

A Tale of Two Electorates: Generational Replacement and the Decline of Voting in Presidential Elections

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This article revisits the question of voter turnout in American presidential elections from the perspective of political generations. We extend previous analyses by examining the entire period between 1952 and 1996 by further specifying the turnout model and, most important, by incorporating a generational component. We hypothesize that the direct effect of membership in the cohort born prior to 1932 is to increase voter turnout and the indirect effect of membership in this cohort is to increase the impact of party-related variables in accounting for turnout. Finally, we hypothesize that the indirect effect of membership in the cohort born after 1932 is to increase the impact of socio-economic, media-related, and candidate-related variables. Our findings strongly suggest that generational effects account for a significant component of the decrease in turnout among American citizens. The impact of generations is most pronounced in the first half of the voting life cycle.

In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville alluded to the difference between a *subject* and a *citizen*. The former passively allows the government to initiate and carry out public policy; the latter actively participates in the rituals of democracy. In many ways the legitimacy of a democratic polity can be cast as a function of the ratio of citizens to subjects. It would seem that a relatively obvious *sine qua non* of citizenship is voting. Applying this admittedly minimalist view of citizenship to American presidential elections, the citizen/subject ratio is now in the neighborhood of unity. While the polity may not be in danger, it may well be in need of some introspection. Why are more and more of us not voting?

Americans have long voted at a relatively low level. This level declined over the last half of the twentieth century, reaching 49% of those eligible in the 1996 presidential election. This decline has been difficult to explain in the context of an electorate seemingly better prepared to participate. Brody's (1978) prescient observation that the decline in voter turnout had occurred in the face of increased education generated a voluminous amount of scholarship by those attempting to solve the "puzzle of participation" (see Abramson and Aldrich 1982;

Boyd 1981; Cassel and Luskin 1988; Leighley and Nagler 1992; Miller 1992; Powell 1986; Shaffer 1981; and Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). Concern culminated almost a decade and a half later with Teixeira's (1992) comprehensive analysis of voter turnout.

In this article, we seek to revisit the question of turnout decline by extending the analysis to the entire period between 1952 and 1996, by further specifying the model and, most important, by incorporating a complex generational component. This generational component will have both additive and interactive components. It will apportion turnout decline in two ways: first, into that share attributable to the post-New Deal generation's propensity to vote less, all things being equal, and second, into the portion attributable to the differential impact of other forces relating to turnout on members of each generation (all things oftentimes being unequal).

Turnout in United States Presidential Elections

Abramson and Aldrich noted that "the decline of electoral participation is among the most clearly documented trends in postwar American politics" (1982, 502). The authors attributed this decline to a weakening of party loyalties and declining feelings of external political efficacy. Indeed, they found a decline among *all* partisan groups (except strong identifiers) and attributed nearly one-quarter of the decline in turnout to the "erosion of party loyalties" (507). Moreover, they found a sharp decline in external political efficacy among whites between 1960 and 1980, finding it responsible for 50% of the decline in voter turnout during the time period (511–12).

Cassel and Luskin (1988) maintained that Abramson and Aldrich might have pursued parsimony to a fault. They were concerned with model misspecification, particularly underspecification: "The exclusion of variables that have acted to increase turnout exaggerates the explanation of net decline" (1988, 1322). Cassel and Luskin contended that relevant variables include education, concern over the election outcome, age, residential mobility, contact by political parties, and registration and voting requirements (1324). Powell (1986) likewise suggested that institutional (structural/systemic) factors—in particular, registration laws; legal prohibitions; the impact of single-member, winner take-all districts; and weak linkages between parties and social groups—make a major contribution to low turnout. Leighley and Nagler (1992) isolated *both* individual and systemic influences on turnout. They found that individual level variables demonstrate the strongest impact, whereas contextual (systemic) factors exhibit a more limited impact. Their findings were consistent with Boyd's (1981) conclusion that "structural theories supplement attitudinal theories, not substitute for them" (155).

Teixeira (1992) likewise incorporated both systemic and attitudinal factors in his comprehensive model that spanned the period between 1960 and 1988. There is no doubt that his treatment was the most extensive and went a long

way toward overcoming Cassel and Luskin's (1988) concerns for model specification. Teixeira made use of MLE modeling to simultaneously measure the impact of factors that ought to increase voter turnout (e.g., education, occupation, and income), along with those factors that ought to decrease voter turnout (e.g., declining social and political connectedness). Teixeira found that the most useful construct for explaining the decline in turnout might well be through declines in social and political connectedness. Social connectedness refers to how "rooted" individuals are in society. The electorate has become younger, more single, and less inclined to attend church over the past 30 years. Political connectedness, as reflected through a lesser commitment to parties and less interest in the outcome of elections, has experienced a similar decline. Social connectedness, while a key concept, has proven difficult to operationalize. Nevertheless, we do not believe this signifies an intractable problem as other measures can be used as reasonable surrogates for the connectedness concept. However, a case can be made that Teixeira's model remains underspecified in its omission of party mobilization.

Party Mobilization

Rosenstone and Hansen's (1993) inclusion of political mobilization as a key variable represented an important advancement in our understanding the puzzle of participation. They conclude that much of the decline in voter turnout since 1960 may be explained by decreases in political mobilization by political parties, campaigns, and social movements. In particular, they note that party contacts decreased between 1956 and 1988. These party contacts differ markedly from other measures of partisanship in that the latter represent affective orientations held by individuals in response to political cues, while the former represent activities initiated by the parties themselves. Their evidence is sufficiently convincing that any model failing to include mobilization as an independent variable would suffer from underspecification.

Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) also suggested that as individual resources increase (e.g., income, education, efficacy, and experience), an individual's likelihood of voting increases. However, we feel that they did not fully explore the nature of experience as it shapes an individual's propensity to vote. In this article, we posit that the unique political experiences of the generation experiencing the Depression and the accompanying governmental response shaped not only their propensity to vote, but the linkages between party and candidate cues and voting. Our position is that Rosenstone and Hansen were too quick to eliminate political generations as a key to vote decline. This may well have been because the time period they used (1956–1988) limited the possibility of observing multiple cohorts of voters through their life cycles. However, it also reflected conclusions that overweighted the explanatory power of aging as opposed

to generational explanations.¹ Thus we believe that political generation has not yet been eliminated as a potential factor in the decline in voting.

Generational Change and Voting

The importance of generational replacement is not new to those accounting for political change.² Many have attempted to explain shifts in *party identification* over time by deploying the concept of generational replacement. We believe that Miller (1992) was correct in suggesting an examination of generational replacement to better understand decreasing *voter turnout*. Generational differences may account for declining turnout in two fundamental ways—lowering the probability of voting *ceteris paribus* and altering the relationships between social and political indicators and voting. This interactive dimension between generation and social and political indicators represents a significant departure from previous analyses of voter turnout.

Generational replacement is related to, but is conceptually distinct from, age. Regardless of when people are born, they age as they and their cohorts vote in successive elections. There is a generational effect to the degree that those in different birth cohorts bring different life experiences to their political participation. Miller (1992) suggested that focusing upon generational change in the electorate could effect a partial solution to Brody's (1978) "puzzle of participation." He argued that each successive generation breeds an increasingly disengaged electorate, contending that the bulk of the decline witnessed throughout the past 30 years can be attributed to the replacement of the New Deal cohort with the "persistent nonvoters of the post-New Deal cohort" (1992, 2). This represented a significant and potentially fruitful departure from previous attempts to explain declining voter turnout.

Jennings and Markus (1984) had earlier used a generational approach to examine party loyalty, a key component of political connectedness. "The circle is thus closed: the younger voters have stabilized at an overall weaker level of partisanship than that of their elders, leading to mass volatile electoral behavior

¹Rosenstone and Hanson (1993) use a strong relationship between age and various indicators of political participation to dismiss generation as a concept with explanatory power. They indicate that the coefficients for cohort effects fail to achieve "either substantive or statistical significance" and are dropped from equations. One can only infer from their presentation that cohort effects were "added" to equations with age and election year already included in the equations and that this addition produced no significant effects. (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 140). We find this method inappropriate. As Rosenstone and Hansen note, age, period, and cohort are collinear. There would be no further variation to apportion to cohort after age and period have been included in the equation. However, given the paucity of information provided, we cannot fully parse their method. Nonetheless, we are not convinced that generation has been given a fair shake in their analysis.

²See for example, the works of Jennings and Niemi (1980), Jennings and Markus (1984), Niemi and Jennings (1991), and Miller (1992) for ample research addressing the role of generations in political behavior.

which, in turn, fails to provide the consistent reinforcement needed to intensify preexisting partisan leanings." (1984, 1014). If the same is true for voter turnout, then it may be that turnout will continue to decline regardless of efforts to make it easier for citizens to participate.

Political generations should react in their own unique way to issues that become highly salient in their particular era (Sears and Valentino 1997, 47). "The kinds of attitudes and values each cohort brings into that crucial stage [the period between the mid-twenties and mid-thirties] are likely to define its outlooks for some time thereafter" (Jennings and Markus 1984, 1016). Consequently, the impact of the turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s may be evinced in the decreasing voter turnout among the post-New Deal cohort. Finally, as Sears and Valentino noted, "the socialization of the youthful cohort at that moment [the salient issues as they come of age] should be distinctively different from the socialization of cohorts who are young in other eras" (1997, 47). Therefore, one could expect differences in the levels of turnout between cohorts and the stimuli that affect them.

There is ample evidence for the need to incorporate generational change as a variable in models of voter turnout. While Miller (1992) did not attempt to construct such a model, he provided the theoretical underpinnings for such an effort. We agree with Miller that much of the decline in voting may well be attributable to the replacement of the New Deal generation. We believe that the earlier generation's commitment to voting was cemented by the importance of electoral outcomes made evident by the differential responses of the parties to the Depression. This commitment transcends other individual-level personal and political characteristics that affect turnout. However, one's generation is inextricably tied to a changing political system that has come to involve a much more educated electorate responding to political stimuli in fundamentally different ways. Over time, the impact of party has lessened and the impact of candidate-centered appeals has increased in importance in accounting for vote choice. These factors also impact the degree to which citizens are mobilized to participate in the electoral process.

Finally, the generations have had differential experiences with patterns of discrimination and regional political culture that have had enormous impact on the fabric of American politics in general, and voting in particular. African-Americans' voting turnout dramatically increased following the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Most of this increase was in the South, where turnout among whites also increased because of the growth of the Republican party in the region. Clearly any generational model must specify a lessened impact of race and region in accounting for variation in turnout among the post-New Deal electorate.

We part with Miller somewhat in that we are not particularly concerned with demonstrating a discontinuity between those for whom the New Deal and the Depression are key events and those who follow them through the electoral cycle. Rather, we agree with Beck's (1993) assessment of how citizens are social-

ized into the political process: The farther one moves away (temporally) from a defining social or political event, the less salient that event becomes to an individual. We believe that as the events of the New Deal era have passed and successive generations are removed from those events, they are less likely to draw upon the experiences of that political era as a resource to inform their decision to vote. In short, we believe there may be a linear retreat in an individual's assessment of the importance of electoral participation and the use of party-related variables to inform his or her decision to vote or not vote. One's life experiences can affect not only one's overall propensity to participate, but also the cues that facilitate that participation. The events of the New Deal are much like a rock being thrown in the water with the successive outward ripples representing the successive decline in turnout and the use of party-related cues.

