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QUALITY OF GOVERNMENT AFFECT VOTER TURNOUT IN THE EUROPEAN REGIONS

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ABSTRACT

While much of the literature on voter turnout focuses on institutional and socioeconomic factors related to the "input" side of the political process, we examine the "output" side of the political process – and advance this field of research by studying the impact of corruption on turnout in the most recent national legislative elections across 172 European regions. Using data from a novel measure of regional quality of government – gauging the quality, impartiality and corruption in government services – and several control variables at the regional and national levels, we find through multi-level modeling that regional quality of government positively impacts regional turnout. In more detail, our results indicate that citizens' perceptions of the government as partial and corrupt make them, in the aggregate, less likely to cast a ballot.

Key words: Regional level turnout, quality of government, corruption, electoral participation

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Introduction

After 50 years of debate (see, among others, Huntington 1968; Lipset and Lenz 2002; Rose-Ackerman 2008), there is now some strong consensus in the literature that corruption in particular and bad governance practices in general are plagues that must be combated. Bribery, nepotism, money laundering and ineffective governments have a corrosive impact on a wide range of societal features, such as economic growth (Mauro 1995), interpersonal trust (Rothstein and Uslaner 2005) and infant mortality rates (Gupta et al. 2000). Yet, it is less clear whether corrupt and poorly governed states impact turnout rates in national legislative elections. On the one hand, the minority view states that corruption increases electoral participation because citizens are driven to elect a new leadership and that politicians can "buy" votes by granting pork barrel spending and favoring specific constituents (Karahan et al. 2006; Escaleras et al. 2012). On the other hand, the majority view contends that inefficient and corrupt governance decreases voter turnout as citizens distrust the political system when bribery and partiality are widespread (Kostadinova 2009; Stockemer et al. 2013).

While the existing approximately one dozen studies to a large part find that corrupt and inefficient governments decrease electoral participation, they have all been conducted on the national level, thus overlooking significant variation in both corruption and turnout within countries. For example, differences in regional governance performance are often more pronounced within regions of the same country than between countries (e.g. France's regions are roughly situated between the 50th and 80th percentile in governance quality across the approximately 170 regions studied in this article). Similarly, regional turnout rates frequently vacillate considerably within the same country (e.g. on average, there is a more than 10 percentage point gap within the same country and this gap sometimes reaches 17 or 18 percent, such as in Portugal and Austria, respectively). Only a more fine-grained analysis at the regional level can capture these differences (Rydgren 2007).

Using data from a novel survey on citizen's perceptions of government performance in 172 regions across 18 European countries, we study the impact of regional levels of quality of government and corruption on voter turnout in the most recent national legislative elections in these regions. Using a Hierarchical Linear Model and controlling for three national level factors, compulsory voting, the electoral system type and presidentialism, and three regional level socio-economic factors, economic development, population density and the closeness of the race in these elections, we find that

regional levels of quality of governance/lack of corruption have a significant and substantially positive influence on electoral participation.

This article proceeds as follows: we first place our study in the scarce, albeit growing, literature that discusses the link between both inefficient/corrupt governance performance on the one hand and aggregate voter turnout on the other. After describing the design and objective of our study, we present our dataset and explain the statistical procedures adopted for this research. The third section of the article reports our results. We conclude by discussing the relevance of our findings and suggesting avenues for future research.

Previous Literature

Alongside political and individual rights, free and fair elections are the main characteristic of a democracy (Huntington 1991). Through elections, citizens can choose their representatives, control their governments and make their preferences heard. In addition, (high) electoral participation can be a healthy repertoire of contention and a vent for citizens to express their discontent with the performance of politicians (Powell 1982; Putnam et al. 1983). In contrast, "low voter turnout can act as a signal that something is wrong – not with the voters who fail to turn out or with the society of which they are part, but with a political system" (Franklin 2004: 219). Given its primary importance, it is not surprising that scholars of political science (Geys 2006; 2010) have devoted considerable attention to studying variances in voter turnout in electoral democracies across time and space.

Previous studies have focused mainly on institutional factors (e.g. compulsory voting or the electoral system type), which are frequently termed the input side of the democratic process, to explain variation in voter turnout between and, to a lesser degree, within countries (Blais 2006). There are fewer studies that discuss the "output" side of the political system, such as the influence of the quality of public services and the trustworthiness, honesty and professionalism of the public employees on citizen's willingness to participate in the electoral process (Rothstein and Solevid 2013, 2). Actually, quite few studies (e.g. Stockemer 2013) have focused on citizens' perceptions of corruption and the quality of government when exploring between country differences in voter turnout.

In fact, studies discussing the link between government performance/corruption and voter turnout

germinate from the literature that evaluates the link between perceptions of the satisfaction with democracy or the quality of institutions and voter turnout (Abrahamson and Aldrich 1982; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Clarke et al. 2004; Grönlund and Setälä 2007; Karp and Banducci 2008). However, contrary to the institutional literature, which has come to a (near) consensus that compulsory voting, parliamentarism, and a high district magnitude increase macro level political engagement in the polls, this output literature is anything but consensual. Ezrow and Xesonakis (2013), for example, summarize the contradictory evidence regarding the influence of citizens' satisfaction with democracy on electoral participation. They describe the first perspective as follows: "citizens who are more satisfied with democracy tend to be more politically engaged, and thus they are more likely to turn out to vote" (2013, 2). The counter perspective proposes that the electorate should shun the polls if satisfaction with democracy is lower. In Ezrow and Xesanaki's (2013, 4) words: "dissatisfaction generates demand for change in the electorate, which in turn mobilizes citizens to engage in, amongst other forms of participation, voting."

