

**THE NEW EUROPEAN VOTER**  
**The economy and the vote: the economy as context**

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The literature on the relationship between the economy and political support is among the most developed in the sub-field of election studies. A (highly) selected bibliography by Stegmeier and Lewis-Beck (2013) lists eight crucial works, addressing issues such as the prospective/retrospective and sociotropic/egocentric controversies, cross-national variations, and the way political, economic, and institutional contexts mediate the impact of economic variables on vote choices. In another recent overview, the same authors (Lewis-Beck and Stegmeier 2013) report, probably conservatively, that the literature on the relationship between the economy and the vote comprises “perhaps 500 titles”.

Among the proposed main findings of this literature are that “the voter rewards the government for good economic performance and punishes it for bad”; that voters’ views about past performance and about the overall economy of the nation are more strongly related to vote choices than future expectations and personal situations; and that unemployment, inflation, and economic growth are the most consequential economic variables from this point of view (Lewis-Beck and Stegmeier 2013). The relationship between economic conditions and turnout has been much less explored, but has nonetheless generated a number of suggestive findings. Turnout seems to be higher in the more economically advanced countries (Blais & Dobrzynska 1998; Norris 2004; Fornos et al. 2004). Changes in crucial indicators of economic performance do seem to make a difference, arguably mobilizing and demobilizing voters, by creating discontent in some cases, passivity in others, or mobilization to reinstate successful incumbents (Rosenstone 1982; Radcliff 1992; Gomez and Hansford 2010; Burden and Wichowsky 2012; Martins and Veiga 2013).

However, all the examples discussed so far concern studies that have inquired about the direct effect of economic conditions on vote choices, or at most at how such an effect as it is mediated by individual perceptions. And there are reasons to believe that the fruitfulness of this line of inquiry has not been proportional to the formidable efforts employed. Crucial questions, such the differential impact of the economy on the performance of different types of parties (Carlsen 2000; van der Brug et al. 2007),

continue to generate contradictory findings. Voters in many contexts seem strikingly unwilling or unable to blame the incumbents government for the economic conditions (see Anderson and Hecht 2012). The relationship between economic conditions and vote choice is far from inevitable (Marsh and Mikhaylov 2012), and rather contingent upon different attributes of voters and of the political context they are exposed to (Anderson 2007). As Kayser notes, in a recent review article tellingly titled “the elusive economic vote,” the causal links between economic conditions and political behavior, once properly specified, are remarkably complex, rendering the economic vote “unstable and contingent on multiple individual, political, institutional, and economic circumstances,” with the consequence that “the effect of the economy on the vote is both disconcertingly sporadic and the best empirical evidence of electoral accountability” (Kayser 2013: 19-20). All this suggests that perhaps greater efforts could be devoted to looking at the relationship between economic conditions and political behavior from a different but often neglected perspective: the *indirect* effects of the economy, or to put it differently, on its role as a *moderator* in the explanation of political behavior.

### ***The economy as context***

What do we mean by this? Individual vote functions, in spite of their complexity and diversity in the literature, typically comprise a relative small set of generic features of individuals and the groups to which they belong and are supposed to affect their vote choices: “*structural*” *social positions* along different lines of social cleavage; views about *issues*, some economic and others not; perceptions and evaluations of *competence and performance* (including economic) of parties and leaders; and generic “nonpolicy” factors, such as partisan attachments or ideological predispositions. Similarly, although numerous studies have analyzed the determinants of voter turnout and a great diversity of theories have emerged addressing the many different aspects of the theme (see Geys 2006a and 2006b, Blais 2006 and Smets and van Ham 2013 for overviews), at least three main factors have been recurrently referenced as important at the individual level. The first concerns socio-demographic characteristics related to individual *resources*, such as age, education, income and social class (Verba & Nie 1972; Blais 2000; Franklin 2004; Lijphart 1997). Other individual level aspects to take into account are *attitudes*, such as political interest and

internal as well as external efficacy (Dalton 2006). Finally, *mobilization*, resulting from individual linkages to mobilization agencies such as churches, unions, and other organizations or of the actions of parties and candidates themselves (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba et al. 1995; Wattenberg 2000), has also been demonstrated to have an effect (but see Smets and van Ham 2013).

What can we say about the relative importance of these different factors in different countries and elections? A lot of the discussion about electoral politics in the last decades in Europe and elsewhere has precisely hinged on this question. This includes themes like the “decline of cleavage politics” (Franklin, Mackie and Valen 1992), the decline of “position politics” and the rise of “valence politics” (Clarke et al. 2004), the decline of the mobilizing role of churches and unions (Norris 2002), and partisan dealignment and the rise of short-term forces in the explanation of the vote (Dalton 2006). These are all “rises” and “declines” that tell us about how these different broadly defined factors have become less or more important through time. And regardless of any secular “rises” or “declines” through time, there seem to be important variations *between contexts*, i.e., between political systems, societies, and even elections, on the extent to which these different factors turn out to be consequential for vote choices and the choice to vote.