A Generational Model of Turnout

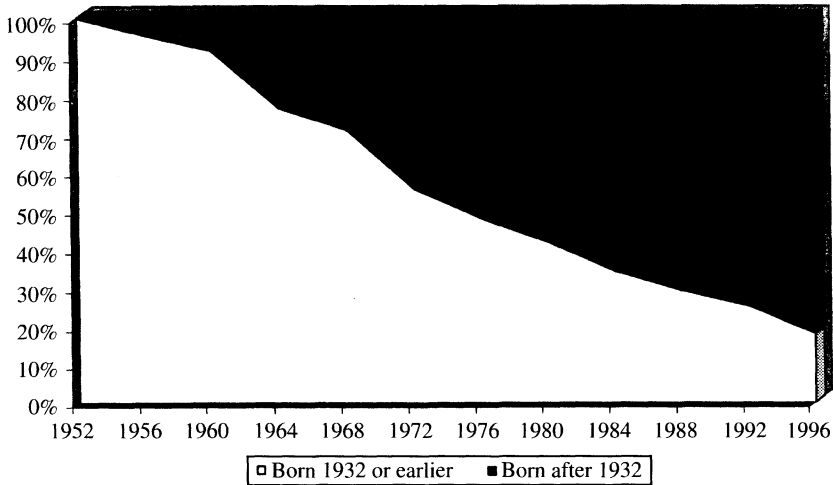
In this exercise, we explicitly add the concept of generation as we build on the work of Teixeira (1987), extending his analysis backward and forward through the twentieth century around a comprehensive generational model of voter turnout. We further specify the model by incorporating party mobilization as suggested by Rosenstone and Hansen (1993). Our interest is in modeling voting turnout and accounting for its decline between 1952 and 1996. We use National Election Study (NES) data for each presidential election during that period. The dependent variable—voting in presidential elections—is routinely overstated by NES respondents by between 10% and 12%. Therefore, while we rely on NES data for modeling relationships, we make adjustments based on more reliable census estimates when estimating the levels of turnout in the entire electorate.

We follow the lead of Cassel and Luskin (1988) in using the pooled NES data set but include the elections between 1952 and 1996 in our analysis. This marks an extension of the analysis in both directions from previous efforts; most modeled the vote beginning in 1960. We believe it is essential to consider the electorate over the longer time period to fully assess the phenomenon of turnout decline. Further, such a time period is essential to considering the impact of generation. Those entering the electorate at age 21 in 1952 were 65 in 1996. In looking at this time period, we begin with an electorate composed entirely of those for whom the Depression and World War II were defining events. By the end of the time period, this group's presence had declined to 20% (see Figure 1).

The decision to restrict the analysis to two cohorts and the 1932 cutoff are both somewhat arbitrary, of course. Our reasons are both conceptual and practical. Individuals born prior to 1932 had at least a childhood experience with the Depression, and all experienced some of the watershed FDR presidency. In order to isolate a generational effect across elections, we needed to define generations broadly enough to include sufficient representation in each election. By extending our analysis to 1952 and placing the cutoff at a 1932 birth year, we could follow the progress of those born after 1932 and first voting in 1952 across

FIGURE 1

Division of the Eligible Electorate by Political Generation (1952–1996)



most of their political life cycle. Even this definition and limitation of political generation left us with incomplete cells for the post-1932 cohort for the latter age categories in later elections. Our specification of cohort maximized our analytic options in a manner consistent with our notion of generation.

While generation is a theoretical concept of broad scope, cohort is an analytical construct. Our interest is not in a “cohort analysis” of voting, but a test of the uniqueness of a political generation.³ Our definition of generation encompasses a full set of experiences common to a large segment of the electorate. A cohort, on the other hand, is a measurement device not necessarily tied to generation. Even if we could somehow overcome the limited cell problem, we would not find it particularly useful to examine successive 10-year birth cohorts.

³ We would, of course, prefer to more narrowly specify generations so that we could assess the linearity of change among succeeding cohorts. This was simply not possible for both technical and theoretical reasons. Any cohort whose youngest members entered the electorate following 1956 would not have significant numbers of voters having reached the age of 60 by 1996. We would not be able to fully model the impact of age in such a case. Smaller cohorts would render the analysis even more problematic. We would soon reach a point where election, aging, and cohort effects would merge. This is because all voters aged, say, 55 to 65 would reach that age in at most two elections and all would have been born within a decade of each other. Our use of very large cohorts allows us to observe them in a number of age categories across a number of elections.

Modeling a Half-Century Electorate

Our task was to create an aggregate of the electorate over the 44-year time period. In doing so we found it necessary to create a two-part weight variable for each respondent. The first reflected the weighting necessary to obtain a cross-sectional sample for that year. The second was required to reflect the relative size of that year's electorate relative to the aggregate electorate for the 1952–1996 period.⁴ This was necessary to more fully replicate the electorate as a 44-year phenomenon with election serving as a variable rather than as 12 discrete electorates. This method facilitated combining respondents across years without over-representing those from a year in which the NES employed a larger sample size.

