Mobilizing Party Activism: A Field Experiment with Party Members and Sympathizers

Giordano Neuenschwander* Florian Foos†

Abstract

Electoral mobilization and persuasion are often characterized as two-stage processes, where parties mobilize their core supporters, who then mobilize and persuade larger shares of the electorate. While there is a lot of research on the second stage of this process, the mobilization and persuasion of the wider electorate by party activists, there is little causally identified evidence on whether party elites can encourage campaign activism among party members. To address this question, we conducted a randomized field experiment in cooperation with the Swiss Social Democratic Party in the context of the 2015 cantonal elections in Ticino. The experiment consisted of the randomized administration of mobilization telephone calls to members and strong supporters of the party, while their self-reported campaign activism and attitudes towards the campaign were measured in a two-wave online panel survey. Against expectations, we record small, negative effects on different measures of campaign activism including on the mobilization of relatives, and friends. The results raise important questions about omitted variable bias in observational studies of party activism that consistently report significant positive effects of party contact on the campaign activism of members and core voters.

*Graduate student, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, giordano.neuenschwander@graduateinstitute.ch; We are grateful to the Ticino Cantonal Section of the Swiss Social Democratic Party for collaborating with us on this experiment.

†Lecturer in Politics, King's College London, florian.foos@kcl.ac.uk

Introduction

In their mobilization efforts during electoral campaigns, parties are constrained by limited resources and can only reach a limited number of voters directly. Therefore, voter persuasion and mobilization have been characterized by political scientists as two-stage processes, where direct contact with party members is only a first step, complemented by a second, indirect, step in which the party's message is passed on and amplified by its core supporters (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Rolfe 2012). The success of a party's campaign therefore depends on its ability to mobilize its members and core supporters, who can then pass on its message to a wider spectrum of the population, thereby magnifying the mobilization of the electorate. Since communication between parties and their membership is therefore a central aspect of political campaigns and electoral politics, it is surprising that there is so little existing causal evidence on whether parties are effective at activating members and strong supporters during election campaigns. Yet, there is a wealth of observational studies which argue that party contact is effective at mobilizing activists to contact voters and engage in election campaigns (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Wielhouwer 1999; McClurg 2004). As Verba et al. (1995, 371) wrote "With respect to requests for activity, people do undertake political actions because they are asked." Estimated positive effect sizes of party contact on activists' propensity to attempt to "persuade others" are as large as 12 (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993) and 15 percentage-points (McClurg 2004). Indeed, we could not find a single study that reports negative or null effects of party contact on engaging in attempts to "persuade others".

In this study, we report the results from a randomized field experiment, in which party representatives called party members and asked them to engage in campaign activities during an election campaign. The embedded field experiment was conducted in cooperation with the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland, during the April 2015 cantonal elections in the Swiss-Italian canton of Ticino. A sample composed of members and strong sympathizers

of the party was randomly assigned into a treatment and a control group. Subjects in the treatment group were called by party representatives, who delivered a message about the importance of members' individual contribution to the campaign, and encouraged them to take on a more active role by speaking to family and friends. The self-reported campaign activism, perceptions, and attitudes of subjects towards the party and the campaign were measured in a two-wave online panel survey. Against expectations, the phone calls had small, negative effects on self-reported current and future campaign activism, opinions towards the campaign, and all other outcome measures. In a majority of cases, the null hypothesis of no treatment effect cannot be rejected. This paper hence provides the first field experimental evidence on the effect of phone calls executed by party representatives on the campaign efforts by party members and strong supporters. While our results only provide evidence on one case, they question whether the two-stage process of electoral mobilization is as easy to execute as commonly assumed by political scientists.

Electoral mobilization as a two-stage process

As Rolfe (2012, 121) specifies "all turnout is, in a sense, mobilized, with much of the mobilization occurring indirectly". Parties' ability to mobilize campaign activists is relevant because we assume that it can have far-reaching downstream effects. Analyzing the results of an electoral study conducted in South Bend, Indiana, in 1984 Huckfeldt and Sprague (1992) set out to assess the success of political parties in contacting individual citizens during election campaigns. They reached the conclusion that party contact acts as a catalyst: "[o]rganizations make contact with potential activists who, in turn, make contact with the population at large" (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992, 83-84). In other words, "party organizations mobilize the faithful, and the activity of the faithful sends a message to the rest of the public" (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992, 84). If this is the case, the relation between parties and their "faithful", be it the membership base or their "core supporters" (Holbrook and

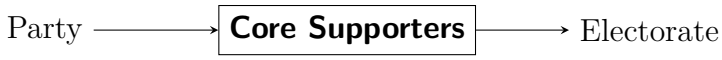

Figure 1: *Assumed two-step mobilization process*

McClurg 2005), assumes a fundamental role in the study of political parties and election campaigns. In their influential "Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America", Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) adopt a theoretical approach similar to that outlined in Huckfeldt and Sprague (1992). They define mobilization as "the process by which candidates, parties, activists, and groups induce others to participate" (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 25), and characterize it as a two-stage process composed by direct mobilization and indirect mobilization. Direct mobilization is the process by which parties and leaders "contact citizens personally and encourage them to take action" (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 26), for instance by means of phone banks or door-to-door canvassing. Parties are more likely to directly contact people they already know and that are more likely to vote for them: their core supporters. In a second step, indirect mobilization takes place when people who have been contacted by the party pass on the message, or "when local activists push their friends to attend meetings and friends ask family to accompany them, when parties contact workers in a plant and the workers ask their co-workers to vote" (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 28). In sum, "direct mobilization reverberates through indirect mobilization" (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 28).

