




The conditional effect of candidate-centered electoral systems on political trust

Manuel Diaz Garcia (Goethe University Frankfurt)
Thomas Zittel (Goethe University Frankfurt / New York University)

Prepared for the ECPR General Conference 2023, Charles University, 4 – 8 September



Research question

Do candidate-centered systems result in greater political trust?

Two points of departure

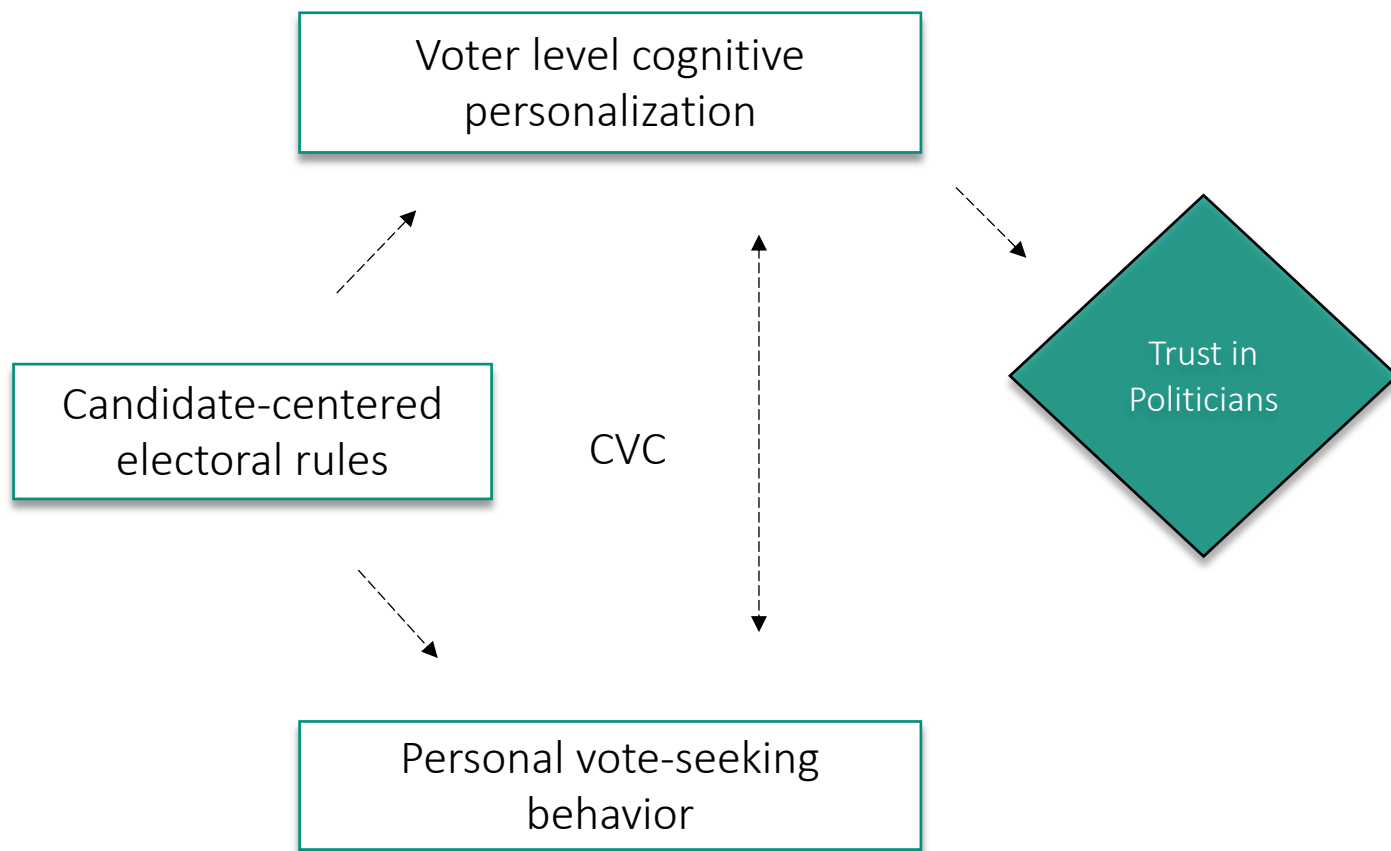
What explains political trust ?

