

The political geography of macro-level turnout in American political development

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Abstract

Aggregate turnout rates are among the central indicators of democratic performance in the American polity. Despite the considerable implications of macro turnout, however, most studies of turnout focus instead on the micro level. As a consequence, we know little about how local, political, and historical influences have impacted turnout over the course of American political development. The result is a somewhat impoverished conception of turnout that often removes the political from political participation. In this article, I argue for a new, macro-level perspective that highlights the political dimension of turnout by placing turnout in the local political settings in which it has taken place. I contrast two competing explanations of macro turnout variation across local electorates, a political account and Elazar's cultural thesis, and discuss their implications for the political geography of macro turnout in American electoral history. I then examine this political geography by employing a local indicator of spatial association (a LISA statistic) to identify the spatial structuring of macro turnout in the United States from 1828 through 2000. I demonstrate that a political perspective provides greater leverage than Elazar's cultural perspective in explaining the political geography of macro turnout in the United States.

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Introduction

Aggregate turnout rates have long been a central concern of both democratic theorists and scholars of political behavior. The reason for this interest is clear: in its macro form, voter

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participation is the voice of the people. It is the citizenry's sole mechanism for choosing the governing, and is an essential mechanism for constraining the governing once they are elected. Aggregate turnout rates, as a consequence, are among the central indicators of the health of a representative democracy. High turnout rates are viewed as evidence that an engaged citizenry is willing and able to carry out its principal political responsibility, that political elites are articulating and representing the interests and concerns of the citizenry, and that the political system is accorded support and legitimacy by the citizenry (Brody, 1978; Putnam, 2000; Schattschneider, 1960).

Despite the considerable implications of macro-level turnout, most studies of turnout have focused instead on the micro level, and the question of why individuals vote (Campbell, Converse, Miller & Stokes, 1960; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). Although this micro-level approach has shed light on the sources of individual-level turnout, it is fundamentally ill-equipped to address macro-level turnout and the more consequential question of why electorates vote at the rates they do.

This micro–macro divergence results from the fact that aggregates, such as electorates, often behave differently than we would expect based on our knowledge of the behavior of individuals, such as voters. What appears random or irrational at the micro level may appear orderly or rational at the macro level (Erikson, MacKuen, & Stimson, 2002; MacKuen, Erikson, & Stimson, 1989; Page & Shapiro, 1992). What produces variation in micro-level behaviors may not produce variation in macro-level behaviors (Kramer, 1983). Add to this emergent macro-level properties such as popular sovereignty and political legitimacy that have no direct analogs in micro-level turnout and it is clear that our understanding of micro-level turnout will carry us only so far in understanding macro-level turnout.

Given the dominance of the micro-level turnout perspective to date, there is also the danger that we will transfer the limitations of this perspective to the macro level by adopting a similar theoretical framework or research approach in the study of macro turnout. The two dominant micro-level theoretical perspectives on turnout, the Michigan model of voting (Campbell et al., 1960) and the socioeconomic approach (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980) largely divorce turnout from the local political settings in which voting takes place. The former does so by tracing turnout to citizens' early socialization experiences while the latter does so by tracing turnout to citizens' socioeconomic demographic characteristics. Turnout is further detached from its local political settings by the national random surveys of geographically dispersed respondents employed in most micro-level turnout studies. Moreover, because individual-level data exist only for the modern survey era, micro-level studies necessarily disregard nearly 70 percent of the history of mass voter participation in the United States. These features of the micro-level perspective lead individual-level turnout studies to deemphasize local, political, and historical influences on turnout.¹

A macro-level perspective on turnout allows us to overcome these limitations of the micro-level approach. We can develop a theoretical perspective that delineates the role that local political features, such as partisan competition, play in shaping macro turnout (Darmofal, 2003). This macro-level perspective highlights the political dimension of political participation, and with it, the collective responsibility of both elites and citizens for voter participation and democratic performance. This stands in contrast to the micro-level perspective's emphasis on

¹ Exceptions to this broader tendency in the literature include Huckfeldt and Sprague (1992), Rosenstone and Hansen (1993), and Gerber and Green (2000). While these contributions are significant and point to the importance of local political influences for participation, none seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of political influences on turnout in local electorates over the course of American electoral history.

citizen attributes and deemphasis of political factors, which carry the implication that the responsibility for participation rests largely on citizens' shoulders.

We can readily examine implications of the macro-level political perspective on turnout with aggregate electoral data. Unlike micro-level data, macro-level data provide complete spatial coverage of local political settings in the United States. And where micro-level data are limited to the period since the late 1940s, macro-level data exist for the entire period of mass voter participation in the United States. As a consequence, we can examine how local political settings have shaped turnout over the course of American political development.

The testing of a comprehensive macro-level model of turnout over the full period of mass voter participation in the United States is beyond the scope possible in a single article.² In this article, instead, I demonstrate the utility of a macro-level approach to turnout over the course of American political development. I identify the significant local-level variation in turnout in the United States over the past 170 years and argue for a shift from the analysis of the national electorate that has predominated in recent studies of macro behaviors to the analysis of local electorates. I next contrast two competing explanations of macro turnout variation across local electorates, a political account and Elazar's cultural thesis, and discuss their implications for the political geography of macro turnout in American electoral history. In the following section, I apply a local indicator of spatial association (a LISA statistic) to identify the political geography of macro turnout in presidential elections since the advent of Jacksonian democracy and mass voter participation in the 1820s. I demonstrate that a political account provides leverage in explaining this political geography while Elazar's cultural account fares poorly. I conclude by discussing the implications that the political geography of macro turnout presents for our understanding of macro turnout in American political development.

Macro analyses and macro turnout in local electorates

Prior to the introduction of scientific surveys, macro-level analyses were the preferred approach for the study of political behavior. Key's (1949) *Southern Politics in State and Nation* is the exemplar of this approach. In recent decades, scholars have expressed a renewed interest in macro-level political behavior as a result of its consequential implications for the functioning of politics. This renewed interest can be seen in the titles of some of the most prominent recent works in the political science discipline: "Macropartisanship" (MacKuen et al., 1989), *The Rational Public* (Page & Shapiro, 1992), and *The Macro Polity* (Erikson et al., 2002). These and other studies seek to understand macro political behavior by examining over time changes in the behavior of national survey aggregates. Although much of the study of voter turnout remains focused on the micro level, the limited macro-level literature on turnout also focuses on national survey aggregates, and particularly the question of why national turnout has declined since the early 1960s (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982; Brody, 1978).

The increased analysis of national survey aggregates represents an important development, as it recognizes the critical political importance of macro behaviors. Subnational aggregates, however, have been less analyzed. This is unfortunate, since federalism and localism combine to make the United States a highly decentralized polity (Elazar, 1984, 1994; Erikson, Wright, & McIver, 1993). This produces significant local-level variation in political behavior (Gimpel & Schuknecht, 2003).

² I provide an analysis of political, contextual, and demographic influences on macro turnout in local electorates in the United States since the advent of mass voter participation in 1828 in Darmofal (2003).

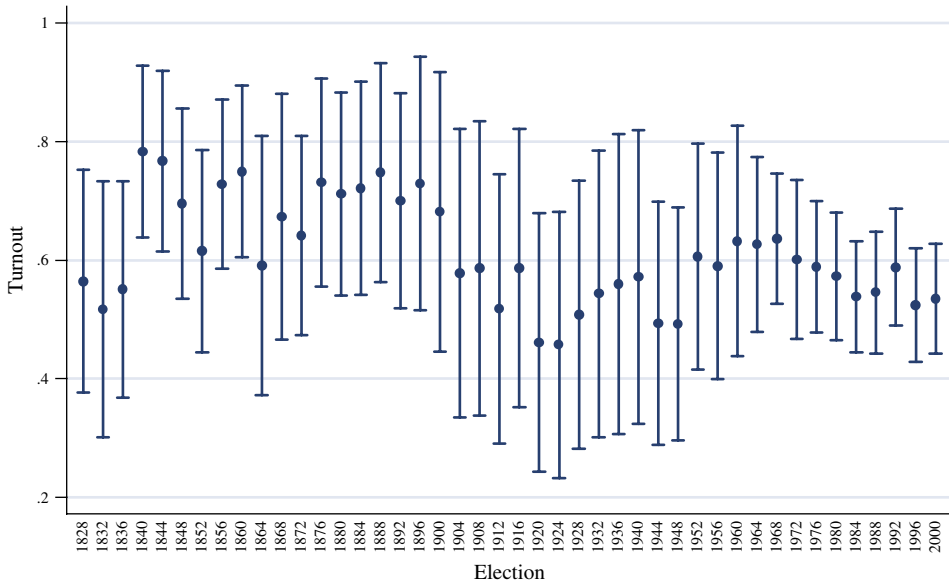


Fig. 1. Macro turnout, 1828–2000.

Macro turnout is marked by this local-level variation. Fig. 1 presents the national turnout time series with a single standard deviation in county-level turnout plotted on either side of the national series.³ From 1828 through 2000, the average per election standard deviation in county-level presidential turnout was 15.7 percentage points; the mean interquartile range was 20.6 percentage points. By either measure, the variation in county-level turnout has been extensive. We miss a significant dimension of the story of macro turnout by focusing solely on trends in national survey aggregates. We must also examine the significant local-level variation in macro turnout in order to understand fully the sources of voter participation in the United States.

Politics, culture, and macro turnout

The micro–macro divergence often precludes straightforward aggregation from the micro level to the macro level. A theory of macro-level behavior, however, benefits significantly from a theory of how micro-level behavior is influenced. By first understanding the factors that shape individual-level behavior, we can develop expectations for how micro-level behaviors are likely to aggregate to produce macro-level behaviors.

The act of voting, I argue, is a goal-oriented behavior; citizens vote because they believe they will realize a benefit by doing so. This may be a material policy investment benefit that

³ County-level data provide the lowest level of aggregation of electoral data over the full period of mass voter participation in the United States, from the 1820s to the present. As a consequence, if we are interested in maximizing both cross-sectional and longitudinal variation in macro turnout, county-level data are preferable over alternative, larger areal units such as states or sections. The numerator in the county-level turnout measure is presidential votes cast and the denominator is the voting age population, modified to exclude African Americans and women where they were ineligible to vote.

a citizen believes she will help produce by casting a ballot for a favored candidate (Downs, 1957). Alternatively, it may be a psychological benefit such as fulfilling a perceived civic duty or affirming a partisan loyalty that a citizen consumes as a result of voting (Campbell et al., 1960; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968).

