*Voting and Nonvoting: A Multi-Election Perspective**

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Prior attempts to differentiate between voters and nonvoters have focused on a single election, the implicit assumption being that voting or not voting in a particular election is indicative of a more general proclivity. This paper tests the impact of a number of factors that have emerged in earlier studies as predictors of voting participation, but uses participation over a series of 10 elections as the criterion. The model tested here demonstrates greater explanatory power than those previously tested, and follow-up analysis strongly suggests that this explanatory power is a function of the multi-election measurement of participation.

Over the past six decades, countless attempts have been made to explain why Americans do or do not vote. The underlying intent of most such studies has been to differentiate voters as a class from nonvoters as a class, rather than simply describing who voted and who did not vote in a particular election. However, most of these studies, from Merriam and Gosnell's *Non-Voting* (1924/1980) to Wolfinger and Rosenstone's *Who Votes?* (1980) and beyond, have focused on a single election, normally a presidential election.

There has, then, been a disjunction between broad research goals and narrow research focus, and this disjunction poses potential problems for our understanding of voting and nonvoting. For one thing, because different types of people may vote in different types of elections, the conclusions one draws about voting and nonvoting as generic phenomena may reflect idiosyncrasies of the types of elections one has studied. However, there are indications from prior research (e.g., King, 1981; Wolfinger, Rosenstone, and McIntosh, 1981) that the characteristics of voters and nonvoters remain fairly constant from one type of election to another. More problematically, single-election analyses fail to distinguish between people whose behavior may be highly distinctive when viewed from a longer time perspective. In a

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single-election study, a person who votes is lumped together with all other voters, irrespective of whether voting is normal or abnormal, habitual or rare for that person. Similarly, a person who does not vote in a particular election may not even be registered to vote, may be registered but seldom or never vote, may vote fairly regularly, or may have always voted except for this one time. Behavior in a single election, then, may not be a very reliable guide to behavior over the course of many elections—a possibility, rarely explored until now, that provides the point of departure for the present study.

While there is no question that the generic issue of voting versus nonvoting is best studied in the context of tendencies observable over several elections, it is no simple task to assemble individual-level, multi-election data on voting and nonvoting. The most common approach has been to rely on information supplied by interviewees in response to questions about whether they voted in any or all of several previous elections. However, such recall items are notoriously untrustworthy (e.g., Niemi, Katz, and Newman, 1980; Weir, 1975); indeed, even surveys conducted immediately after an election typically overestimate voter turnout by 10 percent or more (Sigelman, 1982).

In this paper we reexamine the characteristics of voters and nonvoters. We offer no new theory of voting and nonvoting. Indeed, our explanatory model is composed entirely of variables that have already attracted considerable attention. Our model is more comprehensive than most, but we make no claim of theoretical innovation. We do, however, claim to have registered a methodological advance, for we study the characteristics of voters and nonvoters in a multi-election context, using validated electoral data. We draw on official voting records from a series of 10 elections (5 primaries and 5 general elections) held over a five-year time span to construct a scale of electoral participation that ranges from not being registered to having voted in at least 9 of the 10 elections. These voting data, supplemented by data on the same individuals drawn from a large-scale opinion survey, enable us to retest in a multi-election setting propositions drawn from earlier, single-election studies of voting and nonvoting.

The Multi-Election Distribution of Voting and Nonvoting

Before proceeding any further, let us consider the possibility that the difference between single- and multiple-election perspectives on voting and nonvoting is more apparent than real. Is the public divided into two groups—those who almost always vote and those who almost never do? If it is, then conclusions based on a multi-election analysis should not be expected to differ very much from conclusions reached in existing single-election studies, for those who vote in any particular election would be the same people who vote most often over time.

In the past, the question of how often people vote has had to be addressed via crude and untrustworthy indicators. This question still cannot be reliably answered on a nationwide basis, but one state, Kentucky, now maintains a computerized voter registration system in which each registrant's voting history is recorded over a running five-year (10-election) period. The availability of this database to academic researchers (an arrangement apparently unique to Kentucky) enables us to analyze voting and nonvoting from a multi-election perspective.

