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Information on the ballot, voter satisfaction and election turnout *

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Abstract: If voters do not perceive meaningful differences between parties and candidates, they tend to stay at home or choose by other factors like style or likability. This study examines whether including different kinds of information about the candidates on the ballot affects the satisfaction and turnout of voters in low-profile elections in which most candidates are unknown and party-identification cannot be used to distinguish them. This case often appears in election systems with either intra-party primaries or open lists, in particular at lower institutional levels. The empirical analysis is based on an experimental exit-poll of voters at local elections in two German states in 2014 in which respondents faced a hypothetical election with different information treatments. The main results are: (1) More information on the ballot increases voter satisfaction, but the marginal effect is decreasing. (2) Profession information is particularly useful for voters. (3) This translates directly into a greater willingness to take part in the hypothetical election ("turnout"), especially for individuals unsatisfied with the real election system. (4) The last result can be confirmed with aggregate turnout data of German local elections after reunification. (185 words)

JEL classification: D72, H79, P16
Keywords: Information cues, voter satisfaction, turnout, electoral systems, profession

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1. Introduction

Voter satisfaction and turnout are crucial for the legitimacy of democracy and the acceptance of decisions made by elected bodies. If turnout is high, the supporters of losing candidates or parties are more willing to accept their defeat and acknowledge the other side's mandate to govern and pursue its agenda (see, in particular, Nadeau and Blais, 1993, and Anderson et al., 2005). This includes economically important issues like free-trade agreements, tax reforms, labor market regulations, and compliance with minimum wages at the national level, and the acceptance of major infrastructural projects like highways, airports, dams, schools, or power lines at the local. A growing number of citizens in Western countries are wary about voting, however, as exemplified by falling voter turnout over time (Lijphart, 1997; Gray and Caul, 2000; and Gallego, 2009). To counter this development and increase interest and involvement in politics, citizen initiatives, popular movements, and research committees on electoral reform often propose the use of open-list elections, also known as preferential voting (e.g., British Columbia, 2004, The Power Inquiry, 2006, Democracia Real Ya, 2011, and Mehr Demokratie, 2016, for the cases of Canada, the UK, Spain, and Germany, respectively). The particular feature of open-list elections is that citizens do not only vote for a certain candidate, party, or party list, but can indicate their preference for specific candidates within a party list. The number of seats for each party is then determined by the sum of votes obtained by all of its candidates together, whereas which ones end up being elected usually depends on the intra-party ranking of personal votes obtained.[1]

Proponents of this system argue that it leads to greater satisfaction by offering more choice and granting the voters more influence on the electoral outcome, as they not only determine the parties' share of seats, but are also able to vote individual politicians out of office at the same time. Existing research by Farrell and McAllister (2006) supports this claim, showing that voters in countries using open lists indeed report higher satisfaction with the election process.[2] On the other hand, studies of consumer behavior demonstrate that having more options does not necessarily lead to greater happiness, especially if there are numerous alternatives with hardly noticeable differences (Reutskaja and Hogarth, 2009; Park and Jang, 2013). In the case of open-list elections, the large number of mostly unknown candidates could thus even reduce voter satisfaction and turnout, as informing oneself about their personalities and political positions may be prohibitively costly.[3] The same reasoning

[1] The mechanics of the final allocation of seats vary across the different systems of preferential voting (see the overview by Toplak, 2010), but this is the general idea.

[2] In 2015, this included countries as diverse as Indonesia, Japan, Brazil, Chile, Germany, Switzerland, and Finland.

[3] The wider use of online Voting Advice Applications allowing individuals to compare their own positions on certain topics with those of the candidates may alleviate this problem somewhat by reducing the cost of

can also be applied to the situation of low-profile races in primary election systems like the US, where voters are supposed to choose their party's candidate for a certain office among several and often unknown candidates.

The whole debate about the pros and cons of preferential voting or primary elections may be misleading, however, as long as it neglects a crucial aspect: For voters, it may not be important to *have* a choice, but to have a *meaningful* choice. This means that open lists or primary elections may only be successful in raising satisfaction and turnout if the voters know enough about the single candidates to form an opinion.

In this paper, I test this hypothesis and evaluate the importance of information about the candidates for the satisfaction of voters with an election and their willingness to take part in it. In particular, I consider the environment of an open-list election and a specific source of candidate information, which can be made available to each voter easily: statements about the candidates on the ballot itself. While the typical ballot simply lists the names of the candidates per party, there are many countries and states in which election laws require additional information to be added. For instance, state-wide races in California additionally include the profession of the candidates (McDermott, 2005), and several states in Switzerland and Germany even require their current direction and year of birth. If individuals are unfamiliar with the candidates and decide only in the voting booth, these pieces of information may allow them to use certain heuristics to identify those candidates that seem best suited to represent them (along the lines of Gigerenzer and Goldstein, 1996) and in consequence feel better about the process itself.

Existing research has ignored this issue so far, despite its potential to significantly influence voters in low-information elections. While few studies on the effect of information cues on the ballot on voting behavior exist (e.g., McDermott, 2005, and Mechtel, 2014), the present work is the first to examine the potential relation between information on the ballot, voter satisfaction, and election turnout. The focus of this evaluation lies on three personal characteristics which are either already on the ballot in some places (*profession* and *year of birth*) or play a prominent role in electoral campaigns to present and describe a candidate (*family status*).

For the empirical analysis, I conducted a voting experiment built into an exit poll of actual voters in the local elections in two German states in 2014. To identify the causal effect of each of the three personal characteristics, respondents were randomly assigned to eight different ballot versions of a hypothetical election in which they were supposed to select six

information. With a larger number of candidates, however, even this gets increasingly tedious. Furthermore, VAAs can only provide an overview on the candidates' political positions, but do not allow any inference on their competence or personality.

out of 30 fictitious candidates. Across these versions, I incrementally vary the amount and type of additional information about the candidates, while holding their names and positions in the list constant. This setup enables me to isolate the impact of candidate information on voter satisfaction and turnout from any other aspect that may be important to individuals.

The results suggest that voters strongly appreciate the presence of further information on the ballot. Stating the profession of the candidates seems to be particularly helpful, leading to an increase in reported voter satisfaction of about 11% compared to the sample mean in the most conservative specification. Year of birth and family status also improve the voters' attitudes towards the election and the selected candidates, but the magnitude of the impact is much smaller with estimates ranging from 4% to around 7% (again compared to the sample mean). Further analysis shows that these results directly translate into higher turnout as well, proxied by the willingness of survey respondents to vote in the hypothetical election. Here, information about the candidates' profession triggers the largest reaction again, raising "turnout" by 4.6 percentage points or 5.2% relative to the sample mean. Adding family status equally increases the probability to vote by 3.2 percentage points (3.6%), while year of birth does not change the participants' behaviour in this respect.

The experimental results are confirmed when looking at aggregate turnout data of local elections in the 16 German states since the reunification in 1990. Here, stating the profession of the candidates is also associated with a 6.1 percentage point higher turnout in states that use open lists, whereas including the candidates' year of birth is not significantly correlated with turnout. All in all, these findings show that the usefulness of open lists in raising voter satisfaction and turnout depends strongly on the presence and right kind of explicit information about the candidates. Thus, including meaningful characteristics of the candidates on the ballot seems to be an efficient and economic way to improve voter attitudes towards democracy and the legitimacy of the elected government.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: In section 2, I briefly sketch the theoretical framework of voting in open-list elections with multiple votes. Section 3 describes the survey design and identification strategy, followed by section 4 which provides descriptive statistics of the sample obtained and discusses its quality. The results of the empirical evaluation and several robustness checks are then presented in sections 5 and 6, first for voter satisfaction and then on voter turnout. Finally, section 7 discusses the findings and points out possible directions for further research.

2. Information and voting

In a situation of perfect information, in which the citizens know their own political position on all relevant issues and possess correct and complete information about all the candidates, their platforms and their chances to get elected, we can assume voters to choose those candidates who maximize their expected utility based on the following three factors: (a) The proximity of political positions, (b) the probability to get elected, and (c) the ability/ qualification to implement their program.[4] The first is straightforward, since we want to have our political position represented in the council or parliament (Downs, 1957). Likewise, eligibility and assertiveness are equally important properties. Thus, individuals may strategically use their vote to push a second-best candidate in terms of political proximity if she has a better shot at getting elected than the first-best candidate and/or a greater ability to get things done (Cox, 1997).

The assumption of perfect information is usually not realistic, however, as it is too costly for most individuals to inform themselves about every candidate, their programs and chances to win. Under these circumstances, voters often rely on heuristics when making their decision in the voting booth, that is, they use the available informational cues provided on the ballot to form a quick opinion about the candidates' likely position and ability to do a good job (McDermott, 2005). In a direct matchup between candidates of different parties, *party affiliation* is usually all that is needed for the choice, as members of one party typically share a widely known common ideology or platform (Rahn, 1993; Lau and Redlawsk, 2001; Valdini, 2005; Shugart et al., 2005). In open list or primary election systems, however, there are many different candidates from the same party on the ballot (in some local elections in Germany up to 80, for instance, in Bavaria), so this criterion does not provide the necessary differentiation anymore. In these cases, individuals have to resort to other available cues. One possibility in any case is the *name of the candidates*, which may reveal some important information, in particular her gender, but sometimes also her regional or ethnic origin or social class (e.g., McDermott, 1997, 1998, and Guell et al., 2015). Furthermore, if the candidates do not only appear in alphabetical order but are ranked by the party elders or some party convention, the *rank* on the list may allow an inference on how the respective party views the candidate's importance and quality (Esteve-Volart and Bagues, 2012).

On top of this, several countries or states provide additional and more direct information on the ballots to facilitate the selection problem. This often includes stating the candidates' *profession*, *place of residence*, and/or *year of birth*, in order to convey their

[4] We may also add likeability to the list, but it should be highly correlated with the political position, as we tend to like others who agree with us on important issues and vice versa (Byrne et al., 1986; Eisinger, 2000).

education, age, and what they are occupied with in their daily life, allowing voters to form their own opinion on the candidates' likely policy position and ability to represent them well.[5] Thus, differences in the amount and content of information stated on the ballot may influence the voting decision under imperfect information to a large degree.

From a theoretical point of view, however, there is no clear prediction about the direction of this effect. On the one hand, having more information may increase voter satisfaction and turnout, as it enables voters to identify better fitting candidates and thus come closer to their utility-maximizing solution under complete information. On the other hand, looking at different cues and spending more time in the voting booth figuring out the best candidates also involves certain opportunity costs. If individuals value this extra burden more than the gain obtained from being able to identify better suited candidates, they would even be worse off. At the extreme, this disutility could provoke some people to stay at home who would have been inclined or indifferent to voting otherwise.

Thus, the net effect of adding explicit information likely depends on various aspects: First, whether there is a *need for further information* to differentiate between the candidates. When there is only one candidate per party or the number of well-known candidates exceeds the number of votes to be cast, we may expect the benefit of additional information cues to be very small. With increasing numbers of unknown candidates and votes to be cast, however, further information on the ballot may be highly appreciated. In consequence, the results of this study will have more explanatory power for elections on lower institutional levels or down-ballot races, for which voters may not put much effort into informing themselves and media coverage is low compared to highly publicized elections with large-scale campaigning by the candidates and their parties.

