

Increasingly Unequal Turnout in Eastern European New Democracies: Communist and Transitional Legacies versus New Institutions

Abstract:

Unequal turnout, namely that educated citizens are more likely to vote, has been a long-standing pre-occupation of scholars of political participation and has been shown to exist across established democracies in varying degrees. Using pooled cross-sectional individual level data covering the period from 1990 to 2007 across 12 post-communist new democracies, this paper examines the applicability of existing explanations for unequal turnout in the Eastern European context. The paper shows that while voting procedures explain some cross-national variation in unequal turnout, turnout inequality is likewise shaped over time by processes related to the transition from communism, primarily the fading of initial excitement with democratic elections. The mechanism of learning among mature voters rather than generational replacement dominates the latter process.

In a democracy every citizen should, ideally, have the right to vote and thus have equal political influence. In practice, citizens' influence through elections is hardly equal: wealthier, better educated voters are more likely to vote than the disadvantaged; Lijphart terms this pattern "unequal turnout" (1997). Turnout inequality has naturally received much attention from scholars of democratic political participation (Verba *et al.* 1995, Brady *et al.* 1995; Schlozman *et al.* 2012; Gallego 2008, 2010; Leighley and Nagler 2013) and its implications for unequal political influence are repeatedly noted (Mahler 2008).

Recent efforts to explain the cross-national variation in turnout inequality have focused on the importance of the national institutional context; turnout inequality is almost non-existent in countries with compulsory voting and highest in countries, such as the USA, where onerous registration rules discourage disadvantaged voters (Gallego 2010). These explanations, however, assume a relatively stable institutional and micro-level social context, and thus are unsuited to capturing the dynamic nature of new democracies. A cross-sectional approach may work for established democracies that are in a stable equilibrium (Gray and Caul 2000); however the Eastern European new democracies have been in a state of flux since the collapse of communism. We already know that turnout in post-communist countries has declined over time (Kostadinova 2003; Kostadinova and Power 2007) indicating that strong temporal mechanisms are at work. Recent studies that apply theories of socialization and political learning to the post-communist context attest to the dynamic nature of these societies including the fading of communist legacies as well as the effects of new experiences during the transitions (Mishler and Rose 2007; Neundorf 2010; Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2014). Unequal turnout in post-communist countries must thus be analysed not just cross-sectionally but across time, and particular attention must be given not only to how the context changes but also how the electorate itself is changing both through generational replacement and learning.

This paper firstly complements Aina Gallego's (2010) paper on unequal turnout in established democracies by extending her analysis to Eastern Europe. Thus far no studies have systematically explained turnout inequality in the context of Eastern European new democracies; thus goal of this paper is to assess the current explanations against new ones that specifically apply to these new democracies. The new explanations considered in this paper are (a) the fading of the excitement with democratic elections and (b) the fading effects of compulsory participation in communist elections. Both explanations incorporate the legacies of past regimes and the transitional period itself.

The second part of the analysis compares the older (pre-Cold War and Cold War) and post-Cold War generations weighing the evidence in favour of the two possible dynamic explanations of turnout inequality: the fading of the initial excitement with democracy driven through learning and the replacement of older generations socialized when voting was compulsory under communism. The findings indicate that learning among the older generations primarily contributed to the increase in turnout inequality, while the replacement of the older generations by the post-Cold War post-transition cohorts made a small contribution.

I begin this paper with an overview of the various potential explanations of turnout inequality; both those found to apply in established democracies as well as explanations that incorporate the transitional nature of the post-communist context. I use pooled survey data from four large mass surveys to maximize cross-sectional and temporal coverage. In this paper I argue that turnout inequality in Eastern Europe can be partially explained by electoral institutions (ballot complexity specifically) as in established democracies, but institutional explanations fail to explain why turnout inequality increased with time. While some replacement of mature post-communist voters by younger cohorts, which neither experienced the habit-forming effects of compulsory voting under communism nor the excitement of the transition, has occurred, the increasing turnout inequality appears to be primarily caused by

behavioural change among the older voters. The once excited older voters appear to be accepting democratic elections as a more routine process.

Fading euphoria and the end of forced voting

The two main studies, which examine the decline in turnout in post-communist countries, attribute the decline to the natural waning of excitement at the first democratic elections (Kostadinova 2003; Kostadinova and Power 2007). The idea that founding elections are somehow unique was most notably put forward by O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) who observed, based on several case studies of regime change in Latin America, that the first post-authoritarian elections are a time of euphoria and unusually high levels of interest in politics during which people believe they can shape political outcomes; however, once the new political rules are in place, the excitement wears off. Increasing turnout inequality is part of this 'normalization' process as the disadvantaged voters who are most sensitive to the costs of voting drop out of the electorate.

The founding elections euphoria effect can be understood as being comprised of two components: the high salience of the first election (Fornos 2004) and high hopes for democracy (Hughes and Guerrero 2009). Arguably the first elections are the most salient elections possible in a democracy as they determine the constitutions and institutions of a new democratic regime. Numerous studies show that voters become mobilized when they perceive the electoral stakes to be high and they believe that individual votes make a difference (Pacek *et al.* 2009). Secondly, the founding elections, as well as some of the subsequent elections, are characterized by high hopes for what democracy can deliver in terms of policy; with each passing election voters learn that democracy is not a panacea for all problems and they adjust their expectations accordingly, becoming less engaged (Hutcheson 2004; Mason 2004; Ingelhart and Cattelberg 2002). Thus, founding elections in new democracies are characterized by unusually high turnout which then declines over time with each subsequent election (Roussias 2012).

The 'founding elections' or 'euphoria' effect, as it is often referred to, is not explored theoretically in much depth. Its effect is largely based on the assumption that the first democratic elections after a long period of authoritarianism will cause excitement and voter mobilization. This assumption is further substantiated by the presumed high salience of the first elections and arguments about the high stakes involved. However, both these justifications would imply a relatively short-lived surge in electoral turnout, and a readjustment could be expected to occur even in the second democratic election.

Alternatively, the 'founding elections' or 'euphoria' effect can be understood in a broader manner to include mobilization of the popular opposition leading up to the regime collapse. Descriptions of the protest cycles leading up to the collapse of the communist regimes show a build-up of protest participation (of varying speeds) culminating in protest events that included up to three quarters of the population (i.e. the November strike in Czechoslovakia) (Glenn 2003; Rucht 2003; Ekiert and Kubik 1998; Ulfelder 2004). The duration of the protest cycles implies a general level of political mobilization that began earlier than the actual first democratic elections and which could imply a certain momentum that could take time to dissipate. The prolonged nature of opposition mobilization could allow for both updating/re-learning effects among mature citizens as well as socialization effects on the transition cohorts.

The core theoretical principle underlying the 'founding elections' explanation is the idea that voting behaviour progresses towards more 'normal' patterns as democracy becomes routinized. As shown already by several studies, aggregate turnout has declined in post-communist new democracies in keeping with the 'founding elections' explanation (Kostadinova 2003; Kostadinova and Power 2007; Roussias 2012). While it may still be early to see, aggregate turnout should plateau at levels appropriate to the institutions in given countries. At the micro-level, we expect the 'normalization' of turnout to be characterized by

a turnout decline concentrated among people who are most sensitive to the costs of voting, in particular people of low socioeconomic status; as the ‘founding elections’ effect dissipates, the perceived benefits of voting decline relative to the costs, resulting in an increasing turnout gap between high and low status voters.

The elements of socioeconomic status (income, education, and social class) serve as proxies for political engagement and sensitivity to the cost of voting. Verba *et al.* (1995: 358) find that socioeconomic status, especially education, primarily contributes indirectly to voting; socioeconomic status shapes the ‘civic orientations’ or ‘psychological engagement in politics’ such as interest, political efficacy, and civic skills (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba *et al.* 1995). Educated voters are more likely to vote because they possess more cognitive resources, making the costs of navigating voting procedures and making electoral choices easier to bear. Also educated individuals are more likely to vote because of the ‘sorting’ effects of the education system; they are more likely to be socialized among equally educated individuals who are interested in politics and to remain embedded in politically active social networks (Abrams, Iversen and Soskice 2010; Rolfe 2012). Verba *et al.* (1995: 358) find that accounting for ‘psychological engagement’ in politics in a regression model with the determinants of voting almost eliminates the effects measured for socioeconomic status. Political engagement as well as the social environment of politically engaged people allow for easier acquisition of political information and help reduce sensitivity to costs of voting.

