Effects of Issue-Specific Political Advertisements in the 2015 Parliamentary Elections of Switzerland

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Abstract: *Our paper captures the influence of political advertisements on vote intentions in the framework of the 2015 parliamentary elections. We focus on the two winning parties, the FDP and SVP, and the promotion of their stances on immigration/asylum, relations to the EU and the economy. We make use of an extensive database on political advertisements collected in 50 important national and regional newspapers that we link to the Selects respondents. Our findings only hint at limited effects of issue-specific advertisements with regard to the activation of latent preferences, suggesting that campaigns mattered more when they have managed to make a party's issue positions known to the electorate. The general reinforcement tendencies detected for migration ads of the SVP suggest that reinforcement effects might be particularly prone when highly contentious issues are at stake. Our results indicate that the SVP did not manage to mobilize new voters with their political advertisements.*

Introduction

National elections take place in a highly competitive information environment. Voters are exposed to multiple and alternative campaign positions via media reporting and/or campaign activities. While in Switzerland, media attention to parties is dedicated roughly equal to their voter share (Bühlmann et al. 2015a; Fög 2017), parties can strive for additional attention by means of political campaigning. The financial means of parties and candidates vary, which has a direct impact on the campaign intensity and thus visibility of a party and its candidates. In Switzerland, there are two parties that usually stand out in terms of campaign intensity, as captured by number of political advertisements in printed newspapers: the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and the Liberal Radical Party (FDP) (Hermann 2012). In the lead-up to the 2015 national election, both parties launched a large-scale campaign that strongly focused on particular issues; the contested issues of immigration and asylum, Switzerland's relations to the European Union (EU), and the economy. The campaigns of other parties were of lower intensity and more fragmented in nature (Bühlmann et al. 2016). Both the SVP and the FDP emerged as the winners of the 2015 elections. The question therefore arises whether and to what extent those campaigns influenced voters' decisions to vote and who to vote for.

Traditional research on electoral campaigns have usually concluded that campaign effects are minimal at best (see Iyengar and Simon 2000: 150). These studies have largely relied on the analysis of aggregate time series or panels, assuming all voters have been exposed to the same campaign (ibid.: 153). Common methodological approaches have also been criticized for carrying an inherent endogeneity problem (Goldstein and Freedman 2000; Gordon and Hartmann 2013; Ridout et al. 2002). Recent developments in the field

try to tackle this endogeneity issue using large randomized field experiments (Gerber et al. 2007), regression discontinuity design (Huber and Arceneaux 2007; Spenkuch and Toniatti 2015), instrumental variables (Gordon and Hartman 2013) and exploiting exogenous variation (Da Silveira and De Mello 2011; Durante and Gutierrez 2014; Kendall et al. 2015; Larreguy et al. 2014). Using finer-grained methodological approaches, authors have identified a significant positive impact of political advertising on voting behavior. Although the impact remains short-lived in some cases (see Durante and Gutierrez 2014; Gerber and al. 2007), such results beg for further research to be conducted in other contexts. Laboratory experiments have also identified a significant impact of advertisement on voting behavior (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1996; Brader 2005). While holding strong internal validity, the external validity of laboratory experiments remains questionable.

As for Switzerland, we note a paucity of research focusing on individual exposure to political campaigns during elections. Although considerable insights exist on overall campaign effects in a selection of cantons (Kriesi and Sciarini 2004; Lachat 2000; Lachat and Sciarini 2002; Sciarini and Kriesi 2003), previous election surveys precluded researchers from analyzing individual campaign exposure. Assuming a monolithic understanding of electoral campaigns not only presumes that all voters have received identical campaign messages, it also makes the term "electoral campaign" all-encompassing. The issue with such a view is that it contains all instances of electoral campaigning, as well as external events that occurred during the time of the electoral campaign rather than focusing on individual-level exposure to specific campaign designs.

Last but not least, the influence of parties' issue-specific communications on individuals is still little understood (see Bechtel et al. 2015; Slothuus and De Vreese 2010). While the framing literature has convincingly demonstrated the influence of elite frames (see Chong and Druckman 2007), much less is known about the effect of issue frames delivered by political parties (see Bechtel et al. 2015; Slothuus and De Vreese 2010 for recent exceptions).

The aim of this paper is to examine whether and to what extent the widespread use of electoral campaigns conducted by the SVP and FDP increased electoral success of those parties. In particular, we are interested in the degree to which their issue-specific campaigns succeeded in activating voters, and how they managed to reinforce their established voter clientele. In addition, we also ask whether issue-specific campaign advertisements influence competence-issue ownership perceptions among a party's potential voter clientele. We take advantage of a new question introduced in the Selects survey 2015 that asks participants which newspaper they consulted the most. Together with the Année Politique Suisse database (APS 2016), our data on political advertisements in print media, we are able to create an individual measure of potential campaign exposure to test its influence on vote choice and issue-ownership perceptions in the context of the 2015 general elections.[1] Thus, our paper follows the logic of linkage studies (see De Vreese et al. 2017). By making use of a unique dataset consisting of campaign advertisements published in a variety of national and regional newspapers (APS 2016), we can, for the first time, track electoral campaigning in all 26 cantons. We test our hypotheses with the help of

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[1] Although alternative communication channels, such as social media, gain in importance during political campaigns, the Selects survey 2015 indicates that their role remains minimal. Citizens focus on TV, radio and newspaper to obtain information. Regarding political campaigning in Switzerland, advertising is prohibited on TV and radio. Therefore, we concentrate on print media to examine the impact of political campaigning.

multinomial regression models and the inclusion of two-way- and three-way-interactions between initial vote intention, political advertisements and issue-specific considerations.

This paper is structured as follows: In the following section, we first elaborate on the theoretical framework, discussing general characteristics of the 2015 electoral campaign and outlining why this context presents a likely case for campaigning to have an effect. We then present our theoretical argument, referring to cognitive accessibility-based models, postulating that because individuals have a limited capacity to process information, they base political judgments on their most salient considerations. In section 3, we present our methodological approach (linkage study). Our main results that hint at only limited effects of issue-specific advertisements are described in detail in section 4. Section 5 proposes future research avenues and acknowledges some limitations of our study.

