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The Meanings of Voting for Citizens

A Scientific Challenge, a Portrait, and Implications

Carolina Plescia

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The Meanings of Voting for Citizens

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A Scientific Challenge, a Portrait, and Implications

Edited by

Carolina Plescia

with *María Belén Abdala, André Blais, Ming M. Boyer, Anna Lia Brunetti, Cal Le Gall, Sylvia Kritzinger, Carolina Plescia, Petro Tolochko, Markus Wagner, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister*

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Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

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Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024950430

ISBN 9780198946304

DOI: 10.1093/9780198946335.001.0001

Printed and bound by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

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Acknowledgements

This book is based on research conducted in the context of the still-ongoing ERC Starting Grant project DeVOTE (Grant agreement ID: 949247). It could not have been completed without the European Research Council's generous research support.[1] This book project, especially the data collection it benefited from, could not have been implemented without the fantastic core team of DeVOTE: María Belén Abdala, Ming M. Boyer, Anna Lia Brunetti, and Cal Le Gall. My deep gratitude goes to them for the countless hours they have spent working with me on the DeVOTE project and this book in particular. Special thanks also go to Zita Zeberer for her invaluable, constant help and attentiveness at every stage of the project. She exemplifies the project administrator that any project would be lucky to have. My heartfelt gratitude extends to the DeVOTE advisory board (André Blais, Sylvia Kritzinger, Sophie Lecheler, Zoe Lefkofridi, Gail McElroy, Markus Wagner, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister) for their invaluable guidance and unwavering support throughout the project. André Blais, Sylvia Kritzinger, Enrique Hernández, Zoe Lefkofridi, Filip Kostelka, Gail McElroy, Jennifer Oser, Julia Partheymüller, Kaat Smets, Markus Wagner, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister participated in the book workshop in October 2023 at the University of Vienna. The workshop was a fantastic opportunity to rigorously test the book's central arguments and structure. The expertise and insights of the participants were instrumental in sharpening the book's central arguments and enhancing its overall coherence. Thank you for your time, dedication, and valuable feedback. Special thanks go to André Blais, Sylvia Kritzinger, Petro Tolochko, Markus Wagner, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister for being absolutely fantastic co-authors on this journey. Many thanks also go to the translators (Aline Burni, Deniz Yildirim, Roman Zolotarjov, Valdemar Holt, and Zita Zeberer) and the coders (Felix Krejca, Wanda Melina Perner, Gloria Tokatligil, David Brandl, Jasmin Wagner, and Leonie Schmid) who, since 2021, have helped with the translation and coding of the open-ended questions that constitute the empirical basis for this book. In particular, I thank

[1] This research was funded by the European Union; the views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Wanda Melina Perner and Tobias Sundl, whose impeccable attention to detail provided excellent research assistance throughout the project. Clara Faulí Molas only joined the core team of DeVOTE in February 2024, but she has already made significant contributions with her dedication and expertise. More broadly, I thank the brilliant team at the Department of Government at the University of Vienna who, at every corner, helped with the theoretical and empirical parts of the derived papers from the ERC project, and some of these comments made this book undoubtedly stronger.

The book benefited from the input of many friends and colleagues who offered constructive criticism and advice on individual arguments that were presented as papers at various international conferences, invited talks, or workshops over the last years. There are too many to mention them all. Special thanks go to Marc Hooghe and Dieter Stiers, who invited me to the PhD Winter School in Leuven in 2022 to present my ongoing project work; to Macarena Ares, who invited me to Barcelona to present a paper related to this book; to Michael Bruter and Sarah Harrison, who were not only kind enough to travel to Vienna to meet with me and my team but also to provide invaluable insights during the day workshop in Vienna; to Daniel Dörler and Florian Heigl, for their advances and expertise on citizen science; and to Faten Ghosn, who invited me on behalf of the ECPR to give the inaugural Jean Blondel Lecture at the University of Essex in November 2023. This event allowed me to give my first lecture on the overall framework that holds the empirical elements of the book together. It also provided me with a last round of valuable feedback. The data collection benefited from the input from the several survey companies involved in data collection and in particular I thank Emily Dickinson at Opinium, and Kerstin Stippler and Valentyna Chuikina at Dynata. Many thanks go to Dominic Byatt, OUP editor, for his critical input as well as his guidance. The same applies to the OUP referees who commented on various aspects of the book project.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my family, and in particular my husband, Paolo Di Francesco, without whom this whole project would have been—from start to finish—unfeasible, and my boy, Daniel Di Francesco, whose energy has undoubtedly delayed the book but made it much more fun. This book is dedicated to the future, which is set to be pinker, prettier, and even better.

Vienna, 18 July 2024
Carolina Plescia

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Funder Acknowledgement

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

This work is supported by the ERC—Starting Grant (Agreement ID: 949247).

Introduction

Carolina Plescia

On election day, citizens typically place a mark beside a party or candidate on a ballot paper. The right to cast this mark has been a historic conquest and today, voting is among the most frequent political acts citizens perform. But what does that mark mean to them? It is frequently assumed that citizens share the view that such a mark is substantively meaningful. Many also believe in a universal vision of democracy, where voting is crucial and elections have clear meanings, yet these assumptions are increasingly questioned. High rates of abstention, political disillusionment, distrust in election integrity, and the rise of authoritarian-populist leaders and unelected technocrats all challenge this idea. Election results often provide little clarity about their true meaning to citizens, revealing diverse interpretations among the public and conflicting narratives from politicians and reporters (Mutz 2018; Thomas and Baas 1996).

This book studies what meanings citizens attribute to voting in general as well as in the specific context of an election. Meaning in this project refers to both the *significance* of voting as well as what is *meant* by voting for citizens, which may encompass citizens' *definitions* or *understandings* of voting, or the *motivations* they have (or don't have) to vote. It examines voting as an act, the performance of the act, and the motivations behind it. The book primarily relies on an open-ended survey question via qualitative and standardized interviews as well as a citizen-science website to measure the meanings of voting of ordinary citizens, but also on closed-ended questions, using cross-sectional and longitudinal panel studies, manual coding, and AI-based text analysis. This book covers 13 countries spanning Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania: Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Kenya, Nigeria, Serbia, Sweden, Tunisia, Türkiye and the United States (US). All in all, more than 25,000 people were interviewed and, from the open-ended answers alone, nearly a million words were gathered about the meanings of voting. To the best of our knowledge, this is an unparalleled effort to place citizens' own views about the meaning of the term 'voting' at the very core of a research project and to examine the variation of such meanings across individuals and types of democracies.

As such, this book is for anyone who seeks to understand what voting means to citizens, find a consensus on what voting actually is, and explore the implications voting has on our political and social landscape. By highlighting responses to a broad open question on the meaning of voting, this book sheds light on its alleged crisis from the citizens' perspective. The major difference that distinguishes this book from anything that precedes it is the aim of studying citizens' *views* of voting rather than explaining their voting *behaviour*. This practically means that when explaining voting turnout or voting behaviour one key variable of interest is their conceptualizations of voting. What are these conceptualizations? We use insights from the existing literature to derive a possible categorization and then study its variation across individuals, over time, and across countries in the different chapters of the book.

