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WHAT EXPLAINS VOTER TURNOUT IN LATIN AMERICA? A TEST OF THE EFFECT OF CITIZENS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE ELECTORAL PROCESS*

¿Qué explica la participación electoral en América Latina? Un estudio sobre el efecto de la actitud de los ciudadanos hacia el proceso electoral

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ABSTRACT

Research on electoral participation at the individual level in Latin America remains scarce. This article extends our knowledge about the individual-level factors that impact citizens' propensity to vote in the region. Specifically, I assess the link between citizens' trust in the electoral process and voter turnout using recent survey data from 19 Latin American countries between 2004 and 2014. Using logistic models I show that trust in the fairness of elections has a significant and positive effect on voter turnout across the region, and that this effect is mediated by the existence of compulsory voting laws.

Key words: voter turnout, trust in elections, voter behavior, Latin American elections, democracy

RESUMEN

Los estudios sobre la participación electoral a nivel individual en América Latina son escasos. Este artículo busca contribuir a esta literatura. Específicamente, el presente estudio evalúa el vínculo entre la confianza de los ciudadanos en el proceso electoral y su participación en elecciones presidenciales a partir de datos de encuestas llevadas a cabo en 19 países de América Latina desde el año 2004 hasta el 2014. Mediante el uso de modelos logísticos, se demuestra que la confianza en las elecciones tiene un efecto positivo y significativo en la participación electoral en toda la región y que la magnitud de este efecto depende de la existencia de leyes de voto obligatorio.

Palabras clave: participación electoral, confianza en las elecciones, comportamiento electoral, elecciones en América Latina, democracia

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I. INTRODUCTION

Cross-national studies of voter turnout among advanced industrial countries are abundant. These have focused primarily on the impact of institutional variables (Powell 1986; Jackman 1987; Jackman and Miller 1995), rarely looking at individual-level data to understand the factors that impact citizens' participation in elections. Comparative research on electoral participation in Latin America at the individual level is also scarce. Over the last decade, several scholars have studied the determinants of the cross-country differences in electoral participation in the region (Pérez-Liñán 2001; Fornos et al. 2004; Dettrey and Schwindt-Bayer 2009), but have mainly focused on institutional and contextual factors such as registration procedures, compulsory voting laws, and concurrent presidential and legislative elections.

In recent years, comparative studies of advanced industrial democracies have started to focus on the effect that citizens' attitudes and perceptions towards political institutions have on electoral participation (Cox 2003; Grönlund and Setälä 2007; Birch 2010). However, this type of research in Latin America remains limited. The purpose of this article is thus to extend knowledge of these individual-level determinants of electoral participation in the region. In order to do this, I assess the link between citizens' confidence in the electoral process and turnout using recent survey data from 19 Latin American countries between 2004 and 2014. To my knowledge, only one previous article has examined this relationship in the region, using survey data for the year 2010 (Carreras and İrepoğlu 2013). In this study, I extend the analysis using a larger timespan in order to better examine the impact of citizens' trust in elections on their electoral participation within and between countries over time.

I find evidence that trust in the electoral process is a significant determinant of individual incentives to vote across the region. However, the effect of this variable is mediated by the existence of compulsory voting laws. In particular, trust in elections remains a stronger predictor of turnout in countries where voting is voluntary in comparison to those countries where voting is compulsory, irrespective of whether this is enforced or not. In addition, the analysis shows that education is one of the strongest predictors of turnout in the region and that, as the conventional wisdom holds, older and employed citizens are more likely to vote. The results also provide evidence about women's higher propensity to vote than men across the region, and about the importance of party identification, political interest, and exposure to vote-buying for increasing turnout.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section summarizes the main theoretical approaches that have tried to explain voter turnout in the comparative literature. In the second section, I set out the theory and the expected hypothesis. In the third section, I describe the dataset and the variables, as well as the method used in the empirical analysis. In the fourth section, I report and analyze the empirical results. The final section offers some concluding remarks.

II. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO VOTER TURNOUT IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The importance of voter turnout for democratic stability and the overall health of democracy has motivated a large literature that tries to understand why voter turnout varies across countries (Powell 1986; Teixeira 1992; Lijphart 1997). Existing cross-national research has focused on the effects of two main groups of variables: institutions and socio-demographic characteristics.

Institutional Explanations

Comparative, aggregate-level research has established that institutional variables are the strongest determinants of variations in voter turnout. Institutional and political context explanations focus on the effects of electoral rules and the structure of the political system on voters' decision-making calculations about whether to vote. The electoral system (Blais and Carty 1991; Radcliff and Davis 2000), the electoral cycle (Fornos et al. 2004; Dettrey and Schwindt-Bayer 2009), compulsory voting laws (Jackman 1987; Hirczy 1994; Jackman and Miller 1995; Pérez-Liñán 2001; Fornos et al. 2004; Power and Garand 2007), unicameralism (Jackman 1987; Pérez-Liñán 2001; Fornos et al. 2004; Kostadinova and Power 2007), district magnitude, the disproportionality of the electoral system, nationally competitive districts, and party fragmentation (Jackman 1987; Pérez-Liñán 2001; Fornos et al. 2004;; Lehoucq and Wall 2004; Kostadinova and Power 2007) have all been linked to voter turnout.