Theoretical Framework

Before we introduce our hypotheses, we need to contextualize the electoral campaign of 2015. There are several reasons suggesting that the campaign conducted by the two parties under scrutiny are likely to have influenced individual preferences. According to Kriesi and Sciarini (2004), campaigns are most influential when built around issues that are central, well-known and highly polarizing (see also Nicolet and Sciarini 2006). With immigration and Switzerland's relations to the EU, the SVP and the FDP focused on two highly contested issues that were regarded as both salient and pressing. During the spring and summer of 2015 and thus in the run-up to the elections, the media was dominated by reporting on refugee catastrophes in the Mediterranean Sea and the sharp increase of asylum seekers in Europe (Fög 2015), potentially influencing voters' perception of relevant problems (Gerber and Mueller 2016; Longchamp et al. 2015): 44% of respondents in the 2015 Selects survey indicated that they regard the issues of migration and asylum as the most important problems Switzerland currently faces (Lutz 2016). Compared to the ranking of most important problems in former Selects studies (1995-2011), the 2015 results are surprising in their singularity: adherents of all seven major parties classified the issue of migration and asylum to be the most important problem to solve (ibid.).

In February 2014, the SVP's initiative against mass immigration had been accepted at the ballot, resulting in great uncertainties about the future of Switzerland's relations with the EU, as the government was requested to renegotiate the Agreement on the Free Movement of Persons with the EU. Among the Selects respondents, 13% considered European policy to be the most important issue for Switzerland, making this the second most salient issue after immigration and asylum (Lutz 2016).

Turning to the economy, the Swiss National Bank surprisingly annulled the minimum exchange rate against the Euro at the beginning of 2015. As a consequence, uncertainties with regard to potential economic consequences were growing, rendering the topic a salient issue throughout the year (Lutz and Sciarini 2016: 9). The economy, however, was only regarded to be the most important problem by 5% of the Selects respondents (Lutz 2016), indicating that the issue was seen as less pressing than immigration and European policy.

A salient topic alone does not present a sufficient condition for voters to change their minds about the party they favor. We argue that campaign messages on a given salient issue have the power to alter vote intentions only when the party sponsoring them is perceived as the actor best able to deal with it. In the literature, this is referred to as

"owning an issue" (Geers and Bos 2017; Petrocik 1996). Numerous studies have demonstrated a potential electoral advantage for political parties owning a salient issue (Alvarez et al. 2000; Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Kriesi and Sciarini 2004; Lutz and Sciarini 2016). In this regard, the distinction between associative and competence issue-ownership is pivotal. While associative issue-ownership denotes the "spontaneous association between an issue and a party in the minds of voters", competence issue-ownership refers to the belief that a party is the most competent to handle a relevant issue (Lachat 2014: 728; Walgrave et al. 2014: 1 and 7). For our purpose, we rely extensively on competence issue-ownership, since associating a party with an issue does not necessarily mean voters agree with the solution the party advances (e.g., see also Lachat 2014; Lutz and Sciarini 2016; Walgrave et al. 2014). Additionally, a voter's party preference is deeply linked to her perception of the party's issue competence. This is also in line with the theory of valence politics that claims that voters cast ballots for the political party they see as the most competent to handle their most pressing issue (Clarke et al. 2011).

In the context of the 2015 elections, issue ownership was accredited to both parties with regard to all of their central campaign issues. Migration has recently been occupied to large extent by the SVP (Lutz and Sciarini 2016: 5), which is confirmed by the analysis of media data in the run-up to the general elections (Bühlmann et al. 2015b). The SVP is regarded to be the most competent party to offer solutions to immigration – 29% of respondents affirmed this question, followed by 22% who considered the Social Democrats (SP) to be the most competent party in this regard (ibid.). In addition, almost two thirds of all Selects respondents indicated that the SVP is the party that cares the most about the issue (Lutz 2016). Thus, the SVP owns the migration issue both in terms of associative and competence issue ownership. Turning to the economy issue, it becomes evident that the FDP owns the issue both in terms of associative and competence issue ownership. Not only 68% of respondents agree that the FDP cares most about the issue, but also 50% affirm that the FDP is the most competent party to offer solutions to the issue (Lutz 2016). With regard to European policy, the SVP and FDP are associated with higher issue ownership than any other party (Lutz 2016): the FDP is regarded to be the most competent party to deal with this issue – 27% of respondents agree on that, followed by 20% of respondents who perceive the SVP to be the most competent party. On the other hand, the SVP is the party associated the most with the issue: 29% of respondents think the SVP cares most about the EU, followed by 24% of respondents who mostly associate the FDP with the issue.

Hypotheses

We have demonstrated that political messages espoused by a party that owns the issue have the potential to influence voters' preferences. However, people are "limited information processors" (Lau and Redlawsk 2006: 23); they are biased in how they process information (e.g., Fiske and Taylor 1991; Kunda 1990; Steenbergen 2010; Taber and Lodge 2006; Zaller 1992). Thus, the availability of a particular campaign message does not imply its automatic acceptance. A central reason for this is subsumed under the theory of motivated reasoning, which states that people often pursue directional goals, preferring information that is in line with their predispositions and ignore conflicting information (Kunda 1990) or even argue against them (Sloothus and De Vreese 2010; Taber and Lodge 2006). Motivated reasoning occurs at every step of information processing, e.g. when it comes to the search of information (Taber and Lodge 2006), the evaluation of

information (Bechtel et al. 2015; Jerit and Barabas 2012; Taber and Lodge 2006) or the recalling of it (Lau and Redlawsk 2006: Chp. 5). Numerous studies have demonstrated that processing information depends on political predispositions (e.g., Jerit and Barabas 2012; Nicolet and Sciarini 2006; Slothuus and De Vreese 2010; Zaller 1992). Political campaigns thus mainly succeed in reinforcing initially-held views or in activating latent preferences rather than in convincing voters to adapt their preferences (Lazarsfeld et al. 1968: 94). Based on these considerations, we expect political advertisements of a particular party to exert the strongest effect for citizens who are already favorably inclined towards that party – independent of the issues portrayed. Consequently, we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: Citizens are reinforced in their vote choice with increasing exposure to the campaign of the party they initially favored.