Second, the impact of particular cues may differ with their *potential to distinguish* the candidates in a meaningful way. Stating the hair or eye color of the candidates, for instance, may be rather redundant to assess a person's political position or prowess. Profession or year of birth, on the other hand, may convey a lot of information about the candidates and thus play a relevant role in the selection process.

Finally, any possible impact of introducing candidate information on the ballot on non-voters likely depends on whether they *know about the existence* of this decision-making aid at all. For individuals who are at the margin and vote occasionally, the effect may emerge with some delay over time, as they eventually experience an election with the information on the candidates and react to it then. For notorious non-voters, on the other hand, the influence

[5] For instance, profession information is currently stated on the ballot in 9 out of 12 states in Germany which use open-lists to elect their city or county councils. In the US, states like California also include candidate occupation for all state-wide races (McDermott, 2005).

of information may be much lower and take more time. In both cases, sending out sample ballots to all eligible voters ahead of the election as done in several states and countries may speed up the process considerably.

3. Survey design and identification strategy

In order to test the direction and size of the impact of stating more information on the ballot empirically, I conducted an exit poll of voters at the local elections in the two German states of Nordrhein-Westfalen and Baden-Württemberg on the 25nd of May, 2014, asking every third individual leaving one of the 28 polling stations in 15 different towns to participate in a survey on voting behavior.[6] Collecting data in these two particular states provides interesting insights, as they apply different election systems: While Nordrhein-Westfalen uses a mixed system of directly elected representatives in single-member districts and indirectly elected representatives from party lists to achieve overall proportional representation, people vote with open lists in Baden-Württemberg since after World War II. Thus, individuals living in these two states possess quite different experiences with and attitudes towards the process of voting and may react differently to the presence of information cues on the ballot. This feature is important for the external validity of this study. If we find the same pattern of results in both locations, we can be fairly confident that they hold in various other political environments as well.

The survey itself consisted of three main parts: In the first, respondents answered several questions on the real election they had just participated in, e.g., which party they voted for and how satisfied they were with the possibility to express their own political opinion in the election. Then, participants were asked to vote in a hypothetical election with open lists, in which they should assign a total of 6 votes on a list of 30 fictional candidates of their preferred party. And finally, respondents answered questions about the hypothetical election and reported some individual characteristics. The response rate was relatively high with about half of the contacted individuals filling out the questionnaire, which took them between five and ten minutes.[7]

The key part of the survey is the hypothetical election. To identify the causal impact of differences in the amount and content of information cues on voting behavior and voter satisfaction, eight versions of the list of hypothetical candidates were randomly assigned to

[6] Respondents could fill out the survey in secret, as Bishop and Fisher (1995) have shown that this improves the accuracy of answers.

[7] The complete questionnaire of one ballot version and the exact wording of the questions (in German) are available in the appendix.

the respondents.[8] In each version, there is an even share of male and female candidates, appearing in alternating order with a male candidate at the top. Likewise, every candidate keeps the same name and rank in the list across all versions in order to prevent any confounding effects due to changes among the candidates. The versions differ, however, with respect to the number and type of information cues stated next to the name.

[Figure 1 about here]

Figure 1 provides an overview on the different hypothetical ballots and their respective content, sorted by the number of information cues on the ballot in ascending order from top to bottom. Version 1 represents the benchmark, stating the candidates' name but nothing else. Each of the versions 2 to 4 adds one different piece of information to the name, either the candidates' profession, year of birth, or family status. Versions 5 to 7 contain the three possible pair-wise combinations of information cues under consideration, while version 8 combines all of them. As respondents are randomly allocated over the different versions, this setup creates credible counterfactuals and thus allows for a number of interesting comparisons between different information treatments. In particular, if we compare two versions which differ only in the use of one additional piece of information, we have a simple experimental setup with treatment and control group. As such, we can interpret any difference in the means of an outcome variable directly as the causal effect of stating this information on the ballot, conditional on the amount and type of information already present. For example, if we observe an increase in reported average satisfaction of 5% from version 4 to 6, we can conclude that this is the effect of adding profession information to the ballot when family status is already present. In total, the survey design thus allows for twelve such experiments, which are depicted as grey arrows in figure 1.

For the credibility of this approach, it is crucial to choose characteristics for the fictitious candidates which are as realistic and ordinary as possible in order to resemble the real voting situation. To this end, I generated the *names of the candidates* in three steps: First, I used ballots of local elections in other places in Germany in the 1990s to get a sample of real German names. Then, I randomly reassembled the first and family names to create new personalities. At the same time, any double names and Doctor titles were deleted to avoid sending strong signals from the names already.[9] Finally, I checked by means of an internet

[8] The experiment had a total of 16 different ballot versions. To focus the analysis in the present paper, I only use those which keep names, gender, and profession constant.

[9] Double names in Germany enable a spouse (mostly the wife) to keep the old family name while at the same time taking up the one of the partner. Holding a double name is often considered as a feminist and liberal statement, as traditionally the wife would carry the husband's name in a marriage. Likewise, Doctor titles send

search whether any of these new names coincided with a well-known person in public life, be it a sports star, a political figure, or any other kind of regional or national celebrity. In the few instances where this was the case, I changed the name further and checked again.

Similarly, the *professions* of the candidates should represent a number of common occupations, ranging from carpenters, nurses, and metalworkers to lawyers, teachers, and physicians. In order to be able to differentiate, each profession is assigned to only one candidate. The *year of birth* of each candidate is randomly determined by a computer program such that the corresponding age at the time of the survey in 2014 would be between 20 and 68. To avoid double entries of the same year of birth or odd combinations of characteristics (for instance, being widowed with two children at age 23), I manually adjusted those cases to either neighboring numbers or more realistic ages. In the end, the average age of the candidates in 2014 was 42.5. Finally, *family status* contains information on two dimensions, legal status and number of children. For legal status, twelve candidates are single, 15 married, two widowed, and one living in a civil union with a same-sex partner. With respect to the number of children, twelve candidates do not have children, and six each state to be parent of one child, two children, and more than two children. All in all, the different entries in these two dimensions combined to eleven different categories.

The complete information on the individual characteristics of each fictional candidate is reported in table 1. As written above, they remain constant over all versions, but are only revealed to the survey participants in the respective ballot versions.

[Table 1 about here]

4. Sample and randomization

4.1 Sample

There are several aspects which motivate the approach to concentrate on real voters rather than attempting to obtain a representative sample for the whole voting-age population. The first is of practical nature and concerns the problem to get a *representative sample* and simultaneously maintain a *close resemblance to the actual voting situation*. While it is possible to produce nationally representative samples by phone interviews, they would not be able to recreate the election situation with an actual list of candidates before the respondent. The problem is the reverse for online surveys. Here it is easy to show the different lists of candidates in the right way, but participation is likely highly selective as groups like the elderly may not be as affine and will therefore be highly underrepresented. Likewise,

a signal of academic accomplishment. As they are officially part of a person's name in Germany, they would also appear on the ballot.

conducting face-to-face interviews on the street may systematically miss some segments of the population like commuters using their cars or more affluent people shopping in different locations as the average. At the same time, these three methods commonly have to deal with very *low response rates* as people usually have other things to attend to. In contrast, polling voters directly outside the voting station throughout Election Day ensures a good mixture of respondents from all groups of the society, ages, and educational levels. Additionally, a large share of individuals leaving the buildings was eager to share its opinion on the election. On average, about half of the contacted persons agreed to answer the questions, which is a rather high rate for a survey and helps to reduce the issue of selective response even further.

The crucial reason for the chosen approach, however, is that the respondents should be in the *right state of mind*, so that their statements regarding the real election are accurate and the choice between the hypothetical candidates mimics their actual voting strategies as much as possible. This aspect is more important than the composition of the sample, as the characteristics of the population of eligible voters are known and we can thus adjust for the observable selection into the sample by appropriately reweighting the observations.[10] By contrast, it is impossible to retrospectively correct the respondents' answers with respect to their choice of candidates, for instance, as we do not have any reference point for that. Thus, using an exit poll which surveys voters directly after they made up their mind and decided which criteria are important for their choice should provide the best approximation of the real voting behavior and satisfaction with the election as possible.

In total, 2187 individuals participated in the survey. Table 2 provides their regional distribution over the two states and three types of communities: urban, semi-urban, and rural.[11] Additionally, table 2 also contains the shares of the population living in these three community types in both states. From the numbers, we can observe that the respondents are almost evenly split between the two states, with 51% coming from Baden-Württemberg and 49% from Nordrhein-Westfalen. With respect to the type of community, the focus of the study lies on urban voters with 53.7% of the observations, compared to 28.3% from semi-urban and 18.1% from rural communities. Thus, urbanites are overrepresented in the sample relative to the real population in both Nordrhein-Westfalen and Baden-Württemberg. This is done intentionally, as local elections in larger municipalities tend to have a greater degree of the low-information environment that is at the heart of this study. One reason for that is that life in cities is generally more anonymous than in small municipalities where people are more likely to know each other. Another is of legal nature, as the election law in Baden-

[10] In section 5.3, I do this as a robustness check.
[11] The sorting into the different types of communities is taken from Statistisches Bundesamt (2014).

Württemberg specifies that both the number of members of local councils and the number of votes to be cast depend on the size of the community. Voters in cities in Baden-Württemberg therefore have a lot of votes to allocate (up to 60), but do not know many candidates personally. And although the possibility to vote a straight party ticket exists, more than 50% of voters regularly choose to allocate their votes individually (Landeszentrale, 2014). Thus, the analysis focuses mainly on urban voters, but the rural sample is large enough to check whether the results also hold in this environment.[12]

[Table 2 about here]

4.2 Randomization

Table 3 reports the descriptive characteristics of the survey participants for each ballot version and the sample as a whole to check whether the random allocation of individuals worked well. The first thing to note is that the sample size for the eight different survey versions are very close to each other, ranging between 261 and 279. Among the personal characteristics of the respondents, females represent 46.6% of the overall sample, the average age is around 45.1 years, 64% are or have been married already, 34.4% do not have a at least a university entrance qualification (*Abitur*), and 54.5% are parents. Furthermore, the participants are, on average, modestly content with the possibility to express their political opinion in the real election (6.9 on a scale from 1 to 10) and with their selected candidates (6.8 out of 10). The 10-point scale is used to create a finer measure for satisfaction than the typical 5-item scale *very satisfied, fairly satisfied*, *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, not very satisfied*, or *not at all satisfied*, but can be easily transformed into the latter if we lump together two points each. Finally, about 26% report to have voted for the center-left Social Democratic Party (SPD) and a bit more than 24% for the center-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU), the two dominant parties in German politics. These comparatively low shares are typical for local elections in which independent parties and candidates tend to obtain a large fraction of the votes.

