Perceptions of Electoral Fairness and Voter Turnout

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Abstract

Previous research has established a link between turnout and the extent to which voters are faced with a "meaningful" partisan choice in elections; this study extends the logic of this argument to perceptions of the "meaningfulness" of electoral conduct. It hypothesizes that perceptions of electoral integrity are positively related to turnout. The empirical analysis to test this hypothesis is based on aggregate-level data from 31 countries, combined with survey results from Module 1 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems survey project, which includes new and established democracies. Multilevel modeling is employed to control for a variety of individual- and election-level variables that have been found in previous research to influence turnout. The results of the analysis show that perceptions of electoral integrity are indeed positively associated with propensity to vote.

Keywords

electoral integrity, electoral misconduct, electoral participation, turnout, electoral behavior

The comparative study of voter turnout has exhibited an increasing focus in recent years on citizens' perceptions of the competitive context in which elections take place (e.g., Blais, 2000; Franklin, 2002, 2004; Jackman & Miller,

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1995; Milner, 2002; Norris, 2002, 2004). Most such research has conceptualized the competitiveness of elections in terms of the choices on offer, the decisiveness of the contest, and citizen perceptions of the legitimacy of political institutions. This study extends that line of enquiry by examining another aspect of electoral competitiveness: the degree to which an election is perceived as being a fair contest.

Electoral integrity is a topic that has until recently received scant attention from comparative political scientists. However, a growing body of work, building on the insights of those involved in the field of electoral assistance and observation, has analyzed the importance of confidence in electoral processes in new and emerging democracies, and it is in this context that this literature has seen the most growth in recent years (e.g., Birch, 2007, 2008; Elklit & Reynolds, 2002, 2005; Hartlyn & McCoy, 2006; Lehoucq, 2003, p. 252; Mozaffar, 2002; Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002; Schedler, 2002a, 2002b, 2006). As Fabrice Lehoucq (2002) argues, electoral malpractice "undermines [citizens'] ability to constrain the actions of state officials. . . . To the extent that public officials can corrupt the electoral process, they are less accountable to the electorate" (p. 35). Lack of trust in electoral institutions can erode citizens' perceptions of the legitimacy of other political institutions, it can dent international legitimacy (with possible knock-on effects for donor aid), and in some cases it can even spark civil unrest. But this is not to suggest that electoral confidence is relevant only in the context of new and emerging democracies; as the evidence presented here will show, it appears to have just as great an impact on behavior in established democracies.

The purpose of this article is to explore another possible consequence of perceptions of electoral misconduct: its impact on voter turnout. In so doing, the article sets out to integrate recent work on electoral processes in emergent democracies and semidemocratic countries with the traditional concerns of electoral behaviorists by suggesting that perceptions of the electoral process are part of the broader context of political perceptions that structure the choice of whether or not to vote. The principal argument put forward here is that confidence in electoral conduct has an important and previously understudied impact on the likelihood that voters will go to the polls: When voters are confident that an election will be free and fair, they are more likely to vote, all else being equal, than is the case when they have reservations about the ability (or willingness) of those conducting the election to maintain democratic standards of electoral integrity. This hypothesis is tested and confirmed in a multilevel analysis of 31 elections held between 1996 and 2002 in established, new, and partial democracies.

Evaluations of Electoral Integrity and the Likelihood of Voting

Political scientists have long been aware of the association between various measures of regime legitimacy and voter turnout (Clarke & Alcock, 1989; Finkel, 1985; Karp & Banducci, 2008; Norris, 2002, pp. 86-98; 2004, pp. 158-159; Powell, 1986), but there has been virtually no systematic consideration of what is arguably the most relevant aspect of institutional legitimacy: confidence in the electoral process itself. Low levels of popular confidence in the conduct of elections can be expected to shape citizens' approach to the electoral choice situation in a variety of ways. Specifically, there are several reasons for believing that low *quality* opportunities for participation might translate into lower *quantitative* levels of turnout. If voters fear that polls are corrupt, they have less incentive to bother casting a vote; participating in a process in which they do not have confidence will be less attractive, and they may well perceive the outcome of the election to be a foregone conclusion. There is some anecdotal and survey evidence to suggest that perceptions of the quality of elections are associated with voter turnout in a number of African (Bratton, 1998; Bratton & van de Walle, 1997, pp. 206-210) and Latin American (McCann & Domínguez, 1998) states.[1] Yet this relationship has yet to be systematically examined in a cross-national context.

