

The direct and indirect determinants of electoral participation. New insights from structural equation modeling.

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The research problem

With a plummeting turnout rate reaching a historical low of 57.43% in the December 2008 general elections, it seems like Quebec has joined the trend recently observed in other established democracies. Although this phenomenon has been broadly studied, the specificities of the Quebec experience are not well documented.

- 1. To what extent has turnout declined in Quebec?**
- 2. Who is responsible for the decline?**
- 3. Why is turnout lower among younger voters?**

The data

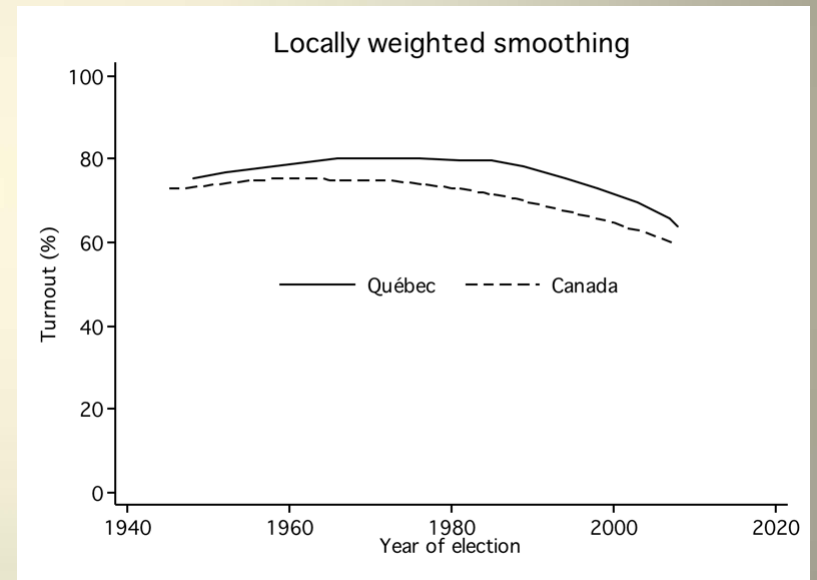
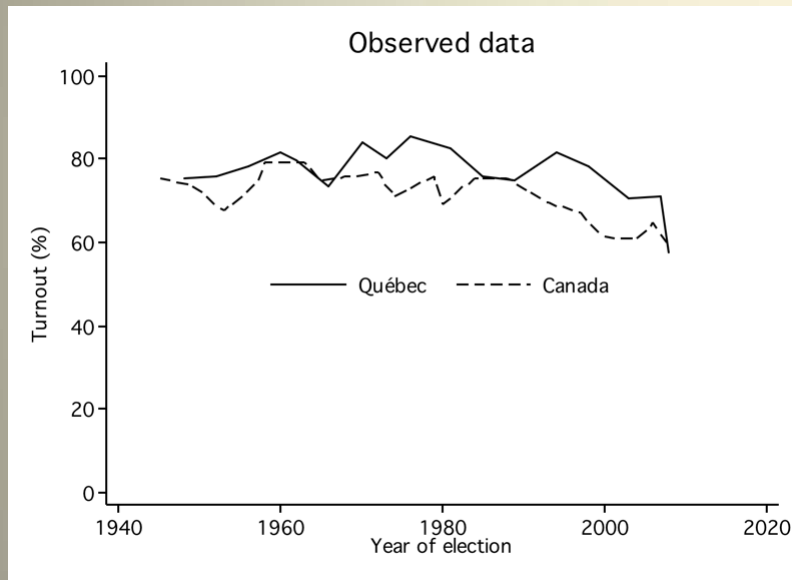
1. Annotated voter registry data

- * Covers 6 elections in the 1985-2007 period
- * Contains data from 223 456 individuals
 - date of birth
 - gender
 - whether the individual voted (or not)

