

THE LOWERING OF THE ELECTORAL AGE IN GERMANY – CHANGES AMONG POLITICAL PARTIES

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SUMMARY

This thesis investigates one of the arguments in the debate regarding the lowering of the electoral age, that is, the influence of a lowering of the electoral age to sixteen years on the interest of political parties towards youth. Four different aspects are studied: the increase in the interest of political parties in youth during the period of 1990-2012, the influence of a lowering on this interest, the influence of a reversal, and the reaction of right-wing political parties on a lowering. This is done for the German case as Germany features some constituent states (Länder) that did lower the electoral age and some that did not, allowing a comparison between them. The interest for youth is measured by looking at the salience of youth-related issues in the party programmes of the political parties. These youth-related issues are defined by a number of terms in a computerized content analysis dictionary that draws upon secondary party literature. This dictionary also contains words relating to other categories, allowing us to use the proportion of youth related words as related to the total of scored words, instead of the total of words in the electoral programmes. We used *Yoshikoder* to calculate the proportions and STATA for further analysis. The results showed that though there is a general increase in the proportion of youth-related words, there is not sufficient evidence to say that a lowering leads to an increase in proportion. Moreover, rightist parties showed no direct change after a lowering and the proportion of words does not decrease after a reversal of the lowering. Therefore, this study concludes that, based on a content analysis, there is not enough evidence for the proponents to claim that a lowering of the electoral age leads to an increase in interest in youth on the behalf of political parties.

PREFACE

This thesis deals with the effects that a lowering of the electoral age can have on politician's opinions. As research in this area has been relatively scarce, this thesis has to be seen as a *first step* – and it is never the idea that this is somehow the 'final word' on the topic. On the contrary, I would be pleased if research that is more extensive would be done on this topic. For any scientific information seems to be welcome in the debate that this thesis investigates. Otherwise, the debate would go on as it is now: without evidence for the pros or the cons, resulting in a discussion where everything is true – if one repeats it just enough times.

The idea for this thesis is derived from a report by Kolk and Aarts (2010) that drew my attention when writing a research proposal for an extra-curricular course. I read the report because I had developed an interest in voting and voting systems after an interesting course on this topic. A few questions struck me directly and I soon decided to make this into my proposal. This thesis directly derived from that.

I would like to thank Henk van der Kolk for guiding me through the first stages of this (my first) research proposal, and Adriana Need for her help in finishing it. I would also like to thank Kostas Gemenis, for both guiding me through the writing of this thesis and for his ideas and patience, and Andreas Warntjen, for being the second reader. Without your help, everything would have been more difficult than necessary. This also goes for everyone involved in the Honours programme, for which I wrote the research proposal in the first place, and especially for everyone who supported me in actually carrying out my proposal. Finally, I would like to thank everyone else involved for helping me out when I did – or did not – ask for it.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Before we start with the main body of the thesis, it is wise to briefly investigate first the topic we want to discuss. How and in which order this will be done, is the subject of the next paragraph.

i. Structure of the Paper

This paper consists of five parts. First, we introduce our topic – the responsiveness of political parties to changes in the electorate – and the setting it is in, the debate regarding the lowering of the electoral age. We will then defend why we think this study deserves attention and what kind of research questions we think need to be answered.

Before we do so however, we analyse the surrounding theories and ideas in the second section. First, we investigate the current debate surrounding the lowering of the electoral age to sixteen and the kind of arguments and problems it has brought about in both the political and academic world. Then, we look at one of the assumptions in the argument we investigate, being that parties and voters are somehow ‘linked’ to each other, and that change in one leads to change in the other. This leads directly to the next section where we describe ‘how’ this change can be measured with the use of the saliency theory. Following, we describe our case, Germany, and based upon the circumstances there, draw a number of hypotheses that serve as the guiding part of our research.

Then we move on to the methodology section. After having established what we want to know and what we expect, we introduce our research design and our ideas on how to measure the used theoretical concepts. Following, we will describe how we will use content analysis to answer our research question and what kind of dictionary and documents we will use. We will conclude with an analysis of the limits of our measurements.

In the fourth part, the data and analysis section, we will first describe *what* kind of data we have and *how* we understand them. Then we go on with the testing of the hypotheses we made earlier. Here, we also conclude with an analysis of the limits of our findings and threats to validity and reliability.

In the last part, we draw our conclusions based on our findings in the data and analysis section and answer our research questions. Then we shall briefly summarize what we have done and relate our study to the current literature. Finally, we shall investigate the total limits of the study and suggest ideas for further research.

ii. Introduction to the Debate

Since the 1970's, the age for both active and passive voting in Europe has remained at eighteen years, with only a few exceptions. However, in the last years, the number of exceptions has grown, as there are more and more calls to further lower the electoral age to 16, or even further to 14 – calls that have led to a full-grown debate. The immediate cause of this debate is the observation of declining rates of electoral participation in Western Europe, and the idea that a lowering of the electoral age might perhaps reverse the trend (Folkes, 2004; Hart & Atkins, 2011; Wagner, Johann, & Kritzinger, 2012). Over time, the debate has spawned proponents and opponents in both the political and academic world.

In the academic world, proponents point out that not allowing 16-year olds to vote is undemocratic as they are allowed to work, marry, or serve in the army. Moreover, allowing them to vote at an early age increases the possibility that they will vote when older. A view supported by the European Council, when it stated that “a voting age of 16 would be more conducive to a higher turnout of first-time voters, and thus to an overall higher turnout” and “the larger the share of society taking part in elections, the greater the representativeness of those elected” (Aligrudić, 2011). Opponents however, point to the fact the sixteen-year olds are not yet old enough to make such a decision and that they are not able to participate effectively in the vote. Besides, they suggest that turnout rates will not rise as the motivation of sixteen-year olds to vote is relatively low, and their numbers are small in proportion to the rest of the electorate.

In addition, sixteen year olds still have different rights and duties as eighteen year olds, making a comparison impossible. Meanwhile, in the political world, the debate assumes quite the same form; with organisations as *Votes At 16* and the *National Youth Rights Association* actively promote their proponent viewpoints, only to find governments and conservative parties against them. In various countries, commissions have been established to investigate the issue, such as the Electoral Commission in Great Britain, or the issue is debated in parliament (as in Germany).

iii. Questions for Research

In both the academic and political world, however, there seems to be a lack of empirical evidence for any of the arguments (Kolk & Aarts, 2010, p. 48). Proponents and opponents have a tendency to cite different sources, obstructing the debate itself as not the argument, but the evidence for the argument is questioned.

Therefore, we shall investigate one of the proponents' arguments, that is, that the lowering of the electoral age will lead to an increase in politician's awareness of youth related issues. This argument has its origins in a report from the British Electoral Commission (which was set up to investigate the large drop in voters during the British general elections of 2001) when they concluded that one of the reasons for the low turnout amongst young voters was alienation, or the feeling that politics is 'not for young people' (The Electoral Commission, 2002). When the electoral age is lowered, however, politics is bound to become 'more for the young people' as they now have the vote. After all, as Alex Folkes, campaign manager for the Votes at 16 campaign, and one of the main proponents, puts it: 'until young people can vote, their views will always take second place to those who are enfranchised' (Folkes, 2004, p. 55).

The argument has, however, never been tested. It is therefore unknown if there is any effect on politicians and, if there is, how large the effect is. Here, we shall attempt to investigate this argument by performing a content analysis on party manifestos to see if the interest amongst political parties has increased after the introduction of the lowering of the electoral age as opposed to before. During the investigation we will focus on Germany, as in this country, some Länder have lowered the electoral age, while others have not. Using a computerized content analysis dictionary approach, we plan to provide evidence regarding this argument.

iv. Research Questions

The argument of the proponents states that politicians¹ pay more attention to youth when the electoral age is lowered. A positive increase is thus expected. However, it might very well be that there is no increase at all, or even a negative increase. Thus, our research question shall be:

How did the interest of political parties towards youth change after the lowering of the electoral age to sixteen years?

We further divide this question into three sub-questions. The first is based on the assumption that due to the debate regarding the lowering of the electoral age itself, parties' interest in them increases. This would be not only the case in federal states where there was a lowering, but also in federal states where this was not the case.

- I. Is there an increase in interest in youth-related issues among political parties in German federal states in the period of 1990-2012?*

The second sub-question is based on the above-mentioned assumption that parties in the regional states that did lower the electoral age pay more attention towards youth after a lowering of the electoral age than before. They will thus show an increase in interest when they are able to vote, in order to convince them to vote for their respective party.

- II. Is there a larger increase of interest among political parties in the German federal states who did lower the electoral age, than among political parties in the regional states who did not lower the electoral age?*

The third question asks what the differences are between right wing and left wing parties, given that the latter are overall more enthusiastic about the lowering than the former.

- III. Are there differences in the amount of interest between right wing and left wing political parties?*

¹ Note that while the argument and much of the theory talks about individual politicians, we talk about parties, as politician's opinions are most of the time comparable to those of their respective party.

II. THEORY

In this section, we set out to find hypotheses to answer our research questions. We do so in four steps. First, we investigate the debate regarding the lowering of the electoral age itself, and the arguments it has brought about. Second, we describe one of the assumptions of the argument we are investigating, namely, the supposed relationship between parties and voters. Third, we describe how we can measure the expected change by using the theory of *issue salience*. Fourth, we describe the case of Germany and the implications it has for our research.

Note: the text in brackets does not present any new information but instead gives both a summary and an idea of the consequences of the text preceding.

i. Lowering the Voting Age to Sixteen

The debate regarding the lowering of the electoral age to sixteen is a young one. Until the 1970's the voting age was 21 for most countries, and while most of them lowered the voting age to 18 in those days, there are still some, such as Fiji and Oman that support a voting age of 21 (Blais, Massicotte, & Yoshinaka, 2001). The reduction to 16 started only in the beginning of the 21st century, with Brazil and Nicaragua in 1984 and 1988, and Lower Saxony in 1995 being the forerunners, and Austria in 2007, Ecuador in 2008 and the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man in 2006-2008 being the first setting the stage for a new period of reductions. Meanwhile, the idea seems to have taken off in the public debate as the idea was investigated in various countries (i.e. by the Electoral Commission in Great Britain), and politicians have put the idea on their agenda.

Arguments in the Debate

In the debate, both proponents and opponents have a wide variety of arguments at their disposal (see table 1). Generally, they can be divided into three kinds: arguments based on **general principles**, arguments based on **expected changes in the electorate**, and arguments based on **expected changes amongst politicians** (Kolk & Aarts, 2010).

FOR	AGAINST
Prevents alienation	Maturity
Citizenship	Low interest in politics
Increases turnout	Where to draw the line?
Increases in knowledge of politics	Low turnout expected
Fundamental right	Research is flawed
Effected by the policy decisions	Not the same rights as 18-year olds
No taxation without representation	Not the same duties as 18-year olds
Increases interest in youth issues	Youth pay very low to no taxes
Increases chance of voting in later life	No change in the long run

Table 1 – Adapted from: Cowley and Denver (2004); Folkes (2004); Kolk and Aarts (2010); Votes at 16 (2008); Wagner et al. (2012)

The *first kind of arguments* are based on the principles of democracy, stating that for a ‘true’ democracy, every person of the ‘demos’ must be allowed to vote. Moreover, if 16-years olds have the right to drive and marry, then they also should have the right to vote. These arguments are most of the time quite based on reasons of principle and do not allow much room for discussion. Proponents who use this argument find that lowering the electoral age is just “right” in a democratic society, while opponents will find it “wrong” for the same reasons.

The *second kind of arguments* are based on expected changes in the electorate. It is thus expected that when there is a lowering of the electoral age, the electorate will change because of it. According to proponents, young voters will be more willing to vote in their later life than older voters will, and giving the vote to youth allows them to develop their political knowledge at a young age. This in turn leads to a rise in the electoral turnout and a healthier democracy overall. Opponents, however, question this idea and will point to the lack of maturity in 16 and 17 year old voters, and thus their less valid vote (Chan & Clayton, 2006). Moreover, their low interest in politics will make that only a few of them will vote in the elections, making for a lower, instead of a higher, turnout overall.

The *third kind of arguments* are based on the idea that politicians, when noting that young people also have the vote, will focus their attention more on their issues than before, leading to youth issues being heard louder than before. Young people now become “more interesting” for them and they will listen to them sooner. Proponents link this argument to the first kind, as they state that in a

democracy everyone's voice should be heard. Moreover, if a lowering of the electoral age is necessary for politicians to hear the voice of youth, so be it. The argument we are investigating belongs to this third kind of arguments.

The Debate in the Political World

Usually, the reasons to put a lowering of the electoral age on the agenda are political. Parties and politicians supporting the lowering hope to gain benefit of it in the later run. According to Aarts and Van Hees (2003), supporters are mostly to be found amongst the political left and progressive wing. This was the case in Germany, where the leftist SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) and the progressive Bündnis 90/Die Grünen are proponents and in Belgium, where the liberal VLD (Vlaamse Liberale Partij) and the green Agalev (Anders Gaan Leven) supported the idea. Besides, socialist political leaders in both France and the Netherlands endorsed the idea at some point, though the ideas never made it to the formal party programs. Conservative parties on the other hand seem to be hesitant to support the lowering, however. The German Christian democratic CDU has always been against the proposal (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Baden-Württemberg, 2012), as has the Conservative Party in Britain. In the United Kingdom, the government charged the Electoral Commission to conduct an investigation into the problem and its arguments. Their conclusions are that the electoral age should *not* be lowered to sixteen years, but that the age of candidacy should be lowered to eighteen (The Electoral Commission, 2002, 2003, 2004).

The Debate in the Academic World

Besides a political debate, the academic debate also knows its proponents and opponents. Proponents, such as Hart and Atkins (2011), state that 16 year olds possess the same 'quality of citizenship' as 18 year olds. Besides, they refute evidence that adolescents are not neurologically or socially mature enough to make such a decision. In this opinion they are supported by Wagner et al. (2012) who point out that while the turnout levels under 18 may be relatively low in countries that did lower the electoral age (in this case Austria), this 'cannot be explained by a lower ability or motivation to participate' (2012, p. 1).

The political proponents such as the British Votes frequently cite both articles *at 16*² or the American *Votes For Youth*³ campaign. Opponents such as Chan and Clayton (2006), The Electoral Commission (2004) and Cowley and Denver (2004), however, claim the opposite and state that 16 year olds are both too young, and too small a group to make any change to the electorate. At this moment there still seems to be no consensus on the issue in scientific circles. This lack of consensus has two origins. First, there is the political nature of the debate. All the articles cited above seem to have clear intentions what to prove and show on whose side they are. This is most strongly seen in Hart & Atkins, but also in Chan & Clayton. Secondly, there is the lack of empirical evidence (Kolk & Aarts, 2010, p. 47). It seems that in the public debate the empirical evidence for an argument is of less importance than the argument itself.

What does this mean to our research? There are two implications. First, because the idea seems to stem from leftist parties, we may expect those parties to be more interested in youth in the first place. They will therefore, have a greater interest in youth before an eventual lowering than rightist parties would have. Second, because we see that the debate has expanded over the last years, we can expect parties to have taken notice. In other words: the interest of parties in youth will grow because of the debate itself.

² See <http://www.votesat16.org/>

³ See <http://www.youthrights.org/2012/04/05/nyra-launches-votes-for-youth-campaign/>

ii. Changes Among Parties & Voters

Why do proponents expect parties to change their policies because of a change in the electorate? The main reason is what Adams, Clark, Ezrow, and Glasgow (2004) call the 'General Dynamic Representation Hypothesis' which is an application of spatial modelling studies. In these studies, based on the works of Anthony Downs, it is expected that parties strive to vote maximizing. In that fashion, they will employ those strategies that will give them the largest possible share of voters. To do so, they have to keep a constant eye on the electorate. If the electorate moves to ideas that are more leftist on say, environmental problems, parties who do not want to become alienated from the electorate will also take a more leftist position on the issue, in order to maximise their share of the voters. Parties are thus 'comparable to entrepreneurs in a profit-seeking economy' (Downs (1957), as quoted in Cunningham (2002, p. 103)).

The same goes for the parties' policies. They are influenced by what Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson (1995) call 'policy responsiveness' – i.e. when the parties change as a result of changes in the electorate, as stated by the general dynamic representation hypothesis, then their policies will change with them. This is because the party's policies indicate how the party thinks and what its ideas and ideals are. According to Stimson et al., there are two moments when this change can happen: *a.* after elections, which change the political composition and hence lead to new kinds of policies, and *b.*, after the calculation of future implications of current public views and their electoral implications.

Both of these are changes caused by the electorate. In the first, due to shifting preferences in the electorate, for example to the left on economic issues, the parties on this left side gained votes, thus spurring more right wing parties to adjust their positions to the left. In the second, changes in the electorate that may have future implications for a party are observed and changes are made to the party's policies to deal with them in the future. Therefore, there is change in foresight and in hindsight. The lowering of the electoral age belongs to both forms. On the one hand, we expect parties to change their programmes when 'they see it coming', and on the other, we expect them to change it when 'it has happened', i.e., when after an election a party has to conclude that its loss is partly a result of the ignoring of youth related issues.

