

Comparing Political Systems

PARTICIPATION

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Introduction

Welcome to CPS!

- **Module Convenor:**
 - **Dr. Sebastian Koehler**
- **Office Hours**
 - **When?** Wednesdays, 3:00pm to 4:30pm (in office) and Fridays, 09am to 10am (online).
 - **Bookings:** Please visit <https://doodle.com/bp/sebastiankoehler/officehours>

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Programme for the module

- Week 11 – Political Participation (19 January 2022)
- Week 12 – Elections and Electoral Systems (26 January 2022)
- Week 13 – Political Parties (02 February 2022)
- Week 14 – Voters (09 February 2022)
- Week 15 – Comparing Democracies (16 February 2022)

Plan of today's lecture

In this lecture, I will focus on political participation. To do so, I will:

1. Define and discuss forms of participation, as well as some political consequences of being excluded from participation.
2. Most of the lecture, however, will focus on elections.
3. You will learn why elections are important and why people vote.

Types of political participation

What is political participation?

- Political participation can be defined as the actions made by individuals with the goal of influencing rulers, or the decision-making process, on a particular issue.
- There are two types of political participation:
 1. Conventional participation - This is the participation that takes place formally or informally but within the law.
 2. Unconventional participation - This form of participation takes place outside or at the boundaries of what is allowed by the law.

Examples

- Unconventional forms of political participation
 - Civil disobedience.
 - Occupation of buildings or public spaces.
 - Sabotaging parts of the electoral process like rallies by candidates or counting of ballots.
 - Political violence, including forms of terrorism.
- Conventional forms of political participation
 - Voting in elections.
 - Taking part in demonstrations.
 - Advocating for a political view using social media.
 - Signing petitions, participating in consumer boycotts...

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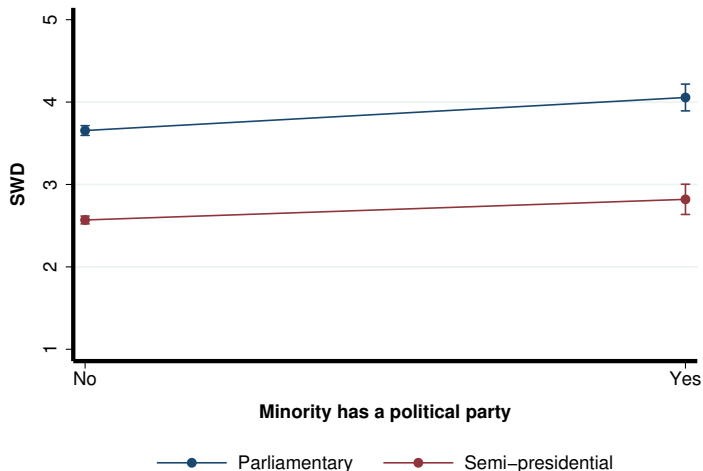
Political exclusion

- Political exclusion is observed when political participation is limited.
- Being excluded from political participation implies a bias in the decision-making process as a policy is considered without having considered the full distribution of preferences.
- Political exclusion can be of two types:
 1. Voluntary exclusion - Individuals may exclude themselves from participating even though they are entitled to have a voice in the decision-making process. Think of the the importance of education.
 2. Forced exclusion - Individuals may be deliberately excluded from participating in the political process. Think of some countries limiting participation of ethnic minorities.
- Political exclusion may be a trigger of participating in unconventional form of participation.

