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When Compulsory Voting Isn't: Evidence from Mixed Electoral Systems

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Compulsory voting is generally associated with increased turnout, yet this expected boost relies on assumptions of enforcement. Mixed electoral systems which allocate seats by both single member districts (SMDs) and proportional representation (PR) in the same legislative chamber provide a unique electoral context to evaluate the effects of compulsory voting alongside other electoral institutions to evaluate which potentially influence turnout. Through an analysis of all mixed electoral system elections from 1990-2010, this analysis finds that compulsory voting laws fail to correlate with a statistically significant boost in turnout in any model. These findings not only conflict with the broader literature and question the role of compulsory voting in these countries, but suggest other ways to increase turnout in mixed systems.

Introduction

What explains turnout in mixed electoral systems? Turnout remains the standard measure for citizen participation (Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978) and low turnout potentially distorts the link between citizen desires and representation (Larcinese 2007; Lijphart 1997a). Considering the 30 year global trend of lower turnout in elections (Franklin 2004; Kostadinova 2003), one understands the attention to institutional influences on turnout as a means to reverse this trend. Compulsory voting in particular is associated with increased turnout, yet this expected boost relies on assumptions of enforcement. Mixed electoral systems which allocate seats by both single member districts (SMDs) and proportional representation (PR) provide a unique electoral context to evaluate whether the simple presence of compulsory voting laws influence turnout or whether other electoral institutions do the heavy lifting.

One means to increase turnout commonly proposed is compulsory voting laws. Currently 27 countries have compulsory voting laws for national elections (Table 1)¹ and other countries have considered enacting compulsory voting (Hill and Louth 2004). Australia for example saw turnout increase from under 60% for both legislative chambers before the introduction of compulsory voting to over 90% in the first election afterwards (Hill and Louth 2004). In contrast, the role of compulsory voting

¹ In addition, the Swiss canton of Schaffhausen maintains compulsory voting while the rest of the country abolished it in 1974. Elections to the French Senate also use compulsory voting, although voting is restricted to roughly 150,000 officials.

has received virtually no attention in an increasingly popular electoral structure: mixed electoral systems. Proliferating since 1990, mixed electoral systems provide a unique context to evaluate institutional influences on turnout. Compared to the broader literature on pure majoritarian systems (e.g. United States, United Kingdom) and pure proportional systems (e.g. much of Latin America), how mixed system institutions influence the act of voting remains unclear. The complexity of these systems, usually requiring voters to cast two physical ballots, potentially influences the decision to vote just as it influences decisions on strategic voting. Yet a cursory analysis of mixed systems with compulsory voting laws sees no correlation between the presence of such laws and turnout, questioning their utility. This analysis will analyze whether compulsory voting laws show any systematic boost in turnout within mixed systems after controlling for other institutional factors.

Table 1: Countries with Compulsory Voting Laws for National Elections

Argentina	Honduras
Australia	Lebanon ²
Belgium	Libya
<i>Bolivia</i>	Liechtenstein
Costa Rica	Luxembourg
Cyprus	<i>Mexico</i>
Dominican Republic	Nauru
DRC	Paraguay
Ecuador	Peru
Egypt	Singapore
Fiji	<i>Thailand</i>
Gabon	Turkey
Greece	Uruguay
Guatemala	

Mixed Electoral Systems in Italics

This analysis will first briefly introduce mixed electoral systems before tying this to the broader literature on turnout and specifically the role of compulsory voting laws. Descriptive and regression analysis fails to find a statistically significant correlation between compulsory voting laws and turnout under any test. The conclusion suggests the limits to compulsory voting laws and highlights other means to increase turnout in mixed systems.

² Compulsory voting is restricted to males.

