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**Ch. 22 "Linking Electoral and Partisan Participation" [pre-print]  
from The Oxford Handbook of Political Participation**

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## 22. Linking Electoral and Partisan Participation

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### Abstract:

This chapter explores a mechanism that ties party choice at the individual level to election-level turnout rates. It employs survey and election data from 14 countries over 20-50 years. It builds on past findings that used error correction models to confirm the role of negative feedback in maintaining equilibrium rates of party support. On that foundation it proposes a parallel mechanism that helps to maintain an equilibrium rate of turnout, through voter reactions to evolving rates of electoral competition. It finds that party-level competitive processes are complemented by individual-level evolutions of partisanship differences. The chapter treats voter turnout, policy congruence, and party support as aspects of a single dynamic process at the party level of aggregation and investigates the individual-level and election-level concomitants of this process, also validating the dynamic account of turnout processes suggested in earlier work.

**Keywords:** Electoral participation; partisanship; equilibrium voter turnout; error correction turnout models.

## 1) Introduction<sup>1</sup>

One reason people vote at an election is to support a preferred party in its quest to influence the course of public affairs.<sup>2</sup> As long ago pointed out by Downs (1957), eligible voters' willingness to vote (paying the "costs" of voting, in Downs's terminology) depends on the extent to which they prefer one candidate over another. If they have no strong preference between parties competing for their votes, then they might as well save themselves the trouble (1957:39).

This insight seems to provide grounds for supposing that the voter turnout rate might be linked to the extent of partisanship and, indeed, past research has found a strong connection between declining partisanship and declining turnout, at least in Britain. Heath (2007) even suggested (building on the work of Eric Plutzer, 2002) that previously high partisanship might have played a role in maintaining the long-term stability of high voter turnout. The temptation is to go further and think that the acquisition of partisanship might come hand-in-hand with the acquisition of a "habit of voting" that apparently results from repeated acts of voting (for a survey of relevant literature see Dinas 2018). But I also follow Plutzer (2002) in arguing that partisanship plays a more fundamental role in maintaining long-term turnout stability, locking down behaviors at the individual level of analysis that have other sources. In this chapter I suggest a causal path by which this stabilization can occur, using survey and aggregate data from 14 countries over 50 years.

I base my approach on findings at the party level of aggregation that show how parties try (by

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<sup>1</sup> Online appendices for this chapter can be found at <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/facpub/314> (permanent URL).

<sup>2</sup> André Blais would rate this reason as secondary, effective only when civic duty is lacking (Galais and Blais 2016). But it is noteworthy that non-voters do not explain their failures to vote as due to lack of civic duty. Even when structural equation modeling shows apparently clear evidence of duty's primacy (ibid.), the implicit effect on non-voting is essentially an effect on missing data. Models using the duty variable are all of them mis-specified on this account.

modifying their policies) to re-attach voters disenchanted by previous policy failures (Franklin and Lutz 2020). These policy-related developments give rise to an equilibrium rate of party support that, over time, is repeatedly disturbed only to be re-instated (perhaps at new levels of party support). I suggest that a second but closely connected dynamic process should have similar consequences for turnout, as newly competitive elections restore voter support for parties whose inattention to voter preferences had previously cost them votes. In other words, the cycle of loss and restoration of party support should be mirrored by a cycle of loss and restoration of competitive elections; with more competitive elections restoring turnout rates that fell at previous, less competitive, elections (cf. Franklin 2004; Pacheco 2008; Evans Ensley and Carmines 2014). I then explore the individual-level and election-level concomitants of this suggested party-level mechanism. I show how findings at each level serve to explain otherwise anomalous observations at other levels of analysis.

In brief, this chapter studies the interplay of these multi-level processes by combining survey with aggregate data and investigating the extent to which proper model specification requires data at all levels simultaneously.

## **2) Habitual voting and the dynamics of turnout variations**

I start with the insight expressed in a foundational study of voting behavior (Campbell et al. 1960) that people are far more likely to vote who care about an election's outcome. But those authors point out (1960: 496) that most of the reasons that would make people care about the outcome are not related to turnout. They found just one individual-level phenomenon reliably associated with turnout: partisanship. Respondents who more closely identified with a political party were more likely to vote. Campbell and his co-authors saw this identification with party as being closely associated with age (1960: 497). Twelve years later Verba and Nie (1972, 1987) revisited the topic

and labeled the phenomenon of rising turnout with increasing age a “start-up” phenomenon. This was mirrored by a “slow-down” phenomenon (also noted by Campbell and his co-authors) among older voters. Verba and Nie gave close attention these phenomena but did not manage to fully explain the startup phenomenon. Another thirty years were to pass before, addressing this theoretical gap, Plutzer (2002) demonstrated persuasively that young adults experience a “transitional” period that leads them to either acquire a “habit of voting” or, alternatively, a “habit of non-voting.” This finding was repeatedly confirmed over ensuing years in a series of experimental and quasi-experimental studies, the first one published only a year after Plutzer’s seminal article (Gerber, Green and Schachar 2003). For a survey see Dinas (2018).

