When do Voters Take into Account Post-Election Bargaining Processes?

Partick W. Kraft, Fridolin Linder, Lukas F. Stoetzer

Contact Information:

Patrick W. Kraft
Email: `patrick.kraft@stonybrook.edu`

Lukas F. Stoetzer
Email: `lstoetze@mail.uni-mannheim.de`

Stony Brook University

UNIVERSITY OF MANNHEIM

Abstract

Under what conditions are citizens able and willing to take into account post-election bargaining processes? In this article, we show that the ability of voters to cast rational decisions in multi-party contexts is conditional on distinct aspects of political sophistication and engagement. In our experimental design, we ask subjects to participate in several mock elections. Participants are asked to vote in such a way, that the final electoral outcome is as close as possible to their own ideal position. In a control group, less than 10% of the individual vote decisions lead to outcomes that were as close as possible to the voters' individual preferences. The share of optimal decisions increases drastically if we increase the available information and abolish time constraints to solve the task. Interestingly, monetary incentives do not have a direct effect on the accuracy of voting decisions, but rather moderate the beneficial effects of available information and reduced time constraints. These results indicate that three aspects of political sophistication and engagement – information, capabilities and motivation – have differential effects on the ability of citizens to cast strategic voting decisions in multi-party systems.

Motivation

- Policy outcomes in multi-party systems are not determined by a single party, but rather through compromises between different party platforms.
- For these power-sharing systems, Kedar (2005) conceptualized the notion that individuals are interested in the outcome of the post-election bargaining process rather than the party platforms themselves.
- **Voters should consider the way institutions convert their votes to policy. But to what extent is the electorate able to perform these demanding calculations? What are sources for heterogeneity in the application of different voting rules?**
- We examine political sophistication and engagement as a potential moderator for the reliance on different voting rules and party considerations.

Experimental Research Design

Participants are asked to vote for one of the offered parties (A to E) such that the compromise between the parties after the election is closest to their ideal position (X). Party positions and individual preferences for each scenario are presented in the following way:

Figure 1: Party Positions and Individual Preferences
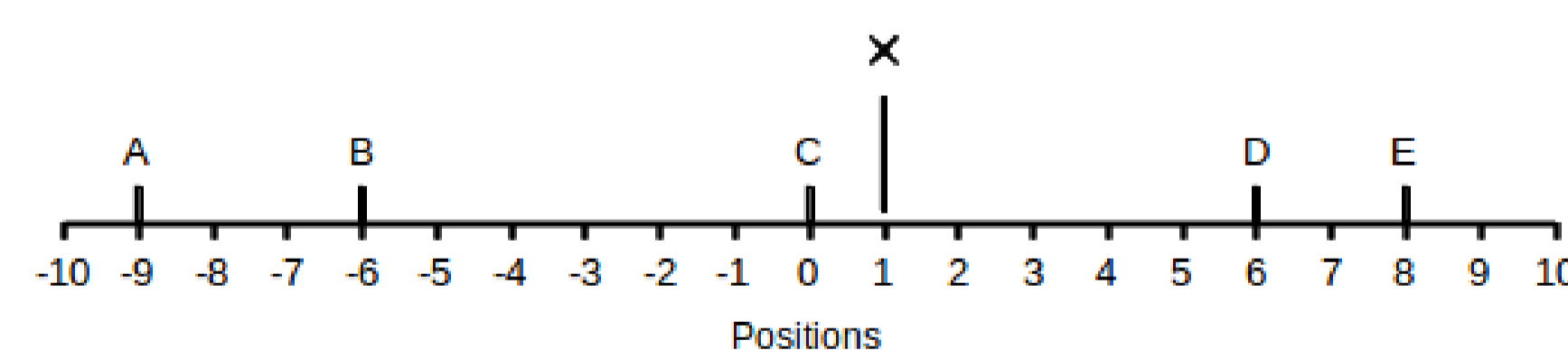
The outcome of the election is determined by the average position of all parties, weighted by their relative support. The predicted party supported prior to each election is displayed in a poll.