We can thus conclude that, based on spatial modelling studies, parties change when the electorate changes, because they strive to vote maximising. Moreover, these changes happen after elections or

calculations of future public views. However, Wlezien (2004) points out that the amount of change is dependent on the importance of the issue. It is thus expected that the higher the implications are, the higher the responsiveness of the parties (Burstein, 2003). This is quite easy to understand, as we do not expect parties to change on issues that do not pose a threat for them. However, in our case we assume the issue is important enough as we are dealing with an enlarging of the electorate and an issue that is debated in both the political and academic world. Therefore, we expect the lowering of the electoral age to be important enough to lead to changes amongst parties.

What are the implications from this? First, we can now say that we have a reason why we expect parties to change when the electorate changes. Moreover, we can conclude that parties who strive to have the youth vote for them will move 'towards' them in their positions and ideas.

iii. Measuring Change amongst Parties with Issue Salience

Now, how do parties show to the electorate that they have changed? For if the reason for the change is to draw voters to the party, change is of no use when it is not noticed. One of the answers to this question is given by the saliency theory. This theory predicts that parties select a number of specific issues important to them and emphasize them. So, if a party wants to show that it is paying more attention to youth-related issues, it will put more emphasis on it, or in other words, make the issue more salient (Budge, Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, & Tanenbaum, 2001). On the other hand, if it finds the issue unimportant or negative for its performance, it will place a lower, or even no, emphasis on it. This might for example be when a party feels that its ideas on the economy, however necessary, are not popular among the voters; and therefore instead of putting an emphasis on it will only mention it shortly. Parties thus only emphasize something when they expect to benefit from it. However, when an issue frequently appears in the political debate, parties are ‘forced’ to consider the issue anyway, even if it is not in their benefit. Hence, the statements are mostly positive (“we agree with”) instead of negative (“we do not agree with”) (Alonso, Volkens, Cabeza, & Gómez, 2012).

Problematic with the saliency theory is that most of the theory surrounding it is catered for majoritarian democracies. In countries with proportional representation there is the possibility for niche parties to emphasize issues *they* think are important, so the ‘need’ to emphasize something because other emphasize it, is less than in countries with majoritarian democracies. Moreover, in some contexts it does matter where in a document the sentences are placed – for example in cases where there is a widespread agreement on an issue. In these cases, it is important ‘how’ a party thinks about it (i.e. if they are either negative or positive) and not how many times they mention it (Gemenis, 2012). However, we think that in our case we can still use the theory as long as we acknowledge these shortcomings. For the idea itself is quite useful for our investigation. For if we expect that parties change their amount of interest because of the lowering of the electoral age (a change in the electorate), we can easily measure this interest by looking at the *emphasis* parties place on the issue. Therefore, if youth related issues are mentioned more often after the introduction of the lowering we can say that the parties’ interest has changed. As this idea is important for the methodology of our research, we will come back to it later in the methodology section where we will investigate it further and see how it will help us in our investigation. For now, however, we can change ‘interest in youth’ by ‘use of youth-related words’, as for our study, these two are the same.

iv. Case Selection

For our research, we have chosen to focus on Germany for several reasons. The first is that in Germany the debate surrounding the lowering of the electoral age is already existent since the mid-90's, which makes it possible to study the country over a longer time. This is the more relevant as we want to observe a 'change' among parties. Besides, its political structure makes it possible to study both cases where the electoral age was lowered and cases where it was not. To get a better understanding of the influence of our choice, we will describe the political structure of Germany, the parties we are dealing with and the general opinions surrounding the topic.

Germany is a federal republic where the legislative power is in the hands of the Bundestag (lower house) and the Bundesrat (upper house). The first is chosen by national elections, while the second represents the interests of the sixteen individual Bundesländer. Of these Bundesländer, three are "city states" (Stadtstaaten). Their government is the same as the government of their respective city. The thirteen other states are all headed by a so-called Landtag. Furthermore, they are divided into (Land-) Kreise and Kreisfreie Städte, headed by a Kreistag. These Kreise are further divided into Gemeinden (municipalities), headed by a mayor and council. The elections are called Bundestagwahlen for the federal level, Landtagwahlen for the regional level, Kreiswahlen for the district level and Kommunalwahlen for the municipal level.

Regional State	Year of Lowering
Niedersachsen	1996
Schleswig-Holstein	1998
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	1999
Nordrhein-Westfalen	1999
Sachsen-Anhalt	1999
Bremen*	2009
Brandenburg	2011
Hessen	2001-2002

Table 2 – Year of the lowering of the electoral age to 16 per regional state. An asterisk () denotes a lowering on regional state level.*

The age for active participation in elections is 18 at the federal level and in most of the Bundesländer. However, the age was lowered to sixteen in Niedersachsen in 1996, with Schleswig-Holstein (1998), Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (1999), Nordrhein-Westfalen (1999), Sachsen-Anhalt (1999), Bremen (2009) and Brandenburg (2011) following suit. In Hessen, the age was lowered to sixteen in 2001, but reverted back to eighteen a year later (Kolk & Aarts, 2010, p. 7).

Moreover, the SPD in Baden-Württemberg is considering the idea (Zorell, 2012).

Germany knows a large number of political parties, of which we will consider only fourteen (*see table 3*). Most of the coalitions formed in the Bundesländer contain at least the mid-right CDU or the mid-left SPD. A combination of both leads to a Grand Coalition, as the one the CDU/CSU formed with the SPD in the cabinet Merkel-I. Other possibilities are a red-green alliance between the SPD and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (sometimes joined by Die Linke), a social-liberal coalition between SPD and FDP⁴, a ‘traffic light’ coalition when Bündnis 90/Die Grünen joins the social-liberal alliance⁵, and a ‘Jamaica’ coalition between CDU/CSU, FDP, and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen.

Party	Abbreviation	Type	Position
Piratenpartei Deutschland	PIR	Social-Liberalism	Left
Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus	PDS	Socialism	Left
„Arbeit & soziale Gerechtigkeit – Die Wahlalternative“	WASG	Green-Socialism	Left
Die Linke	DIE LINKE	Socialism	Left
Bündnis 90/Die Grünen	GRU	Green	Centre-left
Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands	SPD	Social-Democratic	Centre-left
Freie Wähler	FW	-	Centre-left
Freie Demokratische Partei	FDP	Classical Liberalism	Centre-right
Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands/Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern	CDU/CSU	Christian Democratic	Centre-right
Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands	CDU	Christian Democratic	Centre-right
Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern	CSU	Christian Democratic	Centre-right
Die Republikaner	REP	National Conservatism	Right
Deutsche Soziale Union	DSU	Conservative	Right
Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands	NPD	Nationalism	Far-Right

Table 3 – Adapted from: Huber and Inglehart (1995); Lees (2006); Saalfeld (2002) – The left and right positions are used further on in this study to categorize the parties on the left and right

⁴ Although such coalitions are rare; the only example after the 1990’s stems from Rhineland-Pfalz, where a SPD-FDP coalition governed from 1991 to 2006, which only ended when the SPD received an absolute majority in the subsequent elections.

⁵ This happened in Brandenburg from 1990 to 1994 and in Bremen from 1991 to 1995.

The initiative for the lowering to sixteen years came in all the cases from Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, with the SPD joining them sometimes reluctantly, mostly as a concession during coalition negotiations. The FDP and the CDU have always been against the lowering and were responsible for reverting the electoral age in Hessen to 18 after the defeat of the SPD/Bündnis 90-Die Grünen coalition in 1999 (Hauser, 1999, p. 4). Especially the CDU has referred to the propositions as premature and stated that it is no more than 'logical' to harmonize the electoral age with the age of maturity (CDU/CSU-Bundestagsfraktion, 2012).

Other organisations, such as the *Deutsche Bundesjugendring* even propose a lowering to 14 years, citing article 12 of the UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child as a reason to do so. Parties as the *Piratenpartei*, the *Grüne Jugend*, the *Deutsche Kinderhilfswerk* and the *Stiftung für die Rechte zukünftiger Generationen* (Foundation for the Rights of the Future Generation) even propose that the electoral age is done away with and that anyone can chose the age when he firsts cast his or her vote (Stiftung für die Rechte zukünftiger Generationen, 2011).

What are the implications of taking Germany as a case? We already saw that leftist parties are the main proponents of a lowering, which also seems the case in Germany so we can use this idea. Moreover, because there are some regional states that did introduce the lowering and some who did not, we can use the latter as a control group in our research design. Furthermore, the positions of German parties are well documented and easy to obtain, making our data collection less tedious.

v. The Debate in the German regional states

Now we shall look in more detail to the lowering of the electoral age in the German regional states that did introduce the lowering. As scientific literature is rare here, we will make extensive use of newspaper articles, the report "*Het verlagen van de kiesgerechtigde leeftijd tot 16 jaar: debatten, argumenten en consequenties*" (Kolk & Aarts, 2010), and two articles from (Eisel, 2011, 2012)

On December 11, 2011, the regional state government of **Brandenburg** lowered the electoral age to 16 for both the regional and municipal elections. The lowering was an idea from Die Linke, whose coalition partner SPD also voted for the lowering as part of coalition agreements. In addition, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen voted in favour of the proposal, with CDU and FDP opposing. The SPD had, in contrast to sister parties in other states, long been against a lowering, citing disinterest among youth as a major concern. The CDU opposed the lowering, citing reasons that youth have no interest in the vote, and that participation is already possible via the youth organisations of the parties. The FDP voted against proposal, only supporting a lowering for the municipal elections instead. Because of the lowering, 35.000 16- and 17-year olds are allowed to vote in the next elections in 2014. However, on a total of 2.1 million voters, no large changes are expected (Metzner, 2011).

On the 22th of May 2011, around 10.000 16- and 17-years olds first voted in the regional elections in **Bremen**. The lowering was adopted in 2009 because of a proposal from the SPD-Die Linke coalition, with Bündnis 90/Die Grünen actively supporting the idea. As in other regional states, the CDU, as the only party, voted against the proposal. However, as in Brandenburg, the SPD had doubts against the proposal, but agreed to it as part of the coalition agreements (Strohschneider, 2011).

In **Hessen**, the first talks about a lowering started in 1998 as result of a proposal of the coalition of SPD and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen. Here, as in the other states, the CDU opposed the lowering, this time supported by the FDP. The proposal is adopted however and the first elections for the municipalities are scheduled for 2001. However, when in 1999 the red-green alliance is replaced by a coalition of CDU and FDP in the regional elections, the lowering is reversed back to sixteen again by the new coalition. In 2008 however, Die Linke again proposed a lowering. This proposal has a low change of succeeding, however, as the current coalition of CDU-FDP is still strongly opposed to the idea.

In **Mecklenburg-Vorpommern**, the proposal for the lowering of the electoral age for municipal elections was adopted in 1999 by the coalition of SPD-Die Linke, with Bündnis 90/Die Grünen supporting. As in all other regional states, the CDU voted against the proposal. In 2011, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen proposed to extend the lowering to the regional elections. They were supported by Die Linke who stated that it was “unfair” to make a difference between the two elections (Ritter, 2011). However, this time the SPD did not support a further lowering, which, given the current coalition of SPD and CDU gives low hopes for the proposal.

In 1995, a proposal to lower the electoral age for the municipal elections to 16 in **Niedersachsen** was adopted by the party conference of the SPD, which at that moment held an absolute majority in the regional state government. The party was divided on the subject however, but supported it in later debates. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen joined them, pointing to scientific evidence that 16- and 17- year olds are as interested in politics as others. Also here, the CDU opposed the lowering, citing opinion polls showing that a majority of the voters is opposed to the lowering, as are the 16- and 17-year olds themselves. The proposal is however adopted by a majority of SPD–Bündnis 90/Die Grünen later that year, making Niedersachsen the first German regional state to do so. In 2012, there is a new proposal of Die Linke and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, joined by the SPD, to further extend the lowering to the regional elections (Perli, 2012). However, because the current coalition of CDU-FDP is opposed against this proposal, there seems little change of a lowering before the next elections in 2013.

In **Nordrhein-Westfalen**, a proposal to lower the electoral age to 16 for municipal elections was adopted in 1999 by a coalition of SPD-Bündnis 90/Die Grünen. During the negotiations between SPD and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen after the 2012 elections, the green party proposed an extension of the lowering to regional elections. This was agreed upon by the SPD, and to convince the opposition of CDU and FDP, a commission would be established to investigate the lowering (WDR, 2012).

In **Sachsen-Anhalt**, the electoral age was lowered to 16 for municipal elections in 1998 by the then ruling party of the SPD, supported by Bündnis 90/Die Grünen. In 2012, a new proposition was made by both the new Piratenpartei and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen to further lower this age to respectively 12 and 14 years (Spiegel Online, 2012). However, given the current coalition of CDU-SPD, this further lowering seems unlikely.

In 1996 in **Schleswig-Holstein**, the then coalition of SPD-Bündnis 90/Die Grünen proposes a lowering to sixteen years for the regional elections. Especially the green party points to the changing political environment and the need for a youth vote. The SPD supports this, but points out that it will do very little to make youth more interested in politics. The CDU was, as in other states, opposed to the lowering, this time accusing the coalition that their major reason for a lowering is that it would give them more votes in the next election. They are supported by the FDP in this case. It is then decided to have a commission look further into the matter. This commission rules in favour of the proposal, after which the proposal is adopted.

vi. Hypotheses

Based on the theories above, we can make the following hypotheses. The first one is that, based on the idea of policy representativeness and the idea that parties change when the electorate changes, we expect that when the lowering of the electorate age is proposed or plays any role in the debate, the issue becomes more *salient* among parties. We can thus expect an increase in the use of youth related words.

H1 There is an increase in the use of youth-related words among parties in the period 1990-2012

Moreover, we can expect that in regional states where the lowering has been carried out, parties will show a higher interest in youth because they are able to vote for them. They will therefore increase their use of youth-related words in an attempt to persuade the youth to vote for them. Something that will not happen in states where there was no lowering.

H2 There is a larger increase in the use of youth-related words among parties in the regional states who did lower the electoral age, than among parties in the regional states who did not lower the electoral age

In addition, we saw that in Germany, parties on the left of the political spectrum frequently supported the lowering, while parties on the right opposed it. Therefore, we can expect that the leftist parties are already interested in youth anyway and are therefore not as influenced by the lowering as rightist parties are. These parties will only show interest in youth after the lowering.

H3 Parties on the right of the political spectrum show an increase in the number of youth-related words only after the eventual lowering

Moreover, when we look at the theory of issue salience and the given fact that parties can also deemphasize an issue when it becomes of *less* importance to them, we can say that:

H4 There is a decrease in the use of youth-related words among parties in the regional states who reverted the electoral age from the age of sixteen to the original age of eighteen

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND MEASUREMENT

In this section, we will describe how the research will be carried out. We will thereby pay attention to both the possibilities and the limitations of our procedures. We will, in order, describe the research design, measurement of concepts, method of analysis, and the selection of the data and the limits of our measurements.

i. Choice of Research Design

As follows from the research question, we view youth-related words as the **dependent variable** and the years in which the elections took place as the **independent variable**. We furthermore distinguish two kinds of groups: one with the regional states that **did lower the electoral age** (Group A) and one with the regional states that **did not lower the electoral age** (Group B). We expect that in Group A there will be no change in proportion over time, while in Group B there will be one.

For our study, we use interrupted time-series designs for all hypotheses, except the first one. We will first describe which we will use before we list some of the problems with interrupted time-series and the influences they have on our study.

For our **first hypothesis**, we use a simple trend study where we look at the number of youth related words for both left wing and right wing parties, per regional state, over time. We can thus see how the proportion changes over time **and** if the expected change in proportion is different between both regional states and parties.

For our **second hypothesis**, we use an *interrupted time series with a non-equivalent no-treatment control group*. In systematic notation, this looks as follows:

NR	Group A	O ₁	O ₂	O ₃	O ₄	O ₅	X	O ₆	O ₇	O ₈	O ₉	O ₁₀
NR	Group B	O ₁	O ₂	O ₃	O ₄	O ₅		O ₆	O ₇	O ₈	O ₉	O ₁₀

From: Shadish, Cook, and Campbell (2002, p. 182)

The “X” denotes the introduction of the lowering. By looking at the number of words before and after this lowering, we can easily observe the influence of the lowering itself. Moreover, by adding a control group we control for the threat of *history*, which can be described as ‘*the possibility that*

forces other than the treatment under investigation influenced the dependent variable at the same time at which the intervention was introduced' (Shadish et al., 2002, p. 179).