Looking at the numbers in table 3 by treatment, we see that the *randomization* of respondents over the different versions has worked very well with respect to both the participants' answers about the real election and their individual characteristics. Only in 5 out of the 104 cells (i.e., 4.8% of the cases) do we observe significant deviations on at least the

[12] As the discussion of heterogeneous effects in section 5.2 shows, there is not much difference in the role of information cues between the different types of communities. Hence, the estimated effects do not change significantly when I reweight the observations to be more similar to the population of eligible voters in the robustness checks in section 5.3.

10% level between the average of a particular ballot version and the mean of the other versions. Given this similarity in the observable characteristics of survey participants across treatment, it seems plausible to assume that they also share the same unobservable characteristics on average and hence constitute credible counterfactuals.

[Table 3 about here]

5. The effect on voter satisfaction

The results of the empirical analysis are presented in two parts. In this section, I first examine the effect of adding the three information cues on reported *voter satisfaction* with the hypothetical election and its candidates. This can be considered as the impact on the interior margin of satisfaction with the election. The second part in section 6 then extends the scope of the analysis to the exterior margin, i.e., *voter turnout*, proxied by the probability of participants to "vote" in the hypothetical election.

5.1 Main results

The first central question of this paper is whether having more information on the ballot leads to more meaningful alternatives and happier voters in consequence. To test this, I examine the answers to two questions about voter satisfaction: (1) "*Do you think the individual candidates of this hypothetical list would represent you well in case they were really elected?*", and (2) "*Are you satisfied with the way you could express your own political preferences in this hypothetical election?*" As in the case of satisfaction with the real election, participants could indicate their answer for both questions on a scale from 1 to 10. I use these two separate measures for satisfaction to examine whether the impact of information cues varies across satisfaction dimensions, i.e., whether there are different effects with respect to the selected candidates (the "outcome") and the election experience as a whole (the "procedure"). Additionally, the two measures provide us with a kind of consistency check, as their respective results should not be too far off.

For a start, I check whether simply adding any kind of information affects these satisfaction measures, independent of the actual content. To do this, I lump all versions with the same number of information cues together, which means version 1 is the benchmark, versions 2 to 4 are those with one information cue, versions 5 to 7 contain two, and version 8 all three (see figure 1). Equations 1 and 2 state the two specifications used for the analysis, the

first imposing a simple linear effect on the number of cues, the second allowing for different marginal returns by creating a separate dummy for each category:

$$Satisfaction_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \#Cues_i + \gamma X_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

$$Satisfaction_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 1Cue_i + \beta_2 2Cues_i + \beta_3 3Cues_i + \gamma X_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

To increase the efficiency of the estimates, both specifications include control variables for personal and regional specific characteristics, i.e., indicators for being female, the different age groups and marital statuses, and the existence of children, as well as indicators for the state and the type of community the interview was conducted. In the case of missing information for a control variable, I set it to 0 or the sample mean in the case of binary and continuous variables, respectively, in order to avoid the loss of observations. To take the impact of these imputations into account, I separately include indicator variables in the regression.

[Table 4 about here]

Table 4 summarizes the results, displaying the estimates for specifications 1 and 2 in panels A and B, respectively. In both cases, including control variables hardly changes the point estimates, which confirms the successful randomization of individuals across information treatments and the resulting exogeneity of the different treatment indicators. Furthermore, the results are also very similar across the two satisfaction measures, demonstrating the consistency of the effect. Looking at the individual results, we see in panel A that each added cue significantly improves the satisfaction with the candidates and the election system by 0.45 and 0.46 points on the scale, respectively. Compared to the sample mean, this represents an increase of 8.1% for the satisfaction with the candidates and 9% for overall satisfaction. This clearly shows that the voters appreciate to get some help to make their choice.

The next objective is to evaluate whether this effect is approximately constant with more cues on the ballot or quickly decreasing. The latter could be if individuals value some additional information, but are averse to overloaded ballots. To see whether this is the case, *marginal effects* are reported in panel B for adding the first, second, and third cue, respectively, i.e., the difference in average satisfaction between versions with two cues on the ballot vs. those with only one. Note that this is not the typical way of presenting the regression results of specification 2 as differences relative to the benchmark of zero additional information. As we are interested in the marginal effects, however, this form has the advantage of stating the relevant size and significance directly without need for further computation. Thus, the results show the following pattern: For both measures, the first

information cue has the strongest impact, with increases in satisfaction of 0.58 in the case of the selected candidates and 0.67 for the whole election system. Adding further cues produces smaller gains, but here the conclusions for the two satisfaction measures diverge. For the satisfaction with the candidates, we see a clear trend of decreasing marginal returns with an effect of 0.42 for the second cue and only 0.27 for the third. This means that more and more information will eventually stop to produce further increases in satisfaction. For overall satisfaction with the election system, this is not (yet) the case, as the marginal effect of the third cue is slightly larger than that of the second (0.42 after 0.37). Here, the bliss point may arrive later, but the outcomes do not point towards any concrete number.

Having treated the different information cues in the same way so far, the next question to ask is whether the effect of adding more cues is the same across information types, i.e., for different contents. The theoretical discussion in section 2 already suggested that the power of a particular information does not only stem from the need for it, which increases in the numbers of votes and candidates, but also its capacity to differentiate. The first aspect should be the same for the three information cues under examination, as the fraction of respondents coming from smaller communities in which only few votes can be cast and people more likely know each other is very similar across treatments. The second point may differ, however, due to the nature of the specific information. As profession, age, and family status provide insights into different aspects of the candidates' life, it is unclear a priori whether one is more informative than the other.

[Figure 2 about here]

To identify the individual effect of each of these cues, I therefore undertake the following steps, illustrated by the example of profession information: (1) I select the four pairs of treatment versions that contain the same basic information, but in which only one each additionally states the profession of candidates. As is shown in figure 2, this would be versions 1 and 2 (no other cue present), 3 and 5 (year of birth there additionally), 4 and 6 (family status), and finally 7 and 8 (both year of birth and family status). (2) For every such pair *p*, I create an individual indicator variable. (3) I also generate an identifier for those versions in which profession is added (*Profession*). (4) I run the following specification:

$$Satisfaction_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Profession_i + \sum_{p=2}^{4} \beta_p \, Pair_{pi} + \gamma X_i + \varepsilon_i \qquad (3)$$

Here, α_1 gives us the average treatment effect (ATE) of adding profession information on the ballot on reported voter satisfaction, controlled for the influence of the other information cues (captured by the *Pair* indicators) and personal and regional characteristics (*X*). This is

practically the same as calculating the weighted average of the individual treatment effects of the four underlying sub-experiments. The influence of year of birth and family status is calculated accordingly.

[Table 5 about here]

Table 5 summarizes the estimated ATEs for the three information cues on both satisfaction measures. The coefficients of columns 1 and 4 are obtained without controlling for anything else, those in columns 2 and 5 condition on the level of already present information, i.e., the *Pair* indicator, and those in columns 3 and 6 finally use the full set of individual characteristics as additional explanatory variables.

The results confirm the conclusions about the successful randomization and the consistency between the two satisfaction measures. Additionally, they show that all cues produce statistically significant and positive individual effects on voter satisfaction. Among the three, profession proves to have the largest impact by far. While its coefficient is already more than twice the size of the runner-up, year of birth, with respect to the satisfaction with the election system (0.772 vs. 0.376), there is an even greater gap when we look at the satisfaction with the hypothetical candidates (0.904 vs. 0.195 for year of birth and 0.232 for family status). Thus, we can conclude that although all cues are relevant, it is clearly the profession of the candidates that stands out as the most important information.

5.2 Heterogeneous effects

By construction, the effects obtained above are the average impact of adding certain information cues on the ballot over several different scenarios and across all types of individuals. In this subsection, we take a deeper look at whether there are significant differences in the way additional information cues work, both by the presence of other information on the ballot and across various subgroups of people.

We begin with the first of these two possibilities for heterogeneous effects and the following question: Does adding a certain cue affect people differently if the ballot already contains some information. To answer this, we now look at all the 12 sub-experiments separately in order to see the exact treatment effect for each of them. The results are summarized in table 6. Each coefficient states the marginal effect of adding the respective information on the left-hand side (the rows) to ballots defined by the level of already existing information (the columns). For simplicity, I only report the outcomes for the case of satisfaction with the election here, but running the same analysis with the satisfaction with the candidates leads to the same conclusions.

[Table 6 about here]

At first glance, the results do not seem to exhibit a clear pattern, but two aspects are noteworthy: The first is the prominent role of profession again. Each of the four individual effects reported in row 1 is positive and very significant. And although we clearly observe decreasing marginal returns in this case (the effect goes down from 1.18 without any prior information to 0.61 when both year of birth and family status are already present), it still surpasses the highest effects of the other two info cues. The second is that profession information almost completely crowds out the effects of year of birth and family status. In 3 out of 4 cases when either year of birth or family status is added while profession is already there (rows 2 and 3 and columns 2, 5, and 6), this additional piece of information does not lead to a significant increase in satisfaction. Only year of birth yields some added value when introduced to ballots that already contain profession and family status. Thus, we can conclude that year of birth and family status have some merits on their own (on average, they cause an increase of 0.47 in reported voter satisfaction if profession is not present on the ballot), it is clearly the occupation of the candidates that is crucial for the voters.

The second dimension for heterogeneous effects is subgroups of respondents. As the sample is not representative for the general population, it is important to check whether the results would change a lot if individual subgroups were weighted differently. For this purpose, I compute the ATE as described above for different subgroups, splitting the sample along the six dimensions gender, age (younger and older than 45), political orientation (voting for a left- or right-leaning party in the real election), education (less than "Abitur" vs. "Abitur" and more), region (rural towns and suburbs vs. larger cities), and state (NRW vs. BW). To focus the presentation, I restrict the analysis to reported satisfaction with the hypothetical election as the relevant outcome variable. Table 7 reports the results of this exercise and states the corresponding sample sizes for each subsample in curly brackets below the estimates and their standard errors.

[Table 7 about here]

The coefficients for the single subgroups broadly confirm the main results as shown in table 5. In particular, ranking the variables in terms of their impact sizes reaffirms the conclusion that the most important information for the voters in all subgroups is the profession of the candidates. The coefficients of year of birth and family status again display much lower magnitudes, with year of birth seemingly having a more significant influence than family status, but this is merely the result of the choice of satisfaction measure. Apart from this

general observation, we can see that the estimates for the effect of profession vary somewhat by subgroup with differences that are in some cases statistically significant. For instance, male voters react stronger to stating professions than female ones, and the same holds for young individuals, the highly educated, and center-left oriented ones. As the sample is not constructed to be perfectly representative, this may affect the true magnitudes to a certain extent. In the next subsection, I will examine this in more detail and show that reweighting the sample to make it more representative of the electorate in the two states does not change the results significantly.

