gesis Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences

GOR organized by DGOF

General Online Research Conference 2022 (GOR 22)
Berlin | 7.-9. September 2022

A Closer Look at Face-Saving Response Options to Reduce Vote Overreporting

Disentangling Social Desirability Bias, Memory Failure, and Response Order Effects

Rebekka Kluge, 12.08.2022

Leibniz Association

Rebekka Kluge, Fabienne Krämer, Henning Silber, Michael Bosnjak, Joanna Koßmann, Bella Struminskaya, Bernd Weiß

Table of contents

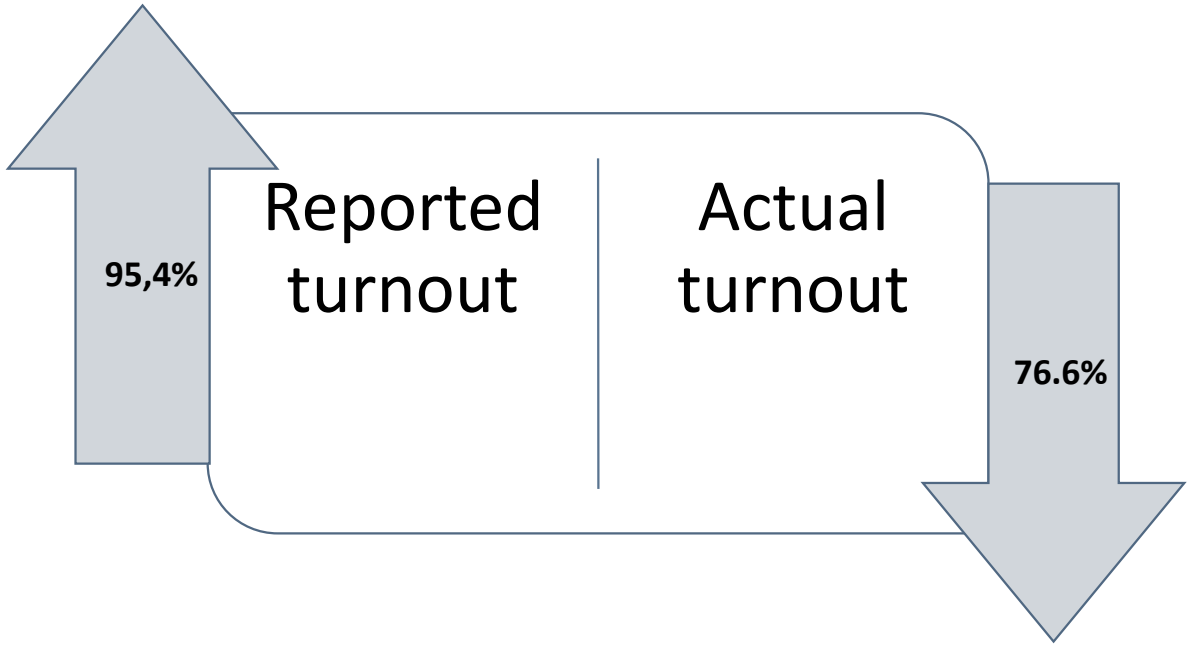
Table of contents

Motivation

GLES German Longitudinal Election Study

Post-election survey 2021

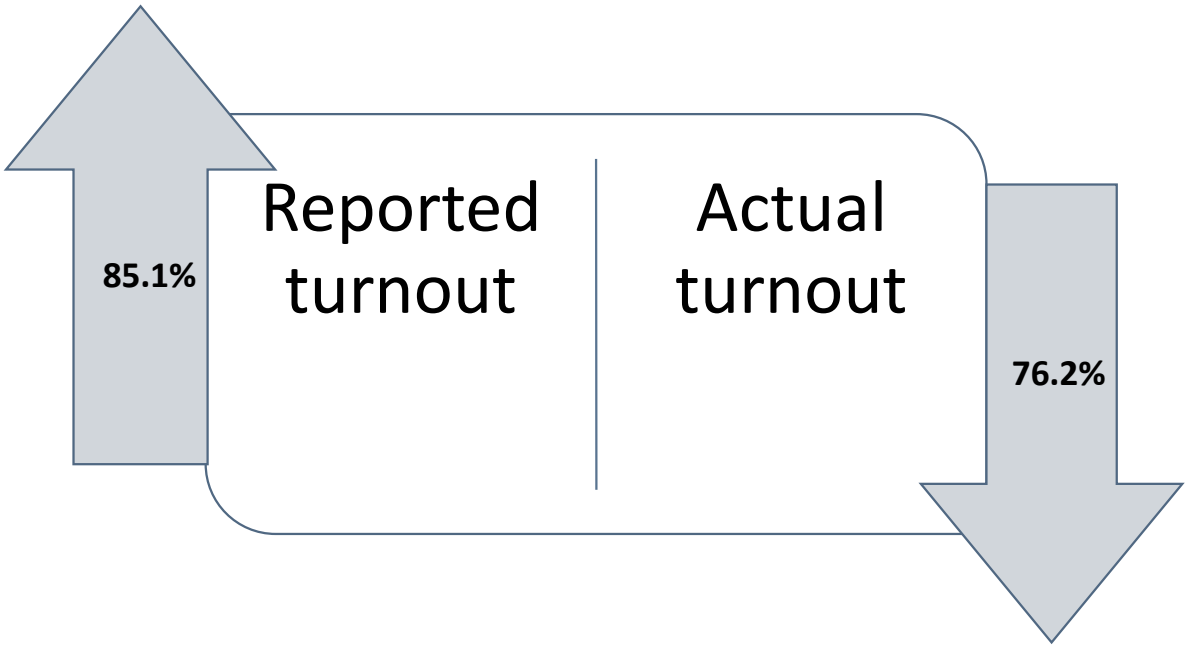
Federal election 2021
in Germany



Motivation

ALLBUS 2018

Federal election 2017 in Germany



Motivation

- Problem: Turnout overestimation in surveys
- Potential causes:
  1. Sampling error with overrepresentation of voters
  2. Unintentional inaccurate recall of voting behavior (**memory failure**)
  3. Misreporting due to socially desirable responding (**SDR**)

In our study, we focus on causes 2 & 3

Table of contents

Theory – Literature Review

- Offering abstainers **face-saving response options** reduces the rate at which respondents reported having voted:
  - *Belli et al. (2006):* face-saving responses **reduced the reported voting** by ~ 9 pp in an U.S. telephone survey
  - *Morin-Chassé et al. (2017):* face-saving responses **reduced reported voting** by ~ 6 pp in an online panel survey in Germany
  - *Belli et al. (2006):* face-saving responses were particularly successful in reducing the reported voting with **longer distance** to last election

Theory – Research Question

- Are those results driven by:
  - Reducing **social desirability** concerns?
  - Characteristics of item wording (**memory effects** due to length and specificity of the face-saving items)?
  - OR: **Primacy effects** as an artefact of the different response order (abstention first only for face-saving items)?

Theory – Hypotheses

- H1: Using the **face-saving items** results in **a lower reported turnout** (*social desirability effect*).
- H2: The presentation of **abstention first** results in a **lower reported turnout** (*response order effects*).
