

Governmental Responsiveness to Public Demands between Elections A Research Agenda

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Outline of the Lecture

- Background to the research agenda
- What is the ResponsiveGov project about?
- Conceptual development: defining and measuring responsiveness
- Theoretical development: normative and empirical issues in the study of responsiveness
- Research design
- Illustration of data collection progress and some preliminary findings

Background to the research agenda on responsiveness

- Early years of research career: interest in how institutional configurations shape citizens' political engagement
- More recently: interest in other side of the coin,
 - How much does citizens' engagement shape what governments do, and
 - How do institutional configurations moderate that link

Background to the research agenda (cont.)

- In 2011, ERC grant award of €1.4M to support research programme: the ResponsiveGov project.
- Since 2012, team set up at Leicester with:
 - 2 post-doctoral researchers
 - 2 PhD students
 - 1 Administrator
 - Numerous RAs to support in data collection



What is the ResponsiveGov project about?

Main Research Questions

- To what extent are democratic governments responsive to citizens' demands and preferences between elections?
- Are governments more likely to be responsive to the expression of public opinion through surveys or to collective and publicly expressed opinion – generally in the form of lobbying and protests?
- What happens when both forms of expression of the public mood are in clear contradiction?
- Are certain institutional and political configurations more likely to make governments more responsive to citizens' views between elections?
- And are certain political configurations more conducive to governments paying attention to opinion polls while others make them more receptive to collective action claims-making?

Theoretical and empirical motivations

- Why is this project of interest?
 - Vast and increasing empirical scholarship on governmental responsiveness, but less conceptual & theoretical elaboration on what responsiveness is.
 - Normative disagreement about whether governments *ought* to respond to the public's demands between elections.
 - Two views (cf. Mansbridge & Rehfeld debate):
 - Promissory view/form of representation: Elections confer mandates based on electoral platforms, and governments are legitimized to 'resist' the pressures of multiple sectors of the public between elections.
 - Anticipatory view/form of representation: Elections provide incentives for governments to engage in deliberative dynamics and switch policies between elections, thus it is 'natural' to expect responsiveness between elections.

- Normative debate focuses considerably on role of elections, pledges and electoral mandates.
- But very little empirical work exists on whether electoral mandates matter for responsive behaviour.
- Claiming a ‘mandate’ can be difficult when (i) no electoral pledge or discussion was made before elections, and/or (ii) unexpected situations or ‘shocks’ put the validity of any ‘mandate’ into question.
- The comparison of ‘unexpected’/ ‘shock-driven’ situations with ‘normal’ policy making situations is potentially interesting, from both normative and empirical perspectives.

Main Goals of the Project

- Goal 1: To define what is governmental responsiveness between elections and how we can best measure it
- Goal 2: To provide a conceptual and theoretical framework to the study of governmental policy responsiveness between elections.
- Goal 3: To collect new data that allows an examination of how and when gov'ts respond to the pressures of the public
- Goal 4: To assess whether 'mandates' and 'pledges' play a significant role in shaping governmental responsiveness
- Goal 5: To assess whether certain institutional configurations are more conducive to greater responsiveness or to 'biased' responsiveness

Filling in Research Gaps

- Core questions about democratic politics at the intersection of various subfields in political science and sociology: democratic theory, public opinion, collective action and social movements, comparative political institutions, and policy-making.
- Multiple scholars link institutional designs to process of democratic preference representation (Lijphart, Powell, Soroka & Wlezien), BUT
- Comparative studies of governmental responsiveness are scarce and partial, mostly comparing US with UK, Canada.
- None looks at contrasting forms of expression of public opinion.

Conceptual development:

Defining and Measuring Responsiveness

What is responsiveness?

- Pitkin: Representation is acting in the interested of the represented, in a manner responsive to them.
- Rarely discussed what exactly is meant by responsiveness.
- Powell: Responsiveness is ‘what occurs when the democratic process induces the government to form and implement policies that the citizens want’.
- Responsiveness and congruence often used interchangeably.

What is responsiveness? (cont.)

- Problematic because congruence can be due to:
 - Constituents choosing representatives who match their preferences; or
 - Representatives not sharing preferences but constrained by other factors to follow policies consistent with constituents; or
 - Representatives persuading constituents to share their preferences; or
 - External factors changing simultaneously the views and/or preferences of both the constituents and the representative; or
 - Representatives adapting policy behaviour to views of constituents.
- I argue only the latter should be called ‘responsiveness’.

What is responsiveness? (cont.)

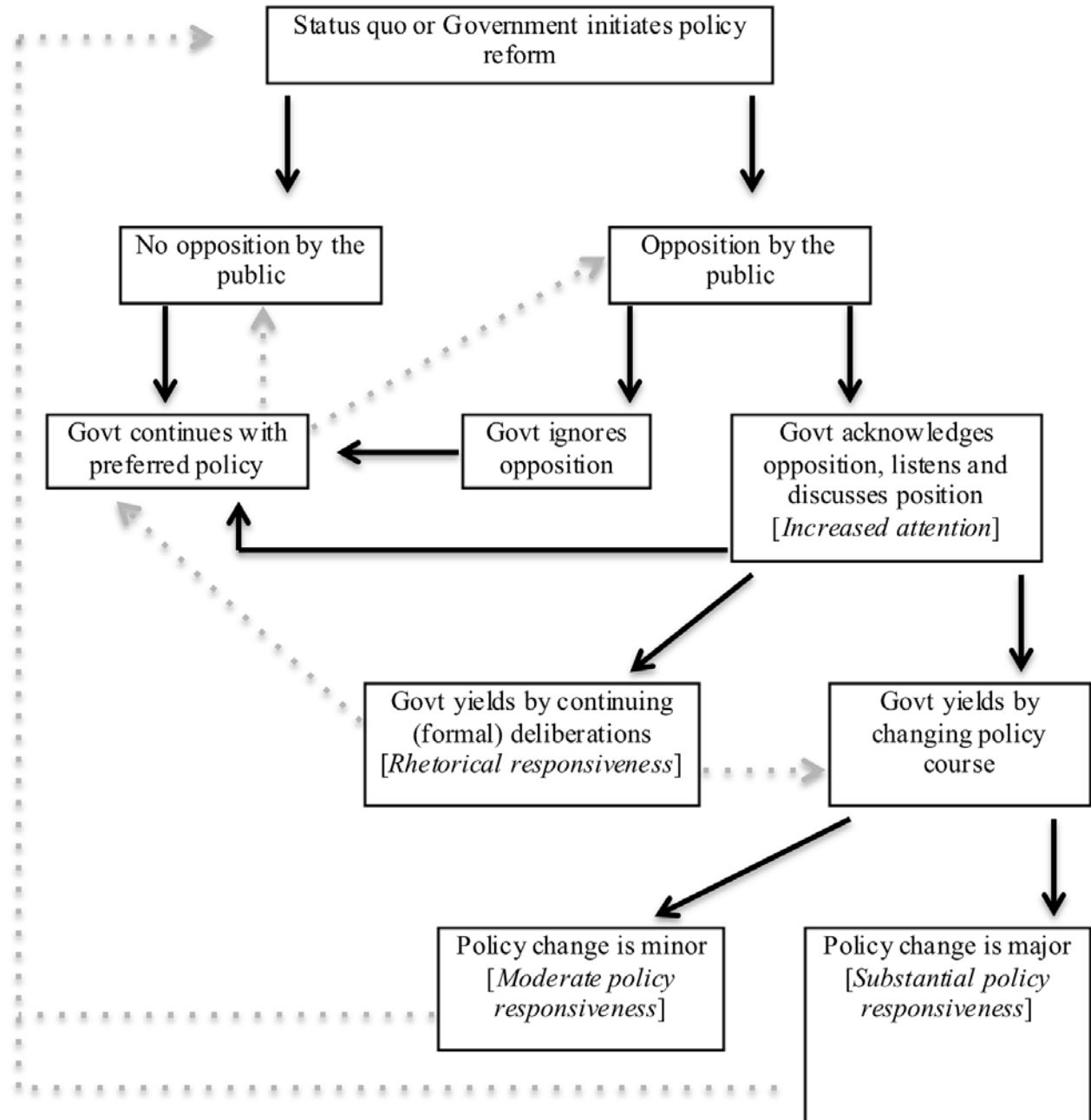
- With this definition, gov'tal responsiveness requires:
 - That views or preferences over issues differ between constituents and gov't; and
 - That gov'ts adapt or change their position to reflect the diverging view/preference of constituents.
- Assumption: in most cases, gov'ts hold an opinion and have a preferred policy, and responsiveness requires change.
- When gov't does not have a firm preferred policy, responsiveness requires adopting preferred policy of constituents.

What counts as responsiveness?

I argue that...

- There are multiple forms in which governments can respond to the policy demands of citizens;
- A ‘processual’ notion of democratic responsiveness might be useful: responsiveness viewed as a series of steps or stages;
- Rhetorical reactions also matter (as argued by deliberative theorists) but are just a ‘minimal’ stage in the responsiveness process.