Political exclusion of ethnic minorities

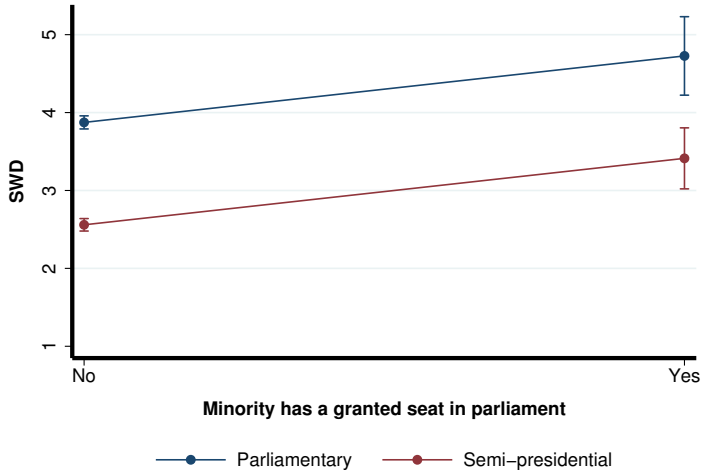
- What are the consequences of excluding members of society from the decision-making process?
- Rubén Ruiz-Rufino studied this question, focussing on individual perceptions of regime performance in multi-ethnic countries.
- In **his study**, he collected data from the largest ethnic minorities in 9 Central and Eastern European countries.
- To predict regime stability, he used satisfaction with democracy (SWD).
- Finally, he also collected data on whether minorities had granted seats in parliament, as well as data on ethnic representation and proportionality of electoral rules.
- His conclusion is that being politically included matters as it increases levels of satisfaction with democracy.

The importance of having a political party



Source: Ruiz-Rufino 2013

The importance of having a seat in parliament



Source: Ruiz-Rufino 2013

The importance of elections

Are elected governments really useful?

- Unclear that elected governments outperform authoritarian rulers in creating wealth.
 1. Some empirical evidence shows that political institutions based on elected governments promote economic growth. But other studies argue that political institutions do not matter as much as economic institutions that may exist in non-elected governments (China).
- Unclear that elected governments are effective in reducing economic inequalities. Particularly when most productive resources are privately owned and when economic inequality produces political inequality.
 1. Think of levels of inequality in the US. Successive governments are unable to reduce it, and wealthy people or firms can effectively influence political outputs in their favour.
- Unclear that elections are effective mechanisms of controlling government, especially if dimensions of decision-making are no longer in hands of national governments (EMU).

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So, why bother with elections?

- Despite these shortcomings, elections are instrumental to achieve important societal outcomes.
- Elections are mechanisms that allow citizens to observe the distributions of preferences and to make a decision about which preference is the one to be used.
 1. This is important because by doing so, elections minimises levels of popular dissatisfaction with laws, policies and other important outcomes.
- Elections are also instruments that help regulate conflicts and, ultimately, avoid war and bloodshed.
 1. Think of competitive elections that lead to alternation in power. If your party did not win the elections, political losers have reasonable hopes that elections can be won in the next round. Since conflict is more costly than peace, this time-consistent expectation decreases the risk of starting a war, for example.

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The importance of elections

- **Practical function of elections:**

1. Elections select governments: We use elections to punish bad government or reward responsive and responsible rulers. Elections are instrument of political accountability.
2. Elections reflect the preferences of a society: Voting is a mechanism to express a preference for a set of choices.
3. Elections determine policies: Determine the composition of the legislature which will decide on policies affecting our daily lives.

- **Symbolic function of elections:**

1. Democracies: Elections may lead to alternation in power. Political turnovers reduce the level of conflict.
2. Autocracies: Voting in elections is the only active participation in the political process. Voting can also lead to democratization.

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The decision to vote

Who votes?

- Today, almost no restrictions to vote in most democracies except age. Most countries exclude people under 18 from voting. However, countries like Austria decrease voting age to 16 and some other countries are also discussing that possibility.
- But historically, the right to vote has had an interesting evolution. There has been two types of enfranchisement:
 1. Limited suffrage: Voting conditional on some socio-economic condition like property, literacy or level of income.
 2. Universal suffrage: Voting unconditional and exercised regardless of socio-economic conditions.

Who votes?

- Moving from limited to universal male suffrage was the result of mobilisation and rise of Left parties at the turn of 20th century.
 - During the Industrial Revolution, workers were organised around unions and parties which campaigned for the extension of political rights. Most conservative parties granted extension of suffrage given the threat of a Revolution from Left parties. Extending voting rights was the price that affluent classes paid to protect their property and political survival.
 - First European countries adopting universal suffrage were France (1848), Spain (1890), Switzerland (1848). UK did not extended suffrage to all men until 1918.
- Universal female suffrage followed a different path.
 - New Zealand (1893) and Australia (1902) first countries granting women voting rights.
 - Switzerland (1971) was the last European democracy enfranchising women.

