

Personal Communication, Mass Communication, and Turnout at Local Elections

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*Introduction*¹

According to an often-quoted formula, to understand why some people participate in elections while others abstain one must ask whether they can, whether they want, and whether they have been asked to participate (Brady et al. 1995; Verba et al. 1995). The first component refers to citizens' personal resources. Participation is costly, and people who are well endowed with cognitive skills, self-confidence, discretionary time, and money, are better equipped to deal with the complexities of politics, to make up their minds about which party or candidate to support, to develop a sense that their participation makes a difference, and to carry the opportunity costs of deciding and going to the polls. The second aspect has to do with people's motivation to keep informed and actively take part in the political process. People who are more eager to learn and think about politics, and more involved in the political process are more inclined to develop an interest to express their preferences, and are thus more likely to vote.

The third aspect concerns the social component of political activities. While the other two preconditions of turnout – being capable and motivated to participate – refer to individual voters' personal attributes, the third one derives from the premise that voting, like other forms of political participation, cannot be fully understood by studying such individual attributes alone. According to this view, the question of whether or not a person goes to the polls is ultimately a function of cues she is exposed to by her social environment. In recent years, electoral research has moved away from its fixation on the individual and its personal attributes as key explanatory variables for electoral behavior. An old theme is resurfacing that already in the 1940s and 1950s had been emphasized by the Columbia school's seminal studies of electoral behavior (Lazarsfeld et al. 1968; Berelson et al. 1954), but fell into neglect afterwards: that political choices are not solitary acts of atomized individuals and cannot, therefore, be fully explained through studying their attitudes, beliefs, values or norms (Leighley 1995; Norris 2002, 26-9). Rather, as Rosenstone and Hansen noted, "the explanation of participation, to make any sense, must move beyond the worlds of individuals to include family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers, plus politicians, parties, activists, and interest groups" (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993: 23). More recently, the mass media have also been added to this list of potentially important sources of mobilizing cues at elections (Norris 2002, 28-9).

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In general terms, the mobilization model of participation asserts that "participation is a response to contextual cues and political opportunities structured by the individual's environment" (Leighley 1995, 188). Previous research on the role of mobilization for turnout has often focused on the role of organizations like political parties, trade unions, churches, community groups, or other voluntary associations (e.g., Caldeira et al. 1990; Wielhouwer and Lockerbie 1994; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1995; Knoke 1982; Leighley 1996; Norris 2002, 168-87). The recent debate on social capital has lent additional emphasis to this topic (Putnam 1993, 2000). In the present paper, we focus on two other agencies that presumably have the capacity to engage people in politics, and thereby increase their likelihood to vote, but have less often been explored: the associates with whom voters interact in their everyday lives, and the mass media. Taking the case of a recent local election in Germany, we will inquire whether it makes a difference for turnout if voters discuss politics with other people who may or may not vote themselves, and whether it is important how much attention they pay to television and the press. As McLeod et al. note, "media or interpersonal forms of communication may mobilize individuals to local political participation" (McLeod et al. 1999, 316-7). The purpose of this paper is to subject this proposition to a test.

Are there any effects of citizens' exposure to political cues through personal and mass communication on their likelihood to go to the polls at local elections? If so, what is their direction – do they indeed contribute to increases in turnout by mobilizing voters, as implied by the basic premise of the mobilization model of political participation? Or can exposure to political communication also contribute to a demobilization of voters, by creating apathy and incentives to stay at home? Which type of communication is stronger when it comes to drawing citizens to the polls, or away from the polls, for that matter – mass communication or personal communication? To answer these questions we will analyse voters' exposure to political reporting on television and in the press, and to signals from their personal environments, and discern whether and how these impinge on their likelihood to vote. Our analyses will be based on a survey conducted in a West German city at the occasion of a recent local election.

The next section presents a discussion of the state of theorizing and research concerning the electoral effects of both personal and mass communication. We then go on to describe the

data and variables used in our study. In doing so, we will detail some basic features of personal and mass communication in the city we selected for our analysis. The final section will present findings from a series of multivariate models that seek to discern the direct and indirect importance of voters' exposure to political news through both television and the press, as well as communications within their primary environments of spouses and other associates.

Personal communication, mass communication, and voting

Personal communication and turnout

While strongly emphasized by the Columbia studies in the 1940s and 1950s (Lazarsfeld et al. 1968; Berelson et al. 1954; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955), for a number of reasons the view that individuals' political behavior follows a social logic and is dependent not only on their personal attributes but also on those of their primary environments of personal associates fell into oblivion in the aftermath of these seminal studies (Zuckerman 2005). Theorizing about citizens' political attitudes and behavior turned into some sort of 'aggregate psychology' (Coleman 1964, 88) which for many decades dominated research into political participation, and political attitudes and behavior more generally. Only in recent years the view has regained ground that conceiving of the electorate as an aggregate of independent, isolated, atomized individuals is an artificial construct that misses important facets of the processes through which citizens make up their minds at elections (Carmines and Huckfeldt 1996). Meanwhile, findings have accumulated that support the notion that in terms of political preferences, citizens are essentially interdependent. "The political influence that arises due to patterns of communication among citizens is a fact of life in democratic politics. Citizens depend on one another for information and guidance, and this interdependence gives rise to persuasion and shared political preferences." (Huckfeldt et al. 2004, 36)

How can such interpersonal influence on voting decisions occur? Two factors seem important as possible pathways for citizens to influence each other – information and social norms (Leighley 1990; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 23-5). Interacting with other people may impinge on persons' political decisions by providing them with information that is helpful in making up their minds. Hence, better informed people are more likely to vote (Lassen 2005). This extends also to local electoral participation: "Through communication, citizens acquire

information about issues and problems in the community and learn of opportunities and ways to participate." (McLeod et al. 1999, 316) Ultimately, information obtained from other people may persuade citizens to act differently than they would otherwise have, guided exclusively by their personal attributes.

When facing an election and the concomitant need to arrive at a decision about how to vote, casually discussing alternative courses of action with spouses, relatives, neighbors or co-workers may provide citizens with reasons to prefer one alternative over another. Through receiving and accepting persuasive pieces of information, they may learn why one party is more preferable than others, or why a particular candidate is not a good choice. While strong electoral preferences may in themselves constitute an important reason to go to the polls, through political conversations voters may also become aware of more general considerations why it is important to vote (Franklin 2004, 45-6). Thus, talking about politics may contribute to mobilizing people to participate in elections. At the same time, however, the opposite seems likewise conceivable. Depending on the views expressed by their associates voters may also learn that voting is utterly unimportant, or perhaps even wrong. The crucial variable is the specific composition of associates voters get in touch with – whether the information conveyed by their discussants predisposes citizens to go to the polls, or not.

Personal political communication also "provides participation norms and models that influence individual behavior" (Leighley 1990: 462). When discussing political matters, and upcoming elections in particular, citizens may convey to each other expectations concerning proper participatory behavior and create a sense of the rewards or sanctions that others may have to expect from them, depending on their behavior on election day. Again, this may concern vote choices themselves (Fishbein et al. 1980). But it may also concern turnout. For the individual voter participation may not only be a function of her own sense of duty (Rattinger and Krämer 1995; Blais et al. 2000; Bjørklund 2002), but also "of the strength of duty of one's family, friends, and other associates, and of the frequency and quality of interaction with these potential enforcers" (Knack 1992, 138; see also Opp 2001; Kühnel and Fuchs 1998). Again, it seems similarly conceivable that norms concerning voting may not necessarily always imply that it is appropriate to go to the polls. Sometimes they may also convey quite the contrasting expectation that one should stay at home rather than take part in an election. Hence, solidarity rewards may also be endowed for abstaining rather than participating, and normative political communication in social networks may thus not

necessarily be mobilizing. Talking to the right (or rather, the wrong) people may also have the opposite effect and demobilize individuals who otherwise might have found their way to the ballot box.