5.3 Robustness

To examine the robustness of the results with respect to changes in their derivation, I conduct two additional tests. The first concerns the representativeness of the sample. As described in sections 3 and 4, the total number of participants is 2,187, with each of them just having voted in the local and European parliament elections. The population from which these observations are obtained is therefore not all eligible voters or the total adult population, but voters in selectively chosen locations.[13] Furthermore, participation in a survey is also selective, so the actual sample cannot be assumed to be representative. This is depicted in table 8, which compares the averages of various characteristics between the respondents in my study and the group of eligible voters in Baden-Württemberg and Nordrhein-Westfalen. The information for the latter comes from the German Microcensus of 2010, a 1% representative sample of the German population. To identify the relevant eligible voters, I restrict the sample by age (at least 16 years[14]), German citizenship, and residence in one of the two states under consideration.

[Table 8 about here]

As table 8 shows, the joint effect of these selection issues leads to sizable differences in relevant characteristics. First, the survey sample contains less women (44.1% vs. 52.3%) and low-educated individuals (34.4% vs. 70% report to have less than Abitur). Next, respondents are on average younger than the eligible voters as a whole (the average age is 45 years compared to 50). Additionally, urban regions and the state of Baden-Württemberg are over-represented (53.7% vs. 34.8%, and 51% vs. 37.5%, respectively). And finally, respondents also skewed leftwards in their political orientation. While official election results state that

[13] The turnout in these elections reached 52.1% in Baden-Württemberg and 52.3% in Nordrhein-Westfalen.
[14] In contrast to federal elections, individuals are already allowed to vote in local elections with 16 in these two states.

34.3% of the voters voted for the center-right conservative party (Christian Democratic Union, CDU), only 24.4% of survey participants indicated that choice. The results from the subgroup analysis as reported in table 7 therefore suggest that these deviations may lead to biased ATE estimates. This effect may take place in particular for profession information, as every subgroup that is under-represented in the sample systematically reports lower effects for this cue in table 7. Thus, it is important to get a measure for the magnitude of this bias and whether it significantly changes the conclusions obtained.

To do so, I reweight the sample such that it perfectly matches the 2010 population of eligible voters in these two states and repeat the analysis. To get the proper weights, I use the information from the German Microcensus of 2010 about the distribution of individuals into 96 cells defined by state, gender, six age groups (as in the questionnaire), high vs. low education, and living in a large town.[15] The results of both the unweighted and weighted sample are reported in table 9, focusing again on the satisfaction with the electoral system as outcome variable. The findings confirm that the estimates for the weighted and thus more representative sample are indeed smaller for profession information (the coefficient drops from 0.79 to 0.59), but we do not observe significant changes for year of birth and family status. Furthermore, the effect for profession is still statistically significant and the order of importance between the different information cues remains exactly the same. Thus, the main results do not depend on the particular sample collected for this study.

[Table 9 about here]

The second robustness check concerns the selective exclusion of non-voters from the sample. While there are several reasons to focus the analysis on voters as discussed in section 4.1, leaving out about 48% of the eligible individuals in the local elections under consideration may limit the external validity of the results significantly. In the absence of observations from this group, I test this by taking a group of individuals in the sample that may reasonably proxy non-voters and assigning them the same weight as the share of non-voters in the real elections. This approach follows Heffetz and Rabin (2013), who argue that the individuals who are most similar to non-participants in a survey are those who were the hardest to contact.

For the present study, the equivalent is to approximate non-voters by those survey participants who were at the margin of voting in the real election. Arguably, the most likely group for that are respondents who were *very dissatisfied* or *rather dissatisfied* with the real

[15] The Microcensus is an annual representative survey of 1% of the households in Germany, containing about 830,000 individuals in 370,000 households.

election system, i.e., those reporting a satisfaction between 1 and 4 on the 10-point satisfaction scale. In total, these are 373 participants, or 17.1% of the sample. In order to mirror the turnout in the real election, I weight the disaffected individuals such that they account for 48% of the sample. The result of this change is presented in column 3 of table 9. The coefficient for profession drops a bit in comparison to the benchmark specification (from 0.79 to 0.68), but the change is not statistically significant. For year of birth and family status, the estimates remain roughly unchanged, but the effect of family status turns insignificant. Thus, reweighting the sample to give more importance to the dissatisfied reaffirms the conclusions reached above.

5.4 Demand for information

Self-reported satisfaction measures are one possibility to examine the impact of information cues. Additionally, the design of the survey allows for a second way to approach this issue. After going through the hypothetical election, participants are also asked whether they would have liked to have more information on the candidates in order to make up their minds, and if so, which information. The second part of the question was open to ensure that the respondents were completely free in their statements. The answers were then coded into different categories by a research assistant and me and checked for consistency.

[Table 10 about here]

Table 10 states the findings of these questions by ballot version. Part A shows the share of respondents per treatment who would have liked to know more about the candidates. If the ballot did not include any other information than the candidates' name (column 1), this was the case for 86.2% of the participants. Once we start adding cues next to the names, this fraction falls to lower levels, up to only 74.3% in column 8, representing the treatment that includes all three types of information. Although this is still an overwhelming majority of individuals, we have to remember that the candidates in the hypothetical election were completely fictitious, so that it seems natural that voters would like to know more about them.

Part B states the type of information that the participants indicated in the open question and their respective frequencies, sorted in descending order by importance in the benchmark version. As we can see, the respondents came up with a list of diverse topics, ranging from profession and political opinions to the direction, the origin, and photos of the candidates. As the participants were allowed to write in as many types of information as they desired, the shares do not add up to 1. Across all treatment versions, we can see that a substantial fraction (on average 36.7%) would have liked to know more about the *political*

position or platform of the individual candidates. It thus ranks first place in five of the eight information treatments. Interestingly, however, political position comes in only second on average in the four versions in which profession information is absent from the ballot (columns 1, 3, 4, and 7). Here, the information desired the most is the candidates' *profession* with an average of 38.5% over those four versions against only 33.4% mentioning political position. In particular, if nothing is available other than the name of the candidates, profession clearly leads platform by 38.4% to 31.1%. This suggests that profession is the single most interesting characteristic for voters, if they have to choose between candidates of the same party. This may be due to fact that members of the same party usually share a certain set of policy preferences anyway, whereas profession may reveal other important traits in which they could differ, like competence or area of expertise. Among the other characteristics, the *age* of candidates was also demanded relatively often in the versions without it (on average 18.3% in columns 1, 2, 4, and 6), whereas *family status* came in only third among the cues considered in this study (on average 6.4% in columns 1, 2, 3, and 5), and behind other categories like the candidates' *CV* and *party affiliation* with 9.6% and 7.8% on average.[16] All in all, the results in this subsection reaffirm the conclusions obtained from above that all three cues matter for at least some voters, but that profession information clearly dominates the other two.

6. The effect on election turnout

So far, we have seen that including more information on the ballot increases the satisfaction of voters with the election system. This is an important result by itself, as higher satisfaction with the election system likely increases the overall consent with democracy among the voters and thus the legitimacy of democratically elected governments. As noted above, there may exist a second channel towards the same end, however, which could further increase the relevance of meaningful information on the ballot. If individuals are happier with the choices they face and believe they can exert more influence on the outcome of the election, they may also be more likely to actually go to the polls and vote. In this case, the eventual elected government would possess a larger mandate and more authority in its actions (see Nadeau and Blais, 1993, and Anderson et al., 2005). Given the theoretical discussion in section 2, however, it is not clear per-se whether including more information on the ballot leads to an increase in actual voting, as the additional complexity may turn off individuals who want to spend as little time on the choice of candidates as possible. Answering this question is

[16] *Party affiliation* does not primarily mean which party the candidates are in, as the setup described them as all belonging to the favorite party of the respondent. Rather, people would have liked to know more about the candidates' past activities *for* the party.

therefore an empirical task. In this section, I thus examine the effect of information cues on the probability that an individual participates in the hypothetical election in this survey. Additionally, I will also use aggregate turnout data from local elections in the German states since 1990 to corroborate the findings.

6.1 Measuring the impact on "turnout" in the experiment

With observational data, it is difficult to determine the factors of why some individuals vote while others abstain as the potential explanatory variables like personal attitudes may not be exogenous. For instance, correlations between reported satisfaction with the election system and actual voting behavior may be influenced by ex-post rationalizing. Individuals who made the effort to go to the polls may claim to be very satisfied with the system while those who did not bother to vote for any reason may say they had been unhappy all along simply to justify their own behavior. Likewise, evaluating the impact of information cues in real elections is problematic, as there is no credible counterfactual control group available. Simply looking at elections in countries with and without information may be comparing apples with oranges, as systematic underlying differences between the two groups may exist that we could not control for.

The present study thus provides an exceptional opportunity to examine this issue by means of a randomized experiment. Since the whole sample consists of actual voters, the biggest challenge to overcome here is to get a measure or proxy for "turnout" that is both closely related to real turnout and contains some variation. In the context of this survey, such a measure can be constructed from the answering behavior of the respondents. The interviewers asked people leaving the polling station to participate in a voter survey and if they agreed to do so, they gave them the questionnaire to fill out on their own. While instructed to stay nearby in order to clarify any questions, the interviewers were not supposed to fill in the answers of the respondents themselves or to encourage them to answer everything. Thus, if respondents wanted to skip parts of the survey or pass on voting in the hypothetical election, they could easily do so. Over the whole sample, this was the case for about 12% of participating individuals. For sure, some of these "non-voters" may have had other reasons to do so, for instance, the realization that the survey takes longer than expected, but these should be the same across ballot versions. Thus, if we find systematic deviations in the share of abstentions across information treatments, we can directly attribute them to the differences in the exogenously allocated informational content of the hypothetical ballots.

This measure of turnout comes with both advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it originates in the observed real behavior of individuals rather than just asking them

whether they would vote under this or that circumstance. It should therefore be very close to the real voting decision situation and provide interesting insights. On the other hand, the results may not allow for inference to the non-voting population as they are derived from a sample of real voters. I will attempt to address this concern in subsections 6.3 and 6.4 below.

6.2 Turnout and incorrect voting

The empirical specification used to analyze the impact of the individual information cues is the same as equation 3 from above, but replaces satisfaction as outcome variable by an indicator for whether respondent *i* voted in the hypothetical election. For simplicity, the method applied is a linear probability model, but the results are essentially the same when using a binary choice model.

[Table 11 about here]

Table 11 lists the estimated average treatment effect over the four different subexperiments for each information cue and adding control variables step by step in columns 1 to 3. Again, we see that the controls are rather redundant, as the coefficients change only slightly when we include them. The estimates themselves show that providing more information on the ballot also affects the probability to participate in the election, with profession adding 4.6 percentage points to the likelihood of casting votes in the hypothetical election and family status increasing turnout by 3.2 percentage points. Only for year of birth, the impact is insignificant. These findings provide evidence that if individuals possess more knowledge about the candidates and are thus able to choose between real alternatives, they are more likely to get involved and vote.

Finally, column 4 examines the other side of the coin, invalid voting. As critics of open lists in general and more information on the ballot in particular claim, voting under these circumstances gets increasingly complex and may lead to a large number of invalid ballots when individuals lose track and accidentally allocate too many votes. Running the same specification as in column 3 with an indicator for whether somebody distributed more than six votes shows that this is not the case. None of the three information cues significantly increases incorrect voting. To the contrary, we even observe a negative and significant effect of profession showing that stating the profession of the candidates even leads to a decrease in invalid votes.

