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Campaign and network effects on electoral participation: The various facets of mobilization and interpersonal influence

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Summary

Introduction

Expressing a vote in any kind of democratic elections is an obvious indicator of political participation (Fieldhouse, Tranmer, and Russell, 2007). Voting is considered as "the most-all embracing form of political activity" and voter turnout as a "democratic health check" (Topf, 1995, p. 27). Low electoral participation is often seen as a worrying sign for a democracy, mainly because it could imply a lack of civic-mindedness and adhesion to democratic norms and duties (Franklin, 2004). An opposite thesis, which goes back to the seminal work of Lipset (1960), states that high rates of abstention stand as indicators of a country's political stability because they could be interpreted as a symptom of low conflict. Anyhow, abstention is perceived as a political problem when it suddenly and significantly increases (or decreases) after a period of relative stability (Caciagli and Scaramozzino, 1983). This is very much the situation that we are experiencing in Europe, both in old and new democracies.

Electoral participation has been declining all over Europe in the last 30 years (Franklin, 2004; Lutz and Marsh, 2007; Tuorto and Blais, 2014) but this trend has speeded up dramatically in the last 10 to 15 years, especially in second-order elections (e.g. European elections). In Italy, scholars generally agree that a turning point for electoral participation was reached in the 1979 election (Mannheimer and Sani, 2001; Tuorto, 2006), when an increase in the abstention rate was registered after three decades of high and stable levels of participation, and was confirmed in the following elections, especially in the last two decades, given the political earthquake of the 1990s. During that period, voter turnout in national general elections declined from 87% in 1992 to 75% in 2013, while the drop was even more dramatic in the European elections, from 73% in 1994 to 65% in 2009 up to a record low of 57% in 2014. This trend can also be generalized to all kinds of political elections.[1]

[1] A noticeable exception is represented by the constitutional referendum held in December 2016, which registered the highest turnout in Italian constitutional referenda, equal to 65.5%. Nonetheless, only three

Nonetheless, seminal studies on political participation in Italy considered electoral participation as a useless measure to study political behaviour because of the compulsory voting system (Martinotti, 1966a; Capecchi, 1968).[2] Regardless of the obligation to vote, which however does not lead to total compliance though it takes to a higher turnout rate (Jackman, 1987), until the 1970s, electoral participation in Italy did not represent a form of political activity that was interesting to analyse, since the percentage of non-voters was too low. On the contrary, in the same period, the study of political participation in the US was mainly focused on electoral participation, since back in the 1960s the percentage of non-voters in US presidential elections was already about 40%.

Nowadays, even within the Italian context, both the academic community and the public opinion acknowledge the crucial role of electoral participation within the framework of political participation. During electoral campaigns, politicians make efforts to take intended non-voters to the polls, and often attribute a negative electoral outcome to a failure in convincing a number of citizens to participate. Furthermore, when the news media provide information on the electoral results, the turnout rate is generally reported together with the vote shares for the main parties and candidates. With the substantial increase of the abstainers since the 1990s, scholars have also started to analyse their characteristics, by focusing in particular on the two categories of intermittent and chronical abstainers (Legnante and Segatti, 2001; Tuorto, 2006). Notwithstanding, the individual-level analyses of turnout in recent Italian elections suffer from two considerable methodological issues.

First, after the introduction of the privacy law in 2003, the access to individual voting records has become extremely complicated; therefore information on actual individual turnout is hardly available. Before the introduction of the law, several studies employed those official

constitutional referenda took place in the history of the Italian republic, and each referendum aimed at addressing different constitutional issues, thus comparison among turnout rates in those electoral races needs to be taken with caution.

[2] In Italy, the law on compulsory voting was abolished in 1993.

data sources in order to analyse socio-demographic factors coming from administrative data as predictors of individual turnout (Legnante and Segatti, 2001; Mannheimer and Sani, 2001; Corbetta and Tuorto, 2004; Tuorto, 2006). The paradox deals with the fact that this precious tool for research has been made almost unavailable just when the study of abstention was becoming more substantially relevant.

Second, self-reported measures of turnout in surveys are generally affected by a sizable overestimation of 10-15 percentage points. This represents a further issue in countries where the level of electoral participation is rather high (Karp and Brockington, 2005), like Italy. In such a situation, the scarce variability of the measure of self-reported turnout makes inference on the factors predicting turnout hard to draw.

These issues have discouraged scholars from shedding more light on the individual-level determinants of electoral participation in recent elections, with the exception of few studies concerning the effects of economic factors (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2014; Tuorto, 2014; Tuorto and Blais, 2014) and interpersonal networks (Guidetti, Cavazza, and Graziani, 2016). Nonetheless, although the individual data available on electoral participation suffer from the abovementioned shortcomings, more research is needed to better understand why people vote or do not vote in the various electoral races.

With the awareness of the methodological limitations concerning the study of electoral participation, this thesis aims at giving some contributions on the role played by some extra-individual factors of individual participation, with a focus on the Italian context. Since voters are not surrounded by a social vacuum where their choices only depend on their individual characteristics and the rational evaluation of costs and benefits, the study of their electoral participation has to move "beyond the worlds of individuals" (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993, p. 23). Indeed, voters are exposed on the one hand to political messages delivered by political parties and candidates or other individuals, and on the other hand to social interactions within

their networks. In other words, they are exposed to mobilization and interpersonal influence, which can thus affect in a number of ways their decision to turn out.

Citizens participate in elections, and more in general in politics, because they want, because they can, or because they are asked to (Brady, Scholzman, and Verba, 1995). Mobilization deals exactly with the third explanation, namely with the activities aimed at convincing an individual to vote for a specific candidate or party. Indeed, during electoral campaigns, political candidates and parties make an effort to persuade citizens to vote for them. In recent years, electoral campaigns have largely evolved towards a high level of professionalization, a differentiated use of media sources and an attention to specific target groups of voters (Farrell, 2002; Negrine et al., 2007). Political communication literature has devoted large attention to the transformation of electoral campaigns and the illustration of the features of recent electoral campaigns is widespread (Norris, 2000; Gibson and Rommele, 2009). Nonetheless, in the light of the decreasing trend of turnout, the assessment of the impact of the recent campaigns on electoral participation deserves further investigation, especially in the European context.

Moreover, electoral participation can be influenced by the informal networks citizens are embedded in. Therefore, by conversing with family members, friends, coworkers, and acquaintances, individuals expose one another to several pieces of information, which can condition the decision to participate or not. Various features of interpersonal influence can impact on participation, thus the scholars' interest consists in discovering under which conditions individual are less prone to participate. Nonetheless, with the exception of a single contribution (Guidetti, Cavazza, and Graziani, 2016), the relation between interpersonal influence and turnout has been poorly studied in the Italian context.

Are electoral campaigns mobilizing? And if so, to what extent? Does mobilization increase turnout? Which form of mobilization is the most effective? Does the network

political composition affect the electoral participation and how? By highlighting the salience of the concepts of *mobilization* and *interpersonal influence* within the framework of electoral politics, the aim of this thesis is to provide an answer to these general questions alongside more specific ones, analysing empirical evidence mainly but not exclusively concerning the Italian case.

The goal is to give new empirical insight to some relevant research questions within the conceptual framework of mobilization, interpersonal influence, and turnout, which is presented in Chapter 1. The three empirical chapters (Chap. 2-4) are thought both as integral pieces of this thesis and as single contributions to the literature of mobilization, interpersonal communication and political participation. Although Chapter 1 addresses the theoretical foundations of the whole thesis, every empirical chapter addresses specific theoretical issues strictly related to the research questions that are there tested.

Chapter 1. Mobilization, interpersonal influence and electoral participation: A theoretical framework

1.1. Main approaches to the study of electoral participation

Although research on electoral participation has been addressed by multiple and diverse points of view, it has traditionally focused on two main approaches, the first one inspired by the rational choice theory, the second one framed in the socio-structural analysis of political behaviour. Both the theoretical frameworks have been largely employed, though they do not succeed in providing a complete explanation of voter turnout dynamics since they suffer from some shortcomings. This does not mean that they fail in providing any kind of explanation of electoral participation, but that they need to be taken with caution when referred to as unifying theories. Next subsections (1.1.1 - 1.1.2) aim at giving an overview of the two approaches.

1.1.1 Rational choice approach

The first approach is based on the Downsian spatial model (1957), according to which voting is a function of costs and benefits, thus citizens decide to vote only if the benefits are higher than the costs. This kind of approach studies voter turnout in terms of expected utilities that every individual maximizes. Benefits are the product of two components: the expected utilities coming from the choice of a specific party, coalition or candidate against other possible choices, intended as benefits *in stricto sensu* (B), multiplied by the utility derived from the ability to influence the final outcome, in other words, the probability of casting a decisive ballot (p). Costs (C) are intended as opportunity costs (Blais, 2000), which include the time required to go to the polls and mark a ballot, collect information on candidates and parties, and register to vote for the countries which need it as for example the US. Thus, the

original formalization of the rational-choice model is simply synthesized by the following formula:

$pB - C$.

According to this model, citizens go to the polls only when the difference is positive. Therefore, when individuals do not express any preference because the difference of expected utilities is null or their vote does not have any influence on the final outcome, it means that they are indifferent to the elections, so they do not vote.

Rational choice model succeeds in identifying some of the factors that predict electoral participation. If we focus on the *p* term, for instance, we can understand why the population size and the closeness of an election are significant predictors of electoral participation (see Geys, 2006, for a meta-analysis on the determinants of voter turnout at the aggregate level); indeed, the larger (smaller) the population size (closeness of the electoral race), the lower (higher) the probability to cast a decisive ballot and the lower (higher) the likelihood for every individual to vote.

The aim of this model is to provide a unifying theory of voter turnout, which considers the characteristics of the electoral context as opportunity costs to obtain information about the electoral race. These are usually lower in first-order than in second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980), or, when close to an election, higher when the level of competition is higher. Although there are no reasons to discard the entire model, as it "provide(s) some helpful insights into why some people are more likely to vote than others and why turnout is higher and lower in certain places or times" (Blais, 2000, p. 15), it fails in giving a reasonable estimate of the turnout rate.

Indeed, by taking into account the original formulation of the rational choice theory on voter turnout, it is easy to see how only a few people (if any) would take part in an election because the probability to cast a decisive vote is infinitesimal. This is clearly a paradox, that

was also defined as “the Achilles’ heel of rational choice theory in political science” (Aldrich, 1997, p. 373), and goes against trivial empirical evidence. Downs himself realized the weakness of the model, but he did not manage to solve it. At a later stage, some reformulations of the original theory were suggested to overcome the problem. Riker and Ordershook (1968) introduced an additional component to the original function of voting, the *D* term, which stands for the sense of civic duty. Therefore, the revised formulation of the function of voting is expressed as follows:

$pB - C + D$.

Although this reformulation makes the theory more plausible and well addresses the paradox, it weakens some properties of the rational choice model. Indeed, since the D term is successful in overcoming the paradox, it means that it plays an important role in the model of electoral participation and, as a consequence, that rational choice theory fails in explaining why citizens vote (Aldrich, 1993). An alternative solution is proposed by Ferejohn and Fiorina (1974), who reject the Riker and Ordershook (1968) formulation, considered only functional to overcome the paradox, and proposed an alternative concept of rationality. According to them, the voting choice is made under uncertainty, because citizens are not able to estimate the probability of being decisive. Furthermore, rationality does not refer to as the *maximization of the expected utility*, but as the *minimization of the maximum regret*, thus citizens make the decision that minimizes their regret. However, even Ferejohn and Fiorina’s (1974) alternative conceptualization of rationality was highly criticized. Among the various criticisms, it can be simply underlined that it is rather doubtful that for every individual the stakes of an election are so high to provoke too much regret (Udehn, 1996).

As highlighted, various reformulations have tried to make the Downsian theory more efficient, nonetheless the rational choice approach presents some clear shortcomings, as it completely neglects the social context (Franklin, 2004) and the non-rational reasons to vote

(Grofman, 1993). Therefore, as Rolfe (2012, p. 9) underlines, "it remains difficult to adequately model voter turnout starting with a Downsian logic of costs and benefits", although some factors introduced in the model need to be framed in an ideal core model of voter turnout.

1.1.2 Socio-structural approach

An alternative to the Downsian paradigm is represented by the socio-structural approach (Almond and Verba, 1963; Milbrath, 1965; Verba and Nie, 1972), which argues that turnout is strongly dependent on the socio-economic status (the model is also defined as SES model). According to that model, high-status people (with high level of education, high occupational prestige and high wage) have a higher propensity to vote than low-status individuals; therefore core voters tend to participate in elections more frequently than peripheral ones. The SES model assigns a central role to education, which is "the key ingredient of any relationship between socioeconomic status and voting turnout''(Lewis-Beck et al., 2008, p. 102). Indeed, literature largely agrees on the fact that education is one of the most powerful predictor of electoral participation (Milbrath, 1965; Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Nie, Junn, and Sthelik-Barry, 1996). Nonetheless, also the socio-structural model of electoral participation fails in predicting the relationship between educational attainment and voter turnout at the aggregate level. Since education is placed at the beginning of the funnel of causality of voting (Campbell et al., 1960), the expectation is that a large increase of the general educational attainment, such as the one experienced in the Western countries during the last decades, would cause an increase of turnout. Instead, turnout has been decreasing over time. This is the paradox of the SES model, also referred to as a puzzle (Brody, 1978; Blais, Gidengil, and Nevitte, 2004; Burden, 2009). In order to solve the puzzle, Nie, Junn, and Sthelik-Barry (1996) suggest that the effect of educational attainments should not be intended as absolute but as relative to the average level of education of one's social environment. Therefore, since

educational level is a proxy for the social status, when the average educational level increases in a social environment, individuals need to have higher skills in order to reach the top of the status hierarchy. The underlying idea is that education affects the individual's social centrality in a network, which predicts electoral participation. Such a reformulation of the original SES model of electoral participation turnout helps to overcome the paradox, by highlighting the role of the social context in explaining turnout and its dynamics.

Further scholars have tried to go beyond the standard SES model, in order to understand not only who is voting but also why do people vote. The main contribution within this framework is given by Brady, Scholzman, and Verba (1995), who focus on the mechanism that links the socio-economic status to electoral participation. They outline the role that resources, namely time, money, and civic skills, the individual psychological involvement, and the recruitment networks can play in determining participation in politics. According to their theoretical framework, education has an indirect effect on turnout through those factors. The last explanation deals with the concept of mobilization, which will be discussed in depth as it represents a key-concept of the theoretical framework of the thesis.

The revised version of the SES model outlines the social nature of the act of voting, by providing a more comprehensive explanation of electoral participation. However, it does not examine in depth the focal part the context plays, here examined through its various meanings. In particular, this approach often neglects the electoral context "as a source of instrumental motivation" (Franklin, 2002, p. 153) that characterizes every democratic election. Furthermore, SES models seem to underestimate the role of political factors (McClurg, 2004), namely the influence of political parties and candidates, in explaining electoral participation.

1.2 Electoral participation in context

Despite a large number of scholars have studied electoral participation by endorsing more or less explicitly one of the approaches illustrated before, "almost everything of voter turnout is puzzling" (Franklin, 2004, p. XI). The models employed are so many that the current state of that strand of research is depicted as "the embarrassment of riches" (Smets and Van Ham, 2013, p. 356). This comes from the fact that the study of electoral participation should take into account a larger number of elements that account for the multi-faceted nature of the process. Moreover, electoral participation needs to be framed within context, which can be conceptualized at three different levels, characterized by growing degrees of specificity: the *institutional context*, the *temporal* or *campaign context*, and the *social context* (Franklin, 2004).

The *institutional context* includes every institutional feature that helps explaining the variations of the level of electoral participation within countries, and in some circumstances through time within the same country. Among the institutional factors that can affect electoral participation in every single country, a crucial role is played by the presence of compulsory voting (Powell, 1986; Jackman, 1987), still existing in some countries as Belgium and Australia, which by definition has a positive effect on voting. Other influencing institutional factors are represented by the registration laws, which are considered one of the causes of the low electoral participation in US (Powell, 1986), the electoral system, as turnout tends to be higher in proportional electoral systems (Blais and Dobrynska, 1998), and the voting age, since a lower voting age tends to correspond to a lower electoral participation (Blais and Dobrynska, 1998; Franklin, 2004).

The *temporal* or *campaign context* refers to the context of every specific election. It involves the electoral competitiveness, the stake of the elections and the electoral campaign. This contextual level can be split into two different levels, which I refer to as the *electoral*

context and the *campaign context*, which are however strictly interrelated. The *electoral context* involves both the level of competition and the stakes of the election. Electoral competitiveness deals with the closeness of the race and is also a standing point in the rational choice theory. The electoral stakes depend on the perceived importance of the policy level. Therefore, in first-order national elections, people tend to vote more than in second-order elections, such as European and local elections, because in the former there is more at stake compared to the latter (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). The *campaign context* instead specifically refers to the electoral campaign, which can influence electoral participation. Voters who are more exposed to the electoral campaign obtain more information on the election and are therefore more likely to participate (Franklin and Van Der Eijk, 1996; Lefevere and Van Aelst, 2014). Moreover, political parties, candidates, and groups can contact voters in a large variety of ways in order to encourage their participation and consequently producing mobilization efforts (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). The intensity of an electoral campaign is related both to the electoral competitiveness and to the electoral stakes, nonetheless the *campaign context* can exert an influence on turnout independently from the *electoral context*. Elections with similar levels of competitiveness and stakes could indeed be characterized by different levels of campaign intensity.

Social context refers to the social groups in which every individual is embedded. Citizens are integrated within different types of social structures in which they interact. Thus, they can learn about politics by obtaining political information through their social contacts (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1987) and, as a consequence, be more likely to vote (Schmitt-Beck and Mackenrodt, 2010). Moreover, we have to take into account the fact that social networks, along with the information exchange function, have also the role of affecting normatively the individual, by means of social rewards and punishments (Franklin, 2004). In other words,

people can be pushed to vote or to not vote by the individuals in their social surrounding, such as relatives, co-workers, and friends.

The traditional approaches to the study of electoral participation allows us to consider several factors which should never be neglected, as they can give a more comprehensive framework of turnout once integrated with the notion of context and all of its dimensions. A recent meta-analysis on the determinants of micro-level turnout, which reviewed 90 top-journal articles in the period 2000-2010, pointed out that the empirical studies on turnout often underspecify the models, both theoretically and empirically (Smets and Van Ham, 2013, p. 356). According to the authors, while the theoretical framework relative to the independent variable(s) of interest of the study is usually well-specified, low attention is generally devoted to the other factors that can have a substantial effect on electoral participation or confound the effect of the main independent variables. As they suggest, scholars should always add the core predictors as controls in their models, unless there are theoretical reasons to exclude them.

By taking into account all of the competing factors which influence turnout, the present work focuses on the role of the campaign and the social context in explaining electoral participation. If the institutional context generally deals with the electoral rules of a country, and the electoral context with characteristics of a specific election, both campaign and social context refer to the environmental factors related to the individual's exposure to information. Since individuals are exposed to a number of stimuli from the external environment, the study of participation has to move beyond an atomistic approach. The two notions of mobilization and interpersonal influence are well suited to address that issue.

1.3 Mobilization and turnout

Starting from the seminal Columbia studies (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1968), it has been generally acknowledged that the two

main functions of electoral campaigns consist in activating and reinforcing individual latent predispositions, while they are less effective in their ultimate goal, namely converting voters from a party to another. For that reason, scholars started to refer to campaign effects as minimal effects, whose nature was confirmed in several other studies (Finkel, 1993; Gelman and King, 1993). Therefore, as the main campaign effects are activation and reinforcement, campaigns mainly produce mobilization effects, namely an increase in the likelihood to turn out. Within the contextual theory of electoral participation, mobilization represents a characteristic of the campaign context. Nonetheless, the term 'mobilization' is often misused, thus the following lines will try to clarify its proper meaning.

1.3.1 The concept of mobilization

In common language, mobilization could be intended as the vote itself; citizens who mobilize themselves coincide with citizens who vote. Mobilization can be even seen as an inner characteristic of the individual, referred to as cognitive mobilization and defined as "one's inner predisposition to attend to politics" (Inglehart and Rabier, 1979, p. 484). As outlined, mobilization can have at least two different meanings, which do not necessarily relate to the actual concept of mobilization. Indeed, mobilization represents a classical example of conceptual stretching, as it includes both the voluntary participation and the external forces that move the individuals to participate (Sartori 1970, 2011). The latter deals with what is defined by Sartori (2011, p. 223) as mobilization *in strictu sensu*. In other words, "[w]e can say that individuals participate, but we cannot say about the same individuals that they mobilize – they *are mobilized*[3]" (Sartori, 1970, pp. 1050-1051). Mobilization indeed requires the presence of external forces, as well as external actors, that push the individual to participate.

[3] Italic characters come from the original quotation.

Within the electoral framework, mobilization indeed consists in a process preceding the election that can influence citizens to participate. More precisely, it is defined as ”the process by which candidates, parties, activists, and groups induce other people to participate” (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993, p. 25). The seminal studies debating the relevance of mobilization in the explanation of turnout have tried to integrate it with the main traditional approaches to the study of electoral participation. On the one hand, moving away from the rational choice approach, Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) argued that benefits and costs are able to explain electoral participation only partially, thus mobilization helps in subsidizing the costs of turnout by providing information regarding the election. On the other hand, Brady, Scholzman, and Verba (1995) employ the notion of mobilization (citizens vote because they are asked to) in order to overcome the traditional socio-structural model, as highlighted in subsection 1.1.2.

In their work on the decline of voter turnout in the US from the 1960s to the 1980s, Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) concluded that “Had candidates, parties, campaigns, interest groups, and social movements been as active in mobilizing voters in the 1980s as they were in the 1960s, even leaving the social structure and the condition of individual voters unchanged, reported voter participation would have fallen only 2.6 percent, rather than the 11.3 percent that it did” (p. 218). Although their analysis seems to overestimate the role of mobilization in the dynamics of electoral participation (Green and Schwam-Baird, 2016), it makes stressing its salience in the explanation of participation possible. The abovementioned meta-analysis on the determinants of micro-level turnout indeed argues that mobilization needs to be included in the core model of voter turnout (Smets and Van Ham, 2013).

Nonetheless, mobilization is a broad concept, which needs to be specified in its several facets in order to assess under which circumstances it boosts turnout and to which extent. The

concept can be declined at least in two main dimensions: *direct* and *indirect mobilization* (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993).

Direct mobilization, also defined as political mobilization (Inglehart and Rabier, 1979), deals with the "external factors, such as political parties or electoral campaigns, that can inform and motivate the individual to act politically" (Inglehart and Rabier, 1979, p. 484). Political candidates and parties are indeed incentivized to convince people to vote for them in order to fulfil a good electoral performance. *Direct mobilization* is achieved through the electoral campaign, which either encourages or discourages citizens to participate by exposing them to political information.

Indirect mobilization, also defined as *interpersonal mobilization*, is strictly connected to direct mobilization. Indeed, political parties and candidates can get in touch directly with a limited number of people, and these people can then spread the messages they receive through interpersonal communication. *Interpersonal mobilization* is thus activated indirectly by direct mobilization through social networks (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993).[4] According to Rolfe's (2012) social theory of political participation, in a hypothetical non-salient election, where no campaign activities are undertaken, the only citizens who vote would be the so called unconditional voters, the ones who vote independently from the process of mobilization. Moreover, this scenario would imply that the lack of *direct mobilization* resulted in the absence of *interpersonal mobilization*, given that *interpersonal mobilization* takes place within the *social context*, as Franklin's (2004) framework suggests.[5] Indeed, the identification of the two dimensions of mobilization allows us to detect how different contextual levels

[4] The logic of *indirect mobilization* is similar to the one of the 'two-step flow of communication' (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955).

[5] Anyhow, some argue that *interpersonal mobilization* is not completely derivative from *direct mobilization*. According to this perspective, within a social network individuals who are not candidates or party members can persuade other individuals to turn out although none of them have been contacted by a candidate or a party (McClurg, 2004). In other words, contrasting with Rolfe's (2012) theoretical model, even if no campaign activities are undertaken individuals can attempt to convince other individuals to vote through interpersonal conversation.

interrelate, in other words, how the *campaign context* activates the *social context* in order to amplify the effect of mobilization on turnout.

When testing mobilization effects on turnout, a good part of the literature analyses the effect of the whole campaign on participation in elections as an exogenous factor. This approach allows for testing whether a campaign has been able to increase turnout and to which extent, however, it cannot disentangle the effect of the various mobilization strategies on turnout. Both *direct* and *indirect mobilization* represent two broad dimensions of the concept of mobilization and can be expressed into several forms. Mobilizing messages can indeed vary in terms of mode of delivery, content, timing and a number of other features.

A recent strand of research, defined as Get Out The Vote (GOTV), has largely contributed to shed light on the nature of mobilization effects. By means of field experimental techniques, these studies analyse the effects of specific campaign messages that encourage people to vote on individual electoral participation, which are then measured through official voting records in an unbiased manner. Differently from the studies that consider electoral campaigns as black boxes that have an impact on various electoral outcomes, GOTV studies deal with specific mechanisms of the process of campaign mobilization. Moving from the seminal works of Gosnell (1927) and Eldersveld (1956), the first GOTV study was carried out in the context of New Haven mayor election (Gerber and Green, 2000), in an attempt to analyse the effects on voter turnout of non-partisan messages that encouraged people to vote. Gerber and Green's work gave birth to an impressive strand of GOTV research carried out mainly in the US context (for a review Green and Gerber, 2008; Green, Aronow, and McGrath, 2013), which is also growing in Europe, especially in the UK (John and Brannan, 2006, 2008; Fieldhouse et al., 2013) and in Denmark (Bhatti et al., 2015, 2017, 2018).

GOTV studies, and further studies on mobilization effects, have mainly focused on the assessment of the impact on turnout of *direct mobilization*, since the measurement of *indirect*

mobilization is rather complicated (see subsection 1.3.5, which offers a review of the few studies on *the interpersonal mobilization* effect on turnout). Therefore, when overviewing the mobilization effects on turnout by examining various features of mobilization messages (subsections 1.3.2 – 1.3.3) and the interplay between mobilization and other factors in influencing turnout (subsection 1.3.4), I refer to *direct mobilization*.

1.3.2 Forms of mobilization and turnout

Political parties contact voters through several modes that can be classified according to different criteria. The most employed criterion depends on the presence of a physical person that delivers the mobilizing message; hence mobilization techniques can be both *personal* and *impersonal*. A classic example of *personal mobilization* is represented by face-to-face interaction with a candidate, a party member or a volunteer, generally measured in GOTV research by means of door-to-door canvassing.[6] *Impersonal mobilization* is expressed through phone calls, direct mail, emails, text-messages, social networks, TV, radio and press advertisements and other mediated forms. Therefore, we refer to *impersonal mobilization* when the campaign message is delivered through every mean of communication.

Two different mechanisms attempt to explain the differentiated effects of personal and impersonal mobilization on turnout. These mechanisms are respectively explained by the Social Occasion Theory or the Noticeable Reminder Theory (Dale and Strauss, 2009).[7]

The Social Occasion Theory, largely employed within the GOTV research (Gerber and Green, 2000; Green and Gerber, 2008), argues that the necessary condition of mobilization 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

[6] Sometimes literature defines *personal mobilization* in terms of direct contacts. Nonetheless, direct contact does not necessarily imply *direct mobilization*, as an individual could be personally contacted by another individual who has been contacted by a political party or candidate. For this reason, in the thesis I will always employ the expression *personal mobilization* instead of direct contacting, in order not to create confusion between direct mobilization and direct modes of contacting.

[7] These two labels were first introduced in Dale and Strauss (2009).

connection with the electoral process" (Green and Gerber, 2008, p. 45), and it is therefore more successful in increasing the individual motivation to participate. 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 mobilization does not involve the social connection but 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 *impersonal* messages, which do not include any element of social connection, can increase the likelihood of turnout.[8] 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.

Since Gerber and Green's (2000) study, empirical evidence has corroborated both of the theories, by showing that *personal mobilization* is generally more effective than *impersonal one*. Nonetheless, even among the *impersonal mobilization* techniques, the presence of elements of personal *mobilization* can vary and therefore produce differentiated effects on turnout. In other words, although *personal* and *impersonal mobilization* are two separate dimensions, it could be argued that some *impersonal mobilization* 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. The forms of mobilization 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, p. 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

[8] Their argumentation, indeed, moves from the effectiveness of text messages.

Social Occasion Theory can be reformulated 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.

Anyhow, every medium of delivery has a different impact on turnout.

A meta-analysis of 71 door-to-door canvassing experiments, whose large majority was carried out in the US, reported a 2.5 percentage point average effect[9] of *personal* contact on turnout (Green, Aronow, and McGrath, 2013). Focusing on the European context, where a smaller number of GOTV studies were carried out, the effect of *personal mobilization* on turnout proved to be lower than in the US; a meta-analysis examining 9 GOTV studies in 6 European countries proved the average effect[10] of door-to-door canvassing positive, but equal to 0.8 percentage points and significant only at the 90% level (Bhatti et al., 2017). Although further research is needed to compare the effects of *personal mobilization* on turnout between the American and the European context, the existent studies suggest that contextual characteristics could interact with *personal mobilization*. In particular, 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 mobilization message (Schmitt-Beck, 2016; Bhatti et al., 2016). *Personal mobilization* does not, however, deal with only 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. Those further forms of contact have not however been analysed by means of GOTV research.

[9] 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, p. 137).
[10] CACE effect.

Looking at the *impersonal mobilization*, several studies have assessed the impact of the various mediated forms on turnout. However, they generally proved to be less effective than door-to-door canvassing. Regardless of the partisan or nonpartisan nature of the message, conventional direct mails result in a very small but positive effect on turnout, equal to 0.2 percentage points measured on the results of 110 experiments[11] (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).

In contrast with Gerber and Green's (2000) findings, even phone calls have produced a significant increase in turnout in a large number of studies (Green, Aronow, and McGrath, 2013). If we consider phone-calls, while the most *impersonal* ones are the pre-recorded calls and their effect on turnout in 11 treatments is equal to 0.2 percentage points and not significant, live calls from commercial (25 treatments) and volunteers phone banks (37 treatments) make the turnout increase of 1.0 and 1.9 percentage points respectively[12] (Green, Aronow, and McGrath, 2013). According to the only two experiments carried out in Europe - at the best of my knowledge - coming from the UK, phone calls 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 a massive use of phone calls as it happens in the US (John and Brannan, 2008).

Another form of *impersonal mobilization* is represented by text messages, which are well suited for large-scale campaigns, as they can reach a large number of people in only a few seconds. Few studies have assessed their impact on turnout, all of them reporting positive

[11] 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.
[12] All the effects of phone calls are expressed in terms of CACE.

effects but different in size. In particular, the first experiment, carried out in the US, registered a sizeable effect of 3 percentage points (Dale and Strauss, 2009), comparable to *personal mobilization* effects. Another study reported a positive effect of 0.8-0.9 percentage points in the US context (Malhotra et al., 2011), while a recent study carried out in Denmark, the only one published concerning the European context, found a similar pooled effect of four different experiments, equal to 0.7 percentage points (Bhatti et al., 2017). However, as pointed out by Bhatti and colleagues (2017), those two studies seem to provide more plausible and externally valid findings, as in Dale and Strauss's study (2009), had already established a connection with one of the partner organization of the experiment.[13]

Furthermore, email messages share various features with text messages and especially the potential to contact a broad audience within a short period of time. Nonetheless, limited existing research shows mixed evidence on their impact of turnout, which has proved to be insignificant (Nickerson, 2007a) or small but positive (Malhotra, Michelson, and Valenzuela, 2012).[14]

Although previous research tends to confirm the higher efficacy of *personal mobilization* in boosting turnout, we need to take into account the costs of *personal mobilization*. While some *impersonal mobilization* techniques, such as text-messages and emails, require a minimum effort in terms of money and time, door-to-door canvassing is largely demanding. Moreover, "the more personal the interaction, the harder it is to reproduce on a large scale" (Green and Gerber, 2008, p. 10). Therefore, when evaluating the efficacy of *personal* and *impersonal mobilization*, both scholars and electoral campaigners should take into account the trade-off between the mobilization effect and the effort to undertake such activities. In this regards, a relevant contribution of GOTV research stands in providing the cost of every additional vote obtained through a mobilization campaign.

