

## 2. Voter Turnout in the European Union Member Countries\*

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**Western Europe has more long-established democracies than any other continent. Free elections have been held without interruption for more than a century in countries such as Belgium, Denmark, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Free elections were introduced by the end of the First World War in Austria, Germany, Finland and Italy, but interrupted by periods of undemocratic rule. Even the relative latecomers—Greece, Portugal and Spain—have had free elections for more than a quarter of a century, long enough for most adults to have enjoyed the right to vote throughout their adult lives.**

Yet turnout in West European countries is not as high as democratic activists would like, and there are some signs that electors are less likely to vote today than they were a generation ago. Among the 233 national parliamentary elections that have taken place in 15 different European Union (EU) member countries and an additional 64 national elections for the European Parliament since the Second World War, it is always possible to find examples of turnout going down or going up, and generalizations based on one country can be contradicted by generalizations drawn from another. Moreover, in half a century turnout can fluctuate up as well as down. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is to review trends in turnout systematically in order to determine whether or not the electorates of many of the world's oldest democracies are losing interest in exercising their right to vote and, if so, why.

### *Differences Between Countries and Across Time*

When the latest election results are compared across national boundaries, differences in turnout are immediately apparent. Even though a majority of electors invariably participate in their national elections, there is a big gap between the highest and lowest turnouts. The Belgian turnout of 90.6 per cent in 1999 was more than half as great again as the abnormally low turnout of 59.4 per cent in the UK in 2001.

In *parliamentary* elections since 1945, the *average* turnout in the EU member countries has been 83.0 per cent of the registered electorate. This average in fact underrepresents the proportion of the electorate who usually vote, for it is consistent with every elector voting in five out of six national elections. When a citizen is occasionally absent from the polls this is a sign not of political disaffection but of an unexpected or unwanted change in personal circumstances, such as being unexpectedly sick or on holiday on election day. Voting turnout may also be depressed by inaccuracies in the electoral register, such as the inclusion of deceased persons or those who have emigrated as still eligible to vote. In short, an overwhelming majority of citizens have voted in a majority of the elections in which they are eligible to vote.

A multi-national average conceals substantial differences between countries in the average level of turnout in each (figure 2.1). Belgium has consistently had a high turnout: in 18 elections to the national Parliament since 1945 an average of 92.5 per cent of the electorate has participated, and turnout has never dropped below 90 per cent. In Luxembourg and Italy, almost nine-tenths of electors have usually voted. At the other end of the continuum, turnout averages 73.2 per cent in Ireland, and below 75 per cent in Spain and France. Even here, however, to describe turnout as 'low' in a country in which three out of four voters participate in elections is misleading; it would be more accurate to describe turnout as 'less high' or simply as below the EU average.

In the past half-century turnout has varied relatively little: the standard deviation is only 8.3 per cent. In more than two-thirds of national elections, 75 per cent of the electorate votes and there is a turnout of more than 90 per cent in almost one-third of all elections. In ten of the 15 EU countries, turnout at every election in more than half a century has always been 75 per cent or higher. Only once in 233 national parliamentary

\* This article analyses turnout in elections up to April 2002. It therefore excludes four elections held subsequently in Ireland, Austria, Belgium and Finland, which are included in the statistical tables at the end of the book.

elections has turnout dropped below 60 per cent of the registered electorate; this happened in the UK in 2001.

**Figure 2.1: Average Turnout in Elections in the EU Member Countries, 1945–2002**

Figures are percentages of the registered electorate.

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Belgium	90.0	95.1	92.5
Austria	80.4	96.8	91.3
Compulsory, 1945–79	91.8	96.8	94.0
Semi-compulsory 1983–	80.4	92.6	86.3
Italy	81.4	93.9	89.8
1946–87	88.9	93.9	91.8
1992– (new electoral system)	81.4	87.4	84.5
Luxembourg	86.5	91.6	89.7
Netherlands	73.2	95.6	87.2
Compulsory 1945–67	93.1	95.6	94.7
Non-compulsory 1971–	73.2	88.0	81.9
Denmark	80.6	89.9	86.0
Sweden	77.4	91.4	85.7
Germany	77.8	91.1	85.0
1949–87	78.5	91.1	87.0
1990 (reunification)	77.8	82.2	79.5
Greece	75.0	84.5	79.9
1951–60 (pre-coup)	75.0	83.0	78.5
1974–	75.0	84.5	81.0
Finland	65.3	85.1	76.0
Portugal	61.0	91.7	75.7
United Kingdom	59.4	83.6	75.2
France	60.3	82.7	74.8
4th Republic	78.8	82.7	81.1
5th Republic	60.3	81.3	72.7
Spain	68.1	79.8	73.6
Ireland	66.1	76.9	73.2
<b>EU countries average</b>	59.4	96.8	83.0