Figure 2: Poll Result

After viewing positions and polls for a scenario, participants are asked to vote for one of the parties such that the outcome of the election is as close as possible to their assigned preference (X). This procedure is repeated such that each participant takes part in six different elections with different numbers of total voters (10, 20, 50, 100, 500, undefined large electorate).

Try it out

Treatment Political Sophistication

- *Information:*
  - Low Information (Control): A margin of error/uncertainty about the poll predictions of the election as well as the party positions.
  - High Information (Treatment): No uncertainty about poll predictions as well as the party positions.
- *Motivation:*
  - Low Motivation (Control): No bonus payments or incentivization.
  - High Motivation (Treatment): Offering monetary pay-off depending on the electoral outcome. $0.05 for every choice that pulls the electoral outcome closest to them.
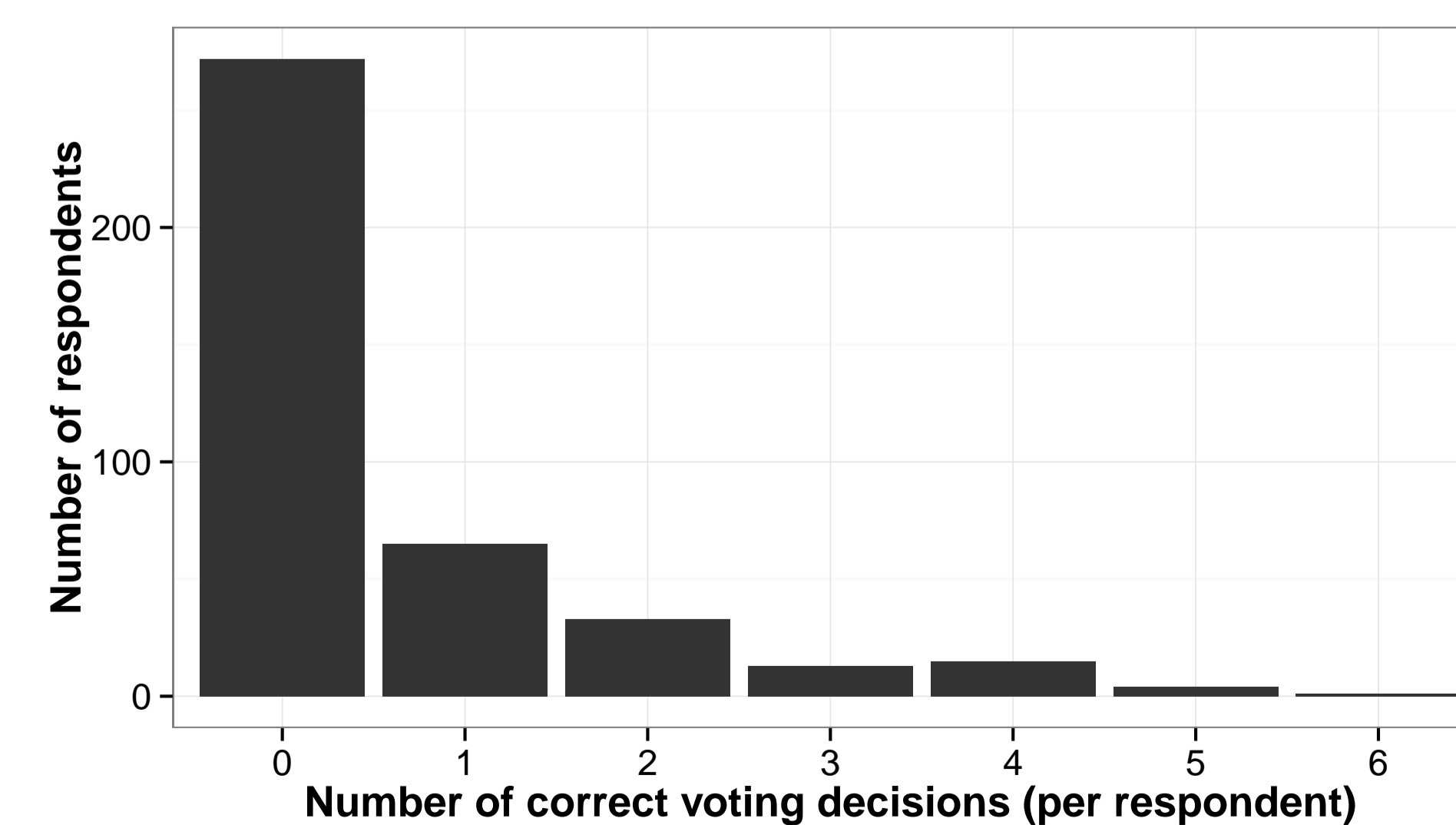- *Capabilities:*
  - Low Capabilities (Control): Time for the voting tasks limited to 15 seconds per scenario.
  - High Capabilities (Treatment): No time constraint for voting task.