Regardless of the attractiveness of these benefits, citizens may be kept from pursuing them by the costs of voting. These costs may take either of two basic forms. Direct costs such as information or money may create impediments that preclude citizens from going to the polls. Alternatively, indirect opportunity costs may convince citizens that their limited resources are best spent on other activities (Downs, 1957).

The costs and benefits of voting, in short, are central to the turnout decision. We cannot understand turnout without reference to these parameters. This is true whether our theoretical framework is a social–psychological model, a socioeconomic model, or a rational choice expected utility model. These perspectives either explicitly or implicitly trace turnout to the costs and benefits of voting. Only the conception of how citizens weigh these parameters differs across these schools.

For the two dominant micro-level perspectives on turnout, the costs and benefits of voting largely result from generally immutable attributes of citizens. For the social–psychological Michigan model of voting, citizens' benefits from voting primarily result from the affirmation of their socialized partisan identifications. For the socioeconomic model, citizens' abilities to surmount the costs of voting are determined by their socioeconomic status.

Where micro-level studies generally treat these citizen attributes as the principal influences on turnout, I argue that they are best viewed, instead, as providing a foundation upon which political and social influences also act to impact turnout. In contrast to the standard micro-level perspective, citizens in actual electorates are not detached from their local political settings. Instead they interact with local political elites and with other citizens. These interactions impact the costs and benefits of voting, and consequently, citizens' decisions of whether or not to vote. In doing so, these interactions can moderate and even reverse individual-level correlates of turnout.

Local political settings and macro turnout

Embedding the decision of whether or not to vote, the calculus of voting, in citizens' local electorates can provide particular analytical advantage in identifying the political dimension of voter participation. Citizens' costs and benefits of voting and, by extension, their turnout, are recognized as depending not just on who citizens are, but also on where they live. The calculus of voting, in turn, becomes a political calculus. As Aldrich (1997, 390) argues, “Embedding this simple [turnout] decision problem in a genuine and realistic political context (one filled with candidates, parties,...., and others) makes this simple decision political, interesting, and important.”

Political impacts on the costs and benefits of voting in local electorates reflect two principal streams of influence. The first are elite behaviors. Political elites have strong electoral incentives to see that their own supporters vote and that their opponents' supporters abstain. They do so, I argue, by attempting to strategically manipulate these citizens' voting costs and benefits (see also Aldrich, 1995). At the same time, citizens are also impacted by campaign issues and events independent of elite mediation. It is impossible, of course, to determine how much of the political dimension of macro turnout reflects direct elite influence vs. citizens' responses to

campaigns. We would expect, however, that in most electorates over the course of American political development, this political dimension reflects both streams of influence.

Given elites' incentives to be electorally active in local electorates, it is essential to examine how elites seek to gain office by impacting citizens' costs and benefits of voting. Elites seek to mobilize their supporters' turnout by increasing their policy and psychological benefits of voting and by reducing their direct and indirect costs of voting. They seek to demobilize opposition turnout by reducing opposition supporters' benefits of voting and by increasing their costs of voting.

Elites can increase their supporters' policy differential benefits, as well as the consumption benefits that accompany these policy benefits (Fiorina, 1976), by drawing distinctions between their own positions and their opponents'. And contrary to Downsian expectations about the median voter, American parties' policy positions do in fact diverge (Page, 1978). At the same time, this divergence is not universal across all issues. Elites have strategic incentives to mimic their opponents' positions on some issues or to take ambiguous positions (Page, 1976; Shepsle, 1972). Such strategies can reduce the turnout of opposition supporters by reducing their policy motives for voting. Elites influence the cost side of the turnout ledger through campaign activities and voting law enactments. Campaign speeches, debates, and paid advertising all aim to reduce supporters' information costs. Get-out-the-vote efforts at the end of campaigns aim to reduce the monetary, time, and information costs of voting (Aldrich, 1995, 101).

Voting law enactments can be employed to increase opposition supporters' costs of voting. There is an asymmetric political benefit from such voting law enactments. Because lower-class citizens are likely to have the greatest difficulty clearing the hurdle to participation posed by restrictive voting laws (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; but see Nagler, 1991), restrictive voting laws provide a particularly attractive means for political elites representing upper-class interests to restrict the participation of lower-class opposition supporters.

The two streams of political influence shape the costs and benefits of voting via several political dimensions of local electorates. Among these are the competitiveness of elections, the vigor of minor party campaigns, and the restrictiveness of voting laws. Each of these political features of local electorates is likely to affect individuals' turnout decisions and potentially produce macro turnout variation across local electorates as a consequence.

As discussed earlier, translating implications from the micro to the macro level is not always a straightforward process. Aggregation bias largely precludes predictions regarding point estimates of macro effects. Because macro-level coefficients are often correlated with their regressors, and because we have little a priori theory for modeling this correlation, we are generally unable to predict how much a political feature of a local electorate will increase or decrease macro turnout (Cho, 1998; King, 1997; Robinson, 1950).

Generally, however, our interest is not in point prediction but rather in directional prediction: is a political dimension of a local electorate likely to increase or reduce macro turnout? Even here, however, we will often encounter difficulties in formulating a priori expectations due to the micro–macro divergence. Political factors may shift the benefits or costs of voting (and thus the probabilities of voting) in different directions for different citizens in a local electorate. Divergent micro-level effects preclude macro-level expectations.

Consider minor party candidacies. These candidacies may increase the policy or psychological benefits of voting for Independents and those disenchanting with the major party alternatives (and may reduce these citizens' voting costs through mobilization campaigns). At the same time, the issues raised by these candidacies may highlight the weaknesses in major party candidacies, making partisan adherents less likely to vote. The result is no clear directional

prediction for macro-level turnout. A significant advantage of a macro-level approach, however, is that we are able to identify how factors with no clear directional predictions at the micro level impact the more consequential macro-level turnout. It is of considerable importance to identify how minor party candidacies and other factors with no clear micro-level predictions have impacted macro turnout over the course of American political development.

We can be more confident in our macro-level expectations when a political dimension is likely to shift citizens' probabilities of voting in the same direction within a local electorate. Partisan competition carries these directionally consistent micro-level effects, producing a clear macro-level expectation. Strategic political elites are more likely to mobilize citizens in close elections (Cox & Munger, 1989). This is likely to increase the psychological benefits of voting while reducing the costs of voting (through get-out-the-vote efforts). Citizens are also likely to have increased psychological motives for voting in competitive elections due to their increased interest in such contests. At the same time, citizens may have increased policy motives for voting in such contests as they believe erroneously that their vote is likely to be decisive despite the fact that the chances of casting a decisive ballot are infinitesimally small (Gelman, King, & Boscardin, 1998; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968).

It is unlikely that competitive elections will reduce voting benefits or increase voting costs, and thus reduce micro-level turnout. Partisan competition thus is expected to increase both micro- and macro-level turnout. As a consequence, electorates with more competitive elections should have higher turnout than electorates with less competitive elections.

Political influences on macro turnout are also likely to promote a spatial structuring of turnout rates that transcends local electorates. Similar levels of partisan competition, for example, are likely to exist in neighboring electorates, particularly as elites speak to shared interests that transcend these electorates and imitate the mobilization activities of neighboring elites. Identifying the relationship between political dimensions, including partisan competition, and the spatial structuring of macro turnout is critical for understanding the political dimension of participation in American political development.

Elazar's cultural thesis and macro turnout

Although the implications of local political dimensions for macro turnout and its spatial structuring have been underexplored to date, an earlier research approach emphasizing the importance of local political culture for participation has received extensive consideration in the literature (Elazar, 1984, 1994; Sharkansky, 1969). The principal cultural thesis is Elazar's account. Borrowing from Almond's (1956, 396) definition, Elazar (1994, 214) defines political culture as "the particular pattern of orientations to political action in which each political system is embedded." Elazar presents a tripartite thesis, in which he argues that locales are marked by moralistic, individualistic, or traditionalistic political cultures. These political cultures, Elazar argues, carry clear expectations for macro turnout rates.

The moralistic culture views politics as "the search for the good society ... an effort to exercise power for the betterment of the commonwealth" (Elazar, 1984, 117). Citizen participation is valued and expected in this commonwealth conception of governance. For Elazar (1994, 233), "this political culture considers it the duty of every citizen to participate in the political affairs of his or her commonwealth." As a consequence, electorates with moralistic political cultures should exhibit high turnout rates (Elazar, 1984, 1994).

At the opposite end of the political cultural spectrum is the traditionalistic culture. Where the moralistic culture values citizen participation, the traditionalistic culture discourages it. The

traditionalistic culture, Elazar argues, is built upon the notion of a natural social hierarchy. In the traditionalistic culture, “real political power [is confined] to a relatively small and self-perpetuating group drawn from an established elite who often inherit their right to govern through family ties or social position” (Elazar, 1984, 119). Such a small sphere of power cannot be long maintained if ordinary citizens are actively engaged in politics. As a result, Elazar (1994, 235) argues, in the traditionalistic culture, “those [ordinary citizens] who do not have a definite role to play in politics are not expected to be even minimally active as citizens. In many cases, they are not even expected to vote.” As a consequence, macro turnout should be low in electorates with traditionalistic political cultures.

Between the two extremes of the political cultural continuum lies the individualistic culture. Where the moralistic culture views society as a commonwealth and the traditionalistic culture views it as a hierarchy, the individualistic culture views it as a marketplace. Elazar (1994, 230) notes, “political participation in systems dominated by the individualistic political culture reflects the view that politics is just another means by which individuals may improve themselves socially and economically.” Neither promoted by conceptions of the commonwealth nor discouraged by conceptions of hierarchy, macro turnout rates in the individualistic culture are expected to be between those in the moralistic and traditionalistic cultures (Sharkansky, 1969).

Elazar’s political culture thesis has found empirical support in explaining aggregate turnout rates. Coding states’ political cultures on a 9 point scale ranging from moralistic (1) to traditionalistic (9), Sharkansky (1969, 71, 80) finds significant negative correlations between political culture and macro turnout at the state level, controlling for state-level characteristics such as personal income and urbanism. Sharkansky’s (1969, 73) analysis, however, is static, focusing only on the period of the early 1960s.

Elazar’s conception of political culture, in contrast, is not static. Instead, Elazar (1994, 216, 217) argues that the geographic location of political cultures has depended upon ethnocultural waves of immigration, from the first European immigration during the Colonial era, to 19th century European and Canadian immigration, to 20th century Hispanic and Asian immigration. Elazar traces the moralistic political culture to Puritan, North Sea, and Jewish immigration waves and places this culture in the Northern tier of states from New England across the Upper Plains to the Pacific Northwest. Elazar traces the traditionalistic political culture to early European agrarian immigration and places it in the South. Finally, Elazar traces the individualistic political culture to several European immigration waves including English, Mediterranean, and Irish streams and places this culture in the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest states (Elazar, 1994, 215–223, 230–237).