- H3: A stronger **need for social approval** (as measured by the Social Desirability Scale; SDS-17) results in a **greater reported turnout** (*effect of need for social approval*).
- H4: The face-saving items perform particularly successful with a **long distance** to the last election (interaction of *social desirability effects* and *memory effects*).
- H5: The effect of the need for social approval on turnout is **greater for the standard voting turnout questions** (interaction of *need for social approval* and *social desirability effects*).

Theory – Hypotheses

- H1: Using the **face-saving items** results in **a lower reported turnout** (*social desirability effect*).
- H2: The presentation of **abstention first** results in a **lower reported turnout** (*response order effects*).
- H3: A stronger **need for social approval** (as measured by the Social Desirability Scale; SDS-17) results in a **greater reported turnout** (*effect of need for social approval*).
- H4: The face-saving items perform particularly successful with a **long distance** to the last election (interaction of *social desirability effects* and *memory effects*).
- H5: The effect of the need for social approval on turnout is **greater for the standard voting turnout questions** (interaction of *need for social approval* and *social desirability effects*).

Theory – Hypotheses

- H1: Using the **face-saving items** results in **a lower reported turnout** (*social desirability effect*).
- H2: The presentation of **abstention first** results in a **lower reported turnout** (*response order effects*).
- H3: A stronger **need for social approval** (as measured by the Social Desirability Scale; SDS-17) results in a **greater reported turnout** (*effect of need for social approval*).
- H4: The face-saving items perform particularly successful with a **long distance** to the last election (interaction of *social desirability effects* and *memory effects*).
- H5: The effect of the need for social approval on turnout is **greater for the standard voting turnout questions** (interaction of *need for social approval* and *social desirability effects*).

