Studies in Communication Sciences 25.2 (2025), pp. 145–159

# No local newspapers but WhatsApp? Political information repertoires, local media use and their effects in Switzerland

Johanna Burger, University of Applied Sciences of the Grisons, Institute for Multimedia Production, Switzerland, and Freie Universität Berlin, Institute for Media and Communication Studies, Germany
johanna.burger@fhgr.ch

*Abstract*
In recent years, there has been an increasing focus in research on local media. However, there are still blind spots in this area of research, especially local media *use*. Considering the increasing variety of information sources due to digitalization, it is no longer sufficient to analyze just individual local information sources. Instead, examining the full range of local information sources becomes essential. Knowing from the news desert research that information on a local level is especially important for a functioning democracy, insights into the use of information sources and local media are therefore of high relevance. This paper presents an analysis of a distinctive data set – a survey in the Swiss canton of Berne in 2022 – that offers insights into local media use, their effects on voter turnout and split-ticket voting, as well as the political information repertoires in Switzerland. Four types of political information repertoires can be derived from all the information sources used: *the informed socializers, the traditionalists, the wooed ones,* and *the online readers*. Belonging to a particular political information repertoire has an effect on voter turnout and on Swiss split-ticket voting (panaschieren), as well as just newspaper use does. The findings from this paper should both lay the groundwork for further research and provide insights for practitioners.

*Keywords*
political information, information repertoire, news desert, local media, media use, Switzerland, Berne

## 1 Introduction

In Switzerland, a country with a direct democratic system, there are numerous votes and elections at the municipal, cantonal, and national level (Linder & Wirz, 2014, 145-149). It is of great importance that citizens in Switzerland are adequately informed, and that there is an elevated level of availability of information and news, especially on politics, at the national and at sub-national (cantonal and municipal) levels. Getting politically informed can be achieved through a combination of media content and other sources of information, such as talking to colleagues at work (Marcinkowski et al., 2014, p. 435). Local media outlets, which represent a significant source of local information, have often been largely overlooked by researchers for a long time. In the last decade, research interest in local media has increased, especially with the new buzzword *news deserts* (Chmielewski, 2011, pp. 27–29; Abernathy, 2016). The concept of news deserts has been the subject of investigation at varying levels of analysis, with differing conceptualizations of its defining characteristics and the use of diverse methodological approaches and data sources (e. g., Abernathy, 2016; Mathews & Ali, 2022; Schulhofer-Wohl & Garrido, 2013; Vogler et al., 2023; Wang, 2023). However, this research has been focused on the decline of printed newspapers and the decline's effects (e. g., Kübler & Goodman, 2019, for Switzerland). The underlying argument that runs through the news desert research is that local media are essential for a functioning democracy and the dissemination of political information. Various studies have shown that the absence of local media has negative effects on society, for example, on split-ticket voting and voting turnout (e. g., Rubado & Jennings, 2020; Moskowitz, 2021; Montgomery, 2024). While some find negative effects, as fewer voters with less or no local media (e. g., Filla & Johnson, 2010; Schulhofer-Wohl & Garrido,

https://doi.org/10.24434/j.scoms.2025.02.6150

2013; Rubado & Jennings, 2020), a few others find no significant effect for voting itself (Chapp & Aehl, 2021). Although there is a lot of research in this field, there exists criticism of news desert research as a whole: Usher (2023) admits that news desert research is (partly) important but needs to move away from the *void-fixation* and also needs to analyze (still) functioning local media and media markets in order to better understand *who uses* local media and thus local information at all. In response to this criticism, this paper analyses local media use in the Swiss canton of Berne – a region in which local media still exists and is therefore not a news desert. However, in the context of advancing digitalization and the growing number of possible sources of information, it is argued here that merely examining individual local media sources is insufficient for gaining insights into the entire concept of local information gathering. Consequently, this study extends beyond the analysis of individual local media / information sources to analyzing political information repertoires (explanations on this follow in chapter 2).

By adopting the users' perspective, the present study explores a subject that has received comparatively little attention from researchers to date. The overarching question is: What information sources do people in the canton of Berne use to get information on cantonal politics?

The concept of local media is complex and resists a clear-cut definition. There are different approaches as to how *the local* can be defined at all, geographically, politically, or socio-geographically (Burger et al., 2023, pp. 9–10). Based on the definition by Burger et al. (2023, pp. 9–10), local media are defined in this paper as local and sub-national regional media that have an editorial organizational structure, produce clearly identifiable editorial content, whereby this content is primarily produced for a geographical area – municipalities, districts, or cities.

Accordingly, the focus on a specific canton enables the examination of political information repertoires and local media use at the local level with a degree of detail that has not existed yet, especially for Switzerland. Despite the existence of research on national news repertoires and media use in Switzerland (e.g., Schwaiger et al., 2020, see also the annual published books "Jahrbuch Qualität der Medien" by the fög – Research Center for the Public Sphere and Society), there is a lack of research examining the political information repertoires and local media use at the local level here. The following section presents the current state of research on media use on a local level and information repertoires.

## 2 Political information repertoires and (local) media as part of it

In the contemporary context of digital transformation, characterized by a multiplication of information sources, a focus on individual channels is no longer a sufficient approach. An alternative perspective is to examine the overall range of local information, which is grouped into what are termed repertoires. First efforts in categorizing and grouping disparate channels or information sources were made in the field of media perception research. Initially, within one information medium, Heeter and Greenberg (1985) analyzed and grouped TV cable and program choice. When investigating the use of different information sources, Reagan et al. (1995) found that combinations of sources are used for different purposes / with different motivations – this is in reference to the uses and gratifications approach (citing Perse and Courtright 1993, but interestingly not Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch 1973). Using regression models, they came to the following conclusion: "For sports, the repertoire is only television and newspaper, while for what's going on in the community, radio and newspaper – along with two technologies, cellular phone and personal computer – comprise the repertoire" (Reagan et al., 1995, p. 26).

