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Abstract

Various possible explanations for the turnout increase of nearly 6 percentage points in the 1992 U.S. presidential election as compared to the 1988 election are examined, using both survey and state-level data. The turnout impact of Perot's candidacy, surprisingly, is found to be negligible. Neither is support found for views frequently expressed in the media that the economic recession and MTV's 'Rock the Vote' registration campaign aimed at young people played substantial roles in stimulating additional voter participation. Only a small fraction of the turnout rise can be attributed to the spread and maturation of 'motor voter' registration programs at the state level between the 1988 and 1992 elections. The mystery is 'resolved' in part by evidence that, from the perspective of recent history, the low turnout of 1988 is at least as great an anomaly as the high turnout of 1992. Unfortunately, there are few clues as to what factors peculiar to the 1988 elections led turnout to be so low in that year.

1. INTRODUCTION

The post-1960 decline in voter turnout in U.S. presidential elections has been analyzed extensively by Teixeira (1992) and others. The election of 1984 was the first since 1960 to show an increase from the preceding presidential year, but this small rise was followed in 1988 by a record low. The 1992 election, however, saw a return to 1970s-level participation, with 55.9% of the voting age population casting ballots, compared to only 50.1% in 1988. Whether this increase was temporary, or indicative of a counter-trend, depends in large part on whether higher turnout was a product of election-specific factors such as Ross Perot's candidacy, or of more permanent changes such as the trend toward easier voter registration.

Related to these issues is that of whether higher turnout added to Clinton's margin of victory. If the 1992 turnout signalled a trend, and if Democrats really do benefit from higher participation at the expense of Republicans, the prospects of Democratic candidates in future races may be improved. Evidence is mixed, however, on whether higher-turnout elections have in the past have actually favored Democrats on balance (Erikson, 1995; Radcliff, 1995, 1994; DeNardo, 1980; Tucker and Vedlitz, 1986).

This paper explores the possible role in accounting for the turnout rise of several factors commonly cited both before and after the 1992 election as positive influences on participation rates. Attention is focused primarily on the Perot candidacy, the recession, MTV's 'Rock the Vote' campaign targeted at young people, and new 'motor voter' provisions adopted by many states making it easier to register. Curtis Gans, director of the Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, claimed that 'the entire increase in participation can be traced to Ross Perot's candidacy' (Newsday, November 10, 1992). Patrick Lippert, then executive director of 'Rock the Vote,' boasted after the election that 'two million more young people voted' (Washington Post, January 19, 1993, C3) as a result of the MTV-sponsored campaign to raise turnout among the young, who

historically in the U.S. have voted at very low rates. This paper explores whether the turnout rise can be statistically explained by these factors.

2. METHODOLOGY

Several of these factors can be analyzed using state-level data on turnout. Using a pooled time-series, cross-section model of turnout in presidential elections over the 1976-92 period permits tests of the impact of Perot's candidacy, motor voter, the recession, and other variables alleged to have helped produce the rise in voter participation. This model controls for 'resource' variables such as education and income included in many turnout studies (e.g., Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993), and 'mobilization' variables such as the presence of Senate and gubernatorial races on the ballot (Caldeira, Patterson, and Markko, 1985; Boyd, 1986).

Time-series, cross-section data also permit the use of fixed state and year effects. In models with fixed state effects, coefficients are estimated exploiting only within-state variation over time. Fixed state effects control for important otherwise unmeasurable turnout determinants varying substantially across states but very little over time, which may be correlated with the variables of interest. These models are far more useful for testing hypotheses regarding variables exhibiting large variation over time -- such as the Perot vote share, unemployment, and motor voter programs that are the focus of this analysis -- as opposed to variables such as registration closing date and demographic characteristics, which change relatively little over the 1976-92 period. (See Stimson, 1985, for further explanation of fixed-effects models.)

Table 1 reports results from these tests of state-level turnout. Weighted least squares (with voting-age population as the weight variable) is used to correct for heteroskedasticity, as the error variance in state-level turnout models is found to be significantly and inversely correlated with voting-age population in tests using OLS.

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[TABLE 1 HERE]

The major 'resource' variable, percent of the over-25 population with a high-school diploma, is positively and significantly associated with turnout in Table 1. Each 3-percentage point rise in the diploma rate is associated with a turnout rise of 1 percentage point. Increases in per capita income also increase state turnout. Increases in the number of recent movers, as measured by the percentage of residents living at their current address less than 5 years, are associated with reduced turnout, as expected, but this effect is also not significant. Similarly, increases in the percentage of adults who are less than 25 years old lower turnout, but not significantly so.[i]

Turnout is nearly 2 percentage points higher on average (significant at .05) when there is a gubernatorial race on the ballot. The presence of a Senate race on the ballot has a much smaller and insignificant effect. These results are both consistent with those of Boyd (1986), who uses survey data.

Among registration-law variables, the adoption of mail-in registration is associated with a nearly 2-percentage-point rise in turnout. Registration closing date has the anticipated negative sign but is not significant.

Limited variation over time within states in the demographic variables, and in registration closing date, may be responsible for their lack of statistical significance. Variation over time is very high, however, in the variables tested in Table 1 which are alleged to have played a role in the turnout rise, making the fixed-effects model an appropriate one for testing their turnout impacts. These factors include the Perot candidacy, the recession, motor voter, term limit initiatives, and election closeness, which are considered in turn below. Evidence from Voter Research and Surveys (VRS), the National Elections Studies (NES), the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, and other data sources will be used to supplement the state-level results in Table 1, in considering the effects of 'Rock the Vote' and other factors.