Most existing research into the consequences of personal communication on voting has dealt with how social networks impinge on party or candidate choices at national elections. Several American and European studies provided unequivocal evidence that interacting with associates who adhere to a particular party or candidate creates a strong likelihood to choose likewise on election day, regardless of one's personal attributes (MacKuen and Brown 1987; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1991, 1995; Lenart 1994; Curtice 1995; Kenny 1998; Schmitt-Beck 2000, 2004; Pattie and Johnston 1999, 2000, 2001; Beck 2002; Levine 2005). Only few studies have so far dealt with the question of how citizens' personal environments influence turnout and abstention.

Some studies seem to indicate that the mere amount of interaction with others counts for participation. For instance, Rosenstone and Hansen claim that "the greater the extent of social involvements, the greater the likelihood that people will cast votes in national elections" (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 158). Numerous findings suggest that socially integrated individuals are indeed more likely to vote. For instance, marriage and gainful employment have been found to increase turnout. Linkages that more specifically concern citizens' integration into their communities have also been identified as correlates of turnout (Timpone 1998; Armingeon 1994; Niedermayer 2001, 171-3; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; 156-9). Such community ties may be especially important as facilitators of participation at the local level. "Community integration can be understood as a necessary condition or at least an important prerequisite for local political participation." (McLeod et al. 1999, 316)

However, other research suggests that such linkages need to have some political content in order to become relevant for citizens' political attitudes and behavior. According to some studies turnout may be enhanced by frequent political discussions (La Due and Huckfeldt 1998; Knoke 1990; Wolling 1999, 218-20). But the messages conveyed during such conversations also seem important. It appears that turnout is increased if voters communicate to others who express clear electoral preferences (Knoke 1990; Huckfeldt et al. 2004, 198-202). In contrast, the odds of participating become less favorable if one interacts with people

who abstain, especially if this concerns spouses (Straits 1990; Knack 1992; Kenny 1992, 1993; Kühnel 2001; Kühnel and Fuchs 2001; Opp 2001).

Mass communication and turnout

Personal communication and mass communication can be seen as functionally equivalent forms of providing citizens with political information (Rogers 1973; Chaffee 1986; Chaffee and Mutz 1988). Nonetheless, social network studies that are interested in the electoral consequences of citizens' personal exchanges, and studies that seek to demonstrate effects of the media's political coverage on their audiences have remained two distinct, unconnected strands of research (Reardon and Rogers 1988; Rogers 1999). "Media and interpersonal effects tend to be separate research agendas in political science." (Lenart 1994, 4) Attempts to bridge this divide by studying both types of political communication simultaneously are rare and in between (Lazarsfeld et al. 1968; Robinson 1976; Beck 1991; Beck et al. 2002; Lenart 1994; Schenk 1995; Schmitt-Beck 1994, 2000, 2003, 2004; Mutz and Martin 2001; Brettschneider 1997; Neller 2004; McLeod et al. 1996, 1999; Scheufele et al. 2002).

Hence, research into the relationship between media consumption and electoral behavior has developed almost unrelated to personal communication, except for occasional inclusions of such variables as controls in multivariate models (the same being true the other way round as well). Not unlike the notion of the social embeddedness of political behavior, while undergoing a renaissance over the past one or two decades, the notion of mass media influencing citizens' electoral behavior also still seems somewhat unorthodox. Similar to political network research, it has also gone through a long period of neglect. Remarkably, this development also bears a strong connection to the Columbia studies – yet, an entirely different one, since the 'limited effects' paradigm that effectively laid to rest the entire theme of media influences at elections was a direct outcome of these seminal investigations. While buttressing the notion of a strong dependence of political behavior on interpersonal communication, these studies' findings let appear mass communication largely irrelevant (Klapper 1960). Accordingly, few bothered about studying media effects at elections for the following decades. Only in recent years has interest been revived in the question of whether the media have an impact on their audience's electoral behavior (Ansolabehere et al. 1993; Bartels 1993; Joslyn and Ceccoli 1996; Zaller 1996; Dalton et al. 1998; Kinder 1998;

Schmitt-Beck 2000, 2003, 2004; Denmark 2002; Dobrzynska et al. 2003; Lawson and McCann 2004; White et al. 2005). However, this strand of research also mostly concentrates on how exposure to mass communication structures how voters cast their votes, but less so, whether they go to the polls in the first place (Delli Carpini 2004, 418-20).

To the degree that it was dealt with at all, this question became thematized in the context of the 'media malaise' debate, where scholars engaged in heated controversies about whether and how modern mass media contribute to a growing political disenchantment, detachment, and apathy of citizens. According to the 'malaise' hypothesis, through negativistic 'attack journalism' and by framing politics as a big selfish game of power-hungry elites, media undermine citizens' support for public officials and democratic institutions, and eventually turn them off, with the ultimate outcome of decreased turnout (Robinson 1976; Patterson 1993; Cappella and Jamieson 1997). The most recent voice in this choir is the proposition that television, especially televised entertainment, destroys citizens' social capital, and thus indirectly their capacity and motivation for political participation, by stealing their precious time and turning them into apathetic and cynic couch potatoes (Putnam 1995, 2000). Remarkably, this claim reiterates concerns already voiced decades ago in Lazarsfeld and Merton's reflections on the 'narcotizing dysfunction' of the media (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1964, 105-6).

However, the 'media malaise' hypothesis has not gone unchallenged. More recently, proponents of a contrasting 'mobilization' hypothesis assume positive effects of the media on citizens' political involvement. It emphasizes the importance of mediated information for mass politics, and claims that by informing citizens about politics the media draw them into the political process, making them more, rather than less capable and motivated to participate (Dalton 1984; Newton 1999; Norris 2000). Information provision plays a prominent role in most treatments of the media's mobilizing, or demobilizing, role with regard to electoral participation. This extends also to participation in local politics, where local media play an especially important role, providing "mobilizing information or mobilizing messages [...] that allow citizens to know where or how to become involved in local affairs" (Moy et al. 2004, 536). However, as Lazarsfeld and Merton already noted, media may also be important socialization agencies, contributing to the enforcement of social norms (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1964, 102-5). Hence, if mass communication conveys the message that voting is any citizen's democratic duty, it may, similar to personal communication, influence citizens' decisions to vote or to abstain not only by means of informing, but also by emphasizing social norms.

The available empirical evidence is indeed far from unequivocally supportive of the various 'malaise' claims. Quite a few studies in this tradition fail to demonstrate detrimental media effects, and several even find a beneficial impact of the media on political attitudes (Wolling 1999; Delli Carpini 2004). Several recent studies suggest that attending to the news may actually increase citizens' interest in and knowledge of politics, and make them more self-confident and efficacious when it comes to dealing with it. This pertains to the national level (Newton 1999; Norris 2000), but also to the level of communities where local media appear particularly influential. People who pay attention to local news on TV and especially in newspapers appear better integrated into their community both structurally and psychologically, but also more interested in local public affairs, more knowledgeable with regard to their community, and ultimately more active on a whole range of forms of local political activity (McLeod et al. 1996, 1999; Scheufele et al. 2002; Moy et al. 2004).

On the whole, these healthy consequences of mass communication seem to pertain mostly to the more informative 'serious' media, such as newspapers, especially the quality press, as well as Public television, whereas more entertaining styles of presenting political content, typical of commercial broadcasters, appear to have no or perhaps even detrimental effects on political attitudes (Holtz-Bacha 1990; Holtz-Bacha and Norris 2001; Schmitt-Beck 1998; Aarts and Semetko 2003; Schmitt-Beck and Voltmer 2006; Voltmer and Schmitt-Beck 2005). Some studies report similar patterns for political participation, and turnout at elections more specifically. Here as well, 'hard news' appear more effective than 'soft news' (Oehmichen and Simon 1996; Kaase and Bauer-Kaase 1998; Holtz-Bacha 1990; Schulz 2001; Stein and Kelleter 2002; Sotirovic and McLeod 2001; Wilkins 2000; Voltmer and Schmitt-Beck 2005; Schmitt-Beck and Voltmer 2006).

