Week 5
Political Participation and Voter Turnout

Thiago Nascimento da Silva

School of Politics and International Relations
The Australian National University

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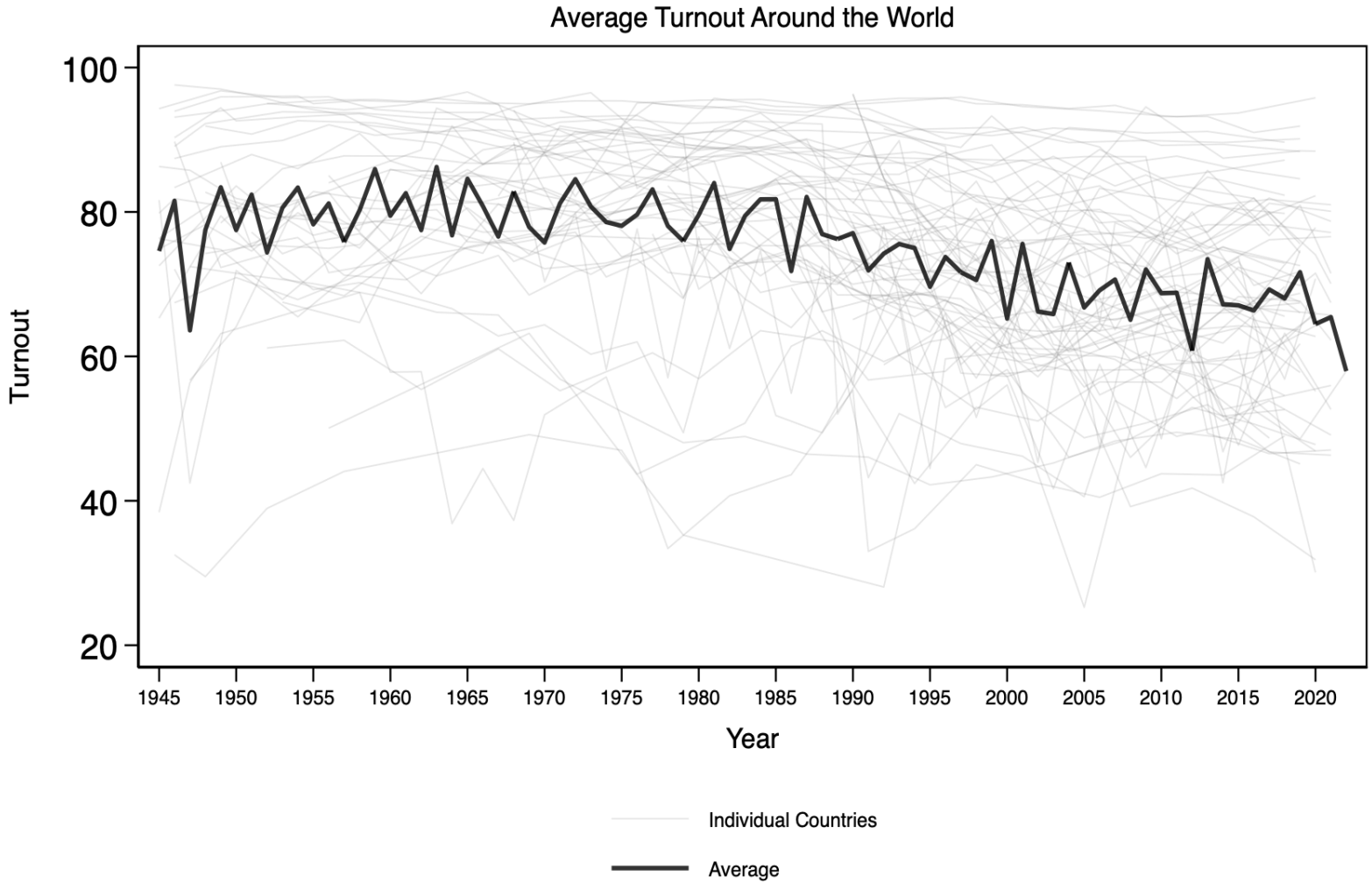
Australian National University

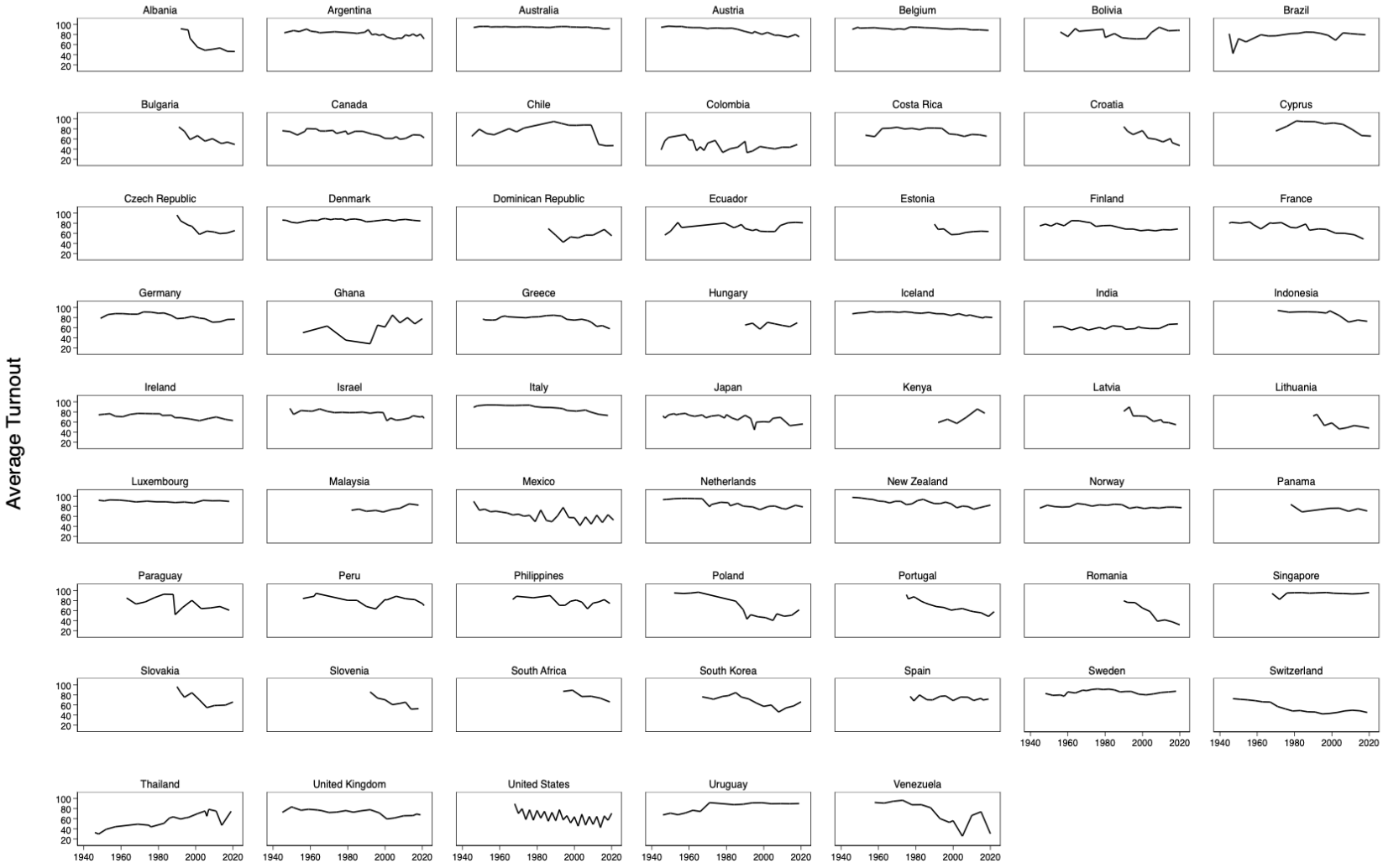
- What is turnout?
- Why is turnout higher in some countries, and/or some elections than others?
- Why does turnout increase or decrease over time?

Turnout

Voter turnout measures the percentage of voters that have actually taken part in an election (the proportion of eligible voters who actually cast a vote).



