

# Electoral Responsiveness in Closed Autocracies: Evidence from Petitions in the former German Democratic Republic

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—Online Appendix—

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## A Archival Sources

This paper assembles new evidence on the petition system of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Part of this evidence comes from original archival fieldwork, during which I reviewed numerous internal documents and petition files. All documents cited in the main text are listed in Table A1.

I further assembled a novel dataset of petitions to the GDR government. This dataset comprises two samples. The first sample consists of 10,892 petitions sent to the GDR's *People's Chamber* between 1974 and 1989. I manually retrieved data on these petitions from 282 boxes stored at the archives. The archival signatures of these boxes are listed in Table A2. To the best of my knowledge, the dataset contains all *People's Chamber* petitions available at the archives.

The second sample consists of 60,491 petitions sent to the *Council of Ministers* between 1988 and 1990. The data were entered into an electronic database by *Council of Ministers* staff. This database was converted into a modern file format by researchers at the German Federal Archives. To the best of my knowledge, this dataset contains the universe of all *Council of Ministers* petitions submitted in this period.

Table A1: Archival sources on the GDR petition system

Collection	Signature	Document
<i>BArch: Bundesarchiv / German Federal Archives</i>		
DA 5 (Staatsrat / State Council)	BArch DA 5/10906	“Kurzinformation über die im Jahre 1978 an den Staatsrat gerichteten Eingaben aus dem Bezirk Erfurt” [“Short report on the petitions sent to the State Council in 1978 from the district Erfurt”]
	BArch DA 5/10913	“Kurzinformation über die im Jahre 1978 an den Staatsrat gerichteten Eingaben aus dem Bezirk Neubrandenburg” [“Short report on the petitions sent to the State Council in 1978 from the district Neubrandenburg”]
	BArch DA 5/10914	“Kurzininformation über die im Jahre 1978 an den Staatsrat gerichteten Eingaben aus dem Bezirk Potsdam” [“Short report on the petitions sent to the State Council in 1978 from the district Potsdam”]
	BArch DA 5/10926	“Kurzininformation über die im Jahre 1979 an den Staatsrat gerichteten Eingaben aus dem Bezirk Karl-Marx-Stadt” [“Short report on the petitions sent to the State Council in 1979 from the district Karl-Marx-City”]
	BArch DA 5/11026	“Kurzininformation über die im Jahre 1980 an den Staatsrat gerichteten Eingaben aus dem Bezirk Magdeburg” [“Short report on the petitions sent to the State Council in 1980 from the district Magdeburg”]
	BArch DA 5/11072	“Kurzininformation über die im Jahre 1982 an den Staatsrat gerichteten Eingaben aus dem Bezirk Cottbus” [“Short report on the petitions sent to the State Council in 1982 from the district Cottbus”]
	BArch DA 5/11079	“Kurzininformation über die im Jahre 1982 an den Staatsrat gerichteten Eingaben aus dem Bezirk Leipzig” [“Short report on the petitions sent to the State Council in 1982 from the district Leipzig”]
	BArch DA 5/11419	“Bericht über den Hauptinhalt und die Bearbeitungsergebnisse der an den Staatsrat und seinen Vorsitzenden gerichteten Eingaben der Bürger im Jahre 1985” [“Report on the main content and outcomes of citizen petitions to the State Council and its chairman in the year 1985”]
	BArch DA 5/11421	“Bericht über den Hauptinhalt und die Bearbeitungsergebnisse der an den Staatsrat gerichteten Eingaben der Bürger im Jahre 1986” [“Report on the main content and outcomes of citizen petitions to the State Council in the year 1986”]
	BArch DA 5/11423	“Bericht über den Hauptinhalt und die Bearbeitungsergebnisse der an den Staatsrat gerichteten Eingaben der Bürger im Jahre 1987” [“Report on the main content and outcomes of citizen petitions to the State Council in the year 1987”]
	BArch DA 5/11425	“Bericht über den Hauptinhalt und die Bearbeitungsergebnisse der an den Staatsrat und seinen Vorsitzenden gerichteten Eingaben der Bürger im Jahre 1988” [“Report on the main content and outcomes of citizen petitions to the State Council and its chairman in the year 1988”]
	BArch DA 5/11432	“Kurzininformation über die im Jahre 1985 an den Staatsrat gerichteten Eingaben aus Berlin, Hauptstadt der DDR” [“Short report on the petitions sent to the State Council in 1985 from Berlin, Capital of the GDR”]
	BArch DA 5/11433	“Kurzininformation über die im Jahre 1986 an den Staatsrat gerichteten Eingaben aus dem Bezirk Neubrandenburg” [“Short report on the petitions sent to the State Council in 1986 from the district Neubrandenburg”]
	BArch DA 5/11436	“Kurzininformation über die im Jahre 1988 an den Staatsrat gerichteten Eingaben aus dem Bezirk Leipzig” [“Short report on the petitions sent to the State Council in 1988 from the district Leipzig”]
DE 2 (Staatliche Zentralverwaltung für Statistik / Central Statistical Office)	BArch DE 2/43626	Sammlung Informationsberichte Eingaben der Bürger, 1964-1967 [collection of reports on citizen petitions, 1964-1967]