It is tempting to suppose that this literature regarding habit-formation provides the link between partisanship and turnout, both resulting from habitual behavior. The temptation is strengthened when we notice that the correlation between turnout and partisanship is even stronger than the correlation between turnout and age ( $r=0.83$  for partisanship and turnout across the countries I focus on in this chapter, as compared to  $r=0.68$  for age and turnout).<sup>3</sup>

But fastening on evolving partisanship as a source of evolving turnout would ignore the careful work of Eric Plutzer (referenced earlier) who saw differences between rates of partisanship for different groups of people as consequences of the transition to habitual voting rather than its cause, with the impact of partisanship more evidently flowing from the young adults’ parents than from young adults themselves, the objects of his study (Plutzer 2002: 51). Plutzer’s insistence on partisanship as a stable trait instead focuses us on that variable’s role in explaining the slow-moving evolution of election-level voter turnout, the topic to which we now turn.

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<sup>3</sup> These correlations are for voting and partisanship aggregated to the level of age in years, I truncate the age scale at age 70 so as to focus on the age range characterized by rising turnout.

Past research (Franklin 2004; Johnson et al. 2007; Vowles et al. 2017) has seen voter turnout as an archetypical example of a quantity that is in dynamic equilibrium. For any given country at any given time, turnout sits at a rate set by a balance of forces. Most of those forces are slow to change and are largely captured by the rate of turnout at the previous election ("turnout  $t-1$ " in statistical parlance). One can think of these forces as manifesting the power of inertia in human affairs, serving to hold back turnout change.

Nevertheless, things do change. An influence on aggregate-level turnout, stable for decades, can alter as a result of legislation or other factors. More importantly, some forces are by their nature quite ephemeral. The marginality of the election (which can motivate people to vote in a tight race who might not have voted had the outcome been a foregone conclusion) is a quintessential short-term force. Another is the electoral clarity bestowed by a party that receives close to 50% of the votes (such parties, if large enough, can govern alone and, if not quite large enough to govern alone, will dominate any coalition of which they form part, simplifying the decision-process for voters – see Russo et al. 2020). Long-term forces, by contrast, are more closely associated with the political system than with party politics. Often, such forces are institutional or quasi-institutional in nature: rules such as the voting age or whether voting is compulsory.

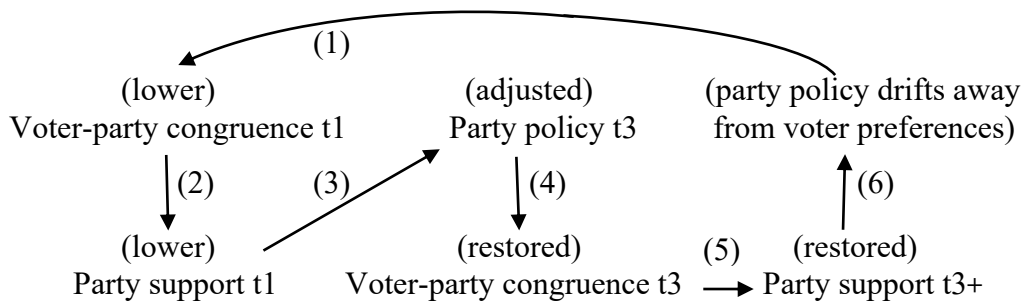
A short-term force that has received little attention in turnout studies plays a central role in this chapter: voter-party policy congruence (the proximity of voters to parties, here operationalized in left-right terms).

### **3) A unified view of party choice, partisanship and turnout**

In the chapter I co-authored with Georg Lutz on partisanship in the process of party choice (Franklin and Lutz 2020) we used error correction models to investigate the way in which variations in policy

congruence between voters and parties govern fluctuations in party support around a central tendency established by partisanship, consistent with classic theorizing (Campbell et al. 1960). In this section, I revisit and build on those findings to theorize a connection between party choice and turnout such that voter-party policy congruence contributes to the maintenance of an equilibrium rate not just for party support but for turnout as well.

The balance of forces that maintains an equilibrium rate of party support involves a feedback loop that “corrects” the policy positions taken by political parties when those positions drift away from supporter preferences. These forces are illustrated in the flowchart shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Schema for a feedback loop “correcting” voter-party congruence

The story shown there starts with a successful party feeling free to drift away from supporter preferences (arrow 1), often due to party activists’ desires to “purify” the party’s message, resulting in declining congruence between party policies and supporter preferences. In response, voters reduce the support they give to the party at that election (arrow 2). All of this happens during the run up to an election whose outcome becomes known at the point in time labeled t1 in the schema. Party leaders use this signal to pressure their activist base into adopting more moderate party positions (which can take quite time to achieve), leading to policies being adjusted only after some delay, at timepoint t3 (often policy adjustment only happens after a second bad election outcome, somewhere along arrow 3, which occurs at a timepoint not shown on the schema). That adjustment

restores voter-party congruence (arrow 4) in the eyes of previous supporters who, at the ensuing election (still at timepoint  $t_3$ ) reward the party for its improved (to their eyes) policy stances, restoring party support (arrow 5). But this strips party leaders of the argument that had previously brought their activist base to toe the leadership line (arrow 6), and brings us back to arrow 1.

Note that there is no theoretical or empirical reason why arrow 6 should be travelled immediately following arrow 5. The point reached at the end of arrow 5 is a point of equilibrium and nothing in our theorizing suggests how much time will pass before party policies again start to diverge from supporter preferences (hence the appearance of a “+” sign after the  $t_3$  indicator at the end of arrow 5). A successful party leader might be able to delay that divergence for a considerable period, perhaps indefinitely.