As regards compulsory voting, the theoretical expectation is that it should increase the costs of non-voting, thereby generating incentives to show up at the polls. This relation has been confirmed by most studies of turnout in Western democracies (for a review of the studies see Blais 2006). Unicameralism should also lead to higher rates of turnout because citizens will have greater perceptions of the decisiveness and the efficiency of their vote. This is because under a "strong" bicameral system, where both chambers have equal constitutional powers (Lijphart 1984), laws have to be discussed and approved in both chambers, so either of the chambers can act as a veto player. As a result, "elections for the lower house play a less decisive role in the production of legislation" (Jackman 1987: 408), and citizens should have less incentives to vote. However, the findings about the impact of unicameralism on turnout are mixed (Blais 2006).

The causal mechanism linking the electoral system to voter turnout remains unclear (Blais 2006). On the one hand, it has been argued that proportional representation (PR) with high average district magnitudes should have a positive effect on turnout due to the higher number of competitive districts, increasing the incentives for party mobilization. In contrast, in majority systems with single-member districts, most districts remain uncompetitive (Cox 2014).

Studies have, for the most part, confirmed the hypothesis that countries with a higher number of competitive districts have higher overall rates of turnout as a result of mobilization efforts by parties (Jackman 1987; Blais and Carty 1991; Jackman and Miller 1995; Radcliff and Davis 2000). In addition, PR should have a positive effect on turnout due to the disproportional effects in the translation of votes into seats in majority-type electoral systems, which could diminish voters' sense of political efficacy, increasing the belief that their vote is of no importance and leading them to abstain from voting (Blais and Dobrzynska 1998). On the other hand, PR should have a negative effect on voter turnout due to the higher number of parties that it fosters in comparison to majority systems. Almost all of the empirical research has found a negative correlation between the number of parties and turnout (Jackman 1987; Blais and Carty 1991; Blais and Dobrzynska 1998; Radcliff and Davis 2000), except in Latin America, where there seems to be no relationship between these variables (Pérez-Liñán 2001; Fornos et al. 2004).

Concurrent elections in presidential systems have also been linked to increased voter turnout (Dettrey and Schwindt-Bayer 2009). This can be attributed to two main reasons: they reduce the costs of voting because citizens can go to the polls once rather than having to make two trips, and they clarify the policy implications of the vote. The former refers to the reduction in the physical costs of voting. The latter has to do with the fact that concurrent presidential and legislative elections increase the likelihood of a majority government, where the winning party will supposedly be better able to implement its policy agenda. Thus, voters should be able to distinguish more clearly the policy consequences of their presidential vote, increasing the perceived benefits of voting as a result.

Specifically in Latin America, there have been mixed findings about the impact of institutional variables. Pérez-Liñán (2001) finds that neither multipartism, unicameralism, electoral disproportionality, the type of electoral district (whether it is competitive or not), nor compulsory voting are significant predictors of voter turnout in presidential and legislative elections. On the contrary, the findings of Fornos et al. (2004) suggest that turnout is determined primarily by unicameralism, compulsory voting, and concurrent elections, which have significant positive effects on turnout. Kostadinova and Power (2007) also find an effect of institutional variables on voter turnout in the region: unicameralism, disproportionality, district magnitude, and concurrent elections are all significant predictors of participation in legislative elections.

Socio-demographic Explanations

Cross-national as well as nation-specific studies relying on survey data have concluded that the "resource model" of political participation is a strong predictor of citizens' political involvement. The model developed by Brady et al. (1995) argues that participation is driven by time, money and civic skills, and

that these resources are distributed unequally across socio-economic groups. Those citizens with higher socio-economic status (SES) are more likely to acquire and have a wider range of resources that allow them to better bear the costs of voting and are thus more likely to turn out (Almond and Verba 1963; Verba and Nie 1972; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). These individuals tend to have more time to participate in politics and are better informed than less educated and lower income citizens (Verba and Nie 1972; Rosenstone 1982).

Research on conventional political participation in the developed world has also found that age is associated with turnout (Lane 1959; Strate et al. 1989; Jankowski and Strate 1995): as citizens transition into adulthood, they become more involved with public affairs, more connected with their communities, and develop a greater sense of civic duty, which increases their incentives to participate. In addition, as older citizens become inserted in social networks, their behavior is monitored and scrutinized by others, increasing the costs of not voting. Gender has also been linked to voter turnout: it has been argued that men have more resources and, thus, are more likely to turnout than women. However, recent comparative research suggests that the gender gap has gradually disappeared and that it is usually women who turnout at higher rates than men (Lehoucq and Wall 2004; Desposato and Norrander 2009).

In addition, comparative and within-country studies have found that party identification increases the probability of voting (Campbell et al. 1960; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Blais 2000; Green et al. 2002). Identifying with a political party reduces the costs of voting because it serves as a decision short-cut when voters are trying to choose between different electoral options (Downs 1957; Campbell et al. 1960). Furthermore, it has been argued that citizens who identify with a political party obtain a higher expressive benefit when voting and therefore have a higher motivation to do so (Achen and Sinnott 2007).

A Not-So-New Explanation: Citizens' Confidence In The Electoral Process

Even though the conventional wisdom holds that institutions outperform other, individual-level variables in explaining variations in voter turnout, a growing comparative literature has been focusing on the psychological determinants of why people vote, especially with respect to citizens' confidence in the integrity of the electoral process. Birch (2010) analyzes the relationship between perceptions of electoral fairness and turnout in 31 countries between 1996 and 2002 using survey data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. Her findings provide evidence in favor of a positive relation between confidence in the electoral process and voting. Norris (2012) also explores the relationship between citizens' trust in electoral institutions and participation in elections. Using data from the sixth wave of the World Values Survey for the period 2010 to 2012, the author finds evidence of the positive impact that citizens' perceptions

of electoral integrity have on turnout: “those with more faith in the process proved more willing to cast a ballot” (Norris 2012: 13). Similarly, Alvarez et al. (2008) find that in the United States those citizens who are more confident in the integrity of the electoral process (i.e. confidence that their ballot was counted correctly) are more likely to vote.