During the extraordinary times of the ‘founding elections’ when populations are unusually mobilized, ‘normal’ variation in voting participation along the lines of socioeconomic status should be suppressed reflecting the higher perceived benefits and lower costs of voting. During the exciting times of the first democratic elections, people are more likely to discuss politics and political parties make a greater effort to mobilize voters so political information is ‘cheaper.’ Individuals who normally would not be interested in politics, such as the poor and the uneducated, will be mobilized to a similar degree as educated voters who normally maintain an interest in politics. Furthermore, the high salience of the ‘founding elections’, as well as the high hopes and expectations for the new democratic regime counteract the costs of voting for low socioeconomic status voters by raising the perceived benefits of voting. As the initial euphoria of the ‘founding elections’ wanes, interest in politics should return to more normal levels: high status individuals who are less sensitive to voting costs will maintain their interest in politics and will continue to vote at high levels, but interest in politics and voting participation among the disadvantaged should drop with time to more ‘normal’ levels.

There is an alternative factor that could also produce a pattern of increasing turnout inequality over time: the fading of the effects of forced participation in communist elections. Although officially there was no legal requirement to vote, participation in elections by all citizens over the age of 18 was expected by the communist authorities. Voting under communism had a specific and rather important function: the legitimation of the communist regime (Sakwa and Crouch 1978) or, counter-intuitively as some argue, a demonstration of the mass acceptance of the regime as it actually was (e.g. a fictitious democracy) (Zaslavsky and Brym 1978). Either way, to fulfil these functions, voting had to have the semblance of a voluntary action or, even more likely, of a submission to the system.

The communist regimes achieved the incredible turnout figures generally not through outright falsification but thanks to the incredibly powerful mobilization campaigns (Furtak 1990: 36-38; Zaslavsky and Brym 1978; Birch 2009). The regimes would nominate ‘agitators’ who were responsible for cajoling voters into showing up to vote; in the Soviet Union there was one agitator for every 15-20 voters (Karklins 1986; Furtak 1990). These agitators themselves would face sanctions if their designated voters did not vote. If someone did not turn up at the electoral station, the agitators would come and knock on the person’s door. Every

effort was made to make voting easy; ballot boxes would be brought to the homes of elderly or ill persons (Furtak 1990). Whereas those who did not vote would face a variety of sanctions: usually the denial of professional promotions or expulsion from university (Birch 2009; Zaslavsky and Brym 1978). Electoral avoidance would have taken far more effort than simply voting. The reasons behind the majority of electoral avoidance are disputed - some arguing that it was a form of political dissent (Karklins 1986) and others that the main reason was to have a peaceful Sunday afternoon (Furtak 1990) - but either way it would have been relatively low. Outside the Soviet Union, the methods and sanctions would have been milder, but would still have followed the same principles.

The perceived meaningless of these elections is probably the principal reason why the habit-forming effects of communist elections have not been considered (Kostelka 2014); instead emphasis has been on the newly found 'right to not participate' after the collapse of communism (Rose *et al.* 2001). Given the incredible level of the communist mobilization campaigns, some habit-forming effect should not be dismissed. The possibility that longitudinal turnout patterns have been shaped by the end of the *de facto* communist compulsory voting regime would be a parsimonious explanation, and it would accord well with explanations of long-term changes in turnout in established democracies, which emphasize habit-formation and change through generational replacement (Franklin 2004). If forced participation in communist elections did have a habit-forming effect which would persist in democratic elections, then turnout would be boosted among the cohorts which came of age under communism thus lowering turnout inequality; an increase over time in turnout inequality would occur as the older generations are replaced by the post-transition cohorts, which came of age too late to experience forced electoral participation.

Party Supply: Too few or too many choices

For citizens to be able to indicate their preferences through elections effectively there must be a balanced supply of electoral choices. A sufficient number of electoral choices must be available for voters to have real alternatives to choose from. In established democracies the convergence of parties towards the political centre, or 'de-polarization,' has contributed to electoral fatigue (Schmitt and Friere 2012). On the other hand, too many choices and choices that are too radically different from one another also present problems for the quality of electoral democracy (Sartori 1976).

While party supply in moderation has a positive effect on the quality of democracy, not all voters benefit equally from greater party supply: party supply mobilizes turnout among sophisticated voters but depresses turnout among uninformed and inefficacious voters (Kittilson and Anderson 2012; Jusko and Shiveley 2005; Karp and Banducci 2007, 2008). Kittilson and Anderson (2012) find that highly efficacious voters, who believe that their vote matters, are far more likely to vote when there are more parties to choose from and the parties are more polarized, representing greater choice on issue dimensions; these voters are easily able to bear the costs of making electoral choices, so the additional complexity of electoral choices does not dissuade them. Disadvantaged voters on the other hand, who already bear the costs of voting with difficulty, become discouraged as party supply increases. We expect that party supply will, therefore, influence the degree of turnout inequality. When party supply is high, the gap in turnout between advantaged and disadvantaged voters will be greater.

The implications of party supply for turnout are particularly relevant in the post-communist context where the party systems have been in the process of evolving. The supply of new parties, driven by impatient elites, has forced voters to constantly switch from party to party (Tavits 2008). The constant supply of new parties in Eastern European elections inhibits the formation of party identification thus making voting costly for disadvantaged voters. On

the other hand, as party systems consolidate in some countries and party supply declines, ideologically committed voters are likely to lose interest in voting (Roussias 2012).

The strength of the left: organizational mobilization of the poor

The resource explanations of political participation suggest that disadvantaged citizens are less likely to vote than advantaged citizens, since they lack the motivation and interest in the election as well as the cognitive resources needed to navigate the electoral process (Brady *et al.* 1995; Verba *et al.* 1995). Mobilization efforts on the part of political and social organizations targeted at low socioeconomic status can counteract turnout inequality, as organizations themselves can serve as a resource for disadvantaged citizens (Gallego 2010, Verba *et al.* 1978).

In established democracies two forms of organizations have been identified as sources of mobilization for low socioeconomic status voters: left parties and trade unions (Gallego 2010). Historically, left parties, such as the socialist, social democratic, and communist parties, provided the backbone of workers' movements in European democracies throughout the 20th century (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). These parties explicitly addressed the concerns of the working class electorate thus providing additional incentives for working class voters to participate in elections.

Trade unions provide the second source of mobilization for low socioeconomic status voters (Nagler and Leighley 2007). Trade unions provide informational support for members as well as wider mobilization of people with similar interests to members through assistance in political campaigns. Unsurprisingly, trade union members tend to be more likely to vote (Delaney, Masters, and Schwochau 1988; Leighley and Nagler 1992a; Radcliff 2000, 2001; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). The decline in turnout in established democracies has been attributed to a weakening of the traditional link between trade union movement and left parties (Gray and Caul 2000) and a shift in emphasis by trade unions away from the working class towards the middle class (Nagler and Leighley 2007).

One could object that trade union membership may have a different meaning in post-communist new democracies, owing to the legacy of compulsory membership under communism. However, this legacy seems to have a lasting socialization effect of actually encouraging organization and political participation (Letki 2004). According to Letki, past membership in non-democratic organizations actually predicts political participation under the new democratic regimes. Trade union membership has the same or even a slightly more positive effect on encouraging voter participation in Eastern Europe compared to Western Europe (Bernhagen and Marsh 2006). Overall, we would expect that strong left parties, which receive a considerable share of the vote, and extensive trade union membership will counteract socioeconomic bias in turnout by encouraging people of low socioeconomic status to vote.

