

**VOTE  
HERE**

A white sign with red text and a red arrow pointing right, set against a blurred background of a hallway with people.

# Voter Turnout

April 2, 2024

# Voter behavior and decision making

- Vote choice
- Decision to vote
  
- Why is voter turnout important??
- Should there be high turnout?
  
- Who it helps/hurts?

# Voter turnout

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- Why voters vote?
- Who is more/less likely to vote
- What factors matter?



# Why do you vote?

- A. Downs: paradox of voting
- Benefit of voting must exceed cost of voting
- $R = PB - C$
  
- Costs before the election
- Cost of actual voting
  
- While some people might vote instrumentally, rational choice does not explain voter turnout



# The D Term!

- Riker and Odershook: The Calculus of Voting
- $R = PB - C + D$
- Expressive term
- People want to support their favorite. Candidate/party, they feel more satisfied, they feel moral obligation to vote..
- Many voters are expressive voters and care about elections
- Many voters don't care about elections but vote anyway!
- Civic duty as a motivator

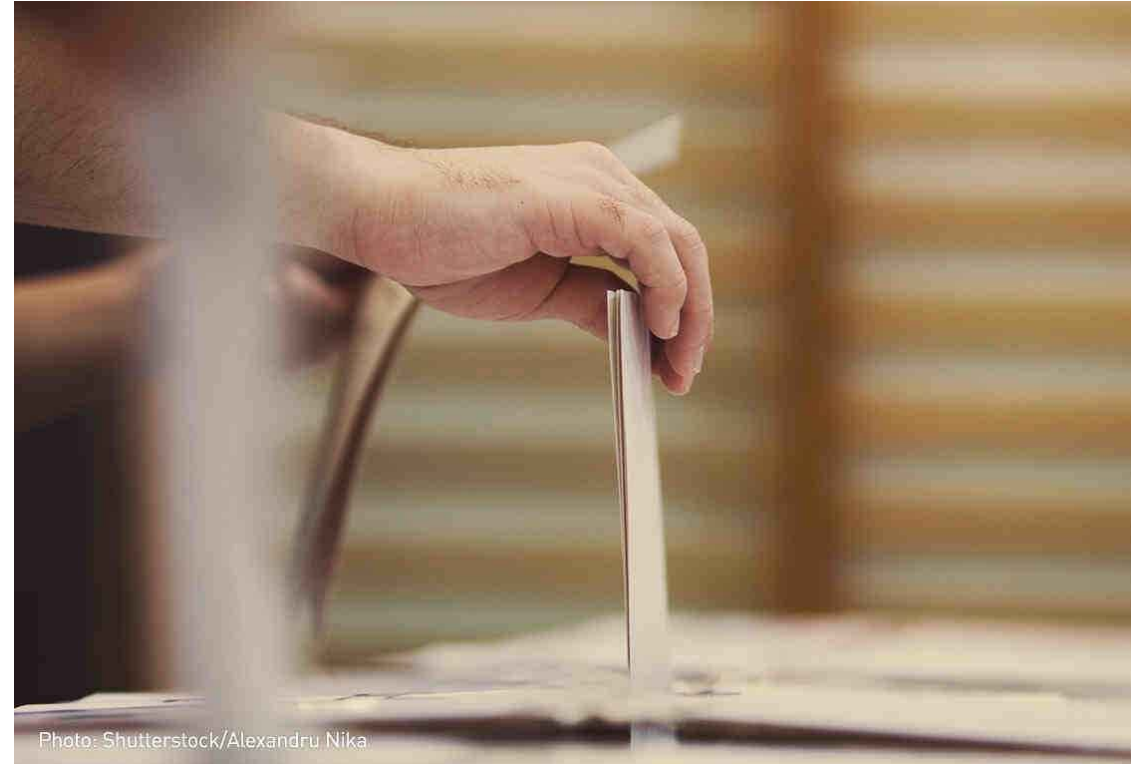


Photo: Shutterstock/Alexandru Nika



# Civic duty

- Works for some voters as motivator
- Voting compulsory in 29 democratic countries
- In 8 constitutions: voting is a civic duty
- 2000 US presidential election: 71 % feeling of guilt when not voting
- 90% voters in Canada = vote as a civic duty (Blais et al. 2000)
- 80% in the UK (Clarke et al. 2004)
- 95% in Japan (2000)