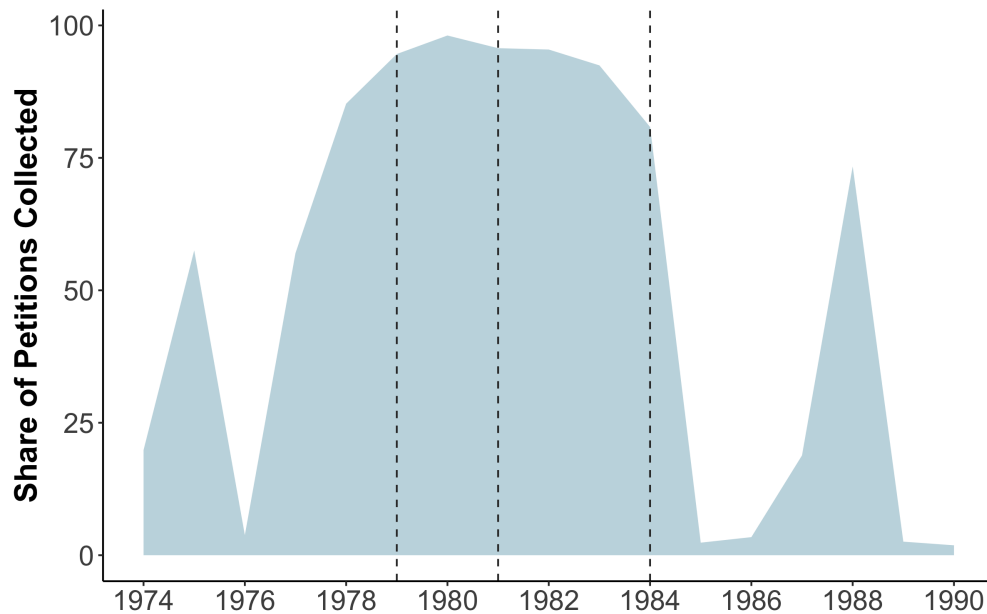
## B Summary statistics

### B.1 Share of *People's Chamber* petitions collected

Not all *People's Chamber* petitions are available at the archives. To examine the share of petitions that I collected, I exploit the fact that each petition received a sequential input number, which starts at 1 at the beginning of each year. Dividing the number of petitions collected in a particular year by the highest input number in the same year yields a rough estimate of the share of petitions collected. Figure A1 reports this statistic by year. Vertical dashed lines indicate the three election years considered in the analysis of *People's Chamber* petitions. All three years and their corresponding pseudo-election years are characterized by low missingness. I compute that I collected between 81 (1984) and 98 percent (1980) of petitions in that time period.

The exception is the pseudo-election year 1985, for which only a few petitions were available. Removing this year leaves all results unchanged, as shown in Table A17 below.

Figure A1: Share of *People's Chamber* petitions collected



*Notes:* Estimated share of *People's Chamber* petitions collected by year. Vertical dashed lines indicate the three election years examined.

## B.2 Descriptive Statistics

This Appendix section presents various summary statistics. Table A3 provides descriptive statistics for all variables included in the analysis. The samples are restricted to the 90 days before and after elections or pseudo-elections. Statistics for the number of incoming petitions, government responses to these petitions, and pending petitions are provided by day. All other statistics are calculated across all petitions.

Table A3: Summary statistics

	People's Chamber		Council of Ministers	
	mean	sd	mean	sd
Response time (days)	34.885	35.086	45.988	32.011
Positive resolution	0.121	0.326		
Contains criticism			0.392	0.488
Central government responds			0.325	0.468
# Pending petitions	16.457	38.987	4420.884	360.832
# Incoming	2.581	3.166	30.547	44.768
# Responses	2.598	4.111	26.354	44.961

*Notes:* Summary statistics for all variables used in the main analysis. The samples are restricted to the three months before and after elections or pseudo-elections.

Table A4 reports the share of petitions by topic, separately for the *People's Chamber* and *Council of Ministers* petitions. The data are restricted to the 90 days before and after elections or pseudo-elections. The shares correspond to those depicted in Figure 2 in the main text.

Table A4: Distribution of topics

Topic	People's Chamber	Council of Ministers
Agriculture	1.07	1.24
Construction	6.46	9.12
Culture, Sports, and Tourism	1.44	0.44
Defense	1.26	0.44
Domestic Affairs	7.67	15.46
Education and Science	2.59	1.55
Finances	2.70	2.94
Foreign Affairs	1.10	0.57
Foreign Trade	0.71	0.96
Governance	2.98	0.71
Health and Social Services	6.67	2.79
Housing	26.25	31.35
Industry	1.36	2.10
Justice	13.92	1.47
Labor, Wages, and Social Insurance	9.13	6.00
Miscellaneous	1.62	0.00
Motor Vehicles and Transportation	4.14	9.98
Nature, Environment, and Water	1.60	1.55
Postal Service and Telecommunications	2.28	6.17
Trade and Supply	5.05	5.16

*Notes:* Distribution of topics (in % of all petitions submitted) covered in the *People's Chamber* and *Council of Ministers* petitions. The data are restricted to the three months before and after elections or pseudo-elections.

Table A4 reports the distribution of *Council of Ministers* petition attributes: the share of petitions by character, reference, and responding government body.

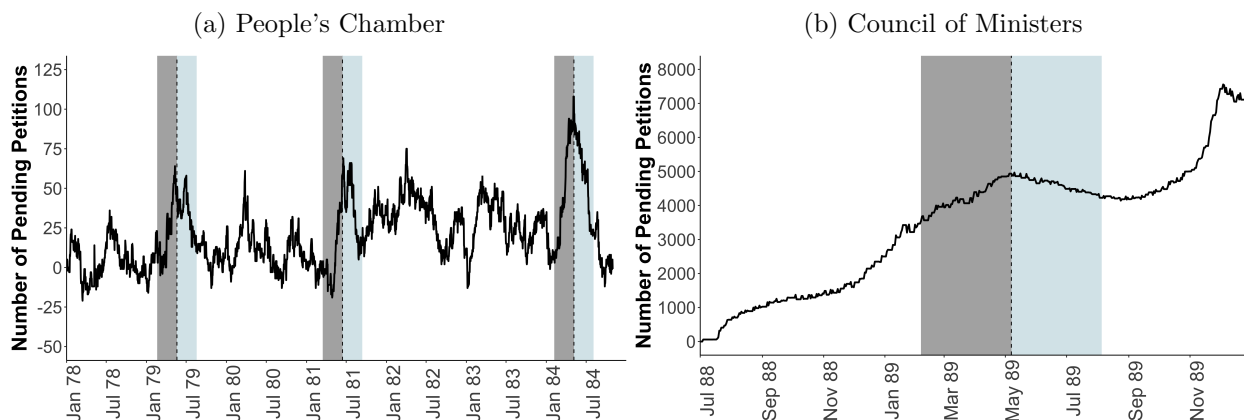
Table A5: Distribution of petition attributes

	Attribute	Share
Character	Complaint	9.18
	Criticism	28.93
	Follow-up petition	2.24
	Request	52.85
	Suggestion	0.44
	Tip	3.50
	Unknown	2.85
Reference	Council of Ministers decisions	0.67
	Elections	7.80
	Law	20.86
	Local decisions	2.22
	Politburo	0.19
	Unknown	68.26
Response by	Central government	27.36
	Company	6.31
	County government	22.16
	District government	14.07
	Municipal government	14.26
	Unknown	15.85

*Notes:* Distribution of *Council of Ministers* petition attributes (in % of all petitions submitted). The data are restricted to the three months before and after the 1989 local election.