However, few studies have analyzed the impact of citizens’ attitudes towards elections on turnout in Latin America. The first article to address this issue was McCann and Domínguez (1998), whose Mexican case study examined the effect that perceptions of electoral fraud and corruption had on electoral participation and outcomes using national public opinion surveys conducted between 1986 and 1995. Their findings provide evidence of the negative impact of citizens’ perceptions of electoral fraud on their likelihood of turnout: the greater the expectation of fraud, the lower the likelihood of voting. Conversely, those who believed that the electoral process wasn’t fraudulent and that their vote would make a difference for the electoral result were more likely to turnout.

More recently, an article by Cantú and García-Ponce (2015) focuses on perceptions of electoral fairness among the Mexican electorate. However, this article doesn’t seek to explain the impact of citizens’ attitudes towards the electoral process on turnout, but rather the variables that help to understand how these perceptions come about. Using three nation-wide pre- and post-electoral surveys for the presidential election of 2012, they find evidence of partisan effects on attitudes towards the electoral process. Supporters of the incumbent party showed lower levels of confidence in the integrity of the electoral process once they learned that their preferred candidate lost, whereas doubt about this process among supporters of a party that never won the elections remained consistent over time.

Carreras and İrepoğlu (2013) explore the impact of trust in elections on voter turnout, going a step further with a cross-national comparison between Latin American countries. Using data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project for the year 2010, the authors find a positive and significant effect of this variable on turnout, especially in countries without compulsory voting laws. In turn, in countries where voting is mandatory the effect of perceptions of electoral fairness on turnout is weaker, as citizens have incentives to vote in order to avoid sanctions. Because the authors only focus on one year it is hard to derive a conclusion about the impact of citizens’ trust in elections across the region over time.

In sum, while comparative aggregate-level research has established the predominance of institutional variables for explaining variations in voter turnout, there is a growing literature on electoral participation that has focused on the effect that individual-level perceptions of the electoral process have on turnout. However, this type of research in Latin America still remains scarce.

III. THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

My expectation regarding the effect of trust in elections on voter turnout is based on previous research on the psychological determinants of why people vote. Following previous evidence (McAllister and White 2011), I argue that when citizens trust in the integrity of the electoral process, and therefore believe that the outcome of elections are not a foregone conclusion, they will feel more politically efficacious. If, on the other hand, citizens have less confidence in the electoral process and believe that elections are unfair or manipulated, this will undermine their feelings of political efficacy.

Political efficacy refers to “the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process, i.e. that it is worthwhile to perform one’s civic duties” (Campbell et al. 1954: 187). In other words, it refers to citizens’ beliefs that their actions—in this case, voting—can influence the outcome of political decisions—in this case, the result of the election and the direction of the policies that will be enacted as a result (Craig and Maggiotto 1982). When citizens have high levels of trust in the integrity of the electoral process, they feel more politically efficacious due to the perception that political institutions will be responsive to their attempts to exert political influence (Clarke and Acock 1989). In turn, when citizens are less confident about the fairness of the electoral process they will have a harder time believing that their vote will have an impact on the outcome of the election (especially if they are convinced that their votes will not be counted as intended), negatively affecting their sense of political efficacy.

Assuming that citizens derive a benefit from “affirming their efficacy in the political system” (Riker and Ordeshook 1968: 28) and complying with their civic duty, the benefit they derive from voting will outweigh their perceived costs (Riker and Ordeshook 1968). As a result, they will have more incentives to turnout (Almond and Verba 1963; Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Craig and Maggiotto 1982; Finkel 1985). An increased sense of political efficacy will help citizens overcome the constant suspicion that their participation is hopeless, as they will instead believe that their vote can impact the outcome of the election and the functioning of political institutions, leading them to prefer to vote on election day rather than stay at home (Karp and Banducci 2008).

In turn, if citizens perceive that elections are not a trustworthy instrument through which they can impact the political process and the election results, the costs that they perceive from voting may outweigh any perceived benefits, leading them to prefer to stay home on election day. Because citizens will likely feel less politically efficacious if they believe that there are irregularities in the way the electoral process is conducted, their electoral participation will suffer (Shaffer 1981; Abramson and Aldrich 1982). As Birch (2010) claims:

If voters fear that polls are corrupt, they have less incentive to bother casting a vote; participating in a process in which they do not have

confidence will be less attractive, and they may well perceive the outcome of the election to be a foregone conclusion (Birch 2010: 1603).

In fact, empirical evidence shows that a lack of political efficacy is a major cause of low voter turnout (Campbell et al. 1954; Abramson and Aldrich 1982). Thus, my main hypothesis is that, other things being equal, *citizens with higher levels of trust in elections will be more likely to vote.*

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

Data and Variables

In order to study the impact of citizens' confidence in the electoral process on voter turnout, I use data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project's (LAPOP) Americas Barometer for 19 countries for the period from 2004 to 2014.¹ Table 3 in the Appendix presents the countries, the years for which survey data is available, and the total number of respondents for each country included in the study.