We focus on the 1978–82 period, the most recent period for which data were available when we undertook this study. In these elections the following offices were contested: 1978—congressional and senatorial; 1979—gubernatorial and other state offices and legislative; 1980—presidential, congressional, and senatorial; 1981—legislative and local; 1982—congressional.[1] In 1980, 50.2 percent of voting-age Kentuckians cast a ballot in the presidential election. A typical analysis of voting and nonvoting would compare the characteristics of these 50.2 percent with the characteristics of the 49.8 percent who did not vote. However, during the five-year period in which we are interested, voter turnout varied tremendously from election to election, reflecting the low stimulus exerted by primary elections, salience differences among the general elections, and election-specific idiosyncrasies as well. As the size of the electorate and the identities of the voters and nonvoters changed from election to election, so too might have the social, psychological, and political *bases* of voting and nonvoting. In other words, the expansion and contraction of the electorate could have affected the profile of the voter and the nonvoter.

Table 1 summarizes the electoral participation of voting-age Kentuckians between 1978 and 1982. Some 38.3 percent of the voting-age public did not vote even once during this period. Of these nonvoters, about three-quarters were not registered to vote; the other one-quarter were registered. There was also a sizable group of "marginal" voters who voted only a few times. If we somewhat arbitrarily designate as marginal all those who voted from one to four times, we would classify 36.7 percent of all voting-age Kentuckians as marginal voters. Within these two initial categories of nonvoters and marginal voters, then, we find almost three-quarters of all adult Kentuckians. Only one Kentuckian in eight voted in as many as seven elections, and overall the "hard-core" voters—those who voted in five or more elections—comprised only one-quarter of the voting-age population. Clearly, then, very frequent voting was the exception and nonregistration or

[1] Kentucky's election calendar is unique: it is always election season, and the election in question normally includes some contests for significant offices. It is worth speculating, then, that in a given five-year period there will be more "high-stimulus" elections in Kentucky than there are in other states.

TABLE 1

Electoral Participation Summary, Kentucky, 1978–82

Participation Category	Percentage of Voting-Age Population	Percentage of Registrants
Not registered	28.7	—
Registered		
Voted in 0 elections	9.6	13.5
Voted in 1 or 2 elections	20.2	28.2
Voted in 3 or 4 elections	15.5	21.8
Voted in 5 or 6 elections	13.5	18.9
Voted in 7 or 8 elections	8.6	12.1
Voted in 9 or 10 elections	3.9	5.5
	100.0	100.0

infrequent voting were very widespread. Just as clearly, there was no hard-and-fast distinction between voters and nonvoters, unless one lumped together as "voters" all those who *ever* voted during the five-year period—those who voted only once alongside those who voted every time. Rather, there were only *degrees* of electoral participation that shaded into one another. Based on this evidence, we would argue that electoral participation should not be conceived in binary terms, but should be seen as a greater or lesser tendency observable only with the passage of time.

Factors Affecting Voting and Nonvoting

As we indicated earlier, it is not our purpose to formulate or test a new theory of voting and nonvoting. Rather, we wish to use multi-election data on electoral participation to reexamine the impact of a number of factors whose effects have been examined many times before. Our multi-election focus should eliminate from consideration many of the idiosyncratic, election-specific influences to which voting in any particular election is subject. As a consequence, the predictive power of our model of voting and nonvoting might be expected to be greater than that of models tested in prior studies—assuming, of course, that we have not omitted any key predictors from the model.

What factors should be included in a model of voting and nonvoting? Earlier research (much of it summarized by Milbrath and Goel, 1977) has identified two major types of factors, which can be loosely categorized as sociological (personal demographic, social, and economic attributes) and psychological (politically relevant attitudes, beliefs, and values). From the

abundant research literature we have selected a number of predictors for inclusion in our model.