Theory – Hypotheses

- H1: Using the **face-saving items** results in **a lower reported turnout** (*social desirability effect*).
- H2: The presentation of **abstention first** results in a **lower reported turnout** (*response order effects*).
- H3: A stronger **need for social approval** (as measured by the Social Desirability Scale; SDS-17) results in a **greater reported turnout** (*effect of need for social approval*).
- H4: The face-saving items perform particularly successful with a **long distance** to the last election (interaction of *social desirability effects* and *memory effects*).
- H5: The effect of the need for social approval on turnout is **greater for the standard voting turnout questions** (interaction of *need for social approval* and *social desirability effects*).

Theory – Hypotheses

- H1: Using the **face-saving items** results in **a lower reported turnout** (*social desirability effect*).
- H2: The presentation of **abstention first** results in a **lower reported turnout** (*response order effects*).
- H3: A stronger **need for social approval** (as measured by the Social Desirability Scale; SDS-17) results in a **greater reported turnout** (*effect of need for social approval*).
- H4: The face-saving items perform particularly successful with a **long distance** to the last election (interaction of *social desirability effects* and *memory effects*).
- H5: The effect of the need for social approval on turnout is **greater for the standard voting turnout questions** (interaction of *need for social approval* and *social desirability effects*).

Table of contents

Data

- Non-probability online survey with 6 waves and 2 different panel intervals
- Quotas for age, education, gender
- Sample composition:

  Age: $\bar{x}$ = 53 years

  Education: 35% low, 31% medium, 34% high

  52% female
- Sample size:

  Wave 1: 3,524 respondents

  Wave 6: 2,044 respondents

  Attrition rate ~42%

Experimental design

- 4 groups varying **item type** and **response order**
  - Standard items & voting first (25 %)
  - Standard items & abstention first (25 %)
  - Face-saving items & voting first (25 %)
  - Face-saving items & abstention first (25 %)

- 2 different **panel intervals**
  - October 2020 & March 2021 (25 %)
  - October 2020 & November 2021 (75 %)

Method – Measurement

[**intro**]: In each election we find that a lot of people were not able to vote because they were sick, or they did not have time. How about the last federal election in [2017/2021]:

[**standard** items]:

Did you vote or did you not vote?

- Yes, I voted.
- No, I did not vote.

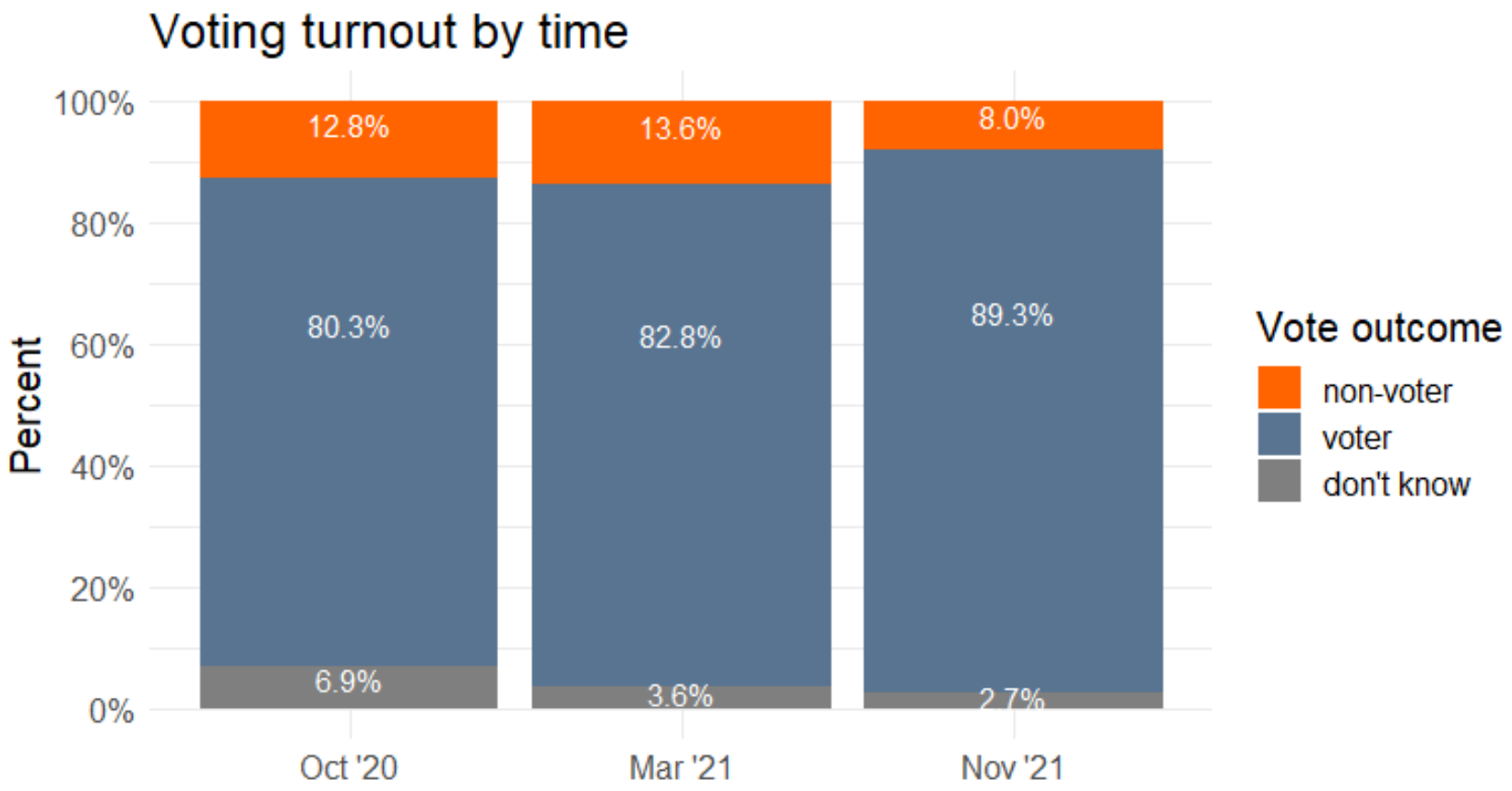
[**face-saving** items]:

Which of the following statements best describes you?

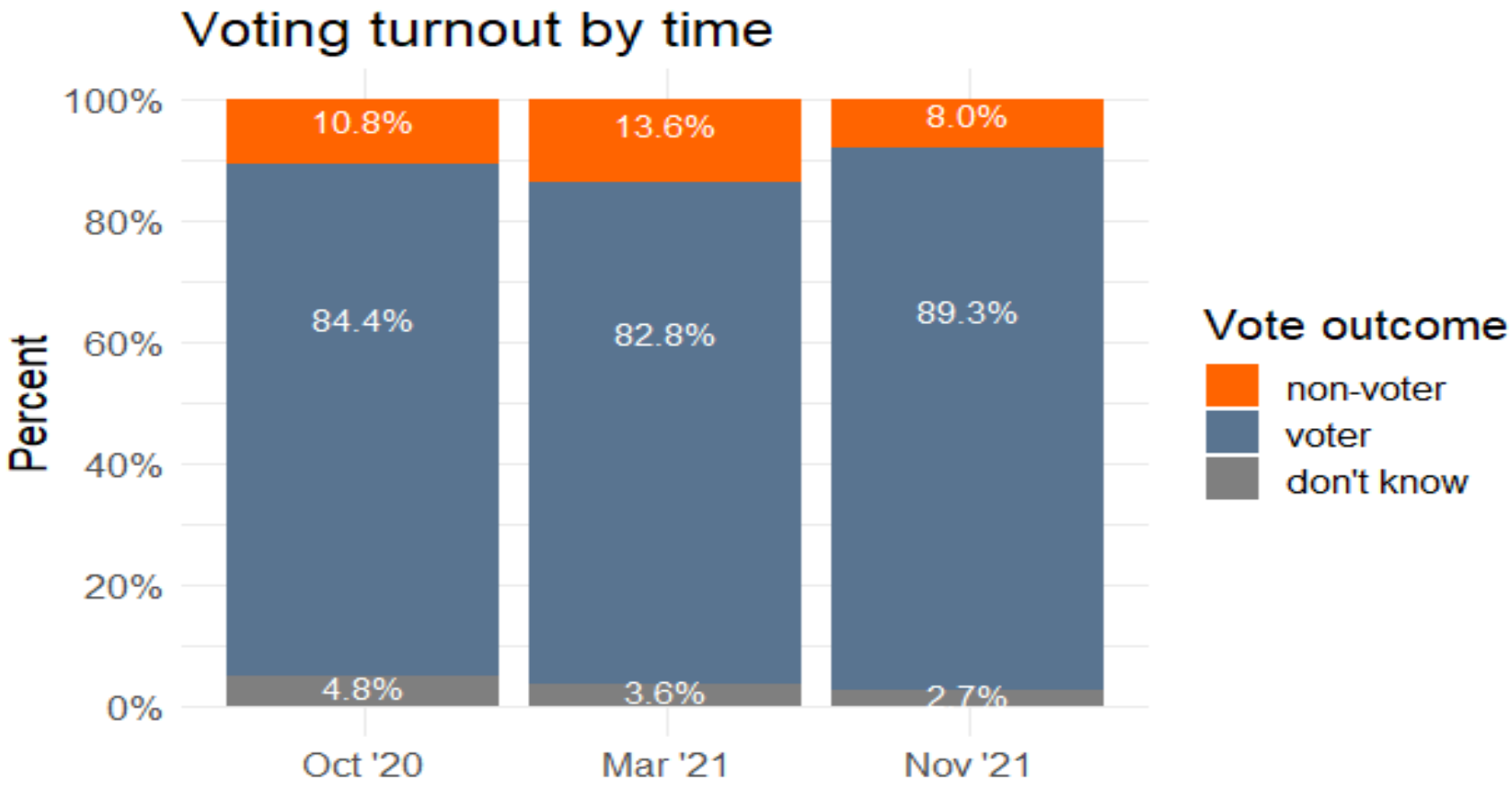
- I voted in the election.
- I did not vote in the election.
- I thought about voting this time but didn't.
- I usually vote but didn't this time.