- ... general conviction that the system is responsive to ones needs even in the absence of scrutiny (Miller & Listhaug 1990: 381)
- ... part of a set of beliefs that mutually reenforce each other and that facilitate the quality of democracy (Almond & Verba 1963; Hetherington 1998);
- ... in short supply and in decline (Crozier et al. 1975, Dalton 2004, Citrin & Stoker 2018)

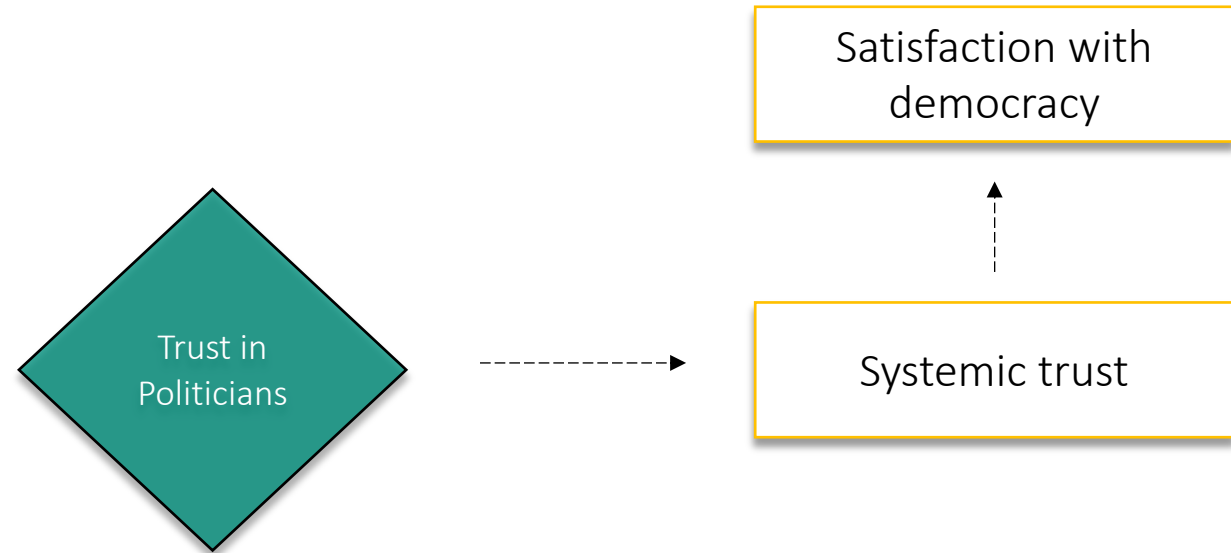
Do electoral systems matter for political trust ?

- Affirmative answer: The role of a proportional electoral formula (Powell 2000, Banducci, Donovan & Karp 1999)
- Paper advances from: The role of candidate-centered ballots combined with a proportional electoral formula (Shugart & Wattenberg 2001; Renwick & Pilet 2015)