### B.3 Number of pending petitions

Figure A2: Number of pending petitions



Notes: Daily number of pending *People's Chamber* (left panel) and *Council of Ministers* petitions (right panel). Calculated as the difference between the cumulative number of incoming petitions and responses. Gray and light blue mark the 90-days before and after elections.

Figure A2 reports the number of pending petitions by day, which are calculated as the difference between the cumulative number of incoming petitions and the cumulative number of responses. Negative values are possible because the calculation does not account for petitions received in years not covered in the dataset.

Regarding the *People's Chamber* petitions, Figure A2a shows that while the number of pending petitions fluctuates over the course of a year, it remains roughly the same across the years for which data are available. By contrast, the number of pending *Council of Ministers* petitions kept increasing for most of the period for which the data are available (Figure A2b). This justifies the inclusion of a control for the number of pending a petitions: it accounts for the fact that due to the rising backlog of *Council of Ministers* petitions, we should expect average response times to increase over time.



## C Additional Analyses

### C.1 Responsiveness around the 1981 SED party congress

This Appendix section explores variation in responsiveness to citizen petitions surrounding party congresses in the GDR. Given the limited temporal coverage of my petition data, the analysis is restricted to the  $X^{th}$  party congress of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), held April 11-16, 1981. The empirical strategy mirrors that used for the analysis of the *People’s Chamber* petitions. Thus, I compare the change in the difference from the 90 days before to the 90 days after the party congress between the year of the party congress and the two adjacent years. Given collinearity between the pre-Congress period and the year-fixed effects, the coefficient on this lower-order term is not reported.

Table A6: No difference in petition response time around the 1981 SED party congress

	Response time (log days)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Pre-Congress $\times$ Congress year	0.097 (0.182)	0.085 (0.286)	0.079 (0.213)	0.097 (0.297)
# pending petitions	0.0001 (0.003)	0.003 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.003)	0.0001 (0.004)
Day-FE?	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE?	✓	✓	✓	✓
County-FE?	✓		✓	✓
ZIP code-FE?		✓		
County $\times$ year?			✓	
SE clustered by	county	zip code	county	county & month-year
Observations	1,574	1,572	1,574	1,574
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.154	0.135	0.168	0.154

*Notes:* This table examines whether *People’s Chamber* petitions were answered more or less quickly before the 1981 SED party congress. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table A6 replicates the analysis reported in Table 3 in the main text, focusing on the  $X^{th}$  SED party congress. Across all four model specifications, the coefficient on the interaction term is small and statistically indistinguishable from zero, suggesting that the party congress had no effect on response time.

Table A7: No difference in petition success rate around the 1981 SED party congress

	I(positive resolution)					
	all petitions				housing	non-housing
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Pre-Congress $\times$ Congress year	-0.026 (0.061)	-0.032 (0.092)	-0.037 (0.073)	-0.026 (0.055)	0.103 (0.161)	-0.021 (0.072)
# pending petitions	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.0005 (0.006)	0.0004 (0.001)
Day-FE?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
County-FE?	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Zip code-FE?		✓				
County $\times$ year?			✓			
SE clustered by	county	zip code	county	county & month-year	county	county
Observations	1,574	1,572	1,574	1,574	492	1,082
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.078	0.115	0.076	0.078	0.029	0.045

*Notes:* This table examines whether *People's Chamber* petitions were more or less successful before the 1981 SED party congress. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

This conclusion finds further support in Table A7, which examines the effect of the X<sup>th</sup> SED party congress on petition success. Again, the models mirror those reported in the main text (Table 4). As in the previous analysis, the coefficient of interest is small and insignificant, indicating that party congresses had no effect on the probability that a petition was successful.

## C.2 Increase in government expenditures

Table A8: Stronger increase in government expenditures in election years

	Housing	Price stability
	(1)	(2)
Election year	0.061 (0.036)	0.121** (0.052)
Constant	0.109*** (0.021)	0.073** (0.031)
Observations	17	17
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.102	0.219

*Notes:* This table test for the existence of electoral cycles in government expenditures in the GDR. It reports OLS regressions of government expenditure increases on a binary indicator of election years. The coefficient on this variable reflects the difference in expenditure increases (in percentage points) between election and non-election years. \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ . Standard errors in parentheses.

Figure 5 in the main text provides visual evidence of electoral budget cycles in government expenditures on housing and price stability. I show that expenditures in both categories increased more strongly in election compared to non-election years. Table A8 regresses annual expenditure increases in these two categories on a binary indicator of election years to compute the average difference between election and non-election years. The results imply that housing-related expenditures increased by an additional 6.1 percentage points in election years ( $p \approx 0.114$ ), while expenditures on price stability increased by an extra 12.1 points ( $p \approx 0.034$ ). Of course, given limited data availability, it is challenging to establish statistical significance, and the results thus should be interpreted as suggestive.

## D Alternative Explanations

This section provides evidence against several alternative explanations for my results.