At the same time, there is related literature, which should increase our scepticism about the two-step mobilization model. Enos and Hersh (2015) has outlined the principal-agent problem inherent in election campaigns, which rely on party activists as intermediaries to persuade and mobilize voters. In their paper, they highlight the inability of party elites to exert control over activists. Our findings directly speak to this issue, and suggest that the two-step model can fail even earlier than suggested by Enos and Hersh (2015), at the first stage of the mobilization process, the recruitment and activation of party members. Moreover, a recent meta analysis by Kalla and Broockman (2017) shows that, on average,

the persuasion effect of personal campaign contact in high salience elections is zero. While their study cannot speak to the two-step model of campaign mobilization, it does suggest that campaign influence is harder to exert than previously assumed.

If party activism can act as a catalyst in a two-stage mobilization process, as displayed in Figure 1, the ability of parties to encourage their members and core supporters to take on a more active role in election campaigns should be of paramount concern to researchers. But most experimental research on electoral mobilization and persuasion by political parties has focused narrowly on the second stage of this process, neglecting the ability of parties and campaigns to recruit and mobilize activists in the first place(Green 2004; Cardy 2005; McNulty 2005; Nickerson, Friedrichs and King 2006; Bailey, Hopkins and Rogers 2016; Kendall, Nannicini and Trebi 2015; Doherty and Adler 2014; Barton, Castillo and Petrie 2014; Foos and de Rooij 2017; Foos and John 2018; Kalla and Broockman 2017; Pons 108). While the literature has lead to great advances in our understanding of electoral mobilization and persuasion, this paper aims to start at the beginning rather than the end of the voter mobilization and persuasion process.

While two thirds of the potential activists targeted in this campaign were formal members of the party, one third were strong sympathizers. As Fisher, Fieldhouse and Cutts (2014) show, with the steady decline of party membership in the last decades, parties have started relying more on volunteering non-members. Can parties push their members and sympathizers to become activists? How can they do so? Building on Rosenstone and Hansen (1993)'s and Huckfeldt and Sprague (1992)'s theoretical approach, while integrating elements of the recent tradition of experimental GOTV research, we propose to address the following general research question: Can phone calls by political parties in the context of electoral campaigns affect the opinions and campaign activism of their core supporters?

In conclusion, while the existing observational literature suggests that contact from party elites should increases the likelihood that party members and supporters will engage in campaigning, there is no experimental research which has tested the important first step in

the two-step model of electoral mobilization and persuasion by political parties. It is therefore no surprise that other than mode ("the more personal, the more effective"), specifics about the type of messages required to mobilize core supporters are rarely discussed. A simple "ask" should be enough (Verba et al. 1995). We therefore hypothesized that phone messages administered by representatives of the Social Democratic Party of the Canton of Ticino should *increase* the campaign activism of their members and supporters and positively affect their perceptions about the campaign and their role in it.

Study Design

We set out to test whether party elites are effective at mobilizing activists to engage in voter persuasion by means of an embedded field experiment. The experiment took place in the Canton of Ticino, Switzerland, during the electoral campaign leading up to the cantonal elections of April 2015, and was conducted in cooperation with the Social Democratic Party of the Canton of Ticino (SP), a cantonal section of the Swiss Social Democratic Party. We first got in contact with a senior party member via common acquaintances and then pitched our study to the political secretary, who expressed interest in the idea of cooperating. After a second meeting with a member of the party leadership, the party agreed to cooperate and we signed an agreement establishing the respective responsibilities. The agreement stated that the party agreed to cooperate in an embedded field experiment, in which pre-approved electoral messages would be administered by phone to randomly chosen members and sympathizers of the party in the context of the electoral campaign. The study was approved by the IRB of the University of [removed for review].

Context

While most campaign field experiments have been conducted in the US or in the UK, we address the question by means of an embedded field experiment in the Canton of Ticino, in

Switzerland. Recently, persuasion and mobilization phone calls have been commonplace in Swiss election campaigns, and have been deployed by the Swiss Social Democratic Party in both cantonal and national elections. Switzerland is hence a typical case for the diffusion of modern GOTV methods across the world; methods which were first tested in the United States (Green and Gerber 2008) and Britian (Foos and de Rooij 2017), but then adapted in continental European countries such as France (Pons 108), Italy (Cantoni and Pons 2017), Germany (Faas and Hohmann 2014), and Switzerland. Our study is not designed to directly evaluate the effects of phone calls on voter mobilization or persuasion. We speak to a different but related question, namely the effectiveness of a party section in mobilizing supporters to engage in those activities, and more broadly the effect of external stimuli on the campaign activism of party members.

The experiment took place in the April 2015 Cantonal Election, in which citizens from the Canton of Ticino, a Swiss federal state with an electorate of 220,864 voters, elected the ninety members of the state legislature and the five members of the state executive proportionally via party-lists. Cantons - the Swiss states - play an important role in the strongly decentralised Swiss political system. Cantonal legislatures and executives play a very prominent role, and cantonal elections in Ticino are highly salient. Participation in the election reached 62%, which is very high for Swiss standards. The Social Democratic Party list received 14.81% of the votes for the executive and 14.64% for the legislature, down from 16.27% and 15.07% in 2011 (Repubblica e Cantone Ticino, 2015). The party kept its seat in the five-people executive, but lost one seat in the legislature going from fourteen to thirteen elected representatives.