For our **third hypotheses**, we use an interrupted time series to see if the interest in youth among right-wing parties changed after the introduction of the lowering, or that before the lowering there was already an increase:

O₁ O₂ O₃ O₄ O₅ X O₆ O₇ O₈ O₉ O₁₀

From: Shadish et al. (2002, p. 175)

For our **fourth hypothesis** we use a longitudinal design where the treatment is 'removed' at a certain point in time. In notation:

O₁ O₂ O₃ O₄ X O₅ O₆ O₇ O₈ O₉ ✕ O₁₀ O₁₁ O₁₂ O₁₃

From: Shadish et al. (2002, p. 188)

Here, the idea is that after the treatment is introduced the number of words rises because of it, while it is expected to go down again when the treatment is reverted. This is only the case in Hessen. The advantage of having this possibility in our study is that we can observe if the expected effect also works the other way around.

Shadish et al. (2002) list four frequently occurring problems with interrupted time-series: diffusion, delayed causation, short time series and limitations of archival data. With regard to diffusion, they warn that a treatment is not always 'directly' implemented – sometimes this takes a certain period, during which it is difficult to say what the influence of the treatment is. This is related to delayed causation, for if treatment is fully introduced, this does not necessarily mean that there is a direct effect. In our case, we do not need to worry about the first treatment, but we certainly need to take the second into account. For the treatment, it is always carried through directly in the regional states. If the electoral age is lowered to sixteen this is so directly for all the municipalities throughout the state. It is thus not so that it is possible to vote at sixteen in some municipalities and not in others. The effect on political parties is however more of a problem. Parties change, according to Harmel and Janda (1994, p. 260), "incremental and gradual", which means that it will take a while before parties react to the lowering. We do need to look not only at the direct reactions of the parties, but also at those later. However, we can do this, as we have multiple observations with

enough time between them for parties to make the change. With regard to the other two threats, we can say that though we are aware of both of them, we have almost no possibilities to rule them out. This is because we have a limited amount of data to work with. Because we chose to use party manifestoes later on, we are working with a 'fixed' amount of data. We can make inferences from this data, but we do need to keep in mind that, in all cases, the rule of the thumb number for time points (Shadish et al. (2002) mention an average of 100 observations) is not reached. In addition, the problems arising out of the limitations of archival data need to be remembered as well. It was, for example, not possible to obtain all manifestoes from all parties, simply because they were not available in the archives we used. Some time points in the analysis thus miss some manifestoes. Taking these limitations into account we still think that a descriptive inference analysis based on the time-series data is the best way to answer the research questions given the data at hand (Gerring, 2012, p. 19).

ii. Measurement of Theoretical Concepts

When measuring the interest of political parties and politicians, it is important to understand what *interest* exactly means. According to the Oxford Online Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 2012), *interest* means to '*excite curiosity or attention*'. Proponents of the lowering thus expect an increase in the amount of 'attention' parties take of youth related issues. It is therefore this 'attention' we want to measure. This can be done in a variety of ways. For example, it would be possible to interview all the respective parties and politicians and ask them if, in their view, the amount of 'attention' has increased, decreased, or not changed at all. However, this is not only time consuming, but also reasonably expensive. Besides, as the issue is still being debated and proponents and opponents have a very small scientific ground to stand on, any interference in the debate can have a possible influence. Therefore, we use a form of unobtrusive research, content analysis, to measure the amount of attention amongst politicians and political parties.

Based on the idea of issue salience we discussed earlier, we **measure the interest a party has in youth by the salience it places on these issues**. In other words: the amount of words parties spent on youth is the measure for the interest they have in youth. The higher the attention, the higher the

amount of words used. We find these words in the parties' electoral manifestos⁶. This may miss some of the relevant point in the electoral competition, for example when the media challenge a party to take stance on an issue not mentioned in the programme. However, we use them for pragmatic reasons because they are easily obtainable and focus on the main statements of the party. Moreover, they have the advantage that they represent the party as a whole and not the individual politicians which are frequently interviewed in the media (Libbrecht, Maddens, Swenden, & Fabre, 2009, p. 60).

iii. Method of Analysis

When analysing manifestos, there are two ways of working: hand-coded and computerized. The first method uses expert coders, fluent in the language concerned, who allocate each separate sentence to a category in a coding scheme. The Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) by Volkens et al. (2011) and the Party Change Project (PCP) by Harmel, Janda, and Tan (1995), are the most cited examples of this approach. However, while this approach does deliver rich time-series data it has several problems in terms of validity and reliability (Gemenis, 2012). One of the main problems with it is that it calls for human coders to "code" every piece of text to a specific category. However, what is understood under a single sentence can be different amongst different coders, leading to the same sentences being classified differently. Indeed, Mikhaylov, Laver, and Benoit (2012, p. 90), point out that 'had multiple independent human coders indeed been used to code every document in the CMP data set, then these codings would have been deemed unacceptably unreliable.' Moreover, the process is 'highly labour intensive', 'time consuming' and 'costly' (Volkens, 2007, p. 111).

Therefore, a second way of working has been established with the introduction of computerized methods of analysis. In this technique, party manifestos are digitalized so every word is seen as a piece of data by the computer. Hence, there is no difference *where* a word is written in a document or in what kind of sentence. Documents are, in the words of Grimmer and Stewart (2012, p. 11) a 'bag of words', where the order is of no importance. The advantage with computerized methods is that they are relatively cheap, fast, and extremely reliable. After all, computers are expected to perform the same analysis time after time without any differences. With the use of statistical software word counts can be easily constructed for a large number of texts. Moreover, Laver and

⁶ Manifestoes, electoral manifestos, electoral programmes, and party programmes all point to the same document.

Garry (2000) developed a method to estimate party policy positions in these documents by using pre-determined dictionaries. These dictionaries contain the words that are typical for a political dimension and have weights attached to them. That is, some words have a higher signal function for the dimension than others and therefore carry a heavier 'weight'. In the end, the total weight for each dimension can be calculated, so documents can be compared to each other. Examples of this approach can be found in Pauwels (2011), who used it to investigate populism in Flanders, and Gemenis, Kuipers, and Morissens (2012), who did the same for the Netherlands.

Variations in this method are most prominently *Wordscores* (Laver, Benoit, & Garry, 2003) and *Wordfish* (Slapin & Proksch, 2008). The first calls for reference documents that signify both ends of a political spectrum (for example, left to right) – the other documents are then placed between them – on a -1 to 1 scale. Documents that are thus on the left side of the spectrum will obtain a more 'negative' value the closer they come to the reference document. The problem is, however, that when the reference documents are wrong, the rest of the analysis goes wrong as well, and previous research has also pointed out several other shortcomings (Gemenis et al., 2012).

The second variation calls for a scaling approach where no reference documents are needed. Based on expected values, the documents are grouped among various dimensions. Troublesome here is, however, that one is restricted to those sections of the document that are relevant for the dimension one wants to investigate. Mostly, this is not made quite clear in the documents itself. Issues like nationalism, populism, or youth awareness, seldom have their own paragraph. Moreover, while it works fine for investigating dimensions, it seems less suited to investigate a specific aspect such as youth related issues (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011, p. 1280).

Therefore, to measure the interest of youth related issues in political party programmes, it seems best to use the dictionary approach by Laver and Garry (2000) and establish a dictionary containing youth related words to measure the degree of salience.

iv. Establishing a Dictionary

Establishing this dictionary can be done in two ways: inductive or deductive. The deductive approach calls for the researcher's judgement to select those words that measure 'youth' in his or her opinion. However, this proves to be a difficult method for establishing what *kind* of words are used in the dictionary, as it the method is quite personal. Expertise and personal preferences can vary amongst different researchers and therefore also the content of the dictionary. In this fashion, human related errors are bound to occur, which was the very reason to choose for a computerized content analysis and not an expert one.

The inductive approach on the other hand, calls for looking at the data and establish what kind of words are used when talking about youth. In this manner, it is quite easy to obtain a large enough dictionary to measure the concept, but there are problems. First, there is the problem which data to look at and which not. For example, if one was to study electoral programmes, is it then also necessary to look at electoral debates and the kind of words used there? Or is it better to stick to the original manifestos? Second, there is the problem that when the data studied is used to establish the dictionary, it is no more than logical that one will measure an effect. After all, we choose the words because not only they measure the concept, but also because they are in the data we study.

Therefore, we follow an approach proposed by Pauwels (2011). He suggested looking at different documents than those studied, but which still had a link with the studied documents. In our case, where the studied documents are electoral programmes, this means that we look at other documents the parties release such as magazines, interviews, and brochures. Assuming that parties are consistent in their choice of words in different documents (e.g. that they will use the same words for 'youth' in interviews as in their programmes), this circumvents the problem of both endogenous references and human related errors. However, it does not solve the problem of completeness. That is to say, it might well be possible that not every aspect of the category is measured. This problem is prevented in hand coded analysis by having the coders themselves look for ambiguities or overlooked categories, and subsequent revision of the dictionary until the problems are solved (Grimmer & Stewart, 2012, p. 17). However, as we both miss the needed time and expertise in this case, we choose for Pauwels' approach to establish the dictionary ourselves by studying the partisan documents of the parties.

For the other categories, we use the dictionary Pauwels used to measure the degree of populism amongst Flemish parties. We translate this to German by using both a dictionary (Van Dale Nederlands-Duits (Van Dale Uitgevers, 2009)) and a website called EuroVoc⁷, a multilingual thesaurus that contains words used by European Institutions in various languages. Moreover, we also looked at party-related documents to establish which of the dictionary translations is used in the German political context⁸.

For the category youth, we focussed on three aspects: words directly pointing to youth, words pointing to youth-specific issues, and words pointing to youth voting rights. In the first aspect, words as “kinder”, “teenager” and “jugend” are used. In the second aspect, words as “schüle”, “bildung” and “stadium”, are chosen because they point to education, which is one of the main concerns for 16-year olds. In the last aspect, words as “wahlrecht”, “jungwähl”, and “wahlalter” were chosen as they frequently appear in the party related material when the lowering of the electoral age is discussed.

Difference with the Comparative Manifesto Project

The difference between our dictionary and the way the CMP codes youth issues is that the CMP codes these issues with other issues such as assistance to women, old people etc., in a single category. The CMP thus views youth as a ‘special interest group’ and not as a separate group. Their coding is thus too general for us to draw any conclusions from it. Moreover, the CMP does not allow us to include words such as “wahlalter”, which are important in our case. As the CMP relies on coders to “code” quasi-sentences into pre-established categories, it leaves little space to include or exclude new words. Besides, we have to rely on documents already selected by the CMP for the positions of their categories. We thus have little control here, while with the method we use we have total control which documents we do and do not include. In addition, there has been a number of critiques with regard to the CMP lately, mostly based on the methodology used (Gemenis, 2012). We mentioned this earlier, when we described the theory of issue salience.

⁷ See: eurovoc.europa.eu/drupal

⁸ Besides, we excluded the category of ‘Flemish nationalism’ from Pauwels’ original dictionary, for it is of no relevance in German politics.

v. Selection of documents

Electoral programmes, or party manifestos, consist of '*statements connoting intentions, emphases, promises, pledges, policies or goals to be activated should that party achieve office*' (Bara, 2005, p. 585). They are therefore more a statement of what a party intends to do, than what they actually will do once in power. However, they give a good idea of the ideas and ideals within the party itself, and are therefore useful to study party behaviour. They furthermore have the advantage that they a. represent the 'whole' party, and not a single movement within the party, b. are issued at regular intervals, so changes can easily be studied, c. cover a wide range of issues, and d. are quite easily obtainable for study use (Alonso et al., 2012).

On the opposite side however, one can say that the people they are intended for never read the electoral programmes. The programmes tend to be too vaguely formulated, and merely serve as electoral propaganda. However, Alonso et al. (2012) point out that while this may be the case, the content of the programmes is still of importance as the mass media uses them to inform voters on the ideas and ideals of the different parties. Therefore, parties and politicians are bound to their manifestoes for when they hold different opinions, the mass media will soon point to the incongruence. Moreover, in our case, the electoral programmes for the political parties are freely available in the Polidoc archive set up by Benoit, Bräuninger, and Debus (2009). Other documents can be easily obtained by means of the party's website or the party's scientific institution (e.g. the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung for the CDU or the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung for the SPD).

vi. Limits of Measurement

Here we will describe the threats posed by both internal and construct validity. With regard to internal validity, we distinguish the threats of selection, history, maturation, and instrumentation. The first one, selection, warns for the influences of differences in conditions. In our case, this would mean that the states that carried out the lowering are different from those that did not carry out the lowering. We think that this is not so. The reason for this is that all the regional states are located in Germany and share very much the same culture and political system. The control group we use with the testing of our second research question prohibits the second threat, history. If there are changes in the environment that cause an increase in the proportion, we should see this in both Group A and Group B. The third threat, maturation, is related to the second. It may well be that in the twenty

years we observe, parties pay more attention to youth not because of the debate regarding the lowering of the electoral age, but because of other reasons. In Germany, it may well be that the reunification of Germany in 1990 and the subsequent establishment of new regional states in former DDR has had an influence on the proportion of youth related words. However, the control group can also control for this. The most important threat is however instrumentation. A change in how political parties write their electoral programmes can lead to a change in the proportion. As it is unknown if this has happened we need to take this in account.

With regard to construct validity, we describe the threats of inadequate explication of constructs and mono-method bias. The first one is the most important here, and there are two cases where this needs to worry us. The first is when we assume that interest in youth can be measured by the mentioning of youth-related words. However, we need to take into account that we only measure a small part of interest in youth in this manner. Interest in youth can, for example, also follow from activities a party organizes for young people, or the existence of a youth wing of the party. Both are not mentioned in the electoral programmes itself. The second is when we think about the choice of words. To measure interest in youth we established a dictionary with words that point to interest. However, the list is far but exhaustive. Besides, for every word on it, it is possible to argue for both its inclusion and exclusion. It is therefore possible that revised versions of this list lead to other conclusions. However, we think that in our case, we have done a reasonable try to establish a comprehensive list. The second threat for construct validity is mono-method bias. As we use only electoral programmes to measure the interest, we more accurately have to describe our construct as *youth interest in electoral programmes*. This is important when we later try to generalize our findings.

IV. DATA AND ANALYSIS

i. Description of Data

The data in this thesis are the words scored under the category ‘youth’ in the manifestos. We obtain these by uploading all the documents in *Yoshikoder*⁹, after checking them for errors and unreadable characters. *Yoshikoder* then gives us the total number of words scored (based on all the entries in the dictionary) and the number of words scored per category. From this, we calculate the proportion of the scored words in the category youth from the total number of scored words. In this fashion, the length of the manifesto itself does not need to worry us. We then upload the data into STATA, from which we carry out the subsequent analysis.

ii. Interpretation of Findings & Testing of Hypotheses

Depicting the data

We plot our data in a scatterplot with two regression lines. We do so because scatterplots are able to give a quick and comprehensive overview of the situation, from which relationships can be easily spotted, and because we want a regression line to “summarize” the central tendency of the Y-variable. If there is no relation between the two variables, then such a curve will be a flat line. If there is a relationship, then the curve will show another, non-horizontal shape (Jacoby, 2000, p. 579).

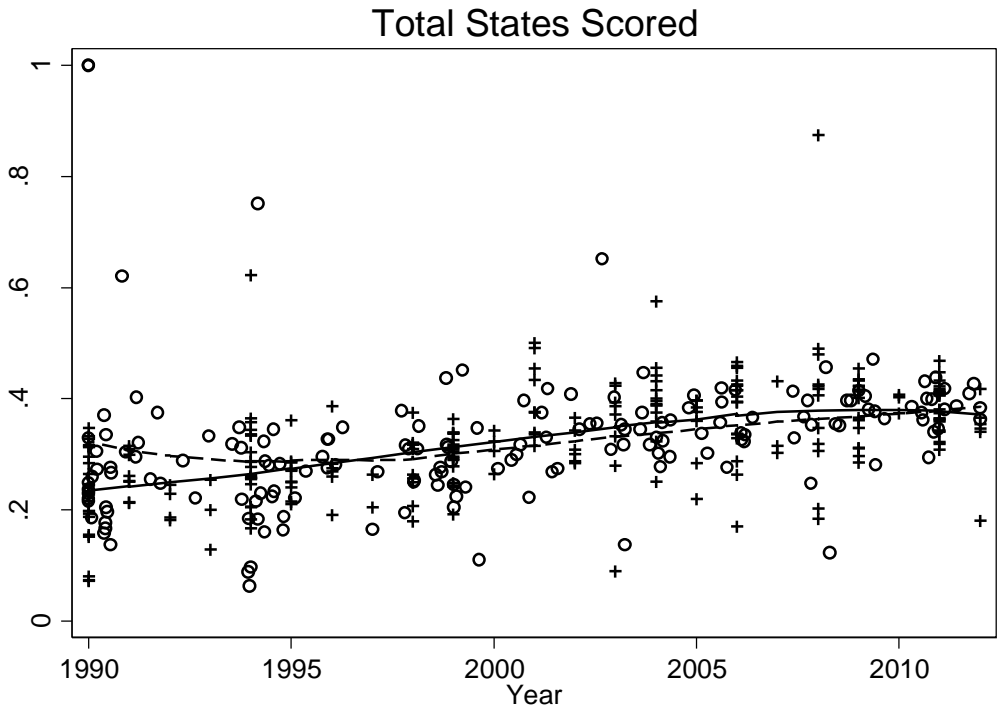
In our analysis, we use a special kind of regression analysis called *locally weighted scatterplot smoothing (LOESS)*. This kind of regression has the advantage that it combines the simplicity of least-squares types of regression with non-linearity. It draws a regression line by performing a series of weighted regression analyses for a set number of evaluation points. These regressions can be called “local” because every regression uses only the subset of observations that fall closest to the evaluation point. The researcher can determine the exact size of this subset. In our case, we use the loess parameter $\alpha=0.7$. This means that in each local regression, 70% of the observations are used. We chose this value because we think it is the right balance between a too high number of observations used – which makes that outliers are cancelled out earlier, but which gives a less accurate impression of the local situation, and a too low number – which gives more information on the local situation, but is easily influenced by outliers (Jacoby, 2000; NIST/SEMATECH, 2012).