Przeworski (1988) and Mozaffar and Schedler (2002) argue that procedural certainty is a necessary requirement for the uncertainty in outcomes that defines democracy. It follows that the establishment and maintenance of electoral integrity involves guaranteeing the indeterminacy of election results by safeguarding the reliability of electoral institutions. Violation of integrity occurs when the indeterminacy of the outcome is compromised by the politically motivated application of electoral rules. When this happens and there is widespread public awareness that it has happened, voters cannot be sure that their vote will be fairly counted. In some cases they may even be convinced that their vote will not be fairly counted: "As long as electoral governance artificially reduces electoral uncertainty . . . electoral processes are unlikely to be perceived as fully democratic, or, by implication, fully legitimate" (Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002, p. 11).

These considerations have relevance for conventional political science understandings of the voter calculus that informs a decision on whether or not to go to the polls. Insight into the impact of electoral conduct perceptions on turnout can be gained from consideration of the comparative literature on corruption perceptions. Like corruption, instances of electoral misconduct are typically covert activities of which the majority of the population have no

direct knowledge. Those who perceive corruption to exist have been found to have lower levels of regime support and trust in government (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003; Bowler & Karp, 2004; Seligson, 2002). Regime support and trust in government have in turn been linked to propensity to vote (Finkel, 1985; Karp & Banducci, 2008; Norris, 2002, pp. 86-98). Given that of all regime support variables confidence in electoral processes is most logically proximate to voting, we might expect low levels of confidence in electoral processes to have a direct negative impact on the likelihood of voting.

Following on from these clues in the behavioral literature, the rational choice literature can help to develop this argument. Based on the reasoning of Downs (1957), Riker and Ordeshook (1968, p. 25), present a basic model of the voting decision in terms of costs, benefits, and the probability of an individual vote being decisive,

$$R = (B*P) - C + D,$$

where *R* is the reward that an individual receives from voting, *B* is the differential benefit the voter receives from the preferred electoral outcome over another, *P* is the probability that the act of voting will bring about that benefit, and *C* is the cost to the individual of voting and the potential cost, in terms of retribution, of voting in a way that is unpleasing to others.[2]

From the point of view of the present analysis, the key term in this equation is *P*, which has been traditionally understood in terms of the perceived closeness of the race. In a close race, one vote is more likely to be decisive, so each vote has a greater likelihood of influencing the outcome. But this is true only if it can be assumed that all votes are fairly counted and aggregated. To the extent that voters doubt their vote will be duly processed, they have further reason to doubt that it will be decisive. This suggests that the "decisiveness *P*," which we label "P_1," should be multiplied by the perceived probability that votes will be fairly counted and aggregated—what might be called "reliability *P*"—which we label "P_2":

$$R = (B*P_1*P_2) - C + D$$

Thus in rational choice terms, the main insight offered by this analysis is that if vote calculus models are to be extended to a wider variety of electoral contexts, they must take into consideration rewards and punishments as well as the perceived likelihood that one's vote will be fairly counted and accurately included in the vote tabulation and that the tabulated votes will be accurately reported—in other words, the perceived likelihood that the election will be

conducted fairly. If voters perceive that their vote will not offer them an opportunity to contribute to the selection of leaders, they can be expected to discount the utility of the outcome when deciding whether it is worth their while to vote. Furthermore, considerations of reliability are logically anterior to considerations of decisiveness: It makes sense for a voter to engage in calculations of outcome utility and decisiveness only once they have established that there is sufficient likelihood that their vote will be reliably processed. This suggests that the costs of deciding whether to vote will in certain circumstances reduce to an estimation of the probability that the election will be conducted fairly; if this probability is very low, it will be rational for voters to stay at home, regardless of how much they care about the outcome and regardless of how decisive they think their vote might be.

Data and Method

The majority of the indicators used in this analysis are drawn from Module 1 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). This project is a major collaborative endeavor that involves the inclusion of a series of common electoral survey questions in national election studies so as to enable cross-national comparisons. The Module 1 database includes the pooled results from the relevant sections of 39 election surveys conducted in 33 countries between 1996 and 2002 as well as election- and country-level variables on political institutions. Usable data for they key variables under consideration were available for 31 cases (see Table 1).[3] CSES survey data on these 31 elections were supplemented by aggregate-level data, detailed below.

The dependent variable employed here consists of responses to the standard survey items on turnout. The main independent variable in this analysis, perceptions of electoral fairness, was constructed on the basis of the following question:

> In some countries, people believe their elections are conducted fairly. In other countries, people believe that their elections are conducted unfairly. Thinking of the last election in [country], where would you place it on this scale of one to five where ONE means that the last election was conducted fairly and FIVE means that the last election was conducted unfairly?

