

A Validation Study on Voter Turnout Bias in Switzerland

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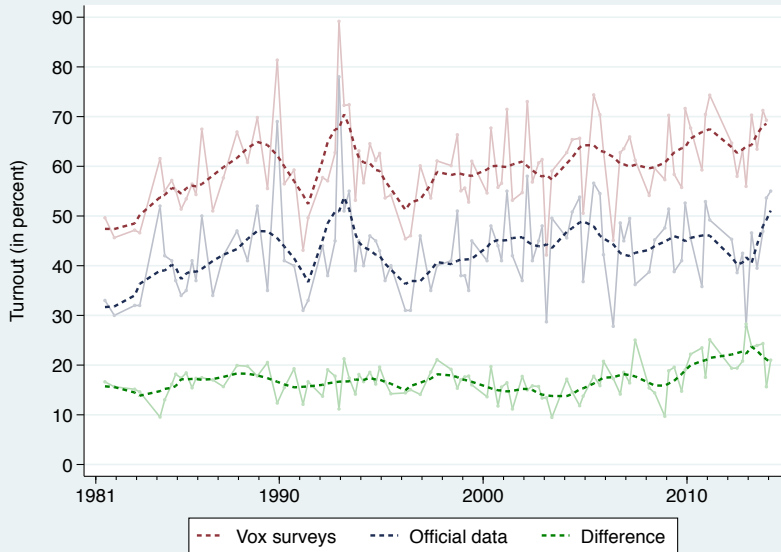
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Outline

- Introduction
- Our study
- Results
- Conclusions

Introduction: Voter Turnout Bias in Switzerland



Source: Own calculations based on the most recent VOX dataset.

Introduction: Research Questions

- What are the mechanisms that lead to the observed turnout bias in Swiss voting and election studies?
- How much do the different mechanisms contribute to the total bias?
- Is it possible to reduce the bias by special questioning techniques or weighting schemes?

Introduction: Types of Biases

● Undercoverage

- ▶ Sampling frames typically do not cover the whole population.
- ▶ Political participation is likely to be lower among uncovered subpopulations (e.g. young people without landline) than among covered subpopulation, leading to a positive bias in survey estimates of voter turnout (Mokrzycki, Keeter und Kennedy 2009, Blumberg und Luke 2007)

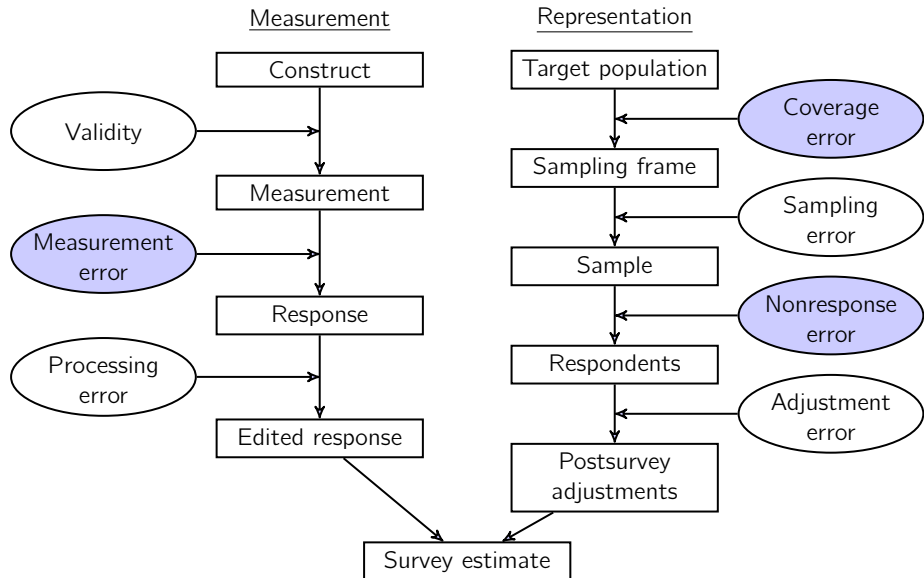
● Nonresponse

- ▶ Participation in surveys correlates with political interest and political participation (Voogt und Saris 2003, Jackman 1999, Brehm 1993).

● Misreporting

- ▶ Due to social desirability (Tourangeau und Yan 2007) and recall errors (Belli et al. 1999), respondents tend to overreport their participation behavior.