Expectations

Findings from numerous studies thus suggest that electoral behavior depends not only on the personal attributes of electors themselves, but also on properties of their social environments, and the patterns of political communication that characterize them. Although casting their votes in the isolation of the voting booth, voters do not seem to decide as detached monads but as social beings. While still not a mainstream topic, the social embeddedness and

interdependence of political behavior as well as its dependence on messages conveyed by the mass media has gradually come to be accepted as an important phenomenon, meriting further attention (Carmines and Huckfeldt 1996). To be sure, the assumption that both personal and mass communication count for electoral behavior is no attempt to replace the prevailing perspective that seeks to explain electoral behavior from voters' personal attributes. There can be no question that political resources, beliefs, attitudes, and values as well as other agencies of mobilization are important antecedent factors that are not to be neglected when attempting to arrive at comprehensive explanations of how electors cast their votes. However, ignoring these two potential agencies of mobilization entails the danger of missing an important point, and arriving at incomplete explanations. We believe that how individuals choose at the ballots is not only dependent on the considerations and feelings they carry around in their heads, but also on how their social environments are structured socially and politically.

Accordingly, we expect that both personal and mass communication count for local electoral participation in Germany. Through conveying political information, and by exposing citizens to participation-related norms they may mobilize electors to go to the polls. However, we also believe that depending on the particular content of the informative and normative messages to which citizens are exposed through their associates and the media, both forms of communication may as well have demobilizing consequences, depressing rather than enhancing turnout. More specifically, we expect exposure to mass media, especially to 'hard' news and to coverage of local politics, to contribute to turnout, while it may be rather undermined by attention to 'soft' news. By exposing voters to social norms and to political information in the course of political conversions, people's associates may also impinge on their likelihood to vote. Depending on whether they are positively or negatively oriented towards electoral participation we expect them to mobilize or demobilize electors who are exposed to their views.

While it is an important topic how and to which degree personal communication and mass communication interact with each other in the process of influencing political orientations (Chaffee and Mutz 1988; Rössler 1999; Scheufele 2002; Schmitt-Beck 2003; Eveland and Shah 2003), we will stick in this paper with a more straightforward question that is based on the premise that these two forms of communication operate basically independent of each other. From this perspective we are interested to see which form of communication is more important and consequential with regard to local electoral participation – voters' exchanges

with associates within their social networks, or their exposure to the mass media? Starting with Katz and Lazarsfeld's classic study on 'Personal Influence' the – after half a century still scarce – available evidence suggests that personal communication is more powerful than mass communication when it comes to influencing voters (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Robinson 1976; Schmitt-Beck 2000, 2004). On the whole, we thus expect the more direct communication that takes place in citizens' primary environments to be more effective than mass communication with its more distant character, with regard to participation at local elections. However, when testing this assumption it has to be borne in mind that communication's impact on individuals and its importance at the aggregate level of the entire population are not the same thing. Even a very powerful capacity to influence individuals will not translate into an equally important role for societal outcomes, if only few individuals are actually subjected to this strong influence. Hence, we need to test what the individual-level effects that we may find imply for increasing or reducing turnout at the level of the entire electorate.

Data and variables

Data

The remainder of this paper will present findings from a case study undertaken at the occasion of the local election in the state of Northrhine-Westphalia, the largest of the German states, on 26 September, 2004.² Its turnout was 54.5 percent (state average). Data for this study were collected in Duisburg, a city of about half a million inhabitants, located at the Western fringe of the Ruhr area, Germany's old industrial heartland. At the 2004 local election, along with other Northrhine-Westphalians Duisburg citizens were called to the ballots to elect their local councillors and the mayor. 48.0 percent of them took the opportunity to participate in selecting the city's future political leaders. During the campaign for this election, we conducted a CATI survey of a random sample of Duisburg's voting age population of German

² Local elections are organized statewide in Germany.

nationality (N = 1,009).³ To be able to analyse the mobilizing effects of both personal and mass communication it is essential to locate individual voters in their respective communication contexts with regard to both forms of political communication (cf. Huckfeldt et al. 2004, 34). Accordingly, the survey included numerous questions on respondents' media consumption habits, as well as perceptions of their primary environments.

Dependent variable

Measuring turnout in surveys is not without problems. Typically, the amount of electoral abstention is considerably underestimated in survey data. While mismatches between official turnout statistics and survey responses may to some degree be due to errors in official voter records, the main reasons for this problem are the tendency of nonvoters to refuse to take part in political surveys, and respondents' disposition to 'overreport' voting for reasons of social desirability (Caballero 2005, 333-6). Unfortunately, the problem of unit nonresponse clearly affected our survey. Thorough analyses revealed a sizable correlation between turnout and response rates across the 46 administrative districts of Duisburg. On average, response rates were better in neighborhoods where turnout was high, while it was more difficult to obtain interviews in districts where turnout was low (Schmitt-Beck 2005).⁴ This pattern occurred despite the fact that our fieldwork, in anticipation of this problem, was very intense.⁵

³ The minimum voting age at local elections in Northrhine-Westphalia is 16 years, while at all other elections one must be at least 18 to be entitled to vote. The survey did not include resident citizens from other EU countries who were also entitled to vote. Thorsten Faas participated in drafting the questionnaire, fieldwork was conducted between 30 August and 15 September, 2004, by the Social Science Survey Center (SUZ) of the University of Duisburg-Essen under the supervision of Frank Faulbaum and Martin Kleudgen. A precise response rate cannot be calculated, but its order of magnitude was about 30 percent. The lion's share of unit response is attributable to refusals by households or target persons.

⁴ Pearson's $r = .51$. In addition, we were able to obtain answers at least to the vote intention question from about 900 persons who refused to participate in the rest of the survey. The proportion of certain voters registered by that question lay 18 percent below the rate registered for those taking part in the entire survey (cf. Table 1). While it is impossible to indicate a population for which these 'one-question responders' were representative, this finding is at least suggestive.

⁵ A maximum of 10 contact attempts at different weekdays and times of the day were conducted before a case was omitted from the active sample.

While such fieldwork problems are probably impossible to avoid, respondents' inclination to claim to vote although they will not do so can at least partly be alleviated by appropriate measurement instruments. The question on which the dependent variable of our analyses is based was designed to meet the problem of overreporting in two ways. First, the question itself was phrased in such a way that denying to participate in the local election could be considered a non-embarrassing response. Second, instead of confronting respondents with the discrete alternatives of either voting or abstaining, a scale was offered on which respondents could assess the likelihood of their participation in the upcoming election, upon the assumption that such a format would make it easier for prospective nonvoters to admit that they might abstain.⁶ 76.5 percent of our respondents claimed to vote certainly at the local election (including respondents who at the time of the survey had already voted by mail), while the others chose one of the alternatives which implied that they might, at the end of the day, abstain (Table 1).