The goal of our paper is to discuss how economic conditions may have worked as relevant sources of such contextual variation. Rather than focusing on how economic conditions, objective or perceived, national or personal, past or expected, affect directly the decision of whether to vote and for whom, our interest is to determine the extent to which economic conditions *moderate* the relationship between those dependent variables of interest and some of the well-established factors that are supposed to influence vote choices and turnout. To put it differently, moving from *direct to indirect effects* still implies an interest in the causal mechanism of the relationship between the economy, on the one hand, and turnout and vote choices, on the other. However, it sees is as funneled through the well-established determinants of turnout and vote choices. By studying how the economy may alter the role of fundamental determinants of political behavior, making them less or more prominent across countries and elections, we may reach a more in-depth understanding of the mechanisms of vote choice, and of, broadly speaking, “economic voting” itself. In the

next sections, we discuss the potential role of three types of economic factors: economic development; economic inequality; and economic performance.

### *Socioeconomic development*

One major source of contextual economic variation is, of course, a country's level of socioeconomic development, with what it implies in terms of greater material and cognitive resources in a society, occupational differentiation, social mobilization, and secularization, among other aspects of the overall "societal modernization" package. There are good reasons to believe that this process, and extent to which countries have undergone it, affects the basic vote and turnout functions.

Modernization is thought to have disturbed old alignments between parties and social groups; to weaken the ties between individuals and those organizations—such as churches or unions—that gave expression to collective identities and worked as intermediaries between parties and society; or to increase citizens' cognitive skills and changing their generic values and attitudes towards politics. In particular, modernization is thought to be connected to partisan dealignment, with partisanship on decline and election specific factors playing an increasing role, often referred to as an increase in issue-voting. If this is the case, parties' perceived competency to deal with the most salient issues should become more important – and should be election specific depending on the context of the election (which issues are perceived as important) (Bélanger and Meguid 2008). All this leads to a series of expectations about the consequences of modernization that concern us directly here:

- A decline in the extent to which voting choices are anchored in traditional social cleavages (Norris 2004).

- "Cognitive mobilization" as a source of partisan dealignment, rendering partisan attachments less relevant to explain vote choices (Dalton and Wattenberg 2002; Dalton 2006).

- Weakening mobilization capabilities on the part of traditional linkage organizations, such as churches or unions (Norris 2002).

- Overall, "a general decline in the long-term determinants of voting choice" (Dalton 2006) – cleavage-based, partisanship-based voting – with a shift towards short-term factors, such as candidate image, issue opinions and performance (Dalton and Klingemann 2007).

In sum, we should generically expect that, when examining the relative weight of different constellations of factors in explaining vote choices, in more developed societies all indicators capturing social characteristics of voters, and partisan and ideological attachments (i.e., “y-hats”, PID and LRDIST) should have a weaker explanatory power, in contrast with perceptions of party competence (PCOMP) or evaluations of party leaders or presidential candidates (LSYMP/CSYMP).

In what concerns turnout, we expect that mobilization by traditional linkage organizations, such as churches or unions, should have become less relevant as explanations of turnout in the most developed countries. In what concerns church attendance and union-membership, we also intend to probe – at a later stage – whether socioeconomic development comparatively undermines the importance of the latter in comparison with the former, due the economic nature of union-membership as a mobilizing factor and the non-economic nature of church attendance. Finally, if education reflects cognitive and social resources of individuals, (Kam and Palmer 2008, Gallego 2010 via Häusermann, Wueest and Kurer 2013) it should explain turnout to a greater extent in more modern societies, because of cognitive mobilisation of voters. On the contrary, we could expect that party identification to decrease as a determinant of turnout for the same reason, that is, development and higher overall levels of cognitive mobilisation should diminish the effect of party identification on turnout.

### *Income inequality*

An increasingly large number of studies have focused on the impact of aggregate income inequality measured at the national level on political attitudes and behaviors, including attitudes such as “support for democracy” (Solt 2012), nationalism and national pride (Solt 2011; Han 2013) or demand for redistribution (Finseraas 2009). But how would inequality work as a moderator variable in the study of the determinants of vote choices and turnout?

In more unequal societies, it is likely that redistributive policy conflicts tend to be more intense, increasing the distance between the policy preferences of the poor and the rich. This is precisely what has been found in the case of education policies (Busemeyer 2012), and it is arguably the case for other policy domains that involve some sort of redistribution. This suggests the possibility that, in more unequal

societies, vote choices are more strongly determined by factors such as income or social class, therefore increasing – at least from that perspective – the amount of “structural voting” (but see also Gelman et al. 2010, who find no evidence of a relationship between inequality and class-based voting).

Furthermore, greater economic inequality may also increase the relevance of ideological predispositions on the vote, particularly as captured in terms of “left-right” placements and voters’ distance to parties positions in this respect. The left-right scale has been referred to as a super-issue that summarizes a broad range of diverse issues. Van der Eijk and Schmitt (2010) established that voters perceptions of parties’ placement on left-right does reflect the policy content of parties manifestos. Although there are differences between Eastern and Western Europe, differences between left and right still largely reflect, in both cases, what the role of the government should be in the economy. This suggests that, to the extent that these redistributive/economic policies make up for at least part of the left/right conflict, inequality should increase polarization among the electorate (but see Dettrey and Campbell 2013) causing ideology (or distances vis-à-vis parties along the left/right spectrum) to have a more significant impact in vote choices in countries with higher levels of inequality. Furthermore, if we look at this from a “partisan supply” point of view – rather than a “citizen demand” one – income inequality also seems to increase ideological polarization between parties (McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006; Garand 2010). This could imply, again, a connection between inequality and an increased role of ideology, given the finding that greater party system polarization increases positional voting (Dalton 2008; Lachat 2008).

