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Mobilizing different types of voters: The influence of campaign intensity on turnout in direct democratic votes[☆]

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ABSTRACT

A well-established body of literature links voter turnout to political campaigns. In this view, intensive campaigns increase the perceived salience of a decision, fostering information-seeking and, ultimately, turnout. The existing literature has also advanced our understanding of how direct democratic institutions influence turnout in elections. Yet we still know little about whether and to what extent campaign efforts influence voter turnout in direct democratic votes, and we know even less about who is mobilized. We claim that campaign intensity has differentiated effects across voters, depending on voters' participation profile. To test this claim we use a rich dataset of official turnout data covering more than 40 direct democratic votes in Switzerland. The results support our claim. While intensive political campaigns overall foster citizens to turn out to vote, they do so especially for "selective" (or "intermittent") voters, who need to decide anew at each ballot whether to turn out or not. Interestingly, we also find that frequent abstainers are not immune from campaign effects, and get almost as strongly mobilized as selective voters in highly intensive campaigns.

1. Introduction

Turnout rates can vary greatly between two votes. This is true for elections and, even more so, for direct democratic votes. For instance, while only 28 percent of the Swiss voters showed up at the polls on a vote in 2012, 63 percent participated in a 2016 ballot. These high variations in turnout cannot be accounted for by individual determinants. According to a widespread view, context-related factors – in particular, campaign intensity – provide the missing link and account for variations in turnout across elections (e.g. Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998; Hogan, 2013; Holbrook, 1996; Norris, 2002). Intensive campaigns increase both the amount of available information and the perceived salience of votes, which encourages and mobilizes citizens to participate (Bowler and Donovan, 1998; Kahn and Kenney, 1999). The existing – mainly U.S. – literature has also advanced our understanding of how direct democratic institutions influence participation in

elections (Donovan et al., 2009; Gerber, 1999; Hillygus, 2005; Matsusaka, 2004; Smith and Tolbert, 2004; Smith, 2001; Tolbert et al., 2009). Yet there is scant research on whether and to what extent campaign efforts influence participation in direct democratic votes. We know even less about who is mobilized in initiative and referendum campaigns.

Combining insights from the habituation theory of voting and from the literature on campaign effects, this paper makes three contributions. First, while the habituation theory emphasizes the existence of two main categories of voters, abstainers and frequent voters (Denny and Doyle, 2000; Fowler, 2006; Gerber et al., 2003; Green and Shachar, 2000; Plutzer, 2002), we draw attention to a third and sizeable category of voters, the selective (or intermittent) voters, who alternate participation and abstention. Second, we argue that the influence of campaign efforts on individuals' decision to turn out to vote is conditioned by citizens' voting profile. More specifically, we assume that campaign

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intensity has a stronger influence among selective voters than among abstainers or frequent voters. Third, we take advantage of the “laboratory” character of the Swiss direct democracy (Kriesi, 2005), and we rely on a rich set of official turnout data covering 43 successive direct democratic votes in the canton of Geneva. As each citizen is identified with a numeric code, we can track the evolution of her participation across all ballots. This offers a highly reliable and more valid indicator of citizens’ participation profile than the one used in similar studies (Niven, 2004; Parry et al., 2008). We match this data with measures of campaign intensity and other ballot characteristics.

The results support our argument that campaign intensity has differentiated effects, depending on voters’ past participation profile: while intensive political campaigns overall foster citizens to turn out to vote, they do so especially for selective voters. If campaigns are fought intensively, selective voters are likely to participate. If not, they tend to stay at home. However, intensive campaigns also have mobilizing effects on people who usually abstain. By contrast, frequent voters are largely immune from campaign effects, meaning that they are not demobilized by unusually low levels of campaign intensity. Furthermore, we find that selective voting is not limited to specific cohorts of young or old voters in transition, but is present in the entire electorate. In addition to their scientific importance, our results have both normative and practical implications, which we discuss in the conclusion.

2. Campaigns and participation

In electoral research, there is widespread agreement that campaign efforts, campaign information and media coverage foster turnout (Blais and Dobrzynska, 1998; Hogan, 2013; Holbrook, 1996; Norris, 2002; Schmitt-Beck and Farrell, 2002). The conventional view that intensive campaigns have a positive impact on turnout transpires from both aggregate-level and survey-based studies, as well as from experimental research (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995; A. S. Gerber and Green, 2000). In the context of Senate elections, Kahn and Kenney (1999) have highlighted the twofold mechanism through which campaign intensity matters. First, intense campaigns increase the quantity of messages delivered to voters and, therefore help them to form opinions. Second, intense campaigns play a signalling role by alerting voters that something important is at stake. This leads voters to pay more attention to the campaign and to make more sophisticated decisions about parties and candidates. By contrast, when intensity is low, information is scarce and citizens have fewer incentives to mobilize. This argument resonates with the main thrust of the information model that citizens who are better informed are more likely to vote (Matsusaka, 1995: 93): “even if people believe it is in their duty to vote, rational citizens abstain if they feel unable to evaluate the choices. Holding constant the basic inclination to vote, then, variations in turnout can be explained by variations of how informed citizens are.”

More recently, Schuck et al. (2016) have argued that the mobilizing effect of exposure to campaign news is especially strong when these news are framed in conflict terms. In their view, conflict during a campaign is indicative of a well-functioning democracy, which motivates citizens to talk about politics and eventually leads them to vote. However, the causal effect may be even simpler. Green and Gerber (2015: 116) claim that “the content of political ads is secondary; what matters is the fact that the airwaves and newspapers are filled with ads and political banter. When voters see or hear a lot of political ads, they infer that an important election is coming up. Elections that are perceived to be important attract higher rates of turnout.”

Besides campaigns, institutions are the second major contextual driver of turnout (Blais, 2006; Franklin et al., 1996).¹ Earlier studies

have highlighted the “educative effect” of direct democratic institutions on citizens (Dyck and Seabrook, 2010; Smith and Tolbert, 2004). Salient ballot measures and frequent use of direct democratic processes have a positive influence on voters’ political knowledge, interest, and efficacy (Benz and Stutzer, 2004; Bowler and Donovan, 2002; Smith and Tolbert, 2004; Smith, 2002). In U.S. states with an easier availability or higher usage of initiatives and referendums turnout rate in elections is higher (Lacey, 2005; Smith, 2001).² Only few studies, however, measured actual initiative and referendum campaigns and even fewer dealt with campaign effects (Hillygus, 2005; Tolbert et al., 2009). Moreover, all analyses have electoral participation or related measures such as interest in election as their dependent variable. Therefore, we still know little about campaign effects on voter mobilization in direct democratic votes, and we know even less about *who* is mobilized by these campaigns. A notable exception is the study by Dyck and Seabrook (2010), which highlights differing effects of high- vs. low-stimulus ballot initiative elections on partisan voters and independents. Our study aims to continue this line of research by looking at another context, a different measure for ballot importance and across different types of voters.

3. Who is sensitive to campaign intensity?

According to the (scarce) literature, campaign intensity is a major driver of citizens’ participation in direct democratic votes, too (Bowler and Donovan, 1998; Kriesi, 2005; Nicholson, 2003). As mentioned with respect to elections, intensive campaigns enhance both the quantity of information and the incentives to search for information, and to participate. Going one step further, we argue that campaigns do not have uniform effects across voters. Instead, we share Jackson’s (1993: 1084) view that “[t]he process of political mobilization should be conditioned by the characteristics of the potential voter”. That is, we assume that citizens are not equally affected by campaign efforts. This raises the question which voters are likely to be most (or least) mobilized by the campaign?

From the perspective of the habituation thesis, citizens basically divide into two main categories, voters and abstainers (Denny and Doyle, 2000; Gerber et al., 2003; Green and Shachar, 2000; Plutzer, 2002). In this view, voting is mainly a routine.³ Once citizens have established themselves as voters or abstainers, they do not need to decide anew at each election whether to participate. As Fowler (2006: 432) puts it, “most people either vote all the time or abstain all the time”. As a result, a person’s voting history is a strong predictor of future turning out (e.g. Green and Shachar, 2000; Smets and van Ham, 2013) and even exceeds the influence of standard determinants of participation such as age or education (A. S. Gerber et al., 2003). Likewise, Aldrich et al. (2011) find that citizens with strong voting habits are less sensitive to the standard cognitive-based determinants of participation. Arguing along a similar line, we expect that people who often abstain or often vote are weakly affected by the campaign.

However, while the habituation theory is centred around voters and abstainers, evidence from direct democratic systems points to the

(footnote continued)
democratic votes.

² Switzerland does not follow this pattern. According to a study of individuals’ participation in cantonal elections, extensive (availability or use of) direct democracy is not associated with an increased but, rather, a decreased likelihood to participate in elections (Freitag and Stadelmann-Steffen, 2010). The lower significance of elections in the Swiss consensus democracy, together with the “voter fatigue” associated with a highly developed direct democracy, presumably accounts for this outlier character (Linder, 2010).

³ Characteristics of the first election in which a young citizen participates are said to influence her initial behavior and, therefore, her subsequent behavior (Franklin, 2004: 120). Over time, many young citizens who started as habitual nonvoters develop into habitual voters, just with varying speed (Plutzer, 2002).

¹ For our present purposes, we disregard institutions such as compulsory voting, electoral system, or vote-facilitating modes such as postal vote or e-voting (e.g. Germann and Serdült, 2017) and focus on characteristics of direct

existence of a third category of voters, the selective (or intermittent) voters, who sometimes participate and sometimes not (Dermont and Stadelmann-Steffen, 2018; Dermont, 2016; Linder, 2010; Qvortrup, 2002; Sciarini et al., 2016; Serdült, 2013). In these systems, citizens are often called to the polls. In addition to elections, initiative and referendum votes take place over short time intervals.⁴ Given the high number of voting opportunities, it is highly demanding to be a habitual voter in the strict sense and it is also rather unlikely to be a permanent abstainer. Unlike the usual treatment of selective voters as one of three voter categories, we will consider previous participation in a finer-grained, continuous way to not lose precision regarding different voter types. For reasons of coherence with the literature, though, we continue to use the simplifying labels of three voter categories in the following.