The dependent variable in the analysis is self-reported voter turnout in presidential elections. This variable is measured in the surveys through the following question: *Did you vote in the last presidential elections of (year of last presidential elections)?* **Turnout** is thus a dichotomous variable, measuring whether respondents voted in the last presidential elections: 1=yes, voted; 0=no, did not vote.

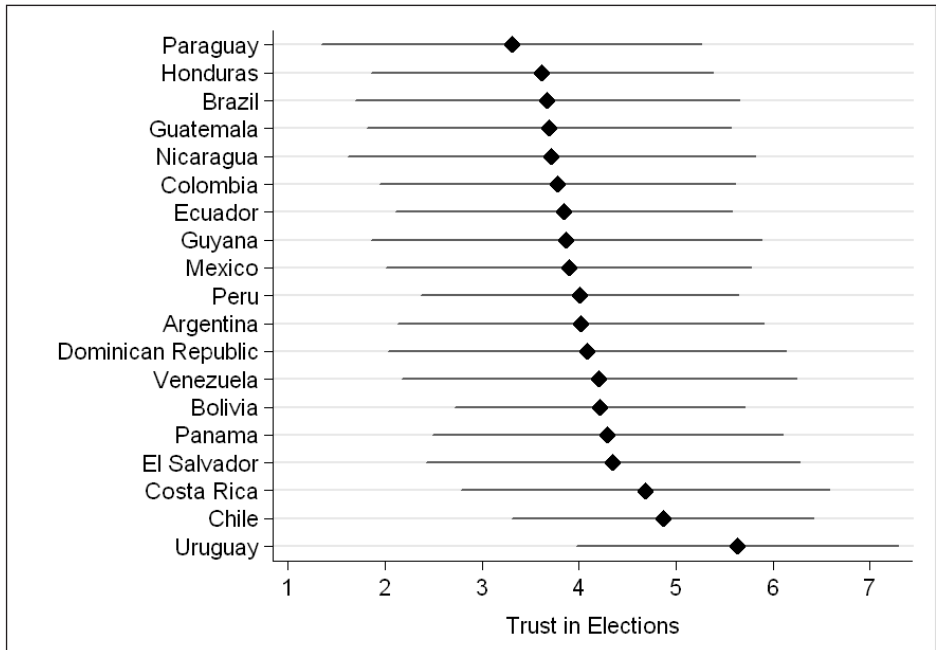
One of the limitations of using survey data to measure turnout is that most of the time the proportion of respondents who report voting is greater than the proportion who actually voted. It has been argued that this is due to the fact that non-voters are motivated to give a socially desirable response. Voter validation studies in the United States that match a respondent's reported turnout against the official election records have confirmed the existence of this bias towards over-reporting, especially due to a great number of non-voters who claim to have voted (Clausen 1968; Silver et al. 1986; Karp and Brockington 2005; Selb and Munzert 2013). While I am aware of this limitation in the data, I was unable to match respondents' reported turnout against the official elections records with the information I have, so I will proceed with the use of self-reported turnout as my dependent variable.

The main independent variable of this study is **trust in elections**. The variable was constructed on the basis of the following question: *To what extent do you trust elections in this country?* Responses were given using a 1 to 7 scale, where a value of 1 corresponds to "not at all" and a value of 7 corresponds to "a lot".

¹ The datasets and country questionnaires are available from the AmericasBarometer operated by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), www.LapopSurveys.org.

Figure 1 graphs the mean level of trust in elections in each country (with the corresponding standard deviations) for all the years in which the survey was administered. In the period covered by the data, the average level of trust in elections varied between a low of 3.31 (sd=1.96) in Paraguay and a high of 5.63 (sd=1.66) in Uruguay.

Figure 1. Mean trust in elections in Latin America, 2004-2014



Note: Bars indicate standard deviations.

To test my main hypothesis, I also include a series of individual-level² and aggregate-level control variables that have been shown in previous research to affect electoral participation. First, it is possible that the age of the respondents has an impact on their likelihood of turnout (Lane 1959; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Strate et al. 1989; Jankowski and Strate 1995). **Age** is a variable that measures the age of the respondents in each survey, dividing it into five cohorts. I expect that, other things being equal, older people, whose age makes them more likely to have a greater sense of civic duty and are more aware of public affairs, will turnout at a higher rate than younger people.

Second, I include a dummy variable that measures the **gender** of the respondent (1=male). My expectation is that in Latin America, women will turnout more

² More information about the operationalization of these individual-level variables can be found in the Appendix.

than men. Even though it has been argued that men have more resources than women and thus have higher rates of electoral participation, recent research in the region suggests that the gender gap has been gradually disappearing and that women have higher turnout rates than men (Seligson 2002; Lehoucq and Wall 2004; Carreras and Castañeda-Angarita 2013).

Furthermore, I incorporate a series of control variables corresponding to the socio-economic model of participation: employment status, income, and education. **Employment status** is a dummy variable that measures whether respondents were employed or unemployed at the time of the survey (1=employed). **Income** is a categorical variable that measures the decile into which the respondents' household monthly income fits. **Education** is an ordinal variable that measures whether the respondents had no education (0), primary school (1), secondary school education, (2), or achieved a higher education (3). Following the expectations of the resource model of political participation, I hypothesize that citizens with jobs, a higher income, and a higher level of education are more likely to turnout (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Leighley and Nagler 1992).