[13] They registered to vote with that organization and subscribed to an agreement concerning the reception of communications.
[14] A broader overview on the effects of email messages on turnout is provided in Chapter 3.

As previously mentioned, the forms of mobilization can be categorized according to other criteria in relation to the medium of delivery. We thus refer to *online mobilization* when the message is delivered through the web, and to *offline mobilization* when it is delivered otherwise. Going back to *personal* and *impersonal mobilization*, while *personal mobilization* necessarily deals with *offline mobilization*, the modes of *impersonal mobilization* could be classified into *online* and *offline mobilization* depending on the medium of delivery. Moving from Aldrich and colleagues' typology (2016), *online mobilization* is expressed by means of emails, social media, and websites.[15] Despite the increasing potential and the resulting employment of *online mobilization*, previous research has showed mixed findings towards the effects of emails on turnout, as previously outlined. By employing observational data, Aldrich and colleagues (2016) did not find a significant measure effect on turnout of *online mobilization* in neither in the UK nor the US. In relation to social media, an impressive large-scale experiment on 61 million Facebook users registered an increase of 0.4 percentage points in actual turnout in the 2010 US congressional election. The experiment was carried out on individuals who had received a Facebook message showing them information on the polling place and a list of 6 random Facebook friends who had already voted[16] (Bond et al., 2012). However, messages containing only information on polling stations did not have any effect on turnout.

An additional distinction is based on the campaigning style of a political party and, specifically, on the adoption of old or new mobilization techniques. For this purpose, a distinction between *traditional campaigning*, *e-campaigning,* and *modern campaigning* has been recently suggested (Fisher et al., 2016). While *traditional campaigning* is characterized

[15] According to that typology, text messages are included within *online mobilization* because of the purposes of their paper. They argue that text messages represent a hybrid form because, on the one hand they represent a form of phone contact, which deals with *offline mobilization*, but on the other hand they constitute a new form of communication similar to other forms of web contacting. Nonetheless, the latter argumentation does not seem to fit with the dimensions of *online* and *offline mobilization*, but with further dimensions of the concept of mobilization. Therefore, it seems more reasonable to treat text messages as a form of *offline mobilization*.

[16] That strategy includes an element of interpersonal influence within an on-line mobilizing message. Section 1.4 provides an overview of the relationship between interpersonal networks and electoral participation.

by face-to-face interactions and the use of leaflets and posters, *modern campaigning* involves phone calls and direct mail, (using computers only to organize contacts), and *e-campaigning* employs text-messages, emails, and social media. By employing constituency-level data coming from the UK 2010 election to test the impact of the different campaigning styles on turnout, Fisher and colleagues (2016) provided similar evidence to GOTV findings: *traditional campaigning* is the most effective, *modern campaigning* is also effective, while *e-campaigning* proves not to increase turnout.

In sum, an adequate conceptualization of mobilization that considers the various characteristics of the medium of delivery helps in shedding light on the different dimensions of mobilization and their impact on turnout. However, scholars need to be careful and measure these dimensions in a rightful manner, in order to avoid the overlapping of the dimensions themselves.

1.3.3 Content, timing of mobilization, and turnout

Political parties and candidates contact voters by means of various media, but the messages delivered differ in content and timing. Which phrasing is most effective in boosting turnout? And when should parties and candidates contact voters in order to maximize the mobilization effect on turnout? The Social Occasion Theory and the Noticeable Reminder Theory offer two different explanations.

According to the Social Occasion Theory content does matter: the hypothesis is that messages with more personal contents produce higher effects on turnout, as they increase the level of social connection. On the contrary, the Noticeable Reminder Theory suggests that content should not matter, since mobilization messages simply have to remind voters to turn out, despite the phrasing of the message.

Nonetheless, even among the *impersonal mobilization* techniques, the presence of elements of personal *mobilization* can vary and therefore determine differentiated effects on

turnout. In other words, although *personal* and *impersonal mobilization* represent two separate dimensions, it could be argued that some *impersonal mobilization* techniques are *more personal* than others.

Several GOTV studies have been carried out to test these hypotheses, but the empirical evidence does not lead to a unique conclusion. Gerber and Green (2000) varied the content of the appeal of personal canvassing in terms of civic duty, neighbourhood solidarity[17] and closeness of the election. Similarly, Dale and Strauss (2009) sent text messages appealing respectively to civic duty and closeness of the election. In the Danish context, Bhatti et al. (2017) compared the effects of text messages underlining respectively civic duty and political conflict[18]. Although the studies did not find significant and different effects of the diverse contents (Gerber and Green, 2000; Dale and Strauss, 2009; Bhatti et al., 2017), they provide some empirical evidence for the Noticeable Reminder hypothesis; however, they do not directly refer to the Social Occasion hypothesis, as the content of the message does change, but not in terms of personalization of the message.

Nevertheless, content matters when it touches elements of social pressure, which proved to have a higher effect on turnout than other types of messages (Green, Aronow, and McGrath, 2013). For example, mobilizing direct mail that contains the turnout history of the household or the neighbourhood, and informs on the publicity of the individual turnout, was found to be more effective than direct mail simply appealing to civic duty (Gerber, Green, and Larimer, 2008). Nonetheless, sometimes such explicit social pressure might seem like a violation of the voter's privacy and may produce backlash effects (Matland and Murray, 2013). Other studies have tested the effects of direct mails containing implicit social pressure – e.g. showing a picture of human eyes – on turnout, but report mixed findings

[17] When appealing to neighborhood solidarity, the messages stressed the importance of reaching a high turnout in the neighborhood in order to make the neighborhood's voice heard among the politicians.
[18] Political conflict messages stated that politicians disagree on political matters, and thus invited to vote for the candidate with whom the voter agreed the most (Bhatti et al., 2017, p. 300)

(Panagopoulos, 2014; Matland and Murray, 2016). Given that social pressure messages are in general more effective than others in increasing the turnout, the Noticeable Reminder hypothesis, which states that the content does not matter, fails in predicting the effect of various contents on the turnout. On the other hand, the Social Occasion hypothesis does not mention social pressure, even though it argues that different contents can produce differentiated effects on turnout. The two above-mentioned theories are thus able to provide only a partial explanation of the relationship between mobilizing content and turnout. Instead, a more plausible explanation can be provided by the socio-psychological literature, according to which individuals are more likely to conform to normative instructions when exposed to social pressure (Cialdini and Goldstein, 2004; Gerber, Green, and Larimer, 2008), such as the case in which their behaviour is publicized.

If we consider the timing of the mobilization, the Social Occasion Theory hypothesizes that timing does not matter. Following this hypothesis, the social connection created by the mobilization efforts can take place in every circumstance of the electoral campaign, and produces similar positive effects on turnout. On the contrary, the timing of the message plays a key role within the framework of the Noticeable Reminder theory, as "the reminders must be close to the election to be relevant"(Dale and Strauss, 2009, p. 792).

Looking at existent empirical evidence, previous GOTV experiments give some support to the Noticeable Reminder theory. Nickerson (2007b) empirically proved that phone calls are successful in increasing turnout only when made during the week before the election, while Murray and Matland (2014) found that in Wisconsin direct mails sent four days before the election had a 2.6 percentage points higher effect on turnout than direct mails sent eight days before the election. Nonetheless, a similar mailing experiment carried out in Texas did not register an effect of timing (Murray and Matland, 2014). Moreover, in Denmark Bhatti and colleagues (2017) provided only partial evidence of the stronger effect of text messages

delivered on the last days of the campaign compared to those delivered on the Election Day itself. In sum, there is partial evidence towards the Noticeable Reminder hypothesis on a timing effect on turnout; nonetheless, future research in other contexts is needed to provide a more robust assessment of that effect.

1.3.4 Who is mobilized? For which type of election?

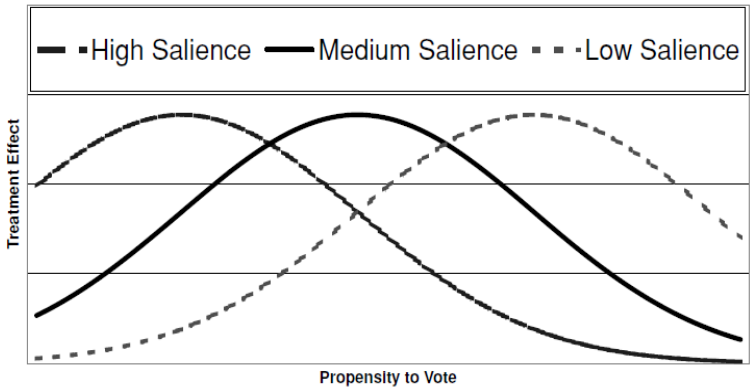
Despite the modality of party contacting, mobilization effects on turnout can vary among types of voters, according to their latent propensity to turn out, which is thought as an enduring individual trait (Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009). The ultimate goal of an electoral campaign is to increase by means of mobilization efforts the individual propensity to turn out in that election. Individual turnout, in turn, is seen as a probabilistic function of that propensity. Although the baseline propensity is thought to be strictly dependent on a number of variables, above all we find the past voting behaviour (Niven, 2004). Indeed, while high-propensity voters tend to turn out in every election, moderate-propensity voters are intermittent and tend to vote only in some elections, whereas low-propensity voters seldom go to the polls. High-propensity voters are also more likely to be contacted than low-propensity ones as they are more socially central and more involved in politics. As explained in the socio-structural theories of turnout (subsection 1.1.2), voters with a high propensity to turn out differ in the socio-demographics, on average, from voters with a low propensity to turn out, therefore mobilization can reduce or enlarge social disparities in participation. While a reduction of the participation gap fosters equality in participation (Enos, Fowler, and Vavreck, 2014), an increase of the gap has the negative consequence of exacerbating the political underrepresentation of more peripheral, disadvantaged citizens. Despite the likelihood of being contacted, previous literature argues that mobilization produces differentiated effects on turnout depending on the interplay between the individual propensity to turnout and the electoral context.

The theoretical foundations come from Zaller's Receive-Accept-Sample model (1992). According to this framework, an individual attitude change on a political issue is considered as a function of campaign intensity[19] 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 voters, 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 mind when receiving a piece of information. This theoretical framework seems suitable also for the explanation of changes in turnout intentions, when considering an attitude change the shift from the intention not to vote to the intention to vote (and the consequent behaviour). The theory of contingent mobilization (Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009) indeed argues, and empirically proves, that mobilization interacts with the individual propensity to turn out and the salience of the election in affecting turnout. More in detail, the theory assumes that a latent variable dealing with the individual decision to turn out in a particular election is equal to the sum of the individual latent propensity to turn out and the level of mobilization of the campaign. When the value of the latent variable exceeds a certain threshold, which is inversely proportional to the salience of an election (namely, the higher is the threshold, the lower is the salience of the election), the individual is expected to turn out; otherwise, she is expected not to vote. Model implications come to light by looking at the peaks of the three distributions in Figure 1.1. While in high-salience elections campaigns are able to increase the turnout mostly among voters with a low propensity to participate, in low-salience elections campaigns are most effective in increasing turnout among high-propensity voters, whereas in medium-salience elections the highest effect is

[19] 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 in radio and TV or front-page space in newspapers). Campaign intensity is strictly related to the electoral context.

expected among moderate-propensity voters.[20] In other words, in high-salience elections mobilization effects are supposed to be affected by a ceiling effect for high-propensity voters; the large majority of them intend to vote independently from the mobilization efforts, therefore whenever the effect of mobilization on turnout is detected, it is mainly registered among low-propensity voters. Instead, in low-salience elections mobilization efforts are less effective in convincing low-propensity voters to turn out, as their perceived stakes on electoral outcomes are considerably lower, and mobilization is less able to subsidize the higher cost of participation. Therefore, in this kind of election, there is more room to mobilize high-propensity voters, as they are, on average, less likely to turn out than in high-salience elections.

Figure 1.1. Theory of contingent mobilization. Hypothesized effects of mobilization on turnout by individual propensity to turn out and salience of the election.



Source: Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009, p. 4

The theory of contingent mobilization was also applied to 24 GOTV face-to-face experiments (Enos, Fowler, and Vavreck, 2014), which provided further empirical evidence to explain the exacerbated participation gap in low-salience elections. Nonetheless, it was

[20] The theory of contingent mobilization has been mainly applied to the US context, where scholars distinguish among high, medium, and low salience elections because of the high number of elections and the large variability in turnout among the types of elections. According to this categorization, medium salience elections deal with the US mayoral and congressional elections (Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009). In the European context, where the variability is less pronounced, scholars tend to simply distinguish between first and second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980), which can be considered as equivalent of respectively high and low salience election (Bhatti, Hansen, and Wass, 2016).

found the mobilization effect to be higher among high-propensity than low-propensity voters even in high-salience elections, in contrast with Arceneaux and Nickerson's (2009) theory. According to Enos and colleagues' (2014) argument, high-propensity voters are always more responsive to mobilization than low-propensity ones, thus political parties need to concentrate their efforts on the latter category in order to avoid the increase of political inequalities. Further research could shed more light on the mobilization effect on the participation gap since by now GOTV research has mainly analysed the overall effect of the various mobilization techniques on turnout.

1.3.5 The effects of interpersonal mobilization on turnout

When the concept of mobilization was introduced, the idea that parties and candidates could get in touch with voters indirectly, thanks to the interpersonal communication, became an issue of interest. Parties have become more and more aware of the potential of the *interpersonal mobilization*, in particular since the diffusion of the social media (Grandi and Vaccari, 2013). They acknowledge that only a limited number of individuals can be directly contacted, but an efficient *direct mobilization* can have cascade effects on a larger number of voters. However, very few empirical studies have assessed both the magnitude of *interpersonal mobilization* and its effect on turnout. The measurement of *interpersonal mobilization* suffers indeed from several issues, in particular when observational data are employed. An accurate measurement requires indeed gathering information on both the individuals who have been contacted by parties and on the members of their social networks. Anyhow, these data sources are extremely rare.

One of the most relevant empirical contributions comes from McClurg (2004) who used the South Bend data collected during the 1984 US presidential election (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1987). Those data represent a unique data source for the study of political networks thanks to the adoption of a snowball sampling, which allowed researchers to interview both

the sampled individual and their discussants. The analysis provides evidence toward the actual presence of *interpersonal mobilization*, which spreads mainly through what the author defines as '*behavioral contagion'*. On average, respondents contacted by a party proved to be 15 percentage points more likely to persuade a discussant to vote than respondents who were not contacted.[21] Furthermore, though the effect of *interpersonal mobilization* on turnout was not estimated, the discussants' likelihood of working for the campaign and attending meetings seemed to increase when the party contacted the respondent directly. In particular, among politically interested discussants, the increase was of respectively 6 and 10 percentage points.

When the effect of *interpersonal mobilization* is analysed through survey data, it could be confused with the effect of other external factors: indeed, other forms of campaign exposure are not necessarily measured in surveys but may affect the turnout of indirectly contacted individuals in a non-random manner. Furthermore, more than one member of the same network could be directly contacted, hence accurately disentangling the effect of *direct* and *indirect mobilization* becomes rather hard (Nickerson, 2008). However, these issues could be overcome by the adoption of an experimental design and thanks to randomization. However, such a design needs a high level of experimental control, since it has to guarantee that the treatment is only delivered to the subjects assigned to the treatment group and not to their social network peers excluded from the treatment group.

A remarkable experimental design comes from Nickerson (2008). The experiment consisted in delivering door-to-door messages to households with two registered voters in which the cohabitant who opened the door received either a GOTV message or a recycling pitch. The effect of GOTV on the turnout of the message recipient proved to be equal to 9.8 percentage points. More interestingly, the likelihood of turnout of the other member of the household registered a 6 percentage points increase when their cohabitant received the

[21] The frequency of political communication of the main discussants does not significantly vary with party contacting; therefore, little evidence was given towards what McClurg (2004) defines as '*informational contagion'*.

mobilizing message.[22] It was estimated that the message recipient, when their turnout is affected by the mobilizing message, influenced the electoral participation of the other household member in about 60% of the cases. That outstanding experiment succeeds in empirically studying the whole process of mobilization, and leads to the substantive conclusion that voting can be contagious to a sizeable extent. Nonetheless, the complexity of carrying out such experiments with an adequate level of internal validity has reflected in the paucity of empirical research (among the few exceptions, see Sinclair, McConnell, and Green, 2012).

Moreover, the same categorization associated with the concept of *direct mobilization* can be applied to the concept of *indirect mobilization.* Regardless the way in which *indirect mobilization* is referred to (namely, whether it is totally derivative from direct mobilization or it also includes individual attempts to persuasion independently from the campaign-stimulated process), forms of *indirect mobilization* could be classified in *online* and *offline* (Aldrich et al., 2016). For instance, when an individual attempts to persuade other individuals to vote through emails and/or social media, or when she shares with them campaign messages coming from candidates and parties, we can refer to it as *indirect online mobilization*. Conversely, when they try to convince people to vote through face-to-face conversations, calls, and text messages, we are dealing with *indirect offline mobilization*. Similarly to direct mobilization effects, in a study on the UK and the US Aldrich et al. (2016) found the indirect offline contacts are associated to a higher turnout, while the same does not apply from indirect online contacts. As well, we can apply to indirect mobilization even the distinction between personal and impersonal forms, and furthermore in terms of the continuum from the most personal to the most impersonal forms where the most personal one is represented by face-to-face contacts. On the contrary, when considering emails as an example of impersonal

[22] This effect is referred to as *spillover effect* (Sinclair, McConnell, and Green, 2012).

mobilization, the most impersonal form could consist of an email where an individual only shares with another individual a campaign message. Instead, an email where an individual writes a text for convincing another to vote should be considered as less impersonal. Analogously, such an example could be applied to the other impersonal forms.

1.4 The social logic of participation

As previously argued, the decision to turnout is conditional to a wide array of factors, most of which do not pertain to individual characteristics. According to Franklin's (2004) contextual theory of turnout, a key role in the explanation of electoral participation is played by the social context the individual is embedded in. If we consider the impact the *social context* has on participation, we cannot ignore the role of the interpersonal networks where individuals interact.

Within the study of voting behaviour, the salience of social circles in shaping individual political preferences has been addressed since the seminal Columbia school studies (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1968). After a long predominance of atomistic approaches to the study of political behaviour and therefore of electoral participation, the largely neglected network-cantered approach has emerged as a renewed scholars' interest in the last three decades within the framework of the *social logic of politics* (Zuckerman, 2005; see also Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1987, 1995; Mutz, 2002; McClurg 2006).

If we go back to the process of *indirect mobilization*, it is argued whether interpersonal networks can amplify mobilization messages to a larger audience (subsection 1.3.4). However, social networks can influence the decision to turn out independently from *indirect mobilization* (McClurg, 2004). When dealing with the effect of *interpersonal influence* on political participation, by paraphrasing Zuckerman's (2005) formula, we can refer to it as

social logic of participation. There are various ways in which interpersonal networks exert an influence on turnout, depending on the network members' turnout, on the frequency and quality of political conversations, and on the political views of the network members.

According to the social theory of political participation (Rolfe, 2012), voter turnout should be thought as a *conditional choice*. This means that "turnout decision is best represented as a conditional cooperative response to cooperative decisions made by friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers[…]. Sometimes a handful of people are willing to cooperate if enough other people will do the same, whereas some people will not cooperate under any circumstances" (Rolfe, 2012, p. 4). Therefore, despite *interpersonal mobilization*, turnout can be contagious. Being part of a network in which most of the associates go to the polls, makes the individual's likelihood to turn out increase, especially when it occurs in the family network (Schmitt-Beck and Mackenrodt, 2010). Although individuals are hardly aware of the definitive turnout behaviour of their associates, interpersonal networks can indeed transmit normative views towards participation by means of social interactions (Leighley 1990), which can condition the final decision to turn out. Indeed, it seems that when individuals perceive normative views toward electoral participation among their family members, they are more likely to turn out (Schmitt-Beck and Mackenrodt, 2010).

Moreover, social networks can influence electoral participation through the exchange of information (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995). Citizens are embedded in networks in which they hold conversations concerning several topics, including political issues. Therefore, the mechanism would be that individuals share political information by conversing with other individuals (McClurg, 2003). According to this mechanism, when individuals talk about politics they gain information on the candidates, the party positions, and more in general on the electoral process. Therefore, they get more politically involved, and it works as a driver to their turnout. The function of the social networks is thus to "accrue resources that lower the

barriers to political participation" (McClurg 2003, p. 450). The frequency of political discussion within the network has indeed proved to be positively related to voter turnout (McClurg 2003; Klofstad 2007, 2015). Furthermore, the quality of those conversations can have a crucial impact on voters' participation as well. The key element that increases the quality of a political conversation within the social network is the level of political expertise of its members. As argued in McClurg (2006), discussing politics with politically expert associates helps in getting clearer information, and consequently in being more confident on personal political views. This "establishes a more secure attitudinal foundation for involvement" (McClurg, 2006, p. 740), also reflecting in a higher propensity to turn out.

Another feature of social networks that can influence individuals' electoral participation is their political composition. Individuals are embedded in networks where components hold similar or mixed political views, and these political views can correspond or differ from the ones of the individuals themselves. In other words, voters can experience *disagreement*, namely the "interaction among citizens who hold divergent viewpoints and perspectives regarding politics" (Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague, 2004, pp. 3-4). Nonetheless, the empirical assessment of the effect of networks' disagreement on turnout has provided mixed evidence. Several works (e.g. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1968; Mutz, 2002) have stressed a negative relation between *disagreement* and electoral participation. According to these studies, people exposed to high levels of *disagreement* are more likely to remain undecided until the election day, or are less motivated to participate so as to preserve the harmony of their network and avoid arguments. However, a recent line of research has introduced a different perspective by showing that disagreement does not always depress turnout. *Some* forms of *disagreement* - a situation in which some discussants agree and some others do not - can indeed increase it. According to this view, a diverse network enhances a more passionate partisanship attitude and commitment (Eveland and Hively, 2009; Nir, 2011;

Bello, 2012; Lupton and Thornton, 2017), which leads eventually to a much more vivid political debate and a higher propensity for individuals to turn out.[23]

Finally, *intimacy* has proved to be crucial in shaping the way people are affected by their social network (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995; Erisen and Erisen, 2012; Bello and Rolfe, 2014). Since more intimate relationships are thought to exert a higher normative pressure (Faas and Schmitt-Beck, 2010; Partheymuller and Schmitt-Beck, 2012), they are generally expected to have a stronger influence on electoral participation. Indeed, if we take into consideration all the above-mentioned network characteristics aimed at influencing the turnout, it seems that while normative positions toward participation among friends do not affect the individual turnout, they do among family, as reported before (Schmitt-Beck and Mackenrodt, 2010). Similarly, the positive effect of the frequency of political conversation on participation in electoral activities proves to be larger when the main discussant is the spouse or another family member other than a friend (McClurg, 2003). Nonetheless, scant evidence on the role of intimacy regarding the relationship between disagreement and turnout has been provided up to now, although it could be crucial for a better understanding of the social logic of participation. Indeed, the higher coercion that characterizes more intimate relationships makes disagreement more difficult to be sustained, On the contrary, a social circle characterized by less intimate relationships can render disagreement more bearable, and thus leading to a more intense exchange of ideas. As a consequence, the differentiated experience of disagreement in a social network can be reflected in a different relationship between disagreement and turnout. Depending on the level of intimacy with discussants, the mechanisms explaining the effects of disagreement on turnout could be different. Mechanisms are explained in detail in Chapter 4

[23] Mechanisms that explain the relationship between disagreement and turnout are examined in Chapter 4.

1.5 The contribution of the dissertation

Moving from the theoretical framework here presented, the empirical chapters aims at investigating the role played by *mobilization* and *interpersonal influence* in affecting electoral participation. Nonetheless, these chapters will not cover all the features of mobilization and interpersonal influence, and their effects on turnout. Instead, they are thought to provide empirical evidence to some theoretically relevant research questions within this framework, which have been little investigated so far.

Most of the existent research on mobilization, interpersonal influence, and turnout has been carried out in the US, which however represents "an outlier with respect to important aspects of political behaviour and the political system" (Hopmann, 2012, p. 266) compared to European countries. Some of those aspects can have an impact on the nature of mobilization and interpersonal influence, and accordingly, on their relationship with electoral participation. First, the difference in the voting system between the US (majoritarian) and most of the European countries (proportional representation)[24] can affect the forms of mobilization; majoritarian systems are more candidate-centered, therefore the forms of mobilization are more focused on the candidate, while in proportional representation systems they are more focused on the party (Bhatti et al., 2016). Furthermore, party contacts have proved to be less frequent in proportional representation systems (Karp, Banducci, and Bowler, 2008), and the level of professionalization of campaigns is far lower in the European than in the US (Aldrich et al., 2016, see Section 2.1). Second, the impact of interpersonal influence can vary from a two-party system (like the US) to a multi-party system (like European countries). Differently from contexts with a two-party system, in contexts characterized by a multi-party system the experience of the same amount of political disagreement in a social network can have indeed several meanings. Namely, when one individual is embedded in a network where the

[24] This consideration applies for most of the European countries, but not for their totality (e.g. France and the UK, which the voting system is majoritarian).

members support a different party from the one supported by the individual, they could all support a single party or alternatively two or more parties. Therefore, in multi-party systems, the various experience of the same amount of disagreement could produce differentiated effects on turnout, while the same cannot be extended to two-party systems. Moreover, levels of disagreement prove to be higher in multi-party systems (Smith, 2015).

Empirical evidence shown in this thesis is mainly referred to the Italian context, which shares with the other European countries most of the abovementioned characteristics (the same applies for the Austrian context, which represents the case study of Chapter 2 together to the Italian one). Therefore, findings are meant to give some insights into the role of mobilization and interpersonal networks in influencing electoral participation in Western European countries characterized by multi-party systems and a proportional representation voting systems. Nevertheless, since the thesis does not adopt a fully comparative design, future research is needed to test whether the results here provided could be actually generalized to the other European countries.

Next paragraphs briefly illustrate every empirical chapter, by highlighting their potential contribution to the existent literature.

By focusing on the Austrian and the Italian case, where the 2013 National Elections registered the lowest turnout record, Chapter 2 will try to disentangle the effects of mobilization on participation by integrating two empirical strategies. First, it explores the dynamics of campaign effects on measures of latent participation in the two countries. This first set of analysis allows testing whether electoral campaigns are successful in increasing the political predispositions in contexts characterized by a long decline in electoral participation. It thus contributes in understanding at a first glance whether mobilization has to be thought as a crucial factor in the negative trend of turnout. Second, it analyses the effect on self-reported turnout of various forms of party contacting, both personal and impersonal, as measures of

direct mobilization. Since the study of the different forms of party-contacting and their effects has remained somehow underdeveloped in the Western European countries, this chapter will thus help in understanding which mobilization strategies are more successful. Because of data availability, this section only focuses on the Austrian case, which shares several features with the Italian one, especially concerning electoral participation. Data come from the Austrian National Election Study (Autnes) and Italian National Election Study (Itanes) Rolling Cross-Section Panel 2013. These data sources make it possible to analyse the campaign effects dynamically through LOWESS estimations of the daily means of measures of latent participation. At the same time, they allow us to take under control the propensity to turn out before the elections whilst studying the effects of party contacting on self-reported turnout (by means of logistic regression models).

Chapter 3 still analyses the relation between *direct mobilization* and turnout, especially focusing on the effect of *online mobilization*, in terms of email messages. Since in the European context no empirical assessment of the impact of e-mail campaigning on turnout has been provided yet, this chapter aims at filling this gap by adopting an original research design. It employs field experimental data coming from a Get Out The Vote (GOTV) campaign carried out in the context of the elections for the students' representatives of the University of Trento. The experiment tests whether a non-partisan email message sent before the election inviting to vote increases the individual probability to turn out. The population was randomized in four groups: three of them received an official email from the communication office of the university encouraging them to participate in the election (treatment groups), while the fourth group received no messages (control group). Each treated group received a message with different content randomly sent either one or five days before the election. This chapter aims at integrating the findings of the second chapter by employing a methodology that guarantees a higher internal validity, and by testing the effect of online

mobilization, which could not be tested in the previous chapter. The chapter also explores the determinants of participation in university elections, which have been scarcely investigated before.

While the second and the third chapter could be considered as complementary and aim at giving a broader assessment of mobilization - especially *direct mobilization* - on turnout, the Chapter 4 deals instead with the role played by interpersonal networks in influencing turnout. This chapter analyses the relationship between the level of *disagreement* an individual perceives in her social circles and turnout. In particular, the chapter aims at providing some new theoretical insights into the explanation of this relationship. Since individuals are embedded in various social circles, which are characterized by different levels of cohesiveness, the main aim of the chapter is to provide an empirical answer to the following research question: Does cohesiveness matter in explaining the relationship between disagreement and turnout? By separately studying the effects of disagreement in family and friends' networks and employing 2013 Itanes Rolling-Cross Section data, the shape of the relation is analysed. The chapter thus argues that the insights of previous studies are the result of two differentiated effects that depend on the level of cohesiveness of the social circle to which one is exposed (high among relatives, low among friends).

Chapter 2. Campaign dynamic effects on participation in Austrian and Italian 2013 General Elections: A focus on direct mobilization

2.1 Introduction

Starting from Rosenstone and Hansen's work (1993) on mobilization and participation in the US, scholars largely acknowledge the key role of extra-individual mobilization factors in explaining electoral participation. In order to break down the broad concept of mobilization, two main dimensions have been identified: direct mobilization and indirect mobilization. Moving from this conceptualization, this chapter mainly focuses on the first dimension and its effects on electoral participation. The study of the effects of the several forms of direct mobilization deserves a further investigation especially in the European context, since most of the previous research was carried out in the US. Moreover, in recent years electoral campaigns have been gradually changing their nature, as well as the 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 low involved ones would not. Therefore, campaign effects on participation should not be taken for granted as a conventional wisdom (Stromback, 2017), but need to be further assessed.

Furthermore, in recent years various European countries have experienced a significant decrease in voter turnout, reaching the lowest record in the last National elections. This is the case experienced by Austria and Italy, two countries that show very similar levels and trends of voter turnout. 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; Tuorto, 2014), but little attention has been devoted to the role played by campaign mobilization.

This chapter thus aims at investigating whether electoral campaigns and, eventually, which forms of direct mobilization enhance electoral participation, and to which extent in such contexts. The choice of providing analyses on a different country from Italy mostly depends on the lack of adequate Italian data to analyse the effect of the various forms of mobilization. Austria is selected as a case study since it shares several characteristics with the Italian context, as later argued. In order to give a broad overview of the effects of campaign mobilization on electoral participation, two different strategies for the operationalization and the assessment of the relation between mobilization and participation will be employed.

First, we will examine the dynamic effect on some measures of latent participation of campaign mobilization, which is measured in terms of days of campaign. This first empirical section is mainly exploratory and analyses at the aggregate level the trend of some measures of latent participation during the time-span of the electoral campaign by employing Austrian National Election Study (Autnes) and Italian National Election Study (Itanes) 2013 Rolling Cross-Section data.

Second, in order to enter the black box of campaign effects, the effects on individual self-reported turnout of the different forms of party contacting, intended as measures of direct mobilization, will be examined by comparing the effects of personal and impersonal forms. Finally, whether mobilization effects vary according to the propensity to turn out before the

elections will be tested. These analyses will be performed on the panel component of Rolling Cross-Section Autnes 2013 data that integrates the pre-electoral survey with a post-electoral one. The panel structure of the data consents to detect the effects of the forms of party contact net of the propensity to turn out before the elections. Because of data availability, the same analyses cannot be carried out on Itanes data.

