The differentiated effects of direct mobilisation forms on turnout: Evidence from Austrian 2013 Parliamentary Election

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Abstract

In recent years several European countries have been experiencing a significant decrease in turnout although the level of campaign professionalization has been largely increasing. Nonetheless, scholars acknowledge a key role of mobilization in determining turnout. By focusing on the Austrian case, where the 2013 Parliamentary Election registered the lowest turnout record, this work aims at disentangling the effects of mobilization on participation.

Data come from the Austrian National Election Study Rolling Cross-Section Panel 2013. This data source allows analysing the campaign effects dynamically through LOWESS estimations of the daily means of the measures of interest. Moreover, its panel structure permits us to take under control the propensity to turn out before the elections whilst studying the effects of various forms of party contacting on self-reported turnout.

Findings show that only personal forms of party contacting significantly increase electoral participation. Furthermore, those forms are more effective in increasing the turnout among low-propensity voters. Overall, one of the main contributions of the work is to provide differentiated estimations of the effects of any single form of party contacting on turnout, computed on the same sample and concerning the same electoral context.

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Introduction

Starting from Rosenstone and Hansen (1993), scholars have largely acknowledged the key role of mobilisation in explaining electoral participation. To break down the broad concept of mobilisation, two main dimensions have been identified: direct mobilisation is intended as the ‘external factors, such as political parties or electoral campaigns, that can inform and motivate the individual to act politically’ (Inglehart and Rabier 1979, 484), while indirect mobilisation takes place within the social circles in which an individual is embedded.

In recent years electoral campaigns have been gradually changing their nature, as well as the electoral contexts in which they take place. On the one hand, the level of professionalization of campaigns has become increasingly higher, aiming at targeting specific groups of voters through a broader employment of digital techniques and professional figures (Farrell 1996, 2002; Negrine et al. 2007). On the other hand, Western countries have gradually transformed into a high media choice environment (Prior 2007), where citizens are potentially exposed to a far larger number of media sources than in the past. With the expansion of the media supply and by personalizing their media consumption, citizens can now decide where, when, and how to obtain political information, but at the same time they can also avoid political information or undesired messages (Stromback 2017). In such a framework, it could be hypothetically expected that only politically involved citizens would be exposed to the electoral campaign while the others would not. Therefore, campaign effects on participation should not be taken for granted as conventional wisdom (Stromback 2017) but need to be further assessed.

Moreover, in the last decades various European countries have experienced a significant decrease in voter turnout, reaching the lowest record in recent National elections. This is the case experienced by Austria in 2013. Scholars have identified various concurring factors as responsible for that decline, such as the dissatisfaction with politics, the economic crisis, and the generational

replacement (Kritzinger, Muller, and Schönbach 2014), but little attention has been devoted to the role played by mobilisation.

This paper thus aims at investigating whether direct mobilisation and, eventually, which forms of direct mobilisation have enhanced electoral participation, and to which extent in such a context. By means of an exploratory analysis we will first examine the dynamic trend of some measures of party contacting and political involvement (see Ekman and Amnå 2012), namely the propensity to turn out and the attentiveness to the campaign, during the time-span of the electoral campaign by employing Austrian National Election Study (Autnes) 2013 Rolling Cross-Section (RCS) data. Second, to enter the black box of campaign effects, the differentiated impact of several personal and impersonal forms of party contacting on individual self-reported turnout will be estimated. One of the main contribution of this work, indeed, is to quantify and compare the effect of every single form of party contacting within the same sample. Finally, we will test whether mobilisation effects vary according to the individual propensity to turn out before the elections. Inferential analyses will be performed on the panel component of Autnes RCS 2013 data that integrates a pre-electoral survey with a post-electoral one. The panel structure of the data allows detecting the effects of the forms of party contact net of the propensity to turn out before the elections (Bartels 2006; Schmitt-Beck 2016).

Party contacting effects on electoral participation

Political parties contact voters through several modes that can be classified according to different criteria. The simplest criterion is represented by the presence of a physical person that delivers the mobilising message; hence mobilisation techniques can be both personal and impersonal. A classic example of personal mobilisation is represented by face-to-face interactions with a candidate, a party member or a volunteer. Impersonal mobilisation is expressed through phone calls, direct mails, emails, text-messages, social networks, TV, radio and press advertisements and other mediated forms.