Before turning to this evidence, it is instructive to examine the year effects estimated from

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the state-level model. (The coefficients for the state and year dummy variables are not reported in the table for reasons of space.) Controlling for the variables included in Table 1 -- which includes most of the factors idiosyncratic to the 1992 election and alleged to account for the turnout increase -- there remains an unexplained gap of more than 4 percentage points between turnout in 1988 and 1992:

Year	Estimate	Std. error
1976	5.89	2.45
1980	3.42	2.12
1984	1.78	1.65
1988	-4.16	1.27
1992	0.00 (reference year)	

Thus, accounting for Perot, term limits, motor voter, the recession, and state-level closeness, about 4.2 percentage points of the 6-point rise from 1988 to 1992 remains unexplained. The pattern among four of these year-dummy coefficients is consistent with the gradual downward trend observed since the 1960s. The 1988 value is an outlier, however, suggesting that a portion of the 6-point rise in 1992 relative to 1988 may be due to factors idiosyncratic to the 1988 election. This finding is consistent with the results presented below, in which the various factors peculiar to the 1992 election are dismissed one by one as important sources of the turnout rise. Where the data permit, attempts are made below (although with very limited success) to identify possible culprits in the low turnout of 1988. The mystery of low 1988 turnout will remain mostly unexplained.

3. THE PEROT CANDIDACY

From the perspective of spatial voting models in which greater distances between candidate positions and voters' ideal points are associated with increased abstention, Perot's or any other third-party candidacy can be expected to increase turnout. History suggests that the turnout impact of a third-party candidacy is very modest. Turnout was lower in 1968 than in 1964, despite a much

closer election and the fact that George Wallace's candidacy was popular enough to actually win several states (unlike Perot's). Similarly, the downward trend in turnout continued in 1980, despite John Anderson's highly visible presence in the campaign. Rosenstone et al. (1993) report regression results showing that major third-party candidacies in the 20th century have not on balance been associated with higher turnout rates.

Perot's candidacy, however, was popularly believed to have attracted a different kind of voter -- namely disillusioned and cynical persons who would have otherwise sat out the election -- from other recent third-party candidates. Among respondents in the 1992 NES indicating a preference for Perot in post-election interviews, 54% agreed that 'quite a few' government officials are crooked, compared to only 39% of the remaining respondents. Trust in government showed similar differences, with 79% of Perot supporters, and only 60% of others, replying that government officials could be trusted only 'some of the time' or 'never' (the other choices were 'always' or 'most of the time').

Survey evidence provides little support, however, for the belief that there is a large pool of eligible voters who abstain out of a disgust with politics. In most past elections, NES respondents who believe that government officials are crooked, or that they can't be trusted, are no less likely to vote than other respondents (Miller and Traugott, 1989, p. 308), even when other determinants of turnout are accounted for. If the conventional wisdom is wrong and there is in fact very little disgust-based abstention, Perot's candidacy should not have been expected to attract sizeable numbers of new voters.

There are some modest indications of a mobilization of the disaffected in 1992 relative to 1988, however. Among 'low-trust' NES respondents to the 1988 NES, 66.6% reported having voted as opposed to 73.9% of the remainder. This gap narrows in the 1992 NES: the 74.9% self-reported turnout of low-trust respondents nearly matches the 76.6% reported by other respondents. The 8.3 percentage point turnout increase among low-trust respondents from one

election to the next is three times larger than the 2.7 point rise among high-trust respondents. Assuming that the **difference** in the increase between the two groups is entirely attributable to Perot (i.e., that turnout of both low-trust and high-trust respondents would have risen by the same 2.7 percentage points if Perot had not run), a roughly 3.5-point rise in turnout -- or over one-half of the total increase -- could be credited to Perot's candidacy (5.6% of the 63.1% of respondents indicating they trusted government officials only 'sometimes' or 'never' in 1992 -- an increase from only 50.4% in the 1988 NES).

More direct evidence of Perot's impact on turnout is available. In exit polls conducted by VRS, 14% of Perot voters when asked their second choice indicated they would have abstained from the presidential contest had Perot not been on the ballot. This estimate implies a turnout increase of about 1.5 percentage points (Perot voters were 18.9% of all voters, and voters were 56% of the voting-age population: .14 x .189 x .56 = .0149).

Voter self-reports cannot be accepted uncritically, however. Perot supporters may have been merely demonstrating their loyalty by claiming to find other candidates unacceptable, biasing the Perot effect upward. Also, estimates from this survey question neglect 'external effects': it is not only the Perot voters themselves who might have been attracted to the polls by his candidacy, but also Clinton and Bush supporters whose interest in this highly-competitive race was heightened by Perot's candidacy.

State-level variations in turnout and the Perot vote share can provide more objective evidence regarding Perot's impact on turnout. To the extent that interest and competitiveness effects of Perot's candidacy vary by state, these effects can be captured in a state-level turnout regression. While turnout was much higher in 1992 in states with strong support for Perot, these mostly-Western states have long had higher turnout rates than the (mostly-Southern) states where Perot ran poorly. A more appropriate test then regresses the *difference* in turnout by state from 1988 to 1992 on the Perot vote share; this procedure implicitly controls for regional and other

(largely) time-invariant effects. This test shows that each 1 percentage point rise in Perot's share is associated with a small and insignificant increase in turnout:

$$\text{TURN92 - TURN88} = 4.25 + .102(\text{PEROT}) \quad R^2 = .05$$

The .102 coefficient, multiplied by Perot's 18.9% national vote share, implies a turnout impact of about 2 percentage points. But, with a standard error of .064, the Perot coefficient is not significantly different from zero.