In addition, because studies have consistently found that partisan attachments affect how citizens approach the political world (Campbell et al. 1960; Green et al. 2002), I include a dichotomous variable measuring whether **respondents identify with the party of the incumbent president** (1=yes). I interact this variable with **trust in elections** and expect it to have a positive impact on turnout because there might be a partisan effect on attitudes towards the electoral process (Cantú and García-Ponce 2015): supporters of the party of the incumbent president who have higher levels of confidence in the electoral process might be more likely to vote.

Citizens who are interested in politics might also be more likely to vote, since this suggests a high level of psychological engagement with the political process (Brady et al. 1995). Accordingly, previous research in Latin America has found that citizens who are more interested in political issues are more likely to turnout (Carlin 2006; Carreras and Castañeda-Angarita 2013; Carreras and İrepoğlu 2013). **Political interest** is a variable that ranges from 1 to 4 and I expect it to have a positive effect on turnout.

Another variable that might affect citizens' likelihood of turnout is their exposure to vote-buying incentives. A large literature argues that vote-buying works as a tool for electoral mobilization (Stokes 2005; Nichter 2008; Stokes et al. 2013). For example, using data from Argentina, Nichter (2008) finds that party machines use clientelistic networks as a turnout-buying strategy, mobilizing supporters who would have otherwise stayed home on election day. **Exposure to vote-buying** is an ordinal variable from 1 to 3 that takes the value of 1 for respondents who have never been offered a favor, good or any other benefit in return for their vote and the value of 3 for those who have experienced this

often. In line with the literature I expect this variable to have a positive effect on turnout.

Citizens' perceptions of corruption might also impact their likelihood of voting. **Corruption** is an ordinal variable ranging from 1 to 4 that measures whether respondents believe that corruption is common among public officials in their country. The empirical evidence provides mixed findings on the impact of corruption on turnout. While some studies find a negative relationship between both variables (McCann and Domínguez 1988; Caillier 2010; Stockemer et al. 2012; Stockemer 2013), others find that it has a mobilizing effect making citizens more likely to vote, either to punish the incumbent government or to bring to power politicians with integrity (Kostadinova 2009; Inman and Andrews 2010). As a result, I have a double-tailed hypothesis regarding the effect of this variable: it could have a positive effect on turnout, but it could also have a negative effect.

At the aggregate-level, I control for whether voting is compulsory or not. **Compulsory** is a categorical variable that takes the value of 0 in countries where voting is voluntary, 1 where voting is mandatory but not enforced, and 2 where it is both mandatory and enforced. The incentives to comply with the obligation to vote will likely depend on whether the government is strict about its enforcement, and the literature on turnout in Latin America has shown that in countries where voting is compulsory and sanctions for non-voting are enforced turnout tends to be higher (Pérez-Liñán 2001; Fornos et al. 2004; Carlin and Love 2015). As a result, I expect this variable to have a positive effect, and that citizens will be more likely to vote in countries where voting is both mandatory and enforced.

I also include an interaction term between **trust in elections** and **compulsory voting**. When voting is compulsory, the explanatory power of trust in elections will likely decrease, as voting "is easy, common, and legally coerced" (Carlin and Love 2015: 51) and voters become less dependent on their internal motivation to vote. In turn, when voting is voluntary, citizens have to rely more heavily in this internal motivation and the impact of citizens' confidence in the electoral process will likely be stronger. In addition, in their study of the impact of trust in elections on turnout in Latin America, Carreras and İrepoğlu (2013) concluded that "trust in elections is a much stronger predictor of electoral participation in countries where compulsory voting laws do not exist" (Carreras and İrepoğlu 2013: 617). As a result, I expect **compulsory*trust in elections** to have a negative effect on voter turnout.

Closeness is a variable that measures the difference in the percentage of votes obtained by the first and second most voted presidential candidates, since the literature has found that turnout tends to be higher in elections that are competitive (Powell 1986; Blais and Carty 1991; Cox 2014). Because higher values of this variable indicate a less competitive election, I expect **closeness** to have a negative effect on turnout.

Finally, I control for whether presidential and legislative elections are concurrent, whether the country has a unicameral system, and for party system polarization. **Concurrent** is a dichotomous variable that takes the value of 1 in cases where the survey asks respondents whether they voted in a presidential election that was concurrent with a legislative election. **Unicameral** is also a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 in countries with only one legislative chamber. **Polarization** represents the mean ideological placement of the parties by a country's parliamentary elite.³ Concurrent elections, by reducing the costs of voting and clarifying the policy implications of the vote should have a positive effect on turnout (Dettrey and Schwindt-Bayer 2009). Unicameralism should also increase turnout because it allows citizens to perceive better the consequences of their vote over policy outcomes (Fornos et al. 2004; Kostadinova and Power 2007). Polarization makes the electoral options available to voters easier to identify and distinguish and should lead to increasing turnout (Dalton 2008; Brockington 2009; Carlin and Love 2015).

Modeling Turnout in Latin America

In this article I use data from LAPOP to explore the effect of trust in elections on voter turnout in 19 Latin American countries during the period from 2004 to 2014. In order to test my main hypothesis, I first estimate a logistic regression with fixed-effects for each country (to control for unmeasured country-level characteristics that might affect voter turnout) and year (to control for unmeasured characteristics that vary between years and might affect all countries).⁴ The use of logistic regressions is appropriate since the dependent variable is dichotomous. In addition, I estimate a multilevel logistic model with a random-intercept for country that allows me to include the aggregate-level variables described in the previous section.⁵

³ Information for creating this variable was based on Singer (2016). The author built the polarization measure with information from University of Salamanca's Parliamentary Elites survey in Latin America (PELA). He estimated the overall left-right ideological position of the parties based on the self-placement of party elites. For each party he then estimated the squared distance between the party's ideology and the system-mean, and then calculated the square root of the weighted average of those squared distances, weighting deviations from the mean in accordance with each party's size in the legislature.