Elazar’s thesis thus provides clear expectations for the local spatial structuring of turnout in American political development. Throughout American electoral history, local electorates in New England should have been marked by high turnout rates due to their moralistic cultures. As Northern European immigration spread westward into the Upper Plains and Pacific Northwest, local electorates in these locations should also have become marked by high turnout rates due to their moralistic cultures. Local electorates in the Middle Atlantic states, alternatively, should always evidence intermediate turnout rates due to their individualistic political cultures. Additionally, as westward expansion of the population and of the individualistic culture spread across the Midwest, local electorates in these states should also have become marked by intermediate turnout rates as a result of their individualistic political cultures. Finally, local electorates in the South should have been marked by low turnout rates from the beginning as the traditionalistic political culture was present in the South from its beginning, even prior to the Jim Crow era.

The political geography of macro turnout in the United States, 1828–2000

By identifying the spatial structure of macro turnout in American political development, we can examine the validity of Elazar's cultural account of macro turnout and compare it against a political account of macro turnout. We can identify this spatial structure of macro turnout, a long-held secret of American electoral history, by applying global and local tests of spatial autocorrelation. To examine whether macro turnout has exhibited a spatial structure, and if so, how this structure has waxed and waned over the course of American political development, I conducted global and local tests of spatial autocorrelation in county-level turnout for each presidential election from 1828 through 2000.⁴

The global test, a global Moran's I , determines whether the data as a whole (in this case, the county-level turnout rates in a presidential election) exhibit a spatial structure (against a null hypothesis of no global spatial structure) (Moran, 1948, 1950). A significant positive global Moran indicates positive spatial autocorrelation (neighboring counties share similar turnout rates), while a significant negative global Moran indicates negative spatial autocorrelation (neighboring counties have dissimilar turnout rates).

The global Moran's I 's for county-level turnout for each presidential election from 1828 through 2000 are listed in Table 1.⁵ As the table shows, the global Moran's I is positive and significant in each presidential election (with p -values that are significant to the sixth decimal place in each election).⁶ There has been a strong global spatial structuring of turnout rates in each presidential election over the period of mass voter participation in the United States.

To identify which counties have shared similar turnout rates in presidential elections, I employed a local indicator of spatial association (LISA) statistic, the local Moran's I (Anselin, 1995). The local Moran provides an individual measure of local spatial autocorrelation for each observation i in the data (in relation to i 's neighbors j), an indication of whether this autocorrelation is statistically significant, and the direction (positive vs. negative) of this autocorrelation. Moreover, the sum of the local Moran's I 's is proportional to the global Moran's I . This allows the global Moran to be decomposed to determine which observations are producing the global result, which observations run counter to the global trend, and which are insignificant (see Anselin, 1995).

The close relationship between the local and global Morans can be seen in Table 2, which reports the percentage of counties with pseudo-significant local Morans in each presidential election. The vast majority of these significant local Morans are cases of positive spatial autocorrelation. In most presidential elections, less than two percent of counties exhibit negative local spatial autocorrelation. Overall, there has been a strong spatial structuring of macro turnout at both the global and local levels throughout the period of mass voter participation in the United States.

By combining the local Morans with a Moran scatterplot (see Anselin, 1995, 105–106), we can determine whether cases of positive local spatial autocorrelation indicate clusters of turnout values above or below the national mean and whether cases of negative local spatial autocorrelation indicate low turnout values surrounded by higher turnout values, or the reverse. Fig. 2

⁴ The data employed in this analysis are part of a county-level and state-level political, electoral, and demographic archive collected by Peter F. Nardulli and a team of researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The data archive includes observations on all counties in the continental United States for each presidential election from 1828 to the present.

⁵ The Moran's I 's were estimated using SpaceStat versions 1.90 and 1.91.

⁶ Note, the Moran's I values themselves are not comparable across elections since they depend upon the weights, which vary with the number of observations.

Table 1
Global spatial autocorrelation of macro turnout

Year	Global Moran	Z-value*	Year	Global Moran	Z-value	Year	Global Moran	Z-value
1828	.659	24.747	1888	.723	57.305	1948	.867	80.348
1832	.720	29.654	1892	.703	58.438	1952	.869	80.501
1836	.576	25.938	1896	.810	68.309	1956	.851	78.860
1840	.543	26.431	1900	.859	72.654	1960	.857	79.409
1844	.528	27.343	1904	.841	71.373	1964	.758	70.212
1848	.568	31.377	1908	.877	76.415	1968	.595	55.065
1852	.575	33.410	1912	.850	75.988	1972	.717	66.334
1856	.504	31.369	1916	.849	76.917	1976	.610	56.544
1860	.519	34.359	1920	.874	80.152	1980	.598	55.401
1864	.734	39.209	1924	.891	82.431	1984	.490	45.459
1868	.683	43.990	1928	.905	83.834	1988	.589	54.620
1872	.533	39.428	1932	.889	82.367	1992	.563	52.203
1876	.624	47.191	1936	.901	83.492	1996	.579	53.703
1880	.657	50.513	1940	.912	84.479	2000	.524	48.647
1884	.684	53.287	1944	.892	82.677			

* All Z-values were significant at $p < .0000$.

presents an example of the Moran scatterplot for the 1960 presidential election, with the county-level turnout rates in that election plotted along the x -axis (as standard deviations from the mean) and the weighted averages of the turnout rates for each county's neighbors plotted along the y -axis (again in standardized form).

As expected, given the strongly positive global Moran in 1960, there is a tight clustering of turnout values along the 45° line, indicating that many counties shared similar turnout values with their neighbors. Counties with significant positive local Morans in the upper-right quadrant shared above average turnout rates with their neighbors; counties with significant positive local Morans in the lower-left quadrant shared below average turnout with their neighbors. Counties

Table 2
Local spatial autocorrelation of macro turnout

Year	% Spatially autocorrelated	Year	% Spatially autocorrelated	Year	% Spatially autocorrelated
1828	39.0	1888	42.9	1948	60.5
1832	44.9	1892	39.0	1952	58.7
1836	34.5	1896	47.2	1956	57.6
1840	30.6	1900	49.5	1960	60.0
1844	32.6	1904	56.5	1964	51.4
1848	35.1	1908	56.5	1968	44.6
1852	37.9	1912	54.8	1972	51.4
1856	33.8	1916	53.0	1976	45.1
1860	34.7	1920	53.0	1980	42.1
1864	49.7	1924	61.2	1984	36.0
1868	45.3	1928	65.1	1988	39.4
1872	34.0	1932	61.4	1992	43.0
1876	39.6	1936	62.7	1996	42.2
1880	44.1	1940	62.1	2000	41.2
1884	44.2	1944	59.4		

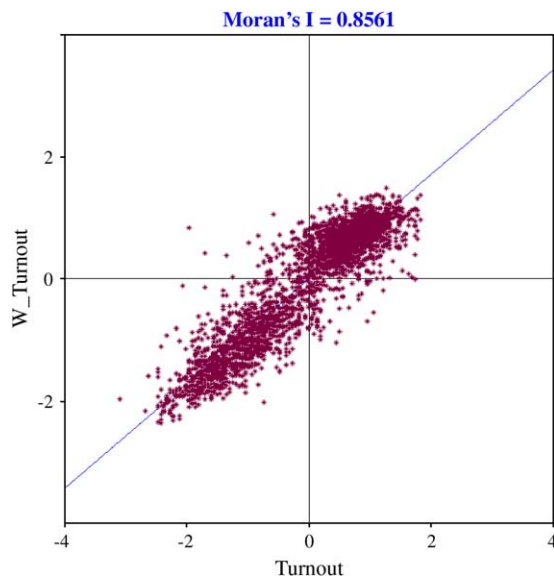


Fig. 2. 1960 Moran scatterplot.

with significant negative local Morans in the upper-left quadrant had lower turnout rates than their neighbors; counties with significant negative local Morans in the lower-right quadrant had higher turnout rates than their neighbors.

We can use the local Morans in conjunction with the information from the Moran scatterplots to decompose the global Moran's I 's and identify where and how macro turnout has been spatially structured at the county level in presidential elections. Figs. 3–13 map the county-level structure of turnout in presidential elections from 1828 through 2000. In each map, counties with spatially random turnout (turnout uncorrelated with turnout in neighboring counties) are plotted in white and labeled as not significant. Counties with significant local Morans are divided into four categories, based on their locations in the Moran scatterplots. Positively autocorrelated counties in the upper-right quadrant are denoted, for ease of exposition, as counties with high turnout bordered by high turnout. Positively autocorrelated counties in the lower-left quadrant are labeled as counties with low turnout bordered by low turnout. Negatively autocorrelated counties in the lower-right quadrant are labeled as counties with high turnout bordered by low turnout. Negatively autocorrelated counties in the upper-left quadrant are labeled as counties with low turnout bordered by high turnout.⁷ As Figs. 3–13 demonstrate, there has been a gradual and patterned evolution of macro turnout over the course of American electoral history. Although there has been some short-term, election-specific structuring of macro turnout, broad discernible patterns that have changed gradually over time have been more the rule. Notably, these patterns directly contradict many of the expectations of Elazar's political cultural thesis.

⁷ Note that each county is shaded according to its own local Moran. Thus, a county that is spatially autocorrelated with neighboring counties may border some insignificant counties if those bordering counties are not spatially autocorrelated with their own neighbors. Counties with missing data (including those not in the union at the time of the election) are not mapped.