Study Population and Experimental Assignment

The study therefore aims at assessing the effects of communication between party representatives and the party's core supporters on campaign activism and perceptions about the campaign, and the role of members in the campaign. The study population is composed

of members and sympathizers of the Social Democratic Party of Ticino. The outcomes of interest are the perceptions and self-reported campaigning behavior of party members and party sympathizers. On 18 March, a month prior to the election date, the party secretariat sent an email to all members and sympathizers of the party for whom an email address was available in the party database, inviting them to take part in an online survey.[1] The email explained that the survey was structured in two waves, provided a link to the first wave of the survey, and informed the recipients that they would be invited to take part in the second wave after the elections. The purpose of the first wave of the survey was twofold: to recruit a panel for the field experiment, and to collect background information and baseline data on campaign perceptions. Informed consent was obtained from participants before they started the survey[2]. Outcome measures were collected post-treatment in the second wave of the survey.

The first round was carried out between March 18 and March 25, 3-4 weeks prior to the election. Since the purpose of this round was mainly to recruit a panel population for the experiment, the survey was kept very short in order to maximize the response rate. The invitation email was sent to about 2,000 members and sympathizers of the party. The first round of the survey resulted in a total of 331 respondents, a response rate of 17%. In order to track the respondents in the party database and match them to an available telephone number, they were asked at the beginning of the survey to sign in with the email address that was used in the email invitation. Except for a few cases, the respondents complied with this request. Since the email was sent to all contacts listed in the party's database, before experimental assignment, the sample had to be restricted to remove members of the party leadership, other individuals who knew about the experiment, and candidates running for election. This resulted in a sample of N=296 subjects.

Once we had determined the sample, we employed complete random assignment to allocate half of the respondents to the control group and half to the treatment group, which

[1]The text of the invitation is displayed in Figure A in the Supporting Information

[2]The English translation of the survey is available in the Supporting Information in Figure B

resulted in two equal-sized experimental arms (N=148). The randomization procedure was carried out using the 2015 version of the "randomizr" package in the statistical computing software R (Coppock 2015). Random assignment assures that, in expectation, there should be no systematic differences between treatment group and control group besides the treatment itself (Gerber and Green 2012). This means that the difference in average outcomes between treatment and control groups should, ex-ante, provide an unbiased estimate of the Intent-to-Treat effect (ITT) (Gerber and Green 2012).

STATISTICAL POWER Hahn APSR experiment 2=104 subjects, experiment 3=144 subjects

Half a standard deviation = moderate effect size, we are well powered.

Covariate balance in treatment and control groups, on the final sample, which answered wave 2 and is used for the analysis, is shown in 1. We also used all variables collected in the pre-treatment survey to carry out a covariate balance check using randomization inference. The purpose of the randomization-inference-based balance check is "to assess whether the degree of covariate balance is in line with what one would expect to see given the use of random assignment" (Gerber and Green 2012, 431). The covariates we used to test for balance between the two experimental groups were sex, age, and answers to the five pre-treatment questions displayed in 1 (see Figure B in the Supporting Information). The balance test we performed consists in "a regression of the assigned treatment on all of the covariates and calculation of the F-statistic" (Gerber and Green 2012, 107). We then compared the f-statistic to the mean of all f-statistics that we received over 10,000 simulated random assignments under the assumption of no treatment effect for any subject. The p-value of 0.13 suggests that any imbalances between the treatment group and the control group are no larger than what one would expect based on random sampling variation.

After the treatment had been administered, an email was sent to the study population to invite subjects to take part in the second wave of the online survey (see Figure A). 258 1st round respondents participated, which represents a test-retest rate of 88%. Since outcome

Table 1: Pre-treatment covariates

	Control	Treatment
18-25	0.01	0.03
26-35	0.07	0.04
36-50	0.23	0.14
51-65	0.38	0.47
>65	0.31	0.32
Male	0.70	0.64
Outcome uncertain	0.86	0.70
Personal contribution	5.79	5.68
Approve campaign	1.82	1.86
Labour	0.37	0.51
Environment	0.25	0.17
Social	0.15	0.19
Education	0.23	0.13
Ground game	0.63	0.57
Media	0.22	0.24
Debates	0.07	0.10
Nothing to improve	0.08	0.09
N	115	133

measures were collected by means of this survey, the study population was reduced by attrition. Before dropping non-respondents to the second wave of the survey, to ensure that attrition did not occur as a function of treatment assignment, we regressed non-response on treatment assignment, calculated the F-statistic, and estimated the p-value using the standard randomization inference-procedure (Gerber and Green 2012) with 10,000 simulated random assignments. The resulting p-value of 0.21, confirms that attrition was not a function of treatment assignment. Finally, we used the same procedure detailed above to assess covariate balance between treatment group and control group in the sample resulting after attrition, with a resulting p-value of .14.

Treatment

The treatment consisted of a phone message delivered to subjects in the treatment group during the period from March 26 to April 4 (2-3 weeks before the election date). Subjects in

the control group were not contacted. Since the callers were instructed to check the identity of the person they were calling and the sample was checked to prevent people from the same household being in the survey population, the non-interference assumption should not be violated.