"Sociological" Factors

Race and Gender. Race- and gender-based differentials in electoral participation seem to have lessened considerably over the years, to the point that some recent studies (e.g., Cassel and Hill, 1981) have been unable to isolate any race- or gender-related differences. Nonetheless, because our focus is on a border state where relatively traditionalistic attitudes still predominate (Baer, Roeder, and Sigelman, 1984), it seemed advisable to retain race and gender as components in our model.

Age. Age has often been shown to be one of the leading predictors of voter turnout. In general, older citizens are more likely to vote in any given election than younger citizens are, but it has often been suggested that the relationship is curvilinear, with the likelihood of voting increasing through late middle age but declining thereafter.

Marital Status. According to a number of studies, married people are more likely than unmarried people to participate in a wide range of political and social activities, including voting.

Residential Mobility. Even though length-of-residence requirements are no longer a major impediment to voting, mobility itself suggests a lack of roots in the community or state and a consequent lack of interest in local or state political issues. If this is true, longtime residents should be more likely to vote in a particular election than relative newcomers are. This difference might be somewhat less decisive in a multi-election context, for over time the mobile should become more integrated into their community and their state. Nonetheless, some lingering effects of residential mobility might still be felt—effects likely to be overcome only with the passage of several years.

Level of Education. Along with age, education has emerged over the years as the foremost demographic predictor of voting. The more years of formal education one has, the greater the probability that one will vote.

Economic Status. With other relevant factors (especially education) held constant, economic status has often exhibited a weak or even nonexistent impact on voting. However, as Wolfinger and Rosenstone's (1980) findings indicated, the likelihood of voting may not be a linear function of income. Rather, for understanding voter turnout the key distinction seems to be the gross difference between those who are poor and all those who are not, with the poor being less likely to vote.

Public Employment. With education and economic status held constant, occupation does not appear to exert a great effect on voting or not voting. Even farmers, who are conventionally viewed as being uncommonly likely to abstain from voting (Campbell et al., 1960), have become much less distinctive in this regard (Sigelman, 1983). However, prior studies have shown that government workers of all types tend to take an unusual interest in political issues and are unusually likely to vote (Bush and Denzau, 1977).

"Psychological" Factors

Interest in and Attention to Public Affairs. Those who are most interested in politics and who follow news of public affairs most closely have often been shown to be likely voters, while those who take only a minimal interest and who devote little time and effort to keeping themselves informed tend to be nonvoters.

Strength and Direction of Party Identification. Democrats as a group are less likely to vote than Republicans are, but this largely reflects the different social bases from which the parties draw their members rather than any inherent party-based difference. So we might expect only minimal differences in electoral participation between Democrats and Republicans once sociological characteristics have been taken into account. However, *strength* of party identification should affect electoral participation, with those who identify strongly with a party, whether Republican or Democratic, being more likely to vote than those who identify weakly or not at all.

Perceived Difference between the Parties. As Downs (1957) argued, people are more likely to vote if they see clear-cut differences between the parties. If they perceive the parties and the candidates as Tweedledum and Tweedledee, then they will probably find little point in participating in what amounts to an empty, issueless charade.

Political Efficacy and Citizen Duty. Among the foremost psychological predictors of voting are the senses that one can make a difference politically and that one has an obligation to vote even if one's vote is unlikely to make a difference.

In the analysis that follows, we shall fit a multi-election model of electoral participation that contains measures of all these sociological and psychological factors.

Data and Methods

Our data come from two separate statewide surveys conducted in Kentucky in mid-1983. The voter registration files maintained by the Kentucky State Board of Elections constituted the sampling frame for a

telephone survey of registrants (and also helped define the dependent variable for our analysis). There were 1,468 respondents in the registrant sample, stratified according to the number of elections in which each had voted, in order to insure that adequate numbers of registrants at each level of electoral participation were represented. A second sample, this one made up of 632 Kentuckians who were not registered to vote, was formed via a variant of random-digit dialing, with only those who said they were unregistered being interviewed.[2] After the surveys were completed, the two samples were merged and weighted to reflect the correct proportions of registrants and nonregistrants in the state as well as the correct proportions of registrants who voted with varying degrees of frequency (all based on census data and on the entire voter registration data set from which our sample was drawn). This weighting was accomplished without changing the total number of respondents, which remained fixed at 2,100.