In Switzerland, selective voters constitute the majority of the electorate. Depending on the number of consecutive voters under consideration, the share of selective voters varies from 70% (for ten consecutive votes) to over 80% (for 30 consecutive votes) (Sciarini et al., 2016).⁵ Unlike frequent voters or abstainers, selective voters form a heterogeneous group in terms of socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, marital status, residence duration, citizenship status or education). By contrast, with respect to political characteristics selective voters lean more towards abstainers than towards frequent voters: They show rather weak interest in politics, political knowledge, partisanship and ideology (Sciarini et al., 2016). These factors are known to decrease participation and should thus lead to abstention. Yet the fact that selective voters nevertheless vote, at least occasionally, raises the question *why* do they sometimes end up voting? Context and ballot-related factors, and the especially high sensitivity of selective voters to context and ballot-related factors, arguably provide the answer.⁶

That campaign effects differ across voters transpires from a number of studies on U.S. elections. Tolbert et al. (2009) show that spending in initiative campaigns increases the probability to vote in presidential or mid-term elections especially among people with lower education. Similarly, Hillygus (2005) finds that campaign efforts have a particularly high influence on vote intention among citizens initially not planning to vote. Likewise, Donovan et al. (2009) demonstrate that ballot measures engage and mobilize people who do not fit the profile of regular voters (i.e. independents, young and less educated).

Drawing on psychological research on persuasive messages, Niven (2004: 870–871) discusses the causal mechanisms that may account for the higher sensitivity of intermittent voters to campaign effects. He argues that the effectiveness of mobilization efforts varies between citizens depending on their receptivity to political messages, i.e. depending on their willingness and capacity to understand, think about and use messages. Receptivity is said to be higher among the intermediate category of people holding neither particularly strong nor weak attitudes, than among people with strong attitudes, who will be resistant to information, or among people with weak attitudes, who may miss the message. Applying the argument to the case of electoral campaigns, Niven (2004: 871) concludes that mobilization efforts through contacts will have limited effects among abstainers who will ignore or quickly forget them, and among citizens who already vote regularly and will hence not find the contact particularly relevant. Mobilizing efforts will be more consequential for the in-between category of voters “who are neither fully disengaged from politics nor fully committed to it”.⁷ The empirical tests demonstrate a positive effect of

campaign contact on participation across all types of voters, but a significantly higher one for the middle category of intermittent voters. However, in another, similar study Parry et al. (2008) come to a different conclusion. They also find significant mobilization effects of campaign contacts among intermittent voters, but they find even stronger effects among “seldom” voters. The result that mildly involved people are not the most sensitive to campaign efforts is intriguing and highlights the non-trivial nature of the interaction between campaign effects and citizens’ profile.

Based on the development above we formulate three hypotheses:

H1. (“habitual voting hypothesis”): *Citizens’ likelihood to turn out to vote increases with their past participation record.*

H2. (“campaign intensity hypothesis”): *Citizens’ likelihood to turn out to vote increases with campaign intensity.*

H3. (“conditional hypothesis”): *Campaign intensity increases the likelihood to turn out to vote more strongly among selective voters than among habitual voters and abstainers.*

Due to a certain ceiling- and bottom-effect for frequent voters and abstainers respectively, i.e. abstainers cannot abstain more and frequent voters cannot vote more than in the past, we compare mobilization effects between abstainers and selective voters and demobilization effects between frequent and selective voters.

4. Data

As the country with the most far-reaching experience in direct legislation and – initiative and referendum – campaigns, Switzerland lends itself particularly well to a study of how individual-level and context-level variables interact and jointly influence participation in direct democratic votes (Kriesi, 2005). On the voter level, we employ official data from the canton of Geneva. While survey data overestimate turnout, our data provides highly reliable information about individual participation in direct democratic votes for the entire cantonal electorate, roughly 200,000 people. As this dataset includes the whole electorate, we do not face the usual survey problems of sampling, coverage, nonresponse bias and vote overreporting (cf. Sciarini and Goldberg, 2016; 2017; Goldberg and Sciarini, 2018). In the time period under study (1999–2012), there were 43 ballot days, which results in almost 8 million data points (electorate times ballot days). As this number is too big to run the statistical models, we draw a random sample of 10 per cent of the individuals. In the dataset, each citizen is identified with an anonymous code, which allows us to track her history of participation. The data provides information on gender, age, civil status, residence duration, and Geneva citizenship.⁸ While other common determinants of voters’ participation such as education, occupation or political attitudes are not available, citizens’ past participation record is an even more straightforward measure of their propensity to vote, one that

(footnote continued)

sensitivity to campaign efforts, scholars in political psychology have emphasized the role of political sophistication. In Zaller’s (1992) model of opinion formation, political sophistication (or as he calls it “political awareness”) regulates the reception and acceptance of political messages. On the one hand, the greater the person’s awareness (i.e. the greater her interest in and knowledge of politics), the more likely she is to receive a political message. On the other hand, the ability of citizens to resist messages that are not consistent with their political predispositions increases with their political awareness. Consequently, mildly aware citizens are most susceptible to opinion change, because they are more prone to receive messages than unaware citizens and because they are more prone to accept those messages than highly aware citizens (Zaller, 1992: 123).

⁸ Citizenship status refers to a cantonal citizenship, which exists next to the Swiss national one. Residents with citizenship of another canton can still have the right to vote in Geneva.

⁴ Direct democratic votes are held quarterly in Switzerland. Every four years, the October vote (third quarter) is replaced by federal elections.

⁵ Niven (2004) also reports the highest share of intermittent voters in his data from Florida regarding a general, primary and municipal election.

⁶ Swiss direct democratic votes show strong variations in turnout rates. Given that successive votes include basically the same electorate each time, these variations cannot be accounted for by composition effects, and are thus driven by some vote-specific effects.

⁷ While Niven (2004) points to the strength of attitudes as the determinant of

already captures the effects of those determinants (see also Cutts et al., 2009).

On the contextual level we rely on data measuring the media campaign of each ballot (Nai, 2014).⁹ A ballot day can include only one vote, but often several votes take place on the same day.¹⁰ The dataset covers political ads in two major newspaper outlets in the French-speaking region of which Geneva is a part (Tribune de Genève & Le Temps) during a period of four weeks prior to each ballot. Previous research has also opted for newspaper ads to measure campaigns (e.g. Kriesi, 2005; Lanz and Nai, 2015; Sciarini and Tresch, 2011). Swiss law prohibits political ads in radio and TV programs and direct campaign contact via telephone is not common. This increases the importance of newspaper ads as instrument for campaigning. Moreover, newspapers are frequently read. According to surveys conducted after each ballot, more than 80 percent of the voters declare they use newspapers to learn about the proposals submitted to vote, and 50 percent say they use newspaper ads as source of information (Sciarini and Tresch, 2014). Swiss campaigners appreciate the possibility of publishing ads to inform voters and influence opinion formation. Publicity in the press provides political actors with a direct access to the public, free from any selection process by journalists or newspapers' editors. Empirically, only one out of the 43 ballots did not see a single published newspaper ad.¹¹

5. Operationalisation

PARTICIPATION Our dependent variable is a citizen's participation in a given ballot. This measure does not distinguish between several votes taking place on the same day. However, this is only a minor drawback since participation rates of different votes on one ballot day rarely vary more than one percentage point. Our dataset provides highly reliable information as the official participation is registered through an electronic reading of the voting card of each eligible voter in Geneva. The estimations furthermore contain the following explanatory variables:

PAST PARTICIPATION The main independent variable on the individual level is the past participation record. Instead of the classification of voters into three categories, our measure is more detailed and treats participation as a continuum between abstention (0) and frequent participation (5). For that we consider official participation over the five previous ballots.¹² Specifically, we create six dummy variables indicating the number of ballots in which a person participated – from 0 to 5 ballots. Note that the past participation record is not static, but is calculated for each ballot anew. This means that individuals may move from one category to another from one ballot to the next.¹³ For

example, a citizen may have participated in five ballots in a row, but abstained in the sixth, and would hence move from the “habitual” (5/5) to the highest “selective” voter category (4/5). In that sense, the two extreme categories may not capture “true” habitual abstainers or “true” habitual voters. Therefore, we label voters who participated (abstained) in the five previous ballots as “frequent” voters (abstainers). This dynamic coding is central to our theoretical argument, as campaigns could obviously not affect participation among citizens who always abstain (or participate).¹⁴ All citizens who participated 1, 2, 3 or 4 times are then part of the commonly merged group of selective voters.

According to this coding, the two extreme groups of frequent abstainers and frequent voters each comprise around 25 percent of the electorate, on average. The four groups of selective voters comprise between 11 and 15 percent each. Overall, then, there are as many selective voters as frequent abstainers and voters taken together. Table 1 shows socio-demographic patterns of abstainers, frequent voters and for once the merged category of selective voters. It confirms that frequent abstainers and frequent voters have distinct profiles, and that selective voters form an in-between and heterogeneous group.

The measurement of past participation has limitations. First, while the past participation record is measured on the individual level, it can be affected by the contextual characteristics of the five previous ballots, e.g. if these five ballots took place in a highly-politicized context prompting turnout overall. However, our non-static coding can capture such contextual or periodical effects, which reduces the risk of bias. The second possible bias stems from different voting patterns among selective voters. For instance, some people voting three out of five times may vote at ballot days 1, 2 and 3, and then abstain, but others may vote at ballots 1, 3 and 5, and abstain in between. The latter pattern looks more like a “real” selective voter, whereas the former might also capture a transition from frequent voting to abstention, e.g. due to health problems among older people. Therefore, we need to identify citizens who might be simply in transition between frequent voting and abstention, i.e. those who switched only once – from abstention to participation, or vice versa – during the five previous ballots. The visualization in Appendix A2 shows that 42 percent of voters who voted one time out of five switched only once (either they abstained in the first four ballots and participated in the fifth, or they participated in the first ballot and abstained in the next four). Similarly, on the opposite pole 42 percent of voters who voted four times out of five exhibit a voting pattern very close to that of frequent voters: they participated in the first four ballots and abstained in the last, or they abstained in the first ballot and participated in the last four. In the empirical section, we will thus need to run additional robustness checks excluding those selective voters potentially in transition.