Introduction: Types of Biases

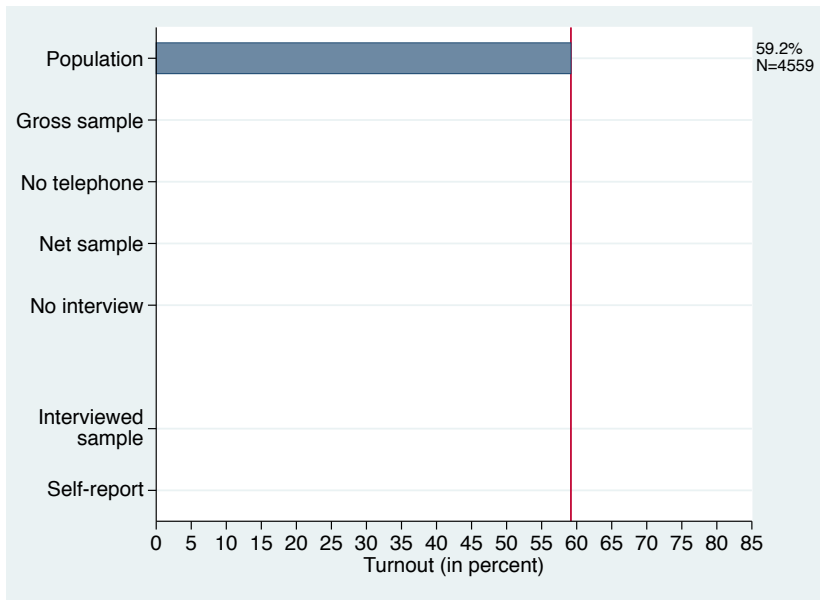


(Groves et al. 2009:48)

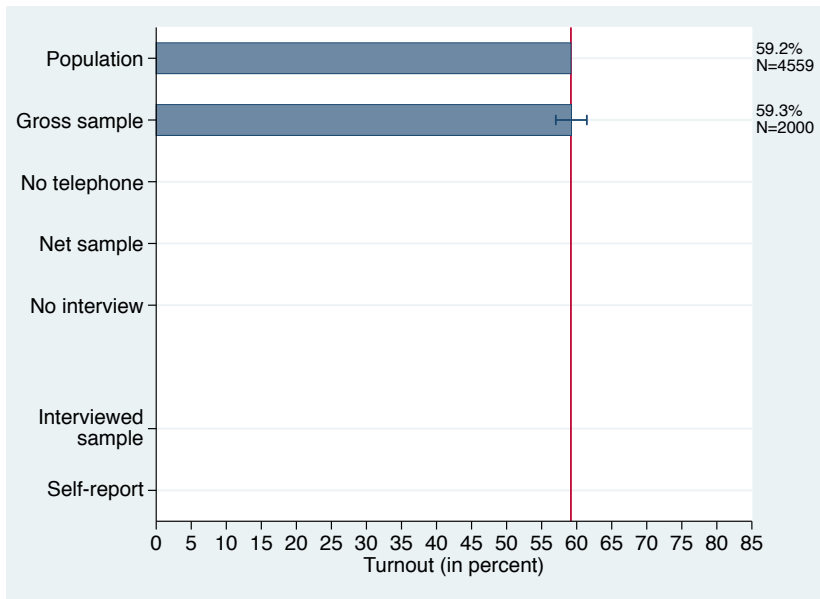
Our Study

- Voter turnout validation study comparing survey data to registered polling cards at a small municipality in Switzerland.
- Polling cards
 - ▶ Federal vote of September 22, 2013.
 - ▶ Citizens who took part in the vote can be identified from the collected polling cards.
- Survey
 - ▶ Gross sample of 2000 citizens from the municipality's register.
 - ▶ Net sample of 1696 (84.8%) citizens whose households could be found in the telephone register.
 - ▶ CATI survey between September 23 and October 20 with 893 respondents (52.7% of net sample).
 - ▶ Questions on: political interest, participation in the September 22 vote and other votes, social desirability of voting, key indicators of political participation research, social demographics.
 - ▶ Wording experiment for the September 22 voting question.

