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Abstract

Over the last 30 years, voter turnout, which is often considered to be an important sign of the vitality of a democracy, has been decreasing throughout the world. Traditional factors that drive voter turnout have not dramatically changed within the same period, suggesting that another factor is potentially at play. I contend that globalization, specifically economic globalization, has played a significant role in driving down voter turnout in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. First, economic globalization limits national autonomy in areas of economic policy by constraining national policymakers in their ability to implement substantive policy change. Second, as a result of the limiting effects of economic globalization on national autonomy, citizens increasingly view their vote as having less capacity to influence economic policy, which in turn causes them to be more likely consider the traditional costs of voting, such as time and effort. Through an analysis of over 180 countries spanning the time period of 1970 to 2018, I demonstrate that there is a negative relationship between levels of economic globalization and voter turnout. My findings suggest that the rate at which political elites within a particular country pursue economic globalization can directly influence how much of their electorate ultimately decide to vote in their country's legislative elections, which has significant ramifications for the future as debates about the merits of globalization continue to dominate contemporary political discussion as the world emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords

Voter Turnout, Globalization, Economic Globalization, National Autonomy, Voting

Disciplines

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Comments

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The Effects of Economic Globalization on Voter Turnout

By Patrick Mahoney

POL 403 Capstone – Professor Hartzell

Over the last 30 years, voter turnout, which is often considered to be an important sign of the vitality of a democracy, has been decreasing throughout the world. Traditional factors that drive voter turnout have not dramatically changed within the same period, suggesting that another factor is potentially at play. I contend that globalization, specifically economic globalization, has played a significant role in driving down voter turnout in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. First, economic globalization limits national autonomy in areas of economic policy by constraining national policymakers in their ability to implement substantive policy change. Second, as a result of the limiting effects of economic globalization on national autonomy, citizens increasingly view their vote as having less capacity to influence economic policy, which in turn causes them to be more likely consider the traditional costs of voting, such as time and effort. Through an analysis of over 180 countries spanning the time period of 1970 to 2018, I demonstrate that there is a negative relationship between levels of economic globalization and voter turnout. My findings suggest that the rate at which political elites within a particular country pursue economic globalization can directly influence how much of their electorate ultimately decide to vote in their country's legislative elections, which has significant ramifications for the future as debates about the merits of globalization continue to dominate contemporary political discussion as the world emerges from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Introduction

The right to vote is one of the most important rights that citizens hold within democratic countries. Voter turnout, which measures the number of eligible voters who ultimately participate in elections, is considered to be an important sign of the vitality of a democracy. Traditionally, the right to vote has not only allowed citizens to hold their political elites accountable but has allowed them to influence and drive policies that affect the country and its citizens. However, the last thirty years have seen voter turnout decrease throughout the world. Even as the third wave of democracy brought about an increase in the number of democracies throughout the 1980's and early 1990's as countries in regions like Latin America and Eastern Europe democratized, global voter turnout has declined over the last several decades (Huntington 1991). In the 21st century, citizens are increasingly choosing to withhold from participating in elections, particularly parliamentary elections. To understand this global trend, scholars have

attempted to identify a number of traditional factors, such as the competitiveness of elections and a country's electoral system, that drive voter turnout (Blais and Carty 1990; Blais and Kostelka 2021). However, the continued prevalence of competitive elections and the rise of proportional representation, which has been shown to increase voter turnout, indicate that there is perhaps another factor driving down voter turnout (Fumagalli and Narciso 2012).

Given that the factors that have traditionally been thought to affect voter turnout do not seem to be driving the global decrease in voter turnout, this paper will examine another potential factor: economic globalization. By considering whether economic globalization restricts national autonomy and thus causes citizens to view their vote as having less ability to substantially change national economic policy, this paper will examine whether the rise in economic globalization over the last thirty years has directly contributed to the decrease in global voter turnout. While some recent scholarly research has attempted to link economic globalization and voter turnout, these studies have largely limited their scope to OECD countries, which generally share similar economic and political structures. In contrast to these studies, this paper will attempt to discern whether globalization affects voter turnout on a global scale by analyzing the relationship over a span of 48 years in over 180 countries.

I divide this paper into six sections. First, I define and discuss voter turnout and the traditional factors that have been thought to drive voter turnout historically. I next discuss the relationship between globalization, particularly economic globalization, and national autonomy, and how that relationship affects how citizens perceive the value of their vote. In the third section, I discuss my theory regarding how higher levels of economic globalization directly cause citizens to view their ability to influence policymakers on substantive economic policy as limited, which in turn drives them to be more likely to consider traditional costs of voting like

time and effort. The next section describes the research design I use to test this theory, which is followed by a section discussing my findings. Lastly, I discuss the implications of my findings and make suggestions on what kinds of future research could be done on this topic.

