



# *Electoral Engineering & Turnout*

Pippa Norris ~ UNDP

Democratic Governance

Details: [www.undp.org/governance](http://www.undp.org/governance)



# Structure

## I. Theoretical framework:

- Multilevel model of electoral turnout

## II. Research design & evidence:

- Macro-level data worldwide - International IDEA
- Micro-level – CSES Module 1

## III. Conclusions:

- 'Rules matter' for turnout, with direct and indirect effects
- Important for public policy reforms
- Yet their impact is constrained by levels of societal modernization, the role of mobilizing agencies, cultural attitudes, and structural resources

# I. Theoretical framework





# Context: why of interest?

- Renewed interest in the limits and capacities of 'electoral engineering' and rule design
  - For transitional and consolidating democracies
  - For established democracies debating electoral reform
    - Major revision Eg NZ, UK, Italy, Israel, Japan, Venezuela etc.
    - Modifications of procedures Eg e-voting, voter registration procedures, etc.
- But can electoral engineering boost turnout in the short-term?



# Context: why of interest?

- Increased popular concern about turnout as an indicator of the health of representative democracy
  - Yet no consistent fall in turnout across all established democracies since 1945 (*Democratic Phoenix*)
  - Turnout *has* eroded modestly in established democracy during the last decade: reasons unclear
  - Alternative types of activism have expanded (demonstrations, consumer politics, petitions etc)

## II: Research design & evidence



AP



AP





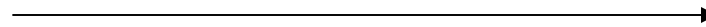


# Research design

Classify  
constitutions, laws,  
procedures



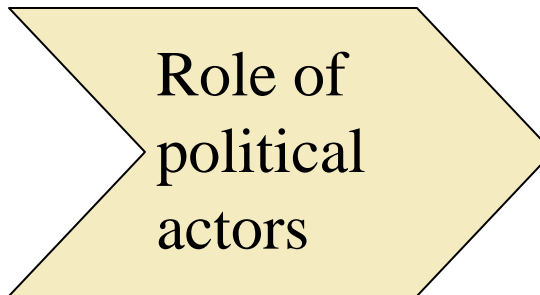
Compare  
formal  
rules



Analyze aggregate data  
and cross-national  
election surveys



Compare  
behavior of  
citizens

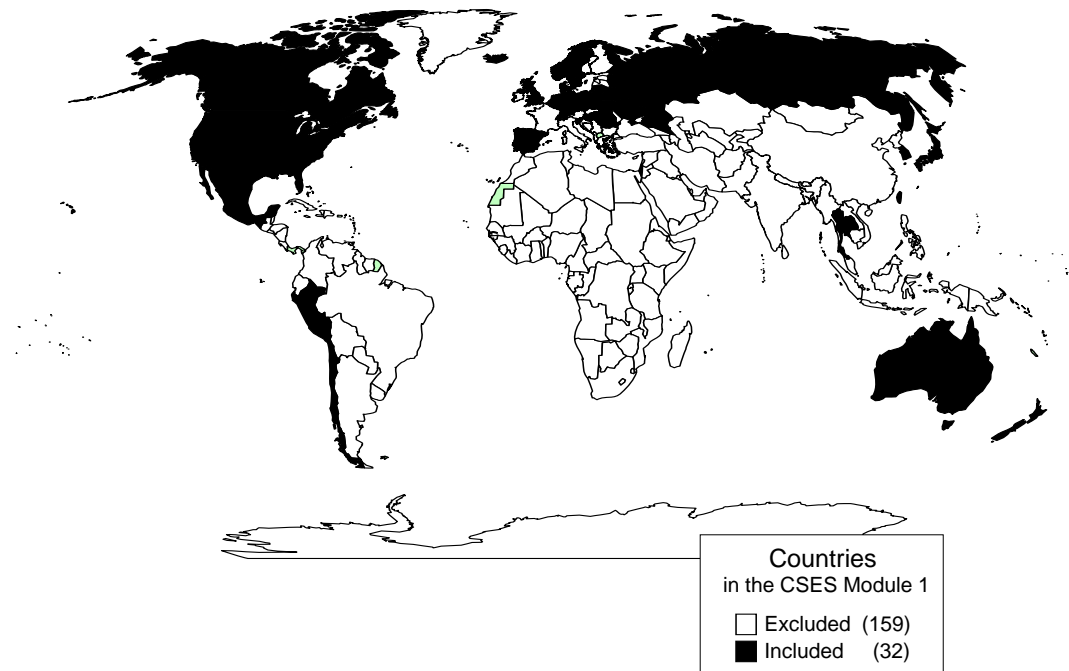


*Party campaigns,  
candidate strategies,  
electoral appeals, party  
organizations and  
members*