Measuring Electoral Participation

In single-election studies the measurement of electoral participation is very straightforward: some people voted and others did not. In the present study, the measurement of electoral participation is more complex. There are four sets of complicating factors.

One is that, with the exception noted above, we are using a validated measure of voter turnout (Traugott and Katosh, 1979; Sigelman, 1982). As we indicated earlier, until quite recently the norm has been to rely upon respondent self-reports of having voted or not voted. We, on the other hand, used the official voting records to form our sample of registrants. This was considerably more cumbersome than it would have been simply to ask respondents how often they had voted, but it also yielded a more accurate electoral participation measure than has been employed in most previous studies.

The second complication involves the often-ignored distinction between nonregistrants and nonvoting registrants. Nonvoting registrants did not vote during a given period, but they at least took the trouble to register, indicating at least a modicum of political interest on their part. Nonregistrants, on the other hand, did not see fit to invest even the minimal time and

[2] These were not "validated nonregistrants"; that is, the sample of nonregistrants was constituted on the basis of respondent self-reports. Prior research (e.g., Sigelman, 1982) indicates that the tendency to *under*report electoral participation is very rare, so we are not particularly worried about the possibility that the sample of nonregistrants contains very many people who were actually registered. Still, it is possible that in relying on self-reports to form the sample of nonregistrants we may inadvertently have screened out some nonregistrants who reported that they were registered. As might be expected, the response rate was substantially higher among registrants (80.1 percent) than it was in the sample of nonregistrants (62.7 percent).

energy that are needed to register. Accordingly, we might suspect that nonregistrants are to nonvoting registrants as nonvoting registrants are to voters, i.e., less politically interested and motivated, though the former distinction may not be as sharp as the latter.

There is nothing about the multi-election context that makes it absolutely necessary to distinguish between nonregistrants and nonvoting registrants, nor is there anything about the single-election setting that makes it necessary to ignore this distinction. But the fact is that the distinction between nonregistrants and nonvoting registrants has routinely been ignored in single-election studies: either the sample is restricted to registrants, or nonregistrants and registered nonvoters are simply lumped together as nonvoters (for exceptions, see Erikson, 1981; Katosh and Traugott, 1982). We believe that the distinction is worth making in both single- and multi-election studies, and in the analysis reported below we therefore place nonregistrants at a lower point on the electoral participation scale than nonvoting registrants.

The third complicating factor should be quite evident by now: in the multi-election context we are dealing with gradations of participation measured over time rather than with a simple voted/did not vote dichotomy. Our sample, then, contains not 2 types of respondents (voters and nonvoters), but 12: nonregistrants, registrants who never voted, those who voted once, those who voted twice, and so on up through those who voted in all 10 elections.

Fourth, some of the nonvoters in our sample could not have voted in some of the previous 10 Kentucky elections because they were not of legal voting age, were not residents of Kentucky, or both. Even a civics-textbook-style perfect citizen could hardly be faulted for not having voted in elections for which he or she was not eligible. Accordingly, for each respondent who had come of age or who had moved to Kentucky within the preceding five years, we recalculated the number of elections voted in by (a) determining how many of the 10 elections the respondent had, by age and residence, been eligible to vote in; (b) dividing this number into the number of elections the respondent had actually voted in; and (c) multiplying the resulting quotient by 10. This gave us the "adjusted" number of elections in which each respondent had voted; or course, for those who had been of age and had been Kentucky residents all along (the overwhelming majority of our respondents), the adjusted figure equaled the original figure. Thus defined, the adjusted number of times a person had voted could take on a noninteger value, but we subsequently collapsed the 12 original categories into 7: nonregistrants; nonvoting registrants; those who had voted in 1 or 2 elections; those who had voted in 3 or 4 elections; those who had voted in 5 or 6 elections; those who had voted in 7 or 8 elections; and those who had voted in 9 or 10 elections.