Income Inequality: economic disengagement among transitions' losers

Income inequality appears to reinforce feelings of relative powerlessness among disadvantaged voters, discouraging them from participation in elections (Solt 2008, 2010; Anderson and Beramendi 2008). According to the relative power argument, poor voters assess their general abilities to influence policy outcomes in relation to wealthier co-citizens, and if the relative power differentials are too great and income inequality is high, poor voters will deem voting as ineffectual and pointless (Goodin and Dryzek 1980). Examining the effects of income inequality on turnout among disadvantaged voters in post-communist countries is particularly relevant as several of these countries experienced dramatic increases in income inequality as they transitioned to market economies. The growth in income inequality in these countries is a reflection of differing abilities of socioeconomic groups to compete in market economies,

particularly in terms of education; the wages of highly educated people, especially professionals, outpaced those of the less educated in manufacturing and agricultural sectors.

We would expect that unequal success in the new market economies has caused political disillusionment among the economic losers resulting in more unequal turnout in countries with high income inequality. In post-communist countries, people are more likely to vote if they are employed (White and McAllister 2004); and more generally people with positive economic evaluations are more positively disposed to the new democratic regimes in Eastern Europe (Kluegel and Mason 2004, Neundorf 2010, Evans and Whitefield 1995).

Election procedures and costs of voting

Last but not least, electoral procedures are possibly the main determinants of turnout inequality: to put it simply, turnout inequality is lower where voting is easier. The fine balance between the costs and benefits of voting means that even small changes tip the balance for and against voting (Blais 2000, Tingsten 1937). The more complicated the electoral procedures are, the more difficult voting becomes for unmotivated voters with few cognitive resources. Each additional complication quickly tips the balance against the benefits of voting, whether it is complex registration procedures or complicated choices on the preferential ballots. For this reason, compulsory voting, which raises the costs of not voting by imposing sanctions, almost eliminates turnout inequality (Lijphart 1997; Gallego 2010). Also, state-initiated voter registration, in contrast to the onerous voter registration in the US, reduces turnout inequality by reducing the informational costs and effort of getting to the polling booth.

Finally, the complexity of the ballots themselves and how many choices they require the voter to make has an influence on turnout inequality. Simple ballots that present the voter with only one choice, such as in majoritarian systems where the voter has to choose only between a handful of candidates or closed list PR systems, impose minimal cognitive costs of voting and thus do not deter uninformed voters. On the other hand complex ballots, which allow voters to choose both the party and the candidate, encourage informed and highly motivated voters by giving them the opportunity to send a more nuanced political message, while confusing and discouraging the less informed voters (Anduiza 2002, Gallego 2010).

For post-communist Eastern Europe only, ballot type may be relevant in explaining turnout inequality as none of these countries currently has compulsory voting and all have state-initiated voter registration. Eastern European countries have a variety of electoral systems ranging from simple closed list PR in Moldova; mixed proportional representation and majoritarian systems in Russia (until 2005); to open list proportional representation with preferential voting in Latvia. We would expect that turnout inequality will be lower where voting involves fewer choices, such as in the countries with simple closed list proportional representation systems, and higher where preferential voting imposes complex choices on the voter.

Data, Variables, and Method

To maximize temporal and cross-sectional coverage, data is pooled from four different data sources: a collection of cross-sectional national stratified random sample surveys covering the period from 1991 to 2008 conducted as part of UK ESRC and EU Science Foundation funded projects run by Geoffrey Evans and Stephen Whitefield from 1992 to 2009 (hereafter referred to as the EurEqual survey); the European Social Survey Rounds 1 to 4 (ESS); the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems Module 1 (CSES); and Waves 1 and 2 of the study 'Consolidation of Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe' (CDCEE). The dataset covers 45 elections across

12 post-communist countries with at least 2 elections covered in each.¹ At least 900 individuals were surveyed for each election, so in total the entire dataset includes a sample size of about 98,000 individuals.

While the models are estimated with turnout as the dependent variable, the quantity of interest is turnout inequality. I focus on operationalizing turnout inequality along the dimension of education. Education is arguably most central to the creation of inequalities in voting participation by serving as the primary social sorting mechanism segregating people into networks that share not only political attitudes but also economic status. Unsurprisingly, of the three indicators of socioeconomic status, education appears to be most closely and consistently linked to voter participation (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, Blais 2000, 2006), and post-communist countries are no exception to the strong effects of education on voter turnout (Bernhagen and Marsh 2006; Kostelka 2014). Finally, education is not disaggregated by accounting for political attitudes, which are themselves closely associated with education, because from the normative point of view turnout inequality matters in the sense of an overall unequal representation of education groups. Education is measured as a three category variable: 1-Primary, 2-Secondary, and 3-Tertiary. The estimated strength of the treatment effect of education on turnout is treated as the measure of turnout inequality.

Trade union membership (member -1, non-member - 0) is added at the micro-level as one of the components of left strength. Finally, only age and age squared are included as controls at the individual level so as not to further disaggregate the effect of education, particularly as education has indirect effects.

To capture the passing of the ‘founding elections’ euphoria some measure of time is needed. To allow for cross-national comparability, all the data is clustered according to election sequence rather than using the years in which the elections occur. For example, all the first ‘founding elections’ would be coded 1 regardless of the actual year of occurrence (i.e. Poland 1989 and Russia 1990). The dataset covers most of the elections between the second and sixth elections since the collapse of communism for all the countries in the study.² Also, all the surveys for each country that occur in the same electoral cycle are clustered together to cover the preceding election (i.e. all surveys done between the 1993 and 1995 elections for the Russian Duma are used to cover the 1993 election).

Party supply is measured using two indicators: the effective number of electoral parties and polarization. The effective number of electoral parties, which is calculated using Laakso and Taghepera’s index (1979), is taken from the dataset kindly provided by Kostadinova and Power (2007) and is supplemented by the Database of Political Institutions as well as by a dataset of election indices created by Michael Gallagher (Gallagher and Mitchell 2003). Polarization is measured using the RILE index of parties left-right positions from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (Klingemann *et al* 2006), and is calculated using Dalton’s (2008) formula for polarization.³

Left party strength is measured as the left parties’ share of the total vote. Left parties are identified using a scale measuring party position on the economic dimension based on the CMP analysis of party manifesto positions relating to particular issues concerning the

¹ The database consists of the following legislative elections: Bulgaria (1991, 1997, 2005) Czech Republic (1992, 1996, 1998, 2002, 2006) Estonia (1992, 1995, 1999, 2003) Hungary (1998, 2002, 2006) Latvia (1995, 2006) Lithuania (1992, 1996, 2000, 2008) Moldova (1994, 2005) Poland (1993, 1997, 2001, 2005) Romania (1992, 1996, 2004, 2008) Russia (1993, 1999, 2003, 2007) Slovakia (1994, 1998, 2002, 2006) Ukraine (1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2007). I include Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova despite these countries being considered undemocratic, since I agree with Joshua Tucker’s argument in *Regional Economic Voting* (2006) that we have much to learn by comparing these countries with the rest of Eastern Europe.

² Unfortunately owing to the lack of a sufficient number of countries being covered, I have been unable to include the first founding elections in the analysis.

³ $PI = \text{SQRT} \{ \sum (\text{party vote share}_i * ([\text{party L/R score}_i - \text{party system average L/R score}] / 5)^2) \}$

economic and welfare policy (see Tavits and Letki 2009 for a discussion of this measure of party position).⁴ Parties left of the party system, which centre on the economic dimension in each election within each country, are classified as left parties. I focus on identifying left parties based on their positions on the economic dimension based on the assumption that parties' stated position on economic and welfare policy is most relevant for mobilizing poor and working-class voters. Furthermore, left parties are identified by their position on the left-right scale rather than party family since the traditional left party families do not capture all the parties that fall left of the centre.

Income inequality is measured as inequality in net income, post-tax and post-transfer. The gini coefficient measure of net income inequality is obtained from the Standardized World Income Inequality Database (SWIID) compiled by Frederick Solt (2009).

Finally, ballot complexity is measured as a three-category variable coded 1 for the simplest electoral systems (closed list PR), 2 for mixed systems, 3 for open list PR.