Figure 1. Democratic (governmental) responsiveness as a process



- Following this processual understanding of responsiveness to policy demands by the public...
- I propose an ordinal conceptualization of responsiveness:
 0. No reaction, no change in attention or in position.
 1. Increased attention to the issue by the Government but no change in position.
 2. Rhetorical reaction/change: increased attention to the issue and some symbolic yielding to opposing actors without substantive change in policy.
 3. Moderate policy reaction/change: substantive change in a (relatively) minor aspect of the policy.
 4. Substantial policy reaction/change: in the case of major policy changes, u-turns in relation to initial policy positions or proposals, or when major legislation is enacted.

Other relevant conceptual issues

- What counts as ‘public opinion’ or public policy demands?
 - Opinions expressed in surveys [[the ‘median’ voter](#)]: provide information about the public mood for general public.
 - Collective action [[the ‘vocal’ voter](#)]: provides information about strong preferences and ‘mini-publics’.
- How do we measure citizens’ preferences and demands?
 - Information imperfect: we have chosen to measure what is in public domain only through multiplicity of sources.

Theoretical development:

When ought governments
to be responsive vs. when
are they likely to be
responsive

The Normative Discussion

- Four problems for normative (and empirical) analysis:
 1. Who are they representing: constituents, all citizens, the party?
 - Party democracies considerably complicate the principal-agent relationship
 - Consequence: Understanding of the representative link (and definition of the principal) varies considerably across countries and across types of parties
 - Examples: In Portugal, Greece, Germany or France between 70 and 50% of MPs see themselves primarily as representatives of the citizens of their countries as a whole; in Spain only 45%. In some countries, a very sizeable minority of MPs view themselves as primarily representing their parties — e.g., 22 per cent in Belgium, 19 per cent in Spain, and 16 per cent in Italy — as well as a majority of Danish MPs (48 per cent)
 - Even if gov'ts more likely to view themselves as representing whole country, some will think they should represent their core voters instead

2. Mandate vs independence: unresolved issue of how much responsiveness between elections is desirable

- Conflicting views about desirability of responsiveness between elections
- Most citizens expect gov'ts to be responsive but huge cross-national variations: 47% in Denmark and 75% and above in Portugal, Switzerland and Spain
- Representatives don't share this view: 72% of MPs on average think that MP should behave independently and in most countries large majority of MPs are of this view, but
- Interesting cross-national differences: majority of Spanish MPs (58%) thought they should vote following opinions of voters, and sizeable minorities of above 35% of same opinion in Hungary, Israel, Norway and Portugal

3. Diversity of constituents' views: there is no single 'principal', heterogeneity of preferences, to whom should representatives pay attention?

- When preferences and demands are conflicting, should they yield to their own voters? The majority? The most vocal? The most threatening?
- Aggregating heterogeneous preferences is difficult, and sometimes impossible

4. How to learn about their views: surveys do not solve all problems, preferences expressed through multiple 'voices', how to weight each?

- How to weight the voices expressed through surveys (median voter) and through collective action (protest, lobbying, etc., the vocal voter)?

- Normative debate focuses considerably on electoral mandates.
- But, the existence of ‘electoral mandates’ is disputed;
- Parties bundle positions on many issues in their party manifestos / electoral pledges;
- Some issues are not covered in (any) detail in manifestos for any given election;
- Even if covered in manifestos, many/most issues are not discussed during electoral campaigns;
- In countries with coalition gov’ts, the notion of an electoral mandate often makes no sense;

- Yet, parties and representatives constantly claim to have an electoral mandate to do what they want to do;
- Mandates are best understood as a legitimizing rhetorical tool to neutralize opposition to policy initiatives (or to status quo);
- Yet, when ‘unexpected’ circumstances emerge (e.g. shocks), this alters the capacity to legitimately and validly claim a mandate;
- When major shocks (or focusing events) happen, the information voters have can drastically change and invalidate whatever information was used to cast a vote in the past;
- Thus, gov'ts ought to be more responsive due to reduced legitimacy of resisting opposition.

The Empirical Discussion

- When are governments *likely* to be responsive?
- On most policies, governments have a ‘preferred policy’ option, even if they have not made a ‘pledge’ or declared a manifesto position;
- In absence of opposition, this is the policy course they would follow;
- Key empirical focus = Under what conditions will they change course?

- Governmental actors are ‘anticipators’ who need to balance vote maximization, policy seeking and office seeking goals.
- But Gov’ts also constrained: policy-making process related, external constraints (reputation, contracts), internal party/coalition constraints.
- Responses are contingent to range of goals and constraints.
- Relevant factors traditionally considered = saliency of issue, size of potential electoral loss, closeness to elections.

- This project adds detailed focus on two types of ‘public opinion’ gov’ts might respond to: ‘median’ voter (surveys) and the ‘vocal’ voter (citizens engaging in collective action).
- A solid opposing mood in surveys can signal future electoral losses. But is it enough to sway gov’ts?
- Successful mobilization of ‘vocal’ voters can signal strong preferences from certain sectors of public. But is it enough to sway gov’ts?
- Key argument of project: importance of ‘amplification’ mechanism (Agnone), joint signals about future losses

- Empirical expectations on governmental responsiveness
 - In the absence of collective public opposition → little incentive for responsiveness between elections, regardless of position of ‘median’ voter (H1)
 - If public opposition substantial and consistent with ‘median’ voter → substantial responsiveness much more likely (H2)
 - If public opposition substantial but inconsistent with ‘median’ voter → reaction conditional on single vs. coalition gov’t (H3a), and if protesters in line with ‘core’ voters (of any gov’t party) (H3b)
 - Above expectations conditional on how close election day is (H4a), the type of issue (H4b), and other constraints (H4c)
 - ‘Unexpected’ vs ‘normal’ policy-making situations → responsiveness more likely in ‘unexpected’ junctures (H5)

The research design

Policy 'Junctures' as the Focus of Analysis

- Innovative approach to the subject by not looking at continuous aggregate-level time series.
- Instead, focusing on policy 'junctures', as moments of policy formulation, reform or decision-making.
- Process-tracing approach possible relying on event-history logic.
- 'Normal' vs 'shock-driven' junctures compared.

Policy ‘Junctures’ as the Focus of Analysis

Table 1. Classification of policy cases to study

Policy area	Unexpected situations	“Normal” situations
<i>Industry & Environment-related policies</i>	1. Nuclear energy after Fukushima (pilot) [Shock = Fukushima]	3. Regulations on genetically modified crops (GMCs)
<i>Economy-related reforms: productive sectors</i>	4. Mortgage laws regulations after 2008 crisis [Shock = banking crisis/recession]	2. Intellectual property and internet reforms (pilot)
<i>Welfare/social reform policies</i>	7. Pensions reform after 2008 crisis [Shock = banking crisis/recession] 11. Immigration reform after unexpected immigration/asylum seekers crisis [Shock = country-specific]	8. Pensions reforms pre-2008 crisis (and post-1996) 10. University fees reforms
<i>Moral policies</i>	(No unexpected cases found)	9. Same-sex marriage reforms
<i>Foreign affairs policy</i>	5. Participation in Afghanistan war [Shock = 9/11]	6. Participation in Iraq war/invasion (2003)

Note: The numbers rank-order temporal precedence in the data collection process. The lighter type font indicates case studies for which we might run out of time given delays in coding.

- Own manual coding of:
 - ✓ All claims made by different actors as covered by the national press agency newswires;
 - ✓ All relevant survey reports measuring public opinion during the coding time periods, incl. reported in newswires;
 - ✓ Newspaper editorials for 2 newspapers in each country;
 - ✓ Parliamentary questions and legislation databases;
 - ✓ Party manifesto pledges for elections before and after juncture period.
- Unit of coding and analysis:
 - ✓ An “event” = claim, statement, action, survey result, editorial
 - ✓ An “actor” (up to 3 actors coded per “event”).
 - ✓ Use of comprehensive dictionary of keywords to track all relevant events

Comparative Approach

Table 2. Countries included in the overall study

	EU member-states	Non-EU member states
European	Austria, Belgium, Cyprus (part of the period), Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden (most of the period), UK	Cyprus (part of the period), Iceland, Norway, Sweden (part of the period), Switzerland
Non-European		Australia, Canada, New Zealand, US

Note: Not all of these countries will be included in all case studies due to relevance and/or data availability, but this is the pool of countries for which we will attempt to gather data in all instances.