Finally, the Perot share was included in the pooled time-series cross-section model of state-level turnout for the 1976-92 period, in Table 1, which controls for numerous other turnout influences. Values for PEROT for all states for all elections prior to 1992 are all set equal to zero. The PEROT coefficient is actually negative, although not statistically significant.

Most of the estimates derived from various procedures and data sources thus provide little support for the proposition that Perot's candidacy was the primary factor in raising turnout in the '92 election. This conclusion is consistent with that of Rosenstone et al. (1993), who report that Perot supporters among respondents in the 1992 NES were no more likely to vote or to participate in the campaign than were non-supporters, and that Perot's campaign had personally contacted less than 3% of the electorate.

Nevertheless, it is possible that Perot's candidacy influenced the **outcome** of the presidential election. Any 'direct' effects on the Clinton-Bush vote distribution were minor, if the exit polls can be believed: Perot voters split almost evenly between Clinton (38%) and Bush (37%) when asked their second choice. 'Indirect' effects of Perot's candidacy on the candidate choices of the 80% of voters who chose Clinton or Bush are more uncertain: Perot may have changed the dynamics of the race by focusing primarily on Bush's rather than Clinton's weaknesses.

4. THE RECESSION

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A sluggish economy was widely credited in the media for stimulating interest in the election, and for playing a role in the turnout rise. As with the case of third-party candidacies, history suggests skepticism regarding voter participation effects of recession. Turnout fell in 1980 relative to 1976, despite a third major candidacy and a national unemployment rate of 7.5% -- identical to the fall 1992 jobless rate.

Moreover, Rosenstone (1982) has found a _negative_ effect of unemployment on turnout in a U.S. time-series model of elections from 1948-80: a 1-point rise in the short-term (< 5 weeks) unemployment rate reduces turnout by an estimated 2.8 percentage points. Using the total unemployment rate, however, Rosenstone obtains a smaller and statistically insignificant coefficient.

The 'unemployment rate' variable in Table 1 is the total unemployment rate by state, averaged over the election year. Its coefficient indicates that a 1 percentage point rise in a state's total unemployment rate pushes up turnout by a statistically insignificant one-fourteenth of one percentage point. Applying this estimate to the country as a whole, the rise in the national unemployment rate from 5.4% in 1988 to 7.5% in 1992 implies a turnout increase of only one-seventh of a percentage point.

To the extent the recession had little or no impact on turnout, Clinton's support was not dependent on the participation of new voters registering economic discontent by voting against the incumbent. Any such turnout effects were doubtless dwarfed by the number of voters who would have turned out anyway, regardless of prevailing economic conditions, who switched their votes from Bush to another candidate because they blamed him for the recession.

Clinton rather than Perot appears to have been the chief beneficiary of recession-related discontent with Bush's performance. Clinton's vote share is positively correlated with state-level unemployment rates, but Perot's is not in simple cross-sectional regressions that also control for a

Southern regional dummy and percent black population. Exit polls from VRS found that 56% of unemployed respondents voted for Clinton, while Perot's 20% support among this group barely exceeded his overall performance.

5. MTV'S 'ROCK THE VOTE' Campaign

From exit polling of a random sample of voters in 1988 and 1992, coupled with U.S. Census data on the age distribution of the population, Voter Research and Surveys estimates that turnout for the 18-29 age group rose by 12% relative to 1988. Attributing the entire increase in turnout within this age group to MTV's campaign is highly suspect, however. While turnout among the young rose 12%, overall turnout rose by 9.5% (i.e., about 5 percentage points).

Even crediting the difference between these two increases to 'Rock the Vote' may be overly generous. Turnout in the 30-44 and 45-59 age groups rose by 11% and 12%, respectively; only for the oldest (60+) group was the turnout rise substantially lower (at 2%) than for the 18- to 29-year-olds. Furthermore, the increases for the 30-44 and 45-59 groups were from a larger base, as those groups -- unlike the young -- already voted at high rates. For example, a 12% increase from a base of about 40% turnout for young persons implies a 4.8 percentage-point increase, to 44.8. The same 12% rise from a base of 60% for middle-aged persons implies a 7.2 percentage-point rise, to 67.2% turnout.

This arithmetic indicates that the turnout rise in the under-30 category represented only about one-twelfth of the maximum possible rise, while the increase in the 45-59 category was nearly one-fifth of the maximum possible rise. While there were about 2 million more voters aged 18 to 29 in 1992 compared to 1988, by these estimates, this age group failed to pull its weight: it comprises over one-fourth of the voting age population, but accounted for only about one-sixth of the 12 million-plus total increase in turnout.

Among respondents to the 1992 NES aged 18-24, 53.8% reported having voted, versus a mere 44.3% in 1988. This increase exceeded that of respondents aged 25 and over, 72.3% of whom reported voting in 1988, compared to 77.5% in 1992. For respondents aged 18-29, the increase was from 50.0% to 61.1%, compared to a rise from 74.9% to 78.9% for respondents aged 30 and over. These figures are based on self-reports, however, while VRS estimates are based on comparing random samples of actual voters at the polls to known characteristics of the population.