Arceneaux and Nickerson (2000) and Enos et al. (2014) use an alternative approach to divide the electorate according to their probability of voting. They estimate voting propensities based on socio-demographic and political variables (including past participation record). This approach aims to prevent the mislabelling of regular voters into selective voters due to a single unintended non-participation because of illness, vacancy or similar factors. In our case these problems are negligible, since Swiss citizens do not need to register to vote and automatically receive the voting material four weeks prior to voting day. More than 80 percent of the Swiss vote by post. Thus, everybody has one month to vote, which means that unintended non-participation is unlikely.¹⁵ A more practical reason for our coding is the easier

⁹ Data available on <http://www.alessandro-nai.com>.

¹⁰ In the remainder of the paper we use the generic term “ballot” to refer to one or more votes taking place on a given day, and the term “vote” or “direct democratic vote” to refer to single votes on a given policy proposal.

¹¹ This ballot (21 May 2006) only contained one uncontroversial vote (a new constitutional article on education unanimously supported by the party elite), which got accepted with 86 percent of the votes.

¹² We decided to consider five ballots for various reasons. First, using five votes to calculate past participation corresponds to a time span of about 15–18 months. This short period enables us to include young voters having recently received their voting rights and citizens who recently arrived in Geneva. Secondly, we aim to make full use of our campaign data, which is available from 1999 onwards. Before 1999, we have only limited information about citizens' participation. Using a wider vote window would thus result in a more limited number of observations on the ballot level. Further, a possible misclassification will only affect the next five ballots, e.g. around 12% of cases only (5/43).

¹³ Our models thus rely on a sample including citizens being present throughout the entire time period, people who entered the sample at a later stage (e.g. young people receiving their voting rights), people who dropped out before the end of our time period (e.g. people who die or move away and hence lose their voting rights in Geneva) and also people that entered late and dropped out early. The only requirement of being included is to have been

(footnote continued)

eligible to vote in the 5 previous ballots.

¹⁴ Our dynamic coding of past participation also captures the fact that differences in participation habits may be due to citizens' changing socio-demographic profile (e.g., a higher participation for middle-aged and/or married persons).

¹⁵ Even in case of an unintended non-participation, the used dynamic

Table 1
Descriptive statistics: abstainers, selective voters, frequent voters.

	Abstainers 0 ballots	Selective voters 1–4 ballots	Frequent voters 5 ballots
Age	47.77	49.11	58.30
Gender			
Female	56.58	57.18	51.88
Male	43.42	42.82	48.12
Marital status			
Single	36.29	29.12	17.75
Married	34.01	49.60	62.51
Divorced/widowed	29.70	21.28	19.74
Residence duration			
Less than 10 years	12.25	9.17	6.01
10–19 years	15.59	13.24	9.66
At least 20 years	72.16	77.59	84.33

Note: Numbers stand for the proportion (in per cent) of respondents in a given category.

In the case of age the values represent the average age in years.

interpretation of results. We can immediately spot differences in the campaign effects for each of our six levels of past participation, and also compare their absolute level of participation for different campaign intensities. Hence, we can analyze to what extent the turnout level of the six groups becomes more/less similar when campaign intensity reaches a certain level. Still, to strengthen our findings, we later present several robustness checks with alternative operationalizations of our independent variable including both the use of wider vote-windows of 10 or 20 past participations, and with a linear and cumulative measure of participation.

CAMPAIGN INTENSITY Our main variable on the contextual level measures the intensity of the campaign. This variable sums the total ad sizes (in m²) in the previously mentioned two major French-speaking newspapers in the four weeks prior to a ballot day, regardless of how many different votes took place. This variable captures the overall visibility of the campaign in the newspapers (for detailed values see Appendix A1).

CONTROL VARIABLES We include the following individual-level control variables in our models: *Sex* is measured with a dummy variable where women take the value 1. *Civil status* distinguishes three groups: single, married and divorced/widowed citizens. We further include a centred variable for age plus a squared term to account for the well-known curvilinear relation between age and political participation (e.g. Norris, 2002). To ease the interpretation we recode a continuous measure of *residence duration* into three groups (less than ten years, between ten and nineteen years and at least twenty years). *Geneva citizenship* distinguishes Swiss who were born in Geneva or have acquired Genevan citizenship, from citizens from another canton but entitled to vote in Geneva. Except sex, all control variables may vary between votes for a given person.

On the contextual level, the effect of ads published during a campaign might be different depending on whether the campaign is balanced between both camps (yes vs. no) or strongly leaning towards one camp. Hence, we include a control variable that measures the *balance of ads between the opposing camps*.¹⁶ This is done by calculating the ratio of ads published by the smaller camp (yes or no) versus the ads published by the bigger camp. The result is a score between zero and one (correlation with campaign intensity is $\rho = 0.36$). Zero stands for a completely one-sided campaign where only one camp published newspaper

ads, whereas one stands for a balanced campaign with equally strong advertising by both camps. If more than one vote takes place on a ballot day we use the average ratio of all votes.

To take into account the role of other contextual factors such as competitiveness, issue importance or complexity we run additional robustness checks controlling for such variables. We further check for the influence of highly salient issues concerning immigration and examine alternative measures of campaign intensity. The latter include the usage of Swiss-wide newspaper ads (including also German- and Italian-speaking newspapers), the number instead of the size of ads and the tone, i.e. negativity, of the ads (e.g. Nai and Walter, 2015). We discuss the results of these robustness checks in more detail in the empirical section.

6. Empirical model

We argue that campaign intensity influences participation, and this especially among selective voters. Given our data structure, we fit a logit random-intercept multilevel model where both individual factors and the contextual setting of a ballot predicts individual participation¹⁷:

$$\Pr(y_{ij} = 1) = \text{logit}^{-1}(\beta_0 + \beta_{1,\dots,5} \cdot pp_i^{1,\dots,5} + \psi_1 \cdot \mathbf{X}_i^T + \gamma_1 \cdot \text{int}_j + \gamma_2 \cdot \text{bal}_j + \alpha_{1,\dots,5} \cdot pp_i^{1,\dots,5} \cdot \text{int}_j + \mu_{0j})$$

Where citizen i 's probability of turning out at ballot j is a function of individual and contextual factors (for $i = 1, \dots, I$; for $j = 1, \dots, 43$). β_0 is a global average for the citizen to participate. $pp_i^{1,\dots,5}$ are the five dummy variables for past participation. The reference category is no participation in the last five ballots. $\mathbf{X}$ is a matrix for the control variables gender, age, civil status, residence duration, and Geneva citizenship. int is a ballot level predictor of campaign intensity. Our contextual control, campaign balance, is represented by bal . $pp_i^{1,\dots,5} \cdot \text{int}$ are the interactions between campaign intensity and the dummies for the past participation record. These terms allow us to assess whether the impact of the frequency of past participation varies with the context. μ_{0j} covers context-dependent differences, i.e. the differences between the 43 random intercepts and the fixed global estimate β_0 .

Because of the nonlinearity of the logistic curve, coefficients in logistic regressions are difficult to interpret and this even more in case of interactions with a fixed reference category. In the empirical part we therefore rely on predicted probabilities and related first differences. This also avoids false reading of the (in)significance of interaction terms. Several scholars demonstrate that for multiplicative interactions the interpretation of p-values can be misleading (see Brambor et al., 2006; Friedrich, 1982; Kam and Franzese, 2007). According to these authors, a more appropriate interpretation is possible by graphical presentation of interactions.

For the interpretation of our results, the use of first differences is beneficial as it includes the uncertainties in the estimated probabilities that derive from uncertainties in the estimated coefficients (King et al., 2000). In our case, first differences show how much the probability of turning out changes as a function of increasing campaign intensity. This is done in four steps: First, we set our explanatory variables to their mode. The standard voter is a 49-year-old married woman, Geneva citizen and long-term resident. Balance of the campaign (contextual control) is fixed at its mean value. Our context variable of interest (campaign intensity) is set to its minimum. With these initial settings (Z_i) we calculate the probability to turn out ($\Pr(\tilde{y}_i = 1)$). In a second

(footnote continued)

measurement of the last five votes calculated for each ballot anew would mislabel such a person into a lower group for only the next five ballots.

¹⁶ A camp can consist of parties, but also of associations from different fields such as the economy or the society, or even influential individuals.

¹⁷ Since the citizens participate in multiple votes (up to 43), we should group each decision to turn out on a citizen level as well. However, as neither the votes, nor the citizens are a perfect subset of each other we would have to estimate a non-nested (cross-classified) model (Gelman and Hill, 2007: 244). We refrain from doing so for two reasons. First, the non-nested models converge very poorly. Second, the model fit does not improve if we include this additional level.

Fig. 1. Amount of defection in relation to level of campaign intensity.

Note: The x-axis represents the ballot days with their official code name, i.e. the first four numbers are the year and afterwards a code to the given ballot day.

step, we set the value of the campaign intensity on its maximum (Z_e) and approximate $Pr(\tilde{y}_e = 1)$. Third, we estimate the difference between the two predicted probabilities ($Pr(\tilde{y}_e = 1)$) and ($Pr(\tilde{y}_e = 0)$). By repeating this algorithm 1'500 times we compute the first difference. Finally, we sort the values and cut the lowest and highest 2.5 percent of the values to calculate the 95 percent confidence interval.

