Decision-Makers as Decision-Shapers: Evidence on the Influence of Representatives on Direct Democratic Votes*

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Abstract

This paper estimates whether elected representatives causally shape citizens' decisions in direct democratic votes. We study Swiss referenda, where voters decide on the same policy proposals that legislators previously vote on in parliament, allowing a direct comparison between representatives' positions and citizens' binding policy choices. Using close elections between candidates with opposing positions on a given issue, we implement a regression discontinuity design that generates quasi-random variation in the issue positions of elected representatives. Having an issue supporter instead of an issue opponent as a representative increases the electorate's share of yes votes by about 8.7 percentage points. The effect is strongest where alternative information is scarce, suggesting that representatives shape voter choices partly by providing cues on complex policies. The results imply that even in institutions designed to let citizens overrule politicians, representatives remain an important force in preference formation and policy choice.

Keywords: direct democracy, popular votes, referendum, public opinion, representative democracy, political influence, decision-making

JEL: D72, D78, D80, D91

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1 Introduction

Do elected representatives still shape policy when citizens themselves cast the decisive vote? This paper answers that question in the Swiss system of direct democracy, where voters decide in referenda on the same policy proposals that legislators previously voted on in parliament. We exploit close elections between candidates with opposing positions on a proposal to generate quasi-random variation in the issue positions of elected representatives. Using a regression discontinuity design, we find that electing an additional supporter of a proposal increases the share of yes votes in that person's constituency in the subsequent referendum by about 8.7 percentage points. The result implies that even in institutions designed to let citizens overrule politicians, representatives remain important in shaping policy choices.

That finding is not obvious. Direct democratic institutions are commonly understood as a device that limits the agency problems of representative democracy by allowing citizens to review and overturn legislative decisions (Gerber, 1996; Matsusaka, 2005). If referendum outcomes simply aggregate preexisting voter preferences, elected representatives should matter little once citizens have the final say. This assumes that voters enter direct democratic campaigns with stable preferences and sufficient information to evaluate often complex proposals on their own. In practice, it is costly for ordinary voters to understand policy issues, so they remain rationally ignorant (Downs, 1957). Under this assumption, referendum campaigns create an environment in which political actors can shape how voters interpret policy issues. Representatives may therefore matter not only through their parliamentary votes, but also through the cues they provide to citizens during referendum campaigns.

Identifying such influence is difficult because representatives are elected by the same constituencies whose later referendum choices we observe. Constituencies that elect supporters of an issue are also likely to be more supportive of that issue in the referendum, even in the absence of any causal influence from the elected representative. Simple correlations between legislators' positions and referendum outcomes, therefore, confound the influence of representatives with underlying voter preferences. A credible empirical design must isolate variation in representatives' issue positions that is unrelated to the electorate's latent support for the proposal.

We estimate the causal effect of legislators' issue positions on direct democratic decisions by focusing on close elections between candidates with opposing positions on a given pol-

icy proposal. For 263 Swiss referenda[1], each held in all 26 cantons (6,838 canton-referendum pairs), we identify the marginally elected and marginally non-elected candidates from the most recent election and keep observations in which those two candidates take opposing positions on the proposal later decided in the referendum. We refer to these cases as *opposing races*. When the policy-supporting candidate closely wins rather than closely loses such a race, the composition of parliamentary representation shifts for reasons that are plausibly unrelated to the electorate's subsequent referendum preferences. We use this quasi-random variation in a fuzzy regression discontinuity design (Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik, 2014), with the supporting candidate's vote margin as the running variable and actual parliamentary entry as the treatment.

Switzerland provides an ideal institutional setting to study this question. Federal referenda allow citizens to vote on the same legislative proposals, with identical wording, that were previously decided in parliament (Carey and Hix, 2013; Stadelmann, Portmann, et al., 2013). This makes it possible to compare representatives' positions and citizens' direct democratic votes on exactly the same issues rather than on broad ideological scales or survey questions. We construct a novel dataset linking referendum outcomes in all 26 cantons to the issue positions and electoral margins of elected and non-elected candidates for 263 federal referenda held between 1996 and 2026. We measure candidates' electoral closeness using the relative vote margin of Luechinger et al. (2024), which captures both party-level and within-party competition in proportional representation systems.

Our estimates indicate that an issue supporter closely making it into parliament instead of an issue opponent increases the share of yes votes in the subsequent referendum by roughly 8.7 percentage points. Note that, given our regression discontinuity design, this is a local average treatment effect. It identifies the effect of marginal changes in the issue positions of representatives for a subset of votes, not the average effect of representative positions across all referenda or all constituencies. The paper does not claim that representatives fully determine voter choices, nor that the estimated effect generalizes mechanically beyond close races. It shows instead that, in a setting where citizens formally have the final say, elected representatives can still causally affect binding policy outcomes.

We contribute to the literature on political influence and public opinion (Broockman and Butler, 2017; Bullock, 2011; Slothuus and Bisgaard, 2021) by moving beyond survey attitudes

[1]For simplicity, we use the term *referenda* to refer to both federal initiatives and referenda.

and examining binding policy decisions. Existing work shows that party cues, elite messages, and campaign information can affect reported opinions. There is much less causal evidence on whether politicians shape actual policy choices with real consequences (Burnett and Parry, 2014; Colombo and Kriesi, 2017). The paper also contributes to the close-election literature in political economy (Marshall, 2022). Prior studies typically use close races to identify the effects of fixed politician characteristics such as party affiliation, incumbency, gender, or ideology. We extend that logic to referendum-specific issue positions, allowing the same empirical framework to identify how the election of a supporter rather than an opponent affects voters' decisions on the same proposal.

The broader implication is that direct democracy does not eliminate the political role of representatives. Even when voters formally decide policy themselves, representatives may continue to shape outcomes by affecting how citizens interpret and evaluate proposals. This matters for how we understand accountability, delegation, and information aggregation in democratic institutions. If representatives influence voters' preferences rather than merely implement them, then the distinction between representative democracy and direct democracy is less sharp than standard institutional distinctions imply. It also means that direct democratic institutions are potentially less effective at holding politicians accountable than previously thought.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 discusses the related literature and the conceptual channels through which representatives may influence referendum outcomes. Section 3 describes Switzerland's institutional setting and the construction of the dataset. Section 4 presents the empirical design. Section 5 reports the main results and validation exercises. Section 6 examines heterogeneity in the estimated effects. Section 7 summarizes our results and discusses their broader implications for democratic representation.

2 Related literature and conceptual framework

This paper contributes to two main literatures. The first studies how political actors shape citizens' preferences. A large body of work shows that party cues, elite messages, media exposure, and campaign communication can affect political attitudes and reported opinions (Broockman and Butler, 2017; Bullock, 2011; Campbell et al., 1960; Slothuus and Bisgaard, 2021). That literature establishes that voter preferences are responsive to information and signals from political

elites rather than fully fixed in advance (Gerber and Jackson, 1993). However, much of the evidence comes from surveys or survey experiments, where the outcome is stated opinion rather than a binding policy choice (Hill and Huber, 2019; Zaller and Feldman, 1992).

A smaller literature examines whether politicians and parties affect views on concrete policy proposals. Survey experiments show that voters update their opinions on ballot measures and policy issues when exposed to party positions, endorsements, or policy arguments (Boudreau and MacKenzie, 2014; Colombo and Kriesi, 2017; Grewenig et al., 2020). These studies leave open whether the same responsiveness extends to actual votes with real consequences. Reported attitudes in a survey, however, do not necessarily reflect binding votes (Hill and Huber, 2019; Zaller and Feldman, 1992). This is especially true given that survey respondents do not necessarily have experience with direct democratic decision-making, nor are they subject to the political discourse that precedes a popular vote.

The paper also contributes to the literature that uses close elections to identify the causal effects of politicians on downstream outcomes (Marshall, 2022). Existing studies exploit close electoral races to examine the effects of party affiliation, incumbency, ideology, gender, age, religion, and other politician characteristics (Baskaran and Hessami, 2023; Bhalotra et al., 2021; Carlino et al., 2023; Carlsson et al., 2021; Marx et al., 2024; Matsubayashi, 2013). We apply that logic to referendum-specific issue positions rather than to fixed politician characteristics. This extension matters because it allows the same empirical framework to identify whether electing a supporter rather than an opponent of a specific proposal shifts voter support for that proposal, and it enables a direct comparison between representatives' and voters' choices on the same issues. To our knowledge, we are the first to apply this design to candidates' *issue positions*, rather than their personal characteristics or previous electoral performance.

The conceptual mechanism is straightforward. Direct democratic proposals are often costly for voters to evaluate, and many citizens are unlikely to acquire detailed information about every issue on the ballot (Downs, 1957). In that environment, representatives can matter by providing visible and credible cues about the content or consequences of a proposal (Boudreau and MacKenzie, 2014; Bullock, 2011). Legislators vote publicly in parliament, participate in campaigns, appear in the media, and signal partisan or ideological interpretations of policy choices (Stadelmann and Torgler, 2013). If voters use those signals when forming judgments, then quasi-random variation in representatives' issue positions should translate into differences in referendum outcomes.

This mechanism is plausible, but it should not be overstated. The empirical design identifies whether representative positions affect referendum outcomes. It does not, by itself, identify whether that influence works through persuasion, information transmission, party mobilization, or some other channel. The heterogeneity analysis in Section 6 provides suggestive evidence on when representative influence is stronger, but not definitive proof of why it operates.

3 Institutional context and data

We leverage Switzerland's institutional setting to estimate the causal effect of legislators' policy decisions in parliament on the outcomes of direct democratic votes on the same policy proposals. Swiss citizens can challenge laws and constitutional amendments adopted by parliament through referenda or propose their own proposals through federal initiatives. These votes are binding and allow citizens to decide on the same policy proposals, with identical wording, that legislators previously voted on in parliament. This institutional feature enables a direct comparison between the policy choices of legislators and voters. In this section, we describe the institutional framework and introduce the data used in the analysis.

3.1 Swiss parliament and electoral system

The Swiss federal parliament consists of the National Council (lower house) with 200 seats and the Council of States (upper house) with 46 seats. Members of both chambers serve four-year terms and are elected simultaneously across all 26 cantons, which function as electoral districts. We focus on the National Council, where seats are allocated proportionally to each canton's permanent resident population. As a result, cantons have between one (in the six smallest cantons) and 36 (in the largest canton, Zürich) National Councilors.[2] Elections follow an open ballot proportional representation (PR) system. In single-seat cantons, the elections de facto follow a first-past-the-post system. Parties and other electoral groups nominate candidates on lists. Voters can cast as many votes as their canton has seats. They can submit a party list unchanged, modify lists by crossing out names and writing down others a second time

[2]The numbers refer to the 52nd legislative period (2023-2027). From 1963 to 2011, seats were redistributed across cantons periodically over multiple legislative terms. Since 2011, seats are redistributed every legislative term (Parliamentary Services, 2024).

(pre-accumulating), combine names from different party lists (splitting), or fill out an empty list from scratch (for details, see, ch.ch, 2025).

3.2 Swiss referenda

With Switzerland's direct democratic institutions, decisions made by parliament do not automatically become law. Citizens can challenge parliamentary decisions through referenda by collecting 50,000 signatures within 100 days. Constitutional amendments are automatically subject to a referendum. In addition, federal initiatives allow citizens to propose constitutional changes themselves by collecting 100,000 signatures within 18 months. Referenda enable citizens to vote on the same policy proposal with identical wording as politicians do in parliament. Referenda cover a wide range of policy areas, including foreign policy, public finances, transport and infrastructure, social policy, energy, and agriculture.[3] Referenda allow citizens to rank proposed legislation against the status quo, and the outcome of the referendum is decisive.

Citizens vote by mail or in person on up to four days per year, often deciding on multiple referenda. All eligible citizens receive the voting material by mail without registering. The materials include the complete text of the proposed changes to the law or the constitution, arguments from the campaigns of both supporters and opponents, and official recommendations from the Federal Council and Parliament.

Referendum campaigns in Switzerland are highly informative and follow clear regulations. Advertisements for referenda are prohibited on the radio and television, but they are permitted in newspapers. The media provide comprehensive and balanced coverage of referenda (Udris, 2023). Politicians publicly advocate for their positions in interviews and appear in dedicated programs on television, radio, and in the press. All of their votes in parliament are publicly available through the official parliamentary website and the official bulletin of the Federal Assembly. For policy proposals that are subject to referenda, which are the focus of this study, media outlets often report on how individual politicians voted. Before referenda, both the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG) and the media group Tamedia conduct representative polls. The results are published across major platforms—online, on television and radio, and in newspapers—and receive widespread national and international coverage (for further information on voting polls, see Bursztyn et al., 2024).

[3] See Parliamentary Services (2025a) for more information on all referenda.