Table of contents

Results - voting turnout



Results - voting turnout, balanced panel



Results – glm-Models

Table 1. Pooled logistic regression models with voting turnout as dependent variable and cluster robust standard errors

	Model 1	Model 2
	Estimate (SE)	Estimate (SE)
Intercept	1.796 (0.201) ***	1.905 (0.285) ***
Item type (0=face-saving; 1=standard)	-0.066 (0.102)	0.456 (0.407)
Response order (0=abstention first; 1=voting first)	-0.108 (0.103)	-0.111 (0.103)
Social desirability score	**0.033** (0.015) *	**0.050** (0.021) *
Distance to last election (in month)		-0.012 (0.005) **
Int: Item type * distance		-0.003 (0.006)
Int: Item type * SD-score		-0.038 (0.031)
AIC	2,702.275	2,687.569
BIC	2,727.357	2,731.463
Log Likelihood	-1,347.137	-1,336.785
Num. obs.	3,907	3,907

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

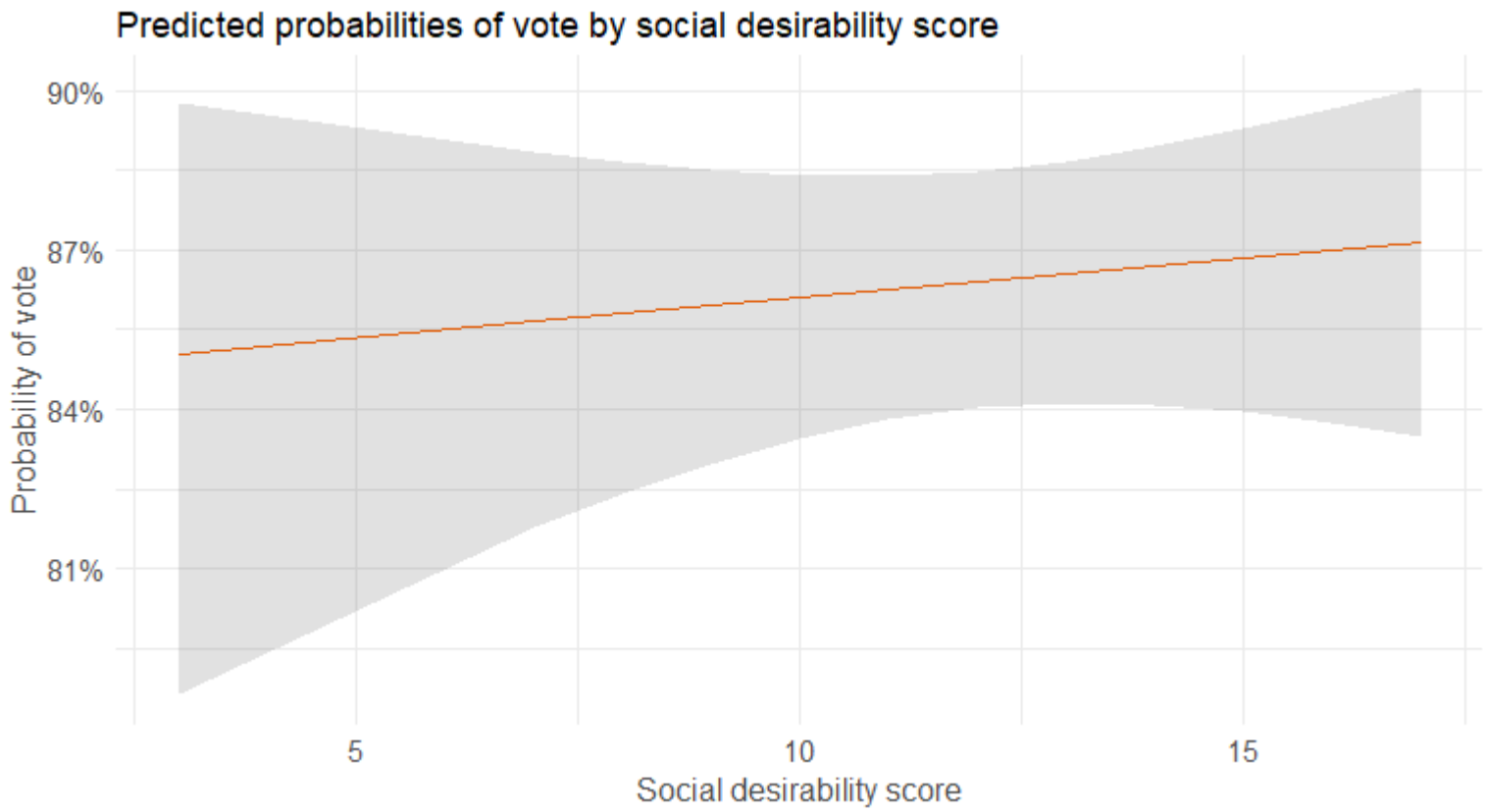
Results – Interpretation I

No support for **H1** and **H2**:

- H1: Social desirability effects are not supported.
- H2: Response order effects are not supported.