Implications of inequality for the determinants of turnout (and of political participation in general) may also be important. Referring to the case of the US, Schattschneider suggested that the large turnout differential between richer and poorer individuals was linked to high income inequality, with what it implied for the ability of the former to place issues in the political agenda and increase the value of the vote for them, while decreasing it for individuals with lower resources (Schattschneider 1960). Solt (2010) tested this hypothesis for the United States and found that inequality not only depresses turnout, but also creates a larger bias between high and low resources individuals. Thus, we expect that, in countries with higher inequality, measures of resources are more consequential to explain turnout.

### *Economic performance*

How should economic performance affect how consequential different determinants of vote choices become? Although, as we have seen, the main focus of the literature has been on the direct effects of the economy on vote choices and (to a much lesser extent) turnout, there are intuitions and related findings in the literature to guide us.

One line of argument is that, under unfavorable economic conditions, voters and parties behave in ways that are likely to make positional voting less relevant and competence judgments more consequential. When times are tough, voters seem to pay special attention to parties' ability to deliver prosperity and growth (Bloom and Price 1975; Clarke et al. 2011), which are clear valence goals. Stanig (2013) further argues that economic downturns "focus" voters and reduce variance in perceptions of the economy, unlike what occurs under conditions of economic recovery, which make perceptions more polarized along partisan and ideological lines. Rohrschneider and Loveless (2010), addressing on other sorts of political evaluations (of the EU), similarly suggest that economic downturns increase the relevance of performance evaluations. Finally, Lewis-Beck and Nadeau (2012), looking at 10 European countries since 1988, show that the effects of economic perceptions on the vote increase as macro-economic conditions become worse. All this should lead us to expect that, during economic downturns, ideological distance and partisanship should matter less for voters, while performance considerations should matter more. To put it differently, better economic performance should *decrease* the relevance of competence and leadership abilities considerations and *increase* partisan and ideological determinants.

The implications for turnout of economic performance—again serving as a context-level moderator rather than in terms of direct effects – is also a matter of interest to us. One central is that the *direct* relationship between economic performance and turnout is curvilinear (Veiga and Martins 2013; Gomez and Hansford 2010): turnout increases both in the worst of times (to oust incumbents) and the best (to reaffirm them). To put it differently, this means that both bad and good economic conditions generally increase the perceived benefits of voting. But if that is the case, a few implications for the *indirect* effects of economic conditions might follow. First, if the value of the vote generally increases in situations of either bad or

good economic performance, all kinds of gaps between young and old, low and high resource voters and mobilized and non-mobilized voters are all likely to become smaller in conditions of such higher stakes elections. In other words, we expect the impact that age, resources, mobilization, and political engagement attitudes have on turnout to become smaller in such economic conditions. The overall mobilization effect produced by extreme – positive and negative – economic contexts is likely to compensate for the effect of scarcity of resources and the differential mobilization capabilities of parties and other agents.

Here, however, expectations about these indirect effects hinge on the assumption that the effects of economic performance are indeed curvilinear. Such relationship has also been argued to be negative and linear, with only economic downturns increasing mobilization and turnout. More important, that increase in turnout seems to result from the increase mobilization of the worst-off in society, with the result that, in such contexts of economic downturn, the turnout gap between individuals with high and low resources (Aguilar and Pacek 2000; Burden and Wichowsky 2012) should become smaller.

### *Hypotheses*

Tables 1 and 2 generally sketch our expectations. In Table 1, we deal with the determinants of vote choices. In countries with higher levels of economic development, we should expect less structural voting, a lower relevance of partisan and ideological predispositions, and an enhanced importance of election-specific and short-term factors on the vote, such as party competence and leader evaluations. Greater levels of economic inequality are expected to increase structural voting and positional voting. Finally, in what concerns economic performance, the expectation is that better economic performance should make competence and leadership considerations less relevant and to allow space for more partisan and positional voting.

Table 1. Expectations about the determinants of vote choice

	“Structural voting” (YHATS)	Partisan attachments (PID)	Left-right distance (LRDIST)	Party competence (PCOMP)	Leader sympathy (LSYMP/CSYMP)
Socioeconomic development	-	-	-	+	+
Economic inequality	+		+		
Economic performance		+	+	-	-

Table 2 sketches the hypothesized consequences for turnout. We expect that, in more developed countries, educational resources become more relevant, while mobilization variables (linked to social integration in churches and unions) and party cues become less relevant. Inequality is likely to increase the turnout differential between people with low and high resources, in this case educational, which is the resources measure we have available. Finally, expectations for economic performance are not clear. Some suggest that mobilization, resources and partisanship are less likely to be important in high-stakes elections, i.e., those taking place either under both the worst and the best economic conditions. Others, however, suggest that elections under economic crisis are the real mobilizing elections, which leads to the expectation that, under those situations, gaps between high and low resource individuals, between those who are better socially integrated, and those who are attached to parties should be smaller, while those gaps should larger under better economic conditions (which justified the ‘+’ sign in the table below).

