

# A Validation Study on Voter Turnout Bias in Switzerland

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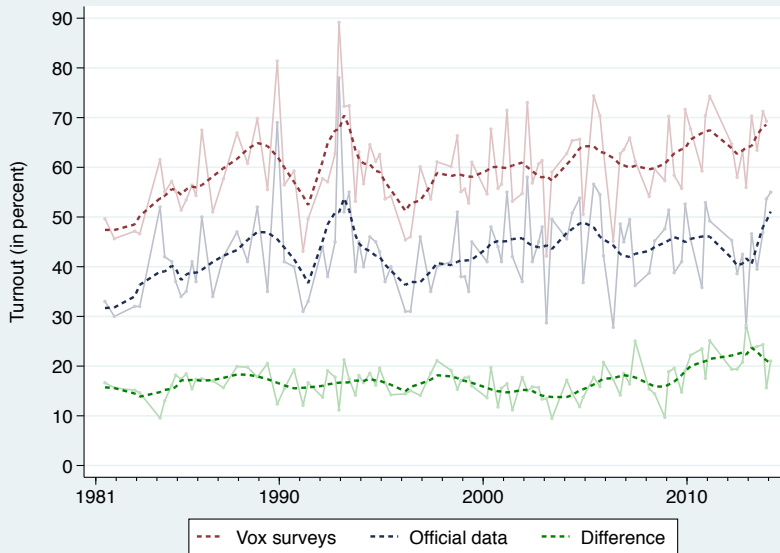
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# Outline

- 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)