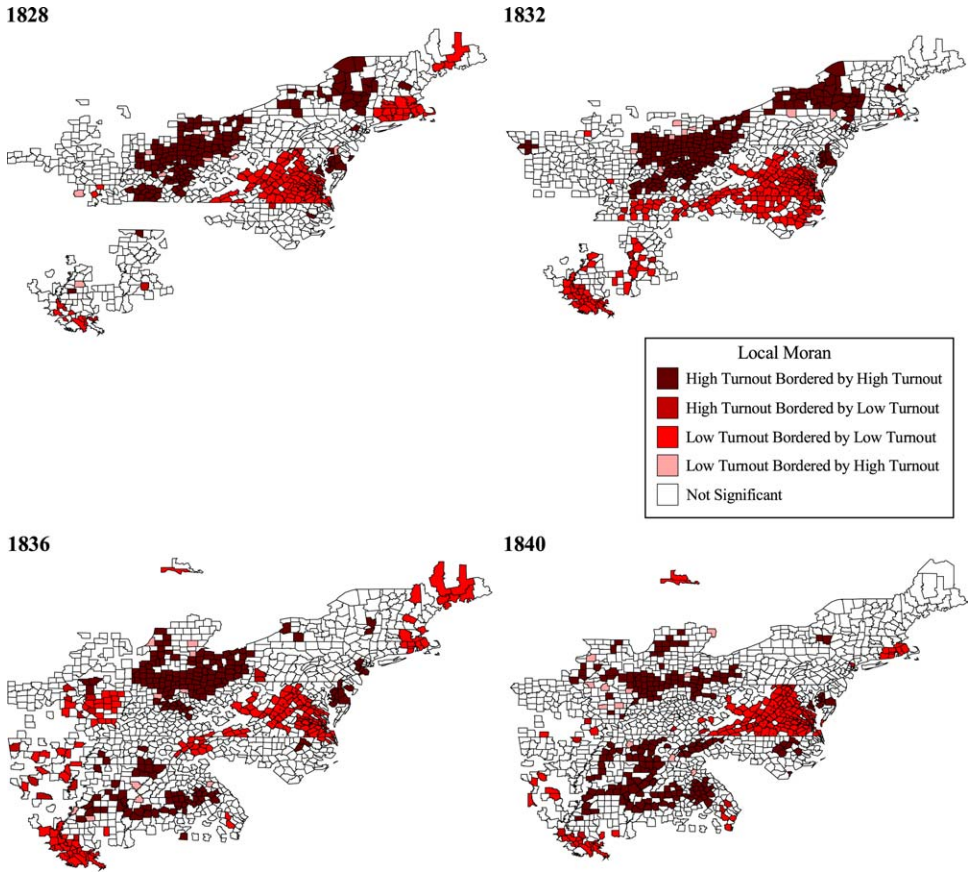


Fig. 3. Spatial structure of macro turnout, 1828–1840.

Turnout patterns prior to the civil war

The early years of mass participation in America were marked by pockets of above average and below average turnout, separated by large areas of randomly distributed turnout. In a pattern that would continue and build through the 1950s, many neighboring counties in Ohio and Indiana shared high turnout rates from the beginning of mass voter participation. (The average turnout in these spatially autocorrelated counties during the antebellum period was 83 percent, compared to 69 percent for randomly distributed cases in the nation during the same time frame.)

These high turnout patterns were also common during the antebellum period in pockets of Southern and Border counties. Several neighboring counties in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia shared high turnout prior to the Civil War. Portions of Georgia, in particular, were hotbeds of participation (248 county-elections exhibited autocorrelated high turnout with an average turnout rate of 88.2 percent). Positive autocorrelation of this sort also existed in portions of Tennessee (turnout averaged 86.6 percent in these 187 county-elections).

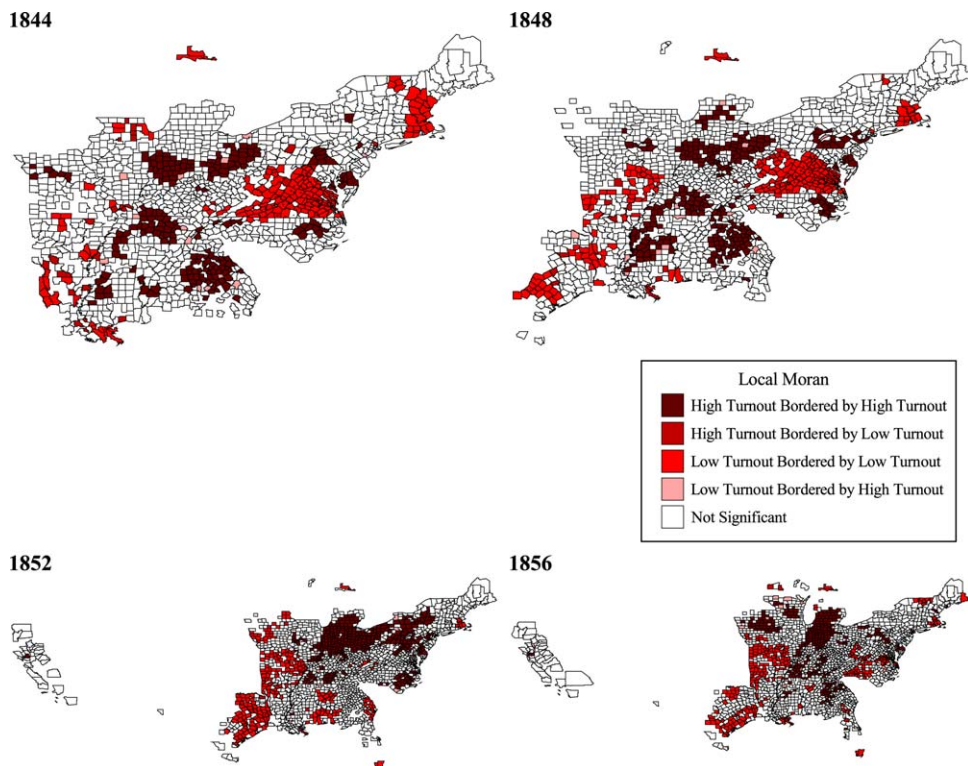


Fig. 4. Spatial structure of macro turnout, 1844–1856.

Areas with frequently low turnout during the pre-Civil War era existed in Virginia, Louisiana, Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas. Virginia is a somewhat anomalous case among this group. Although state structuring of turnout rates was not the norm during the antebellum era, Virginia as a state stands out in bold relief during much of this period. More than 85 percent of Virginia counties shared low turnout rates (averaging 42.8 percent turnout) prior to 1852. The remaining areas of below average turnout during the era were not as clearly structured by state, but rather, existed as pockets within states. The average turnout in these counties during this period was 45.1 percent.

The high turnout patterns in the South prior to the Civil War stand in marked contrast to the expectations of Elazar's political cultural account of participation, which predicts low turnout rates due to traditionalistic cultures. Local electorates in the Midwest also did not exhibit the moderate turnout rates due to individualistic cultures that were predicted by Elazar. Moreover, where Elazar's thesis predicts high turnout rates in local electorates in New England due to moralistic cultures, spatially random turnout instead was the norm.

Interregnum: 1864–1876

Turnout in 1864 and 1868 appears to have been heavily influenced by short-term factors. Many counties in Missouri, Kentucky, West Virginia, and Tennessee (upon its return to the

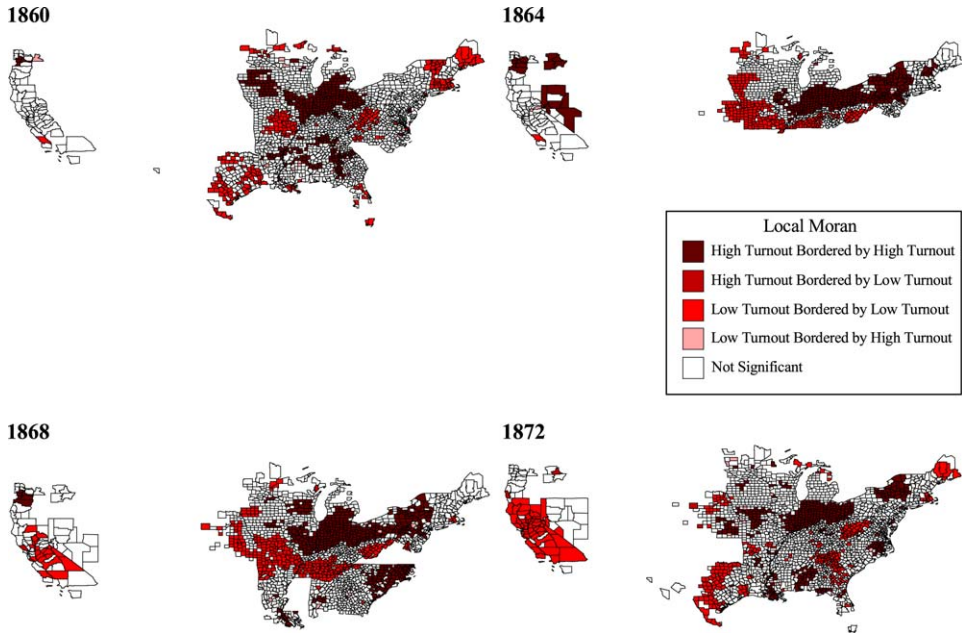


Fig. 5. Spatial structure of macro turnout, 1860–1872.

union in 1868) exhibited below average turnout, averaging 34 percent turnout vs. a national average of 64 percent turnout in these elections. In subsequent elections, these counties would be marked more by randomly distributed turnout. Pennsylvania was marked by positively autocorrelated above average turnout; this was rare given that Pennsylvania counties have nearly always had spatially random turnout.

While short-term forces predominated, two significant long-term trends also emerged in these two elections. Most neighboring counties in New York shared high turnout rates (60 percent of New York counties in each election, averaging 81.1 percent turnout). This spatial pattern would persist, with a few exceptions, through 1960. An extended area of below average turnout developed in California in 1868; this pattern would continue through 1896.

If the elections of 1864 and 1868 were marked by short-term forces and some emerging trends, the turbulent elections of 1872 and 1876 seem, on the surface, a surprising return to the patterns from the elections preceding the Civil War. The traditional areas of high turnout marked Ohio and Indiana (averaging 88.8 percent turnout) and portions of the South (averaging 86.3 percent turnout), both again in contrast to the expectations of Elazar's political cultural thesis. Much of the rest of the country at the time was again marked by spatially random turnout (63.2 percent of all counties in the country, with an average turnout of 68.4 percent).

In addition to this normal pattern, however, an important new pattern began to emerge in the Midwest. Parts of Illinois had begun to exhibit above average turnout in 1860; by 1872 and 1876, portions of Missouri, Iowa, and Wisconsin likewise began to show this pattern (averaging 82.5 percent turnout). With the election of 1880, this pattern in the Midwest would emerge more fully; a counter pattern of below average turnout in the South would also begin to develop in that election. These two spatial patterns would dominate participation in America for the next 80 years.