This item might not, on the face of it, appear to be a very promising indicator for predicting electoral participation. The question was asked after the election was over, after respondents had voted (or not voted), and after they had had the

Table 1. Confidence in Elections and Rates of Electoral Participation

Country (year of election)	Aggregate turnout (%)[a]	Proportion of respondents with full confidence in the electoral process (%)[b]	Proportion of respondents with broad confidence in the electoral process (%)[c]
Belarus (2001)	83.86	45.36	59.58
Canada (1997)	56.20	34.60	71.42
China (Taiwan) (1996)	75.10	37.77	62.14
Czech Republic (1996)	76.70	46.53	79.79
Denmark (1998)	83.10	88.68	94.87
Germany (1998)	82.20	73.92	90.66
Great Britain (1997)	59.40	56.66	80.55
Hong Kong (1998)	53.20	18.14	56.64
Hong Kong (2000)	43.50	17.55	51.21
Hungary (1998)	59.90	59.33	81.89
Iceland (1999)	84.70	59.46	83.89
Israel (1996)	84.70	38.53	62.61
Japan (1996)	59.80	19.29	42.30
Korea (2000)	57.20	10.60	30.74
Lithuania (1997)	50.00	30.57	55.75
Mexico (1997)	54.40	42.67	56.08
Mexico (2000)	63.90	52.38	67.98
Netherlands (1998)	73.00	70.91	91.74
New Zealand (1996)	83.00	47.41	76.92
Norway (1997)	76.80	81.97	93.16
Poland (1997)	48.80	46.93	72.07
Portugal (2002)	61.60	64.71	81.36
Romania (1996)	78.20	62.24	81.66
Russia (1999)	61.80	25.31	44.05
Slovenia (1996)	75.50	45.47	67.78
Spain (1996)	80.60	62.61	80.05
Spain (2000)	77.30	55.96	79.73
Sweden (1998)	81.40	75.54	88.02
Switzerland (1999)	43.40	74.18	88.20
Ukraine (1998)	68.10	22.84	37.04
United States(1996)	49.00	49.31	75.35
Mean	67.30	48.95	67.74

See the appendix, available at http://cps.sagepub.com/supplemental for data sources.
a. Official turnout as a proportion of the voting-age population.
b. Percentage of survey respondents who answered 1 to the electoral fairness question.
c. Percentage of survey respondents who answered 1 or 2 to the electoral fairness question.

opportunity to evaluate the electoral process from start to finish. Their answer to this question may thus partly reflect their experience on or following election day. If this were the case, it would mean that evaluations of electoral fairness were a consequence, not a cause, of turnout.[4] This possibility is discussed and tested at greater length below, but there are several reasons to believe that confidence in the electoral process reflects attitudes and evaluations that have largely crystallized at the time of the election and are unlikely to change significantly thereafter (save in exceptional cases). Most voters (even in new democracies) have experienced a number of elections in their country, and it is unlikely that their views of the fairness or otherwise of the electoral process will be significantly altered by a single electoral event. Furthermore, the factors that make an election "fair" or "unfair," such as the institutional rules and bodies governing the election, the admission or exclusion of candidates, and the campaign, mostly take place before election day itself. Finally, if perceptions of the electoral process are altered following the election by objective events and reports on the elections in the media, these factors will most likely change the perceptions of all respondents, regardless of whether or not they voted.

The act of voting itself can be expected to affect perceptions of electoral integrity in one of two ways: by increasing the respondent's stake in the election and by providing him or her with additional information about the electoral process. In the first case, the concern raised is that those whose favored party or candidate loses the election may have a less sanguine assessment of electoral conduct. Indeed, Anderson, Blais, Bowler, Donovan, and Listhaug (2005, pp. 144-159) find that "losers" in the electoral process are less likely to evaluate the electoral process favorably, even controlling for a variety of other factors.[5] In the multivariate analyses reported below, this "sour grapes" interpretation of electoral confidence is controlled for by introducing a variable designating whether or not the respondent reported identifying with the winning party (or the winning candidate's party). It is worth noting at this point that the mean fairness rating among "losers" (those identifying with a losing party) was 1.95, compared to 1.92 among "winners" and nonidentifiers—a very small difference. This difference is significant at the .001 level, yet this is not surprising in a sample of nearly 40,000. Moreover, aggregate-level analyses reveal that "losers" are significantly more likely to give an election a worse rating in only six of the countries included in the data set (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Israel, Mexico, Portugal, and Spain). These findings suggest that "sour grapes" had little potential to mediate impacts on turnout, a conclusion that is confirmed in multivariate analysis.