During the course of political campaigns, (potential) voters have the chance to learn more about fundamental issues and parties' stances on these issues (Arceneaux 2006; Gelman and King 1993; see also Iyengar and Simon 2000: 155). Political predispositions also play out in this context. As Kriesi and Sciarini (2004: 737) note, "electoral campaigns are not so much shaping policy preferences, but linking established preferences to political parties." Citizens who are indecisive whether they would like to partake in the elections may be encouraged to vote for a party if that party manages to activate their latent predispositions (Lazarsfeld et al. 1968). Kriesi and Sciarini (2004: 726) decompose the activation in four steps: campaign awakens interest, interest motivates exposure, exposure becomes selective due to motivated reasoning and finally, latent predispositions crystallize into a vote intention. In order for considerations to influence the opinion formation process, they need to be accessible. One way to attain accessibility is to increase exposure to the consideration on a regular or recent basis (Chong and Druckman 2007). Hence, we hypothesize that:

H2a: The higher the exposure to the issue-specific campaign by the advertising party, the higher the chances that a citizen develops a vote intention for that party – given that her issue preferences are in line with the ones portrayed by the party.

Similarly, we might expect reinforcement effects to be on display, assuming that at the beginning of the campaign, voters are not perfectly informed about issue stances of the party they favor. Therefore, we posit the following hypothesis:

H2b: The higher the exposure to the issue-specific campaign of an advertising party, the higher the chances that a citizen is reinforced in her vote intention for that party – given that her issue preferences are in line with the ones portrayed by the party.

Given the preponderant influence of issue-ownership on vote behavior, political parties potentially follow two strategies when communicating with citizens. The first strategy is to selectively link their campaign to issues they already own. They can thus profit from associations with the issue that were created in the past, e.g. via news reporting or campaign activity. Our hypotheses 2a and 2b follow this scenario. The second strategy therefore goes beyond this; parties recognize that each political campaign bears the potential to increase issue ownership perceptions among their potential electorate (Walgrave et al. 2014). This is in line with issue ownership theory, according to which campaigns have the intended effect when a political actor manages to demonstrate its reputation in handling a relevant political issue (Petrocik 1996: 826). Recent literature

emphasizes the dynamic dimension of competence issue-ownership. It assumes that, in addition to a party's political performance, party communications contribute to the recorded fluctuations in the public's perception of issue ownership (Bélanger 2003; Stubager and Sloothus 2012; Walgrave et al. 2009, 2014). Motivated reasoning is relevant here too. Therefore, parties are supposed to increase issue ownership perceptions only among individuals that are favorably inclined towards that party (see also Walgrave et al. 2014).

H3a: The higher the exposure to the issue-specific campaign of an advertising party, the higher the chances that a citizen favoring that party perceives it to be most competent to solve this issue.

Assuming that individuals who initially do not plan to vote possess weaker party preferences compared to their peers who already held vote intentions at the beginning of the campaign, we hypothesize similar effects for people who do not intend to vote. Again, we argue that people who hold firm vote intentions are more selective in how they process incoming information, giving greater weight to information that is in line with their predispositions (Zaller 1992). Thus, people without firm vote intention may be less biased when it comes to the selection and processing of new information. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H3b: The higher the exposure to the issue-specific campaign of an advertising party, the higher the chances that a citizen without vote intentions perceives that party to be the most competent to solve the issue.

Methods

Data

Our empirical approach takes advantage of two datasets. Our first dataset is a Selects panel/rolling cross-section (RCS) survey conducted within the context of Switzerland's 2015 parliamentary elections. In the Selects survey, 11'073 respondents took part in the first wave of the survey. 7'399 respondents also participated in the second wave. Since we are interested in monitoring campaign effects, we restrict our dataset to the respondents who engaged in both waves (N=7'399). We consider the first wave to be a survey of the pre-campaign, as it lasted from mid-June to the end of July; the last interview of this wave was thus conducted more than two and a half months before the elections. The second wave represents the campaign itself. This wave took place from 17 August to 18 October, which was the ballot day. From the Selects database, we draw our outcome variable of vote intention at wave 2, as well as our control variables as indicated by the respondents at wave 1 (see below).

The RCS design has an advantage to other survey designs in that the random selection of respondents at any given day during the campaign facilitates drawing causal links between specific campaign events and a change in opinion (Brady and Johnston 2006: 164). This allows us to calculate individual level variables of campaign exposure at varying times during the campaign (1 August to 18 October).

Our second extensive dataset is on political advertisements developed by Année Politique Suisse (APS 2016). To obtain a precise counting of political advertisements in all 26 cantons, APS uses trained coders to manually track advertising data in 50

supraregional and regional newspapers. The dataset consists of a collection of more than 5'000 political advertisements placed in print newspapers ahead of the 2015 parliamentary elections. In order to proxy campaign exposure in newspapers, we take advantage of a question introduced in the second wave of the Selects survey, which asks which print newspaper (fee-based or free) respondents have consulted the most within the last days of the interview, if any. From this we infer that a respondent belongs to the general readership of the mentioned source and that they consume this journal on a regular basis. Together with the date of the second interview, this allows us to calculate a respondent's potential campaign exposure before the second interview took place.[2]

By linking survey data with media content data, this paper follows the logic of linkage studies (see De Vreese and Semetko 2004; Miller et al. 1979). A precise and reliable measure of media exposure is of prime importance to successfully determine the effects of media content using linkage analysis (De Vreese et al. 2017; Scharkow and Bachl 2017). We therefore undertook several robustness checks to test whether and to what degree our results are sensitive to the operationalization choices of our central media content variables (see below). Furthermore, survey respondents are prone to over-report their media use (Scharkow and Bachl 2017). Since the Selects 2015 database only asked about the use of individual media outlets in one specific wave (round 2) we cannot report the reliability scores of our measure of interest. Nonetheless, considering survey items that ask about the use of a specific news outlet may lessen the problem of over-reporting at least to some extent (De Vreese et al. 2017: 225).

Method of Analysis and Outcome Variables

To investigate campaign effects on the vote, we ran several multinomial regression models with three outcome variables captured at the second wave of interviews. The three outcomes are: intention to vote for the SVP, intention to vote for the FDP and intention to vote for another party (see Lutz and Sciarini 2016 for a similar approach).[3] Given our focus on campaign effects and the operationalization of the outcome variables, we only considered cantons where the party under scrutiny presented candidates to run for office (for the National Council, for the Council of States, or for both). In one canton (Appenzell Innerrhoden), neither party presented a candidate. For the purpose of modeling dynamics in vote intention that occurred during the electoral campaign and in order to circumvent endogeneity issues, we controlled for the vote intention at wave 1 (for a similar approach, see De Vreese and Semetko 2004; Kriesi and Sciarini 2004; Lutz and Sciarini 2016; Sanders 2012). Our variable vote intention distinguishes between four categories: (0) no intention to vote, i.e. respondents indicate at wave 1 that they are certainly or probably not going to participate, (1) intention to vote for the FDP, (2) intention to vote for the SVP, and (3) intention to vote for another party. In order to test our hypothesis, we calculated models with two- (H1, H3) and three-way-interaction terms (H2).