Table 2. Expectations about the determinants of turnout

	Age (turnBAGE)	Education (turnBEDU)	Social integration (turnBSOCINT)	Party identification (turnBPID)
Socioeconomic development		+	-	-
Economic inequality		+		
Economic performance	Curv./+	Curv./+	Curv./+	Curv./+

### Analysis: the determinants of vote choice

Our data consists on estimates, for each country/election, of the effects of a set of individual determinants of vote choices and turnout. For vote choice, this includes YHATS (estimates of the effect of socio-demographic features), PID (of party identification), LRDIST (distance between voters and parties along the left-right axis), PCOMP (evaluation of party competence on the most important issue), and LSYMP/CSYMP (evaluation of party leaders or candidates).

Let us start by inspecting some bivariate patterns related to our hypotheses. The first concerns the role of socio-demographic features of determinants of the vote. We suggested they should be less relevant in more developed countries and more important under conditions of greater income inequality. Figure 1 plots our YHAT coefficients against a measure of socio-economic development, GDP per capita.<sup>1</sup> The suggested relationship, if anything, is positive rather than negative, unlike our expectations. If we had modeled this relationship as linear, R2 would have been .09.

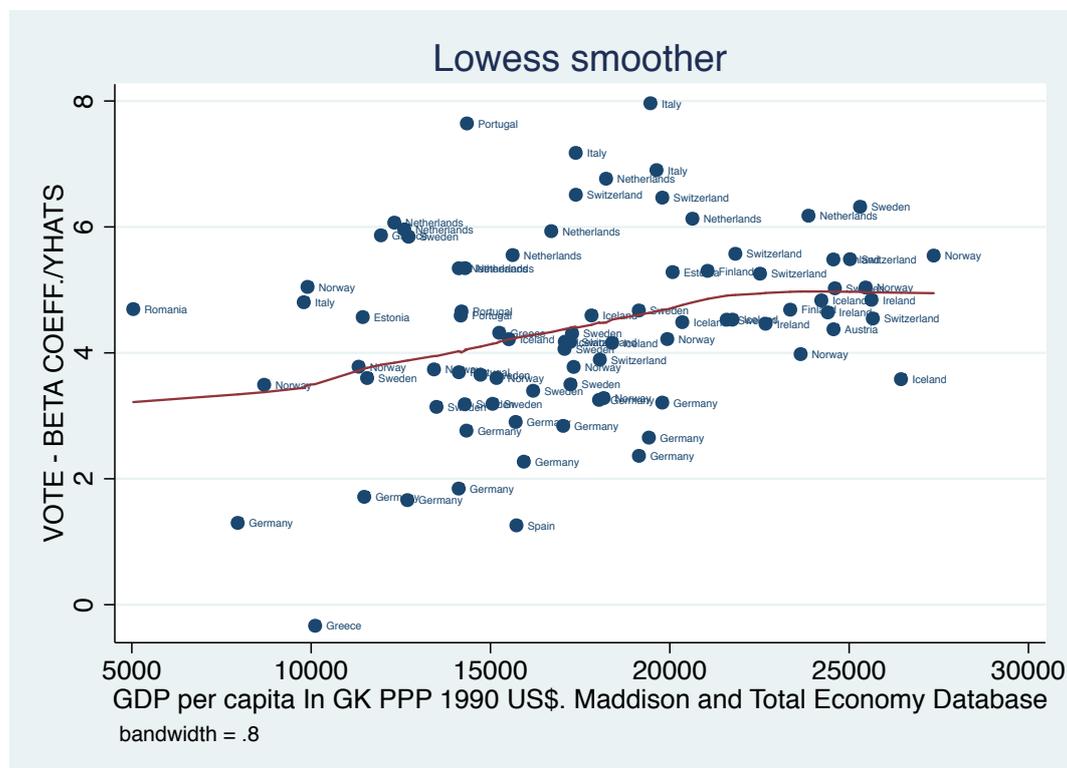


Figure 1: Economic development and YHATS

<sup>1</sup> Source: Maddison Project, <http://www.ggdc.net/maddison/maddison-project/home.htm>.

Figure 2 does the same, in this case for economic inequality, measured as the net Gini index.<sup>2</sup> Again, a positive relationship suggests itself, this time according to our hypothesis. R2 for a linear relationship, however, would have been a mere .04.

