

PARTISAN REPRESENTATION OF THE POOR:
ELECTORAL GEOGRAPHY, STRATEGIC MOBILIZATION, AND
IMPLICATIONS FOR VOTER TURNOUT *

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Abstract

How do electoral rules affect the poor? When do parties have an incentive to stand as the party of low-income citizens? When will parties mobilize the electoral support of low-income voters? This discussion presents evidence that rates of turnout among low-income citizens reflect legislators' and parties' electoral incentives to be responsive to the poor, and that these electoral incentives are determined by electoral geography – the joint geographic distribution of legislative seats and low-income voters across electoral districts. Further, this discussion demonstrates that under SMD electoral rules, low-income voters are more likely to vote in those electoral districts in which they are likely to be pivotal. By presenting a strategic mobilization account of voter turnout, this discussion breaks with current accounts of voter turnout that emphasize facilitative and motivational individual- and system-level factors. Instead, this discussion argues that low-income voters' turnout decisions, in fact, reflect parties' electoral incentives to cultivate and mobilize a low-income constituency.

1 Introduction

How do electoral rules affect the poor? When will parties stand for – and mobilize – low-income citizens? This discussion presents a strategic mobilization account of turnout bias: Although low-income citizens typically vote less frequently than others in contemporary democratic societies (e.g., Nevitte, Blais, Gidengil & Nadeau 2009), political parties sometimes have strong electoral incentives to mobilize their electoral support. Here, parties' incentives to strategically mobilize low-income citizens reflect the electoral geography of their political system, specifically the joint geographic allocation of voters and seats across electoral districts. When low-income citizens are pivotal in the allocation of legislative seats, political parties actively mobilize their electoral support.

This motivating intuition – that turnout decisions among low-income citizens reflect, at least in part, parties' electoral incentives to mobilize their support – leads to two sets of testable hypotheses. First, in a broadly-comparative context, in those countries in which a low-income voting bloc is pivotal in the allocation of a large proportion of legislative seats, levels of turnout bias (the underrepresentation of low-income citizens in the electorate) ought to be lower than the levels of turnout bias that characterize countries in which low-income citizens are rarely pivotal in the allocation of legislative seats. Second, within countries, turnout rates for low-income citizens ought to be higher in those electoral districts in which they are pivotal.

This discussion presents evidence in favor of both of these hypotheses: Using individual-level survey data, this discussion demonstrates that turnout bias generally decreases as the share of seats that a low-income voting bloc can elect increases, *and* turnout rates among low-income citizens within a particular country are higher in those electoral districts in which they are pivotal. Of course, this individual-level evidence provides only indirect support for a strategic mobilization account of voter turnout: I do not draw on evidence, for example, of cross-district differences in specific campaign activities. However, as I suggest in the next section, the contextual effect of living in low-income districts likely undermines parties' efforts to mobilize low-income citizens. The final sections of this discussion, therefore, presents hard tests of parties' strategic mobilization efforts: Do political parties succeed in mobilizing low-income voters in low-income electoral districts?

2 Electoral Rules, Electoral Geography, and Voter Turnout

Most earlier accounts of the relationship between voter turnout and electoral rules emphasize a stark distinction between multi-member district (MMD) electoral rules and single-member district (SMD) rules,¹ and have emphasized overall levels of voter turnout, rather than cross-national variation in the composition of the electorate. Blais & Dobrzynska (1998, 245), for example, establish that “turnout tends to be higher in PR systems,” and suggest three reasons for why this might be the case:

First, PR is a fairer system, and because it is fair people feel less alienated and thus more inclined to vote. Second, PR increases the number of parties and the variety of options among which people can choose.² Third, PR makes elections more competitive: as there are many members to be elected in each district, most parties have a chance to win at least one seat, and as a consequence they attempt to mobilize voters throughout the country.

As Cox (1999) notes, especially the third of these reasons why PR electoral rules might boost turnout corresponds to parties’ incentives to mobilize voters. Notice, however, that Blais & Dobrzynska, and indeed, most other broadly comparative analysis of voter turnout, offer little consideration of within-country variation in the extent to a party might benefit from the mobilization of a *specific* group of voters.

To illustrate a strategic mobilization account of voter turnout, this discussion builds on Cox’s (1999) useful framework for the analysis of electoral rules and turnout, based on the pivotal voter model: Following Downs (1957), let the utility of voting be defined over our expected benefits associated with one party, over all others (B), weighted by the probability our vote is decisive (p), and finally, minus the costs associated with voting (C). That is, let

$$U(\text{voting}) = pB - C. \tag{1}$$

¹The expression “single-member district” distinguishes those electoral districts that elect only one legislator from others that elect more than one legislator. Cox (1999) rightly notes the confluence of district magnitude and electoral formula: Specifically, most prior studies of how electoral rules affect turnout compare single member simple plurality or majoritarian systems with multimember proportional representation systems.