7. Results

Let us begin with descriptive statistics regarding participation at the ballot and how it relates to campaign intensity. More specifically, we focus on citizens who are classified as either 'frequent voters' (5) or 'frequent abstainers' (0) according to their participation record in the five previous votes. Fig. 1 displays the share of frequent abstainers who, against their habit, participated in a given ballot day (dotted line) and the share of frequent voters who abstained in that ballot day (solid line). After the ballot, these voters (i.e. frequent voters who abstained and frequent abstainers who participated) moved to the group of selective voters. As one can see, on several ballot days up to 15 percent (and in some cases more than 20 percent) of frequent voters abstained. Similarly, the share of abstainers who voted in a given ballot day often exceeds 10 percent. Further, the graph shows no correlation ($r = 0.01$) between the level of campaign intensity (grey bars) and the share of frequent voters who abstain on a given day and a weak correlation with the share of abstainers who vote ($r = 0.30$). In general, and as expected, campaign intensity does not seem to be the driving factor behind the variations in the participation decision of frequent voters or abstainers.

We now turn to the regression models (Table 2). To test our first hypothesis, model 1 includes only the past participation record plus individual controls. The coefficients of all five participation dummies are positive and significant. Compared to citizens who did not participate in any of the last five ballots, people who participated at least once are more likely to vote. The effects increase in size with each dummy, which indicates that the more frequently a voter participated in the past five votes, the more likely she is to turn out. Predicted probabilities help to grasp the effect of the past participation record more clearly. Former abstainers have a probability of only 0.08 to participate. This value raises to 0.28 if a citizen participated once in the last five ballots. With each additional level of past participation, the probability to participate increases by around 0.15 to 0.20 until it reaches a peak of over 0.9 for those who participated in all past

five ballots.¹⁸ This first model thus confirms our hypothesis that a higher past participation increases the likelihood to turn out to vote (H1). The control variables paint the usual picture (e.g. Sciarini et al., 2016). We find a curvilinear relationship between age and the likelihood to participate. Married citizens are more probable to participate than singles and divorced or widowed citizens. Whereas being a long-term resident and a Geneva citizen both increase participation, being a woman decreases participation.

Next, we investigate how campaign intensity influences participation with the second model including two contextual measures, campaign intensity and as a control the balance of the campaign, plus individual controls. Campaign intensity displays a significant positive effect, i.e. a more intensive campaign increases individual participation. The probability to turn out increases by 0.18 when moving from a non-intensive to very intensive campaign (see visualization in Appendix A4). This supports our second hypothesis. The third model includes both our individual and contextual variables of interest (i.e. past participation and campaign intensity), and confirms their significant positive effects.

More interesting, though, is whether campaign intensity interacts with the past participation record. These interaction terms are added in the fourth model. This helps to test our third hypothesis that campaign intensity matters more for the group of selective voters who participated in one to four previous ballots, than for usual abstainers and frequent voters. The six solid black lines (one for each of our six groups of voters) in Fig. 2 depict the probability to vote (y-axis) with increasing levels of campaign intensity (x-axis; balance of campaign is set to its mean value). The numbers displayed next to each line represent first differences (Δ) and show the change of voting probability per group if we increase campaign intensity from its minimum to its maximum. For instance, for the line representing abstainers we subtract the probability to participate at the very left of the graph ($0.06 = \text{minimum}$) from that on the very right ($0.22 = \text{maximum}$).

While campaign intensity has a positive effect on all groups, the magnitude of the effect varies depending on past participation.¹⁹ In line

¹⁸ Exact scores: 0/5 = 0.08, 1/5 = 0.28, 2/5 = 0.46, 3/5 = 0.63, 4/5 = 0.79, 5/5 = 0.92. See visualization in Appendix A3.

¹⁹ Important to note here is that the effects indeed stem from campaign intensity and are no artefact of issue salience or similar. For a further discussion of this important difference between intensity and salience see the subsequent section including several robustness tests.

Table 2
Multilevel logistic regression models.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Individual-level				
Past participation 1/5 (ref. 0/5)	1.501*** (0.011)		1.501*** (0.011)	1.478*** (0.018)
Past participation 2/5	2.284*** (0.011)		2.284*** (0.011)	2.246*** (0.017)
Past participation 3/5	2.969*** (0.011)		2.969*** (0.011)	2.973*** (0.017)
Past participation 4/5	3.769*** (0.012)		3.769*** (0.011)	3.756*** (0.017)
Past participation 5/5	4.916*** (0.012)		4.916*** (0.012)	4.945*** (0.018)
Ballot-level				
Campaign intensity		0.149* (0.073)	0.257** (0.095)	0.252** (0.095)
Balance of campaign		0.116 (1.069)	0.318 (0.628)	0.325 (0.629)
Controls				
Sex: female (ref. male)	−0.033*** (0.006)	−0.054*** (0.005)	−0.033*** (0.006)	−0.030*** (0.006)
Civil status: married (ref. singles)	0.046*** (0.009)	0.176*** (0.007)	0.046*** (0.009)	0.045*** (0.009)
Civil status: divorced/widowed	−0.153*** (0.011)	−0.489*** (0.005)	−0.132*** (0.011)	−0.145*** (0.011)
Age	0.008*** (2.261e − 04)	0.027*** (1.753e − 04)	0.008*** (2.261e − 04)	0.008*** (2.263e − 04)
Age ²	−2.914e-04*** (9.946e − 06)	−5.567e-04*** (7.759e − 05)	−2.914e-04*** (9.946e − 06)	−2.894e-04*** (9.948e − 06)
Residence: <10 years (ref. 10–19 years)	0.011*** (0.013)	−0.054*** (0.010)	0.011 (0.013)	0.032* (0.013)
Residence: ≥20 years	0.072*** (0.009)	0.213*** (0.007)	0.073*** (0.009)	0.095*** (0.009)
Geneva citizen	0.047*** (0.006)	0.189*** (0.004)	0.045*** (0.006)	0.054*** (0.006)
Interaction				
Past participation 1/5 × intensity				0.012 (0.010)
Past participation 2/5 × intensity				0.030** (0.010)
Past participation 3/5 × intensity				0.008 (0.010)
Past participation 4/5 × intensity				0.010 (0.011)
Past participation 5/5 × intensity				−0.020 (0.012)
Constant	−2.559*** (0.102)	−0.195 (0.198)	−2.922*** (0.173)	−2.948*** (0.173)
Variance				
Variance: citizen	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Variance: ballot	0.450	0.123	0.367	0.368
Observations: citizen	783,975	783,975	783,975	783,975
Observations: ballot	43	43	43	43
ℓℓ	−340,443	−504,675	−340,438	−339,055
AIC	680,916	1009,374	680,911	678,154

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001. Past participation 1/5 stands for one vote in the last five referenda, past participation 2/5. for two out of five, etc.

with our third hypothesis, the first differences in Fig. 2 indicate that selective voters are more affected by the context than frequent voters or abstainers. Voters who never participated in the past five ballots have a 0.16 higher probability to vote if the campaign is intensive, than if intensity is low. Citizens who in the past participated once, twice, or three times are much more sensitive to campaign intensity. Their voting probability increases between 0.36 and 0.27. This increase is lower for voters who participated in four of the last five ballots (Δ 0.18). The latter group is thus only slightly more affected than abstainers (Δ 0.16). The rather strong sensitivity of abstainers to campaign intensity is similar to Parry et al.'s (2008) finding and confirms the non-trivial nature

of the relation between campaign intensity and individual voting profiles. Abstainers can also be significantly mobilized by the campaign despite their theoretical low mobilization potential. Notwithstanding this interesting similar influence on these two groups, overall we can still clearly see a stronger mobilization effect among selective voters than among abstainers.

The weak influence of campaign intensity on frequent voters provides an even stronger support for hypothesis 3 (Δ 0.07). Even in case of a very low campaign intensity, the huge majority of frequent voters still participate. Put differently, they do not need the incentive of an intense campaign to vote. While a low campaign intensity has a strong

Fig. 2. Probability to turn out depending on past record of participation and varying levels of campaign intensity.

Note: First differences (Δ) with * are significant on the 0.05 level.

demobilization effect among selective voters, it barely affects frequent voters. These results are in line with the studies by Niven (2004) and Parry et al. (2008) and confirm the very consistent voting pattern among frequent voters.

To check whether the slopes of the curves in Fig. 2 are significantly different from each other, i.e. that the campaign effect differs across types of voters, we perform a more detailed test presented in Appendix A5.²⁰ This analysis confirms that the slopes are steeper for selective voters than for frequent voters. The differences between selective voters and abstainers are less pronounced and are not always significant on a 0.05 level: In very intensive campaigns mobilization effects become similar for selective voters (particularly three- or four-time voters) and abstainers. In medium-intensive campaigns one can still see a statistically stronger participation effect for selective voters (though less so for four-time voters).

Importantly and despite the overall confirmation of our third hypothesis, the surprisingly high mobilization of abstainers and strong similarity to 4 out of 5 selective voters is noteworthy. One could have expected a certain symmetry in mobilization effects, i.e. 0/5 and 5/5 with lowest, 1/5 and 4/5 with medium and 2/5 and 3/5 with highest effects, but the results partly differ from that. Especially the two lower categories of selective voters (1/5 & 2/5) are intensely mobilized, and campaign effects are almost as strong among abstainers as among the most active selective voters. In that sense, abstainers substantially differ from frequent voters, who display the lowest sensitivity to mobilization efforts.

8. Robustness tests

To ensure the robustness of the results, we perform several additional tests regarding both our individual-level and contextual measures.²¹ On the individual level, we replicate the model with past participation measures including a wider window of 10 and 20 past ballots (Appendix A6 & Appendix A7). Both tests confirm the stronger campaign effects for selective voters than for abstainers and frequent voters.

²⁰ Note that the mostly insignificant interaction terms in Table 2 Model 4 do not inform if this is the case (see discussion in Section ‘Empirical Model’).

²¹ For more details about the operationalisation of the additional variables used, see the respective parts in the appendix.

While abstainers are again significantly affected by the campaign (and again more than frequent voters), campaign effects are weaker than in the original model using five ballots.²² We further run models with linear past participation measures instead of dummy variables. For a linear measure based on five ballots (Appendix A8), the results regarding selective voters are again confirmed – and this time also the strong positive campaign effect for abstainers. The same is true for an alternative indicator measuring a long-term and cumulative past participation record (Appendix A9).