Summarizing the outcomes of this subsection, we thus find that more information on the ballot (especially meaningful one) increases the probability of participating in the election and reduces the occurrence of incorrect voting.

6.3 Effect on the turnout of the least satisfied

The main argument against the external validity of these results comes from the fact that the sample consists entirely of voters and that we should be cautious therefore in extrapolating the findings to the behavior of non-voters. While this argument cannot be neglected, we can increase our confidence in the results by applying a similar approach as in section 5.3. That is, I take dissatisfied voters in the sample as closest approximation to non-voters a la Heffetz and Rabin (2013) and repeat the turnout analysis of section 6.2 for this particular subgroup. This provides an at least suggestive impression on how information cues may affect non-voters. Table 12 displays the results, comparing the coefficients for the disaffected voters in column 2 with the results for the whole sample as benchmark in column 1.

[Table 12 about here]

To begin, we can see in the last row of the table that the probability to participate in the hypothetical election is significantly lower in the subgroup of unhappy voters than in the full sample (83.9% to 88.0%). This supports the suggestion that disaffected voters are more selective in their election participation than the more satisfied ones, and indicates that using them to represent the non-voters may be a reasonable first approximation. Further, the individual estimates show that disaffected voters are more sensitive and critical with respect to whether certain information is meaningful. While we do not observe a large change in the coefficient for family status, there is a sizable increase in the effect of profession, from 4.6 to 7.1 percentage points, and an even larger and somewhat surprising increase in the impact of year of birth, changing from -0.7 to -7.4 percentage points. Taken at face value, this would suggest that the candidates' age does not provide any meaningful information to this subgroup of respondents, while their professions clearly do.

6.4 Turnout in local elections in Germany

As a second way to test the external validity of the experimental results of this study, I turn to aggregate turnout data in local elections in the 16 German states after reunification in 1990. As discussed above, the estimates obtained with these observational data cannot claim causality as the distribution of information cues across the different states and over time may not be exogenous. For instance, states may introduce the use of certain information in response to decreasing turnout. However, looking at this source provides the opportunity to look at the whole population of eligible voters and check whether the correlations between

information cues on the ballot and turnout are at least somewhat similar to the results in the hypothetical election presented here.

For this analysis, I use the state-wide turnout for each election as a single observation. This reflects that within a certain state, local elections take place at the same time, are run by the same rules, and include the same information on the ballot in all communities. All in all, this leads to 87 elections in the sample, with an average of 5.5 per state.[17] The empirical specification is a difference-in-differences approach as follows:

$$Turnout_{st} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Open_{st} + \alpha_2 Profession_{st} + \alpha_3 Open * Profession_{st} + \\ + \alpha_4 Year\ of\ birth_{st} + \alpha_5 Open * Year\ of\ birth_{st} + \delta T_t + \gamma X_{st} + \varepsilon_{st} \qquad (4)$$

That is, we want to see whether the use of *profession* and *year of birth* on the ballot (both coded as binary indicators) in the local election in state *s* and year *t* correlates with the *turnout* in the respective election.[18] Furthermore, according to the theoretical framework in section 2, this relationship should be stronger in open-list elections (*open*) compared to closed-list ones, as party affiliation will dominate the voters' decision-making in the latter case. This is captured by interaction terms between *open* and the respective information cue. As controls, I include a linear time trend (*T*) starting in 1990, state fixed-effects, and indicators for the simultaneous occurrence of federal, state, EU, or mayoral elections, as well as public referenda. Finally, I also condition on the weather at Election Day in the state capital, i.e., whether the temperature exceeded 28 degrees Celsius (*heat*) or was below 4 degrees Celsius (*cold*), and whether it rained that day (*rain*).

[Table 13 about here]

The results are presented in table 13, where I add the explanatory variables stepwise to show whether and how they affect the correlations of interests. In column 1, I only include the linear time trend and the indicator for an open-list election. The coefficients show that turnout decreased over time by 1 percentage point per year on average and that elections with open lists are associated with a 5 percentage point lower turnout than those with closed lists. This could be due either to the higher complexity of voting with open lists or to a systematic use of open lists in place with a lower tendency to vote. Specification 2 then adds the two types of information on the ballot and interacts them with the open-list indicator. Here, we see that profession information is correlated with elections with a lower turnout and that there is no

[17] Due to differences in term limits and the occurrence of special elections, the actual number of elections per state during this period ranges from 4 in Bavaria to 8 in Hamburg.

[18] It is not possible to examine *family status* in this exercise, as this information does not appear on the ballot in any state in Germany yet.

difference between the two election systems in this respect. Year of birth, on the other hand, does not seem to be correlated with turnout whatsoever.

Once we add state fixed-effects to the regression in column 3, however, the pattern changes. While stating the candidates' profession is still associated with lower turnout and the same holds for open lists in general, we now observe a significantly positive coefficient of 7.1 percentage points for profession information in open rather than closed-list elections. At the same time, there is still no statistically significant relation between year of birth and turnout. This would be roughly in line with the findings in the experimental part that more information produces greater satisfaction and a higher willingness to participate, but that profession has the largest effect among the different possible cues. Adding the indicators for different kinds of other elections taking place at the same time in column 4, as well as for difficult weather conditions in column 5 increases the overall goodness-of-fit of the model, but only slightly reduces the size of the coefficient for the interaction between profession information and open-list elections.

To sum up, the examination of real turnout data provides an opportunity to test the validity of the empirical findings among the total population of eligible voters outside the experimental framework. The outcome confirms the key experimental insights that information on the ballot seems to affect the willingness of individuals to vote in an election, but that the size of the effect varies across different cues. Among the cues considered here, stating the profession of candidates on the ballot seems to produce the largest and most robust impact.

7. Conclusions

This paper evaluates the impact of information cues on voter satisfaction and turnout in low-information elections where individuals have to choose between several candidates of their preferred party. The empirical results suggest three conclusions: First, the reported satisfaction of voters increases with the use of information cues on the ballot, but with decreasing marginal returns. Second, profession information seems to be particularly helpful. And third, the higher satisfaction in the presence of profession information seems to translate into larger turnout, both in the experiment by raising the probability to participate in the hypothetical election and in aggregate turnout data from local elections in Germany.

Together, these findings provide strong evidence for the importance of information in an election and indicate that the decisive aspect for voter satisfaction and turnout is not necessarily to be able to choose between many candidates, but to have a *meaningful* and *informed* choice, similar to the results for the case of goods in Reutskaja and Hogarth (2009).

The present paper thus adds an important aspect to the literature which until now only stated that elections with open lists increase satisfaction with the way democracy works per-se (Farrell and McAllister, 2006). In elections for nationwide parliaments, this may be less important as there is usually a lot of media coverage and attention and only a small number of votes to allocate. For elections in a low-information environment, however, the amount and content of information provided on the ballot may be the key to understanding voter satisfaction and turnout.

Two aspects could limit the external validity of the results, especially with respect to the impact of profession information. In real elections, it is the parties who decide which candidates appear on their list and the candidates themselves have to declare their profession. As these actors most likely know the importance of information cues and signals (Reynolds and Steenbergen, 2006; Tessin, 2007; Vavreck, 2001), the typical list may not present the balanced mix of candidates with different high- and low-skill professions that participants faced in this survey. On the contrary, parties can be expected to be prone to nominate candidates whose professions had a good track record in the past.

At the same time, candidates surely use their leeway in describing their profession to their advantage as well. For example, if candidates with high-skill jobs tended to be successful in the past, a "cashier" in the local supermarket could thus truthfully declare to be an "employee", whereas an "employee" who has studied sociology would probably state her profession as "sociologist". Together, the actions of parties and candidates may lead to ballots with clusters of candidates working in the most promising occupations.. This may significantly reduce the power of profession information to distinguish between the candidates in terms of their qualification and consequently its impact on voter satisfaction and turnout. Even in this case, however, profession information could still be useful for voters to select candidates they perceive to be closer to their own political position.

Looking at voter satisfaction and turnout is only one side of the coin when evaluating the effect of stating additional information about the candidates on the ballot. Before making policy recommendations to decision-makers about the proper ballot design, we have to know more about the impact on actual policies. There are two channels for this: First, the results raise the possibility that including candidate information on the ballot could change the partisan composition of the elected parliament or council. As higher turnout is usually considered to benefit parties advocating for the lower social classes, this could lead to different economic and social policies (see Bechtel et al., 2015). This effect may be more pronounced in proportional representation systems than in elections with simple majority, however, as higher turnout would only affect the marginal races in the latter (see Citrin et al.,

2003). Second, if some characteristics prove to be more attractive or a better signal to voters, this may change the composition of the elected candidates within each party and thus the parties' stance on certain topics.

Further research should address these issues: First, it is necessary to know whether and how voters adjust their voting behavior to the presence of information cues on the ballot. Second, we need to understand how the relevant political actors respond to the inclusion of profession on the ballot as this could limit the external validity of the results presented here. And finally, the power of information cues could also depend on the main political cleavage in the respective society. Thus, further studies could repeat the analysis of this paper in contexts where, for instance, ethnicity or religious denomination are of major importance for the voters. If especially profession was found to significantly influence voters in such settings as well, it may even be helpful for the designers of electoral systems to prevent individuals from voting purely along the lines of the main social conflict.

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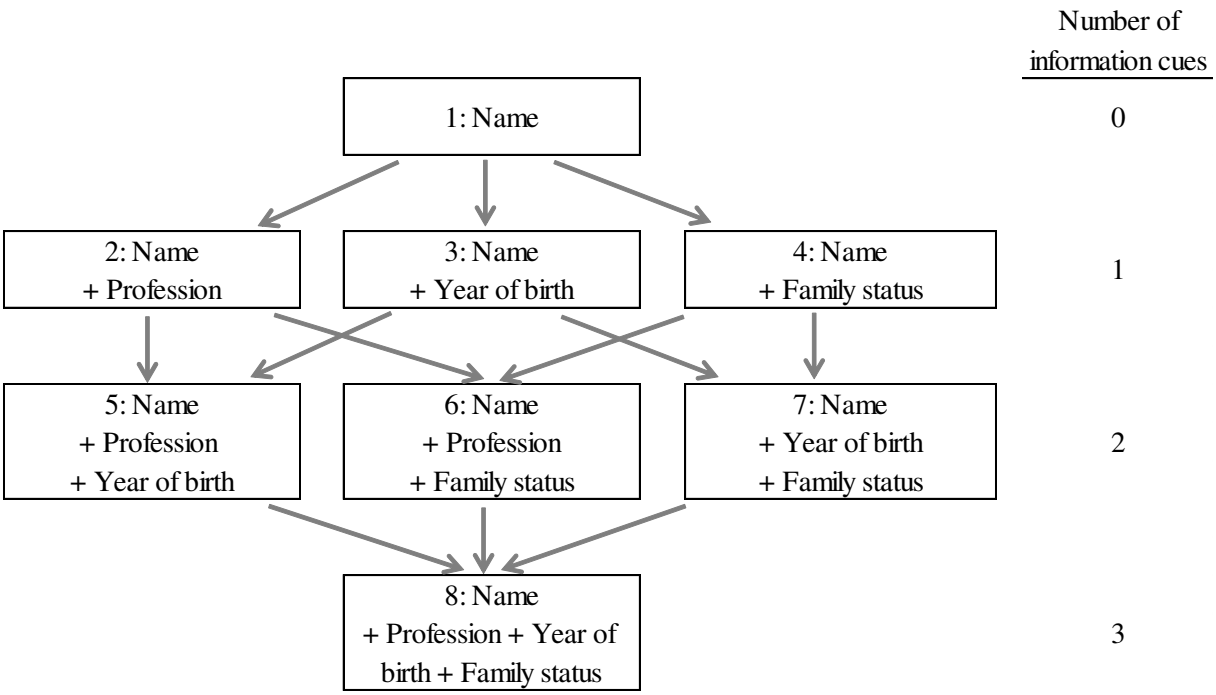
Tables and figures

Figure 1

Overview on the different ballot versions



Notes: Rank and name of each candidate remain unchanged across versions. Arrows illustrate which versions can be directly compared to each other as control and treatment group, with the treatment being the one additional information cue present in the latter version.

