ISSN: 1852-9003 - eISSN: 2660-700X

Shane P. Singh. *Beyond Turnout: How Compulsory Voting Shapes Citizens and Political Parties*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021. 225 pages. ISBN: 9780198832928. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198832928.001.0001.

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Should voting in elections be compulsory? For quite some time now, scholars have been debating this issue: for instance, an article published more than a century ago (in 1891) by Frederick W. Holls called for the adoption of compulsory voting in the United States. Two years later (in 1893), John M. Broomall published another article defending compulsory voting, too.

A long time has passed since the publication of these two studies. But, as with several other debates in political science, researchers have not yet reached a consensus about whether voting should be compulsory or not. This is because compulsory voting has been shown to lead to both positive and negative political consequences: for instance, while compulsory voting has been shown to foster electoral participation (e.g., Panagopoulos, 2008; Kostelka *et al.*, 2022), it is also likely to reduce the "quality" of the vote (Dassonneville *et al.*, 2018; Selb & Lachat, 2009) and people's satisfaction with democracy (Singh, 2018), as well as to increase invalid and blank balloting (Barnes & Rangel, 2018; Singh, 2019).

Shane Singh's new book on compulsory voting —the focus of this review— makes a consensus on the adoption of compulsory voting even harder to be reached, as it shows that compulsory voting actually has a double-sided effect on citizens and parties. For instance, compulsory voting, especially when strictly enforced, is shown to amplify "the negative relationship between dissatisfaction with democracy and support for authorities" (169). Moreover, non-mainstream parties are shown to "take more extreme positions" when voting is compulsory than when it is not (170).

This review – a non-exhaustive account of Singh's new book – is divided in two parts: first, I present some of the book's keys findings. Then, using Singh's book as the point of departure, I discuss potential avenues for future research.

THEORIES, HYPOTHESES, AND RESULTS

Singh's book proposes two main theories: first, compulsory voting exacerbates the negative effects of anti-democratic orientations "on attitudes toward political actors and levels of political engagement" (58). Second, compulsory voting reduces parties' efforts to mobilize turnout, especially for (but not limited to) those of the political mainstream; as a result, mainstream parties "moderate their messages under compulsory voting" (133), while non-mainstream parties "make more appeals to the fringes" under this voting system (134).

The first theory (on individuals) leads to four testable hypotheses. **Hypothesis 1** is that "individuals who are more negatively oriented toward electoral democracy are less likely to support compulsory voting" (65). **Hypothesis 2** is that "compulsory voting enhances the negative relationship between negative orientations toward democracy and support for political authorities" (65). **Hypothesis 3** is that "compulsory voting enhances the positive relationship between negative orientations toward democracy and support for extremist and outsider parties" (65). And **Hypothesis 4** is that "compulsory voting enhances the negative relationship between negative orientations toward democracy and political sophistication" (65). These hypotheses are believed to hold especially in places where compulsory voting is strictly enforced and where it includes significant sanctions for abstention.

Hypothesis 1 is tested by means of multiple multivariate regressions with data from six compulsory voting countries (Australia, Belgium, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay) (see Table 4.1 in page 72 for a detailed description of the studies used). The results are overall supportive of Hypothesis 1 as they suggest – most importantly – a positive association between satisfaction with democracy and support for compulsory voting. Singh interprets this finding as evidence that a "belief in and commitment to the value of all citizens' participation in democracy" explains support of compulsory voting (79), though he does not exclude that citizens may be actually driven by a desire to preserve the "legal ability to signal discontent via abstention" (79).

Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 are tested by means of multivariate regressions with data from the AmericasBarometer and the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), as well as regression-discontinuity analyses of data from Swiss Election Studies from 1971 to 2015 and from an original study conducted in Argentina, in 2019. The results provide some support for Hypotheses 2 and 4, and full support for Hypothesis 3. More precisely, Hypothesis 2 (on support for political authorities) is disconfirmed by the cross-country analyses but confirmed by the regression-discontinuity analyses in Switzerland and Argentina. Hypothesis 3 (on extremity of vote choice) is confirmed by the cross-country analyses and by the regression-discontinuity analyses in Switzerland (this hypothesis is not tested in Argentina). Hypothesis 4 (on political sophistication) is partly confirmed by the

cross-country analyses and by the regression-discontinuity analyses in Switzerland (an effect is observed for political interest and, in the case of the cross-country analyses, for understanding of political issues too, but not for perceived parties' positions). Conversely, the exact opposite of Hypothesis 4 is observed in Argentina: compulsory voting actually engenders "political interest among young citizens who are democratically disaffected, while lessening interest among those who are satisfied with democracy" (132). Note that a cautious interpretation of the regression estimates is, however, needed given the large amount of imprecision in those estimates.

The second theory (on parties) leads to three testable hypothesis. **Hypothesis 5** is that "compulsory voting reduces the extent to which parties make efforts to mobilize turnout, especially if they are of the political mainstream" (140). **Hypothesis 6a** is that "compulsory voting curtails the relationship between mainstream parties' ideological orientations and their emphasis of policies fundamental to their ideologies" (141). And **Hypothesis 6b** is that "compulsory voting enhances the relationship between non-mainstream parties' ideological orientations and their emphasis of policies fundamental to their ideologies" (141). As with the previous hypotheses, Hypotheses 5, 6a, and 6b are believed to hold especially in places where compulsory voting is strictly enforced and where it includes significant sanctions for abstention.

Hypothesis 5 is tested by means of descriptive analyses of cross-national data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), as well as regression-discontinuity analyses of Argentinian data. These analyses offer weak evidence in support of Hypothesis 5. First, the results of the descriptive analyses suggest that party-citizen contact is indeed lower in compulsory systems with strong penalties and routine enforcement. However, the only country classified as such is Peru, which means that the observed differences may be due to characteristics that are specific to this country. Second, the results from Argentina suggest that compulsory voting actually leads to a higher contact by a candidate or party among those just above 18 years old (who are required to vote), though it indeed leads to a lower contact among those just below 70 years old (who are required to vote). Compulsory voting does not lead to a higher contact by a candidate or party among those just above 18 years old when information on individuals' ideology (a proxy for whether the candidate or party is mainstream or not) is added to the analysis. Still, Singh concludes that "the widely believed pattern by which parties do less to mobilize turnout and focus more on conversion under compulsory voting, although very plausible in theory, has little empirical support" (165).

Hypotheses 6a and 6b are tested by means of multivariate regressions with data from the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) containing information on parties' policy positions from 38 countries. Despite Hypothesis 5 not being confirmed by the analyses, the results are still taken as overall supportive of

Hypotheses 6a and 6b as mainstream parties' general left-right position is found not to be associated with their emphasis on patriotism/nationalism, equality, and pro-law-and-order positions where voting is compulsory, and rules are strictly enforced. In contrast, under strong compulsory voting rules, non-mainstream parties give extra prominence or further downplay such issues, depending on their ideology. Different results are observed, however, for environmental protection: no such a dynamic is observed across different voting rules.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

With these findings, Singh's book offers compelling evidence that compulsory voting can be beneficial and detrimental to politics at the same time. For instance, as observed in Switzerland and Argentina but not cross-nationally, while compulsory voting may increase support for authorities among the democratically satisfied, it may actually reduce such a support among the democratically dissatisfied. As such, Singh's book likely makes it even harder for researchers to arrive at a consensus about the use of compulsory voting.

To complicate things further, Singh's approach to compulsory voting (i.e., that its effect is likely conditional on one's predispositions) raises several questions. For instance, could it be that compulsory voting leads to a greater knowledge of political affairs (beyond parties' ideological position) among those who are satisfied with democracy, but not so among those who are dissatisfied with it? Singh's book suggests that *yes*. In addition, could the advantages of compulsory voting, especially the reduction of inequalities in who votes, be achieved by means of initiatives that would not lead to the same disadvantages of compulsory voting? The answer to this question seems to be *yes* too. Indeed, building on Aldrich *et al.* (2011) but focusing instead on a habit to vote that includes voting in primary, midterm, and European elections, I regress electoral participation on political interest (a key determinant of electoral participation, and, consequently, a key gap in who votes), habit to vote (measured by frequency of voting in three adjacent elections, including primary, midterm, and European elections), and their interaction in the United States and Sweden. As shown on Appendix A, political interest is unlikely to drive the electoral participation of habitual voters, while it is likely to influence the electoral participation of non-habitual voters. Based on these (very) preliminary findings as well as Aldrich *et al.*'s work, it seems that there are indeed other (but not necessarily easier) ways of arriving at the same positive political consequences of compulsory voting, especially the reduction of inequalities in who votes, without suffering from the negative ones.