# Evidence

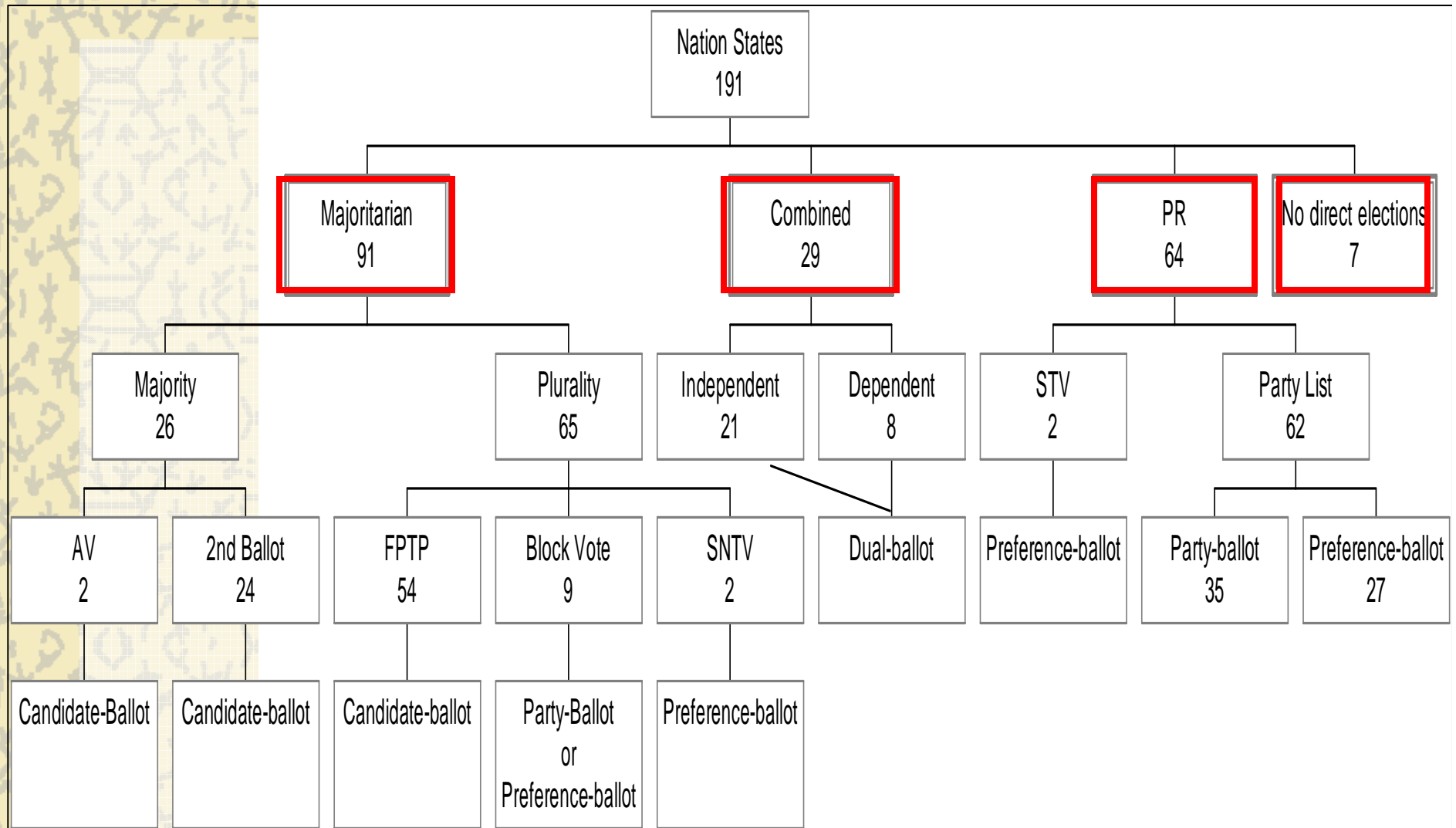
- Macro-level turnout worldwide: International IDEA database *Voter Turnout Since 1945* [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)
- Micro-level: CSES dataset: surveys of 32 nations in Module 1 (1996-2001)