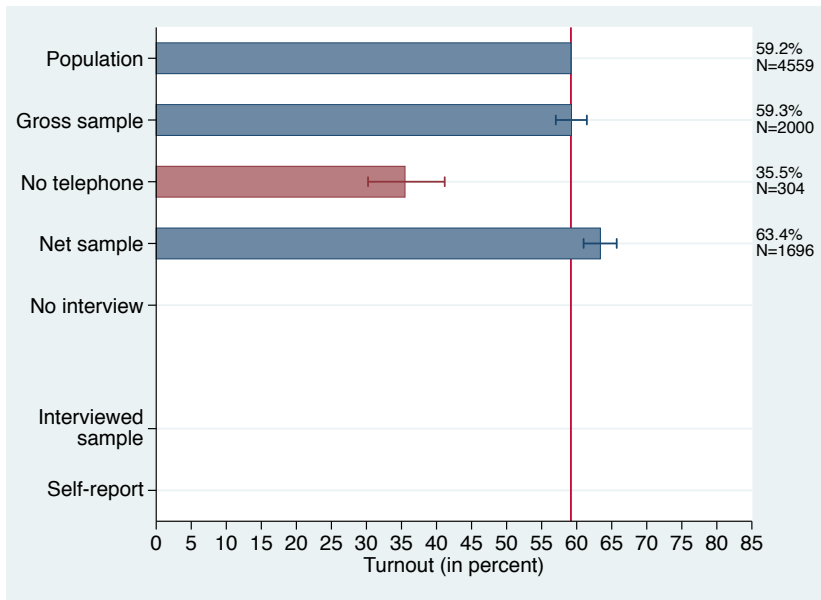
Main Results



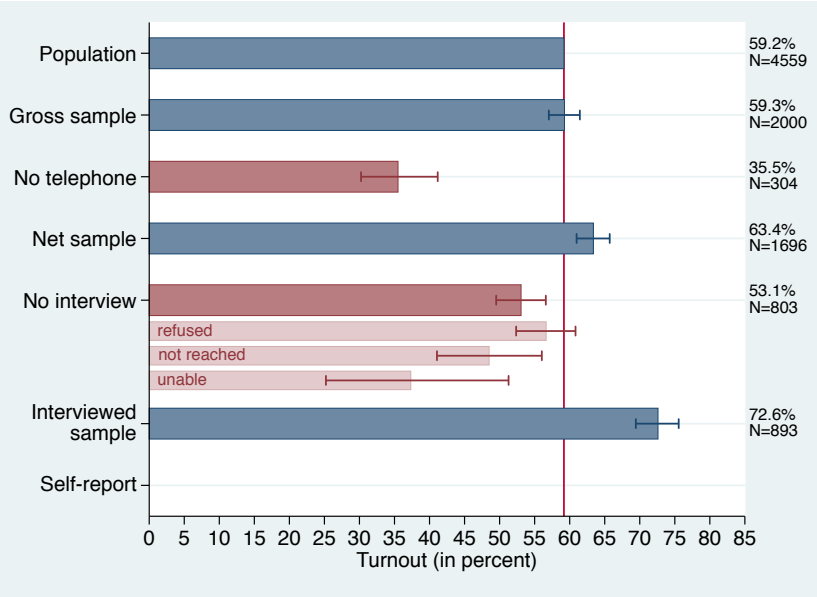
Main Results



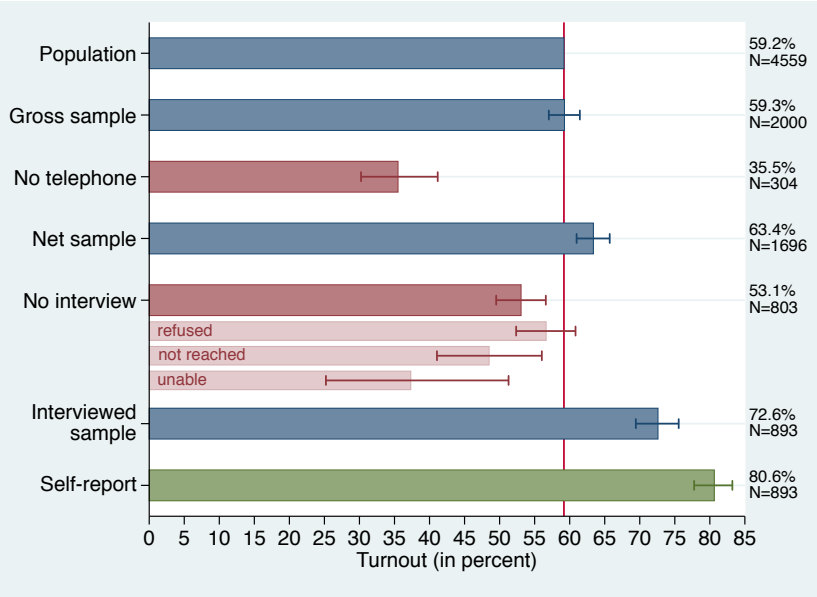
Main Results



Main Results



Main Results