Table 1

Characteristics of individual candidates

Rank	Candidate	Profession	Year of birth	Family status
1	Gillen, Arnold	Physicist	1956	married, 1 child
2	Heyer, Regina	Elderly care nurse	1970	married
3	Amrein, Karl	Confectioner	1993	single
4	Tesch, Iris	Social pedagogue	1951	widowed, 3 children
5	Höhne, Otto	Metalworker	1971	married, 2 children
6	Lötz, Margarete	Lawyer	1984	single
7	Peters, Bernd	Hairdresser	1975	single, 2 children
8	Gussmann, Ute	Construction engineer	1968	married, 3 children
9	Kilic, Mehmet	Teacher	1977	married, 2 children
10	Kunde, Hildegard	Firefighter	1990	single
11	Berger, Martin	Psychologist	1965	civil union
12	Silbernagel, Marianne	Postal worker	1989	single
13	Gorges, Hans-Peter	Innkeeper	1967	married, 4 children
14	Kleine, Erika	Bookseller	1973	single
15	Bernsen, Karl-Heinz	Painter	1962	single, 1 child
16	Block, Silke	Dentist	1959	married, 3 children
17	Weber, Daniel	Electrical engineer	1991	single
18	Schenzer, Bärbel	Cleaner	1980	married, 2 children
19	Lütticken, Reinhardt	Physician	1987	married, 1 child
20	Propach, Inge	Farmer	1948	married, 2 children
21	Altenburg, Jürgen	Elementory school teach	1981	single, 1 child
22	Greiner, Waltraud	Retailer	1992	single
23	Leisen, Walter	Medical assistant	1946	widowed, 2 children
24	Benz, Barbara	Computer scientist	1952	married, 3 children
25	Schüttke, Heinrich	Cook	1983	married, 2 children
26	Rudnick, Julia	Pharmacist	1961	single
27	Nawak, Thomas	Carpenter	1953	married, 1 child
28	Block, Christiane	Local public servant	1964	married
29	Usleber , Johannes	Software developer	1966	married, 1 child
30	Lochner, Susanne	Textile cleaner	1994	single

Notes: Each candidate appears at the same position and with the same name in every ballot version. The other characteristics (profession, year of birth, and family status) are equally fixed to the candidates, but only stated in individual versions as shown in figure 1.

Table 2

Distribution of interviews across types of community

	Region			
State	Urban	Semi-urban	Rural	Total
Baden-Württemberg				
No. of respondents	610	262	243	1115
% in BW in experiment	54.7	23.5	21.8	
% in BW in 2013	24.8	55.0	20.3	
Nordrhein-Westfalen				
No. of respondents	564	356	152	1072
% in NRW in experiment	52.6	33.2	14.2	
% in NRW in 2013	47.1	43.1	9.8	
Total:	1174	618	395	**2187**

Notes: The sorting into different types of community is based on the EU definitions for urban and rural, and the list of communities ("*Gemeindeverzeichnis*") of the Federal Statistical Office with respect to the 31st of December, 2013 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2014). The fraction of individuals living in these types of communities is obtained from the same source.

Table 3

Characteristics of respondents by treatment

Version	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
Sample size	274	273	275	278	278	279	261	269	2187
Personal characteristics									
Female	0.423	0.480	0.465	**0.356**	0.468	0.470	0.441	0.428	0.466
	(0.49)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.48)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)
Age	45.4	44.2	46.6	45.8	**43.1**	44.9	44.6	46.4	45.1
	(16.41)	(17.36)	(17.95)	(17.55)	(16.44)	(16.93)	(16.50)	(16.67)	(17.0)
Ever married	0.645	0.663	0.626	0.640	**0.583**	0.651	0.634	0.679	0.640
	(0.48)	(0.47)	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.49)	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.47)	(0.48)
Low education	0.354	0.355	0.345	0.372	0.335	**0.295**	0.362	0.332	0.344
	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.48)	(0.47)	(0.46)	(0.48)	(0.47)	(0.48)
Children [y/n]	0.529	0.513	0.535	0.489	0.518	0.480	0.506	0.550	0.545
	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)
No. of children	1.05	1.04	1.10	1.03	0.98	0.95	1.06	1.10	1.037
	(1.18)	(1.17)	(1.22)	(1.18)	(1.11)	(1.15)	(1.22)	(1.16)	(1.17)
Regional characteristics and attitudes towards real election									
Overall satisfaction	7.0	6.8	7.0	6.9	6.8	6.7	**7.2**	7.0	6.9
	(2.38)	(2.50)	(2.35)	(2.54)	(2.45)	(2.49)	(2.33)	(2.55)	(2.45)
Satisfaction with selected candidates	6.8	6.7	6.7	6.8	6.8	6.7	7.0	6.8	6.8
	(1.90)	(1.93)	(1.99)	(2.06)	(1.98)	(1.93)	(1.81)	(2.04)	(1.95)
Vote for SPD	0.294	0.265	0.270	0.242	0.240	0.244	0.241	0.265	0.258
	(0.45)	(0.43)	(0.44)	(0.42)	(0.41)	(0.42)	(0.42)	(0.43)	(0.43)
Vote for CDU	0.241	0.267	0.233	0.259	0.242	0.251	0.218	0.242	0.244
	(0.42)	(0.43)	(0.42)	(0.44)	(0.42)	(0.43)	(0.41)	(0.42)	(0.42)
How many candidates known	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.0
	(1.10)	(1.11)	(1.04)	(1.09)	(1.08)	(1.09)	(1.07)	(1.16)	(1.09)
Large city	0.522	0.538	0.535	0.558	0.543	0.530	0.536	0.532	0.537
	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)
Baden-Württemberg	0.504	0.509	0.487	0.514	0.518	0.520	0.490	0.524	0.510
	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.50)

Notes: (1) Standard deviations are reported in parentheses. (2) Numbers written in **bold** indicate significant differences from the mean of all the other versions on at least the 10%-level. (3) Sample excludes participants who only answered the survey as partners of the actual target person.

Table 4

The effect of more information cues on voter satisfaction

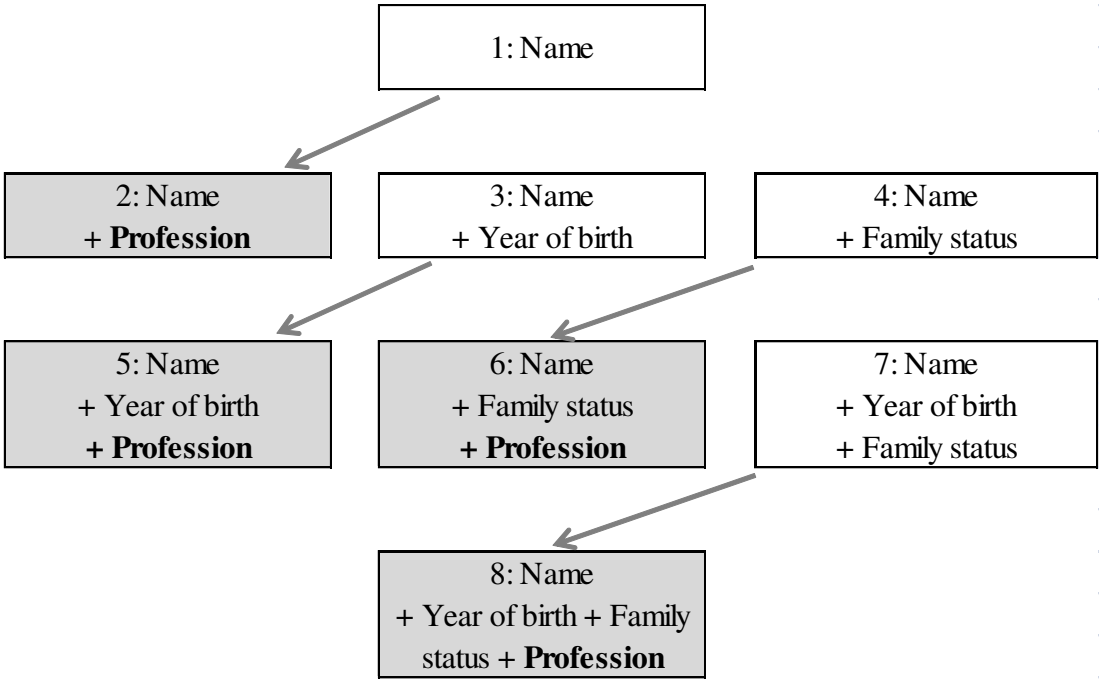
	Satisfaction with hypoth. candidates [1-10]		Satisfaction with hypoth. election system [1-10]	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Panel A: Linear specification				
No information	**4.90*****	**4.10*****	**4.43*****	**3.27*****
	(0.11)	(0.22)	(0.12)	(0.24)
No. of cues	**0.44*****	**0.45*****	**0.45*****	**0.46*****
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	1990	1990	2004	2004
Ad. R^2	0.03	0.05	0.02	0.06
Mean(outcome)	5.56	5.56	5.12	5.12
Std. dev.(outcome)	2.36	2.36	2.67	2.67
Panel B: Non-linear specification				
No information	**4.77*****	**4.00*****	**4.26*****	**3.13*****
	(0.15)	(0.25)	(0.17)	(0.27)
1 info cue	**0.63*****	**0.58*****	**0.74*****	**0.67*****
	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.20)	(0.19)
2 info cues	**0.42*****	**0.46*****	**0.32****	**0.37*****
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.14)
3 info cues	**0.28***	**0.27***	**0.44****	**0.42****
	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.18)	(0.18)
Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	1990	1990	2004	2004
Ad. R^2	0.03	0.06	0.02	0.06
Mean(outcome)	5.56	5.56	5.12	5.12
Std. dev.(outcome)	2.36	2.36	2.67	2.67

*, **, *** = significantly different on the 10%, 5%, or 1% level.