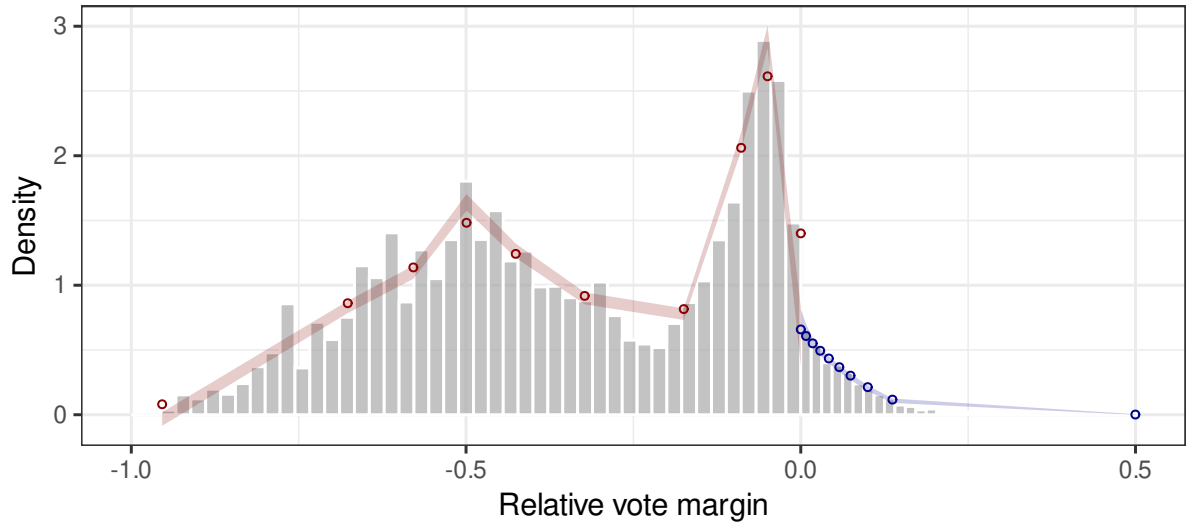
The continuity and intensity of the political discourse make Swiss referenda particularly credible for studying the influence of politicians on voter preferences. Popular votes always follow parliamentary votes, and the majority decision in Parliament serves as a voting recommendation for the voters (Stadelmann and Torgler, 2013). By design, parliament always approves policy proposals that are subject to a referendum after passing through parliament. For these votes, the recommendation is always to accept the proposed legislation. Policies proposed by citizens as federal initiatives, by contrast, are typically rejected by a majority in parliament.

3.3 Data

We use data on 28,862 candidates for the Swiss National Council from eight federal elections (1995-2023), provided by the Federal Statistical Office. The data cover the number of votes, election outcomes, party list affiliations, names, ages, genders, and places of residence for each candidate; the number of votes per party list; and information on alliances between party lists.

Using these data, we calculate the electoral closeness of each candidate in every election. Measuring closeness at the candidate level in PR systems is not straightforward because seats are first assigned to party lists and then to candidates within those lists. As a result, competition arises both between parties and within party lists. We calculate the *relative vote margin* proposed by Luechinger et al. (2024), which overcomes the limitations of previous approaches that focused only on either party-level or within-party competition (Clots-Figueras, 2011; Freier and Odendahl, 2015; Hyytinen et al., 2018). The method accounts for both sources of competition by calculating candidates' vote surplus to the loss of a seat or their vote shortfall to the gain of a seat. It identifies the smallest change in votes required for a candidate to either win a seat by surpassing the last elected candidate on their list (candidate margin) or by securing enough votes for their party to gain an additional seat, thereby allowing them to win a seat based on their position on the list (party margin). For each seat-candidate combination, the binding margin is the smaller of these two values.[4] A candidate's overall vote margin to win (lose) a seat is then the maximum (minimum) of these binding margins across all seat-candidate com-

[4]For example, on party list P two candidates, C_1 and C_2, are elected. C_2 has 800 votes more than the third-ranked candidate C_3. The party would lose its second seat if it scored 1,000 votes less and would gain a seat if it scored 500 votes more. Thus, C_2's binding margin for the third seat is 800, and C_3's binding margin for the second seat is 500.



Notes: The figure shows a histogram and local polynomial density estimate of the relative vote margin for candidates below and above the cutoff (Cattaneo, Jansson, et al., 2020).

Figure 1: Distribution of vote margins in the full candidate sample

binations. To ensure comparability across districts and elections, we divide each candidate's vote margin by the number of votes cast in the election.[5]

Figure 1 shows the histogram and local polynomial density estimate of the relative vote margin for elected candidates ($vote\,margin > 0$) and non-elected candidates ($vote\,margin < 0$) below and above the cutoff. The figure and the empirical manipulation testing results, following Cattaneo, Jansson, et al. (2020), show that the relative vote margin is continuous at the cutoff of 0 ($T = 0.790,\ p = 0.430$). Note that the vote margin does not perfectly determine whether a candidate enters parliament. Some legislators are in parliament despite having negative vote margins, while others are not in parliament despite having positive vote margins. This occurs when elected candidates resign from office or do not take office in the first place, allowing the next best candidate from a party list to assume office. Figure C1 in the appendix shows candidates' probability of entering parliament conditional on their vote margin.

We match candidates to all referenda held during the legislative term following the election in which they participated. We match candidates to referenda using the referendum date, meaning that matched candidates are in office at the time the electorate votes at the ballot box. On average, the popular vote takes place 256 days after the corresponding parliamentary

[5]Luechinger et al. (2024) propose the vote margin divided by the number of *eligible voters* as the relative vote margin.

vote ($SD = 106$). The time gap ranges from 88 to 718 days. The final data set includes 919,989 candidate$\times$referendum observations, covering 263 referenda across eight legislative periods and 26 electoral districts.

We directly observe the issue positions of elected candidates based on their roll-call votes in parliament, which we obtain from the official web services of the Swiss Parliament (Parliamentary Services, 2025b). Candidates who do not enter parliament never cast a roll-call vote. We infer their positions from the party line. Thus, we measure the positions of elected and non-elected candidates differently. Although the Swiss Federal Constitution entitles parliamentarians to vote without instructions, party lines remain highly influential. In our data, which cover legislators' votes on policy proposals with subsequent referenda, only 6.24% of legislators voted against their party's official voting recommendations, suggesting that party lines appropriately approximate actual voting behavior. We assess robustness by approximating positions uniformly with party lines for all candidates and by restricting the sample to referenda with high party discipline. Note that misclassifications do not bias our results as long as they are symmetric—that is, as long as misclassifications occur just as often among supporters as among opponents. Symmetric misclassifications may still attenuate the estimated effect. Our robustness checks, restricting the sample to referenda with high party discipline, where misclassification is less likely, yield similar estimates, suggesting that any such attenuation is small.

We collect additional referendum information from the Swissvotes dataset, which is published by Année Politique Suisse, an online platform hosted by the Institute of Political Science at the University of Bern. From this dataset, we obtain the referendum party lines, official results, issue topics, and measures that describe the campaign and media environment. In particular, we use media coverage (the number of newspaper articles published in the 12 weeks before the vote), media tonality (ranging from -100 for fully negative to $+100$ for fully positive coverage), and campaign balance, defined as the share of advertisements advocating a yes vote among all referendum-related advertisements appearing in approximately 50 print media outlets, excluding neutral advertisements. For further details, see Swissvotes (2026).

We further draw on representative post-referendum surveys (VOX analyses), which cover all 263 referenda in our dataset. These surveys, conducted within ten days of each referendum, collect detailed information from 1,000 to 3,000 respondents on their socioeconomic characteristics, voting behavior, and knowledge of the proposals. The surveys are widely regarded as

the standard data source for studying Swiss referenda; their results are frequently discussed in newspapers and have been used extensively in the literature (e.g. Ahlfeldt et al., 2022; Stutzer et al., 2019). From these surveys, we construct referendum-level measures of perceived policy complexity and importance by aggregating respondents' evaluations for each referendum. Complexity is measured using a binary indicator reported in the survey, while importance is measured on a 0–10 scale.[6]

Our main outcome variable is the electorate's share of yes votes in a referendum at the cantonal level. This yields 6,838 canton×referendum observations (263×26). For each cantonal-level referendum result, we observe the position and electoral closeness of all candidates who competed in the last election. The result is a unique dataset that links candidates' electoral closeness and issue positions to their voters' decisions on identical policy proposals. It enables us to implement a close-election RD design to estimate the causal effect of politicians' issue positions on decisions in direct democratic votes.

4 Identification strategy and empirical design

Our objective is to estimate whether electing a representative who supports a policy proposal changes voters' support for that same proposal in the subsequent referendum. The main empirical challenge is endogeneity. Representatives are elected by the very constituencies whose referendum choices we study, so constituencies that elect supporters of a proposal are also likely to be more favorable toward that proposal. A simple comparison between cantons represented by supportive and opposing legislators would therefore confound the influence of representatives with underlying voter preferences.

To address this problem, we exploit close elections between candidates with opposing positions on the same proposal. We construct an RD sample from the 6,838 canton-referendum pairs in our dataset. For each pair, we identify the marginally elected and marginally non-elected candidates from the most recent National Council election before the referendum. These are the elected candidate with the smallest vote margin and the non-elected candidate with the largest vote margin. We retain pairs in which those two candidates hold opposing positions on the proposal later decided in the referendum. We call these observations *oppos-*

[6] Importance is assessed with the question: "On a scale from 0 (not important at all) to 10 (very important), how important was [referendum title] for you personally?" Complexity is measured with the question: "Did you find it easy or difficult to understand what [referendum title] was about?" with response options coded as 1 = rather easy and 2 = rather difficult.

ing races. In such cases, a close victory by the supportive candidate rather than the opposing candidate changes the issue position represented in parliament while holding constant the underlying electoral environment. Our RD sample is therefore referendum-specific. The two marginal candidates remain fixed throughout a legislative term, but whether they form an opposing race depends on the specific proposal under consideration.[7]

We observe opposing races in four scenarios. The majority of opposing races arises because the two marginal candidates belong to different parties with opposing party lines, and the elected candidate follows the party line (1,168 observations; 85.5%). When the elected candidate deviates from the party line, we observe an opposing race either when the candidates belong to different parties with identical party lines (73 observations; 5.34%), or when both candidates belong to the same party (93 observations; 6.81%). In all other cases, the candidates hold opposing positions, and the party of the elected candidate has not issued a voting recommendation (32 observations; 2.34%). Because we infer non-elected candidates' positions from party lines, some opposing races may be misclassified. As discussed in Section 3, symmetric misclassification does not bias the design.

Overall, we observe 1,366 opposing races out of 6,838 canton$\times$referendum pairs. The supporter enters parliament in 736 of these races, while the opponent does so in 630. For each opposing race, the electoral margin of the policy-supporting candidate serves as the running variable. Positive values indicate that the supporter wins the opposing race, whereas negative values indicate that the opponent wins. As we are interested in the causal effect of elected representatives *in parliament*, we define the treatment as parliamentary entry by the supporter, not merely electoral victory. Some candidates with negative margins enter parliament when an elected candidate resigns. These noncompliant observations appear on the left side of the running variable. We quantify this below (Section 4.1). Because victory in a close electoral race is quasi-random, the issue position of the marginally elected candidate is plausibly exogenous to voter policy preferences (Lee and Lemieux, 2010).

We estimate the LATE of having an additional issue supporter as a representative on constituents' referendum support using the following RD model:

[7] Exceptions arise only when a candidate resigns or dies during the term.

$$
\begin{aligned}
yes\ share\ voters_{cr} = \alpha + \beta_1 supporter\ in\ parliament_{cr} + \\
f(vote\ margin\ supporter_{cr}) + \\
supporter\ in\ parliament_{cr} \times g(vote\ margin\ supporter_{cr}) + \epsilon_{cr}
\end{aligned} \tag{1}
$$

The outcome $yes\ share\ voters_{cr}$ is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r. The running variable $vote\ margin\ supporter_{cr}$ is the relative vote margin of the policy-supporting marginal candidate. The treatment indicator $supporter\ in\ parliament$ equals one if the supportive candidate entered parliament (i.e., won the opposing race) and zero otherwise. The functions $f(\cdot)$ and $g(\cdot)$ allow for flexible, potentially asymmetric relationships between the running variable and the outcome. The coefficient of interest β_1 captures the local average treatment effect of electing an issue supporter on the constituency's referendum support.

Because we observe candidates with negative vote margins entering parliament, we implement a fuzzy RD design, with the vote margin serving as an instrument for actual parliamentary entry. We estimate the model using local polynomial regression following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014). Figure C3 in the appendix shows the probability that an issue supporter enters parliament as a function of their vote margin. In our RD sample, 975 of the 1,366 observations have negative vote margins. Among these, 346 are non-compliers, meaning that 35.5 percent of observations below the cutoff come from legislators who nonetheless entered parliament.