Two things about the process illustrated in Figure 1 make its causal nature readily identifiable statistically. First, the passage of time is involved. Parties respond to voter signals only after a palpable delay, meaning we do not rely for evidence of causality on the weak standard of “constant conjunction” (things that happen together may be causally connected) but the more stringent standard of “Granger causality” (a cause must precede its consequence). Second, the process accords with extant empirical findings regarding responsiveness of national policy-making to voter preferences, showing negative feedback from an earlier time-point as policy-makers “correct” their policies in light of changing public preferences (e.g. Wlezien 1995; Jennings and John 2009; for a survey see Wlezien 2018). Negative feedback makes it easy to distinguish the responses of policy-makers from the signals given by voters, since their coefficients have different signs.

Franklin and Lutz (2020) used left-right locations of parties as surrogates for policy positions and focused on whether parties “corrected” those locations in response to supporter signals. I do the same in the online Appendix A to this chapter, using respondent judgments to code party



positions and taking votes cast as the signals most relevant to party leaders and activists (details methodological concerns and robustness checks are in all four of the online appendices).

The original contribution of the present chapter is to suggest a related feedback loop that connects the voter turnout rate with the rate of party support. The intuition is that, when previous supporters “punish” their party by withdrawing electoral support, those previous supporters do not necessarily vote for a different party. More often they simply fail to vote at all. So failures by parties to take policy stances popular with their supporters do not just cost those parties seats in their country’s legislature but may cost the entire political system the votes of many citizens, lowering the turnout rate.<sup>4</sup> This will tend to happen when the largest party(ies) – generally the one(s) seen to have “won” the previous election – lose(s) support. The linkage is not a logical necessity. It might be absent in particular instances. But it appears to be present sufficiently often as to produce the findings regarding turnout contained in this chapter’s online Appendix A. Elections in democracies are very public events and enthusiasm (or the lack of it) are both of them contagious, presumably helping to keep the stimulus to voter turnout in sync across supporters of different parties.

In this handbook chapter there is not space to describe the exploratory party-level analyses that have suggested the form taken by a model that matches, for turnout, the analyses conducted by Franklin and Lutz (2020) for party support. Such a model is shown in this chapter’s online

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<sup>4</sup> At the party level there is no empirical difference between the variable measuring turnout and the variable measuring party choice. Party support can be interpreted in either way, although the lag structure for a turnout model differs from the lag structure for a party support model.. The ambiguity of the party support variable in a model such as that employed by Franklin and Lutz (2020) signals what has always been a troubling disconnect between the turnout literature (including my own contributions) and the party choice literature. After all, turning out to vote involves picking a party to vote for, as originally pointed out by Campbell et al. (1960: 96-7). Here I bring the two strands of literature together for perhaps the first time since that pathbreaking study.

Appendix A. In the main text of this chapter I mainly address the implications of the party-level turnout findings for individual-level turnout analyses, also the focus of much previous turnout research. Those analyses will explore the individual-level mechanism by which previously higher turnout rates might be restored. Given the party-level findings, voter-party issue congruence (here operationalized in terms of left-right proximity between voters and parties) should be involved. Following Plutzer (2002), partisanship should also play a role. Partisanship has sometimes been included in individual-level models, though only occasionally. It is generally excluded because it “eats up” such a large proportion of effects on turnout that pass by way of partisanship as an intervening variable. To the best of my knowledge, voter-party congruence has never previously been included in such analyses. My conjectures regarding the impact of party-level feedback for turnout suggest that both partisanship and congruence are essential for well-specified models at the individual level.

The mechanism I propose involves changes in the complexion of a country’s electorate that would occur between  $t_1$  and  $t_3$  in Figure 1. A relevant way in which the  $t_3$  electorate will differ from the  $t_1$  electorate is that, at  $t_3$ , *all* of the citizens who, at  $t_1$ , were learning the habit of voting (or not) will have been transformed from impressionable young adults into habitual voters (or non-voters). Their passage through this socializing process will have been shaped by their experiences of elections held during that two-election period. For those individuals, the elections concerned will have been formative. If the elections were hard-fought, more young adults will have acquired the strong partisanship associated with a habit of voting than if those elections were foregone conclusions. In that manner, position in the party-level feedback loop will have become embedded in the individual-level “footprint” that formative elections leave within the age-structure of an electorate (Franklin 2004:43).

But note that, when we include independent variables in a model because of their relevance at a different level of aggregation, apparent effects may rather reflect the process that is underway at that different level than play a causal role. The ambiguity regarding the roles of particular coefficients calls for careful interpretation of apparent effects not only for variables from a different level of aggregation. It is quite general problem of interpretation like others that I now address.

#### **4) Problems of analysis and interpretation**

The countries on which I focus in this chapter are a subset of the 22 countries that were studied in my (2004) volume *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies Since 1945*. Those 22 countries are the only ones that have held elections continuously since within one electoral cycle of the end of World War II. I avoided countries that experienced non-democratic rule during the lifetimes of 2004 citizens because the mechanisms of long-term turnout change that I documented in that volume are primarily processes of generational replacement, as older cohorts of voters are replaced by newly adult cohorts at election after election. Newly adult cohorts have not yet established a habit of voting, giving them malleability in the face of influences that differ from those that governed the learning of older cohorts, with consequences for the equilibrium turnout-rate that may shift over time. Such influences are well-understood in established democracies but as soon we include countries that transitioned to democracy (or had non-democratic periods) during the lifetimes of adult citizens, we introduce contaminants that are specific to each country and which are in any case not well-understood.