Notes: (1) The coefficients report the marginal effect of an additional information cue on the ballot on the respective satisfaction measure. To depict the marginal effect of adding the second and third info cue in panel B, the coefficients for 2 and 3 info cues state the average difference to the category with one cue less, not the difference to the reference category. (2) Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. (3) Controls include indicators for female, five age groups (reference group: 18-25 year olds), three marital statuses (reference group: single), whether an individual has children, two different types of city (suburban and rural, with urban as benchmark), and the state of Baden-Württemberg.

Figure 2

Measuring the average treatment effect of *Profession*



Notes: Each arrows represents an own experimental comparison between a control group without profession information (white colored) and a treatment group including it (in grey). The ATE reflects the weighted average of these four separate treatment effects.

Table 5

Average treatment effects of different information cues on voter satisfaction

	Satisfaction with hypoth. candidates [1-10]			Satisfaction with hypoth. election system [1-10]		
Treatment	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Profession	**0.890***** (0.104)	**0.890***** (0.104)	**0.904***** (0.102)	**0.766***** (0.118)	**0.764***** (0.118)	**0.772***** (0.116)
Year of birth	**0.208**** (0.106)	**0.202*** (0.104)	**0.195*** (0.102)	**0.370***** (0.119)	**0.367***** (0.118)	**0.376***** (0.116)
Family status	**0.227**** (0.106)	**0.223**** (0.103)	**0.232**** (0.102)	**0.232*** (0.119)	**0.226*** (0.118)	**0.225*** (0.116)
Pairs	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
N	1990	1990	1990	2004	2004	2004
Mean(outcome)	5.56	5.56	5.56	5.12	5.12	5.12

*, **, *** = significantly different on the 10%, 5%, or 1% level.

Notes: (1) Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses, the number of observations used for each regression in curly brackets. (2) The reported coefficients are the average treatment effects of adding the respective information cue, estimated in separate regressions. (3) Individual controls include an indicator for being female, dummies for the different age groups and marital statuses, as well as whether the respondent has children. Controls for location-specific effects contain indicators for the state and the type of community the interview was conducted.

Table 6

Heterogeneous effects with different levels of already existing information

[Outcome variable: Satisfaction with hyp. election system]

	Already existing information						
	None	Profession	Year of birth	Family status	Profession + Year of birth	Profession + Family status	Year of birth + Family status
Treatment	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Profession	**1.18*** **		**0.76*** **	**0.62*** **			**0.61*** **
	(0.24)		(0.24)	(0.23)			(0.23)
	{497}		{500}	{508}			{499}
Year of birth	**0.46***	0.08		**0.55** **		**0.43***	
	(0.24)	(0.24)		(0.24)		(0.22)	
	{503}	{494}		{499}		{508}	
Family status	**0.41***	-0.16	**0.50** **		0.28		
	(0.24)	(0.23)	(0.25)		(0.22)		
	{504}	{501}	{498}		{501}		
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*, **, *** = significantly different on the 10%, 5%, or 1% level.

Notes: (1) Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses, the number of observations used for each regression in curly brackets. (2) The reported coefficients are the effects of adding the respective information cue, estimated in separate regressions. (3) Individual controls include an indicator for being female, dummies for the different age groups and marital statuses, as well as whether the respondent has children. Controls for location-specific effects contain indicators for the state and the type of community the interview was conducted.

Table 7

Heterogeneous effects by subgroups

Dependent variable: Satisfaction with hypoth. election system [1-10]

	Gender		**Age**		**Political orientation**	
	Men	Women	Young	Old	Left	Right
Info cue	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Profession	**0.915*****	**0.608*****	**0.937*****	**0.634*****	**0.954*****	**0.518*****
	(0.161)	(0.166)	(0.160)	(0.172)	(0.154)	(0.177)
	{1090}	{914}	{1000}	{953}	{1109}	{895}
Year of birth	**0.409****	**0.307***	**0.475*****	**0.309***	**0.341****	**0.407****
	(0.161)	(0.166)	(0.160)	(0.172)	(0.155)	(0.176)
	{1090}	{914}	{1000}	{953}	{1109}	{895}
Family status	0.199	0.229	**0.265***	0.204	**0.307****	0.134
	(0.163)	(0.166)	(0.160)	(0.174)	(0.155)	(0.178)
	{1090}	{914}	{1000}	{953}	{1109}	{895}

	Education		**Region**		**State**	
	Low	High	Rural	Metropolitan	NRW	BW
Info cue	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Profession	**0.635*****	**1.035*****	**0.830*****	**0.762*****	**0.702*****	**0.856*****
	(0.143)	(0.203)	(0.172)	(0.159)	(0.168)	(0.160)
	{1249}	{687}	{920}	{1084}	{971}	{1033}
Year of birth	**0.386*****	**0.536*****	**0.432****	**0.369****	**0.384****	**0.385****
	(0.143)	(0.203)	(0.173)	(0.157)	(0.169)	(0.160)
	{1249}	{687}	{920}	{1084}	{971}	{1033}
Family status	**0.284****	0.077	0.041	**0.356****	**0.331****	0.13
	(0.144)	(0.205)	(0.173)	(0.158)	(0.169)	(0.161)
	{1249}	{687}	{920}	{1084}	{971}	{1033}

*, **, *** = significantly different on the 10%, 5%, or 1% level.

Notes: (1) Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses, sample sizes in curly brackets. (2) The reported coefficients depict the average treatment effects of the respective information cue, estimated separately for the different subgroups. (3) Each regression uses all the controls as in table 5, except if a variable is used to define the subgroup. (4) Individuals are defined as young if they are 45 years or below, left if they voted for the Social Democratic Party, the Greens, the Left, or similar parties, low educated if they do not have a university education, and from a metropolitan area if more than 100,000 people live in their community.

Table 8

Comparison of individual characteristics: Sample vs. eligible voters

	Individuals in the sample	*Eligible voters in 2010*
Female	0.441	0.523
	(0.50)	(0.50)
Age	45.1	50.2
	(17.83)	(19.24)
Low education	0.344	0.698
	(0.48)	(0.46)
Urban	0.537	0.348
	(0.50)	(0.48)
Baden-Württemberg	0.510	0.375
	(0.50)	(0.48)
N	2,187	128,274

Notes: (1) All means are significantly different on the 1% level. (2) The information on the eligible voters in Baden-Württemberg and Nordrhein-Westfalen comes from the German Microcensus of 2010. To focus on eligible voters, I only consider individuals with at least 16 years of age and in possession of the German citizenship. (3) Standard deviations are reported in parentheses. (4) Low education is defined as any educational attainment below the university entrance qualification ("Abitur"). (5) The six age brackets from the survey are converted into a continuous measure by using the range means and the value of 75 for those over 65.

Table 9

Robustness checks - Voter satisfaction

	Outcome: Satisfaction with the hypothetical election		
	Benchmark specification	Reweighted to match the electorate	Reweighted to match turnout (least satisfied as non-voters)
Treatment	(1)	(2)	(3)
Profession	**0.789***** (0.117)	**0.594***** (0.158)	**0.677***** (0.173)
Year of birth	**0.431***** (0.117)	**0.377**** (0.159)	**0.428**** (0.179)
Family status	**0.216*** (0.118)	0.226 (0.156)	0.266 (0.174)
Pairs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	1931	1931	1931
Mean(outcome)	5.08	5.41	4.61

*, **, *** = significantly different from 0 on the 10%, 5%, or 1% level, respectively.

Notes: (1) Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. (2) The reported coefficients are the average treatment effects of adding the respective information cue, estimated in separate regressions. (3) The results for the benchmark specification differ somewhat from those in table 5 as only those respondents are included here for which weights could be produced. This restriction excludes all individuals who did not provide the information about their gender, age, or highest educational attainment. (4) The observations in column 3 are reweighted such that the relation of satisfied to unsatisfied voters (reported satisfaction of more than 4 vs. less or equal 4) reflects the relation of voters to non-voters in the real local elections. (5) Individual controls include an indicator for being female, dummies for the different age groups and marital statuses, as well as whether the respondent has children. Furthermore, I condition on the state and the type of community the interview was conducted.

Table 10

Desire for more information on the ballot, by treatment

	Information stated on the ballot [Treatment]							
	None	Profession	Year of birth	Family status	Profession & Year of birth	Profession & Family status	Year of birth & Family status	All information
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
A. Fraction of respondents who would have liked to possess more information about the candidates on the list (yes/no)								
	0.862	0.820	0.835	0.794	0.765	0.813	0.844	0.743
B. Fraction stating this particular type of desired information among those who desired more (open question)								
Profession	**0.384**	0.010	0.338	**0.398**	0.031	0.005	**0.422**	0.016
Platform	0.311	**0.366**	**0.377**	0.333	**0.426**	**0.432**	0.313	**0.378**
Age	0.260	0.171	0.010	0.164	0.026	0.136	0.014	0.005
CV	0.087	0.112	0.097	0.100	0.097	0.094	0.104	0.076
Party	0.082	0.078	0.082	0.085	0.087	0.052	0.104	0.054
Family status	0.073	0.068	0.024	0.000	0.092	0.000	0.005	0.005
Education	0.023	0.000	0.010	0.015	0.005	0.009	0.057	0.011
Pol. Activity	0.023	0.049	0.019	0.030	0.031	0.023	0.000	0.043
Address	0.023	0.049	0.053	0.050	0.026	0.033	0.062	0.043
Experience	0.014	0.039	0.014	0.025	0.056	0.056	0.024	0.038
Origin	0.014	0.005	0.024	0.000	0.015	0.014	0.009	0.000
Photo	0.009	0.005	0.010	0.015	0.015	0.000	0.005	0.011

Notes: (1) Panel A shows the fraction of respondents stating they would have liked to possess more information about the candidates on the list in order to make their decision. Panel B reports the fraction stating particular types of information among those participants who answered yes to the previous question. In order to elicit unbiased answers, this question was asked in open format, i.e., without predetermined alternatives. (2) Information sought by the most individuals marked in **bold** for each ballot version.

Table 11

The effect of information cues on voter turnout and incorrect voting

	Voting in the hypothetical election [0/1]			Invalid voting [0/1]
Info cue	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Profession	**0.051*****	**0.050*****	**0.046*****	**-0.005***
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.003)
Year of birth	-0.006	-0.005	-0.007	-0.003
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.003)
Family status	**0.030****	**0.030****	**0.032****	-0.001
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.003)
Pairs	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Controls	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	2187	2187	2187	1925
Mean(outcome)	0.88	0.88	0.88	0.005

*, **, *** = significantly different on the 10%, 5%, or 1% level.

Notes: (1) Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. (2) The reported coefficients are the average treatment effects of adding the respective information cue, estimated in separate regressions. (3) The list of controls is the same as in table 5. (4) Invalid voting is defined as 1 if a participant voted for more than six candidates.