Two different mechanisms attempt to explain the differentiated effects of personal and impersonal mobilisation on turnout, which are respectively explained by the Social Occasion and the Noticeable Reminder Theory (Dale and Strauss 2009).

The Social Occasion Theory argues that the necessary condition of mobilisation is the social connection between the voter and the electoral process. The underlying idea is that ‘face-to-face interaction makes politics come to life and helps voters to establish a personal connection with the electoral process’ (Green and Gerber 2008, 45), and is more successful in increasing the individual motivation to participate accordingly. Therefore, personal contacts are more likely to increase participation than impersonal ones, since they are more effective in getting voters involved in the electoral race.

The Noticeable Reminder Theory states instead that the necessary condition for mobilisation is the presence of a noticeable reminder that helps the individual remember to go to the polls. This theory first proposed by Dale and Strauss (2009) moves from the consideration that also impersonal messages, which do not include any element of social connection, could be effective in increasing the likelihood of turnout. Moreover, it is argued that the medium of delivery affects the noticeability of a reminder; therefore, personal techniques are expected to be more effective than impersonal ones.

By means of the large amount of Get Out The Vote (GOTV) field experimental research (Gerber and Green 2000; Green and Gerber 2008; Green, Aronow, and McGrath 2013), empirical evidence has corroborated both the theories, by showing that personal mobilisation is generally more effective than impersonal one. Nonetheless, even among the impersonal mobilisation techniques the presence of elements of personal mobilisation can vary and thus produce differentiated effects on turnout. In other words, although personal and impersonal mobilisation are two separate dimensions, it could be argued that some impersonal mobilisation techniques are more personal than others. For instance, if we look at phone calls, live calls where there is at least a minimal social interaction can be considered as more personal than pre-recorded ones (Green,

Aronow, and McGrath 2013). The forms of mobilisation could thus be classified on a continuum where the two poles respectively represent the most personal and the most impersonal techniques. While the most personal technique is the face-to-face contact, which is defined the ‘gold-standard mode’ (Aldrich et al. 2016, 167), the most impersonal ones deal with those mediated forms which do not include any element of personal connection. Accordingly, the main expectation of the Social Occasion Theory can be reframed as follows: the more personal is the contact, the higher is the likelihood of increasing electoral participation. Indeed, even if the same impersonal medium of delivery is employed, more personal messages can increase the level of connection between the individual and the electoral process.

Notwithstanding, some impersonal mobilisation techniques, such as text-messages and emails, require a minimum effort in terms of money and time, door-to-door canvassing is largely demanding. Furthermore, ‘the more personal the interaction, the harder it is to reproduce on a large scale’ (Green and Gerber 2008, 10). Therefore, when evaluating the efficacy of personal and impersonal mobilisation, both scholars and electoral campaigners should take into account the trade-off between the mobilisation effect and the effort to undertake such activities. In this regard, a relevant contribution of GOTV research stands in providing the cost of every additional vote obtained through a mobilisation campaign.

Previous research also found that the amount of contacts depends from contextual factors. For instance, the number of contacts proved to be higher in countries with majoritarian electoral systems (Karp, Banducci, and Bowler 2008) and old democracies (Karp and Banducci 2007). In European countries door-to-door canvassing is far less spread than in the US, thus people could perceive it as more invasive and be less prone to receive the mobilisation message (Bhatti et al. 2016; Schmitt-Beck 2016). Personal mobilisation does not, however, only deal with door-to-door canvassing, but also with other forms, such as being approached by a party member at an electoral booth or being visited by a politician at the workplace or at the headquarters of an association.¹ Anyhow, a meta-analysis examining 9 GOTV studies in 6 European countries found a positive

average effect² of door-to-door canvassing, but equal to 0.8 percentage points and significant only at the 90% level (Bhatti et al. 2016).

Looking at the forms of impersonal mobilization, several studies have tested the impact of conventional direct mails, by resulting in a very small but positive effect on turnout, equal to 0.2 percentage points measured on the results of 110 experiments in US³ (Green, Aronow, and McGrath 2013). Similar findings also come from the European context, where the effect was proved to be a little higher (in the UK, Fieldhouse et al. 2013; in Denmark: Bhatti et al. 2018). According to the only two experiments carried out in Europe on phone calls - at the best of my knowledge - coming from the UK, they seem to be more effective than in the US, both when employing professional (John and Brannan 2008) and volunteer phone banks (Fieldhouse et al. 2013). These preliminary findings suggest that in the European context individuals could be more open to these messages, since campaigns are not characterized by less massive use of phone calls than in the US (John and Brannan 2008). Looking at text messages, which are well suited for large-scale campaigns as they can reach a large number of people in only a few seconds, a recent study carried out in Denmark, found a pooled effect of four different experiments equal to 0.7 percentage points (Bhatti et al. 2017), similarly to Malhotra et al. (2012) in the US.