- Table 1 –

In the second column of Table 1, for the sake of comparison the results for a similar question are displayed which concerns vote intentions for a (hypothetical) general election. Here, more respondents chose the alternative of certain participation, indicating that respondents differentiated between the two types of elections. However, the proportion of respondents choosing one of the qualified alternatives with regard to participation at a general election is much higher than the share of nonvoters that is typically registered by the usual type of question with only two alternatives, demanding respondents to unequivocally commit themselves to being either voters or nonvoters. In election surveys, such questions usually register not more than about 10 percent abstainers. Hence, it seems that our question made it indeed easier for prospective nonvoters not to claim to be voters. The question thus seems to be a sufficiently valid measure of respondents' intention to vote, although the number of

⁶ The question reads: "At elections, many people cast their votes, while other for good reasons do not go to the polls. On 26 September, 2004, there will be a local election here in Duisburg. How about you? Will you certainly go voting, probably go voting, perhaps go voting, probably not go voting, or certainly not go voting?"

voters is still substantially overestimated.⁷ To model electoral participation, we dichotomized the dependent variable in such a way that respondents claiming to be certain voters (including postal voters) were distinguished from all those respondents whose answers implied a smaller or larger possibility that they might abstain.

Independent variables

The goal of this analysis is to demonstrate the impact of personal communication and mass communication on voters' decisions to take part in a local election. To register respondents' exposure to mass communication we asked a number of questions on TV habits, for instance *how much time they spent on an average day watching TV*. This variable is essential for testing recent claims about the destructive role of television for social capital, and mediated through this, for political participation (Putnam 1995, 2000). Less than two percent of our respondents never watched TV. The mean self-reported average daily consumption was 133 minutes. Further we need an indicator of *consumption of televised news*. We inquired on how many days during an average week respondents watched the news on television. Almost all TV viewers in our sample claimed to watch a newscast at least once a week (Table 2). Three out of four respondents claimed to watch the news on six or seven days per week, i.e., virtually daily. TV thus appears as a ubiquitous medium of political information.

- Table 2 -

The German TV landscape is one of the most diverse in Europe. An average TV household can choose between about four dozen channels (Zubayr and Gerhard 2005). Several of these channels are Public, most are private, i.e., operating on commercial premises. In contrast to private broadcasters whose operations are less heavily regulated, Public TV is entrusted with a special mission by German media law. It is required to treat its viewers not as customers, like its private competitors, but to cater to their needs as citizens of a democratic community, and to enhance their capability for active participation in the political process (Kiefer 1996).

⁷ It deserves mentioning that in Germany it is impossible to obtain data about individuals' actual electoral participation from official voting records. Hence, validating survey data with external information on respondents' actual behavior, as it is often done in US studies (e.g., Kenny 1993), is no feasible alternative for studies like ours.

As a consequence, the news on Public TV tend to be more informative and 'serious'. In contrast, private stations' news programs are guided by the commercial logic of audience maximization, present information in a more entertaining style, and place more emphasis on human touch stories, celebrity gossip, catastrophes, and sports instead of 'dry' politics (Pfetsch 1996). Some studies suggest that the type of broadcaster plays a role for turnout: at least in bivariate perspective watching the news on Public TV appears positively related to turnout at national elections, while this is not the case for private news (Oehmichen and Simon 1996; Kaase and Bauer-Kaase 1998). To identify our respondents' main source of televised news, and thus indirectly whether they rather attended to 'hard' or 'soft' news, we asked them on which channels they usually watched the news. Clearly, Public TV appears as the main provider of televised political information – a finding that corresponds to telemetric data on the national audience's TV habits (Zubayr and Gerhard 2005). 70 percent of all Duisburg voters watched Public TV's news programs at least once a week, more than half of them more or less daily. Just about one out of four claimed to watch the news primarily on private channels, about 20 percent did so on a regular basis.

Table 3 confirms by means of simple bivariate correlational analysis that the type of broadcaster, and thus the type of news watched, was indeed related to turnout at the 2004 local election in Duisburg. The frequency of general exposure to TV newscasts is positively, though only very weakly linked to turnout. However, once we distinguish between the two types of providers of news, the picture becomes much clearer. Respondents who intensely followed the news on Public TV were considerably more likely to vote, while attending to private news programs actually went along with a decrease in the likelihood to take part in the local election. The almost negligible correlation between turnout and general exposure to news appears thus as a consequence of an averaging effect of two contrasting patterns of relationships.

- Table 3 –

Fewer citizens were exposed to political information provided by daily newspapers than by television (Table 2). About 83 percent of our respondents were registered as *reading news on national politics* at least once a week, somewhat less than 50 percent daily or almost daily. Although TV has recently begun to play a moderate role as conveyor of local news in some metropolitan areas (but not yet in Duisburg where our study was conducted), the daily press is

still the dominant source of mediated local political information in Germany. More than 90 percent of all newspaper readers in our sample relied on a local daily, the national quality press was attended to only rarely, and the number of respondents who relied entirely on tabloids was also small – all in all a typical pattern with regard to newspaper readership in Germany (Schmitt-Beck 2000, 182-95). *Reading local news* was less widespread than consumption of national news. Only about 73 percent of our respondents read such reports at all, and just 41 percent did so at a daily basis. It seems plausible to assume that local news fulfils a crucial function with regard to mediated information on community matters, and is thus more likely to be consequential with regard to local politics in general, and municipal elections in particular (McLeod et al. 1996, 1999). Table 3 suggests that this was indeed the case, although the differences are slight, due to the high correlation between the frequency of attending to national and to local news among newspaper readers (.68, $p < .001$). Following the news on local politics was somewhat more strongly correlated to turnout than reading reports on national politics.⁸

Table 4 gives an impression of the interrelationships between news exposure on TV and the daily press. We see clear evidence for the well-known 'the more, the more' rule (Berelson u.a. 1954: 241). The more often respondents watched the news, the more likely they were to read political reports in newspapers, and even more so to read them often. This pattern becomes visible for the intensity of watching the news both on Public and on private TV. However, the type of broadcaster also made a difference. Those who watched Public news were considerably more likely to read newspapers than those attending to private stations' 'soft' news. Among those following the news very often this difference was especially pronounced. This suggests that the press was particularly attractive as an additional source of news for the audience of Public TV's political programs, but less so for the viewers of private broadcasters' 'soft' news, indicating a general syndrome of interest in 'serious' news that encompasses both television and the press (cf. Schmitt-Beck 1998). Interestingly, while this pattern emerges with regard to reading both reports on national and local politics, it is particularly pronounced concerning the latter. Among private broadcasters' news programs audience exposure to local news seems rather a minority phenomenon.

⁸ Causal analyses predicting turnout from newspaper readership confirm the impression of a stronger effect of exposure to local than to national coverage (tables not shown).

Based on these findings, three media variables will be included in the analyses presented in the next section: the time spent by respondents watching TV (in minutes on an average day; range 0 to 720), the average number of days per week they follow the news on Public TV (range 0 to 7), and the average number of days per week they read articles about local politics in a newspaper (range 0 to 7). Due to their high correlations with these variables, reading news on national politics in newspapers, and watching the news on private channels cannot at the same time be included in the models.

- Table 4 –

Unfortunately, these measures of media usage do not allow for a distinction between the provision of political information and exposure to social norms as mechanisms through which mass communication may influence citizens' likelihood to go to the ballots. Hence, it is not possible to draw conclusions from our findings concerning the precise nature of the influence mechanism that is at work with regard to media effects on turnout – whether it is informational, or normative. However, with regard to personal communication various indicators are available that enable us to make this distinction. Table 5 displays descriptive findings concerning *voting norms in voters' primary environments*. More than 80 percent of our respondents reported that they personally subscribed to the norm that voting is a citizen's personal duty (cf. Rattinger and Krämer 1995; Blais et al. 2000; Bjørklund 2002). However, when asked for their associates' likely responses if they abstained from the local election quite a few voters also felt that their social environment expected them to show up at the polls. Almost 40 percent did so with regard to their *family*, nearly 30 percent had this feeling with regard to the majority of their *friends and acquaintances*. Remarkably, a non-negligible number of respondents – 15 percent with regard to their family, 10 percent with regard to friends and acquaintances – had the impression that their associates expected them rather *not to vote*. Obviously, social norms concerning political participation, if they are of any import for citizens' behavior, may work in different directions – they may draw citizens to the polls, but they may also, although less frequently, keep them away. For the analyses presented below these variables are transformed into four dummy variables, indicating, respectively, whether a respondents feels that her family, or friends and acquaintances, would object, or comply with her not voting.