# Electoral Systems Worldwide



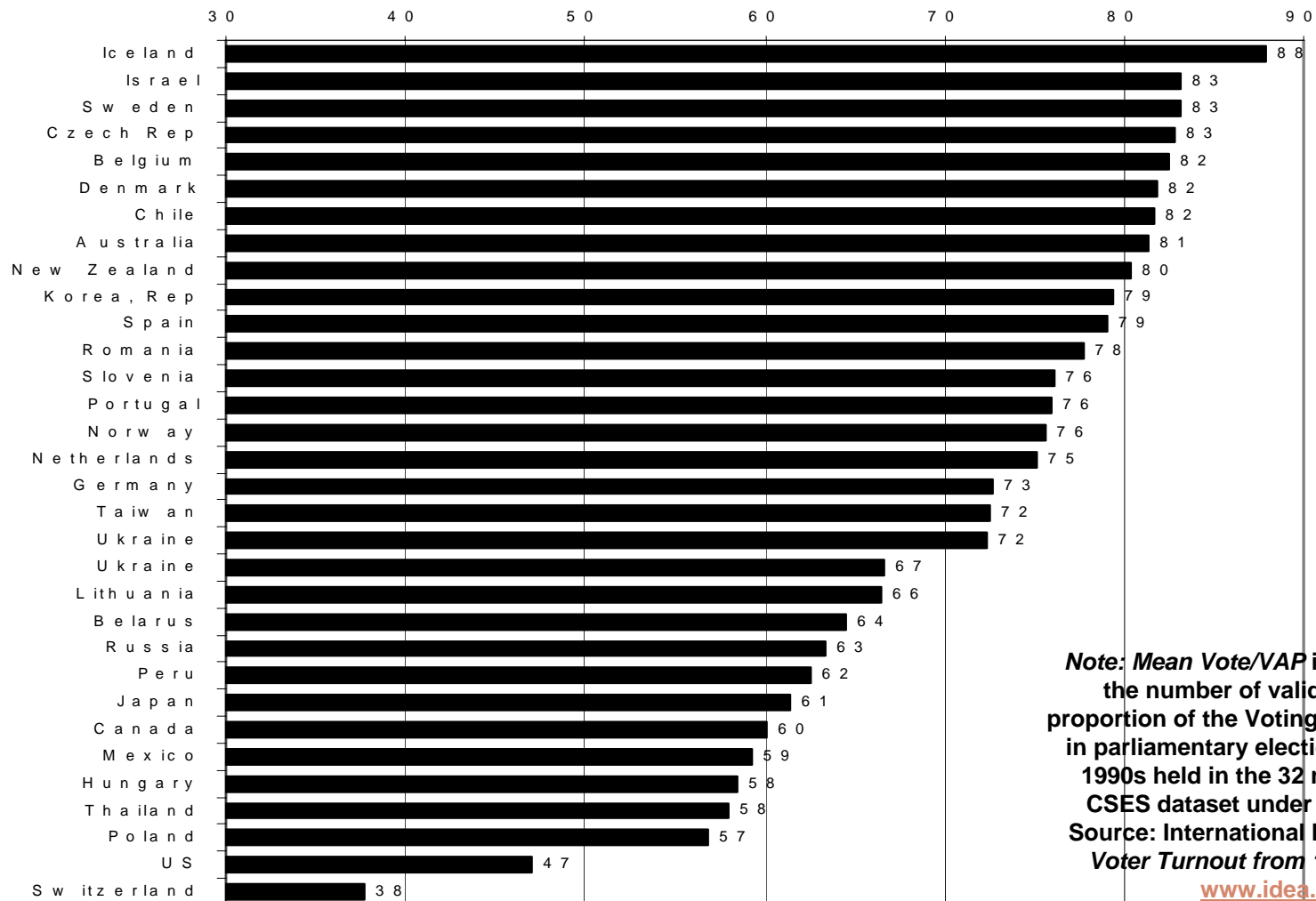


# CSES Elections (37)

Majoritarian electoral systems (14 elections)	Combined electoral systems (10 elections)	Proportional electoral systems (15 elections)
<i>Legislative</i> Australia (1996) Britain (1997) Canada (1997) United States (1996)	Germany (1998) (l,c) Hungary (1998) (l,c) Japan (1996) (l,c) Korea, Republic of (2000) (c)	Belgium (1999) Czech Republic (1996) Denmark (1998) Iceland (1999) Israel (1996)
<i>Presidential</i> Lithuania (2001) Chile (1999) Israel (1996) (i) Lithuania (1997) Mexico (2000) Peru (2000) Romania (1996) Russia (2000) Taiwan (1996) United States (1996)	Mexico (1997) (c) New Zealand (1996) (l,c) Russia (1999) (l) Taiwan (1996) (c) Thailand (2001) (c) Ukraine (1998) (l)	Netherlands, The (1998) Norway (1997) Peru (2000) Poland (1997) Portugal (2002) Romania (1996) Slovenia (1996) Spain (1996, 2000) Sweden (1998) Switzerland (1999).



