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Studying the interplay of party support and turnout

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Abstract:

This chapter builds on earlier work (Franklin 2022) that explored a mechanism tying the evolution of party choice at the individual level to evolving 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.

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

1) Introduction¹

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).

Yet one of the most sterling qualities of Richard Rose as a scholar was his complete disregard for

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

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 earlier or later time-points, an approach 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.

Such a linkage would suggest that models of turnout are ubiquitously mis-specified through failure to take account of the influence of party support (or of variables linked to party support).

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.

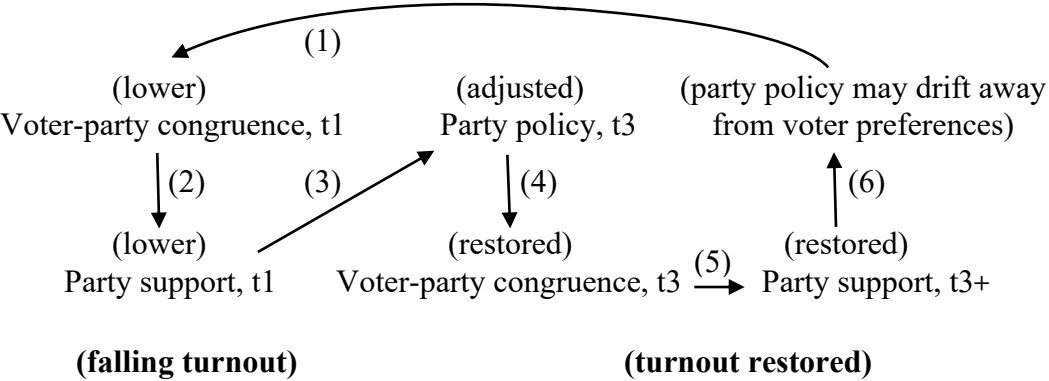


Figure 1 Schema for a feedback loop “correcting” voter-party congruence and turnout

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 reduced support 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.² Turnout

² Voter and party motivations in this model are rather different from those proposed by Anthony Downs

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 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 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

(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.

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).³ This link is not a logical necessity; indeed it assumes some degree of synchronization across parties. But the presence of such a link appears to produce the findings reported here. Democratic elections are very public events and public enthusiasm can be contagious, presumably working to synchronise periods of strong and weak party support across a party system taken as a whole (see Appendix B Section 2).

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 acquisition. Partisanship is often omitted from individual-level turnout models because it “explains away” 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 (but see Lefkofridi et al. 2014). In this chapter I build on my (2022) individual-level findings to investigate an equilibrium turnout model

³ 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.

at the party level – one that includes both party support and congruence in a time-series cross-section analysis that will be described in this chapter’s Section 3.

In my (2022) study I suggested 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. Plutzer (2002) established the presence of what he called a “developmental process” during which most citizens newly adult at t_1 will evolve from impressionable young adults into habitual voters (or non-voters) by t_3 . This three-election period is a period of learning for newly adult voters: learning not only of partisanship but also of their own policy preferences and the policy stances taken by the various parties vying for their votes. But (not stressed in Plutzer’s account) this learning is shaped by electoral experiences (Franklin 2004:43). More young adults learn the habit of voting if they experience high-turnout elections during this period. So the developmental process is not continuous but depends on the timing of high-turnout elections. If the first election a young adult encounters is a high turnout election then the process is jump-started and little if any additional learning may take place over the next two elections. So we expect a negative relationship between turnout increase at the first election and the level of turnout two elections later, with higher initial turnout leading to less increase in turnout over the process as a whole than if the initial turnout level had been lower.

Perhaps surprisingly, my (2022) chapter discovered an even stronger effect of the developmental process on voter-party congruence than on partisanship. Newly adult voters learn where their preferred party stands in policy terms even while learning a preference for that party.

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 2016.⁴ 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 (see the online Appendix A for details).⁵ 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.⁶

⁴ 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.

⁵ I deleted Hong Kong (not a country) and countries contributing insufficient contiguous time-points. 28 countries remain 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, United States.