One of the main innovations of this book is of *conceptual* nature. A growing literature has begun to test the correspondence between scholarly definitions and individual conceptualizations in many areas of political science (Kirsch and Welzel 2019; Shamir and Shamir 2008). Research on the meanings of democracy specifically has identified a gap between academic and non-academic definitions (Andersen et al. 2018; Dahlberg et al. 2020; Davis et al. 2021; Frankenberger and Buhr 2020). The book sets out to test the extent to which scholarly derived categorizations of voting (e.g., voting as a choice, rather than a duty or right) match citizens' views. Adding to existing research, the book explores the possibility of voting having no meaning for citizens or even an 'anti-voting' meaning. Specifically, the book makes a conceptual, theoretical, and empirical distinction first and foremost between holding and not holding a meaning of voting. Then, within the category of holding a meaning, it studies what types of meanings exist. We distinguish between (a) *instrumental* meanings, which align with rational choice theory (e.g., Cox 1997; Fiorina 1981), where individuals vote to achieve broadly defined or specific outcomes, for example, influencing the country's future, shaping government composition, winning elections, or advocating for specific policies; (b) *expressive* meanings, which involve using the ballot as a means to express identification, affiliation, preferences, or protest against candidates, parties, ideologies, or policies; (c) *ethical* meanings, which view the act of voting as a way to comply with (or deviate from) societal norms, or as encompassing a sense of civic duty, obligation, or responsibility (Blais and Achen 2019), (d) *allegiance* meanings, which entail affirming commitment to the political system and its institutions, including supporting or defending democracy and exercising one's rights. (e) Lastly, *anti-voting* meanings refer to negative

attitudes towards the value of voting itself, perceiving it as inconsequential, burdensome, or unpleasant.

The second innovation is of *theoretical* nature. The categorization of voting proposed in this book allows us to test fundamental findings from the seminal literature on election turnout and voting behaviour, such as: 'do the most affluent consider voting most important?', 'who possesses the right "skills" to vote?', and 'when does voting lose significance?', among others. Leveraging on both within- and between-country variations, attention is given to both individual- or group-level key covariates commonly studied in the existing literature, such as cognitive sophistication and political knowledge, but also to contextual factors building broadly on the logic of learning (Rohrschneider 1999), which suggests that democratic ideas and values are 'learned' from democratic experience.

The third innovation of the book is of *empirical* nature. There is no existing paper or book that competes with our proposed project in terms of the topic and breadth of coverage. We have collected original data on the meanings of voting in very different countries—full democracies and electoral autocracies. As such, the book covers countries that reflect different levels of democratic development and in doing so ensures the representation of multiple continents. Following publication, and complying with the rules of the funding agency, the entirety of the data will be made publicly available and easily accessible via the Austrian Social Science Archive (AUSSDA). In addition, every empirical analysis presented in this book is accompanied by an R markdown file for an easy reproducibility of the results.

This book yields four main generalizations about citizens' meanings of voting. First, most people offer meaningful definitions of voting, stable over time and independent of democracy levels, which indicates that these meanings are internalized and socialized norms that can support democracy. Second, the book identifies a category of anti-voting, linked to distrust in electoral democracy, though only a small percentage hold these views and often seek alternative forms of participation. Third, factors like partisanship, political sophistication, and polarization have limited impact on the complexity of voting meanings. Across both liberal democracies and electoral autocracies, results show that underrepresented groups tend to hold fewer meanings of voting and more 'anti-voting' meanings compared to their well-represented counterparts. The specific meanings individuals attribute to voting vary significantly between demographic characteristics. Fourth, there is a clear mismatch between scholarly definitions of voting and those held by

the public, particularly regarding voting as a right, which is rarely studied in existing literature (but see Blais and Achen 2019) but is almost omnipresent in citizens' views. Additionally, the concept of diversified instrumentality in voting is highlighted. While existing research often considers strategic voting as mainly aimed at influencing the formation of the government or who is elected (e.g., Cox 1997; Downs 1957), the book's analysis shows that instrumentality in voting takes many more forms, including a naïve instrumentality to affect the future direction of the country. It is clear from the findings presented in this book that we should stop assuming voting is solely an expression of preferences.

The ambitious goal of the book is to become a critical reference for scholars in the extensive field of public opinion and behaviour, as it provides first-time evidence on citizens' conceptualizations of a key act in both liberal democracies and electoral autocracies. Elections, together with referenda, are central to democratic governance and provide citizens the opportunity to participate in formal decision-making processes that (in most cases) have a direct political impact. Addressing how citizens view these processes can significantly contribute to scholarly literature and public debate, particularly given the challenges democracies face and the growing critical and distant attitudes among citizens. We believe that scholars on democratization will also find this book informative since the unprecedented broad geographical scope of the book, spanning both consolidated and non-consolidated democracies, offers an unparalleled insight into the legitimizing qualities of elections and affords the opportunity to study under what conditions citizens perceive election choices to be meaningful. In addition, we believe this book will be ideal for undergraduate courses and graduate seminars in comparative political behaviour, as well as a valuable supplement for courses on empirical methods, comparative politics, and survey research. We offer a theoretically ambitious, touchstone work for scholars while at the same time making the manuscript accessible for a broad student audience. Finally, we expect the book to be valuable to practitioners specifically working on election reforms. In many countries, electoral democracy is today at the core of discussions of institutional reforms, including how we should vote, how often, and whether voting rights should be based on residency rather than citizenship. Yet, institutional reforms risk being completely ineffective if they are not tailored to the meanings people place on the very political actions they intend to reform. During these critical times, there is a dire need for a project that places citizens at the core of research.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first part entitled 'Meanings of Voting: A Scientific Challenge' includes three chapters. Chapter 1

by Carolina Plescia, María Belén Abdala, Sylvia Kritzinger, and Elisabeth Zechmeister provides a concise yet precise mapping of the main conceptualizations of voting that exist in the current literature. It then moves on to putting forward specific arguments about what to expect when citizens are asked directly about the meanings of voting. Chapter 2 by Carolina Plescia and María Belén Abdala explains how we conducted our research, thoroughly describing the procedure, sample, materials, and methods of data collection. It describes the challenges of gauging citizen meanings, and the measures we took to overcome them. Chapter 3 by María Belén Abdala, Carolina Plescia, and Markus Wagner provides an overview of the collected data, where to find them, how to use these data, and how it can be combined with existing data—both at the individual level, such as those provided by the CSES, as well as party-level data. The chapter explains the rationale behind case selection and the implications of studying voting meanings in diverse settings. It addresses two major challenges: ensuring survey quality and maintaining equivalence of meaning across cultures.