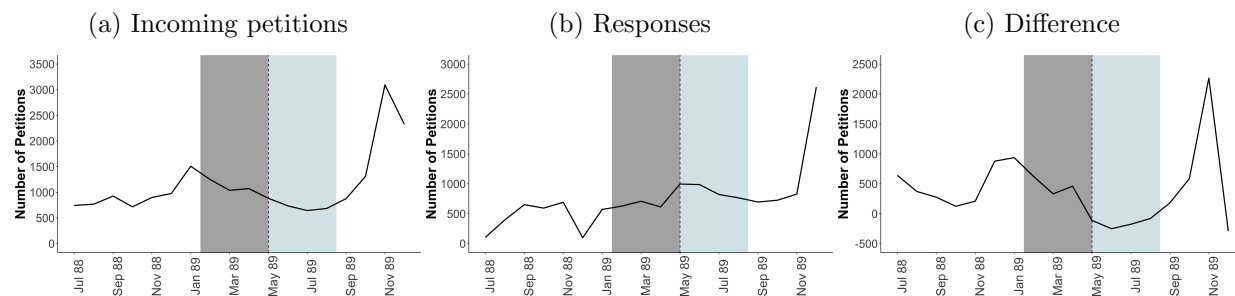
### D.1 Different volume and content of petitions?

It is possible that my results are driven by differences in the volume or content of petitions between election and non-election periods. Specifically, a higher volume of incoming petitions may have allowed government bureaucrats to strategically select those petitions they could answer easily and quickly, thus artificially lowering average response times and introducing upward bias into my coefficients. Alternatively, citizens may have anticipated better responsiveness and thus strategically submitted petitions about different topics to the government. Another possibility is that the government answered fewer petitions or only petitions about “easy” topics. This section addresses these concerns. I show that there is little evidence that petition volume or content varied systematically around elections. Furthermore, accounting for petition volume in the regression analysis leaves the coefficients of interest unchanged. Lastly, I show that the effects reported in the main paper are driven by improved responsiveness before elections as opposed to worse responsiveness thereafter.

#### D.1.1 Increase in petition volume?

Figures 3 in the main text and A3 in this Appendix section report the number of (a) incoming petitions and (b) government responses to these petitions, separately for petitions to the *People’s Chamber* and *Council of Ministers*. They also report the difference between incoming petitions and responses (c). Visual inspection of the figures suggests that East Germans sent slightly more petitions to the central government in the pre-election period. However, increases in incoming petition volume were usually accompanied by increased volume of government responses to petitions about a month later. By law, petitions had to receive an initial response within four weeks, thus forcing the government to respond to more petitions as the volume of incoming petitions went up. In other words, the law constrained bureaucrats’ ability to strategically select “easy” petitions.

Figure A3: *Council of Ministers* petition volume over time



Notes: Monthly number of (a) incoming *Council of Ministers* petitions, (b) government responses, and (c) the difference between both. Gray and light blue mark the 90-days before and after elections.

Table A9: No change in petition volume around elections

	# Incoming (log)		# Responses (log)	
	PC	CoM	PC	CoM
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Pre-Election	0.147 (0.152)	0.345 (0.313)	0.020 (0.160)	-0.455 (0.298)
Pre-Election $\times$ Election year	0.056 (0.097)		-0.112 (0.111)	
Day-FE?	✓		✓	
Year-FE?	✓		✓	
Observations	1,440	180	1,440	180
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.119	0.001	0.059	0.007

*Notes:* This table examines whether the *People’s Chamber* (Models 1 and 3) or the *Council of Ministers* (Models 2 and 4) either received (Models 1 and 2) or answered (Models 3 and 4) a different number of petitions before elections. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. Robust standard errors, clustered by day (Models 1 and 3), in parentheses.

Table A9 conducts a formal test of whether petition volume varied systematically around elections. It regresses the (log) number of *People’s Chamber* (Models 1 and 2) and *Council of Ministers* (Models 3 and 4) petitions that were received (Models 1 and 3) and answered (Models 2 and 4) by the respective entity each day. The analysis parallels the main model specification without county-fixed effects. Of interest are the coefficients on the interaction term between the indicators for the pre-election period and election years (Models 1 and 3) or the coefficient on the indicator for the pre-election period (Models 2 and 4). These coefficients are insignificant, implying that petition volume was not statistically significantly different between the pre- and post-election periods. This result suggests that seasonality effects may explain the change in petition volume before elections: in fact, we notice that petition volume was equally high in the same months in non-election years. The inclusion of day-fixed effects in my main specification (Equation 1) accounts for these seasonality effects.

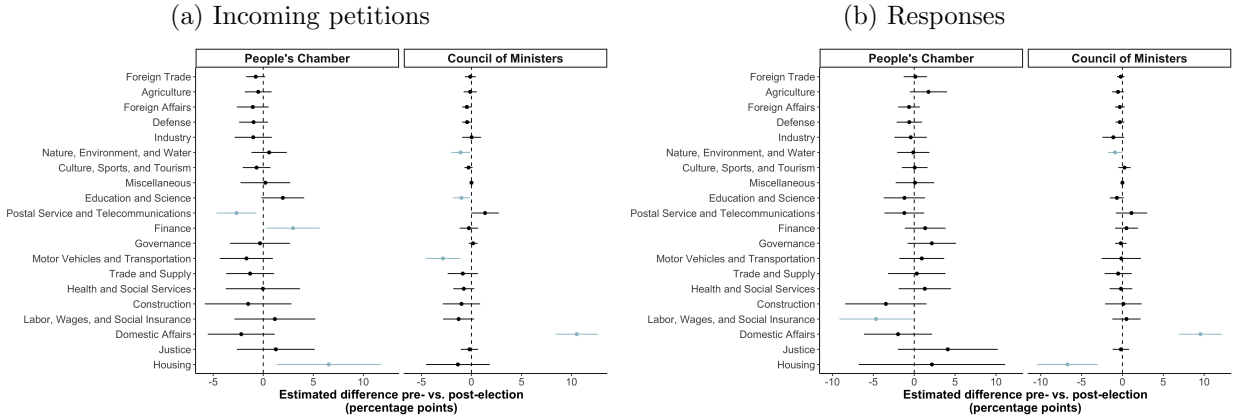
### D.1.2 Change in petition content?