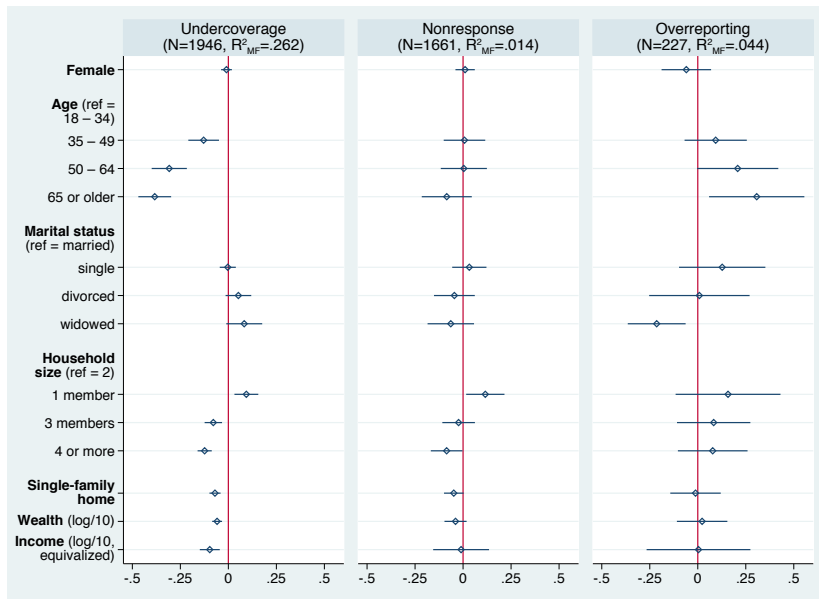


Over- and Underreporting

	self-report		
	did not vote	voted	Total
polling cards			
– did not vote	69.6	30.4	100.0
– voted	0.4	99.6	100.0

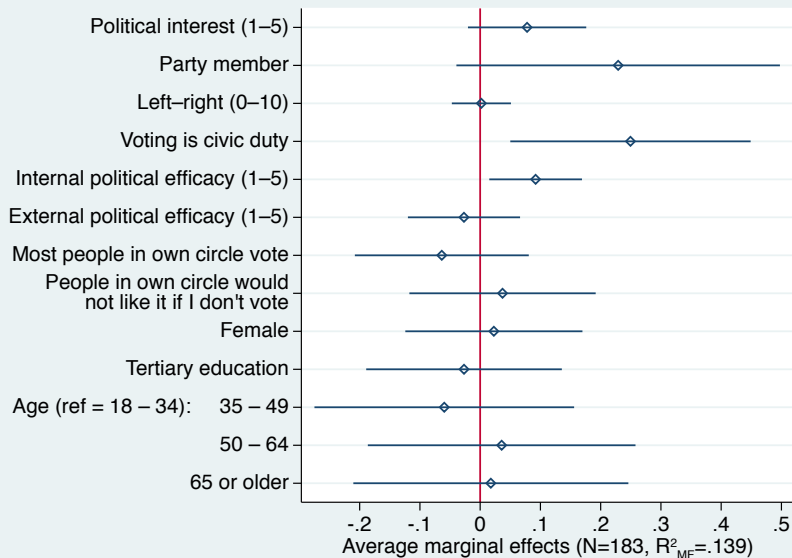
(N = 893)