The second part of the book is 'Meanings of Voting: A Portrait' and also includes three chapters. Chapter 4 by María Belén Abdala, Petro Tolochko, and Carolina Plescia provides an overview of how citizens think about voting and the extent to which citizens' meanings of voting vary over time. In addition, it delves into the question of validity and testing of our measurement of the meanings of voting. Responses to open-ended questions on voting meanings are compared with closed-ended ones, and traditional voter behaviours and attitudes (e.g., turnout and trust in institutions). Additionally, the chapter uses large language models (LLMs) to evaluate the robustness of coding to test the consistency and accuracy of the codebook across nearly a million words from diverse linguistic contexts. Chapter 5 by Anna Lia Brunetti, Cal Le Gall, and Carolina Plescia examines the explanations behind variations of citizens' meanings across countries. The main focus is on country variation in terms of level of democracy, electoral systems, and compulsory voting, which can shape what citizens understand by the electoral process and their perceptions of the significance of voting. Chapter 6 by Ming M. Boyer, María Belén Abdala, and Carolina Plescia examines what explains variation of citizens' meanings across individuals. It theorizes that demographic factors (gender, age, education) and political attitudes (partisanship, centrism) shape voting meanings through political socialization and political representation.

Part III of the book addresses 'Meanings of Voting and Their Implications' and includes two chapters about the empirical consequences of meanings of voting. Chapter 7 by Anna Lia Brunetti, Ming M. Boyer, and Carolina

Plescia studies the link between the significance and content of voting and behavioural consequences in terms of electoral and non-electoral participation, relying on both cross-sectional and panel data. Chapter 8 by Carolina Plescia and André Blais reflects on the implications of the book's findings for the design of voting systems. It identifies which meanings most support democracy and electoral democracy, deeming these 'supportive' meanings. The chapter then examines contexts where people hold more supportive meanings and analyses the influence of voting systems (majoritarian, proportional, or mixed), compulsory voting, and democracy levels. The final chapter by Carolina Plescia, Sylvia Kritzinger, and André Blais discusses the overall results of the book and relates them to the main argument of the book, and provides a summary that allows us to offer a taxonomy of voting in the eyes of citizens—a major legacy of the book.

We invite you to join us on this journey. Whether you are a newcomer to political science or a seasoned researcher, this book offers insights and strategies to deepen your understanding of the complexities of voting behaviour and public opinion. Together, we will explore how to interpret diverse perspectives on voting, navigate evolving democratic landscapes, and contribute to shaping a future where electoral processes empower and engage citizens in meaningful ways. Investigating individual views on voting can serve as tools to understand what shapes the dynamic of public opinion and influences citizens' behaviour with both theoretical and methodological implications that go beyond the study of the act of voting itself.

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PART I

MEANINGS OF VOTING: A SCIENTIFIC CHALLENGE

1

The Meanings of Voting

A conceptual framework

Carolina Plescia, María Belén Abdala, Sylvia Kritzinger, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister

> *The meaning of a word is its use in the language.*
> *One cannot guess how a word functions.*
> *One has to look at its use, and learn from that.*
>
> **Wittgenstein 1958**

Introduction

This book deals with the way citizens—not scholars—understand the word 'voting'. Conceptualizing abstract and multidimensional political concepts such as voting is inherently difficult and their consequent measurement a thorny issue. Yet, as Sartori (1970, 1038) reminds us, 'concept formation stands prior to quantification'. That is, 'we cannot measure unless we know first what it is that we are measuring' (Sartori 1970, 1038). Unbiased conceptualizations and valid measures of political concepts are necessary steps to rigorously compare countries, and track changes and continuity over time (Steiner and Martin 2012). A problematic area is the disconnect between scholarly definitions and citizens' individual *meanings* of these same concepts and subjective experiences (see also Bruter and Harrison 2020). Such a gap seems to be present in many areas of political-science research related to public opinion, citizens' attitudes, and behaviour, spanning from views about what elections are for (Hershey 1992; Kelley 1983; Shamir and Shamir 2008) to authoritarian notions (Kirsch and Welzel 2019) to meanings of democracy (e.g., Andersen et al. 2018; Baviskar and Malone 2004; Canache 2012; Dahlberg et al. 2020; Dalton et al. 2007; Davis et al. 2021; Frankenberger and Buhr 2020; Osterberg-Kaufmann and Stadelmaier 2020) as well as what

Carolina Plescia, María Belén Abdala, Sylvia Kritzinger, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, *The Meanings of Voting*.
In: *The Meanings of Voting for Citizens.* Edited by: Carolina Plescia, Oxford University Press. © Carolina Plescia (2025).
DOI: 10.1093/9780198946335.003.0001

meanings individuals attach to ideological labels (Conover and Feldman 1981; Zechmeister 2006). Frankenberger and Buhr (2020) emphasize that, if one assumes that citizens' subjective meanings are central to how they act politically, how satisfied they are with their polity and, as a consequence, how stable their political system is (Almond and Verba 1963; Dalton and Klingemann 2007; Easton 1975), then it is all the more important to find appropriate ways to adequately capture these subjective meanings in their own right and to set them in relationship with other concepts in political science research.

In this chapter we aim to map the main conceptualizations of voting that exist in the current academic literature, and then suggest clear notions about what to expect when citizens are asked directly about their *own* meanings of voting. Two considerations are key while reading the entire book. First, we reflect upon potential differences across countries with varying levels of democracy. Over the 0–1 range of V-Dem scores for liberal democracy (Coppedge et al. 2022), the book covers countries ranging from 0.12 (i.e., Türkiye) to 0.87 (i.e., Sweden). In this book, countries scoring below 0.5 on this index are classified as electoral autocracies, while the rest are considered liberal democracies (Lührmann et al. 2017; Schedler 2009). Second, as voting likely means very different things to citizens in different political—or social—settings, it is important to indicate that we focus exclusively on voting for national elections where the main representative assembly of the country under study is elected. Taken together, we believe that the conceptualization, theoretical framework, and empirical evidence presented in this book each has the potential to fundamentally change our understanding of the role voting plays in our societies.

Conceptualizing meanings of voting

Voting is an abundantly used concept in the social sciences in general and in political science in particular, but contrary to many other concepts in the social sciences (e.g., democracy; see Munck and Verkuilen 2022), it is not a contested concept per se and there has been no clear attempt to systematically define it. This does not mean, however, that there is no theoretical diversity in how it is viewed by the scholarly literature or in the way it is conceptualized and operationalized practically by empirical research, stakeholders, and voters. As for the concept of democracy (Baviskar and Malone 2004), one could also make a broad distinction between a 'minimal' and 'maximal' definition of voting. If one accepts such distinction, the former could focus on the physical act of going to vote, which may or may not include casting a blank or

improperly marked ballot, in person by walking to the polling station, or via mail, and so forth—on or before election day.