So what happens if the government is perceived as corrupt and/or inefficient? Does the resulting dissatisfaction with the government's performance trigger some increased mobilization to oust corrupt leaders and re-implement transparency or does it make citizens discouraged and apathetic about the political system? The corruption and turnout literature is not unanimous on that point. The minority views corruption as a mobilizing aspect for increased citizen involvement and proposes three rather different causal mechanisms to support this view. The first view advances the simple argument that corruption is likely to enrage citizens, who should then express their dissatisfaction on Election Day by casting a ballot for a non-corrupt politician (Kostadinova 2009). Bauhr and Grimes (2013) describe this as a process of *indignation*. Second, Escaleras et al. (2012) make the argument that, in corrupt and clientelist societies, voters can be bought off to vote. According to this strain of thought, "corruption increases the value of office-holding, it also increases the demand for votes on the part of incumbents wanting to retain their profitable positions of political power …this produces more electoral effort and higher voter turnout in corrupt than in non-corrupt countries" (Karahan et al. 2006:88).

The third argument is rather indirect and suggests that, once corruption is contained, voter turnout should be lower. For example, explaining voter turnout in the second half of the 19th century in the U.S., Heckelman (1995) argues that bribery was a common mean to harvest votes in the U.S. prior to the reform of secret voting, which most US states adopted in the 1880s. The author finds that, after this reform, the direct importance of bribery diminished. More precisely, Heckelman (1995,

107) in a study of gubernatorial elections in the U.S. from 1870-1910, concludes that political parties stopped offering payments in return for votes after they were "no longer able to verify the voters' choices". Hence, a reform that reduced corrupt practices indirectly resulted in a decreased turnout. Schaffer (2002; 2007) further explores the finding that a "clean up" of the election process ought to keep people away from the polls. Analyzing the processes through which reduced corruption – and hence the reduced possibilities for vote buying – affects turnout, he concludes that "lowered turnout in more transparent and better performing systems may thus be either an unintended consequence or an intended effect of clean election reforms" (2002:80).

In contrast, there are also strong arguments in support of a negative relationship between corruption and voter turnout. This perspective, to which most scholars (Hellmann et al. 2000; Tucker 2007) adhere, holds that widespread perceptions among the citizenry that the system is corrupt tend to decrease individuals' willingness to engage in the political process (Stockemer 2013, Stockemer et al. 2013). According to Kostadinova (2009, 693), "corruption undermines the faith of voters in the democratic process, and consequently, weakens their desire to participate in politics." Bauhr and Grimes (2013) write that increased political corruption in the political and social realm leads to a process of *resignation* in the population.

As expected from the contradictory theoretical views or explanations, the existing approximately dozen empirical studies do not find unanimous support for either of the two perspectives. A minority of studies report that corruption has a bolstering effect on electoral participation (e.g. Karahan et al. 2006). For example, studying turnout rates in gubernatorial elections in the U.S. between 1979 and 2005, Escaleras and colleagues (2012) find that governmental corruption raises electoral participation, a finding that was already advanced in the early 1980s by Johnston (1983). Still, a majority of studies find that corruption has a negative influence on citizens' participation in elections. For example, McCann and Dominguez (1998, 499) report that "perceptions of electoral fraud did affect the likelihood of voting: the greater the expectation of fraud, the lower the likelihood of voting." Similarly, Simpser (2005) finds corruption to be negatively related to turnout in a large N study comprising both autocracies and democracies. Likewise, Stockemer et al. (2013) find in their study of a large number of national legislative elections in electoral democracies that, as corruption increases, the percentage of voters who go to the polls decreases.

In another study Birch (2010), using data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems for a large number of new and established democracies, finds that unresponsive, ineffective and corrupt

governments negatively affect the likelihood that voters go to the polls. Birch (2010, 1607) adds further detail that "actual electoral misconduct will in some cases increase rates of electoral participation, but perceptions of malpractice will have the countervailing effect of decreasing it," Equally detailed, Stockemer (2013), using three corruption measures (i.e. the World Bank, the Transparency International and the PR Group measure) across a large sample of presidential regimes, finds that only the PR group corruption measure has the expected negative influence. The other two measures were unrelated to macro level turnout. Also quite suggestive, Kostadinova (2009) reports mixed results based on a sample of post-communist countries. In her study, she finds that corruption's mobilizing effect is slightly weaker than its deterring effect on voter turnout (see also Kostandinova 2003).[1]