An alternative conception of "stake" in an election might be formulated with reference to cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957). It may be that, having participated in an event, voters are more likely to express a positive

evaluation of that event, so as to justify their participation. Though studies of the role of voting on other measures of external efficacy have found limited evidence for such an effect (Clarke & Alcock, 1989; Finkel, 1985), this hypothesis is nevertheless worth considering.

The former concern—that the act of voting may itself have conditioned views of the electoral process—is trickier to address, but there are several reasons to believe that this effect will be minimal. Voters have multiple sources of information about the fairness of an election, from press reports to word of mouth and the observed performance of candidates and election officials both before and after the election. And though the fact of voting at a polling station that appears to be orderly, efficient, and free of outright fraud may tend to improve voters' perceptions of the integrity of the electoral process, even the most naïve of voters can be expected to be aware that they have "observed" the electoral process at their polling station for a very small proportion of the time it was in operation and that their sample of one polling place constitutes a poor basis on which to generalize to the electoral process as a whole. Finally, voting may decrease confidence in the election as well as increase it. If voters have to wait a long time to vote or if conditions in the polling station are chaotic, they may leave feeling that the election was less well conducted than they had thought, so we cannot necessarily assume that voting can in all cases be expected to increase electoral confidence. We can thus be reasonably sure that the question about electoral fairness taps a general view of the electoral process that is not strongly influenced by the vote act itself. We nevertheless return to the question of endogeneity in the following section.

A final concern is the reliance on a single survey item to measure the variable of interest. Though clearly not ideal, the lack of other measures in the data set leaves little choice. Fortunately, the evidence presented below suggests that this item is sufficiently distinct from other relevant legitimacy items.

Details of the construction of the remaining control variables are included in the appendix, available at http://cps.sagepub.com/supplemental. The main method employed to test the hypotheses elaborated above is multilevel modeling. This technique allows inclusion of micro- and macro-level control variables as well as cross-level interactions (see Steenbergen & Jones, 2002).[6]

Results

Preliminary bivariate analysis at both individual and aggregate levels supports the hypothesis that electoral confidence fosters turnout. At the individual level, those survey respondents who reported having voted rated the fairness of the

election in which they had participated 1.89 on average, whereas the average score for those who claimed not to have voted was 2.22, a difference significant at the .001 level. At the aggregate level, there is a correlation of .367 (significant at the .05 level) between the proportion of survey respondents who expressed full confidence in the electoral process (responded 1 to the question cited above) and official turnout (as a proportion of the voting-age population). The correlation between the proportion expressing broad confidence (those who answered either 1 or 2 to the electoral fairness question) and official turnout is .265, though this coefficient fails to reach statistical significance (see Table 1).[7] These findings provide prima facie evidence that confidence in the electoral process leads to increased levels of voter turnout.

But the real test of this relationship must be carried out in a multivariate context, to which we now turn. A range of controls are necessary for variables most commonly found at the individual and aggregate levels to be associated with turnout. At the individual level, these include age, gender, education level, socioeconomic status, unionization, religiosity, political knowledge, partisan attachment, efficacy, and satisfaction with democracy.[8] At the aggregate level, relevant variables are electoral system, closeness of the race, decisiveness of the contest, multiple (concurrent) elections, campaign finance regulations, time since the last election, population of the country, and experience with democracy.[9]

We start with a random intercepts logit model with individual-level variables only (Model 1 in Table 2). This model shows that perceptions of electoral fairness have a strong and highly significant impact on willingness to cast a ballot.[10] The control variables are virtually all significant and in the expected direction, but even controlling for the factors that have been found repeatedly in previous studies to affect turnout, perceptions of fairness still stands out as a strong predictor.

The evidence also strongly suggests that answers to the electoral fairness question are tapping a distinct dimension of legitimacy perceptions. Factor analysis of the four principal legitimacy questions included in this survey yields a two-factor solution in which perceptions of electoral fairness and satisfaction with democracy load on one factor and two efficacy variables on a second factor. Given the well-known difficulty in interpreting satisfaction with democracy (Canache, Mondak, & Seligson, 2001), it is reasonable to conclude that overall levels of satisfaction are to a certain extent driven by perceptions of electoral fairness. The two variables are, however, sufficiently distinct to warrant separate consideration; the model supports the hypothesis that evaluations of electoral integrity have an impact independent on overall evaluations of the democratic system. It is also noteworthy that party identification with a loser does not prove significant, nor does an interaction term between party identification with a