²This contribution of PR electoral rules to turnout is similar to that suggested by Powell (1986): The increased diversity of ideological positions taken by parties in PR systems facilitates stronger party-group links, which aid in voter mobilization.

Of course, a citizen will turnout to vote if her expected returns exceed her anticipated costs, or if $pB > C$. Notice that, as Cox (1999, 388) argues, a party’s mobilization efforts can be characterized using a similar expression: Parties will work to mobilize voters “only if the probability that their effort is decisive, times the benefit of winning rather than losing, exceeds the costs of mobilization.” More specifically, parties will exert efforts to mobilize voters if (1) these efforts effectively generate votes, (2) the newly-won votes increase the likelihood of winning seats, and (3) the newly-won seats increase that party share of cabinet portfolios. Cox (1999, 394) formalizes this decision problem in the following way:

Imagine a particular constituency in which n candidates or lists compete for $M \geq 1$ seats. Let e be the level of effort a party exerts in mobilizing its followers; $V(e)$ be the expected increment in votes that an effort of level e will yield; $S(V)$ be the expected increment in seats that V more votes will yield; $P(S)$ be the expected increment in portfolios that S more seats will yield; u_S be the value of a seats; u_P be the value of a portfolio; and $c(e)$ be the cost of the effort.

Thus, a party will exert mobilization efforts if the expected benefits exceed the costs of the efforts, or if

$$u_S S(V(e)) + u_P P(S(V(e))) > c(e). \quad (2)$$

Finally, the marginal utility derived from an increase in mobilization effort can be evaluated with the following expression:

$$\frac{\partial [u_S S(V(e)) + u_P P(S(V(e)))]}{\partial e} = u_S S' V' + u_P P' S' V' \quad (3)$$

(Here, following Cox 1999, V' denotes the derivative of V with respect to e , S' denotes the derivative of S with respect to V , and P' reports the derivative of P with respect to S). In substantive terms, a party’s benefit from increased mobilization efforts is conditioned by the extent to which these efforts are effective in turning out new and favorable voters, securing new seats, and claiming new portfolios; larger values of V' , S' , and P' increase the returns to mobilization efforts. As Cox (1999) suggests, PR systems are likely associated with higher values of S' and V' than are SMP systems, particularly when few SMD electoral districts are competitive; in any case, the cross-district benefits to mobilization are decidedly more variable under SMP rules.

Now, consider a case in which a party can allocate mobilization efforts across different groups of voters, and suppose that these groups are geographically distributed so that efforts vary in the rates at which new votes contribute to new seats. To illustrate with a concrete example, let $e_L, e_M,$ and e_H denote a party's efforts to mobilize low-, middle-, and high-income voters, where $e \equiv e_L + e_M + e_H$. Importantly, suppose that because of the geographic distribution of income, the votes of low-income voters are less effectively converted into seats, or that $S'_L < S'_M$ and $S'_L < S'_H$. Clearly, even if mobilization efforts across all three groups are equally effective in bringing would-be voters to the polls (i.e., $V'_L \approx V'_M \approx V'_H$, an assumption made in the analysis below), a party that is behaving optimally will focus mobilization efforts on middle- and high-income citizens, rather than on low-income citizens.

Here, the discussion returns to its motivating research question: Under which conditions will electoral rules and electoral geography create incentives for the strategic mobilization of low-income citizens? Put concretely, what determines the relationship between $S'_L, S'_M,$ and S'_H , and thus parties' incentives to strategically mobilize voters in different income groups? As the next section demonstrates, even when countries have similar electoral rules, the geographic distribution of income groups operates in important ways to moderate the effective conversion of votes to seats.

3 Measuring the Electoral Power of a Low-Income Voting Bloc

How many seats could a low-income voting bloc elect, if all low-income voters turned out to vote, and they all voted the same way? Building on the notation from the example presented above, define S_L as the “electoral power” of a low-income voting bloc, or the rate at which votes of low-income citizens contribute to legislative seats. As will be evident shortly, electoral power is a function of electoral geography – the joint geographic distribution of voters and seats *across* legislative districts, and of electoral formula, which provides the basis of the allocation of seats *within* districts. Importantly, the concept of electoral geography encompasses district magnitude in a general sense (whether more than one legislator is elected in each district), and the extent to which district magnitude varies across districts (see, e.g., Monroe & Rose 2002).