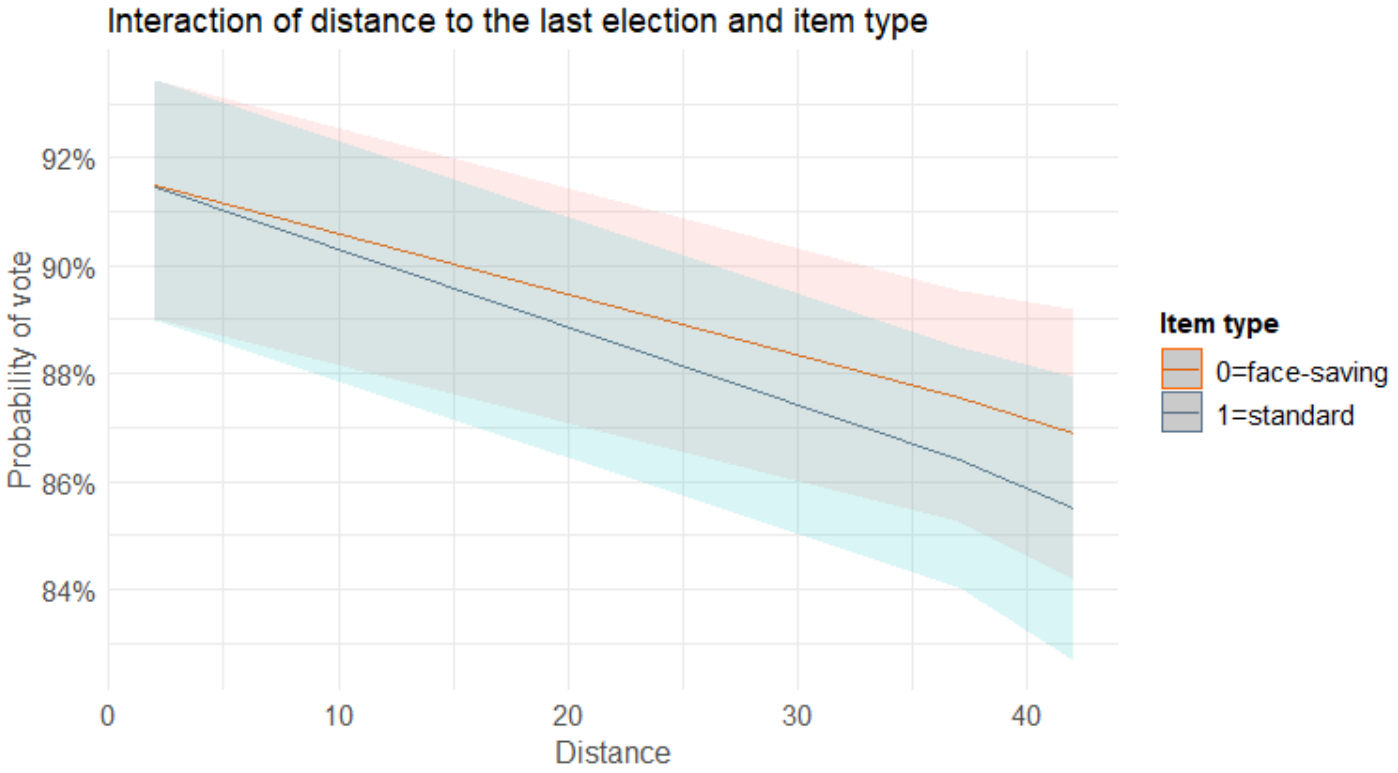
Results – Interpretation II

Support for **H3**: Effect of the need for social approval



Results – Interpretation III

No support for **H4**: Performance of face-saving items does **not differ** from standard items regardless of distance to the last election



Results – Interpretation IV

No support for **H5**: The effect of SDS is **not** greater for **standard items**