Subsequent research in the filed states that "[…] little attention has been paid to the question what the overall result of all this selectivity is, how media users combine different media contacts into a comprehensive pattern of exposure or, as we call it, a *media repertoire*" (Hasebrink & Popp, 2006, p. 369, italics by that paper), and "[i]n contemporary high-choice media environments, people increasingly mix and combine their use of various news media into personal news

repertoires" (Strömbäck et al., 2018, p. 413). They find that "only social news consumers are more likely to become active in politics offline, compared to the minimalists" (Strömbäck et al., 2018, p. 424). In relation to the subject of local media and news repertoires, the research base is limited. Tang and Lai (2018) did, however, perform a hierarchical cluster analysis in order to find multiplatform local news repertoires. What they found are three repertoires: *the determined location-independent news seekers, the light local news seekers,* and *the heavy local news seekers* (Tang & Lai, 2018, p. 49). Nevertheless, these results are not truly comparable to the expected results of the present study, as they refer only to the generation C / Millennials and they are not just interested in political information (Tang & Lai, 2018, p. 53). Furthermore, no effects of belonging to these repertoires on voter turnout were identified.

The present study aims to identify repertoires *and* their effects on (split-ticket) voting. Additionally, rather than focusing exclusively on media use at the local level, it also considers the role of other sources of political information. Therefore, the term *political information repertoire* is chosen. This term has already been employed in research, for example, by Wolfsfeld et al. (2016).[1] All information sources included in this study's repertoire can be found in the spiderwebs in the appendix (figures 4 to 6).

There used to be no data available for Switzerland, focusing on just *local media users*. What can be found is the research (on a national level) by Udris et al. (2022). By analyzing data from a follow-up survey on the Swiss national vote of February 13, 2022, they find six repertoires. Their group of homeland-*oriented* people consists of people who mainly use national and local media. This group differs from other groups by socioeconomic factors (age: many older than 50 years, gender: more females than males compared to other groups, education: averagely educated, as well as interest in politics: high; and trust in the government: relatively high; Udris et al., 2022, pp. 7–9). In this paper, the local level is examined in more detail, and it is expected that several differing repertoires can be found. Since previous research, albeit on a national level, has shown that repertoires can be found and differ in terms of socio-demographic characteristics and political interest, the following research questions are formulated:

- RQ1: What political information repertoires can be found in the canton of Berne?
- RQ2: To what extent do socio-demographic variables vary in relation to the political information repertoire to which individuals belong in the canton of Berne?

## 3 The effects of local media use

While the use of media was and is of constant interest in media perception research, local media use and information seeking on a local level have always been treated somewhat conservatively and thus still represent a research gap today (e. g., Chmielewski, 2011, p. 27; Hess et al., 2022; Hess et al., 2023). The explanation for the reluctance to investigate local media use and local areas in research is probably to be found in resources: Small-scale research can lead to increased and sometimes more difficult recruitment efforts. Furthermore, funding may be more difficult to obtain, as the question of extrapolation to a larger area arises, and a good justification is needed.

Two effects of local media use that have already been analyzed are voter turnout and split-ticket voting (i. e., voting for candidates from different parties): Becker and Dunwoody (1982) came to the conclusion that media use leads to knowledge about local politics and thus to a higher probability of voting for the city of Columbus. In their research, McLeod et al. (1996) take a three-step approach: More local media use leads to more community integration and more community integration leads to more political participation (voting). They conclude: "Although evidence of a relationship between local media use and local political participation is demonstrated, the strength of the contribution differs considerably for each of the three measures of participation" (McLeod et al., 1996, p. 198). However, the effect on the measure,

1 As Wolfsfeld et al. (2016) actually limit their analysis to *media content*, thus they should probably correctly speak of political *media* repertoires.

which also includes active voting, is significant (McLeod et al., 1996, pp. 198–199). Recent research by Magasic et al. (2023, p. 411) concludes that people in Australia's Lightning Ridge also feel less willing to participate in the political process following the closure of a local newspaper. Furthermore: "They also missed political events or were denied the chance to participate in processes" (Magasic et al., 2023, p. 411). The findings of such research suggest that local media users are better informed politically, feel better informed, and see themselves as part of society, and are therefore more likely to vote. In Switzerland, Kübler and Goodman (2019) examined the impact of local media on voter turnout. They did not utilize survey data directly; they employed voter turnout and media market data instead. Moreover, they just researched the six largest cities (municipalities) and their printed newspapers in Switzerland. In their thus limited study, they draw the following conclusion: "[…] newspaper audience in a municipality and the congruence of newspaper markets with municipal territories both have substantial positive effects on levels of turnout in municipal elections" (Kübler & Goodman, 2019, p. 1). Given that a correlation has already been found for some Swiss cities, the corresponding hypothesis and research question are:

- RQ3: Does belonging to a particular political information repertoire have an effect on the likelihood of voting?
- H1: Local newspaper use is positively related to the likelihood of voting.[2]

This paper not only questions whether someone is more likely to vote, but also whether someone is more likely to vote for varying parties instead of just one, depending on the local media use. The assumption underpinning this is that local media users get a wide range of opinions and balanced political information. Therefore, they might have less incentive to vote in a polarized way but actually vote for candidates from different parties (for example, because they agree on some issues and not just use the heuristic of party voting)[3]. In the US, this phenomenon is called split-ticket voting. Moskowitz (2021, p. 126) analyses split-ticket voting in the US with a view to the local TV market and comes to the conclusion: "Exposure to relevant local news coverage has considerable effects on voter knowledge of both officeholders and nonincumbent candidates. […] voters residing in in-state markets are about 2–3 percentage points more likely to cast a split president–senator ticket and 4–5 percentage points more likely to cast a split president–governor ticket" (Moskowitz, 2021, p. 126). Despite the fact that Switzerland does not operate within the framework of a two-party system, but has a multi-party political structure, the same tendency towards reduced polarization in voting is, in this study, termed split-ticket voting. The assumption is that people who get their political information from a well-balanced information repertoire are better informed and vote in a more nuanced way and more in line with their true personal preferences (those personal preferences being described by Milic, 2012). This *voting in a nuanced way* is expected to be a shift away from pure party loyalty and towards split-ticket voting. The option of voting behavior comparable to the US split-ticket voting in Switzerland is called *panaschieren* – when voting, you can combine names of candidates from different voting lists[4] (Swiss Confederation: Art. 35). Therefore, the corresponding hypothesis and research questions are:

- RQ4: Does belonging to a particular political information repertoire have an effect on the likelihood of the Swiss split-ticket voting?