A multilevel model is used in the regression analysis so as to account for variation across elections within countries as well as country effects. Not accounting for the clustering of the data would violate the assumption of independent standard errors and would underestimate the errors for the contextual effects. The model has three levels: individual, election, and country. Random intercepts are included at the two higher levels, but no random slopes as there are too few higher-level cases. I have decided it is more important to account for clustering within countries rather than include random slopes at the second level. Trade union membership is included as an individual level variable. The model is shown below in reduced form:

$$\text{Logit}(\text{Vote}_{ijk}) = \gamma_{000} + \gamma_{10jk}\text{Education}_{ijk} + \gamma_{11k}\text{Context}_{jk}\text{Education}_{ijk} + \gamma_{01k}\text{Context}_{jk} + \gamma_{2jk}\text{Age}_{ijk} + \gamma_{3jk}\text{Age}_{ijk}^2 + \gamma_{4jk}\text{TradeUnion}_{ijk} + U_{00k} + U_{0jk}$$

Estimating turnout inequality

As discussed earlier, turnout inequality is measured as the size of the coefficient for education. For descriptive purposes, I estimate turnout inequality across country-elections by running logit regressions for each cluster. Sticking with Gallego's (2010) simple model of turnout at the individual level, the regressions are estimated accounting only for age and age squared at the individual level.

While the logit coefficients for education do not show the substantive effects of education on turnout, they show the overall strength of the relationship between education and turnout; the coefficient serves as an approximation of its association with turnout. Where the coefficients are close to zero, turnout inequality would be practically non-existent. Education influences turnout indirectly through various mechanisms such as political engagement (Verba *et al.* 1995), so controls for these other factors are not included in order to capture the overall effect. For normative concerns about equality of representation, the overall effect is of most interest.

⁴ Items included from the Comparative Manifesto Project (Klingemann et al 2006) to form economic dimension scale: Party economic left-right score = Right wing (Liberal, Reformist) – Left Wing (Socialist, Anti-reformist) = (per401 Free enterprise positive + per 402 Incentives Positive + per407 Protectionism Negative + per409 Keynesian Demand Management: Positive + per410 Productivity Positive + per505 Welfare state limitation positive + per507 Education limitation positive + per4011 Privatization positive + per4012 Control of economy negative + per4013 Property-restitution positive) – (per403 Market Regulation Positive + per404 Economic Planning positive + per406 Protectionism Positive + per412 Controlled Economy Positive + per413 Nationalization Positive + per503 Social Justice Positive + per504 Welfare State Expansion Positive + per506 Education Expansion Positive + per4123 Publicly Owned Industry Positive + per4124 Socialist Property Positive + per4131 Property-Restitution Negative + per4132 Privatization Negative)

In general, some degree of turnout inequality along the dimension of education exists in all the Eastern European countries included in this study as illustrated by Figure 1. Nowhere is the relationship between education and turnout negative, which means that the university-educated are more likely to vote than the uneducated in all the countries considered. Turnout inequality is weakest in Moldova in the second election and in Ukraine in the third election, but even in these instances education has a slight positive effect. The finding that turnout inequality exists in all these countries to a greater or lesser extent is unsurprising given that none of these countries currently has compulsory voting. Compulsory voting is by far the strongest institutional determinant of turnout (Blais and Dobrzynska 1998, Jackman 1987, Norris 2002), and it is the primary institutional feature, which almost eliminates turnout inequality (Lijphart 1997, Gallego 2010). Also, all post-communist new democracies have state-initiated voter registration, the lack of which is the other main cause of turnout inequality (Lijphart 1997, Gallego 2010; although see Calvert and Gilchrist 1993: 699; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980), so although the levels of turnout inequality are quite varied in Eastern Europe, registration procedures do not play as strong a role as they do in a wider pool of cases. In the absence of these two main institutional explanatory factors, we have to cast our nets wider to explain variations in turnout inequality in the post-communist context.

[Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here]

The need to consider temporal dynamics is reinforced by the clear variation in turnout inequality over time, particularly the visible upward trend in several countries shown in Figure 2. Figure 2 shows overall turnout and the turnout inequality by election sequence. Turnout inequality remains relatively stable in only two countries: Poland and Bulgaria. In the remaining countries turnout inequality changes considerably over time. Just over half of the countries reveal a pattern in turnout and turnout inequality that seems to fit with both of the proposed dynamic explanations (fading euphoria or fading effects of compulsory voting): turnout declines while turnout inequality increases. The pervasive pattern of turnout decline would appear to fit with prior studies that argue that voting participation declined in Eastern Europe as the initial excitement with democratic elections faded away (Kostadinova 2003; Kostadinova and Power 2007), however one should note the variation in the starting levels of turnout in earliest elections. High initial turnout is not present in all the countries, suggesting other factors at play such as the varying intensity of popular mobilization leading up to the regime collapses, as well as the decision to stop enforcing electoral participation by communist authorities, most notably in Poland and Hungary. Further analysis of these changes within generations is required to adjudicate between the two explanations.

Regression Results

Table 1 shows the results of a hierarchical three-level random slopes logit regression.⁵ The second level consists of elections, which in turn are nested within countries at the third level.

⁵ Robustness checks: Several additional analyses to ensure the stability of the interaction coefficients. Also I have run individual models for each of the explanatory variables with an interaction with education, as well as one single model with all the explanatory variables and interactions between each of these variables and education included following Gallego's (2010) example. The directions of the interaction effects remain stable across all the different models.

Finally, as the number of higher level cases is relatively small, I conduct a two-stage analysis to allow for the detection of any influential outliers at second level. I use the estimated coefficients for education for the second-level units to identify any influential outliers by examining scatterplots of turnout inequality against each of the explanatory factors as well as the leverage of each level two unit. Finally I ran several regressions for the second stage eliminating one country at a time. In the following analysis I discuss how particular higher level cases influence the results.

Covering several elections within countries allows turnout inequality to be examined both across countries and across time. All the explanatory variables, even ballot complexity, have changed over time, so the structure of the data allows us to account for the impact of these changes. Time, which is necessary to measure the fading of the euphoria effect and communist compulsory voting, is accounted for by the election sequence variable.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Looking at the directions of the coefficients for the interactions in Table 1, three factors produce the expected results. As expected the interaction between election sequence and education is positive, which would indicate that with time turnout inequality increases. The main effect for election sequence is negative indicating that overall turnout fell with each subsequent democratic election. The results of Model 1 indicate that the time effect remains robust even when changes in the party system and electoral institutions are accounted for: none of the other factors explain away the coefficient for the interaction between election sequence and education.

These effects would appear to fit with the ‘founding elections’ euphoria explanation. The low socioeconomic status voters, who are most sensitive to the costs of voting, drop out more quickly than the high status voters, as the initial excitement with democratic elections fades and no longer counter-balances the costs of voting. Alternatively, turnout inequality could increase as the older cohorts are replaced by younger ones who came of age too late to experience compulsory voting in communist elections. The analysis in the next section will adjudicate between these two possibilities by determining whether turnout inequality increased because older voters stopped voting as they reassessed their faith in elections, or because of the entrance of the new post-transition generation for whom voting was voluntary.

Also as expected, trade union membership reduces the impact of education. Additionally the main effect of trade union membership is positive. The two effects for trade union membership indicate that, as expected, trade union membership boosts turnout among the disadvantaged voters, thus equalizing turnout.

Finally, as expected, ballot complexity increases the impact of education. In systems with preferential voting, turnout inequality is higher than in the simpler closed list PR or mixed majoritarian-PR systems. That ballot complexity appears to discourage disadvantaged voters suggests that voters in Eastern Europe react to changes in the cost of voting in the same ways as voters in established democracies.

The remaining factors do not have the effects expected based on the experience of established democracies. Overall party supply seems to have no effect on turnout inequality and it may even encourage voters in Eastern Europe contrary to expectations. Polarization also has no effect on the impact of education on turnout; the dispersion of political parties on the left-right spectrum seems to have no influence on turnout inequality. Polarization encourages voters to rely on ideology to make electoral choices rather than party identification (Dalton and Anderson in Dalton 2010). In new democracies in Eastern Europe where party identification is weak and voter volatility high (Tavits 2008), voters already have to rely on ideology, so for this reason a variety of party positions may not significantly discourage voters.