Sample

- The sample consists of 400 participants recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk
- Initial amount of $0.60 for participating as well as a bonus of up to $0.30 depending on their performance (motivation/incentivization treatmtent).

Results: Post-Electoral Bargaining

Figure 3: Number of optimal decisions per respondent

Most participants were not able to identify the party that pulled the policy outcome as close as possible to their own preference in any of the scenarios (272 participants did not vote for the optimal party in any of the six election scenarios).
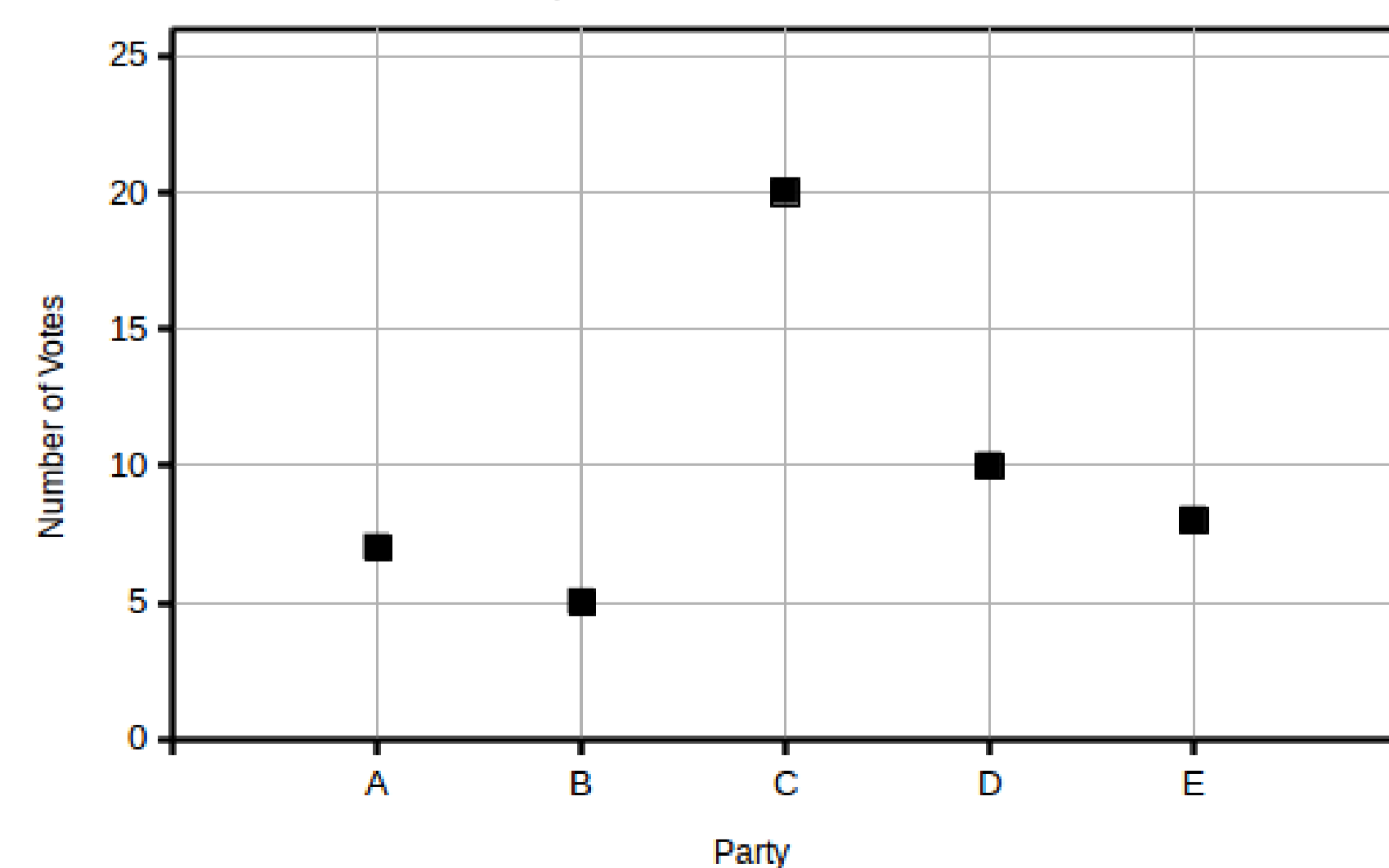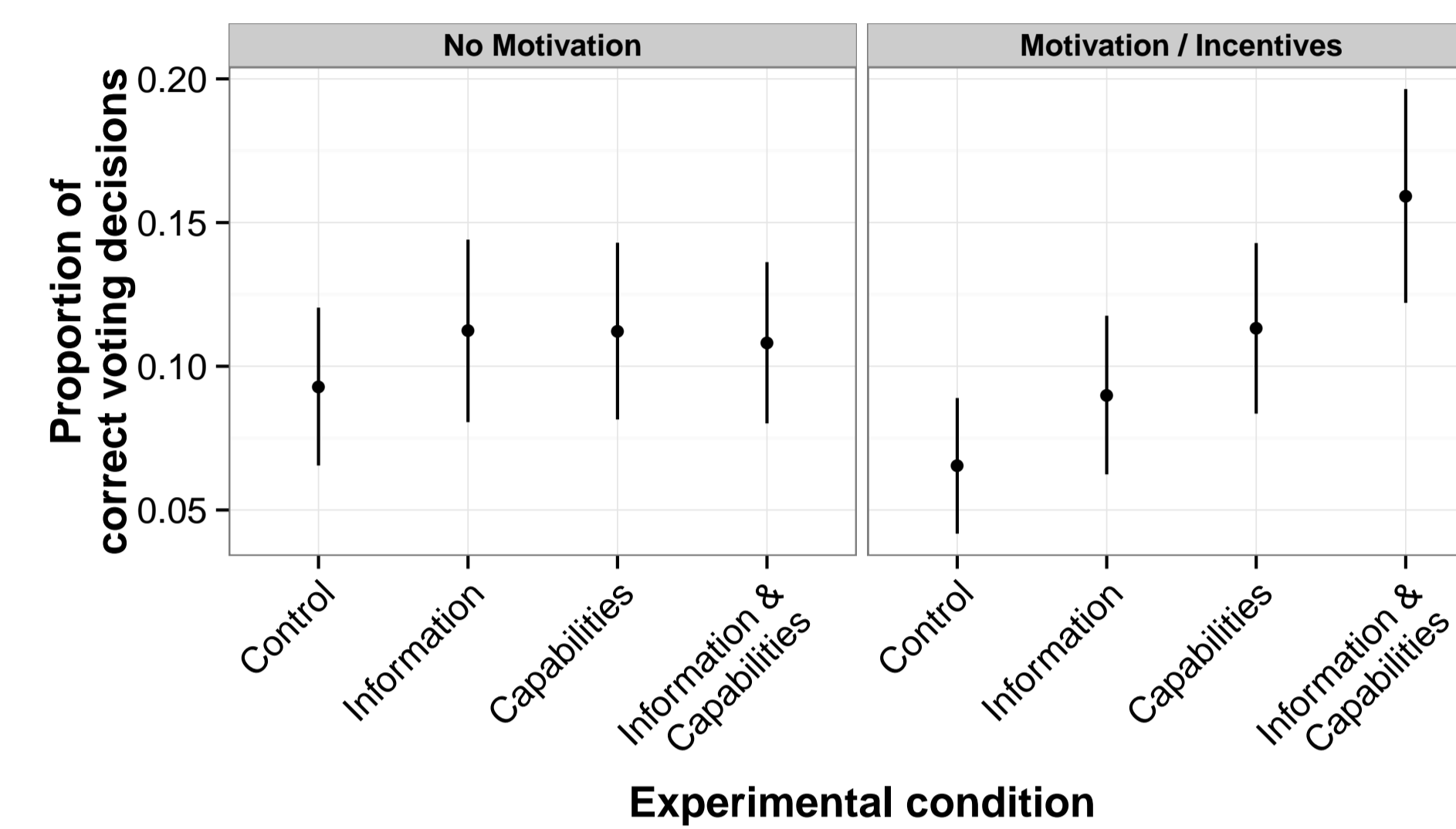