2.2 Campaigns dynamic effects on latent participation

Since electoral campaigns are basically "the period right before citizens make a real choice" (Brady, Johnson, and Sides, 2006, p. 2), it seems straightforward to assume that during that period the primary goal of parties and candidates is to convince citizens to vote for them. As argued in Chapter 1 (Section 1.3), campaign efforts are more successful in increasing individual predispositions to participate in elections rather then moving voting intentions from a party to another. Some scholars even found out that campaigns can depress turnout when they are characterized by a negative tonality (Ansolabehere et al., 1994), but this demobilizing effect was not proved in most of the studies (Lau, Sigelman, and Rovner, 2007). Although for a long time the debate on campaign mobilization effects focused on the very common and general question "Do campaigns matter?" (Holbrook, 1996), empirical research has recently started to go beyond this question by investigating how campaign dynamics shape mobilization effects.

Campaigns are indeed dynamic processes, but the assessment of their impact usually deals with the analysis of two points in time, namely before and after the elections. In the framework of mobilization effects, pre-post electoral panel analysis could thus be integrated with dynamic analyses concerning the evolution of the campaigns. Following this hint, as suggested by Bartels (2006, p. 134) "time must enter the analysis either directly or indirectly (as a proxy for campaign activities or events)". In particular, the days of the campaign should

coincide with the units of time in the analyses, as the aim is to catch the daily variations in the outcomes of interest. In order to detect the dynamic effects of the campaign in the mobilization perspective, we need to take into account some measures that do not directly involve electoral participation itself, which is measured after the campaign. The notion of latent participation seems well suited to study the campaign dynamic effects of mobilization. According to the conceptualization by Ekman and Amnå (2012), latent participation, also referred to as pre-political engagement, includes the non-manifest forms of political participation preceding the act of voting, such as the interest in the electoral campaign and in the electoral outcome, the propensity to turn out and the interest in politics.[25] Turnout could be seen as a probabilistic function of latent participation, as a high level of the latter is associated with a higher likelihood of electoral participation. The focus on the dynamics of latent participation during an electoral campaign seems thus appropriate to investigate not only whether campaigns behave as mobilizers, but also to what extent and in which way (e.g. by showing whether there are days or periods of the campaign that are more mobilizing than others).

Every campaign is characterized by a different level of intensity (Brady, Johnson, and Sides, 2006, p. 2), consisting in parties and candidates' efforts and in mass media attention toward the elections, which can depend on the electoral context and interact with the "approaching "deadline" of the Election Day" (p. 2). Campaign intensity is also associated with the salience of the elections, which is expected to be higher in first order than in second order elections and to produce higher mobilizing effects as a consequence (Stromback, 2017). Coming back to the dynamics of latent participation, in two elections of similar salience but characterized by a different level of campaign intensity, and where the initial level of latent

[25] The notion of 'latent participation' has also been employed in previous studies, in opposition to the notion of 'manifest participation' (Pasquino, 1997; Raniolo, 2004). Moreover, here the term 'latent participation' does not deal with a latent construct of political participation within the framework of measurement models (see, for instance, Finkel, 1985). However, it refers to forms of political and social involvement, dealing with "citizens' readiness or willingness to take action" (Ekman and Amnå, 2012, p. 286).

participation is assumed to be the same, we should expect a higher increase of the level of latent participation where the intensity is higher.

Since both in Austria and in Italy the campaign dynamic effects on latent participation have never been investigated, to the best of my knowledge, this chapter contributes to give some empirical evidence on these two situations that experienced the lowest level of turnout in general elections. The first general research question could be thus expressed in the following way: *Does electoral campaign increase latent participation in such contexts?*

Since electoral campaigns are aimed at increasing the salience of an election, and consequently the level of latent participation, we should expect them to have some mobilizing effects even in contexts experiencing a decrease in turnout. If no increase in latent participation is observed, campaigns prove to be non-mobilizing at all. After providing an answer to the first general question, it is then possible to compare the trends of latent participation between the two countries, in order to test when and how the campaigns have had an effect on latent participation. Although it cannot be directly tested, we can infer that a higher increase in latent participation could be associated with higher campaign intensity. Nonetheless, the analysis of the dynamics of the campaign cannot give insights on the mechanisms that lead to an increase of participation, since it cannot disentangle the effects of direct mobilization, indirect mobilization, and other campaign events.

The next section will argue the impact of some of the specific features of the campaigns, namely party contacting, on individual electoral participation.

2.3 Party contacting effects on electoral participation

Apart from the studies that treat campaigns as a sort of external shock (Hillygus, 2005), research on campaign effects on electoral participation follows two main approaches. Some studies, which mainly look at the US context, employ some contextual variables as proxies of

campaign mobilization, such as campaign expenditures (Patterson and Caldeira, 1983; Cox and Munger, 1989; Jackson, 1997) or candidate appearances (Shaw, 1999; Holbrook and McClurg, 2005) measured at a specific area-level. Other studies based on individual-level data analyse instead the effect of campaign contacting on individual electoral participation. This latter approach, well suited to study direct mobilization effects, will be the one employed in the chapter in order to enter the black box of campaign effects.

During the last fifteen years, the relationship between campaign contacting and turnout has been largely investigated by means of the Get Out The Vote (GOTV) field experimental research, as argued in Chapter 1 (Section 1.3). Although the advantages of experimental research are acknowledged (above all, the randomization of contacts and the unbiased measures of actual turnout, measured through the access to voting records), various studies have employed survey data to analyse the relationship between party contacting and turnout. In various countries (such as Italy and Germany), it is indeed very hard to access the official voting records because of privacy restrictions.[26] However, the main limitation of survey measures of party contacting, namely their endogeneity with self-reported turnout,[27] could be overcome through the employment of pre-post elections panel data, that makes it possible to test the effect of contact on turnout net of the propensity to turn out before the elections.

Even though the number of contacts proved to be higher in some contexts rather than in others, for instance in countries with majoritarian electoral systems (Karp, Banducci, and Bowler, 2008) and in old democracies (Karp and Banducci, 2007), various comparative studies on survey data have basically discovered that party contacting boosts turnout (Karp and Banducci, 2007; Karp, Banducci, and Bowler, 2008; Magalhaes, Segatti, and Shi, 2016).

[26] In Italy, the introduction of the privacy law in 2003 made rather complicated the access to individual voting records (see further details in Chapter 3), while in Germany there is no possibility to get access (Schmitt-Beck and Mackenrodt, 2010).

[27] The employment of cross-sectional post-electoral survey data does not allow disentangling whether party contacting makes increase turnout, or whether mobilization messages are mainly addressed to citizens with a high likelihood to turn out (Gerber and Green, 2000).

However, those studies do not analyse the differentiated effects of the various modes of party contacting.

Greater attention has been recently given to the forms of contacts in a special issue of Party Politics (2, 2016), aimed at studying the effects of mobilization in the digital age. The most surprising findings come from the only study on the issue carried out outside both the US and the UK, which is focused on German 2013 Federal Election and employs the German Longitudinal Panel Study (GLES) Rolling Cross-Section Panel Data (Schmitt-Beck, 2016). In contrast to the large amount of GOTV research (see subsection 1.3.2), it shows indeed that personal mobilization is less effective than impersonal one, taking personal mobilization as a count index of exposure to three different ways of personal contacts (namely attending rallies, visiting street stands and reading leaflets), and impersonal mobilization as a count index of exposure to two mediated contacts (watching TV advertisements and visiting party websites). Moreover, personal mobilization proves not to increase turnout. In the discussion, Schmitt-Beck (2016) argues that the results are not so surprising as, on the one hand, personal forms of contacting like door-to-door canvassing are considered more intrusive in Germany, and more in general in European countries (Bhatti et al., 2016), than in the US, and, on the other hand, personal contacts with parties could be more exposed to self-selection, as high-propensity voters are largely more likely to be contacted.[28] Nonetheless, no measure of exposure to door-to-door canvassing is included in the analyses, and the synthetic additive indexes of personal and mediated party contacting cannot disentangle which specific forms of contacting were taken as the mobilizing force and to which extent, and which were not, as it will be later argued in Section 2.5. Moreover, recent GOTV studies conducted in the European context have shown that door-to-door canvassing has positive effects on turnout, even though smaller than in the US (Bhatti et al., 2016).

[28] Furthermore, it has been argued that in proportional representation voting systems, which characterize most of the European democracies, the effect of personal mobilization 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).

This chapter thus aims to test the effects of personal and impersonal mobilization in the Austrian context. As pointed out in Chapter 1 (subsection 1.3.2), existent theories argue that personal contacts are expected to be more effective than impersonal ones (Dale and Strauss, 2009). On the one hand, the Social Occasion Theory states that face-to-face interactions are more successful in creating a social connection between voters and the elections; on the other hand, according to the Noticeable Reminder Theory, the personal contact makes increase the noticeability of a reminder. Although German data seem not to provide empirical evidence to those theoretical expectations, there are no substantial reasons not to extend those theories to Austrian context. Moreover, moving from this framework and further empirical evidence from previous GOTV studies, the first hypothesis states as follows:

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

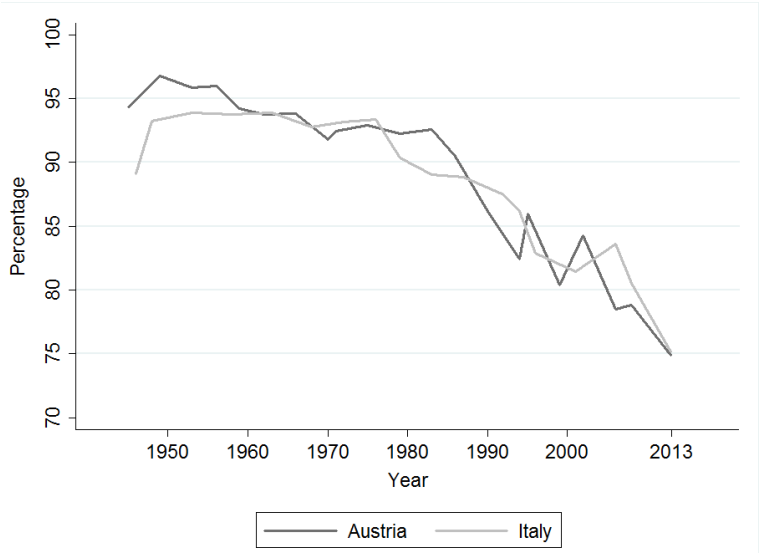
Besides testing which forms of party contacting are more effective, the next step consists in identifying the categories of voters who are more likely to increase their turnout after the contact. According to the theory of contingent mobilization (Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009), mobilization effects on turnout depends on the interplay between the individual propensity to turn out and the salience of the election (see Chapter 1, subsection 1.3.3). Namely, the theory predicts that in high-salience elections mobilization efforts are more successful among low-propensity voters, while the effect of mobilization on turnout is expected to be the highest among medium-propensity voters in medium-salience elections, and among high-propensity voters in low-salience ones. Since this study 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.

2.4 The contexts

The case studies of the chapter refer to Austrian and Italian 2013 general elections. In Austria, elections took place on September 29, while in Italy on February 24-25. The choice of analysing the Austrian context together to the Italian one is based on the several similarities which the two countries share. First, Austria and Italy show largely similar trends of participation in national elections, as reported in Figure 2.1. Indeed, both countries registered a very high turnout (above 90%) in the first elections after the II World War, which remained rather stable until the 70s. Although voter turnout had slightly began to decline in Italy already in the late 70s (1979 election), a considerable decrease was observable in both countries starting from the 90s, though in Austria the turnout had remained higher than 90% until the late 80s. This drop in participation led to the record-low in the last national elections in both countries, equal to 74.9 % in Austria and to 75.2% in Italy. Nonetheless, the level of electoral participation in the two countries is quite high when compared to the other European Union countries, where the average turnout in last national elections was equal to 66.9%.

Figure 2.1: Turnout in national elections in Austria and Italy from 1945 to 2013.



Second, the two contexts share a crucial institutional factor, namely the type of voting system. Indeed, in 2013 both in Austria and in Italy voting system is based on proportional

representation, which has been argued to lead to less candidate-centered mobilization than what happens in majoritarian systems (Bhatti et al., 2016).[29]

Looking at the political arenas, Austria and Italy shared various elements in approaching 2013 elections. In both the countries 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 (Bellucci and Segatti, 2013; Dolezal and Zeglovits, 2014). Furthermore, in Italy especially, the economic crisis largely affected the trust towards parties and politicians, which had proven to be unable to manage the economic crisis. In Italy, indeed, from November 2011 up until the 2013 elections a technocratic government led by professor Mario Monti and supported by the large majority of political parties, settled down in order to save the country from the Eurozone sovereign debt crisis (Garzia, 2013). In both countries, these several issues gave the opportunity for new parties to emerge, such as the Five Stars Movement in Italy, led by comedian Beppe Grillo, and the Team Stronach, founded by billionaire entrepreneur Frank Stronach, and the liberal NEOS in Austria.

Even the electoral campaigns of the two countries shared various features. First, although scholars agree that the starting point of the hot phase of the 2013 campaigns can be located around six weeks before the elections (Garzia, 2013; Dolezal and Zeglovits, 2014), Austria and Italy do not give legal limitation to the campaign length. Second, they impose restrictions on campaign expenditures (CESifo, 2015). Nevertheless, the rules are not so strict, thus some parties still exceed the limit (for instance, Team Stronach in Austria, see Dolezal and Zeglovits, 2014) and not all parties provide information on the expenditures.

However, the two contexts also present some differences. First, the two campaigns vary by the role played by the TV debates among the candidates. The Austrian 2013 campaign was

[29] Nonetheless, differently from Italy, Austrian electoral system allows the preferential vote; therefore, personal contacts could be more incentivized.

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). In Italy, though no restrictions were set, no debates among candidates took place during the 2013 campaign.[30] Nonetheless, observers acknowledged Silvio Berlusconi's participation on January 10 to the talk show Servizio Pubblico, well known for expressing positions against the candidate's politics, as the major media event of the campaign (Garzia, 2013).

Moreover, Austria and Italy largely differ in the levels of party membership. Although since the 1980s both the countries have seen a substantial decline in party membership, like all the other European democracies, the ratio of party members to the electorate is far higher in Austria (17.3% in 2008) than in Italy (5.6% in 2007). Austria is indeed the European democracy with the highest proportion of party members (Van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke, 2012[31]). These figures 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.

Focusing on the forms of party contacting, while on Austrian TV advertisements are only allowed on private TV channels, in Italy since 1996 they have been forbidden in every TV national channel during the electoral campaigns (Morini, 2015), while they are still allowed in local TV channels. If we concentrate 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), while similar information cannot be detected for the Italian

[30] In the history of Italian national elections campaigns, the last debate took place in 2006, between the candidate of the center-right coalition Silvio Berlusconi and the candidate of the center-left coalition Romano Prodi. TV debates between the leaders took place also in 1994 and 1996.

[31] Figures on the levels of party membership come from data reported by political parties and then collected by the authors.

case. Nonetheless, even Italian 2013 campaign was little characterized by a high targetization of voters and a broad adoption of web technologies together with a renewed employment of personal mobilization techniques, that are typical traits of postmodern campaigns (Grandi and Vaccari, 2013)[32].

2.5 Data, methods and measures

2.5.1 Data

A well-suited tool to dynamically study the campaign effects is represented by the rolling cross-section design (Johnston and Brady, 2002), thanks to which random samples of individuals are interviewed daily throughout the campaign period. By including time in terms of days of the campaign within the study of campaign effects, it is also possible to detect the mobilizing effect of the main events characterizing every electoral campaign, such as the televised debates among candidates (see McKinney and Carlin, 2004; Ferreri et al., 2015). Although electoral research tends to mainly employ the rolling cross-section data to analyse campaign effects on party preferences, leaders evaluations and media exposure (on Austrian 2013 Elections see various contributions in Kritzinger, Muller, and Schonbach, 2014; on Italian 2013 Elections see Barisione, Catellani, and Garzia, 2014; Vezzoni and Mancosu, 2016), the design is in fact apt to analyse campaign effects on latent participation (Schmitt-Beck and Faas, 2006; Krewel, Schmitt-Beck and Wolsing, 2011). Both Autnes and Itanes 2013 include a rolling cross-section survey[33] 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. Nonetheless, the two studies differ in data collection mode, sampling design and information collected.

[32] According to Norris' (2000) typology, electoral campaigns are classified in premodern, modern, and postmodern.

[33] In the case of Austria, this represents the first rolling cross-section survey carried out, while in Italy a previous rolling cross-section survey was undertaken during the 2006 electoral campaign.

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,[34] 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).

Itanes Rolling Cross-Section survey almost covers the last two months of 2013 electoral campaign, from January 5 to February 23, the day before the elections, for a total of 43 days of interviews excluding Sundays. Unlike the Austrian survey, Itanes RCS employs independent quota samples of about 200 people,[35] selected from an opt-in community group of a private research company (SWG) and interviewed through the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) mode. The entire sample is made of 8722 individuals, while a random sample of 3008 of them was later interviewed after the elections (for further details see Vezzoni, 2014).

2.5.2 Main dependent and independent measures

Since the empirical analyses of the chapter are based on two different surveys, some pieces of information are not available for both countries. Regarding the measurement of latent participation in the RCS surveys, we employ the propensity to turn out on an 11-point scale (0: not at all likely - 10: very likely), which is common to both the surveys. Since additional measures of latent participation are not shared by the two surveys, we consider two similar indicators, namely the attentiveness to the electoral campaign on a 4-point scale (0: not at all – 3: a lot) for Austria and the interest in the electoral outcome still on a 4-point scale

[34] The first four days are not considered in the following analyses.
[35] Daily samples aim at reproducing the quota of the Italian population for gender, age, and territorial areas.

(0: not at all – 3: a lot) for Italy. These measures of latent participation constitute the key dependent variables in the first section of the study, concerning the dynamics of latent participation through the campaign.

Self-reported turnout represents the dependent variable of the second section of the study focusing on party contacting effects. Similar self-reported rates are found in Austria (90,8% of the entire sample, 91,1% of the valid cases) and Italy (87,7% of the entire sample, 91,4% of the valid cases), registering about 15 percentage points of overestimation compared to the actual rates, as it usually happens when measuring turnout in surveys (McDonald, 2003).

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 advertisements, 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.[36] 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

[36] 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.

plausible that two forms of contact can have a different impact on the turnout even when belonging to the same dimension, for instance respectively a positive and a null effect, 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 mobilizers.

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).

On the contrary, Itanes RCS Panel Study includes in the pre-electoral survey a single item regarding online contacting, namely having been contacted by a candidate or a party by e-mail or social networks. Since no measures of party contacting are included in the post-electoral survey, data do not allow an accurate measuring of the online contact during the campaign. Indeed, some respondents might not had yet been contacted by parties at the time the pre-electoral survey was carried out, but might have been contacted subsequently in the timespan between the interview and the election. Therefore, the effect of party contacting on turnout cannot be properly assessed.

2.5.3 Methods

In the first section of the chapter, which deals with the dynamic effects of latent participation during the campaign, LOWESS estimations (bandwidth 0.5) of the daily means

of the measures of latent participation will be employed separately on Austrian and Italian data. Furthermore, LOWESS estimations of the daily proportions of the different party contacting forms (six for Austria, one for Italy) will be shown, in order 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. Although causal relationships between campaign mobilization and latent participation cannot be established by means of this kind of analysis, it could be useful to simultaneously consider both the trend of party contacting and that of latent participation in order to verify at first glance the plausibility of an association between the two. For instance, if the amount of party contacting increases throughout the campaign, while the daily means of the measures of latent participation remain stable, there is preliminary empirical evidence against the mobilizing effect of party contacting.[37]

The second part of the study will focus on the Austrian case, as previously mentioned. In order to contextualise party contacting in 2013 Austrian elections, before testing Hypothesis 1 we provide a multivariate analysis aimed at profiling the characteristics of citizens contacted by parties during the campaign. For every form of contact, a logistic regression model was estimated (overall, six different models), where the dependent variable is party contacting, while independent variables deals with control variables employed in models with self-reported turnout as dependent variable (later listed in this paragraph), except for the propensity to turn out. 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

[37] Since we are referring to aggregate data, a null relationship between party contacting and latent participation could be produced by the combination of a mobilizing effect among a group of respondents balanced out by a demobilizing effect among another group of respondents. However, previous empirical research generally tends to avoid the demobilizing hypothesis, thus we can basically exclude the presence of a demobilizing effect.

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 attitudes[38]). 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 4-point scale (0: almost none of them/only a few of them - 3: almost all of them)[39]. Following previous research on networks' 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. Finally, an additional logistic regression model including all the six forms of contacting as independent variables was estimated.

To run robustness checks, the same models were 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.

[38] 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).

[39] The original variable is measured on a 5-point scale, however, since only 5 panel respondents answered the category 'almost none of them' (0,2% of the entire sample), in the analyses that category has been joined to the category 'only a few of them'.

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.

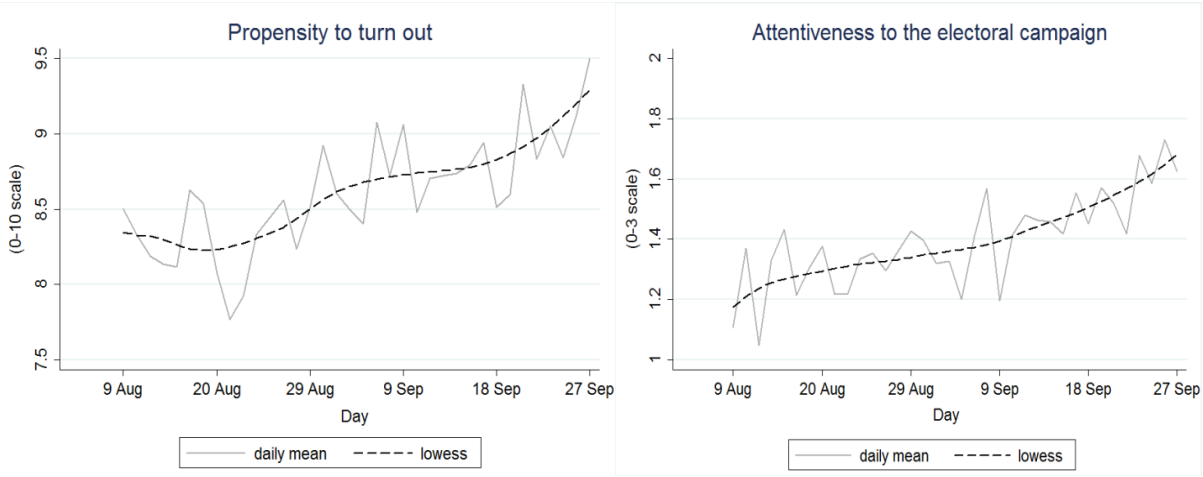
After having tested whether every single form of party contacting increases the turnout, we can then test Hypothesis 2 by means of a similar logistic model, holding an interaction term between the mode of party contacting and the propensity to turn out. In order to properly test that hypothesis, propensity 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.

2.6 Results

Figures 2.2 and 2.3 show respectively the dynamics of latent participation in Austria and in Italy, which follow different patterns. In Austria (Figure 2.2), both the propensity to turn out and the attentiveness to the electoral campaign enable to register an overall increasing trend during the timespan of the campaign. Although the daily means of the propensity to turn out show to be rather high at the beginning of the campaign (higher than 8 on a 0-10 scale),

the average leads to a 1-point increase of the measure at the end of the campaign. If we focus on the dynamics 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 2.2, 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 mobilizing effect.

Figure 2.2: Trends of propensity to turn out (N=3,988) and attentiveness to the campaign (N=3,986) during 2013 Austrian electoral campaign. Daily means and LOWESS interpolation (bandwidth=0.5).



On the contrary, Figure 2.3 shows the non-mobilizing effect of Italian 2013 campaign, except for an increase in the first 10 days, which could be attributed to the effect of the abovementioned media event of the campaign with the presence of Silvio Berlusconi at the talk show Servizio Pubblico on January 10. Though the average level of the propensity to vote and the interest in the electoral outcome prove to be rather high, the final trend is quite surprising, as it seems that the last month of the campaign has not had any effect on latent participation. Nonetheless, some signals of the limited impact on public opinion of the

campaign have come out also in previous research. For instance, the amount of political and electoral news in several TV programs during the last two months of the campaign did not result in an increasing trend towards the deadline of the elections (Bianchi, Chianale, and Pulvirenti, 2014). In particular, the trends observed a strong negative peak during the second to last week before the elections, after the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI (February 11). The event had a strong impact among the public opinion because of its exceptionality, hence overshadowed the electoral campaign in the media. Another element that could explain the low mobilization effect in the 2013 Italian campaign is represented by the ranking of the appearances of the main political leaders in the media. The most visible leader in newspapers (Legnante et al., 2013) and television (Bianchi, Chianale, and Pulvirenti, 2014) was Mario Monti, the former president and then leader of the new party Scelta Civica, who decided to run for the elections about two months before the deadline (December 23, 2012). This element symbolically demonstrates the low intensity of the 2013 electoral campaign, given both the scarce electoral performance of Monti's party and coalition (respectively, 8.3% and 10.6% of votes for the Chamber) and his low media appealing. Therefore, we could argue that among the various factors responsible for the decline of the turnout in Italy in 2013, campaign mobilization cannot be neglected.

Figure 2.3: Trends of propensity to turn out (N=8,455) and interest in the electoral outcome (N=8,497) during 2013 Italian electoral campaign. Daily means and LOWESS interpolation (bandwidth=0.5).

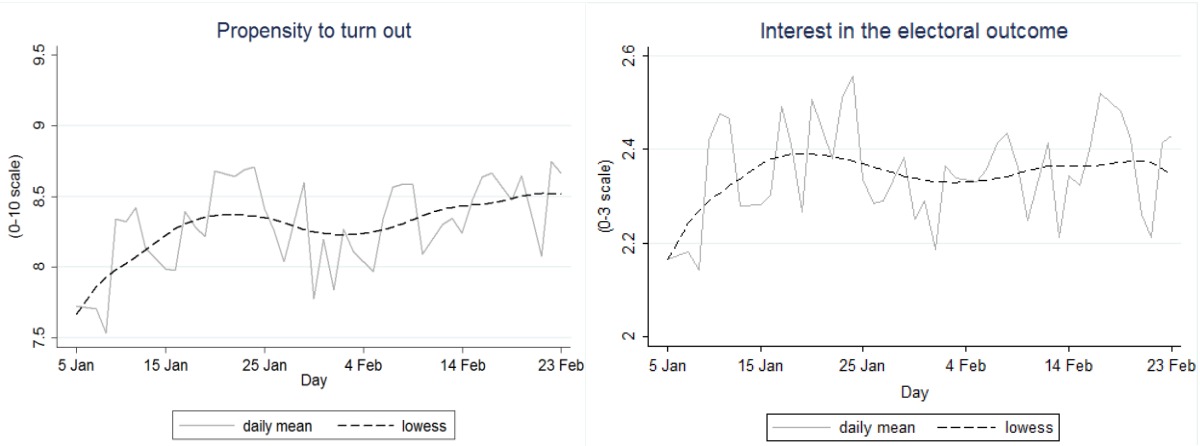


Figure 2.4: Lowess interpolation (bandwidth 0.5) of the daily proportion of interviewees contacted by parties through different modes during 2013 Austrian electoral campaign (N=4,011).

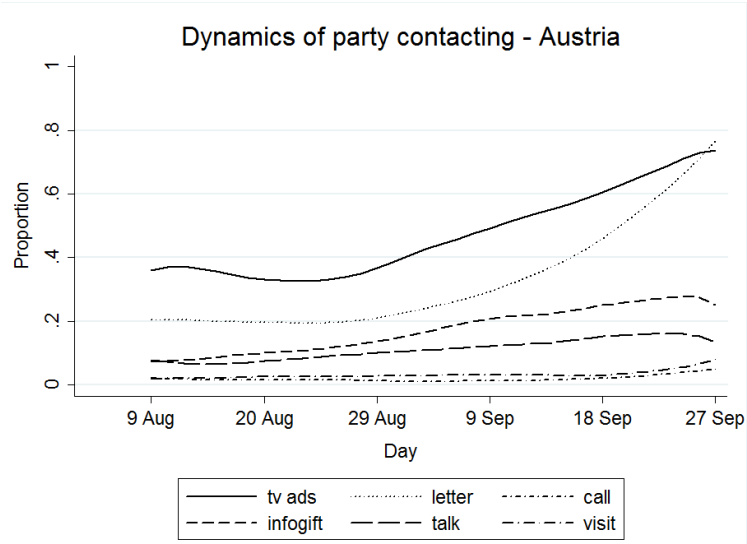
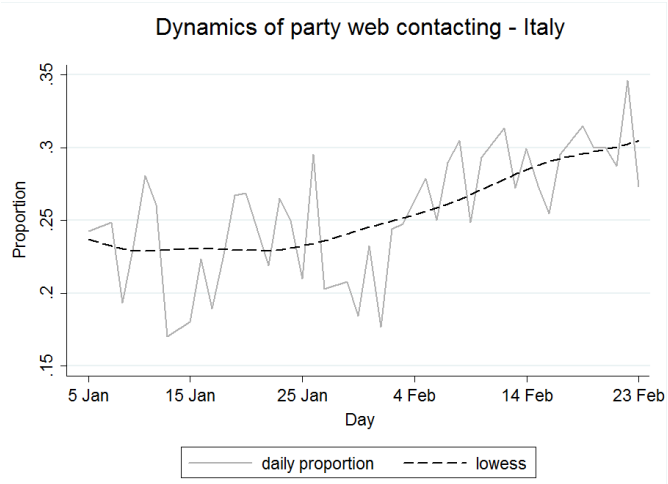


Figure 2.5: Trends of proportions of interviewees contacted by parties through on-line forms during 2013 Italian electoral campaign. Daily proportions and lowess interpolation (bandwidth 0.5). N=8,722



The analysis of its dynamics of party contacting gives further elements to understand the amount of direct mobilization during the campaign. Figure 2.4 shows that during the Austrian 2013 campaign the percentage of respondents who were somehow contacted by a political party increased with the approaching of the elections. This demonstrates that 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 during the campaign 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 A2.1 in Appendix A2). Looking at the Italian context, the dynamics of party contacting via web shows an increasing trend as well (Figure 2.5). However, the percentage increase of respondents contacted via web proves to be lower (from 24% of respondents to 30%) when compared to Austria, where at the end of the campaign some forms of contacting had reached over twice the number of respondents they had reached at the beginning.

Table 2.1: Logistic regression models (beta coefficients and standard errors in parentheses) with self-reported turnout as dependent variable and the six forms of party contacting (1=contacted after the pre-electoral survey; 0=otherwise), as main independent variables.