Illustration of data collection progress and preliminary findings

The nuclear energy policy after Fukushima study

- Policy juncture starts with date of ‘shock’ (March 11, 2011)
- From this date all ‘events’ relating to nuclear energy policy are tracked and coded
- Coding continues until:
 - The gov’t changes substantially policy position (substantial policy responsiveness), or
 - Elections take place 6 months or later from shock date (providing a new electoral ‘mandate’), or
 - The date of March 30, 2013 is reached
- Data collected for 12 countries for this study (14 gov’t cases because of caretaker gov’t in BE and elections shortly after in FI)
- Cases with & without nuclear energy, but at least a debate, included

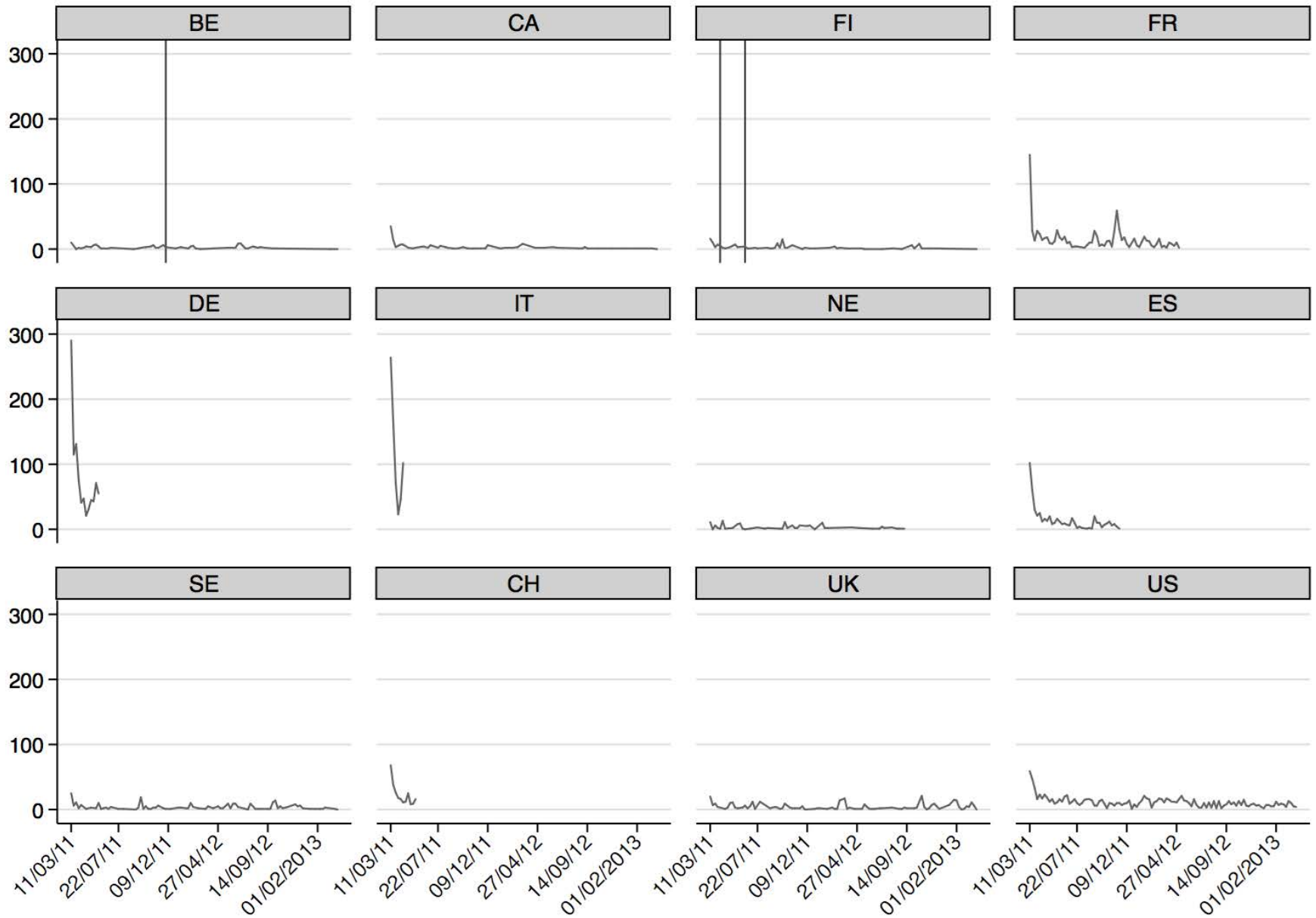
Table 1. Criteria and classification for case selection

		Substantial debate immediately prior to Fukushima	
		YES	NO
Nuclear energy prior to Fukushima	YES	(1) Belgium Germany Spain Switzerland	(2) Canada Finland France Netherlands Sweden United Kingdom United States
	NO	(3) Italy	(4) Australia Austria Cyprus Denmark Greece Ireland Iceland New Zealand Malta Norway Portugal

The intellectual property and internet reforms study

- Policy juncture starts with:
 - An electoral pledge to reform intellectual property regulations to protect from copyright infringements on the internet, or
 - An announcement of intention to introduce a reform in coalition agreement or any other government statement.
- From this date all ‘events’ relating to policy area tracked and coded. Coding continues until:
 - The gov’t changes substantially policy position (substantial policy responsiveness), or
 - National general elections happen.
- Several ‘juncture’ cases per country possible if pledges in more than one gov’t term
- Data collection completed for 7 countries, and 24 cases
- Eventually data for all 22 countries in project, and probably around 70 juncture cases in total

Sum of all events and statements



Week

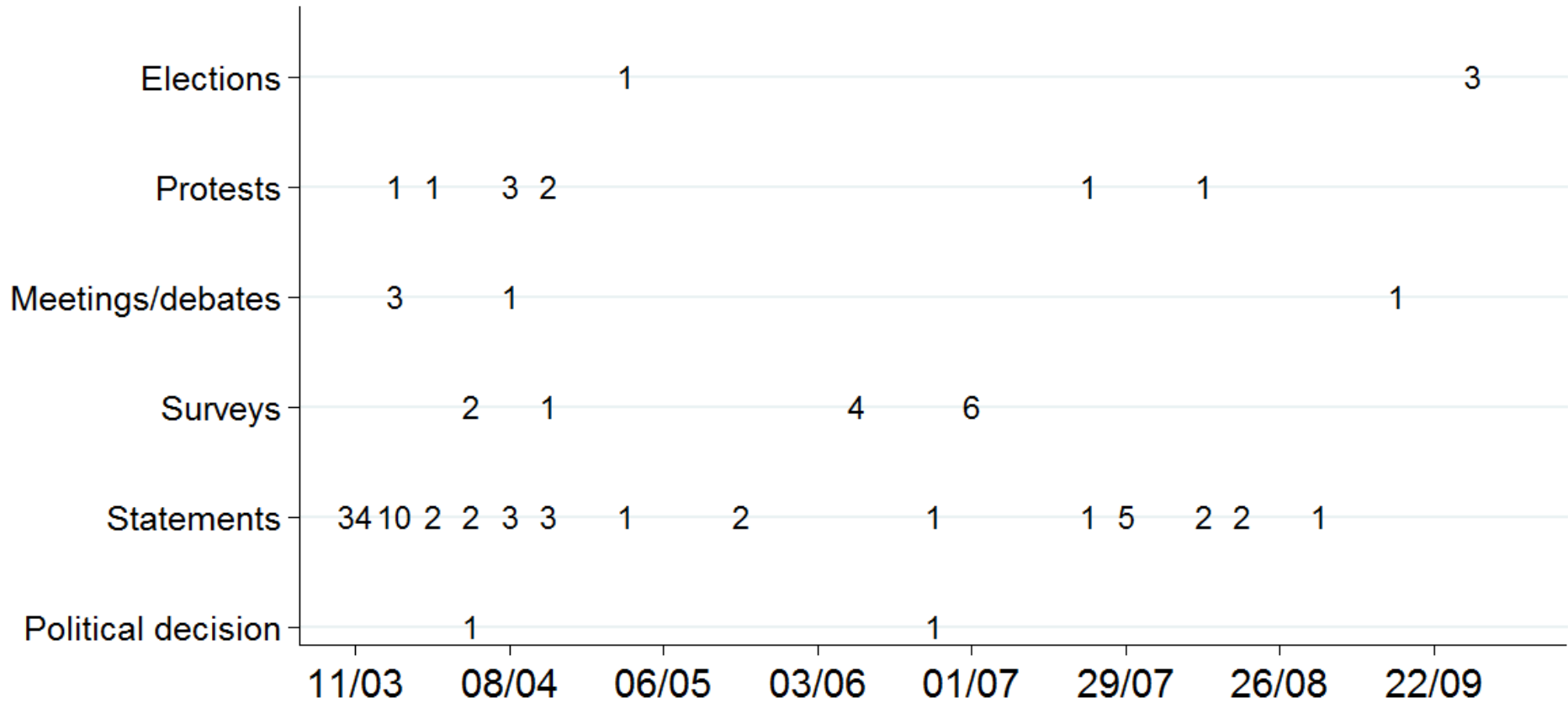
Number of events by event type for the first 6 months, per country and week (Fukushima case)