In my (2004) volume I mainly employed election-level aggregate data, though this was supplemented by survey findings to the extent that surveys were available. Just six of the 22 countries had histories of academic voter studies covering enough elections to make time-series analyses feasible

at an appropriate level of aggregation. As I revisit this subfield 20 years later I find more than twice that number of countries with a useable sequence of voter studies, so in this chapter I employ mainly survey data. The 14 countries on which I focus are Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. See Franklin (2004) and this chapter's online Appendix A for details. I merge the surveys with aggregate data mainly from the IDEA Voter Turnout Database and the PARLGOV database of parties elections and governments.<sup>5</sup> Additional data sources are reported in Appendix B of my (2004) volume.

Survey data at the individual level has the huge disadvantage of overstating the turnout rate, due to non-response and overreporting (Dahlgaard et al, 2019). This problem can be mitigated by weighting the survey data to official turnout, as I have done in past work and do in this chapter,<sup>6</sup> allowing me to benefit from survey data's primary advantage: it permits researchers to look within electorates at population subgroups theoretically expected to be especially susceptible to effects of different types. In particular, my (2004) volume theorized and then tested the special susceptibility of newly adult voters to short-term effects such as those of electoral clarity and margin of victory. In order to distinguish long-term from short-term effects for countries lacking survey data, I used

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<sup>5</sup> The IDEA database does not include more than a single election during any calendar year for any one country so I used the ParlGov archive to fill some gaps. US turnout has always caused problems for comparative studies (Franklin 2004:86-88) because voter registration in that country is lower than elsewhere. Contemporary scholars employ Voter Eligible Turnout (VEP) for the US (percent voting out of those eligible to vote) even as they use turnout as a percentage of registered voters elsewhere. My VEP turnout data for the US are taken from Michael McDonald's United States Elections Project website (<http://www.electproject.org/national-1789-present> – accessed in September 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Increasing the weight of respondents who did not vote while reducing the weight of voting counterparts matches the sizes of each group to those in the voting population (see online Appendix C). Unfortunately hierarchical modeling procedures can seldom handle weights within strata so I am obliged to use regression models that employ a battery of country dummies to enforce fixed effects.

election-level data in conjunction with a weighting strategy that incorporated the fluctuating sizes of newly adult cohorts, thus giving each such cohort a distinct “signature,” in terms of those fluctuations, that could be used to identify each cohort even as it aged (for details see Franklin 2004:122-126). The findings reported in the present chapter replicate those earlier findings but do so while employing data that allow new cohorts of voters to be identified by their birth-dates, improving accuracy as well as transparency.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, one of the variables found important in my earlier research (female suffrage extensions) sees no variation over the countries and periods for which I have survey data. So I cannot validate my findings regarding that variables. Critical election studies are missing for the only country (Switzerland) that extended votes to women over recent decades.

To distinguish long-term from short-term forces at the individual level I take advantage of the fact, already noted, that ephemeral effects are registered primarily by newly adult cohorts of voters – individuals who have not yet acquired settled voting habits that would insulate them from such effects. Long-term forces, by contrast, are those that have become “baked-in” to the behavior of voters who have already acquired habits of voting (or of non-voting).<sup>8</sup> Whether a particular force

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<sup>7</sup> Transparency is also improved by presenting survey findings at the individual level, rather than aggregated to the level of electoral cohorts. This requires that I get my measure of past voting from answers to the question whether respondents voted in the previous election (referred to in what follows as the “quasi-lagged outcome”), rather than from each cohort’s actual vote at the previous election; and recall of past vote will be overstated in survey data in the same way as recall of the recent election’s vote. But the same weighting strategy should deal with both problems.

<sup>8</sup> The number of times the same choice needs to be repeated in order for it to become habitual is not definitively established. Franklin (2004) followed Butler and Stokes (1969) in supposing the effective number to be 3 while Johnston et al (2005), along with Bruter and Harrison (2020) fastened on 2. In practice defections from habitual behavior decline with each repetition of the behavior concerned, so the cut-point is somewhat arbitrary. In this chapter, for consistency with party level findings, I treat individual voters as newly adult when facing either of their first two elections. Findings are not dissimilar if other definitions

is short-term or long-term at any given point in time is effectively a matter for empirical assessment but the way in which that assessment is made is different for survey data than it is for aggregate data. With party-level aggregate data (as used by Franklin and Lutz 2020) one can identify a short-term force from the rapid decay of its effect as the turnout series moves back towards its long-term equilibrium. With the individual-level survey data that I will use in following sections, I can identify short-term forces as ones whose effects are felt primarily by newly-adult cohorts of voters. But the fact that these forces are distinguished in such very different ways at each level of analysis must be kept in mind when associating party-level effects with their individual-level counterparts.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the most consequential analysis problem still facing scholars who would try to understand the mainsprings of voter turnout variation is highlighted by the question “in turnout studies, what is a well-specified model?” Most studies of voter turnout focus either on the individual level, and ask why people vote. Alternatively they focus on the election level, and ask: why turnout sits at a given rate and why that rate varies across countries and/or over time? Earlier sections of this chapter make it clear that the party level is another level of aggregation at which it is appropriate to ask (at the very least) why the turnout rate (average party support) varies over time. In my (2004) volume I tried to demonstrate that models at the individual level of aggregation would be mis-specified if they did not include variables detailing the character of the elections at

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are employed (see this chapter’s online Appendix B).