Figure 2 illustrates the design for a single canton during one legislative period (2019–2023). Whether a referendum enters the RD sample depends entirely on whether the two marginal candidates C_3 and C_4 hold opposing positions in the parliamentary vote before a referendum. When they do, the observation enters our RD sample with the supporter's electoral margin as the running variable and the canton's share of yes votes as the outcome (Referendum 1 and 3). When they do not, the referendum does not enter the RD sample. Panel B shows an example of the resulting RD scatter. Each dot is a canton-referendum pair; the horizontal axis is the supporter's electoral margin, and the vertical axis is the constituency's share of yes votes in the referendum. The jump at zero is the estimated local average treatment effect of a referendum supporter entering parliament instead of a referendum opponent. Table B2 in the appendix reports summary statistics for the running variable and the number of opposing races by canton

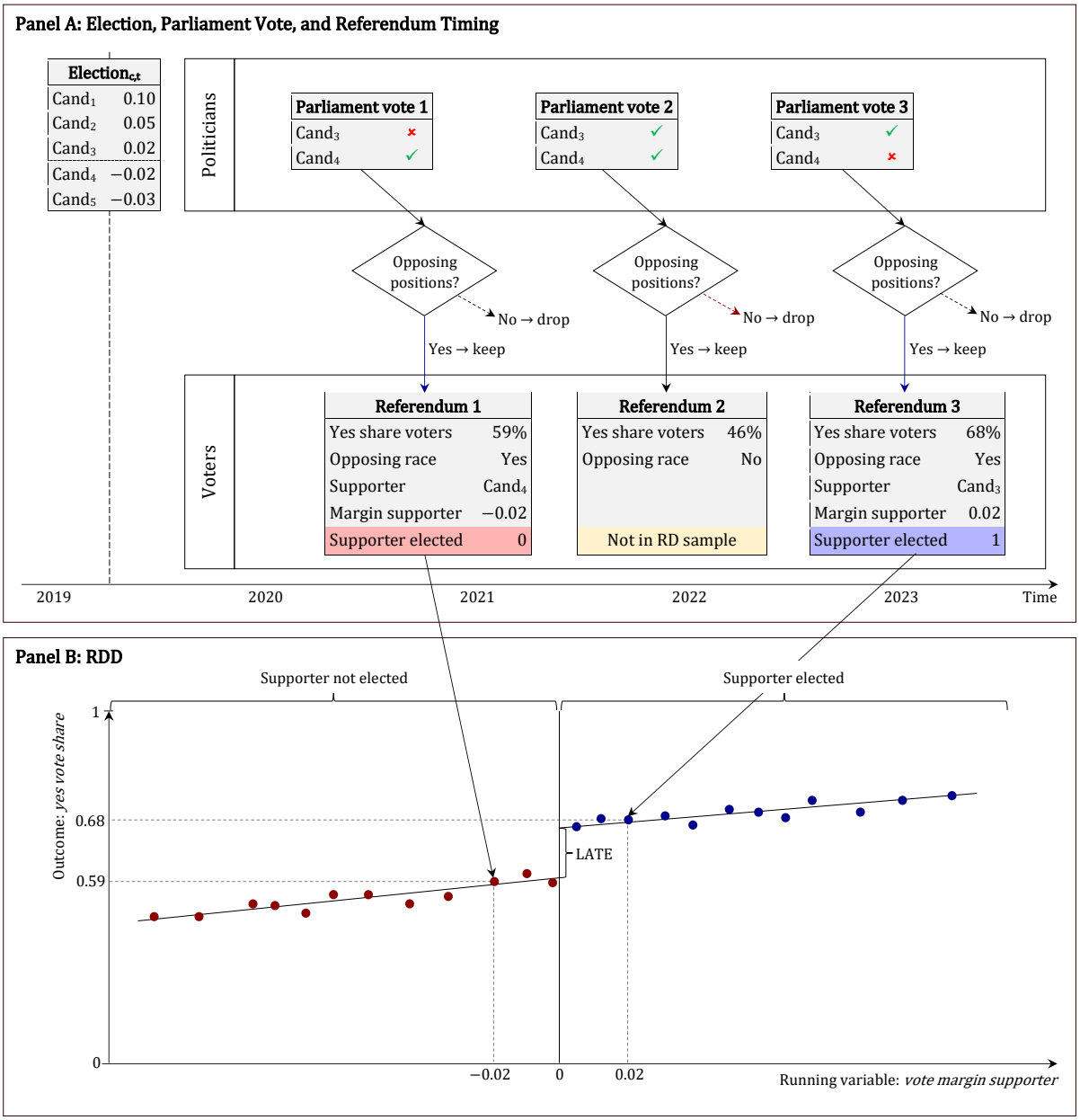


Figure 2: Institutional timing and RD design illustration

Notes: Panel A illustrates the sample construction within canton c during the 51st legislative period (2019–2023). The marginally elected C_3 (vote margin $+0.02$) and the marginally non-elected C_4 (vote margin -0.02) remain fixed throughout the term. For each referendum during the term, we identify the supporter as the candidate who voted in favor of the proposal in parliament and set the running variable to that candidate's electoral margin. Referendum 1 is an opposing race in which the issue supporter (C_4) closely lost (running variable $= -0.02$, treatment $= 0$, yes share $= 59\%$). Referendum 2 does not enter the RD sample because both candidates hold the same position. Referendum 3 is an opposing race in which the issue supporter (C_3) closely won (running variable $= +0.02$, treatment $= 1$, yes share $= 68\%$). Panel B pools all opposing races across cantons and referenda in an exemplary RD scatter. Each dot represents a canton-referendum pair; the x-axis is the supporter's electoral margin; the y-axis is the constituency's share of yes votes in the referendum. The jump at zero estimates the LATE of electing an issue supporter on the referendum support of a constituency. Note that this example abstracts from the fuzzy design and illustrates only observations where the electoral margin perfectly predicts parliamentary entry.

and election outcome. Figure C2 shows the distribution of close opposing races across cantons and referenda.

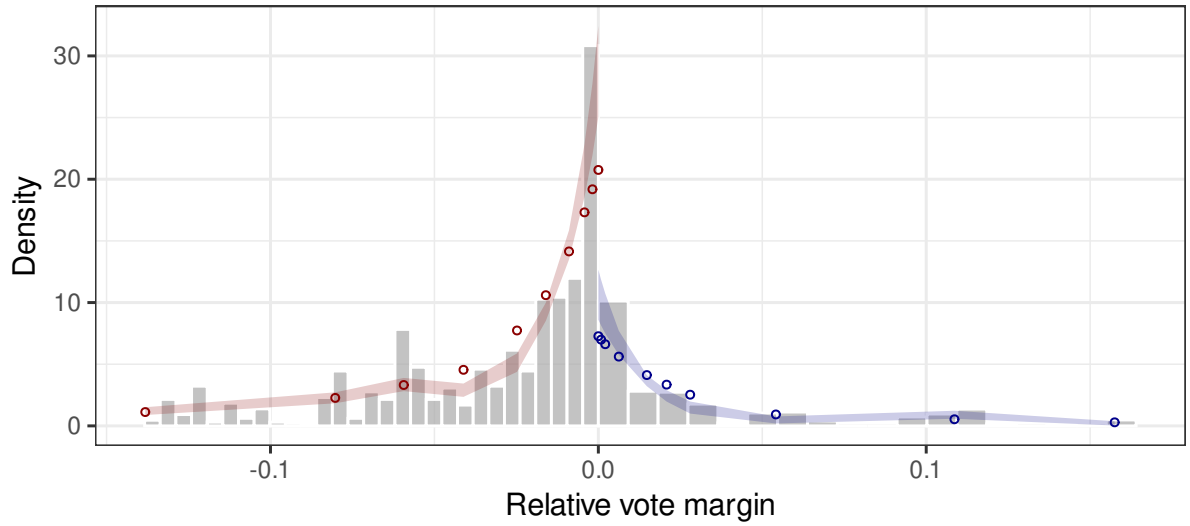
4.1 Sample validity

The credibility of this design depends on whether observations just above and below the cutoff are comparable. We assess this in three ways. First, we test for discontinuities in the density of the running variable at the cutoff. Second, we test whether observations near the cutoff are similar in terms of observable characteristics. Third, since constituents' referendum support likely depends on the positions of all legislators in a canton, we test whether the election of an issue supporter in an opposing race significantly changes the share of issue supporters among the canton's legislators.

We test for discontinuities in the density of the vote margin at the cutoff following Cattaneo, Jansson, et al. (2020). Figure 3 shows a discontinuity: there are more observations just below the cutoff, where the supporter barely lost, than just above it, where the supporter barely won. A jump in the density would usually imply endogenous sorting. In our design, this would mean that issue supporters strategically lost close elections with subsequent referenda on issues they support, which is highly unlikely. The full candidate sample confirms this interpretation. Figure 1 shows a continuous density at zero across all candidates regardless of their issue positions.

The jump is specific to the RD sample. The likely source is asymmetric noncompliance. In our fuzzy design, some candidates with negative margins enter parliament because the original winner resigned and was replaced by the next candidate on the party list. These noncompliant observations remain in the RD sample on the left side of the cutoff, inflating the number of observations with negative margins relative to positive ones. We confirm this directly. When we reconstruct the RD sample using the electoral outcome to define the marginal candidate rather than parliamentary presence, the 346 noncompliant observations shift from the left side of the cutoff to the right. The density test reverses direction: there are now significantly more observations above the cutoff than below ($T = 4.39, p < 0.001$). The noncompliant observations mechanically drive the imbalance.

Panel 5c confirms that this does not threaten identification. Excluding observations within ± 0.0002, ± 0.0004, ± 0.0006, and ± 0.0008 of the cutoff yields stable, statistically significant estimates throughout. Strategic sorting would concentrate bias near the threshold and produce shrinking estimates as observations close to the cutoff are removed. We do not observe this.



Notes: Local polynomial density estimation for issue supporters and opponents in opposing electoral races based on Cattaneo, Jansson, et al. (2020).

Figure 3: RD validity—Density of referendum-supporter vote margin in the RD sample

Second, we examine whether observable covariates differ at the cutoff. We estimate sharp RD specifications using these covariates as outcomes, with optimal bandwidth selection for inference as proposed by Cattaneo, Idrobo, et al. (2020). The results in Figure 4 show that observed covariates are balanced at the cutoff at the 99 percent confidence level. However, five covariates—Yes-voting recommendations by the Parliament and the Federal Council, the number of supportive and neutral advertisements, and the infrastructure topics—differ at the cutoff at the 95 percent level (Table B3). We discuss each in turn.

The imbalances in Parliament and Federal Council yes-vote recommendations deserve particular attention, as these are important cues on which voters rely when deciding on referenda. Note that the coefficients on both variables are *negative*. Close supporter victories are systematically more likely on proposals where Parliament and the Federal Council recommended voting *no*. This means that, if anything, the imbalance works *against* our finding. The imbalance, therefore, biases our estimate downward rather than upward and cannot explain the positive effect we document. To confirm this formally, Table B4 reports the baseline RD estimate controlling directly for indicators equal to one if the Parliament or the Federal Council recommends voting yes as covariates. The coefficient on $supporter\ in\ parliament$ is larger than our baseline estimate of 0.087, consistent with the conservative direction of the imbalance.

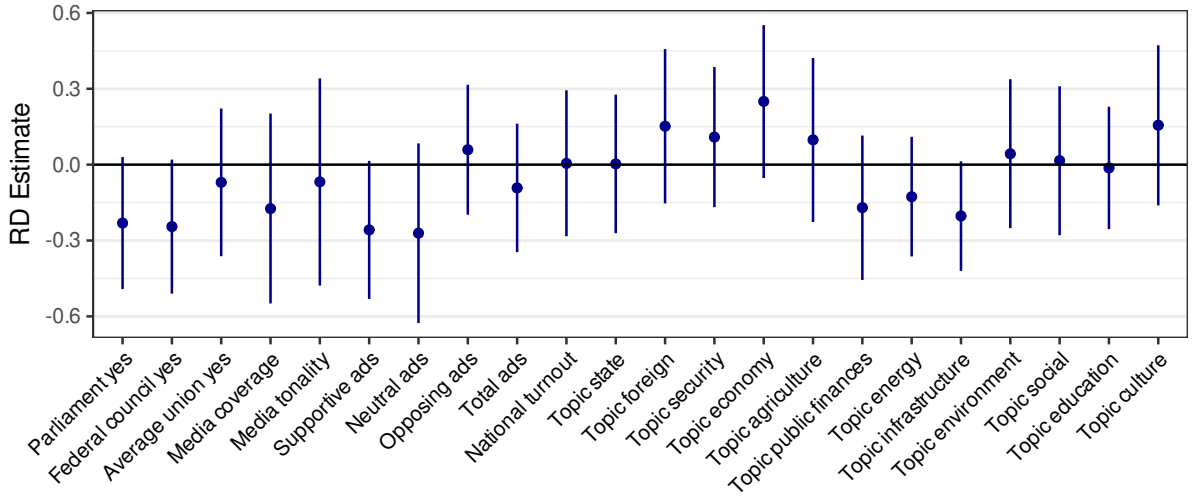


Figure 4: RD validity—Covariate balance test

Notes: The figure shows robust and bias-corrected ITT RD estimates and 99% confidence intervals for various covariates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and coverage error rate optimal bandwidth selection, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Table B1 provides descriptions of the covariates. Table B3 in the Appendix provides formal results.

Furthermore, specifications with referendum fixed effects, which absorb all referendum-level variation, yield similar estimates (see Table B9 in the appendix).

The imbalances on the number of supportive and neutral advertisements per referendum are likely mechanical. Referenda where a supporter closely wins may feature slightly more pro-yes campaign activity. The infrastructure topic indicator imbalance is substantively negligible, given that only 17 referenda fall in this topic area.

Finally, because constituents' policy preferences potentially depend on the positions of all legislators in a canton, we assess whether a supporter's victory in an opposing race increases the share of issue supporters among the legislators. Table B5 in the appendix shows that issue supporter victories in close opposing races increase the share of issue supporters among the legislators of a canton.

5 Results

5.1 Baseline results

This section presents fuzzy RD results for the effect of having an issue supporter as a representative on the electorate's support for the same policy proposal. We use local linear regression with robust, bias-corrected estimates and optimal bandwidth selection following Calonico,

Table 1: Electorate's referendum support and issue supporter wins in marginal opposing races

Dependent variable	Yes share voters			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.087***	0.101***	0.112***	0.127***
	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.011)	(0.013)
First stage estimates	0.782***	0.770***	0.779***	0.762***
	(0.012)	(0.016)	(0.013)	(0.017)
N	1366	1366	1366	1366
$N_{effective}$	531;217	443;240	499;207	414;221
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.037	0.024;0.062	0.030	0.019;0.051
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	47.360	47.494	47.110	47.235

Notes: The table reports robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and canton-level clustered standard errors in parentheses, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Observations are weighted by the inverse number of representatives per canton. The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter entering parliament instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of voters who turned out. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Cattaneo, and Farrell (2019) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014). As cantons vary in their number of representatives (district magnitude), we weight observations by the inverse of district magnitude to account for the stronger influence that legislators from smaller cantons may exert on voter preferences.