⁹ Yoshikoder is a *free to use* content analysis programme by Lowe (2006)

In the following data, a cross (+) represents the manifestoes of the left-wing parties, while a nought (o) represents the right-wing manifestoes. Moreover, the dashed line is the regression line for right-wing parties, while the solid line represents the left-wing parties.

Overall increase in proportion

We notice that though there are some outliers, most of the data centres on 0.3. The proportion of words seems to be stable at first, but increases slightly around 1998, which was the year of the first introduction of the lowering of the electoral age in Niedersachsen. Moreover, also the loess line increases here. We can thus say that, overall, there is an increase in the proportion during the observed period, which **confirms our first hypothesis**.



Graph 1 – Proportion of total words scored related to the years of the elections, for both the investigated and the control states

Change in proportion per state

Now we perform the same analysis as above on the regional states themselves. The results from this can be found in the second part of the appendix. We hypothesized that there is a larger increase in the use of the proportion in regional states that did lower the electoral age than in regional states that did not. Of the seven states that did lower the electoral age, only five are useful here as both Brandenburg and Bremen introduced the lowering only in the late 2000's with only a single or no elections after the lowering. In the graphs, the dotted line indicates the lowering and four loess analyses have been carried out on both the right wing and left wing parties *before* and *after* the lowering. We shall first describe the states that did lower the electoral age, and then those that did not.

We see that in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern both the loess lines centre around 0.2 before going up to 0.3 as the lowering nears. After the lowering, it centres on 0.35. In Nordrhein-Westfalen, we see something else. Here we see that there is an increase in the proportion to 0.3 before the lowering, before this drops back to 0.25 after the lowering. Later, it increases again to 0.35. In Sachsen-Anhalt, we see something similar. First the proportion increases to 0.35, drops to 0.3 after the lowering, and then increases to 0.4.

In Schleswig-Holstein, we see that before the lowering, there is a sharp increase in the proportion among the left-wing parties, but a decline for the right wing parties. After the lowering the right wing parties' proportion increases again, as does the left wing parties', before they fall later on to about 0.3. Something else goes for Niedersachsen, where the trend decreases among right wing parties before the lowering to 0.4, while it increases among the left wing parties to the same value. After the lowering, both wings stay around 0.2.

As we look at Baden-Württemberg, we see an increasing trend from 1990 to 2005 after which it stabilizes between 0.4 and 0.5. For both Bayern and Berlin, we see an increasing trend going from around 0.25 or 0.2 respectively to around 0.4 and 0.3. We observe the same in Brandenburg, with an increasing trend going from 0.25 to around 0.4. In Bremen, where there was only a single election after the lowering – making it impossible to construct a loess line – we see the same as in Brandenburg, with the main difference that the proportion increases to 0.35.

In Hamburg, Rheinland-Pfalz and Sachsen we see an increase in the proportion over time, going from around 0.25 to 0.4 in Hamburg, 0.3 to 0.35 in Rheinland-Pfalz and 0.25 to 0.35 in Sachsen. In Hessen,

the proportion starts at 0.5 for the right wing parties, drops to 0.25 in 1995 and reverts again to 0.4 in the late 2000's. For the left wing parties the proportion gradually increases for both wings from 0.2 to 0.4. In Saarland, the proportion stays stable until 1995, after which it increases to 0.4. In Thüringen, the proportion remains stable around 0.3 for right wing parties, but increases from 0.15 to 0.4 for the leftist parties.

The first thing we can observe is that an increase in the use of youth related words is not restricted to states who implemented the lowering. Instead, all of these states, except for Thüringen, showed an increase in the proportion. In the states who did implement the lowering, this was also the case, except for Niedersachsen, where the proportion went down after 1990. However, this can be partly explained by the two values centred on 1.00 in 1990. Had they not been present, the trend would have been increasing before the lowering, and stabilized afterwards.

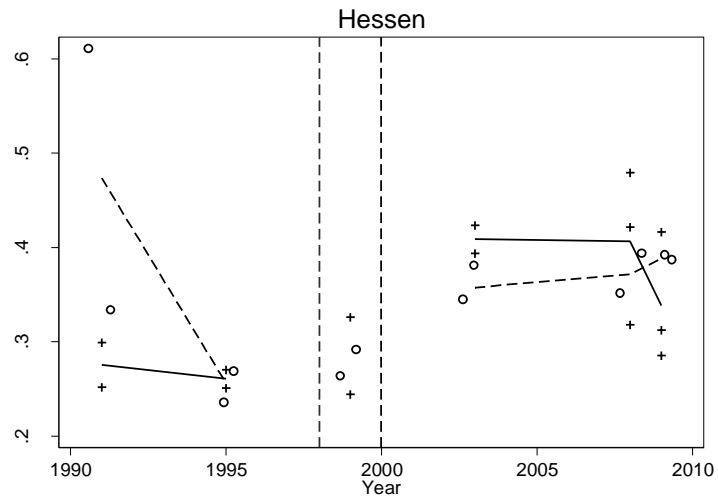
The second thing we can observe is that the increases are not larger in the states that did impose the lowering than in the states that did not. In Hamburg, for example, the proportion rose from around 0.3 to 0.4, the same as in Sachsen-Anhalt. In addition, in Niedersachsen the proportion did even barely change at all (if we omit the outliers earlier mentioned). We can thus say that our second **hypothesis has to be rejected.**

Right wing parties vs. Left wing parties

We hypothesized that right-wing parties would only show an increase in the number of youth-related words after an eventual lowering. If we look at our results however, we see that this is nowhere the case. In both Bremen and Hamburg, the proportion already increased before the eventual lowering. In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Nordrhein-Westfalen, and Sachsen-Anhalt, the proportions are indeed higher after the lowering than before, but there still was an increase before the lowering. In Niedersachsen, the proportions were even lower after the lowering than before. The only states where there was an increase after the lowering are Hessen and Schleswig-Holstein. In the latter, there was a decreasing trend until the lowering and an increasing afterwards, while in the former the trend only started to increase (if we correct for the outlier) after the lowering. **Therefore, for all cases except the earlier mentioned, we can say that our hypothesis has to be rejected.**

The case of Hessen

We hypothesized that if the lowering of the electoral age would be reversed after an eventual lowering, this would lead to a decrease of the proportion after the lowering. If we look at Hessen however, the only state where such a reversal took place, we see that before the lowering there was a sharp decline in the proportion among the right wing parties (though this is mostly caused by an outlier at 0.6 – if removed



Graph 2 – Proportion of words scored related to the years of the elections, for Hessen only

the line would actually be stable) and very little to no change among the left wing parties. Between the lowering and the reversal, the proportion seems to be higher than before, but after the reversal, both right wing and left wing parties show a considerable increase. We can thus not conclude that the reversal of the lowering has brought about a lowering of the proportion. Therefore, our fourth **hypothesis has to be rejected.**

iii. Limits of Findings

Most of the limits of the findings are related to the number of observations per regional state. On average, there are five moments of observation (elections) which all have around five to six manifestos each. This makes the total number of observations quite low and leads to a high sensitivity to outliers. We partially solved this problem by using a loess regression line, but because we need to make a few assumptions (such as the value of α) here, which are quite arbitrary, it is still difficult to make good and stable inferences from the data. Moreover, in some situations, such as in Niedersachsen or Hessen, there are so few observations before the lowering, that it is quite difficult to speak of a trend. The regression line serves in such cases more as a line connecting the dots, then that it says anything about the trend.

Besides, we have to hold in mind the strong heterogeneity of the units we study. Each of the proportions is from a different manifesto, from a different party. For example, while the shortest manifesto contained only 155 words, the longest contained 63197. Moreover, while the lowest number of scored words was only 10, the highest number was 2484. Especially in the manifestos, where there is a median of 15515, 50 words, there are a number of influential outliers. The observations are thus not all the same, which leads to wrong conclusions as the relation between with the independent variable might be disturbed because of the high errors in the observations.

V. CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION

In this section, we draw our conclusions based on our findings in the previous section. Moreover, we will give both the limits of this study and the use it can have in the debate regarding the lowering of the electoral age.

i. Answer to the Research Question

Our research question was: *how did the interest of political parties towards youth change after the lowering of the electoral age to sixteen?* We posed this question to investigate if there was any truth in the claim that a lowering of the electoral age increases the interest politicians and political parties have for youth. We can now say that this relationship is not as strong as the proponents argue. For while in most cases the interest in youth increased after a lowering, the same happened to states where there was no lowering at all. Therefore, we cannot say that the lowering directly caused the increase. It thus need not be so that lowering the electoral age leads to an increase in the interest of politicians towards youth.

Moreover, we saw no evidence that right wing political parties only increase their attention after the lowering. In many cases, even before the lowering the interest increased. In addition, a reversal in the lowering did not bring about the expected decrease in interest. This does however not mean that no relation exists at all. As the situation is different in every German regional state, it is perhaps a more effective idea to study the states independently. In this fashion, it is easier and better doable to perform a wider analysis.

ii. Limits of Generalisation

What are the limits of this study? First, there are limits because of the units we studied. We chose in our research to conduct an unobtrusive approach by analysing party manifestoes. However, we can question if these manifestoes are enough to get a clear picture of the ideas of the parties. We saw that manifestoes are frequently used to position parties (recall for example Alonso et al. (2012)), but we can imagine that, as party manifestoes are not frequently read by the voters – and most certainly not by the young voters – parties opt for different ways to make their views public towards a

younger electorate. Therefore, other media might prove to be a more fruitful way to perform this analysis.

Moreover, with regard to the analysis itself, we constructed a – in our eyes comprehensive – dictionary to measure ‘youth’. However, we acknowledge that such a dictionary can never be complete. It might well be that a different choice of words would have led to different conclusions. In addition, it may be that some words did not only point to the category ‘youth’ but also to other categories. Besides, it may be that using a different analysis technique – for example one in which not individual words, but whole sentences are categorized – may lead to different conclusions. However, we still feel that if we want to measure ‘interest’ that this can be interpreted as both negative or positive, and that therefore the exact consonance of the words we are looking for is of little interest. That said, we could say that we can generalize to the parties or manifestoes we have not studied. We believe that the small number of documents we did not analyse would not have changed our conclusions very much and that the general pattern would have remained the same.

iii. Further research

This study has tried to use a content analysis to prove the influence of a lowering of the electoral age on the proportion of youth related words in party manifestoes. We already saw that we found no direct evidence to support this claim. However, we did see an overall increase in the proportion over the years – not only in general, but also in most individual states. This may look strange at first but can be partly explained when one considers the choice of words used to measure interest in youth. If we look at the dictionary, we can see that a number of words relating to education have been used. It may therefore well be that there was an increase in the use of these words and not in the other words. Something that may have been caused by debates on education. To prove this, however, we would need to split the category in two.

Further research can perhaps try to establish such a second category, or create a completely new category based on other documents. Moreover, instead of computerized analysis, a more labour intensive expert analysis can be used. This will not directly produce better results, but it will lead to more comparison material – which can be useful in the long run.

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VII. APPENDIX

i. Dictionary of Youth-related words

Dictionary		
Categories	German words	Translation
Immigration	asyl*; einwand*; fremd*; halal*; illega*; immigran*; islam*; kopftuch*; koran; marok*; moslem*; muslim*; türk*	asylum*; immigr*; foreign*; halal*; illegal*; allocht*; islam*; scarf*; koran; marok*; muslim*; turk*;
Youth	*bildung; *kinder; *schüle; *studium; *teenager; *wahlrecht; jugend*; jungwähl*; kinder*; schül*; studium*; teenager*; wahlalter; wahlrecht*	*education; *children; *school; *study; *teenager; *enfranchisement; education*; youth*; youth vote*; children*; school*; study*; teenager*; age of enfranchisement; enfranchisement*;
Conservatism	christ*; familie; glaub*; kirche; moral; porn*; prinzip; sex*	christ*; family; belief*; church; norm; porn*; values; sex*;
Liberalism	*abgabe; *ermäßigung; *steuer; bürokrat*; deregul*; effekt*; effiz*; konkur*; stellung; wirtschaft*;	*tax; *reduction; *tax; bureaucrat*; dereg*; effect*; effici*; compet*; job*; economy*;
Neoliberalism	bevormundung; einheitssteuer*; gewinn*; markt*; parasit*; schmarotzer*; schwarzarbeit*	overcar*; flat tax*; profit*; market*; parasi*; informal labour*;
Law and order	droge*; gewalt*; kriminal*; kriminell*; sicher*; straf*; verbrecherisch	drug*; violence*; criminal*; criminal*; safe*; punishment*; felonious;

Populism	*betrug; *regime; *schicht; *versprechen; absurd*; arrogant*; direkt*; elit*; erlieg*; establishment; gesellschaftsordnung; herrsch*; kapitul*; kaste; klasse*; korrupt*; mafia*; meinungsäußer*; parteienherrschaft*; plebiszit; politic*; politik*; propaganda; schamlos; schand*; skand*; stand; traditio*; undemokratisch*; unmittelbar*; verrat*; verrät*; volk*; volksabstimm*; volksentscheid*;	*deceit; *regime; *class; *promise; absurd*; arrogant*; direct*; elit*; succumb*; establishment; society; ruling*; capitul*; caste; class*; corrupt*; mafia*; freedom of expression*; particrat*; referendum; politic*; propaganda; shameless; shame*; state; tradition*; undemocratic*; direct*; treason*; traitor*; people*; referendum*
Progressive	autonom*; frau*; freiheit; individu*; progressiv; recht; selbstbestimmung;	autonom*; woman*; freedom; individu*; progressive; right; self- disposition;
Social	*armut; *behinderung; *handicap; *schwachen; ehrlich; gleichberechtigung; gleichheit*; pension*; rente*; ruhegeld; schutz*; sozial*; unterricht;	*poverty; *handicap; *weak; honest; emancipation; equality*; pension*; retire*; retirement pay; protection*; social*; education;
Environment	aufheizung; erwärmung; grün*; klima*; milieu; umwelt; öko*;	heating; warming; green*; climate*; environment*; ecol*

Adapted from: (Pauwels, 2011)