As previously outlined, an explicit hypothesis concerning the effect of local newspapers (online or printed format) use is:

- H2: Local newspaper use is positively related to the likelihood of split-ticket voting.

2 Since the data set also allows for a specific analysis of printed and online newspapers, this hypothesis is formulated in the tradition of previous news desert research.

3 Heuristics in context are explained by Fortunato and Stevenson (2019)

4 These lists do not necessarily correspond to the party affiliation of the candidates on the list, but for the sake of simplicity, they are treated as equivalent to parties in the following.

Testing this hypothesis will also clarify whether nowadays it is still possible to focus in news desert research on newspapers (online and in printed format), or whether it is no longer possible to make any statements at all about this channel and the effects of its use.

## 4 Method and design

In order to answer the questions and test the hypotheses posed in the paper, data from an online survey were analyzed. This unique survey data set was collated by Professor Dr. Nathalie Giger and Dr. Maxime Walder, in conjunction with their SNSF project[5] team, for the purposes of their research. The data set was subsequently provided to the answering of the research questions posed in this paper. The initial survey comprised two waves (pre- and post-election survey) in 2022 in the Swiss canton of Berne. Such a detailed survey on media use and voting behavior in cantonal elections is rare, and there appears to be a paucity of comparable data on this scale for Switzerland itself. In addition, in the online survey, they explicitly asked about media titles, which makes it possible to examine local media use in even greater detail in this paper. For the following study, only the data from the post-election survey is used in order to be able to include voting behavior in the models. The Bernese Grand Council (legislative) and the Cantonal Government (executive) elections took place on March 27, 2022. The data set ($N$=5 904) contains responses that were all submitted between March 28 and April 9, 2022. The survey was available in German and French, as the canton of Berne is bilingual. The adjusted data set, which contains data for the required repertoires model calculations, contains 5 616 cases. This adjusted data set shows a slight overrepresentation of men (52.18% instead of 49.2% for $N$=5 904; 52.78% for $N$=5 616). To test the hypotheses, a cluster analysis was first conducted using the statistical computing program R. This was followed by descriptive evaluations, correlation calculations (chi-square and Spearman's rank), and hierarchical generalized linear regression models. All questions from the survey used, including the response options and the variables' scale levels, are listed in table 5 in the appendix.

The information sources used on a local level can be derived from the answers to the question "Which of the following options have you used in the last two months to find out about the Bernese elections or politics in general?" (a semi-closed question with 12 sources of information given, the possibility of multiple answers, and an additional individual answer). The responses to the 12 closed questions were designated as dummy variables and incorporated into a hierarchical cluster model, using the Ward method (based on descriptions of a similarly designed data set in Matthes & Kohring, 2008, and Hands & Everitt, 1987).

In the subsequently calculated models, each repertoire, was recoded into a binary variable, followed by a generalized linear regression model calculation with the repertoire dummy being the *dependent variable* (see table 2). The *independent variables* in these models are age, gender, political interest, party preference, and urbanity of the place of residence. These first three variables were extracted directly from the survey data set. Age and gender (as socio-economic variables) and interest in politics are included in the model as they proved to be important in previous research (e.g., Udris et al., 2022). Unfortunately, it is not possible to control for education as these data are not available. As demonstrated in Udris et al., a correlation appears to exist between distinct national use repertoires and party affiliation in Switzerland (Udris et al., 2022, p. 8). Consequently, the party preference is controlled for. Party preference is a recoded variable from the question "Which party did you vote for in the legislative elections or from which party did you vote for the most candidates?" In accordance with Ernst et al.'s (2017, 256–257) research, the five largest parties were coded. As Ernst et al. (2017) rate *the Green party* (Grüne) and *the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland* (SP) almost equally on the left–right scale, an ordinal variable 1 = left and 4 = right was created, whereby Grüne and SP were both

5 Their research project for the national research program 77 is called "Online News Exposure: A Threat to Democracy? How Digital Transformation Affects Opinion Formation, Political Polarization and Trust"

given the value 1. *The center party* (Die Mitte) gets the value 2, *the Free Democratic Party of Switzerland* (FDP) gets the value 3, and the *Swiss People's Party* (SVP) gets the value 4 (see table 5 in the appendix).

Furthermore, the geographical location of the respondents' places of residents is incorporated as a control variable, categorized as follows: urban centers, areas of influence by urban centers, and areas outside the influence of urban centers (rural areas). This variable originates from a data set provided by the Federal Statistical Office (2022) and was subsequently merged with the survey data set. This variable is employed as a control variable, operating under the assumption that there is more local media content available in urban centers compared to rural areas. This might have an influence on local media consumption habits, which, already in 2012, was found to be true for the US by Miller et al. (2012, p. 4, compare also to the base of the latest local media outlet data set for Switzerland generated by Hilse et al., 2025).

The socio-economic variable income was derived from a data set by the Federal Statistical Office (2009–2024); however, these data do not exist on an individual level but is a mean value for each municipality[6].

In the regression models testing for effects on voting and split-ticket voting, the already mentioned variables are used as *independent variables,* as well as belonging to a certain repertoire, and a recoded variable on actual local newspaper use. This variable stems from the data set, which contains a substantial question on the exact outlets' titles used[7]. Consequently, it is imperative to incorporate this variable, particularly given the extensive research conducted on local newspaper use within the context of news desert research. However, it was necessary to recode the variable to incorporate it: There were 16 predefined options and one field for free additions. All these answers, the predefined and the self-added titles, were divided into the new variable local/non-local using the Swiss local media data set (Burger, Meyer, et al., 2024). This list of local media published in 2024 comprises a total of 489 local media (printed newspaper, online newspaper, radio, and TV) in four national languages (German, French, Italian, and Romansh), with 63 for the canton of Berne (Burger, Meyer, et al., 2024). Each newspaper mentioned was counted in a newly built variable. As the canton of Berne – with the national capital Berne – is the canton with the second largest population in Switzerland, it is still one of the cantons with a relatively large number of local media (Burger, Meyer, et al., 2024; Federal Statistical Office of Switzerland, 2022; Hilse et al., 2025). Hence, the variable that counts the use of newspapers has values from 0 ($N = 1\,362$) to 5 ($N = 3$). A second dummy variable, 'use/non-use', was created from this variable to ascertain whether there is a difference in the use of one or many local newspapers. The findings resulting from this are presented in the following chapter.