A maximal definition of voting could include the motivation behind casting the ballot. Such motivation may or may not exist, and we are not the first to claim that the act of voting may contain a meaning. For example, in his foundational work, Albert Hirschman (1970) includes voting when talking about consumers' possibility of exit, voice, or loyalty. In his framework, *exit* refers to viewing voting rather negatively with a sense of frustration or disillusionment with the available political options and/or the electoral system. *Voice* represents individuals actively participating in the vote and voting to express concerns, preferences, or dissatisfaction. It is also a way for individuals to voice their opinions and try to influence the political system. *Loyalty* is a more charged concept and refers to voting in order to remain committed or loyal to a particular political party, candidate, or ideology. Loyalty can stem from various factors, including party identification, ideological alignment, or a belief that change can be achieved by staying engaged and supporting the preferred option. Much more literature today focuses on voice and loyalty in voting behaviour, rather than on exit, and such literature is based to a large extent on an underlying assumption that voting ought to have a meaning for everyone. Actually, and as discussed in the introduction of this book, assuming that everyone has a meaning of voting is particularly problematic today; for example, declining turnout (Kostelka and Blais 2021) increasingly points towards a picture of voting being 'meaningless' for some citizens.

When talking about the meaning of voting, we consider simultaneously voting as the act itself (a noun), the performance of the act (a verb), or the motivation behind that act. So, in this book, we study the meanings of voting and *not why* people vote. This allows us to adopt a maximal definition, and make sure that no (hidden) meanings are missed, while at the same time considering that for (some) citizens minimal definitions of the act itself can apply. We notably talk about meaning*s* in plural because voting conceptualizations are not mutually exclusive, and citizens may hold multiple meanings simultaneously—or none at all. How we conceptualize voting is graphically summarized in Figure 1.1, which shows how, when citizens hold *no meaning* of voting, we specifically talk about voting having *no meaning*. This notion refers therefore to an absence of meaning or a failure to grasp or formulate meanings. In methodological terms, examples of answers to open-ended questions asking respondents 'What does voting mean to you?' are classified as no meaning when they include explicit mentions of 'No', 'None', or 'No meaning'. In closed-ended questions asked about potential meanings of voting, having *no meaning* means scoring low on average for all potential

meanings. Meanwhile, when holding meanings (i.e., view voting as *meaningful*), citizens can hold *any* meaning, and these meanings can be of different nature and valence.

When meanings are present, they can be of different kinds. Four of these meanings are derived directly from the existing literature. There is an additional type largely disregarded in the existing voting behaviour literature (but see Hirschman 1970) that we label as anti-voting meaning.[1] Anti-voting is per se a difficult concept to grasp because, much as philosophers of life explain for the anti-meaning of life, we lack terminology for this idea in ordinary language, and the concept in itself is novel and unfamiliar (Campbell and Nyholm 2015). Therefore, the next section first reviews the traditionally covered possible meanings of voting and then locates anti-voting meanings. While it is logical and empirically impossible to have simultaneously no meaning and a meaning, the different types of meanings are not mutually exclusive, as citizens can—and often do—hold multiple meanings simultaneously (hence the overlapping in Figure 1.1), including an overlap between anti-voting and any other meaning.[2] Furthermore, while we acknowledge

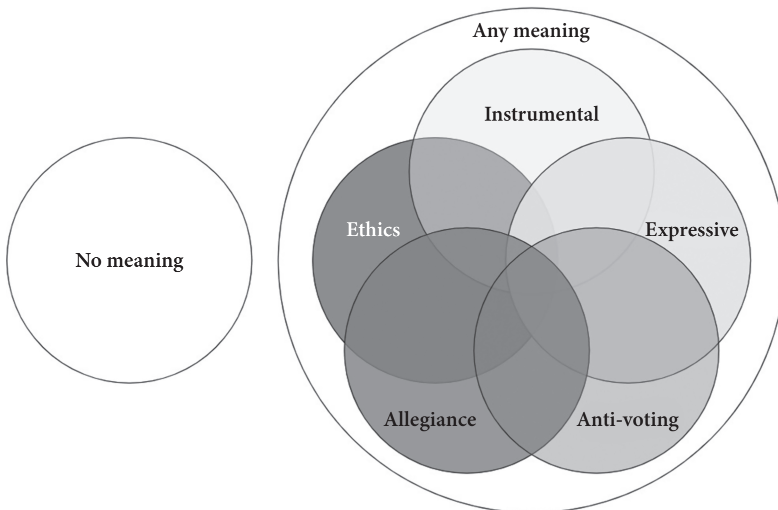

Figure 1.1 Conceptualizing voting.

[1] Anti-voting meaning resembles the concept of anti-voting used by theorists (e.g., Malkopoulou 2014), but it is fundamentally different in the sense that in this book it is not used as a necessary condition for abstention (you can abstain without an anti-voting meaning) and it does not necessarily lead to abstention (you can vote while having an anti-voting meaning).

[2] This sets us somewhat apart from the concept of anti-meaning of life. In fact, Nyholm and Campbell (2022) regard anti-meaning and meaning as antagonistic forces, whose net effect determines the final level of meaningfulness that an individual experiences (see also Campbell and Nyholm 2015). However, in the case of anti-voting it can co-exist with meaning, as we explain later.

these categories, we do not assert that they encompass the entirety of citizens' potential meanings. Our measurement remains open to other types of meanings that may not fit into these specific categories, as well as additional categorizations that may exist within or across these categories. However, in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 of this book, we demonstrate and discuss how these categories capture the overwhelming majority of meanings that people possess. Relatively little is left unexplained. As such, these meanings constitute the primary focus of the analysis presented in this book.

Mapping conceptualizations of the meanings of voting

In this section, we describe our five meanings of voting and the literature from which they are derived. Our starting point is the foundational work of Anthony Downs (1957). Rational choice theory is relevant both to explain *why people vote* and *for whom they vote*. From a rational choice perspective, the decision to vote is the result of a personal cost–benefit calculation in which the expected benefits of voting should outweigh its costs (Downs 1957). Costs may include time, effort, transportation, and opportunity costs, while benefits may include the perceived impact of one's vote on policy outcomes, the satisfaction of fulfilling civic duty, or the sense of efficacy gained from participation. Rational individuals will choose to vote only if they anticipate that the benefits of voting exceed the costs involved. If the perceived benefits are deemed insufficient, individuals may opt not to vote. Because the likelihood that one person's vote will have a decisive effect on the electoral outcome is infinitesimal, rational choice theorists have highlighted a mismatch between actual turnout and the low incentives citizens have to vote, that is, the 'paradox of voting' (Blais 2000).

Meanings of voting: Ethics

As a solution to the 'paradox of voting', Riker and Ordeshook (1968) extend the pure rational choice perspective by drawing attention to the fact that people might vote out of a sense of either personal civic duty (Blais 2000) or societal duty (Fowler 2006a; 2006b). According to this approach, voting has been considered primarily a product of ethical considerations in which citizens can be motivated to vote out of a sense of duty (Blais and Achen 2019). To a large extent this implies increases to the benefits of voting, such that, in the rational choice comparison between costs and benefits, the latter are maximized.