Measuring the Predictors of Electoral Participation

Our model of electoral participation includes a total of 17 predictors. In the order in which the factors were introduced above, they are

Race: 0 = nonwhite, 1 = white.
Gender: 0 = female, 1 = male.
Age: Age in years.[3]
Marital Status: 0 = not presently married, 1 = married.
Length of Residence in the State: 0 = five years or less, 1 = more than five years.
Length of Residence in the County: 0 = five years or less, 1 = more than five years.
Level of Education: A seven-point scale ranging from 0–4 years of schooling (1) to graduate work or degree (7).
Economic Status: 0 = poor (family income below $5,000), 1 = not poor (family income above $5,000), a dichotomy intended to capture the distinction, highlighted above, between those who live in poverty and those who do not.
Employment: 0 = not a public employee, 1 = public employee.
Interest in Politics and Elections: Response to the following question: "People differ in how much attention they pay to politics and elections. How about you? Would you say that you are (1) very much interested, (2) somewhat interested, (3) not very interested, or (4) not at all interested in following politics and elections?"
Attention to Public Affairs: Summed response to "About how many days a week do you read a newspaper?" "How many days a week do you watch a national television network early evening news broadcast?" and "How many days a week do you watch a local early evening news broadcast?"
Democratic Identification: 0 = not a Democrat, 1 = a Democrat, coded from responses to "Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or what?" (Follow-up: "Do you consider yourself a strong or not-so-strong Democrat/Republican?")
Republican Identification: 0 = not a Republican, 1 = Republican, coded from the same responses.
Strength of Party Identification: 1 = independent or Democratic- or Republican-leaner, 2 = not-so-strong Democrat or not-so-strong Republi-

[3] Guided by indications from prior studies of a nonlinear relationship between age and political participation, we experimented with alternative specifications of the age term, but to no avail; consequently, we ultimately estimated the model with age expressed in its simplest form. We are not alone in finding that the oft-documented curvilinear relationship between age and participation fails to emerge when other relevant factors, such as level of education, are taken into account; see, e.g., Glenn and Grimes (1968).

can, 3 = strong Democrat or strong Republican, coded from the same responses and from responses to a follow-up for independents and others ("Do you think of yourself as being closer to the Democratic or Republican party?").

Perceived Difference between the Parties: A scale score ranging from − 3 for those who perceived no differences to + 3 for those who perceived great differences, coded from responses to three questions ("In general, do you think it makes any difference what political party is in office at the state and local level?" "How about at the national level?" "Do you think it will make any difference who is elected the next governor of Kentucky?"). In all three cases, the "makes a difference" response was coded + 1, the "makes no difference" response − 1, and "don't know" 0. The three item scores were summed to form a scale.

Sense of External Efficacy: A 0–1 scale coded from responses on two items ("I don't think public officials care much what people like me think" and "People like me don't have any say about what the government does"). Responses to each item ranged from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree). The two item scores were reversed and summed, and the sum was rescaled to range between 0 and 1 rather than between 2 and 8 and to measure efficacy rather than inefficacy.

Sense of Citizen Duty: A 0–1 scale coded from responses on three items ("It isn't so important to vote when you know your party doesn't have any chance to win," "A good many local elections aren't important enough to bother with," and "So many other people vote in the national elections that it doesn't matter much to me whether I vote or not"). Responses to each item ranged from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree). The three item scores were reversed and summed, and the sum was rescaled to range between 0 and 1 rather than between 3 and 12 and to measure the sense of duty rather than the lack of it.[4]

Findings

The results of a multivariate probit analysis relating multi-election electoral participation to the 17 predictors introduced above are summa-

[4] For all the summated scales employed in this study, scale reliability was acceptable in the internal consistency sense, as indicated by Cronbach's alpha.