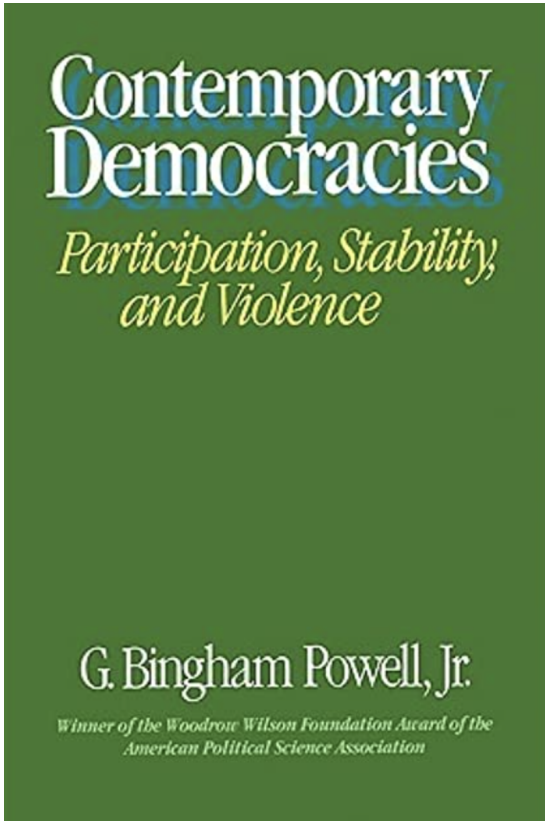
Notes: 61 democracies. N = 1,048 parliamentary elections. Data source: Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA 2022).



Notes: 61 democracies. N = 1,048 parliamentary elections. Data source: Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA 2022).

Blais, André. 2006. "What affects voter turnout?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 9: 111–125.

Why turnout is higher in some countries than in others?



POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND VOTER TURNOUT IN THE INDUSTRIAL DEMOCRACIES

ROBERT W. JACKMAN
Michigan State University

Differences in voter turnout among industrial democracies are a function of political institutions and electoral law. Specifically, the presence of nationally competitive electoral districts provides incentives for parties and candidates to mobilize voters everywhere, thereby increasing turnout. Disproportionality in the translation of votes into legislative seats provides a disincentive to voting, which lowers turnout. Multipartyism assigns elections a less decisive role in government formation, depressing turnout. By generating more decisive governments, unicameralism provides a clearer link between elections and legislation, increasing turnout. Finally, mandatory voting laws produce a disincentive to not vote. Empirical analyses of average voter-turnout levels in the 1970s and 1960s across 19 democracies are consistent with these expectations, although Switzerland and the United States appear to be outliers. The results have major implications for the way we interpret national differences in voter-turnout rates.

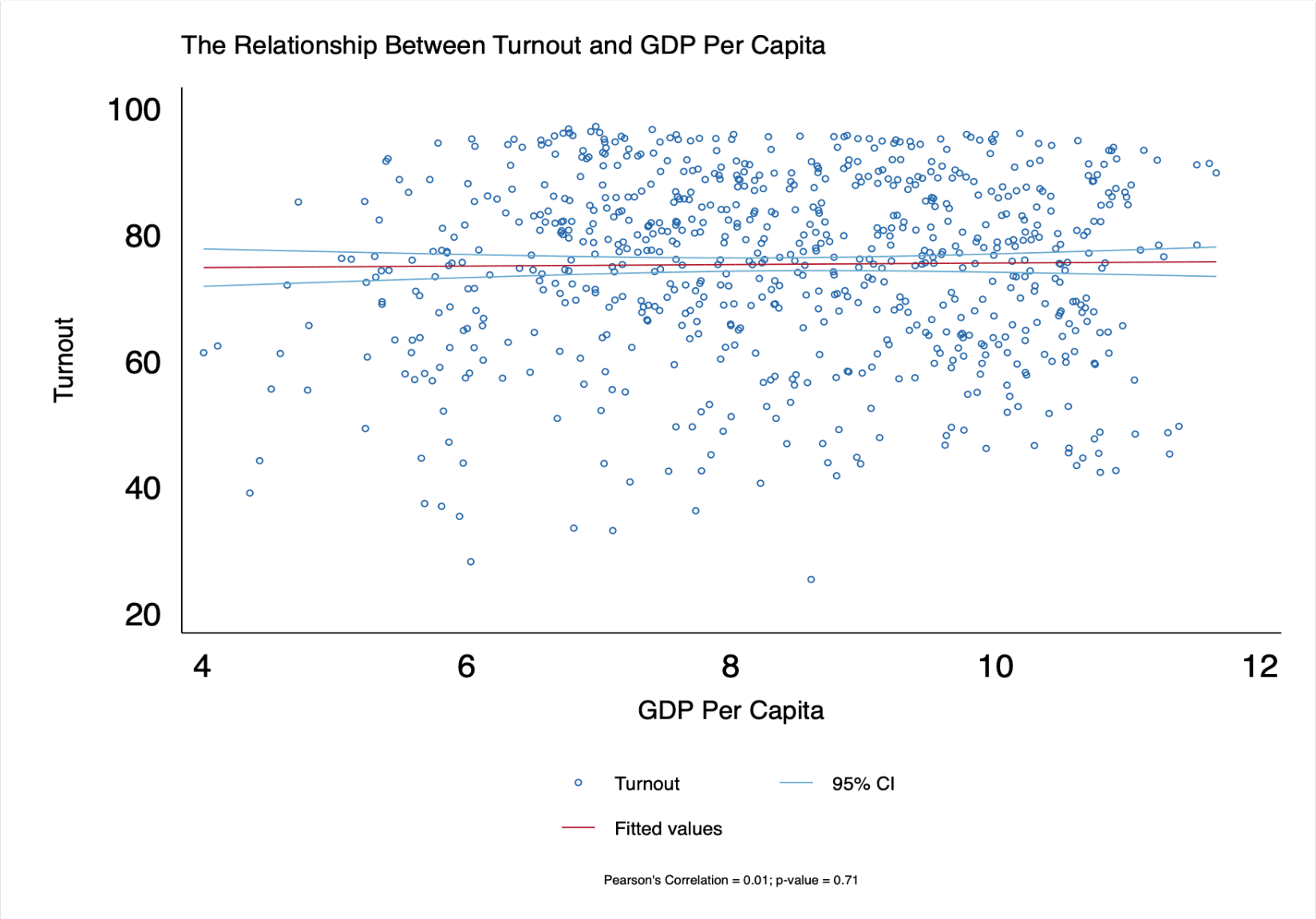
Powell 1982:

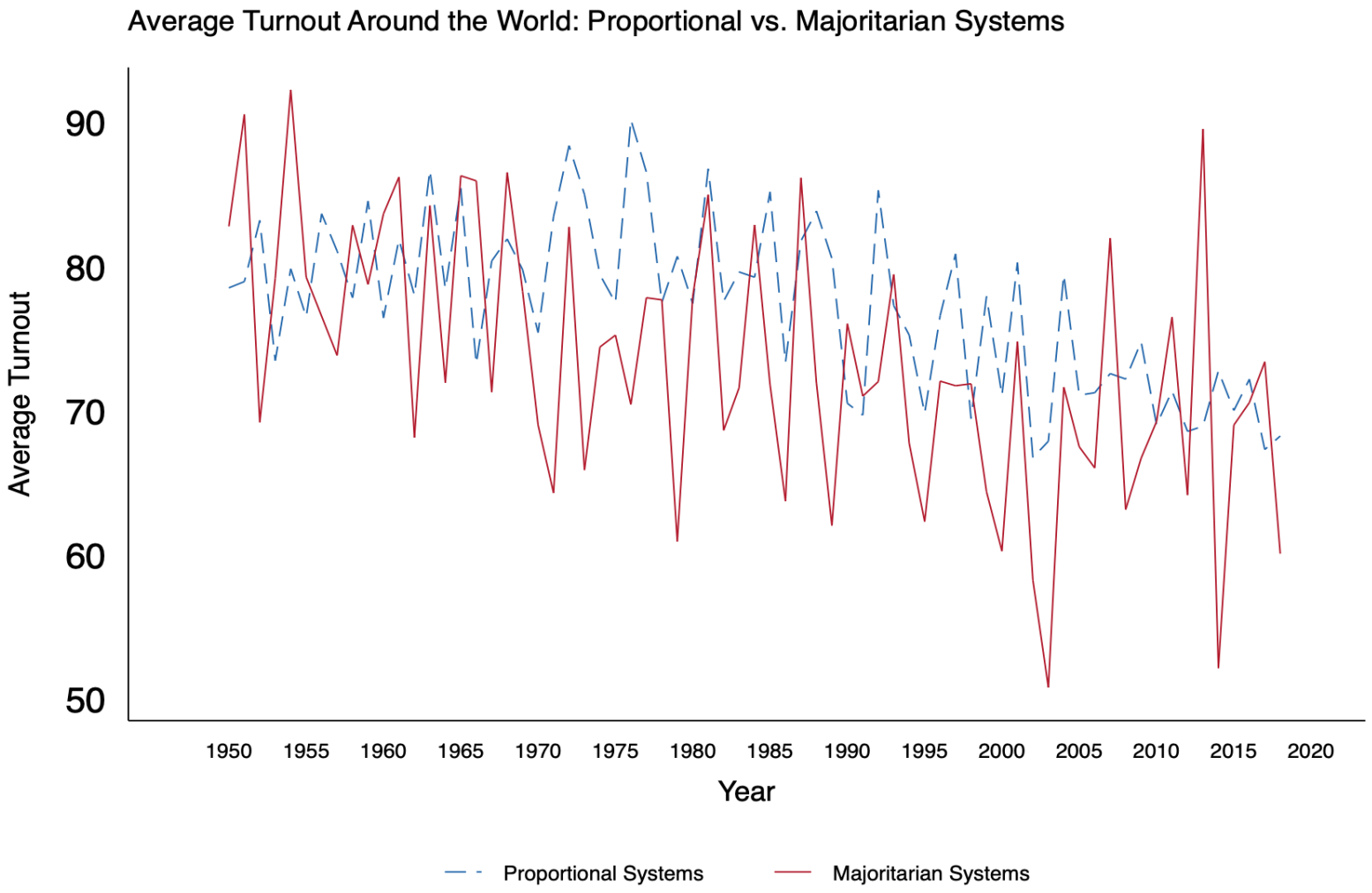
- Analysis of turnout in 23 countries.
- The model distinguishes three blocs of variables:

1. The socioeconomic environment (e.g., GDP per capita);
2. Electoral systems (e.g., proportional representation), and;
3. Party systems and election outcomes (e.g., number of parties and party-group linkage).

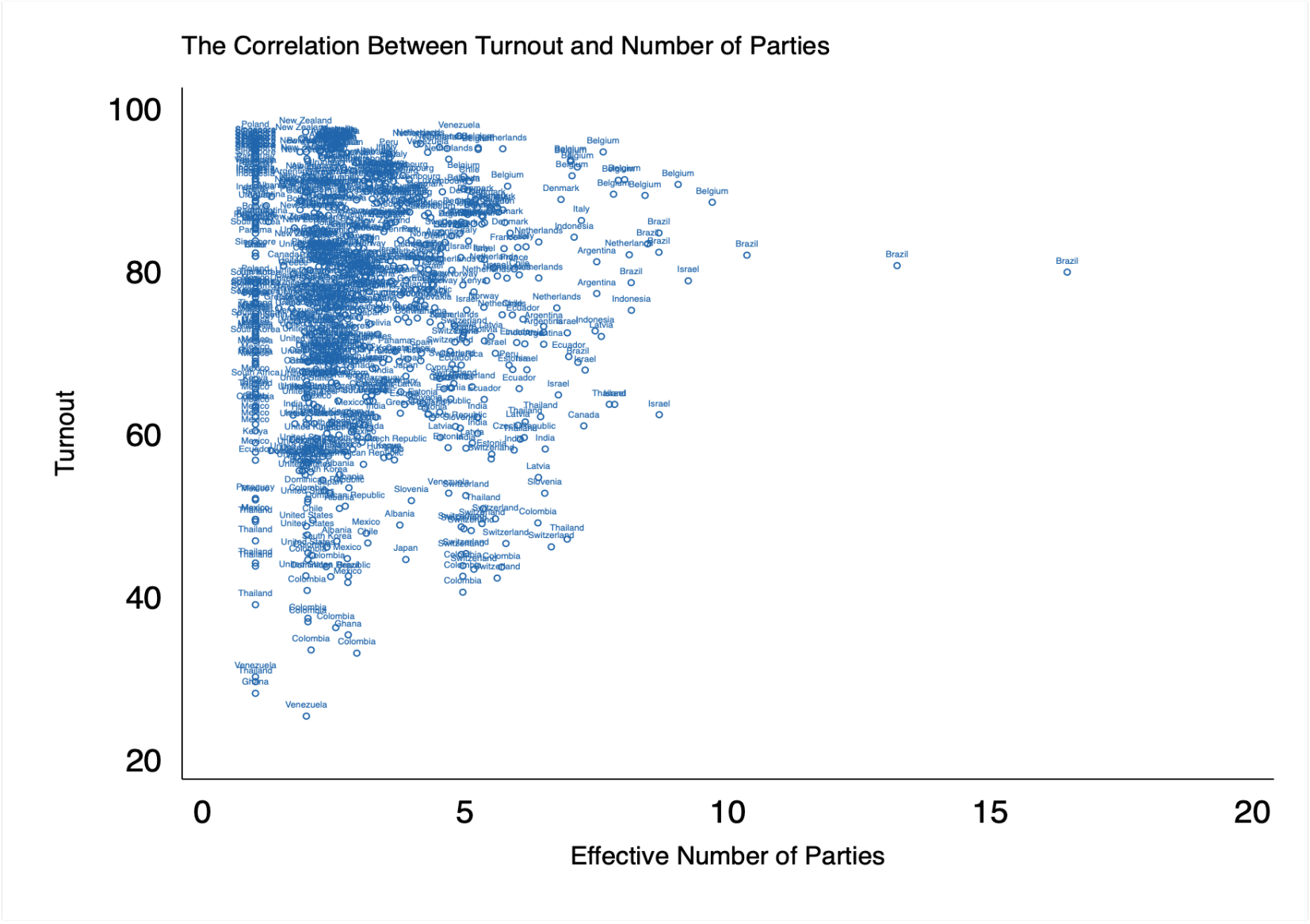
https://rpsychologist.com/correlation/

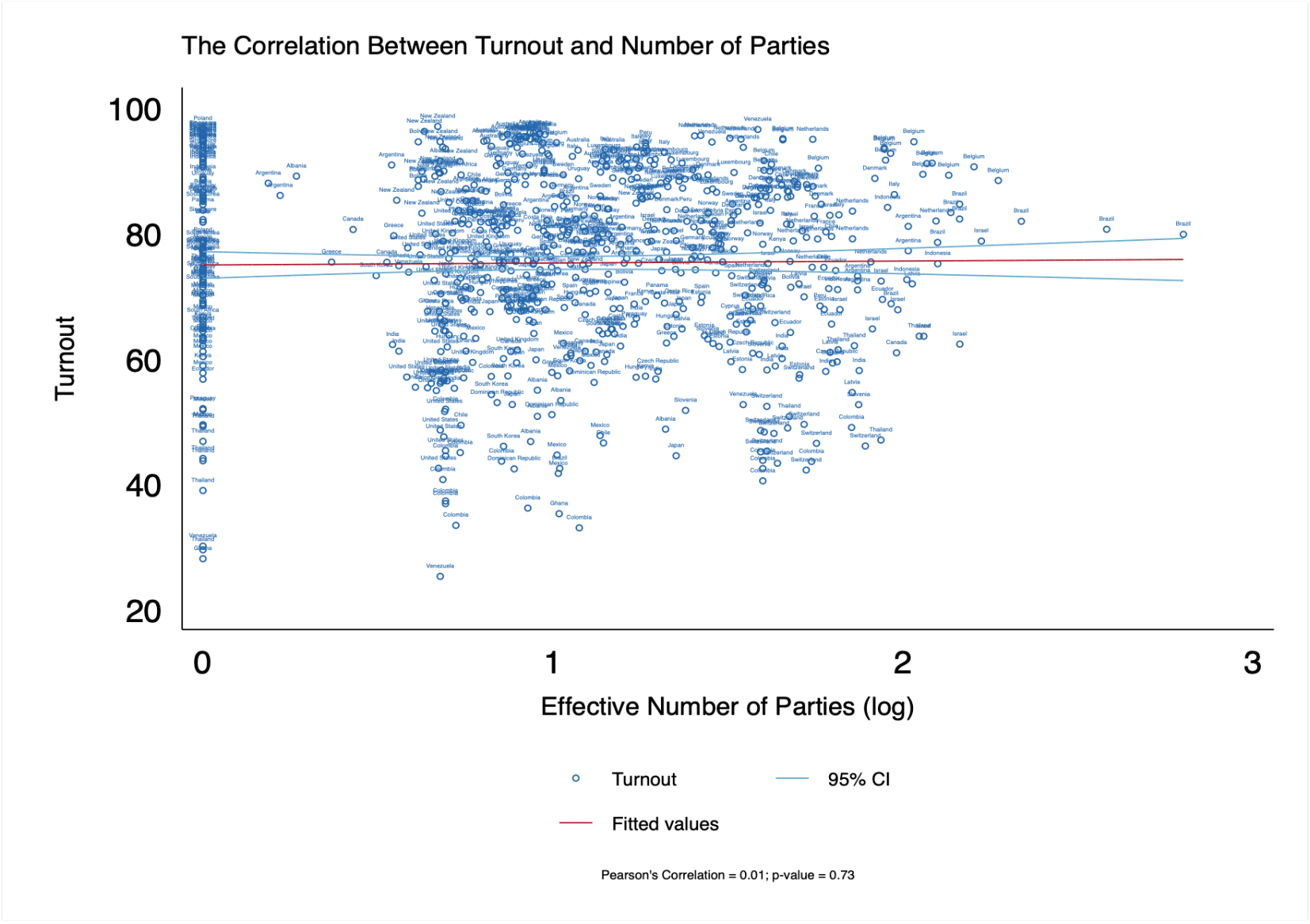
The Socioeconomic Environment

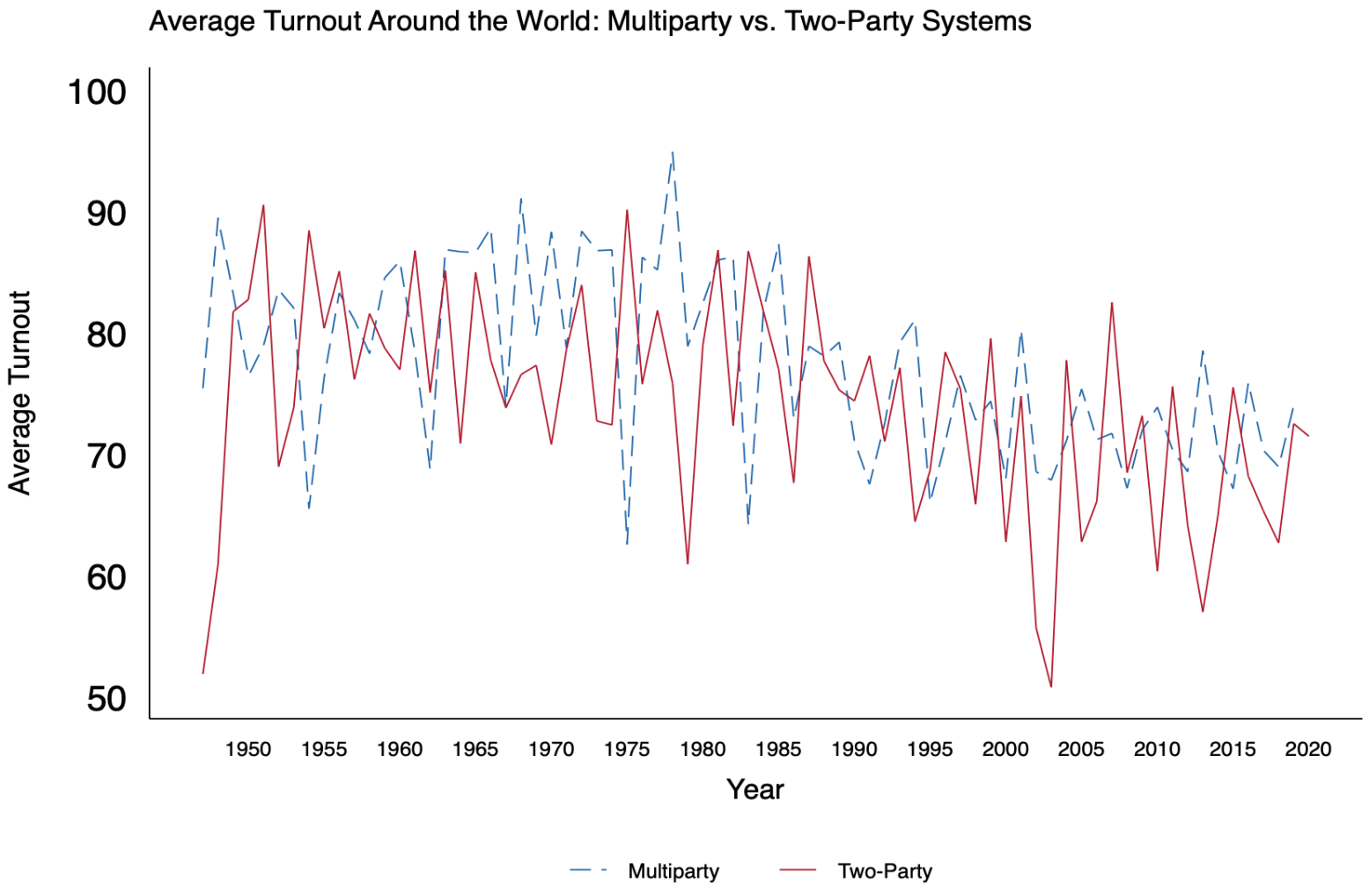




Pearson's Correlation = 0.10; p-value = 0.01.
Notes: 61 democracies. N = 1,048 parliamentary elections. Data source: Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA 2022).