Table 12

Voters with low satisfaction with real election as proxy for non-voters

Info cue	Benchmark (1)	Low-satisfied (2)
Profession	**0.046*** **	**0.071***
	(0.013)	(0.040)
Year of birth	-0.007	**-0.074***
	(0.013)	(0.039)
Family status	**0.032** **	0.022
	(0.013)	(0.040)
Pairs	Yes	Yes
Controls	Yes	Yes
N	2187	373
Mean(turnout)	0.880	0.839

*, **, *** = significantly different on the 10%, 5%, or 1% level.

Notes: (1) Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. (2) The reported coefficients are the average treatment effects of adding the respective information cue, estimated in separate regressions. (3) The list of controls is the same as in table 5. (4) "Low-satisfied" is defined as reporting a satisfaction with the real election system of 4 and below (on a 1-10 scale).

Table 13

Open lists, candidate information, and voter turnout in German local elections

	Outcome: Turnout in local elections (on the state level)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Open list	-0.050***	-0.042**	-0.088***	-0.120***	-0.118***
	(0.013)	(0.019)	(0.022)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Profession		-0.034**	-0.035	-0.022	-0.021
		(0.016)	(0.045)	(0.063)	(0.065)
Open*Profession		0.001	**0.071****	**0.064****	**0.061***
		(0.025)	(0.033)	(0.032)	(0.034)
Year of birth		0.007	0.027	0.006	0.012
		(0.037)	(0.040)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Open*Year		-0.002	0.027	0.024	0.015
		(0.042)	(0.044)	(0.030)	(0.030)
Time trend	-0.010***	-0.009***	-0.010***	-0.009***	-0.009***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Federal elections				0.154***	0.151***
				(0.043)	(0.044)
State elections				0.112*	0.133**
				(0.058)	(0.056)
EU elections				0.048***	0.043**
				(0.016)	(0.020)
Mayoral elections				-0.025*	-0.032**
				(0.014)	(0.014)
Referendum				0.063***	0.058***
				(0.016)	(0.020)
Heat					-0.022
					(0.028)
Cold					-0.030**
					(0.014)
Rain					-0.009
					(0.012)
Constant	0.735***	0.746***	0.736***	0.709***	0.714***
	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.045)	(0.059)	(0.061)
State FE	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	87	87	87	87	87
Adj. R^2	0.629	0.632	0.716	0.806	0.801

*, **, *** = significantly different from 0 on the 10%, 5%, or 1% level, respectively.

Notes: (1) Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. (2) The sample consists of all local elections in the 16 German states between the reunification in late 1990 and 2015.

Appendix: Questionnaire

Studie zur Kommunalwahl 2014:

Vielen Dank für Ihre Teilnahme an dieser Umfrage für die

Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg.

Der Fragebogen ist in fünf Teile gegliedert. Für die Zwecke dieser Umfrage ist es wichtig, die Fragen **in der gegebenen Reihenfolge** zu beantworten.

Ihre Angaben sind anonym und werden streng vertraulich und ausschließlich für die Ziele dieses Forschungsprojektes erhoben.

Vielen Dank!

Bei Fragen zu den einzelnen Punkten wenden Sie sich bitte direkt an Ihren Interviewer.

Teil 1: Fragen zur Kommunalwahl 2014

1. Wie zufrieden sind Sie mit den Möglichkeiten Ihre eigene politische Meinung bei der Kommunalwahl auszudrücken?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Gar nicht zufrieden — Sehr zufrieden

2. Welche Partei / Liste haben Sie bei der Kommunalwahl (überwiegend) gewählt?

☐ SPD ☐ CDU ☐ B´90/Grüne ☐ FDP ☐ Linke ☐ Sonstige (Name)

3. Wie viele der lokalen Kandidaten dieser Partei / Liste kennen Sie mit Namen?

☐ Keine(n) ☐ Eine(n) ☐ Zwei ☐ Drei oder mehr

4. Glauben Sie, dass die von Ihnen gewählten Kandidaten dieser Partei/Liste Sie gut vertreten werden?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Nein, gar nicht — Ja, sehr gut

Teil 2: Fiktive Wahl

Auf der folgenden Seite finden Sie eine Liste von **30 hypothetischen Kandidaten** für Ihren Stadt- oder Gemeinderat. Stellen Sie sich bitte vor, dass alle diese Kandidaten zu der **von Ihnen bevorzugten Partei** gehören (d.h. Sie sehen hier nur die Liste der Partei, die Sie normalerweise wählen), Sie aber keinen der Kandidaten näher kennen.

In dieser fiktiven Wahl können Sie insgesamt **6 Stimmen** frei auf die 30 Kandidaten verteilen. Sie wählen einen Kandidaten indem Sie das **Feld hinter seinem Namen ankreuzen**.

Für jeden Kandidaten ist maximal eine Stimme möglich.

Wenn Sie mehr als 6 Stimmen vergeben, wird der Wahlzettel ungültig!

(Anmerkung: Die Auswahl der Kandidaten sollte nicht mehr Zeit beanspruchen als Sie üblicherweise zum Wählen benötigen.)

Bitte markieren Sie Ihre **6 bevorzugten Kandidaten**, indem Sie ein **X** in das Kästchen hinter deren Namen setzen.

Liste 1	**Meine bevorzugte Partei**		
1.	**Gillen, Arnold**	Arzt	
2.	**Heyer, Regina**	Elektroingenieurin	
3.	**Amrein, Karl**	Textilpfleger	
4.	**Tesch, Iris**	Landwirtin	
5.	**Höhne, Otto**	Koch	
6.	**Lötz, Margarete**	Apothekerin	
7.	**Peters, Bernd**	Buchhändler	
8.	**Gussmann, Ute**	Zahnärztin	
9.	**Kilic, Mehmet**	Softwareentwickler	
10.	**Kunde, Hildegard**	Gastwirtin	
11.	**Berger, Martin**	Feuerwehrmann	
12.	**Silbernagel, Marianne**	Reinigungsfachkraft	
13.	**Gorges, Hans-Peter**	Friseur	
14.	**Kleine, Erika**	Malerin	
15.	**Bernsen, Karl-Heinz**	Postangestellter	
16.	**Block, Silke**	Psychologin	
17.	**Weber, Daniel**	Anwalt	
18.	**Schenzer, Bärbel**	Bauingenieurin	
19.	**Lütticken, Reinhardt**	Grundschullehrer	
20.	**Propach, Inge**	Konditorin	
21.	**Altenburg, Jürgen**	Schreiner	
22.	**Greiner, Waltraud**	Praxishelferin	
23.	**Leisen, Walter**	Informatiker	
24.	**Benz, Barbara**	Kommunalbeamtin	
25.	**Schüttke, Heinrich**	Altenpfleger	
26.	**Rudnick, Julia**	Metallarbeiterin	
27.	**Nawak, Thomas**	Einzelhandelskaufmann	
28.	**Block, Christiane**	Sozialpädagogin	
29.	**Usleber , Johannes**	Gymnasiallehrer	
30.	**Lochner, Susanne**	Physikerin	

Teil 3: Fragen zur fiktiven Wahl

5. Wie zufrieden sind Sie mit den Möglichkeiten Ihre eigene politische Meinung bei dieser fiktiven Wahl auszudrücken?

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Gar nicht zufrieden Sehr zufrieden

6. Glauben Sie, dass die von Ihnen gewählten Kandidaten dieser fiktiven Liste Sie gut vertreten würden, wenn sie tatsächlich gewählt werden würden?

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Nein, gar nicht Ja, sehr gut

7. Hätten Sie gerne mehr Informationen über die Kandidaten dieser Liste gehabt?

☐ Ja ☐ Nein

→ Falls ja, welche Informationen? ☐

8. Haben Sie eine bestimmte Methode benutzt, um die Stimmen auf die Kandidaten zu verteilen?

☐ Ja ☐ Nein

→ Falls ja, welche?

☐

9. Mit welchem Wahlsystem wählen Sie lieber: Dem der realen Kommunalwahl oder dem der fiktiven Wahl in dieser Umfrage?

☐ Dem der realen Kommunalwahl ☐ Dem der fiktiven Wahl

Teil 4: Persönliche Angaben

10. Wie alt sind Sie? (Wählen Sie bitte die entsprechende Altersgruppe aus)

☐ bis 25 ☐ 26 - 35 ☐ 36 - 45 ☐ 46 - 55 ☐ 56 - 65 ☐ über 65

11. Welches Geschlecht haben Sie?

☐ Weiblich ☐ Männlich

12. Welchen Familienstand haben Sie?

☐ Ledig ☐ Verheiratet / Lebenspartnerschaft ☐ Geschieden ☐ Verwitwet

13. Haben Sie Kinder?

☐ Nein ☐ Ja → Anzahl: ☐

14. Was ist Ihr höchster Bildungsabschluss?

☐ Ohne Abschluss abgegangen ☐ Hauptschul-abschluss ☐ Mittlere Reife ☐ Abitur / Fach-hochschulreife ☐ Abgeschl. Studium

15. Was ist ihr derzeitiger Beruf?

☐

16. Haben Sie noch Kommentare über die abgefragte Wahlmethode in dieser Umfrage, die Art und Weise wie Sie dabei gewählt haben oder den Fragebogen als Ganzes?

☐

Teil 5: Fragen zur Wahl des EU-Parlaments

17. Welche Partei haben Sie bei der Wahl des **Europäischen Parlaments** gewählt?

☐ Habe nicht gewählt

18. Welche Partei haben Sie bei der **letzten** Wahl zum EU-Parlament 2009 gewählt?

☐ Habe nicht gewählt ☐ Weiß nicht mehr

19. Haben Sie ein Kind oder mehrere Kinder im Alter **unter 18 Jahren**?

☐ Ja, eines ☐ Ja, mehrere ☐ Nein → **Ende der Befragung**

20. Bitte tragen Sie hier das Alter Ihrer **minderjährigen** Kinder ein:

Kind 1: ___ Jahre Kind 2: __ Jahre Kind 3: ___Jahre Kind 4: ___Jahre

21. Kürzlich wurde vorgeschlagen, ein Wahlrecht für Kinder einzuführen, wobei die **Eltern stellvertretend für das Kind** abstimmen sollen. Jedes Elternteil könnte dabei **eine halbe Stimme für jedes Kind** abgeben.

Halten Sie das für eine gute Idee?

☐ Gute Idee ☐ Keine gute Idee ☐ Unentschieden, kommt drauf an

22. Wenn Sie sich einmal in die Lage **Ihres ältesten Kindes unter 18 Jahren** hineinversetzen: Angenommen, Sie könnten heute für dieses Kind eine halbe Stimme abgeben.

Würden Sie vor der Wahl mit dem Kind über die Wahlentscheidung sprechen, oder würden Sie die Entscheidung alleine treffen?

☐ Mit dem Kind besprechen ☐ Entscheidung alleine treffen ☐ Unentschieden, kommt drauf an

23. Welche Partei würden Sie vermutlich für dieses Kind wählen?

☐ Unmöglich zu sagen ☐ Würde für das Kind nicht wählen

Vielen Dank für Ihre Mithilfe!

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