# Voting Turnout, 1990s



**Note:** *Mean Vote/VAP* is measured as the number of valid votes as a proportion of the Voting Age Population in parliamentary elections during the 1990s held in the 32 nations in the CSES dataset under comparison.  
**Source:** International IDEA database  
*Voter Turnout from 1945 to 2000.*

[www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)

### III: Results





# Electoral systems

Source: Calculated from International IDEA database *Voter Turnout from 1945 to 2000*.

Type of Electoral System	Mean Vote/VAP 1990s	Mean Vote/Reg 1990s	N.
<b>MAJORITARIAN</b>			
Alternative Vote	65.5	92.9	2
2 <sup>nd</sup> Ballot	58.5	65.0	21
First-Past-The-Post	61.2	67.7	43
Single Non-Transferable Vote	52.6	59.8	2
Block Vote	56.5	70.9	9
<b>All majoritarian</b>	<b>60.4</b>	<b>68.3</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>COMBINED</b>			
Combined-Dependent	66.6	71.9	7
Combined-Independent	63.5	69.0	19
<b>All combined</b>	<b>64.0</b>	<b>70.4</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>PROPORTIONAL</b>			
List PR	70.0	74.7	59
Single Transferable Vote	83.4	81.7	2
<b>All PR Systems</b>	<b>70.0</b>	<b>74.6</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>All</b>	<b>65.0</b>	<b>70.8</b>	<b>164</b>



