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Voter Turnout in Presidential Democracies

Bryan J. Dettrey
University at Buffalo, State University of New York
Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer
University of Missouri

Numerous studies indicate that political institutions play an important role in explaining variation in voter turnout across countries. The nuances of institutions unique to presidential elections have been largely overlooked, however, despite the different incentives they offer for voters to participate in elections. This article examines the effect that four presidential institutions had on voter turnout in presidential elections between 1974 and 2004—the timing of elections (whether concurrent or nonconcurrent), the power of the presidency, presidential electoral rules (plurality or majority runoff), and reelection rules. To isolate the effect of presidential institutions, this study controls for other likely influences on turnout, including the economic environment and the wider political context. It finds that (a) runoff elections dampen turnout whereas incumbency spurs it and (b) more powerful presidencies and elections, when held concurrently with legislative elections, have little effect on voter participation.

Keywords: *voter turnout; presidential democracies; electoral rules; institutions*

Numerous studies indicate that political institutions play an important role explaining variation in voter turnout across countries (Fornos, Power, & Garand, 2004; Franklin, 2004; R. Jackman & Miller, 1995; R. W. Jackman, 1987; Pérez-Liñán, 2001). Of course, institutions are not the only influence on turnout. Culture, socioeconomic environments, economic performance, and noninstitutional characteristics of the political context also affect turnout rates (Fornos et al., 2004; Franklin, 2004; Gray & Caul, 2000; Powell, 1986). Still, institutions are one of the most prominent factors.

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Despite the widespread recognition of the role that institutions play, empirical studies of institutions and those of turnout have focused on just a few factors—district competitiveness, proportionality, multipartism, bicameralism, and compulsory voting—and, in doing so, have limited their samples to parliamentary elections;[1] that is, presidential elections, and the institutions unique to them, have been ignored.

In this article, we examine the effect that institutions have on voter turnout in presidential elections, focusing on four factors: the electoral cycle (concurrent or nonconcurrent presidential and legislative elections), presidential election rules (plurality or runoff rules), reelection rules, and presidential powers. We argue that the political context in which elections take place—specifically, the institutional arrangements—condition voters' decisions about whether to vote, namely, by making elections more or less salient to voters (Franklin, 2004). Salient elections make voters more willing to shoulder the costs of voting, such as that of acquiring information about candidates or physically going to the polls to cast a ballot. Such elections also increase the benefits of voting by increasing voters' beliefs that their votes will affect the election outcome (Blais, 2000; Downs, 1957; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968). We use this rational choice theory of electoral salience to develop hypotheses about the effect that presidential institutions have on turnout; we then test the hypotheses empirically, with data on presidential elections in countries from 1974 (or the country's first presidential election) through 2004. We find that some presidential institutions affect voter turnout, but not all. Second-round elections reduce voter participation, whereas having an incumbent on the ballot increases turnout. In contrast, the electoral cycle and the power of the presidency have little effect. Just as in parliamentary and legislative elections, however, the political and socioeconomic context in which elections occur help to explain turnout in presidential elections.

Voter Turnout and Democracy

Voter turnout is a frequently studied topic in political science. It has long been of interest in American politics literature (Downs, 1957; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968) and, more recently, in comparative literature (Geys, 2006; R. W. Jackman, 1987; Powell, 1986). Interest in turnout is rooted in varying concerns about the implications of low voter turnout for democratic theory and practice. Some scholars argue that low voter turnout decreases the legitimacy of democracy (Powell, 1986; Teixeira, 1992; Wattenburg,

2002). If voters do not fulfill their civic duty and vote, it is an indication of apathy toward democracy as a system. Others argue that low voter turnout decreases the representativeness of democracy. Lijphart (1997) argues that low turnout creates a bias in favor of the upper classes, who are more likely to vote and, consequently, be represented. Politicians and policies need not reflect the preferences of people who do not vote or otherwise participate in the political process: "If some citizens are invisible, one cannot respond to them" (Verba, 1996, p. 1). Studies of voter turnout also reflect concerns regarding democratic stability and the overall health of democracy (Franklin, 2004). Powell (1986) points to the argument made by some democratic theorists that high turnout brings out "the often undemocratic values of the less educated" (p. 36), thereby creating unstable political systems (e.g., Weimar Germany and postwar Italy), although he finds that higher turnout actually leads to less political violence and instability (Powell, 1982).

These concerns with the consequences of voter turnout motivate a large literature that aims to understand why voter turnout varies widely across countries. The bulk of this literature relies on institutional, political, economic, cultural, and structural explanations. Institutional and political context explanations focus on how electoral rules and the structure of the political system condition voters' decision-making calculations about whether to vote (Brockington, 2004; Fornos et al., 2004; Franklin, 2004; R. W. Jackman, 1987; Lijphart, 1997; Pérez-Liñán, 2001). These studies look at variables such as the disproportionality produced by electoral formulae, the number of parties, the competitive districts, cameral structure, federalism, compulsory voting, democraticness, and political violence. Economic explanations rely on the rational choice perspective suggesting that voting has costs and that economic resources are important in overcoming these costs. Increased economic development strongly correlates with higher levels of education and media proliferation, which reduce the information costs of voting; however, better economic performance in a given year increases voter apathy (Fornos et al., 2004). Cultural theories stress the sociological and psychological reasons why people vote, and they look at the characteristics of individuals as explanations for voting—such as their political attitudes, frequency of political discussions, feelings of efficacy, interpersonal trust, and identification with political parties (Powell, 1986; Putnam, 2000). Finally, structural explanations draw on mobilization theories; they argue that changes in socioeconomic cleavages and party systems have reduced the ability of unions and class-based political parties to mobilize voters and have thus led to a decline in turnout in industrial democracies (Gray & Caul, 2000).