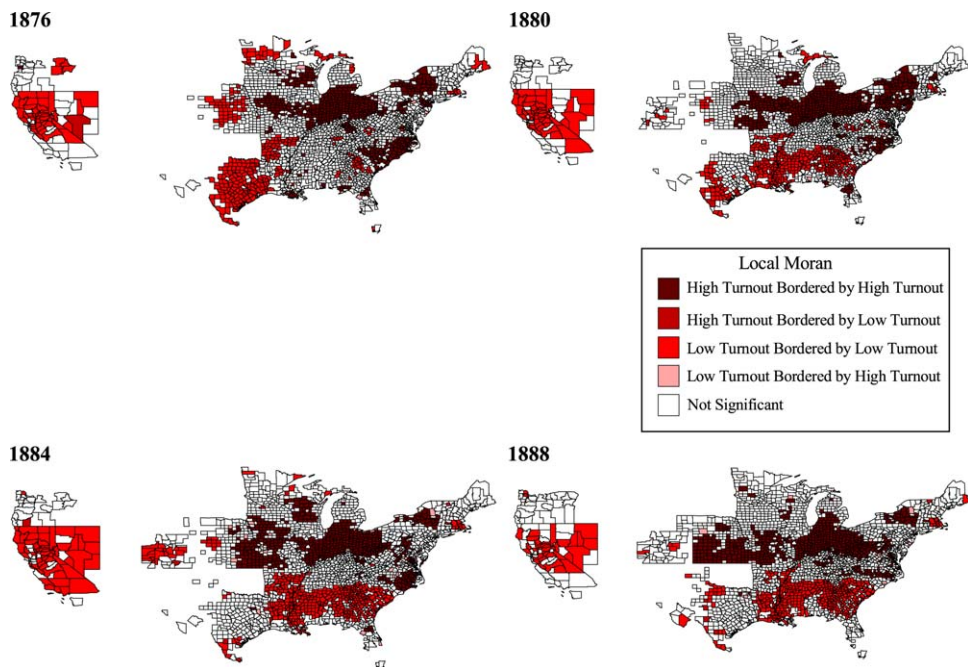


Fig. 6. Spatial structure of macro turnout, 1876–1888.

The development of dominant spatial regimes: 1880–1964

The South's regime of low turnout following Reconstruction has received considerable attention from scholars (see, e.g., Key, 1949; Kousser, 1974). This regime actually took several decades to develop. Many neighboring counties in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia did begin to share below average turnout beginning in 1880 where they had not before (73.9 percent of counties in these states, with an average turnout of 46.3 percent). But in the South as a whole, only 41.1 percent of counties exhibited this pattern in 1880 (averaging 48.4 percent turnout). Nearly half of Southern counties in 1880 (49.9 percent) had randomly distributed turnout (averaging 66.7 percent turnout).

A low turnout pattern instead took several elections to spread across the South. For several elections, the number of Southern counties evidencing this pattern actually declined. In 1884, 40.4 percent of Southern counties exhibited this pattern; in 1888 and 1892, the numbers dipped further to 39.9 percent and 31.8 percent. In 1896, however, the number of neighboring Southern counties sharing below average turnout rose dramatically to 46 percent; in 1900, the figure rose further to 51.1 percent. By 1904, the pattern had clearly become the norm, with 72 percent of Southern counties exhibiting this local structure.

Moreover, as the low turnout area spread across the South, the turnout rates in these counties declined. In 1888, Southern counties with this pattern averaged 44.1 percent turnout. By 1896, Southern counties with this pattern averaged 36.9 percent turnout and by 1904, they averaged 25.6 percent turnout. The story of Southern turnout following Reconstruction, therefore, is of a low turnout regime which, over several decades, grew in severity as it grew in scope. The

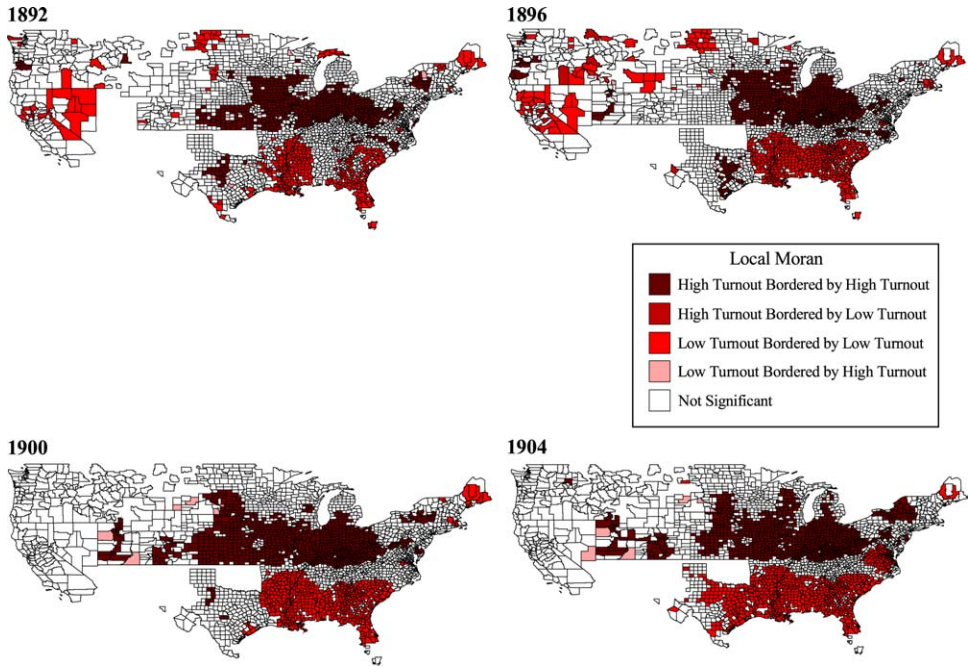


Fig. 7. Spatial structure of macro turnout, 1892–1904.

pattern of below average turnout throughout the South would persist through 1964, when 67.6 percent of Southern counties exhibited this pattern.

The several decades of declining turnout in the South following Reconstruction again stand in contrast to the expectations of Elazar's thesis. The traditionalistic culture, Elazar had argued, had long marked the South and should have produced consistently low turnout rates. The pattern of low turnout that developed following the end of Reconstruction suggests the influence, instead, of political features of local electorates, such as a decline in partisan competition and the enactment of restrictive voting laws (Darmofal, 2003). The patterns are consistent not with a cultural account, which in this particular instance predicts a time-invariant pattern, but instead, with a political account that recognizes the impact of partisan competition and elite activities.

Although the low turnout regime in the South has received a great deal of attention from political scientists and historians, the development of a high turnout regime in Midwest and Plains counties during the same period has received far less attention. Indeed, one of the great untold stories of voter turnout in American history has been this westward expansion of participation. At its high point in the early 1940s, this spatial pattern would encompass nearly a third of the counties in the continental United States.

The pattern of high turnout that had marked portions of the Midwest in 1876 expanded to Kansas in 1880 and 1884. By 1888, 85.7 percent of Kansas counties exhibited this pattern (averaging 91.2 percent turnout). Overall, 64.2 percent of counties in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Michigan, and Kansas exhibited this structure in 1888 (averaging, again, 91.2 percent turnout). By 1900, this pattern had spread to encompass most of Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio (81.1 percent of the counties in these states, averaging 89.1

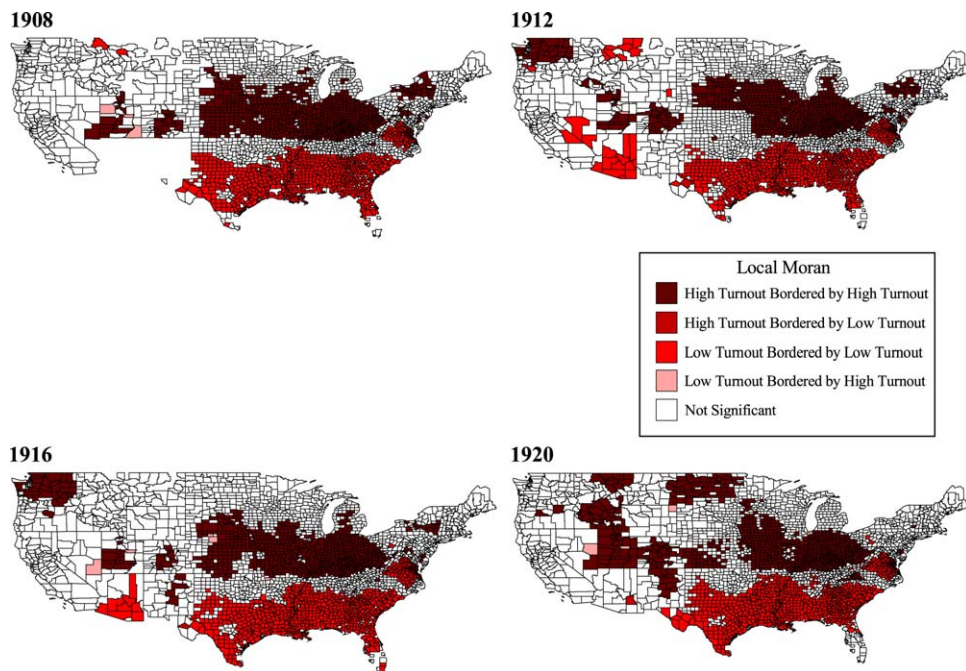


Fig. 8. Spatial structure of macro turnout, 1908–1920.

percent turnout). With minor short-term fluctuations, this spatial pattern of above average turnout persisted through the 1916 election.

Beginning in 1920, this spatial pattern in the Midwest and Plains was joined by a similar pattern in Mountain and Upper Plains counties. In 1920, 69.8 percent of neighboring counties in Utah, Colorado, Idaho, and North Dakota shared above average turnout rates (averaging 65.4 percent turnout). In 1924, this spatial pattern began to merge with the spatial pattern in the Midwest and Plains, producing a belt of above average turnout that extended from West Virginia to the western-most reaches of the Mountain states. By 1928, 73.9 percent of counties in 18 states from West Virginia through Idaho would share above average turnout with their neighboring counties (averaging 71.1 percent turnout).⁸ This spatial structure persisted, with minor variations, through 1952.⁹

In 1956, the pattern broke down a bit, with only 62.6 percent of the counties in the area exhibiting this type of positive spatial autocorrelation. In Kansas, a majority of counties (58.1 percent) began to exhibit spatially random turnout. An even higher percentage (69.3 percent) in Ohio also exhibited spatial randomness, reflecting the continuation of a trend that had begun in 1948. Many counties in the Mountain states also began to exhibit spatially random turnout (53.5 percent of Wyoming and Colorado counties), or negatively autocorrelated lower turnout

⁸ The states were West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, North Dakota, Colorado, New Mexico, Wyoming, Montana, Utah, and Idaho.

