

# What Motivates Political Activists? Evidence From a Field Experiment Pre-Analysis Plan

Lukas Hensel\*   Anselm Rink†

July 28, 2017

## 1 Introduction

We conduct a field experiment in collaboration with a large German party to examine its members' motivation to participate in an extensive canvassing campaign in the run-up to the federal election on September 24<sup>th</sup> 2017. The campaign relies on the participation of local party members and supporters. In cooperation with the party, we designed this field experiment to analyse how individuals decide to participate in a political campaign and how much effort they exert as part of the campaign. We focus on the role of beliefs about the effort of other volunteers in the campaign in two ways.

First, we measure volunteers' beliefs about the campaigning activities of members of the own party and beliefs about the campaigning activities of the main opposition party. Next, we exogenously shift beliefs about the campaigning activities of members of the own party and beliefs about the campaigning activities of the main opposing party. We measure the impact of changes in beliefs on planned and actual participation in canvassing activities.

---

\*University of Oxford

†University of Konstanz

## 2 Survey Design

Our original sample consists of all members and supporters of the party that have signed up to their online platform (currently more than 60,000 individuals) which the party established to organize its grassroots activities. We will send an invitation to participate in an online survey to all individuals on behalf of the party, followed by up to three reminder emails. Participants who click on the link will randomly be divided into one of the following two groups:

- **Own Party group:** We elicit people's beliefs about the share of own party members who intend to go canvassing. Half of all respondents in this arm will be randomly assigned to receive information about canvassing intentions of a sample of own party members. Thereafter, all respondents estimate the share of members who will actually go canvassing for their own party.
- **Other Party group:** We elicit people's beliefs about the share of members of the opposing party who intend to go canvassing. Half of all respondents in this arm will be randomly assigned to receive information about canvassing intentions of a sample of opposing party members. Thereafter, all respondents estimate the share of members of the opposing party who will actually go canvassing for the opposing party.

We also collect data on people's intention to canvass. Specifically, we ask them whether they plan to canvass at all and how many days they plan to canvass. On top of that, we provide people with a link to the online application of the party. We will be able to get data on actual downloads of the app.

In the time-span between participation in the survey and the federal election we will collect further outcome data through the application.

## 2.1 Definition of primary outcome variables

We will create an unweighted index based on the five main outcome variables below which we z-score using the mean and the standard deviation of the control group in the “own party group” and the “other party group” respectively:

- Our main outcome of interest is effort exerted in canvassing activities during the federal election campaign. In our analysis we will make use of three variables based on the number of doors people knock on:
  - 1) The number of doors people knock on during the door-to-door campaign as registered through the online application. <sup>1</sup>
  - 2) Whether people knock on any door as registered through the app.
  - 3) The number of days on which people knock on any door as registered through the app.
  
- On top of that, we use two self-reported measures that we collect as part of the survey:
  - 4) A binary variable on whether an individual plans to engage in canvassing during the federal election campaign.
  - 5) The planned number of days of participation. Individuals who do not plan to canvass will be coded as zero days.

On top of that we will analyze data on whether people download the app within the day of the completion of the survey, the week after the completion of the survey and the period until the election.

## 2.2 Control Variables

We estimate all regression models with and without a list of controls,  $\mathbf{X}_i$  which we think might affect canvassing. We include the following control variables:

---

<sup>1</sup>We winsorize this variable at the 99 percentile to deal with outliers. We will also report regressions without the winsorization.

- Party membership (taking value one for members).
- Number of years of party membership
- Age
- Sex
- Whether a participant has participated in a canvassing training workshop.
- Whether a participant has already downloaded the online application.
- Whether a participant has participated in canvassing before this federal election.
- Whether a participant has participated in canvassing for this federal election.

### 3 Analysis

#### 3.1 Own Party Group

First, we estimate the following equation:

$$y_i = \pi_0 + \pi_1 T_i + \zeta^T \mathbf{X}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where  $y_i$  is the outcome variable of interest.  $T_i$  is a dummy variable taking value one for people who receive the information about the share of own party members who plan to go canvassing and which takes value zero for respondents who do not receive this information.  $\mathbf{X}_i$  is the set of control variables defined above.  $\varepsilon_i$  is the error term. Throughout the analysis, we employ robust standard errors.

Next, we consider the following specification:

$$y_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 T_i \times \text{Highprior}_i + \alpha_2 T_i + \alpha_3 \text{Highprior}_i + \Pi^T \mathbf{X}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

$\text{Highprior}_i$  takes value one for respondents who weakly overestimate the actual number of

own party members who plan to go canvassing (prior  $\geq 37$ ) and zero otherwise.

### 3.2 Opposing Party Group

Next, we estimate the following equation:

$$y_i = \delta_0 + \delta_1 T2_i + \zeta^T \mathbf{X}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where  $y_i$  is the outcome variable of interest.  $T2_i$  is a dummy variable taking value one for people who receive the information about the share of opposing party members who plan to go canvassing and which takes value zero for respondents who do not receive this information.

Next, we consider the following specification:

$$y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 T2_i \times \text{Highprior}2_i + \beta_2 T2_i + \beta_3 \text{Highprior}2_i + \Xi^T \mathbf{X}_i + \epsilon_i$$

$\text{Highprior}2_i$  takes value one for respondents who weakly overestimate the number of opposing party members who plan to go canvassing (prior  $\geq 56$ ) and zero otherwise.

### 3.3 Definition of Dimensions of Heterogeneity

We will repeat the above analysis separately for the subsample of respondents which has already downloaded the app and the sample that has not already downloaded the app.

On top of that we also look at heterogeneity by party membership/number of years of membership as well as previous canvassing activity.

### 3.4 Sample definition

We will include all respondents in our analysis which submit the estimate of either the share of own party members or opposing party members who intend to go canvassing. If people

do not register any data with the online application we set the number of registered doors to zero. If people do not respond to survey questions after the treatment assignment, we treat responses as missing.