Mixed Electoral Systems and Turnout

By definition mixed electoral systems use at least two formulas to allocate seats, although beyond this point, a generally accepted definition remains illusory (e.g. Massicotte and Blais 1999; Nishikawa and Herron 2004; Reynolds and Reilly 1997; Shugart and Wattenberg 2001). However, most mixed electoral systems share a few commonalities. The most obvious is that they combine SMDs, like those used for elections to the US House of Representatives or the United Kingdom's House of Commons, with PR, like that of much of Latin America and Europe. Thus there are two paths to seats in the same legislative chamber and geographically the two types of seats overlap, as opposed to having separate electoral rules for different regions in a country or by ethnic group. These systems can be viewed as a compromise between national representation through national policy-oriented party seats and local representation through constituency-oriented district seats. This type of SMD-PR combination constitutes nearly all of the examples in the mixed legislative system literature³ and thus can be viewed as a de facto agreed upon definition. With this definition and the exclusion of countries labeled "Not Free" by Freedom House since the institutional influences are likely trumped by non-institutional coercion (e.g. Guinea, Kazakhstan, Pakistan and Tajikistan), leaves eighty-seven elections in twenty-five countries between 1990, when mixed systems were a rarity and largely identified with Germany, to 2010 where mixed systems had emerged throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Table 2).

As one of the seminal findings in electoral politics, Duverger's Law (Duverger 1954) expects two-party competition in SMDs as there can only be one winner and more than two parties under PR as the district magnitude (often the total number of legislative seats) produces a much lower barrier for parties to gain seats. Mixed systems provide a new means to address Duverger's Law. Proponents of the "best of both worlds" view (see Shugart and Wattenberg 2001) see mixed systems as a form of natural experiment, where elections to SMDs and PR can be viewed as if they were independent elections (e.g. Moser 1997; Moser and Scheiner 2005; Reed 1999). As such, the broader literature on elections employing SMDs or PR should apply to individual seat types of mixed systems.

³ This definition excludes Cameroon and Chad (list seats are not proportional), Andorra and Guatemala (both tiers are multimember), Monaco (multiple votes in the nominal tier), Niger (SMDs only for minority groups), Panama and Congo-Kinshasa (tiers do not overlap), Senegal and Tunisia (bloc vote), and Switzerland (one and two-member districts).

Table 2: Elections in Mixed Electoral Systems Included in Analysis (1990-2010)

Country	Election Year
Albania	1992, 1996, 1997, 2001, 2005
Armenia	1995, 1999, 2003, 2007
Azerbaijan	2000
Bolivia	1997, 2002, 2005, 2009
Bulgaria	1990, 2009
Croatia	1992, 1995
Georgia	1995, 1999, 2004, 2008
Germany	1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2005, 2009
Hungary	1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010
Italy	1994, 1996, 2001
Japan	1996, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2009
Korea	1996, 2000, 2004, 2008
Lesotho	2002, 2007
Lithuania	1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008
Macedonia	1998
Mexico	1991, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009
Nepal	2008
New Zealand	1996, 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008
Philippines	1998, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010
Russia	1993, 1995, 1999, 2003
Seychelles	1998, 2002, 2007
Taiwan	2008
Thailand	2001, 2005
Ukraine	1998, 2002
Venezuela	1993, 1998, 2000

In contrast, supporters of a contamination thesis suggest that an interaction occurs between the SMDs and PR seats, leading to outcomes inconsistent with Duverger. Bawn (1999) argues that some voters will use information from the district tier in calculating their party vote. Elections in both tiers occur virtually simultaneously (and in one-vote systems the election is simultaneous) and the minor disparity among the aggregate votes cast in each tier in two-vote systems suggest the overarching decision to vote is not independent. A myriad of factors that cross tiers, such as party interests, may increase the number of district candidates (Ferrara, Herron, and Nishikawa 2005; Herron and Nishikawa 2001).