To conclude, Singh's book stands as a unique source of information about the potential consequences of compulsory voting for politics. In offering new ways

of approaching compulsory voting, this book should be a must-read to scholars and practitioners who are interested in compulsory voting and its political consequences.

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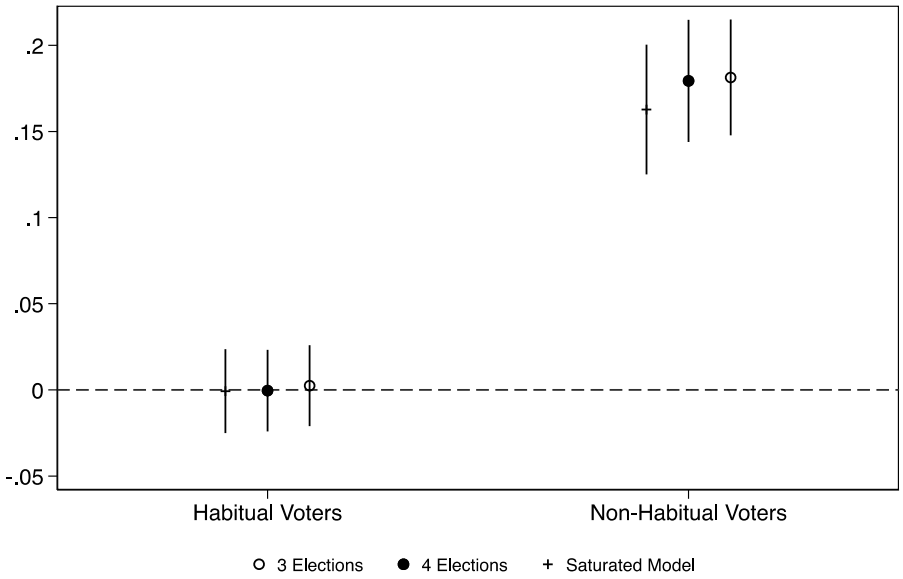
APPENDIX A

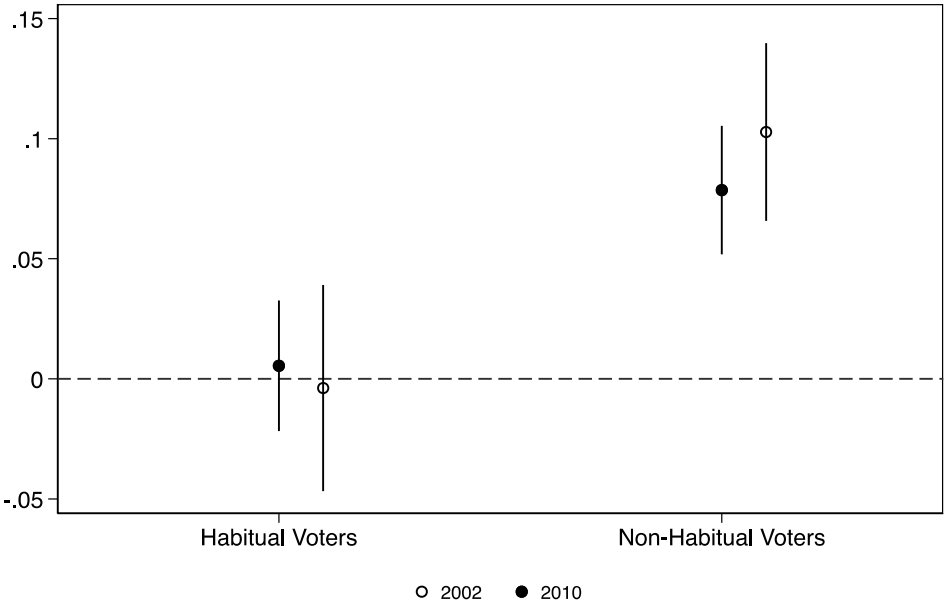
Figure 1. Average marginal effect of political interest on participation in the 2014 U.S. midterm elections among habitual and non-habitual voters