Table 2. Multilevel Logit Models of Reported Turnout

	Model 1		Model 2	
Variable	Coeff.	*SE*	Coeff.	*SE*
Fixed effects				
Individual level				
Perceptions of electoral fairness (PEF; 1-5)	0.136***	(0.026)	0.157***	(0.022)
Age	0.025***	(0.001)	0.026***	(0.002)
Gender (female)	0.040	(0.069)		
Education	0.402***	(0.107)	0.365***	(0.099)
Income	0.113***	(0.029)	0.124***	(0.022)
Union member	0.311***	(0.068)		
Religious attendance	0.390**	(0.137)		
Political knowledge	0.686***	(0.077)		
Party identification	0.848***	(0.093)	0.912***	(0.083)
Efficacy	0.224***	(0.026)	0.241***	(0.022)
Satisfaction with democracy	0.077**	(0.031)	0.097***	(0.023)
Identifies with loser	0.069	(0.133)		
Election level				
PR component			0.384	(0.481)
Margin of victory			0.034*	(0.014)
Decisiveness			−0.085	(0.217)
Concurrent elections			0.751*	(0.363)
Expenditure limit			−0.045	(0.265)
Time since last election			0.010	(0.011)
Size of population (log)			−0.017	(0.094)
Established democracy			−0.103	(0.279)
Constant	−2.324	(0.332)	−2.804	(1.209)
Random terms				
Intercept variance	0.766***	(0.165)	0.694***	(0.148)
PEF variance		0.009*	(0.004)	
χ^2—fixed	1852.035 (14 *df*)		1187.978 (16 *df*)	
χ^2—random	21.628 (1 *df*)		47.440 (3 *df*)	
N individuals	23,712		35,848	
N elections	22		29	

Cell entries are logit coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

loser and perceptions of electoral fairness, designed to test whether the effect of such perceptions may have been conditioned by support for an unsuccessful party (the "sour grapes" hypothesis).[11]

Unfortunately, a number of the CSES surveys did not ask questions on union membership, religion, or political information, and because different questions were omitted in different surveys, Model 1 includes only 22 elections.[12] To retain enough macro-level cases for the introduction of election-level controls to be possible, those variables with significant amounts of missing data, as well as those insignificant in Model 1, were removed in Model 2.[13] In Model 2, perceptions of electoral fairness were allowed to vary over elections (in other words, this is a fully random model), and a range of election-level variables know to influence aggregate turnout were added.[14] The results reported here are largely in agreement with expectations, though many of the country-level variables fail to reach conventional levels of significance, presumably because of the relatively small number of macro-level cases included.[15]

Somewhat unexpectedly, the margin of victory (employed as a measure of the closeness of the race) is associated with increased turnout in this data set (with no evidence of a cross-level interaction between margin of victory and perceptions of electoral fairness). Examination of the data reveals that Belarus is a distinct outlier on this variable, in that the margin of victory in the Belarusian election included in this data set was 60.0%, whereas the next highest figure was 26.3% (Taiwan). When Belarus is removed from the data set, this coefficient is no longer significant, suggesting that it is the relatively high level of turnout among Belarusian voters that accounts for this anomalous finding.

The most noteworthy aspect of this model from the point of view of the present analysis is the fact that the electoral confidence variable remains highly significant, and its coefficient has barely changed from Model 1. All in all, the relationship between perceptions of electoral fairness and propensity to vote appears to hold across a variety of institutional and political settings, lending confidence to the robustness of the results presented here.

How strong is the effect observed in this analysis? The substantive impact of confidence in the electoral process was calculated from Model 2, holding continuous variables at their means and nominal and ordinal variables at their modes. This calculation shows that moving from the bottom to the top of the 1-5 scale increases a person's chance of voting from .684 to .803, which represents a substantial shift. This suggests that confidence in the electoral process is one of the more important factors conditioning propensity to participate in electoral politics.

It is worth considering possible criticisms of the approach employed in this analysis. One consideration is the possibility of endogeneity, mentioned above.

This is an issue that arises in the context of many attitudinal variables that are highly proximate to the voting decision, such as party identification, political interest or information, and efficacy: Behavior (voting) can be expected to reinforce preexisting attitudes, at the same time as being a consequence of them (Anderson et al., 2005, pp. 26-29, 193-194; Anderson & LoTempio, 2002; Finkel, 1985, 1987; Ginsberg & Weissberg, 1978; Lassen, 2005; Nadeau & Blais, 1993). The same could be true of perceptions of electoral fairness. Unfortunately, the question on electoral fairness was asked only in the first module of the CSES, and it is always difficult to disentangle causal flows in cross-sectional data. Moreover, statistical "fixes" typically employed with this type of data such as instrumental variables are precluded in the present instance by the lack of efficient and exogenous instruments for perceptions of electoral fairness (the only indicators with which this variable is highly correlated are those such as satisfaction with democracy that cannot be assumed to be exogenous either).