The Correlation Between Turnout and Number of Parties
Turnout
100
80
60
40
20
0
5
10
15
20
Effective Number of Parties


The Correlation Between Turnout and Number of Parties
Turnout
100
80
60
40
20
0
1
2
3
Effective Number of Parties (log)
Turnout
95% CI
Fitted values
Pearson's Correlation = 0.01; p-value = 0.73



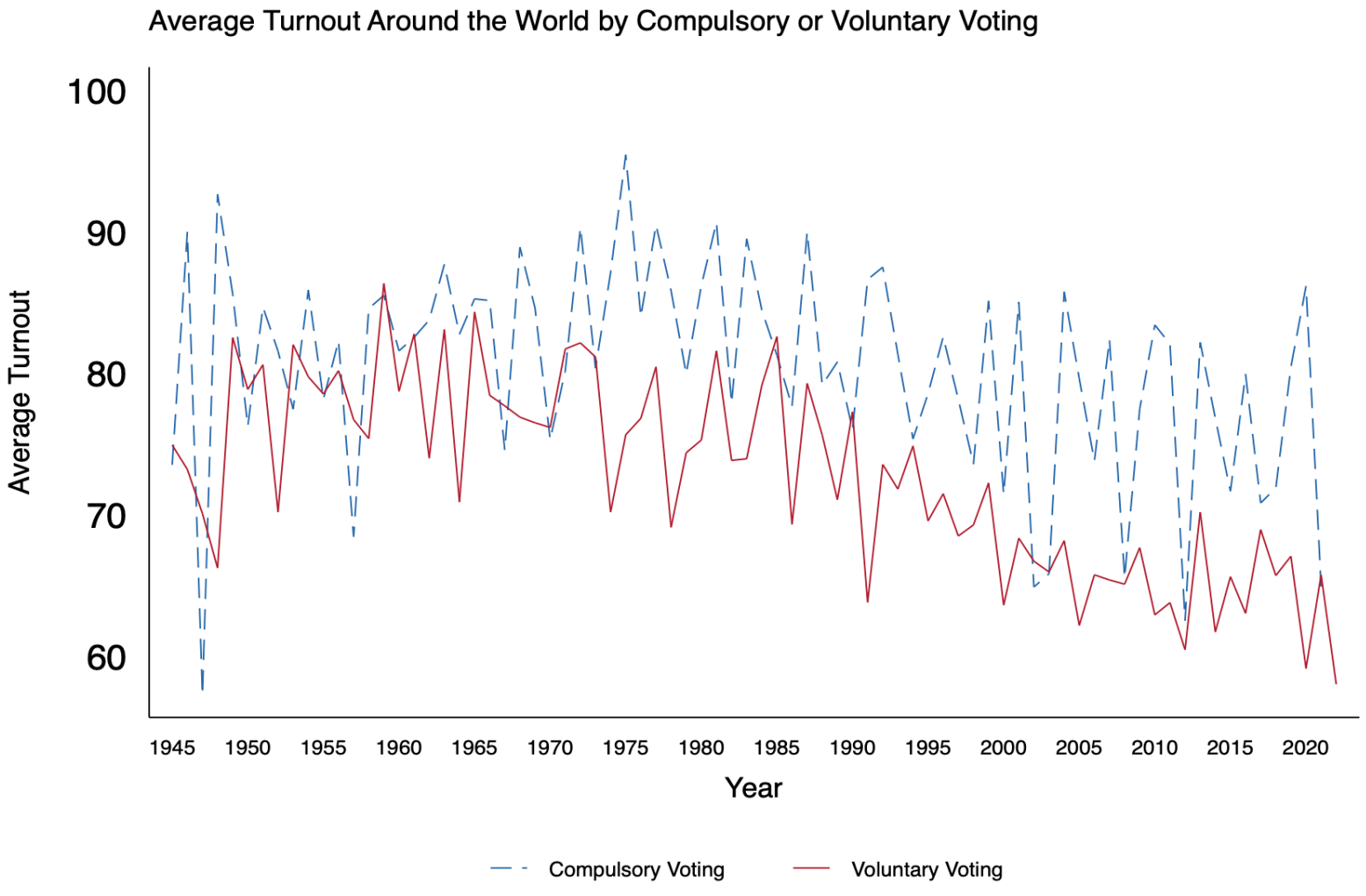
Pearson's Correlation = 0.04; p-value = 0.21.
Notes: 61 democracies. N = 1,048 parliamentary elections. Data source: Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA 2022).