Italy: Fukushima

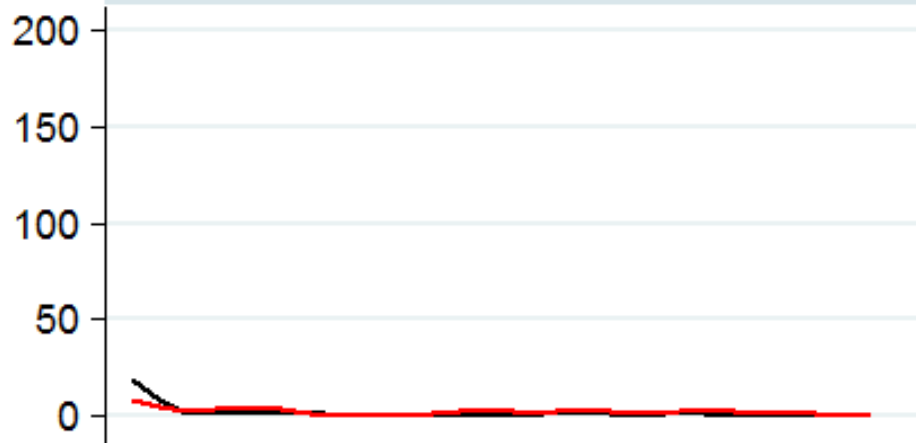
Event Type	11/03				08/04	
Elections						
Protests	7	6	3		1	2
Meetings/debates	14	9	11	3	7	7
Surveys	5	9			1	3
Statements	233	137	54	19	35	88
Political decision	5	4	4	1	2	2

Number of events by event type for the first 6 months, per country and week (Fukushima case)