Similarly, the Census Bureau's Current Population Surveys (CPS) for November 1988 and November 1992 shows larger increases in turnout for younger age groups, but these estimates are also based on self-reports, or the reports of family members (see Table A in Jennings, 1993). Perhaps 'Rock the Vote' succeeded in making young people more embarrassed to admit not having voted, but not in actually getting them to the polls.

Even if the assumption were made that the NES and CPS self-reports of turnout are more accurate than estimates based on exit polls, and this disproportionate increase in turnout among the young is attributable entirely to 'Rock the Vote,' the MTV-sponsored campaign would still account only for a tiny fraction of the nearly 6-point rise in the aggregate turnout rate. If the difference between the 6.6 percentage point increase in turnout among 18-24 year olds indicated in the Census figures and the 3.3% rise indicated for the other age groups combined were credited entirely to 'Rock the Vote,' that would account for only about 750,000 young voters -- far short of Lippert's claim of two million. Given the Census estimates of a total of nearly 114 million votes and of an overall turnout of 61.3%, three-quarters of a million votes represents less than one-half of one percentage point of turnout.

Even if the increase in 1992 turnout, relative to 1988, among young people is not simply an artifact of increased 'overreporting,' the increase may well be due to factors other than 'Rock the Vote.' The CPS data reported in Jennings (1993, Table A) suggest that 1988 was the real outlier, with only 36.2% of young people reporting that they voted in that year. By historical standards,

turnout in 1988 was abnormally low among the under-45 population, and was abnormally high in 1992 for **older** voters, according to this data.

Exit polls clearly indicate that Clinton's margin over Bush among young voters was much greater than his overall margin (see Table 2).   Any increase in turnout among the young may thus have contributed to his victory.   This outcome is ironic given that the campaign to place warning labels on music with offensive lyrics was led by Tipper Gore, the wife of Clinton's running mate, and that the inspiration for 'Rock the Vote' was the supposed threat of censorship represented by this campaign.

[TABLE 2 HERE]

6. THE SPREAD OF 'MOTOR VOTER' PROGRAMS

Perot's candidacy, the recession and 'Rock the Vote' are each election-specific variables that may be irrelevant for turnout levels in future elections.   Passage of the National Voter Registration Act (NVRA) in the spring of 1993, however, may represent a permanent upward force on turnout.

The NVRA is popularly known as the 'motor voter' bill, as its provision for registering voters at driver's license bureaus is widely expected to be its most effective feature -- as an analysis of such programs already in effect in many states has found (Knack, 1995).   Some version of the key motor voter provision was implemented in the majority of states between 1975 (Michigan was the first) and 1992. 'Active' versions of motor voter similar to that mandated by the NVRA had been implemented in 16 states by the 1992 election ('active' motor voter programs are those that specifically ask on the driver's license application, or that require agency clerks to request verbally, whether the applicant wishes to register to vote, while 'passive' programs typically make voter registration forms available on countertops or upon request by applicants, and are demonstrably less

effective in registering voters). The impact of motor voter can thus be estimated using the state-level model.

Several states and the District of Columbia adopted 'active' motor voter programs between the 1988 and 1992 elections.[ii] The recent spread of motor voter legislation at the state level is thus a fourth factor to include on a list of possible contributors to the 1992 turnout rise. Motor voter programs were implemented in every state before the 1996 election; any portion of the 1992 turnout rise that is attributable to motor voter will not only be permanent, but will be augmented by many more such programs.

Using data for the 1976-92 period, Knack (1995) shows that 'active' motor voter substantially raises registration rates, and raises turnout to a more modest degree (estimated turnout effects are larger for midterm than for presidential-year elections). That study introduces a 'duration'-based specification for motor voter, coded as the number of elections since implementation of a program. This specification allows motor voter's impact to increase with time, as more of a state's voting-age population has the opportunity to register when applying for a driver's license, or license renewal, the longer the program has been in effect. A simple dummy variable specification would underestimate the eventual impact of motor voter, by coding new programs the same as mature programs that have reached more drivers. The square of the duration term is also included in turnout equations, reflecting the fact that the marginal effect of time diminishes as eventually all driver's license renewal applicants will have had prior opportunities to register via motor voter.

Using the data from Knack (1995), the model in Table 1 includes these motor voter variables. Coefficients imply a slightly smaller impact on turnout than in Knack (1995), which did not include some of the other regressors used here.

The rise in 1992 turnout relative to that for 1988 may be attributable in part to the 'maturing' of motor voter programs already implemented in several states, and to the adoption of such

programs in other states subsequent to the 1988 election. A simulation exercise was used to estimate the rise in turnout attributable to these changes in registration programs. Presidential-year estimates for motor voter's impact were obtained from a state-level turnout model (similar to that of Table 1) for the 1976-88 elections. By multiplying the 1976-88 model coefficient estimates by the actual 1992 values for each variable and summing, predicted turnout rates for 1992 were generated. This procedure was duplicated substituting the 1988 values for the motor voter duration variables, generating predicted turnout rates on the (false) assumption that the presence and age of motor voter programs remained unchanged in 1992 from their 1988 values. The second, 'false' set of values was subtracted from the 'true' predicted rates to estimate the increase in turnout for each state attributable to the spread and maturation of motor voter programs. A weighted (by voting-age population) mean of these state impacts was computed to arrive at an overall estimate. Results of this simulation indicate that the introduction of new motor voter programs since the 1988 election, coupled with the maturing of programs that were in place but still relatively new as of the 1988 election, account for only about a one-seventh of a percentage point of the 1992 turnout.[iii]

Coefficients for the presidential-year model indicate an eventual average turnout impact of motor voter of less than 2 percentage points. Turnout estimates from a model pooling the presidential and midterm elections, or from one using OLS instead of WLS, are somewhat larger. Applying these larger estimates to the presidential-year data, motor voter would account for a larger increase in turnout, but still less than one percentage point.