Variables	Categories	DV: Call	DV: Letter	DV: Tvads	DV: Infogift	DV: Talk	DV: Visit
Gender (Male)	Female	-0.05	0.05	-0.09	0.02	-0.15	-0.18
		(0.19)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.17)
Age		-0.03	0.00	-0.03	0.01	0.01	0.01
		(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)
Age_squared		0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	Vocational	0.23	0.07	0.14	0.39**	0.47**	0.41
(Primary-lower sec.)		(0.31)	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.20)	(0.29)
	Secondary	0.28	0.16	-0.11	0.25	0.31	0.03
		(0.33)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.32)
	Tertiary	-0.06	0.44**	-0.68***	-0.43**	-0.38	-0.42
		(0.38)	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.25)	(0.37)
Religiosity	A little	-0.53**	0.15	0.12	-0.44***	-0.38**	-0.17
(Not at all)		(0.26)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.26)
	Somewhat	-0.95***	-0.17	-0.36***	-0.72***	-0.55***	-0.16
		(0.24)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.24)
	Very	-0.15	-0.26	-0.37*	-0.02	0.42*	-0.62
		(0.33)	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.41)
Party closeness	Yes	0.15	0.27***	-0.01	0.18*	0.31***	0.03
		(0.19)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.18)
Attitudes toward	0-4	0.14	-0.08	0.09	0.48***	0.14*	0.44***
Politicians		(0.13)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.12)
Newspapers exposure	0-4	0.08	0.05	0.19***	0.23***	0.16***	-0.07
		(0.09)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.08)
TV exposure	0-4	-0.00	0.19***	0.25***	0.06	0.04	0.14
		(0.09)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.09)
Campaign	0-3	0.41***	0.23***	0.09	0.21***	0.36***	0.44***
Attentiveness		(0.11)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.11)
Network turnout	0-3	0.88***	0.38***	0.25***	-0.32***	0.47***	0.67***
		(0.16)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.08)	(0.14)
	Constant	-6.02***	-2.41***	-0.42	-1.56***	-4.45***	-6.76***
		(0.96)	(0.42)	(0.45)	(0.48)	(0.59)	(0.94)
	Pseudo R-squared	0,09	0,06	0,07	0,08	0,08	0,08
	Observations	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Previous findings report an increasing trend in party contacting during the Austrian campaign, nonetheless existent research has shown that contacts with parties are not randomly distributed (Karp, Banducci, and Bowler, 2008; Karp, 2012). However, those studies do not

distinguish among the several forms of contacting. In Table 2.1, we analyse the determinants of every mode of contacting. Among socio-demographics, gender and age prove not to be related to any contact. Education and religiosity are associated to some forms of mobilization, but a definite pattern does not emerge; net of political variables, tertiary educated are more likely to be contacted through letters or emails than lower secondary/primary educated, but they are less likely to watch TV advertisements or receive gifts and informational material. When looking at political variables, favourable attitudes toward politics encourage personal contacting and watching TV advertisements, while party closeness is positively related only to receiving letters or e-mails and talking to a politician. Instead, campaign attentiveness and the perceived amount of turnout in the network are positively associated with every mode of contact (the only exception is the negative relationship between perceived amount of turnout in the network and receiving informational material or gifts).[40] Finally, concerning media exposure, apart from calls and visits all the other forms are positively related to at least one between newspapers and TV consumption. Overall, multivariate analysis shows that party contacting seems not to be socially patterned, but it is connected to various political attitudes and predispositions, as well as to media exposure. Notwithstanding, factors affecting party contacting prove to be strictly dependent on the mode of contact employed.

After having detected factors influencing form of contacting, we can address the main aim of the chapter, namely to test whether turnout is driven by party contacting. Figure 2.6 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

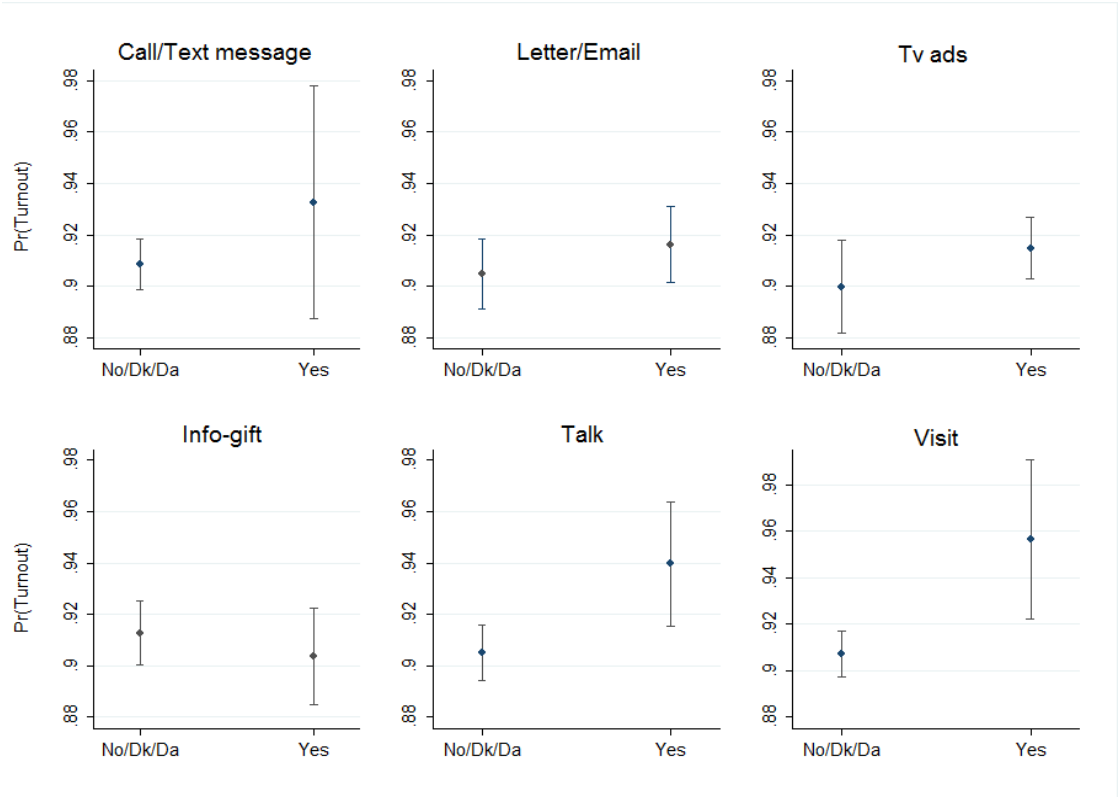
[40] Both campaign attentiveness and perceived turnout among family members could be seen as endogenous to party contacting, however the analysis shown in Table 2.1 is just meant to describe the characteristics of voters contacted by parties, without any causal claims.

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 A2.2 in the Appendix A2, 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 (although the effect is not statistically significant) percentage points, 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 A2 (Table A2.3), 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, having talked to a party member only or having been visited by a politician positively affected the likelihood to turn out.[41]

[41] 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 we have shown that being contacted by a party depends on several factors, in our framework the CEM technique allows minimizing the effects of selection bias when analyzing the relationship between the various forms of party contacting and turnout. Here, every treatment variable is represented by any forms of party contacting. As overall socio-demographic factors prove not to substantively affect party contacting, and media exposure influences only some forms of contact, coarsened variables were party closeness (2 categories: no; yes), attitudes toward politics (2 categories: <2; 2-4), campaign attentiveness (2 categories: 0-1; 2-3), perceived amount of turnout in personal networks (2 categories: 0-1; 2-3), and also propensity to turn out (3 categories: 0-5; 6-8; 9-10). In other not to lose relevant information, covariates can indeed be categorized into substantively meaningful groups (King, Iacus, and Porro, 2012, p. 9). In Appendix Table A2.4 reports six logistic regression models with CEM weights, analogous to models shown in Table A2.2. Since we matched data by every treatment variable, sample sizes are allowed to among the models. Findings

Figure 2.6: Predicted probabilities of turnout by modes of party contacting in Austrian 2013 Elections. Estimates from the six different logistic regression models presented in Table A2.2. 95% confidence intervals (N=2,333) .



The full logistic regression models are reported in Table A2.2. The table shows that, even when the propensity to turn out before the elections is included among the control variables, both campaign attentiveness, which could be referred to as an indicator of latent participation, and expected turnout among network members, which is a measure interpersonal influence, significantly enhance the likelihood to turn out. Furthermore, tertiary educated people are more likely to turn out than the primary and lower secondary educated.[42] Net of the broad set of controls, both newspapers and TV exposures do not significantly affect the turnout.

Since it was argued that being exposed to multiple conflicting messages could reduce the effect of mobilization (Zaller, 1996), we also ran analyses where every from of

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.

[42] 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.

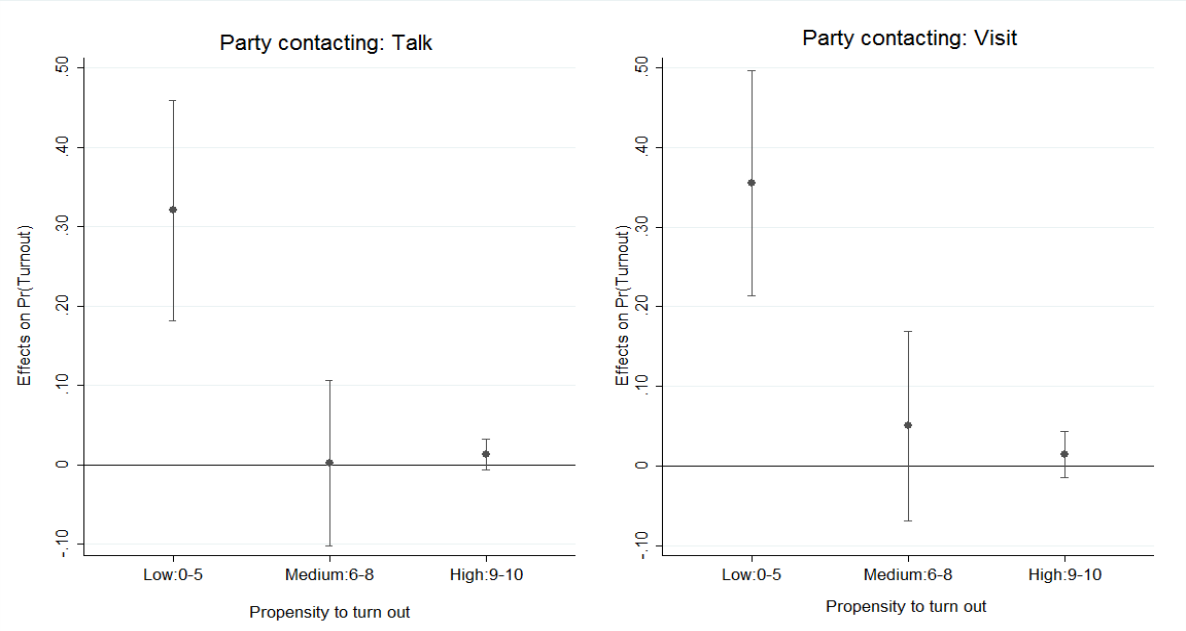
mobilization is differentiated between contacts with a single party and contacts with two or more parties (see Table A2.5 in Appendix). Concerning personal contacts, talking to party members indeed produces a higher effect on turnout when coming from a single party (4.7 percentage points, 1.4 when coming from two or more parties), while being visited by both one or multiple parties has similar positive effects on turnout (respectively, 4.4 and 5.8 percentage points). Looking at the impersonal forms of contacting, watching TV advertisements of only one party proves to be positively related to turnout, as well as receiving call/text message by a single party, although barely significant at the 90% level. Moreover, receiving information material and gifts by multiple parties seems to discourage participation.

Finally, Figure 2.7[43] gives enough empirical evidence to support Hypothesis 2, which claims that in high-salience election campaigns, mobilization increases the turnout mainly among low-propensity voters, in accordance with Arceneaux and Nickerson's (2009) theory of contingent mobilization. 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

[43] In Figure 2.7, 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 A2 (figure A2.1).

difference in size of the effect between the low-propensity voters and all others gives empirical leverage to the corroboration of Hypothesis 2.

Figure 2.7: Average marginal effect[44] 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).



Furthermore, in order 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 A2.2 in Appendix A2 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.

2.7 Discussion and conclusions

The increasing digitalization of electoral campaigns and the transition from a low to a high choice of media involved have raised scholars' attention towards the role of campaigns in boosting electoral participation. This chapter has contributed to shed some light on the

[44] 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 A2 (Table A2.6).

impact of campaign mobilization on participation in two European countries, namely Austria and Italy, where few empirical studies have been previously undertaken.

Methodologically, the chapter adopted an original bottleneck approach, aimed at integrating an overview of the dynamics of latent participation during the timespan of the campaign with the assessment of some specific mechanisms of campaign mobilization, namely the effects on turnout of various forms of party contacting. 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 examining the causal effects with the pre-post 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.

Nonetheless, although the chapter employs a comparative perspective, the comparison between Austria and Italy was carried out only for the campaign development, as the Italian post-electoral data do not include measures of party contacting. This represents a limit of the chapter, since a full comparison between the two countries cannot be satisfied. However, if we consider the analyses that are comparable, Austria and Italy show different trends in latent participation during the 2013 electoral campaigns. Rather surprisingly, the last month of the Italian campaign did not produce a clear mobilization effect; this means that the parties' attempts have been ineffective in enhancing the turnout, despite the large availability of techniques devolved to convince voters to go to the polls. Despite some relevant concurring events that took place during the Italian 2013 campaign, above all the resignation of Pope Benedict, the very weak mobilization effect represents an alarm signal for political parties and an element that should be taken into account by all scholars who analyse the decline of the turnout in Italy. In Austria, on the contrary, the campaign has been successful in increasing both the attention towards the campaign itself and the propensity to turn out. Indeed,

campaign mobilization does not seem to be among the most relevant predictors of the decline of turnout in the Austrian context.

Focusing on party contacting in Austria, in the chapter the assessment of the effect of every form of contact on turnout is rather robust for three main reasons. First, by controlling for the propensity to vote before the elections, and moreover through the use of coarsened exact matching as a robustness check, most of the issues on endogeneity regarding 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 pretty robust. Third, robustness checks on the 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.

Looking at the findings, in Austria the most mobilizing forms are represented by personal contacts. As several Get Out The Vote studies found, voters are more likely to be pushed to the polls when they experience 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 the German context in the 2013 federal elections, where impersonal contacts proved to be more effective than the personal ones. However, as previously argued, that paper does not disentangle 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 RCS data in which every form of party contact is treated separately could clarify whether in Germany personal contacts boost or not 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 due to 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, this work shows that in Austrian high salience elections, personal contacts are more effective among low-propensity voters, in line with Arceneaux and Nickerson's (2009) theory of contingent mobilization. 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 mobilizing 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. In order to overcome this issue, the presence of some specific measures of digital contacting would be very welcome in future rolling cross-section panel studies. Furthermore, it would be advisable for future Itanes rolling cross-section panel studies to address the questions of party contacting in both pre and post survey, in order to analyse their causal effects on turnout.

The use of panel survey data 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 mobilization, parties and candidates are the exclusive actors. Experimental methods, as the Get Out The Vote experiment in the context of Italian university elections described in Chapter 3, enable to treat with campaign contact only a random subsample of voters and to measure unbiased individual turnout.

Future research programs are also welcomed to adopt more accurate comparative designs through the employment of new data sources, such as the fourth wave (2011-2016) of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. Although the cross-sectional nature of those data is a limitation for assessing causality, they provide information for many countries on

several forms of contacting, including two specific items on online mobilization. Comparative data allow testing hypothesis on the moderating role of institutional factors, such as party system and voting system, in the relationship between party contacting and turnout. Also, comparative research should aim at investigating the impact of countries' level of internet penetration on online mobilization, and moreover on the effect of online mobilization on electoral participation. Furthermore, comparative studies are needed to analyse the impact of the countries' level of party membership on the volume of mobilization. Since party members "can help candidates and parties accomplish the labor-intensive side of local organizing and electoral campaigns" (Scarrow, 2014, p. 103), volunteering is indeed acknowledged as one of the leading contributions they offer to parties. However, research made little efforts to disentangle the effects of country-level party membership on mobilization and turnout so far, thus comparative data analysis can offer new empirical evidence.

Appendix A2

Table A2.1: Distribution of the forms of party contacting (overall and by two or more parties).

PARTY CONTACTING	%	% (by two or more party)
Seen TV ads	69	60
Received a letter/e-mail (a)	46	33
Received info materials/gifts (b)	24	12
Talked to a party member (b)	17	5
Visited by a politician (c)	6	2
Received a call/text message (a)	6	1

(a) from any party or candidate during the electoral campaign

(b) from any party or candidate at a campaign stand or at a campaign event

(c) at home or at workplace

Table A2.2: Logistic regression models (beta coefficients and standard errors in parentheses) with self-reported turnout as dependent variable and the six forms of party contacting, measured in the post-electoral survey, as main independent variables.

Variables	Categories	Main IV: Call	Main IV: Letter	Main IV: TV ads	Main IV: Info-gift	Main IV: Talk	Main IV: Visit	6 main IVs
Gender (Male)	Female	0.12	0.12	0.13	0.13	0.12	0.14	0.17
		(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Age		0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.03
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Age_squared		-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	Vocational	0.16	0.17	0.17	0.18	0.12	0.14	0.13
(Primary-lower sec.)		(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)
	Secondary	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.26	0.23	0.24	0.24
		(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)
	Tertiary	0.73*	0.74*	0.79**	0.74*	0.76*	0.76*	0.78*
		(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.40)	(0.40)	(0.40)	(0.40)	(0.40)
Religiosity	A little	0.11	0.10	0.12	0.09	0.12	0.11	0.08
(Not at all)		(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)
	Somewhat	0.47**	0.47**	0.48**	0.44*	0.48**	0.46*	0.45*
		(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.24)
	Very	0.31	0.32	0.33	0.28	0.29	0.34	0.26
		(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.40)	(0.39)	(0.40)
Party closeness	Yes	0.19	0.20	0.20	0.21	0.18	0.20	0.22
		(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
Attitudes toward	0-4	-0.08	-0.08	-0.08	-0.06	-0.09	-0.10	-0.02
Politicians		(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.13)
Newspapers exposure	0-4	-0.04	-0.04	-0.05	-0.04	-0.05	-0.04	-0.03
		(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
TV exposure	0-4	-0.06	-0.07	-0.07	-0.05	-0.06	-0.06	-0.06
		(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Campaign attentiveness	0-3	0.20*	0.20*	0.22**	0.22*	0.21*	0.21*	0.22*
		(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Network turnout	0-3	0.29**	0.29**	0.30**	0.29**	0.28**	0.29**	0.21*
		(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Propensity to turn out	0-10	0.42***	0.41***	0.41***	0.41***	0.41***	0.41***	0.40***
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Contact	Call	0.47						0.15
		(0.52)						(0.55)
	Letter		0.20					0.03
			(0.18)					(0.19)
	TV ads			0.25				0.17
				(0.19)				(0.20)
	Info-gift				-0.16			-0.51**
					(0.20)			(0.24)
	Talk					0.69**		0.81**
						(0.31)		(0.36)
	Visit						1.12**	0.78
							(0.56)	(0.59)
	Constant	-2.71***	-2.71***	-2.76***	-2.67***	-2.69***	-2.70***	-2.72***
		(0.72)	(0.72)	(0.72)	(0.72)	(0.72)	(0.72)	(0.72)
	Pseudo R-squared	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.31	0,32
	Observations	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A2.3: Logistic regression models (beta coefficients and standard errors in parentheses) with self-reported turnout as dependent variable and the six forms of party contacting (1=contacted after the pre-electoral survey; 0=otherwise), as main independent variables.

		DV: Individual turnout						
Variables	Categories	Main IV: Call	Main IV: Letter	Main IV: TV ads	Main IV: Info-gift	Main IV: Talk	Main IV: Visit	6 main IVs
Gender (Male)	Female	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.13	0.14
		(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Age		0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.03
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Age_squared		-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	Vocational	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.15	0.16	0.15
(Primary-lower sec.)		(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)
	Secondary	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.26	0.24	0.25
		(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)
	Tertiary	0.75*	0.75*	0.75*	0.75*	0.77*	0.76*	0.78*
		(0.39)	(0.40)	(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.40)	(0.40)	(0.40)
Religiosity	A little	0.10	0.11	0.09	0.10	0.12	0.10	0.10
(Not at all)		(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)
	Somewhat	0.45*	0.46**	0.44*	0.46*	0.48**	0.45*	0.46*
		(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.24)
	Very	0.30	0.30	0.28	0.30	0.33	0.32	0.32
		(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.39)
Party closeness	Yes	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.22
		(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
Attitudes toward	0-4	-0.09	-0.09	-0.08	-0.09	-0.10	-0.09	-0.09
Politicians		(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Newspapers exposure	0-4	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	-0.03
		(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
TV exposure	0-4	-0.06	-0.06	-0.06	-0.06	-0.07	-0.06	-0.06
		(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Campaign attentiveness	0-3	0.21*	0.22*	0.20*	0.21*	0.23**	0.22**	0.22**
		(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Network turnout	0-3	0.31***	0.30***	0.30***	0.31***	0.31***	0.31***	0.30**
		(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Propensity to turn out	0-10	0.41***	0.41***	0.41***	0.41***	0.41***	0.41***	0.41***
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Contact	Call	-0.14						-0.38
		(0.52)						(0.53)
	Letter		0.12					0.06
			(0.23)					(0.24)
	TV ads			-0.18				-0.22
				(0.20)				(0.21)
	Info-gift				0.01			-0.21
					(0.25)			(0.28)
	Talk					1.10**		1.09*
						(0.51)		(0.55)
	Visit						1.50*	1.24
							(0.79)	(0.82)
	Constant	-2.71***	-2.71***	-2.76***	-2.67***	-2.69***	-2.70***	-2.72***
		(0.72)	(0.72)	(0.72)	(0.72)	(0.72)	(0.72)	(0.72)
	Pseudo R-squared	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.31	0,32
	Observations	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A2.4: Logistic regression models (beta coefficients and standard errors in parentheses) with self-reported turnout as dependent variable and the six forms of party contacting, measured in the post-electoral survey, as main independent variables. Data pre-processed through coarsened exact matching.

Variables	Categories	Main IV: Call	Main IV: Letter	Main IV: TV ads	Main IV: Info-gift	Main IV: Talk	Main IV: Visit
Gender (Male)	Female	-0.02	0.03	0.04	0.21	0.12	0.16
		(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.17)	(0.23)	(0.22)
Age		0.05	0.04	0.03	-0.01	0.07*	0.05
		(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)
Age_squared		-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	-0.00
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	Vocational	-0.20	-0.03	0.15	0.54**	0.05	0.20
(Primary-lower sec.)		(0.34)	(0.29)	(0.27)	(0.24)	(0.33)	(0.31)
	Secondary	-0.15	-0.01	0.20	1.07***	0.16	0.41
		(0.37)	(0.32)	(0.30)	(0.27)	(0.37)	(0.33)
	Tertiary	0.73	0.56	0.83*	1.09***	0.34	0.57
		(0.55)	(0.45)	(0.42)	(0.37)	(0.44)	(0.44)
Religiosity	A little	0.31	0.15	0.14	-0.16	-0.03	-0.04
(Not at all)		(0.29)	(0.26)	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.30)	(0.29)
	Somewhat	0.78***	0.60**	0.53**	0.39*	0.72**	0.37
		(0.30)	(0.26)	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.31)	(0.30)
	Very	0.59	0.23	0.28	-0.25	-0.19	0.48
		(0.47)	(0.41)	(0.40)	(0.36)	(0.43)	(0.47)
Party closeness	Yes	0.28	0.23	0.19	0.07	0.38	0.24
		(0.24)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.17)	(0.24)	(0.24)
Attitudes toward	0-4	0.12	0.05	-0.00	-0.29***	0.20	0.05
Politicians		(0.15)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.11)	(0.15)	(0.14)
Newspapers exposure	0-4	-0.00	-0.04	-0.07	0.19**	0.02	0.17*
		(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.10)
TV exposure	0-4	-0.08	-0.08	-0.07	-0.20**	-0.08	-0.20**
		(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.10)
Campaign attentiveness	0-3	0.24*	0.17	0.20*	0.05	0.12	0.51***
		(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.15)	(0.14)
Network turnout	0-3	0.34**	0.26**	0.28**	0.47***	0.15	0.24*
		(0.16)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.17)	(0.14)
Propensity to turn out	0-10	0.37***	0.38***	0.41***	0.40***	0.46***	0.36***
		(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.05)
Contact	Call	0.36					
		(0.51)					
	Letter		0.12				
			(0.20)				
	TV ads			0.16			
				(0.20)			
	Info-gift				-0.20		
					(0.19)		
	Talk					0.56*	
						(0.32)	
	Visit						1.08*
							(0.57)
	Constant	-3.04***	-2.56***	-2.83***	-2.18***	-4.22***	-3.83***
		(0.94)	(0.80)	(0.76)	(0.71)	(0.87)	(0.84)
	Pseudo R-squared	0.17	0.23	0.27	0.40	0.24	0.25
	Observations	2,123	2,328	2,327	2,324	2,217	2,147

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A2.5: Logistic regression models (beta coefficients and standard errors in parentheses) with self-reported turnout as dependent variable and the six forms of party contacting, measured in the post-electoral survey and differentiated between contact with one party and contact with two or more parties, as main independent variables.

Variables	Categories	Main IV: Call	Main IV: Letter	Main IV: TV ads	Main IV: Info-gift	Main IV: Talk	Main IV: Visit
Gender (Male)	Female	0.11	0.12	0.15	0.11	0.11	0.14
		(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Age		0.03	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.02
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Age_squared		-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	Vocational	0.15	0.16	0.18	0.17	0.11	0.14
(Primary-lower sec.)		(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)	(0.26)
	Secondary	0.25	0.24	0.26	0.24	0.22	0.24
		(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)	(0.29)
	Tertiary	0.71*	0.72*	0.81**	0.71*	0.75*	0.76*
		(0.39)	(0.40)	(0.40)	(0.39)	(0.40)	(0.40)
Religiosity	A little	0.12	0.11	0.13	0.01	0.12	0.11
(Not at all)		(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.23)	(0.23)
	Somewhat	0.48**	0.47**	0.50**	0.38	0.48**	0.45*
		(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.23)	(0.23)
	Very	0.31	0.32	0.35	0.17	0.29	0.34
		(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.40)	(0.39)
Party closeness	Yes	0.19	0.20	0.18	0.21	0.18	0.20
		(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
Attitudes toward	0-4	-0.08	-0.07	-0.08	-0.01	-0.10	-0.10
Politicians		(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Newspapers exposure	0-4	-0.05	-0.04	-0.06	-0.04	-0.05	-0.04
		(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
TV exposure	0-4	-0.06	-0.07	-0.07	-0.04	-0.06	-0.06
		(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Campaign attentiveness	0-3	0.19*	0.20*	0.22*	0.21*	0.22*	0.21*
		(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Network turnout	0-3	0.28**	0.28**	0.30***	0.24**	0.28**	0.29**
		(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Propensity to turn out	0-10	0.42***	0.41***	0.41***	0.41***	0.41***	0.41***
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Contact: Call	One party	1.75*					
		(1.05)					
	Two or more parties	0.58					
		(1.14)					
Contact Letter	One party		0.20				
			(0.25)				
	Two or more parties		0.32				
			(0.22)				
Contact: TV ads	One party			0.86**			
				(0.41)			
	Two or more parties			0.28			
				(0.19)			
Contact: Info-gift	One party				0.47		
					(0.35)		
	Two or more parties				-0.49**		
					(0.23)		
Contact: Talk	One party					1.00**	
						(0.43)	
	Two or more parties					0.26	
						(0.44)	
Contact: Visit	One party						0.97
							(0.66)
	Two or more parties						1.43
							(1.05)
	Constant	-2.73***	-2.72***	-2.79***	-2.62***	-2.70***	-2.68***
		(0.72)	(0.72)	(0.72)	(0.72)	(0.72)	(0.72)
	Pseudo R-squared	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.31
	Observations	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A2.6: Logistic regression models (beta coefficients and standard errors in parentheses) with self-reported turnout as dependent variable and the interaction between forms of party contacting and propensity to turn out as main independent variables.

		DV: Individual turnout					
Variables	Categories	Main IV: Call	Main IV: Letter	Main IV: TV ads	Main IV: Info-gift	Main IV: Talk	Main IV: Visit
Gender (Male)	Female	0.17	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.17	0.21
		(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Age		0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Age_squared		-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Education	Vocational	0.19	0.19	0.18	0.20	0.11	0.16
(Primary-lower sec.)		(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.25)	(0.26)	(0.26)
	Secondary	0.20	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.20	0.19
		(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.28)
	Tertiary	0.73*	0.71*	0.77**	0.73*	0.75*	0.74*
		(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.39)
Religiosity	A little	0.08	0.10	0.08	0.06	0.09	0.09
(Not at all)		(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)
	Somewhat	0.47**	0.50**	0.48**	0.45*	0.49**	0.45*
		(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)
	Very	0.31	0.38	0.34	0.30	0.35	0.37
		(0.38)	(0.38)	(0.38)	(0.38)	(0.39)	(0.39)
Party closeness	Yes	0.15	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16
		(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
Attitudes toward	0-4	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.04	-0.02	-0.00
Politicians		(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Newspapers exposure	0-4	-0.05	-0.05	-0.06	-0.04	-0.05	-0.04
		(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
TV exposure	0-4	-0.04	-0.05	-0.06	-0.04	-0.05	-0.05
		(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
Campaign attentiveness	0-3	0.21*	0.21*	0.22**	0.22**	0.23**	0.22**
		(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)
Network turnout	0-3	0.28**	0.27**	0.28**	0.28**	0.27**	0.28**
		(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Propensity to turn out	Medium	1.78***	2.09***	1.58***	1.77***	1.91***	1.83***
(Low: 0-5)	(6-8)	(0.24)	(0.30)	(0.38)	(0.31)	(0.25)	(0.24)
	High	3.02***	3.11***	2.90***	3.01***	3.10***	3.10***
	(9-10)	(0.24)	(0.30)	(0.35)	(0.27)	(0.25)	(0.24)
Call		-0.14					
		(0.52)					
Call*Propensity	Call*Medium	0.05					
to turn out		(1.48)					
	Call*High	0.65					
		(1.21)					
Letter			0.50*				
			(0.29)				
Letter*Propensity	Letter*Medium		-0.86*				
to turn out			(0.47)				
	Letter*High		-0.29				
			(0.40)				
TV ads				0.13			
				(0.28)			
TV ads*Propensity	TV ads*Medium			0.26			
to turn out				(0.48)			
	TV ads*High			0.18			
				(0.41)			
Info-gift					-0.13		
					(0.32)		
Info-gift*Propensity	Info-gift*Medium				0.03		
to turn out					(0.47)		
	Info-gift*High				0.10		
					(0.46)		
Talk						1.92***	
						(0.67)	
Talk*Propensity	Talk*Medium					-1.90**	
to turn out						(0.88)	
	Talk*High					-1.44*	
						(0.79)	
Visit							2.48**
							(1.08)
Visit*Propensity	Visit*Medium						-1.81

to turn out							(1.51)
	Visit*High						-1.94
							(1.31)
Constant		-1.79**	-2.00***	-1.85**	-1.79**	-1.88**	-1.85**
		(0.75)	(0.75)	(0.75)	(0.75)	(0.76)	(0.75)
Pseudo R-squared		0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.31	0.31
Observations		2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333	2,333

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure A2.1: Average marginal effect on self-reported turnout in Austrian 2013 Elections of having received a call/text message, a letter/email, seen a TV advertisement and received information materials or gifts by propensity to turn out before the election. Estimates from logistic regression models. 95% confidence intervals (N=2,333).