As previously mentioned, it is possible that voters in the selective group switched from being frequent voters to abstainers (or vice versa). If this holds, these citizens might not be “true” selective voters but rather citizens in a phase of transition from one habitual behavior to another. Such a transition may be particularly present for young and old cohorts moving into and out of voting, respectively. To deal with this risk of misclassification, we excluded selective voters who switched only once – from abstention to participation or vice versa. Appendix A10 shows that our findings are not sensitive to these special cases.

On the contextual level we examine the influence of potential other ballot factors. We first run a model including additional ballot-level controls such as the number of parallel votes on one day, competitiveness measured as the level of party conflict in parliament, and the perceived importance and complexity of a ballot (Appendix A11). None of these covariates change the main findings of the analysis. A similar question is whether the observed (campaign) effect is limited to high-profile issues only. In Switzerland, foreign policy (mostly related to the European Union) and immigration are the most intensely debated issues. Appendix A12 shows that our main findings do not change when we control for these salient issues, albeit the size of the moderated campaign effects becomes weaker. This proves that campaign intensity and issue salience are two different concepts. Further, the (significantly) positive coefficient of the immigration and foreign policy variable in Table A12 shows that participation is generally higher in referenda including these types of issues (regardless of the past participation record).

²² Citizens who abstained in 10 or 20 successive votes come closer to the “fully disengaged” than those who abstained in 5 successive votes. This presumably accounts for the weaker campaign effects among those “fully disengaged”.

We also test for alternative measures of campaign intensity. In the models so far, campaign intensity contains political ads from the French-speaking region of Switzerland (the region of which Geneva is a part). In [Appendix A13](#) we estimate a model with ads from the entire country (Tribune de Genève, Le Temps, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Tages-Anzeiger, Regione, and Giornale del Popolo). [Table A13](#) and [Fig. A13](#) show that the results remain unchanged. This indicates, that the intensity of political campaigns does not vary substantially between Geneva and the rest of the country. [Appendix A14](#) shows that the results remain unchanged if we use the number of newspaper ads (instead of the ad size) as an alternative campaign measure. We also tested if the tone (negativity) of the campaign yields similar effects on political participation as campaign intensity ([Appendix A15](#)).²³ While the results indicate a tendency to participate less in more negatively toned campaigns, and this more so for selective voters, the effects are much weaker and never reach statistical significance. This proves that not any aspect of the campaign leads to significant moderation effects.

Finally, the ballots from September 2000 and May 2003 are striking outliers regarding the level of campaign intensity (see [Appendix A1](#)). We thus run a separate model excluding these extreme cases to see whether they drive our effects. [Appendix A16](#) shows that this is not the case. In fact, these two cases might rather dampen than foster the effect of campaign intensity.

9. Conclusion

Electoral research draws our attention to the importance of context and campaign-related characteristics for voter turnout. As [Curtice \(2002: 164\)](#) once put it, elections should be regarded “as independent events whose political context needs to be measured and impact evaluated”. The U.S. literature has highlighted the virtuous effects of ballot initiatives and related mobilization efforts on turnout in elections. Our paper adds to that literature by showing that campaign intensity influences the mobilization of voters in direct democratic votes. Moreover, it highlights that campaign effects are conditional on citizens’ participation profile.

In line with the thesis that voting is a habit we find that past participation has a strong influence on current vote: the higher the participation record in the five previous ballots, the higher the likelihood of voting in the ballot of interest. Moreover, people who either abstained or participated in the five previous ballots are weakly or not at all influenced by campaign intensity. However, our results depart from the habituation thesis by emphasizing the importance of a third category of voters, the selective voters, which comprises roughly half of the electorate. More importantly, while intensive political campaigns foster individual participation overall, selective voters are more sensitive to campaign intensity than abstainers and – even more so – than frequent voters. The higher the campaign intensity the higher the likelihood that selective voters will participate in the current vote. Moreover, we find that selective participation is not limited to cohorts of young or old voters in transition for reasons of life events, residential mobility or illness ([Alfaro-Redondo, 2014](#); [Plutzer, 2002](#)), but is present in the entire electorate.

By specifying under which circumstances and to whom campaigns matter, our results speak to earlier studies that both theorized and

tested similar effects. Studies such as the ones by [Jackson \(1993\)](#) and [Niven \(2004\)](#) have established the idea that political campaigns are not equally effective across voters. Especially medium involved people are said to be sensitive to campaign efforts. This is also what we find, and we can thus confirm earlier results by [Niven \(2004\)](#) using a different case (Switzerland instead of U.S.), a different type of voting (referendum instead of election) and a different campaign measure (intensity instead of contact). However, our findings from the Swiss case also speak to the slightly diverging results found by [Parry et al. \(2008\)](#) that abstainers are not as habitual as one may think. Once the campaign gets really intense, abstainers are also mobilized in a significant way. In other words, strong campaign efforts have mobilization effects even among those who are least likely to turn out.

Beyond their scientific importance, our findings also have practical and normative implications. On the one hand, the strong mobilization effects of campaign intensity on the (large) group of intermittent voters and the weaker but still significant mobilization effects on abstainers opens up new possibilities for campaign practitioners. On the other hand, the increase of participation brought about by intensive campaigns is good news from the perspective of democratic theory. As we mentioned, political selective voters constitute a heterogeneous group in socio-demographic terms, but their political attitudes lean towards those of abstainers. While selective voters thus have a propensity to abstain, campaign intensity has a countervailing effect, and gets them to vote. Moreover, in addition to its short-term activation effects, campaign intensity may also have virtuous effects in the longer run ([Kriesi, 2005](#)): Higher participation is likely to come along with higher political competence which, in turn, is likely to foster voting. Despite these positive effects for democracy, the mobilization potential due to campaign intensity also illustrates the opportunity for (non-democratic) third-party actors to meddle in the democratic process. Through purchasing newspaper ads, such actors might be successful in mobilizing voters and influencing their preferences.

For two reasons, we believe that our results are not Swiss-specific, but travel well to other countries. First, while elections are central to democracy, many countries and states have developed additional direct democratic tools. In a direct democratic context, the high frequency of votes and the variations in issue or importance across ballots favour some sort of selective or irregular participation. Thus, it is safe to assume that our findings are valid in other direct democratic contexts, such as in American states.

Second, selective participation arguably has a broader relevance beyond direct democratic contexts. That is, there are certainly many selective voters in purely representative democracies, too. To the same extent that in a direct democratic context voters are sensitive to project- and campaign-related characteristics, voters in a representative democracy may also (and in fact, do) mobilize to various extents in different types of election, e.g. in national versus local elections or presidential versus midterm elections, but also in the very same type of elections over time. True, in representative democracies citizens mainly express their opinion through elections, which take place only episodically. Given the relatively small number of elections it is obviously harder to capture selective participation than in a direct democratic context. However, being unable to evaluate the extent of selective participation does not mean that it does not exist.

²³ Note that due to data availability this analysis is only based on 23 votes from 1999 to 2005.

Appendix A1. Descriptives: Ballots

Table A1

Descriptive statistics: ballots

No.	Date	Turnout GE	Intensity GE	Balance GE	Intensity CH	Balance CH
1	07.02.1999	40.6	0.70	0.28	2.95	0.26
2	18.04.1999	25.1	0.04	0.00	0.34	0.00
3	13.06.1999	49.1	0.69	0.30	2.11	0.36
4	12.03.2000	47.5	1.38	0.37	5.15	0.11
5	21.05.2000	58.4	0.94	0.26	2.76	0.35
6	24.09.2000	52.0	5.66	0.32	17.48	0.33
7	26.11.2000	48.1	1.28	0.49	2.99	0.15
8	04.03.2001	63.2	2.35	0.42	8.42	0.43
9	10.06.2001	43.5	1.93	0.36	6.09	0.20
10	02.12.2001	43.1	1.69	0.32	5.17	0.20
11	03.03.2002	61.1	1.88	0.46	5.31	0.60
12	02.06.2002	52.3	1.04	0.15	3.17	0.11
13	22.09.2002	51.7	1.64	0.22	5.61	0.16
14	24.11.2002	51.8	0.90	0.29	2.78	0.63
15	09.02.2003	36.4	0.34	0.04	0.34	0.04
16	18.05.2003	51.7	3.36	0.17	13.99	0.27
17	08.02.2004	57.4	1.32	0.29	4.71	0.45
18	16.05.2004	58.0	2.66	0.10	7.71	0.16
19	26.09.2004	58.1	1.75	0.24	4.68	0.43
20	28.11.2004	41.9	0.60	0.24	1.32	0.14
21	05.06.2005	61.3	1.83	0.35	5.27	0.36
22	25.09.2005	63.5	1.76	0.41	4.75	0.20
23	27.11.2005	48.5	0.52	0.10	1.73	0.41
24	21.05.2006	36.7	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
25	24.09.2006	56.9	1.64	0.45	4.34	0.44
26	26.11.2006	50.7	0.65	0.23	1.77	0.49
27	11.03.2007	57.7	0.49	0.02	1.27	0.18
28	17.06.2007	43.8	0.55	0.08	1.51	0.29
29	24.02.2008	62.6	0.53	0.11	1.37	0.30
30	01.06.2008	53.7	1.34	0.24	4.04	0.20
31	30.11.2008	44.1	1.21	0.10	4.40	0.18
32	08.02.2009	55.5	2.07	0.42	4.96	0.68
33	17.05.2009	41.3	0.00	0.00	0.16	0.01
34	27.09.2009	51.2	0.13	0.42	2.29	0.26
35	29.11.2009	58.9	0.57	0.02	1.40	0.09
36	07.03.2010	49.9	0.41	0.03	1.66	0.06
37	26.09.2010	42.5	0.47	0.11	1.09	0.42
38	28.11.2010	55.7	0.52	0.10	2.83	0.25
39	13.02.2011	48.7	0.03	0.00	0.73	0.19
40	11.03.2011	56.2	0.79	0.18	1.80	0.23
41	17.06.2012	50.6	0.72	0.32	2.02	0.20
42	23.09.2012	45.9	0.22	0.19	0.98	0.20
43	25.11.2012	29.8	0.03	0.62	0.06	0.92
$\emptyset$		50.1	1.13	0.23	3.57	0.28

Note: Turnout represents the validated turnout for Geneva in our dataset. The values for balance show the average values per voting day in case of parallel ballots. The last two columns include media data from six Swiss newspapers (French plus German and Italian).