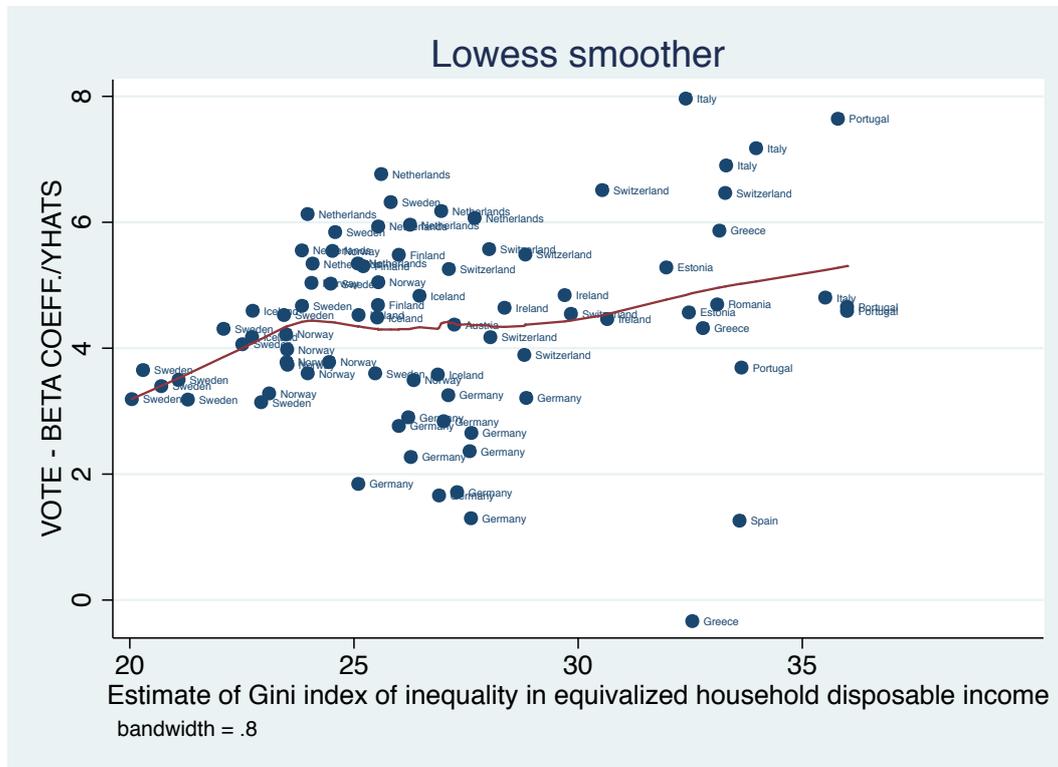


Figure 2: Income inequality and voteYHATS

However, a bivariate analysis is insufficient to uncover existing patterns. In Table 3, we regress out YHAT estimates on both development and inequality, and add two control variables. The first is *Age of democracy*, the number of years up until the year of the election since the country became a democracy, as assessed by a *polity* score greater or equal to 7.<sup>3</sup> Since the distribution of this variable is positively skewed in our data (at .75), we log-transformed the variable. The second is whether the country only became a democracy since the 1970s (*Newdem*). Although these variables may seem very similar, they are not: since we have repeated observations of elections in the same countries, *Age of democracy* captures the extent to which an increased experience under competitive elections has contributed to increase (or

<sup>2</sup> Source: The Standardized World Income Inequality Database. Available at: <http://myweb.uiowa.edu/fsolt/swiid/swiid.html>

<sup>3</sup> Source: Polity IV Project: Political Regime Characteristics and Transitions, 1800-2012. Available at: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>

decrease) the social anchoring of parties and electoral behavior as a whole. Conversely, *Newdem* explores the possibility that, independently of the length of experience with competitive elections, countries that became democratic in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century have a different nature from this point of view, with parties having been less central in citizen mobilization and more weakly rooted in society than in those democracies that were inaugurated earlier (Mainwaring and Zoco 2007).

Table 3: Development, inequality, and structural voting

GDP per capita (thousands US\$)	.02 (.04)
Net Gini Index	.17 (.07)**
Log of age of democracy	1.22 (.77)
New democracy	-.21 (1.20)
Constant	-5.47 (3.41)
N	82
R2	.29

\*p<.10; \*\*p<.05; \*\*\*p<.01; cluster-corrected standard errors (by country)

The results show that only income inequality has a statistically significant effect on the strength of socio-demographic features of individuals as predictors of vote choices: the more unequal a country is, the greater the importance of “structural voting.” In contrast, economic development, as measured with GDP per capita, is unrelated to the YHAT coefficients.

We can follow the same strategy to investigate the importance of party identification on the vote. Recall that here we had hypotheses for both economic development and economic performance, with the former argued to have a negative effect on the importance of party identification and the latter to have a positive effect (under better economic conditions, ideological and partisan considerations should take lead over competence considerations).