As of March 2013, there is still no consensus as to the exact impact of corruption on electoral turnout. Two solutions exist for reconciling or clarifying the contrasting relationship between the two concepts: (1) increase the number of observations or (2) use more fine grained data on the regional level. The first suggestion, strongly advanced by Blais (2006)[2], has largely been met, as studies (Simpser 2005; Stockemer 2013; Stockemer et al. 2013) have analyzed the influence of corruption on voter turnout across samples comprising several hundred democratic elections from more than 100 countries. However, except for some within country analyses in the U.S. (e.g. Johnston 1983), there is a lack of sub-national analyses measuring the link between corruption and turnout.[3]

Yet gauging the influence of the quality of governance/corruption on turnout on the regional level has several advantages. First, through the use of differences in corruption levels and turnout *within* countries, we increase the variance of the dependent variable, turnout, and the independent variable, degree of corruption/ quality of government. For instance, turnout rates in the countries in this study vary significantly (often by more than 15 percentage points); the same applies to differences in quality of government that relatively change by more than 30 percent for regions within one

[1]Using a similar sample of post-communist countries, Pacek et al. (2009) find no correlation between higher corruption and decreased citizen engagement

[2]To urge scholars to increase their "N", Blais (2006) writes: "as the number of democracies and the number of democratic elections are greatly expanding, we can test our hypotheses with more cases and with greater variance in both the dependent and independent variables" (p. 122).

[3]Notable exceptions of scholars that focus on regional comparisons of turnout are Kirchgässner and Schimmelpfennig (1992), as well as Hoffman-Martinot et al. (1996). The former authors compare voter turnout in 248 German and 650 UK districts (1987 elections). The latter scholars contrast citizens' participation in elections in 364 UK councils with electoral turnout in 382 French municipalities for the 1983 and the 1990 local elections.

country (see also Tabellini 2005). Second, there are strong theoretical reasons to believe that sub-national variations in the quality of government have a stronger influence on citizens' likelihood to participate in the political process than national averages.

We believe that citizens' perceptions of the quality of government are in many ways a product of experiences of everyday life that for most people takes place right where they live in their town or region. As Lipsky (1980) argues, citizens most often come into contact with street level bureaucrats when in their dealings with agents of the state. Consequently, citizens in regions where corruption and partiality are widespread will be more likely to be confronted with officials asking for bribes or acting in a partial manner than citizens in regions with a higher quality of government. In turn, these perceptions ought to influence individuals' choice to vote (or not) more than some national averages. For this reason, we argue that it is more appropriate to analyze the associations between corruption/good governance and turnout regionally rather than to focus on nations as the unit of analysis.

Data

In the ensuing analysis, we combine the small but growing scholarly focus on corruption as an explanation for electoral participation with the literature focusing on regional differences in turnout. In more detail, we examine the influence of regional level government performance/corruption on turnout by analyzing electoral participation in 172 NUTS 1 and NUTS 2 regions in 18 European countries.[4] In the following pages, we will introduce our dependent variable, regional level turnout, our independent variable, regional level quality of government/corruption, and our regional level control variables (population density, GDP per capita and the closeness of the election) and national level control variables (compulsory voting, the electoral system type and presidentialism). It is our goal to assess the importance of regional levels of quality of governance/corruption in relation to other national and regional level factors in explaining the regional variance in electoral participation.

[4] NUTS (the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) levels differ in the countries we analyze. NUTS 1 regions are from Belgium, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Netherlands, Sweden and U.K. NUTS 2 regions are from Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain.

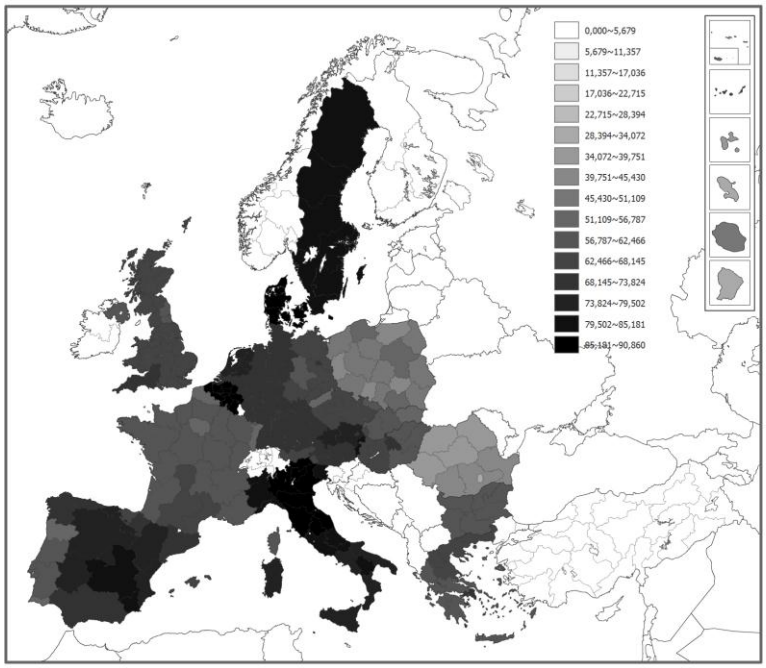
Dependent variable

We measure turnout, our dependent variable, in its standard form, by the percentage of registered citizens that cast their ballot in their country's national elections in each region. The data come from the European Election Database, where we selected turnout data for the most recent available elections.[5] Due to the irregular electoral cycles in the 18 countries in the study, the most recently available figures on turnout range from the year 2008 in four countries (Italy, Romania, Spain and Austria) to the year 2012 for France.[6] Our dependent variable is illustrated graphically in Figure 1. Figure 2 illustrates regional differences of turnout in relation to the national means. For a full list of how turnout rates are dispersed in the different regions, see Appendix 2.