The comparative literature has provided diverse explanations for variations in voter turnout and has made important strides in understanding why turnout varies across countries. However, it has almost entirely focused on explaining voter turnout in parliamentary systems or in legislative elections in presidential systems. It has overlooked an important category of elections—namely, presidential elections—which occur in more than 50 democracies around the world. These are elections for some of the most visible and powerful leaders in the world, and they are elections in which we have little understanding of why citizens participate. Do the explanations for parliamentary and legislative elections apply to presidential elections? What factors unique to presidential elections affect turnout? Do institutional explanations for turnout in presidential elections overwhelm broader influences, such as political context and economics, which have proved so vital to understanding turnout in parliamentary systems? These are the questions that we aim to answer in this article.

Presidential Institutions and Voter Turnout

Presidential institutions are the rules unique to presidential systems that define how presidents get elected and what powers the presidency retains. Presidential institutions explain a range of political patterns and behavior. Powerful presidencies make new democracies prone to breakdown (Shugart & Carey, 1992), and the various legislative powers of presidents shape patterns of executive–legislative relations and policy making (Carey & Shugart, 1998). Presidential election rules, such as those of the electoral cycle and voting, affect political party strategies on how to run for office and so explain the number of parties fielding candidates and winning elections (Jones, 1994, 1999). Presidential electoral rules also influence the perceived legitimacy and stability of regimes (Blais, Massicotte, & Dobrzynska, 1997; Shugart & Carey, 1992). Runoff systems virtually guarantee that the president obtains majority support and increased legitimacy, whereas plurality rules permit presidents to be selected with less popular support and lower legitimacy.[2] Furthermore, presidential institutions affect voting behavior. Samuels (2004), for example, finds that voters hold presidents accountable under concurrent electoral rules only, whereas term limits have no effect on the voting share that a presidents wins.

Despite the growing body of research on presidential institutions, little research has examined the ways in which these rules affect the decisions of voters to go to the polls and participate in democracy in the first place.

Fornos et al. (2004) study voter turnout in Latin American democracies (all of which are presidential systems), and they use the electoral cycle as a variable explaining turnout in the region. However, the electoral cycle is but one of many political and socioeconomic factors, and the researchers do not examine other institutions of presidentialism that affect turnout (e.g., powers, other electoral rules). Similarly, Pérez-Liñán (2001) studies institutional explanations for turnout in Latin American presidential systems, but he limits his focus to the legislative elections and institutional variables previously considered in the literature—such as compulsory voting, registration laws, competitiveness, multipartism, concurrent elections, and level of democracy. In contrast, we look at presidential systems beyond Latin America and focus on how the institutions unique to presidential systems create incentives for voters to participate in presidential elections.

Institutions affect voter participation by creating conditions under which elections are salient to voters. Franklin (2004, p. 44) argues that elections are salient when institutions make voting less costly to voters and when they make the policy implications of their votes clear, thereby giving them more incentive to turn out. Prohibitive registration laws, poorly located voting stations, and strict voter identification procedures increase the effort associated with going to the polls and thus decrease voter turnout. Similarly, institutions such as the separation of powers hinder turnout because they obscure policy choices and so decrease the likelihood that candidates' political platforms will easily translate into policy (Franklin & Hirczy de Miño, 1998). This logic of institutions' conditioning election salience is fundamental for explaining how and why presidential institutions affect voter turnout.

One presidential institution that may affect voter turnout is the electoral cycle, specifically, the timing of presidential and legislative elections. Concurrent elections occur when legislative and presidential elections are held simultaneously, whereas nonconcurrent legislative and presidential elections are held separately. Nonconcurrent elections may be separated by only a few months, as in Colombia, where congressional elections are held in March, and presidential elections, in May of the same year; alternately, such elections may be separated by years, as in El Salvador, where legislative elections are held every 3 years, and presidential elections, every 5 years. In semipresidential systems, elections are typically nonconcurrent because presidential elections are held on a regular schedule—every 7 years in France, for example—and parliamentary elections are held only when new elections are called.

Concurrent elections may affect turnout for two related reasons. One, concurrent elections reduce the costs of voting because voters can go to the

polls one time to vote in two elections rather than make two or more trips to the ballot box for multiple elections. Concurrent elections increase the importance of that one trip to the polls because it allows voters to vote for both the president and the legislature at the same time. The second reason is that concurrent elections clarify the policy consequences of one's vote, thereby increasing the perceived benefits of voting. In concurrent elections, legislative parties often ride on the coattails of the winning presidential candidate such that the president's party wins a higher share of legislative seats than it would have if elections were nonconcurrent (Jones, 1994; Shugart & Carey, 1992). This means that the president's party is able to implement its policy agenda on its own or, rather, more easily build a coalition to pass its agenda if it does not have a majority of seats. Either way, concurrent elections facilitate majoritarian government, where the winning party is better able to implement its policy agenda. For voters, the prospect of majoritarian government means that they can clearly see the policy consequences of their vote for the president. Consequently, they may be more likely to turn out and vote than when the policy outcomes of their vote are clouded by the party fragmentation that often results from nonconcurrent elections. In sum, the reduced of costs of going to the polls once to participate in multiple elections and the increases in policy salience of concurrent elections should lead to higher voter turnout among concurrent elections.

