

**EFFECT OF THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM ON VOTER TURNOUT
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

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Abstract

Voter turnout in elections in the United States of America is one of the lowest among democracies around the world. Usually, such a low level of voter turnout is connected to the costs of voting, such as voter identification document (ID) laws or the registration system. The factors of competitiveness and political representation in the United States' two-party system are frequently discarded in the conversation about voter turnout. This thesis uses data on elections and analyzes the effect that the two-party system has on the voting behavior of American citizens, and explores specific elections and the reasons for turnout in these elections. The data used in this thesis include a comparison between turnout in the United States and that in other democracies, turnout in different states of the United States, as well as various polling data for particular elections. The research of elections includes the analysis of agendas, issues, candidates and how campaigns shape voter turnout. The stable two-party system in the United States, combined with the rise in the number of "independent" voters and citizens disengaged from the political process, result in a turnout that is lower than average around the world. The introduction of a third-party candidate that follows certain criteria can temporarily increase turnout. Besides, the political power of parties to force their agendas, the correct choice of agendas, along with other specific factors can also increase turnout. However, without the elimination of the two-party system the constant increase of voter turnout in the United States to European levels is impossible.

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Introduction

The right to vote is one of the most essential and fundamental human rights in a functioning democracy. Yet millions of American voters neglect using this right on a regular basis and some of them never show up to vote throughout their entire life. At the same time, voter turnout in the United States is much lower than in other democracies around the world. While turnout in European countries is usually above 70 percent, United States presidential elections have not seen a 60 percent turnout in half a century.¹ Citizens that participate in the political life of their country are the basis of democracy and the decreasing interest of voters in taking part in electing their representatives in the government may be dangerous for the freedom of the society in general. Why do so many Americans tend to abstain from voting and why is voter turnout in the United States lower than in most other democracies? Different schools of thought have offered different answers to this question.

One of the most traditional schools of thought on this issue is legislative and logistical. Authors such as David Hill, Ph.D., Stetson University,² claim that voting legislation and logistical issues lowered voter turnout in the United States. American voting system has traits that are uncommon in other democracies, such as non-automatic voter registration and voting on a weekday. These authors have proposed decreasing the cost of voting, so that citizens would have easier access to polling, automating voter registration, eliminating laws that require a photo identification document to vote, enfranchising ex-

¹ “*Voter turnout in U.S. presidential elections since 1908.*” American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/voter-turnout-in-presidential-elections>

² Hill, David Lee. *American Voter Turnout: An Institutional Perspective*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2006.

felons and opening additional polling stations. These steps should lead to a voter turnout in the United States that is closer to European levels, as citizens can spend less time to cast their votes and thus, can turn out in larger numbers.³ Currently, this is the primary school of thought among American political scientists.

The second school of thought connects voter turnout to civic engagement. Authors such as Jack Doppelt and Ellen Shearer, Medill University, discuss the connection of Americans to their politicians and social issues.⁴ On the one hand, candidates do not attract voters with viable social problems that would be interesting and useful for them. On the other hand, in recent decades the whole new class of Americans became disengaged from the political and voting process, like blue-collar workers. These people do not trust the system as a whole and do not see their candidates in the current political climate. For different reasons, this non-voting class of Americans includes white blue-collar workers, younger voters and African Americans. Authors from this school of thought claim that campaigns do not target these groups of voters sufficiently to attract them to polling stations; thus, certain conditions must be created to ensure that campaigns cover these voters, such as more diverse discussion of issues that would be closer to what these groups of people might be interested in.

Finally, there is a third school of thought, which links low voter turnout to the foundations of the U.S. political system. According to authors such as William Flanigan, Ph.D., University of Minnesota, Nancy Zingale, Ph.D., University of St. Thomas, and Bridgett King, Ph.D., Auburn University, voters are too limited in their decision on casting

³ Ibid.

⁴ Doppelt, Jack C., and Ellen Shearer. *Nonvoters: America's No-Shows*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2013.

their ballots, as there are not enough parties to represent their ideas.⁵ The two-party system, which has become one of the cornerstones of the U.S. political system, does not promote increasing voter turnout. With the rising number of Americans who identify themselves as “independents,” the major political parties fail to represent voters of all major political ideologies. The current radicalization of the American party system will only lower turnout, as increasing numbers of voters in the political center will tend to abstain from voting, not seeing an appropriate candidate on the ballot. The absence of a strong third party or third-party candidates exacerbates the situation by lowering voter turnout, even if strong candidates outside of the major political parties appear on the ballot, the two-party system’s specific characteristics, such as the “wasted vote” phenomenon, do not allow turnout to increase, as unaffiliated voters still prefer to abstain from voting.

The approach of this thesis mostly falls into the third school of thought. The main argument of this paper is that low turnout became an inalienable part of the U.S. political system and cannot be significantly increased on a permanent basis without drastic changes to the system. However, voter turnout can increase from time to time under specific circumstances, which will be explored in this thesis. The main reason why voter turnout is so low in the United States is that a single-member district system is used to elect the Congress. The single-member district system and the plurality-vote election system guarantee the two-party system in the United States and create the “wasted vote” phenomenon – voters see casting a ballot for a third-party candidate as useless, as such a candidate has a minimal chance to get a sufficient number of votes in a single district and

⁵ Flanigan, William H., and Nancy H Zingale. *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*. 12th ed. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1991.

get elected. In proportional representation systems that are used to elect legislatures in most democracies, a party that gets between 3 percent and 5 percent of the votes countrywide gains seats in the parliament. Thus, citizens who want to vote for a non-major party in other democracies do not see their votes as “wasted” and turn out in higher numbers.

The phenomenon of the “wasted vote” has significantly lowered voter turnout in the United States, especially in recent decades, when increasing numbers of Americans have identified themselves as independents – since 1991 there are more Americans who politically identify themselves as independents than those who identify as Democrats or Republicans.⁶ As independents do not always find their candidate in a two-party system, the “wasted vote” phenomenon appears more often, and turnout decreases as the number of independents rises. Introducing more independent candidates can address this problem; however, not all independent candidates increase voter turnout, but only those who present their candidacies under specific circumstances and create a suitable political image for themselves.

Even though the argument of this thesis mostly connects voter turnout to the political system, the paper also discusses other schools of thought. Several legislative factors depress turnout: voter registration, a weekday as a voting day and voter ID laws. These factors influence turnout, but not nearly as much as political factors. The data indicate that countries with a similar registration process, voter ID laws or voting days on a weekday still have a substantially higher turnout than the United States.

⁶ “*Trends in Party Identification, 1939-2014*”, Pew Research Center. <http://www.people-press.org/interactives/party-id-trend/>

Finally, this thesis posits the right approach to the political process and mobilization as the best way of increasing voter turnout with the existing political system, as opposed to decreasing the cost of voting. The introduction of independent candidates that follow specific criteria, the mobilization of particular demographic groups and the correct construction of agendas and ways to force these agendas are the best ways of increasing turnout.

This thesis uses various sources that can mostly be divided into three major groups: data, literature and media. Data primarily include official statistics on voter turnout from the American Presidency Project that compiled data from the Federal Election Commission⁷ and its analogs in other countries⁸, as well as demographic data from the same sources. This thesis also uses approval ratings and other polling data from agencies and exit poll data from the media, when necessary. Acknowledging that unofficial sources might be inaccurate, this thesis does not rely solely on these and looks for more reliable sources, when possible. The other primary source is the literature on the topic of elections. This thesis analyzes the vast number of available books and articles written on this topic from the perspective of all schools of thought, as well as other literature on the subject of elections. This thesis pays special attention to the literature analyzing specific elections, although such literature does not always discuss the issue of turnout. Finally, various media articles are used in this paper to analyze specific elections, problems, topics and their influence on results and voter turnout.

⁷ “Voter turnout in U.S. presidential elections since 1908.” American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/voter-turnout-in-presidential-elections>

⁸ All sources for turnouts in other countries are listed at the end of this thesis, as well as in multiple footnotes

The main question of Chapter I is why turnout in the United States is lower than that in other developed democracies. To answer this question, this thesis presents data sets that compare the USA to other countries in different ways, and divides them into two large groups: political data and cost-of-voting data. The first group includes data that can prove that the political system, first of all, the two-party system, seriously influences voter turnout. The second set of data investigates how cost-of-voting factors influence turnout.

As the single-member district system has been argued to be the primary reason for low voter turnout, the first part of this chapter concentrates on why the single-member district system leads to the two-party system and the “wasted vote” phenomenon, and how the rise in independent voters along with the “wasted vote” influence voter turnout. Other factors mentioned in this part are the satisfaction with democracy, the population’s trust and approval of the democratic institutions in their countries and research on how these criteria influence voter turnout.

The second part of this chapter investigates cost-of-voting factors and their influence on voter turnout. These factors are voter registration, voter ID laws and voting day. In addition to the comparison of the United States with other countries conducted in the first part, states of the US are compared, as different states have different voter ID laws, registration processes and laws regarding the Election Day.

Chapter II analyzes specific elections and scenarios for raising turnout under the conditions of the U.S. political system. The main question of this chapter is: Which factors decrease voter turnout and which factors increase voter turnout in the United States? This research begins with the reduced turnout and analyzes three major periods of low turnout in U.S. presidential elections: 1828–1836, 1920–1932 and 1972–2000. The main question

in this section is why these consecutive elections had lower voter turnout than usual. This part of the thesis focuses on recently enfranchised groups of voters and their voting behavior, as well as on how the perception of the political system affects engagement of certain groups of voters, specifically, discriminated minorities, blue-collar workers and impoverished, and thus, how historical, social and economic factors influence turnout. This chapter also investigates, what made voter turnout go up in the past, specifically, how significantly non-voting groups can increase voter turnout in particular elections. For this purpose, several scenarios are analyzed: the targeted mobilization of non-voting groups using the example of the 2008 then-Senator Barack Obama presidential campaign, and the comparison of two of the most successful third-party candidates' campaigns of recent decades: former Alabama governor George Wallace's campaign in 1968 and businessman Ross Perot's campaign in 1992. This part of the research aims at unearthing, which type of third-party candidate, as well as what conditions are necessary for a higher than average turnout.

Chapter III analyzes the 2018 midterm elections. As these elections had the highest turnout for midterms in 100 years,⁹ the goal of this chapter is to find out why this was the case. For this purpose, all midterm elections since 1974 are divided into four major groups,¹⁰ according to their turnout patterns: one-party surge, one-party collapse, unequal gains and stabilization. As an "unequal gains turnout" means that both parties get more voters than four years before that, these elections demonstrate the highest turnout. Thus, the second part of this chapter deals with the question of why unequal gains turnout

⁹ Compilation of turnout data from official government sources - United States Election Project. 2018 November General Election Turnout Rates. <http://www.electproject.org/2018g>.

¹⁰ Cook, Rhodes. Voter Turnout and Congressional Change. Pew Research Center. November 1, 2006. <http://www.pewresearch.org/2006/11/01/voter-turnout-and-congressional-change/>.

elections happen and what conditions are necessary for this type of turnout, analyzing the midterm elections with higher turnout, more specifically 1982 and 2002, as unequal gains turnout elections, as well as the 1994 elections as a one-party surge turnout election. This chapter analyzes the elections mentioned above from different angles to determine which conditions are necessary for a midterm election turnout to be higher than average. Lastly, this chapter proceeds to analyze the recent 2018 midterm elections and its high turnout, using the conclusions from the previous elections.

All these three chapters set goals for different questions regarding voter turnout. However, all three chapters have one big common answer in their cores: what makes turnout in the United States increase or decrease? Three chapters try to answer this question from different perspectives. Chapter I investigates numbers and has a goal of finding, how political and cost-of-voting factors influence turnout, comparing the United States with other democracies to find similarities and differences between American electoral system and ones in other countries and makes conclusions on the big picture – why the United States generally has one of the lowest turnouts in the world. Chapter II focuses precisely on specific aspects of the United States political system that were discovered in Chapter I. It continues to investigate the effect of the two-party system from another angle – the introduction of strong third-party candidates. Besides, this chapter continues to look into voters that are not affiliated with a major party on the example of groups of citizens, who could not participate in elections and were recently enfranchised, as well as groups of citizens that became disengaged with the political system, traditional “no-shows.” This chapter focuses more precisely on particular elections and people, however, deals with similar question as Chapter I. The final chapter of this thesis attempts to look into the 2018

midterm elections turnout as an example of elections that delivered the record-breaking turnout, while maintaining all the limitations that American electoral system introduces, both political and cost-of-voting. While this thesis generally postulates the fact that turnout in the United States cannot be increased in the constant basis without significant changes into the political system, it also believes that turnout can increase temporarily under certain conditions. While Chapter II looks into the introduction of third-party candidates as one of such conditions, Chapter III tries to find out, what other factors can increase the turnout in the American two-party system on the example on 2018 election. Despite different topics for all three chapters, they all deal with similar questions: why the turnout in the United States of America is low and what can be done to increase it?

Understanding the nature of voter turnout provides answers to various questions, both regarding political science and electoral strategies. What drives a voter to or from the polling booth is the crucial question in deciding how to improve the political system of the country, how to build a better mechanism and guarantee that citizens have access to voting, but at the same time ensure that voters have a desire to cast their ballots as often as possible. This thesis explores the problem of voter turnout from multiple sides and aims to outline the primary goal for those who hope to raise voter turnout in the United States to a higher level. At the same time, voter turnout is one of the most important issues for political campaigns. Campaigns can be won not only by mobilizing the existing electorate but also by attracting traditional non-voters, and this thesis describes particular campaigns that were won by mobilizing non-voting groups of voters. Finally, this thesis offers a different view for the media on how to analyze the results of elections. Currently, various media outlets

focus on turnout of specific demographic groups, but this thesis sees social issues and their influence on turnout as the primary focus for understanding campaigns and elections.

Chapter I. Political and cost-of-voting factors – their influence on voter turnout in the United States of America and other countries

This chapter examines different sets of statistics used to explain the decreasing voter turnout in the United States, to review the literature and authors' viewpoints on the issue of voter turnout in the United States, and to find correlations and patterns which could explain why voter turnout in different countries is higher or lower. The comparison with other countries can provide insight into why turnout in the United States is lower than that of other democracies. For this purpose, different comparisons will be made: international (comparing different countries with different political and legal circumstances, including America) and temporal (comparing how voter turnout has changed in a specific country or state over time).

This chapter examines how the following topics and factors influence voter turnout in the United States and other countries:

- a) the competitiveness and diversity of elections in the United States and other countries;
 - b) America's two-party system;
 - c) the number of citizens who identify themselves as independent voters;
 - d) the satisfaction with democracy in the United States and around the world;
 - e) the enactment of voter identification document laws and the cost of voter IDs in states with strict legislation on the access to casting a ballot;
 - f) registration for election systems in the United States and around the world;
- and

g) holding an election on a weekday.

This chapter uses turnout statistics from major elections in various countries. For most countries, these elections are parliamentary elections, where a head of the government (prime minister or another similar title) is the de-facto head of state, such as Germany, the United Kingdom or Spain, or presidential elections for countries with stronger presidential power, like in France or the United States.

The literature on this issue describes such factors quite thoroughly. Thus, the goal and original contribution are to prove the existing factors with statistics not found in the literature (or by contrast, to provide specific data to disprove these) and to discuss factors which are less frequently mentioned in the conventional literature on voter turnout. The data sets are divided into two major categories: political data and cost-of-voting data.

Political data

For the purposes of this research, various electoral factors in different countries are examined in order to find patterns in the electorate behavior of citizens from democratic countries across the world. The research investigates five democracies: Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain, Norway and Japan, and explores several factors connected to elections in these countries. The last three elections in these countries (and all the special elections that took place in these countries in this same period) and the following factors are examined: average turnout, number of parties that received more than 5 percent of the seats in the national legislature, and the percentage of seats in the legislature that the winning party received.

The number of parties

This research includes only those parties that received more than 5 percent of the seats in the legislature in the last election. America has the stable two-party system allows almost no possibility for other parties or independent candidates (of 535 lawmakers in the 116th Congress, only two senators are not from the Democratic or Republican Parties, and both these senators caucus and vote with the Democratic Party)^{11 12}. In other countries, the situation is quite different. All countries examined in further research had at least one election with more than two parties getting more than 5 percent of the seats in their legislatures in the last five years, and the United Kingdom is the only country which did not have four or more parties getting this number of seats. Two dependencies can be determined in respect of the number of parties competing.

First, Table 1 shows countries that traditionally have more than two parties receiving at least 5 percent of seats have higher voter turnout in order to find the dependency between the number of parties in national legislatures and turnout. Germany

¹¹ Congress.gov. *Members of the U.S. Congress, 116th Congress.*

<https://www.congress.gov/members?q=%7B%22congress%22%3A116%7D>

¹² Since the start of the 20th century, there were only eight U.S. senators, who were first elected to their offices as Independents (and two more senators, who were first elected from a major party, but then got re-elected as Independents) and 47 congressmen, who were first elected as third-party candidates (and two congressmen, who got elected as Republicans and then re-elected as Independents.) Keeping in mind that the ratio of U.S. Congressmen to U.S. Senators is now 4.35/1 and have not varied significantly from the start of the 20th century (from 4.19/1 to 4.53/1,) despite the situation with Independent Members of the 116th Congress, historically, there is slightly higher chance for an Independent politician to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives than in the U.S. Senate. Most likely, the current situation happened after the general decline in the number of Independent lawmakers in the United States. Two incumbent Independent Senators were elected from states that also have highest numbers of Independent lawmakers in their state legislatures (Vermont leads in Independents and Maine trails.) Citizens of these two states are more likely to vote for an Independent candidate for the U.S. Congress, when there is a strong one, and it is likely that they are ready to do that because they are less affected by the effect of “wasted vote,” as they successfully elect Independent lawmakers into their legislatures and do not see their votes for third-party candidates as “wasted.” However, having two U.S. Senators and zero U.S. congressman in 116th Congress does not allow to say that the chance to elect an Independent candidate depends on the office.

and Norway are examples, which have five and six parties receiving at least 5 percent of seats, respectively, while Japan and the United Kingdom tend to have between two and four parties receiving at least 5 percent of seats. Table 1 shows the correlation between voter turnout and the number of parties that get at least 5 percent of seats in national legislatures. Table 1 shows that in terms of voter turnout, average voter turnout in Germany and Norway is more than 10 percent higher than in the United Kingdom and Japan, thus, making it very likely that turnout elevates as the number of competing parties increases.

Table 1. Voter turnout and number of parties with at least 5 percent of seats

Election year	Voter turnout (%)	Number of parties with at least 5 percent of seats in the legislature after elections
Germany		
2017	76.2 ¹³	6
2013	71.5 ¹⁴	5
2009	70.8 ¹⁵	6
Norway ¹⁶		
2017	78.2	5
2013	78.3	6
2009	76.4	6

(continued on next page)

¹³ “Election to the 19th German Bundestag on 24 September 2017.” The Federal Returning Officer. <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2017/ergebnisse/bund-99.html>

¹⁴ “Bundestag Election 2013” The Federal Returning Officer. <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2013/ergebnisse/bund-99.html>

¹⁵ “Election to the 17th German Bundestag on 27 September 2009.” The Federal Returning Officer. <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2009.html>

¹⁶ Valg. Tall for hele Norge. - <https://valgresultat.no/>

The United Kingdom		
2017	68.8 ¹⁷	3
2015	66.2 ¹⁸	3
2010	65.1 ¹⁹	3
Japan ²⁰		
2012	59.3	4
2009	69.2	2
2005	67.5	3

The second pattern, concerning the number of parties competing for seats, emerges in countries with fewer than five parties, such as Japan and Spain. Table 2 that compares turnout and number of parties that got more than 5 percent of seats shows that such countries tend to have lower voter turnout when more parties get at least 5 percent of the seats to estimate, how turnout depends on the chances of multiple parties to have their representatives elected.

¹⁷ “General Election 2017: full results and analysis,” House of Commons Library, <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7979#fullreport>

¹⁸ “General Election 2015: full results and analysis,” House of Commons Library, <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7186#fullreport>

¹⁹ “General Election 2010: full results and analysis,” House of Commons Library, <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/RP10-36>

²⁰ “Japan,” Election Guide, <http://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/109/>

**Table 2. Voter turnout and number of parties with at least 5 percent of seats
(temporal, 2004–2016)**

Election year	Voter turnout (%)	Number of parties with at least 5 percent of seats
Spain ²¹		
2016	66.5	4
2015	69.7	4
2011	68.9	2
2008	73.8	2
2004	75.7	2
Japan ²²		
2017	53.6	4
2014	52.6	4
2012	59.3	4
2009	69.2	2
2005	67.5	3

Taking Japan as an example, five federal elections were held in the last 12 years. The highest turnout was in 2009 when 69.2 percent of eligible voters came to the polls.²³ The 2009 election is the only one where only two parties received more than 5 percent of the seats. At the same time, turnout of less than 60 percent was registered when four parties

²¹ “Consulta des Resultatas Electorales,” Spain Ministry of Interior.

<http://www.infoelectoral.mir.es/infoelectoral/min/>

²² “Japan,” Election Guide, <http://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/109/>

²³ Ibid.

received more than 5 percent of the seats.²⁴

Turnout advantage of the multi-party system corresponds with the theory introduced by French scientist Maurice Duverger that the plurality-vote election system tends to create a two-party system and that the phenomenon of a “wasted vote” exists in such systems.²⁵ Voters tend to cast their votes for candidates with a real chance of being elected (namely, the candidates from the two major parties) and not to “waste” them on candidates from a third party, as such a candidate has a smaller chance of being elected.²⁶ Research Professor Emeritus at University of California in San Diego Arend Lijphart in *The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws 1945–85*, has also demonstrated the theory of a “wasted vote”, when he wrote: “When smaller parties are expected to be discriminated against, voters, as well as politicians, political activists, and money givers will favor larger parties.”²⁷ Finally, this theory is substantiated by statistics quoted in the *Third-Party and Independent Candidates: Wallace, Anderson, and Perot* by Paul R. Abramson et al.: a significant number of voters do not cast their votes for third-party candidates despite

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ The rule formulated by Dr. Duverger has exceptions, for example, in countries with multi-ethnic population that tend to form ethnicity-oriented parties in certain areas of the country. Besides, not all countries that have single-member district systems have the first-past-the-post elections (or winner-takes-all, where candidates win, when they more votes than any other candidate.) This system is used to elect members of U.S. Congress and state legislatures, as well as serves as a basis for the Electoral College that elects the President of the United States. Some countries (for example, France) form their legislatures using the single-member district, however, they use other electoral systems, usually the two-round system, where the runoff elections happen in every district, where no candidate received the majority of votes. These systems do not create the “wasted vote” phenomenon, as the candidate that finished second in the first round of votes still has a chance of winning the election. This thesis only researches countries with the first-past-the-post electoral system, as it is closest to one in the United States. However, despite these countries having the traditional two-party system, as of now they have three parties in their legislatures.

²⁶ Duverger, Maurice, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity In the Modern State*. London: Methuen, 1954.

²⁷ Lijphart, Arend. "The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws, 1945-85." *The American Political Science Review* 84, no. 2 (1990): 481-96.

supporting them. For instance, the statistics indicate that 21 percent of Perot's supporters cast their votes for either Clinton or Bush in 1992.²⁸

However, the existence of a strong third-party candidate might still improve voter turnout. In the last 70 years, there were three elections with such candidates: 1948 (Strom Thurmond), 1968 (George Wallace), and 1992 (Ross Perot). In 1992 the independent candidate Perot received an unprecedented 18.9 percent of votes.²⁹ The 1992 election attracted the highest number of voters in almost 40 years; turnout (55.2 percent)³⁰ was higher than any elections since 1968 and held the record until 2004, and was 5-6 percent higher than turnout for the elections of 1988 and 1994. In 1968, quite a high percentage, namely 13.5 percent of voters, cast their ballots for independent candidate George Wallace. However, the 1968 voter turnout (60.8 percent) was lower than for the 1960 (62.7 percent) and 1964 (61.9 percent) elections.³¹ In 1948, Strom Thurmond ran as an independent candidate and carried four states,³² but turnout was the lowest since 1924, and a lower turnout was registered only in 1980.³³ The topic of third-party candidates and their influence on voter turnout will be discussed in Chapter II.