It is further possible that the petitions submitted before elections differed in content. Alternatively, East German bureaucrats might have selected petitions they could answer easily in an effort to improve average response times. If true, we should find that the content of incoming petitions or government responses differed before elections.

Figure A4 tests this implication. It reports the probability that a petition sent to (Figure A4a) or answered by (Figure A4b) the *People’s Chamber* or *Council of Ministers* was about one of the 20 topics. The coefficients are estimated using Equation 1 (*People’s Chamber*) and 2 (*Council of Ministers*), where the dependent variable is an indicator of the respective topic.

Most coefficients lack statistical significance, implying that the content of petitions did not vary systematically around elections. I find that petitions sent to the *People’s Chamber* before elections were somewhat more likely to talk about housing and finance, while they were less likely to be about the postal service and telecommunications. Regarding incom-

Figure A4: Variation in topics before elections



Notes: Differences in the likelihood that a particular (a) incoming petition or (b) government response is about the indicated topic. Statistically significant coefficients ( $p < 0.05$ ) are emphasized in light blue.

ing petitions to the *Council of Ministers*, four out of the 20 topics see changes in topic proportions. The most notable is domestic affairs, which sees an increase by more than 10 percentage points. Yet, reassuringly, the increase in incoming petitions about domestic affairs is accompanied by a concomitant increase in government responses about the same topic (Figure A4b).

In sum, there is little evidence that petition topics varied systematically around elections. As yet another piece of evidence that variation in the content of petitions does not explain the differences in response times, I show in Table A10 that the main results remain unchanged when controlling for petition content. This table replicates the base models from Table 3 in the main text. Model 1 examines the *People's Chamber* petitions and adds controls for petition topic. Models 2 to 5 examine the *Council of Ministers* petitions. I subsequently add controls for topic, character (i.e., complaint, criticism, follow-up petition, request, suggestion, tip, or unknown), and reference (i.e., Council of Ministers decision, Elections, Law, Local decisions, Politburo, or unknown). Model 5 includes all three variables. Model 6 returns to the *People's Chamber* petitions and adds topic-fixed effects to the base model in the analysis of petition success (replication of Model 1 in Table 4). Across all models, the inclusion of these additional controls does not substantively alter the coefficients of interest; the coefficients of interest remain unchanged with respect to their size and statistical significance.

### D.1.3 Increase in response time after elections?

Lastly, more incoming petitions before elections may have slowed down response times afterwards: it is possible that the regime spent extra resources on resolving petitions before elections, which might have reduced its resources in the post-election period. In that case, my results may be driven by this post-electoral slowdown instead of improved pre-electoral responsiveness.

Table A10: The effect is not due to differences in petition topic, character, or reference

	Response time (log days)					1(positive resolution)
	People's Chamber	Council of Ministers			People's Chamber	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Pre-Election	0.128 (0.097)	-0.171*** (0.031)	-0.248*** (0.031)	-0.200*** (0.033)	-0.170*** (0.030)	-0.028 (0.062)
Pre-Election × Election year	-0.315*** (0.086)					0.098** (0.040)
Topic: Construction	0.317* (0.190)	0.034 (0.154)			0.055 (0.158)	0.253*** (0.056)
Topic: Culture, Sports, and Tourism	-0.197 (0.266)	0.149 (0.178)			0.138 (0.182)	0.083 (0.080)
Topic: Defense	-0.473** (0.231)	-1.067*** (0.294)			-1.099*** (0.291)	-0.027 (0.077)
Topic: Domestic Affairs	-0.878*** (0.179)	-0.951*** (0.154)			-1.009*** (0.159)	-0.003 (0.046)
Topic: Education and Science	-0.250 (0.201)	-0.271 (0.191)			-0.338* (0.190)	0.084 (0.056)
Topic: Finances	-0.292 (0.199)	-0.154 (0.166)			-0.178 (0.164)	0.065 (0.058)
Topic: Foreign Affairs	-1.039*** (0.217)	-1.087*** (0.185)			-1.175*** (0.197)	-0.029 (0.056)
Topic: Foreign Trade	-0.563** (0.268)	-0.388** (0.196)			-0.468** (0.197)	0.016 (0.054)
Topic: Governance	-0.102 (0.222)	-0.195 (0.215)			-0.281 (0.218)	0.094 (0.062)
Topic: Health and Social Services	0.00004 (0.209)	-0.424** (0.173)			-0.460*** (0.173)	0.088* (0.052)
Topic: Housing	0.301* (0.174)	0.133 (0.154)			0.082 (0.151)	0.281*** (0.050)
Topic: Industry	0.105 (0.224)	0.266 (0.180)			0.189 (0.181)	0.107 (0.077)
Topic: Justice	-0.560*** (0.178)	-0.194 (0.195)			-0.268 (0.196)	0.021 (0.048)
Topic: Labor, Wages, and Social Insurance	-0.226 (0.184)	-0.255 (0.160)			-0.309* (0.161)	0.037 (0.051)
Topic: Miscellaneous	-0.708*** (0.275)					0.035 (0.060)
Topic: Motor Vehicles and Transportation	-0.190 (0.190)	0.161 (0.157)			0.094 (0.156)	0.163*** (0.059)
Topic: Nature, Environment, and Water	-0.036 (0.261)	-0.001 (0.188)			-0.077 (0.189)	0.055 (0.073)
Topic: Postal Service and Telecommunications	0.211 (0.181)	0.109 (0.163)			0.047 (0.165)	0.090 (0.063)
Topic: Trade and Supply	-0.0004 (0.192)	0.179 (0.159)			0.124 (0.158)	0.197*** (0.055)
Character: Criticism			-0.629*** (0.039)		-0.258*** (0.049)	
Character: Follow-up petition			-0.239** (0.107)		-0.250** (0.105)	
Character: Request			-0.189*** (0.033)		-0.100*** (0.038)	
Character: Suggestion			-0.485** (0.229)		-0.424* (0.218)	
Character: Tip			-0.465*** (0.076)		-0.439*** (0.080)	
Character: Unknown			-0.640*** (0.094)		-0.368*** (0.091)	
Reference: Elections				0.082 (0.165)	0.046 (0.145)	
Reference: Law				-0.681*** (0.162)	-0.003 (0.145)	
Reference: Local decisions				-0.103 (0.163)	-0.164 (0.150)	
Reference: Politburo				0.303 (0.198)	0.180 (0.195)	
Reference: Unknown				-0.117 (0.168)	-0.143 (0.147)	
# pending petitions	-0.001 (0.001)	0.0004*** (0.00005)	0.001*** (0.00004)	0.001*** (0.00005)	0.0003*** (0.00005)	0.001 (0.001)
Day-FE?	✓					✓
Year-FE?	✓					✓
County-FE?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,736	4,768	4,770	4,770	4,768	2,625
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.202	0.313	0.218	0.224	0.327	0.111