Studies of voter turnout in legislative elections have found that when presidential elections are held concurrently with legislative elections, turnout is larger than that when legislative elections are held on their own (Fornos et al., 2004; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2007). It is impossible to know, however, whether the reason is that concurrent elections reduce voting costs and clarify policy implications or that presidential elections carry higher importance in the eyes of voters, which carries over to legislative elections concurrently held with presidential elections.[3] By looking at the effect of the electoral cycle on turnout in presidential elections, we can determine whether election timing affects turnout in presidential elections, and we shed more light on why concurrent elections increase turnout in legislative races. If concurrent elections have an independent effect on turnout in presidential elections (after controlling for other characteristics of presidential elections), then voters are apparently swayed by reduced costs and clear policy implications of multiple elections held at the same time. If concurrent legislative and presidential elections do not affect turnout in presidential elections, then the unique characteristics of presidential elections ostensibly increase legislative voter turnout. In other words, it may be that presidential elections, not electoral timing per se, affect voter turnout in legislative elections.

A second institution that could affect turnout in presidential elections is that of the electoral rules. Presidential election rules take one of two broad forms—plurality or runoff. Under plurality rules, voters participate in one round of voting, and the candidate who receives the largest number of votes wins. Under runoff rules, one candidate must win a certain percentage of votes in the first round to avoid a runoff election between the top two vote getters. Runoff systems can be majority runoff systems or reduced threshold systems, where the minimal proportion of votes to win is a percentage less than 50% (e.g., 40% in Costa Rica, 45% in Argentina).

Regardless of the threshold, runoff systems dampen the incentives for voters to engage in strategic voting behavior. By having multiple rounds of elections, strategic voting becomes more complicated, and the possibility of a second-round election encourages voters to cast a sincere vote for their most-preferred party/candidate in the first round (Cox, 1997; Pérez-Liñán, 2006; Shugart & Carey, 1992).[4] In runoff systems, sincere votes are less likely to be wasted in the first round, because the vote serves two purposes: First, it helps select the two candidates or parties that move to the second round of the election. Because voters get to select two winners rather than one, the probability that one's vote will help select a winner is higher. Even if the voter's preferred candidate does not make it to the runoff election, the vote has a second opportunity to matter. Parties that do not win but still have backing by voters are courted by winning parties for the second round. Sincere voting in the first round can increase the negotiating power of a party and get some of the policy concerns of that party represented by one of the candidates in the second round. Thus, the value of the vote—and the impact that it is likely to have in a first-round runoff election—is higher than it is in second-round elections or a plurality election, where strategic voting incentives are high. This context is likely to lead to higher voter turnout in first-round elections than in second-round elections or plurality systems.

A third presidential institution that could affect voter turnout is that of reelection rules. Most presidential systems either prohibit immediate reelection of presidents or allow the president to be reelected once. One country permits more than two terms (Seychelles) and a few others do not limit reelection at all (Cyprus, France, and Iceland). When incumbents can and do run for reelection, they have numerous advantages over their opponents (Jacobson, 1997). One of the most important is that of name recognition, which not only advantages candidates but reduces the information costs of voters, who do not have to expend resources learning about the incumbent candidate. In other words, voters may be more likely to vote when an

incumbent is running because it is less costly than when all candidates are considered unknown quantities.

Another way in which reelection rules could affect turnout is through restrictions on democratic accountability (Carey, 2003). Limiting presidents to one term makes it more difficult for voters to hold presidents accountable for their job performance (Fiorina, 1981; Jones, 2004). Jones (2004) notes that voters are less likely to be indifferent toward incumbents, because they have an established track record. Voters are more likely to go to the polls and express their opinions, good or bad, specifically holding the president accountable for job performance. In contrast, the absence of an incumbent in the reelection contest increases the ambiguity of whom to hold accountable for prior performance.[5] This decreases the salience of elections for voters, and it is likely to dampen voter turnout, especially in systems that never allow reelection. Where presidents can and do run for reelection, incumbency increases clarity of responsibility and so creates the opportunity for voters to hold elected political leaders accountable for their performance; that is, voters are more likely to take advantage of this opportunity to hold an incumbent accountable for past performance.

Finally, the powers invested in the office of the presidency can vary widely from country to country. Some presidents are mere figureheads, with separate and popular elections but no real legislative or nonlegislative powers (e.g., Bulgaria, Ireland, and Macedonia). Other countries afford their presidents substantial political powers. Belarus, for example, is one of the most powerful presidential systems in the world, with strong package and partial veto powers, some decree powers, exclusive bill introduction powers, and the ability to unilaterally call referenda. The power of presidents should affect voter turnout because more powerful presidents have greater ability to translate their political agendas into policy. If the president is a figurehead, voters may not waste their time voting, because they know the president, once elected, has little role in determining political outcomes. However, if the president has substantial powers to influence or disrupt the policy-making process, then voters might place more weight on the importance of the presidential election, thereby tipping the cost–benefit calculation in favor of voting. Thus, we expect that elections for more powerful presidents will have higher voter turnout than that of elections for weak presidents.

Institutions of presidential elections can increase the salience of a citizen's vote and thus spur voter turnout. This may occur because of the timing of presidential and legislative elections, the presidential electoral rules, the reelection laws, or the powers of the presidential office. In the next section,

we conduct an empirical test of these explanations, alongside of traditional political context and socioeconomic explanations, to determine what explains variation in voter turnout in presidential elections.

Data and Method

We collected data on presidential elections in all countries that were presidential democracies for two or more elections at any point between 1974 (the start of the third wave of democracy) and 2004. We use Siaroff's classification (2003) of presidential democracies as countries with electoral democracies and popularly elected presidents that are not accountable to the legislature.[6] This yields a data set of 52 countries, with 2 to 14 elections in each country.[7] The appendix provides a list of the countries and elections in the data set.