David Hill, Ph.D., Stetson University, in his book *American Voter Turnout*, raises a similar issue. He refers to the average voter turnout statistics between 1960 and 2000 in

²⁸ Abramson, Paul R., John H. Aldrich, Phil Paolino, and David W. Rohde. "Third-Party and Independent Candidates in American Politics: Wallace, Anderson, and Perot." *Political Science Quarterly* 110, no. 3 (1995): 349-67.

²⁹ Klein, Patricia A., "Federal Elections 92," Federal Election Commission. <https://transition.fec.gov/pubrec/fe1992/federalections92.pdf>

³⁰ "Voter turnout in U.S. presidential elections since 1908." American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/voter-turnout-in-presidential-elections>

³¹ "1968." American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/elections/1968>

³² "1948." American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/elections/1948>

³³ "Voter turnout in U.S. presidential elections since 1908." American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/voter-turnout-in-presidential-elections>

countries with single-member districts (SMD) and proportional representation (PR) systems. According to his comparison, countries with SMDs have an average turnout of 72.15 percent, while countries with a PR system have an average turnout of 78.2 percent.³⁴ He stated: “Many people argue that the lack of choices in the two-party system in the United States is a central issue of low turnout. They point to the high turnout rates in PR systems and conclude that the existence of multiple parties in a PR system leads to higher turnout because voters have more choices.” Based on his research, Hill later concluded that the comparison of voter turnout between countries with SMD and PR systems does not correspond with this statement, as voters in SMD systems vote for their government and a specific person to represent a district in this government. People in PR systems, he argued, vote for an abstract party that will form a coalition to govern, thus voters in such systems believe that elections are not important.³⁵

However, the statistics provided above refute this statement. Statistics of average turnout in countries with different systems reveal another tendency: countries with an SMD system have a lower turnout than countries with a PR system, as Table 3 that compares countries with SMD and PR systems in terms of turnout on the latest general elections shows.

Table 3 shows that all the countries with a PR system listed have an average voter turnout of higher than 70 percent (the lowest is Spain, with 70.9 percent). Countries with at least a partial SMD system and, more importantly, a strong two-party system have turnout of less than 70 percent. It indicates that countries with an SMD system, thus tending

³⁴ Hill, David Lee. *American Voter Turnout: An Institutional Perspective*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2006.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

to form a two-party system, have lower turnout than countries with a PR system. Political and party systems play a significant role in how many people cast their ballots in elections.

As illustrated by Table 3, the lack of political choices in elections can lower turnout.

Table 3. Voter turnout in countries with PR and SMD systems (% of the voting-eligible population) on the latest general election

PR		SMD	
Norway ³⁶	77.6	United Kingdom ³⁷	65.4
Germany ³⁸	72.8	United States ³⁹	58.6
Spain ⁴⁰	70.9	Canada ⁴¹	68.3

More choices on the ballot tend to lead to a higher voter turnout. Countries with a single-member district system tend to form a two-party system, thus significantly reducing the choice for voters. Hence the United States, with a traditional SMD system and a very strong two-party system, will inevitably suffer from low voter turnout due to the lack of choices for voters.

Percentage of seats that winning parties receive

Besides the number of parties which receive at least 5 percent of seats in their

³⁶ Valg. Tall for hele Norge. - <https://valgresultat.no/>

³⁷ “General Election 2017: full results and analysis,” House of Commons Library, <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7979#fullreport>

³⁸ “Election to the 19th German Bundestag on 24 September 2017.” The Federal Returning Officer. <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2017/ergebnisse/bund-99.html>

³⁹ Leamon, Eileen J., Bucelato, Jason. “Federal Elections 2016,” Federal Election Commission. <https://transition.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2016/federalections2016.pdf>

⁴⁰ “Consulta des Resultatas Electorales/Congreso/Junio 2016,” Spain Ministry of Interior. <http://www.infoelectoral.mir.es/infoelectoral/min/busquedaAvanzadaAction.html?codTipoEleccion=2&vueIta=1&isHome=1&codPeriodo=201606>

⁴¹ “Official Voting Results Forty-Second General Elections,” Elections Canada. <http://www.elections.ca/res/rep/off/ovr2015app/home.html>

legislatures, for the purpose of comparing voter turnout to political competitiveness in a country, this chapter analyzes the percentage of seats which parties receive in elections and compares it to voter turnout in these elections. For this reason, two statistics from each election are examined: the percentage of seats the winning party receives and the percentage of seats received by the two leading parties.

Starting with the percentage of seats of the winning party, the data on the last three elections (and all the special elections held in these countries during the same period) is analyzed for five countries: Norway, Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom and Japan. The information used is the average percentage of seats won by the leading party and the average turnout for these elections.

The result of this comparison is obvious from Table 4 that has a goal to find out, how turnout depends on leading party's closeness to the 50 percent of seats in the legislature. The table shows that the more seats the leading party usually wins, the lower the average voter turnout rate is in the country. However, average voter turnout for the three midterm elections before 2018⁴² in America (2006, 2010, 2014) is only 39.1 percent, which is far lower than the lowest turnout rate for any country in Table 4, which is Japan. However, the number of seats received by the majority party (Democratic Party in 2006⁴³ and Republican Party in 2010⁴⁴ and 2014⁴⁵) is slightly more than for the United Kingdom, which is 51.7 percent (the average turnout in the United Kingdom is 65.4 percent).

⁴² Unusually high turnout on 2018 midterm elections is discussed in Chapter III of this thesis, page 93

⁴³ "Federal Elections 2006: Election Results for the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives," Federal Election Commission. <https://transition.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2006/federalections2006.shtml>

⁴⁴ "Federal Elections 2010: Election Results for the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives," Federal Election Commission. <https://transition.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2010/federalections2010.shtml>

⁴⁵ "Federal Elections 2014: Election Results for the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives," Federal Election Commission. <https://transition.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2014/federalections2014.shtml>

Table 4. Average voter turnout and the average percentage of seats of the leading party

Country	Average voter turnout (%)	The average percentage of seats won by the leading party in the last three elections (%)
Norway ⁴⁶	77.6	33.1
Germany ⁴⁷	72.8	35.4
Spain ⁴⁸	70.9	44.4
United Kingdom ⁴⁹	65.4	50.4
Japan ⁵⁰	60.4	67.6

Based on this data, one may conclude the competitiveness of elections and the legislative process, and, more importantly, the diversity of political views in a representative body increase voter turnout.

Party identification

Another side of the two-party system in the United States is party identification: when asked about their political affiliation, people have only three major choices: Republican, Democrat, or without affiliation (independent). 1991 was the first year when the largest number of Americans identified themselves as independent (33 percent -

⁴⁶ Valg. Tall for hele Norge. - <https://valgresultat.no/>

⁴⁷ “Bundestagswahl,” The Federal Returning Officer. <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2017.html>

⁴⁸ “Consulta des Resultatas Electorales,” Spain Ministry of Interior. <http://www.infoelectoral.mir.es/infoelectoral/min/>

⁴⁹ House of Commons Library, <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/>

⁵⁰ “Japan,” Election Guide, <http://www.electionguide.org/countries/id/109/>

independent, 31 percent - Democrat and 31 percent - Republican).⁵¹ In cases, when a citizen does not have a particular party affiliation or prefers a third-party, it is more likely that such citizen will abstain from voting. The decreasing number of Americans that affiliate themselves with one of two major parties is a threat to voter turnout. Linda M. Trautman, Ph.D., Ohio University, in her article *Politics of Representation: The Two-Party System*, has argued that, “Over the past several years, the steady decline in party identification among voters is a significant trend that affects voter turnout. <...> Partisan representation is significantly limited within the American political system due to a small number of party choices and inherent systematic biases against third parties.”⁵²

Even though independents with no political affiliation often act as partisans with only 9 percent of voters being “true independents” during the 2018 midterm election,⁵³ the two-party system still limits the choice for voters and creates biases against third-party candidates. Dr. Trautman mentions decrease the chance that a citizen will find his or her candidate in the ballot and will not think that they waste a vote. Dr. Trautman continues: “Party identification is a key psychological factor in fostering political involvement, interest, and participation.”⁵⁴ Local and regional offices of political parties, their events and rallies are effective ways for politicians to engage with a citizen. Even though

⁵¹ Pew Research Center. Trends in Party Identification, 1939-2014. - <http://www.people-press.org/interactives/party-id-trend/>

⁵² King, Bridgett A. *Why Don't Americans Vote?: Causes and Consequences*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2016. P. 113

⁵³ Ornstein, Mann, Malbin, Rugg, Wakeman. Vital Statistics on Congress, Chapter 2: Congressional Elections. Brookings Institution. April 7, 2014. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Chpt-2.pdf>.

⁵⁴ King, Bridgett A. *Why Don't Americans Vote?: Causes and Consequences*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2016. P. 113

independents often act as partisans on elections, their level of engagement with the political system is minimized, and these citizens are less likely to vote.

Table 5 demonstrates that the correlation between party identification and voter turnout is quite high. First of all, it shows that the percentage of Americans who identified themselves as independents in 1960 was 23 percent, but by 2012 this number was already 36 percent, while turnout in 1960 was 62.7 percent and in 2012 it was 54.8 percent. From a long-term perspective, the connection between the two issues is clear.

Table 5. Party identification and voter turnout in the United States (1960–2012)

Year	Americans who identify themselves as independent (%) ⁵⁵	Voter turnout in presidential elections (%) ⁵⁶
1960	23	62.7
1964	23	61.9
1968	28	60.8
1972	30	55.2
1976	29	53.5
1980	29	52.5
1984	29	53.2
1988	31	50.1
1992	36	55.2

(continued on next page)

⁵⁵ Pew Research Center. Trends in Party Identification, 1939-2014. - <http://www.people-press.org/interactives/party-id-trend/>

⁵⁶ “Voter turnout in U.S. presidential elections since 1908.” American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/voter-turnout-in-presidential-elections>

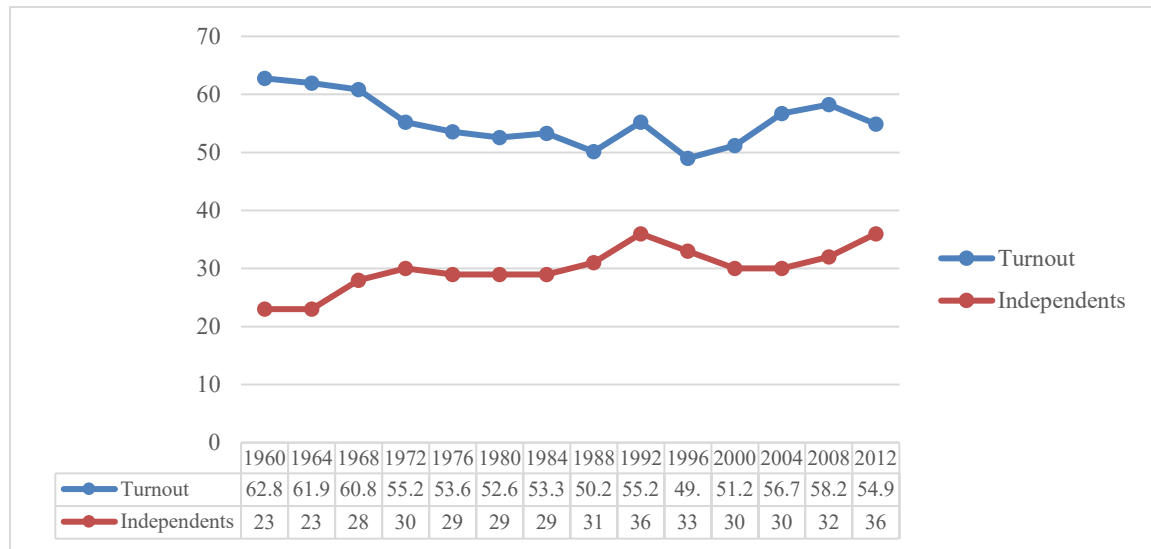
1996	33	49
2000	30	51.2
2004	30	56.7
2008	32	58.2
2012	36	54.8

One particular time period can be taken as an example for a short-term perspective. From 1976 to 1984 both turnout and the percentage of independents were stable – Figure 1 shows that turnout slightly decreased from 53.6 percent in 1976 to 53.3 percent in 1984, and the percentage of independents was 29 percent. In 1988 the percentage of independents rose to 31 percent, 2 percent more than four years earlier. Turnout dropped by 3 percent, from 53.2 percent in 1984 to 50.1 percent in 1988. Four years later, in 1992, both statistics went up: 36 percent of voters identified as independents (5 percent more than in 1988) and 55.2 percent of voters cast their ballots (5 percent more than in 1988). However, 1992 was the election where part of the independent voters found their candidate in businessman Ross Perot, who ran as a third-party candidate. His campaign may have increased the percentage of independents, and unaffiliated voters, who usually would have abstained from voting, had a candidate for whom to cast their ballot.

Another example is the period from 1964 to 1972. The percentage of independents rose (from 23 percent in 1964 to 28 percent in 1968 and 30 percent in 1972), and with the rise in the rank of independents, voter turnout fell (from 61.9 percent in 1964 to 60.8 percent in 1968 and 55.2 percent in 1972). Figure 1 additionally illustrates that the

percentage of Americans who identify themselves as independents clearly influences voter turnout.

Figure 1. Voter turnout and percentage of independent Americans – 1960-2012⁵⁷



Despite the spike of turnout in 1992, when Ross Perot was running as a third-party candidate, in normal circumstances, these candidates do not attract independent voters because of the “wasted vote” syndrome. In her essay, Dr. Trautman, Professor at Ohio University, also addresses the issue of this phenomenon supporting the statistics: “... even if a minor party or minor party candidate is a voter’s preferred option, the voter will abstain from casting a vote that truly reflects their political preferences.”⁵⁸ Thus, an increasing percentage of people who identify themselves as independent should lower turnout, as

⁵⁷ Pew Research Center. Trends in Party Identification, 1939-2014. - <http://www.people-press.org/interactives/party-id-trend/>

⁵⁸ Ibid.

fewer people are willing to vote for either a Democratic or Republican candidate, and would rather abstain from voting.

Why does the percentage of independents in the United States continue to increase? For instance, Gallup, in an article on one of their polls on the percentage of independents, stated: “The decline in identification with both parties in recent years comes as dissatisfaction with government has emerged as one of the most important problems facing the country, according to Americans.”⁵⁹

If one can say that the decline in turnout is connected to the decline in identification with one of the major U.S. parties, which in turn is connected to the declining satisfaction with government and democracy, it is fair to say that voter turnout is dependent not on people’s approval of the current government and the majority party but the state of democracy and government in general.

Satisfaction with democracy

The last factor related to voter turnout is satisfaction with democracy. Lawrence Ezrow from the University of Essex in the United Kingdom and Georgios Xezonakis from the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, in their work *Satisfaction with democracy and voter turnout: A temporal perspective*, have investigated how the population reacts to the low levels of trust and satisfaction with democratic processes in their countries and voting is one of the ways to influence the state of democracy. As a result of their data analysis, they concluded that voter satisfaction and voter turnout, in general, are dependent on one another, where “a 10 percent increase in satisfaction is associated with 1.6 percent decrease

⁵⁹ In U.S., New Record 43 percent Are Political Independents. Gallup News. – <http://news.gallup.com/poll/180440/new-record-political-independents.aspx>

in turnout,” thus concluding that a decrease in satisfaction with democracy leads to a higher voter turnout.⁶⁰ This research was based on the historical and temporal analysis of changes in these two factors over a period. For this reason, this research study conducted data analysis with regard to a number of countries of the European Union (the countries that only have parliamentary elections and a president is either absent or elected by parliament, 17 in total), not to make comparisons from a temporal perspective but rather to conduct a comparative analysis between countries. For this analysis, the satisfaction level in a country (2009) and voter turnout in the elections (2007–2011) are examined in Table 6 to determine, if voter turnout is connected satisfaction with democracy.

Table 6. Level of satisfaction with democracy and voter turnout in countries of the European Union

Country	Voter turnout (%)	Level of satisfaction with democracy (%) ⁶¹
Lithuania	51.7	28
Portugal	59.7	31
Estonia	61.9	47
Latvia	62	17
Czech Republic	62.6	48
The United Kingdom	65.1	57
Germany	70.8	66

(continued on next page)

⁶⁰ Ezrow, Lawrence, Xezonakis, Georgios. *Satisfaction with democracy and voter turnout: A temporal perspective*.

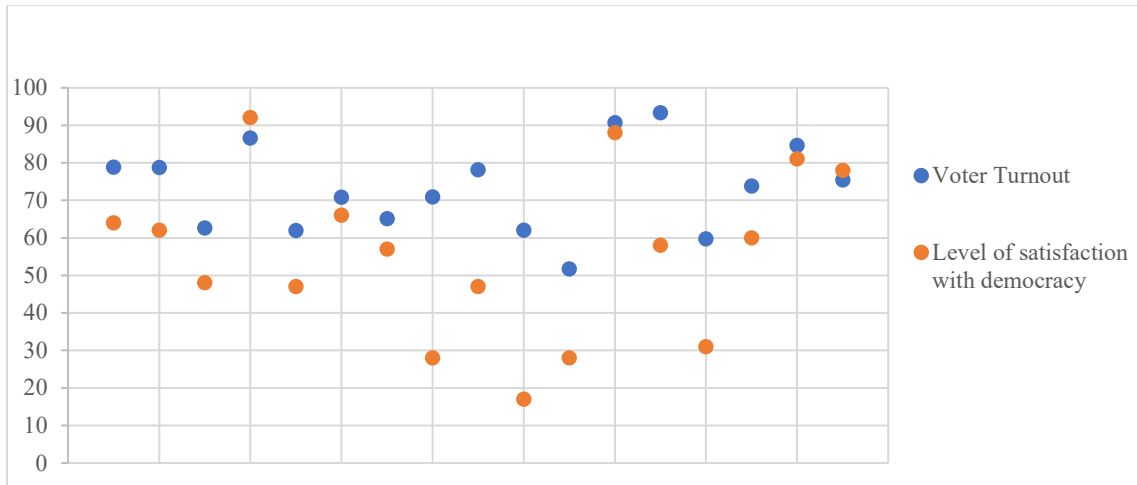
Party Politics. Vol 22, Issue 1, pp. 3 – 14. First Published September 9, 2014

⁶¹ Hobolt, Sara B. *Citizen Satisfaction with Democracy in the European Union*. London School of Economics and Political Science: JCMS 2012 Volume 50. Number S1. pp. 88–105

Spain	73.8	60
The Netherlands	75.4	78
Italy	78.1	47
Cyprus	78.7	62
Austria	78.8	64
Sweden	84.6	81
Denmark	86.6	92
Luxembourg	90.7	88
Malta	93.3	58

The results in Table 6 vary: with a few exceptions, a lower level of satisfaction with the state of democracy in a country leads to a lower voter turnout. Two countries that had low turnout, Lithuania and Portugal, with turnout lower than 60 percent, had very low democracy satisfaction ratings – 28 percent and 31 percent, respectively. Latvia, with a satisfaction rating of 17 percent, also had the rather low voter turnout of 62 percent. Yet countries such as Denmark with a satisfaction rating of 92 percent and Sweden with a satisfaction rating of 81 percent each had a voter turnout of more than 80 percent.

Figure 2. Satisfaction with democracy and voter turnout



At the same time, the recent Pew Research Center poll on the satisfaction ratings in various countries around the world indicated that the rating for the United States was only 46 percent with 51 percent dissatisfied.⁶² This percentage is similar to European countries such as Estonia (47 percent) and the Czech Republic (48 percent), where voter turnout was around 62 percent (61.9 percent and 62.6 percent respectively), which is closer to America than countries examined previously: the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain and Japan.

The issue of satisfaction with democracy and its effect on the turnout is further addressed in Chapter II, section “Perception as a major factor deciding the turnout,” page 62.

⁶² Middle East, Latin America are least satisfied with way democracy working. Pew Research Center. - http://www.pewglobal.org/2017/10/16/many-unhappy-with-current-political-system/pg_2017-10-16_global-democracy_1-01/

Cost-of-voting data

Voter identification document

Voter identification documents legislation is one of the most discussed topics regarding limitations on Americans' right to vote. In recent decades, several states introduced stricter requirements for documents that a citizen needs to provide in order to be able to vote. These laws require every citizen to show a government-issued identification document that has a photo of a voter on it.⁶³ In most cases, voters can provide documents like a driver's license or a passport,⁶⁴ however, in case a voter never learned to drive and never left the country, he or she needs to file for a special voter identification card. The cost of this card varies across different states. Voter ID laws are often blamed by political scientists,⁶⁵ government officials⁶⁶ and pundits⁶⁷ for decreasing turnout and alleged artificial limitations for certain groups of voters.⁶⁸ However, identification documents are required to vote in most democracies around the world,⁶⁹ which at the same time have a much higher voter turnout than in the United States.

A summary of recent studies on voter ID laws was conducted by Ryan Voris, Ph.D.

⁶³ Underhill, Wendy. "Voter ID Requirements. Voter ID laws," National Conference of State Legislatures. <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/voter-id.aspx>

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Barreto, Matt A., Stephen Nuño, Gabriel R. Sanchez, and Hannah L. Walker. "The Racial Implications of Voter Identification Laws in America." *American Politics Research* 47, no. 2 (March 2019): 238–49. doi:10.1177/1532673X18810012.

⁶⁶ Horwitz, Sary. "Eric Holder vows to aggressively challenge voter ID laws." *Washington Post*. July 10, 2012. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/eric-holder-vows-to-aggressively-challenge-voter-id-laws/2012/07/10/gJQApOASbW_story.html?utm_term=.cf06cb8161ea

⁶⁷ Newkirk, Vann R. "How Voter ID Laws Discriminate," *The Atlantic*. February 18, 2017. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/02/how-voter-id-laws-discriminate-study/517218/>

⁶⁸ "Oppose voter ID legislation – Fact Sheet", American Civil Liberties Union. <https://www.aclu.org/other/oppose-voter-id-legislation-fact-sheet>.

⁶⁹ Schaffer, Charles, Frederic, Wang, Tova, Andrea. "Is Everyone Else Doing It? Indiana's Voter Identification Law in International Perspective." *Harvard Law & Policy Review*. https://harvardlpr.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2013/05/3.2_8_Schaffer.pdf.

He wrote: “The literature is considerably mixed on whether these requirements depress voter turnout in elections.”⁷⁰ Some studies, he wrote, did not find any connection between voter ID laws and turnout. However, some studies did find that voter ID laws lower turnout. For instance, a study by Matt A. Barreto, University of Washington. Stephen A. Nuño, Northern Arizona University. Gabriel R. Sanchez, University of New Mexico, found evidence that voter ID laws harm minority groups,^{71 72} while a study by M. V. Hood, Ph.D., and Charles Bullock, Ph.D, University of Georgia, did not find such a connection.⁷³

Voter ID laws, which have been enacted in several American states, are often named as one of the reasons for the low turnout in certain parts of the United States. In order to analyze this allegation, the information was examined regarding the cost of photo

⁷⁰ King, Bridgett A. *Why Don't Americans Vote?: Causes and Consequences*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2016. P. 113

⁷¹ Barreto, Matt A., Stephen Nuño, Gabriel R. Sanchez, and Hannah L. Walker. “The Racial Implications of Voter Identification Laws in America.” *American Politics Research* 47, no. 2 (March 2019): 238–49. doi:10.1177/1532673X18810012.