Why Vote?

- Think of voting as a cost-benefit action.
 - The benefit (B) derives from the satisfaction that you get if your party wins.
 - The cost (C) derives from the fact of going to vote. For example, suppose that on voting day the weather is awful or that going to vote prevent you from doing something more exciting.
 - Using these terms, a person will vote if:

$$B > C$$

Why Vote?

- Think, however, of the probability (p) that your vote actually is the decisive vote that makes your party win.
- Then, the decision to vote becomes a bit more complex:

$$\text{Vote} = pB - C$$

and you will go to vote only if:

$$pB > C$$

Why Vote?

- But p can be very, very, very small. Actually, you can think of p as:

$$p = \frac{1}{\text{Voting Population}} \approx 0$$

- And if this is true, then, your decision to vote:

$$\text{Vote} = pB - C$$

is approximated to:

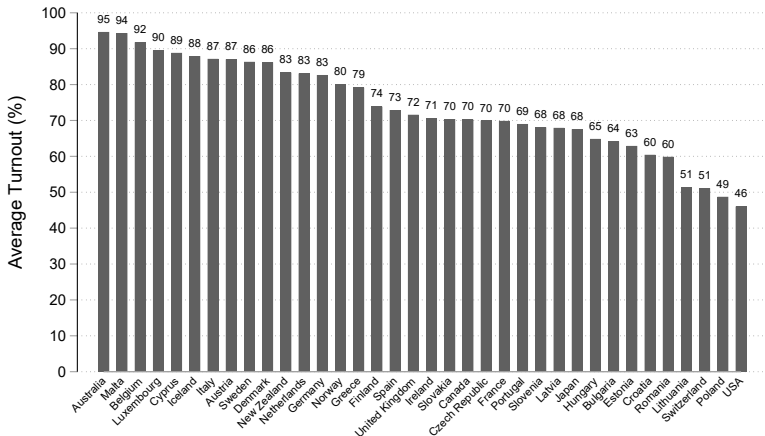
$$\text{Vote} = -C$$

- Your conclusion as a benefit maximiser voter is that voting costs you more than your real benefit and, if we all were rational, perhaps we should never vote.

And yet people do vote!!! Why?

Levels of turnout

Voter turnout 1960-2017 in 36 democracies



Source: CDPS 2019

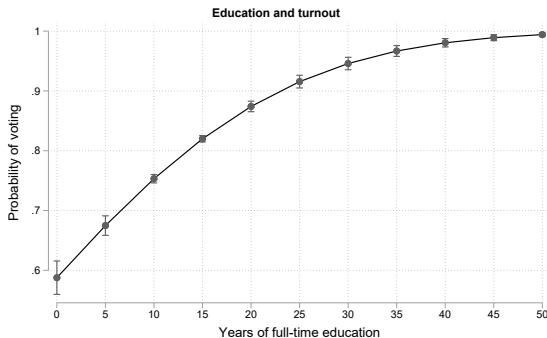
Explaining turnout: Individual factors

Socio-economic factors

- The importance of individual socio-economic factors informs the **resource model**.
- This model argues that political participation can be explained by how many resources individuals enjoy. In particular, monetary and skill resources.
- Turnout is higher for people with high access to resources than for people lacking resources for several reasons:
 - Resource-rich individuals may have more at stake in elections than voters with less resources.
 - Having lots of resources may also imply having broader channels and network to gather information which may push people to vote.
- Using data from the European Social Survey, you will see how some of these variables explain the likelihood to vote.