Significant disagreement exists on how best to measure the dependent variable in studies of voter turnout. On one side, scholars advocate measuring turnout as the proportion of the voting-age population that votes (Endersby & Krieckhaus, 2008; Fornos et al., 2004; Gray & Caul, 2000; R. W. Jackman, 1987; Powell, 1986). On the other, scholars measure turnout as the percentage of registered voters that turn out to vote (Blais & Dobrzynska, 1998; Franklin, 2004; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2007; Powell, 1986).[8] Both measures are imperfect. In terms of data, they are imprecise measures of turnout because of inaccurate voter registration rolls and poor population estimates. Their comparability across countries is also questionable because of differences in voter registration laws and the exclusion of some groups in the voting-age population from voting in some countries (Blais, Massicotte, & Yoshinaka, 2001). The variables also get at distinct, though related, ideas. Explaining variation in the proportion of registered voters is a narrower measure of what causes those who are already predisposed to vote to go to the polls and cast a ballot. Focusing on the proportion of the voting-age population that votes is a broader measure of those who are eligible, though not necessarily as likely, to participate. Explaining variation in both is important; as such, we present models with both dependent variables and compare explanations across them.

Variation in the dependent variables is wide and highly correlated. The percentage of registered voters who vote ranges from 20.9% (in the second round of Mali's 1992 election) to 95.0% (in the second round of the 1988 Cyprus election), with an average of 70.8%. The percentage of the voting-age population that votes ranges from 26.3% (in the second round of

Guatemala's 1995 election) to 98.7% (in Benin's 2001 election), with an average of 67.2%. Correlation in the two measures of the dependent variable is high, $r = .79$ ($p < .000$), thereby suggesting that they are similar, though not identical, measures of turnout.

Our key independent variables are as follows: the electoral cycle, presidential electoral rules, reelection rules, and presidential powers.[9] The electoral cycle is a dichotomous variable for whether presidential and legislative elections were held on the same day (concurrent = 1). *Presidential electoral rules* is a categorical measure that distinguishes elections under plurality electoral rules,[10] first-round elections in runoff systems, and second-round elections in runoff systems, with three dummy variables.[11] Because we expect turnout in plurality and second-round elections to be significantly lower than that in first-round elections (but not particularly different from each other), we use the first-round election variable as the excluded category.[12] *Reelection rules* is a dichotomous variable, coded 1 if an incumbent is running for reelection and 0 if not. For presidential powers, we draw on and extend Shugart and Carey's classification of presidential powers (1992), merging it with the update provided by Metcalf (2000). For cases not included in either of those studies, we return to the original country constitutions and thus code presidential powers according to Metcalf's revised criteria. We measure the power of presidents with three binary variables—weak powers, moderate powers, and strong powers—using the *weak powers* variable as the comparison category for the other two variables.[13]

To isolate the effect of presidential institutions on voter turnout, we control for political context and socioeconomic factors that affect turnout. These are influences that existing literature on turnout in parliamentary elections has found to explain turnout and that may be relevant to presidential elections. Political context factors include the competitiveness of the election, the number of candidates or parties running for office, compulsory voting laws, the newness of democracy, and a country's degree of political freedom. More competitive presidential races may spur higher turnout because parties are more likely to mobilize voters when their candidate is in a tight race (Pérez-Liñán, 2001). Turnout studies have used an array of competitiveness measures, ranging from ordinal scales linking competitiveness to the size of the electoral district (Fornos et al., 2004; R. W. Jackman, 1987; Powell, 1986) to a ratio of competitiveness that accounts for legislative votes and seats won (Pérez-Liñán, 2001). These are not applicable for presidential elections; so, we measure competitiveness as the margin of victory for the winning candidate (Franklin & Hirczy de Miño, 1998).14 The larger the margin of victory, the less competitive the race is—thus, lower expected turnout.

The number of parties competing in the race could also affect turnout (Fornos et al., 2004; R. W. Jackman, 1987; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2007; Pérez-Liñán, 2001). R. W. Jackman (1987) argues that multipartism should lower turnout in parliamentary elections, namely, because a multiparty government makes it more difficult to form governing coalitions and it makes governing less decisive. This form of government gives voters fewer incentives to cast a ballot because they cannot see the policy consequences of that vote. In presidential elections, multipartism in the race does not translate into multipartism in the office, because only one candidate wins. However, the presence of many candidates still makes it more difficult for voters to discern the policy implications of their vote, given that a larger number of candidates means more overlap in the policy agendas promoted in the race and, thus, an indiscernible outcome. We include a variable measuring the number of candidates who ran in the presidential election and won more than 5% of the vote. This ensures that we include only credible candidates, and it avoids skewing the variable with outliers. We expect a race with more candidates to lead to lower voter turnout.

Where voters are required by law to vote, turnout should be higher (Fornos et al., 2004; Franklin, 1999; Gray & Caul, 2000; R. W. Jackman, 1987; Lijphart, 1997; Powell, 1986). We measure compulsory voting with an ordinal scale, from 0 to 3, ranking laws by their presence and strength of enforcement in practice. A code of 0 corresponds to countries with no compulsory voting laws; codes 1 to 3 correspond to countries that mandate voting by degree of enforcement—no enforcement, weak enforcement, and strict enforcement, respectively.[15]

Also affecting turnout is the length of time that a country has been democratic and the level of democracy at election time (Fornos et al., 2004; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2007; Pérez-Liñán, 2001). When democratic elections are new, voters have high expectations from the political system and therefore turn out to exercise their new political rights. As the democratic transition fades into memory, voters become disillusioned with their new democracies, and turnout declines. We control for this effect with a variable measuring the number of years that the country has been democratic. We log this in the models to adjust for the smaller effect that it may have among long-standing democracies.

The overall level of democracy at the time of an election should also affect turnout. More democratic states may have higher voter turnout because the citizens know that the state respects political rights and civil liberties (Fornos et al., 2004). We use Freedom House's continuous measure of democracy, combining the political rights and civil liberties scores

and inverting the scale such that low values are less democratic and high values are more democratic (see http://www.freedomhouse.org).