In contrast to the large amount of GOTV research, a recent study on German Longitudinal Panel Study (GLES) 2013 survey data shows indeed that personal mobilisation is less effective than impersonal one, and, moreover, is not successful in increasing turnout. More in detail, it measures personal mobilisation as a count index of exposure to three different forms of personal contacts (namely attending rallies, visiting street stands and reading leaflets), and impersonal mobilisation as a count index of exposure to two mediated contacts (watching TV advertisements and visiting party websites). In the discussion, Schmitt-Beck (2016) argues that the results are not so surprising as personal contacts with parties could be more exposed to self-selection, as high-propensity voters are largely more likely to be contacted. Furthermore, in proportional representation voting systems, which characterize most of the European democracies, the effect of personal mobilisation is

expected to be lower than in majoritarian ones, like the ones employed in the UK and US, that are more candidate-centered (Bhatti et al. 2016). Although empirical evidence on Germany proves to be against the main theoretical expectations, the argumentations provided do not allow explaining the larger impact of impersonal mobilisation techniques on turnout.

Therefore, our first hypothesis extends the expectations of the Social Occasion and the Noticeable Reminder theories to the Austrian context, and thus states as follows:

Hp1: Personal contacts have a higher effect on turnout than impersonal ones.

Besides testing which forms of party contacting are more effective, the next step consists in identifying the categories of voters who are more likely to increase their turnout after the contact. According to the Receive-Accept-Sample model (Zaller 1992), individual attitude change on a political issue is a function of campaign intensity⁴ and individual political awareness. When a message concerning a political issue is spread with low intensity, the highest proportion of attitude change is registered among the highly politically-aware people, since they are supposed to be the only ones able to receive the message. On the contrary, when a message is spread with high intensity, the proportion of attitude change will be higher among less aware individuals, who are more likely to change their minds when receiving a piece of information. This theoretical framework seems also suitable for the explanation of changes in turnout intentions, as it considers the shift from an intention of non-participation to an intention of participation an attitude (and consequently a behavioural) change. Similarly, the theory of contingent mobilisation (Arcenaux and Nickerson 2009) argues and empirically proves that in high-salience elections, campaigns are able to increase the turnout mostly among voters with a low propensity to participate, whereas in low-salience elections, campaigns are most effective in increasing the turnout among high-propensity voters, and in medium-salience elections the highest effect is expected to be found among moderate-propensity voters. Since our work analyses a first-order election, which is considered as equivalent to a high-salience one (Bhatti, Hansen, and Wass 2016), moving from this theoretical framework the second hypothesis stands as follows:

Hp2: In high-salience elections party contacting is more effective in increasing the turnout among low-propensity voters than among medium and high-propensity voters.

The context

Since the first elections after the II World War, Austria made register a very high turnout in parliamentary elections, higher than 90% until the late 1980s. A considerable decrease has been taking place since the 90s, by leading to the record-low in 2013, where 74,9% of the Austrian citizens participated to the election.⁵

Looking at the political arena, the main parties faced the 2013 elections in a climate of general disaffection toward traditional politics, fuelled by the various scandals that had characterized the previous legislative period (Dolezal and Zeglovits 2014). These several issues gave the opportunity for new parties to emerge, such as the Team Stronach, founded by billionaire entrepreneur Frank Stronach, and the liberal NEOS.

Concerning the electoral campaigns, scholars agree that the starting point of the hot phase of the 2013 campaign can be located around six weeks before the elections (Dolezal and Zeglovits 2014). In Austria, although restrictions on campaign expenditures are foreseen (CESifo, 2015), those rules are not so strict; thus, some parties still exceed the limit (Dolezal and Zeglovits 2014) and not all the parties provide information on the expenditures. If we focus on expenditures by types of campaigning, in Austria almost 90% of the parties' budget was spent for traditional advertising, like newspapers advertisements and posters, and only 3.3% for advertisements in online media (Dolezal and Zeglovits 2014). Austrian 2013 campaign was characterized by 15 pairwise debates among the six main parties, other than a round table with representatives of all the six parties; these represented the main media events of the campaign and were watched on average by more than 10 per cent of the electorate (Dolezal and Zeglovits 2014).

