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### Studying the interplay of party support and turnout [pre=print]

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# **Studying the interplay of party support and turnout**

(Chapter to be contributed to a festschrift for Richard Rose)

by

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## **Abstract:**

This chapter builds on earlier work (Franklin 2022) that explored the mechanism tying party choice at the individual level to election-level turnout rates. It employs CSES surveys from 28 countries over the course of 3 to 5 elections. It builds on past findings that used error correction models to confirm the role of negative feedback in maintaining equilibrium rates of party support; and elaborates on a parallel mechanism that helps to maintain an equilibrium level of turnout, through voter reactions to evolving levels of electoral competition. The chapter treats voter turnout, voter-party policy congruence, and party support as aspects of a single dynamic process at the party and birthyear-cohort levels, also helping to validate the dynamic account of turnout processes suggested in earlier work. (126 words)

**Keywords:** Electoral participation; partisanship evolution; equilibrium voter turnout; error correction turnout models. (5,9 words)

(6,923 words including figure, tables and bibliography)

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

The foundational study of voting behavior by Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes (*The American Voter* 1960) treated turnout as an integral aspect of the voting act. Those authors considered the origins and effects of turnout fluctuations using the same concepts as guided their study of party choice and partisanship. But in the 14 years that separated that study from Rose's (edited, 1974) seminal handbook, *Electoral Behavior*, there was little attention to the connection between turnout and party choice. In those years most scholarly attention given to voting studies focused on choice rather than on turnout and Rose's volume did not break with this focus; although I should not omit to mention that, six years later, Rose published an edited volume on *Political Participation* (1980). Indeed in the half-century that has elapsed since *Electoral Behavior*'s publication there continued to be almost no attempts to integrate the study of party choice with the study of turnout (major exceptions are Hirschman 1970 and Weber 2011), and none that has had long-term impact on how research on political behaviour is conducted today, still following in the footsteps of Rose's volume.

I was a member of Rose's department at the University of Strathclyde during the years when Rose was pulling together the *Electoral Behaviour* handbook and I well remember the excitement occasioned by visits from famous authors of that book's chapters and the intellectual opportunities provided by those visits. I do not recall voter turnout ever being a subject for discussion.

In the years since then I remember occasional casual conversations with other scholars in which the lack of theoretical development on the link between turnout and party choice was mentioned, often with a degree of wonder or frustration. Of course this is not to say that attempts to address this important question in mainstream political science publications have not been shot down by increasingly picky reviewers (perhaps Ming Li 2010; Myatt 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> Online appendices for this chapter are at <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/facpub/386> (permanent URL).

Yet one of the most sterling qualities of Richard Rose as a scholar was his complete disregard for such hurdles when addressing new topics with contributions that almost invariably became staples of the academic literature. So it occurred to me that it would be wholly appropriate to take this opportunity to follow his example in this regard.

The approach I will take is time-serial. It has been mentioned repeatedly that turnout stands at an equilibrium maintained by a balance of forces – an equilibrium that is itself in constant motion as turnout rises or (more generally) falls (e.g. Franklin 2004; Ming Li 2010). So turnout has often been seen (or suggestions have been made that turnout should be seen – Grofman 1993; Norris 2004:261) through a lens that compares the level of turnout at any given point in time with turnout at an earlier or later time-point, an approach that is much less common with party support. Indeed the paucity of studies regarding possible equilibrium levels of party support (but see Weber and Franklin 2018) may well be one reason for past failures to link party support and turnout within a single theoretical framework.