Figure 4: Proportion of optimal decisions by treatment conditions

The proportion of optimal decisions does not increase substantially by providing more information or capabilities if the participants are not motivated through monetary incentives. However, in the incentivized condition, providing additional information and reducing time constraints increases the likelihood of optimal voting decisions.

Results: Voting Rules

Figure 5: Distribution of voting rules applied in individual decisions
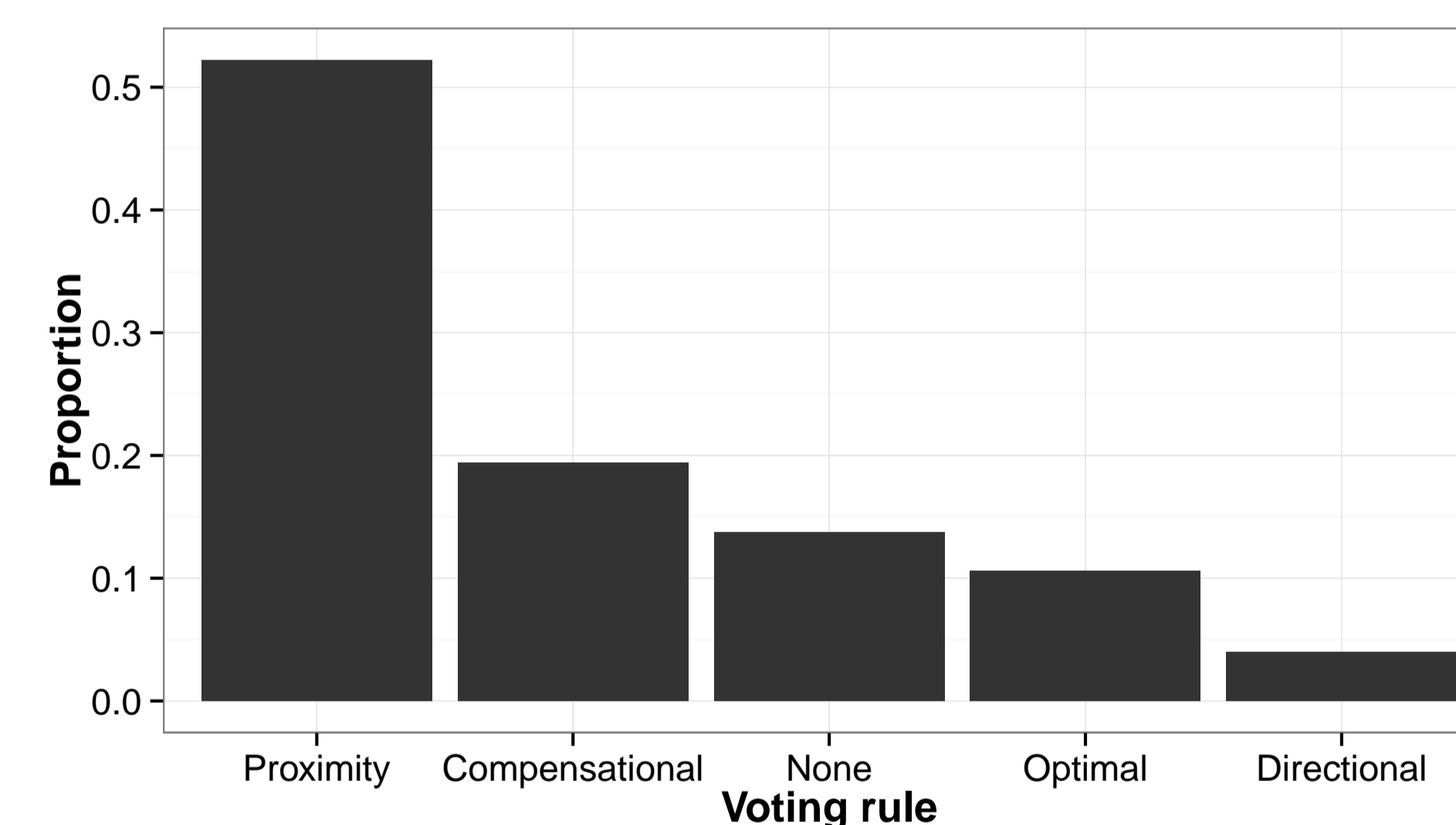
Participants were most likely to vote for the party that is closest to them (*proximity voting*), even though this voting rule did not result in a policy outcome that is as close as possible to their own preference.