⁷² Voter ID legislation is often criticized by politicians and activists for creating alleged artificial barriers for minority groups in their right to vote. The research mentioned above, as well as research by Hajnal, Lajevardi and Nielson, “Voter Identification Laws and the Suppression of Minority Votes,” *Journal of Politics*, discuss the issue of voter suppression, however, rarely tie it directly to voter turnout. The reason for the lack of this connection is that, while voter ID laws and other artificial barriers might suppress the right to vote for some groups of citizens, the percentage of people affected by this alleged suppression is very low. For instance, two major scandals that involved the topic of voter suppression happened during the 2018 midterm elections. In Georgia, 53,000 citizens were alleged blocked from voting by machinations with their voter registration, 80 percent of these voters were African American, *The Atlantic* reported on November 6, 2018 (Newkirk, Vann R., “The Georgia Governor’s Race Has Brought Voter Suppression Into Full View”.) However, the voting-eligible population (VEP) in Georgia in November 2018 was 3,959,905 people, thus, the percentage of people, who were allegedly deprived of their right to vote in terms of voter turnout was 0.01%, and the turnout in Georgia was significantly higher in 2018 than on at least three previous midterm elections. Second case happened in North Dakota, where 2,305 Native Americans were allegedly deprived from voting, because they lacked voter ID laws with home address, *Slate* reported on October 10, 2018 (Stern, Mark Joseph, “North Dakota’s Voter ID Law Will Disenfranchise Thousands of Native Americans, Imperiling Heitkamp”.) With North Dakota’s VEP of 330,598 in November 2018, the percentage of allegedly suppressed citizens would be 0.006%. While, in author’s opinion, voter suppression acts are illegal and immoral, no matter how many citizens were affected, these acts should be investigated by law enforcement, appropriate committees in U.S. Congress, activists and political scientists, who specialize on voting rights and suppression. However, even though these acts are enforced using the cost-of-voting factors, this thesis researches large numbers and trends in voter turnout, thus, will not address the issue of voter suppression due to small effect on turnout.

⁷³ Hood, M. V., and Charles S. Bullock. "Much Ado About Nothing? An Empirical Assessment of the Georgia Voter Identification Statute." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (2012): 394-414. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24711094>.

voter IDs from the Department of Motor Vehicles' websites in those states which had enacted such laws and strictly enforced them.⁷⁴ These states are Wisconsin, Virginia, Georgia, Kansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee. The same information was examined for three countries: France, Germany and the United Kingdom. For the purpose of correct comparison, the cost of the voter ID was calculated in terms of the average annual income in these states and countries (to estimate the cost of voter ID in terms of purchasing power parity and not absolute numbers), and then compared with voter turnout in the last election in these countries and turnout in these states in the 2016 presidential election.

The statistics in Table 7 demonstrate the rule that the more it costs to obtain a voter ID in a country/state, the higher voter turnout is. All American states with strict voter ID laws are at the lower end of the table in terms of both the price of the ID and voter turnout, compared to other countries.

Table 7. Voter ID price and voter turnout in different states and countries

Country	Photo voter ID price (USD divided by the annual income in state/country) ^{75 76 77}	Voter turnout in the elections (%) ⁷⁸
France	0.003246	77.7
Germany	0.001500	76.2

(continued on next page)

⁷⁴ Department of Motor Vehicles. - <https://www.dmv.org/>

⁷⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics. *May 2016 State Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates*. - <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oesrcst.htm>

⁷⁶ Gallup. *Ranking of countries by median self-reported household income between 2006 and 2012 (in U.S. dollars)*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/318120/ranking-of-countries-by-median-household-income/>

⁷⁷ As average annual salaries vary from one country/state to another, this table presents, how financially damaging the cost of voter ID to a citizen of this state/country with the average salary in terms of their annual income.

⁷⁸ 2017 presidential election in France, 2017 general elections in the United Kingdom and Germany, 2016 presidential election in the United States

United Kingdom ⁷⁹	0.000633	68.8
Wisconsin	0.000825	68.3
Virginia	0.000514	65.5
Georgia	0.000984	60
Kansas	0.000685	55.6
Mississippi	0.000602	53.5
Tennessee	0.000387	51

However, the need to obtain a voter ID still raises the cost of voting, thus supposedly lowers voter turnout. When Kansas enacted its voter ID law, experts worried it would reduce voter turnout. Michael S. Lynch, Ph.D., University of Georgia, and Chelsie L. M. Bright, Ph.D., Mills College, in *Kansas Voter ID Laws: Advertising and Its Effects on Turnout*, described the experiment conducted in Kansas after the enactment of legislation that would require to present a identification document with a photo in order to vote. In response to this law, Douglas County Clerk Jamie Shew enacted two provisions for obtaining an ID in his county. First, the cost of the ID was eliminated – all citizens could get an ID for free. Second, instead of applying the state rule, which required a birth certificate to be presented to be issued with an ID, any document with a name and address (a utility bill, bank statement, etc.) was sufficient. Research conducted by Bright and Lynch indicated that voter turnout in the next election in Douglas County was higher than in the

⁷⁹ An official photo ID is not required to vote only in some parts of the United Kingdom

rest of Kansas.⁸⁰ The research on Douglas County illustrates that specific measures, such as eliminating the cost of an ID and reducing the requirements for issuing one, increase voter turnout.

Data from European countries indicate that the cost of an ID does not affect turnout. In two of the three countries (the United Kingdom is the exception) the cost of an ID compared to the average annual income is higher than in America, while turnout is higher as well. In the United States, voter turnout and the cost of an ID demonstrate the same tendency as in the general comparison – turnout in Virginia is 12 percent higher than in Tennessee while the cost of an ID is higher as well.

Mail voting in Switzerland can help to address the claim that reducing the requirements for issuing a voter ID will raise voter turnout. Switzerland is struggling with decreasing voter turnout and has introduced ways of reducing the cost of voting. As such, all Swiss citizens receive a ballot by mail two weeks before Election Day. Since the late 1970s (the 1990s in all cantons⁸¹) have the option of casting the ballot by mail. Since the 1970s voter turnout has continued to drop (from 52.4 percent in 1975 to 42.2 percent in 1995), though it started to rise slightly in recent elections (from 42.2 percent in 1995 to 48.4 percent in 2015,) thus, reducing the cost of voting by introducing postal voting did not help Switzerland increase voter turnout in the long term. However, elections are not the only way of voting in Switzerland. The country holds numerous referendums annually: between 2014 and 2016 Switzerland held four referendums with turnout of 60 percent and higher, which is more than 10 percent higher than turnout in a general election and eight

⁸⁰ Bright, Chelsie L. M., Lynch, Michael S. “Kansas Voter ID Laws: Advertising and Its Effects on Turnout.” *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol 70, Issue 2, (2017) pp. 340 - 347

⁸¹ Administrative division in Switzerland

referendums with turnout of at least 50 percent. Thus, the cost of voting does not have such an impact on issues that were put to a referendum, while it has the consequence of lowering voter turnout in general elections. For this reason, the possibility of lowering the requirements (including the cost) for voter IDs in the USA may not lead to an increase in voter turnout in the long term.

The other question is how the enactment of voter ID laws has already influenced voter turnout in the United States. To answer it, statistics were examined on voter turnout in recent elections in seven states with strict photo voter ID laws: Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Tennessee, Wisconsin, Mississippi and Virginia. The data provided are for five recent presidential elections (2004–2016) and examined how voter turnout changed with the enactment of voter ID laws.

The statistics in Table 8 indicate that of seven states that currently have strict photo voter ID laws four states (Georgia, Indiana, Wisconsin and Virginia) had higher turnout in the first election that required a photo ID. Two of them (Georgia and Indiana) had a higher turnout in 2016 than in 2004 that were last elections in these states that did not require a voter ID (Georgia – 59.9 percent in 2016, 56.4 percent in 2004; Indiana – 57.9 percent in 2016, 55.8 percent in 2004). Yet the rules for obtaining a voter ID are the same in Georgia, Virginia, Kansas, and Wisconsin (Tennessee does not allow applying for a voter ID online, only by mail or in person). Regarding the price of a voter ID, Table 8 shows that Georgia and Wisconsin (states where turnout increased right after the enactment of voter ID laws) have significantly higher costs for ID cards compared to the average annual income (Georgia – 0,000984; Wisconsin – 0,000825) than Kansas (0,000685) and Tennessee (0,000387).

Table 8. Comparison of turnout (%) before and after the enactment of voter ID laws (2004–2016)

State	Year of enactment	2016	2012	2008 ⁸²	2004
Georgia	2005 ^{83 84}	59.9	59	62.7	56.4
Indiana	2005 ⁸⁵	57.9	55.2	60.3	55.8
Kansas	2011 ⁸⁶	59.7	56.9	63.5	62.9
Tennessee	2011 ⁸⁷	51.2	51.9	57.4	56.8
Wisconsin	2011 ⁸⁸	69.4	72.9	72.7	75.3
Mississippi	2012 ⁸⁹	55.6	59.3	61	55.7
Virginia	2013 ⁹⁰	66.11	66.05	67.6	61.1

Dr. Marjorie Randon Hershey, University of Indiana, in her speech *What We Know about Voter-ID Laws, Registration, and Turnout*, provided a summary of studies that were conducted to discover how the enactment of voter ID laws corresponds with voter turnout. She stated: “Few studies [...] show that I aggregate data, voter-ID laws had no significant impact on turnout during 2000-2006.” She continued that several studies had found that

⁸² In bold – first election with the requirement for voter ID

⁸³ Act 53/House Bill 244, sec.59, Sess. of 2005 (Ga. 2005) - <http://www.legis.ga.gov/Legislation/20052006/52923.pdf>

⁸⁴ Implemented in 2008

⁸⁵ P.L. 109/Senate Bill 483, Sess. of 2005 (Ind. 2005) – <http://www.in.gov/legislative/bills/2005/SE/SE0483.1.html>

⁸⁶ Act 2011-56, HB 2067, Sess. of 2011 (Kans. 2011) – http://www.kslegislature.org/li_2012/b2011_12/asures/documents/hb2067_enrolled.pdf

⁸⁷ Act 323, SB 16/HB 7, Sess. of 2011 (Tenn. 2011) – <http://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/107/Bill/SB0016.pdf>; <http://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/107/Bill/HB0007.pdf>

⁸⁸ Act 23, AB 7, Sess. of 2011 (Wis. 2011) – <http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2011/related/acts/23.pdf>

⁸⁹ Act 526, HB 921, Sess. of 2012 (Miss. 2012) – <http://billstatus.ls.state.ms.us/documents/2012/pdf/HB/0900-0999/HB0921SG.pdf>

⁹⁰ Chap. 838, HB 9, Sess. of 2012 (Va. 2012) – <http://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?121+ful+CHAP0838>

there was a modest correlation between voter ID laws and lowering of turnout. Finally, one more study indicated that "... the politically more involved are more likely to learn about voter-ID rules and also more likely to vote,"⁹¹ meaning that voter engagement is more important in terms of turnout than cost-of-voting factors, like voter ID laws.

It is still not clear what effect voter ID laws have on voter turnout in the United States. Various research conclusions, experiments and data have provided different results. While some states have lower turnout compared to the period before voter ID laws, other states have demonstrated a different dynamic and higher turnout. It is very likely that voter ID laws have a negative effect on turnout of citizens that are already disengaged from politics, and such an increase in the cost of voting creates an additional incentive to abstain from voting. However, this work shows that it is possible that voter ID laws were not the cause of such behavior and the question of why these citizens are disengaged should be expanded to different topics, which will be discussed further in this thesis.

Registration for the election

America's electoral system has one obstacle which is often blamed when voter turnout is discussed, namely the absence of automatic registration to vote, while in most countries a citizen is automatically registered to vote upon reaching the voting age. The need to register for voting increases the cost of voting, making people less willing to go to the polling station.

⁹¹ Hershey, Marjorie Randon. "What We Know about Voter-ID Laws, Registration, and Turnout." PS: Political Science and Politics 42, no. 1 (2009): 87-91.

However, as Jack C. Doppelt and Ellen Shearer, Medill University, wrote in *Nonvoters: America's no-shows*, the 1996 election demonstrated reducing the cost of voting by making the registration process easier may not be the way to improve turnout. They wrote that as a result of the report of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, then based in American University, the number of registered voters increased by 3.5 million people because of the enactment of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993. This bill was enacted by Congress in order to reduce the cost of registration, thus decreasing the cost of voting. People received the registration form by mail, which significantly decreased the cost of voting. However, turnout in the following election, the 1996 election, dropped immediately – from 58.1 percent in 1992 to 51.7 percent in 1996, or by 8 million people who were registered and did not come to vote.⁹²

The same data are mentioned in *Qualify to Vote: Voter Registration Requirements* by Gayle Alberda, Ph.D., Fairfield University: “In a study of the NRVA, Martinez and Hill (1999) found that registration increased, but not turnout.”⁹³ Dr. Alberda also mentions the 1970 amendments⁹⁴ to the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which decreased the necessary period of residence to be able to register in the whole country to 30 days, and the decision of the Supreme Court that declared the Tennessee law⁹⁵ that set this period as one year as unconstitutional. Thus, if the process of registration was simplified and the cost-of-voting decreased, turnout in the 1972 presidential election should have increased compared to the

⁹² Doppelt, Jack C., and Ellen Shearer. *Nonvoters: America's No-Shows*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2013.

⁹³ King, Bridgett A. *Why Don't Americans Vote?: Causes and Consequences*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2016. P. 113

⁹⁴ Voting Rights Act Amendments of 1970, Pub. L. No. 91-285, 84 Stat. 315 (1970) (codified as amended in scattered sections of 42 U.S.C. §§ 1973–1973bb-1)

⁹⁵ *Dunn v. Blumstein*, 405 U.S. 330 (1972)

1968 presidential election, but the result was different: voter turnout decreased from 60.8 percent in 1968 to 55.2 percent in 1972. However, these results may be inconclusive, as the 26th Amendment was enacted in 1971⁹⁶, lowering the minimum age for voting from 21 to 18, and introducing a whole new group of voters (this topic is discussed in the first section of Chapter II of this thesis, page 54). As of now, only one state does not require registration at all, which is North Dakota, while two states have automatic registration: California and Oregon.⁹⁷ If the registration process is an issue that lowers voter turnout, it should be higher in these states compared to others, as the less complicated process of registration decreases the cost of voting. However, these three states did not have the highest turnout in 2016. North Dakota was 22nd in terms of turnout (61.7 percent)⁹⁸ and California was 35th (58.7 percent)⁹⁹. The only state of these three which had a high voter turnout was Oregon, which was 7th in terms of voter turnout (68.0 percent).^{100 101} Dr. Alberda concluded that registration could be a significant burden and lower voter turnout, and therefore making registration easier and reducing the cost of voting may increase turnout. However, this essay provides only one example of a change in turnout after a

⁹⁶ U.S. Const. amend. XVI. Sec. 1.

⁹⁷ King, Bridgett A. *Why Don't Americans Vote?: Causes and Consequences*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2016. P. 113

⁹⁸ "Official 2016 General Election Results," North Dakota Secretary of State.
<https://results.sos.nd.gov/Default.aspx?map=Cty&eid=292>

⁹⁹ "Voter Participation Statistics by County," California Secretary of State.
<https://elections.cdn.sos.ca.gov/sov/2016-general/sov/03-voter-participation-stats-by-county.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ "Voter Turnout History for General Elections," Oregon Secretary of State.
https://sos.oregon.gov/elections/Documents/Voter_Turnout_History_General_Election.pdf

¹⁰¹ Oregon's high position in this ranking might be inconclusive, as this state facilitated the process of voting by sending a ballot by mail to every voter in the state and allowing easy vote-by-mail, thus, 62 percent of Oregon voters casted their ballots by mail, which is a significantly larger percent of votes by mail than in any other country.

reduction in the cost of voting, specifically the 1996 election, when, as mentioned above, turnout reduced drastically.¹⁰²

Jack C. Doppelt and Ellen Shearer, Medill University, have also noted how insignificant the process of registration may be in people's decision not to vote: "And the nonvoters we interviewed more often criticized the political process than the registration process." Moreover, during the interviewing process, they had conducted, "nearly two thirds of the nonvoters agreed to some degree that elected officials generally don't care what [people] think" that again leads to the issue of disengagement rather than the cost of voting. If a voter is disengaged from the political process, does not trust the government and is not interested in current politics and elections, automatic registration will not make it easier for such person to vote. It corresponds with the topic of voter ID legislation, on which Dr. Hershey, Ph.D., University of Indiana, mentions that it is more likely that a politically engaged citizen will learn more about voter ID laws.¹⁰³

Finally, the American registration system is not unique; non-automatic registration also exists in France. David Hill, Ph.D., Stetson University, in *American Voter Turnout*, compares the mean voter turnout in specific categories of countries with the mean voter turnout in France and the United States. He lists the statistics for 1960–2001 that demonstrates that countries with automatic registration have an average turnout of 76 percent, while France has an average turnout of 65 percent, while the average turnout in the USA is 55 percent. This statistic illustrates that even though voter registration in France

¹⁰² King, Bridgett A. *Why Don't Americans Vote?: Causes and Consequences*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2016. P. 113

¹⁰³ Hershey, Marjorie Randon. "What We Know about Voter-ID Laws, Registration, and Turnout." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 42, no. 1 (2009): 87-91.

is similar to that in the United States, the average voter turnout in France is 10 percent higher than in the United States. By comparison, in countries without compulsory voting that also have automatic voter registration turnout is approximately 10 percent higher than in France, which indicates that the need to register for voting lowers turnout.¹⁰⁴

However, the statistics provided by Dr. Hill are not entirely correct. While measuring the average turnout in France, apparently, he also included parliamentary elections, which, as in the United States, usually attract far fewer voters than presidential elections. If one takes into consideration only French presidential elections from 1965 to 1995 (the period investigated by Dr. Hill), as Table 9 shows, the average voter turnout is 83 percent, higher than in countries with automatic registration.

Table 9. Voter turnout on the first round of voting on French presidential elections (1965–2017)

Election year	Voter turnout
2017 ¹⁰⁵	77.8
2012 ¹⁰⁶	80.4
2007 ¹⁰⁷	84

(continued on next page)

¹⁰⁴ Hill, David Lee. *American Voter Turnout: An Institutional Perspective*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2006.

¹⁰⁵ Décision du Conseil Constitutionnel n° 2017-169 PDR du 26 avril 2017. Conseil Constitutionnel. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/2017/2017169PDR.htm>

¹⁰⁶ Décision du Conseil Constitutionnel n° 2012-152 PDR du 25 avril 2012. Conseil Constitutionnel. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/2012/2012152PDR.htm>

¹⁰⁷ Décision du Conseil Constitutionnel n° 2007-139 PDR du 25 avril 2007. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/2007/2007139PDR.htm>

2002 ¹⁰⁸	71.6
1995 ¹⁰⁹	78.4
1988 ¹¹⁰	84.1
1981 ¹¹¹	85.9
1974 ¹¹²	87.3
1969 ¹¹³	77.6
1965 ¹¹⁴	84.8

French and American systems of voter registration are often compared because of their similarities. For instance, Céline Braconnier, Ph.D., Sciences Po, Jean-Yves Dormagen, Ph.D., University of Montpellier, and Vincent Pons, Ph.D., Harvard Business School, in *Voter Registration Costs and Disenfranchisement: Experimental Evidence from France*, give the following figures: 29 percent of eligible voters in America are not registered to vote, while in France this figure is only 7 percent. The authors also describe the experiment that was conducted in 2011 in random regions of France: before the 2012 presidential election, a group of researchers conducted door-to-door canvassing to inform citizens of the need to register and explain the process, also registering people to vote in

¹⁰⁸ Décision du Conseil Constitutionnel n° 2002-109 PDR du 24 avril 2002. Conseil Constitutionnel. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/2002/2002109PDR.htm>

¹⁰⁹ Décision du Conseil Constitutionnel n° 95-79 PDR du 26 avril 1995. Conseil Constitutionnel. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/1995/9579pdr.htm>

¹¹⁰ Décision du Conseil Constitutionnel n° 88-56 PDR du 27 avril 1988. Conseil Constitutionnel. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/1988/8856pdr.htm>

¹¹¹ Décision du Conseil Constitutionnel n° 81-45 PDR du 29 avril 1981. Conseil Constitutionnel. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/1981/8145pdr.htm>

¹¹² Décision du Conseil Constitutionnel n° 74-30 PDR du 7 mai 1974. Conseil Constitutionnel. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/1974/7430pdr.htm>

¹¹³ Décision du Conseil Constitutionnel n° 69-20 PDR du 3 juin 1969. Conseil Constitutionnel. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/1969/6920PDR.htm>

¹¹⁴ Décision du Conseil Constitutionnel n° 65-6 PDR du 7 décembre 1965. Conseil Constitutionnel. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/1965/656pdr.htm>

some of these houses. As a result, 14 percent of those who were informed about the process eventually registered to vote, and 26 percent did it at home.¹¹⁵

The 2012 French election showed an increase in voter turnout in these regions as a result of this experiment. However, this experience does not correspond with the experiment in the United States after 3.5 million voters registered after the enactment of the National Voter Registration Act, but voter turnout was historically low.

Voting on a working day

One of the primary differences between voting systems in the U.S. and other countries is that elections in America are traditionally held on Tuesdays (except for primary elections in some states.) In most countries around the world elections are conducted on Saturdays or Sundays, giving citizens the opportunity to vote on a non-working day, thus significantly decreasing the cost of voting. It is commonly thought that having elections on a weekday is one of the reasons for lower voter turnout in America. The question, therefore, is whether voting on a weekend could raise voter turnout in the United States.

David C. Huckabee, American National Government, and Kevin J. Coleman, a Library of Congress, raised this question in their 1983 memorandum.¹¹⁶ The first question of this research was: “Did the foreign countries that now vote on either Saturday or Sunday ever vote on a weekday?” Researchers found only one such example: Portugal, as elections

¹¹⁵ Braconnier, Céline; Dormagen, Jean-Yves; Pons, Vincent. Voter “*Registration Costs and Disenfranchisement: Experimental Evidence from France.*” *The American Political Science Review* 111, no. 3 (2017): 584-604

¹¹⁶ Hackabee, David C., Coleman, Kevin J. “Voting On a Rest Day Or a Work Day: Comparative Voting Information.” Library of Congress. Congressional Research Service (1986)

in this country used to be held on the anniversary of the Carnation Revolution. Turnout from Portuguese elections is listed in Table 10.

Out of four elections from Table 10, the highest voter turnout was recorded in 1975, when 91.7 percent of voters came to the polls, and the election was held on a Friday. Yet voter turnout continued to fall, and turnout eight years later was significantly lower at just 78.6 percent of voters. However, the results from Portugal may be inconclusive, because these four elections were held in the first years of Portuguese democracy and citizens might have been more willing to go to voting booths and choose their first democratically-elected government. Thus, the 91.7 percent voter turnout in 1975 can be connected to the fact that these elections were the first democratic elections since 1924.

Table 10. Voter Turnout in Portugal (1975–1983)

Year ¹¹⁷	Voting day	Voter turnout (%)
1975	Friday	91.7
1976	Tuesday	83.3
1980	Sunday	83.9
1983	Monday	78.6

Today most democratic countries hold elections on weekends. However, along with the USA, several countries hold general elections on a weekday. These are Ireland, Canada, Israel, Denmark, Canada, Norway and South Korea.¹¹⁸ In order to compare results from

¹¹⁷ The authors of the memorandum also included the 1973 election; however, these results are excluded from this table, as this election happened before the Carnation Revolution, and the first democratic election was held in 1975.

¹¹⁸ South Korea is excluded from analysis as the election day is a national holiday.

different countries, turnout on elections in these countries are presented along with the date of the latest general elections and the day of the week in Table 11. It illustrates that in certain countries voter turnout is even higher than in countries where the voting day is always at the weekend. Yet, the United States has the lowest voter turnout of all countries that hold elections on weekdays.