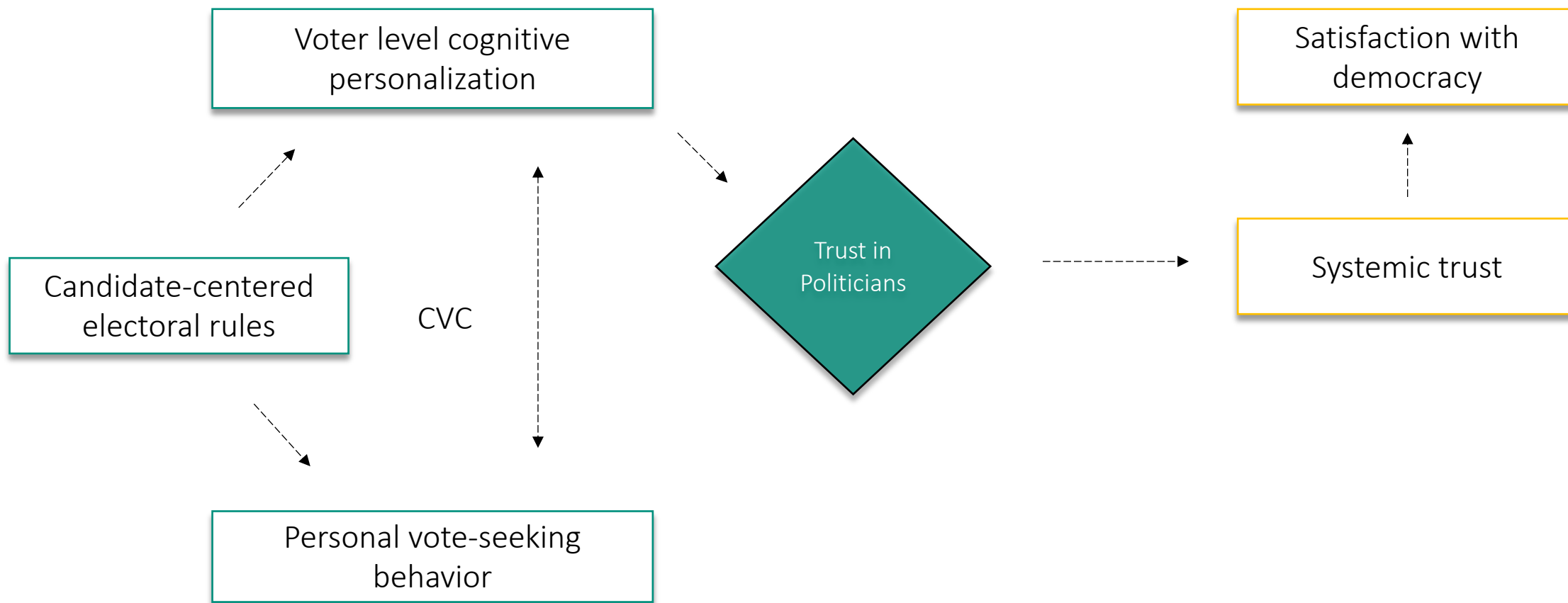
The role of candidate-voter communication



The role of candidate-voter communication



The role of candidate-voter communication



A typology of candidate-voter communication

	<i>Interactive</i>	<i>Non-Interactive</i>
<i>direct</i>		
<i>mediated</i>		

Data

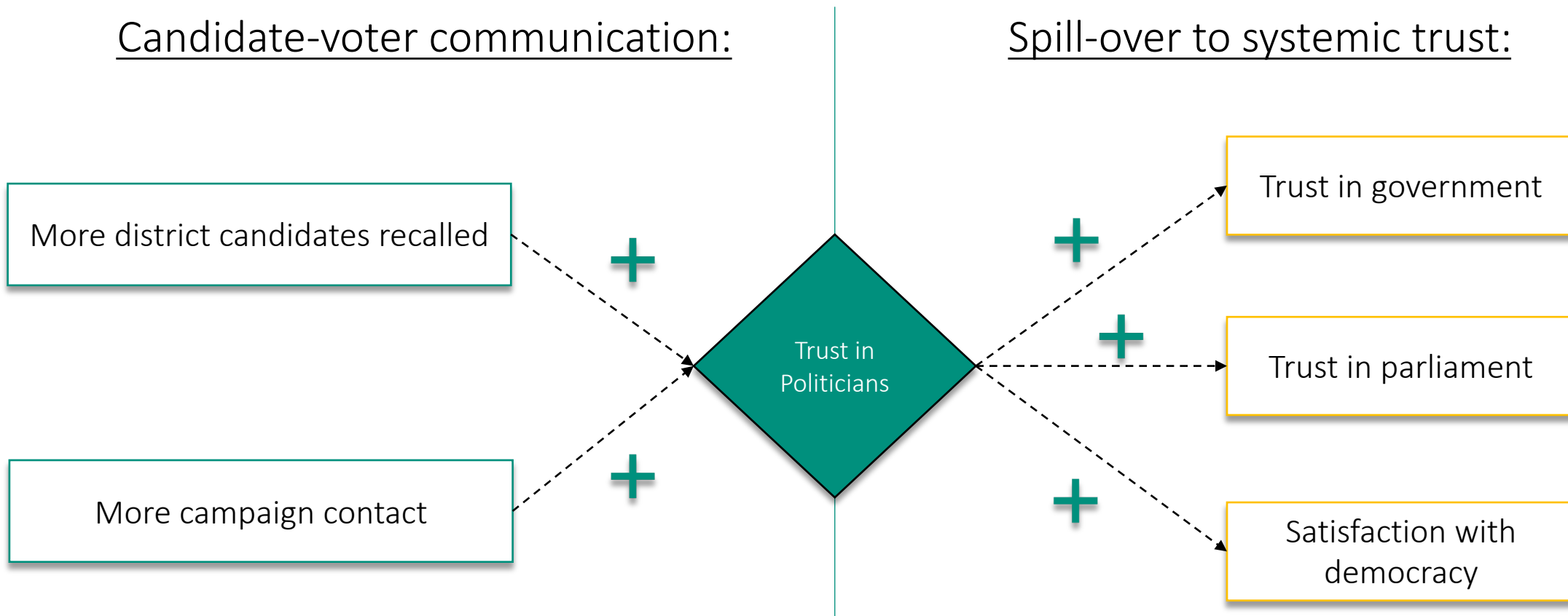
German Longitudinal Election Study 2021 Post-Election Survey (N = 3431)