Although since the 1980s Austria has seen a substantial decline in party membership, like all the other European democracies, its ratio of party members to the electorate is the highest in

Europe, equal to 17.3% in 2008 (Van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke 2012). This figure can have direct implications on the proportion of people contacted by parties during the electoral campaigns since party members are supposed to have a higher likelihood to be contacted than other individuals. Finally, even though the Austrian voting system is based on proportional representation, it allows the preferential voting, which could incentivize personal contacting.

Data, methods and measures

Data

A well-suited tool to dynamically study the campaign effects is represented by the rolling cross-section design (Johnston and Brady 2002; Schmitt-Beck and Faas 2006; Krewel, Schmitt-Beck, and Wolsing 2011), thanks to which random samples of individuals are daily interviewed throughout the campaign period. Autnes 2013 includes a rolling cross-section survey⁶ with a panel module, that allows for the testing of the exogenous impact of the campaign on the various outcomes available for both the pre and post-electoral period.

Autnes Rolling Cross-Section survey covers the time span from August 5 to September 27, two days before the elections, excluding Saturdays and Sundays. Apart from the first four days of fieldwork, about 100 CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews) interviews on independent samples were carried out every day. Autnes RCS adopts a probabilistic sampling design for the initial inclusion in the sample. On the whole, RCS sample consists of 4011 people and 2607 of them, randomly selected, were interviewed in the post-electoral survey as well (for further details see Kritzinger et al. 2016).

Main dependent and independent measures

Self-reported turnout is the dependent variable. As it usually happens when measuring turnout in surveys (McDonald 2003), self-reported rates (90,8% of the entire sample, 91,1% of the valid cases) register about 15 percentage points of overestimation compared to the actual rates.

Concerning the measures of party contacting, Autnes RCS Panel Study includes six dichotomous measures of party contacting (yes/no), both in pre and post-electoral surveys. These six questions deal with individual exposure to party contacts in terms of receiving call/text messages, receiving letters/e-mails, watching TV advertisements⁷, receiving information material/gifts (from any party or candidate at a campaign stand or at a campaign event), talking to a party member and being visited by a politician at home or at the workplace. In addition, for every form of contact the name of the party(ies) that had contacted the respondent was also asked. While the first three (call/text messages, letters/e-mails and TV ads) are mediated forms of contacting and the last two figure as personal contact (talk and visit), receiving information material/gifts could be related to both forms, as it does involve a personal contact on the one hand, but the content of the message is indirectly delivered.⁸ However, all the various forms will be treated separately in this study as six main independent variables in six separated regression models. The choice of discarding additive indexes of personal and impersonal contacts, where the highest level of the index would correspond to being contacted through all the forms, is based on the following consideration: as it seems plausible that two forms of contact can have a different impact on the turnout even when belonging to the same dimension, the employment of an additive index as the main independent variable could hide the actual effect of party contacting. If only one out of three forms of contact is positively associated to turnout, the linear effect of the additive index of the three forms of contacting on turnout could prove not to be significantly positive. Nonetheless we cannot conclude by saying that party contacting does not boost participation. This shortcoming could have affected the findings of Schmitt-Beck (2016), where only impersonal contacts proved to behave as mobilisers.

Unfortunately, the assessment of the effect of online contacting on turnout cannot be carried out, since no explicit measure of it is available. The two items included as online forms of contacting do not indeed allow for comparison between online and offline contacting (text messages are included in the same item as phone calls, and the same applies for letters and e-mails).