Socio-economic factors: Education

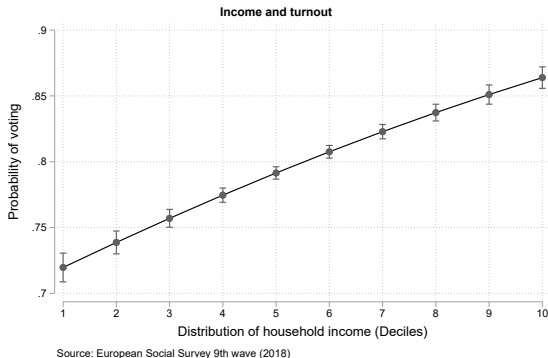
- Education is a strong predictor of turnout. More educated people are more likely to vote as, for example, are more capable to process information needed to make an informed choice as well as understand electoral rules.



Source: European Social Survey 9th wave (2018)

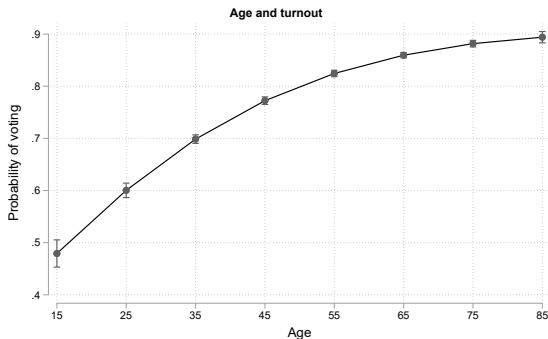
Socio-economic factors: Income

- Income is also a relevant variable to explain turnout. Richer people tend to vote more than poor people. One explanation is that they have economic power to influence political outcomes.



Socio-economic factors: Age

- Many studies show a curvilinear relationship of age with turnout. This means that young and old people tend to vote less than middle-age people.

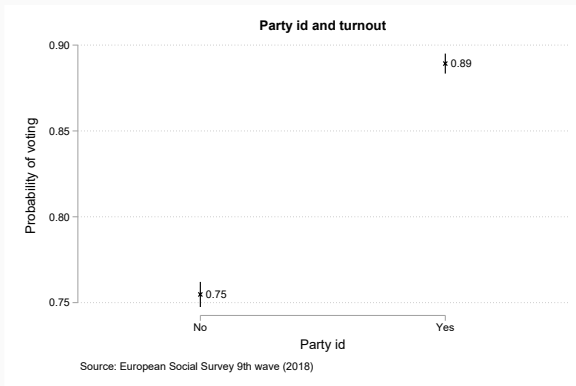


Psychological factors

- The **psychological model** argues that there may be some cognitive characteristic that could explain why some people vote more than other.
- Think for example of variables like ideology, interest in politics or party identification.
- A big limitation of this group of factors is, however, that they can be explained also by socio-economic factors. For example, an individual from low socio-economic status is more likely to have a left-wing ideology and vote for, say, a social-democratic party than an individual coming from a high socio-economic status.
- The next slides show how some of these factors affect the decision to vote.

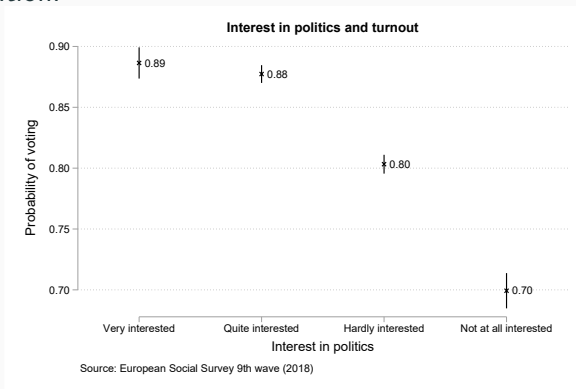
Psychological factors: Party ID

- Party identification is not only a good predictor of whom individuals will vote for but also a good predictor of electoral participation. People with a clear party id show a level of political engagement which is translated into their decision to vote.