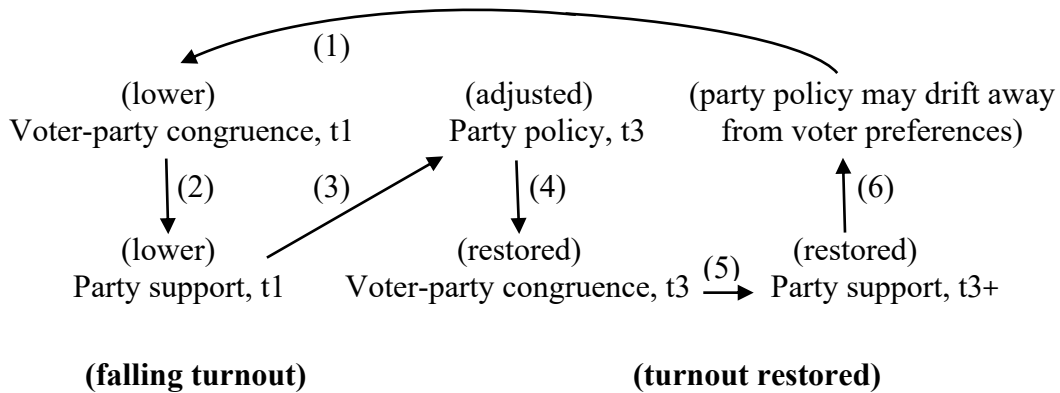
In a chapter I co-authored with Georg Lutz on partisanship in the process of party choice (Franklin and Lutz 2020) we used time-series analysis to investigate the way in which variations in policy congruence between voters and parties govern fluctuations in party support around a central tendency established by partisanship (cf. Fiorina 1981; Rose and McAllister 1990). In this festschrift chapter, I revisit and build on the Franklin-Lutz 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.

## **2) The model**

The balance of forces that maintains an equilibrium rate of party support involves a feedback loop that “corrects” political parties’ policy positions when those positions drift away from supporter

preferences (Franklin and Lutz 2020). These forces are illustrated in the schema shown in Figure 1.

The story told there starts with a successful party drifting away from supporter preferences (arrow 1), often due to party activists’ successful efforts to “purify” the party’s message, resulting in declining congruence between that party’s policies and the preferences of more moderate supporters.



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

In response, voter support for that party is reduced (arrow 2). All of this happens during the approach to an election whose outcome becomes known at the time-point labeled t1 (bottom left). Party leaders use this signal to warn their activists of dire electoral consequences if more moderate policy positions are not adopted. But modifying party policy in this way can take time, leading to those policies being adjusted only after some delay, at time-point t3 (top center). Often such adjustment only happens following a second bad election outcome, somewhere along arrow 3, at a timepoint not shown on the schema. However, when it comes, that adjustment often restores voter-party congruence (arrow 4) in the eyes of erstwhile supporters and, at the next election (still at timepoint t3, bottom center) those supporters reward the party for what they see as its improved policy stances, restoring party support (arrow 5). But this favorable adjustment makes it harder for party leaders to make the argument that had previously brought discipline to their activist base

(arrow 6), restoring the situation *ex-ante*, before the policy evolution suggested top right.<sup>2</sup> Turnout implications (boldfaced in parentheses at the foot of the schema) will be detailed in due course.

There is no theoretical or empirical requirement for arrow 6 to be traversed immediately following arrow 5. The position reached at the end of arrow 5 is an equilibrium position (reason for a “+” sign after the t3 indicator at the end of arrow 5, bottom right). Successful party leadership might be able to delay the (arrow-6) development for a considerable time, perhaps indefinitely.

The process shown in Figure 1 has statistical features that make its causal nature readily identifiable. In the first place, it involves the passage of time. There is a palpable delay before parties respond to the signal of voter disquiet, meaning that we do not rely on the weak standard of “constant conjunction” (that actions occurring together may be causally connected) but the higher “Granger causality” standard (that causes must precede their consequences). In the second place, existing empirical findings reinforce the idea (Deutsch 1963) that attention to consequences, when making government policy, results in negative feedback as policy-makers “correct” their policies in light of public responses (e.g. Wlezien 1995; Jennings 2013 Jennings and John 2009; for a survey see Wlezien 2018). Negative feedback distinguishes the responses of policy-makers from voter signals, since the coefficients concerned have different signs, with policy-makers reacting negatively (reducing the level of policy provision) if voters judge the policy level to be too high.

Franklin and Lutz (2020) followed Dalton et. al. (2011), and others, in using party left-right

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<sup>2</sup> Voter and party motivations in this model are rather different from those proposed by Anthony Downs (1957), and later theorizing in the Downs, tradition that sees parties as competing for the centre-ground. A critical difference lies in the role played, in my model, by party activists who move parties away from the centre ground even while more centrist voters motivate “corrections” to these centrifugal tendencies. But the same sort of equilibrium could as well result from political forces that were reversed, following a Downsean logic (regarding equilibration in such a model see Hortala-Vallve and Esteve-Volart 2011). Here I focus on what I see as a more plausible equilibrating process, often implicit in political commentary.

locations as summary measures of policy positions. We studied whether parties “corrected” those positions by moving closer to supporter left-right positions in response to falling electoral support. That is also what I do in this chapter, relying on respondent judgments when coding party positions and using votes cast as the measure of party support most relevant to party leaders and activists (an online appendix addresses methodological concerns and provides robustness checks at <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/facpub/386>).