*Source:* Figures supplied from the International IDEA Voter Turnout database for elections in all EU member countries from 1945 to April 2002. **To the designer. Please put this note inside the box.**

Differences in turnout within countries are greater than the difference between countries. In Portugal there is a difference of 30.7 percentage points between the 1975 high, in the country’s first free election, and the 1999 parliamentary election. Turnout has also varied more within the Netherlands, France and the UK than it has between the two countries with the highest and lowest turnouts over the period, Belgium and Ireland.

Changes in the rules for conducting elections or governing can affect average turnout. Since the Netherlands in 1967 repealed a law making it compulsory for registered electors to vote, turnout has fallen by an average of 12.8 percentage points. Since Austria stopped imposing a federal requirement to vote (see also chapter 3), average turnout has fallen by 7.7 percentage points. The Greek regime that replaced military rule has achieved a higher average turnout than the regime that governed before the 1967 military coup. However, in France the change from the Fourth to the Fifth Republic in 1958 was accompanied by a fall in turnout. In Italy, the introduction of a new electoral system as part of a campaign against corruption was accompanied by a fall in average turnout.

In the past half-century, great changes have affected the electorates in every West European country. There has been a rise in the level of education and average income, which is associated with increased electoral participation. Concurrently, there has been a 'de-ideologization' of politics, as parties of the left and the right have tended to move towards the centre. Insofar as the clash of ideologies reflected a committed electorate, a decline in ideology should lead to a fall in turnout.

From the end of the Second World War until 1959, turnout in the states that are now the members of the EU averaged 84.7 per cent. In the period of economic boom between 1960 and 1973, turnout was virtually the same, 85.6 per cent. When economic conditions soured due to oil price rises, world recession and inflation, turnout was hardly affected; it averaged 83.9 per cent between 1974 and 1987. Turnout has only shown signs of falling since 1988, averaging 78.0 per cent since then.

It is a half-truth to say that turnout is falling. In eight countries—Portugal, the Netherlands, France, Austria, Finland, Italy, the United Kingdom and Luxembourg—there has been a clear downward trend in turnout, as measured by a least squares regression line.<sup>1</sup> However, in seven countries—Greece, Denmark, Belgium, Spain, Sweden, Germany and Ireland—fluctuations both up and down are so numerous that there is no clear trend in either direction.

The biggest and steadiest downward trend is in Portugal. Even though Portugal has a competitive party system and government often changes hands as a result of an election, there has been a trend fall in turnout of more than 3 per cent between one election and the next since free elections were introduced in 1975. In the Netherlands, the significant and large downward trend in turnout can only partly be explained by the abolition of compulsory voting in 1967, for turnout has continued to decline since then. In France, where there was a change in political regime, the Fifth Republic has experienced a continuing fall in turnout from 77 per cent in the 1958 election to 60 per cent in the parliamentary election of 2002.

In a television age in which personalities are considered at least as important as political parties, a presidential election ought to produce a high turnout, because it is palpably a contest between individuals. However, while every EU country elects a parliament, popular election of the president occurs in only five countries. Where the head of state is a monarch, no election is necessary and in Italy, Germany and Greece the head of state is chosen by the national assembly rather than by direct election. Where there is a popularly elected president, the powers of the office vary greatly. They are greatest in France, where the president is superior to the prime minister, and substantial in Portugal and Finland, but in Austria and Ireland the president's political role is slight.

(Figure 2.2 about here)

*Figure 2.2: Turnout in Presidential and Parliamentary Elections Compared*

*Figure kept separately*

Insofar as personality is more important than the party ties stressed in a parliamentary election, then presidential elections should show a higher turnout, as they occur on different dates. In France, turnout in presidential elections averages nine percentage points higher than in the first-round ballot for the National Assembly (see figure 2.2). However, the French pattern is atypical. In Ireland, where the office is sometimes filled without a contest because there is inter-party agreement about who should hold the ceremonial post, turnout for presidential elections averages 16 percentage points less than the average for elections to the Dail (Parliament). In Portugal, presidential elections produce a turnout 7 percentage points lower than elections to the National Assembly, and there is a significant downward trend. In the first Portuguese presidential election in 1976 three-quarters of the electorate voted, while in 2001 the turnout was even lower than that for the US presidential elections, at 50.0 per cent.