Voter Turnout: What Traditionally Drives It and Why It Matters

One of the most celebrated political rights within liberal democracies is the right to vote. Voter turnout, which measures the number of voters who cast their vote during elections against the total eligible population, is generally regarded as a key measurement of the health of a democracy. Higher turnout is generally considered to be a sign of the vitality of a democracy, while low turnout is usually associated with voter apathy and disillusionment with the political system (Solijonov 2016). Despite the value often associated with the right to vote, many scholars have noted that participation in democratic elections within industrialized countries has dwindled since the late 20th century. Between 1970 and 2007, the average industrialized country experienced a decline in electoral turnout of almost 9% (Fisher and Marshall 2015). In order to understand this trend, scholars have increasingly focused on the factors that drive people to the polls, seeking to identify what factors over the last thirty years have played a role in determining whether individuals choose to vote or withhold from participating in parliamentary elections. Since every potential voter comes from a unique situation and background, it is difficult to pinpoint a single factor that drives people en masse to the polls. However, scholars agree that an individual's turnout behavior is driven primarily by three elements: the motivation to vote, the ability to vote, and the difficulty of voting (Harder and Krosnick 2008). While the ability to vote and difficulty of voting can often be attributed to external factors like the political system of a particular country and an individual's access to transportation, the motivation to vote is a factor primarily driven by personal reasons. For the purposes of this paper, the factors that influence

why an individual may or may not be motivated to participate in parliamentary elections will be of utmost importance.

Ultimately, when a citizen is making the decision on whether to vote or not, they are engaging in some form of cost-benefit analysis. The general notion is that “a person will vote if the information and time costs of doing so are outweighed by the benefits of potentially casting the deciding vote and the rewards from voting” (Harder and Krosnick 2008). Potential voters will weigh the cost of voting, such as the time and effort it takes to fill out and send in a ballot, against the expected benefits of voting. The benefits that motivate individuals to head to the ballot box to cast votes in national governments can vary from person to person. However, scholarly research has found that turnout is especially responsive to the closeness and importance of an election, to the observability of one’s choice to vote, and to social rewards and punishments associated with voting (Ali and Lin 2013). Generally, people expect to sustain a small cost to cast their vote in exchange for a small chance that they will change the outcome of an election. However, if people think that their vote will have more value in the context of a particular election, they will be more willing to undergo the costs of voting. It is important to keep in mind that in addition to the competitiveness of elections, the kind of electoral system that a country implements has been found to have a direct impact on the value that citizens attribute to their vote. Scholars have identified proportional voting systems, as opposed to a plurality system or a majority system, as the electoral system that significantly increases voter turnout (Blais and Carty 1990). When individuals feel as though their vote will play a direct role in determining the proportion of their elected officials, they place more value in their right to vote and become more willing to exercise it. Conversely, presidential systems are generally characterized by a lower sense of attachment of citizens to political entities than parliamentary and proportional systems;

this has the effect of lessening expressive payoff and turnout in national elections (Fumagalli and Narciso 2012). In systems where a vote is not necessarily guaranteed to factor into the final results of an election, individuals become far more willing to consider the costs of voting, which ultimately drives down rates of voter turnout.

In addition to the effects that competitiveness and the electoral system have on voter turnout, scholars have recognized that economic inequality within states plays a significant role in determining who and how many people participate in elections. In countries with low levels of income equality, the difference between the probability that the poorest and richest segments of the country would vote in an election was found to be several percentage points lower than in countries with high levels of income equality (Jensen and Jespersen 2017). These findings are in line with past scholarly research that suggests that voter turnout is largely driven by wealthier individuals who, as a result of the resources at their disposal, face lower costs to voting.

Much of the past scholarly research that focuses on what drives turnout in parliamentary and presidential elections contends that factors like economic inequality, closeness and competitiveness of elections, and the nature of the electoral system are critical to driving up voter turnout, and yet voting trends in the 21st century suggest that voter turnout has been decreasing. While global income inequality within countries has increased over the last several decades, total global inequality (inequality across all individuals in the world) has declined since the 1990's (UN 2022). This trend would suggest that, if level of income is directly related to voter turnout as scholars have identified, the global decrease in income inequality would lead to an increase in global voter turnout. However, the decrease in global voter turnout, despite the decrease in global inequality, the growth of proportional electoral systems, and the continued prevalence of highly contested elections, suggests that there might be another factor driving lower voter turnout

over the course of the last thirty years. While future research could analyze the role that increasing economic inequality within countries has played in driving down voter turnout over the late 20th and early 21 centuries, the growth of proportional systems and continued prevalence of competitive elections amidst growing political polarization suggests that there is perhaps another factor at play that has contributed to the global decline in voter turnout in the early 21st century.

The importance of voter turnout in democracies is clear. High voter turnout in democracies generally suggests that voters feel invested in the affairs and policymaking process of government. The global decline in voter turnout is troubling in that low voter turnout often reflects the fact that economically and socially disadvantaged groups tend to abstain from voting more than wealthier and more resourced groups (Blais and Kostelka 2021). Further, there is evidence that low voter turnout introduces a bias in public policy, reduces government responsiveness, and favors clientelism and patronage over programmatic party competition (Claibourn and Martin 2013). When voters do not exercise their ability to vote, by default they allow others to make decisions for them. Often, these “others” are wealthier elites within society, which only leads to policies (or a lack thereof) that fail to address important issues for low- and middle-income citizens. It is thus critical to understand what is driving decreasing voter turnout in the 21st century.