Appendix A2. Descriptives: Past Participation & Defection

Fig. A2. Distribution of the electorate into six groups of past participation and amount of voters/abstainers potentially in transition among selective voters.

Appendix A3. Past Participation Record & Voting Probability

Fig. A3. Probability to turn out depending on past participation record.

Appendix A4. Campaign Intensity Without Past Participation

Fig. A4. Probability to turn out depending on varying levels of campaign intensity Note: First difference (Δ) with * is significant on the 0.05 level.

Appendix A5. First Differences of Slopes

Figs. A5a and A5b are based on Model 4 in Table 2. These visualizations show the differing influence of campaign intensity on predicted probabilities between selective and frequent voters and abstainers. Put differently, they show differences in the steepness of slopes in Fig. 2 for the mentioned groups. Consider, for instance, the top left panel in Fig. A5a. This panel compares the impact of campaign intensity on abstainers to its impact on voters who participated once out of five ballots. The solid line shows the first differences between the two types of voters. The steady increase of the line stands for a widening gap of contextual influence between abstainers and one-time voters with increasing campaign intensity. The dotted lines represent the 95% confidence intervals. If the intervals include 0, the effect of the context did not produce a significant gap in the probability to turn out. Hence, only if the intensity is higher than 1.2 m^2 , its impact is significantly higher on one-time voters than on frequent abstainers. However, for very big values of intensity, around 3.8 m^2 , the difference loses its significance. One reason for this may be the few cases (ballots) with such high levels of intensity (see also Table A1). For voters who participated three or four out of five times (Fig. A5a, bottom two panels) we observe a ceiling effect of campaign intensity. Overall, campaign effects are stronger for these two groups of selective voters than for abstainers. However, the gap does not always reach statistical significance and does not further increase or even decreases when intensity has reached a certain level. Increasing the campaign intensity from values of around $3\text{--}4 \text{ m}^2$ to the maximum has a similar effect for both three- or four-time voters and abstainers. Put differently, the respective lines for abstainers and three-/four-time voters in Fig. 2 do not differ in their steepness beyond campaign intensities of $3\text{--}4 \text{ m}^2$.

Fig. A5b compares selective voters with frequent voters, the second group displaying habitual participation patterns. Here the differences in the campaign impact are not only stronger in absolute terms, but also significant for all four types of selective voters. This means that the differing impact of campaign intensity is stronger between selective voters and frequent voters than between selective voters and abstainers.

Fig. A5a. First differences between frequent abstainers and the four types of past participation across different levels of campaign intensity.

Fig. A5b. First differences between frequent voters and the four types of past participation across different levels of campaign intensity.

Appendix A6. Robustness Check: 10 Past Participations

Table A6a
Model using 10 past participations DV: participation

Individual-level	
Past participation 1/10 (ref. 0/10)	1.242*** (0.029)
Past participation 2/10	1.935*** (0.028)
Past participation 3/10	2.384*** (0.028)
Past participation 4/10	2.779*** (0.027)
Past participation 5/10	3.138*** (0.027)
Past participation 6/10	3.536*** (0.027)
Past participation 7/10	3.948*** (0.027)
Past participation 8/10	4.430*** (0.027)
Past participation 9/10	5.065*** (0.028)
Past participation 10/10	6.105*** (0.029)
Ballot-level	
Campaign intensity	0.218* (0.089)
Balance of campaign	0.378 (0.432)
Controls	
Sex: female (ref. male)	– 0.024*** (0.007)
Civil status: married (ref. singles)	0.016 (0.009)
Civil status: divorced/widowed	– 0.097*** (0.011)
Age	0.004*** (0.0003)
Age ²	– 0.0004*** (0.00001)
Residence: <10 years (ref. 10–19 years)	0.052*** (0.016)
Residence: ≥20 years	0.084*** (0.010)
Geneva citizen	0.019** (0.007)
Interaction	
Past participation 1/10 × intensity	0.051** (0.017)
Past participation 2/10 × intensity	0.030 (0.016)
Past participation 3/10 × intensity	0.045** (0.016)
Past participation 4/10 × intensity	0.043** (0.016)
Past participation 5/10 × intensity	0.042** (0.016)
Past participation 6/10 × intensity	0.025 (0.016)
Past participation 7/10 × intensity	0.033* (0.016)
Past participation 8/10 × intensity	0.044** (0.017)
Past participation 9/10 × intensity	0.030 (0.018)
Past participation 10/10 × intensity	– 0.027 (0.019)
Constant	– 3.411*** (0.153)
Variance: citizen	1.000
Variance: ballot	0.317

Table A6a (continued)

Observations: citizen	695,675
Observations: ballot	41
$\ell\ell$	–291,301
AIC	582,666

Note: standard errors in parentheses; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Fig. A6. Probability to turn out depending on ten past participations and varying levels of campaign intensity Note: Only values for even numbers of past participation are displayed. First differences (Δ) with * are significant on the 0.05 level.

Measurement of ten past participations

Instead of regarding participation in the five last votes, in this model we coded past participation based on the last ten votes, i.e. including eleven instead of six participation dummies. Since we only have information on past participation for eight votes before the ballot days under consideration here (from 1999 onwards), we had to use two more ballot days in 1999 to have ten past ballots as the basis for our past participation measure. As a result, the n of our context level decreases from 43 to 41 ballot days. For reasons of readability, we only display the probability to turn out for six past participation values in Fig. A6 (in steps of two). All eleven first differences are shown in the following table:

Table A6b

First differences for 11 levels of past participation

0: 0.09	1: 0.27	2: 0.31	3: 0.35	4: 0.34	5: 0.31
6: 0.26	7: 0.22	8: 0.16	9: 0.10	10: 0.03	

Appendix A7. Robustness Check: 20 Past Participations

Table A7a

Model using 20 past participations DV: participation

Individual-level	
Past participation 1/20 (ref. 0/20)	1.229*** (0.063)
Past participation 2/20	1.732*** (0.061)
Past participation 3/20	2.148*** (0.060)
Past participation 4/20	2.376*** (0.059)
Past participation 5/20	2.696*** (0.058)
Past participation 6/20	2.892*** (0.057)
Past participation 7/20	3.151*** (0.057)
Past participation 8/20	3.337*** (0.056)
Past participation 9/20	3.581*** (0.056)
Past participation 10/20	3.797*** (0.056)
Past participation 11/20	3.941*** (0.055)
Past participation 12/20	4.168*** (0.055)
Past participation 13/20	4.354*** (0.055)
Past participation 14/20	4.601*** (0.055)
Past participation 15/20	4.827*** (0.055)
Past participation 16/20	5.132*** (0.055)
Past participation 17/20	5.436*** (0.055)
Past participation 18/20	5.820*** (0.056)
Past participation 19/20	6.364*** (0.057)
Past participation 20/20	7.216*** (0.059)
Ballot-level	
Campaign intensity	0.466*** (0.127)
Balance of campaign	–0.228 (0.693)
Controls	
Sex: female (ref. male)	–0.030*** (0.008)
Civil status: married (ref. singles)	0.025* (0.011)

Table A7a (continued)

Civil status: divorced/widowed	–0.033* (0.013)
Age	0.003*** (0.0003)
Age ²	–0.001*** (0.00001)
Residence: < 10 years (ref. 10–19 years)	0.052* (0.025)
Residence: ≥ 20 years	0.078*** (0.013)
Geneva citizen	–0.001 (0.008)
Interaction	
Past participation 1/20 × intensity	–0.010 (0.043)
Past participation 2/20 × intensity	0.023 (0.042)
Past participation 3/20 × intensity	0.027 (0.041)
Past participation 4/20 × intensity	0.075 (0.041)
Past participation 5/20 × intensity	0.028 (0.040)
Past participation 6/20 × intensity	0.058 (0.040)
Past participation 7/20 × intensity	0.013 (0.040)
Past participation 8/20 × intensity	0.024 (0.039)
Past participation 9/20 × intensity	–0.011 (0.039)
Past participation 10/20 × intensity	0.010 (0.039)
Past participation 11/20 × intensity	0.019 (0.039)
Past participation 12/20 × intensity	–0.019 (0.039)
Past participation 13/20 × intensity	0.006 (0.039)
Past participation 14/20 × intensity	–0.033 (0.040)
Past participation 15/20 × intensity	–0.012 (0.040)
Past participation 16/20 × intensity	–0.034 (0.041)
Past participation 17/20 × intensity	–0.028 (0.041)
Past participation 18/20 × intensity	–0.037 (0.042)
Past participation 19/20 × intensity	–0.029 (0.044)
Past participation 20/20 × intensity	–0.073 (0.048)
Constant	–4.007*** (0.180)
Variance: citizen	1.000
Variance: ballot	0.260
Observations: citizen	465,335
Observations: ballot	31
ℓℓ	–193,849
AIC	387,802

Note: standard errors in parentheses; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Fig. A7. Probability to turn out depending on 20 past participations and varying levels of campaign intensity Note: Only values for 0, 4, 8, 12, 16 and 20 past participations are displayed. First differences (Δ) with * are significant on the 0.05 level.