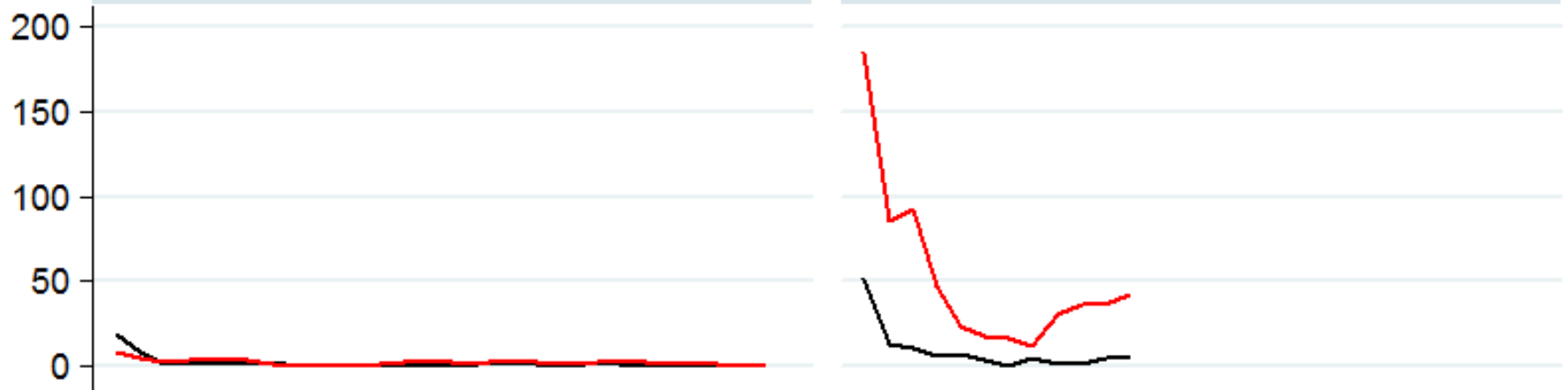
Canada: Fukushima



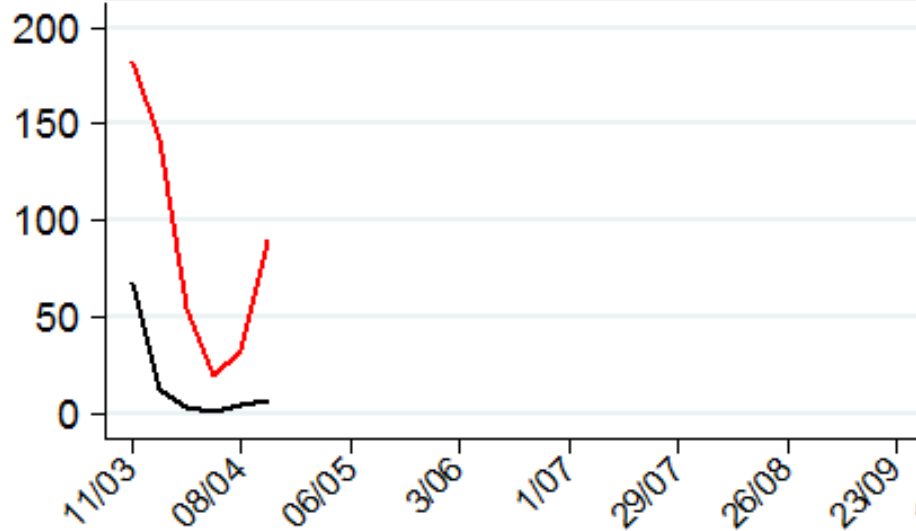
Canada: Fukushima



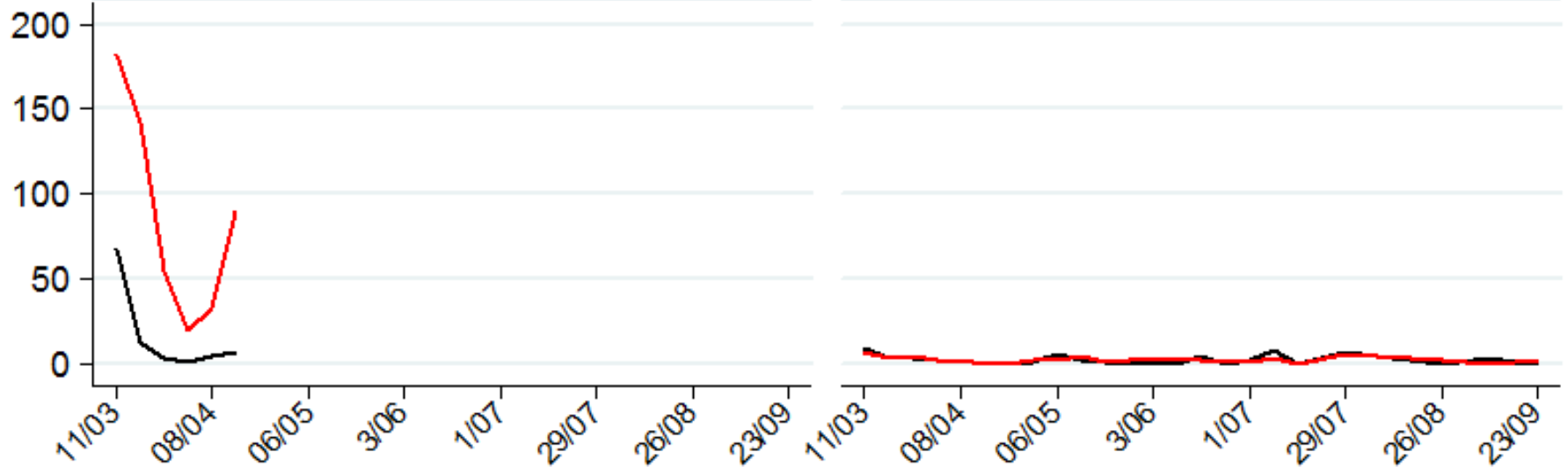
Germany: Fukushima



Italy: Fukushima



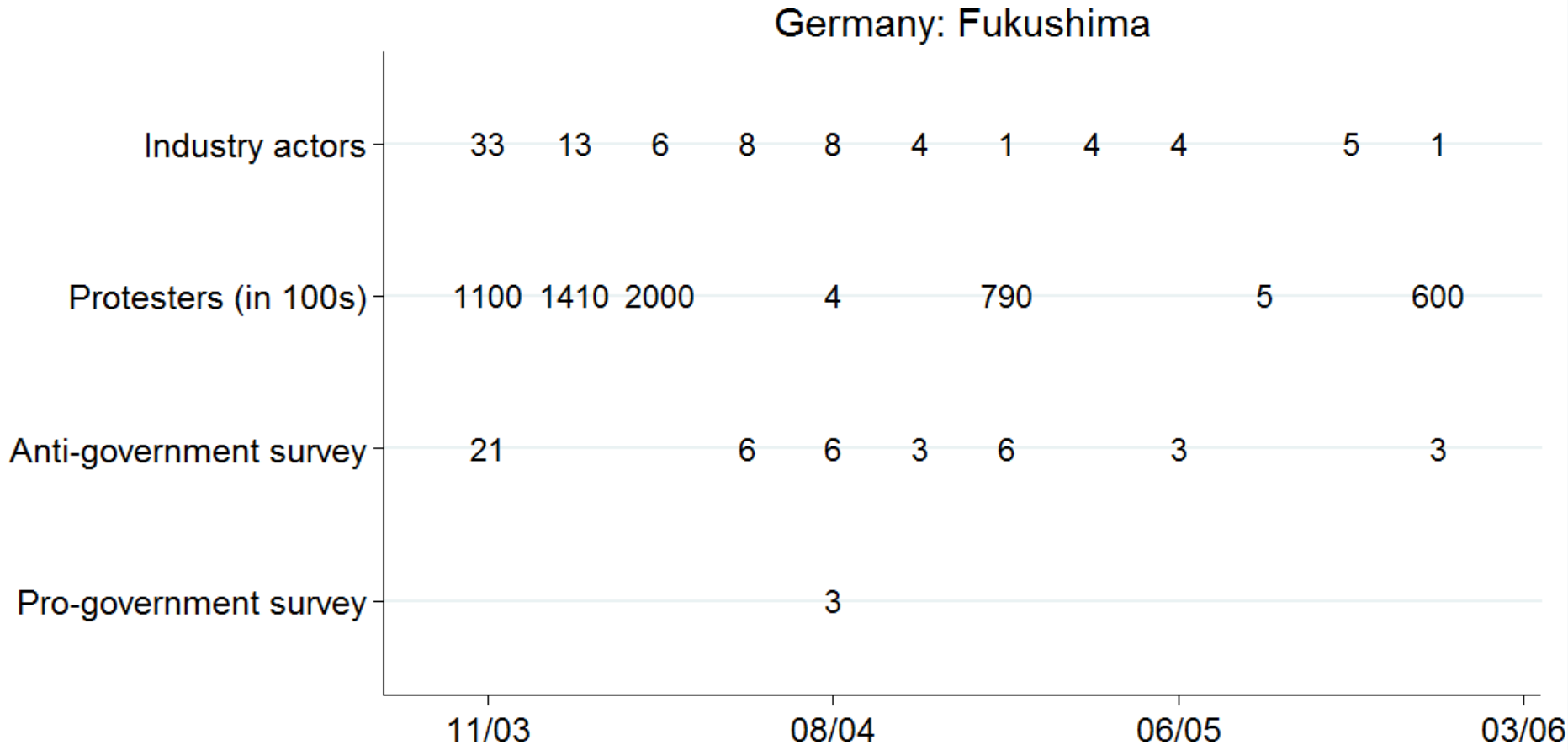
UK: Fukushima



— Sum of all pro-gov events & statements

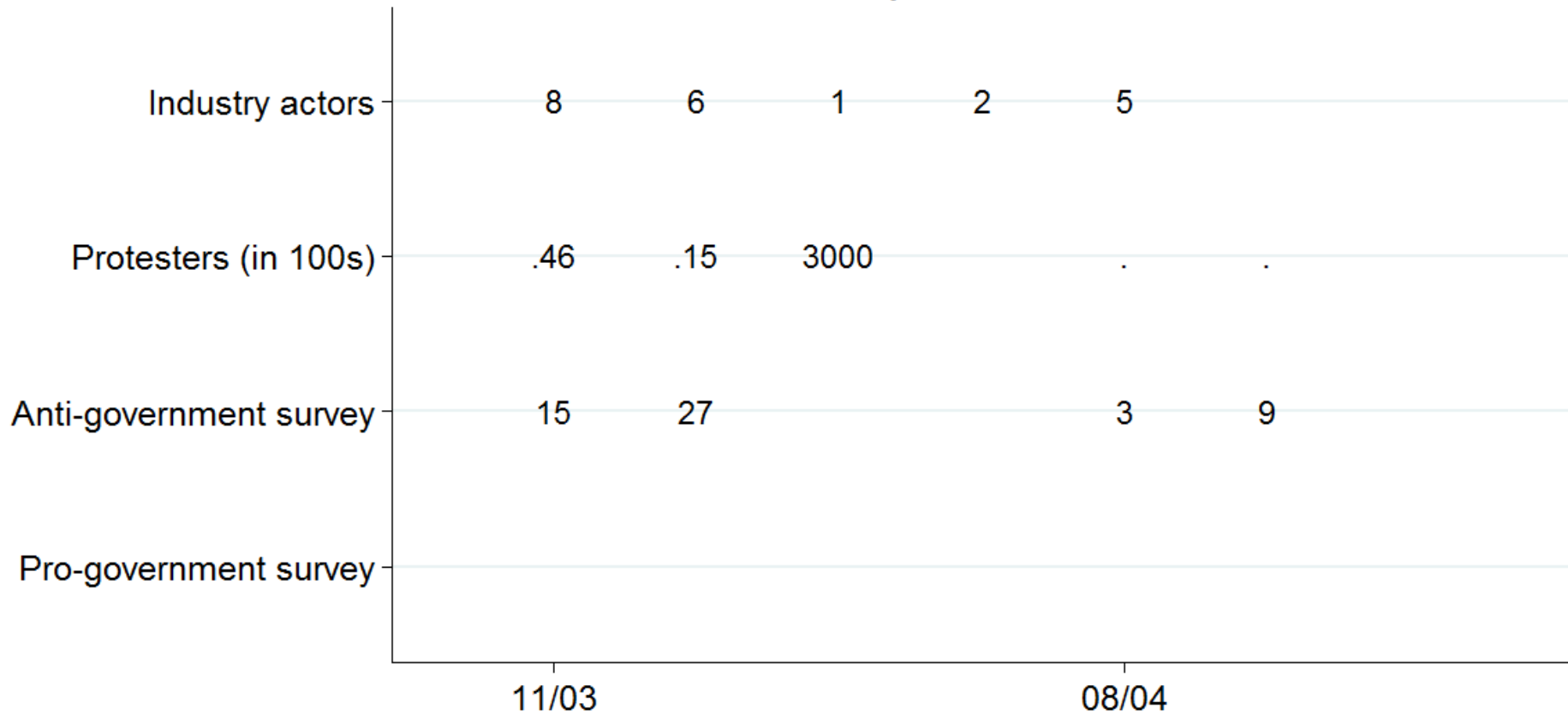
— Sum of all anti-gov events & statements

Pressure received from different types of actors



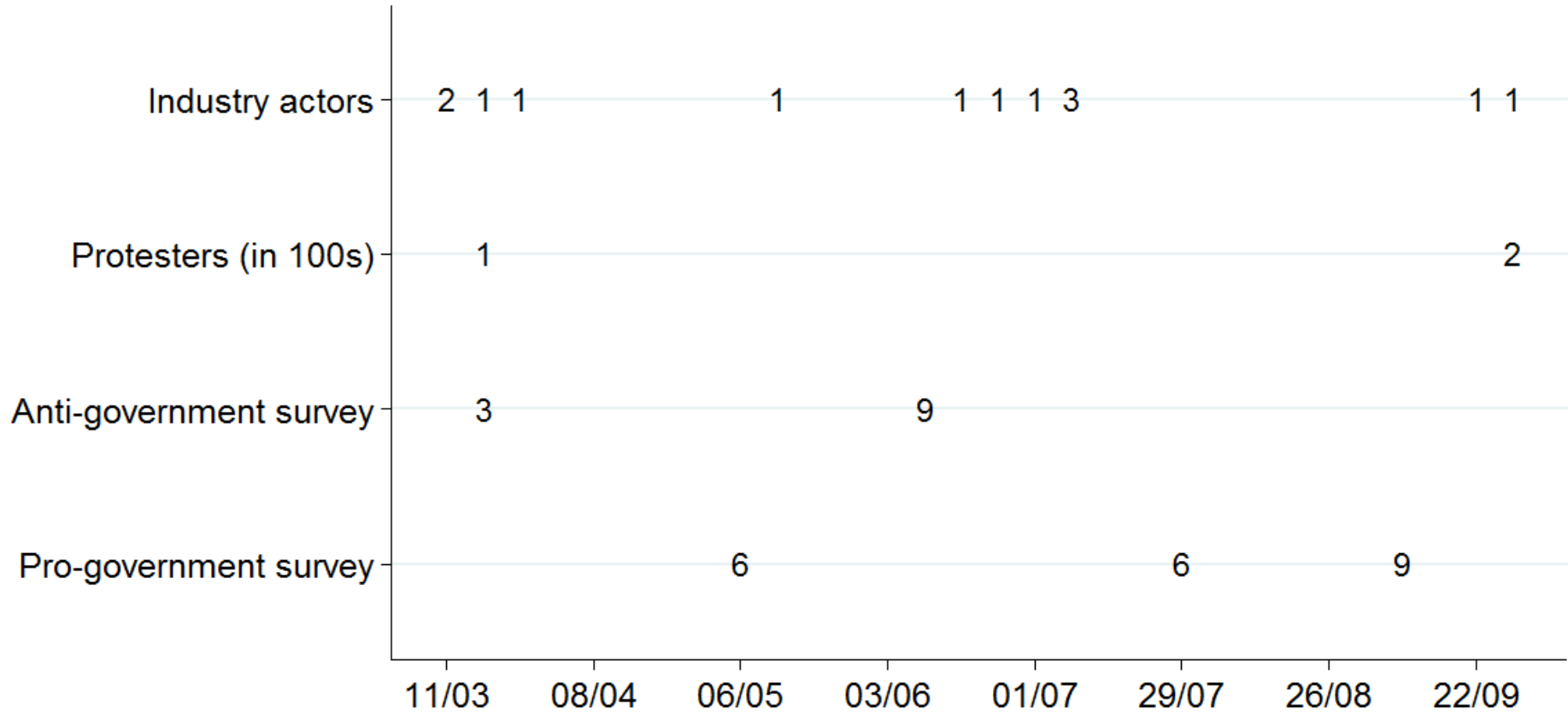
Pressure received from different types of actors