Within this perspective we label an *ethics* meaning of voting. This encompasses voting as a duty to others (Blais and Achen 2019), a (socially) desirable action (Pizzorno and Scardino 1986), or an act expected of a good citizen (Putnam 1995). When asked, US citizens tend to agree that a 'good citizen' has a moral obligation to vote (Mackie 2014), with similar findings across other liberal democracies (Bolzendahl and Coffé 2013). In support of such a view of voting, there are years of validated research showing that, precisely because it is socially desirable to vote, many respondents are inclined to report in surveys they voted, even though they did not (Holbrook and Krosnick 2010). This line of research includes voting as a pure (socially learned) habit (Gerber et al. 2003) or even something that people do because others have convinced them they should (Aldrich 1993). Indeed, the ethics meanings of voting, which have been mostly researched in liberal democracies, are argued to be strongly founded on social, moral, and democratic norms.

However, while much of the ethics conceptualization of voting is seen under a positive light in the existing literature (i.e., a positive sense of duty or an act that aligns with a moral compass), more recent works stress the potential negative valence of civic duty. In particular, Aytaç and Stokes (2019) distinguish between extrinsic motivations to vote that stem from social norms and pressures, and other types of intrinsic incentives related to internalized costs of abstention. Depending on these extrinsic and intrinsic motivations, people might feel a duty to vote or a duty to abstain. So, individuals might see duty as either a positive or negative thing, and people who vote from a sense of duty may often feel discomfort or other negative feelings when they go out to vote (Coleman 2013) or when they anticipate not being able to do so (Aytaç and Stokes 2019).

Likewise, it is entirely possible that duty is not necessarily or inherently positive; rather, it may be perceived as negative when it is imposed or forced upon someone. In this regard, Dassonneville et al. (2023) find very little support for compulsory voting in Brazil, suggesting that mandatory participation in voting can, under certain circumstances, foster resentment or dissatisfaction among voters, potentially leading to negative sentiments towards the act of voting itself. Moreover, feeling a moral (or even legal) obligation to vote does not seem confined to democratic countries. Reuter (2021) shows that a view of voting as a civic duty extends even to autocracies. The duty to vote can exist in the absence of strong democratic norms, although in this case such a conceptualization of voting may instead be rooted in communal attachments. Regardless of the mechanism explaining why this

duty—to the self and others—emerges, extensive research indeed argues that citizens identify ethical motivations to vote both in liberal democracies and in electoral autocracies.

Meanings of voting: Allegiance

A less-studied consideration also originally derives from Riker and Ordeshook (1968) and we label it an *allegiance* meaning of voting. As Downs (1957) argues (although for a long time downplayed by scholars), voting is to be part of a political system and its institutions, and to support, enhance, and defend democracy, as well as the political system. In this perspective, voting becomes a legal right given by the system (Beckman 2008), an opportunity to display empowerment (Hirschman 1970), and to show allegiance to that system (Downs 1957). Voting may thus also be seen as something that provides citizens with the opportunity and capability of being part of the political process (Verba and Nie 1972), as listed in Table 1.1.

As elections represent first and foremost a procedure of regime legitimation (LeDuc 1996), citizens might also see voting as a way to legitimize that system. Conversely, abstention can be considered (but is not limited to) a way to delegitimize the system by refusing to support it and to signal dissatisfaction with that regime (Power and Roberts 1995). This discussion becomes particularly prevalent for systems in which participation is mandated and abstention is not an option (Cohen 2018; Singh 2019), in both democratic and authoritarian regimes. For example, de Miguel et al. (2015) found evidence in seven Arab countries between 2006 and 2009 that citizens may use turnout as a way to signal their approval or disapproval with the regime (see also Blaydes 2010). During Brazil's military rule, compulsory voting did not lead to high turnout. Rather, the many blank and spoiled ballots have been interpreted as an indication of dissatisfaction with authoritarian governance (Power and Roberts 1995).

Despite this, in autocratic elections the rationale behind voter turnout has often been linked to material gains like patronage. Yet, Martinez i Coma and Morgenbesser's (2020) study of turnout rates for 548 legislative elections in 108 authoritarian regimes between 1960 and 2011 concludes that electoral participation is explained by a combination of contestation and coercion, while clientelism seems to discourage participation due to inadequate and disorganized allocation and is viewed as morally reprehensible by citizens (see also Bratton 2008). Letsa (2020) challenges established democratization

models as well and sheds light on the fact that, even in autocracies, citizens' non-material motivations sustain electoral participation, for example, a desire for democratic improvement. In sum, citizens' conceptualizations of voting, in both democracies and autocracies, likely include the regime that organizes the election.

Meanings of voting: Instrumental

Instrumental means of voting is by far one of the two most-studied and used conceptualizations of voting in the academic literature (we cover the other, *expressive*, in the next section). Instrumental involves perceiving voting as a tool or mechanism used to achieve a particular objective, whether that objective is directly linked to specific consequences or only loosely associated with them. This perspective sees voting as a means to an end and emphasizes the outcome or result that aligns with personal interests or desired consequences. Within this conceptualization, voting is first and foremost a way to make and organize collective decisions, such as by attempting to influence the formation of the government (Cox 1997), support or reject specific issues (Nie et al. 1976), and/or to influence the future of public policy (Kedar 2005). This perspective includes retrospective voting (e.g., to punish or reward candidates, parties, or representatives at any level of government; see Fiorina 1981), or prospective voting (e.g., to protect personal interests, such as improving your own or your family/group's well-being; see Edlin et al. 2007). It also includes simply to avoid regret for having not participated when the election outcome is announced (Ferejohn and Fiorina 1974). Voting in this instrumental conceptualization, as is the case for the other typology of meanings we examine later, does not necessarily have a positive valence. Retrospective/prospective voting (Fiorina 1981; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2013) for example, can be both positive (rewarding/stimulating) or negative (punishing/preventing).

For electoral autocracies, de Miguel et al. (2015) show that, in the case of Arab countries, voting is often related to high-income citizens wanting to show support for the economic performance of the regime. Further, strategic voting, in its classic form, expects voters to focus their choice on candidates or parties viable for election (Aldrich et al. 2018). The intention of strategic voting can be positive and negative at the same time if one tries to maximize the chances of one government to form while blocking certain parties or candidates from being elected (see also Garzia and Ferreira da Silva 2022). In each of these cases, one's vote is seen as a way to achieve something else, as a means to an end.

Meanings of voting: Expressive

Individuals categorized under expressive meanings view voting as a means of expressing their identification with preference for, or opposition to, a candidate, party, ideology, or policy. In this view, voting serves as a method of articulating one's affiliation, support, or disagreement, independent of the election outcome. This expression of views and values occurs during the act of voting, allowing individuals to manifest their beliefs, regardless of the ultimate result of the election. To put it differently, the consequences of the vote are not paramount, but rather what is foremost in citizens' minds is a need of expressing support or aversion for something (Brennan and Hamlin 1998; Schuessler 2001). What Dalton and Wattenberg (1993) label as the 'foundation period of electoral research' drew attention to voting as a result of long-term psychological predispositions (Campbell et al. 1960). Expressive voters give relevance to expressing their preferences (in terms of ideology and/or like–dislike for parties and candidates) regardless of the future implications of their vote or the outcome of the election (Blais 2000). A well-known form of expressive voting concerns the need to affirm an identity, affiliation, or loyalty to a political camp (Campbell et al. 1960). Importantly, while partisanship theories were initially formulated within democratic frameworks, their relevance also extends to electoral autocracies. For example, Laebens and Öztürk (2021) find that in Türkiye the strength of partisanship correlates with political attitudes and behaviour. However, unlike in democratic systems, where the association between partisanship and political action remains robust across party lines, the ruling party's adeptness at mobilizing supporters through clientelist networks weakens this connection among its loyalists.