## 5 Findings

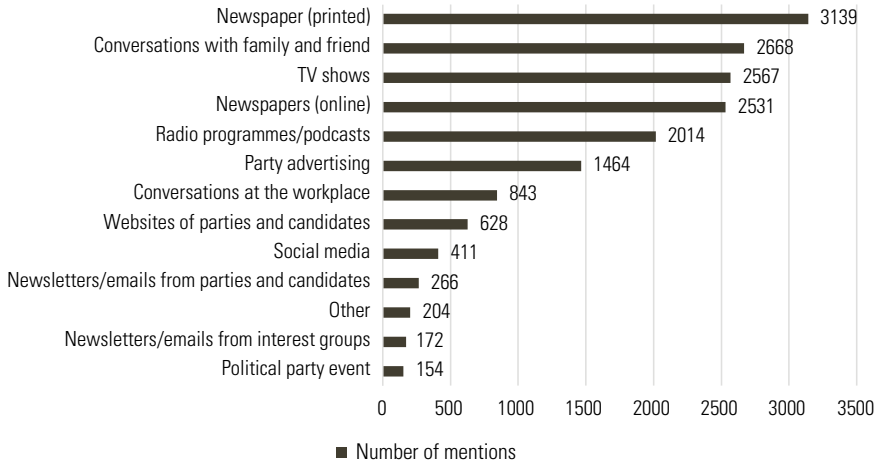
### 5.1 Information sources and local media

In order to gain insight into the media and information sources in use at a local level, a preliminary descriptive evaluation of information sources is being conducted. Figure 1 shows that printed newspapers are the most frequently mentioned source of information, followed by family conversations and television news. Political party events were mentioned the least. *Other* includes the official voting information booklet that is made available to every voter, together with the voting documents, and easyvote.ch, a website of the organization of Swiss youth parliaments that explains Swiss votes. These results, therefore, differ relatively strongly from a statistical analysis of a national survey conducted in Switzerland in 2023 (Tresch et al., p. 45). Here, respondents most frequently cited conversations with family as a source of information; newspapers only came in third place, after TV/radio (Tresch et al., p. 45).

6 The Federal Statistical Office's data, which was merged with the data set, was linked via the municipality number. As the survey data set only contained ZIP codes, it was necessary to undertake an intermediate step (manual assignment of municipality names to unique municipality numbers) to achieve this.

7 "You indicated that you used newspapers (online or print) to find out about Berne's elections and politics in general. Which of the following media did you use?"

Figure 1: Sources of information used in the last two months for Bernese elections and politics in general




Note: Multiple mentions possible ($N$=5525).

Table 1: Mean values per cluster (hierarchical cluster analysis with Ward method)

| Information source used | The informed socializers | The traditionalists | The wooed ones | The online readers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Newspaper (printed) | 0.50 | 0.62 | 0.64 | 0.35 |
| Newspaper (online) | 0.42 | 0.36 | 0.37 | 1.00 |
| TV | 0.40 | 0.67 | 0.36 | 0.00 |
| Radio/podcast | 0.34 | 0.41 | 0.34 | 0.00 |
| Websites by parties/candidates | 0.18 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Emails/newsletters from parties/candidates | 0.05 | 0.00 | 0.02 | 0.00 |
| Advertising by parties or candidates (flyers etc.) | 0.13 | 0.06 | 1.00 | 0.00 |
| Events / podiums / personal contact etc. | 0.02 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.00 |
| Emails/newsletters from interest groups | 0.02 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.00 |
| Talking to family or friends | 0.71 | 0.08 | 0.43 | 0.00 |
| Talking at work / at school | 0.24 | 0.00 | 0.04 | 0.00 |
| Social media / messenger apps | 0.10 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.00 |

A closer look at social media use shows that Instagram was mentioned most frequently, followed by Facebook and messaging services such as Twitter and Threema (see figure 2 in the appendix). Only two out of 394 people who explicitly stated using social media as a tool for information cited the streaming platform Twitch. The mean age of the social media users[8] is 41.43 years. The mean value of the non-users is 55.17 years, which makes the social media users for political information significantly younger than the non-users (Welch t-test: $<0.001$; Spearman's rank correlation rho is significant with value –0.18). Hence, there is a weak negative correlation between age and use of social media.

### 5.2 The four political information repertoires found

The hierarchical cluster analysis results in four easily interpretable groups of local information users, thus four political information repertoires. A more granular division into clusters results in too many and smaller groups (see figure 6 in the appendix). The 4-cluster solution was therefore chosen (see table 1, and visualized as spider webs in the appendix in figures 3–6). Each cluster represents one political information repertoire.

The first repertoire is characterized by a comparatively high degree of information use through traditional media channels, namely radio, printed newspapers, and television. Additionally, the values for online newspaper use and talking to family and friends ($N=2\,930$) are high as well. Consequently, people belonging to this repertoire are named the *informed socializers*. The second repertoire's members inform themselves almost exclusively via the legacy, more traditional media, fewer online newspapers, hence they are called *the traditionalists* ($N=1\,463$). The third repertoire comprises *the wooed ones* ($N=888$). Its members use the more traditional media channels somewhat, but have an extremely high score for advertising by parties or candidates as a source of information. The fourth repertoire is the *online readers* ($N=335$). They have an almost exclusive and high value for reading online newspapers.