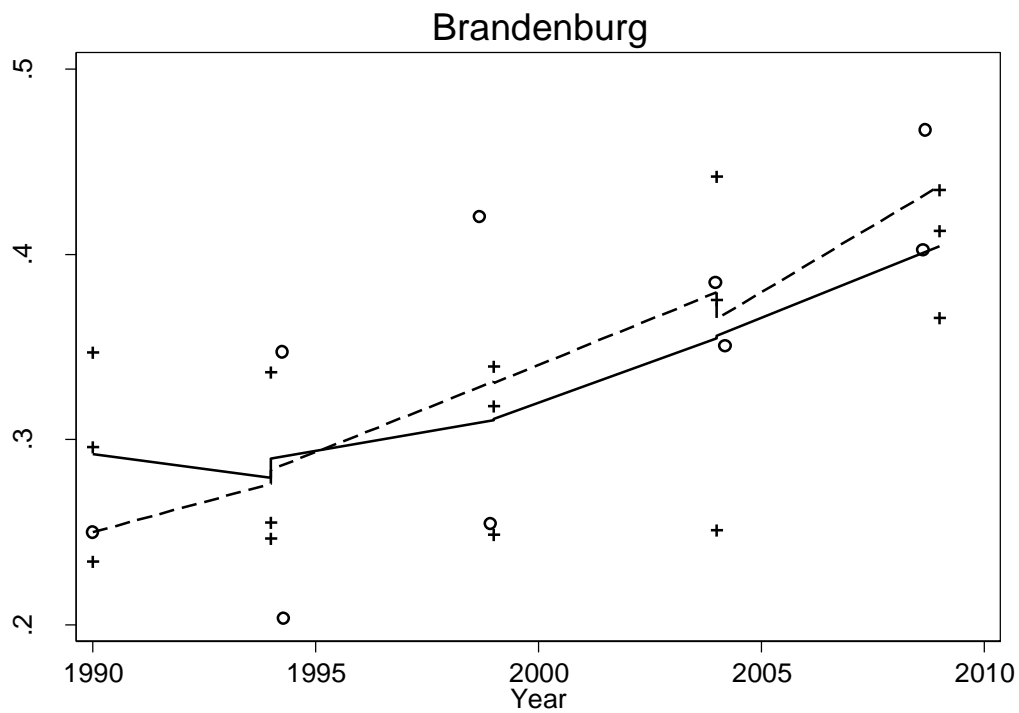
An asterisk () indicates the 'stemming' of a word and is used to shorten the dictionary. So, instead of searching for "teenager", "teenagerin" or "teenagers", one searches for teenager* instead, making the software count all the words starting with "teenager"*

ii. Proportion of Scored Words per State including Least Squares Smoothing

Investigated States compared with Control States

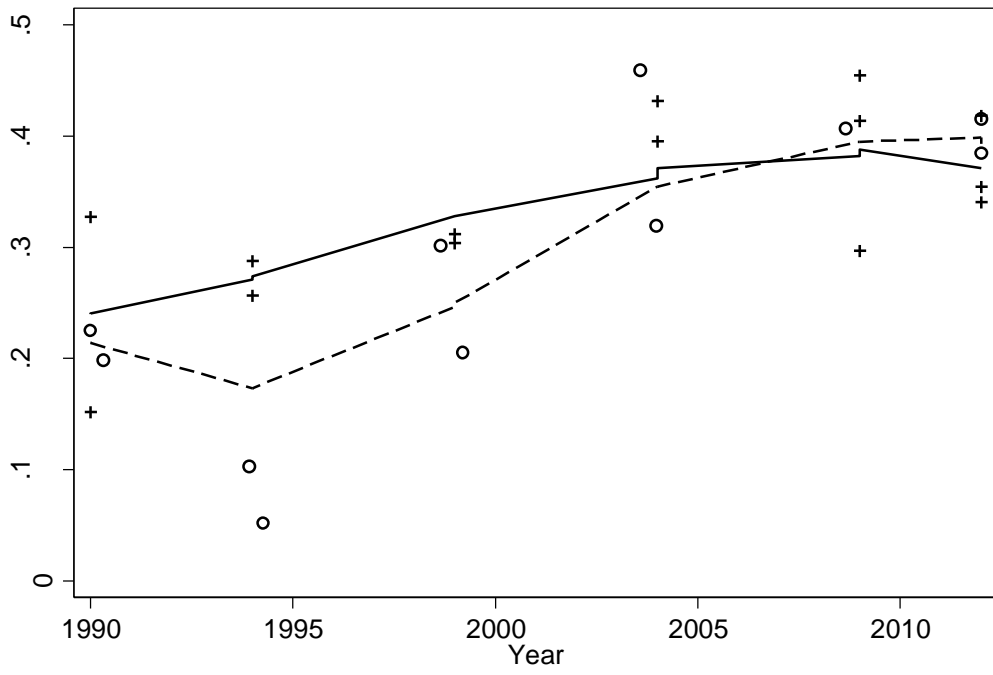
Here, the control states are placed below the investigated states for the ease of comparison. Thus, only the control states with roughly the same years of elections are used.

Brandenburg¹⁰

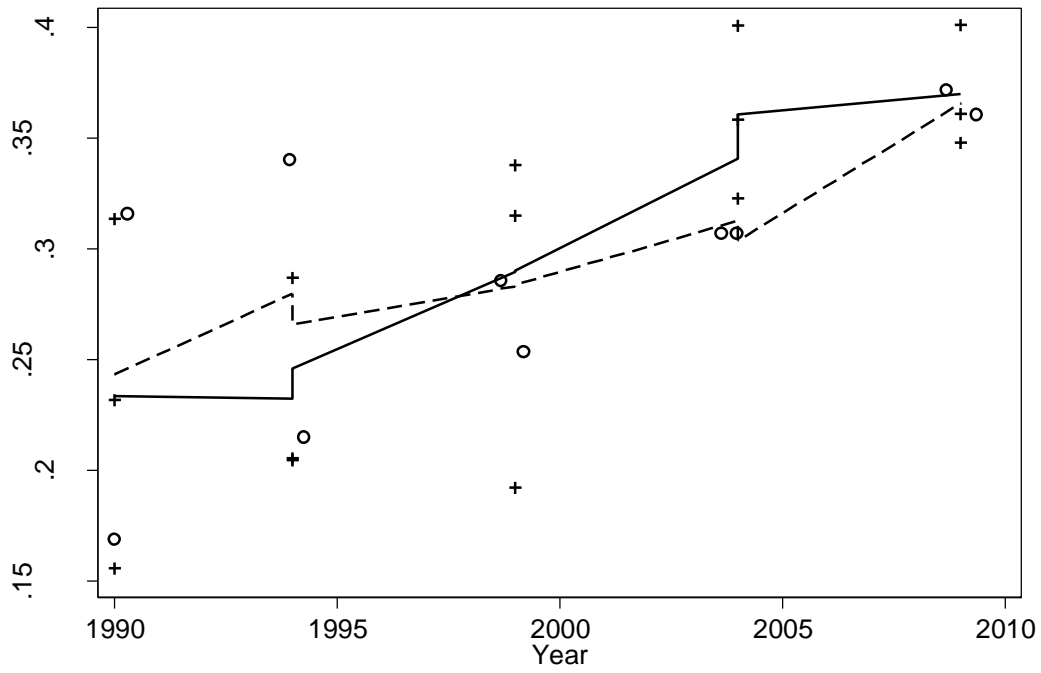


¹⁰ Brandenburg did have a lowering in 2011, but as there were no data after this lowering, no regression line has been calculated after 2011, nor have we included the line when the lowering took place