Does motor voter help the Democrats, as Republican opponents of the NVRA in Congress feared? Evidence in Knack and White (1996) suggests at best a modest edge for the Democrats. Following implementation of motor voter, the proportion of registrants who register as independents rises significantly, but there is no shift in the Democrat-Republican balance in party registration. The percentage vote for Democratic presidential candidates rises by about two percentage points, however.

7. CLOSENESS

More competitive elections may attract higher turnout, either because individual voters think their votes are more likely to be decisive, or because organizations face heightened incentives to mobilize voters in close races. (See Foster, 1980, and Mueller, 1988, ch. 18 for summaries of the conflicting evidence on the closeness-turnout relationship.) The 1992 race was somewhat closer than the 1988 race: the electoral margin was 370 to 168 in the former, versus 426 to 112 in the latter election. The percentage margin for the popular vote was 5.6 points in 1992, compared to 7.8 in 1988. The margin in actual votes was 5.8 million in 1992 and 7.1 million in 1988.

The state-level model provides some modest support for the view that closeness matters for turnout. The coefficient on the 'vote margin' in Table 1 is negative and significant at the .05 level for a one-tailed test. The point estimate is small, however: a 1-million-vote increase in the margin -- larger than the voting-age population of many states -- reduces a state's turnout by only three-quarters of one percentage point. As the average state-level margin increased by only about 25,000 votes -- one-fortieth of a million -- from 1988 to 1992, the estimated impact on turnout from increased closeness is a tiny fraction of a percentage point.

Of course, estimates from state-level data do not capture national-level competitiveness effects. For example, regardless of the expected margin in one's state, one may perceive little incentive to vote if a landslide of other states for a particular candidate is anticipated. Also, some voters are either unaware of or do not understand the electoral college system; their decisions may be affected solely by national-level competitiveness and thus will not be reflected in a state-level margin regression coefficient. Analyses of survey data below will return to this dimension of the issue.

A casual look at the national time-series evidence also shows little indication of substantial

turnout effects of competitiveness. No closeness-related differences can be discerned in the general downward trend from 1960 to 1988. Turnout fell in 1968 from its 1964 level, despite the much closer race and a third-party candidate; turnout fell in 1976, relative to the 1972 landslide election, and turnout rose in 1984 -- a landslide year -- relative to 1980, which saw a closer race as well as a third-party candidate. Neither does the pattern of year-dummy coefficients in the state-level model show any relationship to the national vote margins (Table 1). The somewhat closer presidential race in 1992 relative to 1988 thus does not appear to have played a major role in the turnout increase.

8. TERM LIMIT INITIATIVES

An additional election-specific event to address is the term limit movement, which succeeded in placing initiatives on the ballot in 14 states -- and in winning approval of all of them. Conceivably, this issue helped to push up participation rates, as angry voters mobbed to the polls to voice their protest against politics-as-usual:

> More than 230 state issues ranging from term limits to mandatory health insurance and curbs on gay rights were on Tuesday's ballots. But none was as incendiary as the fire storm of demands for restrictions on the number of terms elected officials can serve. Not since citizen initiatives first appeared on state ballots in 1898 has an issue so galvanized Americans. (Time, Nov. 16, 1992, p. 22)

However, the 14 term limit states fail to show a significantly higher turnout rate than the other 37, either in simple cross-sectional tests, or in the time-series cross-sectional model of Table 1.

Was the Perot candidacy partially responsible for the 14-state sweep by term limit proponents? Perot conceivably inspired many alienated voters to go to the polls, aiding the throw-the-bums-out campaign.[iv] Little support is found for this thesis: among the 14 term limit states, there is a positive but moderate (.32) and insignificant correlation between the Perot vote share and the percentage of 'Yes' votes on term limitation.

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9. 'POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT'

Beginning with *The American Voter* (Campbell et. al., 1960), voting in elections has been identified with a particular set of political attitudes, as measured by indicators in the NES of psychological involvement in politics. Influential analyses of turnout decline have noted corresponding declines over time in some of these measures, which are significantly correlated cross-sectionally with turnout. Abramson and Aldrich (1982) attributed a major portion of the post-1960 turnout drop to a diminishing sense of political efficacy and strength of partisan identification. Teixeira (1987) has shown that having read newspaper articles about the political campaign is strongly correlated cross-sectionally with turnout, and that such newspaper reading has fallen over time. Comparisons of some of these involvement measures for 1992 and other years may similarly provide some insight into the 1992 turnout rise.