While evidence of the “best of both worlds” or a contamination thesis in part depends on the level of analysis, little analysis in the mixed systems literature addresses turnout. This is puzzling considering the vast literature in the broader electoral politics literature on turnout under different electoral rules. Of particular concern here is the role of compulsory voting laws. The literature on such laws remains underdeveloped compared to the broader literature on institutional effects on voting, with studies primarily of

advanced democracies, single case studies of Latin American countries, or a passing reference as a control variable in cross-national work (Power 2009, 100).

One would expect higher turnout under compulsory voting and cross-national studies do identify a boost of 10% to 20% (e.g. Baek 2009; Birch 2009; Lijphart 1997a). Fumagalli and Narciso (2012, 165) remains one of the few studies to find no significant relationship. However, compulsory voting without proper enforcement is unlikely to dissuade non-voting (Kato 2008; Panagopoulos 2008). Countries often exempt the sick, elderly, illiterate or those opposed to voting on religious grounds (e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses) and these exceptions should be factored into the "compulsoriness" of the system (Power 2009). Yet these exceptions alone would fail to explain the variance in turnout rates in countries with compulsory voting. For example, turnout as a percentage of registered voters commonly reaches 90% in Australia, Belgium, and Singapore and over 80% in Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Nauru, Peru, Turkey, and Uruguay. In contrast, turnout in the Dominican Republic had only topped 60% once since 1990 (78.57% in 1996) and Ecuador has ranged from 47.25% to 80.84% since 1990, with similar variation in Honduras. The three mixed systems with compulsory voting – Bolivia, Mexico, and Thailand – show similar variance. Among the voting age population (VAP), Bolivia's turnout has ranged from 63.44% to 85.55%. Mexico's parliamentary elections since 1990 have ranged from 41.68% (2003) to 77.73% (1994). Thai House elections have fluctuated over the past twenty years from low 60s to high 70s.

This cursory view of compulsory voting in mixed systems suggests an issue with enforcement. If enforcement is lax (as in Thailand and Mexico), or strictly enforced but with low penalties (such as Bolivia) compulsory voting should not affect turnout compared to other mixed systems. Compulsory voting by definition implies a level of coercion. Those disinterested in voting or otherwise not mobilized require additional motivation beyond just a sense of civic duty to vote. Punishments ranging from fines to an inability to get a passport or receive tax returns potentially overcome the complacency of those otherwise unlikely to vote. However, if punishments are seldom forthcoming or considered insignificant, traditional non-voters have little reason to alter behavior.

H1: Compulsory voting with weak enforcement will not increase turnout (null hypothesis)

Compulsory voting of course is not the only institutional factor that potentially influences turnout. A sizable literature finds higher turnout in countries using PR rather than majoritarian designs, usually defined as SMDs (e.g. Blais and Carty 1990; Blais and Dobrzynska 1998; Kostadinova 2003). However, overall proportionality does not appear to have a linear effect on turnout (Grofman and Selb 2011). This turnout boost (usually between 2% to 10%) is most evident in older democracies, but the reason for this boost remains unclear (see Birch 2009; Blais and Carty 1990). Turnout in mixed systems appear to fall somewhere in between majoritarian and proportional systems (see Norris 1997), with the institutional variation within mixed systems largely unexplored outside of Rich (2014). Furthermore, the proliferation of mixed systems since the early 1990s arguably has not led to a greater analysis of the diversity of mixed systems, with the early adopters (e.g. Germany, New Zealand, Japan) dominating the literature. Still, if the findings among pure systems can give any insight into mixed systems, mixed systems that guarantee proportionality would be expected to have higher turnout.