⁴ Estimates of the country and year dummies are not reported but the full model is available upon request to the author.

⁵ This model also includes dummy variables for each year the survey was conducted to control for unmeasured characteristics that vary between years in all countries. Estimates of the year dummies are not reported but the full model is available upon request to the author.

V. RESULTS

Table 1 presents the coefficients from the estimated models. Model 1 only incorporates individual-level variables as predictors, while Model 2 also includes the country-level control variables.⁶

Taken together, the results from Table 1 indicate that trust in elections is a significant predictor of voter turnout in Latin America and in the expected positive direction. The variable remains statistically significant after accounting for the effect of other individual and aggregate-level variables. As hypothesized, citizens who perceive that elections are a trustworthy instrument of the democratic system are more likely to go to the polls. This finding is in line with previous studies in the region (McCann and Domínguez 1998; Carreras and İrepoğlu 2013).

The results also provide evidence about the mobilizing effects of vote-buying. In line with previous evidence across the region (Carreras and Castañeda-Angarita 2013; Carreras and İrepoğlu 2013; Carlin and Love 2015) and with my expectations, exposure to vote-buying remains a significant predictor of turnout in both models. In addition, as expected, employment status and education have a positive and statistically significant effect on turnout. These results support the theoretical expectations concerning the importance of individual resources for participation. Surprisingly, the coefficient measuring income has the expected positive direction but does not attain statistical significance. This could be due to the fact that most of the impact of the variable is already absorbed by other indicators of socio-economic status such as education and occupation.⁷

Table 1. Determinants of voter turnout in Latin America.

	Model 1 Fixed Effects	Model 2 Random-Intercept
Trust in Elections	0.064*** (0.007)	0.086*** (0.013)
Age	0.056*** (0.001)	0.056*** (0.001)
Gender	-0.281*** (0.025)	-0.284*** (0.028)
Employment Status	0.579*** (0.025)	0.573*** (0.028)

⁶ I also estimated other model specifications, including an additional set of individual-level variables. These models can be found in the Appendix.

⁷ However, this variable is sensitive to the way the model is specified. In the models included in the Appendix, the variable attains statistical significance.

	Model 1 Fixed Effects	Model 2 Random-Intercept
Party of Incumbent	0.309** (0.107)	0.228* (0.115)
Party of Incumbent*Trust in Elections	0.038 (0.022)	0.041 (0.024)
Education	0.280*** (0.019)	0.294*** (0.020)
Income	0.009 (0.006)	0.009 (0.006)
Exposure to vote-buying	0.217*** (0.042)	0.163** (0.049)
Corruption	0.064*** (0.014)	0.027 (0.015)
Political Interest	0.223*** (0.013)	0.244*** (0.015)
Country-level variables		1.668***
Compulsory Vote		(0.191)
Compulsory Vote*Trust in Elections		-0.065*** (0.015)
Unicameralism		0.622* (0.309)
Closeness		0.003 (0.003)
Concurrent		-0.130 (0.404)
Polarization		0.159 (0.118)
Constant	-2.803*** (0.132)	-3.503*** (0.444)
n	46,404	43,906

Note: Standard errors shown in parentheses. Country and year dummies not reported.
*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Citizens who identify with the party of the incumbent president are also more likely to vote across the region, even though the interaction with trust in elections does not attain statistical significance in either model. As expected, older citizens and respondents who are interested in politics are more likely to vote. Furthermore, gender has a statistically significant and negative coefficient

indicating that, as hypothesized, women tend to have a higher likelihood of turnout than men. Model 1 also indicates that citizens who believe that corruption among public officials is common are more likely to vote, which would provide evidence about its mobilizing effect. However, once institutional and contextual variables are added to the model the variable is no longer significant.

Table 2 summarizes the first differences in the predicted probabilities of turnout obtained from Model 1 with the corresponding 95% confidence intervals. As the table shows, having the highest possible level of trust in elections increases the probability of voting by approximately 5.4% compared to having no trust at all. The predicted probabilities also reveal that education is the best predictor of reported turnout in the region: achieving a higher education level increases the probability of voting by 12.7% compared to having no education. In addition, employment status and political interest also provide a big boost in the probability of voting. A change from being unemployed to being employed increases the probability of voting by 8.4%, while a change from having no interest in politics to having a lot of interest increases it by 8.8%.

Model 2 shows that institutional variables also influence electoral participation in Latin America. Turnout is higher in countries that have only one legislative chamber⁸ and where voting is mandatory and enforced. The negative sign in the interaction term between trust in elections and compulsory voting indicates that trust in elections provides a stronger motivation for turnout in countries where voting is voluntary. In line with my expectations, it seems that when voting is voluntary citizens have to rely more heavily on their internal motivation to vote.