Measurement of 20 past participations

In this model we coded past participation based on the last 20 votes, i.e. including 21 participation dummies. Since we only have information on past participation for eight votes before the ballot days under consideration here (from 1999 onwards), we had to use 12 more ballot days since 1999 to have 20 past ballots as the basis for our measure. As a result, the n of our context level decreases from 43 to 31 ballot days. For reasons of readability, we only display the probability to turn out for six past participation values in Fig. A7 (in steps of four). All 21 first differences are shown in the following table:

Table A7b

First differences for 21 levels of past participation

0: 0.07	1: 0.17	2: 0.26	3: 0.32	4: 0.38	5: 0.37	6: 0.41
7: 0.38	8: 0.38	9: 0.35	10: 0.35	11: 0.34	12: 0.29	13: 0.28
14: 0.23	15: 0.21	16: 0.17	17: 0.14	18: 0.10	19: 0.06	20: 0.03

Appendix A8. Robustness Check: Linear Past Participation Measure

Table A8
Model using linear past participation. DV: participation

Individual-level	
Past participation	4.720*** (0.049)
Past participation ²	−0.133** (0.045)
Ballot-level	
Campaign intensity	0.226* (0.100)
Balance of campaign	0.321 (0.946)
Controls	
Sex: female (ref. male)	−0.009 (0.006)
Civil status: married (ref. singles)	0.044*** (0.009)
Civil status: divorced/widowed	−0.149*** (0.011)
Age	0.008*** (0.0002)
Age ²	−0.0003*** (0.00001)
Residence: < 10 years (ref. 10–19 years)	0.007 (0.013)
Residence: ≥ 20 years	0.086*** (0.009)
Geneva citizen	0.054*** (0.006)
Interaction	
Past participation × intensity	0.328*** (0.031)
Past participation ² × intensity	−0.375*** (0.030)
Constant	−2.690*** (0.194)
Variance: citizen	1.000
Variance: ballot	0.368
Observations: citizen	780,213
Observations: ballot	43
$\ell\ell$	−340,688
AIC	681,408

Note: standard errors in parentheses; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Fig. A8. Probability to turn out depending on linear past participation and varying levels of campaign intensity Note: First differences (Δ) with * are significant on the 0.05 level.

Measurement of linear past participation

Instead of treating the participation in the previous five ballots as six dummy variables, we coded them as a (quasi-)linear measure ranging from zero to one. Citizens who participated in one out of five referenda receive a value of 0.2, citizens participating in two out of five a value of 0.4 etc. Due to the expected curvilinear effect, we included both a simple and squared term of this measure. For the graphical presentation above, we calculated the predicted probabilities for six distinct values of the linear past participation measure (0, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8 and 1) that match the actual levels of past participation in the last five ballots.

Appendix A9. Robustness Check: Cumulative Past Participation Measure

Table A9

Model using cumulative past participation since 1996. DV: participation

Individual-level	
Cumulative past participation	5.736*** (0.058)
Cumulative past participation ²	−0.515*** (0.055)
Ballot-level	
Campaign intensity	0.212* (0.085)
Balance of campaign	0.381 (0.418)
Controls	
Sex: female (ref. male)	−0.019** (0.006)
Civil status: married (ref. singles)	−0.006 (0.009)
Civil status: divorced/widowed	−0.150*** (0.010)
Age	0.007*** (0.0002)
Age ²	−0.001*** (0.00001)
Residence: < 10 years (ref. 10–19 years)	0.053*** (0.013)
Residence: ≥ 20 years	0.120*** (0.009)
Geneva citizen	−0.027*** (0.006)
Interaction	
Cumulative past participation × intensity	0.389*** (0.036)
Cumulative past participation ² × intensity	−0.439*** (0.036)
Constant	−2.804*** (0.144)
Variance: citizen	1.000
Variance: ballot	0.319
Observations: citizen	789,149
Observations: ballot	43
ℓℓ	−345,505
AIC	691,043

Note: standard errors in parentheses; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Cumulative participation measured since 1996 anew for each ballot.

Fig. A9. Probability to turn out depending on cumulative past participation and varying levels of campaign intensity Note: First differences (Δ) with * are significant on the 0.05 level.

Measurement of cumulative past participation

Cumulative past participation is measured by dividing the number of actual participations in direct democratic votes by the number of possible direct democratic votes a person could have participated in. The resulting ratio ranges from 0 (never participated) to 1 (always participated). For the

calculation we could use individual participation records reaching back until 1996, so that for the first ballot under study in 1999, the ratio is based on eight previous referendum votes. For the last ballot under study in 2012, it is based on 50 previous votes. The ratio is calculated anew for each ballot and person, i.e. becomes more stable over time. We included a simple and a squared term of this measure into the model for the expected curvilinear effect, i.e. smaller effects for abstainers and frequent voters at the extremes and bigger effects among selective voters in the middle. For the graphical presentation above, we calculated the predicted probabilities for six distinct values of the continuous cumulative past participation (0, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8 and 1) that match the original 0–5 past participation coding from our main models.

Appendix A10. Robustness Check: Respondents Potentially in Transition

Table A10

Model excluding potential voters/abstainers in transition. DV: participation

Individual-level	
Past participation 1/5 (ref. 0/5)	1.465*** (0.021)
Past participation 2/5	2.290*** (0.018)
Past participation 3/5	3.000*** (0.018)
Past participation 4/5	3.793*** (0.020)
Past participation 5/5	4.962*** (0.019)
Ballot-level	
Campaign intensity	0.253** (0.094)
Balance of campaign	0.320 (0.574)
Controls	
Sex: female (ref. male)	– 0.029*** (0.007)
Civil status: married (ref. singles)	0.058*** (0.010)
Civil status: divorced/widowed	– 0.139*** (0.012)
Age	0.008*** (2.602e – 04)
Age ²	2.587e-04*** (1.135e – 05)
Residence: <10 years (ref. 10–19 years)	– 0.018 (0.015)
Residence: ≥20 years	0.075*** (0.011)
Geneva citizen	0.037*** (0.007)
Interaction	
Past participation 1/5 × intensity	0.022 (0.013)
Past participation 2/5 × intensity	0.016 (0.011)
Past participation 3/5 × intensity	– 0.007 (0.011)
Past participation 4/5 × intensity	0.005 (0.012)
Past participation 5/5 × intensity	– 0.028* (0.012)
Constant	– 2.949*** (0.173)
Variance: citizen	
Variance: ballot	1.000
Observations: citizen	0.384
Observations: ballot	650,910
ℓℓ	43
ℓℓ	– 263,676
AIC	527,396

Note: standard errors in parentheses; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Past participation 1/5 stands for one vote in the last five referenda, past participation 2/5 for two out of five, etc.

Fig. A10. Probability to turn out depending on past record of participation and varying levels of campaign intensity excluding respondents potentially in transition
 Note: Voters/abstainers potentially in transition (see Fig. A2) excluded. First differences (Δ) with * are significant on the 0.05 level.

Appendix A11. Robustness Check: Ballot-level Controls

Table A11

Model with further ballot-level controls. DV: participation

Individual-level	
Past participation 1/5 (ref. 0/5)	1.477*** (0.018)
Past participation 2/5	2.293*** (0.017)
Past participation 3/5	2.964*** (0.017)
Past participation 4/5	3.775*** (0.017)
Past participation 5/5	4.960*** (0.018)
Ballot-level	
Campaign intensity	0.190 (0.115)
Balance of campaign	0.057 (0.605)
Controls	
Sex: female (ref. male)	−0.038*** (0.006)
Civil status: married (ref. singles)	0.022* (0.009)
Civil status: divorced/widowed	−0.150*** (0.011)
Age	0.008*** (2.249e − 04)
Age ²	−2.821e-04*** (9.989e − 06)
Residence: <10 years (ref. 10–19 years)	0.016 (0.013)
Residence: ≥20 years	0.084*** (0.009)
Geneva citizen	0.049*** (0.006)
Ballot: nr. of votes	0.023 (0.064)
Ballot: competition	0.677 (0.577)
Ballot: importance	0.325 (0.170)
Ballot: complexity	−0.013 (0.010)
Interaction	
Past participation 1/5 × intensity	0.038*** (0.011)
Past participation 2/5 × intensity	0.038*** (0.010)
Past participation 3/5 × intensity	0.031** (0.011)
Past participation 4/5 × intensity	0.017 (0.011)
Past participation 5/5 × intensity	−0.031* (0.012)
Constant	−4.939*** (1.321)
Variance: citizen	
Variance: ballot	1.000 0.312

Table A11 (continued)

Observations: citizen	784,171
Observations: ballot	43
$\ell\ell$	–339,194
AIC	678,441

Note: standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.
 Past participation 1/5 stands for one vote in the last five referenda, past participation 2/5 for two out of five, etc.

Fig. A11. Probability to turn out depending on past record of participation and varying levels of campaign intensity Note: First differences (Δ) with * are significant on the 0.05 level.

Measurement of additional ballot controls

Number of votes represents the number of parallel votes on a ballot day. The variable mostly varies between 1 and 5 with the exception of one ballot day having 9 parallel votes.

Competition of a ballot is calculated by dividing the vote share of parties in the Swiss Lower House that recommend accepting a ballot and those who recommend rejecting it. The resulting score can vary between zero representing no party conflict as all parties propose to reject/accept the ballot and one standing for a strong party division with both party camps representing the same amount of voters in the Swiss Lower House in the previous general election.

Importance of a ballot day is measured by the perceived importance on a 0–10 scale according to Swiss VOX surveys. Exact question wording is: “On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means ‘no importance’ and 10 means ‘very important’, how do you evaluate the importance of the measure [XXX] for the country?” These VOX surveys are conducted after each ballot day.

Complexity is similarly measured by the perceived complexity according to Swiss VOX surveys (0–100 scale).