# Civic Duty and Voter Turnout

André Blais<sup>1</sup> · Christopher H. Achen<sup>2</sup>

*Different people feel differently about voting.*

*For some, voting is a DUTY. They feel that they should vote in every election however they feel about the candidates and parties.*

*For others, voting is a CHOICE. They feel free to vote or not to vote in an election depending on how they feel about the candidates and parties. [The order of these two statements was varied randomly.]*

For you personally, voting is FIRST AND FOREMOST a:

- 1 Duty
- 2 Choice
- 9 Not sure

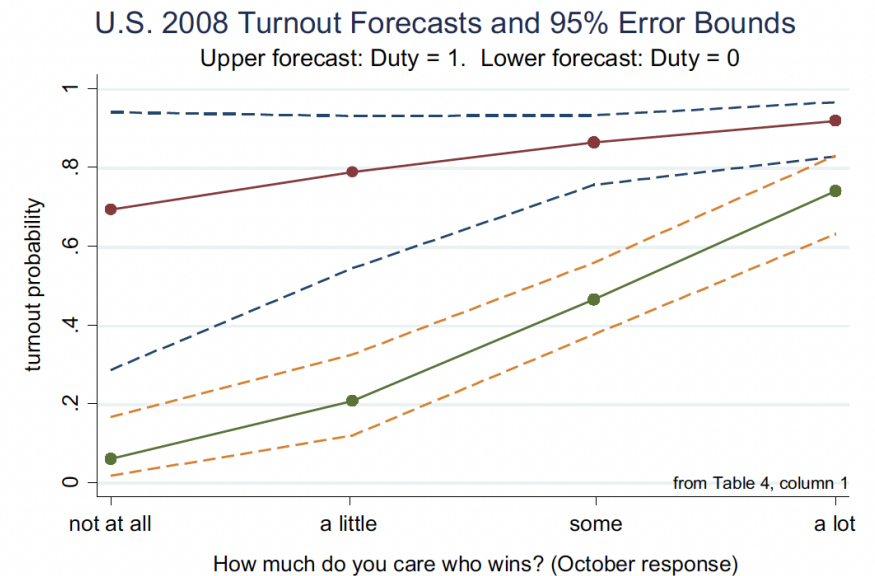
[If respondent chose “Duty”] How strongly do you feel personally that voting is a duty?

- 1 Very strongly
- 2 Somewhat strongly
- 3 Not very strongly

**Table 4** Probit models of turnout in the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election (weighted)

	Pref Oct Duty Jan b/se	Pref Oct Duty Oct b/se	Pref Jan Duty Jan b/se	Pref Oct Duty Jan b/se
Preferences	2.19*** (0.38)	2.18*** (0.38)	1.80*** (0.34)	1.95*** (0.43)
Duty	2.05*** (0.64)	3.71*** (0.71)	3.03*** (1.10)	2.41*** (0.76)
Preferences × Duty	− 1.29* (0.76)	− 2.57*** (0.84)	− 2.44*** (1.17)	− 1.83** (0.86)
Age				3.96*** (1.85)
Age <sup>2</sup>				− 4.13* (2.18)
Education				1.32*** (0.47)
Interest				0.45* (0.27)
PID strength				0.89*** (0.32)
Constant	− 1.54*** (0.29)	− 1.77*** (0.30)	− 1.24*** (0.26)	− 3.34*** (0.53)
Unweighted N	897	896	1049	839

Significant at 0.01; \*\*significant at 0.05; \*significant at 0.10





# Experimenting with voter turnout

- Can different messages increase voter turnout?
- Gerber, Green, Larmier 2008: Social pressure to increase turnout?
- Michigan primaries 2006, 180,002 households
- Mailing one of the messages, turnout data from public records

**TABLE 2. Effects of Four Mail Treatments on Voter Turnout in the August 2006 Primary Election**

	Experimental Group				
	Control	Civic Duty	Hawthorne	Self	Neighbors
Percentage Voting	29.7%	31.5%	32.2%	34.5%	37.8%
N of Individuals	191,243	38,218	38,204	38,218	38,201