Table 2. First differences in the predicted probability of turnout in Latin America⁹

Variable	Change	First Difference
Trust in elections	From "not at all" to "a lot"	.054 (.043 - .065)
Exposure to vote-buying	From "never" to "often"	.057 (.036 - .079)
Gender	From woman to man	-.040 (-.047 - -.033)
Employment status	From unemployed to employed	.084 (.077 - .091)

⁸ The importance of this variable for turnout should not be overemphasized since it loses statistical significance once variables such as trust in the president and satisfaction with democracy are added to the models presented in the Appendix.

⁹ The first differences were estimated while all other variables were held constant at their mean or modal (for dichotomous variables) values.

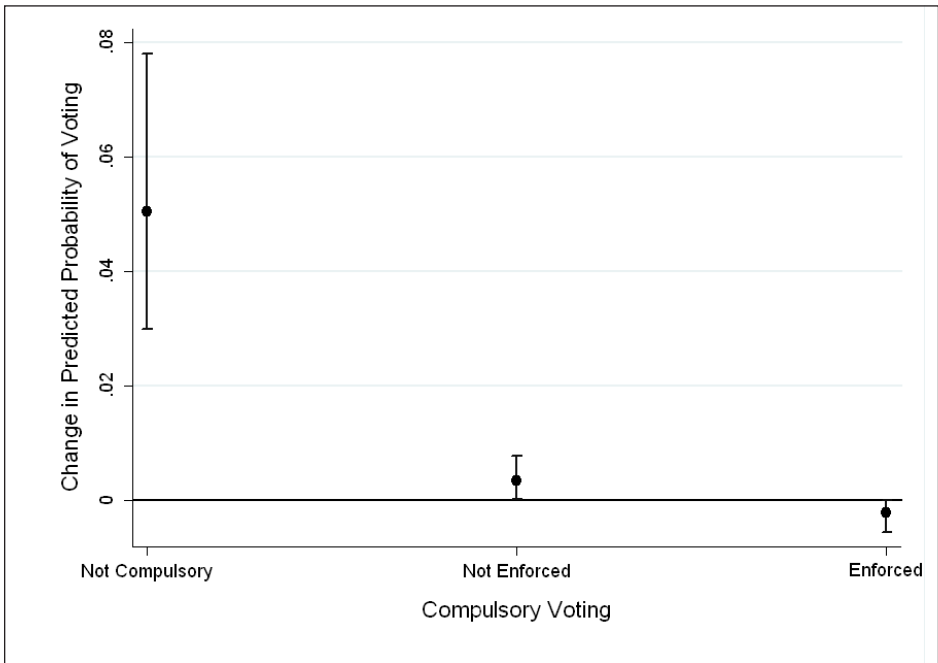
Variable	Change	First Difference
Identify with party of incumbent	From not identify to identify	.040 (.013 - .065)
Education level	From no education to higher education	.127 (.110 - .145)
Political interest	From “none” to “a lot”	.088 (.080 - .098)
Corruption	From “very uncommon” to “very common”	.028 (.016 - .040)
Age	From category 1 to category 5	.054 (.053 - .055)

Note: 95% confidence intervals in parentheses.

In order to provide a better interpretation of the effect that trust in elections has in interaction with different voting rules, Figure 2 shows the marginal effect of a change in trust in elections from its minimum value (not at all) to its maximum value (a lot) when voting is voluntary, compulsory but not enforced, and compulsory and enforced.¹⁰ As can be seen, the effect of perceptions of electoral integrity on turnout remains stronger in countries where voting is voluntary. In countries where voting is not compulsory the predicted probability of voting increases by 5% between citizens who have no trust at all in the electoral process and those who trust it a lot, while in countries where voting is compulsory but not enforced this change increases the probability of voting by less than 1%. Finally, in countries where voting is compulsory and enforced the effect of increasing trust in elections remains indistinguishable from zero.

¹⁰ To estimate this marginal effect all other variables were held constant at their mean values.

Figure 2. Marginal effect of trust in elections (from “not at all” to a “lot”)



Note: With 95% confidence bars.

VI. CONCLUSION

In this article, I explored the impact of citizens' trust in the electoral process on their likelihood of voting. The empirical results showed that this variable has a significant effect on voter turnout in Latin America but that its impact is mediated by the existence of compulsory voting laws. Specifically, the variable remains a stronger predictor of turnout in countries where voting is voluntary than in countries where voting is compulsory (either enforced or not). This suggests the need to take into account both attitudinal and institutional variables to understand variations in citizens' propensity to vote across the region.

As hypothesized, the analysis revealed that women tend to vote more than men, and identifying with the party of the incumbent president, being exposed to vote-buying incentives and having a high level of interest in politics increase turnout. In line with previous studies in the region (Fornos et al. 2004; Kostadinova and Power 2007) the study also provided evidence about the importance of some institutional variables—unicameralism and compulsory voting—for explaining cross-national variations in turnout.

Finally, the results showed that the socio-demographic variables that explain voter turnout in the industrialized world also have explanatory power in Latin America. Older, educated and employed citizens have higher probabilities

of voting. These findings challenge the conventional wisdom on electoral participation in the region which argues that socio-economic variables have a small effect on voter turnout (Fornos et al. 2004). Specifically, Fornos et al.'s (2004) seminal study found that a country's aggregate level of wealth had no statistically significant effect on electoral participation. Further work should thus better explore the relationship between socio-economic variables and participation across the region combining both aggregate and individual-level data.