The socioeconomic environment variables include the level of economic development (measured as gross domestic product per capita logged) and economic performance (measured as gross domestic product growth; World Bank, 2007). The level-of-development measure assesses the overall wealth and social development of a country, which should contribute to higher voter turnout. Numerous studies of individual voters and aggregate populations have found that citizens with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to vote (Gray & Caul, 2000; R. W. Jackman, 1987; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2007; Powell, 1986). They have sufficient economic and educational resources to lower the costs of voting. As such, level of development measures the long-term socioeconomic health of a country, whereas economic performance addresses a country's short-term economic success. Annual gross domestic product growth provides a measure of how the economy is doing each year. We expect that voter turnout will be higher when economic performance is poor, given that citizens are more likely to vote when they are unhappy with the direction that the country is going (Fornos et al., 2004; Gray & Caul, 2000). When the economy is doing well, citizens are more apathetic toward the political system, and the costs of voting may well outweigh any perceived benefit. When the economy is suffering, citizens have greater incentives to vote and so demand changes to improve their current situation.

The data set is both cross-sectional and time-series; however, the panels are unbalanced, with uneven gaps in the time-series, which violate the assumptions of pooled time-series analysis. One option is to condense the data set into one that is purely cross-sectional by averaging across decades and by running separate models by decade. Indeed, this option has been popular in literature that focuses on institutional effects and institutions have not changed much over time (R. W. Jackman, 1987; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2007; Pérez-Liñán, 2001; Powell, 1986). Our covariates do vary over time, however, and it would be impossible to study the effect of two-round elections (which often occur within months of one another) by averaging turnout across elections. The other option is to maintain the disaggregated data set and run models that take into account the most common problems with cross-sectional, time-series data (Endersby & Krieckhaus, 2008). Because our data set has many more panels ($n = 52$) than it does time points (up to 14), we are more concerned with problems of heteroskedasticity and serial correlation across panels than we are with autocorrelation over time. Under these circumstances, we follow Endersby and Krieckhaus (2008) and use ordinary least squares regression with

robust standard errors, but we cluster around countries.[16] Clustering eliminates country-specific effects in the error term, and robust standard errors reduce the problem of heteroskedasticity.[17] Finally, multicollinearity is unlikely in the models. No independent variables correlate any higher than .61, which is the case for gross domestic product per capita and level of democracy; furthermore, a variance inflation factor test for higher-order multicollinearity reveals a mean of only 1.71, well below the accepted threshold (10.00) for multicollinearity problems.[18]

Findings

Presidential institutions do influence voter turnout in presidential elections, but not all our hypothesized institutions matter. Table 1 presents the results of our analysis, with Model 1 explaining variation in the percentage of registered voters who turn out and with Model 2 explaining variation in the percentage of the voting age-population that votes. Concurrent presidential and legislative elections do not boost turnout for presidential elections. This finding contrasts that of the literature indicating that concurrent elections increase turnout in Latin American presidential elections (Fornos et al., 2004) and that they have higher legislative turnout than that of non-concurrent election (Fornos et al., 2004; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2007). We further investigated the lack of significance and discovered that when we exclude the control for presidential election rules, the electoral-cycle variable becomes significant.[19] Once we account for the effect that plurality and runoff systems have on turnout, concurrent elections no longer matter. This finding suggests that Fornos and colleauges' findings for presidential elections may be spurious because they do not account for the effect of varying presidential electoral rules, which, as our results show, affect turnout whereas the electoral cycle does not.

In addition, the nonsignificant effect of the electoral cycle implies that the reduced costs associated with holding two elections at one time do not affect legislative turnout but that the value associated with the presidential election itself does. In other words, voter turnout in legislative elections rides on the coattails of presidential elections. Presidential elections are less frequent; they elect a single person; and they carry high visibility, which can boost turnout in legislative elections when they are held at the same time. There are no reverse coattails, however. Legislative elections held at the same time as presidential elections bring no increased visibility to election day, and they do not make turnout in presidential elections higher than what it otherwise would be.

Table 1
Effect of Presidential Institutions on Voter Turnout

Variable	Model 1: Percentage of Registered Voters	Model 2: Percentage of Voting-Age Population
Presidential institutions		
Concurrent elections	2.45 (2.25)	–0.42 (3.57)
Electoral rules[a]		
Plurality electoral rules	0.39 (2.63)	–1.18 (3.82)
Second-round election	–5.66** (2.64)	–6.74** (3.23)
Reelection rules		
Incumbent running	5.94*** (2.19)	2.19 (2.91)
Presidential powers[b]		
Moderate presidential powers	–3.90 (3.07)	–5.47 (3.72)
Strong presidential powers	–8.30 (5.78)	–10.35† (5.82)
Political context		
Competitiveness	–0.05 (0.07)	–0.008 (0.07)
Number of candidates/parties	–2.76*** (0.89)	–1.79* (1.18)
Strength of compulsory voting	7.17*** (1.34)	5.59*** (2.08)
Years democratic (logged)	–2.24** (0.95)	–2.38* (1.57)
Level of democratic freedom	1.13* (0.86)	1.56* (1.20)
Socioeconomic environment		
Level of development	2.42** (1.41)	1.99 (1.78)
Economic growth	–0.20* (0.14)	–0.17 (0.16)
Constant	70.28*** (13.83)	73.91*** (19.61)
R^2	.35	.22
n	262	260

Note: Ordinary least squares regression coefficients, with robust standard errors clustered around country (in parentheses).
a. Comparison category: first-round election.
b. Comparison category: weak presidential powers.
$^{\dagger}p < .10$. Two-tailed. $^{*}p < .10$. $^{**}p < .05$. $^{***}p < .01$. One-tailed.