While partisanship is most often seen as identifying oneself through affiliation with a political party, negative partisanship (i.e., defining one's partisanship through aversion of an opponent; see Abramowitz and Webster 2016) has dramatically increased over time. It remains, however, much overlooked (Mayer 2017). Expressing negative views or feelings via voting, such as voting to protest (Alvarez et al. 2018) can also be classified within an *expressive* conceptualization of voting, as well as intentional null voting to express discontent with the entire menu of choices (Cohen 2018). In these cases, voting can be considered as useful insofar as it allows citizens to express their dissatisfaction and discontent within the system.[3]

[3] It is important to note that this phenomenon differs from retrospective voting, wherein performance evaluation of incumbents guides electoral decisions. Here, the focus lies not on specific performance metrics, but rather on broader political choices and affiliations, marking a distinct aspect of meanings.

Anti-voting meanings

These existing theoretical accounts allow us to list four possible meanings of voting: ethics, instrumental, allegiance, and expressive. Since we have now a clear idea of what constitutes an ethical, instrumental, allegiance, and expressive meaning (see Table 1.1), what exactly constitutes the anti-voting meaning in Figure 1.1? To answer this question, we follow the methodology of Campbell and Nyholm (2015) and start with two working assumptions: (1) where there is meaning, there is the possibility of anti-meaning; and (2) meaning and anti-meaning share a similar nature. Then, we move to the two main aspects of meanings that help us define anti-voting meanings.

Table 1.1 Typology of citizen meanings of voting

Typology	**Key explanations**
ETHICS/DUTY: To comply with the act/ethics of voting	• Duty, responsibility, obligation • Social desirability, reciprocity, and altruism • Something that others convinced one to do • An act expected of one
ALLEGIANCE: To be part of a political system and its institutions	• To support democracy, the political system, the existing regime • Right to vote • Voice and empowerment • Capability of informed political decisions
INSTRUMENTAL: To affirm one's own political efficacy (considering future consequences of the vote)	• Collective decision making, e.g., to influence the formation of the government • To influence public policies • Prospective or retrospective voting • Holding politicians accountable • Mini/max regret calculus
EXPRESSIVE: To affirm a (political) preference (regardless of the future implications of the vote)	• Expressive voting • Protest voting • Affirming identity, affiliations, loyalty, and trust
ANTI-VOTING: To assign negative values to voting, either as an act or as a system	• Voting as pointless (e.g., waste of time) • Voting as unethical (e.g., validate authoritarian elite) • Voting as ineffective (e.g., nothing will change/they never listen) • Voting as unfulfilling (e.g., difficult/tiresome)

First, voting has a meaning to the extent that it has an *aim*, whatever this might be, and with whatever valence. Voting can be a way to: do your duty or act in your obligation as a citizen; contribute to create or to dismantle something; help you achieve or impede something from happening; express support or aversion to something, and so forth. In this regard, an anti-voting meaning consists of the failure of voting to have an aim (pointless both with regard to its outcome and its expression), that the aim or the act is undesirable (or unethical), or that it cannot reach the goal it sets (ineffective).

Second, voting has a meaning to the extent that the individual takes satisfaction or a sense of *fulfilment* from engaging or not engaging in it. In this view, a meaning is not directly affected by whether one's activities have any objective value or disvalue. It is also not directly related to that objective value being necessarily positive. For example, even intentional null voting can be expressive and provide fulfilment, albeit of a negative valence (Cohen 2018). Hence, an anti-voting meaning should not be associated with a mere lack of compliance with an activity (e.g., not showing up at the polls or marking a ballot), nor should it necessarily be associated with the alienation that can arise from this lack of fulfilment. Instead, anti-voting meanings consist in an outright dissatisfaction or even repulsion with the act of voting itself. Such dissatisfaction could take a wide variety of forms and spring from many causes, several of which we review in this book. Hence, combining aim and fulfilment, we define anti-voting meanings as capturing voting being pointless (e.g., waste of time), unethical (e.g., validate and legitimize authoritarian elite), ineffective (e.g., nothing will change/they never listen), or unfulfilling (e.g., difficult/tiresome).

The anti-voting concept has theoretical and practical implications. Starting with the theoretical significance, recognizing the existence of anti-voting meaning allows us to offer a greater clarity to the conceptualization of voting and, as such, arrive at a much more accurate picture of voting theory. This is also important insofar as one expects no immediate equivalence between anti-voting and specific types of voting behaviour. In this regard, in their taxonomy of protest voting, Alvarez et al. (2018) classify blank, null, and spoiled ballots also as voting in its own right, hinting precisely to the problem of inferring voting motivations from voting behaviour. So, as explained, behind a blank ballot or abstention there can be at least four (different) meanings of voting: an ethics, an allegiance, an expressive, or an anti-voting conceptualization of voting. In the ethics conceptualization, voting blank is useful because it allows citizens to comply with their duty without having to support options they do not like or with which they do not agree. In the allegiance conceptualization, voting could be viewed as unethical but effective because

it allows, by blank ballot or abstention, for example, to avoid legitimizing the political authorities of the regime. With an anti-voting conceptualization meanwhile, abstention can be a consequence of voting being neither useful nor ethical. Only by studying the meanings of voting can we move past assumptions and learn the origins of voting behaviours.

This seems particularly important if one considers that different electoral systems allow voters to express their voting intentions (and hence also their meanings of voting) in substantially disparate ways. For example, it appears that having a 'none-of-the-above' (NOTA) option on the ballot paper would reduce invalid balloting but not necessarily abstention and protest voting (Plescia et al. 2023). To the extent that people have anti-voting meanings, and not just meanings or no meanings at all, they will have the possibility to act upon these anti-voting meanings—either within or outside of the possibilities provided by the electoral system available to them: namely, via civil disobedience actions or utilizing social media platforms to mobilize support for specific causes. Differences between liberal democracies and electoral autocracies are to be expected regarding both the prevalence and reasons behind anti-voting meanings. Chapters 5 and 6 of this book explore differences in both the prevalence and reasons for such disparities. However, speculation is necessary here, as existing literature on this topic is scarce. In both liberal democracies and electoral autocracies, anti-voting sentiments may stem from disillusionment with the political process, dissatisfaction with available choices, or ideological opposition to the electoral system's functioning. In addition, in authoritarian states, anti-voting meanings may additionally arise from coercion, manipulation, or lack of genuine electoral competition. The underlying reasons and implications of anti-voting sentiments vary significantly between these two political contexts and reflect distinct challenges and dynamics in democratic participation and governance.