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[2] Among the people who mentioned a vote intention at wave 2 (N=5,315), N=4'241 respondents indicated that they had read a printed newspaper in the last four days. Out of this sample, we could match the reported newspaper of N=3'655 respondents with the database on political advertisements. For the considered newspapers, see online appendix, Table A1.

[3] The assumption on the independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA) holds. Respondents that indicated at wave 2 that they are certainly or probably not going to participate were excluded from our sample.

To estimate the influence of campaigns on dynamics of issue ownership perceptions, we calculated five logistic regressions for the attribution of competence issue ownership on the issues that were advertised the most by the two parties under scrutiny (see below).[4] Our outcome variable takes the value of 1 when a respondent indicated that they view the given actor to be the most competent party to handle the respective policy issue, and 0 if not. In order to estimate change in issue ownership perceptions, we controlled for a respondent's perceptions of competence issue ownership at wave 1. Table A3 and A4.1-A4.6 in the online appendix display recorded dynamics in vote intentions and issue ownership perceptions between the first and second wave of the interview.

Variables of Interest

We intended to capture campaign exposure at the individual level. For each individual that consumed a particular printed newspaper, potential campaign exposure is expressed as the amount of FDP and SVP campaign ads in the respective newspaper up to the day of the second interview. For example, a value of 30 for SVP advertisements signifies that a respondent had read a newspaper where 30 ads of this party were published from 1 August (end of wave 1) up to the day of the respondent's second interview. However, since our variable of interest is strongly skewed to the right, and given that the marginal return of campaign advertisements may diminish with increasingly high values, we transformed our variable using the square root function.[5] Besides the overall amount of advertisements, we also inserted variables that capture the number of issue-specific campaign ads that a voter had been exposed to by the day of the second interview. Again, we transformed these values using the square root function. To test for the robustness of the finding, we also employed alternative variable specifications.[6] Although most of these tests confirmed our findings, not all results proved to be fully robust. We report these cases in the result section.

Scharkow and Bachl (2017: 334) convincingly demonstrate that measurement error in the media content analysis may lead to a substantial underestimation of media effects. According to the authors, the problem is aggravated when the observed phenomenon is rare. Results of our intercoder reliability test reveal excellent coding agreement for the two rarer items (migration and relations to the EU) and substantial agreement for the most prominent topic of the campaign in terms of advertisement place in printed newspaper, the economy (see below).[7]

Table 1 displays the campaign activity of the seven major parties for the three issues that were central to the campaign of the SVP and the FDP and that are analyzed in the

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[4] Since the FDP only marginally broached the issue of migration, interaction models relying on FDP migration advertisements cannot be calculated.

[5] We refrained from undertaking a logarithmic transformation due to the numerous respondents that have not been exposed to campaign ads and thus received 0 on our variable of interest.

[6] We utilized the absolute number of campaign ads and the relative share of a party's ads. Furthermore, we weighted our campaign variables by the degree of a respondent's news attention. Since some of the campaign variables are highly correlated (see Table A5 and A6 in the online appendix), we also ran separate models where we included only one campaign variable at a time (see Figures A1.1 to A1.6).

[7] One and a half years after the coding process, two of the three main coders recoded a random selection of 175 advertisements. The following test results for rater coder agreement (RCA) and Cohen's kappa (κ) are reported: migration (RCA 100%; κ 1.000); EU (RCA 98.9%; κ 0.946); economy (RCA 92%; κ 0.753) (see online appendix Table A7).

Table 1: Issue-Specific Advertisements Published by the Seven Major Parties

	Migration & Asylum		Relations to the EU		Economy		Total
SVP	482	(29.1%)	323	(19.5%)	230	(13.9%)	1658
FDP	27	(1.7%)	79	(5.0%)	400	(25.3%)	1580
CVP	7	(0.8%)	9	(1.0%)	89	(10.3%)	860
SP	11	(1.4%)	15	(2.0%)	24	(3.1%)	764
GPS	22	(7.8%)	0	(0.0%)	8	(2.8%)	281
BDP	3	(1.3%)	2	(0.9%)	18	(7.9%)	229
GLP	0	(0.0%)	0	(0.0%)	17	(17.5%)	97
Total[a]	552	(10.1%)	428	(7.8%)	786	(14.4%)	5469

Notes: Entries are given in absolute number of advertisements published in printed newspapers between 1 August and 18 October 2015, as well as in percent of total ads registered for that party during the given period. Source: APS (2016). [a] These entries correspond to the total number of ads published by the seven major parties.

framework of this study. The table confirms that the SVP and the FDP took a leading role in terms of overall number of advertisements published in printed newspapers, followed by the Christian Democrats (CVP) and the SP. Compared to the bigger parties, the smaller parties of the Greens, the Green Liberals (GLP) and the Bourgeois Democratic Party (BDP) were only marginally present in terms of ads. Turning to issue-specific ads, the topics of economy was the most frequently mentioned campaign issue, followed by migration and relations to the EU. Other issues, such as social security and the environment, were far less prominent in newspaper ads (Bühlmann et al. 2016). While the issues of social security and the environment were mostly promoted by the SP and the Greens respectively (ibid.), the topic of relations to the EU was mainly used by the SVP and, to a lesser extent, by the FDP.[8]

There are several conclusions that we can draw from observing the campaign in the print media. First, the distribution of advertisements between parties portrays the large financial inequalities that parties have at their disposal (Hermann 2012): the FDP and the SVP placed almost twice as many ads in newspapers than the party with the third most intensive campaign in print media (CVP). Second, it was particularly the SVP and the FDP which conducted an intensive large-scale issue-specific campaign. In contrast to the other parties, both parties placed a large amount of ads that focused solely on issues rather than on candidates (Bochsler et al. 2016; Bühlmann et al. 2016) This stands in stark contrast to the 2011 elections, where most of the parties also promoted their core issues with issue-specific newspaper ads by advertising their popular initiatives, though less frequently (Gerber and Mueller 2016: 195). Third, it is discernible in Table 1 that the SVP was the only party that substantially promoted its stance on the issue of migration and asylum. There were some candidates of other parties, particularly from the Greens and the FDP, who also raised the issue in their newspaper ads, but the SVP was responsible for

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[8] The BDP made the Bilateral Agreement a central issue of its electoral campaign – though not frequently in newspaper advertisements and on a smaller basis than the bigger parties. The FDP placed a stronger emphasis on the EU at the very beginning of the campaign. As Bühlmann et al. (2016) report, there were several candidates of the Liberals who advertised during two days in June with the Slogan "Bilaterale ja – EU nein" (trad. *Bilateral Agreement yes – joining the EU no*). These advertisements do not form part of our analysis, since in order to estimate the effect of political campaigns, we only consider advertisements that have been placed in newspapers after the first wave of interviews.

almost 90% of all migration posts encountered in the print media. This stands in contrast to the other two campaign issues of the SVP, where it had to compete with other parties: the EU issue was also brought up by the FDP and the issue of economy was not only intensively promoted by the FDP and the SVP, but was also an important campaign topic of the CVP.