# Communication channel

- Large-scale study of GOTV
- 1998 election, New Haven

## The Effects of Canvassing, Telephone Calls, and Direct Mail on Voter Turnout: A Field Experiment

ALAN S. GERBER and DONALD P. GREEN *Yale University*

*We report the results of a randomized field experiment involving approximately 30,000 registered voters in New Haven, Connecticut. Nonpartisan get-out-the-vote messages were conveyed through personal canvassing, direct mail, and telephone calls shortly before the November 1998 election. A variety of substantive messages were used. Voter turnout was increased substantially by personal canvassing, slightly by direct mail, and not at all by telephone calls. These findings support our hypothesis that the long-term retrenchment in voter turnout is partly attributable to the decline in face-to-face political mobilization.*

**TABLE 4. Effects of Personal Canvassing on Voter Turnout, by Type of Nonpartisan Appeal**

Type of Appeal	Turnout Rate	Number of Registered Voters in Treatment Group	Number of Persons Actually Contacted
Unadjusted Turnout Rates among Experimental Subgroups			
Civic duty	47.2%	1,985	534
Neighborhood solidarity	46.3%	1,881	546
Election is close	48.1%	1,928	535
Control	44.8%	23,586	N/A
Implied Effects of Personal Contact on Voter Turnout			
Civic duty	Turnout Differential (2.43%)/Contact Rate (26.90%) = 9.1% Standard Error (4.3)		
Neighborhood solidarity	Turnout Differential (1.48%)/Contact Rate (29.03%) = 5.1% Standard Error (4.1)		
Election is close	Turnout Differential (3.36%)/Contact Rate (27.75%) = 12.1% Standard Error (4.2)		

**TABLE 5. Linear and Nonlinear Regression of Voter Turnout on Mode of Contact, with and without Covariates**

Independent Variables	Two-Stage Least Squares		Two-Stage Probit
	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)
Personal contact	.087 (.026)	.098 (.022)	.323 (.074)
Direct mailings (0 to 3)	.0058 (.0027)	.0063 (.0023)	.0214 (.0067)
Telephone contact	-.047 (.023)	-.035 (.020)	-.130 (.056)
Registered as Democrat or Republican		.064 (.006)	.217 (.015)
Voted in 1996 general election		.229 (.007)	.589 (.018)
Abstained in 1996 general election		-.231 (.008)	-.824 (.024)
Age		.0188 (.0008)	.0649 (.0022)
Age squared		-.000133 (.000007)	-.000467 (.000020)
Number of registered voters in household (1 or 2)		.056 (.005)	.188 (.014)
Constant	.445		
F	5.86	296.66	
Degrees of freedom	29,376	29,342	29,342

Note: The base category for past voting behavior is the set of people who were not registered in 1996. Not reported in this table are the coefficients associated with each of the 29 wards. The first-stage equations include dummy variables representing the intent-to-treat groups associated with canvassing, phone calls, and direct mail. The first-stage equation also includes covariates for columns 2 and 3. Standard errors for the two-stage probit estimates were obtained using jackknifing.

## What other factors matter?

- Focus on aggregate level and systems (country-level factors)
- Focus of social characteristics



# Aggregate level

- In/equality and electoral turnout?
- Some research confirms
- Some does not
- Role of operationalization
- Wilford (2013)

Across 41 elections in 22 countries

Economic hardship = lower turnout among people of lower socioeconomic status

# Political factors (Geys 2006)

- Closeness indicates competitiveness
  - Increases probability of one's vote having effect
  - More party mobilization in close districts
- Campaign expenditure
  - Increase information
  - GOTV
- Pol. Fragmentation
  - Number of parties (inconclusive)

Table 3. Results of meta-analysis for political variables

	Success	Failure	Anomaly	Success rate (%)
Closeness				
Tests	206	137	19	56.91
Studies	36	16	–	69.23
Campaign expenditures				
Tests	97	33	4	72.39
Studies	17	3	–	85.00
Political fragmentation				
Tests	25	23	27	33.33
Studies	5	17	–	22.73

Note: \* denotes statistical significance at better than the 5% level.