[5]This information is available online (see http://www.nsd.uib.no/european_election_database/country/italy/parliamentary_elections.html). For the French case, where no data were available on the regional level, we calculated this measure by aggregating data from provinces, available from the Ministry of Interior (http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats). For Italy, the regional data were taken from the Ministry of Interior (see http://elezionistorico.interno.it/index.php?tpel=C&dtel=13/04/2008&tpa=I&tpe=A&lev0=0&levsut0=0&es0=S&ms=S). for a list of the elections, see Appendix 1.

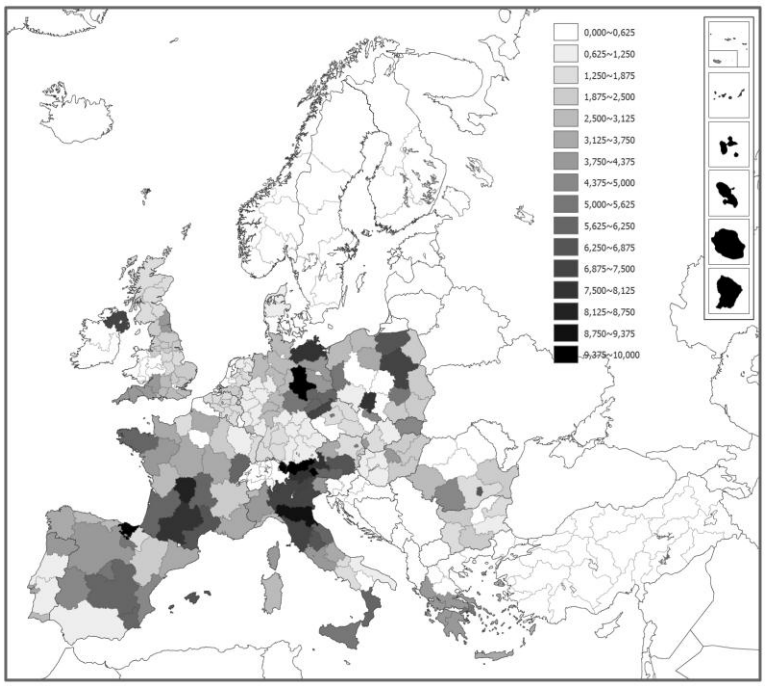
[6]Although the temporal variation is not perfect, it will almost certainly not affect our results. The quality of government and perceptions of partiality and corruption in government among experts and citizens is a "sticky" concept, known to be quite stable over time (see Charron and Lapuente 2013). We hence feel sure that we can study electoral turnout in these regions as an outcome of regional quality of government. A list highlighting the year in which the national legislative elections, which are part of our dataset, can be found in Appendix 1.

FIGURE 1. TURNOUT IN 172 EUROPEAN REGIONS, PERCENTAGES



Comments: The data refer to the most recent legislative elections in the 18 countries. Source: The European Election Database and the Ministry of Interior in France and Italy.

FIGURE 2. REGIONAL DEVIATIONS FROM NATIONAL MEANS OF TURNOUT, PERCENTAGE UNITS



Comments: The data refer to the most recent legislative elections in the 18 countries. Source: The European Election Database and the Ministry of Interior in France and Italy.

Quality of government

Although several corruption or quality of government indicators exist on the national level (e.g. the World Bank Good Governance Indicator, the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, the Corruptions Perception Index), there is some scarcity of data on the sub-national level. In fact, there is only one comprehensive regional governance indicator, the European Quality of Government Index (EQI), which was compiled in 2009 by researchers at the Quality of Government Institute, at the University of Gothenburg, in a project funded by the European Commission (see Charron et al. 2011). The researchers surveyed around 34 000 citizens in 18 countries on three types of public services (education, health care and law enforcement). More precisely, all participants were asked how they would numerically evaluate these services according to *quality*, *impartiality* and *corruption*. In total, the questionnaire consisted of 16 independent survey questions related to these three pillars of good governance, which were then combined into a regional index. In an additional step, the researchers merged the regional scores with external measures on quality of government to create the EQI. To add a country context to the regional scores from the survey, the researchers also introduced a component controlling for these regions' deviation from the national average of the established World Bank's World Government Indicator (WGI). (For a more detailed description on the survey and the creation of the index, see Charron et al. 2012.[7]). In this sense, the measure captures aspects of both administrative and political types of corruption. The index scores of the EQI are standardized so that the mean is 0 with a standard deviation of 1. Altogether, the index is a measure for the quality, impartiality and corruption of government in these regions, where higher values equal higher quality of government and lower levels more corruption, partiality and ineffectiveness (see also Charron and Lapuente 2013). In our analysis we include all regions from the 18 countries that have been covered by the EQI.