Methods

Hypothesis 1 is tested by analysing the effect of every single form of party contacting on turnout, net of the main predictors of turnout. Thanks to the panel design of the study, it is possible to control for the propensity to turn out in the pre-electoral survey by following the strategy of Schmitt-Beck (2016). Six separated logistic models were then estimated, having individual turnout (yes/no) as dependent variable and the form of party contacting, measured in the post-electoral survey, as the main independent variable. Besides the propensity to turn out (measured on a 11-point scale: 0 - I will definitely not vote; 10 – I will definitely vote), the models control for a large number of covariates: gender, age and age squared (as recommended by Smets and Van Ham 2013), educational level (4 categories: primary/lower secondary, vocational training, secondary, tertiary), degree of religiosity (4 categories: not at all, little, somewhat, very religious), union membership, party identification, exposure to newspapers and television in terms of reading or watching about political events (0: never – 4: almost every day), attentiveness to the electoral campaign (0-3 scale) and attitudes towards politicians (0-4 index, where 4 means extremely positive attitudes⁹). Furthermore, controls include a measure of interpersonal influence, dealing with the ego's perception of the amount of relatives and friends who were supposed to vote in the 2013 Austrian General Election, measured on a 5 point scale (0: almost none of them - 4: almost all of them). Following previous research on mobilisation effects (Schmitt-Beck and Mackenrodt 2010), the expectation is that the higher the percentage of network members who are likely to vote, the higher the likelihood the ego goes to the polls. All the control variables listed are measured in the pre-electoral survey.

To run robustness checks, the same models have been estimated by employing as the main independent variable the contact with parties when delivered in the timespan between the pre-electoral survey and the elections. Such a procedure enables to further approach the issue of endogeneity between party contacting and the propensity to turn out before the elections. Indeed, any form of party contact before the pre-electoral survey could produce a positive effect on the propensity to turn out, which is likely to be positively related to the actual turnout. Therefore, the main independent variables are still dichotomous measures, but they are equal to 1 when an individual was contacted in the period between the pre-electoral survey and the elections and to 0 otherwise.

After having tested whether every single form of party contacting increases the turnout, we can then test the second hypothesis by means of a similar logistic model, holding an interaction term between the mode of party contacting and the propensity to turn out. To test that hypothesis, propensity to turn out is here recoded in three categories. The distribution of the original variable shows a strongly negative skewness (10-score is associated to the 64% of the respondents, 66% if we consider only valid cases), hence the categorization of it needs to be taken into account. We thus call low-propensity voters those who score between 0 and 5, that is when they have at most the same likelihood to vote or not; we deal with medium-propensity voters when the score is between 6 and 8, and high-propensity voters when the score is 9 or 10, that is to say when they are rather sure to go to the polls. Differently from the models employed for testing Hypothesis 1, these models do not control for the original measure of the propensity to turn out, but for its three-categories version.

Results

Figure 1 shows the dynamics of the propensity to turn out (0-10 scale) and the attentiveness to the electoral campaign (0-3 scale) in Austria 2013 pre-electoral period, by means of LOWESS estimations (bandwidth 0.5) of the daily means.¹⁰ Both make register an overall increasing trend during the timespan of the campaign. Although the daily mean of the propensity to turn out shows

to be rather high at the beginning of the campaign (higher than 8 on a 0-10 scale), it rises by about 1-point at the end of the campaign. If we focus on the shape of the trend we note that the propensity to turn out increases significantly during the last month of the campaign, while during the first three weeks it remains rather stable. This trend is not surprising, as the hottest phase of the campaign started at the end of August when the first two pairwise debates between the candidates took place (on August 29). Indeed, if one looks at Figure 1 (left panel), it seems that the trend of the propensity to turn out starts increasing around August 29. The mean level of attentiveness to the campaign shows however a rather linear increasing trend. Overall, it seems that the Austrian 2013 campaign has produced a mobilising effect.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Since it has been argued that party contacting represents one of the main forms of direct mobilisation, the analysis of its dynamics gives further elements to understand the amount of mobilisation during the campaign. Figure 2 shows the LOWESS estimations of the daily proportions of the six forms of party contacting, to analyse whether the intensity of every single form of party contacting increases with the approaching deadline of the elections, and, if so, to what extent. Looking at the findings, during the Austrian 2013 campaign the percentage of respondents who were contacted (at least in one form) by a political party (at least) proved to have increased with the approaching of the elections. As one could expect, parties made their highest efforts during the last part of the campaign. In particular, in the last days of the campaign the percentage of people who declared to have received letters or e-mails was almost four times higher than that at the beginning of the campaign. The most personal forms of contacting, namely talking to a party member and being visited by a politician, show to be among the least spread, together with receiving a call or a text message. Nonetheless, among people who answered the survey during the last days of the campaign, almost one out of five declared to have talked to a party member. The most spread form of contact is instead represented by the exposure to TV advertisements, and although they cannot be broadcast in the public TV channels, they were able to reach an overall of

69% of respondents (60% saw TV advertisements for more than one party, see Table A1 in Appendix).