<sup>9</sup> See online Appendix D. A further methodological problem for individual-level analyses of turnout is that the dependent variable is binary and, in political science research, with such outcomes it is common practice is to employ probit or logit analysis. However, the non-linearity of the dependent variable in such analyses makes it problematic to include interaction terms (Ai and Norton 2003; Buis 2010), which I need if I am to distinguish effects on new cohorts of voters from effects on older cohorts. This problem is overcome if, instead of logit models, I employ linear probability models (which use OLS regression). Such models are widely used by econometricians (Kennedy 2008; Angrist and Pischke 2008) and it can be shown that findings are hardly different when using one method rather than the other (see online Appendix B).

which turnout was measured; similarly, the brunt of the entire book was to demonstrate that individual-level forces (especially generational replacement) affected turnout at the aggregate level. Those demonstrations appear to have gone largely unnoticed. Over the subsequent 17 years, to the best of my knowledge turnout models at each level have largely failed to include measures originating at the other level of analysis (an exception is the closeness of the race, frequently included in individual-level turnout models).

In this chapter I want to make my point in more dramatic language: the problem with individual-level models of why people vote is that they do not explain either the turnout rate or its variation over time, including its decline in many countries that began during the final quarter of the twentieth Century.<sup>10</sup> The first thing we need to do in order to explain change in turnout-rate over time, using individual-level data, is to insert a measure of past voting into the model. But, when we do that, the effect of age immediately becomes non-significant, statistically, and the effect of age squared changes its sign – becoming positive (see Table 1, Model A in the next section). The remainder of this chapter is much concerned with producing better-specified models with the object of ultimately rendering both age and age-squared non-significant, statistically – elaborating those variables by treating them as constitutive terms in age-related interactions that clarify their functioning.

## **5) Understanding individual-level concomitants of turnout evolution**

How does dynamic turnout equilibration at the party level of aggregation reveal itself at the individual level? Table 1's Model A shows coefficients estimating the effects of the quasi-lagged

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<sup>10</sup> It was long ago pointed out that trying to explain the rate of turnout would be a rather quixotic enterprise (Groffman 1993) and that political scientists would do better to emulate economists who focus on explaining change in their variables of interest.

outcome, demographic and knowledge indicators, and an indicator for recently adult respondents. That last indicator's coefficient is negative, as expected, but surprisingly small.<sup>11</sup> Interactions of what are sometimes called “main effects” ([Brambor et al., 2006](#), would rather see us describe them as “constitutive terms”) with this indicator in Models B and C show how different are effects for newly adult respondents than for established cohorts. The constitutive terms taken separately show effects on respondents who are *not* newly adult. Consistent with similar labels used in my (2004) volume, effects of these constitutive terms taken alone are labeled “long-term effects.” Short-term effects are not labeled as such in the table. We get those by adding “short-term interactions” to corresponding long-term effects. So, for example, the short-term effect of partisanship in Row 5 of Model D is 0.04 greater than its long-term effect of 0.15 in Row 2). Short-term forces apply to younger cohorts that are not expected to have yet acquired settled habits of voting or non-voting. For them, effects can result in behavioral differences from one time-point to the next – differences that can thus bring immediate turnout change. Older cohorts show differences that should only bring turnout change through generational replacement. Of course, it is possible for a variable to have both long-term and short-term effects, in which case the short-term component is expected to dissipate as newly adult cohorts move beyond their habit-forming phase under the influence of factors identified by [Plutzer \(2002\)](#).

A critical difference between this measurement strategy and the strategy employed in party-level models is that, here, the time-horizon for individual-level short-term effects is encoded in the data, whereas at the party level this horizon can be determined empirically. In this chapter the individual-level time horizon was chosen to match a t-2 horizon found empirically at the party level, as already

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<sup>11</sup> The small size of the newly adult coefficient suggests another specification error, additional to the counter-intuitive age effects. This will be a topic for Section 5.



mentioned (see Figure 1 and online Appendix A).

**Table 1** Effects of age and partisanship on the decision to vote (fixed effects linear probability models with data weighted to official turnout)

Outcome: Voted or not	Model A	Model B	Model C+	Model D +
Inputs:	<b>Age</b>	<b>Partisanship</b>	<b>Proximity</b>	<b>Demographics</b>
	Coef. (s.e.)	Coef. (s.e.)	Coef. (s.e.)	Coef. (s.e.)
1) Quasi-lagged outcome (0-1)	0.26 (0.00)	0.26(0.00)	0.25 (0.00)	0.25 (0.00)
<u>Long-term effects</u>				
2) Partisan closeness (0-3, recoded 0-1)			0.15(0.00)	0.15 (0.00)
3) Proximity to party (left-right; 0-1)				0.01 (0.01)ns
4) Newly adult at recent election (0,1)	-0.03 (0.00)	-0.10 (0.00)	-0.11(0.01)	-0.08 (0.01)
<u>Short-term interactions</u>				
5) New*partisanship			0.04 (0.01)	0.04 (0.01)
6) New*proximity				-0.05 (0.01)
<u>Demographic and knowledge covariates</u>				
7) Age	-0.01 (0.02)ns	0.07(0.03)ns	0.07 (0.03)ns	0.06 (0.03)ns
8) Age-squared	0.12 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.03)ns	-0.05 (0.03)ns	-0.05 (0.03)ns
9) Education (highest reached, recoded 0-1)	0.09 (0.00)	0.07(0.00)	0.08 (0.00)	0.03 (0.00)
10) Religion (0, 1=named)	0.03 (0.00)	0.04 (0.00)	0.04 (0.00)	0.08 (0.00)
11) Marital status (0, 1=married)	0.09 (0.00)	0.12.(0.00)	0.12 (0.00)	0.11 (0.00)
12) Income (quintiles, recoded 0-1)	0.07 (0.00)	0.02.(0.00)	0.03 (0.01)	0.02 (0.00)
13) Knowledge (average of 0,1 battery)	0.13 (0.00)	0.08.(0.00)	0.08 (0.00)	0.07 (0.00)
14) Union member in family (0, 1=yes)	0.02 (0.00)	0.01((0.01)	0.01 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)ns
15) Demographic interactions with New	NO	YES	YES	YES
Fixed effects	YES	YES	YES	YES
Constant	0.25 (0.01)	0.29 (0.00)	0.43 (0.01)	0.26 (0.01)
R-squared	0.22	0.23	0.22	0.25
Countries	14	14	14	14
Observations	267,499	267,499	267,499	267,499