Jackman 1987:

- Analysis of turnout in 19 countries.
- Three institutional variables identified as fostering turnout:

1. Compulsory voting;
2. The electoral system, and;
3. Unicameralism.

Compulsory Voting



Pearson's Correlation = 0.31; p-value = 0.001.
Notes: 61 democracies. N = 1,048 parliamentary elections. Data source: Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA 2022).

Main factors suggested by the literature to foster turnout since Powell 1982 and Jackman 1987:

1. Voting age: the propensity to vote increases with age;

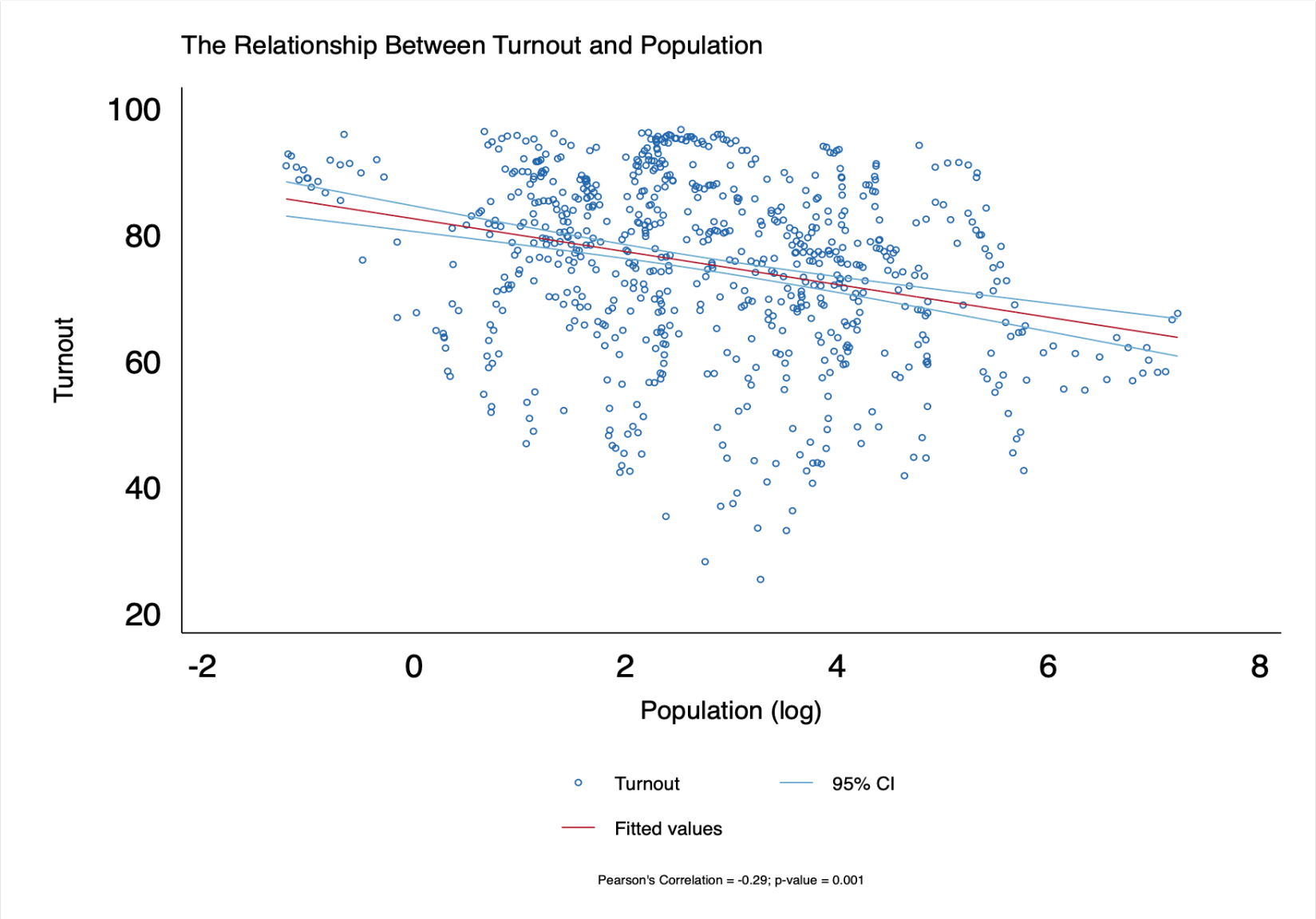
2. Compulsory voting;

3. Electoral system (e.g., countries with PR systems have higher turnout rates);

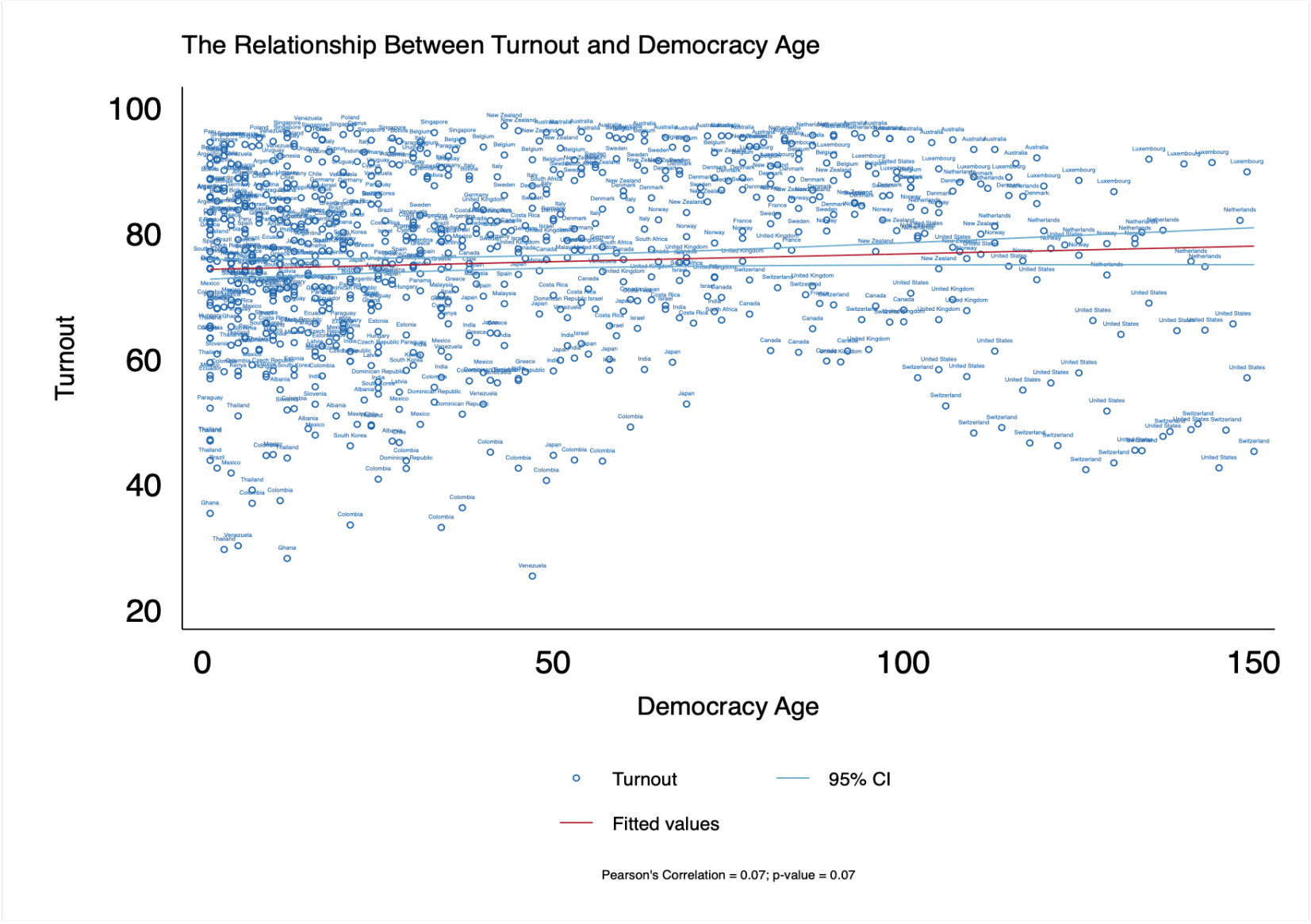
Other factors suggested by the literature:

1. Population;
2. Regime age (e.g., old vs. new democracies);
3. Ethnic fractionalization.

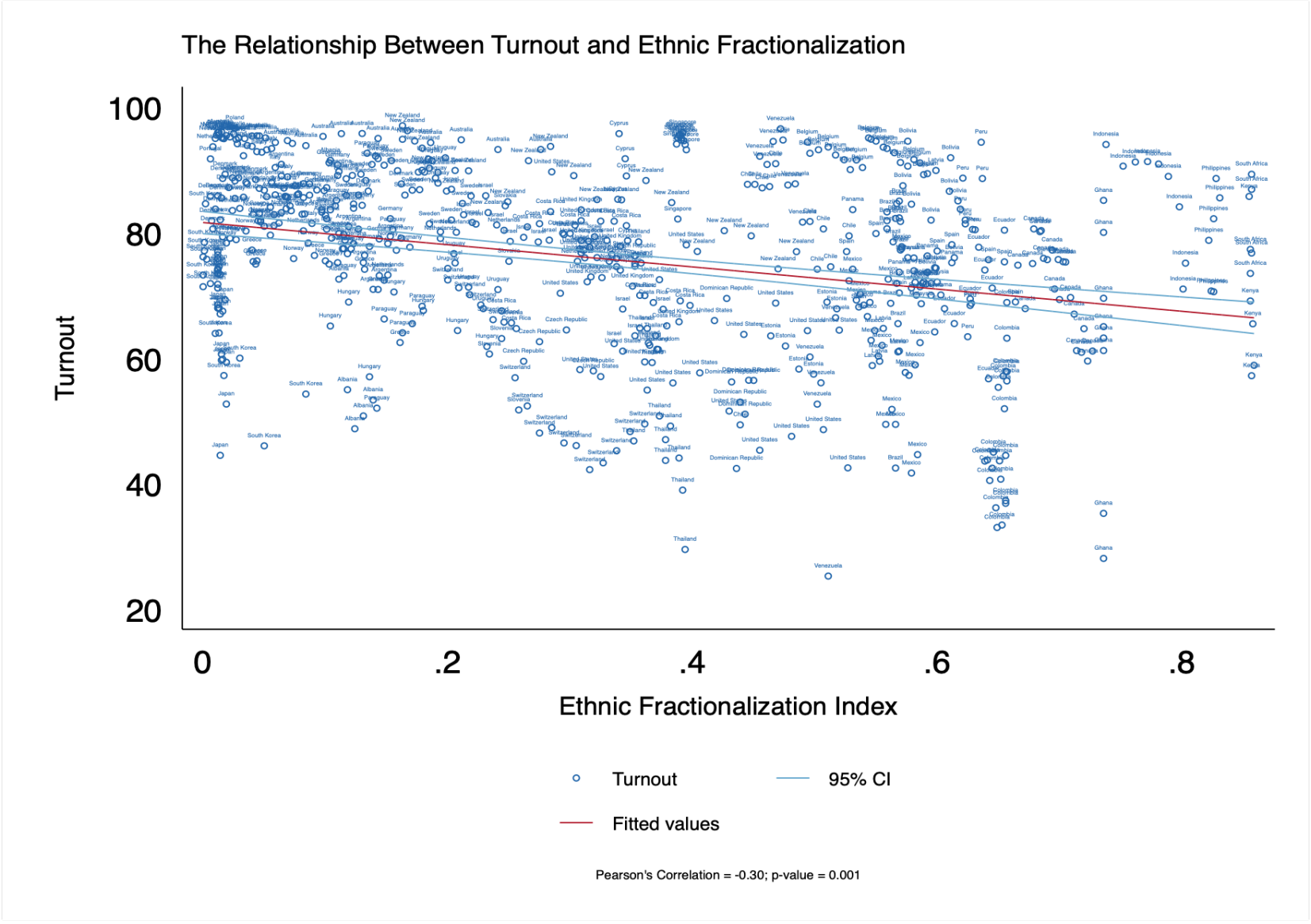
Population


The Relationship Between Turnout and Population
Turnout
100
80
60
40
20
-2
0
2
4
6
8
Population (log)
Turnout
95% CI
Fitted values
Pearson's Correlation = -0.29; p-value = 0.001

Democracy Age



Ethnic Fractionalization



Bringing Powell (1982) back!

- Many of the findings in the comparative cross-national research are either inconsistent or not robust;
- When the findings are robust, we do not have a compelling microfoundation account of the relationship;
- The impact of institutional variables may be overstated.

Blais (2006) advocates for more individual level analyses (from macro to micro).

Brady, Henry E., Verba, Sidney, and Schlozman, Kay L. 1995. "Beyond SES: A resource model of political participation." *American Political Science Review* 89(2): 271–294.

Why people don't take part in politics?

- Because they can't:
  - A paucity of necessary resources: time to take part in political activity, money to make contributions, and civic skills to facilitate effective participation.

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- Because nobody asked them:
  - Implies isolation from the recruitment networks through which citizens are mobilized to politics.

All these factors help explain political participation, but...

Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995) develop a model of political participation focusing on the role of three resources:

- Time;
- Money, and;
- Civic skills.

Four steps to develop the resource model of political participation:

1. Definition and measurement of resources;
2. The distribution of resources among the population;
3. Close look at the resource of civic skills;
4. Show that resources explain political participation.

- US population-representative survey;
- 1989 and 1990;
- 15,000 respondents by telephone;
- In-person interviews with a subset of 2,517 of the original 15,000 respondents.

- Time: Hours left for political activity, if any, after accounting for time spent in an average day of work, household activities, studying, and sleeping.
- Money: Family income;
- Civic Skills: Educational experience and language abilities.
- Political participation: Aggregation of several types of political behavior (e.g., voting, protesting, contacting politicians, donating money for political campaigns, working in campaigns, engaged with others on community issues).