The Relationship Between National Autonomy and Globalization

To understand the decline of voter turnout throughout the world in the late 20th and early 21st century, the role of national autonomy, particularly amidst growing political and economic globalization, must be considered. The relationship between voter turnout and national autonomy has been the subject of research in the past, and while this research has largely been limited to a

small number of advanced, industrialized countries, the mechanisms and relationships that this research has explored is critical to understanding whether a decrease in national autonomy does keep citizens away from the ballot box. Economic globalization, which refers to the integration of economies around the world through increased trade, foreign direct investment, and capital market flows, has been increasingly accepted as having impaired the sovereignty of the modern nation-state (Lerda 1996). More recent literature has recognized that globalization has reduced the capacity of states to control their societies both actively and reactively as states have generally ceded some of their authority in political and economic affairs to international organizations and the global economy (Awdel et. al. 2020). As states become more integrated within the global political and economic system, national governments are constrained in what substantive policies they can enact. The substantial decrease of the autonomy of the nation-state has resulted in what some scholars refer to as a “race to the bottom – a dismantling of welfare states” by governments competing for mobile economic resources (Garrett 2000). The theory that globalization drives this race to the bottom has been branded the ‘efficiency hypothesis’, and has become one of two major opposing theories pertaining to the relationship between globalization and national autonomy. The other theory, called the ‘compensation hypothesis’, assumes that economic integration generates economic uncertainty which, in turn, leads to political demands for more social protection (Cameron 1978; Katzenstein 1985). However, studies that have compared the validity of these hypotheses have largely produced inconclusive results (Steiner 2010). The global decline in voter turnout in the years since the ‘compensation hypothesis’ originated suggests that increased globalization has not necessarily generated strong demands for social protection from the government, at least not through the ballot box. Whether or not either of the two theories that scholars have adopted have any validity, the present state of

research provides few reasons to conclude that economic integration is completely inconsequential for the national autonomy of states. Integration into the global market has lessened national autonomy by increasing exposure to trade, driving the multinationalization of production, and integrating financial markets (Garrett 2000). As countries gradually adopt these characteristics, the capacity of national governments to implement meaningful domestic economic policies decreases.

Some scholars have challenged the predominant theory that economic globalization has hindered national autonomy by arguing that as advanced capitalist nation-states actively promote economic globalization and its associated political institutions, they gain increased power and autonomy in this contemporary phase of their ongoing historical development (Gritsch 2005). However, scholars who make this argument also concede that despite the fact that some groups within these advanced countries such as capitalists and elites may ultimately gain more power over national issues, inequality of decision-making power may grow within countries (Gritsch 2005). This research suggests that as states become more globalized, the power of low- and middle-class citizens to influence substantive policy lessens. Scholars have also challenged the theory that economic globalization has hindered national autonomy by highlighting the historical experiences of strong left-labour regimes in Europe, such as in Scandinavia (Garrett 2000). Scandinavian countries, despite being highly globalized, have been able to adopt and maintain national welfare policies and programs. However, like much of the literature pertaining to the relationship between voter turnout and globalization, these studies are largely limited to historically wealthy and industrialized global North states that have had strong social safety nets for decades. For the many countries that followed through with the neoliberal ideology of reducing the size and capabilities of national government in the late 20th century, the relationship

between globalization and national autonomy has generally been negative. In particular, state autonomy within the global South has been severely reduced under the influence of globalization (Doornbos 2001). Though globalization has perhaps not reduced state autonomy for wealthy, industrialized countries, the general consensus among scholars is that globalization, particularly economic globalization, has limited the ability of state legislatures and political leaders to pass domestic legislation that could challenge the trends of the global economy.

Globalization, Autonomy, and the Vote

While much scholarship focuses on the traditional factors that drive voter turnout and on the relationship between globalization and national autonomy, little research has been done with regards to how all three elements interact. As it currently stands, there is a gap in the research pertaining to how the effects of economic globalization on national autonomy affect voter turnout on a global scale, with the most substantive research on this relationship being severely limited in scope. In his study analyzing the relationship between economic globalization and voter turnout, Steiner provided arguably the most in-depth analysis of this topic. However, Steiner's data is limited to twenty-three OECD countries, many of which are located in Europe and North America (Steiner 2010). While Steiner's results suggest that economic globalization has reduced voter turnout within the twenty-three OECD countries, he notes that further research is needed to analyze both the global impact of economic integration on voter turnout and the role of political parties and how their responses amidst economic globalization impacts voter turnout (Steiner 2010). A year after Steiner published his findings, Marshall and Fisher found that, in an analysis of the twenty-three OECD countries, globalization causes voters to become indifferent between political parties, which they found further reduced turnout (Fisher and Marshall 2011). As discussed earlier, much of the past research on voter turnout and globalization's effects on

national autonomy has identified how wealth and the style of the electoral system of a country play significant roles in determining not only whether people choose to vote but on how much economic integration affects a government's ability to create meaningful economic policies. By limiting the nature of their studies to twenty-three OECD countries, Steiner, Fisher, and Marshall leave the question open of whether economic integration reduces voter turnout on a worldwide scale. Other scholars have similarly focused on specific regions of the world, such as the European Union, where one study found that increases in integration and economic globalization reduced electoral participation within E.U. states (Le Gall 2017).