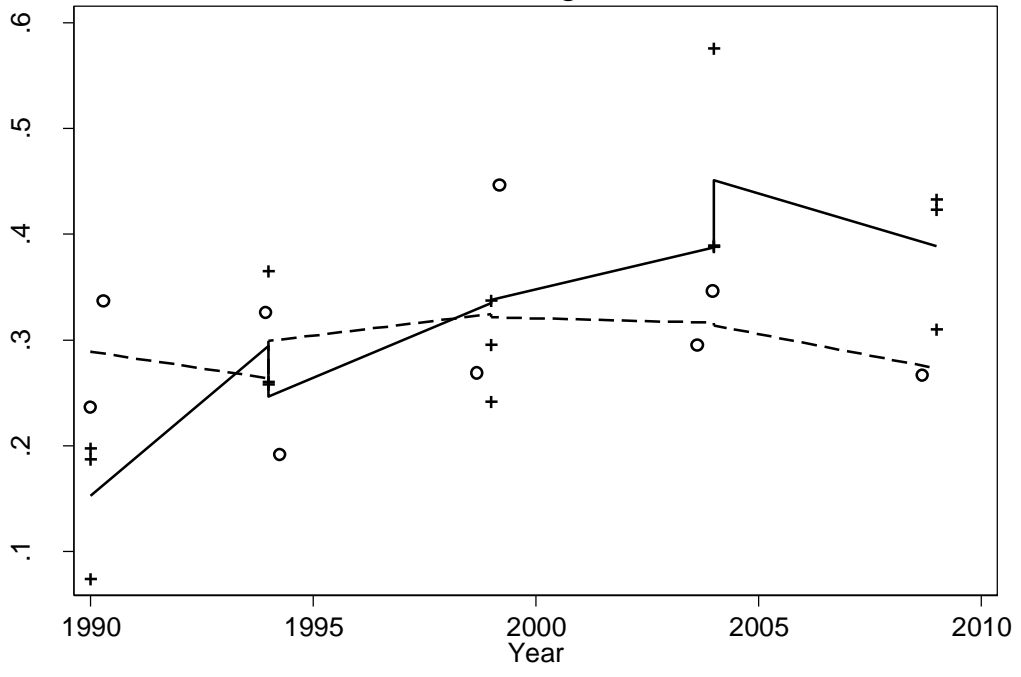
Saarland



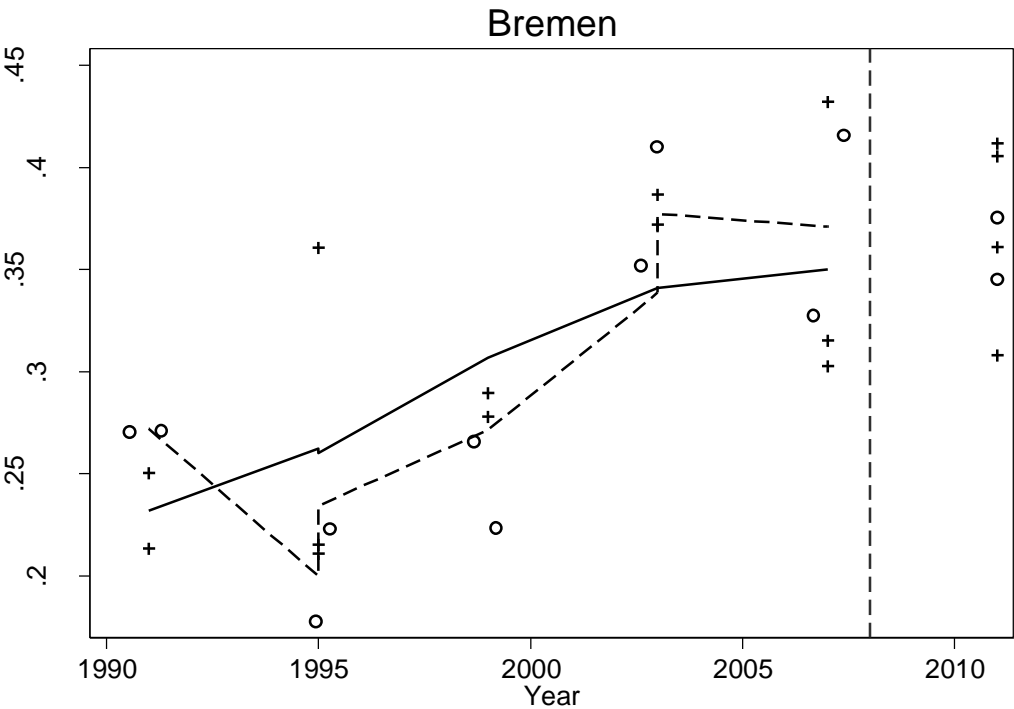
Sachsen



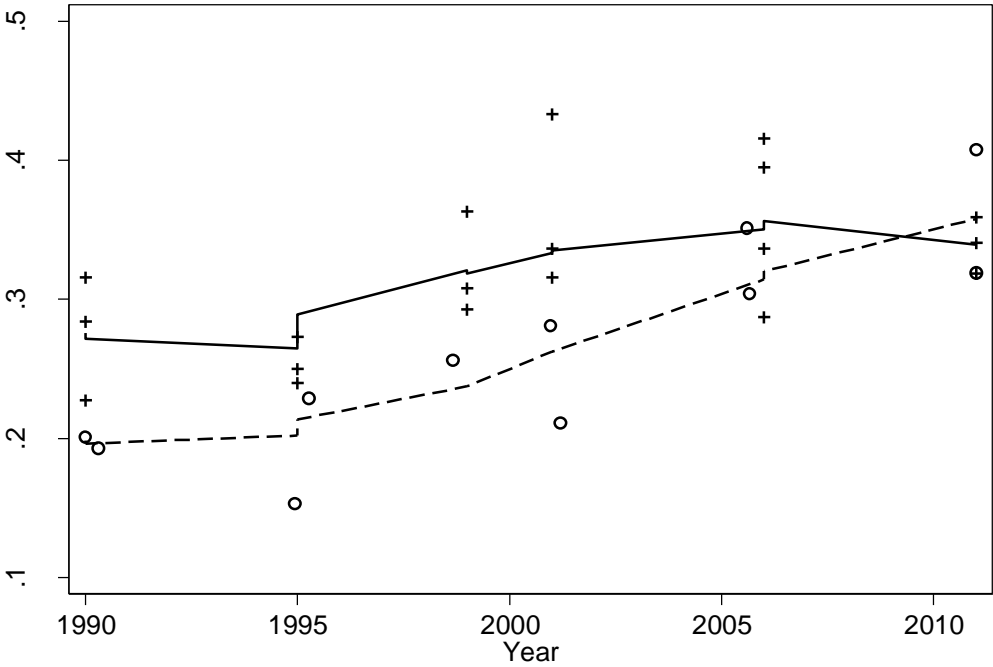
Thüringen



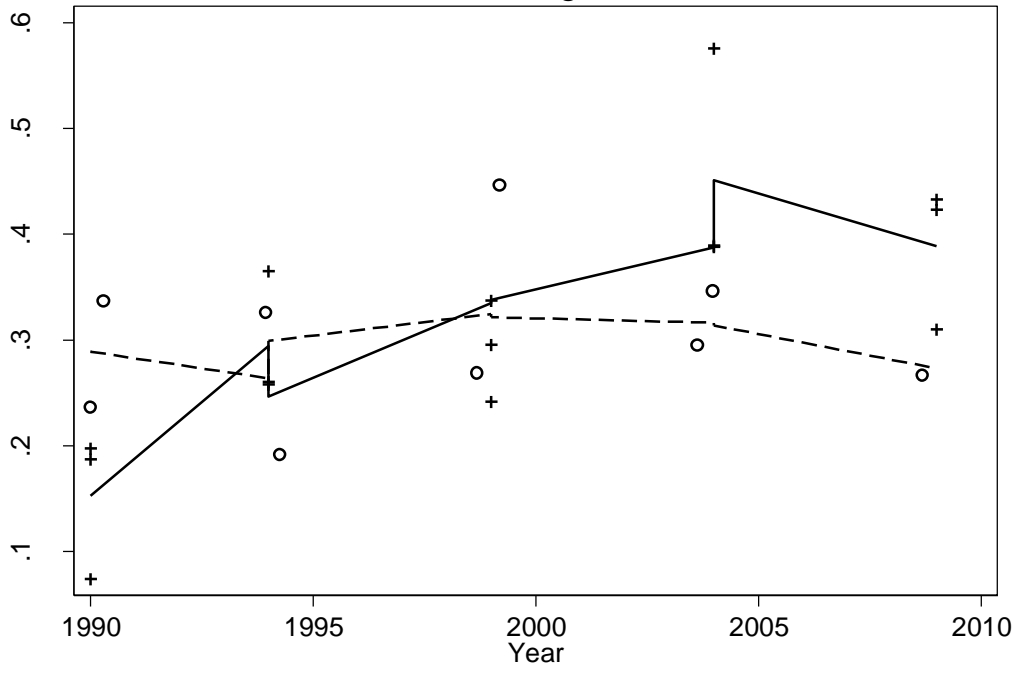
Bremen



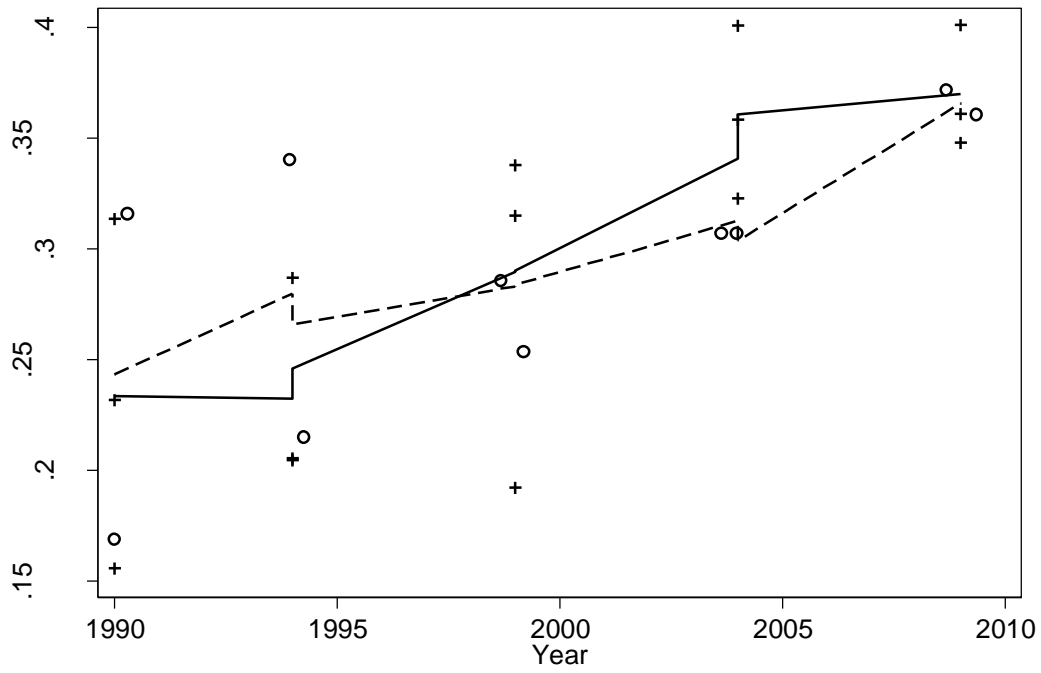
Berlin



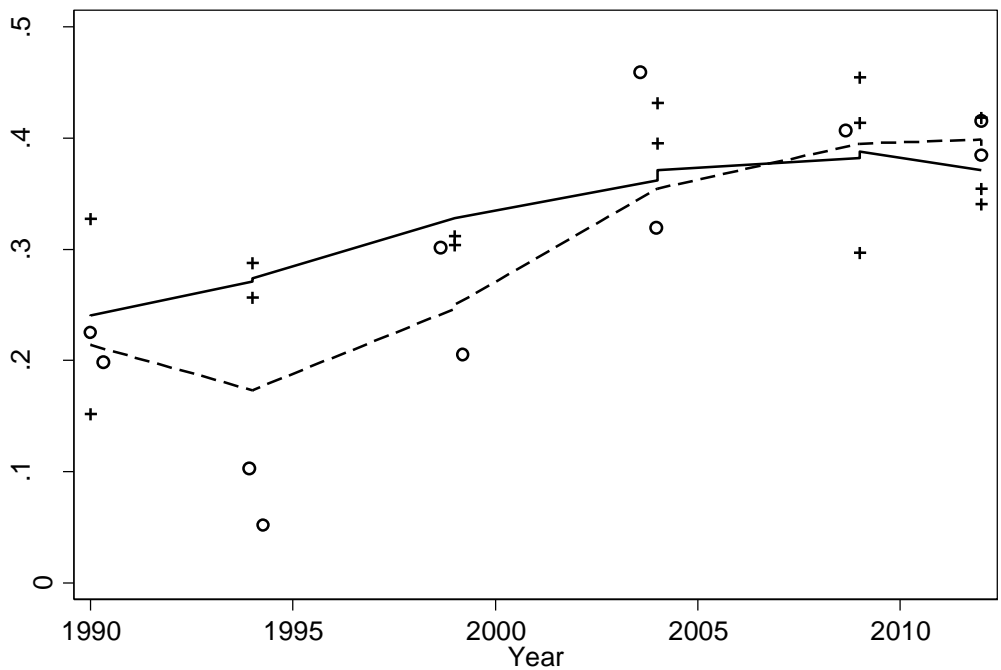
Thüringen



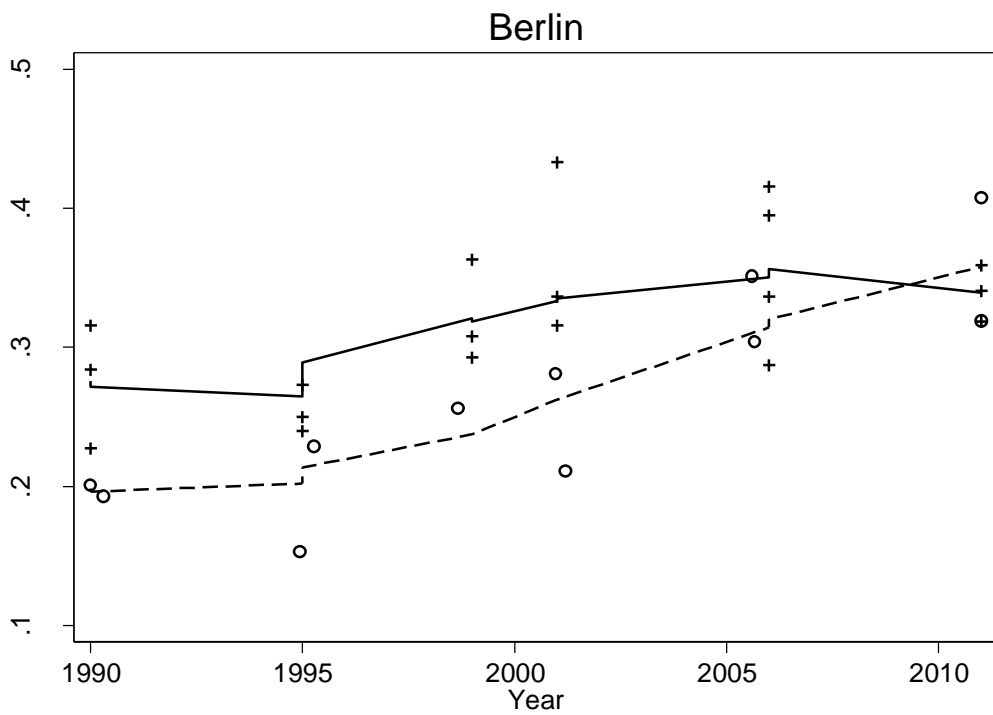
Sachsen



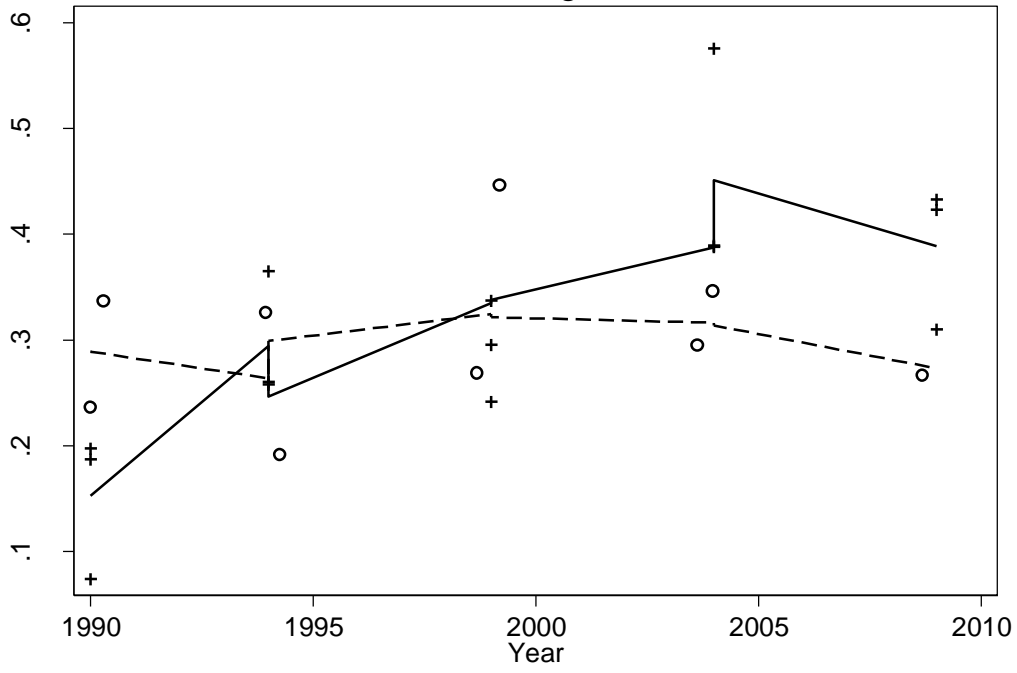
Saarland



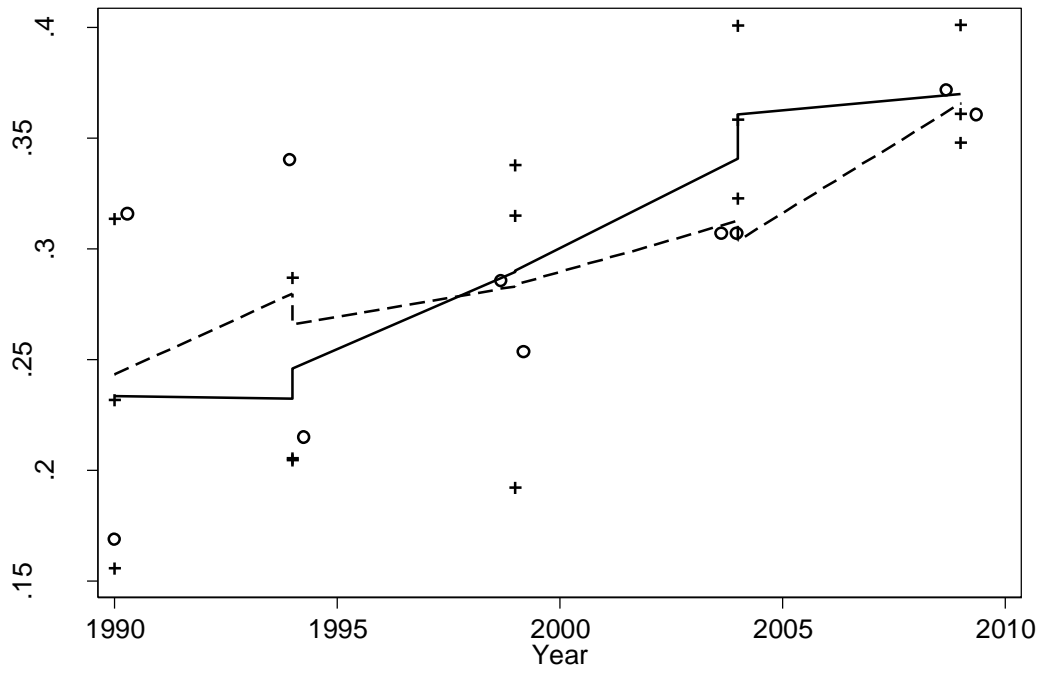
Hessen



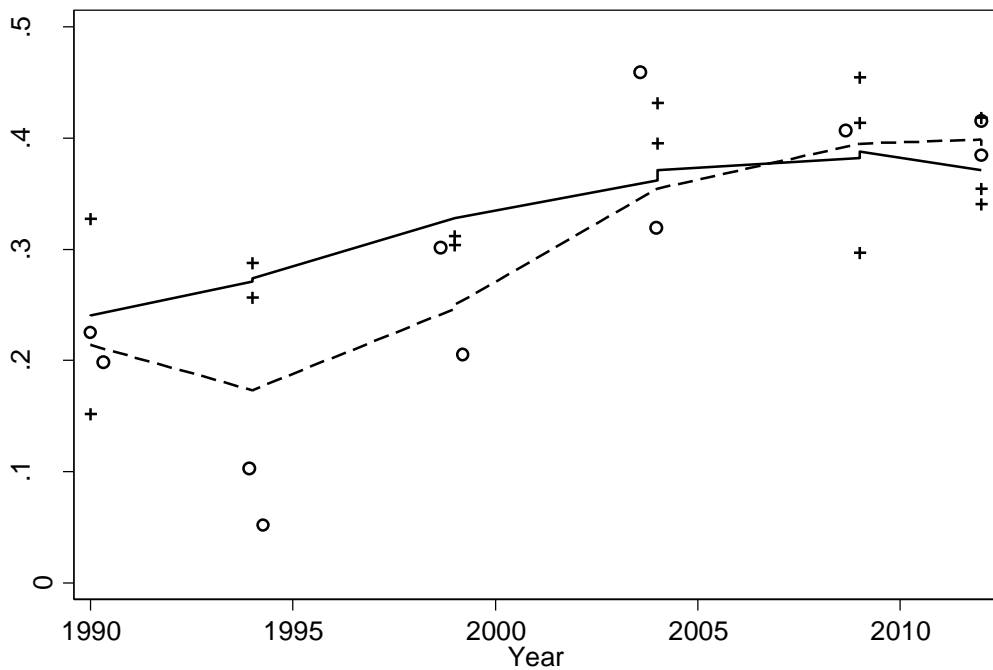
Thüringen



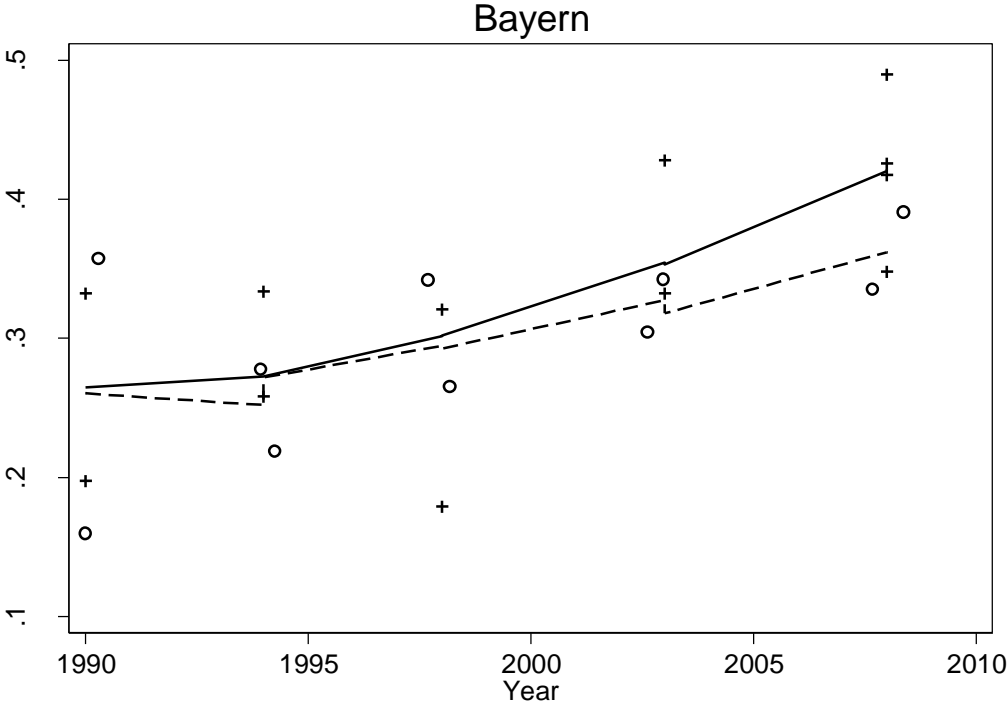