Appendix A12. Robustness Check: Immigration and Foreign Policy Issues

Table A12

Model with immigration issue as ballot-level control. DV: participation

Individual-level	
Past participation 1/5 (ref. 0/5)	1.445*** (0.018)
Past participation 2/5	2.236*** (0.017)
Past participation 3/5	2.944*** (0.017)
Past participation 4/5	3.757*** (0.017)
Past participation 5/5	4.947*** (0.018)
Ballot-level	
Campaign intensity	0.164 (0.102)
Balance of campaign	–0.029 (0.720)
Controls	
Sex: female (ref. male)	–0.021*** (0.006)
Civil status: married (ref. singles)	0.021* (0.009)
Civil status: divorced/widowed	–0.168*** (0.011)
Age	0.008***

Table A12 (continued)

	(2.26e – 04)
Age ²	–2.883e-04***
	(9.856e – 06)
Residence: <10 years (ref. 10–19 years)	0.035*
	(0.013)
Residence: ≥20 years	0.073***
	(0.009)
Geneva citizen	0.045***
	(0.006)
Ballot: immigration and foreign policy	0.435*
	(0.206)
Interaction	
Past participation 1/5 × intensity	0.021*
	(0.011)
Past participation 2/5 × intensity	0.036***
	(0.010)
Past participation 3/5 × intensity	0.015**
	(0.011)
Past participation 4/5 × intensity	0.007
	(0.011)
Past participation 5/5 × intensity	–0.031*
	(0.012)
Constant	–2.926***
	(0.169)
Variance: citizen	1.000
Variance: ballot	0.334
Observations: citizen	781,384
Observations: ballot	43
ℓℓ	–338,219
AIC	676,483

Note: standard errors in parentheses; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Past participation 1/5 stands for one vote in the last five referenda, past participation 2/5 for two out of five, etc.

Fig. A12. Probability to turn out depending on past record of participation and varying levels of campaign intensity Note: First differences (Δ) with * are significant on the 0.05 level.

Measurement of Immigration and foreign policy

This variable is binary and measures if the ballot contained a vote on a foreign policy or migration issue. The coding is based on Nai (2014). On 20 out of the 43 ballots, Swiss citizens had to decide on matters of foreign policy or migration issues.

Appendix A13. Robustness Check: Swiss Ads

Table A13

Model with Swiss ads. DV: participation

Individual-level	
Past participation 1/5 (ref. 0/5)	1.461***
	(0.017)
Past participation 2/5	2.249***
	(0.017)
Past participation 3/5	2.937***
	(0.017)

Table A13 (continued)

Past participation 4/5	3.725*** (0.017)
Past participation 5/5	4.931*** (0.018)
Ballot-level	
Campaign intensity	0.064* (0.027)
Balance of campaign	0.451 (0.281)
Controls	
Sex: female (ref. male)	−0.032*** (0.006)
Civil status: married (ref. singles)	0.020* (0.009)
Civil status: divorced/widowed	−0.175*** (0.011)
Age	0.008*** (2.285e − 04)
Age ²	−3.021e-04*** (9.969e − 06)
Residence: <10 years (ref. 10–19 years)	0.022 (0.013)
Residence: ≥20 years	0.087*** (0.009)
Geneva citizen	0.040*** (0.006)
Interaction	
Past participation 1/5 ×intensity	0.011*** (0.003)
Past participation 2/5 ×intensity	0.012*** (0.003)
Past participation 3/5 ×intensity	0.011*** (0.003)
Past participation 4/5 ×intensity	0.011** (0.003)
Past participation 5/5 ×intensity	3.959e − 04 (0.004)
Constant	−2.903*** (0.140)
Variance: citizen	1.000
Variance: ballot	0.367
Observations: citizen	782,369
Observations: ballot	43
ℓℓ	−337,938
AIC	675,921

Note: standard errors in parentheses; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Past participation 1/5 stands for one vote in the last five referenda, past participation 2/5 for two out of five, etc.

Fig. A13. Probability to turn out depending on past record of participation and varying levels of campaign intensity Note: First differences (Δ) with * are significant on the 0.05 level.

Measurement of Swiss ads

In addition to campaign ads from the two French-speaking newspapers Tribune de Genève and Le Temps, the Swiss-wide variables to measure campaign intensity and balance of campaign include additionally two German-speaking newspapers Neue Zürcher Zeitung and Tages-Anzeiger and two Italian-speaking newspapers Regione and Giornale del Popolo.

Appendix A14. Robustness Check: Number of Ads

Table A14

Model with number of ads. DV: participation

Individual-level	
Past participation 1/5 (ref. 0/5)	1.481*** (0.018)
Past participation 2/5	2.235*** (0.018)
Past participation 3/5	2.927*** (0.018)
Past participation 4/5	3.752*** (0.018)
Past participation 5/5	4.925*** (0.019)
Ballot-level	
Campaign intensity: nr. of ads	0.001 (0.001)
Balance of campaign	0.582 (1.044)
Controls	
Sex: female (ref. male)	−0.008 (0.006)
Civil status: married (ref. singles)	0.038*** (0.009)
Civil status: divorced/widowed	−0.144*** (0.011)
Age	0.008*** (2.277e − 04)
Age ²	−2.907e-04*** (9.923e − 06)
Residence: <10 years (ref. 10–19 years)	0.008 (0.013)
Residence: ≥20 years	0.079*** (0.009)
Geneva citizen	0.045*** (0.006)
Interaction	
Past participation 1/5 × intensity: nr. of ads	4.036e − 05 (5.604e − 05)
Past participation 2/5 × intensity: nr. of ads	1.100e-04* (5.508e − 05)
Past participation 3/5 × intensity: nr. of ads	1.412e-04* (5.512e − 05)
Past participation 4/5 × intensity: nr. of ads	5.437e − 05 (5.623e − 05)
Past participation 5/5 × intensity: nr. of ads	1.099e − 05 (6.075e − 05)
Constant	−2.914*** (0.240)
Variance: citizen	1.000
Variance: ballot	0.393
Observations: citizen	784,697
Observations: ballot	43
$\ell\ell$	−339,554
AIC	679,152

Note: standard errors in parentheses; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Past participation 1/5 stands for one vote in the last five referenda, past participation 2/5 for two out of five, etc.

Fig. A14. Probability to turn out depending on past record of participation and varying levels of campaign intensity (number of ads) Note: First differences (Δ) with * are significant on the 0.05 level.

Measurement of campaign intensity (nr. of ads):

This variable reflects the total number of ads published during the campaign. It is different to the measurement of campaign intensity used throughout the paper in that it does not consider the size of the campaign ads. Note that the number and total surface of newspaper ads are strongly correlated ($\rho = 0.89$).

Appendix A15. Robustness Check: Negative Ads

Table A15
Model with the share of negative ads. DV: participation

Individual-level	
Past participation 1/5 (ref. 0/5)	1.533*** (0.027)
Past participation 2/5	2.319*** (0.026)
Past participation 3/5	2.989*** (0.027)
Past participation 4/5	3.802*** (0.026)
Past participation 5/5	4.961*** (0.027)
Ballot-level	
Negative advertisement (share)	−1.798 (1.187)
Balance of campaign	3.431*** (0.574)
Controls	
Sex: female (ref. male)	−0.041*** (0.009)
Civil status: married (ref. singles)	0.036*** (0.012)
Civil status: divorced/widowed	−0.168*** (0.015)
Age	0.008*** (3.127e − 04)
Age ²	−3.033e-04*** (1.414e − 05)
Residence: <10 years (ref. 10–19 years)	0.032 (0.018)
Residence: ≥20 years	0.087*** (0.013)
Geneva citizen	0.039*** (0.009)
Interaction	
Past participation 1/5 × negative ads	−0.371 (0.286)
Past participation 2/5 × negative ads	−0.485 (0.271)
Past participation 3/5 × negative ads	−0.324 (0.297)
Past participation 4/5 × negative ads	−0.776** (0.273)
Past participation 5/5 × negative ads	−1.191*** (0.279)

Table A15 (continued)

Constant	– 3.244*** (0.183)
Variance: citizen	1.000
Variance: ballot	0.335
Observations: citizen	406,705
Observations: ballot	23
$\ell\ell$	– 177,496
AIC	355,036

Note: standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Past participation 1/5 stands for one vote in the last five referenda, past participation 2/5 for two out of five, etc.

Fig. A15. Probability to turn out depending on past record of participation and varying levels of campaign negativity Note: First differences (Δ) with * are significant on the 0.05 level.

Measurement of negative advertisement

This variable measures the share of ads in the campaign for a given ballot containing at least one attack on a political adversary. In line with [Nai \(2014\)](#), we do not consider attacks on political positions as negative.

Appendix A16. Robustness Check: Excluding Outliers

Table A16

Model excluding outliers (24.09.2000 & 18.05.2003). DV: participation

Individual-level	
Past participation 1/5 (ref. 0/5)	1.459*** (0.022)
Past participation 2/5	2.269*** (0.021)
Past participation 3/5	2.969*** (0.021)
Past participation 4/5	3.788*** (0.021)
Past participation 5/5	4.965*** (0.022)
Ballot-level	
Campaign intensity	0.547*** (0.150)
Balance of campaign	– 0.210 (0.651)
Controls	
Sex: female (ref. male)	– 0.023*** (0.006)
Civil status: married (ref. singles)	0.029** (0.009)
Civil status: divorced/widowed	– 0.154*** (0.011)
Age	0.008*** (2.321e – 04)
Age ²	– 2.864e-04*** (1.016e – 05)
Residence: <10 years (ref. 10–19 years)	0.030* (0.013)

Table A16 (continued)

Residence: ≥ 20 years	0.092*** (0.009)
Geneva citizen	0.051*** (0.006)
Interaction	
Past participation 1/5 $\times$ intensity	0.021 (0.017)
Past participation 2/5 $\times$ intensity	0.002 (0.017)
Past participation 3/5 $\times$ intensity	−0.010 (0.017)
Past participation 4/5 $\times$ intensity	−0.035* (0.017)
Past participation 5/5 $\times$ intensity	−0.081*** (0.018)
Constant	−3.059*** (0.176)
Variance: citizen	1.000
Variance: ballot	0.340
Observations: citizen	749,674
Observations: ballot	41
$\ell\ell$	−326,125
AIC	6522941

Note: standard errors in parentheses; *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Past participation 1/5 stands for one vote in the last five referenda, past participation 2/5 for two out of five, etc.

Fig. A16. Probability to turn out depending on past record of participation and varying levels of campaign intensity Note: Ballots from 24.09.2000 & 18.05.2003 excluded. First differences (Δ) with * are significant on the 0.05 level.

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