The most dramatic increases in 'involvement' as evidenced by the 1992 NES were in the number of respondents indicating they were 'very interested in the campaign' (from 27.8% to 38.8%; see Table 3) and who indicated they cared a lot about the outcome of the presidential race (61% to 74.8%). Sizeable increases also are shown in Table 3 in the sense of 'civic duty' to vote (as indicated by agreement with the statement that one should vote even if one doesn't care who wins) and in 'efficacy' (measured by agreement with the statement 'people like me have a say' in government. The percentages of respondents reporting that they were 'very interested' in the campaign and cared about the outcome were extraordinarily high not only relative to 1988, but from a historical perspective (see the time-series descriptive statistics of these items in Teixeira, 1992, pp. 41, 44). However, the wording of the 'care' question was changed between the 1988 and 1992 surveys, making it impossible to establish whether or not concern over election outcomes really increased among Americans. Specifically, respondents in 1988 were asked 'would you say you

personally care a good deal which party wins the presidential election.' In 1988 'who' was substituted for 'which party.'

[TABLE 3 HERE]

The role of these attitudinal/involvement measures is investigated in Tables 3 and 4. A turnout regression for the pooled 1988 and 1992 samples was run, using a set of demographic variables commonly included in such analyses, to generate estimates of the effects of the attitudinal measures.[v]

[TABLE 4 HERE]

Using these estimates from Table 4, in conjunction with data on changes in the means of these variables from 1988 to 1992 in the first two columns of Table 3, the sources of the turnout rise are decomposed in the third column of Table 3. Increases in the 'care' item alone account for a 2.1 percentage-point rise in turnout, with the interest item accounting for an additional 1 point, and civic duty and efficacy together adding 3/4 of a point. Declines in partisanship and newspaper reading[vi] together suppressed turnout by one-half of a percentage point. Demographic variables individually and collectively account for very little of the turnout change, as may be expected over a mere four-year period.

The bulk of the 6-point turnout rise can thus be 'explained' by increases in measures of psychological involvement in politics that are correlated with turnout. Explaining behavioral involvement (turnout) in terms of psychological involvement, however,

> comes close to being true by definition...*The American Voter* and its trailing literature do not give us an explicit theory of political motivation that could serve to account for voter turnout/abstention below a surface level (Dennis, 1991, p. 26).

As Fiorina (1981) warns: 'Statistical explanation is not identical to substantive explanation.'

From a theoretic standpoint, there is something profoundly unsatisfying about attributing turnout trends to variations in sense of efficacy, partisanship, and reading newspaper articles about the campaign. What accounts for these variations? As Teixeira, one of the foremost practitioners

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of this approach to turnout change, has acknowledged more recently, 'this type of analysis does not reveal where these proximate factors came from...' (1992, ch. 2). To the extent that variables such as heightened interest, concern over the outcome, and efficacy played a role in the turnout rise, improvement in these 'attitudes' is apparently largely unrelated to Perot's candidacy, 'Rock the Vote,' the recession, and term limits -- as none of these phenomena can be strongly linked to turnout.

If 'Rock the Vote' stimulated interest among young people in the political campaign, presumably there would be evidence in the survey data. In fact, there is a sizeable increase in the proportion of under-30 NES respondents who claimed to have been 'very much interested' in the campaign and who cared about the outcome. However, these 12.7 and 16.6 percentage-point rises in interest and concern respectively are nearly matched by 11.0 and 13.8-point rises among *all* NES respondents (Table 3). Civic duty rose slightly more for the under-30 group, but efficacy rose less among young people than in the whole NES sample, and strength of partisan identification fell more for the young than for the over-30 group (Table 3).

The closeness issue can also be re-examined with the benefit of NES survey data. In 1992, 79% of the NES sample expected the presidential election to be close, compared to only 70% in 1988 (Table 3). This survey measure is sometimes uncorrelated with turnout in the NES, for example in 1984. Perceived closeness is significantly correlated with turnout in both 1988 and 1992, however, with a coefficient in the pooled regression of 5.22% (Table 4). Employing this coefficient as an upper-bound estimate of the closeness-turnout partial correlation, an increase in perceived closeness can account for up to a one-half percentage point rise in turnout in this model from 1988 to 1992. This estimate does not materially alter the conclusion reached above that a closer election in 1992 was responsible for only a small portion of the turnout rise.

The NES also asks whether respondents expect the presidential contest to be close within their own state. The proportion expecting close contests within their state rose only from .59 to .61 from the 1988 to the 1992 survey. The point estimate for the impact of this variable when added to

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the Table 4 model is a statistically insignificant .5, only one-tenth that of the NES item measuring perceived closeness in the race at the national level. This evidence is consistent with that obtained from the state-level model.

11. 'STAKES' IN THE ELECTION

The Downsian voting model as formalized by Tullock (1967, ch. 7) and by Riker and Ordeshook (1968) has been interpreted as implying that the greater the perceived difference between the two candidates, the greater the incentive to vote. As Downs (1957, ch. 13) himself originally noted, the infinitesimal probability that an individual voter is decisive suggests that these 'instrumental' benefits will not exceed the costs of voting, so that a rational choice framework is consistent with the decision to vote only if something like 'civic duty' or other private benefits to voting are introduced into the model. Nevertheless, greater differences between the two candidates may increase the incentives to vote as *perceived* by voters with an exaggerated subjective probability of being decisive. Or, greater differences between the two candidates may generate greater mobilization efforts on the part of groups (including party organizations) with stakes in the outcome that are collectively large enough to justify expending resources on invoking group participatory norms (Uhlaner, 1989).