Control variables - regional level indicators

We include three regional level variables into our multi-level model as model one indicators: regional GDP per capita, population density and the closeness of the election. Pertaining to the first indicator, economic development, we assume that richer regions have higher turnout. The rationale

[7]For extensive sensitivity tests between the regional measure of quality of government and national WGI scores, see Charron (2010).

for this hypothesis is that affluent parts of a country should have a more educated workforce, more civil society organizations and more citizens that adhere to post-materialist values (Inglehart 1997): all factors that should be beneficial for increased citizen participation in politics including elections (Wyman et al. 1998, 67). We measure economic development in its standard form by the GDP per capita per region. As it is the standard procedure in turnout studies, we log transform the variable.[8]

Second, we include a control variable for population density and assume turnout to be higher in more densely populated areas. Most importantly, electors are more concentrated the more highly densely populated an area is. This also entails that it makes more sense for parties to campaign in densely populated areas, because they reach more individuals (Lipset 1981). In contrast, more rural areas are not political hotspots; political rallies and events normally do not take place there, and citizens are not as politically socialized as they are in cities (Oliver 2001). Summing up the potential importance of population for political participation studies, Geys (2006) writes that a variable measuring the composition "of the population [is] indispensable to any future analysis of turnout (at whatever level of analysis) to avoid misspecification" (2006, 653). Echoing Geys' (2006) claim, we include a measure of population density for each region in our analysis.[9]

Our last regional control variable is the closeness of the election. We believe that a close election should increase individuals' likelihood to cast their ballot (Blais 2000, 60). For one thing, a rational choice argument would predict that with every percent point an election becomes closer, the likelihood that anybody's vote counts increases (Powell 1986). For another, a close election ought to trigger higher campaign activities by parties, which in turn should additionally push voters to actually cast their ballots (Geys 2006). We measure the closeness of the election by its standard form (Stockemer and Scruggs 2012); that is, we subtract the vote share of the runner up party from that of the winning party. For the descriptive statistics of our regional control variables, see Appendix 3.

[8] The variable is an average of the GDP in these regions between the years 2007 and 2009. The data were generously made available from the data used by Charron et al. (2012) and originated from the official figures reported to the Eurostat database.

[9] The data on population density were generously made available from the data used by Charron et al. (2012) and originated from the official figures reported to the Eurostat database for the year 2010.

Control variables – national level factors

We also add three national level factors or level two indicators to our model. These three variables are: compulsory voting, the electoral system type and presidentialism. The first variable, compulsory voting, should bolster turnout (Jackman 1987; Franklin 1999; Franklin 2004). If voting is mandatory, citizens are forced by law to cast their ballot. If they fail to do so, they face some sanctions. Hence, voting no longer becomes a choice but a duty prescribed by law. To capture variances in compulsory voting legislations in our dataset, we create an ordinal variable. We code Belgium, as the only country with enforced voting, 1, Greece and Italy .5 (Greece has compulsory voting on paper but does not enforce it and Italy recently abolished it) and all other countries 0.

For the second variable, a country's electoral system type, we assume that systems with larger districts have higher turnout than systems with smaller electoral districts. Powell (1986) summarizes the logic behind this finding pretty well. He writes that in countries with "proportional representation from the nation as a whole or from large districts, parties have an incentive to mobilize everywhere. With single-member districts, some areas may be written off as hopeless" (1986, 21), or safe. Hence parties in these districts have little to no incentive to mobilize (Blais and Carty (1990). Although later studies (e.g. Bowler et al. 2001; Blais and Aarts 2006) have found less support for the finding that PR systems bolster turnout, we still assume a positive relationship between proportional representation and higher turnout. In the analysis we differentiate between three types of electoral system types, PR systems, mixed systems and majoritarian systems. To capture these three categories, we create two dummy variables, one for PR systems and one for mixed systems. The remaining category, majoritarian systems, serves as the reference category.[10]

The final national level variable that we include in the analysis is a dummy variable for presidentialism. We suggest that turnout should be lower in legislative elections in presidential systems. While legislative elections in a parliamentary system fill both the executive and the legislature, they fill only the legislature in presidential systems (Marsh 2008). This implies that, in presidential systems, legislative elections become less important or second order (Reif and Schmitt 1980). Hence legislative turnout should be lower there, because the stakes of the election are not as high as for the first order presidential election (Stockemer and Calca 2013).

[10]Data are taken from the Electoral System Design database at http://www.idea.int/esd/