- Table 5 –

Apart from exerting normative pressure, citizens' personal environments may also be a source of political information, thus reducing "uncertainty over the alternative policy outcomes of the election, uncertainty over whether other citizens will vote or abstain, and uncertainty over the preferences of other voters" (Franklin 2004, 46). The vehicle for such information is political discussion. Hence, we sought to register the frequency and content of the political conversations that took place within voters' *egocentered networks of political discussants*. Respondents who were married or lived with a partner were asked a number of questions about their *spouses*. In addition, all respondents were invited to provide the same information about those *two people with whom they most often discussed politics*. About 40 percent of the discussants named in response to these questions were relatives, only about four percent were neighbors. Co-workers were named more frequently. 16 percent of the first discussants and 12.5 percent of the second-named discussants were workplace acquaintances. More than a third were 'just friends'.

Table 6 displays the *frequency of political discussions* in these relationships, according to our respondents' own assessments. About 40 percent of all respondents were unmarried or did not live with a partner in the same household. Some three percent had a spouse, but claimed never to talk about politics with her. About 30 percent of all respondents, corresponding to about one half of those married or living with a partner, claimed to engage often or very often in political conversations with their spouse. Other discussants had a higher reach. Just 13 percent named no political discussant apart from a spouse. Since even these respondents often discussed politics with spouses, all in all just about six percent of our sample reported never discussing politics with anyone. More than 40 percent discussed often or very often with their first discussant, some 15 percent did so with a second associate. However, altogether less than one half of our respondents actually named a second person with whom they discussed politics. Generally, the average frequency of political discussions was highest between spouses, and further declined markedly from the first to the second discussant.

- Table 6 -

Apparently, respondents found it rather easy to determine *whether their associates were going to vote*. More than 80 percent of spouses and both discussants were expected to go to the polls, while somewhat more than one out of ten was perceived to be a nonvoter (Table 7).

Surprisingly rarely were respondents unable to provide an assessment of their network partners' likely turnout. Interestingly, electoral participation appears unrelated to the frequency of political conversations. Frequent discussions led to a decrease in the respondents' uncertainty with regard to whether or not their discussants were going to vote, especially for spouses (Table 8). However, no trends emerge with regard to the perceived likelihood to vote. These findings imply that the frequency of political talks did not systematically differ between voting and nonvoting associates. Respondents had similar chances to become aware of the likely participation of voting associates as of the abstention of those who didn't.

- Tables 7 and 8 –

The variables that will be used in the models presented below are constructed by first creating two dummy variables for each discussant and spouse, indicating for each of them whether she were, according to the perception of the respective respondent, to vote or to abstain at the local election. These dummy variables are then multiplied with the frequency of discussion between the respondent and the respective associate. In cases of respondents with two political discussants, these discussant variables are combined into additive indices. Assuming that the question of voting was thematized during political conversations, the resulting four variables thus capture both the participation-related content and the intensity of communication about this content in our respondents' personal communication with the most important members of their egocentered networks of political discussants. For spouses they range from 0 for respondents who either had no spouse, or never discussed politics with their spouse, or discussed politics with a spouse of whose vote intention they had no clear perception, to 4, if political discussions took place very often with a spouse who either voted, or abstained. For discussants the corresponding range is from 0 to 8, which is assigned when conversations took place very often with two discussants.

Control variables⁹

To subject the hypothesis that personal and mass communication are important mobilizers of local turnout to a rigorous test extensive controls are necessary. Respondents' *age* and *gender*

⁹ All variables are coded in such a way that positive values are expected to increase turnout.

serve as basic demographic controls. Further, it is necessary to include measures of respondents' individual resources (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Brady et al. 1995). Individuals who are better *educated*, and are more *internally efficacious* with regard to local politics (which, surprisingly, was somewhat less often the case than with regard to national politics, with 51.1 percent agreeing that they understand national political questions, but only 43.7 percent with regard to questions of local politics) are expected to display higher levels of turnout.

In addition, a whole range of attitudinal variables is included to capture motivational aspects of voting. This concerns measures of respondents' political involvement, upon the assumption that high involvement stimulates electoral turnout (Campbell et al. 1960; Kleinhenz 1995): their *interest in local politics* (which was somewhat lower than their interest in general politics, with 36.8 percent taking a strong interest in politics generally, but only 33.3 percent with regard to local politics, while 31.3 found it rather uninteresting, as opposed to just 19.5 percent with regard to political in general) and the *strength of their partisanship*. Since values and internalized norms are also an important prerequisite of voting, we include a measure of respondents' personal *voting norm*, expecting those who subscribe to the view that it is a citizen's duty to go to the polls (cf. Table 5) to have a higher probability of actually voting at local elections (Rattinger and Krämer 1995; Blais et al. 2000; Bjørklund 2002).

Further, the hypothesis is taken into account that nonvoting is a function of political alienation and lack of support for the political system (Maier 2000). Measures pertaining to different levels of the political system are included. Thus it is tested whether abstention at local elections is a consequence of *dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy*, of *distrust in the local council*, of low levels of *external political efficacy concerning municipal political elites* (this was somewhat higher with regard to local politics than with regard to national politics, with 33.5 percent denying that local politicians "only want citizens' votes, but are otherwise uninterested in them", while only 27 percent did so with regard to politicians at the national level), or of the perception that *none of the local party organizations had the competence to solve the problems of the city* (this view was similarly widespread at the local level and at the national level – only about 24 percent believed that any of the parties had the capacity to solve the problems posed at the respective level of the political system).

Another block of control variables attempts to capture instrumental components of local voting. From an instrumental perspective, voting at local elections is seen as an attempt to influence policies of relevance to one's own life. Hence, it makes only sense to vote if electors believe that the outcome of a local election is indeed relevant for their future, and that their own vote is, in turn, important for this outcome (Kühnel and Fuchs 1998; Opp 2001). It is therefore analysed whether voters are more likely to go to the polls if they think that *the party that governs the city makes a difference for policy*, that *local elections are no less important than general elections*, and that *their own vote makes a difference* for the result of the election. Lastly, we also include variables concerning voluntary associations as alternative potentially mobilizing agencies: the frequency with which respondents *attended church*, and their membership in *trade unions and other voluntary associations*.

Analysis

Baseline model

Our analysis adapts a stepwise logic suggested by a recent study of the relationship between personal communication, mass communication, and local political participation in a US city (McLeod et al. 1999). Findings are displayed in Table 9. We start with a baseline model that includes what McLeod et al. (1996, 1999) characterize as 'structural anchoring' of turnout: demographic attributes of an unquestionably exogenous character: gender, age, and education. In addition our baseline model includes partisanship as a deeply internalized attitudinal predisposition, and respondents' linkages to voluntary associations, i.e., church attendance and organization membership. While the exogenous quality of these variables might be disputed, we believe that a conservative strategy of analysis needs extensive controls, and thus requires including them already in this initial step of analysis. As can be seen from Table 9, most of these variables attain conventional levels of statistical significance as predictors of local turnout. With a Pseudo-R² of .11 their explanatory power is also not negligible.

- Table 9 -

Context models

The next step consists in separately adding three blocks of independent variables to this baseline model: media usage, social network voting norms, and political discussions in egocentered networks, to see whether and how strongly each of them is related to turnout. The first of these partial context models includes the three media variables: time spent watching TV, exposure to news on Public TV, and reading local news in newspapers. All of these variables exert significant effects on turnout. In accordance to Putnam's (1995, 2000) TV hypothesis, respondents were less likely to vote if they watched a lot of TV. At the same time, exposure to Public news on TV and local news in the press increased turnout.