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 3 shows that only being visited by a politician or talking to a party member (marginal effect significant at 90%) led to a noteworthy increase in the turnout. Looking at the size of the effects, the visit of a politician resulted in an increase of 4.9 percentage points on the likelihood to turn out, while having talked to a party member allowed for an increase of 3.5 percentage points. Among the mediated forms, the most effective ones were proved to be the call/text message, producing an increase of 2.4 percentage points on the likelihood to turn out, though not significant because of the low number of voters contacted. No mediated forms of party contacting, as well as receiving information material or gifts, had a significant effect on the turnout. Therefore, the findings give some empirical evidence for Hypothesis 1, as the two more personal and intrusive forms of contact (i.e. visit and talk) prove to be the most effective.

Similar results come from the model including simultaneously the six forms of contacting as independent variables (Table A2 in the Appendix, last column), aimed at detecting the effect of every contacting mode on turnout when accounting for all the others. It shows that talking to a party member and being visited by a politician make increase turnout of respectively 3.7 and 4.0 percentage points (although the effect is not statistically significant), while calls/text messages, letters/emails, and TV advertisements have no substantial effects. Moreover, receiving information materials or gifts even hinders participation (negative effect of 3 percentage points). The robustness check analysis reported in the Appendix (Table A3), where party contacting is referred to as any form of contact happened in the period between the pre-electoral survey and the election, gives further support to Hypothesis 1. Even in those models, only having talked to a party member or having been visited by a politician positively affected the likelihood to turn out.¹¹

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

The full logistic regression models, which are reported in Table A2 in the Appendix, shows that, even when the propensity to turn out before the elections is included among the control variables, both campaign attentiveness and expected turnout among network members significantly enhance the likelihood to turn out. Furthermore, tertiary educated people are more likely to turn out than the primary and lower secondary educated.¹² Instead, net of the broad set of controls, both newspapers and TV exposures do not significantly affect the turnout.

Finally, Figure 4¹³ gives enough empirical evidence to support Hypothesis 2, which claims that in high-salience election campaigns mobilisation increases the turnout mainly among low-propensity voters, in accordance with Arceneaux and Nickerson's (2009) theory of contingent mobilisation. Looking at respondents with a low propensity to vote before the elections (from 0 to 5 on a 0-10 scale), the likelihood to turn out is significantly higher among those who talked to a party member (32 percentage points difference), while the effect of the talk is almost null for medium-propensity voters and rather small for the high-propensity ones (1.3 percentage points). Similarly, the positive effect on turnout of a politician's visit at the workplace or at home is definitely stronger for low-propensity voters (36 percentage points) than for the medium-propensity (5 percentage points) and high-propensity ones (1.4 percentage points). When we analyse the effect on turnout of party contacting among medium-propensity and especially among high-propensity voters, who register very high rates of self-reported turnout, ceiling effects need to be taken into account. However, the large difference in size of the effect between the low-propensity voters and all others gives empirical leverage to the corroboration of Hypothesis 2.

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Furthermore, to overcome the issue of ceiling effects, the same interaction models were estimated by substituting the propensity to turn out with the attentiveness to the electoral campaign. As Figure A2 in Appendix shows, talking to a party member and being visited by a politician significantly enhance turnout only among citizens who are not at all or not very attentive to the campaign, thus giving further evidence to Hypothesis 2.

Discussion and conclusion

The increasing digitalization of electoral campaigns and the transition from a low to a high choice of media involved, combined with the decline in turnout in several Western countries, have raised scholars' attention towards the role of campaigns in boosting electoral participation. Moving within such a framework, the present work contributes to shed some light on the impact of party contacting on participation in Austrian 2013 parliamentary elections, by employing panel data to analyse the effect of several forms of direct mobilisation on turnout.

The present work has adopted an original bottleneck approach, aimed at integrating an overview of the trends of some indicators of political involvement and party contacting during the timespan of the campaign with the identification of specific mechanisms of direct mobilisation. The approach seems well suited to investigate campaign effects on turnout from a broader perspective, starting from a descriptive and dynamic point of view with a rolling-cross-section design and then assessing the causal effects with a pre-post electoral panel survey. Moreover, it aims at exploiting the full potentiality of the rolling-cross-section panel design, which is becoming a standard of quality in the National Election Studies.