The generalized linear regression models' values per repertoire can be found in table 2 below. Age is a significant[9] independent variable for each affiliation to a repertoire, with a negative sign for the informed socializers and the online readers (less likelihood of affiliation with increasing age). Women are significantly more likely to belong to the repertoire of the informed socializers than men, while men are significantly more likely to belong to the repertoire of the online readers than women. Those who voted mainly for the party Die Mitte or FDP are significantly less likely to belong to the repertoire of the informed socializers compared to the SP/Grüne voters. On the other hand, the same voters are significantly more often in the repertoire of the traditionalists compared to the SP/Grüne voters. Residents of areas of influence of urban centers are significantly less likely to be in the repertoire of online readers compared to residents of cities.[10] Since the inclusion of estimated income did not improve the models and was not significant in any of the repertoires, the variable is excluded here, and models that do not include the variable are listed for the sake of clarity.

### 5.3 Effects on voting

Variables that have an effect on the probability of voting are summarized in linear regression models, which can be found in table 3 in the appendix. The table shows first the effect of local newspaper use on the likelihood of voting on a cantonal level. Thus, newspaper use is still significant in times of a wide range of information sources available and controlling for different political information repertoires (hypothesis 1 can thus be retained). While the dummy variable for local newspaper use is significant, the exact number of newspapers used has no significant effect on the likelihood of voting. People who are interested in politics have a significantly higher probability of voting (in this case, participation in the cantonal election). While the urban/rural place of res-

8 Not all of the 411 people who said they would use social media in figure 1 also mentioned a certain source they would use. The calculations with social media use are just done with those mentioning at least one ($N=394$).

9 Please note: All information on models in the following that are reported as significant contain the assumption "ceteris paribus" and $p<0.05$.

10 See table 6 in the appendix for more information on this variable's values.

Table 2: GLM regression models with each political information repertoire as dependent variable

| | The informed socializers | The traditionalists | The wooed ones | The online readers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intercept | 0.79<br>(0.79) | –2.32**<br>(0.87) | –1.61<br>(0.86) | –13.35<br>(323.74) |
| Age | –0.02***<br>(0.00) | 0.03***<br>(0.00) | 0.01***<br>(0.00) | –0.02***<br>(0.00) |
| Gender: female | 0.16*<br>(0.08) | –0.14<br>(0.09) | 0.14<br>(0.10) | –0.69***<br>(0.18) |
| Rather not interested in politics compared to not interested at all | 0.31<br>(0.79) | –0.03<br>(0.86) | –0.87<br>(0.86) | 12.05<br>(323.74) |
| Rather interested in politics compared to not interested at all | 0.56<br>(0.78) | –0.35<br>(0.85) | –0.76<br>(0.85) | 11.78<br>(323.74) |
| Very interested in politics compared to not interested at all | 0.89<br>(0.78) | –0.70<br>(0.85) | –0.90<br>(0.85) | 11.79<br>(323.74) |
| Die Mitte compared to SP/Grüne | –0.38***<br>(0.11) | 0.41***<br>(0.12) | 0.16<br>(0.15) | –0.25<br>(0.28) |
| FDP compared to SP/Grüne | –0.22*<br>(0.11) | 0.35**<br>(0.12) | 0.01<br>(0.15) | –0.31<br>(0.25) |
| SVP compared to SP/Grüne | –0.19<br>(0.10) | 0.19<br>(0.12) | 0.16<br>(0.13) | –0.18<br>(0.23) |
| Area of influence by urban centers compared to urban centers | 0.02<br>(0.09) | 0.10<br>(0.10) | –0.01<br>(0.12) | –0.47*<br>(0.23) |
| Areas outside the influence of urban centers compared to urban centers | –0.14<br>(0.09) | 0.18<br>(0.11) | –0.00<br>(0.13) | 0.08<br>(0.20) |
| AIC | 4220.58 | 3461.52 | 2790.93 | 1257.49 |
| BIC | 4287.15 | 3528.09 | 2857.50 | 1324.06 |
| Log Likelihood | –2099.29 | –1719.76 | –1384.46 | –617.74 |
| Deviance | 4198.58 | 3439.52 | 2768.93 | 1235.49 |
| Num. obs. | 3140 | 3140 | 3140 | 3140 |

Note: ***$p<0.001$; **$p<0.01$; *$p<0.05$.

idence does not have a significant effect on the probability of voting, belonging to some repertoires does: Compared to the traditionalists, the informed socializers and the online readers have a lower probability of voting.

### 5.4 Effects on split-ticket voting

The effects on split-ticket voting can be found in table 4 in the appendix. As for voting, using a local newspaper (printed or online format) does have a significant effect on the probability that voters add candidates from another party list to their preferred list when voting for the Grand Council (using local media as a dummy variable). Hypothesis 2 can therefore be retained. Neither age, gender, nor political interest has a significant effect on the probability of split-ticket voting. However, party preference has a significant effect on the probability of split-ticket voting: Those who feel more affiliated with Die Mitte or SVP are significantly more likely to vote in the split-ticket compared to those affiliated with SP/Grüne. Living in an area outside the influence of urban centers, compared to an urban core area, significantly increases the probability of ticket splitting. While income does have a negative and significant effect, the effect is very small. Looking at the repertoires, informed socializers are significantly more likely to split their ticket compared to the traditionalists, while the wooed ones are significantly less likely to do so compared to the traditionalists.

## 6 Discussion

The data show that legacy media in the local area, and especially local printed and online newspapers, are still being used in a highly digitized communication landscape. Social media use, by contrast, is currently a relatively weak source of political information for the Bernese citizens. The question posed by the paper's title (No local newspapers but WhatsApp?) must be denied on the basis of this data. However, as younger people are more likely to use social media to inform themselves about local politics, it can be assumed that the response to this question will be subject to alteration in the future. Given the diversity of sources of information on local political issues, it is argued that consideration should be extended to political information repertoires rather than merely to individual sources. The key differences found in relation to affiliation to the repertoires are consistent with the findings of recent national media research (Udris et al., 2022). Older people are found to be more likely to use legacy media and, therefore, are more likely to be considered traditionalists. Additionally, younger people are found to be more likely to be online readers. This finding is in line with research on the digital skills of Switzerland's population by Kappeler (2024, pp. 8–9). In her study, she found that older people still rate their digital skills lower than young people do.