- (1) Germany: Mixed-member proportional system that combines “the best of both worlds”
- (2) Questions that measure mediated, non-interactive candidate-voter communication (candidate recall, campaign contact)
- (3) Questions about trust and other beliefs about democracy; socio-structural backgrounds, social trust, and party identification suited to test sociological theories
- (4) Allows for a control of contextual factors at the electoral district level

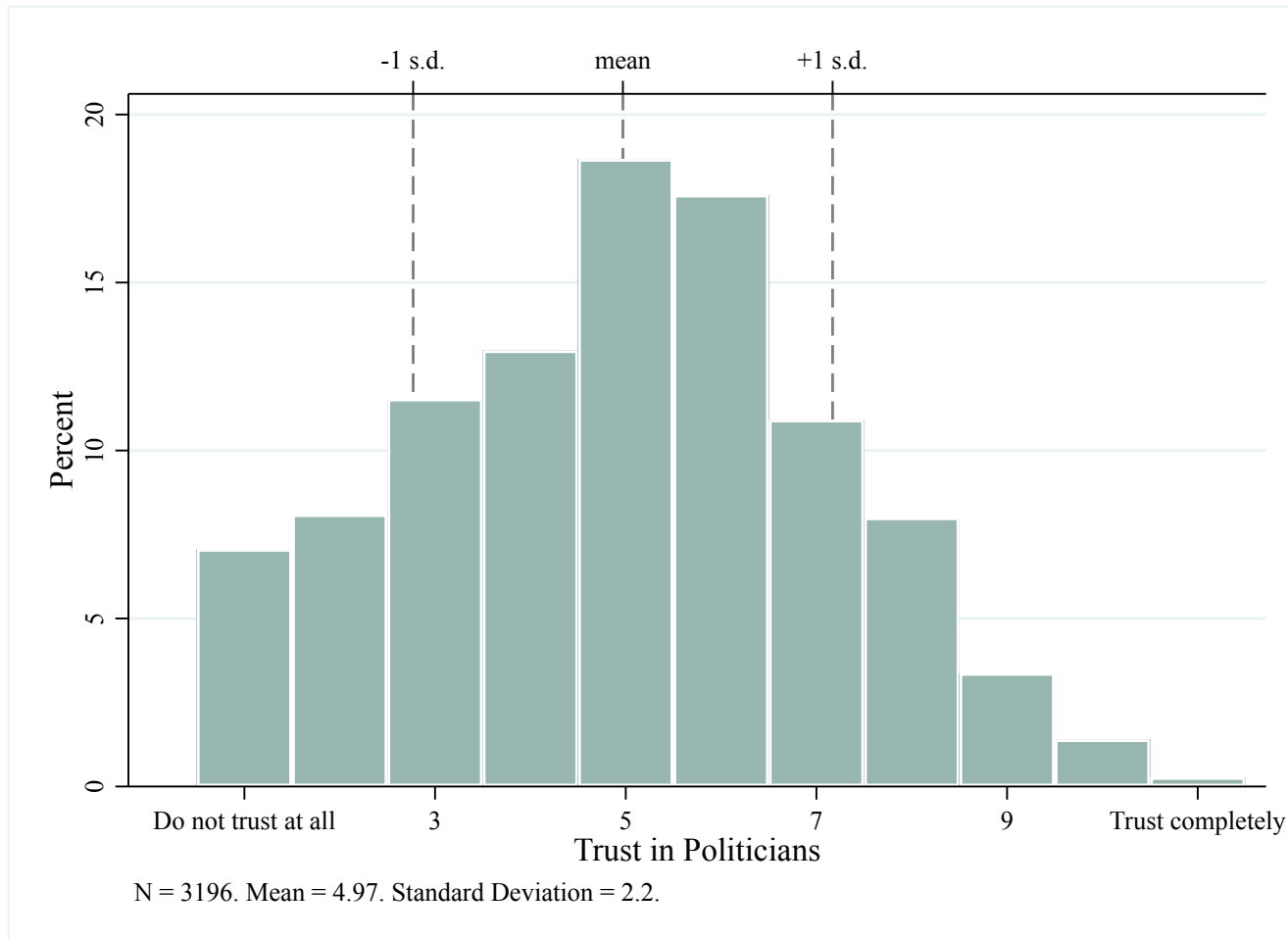
Hypotheses

Candidate-voter communication:

Spill-over to systemic trust:



Do German voters trust politicians?



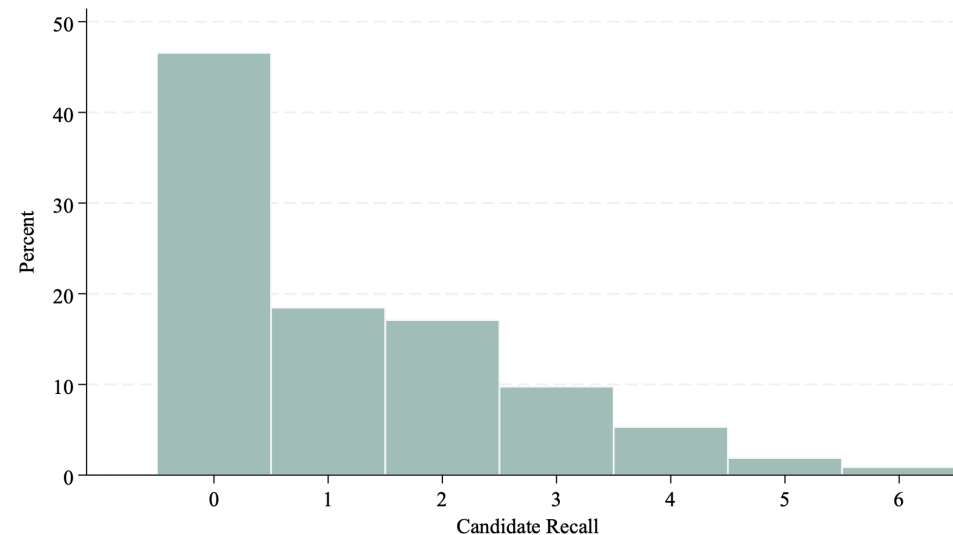
Three observations

- Mean voter is quite neutral, slightly leaning towards distrust
- Significant variance indicated by a sd of 2.2
- 15% range close to perfect distrust (1 and 2); only 1.7% close to perfect trust

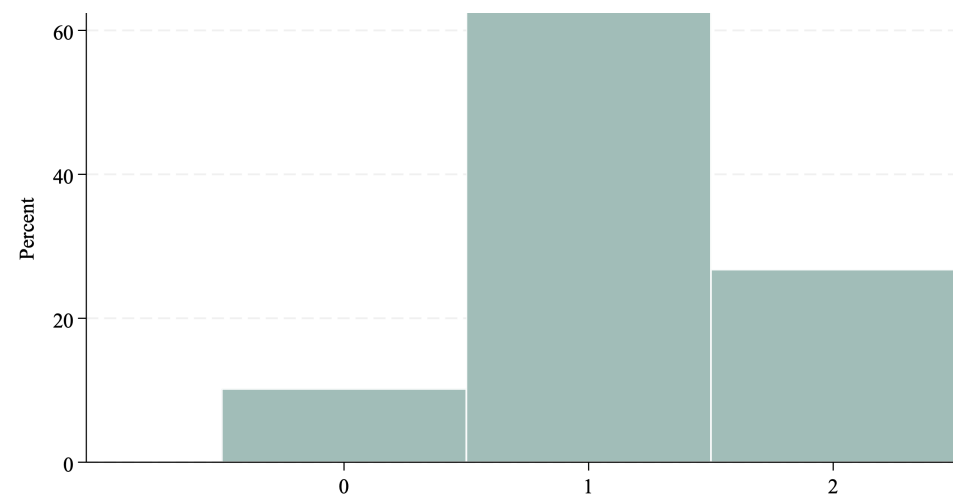
What about candidate-voter communication?