Note: Estimates correspond to average marginal effects, which are calculated by means of OLS regressions (see results in table format on Table 1 below and descriptive statistics on Table 3). The baseline model includes age, gender, and education as controls. The saturated model includes these variables, as well as partisanship, marital status, frequency of church attendance, ethnicity, and income as controls. All models include state fixed effects. Validated voters in the 2014 U.S. midterm election are coded as "1", while validated abstainers are coded as "0". Political interest is measured by the question: "Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs?". "4" stands for individuals who are most interested in politics, while "1" stands for those who are least interested in politics. Habitual voters (also validated) are those who either participated in three adjacent elections (the 2014 U.S. primaries, the 2012 U.S. presidential election, and the 2012 U.S. primaries) or four adjacent elections (the 2014 U.S. primaries, the 2012 U.S. presidential election, the 2012 U.S. primaries, and the 2010 U.S. midterm elections). Non-habitual voters are those who abstained in any of these elections. Results are consistent with Aldrich *et al.* (2011) as they indicate that political interest does not affect habitual voters' decision to vote, while it affects non-habitual voters' decision.

Source: 2010-2014 Cooperative Election Study (CES).

Figure 2. Average marginal effect of political interest on participation in the 2002 and the 2010 Swedish parliamentary elections among habitual and non-habitual voters



Note: Estimates correspond to average marginal effects, which are calculated by means of OLS regressions (see results in table format on Table 2 below and descriptive statistics on Table 3). Models include age, gender, and education as controls. Validated voters in the 2002 and 2010 Swedish parliamentary elections are coded as "1", while validated abstainers are coded as "0". Political interest is measured by the question: "Generally speaking, how interested in politics are you?". "4" stands for individuals who are most interested in politics, while "1" stands for those who are least interested in politics. Habitual voters (also validated) are those who either participated in the 1994 and 1998 elections for the Swedish Parliament, as well as the 1999 election for the European Parliament, or in the 2002 and 2006 elections for the Swedish Parliament, as well as the 2009 election for the European Parliament. Non-habitual voters are those who abstained in any of these elections. Results are consistent with Aldrich *et al.* (2011) as they indicate that political interest does not affect habitual voters' decision to vote, while it affects non-habitual voters' decision.

Source: 1998-2002 and 2006-2010 Swedish National Election Studies (SNES).

Table 1. Association between political interest and participation in the 2014 U.S. midterm elections moderated by habit to vote

	DV: Vote in the 2014 U.S. midterm elections		
	3 elections	4 elections	Saturated model
Political Interest	0.181***	0.179***	0.163***
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.019)
Habit to Vote	0.931***	0.918***	0.864***
	(0.073)	(0.076)	(0.078)
Political Interest*	-0.179***	-0.180***	-0.163***
Habit to Vote	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.021)
Age	0.001	0.001	0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Gender	-0.077***	-0.080***	-0.078***
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.023)
Education	0.013	0.010	0.006
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Partisanship			0.031**
Strength			(0.011)
Marital Status			-0.017
			(0.026)
Church			-0.001
Attendance			(0.007)
Ethnicity			0.028
			(0.031)
Income			0.006
			(0.004)
Constant	0.054	0.078	0.048
	(0.113)	(0.117)	(0.133)
N	7,076	6,764	6,060

Note: Entries correspond to linear estimates. Standard errors in parentheses. All models contain state fixed effects and post-stratification weights (available in the CES data). * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Source: 2010-2014 Cooperative Election Study (CES).