Table 11. Turnout in the last major elections in countries that hold elections on a weekday

Country	Date of the latest general election	Day of week	Voter turnout (%)
USA	11/8/2016	Tuesday	55.7 ¹¹⁹
Ireland	2/26/2016	Friday	65.1 ¹²⁰
Canada	10/19/2015	Monday	68.5 ¹²¹
Israel	3/17/2015	Tuesday	72 ¹²²
Norway	9/11/2017	Monday	78.2 ¹²³
Denmark	6/18/2015	Thursday	85.8 ¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Leamon, Eileen J., Bucelato, Jason. "Federal Elections 2016," Federal Election Commission. <https://transition.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2016/federalections2016.pdf>

¹²⁰ Gallagher, Michael. Irish election 26 February 2016. Trinity College Dublin. https://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/people/michael_gallagher/Election2016.php

¹²¹ "Official Voting Results Forty-Second General Elections," Elections Canada. <http://www.elections.ca/res/rep/off/ovr2015app/home.html>

¹²² "The results of the elections to the 20th Knesset." Central Elections Committee for the 20th Knesset. <http://www.votes20.gov.il/>

¹²³ "Tall for hele Norge," Valg. <https://valgresultat.no/>

¹²⁴ "Parliamentary Elections Thursday 18 June 2015," Danmarks Statistik. <http://www.dst.dk/valg/Valg1487635/valgopp/valgopgHL.htm>

Besides, certain American states have laws allowing employees to vote during their workday: 22 states mandate employers to pay for workers' absence on election day and give various numbers of hours for employees to cast their ballot (one to four hours). Some states require employers to give employees a certain number of hours to vote but do not specify that an employer must pay for the time an employee was absent because of voting. Table 12 shows five states with the highest voter turnout in the 2016 election, five states that had the lowest turnout on the same election, how many hours of absence employees are allowed to vote, and whether these hours are required by state law to be paid in order to find, if there is correlation between these parameters and turnout in these states.

As Table 12 illustrates, two of the five top turnout states (Wisconsin and New Hampshire, along with Maine, which was excluded) do not require an employer to pay for an employee's absence when voting. One state, New Hampshire, does not require an employer to allow an employee any time to vote during working hours. By comparison, the five lowest turnout states all require an employer to pay for an employee's absence and give workers at least two hours to vote.

Table 12. Comparison of turnout in states with different laws for paying for hours of absence during election day

State ¹²⁵	Hours of absence for voting ¹²⁶	The requirement to pay for absence	2016 voter turnout (%) ¹²⁷
Lowest turnout			
Hawaii	2	Yes	42.5
Utah	2	Yes	46.4
West Virginia	3	Yes	51
Tennessee	3	Yes	51
Texas	No limit	Yes	51.1
Highest turnout ¹²⁸			
Colorado	2	Yes	67.9
Wisconsin	3	No	68.3
Iowa	3	Yes	68.5
New Hampshire	0	No	70.3
Minnesota	No limit	Yes	74.1

These statistics provide a clear indication that having a requirement to allow employees several hours to vote and having a requirement that employees should be paid for this time, in general, do not affect voter turnout. In case of any correlation, states with

¹²⁵ States with higher turnout usually have longer periods of early voting, which may affect turnout; however, all states (except New Hampshire) allow at least two weekends before the voting day to cast the ballot.

¹²⁶ The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). *Know Your Rights: State Laws on Employee Time Off to Vote* - <https://aflcio.org/2016/11/5/know-your-rights-state-laws-employee-time-vote>

¹²⁷ Leamon, Eileen J., Bucelato, Jason. "Federal Elections 2016," Federal Election Commission. <https://transition.fec.gov/pubrec/fe2016/federalections2016.pdf>

¹²⁸ Maine was excluded from the statistic as it had a marijuana legalization ballot initiative, which could have raised turnout.

legislation that allows more hours of absence and required employers to pay for such absence would have higher turnout and vice versa. However, any such dependency is absent.

Summary

At what level do cost-of-voting factors influence voter turnout?

The conventional literature gives several major explanations for decreasing voter turnout in the USA, most of which are connected with the issue of the cost of voting and the artificial lowering of voter turnout: voter ID laws, no automatic voter registration, and voting on a weekday. Such explanations have been suggested, for example, in many essays in *Why Americans Don't Vote?*,¹²⁹ and similar reasons were given by Dr. Hill in *American Voter Turnout*.¹³⁰ However, the analysis revealed that several sets of data indicate that cost-of-voting factors have much less influence on voter turnout than political factors such as the two-party system.

Regarding voter ID laws, two sets of data dispute the conventional position: the comparison of the price of IDs and turnout in different states/countries, and the temporal analysis of turnout in states with strict voter ID laws. The analysis indicates two results. First, in most cases, voter turnout does not have a connection with the price of a voter ID. Second, the enactment of voter ID laws does not always result in a lower voter turnout.

¹²⁹ King, Bridgett A. *Why Don't Americans Vote?: Causes and Consequences*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2016. P. 113

¹³⁰ Hill, David Lee. *American Voter Turnout: An Institutional Perspective*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2006.

Besides, two reports on studies that were conducted on the connection between voter ID laws and turnout state that the correlation is inconclusive: some studies indicate that voter ID laws hurt voter turnout, while others indicate that they do not.

The second investigation of statistics about the cost of voting concerned the process of registration. The results are also inconclusive. On the one hand, making the process of registration in the USA easier does not increase voter turnout (based on the results of the 1993 NRVA and the 1996 election turnout, and data from states with automatic registration). On the other hand, the French experiment with making the process of registration easier helped to increase voter turnout in France. However, turnout in France is still much higher than in the USA, even with no automatic registration. Thus, even based on the comparison with France, voter turnout hardly depends on the registration system.

Finally, the conventional opinion on voter turnout in the United States is that voting on Tuesdays during business working hours decreases turnout. However, a comparison of voter turnout among countries around the world that vote on weekdays reveals that there are still more citizens in other countries who vote during regular business hours and that a turnout of at least 70 percent is possible with voting on a weekday. The second set of statistics compares various states with different policies in terms of the number of hours that an employer must allow for an employee to vote, and whether these hours are paid. The data indicates that employees in states with the lowest turnout in the USA are allowed at least two paid hours to vote during business hours. Thus, having an election on a weekday does not lower voter turnout.

How do political and social factors influence voter turnout?

This chapter presented a variety of data and opinions on how U.S. politics, party systems, party identification and Americans' satisfaction with democracy influence voter turnout in the United States. The analysis revealed an explicit dependency of voter turnout in America on these factors.

First of all, data analysis revealed that countries with less competitive and diverse elections normally exhibit lower voter turnout than countries with more parties contesting seats in legislative bodies. Using the research by Maurice Duverger and his statement that countries with a plurality-vote system tend to form a two-party system, the results of the research suggest a hypothesis that the existence of the two-party system in the United States influences voter turnout negatively. Using another theory by political scientist Maurice Duverger on the "wasted vote," this chapter examined how people tend not only to vote for one of the major parties instead of voting for a third-party candidate but also to abstain from voting, thus decreasing voter turnout. Even though the results were inconclusive, there exists a dependency between the number of Americans who identify their political affiliation as independent and voter turnout in presidential elections.

Finally, voter turnout in America also depends on people's satisfaction with democracy. First, the primary reason for the increasing number of independents, according to a Gallup analysis, is dissatisfaction with democracy and the major parties. Thus, decreasing satisfaction with the current state of politics tends to lower voter turnout in the United States. Finally, analysis of the degree of satisfaction with democracy in countries of the European Union reveals that this factor also influences voter turnout in other democratic countries.

Chapter I conclusion

There is no single answer to the question as to what influences the decision of a voter to cast a ballot. Even minor and non-political factors such as the weather may decrease voter turnout in the United States and around the world. However, research may provide insight into what is more important and what is less important in increasing and decreasing turnout.

Starting with political factors that influence voter turnout, these are primarily the strong U.S. two-party system and the satisfaction with democracy. As research has revealed, there is a clear connection between voter turnout and:

- a) the number of parties in a party system in democratic countries around the world;
- b) the U.S. single-member district system; and
- c) the number of Americans who identify themselves as independents.

Combined with the results of the analysis of satisfaction with democracy from the European countries, the research reveals there is a major correlation between voter turnout and people's frustration with the current political system and party decline.

The second part of the research focused on a more traditional attitude towards the declining voter turnout in the United States, specifically the cost of voting. It was revealed that each of the traditional cost-of-voting factors like the voter ID requirement, the need for voter registration and voting on a weekday, have a small influence on voter turnout.

Analyzing different data sets constitutes an original contribution in several ways. First, conventional literature usually regards the cost of voting as a primary issue in

exploring decreasing voter turnout in the USA. This chapter argues that political data, first and foremost, the American two-party system, and other factors like satisfaction with democracy, are more important than the cost of voting. Second, the sets of statistics on the cost of voting provide a different angle of view on this controversial topic, for example by the temporal analysis of turnout (2004–2016) in states with the strict photo voter ID laws that is provided in this chapter.

One cannot say that the cost-of-voting factors are irrelevant in addressing voter turnout; scholars and politicians should address the issue of turnout by combining both political and cost-of-voting factors. However, the main focus should be not only on the voter ID laws, registration system, and voting day but instead on how to raise the political interest of voters in the elections. Based on the statistics, the answer lies in increasing the number of options available for voters by increasing the number of candidates with a diversity of political programs, which is why this approach questions the whole two-party system in the United States.

Chapter II. Enfranchisement, engagement and third-party candidates: best ways to increase or decrease turnout

This chapter is devoted to the analysis of methods for attracting voters to the polls.

The analysis is based on the following three factors:

- a) reasons for low turnout periods, the role of suffrage and younger generations in turnout;
- b) successful campaigns to attract non-voter groups (i.e., younger voters); and
- c) in which cases a strong third-party candidate can increase voter turnout.

The first part focuses specifically on three periods of low voter turnout in United States presidential elections: 1828–1836, 1920–1932 and 1972–2000. The goal of this part is to find specific reasons for the low turnout, looking at demographic groups, such as younger voters, and enfranchisements in 1920 and 1972.

The second part focuses on the 2008 Obama campaign and its efforts and success in attracting younger voters and African Americans. The goal of this part is to find out how additional critical groups of voters were for then-Senator Barack Obama's victory in 2008, and how the situation would have changed if the campaign had not made efforts to attract these groups of voters.

The third part focuses on two third-party campaigns of businessman Ross Perot in 1992 and then-former Alabama governor George Wallace in 1968 and their efforts to

attract the non-voting electorate and increase turnout. This part focuses on why exactly Perot managed to attract new voters and why Wallace failed to accomplish this.

Three periods of depressed turnout in the United States

The period 1972 to 2000 was the time of the lowest voter turnout in U.S. general elections. For the third time in the history of presidential elections, turnout was consistently lower than 60 percent. However, this period was much more extended than previous such periods. The first period was at the time of the very first elections, which allowed all white males to vote for the president and influence the decisions of the electoral college nationwide (1828–1836), and the second period coincided with the Roaring Twenties and the beginning of the Great Depression (1920–1932).

The first period of low voter turnout can be explained in two ways. The first reason is voters' inexperience with a new type of voting (not the whole country voted for the president until 1828), and turnout in 1836 and 1840 were very different – 56.5 percent in 1836 (the lowest in the century) and skyrocketing 80.3 percent in 1840 (the sixth highest in U.S. history). The second reason is explained in an article by Brian G. Walton's, Western Carolina University, "How Many Voted in Arkansas Elections before the Civil War?", which examines turnout in Arkansas in the 1836 and 1840 elections. The author connects turnout to the competitiveness of the presidential elections: "... the explanation for this surge in voting in 1840 lay in the emergence at that time of the first genuinely competitive national two-party system. In many states [...] particularly in the South, and at the presidential level, a strong rival party (the Whigs) did not emerge until after Andrew

Jackson had left the White House in 1837.”¹³¹

The second period of low voter turnout (1920–1932) might be explained from different perspectives. First, the 19th Amendment that guaranteed the right to vote to women significantly increased the voting-eligible population (VEP). However, a small share of women decided to turn out for the first several elections in which they were eligible. Pew Research has published the statistics from the 1920 presidential elections in Chicago which indicates the reasons for not voting divided by gender. The reason for “General indifference” is the highest for both genders, 14.6 percent for men and 30.4 percent for women. For women, two more reasons are reported: “Disbelief in woman’s voting” accounts for 11.4 percent and “Objections of husband” accounts for 1.5 percent. Thus, almost half of the women in Chicago did not even think of voting for different reasons. Besides, the process of voting usually requires acquaintance with the candidates and the basics of their ideology and political programs. Before August 1920, when the 19th Amendment was ratified, there was less purpose for women to learn about politics than after they gained the right to vote, as they did not have an opportunity to express their opinions. Thus, “Ignorance or timidity regarding elections” was the reason for not voting for 8.3 percent of women, lower than other reasons, but almost twice as high as for men, 4.6 percent of whom cited this reason. Finally, 92.8 percent of female non-voters were not registered for voting. As a result, Pew Research concludes that 46 percent of women actually voted for the president in Chicago in 1920.¹³² The 1927 *CQ Press* article on the

¹³¹ Walton, Brian G. "How Many Voted in Arkansas Elections before the Civil War?" *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (1980): 66-75. doi:10.2307/40023153. pp. 67-68

¹³² Rosentiel, Tom. "Reluctant Suffragettes: When Women Questioned Their Right to Vote." Pew Research Center. March 18, 2009. Accessed April 23, 2018. <http://www.pewresearch.org/2009/03/18/reluctant-suffragettes-when-women-questioned-their-right-to-vote/>

women's suffrage movement and voting habits provides a nationwide figure: 67 percent of men voted in 1920, while only 35.1 percent of women cast their ballots. The report also reports "General indifference" as the main reason for women not voting, citing the 1923–1924 study by the University of Chicago – 33 percent of women named this as the reason for not voting. Surprisingly, by the 1924 presidential elections, the percentage of female respondents who gave "Disbelief in woman's voting" as a reason for not voting had increased by 2.1 percent compared to 1920. Besides, the number of ill respondents had almost doubled, from 7.7 percent in 1923 to 13.1 percent in 1924.¹³³

Finally, the mere fact that women did not have a chance to vote before 1920 played a very big role in the early years of their suffrage. Jerrold G. Rusk, Ph.D., Rusk University, and John J. Stucker in their article *Legal-Institutional Factors and Voting Participation: The Impact of Women's Suffrage on Voter Turnout* (published in *Political Participation & American Democracy*.) give another explanation of low women's turnout in the 1920s. According to their theory, every person embarks on political life with a prior probability that he or she will participate as a voter. In their opinion, women could not have turned out in large numbers during first elections after their suffrage for the following reasons: "When females were inducted into the electorate, they should all, regardless of age, have possessed the same prior probability since this would have been the first opportunity for them to vote; and this probability should have been low, owing the lack or appropriate models (specifically mothers, sisters, aunts, etc. who had voted), as well as to the long-standing norms against women participating in politics."¹³⁴ Evidence suggests that the issue of

¹³³ "The Woman's Vote in National Elections." In *Editorial Research Reports 1927*, vol. II, 413. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1927. <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre1927053100>.

¹³⁴ Crotty, William J., *Political Participation and American Democracy*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1991.

voting for groups that recently got this opportunity is harder than for a person, who was born with the prospect of becoming a voter after reaching the voting age. When one suddenly receives the right to vote, such person has a hard time of knowing how to vote, whom to vote for, and, for some people, why should they vote? The prior probability that was mentioned in *Legal-Institutional Factors and Voting Participation* plays its role when a person first encounters the possibility of casting a ballot without prior experience of voting and knowledge that they can get such a right. Thus, it is highly possible that every suffrage of a certain group of voters will lower the turnout, however, as time goes and members of this group will start to turn out, according to the rule of prior probability, soon they will raise their turnout to about average, just as it happened with women's turnout in 1930s.

The mobilization of women was one of the goals for the Democratic Party in the 1920 elections: "... an important element of the Democrats' 1920 presidential campaign was the mobilization of women as a group. Female campaign speakers were organized, and special advertisements were placed in women's magazines,"¹³⁵ writes Anna L. Harvey, Ph.D., New York University, in *Votes Without Leverage*. She notes that the Republican candidate Warren Harding also tried to mobilize this social group by giving speeches to women's organizations. The mobilization of women also struggled after the 1920 elections. On April 25, 1926, *The New York Times* reported that women's turnout in 1924 stayed low, with only 40 percent of women casting their ballots (the total turnout in 1924 was 48,9 percent, the lowest in the history of U.S. presidential elections).¹³⁶ Mrs. Harvey continues

¹³⁵ Harvey, Anna L. *Votes without Leverage: Women In American Electoral Politics, 1920-1970*. p. 119. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

¹³⁶ "Republicans Seek Stay-At-Home Vote; National Committee Will Start Movement to Stir Up All Indifferent Citizens." *The New York Times*. April 26, 1926. Accessed April 23, 2018.

that in 1928 the mobilization of women continued with new momentum: “In 1928, the mobilization of women appears to in fact have been the keystone of the Republicans’ national campaign. Herbert Hoover, Coolidge’s commerce secretary, had been working on building his own organization of women in California as an asset for a future presidential nomination campaign as early as 1924.”¹³⁷ Only by 1928, the situation with the turnout among women started to improve, when 49.1 percent of women voted all across the United States, according to the *CQ Press* report. It appears that only by 1932, with the Great Depression hitting the country, efforts to mobilize women as a distinct social group came to an end.

However, women’s suffrage was not the only reason for the low voter turnout in the 1920 elections. Traditionally, the older population votes more frequently than the younger. In 2016, for instance, of the 18-to-29-year-old population, only 46.1 percent cast their votes, with 58.7 percent of those between 30 and 44 years old voting, 66.6 percent of those between 45 and 64, and 70.9 percent of those 65 and older. A similar trend can be observed over the last 30 years.¹³⁸

In 2002, the U.S. Census Bureau presented the century report on the demographic situation in the United States. As a part of this report, three demographic pyramids were presented, indicating what percentage of the population each demographic group represented. In 1900, the demographic statistics literally had the shape of a pyramid, with

<https://www.nytimes.com/1926/04/26/archives/republicans-seek-stayathome-vote-national-committee-will-start.html>.

¹³⁷ Harvey, Anna L. *Votes without Leverage: Women In American Electoral Politics, 1920-1970*. p. 128. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

¹³⁸ "Voting in America: A Look at the 2016 Presidential Election." The United States Census Bureau. Accessed April 23, 2018. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2017/05/voting_in_america.html.

people younger than five years being the largest group of the population (approximately 12 percent of the population), people between five and nine years old being the second largest group, those 10–14 years old being the third largest and so on, finishing with people 85 years and older being the smallest group. With the declining birth rate, the situation had changed dramatically a century later. In 2000, the largest demographic group was women between 35 and 39 years and people younger than five years old constituting almost 0.5 percent less than the largest group.¹³⁹ With minors being the largest group in 1900, by 1920 they hit the voting age (21 years at that time), constituting a larger group than their parents. Considering the fact that a younger group is less likely to vote, it is clear why voter turnout was lower in 1920. Jon Grinspan, Ph.D., Curator of Political and Military History at Smithsonian Institution, provides a similar perspective in his article “America’s ‘Little Violent Partisan’” in *The Atlantic*. Dr. Grinspan also ties the depressed turnout in the 1920s to young voters: “Nearly 80 percent of eligible voters had turned out in 1896, but fewer than half bothered by the 1920s. Young voters led this exodus. Old partisans kept turning out, committed to the movements that had won their virgin votes, but fewer young men (and women, after 1920) showed interest in casting their first ballot.” However, Dr. Grinspan links this “exodus” not with the number of younger voters, but with the change in the American political arena. He claims that younger voters abstained from voting as they favored non-partisanship and saw themselves in neither the Democratic nor the Republican Party.¹⁴⁰

In 1972 the United States saw another decrease in voter turnout, dropping from 62.5

¹³⁹ "Demographic Trends in the 20th Century." U.S. Census Bureau. November 2002. Accessed April 23, 2018. <https://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf>.

¹⁴⁰ Grinspan, Jon. "America's 'Violent Little Partisans'." *The Atlantic*. May 08, 2016. Accessed April 23, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/05/violent-little-partisans/481641/>

percent in 1968 to 56.2 percent in 1972, with the decrease continuing until 1980 (turnout in 1968 still continues to be the highest with no elections since then having a higher turnout). The 1972 elections were quite similar to 1920 as the 26th Amendment enfranchised 18-to-20-year-olds. Moreover, starting in 1967, most baby boomers started to turn 21, increasing the VEP and decreasing turnout by not voting. The 26th Amendment increased the VEP, which started to include people that were born before 1956 instead of only people that were born before 1953. Together with the fact that the most significant number of baby boomers were born in 1952–1957, the 26th Amendment resulted in a very significant increase in the VEP by people who traditionally were not active voters.¹⁴¹

Three periods of depressed turnout in presidential elections in the United States coincided with similar events: the suffrage and enfranchisement of different demographic groups. The 1828–1836 period coincided with general suffrage when all white males were given the right to cast their ballots for a president nationwide. The 1920–1932 period followed the enactment of the 19th Amendment and coincided with the enfranchisement of women. Finally, the 1972–2000 period began after the enfranchisement of 18-to-20-year-olds. Besides that, at least two of these periods, 1920–1932 and 1972–2000, coincided with the new large generations reaching voting age. Finally, people’s interest in politics and the competitiveness of the elections played a role. The 1828–1836 period was dominated by Andrew Jackson, and voter turnout went up when he left the office and elections became more competitive. The records from 1920 reveal that women were less interested in politics than men, thus were less likely to turn out to vote. These three factors all played a role in

¹⁴¹ "Live Births and Birth Rates, by Year." Infoplease. Accessed April 23, 2018. <https://www.infoplease.com/us/births/live-births-and-birth-rates-year>.

the low turnout.

Perception as a major factor deciding the turnout

Just as women in 1920s experienced problems with voting during their first elections, other demographic groups experience troubles with casting their ballot, particularly, groups that were discriminated against in the past or are being discriminated now. Moreover, even the perception of discrimination can affect the whole group's voting behavior. Carole Jean Uhlaner, Ph.D., University of California, in her article *Political Participation and Discrimination* analyzes different data sets on the participation of voters from groups that were affected by discrimination. The results of her research might give a picture on why some groups of voters turn out better or worse than other; she writes: "...persons who perceive discrimination or prejudice are also more likely to be politically active." First of all, she means African American voters, who showed higher level of participation than other minority groups. In her opinion, perceived discrimination and prejudice lead to group consciousness and activity – it is likely for an African American voter, who perceived discrimination or prejudice to join a group that would fight these acts, thus, increasing political participation. As a result, Dr. Uhlaner's research¹⁴² shows that African American voters showed higher levels of participation and higher turnout than white voters.

At the same time, other groups: Hispanic and Asian-American, showed significantly lower levels of both participation and turnout. Besides, another group of

¹⁴² Conducted in California after 1984 general elections among four groups of voters: White, African American, Hispanic, Asian-American

minority voters, whose turnout seriously suffers from perceived prejudice, and these are immigrant Asian-Americans: “Among Asian-Americans, the impact is stronger for immigrants than for those who are native-born. Since few native-born Asian-Americans perceive prejudice or discrimination, the impact for participation by second and third generation Asian-Americans is further lessened.” Statistics from the research show that not only Asian-American immigrants tend to abstain from voting, but also Hispanic naturalized voters. Besides, statistics show that there are more naturalized immigrants from Hispanic and Asian-American group than from White or African American.¹⁴³ This information leads to the following pattern – immigrants, who were admitted into American citizenship are less likely to vote. This phenomenon also corresponds with the theory of prior participation – people, who received their right to vote after reaching the voting age (suffrage or naturalization) are less likely to vote than those, who received it on their 18th birthday.¹⁴⁴

As of now, it is hard to say if the massive perception of discrimination lasted until the 2010s. Exit polls traditionally show that African American are known to turn out worse than white voters on the national level. For instance, in one of the states that was infamous for discrimination practices against African American population – Mississippi – the share of Black voters on 2018 midterm elections was lower than the share of African American population in the state, which means that the group turned out worse than other racial groups, white voters in particular. On the national level, African American also turned out worse in 2018 than other groups. However, differences in turnout and share in population

¹⁴³ Crotty, William J., *Political Participation and American Democracy*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1991.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

among African Americans is not significant. 2010 U.S. Census showed that African Americans comprise 12.6 percent of U.S. population,¹⁴⁵ while CNN exit polls showed that 11 percent of voters in 2018 were Black.¹⁴⁶ In Mississippi, 32 percent of voters were African American,¹⁴⁷ while the Black population share in the state is 37.8 percent.¹⁴⁸

Not only the perception of discrimination harms the turnout. In his book *Why Americans Don't Vote. 1960-1984* Ruy A. Teixeira, Ph.D., Center for American Progress, analyzes, why the turnout fell down in the 1960s and 1970s from the perspective of socio-political and socio-economic characteristics. After conducting his analysis, the result was that 71.3 percent of predicted 1960-1968 turnout decline was caused by the decline in “political efficacy” or increasing distance between the government and voters. He writes: “This connection between the perception of increased distance between public policy and citizen preferences, on the one hand, and decreased political efficacy, on the other, has been well documented for the period and makes sense in theoretical terms as well.” Political efficacy can hardly be measured in precise numbers, like less relevant numbers presented by Dr. Teixeira, for example, marital status. Responsiveness of government to wishes of people or distance between the government and citizens is a matter of perception for certain groups of people, who do not see any benefit in being engaged with the political process, moreover, protest against their perception of the political system. “We are <...> witnessing <...> a gathering revolt against this same political clerisy and against the whole

¹⁴⁵ “Overview of Race and Hispanic origin in 2010,” U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-02.pdf>

¹⁴⁶ CNN. 2018 Exit Polls: National House. November 6, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/election/2018/exit-polls>.