Three observations

- Around 50% of respondents are not able to recall a single candidate
- Caveat of around 15% missings on candidate recall variable which are likely to be non-recalls → Our analyses are not distorted, but we probably underestimate the effect of candidate recall because non-responses are less trusters.
- 10% of voters don't take note of any posters or personalized information material. 63% with one contact; 27% with two contacts



N = 2918. Mean = 1.18. Standard Deviation = 1.41.



N = 3425.

Does candidate-voter communication matter?

DV: Trust in Politicians	<i>Model I</i>	<i>Model II</i>	<i>Model III</i>
Candidate Recall		0.22*** (0.03)	0.09*** (0.03)
<u>Campaign Contact (baseline = none)</u>			
one contact		0.19 (0.17)	0.08 (0.16)
two contacts		0.48** (0.19)	0.20 (0.17)
Social Trust	0.27*** (0.02)		0.26*** (0.02)
<u>Income (baseline = low)</u>			
moderate	0.27** (0.12)		0.24** (0.12)
high	0.42*** (0.13)		0.36*** (0.13)
Education (1 = high)	-0.06 (0.09)		-0.08 (0.09)
Party Identification	0.29*** (0.03)		0.27*** (0.03)
West Germany	0.68 (0.86)		0.70 (0.86)
Constant	1.89*** (0.62)	4.54*** (0.16)	1.80*** (0.63)
Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	2284	2284	2284
Number of Groups	164	164	164
Intraclass Correlation	0.09	0.09	0.09
R-Squared	0.17	0.03	0.17
AIC	9386	9732	9379
BIC	9426	9755	9436

Established sociological theories matter

- ✓ Voters who are more trusting trust politicians more
- ✓ Voters who identify with a party trust politicians more
- ✓ Household income matters

Does candidate-voter communication matter?

DV: Trust in Politicians	<i>Model I</i>	<i>Model II</i>	<i>Model III</i>
Candidate Recall		0.22*** (0.03)	0.09*** (0.03)
<u>Campaign Contact (baseline = none)</u>			
one contact		0.19 (0.17)	0.08 (0.16)
two contacts		0.48** (0.19)	0.20 (0.17)
Social Trust	0.27*** (0.02)		0.26*** (0.02)
<u>Income (baseline = low)</u>			
moderate	0.27** (0.12)		0.24** (0.12)
high	0.42*** (0.13)		0.36*** (0.13)
Education (1 = high)	-0.06 (0.09)		-0.08 (0.09)
Party Identification	0.29*** (0.03)		0.27*** (0.03)
West Germany	0.68 (0.86)		0.70 (0.86)
Constant	1.89*** (0.62)	4.54*** (0.16)	1.80*** (0.63)
Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	2284	2284	2284
Number of Groups	164	164	164
Intraclass Correlation	0.09	0.09	0.09
R-Squared	0.17	0.03	0.17
AIC	9386	9732	9379
BIC	9426	9755	9436

Established sociological theories matter

- ✓ Voters who are more trusting trust politicians more
- ✓ Voters who identify with a party trust politicians more
- ✓ Household income matters

Candidate-voter communication matters

- ✓ Voters who recall more candidates are more likely to trust politicians
- ✓ Voters with more contacts trust politicians more

Does trust in politicians spill over?