The present chapter also builds on a more recent suggestion (Franklin 2022) that a related feedback loop connects party support with voter turnout. The intuition is that, when supporters “punish” their party by withdrawing electoral support, those erstwhile supporters do not necessarily switch their vote to a different party. Many will fail to vote at all. So, when parties’ policy stances drift away from supporters’ preferences, this does not just cost those parties votes but also reduces the overall turnout rate (at t1, bottom left of Figure 1).<sup>3</sup> This link is not a logical necessity; but it’s presence appears to produce the findings reported here. Democratic elections are very public events and public enthusiasm can be contagious, presumably working to synchronise voter turnout across a party system taken as a whole.

The chapter just referenced (Franklin 2022) took an indirect approach to evaluating the equilibrium it suggested, exploring individual-level processes by which equilibrium turnout rates might be restored after any loss. Building on findings by Plutzer (2002), it suggested a route involving the acquisition of voter-party policy congruence as a by-product of partisanship. Partisanship is often omitted from individual-level turnout models because it “explains away”

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<sup>3</sup> At the party level of analysis there is no empirical difference between a measure of turnout and a measure of party choice. One can interpret party support both ways. The ambiguous nature of the party support variable in a party-level analysis signals a disconnect between the turnout and party choice literatures. Bear in mind that turning out to vote requires choosing a party to vote for (Campbell et al. 1960: 96-7). In this chapter I bring the two literature strands together for possibly the first time since that seminal study.

effects on turnout for which it serves as an intervening variable; and the appearance of voter-party congruence in such a model is even more unusual. In this chapter I build on my (2022) individual-level findings to investigate an equilibrium turnout model at the party level – one that includes both partisanship and congruence in a time-series cross-section analysis, as will be described in this chapter’s Section 3.

There I detail an equilibrating mechanism involving changes in the composition of a country’s electorate that would happen between  $t_1$  and  $t_3$ , bottom-left to top-center of Figure 1. This involves what Plutzer (2002) characterized as a “developmental process” during which all citizens newly adult at  $t_1$  will have evolved from impressionable young adults into habitual voters (or non-voters) by  $t_3$ . This two-election period is a period of learning for newly adult voters – learning shaped by electoral experiences. If those “formative” elections were hard-fought, more young adults will have become strong partisans than if the campaigns were lackluster. In that way, the position occupied by individual young voters in the party-support feedback loop described earlier will have come to define the level of partisanship manifested by those voters in terms of party support. Resulting fluctuations in partisanship/party support then govern turnout fluctuations (cf. Heath 2007), establishing the nature of the turnout “footprint” left by formative elections in the age-structure of an electorate (cf. Franklin 2004:43).

### **3) Data and methods**

The study conducted in this chapter is made feasible by the Integrated Module Dataset (IMD) of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (Quinlen et al. 2018). The integration referred to in the module’s title involved, among other things, providing standard party codes across the four 5-year periods during which individual modules of CSES questions were fielded between 1996 and



2016.<sup>4</sup> Those standard codes permit aggregation of individual-level survey data to a level at which the unit to be analysed becomes the same from election to election. In this way I was able to create a party-level time-series cross-section (TSCS) dataset for between 3 and 5 elections and up to 9 parties in each of 28 countries.<sup>5</sup> This party-level dataset was supplemented by a similar dataset at the birthyear cohort level, aggregated from the same survey data. The party-level data is used to study evolving left-right party policy positions over time; the birthyear cohort data is used to study the evolving left-right policy preferences of party supporters. Aggregation is a straightforward way to obtain time-series cross-section data from individual-level survey data; and these two aggregations (to the party and birthyear-cohort levels) also makes sense substantively – the party level because parties are the units for which votes are cast and also the sources of party policy; the birthyear level because my theorizing regarding party support focuses not on the behavior of individual voters but on the behavior of cohorts of voters who enter their electorates together at the time of specific elections.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Franklin and Lutz (2020) got their data from the same source. Several of the included countries did not conduct free and fair elections continuously since 1945; but at the party level we do not need continuity in generational cohorts, such as was required in earlier work with survey data (Franklin 2004). The number of parties available for analysis is a more pressing concern. This dataset differs from the one used for my work with Lutz (2020) in including additional surveys that became available only in December 2020 with Release 2 of the IMD. Surveys for CSES module 5, released more recently, cannot be added to these data because party codes in Module 5 are not standardized with those of the IMD.