Note: All coefficients significant at .001, two-tailed except where marked ns (not significant). All variables standardized to range from 0 to 1. Re “Quasi-lagged outcome” see Footnote 7.

Models B to D progressively add, first, interactions of demographic variables with the newly-adult indicator, then respondent-reported strength of partisanship for the party to which they feel

most attached;<sup>12</sup> and, finally, proximity to the party to which they feel closest in left–right terms. Happily, interactions with the recently adult indicator (Row 15) resolve the problem of incorrectly signed age effects, which fail to reach significance in Models B-D (but in these models we use a very demanding level of significance; greater progress toward eliminating residual age effects is made in Table 2 below). Moreover the effect of being newly adult, which is implausibly small in Row 4 of Model A, is boosted to a more plausible magnitude in Models B-D. However, this coefficient does not decline when the partisanship indicator is added in Model C, telling us that acquisition of partisanship does not account for effects of aging as some might have supposed.

By contrast, the addition of left-right proximity in Model D does significantly reduce the effect of being newly adult, suggesting that it might be proximity rather than partisanship that is associated with relevant effects of aging. Model D actually shows negative effects of proximity, on balance, among new cohorts of voters if we take the interaction in Row 6 along with its corresponding long-term effect in Row 3 ( $0.01 - 0.05 = -0.04$ ). The negative sign might surprise, but this effect appears to play no causal role, rather signaling a feature of new cohorts of voters: that they are generally located further in left-right terms from the parties that are vying for their votes (this makes sense if young adults are still learning where the different parties stand).

The overall negative short-term effect of proximity among the newly adult also tells us that this variable displaces the age effect quite otherwise than through collinearity with turnout, the generally expected mechanism. Importantly, the passage of time appears to be involved in this substitution. Older voters see strong effects of partisanship (0.15 in Models C and D Row 2), seemingly because those older voters were once themselves newly adult and, at that time, experienced *their own*

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<sup>12</sup> Using respondents as experts and employing their judgments to code party locations might be thought problematic. See the discussion at the end of online Appendix B.

transitions to habitual voting. During such transitions, it only makes sense that finding a proximate party (or not) should play an important role, encouraging the acquisition of partisanship (or not).<sup>13</sup> Our party-level model in Figure 1 suggests that such young adults will be the focus of more intense mobilization efforts in some circumstances than in others, thus producing a larger number of strong partisans in some circumstances than in others.

Coefficients associated with this transition might appear surprisingly small; but we should bear in mind that survey error serves to mute individual level coefficients compared to their aggregate-level counterparts.<sup>14</sup>

## **6) Considering election-level inputs to turnout models**

The main contribution of my (2004) volume to voting studies was incorporating individual-level sources of dynamic turnout change into election-level models of voter turnout. The present chapter has looked more deeply at those sources and suggested the existence of additional dynamic processes at the party level of analysis. In this section I replicate election-level findings from my (2004) volume at the individual-level,<sup>15</sup> and add variables suggested by party-level findings in this chapter's online Appendix A. I do this to establish (1) whether effects identified at the party level survive the introduction of controls for well-established drivers of country-level turnout variations and (2) whether those controls remove the hints of specification error that were evident in Table 1

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<sup>13</sup> The transmutation of low proximity into high partisanship over the course of two electoral cycles elaborates Plutzer's (2002) finding by suggesting a route by which well-endowed young adults acquire their partisanship (through finding a party they feel close to in policy terms).

<sup>14</sup> Still, effects for partisanship of 0.19 among newly adult voters (adding the terms in rows 2 and 5 of Model D) are not very different from equivalent party-level effects in online Appendix A.

<sup>15</sup> One of those findings (regarding female suffrage extensions) cannot be replicated with a dataset that covers a later period in time, as already mentioned.

(see footnote 11).

Table 2 pursues these objectives using three models. Model A replicates my (2004) analysis. Model B adds the two variables whose roles are original to the present chapter: partisanship (strength of party attachment) and proximity in left-right terms of respondents to the party they feel closest to. Model C adds the individual-level covariates, already seen in Table 1, so as to produce a more fully specified model that includes all types of variables ever used in turnout models, at whatever levels of analysis.