Established sociological theories matter

- ✓ Voters who trust more, who identify with a party, and who are educated and economically well-off show more systemic trust

	<i>Trust in Government</i>		<i>Trust in Parliament</i>		<i>Satisfaction with Democracy</i>	
	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)
Social Trust	0.30*** (0.02)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.31*** (0.02)	0.11*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)
Income (baseline = low)						
moderate	0.12 (0.13)	-0.04 (0.09)	0.08 (0.12)	-0.08 (0.09)	0.12*** (0.05)	0.09** (0.04)
high	0.36*** (0.14)	0.07 (0.10)	0.38*** (0.14)	0.07 (0.10)	0.28*** (0.05)	0.21*** (0.05)
Education (1 = high)	0.11 (0.10)	0.15** (0.07)	0.20** (0.10)	0.23*** (0.07)	0.08** (0.04)	0.09*** (0.03)
Party Identification	0.30*** (0.03)	0.06*** (0.02)	0.28*** (0.03)	0.05** (0.02)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
West Germany	0.26 (0.92)	-0.37 (0.65)	-0.05 (0.90)	-0.66 (0.64)	-0.20 (0.35)	-0.34 (0.31)
Trust in Politicians		0.81*** (0.02)		0.78*** (0.02)		0.18*** (0.01)
Constant	3.12*** (0.65)	1.59*** (0.46)	3.39*** (0.63)	1.91*** (0.45)	2.71*** (0.24)	2.37*** (0.22)
Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	2563	2563	2556	2556	2570	2570
Number of Groups	164	164	164	164	164	164
Intraclass Correlation	0.06	0.09	0.07	0.12	0.13	0.18
R-Squared	0.15	0.58	0.16	0.57	0.11	0.27
AIC	11310	9526	11163	9446	6319	5811
BIC	11351	9573	11204	9493	6360	5858

Does trust in politicians spill over?

Established sociological theories matter

- ✓ Voters who trust more, who identify with a party, and who are educated and economically well-off show more systemic trust

Trust in politicians matters

- ✓ Voters who trust politicians more show more systemic trust independent of sociological theories
- ✓ Models improve from an r^2 .15 (.16) [.11] to .58 (.57) [.27]

	<i>Trust in Government</i>		<i>Trust in Parliament</i>		<i>Satisfaction with Democracy</i>	
	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)	(a)	(b)
Social Trust	0.30*** (0.02)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.31*** (0.02)	0.11*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)
Income (baseline = low)						
moderate	0.12 (0.13)	-0.04 (0.09)	0.08 (0.12)	-0.08 (0.09)	0.12*** (0.05)	0.09** (0.04)
high	0.36*** (0.14)	0.07 (0.10)	0.38*** (0.14)	0.07 (0.10)	0.28*** (0.05)	0.21*** (0.05)
Education (1 = high)	0.11 (0.10)	0.15** (0.07)	0.20** (0.10)	0.23*** (0.07)	0.08** (0.04)	0.09*** (0.03)
Party Identification	0.30*** (0.03)	0.06*** (0.02)	0.28*** (0.03)	0.05** (0.02)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
West Germany	0.26 (0.92)	-0.37 (0.65)	-0.05 (0.90)	-0.66 (0.64)	-0.20 (0.35)	-0.34 (0.31)
Trust in Politicians		0.81*** (0.02)		0.78*** (0.02)		0.18*** (0.01)
Constant	3.12*** (0.65)	1.59*** (0.46)	3.39*** (0.63)	1.91*** (0.45)	2.71*** (0.24)	2.37*** (0.22)
Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	2563	2563	2556	2556	2570	2570
Number of Groups	164	164	164	164	164	164
Intraclass Correlation	0.06	0.09	0.07	0.12	0.13	0.18
R-Squared	0.15	0.58	0.16	0.57	0.11	0.27
AIC	11310	9526	11163	9446	6319	5811
BIC	11351	9573	11204	9493	6360	5858

What does all this mean?

- (1) More candidate-voter communication leads to voters showing higher levels of trust in politicians with a consistent and robust effect of candidate recall
- (2) Trust in politicians matters for systemic trust and satisfaction with democracy independent of standard sociological explanantions
- (3) **Candidate-centered electoral rules provide a fertile ground for political trust which seems to be mediated by candidate-voter communication.**



The conditional effect of candidate-centered electoral systems on political trust

Manuel Diaz Garcia (Goethe University Frankfurt)
Thomas Zittel (Goethe University Frankfurt / New York University)

Prepared for the ECPR General Conference 2023, Charles University, 4 – 8 September