### ***Explanations of Turnout***

In Western Europe, the *electoral system* usually reflects laws enacted by a coalition government that depends on two, three or even four parties for support and, as coalitions vary between countries, so too do electoral arrangements. Political scientists have taken advantage of this fact to formulate the following hypotheses. Election turnout will be higher if:

- *Members of parliament (MPs) are elected by proportional representation (PR).* In PR elections, every vote cast for parties above a low threshold (5 per cent of total votes or less) helps the voters' choice get into Parliament. By contrast, in first-past-the-post elections, the winner needs at least a plurality of the vote, thus causing many votes to be 'wasted'. Advocates of PR claim that it raises turnout by reducing the percentage of wasted votes. Of the 15 EU member countries today, 12 have a PR electoral system and three (the UK, Ireland and France) do not.

- *Voting is compulsory.* Making voting compulsory ought to make turnout higher than it is in countries where it is voluntary. However, the obligation to vote usually involves 'soft compulsion', for penalties can be light or not enforced. Moreover, even if voting is voluntary, many electors may have internalized cultural norms of civic participation, thus reducing the impact of compulsion. Belgium, Luxembourg and Greece have consistently sought to make voting compulsory; the Netherlands had compulsory voting up to and including the 1967 election; and Austria had compulsory voting at the national level up to and including the 1979 election. Italy states that it is a duty of the citizen to vote but sanctions are not effective.

- *Elections are held on a rest day, not a work day.* If an election is held on a Saturday or Sunday, or election day is a public holiday, the free time in which employed electors can vote is greatly increased. At least one day of voting is a rest day in nine EU countries—Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Sweden. In the other six, employed electors are expected to make time to vote in addition to meeting their workaday obligations.

- *Voters are closer to their representatives.* British politicians usually argue that electors are closer to their representatives when votes are cast for an individual candidate in a single-member first-past-the-post electoral district. However, such districts can have up to half a million electors, thus making personal contact 'virtual' at best, and the majority of electors often do not know the name of their MP. An alternative measure of 'closeness' is the ratio of number of electors to number of MPs. Differences between countries are not in proportion to national differences in population.

- *Free elections are long established.* Insofar as socialization into a democratic political system when young encourages citizens to vote, the longer a country has held free elections the more likely citizens are to vote, and it is only possible for all electors to have experienced democratic socialization in their youth if a country has had free elections without interruption since the end of the First World War. This criterion is met by seven EU countries and four more have consistently held free elections since 1945.

Political sociologists assume that a country's social and economic features, such as material prosperity and levels of education, will be the primary influences on electoral participation. Factor analysis shows that gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, employment in non-agricultural sectors, education and the foreign population of a country form a single factor, with each loading at 0.83 or higher, while government expenditure as a percentage of GDP forms a second factor. For clarity, the multitude of socio-economic influences are therefore reduced to one for each factor, in order to test the next hypotheses—that election turnout will be higher if:

- *Citizens are materially better off.* For comparative purposes, material well-being can be measured by GDP per capita, adjusted by purchasing power parity. The difference between the most prosperous and the least prosperous EU countries is less than 2 : 1. In more prosperous countries, citizens are more likely to be urbanized and therefore to find it easier to reach a polling station, and to be better educated, having a greater cognitive awareness of parties, candidates and the importance of elections in a democracy.

- *Government is important for citizens' material well-being.* Empirically as well as ideologically, governments differ in the extent to which public expenditure pays for citizens' health care, social security and education. The more a government raises in taxes, the more money it has to spend on welfare policies benefiting large segments of the electorate. The combination of higher taxes and greater benefits increases the incentives for individuals to vote, whether to keep benefits high or to cut high taxes. Public expenditure as a percentage of national GDP varies from a low of 29.3 per cent in Ireland to 55.1 per cent in Sweden.