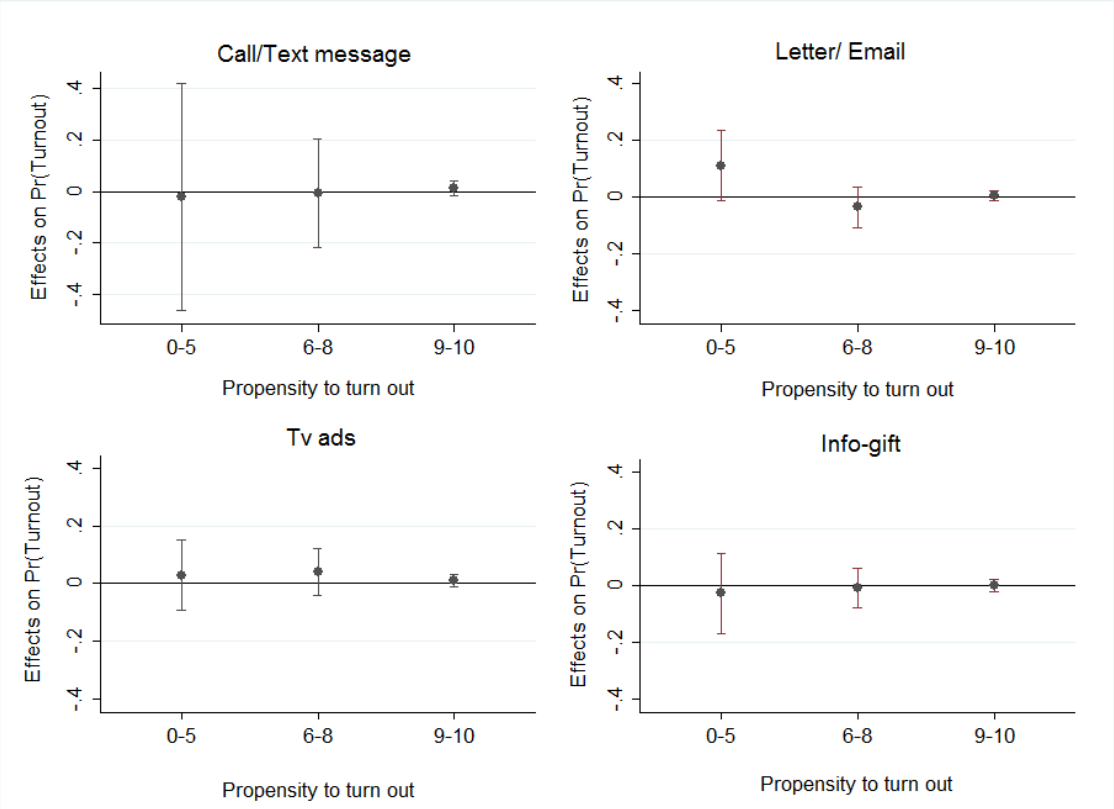
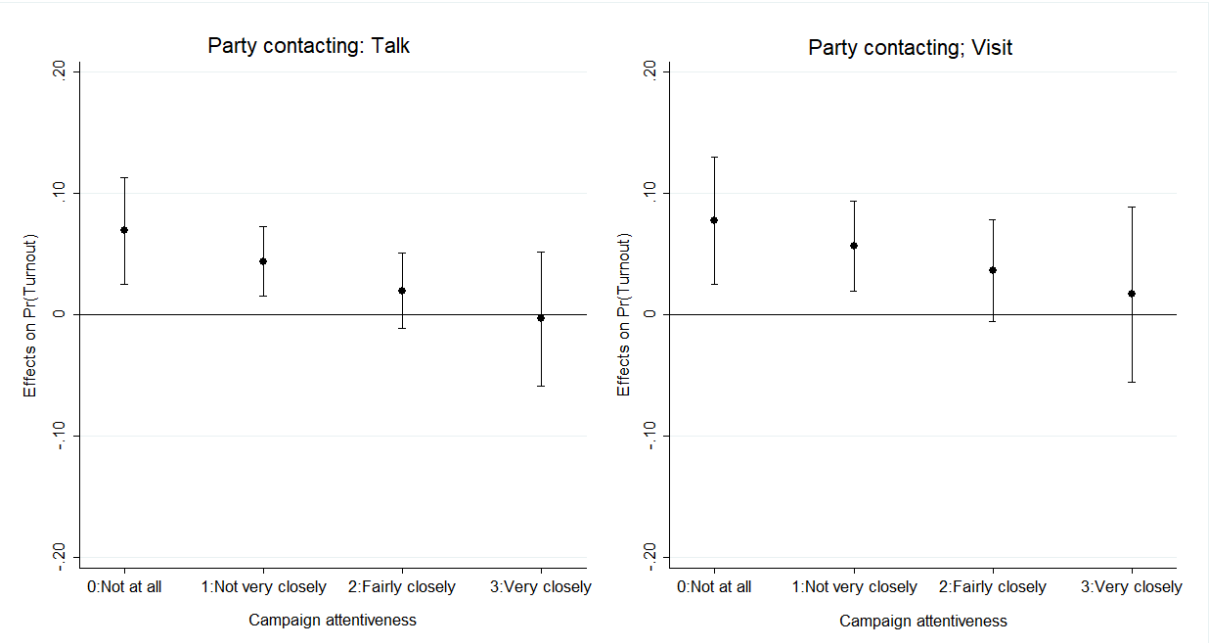


Figure A2.2: Average marginal effect of talking to a party member or being visited by a politician on self-reported turnout by campaign attentiveness in Austrian 2013 elections. Estimates from logistic regression models. 95% confidence intervals (N=2,333).



Chapter 3. Are email messages mobilizing tools? Evidence from a Get Out The Vote experiment in an Italian university election

3.1 Introduction

Mobilization deals with several forms, most of which have been introduced in the previous chapters and analysed in relation to turnout in the context of 2013 Austrian National Election in Chapter 2. Among these forms, the effect of online contacting on turnout could not be estimated, because of the lack of specific items measuring it in the surveys employed. Nonetheless, with the diffusion of the internet, political organizations have started to take advantage of the potential of the web in to contact individuals, mainly through emails and social networks. When campaign messages are sent online, scholars refer to that as *online mobilization* or *internet mobilization* (Krueger, 2006).

Coming back to Rosenstone and Hansen's (1993) conceptualization of mobilization, it has been argued that online mobilization can be expressed both in terms of direct and indirect mobilization (Aldrich et al., 2016; Vaccari, 2017). When online messages are directly sent to individuals by political parties and candidates we refer to that as direct mobilization, and when those messages reach individuals through other individuals (who send or share the messages by just reproducing or personalizing them) we refer to that as indirect mobilization. Although this distinction needs to be taken into consideration when dealing with online mobilization, this chapter focuses on direct online mobilization and its effect on turnout,[45] aiming at integrating the findings of the previous chapter concerning direct mobilization effects on turnout. Previous empirical studies provided mixed findings on the relation between online mobilization and turnout (Nickerson, 2007a; Malhotra, Michelson, and Valenzuela, 2012; Aldrich et al., 2016), therefore further empirical evidence is needed to shed more light on the relationship.

[45] From this point on, in this chapter I will simply refer to as *online mobilization* when dealing with *direct online mobilization.*

To address that issue, a field experiment has been conducted in the context of the 2014 election for the students' representatives of a Northern Italian university (the University of Trento). In the assessment of mobilization effects on turnout, Get Out The Vote (GOTV) field experiments (Gerber and Green, 2008) represent one of the most effective and rigorous tools to test causal mechanisms of mobilization.

A relevant issue regarding GOTV studies is represented by the difficulty in accessing individual voting records in several countries. This issue has been overcome in this chapter thanks to the collaboration of the administrative offices of the University of Trento, which allowed recording the actual individual turnout in addition to sending an email message that invited several randomized groups of students to participate in elections.

In the experimental design, 16,255 students have been randomly split into four groups, among which three of them received a non-partisan email (treatment groups), while the remaining one did not get any message (control group). Moreover, since each treated group received a message with different content and timing of delivery, we will further test the impact of different contents and timings of delivery on electoral participation.

Although the experiment was carried out in the context of a low-salience election, we might argue that the participation in university elections could be intended as an indicator of political participation and civic engagement of young citizens, which has received large attention among scholars Therefore, in addition to analysing the effects of the GOTV campaign, the chapter aims at investigating the individual-level determinants of participation in university elections, which were little investigated before. By employing a unique administrative dataset provided by the University of Trento, the more relevant factors in predicting this form of participation will be examined, mainly socio-demographic and academic career-related characteristics. Since students are enrolled in several degree programs, belonging in turn to different departments, data analysis on the determinants of

turnout in university elections needs to take into account that hierarchical structure. This issue will be addressed through the employment of multilevel logistic regression models, with the individual turnout as the independent variable.

The present chapter is thus split into two sections: the former focuses on the relation between online mobilization on participation in university elections, the latter deals with the determinants of participation in those elections.

3.2 Online mobilization and turnout

Two main advantages, strictly connected each other, are acknowledged to be associated with online mobilization: the low costs and the potential to reach a vast audience (Krueger, 2006). Online techniques are characterized by massive economies of scale and low transaction costs (Nickerson, 2007a). The cost of sending one email message is indeed almost the same to the cost of thousands of email messages. Furthermore, by employing online mobilization, political organizations do not have to target their efforts only on a small portion of voters (Krueger, 2006), as in the case of offline mobilization where campaigners have to maximize their limited resources. Therefore, online mobilization is well suited to carry out large-scale campaigns.

Nonetheless, online mobilization does not come without shortcomings. Although from an ideal point of view it could largely decrease inequalities in party contacting compared to offline mobilization, which tends to target politically active and high socio-economic status citizens, the empirical evidence tends to confirm only partially this expectation. By analysing the determinants of online and offline mobilization, Krueger (2006) found that both internet skills and political interest are associated with a higher likelihood of being contacted online, while civic skills and socio-economic status, which proved to be positively related to offline contacting, are not. A further issue raised by Krueger (2006) deals with the higher level of

annoyance of receiving an unsolicited email from political organizations, compared to other forms of unsolicited political contacts. However, this issue seems far less relevant in the European context than in the US, where it was argued that other unsolicited mediated contacts, such as phone calls, have been regularly employed during electoral campaigns for decades,[46] and have been perceived as more accepted by voters accordingly (Krueger, 2006).

Overall, the main shortcomings of online mobilization do not seem peculiar to that specific form of mobilization. Furthermore, from the perspective of political campaigners, the advantages of online mobilization seem to outweigh the disadvantages. Nonetheless, the use of online contacting is still rather limited compared to the offline one, in particular in the European context, characterized by a lower level of campaign professionalization than in the US. By comparing online and offline contacting in UK 2010 and US 2012 elections, Aldrich et al. (2016) indeed found that while in the US 17,1%[47] of survey respondents reported to have been contacted online, according to two different data sources in the UK the percentage was equal to 1,6% and 2,6%[48] (concerning offline contacting, the quota of respondents contacted was equal to 36,2% in the US, respectively to 46,7% and 50,6% in the UK).

The main concern deals however with the efficacy of online mobilization in increasing political participation. For professional campaigners, it is crucial to know whether online mobilization is successful in increasing participation or whether it has no effect, thus representing a waste of time, as Nickerson (2007a) pointed out. Little empirical research has been carried out so far; however, findings do not converge into a unique direction.

By employing cross-sectional survey data, Aldrich et al. (2016) found that online contacting is associated with a higher participation in campaign activities both in the UK and

[46] This seems to be different in the European context, as argued in the previous chapter in relation to the Austrian case, where only 6% of the respondents to the Autnes post-electoral survey 2013 declared to have been contacted through phone calls or text messages.
[47] American National Election Study (ANES) 2012 post-electoral survey data.
[48] Respectively BMRB 2010 post-electoral survey and British Election Study (BES) 2010 post-electoral survey data.

in the US. Analogously, by employing a comparative cross-sectional study on Germany, Italy, and UK in the period of 2014 European elections, Vaccari (2017) showed that people who are contacted through online forms are more likely to be politically engaged than the others. A laboratory experimental study in the Netherlands found instead that online mobilization only boosts online participation, while it does not increase offline participation (Vissers et al., 2012). Although further research is needed to investigate the relation between online mobilization and political engagement with the employment of more sophisticated research designs, the few existing studies give some empirical evidence toward the presence of a positive relation between online mobilization and political engagement.

When looking at online mobilization effects on turnout, in the abovementioned study Aldrich et al. (2016) showed that online contacting does not make increase turnout both in the UK and in the US. Nevertheless, the measurement of online mobilization reported in surveys could be affected by higher biases than the measurement of offline mobilization. Since the stimuli conveyed through online mobilization are in general low-intense, respondents could be more likely to misreport online contacts because they do not remember to have been contacted or they do not open or read the online messages sent by political organizations. Furthermore, as argued in previous chapters, when the dependent variable is represented by the individual turnout, another bias is represented by the overestimation of turnout in the surveys. Those issues are addressed by the employment of the GOTV field experimental technique. The following subsection will present an overview of the GOTV research, before focusing on GOTV studies on the relation between online mobilization, mainly regarding email messages, and turnout.

3.2.1 GOTV email messages and turnout

The experimental method guarantees a higher internal validity to the findings. GOTV studies have indeed the great advantage of measuring unbiasedly both the campaign contact,

since mobilizing messages are sent to randomized groups of individuals, and turnout, thanks to the access to individual voting records. Field experiments are usually carried out in small areas, providing a lower level of generalization than survey methods carried out in country areas. Nevertheless, thanks to their real-world setting field-experimental techniques provide a higher external validity with respect to lab-experimental techniques (de Rooji, Green and Gerber, 2009).

Field experimental GOTV research has been mainly spread in the US, even though it has been recently growing in the European context (Bhatti et al., 2016). As Green, Aronow, and McGrath (2013) have suggested, more GOTV campaigns in each country are needed in order to compare the impact of different campaign strategies among contexts with various political cultures, media systems and electoral systems. GOTV is indeed still underdeveloped in a large number of countries. Anyhow, this cannot be entirely attributed to a low-advanced state of the mobilization research; also legal impediments that do not allow to carry out a proper GOTV campaign might have caused this differentiated development. Indeed, one of the main features of GOTV experiments consists in the measurement of the individual electoral participation, which represents the dependent variable in those studies, through individual official voting records. In some countries, an obstacle to the diffusion of GOTV techniques is represented by the difficulty in accessing the individual official voting records, due to privacy protection. In Italy, access to this information is allowed only with the authorization of the president of the provincial court in charge of the voting records – a rather hard procedure to obtain permission. So far, only one door-to-door canvassing GOTV study has been carried out in Italy employing the official voting records, in the context of the 2014 mayoral election in a single municipality of the Northern Italy (Cantoni and Pons, 2017).[49]

[49] Other GOTV studies have been conducted in Italy, nonetheless but they do not employ individual official voting records for the measurement of turnout (Kendall, Nannicini, and Trebbi, 2015; Galasso and Nannicini, 2016).

When dealing with online mobilization, previous GOTV research has tested the effect of email messages on voter turnout. Those studies, all carried out in the US context, led to inconsistent findings. On one side, 13 GOTV email campaigns organized by fictional and unofficial groups (e.g. Vote For Students) for various electoral events did not have positive effects on turnout, though they produced an overall weak negative effect, although not significant (Nickerson, 2007a). Similarly, email messages encouraging university students to online register to an election proved to cause a decrease in the registration rate of 0.3 percentage points (Bennion and Nickerson, 2011) or to be ineffective (Bennion and Nickerson, 2012). On the other side, Malhotra, Michelson, and Valenzuela (2012) found a significant positive effect, although small, of the email messages on turnout when delivered by an official source,[50] which was represented by the nonpartisan official responsible for administering the elections. Furthermore, in an experiment aimed at testing the impact of emails informing about a new convenient voting method, Hanmer, Herrnson, and Smith (2015) found that the experimental group which received an email with an appealing subject line (the only one focused exclusively on the new voting method) made register a higher usage of the new voting system and a higher "open rate" (the share of those who actually opened the email) than the other groups. However, no effect on voter turnout was found.

GOTV email campaigns are "essentially costless" (Bennion and Nickerson, 2011, p. 860). For professional campaigners, it could be crucial to know whether emails are successful in mobilizing some citizens or whether they have no impact on citizens' participation. Even the presence of little mobilization effects could move political parties in conducting e-mail campaigns, thanks to their economic and logistic convenience. In light of these considerations, the present study deals with the impact of a low-cost GOTV email campaign

[50] Similarly to other studies, they also found that e-mail messages sent by fictional and unofficial groups are ineffective.

in the context of university elections, where it has been possible to measure the actual turnout from the official voting records.

3.3 Participation in university elections

In the European context the number of elections is far lower than in the US, where people are asked to express their vote for choosing a larger number of representatives (such as leaders at work or at church, see Lewis and Rice, 2005) However, in addition to classic first- and second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980), individuals have further occasions to cast a ballot. An example is represented by university elections, in which university students are asked to choose their representatives for several university councils. Those elections are characterized by a low level of politicization, an insignificant media coverage, and low stakes. Because of those reasons, scholars devoted very little attention to the study of participation in university elections, although voting in those elections represents an indicator of political engagement (Astin et al., 1997; Astin, 1998). More specifically, it deals with youth political participation, since university students are mostly young (in 2014, 91% of the students of the University of Trento were under 30) and highly educated (at least with an upper secondary-school diploma).

The issue of youth political participation has been addressed since seminal studies on participation (Milbrath, 1965; in Italy Martinotti, 1966b). Coming to the recent times, younger generations are generally considered distant from politics, in so far that various scholars defined them as 'apathetic' (Norris, 2003), 'disengaged' (Delli Carpini, 2000) or 'invisible' (Diamanti, 1999). From a different perspective, they were referred to as generations "apart" (Henn, Weinstein, and Wring, 2002). According to this view, they are not considered so uninterested in politics and apathetic, although they are supposed to have a different conception of political participation with respect to their parents, leading them to different

ways of participating. In the Italian context, this argument was empirically tested in a recent study by Quaranta (2016), who found that while younger cohorts tend to disregard conventional participation (namely, attending political parties meetings and donating money to political parties), they are more likely to engage in unconventional participation (namely, attending environmental, civil rights and peace meetings and demonstrations). This different way of participating in politics can be attributed to two different processes, labeled in Quaranta (2016) as the 'generational hypothesis' and the 'modernization hypothesis'. The former explains this pattern of youth participation with the period of political socialization of the younger cohorts, characterized by the decline of mass parties and the detachment between civil society and parties. The latter refers to the values shift experienced in Western societies from the late 70s, with the rise of new issues (i.e., civil rights, environmental issues), which reflected in a new way of participating in politics (the so-called New Politics, Poguntke, 1987). Nevertheless, although unconventional forms of participation are becoming more and more popular, they involve only a small minority of citizens unlike the primary form of conventional participation, that is voting. Furthermore, the lower participation of the younger cohorts leads to a decline in the overall turnout. In the Italian context, one of the most comprehensive recent contributions on turnout did not show a substantial decline in electoral participation among the younger cohorts (Tuorto, 2006), but further research is needed to assess that relation.

The issue of youth political participation has been further addressed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which built up a guide including a large number of interventions undertaken in different countries for enhancing youth participation.[51] The issue was even addressed in Denmark by two GOTV studies, which have tested the impact of

[51] The first lines of the guide efficiently sum up the issue of youth participation: "young people […] are often involved in informal, politically relevant processes, such as activism or civic engagement, they are not formally represented in national political institutions such as parliaments and many of them do not participate in elections. This can impact on the quality of democratic governance." (UNDP, 2012, p.3).

mobilizing tools on first-time voters, to increase turnout and to reduce inequalities among low-propensity and high-propensity voters (Bhatti et al., 2015, 2017). Although the effects were rather small, both the studies found that those operations boost turnout among first-time voters and are more likely to mobilize voters with a lower initial propensity to turn out. Our GOTV campaign was thought as an intervention within this framework, following the UNDP good practices and encouraging actions aimed at fostering youth political participation also during the electoral period.

Furthermore, several studies have found that voting is habit-forming (Green and Shacar, 2000; Plutzer, 2002; Gerber, Green, and Shacar, 2003), namely voting in an election makes more likely to vote in other elections. Therefore, even though this chapter will not give empirical evidence on the habit formation of participating in university elections, previous research suggests that it could predict participation in following more salient elections. Because of the young age of the voters, university elections could be one of the first electoral events for most of the students, thus it can really help them in reducing the "inertia" to participate (Plutzer, 2002)

Determinants of participation in university election were never investigated, with the exception of a single study in the US analysing through aggregate level data various predictors of turnout (Lewis and Rice, 2005). Among student demographic factors, it was found that only the percentage of full-time students was associated to a higher turnout, while the percentage of women and minorities, as well as the percentage of students being from another state were not significantly related. Since previous research has never tested whether individual-level factors which are generally related to turnout in political elections are even associated to turnout in university elections, the present chapter aims at facing that issue, by focusing on the role played by social centrality and socio-demographic characteristics (Milbrath, 1965; Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980).

3.4 Research questions

Moving from the theoretical background illustrated here and in Chapter 1, this chapter aims at answering to different research questions on turnout in university election, concerning both the role of online mobilization and social centrality. Within the framework of the thesis, the main research question is the following:

RQ1: Do email messages increase turnout (in an Italian low-salience election)?

Since previous research has provided mixed findings, no specific hypothesis regarding this first research question is given, although following the previous literature it is expected that the relation, if present, will be weak. Anyhow, in our GOTV experiment email messages were sent by an official source, following Malhotra, Michelson, and Valenzuela (2012), who found a weak positive effect on turnout.

Moreover, the GOTV experiment manipulates both the content of the message ('civic duty', 'political efficacy', 'being decisive' – see Section 3.5 for more information) and the timing of delivery (either one or five days before the election). Previous research found that content is more relevant when messages include elements of social pressure, while other types of appeals seem not to produce differentiated effects on turnout (see Chapter 1, subsection 1.3.2). Nonetheless, the experimental design was planned to include different messages in order to test whether some specific appeals are more likely to mobilize young voters.[52] Looking at the timing of the message, some previous GOTV experiments found a recency effect (see Chapter 1, subsection 1.3.2), namely that the message is more effective in increasing turnout when nearer in time to the election day. Moving from the previous literature, two more specific research questions are thus addressed, dealing respectively with the content and the timing of delivery of email messages, as follows:

RQ2a: Do email messages with different contents have differentiated effects on turnout?

[52] Because of ethical issues, the messages employed in this experiment do not, however, include elements of social pressure.

RQ2b: Does the timing of the email message affect turnout?

Both the effects of the content and the timing of the message should be conditional on the general effect of email messages of turnout since negative effects of specific contents or timings of delivery are not theoretically expected.

The last research question does not deal with the GOTV campaign, but more broadly on the determinants of turnout in university elections. In the context of university elections, social centrality is perceived as centrality in university life, both referring to socio-demographic and academic career factors. The research question can be expressed as follows:

RQ3: Do socio-demographic background and academic career-related factors predict turnout in university elections?

Measures employed for answering this question are presented in Section 3.6.

3.5 The context and the experimental design

The case study deals with the election of student representatives of the University of Trento, which took place on November 18-19, 2014. Students having the right to vote were 16,399, belonging to 13 different departments. As previously stated, university elections are low-salient; thus turnout is rather modest. In 2014 elections, although only 21,1% of the students turned out, the result was far higher than in previous student elections in the University of Trento (14,5% in 2010 and to 17,3% in 2012) and similar elections in other Italian universities.[53] Students were called upon to elect their representatives in the academic senate, in their own department council and in other thematic commissions[54]. Overall, 93 elected offices had to be chosen. However, the number of representatives elected in every department council strictly depends on voter turnout, since fewer representatives (than the

[53] For instance, at the University of Milan turnout in 2014 student election was equal to 12,0%, at the University of Turin it was equal to 7,7% in 2015 election.
[54] Concerning sport, right to education and Opera Universitaria.

number expected) are elected in a department council when a quorum of 15% is not reached in the department.

The access to the official voting records was possible thanks to the collaboration with the Chancellorship and other university offices, and turnout data collection was performed by the electoral office. Data were transmitted to the university research office, which produced a dataset including the records of all the students with the right to vote, in an anonymous form.

The experiment consists of delivering email messages encouraging to vote to randomized groups of students. The whole delivering procedure was realized by the communication and events division of the University of Trento. Emails were delivered to the personal addresses provided by the students for receiving communications. For this reason, it is supposed that these email addresses were usually checked by the students, or at least that they were the most employed ones. Since 144 students did not provide an email address (or did not have an active email address), they were excluded from the study. Therefore, the sample involved in the randomization procedure was made of 16,255 students.

Through a simple randomization, carried out by the research office of the university, students were firstly allocated to four different experimental groups. One group (control group: N=4,068) did not receive any email, while the other three groups (treatment groups) received an email with different content for each group, appealing respectively to civic duty (N=4,063), political efficacy (N=4,069) and to cast a decisive vote (N=4,055). All the three messages were expected to encourage electoral participation since they deal with arguments concerning factors that are acknowledged predictors of voter turnout. Civic duty is a key concept in Riker and Ordershook's (1968) revised version of the rational choice theory of voter turnout (the so-called D term): citizens with a higher level of civic duty have a higher propensity to vote. Furthermore, various GOTV experiments, *in primis* Gerber and Green's first experiment (2000), employ civic duty messages aimed at increasing turnout. The

message on political efficacy aims at involving students in university decisions. Previous literature found that the higher is the political efficacy, the higher is the likelihood to vote (Pattie and Johnstone, 1998). The 'being decisive' message rely on the possibility to not reach the quorum allowing to elect all the representatives available. The content of the appeal is strictly linked to the probability of casting the decisive vote, which plays a crucial role in the original Downsian theory of voter turnout (1957): the higher is the probability of casting a decisive ballot, the higher is the likelihood to turn out. In other words, the message deals with the closeness of the election, however not regarding the importance of casting a ballot that could be decisive in determining the success of a candidate, but in meeting a crucial threshold in turnout.

An example of email messages (the 'being decisive' one) is reported in Figure 3.1 (the other messages are reported in Figures A3.1 and A3.2 in Appendix). The three emails only differ in the body of the message (grey-highlighted in Figure 3.1). Emails were sent by a no-reply address of the University of Trento, which was used in order to disincentivize answers. If on one-side a no-reply address can discourage to open the email, on the other side the reference to the University of Trento (@unitn.it) and the direct subject line ("Elezioni universitarie: PARTECIPA") could have made students aware of the truthfulness of the message. The keywords of the message were written in capital letters, in order to be more impressed. They mainly deal with a voting alert and a strong invitation to participate. Furthermore, the email message provided information on when and where to vote and how to find information on the candidates. The email was signed by the administrative in charge of the GOTV campaign[55], belonging to the communication and events division of the university.

[55] Asterisks cover her name for privacy reasons.

Figure 3.1: Example of email message (Being decisive message)[56].

Date: Thu, 13 Nov 2014 15:43:07 +0100
From: noreply@unitn.it
Subject: University elections: PARTICIPATE!
To:

Next Tuesday and Wednesday the STUDENT ELECTIONS for the appointment of student representatives will take place.

YOU ALSO ARE CALLED TO EXPRESS YOUR PREFERENCE.
DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!

Voting in university elections is important.
The number of representatives in every department is directly proportional to the number of voting students in the department itself. If a minimum threshold of votes is not reached, the number of representatives in your department will be lower than the available positions and the student representation will be weaker.
Your voting participation can make the students' voice louder.
MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD, PARTICIPATE! GO TO THE POLLS!

You could vote on the following dates:
Tuesday 18 November, from 9.00 to 17.00
Wednesday 19 November from 9.00 to 16.00

FURTHER INFORMATION:
Information on the CANDIDATES is available on the webpage http://www.unitn.it/ateneo/181/elezioni
Indications on the POLLING STATIONS will be available in every department during the election days.

Best regards,
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********* ******
Communication and Events Division
General Direction
University of Trento

In addition, every treatment group was randomly split into two sub-groups, which differed from the timing of the email. A half of every group received the email 5 days before the election (13 November 2014, at about 4 pm), while the other half received it the day before the election (17 November 2014, at about 10 am).[57]

[56] Author's translation. Original messages were written in Italian. Text highlighted in grey was not highlighted in the original e-mail messages.
[57] Civic duty group - Five days before: N=2,036; One day before: N=2,027.
Political efficacy group - Five days before: N=2,031; One day before: N=2,038.
Being decisive group - Five days before: N=2,025; One day before: N=2,030.
Randomization checks show that the distributions of experimental groups do not significantly differ in terms of socio-demographic and career-related variables (p-value > 0.05 in every chi-square test. See Table A3.2 in Appendix A3)

3.6 Data, measures and methods

Besides experimental data, namely the actual turnout and the experimental conditions, the analyses employ a unique administrative dataset coming from the communication and events division of the University of Trento. For every individual, information on experimental conditions and turnout is matched with socio-demographic characteristics and academic career-related variables. Among individual-level factors, two sets of variables are employed as measures of social centrality, both referring to socio-demographics and academic career. As socio-demographic variables, we include gender, the area of residence and type of upper-secondary school qualifications.

Although historically gender had represented a predictor of turnout, that is, men were more likely to participate in elections than women, recent studies have confirmed the disappearance of the gender gap (Smets and Van Ham, 2013). Furthermore, among Italian adolescents the intention to turn out proved not to significantly vary by gender (Cicognani et al., 2012) Nonetheless, we will take into account of gender in the analysis of the determinants of turnout in university elections, at least as a control variable.

Area of residence is measured in 5 categories: Trento, Province of Trento, Province of Bolzano, other Italian regions and foreign countries. This variable could be interpreted as one of the measures of centrality in university life. Indeed, the large majority of the students coming from outside Trentino-Alto-Adige is supposed to be domiciled in Trento, while the ones coming from the provinces of Trento and Bolzano are supposed to be mainly commuter students. Previous research found that commuter students are less prone to participate in university events and interact with peers (Jacoby, 2000; Newbold, Mehta, and Forbus, 2011), in other words, that they are more marginal in university context than the others. Nonetheless, no specific information on the place of domicile of the students is available.

Since the Italian educational system allows various tracks in upper secondary education, reflecting in a hierarchy of the level of prestige and quality of teaching (Gasperoni, 1996), the type of upper secondary-school qualification is meant as a measure of horizontal inequality, that can further reproduce the socio-economic background of the students (Triventi, 2014). Cicognani et al. (2012) also found that students from lyceum are more likely to be politically engaged, and in particular to turn out in subsequent elections than students from vocational schools. Type of secondary school qualification is here categorized in lyceum, technical or teaching training school, vocational school and a residual category including other Italian qualifications, abroad qualifications and not specified titles.

For what concerns academic career-related variables, we consider the number of ECTS credits obtained in the last academic year, the age of enrollment and the stage of career.

The first variable measures the number of credits obtained during the last academic year, 2013/2014, and the current academic year till November 16, 2014 (two days before the elections), later categorized into four quartiles. This is assumed to be another measure of centrality in university life, since it is supposed that more successful students in terms of credits obtained should be more integrated into the university context than the less successful ones. Since the credits mainly refer to the academic year 2012/2013, in the dataset most of the first year students have zero credits.

The stage of career could be associated to the electoral stakes perceived by students. Stakes are supposed to be higher for students at the beginning of their career, since they should spend a longer period of time in the university context. Therefore, these students are supposed to have more opportunities to be informed of the electoral event, and accordingly, a higher likelihood to participate. The stage of career is measured in three categories (first years, last years, and supplementary years), by considering also the type of degree of the program attended. ‘First year(s)’ category includes all the students enrolled in the first or in

the second year of the bachelor or unique cycle master degree, or in the first year of the master degree. 'Last year(s)' deals with students enrolled in the third year of the bachelor degree, or in the second year of the master degree, or in the third, fourth or fifth year of unique cycle master degree. Students enrolled in the university who are delaying with graduation are included in 'delay' category.

Age of enrollment is coded in two categories, lower than 25 and equal or higher than 25. Similarly to other measures employed, it is meant as a measure of centrality in university life, since students enrolled at the university at an older age are largely more likely to be workers and then to be less integrated into the university context. Therefore, students enrolled at a younger age are expected to make register a higher participation in the university elections. Moreover, no information on the occupational status is available.

An additional measure dealing with the type of degree (bachelor, master, and unique cycle[58]) will be employed in the analysis as a control variable. Differently from the other variables, it is not measured at the individual-level, but rather at the degree program level.

Research questions will be tested using different methods. *RQ1* and *RQ2A-B* will be simply answered by comparing turnout between every treatment group and the control group by means of two-tailed proportions test. Analyses of experimental data are carried out on 16,255 students, the ones who were included in the experimental design. Since randomization was realized at the individual-level, the assessment of the effects of experimental condition on turnout does not require the employment of hierarchical models. Further analyses explore whether the effects of email messages on voter turnout vary according to the socio-demographic and academic career factors described above. This will be done through six

[58] Two unique cycle degree programs are provided by the University of Trento: the degree program in Law within the Department of Law and of the degree program in Architecture and Building Engineering within the Department of Civil, Environmental and Mechanical Engineering.

separate logistic regression models with interaction terms between the experimental condition (control vs treatment) and the student level variables.