Notes: This table shows that the main result is robust to controlling for petition content: Models 1, 6 (*People's Chamber* petitions), and 2 (*Council of Ministers* petitions) control for petition topic. Models 3 and 4 (*Council of Ministers* petitions) control for the character of each petition and what it refers to, respectively. Model 5 includes all three measures. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. Robust standard errors, clustered by county, in parentheses.

Table A11 provides evidence against this idea. It modifies the original analysis of the *People’s Chamber* petitions by considering the pre- and post-election periods separately. I regress response time on an indicator of election years, along with controls for the number of pending petitions and fixed effects for day, year, and county. The coefficient on the election year dummy reflects the average difference in response time between election and non-election years. If my findings were driven by a slowdown in the post-election period, the coefficient of interest should be small and insignificant in the pre-election period (Model 1), but positive and significant thereafter (Model 2). Yet, I find the opposite: consistent with the idea that my results are driven by improved responsiveness before elections, the coefficient on the election year dummy is large and significant in the pre-election period (Model 1), but small and insignificant in the post-election period (Model 2).

Table A11: Response time differences between election and non-election years

	Response time (log days)	
	Before election	After election
	(1)	(2)
Election year	-0.779*** (0.154)	0.198 (0.215)
# pending petitions	0.004 (0.003)	0.002 (0.004)
Day-FE?	✓	✓
Year-FE?	✓	✓
County-FE?	✓	✓
Observations	1,751	1,986
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.088	0.086

*Notes:* This table estimates differences in response time between election and non-election years, using the *People’s Chamber* petition sample. Model 1 considers the 90 days before elections, while Model 2 examines the 90 days thereafter. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. Robust standard errors, clustered by county, in parentheses.



## D.2 Bureaucratic or legislative turnover?

A second alternative explanation is that petitions were answered faster before elections because bureaucrats and legislators wanted to finalize pending petitions in anticipation of bureaucratic or legislative turnover. Alternatively, new officials after the election may require some time to familiarize themselves with the job, which would slow down response times after the election.

If true, the effects reported in the main text should be concentrated in elections that affected the composition of the respective body. Yet, the results are inconsistent with this idea. Even though the 1989 local elections did not alter the composition of the *Council of Ministers*, the *Council of Ministers* petition sample yields the same results as the *People's Chamber* data.

Further evidence against this implication is provided in Table A12. Here, I examine pre-electoral response times for each election separately. If the results were driven by anticipated legislative turnover, we should only find an effect in the 1981 *People's Chamber* elections (Model 2), while the local elections in 1979 (Model 1) and 1984 (Model 3) should leave response times the same. This expectation is not borne out in the data. The coefficient on the interaction term between the pre-election period and the election year dummy is negative and statistically significant across all elections.

Table A12: The effect is constant across different types of elections

	Response time (log days)			
	1979	1981	1984	all
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Pre-Election	0.126*	0.113*	0.021	0.084*
	(0.071)	(0.068)	(0.101)	(0.045)
Pre-Election $\times$ Election year	-0.205*	-0.378**	-0.381***	-0.332***
	(0.112)	(0.147)	(0.144)	(0.075)
# pending petitions	0.003*	-0.002	0.00000	-0.001
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)
Year-FE?	✓	✓	✓	✓
County-FE?	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	1,424	1,661	1,113	3,737
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.023	0.040	0.041	0.028

*Notes:* This table examines the difference in response time to *People's Chamber* petitions between the pre- and post-election periods, separately for the 1979 local (Model 1), 1981 legislative (Model 2), and 1984 local elections (Model 3). Model 4 reports the result when all three elections are considered. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. Robust standard errors, clustered by county, in parentheses.

### D.3 Were petitions entered with delay?

Table A13: Few differences in the time between submission and receipt of petitions

	Time between submission and receipt (log days)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Pre-Election	-0.085 (0.099)	-0.146 (0.131)	-0.042 (0.110)	-0.085 (0.090)
Pre-Election $\times$ Election year	-0.098* (0.055)	-0.089 (0.083)	-0.126* (0.067)	-0.098 (0.061)
# pending petitions	-0.0005 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.0001 (0.001)	-0.0005 (0.001)
Day-FE?	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE?	✓	✓	✓	✓
County-FE?	✓		✓	✓
ZIP code-FE?		✓		
County $\times$ year?			✓	
SE clustered by	county	zip code	county	county & month-year
Observations	2,355	2,353	2,353	2,355
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.111	0.153	0.116	0.111

*Notes:* This table estimates differences in the number of days between the submission and receipt of a petition around elections. \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ . Robust standard errors in parentheses.

It is possible that the receipt date assigned to petitions differs in the pre-election period. Government officials may have recorded a later receipt date before elections to artificially decrease response time and signal competence to their superiors.

Table A13 tests this idea. The dependent variable is the natural logarithm of 1 plus the number of days between the date a petition was written and the date it was received. The variable was top-coded at the 99th percentile. Not all petitions are dated, which explains the smaller sample size. Information on the date a petition was written was unavailable for the *Council of Ministers* sample, such that this analysis is restricted to the *People's Chamber* petition data. Petitions were assigned to either the pre- or post-election (or pseudo-election) periods based on the date they were received.