¹⁴⁷ CNN. 2018 Exit Polls: Mississippi House. November 6, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/election/2018/exit-polls/mississippi>

¹⁴⁸ “Quick Facts. Mississippi,” U.S. Census Bureau. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/ms>

structure of wealth, privilege, and power that the contemporary democratic state has come to represent,” wrote Robert Nisbet, Ph.D., University of California, in his book *Twilight of Authority*, describing the decline in political accord between citizens and the government.¹⁴⁹ In *Stayin’ Alive: the 1970s and the last days of the working class* Jefferson Cowie, Ph.D., Vanderbilt University, shows examples that illustrate Nisbet’s opinion: the mood of working class during the 1970s regarding politics, lack of interest among workers in the political process and their discontent in Washington. Multiple times Dr. Cowie shows, how dissatisfied and disinterested workers were, in one such occasion he quotes one worker, Dewey Burton, when he was asked, who he would vote for: “But I wish just for once that one of them would say, ‘now folks, I swear to God, if you’ll elect me, I won’t do a damn thing.’ That’s the fellow I’d vote for. Somebody who’d just let us alone.” The trust in the government, the connection of political class and the middle class was broken, disengaging people from politics. The person they would vote for should have been a rebel against the political system, and soon enough they got one. In 1976 then-former governor of California Ronald Reagan challenged incumbent president Gerald Ford in Republican primaries. Dr. Cowie’s main interviewee reacted: “In 1976, Dewey Burton announced that he found someone whom he believed could deliver the nation out of its malaise: former actor, California governor, and long-shot presidential candidate Ronald Reagan.” In order to vote for Reagan, Burton switched parties – he moved from the Democratic Party to GOP. When Reagan was running for president in 1980, Mr. Burton could not even remember, whom he voted for in 1976. Burton’s colleagues, on the contrary, voted for then-former governor of Georgia Jimmy Carter in 1976 with hopes for the “resurrection of labor

¹⁴⁹ Nisbet, Robert A. *Twilight of Authority*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

liberalism.” Instead, during his presidency, Carter only disappointed industrial worker, further pushing them away from the political process.¹⁵⁰ Joseph Nye, Ph.D., Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, Philip Zelikow, Ph.D., Miller Center, University of Virginia, and David King, Ph.D., Harvard University, echo the mood of workers in their book *Why Americans Don't Trust Government*: “The public has not only lost faith in the ability of government to solve problems, but it has actually come to believe that government involvement will just make matters worse.”¹⁵¹

Starting in the 1960s and going further in 1970s, uninspiring candidates and unaccomplished hopes made shrinking blue-collar class of Americans less and less interested in politics and participating in the political process, as they did not see any reason for them to be engaged if they did not see a suitable candidate. The general trust in government has severely declined in the last decades. According to the poll conducted by American National Election Study, University of Michigan, while in 1966 61 percent said that they trust the government, by 1974 that number fell to only 29 percent.¹⁵² Chapter I of this thesis (section “Satisfaction with democracy,” page 27) described, how the level of satisfaction with democracy and government can affect the turnout when the decrease in satisfaction can decrease the turnout. Thus, the decreasing level of trust in government among Americans and specifically blue-collar workers was likely to be one of the causes of depressing turnout in the 1970s.

¹⁵⁰ Cowie, Jefferson. *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*. New York: New Press, 2010.

¹⁵¹ Nye, Joseph S., Philip Zelikow, and David C King. *Why People Don't Trust Government*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.

¹⁵² “Trust in Government Index 1958-2016,” American National Election Studies. <https://electionstudies.org/resources/anes-guide/top-tables/?id=116>

Finally, the 1960s and 1970s marked the start of the new era in coverage of American politics. Since many voters get their perception of the political system from the news, the more negative coverage they get from the media, the more disconnected citizens tend to become. From the negative coverage of Vietnam War to the unraveling Watergate, Iran-Contra affair and multiple other political scandals, media, not without reason, creates a larger gap between voters and politicians, sowing distrust among citizens. "...The amount of negative coverage of politics has jumped sharply since the 1960s as journalists have moved away from covering the (mostly positive) words of newsmakers to putting their own cynical spin on the news," write Thomas J. Johnson, Ph.D., University of Texas, Carol E. Hayes, Ph.D., George Washington University, and Scott P. Hays, Ph.D., University of Florida, in *Engaging the Public*.¹⁵³ Besides, the rise of television played its role on turnout. Perhaps, the type of journalism that television introduced was closer to what Johnson, Hayes and Hays described, however, there was another effect of television penetration on the turnout, and particularly on turnout during midterm elections. Matthew Gentzkow, Ph.D., Stanford University, in his research *Television and Voter turnout* found that introduction of the new medium decreased turnout. After comparing data sets from different counties around Chicago, their rates of television penetration and turnout, Dr. Gentzkow concludes that at least 2 percent drop in turnout over a decade was caused by television, while decreasing turnout in years of presidential elections only by 0.7 percent. Such a different effect Gentzkow ties to the type of information that television distributes: "Television in the 1950s and 1960s was similar to the *New York Times* in that its political coverage was primarily national, and we would expect it to cause similar substitution away

¹⁵³ Johnson, Thomas J., Carol E. Hayes, and Scott P. Hays. *Engaging the Public: How Government and the Media Can Reinvigorate American Democracy*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.

from local news. Furthermore, since television was a dramatic improvement in the quality of entertainment available to most households, it may have also reduced the total time devoted to news consumption.”¹⁵⁴ Thus, the style of journalism and the information that it distributes were one of the causes of decreasing turnout in the 1970s. However, it is necessary to admit that now this effect diminishes with the introduction of social media as a new powerful medium. In late 2018 Gallup reported that 68 percent of Americans get their news on social media¹⁵⁵ with 20 percent using social media and 33 percent using news websites as their primary sources of news. However, television remains the most popular source of news even now and about half of Americans get their perception of the political system from it,¹⁵⁶ which still has a bad effect on turnout.

Income and poverty

The industrial decline inevitably created different sorts of economic problems for American blue-collar workers. Along with their decreasing trust in government, the other factor might have influenced the decreased participation in the political process, might be decreasing income and poverty. Literature had the whole variety on this question. However, statistics show that low income and other economic hardships lower the turnout. Steven J. Rosenstone, Ph.D., University of Minnesota, presented the research on how the 1973 economic crisis affected voting behavior on the next, 1974, elections. Several factors

¹⁵⁴ Gentzkow, Matthew. "Television and Voter Turnout." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 121, no. 3 (2006): 931-72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25098813>.

¹⁵⁵ "News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2018," Pew Research Center Journalism & Media. <https://www.journalism.org/2018/09/10/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2018/>

¹⁵⁶ Shearer, Elisa, "Social media outpaces print newspapers in the U.S. as a news source," Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/10/social-media-outpaces-print-newspapers-in-the-u-s-as-a-news-source/>

have major impact on turnout. Poverty has the largest impact, with people that had less than \$2,000 income¹⁵⁷ were 9 percent less likely to vote on 1974 elections. The probability of casting a vote increased with the income until about media income, when the probability stops increasing. The other factor that lowers the turnout is the unemployment – the shorter the unemployment, the less the probability that a person will vote. In the first week the probability that a person will vote decreased by 5 percent, further increasing until a sixteenth week, when unemployment has no effect on turnout. In Dr. Rosenstone's opinion, the less the person is unemployed, the busier he or she is: filing for unemployment benefits, hunting for a new job, etc.¹⁵⁸

The 2008 elections – non-voting millennials and African Americans as a political power

In the aftermath of the 2008 presidential elections, many pundits and experts commented that then-Senator Barack Obama's victory was primarily the result of the mobilization of a new generation in American politics – the millennials. For instance, on November 13, 2008, Pew Research published its analysis of the exit polls and concluded that 66 percent of people under the age of 30 had voted for Obama, compared to the 53 percent of all voters who have voted for him. Compared to previous election results, this was an incredibly high result for the winner – the percentage of votes from the younger generation was 13 percent higher than those from all voters. Usually, the Pew Research

¹⁵⁷ Median income in 1974 was \$11,110

¹⁵⁸ Rosenstone, Steven J. "Economic Adversity and Voter Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* 26, no. 1 (1982): 25-46. doi:10.2307/2110837.

report noted, Democratic candidates receive no more than 54 percent of the votes from younger people, and the difference with the percentage of all voters is rarely more than 4 percent. In 2004, then-Senator John Kerry was the first candidate who increased this difference, from the highest of 4 percent in 1996 to 6 percent in 2004. Barack Obama, however, doubled that record.¹⁵⁹

The absolute number of voters also played a role. The baby boomers reached their voting age along with the enactment of the 26th Amendment, significantly increasing the number of young people allowed to vote. Thus, in 1972 there were 39,362,000 voters in the age group 18 to 29 years, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. By 1984, this number had reached 46,413,000, 7 million more, but in 1996 this number had decreased back to 39 million. The 2004 election saw a record number of young people eligible to vote, namely 46,970,000. By 2008 this number decreased to almost 44 million. Thus, not only did Obama manage to persuade a whole new group of voters to vote, but he also saw the decrease of the population of this group, thus having a slightly smaller group of traditional non-voters to mobilize. Besides, a smaller number of young voters (and thus a more significant number of people older than 30) meant a slight decrease in the traditionally non-voting group (and an increase in the traditionally voting group), thus a possible increase in voter turnout.

The increase in voter turnout was quite significant. Turnout in 2008 was 1.5 percent higher than that in the 2004 election (the highest since 1968) and 6.9 percent higher than that in 2000. Among young voters, the 2008 elections saw an increase of 8.3 percent in

¹⁵⁹ Rosentiel, Tom. "Young Voters in the 2008 Election." Pew Research Center. November 13, 2008. Accessed April 23, 2018. <http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/11/13/young-voters-in-the-2008-election/>.

turnout compared to the 2004 elections and an increase of 10.8 percent compared to the 2000 elections. In fact, the 2008 election attracted 8.6 million new voters, who would not have voted under the same conditions as in 2004. In total numbers, these 8.6 million voters represent 6.6 percent of the total electorate. Considering that 66 percent of young voters cast their ballots for Obama, this is 4.4 percent new voters solely from the younger generation who voted for a Democratic candidate.

Similar to the situation with millennials, the Obama campaign in 2008 also managed to attract another large group of voters – African Americans. Starting from 2004, African Americans demonstrated a better turnout: in 1988, 53.5 percent of them cast their votes, while in 2004 this percentage was even 6.5 percent higher, namely 60 percent. The 2008 elections witnessed a record in African American voter turnout: for the first time in history, they were the race with the highest voter turnout in the United States when 64.7 percent of African Americans cast their votes compared to 64.4 percent of whites who participated in the elections. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the 2008 elections attracted 2.1 million more African Americans than the 2004 elections. The CNN exit polls calculated that 88 percent of African American voters cast their ballot for John Kerry in 2004,¹⁶⁰ while the Gallup exit polls on the 2008 elections indicated that 99 percent of them had voted for Obama.¹⁶¹ This means that Obama managed to attract 3.6 million more African American voters than Kerry did. In terms of the total number of votes, African Americans represent 2.7 percent of all voters.

¹⁶⁰ "2004 Presidential Elections Exit Polls." CNN. Accessed April 23, 2018.

<http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2004/pages/results/states/US/P/00/epolls.0.html>.

¹⁶¹ "Election Polls -- Vote by Groups, 2008." Gallup.com. Accessed April 23, 2018.

<http://news.gallup.com/poll/112132/election-polls-vote-groups-2008.aspx>.

Not only numbers can prove the mobilization of millennials and African American voters. Tracy Osborn, Ph.D., University of Iowa, Scott D. McClurg, Ph.D., Southern Illinois University, and Benjamin Knoll, Ph.D., University of Iowa, in the article *Voter Mobilization and Obama Victory*, claim that the Obama victory was achieved in large portion by the campaign's mobilization of traditional no-shows. They describe techniques that allowed for attracting additional voters and thus increased turnout: "... much media focus was given to the Obama campaign's innovations in targeted turnout, such as using texting to develop a campaign database of young voters and using prominent Black politicians to target African American voters. Once again, the effort seemed to pay off with turnout up to 62 percent, its highest point since the late 1950s."¹⁶²

As mentioned above, of the total electorate 4.4 percent were young voters, and 2.7 percent were African Americans; both these groups of people had not voted before and were mobilized by the Obama campaign. These groups had a crucial influence on the outcome. Taking into account the final result of the popular vote (52.9 percent for Obama against 45.7 percent for 2008 Republican candidate John McCain) and subtracting 7.1 percent from the votes for Obama would have left him with 45.8 percent, just 0.1 percent more than McCain received, and the outcome of the elections after the electoral college vote would have been unpredictable.

¹⁶² Osborn, Tracy, McClurg, Scott D., Knoll, Benjamin, "Voter Mobilization and the Obama Victory", *American Politics Research*, Vol 38, Issue 2, pp. 212, First Published March 3, 2010, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X09359131>

Perot and Wallace – third-party candidates as a way to increase voter turnout

The 1992 presidential elections demonstrated an unprecedented turnout compared to all elections for the 20 years before that: 58.1 percent, compared to 52.8 percent four years before that. Almost simultaneously with the start of this campaign, in 1991, the number of independent voters in the United States exceeded both Democrats and Republicans for the first time, namely 33 percent identifying as independents and 31 percent supporting each of the parties.¹⁶³ At the same time, the 1992 elections produced one of the most successful independent candidates of the last century – businessman Ross Perot, who received 18.9 percent or almost 20 million votes.

Meanwhile, the 1968 elections had also produced one of the most successful third-party candidates – former Alabama governor George Wallace, who received half as many popular votes as Perot in 1992, but unlike the latter received electoral votes, carrying almost the whole Southwest region with five states. However, one of the most striking differences between the 1968 and the 1992 elections is voter turnout. As mentioned, the 1992 elections saw a 5.3 percent increase in turnout compared to the previous elections in 1988. The elections in 1968, by contrast, saw a 0.3 percent decrease in turnout compared to the 1964 elections.

Third-party candidates may increase voter turnout; however, beyond the goal of taking some voters away from the major party candidates, they also have the goal of attracting additional voters. How do they attract no-shows and why was Perot more

¹⁶³ Wormald, Benjamin. "Trends in Party Identification, 1939-2014." Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. April 07, 2015. Accessed April 23, 2018. <http://www.people-press.org/interactives/party-id-trend/>.

successful than Wallace?

Alternative scenarios – one-on-one versus three candidates

It is unclear whether third-party candidates always attract additional voters. For instance, George Wallace and former congressman from Illinois John Anderson mostly concentrated not on the mobilization of non-voters, but on “stealing voters” from their opponents. In *Third-Party and Independent Candidates in American Politics: Wallace, Anderson, and Perot* authors Paul Abramson, Ph.D., Michigan State University, and John Aldrich, Ph.D., Duke University, provide a table of voters who would have voted if there had been only two candidates in 1968, 1980 and 1992. In 1968 a postelection survey indicated that if 1968 Republican candidate Richard Nixon had been running only against Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey, he would have taken 51 percent of the votes with Humphrey taking 39 percent; 10 percent of voters indicated a tie. In reality, the results were very different: Nixon took 43.3 percent of the votes and Humphrey 42.7 percent.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Abramson, Paul R., and John H. Aldrich. 1995. "Third-party and Independent Candidates in American Politics: Wallace, Anderson and Perot." *Political Science Quarterly* (Academy Of Political Science) 110, no. 3: 349. International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center, EBSCOhost (accessed April 22, 2018).

Table 13. One-on-one survey results compared to election results (1968)¹⁶⁵

	Postelection survey (Republican versus Democratic) ¹⁶⁶	Popular vote ¹⁶⁷	Difference
Nixon	51%	43.3%	-7.7%
Humphrey	39%	42.7%	+3.7%
Wallace	n/a	13.5%	+13.5%

Table 14. One-on-one survey results compared to election results (1980)^{168 169}

	Postelection survey (Republican versus Democratic) ¹⁷⁰	Popular vote ¹⁷¹	Difference
Reagan	53%	50.7%	-2.3%
Carter	36%	41.0%	+5%
Anderson	n/a	6.6%	+6.6%

In 1980 the statistics were quite similar to 1968, but the difference between respondents and actual voters is smaller in 1980, along with the result of the third-party

¹⁶⁵ Postelection survey conducted among respondents who reported voting for the president. The statistics indicate that Wallace took more than half of his votes from Nixon and the rest from the “tie”, that is, from the undecided.

¹⁶⁶ Abramson, Paul R., and John H. Aldrich. 1995. "Third-party and Independent Candidates in American Politics: Wallace, Anderson and Perot." *Political Science Quarterly* (Academy Of Political Science) 110, no. 3: 349. International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center, EBSCOhost (accessed April 22, 2018).

¹⁶⁷ “1968,” American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/elections/1968>

¹⁶⁸ Abramson, Paul R., and John H. Aldrich. 1995. "Third-party and Independent Candidates in American Politics: Wallace, Anderson and Perot." *Political Science Quarterly* (Academy Of Political Science) 110, no. 3: 349. International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center, EBSCOhost (accessed April 22, 2018).

¹⁶⁹ Postelection survey conducted among validated voters.

¹⁷⁰ 11 percent of respondents reported a tie between Reagan and Carter in the survey.

¹⁷¹ “1980,” American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/elections/1980>

candidate – Anderson took at least 2.3 percent of 1980 Republican candidate Ronald Reagan’s votes.

Table 15. One-on-one survey results compared to election results (1992)¹⁷²

	Postelection survey (Republican versus Democratic) ¹⁷³	Popular vote ¹⁷⁴	Difference
Clinton	54%	43%	-11%
Bush	37%	37.4%	+0.4%
Perot	n/a	18.9%	+18.9%

In 1992 the statistics again looked quite similar, with Perot “stealing” approximately 11 percent of the votes from 1992 Democratic candidate Clinton (despite a common belief that Perot was the reason President Bush was not reelected), but more importantly, consuming almost all the “tie” respondents between Clinton and Bush – approximately 88 percent of them, compared to 39 percent in 1980 and 68 percent in 1968. This provides one of the clues to the difference between these three elections: Perot managed to take more people who were between two candidates than the other third-party candidates.

The 1968 presidential elections and the George Wallace campaign

In 1968, George Wallace ran just several years after 1964 Republican candidate

¹⁷² Postelection survey conducted among respondents who reported voting for the president.

¹⁷³ Abramson, Paul R., and John H. Aldrich. 1995. "Third-party and Independent Candidates in American Politics: Wallace, Anderson and Perot." *Political Science Quarterly* (Academy Of Political Science) 110, no. 3: 349. International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center, EBSCOhost (accessed April 22, 2018).

¹⁷⁴ Klein, Patricia A., “Federal Elections 1992,” Federal Election Commission. <https://transition.fec.gov/pubrec/fe1992/federalections92.pdf>

Barry Goldwater had formed a new strategy for the Republican Party, which included strong conservatism. Despite the fact that Wallace was trying to win the 1964 presidential nomination in the Democratic Party, by 1968 he did not look like a Democratic candidate at all. After the party realignment in the 1960s, the Democratic Party was no longer a party of white Southerners, and the Republican Party was taking its place as a dominant force in the Southeastern region. The Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act had completed the process of moving the region to the Republican Party. The 1968 elections introduced Richard Nixon as the Republican Party candidate. However, he was not as conservative as his predecessor, Barry Goldwater. J. David Gillespie, Ph.D., Presbyterian College, in *Challengers to Duopoly: Why Third-Parties Matter in American Two-Party Politics*, writes: “Surveys revealed that the person most likely to vote for Wallace in 1968 was a white, unskilled worker under thirty years old who lacked a high school diploma and had little if any self-identity as a Democrat or Republican.”¹⁷⁵ Dr. Gillespie later mentions that Wallace supporters believed that the federal government was too large. Wallace also presented himself as a “protest” candidate: “... former governor George Wallace of Alabama launched and led a coast-to-coast movement of conservative whites who were eager to ‘send Washington a message’ ...”¹⁷⁶ By the time he started his campaign, Wallace was mostly known for shouting “Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!” during his 1963 inaugural address in Alabama, and thus was seen mainly as a pro-segregation candidate. Neither of his opponents was an anti-African American candidate. His conservative vis-à-vis, Richard Nixon, on the contrary, was not a pro-

¹⁷⁵ Gillespie, J. David. *Challengers to Duopoly: Why Third Parties Matter In American Two-Party Politics*. p. 121. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

segregation politician compared to George Wallace, his voters were a bit more moderate about desegregation than Humphrey. However, just many Nixon's voters were for segregation as Humphrey's.¹⁷⁷ As the Richard Nixon Foundation reports, during his tenure as vice-president, Nixon worked on the Civil Rights Act of 1957.¹⁷⁸ Later, during his presidency, Nixon signed into law some important racial equality bills, such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1970.

There were many issues surrounding the 1968 election. Segregation and civil rights should have been one of them: the march on Washington, the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act happened not that long before the elections, and the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. might have fueled the flame around these elections. However, analyst Zubeida Mustafa, for instance, regards the foreign policy, mainly the war in Vietnam, as a primary issue in these elections. Besides the foreign policy, Mustafa points out the following topics: "As a result the election campaigns and party platforms centered around such issues as crime and violence, poverty, rehabilitation of the cities, prosperity without inflation and racial problem." He, therefore, places the issue of civil rights and segregation in the last place and does not mention them again once in his paper on these elections.¹⁷⁹

The 1992 presidential elections and the Ross Perot campaign

The 1992 presidential elections presented one of the best third-party candidates in

¹⁷⁷ Brown, Aaron W. "H. Ross Perot and George C. Wallace: Defining the Archetype of Third-party "Success" in Presidential Elections." University of North Georgia.

<https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1072&context=ngresearchconf>

¹⁷⁸ Nixon. "Nixon's Record on Civil Rights." Richard Nixon Foundation. January 19, 2018. Accessed April 23, 2018. <https://www.nixonfoundation.org/2017/08/nixons-record-civil-rights-2/>.

¹⁷⁹ Mustafa, Zubeida. "The American Presidential Election, 1968." *Pakistan Horizon* 22, no. 1 (1969): 54-57. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41392955>.

the United States presidential elections history, the billionaire Ross Perot. His candidacy combined a number of factors that influenced both his result (18.9 percent of the popular vote) and voter turnout (58.1 percent). As mentioned before, Perot's candidacy appeared at the time of the highest percentage of "independent" voters in the American partisan history.