The scholars who have largely only focused their research on a limited number of highly globalized and industrialized states recognize that their data may ultimately not capture the cross-national cultural and/or institutional differences between developed countries and developing countries (Fisher and Marshall 2015). Because economic globalization creates winners and losers, often between the global North and global South, focusing on a small segment of the world that share similar levels of economic development, wealth, and electoral systems may only provide an incomplete picture of the effects that economic globalization has on voter turnout (Graham 2001). Many citizens within the global South have noted that the benefits of globalization (such as the arrival of factories and other work opportunities) have largely passed them by, which makes it critical to include them in the analysis on the effects of globalization on turnout (Bonifai et. al 2021). These global South perspectives beg the question of whether citizens of global South countries who have not seen their lives benefit as globalization has increased may ultimately be more willing to vote in national elections in order to try to reap the benefits of globalization that they have seen pass them by. Only by including the global South in research pertaining to the relationship between globalization and voter

turnout can we get a complete understanding of how globalization affects voter turnout; this is something that scholarly research has largely failed to do. This paper, by analyzing the effects of economic globalization on voter turnout in over 180 countries, attempts to build a more global perspective.

Theory: How Economic Globalization Impacts Voter Turnout

I posit that countries that have increasingly committed to economic globalization at the likely expense of national autonomy will see voter turnout in parliamentary elections decrease as a result of the electorate's belief that their ability to influence substantive economic policy has diminished. As I discuss below, citizens who view their country's policies as being greatly influenced by the global market will view their ability to change or influence economic policy as less significant than in a country where they perceive their national government as largely being in charge of national economic issues. The belief that they have less power to influence substantive policy will cause citizens to consider the costs of voting when determining whether to vote in a parliamentary election, which in turn will bring down voter turnout.

The effects of economic globalization, which refers to the integration of national markets into the global economy, might not be overly apparent to an average citizen of a country right away. Over time, economic globalization's effects on class structure, the labor process, the application of technology, and the structure and organization of capital might become more apparent to the middle and lower classes of a particular state, especially as governments and multi-national corporations make decisions to outsource jobs or increasingly buy foreign goods (Pologeorgis 2022). Even though these effects may drive backlash against globalization, by the time these effects have been felt by citizens states often have already committed to global integration in one way or another. The rules of globalization that end up defining national

economic policy often are often not initiated at the ballot box but rather by profit-maximizing firms and governments exercising power through international institutions such as the WTO (Deardorff 2004). Advanced capitalist states' capacity to "use globalization to gain autonomy and to disregard citizens' preferences and interests implicitly raises the concern that states can also use this power and autonomy to implement other non-economic agendas against the will of the populace and with relatively unthreatening electoral fallout" (Gritsch 2005). This finding suggests that as globalization spreads to countries throughout the world, the decision-making of political elites and capitalists becomes further disconnected from the desires of the electorate. Thus, when citizens are weighing the decision to participate in a given election, they will be doing so with the knowledge that their government and multinational corporations may be already committed to a path in which the electorate has no say.

My theory builds on this premise by suggesting that individuals who know that their country has committed to global economic integration will view their vote as having less value and thus give more consideration to the costs of voting, which in turn will cause fewer people to participate in national parliamentary elections. This causal link requires understanding why an individual's decision to vote might hinge on their perceived ability to influence national policy. As discussed earlier, individuals who consider participating in elections ultimately participate in a cost-benefit analysis. If individuals view the benefits of voting as particularly high, especially compared to the costs (such as time and effort), then they will be more willing to vote. These perceived benefits rest on a number of factors, including those discussed earlier like the competitiveness of the election and the electoral system. My argument rests on the idea that, in addition to these perceived benefits, individuals also consider the ability of their vote to change substantial national policy when deciding whether to vote or not. Social incentives to vote

generally include the individual's perceived "importance" of an election, and this perception of importance, in addition to whether the election might be closely contested, also relates to the election's inherent ability to change the political, economic, and/or social direction of the country (Ali and Lin 2013). If people believe that an election has the capacity to significantly alter the policies and direction of their country, they will view the importance of the election, and their vote, as greater. As states and capitalists wrest control from intra-national groups (and, by default, voters) by extending the circuit of capital beyond the nation-state's territorial borders, citizens will feel as though they have little power to change the course of their country's policies (Gritsch 2005). Even in democracies where individuals have the ability to vote for their representatives in government, the notion that political and economic globalization is inevitable if the state and capitalists have already committed to it has become more widely accepted (Pologeorgis 2022).