Italy: Fukushima



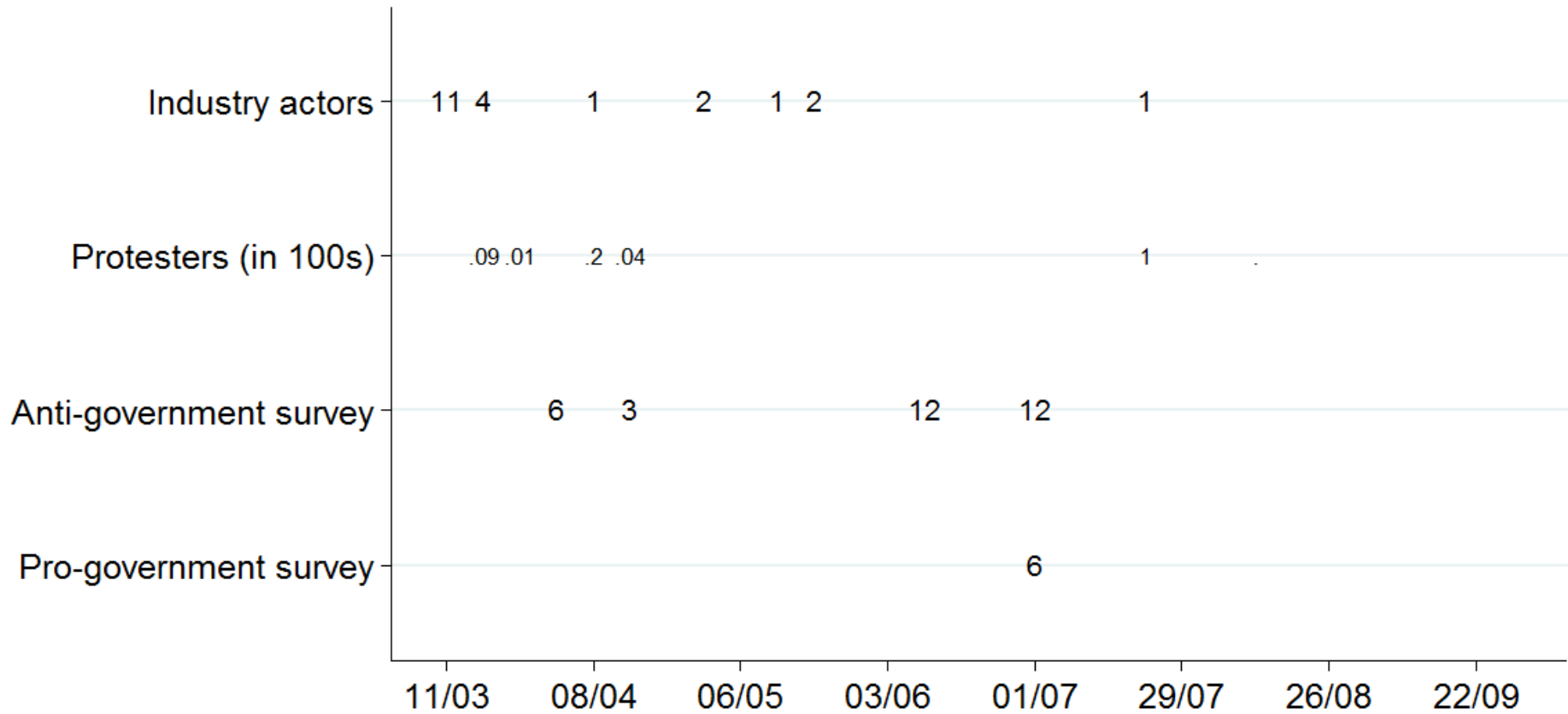
Pressure received from different types of actors

UK: Fukushima



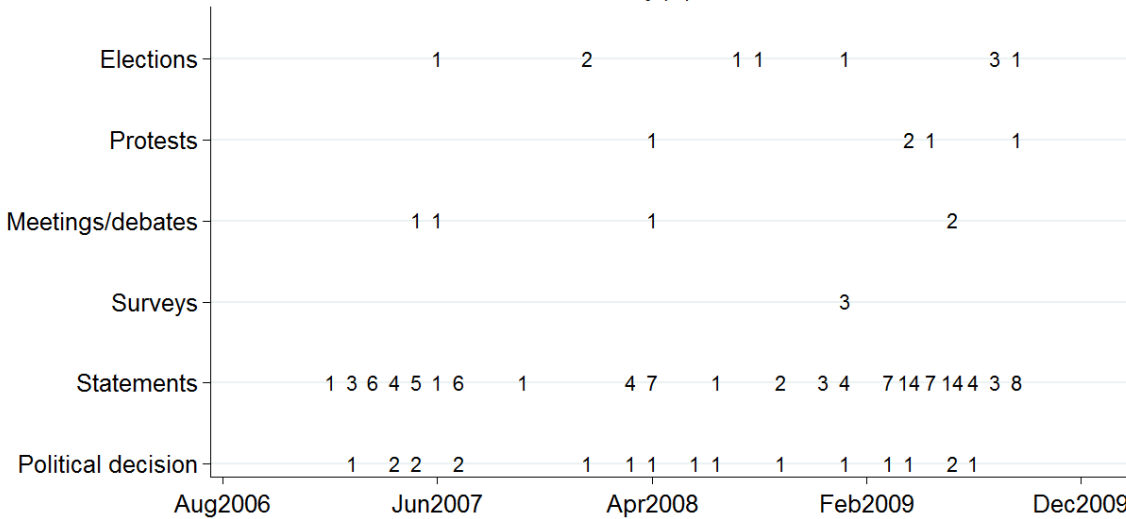
Pressure received from different types of actors

Canada: Fukushima

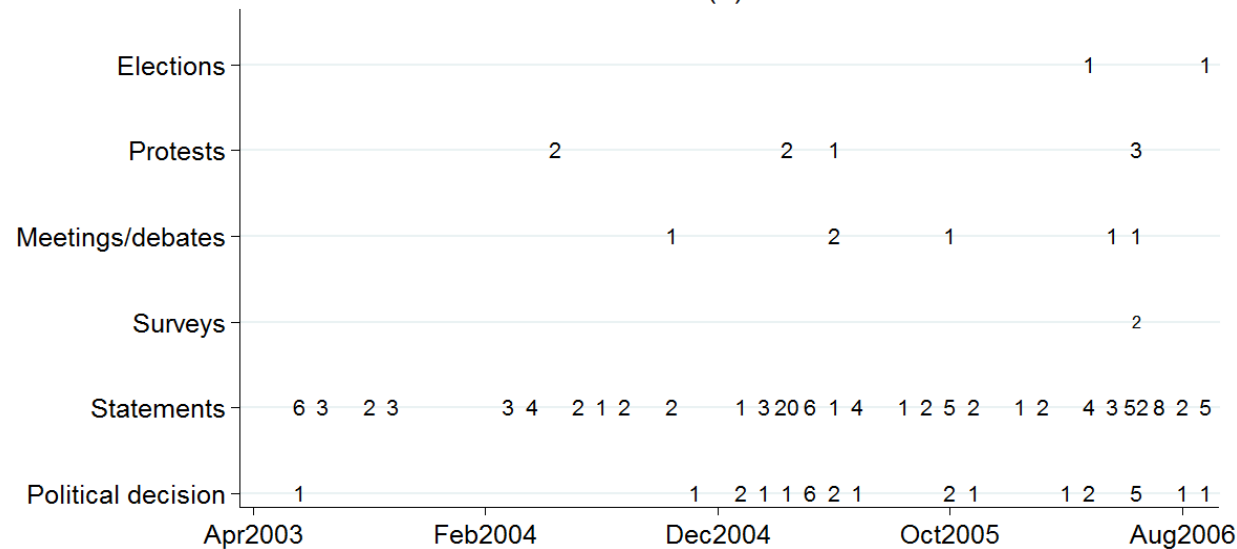


How heated does the issue become in the public debate? Internet copyright regulations