Our approach allowed us to simulate a survey exercise where any potential voter in any year had the same probability of selection. We could then pool respondents across years and attribute differences in turnout to trend, year, or generation around a grand mean of turnout for all respondents for all years. This provides us with the opportunity to generalize to an electorate created around 12 electoral events as if all were part of one “grand event”—the aggregate of all voting over a 44-year period. Thus, those from all age groups can be combined and treated as the same, even though their birth years could vary by 44 years. Likewise, all those with the same birth years can be combined even though they may have cast ballots over 12 different elections, and they may have been very different ages when the ballots were counted. This approach allows the gauging of generation, year, and aging effects on a statistically level playing field.⁵ On one hand, the collinearity of generation, year, and age restricts a formal assignment of variance among the three. On the other hand, it logically forecloses the elimination of any of the three potential causes.⁶

The dichotomous dependent variable—vote—strongly suggested the use of the logistic regression approach to model building. Thus, we model the probability of voting. It is essential that any modeling of the turnout process include measures tapping connectedness to the political process through party and candidate attachments, age, socioeconomic status, mobilization, partisanship, and

⁴The NES data sets for the presidential election years varied in size. The weight variable adjusted the final electorate by weighting each respondent in a given year by a factor such that the year's total number of respondents represented the ratio of the adult population in that year to the adult population in 1952.

⁵While Rosenstone and Hansen appear to have used a related approach, they did not make much of their method explicit or subject to replication. Likewise, many of the manipulations used to reach conclusions are simply not accessible.

⁶Some might argue that cohort effects could be safely dismissed because all change can in some ways be attributed to generational replacement. However, such a caveat would only apply to widely spread points in time. While changes between 1900 and 1988 could be attributed to a whole new electorate, changes over a much shorter time span could reflect either the replacement of older citizens with younger ones with different attributes or changes taking place across the electorate. Similarly, different behavior between young and old voters at one point in time could reflect either an aging effect or a cohort effect.

individual investment in electoral outcome. Moreover, given the changes in voting rights and regional politics during this period, measures for race and region must be included. There is considerable variance, both over time and across states, in registration requirements. However, Timpone (1998) demonstrated that registration's effect on turnout must be modeled in two phases.

We chose not to attempt to model registration requirements as part of this analysis. To do so would have necessitated our creating a dummy variable for each state at each time period. Given the small number of individuals in each age/election intersection, such an analysis would have been problematic at best. Moreover, given the time period of interest (1952–1996), the greatest variation in state level impediments to registration is taken into account by region, race, and time, all of which capture both the general easing of registration requirements and the specific structural barriers to African-American voting. Thus, we model only the voting/nonvoting dichotomy rather than the separate decisions to register and, once registered, to vote.

Our task is complicated by the necessity that the indicators are measured consistently over this time period. Unfortunately, some of the more attractive measures, such as efficacy and alienation, suffer from changes in wording that rule them out for our analysis. We chose to substitute multiple indicators of connectedness, utilizing strength of partisan identification and the number of “likes” and “dislikes” offered about parties and candidates in response to open-ended queries. A respondent disconnected from the parties could be expected to hold little or no affect for either party. Likewise, one disaffected from the current electoral contest should have little to say about any of the candidates. We tapped respondents' investments in electoral outcomes through their interest in the election and whether they cared a great deal about the election result. Unfortunately, none fully capture the richness of the external efficacy measures used by Teixeira (1987).

We cast votes as a function of the following:

- Region/Race
 1. South
 2. Nonwhite
- Age
 1. Membership in cohort one (born prior to 1932)
 2. Year of interview
 3. Age in years
- Socioeconomic status
 1. Income third (constant dollars)
 2. Education beyond high school
- Mobilization activities by parties
 1. Number of contacts initiated by parties
- Connectedness to the political process
 1. Number of likes and dislikes about the candidates

2. Number of likes and dislikes about the parties
3. Strength of party identification
- Individual investment in electoral outcome
 1. Amount of interest in the election (not at all interested–very interested)
 2. Care about the outcome of presidential election

Our basic model is thus:

$$[P^{(\text{vote})} = \text{South} + \text{NW} + \text{Age} + \text{Socioeconomic Status} + \text{Party Mobilization} \\ + \text{Connectedness to Political Process} + \text{Investment in Outcome}].$$

This model is evaluated for all respondents to the NES between 1952⁷ and 1996. This allows us to introduce time as a variable through careful modeling of age with two related variables—year of interview and membership in cohort one. Again, these variables present a formidable and not totally resolvable challenge: They are not statistically independent. All three time-related variables cannot be included in any model because knowledge of one is a function of the other two. That is, if one knows that a respondent was 35 in 1960, one knows that the person is in cohort one (see Glenn 1977).

This limits the degree to which variance in voting can be apportioned among the three. However, we are able to make reasonable estimates of differences between generations in the context of age and yearly trend. Our interest is in specifying the role of generations in two ways—direct and indirect. We measure the former by including it as a component in the equation $[P^{(\text{vote})}]$ above. We measure the latter by observing the differences between the generations in the impact of each of the variables in the models.

Our hypotheses are formalized as follows:

- *The direct effect of membership in the cohort born prior to 1932 (cohort one) is to increase voting turnout.*
- *The indirect effect of membership in cohort one is to increase the impact of party-related variables on turnout.*
- *The indirect effect of membership in cohort two is to increase the impact of socioeconomic, media-related, and candidate-related variables.*

The evaluations of the above hypotheses must take into account two related phenomena—the actual differences between cohorts one and two on each variable and the differences in relationships between each variable and the vote in each cohort. In other words, those born prior to 1932 generally have a greater propensity to participate at a higher level and participate in reaction to different stimuli. If our hypotheses are confirmed, any model that does not include the explicit operationalization of “political generation” suffers from underspecification.