For answering the third research question (RQ3), dealing with the determinants of participation in university elections, analyses need to take into account the hierarchical structure of the data. Students are indeed nested in degree programs, which are in turn nested in departments. The composition of degree programs and departments in terms of socio-demographic and career-related characteristics of the students could indeed largely vary. As well, a large difference is registered in the distribution of the outcome, that is individual turnout, among degree programs and departments (see Table A3.1 in Appendix A3 for the percentage of voters in every department). Considering the low salience of the election, the Centre for Biology Integration and the Department of Physics made register very high levels of participation, near to 50%.[59] On the other side, two departments (Psychology and Cognitive Science, Letters and Philosophy) did not achieve the quorum of 15%, thus they were not able to elect the expected number of representatives. Among the departments with a high number of students, a rather high participation was registered in the Department of Law (27%), while in the Department of Sociology and Social Research the 15% threshold was barely overcome.

Because of the hierarchical structure of the data, the analysis is carried out by means of a three-level multilevel model, where degree programs deal with the level-2 units, while departments with the level-3 ones. The dependent variable of the analysis is the actual turnout, while the independent variables are represented by the six abovementioned individual-level variables (gender, area of residence, type of secondary school, stage of career, number of credits obtained in last academic year) and one degree program level variable, that is, the type of degree. The total number of students involved in this analysis is equal to 15,775, since students who were enrolled in degree programs with less than 10

[59] Even in previous elections, these departments are characterized by a high turnout. It is hard to identify a common pattern in the performance of the two departments, since they are located in two different localities next to Trento. Further investigations are needed to better understand these results.

students or with null turnout are excluded.[60] Degree programs considered are thus 48,[61] with a number of students (level-1 unit) ranging from 42 to 2,568, while departments are 13, with a number of degree programs ranging from 1 to 11.

Two main advantages are associated with the use of multilevel models in this situation, other than properly taking into account the hierarchical structure of our data. First, they allow an assessment of the variance partitioning, namely the quota of residual variance ascribable to every level, which cannot be evaluated in single-level models. Second, multilevel models allow the introduction of independent variables referring to properties of the higher level of analysis and properly assess their effect on the dependent variable measured on level-1 units.

Nevertheless, the employment of multilevel models does not come without shortcomings. Scholars indeed largely debated about the estimation of multilevel models when the number of higher-level units is small. The number of three-level units employed in this chapter, equal to 13, is indeed slightly higher than the minimum number of clusters suggested by Snijders and Bosker (1999), that is, 10. By making use of simulations on survey data, Bryan and Jenkins (2016) show the issues of employing small numbers of higher-level units in multilevel models with random effects and both individual- and group-level fixed effects. In the assessment of variance partitioning coefficients, we thus need to be cautious in the interpretation of the results, however, whether level-2 and level-3 variances will prove to be significantly higher than zero we have robust evidence of the presence of variability at the group-levels.

Multilevel linear probability models are thus employed. They indeed allow directly estimating level-1 variance, which has to be taken as fixed when using multilevel logistic models (Snijders and Bosker 1999). Moreover, they facilitate interpretation and comparison

[60] The degree programs with less than 10 students are supposed to not be active when the university election took place, while the total absence of students not voting enrolled to a precise degree program does not allow variability in the outcome within those level-2 units

[61] In the complete dataset, students are enrolled in 65 unique degree programs.

among models, and to reduce the issues of omitted variables and unobserved heterogeneity (Mood, 2010). Nonetheless, exploratory analyses employing multilevel logistic regression provide substantially analogous results.

The presentation of the models follows a step-wise procedure: Model 0 represents the null model, Model 1 includes socio-demographic variables, then academic career-related variables are added in Model 2, and finally, the type of degree enters in Model 3.

3.7 Results

3.7.1 GOTV campaign

Table 3.1 allows answering the main research question (*RQ1*) and the two more specific ones (*RQ2a* and *RQ2b*). The "treatment" group refers to all the students that received an email message, without taking into account the content and the timing of delivery. *RQ1* is answered through the comparison between the "treatment" group and the "control" group. Voter turnout is little higher in the "treatment" group (21,3% vs 21,1% in the "control" group), but the difference is largely not significant. Email messages were only able to mobilize about 2 students out of 1000, that is a largely insignificant result. Although the messages were sent by the organization in charge of the election, namely the University of Trento, as in Malhotra, Michelson, and Valenzuela (2012), emails seem not to boost electoral participation. Nonetheless, we have to point out that while in Malhotra, Michelson, and Valenzuela (2012) emails were sent directly by the address of the person in charge of the election, in our experiment emails were sent by an impersonal institutional address.

Although GOTV campaign seems to be ineffective, differences between types of treatment could be detected. In order to test *RQ2a*, the effect of the different contents is tested comparing every treatment group (in terms of different content of the message) with the control group, without considering the timing of delivery of the message. The message

focused on the possibility to determine the electoral outcome ("being decisive") proves to be the most effective (21,9%), although not significantly. On the other hand, citizens belonging to the civic duty group show a lower level of participation (20,5%) than the control, but not significant even in this case. We have further tested the difference of voter turnout in every two couple of treatment groups, but no significant differences are found. As in Gerber and Green's (2000) experiment, different contents of the message do not produce differentiated effects on voter turnout. As previously underlined, the messages employed did not vary in terms of social pressure, which proved to significantly affect turnout in several GOTV studies.

Table 3.1: Turnout (%) by experimental group (N=16,255).

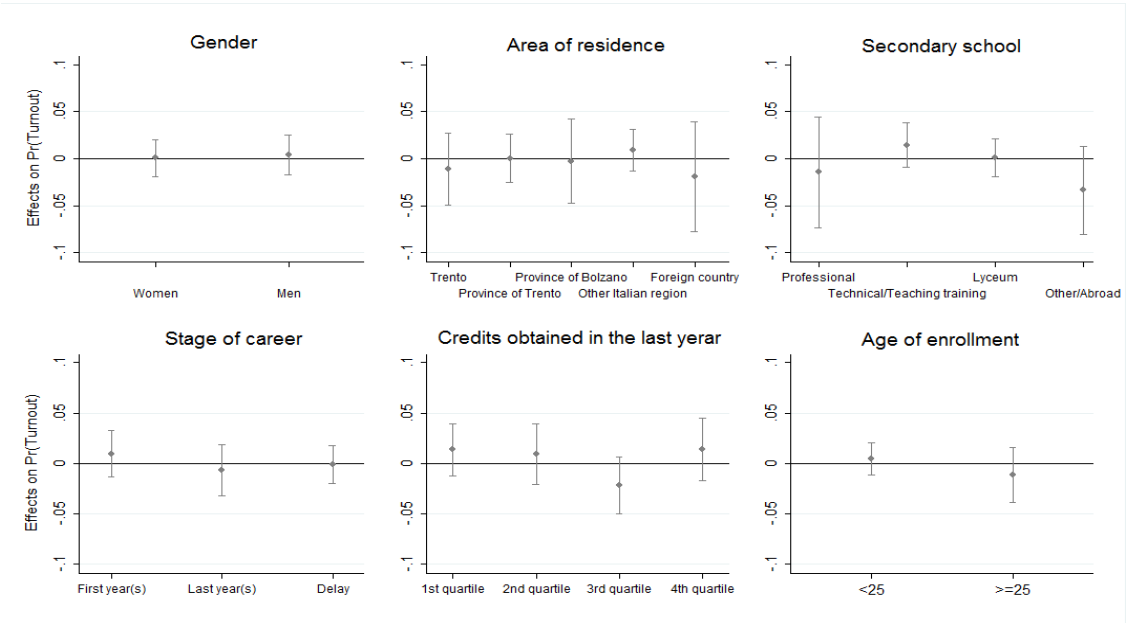
Group	N	% Turnout	P-value (two-tailed) on difference with the control
Control	4,068	21.1	Na
Treatment	12,187	21.3	0.77
Treatment – Content			
Treatment - Civic duty	4,063	20.5	0.54
Treatment - Political efficacy	4,069	21.5	0.68
Treatment - Being decisive	4,055	21.9	0.35
Treatment - Timing			
Treatment - 5 days before	6,092	21.5	0.61
Treatment - 1 day before	6,095	21.1	0.99
*Treatment – Content*Timing*			
Treatment - Civic duty*5 days before	2,036	21.8	0.60
Treatment - Civic duty*1 day before	2,027	19.2	0.09
Treatment – Political efficacy*5 days before	2,031	21.7	0.61
Treatment - Political efficacy *1 day before	2,038	21.2	0.89
Treatment - Being decisive *5 days before	2,025	21.1	1.00
Treatment - Being decisive *1 day before	2,030	22.8	0.12

Notes: Proportion tests have been run for every couple of experimental groups, by content and timing. All the differences are not statistically significant.

The same applies for the timing of the message (*RQ2b*). The difference in turnout between students who received the email 5 days before the election and the other students (both students who did not receive the email and students who received the email, totally ineffective, the day before the election), apart from the content, is equal to 0.4 percentage points, however not significantly different from zero. Therefore, no empirical evidence on the recency effect has been found.[62]

Moreover, there are no combinations of content and timing of the message producing a significant increase in turnout; even, there is weak evidence on the adverse effect of civic duty messages sent the day before the election (- 1.9 percentage points, significant at 90% level).

Figure 3.2: Average marginal effect on turnout of having received the GOTV email by gender, area of residence, type of secondary school, stage of career, number of credits obtained in last year and age of enrollment. Estimates from logistic regression models. 95% confidence intervals (N=16,255).



According to the theory of contingent mobilization (Arceneaux and Nickerson, 2009), in a low-salience election high-propensity voters are more likely to be mobilized, thus we should expect that the students more involved in the university life are more mobilized.

[62] The interaction between content and timing of delivery has been further analysed and it has proved to be largely not significant.

Figure 3.2 shows the average marginal effects of the interaction between the experimental condition and socio-demographics and academic-related factors estimated by means of six separated logistic regression models. The effects of email messages and turnout are not significantly different from zero for all the categories of the independent variables. Thus, no differentiated effects of the online mobilization among student characteristics are detected.

3.7.2 Determinants of participation in university elections

Although online mobilization proved not to increase participation in university election, further analyses aimed at detecting who vote in that kind of election and thus at answering RQ3 are presented in this paragraph. Table 3.2 shows the output of the stepwise three-level linear probability models with turnout in university election as the dependent variable. Looking at the variance components, the almost totality of the variance is explained at the individual level (91.8% in null model). Level-1 variance lowers from 0.161 to 0.158 after adding socio-demographics, and it makes register the highest reduction when including career-related factors, moving to 0.152. However, in every model variance at the degree-program level (level-2) is significantly higher than zero. After adding socio-demographics, the variance partitioning coefficient for level-2 moves from 4.7% (Model 0) to 4.2% (Model 1). Then, in Model 2 including career-related factors the coefficient is equal to 4.1%, and it still lowers to 3.6% in Model 3, which also accounted for the type of degree. Therefore, the more substantial drops in variance partitioning coefficient for level-2 are mainly due to the different composition of the degree programs in terms of socio-demographics and to the explicative power of the type of degree. Anyhow, the employment of multilevel models confirms to be well suited to analyse those data, since a significant quota of variance comes from group levels. Variance at the department level (level-3) is instead not significantly different from zero in all the four models. We should, however, take into account that variance at higher levels with a limited number of groups is systematically underestimated, as

illustrated in the previous section, and that most of the group-level variance is explained at the level-2.

Table 3.2: Multilevel linear probability models (beta coefficients and standard errors in parentheses) with turnout in 2014 university election in Trento as dependent variable (95% confidence intervals).

VARIABLES		Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
SOCIO-DEMO					
Gender (Male)	Female		0.02***	0.03***	0.03***
			(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Area of residence	Province of Trento		0.01	0.00	0.00
(Trento)	(Trento excluded)		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
	Province of Bolzano		-0.02	-0.02	-0.02
			(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)
	Other Italian region		0.09***	0.06***	0.06***
			(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
	Foreign countries		-0.04	-0.06**	-0.06**
			(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Secondary school (Vocational)	Technical/Teacher		0.02	0.01	0.01
	Training		(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
	Lyceum		0.07***	0.04***	0.04***
			(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
	Other/Abroad		-0.00	0.01	0.01
			(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
UNIVERSITY RELATED					
Stage of career	Last year(s)			-0.07***	-0.07***
(First year(s))				(0.01)	(0.01)
	Delay			-0.19***	-0.19***
				(0.01)	(0.01)
Credits obtained	2nd Quartile			0.02*	0.02*
(1st quartile)				(0.01)	(0.01)
	3th Quartile			0.02**	0.02**
				(0.01)	(0.01)
	4th Quartile			0.07***	0.06***
				(0.01)	(0.01)
Age of enrollment	>=25			-0.10***	-0.09***
(<25)				(0.01)	(0.01)
Type of degree	Unique cycle				-0.09
					(0.07)
	Master				-0.03
					(0.03)
Constant		0.23***	0.13***	0.21***	0.23***
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Variance Level 1		0.161***	0.158***	0.152***	0.152***
(Individual)		(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Variance Level 2		0.008***	0.07***	0.07***	0.06***
(Degree program)		(0.002)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Variance Level 3		0.006	0.005	0.004	0.005
(Department)		(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Observations		15,775	15,775	15,775	15,775
Degree programs		48	48	48	48
Departments		13	13	13	13

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Model 1 shows that female students are two percentage points less likely to vote than male ones. Furthermore, students coming from Italian regions outside Trentino-Alto Adige are more likely to vote than all the other students. Since most of them are supposed to move from their places of residence to Trento for the university studies, they could be more motivated to be integrated into the university life, even when compared to the students living in Trento (their probability to turn out is nine percentage points higher than students resident in Trento). On the contrary, students coming from abroad make register the lowest level of participation, although the difference with the ones resident in Trento is not statistically significant. As expected, university students with a lyceum qualification are more likely to vote than the ones with a technical/teacher training (5 percentage points difference) or a vocational qualification (7 percentage points difference). This last finding confirms that horizontal inequalities are also reflected in electoral participation, consistently with previous research (Cicognani et al., 2012).

In Model 2, which accounts for academic career-related factors, the effect of gender even increases (- 3 percentage points in turnout for female). Students coming from Italian regions outside Trentino-Alto-Adige and with a lyceum qualification are still significantly more likely to turn out, although the effects partially weaken. Moreover, the negative effect of coming from foreign countries increases and becomes statistically significant. Looking at the career-related factors, stage of career proves to be strongly associated to turnout: students enrolled in the first years of their degree program have higher stakes to participate, thus they are 7 percentage points more likely to vote than students in last years of their program, and 19 percentage points more likely than ‘delay students’. Findings also show an overall positive association between the number of credits obtained and turnout. In particular, a high difference is observed between students in the fourth quartile, who are thought to be the most

integrated into the university life, and the others. Moreover, students enrolled in university at 25 years old or later are far less likely (- 10 percentage points) to turn out than the others.

After adding the variable on the type of degree in Model 3, coefficients for socio-demographics and career-related variables do not substantially vary from Model 4. Finally, no significant differences in turnout are registered among different types of degree.

3.8 Discussion and conclusions

The relevance of GOTV studies is strictly connected to their impact in real-world campaigns. GOTV research has largely contributed to the innovation of the electoral campaigns, which have been becoming more and more professional, by taking into account the findings of the academic research. The best example is represented by Obama's campaign for 2008 Presidential Election, in which a large number of volunteers were involved in mobilizing American citizens through door-to-door canvassing, coordinated by a professional campaign staff. Nowadays, in the US context an increasing number of professional companies[63] offer their expertise in order to carry out GOTV studies that support every political candidate or party that make request (and obviously pay) for it.[64]

Nonetheless, our GOTV campaign has proved to be ineffective: non-partisan impersonal messages encouraging people to vote have not boost participation university students. The delivery of GOTV email messages has proved to be a waste of time, as Nickerson (2007a) had pointed out. The content of the messages and the timing of delivery did not have any impact. However, because of ethical issues the messages employed did not contain a strong component of social pressure, which was proved to be successful in increasing the likelihood to vote. Furthermore, the collaboration with the university did not allow to employ other forms of contacting, such as text-messages, which proved to be more

[63] As, for example, New Organizing Institute (http://neworganizing.com/content/page/gotv) and Advocacy Data (http://www.advocacydata.com/work/gotv/)

[64] GOTV strategy has even inspired the electoral campaign for an Italian municipal election (Cepernich, 2015).

effective in other contexts. Anyhow, conducting a field experiment is often challenging. As stressed by Gerber and Green (2012, p. 14), "field experiments are often the product of coordination between researchers and those who actually carry out the interventions or furnish data on subjects' outcomes", therefore "researchers cannot make unilateral decision about what treatments to deploy".

The present study presents some clear limitations, that need to be addressed.

First, we do not know whether a person opened the email or not, therefore the mechanism of the no-effect is not wholly detected. Information available only allowed to test intent-to-treat effect, as it usually happens in GOTV direct mail campaigns. Indeed, we cannot conclude that email messages are not mobilizers because students did not read them or because the stimuli proved to be ineffective. Previous studies register an open rate of about 20% (Nickerson, 2007a), thus we can expect that a consistent quota of students opened the emails.

Second, the choice of university students as experimental subjects and of an election for students' representatives as the object of the campaign can pose a threat to the external validity of the study. On one hand, students could be more exposed to digital electoral campaign, as a result of their widespread online presence. On the other hand, since the messages are sent by the university, which delivers a large number of email communications to students, it could be possible that students do not pay attention to these emails. Furthermore, university elections are low-ordered, with low stakes, thus our findings need to be confirmed within other frameworks, wherever it is possible.

Third, the experiment cannot detect the spillover effects of the campaign (see Nickerson, 2008). In other words, we cannot know whether students who voted without having received the email were indirectly mobilized by students who received the email. However, low-salience elections are characterized by a low level of interpersonal

mobilization (Rolfe, 2012); therefore we should be able to detect the direct effect, whenever existent.

Fourth, as in most of GOTV studies, mobilizing messages do not contain a partisan component which is usually included in real-world campaigns.

Although the experiment suffers from the abovementioned shortcomings, it aims at giving an original contribution to the research on campaign mobilization. On our knowledge, it represents the first GOTV email experiment in Europe and it takes to the first empirical evidence of the inefficacy of an impersonal non-partisan email campaign within the Italian framework. The experiment was successfully carried out, since the emails were actually delivered to the randomized groups of students and the individual turnout was unbiasedly measured thanks to the access to the official voting records. Overall, our findings do not deviate from the previous U.S. empirical evidence, which found a little-to-no effect of the emails. Furthermore, the results can represent a precious source for professional campaigners, even though they make use of partisan messages.

Since the study has demonstrated the feasibility to carry out a GOTV experiment even in Italy, although in low-ordered elections, we invite researchers to carry out other GOTV campaigns in order to test the impact of different campaign tactics in different contexts. Other university elections, on a larger scale or through the coordination of some universities, could represent the electoral events where carrying out these experiments. In addition, primary elections with a register of voters could be a precious source for this kind of experimentation. Through an agreement with the political party in charge of the primary election, it could be possible to carry out a GOTV campaign. Primary elections are even well-suited for a non-candidate-oriented campaign, since their turnout usually represents the main proxy of a success, or of a failure, of those elections. Furthermore, other studies carried out in a first or second-order election are welcome, in order both to increase the external validity of our

findings and to test the effect of other campaign techniques on turnout in the Italian context. Cantoni and Pons (2017) have proved that there is a possibility to have access to the official voting records, nonetheless, it strictly depends on the final decision of the president of the provincial court.

Following the UNDP practices, further interventions aiming at increasing political participation among young voters are welcome also in the Italian context. Although our GOTV campaign was not successful, other campaigns should be organized in order to sensitize young people to participate. A significant example comes from the Danish context, where the Parliament sends a copy of the Constitution to all first voters before the first local, national or European election to which they are eligible, together to a letter remembering them their eligibility to vote (Bhatti et al., 2015).

In addition, the unique dataset of the university students which includes their individual electoral participation allows proving some indications on an unexplored form of political participation, that is the vote for university students' representatives. The analyses show that social centrality factors prove to be salient also in the explanation of turnout in this kind of election. Studies on a larger scale, including data on various university elections, are welcome to give further evidence to our empirical findings. Furthermore, longitudinal studies are needed to test whether voting in university elections is really habit-forming.

Appendix A3

Figure A3.1: Civic duty email message.

Next Tuesday and Wednesday the STUDENT ELECTIONS for the appointment of student representatives will take place.

YOU ALSO ARE CALLED TO EXPRESS YOUR PREFERENCE.
DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!

Voting in university elections is important.
Voting is your right and also your duty. Your vote is needed to guarantee the democratic life of the University and the students' control on the collegiate bodies, such the Academic Senate and the Council of your department. Your voting participation is necessary to guarantee the proper functioning of your university.
MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD, PARTICIPATE! GO TO THE POLLS!

You could vote on the following dates:
Tuesday 18 November, from 9.00 to 17.00
Wednesday 19 November from 9.00 to 16.00

FURTHER INFORMATION:
Information on the CANDIDATES is available on the webpage http://www.unitn.it/ateneo/181/elezioni
Indications on the POLLING STATIONS will be available in every department during the election days.

Best regards,
for the Internal Communication of the University
********* ******
Communication and Events Division
General Direction
University of Trento

Figure A3.2: Political efficacy email message.

Next Tuesday and Wednesday the STUDENT ELECTIONS for the appointment of student representatives will take place.

YOU ALSO ARE CALLED TO EXPRESS YOUR PREFERENCE.
DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!

Voting in university elections is important.
With your vote, you could actively participate in decisions on your university life.
You could have a say in matters regarding your studies and your student rights. You could elect colleagues of yours who will represent you in the council of the department and the academic senate.
Your voting participation can improve the functioning of your university.
MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD, PARTICIPATE! GO TO THE POLLS!

You could vote on the following dates:
Tuesday 18 November, from 9.00 to 17.00
Wednesday 19 November from 9.00 to 16.00

FURTHER INFORMATION:
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Table A3.1: Voter turnout (%) by department.

Department	Turnout (%)	N
Centre for biology integration	49.8	269
Physics	46.0	413
International Studies	33.7	95
Centre for Mind/Brain Sciences	30.8	65
Industrial Engineering	30.4	855
Law	27.0	2,705
Economics	22.2	2,491
Mathematics	22.0	478
Civil, Environmental and Mechanical Engineering	18.3	2,051
Information Engineering and Computer Sciences	17.0	1,348
Sociology and Social Research	15.3	1,777
Psychology and Cognitive Sciences	*14.9*	1,212
Letters and Philosophy	*14.1*	2,640
Total	21.1	16,399

Notes: in Italic turnout under the quorum of 15%

Table A3.2: Randomization checks: Percentage distribution of socio-demographics and academic career variables by experimental condition (N=16,255), and chi-square tests of independence.

Variables	Experimental condition							P-Value (Chi2)
	Civic duty 5 days before	Civic duty 1 day before	Pol.efficacy 5 days before	Pol.efficacy 1 day before	Be decisive 5 days before	Be decisive 1 day before	Control	
Gender								
Male	49.3	47.8	49.3	47.9	50.5	50.7	49.8	0.37
Female	50.7	52.2	50.7	52.1	49.5	49.3	50.2	
Area of residence								
Trento	12.5	11.7	12.6	12.4	13.6	12.0	11.7	
Prov. Tn	27.9	28.0	27.9	28.7	26.3	27.8	27.9	
Prov. Bz	7.5	7.0	7.3	6.4	6.6	7.2	7.1	0.87
Other Italy	49.5	51.4	49.2	50.2	51.0	50.3	50.8	
Foreign	2.7	1.9	2.9	2.3	2.5	2.8	2.5	
Sec. School								
Professional	4.7	5.1	5.6	4.5	4.1	4.6	4.6	
Tecnical	29.5	31.4	31.9	30.5	30.0	32.0	30.6	0.67
Lyceum	59.9	58.6	57.1	59.7	60.1	57.9	59.4	
Other/Abroad	5.8	4.9	5.5	5.4	5.9	5.6	5.4	
Career stage								
First year(s)	48.4	46.6	48.0	47.7	47.9	48.9	46.4	
Last year(s)	33.3	33.6	31.6	31.7	31.3	31.6	34.1	0.31
Delay	18.4	19.8	20.4	20.2	20.9	19.5	19.5	
Credits								
1st quartile	27.6	28.8	30.3	28.8	29.2	28.7	28.9	
2nd quartile	21.3	20.5	20.8	21.2	22.2	21.0	19.5	0.57
3rd quartile	27.5	26.0	26.1	26.7	24.4	26.0	26.4	
4th quartile	23.7	24.8	22.9	23.3	24.1	24.4	25.1	
Enrollment age								
<25	89.8	90.3	89.3	90.5	89.3	90.4	90.3	0.68
>=25	10.2	9.7	10.7	9.5	10.7	9.6	9.7	

Chapter 4. The relationship between disagreement in social networks and electoral participation: a matter of cohesiveness?

4.1 Introduction

Since the seminal studies of Columbia scholars (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, 1954; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1968), political behaviour has been seen as a social activity, largely affected by the environment in which citizens structure their preferences (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995; Zuckerman, 2005). The network environment has been acknowledged to play a central role in determining political attitudes and behaviour, such as vote choice (Bello and Rolfe, 2014) and electoral participation (Mutz, 2002). According to Rosenstone and Hansen (1993, p. 23), "the explanation of participation, to make any sense, must move beyond the worlds of individuals to include family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers". Among various characteristics of the networks as predictors of political participation, large amounts of attention have been devoted to their political composition. Citizens can indeed encounter disagreement in their networks, since some of their discussants will likely hold different political views. As exposure to political disagreement is not infrequent (Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague, 2002, 2004), previous research has tested whether this characteristic of the network may be reflected in political participation. Nonetheless, while a number of studies have shown that disagreement is negatively associated to electoral participation, other studies argue that exposure to *some* disagreement can lead to a higher likelihood to participate (see Chapter 1, Section 1.4).

This chapter argues that both of these hypotheses hold, yet depend on the level of cohesiveness of the social circles to which one is exposed (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995). According to our argument, disagreement in more cohesive groups – such as the family – would be more difficult to bear. This would lead people to abstain as long as the level of disagreement in the group increases (Mutz, 2002). On the other side, in less cohesive groups –

such as those composed of friends – *some* disagreement can lead to higher likelihoods of turnout. This is because low levels of coercion (typical of the weak ties circles) can create a unique situation in which competition of opinions leads to the virtuous cycle of interest, commitment in political issues and participation (Nir, 2011; Bello, 2012).

In order to test our expectations, Italian National Election Study (ITANES) data collected before the 2013 national elections will be used. By means of linear regression models, which employ as the main independent variable a continuous measure of political disagreement rarely used in the literature (Lee, Kwak, and Campbell, 2015; Guidetti, Cavazza, and Graziani, 2016), it is found, consistent with our hypotheses, that mixed political views among non-cohesive circles (namely, friends) are associated with a higher likelihood to turn out. The relation between family disagreement and likelihood to turn out, on the contrary, proves to be linear and negative.

4.2 Theoretical Background

4.2.1 Disagreement, diversity and electoral participation

The relation between network and political participation has been investigated since Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet's seminal work, *The People's choice* (1968), in which the authors examined the effects of cross-pressures, defined as "the conflicts and inconsistencies among the factors which influence vote decision" (p. 53). Although their approach was mainly based on extra–political sources of conflict between social memberships (such as the most–known example of religious affiliation and socio–economic status) the authors also focused their attention on the cross-pressures between the voter and the prevalence of a political choice among family and associates.[65] According to their framework, a citizen embedded in a network where at least some of the members politically disagree with her is

[65] This type of cross-pressures was later referred by Mutz (2002) as cross-cutting networks, in order to differentiate them from the other types of cross-pressures.

considered to be under cross–pressure, and, as a result, is more likely to delay her voting decision. Some decades later, a remarkable number of studies tested whether somewhat opposing ideas in one's social network dampen turnout. General consensus concerning the nature of the relationship, however, has not yet been reached.

A number of contributions found a negative relation between disagreement and turnout, reinforcing Lazarsfeld and colleagues' (1968) results. Among these studies, the main contributions came from Mutz (2002, 2006), who provided a more systematic framework explaining the deterrent effect of disagreement both on political participation and turnout. Similar results were found in other studies, both in the US (McClurg, 2006; Belanger and Eagles, 2007; Eveland, Song and Beck, 2015) and in other contexts, such as Great Britain (Pattie and Johnston, 2009), and Italy (Guidetti, Cavazza, and Graziani, 2016).

Conversely, other studies did not find a relation between disagreement and turnout (Nieuwbeerta and Flap, 2000; Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague, 2004; Huckfeldt, Mendez, and Osborn, 2004; Nir, 2005), or indicated only an indirect relation through the time of voting decision (Hopmann, 2012).

Several recent contributions (Eveland and Hively 2009; Nir 2011; Bello, 2012; Klofstad, Sokhey, and McClurg, 2013; Lupton and Thornton, 2017) suggest rethinking the way of assessing the relationship between disagreement and turnout, arguing that the sole concept of disagreement is not enough. By identifying two crucial, qualitatively different states of disagreement (Nir, 2011, p. 676), they highlighted that opinion diversity, *per se*, does not necessarily depress participation. These studies found that there is a substantial difference between being exposed to a network composed of people who totally disagree with ego and experiencing *some* disagreement, namely, being exposed to both agreeable and disagreeable discussants (Bello, 2012). According to this framework, citizens experiencing disagreement could be included either in an *opposition* or in a *competition* network. If universal opposition

depresses turnout (consistently with previous studies) then competition can stimulate, and thus mobilize, voters (Bello, 2012; Eveland and Hively, 2009; Lupton and Thornton, 2017; Nir, 2011). In addition, experiencing complete agreement may signal to ego that the marginal utility of her choice would make an insignificant difference to the outcome, and thus discourage turnout.

Mixed findings emerge from studies that investigate the mobilizing nature of competitive networks. By analysing turnout in two different US elections, it was found that citizens experiencing competition are more likely to vote for the House of Representatives than citizens experiencing total agreement, while no difference is registered in the turnout for Presidential elections (Nir, 2011). Moreover, by studying both the direct effect of disagreement on turnout and the indirect effect through the time of voting decision and political discussion, Bello (2012) showed some empirical evidence concerning the mobilizing nature of the competitive networks.

It seems that the relation between disagreement and turnout could be visualized as a sort of inverted U, where turnout is lowest in a total opposition network, highest in a competitive network and decreases again as people are exposed to complete agreement.

Furthermore, some scholars suggest distinguishing between the concept of disagreement and the concept of diversity (Eveland and Hively, 2009; Lupton and Thornton, 2017). While disagreement is defined as "the extent to which one is exposed to individuals with whom one disagrees", diversity represents "the extent to which multiple viewpoints are expressed in the individual's discussion network" (Lupton and Thornton, 2017: p. 4). By testing the effects of separated measures of the two concepts, it was found that while disagreement discourages electoral participation, diversity boosts it, although not significantly (Lupton and Thornton, 2017). Nonetheless, even though the concepts can diverge, it is possible to find a correspondence between disagreement and diversity. Indeed, we can think that ego

experiences the highest level of diversity when half of the network discussants hold different political views from (disagree with) her. Similarly, when ego is exposed to total agreement or total disagreement (complete *opposition*), she experiences no diversity.[66] In other words, we can refer to diversity as a situation where an individual is exposed both to agreement and disagreement. Coming back to the qualitatively different states of disagreement, an individual is embedded in a *competitive* network only when she is exposed to some diversity of opinions in her network. Since the two concepts prove to be interrelated, we will not test their separated effects on turnout, however we will integrated the notion of diversity within the framework of disagreement.

4.2.2 Mechanisms of participation

The literature proposing a relationship between participation and disagreement provides at least three mechanisms to explain this empirical result.