<sup>5</sup> I deleted Hong Kong (not a country) and countries contributing insufficient contiguous time-points. 28 countries remained for varying periods between 1996 and 2016: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Korea, Latvia, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan and the United States.

<sup>6</sup> Birthyear cohorts, of course, fit within electoral cohorts but electoral cohorts can differ greatly in size due to different time-gaps between elections in many countries. Birthyear cohorts are more comparable in size. More importantly, several birthyear cohorts enter an electorate together at each election, reducing possible aggregation artifacts by permitting the different numbers of birthyear cohorts contained within each electoral

Earlier I suggested that equilibrium turnout-levels can shift over time due to evolving party competition (cf. Franklin 2004). An appropriate statistical approach to representing the resulting dynamics involves “error correction” models (ECMs). That approach has long been used by political scientists for modeling linkages between voter preferences and government policies (for a survey see Wlezien 2018). The major difference here, echoing my work with Lutz (Franklin and Lutz 2020), is to view policies and preferences in left-right terms. (cf. Harkvardian 2010; Dalton et al. 2011: 83-91).

ECMs diagnose the character of a time-series of observations according to whether the series maintains an equilibrium that is repeatedly disturbed and, if so, what is the contribution of each input (independent variable) to (a) disturbing the equilibrium – a short-term effect – and (b) establishing the relative level (higher or lower than before) at which equilibrium is restored – a long-term effect. So an ECM estimates two coefficients for each input (independent variable).

ECMs have the great advantage of being extremely flexible, making no assumptions about the nature of dynamic processes under study – provided the error correction parameter (ECP, described next) is negative and statistically significant (Kennedy 2008: 300). The ECP diagnoses the length of time needed for an equilibrium level of turnout to be restored, scaled as a proportion of the gap between time-points (in this case the average number of years between elections). A negative ECP of -1.0 will indicate a time series in which equilibrium is restored after exactly the average period between elections. An ECP closer to 0 than -1 will diagnose a time-series that takes more than one time-period to return to equilibrium; an ECP further from 0 (more highly negative

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cohort to be reflected in the significance level found in statistical tests. Appendix B investigates such artifacts and provides individual-level evidence suggesting that, when effects are theoretically expected at the birthyear level, the artifacts to be feared apply rather to findings at the individual level than to findings at the birthyear level.

than -1) will diagnose a series with a shorter average delay before equilibrium is restored. As with other autoregressive distributed lag (ADL) models, of which the ECM is a variant, the lag structure of the process can be discovered empirically by trying different lags and discarding any that prove not significant or otherwise implausible. In this research I was not able to go very far in evaluating different possibilities because of the short series of time-points available in the IMD. However, the third lag never proved statistically significant, suggesting later lags would not either.

ECMs, used in this way, supposedly minimize problems that beset many other approaches to time-series modeling (problems of non-stationarity, unit roots, and the like) because these possible “nuisance factors” are explicitly estimated rather than being assumed absent (De Boef and Keele 2008). However, I have been unable to find any examples of ECMs employing data with as small a number of time-points as are available to me here. But neither have I found any cautions against using datasets such as the IMD that get their power in statistical analysis from the number of panels (in this research, countries) rather than from the number of time-points. Babones (2014:163) stresses that the same statistical techniques can be used with datasets that get their power in either manner; and, in related work, Wlezien and Soroka (2012) studied a series of 4 time-points across 15 countries using a different but closely related type of distributed lag model.

Because the corrections expected in this model, for both party support and turnout, are due to individual-level processes (not to external disturbances) there is reason to expect short-term ECM feedback effects to be small or even absent (see online Appendix C). This expectation provides an incidental test for whether the processes observed empirically conform to theoretical expectations.

#### **4) A statistical model of turnout and party choice**

Operationalizing the story illustrated by Figure 1, presented earlier, two equations govern the equilibrium level of party support. These define a balance of forces that push party support in

opposite directions. Here I propose that a third equation governs a corresponding equilibrium level of turnout (an equation that I will divide between two models for analysis purposes), having terms taken from the first two. These equations focus on differences found (in support and turnout) between one election and the next ( $Y_{t2} - Y_t$ ;  $X_{t2} - X_t$ ), in this research tradition such measures are referred to as “differenced” variables identified by using the Greek letter delta (“ $\Delta$ ”) as a prefix.