Germany(1): Internet

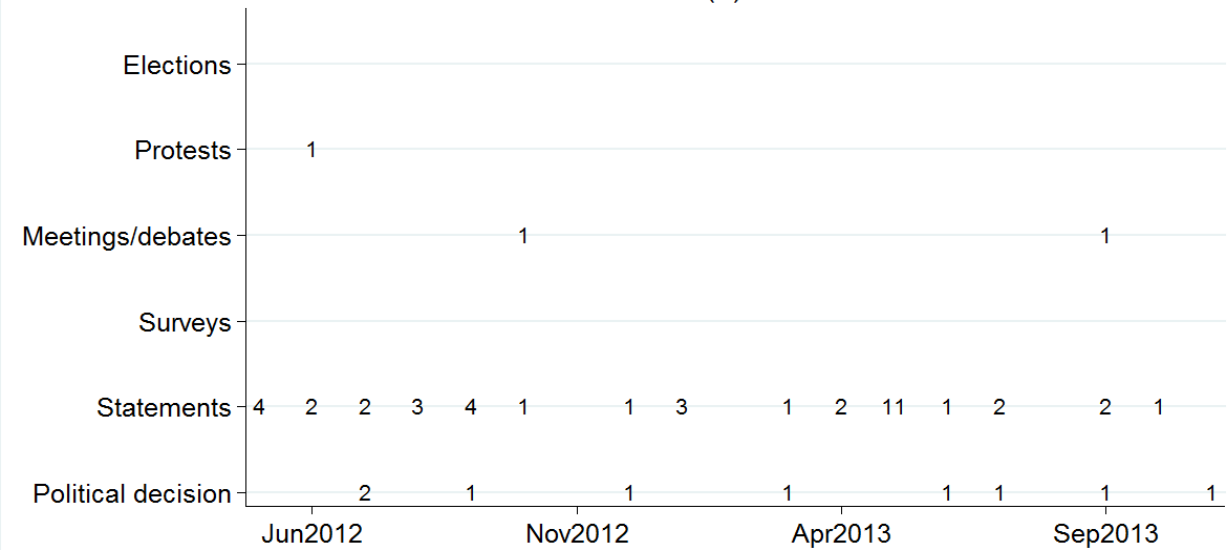


Sweden(1): Internet

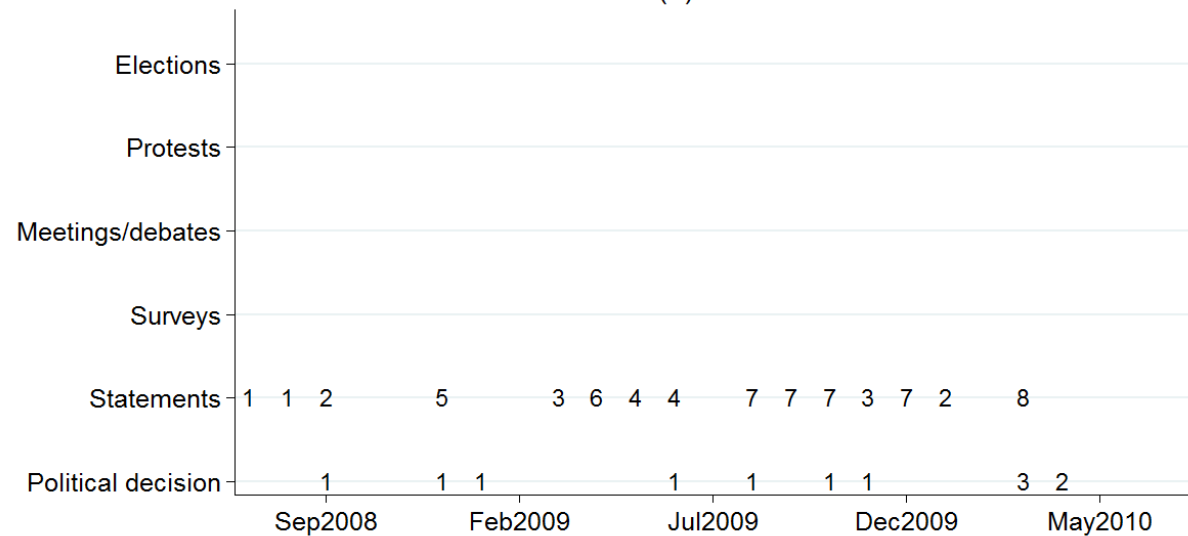


How heated does the issue become in the public debate? Internet copyright regulations

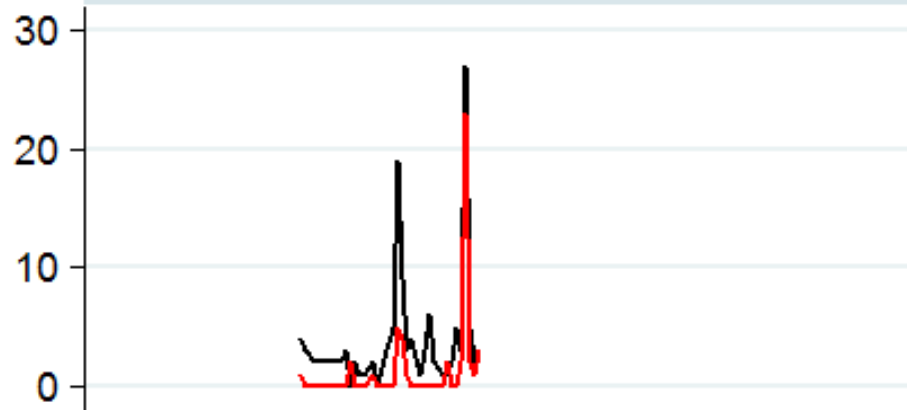
France(3): Internet



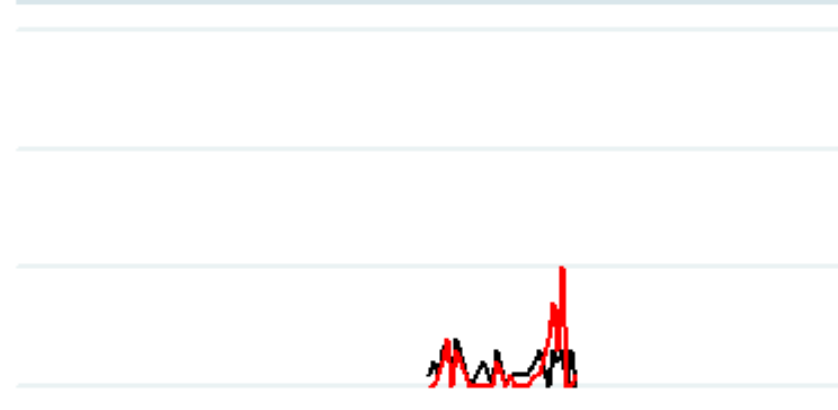
UK(3): Internet



Sweden(1)



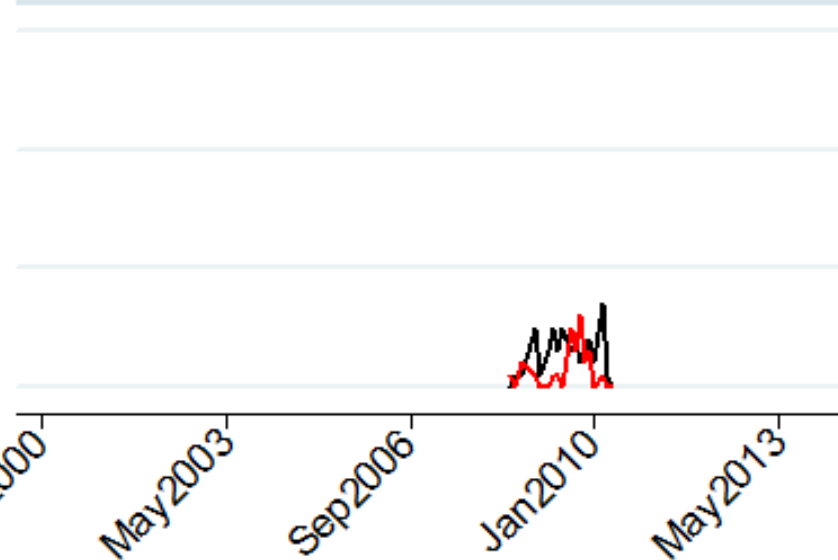
Germany(1)



France(3)



UK(3)