The timing of elections does not affect turnout, but presidential election rules do. The higher incentives for strategic voting in plurality elections (as compared to first-round runoff elections) do not yield significantly lower turnout, but those incentives in second-round elections do turn off voters. The percentage of registered voters that go to the polls in the first round of a runoff election is 6 percentage points higher than that of the second round.[20] Voters express their party or candidate preference in the first round, but far fewer return in the second round to vote for a final winner, where their first-round preference may no longer be a candidate. The effect is slightly larger when turnout is measured via the voting-age population.

Rules about reelection also affect turnout but differently for registered voters and the voting-age population. Among registered voters, turnout is higher when an incumbent is running for office than when an incumbent is not running. Registered voters in many systems express political interest by registering to vote; so, it is not surprising that those who have already shown interest in the political process are inspired to turn out and vote when they have the opportunity to pass judgment on the incumbent president. This does not hold for turnout measured as a percentage of the voting-age population, however. The incumbency variable is not statistically significant in Model 2. The opportunity to engage democracy and hold a president accountable spurs only registered voters to turn out, not the broader swath of the voting-age population.

The powers invested in a president do not affect voter turnout, as originally hypothesized. Most of the regression coefficients for presidential powers are not significant. Only the coefficient for strong powers in the voting-age population model achieves standard levels of statistical significance. However, all the coefficients are negative, thus suggesting that more powerful presidents deter voters from the polls. The insignificance and negative sign persist even when distinguishing legislative from nonlegislative powers and running models for the different types of powers.[21] Thus, we cannot draw any generalizable conclusions about presidential powers and their potential influence on voter turnout.

As expected, the political and socioeconomic contexts play important roles in explaining variations in turnout. The variable measuring competitiveness is negative but not statistically significant. The number of candidates/parties running for the presidency does affect turnout. Voters go to the polls in smaller percentages (a difference of approximately 2 percentage points) when the race is crowded with candidates and less decisive. Strongly enforced compulsory voting laws increase turnout by about 7 percentage points among registered voters and 6 percentage points among the voting-age population. These findings hold when the variable is estimated as a categorical variable rather than as an ordinal scale. New democracies have higher turnout than do older democracies, with the decline leveling out the longer a country has been democratic. The coefficients for levels of democratic freedom in an election just reach levels of statistical significance (in one-tailed tests), thus making us less confident in the robustness of this result and the conclusion suggesting that it matters ($p = .195$ for registered voters and $p = .200$ for the voting-age population).[22] Finally, more economically developed countries have higher turnout than that of less developed countries, and poor economic performance rallies voters to express their dissatisfaction through voting. However, the effects of these variables pertain only to turnout among registered voters. In the voting age population–based model, the coefficients for economic

growth and level of development are in the expected direction, but they do not achieve statistical significance.

Voter Turnout, Presidential Institutions, and Democracy

The role that presidential institutions play in stimulating voter turnout in presidential elections has been largely overlooked, in favor of concerns with turnout in parliamentary and legislative elections. However, the emergence of presidential democracies in Latin America in the 1980s and the adoption of mixed presidential–parliamentary systems around the world make it necessary to examine turnout in presidential systems.

Here, we show that presidential electoral rules and reelection rules affect turnout. Specifically, first-round runoff elections have higher turnout than that of second-round elections, and having incumbents in the race increases turnout. In contrast, presidential powers and the electoral cycle do not explain variation in turnout. Our findings lend support to the theory that certain institutional arrangements make elections more salient and, in turn, generate larger voter turnout. But it occurs only through some presidential institutions.

As such, this article not only contributes to the comparative voter-turnout literature but speaks to the literature on presidential institutions. It is well established that presidential institutions affect policy making, legislator behavior, the structure of party systems, and vote choice, but no research has thus far looked at how presidential institutions affect voter participation. Our research shows that presidential election rules and reelection rules are key explanations for variation in turnout across presidential systems.

In addition, the findings of our article speak directly to two debates about the effectiveness of institutions in presidential systems. First, an ongoing debate examines the pros and cons of multiple-round presidential elections for democratic governability. The effectiveness of runoff elections has been questioned on the grounds that they contribute to greater party fragmentation and that they artificially manufacture a majority with a second-round election that decreases governability (see, e.g., Pérez-Liñán, 2006). Our results add to this concern by revealing that turnout is lower in second-round elections. In other words, although runoff elections ensure that the president enters office with a majority of the voters' support, it is a majority of a smaller portion of the electorate, as compared to that of the first round. Thus, second-round elections have the paradoxical effect of boosting the legitimacy of presidential winners by manufacturing majority support but also discouraging a portion of voters from participating. To be sure, we do not think that two-round systems should be eliminated—indeed,

runoff elections have many perceived benefits—rather, we suggest that new or fragile democracies that implement two-round elections should be aware of their dampening effect on turnout.

The second discussion to which our study speaks is the ongoing debate in Latin American presidential systems over presidential reelection (Carey, 2003). With the transitions to democracy in Latin America in the 1980s, new constitutions emerged that prohibited the immediate reelection of presidents. In recent years, these prohibitions have been called into question and, in many countries, have been rescinded, which has in turn fueled debate over the merits of presidential reelection and term limits. One of the points in favor of permitting presidents to serve more than one term is that it would increase democratic accountability and encourage elected officials to be more responsive to voter demands. Our study's results show that in addition to increasing accountability, incumbents' running for office increases voter turnout. For those considering the pros and cons of presidential reelection rules, reelection's effects on voter participation merits attention.

In addition to making institutional contributions, this article makes contributions to the noninstitutional literature on voter turnout by showing that the political context and socioeconomic environment are key explanations for voter turnout in presidential elections. Clear policy choices that are reflected in a small number of candidates, compulsory voting, and the newness of democracy increase turnout, as do higher levels of socioeconomic development and short-term economic crises. This finding confirms that explanations for variation in voter turnout in legislative and presidential elections are similar, but just as studies of legislative turnout have accounted for legislative institutions as explanatory variables, studies of presidential turnout must account for presidential institutions. Neither institutional, nor political context, nor economic variables explain voter participation on their own, but they do in combination with one another.