While each of the above propositions is familiar, they cannot all be true, or at least equally true. The number of elections since 1945 is large enough to produce statistically reliable tests of alternative theories about what makes for differences in turnout. After controlling for the effects of other influences, statistical analysis shows that all five political variables have a significant independent influence on turnout (figure 2.3). Where citizens have lived all their lives in a democratic system, net of other factors turnout is almost

10 percentage points higher than in new democracies such as Spain, Portugal and Greece.<sup>2</sup> Proportional representation also has a considerable impact: its use can raise turnout by 8.8 percentage points net of other influences. Making voting compulsory tends to raise turnout by 5.3 percentage points. Calling elections on a rest day raises turnout by 3.9 percentage points, net of other influences. The number of electors per MP also affects turnout, but not in the way expected: the greater the number of electors an MP represents, the higher the turnout. However, the impact is slight; increasing the ratio by 10,000 electors, net of other influences, adds only two-thirds of 1 per cent to turnout.

**Figure 2.3: Influences on Voter Turnout in the EU Member Countries**

Results of a multiple regression analysis explaining 59.1% of the variance in turnout in 233 national elections from 1945 to April 2002

	b	Beta <sup>a</sup>
Length of time over which free elections have been held <sup>b</sup>	4.9	.44
Proportional representation	8.8	.43
Compulsory voting	5.3	.29
Election day a rest day	3.9	.23
Electors per MP ('000)	0.066	.22
GDP per capita	not significant	
Government expenditure as a % of GDP	not significant	

<sup>a</sup> The b value is the unstandardized regression coefficient; the Beta value is the standardized regression coefficient.

<sup>b</sup> The lengths of time for which countries have held free elections are divided into three categories: (a) for the lifetime of present-day voters; (b) consistently since 1945; and (c) for about a quarter-century (Greece, Portugal and Spain).

*Source:* Figures supplied from the International IDEA Voter Turnout database for elections in all EU member countries from 1945 to April 2002.

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The socio-economic characteristics of a society have no significant influence on turnout. After taking political influences into account, the material living standard of a country has no significant effect. Likewise, the amount of money the government raises in taxes and spends on public policies has no significant influence. Additional statistical analyses along similar lines to those shown in figure 2.3 show that the urban/rural division of the labour force did not affect whether people voted, nor did the percentage of foreign migrants. Although education encourages individuals to vote, countries with a higher proportion of citizens with a better education do not show a higher level of turnout.

### ***Elections to the European Parliament***

The EU originated as an elite bargain between national leaders concerned with preventing another war in Europe. The 1957 Treaty of Rome was not a response to popular pressures, nor was it subject to national referendums. The expansion of membership has sometimes required referendum votes, some of which have been lost, most notably in Norway. On occasion, two referendums have been held before the electorate produced the result the political elites wanted, for example, in Denmark and in Ireland.

Elections to the European Parliament were first held in 1979, more than two decades after the foundation of what was then the European Economic Community (EEC). Nine countries participated in the founding election. Elections have been held at five-year intervals since, with additional countries participating as the EU has enlarged. In the first election, turnout averaged 65.9 per cent, a lower figure than national elections around that time. At each election since, participation in European Parliament elections has declined. In 1999 turnout was 52.8 per cent.

There are very great differences between the member states in the proportion of electors participating in elections to the European Parliament (figure 2.4). In Belgium, where voting is compulsory, an average of 91.2 per cent participate, and in Luxembourg the proportion is almost as high. At the other extreme, less than one-third of British voters participate in a European Parliament election. In five more countries—Sweden,

Finland, the Netherlands, Denmark and Portugal—less than half the electorate can be bothered to vote for their representatives at the European level of governance.

**Figure 2.4: Turnout in European Parliament Elections by Country, 1979–99**

	No. of European Parliament elections	Turnout in European Parliament elections (%)	Turnout in national elections (%)	Difference
Sweden	2	40.2	80.8	– 40.6
United Kingdom	5	32.3	72.1	– 39.8
Denmark	5	49.4	88.3	– 38.9
Netherlands	5	44.3	81.3	– 37.0
Germany	5	58.0	82.9	– 24.9
Austria	2	58.3	80.4	– 22.1
Finland	2	43.8	65.3	– 21.5
Portugal	4	49.9	66.1	– 16.2
Ireland	5	54.8	70.9	– 16.1
France	5	53.1	68.9	– 15.8
Spain	4	61.7	73.5	– 11.8
Italy	5	79.0	86.6	– 7.6
Greece	4	74.7	81.5	– 6.8
Belgium	5	91.2	92.7	– 1.5
Luxembourg	5	87.9	87.9	0

*Note:* Turnout is the average for all elections held since the country’s first European Parliament election.