On the practical aspect, electoral democracy is increasingly under challenge today, with high percentages of citizens who do not vote (Dalton 2013), rising distrust in election administration and integrity (Norris 2014), alarming undemocratic drifts in countries like Hungary, and the success of technocratic politics (Caramani 2017). Separating 'anti-voting' from 'voting having no meaning' involves recognizing an asymmetry between perceptions of impoverished political conditions that may give rise to anti-voting, and the total rejection of electoral democracy that foresees an increasing number of individuals considering voting to be meaningless. Table 1.1 lists our five archetypes of meanings of voting and some key corresponding theoretical works.

What do we expect for citizens? The key consideration is that since the notion of voting is deeply rooted in citizens' individual perceptions and subjective experiences, their meanings of voting will differ greatly, could be held simultaneously, and will be far more complex than are simplistic scholarly views—with differing implications for citizens' attitudes and behaviours. Several chapters of this book show how much each of these meanings is present in the countries we analyse, what potential meanings we have been missing, who holds these meanings, and with which consequences. Chapters 4 and 5, in particular, explore the degree to which differences in these meanings can be anticipated between democracies and electoral autocracies. Based on the theoretical overview presented here, we anticipate these conceptual meanings will have broad applicability in both categories of countries. The subsequent empirical analysis delves into country subgroups, or even specific countries, and aims to comprehend the prevalence of these meaning typologies across different regime types. Chapter 9 looks at the extent to which other types of voting exist.

A map of the book

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 delve into the measurement of 'meaningless' and 'meaningful', and the data collected for this book. These chapters also outline the scope conditions of our data and research. We designed our empirical analysis to study citizens' own meanings of voting, specifically aimed at capturing individual perspectives and acknowledging the personal aspect. We want to know how each of us thinks about this act. However, meanings are subjective. We recognize the possibility that some respondents may have interpreted each question differently, for example, by considering broader societal views of voting, or a country's collective meaning of voting. Chapter 2 provides an extensive methodological discussion and we discuss the challenges of gauging citizen meanings, the measures we took to overcome them, and we describe in detail the procedure, sample, materials, and methods of data collection. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the collected data, where to find them, how to use these data, and how they can be combined with existing data. The book has a very ambitious aim to study meanings of voting across the globe, in countries with not only varying levels of democracy, but also varying electoral rules, in places in which voting is compulsory or where it is not. Hence, our theoretical propositions are tested on very broad scope conditions, incorporating insights from countries with histories of vote buying and authoritarian tendencies. That said, it is important to recognize that

we focus on voting in *elections* and not in *referenda*, *recall*, or other instances. Further, while we cover countries with varying levels of democracy, we do not cover (for ethics concerns see Chapter 3) countries with authoritarian regimes. Authoritarian regimes and electoral autocracies both concentrate political power in a select few, but diverge substantially in their methods of gaining and maintaining power, as well as the degree of political participation they allow (e.g., Levitsky and Way 2002; Schedler 2002). In fact, authoritarian regimes are characterized by centralized control often under the leadership of a single leader or a small group of elites who sustain power through means such as coercion, censorship, and propaganda. Political opposition is often suppressed as these regimes tend to lack formal mechanisms for political competition, dissent is restricted, and civil liberties are limited. Examples of authoritarian regimes include North Korea, Saudi Arabia, and China under the Chinese Communist Party. Electoral autocracies, on the other hand, also termed competitive authoritarian regimes or hybrid regimes, maintain the façade of democratic institutions and hold periodic elections. However, these elections are often manipulated to ensure the dominance of the ruling elite. While some opposition parties and limited political pluralism may exist, the playing field is heavily tilted in favour of the ruling party or individual. Examples of electoral autocracies featured in this book are Türkiye under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Tunisia under Kais Saied.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present a portrait of the meanings of voting. First, in Chapter 4 we bring forth an overview of how citizens think about voting by validating the measurement of these meanings and analysing the extent to which citizens' meanings of voting vary over time. There, we delve into whether we have captured the actual or ideal meaning of voting. We do so by relying on cross-sectional and panel evidence. In Chapter 4 we test the possibility for artificial intelligence (AI) to substitute the human coding in the annotations of open-ended answers. We collected nearly a million words on the meanings of voting, with manual coding taking about two years and involving six trained coders. Finalizing the codebook took six months, and ten translators covered the languages from 13 countries. This posed challenges in maintaining consistent coding standards and coordinating a large, multilingual team while ensuring nuanced responses were accurately captured. Hence Chapter 4 uses large language models (LLMs)—machine learning models that can comprehend and generate human language text—to test the codebook's robustness and explore whether using these LLMs can streamline future coding processes and match human coder accuracy. The descriptive overview reveals that most citizens attribute specific meanings to voting, with instrumental meanings being the most common, followed

by allegiance and expressive meanings. The rejection of voting, or anti-voting meaning, is minimal. Over-time analysis indicates that these meanings remain stable throughout an election campaign, suggesting they are enduring attitudes, rather than temporary opinions attached to an act. However, the meaning of voting in a specific election varies from its general meaning and evolves as the election approaches. Our thorough preparation and collaborative efforts have resulted in a reliable and valid dataset that provides valuable insights into the meanings of voting across various populations and countries. When leveraging AI to streamline coding processes, we found that while advanced models perform well for some annotation categories, they fall short in others, particularly in few-shot prediction scenarios. We discuss the implications of these findings for future research.

Chapter 5 examines what explains the variation in citizens' meanings of voting across different countries. We focus on three key variations: which countries exhibit more meanings and which exhibit fewer; the different types of meanings of voting and the countries where they occur; and whether these meanings are held in isolation or in conjunction with each other. The 13 countries studied in this book vary in their degrees of democracy, levels of compulsory voting, and types of electoral systems. We focus on these three aspects for an initial exploration of the meanings of voting across different institutional and political contexts. The results show that the level of democracy impacts the types of meanings more than the total number of meanings people hold. Specifically, expressive and ethical meanings are more common in liberal democracies, while exclusive instrumental meanings are more prevalent in countries with lower levels of democracy. Countries with proportional representation systems tend to have slightly more expressive meanings, whereas majoritarian systems favour instrumental meanings. Finally, countries with compulsory voting exhibit the lowest number of citizens with no meanings and score high in allegiance meanings of voting, regardless of their level of democracy.

Chapter 6 zooms in at the individual level to examine what explains variation of citizens' meanings across individuals. There are both theoretical and empirical reasons to expect that citizen meanings of voting vary on the individual level, and we focus specifically on whether meanings of voting may be attributed to citizens' socialization and representation. Here, we show that since voting can be influenced by a variety of factors spanning citizens' upbringing, life experiences, institutional and contextual-level variables, and individual traits, citizens may hold many different definitions of voting simultaneously. We find that general societal imbalances are strongly reflected in the extent to which citizens hold meanings of voting. Social and political

groups that go through more extensive political socialization and/or those that are better represented in the political system more often hold a meaning of voting, are less likely to report having no meaning of voting, and have fewer meanings that are averse to voting altogether.

