

# Voter Registration, Mobilization, and Turnout

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# Normative Questions

- What is the function of a government in a democracy with regard to the political process?
  - On the one hand, we can argue it should be value-neutral.
  - It should provide basic elements—free and fair elections, access to the ballot, non-partisan, etc.
- Long versus Short Term factors
  - I will concentrate on long term

# Empirical Aspects of Turnout

- Turnout in many instances inversely related to degree to which government impacts the individual.
  - Presidential—mean=50%
  - Congressional—mean=38-40%
  - Local—mean=15-20%
    - El Paso County a bit of an outlier.
- Different means of counting: Number voting/Eligible (not Number voting/Voting Age)
- Personally—I'm not a political scientist who gets terribly concerned about turnout, if the circumstances are right.



# Decline in Turnout

<u>VARIABLE</u>	<u>DIRECTION</u>
-Increased education level	Positive
-Elections during the week	Negative
-Younger electorate	Negative
-Bowling Alone	Negative
- <i>Ease of registration</i>	<i>Positive</i>
-Lack of Institutional Mobilization	Negative

# Registration

- (Almost) all states require some sort of registration, with variation in the “degree of ease.”
- Normally, a 2 stage process: Registering; casting ballot.  
Offshoot:
  - Open Primaries—e.g. Missouri
  - Closed Primaries—e.g. Colorado
  - Blanket primaries—Struck down in *California Democratic Party v. Jones*
    - Washington and Alaska were also changed.
    - Blanket primary survives in modified form in Louisiana
- Impact—Strength of parties
  - Polsby and Wildavsky proposal

# Recent Trends in Registration

- Voting Rights Act of 1965
- Motor Voter
- Campus registration drives
- Neither have been overly successful  
(though they aren't exactly failures)



# Ivory Tower Musings...

- Many don't vote because of alienation (an offshoot of the lack of institutional mobilization)
- Abandon SMD-FPP
- Proportional Representation
- Multiple parties
- Downside: Less stable governments

# An (Im)Modest Proposal

- Less ivory tower, but still long term
- **SAME DAY REGISTRATION**
  - Not a cure-all
  - But...
    - Idaho, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Wyoming
    - North Dakota—Has no requirement for registration (except federally mandated—e.g. 18 years of age)



# Statistical Analysis

- DV=Turnout in the state (Presidential elections)
- Cases: Each of the states with loose registration, and other randomly generated states for control purposes
- Variables:
  - North Dakota consideration
  - Intercept shift (0 for years before adoption; 1 for years after adoption)
  - Year counter ( $t=1972$ ;  $t+1=1976$ ; etc.)
  - (3<sup>rd</sup> model only) States that have ever had looser registration requirements=1; otherwise, 0.
  - Look particularly at Fundamental Shift; Policy State

## Predicted Capture of Explanatory Variables on Percent of Voter Turnout

Explanatory Variables	<u>Model 1</u> -Parameter -Estimate (b) -Standard Error in parentheses	<u>Model 2</u> -Parameter -Estimate (b) -Standard Error in parentheses	<u>Model 3</u> -Parameter -Estimate (b) -Standard Error in parentheses
Y- Intercept	<b>57.20</b>	<b>53.05</b>	<b>55.58</b>
North Dakota Consideration	<b>-2.987</b> <b>(2.997)</b>	---	<b>-2.851</b> <b>(2.918)</b>
Fundamental shift	<b>13.333***</b>	---	<b>4.878**</b>
Year Counter	<b>-0.905***</b> <b>(0.406)</b>	---	<b>-0.633</b> <b>(0.414)</b>
Policy State	---	<b>12.497***</b> <b>(1.598)</b>	<b>8.855***</b> <b>(4.098)</b>
R-squared	<b>0.463</b>	<b>0.474</b>	<b>0.499</b>
Number of Cases	70	70	70

\*\*\* - statistically significant.

--- - does not apply to this Model

# Implementing SDR

- Different ways to accomplish same day registration:
  - Less voter fraud (may seem open to it, but data show that voter fraud more likely in states with stringent requirements)
  - Could use Canadian system of universal enrollment.
    - National Register of Electors is a database of Canadians who are eligible to vote.
    - Name, address, sex, and date of birth.
    - Citizens can choose to be added or to refrain from the listing.
    - Once a citizen's name is in the database they have fulfilled the requirements and are registered<sup>[i]</sup>.
  - [i] James D. King, "Political culture, registration laws, and voter turnout among the American States," Publius, vol. 24, no. 4 (Fall 1994): 115-128.



# Other Alternatives

Mail-in registration

Cease purging of polling lists

- OR, at minimum, notify voters of purge

Continued convenience

- Motor Voter; Campus drives

# Bringing It All Back Home

Alienation and lack of institutional mobilization  
big reasons people don't vote, even if registered.  
Making registration and voting easier may be  
costly in short run.

But—if normative ideals are to be realized, this  
may be a short-term, sunk cost that pays  
dividends.

- Reduce alienation; increase confidence in integrity of  
voting process and officials.

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?