Tillman argues that pre-electoral coalition increase the identifiability of possible governments and thereby augment electoral decisiveness. In effect, turnout should increase whenever pre-electoral coalitions form. To support his claim, Tillman reports fixed-effects panel regressions which predict turnout from various specifications of the existence and strength of pre-electoral coalitions. In the following I reassess his contribution from several angles. In doing so, I concentrate on Tillman’s two primary predictors: (a) the presence of a pre-electoral coalition, (b) the result a pre-electoral coaltion achieved. My assessment exposes major flaws in Tillman’s modeling strategy.

# Can the data support any causal effect at all?

Generally speaking, fixed-effects panel regression models estimate the causal effect of some treatment by comparing the outcome on the same observation unit at different points in time. Consequently, a certain amount of (co-)variation *within* the units is required to estimate any causal effect. The figure below shows how within-differences in turnout and PECs align for every country in the data, and it gives reason to doubt Tillman’s analysis.

Figure 1 Correlation of Within-Changes in Turnout and PECs

A close up of a keyboard

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1. The correlation between turnout and PECs varies substantially across countries, ranging from indirect (e.g. Italy and New Zealand) to null (e.g. Denmark and Japan) to direct (e.g., Germany and Greece). It should thus be questioned how representative of the data Tillman’s reported mean effect is.
2. On many occasions the correlation depends on outliers. For instance, the figure implies a direct association between the formation of PECs and turnout in the UK. However, the implication turns entirely on the 1983 and 1987 elections. Likewise, a strong association between turnout and the result for PECs is implied for Portugal. Again, the implication depends entirely on just two elections: 1979 and 1980.
3. Countries contribute unequally to Tillman’s analysis. Pre-electoral coalitions formed in every French and Israelian election. Since the treatment does not vary, these cases drop out. Moreover, almost half of all countries do not exhibit substantially strong associations for either treatment. Hence, Tillman’s results may be driven by strong positive outliers such as Greece respectively Portugal. Jackknife resampling supports that impression (see Figure 2), but it does invalidate Tillman’s conclusions.

Figure 2 Jackknifed Coefficients and Standard Errors

A picture containing object, antenna

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