The calls were carried out on top of the usual election campaign of the party consisting of mail flyers, television appearances (but no TV spots), rallies, and posters in the streets. There were in total three callers, who were volunteers known to and approved by the party leadership but recruited and instructed by us. They called between 18:30 and 20:30 on four different days from the party secretariat, using party landlines. A maximum of three attempts were made for each phone number, after which a message was left on the answering machine or an attempt was made to reach the cell phone, if available. The entire list was called a first time before proceeding with a second attempt to those that had not answered, and then the same for the third one. The callers were instructed not to mention the panel survey or the fact that the call was part of an experiment in general. Since research has shown that more personal forms of contact are more successful in GOTV efforts (Green and Gerber 2008; Green, Aronow and McGrath 2013; John and Brannan 2008), the message was delivered in a conversational tone, avoiding just reading the script out loud and allowing for follow up discussion with subjects. Volunteers were instructed to deliver three main messages in their phone call, and they were provided with a script. As long as the main topics were covered, they were however free to only loosely stick to the script, in order to have a more genuine conversation. The three main messages of the phone calls were the following:

1. Your personal contribution to the campaign is very important.

2. Go vote for the Social Democratic Party.

3. Try to convince your relatives, friends and acquaintances to go vote for the Social Democratic Party.

The suggested script for the phone calls was the following:

Good evening, my name is [name of the volunteer] and I am calling from the Social Democratic Party. I am looking for Mr./Ms. [name of the sympathizer]. We are carrying out a round of phone calls to our members and sympathizers to remind you that in about 3 weeks the Cantonal elections will be held. The result is still very uncertain and the contribution of every single one is fundamental! We would like to invite you not only to go out and vote for the SP, but also to try and convince family, friends and acquaintances to vote for the SP list. Many have lost faith in elections and don't vote anymore, they need to be convinced! Speak about the elections and their importance to your friends, family, and acquaintances, or invite them to go to the poll with you, for instance. In conclusion, vote and have your friends, family, and acquaintances vote for the SP list!

Since an effort was made to keep the tone conversational and have an exchange with the sympathizer, there were often a couple of minutes of follow-up conversation, mainly about the context of the election. In these conversations, the callers tried to keep underlining how the elections were going to be close and the contribution of the single individual important. The content of the phone message (1) underlined how important the contribution of the single party supporter can be for the campaign and (2) encouraged members and sympathizers to take on an active role in the campaign. These are the outcomes that were then measured on the post-treatment survey.

The callers were instructed to record whether: (1) the phone number was functioning; (2) someone picked up the phone; (3) it was possible to speak to the targeted person; (4) it was possible to deliver the entire message; (5) the message was left on the answering machine. They also recorded their general impressions about the phone calls in a journal (Appendix F). The message was delivered in its entirety to 126 individuals out of 148 in the treatment group. It was delivered to the answering machine twice, to a different member of the household once, and only partly delivered once. These few cases were conservatively coded as "message delivered". In the remaining 18 cases, no one could be reached. This is

therefore a case of one-sided noncompliance, which will be accounted for in the analysis of the results. However, even counting only the cases in which the targeted person was reached and the message fully delivered, this represents a delivery rate of 85%, much higher than what is usual in non-partisan or partisan GOTV studies in the U.S. (Green and Gerber 2008; Nickerson et al. 2006) or in the UK (John and Brannan 2008; Foos and de Rooij 2017). This high rate is probably due to the fact that the small sample made it possible to carry out three calling attempts, but the scarcity of commercial phone banks and GOTV campaigns in Switzerland may also have played a role. Since phone marketing is way less usual in Switzerland than in the US, people may be less saturated (John and Brannan 2008). Moreover, the sample is composed of party sympathizers, who have given their phone numbers to the party personally and are expected to be more responsive to contact by the party than the average person. Some subjects even recognized the phone number of the party secretariat and called back. We asked the party representatives who delivered the calls to write down their initial impression of the calls. These impressions are displayed in Figure C in the Supporting Information. Initial impressions were predominately positive, and callers noted that members felt appreciated when called. The only potential problem mentioned was that some respondents asked whether the party was worried about the result of the election.

Dependent Variables

All outcome measures were collected in the second round of the online panel survey. On April 23, four days after the election and 3-4 weeks after the phone calls were delivered, an email was sent from the party secretariat to the entire study population (treatment and control groups), inviting them to take part in the second round of the survey. The purpose of this second round was to collect the two main category of outcome measures: (1) self-reported campaign activism and (2) opinions on the importance of the subject's individual contribution to the electoral campaign and feelings of appreciation by the party. Since the

phone message also encouraged the subjects to cast their votes for the SP, questions on voting behavior and turnout were also included. However, these were only of marginal interest, since the participants are members and strong supporters of the party and we expect almost all of them to vote for the SP, regardless of treatment assignment.

The following items were used to measure self-reported campaign activism: 1) During the electoral campaign, did you talk to any family members about the election? 2) How many family members did you talk to? 3) Did you talk to any friends or acquaintances about the election? 4) How many friends or acquaintances did you talk to? 5) How many family members, friends, or acquaintances do you think you convinced to go vote for the PS?

Results

In what follows we report both the unadjusted and co-variate-adjusted Intent-to-Treat (ITT) and the Complier Average Causal Effects (CACE) of the phone calls on self-reported campaign activism (Table 3), intended, participation, perceptions and opinions about the campaign (Table 4), and electoral behavior (Table 5).

Table 2: Manipulation Check - Recall Phone Call

	Recall	Answered phone
Control	2.6%	0%
Treatment	73.7%	87.2%
	ITT	CACE
Unadjusted	71.1***	81.5***
95% Confidence Interval	[62.7, 79.3]	[74.0, 88.9]
Covariate-adjusted	70.8***	81.1***
95% Confidence Interval	[62.1, 79.6]	[72.9, 89.1]
N	248	248

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, $^{+}$ p<0.1 (based on two-tailed tests), randomization-inference for ITT, 2sls with HC2 standard errors for CACE, 95%-confidence intervals in brackets.

We always report randomization-inference based two-tailed hypothesis tests and 95%-confidence intervals for the ITT (Gerber and Green 2012), and use Two-Stage-Least Squares

regression with robust standard errors (HC2) to estimate the coefficients, and 95% confidence intervals surrounding the CACE. The covariate-adjustment is done including all available pre-treatment covariates collected in survey wave 1 (see Figure B in the Supporting Information).