Looking at the findings, Austrian 2013 campaign has been successful in increasing both the attention towards the campaign itself and the propensity to turn out. Indeed, direct mobilisation does not seem to be among the most relevant predictors of the decline of turnout in the Austrian context. Overall, the most effective forms are represented by personal contacts. Consistent with Social Occasion Theory or the Noticeable Reminder Theory, as well as with findings of several Get Out The Vote studies, voters are more likely to be pushed to the polls when experiencing a face-to-face contact with electoral campaigners or party members. This finding goes in an opposite direction to Schmitt-Beck's (2016) study on German 2013 federal elections, where impersonal contacts proved to be more effective than the personal ones. However, as previously argued, Schmitt-Beck's (2016) contribution does not allow disentangling the effect of every single form of contact, since it

employs as independent variables two count index of personal and impersonal party contacting. Further analyses of the GLES 2013 and 2018 RCS data in which every form of party contact is treated separately could clarify whether in Germany personal contacts are able to boost the turnout.

In Austria, having personal contact with a party member is not so rare, since almost one out of five voters declared to have talked to a party member during the 2013 campaign. However, it represents a form of contact that can reach a restricted portion of voters for practical reasons, mainly because of the limited number of party members and volunteers. Furthermore, low-propensity voters could be less likely to be personally contacted since they are more likely to be socially marginal and, consequently, it is more complex to get in touch with them. By means of a meta-analysis of several GOTV studies employing face-to-face contact as treatment in experimental settings, Enos, Fowler, and Vavreck (2014) also argued that personal contacts increase social inequalities in electoral participation. They found that high-propensity voters were more likely to be pushed to the polls after personal contacts than low-propensity ones, regardless the presence of ceiling effects. On the contrary, our study shows that in Austrian parliamentary elections personal contacts are more effective among low-propensity voters, in line with Arceneaux and Nickerson's (2009) theory of contingent mobilisation. Ceiling effects could soften the resulting effects on medium and high-propensity voters, nonetheless the effects of talk and visit among low-propensity voters are very strong, and further analyses employing campaign attentiveness as moderating variable provide similar results. These findings directly speak to electoral campaigners, who can concentrate their efforts in personally reaching a larger number of low-propensity voters. Concerning mediated contacts, only letters or e-mails produce a higher effect on turnout among low-propensity voters, while the other forms of contact produce irrelevant effects for all the categories of voters.

Despite the increasing use of new technologies in electoral campaigns, the traditional forms of contact still represent the most employed by political parties, at least in the Austrian context. The potentiality of digital techniques in electoral participation needs further research, however some

previous works detected very weak mobilising effects of e-campaigning (Green, Aronow, and McGrath 2013; Aldrich et al. 2016), though proved to be more successful in enhancing campaign participation (Aldrich et al. 2016) and political engagement (Vaccari 2017). Unfortunately, data employed in this chapter do not allow disentangling the effects of on-line forms of contacting, since no specific measures are included in the Austrian data. To overcome this issue, the presence of some specific measures of digital contacting would be very welcome in future rolling cross-section panel studies.

The use of panel survey data on a probabilistic sample is an opportunity to provide external validity to the findings, thanks to the sample representativeness of the national population and the possibility to analyse causal relations within the context of the general elections. Nevertheless, the higher level of internal validity enables the experimental design to be the best way to address the causal effects. Both self-reported measures of party contacting and turnout can be affected by non-random measurement errors, as politically engaged people could be more likely to over-report both the number of contacts and the likelihood to turn out. Furthermore, some forms of party contacting, such as talking to a party member, allow the voters to play an active role, whereas, within campaign mobilisation, parties and candidates are the exclusive actors. Experimental methods, as the Get Out The Vote studies, enable to treat with campaign contact only a random subsample of voters and to measure unbiased individual turnout.

Notwithstanding, the research design here employed aims to be rather robust. First, by controlling for the propensity to vote before the elections, most of the issues on endogeneity concerning the relation between party contacting and turnout are overcome (Schmitt-Beck 2016). Second, since in Austria voter turnout is very high and self-reported turnout is around 90%, the analyses on the impact of contacts on turnout could be affected by ceiling effects (Enos, Fowler, and Vavreck 2014). When significant effects of a predictor are detected, it thus means that they are rather robust. Third, supplementary regression analyses, where party contacting was considered only if occurred in the period between the pre-electoral survey and the elections, were carried out

and have provided findings consistent with the other analyses. Fourth, differently from the large amount of GOTV studies able to identify the effect of one or at most two forms of contact in a single context, our research design allows estimating the effect of six different forms of contact net of several confounders on the same sample, and thus providing a comprehensive picture on the impact of mobilisation strategies within the same geographical context.