Fortunately, for our purposes, the British Panel Study of 1997-2001 reinterviewed those interviewed as part of the CSES module again following the 2001 general election, thus making it possible to ascertain whether perceptions of electoral fairness in 1997 affected vote decision in 2001, as the argument advanced here would lead one to expect. The United Kingdom is a useful case on which to test this hypothesis, as there is little reason to expect that the objective or perceived quality of elections will have changed between the two elections.

The model in Table 3 provides an approximate replication of the individual-level model in Table 2, but using British data panel from 1997 and 2001 (it was not possible to include exactly the same variables as those employed in the cross-national analysis because of reduced variable availability for the 2001 British survey).[16] As expected, perceptions of electoral fairness in 1997 had a strong impact on turnout 4 years later in 2001, demonstrating that answers to this question are indeed associated with *subsequent* electoral behavior. Thus, although these findings do not allow us to entirely discount the potential impact of voting on perceptions of electoral fairness, they do provide strong evidence to support the main hypothesis of this article: that perceptions of electoral fairness influence whether or not people turn out to vote.

A second possible criticism is that electoral manipulation itself might be obscuring or distorting the true relationship between perceptions of electoral fairness and electoral participation. One possibility is that officially reported turnout levels may in some cases be inflated through fraud. Yet there have been few allegations of outright fraud in the elections considered here, and most of the analyses carried out in this article are based on voters' own reports of whether

Table 3. Binary Logistic Regression Model of Turnout in Great Britain, 2001

Variable	Coeff.	*SE*
Perception of electoral fairness 1997	0.208**	(0.075)
Age	0.022***	(0.005)
Female gender	0.180	(0.142)
Education	0.114**	(0.040)
Household income	−0.092	(0.157)
Interest in politics	0.535***	(0.078)
Party identification with Labour	1.783***	(0.298)
Party identification with Conservatives	1.608***	(0.306)
Party identification with other party	1.865***	(0.323)
Constant	−4.451***	(0.538)
−2 log likelihood	1,313.323	
Nagelkerke R^2	.176	
N	1,795	

Cell entries are logit coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$

or not they voted rather than official statistics. A more relevant concern in the present context is the possibility that the results reported here are skewed because of the manipulation of electoral participation through the use of selective incentives, as the use of coercion or particularistic rewards can in some cases alter turnout levels. Manipulators may seek to demobilize the supporters of opponents, thereby decreasing turnout (Cox & Kousser, 1981; Schaffer & Schedler, 2007), or, more commonly, they may seek to increase turnout (e.g., Argersinger, 1985-1986, p. 674; Oberst & Weilage, 1990; Schaffer, 2007, pp. 186-187). Though it is difficult to test for this empirically because of lack of usable data, it is unlikely that manipulation of this type accounts for the results reported here, which are based on subjective perceptions of the quality of electoral conduct and subjective accounts of electoral participation. Moreover, given that pressuring or paying people to vote appears from a review of the case study literature cited above to be more common than pressuring or paying people not to vote, we would expect this sort of undue influence generally to increase voting, which is the opposite of what has been found.

A third possible concern is that high levels of turnout and high levels of satisfaction with elections may obtain in both established electoral democracies and repressive authoritarian states where citizens feel pressured both to vote and to report confidence in elections to survey researchers. A glance at the data

in Table 1 suggests that the confidence figures for Belarus may be "too high." Levels of confidence there are considerably higher there than they are in Russia and Ukraine, which have generally received more favorable evaluations by the main regional election observation body, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). This could be because of the severe restrictions on information dissemination in Belarus noted many times by the OSCE and other human rights organizations, but it could also be because of the fact that Belarusians feel pressured by the state both to vote and to evince confidence in their electoral process when asked by survey interviewers to evaluate it. Removal of Belarus from the data set does not substantively alter the results of the analysis, however. State pressure on the mass population is not a sufficient problem in any of the other cases included in this analysis to give doubt as to the reliability of the survey data.

Examining the Outliers

Further insight into the relationship under investigation here can be obtained by an examination of specific cases. Though space does not permit detailed case studies, a quick assessment of outliers is a useful adjunct to any quantitative analysis based on a limited *N*. Sensitivity analysis suggests that the model is robust to the removal of individual elections, but there are nevertheless some elections that fit the pattern discerned better than others. The outliers fall into two categories: those that have turnout levels higher than one would expect on the basis of the level of confidence their populations demonstrate in their electoral processes and those that have turnout lower than confidence in elections would lead one to predict.