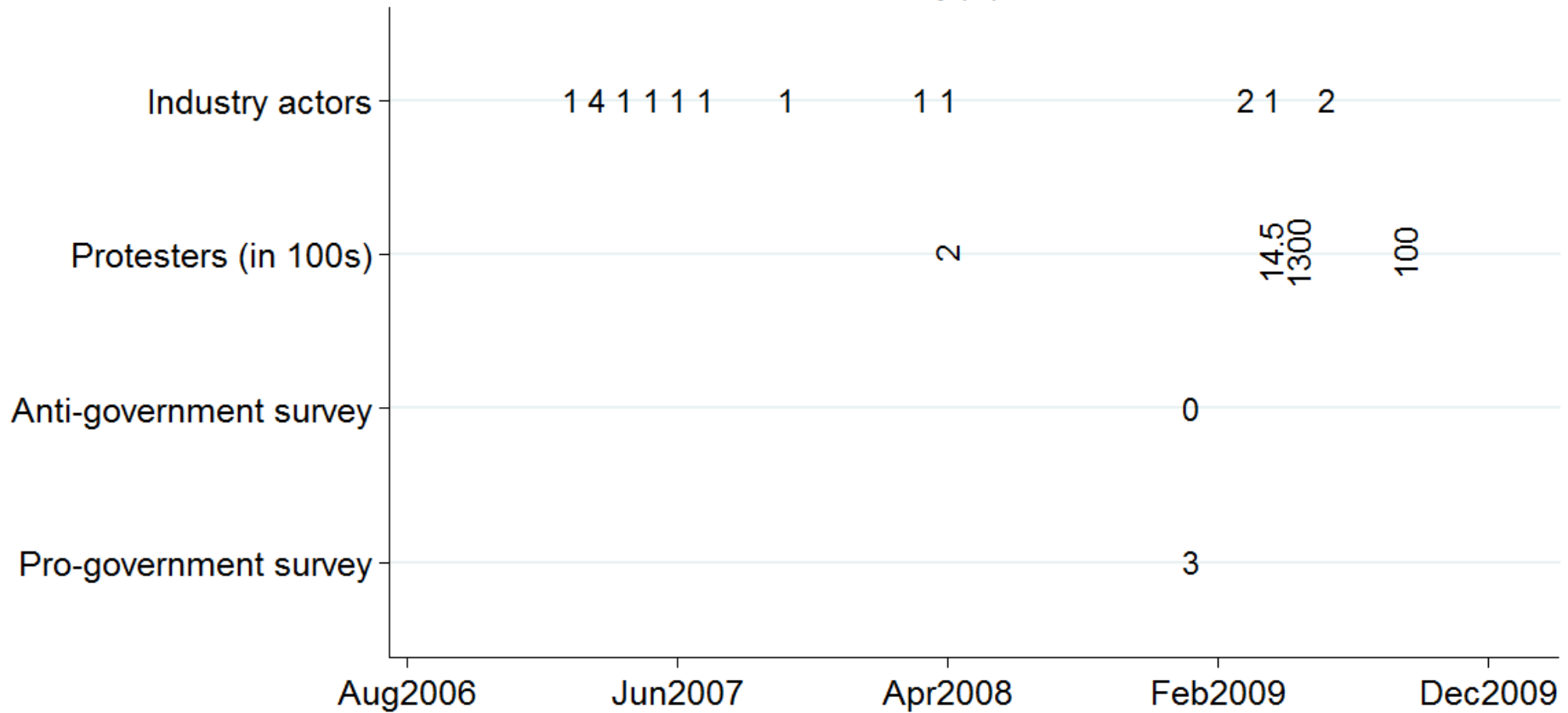


— Sum of all pro-gov events & statements

— Sum of all anti-gov events & statements

Pressure received from different types of actors: Internet case

Germany(1): Internet



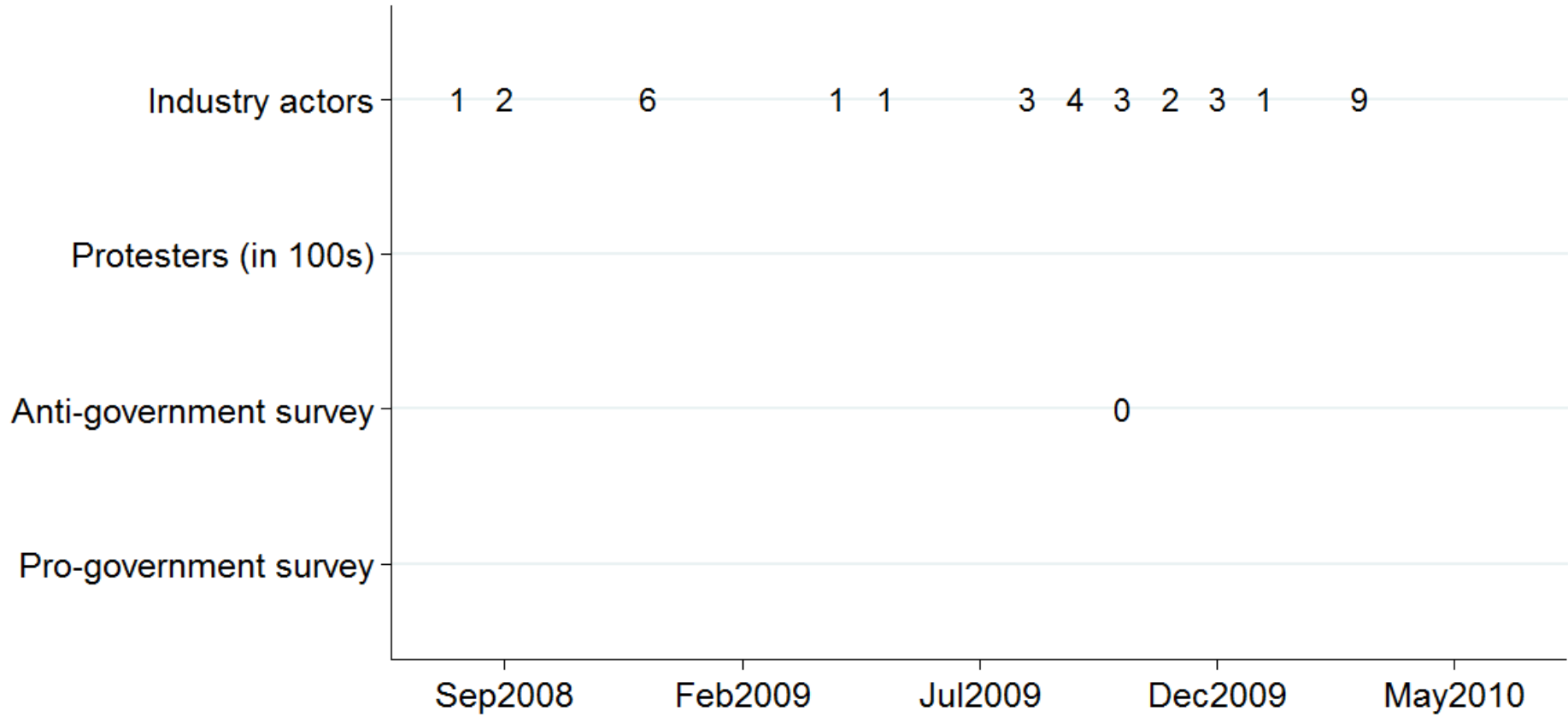
Pressure received from different types of actors: Internet case

Sweden(1): Internet



Pressure received from different types of actors: Internet case

UK(3): Internet



Preliminary findings

- No reaction = 35%
- Increased attention=30%
- Rhetorical resp.=13.5%
- Moderate resp.=8%
- Substantial resp.=13.5%
- Intense protest=8%
- No protest=27%
- In between=65%
- Consistency vocal/median =35%

Protest	Consistency vocal & median voter	Case	Outcome
Intense	Yes	IT-nuclear DE-nuclear CH-nuclear	Substantial policy responsiveness (4) Substantial policy responsiveness (4) Substantial policy responsiveness (4)
	No		
	Fluctuating/ unclear		
Moderate	Yes	FR-internet2 SE-internet1 SE-internet2 IT-internet3	Increased attention to the issue (1) Rhetorical responsiveness (2) Moderate policy responsiveness (3) Increased attention to the issue (1)
	No	FI-nuclear1 FI-nuclear2	Increased attention to the issue (1) No reaction (0) [but initial position moderated during coalition negotiations]
	Fluctuating/ unclear	ES-nuclear FR-nuclear DE-internet2 DE-internet3	Rhetorical responsiveness (2) Rhetorical responsiveness (2) No reaction (0) Substantial policy responsiveness (4) [no signature ACTA]
Small/ Negligible	Yes	BE-nuclear1 BE-nuclear2 SE-nuclear FR-internet1 FR-internet3 CY-internet2	Increased attention to the issue (1) Substantial policy change but counter-responsive move (0) Increased attention to the issue (1) Rhetorical responsiveness (2) Increased attention to the issue (1) Substantial policy responsiveness (4) [no signature ACTA]
	No	UK-nuclear NL-nuclear UK-internet3	Increased attention to the issue (1) Rhetorical responsiveness (2) Moderate policy responsiveness (3) [to industry]
	Fluctuating/ unclear	CA-nuclear US-nuclear NO-internet1 NO-internet2 SE-internet3	No reaction (0) Increased attention to the issue (1) Increased attention to the issue (1) No reaction (0) Moderate policy responsiveness (3) [to industry]
None	Yes		
	No		
	Fluctuating/ unclear	CY-internet1 GR-internet1 GR-internet2 GR-internet3 GR-internet4 IS-internet IT-internet1 IT-internet2 UK-internet4 DK-internet1	No reaction (0) No reaction (0) No reaction (0) No reaction (0) No reaction (0) No reaction (0) No reaction (0) No reaction (0) Increased attention to the issue (1) Increased attention to the issue (1)

Preliminary assessment

Responsive Gov

- Effect of protests (H1): moderate/small protests in most cases and gov'ts almost never changed position; large in CH, DE & IT and gov't changed. [consistent with expectations]
- Effects depending on consistency with surveys (H2 & H3): in CH, IT & DE, overwhelmingly consistent and gov't changed course. [in line with expectations]
- Effects dependent on closeness to elections (H4): mixed findings: IT, CH & DE consistent but elections almost omnipresent. Effect conditional on protest?
- Effect of shocks / lack of mandate (H5): substantial responsiveness (and higher degree responsiveness modes) perhaps more likely in shock-driven juncture? [unclear now]

These are preliminary and rest of cases needed for 'real' conclusions. More to follow soon!

Project website with papers, data codebooks
and intermediate findings:

<http://www.responsivegov.eu>

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THANK YOU!