One methodological caveat should be borne in mind. The dependent variable in this study, electoral participation, is measured over the course of a five-year period. The independent variables, on the other hand, are measured at a single point in time, and at the end of the five-year period at that. Instability over time in any of these measures could disrupt the relationships that are reported below. Of course, many of these measures, e.g., the sociological characteristics, are essentially fixed over time. But instability over time in other measures, especially the psychological ones, is a potential problem whose actual consequences we are unable to estimate.

TABLE 2

Probit Analysis Summary

Predictor (Mean)	Maximum Likelihood Estimate	Standard Error	MLE/SE
Constant	−3.796	0.311	−12.201**
Race (0.952)	0.197	0.132	1.497
Gender (0.504)	0.162	0.050	3.218**
Age (43.045)	0.025	0.002	13.928**
Marital status (0.736)	0.321	0.065	4.957**
Residence in state (0.936)	0.549	0.152	3.608**
Residence in county (0.867)	0.634	0.106	5.976**
Level of education (4.098)	0.187	0.023	8.202**
Economic status (0.926)	0.243	0.113	2.155*
Public employment (0.076)	0.216	0.103	2.090*
Interest in politics (2.071)	−0.263	0.038	−6.950**
Attention to news (13.403)	0.004	0.005	0.825
Democratic identifier (0.523)	−0.072	0.115	−0.626
Republican identifier (0.247)	−0.064	0.120	−0.531
Partisan strength (2.111)	0.217	0.063	3.430**
Party difference (0.992)	0.025	0.013	1.895*
External efficacy (0.525)	0.075	0.153	0.487
Sense of citizen duty (0.668)	1.342	0.206	6.523**
$-2 \times$ log likelihood ratio	652.1 (17 *df*)		
Estimated R^2	.371		
Rank-order correlation, predicted versus actual	.541		

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$ (both tests one-tailed).

rized in Table 2. Table 2 indicates, first, that the 17-variable model performed very well. The rank-order correlation between actual values on the dependent variable and values predicted on the basis of the probit model was .541, indicating a reasonably good fit. More importantly, the estimated R^2 for the model was .371, a degree of predictive power unusual—if not unprecedented—among studies of individual voter turnout; by comparison, Cassel and Hill (1981), in a representative analysis, were able to account for only about 17 percent of the variance in individual-level turnout.

Of the 17 predictors, only 5—race, media use, Republican identification, Democratic identification, and sense of political efficacy—*failed* to

register significant independent impacts on participation in the 10 elections considered here. The 12 remaining predictors were all significantly related to multi-election voter turnout, and in every case the relationship ran in the direction that would be predicted on the basis of earlier studies. That is, controlling for the effects of all the other variables in the model, electoral participation was significantly greater among men, married people, older people, people whose incomes did not place them in the lowest economic category, the more highly educated, those who had lived in the state and in the county for more than five years, public employees, strong partisans, those who perceived major differences between the parties, those imbued with a deep sense of citizen duty, and those who were most interested in politics.

Of all the independent variables, the one with the most decisive impact was clearly age. To help convey the nature of the link between age and electoral participation, in Table 3 we show the predicted probability that a Kentuckian who was "perfectly average" in all relevant respects (that is, who had a mean score on each of the 17 predictors in the probit model) would fall into a given category of electoral participation. According to Table 3, more than one-third of these hypothetical perfectly average citizens would not have voted even once, and there is just over a 20 percent chance that they would have voted in as many as 5 of the 10 elections. If we then imagine another citizen who was perfectly average in every respect *except age*, we can isolate the impact of age on electoral participation. This we have done by recalculating the first column probabilities for a hypothetical respondent who was perfectly average but unusually old (the second column in Table 3) or perfectly average but unusually young (the third column), with "unusually old" and "unusually young" being defined as one standard deviation (16.9 years) above and then one standard deviation below the mean age of 43.0.