# Institutional factors

- PR systems = higher turnout rates
- Compulsory voting is the strongest predictor
- Concurrent elections increase turnout
- Automatic registration increases turnout
- Additional factor
- “Order of the election”

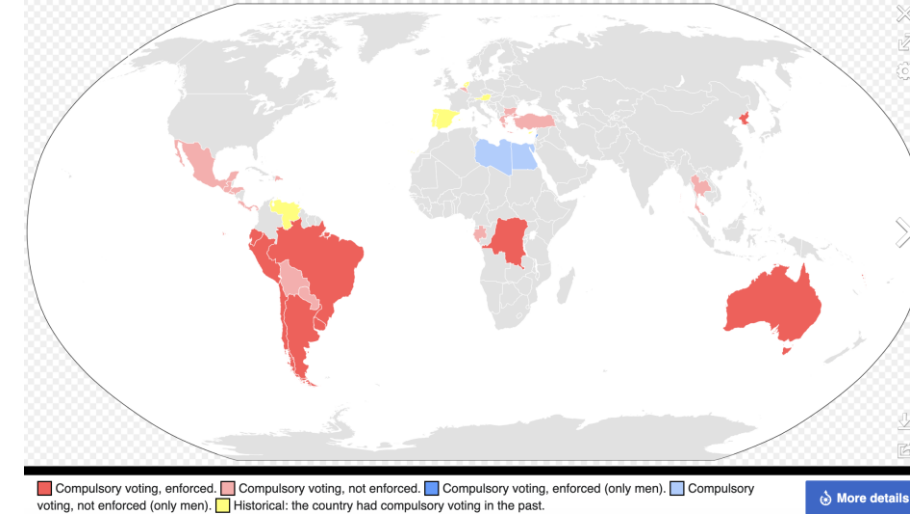


Table 4. Results of meta-analysis for institutional variables

	Success	Failure	Anomaly	Success rate (%)	$r_{av}$
Electoral system					
Tests	49	22	0	69.01	0.69*
Studies	10	4	–	71.43	0.63*
Compulsory voting					
Tests	61	7	0	89.71	0.89*
Studies	13	2	–	86.67	0.86*
Concurrent elections					
Tests	76	46	7	58.91	0.53*
Studies	12	10	–	54.55	0.49*
Registration requirements					
Tests	46	15	0	75.41	0.75*
Studies	13	3	–	81.25	0.75*

Note: \* denotes statistical significance at better than the 5% level.

# Demographics and social groups

- Very straightforward analysis
- Measurement issues

# Age

- Low turnout among the youngest eligible voters
- Steep increase in adulthood, gradual increase until sixties
- Does turnout fall in old age?
  
- Explanation
  - Gradual clarification of interests
  - Gradual internationalization of social norms
  - Peer influence (other young people not voting too, low turnout context, low level of social cues, no expectations etc.)

# SES

TABLE 1 Rates of Voter Turnout by High School Graduation, by Year

	Full Sample			African American Subsample		
	2000	2002	2004	2000	2002	2004
Non-high school graduates	43.2	31.2	45.0	50.0	34.6	54.8
High school graduates	70.3	54.7	75.5	69.5	53.1	76.1
N	52,918	51,617	63,052	1,180	953	837

Source: Current Population Survey, November Supplements. Weighted using final weights from Bureau of Labor Statistics.

- Wide range of characteristics
- Social class – various operationalizations (i.e. occupation – income and prestige) (modest to minimal effects)
- Income effects (mostly in the US)
- Education – strong predictor but is there some other intervening variable?
  - Is it an indicator of social class?
  - Causal studies support the idea of direct effect of education on voter turnout



# Gender

- Women enfranchisement later than men
- Traditional gender gap in voter turnout
- Does it still apply?????

# Summary

- We should still ask normative questions about why people should(not) vote
- Factors on individual (psychological, social) and systematic level (political, institutional, systemic factors)
- Accumulation of much knowledge
- Vast literature, feel free to study more!



# Next step:

- Your position paper!
- Due next week!
  
- Looking forward to learn more about your countries.