⁶ 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, differing numbers of birthyear cohorts can enter an electorate at the time of specific elections, reducing possible aggregation artifacts by permitting the different numbers of birthyear cohorts contained

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; for fuller treatment of ECMs with my data see Appendix C).

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 study 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 one such gap. 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 than -1) will diagnose a series with less than a 1-timepoint 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 statistically significant. In this

within each electoral cohort to be reflected in the significance levels 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.

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 fourth 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 within-model processes (not to external disturbances) there is reason to expect short-term ECM effects to be small, even absent. This expectation provides an incidental test (most clearly seen in Appendix B) 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, 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 (“Δ”) 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:⁷

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

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

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

The number of lags for feedback coefficients in Models 2 and 3 that have “t-?” suffixes are discovered empirically because we do not know how many elections correspond to the unspecified delay theorized for feedback (cf Wlezien 2018). Lags for the different terms named in Model 3 accord with Figure 1: change in support has immediate effect because turnout is a corollary of party support; proximity has a delayed effect because it calls for socializing processes that take time to play out, as explained at the end of Section 2. The roles of the various terms in these equations will now be described in light of 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. Model C instead

⁷ Existing literature regarding feedback for policy-makers generally assumes that policy adjustments are made after a single lag (Wlezien 2018:407) but I find stronger feedback effects on the second lag, which accords with the theory presented earlier. The general theory of policy responsiveness presented in (Wlezien 2018) is not specific about how long is the feedback lag, just that a lag is needed if the direction of causation is to be established. Luckily there is reason to expect such a lag in most policy-making situations.

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 to the same electoral and 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). Importantly the lag structure found empirically, with a two election gap between disequilibrium and correction, reflects expectations illustrated in Figure 1.⁸

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

Level of analysis:	<u>Party level</u>	<u>Birthyear level</u>	<u>Birthyear level</u>
Concept:	Model A Representation (party support)	Model B Feedback (policy adjustment)	Model C Competition (implied by policy adjustment)
Outcome:	Δ .Support for party	Δ .Proximity to party	Δ .Turnout
Inputs:	Coef. (s.e.)	Coef. (s.e.)	Coef. (s.e.)
1) Lagged outcome (ECP)	-1.07 (0.06)	-1.38 (0.14)	-1.39 (0.02)
2) Δ .left-right proximity $_t$	0.23 (0.08)		
3) Left-right proximity $_{t-1}$	0.33 (0.12)		
4) Δ .Support for party(log) \dagger_t			0.24 (0.02)
5) Support for party(log) $^\dagger_{t-1}$			0.43 (0.04)
6) Δ .Support for party $_{t-2}$		-0.29 (0.05)	
7) Support for party $_{t-3}$		-0.40 (0.10)	
8) Δ .left-right proximity $_{t-2}$			-0.23 (0.14)ns
9) Left-right proximity $_{t-3}$			-0.54 (0.21)
Intercept	-0.07 (0.07)ns	0.98 (0.02)	2.68 (0.21)
R-squared	0.64	0.76	0.91
Observations	358	920	920
Number of country-parties	167		
Number of election-birthyears		709	709

Note: All coefficients significant at $p < 0.01$, one-tailed unless marked ns (not significant). Coefficients are scaled relative to maximum change found empirically for the variable concerned (max=1), subject to log transformations in Model C.

\dagger The log transformation addresses artifacts due to very different distributions of the two inputs.

⁸ Two-election lags for Model B work almost as well as the three-election lags used here (see Appendix B). The longer lags are chosen because they should match Model C lags, so are theoretically expected.

In Model A the outcome ($\Delta\text{support}_t$) 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.⁹

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.¹⁰

⁹ 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). The magnitudes of effects are evaluated in Appendix B, Section 2.

¹⁰ 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

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 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 a previous election and I find a short-term (differenced) measure from t-2 (Row 6) and a long-term (lagged) measure from t-3 (Row 7). 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 (-0.35 in Row 7) comes close to balancing the disequilibrating effect (+0.33) in row 3 of Model A.