With regard to the regression models analyzing the effect on voting, the local newspaper variable is worthy of consideration: The research indicates that there is no discernible difference in terms of whether individuals read multiple local newspapers or just one. However, the positive impact observed in news desert studies, which suggests that local newspaper use is associated with an increased likelihood of voting (e. g., Cagé, 2020; Filla & Johnson, 2010; Schulhofer-Wohl & Garrido, 2013), is also evident in this context. This is a fascinating area of research, as these models even controlled for affiliation to different repertoires. The critique (Usher, 2023; Wells et al., 2021) that the study of local newspaper use is outdated today does not (yet) seem appropriate, at least at the local level in Switzerland. This could be due to the fact that, although the number of local media and local newspapers in Switzerland is declining, the total number and especially the number of newspapers (printed or online format) is still high compared to other countries (Hilse et al., 2025). The finding that informed socializers and online readers are less likely to vote than traditionalists suggests that the use of legacy media is still a crucial factor in deciding whether to vote or not. It can also be assumed that those who consume a lot of legacy media are also more interested in politics.[11]

11 The causality in this case is not entirely clear: It could also be assumed that those who are more interested consume therefore more legacy media. Further discourse on this topic will not be pursued at this point, due to limitations of space.

The research indicates that the use of local newspapers has a favorable impact on split-ticket voting, a finding that aligns with the results observed in the USA (Moskowitz, 2021). It needs to be addressed that the sheer use of local newspapers has a significant effect on the Swiss panaschieren; the number of newspapers consumed does not. This may indicate that the local newspapers used in Berne provide balanced coverage, although this assumption should be treated with caution and verified by content analysis. The effects found for party preference and the likelihood of split-ticket voting appear to be reasonable: Those who prefer Die Mitte are voting accordingly (as the name suggests), and combinations with the right or the left are quite plausible. The fact that people preferring SVP are more likely to engage in ticket splitting than those preferring SP/Grüne might be explained by its proximity to FDP in certain respects. If SP and Grüne had been listed individually, we might have seen comparable results, since a shift in votes can be observed at the national level between the SP and Grüne in Switzerland (Enggist et al., 2022, p. 3). It is noteworthy that the probability of split-ticket voting is higher among individuals residing in rural areas (where there are probably also fewer local newspapers available in total) compared to those inhabiting urban centers. This result was not expected, and further research is needed here. Furthermore, what might be interesting for political candidates and spin doctors in these results is the repertoire of the wooed ones. While they are not more likely to vote than traditionalists, they are significantly less likely to split their tickets. Those who are primarily informed by election advertising that is delivered to them (push) and do not have to seek it out themselves (pull) appear to vote more strictly along party lines. In order to gain deeper insights, it would be necessary to combine these results with content analysis of the actual pushed content. This would provide some answers to the following question: Which parties are responsible for the production of more push advertising content? It may be the case that there is an inequitable distribution of advertising content across parties, which could give rise to a subsequent research project on the advertising content itself, its consumption, and the resulting effects.

## 7 Conclusion and limitations

The present study investigates the overarching question of which information sources the citizens of the Swiss canton of Berne utilize for the purpose of getting information on politics prior to a cantonal election. As this paper shows, newspapers are still considered to be an especially important source of information. This is followed by conversations with friends and television. Using survey data, four political information repertoires can be found: the informed socializers, the traditionalists, the wooed ones, and the online readers (RQ1). Citizens belonging to one of those repertoires differ from each other in terms of socio-demographic variables. For instance, there is a higher probability of women than men belonging to the repertoire of the informed socializers, while the opposite is true for the repertoire of the online readers (RQ2). There are some significant effects of the likelihood of voting and split-ticket voting depending on what political information repertoire a citizen belongs to. For example, online readers are significantly less likely to vote compared to traditionalists (RQ3). Furthermore, the wooed ones are significantly less likely to split their tickets compared to the traditionalists (RQ4). A close examination of newspaper use, both printed and online ones, reveals a significant positive correlation between newspaper use and voter turnout, as well as the probability of splitting tickets (H1, H2) – whereby the number of different newspaper used did not result in any significant values in the models.

Despite the fact that all the research questions and hypotheses presented in this study have been addressed, some weaknesses can be identified: More reliable data for the control variables would be desirable. Unfortunately, the data set does not contain any data on income or education. The income data was merged with 2023 income data at the municipal level, which can lead to strong distortions in individual cases – not all residents of a municipality earn the same amount. This might also be the reason why the variable income was not significant in the models and thus was excluded. Moreover, when merging data in Switzerland over time, minor inaccuracies may arise due to

municipal mergers, where the identification numbers of Swiss municipalities are either eliminated or abruptly encompass a more extensive geographical area. Finally, a number of concluding thoughts for future research: An in-depth look at the available local media and political advertorial content would be of interest in order to get a better understanding of the local content citizens consume and the effects of consumption. Especially in the contemporary era of pseudo-local journalism and the dissemination of misinformation, it would be relevant to know to what content users are referring when they indicate using local newspapers without mentioning specific names.[12] Consequently, the combination of survey data with content analyses would be ideal. Such an approach would facilitate a more precise investigation into the effects of local media (use) on citizens. However, it is noteworthy that content analyses of local media content are still rare, although there has been published a detailed analyses of Swiss local media recently (Dalmus et al., 2024). It is considered beneficial that further research of this nature be undertaken at a local level in the future (see also Burger, Künzler, & Autenrieth, 2024a, 2024b for recent research on Swiss local media).

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Swiss National Science Foundation for providing financial support to the international research project led by Prof. Dr. Matthias Künzler. It is within the framework of this project that I started my doctoral studies. I would like to thank the research team led by Professor Dr. Nathalie Giger for the cordial collaboration and for graciously providing their data for the present paper. Furthermore, appreciation is expressed to Dr. Maxime Walder for furnishing information regarding the data set. My profound gratitude is extended to Professors Dr. Matthias Künzler and Dr. Ulla Autenrieth for their invaluable advice and assistance whenever it was required.