Figure 6: Distribution of voting rules by treatment conditions
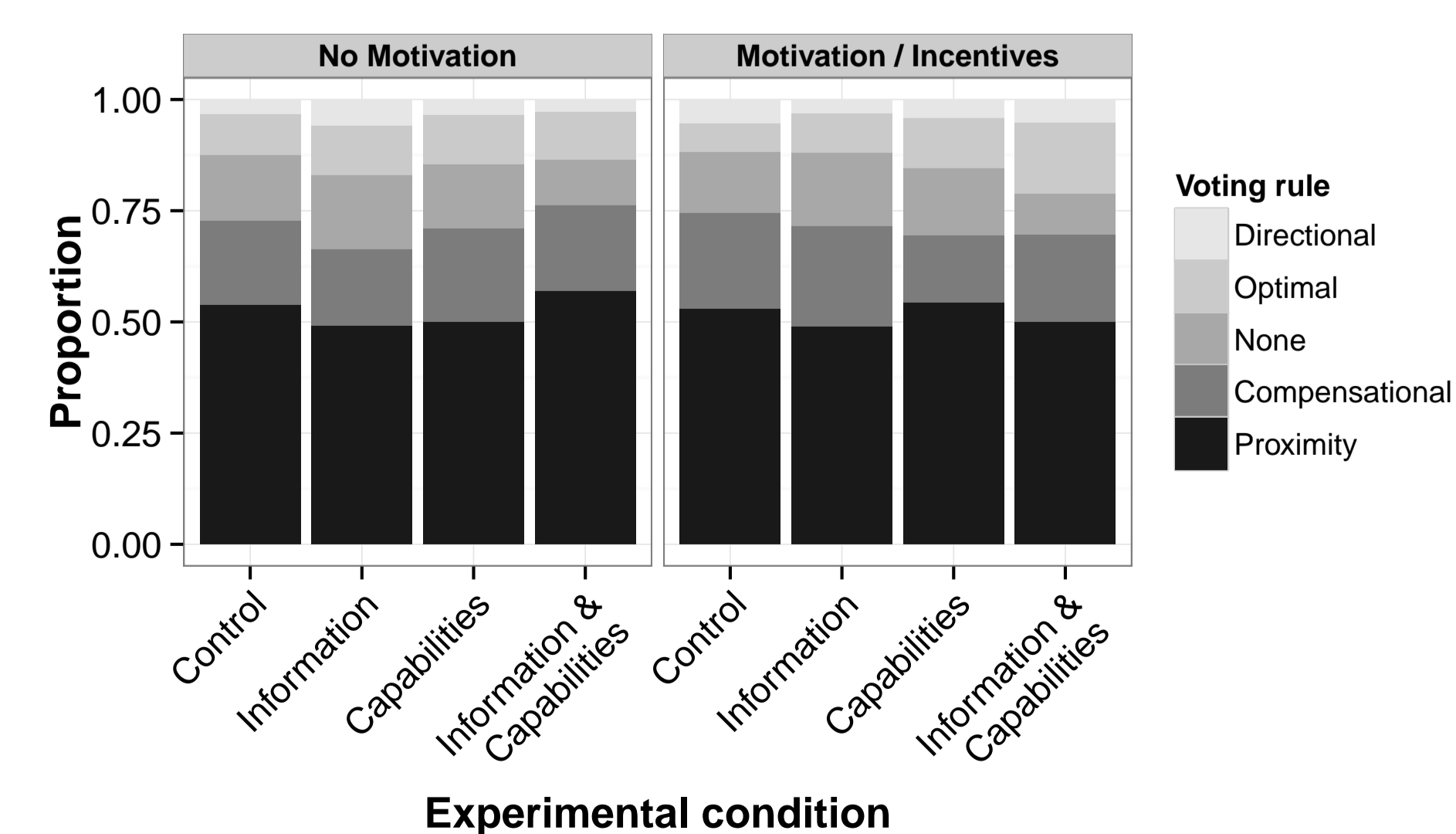
The proportion of specific voting rules applied in each scenario varies depending on the amount of information, capabilities, and motivation.