*Source:* Figures supplied from the International IDEA Voter Turnout database.

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Differences between the percentage turning out to vote in national and in European Parliament elections are also striking. In the UK and Sweden, turnout at European Parliament elections averages less than half that at national parliamentary elections. In Denmark and the Netherlands the gap between the two types of election is similarly vast. On average, the gap between turnout in European Parliament elections and national elections held in the same period is 18.8 percentage points. Luxembourg is the one country that has found a way of making turnout the same: it holds its national election on the same day as the European Parliament election. However, no other European government wants to tie its hands thus, nor is there likely to be popular acceptance of allowing a five-year gap between one national election and the next in order to ensure that national elections fall on the same day as elections to the European Parliament.

As in national elections, electoral arrangements are the major influences on turnout in European Parliament contests. A multiple regression statistical analysis of turnout in elections to the European Parliament shows that the most important influence, compulsory voting, raises turnout by 22.6 per cent net of other influences. PR is second in impact, raising turnout by 13.0 per cent, and making election day a day of rest also has a double-digit impact on turnout. Habitual socialization is again important, as turnout is higher in countries that have been longest in the EU. Net of other influences, government expenditure as a percentage of GDP has a limited impact on turnout, with voting lower in high-spending countries. Per capita GDP is insignificant as an influence on whether people vote.

**Figure 2.5: Influences on Turnout in European Parliament Elections, 1979–99**

Results of a multiple regression analysis explaining 65.4% of the variance in turnout in 63 national European Parliament elections, 1979–99.

	b	Beta <sup>a</sup>
Compulsory voting	22.6	.50
Proportional representation	13.0	.29

Election day a rest day	10.5	.27
Duration of EU membership (years) <sup>b</sup>	5.0	.27
Govt. expenditure as % of GDP	- 0.6	- .21
Electors per MP ('000)	not significant	
GDP per capita	not significant	

<sup>a</sup> The b value is the unstandardized regression coefficient; the Beta value is the standardized regression coefficient.

<sup>b</sup> Four categories of duration of EU membership are used: (a) the six founder countries; (b) three older members, the UK, Ireland and Denmark; (c) three newer members, Spain, Portugal and Greece; and (d) the three newest members, Sweden, Finland and Austria.

*Source:* Figures supplied from the International IDEA Voter Turnout database.

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### *Political Participation as an Issue*

The level of participation in elections is much higher than the proportion of the population who watch current affairs programmes on television, read newspapers which report political events in detail or are well informed about politics. Moreover, the exigencies of government require most government decisions to be taken by representative assemblies or by executive officials accountable to the parliament.

Voting is the one political activity in which a majority of adults participate. Yet turnout falls short of 100 per cent. Democratic idealists claim that everyone ought to participate in elections because it is a civic obligation. Moreover, 100 per cent participation would avoid the risk of representative assemblies not representing the whole spectrum of public opinion in a country. However, the means most suitable to approach this ideal—compulsory voting—is challenged by libertarians who emphasize that in a free society everyone has the right *not* to vote if they so choose. Only totalitarian regimes such as the Soviet Union have compelled citizens to participate in political activities.

Ironically, even where countries have or have had compulsory voting, turnout falls short of 100 per cent. For example, in the Netherlands in the 1950s an average of 5 per cent of the registered electorate did not cast a vote. In Belgium, where voting is still compulsory, almost 10 per cent of the registered electorate does not vote. Libertarian values have gained strength throughout Western Europe, and the Dutch and Austrian parliaments have repealed compulsory voting laws. In societies in which the politically indifferent have not been socialized into a sense of the civic obligation to vote, introducing compulsory voting is likely to be less successful because it conflicts with libertarian and *laissez-faire* norms. It would create very substantial problems of imposing effective penalties and could even be counterproductive if each election produced massive evidence of ‘scoff law’ non-voters going unpunished—or, if forced to vote, registering support for extremist parties or frivolous parties of Beer Drinkers or the Right Not To Vote.

While compulsion is politically unpopular today, national parliaments can take measures to encourage non-voters to come to the polls. Holding elections on a day when the great majority of the population is not working does increase turnout. In a secular era when people can usually do what they want on the Sabbath, religious objections to Sunday voting carry little weight. There are six EU member countries where changing an election date from a weekday to the weekend would produce little opposition.