If voter turnout is driven by whether or not citizens view their vote as having the ability to enact meaningful change, and economic globalization reduces the capacity of the state to respond to the desires of the electorate, it stands to reason that when countries become more economically globalized, citizens will perceive their vote as having less value and thus be more likely to abstain from voting. If citizens see that their government and elites have committed to globalization, they will view their government's policies as more responsive to the global economy than to the demands of the national electorate. As a result, voters will see their vote as less meaningful and will be more likely to consider the traditional costs of voting, which in turn will decrease voter turnout. In the context of parliamentary elections, voters have historically been found to attribute policy responsibility to their support party, which suggests that as citizens

increasingly view globalization as the dominant source of a state's economic policy, their willingness to vote for parties in parliamentary elections will decrease (Fortunato et. al. 2019).

Thus, I expect that the more economically globalized a country is, the lower the rate of voter turnout will be in parliamentary elections. In more globalized countries, citizens will view their ability to significantly alter government policy as less significant as a result of the impact of globalization on national autonomy. Though the notion that elites are more beholden to globalization than the desires of the electorate may fuel political backlash in more globalized countries (as seen in advanced democracies like the United States and United Kingdom in recent years), I posit that the global decrease in voter turnout over the last thirty years is a direct result of economic globalization and its relationship with national autonomy and the factors that drive individuals to vote.

Research Design

In order to obtain a global understanding of the effects of economic globalization on voter turnout, I employ a cross-national time series data set that includes 184 countries located throughout the world. Using the Quality of Government (QOG) data set, my analysis covers the time period from 1970 to 2018. Though the unit of analysis within the QOG data set is the country-year, my analysis only includes the years in which a legislative election took place within particular countries. Thus, despite looking at over 180 countries over a 48-year period for my test, the number of observations is relatively small (1,257).

The Dependent Variable

For my dependent variable, I use the Quality of Government (QOG) dataset's *Voter Turnout in Parliamentary Elections* variable. This variable, which originally stems from the

International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, measures the voter turnout rate in 192 different countries from 1946 to 2021 and is continuous on a scale of 0 to 100, with 0 representing a voter turnout of 0% and 100 representing a voter turnout of 100% (QOG Dataset 2022) (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2021). Because I want to measure whether the voter turnout rate is lower as a result of economic globalization, the operationalization of this variable is relatively straightforward. A lower value for the voter turnout variable measure reflects a lower rate of voter turnout and vice-versa. Going forward, this variable will be labeled Legislative Turnout.

Central Explanatory Variable

For my central explanatory variable, I use the QOG dataset's *Economic Globalization* variable, which measures how economically globalized a country is. Economic globalization is defined as the increasing interdependence of world economies as a result of the growing scale of cross-border trade of commodities and services, flow of international capital and wide and rapid spread of technologies (Shangquan 2000). Countries with higher levels of economic globalization are more integrated into the global economy, meaning they are more likely to have high levels of trade, foreign direct investment (FDI), and capital market flows. Countries with lower levels of economic globalization are less integrated and thus have lower levels of international trade, FDI, and capital market flows. This variable measures the level of economic integration, covering both trade flows as well as financial flows (QOG Dataset 2022) (Dreher 2006). The variable is operationalized on a continuous scale of 1 to 100, with 1 representing the lowest level of economic globalization a country could have and 100 representing the highest level of economic globalization a country could have.

Control Variables

Because I am particularly interested in the direct effects that economic globalization has on voter turnout, it is important to consider and control for other variables that could potentially influence the rate of voter turnout. The first control variable I intend to utilize is the QOG's *Electoral Democracy Index*. This variable measures to what extent the ideal of electoral democracy in its fullest sense is achieved within a particular country (QOG Dataset 2022) (Alizada et. al 2021). The variable is operationalized by providing an aggregation of two measurements. The first measurement is the average of the sum of indices that measure freedom of association, suffrage, clean elections, elected executive (de jure) and freedom of expression and the second measurement is the average of the five-way interaction between those indices (Alizada et. al 2021). The variable is continuous but bounded between the values of 0 and 1, with 0 representing a country that does not achieve any resemblance of an electoral democracy and 1 representing the fullest realization of electoral democracy. Because voter turnout is directly linked to the level of suffrage, whether there are clean elections or not, and freedom of expression, I expect a higher level of electoral democracy to translate into higher rates of voter turnout (Stockemer 2022). Therefore, this effect must be controlled for in order to see whether economic globalization has a direct impact on voter turnout.

The second variable I control for is the QOG dataset's *GDP per capita*. This variable is operationalized by taking the GDP of a country and dividing it by its midyear population using 2010 U.S. dollars (QOG Dataset 2022) (World Bank 2021). The units of measurement for this variable are simply the logged value of this calculation, which means a wide array of values ranging from 183.58 (\$183.58 per person) to 110,701 (\$110,701 per person). Scholars have recognized that wealthier individuals are less likely to face the traditional costs of voting (like

transportation and time) and found that countries with higher rates of wealth are more likely to see higher voter turnout rates (Blais and Kostelka 2021).