First, voters give increased support to parties that move closer to them in policy terms:

$$\Delta\text{Support}_t = \text{Support}_{t-1} + \Delta\text{Proximity}_t + \text{Proximity}_{t-1} \quad (1: \text{party support})$$

Second, parties adjust their policy offerings in reaction to any loss of support:<sup>7</sup>

$$\Delta\text{Proximity}_t = \text{Proximity}_{t-1} - \Delta\text{Support}_{t-1} - \text{Support}_{t-2} \quad (2: \text{feedback})$$

Third, turnout (a multi-party view of party support) reflects the first two processes:

$$\Delta\text{Turnout}_t = \text{Turnout}_{t-1} - \Delta\text{Proximity}_t - \text{Proximity}_{t-1} + \Delta\text{Proximity}_{t-1} + \text{Proximity}_{t-2} \quad (3: \text{turnout})$$

The roles of the different terms in these equations will now be described in light of the empirical findings they produce.

In Table 1, the first two models (A and B) use data that aggregates to the party level the proportions of votes received by each party and similarly recasts proximity as a party attribute, averaging across supporters of each party their reported proximities to that party. Models C and D instead focus on proportions voting among birthyear-cohorts, treating as a single unit all respondents born in the same year in a particular country – respondents who will have been exposed

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<sup>7</sup> This equation implicitly assumes reciprocal adjustments in response to any gains/losses in support. However, my theorizing in Section 2 supposes that increasing support will free parties to move away from supporter preferences, a very different adjustment process but no less potent. I already pointed out (in my comments regarding Figure 1) that party leaders may extend an equilibrium period. This would presumably involve an ability to “manage” activist responses to increased support, along lines implied in Section 2.

to the same electoral socializing experiences (see Section 3). All four models display coefficients that estimate how past values of each input (independent variable) affect current outcomes (dependent variable values); but, importantly, the lag structure for these effects differs between models. In Models A and C the focus is on effects coming from the previous election (at t-1) whereas, in Models B and D, the focus is on effects coming from a yet earlier election (at t-2).

**Table 1** Party and birth-year level (fixed effects) Error Correction Models of party support and turnout (IMD data; Greek letter  $\Delta$  labels each differenced variable:  $X_t - X_{t-1}$ )

Level of analysis:	Party-level analyses		Birthyear cohort analyses	
Concept:	Model A Representation (party support)	Model B Feedback (policy adjustment)	Model C Competition (concomitant of Model A) <sup>†</sup>	Model D Feedback (generational replacement)
Outcome:	$\Delta$ .Voted for party	$\Delta$ .Proximity to party	$\Delta$ .Turnout	$\Delta$ .Turnout
Inputs:	Coef. (s.e.)	Coef. (s.e.)	Coef. (s.e.)	Coef. (s.e.)
1) Lagged outcome (ECP)	-1.07 (0.06)	-1.55 (0.14)	-1.34 (0.02)	-1.34 (0.02)
2) $\Delta$ .left-right proximity $_t$	0.23 (0.08)		-0.26 (0.04)	
3) Left-right proximity $_{t-1}$	0.33 (0.12)		-0.40 (0.07)	
4) $\Delta$ .voted for party $_{t-1}$		-0.19 (0.14)ns		
5) Voted for party $_{t-2}$		-0.49 (0.21)		
6) $\Delta$ .left-right proximity $_{t-1}$				0.03 (0.09)ns
7) Left-right proximity $_{t-2}$				0.27 (0.11)
Intercept	-0.07 (0.07)ns	1.05 (0.09)	1.29 (0.05)	0.87 (0.11)
R-squared	0.64	0.65	0.66	0.66
Observations	354	188	4,544	2,659
Number of party-elections	168	115		
Number of country-birthyears			1,971	1,729

Note: All coefficients significant at  $p < 0.01$ , one-tailed unless marked n.s. (not significant).

<sup>†</sup> Model C is viewed as a concomitant of Model A (see accompanying text).