FIGURE 1

Educational Stratification of Income and Free Time

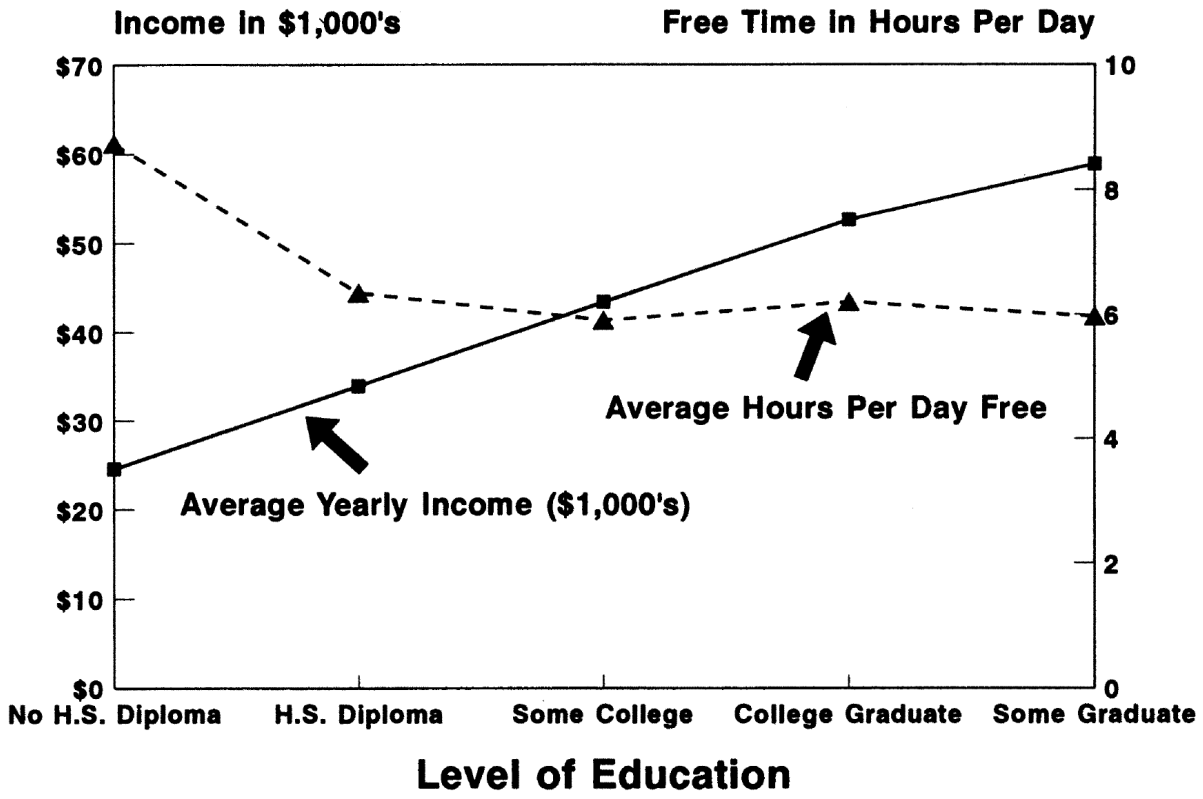
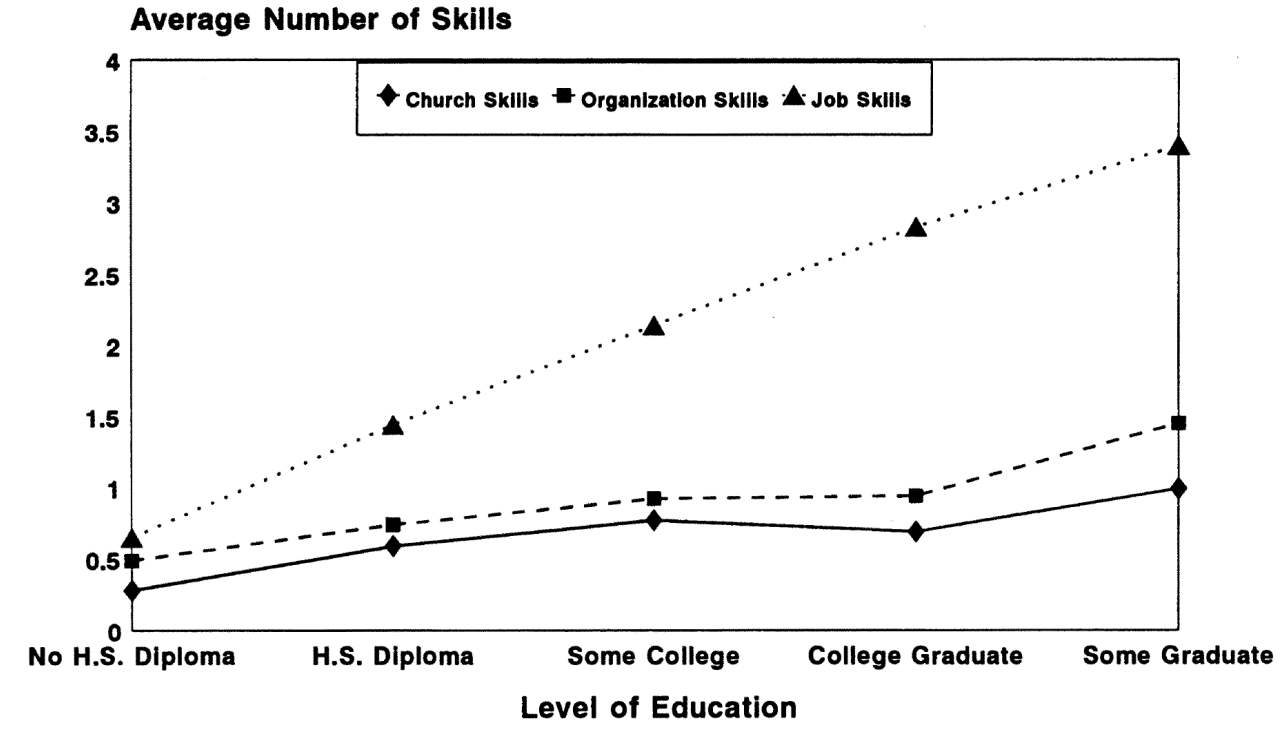


FIGURE 2

Average Civic Skills Acquired on Job, in a Non-Political Organization, and in Church



Among all respondents at each educational level

FIGURE 3

The Resource Model

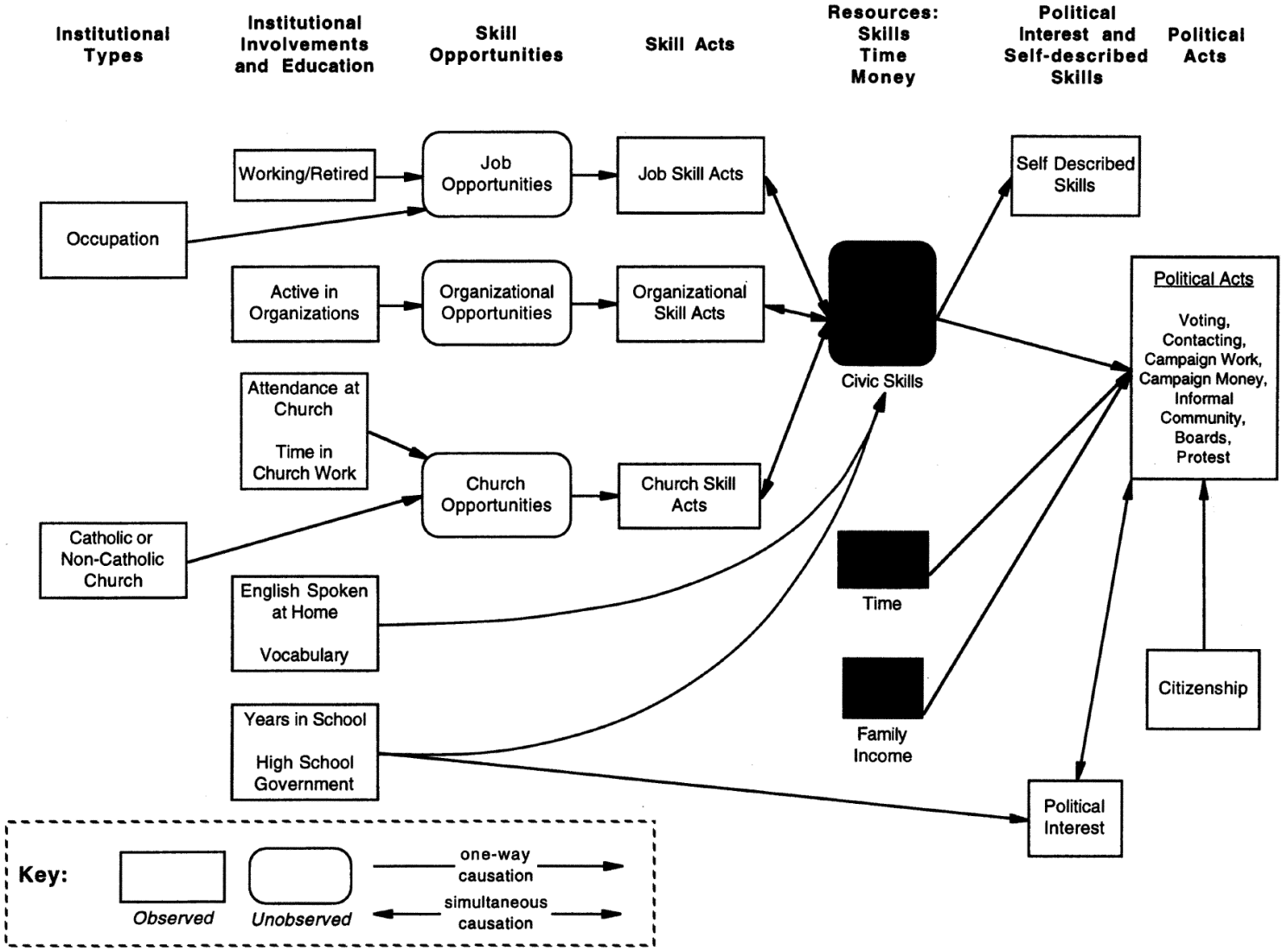


TABLE 2

Determinants of Overall Political Participation: Ordinary Least Squares Estimation