Table 3: Mixed Electoral Systems and Tier Linkage

MMM		MMP
Albania (1996, 1997)	Macedonia	Albania (1992, 2001, 2005)
Armenia	Mexico	Bolivia
Azerbaijan	Nepal	Germany
Bulgaria	Philippines	Lesotho
Croatia	Russia	New Zealand
Georgia	Seychelles	Venezuela
Hungary	South Korea	
Italy	Taiwan	
Japan	Thailand	
Lithuania	Ukraine	

The most basic distinction within mixed systems is that between mixed member proportional (compensatory or MMP) systems and mixed member majoritarian (parallel or MMM) systems (see Table 3). Under MMP the two tiers are linked and party list seats compensate for the disproportionality of the SMDs. For example, if a party received 30% of the party list vote, it will receive roughly 30% of all seats. Ultimately the overall distribution of seats is proportional, with additional PR seats added (compensatory seats) in some cases if needed to ensure proportionality. Under MMM no compensatory mechanism links the two tiers, allowing for very disproportional results if a party wins a greater percentage of SMDs than PR seats. As such, the most common control in the mixed systems literature is to account for the MMP-

MMM distinction (e.g. Ferrara, Herron and Nishikawa 2005; Golder 2005; Moser and Scheiner 2005; Thames and Edwards 2006). In addition, while considerable attention is given to Germany and New Zealand, MMP systems remain comparatively rare among mixed electoral systems as seen in Table 3. Whether MMP systems simply can be included in the wider category of PR systems (e.g. Doorenspleet 2005; Lijphart 1994; Reynolds and Reilly 1997) or treated as a distinct institutional arrangement (e.g. Herron and Nishikawa 2001) remains debatable, but the assumption remains that MMP systems should encourage greater turnout than its MMM counterpart.

H2: MMP systems will encourage higher turnout than MMM systems

The legal threshold for PR seats, defined as the legally mandated minimum percentage of the party list vote necessary to receive any seats, also warrants attention. These thresholds in part limit the level of proportionality of an electoral system and prevent party fragmentation (e.g. Moraski and Loewenberg 1999; Taagepera and Shugart 1989). Thresholds create explicit barriers for parties with ramifications on representation. An extreme case is Russia's 1995 election, where a remarkable 49.5% of PR votes were for parties that failed to clear the five percent threshold. A paradox emerges in the broader literature. SMDs create a high effective threshold of nearly 50% which is shown to depress turnout while the low thresholds under PR, whether legal or effective, correlate with higher turnout. Yet, among mixed systems, Rich (2014) finds that in mixed electoral systems that the threshold positively correlates with turnout, despite creating greater disproportionality. Unfortunately, few countries have altered their legal threshold over time, limiting within country analyses.⁴ As the threshold increases, potentially winnowing down the number of parties and making elections more decisive, the saliency of voting may increase, a factor that traditionally increases turnout (Downs 1957).

H3: The electoral threshold for PR seats will positively correlate with turnout.

Research Design

Debates endure as to how to best measure turnout (e.g. Blais and Dobryznska 1998; Endersby and Kriekhaus 2008; Kuenzi and Lambright

⁴ Five mixed systems (Albania, Georgia, Hungary, Lithuania, and South Korea) have altered their legal threshold, usually after the first mixed election. However the limited number of elections in each case precludes regression analysis.

2007), with the most common measures being the percentage of voting age population (VAP) and registered voters (REG).⁵ Few studies use both measures (e.g. Dettrey and Schwindt-Bayer 2009). Relying on registered voters may create a selection bias towards those interested and more likely to vote (Endersby and Kriekhaus 2008), although the voting age population may mislead in cases where a sizable population remain ineligible to vote (e.g. felons). For this analysis, I rely on data from Rich (2014). This includes both measures of turnout as reported by the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), collected by the Electoral Management Bodies (EMB) for registered turnout and the UN Demographic Yearbook for the VAP turnout. While these measures are prone to estimation errors and poorly updated registration lists, the use of both measures presents a means to identify the robustness of findings. These two measures unsurprisingly are strongly correlated (.78).