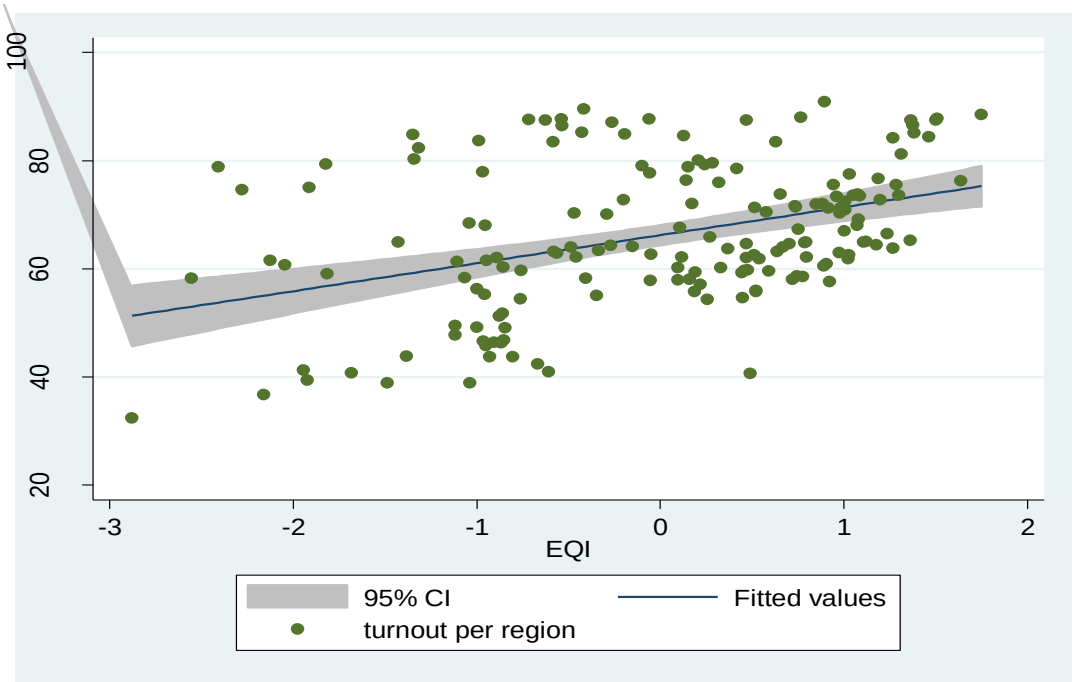
Methodology

To measure the influence of corruption/quality of government on turnout on the regional level we engage in a two-step process. First, we present the relationship between the two concepts in a bivariate realm. Second, we build a multi-level or hierarchical model. We have three regional level covariates (i.e. GDP per capita, population density and closeness of the race) and three static national level covariates or institutional factors (i.e. compulsory voting, the type of electoral system and presidentialism). Having data spanning two different geographical levels renders hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) a sound choice. In the analysis that ensues we cluster regions within countries. Evaluating the corruption's and the other regional level covariates' influence within their national context also avoids an overestimation of the statistical significance of these level 1 indicators (O'Connell and McCoach, 2008). Our HLM model covers 172 regions in 18 European countries. We also include a dummy variable for Eastern Europe, as a level 2 indicator, in the model because turnout there is approximately 20 percentage points lower than in Western Europe (Stockemer 2012).

Results

Our descriptive results indicate that there is a positive relationship between more transparency, impartiality and quality in government services and turnout. In fact, our fitted regression line indicates that well governed regions have up to 20 percentage points more citizens turning out in elections than poorly governed or corrupt regions. Unsurprisingly, this substantively rather strong relationship is statistically significant at the 99 percent level (see Figure 3). In addition, we find that regions that have an above average corruption/quality of government score, have approximately 7 percentage points more citizens turning out on Election Day than regions with below average corruption/quality of government scores. Based on these two types of bi-variate analyses, it seems that governance and corruption influence turnout in European regions. To gain more robust evidence of this finding, however, we have to test this stipulation in a multivariate model, which we will do below.

FIGURE 3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNANCE/CORRUPTION AND TURNOUT



The results of the multi-level model confirm our descriptive statistics. Our quality of government/corruption indicator has the expected sign and is statistically significant. The model predicts that, for every point a region becomes less corrupt/better governed, turnout increases by 2.3 points. This implies that corruption/quality of government alone explains approximately 10 percentage points in the variance in turnout between regions across Europe. Equally importantly, corruption can also explain 2-3 percentage points of the variance in turnout within countries, given that the quality of government frequently differs by more than 1 point within the same state. Several country examples support this finding. In Belgium, for example, there is a 5 percentage point gap between the "most clean" region (Vlaams Gewest) and the "most corrupt" region (Brussels). Similar relationships exist in many other countries including Romania, France or Greece.

TABLE 1. RESULTS OF HIERARCHICAL LINEAR MODEL

Fixed effects	Coefficient	(SE)	t	(df)	p
Model for mean regional turnout (β_0)					
Intercept (γ_{00})	75.69	(7.64)	9.91	(12)	.001
Compulsory Voting (γ_{01})	6.91	(8.83)	.78	(12)	.449
List PR (γ_{02})	-4.79	(8.33)	-.58	(12)	.576
Mixed System	-5.04	(8.84)	-.57	(12)	.579
Presidentialism (γ_{03})	-16.87	(8.30)	-2.03	(12)	.065
Eastern Europe (γ_{04})	-8.17	(5.21)	-157	(12)	.143
Model for Quality of Governance/Corruption Slope (β_1)					
Intercept (y_{10})	2.28	(.72)	3.19	(134)	.002
Model for Population Density Slope (β_2)					
Intercept (y_{20})	11.75	(4.42)	2.66	(134)	.009
Model for Log GDP per Capita Slope (β_3)					
Intercept (y_{30})	3.23	(1.23)	2.63	(134)	<.010
Model for Closeness of the Election Slope (β_4)					
Intercept (y_{40})	-.05	(.05)	-.94	(134)	<.375