We use the Mean Square Error (MSE) optimal bandwidth proposed by Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell (2019) in our main specification (1) in Table 1. The estimated bandwidth is 0.037, limiting the analysis to candidates who either needed votes from an additional 3.7 percent of voters to be elected or would not have been elected had they not received votes from 3.7 percent of the voters. Using the MSE-optimal bandwidth, the fuzzy RD coefficient of 0.087 implies that, among the opposing races, electing the issue supporter increases the canton yes-share in the subsequent referendum by 8.7 percentage points. Relative to the sample mean of 47.36 percent, this corresponds to an increase of about 18 percent and would raise support to roughly 56.1 percent. Note, however, that the estimate is local. It is identified from the 748 canton-referendum observations that fall within the optimal bandwidth, drawn from the 1,366 opposing races, rather than from the full set of 6,838 canton-referendum outcomes. The coefficient should therefore be interpreted as the effect of marginal changes in parliamentary representation in close races, not as an average effect across all cantons and referenda.

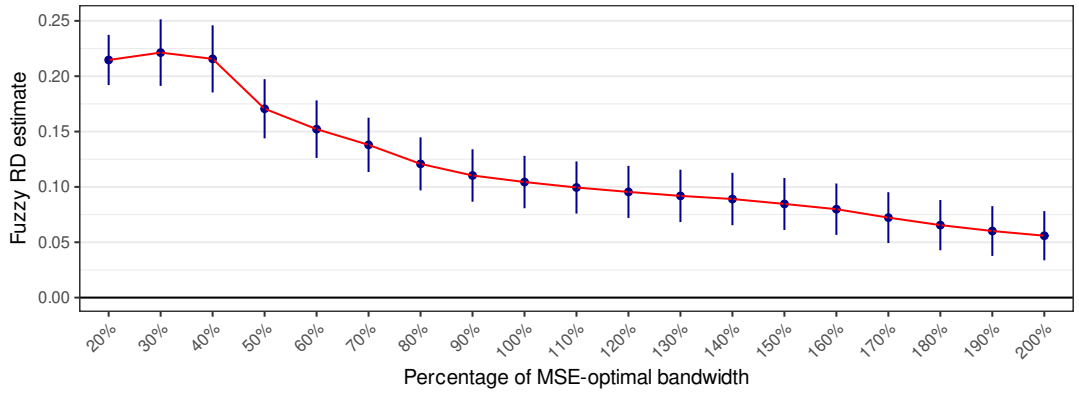
As the number of observations differs on either side of the cutoff, Specification (2) uses two different MSE-optimal bandwidths for each side. The estimated coefficient remains sta-

tistically significant, though slightly smaller. To assess interference, Specification (3) uses one common CER-optimal bandwidth, and Specification (4) uses two different CER-optimal bandwidths. Both specifications confirm that electing a supportive candidate in an opposing race has a positive and significant effect on voter policy support.

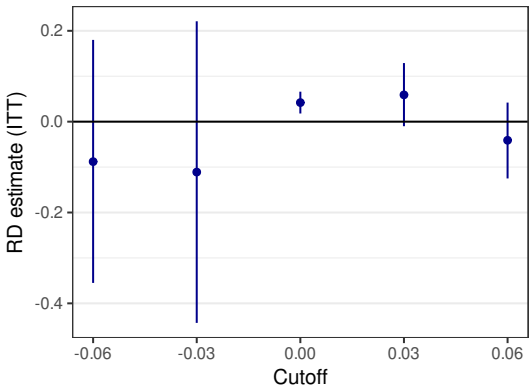
5.2 Robustness and validity

We provide further evidence for the validity of our baseline results in Figure 5. Panel 5a shows that our results are robust across different bandwidths. Using various percentages of the MSE-optimal bandwidth yields statistically significant positive coefficients. Figure 5a also shows that the estimated LATE declines monotonically as the bandwidth widens, from approximately 21 percentage points at 20% of the MSE-optimal bandwidth to 5.6 percentage points at 200%. Three interpretations are worth considering. First, the decline may reflect genuine treatment effect heterogeneity. Legislators elected by close margins have stronger incentives to engage publicly and reach out to constituents. Greater public presence makes their issue positions more salient, which would explain larger effects at very narrow bandwidths. Second, the decline may be partly mechanical. Wider bandwidths include races farther from the cutoff, where electoral outcomes are more likely determined by factors other than the marginal candidate's issue positions—such as incumbency or party resources—and the estimated LATE shrinks toward zero. Third, sorting near the cutoff would concentrate at narrow bandwidths and inflate estimates there. We view this as unlikely given the stability of the donut-hole results in Panel 5c. The estimate at 200% of the optimal bandwidth (5.6 pp) remains statistically significant and is arguably more externally valid, averaging over a wider range of district and referendum types. We report 8.7 pp as the headline result because it corresponds to the bandwidth that minimizes mean squared error near the cutoff.

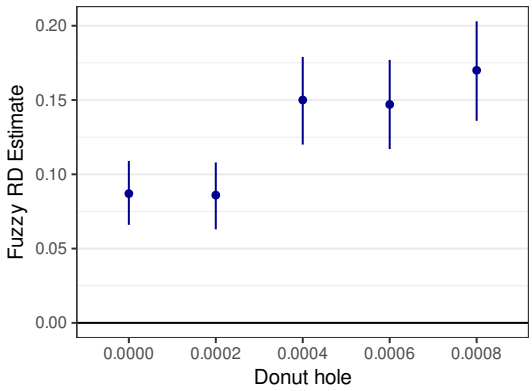
Next, we re-estimate the RD at a series of placebo cutoffs on either side of the true threshold. We restrict the sample to observations on the side of the true cutoff (0) where the placebo cutoff is located and re-center the running variable at each placebo value. We use one placebo cutoff inside (± 0.03) and one outside (± 0.06) the MSE-optimal bandwidth (0.037) on both sides of the true cutoff. Estimating the ITT at artificially chosen cutoffs in Panel 5b shows that we find an effect only at the true cutoff (0). Panel 5c presents results from "donut-hole" specifications, which assess how sensitive our results are to observations very close to the cutoff by excluding them. Estimations excluding observations within ± 0.0002, ± 0.0004, ± 0.0006, and



(a) Alternative bandwidths



(b) True and artificial cutoffs



(c) Donut-Hole approach

Figure 5: RD validity—Bandwidth choice, placebo cutoffs, and donut-hole exclusions

Notes: Each panel shows robust and bias-corrected RD estimates and 95% confidence intervals using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and MSE-optimal bandwidth selection, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Panel (a) uses 20%-200% of the MSE-optimal bandwidth. Panel (b) uses the MSE-optimal bandwidth and the true and artificial cutoff values. Panel (c) excludes certain observations near the cutoff. All panels use the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r as the dependent variable and an issue supporter being in parliament instead of an issue opponent as the treatment. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of voters who turned out. Tables B6, B7, and B8 in the Appendix provide formal results.

± 0.0008 all yield statistically significant treatment coefficients. Moreover, our results remain robust when using covariate adjustment for referendum fixed effects, canton fixed effects, or both (see Table B9 in the appendix). Using epanechnikov or uniform kernel functions also does not alter our results (see Table B10 in the appendix). Finally, we obtain similar results when using local polynomial or local cubic specifications (see Table B11 in the Appendix).

We use the vote margin divided by the number of votes as a running variable. To test whether the estimated effects are sensitive to how electoral closeness is measured, we further estimate our model using (1) the vote margin divided by the number of seats a canton has in the National Council and (2) the vote margin divided by the number of eligible voters in the canton. Estimations using both measures confirm our previous results, as Tables B12 and

B13 in the appendix show. In addition, Table B14 in the appendix shows that we obtain similar results without weighting observations.

Our outcome variable is the share of yes votes on the cantonal level. This variable holds turnout constant by construction. A positive effect could therefore reflect either a change in voting preferences or higher turnout among supporters when their legislator wins. We address this concern directly in Figure 4. When we use turnout as the outcome, the RD estimate is essentially zero ($p = 0.962$), which indicates that electing a supporter does not affect participation. We also re-estimate the baseline model using the log of yes votes per eligible voter as the outcome. Unlike the share of yes votes, this measure does not net out turnout mechanically. The estimated effect remains positive and statistically significant. Table B15 in the appendix shows the formal results. Taken together, these results indicate that the baseline effect reflects a shift in voting preferences rather than differential mobilization.

Our fuzzy RD design identifies effects for compliers, that is, candidates who do not make it into parliament with negative vote margins and candidates in parliament with positive vote margins. In addition, we estimate the intention-to-treat (ITT) effects as a robustness check (Kaliski et al., 2025). The ITT results in Table B16 in the appendix confirm our main findings, with smaller point estimates.

In our main analysis, we measure the positions of elected and non-elected candidates differently. We use roll-call votes in parliament to measure the positions of elected candidates and the party line to measure the positions of non-elected candidates. To avoid potential bias arising from different measurement methods, we also construct the RD sample using national and cantonal party lines for both elected and non-elected candidates, thereby estimating the LATE of a seat gain from supporting versus opposing parties. The results presented in Tables B17 and B18 in the appendix confirm our main findings. As an additional test of the position approximation for non-elected candidates, we restrict the sample to votes with high party cohesion, excluding referenda where many legislators deviated from the party line (above the 90th percentile, corresponding to more than 30 out of 200 legislators). In these votes, party lines provide a particularly accurate issue position proxy. Re-estimating the main specification on this restricted sample yields very similar results (see Table B19 in the Appendix).

As a further robustness check, we complement the main analysis with an alternative RD sample using individual-level voting data from the VOX post-referendum surveys. In the main RD, we match the vote margins of supportive legislators in opposing races to the referendum

result at the cantonal level. However, to construct this sample, we match them to the self-reported votes of VOX survey respondents in the corresponding canton and referendum. This yields multiple individual voting decisions for each opposing race. While the VOX surveys are not representative at the cantonal level, they still provide informative variation for this exercise. In particular, they allow us to examine whether the relationship identified in the aggregate data also appears in individual reported voting behavior. We then estimate the same specifications as we did in the main RD sample. As we use the same running variable values as in the main design, we apply the same bandwidth as in the baseline RD for this exercise.

The results in Table B20 in the appendix confirm our previous results. Across specifications, the estimated effect is slightly larger in magnitude than in the main analysis and remains statistically significant. These results are also robust to using various percentages of the original bandwidth, as Table B21 in the appendix shows.

Finally, Table A1 in the Appendix reports IV[8] estimates instrumenting the total share of issue supporters among a district's legislators with the share of *closely elected* supporters (Baskaran and Hessami, 2023; Clots-Figueras, 2011). The IV coefficients are consistent with the baseline RD estimates. In the IV strategy, a closely elected supporter does not necessarily replace an issue opponent, but rather another supporter. We treat the IV results as a secondary robustness check, not an independent identification strategy. Section A in the Appendix provides more details on the design and results.

Our results provide evidence that legislators' issue positions causally affect citizens' decisions in direct democratic votes. The 8.7 percentage point increase in the share of yes votes when an issue supporter, instead of an issue opponent, is in parliament represents a substantial influence on the outcomes of popular votes. As voters decide on the same policy proposal in referenda that legislators previously decided on in parliament, our results are consistent with representative influence extending beyond agenda-setting to affect citizen preferences on specific policies. Having established this causal relationship, we next explore the mechanisms through which elected representatives may influence direct democratic decisions.

[8] For examples of IV strategies applied to similar research questions, see (Essig et al., 2021; Freier and Odendahl, 2015; Gabel and Scheve, 2007); for overviews, see (Mogstad and Torgovitsky, 2018; Sovey and Green, 2011).

6 Mechanisms

We established *that* legislators' issue positions causally influence voters' decisions on identical issues in direct democratic votes. In this section, we examine *when* such influence is most likely to arise. The goal is to provide evidence of the mechanisms underlying our baseline effects. If voters use legislators' positions as informational cues when deciding on referenda, their influence should be stronger when other policy information is scarce and when legislators themselves are more prominent or politically meaningful. To test these predictions, we re-estimate the baseline fuzzy RD design across a series of prespecified subsamples. For continuous moderators, we split the sample at the median; for categorical moderators, we estimate effects separately by category. Because these subgroup analyses reduce sample size and involve multiple comparisons, the results should be interpreted as suggestive evidence on mechanisms rather than as independent causal estimates.

Motivated by the argument that "uncertainty gives rise to persuasion" (Downs, 1957), we first examine whether legislators' influence is stronger in low-information environments. Prior research shows that voters rely more heavily on heuristics, such as legislators' positions, when information is scarce, costly, or difficult to process (Cohen, 2003; Dhami et al., 2019; Grewenig et al., 2020). We therefore use several proxies for informational scarcity. In particular, we consider referenda that receive limited media coverage, as well as referenda that survey respondents rate as complex or unimportant in post-referendum surveys. We aggregate these responses to the referendum level by calculating the average reported complexity (binary measure) and importance (0–10 scale) for each vote and then split referenda at the median of these measures.