The model specifications mirror those in Models 1 through 4 in Table 3 in the main text. All models control for the number of pending petitions and include day- and year-fixed effects. Models 1, 3, and 4 include county-fixed effects. Model 2 uses zip code-fixed effects instead. Standard errors are clustered accordingly. Model 4 additionally clusters standard errors by month-year. Of interest is the coefficient on the interaction term between the pre-election period and election years. If it is true that it took the government a longer time to enter petitions before elections, this coefficient should be positive.

The results are at odds with the idea that petitions were entered with delay before elections. If anything, the opposite appears to be the case: all coefficients are negative, and some of them are significant at  $p < 0.1$ . This finding provides some additional support for my argument that the East German government sought to process and respond to petitions more quickly before elections.

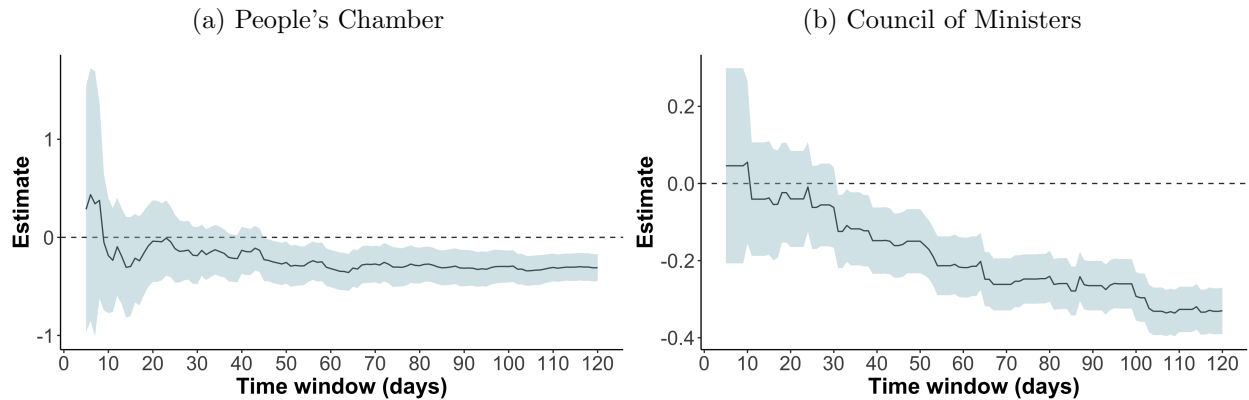
## E Robustness Checks

This Appendix section summarizes multiple robustness checks that show that my findings are not driven by particular coding and modeling decisions.

### E.1 Alternative time windows

The analyses in the main text consider all petitions answered during the 90 days before or after elections. I repeated the analysis (Models 1 and 5 in Table 3) with varying time windows, ranging from 5 to 120 days. The resulting coefficients of interest, along with 95% confidence intervals, are presented in Figure A5. For the *People's Chamber* petitions, the results reflect a high amount of stability. Regarding the *Council of Ministers*, I find that the difference in response time keeps decreasing with the size of the time window, but is negative for all but the shortest time windows.

Figure A5: Effect sizes by time window



*Notes:* Estimated difference in response time (in log days) for varying time windows (5 to 120 days) around the election date. Left: *People's Chamber* petitions. Right: *Council of Ministers* petitions. 95% confidence intervals are depicted in light blue.

## E.2 Alternative definitions of the dependent variable

The dependent variable in the main text is the natural logarithm of 1 plus the number of days between receipt of and answer to a petition. I add one day to the response time to ensure that the first day is properly accounted for. It also ensures that same-day answers are considered, which otherwise would be dropped from the analysis as the logarithm of 0 is not defined.

I show in Table A14 that this transformation does not impact the results. The findings remain unchanged when I do not add 1 to the number of days and thus drop all same-day responses (Models 1 and 4), when not taking logs (Models 2 and 5), and when not taking logs while at the same time dropping same-day responses (Models 3 and 6).

Table A14: Robustness to alternative specifications of the dependent variable

	People's Chamber			Council of Ministers		
	Response time (log days)	Response time (days)		Response time (log days)	Response time (days)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Pre-Election	0.264*** (0.098)	6.978** (3.243)	7.614** (3.244)	-0.280*** (0.035)	-15.388*** (1.130)	-15.567*** (1.126)
Pre-Election $\times$ Election year	-0.313*** (0.108)	-14.261*** (3.187)	-14.353*** (3.404)			
# pending petitions	0.002 (0.002)	-0.075 (0.052)	-0.072 (0.054)	0.001*** (0.00005)	0.018*** (0.001)	0.018*** (0.001)
Day-FE?	✓	✓	✓			
Year-FE?	✓	✓	✓			
County-FE?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,681	3,737	3,681	4,758	4,770	4,758
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.107	0.088	0.093	0.171	0.161	0.164

*Notes:* This table repeats the main analyses presented in Table 3, but uses three alternative measures of the dependent variable. Models 1 to 3 consider the *People's Chamber* petitions, while Models 4 to 6 examine the *Council of Ministers* petitions. The dependent variable in Models 1 and 4 is the natural logarithm of response time (without adding 1). Petitions that were answered on the same day are thus dropped from these samples. Models 2, 3, 5, and 6 consider response time linearly. Models 2 and 5 include petitions that received a same-day response. Models 3 and 6 drop those petitions. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. Robust standard errors, clustered by county, in parentheses.

### E.3 Alternative estimation techniques

Table A15 analyzes the data using Poisson (Models 1 and 3) and negative binomial regression (Models 2 and 4). The dependent variable here is the count of the number of days between receipt of and answer to a petition. The models are defined as before: I model response time to *People’s Chamber* petitions as a function of the interaction between the pre-election period and election years, along with county- and year-fixed effects and the number of pending petitions. Response time to *Council of Ministers* is modeled as a function of the pre-election period, county-fixed effects, and the number of pending petitions. The resulting coefficients of interest, which express the percent change in response time in the pre- compared to the post-election period, are almost the same as those in the main text.