The number of parties reduces the effect of education contrary to expectations. The equalizing effect of the number of parties is not robust, however, as it is driven largely by early elections in Russia and Ukraine. The third election in Ukraine, which took place in 1998, is a particularly extreme outlier in terms of the number of parties, so when it is excluded the effective number of parties has no effect on turnout inequality. The early elections in Russia and especially Ukraine were unusually chaotic with not only a high number of parties running for office but also numerous independent candidates. The first few parliamentary elections in Ukraine were some of the most extreme cases of party fractionalization among electoral democracies (Moser 1999; Moser and Scheiner 2004). The high level of fractionalization in

Ukraine is perhaps best considered as an indication of the extreme weakness of party institutionalization rather than an abundance of meaningful electoral choice.

Left party strength does not have the equalizing effect expected: the vote share of left parties appears to increase the effect of education, but a closer examination of the marginal effects of education shows that left party strength has no significant effect on turnout inequality as shown in Figure 5. In the post-communist left parties do not necessarily offer the pro-welfare policies that encourage poor voters to vote. During the transition, left parties had stronger incentives to pursue austerity and anti-welfare policies than right parties in order to prove their disassociation with socialism (Tavits and Letki 2009). By pursuing more ‘right-wing’ policies than right wing parties themselves, the left parties could not play the anticipated role in mobilizing the low socioeconomic status voters who were often ‘losers’ in the economic transition. While none of the second level country-election units is an influential outlier, the results are driven in part by Hungary and Poland. These two countries are considered one of the most successful cases of market reform, and in these countries, left parties were particularly eager to sever associations with communism (Tavits and Letki 2009).

Finally, income inequality reduces the effect of education, also contrary to expectations. In established democracies, income inequality increases turnout inequality by discouraging poor voters who feel powerless to influence politics (Solt 2008, 2012; Anderson and Beramendi 2008). In post-communist new democracies, on the other hand, income inequality appears to reduce turnout particularly among the best-informed voters. These results suggest that voters in Eastern Europe perceive the implications of inequality differently; owing to past commitments to egalitarianism under communism, Eastern Europeans are far more disapproving of income inequality than Western Europeans (Corneo and Gruner 2000). Income inequality may be linked to the legitimacy of the new regimes. Inequality is highest in the former Soviet Union where the democratic transitions stalled, and economies suffer from elite capture. The best-informed voters will be most aware of the flawed economic and political transitions, and to them inequality may be evidence of the lack of legitimacy of a new political system and the futility of voting.

To aid the interpretation of the logit results in substantive terms I show the predicted probabilities of voting by education depending on the different levels of the explanatory variable following Gallego’s example (2010) in Figures 3 to 6. The effective number of parties and income inequality have the greatest effects on turnout inequality. In countries with the highest number of parties, the gap in turnout between the best and least educated is about 15 percent, but when the number of parties is lowest the gap is only 2 percent. The gap in turnout between the best and least educated voters is 20 percent in the most equal countries, while in the most unequal post-communist countries, such as Russia, the gap is only 4 percent. Whereas with time, turnout inequality increased from 10 percent to 20. Ballot complexity increases turnout inequality from about 6 percent to 12.

[Insert Figures 3, 4, 5, 6 about here]

Fading effects of euphoria or compulsory voting?

The findings thus far clearly indicate that turnout inequality has increased with time in post-communist countries. However, to distinguish between the two possible explanations, we must look at trends in turnout inequality in terms of meaningfully defined generations of voters.⁶ If

⁶ Three generations: The post-Cold War generation consists of people who were in their ‘impressionable’ years after 1989, in other words they would have been aged 14 or younger in 1989. The Cold War generation consists of people who were in their impressionable years (aged 15-25) between 1945 and 1989. The pre-Cold War generation consists of people who came of age before 1945. This cohort is particularly relevant in Warsaw Pact countries where communism was imposed only in 1945, which means that this cohort came of age before being required to vote in communist elections.

the fading effect of communist compulsory voting is responsible for the increase in turnout inequality, we would expect turnout inequality in the overall population through two processes. The replacement of the older generations, particularly the Cold War cohort, by the post-Cold War cohort, which never experienced communist elections, should be the primary process. The Cold War cohort is expected to be the most likely generation to have formed a habit of voting through forced participation in communist elections, since this generation would have experienced communist elections in their formative or ‘impressionable’ years (Alwin *et al.* 1991); generally experiences during these years are most likely to have persistent effects throughout adulthood (Prior 2010). Secondly, we would expect turnout inequality to increase slightly among the pre-Cold War cohort from the Warsaw Pact countries, which came of age before communism regimes were imposed in 1945 and thus never completely formed a habit of voting. On the other hand, if the excitement of the transition temporarily mobilized voters, we would see strong evidence of behavioural change among mature cohorts. We would expect to see turnout inequality increase among both the pre-Cold War and Cold War generations as both these generations of voters lose their excitement about voting. We would also expect to see some generational replacement effects, since the post-Cold War cohort would have come of age after the excitement of the transition.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Table 2 shows how the change in turnout inequality over time differs by generation. For comparison, Model 1 shows the results of a model with all cohorts while accounting for the other main determinants of turnout inequality, as established in the previous section (e.g. ballot complexity, income inequality, and trade union membership). To clarify the extent of the change over time in turnout inequality, elections are treated as dummy variables. Once the post-Cold War cohort is removed from the sample, turnout inequality still increased among the older generations of voters particularly in the fourth and fifth elections as shown by the positive and statistically significant coefficients for the interactions between elections and education in Model 2. A comparison of the predicted turnout inequality for all cohorts and just the two older ones shows that most of the turnout inequality is among the two older generations: for all generations taken together, the university educated were more likely to vote than the uneducated by 21 percent in the 4th election, by 18 percent in the 5th election and by 14 percent in 6th election, but if the post-Cold War generation is removed from the sample the differences are only reduced to 19, 15, and 10 percent respectively.⁷ Therefore generational replacement contributed only a small proportion of the turnout inequality over time.

Next the two older generations are further broken down into the Cold War generation and the pre-Cold War generation in Warsaw Pact countries where communist regimes were not imposed until 1945; the pre-Cold War generation in the Warsaw Pact countries would have come of age before the requirement to vote in communist elections. The separate analysis for these two generations (Models 3 and 4) shows that turnout inequality primarily increased in the Cold War generation, a finding which runs contrary to the expectation that compulsory voting under communism had strong habit forming effects.

These findings suggest that the abolishing of compulsory voting is not the primary explanation; most likely both the fading effects of excitement of the transition and the *de facto* compulsory voting are behind the increase in turnout inequality. Furthermore the results suggest that both learning and generational replacement underlie the changes in voter turnout. That uneducated citizens, particularly among the Cold War generation, are clearly losing interest in voting reflects the decline in perceived benefits of voting as the initial excitement about democracy fades. However, the entrance into the electorate of the post-Cold War cohort,

⁷ The predicted probabilities of voting for all cohorts are based on Model 1 in Table 2, and predicted probabilities for the two older cohorts are based on Model 2.

which came of age in the mid-1990s after the excitement of the transition had waned and which never experienced communist mobilization of voters, has also clearly contributed to the increase in turnout inequality. Further analysis of cohort patterns in turnout over a longer period is needed to exactly determine how much these two explanations contributed to the change in turnout; a longer period of analysis that stretches beyond the period affected by excitement of the transition will better capture any traces of the habituating effects of communist compulsory voting.

Conclusions

This study examined turnout inequality in the context of Eastern European new democracies. Despite the supposed social levelling effects of communism, all these countries display turnout inequality and in quite varied levels. The results of this study show that while some accepted institutional explanations, particularly ballot complexity, help explain turnout inequality in Eastern European new democracies, the dynamic transitional context has to be taken into consideration. In Eastern Europe, turnout inequality is strongly shaped by processes related to the regime change and democratic consolidation, particularly the fading excitement of the democratic transition.