Second, we examine whether legislators' influence is stronger when their positions are more salient (Chan et al., 2019; Murphy and Shleifer, 2004). Salience may increase when campaigns are intense or when media coverage favors the legislator's position.[9] We further test whether the effects are stronger in constituencies where the legislator's party has greater electoral support, because more voters are likely to share the legislator's partisan identity and therefore treat the legislator as a credible cue. For completeness, we also examine heterogeneity across legislators' party wing affiliation.

[9] As campaign funding disclosure became mandatory only in 2024, we follow Sciarini and Tresch (2011) and Goldberg et al. (2019) and use the share of advertisements promoting a yes vote as a proxy for supporter campaign intensity.

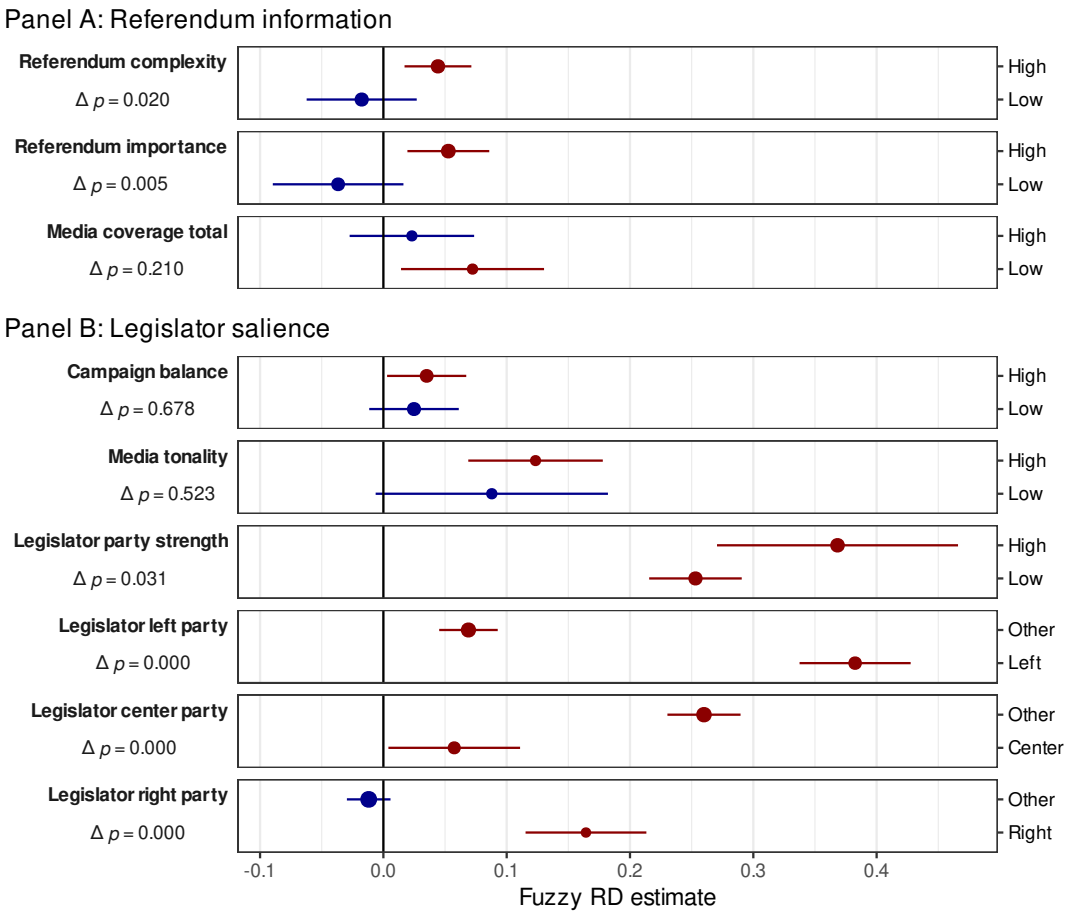


Figure 6: Electorate's referendum support and issue supporter wins in opposing races—Mechanisms

Notes: The figure shows bias-corrected RD estimates with 95% confidence intervals from local linear regressions estimated separately within each subsample, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Continuous moderators are split at the median; categorical moderators are shown by category. Dot size is proportional to the number of observations. Red (blue) coefficients are (not) statistically significantly different from zero at the 5% level. The Δp label reports the p-value from a z-test of the difference between subgroup estimates, using bias-corrected estimates and robust standard errors. Table B22 in the Appendix reports the full numerical results.

Figure 6 presents the results. In each panel, dot size scales with the number of observations. Red (blue) coefficients are (not) statistically significant at the 5% level. The Δp label reports the p-value of the difference between the two subgroup estimates.

Panel A of Figure 6 is consistent with the low-information mechanism. The estimated effect is positive and statistically significant for complex referenda and statistically indistinguishable from zero for less complex proposals. The difference between the effects in these two groups is formally significant. The same holds for perceived importance. The effect is positive for important referenda and near zero for less important ones, with the point estimates being statistically significantly different from each other. For media coverage, the direction is similar. We find a positive effect for issues receiving limited coverage and an insignificant effect for is-

sues with extensive coverage, although the effects are not formally different. Complexity and importance thus provide formal support for the informational mechanism; the media coverage finding is consistent with it but remains suggestive.

Panel B provides evidence for a second mechanism related to the salience of legislator cues. For campaign balance, the effect is positive when supportive campaigns dominate and not significantly different from zero when opposing campaigns prevail, but the subgroup difference is not statistically significant. The media tonality comparison points in the same direction, but the subgroup estimates are not statistically significantly different. By contrast, the subgroup differences for party strength and party wing are statistically significant. The effect is substantially larger in constituencies where the legislator's party enjoys stronger electoral support, consistent with cues from more politically relevant legislators carrying greater weight. The effects also differ across party wings. The estimated effect is largest for legislators from left-wing parties, followed by right-wing and centrist legislators.

Taken together, the heterogeneity analyses point to two complementary mechanisms. First, legislators matter most when referendum decisions are informationally demanding. Second, the influence of legislators increases with the political salience and relevance of their cues. Together, these findings suggest that legislators shape voter decisions most strongly in environments where their signals are politically visible and alternative information sources are scarce.

7 Conclusion

This paper studies whether elected representatives shape policy even when citizens have the final say in direct democratic votes. We use Switzerland's system of direct and representative democracy, which allows us to compare legislators' decisions in parliament with their electorate's support on identical policy proposals in referenda. We observe the outcomes of 263 referenda held between 1996 and 2026 across Switzerland's 26 cantons and match them to the positions and electoral closeness of all lower house candidates from the same canton who ran in the election held before that referendum. To estimate causal effects, we exploit close elections between candidates with opposing positions on referendum proposals as a source of exogenous variation in legislators' issue positions in a regression discontinuity design. When the policy-supporting candidate closely wins rather than closely loses such a race, the com-

position of parliamentary representation shifts for reasons that are plausibly unrelated to the electorate's subsequent referendum preferences.

We find that an additional issue supporter among a canton's representatives increases the constituency's share of yes votes in the subsequent referendum by 8.7 percentage points. The finding holds across alternative bandwidths, fixed effects, kernels, polynomials, and an instrumental variable approach. The heterogeneity analyses point to two mechanisms. First, legislators matter most when referendum information is scarce, costly, or difficult to process. The effects are larger for complex and important issues and for issues with limited media coverage. Second, the influence of legislators is stronger when their positions are more salient or politically meaningful, such as when supportive campaigns are strong or when the legislator's party enjoys greater electoral support in the constituency. These findings are consistent with voters using legislators' issue positions as informational cues when evaluating policy proposals in direct democratic votes. The result implies that even in institutions designed to let citizens overrule politicians, the composition of elected representation can causally shift binding policy outcomes.

Our findings carry normative implications for democratic institutions. Representative democracy rests on a principal-agent relationship in which voters delegate power to legislators (Bianco, 1994; Persson and Tabellini, 2000). Standard principal-agent models predict that information asymmetries can generate moral hazard. Legislators with private information may pursue their own interests over those of constituents (Grossman and Helpman, 2001). Our results point to a complementary channel. Even when voters retain formal authority through direct democratic instruments, information asymmetry lets legislators shape how that authority is exercised.

What remains unclear is how this affects the quality of political decisions. Where legislators are accountable and disciplined by electoral incentives, their influence on the outcomes of direct democratic votes may improve their quality. Legislators with superior policy knowledge provide signals that reduce the cost of information acquisition (Downs, 1957). Where interests diverge, direct democracy may not fully override politicians' policy agendas. Future work should examine whether legislative influence is stronger when the interests of constituents and legislators diverge. This may be the case for policies with concentrated benefits and diffuse costs, or for referendum decisions on parliamentary proposals rather than popular initiatives.

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Appendix for

Decision-Makers as Decision-Shapers: Evidence on the Influence of Representatives on Direct Democratic Votes[1]

Yves Kläy, Reiner Eichenberger, Marco Portmann, David Stadelmann

Appendix A: Instrumental variable approach

We address endogeneity between legislators' decisions and voters' preferences using an instrumental variables (IV) approach.[10] As in our RD design approach, our IV strategy leverages the quasi-random variation in the issue positions of the legislators of a canton arising from close electoral races.

The outcome variable is again the share of yes votes of the voters from canton c on referendum r ($yes\ share\ voters_{cr}$). The endogenous explanatory variable of interest is the share of issue supporters among a canton's legislators ($yes\ share\ legislators_{cr}$). We calculate this as the number of yes-voting legislators of canton c divided by the canton's total number of legislators. We follow Clots-Figueras (2011) and Baskaran and Hessami (2023) and instrument the share of issue supporters among a canton's legislators by the share of *closely elected* issue supporters among a canton's legislators. This instrument captures the extent to which randomness in the outcome of close elections increases or decreases the share of a canton's issue supporters in parliament.

We calculate the share of closely elected legislators supporting a referendum as follows: we construct an indicator variable C_{icrt} for closely elected candidates. The indicator is equal to 1 if the candidate's relative vote margin is within a certain bandwidth. We vary the bandwidth to validate our results. We sum up the number of closely elected issue supporters for each referendum and canton. To account for the differential number of legislators per canton, we divide this number by district size (i.e., the number of legislators of the canton).

In formal terms:

$$Z_{cr} = \left(\sum_{i}^{N_{cr}} Close_{icr} Elected_{icr} Support_{icr} \right) / \sum_{i}^{N_{cr}} Elected_{icr} \tag{2}$$

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[10]For examples of IV strategies applied to similar research questions, see (Essig et al., 2021; Freier and Odendahl, 2015; Gabel and Scheve, 2007); for overviews, see (Mogstad and Torgovitsky, 2018; Sovey and Green, 2011).

Table A1: Instrumental variable estimates—Effect of legislators' support on voter support

Dependent variable	Yes share voters		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Panel A: Second stage			
Yes share legislators	0.137***	0.155***	0.157***
	(0.029)	(0.027)	(0.037)
Panel B: First stage			
Instrument Z	0.404***	0.557***	0.392***
	(0.040)	(0.077)	(0.038)
Panel C: Reduced form			
Instrument Z	0.055***	0.086***	0.061***
	(0.015)	(0.022)	(0.016)
Close election definition	Margin $< h_{\text{MSE}}$	Margin $< 2 * h_{\text{MSE}}$	Margin $< \frac{1}{2} h_{\text{MSE}}$
Canton fixed effects	✓	✓	✓
Referendum fixed effects	✓	✓	✓
First-stage F-stat.	1,019.4	2,691.1	596.371
Observations	5,432	5,422	5,469
R^2	0.8662	0.8735	0.8639
Within R^2	0.0316	0.0845	0.0259

Notes: The table reports two-stage least squares (2SLS) estimates of the effect of the share of legislators supporting a referendum on voter preferences. The endogenous explanatory variable is the share of legislators in canton c who voted yes on the policy proposal. The instrument is the share of closely elected legislators from canton c who supported the proposal. Specifications (1) to (3) define candidates within one, two, and half the MSE-optimal vote margin bandwidth (h_{MSE}) as closely elected. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.

where subscripts i denote candidates, c cantons and r referenda. $Close_{icr}$ is an indicator equal to one if a candidate was part of a close election. $Elected_{icr}$ is an indicator equal to one for elected candidates. $Support_{icr}$ is an indicator equal to one for candidates supporting referendum r. N_{cr} is the canton's number of legislators during the legislative period in which the parliamentary vote with subsequent referendum was held.