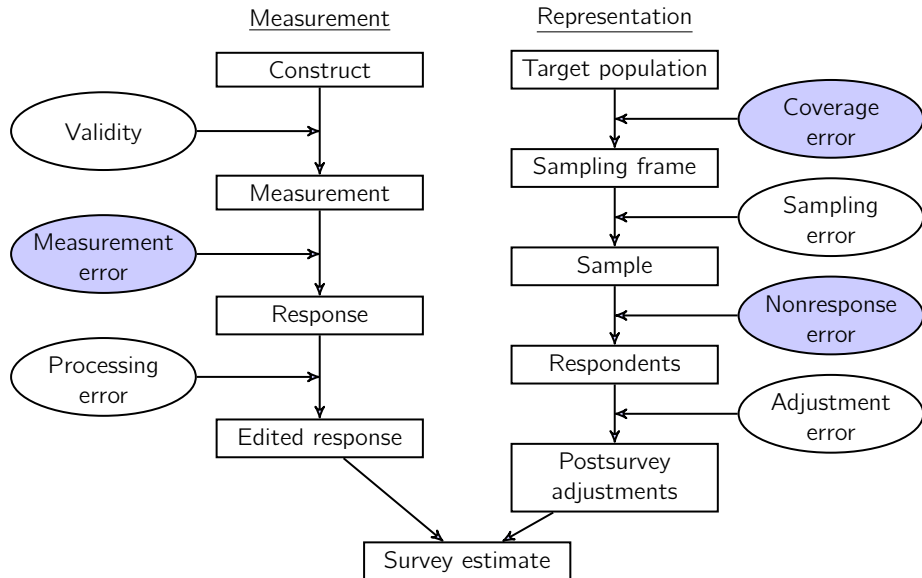
## ● Nonresponse

- ▶ 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

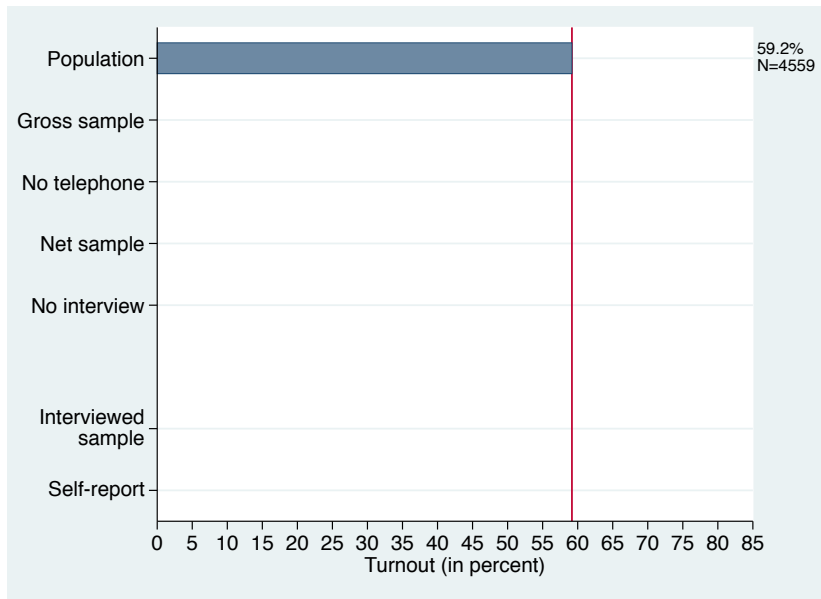


(Groves et al. 2009:48)

# Our Study

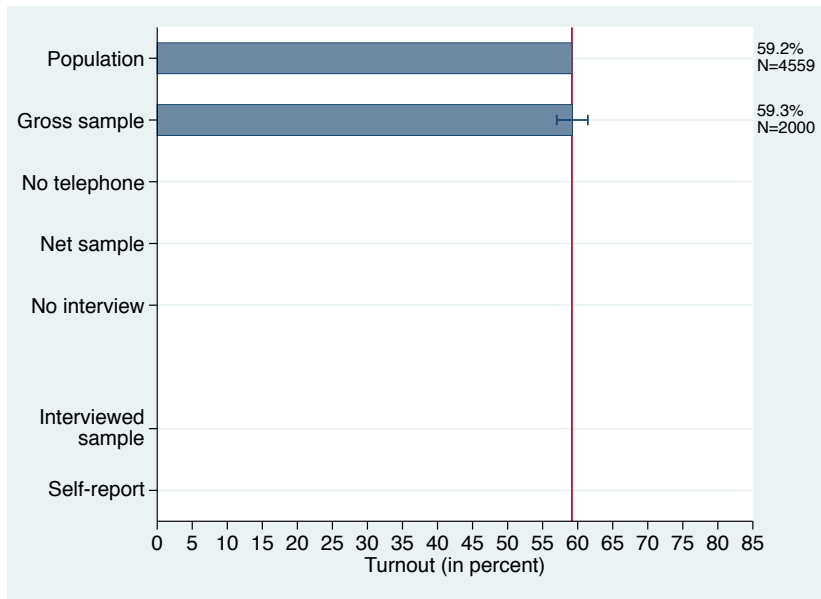
- Voter turnout validation study comparing survey data to polling cards at a small municipality in Switzerland.
- Polling cards
  - ▶ Federal votes of September 22 and June 9, 2013.
  - ▶ Citizens who took part in the votes can be identified from the collected polling cards.
- Survey
  - ▶ Gross sample 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 the votes, social desirability of voting, key indicators of political participation research, social demographics.
  - ▶ Wording experiment voting question.