The third control variable I use is the QOG dataset's *Is the Political System Presidential?* In the QOG dataset, this variable measures whether a state uses a presidential system as opposed to a parliamentary system (QOG Dataset 2022) (Bjørnskov and Rode 2020). This variable is operationalized by scoring whether a country uses a presidential system with a 0 or a 1. A country is scored a 0 if the country does not use a presidential system and is scored a 1 if it does. Because presidential systems are generally characterized by a lower sense of attachment of citizens to political entities than parliamentary and proportional systems, turnout is generally lower in presidential system than in parliamentary systems (Fumagalli and Narciso 2012). Thus, controlling for the style of the electoral system is critical in order to isolate the effects of economic globalization on voter turnout.

The last control variable I will use is the QOG dataset's *Does the Country Have Proportional Voting?* This variable measures whether the country has an electoral system that is characterized by including proportional voting. (QOG Dataset 2022) (Bjørnskov and Rode 2020). This variable measures whether a country uses a proportional voting system by scoring countries as either a 0 or a 1; 0 is reserved for countries that do not use a proportional voting system while 1 is reserved for countries that do. Unlike presidential systems, which have been found to decrease voter turnout, proportional systems have been found to significantly increase voter turnout as opposed to traditional parliamentary systems (Fumagalli and Narciso 2012) (Blais and Carty 1990).

Methodology

Because my dependent variable is continuous, I use OLS regression to carry out my hypothesis test. An OLS regression test allows me to see whether my central explanatory variable, economic globalization, has a direct effect on my dependent variable, voter turnout in parliamentary elections, while controlling for a number of other variables that have been shown to have an effect on voter turnout. By using OLS regression, I can see how much the value of my dependent variable either increases or decreases for every one unit increase of my central explanatory variable. If the results are statistically significant (have a p-value below 0.05) and the value for voter turnout declines as the value of economic globalization increases by one unit, then I can confidently say that my hypothesis that higher levels of economic globalization directly decreases voter turnout is correct and I can reject the null hypothesis.

Analysis

The results of my test appear in Table 1. After running an OLS regression to see whether higher levels of economic globalization are correlated with lower worldwide voter turnout rates, I can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that economic globalization does have a direct effect on worldwide voter turnout rate. My OLS regression shows that, when controlling for variables like GDP per capita and whether countries use proportional voting, the coefficient associated with voter turnout is negatively signed and is statistically significant with a p-value of 0.041. Based on my hypothesis that higher levels of economic globalization would decrease voter turnout, the coefficient is signed as I expected. For every 1 unit increase in economic globalization, I found that the mean level of voter turnout decreased by -0.073. While this number suggest that the magnitude of this effect is not particularly substantial, it does reveal that

economic globalization does have a slight and direct role in driving people to forego the act of voting in parliamentary elections.

Most of the control variables I selected for this test also showed that they had an effect on the dependent variable. Unsurprisingly, the sign of the coefficient for presidential systems was negative while the sign of the coefficient for parliamentary systems was positive. Put another way, the presence of presidential systems was found to significantly decrease voter turnout (-4.345 coefficient) while the presence of proportional voting systems was found to significantly increase voter turnout (5.353 coefficient). Based on the literature existing on the relationship between these variables and voter turnout, the signs of these coefficients should be expected, as should the magnitude of the effects on voter turnout. Both of these variables were also found to be statistically significant as each had a p-value of 0.000. GDP per capita was found to have a positive sign and be statistically significant, but with a coefficient of .00019, the magnitude was not particularly noteworthy. One relatively surprising result was with the electoral democracy control variable, which had a negatively signed coefficient and was found not to be statistically significant. My statistical test found that the level of electoral democracy within a country does not play a role in shaping voter turnout rates. While the results surrounding this variable will be analyzed in the following discussion, both the statistical significance and sign of the coefficient were largely the opposite of what I, and many scholars who have analyzed the relationship between the indices included in the variable (such as suffrage, freedom of association, and clean elections) and voter turnout, would have predicted.

Discussion and Conclusion

As global voter turnout continues to decrease in the early 21st century, the need to identify the causal factors behind this behavior change among voters has become increasingly

important. Over the course of this decline in the last thirty years, scholars have focused on the effects of income and political and electoral structure and found support for the argument that these factors have contributed to voter turnout rates. However, despite the growth of democracies during the third wave of democracy in the 1980's and the decrease in global inequality between countries since the 1990's, global voter turnout has continued to decrease (Huntington 1991) (UN 2022). This anomaly suggests that perhaps there is another factor that had driven down voter turnout rates throughout the world, which some scholars have suggested to be economic globalization. Past efforts to analyze the effects of economic globalization have been relatively unsuccessful at drawing a conclusion about the global effects of economic globalization on voter turnout. While many studies have focused on regional effects of economic globalization, particularly within the global North, few efforts have been made to identify the global effects of economic globalization on voter turnout.