⁷Data for all variables except party contacts are available for all years from 1952 to 1996. Party contacts were not assessed in 1952, however. Given the crucial nature of this variable, we assigned the mean response for all 1956 respondents (.17) to all cases in 1952. This substitution only affected those in cohort one, as virtually no members of cohort two were eligible to vote in 1952.

The Dynamics of Turnout since 1952

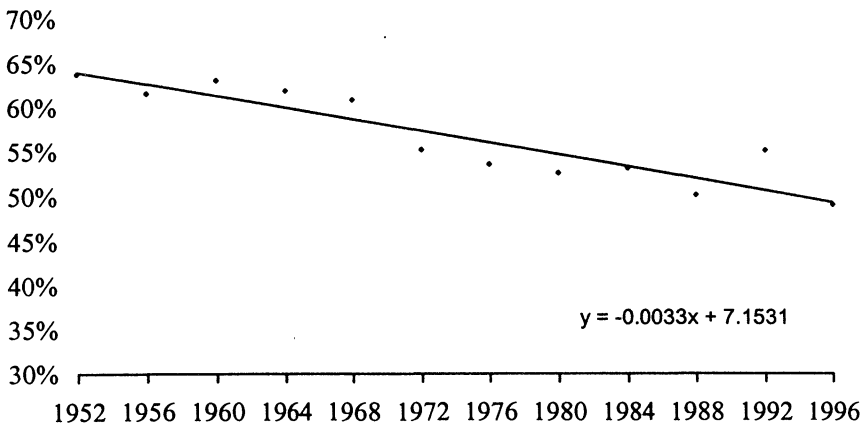
It is difficult to account for a decline in a phenomenon occurring over a long period of time when conditions are in great flux. The downturn in voting between 1952 and 1996 represents a .33% yearly decrease when modeled as a linear bivariate relationship between time and voting (Figure 2). The decline could be a factor of an underlying disinclination to participate, which would be reflected in a series of progressively lower intercepts in equations for the series of elections. It could be because succeeding electorates have different characteristics, which would be reflected in differences in means over time; or it could be that the electorates respond to different stimuli in different ways, which would be reflected in different regression coefficients over time. We subjected the aggregate electorate over the 44-year time period to multivariate logistic regression analysis. We placed all cases in a common data set with year and generation coded as variables, along with age.

We have taken advantage of the characteristics of the logit model to present the findings with a regression analogue. Of course, the nature of logistic regression prevents a measure of the unit increase in y (probability of voting) associated with a unit change in each x , which holds for any value of x . This inability reflects the nonlinear nature of the logit function, which takes on the character of an “S” curve with maximum increases at the mean of x and minimum increases at the extremes.

While there is no slope analogue that holds throughout the range of each predictor, it is possible to show the impact of each factor on the probability of voting at a specific point. We have chosen to show this impact for the “average respondent” by setting each x to its mean. We have further adjusted the inter-

FIGURE 2

Univariate Trend in Turnout in Presidential Elections: 1952–1996



cept to reduce the overall predicted probability for the average voter to the levels from the census, rather than those for the NES. Thus, we make use of the NES to establish the relationships in our model but adjust to census levels to reduce the upward bias in reported vote.

The results of the global logit analysis are displayed in Table 1. Here age and cohort are included as variables, but election, or trend, is left out in order to avoid model overspecification. We have adjusted the intercept so that the average estimate is that of the weighted average of census estimates over the time period rather than those from the NES. The effect of each x_i is presented as the increase in probability of voting associated with a unit increase in x_i at its mean value with all other indicators held constant at their respective mean values.

Not surprisingly, residence in the South and African-American racial identity reduces the probability of voting by 12% and 10%, respectively, over the entire time period. Of course, the impact would have been much greater had we considered only earlier elections. Aging also had the expected effect on turnout. At the overall mean of 45, an increment of one year to 46 increased the probability of voting by .35%. Income clearly has an impact, as does education. Post-secondary schooling has long been targeted as a key to voting. We find education beyond high school increases the likelihood of voting by almost 15% over the time period.

Measures of political connectedness had a profound impact on voting over the last half of the twentieth century. A unit increase of party strength increases the likelihood of voting by 9%. Candidate stimulus, on the other hand, has had twice the impact as has party stimulus. Interest in the election and caring who wins clearly lead to a propensity to vote. Political mobilization is a particularly strong cue. Over the last half of the twentieth century, those contacted by parties were 14% more likely to vote than those who were not contacted. None of these relationships are particularly surprising; they are comparable to those uncovered by others over the years. However, in the aggregate they represent a more fully specified model than had heretofore been available, and this fully specified model for the aggregate electorate provides the framework within which to make inferences about time-related variables. Of course, we are limited to simultaneous consideration of only two of the three time variables.

Age and cohort effects are included in this model, and each has its expected impact. There is a clear cohort effect. When other variables are taken into account, those in cohort one, born before 1932, are more than 8% more likely to vote than are those born after that year. Since we cannot simultaneously measure the impact of trend and cohort, we must address the possibility that this cohort effect is actually a proxy measure of an overall downturn in participation. Again, note that respondents in cohort one are much more likely to have been interviewed during the lower turnout elections earlier in the time period. We find that the cohort effect isolated above is clearly not merely a reflection of a pure trending phenomenon. Cohort is related to, but obviously not redundant to, the election year of the interview. Replacing cohort with year of interview has no appreciable impact on the model's explanatory power (see Appendix

TABLE 1
Logistic Regression Solution: All Respondents: 1952-1996 (Cohort as Variable)