Table A15: Robustness to alternative estimation technique: count models

	Response time (days)			
	People’s Chamber		Council of Ministers	
	Poisson	Neg. Binomial	Poisson	Neg. Binomial
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Pre-Election	0.165 (0.117)	0.173 (0.124)	-0.351*** (0.009)	-0.333*** (0.011)
Pre-Election × Election year	-0.392*** (0.092)	-0.353*** (0.086)		
# pending petitions	-0.002* (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	0.0005*** (0.00003)	0.001*** (0.00003)
Day-FE?	✓	✓		
Year-FE?	✓	✓		
County-FE?	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,737	3,737	4,770	4,770

*Notes:* This table shows that the main results remain robust when estimating count models: Poisson (Models 1 and 3) and negative binomial (Models 2 and 4). \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. Robust standard errors, clustered by county, in parentheses.

## E.4 Omitting the control for pending petitions

My regression models control for the number of pending petitions to address the concern that backlogs might have slowed down the government and increased average response times. As shown above, the volume of incoming petitions and government responses varied slightly around elections. The inclusion of the control for pending petitions may thus introduce post-treatment bias. To show that this is not the case, I replicate the analysis reported in Table 3 without this control. The results are summarized in Table A16.

The omission of the control for pending petitions leaves the coefficients of interest for the *People’s Chamber* petition analysis virtually unchanged. Regarding the *Council of Ministers* petitions, I find that the coefficient of interest actually becomes more negative. This finding suggests that my estimate of the difference in response time before vs. after elections reported in the main text is conservative. Still, I believe that the inclusion of this control is important. It accounts for the fact that the number of pending *Council of Ministers* petitions continued to rise throughout the period for which data are available (Figure A2b). This trend started before the pre-election period and continued thereafter. It is therefore unlikely to be caused by the election.

Table A16: The main results hold when not controlling for the number of pending petitions

	Response time (log days)					
	People’s Chamber				Council of Ministers	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Pre-Election	0.191* (0.101)	0.165 (0.160)	0.151 (0.107)	0.191*** (0.071)	-0.558*** (0.030)	-0.570*** (0.034)
Pre-Election × Election year	-0.327*** (0.082)	-0.366*** (0.106)	-0.310*** (0.084)	-0.327*** (0.083)		
Day-FE?	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Year-FE?	✓	✓	✓	✓		
County-FE?	✓		✓	✓	✓	
ZIP code-FE?		✓				✓
County × year?			✓			
SE clustered by	county	zip code	county	county & month-year	county	zip code
Observations	3,737	3,732	3,737	3,737	4,770	4,770
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.090	0.087	0.089	0.090	0.118	0.090

*Notes:* Difference in response time to *People’s Chamber* (Models 1 to 4) and *Council of Ministers* (Models 5 to 6) petitions between the pre- and post-election periods. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

## E.5 Dropping 1985

As shown in Figure A1, I was able to collect only a small share of *People's Chamber* petitions in 1985. It is unlikely that petitions in that year are missing at random. Table A17 shows that my results remain unchanged when dropping 1985 from the analysis altogether.

Table A17: Robustness to dropping petitions in 1985

	Response time (log days)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Pre-Election	0.201** (0.102)	0.170 (0.160)	0.155 (0.109)	0.088* (0.051)
Pre-Election × Election year	-0.325*** (0.095)	-0.375*** (0.116)	-0.301*** (0.098)	-0.337*** (0.085)
# pending petitions	0.0005 (0.001)	-0.0001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
Day-FE?	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year-FE?	✓	✓	✓	✓
County-FE?	✓		✓	✓
ZIP code-FE?		✓		
County × year?			✓	
SE clustered by	county	zip code	county	county & month-year
Observations	3,726	3,721	3,726	3,726
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.089	0.084	0.090	0.029

*Notes:* This table reports the difference in response time (in log days) between the pre- and post-election period among petitions to the *People's Chamber* when dropping petitions submitted in 1985. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

## E.6 Identification assumptions

Table A18: Testing the identification assumptions

	Response time (log days)	
	(1)	(2)
Pre-Election	0.263 (0.193)	-0.105 (0.142)
Pre-Election $\times$ Election year		-0.112 (0.145)
# pending petitions	-0.003 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.002)
Day-FE?	✓	✓
Year-FE?	✓	✓
County-FE?	✓	✓
Observations	2,056	3,236
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.134	0.076

*Notes:* Model 1 shows that there are no differences in responsiveness between the pseudo-pre- and pseudo-post-election periods in non-election years. Model 2 shows that there are no differences between election and non-election years outside of the 90-day window around elections. \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. Robust standard errors, clustered by county, in parentheses.

This paper’s empirical strategy relies on three identification assumptions. First, the timing of elections must be exogenous and not related to the regime’s ability to respond to petitions. This assumption is plausible because GDR elections were held at the end of regular five-year legislative terms. There is no evidence of strategic election timing.

Second, difference-in-differences designs require no spillovers: the fact that some observations are treated must not change the outcome among non-treated units. Table A11 shows no statistically significant differences in response time between election and non-election years in the post-election period: the fact that responsiveness changed before elections did not impact responsiveness thereafter. It is further possible that responsiveness was generally different in the months before elections or pseudo-elections. To rule out this possibility, Model 1 in Table A18 examines differences in responsiveness between the pseudo-pre- and pseudo-post-election periods in non-election years, using the base model specification. I find no differences in non-election years before and after pseudo-election dates, which substantiates the no spillover assumption.

Third, I assume parallel trends: election and non-election years should move in parallel. Model 2 in Table A18 substantiates this assumption. It replicates the base model (Model 1 in Table 3 in the main text), but considers petitions answered outside the 180-day window around elections. It shows that the difference between the pre- and post-election periods does not vary systematically in election years compared to non-election years in this sample. Outside election season, there are no statistically significant differences in response times between the pre- and post-election periods when comparing election and non-election years.