The main independent variable of interest is a binary measure for the presence of compulsory voting laws. Controls include a dummy variable for MMP systems (*MMP*), the legal threshold for PR seats (*Threshold*) as well as the number of elections under that mixed system (*Elections Under System*).⁶ Since mixed legislative systems do not operate in a vacuum, controlling for coexisting parallel electoral institutions is also warranted. In particular, the literature on federal, bicameral, and presidential systems suggests a contamination effect outside of the context of mixed system (e.g. Amorim-Neto and Cox 1997; Mainwaring 1993; Mondak 1990; Shugart and Carey 1992), yet the direction of this contamination remains contested. That said, Franklin (1999) and Tavits (2009) suggests all three decrease turnout in general. Thus three dummy variables are also included in the basic model: federal systems (*Federal*), the co-existence of a directly elected president (*President*), and legislatures with two houses (*Bicameral*).

I include a second group of controls in an extended model. To capture ethnic heterogeneity, CIA Factbook data is used (*Ethnic Fractionalization*).⁷ To

⁵ Turnout can also be measured at the individual level through surveys. However, this method is prone to overreporting participation (Swaddle and Heath 1989; Katosh and Traugott 1981).

⁶ A system was considered different if the compensatory system changed (MMM to MMP or vice versa) or if the number of ballots changed as these two factors would likely have an influence on party strategy as well as voter comprehension of the system. While Germany used MMP since 1957, the 1990 election was the first after unification and is thus coded as the first under the system.

⁷ Ethnic heterogeneity is measured as the effective number of ethnic groups within the country. All data comes from the CIA Factbook except for two countries where this source did not

capture socioeconomic development, the natural log of GDP per capita derived from purchasing power parity (PPP) from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) database is included (*Log GDP (PPP)*). While an increased number of parties should increase the probability a would-be voter would identify with a party (Denver and Hands 1997, 725), the broader literature is inconsistent regarding the role of the number of parties on turnout (Blais and Dobrzynska 1998; Jackman 1987; Kostadinova 2003), I include the effective number of legislative parties (ENLP).⁸ To capture the general openness of the political system, I recode combined Freedom House scores (14-score) for more intuitive interpretation (e.g. as a country's score increases, it is more "free").

A third model includes three additional controls: the number of seats in the legislative house (*Chamber Size*), a dummy for the use of regional PR lists rather than a national list (*Regional PR*) and a dummy for post-communist countries (*Postcommunist*). Larger chambers theoretically would provide an increased likelihood for both smaller parties as well as a representative from a would-be voter's area if not explicit local representation. Regional PR lists create higher effective thresholds than national lists, potentially reducing the overall proportionality. Mixed legislative systems have been particularly popular in the post-communist world (Clark and Wittrock 2005). With democratization, electoral reform and party system development occurring simultaneously (e.g. Bielasiak 2002; Mair 1997), one may expect the post-communist cases to diverge. The literature consistently finds these cases to be statistical outliers in mixed systems research (e.g. Herron and Nishikawa 2001), namely in terms of party fractionalization, the number of independents winning elections and ethnic heterogeneity. While other institutional factors influencing turnout exist, these test should give insight into the limits of compulsory voting as well as the main distinctions within mixed systems. Furthermore, only two variables highly correlate at .6 or stronger (Presidential systems and Freedom House scores at .63).

Analysis

As a first cut, I present summary statistics for the use of compulsory voting laws as well as the other binary controls under both measurements of turnout (Table 4). Of particular interest, average turnout is marginally higher

provide an ethnic breakdown: Seychelles and Venezuela. Estimates of the ethnic heterogeneity were produced from government sources.

⁸ Birch (2009) found a weak linkage between compulsory voting and the success of small parties.

in those without compulsory voting laws. Summary statistics do provide preliminary evidence that MMP systems, in guaranteeing overall proportionality, encourage turnout, while a marginal distinction is evident in bicameral systems or the use of regional PR lists. Meanwhile, federal and presidential systems as well as the post-communist examples all show lower levels of turnout under both measures of turnout.