To test our hypotheses with regard to campaign effects, we calculated interaction effects between exposure to issue-specific political advertisement, a respondent's vote intention and a respondent's issue preferences. Concerning the latter, we focused on three questions which indicate a respondent's position on the three issues. With regard to immigration, a question in the Selects questionnaire asks whether immigration should be limited. Here, we created a binary indicator for whether respondents somewhat or strongly affirm this question (1) or whether they are neutral or somewhat against such measures (0). Turning to the EU issue, we created a binary variable for whether individuals are strongly opposed (1) to Switzerland becoming a member of the EU or whether they were somewhat opposed, neutral or in favor of EU membership (0).[9] The third dichotomous variable captures preferences on the economy. Here, respondents were scored on whether they somewhat or strongly favor additional measures to strengthen the economy (1) or whether they were neutral towards or opposed to such measures (0). To be able to omit simultaneity issues, these variables were also assessed at wave 1.

Control Variables

As controls at the individual level, we inserted the socio-demographic variables of gender, age in years, religious affiliation, education, income, the self-placement on the left-right-scale and a categorical variable capturing a respondent's language region into all of our models. We also introduced three binary variables, coding them with the number 1 if respondents – at wave 1 – considered the respective issue (migration, EU policy or the economy) to be the most important problem (MIP), and 0 if they did not consider it the MIP. This allowed us to control for issue salience (see also Lutz and Sciarini 2016). See Table A2 in the online appendix for more information on the coding of the variables.[10]

Results

As a first step, we ran a basic multinomial model on vote intention. Table 2 displays the results for respondents who indicated a vote intention for the FDP or the SVP versus respondents that intended to vote for another party at wave 2. Unsurprisingly, the results indicate that the opinions held during wave 2, after individuals had been exposed to the campaign, largely depend on their opinions in wave 1, before the campaign had begun.

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[9] Since this group of respondents indicating strong opposition to EU-membership mounts to almost 50% in the overall Selects sample, we did not code another 25% of respondents who were somewhat against EU membership as 1.

[10] We refrain from incorporating competence issue ownership in our model for reasons of endogeneity. According to Walgrave et al. (2014: 15-16), the causal relationship between vote choice and competence issue-ownership is unclear and pre-existing party preferences are too dependent on measures of competence issue ownership. Furthermore, the degree to which issue ownership perceptions at wave 1 exert an effect on the change in vote intentions is not of our prime interest. Rather, we argue that *changes* in issue ownership perceptions can explain dynamics of voting preferences (Lanz and Sciarini 2016; see also Petitpas and Sciarini 2018).

Some additional results are worth noting. First, we do not detect an effect for issue salience. Whether one considers migration, EU policy or the economy to be the most important problem facing Switzerland has no impact on the vote intentions in wave 2. A possible explanation for this is that since those issues had already received substantial media attention before the start of the electoral campaign, opinions had already been formed.

Second, and contrary to issue salience, issue *preferences* were highly relevant. Individuals who favor limitations on immigration, as well as individuals who are strongly opposed to joining the EU, are significantly more likely to express vote intentions for the SVP than for any other party.[11] Similarly, individuals who agreed that measures should be taken to strengthen the economy are significantly more likely to express vote intentions for the FDP than for any other party. These results suggest that issue voting mattered and that both parties could successfully be linked to their core issues during the campaign. What remains unclear are the mechanisms behind the latter; whether the linking of core issues to the party worked through political advertisements, through other means of political campaigning, or through the media. The results displayed in Table 2 indicate that there are no general or positive effects, neither for the overall amount of campaign nor for the issue-specific campaign ads.[12] With regard to our theory, however, we would expect not general, but conditional effects.

We thus ran additional multinomial models with interaction terms. As a first step, we calculated interactions between the total number of advertisements and the vote intention at wave 1. Figure 1 displays these results for the two parties under scrutiny. In line with our hypothesis 1, we identify a reinforcement effect of political advertisements for respondents who intended to vote for the SVP at wave 1: the more SVP advertisements a person with preferences for the SVP encountered, the more they stuck with their initial vote intention. In contrast, we cannot observe such effects for the FDP and have to therefore reject that hypothesis.

To explore the effect of issue-specific advertisements, we computed multinomial models with three-way interaction terms. In addition to vote intention (w1) and issue-specific campaign intensity, we also included issue preferences, assuming that issue-specific advertisements matter most for those individuals who hold preferences that are in line with a party's position on that issue. Figure 2 displays the result of these interactions.[13] For most graphs enlisted in Figure 2, we cannot substantiate a reinforcement effect, as we would have expected according to our hypothesis 2b: people who intended to vote for a particular party and already held issue preferences in line with that party at wave 1 were in general not reinforced in their vote intention at wave 2. There is, however, a slight reinforcement effect for respondents favoring the SVP and holding preferences for strengthening the economy. This is particularly interesting since according to the Selects survey, the SVP is not perceived to be the party that owns that issue – neither in associative nor in competence issue terms.[14] Hence, the argument that campaigns help in

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[11] The notion of «the other parties», refers to a party other than the SVP and the FDP.

[12] According to our results, people who are exposed to more EU ads sponsored by the SVP are significantly less inclined to vote for the FDP than for another party (other than the SVP). At the moment, we do not have an explanation for this finding.

[13] We did not calculate interaction effects for FDP advertisements on migration, since instances of such advertisements were very rare (see Table 1).

[14] However, the reinforcement effect of SVP-sponsored economy advertisements did not prove to be robust when the relative campaign measure was employed.