This study aimed to identify economic globalization as an alternate factor that directly contributes to the decline in voter turnout and to analyze this relationship on a global scale. Because of economic globalization's ability to limit national autonomy and to cause voters to view their vote as having less value, I posited that economic globalization would have a direct and negative effect on voter turnout. The results of my empirical analysis support the idea that the relationship between economic globalization and voter turnout is negative. Put another way, the results of my OLS regression show that, as levels of economic globalization increase, voter turnout decreases. As shown in Table 1, for every one unit increase in the value of economic globalization, voter turnout decreased by -0.073 units. All my control variables, aside from electoral democracy, also showed that they had statistically significant effects on voter turnout, with some variables, including whether a state has proportional voting and whether a state has a

presidential system, having a significantly large effect on voter turnout as opposed to other controls such as GDP per capita. The fact that many of my control variables achieved statistical significance and showed a strong effect on voter turnout reinforces the ideas that have been the subject of past scholarly research – i.e., that some of the main drivers behind voter turnout are rooted in the style of government, electoral system, and wealth of potential voters.

While a significant portion of my findings align with my hypothesis and past literature on what traditionally drives voter turnout, the effects of my control variable measuring electoral democracy was somewhat surprising. Considering that the variable incorporates indices measuring freedom of association, suffrage, clean elections, and freedom of expression, the fact that this variable was shown to be both statistically significant and had a negative sign pertaining to its effect on voter turnout was unexpected. While the results stemming from this control variable seem to contradict both the literature and the traditional idea that more suffrage leads to more votes, the structure of the variable and the way different countries are scored may help to account for the results. Because the variable captured data from over 180 countries located throughout the world, some of the countries included contain a mixed democratic-authoritarian system, which would skew the results of this variable somewhat. These systems, also referred to as hybrid regimes, often combine democratic features like national elections with autocratic ones like pressuring or controlling the media (Diamond 2002). While the electoral democracy variable attempts to consider factors like freedom of expression and association in its scoring, the factors it incorporates into its calculation may not consider that some hybrid regimes may score high on some factors and low on others. What this limitation results in is an inconclusive measure of the effects of electoral democracy on voter turnout. While most scholars believe that an increase in electoral democracy increases voter turnout, some scholars do point out that despite the

autocratic nature of hybrid regimes, voter turnout is still recorded relatively high, with one study finding that voter turnout in autocratic-leaning countries from 1975 to 2016 was over 65%, only slightly less than the 71% in democracies over the same period (Reuter 2017). However, while these findings do show that voter turnout is still significant in autocratic-leaning states, the fact that the turnout rate is slightly higher in democracies suggests that the sign I get for electoral democracy in my results should be positive, even if the magnitude is not particularly noteworthy.

In addition to the electoral democracy variable, the omission of a variable analyzing the effects of internal economic inequality is significant. Scholars have identified income as a significant factor on whether individuals choose to vote, and while the variable measuring GDP per capita captured the average income of individuals across countries, it fails to provide an in-depth look into potential economic inequalities within countries (Jensen and Jespersen 2017). Especially as global-income inequality continues to grow, looking at the effects of income within countries on voter turnout becomes increasingly important. Future research should consider both the effects of hybrid regimes and increasing economic inequality within states in studies of the relationship between economic globalization and voter turnout rates. While my results show that economic globalization does have a direct and global effect on voter turnout, future research could examine whether either of these factors impact voter turnout directly and whether they influence the findings of future research analyzing the relationship between economic globalization and voter turnout. As states emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, which has only exacerbated income inequality within states, research on these factors and how they relate to voting is as important as ever.

My findings suggest that the effects of economic globalization on voter turnout must be considered going forward when political and economic elites are debating whether to embrace

economic globalization. Because voter turnout is integral to the vitality of a democracy, leaders must be conscious of the effects that economic globalization will have on their electorate when charting the future path of their country. If it is in a government's best interest to prevent the electorate from becoming disengaged from the electoral process, then it may be important for governments to consider limiting the effects of economic globalization on their country. If a party leader believes that their political party benefits from higher voter turnout in parliamentary elections, then their party would benefit from adopting economic policies that would allow the state to retain its national autonomy at the expense of further globalization. Because globalization has become so widespread over the last three to four decades, it may be increasingly difficult and politically and economically damaging to fully reject globalization and its effects. Rather, states should recognize the need for a balance between national autonomy and globalization. Scholars have often pointed to the Scandinavian countries as prime examples of this approach. These countries have largely maintained stable voter turnout at levels hovering around 80% over the last several decades (Elkilt & Togeby 2009). My study suggests that states must be wary of this need for balance, especially as states emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic with an uncertain idea of what the future of globalization looks like. Whether by adopting the approach of Scandinavian countries or looking for a new way to balance national autonomy and globalization, states will need to decide in the coming years what kind of path they want to follow. States must recognize the relationship between electoral participation, national autonomy, and economic globalization while considering the costs and benefits of choosing one over the other. Only by recognizing this relationship and the trade-offs that exist within it can states ultimately make the best decision for themselves and their electorate.