Most of our level 1 and level 2 control variables display the expected effect. Pertaining to the regional level variables, we find that both urban areas (i.e. regions with a higher population density) and richer areas (i.e. regions with a higher GDP per capita) have increased turnout. The first of these findings strongly supports the hypothesized idea that the political life is more pronounced in cities and that parties are more active there. The second, result of a positive influence of development supports strongly supports the notion that citizens individually and in the aggregate display more political interest, knowledge and participation, the more highly educated they are. Our regional-level control variable, electoral closeness, has no influence on regional level turnout. While they are not statistically significant at the 95 percent level, all the country fixed effects except for the two electoral system type dummies have the anticipated sign. In this regard, compulsory voting has a

positive influence on turnout, while presidentialism has a negative influence. Despite being non-significant, the coefficient for both variables is fairly large.

Theoretically, this research provides strong support for the majoritarian perspective; that is, corruption renders citizens less likely to go to the polls. While recent research (e.g. Stockemer et al. 2013) has found that this is the case across a large sample of democracies, our research indicates that, on the regional level, where people have the most contact with state officials, dishonest practices and bad governance deter people from engaging in the political process as well. This finding becomes more relevant the more we consider that regional level governance impacts variation in turnout not only between regions across Europe but also within regions in one country.

Conclusions

This is the first study to evaluate the relationship between the quality of government/ corruption and turnout at the regional level. Supporting the majoritarian view, we find that corruption puts a drain on citizens' likelihood to engage in the political process. However, our study does not only offer more empirical evidence that corruption is a plague in both the economic and political realms, it also provides strong backing for the theory that ineffective governance performances and corruption politically disenfranchise citizens. In addition, our study considerably reduces the risk of ecological fallacies. While national level studies could find that average (high) levels of corruption could decrease turnout, it is still theoretically possible that turnout is actually highest in the most corrupt areas of a country. A study of the sub-national level by definition eliminates such risks when making inferences. Therefore, our study makes it possible to express the negative relationship between bad governance/higher corruption and lower turnout with more certainty.

Without doubt, our study adds greatly to the burgeoning literature on corruption and political participation. Nevertheless, the research on governance/ corruption and turnout is still in its early stages. For one thing, good regional level data are missing for all other regions of the globe (except North America). Thus it would be worthwhile to compile regional corruption/governance data for Asia, Latin America and Africa. While this is certainly a costly endeavor, it would benefit not only the political participation research, but development studies, more generally. In addition, future research should use the existing data and combine various levels of analyses. For example, it would be interesting to study the type of individual who is most likely to abandon the polls because of

corruption. While there is still room for many more good studies, we maintain that our research has brought our understanding on the impact of corruption/governance on turnout forward.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1. THE YEAR OF THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS INCLUDED IN THIS STUDY

Austria	2008
Belgium	2012
Bulgaria	2009
Czech Republic	2010
Denmark	2009
France	2012
Germany	2009
Greece	2012
Hungary	2010
Italy	2008
Netherlands	2010
Poland	2011
Portugal	2011
Romania	2008
Slovakia	2010
Spain	2008
Sweden	2010
United Kingdom	2010

APPENDIX 2. THE TURNOUT RATES IN THE DIFFERENT REGIONS OF THE STUDY

BE2	Vlaams Gewest	90.86
ITD5	Emilia-Romagna	89.56
DK04	Midtylland	88.48
ITD1	Bolzano	88.02
DK02	Sjaelland	87.75
ITD3	Veneto	87.72
BE3	Wallonie	87.68
ITC4	Lombardia	87.53
ITD2	Trento	87.46
DK01	Hovedstaden	87.46
ITE1	Toscana	87.45
DK03	Syddanmark	87.425
ITE2	Umbria	87.06
DK05	Nordjylland	86.58
ITE3	Marche	86.43
BE1	Brussels	85.2
SE1	Östra Sverige	85.13
ITC1	Piemonte	84.86
ITE4	Lazio	84.83
ITD4	Friuli-Venezia Giulia	84.59
SE2	Södra Sverige	84.41
SE3	Norra Sverige	84.14
ITF1	Abruzzo	83.71
ITC3	Ligura	83.45
ITC2	Valle d'Acosta	83.45
ITF2	Molise	82.36
AT11	Burgenland	81.2
ITF5	Basilicata	80.29
ES42	Castilla-La Mancha	80.02
ES62	Región de Murcia	79.58
ITF4	Puglia	79.37
ES23	La Rioja	79.29
ES30	Comunidad de Madrid	79.08
ES52	Comunidad Valenciana	78.84
ITF3	Campania	78.79
ES43	Extremadura	78.55
ITG2	Sardegna	77.94