12 See for the project on this topic: www.fhgr.ch/pinkslime

## Conflict of interest

I declare no conflict of interest.

## References

Abernathy, P. M. (2016). *The rise of a new media baron and the emerging threat of news deserts*. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Becker, L. B., & Dunwoody, S. (1982). Media use, public affairs knowledge and voting in a local election. *Journalism Quarterly*, *59*, 212–255.

Burger, J., Künzler, M., & Autenrieth, U. (2024a). *Impulse für zukunftsfähige Schweizer Lokalmedien: Empfehlungen, Best Practices und Beispiele aus dem In- und Ausland: Praxisempfehlungen aus Leitfadeninterviews und Beobachtungen des Moduls 1, Lokalmedien, des Forschungsprojekts Lokaljournalismus und Gemeindekommunikation in der digitalen Transformation*. FHGR Verlag. https://localmedia.fhgr.ch/wp-content/uploads/sites/48/2024/06/FHGR_Empfehlungen_Lokalmedien_Burger_et_al_2024.pdf

Burger, J., Künzler, M., & Autenrieth, U. (2024b). Zwischen normativen Ansprüchen und wachsenden Nachrichtenwüsten: Zur Notwendigkeit von Lokaljournalismus als mediale Infrastruktur – am Beispiel der Schweiz. In M. Litschka, C. Paganini, & L. Rademacher (Eds.), *Kommunikations- und Medienethik: Vol. 22. Digitalisierte Massenkommunikation und Verantwortung: Politik,* Ökonomik *und Ethik von Plattformen* (pp. 43–64). Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG. https://doi.org/10.5771/9783748942801-43

Burger, J., Meyer, M., Künzler, M., & Autenrieth, U. (2024). *Lokalmedien in der Schweiz und Liechtenstein:* Übersicht *Stand November 2023* überarbeitete *Version: (Version 2.1.0) [Data set]*. Fachhochschule Graubünden. https://doi.org/10.48573/0Y0T-2Z08

Burger, J., Wellinger, D., Künzler, M., Autenrieth, U., Schädler, T., Fetz, U., Dalmus, C., & Dahinden, U. (2023). *Lokaljournalismus und Gemeindekommunikation: Bestandesaufnahme der Schweizer Lokalkommunikation auf Ebene der Lokalmedien und der Gemeinde: Studie*. Fachhochschule Graubünden. www.nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:101:1-20230615134008161462 57

Cagé, J. (2020). Media competition, information provision and political participation: Evidence from French local newspapers and elections, 1944–2014. *Journal of Public Economics*, *185*, 104077. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2019.104077

Chapp, C., & Aehl, P. (2021). Newspapers and political participation: The relationship between ballot rolloff and local newspaper circulation. *Newspaper Research Journal*, *42*(2), 235–252. https://doi.org/10.1177/07395329211014968

Chmielewski, D. (2011). *Lokale Leser. Lokale Nutzer: Informationsinteressen und Ortsbindung im Vergleich; eine crossmediale Fallstudie*. Zugl.: Dortmund, Univ., Diss., 2010. Von Halem.

Dalmus, C., Kalbermatter, U., Burger, J., Künzler, M., & Dahinden, U. (2024). Just weather and cheese? Analysis of the content of Swiss local media online with different business models. *Studies in Communication Sciences, 24*(2), 189–208. https://doi.org/10.24434/j.scoms.2024.02.3100

Enggist, M., Mosimann, N., Abou-Chadi, T., Bürgisser, R., Häusermann, S., Mitteregger, R., & Zollinger, D. (2022, November 3). *Wählerwanderungen rund um die Schweizer Sozialdemokratie: Diskussionspapier.* Anny-Klawa-Morf Stiftung. https://anny-klawa-morf.ch/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/AKM_Waehlerwanderungen_Def.pdf

Ernst, N., Engesser, S., & Esser, F. (2017). Bipolar populism? The use of anti-elitism and people-centrism by Swiss parties on social media. *Swiss Political Science Review*, *23*(3), 253–261. https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12264

Federal Statistical Office of Switzerland. (2009–2024). *Durchschnittliches Reineinkommen* pro Steuerpflichtigem/-r, 2020: [dataset].* https://www.atlas.bfs.admin.ch/core/projects/13/xshared/xlsx/27593_131.xlsx [Last accessed: July 19, 2024]

Federal Statistical Office of Switzerland. (2022). *Struktur der ständigen Wohnbevölkerung nach Kanton, am 31.12.2022: [dataset].* https://dam-api.bfs.admin.ch/hub/api/dam/assets/26565154/master

Filla, J., & Johnson, M. (2010). Local news outlets and political participation. *Urban Affairs Review*, *45*(5), 679–692. https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087409351947

Fortunato, D., & Stevenson, R. T. (2019). Heuristics in context. *Political Science Research and Methods*, *7*(2), 311–330. https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2016.37

Hands, S., & Everitt, B. (1987). A Monte Carlo study of the recovery of cluster structure in binary data by hierarchical clustering techniques. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, *22*(2), 235–243. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327906mbr2202_6

Hasebrink, U., & Popp, J. (2006). Media repertoires as a result of selective media use. A conceptual approach to the analysis of patterns of exposure. *Comm*, *31*(3), 369–387. https://doi.org/10.1515/COMMUN.2006.023

Heeter, C., & Greenberg, B. (1985). Cable and program choice. In D. Zillmann & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Communication. Selective exposure to communication* (pp. 203–224). Erlbaum.