Future research programs are welcomed to adopt comparative designs (Magalhes, Aldrich, and Gibson 2018), by testing hypotheses on the moderating role of institutional factors, such as party system and voting system. Furthermore, new studies are needed to analyse the impact of the countries' level of party membership both on the volume of mobilisation, since volunteering in local party organizations and campaign is one of the leading contributions that members offer to parties, and on the relation between forms of mobilisation and turnout.

Endnotes

¹ Nonetheless, these forms of contact are not analysed in GOTV research.

² The effect was estimated in terms of Complier Average Causal Effect (CACE). It represents the average treatment effect estimated among the compliers, namely the individuals receiving the treatment when assigned to the treatment group and not receiving the treatment when assigned to the control group (Gerber and Green 2012, 137).

³ Since researchers do not know whether the individuals have actually been treated, namely whether they have received the mail, this effect is calculated in terms of intent to treat (ITT) and not in terms of CACE.

⁴ According to Zaller's (1992) framework, intensity itself could be intended as a function of media attention to a political news/issue (for instance, in terms of broadcast time or front-page space; see also Brady, Johnstone, and Sides 2006).

⁵ In 2017 Austrian parliamentary elections, turnout rose to 80.0%.

⁶ It represents the first rolling cross-section survey carried out in the Austrian context.

⁷ In Austria TV advertisements are only allowed on private channels.

⁸ In his study on Germany, Schmitt-Beck (2016) argues that these are more connected to the personal modes of contacting, thus are included in the count index of personal party contacting.

⁹ This is computed by considering the average of two items, dealing respectively with how many politicians are honest with voters and how many politicians are in politics to achieve as much goals as possible, which is reversed to preserve the same semantic polarity. Both the questions include 5 answer categories, from 0 (almost no one) to 4 (almost all).

¹⁰ Because of sampling issues, the first four days are not considered in these analyses.

¹¹ For an additional robustness check data were pre-processed through Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM), a non-parametric matching technique aimed at reducing the imbalance in covariates between treatment and control group (Iacus, King, and Porro 2012). Since being contacted by a party could depend on several individual characteristics (Karp, Banducci and Bowler 2008), in our framework the CEM technique allows minimizing the effects of selection bias when analysing the relationship between the various forms of party contacting and turnout. Findings (see Table A4 in Appendix) provide further evidence to Hypothesis 1 since

only talking to a party member and being visited by a politician significantly (at the 90% level) enhance the likelihood of turning out.

¹² Surprisingly, somewhat religious people are significantly more likely to turn out than non-religious ones, but it is not the same for very religious compared to non-religious.

¹³ In Figure 4, Hypothesis 2 is tested only for the two forms of party contact that proved to be significant at 90% level in the previous analyses, namely talking to a party member and being visited by a politician. Average marginal interaction effects between propensity to turn out and the other four types of party contacting are reported in Appendix (figure A1).

¹⁴ Interaction effects in logistic regression models cannot be interpreted simply by looking at the regression coefficient of the interaction term, but they can be better assessed by reporting the average marginal effects (Ai and Norton 2003). Regression models are reported in Appendix (Table A5).

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Figures

Figure 1: Trends of propensity to turn out (N=3,988, left panel) and attentiveness to the campaign (N=3,986, right panel) during 2013 Austrian electoral campaign. Daily means and lowess interpolation (bandwidth=0.5).

Figure 2: Lowess interpolation (bandwidth 0.5) of the daily proportion of interviewees contacted by parties through different modes during 2013 Austrian electoral campaign (N=4,011).

Figure 3: Predicted probabilities of turnout by modes of party contacting in Austrian 2013 Elections. Estimates from the six different logistic regression models presented in Table A2. 95% confidence intervals (N=2,333) .

Figure 4: Average marginal effect¹⁴ of talking to a party member or being visited by a politician on self-reported turnout by propensity to turn out before the elections in Austrian 2013 elections. Estimates from logistic regression models. 95% confidence intervals (N=2,333).