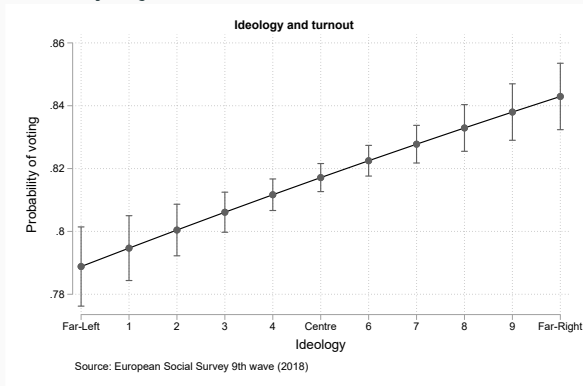
Psychological factors: Political interest

- Political interest is also a variable that can be useful to explain why people vote. This variable may refer to individuals who, for example, follow the news and is able to process information.



Psychological factors: Ideology

- Ideology capture the moral understanding of individuals in society. These attitudes may reflect in how one participates in elections. For example, traditionally anarchists and communist have historically rejected the idea of elections.



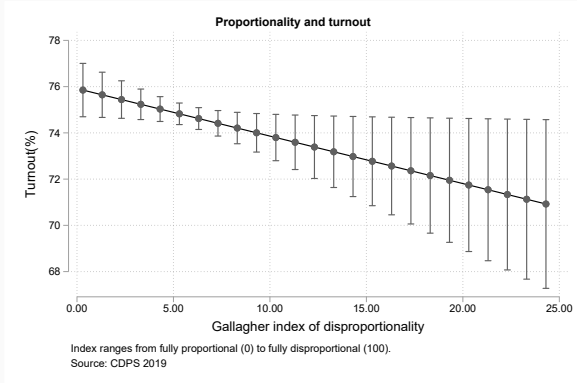
Explaining turnout: Country-level factors

Contextual factors

- Turnout can also be explained by looking at institutional and contextual conditions upon which voting takes place.
- Instead of using individual-data from surveys, this type of questions can be best answered using country-level data.
- In the next slides, three institutional and contextual factors are analysed.
 1. The effect of electoral systems (More on this topic, next week).
 2. The level of government support.
 3. The effect of economic downturns.

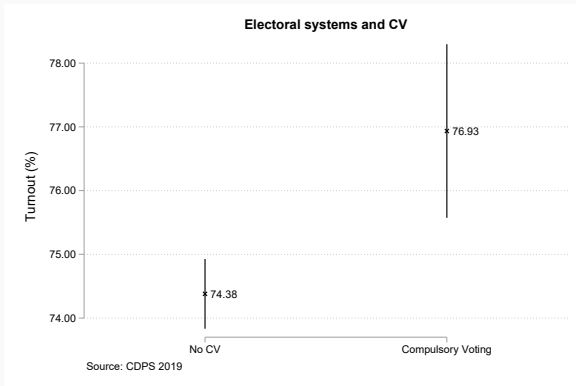
Contextual factors: Proportionality

- Electoral systems transform votes into seats and in that process different types of political representation are obtained. For example, disproportional electoral systems are more exclusionary than proportional ones (details next week!).



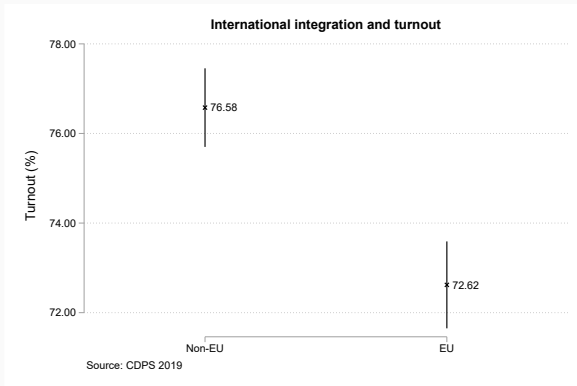
Contextual factors: CV

- Higher levels of turnout can be expected if compulsory voting laws are enacted.



Contextual factors: International integration

- Processes of international integration like the EU implies that some policy areas move from the national to the supra-national arena. How does this affect turnout?



Contextual factors: Financial crises

- Economic downturn may affect participation. One could say that as people become worse-off, they have incentive to participate in politics to see if they can change the policy. However, the opposite can also be said: economic crises may depress people, moving them away from politics.