B	X	Antilog	Δ odds / Δ x	Δ Y at level	Sig.	R
-0.5108	0.32	0.6000154	-39.998463	-12.44%	0.000	-0.085
-0.4188	0.1	0.6578357	-34.216425	-10.20%	0.000	-0.0498
0.0143	45.25	1.0144027	1.440273	0.35%	0.000	0.0647
0.6019	23%	1.8255841	82.558412	14.66%	0.000	0.0682
0.4762	1.92	1.609945	60.994497	11.60%	0.000	0.1216
0.3555	2.94	1.4268939	42.689392	8.66%	0.000	0.1243
0.0791	4.73	1.0823125	8.231255	1.93%	0.000	0.07
0.0393	3.61	1.0400825	4.008246	0.96%	0.000	0.0332
0.553	0.24	1.7384606	73.846058	13.47%	0.000	0.0723
0.3016	0.65	1.3520203	35.202031	7.35%	0.000	0.0488
0.5452	2.13	1.7249533	72.495334	13.28%	0.000	0.1273
0.3399	0.52	1.4048071	40.480710	8.28%	0.000	0.0434
Intercept	-4.41	1.33321	33.320520	<i>Adjusted Grand Mean = 57.14%</i>		
Equation		z log likelihood	11884.545			
		Goodness of fit	12898.49			Significance = .0000
		Model Chi Square	3109.503			79% Correctly Classified

Table A1). Over most of the time period, each generation is well represented in each election event. Thus, we must conclude that generation is more than a trend surrogate and indeed does appear to have a direct impact on one's propensity to vote. Unfortunately, our inability to completely disentangle the trend-cohort knot prevents us from more precisely delineating generation's impact. But we can cautiously offer the fact that members of the New Deal generation are significantly more likely to vote than are those born after 1932, which provides support for hypothesis one.

The Indirect Effect of Generation

We are at least as interested in the indirect impact of generation as we are in its direct effect. The separate analyses for the cohorts are summarized in Table 2. We present the means and the changes in probability for the average voters in each cohort to demonstrate the changes in key variables, as well as changes in their impact on the vote. The post-New Deal electorate is, indeed, different in structure and attitude. Those born after 1932 are twice as likely to have some education beyond college as those born before that year. They are more likely to be nonwhite, and they have different orientations to candidates and party stimuli. As we expected, those born after 1932 are less interested in politics, less connected to party, and less receptive to candidate stimuli.

The electorates are not only different, they react differently, and this difference plays a part in reducing voting. These differences between the respective generational electorates support hypotheses two and three. Not surprisingly, race and region account for substantial variation in voting among those born before 1932. Being a nonwhite or a Southerner each reduces the likelihood of the average respondent's casting a vote by 17% and 14%, respectively. The impact is much less among those in cohort two. Age has a much greater impact on voting among those born after 1932. However, age does not have much impact on the probability of voting among members of the New Deal generation.⁸

Education also has a much greater effect on the propensity to vote among the younger cohort. It is clearly the main factor in accounting for voting among those in cohort two, increasing their probability of voting by 17%. Of course, this impact is all the more impressive when one considers the fact that the post-New Deal generation is twice as likely to have some education beyond high school. As has been often noted, the overall decline in turnout is all the more troubling given the increase in the electorate's level of education.

Interest and party stimulus have greater impact on the propensity to vote among cohort one. These respondents are more interested in the election, are more likely to offer reactions to parties, and have a greater commitment to the parties. As we would expect, one's interest in the outcome and reactions to political parties have a greater impact on those in cohort one's propensity to

⁸For purposes of estimates for the average voter, age was adjusted to the overall grand mean (46) for both groups.

TABLE 2
Comparison Means, Logistic Coefficients and Unit Increase in Probability of Voting: By Cohort

	Means		B		% Δ Vote		Cohort 2—Cohort 1	
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Δ mean	Δ impact
South	0.32	0.33	-0.6786	-0.3311	-16.67%	-9.07%	0.01	7.59%
Nonwhite	0.1	0.15	-0.5752	-0.3315	-14.13%	-8.11%	0.05	6.02%
Age*	55.79	33.63	0.0084	0.318	0.21%	7.78%	22.16	7.57%
HS Grad +	.23	.48	0.5028	0.7048	12.35%	17.23%	0.25	4.89%
Income 3 rd	1.92	2.12	0.44	0.3994	10.81%	9.77%	0.2	-1.04%
Party Strength	2.94	2.49	0.2822	0.3975	6.93%	9.72%	-0.45	2.79%
Candidate Stimulus	4.73	5.09	0.0669	0.0863	1.64%	2.11%	0.36	0.47%
Party Stimulus	3.61	3.07	0.0552	0.0203	1.36%	0.50%	-0.54	-0.86%
Party Contacts	0.24	0.24	0.6949	0.5092	17.07%	12.45%	0	-4.61%
Care who wins	0.66	0.65	0.2592	0.3909	6.37%	9.56%	-0.1	3.19%
Interest	2.13	2.04	0.5005	0.5998	12.29%	14.67%	-0.09	2.37%
Intercept	-4.41	-14.65	Predicted Vote (adjusted to census levels)				53.04%	61.04

All relationships are significant unless noted.
*For effects, age set at grand mean of 45 years.

vote than on their counterparts in cohort two. On the other hand, those in cohort two react more to candidates, and this reaction has greater import in their voting calculus. Both generations care about the same in regard to the outcome, with post-New Dealers more likely to vote in reaction to this caring. This is consistent with the notion of a generation affected less by citizen duty and more by personal psychological investment in the outcome.