As in Table 1, these models identify long-term effects by constitutive terms taken alone. Short-term effects are found by adding relevant interaction coefficients (new \* *constitutive term* in the table). For example, marginality is a quintessential short-term factor, because the gap in votes cast between the largest and second-largest parties changes from election to election. This variable has more than three times the effect among younger voters in Model A, as can be seen by adding the coefficients (0.02 + 0.05) in Rows 5 and 16 and comparing the result with the Row 5 coefficient taken alone. Cohesiveness of the party system (legislative party discipline) is, by contrast, a quintessentially long-term factor; meaning that effects for established cohorts of voters should dominate and, indeed, its short-term component does not reach statistical significance in any of the models in Row 18, meaning that its short-term effect is not statistically different from its long-term effect.

One variable previously identified as long-term (electorate size, Row 9) fails to produce the expected significantly negative long-term effect in Model C (its long-term effect is significantly negative in the other models but Model C should be better-specified). This variable is the only one whose long-term effect in Model C blatantly contradicts expectations derived from my (2004) analyses. Moreover, short term interactions for this variable are uniformly positive for all models

**Table 2** Long-term and short-term effects on the decision to vote (fixed effects linear probability models with data weighted to official turnout)

Outcome: voted or not	Model A : Election- and individual-level effects	Model B: Adding party-level effects	Model C: Adding demographic covariates
Inputs	Coef. (s.e.)	Coef. (s.e.)	Coef. (s.e.)
1) Quasi-lagged outcome	0.30 (0.00)	0.28 (0.00)	0.26 (0.00)
<u>Long-term effects (significance expected in rows 6-11)</u>			
2) Partisanship (strength of attachment; 0-1)		0.16 (0.00)	0.15 (0.00)
3) Proximity to party (0-1)		0.01 (0.01) ns	0.00 (0.01) ns
4) Clarity of election (1-abs(seatShareP1-0.5))	-0.01 (0.01) ns	-0.01 (0.01) ns	-0.03 (0.01)
5) Marginality (1-(seatShareP1-seatShareP2))	0.01 (0.01) ns	0.00 (0.01) ns	0.01 (0.01) ns
6) Time-gap from previous election (rescaled 0-1)	-0.01 (0.01) ns	-0.00 (0.01) ns	0.05 (0.01)
7) Cohesive party system (expert judgement: 0,1)	0.03 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
8) Compulsory voting (0,1)	0.12 (0.01)	0.10 (0.01)	0.12 (0.01)
9) Electorate size (registration as proportion of max)	-0.09 (0.02)	-0.09 (0.02)	0.04 (0.02) ns
10) Responsiveness of executive to legislature (0-1)	0.00 (0.02) ns	0.02 (0.02) ns	0.07 (0.02)
11) Younger eligibility to vote (at age 18; 0,1)	-0.03 (0.00)	-0.02 (0.00)	-0.03 (0.00)
12) Newly adult at this or the previous election (0,1)	-0.06 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.02)
<u>Short-term interactions (significance expected in rows 13-16)</u>			
13) New * partisanship		0.03 (0.01)	0.03 (0.01)
14) New * proximity		-0.04 (0.01)	-0.03 (0.01)
15) New * clarity	0.12 (0.01)	0.09 (0.01)	0.11 (0.01)
16) New * marginality	0.05 (0.01)	0.05 (0.01)	0.06 (0.01)
17) New * time-gap	-0.16 (0.01)	-0.14 (0.01)	-0.12 (0.01)
18) New * cohesive	-0.00 (0.01) ns	-0.01 (0.01) ns	0.00 (0.01) ns
19) New * compulsory	0.10 (0.01)	0.09 (0.01)	0.10 (0.01)
20) New * electorate	0.17 (0.01)	0.16 (0.01)	0.08 (0.01)
21) New * responsiveness	0.07 (0.01)	0.07 (0.01)	0.06 (0.01)
22) New * younger-eligible	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.03 (0.01)	-0.04 (0.01)
<u>Demographic and knowledge covariates</u>			
23) Age			-0.00 (0.02) ns
24) Age-squared			-0.02 (0.03) ns
(More) demographics	NO	NO	YES
Fixed effects	YES	YES	YES
Constant	0.51 (0.03)	0.42 (0.03)	0.10 (0.02)
R-squared	0.21	0.22	0.25
Countries	14	14	14
Observations	267,499	267,499	267,499

Notes: All coefficients significant at  $p < .001$  except as marked “ns”. SeatsShareP1 is largest party proportion, SeatShareP2 second-largest party. Regarding “Quasi-lagged outcome” see footnote 7. For other variables see Appendix B in Franklin (2004). Additional variables mentioned there prove no more significant in this analysis than in earlier work. Individual level: rows 2-3 and 11-12; cross-level: 13-22; election level: others.

In row 18, suggesting that theoretical approaches underpinning expectations of lower turnout in large electorates should be revisited. Another surprise in these findings is that time-gap since the previous election has an effect on recently adult cohorts that is opposite in sign to (and, taking the constitutive terms together, larger than) the effect found for established cohorts. Importantly, members of newly adult cohorts are more likely to vote if elections come in quick succession than if the mobilizing effects of a previous election have had time to dissipate. But the generally significant effects of short-term interactions for variables originally theorized to have long-term effects do not in themselves contradict past findings since analyses for my (2004) volume were not able to estimate short-term effects of variables theorized to be long-term in nature.<sup>16</sup> In this chapter we take a big step forward with analyses that contrast short-term with long-term effects for all variables, adding important nuance to our overall understanding of turnout effects.