# Main Results: September 22 Vote

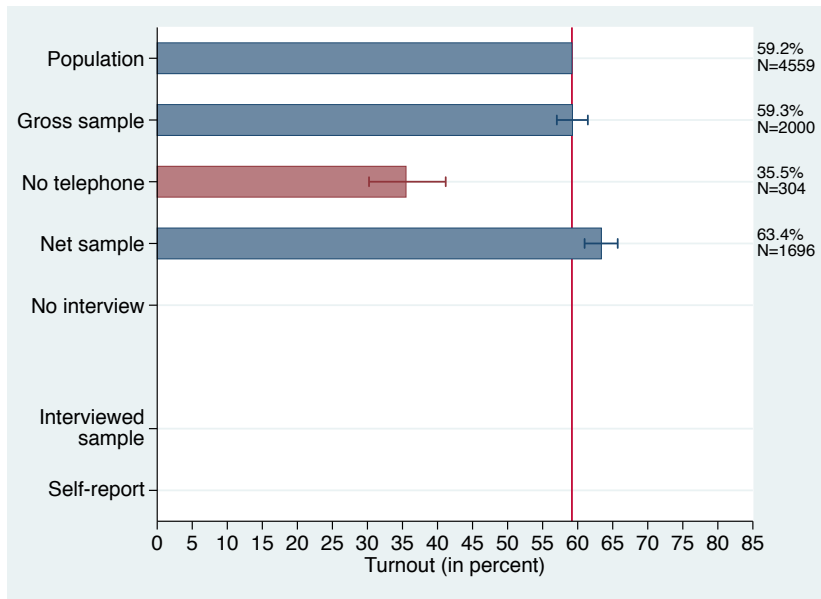




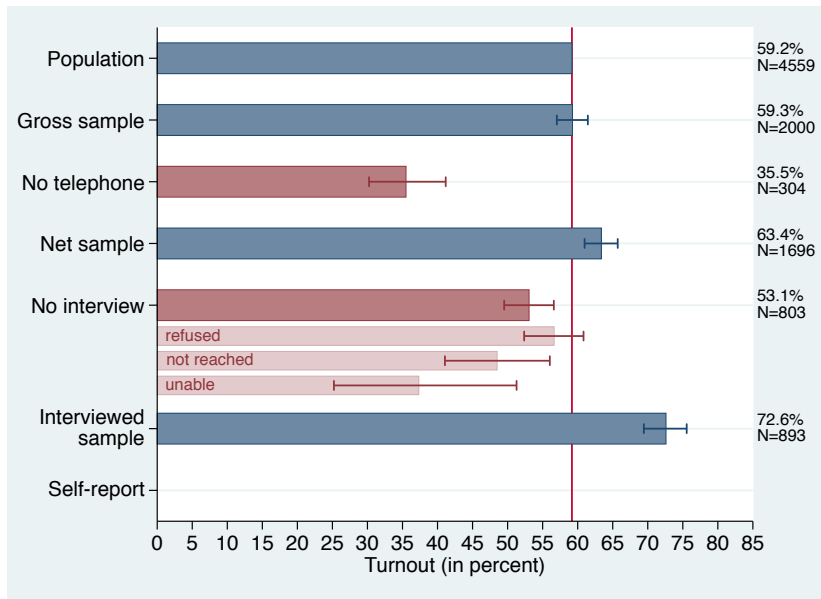
# Main Results: September 22 Vote



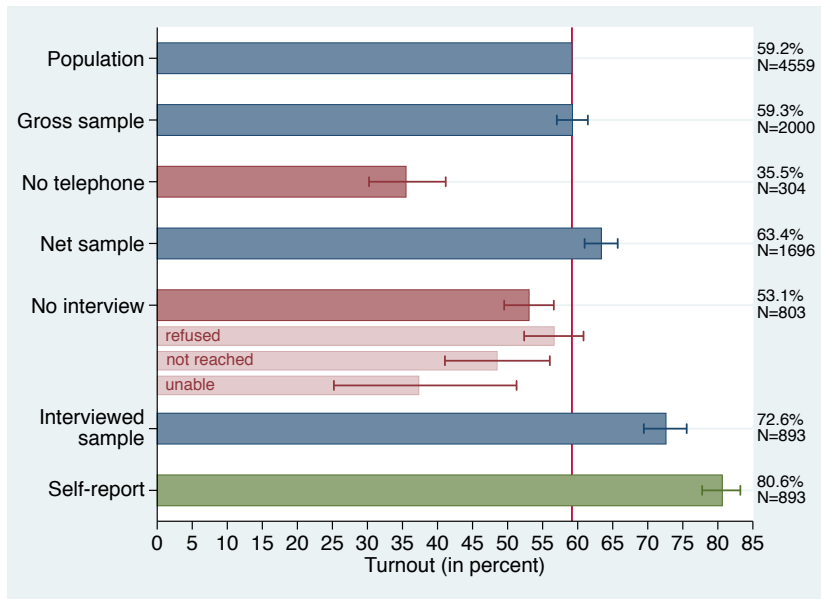
# Main Results: September 22 Vote



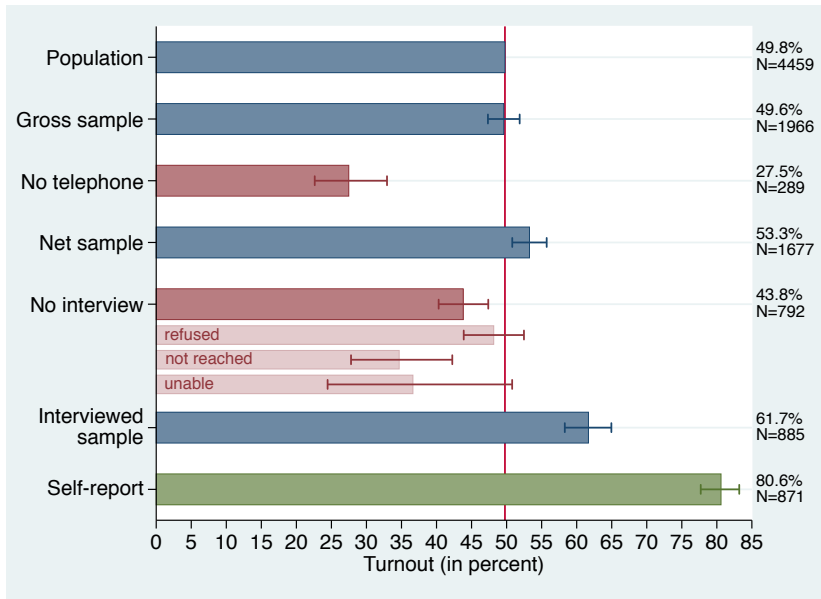
# Main Results: September 22 Vote



# Main Results: September 22 Vote



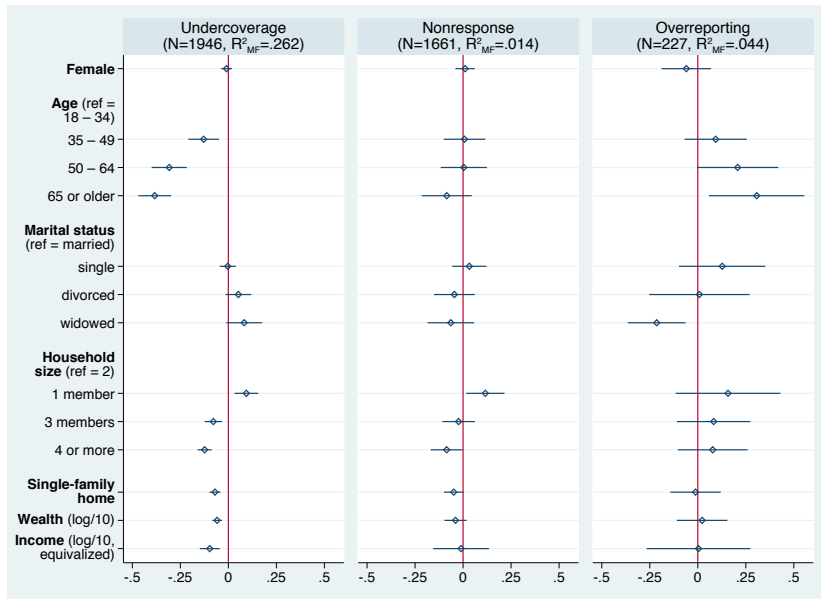
# Main Results: June 9 Vote



## Over- and Underreporting

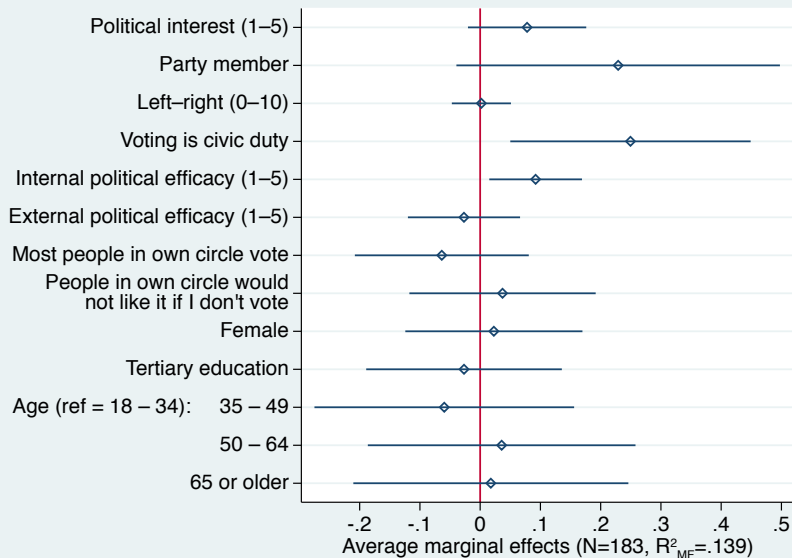
| September 22   | self-report  |             | Total     |
|----------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|
|                | did not vote | voted       |           |
| polling cards  |              |             |           |
| – did not vote | 69.6         | <b>30.4</b> | 100.0     |
| – voted        | <b>0.4</b>   | 99.6        | 100.0     |
|                |              |             | (N = 893) |
| June 9         | self-report  |             | Total     |
|                | did not vote | voted       |           |
| polling cards  |              |             |           |
| – did not vote | 45.8         | <b>54.2</b> | 100.0     |
| – voted        | <b>3.2</b>   | 96.8        | 100.0     |
|                |              |             | (N = 864) |