Comparing the first and second columns of Table 3, we see that whereas 35.6 percent of the perfectly average citizens should be either nonregistrants or registered nonvoters, only 21.2 percent of the otherwise average 60-year-old citizens would fall into these two categories; at the other extreme of participation, 16.7 percent of the 60-year-old average citizens would be expected to have voted in at least 7 of the 10 elections, but only 8.1 percent of the perfectly average citizens would fall into this category. More than 60 percent of these citizens would have voted somewhere between 1 and 6 times. By comparison, among 26-year-old average citizens, 52.3 percent should be nonregistrants or registered nonvoters—two and one-half times the expected probability for 60-year-old average citizens. Only 1 in 8 of the 26-year-old average citizens should have voted in as many as 5 elections, a sharp contrast to the 37.8 percent estimate for the 60-year-old

TABLE 3

Predicted Probabilities of Various Levels of Participation, for "Average Citizen" and with Age Varying

Participation Category	Predicted Probability for "Average Citizen"	Average +16.9 Years	Average −16.9 Years
Not registered	.233	.123	.381
Registered			
0	.123	.089	.142
1–2	.227	.201	.214
3–4	.188	.209	.140
5–6	.148	.211	.089
7–8	.063	.118	.028
9–10	.018	.049	.006
	1.000	1.000	1.000

average citizens. Overall, 73.7 percent of these 26-year-old average citizens would, according to the probit estimates, have voted in 2 or fewer elections during the preceding five years.

Thus Table 3 demonstrates the strong effect of age upon the likelihood of registering and voting. In interpreting these age-related effects, it must be borne in mind that we are dealing in Table 3 with the *independent* impact of age, holding constant all other factors in the model. That being the case, the differences noted in Table 3 cannot be attributed to factors such as geographic mobility, level of education, or strength of partisan identification, which have often been used to help explain age-based patterns in electoral participation. All of these factors are themselves related to both age and electoral participation, and some of these relationships are fairly substantial. But again, the differences reported in Table 3 are for age alone, with differences attributable to other factors being held constant.

None of the other predictors in the model approaches age in terms of its pronounced impact on electoral participation, but several do have fairly marked effects. Included in this category would be education, sense of citizen duty, and interest in politics, followed by geographic mobility and marital status and, more distantly, by strength of partisan identification, gender, economic status, perceived party differences, and public employment. As an example of the nature of these effects, let us take public employment as a case in point. Among respondents who were public employees and who had mean scores on every other predictor in the model, the

estimated probability of never having voted between 1978 and 1982 would be .278; among non-public employees with the exact same mean scores on the remaining predictors, the estimated probability of never having voted works out to .363. This is a fairly appreciable difference, and it would be unwise to disregard it. But once again, the impact of public employment, and for that matter of all the remaining predictors, is not nearly as dramatic as that of age.

Discussion

Consistent with our expectations, our model of electoral participation has performed considerably better than models tested elsewhere in the research literature. How can we account for this?

One possibility is that the explanatory power of our model is a function of our decision to distinguish between nonregistrants and registered nonvoters—a distinction that has not often been made in previous studies. According to Erikson (1981), it is easier to distinguish between registrants and nonregistrants than between voting and nonvoting registrants, and that finding lends some plausibility to the idea that including nonregistrants as a separate category boosted our model's predictive power. In order to determine whether this was actually the case, we combined the two categories of nonvoters and reran the probit model, this time with six rather than seven categories in the dependent variable. Had the distinction between nonregistrants and nonvoting registrants contributed appreciably to the performance of the original model, that performance should have suffered when the two categories were combined. This did not happen, however, as indicated by a comparison of the R^2 values for the two models: .371 for the original model and .379 for the model with a six-category dependent variable. Thus a plausible interpretation of the good showing of our model turned out to be incorrect.

