

ONLINE APPENDIX

The elasticity of voter turnout: Investing 85 cents per voter to increase voter turnout by 4 percent

Mark Schelker*

University of Fribourg, SIAW-HSG, CREMA, CESifo

Marco Schneiter

University of Fribourg

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Abstract

In the aftermath of elections or ballots, the legitimacy of the result is regularly debated if voter turnout was considered to be low. Hence, discussions about legal reforms to increase turnout are common in most democracies. We analyze the impact of a very small change in voting costs on voter turnout. Some municipalities in the Swiss Canton of Bern reduced voting costs by prepaying the postage of the return envelope (CHF 0.85). Prepaid postage is associated with a statistically significant 1.8 percentage points increase in voter turnout. Overall, this amounts to 4 percent more voters participating in the ballots. Moreover, we estimate the influence of this increase in turnout on party support in popular ballots. We find that social democrats and environmentalists see their relative support decline.

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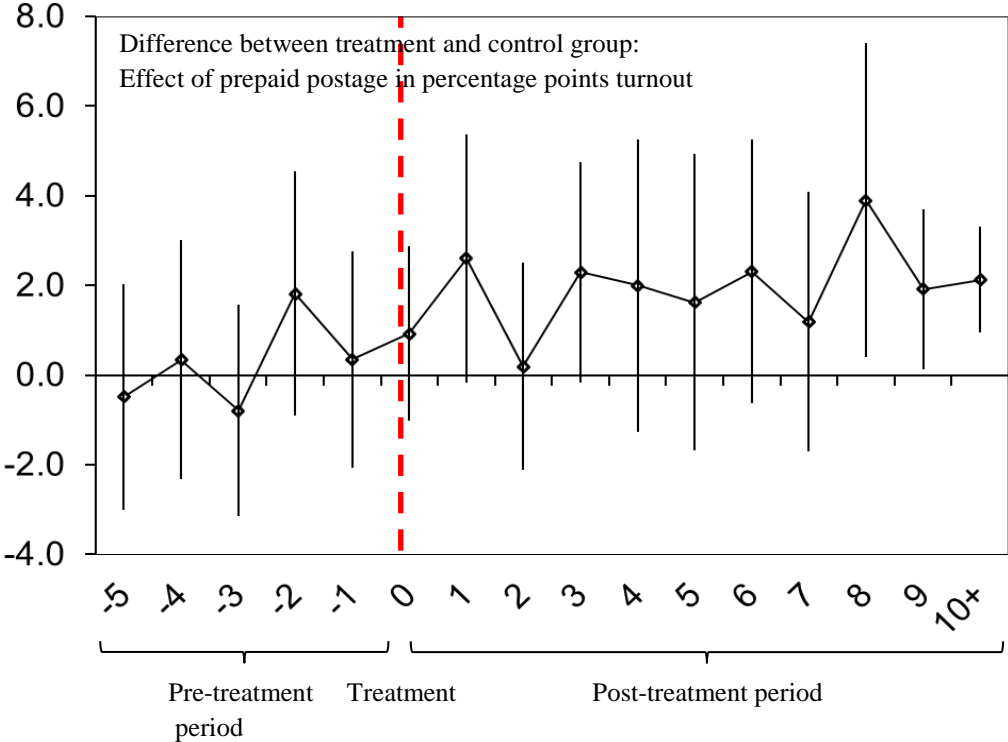
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* Authors' addresses: Mark Schelker (corresponding author) and Marco Schneiter, Department of Economics, Bd. de Pérolles 90, 1700 Fribourg, Switzerland. Email: mark.schelker@unifr.ch, mar.schneiter@gmail.com.

Table A1: Municipalities introducing/abandoning paid postage

Municipality	Introduction (d.m.y)	Specific reason?	Repeal (d.m.y)	Specific reason?
Aarwangen	01.07.1991			
Bern	01.07.1991		31.12.1992	Budget cuts
Brienz	01.07.1991			
Heimenhausen	01.01.2009			
Horrenbach-Buchen	01.01.2000			
Interlaken	01.10.1995			
Ittigen	01.01.1991		16.05.2004	Budget cuts
Kiesen	01.07.1991			
Köniz	01.07.1991			
Landiswil	01.07.1991	Increase turnout	31.12.1999	Budget cuts
Langenthal	01.01.1998	Increase turnout	31.12.2003	
Langnau	01.01.2011	Closing of polling stations	31.12.2012	No effect
Lyssach	01.06.2005	Closing of polling stations		
Mühleberg	01.01.1995			
Muri bei Bern	01.06.2010	Increase turnout	31.12.2013	End of pilot
Neuenegg	01.01.2007	Closing of polling stations		
Steffisburg	17.10.1997	Increase turnout		
Zollikofen	01.01.2004			

Figure A1: Analysis of pre-treatment trends



Notes: Testing the common trends assumption: Estimated pre- and post-treatment effects. Estimated coefficients of 10 lags and 5 leads of treatment dummy (Postage).

Vertical bands represent 95% confidence intervals. Two-way fixed effects regression. Observations: 23'879. R²: 0.824. No municipalities: 325. Control variables included. Baseline specification according to Table 3, column 2. Standard errors are adjusted to clustering at the municipality level.

The dashed red line marks the introduction of prepaid postage. To the left, the figure shows the estimated differences between municipalities with and without prepaid postage in 5 pre-treatment periods. The pre-treatment differences oscillate around zero, none of the estimated differences are statistically significant, and no pre-treatment trends are observable. To the right of the introduction of prepaid postage, the figure presents treatment differences of 10 post-treatment periods. Only half of the estimated differences are significant at least at the 10% level. The estimated coefficients oscillate around a turnout difference of about 2 percentage points. Note that the 10th post-treatment period contains all further periods. All estimated differences are relative to the baseline period of 6 or more pre-treatment periods.

Figure A2: Average voter turnout per ballot day from 1989-2014 in municipalities of the Canton of Berne