Table 2: Determinants of Vote Intention at Wave 2

	FDP	SVP
Vote intention at wave 1	*Baseline: no intention to vote*	
FDP	2.409***	−0.926**
	(0.230)	(0.315)
SVP	−0.055	2.133***
	(0.314)	(0.242)
Another party	−1.626***	−1.981***
	(0.244)	(0.260)
Gender	−0.085	−0.099
	(0.144)	(0.170)
Age	0.008	0.008
	(0.005)	(0.005)
Religious affiliation	*Baseline: no religious affiliation*	
Catholic	−0.094	−0.129
	(0.182)	(0.214)
Protestant	0.102	−0.134
	(0.186)	(0.225)
Other	−0.084	0.250
	(0.347)	(0.349)
Education	−0.001	−0.068*
	(0.024)	(0.028)
Income	0.048**	−0.046
	(0.019)	(0.024)
Left-Right-Orientation	0.291***	0.425***
	(0.040)	(0.046)
Language region	*Baseline: Swiss German*	
French	0.338	−0.316
	(0.178)	(0.220)
Italian	0.547	0.506
	(0.339)	(0.380)
MIP Migration[a]	-0.240	0.008
	(0.166)	(0.188)
MIP EU[a]	0.045	0.001
	(0.219)	(0.324)
MIP Economy[a]	−0.011	−0.120
	(0.238)	(0.341)
Issue preference: Migration	−0.035	1.285***
	(0.151)	(0.228)
Issue preference: EU	0.022	1.039***
	(0.152)	(0.183)
Issue preference: Economy	0.451**	0.359
	(0.174)	(0.203)
SVP: total ads	0.094	0.151
	(0.123)	(0.145)
SVP: economy ads	0.259	0.122
	(0.138)	(0.166)
SVP: migration ads	0.268	0.052
	(0.187)	(0.223)

Table 2: Continued

	FDP	SVP
SVP: EU ads	−0.498*	−0.398
	(0.203)	(0.247)
FDP: total ads	−0.027	−0.051
	(0.088)	(0.099)
FDP: economy ads	0.008	0.051
	(0.104)	(0.123)
FDP: migration ads	−0.280	−0.292
	(0.258)	(0.304)
FDP EU ads	0.008	0.073
	(0.168)	(0.203)
Constant	−4.121***	−4.644***
	(0.476)	(0.586)
Pseudo R2	0.594	
N	3402	

Notes: Estimates are based on a multinomial model (baseline: vote intention for another party). The assumption of independence of irrelevant alternatives holds (Hausmann test). Standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.05. [a)]MIP = Most important problem
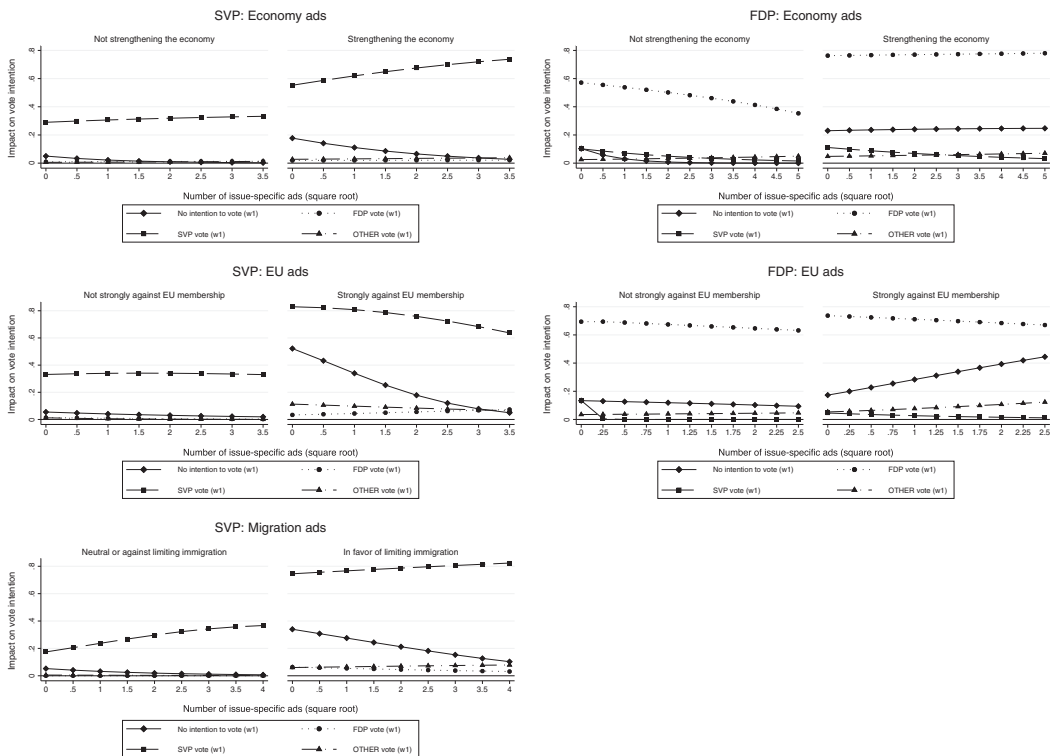
Figure 1: The Influence of Overall Campaign Intensity on Vote Intentions
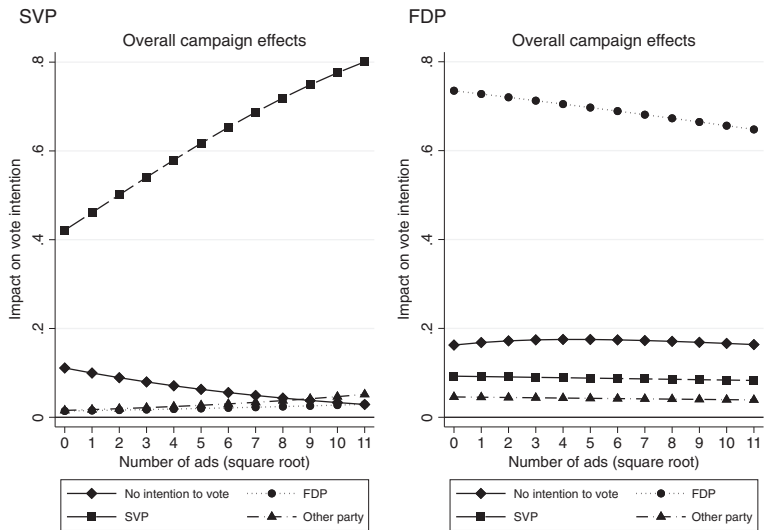
Notes: On display are predicted probabilities for expressing a vote intention for the *SVP (left-hand* figure) or the *FDP (right-hand figure)* at wave 2 by vote intention at wave 1 and varying degrees of overall campaign intensity. Calculations are based on multinomial models including the same control variables as displayed in Table 2.