To measure the electoral power of a low-income voting bloc in contemporary developed democracies, this discussion proceeds in three steps:

1. First, using Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) and sometimes other data resources, I estimate the proportion of low-income voters in each electoral district, within each country. Here, “low-income” refers to those who comprise the lowest third of the national market income distribution. The set of countries included in the analysis are those for which LIS data are available, and in which the thirty-third percentile of the national income distribution is at least as great as the official 2000 U.S. poverty line (\$8,969). All countries included in this analysis have low-income thresholds that are at least 60% of the median income, and are on average 70% of the median income.
2. Second, using these proportions of low-income voters in each district, seats are allocated according to current electoral rules of each country.
3. Finally, a ratio of national seat-share to national vote share is calculated for each country.

Notice that if electoral systems do not moderate the representation of different income groups, with this operationalization, each income group will have an electoral power measure equal to 1; in this case, we would expect that $\hat{S}'_L = 1$ in all countries. In electoral systems that favor the representation of low-income citizens, this measure of electoral power will be greater than 1, or $\hat{S}'_L > 1$. The rest of this section of the discussion describes each of the steps involved in estimating \hat{S}'_L ; Jusko (2009) presents more technical information about this analysis.

3.1 Estimating the Geographic Distribution of Income

Three different strategies are used to estimate the proportion of each lower house electoral district that is composed of low-income households:

- (A) Whenever possible, LIS data are used directly (e.g., Finland). LIS data offer important advantages for this analysis: LIS data represent a cross-national collaboration between income and labor studies, and offer large national samples with standardized income measures. When the LIS data report each respondent household’s region of residence and the regions reported correspond to the country’s electoral districts (or to regions that comprise the electoral districts), the proportion of low-income households in each district is estimated in a straight-forward way.

- (B) In several cases (e.g., Australia), data on the distribution of income within electoral districts are available from other sources. Sometimes the construction of income measures or samples differ from the measures or samples used the analysis presented below.
- (C) When income data corresponding to the electoral district are not available, LIS data are combined with other resources to estimate the proportion of low-income citizens in each electoral district.

To illustrate, the geographic distribution of low-income households in France, was evaluated in several steps: While LIS data do not report each household's electoral district (*circonscription*), they do include each respondent's region of residence. One way to proceed, therefore, might be to use the regional proportions of low-income households to estimate the proportion of low-income households in each electoral district. This strategy, however, would fail to reflect within-region cross-district variance in the concentration of poverty.

Alternatively, although *Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques* (INSEE) does not report income data that correspond to the measures of poverty used in this analysis, INSEE does report data on the structure of the labor force – data that correspond to LIS variables – within each electoral district. Using LIS data, I estimate the proportion of low-income households in each labor force status and industrial sector for each French region, and then use this relationship in combination with the INSEE labor force data to estimate the proportion of low-income citizens in each district. This latter strategy has the advantage incorporating within-region across-district differences that are related to the distribution of poverty, but would be misleading if poverty rates vary within labor force status and industrial sector categories, within each region. For this reason, this strategy is pursued only when LIS regions do not correspond to electoral districts and other measures of the geographic distribution of income are unavailable or are quite different from the measure developed here.

- (D) Finally, when available data only roughly correspond to electoral districts, and/or are insufficiently detailed to be combined with LIS data in a meaningful way (i.e., only unemployment rates are available), the electoral strength of a low-income voting bloc is estimated by calculating the binomial expectation of the number of seats won within a region. For Italy and Germany, the two country cases for which this strategy was followed, the binomial parameter

p , the probability of winning each seat in the SMD components of each system, is calculated in a way that incorporates regional levels of poverty, and the within-region cross-district variance in unemployment rates.

As noted earlier, Jusko (2009) reports the specific details of the estimation strategy used for each country and lists the electoral districts in which a low-income voting bloc could elect (lower house) members of the national legislature.

3.2 Allocating Seats to a Low-Income Voting Bloc

The second task in assessing the electoral strength of a low-income voting bloc involves the allocation of seats according to the electoral rules of each system. Following the classification of electoral systems used in the formal analytic examples, this section of the discussion distinguishes between systems in which all legislators are elected in single-member districts (SMDs), systems in which all legislators are elected in a single nation-wide district, and systems in which the number of legislators varies across districts (usually in a way that reflects population density). Countries included in a fourth category, “mixed” electoral systems, form a hybrid category and typically have two or more levels of nested districts, with separate (but sometimes related) allocations of seats at each level. Using this classification, then, this section outlines the general strategy used for seat allocations, for countries in each category of electoral rules.

Single-Member District (SMD) Systems. Following Lijphart (1994, 28; also Boix 1999), this analysis sets an effective threshold of 35 percent for all SMD systems, and allocates a district’s seat to the low-income voting bloc if the proportion of low-income voters exceeds 35 percent. Note that this relatively low threshold – recall that low-income citizens comprise the bottom third, or 33 percent of the national income distribution – will understate differences between SMD and MMD proportional representation systems in the representation of low-income citizens.

