

Research Project

Voter Turnout in Third-Wave Democracies

Third-party funded project

Project title Voter Turnout in Third-Wave Democracies

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Since the early 1970s, a third wave of democratization has led to the demise of autocratic regimes in four continents. The bulk of these third-wave democracies are clustered in post-communist Europe and Latin America. While in the founding elections of these democratizing states, participation rates were exceptionally high, in both clusters of third-wave democracies voter turnout has declined. The decline of voter turnout questions the democratic consolidation of these young democracies, as the linkage between the electorate and their representatives is potentially weakening and increasingly distorted. At the same time, voter turnout is considerably higher in the parliamentary and presidential elections of Latin American countries compared to those of the post-communist area in Europe. Scholars have rarely addressed this gap in voter turnout in third-wave democracies from a cross-regional perspective, thus this puzzle has been largely neglected in scientific literature. This project addresses this puzzle by exploring voter turnout in third-wave democracies in Latin America and post-communist Europe. The project starts with a macro-level analysis of voter turnout in the first eight electoral cycles, relying on an eclectic theoretical approach allowing the detection of the factors that account for the decrease of voter turnout in third-wave democracies in post-communist Europe and Latin America, and explaining the variation in voter turnout across these two clusters. The second and the third part of the project analyses individuals' voting decisions by taking into account the role of the party system. The second and third part of the study tackles two prominent problems of young democracies: the legacy of their autocratic pasts and corruption. The second part of the project explores the differences between the voting decisions of the older generations who were politically socialized during the previous autocratic regime and the younger ones who have been socialized after the regime change. The third part of the project investigates whether individuals preoccupied with corruption decide to abstain or switch to new or oppositional parties that emphasize the need to combat corruption. This project will provide the first cross-regional comparison of voter turnout in third-wave democracies in Latin America and post-communist Europe. It will refine existing explanations by providing a comprehensive and comparative theoretical framework for voting in third-wave democracies, taking into account the meso- and the macro-level.

Keywords third-wave democracies; turnout; autocratic legacies; corruption; political parties; political socialization

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