ES41	Castilla y León	77.66
AT12	Niederöstrerreich	77.51
NL2	Oost-Nederland	76.67
ES13	Cantabria	76.38
NL1	Noord-Nederland	76.26
ES24	Aragón	75.92
AT31	Oberösterreich	75.48
NL3	West-Nederland	75.48
ITG1	Sicilia	74.99
ITF6	Calabria	74.60
DE7	Hessen	73.76
DEC	Saarland	73.74
AT13	Wien	73.61
DEF	Schleswig-Holstein	73.58
NL4	Zuid-Nederland	73.44
DE9	Lower Saxony	73.34
ES61	Andalucia	72.77
AT21	Kärnten	72.76
DE1	Baden Wuttemberg	72.44
ES22	Comunidad Foral de Navarra	72.06
AT22	Steiermark	72.02
DEB	Rhineland-Palatinate	71.96
DE2	Bavaria	71.63
DEA	North Rhine Westphalia	71.45
DE6	Hamburg	71.31
ES12	Principado de Asturias	71.29
AT32	Salzburg	71.18
DE3	Berlin	70.92
ES11	Galicia	70.48
DE5	Bremen	70.3
ES51	Cataluña	70.3
GR3	Attica	70.12
UKK	South West England	69.1
HU1	Közép-Magyarország	68.43
UKJ	South East England	68
CZ01	Praha	67.99
ES53	Illes Balears	67.57
UKH	East of England	67.3
DE4	Brandenburg	66.96
UKF	East Midland England	66.5
ES70	Canarias (ES)	65.87

DEG	Thuringia	65.21
DED	Saxony	64.98
AT34	Voralberg	64.96
GR1	Voreia Ellada	64.94
UKL	Wales	64.9
UKG	West Midland England	64.8
UKI	London	64.6
FR63	Limousin	64.583
AT33	Tirol	64.37
CZ02	Stredni Cechy	64.26
CZ05	Severovychod	64.1
ES21	Pais Vasco	64.03
CZ06	Jihovychod	64
UKM	Scotland	63.8
FR62	Midi-Pyrenees	63.703
HU2	Dunántúl	63.43
UKE	Yorkshire-Humber	63.2
CZ07	Stedni Morava	63.15
DE8	Mecklenburg-Vorpommen	63
SK01	Bratislavský kraj	62.9
CZ03	Jihozapad	62.7
UKD	Northwest England	62.6
FR81	Languedoc-Roussillon	62.526
PT17	Lisboa	62.19
HU3	Észak és Alföld	62.18
FR61	Aquitaine	62.165
BG33	Severoiztochen	62.04
FR43	Franche-Comte	62.008
FR52	Bretagne	61.856
FR72	Auvergne	61.799
GR4	Nisia Aigaiou-Kriti	61.52
BG34	Yugoiztochen	61.49
GR2	Kentriki Ellada	61.33
UKC	Northeast England	60.9
BG32	Severen Tsentralen	60.69
DEE	Saxony-Anhalt	60.47
SK02	Západné Slovensko	60.33
FR83	Corsica	60.158
FR51	Pays de la Loire	60.137
FR25	Basse-Normandie	59.825
FR26	Bourgogne	59.725

SK03	Stredné Slovensko	59.7
FR24	Centre	59.566
FR82	Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur	59.402
FR22	Picardie	59.27
BG41	Yugozapaden	59.05
FR53	Poitou-Charentes	58.682
FR71	Rhone-Alpes	58.567
BG42	Yuzhen Tsentralen	58.35
BG31	Severozapaden	58.28
CZ08	Moravskoslezsko	58.19
FR21	Champagne-Ardenne	58.047
PT18	Alentejo	58.03
FR23	Haute-Normandie	57.909
PT16	Centro	57.84
UKN	N. Ireland	57.6
FR41	Lorraine	57.095
PL12	Mazowieckie	56.24
FR10	Ile-de-France	55.972
PT15	Algarve	55.8
FR30	Nord - Pas-de-Calais	55.777
CZ04	Severozapad	55.22
PT11	Norte	55.06
FR42	Alsace	54.588
SK04	Východné Slovensko	54.41
PT30	Região Autónoma da Madeira	54.31
PL63	Pomorskie	51.71
PL21	Malopolskie	51.19
PL22	Slaskie	49.51
PL41	Wielkopolskie	49.2
PL11	Lodzkie	49.07
PL51	Dolnoslaskie	47.69
PL32	Podkarpackie	46.83
FR94	Reunion	46.634
PL34	Podlaskie	46.57
PL31	Lubelskie	46.44
PL42	Zachodniopomorskie	46.25
PL61	Kujawsko-Pomorskie	45.79
RO41	Sud-Vest Oltenia	43.86
PL33	Swietokrzyskie	43.74
PL43	Lubuskie	43.67
PL62	Warminsko-Mazurskie	42.37

RO22	Sud-Est	41.2
PL52	Opolskie	40.95
RO31	Sud-Muntenia	40.69
PT20	Região Autónoma dos Açores	40.65
RO21	Nord-Est	39.35
RO11	Nord-Vest	38.91
RO12	Centru	38.84
RO42	Vest	36.67
FR91	Guadeloupe	34.718
FR92	Martinique	32.76
RO32	Bucuresti-Ilfov	32.38
FR93	Guyane	30.84

APPENDIX 3: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE REGIONAL LEVEL INDICATORS

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Turnout	66.24	13.27	32.38	90.86
EQI	.0034	1.02	-2.88	1.75
Population Density	.107	.102	.002	.577
Log GDP per capita	9.86	.651	7.95	11.01
Electoral Closeness	10.97	7.98	.04	38.25