As in established democracies, ballot complexity increases turnout inequality as less informed voters are dissuaded from voting by the required electoral choices. Also, perhaps surprisingly for some readers, trade unions seem to play the same role in mobilizing disadvantaged voters in Eastern Europe as they used to in Western Europe before unions started focusing on white-collar workers (Leighley and Nagler 2007). These findings are consistent with Bernhagen and Marsh's study, which shows that trade union membership has similar effects on turnout in both Eastern and Western Europe (2007). Furthermore, this conclusion is consistent with Letki's finding that compulsory membership in non-democratic organizations did actually have the lasting effect of encouraging political participation after the collapse of communism (2004).

On the other hand, left party strength, party supply, and income inequality play a very different role in Eastern Europe with regards to turnout inequality. Left parties in Eastern Europe do not play the traditional role of mobilizing the working class and thus left parties do not have an equalizing effect on turnout. Left parties in Eastern Europe had strong incentives to pursue austerity and pro-market policies to disprove any associations with the discredited communist ideology (Tavits and Letki 2009). The pressure to prove their commitment to the new democratic system and capitalism outweighed the benefits of appealing to voters harmed by the economic transition. In contrast to established democracies, an abundance of electoral choices at the very least does not deter disadvantaged voters, and a high number of parties to choose from may even encourage them to vote. Possibly, in the absence of party identities, all voters in Eastern Europe choose parties more by ideology regardless of their cognitive abilities, so they need plenty to choose from.

A perhaps worrying finding pertains to effects of income inequality on voter turnout. People in Eastern Europe clearly seem to react differently to income inequality than in established democracies. In established democracies, income inequality appears to reinforce feelings of relative powerlessness among poor voters (Solt 2008; Anderson and Beramendi 2008). In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, socially and economically advantaged voters, who were best rewarded in the economic transition, seem most discouraged by income inequality from participating in democratic politics. This finding suggests that the advantaged voters, who are the best informed and most perceptive, may be aware of the flaws of the economic and political transition in particular how elites were allowed to capture resources.

Finally, consistent with the argument that transitional processes shaped turnout inequality in Eastern Europe, the fading of the initial excitement with democratic elections

appears to be the primary cause of the increasing turnout inequality. In the first few democratic elections, turnout was very high as people placed great hope in the new democratic system. With each subsequent election, however, the perceived benefits of participating in elections declined as people realized that democracy is not a panacea for all problems (Kostadinova 2003). With the decline in perceived benefits, low socioeconomic status people who are most sensitive to the costs of voting have dropped out of the electorate resulting in a growth in turnout inequality over time. This process has been principally one of learning among the older generation of voters; the replacement of the older voters by the post-Cold War, post-transition, generation only slightly contributed to the process. While this process of disillusionment with democracy is unfortunate for the equal political representation of different socioeconomic groups, it is an inevitable 'normalization' of voting behaviour in new democracies as people develop more realistic expectations of the political system.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Figure 1: Turnout Inequality over Turnout (survey estimated)