Distances between an individual's position in policy space and those of the candidates may also influence turnout decisions. 'Alienation' may lead some voters to abstain, as neither candidate comes sufficiently close to their preferences to motivate them to go to the polls. Alternatively, some people may be more likely to vote if they fear victory by a particular candidate: aversion to a candidate perceived as dangerous may motivate their participation. Measures representing each of these three concepts were created from NES ideology items which asked the respondent to place him- or herself and each of the major candidates on a 7-point scale ranging from extremely liberal

to extremely conservative. For the candidate differential measure, the distances between Bush and Dukakis (1988) and between Bush and Clinton (1992), as perceived by the respondent, were calculated. For the alienation measure, the distance between the respondent and his/her most-favored candidate (including Perot where applicable) was calculated. For the aversion measure, the distance between the respondent and the candidate farthest away in issue space (including Perot where applicable) was calculated.[vii]   The three measures were added to the regression model of Table 4, with estimated coefficients and standard errors (OLS model) reported below:[viii]

Variable	Coefficient	Std. error
Candidate difference	1.71	0.70
'Alienation'	-.17	0.78
'Aversion'	-.09	0.79

Only the candidate differential measure is statistically significant and in the hypothesized direction. The aversion measure fails to show the hypothesized sign.

Changes in the means of these three measures between 1988 and 1992 in the NES are reported in Table 3. Even with Perot in the race, NES respondents on average were no closer to their preferred candidate in issue space in 1992 than in 1988, using this one-dimensional issue space of political ideology. On average, respondents were 1.06 places away from their preferred candidate on the ideology scale in both elections (Table 3). Thus, there is no evidence that 'alienation' as defined in terms of distance from voter's ideal points diminished from one election to the other, or that alienation-based abstention exists in the first place. These findings undermine the basic rationale behind the belief that Perot's candidacy should have increased turnout.

Perceived differences between Bush and the Democratic candidate actually declined slightly from 1988 to 1992. Despite Clinton's attempt to define himself as a New Democrat, his mean ideology score (3.19) was to the left of Dukakis' score (3.24) for 1988. However, Bush was moved

left by slightly more himself (to 5.05 in 1992 from 5.11 in 1988). Since candidate differences did not widen in 1992 relative to 1988, they cannot account for any of the difference in turnout across the two elections (Table 3).

'Aversion' increased somewhat from 1988 to 1992 (Table 3). This modest rise had no influence on turnout, however, as aversion is uncorrelated with turnout.[ix]

12. SUMMARY

Several intuitively plausible explanations for the 1992 turnout increase have been examined here, with each shown to have at best modest impacts, using various data sources and methods. In a state-level turnout model controlling for most of these variables, an unexplained gap between 1988 and 1992 turnout of more than four percentage points remained. Using point estimates from the Table 1 model, higher unemployment, the spread of motor voter, and the Perot candidacy collectively account for only a fraction of one percentage point of the turnout increase.

Year-dummy coefficients suggest 1988 may be the real outlier, rather than 1992. The conclusion that the turnout rise is attributable primarily to factors peculiar to the 1988 election is consistent with the evidence presented here on the weak impacts of the Perot candidacy, 'Rock the Vote,' and other factors specific to the 1992 elections which were popularly believed to be responsible for the turnout rise.

Survey evidence suggests few clues as to what might have been special about 1988, however, and even provides some indication that 1992 was the true outlier in some respects. The percentage of respondents who were 'very interested' in the campaign in 1992 was 38.8%, the highest since the 38.9% of 1968 (Teixeira, 1992). The 27.8% of 1980 fell only a little short of 1984's 28.4% and 1980's 29.8%.

The percentage of respondents claiming to 'care' about the election outcome soared to a

record high of 74.8%.   The previous high was only 65.5% in 1964, and 1988's 61.0% exceeded the values for 1972, 1976, and 1980.   Much of 1992's dramatic rise in the number of respondents concerned over the outcome is likely due to the change in question wording, however.

Rosenstone et al. (1993) statistically explain most of the 1992 rise in turnout relative to 1988, largely in terms of variables representing psychological involvement (although they fail to note the change in question wording of the 'care' item.)   This 'involvement'-based explanation is more question-begging than illuminating, however.   Why was concern over the outcome higher, when the ideological distance between the candidates was no greater?   Why did interest and efficacy increase, and how did they raise turnout, given the difficulty in tracing turnout effects to Perot's candidacy, to the recession, or to 'Rock the Vote'?   Survey research has been much more successful at measuring attitudes than in linking these attitudes to campaign- and election-related events.

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Table 1
State-Level Turnout, 1976-92

Variable	Coefficient (std. error)
percent with high school diploma (> 25 years old)	0.330** (0.096)
log of per capita income	7.088* (3.922)
percent living at residence < 5 years	-0.233 (0.172)
percent adults who are 18-24 years old	-0.810 (0.465)
Governor's race on ballot	1.724* (0.866)
Senate race on ballot	0.204 (0.230)
mail-in registration	1.886* (1.014)
registration closing date	-0.053 (0.057)
Perot vote share	-0.026 (0.065)
unemployment rate	0.072 (0.101)
motor voter duration	0.606* (0.343)
square of motor voter duration	-0.048 (0.040)
"passive" motor voter	0.476 (0.417)
vote margin (in 100,000s)	-0.075* (0.039)
term limit initiative on ballot	0.369 (0.612)

Sample size is 250. R^2 is .96. State and year dummy coefficients not shown. A * (**) indicates significance at .05 (.01) for one-tailed tests. Note that R^2 in this weighted least squares model does not have its usual interpretation.