In Model A the outcome ( $\Delta$ support $_t$ ) is change in party support between the current and previous elections. The first input is a lagged but not differenced version of the same outcome variable (support  $_{t-1}$ ). Known as the “error correction parameter” (ECP), its value reflects how long it takes

for deviations from an equilibrium outcome to decay, as already explained. Models in Table 1 all have ECP values of greater magnitude than, but within about half-a-point of, -1. These findings suggest that equilibrium would be restored within the final two years of each 4-year (average) inter-election period (or, in other words, that short-term deviations from equilibrium are ephemeral).

The other inputs to each model come in pairs, differenced inputs being paired with lagged inputs. For each pair, the differenced input tells us the short-term effect of the variable in question – the disequilibrating effect that will dissipate over the period governed by the ECM – whereas the lagged input tells us the long-term effect. So, in Model A, the short-term effect (0.23, in Row 2) will have dissipated by the time the next election is due, leaving a somewhat larger effect of 0.33 (Row 3) to carry over into the longer term.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, I do not suppose that survey respondents necessarily see this process in left-right terms, but the ways in which voters' support for relevant parties react to changes in those parties' left-right policy stances evidently involve (and apparently provide good stand-ins for) voters' cognitive processes, whatever those may be (for an extended discussion see Dalton et al. 2011: 91-102). The results tell us (unsurprisingly) that voters reward their parties (with additional votes) as proximity improves and punish them (by withdrawing electoral support) as proximity declines.<sup>9</sup>

Model B changes the outcome of interest from support to proximity, assessing to what extent parties respond to changes in voter support by adjusting their policy positions relative to supporter preferences. Here we expect negative feedback (Deutsch 1963; Easton 1965; Franklin, Soroka and

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<sup>8</sup> Initially, the short- and long-term effects are felt in conjunction but only the long-term effect persists. That effect also helps to account for any move in the series towards a new equilibrium (see discussion towards the end of Section 3).

<sup>9</sup> Actually, we cannot tell from these data whether parties move closer to their voters by changing their policy stances or whether they succeed in persuading their voters to accept the positions that they (the parties) espouse (see Section 5 for more on this topic).

Wlezien 2014), with parties responding to reduced support by trying to improve the fit of their policies to voter preferences and responding to increased support by permitting those policies to stray from voter preferences (cf. Harkvardien 2010). However, we do not expect this feedback to be immediate. It takes time for parties to alter their policy stances and yet more time for them to communicate those changes to voters. So in Model B we look for effects from party support at the election before last, with a short-term (differenced) measure from t-1 (Row 4) and a long-term (lagged) measure from t-2 (Row 5). The short-term effect is not statistically significant (suggesting the possibility of no disturbance from this source to the equilibrium level of party support), but the long-term effect (-0.49 in Row 5) balances the disequilibrating effect (+0.33) in row 3 of Model A, to within margin of error.

In Models C and D we shift our attention to turnout. Here the outcome is the proportion casting a ballot among different cohorts of respondents, the groupings of respondents that should evince the consequences of different socializing influences. Again the two models show effects with different signs at different lags, but for these two models the outcome (dependent) variable is the same. And, importantly, we see a negative effect (-0.40, Row 3) in the first model of the pair being once again corrected (to within margin-of-error) by a positive effect (+0.27, Row 7) in the second model.

In the turnout models, even more than in the party support models, we see the re-equilibrating correction being a largely long-term phenomenon – so much so that, for turnout, there is no significant short-term component. This provides strong support for the expectation, mentioned at the end of Section 3, regarding corrections due to internal party/voter processes rather than to external disturbances.

It may be surprising that turnout is reduced just when parties receive highest support (in rows 2

and 3 of Table 1) but bear in mind that turnout seemingly responds to electoral competition (Franklin 2004; Johnston et al. 2007; Ming Li 2010). In light of those past findings it should not come as a surprise that competition is lower when parties enjoy higher support and *vice versa*. This topic receives more attention in online Appendix B.

At the same time, there is no necessary delay inherent in decisions whether to vote or not.<sup>10</sup> So the delay we see following the negative effect (in Model C) before its reversal (in Model D) is telling. It corresponds with the time delay underlying the transformation of malleable younger individuals into older members of the electorate with established habits of voting (or not) – a delay that was a principle concern of Franklin’s (2022) Table 22.1. So what we see in this chapter’s Table 1 are short-term turnout variations apparently responding to variations in competitiveness at the party level – turnout responses that are subject to later corrections due to generational replacement at the individual level.