Table 2 reports the answers to the manipulation check, the effect of receiving the phone call on remembering contact by the party. This question was asked at the end of the second survey wave. Table 2 clearly shows that the phone calls were extremely memorable. While only 3% of subjects in the control group reported that the party contacted them during the election campaign, 74% of subjects in the treatment group remembered being contacted. The treatment effect on recall is hence 71 percentage-points, and statistically significant with p<.001. For those subjects who were reached by phone canvassers, the Complier Average Causal Effect on recall is 82 percentage-points. It is hence inconceivable that the treatment was not memorable enough.

Table 3: Number of contacted relatives and friends

	N Relatives contacted	N Relatives persuaded	N Friends contacted	N Friends persuaded
Control	4.8	3.6	22.7	8.0
	(3.8)	(3.8)	(24.1)	(12.0)
Treatment	4.4	2.6	20.4	7.1
	(3.2)	(2.5)	(31.2)	(17.8)
	ITT			
unadjusted	-0.4	-1.0*	-2.4	-1.0
	[-1.3, 0.4]	[-1.9, -0.2]	[-9.3, 4.5]	[-5.2, 3.0]
covariate-adjusted	-0.2	-0.7^{+}	-2.0	-0.8
	[-1.1, 0.6]	[-1.5, 0.1]	[-9.1, 4.9]	[-5.0, 3.4]
	CACE			
unadjusted	-0.5	-1.2*	-2.8	-1.2
	[-1.5, 0.5]	[-2.2, -0.2]	[-10.8, 5.3]	[-5.9., 3.6]
covariate-adjusted	-0.3	-0.8^{+}	-2.3	-0.9
	[-1.3, 0.7]	[-1.8, -0.2]	[-10.8, 5.3]	[-5.8, 4.0]
N	250	224	246	206

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, $^{+}$ p<0.1 (based on two-tailed tests), randomization-inference for ITT, 2sls with HC2 standard errors for CACE, 95%-confidence intervals in brackets.

Table 3 reports the key results of the paper, the effects of the mobilization phone call on self-reported campaign activism of party members and supporters. Columns 1 and 3 report the number of relatives and friends a subject reported to have spoken to during the campaign, and columns 2 and 4 display the perceived number of relatives and friends persuaded to vote for the Social Democratic Party. The treatment effect estimates in Table 3 are consistently small and negative on all outcome variables. Subjects who were contacted by party representatives and urged to persuade family and friends to vote for the Social Democratic Party reported convincing 2 fewer friends and family to vote for the Social Democratic Party.

In this context, it is important to acknowledge that the means in the control group are relatively high, with subjects reporting that they convinced around 4 relatives, and 8 friends to vote for the Social Democrats. Table A.1 in the Supporting Information reports a robustness check using negative binomial regression, taking the count nature of the outcome variables into account. The results are similar to the effects reported in Table 3.

Table 4 displays the effects of the phone calls on future intended participation in the national election campaign, as well as the subjects' perceived individual contribution to the campaign, and feelings of appreciation by the party.

Again, on all three outcome measures we consistently find negative effects, which are hardly distinguishable from zero. On the future participation measure, we estimate an ITT of -0.3 on a 5 point-scale, while we estimate ITTs of -0.3 on a 7-point scale and -0.1 on a 5-point scale respectively for subjects' opinions about how the party was conducting the campaign, and their feelings of involvement and appreciation by the party.

Finally, Table 5 displays the results on vote choice, and turnout behavior of the spouse or partner. On both outcome variables we estimate again small, negative treatment effects of 2 and 1 percentage-points respectively, which are not statistically distinguishable from zero. It is important to highlight that, as can be expected, both vote choice for the Social Democratic Party and turnout among household members is reported to be very high (92%

Table 4: Feelings of contribution and appreciation

	Future participation in campaign meetings 1-5 scale	Opinion about campaign 1-7 scale	Feeling appreciated 1-5 scale
	ITT		
Control	3.7	5.7	3.5
	(1.1)	(1.1)	(0.8)
Treatment	3.4	5.5	3.4
	(1.1)	(1.3)	(0.9)
Unadjusted	-0.3^{+}	-0.2	-0.1
	[-0.5, 0.0]	[-0.5, 0.1]	[-0.4, 0.1]
Covariate-adjusted	-0.2	-0.1	-0.1
	[-0.5, 0.0]	[-0.3, 0.2]	[-0.4, 0.1]
	CACE		
Unadjusted	-0.3^{+}	-0.3	-0.1
	[-0.6, 0.0]	[-0.6, 0.0]	[-0.4, 0.1]
Covariate-adjusted	-0.2	-0.2	-0.1
	[-0.5, 0.1]	[-0.5, 0.1]	[-0.4, 0.1]
N	248	251	244

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, $^{+}$ p<0.1 (based on two-tailed tests), randomization-inference for ITT, 2sls with HC2 standard errors for CACE, 95%-confidence intervals in brackets.

for vote choice, and 94% for turnout). There is hence little room for positive treatment effects on these measures.