⁹ Kentucky counties fell out of the pattern after 1932 and Nevada counties joined the pattern in 1940. The percentage of counties exhibiting this pattern in the states above (including Kentucky in 1932 and Nevada from 1940 on) was 69.3 percent in 1932, 74.8 percent in 1936, 76.8 percent in 1940, 65.3 percent in 1944, 72.2 percent in 1948, and 70.9 percent in 1952. The average turnout in these counties in these elections was, respectively, 77.1 percent, 80.0 percent, 80.2 percent, 68.4 percent, 67.3 percent, and 77.5 percent.

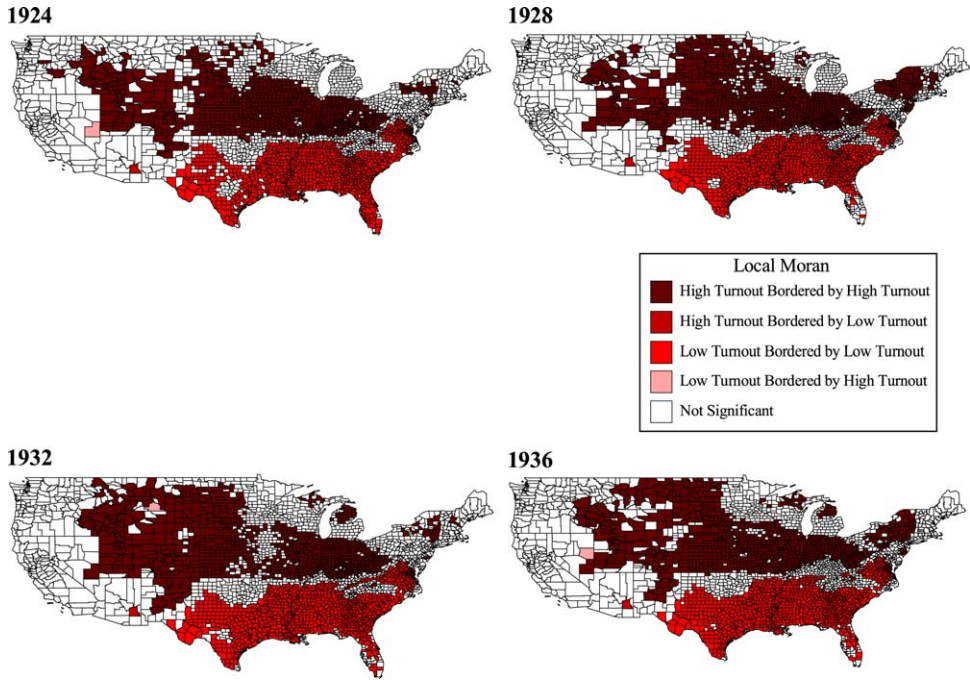


Fig. 9. Spatial structure of macro turnout, 1924–1936.

bordered by higher turnout. Although the earlier pattern would re-form one last time in 1960 (when 68.1 percent of counties in the area exhibited positively autocorrelated above average turnout), the 1956 election was a harbinger of things to come. By 1964 the areas of spatially random turnout in Ohio and Kansas had grown (and spread to Missouri) and by 1968 emergent spatial patterns were becoming clearly defined in both the North and the South.

The previously unknown westward expansion of macro turnout merits considerable attention from political scientists. In contrast to Elazar's cultural thesis, the heart of this expansion swept through the Midwest, which Elazar argued was marked by an individualistic culture associated with moderate turnout rates. Moreover, although the pattern did eventually come to encompass local electorates in the Upper Plains, it did not include those in the Pacific Northwest that should have been marked by a moralistic culture valuing participation. The lack of a cultural explanation for this pattern argues for additional analysis into the westward expansion of participation.

Emerging spatial patterns during a period of turnout decline: 1968–2000

By 1968, the spatial patterns that had dominated many counties in the Midwest, Plains, Mountain, and South for several decades were clearly on the wane. Spatially random turnout now marked much of Ohio, Kansas, Missouri, and Wyoming, as well as portions of Nebraska and Iowa (overall, 70.9 percent of the counties in these states). The extensive area of below average turnout in the South also began to dissolve. Although much of Texas, Georgia, North and South Carolina, and Florida continued to be marked by below average turnout (60.9 percent

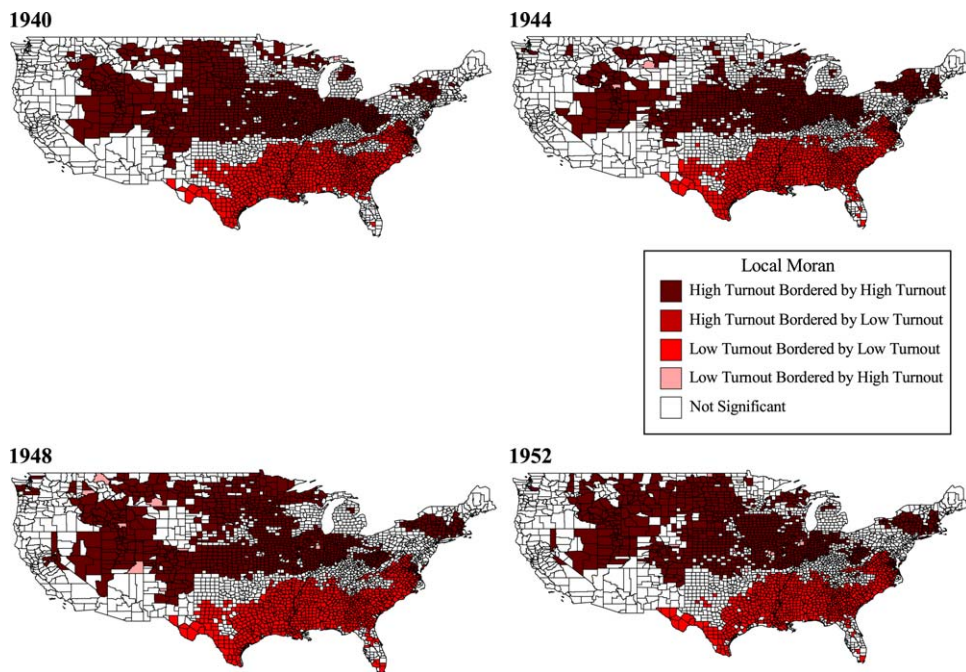


Fig. 10. Spatial structure of macro turnout, 1940–1952.

of these counties, averaging 50.8 percent turnout), much of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Arkansas were now marked by spatially random turnout (64.2 percent of these counties, averaging 59.1 percent turnout).

While previous patterns have dissolved, new participation patterns have formed since 1968. Although the band of counties from Ohio west through the Plains no longer exhibits autocorrelated high turnout (counties in Illinois were the last to lose this structure, in 1976), a large number of counties in the upper Midwest and Mountain sections still do. Indeed, in most elections since 1972, a consistent area of high turnout has been located in the Northern tier of states from Wisconsin through Idaho, extending down into portions of Nebraska, Kansas, Utah, and Colorado (and reaching the west coast in Oregon in some recent elections). In 1972, 59.3 percent of the counties in these states exhibited this pattern (averaging 76.1 percent turnout). In 2000, 57.4 percent of the counties in these states had this pattern (averaging 66.3 percent turnout).¹⁰

While these counties have been marked by above average turnout in recent years, two patterns of below average turnout have marked areas of the South, Southeast, and Appalachia over the same period. One of these patterns has been located in Texas. In 1968, 72.8 percent of Texas counties had this local pattern, with an average turnout of 50.3 percent. Although this area declined in size somewhat during the 1984 and 1988 elections, it has increased since the early 1990s. In 2000, 34.8 percent of Texas counties exhibited this below average turnout pattern, with an average turnout of 47.5 percent.

¹⁰ The percentage of counties in these states that exhibited positively autocorrelated above average turnout from 1976 to 1996 was, respectively, 60.4, 65.1, 55.1, 60.7, 68.6, and 62.1 percent. The average turnout in these counties in these elections was, respectively, 72.8, 71.5, 65.6, 67.7, 72.1, and 69.3 percent.

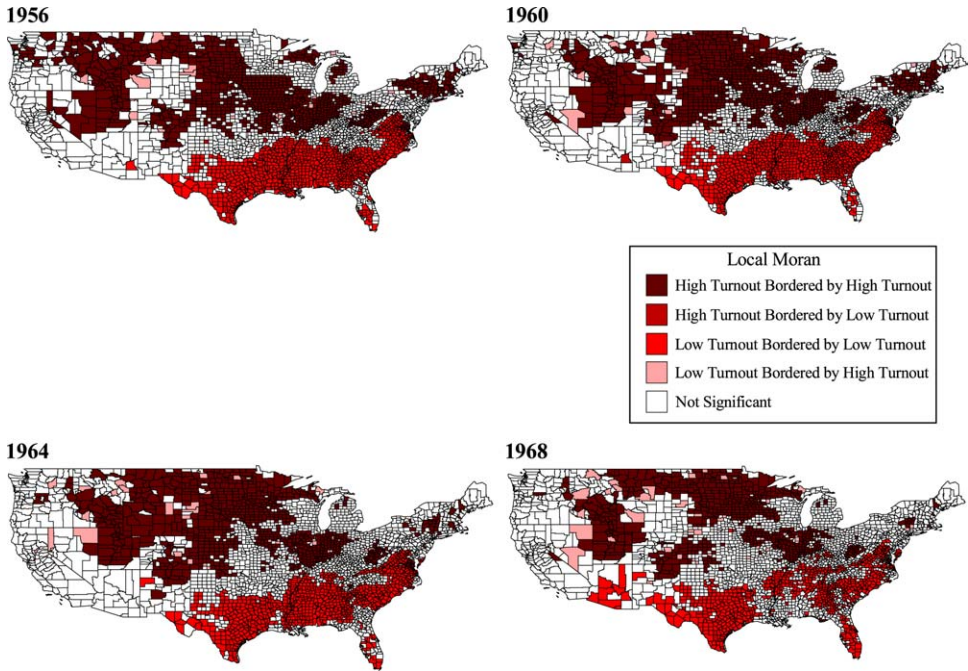


Fig. 11. Spatial structure of macro turnout, 1956–1968.

The second area has, in most elections since 1968, extended from the eastern counties of Arkansas (bordering the Mississippi River) through Tennessee, continued on through the easternmost counties of Kentucky and Alabama, and carried on to Georgia, the Carolinas, and parts of Virginia, Florida, and West Virginia. Because in some states this pattern has been common in only a few counties (e.g., in Arkansas, Alabama, and Kentucky), it has never marked a particularly extensive percentage of the counties in these states (the highest percentage with this local pattern was 60.3 percent in 1972). The percentage of counties exhibiting this turnout pattern has generally declined over time, particularly in the 1990s (in 2000, 44.1 percent of counties in these states had this pattern).¹¹ At the same time, the average turnout in these counties has risen slightly in recent years (though the 48.3 percent figure in 2000 is still below the 51.7 percent figure from 1968).¹² This pattern, then, is something of a reverse image of the post-Reconstruction pattern in the South — it has been declining in both scope and severity in recent years.