National District Systems. In the two countries in which seats are allocated in a single national district, according to a PR allocation rule – Israel and the Netherlands – a low-income voting bloc could secure a third of the seats in the legislature.

Varying District-Magnitude Systems. Because a Droop quota, in contrast to a highest average allocation rule, requires little knowledge and few assumptions about the number of parties competing in each election or about distribution of support for other parties is needed to estimate the seats won by each party, a Droop quota is used to estimate the number of seats won by a low-income voting bloc in all varying district magnitude electoral systems. This strategy is also employed for MMDs in those “mixed” systems that elect some legislators under MMD rules.

3.3 The Electoral Power of Low-Income Voters

How many seats could a low-income voting bloc elect, if all low-income voters turned out to vote, and they all voted the same way? Table 1 reports the results of this analysis, specifically the number of electoral districts in which low-income citizens are over-represented, and the shares of seats a low-income voting bloc could win in each country. The data reported in Column (3) – an estimate of rate at which the votes of low-income citizens contribute to seats – will serve as the key independent variable in the analysis that follows, the electoral power of a low-income voting bloc.

Note, first, that the success of a low-income voting bloc varies within electoral system groups, and particularly within the group of SMD countries. In the US and the Canada, for example, the electoral success of a low-income voting bloc is potentially quite limited, while the largest seat share potentially won by a low-income voting bloc is observed in France, and the electoral power of low-income citizens in the UK is similar to the electoral power of low-income citizens in national-district (PR) systems.

Table 1: Seats Elected by a Low-Income Voting Bloc

Country	(1) # of Districts ^a	(2) Seat Share ^b	(3) Electoral Power (\hat{S}_L^c)
<i>A. Single Member District Systems</i>			
United States	104/435	24%	0.72
Canada	94/308	30%	0.90
United Kingdom	190/569 ^d	33%	1.02
Australia	51/150	34%	1.02
France	267/570 ^e	47%	1.41
<i>B. National District Systems</i>			
Netherlands	0/1	33%	1.00
Israel	0/1	33%	1.00
<i>C. Varying-District-Magnitude Systems</i>			
Austria	1/43	33%	1.00
Belgium	5/11	33%	1.00
Denmark	12/17	33%	1.00
Luxembourg	0/4	35%	1.05
Spain	28/52	35%	1.05
Ireland	12/43	36%	1.08
Finland	9/15	37%	1.11
Switzerland	21/26	37%	1.11
Norway	14/19	38%	1.11
Sweden	20/29	40%	1.20
<i>D. Mixed Electoral Systems</i>			
Germany	8/15 ^f	33%	1.00
Italy	11/26 ^g	35%	1.05

NOTES. This Table reports estimates of the number of seats that a low-income voting bloc could secure if all low-income citizens cast ballots, and cast ballots for the same party. Please refer to the Appendix materials for details of how these estimates were calculated.

^a This column reports the number of districts in which low-income citizens are over-represented.

^b This column reports the total share of seats secured by a low-income voting bloc. The districts in which these seats are secured are listed in the Appendix of Jusko (2009).

^c This column reports the measure of electoral power used in this analysis, or the ratio of national vote share to national seat share, in the lower house of national legislative assembly.

^d Parliamentary constituencies in Scotland and Northern Ireland are excluded.

^e The 15 overseas districts are excluded from the denominator reported in this column, but are included in the calculation of the seat share a low-income voting bloc could win.

^f This ratio refers to the MMD *Länder*, not the SMDs.

^g This ratio refers to the MMD *circoscrizioni*, not the SMDs, the *collegi uninominali*.

Second, while there is a direct correspondence between the number of districts in which low-income voters are over-represented and their share of seats under SMD rules, there is, of course, no correspondence in the systems with varying district magnitudes. What matters for the representation of low-income citizens under varying district-magnitude rules is whether or not low-income voters are over-represented in rural districts that elect a small number of legislators (e.g. Finland, Norway and Sweden), or in urban settings: Under these circumstance, the disproportionality of low-magnitude districts, typically found in the rural regions of these countries, can favor the legislative representation of the low-income voters.

If, as suggested above, the strategic mobilization of low-income citizens reflects the effectiveness with which their votes contribute to legislative seats, then turnout rates among low-income citizens ought to be highest among those countries in which the measure of electoral power exceeds 1: In these countries, the votes of low-income citizens are over-weighted in the generation of seats and, conditional on the effectiveness of mobilization efforts generating votes (i.e., V'_L), the marginal return to mobilization efforts is comparatively large. The next section of this discussion evaluates this proposed relationship: Are turnout rates among low-income citizens larger in those countries in which low-income citizens are over-represented in the allocation of legislative seats?