The first is rooted in the social norms that regulate political discussion among citizens and stresses the constraining nature of the general climate of that network (Ulbig and Funk, 1999; Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2016). This *social accountability* explanation (Mutz, 2002) focuses on the system of social rewards and punishments that regulates political discussions: in the case of disagreement in a certain social network, ego tends to feel more uncomfortable with taking a political side that would unavoidably displease a part of her discussants (Mutz, 2002). As a result, ego could be more prone to abstaining in order to preserve the social harmony of her discussion network.

The second theoretical mechanism is the so-called *ambivalence* (Mutz, 2002; Bello, 2012). According to this explanation, people who are more exposed to disagreement have a higher propensity to remain uncertain until the final days before the election because of cross-

[66] These considerations apply under the assumption of the existence of only two classes of political views. It means that when an individual is embedded in a network of complete opposition, all of her discussants hold similar political views. If they hold different political views, the diversity will be no more null. Following previous literature, both the theoretical and the empirical section of the chapter will ground on this assumption.

pressures produced by their environment. Thus, it is expected that part of these undecided people will withdraw from the possibility of expressing a vote choice when the election day comes because of their indecision (which, in turn, increases the likelihood of abstaining).

While the first two mechanisms suggest that the level of disagreement should be negatively associated with turnout, the third one, that assigns a crucial role to the concept of diversity, argues that different states of disagreement produce complex effects on turnout. According to this mechanism, being exposed to diverse opinions leads individuals to benefit from their exposure to the different sides of the political debate, making them more knowledgeable about politics with respect to those who hear from only one side. Knowledge and interest, in particular, represent two of the strongest predictors of political participation and turnout (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). In other words, as Nir (2011, p. 676; see also Scheufele et al. 2004, 2006) points out, "[i]ndividuals' networks characterized by their diversity of opinion [...] increase factual knowledge and interest, and motivate further exposure to mass-mediated hard news and reflection on its content". As a result, citizens embedded in diverse/competitive networks are *activated* by their environment.[67] According to this framework, then, exposure to different levels of disagreement has a two–sided effect on people's behavior: from one side, total opposition, that implies no diversity, leads to uncomfortable situations, in which people perceive themselves as being attacked because of their opinion (with the result of a likely depression in turnout). From the other, *some* disagreement leads to a more intense exchange of ideas, which can, in turn, enhance knowledge/interest and propensity to go to the polls.[68] Following this line of research, we can thus expect that *mechanisms of activation will be dominant in determining the turnout of people experiencing different levels of network disagreement (Hp1).*

[67] From here on, we will refer to this mechanism as *activation*.
[68] This second side of the effect could not be applied for people experiencing universal opposition, who are affected only by the negative side of exposure to disagreement (Verba, Brady, and Scholzman, 1995).

The original contribution of the chapter, however, is to argue that these two orders of theoretical mechanisms (social accountability/ambivalence and activation) hold, according to the nature of the discussants with whom ego interacts and, in particular, the intimacy that they share.

4.2.3 Mechanisms of participation in cohesive and non-cohesive social groups

As stressed in Chapter 1, when analysing the relationship between the various network's characteristics and political behaviour we should always take into account the level of network's intimacy (see Section 1.4). In this respect, the literature differentiates between cohesive and non-cohesive social groups. Generally speaking, cohesive social groups represent groups where the ties that connect people are more intimate; as Huckfeldt and colleagues (1995) notice, the most ubiquitous example of a cohesive social group is the familiar one. On the other hand, non-cohesive groups can be exemplified as those lying just beyond the boundaries of a cohesive one (for instance, groups of friends or co-workers).

It is known that people mainly exposed to cohesive social groups tend to be subjected to stronger coercive power compared to people who are exposed to non-cohesive groups (Mutz and Mondak, 2006; Faas and Schmitt–Beck, 2010; Fieldhouse and Cutts, 2016). From the other side, less cohesive circles, because of their structure, are expected to present a lower level of coercion (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995) and an increased level of permeability to new and unorthodox ideas (Granovetter, 1973; Vezzoni and Mancosu, 2016). In other words, since the level of intimacy experienced in non-cohesive social groups is lower with respect to more cohesive circles, we can expect that a more lenient system of social rewards and punishments that is usually present in the former could encourage a more productive debate.

If it is true that cohesive networks lead to higher levels of coercion, mechanisms in which the normative system of social rewards and punishments are crucial (namely, social accountability and ambivalence) are expected to have a major role in shaping individual

likelihood to abstain. Exposure to coercive social relations, indeed, should lead individuals to perceive possible situations of disagreement as socially harmful. In turn, this could lead to them delaying their turnout decision or finding it difficult to take a clear political position and, therefore, to a higher likelihood to abstain. The corresponding hypothesis reads as follows: *when cohesive social groups are considered, mechanisms of social accountability/ambivalence are dominant in determining turnout (Hp2)*.

On the other hand, the relation expected by Nir (2011) and Bello (2012) would be clear if condensed in networks in which individuals do not expect a social sanction in case of disagreement. With the debate being freer and discussants less coercive, non-cohesive social groups are expected to be those in which *some* disagreement leads to a more thoughtful debate, that eventually enhances knowledge, interest in political topics and, in turn, the likelihood of going to the polls.[69] For this reason, we expect that, *when non-cohesive social groups are considered, mechanisms of activation are dominant in determining turnout (Hp3).*

The three hypotheses lead to a further remark on the nature of the relationship between network disagreement and turnout. If outcomes result in being consistent with those presented in the hypotheses, it means that both the social accountability/ambivalence and activation mechanisms hold. More specifically, they hold simultaneously in different parts of one ego–network (the former among the more cohesive circles, the latter among the less cohesive). This outcome would mean that previous empirical evidence, found on the global ego-network, is the result of the differentiated effects of two different "social worlds" which individuals are exposed to in their everyday lives.

[69] According to another stream of research (Morey, Eveland, and Hutchens, 2012; Bello and Rolfe, 2014), the expectation could be also reversed. These studies state that in general people tend to avoid discussing dangerous topics (such as politics, religion, values etc.) with people who do not know well (such as, for instance, weak ties). On the contrary, they tend to argue about these issues with closer people and could also be more prone to share disagreement over time. As a result, having intimate disagreeable discussants could increase the likelihood of turnout, instead of depressing it. Nonetheless, by comparing the individual level of conflict avoidance in different types of social circles, Morey, Eveland, and Hutchens (2012) found that the lowest level of conflict avoidance is experienced when discussing with friends.

4.3 Data, measures and methods

4.3.1 Data

As in Chapter 2, data come from the ITANES 2013 Rolling Cross–Section (RCS) pre–electoral survey. The whole sample is thus made of 8,722 individuals interviewed through the CAWI mode from January 5 to February 23 (for further information see subsection 2.5.1)

4.3.2 Dependent variable

The dependent variable employed in the analyses is the propensity to turn out in the 2013 Italian National election, measured on a 0 (not likely at all to turn out) – 10 (very likely to turn out) scale. Since the survey was administered before the election, this variable (valid cases=8,455, mean=8.3, s.d.=2.8) is considered the most suitable to measure the intention to participate in elections (Bolstein, 1991). Indeed, as Wagner, Johann and Kritzinger (2012, p. 375) pointed out, "[r]espondents might be more honest regarding their actual intention to turn out when presented with a scale in which people can indicate uncertainty and reluctance without declaring directly that they might abstain". Although it would have been possible to take into account the reported turnout among respondents included in the panel module (namely, in wave-2), we decided not to consider it since this measure is affected by a remarkable over–reporting bias, a very common issue in the measurement of turnout in survey research. This is particularly relevant in contexts in which turnout is high (Karp and Brockington, 2005), as in the Italian case, where in 2013 it was about 75%. Self–reported turnout obtained through ITANES CAWI post-electoral survey (administered on respondents of the panel module) is equal to 87.6% when considering the whole sample, and 91.4% when considering only respondents reporting a non–missing answer category to the question on electoral participation. As a result, the scarce variance of the measure does not allow a proper

test of our hypotheses.[70] Furthermore, since the panel module involves a minor part of the RCS respondents (about 3,000), we preferred to give higher leverage to the empirical findings by considering the largest number of respondents in the analyses.

4.3.3 Main independent variables

The main independent variables deal with the level of disagreement that an individual perceives in her networks. Since the concept is rather complex to operationalize, the measurement of disagreement represents a non-trivial issue. Previous research has mainly addressed the measurement of disagreement by employing the so-called 'name generator' technique, by which the respondent is asked to name her main political discussants (usually up to five, see Klofstad, McClurg, and Rolfe, 2009; Sokhey and Djupe, 2014). Respondent is thus asked to provide information on every discussant's political attitudes (including the perceived vote choice). By means of these questions, it is possible to measure the level of political disagreement that every individual experiences, by combining respondent's political views with her discussants' (Mutz 2002; Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague, 2004; Nir, 2011; Bello, 2012). Therefore, an individual who holds political views that are different from those of all of her discussants is exposed to the maximum level of disagreement. By means of name generator procedures, in addition, it is possible to estimate how much one is exposed to diversity of opinions, namely, the variety of different political opinions in one's network (Lupton and Thornton, 2017).

The name generator approach suffers from various shortcomings. The first is the fact that information is ego-reported, meaning that the researcher does not know the actual

[70] The six regression models have been also estimated, only for the respondents of the panel module, by employing the self-reported turnout in the post-electoral survey as dependent variable, instead of the propensity to turn out. Even if these analyses are plagued by the abovementioned issues with the self-reported measures of turnout – mainly in terms of overestimation that leads to a lack of variance in contexts of high turnout – we observed that the patterns of the analysis exploiting the longitudinal design (although less consistent in terms of statistical significance) are substantially congruent to the ones employing the cross-sectional data. Models and predicted probabilities of self-reported turn out by networks' disagreement are reported in Table A4.1 and Figures A4.2 and A4.3 in Appendix A4.

opinions of discussants. Research suggests that the level of people's accuracy in guessing their alters' political orientations is not particularly high (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995, p. 131) and that there is a tendency to project one's own attitudes onto the alters (Eveland, Song, and Beck, 2015). In addition, the name generation technique only allows us to obtain information from a limited part of the network, since individuals are usually asked to report information on no more than three/five people. In this way, name generator procedures tend to underreport information on non-cohesive groups, since members of these circles are considered, by definition, individually less important compared to cohesive groups members (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995). Aiming to overcome these issues, the chapter employs original measures of network political composition, introduced for the first time by Baldassarri (2009) in 2006 ITANES surveys, and employed in other works (e.g. Guidetti, Cavazza, and Graziani, 2016). In particular, the two questions (one for family, one for friends), asked in the 2013 RCS survey, differ slightly from those proposed by Baldassarri (2009)[71] and read as follows:

Think of the members of your family [your friends]. How many of them do you think have your same political opinions?

a. None of them (0%)

b. A few of them (around 10%)

c. Some of them (around 25%)

d. About half of them (around 50%)

[71] The questions asked in 2006 ITANES post-electoral surveys deal with the percentage of members of the individual's social circles who voted for the center-right coalition (the House of Freedom) and the center-left one (the Union), thus the level of political disagreement could be obtained by comparing those measures to the coalition voted by the respondent. Instead, in 2013 RCS survey, the questions refer to the political viewpoints of the social circles. Two main advantages could be underlined. First, by means of these variations, it is possible to measure the level of the disagreement that an individual perceives with a single question for each of the social circles examined. Second, since individuals could be mainly affected by the political opinions of their discussants, rather than by their voting intentions, which could be uncertain until the day of the election, it seems more proper measuring disagreement in terms of political opinions.

e. Many of them (around 75%)

f. Most of them (around 90%)

g. All of them (100%)

These measures[72] have the main advantage of referring to the whole network, providing information on more than the core group of discussants. The respondent is asked to evaluate her level of agreement with two social circles, where family network is meant to be more cohesive than friends' one.[73]Another advantage is represented by the possibility to treat them as continuous variables, by rescaling them in a 0 (total disagreement/complete opposition) – 1 (total agreement) scale, in which the value 0.1 is associated to the category 'few of them (around 10%)', the value 0.25 to the category 'some of them (around 25%)', and so forth. We can also expect that the highest level of competition is experienced at the 50% level - a situation in which ego agrees and disagrees with (more or less) an equal proportion of network discussants.

At least three technical issues, related to information availability in the 2013 RCS survey, must be highlighted. The first is that the agreement measure does not give us any information about the size of the network. In other words, given our data, it is impossible to detect whether the respondent calculates the percentage of people in agreement with her by considering 5, 10 or 20 people. The second issue is connected to the first hypothesis, that considers the relation between the whole network and turnout. In this case, in absence of a variable explicitly asking it, we decided to measure the level of disagreement in the whole network by calculating the mean of the two measures of agreement within family and friends'

[72] Following Klofstad, Sokhey, and McClurg's (2013) distinction between general and partisan disagreement, we can underline that our measures tap the concept of general disagreement.

[73] It must be stressed that when we deal with these social groups (the family and the friends), we do not have any empirical instrument to assess whether the family is actually more cohesive than friends' group. We are thus making an assumption based on previous research (Huckfeldt et al., 1995; Klofstad et al., 2009;). The limits that this assumption leads to, as well as possible workarounds, will be addressed in the concluding section of this chapter.

network. This is consistent with Guidetti, Cavazza, and Graziani (2016), who employed the same data to test the linear relation between disagreement in the whole network and turnout. Of course, this is a crude simplification of the actual complexity of the whole network composition, especially because it assumes that each social circle is given equal weights in the variable. We will deepen this latter issue in the Section 4.5. The third drawback, which is shared with name generator procedures is the ego-reported nature of the variables they lead to. As previously observed by Guidetti, Cavazza, and Graziani (2016), the questions do not exactly measure the true disagreement, but rather the level of disagreement that individuals perceive in their network, which is nonetheless the one effectively experienced.

Figure 4.1: Level of political agreement (%) in family and friends networks (n=8,107).

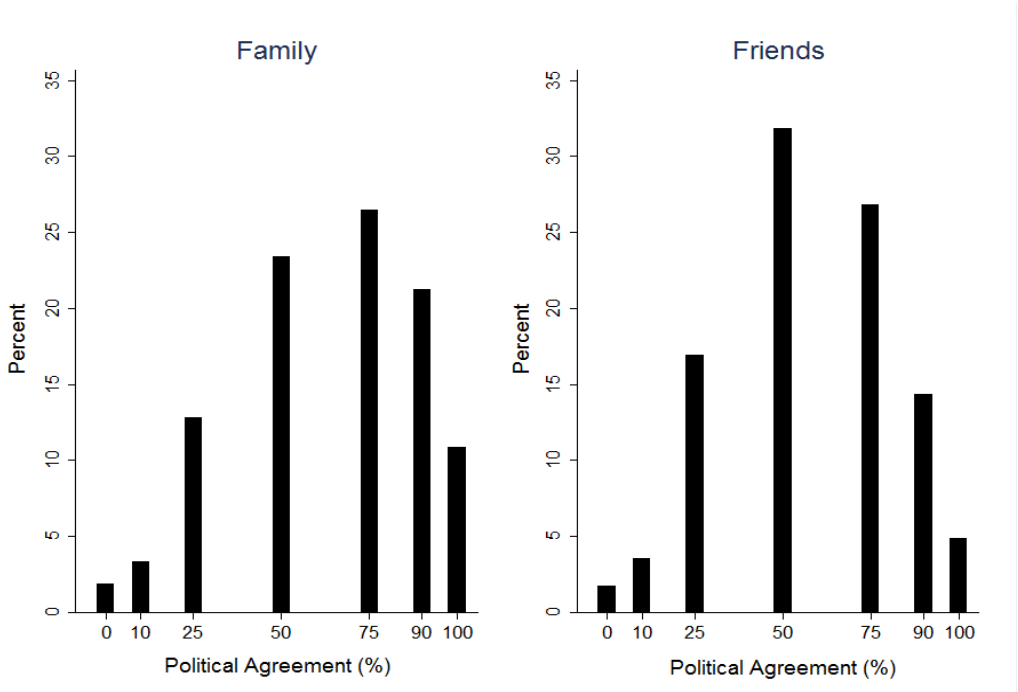


Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of the level of agreement in family and friends networks. As found by previous research (Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague, 2004), disagreement seems to be persistent in both the discussion networks.[74] Only 11% of the

[74] The correlation between the two measures is .56.

respondents experience total agreement within their family (rising to 32% when we include those who encounter agreement among 'most' of their relatives). In friend networks, this figure stands at 5% (and 19% when we include those who encounter agreement among 'most' friends). Furthermore, as can be seen in Figure 4.1, disagreement is more present among friends, where the median and the modal level of network agreement is equal to 50%. In the family, the median and the modal level of network agreement is 75%. This is consistent with several studies (e.g. Huckfeldt et al., 1995; Zuckerman, Dasovic, and Fitzegerald, 2007), in which the family circle is put forward as the social place in which political agreement is stronger.

4.3.4 Control variables

In order to study the genuine relation between disagreement and turnout, the models control for interest in politics, measured on a 4–point scale (0: no interest; 3: high interest), and frequency of political discussion, referred to the week before the interview, measured on a 6–point scale (0: never; 5: every day). Among the political controls, a measure of general dissatisfaction with parties has also been inserted, by means of a 11–point scale, obtained from a question that asked the respondent, according to her view, to which extent the whole party system was responsible for the Italian economic crisis (0: not at all; 10: totally responsible). Since the 2013 Italian electoral context was characterized by strong anti-political claims and a general dissatisfaction toward the established parties (Vezzoni, 2014), we argued that this variable can represent a good predictor of abstention.

Following previous literature, as socio-demographic controls we insert gender, education (coded in three answer categories: primary, secondary and tertiary), age and age-squared (Smets and Van Ham, 2013), and geopolitical area (coded in four categories: North–West, North–East, Red Area, Center–South).

Finally, in order to take into account the mobilizing effect of the electoral campaigns, a

continuous variable that measures the day of campaign in which respondent have been interviewed, on a 1 (first day of interviews) – 43 (last day of interviews) scale, has been added.

4.3.5 Data analysis

In order to test the three hypotheses, step-wise regression models with the propensity to turn out as dependent variable are estimated. Model 1 includes only socio-demographic controls, in Model 2 political variables are added, while in Models 3-6 we introduce network variables. In detail, Model 3 investigates the linear relation between disagreement and turnout, employing the individual-level of network political agreement, operationalized as the mean of family and friends' network agreement. This is the strategy employed, on the same RCS ITANES data, by Guidetti, Cavazza, and Graziani (2016). Model 4 takes into account the non–linear relation between disagreement and turnout, by adding a quadratic term for the whole network political agreement. Model 4, thus, tests the relevance of the activation mechanism when considering the whole discussion network (*Hp*1).

Then, in Model 5 and 6, we differentiate between family network and friend network political agreement. In order to clarify the interpretation of the results, we need to specify that these two models aim to study the effect of agreement in the family (friend) network on the propensity to turn out, net of the effects of agreement in the friend (family) network. In particular, Model 5 assesses the relation in a linear way, by estimating political agreement in those networks separately. Model 6 assesses the non-linear relation among cohesive and non-cohesive social groups, by introducing both the linear and the quadratic term for the two independent variables. Those models allow us to test the relevance of both social accountability/ambivalence and activation mechanisms (*Hp2* and *Hp3*).

4.4 Results

Table 4.1 shows the six regression models employed to test the hypotheses. Looking at socio-demographics, Model 1 shows that gender, education, and geopolitical area are significantly associated with the propensity to turn out: men, higher educated, and individuals coming from the Red Area are more inclined to participate, while residing in Southern Italy depresses the propensity to turn out. After the introduction of political (Model 2) and network variables (Model 3-6), the relation between gender and propensity to turn out is reversed; net of political and network variables, women prove to have a higher propensity to turn out. This association is somewhat puzzling since gender no longer represents a standard predictor of turnout (Smets and Van Ham, 2013[75]). Moreover, the positive effect of the educational level persists, although weaker, while concerning geopolitical areas only coming from Southern Italy remains negatively associated with a propensity to turn out. Those findings are consistent with the literature on turnout in Italy (Mannheimer and Sani, 2001; Tuorto, 2006. Finally, the coefficients for age and age squared are not significant when including political and network variables.

Consistent with numerous previous studies (e.g., Eveland and Hively, 2009; Smets and Van Ham, 2013), Model 2 shows that political discussion enhances the average propensity to vote, as does interest in politics, while a higher dissatisfaction with parties is associated with a lower likelihood to participate. Even after the inclusion of network variables in Models 3-6, the effects of political variables remain pretty stable.

Since we deal with an RCS survey, it is no surprise that the date of interview coefficient is positive and significant, given that, ceteris paribus, the approach of election day leads to a higher propensity to turn out (Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1995).

[75] However, the same authors show that in the few cases in which gender is found as significant in predicting turnout, women are more likely to vote than men, like in our analyses.

Table 4.1: OLS regression models with propensity to turn out as dependent variable. Estimates of coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses).

		Propensity to turn out					
Indep. Variables		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Network							
Network Agreement				0.52***	4.16***		
				(0.13)	(0.58)		
Network Agreement squared					-3.17***		
					(0.49)		
Family Agreement						0.69***	0.69
						(0.13)	(0.55)
Friends Agreement						-0.21	2.64***
						(0.14)	(0.57)
Family Agreement squared							-0.02
							(0.47)
Friends Agreement squared							-2.56***
							(0.50)
Politics							
Political discussion			0.18***	0.17***	0.16***	0.17***	0.16***
			(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Interest in politics			0.73***	0.73***	0.72***	0.73***	0.73***
			(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
All parties responsible for the crisis			-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***
			(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Socio-demographics							
Gender (Male)	Female	-0.13**	0.10*	0.10*	0.12**	0.10*	0.13**
		(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Education (Primary)	Secondary	0.57***	0.32***	0.32***	0.31***	0.32***	0.31***
		(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
	Tertiary	1.05***	0.54***	0.55***	0.52***	0.55***	0.52***
Geopolitical Area	North-East	-0.05	-0.05	-0.06	-0.04	-0.06	-0.05
(North-West)		(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
	Red Area	0.16*	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.07
		(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
	Centre-South	-0.17**	-0.22***	-0.23***	-0.21***	-0.22***	-0.21***
		(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Age		0.04***	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Age squared		-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Day of Interview		0.01***	0.01***	0.01***	0.01***	0.01***	0.01***
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant		6.21***	5.52***	4.57***	3.71***	4.53***	3.97***
		(0.32)	(0.33)	(0.34)	(0.37)	(0.34)	(0.36)
N		7,643	7,643	7,643	7,643	7,643	7,643
R-squared		0.03	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.11

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

As stressed in the previous section, Model 3 and 4 aim to study the relation between

disagreement in the whole network and propensity to turn out. Model 3 shows that an increase in global network agreement is associated with a higher individual propensity to turn out. This seems to add further empirical evidence to the strand of literature that argues a negative relation between disagreement and turnout. In particular, the result is consistent with previous analyses on the same data (Guidetti, Cavazza, and Graziani, 2016), which nonetheless employ as dependent variable the propensity to abstain in the future, finding a positive relation between that measure and disagreement. Model 4 tests whether the activation mechanism is sustained by empirical evidence (*Hp1*). The negative and significant squared agreement coefficient, together with the positive and significant main effect, lead us to posit, similar to Nir (2011), an inverted U relation between agreement and turnout. Figure 4.2 shows the predicted scores of the likelihood to turn out by (whole) network agreement estimated by means of Model 4 coefficients. As it is possible to see, the predicted turnout probability is at its peak when the level of agreement is equal to 66% – a situation of competitive/diverse network, where citizens encounter more agreement than disagreement. In addition, propensity to turn out is higher when citizens are exposed to competition rather than when they encounter a totally agreeable network, consistently with what is argued in *Hp1*.

The other two models in Table 4.1 (Models 5 and 6) account for the same network, but are subdivided between cohesive and non-cohesive circles (operationalized here as family and friends).

In Model 5, the family agreement coefficient is positive and significant. The friend network agreement, however, proves to be non–significant. Thus, the analysis seems to prove the existence of a linear relation between the agreement in a cohesive social group and turnout, while no linear relation between agreement in a non-cohesive social group and turnout is registered. However, Model 6, which takes into account a potential non–linear relation for both the networks, shows quite a different situation. Since the interpretation of the

coefficients and variable trends is not straightforward, linear predictions for the two independent variables are shown in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.2: Predicted means of propensity to turn out by whole network political agreement, estimated by Model 4 (95% confidence intervals).

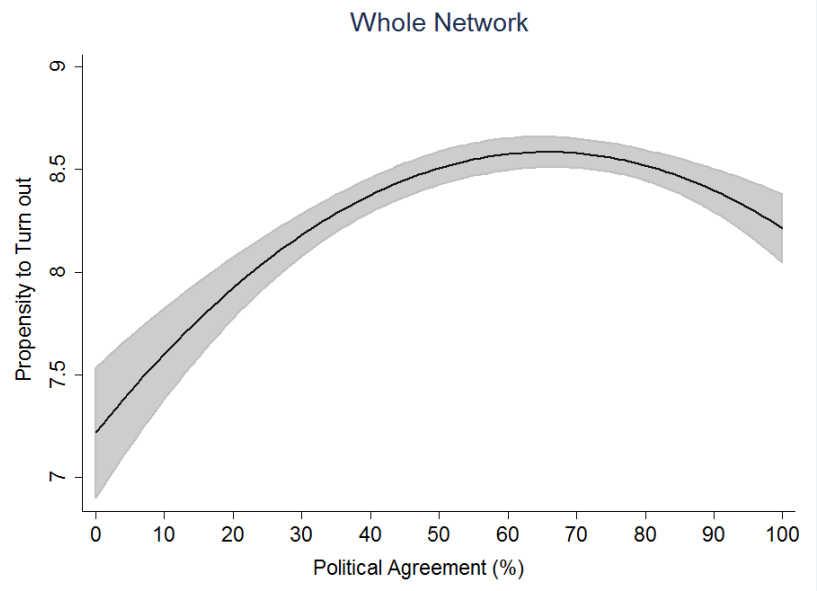
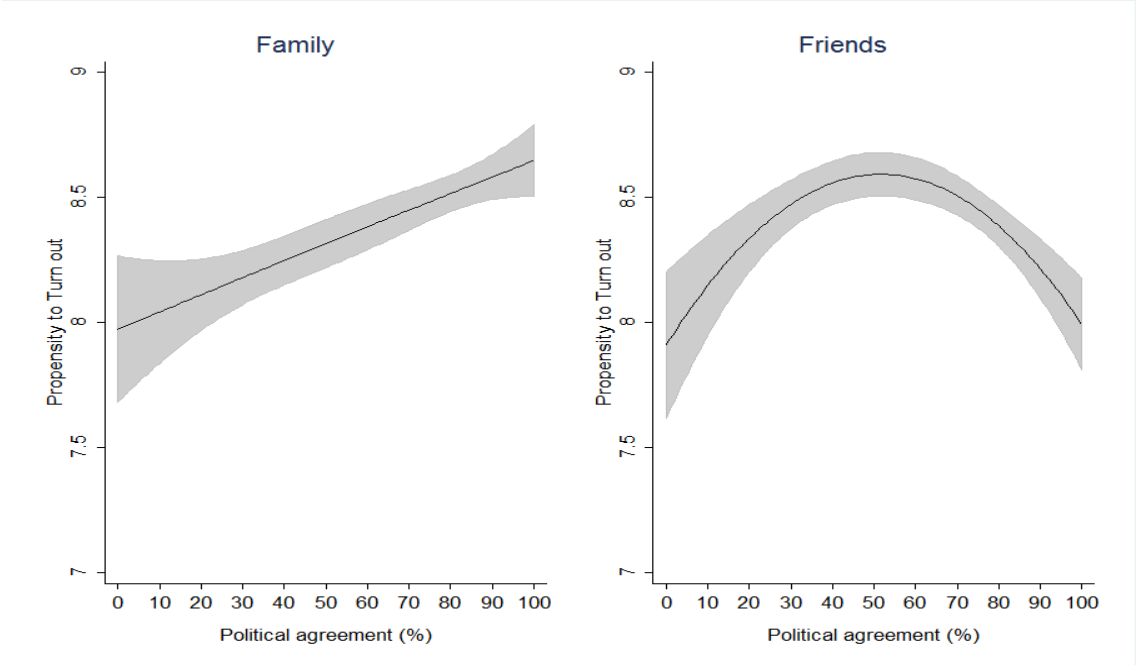


Figure 4.3: Predicted means of propensity to turn out by family (left panel) and friends network (right panel) political agreement, estimated by Model 6 (95% confidence intervals).



The prediction for the family network agreement (left panel) shows a linear trend. In other words, the more the respondent experiences disagreement, the less she is likely to vote. Thus, competitive cohesive networks seem not to mobilize their members. As expected, this outcome seems to be more consistent with social accountability/ambivalence mechanisms compared to activation, corroborating Hypothesis 2. The coefficient of the family agreement terms estimated in Model 6 and the prediction shown in Figure 4.3 (left panel) present an apparent inconsistency.

The trend is radically different for what concerns the friend network agreement. Figure 4.3 (right panel) shows the predicted propensity to turn out at different levels of friend network agreement. The lowest predicted values, as in the family network case, concern universal opposition networks, but the peak of the distribution is around 50% (52%) in a situation that can be exemplified as a competitive network (consistently with the activation mechanism). At the same time, respondents experiencing moderate disagreement seem to hold a similar propensity to turn out with respect to those experiencing moderate agreement. In this case, the shape of the relation between disagreement and turnout looks like an inverted U. Thus, as expected, *some* disagreement in the friend network largely (and significantly) enhances participation, consistent with Hypothesis 3.[76]

Previous studies have also tested whether the relation between disagreement and turnout is mediated by variables such as interest in politics, frequency of political discussion or exposure to political information (Bello, 2012). Since in this chapter we focus on the non–linearity of the relation between disagreement and propensity to turn out, empirically tested through the quadratic term of our measures of disagreement, techniques aimed at detecting indirect effects, such as path analysis or structural equation models, could be arduous to

[76] In the chapter, it is assumed that the optimal functional form is the quadratic one, without considering other options. In Appendix A4 the simple bivariate relationship between agreement and turnout intention is plotted (Figure A4.1). As it is possible to see, the functional forms are pretty similar to models' predictions.

interpret and estimate. Therefore, although linear regression models control for such variables, indirect effects are not assessed.

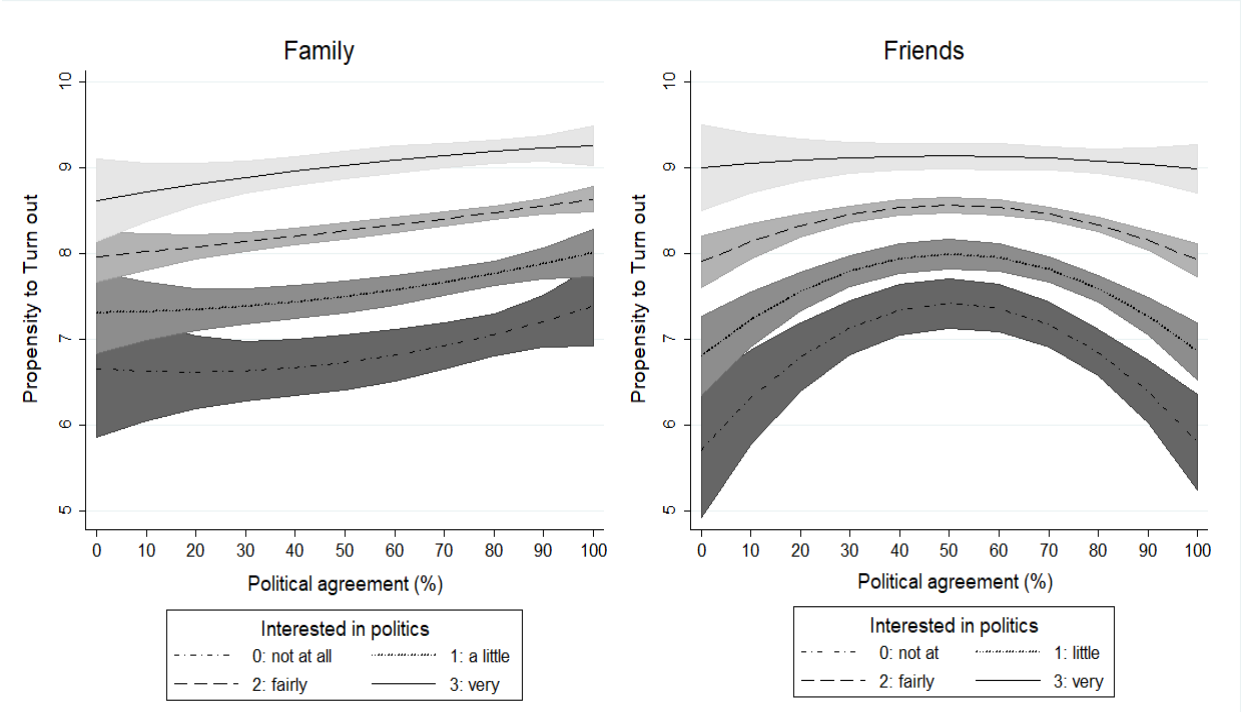
Moreover, interest in politics and frequency of political discussion could even moderate the relationships between disagreement and propensity to turn out in family and friends' networks. Previous findings have shown that two different mechanisms can explain the effects of disagreement within social circles on turnout (social accountability/ambivalence among relatives, activation among friends), but those mechanisms could be more prevalent among individuals characterized by certain political predispositions. By adding interactions between the quadratic terms of family and friends disagreement and interest in politics (see Model 6A in Table A4.2 in Appendix A4), we thus provide an answer to the last research question: Does interest in politics moderate the relationship between disagreement in family (friends) networks and propensity to turn out?