Figure 7: First differences based on probit models predicting deviation from optimal choice in favor of alternative voting rule
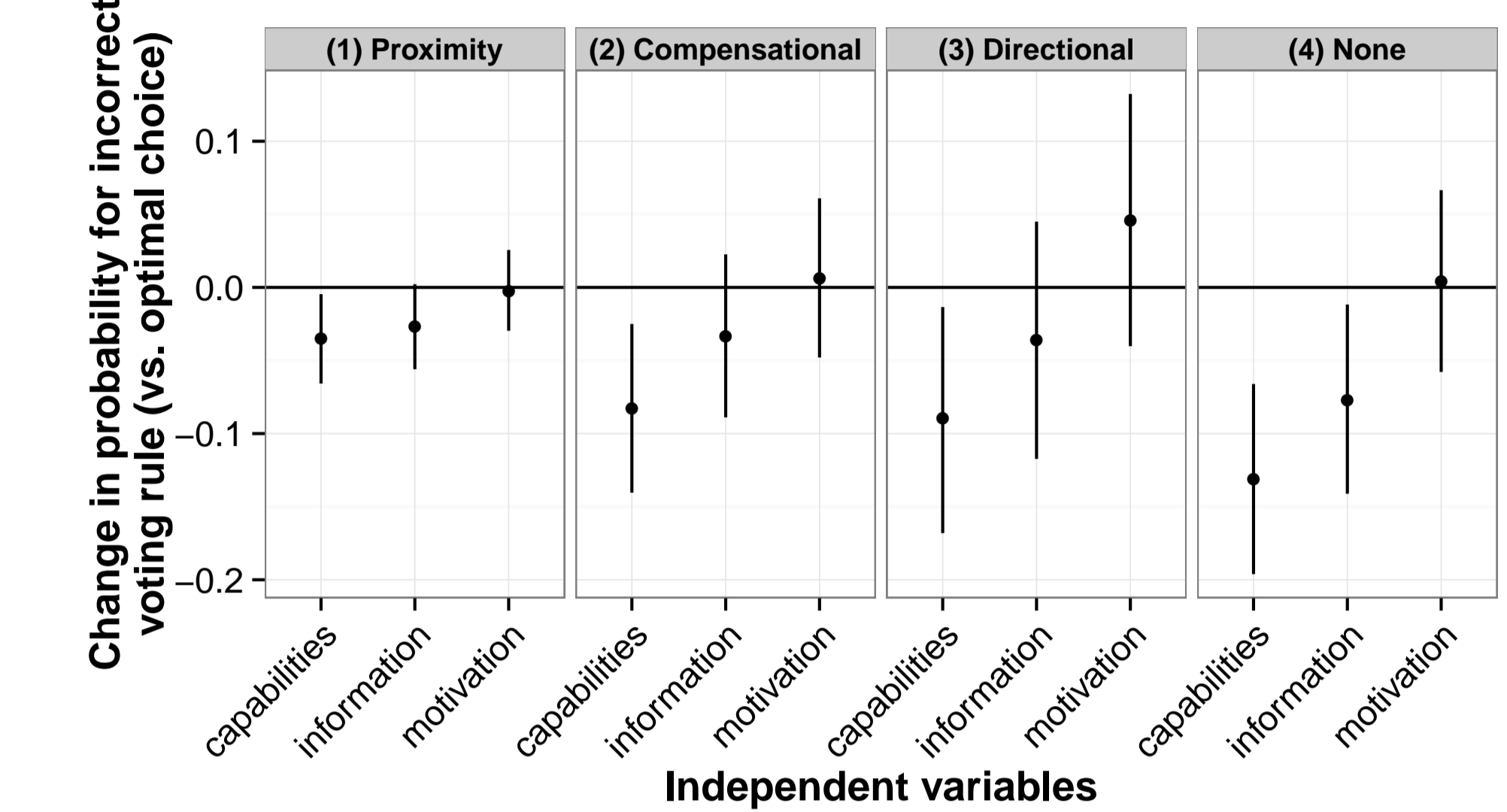
Increasing the participants capabilities (i.e. reducing time constraint) reduces the probability of applying voting rules based on proximity, compensational, or directional considerations instead of voting for the optimal party. Furthermore, increasing capabilities and the amount of information reduce the probability that the vote choice is suboptimal *and* not based on any specified alternative voting rule/heuristic.

Summary of Results

- Even under ideal conditions within our experimental framework (incentivized environment without uncertainty about the election result or time constraints), a majority of decision makers fail to correctly consider the post-electoral bargaining process.
- Most participants relied on proximity or compensational voting heuristics instead of being able to identifying the optimal vote choice in a given scenario.
- About 10% of the participants did not rely on any voting rule specified by the experimenters.
- The application of voting rules varies by the election environment (information, capabilities, motivation). Reducing time constraints (i.e. increasing capabilities in election scenario) is most effective in increasing the probability of optimal choices instead of alternative voting rules.

Implications

- The findings are informative for the strategic environment of popular multi-party elections.
- Varying abilities of citizens to consider how institutions convert their vote into desired policies generates varying power to influence political outcomes.
- The divide between strategic-oriented and sincere voters questions the role of popular elections as a mere aggregation device.

References

Kedar, Orit. 2005. "When Moderate Voters Prefer Extreme Parties: Policy Balancing in Parliamentary Elections." *American Political Science Review* 99 (02): 185-199.

Acknowledgements