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APPENDIX

Table 3. Countries and years included in the study

Country	Survey Years	n
Argentina	2008 - 2010 - 2012 - 2014	3,965
Bolivia	2004-2006-2008-2010-2012-2014	14,568
Brazil	2007-2008-2010-2012-2014	8,247
Colombia	2004-2005-2006-2007-2008-2009-2010-2011-2012-2014	12,506
Costa Rica	2004-2006-2008-2010-2012-2014	9,039
Chile	2006-2008-2010-2012-2014	8,151
Dominican Republic	2006-2008-2010-2012-2014	7,555
Ecuador	2004-2006-2008-2010-2012-2014	14,937
El Salvador	2004-2006-2008-2010-2012-2014	9,426
Guatemala	2004-2006-2008-2010-2012-2014	9,263
Guyana	2006-2009-2010-2012-2014	8,696
Honduras	2004-2006-2008-2010-2012-2014	9,492
Mexico	2004-2006-2008-2010-2012-2014	10,954
Nicaragua	2004-2006-2008-2010-2012-2014	9,505
Panama	2004-2006-2008-2010-2012-2014	9,375
Paraguay	2006-2008-2010-2012-2014	6,858
Peru	2006-2008-2010-2012-2014	7,500
Uruguay	2007-2008-2010-2012-2014	7,224
Venezuela	2007-2008-2010-2012-2014	10,510
Total		177,771

Table 4. Operationalization of control variables

Variables	Survey Items
Age (q2)	Recoded into 1= 16-23; 2= 24-33; 3= 34-48; 4= 49-64; 5= 65 and older
Gender (q1)	Recoded into 1=male, 0=female
Employment Status (ocup4a)	How do you mainly spend your time? Are you currently: 1) Working? 2) Not working, but have a job? 3) Actively looking for a job? 4) A student? 5) Taking care of the home? 6) Retired, a pensioner or permanently disabled to work? 7) Not working and not looking for a job? Recoded into working=1 (options 1&2), not working= 0 (all other options)
Education (ed)	How many years of schooling have you completed? Scale from 0 to over 18. Responses were coded as 0 if the respondent had 0 years of schooling, 1 if the respondent had completed 6 years of schooling (primary school), 2 if the respondent had completed 12 years of schooling (secondary school), and 3 if the respondent had completed at least 13 years of schooling (higher education)
Income (q10)	Into which of the following income ranges does the total monthly income of this household fit, including remittances from abroad and the income of all the working adults and children? [Deciles based on the currency and distribution of the country, and updated throughout the survey years for each country] 0= no income, maximum category varies by country

Variables	Survey Items
Political Interest (pol1)	How much interest do you have in politics? Scale from 1= "a lot" to 4= "none". Recoded into "none"=1; "a lot"=4
Corruption (exc7)	Taking into account your own experience or what you have heard, corruption among public officials is: very common, common, uncommon or very uncommon. Scale from 1= "very common" to 4= "very uncommon". Recoded into "very uncommon"=1; "very common"= 4
Exposure to vote-buying (clien1)	In recent years and thinking about election campaigns, has a candidate or someone from a political party offered you something, like a favor, food, or any other benefit or thing in return for your vote or support? Has this happened often, sometimes or never? Scale from 1= "often" to 3= "never". Recoded into "never"=1; "often"=3.
Identify with party of incumbent president (vb11)	Which political party do you identify with? Responses were coded as 1 if the respondent identifies with the party of the incumbent president at the time of the elections that were asked about in the surveys, and 0 otherwise

Note: The question code used by LAPOP for each item is included in parentheses.

Table 5. Robustness checks: alternative model specifications

	Logistic regression w/ fixed effects for year and country	Multilevel logistic regres- sion with random-inter- cept for country ¹
Trust in Elections	0.051*** (0.009)	0.079*** (0.015)
Age	0.057*** (0.001)	0.057*** (0.001)
Gender	-0.293*** (0.027)	0.292*** (0.029)
Employment Status	0.058*** (0.027)	0.589*** (0.030)
Party of Incumbent	0.238* (0.113)	0.194 (0.120)
Party of Incumbent* Trust in elections	0.045 (0.023)	0.040 (0.025)
Education	0.293*** (0.019)	0.310*** (0.022)
Income	0.015* (0.006)	0.014* (0.007)
Exposure to vote-buying	0.170*** (0.046)	0.172*** (0.052)
Corruption	0.068*** (0.015)	0.024 (0.016)
Political Interest	0.225*** (0.014)	0.242*** (0.016)
Satisfaction with democracy	0.012 (0.019)	0.003 (0.021)
Trust in the president	0.019* (0.009)	0.023* (0.009)
Trust in political parties ²	-0.021* (0.009)	-0.021* (0.009)
Government performance	0.027 (0.016)	0.022 (0.018)

¹ This model also includes fixed effects for year.
² The fact that trust in political parties has a negative effect on turnout should be interpreted with a pinch of salt because it is highly correlated with trust in elections and with trust in the president.

	Logistic regression w/ fixed effects for year and country	Multilevel logistic regres- sion with random-inter- cept for country ¹
Trust in electoral tribunal	0.003 (0.009)	-0.005 (0.009)
Country level variables		
Compulsory Vote		1.430*** (0.212)
Compulsory Vote* Trust in Elections		-0.065** (0.016)
Unicameralism		0.554 (0.285)
Closeness		0.004 (0.003)
Polarization		0.159 (0.119)
Concurrent		0.022 (0.372)
Constant	-2.847*** (0.152)	-3.597*** (0.427)
n	46,404	39,714

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Estimates of the year and country dummies are not reported but are available upon request to the author.

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

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