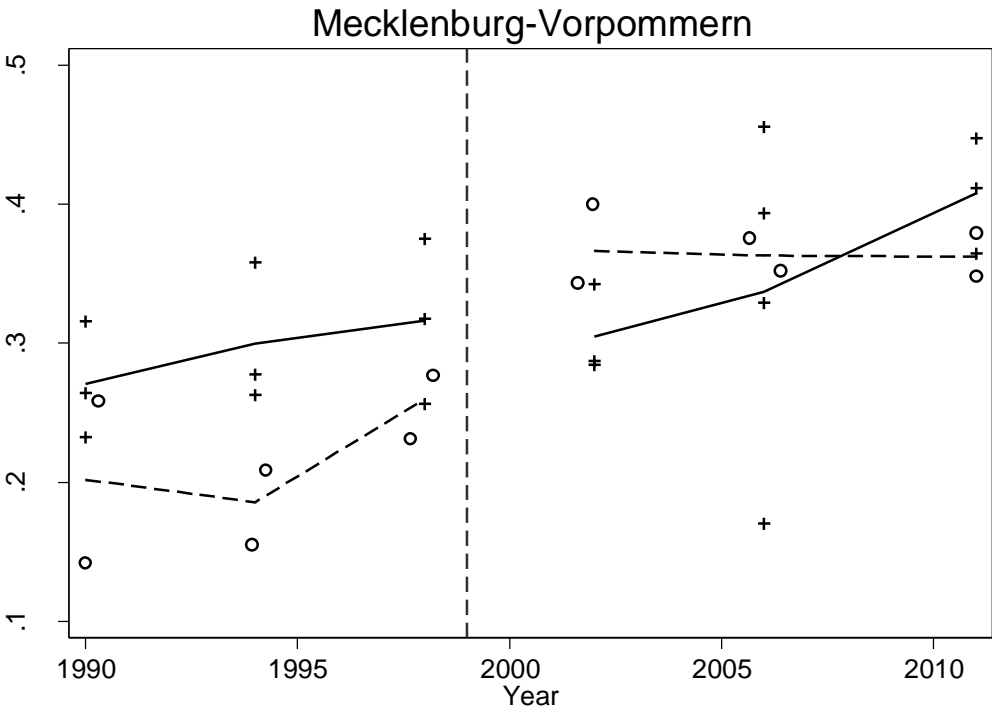
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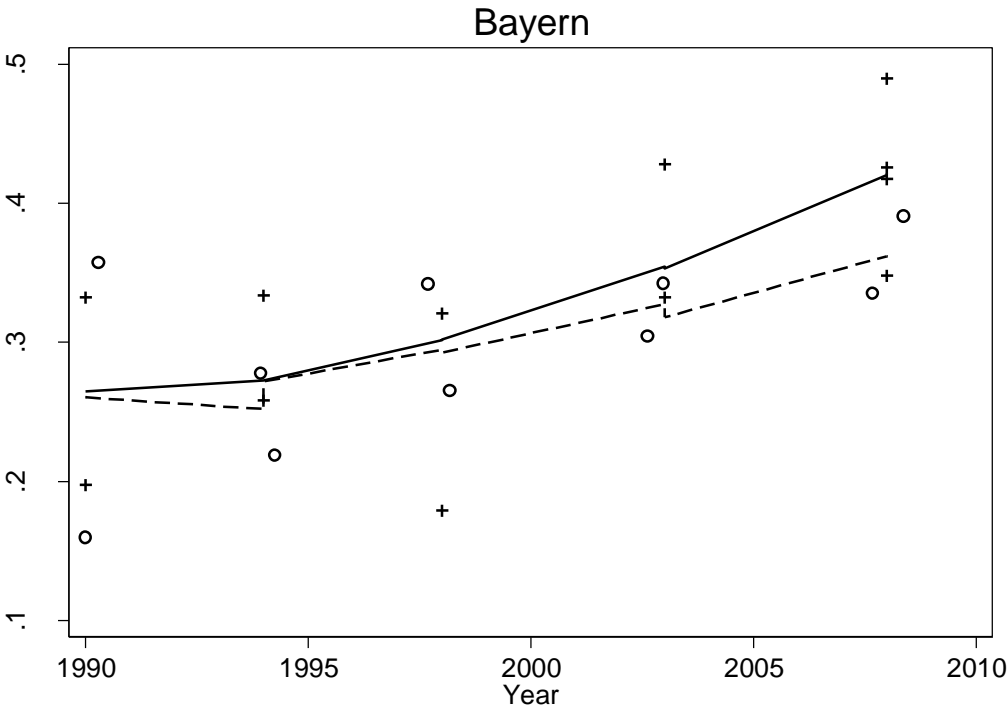
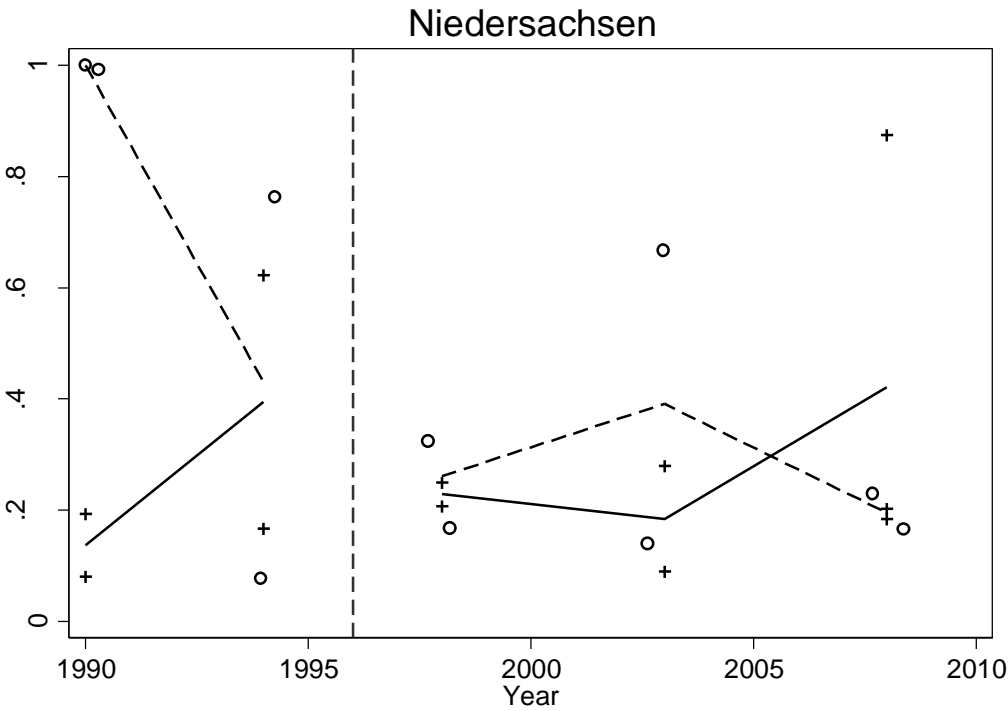
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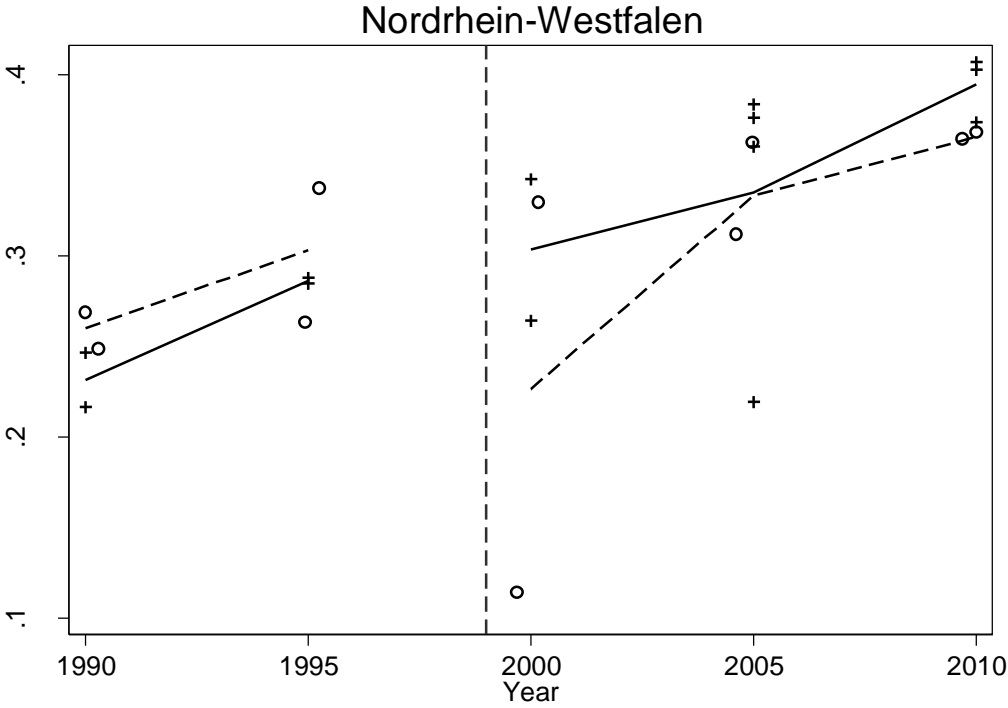
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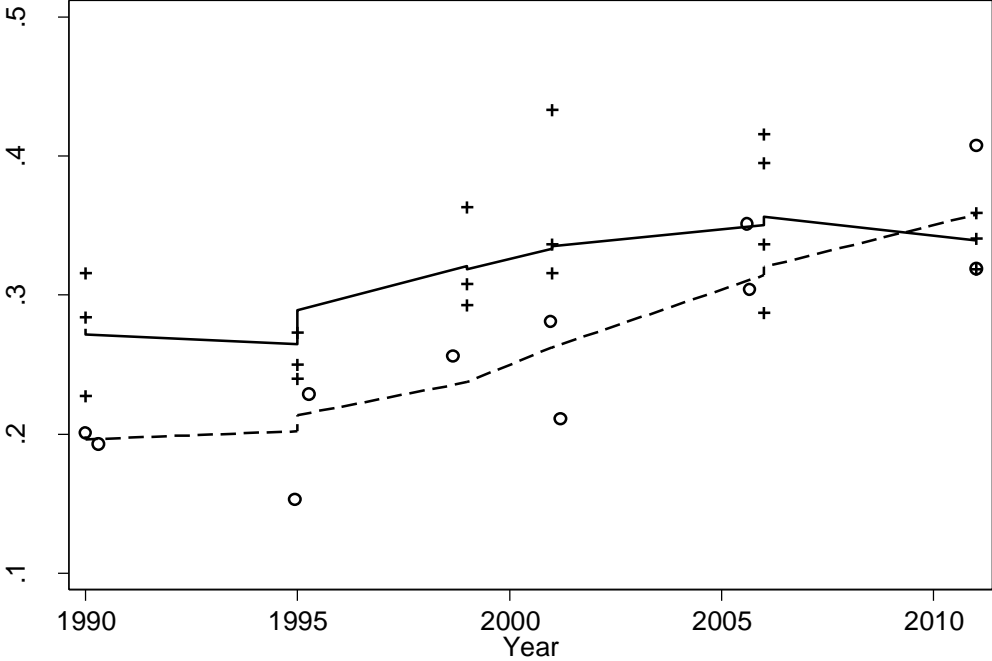
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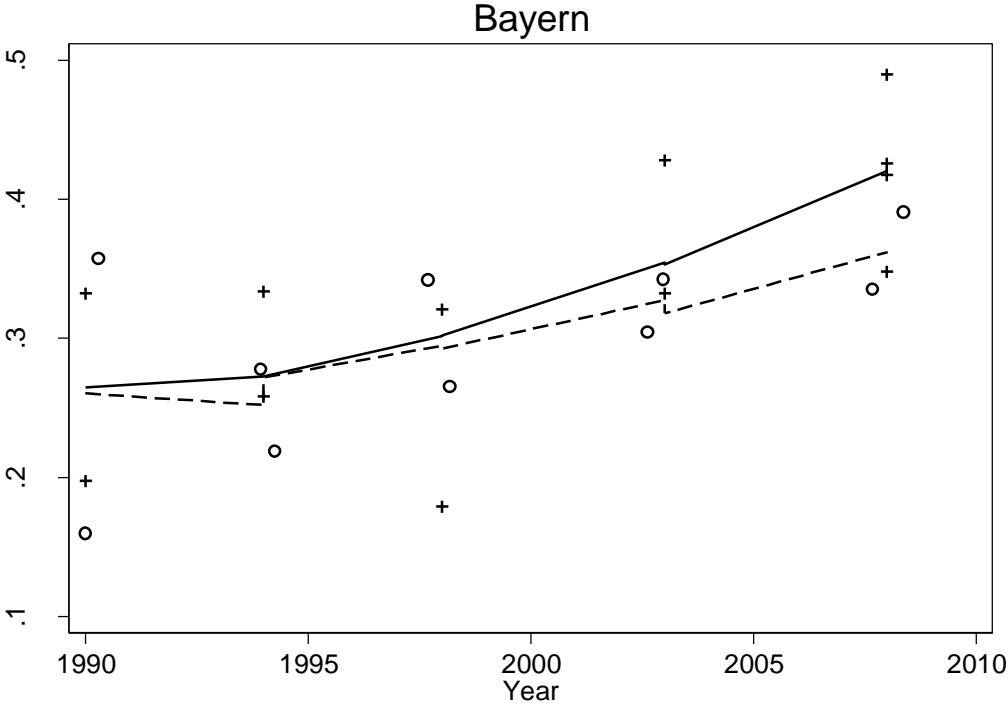
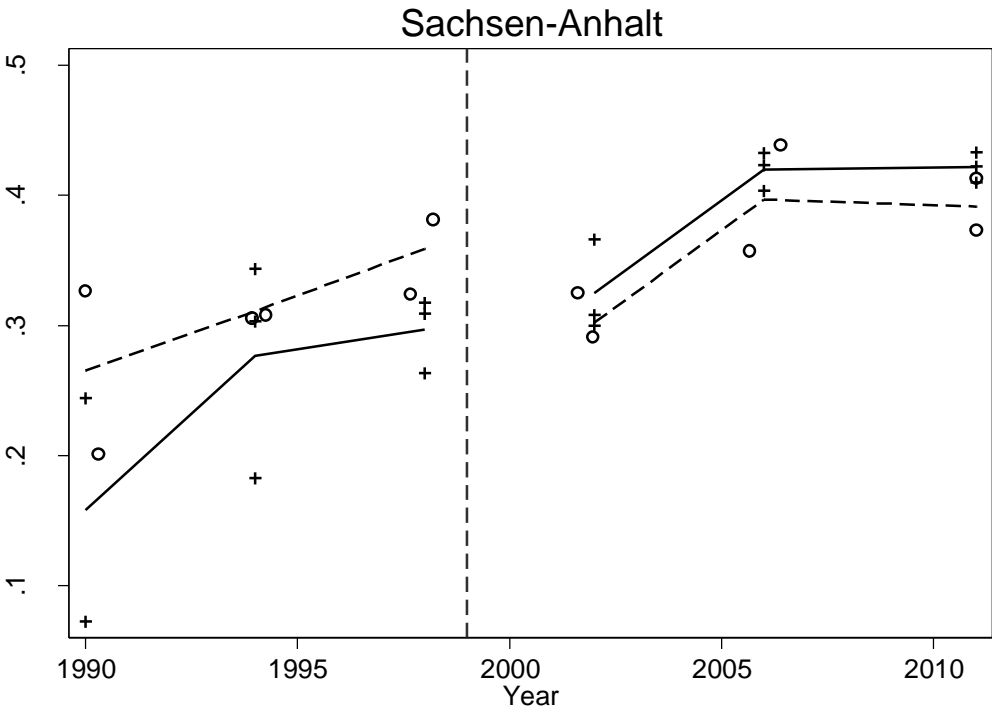
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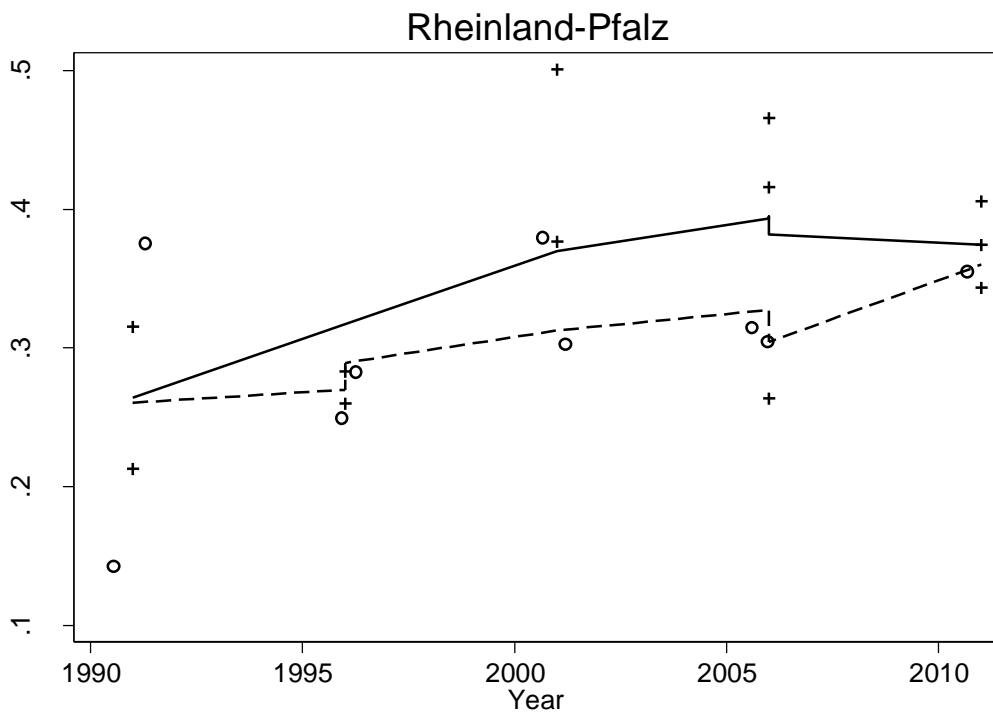
Berlin