We use a standard 2SLS approach where the first stage regression estimates the effect of the share of closely elected issue supporters on the share of a canton's issue supporters:

$$yes\ share\ legislators_{cr} = \pi_0 + \pi_1 close\ supporter\ share_{cr} + \nu_{cr} \tag{3}$$

The second-stage regression uses the predicted values from the first stage to estimate the effect of the share of a canton's issue supporters on voter preferences:

$$yes\ share\ voters_{cr} = \alpha + \beta_1 \widehat{yes\ share\ legislators}_{cr} + \epsilon_{cr} \tag{4}$$

Appendix B: Additional tables

Table B1: Variable Descriptions

Variable	Description	Source
Yes share voters$_{cr}$	Share of yes votes (in percent) cast by voters in canton c on referendum r.	Swissvotes, 2026
Vote margin$_{ir}$	Electoral margin by which politician i was elected before referendum r based on Luechinger et al., 2024.	FSO
In parliament$_{ir}$	Indicator equal to 1 if politician i was a member of the National council when referendum r was held, 0 otherwise.	Parliamentary Services, 2025b
Elected$_{ir}$	Indicator equal to 1 if politician i had a positive vote margin when referendum r was held, 0 otherwise.	FSO
Decision$_{ir}$	Indicator equal to 1 (0) if politician i voted yes (no) on the policy proposal behind referendum r.	Parliamentary Services, 2025b
Party position$_{ir}$	Indicator equal to 1 (0) if politician i's party recommended voting yes (no) on referendum r.	Swissvotes, 2026
District magnitude$_{ir}$	Number of seats of politician i's canton when referendum r was held.	Swissvotes, 2026
Parliament date$_r$	Date on which the policy proposal behind referendum r was held.	Parliamentary Services, 2025b
Referendum date$_r$	Date on which referendum r was held.	Swissvotes, 2026
Referendum type$_r$	Factor variable for the type of referendum r (mandatory, optional, or initiative).	Swissvotes, 2026
Parliament yes$_r$	Indicator equal to 1 if a majority of the National Council voted yes on the policy behind referendum r.	Swissvotes, 2026
Federal council yes$_r$	Indicator equal to 1 if the Federal Council recommended voting yes on referendum r, 0 otherwise.	Swissvotes, 2026
National turnout$_r$	National voter turnout (in percent) in referendum r.	Swissvotes, 2026
Cantonal turnout$_{cr}$	Voter turnout (in percent) in canton c in referendum r.	Swissvotes, 2026
Votes same day$_r$	Number of referenda held on the same day as referendum r.	Swissvotes, 2026
Complexity$_r$	Average complexity (1–2) of referendum r as reported in post-referendum surveys (VOX). Respondents answer: "Was it rather easy (indicator = 1) or rather difficult (indicator = 2) for you to understand what [referendum X] was about?"	gfs.bern
Importance$_r$	Average importance (0–10) of referendum r as reported in post-referendum surveys (VOX). Respondents answer: "On a scale from 0 (not at all important) to 10 (very important), how important was [referendum X] for you personally?"	gfs.bern
Average union yes$_r$	Average voting recommendation for referendum r by the six largest interest groups (Economiesuisse, Schweizerischer Gewerbeverband, Schweizer Bauernverband, Schweizerischer Gewerkschaftsbund, Travail.Suisse, Schweizerischer Arbeitgeberverband)	Swissvotes, 2026
Media coverage$_r$	Number of articles in major print and online outlets in the 12 weeks before referendum r, excluding the final week.	Swissvotes, 2026
Media tonality$_r$	Continuous measure of media tone (-100 = all negative coverage, +100 = all positive) in major outlets during weeks 2–12 before referendum r, excluding the final week.	Swissvotes, 2026
Supportive ads$_r$	Number of advertisements promoting a yes vote on referendum r that appeared in around 50 print media outlets.	Swissvotes, 2026
Neutral ads$_r$	Number of neutral advertisements on referendum r.	Swissvotes, 2026
Opposing ads$_r$	Number of advertisements promoting a no vote on referendum r.	Swissvotes, 2026
Total ads$_r$	Number of advertisements on referendum r (supportive, neutral, opposing).	Swissvotes, 2026
Supportive ads share$_r$	Percentage of supportive advertisements, excluding neutral advertisements.	Swissvotes, 2026
Topic area$_r$	Factor variable for the policy area of referendum r (State organisation; Foreign policy; Security; Economy; Agriculture; Public finance; Energy; Transport and infrastructure; Environment and living; Social; Education and research; Culture).	Swissvotes, 2026

Table B2: RD sample summary statistics by canton and election outcome

	not in parliament						in parliament					
	observations		vote margin				observations		vote margin			
	total	distinct	mean	sd	min	max	total	distinct	mean	sd	min	max
AG	38	11	-0.012	0.011	-0.031	0.000	46	9	-0.041	0.029	-0.078	0.004
AI	16	3	-0.498	0.147	-0.561	-0.064	12	2	0.429	0.220	0.064	0.561
AR	55	7	-0.081	0.078	-0.208	-0.002	31	5	0.074	0.083	0.002	0.204
BE	9	5	-0.003	0.001	-0.005	-0.001	26	9	-0.022	0.015	-0.043	0.001
BL	21	5	-0.034	0.021	-0.059	-0.001	33	7	-0.118	0.073	-0.183	0.046
BS	23	6	-0.032	0.039	-0.100	-0.001	21	7	-0.066	0.072	-0.151	0.033
FR	13	5	-0.011	0.010	-0.043	0.000	17	5	0.005	0.012	-0.003	0.043
GE	14	6	-0.005	0.005	-0.013	0.002	25	9	-0.014	0.034	-0.079	0.015
GL	31	5	-0.226	0.119	-0.342	-0.063	26	3	0.226	0.120	0.063	0.342
GR	12	3	-0.034	0.016	-0.043	-0.006	9	5	0.015	0.010	0.002	0.026
JU	20	8	-0.049	0.061	-0.156	-0.003	22	6	0.041	0.058	0.001	0.156
LU	14	6	-0.010	0.004	-0.013	-0.001	31	9	-0.056	0.036	-0.133	0.011
NE	47	8	-0.027	0.008	-0.034	-0.006	36	8	-0.063	0.099	-0.283	0.034
NW	28	5	-0.405	0.251	-0.705	-0.054	36	3	0.441	0.272	0.054	0.705
OW	21	5	-0.186	0.306	-0.864	-0.004	30	5	0.317	0.307	0.004	0.864
SG	17	5	-0.025	0.012	-0.041	-0.009	22	7	-0.088	0.085	-0.178	0.036
SH	31	6	-0.114	0.057	-0.165	-0.004	54	3	0.027	0.084	-0.114	0.167
SO	16	4	-0.015	0.017	-0.035	0.000	36	5	-0.010	0.024	-0.073	0.022
SZ	33	7	-0.057	0.029	-0.080	-0.002	31	6	0.041	0.066	-0.138	0.109
TG	11	6	-0.034	0.023	-0.058	-0.012	11	4	-0.031	0.072	-0.108	0.071
TI	22	7	-0.016	0.009	-0.031	0.000	19	7	-0.051	0.045	-0.084	0.029
UR	29	5	-0.296	0.192	-0.492	-0.028	22	3	0.157	0.180	0.028	0.492
VD	31	6	-0.002	0.003	-0.013	0.000	47	8	-0.042	0.055	-0.184	-0.003
VS	26	7	-0.017	0.008	-0.029	-0.002	20	9	-0.029	0.078	-0.192	0.031
ZG	17	6	-0.048	0.019	-0.057	-0.002	15	5	0.058	0.049	0.002	0.113
ZH	35	13	-0.003	0.002	-0.009	0.000	58	10	-0.010	0.010	-0.049	0.001
Total	630	160	-0.090	0.157	-0.864	0.002	736	159	0.038	0.179	-0.283	0.864

Notes: The table presents summary statistics for the number of total and distinct MP observations and relative vote margins of issue supporters in close opposing electoral races in the RD sample. MPs in parliament may have negative vote margins because of resignations of initially elected candidates.

Table B3: RD validity—Formal covariate balance test

Variable	RD est.	Robust p-val	BW	$N_{effective}$	CI lower	CI upper
Parliament yes	-0.231	0.022	0.054	585;233	-0.492	0.030
Federal council yes	-0.245	0.017	0.054	582;228	-0.510	0.020
Average union yes	-0.070	0.535	0.061	600;224	-0.362	0.222
Media coverage	-0.174	0.233	0.084	345;109	-0.549	0.202
Media tonality	-0.068	0.667	0.071	305;109	-0.478	0.341
Supportive ads	-0.258	0.015	0.059	575;214	-0.531	0.015
Neutral ads	-0.271	0.049	0.109	337;117	-0.626	0.084
Opposing ads	0.059	0.552	0.059	588;214	-0.198	0.316
Total ads	-0.092	0.352	0.067	632;231	-0.346	0.162
National turnout	0.005	0.962	0.064	670;250	-0.283	0.294
Topic state	0.003	0.979	0.073	693;252	-0.271	0.277
Topic foreign	0.152	0.199	0.072	693;252	-0.153	0.457
Topic security	0.109	0.311	0.081	726;252	-0.168	0.386
Topic economy	0.250	0.033	0.061	653;240	-0.053	0.552
Topic agriculture	0.098	0.439	0.068	675;250	-0.227	0.422
Topic public finances	-0.170	0.125	0.058	618;233	-0.456	0.115
Topic energy	-0.127	0.168	0.078	697;252	-0.363	0.110
Topic infrastructure	-0.203	0.016	0.057	588;233	-0.420	0.013
Topic environment	0.043	0.705	0.076	697;252	-0.251	0.338
Topic social	0.016	0.890	0.066	670;250	-0.279	0.310
Topic education	-0.013	0.890	0.085	741;252	-0.255	0.229
Topic culture	0.156	0.205	0.090	742;252	-0.161	0.472

Notes: The table reports robust and bias-corrected sharp RD estimates for various covariates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and coverage error rate optimal bandwidth selection, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Table B1 provides descriptions of the covariates.

Table B4: Electorate's referendum support and issue supporter wins in marginal opposing races—Parliament and Federal Council voting recommendation controls

Dependent variable	Yes share voters			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.172***	0.157***	0.189***	0.163***
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.012)	(0.010)
First stage estimates	0.751***	0.747***	0.764***	0.746***
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.014)	(0.012)
N	1361	1361	1361	1361
$N_{effective}$	503;205	530;225	454;179	498;215
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.031	0.037;0.053	0.026	0.031;0.043
Recommendation controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	47.146	47.408	47.116	47.121

Notes: The table reports robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and canton-level clustered standard errors in parentheses, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Observations are weighted by the inverse number of representatives per canton. The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter entering parliament instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of voters who turned out. Models include controls for Parliament and Federal Council referendum yes vote recommendations. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table B5: Effect of supporter wins in opposing races on legislator supporter share

Dependent variable	Yes share legislators			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.581***	0.663***	0.590***	0.655***
	(0.031)	(0.035)	(0.031)	(0.035)
First stage estimates	0.840***	0.775***	0.827***	0.768***
	(0.010)	(0.015)	(0.010)	(0.016)
N	1366	1366	1366	1366
$N_{effective}$	742;252	455;252	697;252	426;252
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.095	0.026;0.095	0.078	0.021;0.078
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	46.745	47.681	46.798	47.726

Notes: Bias-corrected and robust point estimates and clustered standard errors at the canton level are shown in parentheses that relate the issue position of the winner of an opposing race to the share of yes votes among the legislators of canton c on the policy proposal with subsequent referendum r. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table B6: RD validity—Alternative bandwidths

MSE-optimal BW %	RD est.	Robust p-val	BW	$N_{effective}$	CI lower	CI upper
20	0.215	0.000	0.007	254;121	0.192	0.237
30	0.221	0.000	0.011	300;129	0.191	0.251
40	0.216	0.000	0.015	348;133	0.185	0.246
50	0.171	0.000	0.018	404;161	0.144	0.197
60	0.152	0.000	0.022	428;173	0.126	0.178
70	0.138	0.000	0.026	455;181	0.113	0.163
80	0.121	0.000	0.030	499;207	0.097	0.145
90	0.110	0.000	0.033	504;208	0.087	0.134
100	0.104	0.000	0.037	531;217	0.081	0.128
110	0.099	0.000	0.041	540;217	0.076	0.123
120	0.095	0.000	0.044	556;218	0.072	0.119
130	0.092	0.000	0.048	565;221	0.068	0.116
140	0.089	0.000	0.052	579;228	0.065	0.113
150	0.085	0.000	0.055	585;233	0.061	0.108
160	0.080	0.000	0.059	631;233	0.057	0.103
170	0.072	0.000	0.063	669;247	0.049	0.095
180	0.065	0.000	0.067	675;250	0.043	0.088
190	0.060	0.000	0.070	688;250	0.038	0.083
200	0.056	0.000	0.074	697;252	0.034	0.078

Notes: Formal results for Figure 5a. The table reports robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel, varying bandwidths, and canton-level clustered standard errors, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Observations are weighted by the inverse number of representatives per canton. The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter entering parliament instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of voters who turned out.

Table B7: RD validity—True and artificial cutoffs

Alternative cutoff	RD est.	Robust p-val	BW	$N_{effective}$	CI lower	CI upper
-0.06	-0.088	0.398	0.013	13;52	-0.355	0.180
-0.03	-0.111	0.389	0.011	32;65	-0.443	0.221
0	0.042	0.000	0.059	618;233	0.018	0.066
0.03	0.059	0.028	0.134	466;92	-0.010	0.129
0.06	-0.041	0.203	0.062	263;50	-0.125	0.042

Notes: Formal results for Figure 5b. The table reports robust and bias-corrected ITT RD estimates and 95% confidence intervals for various artificial cutoffs using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and MSE-optimal bandwidth selection, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter being elected instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of voters who turned out. The true cutoff (0) is included for comparison with artificial cutoffs.

Table B8: RD validity—Donut-Hole

Donut-Hole radius	RD est.	Robust p-val	BW	N	$N_{effective}$	CI lower	CI upper
0	0.087	0.000	0.037	975;391	531;217	0.066	0.109
0.0002	0.086	0.000	0.036	965;384	518;209	0.063	0.108
0.0004	0.150	0.000	0.025	955;377	433;166	0.120	0.179
0.0006	0.147	0.000	0.025	942;376	420;165	0.117	0.177
0.0008	0.170	0.000	0.023	940;366	397;149	0.136	0.203

Notes: Formal results for Figure 5c. The table reports robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates and 95% confidence intervals excluding certain observations near the cutoff using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and MSE-optimal bandwidth selection, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter being elected instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of voters who turned out.