Turning to social network voting norms, we see just one significant effect. As it seems, by conveying expectations concerning proper participatory behavior families have a considerable power to bring their members in line. However, this pertains only to expectations concerning political activity. Families that disapprove of voting do not seem to have the power to keep their members away from the polls. Moreover, friends and acquaintances do in general not appear as relevant reference persons for voters when it comes to local voting. Not only were voting (or nonvoting) norms less frequently observed within such relationships by our respondents; where they occurred they apparently were also not considered relevant. Accordingly, no influences on turnout can be detected. Finally, we see that political discussions in egocentered networks had important consequences for turnout. All four variables are highly significant. Spouses apparently could move each other to the polls, but their capacity to undermine turnout by conveying the impression that they themselves were not going to vote, was even stronger. Other discussants displayed a stronger capacity than spouses to spur turnout, but their capability to keep respondents from voting was less pronounced, though still significant.

The Pseudo- R^2 increments displayed in Table 9 indicate that these three blocks of variables have very different weights with regard to explaining turnout. Political talks in egocentered networks are by far the most important of these three aspects of mobilization contexts. Adding the four network variables to the baseline model doubles the model's total explanatory power. The predictive power of media exposure and social norms is also not negligible. Yet their combined impact is still well below the amount contributed by social network discussions alone.

To get a more complete picture, we combine these three blocks of communication variables into one full context (plus baseline) model to see how these variables fare when analysed simultaneously. The amount of time spent watching TV is no longer significant in this expanded model, and reading news on local politics in newspapers appears also less important, although it is still significant. The most remarkable change concerns the effect of talking to spouses who intend to vote. Once the family norm to vote is controlled for, this relationship becomes negligible. This suggests that political conversations between spouses have a strong normative tone, and are the main source of electors' impressions of the substance of their family voting norms, at least if this norm is promoting turnout and not abstention. The other effects of personal and mass communication remain very similar. The combined explanatory power of all context variables clearly surpasses the joint predictive power of the background variables of the baseline model, attesting to the fact that in order to understand local turnout, citizens' involvement in structures of personal and mass communication must not be ignored.

Full model

The last step of our analysis consists in adding the whole set of remaining control variables to the model. These are essentially attitudinal so that their exogenous character to communication appears at least questionable. The possibility cannot be ruled out that some of them are in their turn dependent on certain aspects of personal or mass communication. In that case they would mediate communication effects. Thus, while the full context model circumscribes the *maximum total*, i.e., direct *and* indirect, impact of exposure to social networks and mass media on local turnout, the final model that also includes the full range of controls shows whether there remain any *direct* effects of personal and mass communication, beyond the combined effects of voters' resources and attitudes, as well as linkages to voluntary associations as alternative paths for electoral mobilization. Remarkably, including the whole range of attitudinal control variables increases the predictive power of the model only by less than the political discussion variables alone, not to speak of the entire set of all communication variables.

In the presence of such powerful controls none of the media variables appears relevant any more. All media effects evaporate. This suggests that any effects that media exposure may

exert on local voting are essentially indirect. It seems plausible, for instance, to assume that following news on community affairs in local newspapers may nurture interest in local politics (cf. McLeod et al. 1996), which in turn is one of the most powerful predictors of local turnout, as can be seen from Table 9. While all media effects disappear in this full model, the effects of personal communication remain almost unchanged. Even in the presence of a very extensive set of structural and attitudinal controls electors are more likely to go to the polls if they have the impression that their family expects them to vote, and if they engage in frequent political conversations with associates – though not spouses – who will vote themselves. Thus, spousal electoral mobilization seems to work through exposure to norms, while other associates increase the likelihood of electoral participation by means of mobilizing information. In contrast, discussing politics with nonvoters may undermine people's tendency to take part in an election. In that respect, spouses appear particularly influential, but other associates are also relevant.

Of our eleven communication variables, only four 'survived' very rigorous statistical controls, and thus seem to exert direct effects on turnout. All of them concern personal communication. Our analysis provides no evidence for direct effects of exposure to television or newspapers on participation in local elections. Social norms not to vote appear generally irrelevant, as do any expectations to participate signaled by friends and acquaintances. According to Table 9, apart from the mobilizing and demobilizing effects of personal communication, turnout at local election is higher among older respondents, among persons with a strong interest in the public affairs of their community, and among individuals who believe that to vote belongs to a good citizens' duties. In addition, instrumental considerations seem to play a role. Turnout is enhanced if people believe that the parties they can choose are actually competent enough to move things to the better, and that it makes a difference which of them wins the election. Furthermore, voters tend to participate more readily if they believe that their own vote can make a difference, and that local elections are important for policy outcomes.

Individual and aggregate consequences of communication for electoral participation

To get a clearer idea of the power of personal communication to move voters to and from the polls, we conclude our analysis by inspecting the predicted probabilities for taking part in the local election that can be calculated from the final model of Table 9. The results are displayed

in Table 10. The first column concerns network effects on *individuals*. It displays the differences in the probabilities to vote between electors who are not at all exposed to the respective form of personal communication, and electors with maximum exposure. Thus, these numbers indicate the maximum change in individuals' probabilities to vote that can come about by variation on the respective communication variables. According to this analysis discussing politics very often with a spouse who doesn't vote can decrease an average voter's probability to participate to .23, from .89 if no such talks take place. Other nonvoting discussants cannot match this large impact – even discussing very often with two of them will lead to decreases in one's likelihood to vote by only .36. For average voters, discussing politics with associates who will vote cannot be similarly consequential because their base likelihood of voting is already very high (Grand Mean = .88). The same applies to the family voting norm. Hence, nonvoting spouses and discussants have a substantial potential to draw citizens away from the polls.

- Table 10 -

A different picture emerges if we turn to primary environments' *aggregate* influence on turnout. This can be done by comparing not idealtypical patterns of minimum and maximum exposure, but of minimum exposure and exposure at the average level measured in the sample. In contrast to the previous analysis, here the fact is taken into account that many more voters are embedded in environments that promote electoral participation than in environments that consist of nonvoters. Accordingly, with regard to actual aggregate turnout, the positive side prevails. On average, the family norm to vote is responsible for a four percent increase, and discussions with voting associates for another seven percent. In contrast, the averse forces emerging from talks with nonvoters amount to not more than a one percent decrease in turnout due to nonvoting spouses, and a similar decrease due to other associates. In sum, this analysis suggests that the interdependence of voters accounts for about nine percent of the total turnout at the local election that was analysed in this case study.

Conclusion

Against the background of the general view that at elections resources, motivation, and mobilization are necessary to draw voters to the polls, this paper explored the specific role

played by personal communication and mass communication at local elections in Germany. Using survey data from a case study in a German city, evidence was found suggesting that both voters' news consumption and their exposure to cues from members of their personal environments can have substantial consequences for their likelihood to vote. Remarkably, such effects must not always be positive. Under certain circumstances they can also be negative. Both turnout and abstention are phenomena that can at least partly be explained by contextual influence. More precisely, voters' decision to abstain can not only come about as a consequence of the absence of mobilizing context cues. Rather, it can also be the result of exposure to *demobilizing* signals from one's communication environment. This concerns both forms of communication that were analysed here. Both personal and mass communication can mobilize voters and thus contribute to an increase in turnout. However, at the same time they can also demobilize citizens who otherwise might vote. How communication influences turnout depends very much on its content.