Interesting details are revealed by the CNN exit polls from 1992. In California (which went by a large margin to Clinton), for instance, only 78 percent of those who voted in 1992 had voted for either Bush or Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis in 1988, 4 percent had voted for other candidates, and 16 percent had not voted at all. Of those who had voted for another candidate in 1988, only 33 percent voted for Perot, but 60 percent voted for Clinton. Of those who had not voted in 1988, 57 percent voted for Clinton, and only 26 percent voted for Perot. Finally, 23 percent of the 1988 Bush voters turned out for Perot four years later, while only 12 percent of the Dukakis supporters voted for Perot.¹⁸⁰ In Florida (which went by a large margin to Bush) the results are similar: 82 percent of voters in 1992 had voted in the previous presidential election, and only 28 percent of those who had not voted in 1988 voted for Perot.¹⁸¹

These exit polls illustrate that: a) Perot's votes were not only "stolen" from the two major-party candidates, but b) most of the people who had not voted in 1988, did not vote for Perot.

¹⁸⁰ "1992 Presidential Elections Exit Polls in California." CNN. Accessed April 23, 2018. <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/1998/states/CA/polls/CA92PH.html>

¹⁸¹ "1992 Presidential Elections Exit Polls in Florida." CNN. Accessed April 23, 2018. <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/1998/states/FL/polls/FL92PH.html>

“Protest” candidate

In 1992, people were quite frustrated with both candidates – both Bush and Clinton had high disapproval ratings.¹⁸² On this verge, Perot appeared as a “protest” candidate. Besides, Perot also appeared on the wave of frustration with the two-party system in general, and as mentioned earlier, the record number of independents that was registered at the start of the campaign. The principle of “lesser evils” might have come into play in the situation with three available candidates. William Flanigan, Ph.D., University of Minnesota, and Nancy Zingale, Ph.D., University of St. Thomas, claim, in *Political Behavior of American Electorate*, that many people often see both candidates on the ballot as equally bad and not worthy of their vote. The availability of a third-party candidate may increase the chance that a frustrated voter will cast a ballot if there are more choices. Flanigan and Zingale write: “If some more people do not vote because they do not like either of the candidates, then having more candidates in the race increases the chances that one candidate will be deemed worthy of a vote.”¹⁸³

Flanigan and Zingale also claim that the role of Perot as a “protest candidate” was not only in attracting non-voters, but it was a specific group of voters – the “unconnected,” as they call them: young, non-partisan, or disenchanting with the government. As they claim, a candidate that seems to be out-of-the-system can attract additional electorate by his lack of experience, as such a candidate has an image of not being “spoiled” by

¹⁸² Toner, Robin. “The 1992 Campaign. Poll; Bush and Clinton Sag in Survey. Perot’s Negative Rating Doubles.” *The New York Times*. June 23, 1992. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/06/23/us/1992-campaign-poll-bush-clinton-sag-survey-perot-s-negative-rating-doubles.html>

¹⁸³ Flanigan, William H., and Nancy H Zingale. *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*. 12th ed., p. 50. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1991.

politics.¹⁸⁴ Voting for such a candidate is a protest against the system. Flanigan and Zingale also explain Perot's failure and the drop in voter turnout in 1996 – compared to the 1992 campaign, Perot could no longer represent himself as a political outsider, as he was already “spoiled” by the 1992 campaign: “By 1996 Perot looked less like the outsider who could fix the system, and he drew fewer of the unconnected into the electorate.”

However, it is unclear whether such a candidate can mobilize people to cast ballots. Jack Doppelt and Ellen Shearer, Medill University, in *Nonvotes: America's No-Shows*, provide several stories of people who seem to fit the profile of the “disenchanted” and politically unconnected, mainly people who have never voted and do not follow politics at all. All of them expressed their support for Perot, but none of them voted for him. One example is Alma Romanowski, who lives in Michigan and first registered to vote in 1996, just before her 37th birthday. She said that she and her husband both supported Perot during the 1992 elections, had not heard much about him, but just liked his image of a smart billionaire. However, she did not take the effort to register, because, as the authors wrote: “It didn't matter.” By the 1996 election, she was still supporting Perot, was registered and had her voting station located just at the end of her block, but she did not vote: “‘Maybe it's just the fear of going in that little booth and not knowing how [to vote],’ Romanowski muses.” While describing her profile, the authors draw a picture similar to that Flanigan and Zingale write about: “Romanowski's connection with political affairs and public officials is faint, mostly tangled images that leave her unsure of what or whom to trust.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Doppelt, Jack C., and Ellen Shearer. *Nonvotes: America's No-Shows*, p. 185. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2013.

Abortion

The 1992 presidential elections introduced many new topics to American elections, largely because it was the year of the first presidential elections after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. James Ceaser, Ph.D., University of Virginia, and Andrew Busch, Ph.D., Claremont McKenna College, write in *Upside Down and Inside Out*: “The 1992 election was the first election at ‘the end of history,’ the first election since the 1930s when the survival of the cause of democracy did not appear to be at stake.”

With the issue of security and foreign policy not being on the main agenda, social issues started to emerge as one of the decisive issues. Alan I. Abramowitz, Ph.D., Emory University, in the article *It's Abortion, Stupid: Policy Voting in the 1992 Presidential Elections*, claims that the abortion issue was one of the deciding topics in the 1992 elections. Dr. Abramowitz writes: “In 1992, however, the issue of abortion appeared to divide Republicans much more than Democrats. In fact, both President Bush and Vice President Quayle sought to downplay the importance of the issue during the campaign to minimize defections by pro-choice Republican voters.”¹⁸⁶ He later provides data from the exit polls that prove his position. He writes that the exit polls during the gubernatorial elections, which took place after the 1989 Supreme Court decision that allowed states to put restrictions on abortion indicated that abortion was a more decisive topic for voters than the economy. According to this article, 51 percent of voters opposed abortions (in the 1992 polls). However, Bush’s campaign decided to abstain from typical Republican “pro-life” rhetoric. The August 15, 1992 article in *The New York Times* points out: “Becalmed

¹⁸⁶ Abramowitz, Alan I. "It's Abortion, Stupid: Policy Voting in the 1992 Presidential Election." *The Journal of Politics* 57, no. 1 (1995), p. 177. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2960276>.

in the polls, under attack for having shifted ground on taxes, they have helped push through platform language that goes well beyond even the President's own strong anti-abortion position in an effort to ensure the support of conservatives, while at the same time they have sent signals to abortion-rights supporters intended to make them feel comfortable voting for Bush."¹⁸⁷

Dr. Abramovitz does not mention voter turnout as a subject of his study but instead focuses on the Bush campaign's failure to address the issue of the time. Due to the data provided, 54 percent of Republican voters in 1992 either favored abortion or allowed for the possibility of abortion "if needed." Dr. Abramovitz claims that the issue could have broken the party at that time, as some Republican voters were uncomfortable voting for a candidate with a "pro-life" position and uncomfortable voting for a Democrat. In a normal two-candidates situation some of these voters could have stayed at home and abstained from voting, thus decreasing turnout. However, the availability of a third-party candidate with a fiscal conservative position but a "pro-choice" stance at the same time allowed voters to cast their ballots for a candidate who supported their position on major issues.

The abortion issue and its importance and timeliness during the 1992 presidential elections are often missed by researchers, but, combined with the economy, it was one of the reasons that people voted instead of staying at home, looking at Perot as their candidate on both the economy and abortion. For some voters, Bush's inarticulate "pro-life" position played a major role in their decision not to vote for him. At the same time, Clinton's more liberal position would not allow them to vote for a Democratic candidate. In case there

¹⁸⁷ "The 1992 Campaign: News Analysis; Behind Bush's Mixed Abortion Signals." The New York Times. August 15, 1992. Accessed April 23, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/08/15/us/the-1992-campaign-news-analysis-behind-bush-s-mixed-abortion-signals.html>.

were only two strong candidates, these voters most likely would have stayed at home and turnout would be lower than it was. The presence for Perot on the ballot did not allow turnout to fall down and created an additional choice for some voters.

Economy

Along with the candidacy of Ross Perot, the 1992 presidential elections introduced one of the most famous political catchphrases: “It’s the economy, stupid.” The conventional literature about the 1992 election cites the economy as a major topic for these elections. Jean Bethke Elshtain, Ph.D., University of Chicago, in *Issues and Themes: Spiral of Delegation or New Social Covenant?*, writes: “Because of a stubborn economic downturn and his broken promise (“read my lips”) not to raise taxes, President Bush was vulnerable on the economic issues during the campaign, and candidates Clinton and Perot fully exploited this vulnerability.”¹⁸⁸ Perot’s position on the economy was conservative and thus he challenged President George H. W. Bush in this realm. As both Clinton and Perot actively exploited the president’s vulnerability on the issue, it became one of the major topics for voters, with 42 percent of them citing it as a deciding issue; meanwhile, Perot got almost as many of these votes on his side (24 percent) as Bush (25 percent).¹⁸⁹

Just as with the topic of abortion, the economy divided the Republican electorate. Some voters were uncomfortable about voting for a Democrat but did not trust President Bush after his failure on tax policy. The third-party candidate, who could attract conservative voters, (51% of Perot’s voters identified themselves as “conservatives,” 23%

¹⁸⁸ Nelson, Michael, “The Elections of 1992,” Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1993

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

as moderates, 27% as liberals¹⁹⁰) appeared just in time to represent this electorate.

1968 and 1992 - comparison

It is evident that Perot's candidacy for the president increased turnout by the fact of its presence – the conventional literature agrees on the fact that Perot's personality and campaign drove some typical no-shows to the polls. However, along with the presence of an active and appealing candidate, the political background just before and during the elections created a positive environment for a third-party candidate and a higher turnout. The issue of the economy drove the 1992 election, and many voters could have stayed at home if Perot did not run, as they were uncomfortable about voting for either Clinton or Bush.

Bush's "pro-life" position alienated a fair number of Republican voters from him. The availability of a third-party candidate with an economic position similar to that of the Republicans, but a different one on the less noticeable but divisive abortion issue, gave voters a "worthy" candidate for whom to cast their ballots. With just two candidates on the ballot, there was a greater possibility that these voters would have stayed at home. The 1992 abortion issue is an example of a major, but not central topic that can be decisive for a voter in his or her decision to vote for his or her party candidate or not to vote at all.

By contrast, in 1968 George Wallace was campaigning as a pro-segregation candidate. With Nixon's inarticulate position on the segregation, more voters might have shifted away from major-party candidate to Wallace, and the civil rights issue could have

¹⁹⁰ McCann, James A., Rapoport, Ronald B. and Stone, Walter J. "Heeding the Call: An Assessment of Mobilization into H. Ross Perot's 1992 Presidential Campaign." *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 1 (1999). <https://jstor.org/stable/2991783>

been similar to the abortion issue in 1992. However, the economy and foreign policy had forced this issue off the main agenda, thus not attracting those voters alienated by Nixon's position to Wallace. As a result, Wallace did not manage to mobilize additional voters and voter turnout was depressed compared to the 1964 elections.

Third-party candidates are positioned as "protest candidates," and have a greater chance of being recognized as such if they have not participated in politics before their candidacy. Politicians who become third-party candidates are not that appealing, as they are considered by typical no-shows who are unconnected with politics to be already "spoiled" by politics. As Perot was a businessman before the 1992 campaign and started with absolutely no political experience, his candidacy was attractive to some electorate. In contrast to Ross Perot, George Wallace can be called a "professional politician." Wallace had 20 years of experience in politics before his 1968 campaign, which was not his first presidential campaign, as he had tried to challenge President Lyndon Johnson for the Democratic Party nomination in 1964. Moreover, in 1968 Wallace was already a one-term Alabama governor. Thus, Wallace was less appealing to voters as a "protest" candidate than Perot, attracted fewer votes and did not cause the increase in turnout, instead, votes redistributed from other candidates without any augmentation.

The difference between the two candidates is evident from the results of these two elections. George Wallace got 6.4 percent of votes less than Perot, but captured electoral votes taking the majority of votes in five states (Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Arkansas, and Louisiana) in the South, unlike Perot, who did not manage to win a single electoral vote. The reason for that is obvious – Wallace's campaign mostly focused Southern white voters (as written above, Wallace's most typical voter was white unskilled worker without

a high-school diploma) and his 13.5 percent of votes mostly concentrated in this region, while Perot's votes were spread across different parts of American population, not allowing him to take the majority of votes in any state. Wallace's strategy for 1968 election was articulated quite clearly: his plan was to win enough electoral votes so that none of two other candidates could get 270 votes for a victory. With the Democratic majority on the House of Representatives, Richard Nixon would have needed to negotiate with Wallace, so that the latter could order electors to vote for Nixon. For that reason, Wallace took notarized affidavits from his electors that they vote for Wallace or any other candidate, whom he would point at.¹⁹¹ Perot, on the other hand, was aiming at victory and was even leading in polls for a short time. With an increased number of independents, his best shot was at targeting unaffiliated voters or non-voting population along with targeting voters from both Bush and Clinton. Thus, Wallace's strategy was not oriented at increasing the turnout since day one, while Perot did not have any way of coming close to a victory without attracting additional voters.

While these two campaigns may look similar in terms of the success of a third-party candidate, in their cores they are quite different. Issues on which candidates were campaigning had different impact: Wallace's main point was highly attractive, but for only one American region, while Perot's campaign was effective across the country, however, not effective enough to push him to win even in one state. However, differences in issues added votes to Perot and attracted those, who would most likely abstain from voting, while Wallace did not have such an advantage. Finally, these two candidates had different goals for their campaigns, Perot's goal was to win and get the non-voting population to cast their

¹⁹¹ Gould, Lewis. *1968: The Election that Changed America*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1993

ballots for him, while Wallace's campaign could not have been successful from the beginning and did not require to attract non-voters.

The 2008 and 1992 elections – similarities

Although the 2008 and 1992 elections both had their specific features compared to other elections, these elections are quite different in terms of voter turnout. However, there is one feature that is true for both – the candidates managed to attract more of the electorate because of the elections' high competitiveness.

William Flanigan, Ph.D., University of Minnesota, and Nancy Zingale, Ph.D., University of St. Thomas, in *Political Behavior of American Electorate*, claim that the elections in 2004 and 2008 attracted more voters in part because of their competitiveness: "The high turnout in 2004 surely resulted in part from the competitiveness of the race nationwide, but issues such as the war in Iraq, along with Democrats' sense that the 2000 election had been unjustly taken from them, also contributed to turnout."¹⁹²

In their study Flanigan and Zingale measure election competitiveness using election polls. Comparing the smallest election winner's polls advantage with voter turnout presents a picture of the dependence of turnout on the competitiveness of the election.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Flanigan, William H., and Nancy H Zingale. *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*. 12th ed., p. 50. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 1991.

¹⁹³ "Gallup Presidential Election Trial-Heat Trends, 1936-2008." Gallup.com. Accessed April 23, 2018. <http://news.gallup.com/poll/110548/gallup-presidential-election-trialheat-trends-19362004.aspx#4>.

Table 16. Comparison of smallest winner's polls advantage and voter turnout

Election year	Smallest winner's polls advantage (September-November)	Voter turnout
2012	-1%	58.6%
2008	+2%	61.6%
2004	-1%	60.1%
2000	-11%	54.2%
1996	+9%	51.7%
1992	0%	58.1%
1988	+5%	52.8%
1984	+16%	55.2%

The only race with a clear winner was the 1984 election when President Ronald Reagan had a huge advantage over Democratic candidate Walter Mondale. The other obvious winner (judging by the polls) was President Bill Clinton in 1996, having a minimum 9 percent advantage over Bob Dole. These two elections had lower voter turnout than average for the last 30 years: 55.2 percent in 1984 and 51.7 percent in 1996 (the average turnout for the 1984–2012 election period is 56.5 percent). Among the elections with the lowest turnout and lower competitiveness is also the 1988 race, with turnout being close to the minimum (52.8 percent) and the polls gap between contestants (+5 percent) being closer than in 1988 and 1996. The 2000 elections were probably the most competitive, with both contestants in a more than 10 percent polls lead during the last two months of the campaign; however, the 2000 election also witnessed a lower than average

turnout. Finally, the closest races in terms of polls – 1992, 2004, 2008, and 2012 elections – had higher than average voter turnout.

The general statistics indicate that election competitiveness in both the 1992 and 2008 elections correlates with a higher than average turnout. There is no evidence in the conventional literature or the statistics that the level of competitiveness was the deciding factor for a higher voter turnout, but this factor might have played a role along with others.

Chapter II conclusion

As the evidence from the three periods of depressed voter turnout indicates, the enfranchisement of additional groups of voters decreases turnout. However, the nature of these three periods is different. The 1828–1836 period, besides enfranchisement of all white men, included less competitive elections, when President Andrew Jackson was dominating the political arena, thus leading to lower voter interest than later in the 19th century, after 1837. With the departure of President Jackson from the White House, voter turnout skyrocketed to record numbers. Enfranchisement lowered voter turnout during two more periods: 1920–1932 (after the 19th Amendment) and 1972–1992 (after the 26th Amendment). However, along with suffrage, additional factors came into play: first and foremost, a new generation of young voters that were less interested in or satisfied with the current state of American politics.

According to the statistics, the 2004 and 2008 elections should have been elections with even lower voter turnout, as the new large demographic group, the millennials, had reached the voting age, and by 2008 had dislocated the baby boomers as the largest

electoral generation. However, the competitiveness of the 2004 elections and the efforts of the Obama campaign to mobilize this new group of voters led to turnout is significantly higher than average for this election. In addition, the mobilization of another group of voters, African Americans, allowed Obama to win the 2008 elections by a margin that was formed by the mobilized electorate.

Finally, a strong third-party candidate is a way to drive voter turnout higher than usual. However, after the examination of two campaigns that included such a candidate (1968 and 1992), it is clear that the mere availability of a strong third-party candidate on the ballot does not guarantee an increase in voter turnout, as turnout in 1968 was lower than that in 1964 and 1960. Along with having a third-party candidate, the concurrence of specific factors is necessary. In 1992, Perot managed to image himself as a “protest” candidate, attracting Republicans with his economic agenda and not alienating a significant number of them by his abortion position, thus making it possible for some Republican voters to cast their ballots for him instead of staying at home. By contrast, Wallace did not manage to present himself as a “protest” candidate, as he was a professional politician and could not attract additional voters with his pro-segregation agenda, as it was not as significant as the abortion agenda in 1992.

Several important conclusions can be made from these observations. First, the introduction of a new demographic group of voters significantly influences voter turnout. Under specific conditions, it can either lower turnout or, vice versa, increase it. The image of candidates, their programs, the efforts of their campaigns and the political environment all play a role in what influence the introduction of the new demographic will have. Second, the availability of a third-party candidate does not guarantee an increased voter turnout.

Instead, factors surrounding the campaign and the candidates play a more important role.

Third, the competitiveness of the elections plays one of the most significant roles in voter turnout.

Chapter III. Voter turnout in 2018 in the context of the last 44 years of midterm elections

The latest midterm elections not only changed the majority party in the House of Representatives but demonstrated the highest midterm election turnout rate for the last 100 years. For the first time in history, more than 100 million American citizens cast their ballot in a non-presidential election. Besides, for the first time in almost a century turnout reached 50 percent of eligible voters. However, it is unclear what caused this increase in voter turnout compared to other midterm elections. The media was speculating on how the presidency of Donald J. Trump and the then-ongoing special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation might have influenced turnout, but it is hard to assess how credible such analysis might be.

The goal of this chapter is to analyze the latest elections in terms of the past midterm elections. For this reason, the first part of this chapter will focus on finding the major patterns of why voter turnout increased and decreased in the last 44 years of midterm elections, and to place the 2018 midterm elections in these patterns. In the absence of credible research on the 2018 elections, various data that is currently available on this election is used.

Method and period of analysis

The basis of this chapter is the division of most midterm election turnout into three categories based on the performance of the two major political parties, as proposed by the political reporter and election analyst Rhodes Cook: a one-party surge, a one-party collapse and unequal gains.¹⁹⁴ These three types explain how and why turnout increases and decreases in most elections, based on factors that stimulate Americans to vote, attract their attention to voting or make them abstain from voting. The classification of the last 12 midterm elections into these three categories and the analysis of elections that fall in the same category as the 2018 elections will help to make a better analysis of the latest election.

For the purposes of this chapter, the period of the analysis is the last 44 years, from the 1974 midterm elections to the 2018 elections. The reason for using the last 44 years is that this period includes elections of all three categories, with a better and worse performance for both parties, with one exception – the Democratic Party did not suffer a major collapse in any turnout in midterm elections. The decrease in their voters is only connected to the increase in the last election, which should be treated as the stabilization of voter turnout, not its collapse.

¹⁹⁴ Cook, Rhodes. “Voter Turnout and Congressional Change.” Pew Research Center. November 1, 2006. <http://www.pewresearch.org/2006/11/01/voter-turnout-and-congressional-change/>

Table 17. Midterm election turnout, number of votes for major party candidates and results of House of Representatives races (1974–2018)

Election year	Democratic Party		Republican Party		House seats	Total turnout	Turnout (%)
	Votes ¹⁹⁵	+/- ¹⁹⁶	Votes	+/-			
1974¹⁹⁷	30	1	21.2	-3.1	D+49	52.3	39.1
1978	29.9	-0.1	24.4	3.2	R+13	54.6	39
1982	35.3	5.4	27.6	3.2	D+27	63.9	42
1986	32.4	-2.9	26.5	-1.1	D+5	59.7	38.1
1990	32.5	0.1	27.6	1.1	D+7	62.3	38.4
1994	32.1	-0.4	37	9.4	R+54	70.4	41.1
1998	31.5	-0.6	32.3	-4.7	D+5	66.6	38.1
2002	33.8	2.3	37.4	5.1	R+8	74.7	39.5
2006	42.3	8.5	35.9	-1.5	D+31	81	40.4
2010	39	-3.3	44.8	8.9	R+64	86.8	41
2014	35.6	-3.4	40	-4.8	R+13	78.2	36.7
2018	60.6	25	50.9	10.9	D+40	113.6	50.4

The midterm elections between 1934 and 1974 had a less evident pattern in voter turnout, for a reason which will be briefly explained later in this chapter. Besides, the elections before 1965 can hardly be compared to the elections after 1965, as: a) the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the 24th and 26th Amendments significantly increased the number of enfranchised citizens, thus slightly changing the voting behavior; b) the U.S. two-party

¹⁹⁵ All numbers – in millions of voters

¹⁹⁶ Gains/losses in millions of voters compared to previous midterm elections

¹⁹⁷ In bold – election analyzed in Cook's report

system went through a series of changes between 1928 and 1966; and c) the pattern presented in this chapter properly established itself from the 1974 elections onwards, whether it is the consequence of the previous two statements or not.

Changes in seats or the final results of each of these midterm elections are not the purpose of this chapter, as the topic of the thesis is voter turnout, but as this chapter analyzes the agenda of parties during elections, and how the agenda influenced turnout, occasional mentions of results are necessary. Nevertheless, research on how voter turnout influences gains in seats in the U.S. Congress or vice versa is not the primary goal of this chapter.

Three scenarios of midterm election turnout

The scenarios presented as a method for analysis in this chapter were suggested by Rhodes Cook, political reporter and electoral analyst, in his prognosis for the 2006 midterm elections. In anticipation of the so-called “blue wave” in 2006, when the Democratic Party was expected to win the majority in the House of Representatives for the first time since 1994, Cook wrote an article in which he based “wave” elections on voter turnout.¹⁹⁸ He divided all “wave” elections since 1974 into the following three categories:

- a) one-party surge – “one of the parties significantly increases its vote from the previous midterm while the other party’s vote remains essentially unchanged;”
- b) one-party collapse – “a huge number of voters from one of the parties simply sit out the election;” and

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

- c) unequal gains – “both parties add votes from the previous midterm, but one party gains far more than the other.”

Based on his classification, Cook categorized three elections into these three types:

- One-party surge – the 1994 midterm elections, when the Republican Party had a 9.4 million increase in their turnout and the Democratic Party had a 400 thousand decrease;
- One-party collapse – the 1974 midterm elections, when, after the resignation of President Nixon, the Republican Party lost 3.1 million of its voters compared to the 1970 elections, while the Democratic Party attracted 1 million more voters; and
- Unequal gains – the 1982 midterm elections, when the Democratic Party had a 5.4 million increase in their turnout, but the Republican Party also gained more votes, but less than the Democratic Party, namely 3.2 million.