Studies of voter turnout need to pay explicit attention to whether they are explaining turnout in parliamentary systems or presidential systems and whether they are concerned with legislative or presidential elections. Although some studies have combined presidential and legislative elections when explaining turnout (Gray & Caul, 2000; R. W. Jackman, 1987; Pérez-Liñán, 2001), ours shows that turnout in presidential elections is explained, in part, by factors specific to presidential elections. Future research on turnout must not only distinguish the two types of elections, as that by Fornos et al. (2004) does, but also explicitly account for different factors that affect turnout in the different elections. Institutions, political context, and socioeconomic environments are some of the major categories of explanations to consider.

Appendix: Countries and Democratic Presidential Election Years

Argentina	1983, 1989, 1995, 1999, 2003
Armenia	1996, $1998_{1,2}$, $2003_{1,2}$
Austria	1974, 1980, $1986_{1,2}$, $1992_{1,2}$, 1998, 2004
Benin	$1991_{1,2}$, $1996_{1,2}$, $2001_{1,2}$
Brazil	$1989_{1,2}$, 1994, 1998, $2002_{1,2}$
Bulgaria	$1992_{1,2}$, $1996_{1,2}$, $2001_{1,2}$
Cape Verde	1991, $2001_{1,2}$
CAR	$1993_{1,2}$, 1999
Chile	1989, 1993, $1999_{1,2}$
Colombia	1978, 1982, 1986, 1990, $1994_{1,2}$, $1998_{1,2}$, 2002
Costa Rica	1974, 1978, 1982, 1986, 1990, 1994, 1998, $2002_{1,2}$
Croatia	1992, 1997, $2000_{1,2}$
Cyprus	1983, $1988_{1,2}$, $1993_{1,2}$, $1998_{1,2}$, 2003
DR	1978, 1982, 1986, 1990, 1994, $1996_{1,2}$, 2000, 2004
Ecuador	1978, 1979_2, $1984_{1,2}$, $1988_{1,2}$, $1992_{1,2}$, $1996_{1,2}$, $1998_{1,2}$, $2002_{1,2}$
El Salvador	$1984_{1,2}$, 1989, $1994_{1,2}$, 1999, 2004
Finland	1978, 1982, 1988, $1994_{1,2}$, $2000_{1,2}$
France	$1974_{1,2}$, $1981_{1,2}$, $1988_{1,2}$, $1995_{1,2}$, $2002_{1,2}$
Georgia	1995, 2000, 2004
Ghana	1996, $2000_{1,2}$, 2004
Guatemala	$1985_{1,2}$, 1990, 1991_2, 1995, 1996_2, $1999_{1,2}$, $2003_{1,2}$
Honduras	1981, 1985, 1989, 1993, 1997, 2001
Iceland	1980, 1988, 1996, 2004
Ireland	1990, 1997
Korea	1987, 1992, 1997, 2002
Lithuania	1993, 1997, 1998_2, 2002, 2003_2, $2004_{1,2}$
Macedonia	1994, $1999_{1,2}$, $2004_{1,2}$
Madagascar	$1992_{1,2}$, $1996_{1,2}$, 2001
Malawi	1994, 1999, 2004
Mali	$1992_{1,2}$, 2002
Mexico	1994, 2000
Mongolia	1993, 1997, 2001
Mozambique	1994, 1999, 2004
Namibia	1994, 1999, 2004
Nicaragua	1990, 1996, 2001
Palau	1996, 2000, 2004
Panama	1994, 1999, 2004
Paraguay	1989, 1993, 1998, 2003
Peru	1980, 1985, $1990_{1,2}$, $2001_{1,2}$
Philippines	1992, 1998, 2004
Poland	$1995_{1,2}$, 2000
Portugal	1976, 1980, $1986_{1,2}$, 1991, 1996, 2001
Romania	$1996_{1,2}$, $2000_{1,2}$, $2004_{1,2}$
STP	$1996_{1,2}$, 2001
Seychelles	1993, 1998, 2001
SR	$1999_{1,2}$, $2004_{1,2}$
Slovenia	1992, 1997, $2002_{1,2}$
Sri Lanka	1982, 1988, 1994, 1999
Ukraine	$1994_{1,2}$, $1999_{1,2}$, $2004_{1,2}$
United States	1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004
Uruguay	1984, 1989, 1994, $1999_{1,2}$
Venezuela	1978, 1983, 1988, 1993, 1998, 2000

Note: Subscript numbers indicate first- and second-round elections in runoff systems. CAR = Central African Republic; DR = Dominican Republic; SR = Slovak Republic; STP = Sao Tome and Principe

Notes

1. Some studies have included a few presidential elections amid a larger sample of parliamentary elections, but they have treated the two identically (Gray & Caul, 2000; R. W. Jackman, 1987; Pérez-Liñán, 2001). Fornos, Power, and Garand (2004) distinguish presidential elections from legislative elections in their study of voter turnout in Latin America, but they do not theorize about differences that their explanatory variables may have on the different types of elections, nor do they include explanatory factors that might be specific to presidential elections.

2. Blais, Massicotte, and Dobrzynska (1997) suggest that the growing number of Latin American nations utilizing second-round elections stems from the breakdown of democratic rule in Chile in 1973. Before then, Chilean democratic legitimacy had been weakened by a series of presidents who failed to receive a majority of the popular vote (see also, Shugart & Carey, 1992, p. 86). Whether second-round elections have actually increased the legitimacy and stability of presidential rules, however, is of some dispute (Pérez-Liñán, 2006).