In line with expectations derived from recent theorizing about the role of TV for the generation of social capital in modern societies (Putnam 1995, 2000), voting at local elections tends to be lower if people watch a lot of TV. Even following the news is not unequivocally favorable for electoral participation. Attending to 'soft' news on commercial channels tends to decrease turnout, while following Public TV's 'hard' news seems to have favorable consequences. Information on local public affairs that is conveyed by local newspapers seems also important as a mobilizer of participation in local elections. However, our findings suggest that these media effects are entirely mediated by political attitudes. In the final stage of our analysis that included a broad array of attitudinal control variables, pertaining to both resource and motivation aspects of voting, no direct effects of media exposure were discernible any more.

Compared to the media, social networks appeared as the stronger force with regard to local electoral participation. Unlike television and the press, their impact is largely direct. Normative expectations from voters' associates are important cues that may drive citizens to the polls – but only if they concern spouses. No other normative influences on turnout could be detected, however. Voters appeared unimpressed by spouses' normative opposition to voting. Friends and acquaintances' normative orientations appeared unimportant either way. Political discussion within egocentered networks emerged as a stronger force than any others out of a broad range of predictors that were inspected in this research. Remarkably, associates

who abstained engage similarly frequently in political conversations than those who are perceived as voters. Nonvoters do not remain isolated because of a concomitant tendency to refrain also from discussing political matters. They are no less enmeshed in the webs of political information flows between interdependent citizens than those who vote. This implies that by means of political discussion voters can encounter similarly intensely mobilizing information that supports participation and demobilizing arguments in favor of abstention. However, due to the probabilistic nature of personal communication in which chances to get into contact with others reflect distributions of attributes like vote intentions in citizens' wider contexts, many more electors get engaged in conversations with voters than with nonvoters. Therefore, in its net aggregate consequences personal communication tends to increase rather than decrease turnout.

Appendix: Overview of variables

Participation at local election	"At elections, many people cast their votes, while other for good reasons do not go to the polls. On 26 September, 2004, there will be a local election here in Duisburg. How about you? Will you certainly go voting, probably go voting, perhaps go voting, probably not go voting, or certainly not go voting?" (1 = will vote certainly/already voted by post, 0 = will vote probably/perhaps/probably not/certainly not/DK)
Time spent watching TV	"On an average day, how many minutes do you watch TV?" (0 through 720)
Watching news on Public TV	Index constructed from the following questions: "In general, on how many days per week do you watch a TV newscast?" and "On which channel do you usually watch the news?" (0 = never, through 7=each day)
Reading local news in newspaper	"On how many days per week do you usually read reports on local politics in Duisburg?" (0 = never, through 7=each day)
Norm to vote: family	"Assuming you would not vote at the local election, would your family approve of this, would it disapprove, or would it not mind?" (1 = family would disapprove, 0 = else)
Norm not to vote: family	"Assuming you would not vote at the local election, would your family approve of this, would it disapprove, or would it not mind?" (1 = family would approve, 0 = else)
Norm to vote: friends	"How about your friends and acquaintances: would most of your friends and acquaintances approve of [you not voting], would they disapprove, or would they not mind?" (1 = friends/acquaintances would disapprove, 0 = else)
Norm not to vote: friends	"How about your friends and acquaintances: would most of your friends and acquaintances approve of [you not voting], would they disapprove, or would they not mind?" (1 = friends/acquaintances would approve, 0 = else)
Discussion with voting spouse	Index constructed from the following questions (only for respondents who are married or live with a partner in the same household): "How often do you talk with your partner about parties, elections, and politics: very often, often, sometimes, rarely, or never?" and "What do you think: will your partner participate in the upcoming local election, or will he/she not go voting?" (0 = no spouse/no spouse with whom respondent discusses politics/voting intention of spouse unknown, through 4 = discussing politics very often with spouse who is perceived as voter)

Discussion with nonvoting spouse	Index constructed from the following questions (only for respondents who are married or live with a partner in the same household): "How often do you talk with your partner about parties, elections, and politics: very often, often, sometimes, rarely, or never?" and "What do you think: will your partner participate in the upcoming local election, or will he/she not go voting?" (0 = no spouse/no spouse with whom respondent discusses politics/voting intention of spouse unknown, through 4 = discussing politics very often with spouse who is perceived as nonvoter)
Discussion with voting associates	Index constructed from the following questions: "From time to time people talk to others about parties, elections, and politics. I now would like to ask some questions on persons with whom you talk about politics. These may be relatives, or not. Please, think now of the person with whom you talk about politics most often. [...] How often do you talk to this person about political questions: very often, often, sometimes, rarely, or never?" - "What do you think: will this person participate in the upcoming local election, or will he/she not go voting?" - "Is there someone else with whom you talk about politics? [...] How often do you talk to this person about political questions: very often, often, sometimes, rarely, or never?" - "What do you think: will this person participate in the upcoming local election, or will he/she not go voting?" (0 = no discussant/voting intention of discussant(s) unknown, through 8 = discussing politics very often with 2 discussants who are perceived as voters)
Discussion with nonvoting associates	Index constructed from the following questions: "From time to time people talk to others about parties, elections, and politics. I now would like to ask some questions on persons with whom you talk about politics. These may be relatives, or not. Please, think now of the person with whom you talk about politics most often. [...] How often do you talk to this person about political questions: very often, often, sometimes, rarely, or never?" - "What do you think: will this person participate in the upcoming local election, or will he/she not go voting?" - "Is there someone else with whom you talk about politics? [...] How often do you talk to this person about political questions: very often, often, sometimes, rarely, or never?" - "What do you think: will this person participate in the upcoming local election, or will he/she not go voting?" (0 = no discussant/voting intention of discussant(s) unknown, through 8 = discussing politics very often with 2 discussants who are perceived as nonvoters)
Gender	1 = male, 0 = female
Age	In years
Secondary education	1 = completed secondary education, 0 = less
Strength of party identification	"In Germany many people feel attached towards a particular political party although they sometimes also vote for another party. How about you: do you, generally speaking, lean towards a particular party? [if yes:] How strongly or weakly do you, all in all, lean towards this party?" (1 = independent/DK/weakly/rather weakly, through 4 = very strongly)
Church attendance	1 = never through 5 = each Sunday/almost each Sunday
Voluntary association membership	1 = Member of trade union or other voluntary association, 0 = no member
Local internal efficacy	"I can understand and assess important questions of local politics very well." (1 = agree not at all, through 5 = agree very strongly)
Interest in local politics	"How strongly are you specifically interested in local politics in Duisburg?" (1 = not at all, through 5 = very strongly)
Voting norm	"In a democracy it is the duty of each citizen to participate regularly in elections." (1 = agree not at all, through 5 = agree very strongly)
Satisfaction with democracy	"How satisfied or dissatisfied are you, all in all, with democracy as it exists in Germany?" (1 = very dissatisfied, through 5 = very satisfied)
Trust in local council	"How strong is your confidence in the Duisburg city council?" (1 = not confident at all, through 5 = fully confident)

Local external efficacy	"The parties in Duisburg are only interested in the citizens' votes, but not in their opinions." (1 = agree very strongly, through 5 = agree not at all)
Parties competent	"Generally thinking of the political problems here in Duisburg, is there a party that is best able to solve these problems?" (-1 = no, through 1 = yes)
Parties different	"It is important which party wins the upcoming local election because that makes a big difference for policy after the election." (1 = agree not at all, through 5 = agree very strongly)
Local elections important	"The outcomes of national elections are far more important for the solution of our problems than the outcomes of local elections." (1 = agree very strongly, through 5 = agree not at all)
Own vote important	"My vote is totally unimportant for the outcome of the local election on 26 September." (1 = agree very strongly, through 5 = agree not at all)

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Table 1: *Intention to participate in 2004 local election in Duisburg (%)*