Considering the fact that post-New Deal respondents were surveyed in more recent elections, we were surprised that both generations experienced the same number of party contacts. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) had found that such contacts had been decreasing up to 1992. The apparent contradiction is explained by the upsurge of contacts in 1996 (Figure 3). Much of this increased contact must have been via the telephone, as both parties have recently been making increased use of phone bank operations. In any case, parties have indeed stepped up their mobilization activities. But they are dealing with an increasingly disinterested audience among post-New Dealers. The impact of a party-initiated contact is much less for this group than for their parents' generation. Rosenstone and Hansen were correct in their assessment of the importance of mobilization. However, their failure to consider generational effects led them to miss the nature of the impact. Parties are continuing to contact voters but are having far less impact among those entering the electorate after 1932, who are much more affected by candidate-centered cues.

The great increase in education among those in cohort two, when coupled with the lessened impact of race and region, should have led to increased, rather than decreased, voting over time. The decline in the role of party and somewhat lessened interest in the outcome do not come close to making up the difference. Those in the cohort born prior to 1932 are *ceteris paribus* more likely to vote than are those born later. In terms of our model, since the means and slope analogues cannot account for the lowered levels of voting, we must look to the intercepts. That is, cohort two has a lower intercept than cohort one. Those

FIGURE 3
Percent Contacted by Party

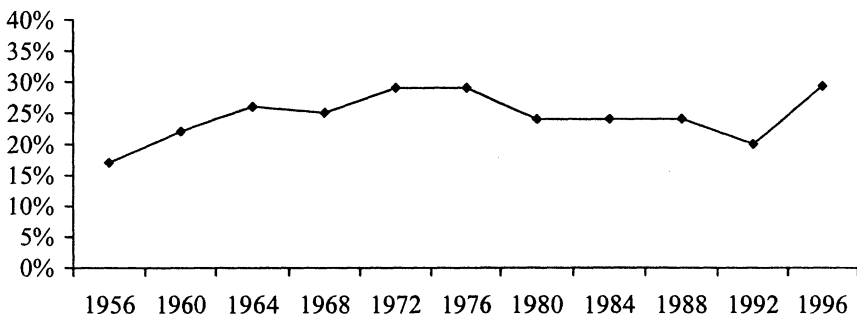
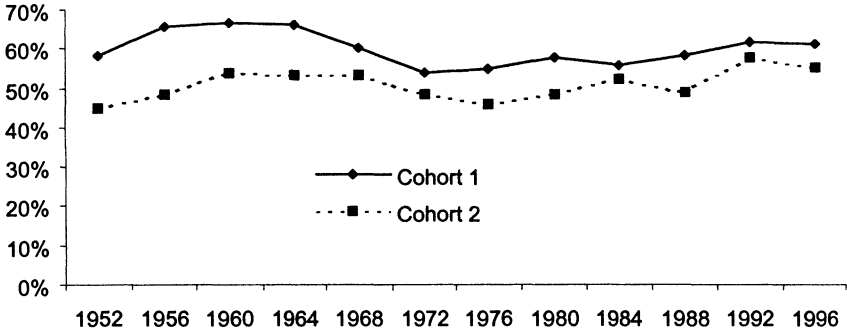


FIGURE 4
Vote* by Year within Cohort

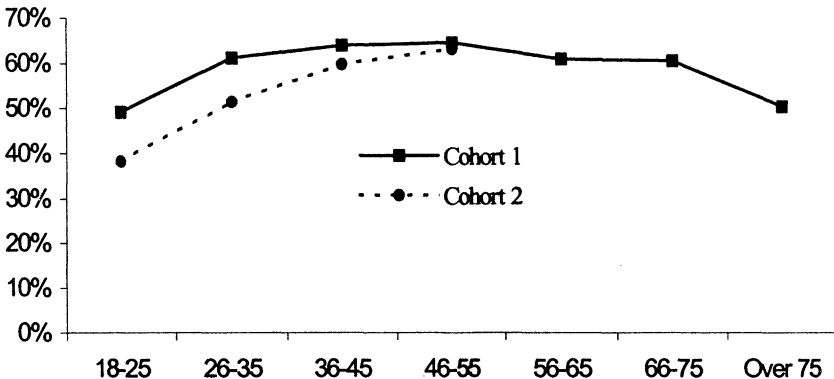


*reported NES Vote

born after 1932 react to their political universe from a different base, representing a lesser likelihood of voting. This lessened likelihood is a residual of sorts, beyond what we would expect from the reasons we can specify in our model. We attribute this to the unique political experiences of the New Deal coalition.

The lessened likelihood of voting is obvious when the turnout of each group is examined over time (Figure 4) and across age groups (Figure 5). In every election since 1952, participation in cohort two is lower than in cohort one. Of

FIGURE 5
Vote* by Age within Cohort



*reported NES Vote

course, those in cohort one are always older than their counterparts. However, at each age level where data are available, those born after 1932 vote at lower levels. The aforementioned lack of a relationship between age and vote in cohort one is clear from an examination of Figure 4.

The implications of this closure are significant for the understanding of overall vote decline. Membership in cohort two brings with it a corresponding lower commitment to the parties. These party cues may play a major role in helping to “jump start” voting among individuals otherwise disinclined to participate. Without this stimulus, those in cohort two appear to be slower to enter the electorate, but they show signs of having caught up by age 50, the midpoint of the electoral life cycle (Figure 5). Thus, the direct impact of generation may well be most strongly felt when potential voters are younger. Of course, some of this could be attributable to the eligibility of 18–21-year-olds in elections after 1972. But the closure is linear and obviously transcends structural change.