3. Fornos et al. (2004) do find that concurrent elections have higher turnout in legislative elections and presidential elections, but their analysis for presidential elections omits some of the key explanatory variables that we propose here for presidential elections. Thus, their findings still leave unclear the correct theoretical linkage between the electoral cycle and voter turnout.

4. We thank Richard Vengroff for suggesting this logic to us.

5. The retrospective theory of voting suggests that voters hold the incumbent or the incumbent's party responsible for prior performance in office (Fiorina, 1981). The theory makes little distinction between the incumbent and the incumbent's party. However, this direct linkage of the party's bearing the full electoral consequences for the incumbent's performance has been challenged. For voters to hold elected officials accountable, they need a clear idea of whom to hold responsible. Clarity of responsibility is highest when the individual incumbent is contesting the elections. This clarity is diluted when the incumbent is not on the ballot. Voters are less able to make the connection between a president and the president's party. The incumbent's party may contribute to this ambiguity by focusing on the future, rather than on past performance, and by putting forward a new candidate and platforms for upcoming elections. Nadeau and Lewis-Beck (2001) find, in the American context, weaker economic voting in open-seat contests owing to the more ambiguous connection between prior performance and the incumbent's party. Gélineau (2007) finds, in the comparative context, weakened economic voting when incumbents are not on the ballot and when party system institutionalization is low.

6. In other words, all countries in Categories 2, 5, and 6 (Siaroff, 2003). We disagree with Siaroff in only a handful of cases on when the first election as an electoral democracy occurred, and we exclude Guyana because it functions more as a parliamentary system than a presidential one—that is, the president's survival is dependent on parliamentary elections.

7. The full data set of presidential democracies and first- and second-round elections yields 281 country–election observations (see appendix). However, data on turnout were not available for a few elections, and we excluded the questionable democracies of Guinea-Bissau (1994–2000) and Nigeria (1999–2004) owing to missing data on presidential powers.

8. We began by collecting these data from the Voter Turnout Web site of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (http://www.idea.int/vt/compulsory_voting.cfm). Much of the data for presidential elections, however, were missing or were reported for only one election round. Thus, we supplemented the data with other election archives and news reports: Nohlen's *Elections in the Americas* (2005), the Elections Results Archive of the

Center for Democratic Performance (http://cdp.binghamton.edu/era/regions/), the Election Guide of the IFES (http://www.electionguide.org/), the African Elections Database (http://africanelections.tripod.com/index.html), the Project on Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe (http://www.essex.ac.uk/elections/), Adam Carr's Election Archive (http://psephos.adam-carr.net/), and the Lexus-Nexus News Archive.

9. Becuase of to inaccuracies in some of the large comparative data sets on political institutions, we researched the electoral rules ourselves and coded them accordingly. We drew on an array of electoral sources to code these data, including the election archives in the previous note, as well as the electoral codes and constitutions of many countries.

10. We include in this category nations that in practice use plurality voting systems, such as alternative voting, supplementary voting, and electoral college rules.

11. We code both majority-runoff and reduced-threshold-runoff systems as nonplurality elections, distinguishing between whether the election under observation is first- or second-round.

12. Because the three variables are perfectly collinear, one of them has to be excluded from the model (Greene, 2008), which means that we must interpret the estimated coefficients from the statistical model in comparison to the excluded category.

13. The coding of presidential powers yields a scale of powers ranging from 1 to 26. One of the common critiques of Shugart and Carey's measure of powers (1992) is its presumption of nuanced, equidistant distinctions between what are actually broad categories of powers (Siaroff, 2003). In other words, a 1-unit increase in power from 2 to 3 or 24 to 25 does not necessarily correspond to a specific increase in power. To counter this claim, we break the scale into more realistic categories of power. We use natural cutoff points in the data to create these categories: 1.0–8.0 = weak power, 8.0–18.5 = moderate power, and 18.5–26.0 = strong power. We also ran our models with the continuous measure of presidential powers, and the results are comparable to what we present below.

14. Specifically, it is the percentage of votes received by the winner minus the percentage of votes received by the second-place candidate.

15. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance records data on compulsory voting laws, types of sanctions applied for nonvoting, and levels of enforcement. We use their classification scheme available at http://www.idea.int/vt/compulsory_voting.cfm.

16. We estimated alternative models using cross-section time-series techniques—panel corrected standard errors (Beck & Katz, 1995) and general linear models—and in some cases, these models were even more robust than what we present in Table 1.

17. Models without clustered standard errors are similar to those with clustering, except that levels of statistical significance are higher in the former. The nonclustered models produce less consistent coefficient estimates, however (Greene, 2008).

18. The highest variance inflation factor is for gross domestic product per capita and the other independent variables, at 2.21.

19. Models available from the authors.

20. Models that restrict the sample to elections where runoff races were actually held yield a smaller and less statistically significant effect (for the registered-voters model, $b = -2.70$, $p = .41$; for the voting-age-population models, $b = -5.10$, $p = .20$). This likely occurs because of the reduced degrees of freedom (sample size drops by half) and the increased correlation between second-round elections and the number of parties competing ($r = .80$). Neither the second-round variable nor the number-of-parties variable reaches traditional levels of statistical significance, though each remains substantively similar to those of the full-sample models.

21. Models available from the authors.

22. We also ran models with the newness-of-democracy variable, coded dichotomously (1 = the founding election). Turnout was significantly higher in the first democratic election.

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Bryan J. Dettrey is a graduate student at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York. His research interests include political behavior and institutions from both an American and a comparative perspective.

Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Missouri. Her comparative politics research focuses on political institutions and behavior, representation, and Latin America. Her work has been published in the *American Journal of Political Science*, *The Journal of Politics*, and *Electoral Studies*.