Table 2
VRS Exit Polls: Vote Choice by Age

Group	Clinton	Bush	Perot
18-29	44%	34	22
30-44	42	38	20
45-59	41	40	19
60+	50	38	12
1st-time voters	48	30	22

Table 3
Decomposition of Turnout Change, 1988 and 1992 NES

Sample	All			< 30		
	Means		Turnout Diff.	Means		Turnout Diff.
	1988	1992	88-92	1988	1992	88-92
voted (%)	69.7	75.4	---	49.5	61.1	---
very interested in campaign (%)	27.8	38.8	1.01	16.8	29.5	1.17
care about outcome (%)	61.0	74.8	2.11	52.0	68.6	2.53
read about campaign in newspaper (%)	48.6	45.9	-0.29	34.6	31.2	-0.34
expect close election (%)	69.7	79.1	0.49	64.8	79.8	0.78
"strong" Democrat or Republican (%)	31.7	29.4	-0.19	24.4	18.7	-0.48
should vote even if don't care who wins (%)	37.1	41.2	0.37	27.7	33.6	0.54
people like me have a say (%)	49.9	57.5	0.38	49.9	55.2	0.26
Dem/Rep candidates' ideology gap (7-pt. scale)	2.73	2.57	-0.27	2.49	2.47	-0.03
Respondent/preferred candidate gap (7-pt. scale)	1.06	1.06	0.00	1.11	1.15	-0.01
Respondent/least-preferred cand. gap (7-pt. scale)	2.98	3.15	-0.02	2.80	3.17	-0.03
regular churchgoer (%)	36.0	37.3	0.07	24.2	24.8	0.03
college degree (%)	19.5	22.9	0.27	14.1	16.4	0.18
high school diploma (%)	76.6	78.7	0.34	81.7	87.3	0.90
years at residence	10.9	11.3	0.13	4.6	6.4	0.73
age in years	45.1	45.7	0.13	24.5	24.6	0.02
log of household income	10.1	10.0	-0.26	9.9	9.9	-0.16
registration closing date (days)	25.6	26.2	-0.29	25.4	26.7	-0.60

Table 4
NES Turnout, 1988 and 1992 Pooled

Independent Variable	Coefficient (std. error)
intercept	-30.26 (7.34)
very interested in campaign	9.22 (1.41)
care about outcome of presidential election	15.26 (1.46)
read about campaign in newspaper	10.76 (1.32)
expect close election	5.22 (1.44)
"strong" Democrat or Republican	8.45 (1.39)
should vote even if don't care about election outcome	9.08 (1.28)
people like me have a say about what govt. does	5.00 (1.29)
regular churchgoer	5.33 (1.30)
high school diploma	16.04 (1.71)
college degree	7.95 (1.60)
years at current residence	0.39 (0.06)
age	0.21 (0.04)
log of household income	5.30 (0.68)
registration closing date	-0.45 (0.07)

The sample size is 3702.   The adjusted R^2 is .29.   All coefficients are significantly different from 0 at the .001 level.

i. Data sources are described fully in Knack (1995).

ii. States included IA, MT, NC, NJ, OR, WA, and WV. North Carolina reinstated an active program that had lapsed under Republican administration. Iowa's did not apply to renewals, only to new applicants. Reclassifying Iowa as non-motor voter because of this limitation in the program does not substantially alter any of the findings reported here. Data sources for motor voter programs are described in Knack (1995).

iii. A simulation using motor voter coefficients estimated from models updated to include the 1992 data (i.e., from results in Table 1) yields similar effects from motor voter.

iv. See <u>Congressional Quarterly</u>, November 7, 1992, p. 3593. In the 1992 NES, more term limit supporters than opponents favored Perot (16.7% to 13.1%), believed many politicians were crooked (43.7% to 34.6%), and had low trust in government (66.2% to 55.8%); all three differences are significant at .01 for 1-tailed tests.

v. Nonlinear specifications for age and length of residence change the results surprisingly little, so were dropped in favor of more readily-interpretable linear specifications. Income is the (log of the) midpoint of the relevant household income interval. Results from logit models are very similar; OLS results are presented here for ease of interpreting regression coefficients. The dependent variable is in percentages, so the coefficient on 'high school diploma,' for example, indicates that graduating from high school

is associated with a 16-percentage-point increase in the likelihood of voting.

vi. The decline in newspaper reading about the campaign is due to fewer people reading daily newspapers. Among respondents who read a newspaper daily, attention to articles about the campaign was actually substantially higher in 1992 than in 1988.

vii. All three variables are positive for every respondent, as they are measured in distances along the 7-point scale. For voters, the preferred candidate is the one they reported voting for. Nonvoters were asked which candidate they preferred.

viii. This regression contained only 1923 observations, as many respondents could not place themselves on this 7-point scale, or could do so only upon further prompting (those cases were dropped as being insufficiently reliable).

ix. One might expect that the 'care' item is highly collinear with these three 'stakes' variables. Correlations of each with the 'care' item are all very modest, and deleting 'care' from the turnout regression changes coefficients for these three variables only trivially. As a dichotomous variable, 'care' may be an insufficiently fine measure to capture much of the variation in the three interval-scale 'stakes' variables. 'Care' also likely encompasses character and competency evaluations, as well as policy preferences not captured by the ideology scale.