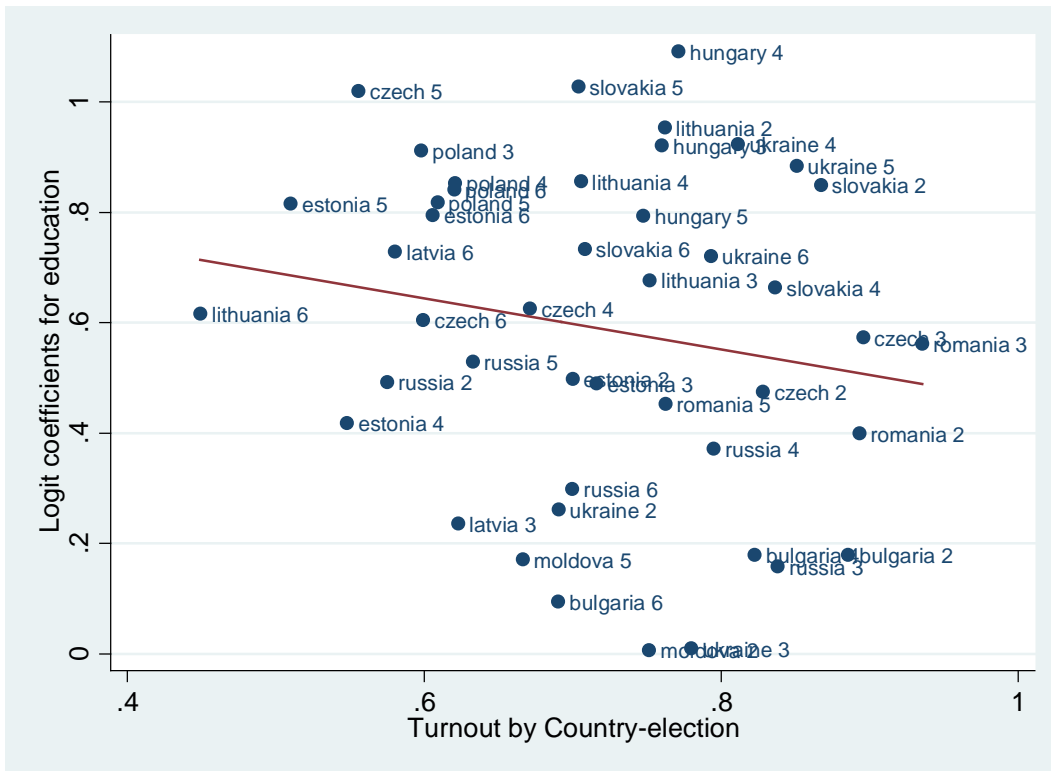


Figure 2: Turnout and Turnout Inequality by Election Sequence

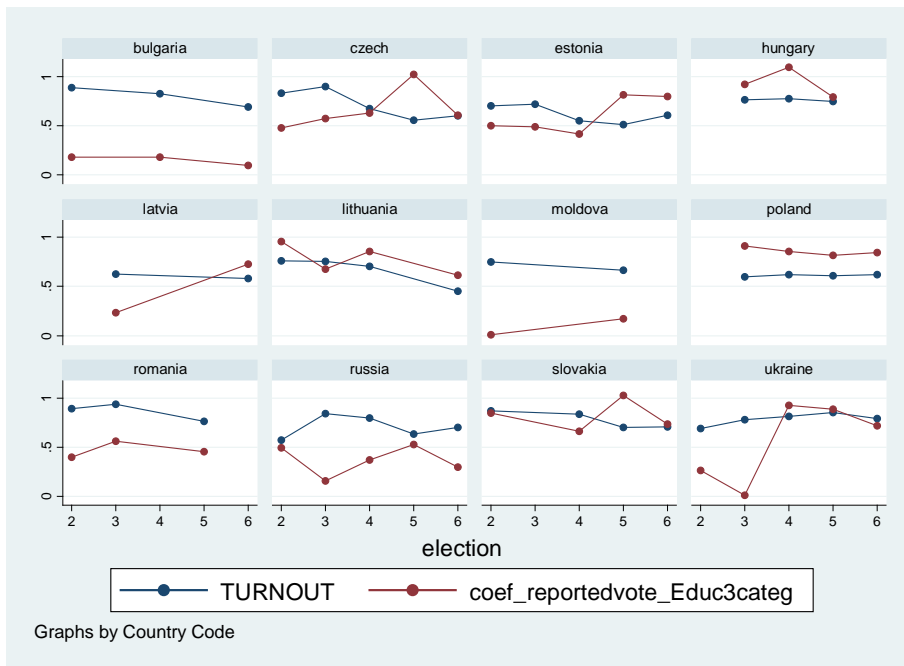


Table 1: Determinants of Turnout Inequality

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Election	-0.230** (0.070)	-0.125 (0.068)	-0.122 (0.068)	-0.121 (0.069)	-0.126 (0.069)	-0.124 (0.069)	-0.142* (0.065)
Education	0.171*** (0.042)	0.478*** (0.030)	0.670*** (0.025)	0.280*** (0.035)	1.291*** (0.074)	0.094* (0.038)	0.441*** (0.013)
Trade Union	0.309*** (0.025)	0.302*** (0.025)	0.311*** (0.025)	0.303*** (0.025)	0.309*** (0.025)	0.309*** (0.025)	0.488*** (0.077)
Polarization	-0.025 (0.043)	-0.008 (0.044)	-0.027 (0.043)	-0.025 (0.043)	-0.030 (0.044)	-0.027 (0.043)	0.006 (0.042)
ENEP	-0.023 (0.031)	-0.023 (0.031)	0.045 (0.032)	-0.024 (0.031)	-0.022 (0.032)	-0.022 (0.032)	-0.038 (0.030)
Left Vote Share	0.036 (0.423)	-0.011 (0.425)	0.026 (0.425)	-0.476 (0.439)	-0.020 (0.432)	-0.016 (0.429)	-0.145 (0.397)
Ballot	-0.423*** (0.106)	-0.417*** (0.106)	-0.422*** (0.106)	-0.418*** (0.107)	-0.417*** (0.108)	-0.678*** (0.111)	-0.769*** (0.166)
Income Inequality	-0.013 (0.016)	-0.014 (0.016)	-0.013 (0.016)	-0.014 (0.016)	0.033* (0.016)	-0.014 (0.016)	-0.023 (0.014)
Age	0.130*** (0.002)	0.130*** (0.002)	0.130*** (0.002)	0.131*** (0.002)	0.130*** (0.002)	0.130*** (0.002)	0.130*** (0.002)
Age ²	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)
ElectionXEduc.	0.060*** (0.009)						
PolarizationXEduc.		-0.010 (0.005)					
ENEPXEduc			-0.037*** (0.003)				
LeftVoteXEduc.				0.262*** (0.057)			
InequalityXEduc.					-0.026*** (0.002)		
BallotXEduc						0.149*** (0.016)	
TradeUnionXEduc.							-0.094* (0.037)
Constant	-0.619 (0.577)	-1.137* (0.577)	-1.492** (0.576)	-0.815 (0.580)	-2.542*** (0.597)	-0.453 (0.584)	-1.321* (0.532)
Survey Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Random Intercept L3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Random Intercept L2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R-squared							
BIC	103890.2	103929.4	103808.5	103911.5	103790.2	103843.6	103910.5
Individuals	98116	98116	98116	98116	98116	98116	98116
Country-elections	46	46	46	46	46	46	46
Countries	12	12	12	12	12	12	12

* p<0.01, *** p<0.001 The coefficients are estimated using a hierarchical random intercept logit regression model. The dependent variables is turnout.