Discussion and Conclusion

For all outcome measures, with no exception, the estimated effects of the treatment are relatively small and point in the opposite direction than anticipated. We find small negative effects of phone calls on the number of friends and relatives party members and supporters reported talking to, and convincing to vote for the Social Democratic Party. Moreover, our best guess is that the phone calls decreased subjects' intentions of participating in future party-sponsored events, and their feelings of appreciation and individual contribution to the electoral campaign. The estimated effect sizes range from small to very small, and all but a few effects fail to reach statistical significance at any conventional level. The few

Table 5: Voting behavior

	2 votes for Socialist Party		Turnout Partner	
	Control	Treatment	Control	Treatment
Control	91.7	90.2	94.1	93.8
	(33.3)	(34.5)	(23.8)	(24.3)
	Unadjusted	Covariate-adjusted	Unadjusted	Covariate-adjusted
ITT	-1.4	-2.1	-0.3	-0.7
	[-9.3, 6.7]	[-10.5, 6.4]	[-6.3, 6.9]	[-7.1, 5.9]
CACE	-1.7	-2.4	-0.3	-0.8
	[-11.3, 8.0]	[-13.0, 8.1]	[-7.5, 6.8]	[-7.7, 6.1]
N	206		213	

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, $^{+}$ p<0.1 (based on two-tailed tests),
randomization-inference for ITT, 2sls with HC2 standard errors for CACE,
95%-confidence intervals in brackets.

statistically significant estimates would not withstand adjustment for the multiple outcomes measured in this study. Overall, there is hence not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis of no treatment effect of the mobilization campaign. Our results therefore reflect the principal-agent problem inherent in election campaigns that rely on the two-step model of voter mobilization (Enos and Hersh 2015). Before we turn to the interpretation of these null findings, we will discuss two potential caveats to our findings.

The most obvious caveat to our results is that outcomes are self-reported. It is possible that phone calls made recipients more conscious of their campaign activism and therefore prone to providing more reliable answers to party representatives. If we consider the question on the number of contacted friends, it is possible that subjects that were asked to talk about the election to friends did so more consciously, remembered the instances more clearly and therefore provided a more precise (and smaller) number. Although there is no other way of measuring attitudes, perceptions and opinions, there are forms of campaign activism where it would be possible to collect behavioral outcomes, for instance taking part in canvassing activities, donating money, taking part in events, or sharing social media content. While the lack of behavioral outcomes is a short-coming of our study, using self-reported measures of activism allows our study to be directly comparable to existing observational studies, which

also rely on survey self-reports.

Second, one can question to what extend the Sample Average Treatment Effects are generalisable to the whole population of party members and supporters who did not answer the survey and for whom no telephone number was available. This limitation does not have implications for causal inference, but it means that the sample was likely composed of the more active members and sympathizers of the party, which presumably correlates with taking a survey when encouraged to do so by the party. We therefore simply do not know if the results apply to all party members and supporters, or only to the more active segnment of the population of interest. One could speculate about whether less active supporters are harder or easier to mobilize than more active supporters, but unfortunately, the limited sample size means that subrgoup analyses would be underpowered[3].

The limitations of the research design discussed above highlight that this paper can only constitute a first attempt at the experimental study of party activism. Nevertheless, it is fair to conclude that our results are at odds with our hypothesis derived from the observational literature on party activism. We know that unobserved hereogeneity is a major problem in observational research on party activism. The exessively large reported effect sizes of previous studies might therefore, at least in part, be due to unobserved confounders. Parties contact individuals who they believe to be more likely to engage in activism (Arceneaux 2010). It is well conceivable that party supporters are more likely to mobilize relatives and friends, but not because they are asked to do so, but due to unobserved, intrinsic motivations or their location in social networks, which this study was not designed to test.

We believe therefore that this question warrants further experimental research. Our study, by reporting a null result based on a stronger, but still imperfect, research design, in a field which is characterised by large positive effect sizes and research designs, which have difficulty identifying causal effects, is therefore a small step forward.

[3]For completeness, we report that the results are no different both in the negative direction, and regarding the size of the effects for registered party members and for sympathizers, although they are more imprecisely estimated

Finally, we hope that this study can contribute to a promising research agenda on the type of appeals, both in relation to mode and content, which can mobilize activists to participate in election campaigns. In a different context, Han (2014, 2016) highlights that effective messages should increase feelings of social belonging and connectedness. Rogers, Goldstein and Fox (2018), moreover, emphasize the mobilization potential of messages that increase the salience of social norms and social identities. While our study was designed to test the effect of the simple "ask", which should be sufficient to mobilize campaign activism according to previous observational studies, we can imagine that messages and treatment which emphasize the social aspect of politics, might be more effective. Capacity building is a crucial task for all political parties if they intend to execute any type of ground campaign at scale, and these questions therefore warrant continued attention from researchers and campaigners alike.

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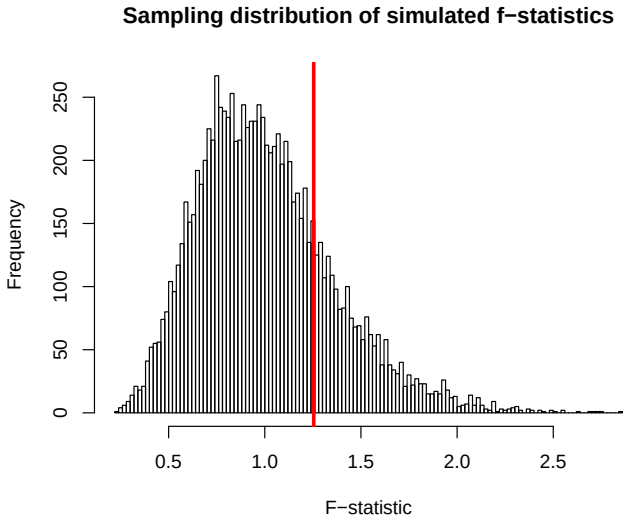
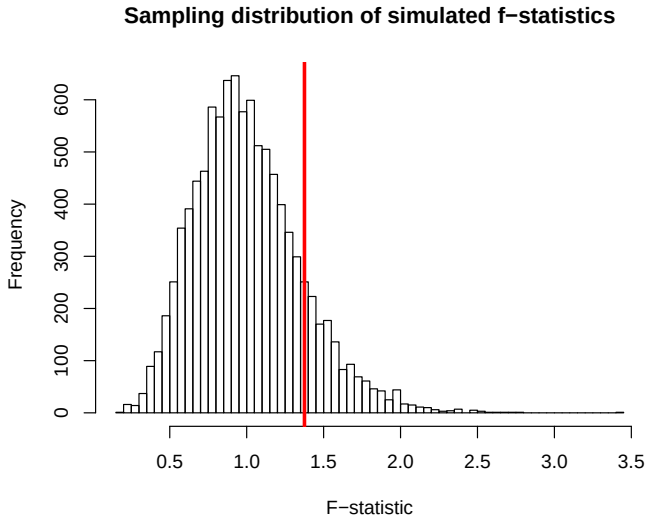
Balance