Table 4: Summary Statistics of Factors Influencing Turnout (in percentages)

Measurement	Registered Voters		VAP	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Compulsory	66.5	67.5	61.3	62.1
MMP	72.6	65.4	67.1	60.2
Bicameral	68.3	66.5	62.2	61.8
Federal	63.6	68.4	58.4	63.1
Presidential	64.9	72	60	65.7
Regional PR	68.1	66.9	60.4	62.9
Postcommunist	64.2	69.6	57	65.5

The influence of compulsory voting may be overlooked due to other institutional variables. For a more rigorous analysis, Table 5 presents the results of generalized least squares (GLS) regressions on turnout as a percent of registered voters. GLS specification was chosen over OLS due to an expectation that elections in a country are partially correlated with election dynamics from previous elections in that country. Compulsory voting fails to reach statistical significance in any model, with a negative sign on the extended models (M2 and M3), counter to evidence largely from established democracies. Across the three models, the MMP dummy variable consistently has a positive sign, but fails to reach significance, suggesting the limited salience of the MMM-MMP distinction in terms of turnout. Meanwhile two factors consistently correlate with a boost in turnout: the electoral threshold for PR seats at about a 3% increase and bicameral systems with a roughly 10% increase. Consistent with the global trend towards lower turnout, the number of elections under a system correlates with roughly a 2% decline in turnout, significant at .05 or stronger. While some have argued that the number of parties increases turnout, the findings here suggest an opposite relationship, consistent with multiparty elections creating less decisive outcomes. Admittedly with a sample size of 85-87 cases, the models may be stretching the data, but these findings do suggest a re-evaluation of compulsory voting in this context. Furthermore, the non-negligible R^2 suggests the models at least partially capture important factors influencing turnout.

Table 5: Correlates of Turnout (Registered Voters)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE
Compulsory Voting	0.53	5.67	-4.21	6.06	-1.35	8.38
MMP	3.42	3.96	4.21	4.15	5.83	5.09
Threshold	2.83***	0.78	3.26***	0.84	3.27***	0.86
Bicameral	9.21*	4.44	10.73*	4.42	10.95*	4.92
Federal	-8.17	5.19	-6.97	5.90	-7.85	7.06
Presidential	-4.71	4.04	-7.96	4.58	-7.95	7.01
Elections Under System	-1.70*	0.74	-1.99**	0.76	-2.07*	0.83
Ethnic Fractionalization			3.37	1.73	3.71	2.07
GDP per Capita (log)			2.64	2.52	3.11	2.80
ENLP			-2.72**	0.99	-3.04**	1.09
Freedom House			-1.63	0.97	-1.49	1.00
Chamber Size					0.01	0.02
Regional PR					-2.91	6.28
Postcommunist					3.26	6.21
Constant	60.64	5.59	54.71**	20.66	46.49	24.78
N	87		85		85	
R ²	0.36		0.48		0.50	

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

Table 6 moves onto turnout as a percentage of the voting age population. Here compulsory voting laws correlate with as high as a 4.5% increase in turnout, yet this variable still fails to reach statistical significance in any model. Again the MMP dummy has the expected sign, but only reaches significance in Model 6. Using the voting age population, the electoral threshold for PR seats correlates with a boost of about 3% to 3.5%, suggesting an unintentional byproduct of reducing proportionality. Models 5 and 6 find an even larger boost for GDP per capita, significant at .05 or greater. Meanwhile the number of elections as well as Freedom House scores both negatively correlate with turnout.