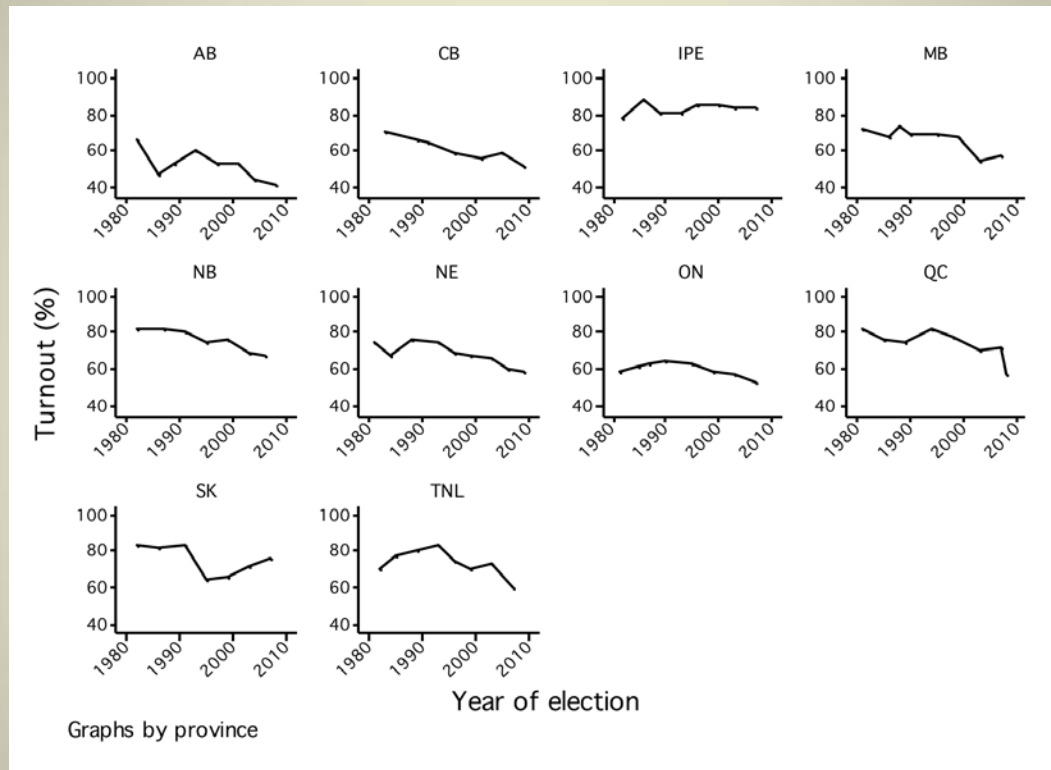
2. Post-electoral survey

- * Questionnaire administered by *Jolicoeur et Associés*
- * Field work: December 9, 2008 – January 24, 2009
- * 999 respondents
 - Oversampling of non-voters (!)
 - Non-weighted estimate of turnout: 74.27%
 - Data weighted to reflect actual turnout

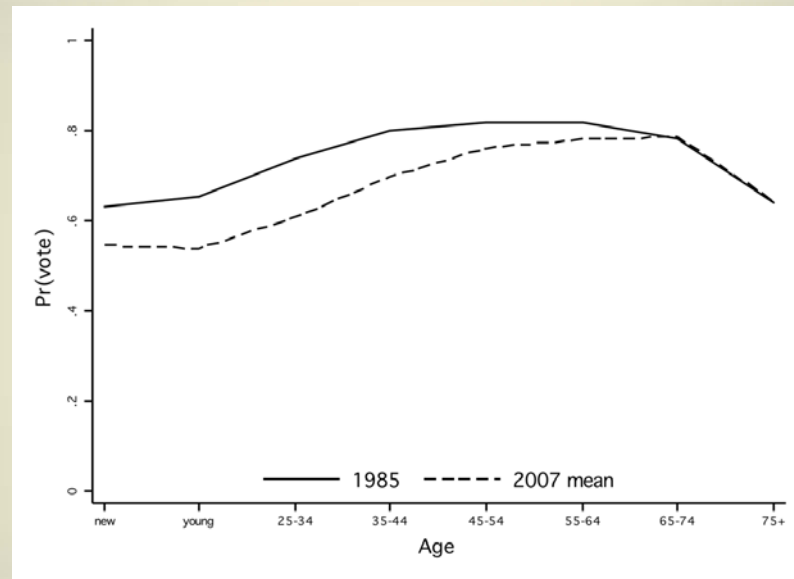
Evolution of turnout in Quebec (provincial elections) and Canada (federal elections), 1940-2008



Turnout in Canadian provincial elections, 1980-2008



Observed turnout among age groups, 1985 and 2007



Predicted turnout by age and generation while controlling for period effects, 1985-2007 (%)

<i>Generation</i>	<i>Age group</i>						
	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s	80s
Pre baby-boomers			83	85	81	77	69
Baby-boomers	73	78	82	78	76		
Generation 60	67	74	71				
Generation 70	65	64					
Generation 80	56						