Table B9: Electorate's referendum support and issue supporter wins in marginal opposing races—Fixed effects

Dependent variable	Yes share voters			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Panel A: Referendum Fixed Effects				
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.176***	0.125***	0.160***	0.101***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.012)	(0.015)
First stage estimates	1.070***	0.911***	1.054***	0.940***
	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.012)
N	1366	1366	1366	1366
$N_{effective}$	114;69	414;70	104;64	354;70
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.002	0.019;0.003	0.002	0.016;0.002
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	46.358	47.600	46.353	48.403
Panel B: Canton Fixed Effects				
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.188***	0.130***	0.189***	0.125***
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.007)
First stage estimates	1.037***	1.458***	1.099***	1.525***
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.014)	(0.022)
N	1366	1366	1366	1366
$N_{effective}$	333;131	223;207	299;129	201;174
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.013	0.006;0.029	0.011	0.005;0.024
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	47.626	46.846	47.488	46.044
Panel C: Referendum and Canton Fixed Effects				
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.231***	0.151***	0.249***	0.155***
	(0.006)	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.003)
First stage estimates	1.031***	1.145***	1.098***	1.058***
	(0.005)	(0.012)	(0.004)	(0.011)
N	1366	1366	1366	1366
$N_{effective}$	135;70	443;76	114;70	414;70
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.003	0.024;0.004	0.002	0.020;0.003
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	47.161	47.562	46.571	47.600

Notes: The table reports robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and canton-level clustered standard errors in parentheses, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Observations are weighted by the inverse number of representatives per canton. The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter entering parliament instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of votes. Estimations include referendum fixed effects in Panel A, canton fixed effects in Panel B, and referendum and canton fixed effects in Panel C. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.
The first-stage estimate exceeds one in some fixed-effects specifications. Fixed effects demean all variables by their group mean before estimation. After subtracting the group mean, the indicator for whether the issue supporter is in parliament is no longer bounded between zero and one, so the first-stage coefficient loses its probability interpretation. This does not imply a compliance rate above 100%. The second-stage LATE remains valid as the ratio of the reduced-form and first-stage coefficients within the fixed-effects transformation.

Table B10: Electorate's referendum support and issue supporter wins in marginal opposing races—Alternative kernels

Dependent variable	Yes share voters			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Panel A: Epanechnikov Kernel				
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.076***	0.074***	0.122***	0.087***
	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.012)
First stage estimates	0.783***	0.781***	0.782***	0.780***
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.015)
N	1366	1366	1366	1366
$N_{effective}$	512;213	499;228	479;195	453;217
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.034	0.030;0.052	0.028	0.025;0.042
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	47.237	47.167	46.952	47.341
Panel B: Uniform Kernel				
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.056***	0.066***	0.116***	0.073***
	(0.011)	(0.016)	(0.012)	(0.013)
First stage estimates	0.779***	0.790***	0.792***	0.788***
	(0.011)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.016)
N	1366	1366	1366	1366
$N_{effective}$	479;195	440;221	440;174	413;217
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.028	0.023;0.047	0.023	0.019;0.039
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	46.952	47.103	46.845	47.273

Notes: The table reports robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates using local linear regression with an epanechnikov kernel in Panel A and a uniform kernel in Panel B, and canton-level clustered standard errors in parentheses, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Observations are weighted by the inverse number of representatives per canton. The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter entering parliament instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of votes. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table B11: Electorate's referendum support and issue supporter wins in marginal opposing races—Alternative local polynomial orders

Dependent variable	Yes share voters			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Panel A: Quadratic				
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.131***	0.127***	0.197***	0.145***
	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.015)
First stage estimates	0.768***	0.768***	0.763***	0.761***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.017)	(0.019)
N	1366	1366	1366	1366
$N_{effective}$	650;237	585;252	565;221	556;250
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.059	0.055;0.084	0.047	0.044;0.067
p	2	2	2	2
q	3	3	3	3
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	46.888	47.529	47.159	47.459
Panel B: Cubic				
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.182***	0.145***	0.193***	0.187***
	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.016)
First stage estimates	0.775***	0.776***	0.772***	0.770***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.018)
N	1366	1366	1366	1366
$N_{effective}$	742;252	742;288	697;252	697;252
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.094	0.093;0.116	0.076	0.075;0.093
p	3	3	3	3
q	4	4	4	4
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	46.745	46.922	46.798	46.798

Notes: The table reports robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates using local quadratic (Panel A) and local cubic (Panel B) regression with a triangular kernel, and canton-level clustered standard errors in parentheses, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). The local-polynomial used to construct the bias-correction, q, is of one order higher than the one to construct the point estimator p. Observations are weighted by the inverse number of representatives per canton. The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter entering parliament instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of votes. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table B12: Electorate's referendum support and issue supporter wins in marginal opposing races—District magnitude scaled vote margin

Dependent variable	Yes share voters			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.096***	0.036***	0.112***	0.058***
	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.009)
First stage estimates	0.777***	0.788***	0.771***	0.784***
	(0.018)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.017)
N	1366	1366	1366	1366
$N_{effective}$	554;220	613;252	529;206	590;246
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	516.082	673.174;1011.178	423.975	553.030;830.709
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	47.362	47.211	47.166	47.055

Notes: The table reports robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and canton-level clustered standard errors in parentheses, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Observations are weighted by the inverse number of representatives per canton. The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter entering parliament instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of the canton's representatives in the National Council. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table B13: Electorate's referendum support and issue supporter wins in marginal opposing races—Eligible voters scaled vote margin

Dependent variable	Yes share voters			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.087***	0.072***	0.100***	0.089***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.012)
First stage estimates	0.786***	0.781***	0.780***	0.775***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.018)
N	1366	1366	1366	1366
$N_{effective}$	570;219	551;239	544;216	527;225
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.022	0.019;0.030	0.018	0.016;0.025
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	47.287	47.603	47.418	47.186

Notes: The table reports robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and canton-level clustered standard errors in parentheses, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Observations are weighted by the inverse number of representatives per canton. The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter entering parliament instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of eligible voters. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table B14: Electorate's referendum support and issue supporter wins in marginal opposing races—Unweighted

Dependent variable	Yes share voters			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.122***	0.119***	0.141***	0.137***
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.013)
First stage estimates	0.706***	0.702***	0.724***	0.723***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
N	1366	1366	1366	1366
$N_{effective}$	502;207	504;208	455;181	460;195
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.031	0.032;0.033	0.026	0.027;0.027
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	47.197	47.146	47.116	47.159

Notes: The table reports unweighted, robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and canton-level clustered standard errors in parentheses, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter entering parliament instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of votes cast. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table B15: Electorate's referendum support and issue supporter wins in marginal opposing races—Log yes votes

Dependent variable	$\log(yes\ votes \div eligible\ voters)$			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.268***	0.303***	0.308***	0.363***
	(0.033)	(0.037)	(0.033)	(0.040)
First stage estimates	0.785***	0.774***	0.782***	0.768***
	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.013)	(0.016)
N	1366	1366	1366	1366
$N_{effective}$	540;217	460;252	504;208	426;250
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.039	0.027;0.080	0.032	0.022;0.065
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	47.276	47.621	47.146	47.729

Notes: The table reports robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and canton-level clustered standard errors in parentheses, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Observations are weighted by the inverse number of representatives per canton. The dependent variable is the log of yes votes per eligible voter in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter entering parliament instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of voters who turned out. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table B16: Electorate's referendum support and issue supporter wins in marginal opposing races—ITT

Dependent variable	Yes share voters			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment ($supporter\ vote\ margin > 0$)	0.042***	0.045***	0.056***	0.059***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
N	1366	1366	1366	1366
$N_{effective}$	618;233	585;240	565;221	556;221
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.059	0.055;0.061	0.048	0.045;0.050
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	47.117	47.440	47.159	47.105

Notes: The table reports robust and bias-corrected ITT RD estimates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel, and canton-level clustered standard errors in parentheses, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Observations are weighted by the inverse number of representatives per canton. The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter being elected instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of votes cast. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table B17: Electorate's referendum support and issue supporter wins in marginal opposing races—National party line legislator position

Dependent variable	Yes share voters			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.115***	0.107***	0.164***	0.127***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
First stage estimates	0.780***	0.748***	0.774***	0.750***
	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.003)
N	1499	1499	1499	1499
$N_{effective}$	510;233	404;282	466;196	351;267
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.028	0.016;0.074	0.023	0.013;0.060
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	45.684	46.411	45.638	46.038

Notes: The table reports robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and canton-level clustered standard errors in parentheses, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Observations are weighted by the inverse number of representatives per canton. The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter entering parliament instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of votes cast. Positions for both elected and non-elected candidates are proxied by national party lines. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table B18: Electorate's referendum support and issue supporter wins in marginal opposing races—Cantonal party line legislator position

Dependent variable	Yes share voters			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.051***	0.122***	0.065***	0.137***
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
First stage estimates	0.801***	0.762***	0.797***	0.755***
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.004)
N	1475	1475	1475	1475
$N_{effective}$	604;233	420;264	576;229	361;246
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.048	0.016;0.068	0.040	0.014;0.056
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	46.133	46.216	46.203	45.861

Notes: The table reports robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and canton-level clustered standard errors in parentheses, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Observations are weighted by the inverse number of representatives per canton. The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter entering parliament instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of votes cast. Positions for both elected and non-elected candidates are proxied by cantonal party lines. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table B19: Electorate's referendum support and issue supporter wins in marginal opposing races—High party cohesion referenda

Dependent variable	Yes share voters			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.075***	0.111***	0.089***	0.128***
	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.010)
First stage estimates	0.791***	0.769***	0.785***	0.760***
	(0.013)	(0.016)	(0.013)	(0.017)
N	1207	1207	1207	1207
$N_{effective}$	503;187	408;187	475;183	380;183
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.046	0.027;0.051	0.038	0.022;0.042
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	46.731	46.776	46.943	46.809

Notes: The table reports robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and canton-level clustered standard errors in parentheses, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). The sample further excludes referenda with low party cohesion, defined as votes in which deviations from the party line exceed the 90th percentile (more than 30 legislators). Observations are weighted by the inverse number of representatives per canton. The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r, and the treatment is an issue supporter entering parliament instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of voters who turned out. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table B20: Individual-level VOX votes and issue supporter wins in marginal opposing races

Dependent variable	Yes vote VOX			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Treatment ($supporter\ in\ parliament = 1$)	0.101^{***}	0.094^{***}	0.106^{***}	0.113^{***}
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
First stage estimates	0.677^{***}	0.707^{***}	0.696^{***}	0.727^{***}
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
N	53,834	53,834	53,834	53,834
$N_{effective}$	31877;8850	28949;9060	30228;8584	26791;8924
BW type	mserd	msetwo	cerrd	certwo
BW size	0.037	0.024;0.062	0.030	0.019;0.051
p value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Mean DV in %	50.293	50.083	49.915	50.046

Notes: The table reports robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and canton-level clustered standard errors in parentheses, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). The sample is constructed by matching VOX respondents' votes to supporters in close opposing races. The outcome is an indicator equal to one if the respondent reports voting yes in the referendum. The running variable is the vote margin of the issue supporter, and treatment indicates whether the supporter won the election. The specifications use the bandwidths from the main RD. $^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$.

Table B21: Individual-level VOX votes and issue supporter wins in marginal opposing races—Alternative bandwidths

MSE-optimal BW %	RD est.	Robust p-val	BW	$N_{effective}$	CI
20	0.184	0.000	0.007	18,669;6,585	0.183;0.184
30	0.194	0.000	0.011	20,704;6,666	0.194;0.195
40	0.193	0.000	0.015	23,082;6,899	0.192;0.193
50	0.158	0.000	0.018	26,448;7,835	0.157;0.158
60	0.141	0.000	0.022	27,798;8,032	0.141;0.141
70	0.126	0.000	0.026	29,336;8,260	0.125;0.126
80	0.111	0.000	0.030	30,228;8,584	0.110;0.112
90	0.104	0.000	0.033	30,973;8,607	0.103;0.105
100	0.101	0.000	0.037	31,877;8,850	0.100;0.102
110	0.098	0.000	0.041	32,431;8,850	0.097;0.099
120	0.095	0.000	0.044	32,982;8,877	0.094;0.095
130	0.092	0.000	0.048	33,383;8,924	0.091;0.092
140	0.090	0.000	0.052	33,906;8,939	0.089;0.090
150	0.086	0.000	0.055	34,032;8,999	0.086;0.087
160	0.081	0.000	0.059	35,879;8,999	0.081;0.082
170	0.075	0.000	0.063	36,355;9,092	0.075;0.076
180	0.070	0.000	0.067	36,532;9,104	0.069;0.070
190	0.065	0.000	0.070	36,950;9,104	0.065;0.066
200	0.061	0.000	0.074	37,284;9,140	0.061;0.062

Notes: The table reports robust and bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates using local linear regression with a triangular kernel, varying bandwidths, and canton-level clustered standard errors, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). The sample is constructed by matching VOX respondents' votes to supporters in close opposing races. The outcome is an indicator equal to one if the respondent reports voting yes in the referendum. The running variable is the vote margin of the issue supporter, and treatment indicates whether the supporter won the election. The specifications use the bandwidths from the main RD.