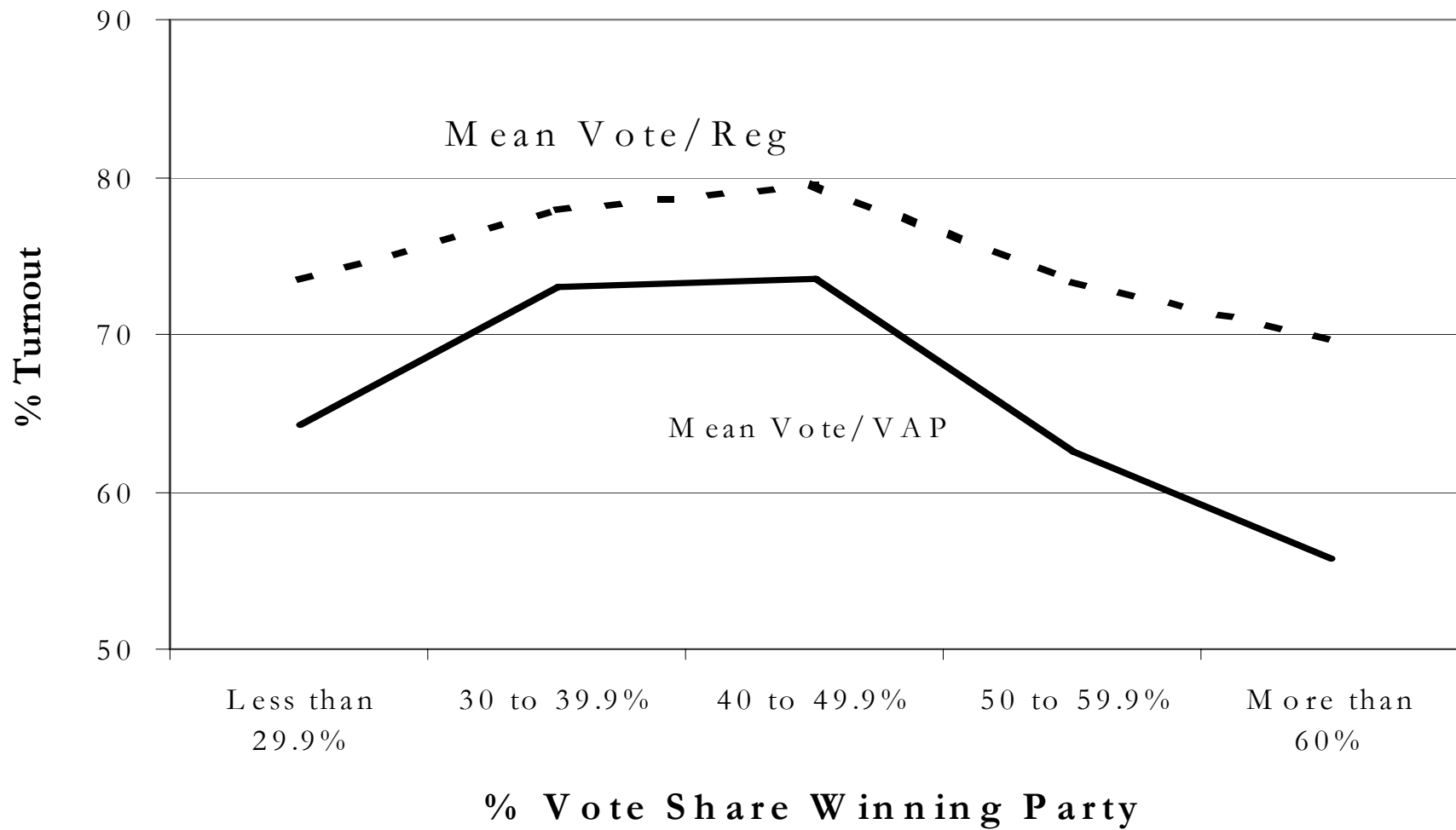
# Compulsory Voting

		Mean Vote/VAP	Mean Vote/Reg	N. Of Nations
Older democracies	Compulsory	79.4	86.9	7
	Non-Compulsory	71.7	72.7	32
	<b>Difference</b>	<b>+7.7</b>	<b>+14.2</b>	<b>39</b>
Newer democracies	Compulsory	67.7	75.8	9
	Non-Compulsory	69.3	73.9	31
	<b>Difference</b>	<b>-1.6</b>	<b>+1.9</b>	<b>40</b>
Semi-democracies	Compulsory	53.9	60.6	5
	Non-Compulsory	56.6	67.0	40
	<b>Difference</b>	<b>-2.7</b>	<b>-6.4</b>	<b>45</b>
Non-democracies	Compulsory	40.9	70.6	2
	Non-Compulsory	61.8	67.8	38
	<b>Difference</b>	<b>-20.9</b>	<b>+2.8</b>	<b>40</b>
All	Compulsory	65.9	75.4	23
	Non-Compulsory	64.2	70.0	140
	<b>Difference</b>	<b>+1.9</b>	<b>+5.4</b>	<b>163</b>



