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Title: Social Altruism and Voter Turnout: Evidence from the 1991 NES Pilot Study

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Dataset(s): 1991 Pilot Study

Abstract

Knack uses data from the 1991 Pilot Study to gauge the effect of civic norms on electoral participation. The Pilot Study contained questions designed to measure a respondent's level of social altruism and level of trust in other citizens. Knack finds that high scores on these measures significantly increase a respondent's likelihood of voting. In addition, the impact of the social altruism and trust variables on the probability of voting are comparable to the effects of the political variables and registration provisions which receive more attention in the turnout literature. Factor analysis provides further support for the notion that voting participation in national elections is primarily a civic minded, rather than a politically-driven, behavior. Specifically, Knack finds that voting in the 1988 and 1990 elections loads heavily with the social altruism items, but fails to load on the second "political participation" factor.