Since 1972, an entirely new pattern of below average turnout has formed in the Southwest United States. After 1896, most counties in California, Arizona, and New Mexico had been marked by spatially random turnout. This changed dramatically, however, in 1976, as a band of below average participation appeared across Southern California and Arizona and extended into portions of New Mexico (affecting 28.3 percent of counties in these states, with an average

¹¹ The percentage of counties in these states that exhibited local autocorrelation at below average turnout rates in the 1968–1996 presidential elections was 44.4, 60.3, 52.1, 52.1, 48.6, 54.7, 47.9, and 46.6 percent.

¹² The average turnout in these counties in the 1972–1996 presidential elections was, respectively, 44.5, 46.5, 45.6, 43.1, 42.6, 48.6, and 43.9 percent.

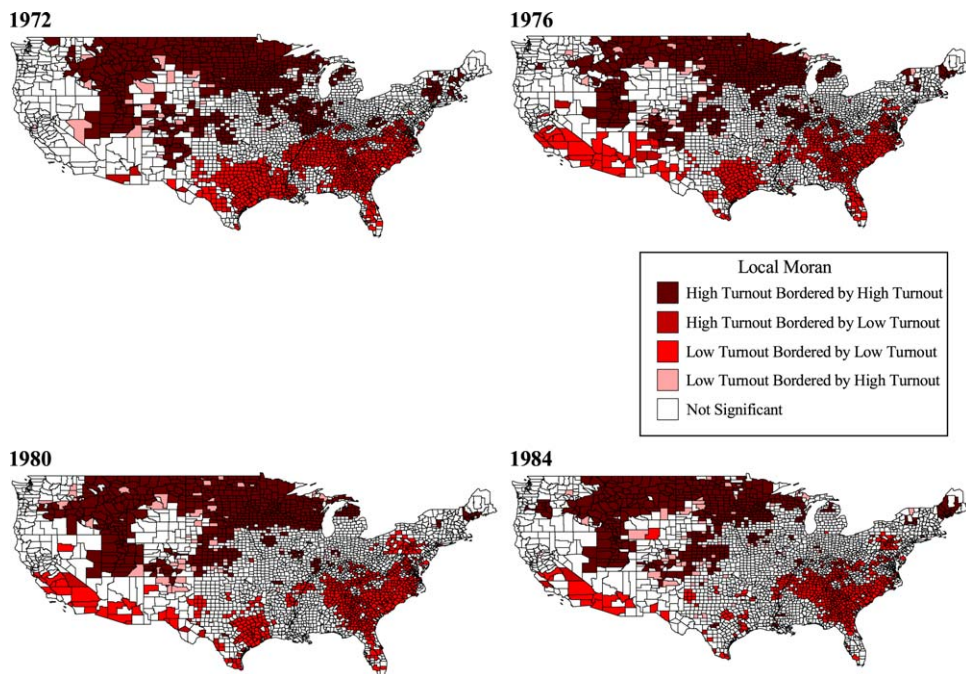


Fig. 12. Spatial structure of macro turnout, 1972–1984.

turnout of 48.2 percent). Although the pattern waned somewhat during the 1980s, it grew in scope dramatically during the 1990s. In 2000, a full 40.6 percent of the counties in these three states showed this local pattern, with an average turnout of 45.7 percent.¹³ This low turnout pattern that has developed in Southern California also contrasts with Elazar's cultural thesis, as Elazar argues that Southern California is marked by a moralistic political culture that should promote voter participation (Elazar, 1984, 124).

The political dimensions of macro turnout

There is, then, little support for Elazar's cultural account of the political geography of macro turnout. Elazar's expectation of consistently high turnout in the Northeast, Upper Plains, and Pacific Northwest conflicts with the spatially random turnout that is often found in these local electorates. Elazar's cultural thesis also fails to account for one of the central stories of turnout in the United States, the westward expansion of high participation following the Civil War. Elazar's cultural perspective also cannot account for the high turnout patterns that marked portions of the antebellum South or the low turnout that has marked Southern California in recent elections.

What has produced the waxing and waning macro turnout regimes over the course of American political development? These patterns, I argue, are the product of three sets of factors. On the one hand are the largely immutable, apolitical attributes of citizens emphasized in micro-level

¹³ The percentage of counties in California, Arizona, and New Mexico exhibiting this local pattern in the 1980–1996 presidential elections was, respectively, 21.2, 12.3, 20.8, 30.2, and 32.1 percent. The average turnout in these counties in these elections was, respectively, 45.8, 44.5, 43.4, 47.0, and 41.6 percent.

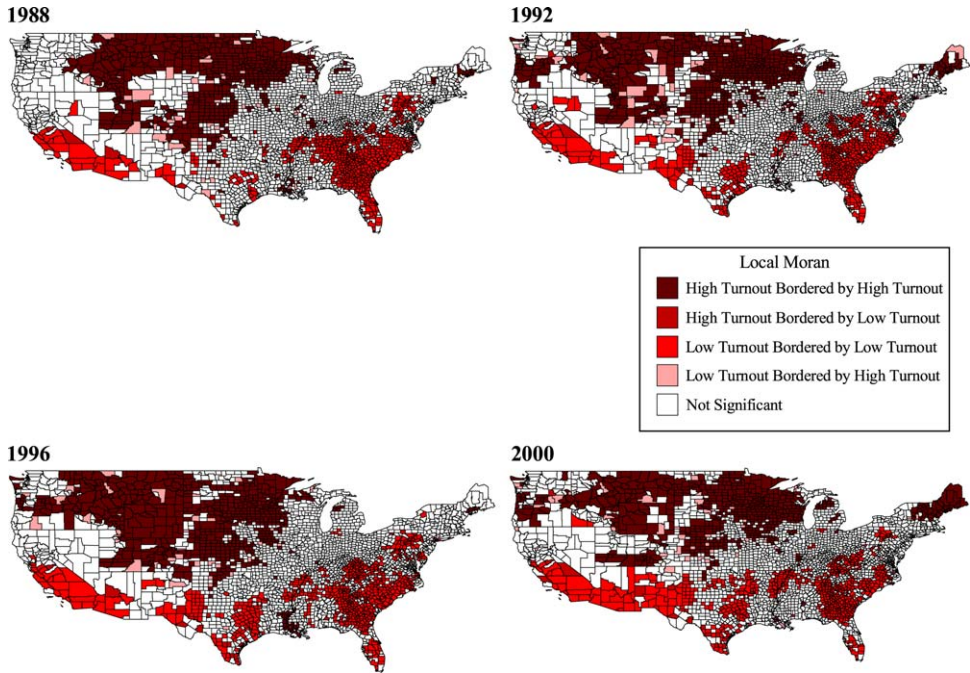


Fig. 13. Spatial structure of macro turnout, 1988–2000.

studies of turnout — socialized partisan identifications and socioeconomic attributes. Time-invariant attributes of citizens impact the costs and benefits of voting and can produce time-varying patterns in macro turnout merely as a result of migration patterns (see also Gimpel, 1999).

Citizens, I argue, are also social actors, interacting with fellow citizens in their local electorates. These interactions impact voting costs and benefits. Macro turnout, as a consequence, is also a social phenomenon. Electorates with stable and dense social networks, for example, should exhibit higher macro turnout rates than electorates with transitory and sparse networks.

This article's central argument, however, is that macro turnout is a political product. Political factors, in fact, have produced significant variation in macro turnout across local electorates. To examine the impacts of political dimensions, as well as social and demographic dimensions on macro turnout, I estimated spatial econometric models of macro turnout for each presidential election from 1828 through 2000. The demographic covariates in the models were *Percent African American*, *Percent Foreign Born*, *Percent Baptist*, *Percent Roman Catholic*, and *Percent Episcopalian*. The social contextual covariates included a measure of *Population Change*, a *Rural* dummy, and a *South* dummy. The political covariates were *Average County-Level Margin*, *Average State-Level Margin*, *Average Minor Party Percent*, *Average Volatility in Partisan Voting*, a *Gubernatorial Election* dummy, a *Senatorial Election* dummy, a measure of the *Average Competitiveness of the State Legislature*, a *County-Level Critical Realignment* dummy, and dummy variables for the following election laws: *Australian Ballot*, *Literacy Test*, *Registration Law*, and *Property Requirement*. I also included a demographic and contextual interaction term, *Percent African American* \times *South* to pick up the differing turnout effects of African American populations in the South and non-South.

In each election other than the 1828 and 1836 elections, Jarque–Bera test rejected the null of normally distributed errors ($p < .01$, one-tailed test). Non-normality in errors compromises the Lagrange Multiplier and Robust Lagrange Multiplier tests for spatial lag and spatial error dependence, as these tests assume normally distributed errors (Anselin & Bera, 1998). The Kelejian and Robinson (1992) test for spatial error dependence, which does not require normality in errors, indicated significant spatial error dependence from unmeasured covariates in each presidential election. There was, therefore, clear evidence of spatial error dependence and no clear evidence of contagion, or spatial lag dependence. As a result, I estimated spatial error models for each election. The estimates for each election, not reported here due to space limitations, are reported in Darmofal (2003). Overall, political covariates account, on average, for an 11.6 point turnout difference per election between positively autocorrelated above average and below average turnout electorates.¹⁴

Earlier I discussed a particular political dimension — partisan competition — that presents a clear macro-level directional turnout expectation due to its consistent micro-level directional turnout effects. High and low turnout electorates have, in fact, been marked by significantly different rates of competition for much of American political development. Throughout most of American electoral history, local electorates with spatially autocorrelated above average turnout have had significantly more competitive presidential elections than have local electorates with spatially autocorrelated below average turnout.¹⁵ A one-way analysis of variance shows that positively autocorrelated above average turnout counties had significantly smaller presidential election margins, on average, than positively autocorrelated below average turnout counties in 40 out of 44 presidential elections from 1828 through 2000 ($p < .001$, one-tailed Bonferroni test).¹⁶

Partisan competition also had a significant substantive impact on turnout differences between high and low turnout regimes for much of American political development. Even after controlling for a set of demographic, social, and other political influences on macro turnout, partisan competition still retained a significant role in producing turnout differences between

¹⁴ Political factors also influence anomalies in the political geography of macro turnout. Consider, for example, New York, with its large band of spatially autocorrelated above average turnout in 1904, its smaller bands of such turnout in 1892 and 1900, and its near absence of such a structure in 1896. Because New York was long a critical swing state, New Yorkers were common figures on national tickets in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The 1896 election was the lone election with no New Yorker on either major party ticket during this period. In 1892, in contrast, the Democratic Presidential and Republican Vice-Presidential candidates were from New York. In 1900, the Republican Vice-Presidential candidate was from New York. And in 1904, both the Republican and Democratic Presidential candidates (Theodore Roosevelt and Alton B. Parker, respectively) hailed from New York (CQ Press, 1997). As we would expect, the spatial structuring of above average turnout in New York was strongest in the 1904 election, and weakest in the 1896 election, with 1892 and 1900 as intermediate cases. Similarly, political factors also influenced the anomalous state structuring of below average turnout in Virginia prior to 1852. For example, Virginia had significantly less competitive presidential elections on average than other states during this period, $p < .001$, one-tailed two-sample t test.