Additional variables were also included in expanded models, but omitted for space. The presence of a fused ballot where district votes are aggregated to fill PR seats receives little attention in the mixed systems literature. The use of the d'Hondt formula for allocation PR seats traditionally favors larger parties. At the national level, neither of these was significant. In addition, replacing the binary variable for compulsory voting laws with a three-point scale (no law, weak enforcement, strong enforcement) from Panagopoulos (2008) finds no difference either. In part

Table 6: Correlates of Turnout (Voting Age Population)

	Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE
Compulsory Voting	3.59	7.88	1.26	7.35	4.53	8.61
MMP	2.56	5.14	7.65	4.91	12.46*	5.59
Threshold	3.15**	1.02	3.59***	1.00	3.52***	0.90
Bicameral	3.63	6.22	6.71	5.84	3.48	5.82
Federal	-5.24	7.24	-11.79	7.21	-18.61*	7.68
Presidential	-7.02	5.58	-10.89*	5.49	-4.06	7.37
Elections Under System	-2.15**	0.82	-2.59**	0.89	-2.17*	0.94
Ethnic Fractionalization			3.55	2.06	1.54	2.14
GDP per Capita (log)			7.82**	2.97	7.15*	3.09
ENLP			-0.23	1.16	-0.29	1.26
Freedom House			-3.37**	1.15	-3.71***	1.13
Chamber Size					0.03	0.02
Regional PR					-7.12	6.58
Postcommunist					-7.70	6.67
Constant	59.07***	7.29	13.24	24.45	17.67	27.04
N	86		84		84	
R ²	0.28		0.47		0.57	

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

this is due to the fact that none of the three compulsory voting cases in the study include strict enforcement or severe penalties.⁹ Rerunning the original models as a hierarchical model with country level random effects produce largely consistent findings, again with the compulsory voting variable never reaching statistical significance. Overall this national level analysis rejects that compulsory voting laws play a meaningful role within mixed legislative systems.

Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Certainly high turnout is not predicated solely on the existence of compulsory voting laws, as Malta clearly shows (Hirczy 1995). Some citizens would vote out of self interest, civic duty or other rationales just as citizens often pay taxes or fees without strict enforcement. Similarly, other means to

⁹ To identify whether a distinction in turnout was apparent between those countries with no weak enforcement versus strong enforcement, I also ran a model just on the sample of countries with compulsory voting laws. Due to the small sample size, I only controlled for strong enforcement by using Bolivia as a dummy variable. While the Bolivian variable positively correlated with turnout, this failed to reach statistical significance.

encourage voluntary turnout, such as making election days a national holiday, may provide similar boosts as that often attributed to compulsory voting.

Treating all compulsory voting systems as equal creates problems both by generating unrealistic expectations of turnout and in ignoring the influence of other electoral institutions. The boost in turnout from compulsory voting appears particularly strong in older democracies, but this is also where enforcement is strong. While often suggested that the only institutional means to secure turnout rates over 90% is compulsory voting, one must question both the means of enforcement and whether citizens have an inherent right not to participate in elections (Lacroix 2007; Lever 2010). Similarly, compulsory voting laws commonly correlate with higher spoiled ballots (Mackerras and McAllister 1999). This questions whether compulsory voting laws promote quality voting.¹⁰ In addition, how compulsory voting laws potentially influence perceptions of government remains a largely unexplored avenue for research. As this preliminary research from mixed systems suggests, in the absence of enforced compulsory voting, which may generate a public backlash, other institutional factors require greater attention.

Future research would benefit from individual level analysis, which remains rare in the mixed systems literature. Existing evidence suggests compulsory voting has its greatest impact in converting lower education citizens into voters (e.g. Hooghe and Pelleriaux 1998; Irwin 1974), consistent with previous works identifying both individual and institutional level influences on turnout (Blais and Dobrzynska 1998; Jackman 1987; Norris 2004). Similarly, subnational analyses of turnout under compulsory laws like that of Power (2009) may give additional insight, especially in the absence of individual level data.

This article ultimately problematizes viewing compulsory voting laws as a simple solution to low turnout while suggesting other institutional influences on voting in mixed systems. Furthermore, this research highlights that many of the moving parts within mixed systems often go unnoticed in cross-national research and as such may discourage a greater understanding of the institutional effects of seemingly minor aspects of electoral rules.

¹⁰ Lijphart (1997b) similarly addresses this, stating that such laws are in effect “compulsory turnout”.

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