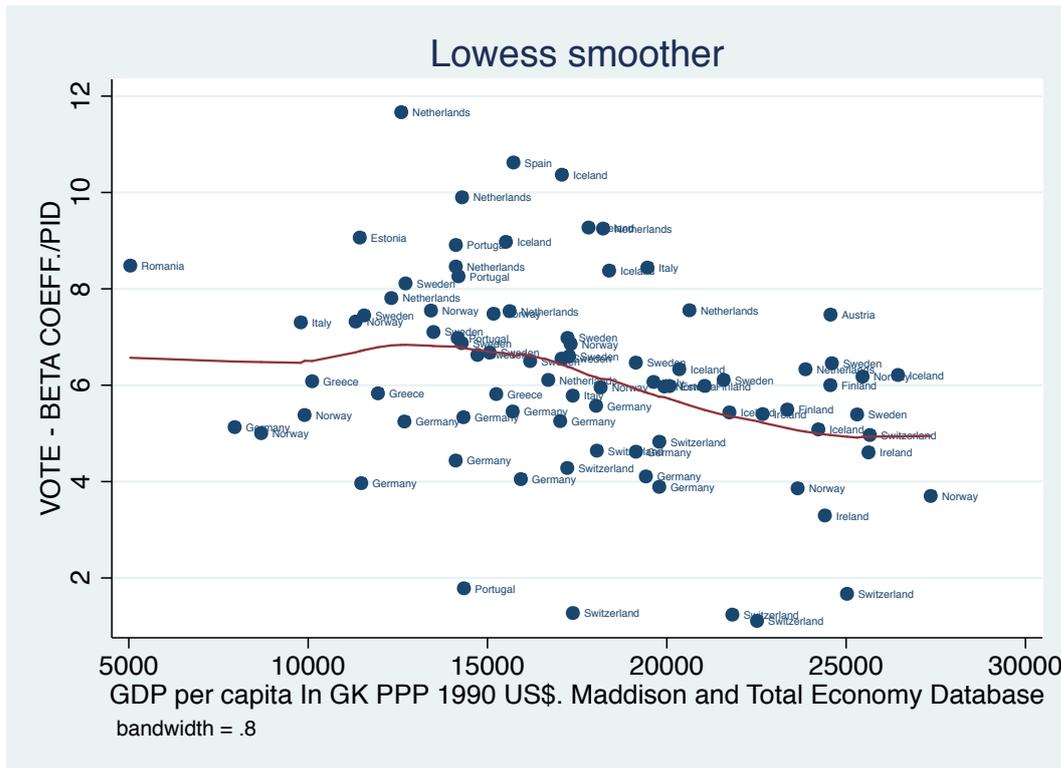


Figure 3: Economic development and votePID

Figure 3 looks at development and votePID. There is an inkling of a possible negative relationship, as expected, with a linear specification yielding an R2 of .12. To investigate the relationship between economic performance and the importance of party attachments, we use four economic variables: GDP growth, the rate of unemployment, the change in the unemployment rate in relation to the previous year, and inflation.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Source: World Bank. Available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>

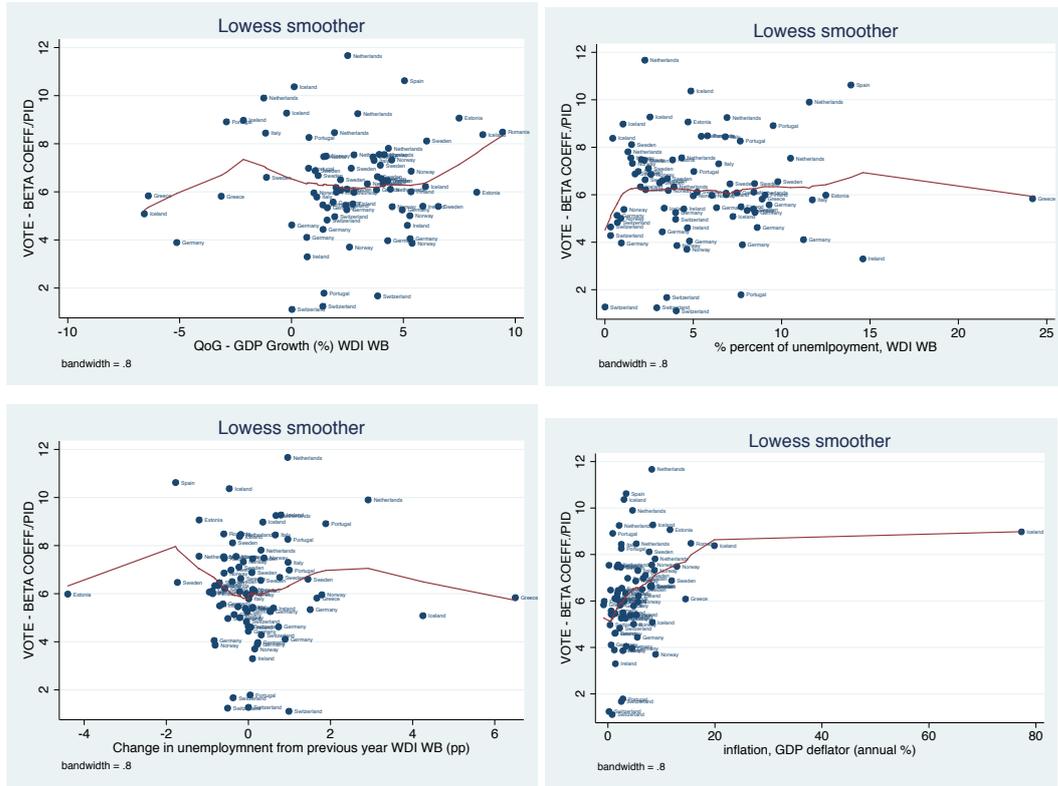


Figure 4: Economic performance and votePID

Nothing very clear emerges from this bivariate approach. The most promising result concerns inflation: in elections with higher inflation, party identification matters more for the vote, particularly if we exclude the massive outlier constituted by Iceland in 1983. Table 4 experiments with two different models, one including and another excluding the Icelandic outlier.