Figure 4.4 shows that interest in politics moderates the relationship between friends' agreement (right panel) and propensity to turnout while the same does not apply when considering the family network (left panel). In friends' circles, mechanisms of activation seem to play a crucial role among less interested individuals (with not at all and little interest in politics), since their experience of some disagreement leads to a significantly higher propensity to turn out (see the inverted U-shape form of the relation). This result suggests that among little-interested individuals the exposure to some disagreement leads to a more vivid debate, which then reflects in an increased propensity to vote. The same consideration cannot be extended to highly interested individuals, whose propensity to turn out proves not to depend on the amount of disagreement experienced in friends' network. When an individual is very interested in politics, any experience of disagreement within friends does not have an impact on her likelihood to participate.

On the contrary, interest in politics does not moderate the relationship between disagreement in the family network and propensity to turn out (see Figure 4.4 – left panel: lines are parallel). Independently from the interest in politics, the higher is the disagreement, the lower is the propensity to turn out. Mechanisms of social accountability/ambivalence thus seem to explain the relationship between disagreement and propensity to turn out for all the individuals, independently from their political interest. This result gives further empirical leverage to the prevalence of such mechanisms when considering familiar networks: experiencing disagreement in familiar networks is more difficult to bear, and it leads to a lower propensity to turn out, even among those who are very interested in politics.

Both for family and friends' network, similar conclusions come out when employing the frequency of political discussion as moderating variable (see Figure A4.4 in Appendix A4, full regression model reported in Table A4.2-Model 6B in Appendix A4).

Figure 4.4: Predicted means of propensity to turn out by family (left panel) and friends network (right panel) political agreement, and interest in politics (95% confidence intervals), estimated by Model 6A (see Table A4.2 in Appendix A4)



4.5 Discussion and conclusions

The relation between participation in elections and political disagreement has been widely studied in electoral research (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1968; Mutz, 2002; Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague, 2004; Nir, 2011; Rolfe, 2012). In this chapter, two orders of competing mechanisms in the explanation of this relation have been analysed. From one side, classical electoral behavior studies stressed that disagreement is an uncomfortable situation that drives citizens to abstain, arguing social accountability/ambivalence mechanisms (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1968; Mutz, 2002). From the other side, more recent contributions have shown that *some* disagreement can lead to an activation of interest, more thoughtful deliberation and higher levels of turnout (Nir, 2011; Bello, 2012). In the literature, these two types of explanation have been presented as competing, but, in this chapter, it has been argued that they can both hold according to the cohesiveness of the network in which the individual is embedded. Since individuals are exposed, at the same time, to different social spaces, with different degrees of coercive power and cohesiveness, it has been argued that, in social circles characterized by higher coercive power and cohesiveness, social accountability/ambivalence could be the dominant mechanism that drives the propensity to turn out. On the other side, when considering circles characterized by weak ties, the relation between disagreement and turnout could be explained by the activation mechanism.

By employing ITANES 2013 data – and a continuous variable that explicitly measures individuals' perceived agreement in different circles – we have found that the evidence presented is consistent with our expectations. In other words, it seems that the relationship between disagreement and turnout is the result of two different effects: people are pulled, in their decision to turn out, by both ambivalence/social accountability and activation mechanisms, depending on the social circle we consider. Among discussants about whom ego cares more, the former mechanism will be dominant – an uncomfortable situation of

disagreement is even more uncomfortable when a person who is more intimate with ego is in disagreement with her (Erisen and Erisen, 2012; Huckfeldt et al., 1995). On the other side, confronting the disagreeable opinions of friends (who are assumed to share, on average, weaker ties with ego) can ignite mechanisms in which political deliberation becomes more thoughtful and enriching for discussants, and can lead, eventually, to a higher level of turnout, as expected by more recent contributions (Bello, 2012; Nir, 2011).

Moreover, this chapter suggests a different perspective in the analysis of the relationship between disagreement and turnout. Previous research that employs the same data as our analysis (Guidetti, Cavazza, and Graziani, 2016) does, in fact, lead to different results. It does not take into account either the non–linearity of the relationship, or the cohesiveness of social groups in which individuals are embedded. By means of more detailed analyses, we are able to shed light on the potential mechanisms underlying the relationship between disagreement and turnout.

Overall, findings of this dissertation lead to two main implications. First, being exposed to *unanimous disagreement* is substantially different from being exposed to *not unanimous disagreement*. In the bivariate relationships between the level of agreement in family and friends' networks and the propensity to turn out (see also Figure A1 in the Appendix), we indeed observe the highest increase in the mean propensity to turn out when moving from *complete disagreement* to *almost total disagreement*. Holding isolated positions within a social network is dramatically detrimental to the individual political predispositions; however, the presence of even minimum political support is highly beneficial. This is consistent with the so-called Asch phenomenon (Asch 1951), according to which even a weak social reinforcement can produce remarkably different results in taking a position on a certain issue. This result suggests the need for further investigations on the qualitative and quantitative extent of political disagreement and its consequences on political behaviour.

Second, this work speaks to the long-standing dilemma between participation and deliberation, by offering a new perspective. Being exposed to some dissonant views is crucial for the existence of deliberative democracy, since it leads to higher political tolerance and open-mindedness, however it is generally meant to be detrimental for participatory democracy (Mutz, 2006). Empirical findings have shown that the experience of disagreement is substantially different in family and friends' networks. When considering family, exposure to disagreement is harmful for participation; therefore participation and deliberation are associated in a sort of trade-off. When considering friends' networks, deliberation and participation are no more seen as competing, since the experience of some disagreement leads to a higher propensity to turn out. Accordingly, we provide partial empirical evidence toward the existence of an ideal democratic citizen, who is supposed "to be enthusiastically politically active […], yet not to be surrounded by like-minded others" (Mutz, 2006, p. 125), however only when those discussants are friends.

This work, however, presents a number of shortcomings. The first is the cross–sectional nature of the data presented. Arguing that people can be pushed to vote (or not) by the relative prevalence of discussants in their network means assuming some form of influence process. However, cross–sectional data are poorly suited to identifying a causal mechanism. In an ideal setting, and according to the most recent research (Klofstad, 2007; Fowler et al., 2011; Bello and Rolfe, 2014), the only way in which we can identify influence is by observing the effect of the change over time of network disagreement on the over-time ego's propensity to turn out. Unfortunately, panel data allowing the detection of such an effect are rarely available.[77] Further studies, and more refined data would be able to tell us more about the causal aspects of the argument.

The second shortcoming is related to the nature of our main independent variable,

[77] Although, as previously argued, the data employed represent the first wave of a six-wave panel, questions on disagreement and propensity to turn out are asked only in the first wave, that is, the RCS survey.

especially for what concerns Models 3 and 4. As stressed in the Methods section, the measure of whole network agreement is calculated by averaging the friends and family network agreement variables, following a strategy already employed on the same data by Guidetti, Cavazza, and Graziani (2016). This makes our measure a (probably biased) simplification of the 'true' perceived level of agreement in the whole network since we are not able to take into account the varying importance that individuals could attribute to family and friends. While acknowledging the issues related to the measure, we decided to keep Models 3 and 4, because they provide a suggestive and useful picture of what happens when the whole network is considered. In addition, the results of the first two models are pretty consistent with previous literature (which could be considered as a sort of external validity check). Another issue related to our independent variable concerns the definition of cohesive and non-cohesive circles. As stressed above, we made the assumption based on previous literature that familial circles are more cohesive than friends' one, since data here employed cannot extract this piece of information. Future data collection strategies will need a more thorough account of the strength of the relationships between the respondents and their discussants (for instance, by measuring directly levels of emotional intimacy, time spent together, and reciprocity of services, see Granovetter, 1973).

Finally, as highlighted in the previous chapters, the measurement of individual turnout in survey research is affected by a number of issues. Since self-reported turnout is highly overestimated and available only for a portion of the sample, this chapter employs as dependent variable a continuous measure of the propensity to turn out. This reveals one's intention to go to the polls before the election, but not the actual participation. Further research in contexts where validated data on individual turnout are available is needed to corroborate the empirical findings of the present work.

Appendix A4

Table A4.1: Logistic regression models with self-reported turnout as dependent variable. Estimates of coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses)

		Turnout					
Independent Variables		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Network							
Network Agreement				0.35	2.26**		
				(0.28)	(1.13)		
Network Agreement squared					-1.74*		
					(1.00)		
Family Agreement						0.39	0.44
						(0.30)	(1.17)
Friends Agreement							1.04
							(1.19)
Family Agreement squared						-0.05	-0.06
						(0.31)	(1.03)
Friends Agreement squared							-1.02
							(1.09)
Politics							
Political discussion			0.14***	0.13**	0.12**	0.13**	0.12**
			(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Interest in politics			0.39***	0.39***	0.38***	0.39***	0.39***
			(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
All the parties responsible for the crisis			-0.04*	-0.05*	-0.05*	-0.05*	-0.05*
			(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Socio-demographics							
Gender (Male)	Female	-0.15	0.04	0.04	0.06	0.04	0.06
		(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.14)
Education (Primary)	Secondary	0.70***	0.57***	0.58***	0.56***	0.58***	0.57***
		(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
	Tertiary	1.04***	0.76***	0.76***	0.73***	0.77***	0.75***
		(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)
Geo-political area (North-West)	North-East	-0.06	-0.06	-0.07	-0.05	-0.06	-0.06
		(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.23)
	Red Area	0.24	0.22	0.22	0.24	0.23	0.24
		(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.24)
	Centre-South	-0.26	-0.28*	-0.28*	-0.27	-0.28*	-0.27*
		(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)
Age		0.07***	0.06**	0.06**	0.06**	0.06**	0.06**
		(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Age squared		-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Day of Interview		-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
		(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant		-0.45	-1.21*	-1.38**	-1.81**	-1.41**	-1.61**
		(0.63)	(0.68)	(0.69)	(0.73)	(0.69)	(0.73)
N		2,589	2,589	2,589	2,589	2,589	2,589
Pseudo R-squared		0,04	0,07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A4.2: OLS regression models with propensity to turn out as dependent variable Interactions between quadratic terms of family (and friends) agreement and interest in politics (Model 6A) and frequency of political discussion (Model 6B). Estimates of coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses).

		Propensity to turn out	
Indep. Variables		Model 6A	Model 6B
Family Agreement		-0.44	0.06
		(1.54)	(1.33)
Friends Agreement		6.74***	5.01***
		(1.55)	(1.32)
Family Agreement squared		1.17	0.94
		(1.35)	(1.18)
Friends Agreement squared		-6.65***	-4.62***
		(1.40)	(1.22)
Political discussion		0.16***	0.38***
		(0.02)	(0.08)
Interest in politics		1.04***	0.73***
		(0.18)	(0.05)
Family Agreement* Interest in politics		0.48	
		(0.71)	
Family Agreement squared* Interest in politics		-0.52	
		(0.62)	
Friends Agreement* Interest in politics		-2.06***	
		(0.73)	
Friends Agreement squared* Interest in politics		2.03***	
		(0.65)	
Family Agreement* Political discussion			0.09
			(0.35)
Family Agreement squared* Political discussion			-0.20
			(0.30)
Friends Agreement* Political discussion			-0.78**
			(0.36)
Friends Agreement squared* Political discussion			0.66**
			(0.32)
All parties responsible for the crisis		-0.08***	-0.08***
		(0.01)	(0.01)
Gender (Male)	Female	1.04***	0.73***
		(0.18)	(0.05)
Education (Primary)	Secondary	-0.08***	-0.08***
		(0.01)	(0.01)
	Tertiary	0.12**	0.13**
		(0.06)	(0.06)
Geopolitical Area	North-East	0.30***	0.31***
(North-West)		(0.09)	(0.09)
	Red Area	0.51***	0.52***
		(0.10)	(0.10)
	Centre-South	-0.04	-0.05
		(0.10)	(0.10)
Age		0.07	0.07
		(0.09)	(0.09)
Age squared		-0.21***	-0.22***
		(0.07)	(0.07)
Day of Interview		0.02	0.02
		(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant		4.18***	4.15***
		(0.46)	(0.41)
N		7,643	7,643
R-squared		0.11	0.11

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure A4.1: Conditional means for propensities to turn out, by family and friends agreement.

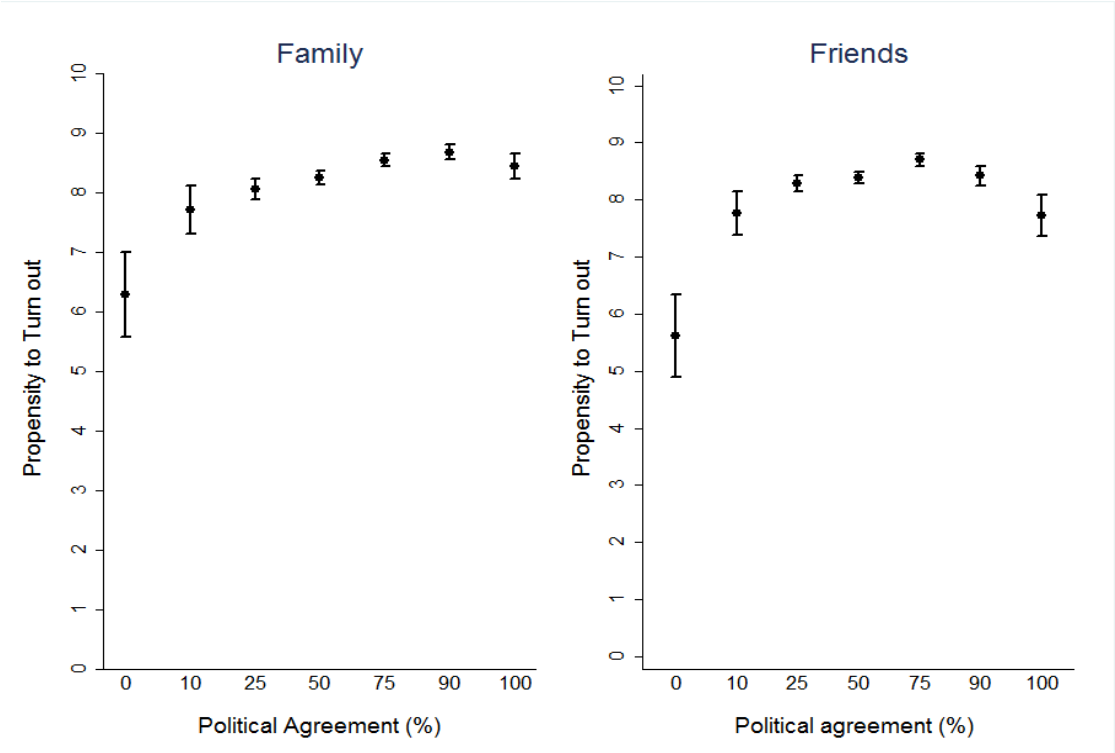


Figure A4.2: Predicted probability to turn out by whole network political agreement, estimated by Model 4 in Table A4.1 (95% confidence intervals).

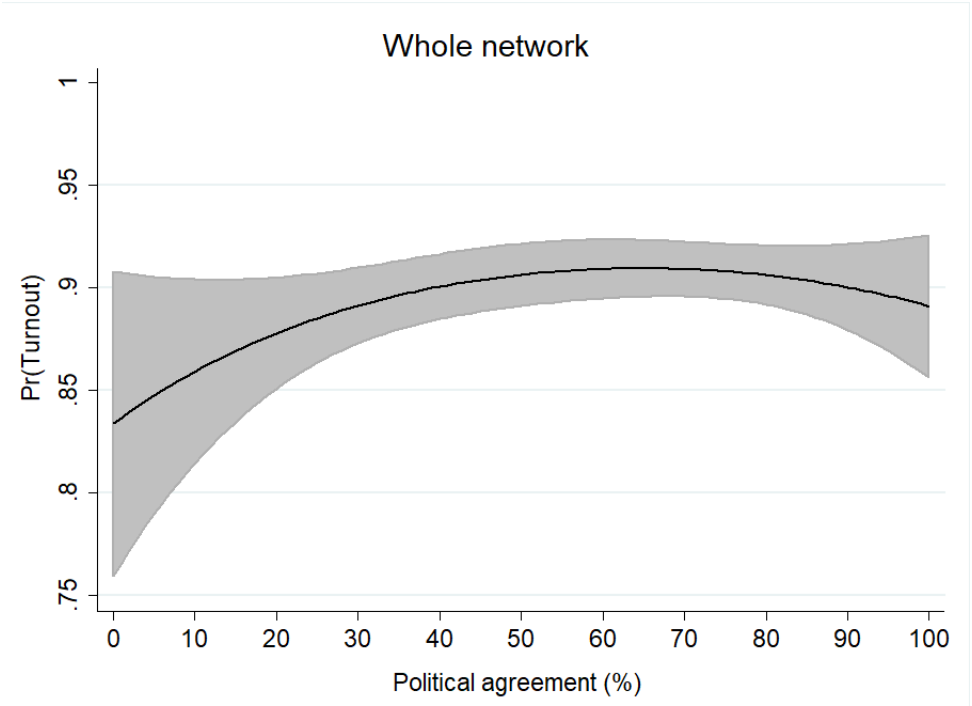


Figure A4.3: Predicted probabilities to turn out by family (left panel) and friends network (right panel) political agreement, estimated by Model 6 in Table A4.1 (95% confidence intervals).

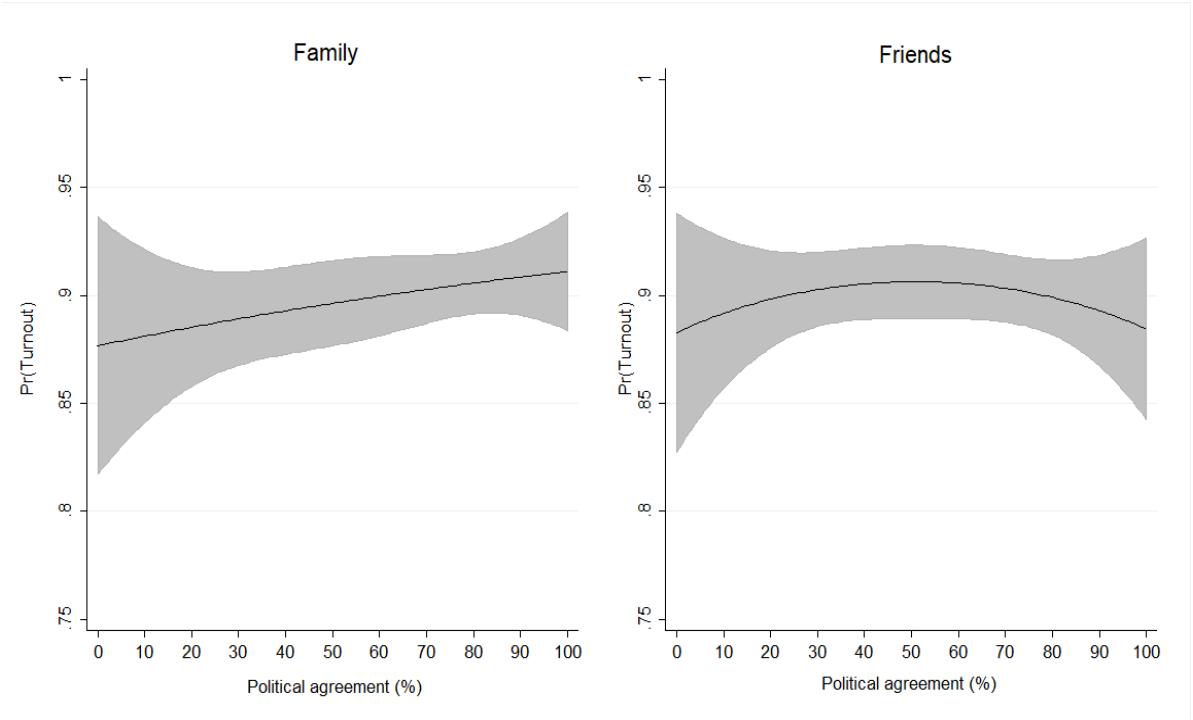
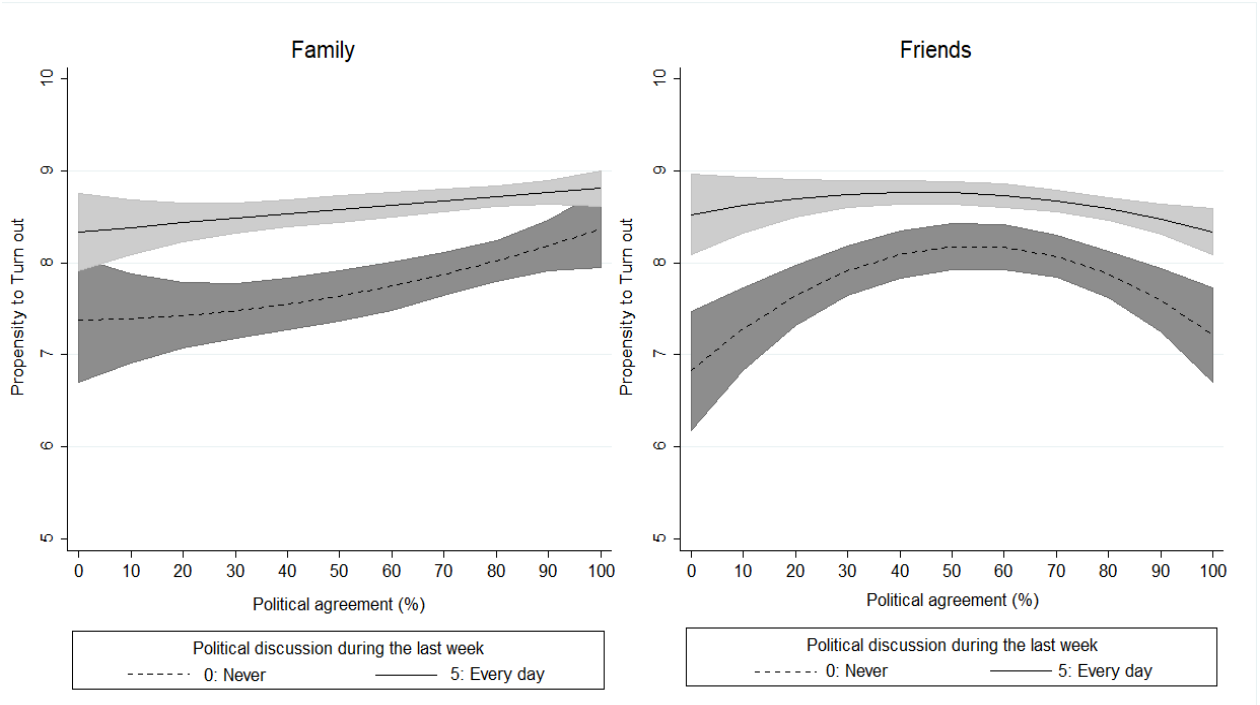


Figure A4.4: Predicted means of propensity to turn out by family (left panel) and friends network (right panel) political agreement, and frequency of political discussion (95% confidence intervals), estimated by Model 6A (see Table A4.2 in Appendix A4)



Conclusions

This thesis has aimed at giving a contribution to the study of the relationship between the various forms of *mobilization* and *interpersonal influence* and *electoral participation*, with a focus on the Italian case, where little research on electoral participation has been recently conducted. The main findings of the thesis could speak both to the academic community and to the political campaigners. In particular, the second and the third chapter could give some suggestions to political candidates and parties when carrying out an electoral campaign. The first advice is that the *personal* contact with party members matters and it is still the most effective tool to convince citizens to participate in elections (see also Green and Gerber, 2008). The second advice is that *impersonal* contacts with parties do not seem effective in boosting turnout, both in traditional (e.g., leaflets, letters) and digital forms (email messages).

This work has given further empirical evidence on the failure of email messaging as a form of *online mobilization* in increasing turnout. This needs to be particularly taken into account when carrying out electoral campaigns since although the employment of online tools has been becoming more and more employed their effects on turnout have proved to be rather weak. However, this work did not investigate the effectiveness of the most widespread form of *online mobilization*, namely mobilization via social media. Future research is needed to address this issue, and moreover to test whether digital appeals increases turnout under specific circumstances.

Moreover, the thesis even proves that *personal mobilization* can reduce inequalities in participation in high salience elections. It indeed succeeded in persuading to vote more peripheral individuals, who have a low-propensity to turn out before the election. Therefore, personal contacting can give a beneficial contribution to the democratic health of a country, since political equality is considered as "the fundamental premise of a democracy" (Dahl,

2006, ix). This finding, which contrasts with evidence coming from the US (Enos, Fowler, and Vavreck, 2014), directly encourages both policy makers to involve marginal voters in the democratic process and political parties to get in contact with them.

Nonetheless, the implications of these findings are not straightforward. The number of citizens who can be personally contacted is limited, as well as the financial budgets of the electoral campaigns. As Chapter 2 empirically shows, in high-salience elections party contacting is effective in increasing turnout especially among low-propensity voters, therefore in that type of elections parties need to target their efforts to reach these categories of citizens. Since low-propensity voters are harder to be contacted, especially in recent times characterized by political disaffection and distrust, political organizations need to find proper strategies to get in touch with them. Furthermore, they need to improve their mediated techniques of contact to be more effective in enhancing participation.

Besides giving empirical evidence on some relevant research questions, the thesis has tried to provide both a theoretical and a methodological contribution. Although all the empirical chapters are inserted within the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1, Chapter 4 provides a new theoretical perspective, then corroborated by the empirical evidence, regarding the relationship between disagreement in social networks and turnout. Previous research has little studied that relationship by providing a differentiated theoretical explanation of the effect of disagreement when experienced in cohesive and in non-cohesive groups. In Chapter 4, we argue that while mechanisms of *social accountability* are more relevant in cohesive groups, in non-cohesive social groups the most relevant mechanism deals with the *activation* of interest. Therefore, in cohesive social groups, the higher is the level of disagreement experienced, the lower is the likelihood to participate, while in non-cohesive groups the highest likelihood to participate is associated with the situation in which individuals experience a mix of agreement and disagreement, namely diversity. The thesis

thus comes to a crucial conclusion: the experience of disagreement in friends' network is substantially different than the experience of disagreement in the family. When intimacy with discussants is high, disagreement is more difficult to bear socially and accordingly does not promote a fertile exchange of ideas. On the contrary, in non-cohesive social groups the exposure to some disagreement is desirable, since it helps stimulating political discussions aimed at activating individual political predispositions. Although the findings refer to disagreement in family and friends' networks, their implication could move beyond those groups to understand the meaning of experiencing disagreement in further social networks and its consequences. In particular, as social media have become a crucial setting for political communication, we could offer insights about the consequences of disagreement in such venues. Previous research even found that individuals are more likely to be exposed to disagreement in social media than in face-to-face interactions (Barnidge, 2017). Therefore, since in social media relationships with discussants are usually supposed to be non-intimate, we could argue that being exposed to some disagreement in social networks has positive consequences. According to our theoretical framework, we could thus expect that in such non-cohesive groups the experience of some disagreement finally leads to higher political participation. However, online interactions could not activate individual predispositions as face to face ones. Future research strategies would be welcomed to test such expectations, and accordingly to add value to the contribution of this thesis.

From the methodological point of view, the thesis employs different methods, data sources, and data analysis techniques to investigate the relationship between the various facets of mobilization and interpersonal influence and turnout. Both secondary survey data and experimental data have been used to study whether direct mobilization boosts turnout, and in particular to test which forms of campaign contacting are more successful. In Chapter 2 and 3, the employment of respectively panel data and experimental data allows overcoming the issue

of causality in the relation between party contacting and turnout. Furthermore, in the second chapter, the integration of an exploratory analysis of the dynamics of the campaign and a pre-post analysis of the effect of the forms of party contacting has been helpful for a better understanding of campaign effects. As well, the employment of experimental data employed in Chapter 3 allows at answering specific research questions which could not be addressed with secondary survey data, and to analyse the effect of online mobilization which could not be tested by those secondary data. Moreover, the integration of national survey data and case-study experimental data helps in providing a mix of external and internal validity to the findings. Further research is thus welcomed to adopt such a multifaceted approach, which could be useful for giving a more comprehensive knowledge of the relationships between sociological concepts.

Notwithstanding, the thesis shows some limitations.

First, although the focus of the thesis deals with the Italian case, the second chapter analyses the effect of party contacting on turnout on the Austrian data. This because no appropriate data are available in the Italian context. The choice of Austria deals with several analogies with the Italian case and the data availability, that can make the two countries comparable, as it has been argued in Chapter 2. Therefore, the overview of the campaign and interpersonal effects on electoral participation offered by the thesis is not exhaustive; thus future research and first of all more suitable data are needed to better assess those effects.

Second, the thesis does not adopt a comparative approach, except for the second chapter where campaign dynamics effects on latent participation in Italy and Austria have been compared. The non-comparative nature of the thesis is explained by two main reasons. The primary aim of the thesis is to shed light on the effects of mobilization and interpersonal influence on electoral participation in Italy, which were very little investigated in previous research. Moreover, the research questions that have been addressed needed some specific

measures that are not available in comparative electoral surveys. In general, the thesis has preferred to properly empirically answer some specific research questions. The absence of comparative data needs, however, to take with caution the generalization of the findings of the thesis to other contexts.

Third, *direct mobilization* and *interpersonal mobilization* have been presented as interrelated in the theoretical framework, but data available do not allow testing whether the latter is wholly derivative from the former, as argued in Rosenstone and Hansen's (1993) theory. New evidence is needed to provide empirical leverage to this theoretical statement, which has been under-investigated in the literature. In addition, the effect of *interpersonal mobilization* was not tested in any empirical chapter of this thesis. Future research could overcome this issue, by following the approach adopted by a few experimental works (Nickerson 2008; Sinclair, McConnell, and Green, 2017), and moreover by analysing the interplay between *direct mobilization*, *interpersonal mobilization*, and *disagreement* in influencing turnout (Foos and de Rooij, 2017).

The thesis, however, has provided empirical evidence on theoretically-driven research questions that are thought to be relevant in the real world. All the research questions deal with the role of extra-individual factors that can enhance (or discourage) electoral participation. More in general, the study of political behavior always needs to take into account of the role of the context and the social circles in which individuals are embedded. This work has shown that both electoral campaigns and interpersonal networks can be crucial in determining individual electoral participation, even in contexts that have been experiencing a decline in turnout.

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