linking existing preferences to political parties may have played a larger role in a context where the party was in need of making its issue positions known to the electorate. On the other hand, in cases of clearly attributed issue ownership, people might already have

Figure 2: The Influence of Issue-Specific Campaigning by Issue Preferences


Notes: On display are predicted probabilities for expressing a vote intention for the SVP (left-hand figures) or the FDP (right-hand figures) at wave 2 by vote intention at wave 1, varying degrees of issue-specific campaign intensity as well as issue preferences. The preferences displayed on the right-hand side of each figure are the ones that correspond to the party position. Calculations are based on multinomial models including the same control variables as displayed in Table 2.

chosen to vote for a particular party at wave 1 exactly *because* of the party's established and well-known position on the issue.

At first sight, the impact of SVP migration ads is also somewhat puzzling. Our results suggest that this issue-specific campaign tended to reinforce all SVP supporters in their initial vote intention – independent of whether they were in favor of limiting immigration (though the overall majority of SVP supporters are). Here, we identify a slight general reinforcement effect for issue-specific advertisements, similar to the effect that we detected for the total amount of advertisements in favor of our hypothesis 1.[15] These results are in line with recent literature postulating that reinforcement effects might be particularly prone to occur with contentious issues: according to Slothuus and De Vreese (2010), a party's influence on the voter is largest when it advertises issues that are at the center of partisan conflict. When such issues are at stake, social identity theory comes into play: voters will thus be likely to maximize their similarities with the in-group (preferred party) and stress differences with the out-group (other party holding dissimilar views).

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[15] These results are not robust when the weighted campaign variable (by news attention) is used.

Figure 3: The Influence of Issue-Specific Campaigning on Perceived Competence Issue Ownership (at wave 2)
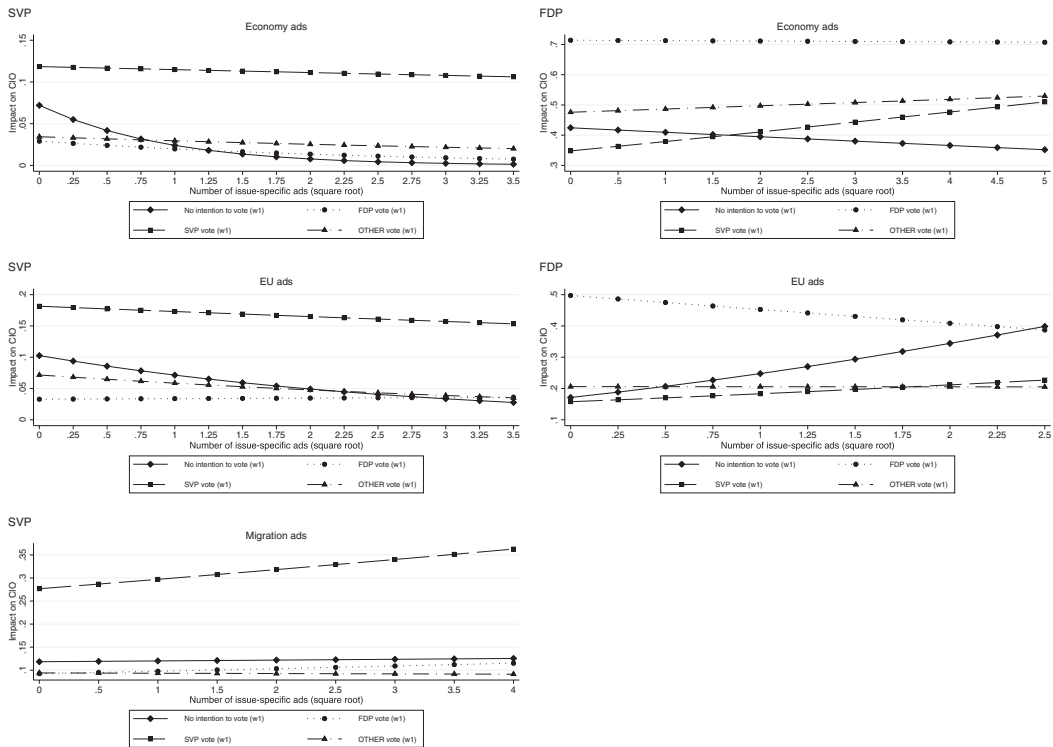
Notes: Entries reflect the predicted probabilities to consider the SVP or the FDP to be the most competent party to handle the issue. The results are based on the estimation of logistic regressions controlling for perceived competence issue ownership at wave 1 and all the variables included in the models displayed in Table 2 (see result section). For the baseline models, see online appendix Table A8.

Additionally, Jerit and Barabas (2012) demonstrate that perceptual biases are strongest among issues that have been prominent in the news. Both these conditions are met with regard to the issue of migration.

Turning to activation effects, we can only confirm our hypothesis 2a regarding advertisements placed by the FDP on the issue of relations to the EU: individuals who are strongly opposed to joining the EU and who indicated at wave 1 that they are certainly or probably not going to participate in the elections, show a strong increase in the probability to participate and vote for the FDP with increasing exposure to the party's issue-specific campaign. This is interesting as the FDP is more perceived to own the issue of the economy – where we cannot find such effects – than the issue of EU policy (Lutz 2016; see also section 2).[16]

For our remaining cases, our hypothesis 2a needs to be rejected. Issue-specific advertisements did not activate voters. Regarding the SVP, the opposite could even be observed: individuals who did not show any intention to vote at the elections (w1) and

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[16] These results are not fully robust when the relative campaign measure is employed.

who are exposed to issue-specific advertisements by the SVP that are in line with their preferences even decrease the likelihood to express a vote intention for that party (w2) when the exposure to the party's issue-specific advertisements increases. This is true for all three issues and independent of how we operationalized our campaign variable.