4 Electoral Power and Turnout Bias

This section explores the empirical relationship between electoral power and rates of turnout among low-income citizens, in a broadly comparative analysis and a focused case-study. First, using the measure of electoral power, developed in the previous section, as the key independent variable, this analysis considers the extent to which cross-national variance turnout bias can be attributed to strategic incentives to mobilize low-income voters. Then, because the strategic incentives to mobilize low-income voters likely vary across electoral districts, especially in SMD systems (as recognized by Cox 1999, in the general case), this analysis evaluates evidence of the strategic mobilization of low-income citizens across U.S. congressional districts.

4.1 Electoral Power and Turnout Bias in Contemporary Democratic Societies

To estimate the rate of turnout among low-income citizens, this analysis uses post-election survey data collected under the auspices of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). For a large set of contemporary democracies, these data offer measures of turnout, income, and other socio-demographic variables for large national samples, and are usually collected immediately following elections to the (lower house of) the national legislature.

Table 2 reports parameter estimates, for country, for a probit analysis, in which turnout is regressed on low-income status and two other potentially confounding socio-demographic variables, age and college education. The analysis is replicated for models in which only low-income status is included as a covariate; these parameter estimates are reported in the top panel of Figure 1. In the CSES, income is reported by approximate quintiles; in this analysis, “low-income” respondents are those that comprise the first two income quintiles, a group slightly larger (and probably more participatory) than the the tertile used to calculate the electoral power of a low-income voting bloc.³

Column (1) in Table 2 reports parameter estimates that describe the under-representation of low-income citizens in each countries’ electorate, relative to other income groups, and conditional on age and college education; let this quantity, β represent the low-income turnout gap, or “turnout bias” in each system. Of course, this measure of turnout bias likely reflects two political processes: The magnitude of each β reflects the effectiveness of party mobilization campaigns (i.e., V_L') and the underlying propensity of low-income citizens to vote in each country. This underlying voting propensity of low-income citizens may reflect some of the factors identified by Blais & Dobrzynska (1998, i.e., representation of diverse interests and perceptions of fairness), as well as voter registration and election day procedures that facilitate or hinder the process of casting ballots. Future versions of this analysis will incorporate these facilitative factors; here, I concentrate on the unconditional strategic incentives for parties to mobilize low-income citizens.

³Note that this operationalization, by diminishing cross-national variance in turnout bias, likely results in a downwards-biased estimate of the cross-national relationship between turnout bias and electoral power, the quantity of interest.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Status and Voter Turnout in Contemporary Democracies

Country (Year of Study)	(1) Low-Income (β)	(2) College Educated	25-26	(3) Age 36-45	45-65	(4) Intercept
<i>A. Single-Member District Systems</i>						
United States (2004)	-0.55 (0.11)	0.53 (0.11)	0.26 (0.17)	0.14 (0.17)	0.49 (0.15)	0.42 (0.16)
Canada (2004)	-0.39 (0.10)	0.31 (0.11)	0.30 (0.19)	0.50 (0.18)	0.72 (0.17)	0.82 (0.17)
Australia (2004)	-0.38 (0.19)	-0.03 (0.20)	-0.05 (0.32)	0.18 (0.33)	0.05 (0.28)	2.21 (0.29)
United Kingdom (2005)	-0.34 (0.12)	0.34 (0.15)	0.50 (0.22)	0.94 (0.21)	1.26 (0.20)	-0.37 (0.19)
France (2002)	-0.01 (0.11)	0.30 (0.12)	-0.07 (0.15)	0.53 (0.16)	0.64 (0.15)	0.42 (0.13)
<i>B. National District Systems</i>						
Netherlands (2002)	-0.65 (0.17)	-0.35 (0.19)	0.07 (0.39)	-0.09 (0.36)	0.17 (0.35)	2.29 (0.36)
Israel (2003)	-0.26 (0.14)	0.53 (0.16)	0.02 (0.19)	0.16 (0.21)	0.47 (0.21)	0.98 (0.17)
<i>C. Varying-District-Magnitude Systems</i>						
Switzerland (2003)	-0.41 (0.09)	0.51 (0.15)	0.00 (0.18)	0.20 (0.17)	0.63 (0.16)	0.29 (0.15)
Denmark (2001)	-0.40 (0.13)	0.25 (0.14)	0.03 (0.18)	0.23 (0.19)	0.65 (0.19)	1.56 (0.17)
Norway (2001)	-0.34 (0.09)	0.28 (0.09)	0.27 (0.12)	0.56 (0.13)	0.73 (0.12)	0.56 (0.12)
Finland (2003)	-0.33 (0.11)	0.51 (0.21)	0.16 (0.15)	0.40 (0.15)	0.67 (0.13)	0.59 (0.13)
Sweden (2002)	-0.31 (0.13)	0.53 (0.13)	-0.27 (0.19)	-0.36 (0.19)	0.10 (0.19)	1.24 (0.18)
Ireland (2002)	-0.07 (0.09)	-0.02 (0.10)	0.50 (0.12)	0.85 (0.12)	0.96 (0.11)	0.42 (0.09)
Spain (2004)	-0.05 (0.16)	0.11 (0.20)	0.13 (0.20)	0.38 (0.21)	0.68 (0.21)	0.91 (0.16)
<i>D. Mixed Electoral Systems</i>						
Italy (2006)	-0.12 (0.14)	0.19 (0.20)	0.25 (0.22)	0.29 (0.20)	0.53 (0.19)	0.74 (0.17)
Germany (1998)	-0.30 (0.10)	0.42 (0.19)	-0.02 (0.17)	0.28 (0.18)	0.32 (0.17)	1.34 (0.16)