Probit analysis of vote on attitudinal and socio-demographic factors

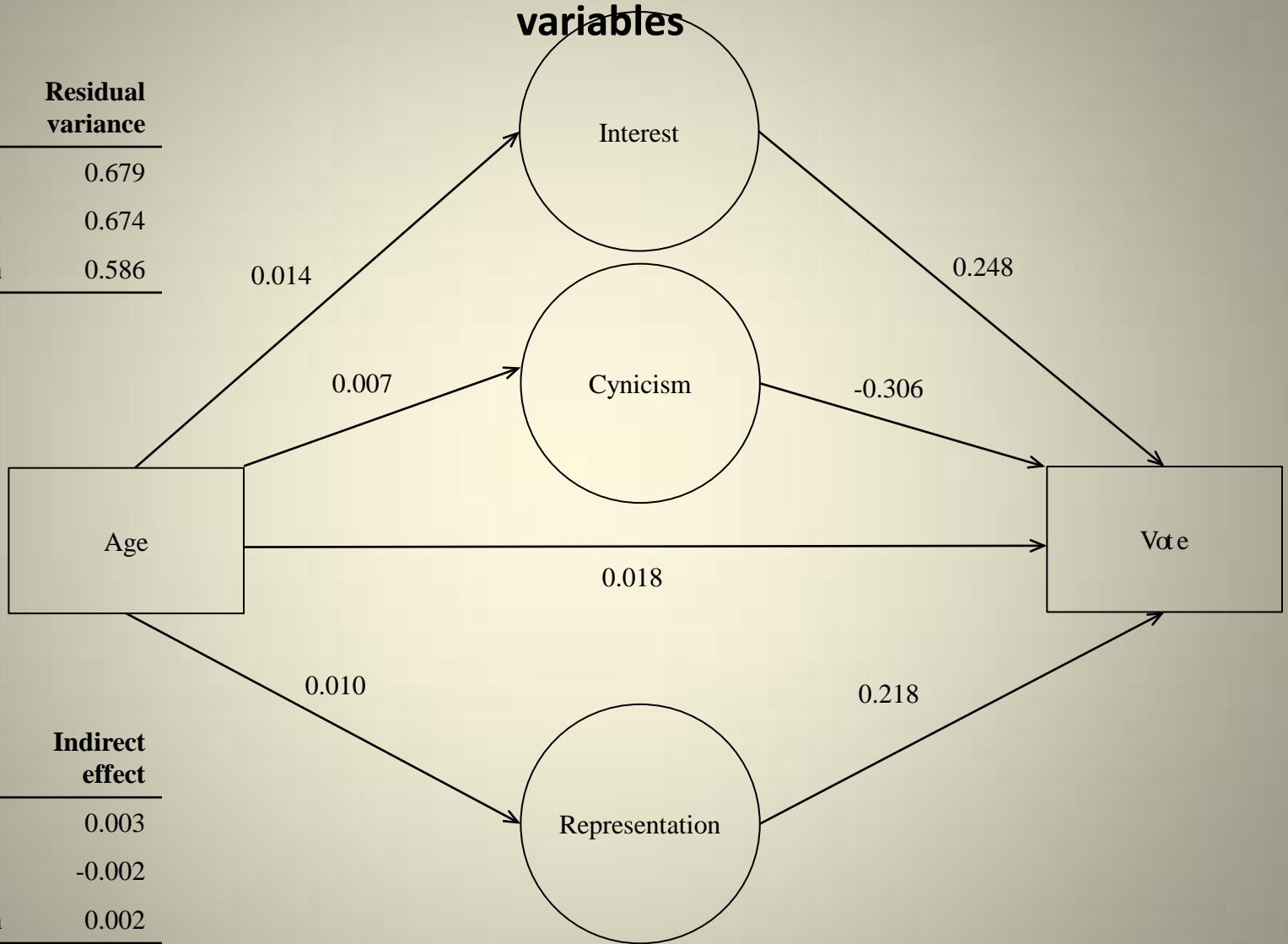
	Model 1	Model 2
Interest		0.219*** (0.076)
Cynicism		-0.269*** (0.079)
Representation		0.155** (0.078)
Card		1.056*** (0.228)
Age	0.019*** (0.004)	0.019*** (0.005)
Education	0.227*** (0.085)	0.068 (0.107)
Women	0.007 (0.113)	0.086 (0.131)
English	-0.289 (0.238)	-0.289 (0.246)
Immigrant	-0.869*** (0.333)	-0.864** (0.374)
Intercept	-1.090*** (0.271)	-1.756*** (0.373)
N	984	783
Pseudo R-squared	0.060	0.139
Wald chi2	39.372	86.178
Prob > chi2	0.000	0.000

Standard errors in parentheses

* p<.10 ** p<.05 *** p<.01

Path analysis of the effect of age on vote via the attitudinal variables

	Residual variance
Interest	0.679
Cynicism	0.674
Representation	0.586



	Indirect effect
Interest	0.003
Cynicism	-0.002
Representation	0.002

Total indirect effect **0.003**

N = 783

Conclusions

1. To what extent has turnout declined in Quebec?

- On average, turnout has shrunk by a little over 2 percentage points per election since the early 1980s.
- Compared to the other Canadian provinces, Quebec does fairly well. It is neither among the worse nor the best performers.

2. Who is responsible for the decline?

- The decline in voter turnout can be traced back to the fact that each new cohort of voters that comes in the electorate turnout less than their predecessors.

3. Why is turnout lower among younger voters?

- Part of the reason why younger voters turnout to a lesser extent is because they are less interested and less confident about the institutions of representation.