Hess, K., Blakston, A., Lai, J., McAdam, A., & Waller, L. (2023). Untapped potential? Exploring the 'latent' local newspaper reader in digital spaces. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 019685992211510. https://doi.org/10.1177/01968599221151084

Hess, K., Waller, L., & Lai, J. (2022). Examining audience perspectives on local newspaper futures. *Journalism*, 146488492211340. https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849221134008

Hilse, L., Burger, J., Künzler, M., & Autenrieth, U. (2025). *Lokalmedien in der Schweiz und Liechtenstein:* Übersicht *Stand Januar 2025: (Version 3.0) [Data set].* Fachhochschule Graubünden. https://doi.org/10.48573/FJSE-1208

Kappeler, K. (2024). A longitudinal perspective on digital skills for everyday life: measurement and empirical evidence. *Media and Communication*, *12*, Article 8159. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.8159

Katz, E., Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and gratifications research. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *37*(4), 509. https://doi.org/10.1086/268109

Kübler, D., & Goodman, C. (2019). Newspaper markets and municipal politics: how audience and congruence increase turnout in local elections. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, *29*(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2018.1442344

Linder, W., & Wirz, R. (2014). Direkte Demokratie. In P. Knoepfel, Y. Papadopoulos, P. Sciarini, A. Vatter, & S. Häusermann (Eds.), *NZZ Libro. Handbuch der Schweizer Politik: = Manuel de la politique Suisse* (5., völlig überarb. und

erw. Aufl., pp. 145–167). Verl. Neue Zürcher Zeitung.

Magasic, M., Hess, K., & Freeman, J. (2023). Examining the social, civic, and political impact of local newspaper closure in outback Australia. *Media and Communication*, *11*(3). https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v11i3.6697

Marcinkowski, F., Flemming, F., & Starke, C. (2014). Mediensystem und politische Kommunikation. In P. Knoepfel, Y. Papadopoulos, P. Sciarini, A. Vatter, & S. Häusermann (Eds.), *NZZ Libro. Handbuch der Schweizer Politik: = Manuel de la politique Suisse* (5., völlig überarb. und erw. Aufl., pp. 435–462). Verl. Neue Zürcher Zeitung.

Mathews, N., & Ali, C. (2022). Desert work: life and labor in a news and broadband desert. *Mass Communication and Society*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2022.2093749

Matthes, J., & Kohring, M. (2008). The content analysis of media frames: toward improving reliability and validity. *Journal of Communication*, *58*(2), 258–279. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00384.x

McLeod, J. M., Daily, K., Guo, Z., Eveland, W. P., JR., Bayer, J., Yang, S., & Wang, H. (1996). Community integration, local media use, and democratic processes. *Communication Research*, *23*(2), 179–209.

Milic, T. (2012). Correct voting in direct legislation. *Swiss Political Science Review*, *18*(4), 399–427. https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12000

Miller, C., Rainie, L., Purcell, K., Mitchell, A., & Rosenstiel, T. (2012, September 26). *A closer look. How people get local news and information in different communities.* Pew Research Center. http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Communities-and-Local-News.aspx

Montgomery, C. (2024). *News deserts, ballot rolloff, and government transparency in rural Georgia*. Regent University. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I. (3086816326). http://ezproxy.fhgr.ch/dissertations-theses/news-deserts-ballot-rolloff-government/docview/3086816326/se-2

Moskowitz, D. J. (2021). Local news, information, and the nationalization of U.S. elections. *American Political Science Review*, *115*(1), 114–129. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055420000829

Perse, E. M., & Courtright, J. A. (1993). Normative images of communication media mass and interpersonal channels in the new media environment. *Human Communication Research*, *19*(4), 485–503. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.1993.tb00310.x

Reagan, J., Pinkleton, B., Chen, C., & Aaronson, D. (1995). How do technologies relate to the repertoire of information sources? *Telematics and Informatics*, *12*(1), 21–27. https://doi.org/10.1016/0736-5853(94)00035-r

Rubado, M. E., & Jennings, J. T. (2020). Political consequences of the endangered local watchdog: newspaper decline and mayoral elections in the United States. *Urban Affairs Review*, *56*(5), 1327–1356. https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087419838058

Schulhofer-Wohl, S., & Garrido, M. (2013). Do newspapers matter? Short-run and long-run evidence from the closure of the Cincinnati Post. *Journal of Media Economics*, *26*(2), 60–81. https://doi.org/10.1080/08997764.2013.785553

Schwaiger, L., Schneider, J., & Vogler, D. (2020). *Mediennutzung*. https://doi.org/10.5167/UZH-197849

Strömbäck, J., Falasca, K., & Kruikemeier, S. (2018). The mix of media use matters: investigating the effects of individual news repertoires on offline and online political participation. *Political Communication*, *35*(3), 413–432. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2017.1385549

Swiss Confederation. *Ausfüllen des Wahlzettels: Art. 35*. https://www.fedlex.admin.ch/eli/cc/1978/688_688_688/de#art_35

Tang, T., & Lai, C.-H. (2018). Managing old and new in local newsrooms: an analysis of generation C's multiplatform local news repertoires. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, *15*(1), 42–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2018.1459141

Tresch, A. D., Lauener, L., Lutz, G., Alkoç, N., Benvenuti, R., Mazzoleni, O., & Rennwald, L. *Eidgenössische Wahlen 2023. Wahlteilnahme und Wahlentscheid: Wahlteilnahme und Wahlentscheid*. FORS – Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences. https://doi.org/10.24447/SLC-2024-00001

Udris, L., Schneider, J., & Vogler, D. (2022). *Mediennutzung und politische Partizipation. Die Bedeutung von Newsrepertoires bei Volksabstimmungen*. https://doi.org/10.5167/UZH-236973

Usher, N. (2023). The real problems with the problem of news deserts: toward rooting place, precision, and positionality in scholarship on

local news and democracy. *Political Communication*, *40*(2), 238–253. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2023.2175399

Vogler, D., Weston, M., & Udris, L. (2023). Investigating news deserts on the content level: geographical diversity in Swiss news media. *Media and Communication*, *11*(3). https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v11i3.6794

Wang, R. Y. (2023). The geography of newspaper circulations: a spatial taxonomy of "news(paper) deserts" in the United States. *Media and Communication*, *11*(3). https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v11i3.6856

Wells, C., Friedland, L. A., Hughes, C., Shah, D. V., Suk, J., & Wagner, M. W. (2021). News media use, talk networks, and anti-elitism across geographic location: evidence from Wisconsin. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, *26*(2), 438–463. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220985128

Wolfsfeld, G., Yarchi, M., & Samuel-Azran, T. (2016). Political information repertoires and political participation. *New Media & Society*, *18*(9), 2096–2115. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815580413