In the first category, states that have "overly" high turnout include Israel, Belarus, and New Zealand. Israel's historically high turnout levels have long been in decline, though that decline experienced a slight reverse in the 1996 election. This election coincided with two distinct reforms: the first use of primaries by the main parties and the first direct election of the prime minister (Hazan & Rahat, 2000). These reforms may in part explain the relative strength of participation in this election, though the politicization of Israeli society undoubtedly also plays a major role in accounting for electoral participation in that country. The situation in Belarus is otherwise. Of all postcommunist European states, Belarus has experienced the least political and electoral change since the communist era, and according to the OSCE, the manipulation of early and absent voting may have accounted for up to 20% of the reported turnout in the 2001 election included here (OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, n.d., pp. 4, 20-22). In New Zealand, on the other hand, the

key most likely lies in the historical context in which this election took place. This was the first election held in that country under proportional representation, following a lengthy period when electoral rules had been highly contentious (Nagel, 2004). The protracted debate over electoral reform, lasting from 1984 to 1993, may have served to delegitimate the electoral process in general; an alternative explanation is that those opposed to the change of electoral system might have vented their frustration by displaying lack of confidence in electoral procedures.

In the second category lie Switzerland, the United States, and Poland. That Switzerland and the United States are turnout outliers has been well documented in the literature on electoral participation in established democracies (Franklin, 2002, 2004; Norris, 2002; Powell, 1986). At the same time, electoral institutions in these countries are some of the oldest in the democratic world, and they have traditionally commanded general respect.[17] The Polish case is likewise a well-know outlier within its category; even during the communist period it witnessed turnout levels that were about 20 percentage points lower than those of other Soviet Bloc states. Birch (2003, pp. 59-62) has shown that when communist-era turnout levels are controlled for, the Polish anomaly disappears.

Thus, five out of six of these cases can be explained with reference to well-known aspects of electoral participation in the political systems in question, and the sixth—New Zealand—can be readily interpreted with reference to a well-documented conjunctural factor.

Conclusion

Most previous research on the link between evaluations of political legitimacy and electoral participation has examined the "who" and the "what" but ignored the "how." Citizens have been asked to evaluate the integrity, competence, and responsiveness of elected officials as well as the efficiency and fairness of the political system's outputs, and their answers to these questions have been linked to propensity to engage in electoral and other forms of political participation. But research in this vein has largely neglected the link between voter turnout and what is arguably the most obvious and most crucial legitimacy evaluation that prospective voters make: How well the election in question is likely to be conducted. This article has sought to remedy this gap in the comparative literature, and in so doing it has found that citizens who perceive elections to be fair are more likely to vote than those who have reservations about the conduct of electoral contests. This relationship has been shown to be robust even when other individual- and election-level

variables are controlled, including related factors such as political efficacy and satisfaction with democracy.

This analysis also has consequences for our understanding of democratic quality. Confidence-related abstention can have a variety of nefarious consequences for democracy. If democrats choose to exit from electoral politics in reaction to perceived flaws in electoral processes, the result may be a downward spiral in democratic performance and legitimacy. As Lehoucq (2003) argues, "If rates of voter participation fall, then fabricating a handful of votes may be sufficient to retain power, a fact that opposition or regional parties may exploit as elections become more competitive" (p. 253). Similarly, McCann and Domínguez (1998, p. 498) show that abstention because of perceptions of fraud helped the PRI stay in power in Mexico. It is perhaps not surprising that Bingham Powell (1982, chap. 10) found higher levels of turnout to be associated with a lower incidence of riots and protests.

The results presented here thus have potential implications for policy. Falling turnout has been of concern in recent years, not just among political scientists but among political actors as well. The findings of this article suggest that if states want to improve turnout, one measure they could take would be to increase confidence in the electoral process. The most obvious means of achieving this end is to improve the conduct of elections. States that are actively engaged in cleaning up their elections also need to make strenuous efforts in the area of voter education to inform their publics of their activities and to convince them that the quality of elections has in fact improved. Moreover, the evidence presented here suggests that proposals in some countries to expand the use of postal, electronic, and absent voting to increase turnout may actually have the opposite effect, if they simultaneously decrease confidence in the electoral process. This might be the case, for example, if such provisions were abused and stories of abuse were widely publicized.