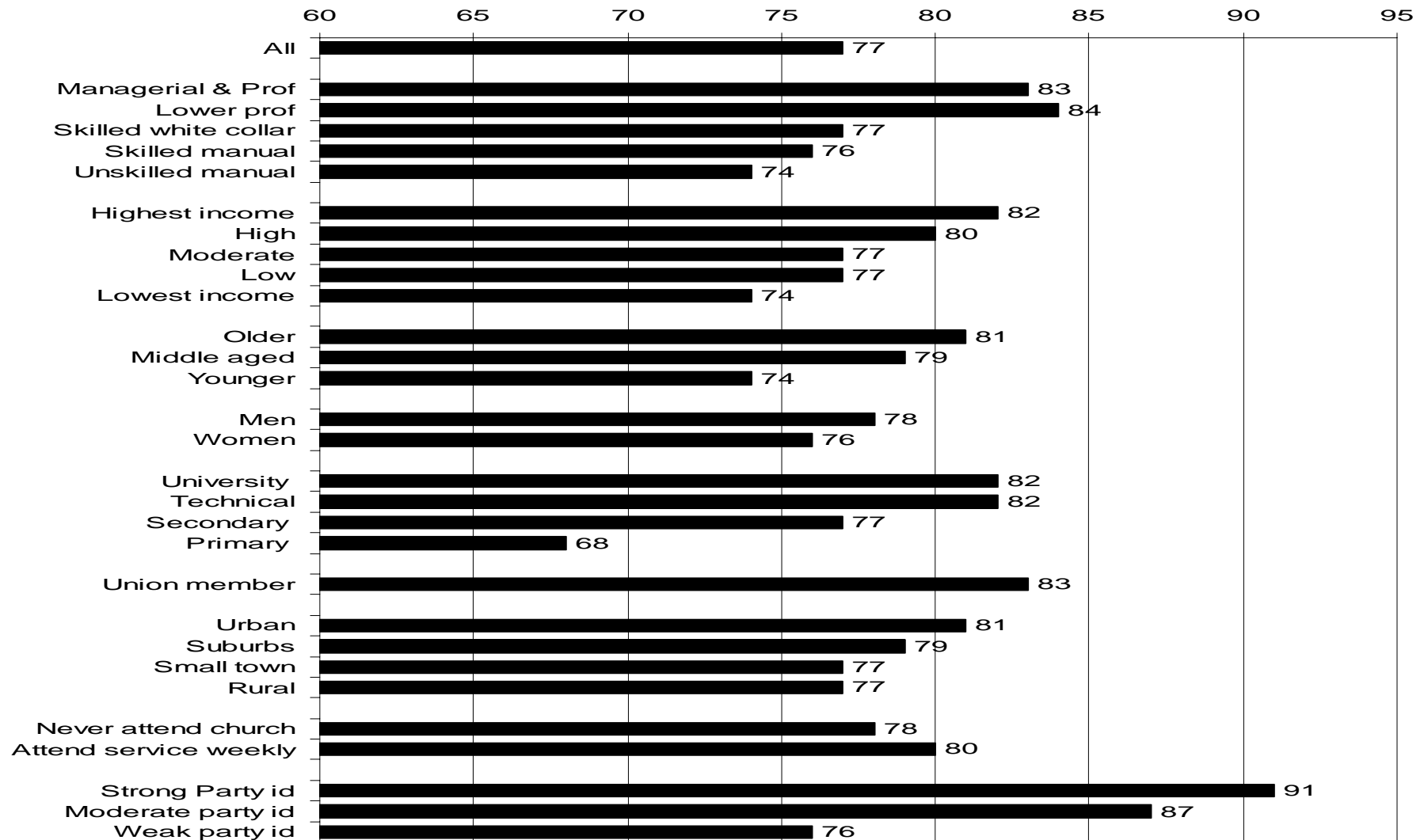


# Party Competition





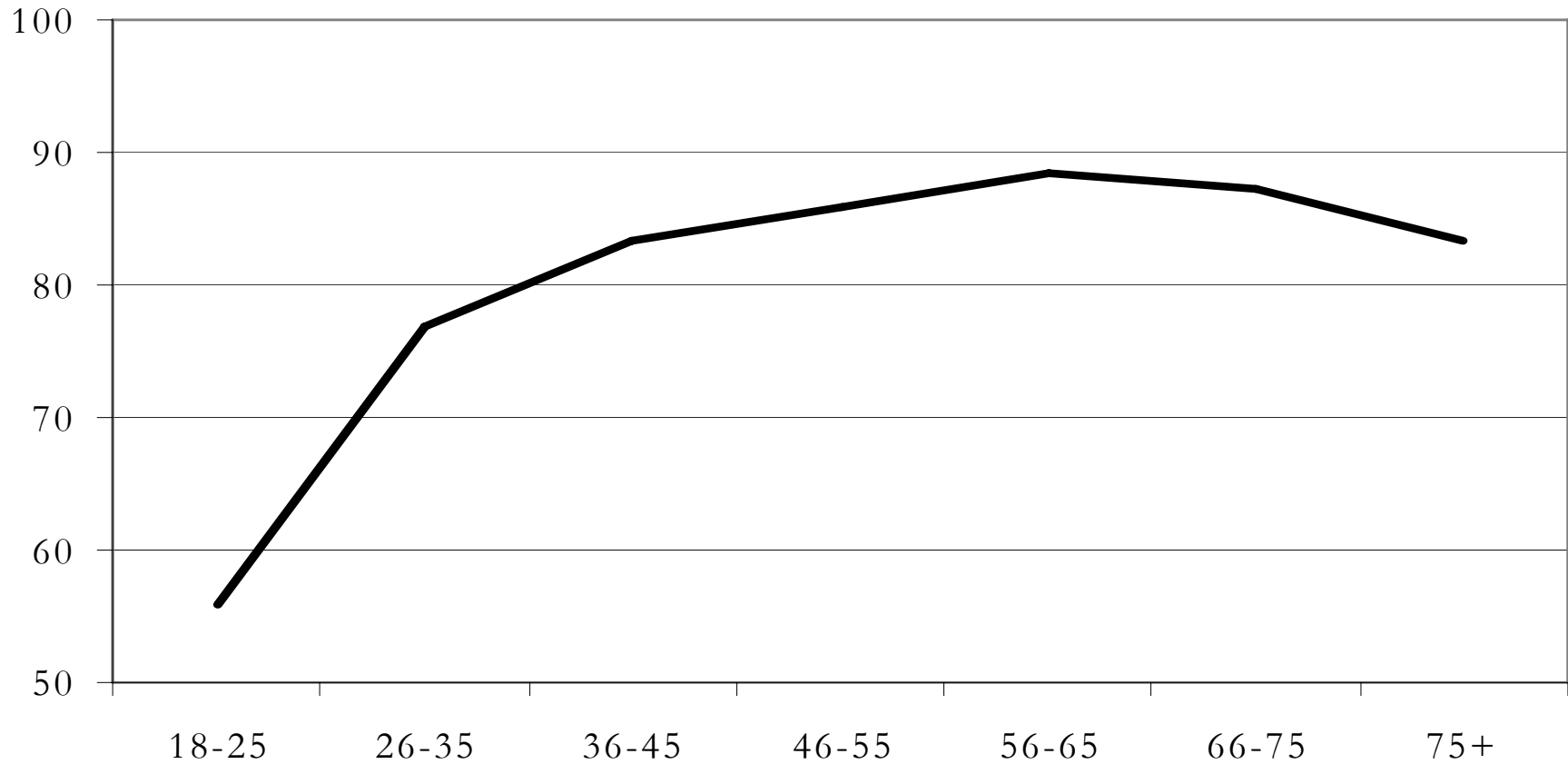
# Social characteristics of turnout





# Age

% Voted by Age Group





# Voter participation in legislative elections

Source: CSES Module 1 1996-2002 Pooled N.24,413

	b	Sig.
<b>SOCIETAL MODERNIZATION</b>		
Human development	4.59	***
<b>INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT</b>		
Electoral system (1=Maj, 2=Comb, 3=PR)	.493	***
District size	-.001	***
Parliamentary executive	1.96	***
Frequency of national elections	-.002	n/s
Use of any compulsory voting	1.50	***
Party competition (% vote party 1 <sup>st</sup> )	.094	n/s
Party fractionalization (ENPP)	.124	***
<b>SOCIAL STRUCTURE</b>		
Logged Age	2.12	***
Gender (male=1)	.003	n/s
Education	.294	***
Income	.102	***
<b>MOBILIZING AGENCIES</b>		
Union membership	.188	***
Religiosity	.095	***
<b>CULTURAL ATTITUDES</b>		
Left-right ideology	.019	**
Party identification	.929	***
External political efficacy	.154	***
Constant	-5.9	
% Correctly predicted	84.0	
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.198	

## IV: Conclusions





# Conclusions

1. Rules matter: voting participation is maximized in elections:
  - Using proportional representation,
  - With small electoral districts,
  - With regular but relatively infrequent national contests,
  - With competitive party systems, and
  - In presidential contests.
2. Important for public policy and electoral design
3. Yet the effect of rules is conditioned by other factors, including levels of human development, mobilizing agencies, and the resources and cultural attitudes of citizens.
4. Therefore limits to the capacity of electoral reform to engineer *short-term* improvements in turnout