Figure A.1: Balance Check: Location of estimated f-statistics resulting from linear regression of treatment assignment on pre-treatment covariates compared to sampling distributions of simulated f-statistics under sharp null hypothesis of no effect of covariates on treatment assignment of any subject



a) Left: Wave 1 (p=.13)



b) Right: Wave 2 (p=.14)

Tables

Table A.1: Negative binomial regression: N of contacted & persuaded relatives & friends

	N Relatives contacted	N Relatives persuaded	N Friends contacted	N Friends persuaded
Unadjusted	-0.09	-0.3**	-0.1	-0.1
	(0.1)	(0.1)	(0.1)	(0.2)
Covariate-adjusted	-0.04	-0.2^{+}	-0.1	-0.4*
	(0.08)	(0.2)	(12.9)	(0.2)
N	250	224	246	206

*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, $^{+}$ p<0.1 (based on two-tailed tests), standard errors in parentheses.

A Invitation emails sent to members and sympathizers

Pre-treatment survey invitation email

SUBJECT: Your opinion is important

Dear member, dear sympathizer,

In the context of a research project that the Socialist Party of Ticino is conducting in cooperation with two researchers of the University of [blinded for review] (names blinded for review), we invite you to take part in a very short online survey. The survey aims at assessing the opinion of members and sympathizers of the party regarding the current electoral campaign, in order to improve the management of future campaigns.

The survey is divided in two phases, each of which consists of literally 5 questions. Click here to take part to the first round! The task will take about 5 minutes and your participation means a lot to us, your opinion is important!

We thank you for your attention.

With kind regards,

On behalf of the Socialist Party Ticino Section of the SSP

[blinded] Vice Presidents

Post-treatment survey invitation email

SUBJECT: Online survey - second phase

Dear member, dear sympathizer,

A few weeks ago, you have accepted our invitation to take part in an online enquiry regarding the electoral campaign. Thank you very much! As anticipated, the enquiry consists of two phases, and now you may take part in the second phase of the enquiry by clicking here!

As with the first phase, the task will take about 5 minutes and your participation is of great importance! We will provide a feedback on the results of the enquiry to all participants during the month of June.

We thank you for your attention.

With kind regards,

On behalf of the Socialist Party Ticino Section of the SSP

[blinded] Vice Presidents

B English translation of the complete pre- and post-treatment surveys

Pre-treatment survey (phase 1)

Declaration of Informed Consent

Purpose of participation: This study is of use to the Socialist Party and to researchers of [blinded for review] University ([names blinded for review]) in order to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies of electoral communication. By participating in this study, you agree to the use of your answers exclusively for research purposes and in a completely anonymized form. Furthermore, you declare your consent to take part in an online survey in two phases. Each phase shall take about five minutes; the first one shall take place immediately, the second in about one month. During this study, you might be contacted telephonically by party activists. Risks of participation: We do not foresee any risk, nor any unpleasant consequence related to the participation in the present study.

Participation on a voluntary basis: Participation in the present study is on a voluntary basis; it may be interrupted at any moment, without presenting reasons and without resulting disadvantages. Protection of data: Your personal data will be handled in a confidential manner, will not be transmitted to third parties and will exclusively be used in a totally anonymized format for the purpose of research.

Questions: For further questions please contact [name and email address blinded for review]. For complaints, please refer to the Ethics Committee of the [institution blinded for review] at following contact: [name and address blinded for review] You can print this informed consent form using the File > Print option in your browser window. Participation can be resumed by clicking the link in the email again. I have read and understood the points above and I consent to participate in this study.

- Accept
- Refuse

[If refused] If you are convinced of refusing the informed consent declaration and conclude the survey, choose the option below. Otherwise, go back to the previous question and accept to continue. In case of further doubts, please contact [email address blinded for review]

- Exit survey

General Information

- V1. E-Mail address (please provide the email address to which the invitation to the survey was sent)

- V2. Gender
    1. Male
    2. Female
- V3. Age
    1. <18 years
    2. 18 - 25 years
    3. 26 - 35 years
    4. 36 - 50 years
    5. 51 - 65 years
    6. >65 years

Questions

- Q1. I think that the result of the Cantonal elections that will be held on the 19th of April is uncertain and that every single vote is important
    1. Strongly agree
    2. Agree
    3. Partially agree
    4. Neither agree nor disagree
    5. Partially disagree
    6. Disagree
    7. Strongly disagree
- Q2. I think that my personal contribution to the electoral campaign, by word of mouth or other means, is important for the success of the Socialist Party.
    1. Strongly agree
    2. Agree
    3. Partially agree
    4. Neither agree nor disagree
    5. Partially disagree

6. Disagree
7. Strongly disagree

- Q3. I think that the Socialist Party is handling the campaign well.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Partially agree
4. Neither agree nor disagree
5. Partially disagree
6. Disagree
7. Strongly disagree

- Q4. If you had to choose one topic to which the Socialist Party should dedicate more space in the electoral campaign, which of the following would it be?