NOTE. This Table reports probit coefficients from a regression of turnout on socio-demographic indicator variables. Countries are grouped according to their electoral rules, and are listed in order of the parameter estimating the partial effect of low-income status on turnout. Standard errors are reported in parentheses.

SOURCE. Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES).

If the strategic mobilization account of voter turnout is correct, levels of turnout bias ought to decrease as the low-income voting bloc’s electoral power increases. That is, in countries where low-income citizens have little electoral power ($S'_L \ll 1$), low-income citizens ought to turnout much less frequently than middle- or high-income citizens ($beta \ll 0$). Alternatively, when low-income citizens are over-represented in the allocation of legislative seats, there should be little or no evident turnout bias ($beta \approx 0$). Further, if the rate at which mobilization effort generates new votes is largely constant across countries, the overall relationship between turnout bias and electoral power ought to be well-represented with a linear specification. Specifically, let

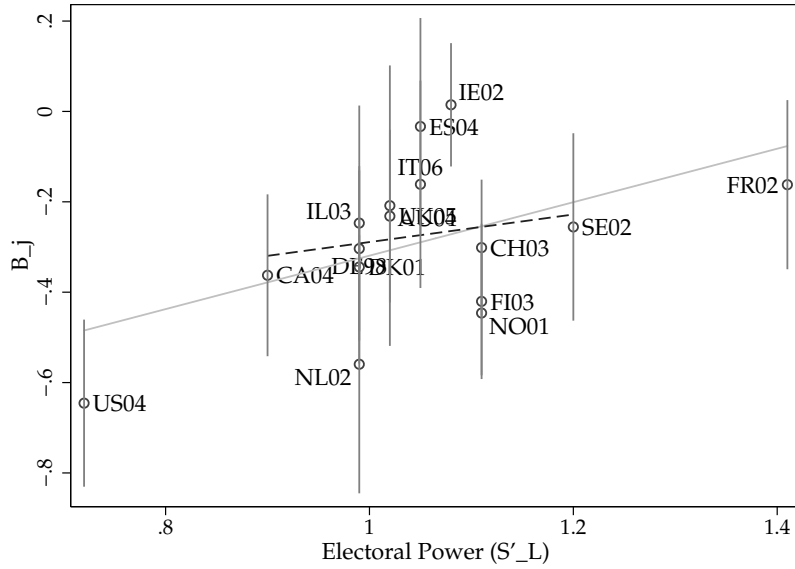
$$\beta = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \hat{S}'_L + u_j. \tag{4}$$

Because we observe $\hat{\beta}$, rather than β , the residual term, u_j includes both a cross-national variance component and a sampling error component. As a consequence, while an ordinary least squares (OLS) estimate of γ_1 – the key parameter of interest – is unbiased, the reported estimates of OLS standard errors are not correct (see Jusko & Shively 2005). (Appropriate standard errors will be incorporated in future versions of this paper.) To be clear: A positive estimate of γ_1 is consistent with the strategic mobilization account of voter turnout.