Cook was interested in voter turnout as a means to produce a “wave” election, and his analysis tied turnout to parties’ results in the midterm elections, but the goal of this chapter is to analyze voter turnout, not its influence on the number of seats that parties receive as a result of this turnout. However, Cook’s division can be applied solely to the study of voter turnout.

Cook’s original analysis considered three “wave” elections: those of 1974, 1982 and 1994. However, his classification, with some adjustments, can be applied to most midterm elections of the last 44 years.

Table 18. Midterm elections of each type of turnout (1974–2010)

Category	Party	Year
One-party surge	Democratic	2006
	Republican	1994, 2010
One-party collapse	Republican	1974
Unequal gains	Democratic	1982
	Republican	2002

This system is unclear on what to consider as a surge or a collapse, especially whether to consider a significant gain in votes after a “one-party collapse” as a “one-party surge,” as in 1978 when the Republican Party gained 3.2 million voters after a 3.1 million decrease four years earlier. Such situations require an adjustment of the system: a return to a normal partisan turnout (within 0.1 million voters) should be considered as a stabilization.

Table 19. Partisan gains in votes, voter turnout (sorted by) and categories of turnout

Year	Turnout (%)	Democratic Party gains	Republican Party gains	House seats	Category
2014	36.7	-3.4	-4.8	R+13	Stabilization
1986	38.1	-2.9	-1.1	D+5	Stabilization
1998	38.1	-0.6	-4.7	D+5	Stabilization ¹⁹⁹

(continued on next page)

¹⁹⁹ Scientists argue that the 1998 decrease in Republican turnout was caused by the unpopularity of the President Clinton impeachment proceedings, but according to the rule explained above, it termed as a “stabilization”

1990	38.4	0.1	1.1	D+7	Stabilization
1978	39	-0.1	3.2	R+13	Stabilization
1974²⁰⁰	39.1	1	-3.1	D+49	One-party collapse
2002	39.5	2.3	5.1	R+8	Unequal gains
2006	40.4	8.5	-1.5	D+31	One-party surge
2010	41	-3.3	8.9	R+64	One-party surge
1994	41.1	-0.4	9.4	R+54	One-party surge
1982	42	5.4	3.2	D+27	Unequal gains
2018	50.4	25	10.9	D+40	Unequal gains

Three elections out of the 12 in the last 44 years cannot be assigned to any category: those of 1990, 2010 and 2014. The 1990 elections did not see a significant increase for any party's turnout, the Democratic Party received 1.1 million more votes than in 1986 and the Republican Party received 0.1 million more; voter turnout was just 0.3 percent higher than four years before that. It is not clear how to characterize the 2010 midterm elections: it represents a "one-party surge," as the Republican Party received an 8.9 million increase in votes, but at the same time the Democratic Party suffered a decrease of 3.3 million votes, which is more votes than the Republican Party lost in 1974, which makes these elections a "one-party collapse" as well. Finally, the 2014 midterm election can be characterized as a "both-parties collapse" – both the Democrats and the Republicans lost more than 3 million votes compared to the 2010 elections.

²⁰⁰ In bold – elections analyzed in Cook's report

However, both the 1990 and 2014 elections are classified as “stabilization” elections. The 1986 elections stabilized voter turnout after the 1982 spike in turnout, and the 1990 elections did not see any significant difference in turnout. These elections also did not significantly change the composition in either the House of Representatives or the Senate, and changes in turnout look like another adjustment from the 1982 elections. The 2014 election saw a significant decrease in voter turnout for both parties, but it can also be classified as a “stabilization” election. For the Democratic Party, the 2014 elections were another stabilization after the 2006 surge, as well as for the Republican Party, after the 2010 elections gains.

Table 19 illustrates which categories of elections work better and worse for a higher turnout. Stabilization elections demonstrate the worst turnout: all the elections that stabilized the previous spike reveal a drop in voter turnout to the lowest point. Except for the 2014 election, which represented the lowest turnout in the history of midterm elections, turnout in all the other stabilizing elections varies by 1 percent – from 38.1 percent to 39.0 percent. Even the election that stabilized the 1974 one-party collapse demonstrated a lower turnout than the collapse. Turnout for unequal gains elections usually represents the highest turnout among all these types, but there is an exception with regard to the 2002 elections – they demonstrated quite a low voter turnout, as they gained votes relative to the very low turnout of the 1998 elections.

Classification in context

Stabilization and one-party collapse turnout

It might be clear what causes a party’s turnout to collapse. In most cases, it is the

result of an adjustment from the previous elections. In 1982, both parties gained a significant number of votes – combined 8.4 million compared to the 1978 elections. In the next midterm election in 1986, both parties lost votes relative to how many new votes they had received in 1982 – the Democrats gained 5.4 million and lost 2.9 million, the Republicans gained 3.2 million and lost 1.1 million. Parties mobilize voters based on their agendas and are not able to keep a part of these voters four years later. These collapses usually happen after unequal gains or one-party surges, and a party usually loses approximately 35-50 percent of their new voters. In 1986, the Democrats lost 53 percent of their new 1982 voters, while the Republicans did better and lost only 34 percent. In 1998, the Republican turnout suffered a significant decrease – 4.7 million voters compared to the previous election in 1994. However, the 1994 elections saw a surge, namely 9.4 million of new Republican voters, but in 1998 the Republican Party lost 50 percent of these voters. After the surge in 2006, the Democratic Party lost a significant number of voters in 2010, namely 38 percent. Finally, the 1974 collapse was caused not by the adjustment after the 1970 elections (in that case the Republicans would have increased their turnout, as they lost voters in 1970), but by the Watergate scandal, President Nixon's resignation and his pardon by President Ford.

One-party surge

A one-party surge is a more frequent phenomenon than a one-party collapse and is similar in nature to a certain extent. The Watergate scandal and all the subsequent events had a negative effect on the Republicans' turnout and a neutral effect on turnout for the Democrats. The one-party surge turnout has similar causes but works in the opposite way. There were three major reasons for the massive Republican turnout in the 1994 elections,

which were formed by a number of smaller factors. The 1992 elections and the candidacy of Ross Perot played a major role in 1994 elections. President Clinton's first presidential victory was not impressive, as he took only 43 percent of the vote. In 1994, Perot was still present in the political arena, and this time meant doom for the Democrats in Congress. The first Clinton administration's major reforms were various and divisive.²⁰¹ In the domestic arena, in 1994 the Clinton administration and several Democratic members of Congress produced two major gun control bills: the Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act and the Federal Assault Weapons Ban. The gun control agenda alienated conservatives and Perot voters, who usually voted Democratic or did not vote at all.²⁰² In terms of foreign policy, the Clinton administration was one of the most pro-free trade administrations by that time, and there were two products of that policy: the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade's 1994 update (GATT 1994), which created the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA.) Both these initiatives were highly controversial inside the country, and once again, were met negatively by conservative Democrats and Perot voters.²⁰³ NAFTA opposition became a major issue for the elections. Perot took part in a protest against NAFTA when he published his book *Save Your Job, Save Our Country: Why NAFTA Must Be Stopped – Now!* Perot started rallying against the agreement around the country,²⁰⁴ which was significant, considering that he received 18.9 percent of the votes in 1992.

²⁰¹ Jacobson, Gary C. *The 1994 House Elections in Perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press, Inc.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Berens, Charlyne. 1999. "Amplifying the Giant Sucking Sound: Ross Perot and the Media in the NAFTA Negotiations." *Newspaper Research Journal* 20 (2): 90. doi:10.1177/073953299902000208.

Besides the approval of the Clinton administration, there were long-term factors. Congress's approval rating has almost always been lower than 40 percent, since 1974 when Gallup started to measure it, but the disapproval rating that was fluctuating between 40 percent and 56 percent between 1970 and 1989 started to rise after 1990, going to its historic high of 73 percent in October 1994. At least two major factors caused such a spike in the disapproval rating, the first of which was the gridlock in a divided government during the Reagan and Bush administrations, which reached its peak during the 107th Congress (1991–1993),²⁰⁵ ²⁰⁶ and the second was the rising movement for term limits for congressmen.²⁰⁷

The Democrats did not lose many votes compared to the 1990 turnout, only 0.4 million, and this does not represent a collapse like those in 2010 or 1974. The collapse of the Democratic Party did not happen, because this campaign did not shift voters from one party to another, but rather radicalized voters. Some Democratic voters shifted to the Republican Party, but these were mostly Republicans who had voted for the Democrats before, the so-called “Reagan Democrats” – 7 percent of Republicans reported voting for a Democratic candidate in 1994 compared to 23 percent in 1990. A similar situation happened on the other side – 10 percent of Democrats (3 percent more than for the Republicans) defected compared to 21 percent in 1990.²⁰⁸

There were fewer defectors than usual on both sides combined – 17 percent in the 1994 House elections compared to 22 percent in 1990. Similar statistics can be traced in

²⁰⁵ Jacobson, Gary C. *The 1994 House Elections in Perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press, Inc.

²⁰⁶ Clymer, Adam. “The 1992 Campaign: Congressional Races; Voter Anger Propels Term-Limit Push.” *The New York Times*. August 22, 1992. <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/08/24/us/the-1992-campaign-congressional-races-voter-anger-propels-term-limit-push.html>

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

other “one-party surge” turnout. In 2006, 11 percent of voters did not vote for their parties’ House candidates compared to 18 percent in 2002, and in 2010 only 10 percent of voters sided with another party’s House candidate.²⁰⁹ During “one-party surge” elections, controversial policies of a party in power tend to radicalize voters and make them stick to their party’s candidate, which results in an increase in the minority party’s votes, while the losing party stays at approximately the same level as four years earlier. Thus, the radicalization of voters and one-party surges usually create higher voter turnout, as in the 1994 and 2006 elections.

Unequal gains turnout

The 2002 elections involved a number of factors which played against the party in power, which in 2002 was the Republican Party. The U.S. economy was in a slight recession in 2001–2003. After 4.7 percent and 4.1 percent growth in GDP in 1999 and 2000, respectively, this index went down to 1 percent in 2001 and 1.8 percent in 2002.²¹⁰ The Democrats used the poor condition of the U.S. economy as their central issue. “The slow economy was potentially a much greater electoral threat to Republicans than the return of red ink, to which it also of course contributed. Had Democrats succeeded in making the economy the dominant issue, they might well be running the 108th Congress,” wrote Gary Jacobson, Ph.D., University of San Diego, about the situation before the 2002 midterm elections.²¹¹ On the one hand, adding to the slow economy, the number of big

²⁰⁹ Ornstein, Mann, Malbin, Rugg, Wakeman. “Vital Statistics on Congress, Chapter 2: Congressional Elections.” Brookings Institution. April 7, 2014. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Chpt-2.pdf>.

²¹⁰ BEA. Real GDP growth of the United States from 1990 to 2017.

<https://apps.bea.gov/iTable/iTable.cfm?reqid=19&step=2#reqid=19&step=2&isuri=1&1921=survey>

²¹¹ Jacobson, Gary C. 2003. “Terror, Terrain, and Turnout: Explaining the 2002 Midterm Elections.” *Political Science Quarterly* (Academy of Political Science) 118 (1): 1.

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tsh&AN=9638151&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

corporation scandals, the most important of which, but far from being the only one, was the Enron bankruptcy,²¹² also added to the momentum of the Democrats. On the other hand, the 2002 midterm election was the first one after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. This attack had a major political effect, raising the president's and the 107th Congress's approval ratings significantly.

The president's power of setting the agenda and turnout

In *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* political scientist Richard Neustadt wrote: "The essence of a President's persuasive task is to convince such men that what the White House wants of them is what they ought to do for their sake and on their authority."²¹³ Larry Sabato, Ph.D., University of Virginia, rephrased it in *The George W. Bush Midterm*: "The power of the president is the power to set the agenda."²¹⁴

In 1994, parties had a different message. Republicans had a structured campaign that was criticizing both policies of the first two years of the Clinton administration and the long-term effects of the Democratic House of Representatives. The Democrats rallied on defending these policies. Both messages were directed at the same swing electorate – "Reagan Democrats," blue-collar workers, who were supporting the Republicans in large numbers but were defecting to Democratic candidates. As the debate in 1994 was centered around the Clinton administration, and the Democrats had decided to side with their president, it was the president's approval rating that determined his power to set the agenda for the public against the same efforts of the Republican campaign. President Clinton's

²¹² Sabato, Larry J. *The George W. Bush Midterms*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2003.

²¹³ Neustadt, Richard E. *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership*. New York: Wiley, 1960.

²¹⁴ Sabato, Larry J. *The George W. Bush Midterms*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2003.

approval rating in early November 1994 was 46 percent,²¹⁵ a rather low figure, which determined his power to set the agenda against the party out of power. The Republicans' work against the president resulted in attracting and mobilizing the additional electorate, while the Democrats lost their traditional "defectors," who might have abstained from voting but decided to cast their ballots, increasing the Republican turnout significantly.

In his essay for *Midterm Madness*,²¹⁶ Dr. Sabato analyzes how the power of the president to set the agenda helped the Republican Party to gain more votes in 2002, at the same time that the Democrats managed to get 2.3 million more votes than four years earlier. By the time of the 2002 elections, President Bush's approval rating still stood at 63 percent.²¹⁷ While the Democrats were forcing the economic and social agenda, the Republicans were using the foreign policy as their main issue, primarily the terror and upcoming war in Iraq. As in 1994, the party out of power was attacking the president's agenda, the party in power was defending it. If the president had had a low approval rating, as Clinton did in 1994, the election might have resulted in a one-party surge turnout. However, the president's approval rating in late October was 63 percent, which was quite enough to force his agenda and attract the electorate. Thus, there was a surge in voter turnout for the party out of power, but the party in power managed to use the president's power to set the agenda to get even more voters, thus resulting in an unequal gains turnout.

²¹⁵ "Presidential Approval Rating. Bill Clinton." Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116584/presidential-approval-ratings-bill-clinton.aspx>

²¹⁶ Sabato, Larry J. *The George W. Bush Midterms*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2003.

²¹⁷ "Presidential Approval Rating. George W. Bush." Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116500/presidential-approval-ratings-george-bush.aspx>

Placing 2018 in context

According to the classification, the 2018 midterm election clearly can be classified as an “unequal gains” election; moreover, both parties gained a record-breaking number of votes compared to the 2014 election: while the Republicans received 9.4 million new votes in 1994, which was the record, in 2018 the Democratic Party gained 25 million new votes, and the GOP also broke its own 1994 record, gaining 10.9 million new votes.

It is quite rare that midterm elections introduce unequal gains for both parties – the 2018 elections became only a third case in 44 years, along with the elections of 1982 and 2002. In 2002 the party in power, both in the House and in the White House, was on the defense and won. This time the party in power lost – unequal gains were on the side of the Democratic Party, which took control of the next House of Representatives. Such a situation resembles the 1982 midterm elections, but in 1982 the government was divided: the House was under the control of the Democratic Party, but the Republican Party controlled the Senate and the White House. However, this is of less importance now, as the strategy of the House minority party for the 1982 and 2018 elections was similar. In 1982 the Republican Party, despite having control of the White House and the Senate, was in the attacking position. The sitting president usually loses seats in the House in his midterm elections. Between 1934 and 2002 there was not a single midterm election where the president’s party would add seats in the House of Representatives. The House was under the control of the Democrats, but effectively the Republicans had the conservative majority in the chamber – the coalition of 192 Republican congressmen and some conservative, mostly Southern, Democrats gave the president an effective majority.²¹⁸ Thus, the

²¹⁸ Busch, Andrew E. *Horses in Midstream. U.S. Midterm Elections and Their Consequences, 1894-1998*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Democrats were effectively in the minority and were in the position of attacking the president and congressmen from his party.

The main theme of these elections was the economy, as the country was going through the deepest recession since the Great Depression. The state of the economy is usually one of the main factors that define the party that wins the midterm elections, even when losing just several seats in the House is treated as the president's victory.²¹⁹ During a period with a good economy, the president's party usually loses fewer than 10 seats, as happened during Reagan's 1986 midterm elections. The economy was in a serious recession in 1982, and the Democrats used this, calling it "Reagan Recession." This could have meant doom for the Republican Party, but they decided to use other tactics and attack the Democrats for the bad shape of the economy, trying to coin the counter phrase "Carter Recession." This strategy could possibly have worked – it was a continuation of the 1980 "Reaganomics" campaign when the president campaigned on a return to the pre-Roosevelt free market economy. Two years later, Republicans in the House wanted to continue the rhetoric, claiming that the recession was the result of the Democratic policy. In 1982, Republicans even hoped that they could take the House, which would have been an incredible result, as before that the president's party had not won seats in the House since 1934 and the Republican Party had not controlled the House since 1955. In June 1981, Republican National Committee Chairman Richard Richards announced that his party planned to take the House in the upcoming elections.²²⁰ However, the Republican agenda

²¹⁹ Jacobson, Gary C. "Terror, Terrain, and Turnout: Explaining the 2002 Midterm Elections." *Political Science Quarterly* (Academy of Political Science) 118 (1): 1.

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tsh&AN=9638151&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

²²⁰ Busch, Andrew E. *Horses in Midstream. U.S. Midterm Elections and Their Consequences, 1894-1998*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

was seriously suffering from the president's low approval rating: President Reagan's rating was just 42 percent on November 8, 1982, six days after the election. The president and his party had the power to persuade voters to turn out and gained 3.2 million more voters than four years earlier. However, because of the low approval rating, the Democrats did a better job at persuading the public and gained 5.4 million more votes.

In 2018 the situation was both similar and different. The economy was in a growth phase, which is always a good sign for the president's party and could have meant calm elections, as in 1990, when the Republicans lost only seven seats in the House under the presidency of George H.W. Bush. However, a number of factors seriously influenced turnout rate in 2018.

Factors that influenced the 2018 midterm election turnout

A number of articles in the media have speculated on what caused such a high voter turnout in 2018. Among the reasons that are listed in the media are:

- a spike in Latino voters;²²¹
- the decrease in male voters;²²²
- highly competitive races;²²³
- alleged voter suppression by the Republican Party in 2014 and 2016;²²⁴
- the unpopularity of the president;²²⁵

²²¹ Vesoulis, Abby. "The 2018 Elections Saw Record Midterm Turnout". Time. November 13, 2018. <http://time.com/5452258/midterm-elections-turnout/>

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Domonoske, Camilla. "A Boatload Of Ballots: Midterm Voter Turnout Hit 50-Year High." National Public Radio. November 8, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/08/665197690/a-boatload-of-ballots-midterm-voter-turnout-hit-50-year-high>

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Silver, Nate. Twitter post. November 18, 2018. 6:07 p.m. <https://twitter.com/NateSilver538/status/1064203383089840128>

- ongoing presidential scandals;²²⁶ and
- the “Taylor Swift” effect²²⁷ and turnout spike among young (18–29 years old) voters.²²⁸

Demographic groups

In the absence of statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau, the exit polls²²⁹ are now the only source to assess the demographic composition of the 2018 turnout. The racial and ethnic composition indeed indicates that Latino voters turned out in greater numbers than in 2014,²³⁰ with a 3 percent increase,²³¹ while the white and African American turnout percentages are lower – 3 percent and 1 percent, respectively, compared to the 2014 turnout. As for 18-to-29-year-old voters, their share in the voting population did not increase compared to 2014: it was 13 percent for both elections. On the contrary, the 64-years-and-older group increased their share by 4 percent, at the expense of the 45-to-64-year-old group. Women turned out in greater numbers than in 2014, but only slightly so – 1 percent more than in 2014. The prognosis that white women would respond to the #MeToo movement with a greater turnout did not come true – white women decreased their share by 1 percent. The most significant increase was among less educated voters – there was a 7 percent increase among people with an associate degree and some college

²²⁶ Vesoulis, Abby. “The 2018 Elections Saw Record Midterm Turnout”. Time. November 13, 2018. <http://time.com/5452258/midterm-elections-turnout/>

²²⁷ Della Volpe, John. “Can Taylor Swift inspire young nonvoters to vote? You bet.” Washington Post. October 9, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2018/10/09/can-taylor-swift-inspire-nonvoting-young-vote-you-bet/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.2237205a5cf0

²²⁸ Reints, Renae. “2018 Midterm Election Sets Record as the First to Exceed Voter Turnout of 100 Million People”. The Fortune. November 7, 2018. <http://fortune.com/2018/11/07/voter-turnout-2018-midterms/>

²²⁹ CNN. “2018 Exit Polls: National House. November 6, 2018.” <https://www.cnn.com/election/2018/exit-polls>

²³⁰ CNN. “2014 Exit Polls: National House. November 4, 2014.” <http://www.cnn.com/election/2014/results/exit-polls>

²³¹ This number and all other exit poll numbers are percent by which groups increased or decreased their share among other groups in the same category compared to 2014 midterm elections. Due to a much higher turnout in general, all groups increased their turnout in absolute numbers.

education, and a 3 percent increase among people with a high school diploma or less. Judging by the numbers from the exit polls, it is fair to say that no specific demographic group turnout could have influenced voter turnout to such a great extent.

The president

President Trump's approval rating is low. Gallup has estimated that 40 percent of Americans approved Trump's job as president on November 4, 2018,²³² while other outlets have given numbers of between 41 percent²³³ and 45 percent²³⁴ on or around the election day. Comparing President Trump's approval rating with other presidents' ratings during high turnout midterm elections, it is noted that President Obama's rating in November 2010 was 44 percent,²³⁵ and President Bush's rating in November 2006 was 38 percent.²³⁶ However, President Trump's approval among Republican voters is significantly higher, and it was 88 percent on Election Day.²³⁷

President Trump's presence in this campaign was very visible. He held 15 rallies in October alone, frequently stressing that the vote for the congressional or gubernatorial candidate was a vote for him. Most of his rallies were held in Republican-leaning states but in unsafe races.²³⁸ Some of these states included: Tennessee (Senate elections²³⁹),

²³² "Presidential Approval Rating. Donald Trump." Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/203207/trump-job-approval-weekly.aspx?version=print>

²³³ CNN/SSRS/Gallup. "President's Approval Rating National Poll." CNN <http://cdn.cnn.com/cnn/2018/images/11/04/re110a-.2018.pdf>

²³⁴ TheEconomist/YouGov Poll. November 4-6, 2018. YouGov. https://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus_uploads/document/ylp5ygohjs/econTabReport.pdf

²³⁵ "Presidential Approval Rating. Barack Obama." Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/113980/gallup-daily-obama-job-approval.aspx>.

²³⁶ "Presidential Approval Rating. George W. Bush." Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/116500/presidential-approval-ratings-george-bush.aspx>.

²³⁷ "Presidential Approval Rating. Donald Trump." Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/203198/presidential-approval-ratings-donald-trump.aspx>

²³⁸ Timmons, Heather. Yanofsky, David. "Trump's frantic midterm MAGA rally schedule, mapped and explained." Quartz. November 2, 2018. <https://qz.com/1448151/trumps-midterm-elections-maga-rally-schedule-mapped/>

²³⁹ In parenthesis – close races in these states

Mississippi (Senate special elections), Minnesota (1st and 2nd congressional districts), Kansas (gubernatorial race, 1st and 2nd districts), Iowa (gubernatorial race, 3rd district), Kentucky (6th district), Ohio (Senate elections, gubernatorial race), Indiana (Senate elections), Montana (Senate race), Texas (Senate race), and Florida (Senate race, gubernatorial race). Despite his low approval ratings in general, President Trump's presence in the campaign might have helped some candidates in close races, such as in Tennessee, Florida, Texas, Kentucky, Indiana and Missouri, where the Democrats lost their Senate seats (Florida, Indiana and Missouri), or lost races in which they had expected to have a good chance (Florida and Tennessee gubernatorial races, KY-6.)