Table 3: Development, economic performance, and the role of party ID

	All cases	Excluding Iceland 1983)
GDP per capita (thousands US\$)	-.11 (.06)*	-.11 (.05)*
Log of age of democracy	-.47 (1.41)	-.26 (1.35)
New democracy	-.21 (1.67)	-.23 (1.54)
GDP growth	.03 (.10)	-.02 (.10)
Unemployment rate	.02 (.07)	.06 (.08)
Change in unemployment rate	.01 (.16)	-.13 (.19)
Inflation	.05 (.03)	.14 (.09)
Constant	9.74 (6.04)	8.29 (6.06)
N	80	79
R2	.21	.22

\*p<.10; \*\*p<.05; \*\*\*p<.01; cluster-corrected standard errors (by country)

Regardless of the model, the only significant variable is economic development: as hypothesized, greater levels of economic development are correlated with a lower importance of party ID as a determinant of the vote in our countries. Economic performance, in turn, seems unrelated with this dependent variable.

Next, we turn to left-right distance. Table 4 shows the results of a regression where all our main variables are used as predictors of the importance of voteLRDIST. Of all our hypothesis, only one finds support: again, in more developed countries, “positional” voting is weaker. Economic inequality approaches statistical significance, but the sign is actually the opposite of what we had hypothesized. No other variable approaches statistical significance at conventional levels.

Table 4: Development, inequality, economic performance, and the importance of positional voting

GDP per capita (thousands US\$)	-.10 (.04)**
Economic inequality	-.12 (.07)
Log of age of democracy	-.54 (1.39)
New democracy	.50 (1.53)
GDP growth	-.01 (.11)
Unemployment rate	.06 (.08)
Change in unemployment rate	-.07 (.22)
Inflation	.11 (.11)
Constant	12.65 (7.33)
N	78
R2	.23

\*p<.10; \*\*p<.05; \*\*\*p<.01; cluster-corrected standard errors (by country)

Our expectations for both votePCOMP and voteLSYMP are similar: more important in more developed countries, should less important when economic conditions are favorable. Visual inspection of the data reveals, first of all, that observations on the importance of competence voting are very few, although the trend does suggest that, in more developed countries, competence may be more important. On the other hand, evaluations of leaders seem *more* (rather than less) relevant in more developed countries, countering our initial hypothesis.

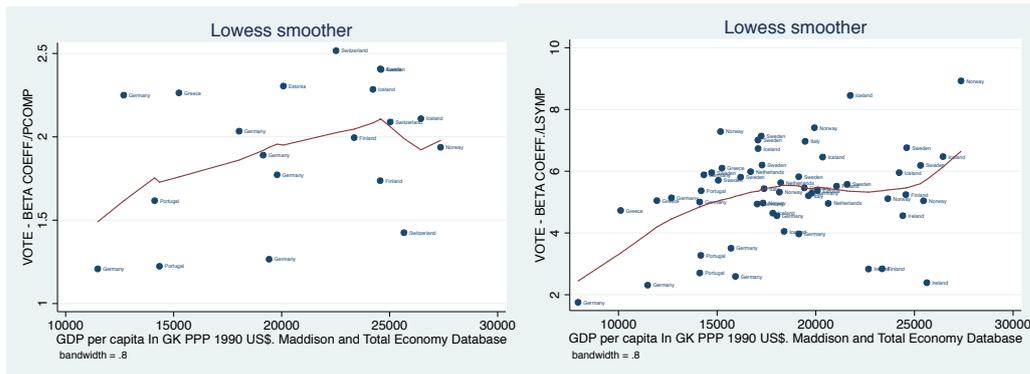


Figure 5: Development, competence voting, and importance of leaders

Table 5 shows the results of models for both PCOMP and LSYMP. For competence, although we should be careful in taking into account the small number of cases we have available, results for economic development are consistent with our expectations: more competence voting as economic development increases. In what concerns the role of leader evaluations, no economic variables seem important. The only significant correlate is age of democracy: the longer the experience with competitive elections, the more those elections seem to be characterized by an important role for leader evaluations.

Table 5: Development, economic performance, competence and leader evaluations.

	PCOMP	LSYMP
GDP per capita (thousands US\$)	.07 (.03)*	-.01 (.07)
Log of age of democracy	-.32 (.26)	1.47 (.54)**
New democracy	.04 (.33)	.31 (.69)
GDP growth	-.03 (.04)	-.15 (.11)
Unemployment rate	-.02 (.02)	.04 (.09)
Change in unemployment rate	.03 (.07)	-.34 (.22)
Inflation	-.03 (.04)	.09 (.10)
Constant	2.09 (.63)***	-.59 (2.57)
N	20	54
R2	.18	.19

In sum, what have we found? First, that several of the hypotheses suggested by modernization theory do seem to hold. The countries/elections with higher levels of economic development in our sample display lower levels of partisan and ideological/positional voting, and higher levels of competence voting. Second, that again as we hypothesized, structural voting is more prevalent in situations of higher income inequality. Finally, no other hypothesis relating economic contexts to the differential importance of determinants of the vote holds. In particular, none of our

indicators of economic performance seem to be related to our indicators about the determinants of the vote. Of course, the economic voting literature is prodigal in variations of how economic performance is measured, including different lag structures and benchmarking in relation to the average performance of the international economy. We did not have time to pursue this avenue, and intend to do so in the future. However, results so far are not particularly encouraging.