Generations and the Contours of Participation

This analysis has added to our knowledge of the voting phenomenon in a number of ways. We have extended the systematic coverage of the electorate to include all elections between 1952 and 1996. In addition, we have elaborated a more fully specified model than had been previously attempted and for the first time included generation as an explanatory variable. Most important, this model has explored not only the levels of turnout, but also the differences between the generations in the nature of the linkages between relevant personal attributes and the vote. This was made possible by conceptualizing a dynamic electorate across time unconstrained by election year boundaries.

We can conclude from this exercise that the last half of the twentieth century has indeed come to represent a tale of two electorates. There is no doubt that a perceptible cohort effect has emerged in American politics during the last 50 years. This effect transcends the additive impact of age and trend and has both additive and interactive dimensions. The generation born prior to 1932 entered the electorate by the 1950s. It has voted at a significantly higher level than would be expected on the basis of its increased partisan cue taking and greater interest in the election. This generation’s voting is even more impressive when considering the structural barriers facing its African-American members, the one-party nature of the South until rather recently, and its lower level of education.

If participation is a puzzle to be solved, the pieces cannot be fit together on a flat surface. Rather, the puzzle takes on height, width, and depth. Unfortunately, we cannot view or grasp the “participation object” in its entirety, but can only deal with it from different angles. Moreover, the object’s parts not only have their peculiar shapes but also exert enough force to constantly reconstitute its contours. We have chosen to view this object from along its generation axis, providing some important clues about its shape.

While it is statistically impossible to isolate a pure generation effect, it is certainly significant and substantial. Its greatest impact appears to be during the

first half of the age cycle. Those born after 1932 are slower to enter the active electorate. They are voters of a different stripe, products of a system whose primary socialization has shifted from citizen duty, buttressed by partisan thinking, to a more passive, candidate-cued system. Upon reaching their forties, perhaps this generation may evolve enough of a perceived stake in the outcome to nudge them toward voting at the same levels as their parents. This convergence of generations may well reflect a more gradual "life-experience" effect for those born after 1932. The life-experience hypothesis asserts that as individuals age, they acquire greater experience with the political system and its processes (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, 136–37). This experience constitutes a resource individuals deploy in the political process. Consequently, as experience increases, the probability of voting increases.

Clearly parties no longer have the ability that they once had to reach citizens. It is significant to note that as party contacts remained constant in 1996, the reaction to this variable by the two cohorts is quite different. Cohort one reacted to party contacts much more positively than did cohort two. Indeed, it may be that cohort two may reach a point at which the amount of party contacts just does not make a difference in its voting calculus. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the post-New Deal generation, disengaged as it may be, is well able to respond to different stimuli.

Because it appears as if different generations may react to different stimuli, there may be a need to change the message along with the messenger. "Motor voter" legislation demonstrates society's concern for turnout, but we may be reaching the point of seriously diminished returns from structural reform. Perhaps greater returns could be realized from better understanding the changing electorate, especially the changing young electorate. However, we could well be observing a consequence of this generation's reputed "radical individualism." If this is the case, then nonvoting may become a norm, with occasional contravening of a downward trend apparent only when enough individuals invest in the outcome. Such investment would be tough to mobilize but would most likely reflect an appeal to candidate affect. This would help stem the tide of nonvoting among new generations. On the positive side of the participation ledger, the evidence presented in this article would suggest no falloff past the middle of the life cycle. This, combined with demographic changes, seems to suggest an aging electorate. We would then expect the framing of issues to shift accordingly.

Several questions remain unanswered. We need to examine the interactions between age and other voting stimuli to better understand why the differences between the generations are more acutely felt at the initial stages of the election cycle, or even during the preadult years (Sears and Valentino 1997). In addition, at the risk of stating the very obvious, we must continue to track the development of the now dominant cohort of those born after 1932, especially in regard to their children's generation. Perhaps the tabloidization of campaigning will stimulate a more media savvy "Generation X" electorate inclined to vote at least at the levels of their parents—or perhaps this generation will further lessen the ante to the point where *subjects* outnumber *citizens*.

Appendix
TABLE A1
Logistic Regression Solutions: All Respondents with Year, Cohort 1, Cohort 2

	All Respondents			Cohort 1			Cohort two		
	B	x	ΔY at level	B	x	ΔY at level	B	x	ΔY at level
South	-0.5101	0.32	-12.43%	-0.6786	0.32	-16.67%	-0.3711	0.33	-9.11%
Nonwhite	-0.4024	0.13	-9.80%	-0.5752	0.1	-14.13%	-0.3315	0.15	-8.14%
Age	0.0208	45.25	0.51%	0.0084	57.12	0.21%	0.318	33.63	7.81%
HS Graduate +	0.6336	0.35	15.44%	0.5028	0.24	12.35%	0.7048	0.48	17.31%
Income 3 rd	0.4558	2.01	11.10%	0.44	1.9	10.81%	0.3994	2.12	9.81%
Party Strength	0.3399	2.72	8.28%	0.2822	2.94	6.93%	0.3975	2.49	9.76%
Candidate Stimulus	0.0803	4.9	1.96%	0.0669	4.78	1.64%	0.0863	5.09	2.12%
Party Stimulus	0.0353	3.35	0.86%	0.0552	3.47	1.36%	0.0203	3.07	0.50%
Party Contact	0.5611	0.24	13.67%	0.6949	0.25	17.07%	0.5092	0.24	12.51%
Care who wins	0.3291	0.65	8.02%	0.2592	0.66	6.37%	0.3909	0.65	9.60%
Interest	0.5486	2.09	13.36%	0.5005	2.14	12.29%	0.5998	2.04	14.73%
Year	-0.0119	24.26	-0.29%						

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