These findings must be treated as tentative. The connection between high voter-party proximity and low levels of electoral competition is still speculative (though it is consistent with past research findings and tentatively confirmed in Appendix B). Moreover, these findings require careful model specification, involving thoughtful measurement choices for which there are no established protocols; see Appendix B). More importantly, the findings shown in Table 1 ignore the possibility of projection effects (in which voters ascribe, to the party they support, policy positions that are actually their own) and assimilation/persuasion effects in which voters (are persuaded to) accept,

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<sup>10</sup> In my (2022) turnout chapter I argue that younger, more malleable, voters can respond immediately to novel features of an electoral situation while for older voters, already set in habits of voting or non voting, change can come only with generational replacement. In Models C and D of Table 1 we see both types of change occurring: change due to voter malleability in Model C and change due to generational replacement in Model D. The distinction makes it clear that individual-level short-term effects can have (at the birthyear cohort level) what, in ECM terminology, are seen as long-term effects. As stressed in Franklin (2022), these concepts (while broadly consistent across modeling strategies) are not the same and can overlap.



as their own, policy positions that are actually those of the party they support. Projection and assimilation effects are unlikely (effects of such mechanisms should be evident immediately and my research finds no significant contemporaneous effects of change in party location on respondent-party left-right proximity (see Appendix B). However, persuasion is a definite possibility – indeed such effects are required for learning to take place, the topic of the next section.

### **5) Persuasion and learning effects**

How are changes in proximity between voters and parties brought about? Is it through parties changing their positions (as hypothesized for feedback effects) or through their success in persuading voters to adopt the policies espoused by their parties (the phenomenon we call a “persuasion effect”)?

Critically, we expect different answers regarding turnout than regarding party choice. For party choice, the critical actor in my theorizing is the party, which should move significantly closer to the position of its voters when confronting loss of voter support. For turnout, by contrast, the critical actor is the voter (specifically the newly adult voter) who should move closer to a preferred party with the passage of time during a formative period in the acquisition of voting habits.

The question is addressed using two models, one for party support and one for turnout, each of which estimates change in left-right proximity in multivariate analysis that employs both left-right party position and left-right voter position as independent variables. So the models predict proximity from its two components using two different datasets. As shown in Table 2, changes in those components do account for most change in left-right proximity –accounting for between two-thirds and three-quarters of the variance in voter-party left-right proximity (higher  $R^2$  for the party support measures than for the turnout measures).

For party support (Model A) we see that parties do indeed dominate the picture, moving decisively (rows 2 and 3) in left-right terms towards voters who, tellingly, make no significant contribution to the resulting change in proximity between them and their parties).<sup>11</sup> For turnout (Model B) the party contribution is less than half what it was in Model A and, more importantly, the voter contribution is in the correct direction (even though showing only borderline statistical significance for the long-term effect).

**Table 2** Change in left-right proximity due to change in respondent vs party left-right location (party and birthyear cohort analyses)

	(Level of analysis):	Model A (Party level)	Model B (Birthyear cohort level)
Inputs	Outcome:	$\Delta$ .Proximity to party Coef. (s.e.)	$\Delta$ .Turnout Coef. (s.e.)
1) Lagged outcome (error correction parameter)		-1.20 (0.06)	-1.23 (0.02)
2) Differenced party left-right location $t$		0.60 (0.17)	0.23 (0.03)
3) Party left-right location $t-1$		0.72 (0.17)	0.33 (0.05)
4) Differenced supporter left-right location $t$		0.00 (0.05)ns	-0.07 (0.01)
5) Supporter left-right location $t-2$		0.07 (0.07)ns	-0.05 (0.02)ns
Constant		0.36 (0.12)	0.68 (0.02)
R-squared		0.73	0.66
Observations		354	4,357
Number of country-parties		165	
Number of country-birthyear-cohorts			1,961

Notes: All coefficients significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level, one-tailed, except where marked “ns”.