Table 2. Association between political interest and participation in the 2002 and 2010 Swedish parliamentary elections moderated by habit to vote

	DV: Vote in the 2002 Swedish parliamentary election	DV: Vote in the 2010 Swedish parliamentary election
Political Interest	0.103***	0.079***
	(0.019)	(0.014)
Habit to Vote	0.378***	0.307***
	(0.079)	(0.052)
Political Interest*	-0.107***	-0.073***
Habit to Vote	(0.028)	(0.019)
Age	0.009	0.026
	(0.021)	(0.015)
Gender	0.023**	-0.007
	(0.008)	(0.005)
Education	0.021	0.002
	(0.015)	(0.011)
Constant	0.454***	0.680***
	(0.065)	(0.047)
N	727	1,198

Note: Entries correspond to linear estimates. Standard errors in parentheses. * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Source: 1998-2002 and 2006-2010 Swedish National Election Studies (SNES).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of variables in the analyses

Cooperative Election Study (CES):	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.	N
Validated Voting in the 2014 Election (0=No; 1=Yes)	0.72	0.45	0.00	1.00	8,168
Validated Habit to Vote (3 elections) (0=No; 1=Yes)	0.31	0.46	0.00	1.00	7,097
Validated Habit to Vote (4 elections) (0=No; 1=Yes)	0.30	0.46	0.00	1.00	6,782
Political Interest (1=Not interested at all; 2=Not very interested; 3=Somewhat interested; 4=Very interested)	3.33	0.91	1.00	4.00	9,463
Age	48.10	16.19	18.00	91.00	9,500
Gender (0=Male; 1=Female)	0.52	0.50	0.00	1.00	9,500
Education (1=No high school; 2=High school; 3=College; 4=Postgraduation)	2.69	0.76	1.00	4.00	9,500
Partisanship (1=Independent; 2=Leaner; 3=Not very strong partisan; 4=Strong partisan)	2.90	1.09	1.00	4.00	9,417
Marital Status (0=Not married; 1=Married)	0.59	0.49	0.00	1.00	9,500
Church Attendance (1=Never; 2=Seldom; 3=A few times a year; 4=Once or twice a month; 5=Once a week; 6=More than once a week)	2.96	1.78	1.00	6.00	9,439
Ethnicity (0=Not white; 1=White)	0.74	0.44	0.00	1.00	9,500

Cooperative Election Study (CES):	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.	N
Income (1=Less than $10,000; 2=$10,000–$19,999; 3=$20,000–$29,999; 4=$30,000–$39,999; 5=$40,000–$49,999; 6=$50,000–$59,999; 7=$60,000–$69,999; 8=$70,000–$79,999; 9=$80,000–$99,999; 10=$100,000–$139,999; 11=$140,000–$149,999; 12=$150,000–$199,999; 13=$200,000–$249,999; 14=$250,000–$349,999; 15=$350,000–$499,999; 16=$500,000 or more)	6.17	3.16	1.00	16.00	8,236
Swedish National Election Studies (SNES):	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.	N
Validated Voting in the 2002 Election (0=No; 1=Yes)	0.83	0.37	0.00	1.00	3,778
Validated Voting in the 2010 Election (0=No; 1=Yes)	0.87	0.33	0.00	1.00	3,961
Validated Habit to Vote (1998-2002) (0=No; 1=Yes)	0.38	0.49	0.00	1.00	1,113
Validated Habit to Vote (2006-2010) (0=No; 1=Yes)	0.47	0.50	0.00	1.00	1,619
Political Interest (1=Not interested at all; 2=Not very interested; 3=Somewhat interested; 4=Very interested)	2.54	0.80	1.00	4.00	5,969
Age (1=18–20; 2=21–30; 3=31–40; 4=41–50; 5=51–60; 6=61–70; 7=71–80)	3.97	1.80	1.00	7.00	8,164
Gender (0=Male; 1=Female)	0.50	0.50	0.00	1.00	8,164

Cooperative Election Study (CES):	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.	N
Education	2.07	0.77	1.00	3.00	4,954
(1=Primary; 2=Secondary; 3=Tertiary)					

Sources: 2010-2014 Cooperative Election Study (CES); 1998-2002 and 2006-2010 Swedish National Election Studies (SNES).