In Model C we shift our attention to turnout. Here the outcome is the proportion voting for any party, among different birthyear cohorts of respondents – the groupings of respondents that should show the consequences of different electoral and socializing experiences. And, once again, we see marked positive disequilibrating effects (in row 5) being corrected by countervailing negative feedback in Row 9.¹¹

(see Section 5 for more on this topic).

¹¹ Note that there are no missing observations in the data used for this table. Respondents who did not vote are coded 0 for both party support and turnout, distinguished through party support getting different values for different parties (=1 for the party that was supported) while turnout gets the same value for all parties (=1 if any party was supported); proximity is coded for all respondents on the basis of mean values for (some of) those who responded to a request for party placements (see Appendix B3) and missing self-placements are plugged with variance-inflated values imputed from the other variables in each model. Sizes of coefficients in rows 5 and 9 are not comparable because of the log transform used for party support, needed to address its very different distributional character from that of proximity.

In the turnout model, as in the party support models, we see the correction being a largely long-term phenomenon. At the same time, because there is no necessary delay inherent in decisions whether to vote or not,¹² the delay we see following the positive effects (in rows 4 and 5 of the turnout model, before their reversal (in rows 6 and 7) is telling. It corresponds to the time delay underlying the transformation, at the individual level, of malleable younger adults 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. This otherwise inexplicable delay corresponds to the time needed for changes in proximity associated with generational replacement at the individual level (Franklin 2022). Additional indirect evidence will be reported in the next section of this chapter.

These findings must be treated as tentative. They call for careful model specification, involving thoughtful measurement choices for which there are no established protocols (see Appendix B). They also are subject to a problem that we *can* address: 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, 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 Table 2). However, persuasion is a definite possibility – indeed such effects are required for learning to take place, the topic to which we now turn.

¹² 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 Model C of Table 1 we see both types of change occurring: change due to voter malleability in rows 4 and 5 and change due to generational replacement in rows 8 and 9. 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), the short-term versus long-term concepts (while broadly consistent across modeling strategies) are not the same and can overlap.

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 on party support) or through their success in persuading voters to support the policies espoused by their parties? The same question can be asked about effects of proximity on turnout. Is the correction in turnout level due to left-right movement by voters (as hypothesized)? Or do changes in party policy play a role?

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 voter-party congruence and one for turnout, each of which estimates change in outcome (proximity or turnout) in multivariate analyses that employ both (average) left-right party positions and (average) left-right voter positions as independent variables. So the models focus on proximity's components, using two different datasets. As shown in Table 2, changes in those components do account for most change in the two outcome variables – explaining some two-thirds of the variance in both outcomes.

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 or away from their voters who, tellingly, make no significant contribution to the long-term change in proximity between them and their parties).¹³ For

¹³ In both models, the direction of change for party left-right locations should be opposite to the direction of change for voter left-right locations, although the specific direction of change for each of those actors is arbitrary and determined by estimation processes (the supporter effects in Model A are not just small but also

turnout (Model B) it is the party contributions that are not statistically significant using one-tailed tests, but the corresponding voter contributions are significant and not trivial (note that only the long-term ECM effects are relevant to our theorizing in this chapter).¹⁴

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

Inputs	Level of analysis:	Model A	Model B
	Outcome: Δ .	Party level	Birthyear level
		Δ .Proximity to party	Δ .Turnout
		Coef. (s.e.)	Coef. (s.e.)
1) Lagged outcome (error correction parameter)		-1.20 (0.06)	-1.32 (0.02)
2) Differenced party left-right location t		0.60 (0.17)	0.23 (0.06)ns
3) Party left-right location $t-1$		0.72 (0.17)	-0.18 (0.19)ns
4) Differenced supporter left-right location t		0.00 (0.05)ns	0.07 (0.03)
5) Supporter left-right location $t-1$		0.07 (0.07)ns	0.11 (0.06)
Constant		0.36 (0.12)	0.68 (0.02)
R-squared		0.67	0.66
Observations		354	4,357
Number of country-parties		165	
Number of country-birthyears			1,961

Notes: All coefficients significant at $p < 0.05$, one-tailed, except where marked “ns” (the row 2 effect of party location on turnout fails a one-tailed test because it has the wrong sign; effects of supporter left-right location on proximity fail their one-tailed tests not just because of their small magnitudes relative to their standard errors but also because they have the wrong signs; see footnote 13).