	Local election (survey respondents)	General election (survey respondents)
Will participate...		
certainly	76.5	80.6
probably	8.8	9.7
perhaps	5.0	3.8
probably not	3.2	2.5
certainly not	5.8	3.2
DK	0.8	0.2
(N)	(1008)	(1006)

Table 2: *Exposure to news (%)*

	Television: watching news			Newspapers: reading news	
	total	mainly on Public TV	mainly on private TV	on national politics	on local politics
At least once a week	97.3	70.5	26.5	83.2	73.5
6-7 days per week	75.9	55.4	20.3	48.4	41.3
(N)	(1007)	(968)	(968)	(1003)	(998)

Table 3: *News exposure and local voting: bivariate relationships (Pearson's r)*

	Television: watching news			Newspapers: reading news	
	total	mainly on Public TV	mainly on private TV	on national politics	on local politics
	.08*	.25***	-.23***	.25***	.26***
	(1000)	(959)	(959)	(994)	(989)

*** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05; + p < .10

Table 4: Relationships between news exposure on TV and in newspapers (%)

TV: watching news Newspapers: reading news on	mainly on Public TV		mainly on private TV	
	at least once a week	6-7 days per week	at least once a week	6-7 days per week
national politics				
at least once a week	85.6	84.9	76.2	77.9
6-7 days per week	55.6	59.2	30.1	35.4
(N _{base})	(680)	(535)	(269)	(195)
local politics				
at least once a week	78.2	79.0	60.9	63.5
6-7 days per week	48.8	53.6	23.7	28.7
(N _{base})	(679)	(534)	(266)	(192)

Example: Of those respondents who watched the news at least once a week and mainly on Public TV, 85.6 percent read articles on national politics at least once a week, including 55.6 percent who read such articles on 6-7 days per week.

Table 5: Internal and external voting norms (%)

	Internal voting norm	External voting norm: family	External voting norm: friends and acquaintances
Norm to vote	83.5	38.9	28.9
No norm to vote	8.5		
Norm not to vote		15.6	10.1
Indifference	8.1	45.5	61.1
(N)	(1008)	(1005)	(1004)

Note: Indifference indicates a vague neither/nor or DK response regarding the internal voting norm, and explicit indifference, DK or a lack of associates of the respective type regarding external voting norms.

Table 6: Political discussion in egocentered networks (%)

	Spouse		1st discussant		2nd discussant	
None	43.5	-	13.1	-	54.5	-
Discuss politics						
rarely	8.1	14.4	7.7	8.8	7.6	16.7
sometimes	18.9	33.5	37.5	43.2	23.1	50.9
often	17.5	30.9	30.6	35.3	11.5	25.2
very often	12.0	21.2	11.0	12.7	3.3	7.2
(N)	(1008)	(570)	(1005)	(873)	(1003)	(456)

Note: For spouses category 'none' includes 2.6 percent respondents who are married (or live with a partner) but never discuss politics with their spouses.

Example: Of all respondents 43.5 percent had no spouse (or partner) or never discussed politics with their spouse. 8.1 reported to have a spouse (or partner) with whom they discussed politics 'rarely'. The latter correspond to 14.4 percent of all those respondents who had a spouse with whom they discussed politics.

Table 7: *Perceived voting intentions of members of egocentered networks (%)*

	Spouse	1st discussant	2nd discussant
Will vote	85.9	82.2	81.4
Will not vote	10.6	10.6	11.3
DK	3.4	7.1	7.2
(N)	(583)	(845)	(442)

Table 8: *Perceived voting intentions by political discussion (%)*

	Spouse			1st discussant			2nd discussant		
	Will not vote	DK	(N)	Will not vote	DK	(N)	Will not vote	DK	(N)
Discuss politics rarely	12.5	7.5	(80)	9.7	5.6	(72)	9.6	11.0	(73)
sometimes	9.2	4.3	(185)	10.1	8.5	366)	14.2	7.1	(226)
often	7.5	2.9	(173)	11.4	6.0	(298)	6.3	6.3	(111)
very often	10.1	0.0	(119)	11.0	6.4	(109)	12.5	3.1	(32)

Example: Of those respondents who discussed politics ‘rarely’ with a spouse (or partner) 12.5 percent said their spouse would not vote, and 7.5 percent did not know whether their spouse would vote or not. The rest (80.0 percent) said their spouse would vote.

Table 9: Predictors of turnout (coefficient estimates from logistic regressions)

	Baseline model		Context model: mass media		Context model: network norms		Context model: political discussion		Context model: full		Full model	
	B	t-value	B	t-value	B	t-value	B	t-value	B	t-value	B	t-value
Time spent watching TV			-.002*	(2.02)					-.001	(1.42)	-.0004	(.38)
Watching news on Public TV			.10**	(3.25)					.08*	(2.41)	.06	(1.48)
Reading local news in newspaper			.17***	(4.55)					.10*	(2.38)	-.03	(.56)
Norm to vote: family					1.19***	(5.49)			1.05***	(4.13)	.87**	(3.10)
Norm not to vote: family					.08	(.30)			.19	(.62)	.18	(.54)
Norm to vote: friends					.34	(1.52)			-.12	(.44)	-.25	(.84)
Norm not to vote: friends					.21	(.71)			.14	(.41)	.33	(.83)
Discussion w. voting spouse							.25**	(3.26)	.12	(1.43)	.03	(.30)
Discussion w. nonvoting spouse							-.67***	(4.58)	-.77***	(5.06)	-.83***	(4.65)
Discussion w. voting associates							.35***	(6.27)	.27***	(4.39)	.21**	(2.88)
Discussion w. nonvoting associates							-.20*	(2.34)	-.22*	(2.44)	-.25*	(2.38)
Gender	.30+	(1.75)	.31+	(1.70)	.34+	(1.92)	.30	(1.57)	.34	(1.64)	.22	(.92)
Age	.03***	(6.40)	.02**	(3.47)	.03***	(5.56)	.04***	(6.48)	.03***	(4.22)	.03***	(3.65)
Secondary education	.57**	(3.04)	.41*	(2.00)	.41*	(2.09)	.44*	(2.12)	.19	(.81)	-.21	(.76)
Strength party identification	.47***	(4.96)	.41***	(4.07)	.44***	(4.54)	.38***	(3.62)	.35**	(3.12)	.11	(.85)
Church attendance	.08	(1.26)	.04	(.55)	.05	(.77)	-.05	(.70)	-.08	(1.10)	-.16+	(1.91)
Voluntary assoc. membership	.47**	(2.75)	.35+	(1.93)	.37*	(2.08)	.28	(1.46)	.14	(.64)	.10	(.44)
Local internal efficacy											.14	(1.32)
Interest in local politics											.69***	(5.23)
Voting norm											.36**	(3.37)
Satisfaction with democracy											.22+	(1.79)
Trust in local council											-.11	(.72)
Local external efficacy											.04	(.36)
Parties competent											.26+	(1.65)
Parties different											.19*	(2.07)
Local elections important											.16+	(1.79)
Own vote important											.21*	(2.24)
Constant	-1.97***	(5.79)	-1.68***	(4.46)	-2.10***	(5.79)	-2.43***	(6.13)	-2.20***	(4.72)	-6.68***	(6.95)

Cox & Snell R²

background	.11					
increment context		.04	.04	.11	.14	.14
increment controls						.08
(N)	(943)	(893)	(938)	(894)	(843)	(813)

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; + $p < .10$

Table 10: Predicted changes in likelihood to vote, depending on context exposure (predicted probabilities)

Change from no exposure to	maximum exposure	mean exposure
Family norm to vote	.08	.04
Discussion with nonvoting spouse	-.66	-.01
Discussion with 2 voting associates	.14	.07
Discussion with 2 nonvoting associates	-.36	-.01

Note: All independent variables are fixed at sample mean (Grand Mean = .88). Entries are calculated from the model in the last column of Table 9.