Our limited findings with regard to issue-specific advertisements deserve further attention. One may argue that it is somewhat naïve to postulate an instant and direct effect of political advertisement on vote intentions or vote choice. Rather, political advertisements may alter intermediate factors which may, to some extent, themselves exert influence on the party choice (see e.g., Lanz and Sciarini 2016). Therefore, we examined whether issue-specific campaigning increases the perceived issue ownership of a party (H3). We thus ran several logistic regression models for perceived competence issue ownership on the topics of migration, EU policy and the economy. The results of these models (see Figure 3) correspond to some extent to the results of issue-specific advertisements on vote intention as displayed in Figure 2. According to these models, there are two groups that showed an increase in perceived issue ownership: individuals with no intention to vote who were increasingly exposed to EU advertisements by the FDP, as well as individuals who intended to vote for the SVP at wave 1 by increasing exposure migration advertisements of that party.[17] From these results we conclude that the mechanism behind activation and reinforcement effects of issue-specific political advertisements may indeed operate by successfully convincing potential voters that the party is the most competent to handle the advertised issue.

Conclusion

Our paper tests the impact of issue-specific advertisements on vote intentions for the two winning parties of the 2015 parliamentary elections in Switzerland, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and the Liberal Radical Party (FDP). In doing so, we present three important innovations. First, we develop a novel measure that allows us to track potential individual exposure to political advertisements. Second, we make use of an extensive dataset of political advertisements gathered in 50 important regional and supraregional newspapers, for the first time allowing us to examine campaign effects in all 26 Swiss cantons. Third, we capture effects of issue-specific political advertisements in the context of the Swiss parliamentary elections.

Overall, our findings point to limited effects of political advertisements, which is in line with previous non-experimental literature. What we do find is a general reinforcement effect for individuals who have been exposed to an intensive political campaign by the SVP. No such effects are on display for the FDP. We also detect a reinforcement effect of the amount of migration ads placed by the SVP, suggesting that perception biases are strongest when the advertised issue is highly contentious (Slothuus and De Vreese 2010). When turning to the question of whether advertisements helped to link existing individual preferences to the positions of a party, our findings indicate that FDP advertisements promoting the issue of EU policy succeeded in activating voters. Furthermore, we identify a reinforcement effect for SVP supporters that favor the strengthening of the economy, while no such effect is detected for economy ads sponsored by the FDP. Contrary to our theoretical expectations, this result suggests that campaign effects are more likely to be observed on issues that are not clearly owned by that party. In other words, campaigns

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[17] Two of our replication models also suggest a reinforcement effect for SVP economy ads. Furthermore, our replication models suggest that there might be a positive effect for SVP EU ads.

may help shed light on a party's issue position previously rather unknown to the voter. Such new information may persuade some voters who hold strong views on that matter to vote for that party. This conclusion is supported by additional analyses, which demonstrate that campaigns may help boost the perceived competence issue ownership, including on issues that are not already owned by that party. Overall, however, our results do not attribute an important role to political advertisements when it comes to explaining changes in competence issue ownership.

We observe no activating effects for political advertisements placed by the SVP, meaning that an intense political campaign by the SVP did not entice people to vote for that party. Quite on the contrary, our results suggest that people who initially did not display an intention to vote are rather repulsed by the party's intensive issue-specific campaign, even when holding preferences that are in line with demands issued by the SVP. At the moment, we can only speculate about this finding. One might argue that the party has already gathered a stable voter clientele by other means before the campaign, most probably by launching (and winning) popular initiatives on these subjects, and therefore having reached its full voter potential. This could indicate that reinforcing its supporters remains the party's main task. On the other hand, political advertisements might not have been the main means through which to gain new voters. The SVP may have profited from a strong association with the migration issue in newspapers – the policy issue that received the greatest media attention at that time (Fög 2015). Hence, the great success of the party in 2015 may either have external roots, i.e. rest on events that occurred independently of the political campaign (see also Sciarini and Kriesi 2003: 442), and/or result from the SVP successfully influencing the tone of media reporting, for example through the introduction of the term "Asylchaos" (asylum chaos) (Lutz 2016: 45).

Our study is not without limitations. First, the findings presented here are strongly bound to a context in which only a small number of issues were seen as salient, and discussions revolving around these issues had been ongoing for several months. This may have contributed to the stabilization of party and issue preferences well in advance of the electoral campaign, reducing the chances for political advertisements to activate latent preferences or reinforce existing views.

Second, linkage analyses are not unimpeachable. Results may be sensitive to the choice of the measure of media exposure and to the way media content is operationalized (De Vreese et al. 2017). The robustness checks conducted within the framework of this study did not indicate that we might have substantially under- or overestimated the effects of campaign advertisements by the choice of our campaign variable.[18] However, future studies might want to give greater weight to more recently published advertisements, consider factors that might increase the visibility of political advertisements or include an analysis of frames. In addition, survey participants in general are prone to over-reporting their media use and the reliability of such measures is only deemed moderate, leading to the weakening of true media effects (see Scharkow and Bachl 2017 for an overview). While incorporating additional and finer grained questions on the use of informational sources in opinion surveys may help to create more reliable measures of exposure (De Vreese et al. 2017: 225), a comprehensive study of information reception and acceptance might want to rely on experimental designs (see Iyengar and Simon 2000: 151).

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[18] We also examined whether the effects are sensitive to political awareness but our results did not provide strong evidence for that (results available on request).

Third, and related to the former, we rely on a thin database – both with regard to exposure to issue-specific ads as well as survey participants who indicated in the pre-campaign wave that they are unlikely to participate. Results thus have to be interpreted cautiously and we propose to speak of trends rather than of established facts.

Finally, due to data availability and our interest in capturing campaign exposure, our study limits itself to the analysis of the influence of political advertisements in print media. We are therefore not in a position to draw general conclusions on the influence of the overall campaign, since it neglects alternative means of campaigning, such as the use of Facebook or Twitter or the distribution of flyers in the streets. Yet, by focusing on political advertisements, we do follow an established path of campaign research conducted in a country where parties are not obliged to reveal their funding (e.g., Gerber and Bühlmann 2014; Kriesi 2009; Lanz and Nai 2015; Marquis 2006; Nai 2013; Sciarini and Kriesi 2003). While the use of social media in the context of politics is not negligible, empirical studies have demonstrated that digitization has not (yet) gained momentum (Bütikofer and Willi 2017; Lutz and Lebert 2017). Future research may want to establish the role and impact of alternative communication channels in the framework of electoral campaigning in Switzerland.

Despite these weaknesses, this study combined media content data with panel data and thus offers "more leverage with regard to change and causality" compared to other linkage studies that rely on descriptive, cross-sectional or RCS survey data (De Vreese et al. 2017: 223). Moreover, and to the best of the authors' knowledge, it did so for the first time to study campaign effects on vote intentions in Switzerland.

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Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article.

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