Though small, the statistically significant effects of supporter left-right location in Model B provide critical support for my theorizing regarding maintenance of an equilibrium level of turnout. The reason for their small size is that the estimated effects are effects seen over the electorate as a whole, even though the hypothesized effects were just for voters experiencing formative electoral

in the wrong direction, given the significant supporter effects we see in Model B). 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.

¹⁴ I should stress that long-term ECM effects are relevant only to the equilibration process. Other research (especially Franklin 2004; 2022) has demonstrated the presence of many other influences on the level of that equilibrium, which is apparently in constant motion up as well as down.

experiences. Such voters make up a small proportion of the entire electorate,¹⁵ so that their influence on the overall election result might have been entirely washed out by the behavior of older, less responsive individuals.¹⁶ It is noteworthy that this does not happen.

Change in proximity makes a huge contribution to turnout equilibration and relevant changes in proximity are wholly the result of evolving voter policy preferences. Remaining sources of turnout equilibration come via changes in party support, also governed by changes in voter policy preferences. So this model puts voters in the driver's seat, subject only to parties positioning their own policies relative to voter preferences. Other variables clearly matter for what we know to be a constantly shifting equilibrium level of turnout, but not for maintaining that equilibrium.

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 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.

¹⁵ About 20 percent for comparably-sized pre- and post-socialization groups taken together. For them, long-term supporter effects are about double what they are in the electorate as a whole while short-term supporter effects are unchanged. It might be wondered how change in proximity for such a small proportion of the electorate could have the strong effects reported in Table 1. But that 20 percent constitute a much larger proportion of those members of an electorate expected theoretically to change their policy preferences. Recently adult individuals dominate electoral change (Erikson 2018; Brug and Franklin 2018).

¹⁶ Although my data distinguish the target groups, their distinctiveness shows up in error variance, not in the magnitudes of estimated coefficients. Interpreting those magnitudes is a subject for Appendix B.

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 taken from different research traditions. At the individual level a seemingly relevant process was uncovered more than two decades ago (Plutzer 2002), whose applicability to turnout was elaborated in my (2004) *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies since 1945*. That title might be thought to have claimed too much for the findings reported in the volume concerned, suggesting an account of equilibrating processes that it did not in fact address; but the title has proved prescient of the findings set out in this chapter. The (2004) findings focused on turnout shifts playing out over time due to generational replacement. Turnout dynamics reported there are still highly relevant but need to be distinguished from party-level dynamics 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 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.¹⁷ The most that can

¹⁷ In particular, the evolution of newly adult individuals into habitual voters is assumed to be accompanied by

be said for now is that the logic is plausible and that such tests as have been conducted 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 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.

In particular, the role of voter-party congruence (here operationalized by proximity in left-right terms), in individual-level turnout models, is critical. The central role of this variable in linking turnout to party choice in over-time perspective reinforces the suggestion, already made by Franklin (2022), that this variable should not be omitted from individual-level accounts of the mainsprings of voter turnout, along lines seemingly pioneered by Lefkofridi et al. (2014).

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 springboard for important future research findings involving the confluence of generational replacement and electoral dynamics.

an evolution of their policy congruence whose extent negatively reflects the extent of policy congruence two elections earlier. This is not implausible because the direction of the evolution is from depressed congruence for the newly adult person to established congruence two elections later. If the newly adult citizen's first election is hard-fought it is likely that this will accelerate the acquisition of policy congruence with a preferred party, leaving less of a depression in congruence to be made good over the ensuing period – less of a positive effect for socializing processes. Or the active ingredient in this less positive effect of socialization might be quite different. It is clear that something happens over a two-election period that affects the voter contribution to voter-party congruence and the learning process established by Plutzer (2002) is a good candidate for being that “something”; but this conjecture is still in need of careful validation.

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