The president's agenda and persona were a more decisive factor for voting than it usually is. According to the exit polls, 12 percent more voters said that their vote represented support for or opposition to the president; only 33 percent of voters said that the president was not a factor in their vote for the House candidate, compared to 45 percent in 2014. Coincidentally, almost the same percentage, 13 percent, is the difference in turnout between 2018 and 2014. It is unlikely that the president being a factor in voting for the House candidate is the sole reason for a higher turnout, but certainly more people turned out to demonstrate their attitude to the president on both sides. In 2006²⁴⁰ (the last elections before 2018 with a Republican as president), 22 percent of voters cast their vote for the House candidate in support of President Bush, in 2018 26 percent of voters called their vote support for the president, and 2 percent more among these voters cast their ballots for a Republican candidate. The same situation pertains to the question of approval of the president – 4 percent more of those who approve of the president's job voted for a

²⁴⁰ CNN. "2006 U.S. House of Representatives National Exit Poll."
<http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/pages/results/states/US/H/00/epolls.0.html>

Republican candidate in 2018 than 12 years earlier.

The 2018 agenda

It is usual that a party that enjoys a good economy survives the midterm elections, and vice versa. In 2018 real GDP growth was high at 4.2 percent in the second quarter and 3.5 percent in the third quarter.²⁴¹ It is very likely that the Republican Party increased their voter gain in this election cycle due to the good state of the economy: 68 percent of voters said that the state of the economy was “excellent” or “good,” and 69 percent of them voted for a Republican House candidate.

The distinctive feature of these elections is the most important issue, which usually is the economy. However, in 2018, 41 percent of voters named health care as the most important issue. It is quite unusual for health care to be the primary issue for voters – in 2014, only 25 percent of voters named health care as the most important issue. Certainly, the importance of health care played to the advantage of the Democrats. Most Democrats rallied against the repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) during this cycle.²⁴² The repeal of this law was one of the central points of the Trump 2016 campaign, as well as for many Republican House and Senate candidates since its enactment. The 115th Congress made several attempts at repealing the ACA in 2017 but did not manage to get enough votes in the Senate, eliciting huge disapproval from the public – just 12 percent of Americans

²⁴¹ BEA. Gross Domestic Product, Third Quarter 2018 (Second Estimate); Corporate Profits, Third Quarter 2018 (Preliminary Estimate). <https://www.bea.gov/news/2018/gross-domestic-product-third-quarter-2018-second-estimate-corporate-profits-third-quarter>

²⁴² Gabriel, Trip. “To Rally Voters, Democrats Focus on Health Care as Their Closing Argument”. The New York Times. October 28, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/28/us/politics/health-care-elections-democrats.html>

approved of the Republican health care bill when it was on the Senate floor,²⁴³ while support of the ACA increased to 50 percent and higher in 2017.²⁴⁴ Some Democrats actively campaigned on the single-payer health care system, Medicare-for-All, the most recent version of which was proposed by Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) during his campaign in 2016.²⁴⁵ Polling data in support of the single-payer health care system varies significantly: reports on two polls give numbers of 51 percent²⁴⁶ and 70 percent²⁴⁷ of support among Americans. These numbers give a clear perspective that the single-payer health care system is popular among Americans, and the Democrats certainly gained a significant number of votes on this issue.

Finally, a presidential scandal was still being investigated. The special counsel Mueller investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 elections divided the country, with 41 percent of voters approving and 46 percent disapproving of the job of the special counsel. Alongside the investigation, some Democratic congressmen made efforts to start impeachment proceedings against President Trump²⁴⁸ based on accusations not connected to the Mueller investigation.

²⁴³ Page, Susan. Kimery, Emma. “Poll: Only 12 percent of Americans support the Senate health care plan” USA Today. June 28, 2017. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2017/06/28/suffolk-poll-obamacare-trump-senate-health-care-plan/103249346/>

²⁴⁴ Brenan, Megan. “Affordable Care Act Approval Slips After Record Highs.” Gallup. November 27, 2017. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/222734/affordable-care-act-approval-slips-record-highs.aspx>

²⁴⁵ Rosenthal, Elizabeth. Luthra, Shefali. “‘Medicare for all’ suddenly popular on campaign trail even in deep-red states: Analysis.” Kaiser Health News. October 22, 2018. <https://khn.org/news/2018-midterms-medicare-for-all-slogan-health-care-policy/>

²⁴⁶ Guskin, Emily. “About half of Americans support single-payer health care.” Washington Post. April 12, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2018/04/12/about-half-of-americans-support-single-payer-health-care/?utm_term=.53188c418499

²⁴⁷ Keller, Megan. “Seventy percent of Americans support ‘Medicare for all’ in new poll.” The Hill. August 23, 2018. <https://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/403248-poll-seventy-percent-of-americans-support-medicare-for-all>

²⁴⁸ Lillis, Mike. Bowden, John. “House Dems introduce articles of impeachment against Trump.” The Hill. November 15, 2017. <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/360455-house-democrats-introduce-articles-of-impeachment-against-trump>

The possibility of impeachment creates analogies with two other midterm elections: that of 1974, after President Nixon faced the threat of impeachment and had to resign from the presidency, and that of 1998 when President Clinton was impeached by the House of Representatives, but proceedings were unpopular among Americans.²⁴⁹

The possible impeachment of President Trump has even less support among voters than the Mueller investigation: only 39 percent of voters support impeachment, and 56 percent oppose it. At the same time, 72 percent of respondents answered that the Democrats would try to impeach President Trump.²⁵⁰ Considering the unpopularity of such action, the Democrats abstained from rallying on the issue of impeachment, avoiding such an agenda in their appearances,²⁵¹ and House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said impeachment is “not a priority” for the Democrats in the 116th Congress.²⁵²

However, the Republican Party and President Trump were campaigning on this issue. Some Republican House candidates were stressing the Democrats’ alleged plans to start impeachment proceedings against the president,²⁵³ but in most cases it was President Trump, during his rallies²⁵⁴ and his administration,²⁵⁵ who mentioned impeachment several

²⁴⁹ Holland, Keating. “Poll: Strong majority do not want Clinton removed from office.” CNN. January 11, 1999. <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1999/01/11/poll/>

²⁵⁰ Washington Post-ABC News Poll. August 26-29, 2018.

<https://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/page/politics/washington-post-abc-news-poll-aug-26-29-2018/2324/>

²⁵¹ Seitz-Wald, Alex. Egan, Lauren. “The ‘I-word’ won’t be mentioned: Democrats dodge Trump impeachment on campaign trail.” NBC News. October 25, 2018.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/elections/i-word-won-t-be-mentioned-democrats-dodge-trump-impeachment-n924161>

²⁵² Birnbaum, Emily. “Pelosi says impeachment ‘not a priority’ after Cohen’s guilty plea.” The Hill. August 22, 2018. <https://thehill.com/homenews/senate/403024-pelosi-says-impeachment-not-a-priority>

²⁵³ Rogers, Wendy. Twitter post. September 10, 2018. 3.16 a.m.

<https://twitter.com/wendyrogersaz/status/1038944188337999872?lang=en>

²⁵⁴ Jackson, David. “Trump hones midterm campaign themes: Kavanaugh, impeachment, nicknames.” USA Today. October 17, 2018. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2018/10/17/donald-trump-midterm-themes-kavanaugh-impeachment-nicknames/1590500002/>

²⁵⁵ Hartmann, Margaret. “Why Republicans, Not Democrats, Want the Midterms to Be About Impeachment.” New York Intelligencer. August 23, 2018. <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/08/why-gop-not-dems-wants-midterms-to-be-about-impeachment.html>

times, apparently trying to mobilize Trump supporters to secure their 2016 vote and keep the president in office.

The 2018 elections by state

A total of 48 states saw a higher voter turnout than four years before; the only two states that had lower turnout were Louisiana (-0.14 percent) and Alaska (-0.18 percent). It is not yet clear what precisely caused the slight decline in voter turnout in these two states, but possible causes are the following.

The competitiveness and importance of the races. In 2014, Louisiana had a close Senate race between the incumbent Mary Landrieu (D) and Bill Cassidy (R), while Alaska had important statewide ballot initiatives, such as an increase in the minimum wage and the decriminalization of marijuana. In 2018, Louisiana did not have any statewide races and Alaska did not have such important ballot issues.

Previous turnout. The 2018 midterm election turnout is in part shocking because of the very low turnout in 2014. However, both Louisiana and Alaska were among the states with the highest turnout in 2014, having higher turnout than in 2006 or 2010. Thus, their decrease in voter turnout between 2014 and 2018 can be explained by the higher turnout four years before that.

The gubernatorial race in Alaska. Alaska had a decrease in voter turnout because of the withdrawal of the incumbent Gov. Bill Walker late in the race. Walker ran in 2014 as an independent but splitting the ticket with the Democrat Byron Mallot and with the endorsement of the Democratic Party. In 2018, there was an independent candidate (Walker) and the Democratic candidate (Mark Begich) on the ballot, which in theory could

have attracted more electorate than in 2014, but Walker's withdrawal caused some of his supporters to abstain from voting in this election.

Some states demonstrated extraordinary spikes in voter turnout (more than 15 percent compared to 2014): among these states are New Jersey, Missouri, California, Indiana, Virginia, Nevada and Georgia. All these states had: a) very competitive races, both at the statewide and district levels; and b) a lower than average turnout in 2014, which made the surge even more significant. Indiana, Missouri and Nevada had Senate races where an incumbent had lost his/her seat; Georgia also had a very competitive statewide race for governor. New Jersey, California and Virginia had the largest number of House seats changing parties. Two states also had a close statewide race or a large number of House seats that were changed, namely Arizona and Pennsylvania: turnout in these two states also spiked compared to the 2014 elections – by 14.98 percent and 14.86 percent, respectively.

Virginia. Virginia is a swing state with both senators and a governor from the Democratic Party, but the state legislature and congressional delegation were under Republican control. Three U.S. House seats changed in Virginia: VA-2, VA-7 and VA-10. All these races saw a spike in both Democratic and Republican votes in 2018: for example, in the 7th congressional district, a Democratic candidate received 86,000 more votes in 2018, running on the issue of health care, than four years earlier, while a Republican candidate received 21,000 more votes. In VA-10, a Democratic candidate ran on the issues of health care and opposition to President Trump, as her opponent usually voted with the president, including on the Republican health care bill. Virginia is an example of a swing state, which coincided with the national agenda – both parties gained votes, but unequally,

due to the national agenda of the Democratic Party. As a result, the Virginia Senate race was again won by a Democrat, and the congressional delegation shifted to Democratic control.

Indiana. Indiana demonstrated an example of a spike in votes, as it had a race for both Senate and governor in 2018, while in 2014 the state had no statewide races. Moreover, not only did Indiana have statewide races in 2018, but at least one was very competitive and drove voters to the polls – the race for the Senate seat was a toss-up. As Indiana is a Republican-leaning state, and the incumbent senator was a Democrat, it is possible that the radicalization of voters, which is usually a precursor of elections with a high voter turnout, attracted Republican voters. As a result, 20,000 more Republicans voted for their candidate in 2018 than in 2012, a year of presidential elections.

California. As of 2018, California has been a Democratic-leaning state, with 39 out of 53 representatives from California to the 115th Congress, as well as both senators, being from the Democratic Party. However, Eastern California is more Republican than the state in general, and the 2018 elections saw some of the Republican seats being taken by the Democrats when seven out of 14 Republican House seats changed. Just as in Virginia, California, although it is not a swing state, saw an unequal gains turnout. In the 10th congressional district, for instance, the Democratic candidate received 115,945 votes, which is more than 80,000 votes more than in 2014, while the Republican candidate added 35,000 votes. However, this was not only the case for swing districts. In the 29th California congressional district, for example, the Democratic candidate received 74,000 more votes than in 2014, and the Republican candidate received almost 13,000 more votes.

In conclusion, there are two major causes for the difference in voter turnout. Turnout is higher or lower depending on the number of statewide races or ballot initiatives; for example, Alaska had a higher than average turnout in 2014 because of important ballot initiatives, and Indiana had a spike in turnout in 2018, as it had two statewide races compared to none in 2014. In other cases, voter turnout in districts was similar to the national voter turnout: most districts demonstrated an unequal gains turnout that favored Democratic candidates. Districts that were in swing states (e.g., Virginia) or areas (e.g., California) voted for the Democratic candidate instead of the Republican candidate, while districts that are less competitive voted for the Republican candidate despite higher gains for the Democratic candidate.

The 2018 midterms as an “unequal gains turnout” election

The analysis of the events that led to the high voter turnout in 2018 provides several major conclusions in the turnout in general.

First, both parties had very strong foundations in terms of mobilizing voters and attracting them to the polling stations. The Republican Party enjoyed a growing and strong economy, which is historically a good sign for the party in power and helps it to gain voters in midterm elections. Besides, the low approval of the special counsel Robert Mueller investigation and possible impeachment of President Trump, along with the GOP rhetoric about the threat of the removal of the president from office, helped the Republican Party get some additional voters.

However, the Democratic Party had better momentum with the health care agenda. Public disapproval of the Republican health care reform in 2017, along with apparent

medium-to-high approval of a more liberal approach to the issue of health care, helped the Democrats attract a large share of voters. Finally, as President Trump became an important factor in this election, Democrats apparently managed to mobilize voters using the opposition to the GOP without citing impeachment. Not only the percentage of people who said that the president was not a factor in their vote for House candidate decreased, but voters also moved in larger numbers to the Democratic side. If 19 percent said that their vote was support for President Obama in 2014, in 2018 38 percent of people said their vote represented opposition to President Trump. The presidential approval ratings in 2014 and 2018 are similar (President Obama – 44 percent, President Trump – 45 percent, according to the CNN exit polls), but a higher percentage of Trump opposers sided with the Democratic candidate in 2018 than Obama supporters in 2014. These figures mean that the 2018 midterm elections saw a record-low percentage of “defectors,” which usually leads to a higher voter turnout.²⁵⁶

Such conclusions resemble those made regarding the 1982 and 2002 elections. In all three elections, both parties had strong agendas and mobilized voters on these issues. In all three these elections the economy was an important issue, but the 2002 and 2018 elections featured another topic as the most important – foreign policy (terrorist activities and the Iraq war) in 2002 and health care in 2018. If the presidential approval rating is high among all Americans, the minority party’s agenda might fade, as the president will successfully force his own. That happened in 2002. On the contrary, when the presidential approval rating is low, but still high among his party’s voters, then both agendas work to

²⁵⁶ Ornstein, Mann, Malbin, Rugg, Wakeman. “Vital Statistics on Congress, Chapter 2: Congressional Elections.” Brookings Institution. April 7, 2014. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Chpt-2.pdf>.

mobilize voters. These scenarios played out in 1982 and 2018 and delivered the highest voter turnout rates in the last 44 years. When two issues are successfully used by the winning party to gain more votes than their opponents, however, the nature of elections with several major topics makes such elections a mobilization race: both parties try to force their agendas and to get additional electorate, while not allowing voters to “defect” from their party, thus increasing turnout.

Conclusion

Modern levels of voter turnout in United States elections have become an inalienable part of the political system. The main argument of this thesis rests on the fact that the single-member district electoral system set by the U.S. Constitution has created the very stable two-party system, which leaves certain demographic and social groups out of the political process by establishing the “wasted vote” phenomenon. As the U.S. political and party systems become more radicalized and the number of voters who identify themselves as “independents” increases, millions of U.S. citizens cannot find a candidate or a party to cast their votes for, thus preferring to abstain from voting. Several literature sources have identified a group of voters who have not voted for decades and become disengaged from the political system. Voters from this group are rarely registered for voting in their states; however, they do not register not because of the process of registration itself, but because they do not see a candidate or a party that would suit their political beliefs. As multiple experiments have illustrated, cost-of-voting factors, such as voter ID laws, registration, or voting on a weekday also might influence the decision to vote or abstain. As such, easing the requirements for getting a voter ID in Kansas or information about the process of registration in France have demonstrated that more citizens tend to vote as a result of these measures.

However, not all measures to decrease the cost of voting have been revealed as effective, as the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 demonstrated when an additional 3.5 million Americans registered to vote, and turnout in the next presidential elections in 1996 decreased by 8 million voters. Vice versa, not all measures that increase the cost of voting lead to a drop in voter turnout – examples of states that enacted a voter ID law before

the 2008 presidential elections demonstrated that turnout increased despite the new legislation. Besides, factors such as the price of a voter ID or voting on weekday have been revealed not to influence voter turnout in the long term – states and countries that have a higher cost of the voter ID indicate a higher turnout, and all democracies that have their voting days on weekdays also have higher turnout than the United States. Finally, there are multiple examples of evidence in this thesis that voters tend to pay more attention to aspects of the political system, parties and candidates rather than to the voting process and its cost.

In two following scenarios:

1) a voter went through the necessary registration process, has a voter ID, but does not have a preference in terms of the candidates;

2) a voter is not registered, does not have the required voter ID, but has a suitable candidate on the ballot;

– a voter is more likely to vote in the second scenario than in the first scenario.

The political process and candidates are more likely to influence voter turnout in both cases. The obvious conclusion from the research on how the U.S. political system influences voter turnout was the exploration of how a third-party candidate would affect turnout. The presumption was that a third-party candidate would increase turnout, as more voters could have seen their candidate on the ballot, and Chapter II of this thesis compared two elections with the most successful third-party candidates: George Wallace and Ross Perot. On the one hand, the 1992 elections, which introduced Perot as the most successful independent candidate of recent decades, also saw one of the highest turnouts in

presidential elections for the last 50 years. On the other hand, the other successful presidential candidate – Wallace – could not raise voter turnout. Both candidates’ success stemmed from their positioning as “protest candidates,” and their voters had little if any self-identity with either the Democratic or Republican parties. In 1968, Wallace managed to “steal” some votes from his conservative vis-à-vis Richard Nixon, using the realignment in the Republican Party under the influence of 1964 Republican nominee Barry Goldwater, as Nixon was less conservative than his predecessor, and thus lost Southern states to Wallace. However, Wallace could not detach himself from the conservative Republican agenda, and thus did a worse job in mobilizing new voters, concentrating his efforts on the politically more engaged. By comparison, Perot in 1992 managed to attract voters who could not affiliate themselves with George H.W. Bush or Bill Clinton. Besides, Perot had a significant advantage over George Wallace – he was not a politician, or how some voters described him, he was not “spoiled by politics,” thus had more appeal to voters who were disengaged from the political process.

In terms of voter turnout, it is necessary to address the issue of voter enfranchisement. Groups of voters that were previously denied the right to vote, such as white men without property, women, and 18-to-20-year-olds, and then were given the right to vote by legislation, usually, tend to abstain from voting until a certain moment when they become more engaged with the political system. This thesis explored how these three groups became more politically active, meaning that they started to turn out in greater numbers than right after their enfranchisement, and they acted in a slightly different but generally similar manner. First, new voters tend to abstain from voting in their first several elections because of their disengagement from the political process, ignorance or general

indifference about politics and voting. Second, direct targeting and mobilization of new voters usually fail until the moment when new voters themselves feel the need and will to cast their votes or see a suitable candidate. As these newly enfranchised voters were included in the voting-eligible population and massively abstained from voting, voter turnout goes down, creating three major periods of depressed turnout in U.S. history: 1828–1836 after the enfranchisement of white men without property, 1920–1928 after the 19th Amendment and 1972–2000 after the 24th and 26th Amendments and the Voting Rights Act. All elections right after these periods of low turnout have certain trigger that leads to a major influx of new voters. The 1840 election presented the first competitive post-Jackson election with a new political party, the 1932 election was the first Great Depression election, while the 2008 election presented the first African American presidential candidate.

Most elections analyzed in this thesis are closely connected to various issues. The success of Perot's candidacy compared to Wallace's was achieved not only by a better presentation as the "protest candidate," but also by a more thoughtful approach to current issues. Wallace's campaign was associated with the problem of civil rights and racial problems; however, in 1968 this problem was less noticeable compared to the foreign policy, the war in Vietnam, crime, poverty and the rehabilitation of cities. Even with his strong anti-equality message, Wallace could not attract white voters alienated by Nixon, because the candidate was not strong on issues that were primary in that election. By contrast, Perot managed to "steal" votes from Clinton and Bush, because of his approach to issues that were vivid at the time. Perot managed to pick up the conservative economy message better than his Republican opponent and articulate his "pro-choice" stance on

abortion, thus getting enough votes from “pro-choice” voters that would not vote for President Bush because of his unclear position on the abortion issue that was getting increasingly important.

Finally, Chapter III which analyzed the recent 2018 midterm elections, almost completely focuses on agendas, parties’ power to force agendas, and their effect on voter turnout. Parties’ and presidents’ powers at the time of elections and their ability to emphasize the right agenda are the key to winning elections via greater mobilization, thus higher voter turnout. Several different scenarios presented in the last chapter of this thesis demonstrate how parties have managed to mobilize voters with the right agenda and how this has increased voter turnout. The best-case scenarios for a higher voter turnout follow the same conditions:

- *One party effectively controls all branches of government.* Before the 2002 and 2018 elections, the Republican Party controlled both Houses of Congress and the White House, in 1982 the Republicans controlled the Senate, the White House, and had effective control over the House of Representatives, meaning that Southern Democrats tended to vote with their Republican colleagues on major legislation;

- *Both sides have important issues that they try to enforce using their political power.* In 2002, the first elections after the September 11 terrorist attack, the war in Afghanistan, and on the verge of the war in Iraq, the Republican Party was forcing the foreign policy and security agenda, while the Democrats tried to play on the issue of the ongoing economic recession. In 2018, the Democrats managed to force the health care agenda much better than usual, while Republican candidates were rallying on a stable and growing economy.

- *Both parties have enough power to set the agenda.* Usually, the president's party does not enjoy a good approval rating and political power to force their agenda, thus fails to mobilize enough of their voters, while the second party successfully uses their agenda of opposition and wins the election. In cases of higher voter turnout, the president either has an unusually high approval rating (as President Bush did in 2002) in general or a higher than usual approval rating inside his own party (as President Reagan and President Trump did in 1982 and 2018, respectively), thus adding to their parties' turnout in midterm elections and increasing the overall turnout.

To conclude, the main idea of this thesis is that voter turnout mostly depends on factors that are not directly connected to turnout itself. Aspects such as the two-party system, the correct use of agendas and the combination of these two factors are more significant in the longer term than cost-of-voting factors such as voter ID laws and the registration process. Sometimes it is much easier for a voter to go through a difficult process of participating in the elections than to find a candidate that is worth his or her vote, and the ballot itself is more of an obstacle than getting access to this ballot. Political and social factors, voters' engagement in the political process, raising issues that concern citizens and the correct usage of these issues are crucial for elevating voter turnout. It is hard to say that cost-of-voting factors play absolutely no role in turnout. However, creating a more representative and competitive political environment can have a much greater influence on citizens' decision to vote or not.

Regarding limitations, this thesis does not include two major questions that are associated with the topic of voter turnout. The paper does not characterize questions of voter ID laws and registration with the morality of such legislation and voter suppression

problems. It was the goal of this thesis to avoid alleged political motivation for such legislation that can artificially decrease turnout and limit some groups of voters in exercising their right to vote. This thesis purposefully does not discuss specific cases of alleged voter suppression and does not consider intentional actions to bar certain small groups of people from voting, although the topic of global voter turnout does not disregard the importance of this problem.

This thesis also does not touch upon the more philosophical question: does a modern democracy need to increase its voter turnout? The conventional wisdom on the question of voter turnout is that the higher turnout, the better the democracy. European democracies are sometimes regarded as “better democracies,” partly because they have higher voter turnout. However, there is another opinion: the older the democracy, the lower voter turnout will be. The United States of America is one of the oldest democracies in the world, and if the notion that old democracies have low turnout is true, it only adds to the opinion that a low turnout is inevitable, but not necessarily bad.

A great deal of research has been conducted on the different conditions that influence voter turnout; however, not enough research has been conducted on the major question of how high and low voter turnout affect the system of democracy itself. Should governments make an artificial effort to increase turnout or is it best not to interfere in the electoral process, even though turnout will stay low? Finally, a whole new area for research opened when Estonia became the first country in the world to enact online voting alongside keeping traditional polling stations in national elections. What is the perspective on this type of voting, how does it affect voter turnout, and will it increase voters’ engagement in the political process? Online voting provides a glimpse into the possible future of elections

and thus should be properly researched before its inevitable implementation around the world.

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