Sociodemographic Profiles



Average marginal effects from logistic regressions

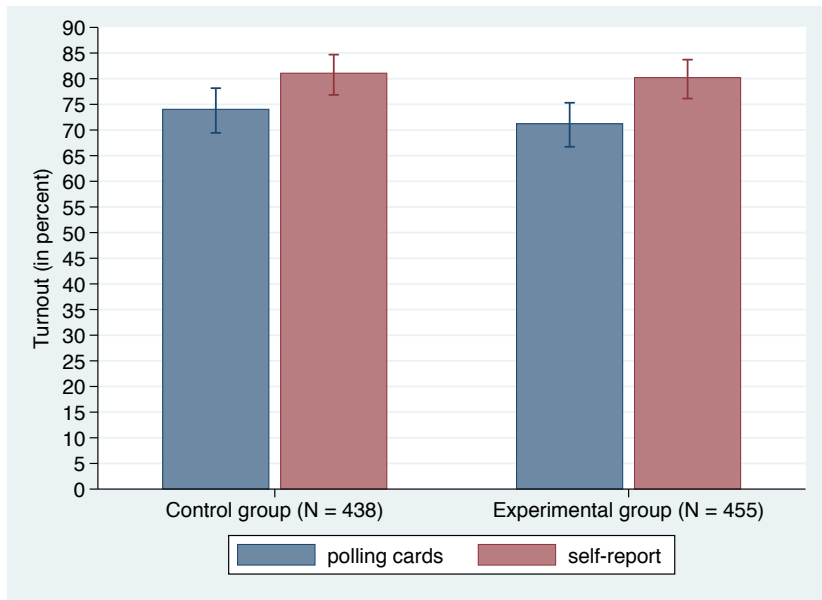
Determinants of Overreporting



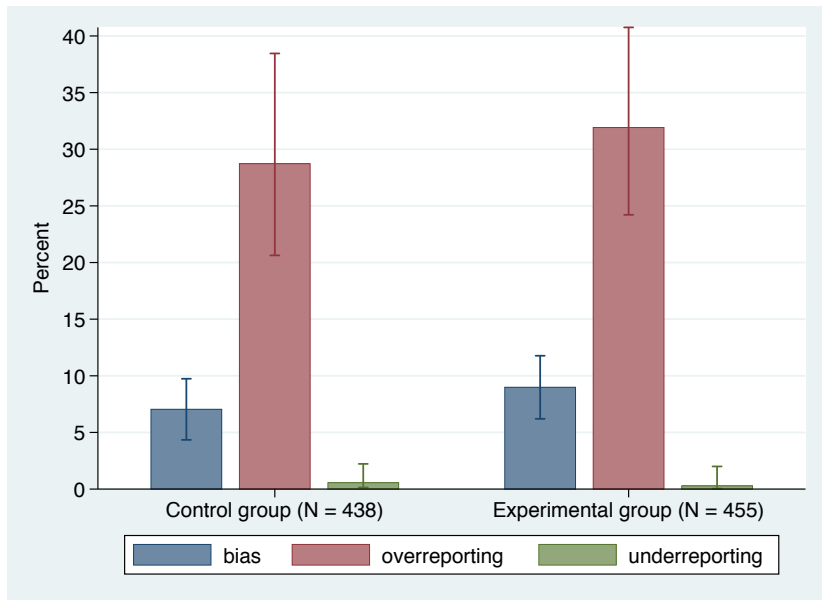
Wording Experiment

- The sample was randomized into a control group and a treatment group.
- The control group received a standard voting question.
 - ▶ „How about you, did you vote or not?“
- The treatment group received a modified voting question intended to minimize social-desirability bias and recall errors.
 - ▶ „Please try to remember whether you read the voting documents and whether you voted in person or by mail. Which of the following statements does apply to you?“
 - ★ I did not vote.
 - ★ I thought about voting, but did not.
 - ★ I usually vote, but did not this time.
 - ★ I am sure I did vote.

Wording Experiment: Results



Wording Experiment: Results



Summary and Conclusions

- Undercoverage, nonresponse, and overreporting jointly contribute to the participation bias in survey data

Sampling error	0.4%
Undercoverage	19.2%
Nonresponse	43.0%
Overreporting	37.4%

Total bias (21.5 pp)	100.0%
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- Undercoverage, nonresponse, and overreporting have differential sociodemographic profiles.
- The errors potentially affect associations and regression models estimated from survey data. Overreporting appears particularly problematic.
- Effort should be put into improving survey measurements of political participation and new correction methods should be developed.
- However: Surveys will always remain an approximate science.

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