1. Labor and occupation policies
2. Environment and territory policies
3. Social and sanitary policies
4. Education and formation policies

- Q5. In your opinion, how should the Socialist Party improve its communication?

1. More contacts with the population
2. More press announcements and presence in the media
3. More debates organized on the territory
4. The communication of the Socialist Party is optimal

Post-treatment survey (phase 2)

Purpose of participation: This is the second phase of the online survey to which you kindly agree to participate some weeks ago. This second round will take about 5 minutes, after which the survey will be concluded. We remind you that the study is conducted by the Socialist Party in cooperation with researchers of the University of [blinded for review] (names blinded for review].

Protection of data: Your personal data will be handled in a confidential manner, will not be transmitted to third parties and will exclusively be used in a totally anonymized format for the purpose of research. Not even the party will have access to your individual answers. We therefore ask you to answer the question as honestly as possible.

Questions: For further questions please contact [name and email address blinded for review].

- V1. Email address (please provide the email address to which the invitation to the survey was sent) Questions
- Q6. I think that my personal contribution to electoral campaigns, by word of mouth or other means, is important for the success of the Socialist Party.
    1. Strongly agree
    2. Agree
    3. Partially agree
    4. Neither agree nor disagree
    5. Partially disagree
    6. Disagree
    7. Strongly disagree
- Q7. Did you vote in the April 19 2015 Cantonal election?
    1. Yes, I voted.
    2. No, I did not vote.
    3. I usually vote, but this time I did not have the time/occasion.
- Q7.1 Did you vote by mail or did you go to the polling station?
    1. Mail
    2. Polling station
- Q7.2 What list did you vote for the in the legislative election?

1. Socialist Party
2. Other party
3. Non-partisan list
4. I would rather not say

- Q7.2 What list did you vote for the in the executive election?

1. Socialist Party
2. Other party
3. Non-partisan list
4. I would rather not say

- Q8. Did your spouse/partner vote in the Cantonal election?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Does not apply / Don't know

- Q9. During the electoral campaign, did you talk to any family members about the election?

1. Yes
2. No

- Q9.1 How many family members did you talk to?
- Q10. Did you talk to any friends or acquaintances about the election?

1. Yes
2. No

- Q10.1 How many friends or acquaintances did you talk to?
- Q11. How many family members, friends, or acquaintances do you think you convinced to go vote for the PS?

1. Family members:
2. Friends and acquaintances:

- V4. Are you a member of the Socialist Party?
    1. Yes
    2. No
- V4.1 Since when (years)?

If member Q12. As a member of the Socialist Party, do you feel valued by the party?

1. Absolutely yes
2. Yes
3. Partially
4. No
5. Absolutely not

If not member Q12. As a sympathizer of the Socialist Party, do you feel valued by the party?

1. Absolutely yes
2. Yes
3. Partially
4. No
5. Absolutely not

- Q13. During the upcoming campaign for the national elections (Fall 2015), will you take part in events organized by the Socialist Party?
    1. Highly likely
    2. Likely
    3. I don't know / Maybe
    4. Unlikely
    5. Highly unlikely
- Q14. During the last few weeks, did you receive a phone call from the Socialist Party?
    1. Yes
    2. No
    3. Don't know

C Observations during phone calls

Notes to the attention of [name blinded for review] and of the Socialist Party of Ticino on the phone calls made from March, 27, 2015 to April, 4, 2015 [names blinded for review] April 5, 2015

Database

Of 146 addressees, there were 20 with wrong or missing phone numbers. For most of these we have found correct numbers and transmitted these to the party secretariat.

Procedure

We carried out a maximum of three attempts on different days over the landline (where available), and immediately after the third unsuccessful attempts a fourth call to the cell phone (where available), as per instructions received.

Time

On the whole we invested 24 hours in the task, of which 6 for the preparation and update of the listings, and 18 for the phone calls. This equals approx. 7 minutes per addressee for the phone calls (a maximum of 3 calls per addressee) and 3 minutes for updates at the computer. We feel that the time for preparation and update of the listings can certainly be optimized, while the mean time per addressee for the phone calls appears plausible.

Reactions

On the whole, the addressees reacted positively to the calls. Various persons gave the impression of feeling appreciated. Some persons were surprised by the calls and asked if we were that worried about the result of the elections. Some persons, mostly people who hold public or party offices, noted from the start that they were already active, but in the end appreciated the telephone exchange (of opinions), and in several cases thanked us for what we were doing. A part of the persons reached listened without commenting, and the call was concluded in little time. To the invitation to convince others to vote the socialist ticket, several persons replied that this was not easy. On the other hand, several others said that they were doing precisely this, some also with details (phone calls, etc.). Several calls revealed a wish to share, like for instance: “I have voted for the women”, or “I told everybody to vote whoever they wanted but not outside the party list”. The impression was that they wished to share their choice (with a certain pride) and to receive confirmation to have done the right thing. The only slightly negative comment was: “I thought only the Christian Democrats did these things” A couple of persons made positive allusions to the presence of the Young Socialists in the campaign.

Time of the calls

We called between 18:30 and 20:30. This is generally a good time slot, in particular between

19:00 and 20:30.

Other considerations

Calling from the Party headquarters was useful, because we were identified with the party (by who recognized the phone number), and because several people we did not reach called back the next day. Most certainly a 0800xx number would have been less successful.