Table 1. Effects of Economic Globalization on Voter Turnout in Legislative Elections (1970-2018)

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error
Economic Globalization	-0.073*	(0.036)
Electoral Democracy	-1.769	(2.352)
GDP per Capita	0.000***	(0.000)
Presidential System	-4.345***	(0.986)
Proportional Voting System	5.353***	(2.142)
N	1,257	
R ²	0.0787	

Standard errors appear in parentheses. Statistical significance levels: * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$

Table 2. Summary Statistics

Variable	Observations	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Voter Turnout in Legislative Elections	1,257	69.79267	16.18964	2.73	99.9
Economic Globalization	1,257	53.66001	16.60905	13.72187	94.00932
Electoral Democracy	1,257	.589825	.2481112	.07	.916
GDP per Capita	1,257	13363.11	17227.07	183.5479	110701.9
Presidential System	1,257	.5759745	.4943909	0	1
Proportional Voting	1,257	.540706	.4985169	0	1

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Appendix

Table 3. Variable Operationalization and Sources

Dependent Variable

Variable	Operationalization	Source
Voter Turnout in Parliamentary Elections	Continuous measure of voter turnout ranging from 0 to 100 depending on the percentage of eligible voters who cast a vote in a particular election.	Gygli, Savina, Florian Haelg, Niklas Potrafke and Jan-Egbert Sturm (2019): The KOF Globalisation Index – Revisited, <i>Review of International Organizations</i> , 14(3), 543-574; The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. (2021b). Voter turnout database. https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voter-turnout

Explanatory Variable

Variable	Operationalization	Source
Economic Globalization	Continuous measure from 1 to 100. Higher number represents higher levels of trade flows and financial flows, lower number represents lower levels.	Gygli, Savina, Florian Haelg, Niklas Potrafke and Jan-Egbert Sturm (2019): The KOF Globalisation Index – Revisited, <i>Review of International Organizations</i> , 14(3), 543-574; Dreher, A. (2006). Does globalization affect growth? evidence from a new index of globalization. <i>Applied Economics</i> , 38 (10), 1091–1110

Control Variables

Variable	Operationalization	Source
Electoral Democracy Index	Dichotomous indicator. Score is ‘1’ if a country meets the criteria to be considered a democracy and ‘0’ if otherwise	Gygli, Savina, Florian Haelg, Niklas Potrafke and Jan-Egbert Sturm (2019): The KOF Globalisation Index – Revisited, <i>Review of International Organizations</i> , 14(3), 543-574; Coppedge, M., Gerring, J., Knutsen, C. H., Lindberg, S. I., Teorell, J., Alizada, N., Altman, D., Bernhard, M., Cornell, A., Fish, M. S., Gastaldi, L., Gjerløw, H., Glynn, A., Hicken, A., Hindle, G., Ilchenko, N., Krusell, J., Luhrmann, A., Maerz, S. F., . . . Ziblatt, D. (2021). V-dem [country-year/country-date] dataset v11.1. https://doi.org/10.23696/vdemds21
GDP per Capita (2010 U.S. Dollar)	GDP divided by midyear population.	Gygli, Savina, Florian Haelg, Niklas Potrafke and Jan-Egbert Sturm (2019): The KOF Globalisation Index – Revisited, <i>Review of International Organizations</i> , 14(3), 543-574;

		World Bank. (2021). World development indicators. https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators
Presidential Political System	Dichotomous indicator. Score is '1' if a country has a presidential system and '0' if it does not.	Gygli, Savina, Florian Haelg, Niklas Potrafke and Jan-Egbert Sturm (2019): The KOF Globalisation Index – Revisited, <i>Review of International Organizations</i> , 14(3), 543-574; Bjørnskov, C., & Rode, M. (2020). Regime types and regime change: A new dataset on democracy, coups, and political institutions. <i>Review of International Organizations</i> , 15, 531–551
Country has Proportional Voting	Dichotomous indicator. Score is '1' if a country has proportional voting and '0' if it does not	Gygli, Savina, Florian Haelg, Niklas Potrafke and Jan-Egbert Sturm (2019): The KOF Globalisation Index – Revisited, <i>Review of International Organizations</i> , 14(3), 543-574; Bjørnskov, C., & Rode, M. (2020). Regime types and regime change: A new dataset on democracy, coups, and political institutions. <i>Review of International Organizations</i> , 15, 531–551

reg ideavt_legvt dr_eg vdem_polyarchy wdi_gdpcapcon2010 br_pres br_pvote

```

Source |   SS      df    MS   Number of obs = 1,257
-----+----- F(5, 1251)   = 21.36

Model | 25892.4731    5 5178.49461 Prob > F    = 0.0000
Residual | 303310.806  1,251 242.454681 R-squared   = 0.0787
-----+----- Adj R-squared = 0.0750
Total | 329203.279  1,256 262.104522 Root MSE    = 15.571

-----+-----
ideavt_legvt | Coefficient Std. err.   t   P>|t|   [95% conf. interval]
-----+-----
dr_eg | -.0729777 .0357217  -2.04 0.041  -1.1430588 -.0028966
vdem_polyarchy | -1.769116 2.352153  -0.75 0.452  -6.383716 2.845483
wdi_gdpcapcon2010 | .0001911 .0000365  5.24 0.000  .0001196 .0002627
br_pres | -4.344662 .9859175  -4.41 0.000  -6.278897 -2.410428
br_pvote | 5.353352 .9653125  5.55 0.000  3.459542 7.247162
_cons | 71.80464 2.142458 33.52 0.000  67.60143 76.00784

```