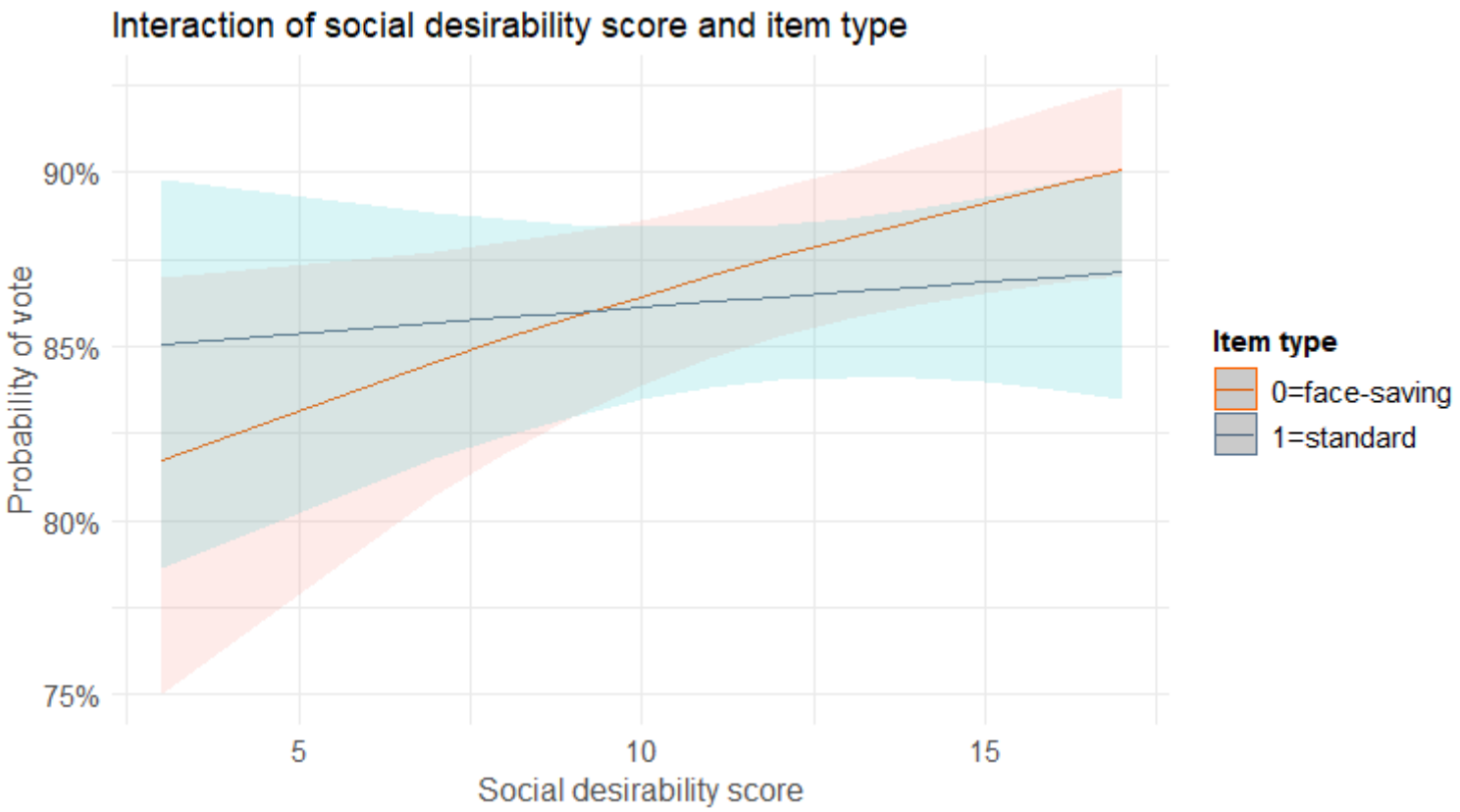
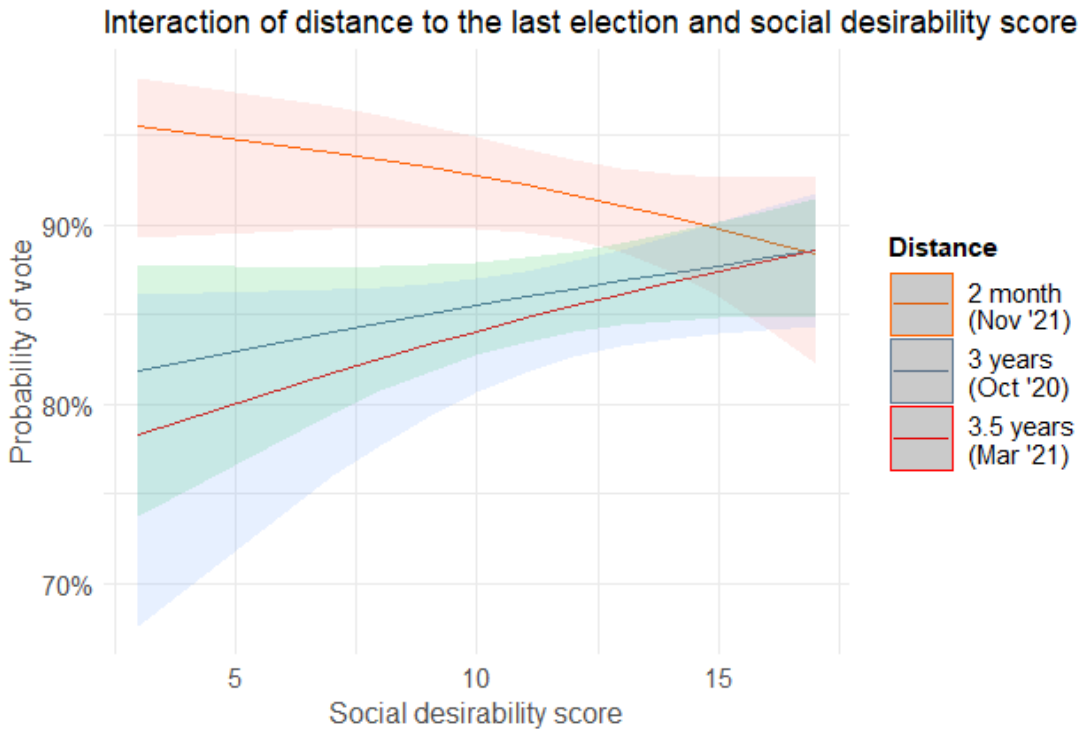


Table of contents

Discussion – Summary

- *Face-saving items* **did not** reduce the reported turnout in our *self-administered* panel survey.
- The efficiency of face-saving items in former studies could **not** be explained by *response order effects*.
- However, the individual *need for social approval* biased respondents' answers to overreport voting .
  - *Additional research* is needed to develop methods that can correct turnout reports.

Discussion - SD



- Memory failures are connected to SDS-17 (measuring self-deception instead of impression management?)

Corresponding author: rebekka.kluge@gesis.org

gesis Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences

Leibniz Association