Elections are the building blocks of democracy; it follows that electoral integrity is a precondition for meaningful democratic competition at all levels. Inasmuch as poor evaluations of the fairness of elections keep citizens away from the polls, democratic legitimacy and performance will be compromised. It is for this reason that the study of electoral confidence is key to understanding the role of elections in the ever-widening world of competitive politics. This article has considered the importance of perceptions of electoral integrity for turnout, but similar analyses could profitably be extended to a range of aspects of political behavior, including vote choice and other forms of political participation. Undertaking such a task would provide a much-needed

integration of the study of electoral manipulation and malpractice with the traditional concerns of behavioralists.

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Notes

1. In some contexts formal boycotts depress turnout (Pastor, 1999), but boycotts did not play a prominent role in any of the elections included in this analysis.
2. Those following in Riker and Ordeshook's (1968) path have mostly considered the turnout calculus in terms of this same basic set of variables—*B*, *P*, *C* and *D*—viewing *P* as the decisiveness of an individual vote (e.g., Aldrich, 1993; Blais, 2000; Ferejohn & Fiorina, 1974; Franklin, 2004, chap. 2).
3. For full details, see the "Comparative Study of Electoral Systems—Module 1 (1996-2001 [*sic*]) Micro-District-Macro Data Codebook: Variable Descriptions," full release, August 4, 2003, available at www.cses.org. Of the 39 surveys included in Module 1, 4 did not ask the electoral fairness question (Australia, Belgium–Flanders, Belgium–Wallonia, Chile) and 4 did not include usable data for other key variables (Peru 2000, Peru 2001, Russia 2000, and Thailand).
4. Some case studies have found electoral participation to be associated with higher levels of support for the government and government policy following the election (Ginsberg & Weissberg, 1978; Nadeau & Blais, 1993).
5. This accords with studies that have found the political support and behavior of losers to differ from those of winners (e.g., Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Anderson & LoTempio, 2002; Anderson & Mendes, 2006; Banducci & Karp, 2003; Ginsberg & Weissberg, 1978; Nadeau & Blais; 1993).
6. The analyses reported here were carried out using MLwiN Version 2.02 software with restricted iterative generalized least squares estimation, which is most appropriate with restricted numbers of level-two cases (Rasbash, Steele, Browne, & Prosser, 2004; Steenbergen & Jones, 2002), and predictive quasi-likelihood approximation for equations with discrete dependent variables.
7. Questions sometimes arise as to the reliability of official turnout statistics in underdemocratized countries. Election observation mission reports and qualitative accounts of the elections in question in this analysis suggest that none in this data

set save Belarus was marred to any great extent by outright fraud or statistical manipulation of the sort that might distort turnout levels. With this case removed, the correlation coefficient between broad confidence and turnout increases to .422 (significant at .05) and that between full confidence and turnout rises to .460 (significant at .05).

8. The literature on electoral participation is vast, and it is not possible to cite all the studies of the individual-level determinants of turnout. Key and indicative recent comparative studies include Blais (2000), Dalton (1996), Franklin (2002, 2004), Gray and Caul (2000), Karp and Banducci (2008), Milner (2002), Norris (2002, 2004), and Pérez-Liñán (2001).
9. Benny Geys (2006) provides a useful meta-analysis of the aggregate-level correlates of turnout, which discusses many of these variables. Other studies that informed this selection include Blais (2000, 2006), Blais and Dobrzynska (1998), Franklin (2002, 2004), Jackman and Miller (1995), Norris (2002, 2004), and Pérez-Liñán (2001).
10. The perceptions of electoral fairness variable is inverted in the regression models so that higher scores correspond to perceptions of greater fairness.
11. Graphical analysis confirms the nonsignificance of this term. The interaction term is left out of the model presented here for ease of interpretation of the coefficients.
12. Membership in the majority ethnic group was included in earlier versions of this model as an alternative sociocultural marker. This variable was insignificant, however, and it was excluded from the model presented here because of the fact that it was available for only 16 elections.
13. An intermediary model with the reduced set of individual-level variables (not shown) demonstrates that misspecification resulting from the exclusion of these variables does not seriously bias the estimate for the impact of electoral confidence.
14. Tests were done for possible cross-level interactions between perceptions of electoral fairness and the various macro-level variables to determine whether the impact of perceptions of electoral fairness on turnout is conditional on polity-level factors such as institutional design or aspects of electoral competition. No significant interactions were found, however.
15. Because of collinearity, it was not possible to include per capita GDP in the same model as established democracy. When included on its own, per capita GDP was insignificant.
16. See the appendix, available at http://cps.sagepub.com/supplemental, for details of variable construction.
17. It is worth noting that the U.S. election included in this data set is that which took place in 1996, prior to the disputed 2000 presidential election, which considerably dented Americans' confidence in their electoral machinery.

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