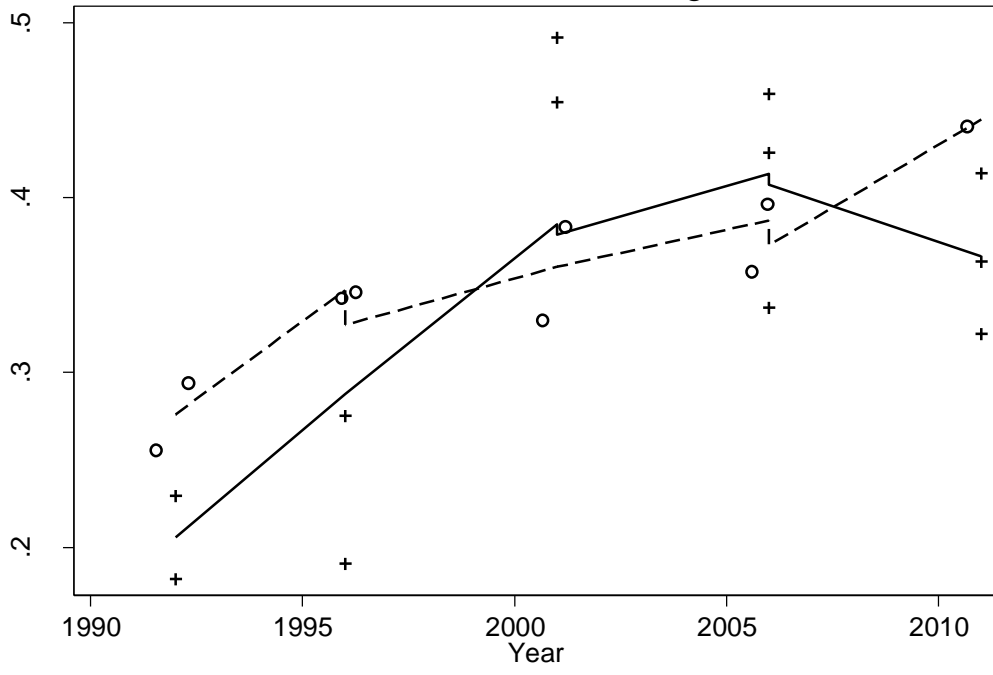
Sachsen-Anhalt



Schleswig-Holstein

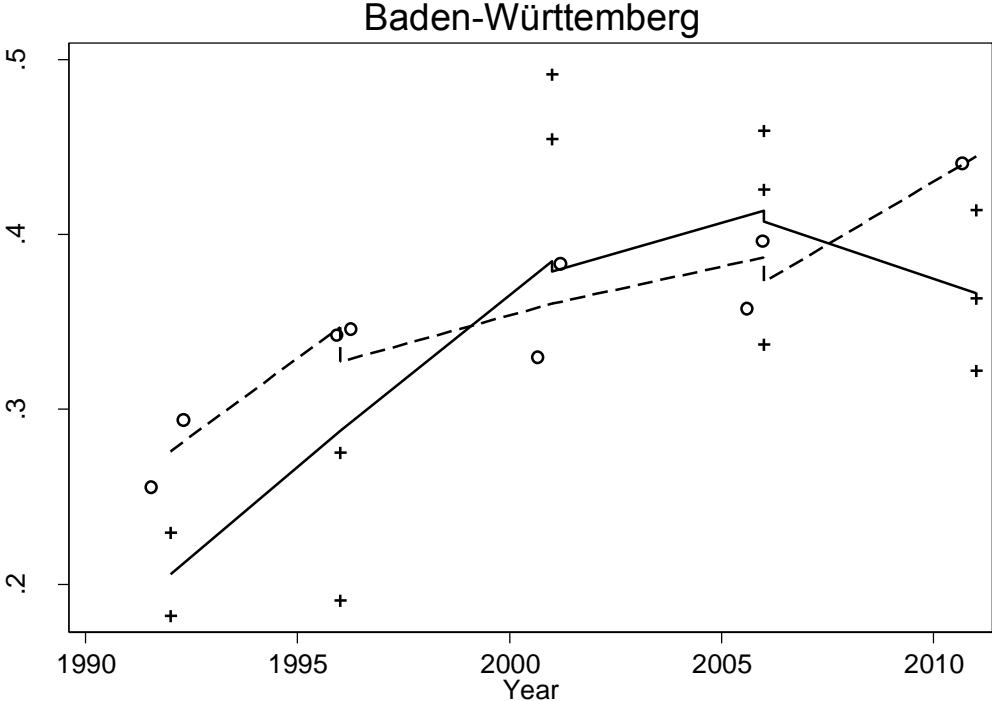


Baden-Württemberg

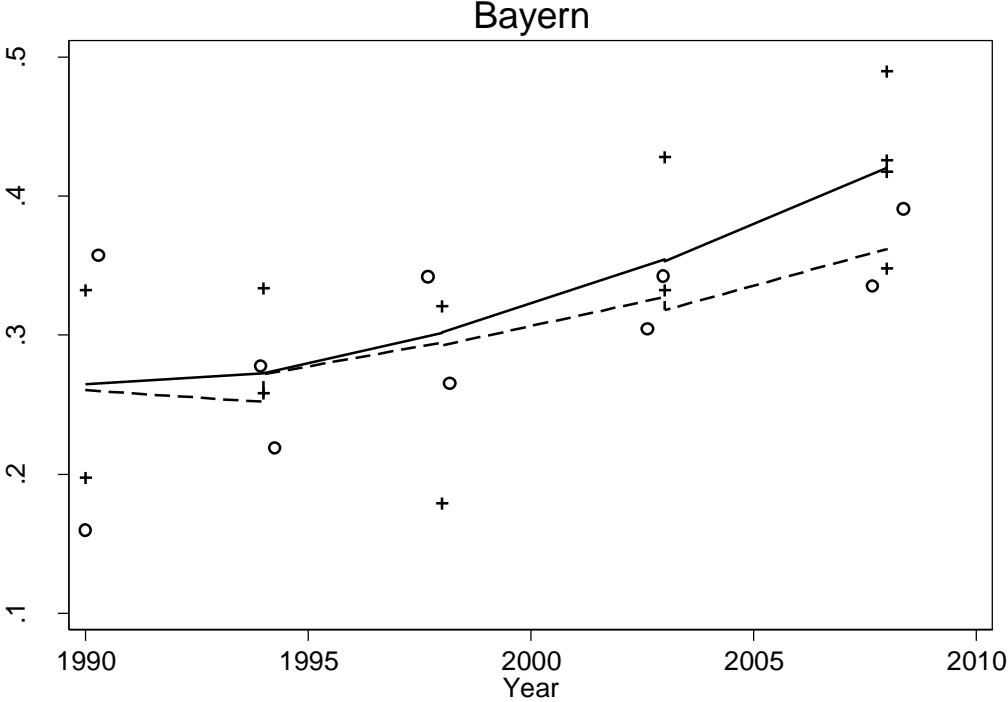


Control states

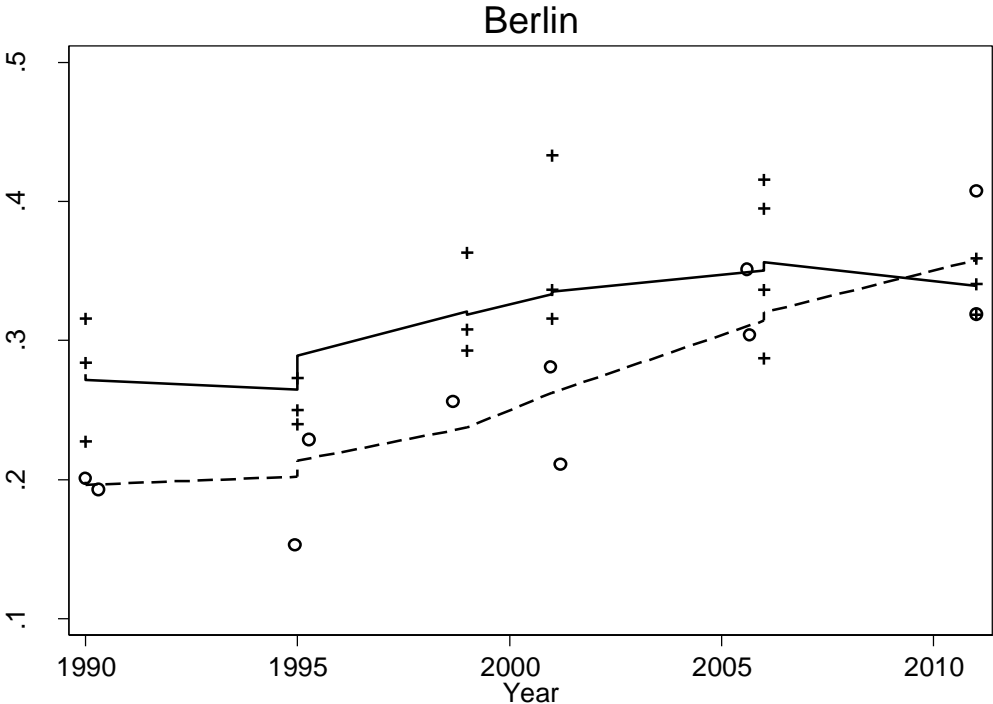
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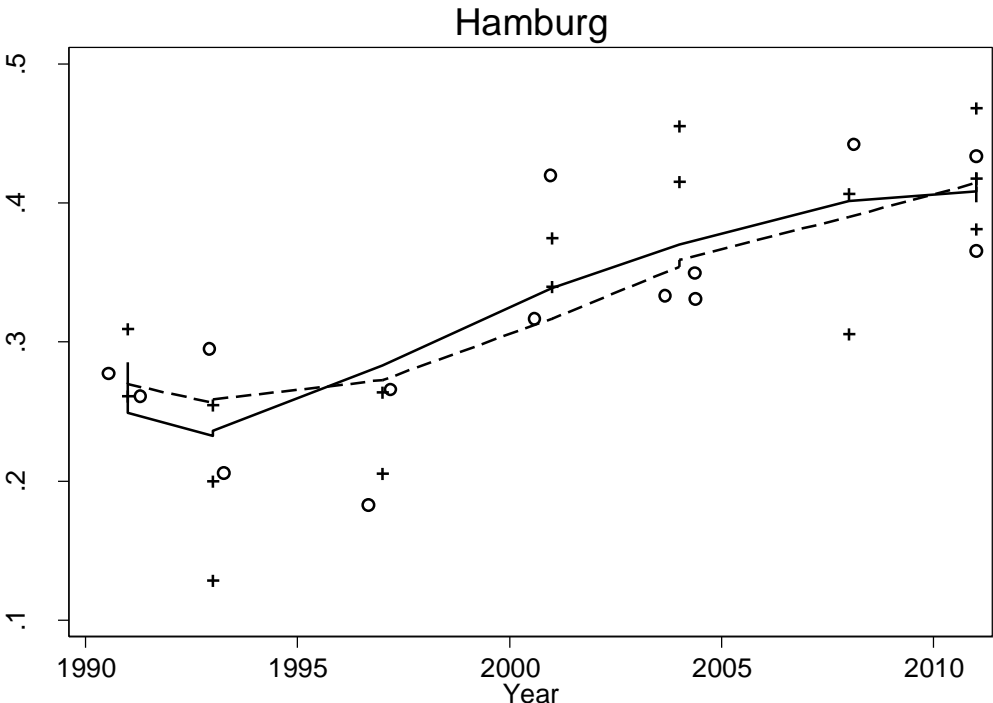
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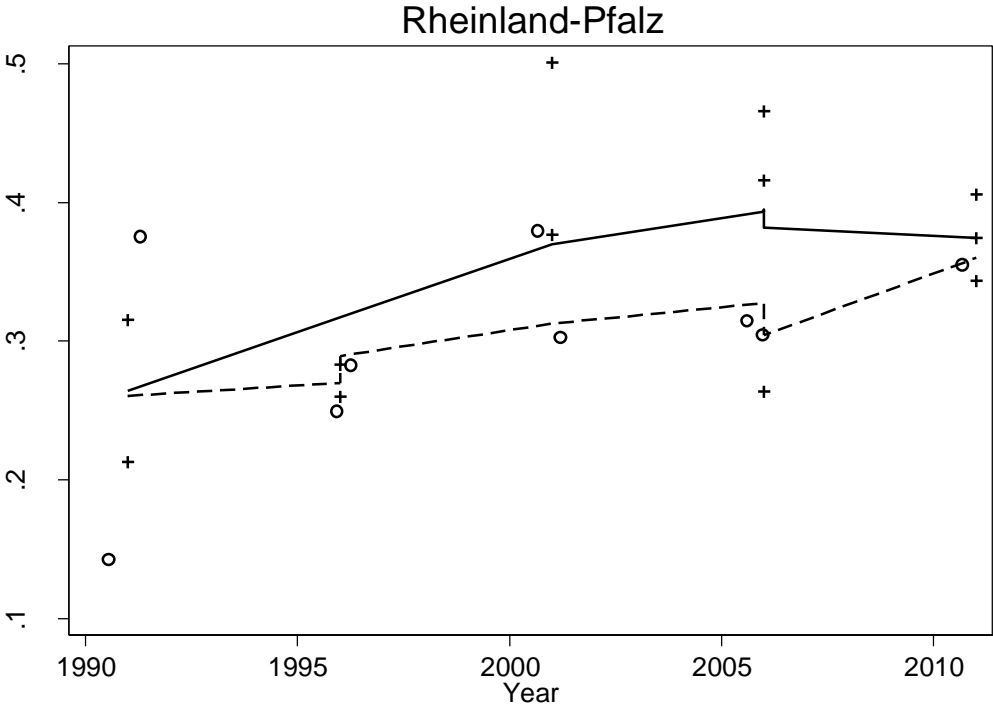
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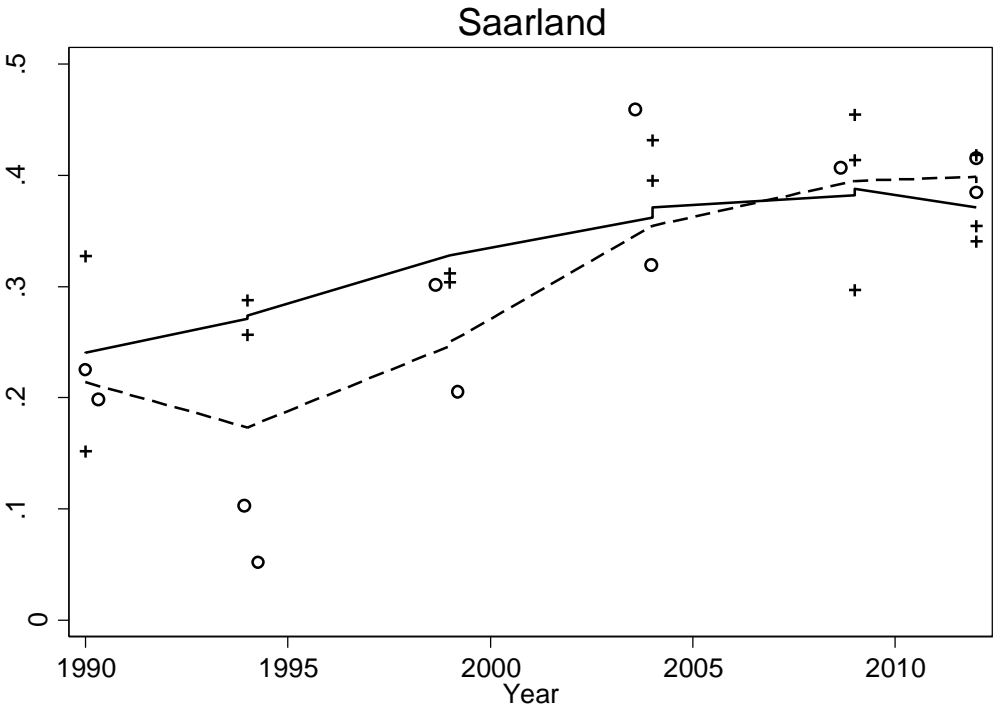
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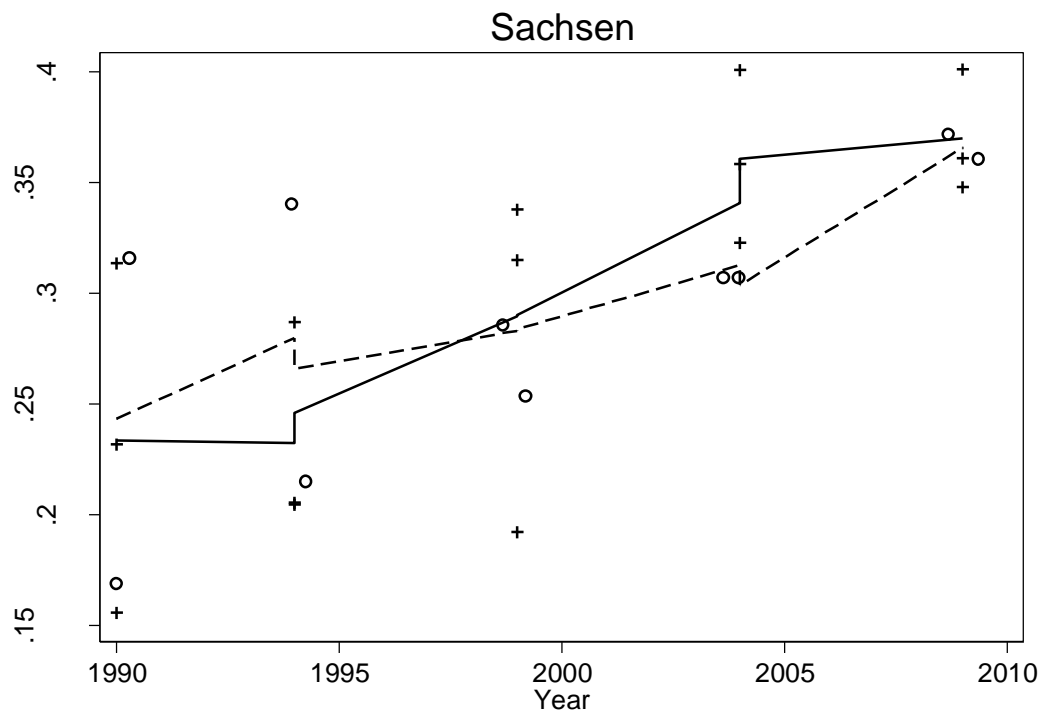
Rheinland-Pfalz



Saarland



Sachsen



Thüringen