Though small, these effects of supporter left-right location provide critical support for my theorizing. The reason for their small size is that the estimated effects are effects seen over the

<sup>11</sup> The direction of change for party left-right locations should be opposite to the direction of change for voter left-right locations, when it comes to explaining change in voter-party proximity, although the specific direction of change for each of those actors is arbitrary and determined by estimation processes. Estimating a constructed measure from its components can create multicollinearity issues. Choice of estimation models and issues of model specification more generally are discussed in Appendix B.

electorate as a whole, even though the hypothesized effects were just for voters newly adult at their first election. Such voters make up a small proportion of the entire electorate, such that their influence on the overall election result might have been entirely washed out by the behavior of older, less responsive individuals.<sup>12</sup> It is noteworthy that this did not happen. In Model B we see that the dominant role is still played by parties; but this is not inconsistent with my argument. Indeed, active learning by new cohorts of voters is central to my theorizing at the individual level; and learning does not show up only as change in individual behavior. Learning is the corollary of persuasion and so we are bound to see persuasion effects if learning is taking place – persuasion effects that would show up precisely in terms of the party-level contribution to improved proximity that is evident in Model B. So a portion of those relatively large effects of party policy change, perhaps virtually all of them,<sup>13</sup> should in reality be attributed to the voter socialization processes that have been my focus when it comes to turnout, underlining the credit due to socializing forces for changes in voter-party proximity.

## **6) Discussion**

It has long been thought that turnout and party choice were intertwined. Scholars and pundits have known well that parties need to turn out their electoral base if they want electoral success. Equally well-known is that, while voters unhappy with policies of the party they support may switch support

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<sup>12</sup> Although my data distinguishes the target groups, their distinctiveness only shows up in error variance, not in estimated coefficients.

<sup>13</sup> In Appendix B, I show that if we change the measurement strategy used to derive left-right party position so as to rule out “contamination” by persuasion effects, the Model B effects in rows 2 and 3 of Table 2 are vastly reduced, with long-term effects (the effects of primary interest) losing statistical significance: powerful evidence that the party contribution to changes in party-voter proximity in turnout models should be ascribed to socializing processes.

to a different party, many of those voters will instead choose to abstain, with obvious effects on turnout. So finding a model that can evaluate in statistical terms the balance of forces governing shifts in party support, while showing how that balance involves turnout, has been something of an unacknowledged “holy grail” of electoral research. Apparently it has also been something of a “third rail” that researchers have been reluctant to touch for fear of electrocution.

In such circumstances it is perhaps not surprising that it would be a scholar nearing the end of his research career who would address such a question, if only in tentative fashion. In this, I seek to emulate Richard Rose, the celebrant in this Festschrift, who never (to the best of my knowledge) hesitated to address a new topic for fear of electrocution or anything else. This chapter is not the only product of new scholarly interest in unifying the study of turnout and party choice (see, for example, Angelucci, De Sio, Franklin and Weber forthcoming). Its objective has been to explore in what ways the intuitions of scholars and commentators work out in practice.

The proposed mechanism linking turnout and party choice is straightforward, once discovered, but quite obscure. It is based on different dynamic processes at different levels of aggregation, confirmed by means of diagnostic tools coming from different research traditions. At the individual level the relevant process was uncovered more than two decades ago (Plutzer 2002) and its relevance to turnout was elaborated in my (2004) *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies since 1945*. That title perhaps claimed too much for the findings reported in the volume concerned, but has proved prescient of the findings set out in this chapter. The (2004) findings focused on turnout shifts due generational replacement. Dynamics reported there now appear to have been only walking “shadows” or, perhaps, poor “replays” (Franklin 2022) of dynamics that could come into focus only at the party level of analysis, as first described by Franklin and Lutz (2020) and extended to incorporate turnout dynamics in Franklin

(2022), as elaborated in this chapter's Figure 1.

The findings reported here are preliminary and somewhat speculative. I can show the presence of a dynamic equilibrium for turnout, seemingly as a by-product of the factors that yield a dynamic equilibrium for party choice. But there are steps in the logic that lead from a support equilibrium to a turnout equilibrium that are still in need of clarification and empirical testing. The most that can be said for now is that the logic is plausible and that such tests as can be conducted with existing data are supportive of that logic. The tests consist not only of those presented in this chapter and its accompanying online appendices – tests conducted at the individual, party, birthyear-cohort and election levels of analysis. Numerous cognate tests were also conducted at the individual level of analysis in my chapter that was published in the *Handbook of Political Participation* (Franklin 2022). Those too showed findings consistent with the theory elaborated in this chapter.

However, more research is certainly needed. My hope, in writing this chapter, is that it will not only memorialize a great scholar, who made innumerable contributions to the early development of voting studies, but also stimulate future research that will extend and support the theoretical framework that I have put forward here – or establish in what way(s) the framework falls short. If supported, the findings I report could dispel many misconceptions about both turnout and party support; and serve as a stimulus to important future research involving the confluence of generational replacement and electoral dynamics.

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