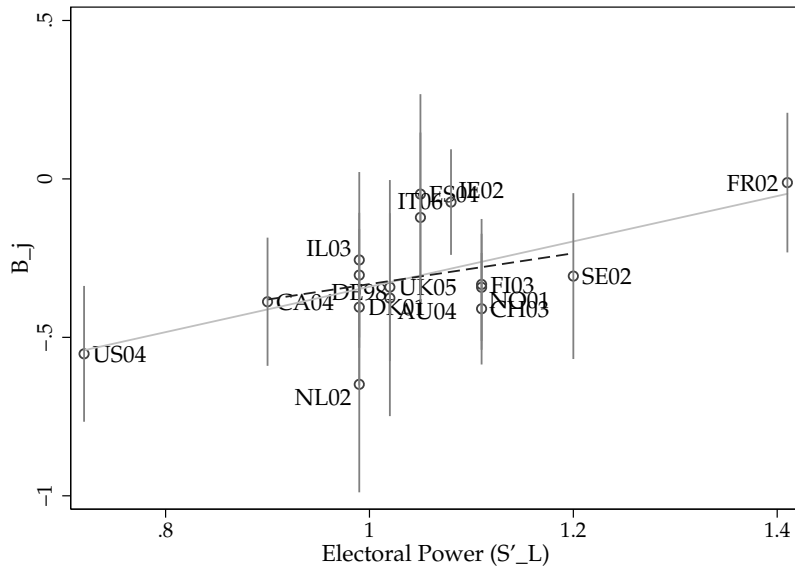
Figure 1 reports the bivariate relationship between the electoral power of a low-income voting bloc (S'_L , horizontal axis), and levels of turnout bias (or β , vertical axis). The top panel reports parameters estimated in a bivariate individual-level model; the lower panel reports conditional estimates of turnout bias. Although the generalizability of the observed relationship is somewhat dependent on the contributions of high-leverage outliers (the U.S. and France), the observed relationships between the electoral strength of a low-income voting and poverty responsiveness is consistent with strategic mobilization account of voter turnout: Turnout among low-income citizens generally increases with their electoral power.

Figure 1: Electoral Power and Voter Turnout

A. Bivariate Individual-Level Specification



B. Multivariate Individual-Level Specification



NOTE. This Figure reports the bivariate relationship between the share of seats potentially secured by a low-income voting bloc and the (in the lower panel, conditional) low-income turnout gap, β , estimated for each country (reported in Table 2). Error bars denote 95 percent confidence intervals. The solid lines in each panel reports ordinary least-squares (OLS) fitted values. In the lower panel, the relationship between electoral power and the turnout gap is represented by the following expression (standard errors reported in parentheses): $\beta = -1.055(0.275) + 0.716(0.261)\hat{S}'_L$. The dashed lines reports OLS fitted values from models that excludes the US and France; this relationship in the lower panel is characterized by the following expression: $\beta = -0.818(0.607) + 0.486(0.581)\hat{S}'_L$.

4.2 Electoral Geography and Turnout Bias in the U.S.

How do incentives for parties to mobilize low-income voters vary *within* a particular country? As Cox (1999) and others rightly suggest, general mobilization incentives likely vary across districts within each country. We should find, therefore, further evidence of the strategic mobilization of low-income citizens within each country, and especially in systems that employ SMD electoral rules: Low-income voters should vote more frequently in single-member electoral districts when their support is pivotal in the allocation of legislative seats.

Recall that, to generate an estimates of \hat{S}'_L for the U.S. (and, indeed, for each other country included in this analysis), the first step involved in calculating the percentage of low-income citizens living within each electoral district. Then, following Lijphart (1994) and others in setting an effective threshold of 35 percent, I identified congressional districts in which a low-income voting bloc is likely to be pivotal in the allocation of each House of Representative seat. These data can be usefully combined with individual-level income and voter turnout data to evaluate whether low-income citizens living in districts in which a low-income voting bloc is pivotal turnout at higher rates than low-income citizens living in other electoral districts.

To evaluate the strategic mobilization account of voter turnout, this part of the analysis draws on data collected as part of the November supplement to the 2002 and 2004 Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS offers the important advantages of a large national sample, detailed income data, and a measure of voter turnout. There are two features of the CPS data, however, that should be noted: First, although the CPS data do not report each respondent's congressional district, each respondent's county is reported and can be matched, although imperfectly, to a congressional district. Second, although the CPS data represent a random sample of the national population, these data do not offer a random sample of the congressional districts. Further, congressional districts in which a low-income voting bloc is pivotal in the allocation of the Representative's seat are under-represented in the CPS data, compared to the national proportion of low-income congressional districts. While the implications of these CPS features for the following analysis are unclear, it is unlikely that they contribute to the appearance of the hypothesized relationship.

To be clear, the following analysis presents several variations of the following model:

$$Pr(Turnout) = \Phi(\alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{Low-Income} + \alpha_2 \text{Low-Income District} + \alpha_3 \text{Low-Income} \times \text{Low-Income}). \quad (5)$$

Here, $\alpha_3 > 0$ indicates that low-income citizens living in districts in which a low-income voting bloc is pivotal are more likely to turnout than low-income citizens living in other districts, and would be consistent with a strategic mobilization account of voter turnout. In fact, as seen in Table 3 in every specification, and for both the 2002 and 2004 elections, $\alpha_3 > 0$ (although this parameter is sometimes estimated with more than conventionally-accepted levels of variance). This pattern holds when potentially confounding individual-level variables, and state indicators are incorporated into the analysis. Further, the magnitude of the parameter is maintained when the less competitive Southern districts are excluded from the analysis.⁴