Table B22: Electorate's referendum support and issue supporter wins in opposing races—Mechanisms

Variable	Median	Sample	RD est.	P-value	BW	N	CI	Diff.
Referendum complexity	1.602	Low	-0.018	0.440	0.124	652	-0.062;0.027	0.062*
		High	0.044	0.001	0.096	681	0.017;0.071	
Referendum importance	5.830	Low	-0.037	0.174	0.077	601	-0.09;0.016	0.089**
		High	0.053	0.002	0.105	732	0.02;0.086	
Referendum turnout	0.478	Low	0.001	0.924	0.077	677	-0.028;0.031	0.036
		High	0.037	0.116	0.072	689	-0.009;0.083	
Votes on same day	3.000	Low	0.056	0.279	0.099	360	-0.045;0.158	−0.053
		High	0.003	0.811	0.134	1006	-0.019;0.024	
Referendum closeness canton	0.131	Low	-0.007	0.651	0.082	677	-0.039;0.025	0.159***
		High	0.152	0.000	0.058	689	0.067;0.237	
Referendum closeness national	0.131	Low	0.078	0.000	0.058	729	0.057;0.099	−0.107**
		High	-0.029	0.394	0.126	637	-0.094;0.037	
Time gap ref.-parliament	246.638	Low	0.019	0.436	0.116	743	-0.028;0.065	0.018
		High	0.037	0.039	0.049	623	0.002;0.072	
District magnitude	6.000	Low	-0.007	0.565	0.088	698	-0.032;0.017	0.256***
		High	0.248	0.000	0.017	668	0.164;0.333	
Legislator party strength	0.214	Low	0.253	0.000	0.020	656	0.216;0.291	0.115*
		High	0.368	0.000	0.016	708	0.271;0.466	
Media coverage total	245.500	Low	0.072	0.015	0.115	340	0.014;0.13	−0.049
		High	0.023	0.369	0.075	335	-0.027;0.074	
Media tonality	−0.500	Low	0.088	0.067	0.097	345	-0.006;0.182	0.035
		High	0.123	0.000	0.049	330	0.069;0.178	
Campaign size	93.000	Low	-0.014	0.247	0.105	580	-0.039;0.01	0.041*
		High	0.027	0.068	0.131	687	-0.002;0.056	
Campaign balance	0.469	Low	0.025	0.180	0.069	637	-0.011;0.061	0.010
		High	0.035	0.032	0.109	605	0.003;0.067	
Strength of supportive parties	0.463	Low	0.099	0.003	0.086	709	0.034;0.165	−0.004
		High	0.095	0.000	0.076	657	0.053;0.137	
Referendum type		Optional	0.094	0.000	0.056	517	0.041;0.147	—
		Initiative	0.186	0.000	0.056	678	0.132;0.239	
		Mandatory	0.137	0.003	0.047	110	0.048;0.226	
		Counterproposal	0.117	0.539	0.108	61	-0.255;0.489	
Legislator left party		Other	0.069	0.000	0.047	796	0.045;0.093	0.314***
		Left	0.383	0.000	0.030	570	0.338;0.428	
Legislator center party		Other	0.260	0.000	0.028	852	0.23;0.29	−0.203***
		Center	0.057	0.035	0.044	514	0.004;0.111	
Legislator right party		Other	-0.012	0.187	0.081	1084	-0.03;0.006	0.176***
		Right	0.164	0.000	0.030	282	0.115;0.213	
Legislator gender		Male	0.028	0.008	0.067	925	0.007;0.048	0.116**
		Female	0.144	0.000	0.031	439	0.069;0.218	
Topic state		Other	0.010	0.298	0.151	1086	-0.009;0.029	0.041
		State	0.051	0.047	0.087	280	0.001;0.101	
Topic economy		Other	0.063	0.000	0.055	1108	0.041;0.085	−0.040
		Economy	0.023	0.559	0.072	258	-0.054;0.101	
Topic public finances		Other	0.042	0.003	0.057	1070	0.014;0.069	−0.018
		Public finances	0.023	0.618	0.148	296	-0.068;0.115	
Topic environment		Other	0.109	0.000	0.033	1129	0.082;0.135	−0.137*
		Environment	-0.028	0.603	0.115	237	-0.135;0.078	
Topic social		Other	-0.036	0.106	0.122	749	-0.08;0.008	0.099***
		Social	0.063	0.000	0.068	617	0.028;0.097	

Notes: The table reports bias-corrected fuzzy RD estimates with robust standard errors for various subsamples, using local linear regression with a triangular kernel and canton-level clustering, following Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2014) and Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik (2015). Observations are weighted by the inverse number of representatives per canton. The dependent variable is the share of yes votes in canton c on referendum r. The treatment is an issue supporter entering parliament instead of an issue opponent. The running variable is the issue supporter's vote margin divided by the number of voters who turned out. For continuous moderators, *Low* (*High*) denotes the subsample below (at or above) the median of the moderator, reported in the Median column. For categorical moderators, the Median column is blank and the Sample column reports the category. *Diff.* reports the difference in RD estimates between the two subgroups (High minus Low, or named category minus Other), with significance from a z-test using bias-corrected estimates and robust standard errors; for referendum type, no pairwise difference is reported. Table B1 provides variable descriptions.

Appendix C: Additional figures

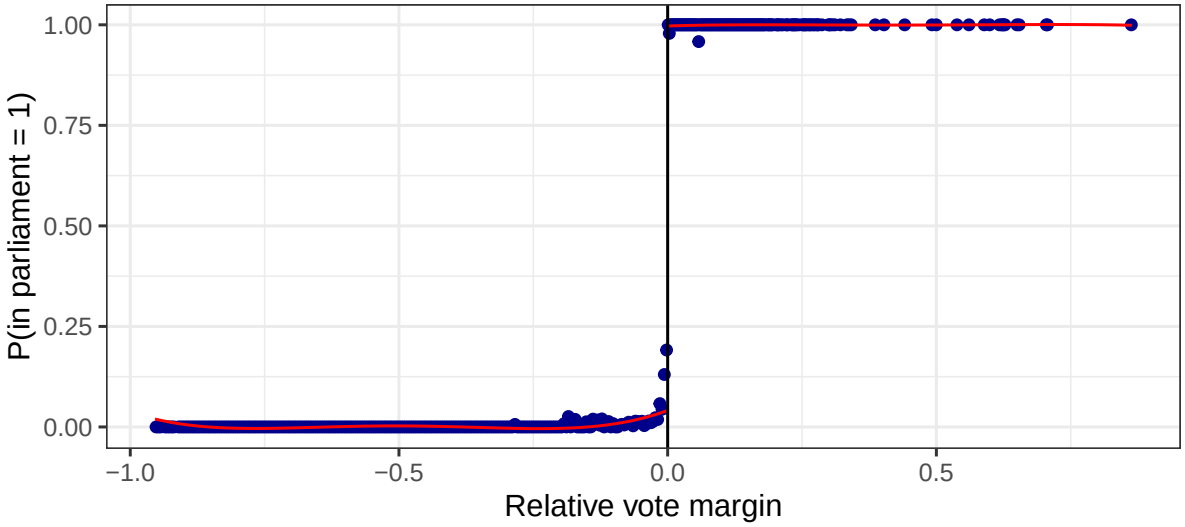

Figure C1: Probability of entering parliament conditional on the vote margin—Full sample

Notes: Probability of being in parliament, conditional on vote margin by Luechinger et al. (2024) divided by the number of voters turning out across all candidates and elections. Noncompliance occurs because of resignations.

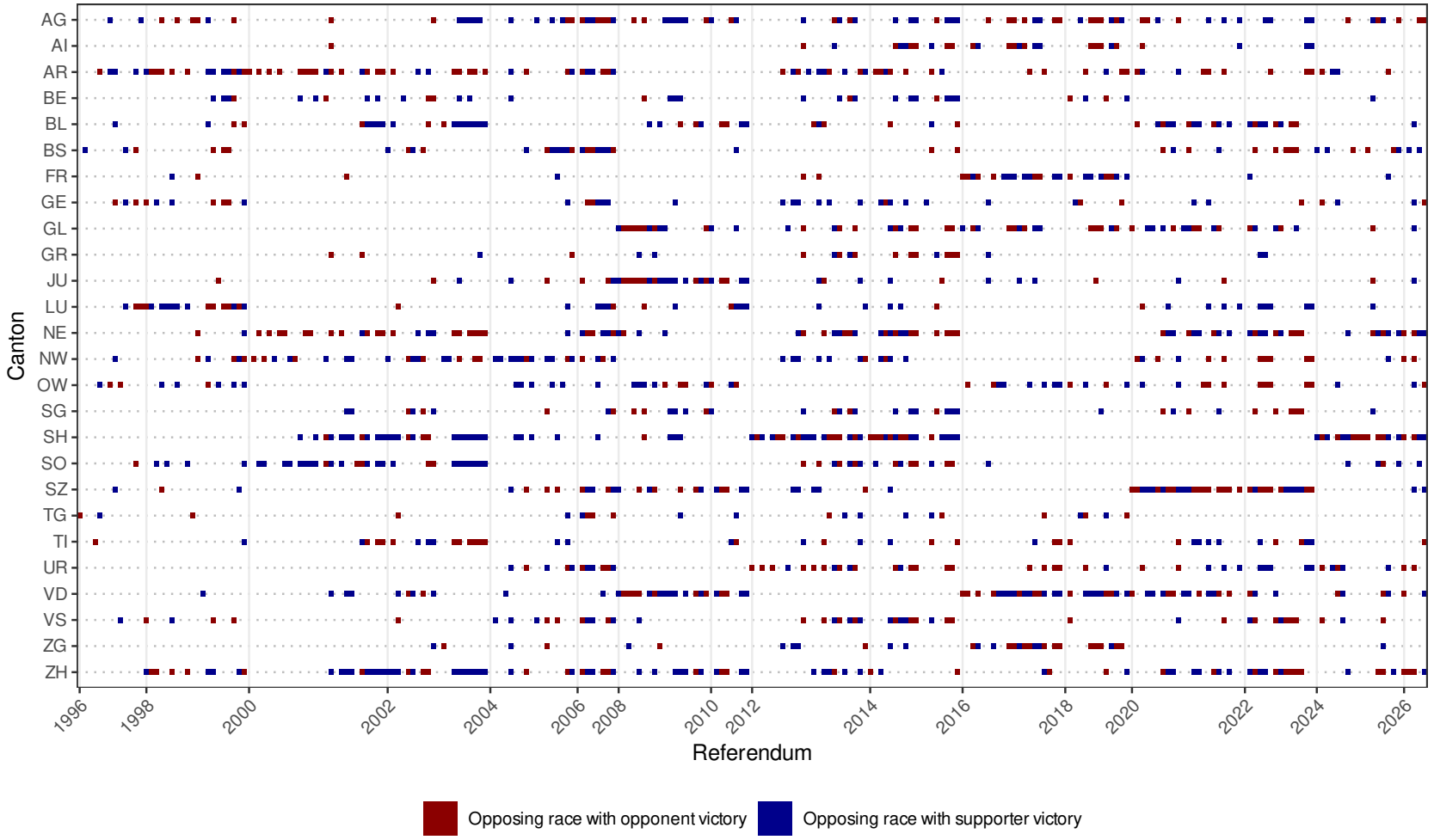

Figure C2: Occurrence and outcomes of opposing races by canton and referendum

Notes: Red (blue) tiles indicate canton×referendum pairs where the marginal candidates in the previous election held opposing positions and the opponent (supporter) won. For blank tiles, no opposing race occurred. Referenda on the x-axis are in chronological order.

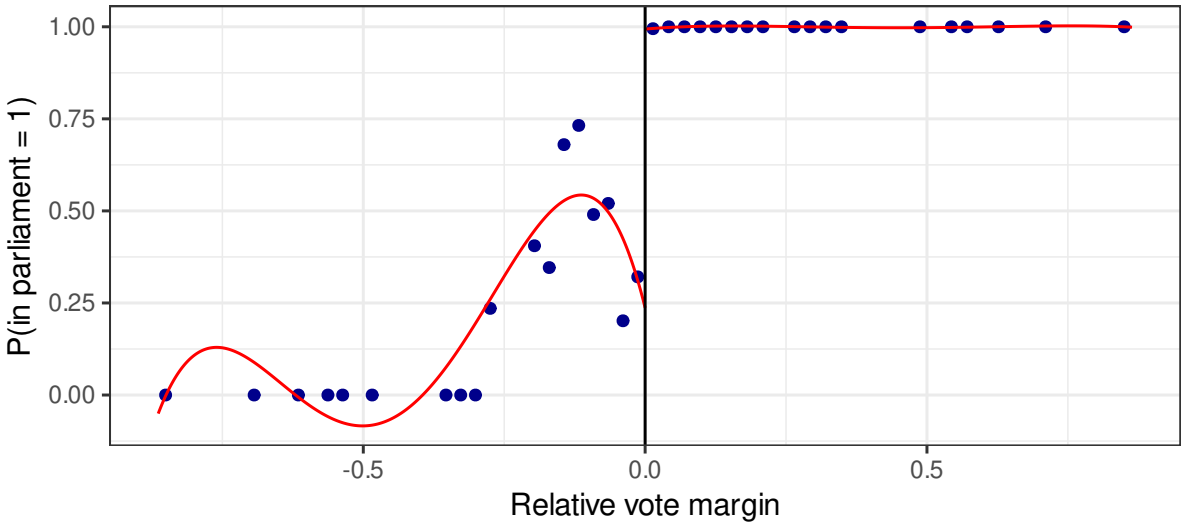

Figure C3: Probability of entering parliament conditional on the vote margin—RD sample

Notes: Probability of being in parliament, conditional on vote margin by Luechinger et al. (2024) divided by the number of voters turning out across candidates in opposing races (RD Sample). Noncompliance occurs because of resignations.