# Sociodemographic Profiles (September 22 Vote)



Average marginal effects from logistic regressions

# Determinants of Overreporting (September 22 Vote)

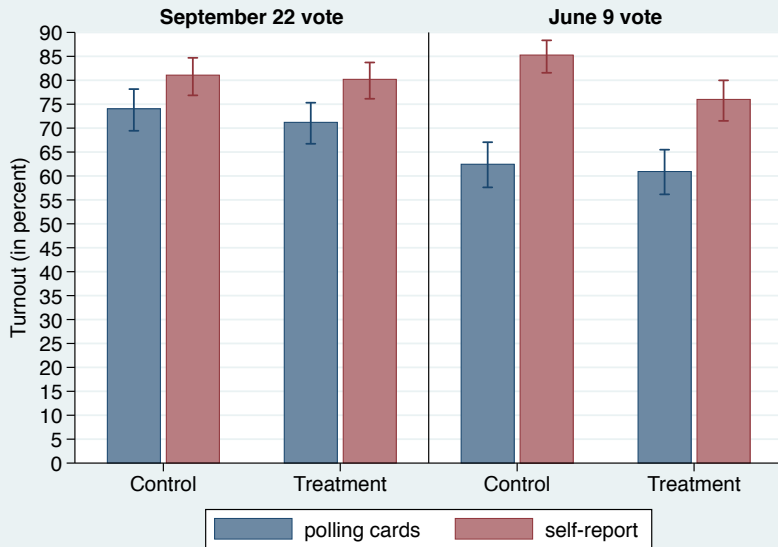




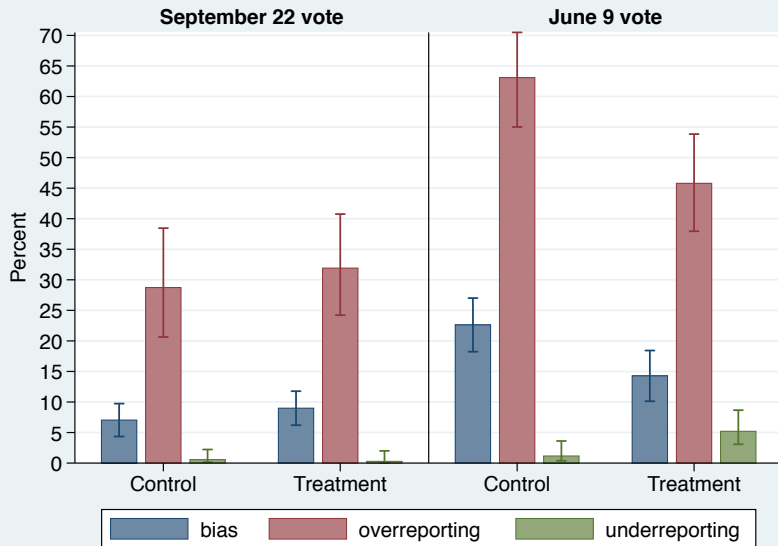
# Wording Experiment

- 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; contribution of overreporting increases over time.

|                | Sept 22 |       | June 9 |       |
|----------------|---------|-------|--------|-------|
|                | PP      | %     | PP     | %     |
| Sampling error | .1      | 0.4   | -.2    | -0.5  |
| Undercoverage  | 4.1     | 19.2  | 3.7    | 11.9  |
| Nonresponse    | 9.2     | 43.0  | 8.4    | 27.3  |
| Overreporting  | 8.0     | 37.4  | 18.9   | 61.3  |
| Total bias     | 21.5    | 100.0 | 30.8   | 100.0 |

- Undercoverage, nonresponse, and overreporting have differential sociodemographic profiles.
- The errors potentially affect associations and regression models estimated from survey data. Overreporting appears particularly problematic.
- Alternative wording to minimize social-desirability bias and recall errors did not lead to substantial improvement.

# References

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