Figure 3: Probability of Voting by Education and Election Sequence

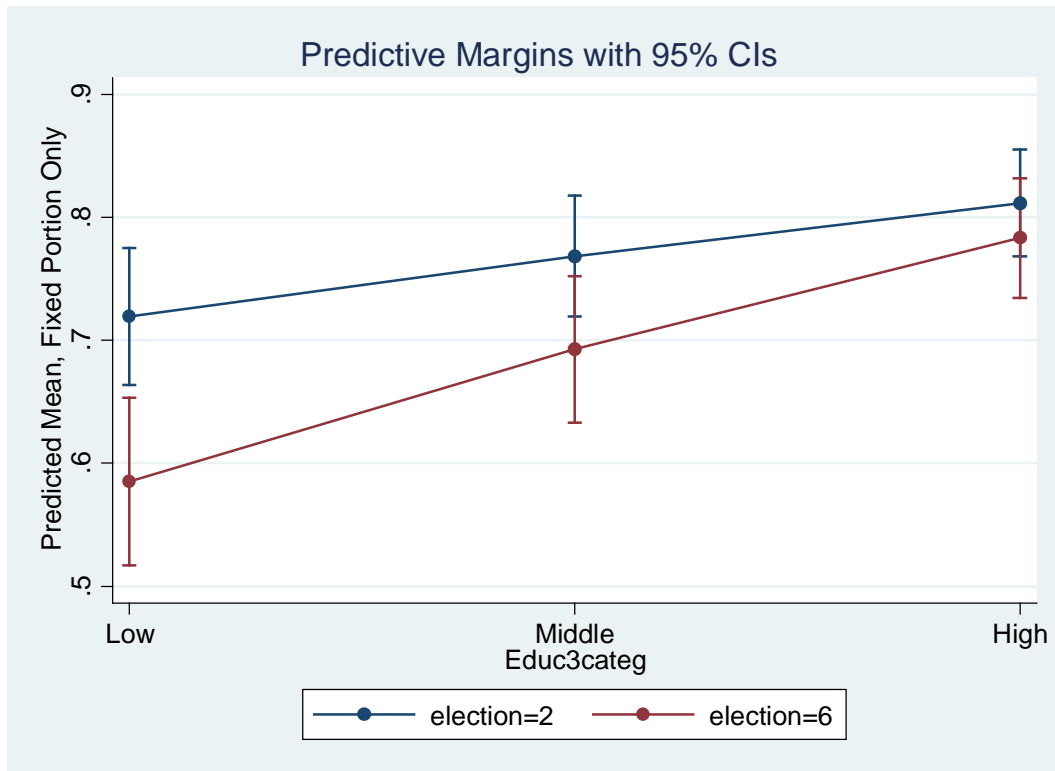


Figure 4: Predicted Probability of Voting By Education and Ballot complexity

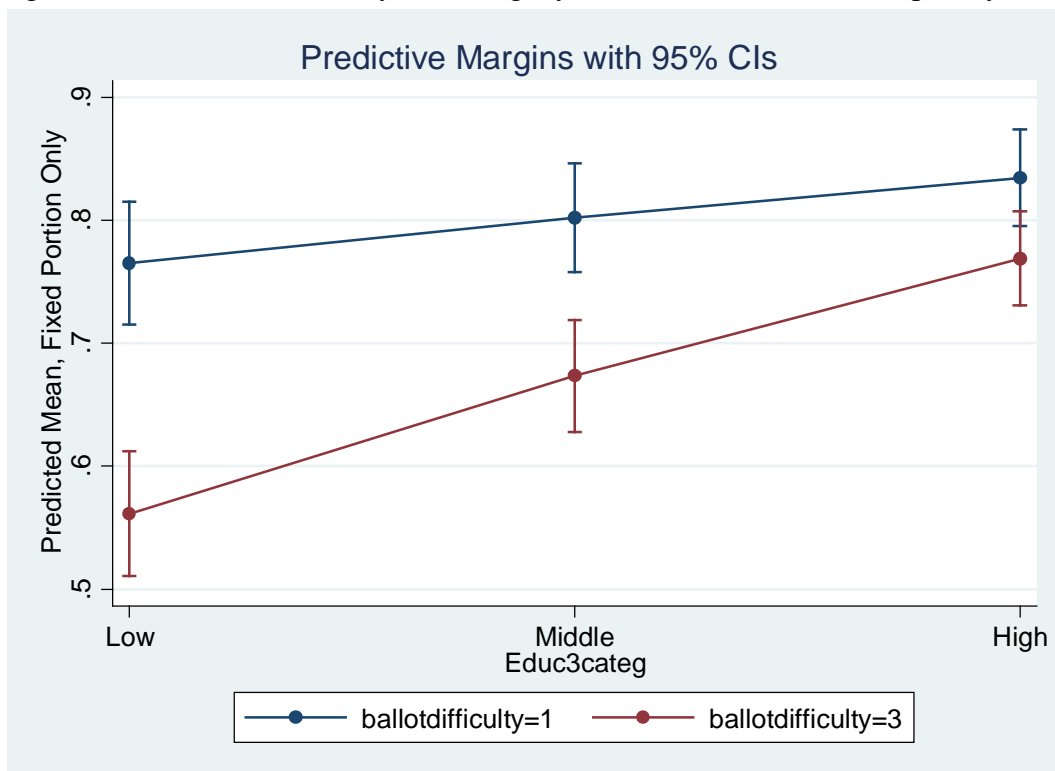


Figure 5: Predicted Probability of Voting by Left Party Strength

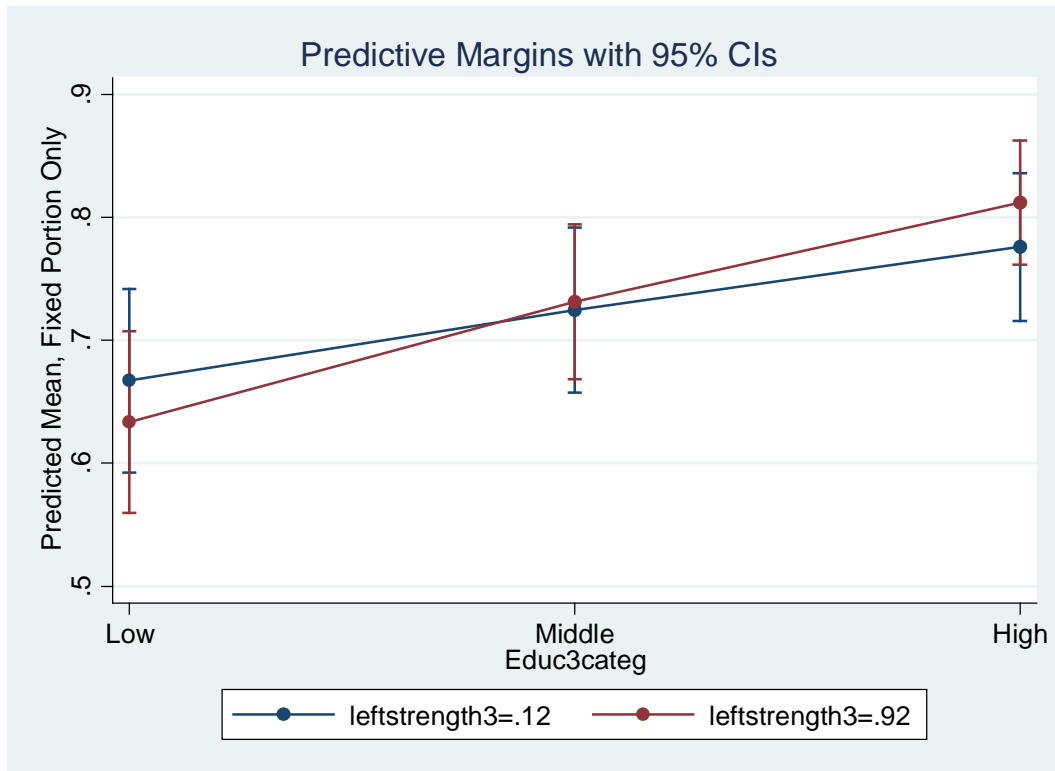


Figure 6: Predicted Probability of Voting by Education and Income Inequality

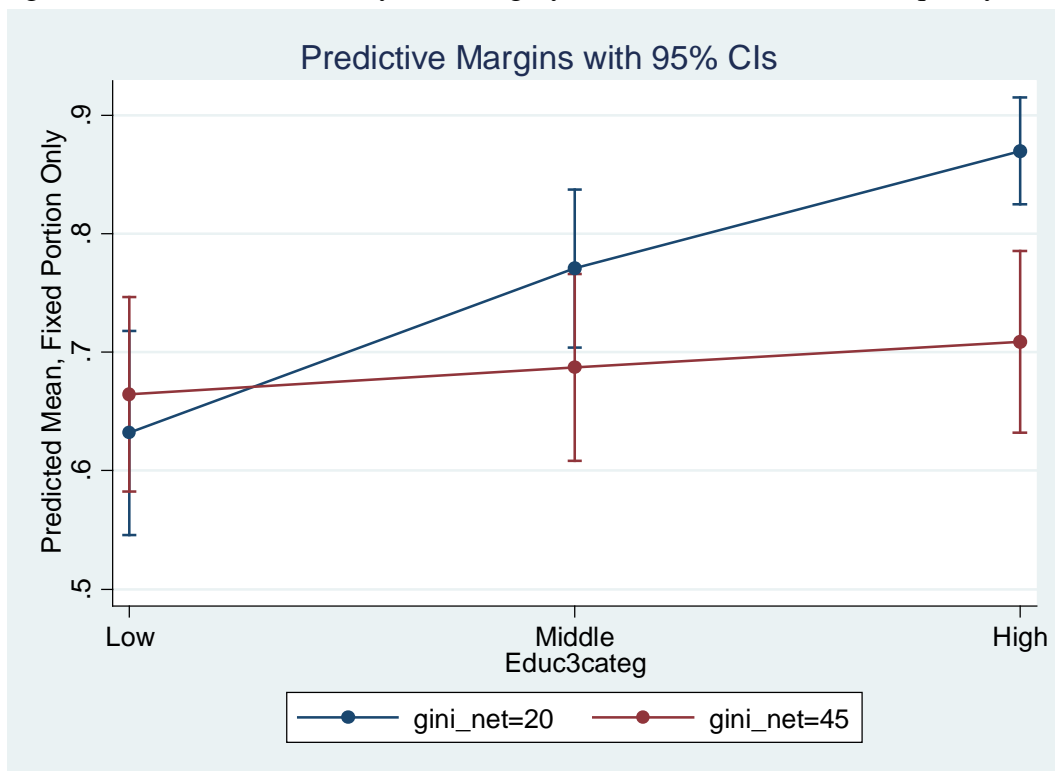


Table 2: Change in turnout inequality by generation

	(1) All cohorts	(2) Pre-Cold War & Cold War	(3) Pre-Cold War (non-USSR)	(4) Cold War
2 nd election (ref.)	-	-	-	-
3 rd election	-0.144 (0.243)	-0.260 (0.251)	-0.363 (0.373)	-0.183 (0.266)
4 th election	-1.087*** (0.242)	-1.145*** (0.250)	-0.886* (0.420)	-1.009*** (0.267)
5 th election	-0.724** (0.240)	-0.674** (0.248)	-0.538 (0.402)	-0.733** (0.264)
6 th election	-0.498* (0.237)	-0.445 (0.246)	0.081 (0.409)	-0.548* (0.262)
Education	0.757*** (0.086)	0.627*** (0.099)	1.373*** (0.415)	0.401** (0.123)
2nd election X Educ. (ref.)	-	-	-	-
3rd election X Educ.	0.067 (0.042)	0.086 (0.046)	0.156 (0.152)	0.042 (0.057)
4th election X Educ.	0.281*** (0.043)	0.230*** (0.049)	0.335 (0.183)	0.198** (0.061)
5 th election X Educ.	0.261*** (0.039)	0.184*** (0.045)	0.367* (0.158)	0.211*** (0.057)
6 th election X Educ.	0.105** (0.039)	0.009 (0.046)	-0.039 (0.173)	0.034 (0.056)
Ballot X Educ.	0.183*** (0.024)	0.152*** (0.029)	-0.042 (0.121)	0.207*** (0.035)
Trade union X Educ.	-0.013 (0.035)	0.013 (0.041)	0.048 (0.215)	0.052 (0.046)
Inequality X Educ.	- 0.017*** (0.002)	-0.012*** (0.003)	-0.032* (0.013)	-0.007* (0.003)
Trade union	0.347*** (0.074)	0.311*** (0.085)	0.356 (0.372)	0.202* (0.096)
Ballot	-1.066*** (0.153)	-1.028*** (0.158)	-0.765** (0.244)	-1.162*** (0.166)
Income inequality	-0.007 (0.013)	-0.015 (0.013)	-0.020 (0.028)	-0.030* (0.014)
Survey effects	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Random Intercept-Country-election	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
BIC	111934.2	80202.67	7853.189	55710.31
Individuals	104532	79081	7401	55540
Country-elections	46	46	46	46

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001 The dependent variable is turnout. The table displays coefficients for a two-level multilevel model with random intercepts for the country-election. All regression include unreported dummies for survey. The 2nd election is the reference category