There are two major reasons why it is so difficult to distinguish between nonregistrants and nonvoting registrants. First, approximately 50 percent of the nonregistrants we interviewed claimed that they had once been registered to vote. This is undoubtedly an overstatement, but even if the actual percentage were appreciably lower the fact would remain that many nonregistrants are nonregistrants only in the sense that they are not *presently* registered, not in the sense that they have *never* registered. Second, approximately 35 percent of the registrants had registered within the preceding five-year period, though they had been eligible to register throughout the period. Putting these two points together, we see that what initially appeared to be a simple distinction between registrants and nonregistrants is actually a good deal more complex, for nonregistrants include those who had once been registered as well as those who had never registered, and

registrants include those who had registered long ago and those who had only recently done so. The sharp distinction with which we began, then, blurs considerably upon closer consideration, and as a consequence it becomes very difficult to distinguish between nonregistrants and nonvoting registrants.

We are *not* saying that nonregistrants can safely be ignored in analyses of the determinants of voting and nonvoting. Whether to include nonregistrants in such analyses is, of course, an issue to be decided on theoretical grounds. But we can report that even though the distinction between nonregistrants and nonvoting registrants does not appear to be empirically fruitful (as indicated by the findings summarized in the preceding paragraph), ignoring nonregistrants altogether would greatly impair the model's performance. When we omitted all nonregistrants from consideration and reestimated the model, the model's performance was greatly affected, with the estimated R^2 falling all the way from .371 to .238—a loss of approximately one-third in explanatory power. The lesson, then, seems to be that nonregistrants and nonvoting registrants are not very different from one another in terms of the factors considered here, but both can be fairly readily distinguished from voters.

Other explanations for the good performance of our model readily suggest themselves. For one thing, because we designed our surveys with the specific goal of accounting for voting and nonvoting, we had at our disposal a more comprehensive set of predictors than has been available in some prior studies (e.g., Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980) which have been based on data collected for other purposes. We have also estimated our model via probit analysis, thereby avoiding some of the explained-variance-deflating deficiencies of OLS regression.

These explanations and others like them cannot be rejected out of hand, but they *can* be rejected. This, at least, is the conclusion to which we were led after we reestimated our model 10 more times, this time using as dependent variables simple dichotomies indicating whether a respondent had or had not voted in a given election. If the impressive explanatory power summarized in Table 2 had been a reflection of the relatively broad array of explanatory variables we were able to employ or of our use of the probit model, then the election-specific models we estimated should have yielded results that were no less impressive. But without exception they did not. We did find that voting or not voting in general elections was easier to explain than voting or not voting in primaries, probably because in many instances the types of people who were predisposed to vote simply had no interesting primary contests to vote in. Notwithstanding some differences in explanatory power from one type of election to another, the major point is that in all 10 instances the explained variance statistic fell to levels comparable to

those reported throughout the extensive literature concerning voting and nonvoting—a literature that is, after all, based on analyses of voting or nonvoting in one election at a time. The greater explanatory power of our model in comparison to those tested in previous studies, then, stems directly from our multi-election focus. When voting is viewed over the course of several elections, election-specific idiosyncrasies fade into the background and systematic effects come to the fore. Since interest normally centers on isolating the factors that affect voting and nonvoting rather than explaining why some people voted and others did not in a specific election, the benefits of a multi-election focus can hardly be overstated.

According to our analysis, the age effect is primary among those that come to the fore in the multi-election context. Why this should be the case is not altogether clear at this point, and it is well beyond the scope of this paper to try to disentangle the various components of the age effect. But let us reemphasize that age is not simply a surrogate measure of geographic mobility, level of education, interest in politics, or other factors that are represented in our model alongside age itself. To speculate for a moment, the key to the strength of the age effect in our analysis may lie in the relatively low rates of registration among young people and in the related tendency for young people to register only when motivated by a desire to vote in a particular election. A local sheriff's race is unlikely to be sufficient motivation to register. Older people, on the other hand, are more likely to be registered when any election takes place. There is some reason, then, to believe that younger people do not register unless they desire to vote in a specific election, while—to draw upon Erikson's (1981) argument—people who are registered may vote in a specific election precisely *because* they are registered. This interpretation is, to repeat, highly speculative. What is certain is that in the multi-election context, with election-specific sources of variability eliminated from consideration, age emerges as the foremost determinant of electoral participation.

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