***Analysis: the determinants of turnout***

We turn our attention now to the extent to which economic conditions moderate the relationship between turnout and some of its basic determinants. Concerning age – as well as all other determinants – we had hypothesized that economic conditions, by changing the stakes of the elections, might render those determinants more or less relevant. One hypothesis is that, under *worse* economic conditions, differences between individuals in terms of age (or education, or social integration, or partisanship) might become less consequential, as those elections become higher stakes and are more generally mobilizing. An alternative hypothesis is that such situation might occur *both* under the worst and the best economic performance conditions.

We ran the same model for all determinants of turnout: it includes age of democracy, and “new democracy” as controls, as well as economic development, economic inequality, and our four measures of economic performance. Another important macro-level control here might be compulsory voting, but none of these countries have compulsory voting with effective monitoring or sanctions. The results are presented in Table 6:

Table 6: Development, inequality, economic performance, and the determinants of turnout

	turnBAGE	turnBEDU	turnBSOCINT	turnBPID
GDP per capita (thousands US\$)	.08 (.02)***	-.04 (.03)	.00 (.02)	-.04 (.01)***
Economic inequality	-.05 (.05)	-.04 (.03)	-.01 (.02)	-.01 (.02)
Log of age of democracy	.18 (.17)	.28 (.23)	-.09 (.18)	-.33 (.12)**
New democracy	1.17 (.53)**	-.13 (.38)	-.40 (.25)	-.58 (.19)***
GDP growth	.05 (.09)	-.05 (.07)	-.02 (.02)	-.09 (.02)***
Unemployment rate	-.03 (.04)	-.01 (.05)	.00 (.03)	.03 (.02)
Change in unemployment rate	.08 (.24)	-.01 (.17)	-.01 (.05)	-.19 (.06)***
Inflation	.03 (.02)	-.04 (.02)*	-.01 (.02)	-.04 (.02)**
Constant	-.30 (1.47)	2.64 (1.17)**	1.65 (1.18)	3.79 (.77)***
N	64	64	64	64
R2	.33	.15	.09	.39

\*p<.10; \*\*p<.05; \*\*\*p<.01; cluster-corrected standard errors (by country)

First, results for Age, Education, and Social integration are generally frustrating. In general, economic performance seems irrelevant, in this specification, as a contextual explanation as to when these variables might be weaker or stronger predictors of turnout. The exception concerns inflation for the effect of education on turnout, where higher rates of inflation seem to make education a weaker predictor of the vote. Another instance of a positive result concerns economic development, which in general makes age a stronger predictor. The former result is according to expectations, the latter is an unexpected finding.

Things are somewhat different in what concerns whether party identification predicts turnout. Party ID is a weaker predictor of turnout in more developed countries (as expected), in conditions of increased unemployment (as expected) and under higher inflation (again as expected). However, to the extent that this and other determinants of turnout should be of lesser importance under worst economic conditions, the positive coefficient for GDP growth counters expectations. Besides, in no circumstance we found that greater economic inequality affects the determinants of turnout. We also experimented with specification where the effects of our economic performance variables were allowed to be non-linear, but in no case did we find another of the hypothesized patterns: that the conventional determinants of the vote would become less relevant in conditions of both extreme positive or extreme negative economic performance. Overall, then, most of our results for turnout are inconclusive.

## **Conclusion**

There is still a substantial amount of work to be done in this regard. So far, we only have observations for, at most 15 countries. More countries and more elections may allow us to examine the robustness of the results obtained so far, particularly in the case of the role of perceived party competence (where observations are indeed very few). Furthermore, economic performance close to each election was measured here, in spite of the use of several indicators, in just one of the possible ways in which scholars of economic voting have assumed to be relevant. Different lags, performance over the entire election cycle, and indicators benchmarked by an “average” performance of the international economy are possible paths. Some of the hypotheses sketched assume the role of ideological polarization as a mediator in the relationship between economic conditions and the importance of different determinants of the vote, and the collection of such measures of polarization may illuminate both the positive and negative findings obtained. Finally, the general methodological approach here, of a two-step multilevel analysis, should be mostly seen as an exploratory one, to be developed with a pooled hierarchical model and cross-level interactions with specific variables.

Having said that, there is a set of findings that emerge as very suggestive, related to how modernization and socio-economic development affect the vote function. We consistently found that higher levels of socio-economic development are related to a weaker role of “long-term” determinants of the vote, linked to partisan attachments and ideological predispositions, and a stronger role for perceptions of party competence. These findings fit well with expectations about the consequences of societal modernization. Economic inequality also seems to be linked to greater “structural voting”, as expected. However, findings concerning economic performance indicators in general and in the analysis of turnout are generally frustrating.

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