Making it easier for individuals to cast an absentee vote can, in principle, increase turnout. This can be done in various ways, for example, allowing people to vote by post, in person at a different polling station than that for their normal home address, or by email or telephone. But each of these measures requires safeguards against fraud. If postal votes are mailed out but there is no means of verifying the identity of the persons who use them, they can be cast by ‘ghost’ voters. If people vote away from home, they must have a positive means of identification, which does not exist in the UK, where there is principled opposition to requiring every citizen to have a national identity card. An email or telephone vote invites impersonation and subsequent controversy when people find that their names have been falsely invoked by an unknown caller from a pay phone or an Internet café. The introduction of safeguards, such as registering a password for an email vote, would reduce the risk of fraud but would also make absentee voting more difficult.

Arguably, declining electoral turnout is a rational response of citizens to the fact that elections make less difference to the way in which a country is governed, as party competition no longer reflects a *kulturkampf* or

class conflict, and parties that are nominally on the left and the right have tended to converge towards the centre in pursuit of votes. Moreover, when the government is accountable to a parliament that is elected by proportional representation, while elections determine the relative strength of parties in parliament, it is inter-party bargaining between political elites that determines who actually governs.

Although elections may be declining in popular concern, the impact of government on the lives of citizens has been steadily rising, as is shown by the growth in public expenditure to two-fifths or more of GDP across the EU as a whole. The money collected is not burned but spent on such popular services as education, health care, social security, roads and rubbish collection. The average European household regularly enjoys at least two such benefits. In addition, citizens look to government to prevent unsafe vehicles from being driven on the road, to protect them against bank and commercial fraud and against impure food, and much more.

The growth of government has led to the growth of single-issue non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Some, such as the anti-abortion 'right to life' campaigners and those wanting to give more aid to Third World countries, advocate a moral cause. Others, such as trade unions and business associations, exist to promote material interests. Individual membership of NGOs is invariably a small or even infinitesimal percentage of the national electorate. A 'mass' demonstration of 25,000 people appears big on a television screen, but will constitute far less than 1 per cent of a European country's electorate. The percentage of citizens who are active in NGOs may be no more than the minority who were privileged to vote in elections when the right to vote was undemocratically restrictive. Yet the 'failure' of the majority to participate in mass demonstrations and counter-demonstrations does not annul the right of people to become active in NGOs lobbying government.

Corporatism, by which business, labour, agricultural and professional organizations bargain, provides virtual representation of individuals. But corporatist NGOs consist of organizations rather than individuals. For example, business associations consist of firms and 'peak' associations such as the British Trades Union Congress have other organizations as their members. In Brussels, where thousands of organizations advocate causes to an EU of 15 member states, the typical NGO consists of an aggregation of national NGOs—a further remove from individual participation.

Problems of representation are even greater at the level of the United Nations, most of whose member states do not hold free and fair elections. At the International Monetary Fund, representation is not equal on the basis of national sovereignty or weighted by population but is determined by the amount of money countries contribute to the fund.

Elections remain important because they are an effective way of giving those who govern a country incentives to take popular interests into account by the sanction of removing from office governors who fail to do so. But elections are not all-important, for the complexity of interest articulation and aggregation in the multi-level world of local, national, European and global politics imposes constraints on what popularly elected governments can do. Similarly, the existence of competing values—civic participation, individual liberty, facilitating voting, and protecting against fraud—places constraints on what can be done to increase turnout at national elections.

### ***Endnotes***

<sup>1</sup> In these eight countries there is a statistically significant downward trend in a least squares regression line of turnout over the period within a country and the variance in turnout explained ( $R^2$ ) by the passage of time is greater than 25 percent. However, the 'fit' varies substantially between an  $R^2$  of 95 per cent in Portugal and 28 per cent in the UK. Moreover, the trend fall in turnout from one election to another varies too. In Portugal there is a trend fall of 3.1 per cent in turnout from one election to the next while in Ireland there is a trend decrease of only 0.43 per cent between elections.

<sup>2</sup> The calculation of impact makes use of the unstandardized coefficients (b values) reported in figure 2.3, which are for either/or variables for proportional representation, compulsory voting and rest day; a tripartite classification, as explained in the text, for duration of democracy; and a continuous variable for number of electors per representative.

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