	OVERALL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION MEASURE			
	MODEL W/O INTEREST		MODEL WITH INTEREST	
INDEPENDENT VARIABLE	COEFF. (SE)	BETA WT.	COEFF. (SE)	BETA WT.
Political Interest	—	—	.261** (.015)	.304
Adult skill-acts				
Job	.087** (.022)	.101	.057** (.021)	.066
Organizational	.137** (.029)	.106	.123** (.027)	.095
Church	.118** (.033)	.088	.096** (.031)	.072
Time and money				
Free time	.000 (.007)	.002	.004 (.006)	.013
Family income	.051** (.009)	.112	.047** (.008)	.104
Institutional involvements				
Working	−.045 (.038)	−.030	−.008 (.036)	−.006
Retired	.388** (.090)	.090	.313** (.085)	.073
Organizational	.070 (.036)	.043	.031 (.034)	.019
Attendance at church	.010 (.011)	.021	.001 (.010)	.002
Time in church work	.049 (.028)	.043	.053 (.027*)	.047
Institutional types				
Occupation	.020 (.011)	.040	.021* (.010)	.042
Catholic church	.061 (.055)	.020	.086 (.052)	.028
Formal education				
Years of education	.145** (.021)	.164	.120** (.020)	.136
High school governance	.178** (.025)	.130	.118** (.024)	.086
Language ability				
Speaking English at home	.045 (.077)	.011	.056 (.073)	.014
Vocabulary score	.062** (.013)	.099	.032* (.012)	.051
Citizenship	.889** (.158)	.109	.790** (.150)	.097
Constant	−1.380** (.193)	—	−2.281** (.190)	—
R^2	.301		.377	
Sample size	2,438		2,429	

Source: Data from Citizen Participation Survey.
Note: COEFF. refers to the regression coefficient and SE to its standard error. BETA WT. refers to the standardized regression coefficient.
*$p \leq .05$.
**$p \leq .01$.

TABLE 4

Determinants of Different Types of Acts (Two-Stage Least Squares Estimations)

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	VOTING (0–8)[a] COEFF. (SE)	BETA WT.
Political interest	.884** (.065)	.542
Sum of adult civic skills	.200** (.044)	.209
Time and money		
Free time	.129** (.018)	.232
Family income	.013 (.018)	.015
Educational experiences		
Years of education	−.042 (.044)	−.025
High school governance	.003 (.054)	.001
Language ability		
Speaking English at home	−.025 (.174)	−.003
Vocabulary score	.058* (.027)	.049
Citizenship	4.110** (.575)	.147
Constant	−3.563** (.593)	—
R^2	.235	
Sample size	2,322	

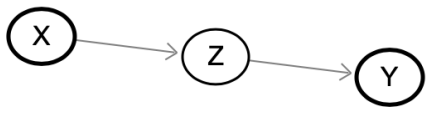
Source: Data from Citizen Participation Survey.
Note: COEFF. refers to the regression coefficient and SE to its standard error. BETA WT. refers to the standardized regression coefficient. Instrumental variables for 2SLS estimation are working at job, retired or not, occupational type, degree of organizational involvement, attendance at church, time in church activities, Catholic, years of education, involvement in high school governance, speaking English at home, vocabulary score, family income, black, Hispanic, education of parents, number of kids, preschool kids, sex, spouse work full-time, spouse work part-time, citizen, and interest in politics from the screener. The endogenous variables are therefore political interest, sum of adult civic skills, and free time.
[a]National and local.
[b]Campaign and mail.
[c]Board or meetings, informal, campaign, contact, and protest.
*$p \leq .05$.
**$p \leq .01$.

- Aggregated dependent variables.
- Empirical strategy:
  - Conditional hypotheses.
- Model revision: Relationships and directions.

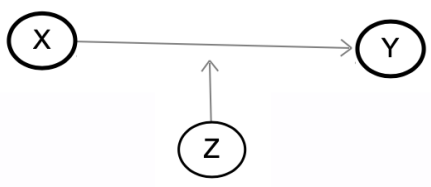
Causal Paths

Direct:

Moderator:



Mediator:



Frank, Richard W. and Coma, Ferran Martínez i. 2021. "Correlates of Voter Turnout." *Political Behavior*, 1–27.

Frank and Coma (2021):

- Comprehensive empirical analysis of
  - 44 articles on turnout from 1986 to 2017.
- 127 potential predictors of voter turnout identified,
  - 70 of these variables collected.
- 579 elections in 80 democracies from 1945 to 2014.
- 15 million regressions to determine which of the 70 variables are robustly associated with voter turnout.

- 22 variables are robustly associated with voter turnout, including:
  - Compulsory voting,
  - Concurrent elections,
  - Competitive elections,
  - Inflation,
  - Previous turnout,
  - Economic globalization.

However...

Table 5 Fixed-effects extreme bounds analysis of voter turnout

Variable	Models	Ave. β	Ave. SE	% Sign	CDF < 0
Competitiveness	22,096	−1.64	1.16	15.62	0.975
Concurrent	22,048	10.15	6.45	31.14	0.007
Economic globalization*	22,096	−4.27	1.82	75.11	0.998
Inflation	22,096	0.89	0.68	15.61	0.029
Spending decentralization	22,096	4.77	8.89	10.16	0.032
Suffrage	21,987	−2.02	1.27	15.81	0.964
Time trend	22,096	−6.87	8.87	61.25	0.987
Years 1945–1994	22,096	1.73	0.98	12.02	0.043
Core model					
Compulsory voting	1,038,770	8.62	7.96	27.91	0.160
GNI per capita, ln	1,170,324	−12.02	11.77	37.58	0.908
Lagged dep. var	1,170,306	−0.06	0.27	14.03	0.429
Population, ln	1,169,987	2.45	1823.88	3.75	0.658
Proportional representation	1,128,068	5.18	3.31	33.90	0.026

Ave β the average coefficient value, *SE* standard error, *% Sign*. percentage of models with a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) coefficient, *CDF* cumulative density function below 0

*Variable significant using Leamer's criteria. Complete results reported in Table A7

Table 6 Random-effects extreme bounds analysis of voter turnout

Variable	Models	Ave. β	Ave. SE	% Sign	CDF < 0
Concurrent	41,600	7.88	7.01	23.63	0.000
E. Europe*	34,220	−4.46	1.43	64.06	0.992
2nd election*	35,750	−6.11	1.35	82.69	0.998
Ethnic fractionalization	41,660	−1.89	12.64	16.85	0.987
GINI index	41,537	−4.24	7.85	35.26	0.989
Inflation	41,658	0.96	0.45	12.70	0.010
Latin Am. and Caribbean	34,220	−4.84	1.90	62.24	0.992
Norway*	41,303	2.10	1.33	23.23	0.035
New Zealand*	35,990	5.06	2.10	73.25	0.041
Oceania	41,599	6.55	4.47	80.89	0.002
Sweden*	41,303	5.41	1.70	74.25	0.003
Switzerland*	41,231	−12.41	4.44	90.08	1.000
Core model					
Compulsory voting	2,955,366	4.87	9.61	63.95	0.003
GNI per capita, ln	2,956,512	−0.65	6.05	20.20	0.311
Lagged dep. var.*	2,956,512	0.63	0.16	92.50	0.008
Population, ln	2,956,017	−1.47	6.40	4.85	0.928
Proportional representation	2,936,444	0.80	1.92	2.86	0.246

Ave β the average coefficient value, *SE* standard error, *% Sign*. percentage of models with a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) coefficient, *CDF* cumulative density function below 0

*Variable significant using Leamer's criteria. Complete results reported in Table A8

- **Thursday, 31 March.**

  Week 6. Spatial Models of Vote Choice

Compulsory readings:

– Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An economic theory of democracy.* New York: Harper Collins. Chapters 2, 3, 7, and 8.

– Aldrich, John H. 1993. "Rational choice and turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* 37(1): 246–278.