4.3 Discussion and Implications

The broadly-comparative and U.S.-based analysis offered in this discussion present evidence that is consistent with a strategic mobilization account of voter turnout: Specifically, turnout bias, or the under-representation of low-income citizens in the electorate, is systematically lower where the electoral power of a low-income voting bloc is greater and, at least in the U.S. case, in electoral districts in which a low-income voting bloc is pivotal. What evidence is there, however, to suggest that these differences result from parties' mobilization efforts? Is it possible that voters are responding to similar variance in their electoral incentive structures? To put the question slightly differently, how might a group's electoral power change the turnout incentives of its membership?

Clearly, the Downsian pivotal voter model, presented above, does not easily accommodate the electoral strength of the different groups with which a particular voter might identify, within the framework of voter decision-making. Even in those districts in which a low-income voting bloc is pivotal, for example, an individual's probability of casting the decisive ballot is increased only to the extent that her group turns out completely and in support of the same party or candidate. Perhaps one's ability to contribute to a group's strength is reflected in Riker & Ordeshook's (1968)

⁴In fact, with the exclusion of the Southern states, we might have expected the parameter α_3 to increase in magnitude. That its magnitude is merely maintained is surprising and an issue to be explored in future analysis.

revision of the pivotal voter model, and incorporated in the utility derived from fulfilling one’s civic “duty,” but this is not what was intended by their original analysis, except insofar as contributing to one’s group’s success may affirm a partisan preference.

Perhaps a more important objection to a voter-based account of strategic turnout comes from the recent literature on neighborhood effects: Following Rosenstone & Hansen (1993), it seems unlikely that low-income voters are more likely to turnout *because* they live in low-income districts. In fact, low-income districts are generally characterized by lower overall levels of turnout than other districts; this pattern is evident in Table 3.

5 Conclusion

How do electoral rules affect the poor? When will parties stand for – and mobilize – low-income citizens? This discussion builds on Cox (1999) to present a strategic mobilization account of turnout bias: Although low-income citizens typically vote less frequently than other voters, political parties sometimes have strong electoral incentives to mobilize their electoral support. Here, parties’ incentives to strategically mobilize low-income citizens reflect the electoral geography of their political system, specifically the joint geographic allocation of voters and seats across electoral districts. In fact, under both SMD and MMD electoral rules, parties’ strategic incentives to mobilize a low-income bloc increase with the share of seats that voting bloc can secure. Preliminary evidence from a broadly comparative analysis and focused case study supports this intuition: Turnout bias is generally lower in those systems in which a low-income voting bloc is over-weighted in the allocation of legislative seats, and in the U.S., in those congressional districts in which the electoral support of a low-income voting bloc is likely to be pivotal in the election outcome.

Table 3: Electoral Geography and Turnout Bias in the US

A. Turnout in 2004 Election

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Low-Income	-0.433 (0.019)	-0.522 (0.021)	-0.418 (0.022)	-0.434 (0.021)	-0.406 (0.026)
Low-Income District		-0.048 (0.030)	-0.052 (0.029)	-0.078 (0.036)	0.072 (0.044)
Low-Income × Low-Income District		0.080 (0.053)	0.091 (0.053)	0.119 (0.056)	0.095 (0.075)
College-Educated			0.736 (0.017)	0.744 (0.018)	0.729 (0.021)
Age			0.016 (0.001)	0.016 (0.001)	0.016 (0.001)
Intercept	0.110 (0.008)	0.710 (0.009)	-0.447 (0.027)	-0.273 (0.089)	-0.455 (0.032)
N	27,931	27,797	27,797	27,797	19,396
Specification				State Indicators	South Excluded

B. Turnout in 2002 Election

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Low-Income	-0.433 (0.186)	-0.436 (0.020)	-0.436 (0.022)	-0.444 (0.022)	-0.400 (0.025)
Low-Income District		-0.039 (0.027)	-0.038 (0.028)	0.007 (0.034)	-0.016 (0.038)
Low-Income × Low-Income District		0.026 (0.053)	0.086 (0.056)	0.107 (0.056)	0.090 (0.076)
College-Educated			0.600 (0.017)	0.598 (0.017)	0.592 (0.198)
Age			0.027 (0.000)	0.028 (0.001)	0.026 (0.001)
Intercept	0.110 (0.008)	0.112 (0.009)	-1.486 (0.028)	-1.725 (0.076)	-1.452 (0.032)
N	28,375	28,055	28,055	28,055	20,183
Specification				State Indicators	South Excluded

NOTE. Table reports probit coefficients. Standard errors are reported in parentheses

SOURCE. Current Population Survey, November Supplement.

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