¹⁵ I measure local partisan competition in presidential elections using a five-election moving average that includes the margin in the four preceding presidential elections and the margin in the current presidential election. Such a moving average measure has the advantage of tapping both retrospective and prospective competitiveness. By incorporating past competitiveness, the measure also incorporates the long-term competitiveness of elections in an electorate and reduces the problem of potential endogeneity inherent in a single-election measure in which turnout may impact competitiveness rather than vice versa.

¹⁶ The lone exceptions were the elections of 1840, 1844, 1848, and 1968, each of which had no significant difference in average presidential margin between the two sets of counties. Positively autocorrelated high turnout electorates also had significantly smaller average margins than spatially random electorates in 27 out of 44 presidential elections (one-way ANOVA, $p < .001$, one-tailed Bonferroni test).

spatially autocorrelated above average and below average turnout electorates. From 1852 through 1896, differences in average presidential margins accounted for one to three percentage points of the turnout difference between the two sets of counties.¹⁷ From 1900 through 1948, this impact grew larger, ranging from four to six percentage points.

Partisan competition has had a much reduced impact on turnout differences between high and low turnout counties, however, since 1960. Indeed, the United States appears to have entered into a distinct political era since the 1960s. Although political factors continue to affect macro turnout, the nature of this impact has changed. For example, where state-level presidential election competitiveness and state legislative competitiveness once produced significant turnout differences between high and low turnout electorates, this is no longer the case (Darmofal, 2003). These differing effects over time highlight the dynamic nature of the American polity and the utility of longitudinal data for identifying the time-varying sources of macro turnout.¹⁸

Minor-party candidacies and macro turnout

Earlier I discussed the lack of a clear macro-level prediction for the turnout impact of minor party candidacies due to potentially differing micro-level effects among citizens in the same local electorate. A critical advantage of the macro-level perspective, I argued, was the ability to examine the macro impacts of such factors where we have conflicting micro-level expectations. It is instructive, therefore, to examine the effects of minor party candidacies on macro turnout. These impacts have been time-variant, changing over the course of political party development in the United States.

Minor party support has had an oscillating, but often consequential relationship with macro turnout. During the Second American Party System, from 1828 through 1856, minor party support in local electorates exerted no impact on macro turnout differences between spatially

¹⁷ The lone exception during this period was the 1860 election, in which presidential margins had no effect on turnout differences between the two regimes.

¹⁸ Immigration, women's suffrage, and the rural vs. urban cleavage have all played critical roles in American political development. The first two impacted the political geography of macro turnout while the third did not. Electorates with spatially autocorrelated above average turnout have generally had larger foreign-born populations than have electorates with spatially autocorrelated below average turnout. From 1880 through 1920, these larger immigrant populations were associated with one to three points lower turnout in the former electorates than in the latter electorates. The much larger immigrant populations in major Midwest urban centers such as Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City partially explain why these locations were often excluded from the westward expansion of macro turnout following the Civil War. In Cook County, IL, for example, 34 percent of the population was foreign born in 1904, vs. a national average of 9.3 percent. From 1924 through 1956, however, larger immigrant populations were associated with one to two points higher turnout in spatially autocorrelated above average turnout electorates than in spatially autocorrelated below average turnout electorates. With aggregate data alone, we cannot tell whether these turnout differences were due to the (non)-voting of immigrants or the (non)-voting of non-immigrants. It is suggestive, however, that the emergence of positive macro turnout effects with larger immigrant populations coincides with the emergence of the modern, urban, ethnic Democratic party in the 1920s. In contrast to immigrant populations, there has not been sufficient variation in male vs. female populations across local electorates to produce significant variation in macro turnout across electorates. Several predominantly western states, however, recognized women's right to vote beginning in the late 19th century. These early adoptions were related to the political geography of macro turnout. Electorates with spatially autocorrelated above average turnout were significantly more likely to have early adoptions of women's suffrage than were electorates with spatially autocorrelated below average turnout (one-way ANOVA, $p < .01$, one-tailed Bonferroni test). After controlling for political, social, and demographic factors, the rural vs. urban cleavage has had little independent effect on macro turnout. In most elections, the *Rural* dummy variable has had no effect on the political geography of macro turnout.

autocorrelated above average and below average turnout electorates.¹⁹ As a minor party, the Republicans, emerged to offer a vessel for opposition to slavery at the beginning of the Third American Party System (1860–1896), support for minor parties briefly produced higher turnout rates in spatially autocorrelated high turnout electorates than in spatially autocorrelated low turnout electorates.²⁰ As the Republican and Democratic parties increased their salience and their mobilization capacities during the latter quarter of the 19th century, minor parties ceased to boost macro turnout.

The Republican and Democratic parties were weakened both in their salience with voters and as mobilizing organizations as a result of Progressive reforms at the beginning of the Fourth American Party System (1896–1932). However, this weakening of the major parties did not result in minor party alternatives boosting macro turnout rates. Despite the considerable electoral support for minor parties such as the Progressives and Socialists during this period, minor party support did not translate into higher macro turnout rates. Instead, minor parties had no effect in producing turnout differences between spatially autocorrelated above average and below average turnout electorates until the 1920s. And at that point, where minor parties ran strongest, macro turnout was generally lowest.

The emergence of the Democratic Party as the majority party in the United States at the beginning of the Fifth American Party System (1932–present) brought with it a partial rehabilitation in major party salience and organizational capacities. But despite the increased prominence and attractiveness of the major parties (particularly the Democrats), minor party candidacies still emerged. The States' Rights (Dixiecrats) and Progressive Party candidacies of 1948 briefly boosted macro turnout rates. Subsequently, minor party candidacies had little consequential impact on macro turnout for several decades.

Recent elections, however, have witnessed the largest macro turnout impacts of minor party candidacies in American electoral history. From 1992 through 2000, minor party support produced a five to six point turnout difference between spatially autocorrelated high and low turnout electorates. This impact occurred during a period in which high-profile minor party candidates, especially H. Ross Perot and Ralph Nader, served as vehicles for voter discontent with the major party alternatives. Overall, minor party candidacies have had a highly time-varying impact on macro turnout over the course of American political development that at times comports with and at other times challenges popular accounts of their role in mobilizing voter participation.

Conclusion

Macro turnout is recognized as a central measure of democratic performance and of the political health of a representative democracy. As a consequence, few data are as keenly examined by both scholars and professional commentators as the national turnout rate. One prominent scholar has analogized recent low turnout rates to a “fever” that indicates “deeper trouble in the body politic” (Putnam, 2000, 35). Professional observers routinely bemoan the low rate of participation by American voters (Dionne, 2000).

Despite the importance of macro turnout, our understanding of this critical macro behavior remains quite limited along several dimensions. The dominant approach to turnout, a

¹⁹ I measure minor party support as a moving average of the level of support for minor party presidential candidacies in the local electorate over five elections.

²⁰ This largely reflects coding of the Republican party as a minor party in 1860.

micro-level survey-based approach, is ill-suited for explaining macro turnout variation. The focus on national survey aggregates obscures local-level variation in macro turnout. The dominant micro-level approach ignores a critical 70 percent of the history of mass voter participation in American political development. And its principal theoretical and methodological approaches necessarily detach participation from the local, political, and historical settings in which it has taken place. The result is a constrained conception of turnout that is fundamentally unable to examine how local political factors have shaped macro turnout over the course of American political development.

This article has argued for an alternative, macro-level political perspective on turnout. This approach offers significant advantages both over the dominant micro-level approach to turnout and Elazar's alternative cultural account of macro turnout variation.

A political perspective on macro turnout identifies the impact of the local political influences on turnout that are largely excluded from the micro-level approach. It also provides greater leverage than Elazar's cultural perspective in explaining the political geography of macro turnout in the United States. In highlighting the political dimension of political participation, the macro-level political perspective underscores the collective responsibility that elites and citizens jointly share for voter participation and democratic performance.

This article has examined macro turnout in its local, political, and historical settings by charting the underexplored political geography of macro turnout in American political development. This political geography challenges much of our conventional wisdom regarding turnout in American electoral history. The South, for example, has not been consistently marked by low rates of participation. Instead, participation was at times vibrant among those eligible to vote in the antebellum South. Macro turnout has not been consistently strong in New England or in the Upper Plains as a product of Puritan or Northern European cultural preferences for participation. Instead, turnout has often been lower in these electorates than in electorates presumed to be dominated by individualistic or traditionalistic cultures.

Most fundamentally, our conception of participation in American political development is challenged by the identification of a previously unknown regime of participation that is, arguably, the dominant macro turnout regime in American history. The westward expansion of voter participation following the Civil War contradicts many conceptions of voter engagement and mobilization in the United States. This regime, for example, poses a fundamental challenge to Schattschneider's privatization of conflict thesis, and the resulting debate between Burnham, Converse, and Rusk regarding the System of 1896. Most fundamentally, this high turnout regime argues that there was no significant privatization of conflict, no extensive elimination of vote fraud (Converse, 1974; Rusk, 1974), no System of 1896 (Burnham, 1974), and no significant decline in macro turnout in much of the non-South. Macro turnout, instead, persisted at high rates for decades after scholars (operating largely with data limited to a few states) had presumed that it had declined substantially.

In this article, I have identified that political factors have played a critical role in producing macro turnout differences between high turnout regimes such as the post-Civil War westward expansion of participation and low turnout regimes such as the post-Reconstruction South. Delineating the particular political factors that produced the westward expansion of macro turnout and that have produced other high and low turnout regimes is the essential next step in understanding how political features of local electorates have shaped macro turnout in American political development. In delineating these influences, we will more readily understand the political dimensions underlying one of the essential macro behaviors in American politics.

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