Models B and C both confirm the effects of partisanship and proximity found in Section 5. Here we see a long-term effect of partisanship that is the strongest of any effect in the table – stronger even than the long-term effect of compulsory voting. But when it comes to previously theorized effects, we see that the demographic effects, added in Model C, are essential for obtaining election-level effects whose patterns and general magnitudes come close to according with my (2004) findings. With individual-level data it matters that models be fully-specified. The same appears true for the demographic effects themselves. Model C shows only two of these, age and age-squared (additional demographic and knowledge effects are in online Appendix B) but age and age-squared are the effects that were wrongly signed in Model A of Table 1. Comparing effects of these variables in Model C of Table 2 with their effects in Table 1 lets us see that these variables become better-behaved as models become more fully-specified.

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<sup>16</sup> This was due to methodological limitations, mentioned in Section 4, inherent in the earlier study.

## 7) Conclusions

This chapter has established the need to include, in individual-level turnout models, variables from multiple levels of aggregation. Without all levels being represented, models are under-specified (sometimes grievously). More importantly, the inclusion of individual-level counterparts to certain party-level effects has illuminated the dynamic processes that underly turnout variations. It has for some time been evident to scholars that voter turnout sits in a (slowly shifting) dynamic equilibrium where the turnout rate is determined by long-term forces. What was unknown was *how* that equilibrium turnout rate was maintained.

I suggested in Section 3 that equilibration is promoted by forces most clearly evident at the party level of aggregation, where a long-term (though shifting) equilibrium in support for different parties is sustained by negative feedback. In that section I posited associated dynamics for voter turnout, whose long-term stability seems deeply entwined with that of party support.<sup>17</sup> As support for a party goes up so parties are freed to move away from the positions preferred by their voters, resulting in voter disenchantment at the following election. This lowers the turnout rate even as it stimulates parties to adjust their policies in response supporter preferences, leading to increased electoral competition and tending to restore the previous turnout-rate. To the extent that variations in party competitiveness are synchronized across parties, turnout at the election level will follow the pattern of increasing and reducing electoral competition at the party level.

However surprising this may seem, it is what appears to happen in practice. Online Appendix A tests models of turnout dynamics that feature both voter-party congruence and voter support for parties. At the party level of aggregation, seemingly synchronized changes in left-right proximity

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<sup>17</sup> For additional perspectives on the maintenance of party system stability see Weber and Franklin (2018).

and party support produce a negative feedback loop that explains roughly the same percentage of turnout variability as the percentage that left-right proximity explains of variability in party support. Still, the findings must be regarded as preliminary. A two-election cycle eats up a lot of degrees of freedom, limiting the statistical reliability of some aspects of the findings; and the micro-level foundations of synchronized changes in party competition are still speculative.

The role for party-level voter-party left-right proximity (congruence) in promoting an equilibrium rate of voter turnout also raises measurement issues but, though closeness to parties in left-right terms (as judged by survey respondents) might be biased by varying amounts of wishful thinking (but see the Appendix B ‘Note on respondent perceptions of party positions’), the reactions by parties cannot be questioned on the same grounds since what party leaders see when they see declining voter support is surely not what they hope to see.

A larger puzzle was to find a mechanism, in survey data, that would parallel the one at the party level where negotiations between party leaders and party activists likely account for delay in party responses to declining voter support – a delay that confirms the causal nature of this feedback. Finding a theoretically plausible source for equivalent delay at the individual level was a motivation underlying analyses presented in Section 5 of this chapter, where newly adult respondents were found to be largely distinguished from their older counterparts by their greater distance from parties in left-right terms. The resulting intuition saw Plutzer’s (2002) developmental process as providing the required mechanism, since it comes with an inherent time-lapse before we see the individual-level negative feedback that “corrects” turnout declines – a time-lapse that matches the delay inherent in the party-level mechanism that “corrects” declines in party support.

Because the timing of this individual-level transformation can be matched to the timing of the party-support negative-feedback loop, it seems plausible to suppose that the rate at which partisanship is acquired during this learning period responds to the extent of electoral competition that



newly adult individuals experience. It makes sense that more strongly competitive elections should produce greater numbers of strong partisans (after the relevant delay) though micro-foundations of the control mechanism are still poorly identified.. This should be an urgent focus for future research, with analyses that employ Plutzer's methodological innovations being elaborated to include party-level measures of electoral competition.

Section 6 introduced election-level variables previously found to set the long-term equilibrium turnout rate. These do not explain away the individual-level effects of variables responsible for turnout re-equilibration. Rather, if anything, the opposite occurs: adding partisanship to the election-level analysis, in Model B of Table 2, somewhat reduces (on balance) observed long-term effects of classic election-level turnout determinants, even while clarifying the individual-level processes that underpin apparent age effects.

The derivative nature of individual-level turnout covariation discovered in this chapter suggests that future research should reappraise the direction of causality commonly assumed for other supposed individual-level sources of turnout evolution, subjecting classic individual-level turnout covariates to the same sort of interpretative lens as has, in this chapter, been used to study individual-level concomitants of party-level forces. If we do so we may find that changing magnitudes of individual-level turnout differences across such variables as education and political knowledge rather reflect higher-level turnout changes than cause them, as we have found to be the case with voter-party congruence.

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