Chapters 7 and 8 focus on the implications of the meanings of voting. Chapter 7 asks if meanings affect political behaviour. Here we review the rich literature on conventional (e.g., voting) and unconventional forms of political participation (e.g., protesting or boycotting certain products) and test key propositions from a model of meanings of voting. This chapter relies on both cross-sectional and panel evidence. The findings show that there is a clear link between meanings of voting and political participation. First, the chapter shows that perceiving voting as a meaningful act is positively related to voting. Second, there is evidence for a hypothesized spill-over effect from voting meanings to other forms of participation, whereby holding instrumental, expressive, ethics, or allegiance meanings correlates positively with various other forms of political participation. Lastly, citizens with anti-voting meanings, that is, citizens who are sceptical about voting, are less likely to vote, but are open to other forms of engagement to voice their concerns. This suggests that negative perceptions of voting can motivate individuals to explore alternative forms of political engagement, which may ultimately strengthen democratic legitimacy via political representation.

Chapter 8 reflects on the implications of the book's findings for the design of voting systems. In particular, the novelty and breadth of the data covering systems with varying electoral rules provides insights into what mechanisms of electoral rules, if any, increase voter satisfaction, and how those mechanisms compare to one another—those that are most effective, and why. First, the chapter aims to discern which specific meanings of voting are most and least intricately linked with the endorsement and promotion of democracy broadly and support for electoral democracy in particular. These are the meanings we deem 'supportive' from a democratic perspective. Second, the chapter aims to determine in what kinds of contexts people are more prone to think of elections in ways associated with system-supporting attitudes and behaviours. This chapter shows that allegiance meanings are most clearly correlated with support for democracy and democratic elections. Conceptualizing voting as ethical, instrumental, or expressive is also positively correlated with these two variables, though to a lesser extent, and there is a less clear ranking among them. Additionally, the findings indicate that having no meaning, rather than an anti-voting meaning, is most strongly negatively correlated with support for democracy and democratic elections. The chapter finds more supportive meanings of voting under proportional

systems than majoritarian systems. This is true above and beyond any other country features. Mandating participation in elections via compulsory voting is the second key country feature positively related to supportive meanings.

In Chapter 9, we consider the book's implications regarding the existing literature on voting, as we offer a taxonomy of voting in the eyes of citizens, a major legacy of the book. The chapter shows that citizens' conceptualizations of voting are deeply rooted in the experiences of individuals and do not necessarily all reflect the scientific or 'objective' notions of voting in the existing literature. There is a notable disparity between scholarly and popular definitions of voting, particularly regarding voting as a right and its diversified instrumental views. This challenges the notion that voting is merely an expression of preferences and shows that its instrumentality includes broader goals, for example, influencing the country's future. Most people can provide meaningful definitions of voting regardless of their country's level of democracy, indicating that these meanings are internalized and socialized norms potentially supporting democracy. Common factors like partisanship and political sophistication have a limited impact on the meanings of voting, especially in established democracies, suggesting that socio-economic inequalities influence turnout but not meanings of voting.

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2

How to Measure the Meanings of Voting?

Carolina Plescia and María Belén Abdala

Introduction

More countries than ever today have national election surveys. These afford an incredible opportunity to study the most important recurring event in liberal democracies, namely elections. The creation of academically driven election studies in most countries and the wealth of data in the field have attracted a large and active community of scholars (Kritzinger 2018). These scholarly contributions concentrate on both the substantive and the methodological aspects of election research. Such a comprehensive approach ensures not only a deep understanding of the underlying phenomena, but also robust and reliable methodologies for data analysis, thus advancing the field's knowledge base and enhancing the credibility of research findings. In practice, this entails employing rigorous analytical techniques alongside theoretical frameworks to uncover nuanced insights into electoral behaviour and dynamics. Presently, the aggregate- and individual-level determinants of electoral participation and voting behaviour are particularly well-researched topics. However, when it comes to what is *meant* by voting by ordinary citizens, we still know very little. The research question of this chapter is *Can we measure the meanings of 'voting' for ordinary citizens, and if so, how?* As such, we deal with two challenges that are sequentially addressed: conceptualization and measurement so that meaningful comparisons can be made across individuals, through time and across politically diverse countries. In particular, in terms of measurement, we first describe the exploratory steps in our data collection and then discuss how these have globally informed data collection via standardized questionnaire. We then move to the coding of meanings of voting and present a first brief description of the data cross-sectionally and over time. We conclude by summarizing what we have achieved via our measurement, what we have learned, and how it contributes to the broader understanding of the topic.

Carolina Plescia and María Belén Abdala, *How to Measure the Meanings of Voting?*. In: *The Meanings of Voting for Citizens*. Edited by: Carolina Plescia, Oxford University Press. © Carolina Plescia (2025).
DOI: 10.1093/9780198946335.003.0002

How to conceptualize the meaning of 'voting'

Defining a concept involves specifying its meaning, which in turn affects the entire process of data generation. 'Voting' is an abstract concept with multiple potential meanings. Like any abstract concept, it is challenging to define precisely. The aim of this book is not merely to study voting as an act, but rather to explore it as an attitude, focusing entirely on citizens' perspectives of the concept of 'voting' itself. Fortunately, voting is an action or activity that provides people with specific memories and experiences, making it appear less abstract compared to concepts, for example, like 'democracy' in political science (see also Gade 2020 in this regard).

In this book, the meaning of voting is broadly understood as citizens' definition of the term 'voting', which may encompass first and foremost the *significance* of the concept of voting for citizens (i.e., is there a definition of voting in people's minds?). Second, it may involve their *understandings* of voting (i.e., how do people describe voting? What are its attributes for citizens? Is it an act, verb, or cause?). This definition risks including elements that may digress from the core meanings of voting and touch upon neighbouring concepts, for example, elections or democracy. However, since ours is a first attempt to conceptualize voting through the eyes of citizens, relying on a broad, maximal definition of voting (see also Chapter 1 of this book) is arguably better. A larger scope minimizes the risk of missing important aspects, and even allows us to assess, in a second step, how discriminately different the concept of voting is from other concepts, for example, turnout, trust, and so forth (see Chapter 4). Moreover, a broad, maximal definition can respond better to the challenge of developing a conceptualization as applicable as possible across time and geography—even outside the realm of liberal democracies. While the entire interview protocol, survey mode, data collection, and sample quality are described in Chapter 3, this chapter focuses exclusively on the processing of the open-ended questions on the meanings of voting.

As discussed in Chapter 1, people might (or might not) have a meaning—hence voting can be meaningful or devoid of meaning. If voting is meaningful, people might simultaneously hold a variety of meanings. Chapter 1 listed five possible overarching categories of meanings. The first is an *instrumental* meaning of voting. Rooted in rational choice theory, individuals with instrumental meanings vote to achieve an outcome, broadly defined as influencing the future of the country, or more specifically, like influencing the composition of government, winning an election, or promoting specific policies (Cox 1997; Fiorina 1981). Second, voters with *expressive* meanings view

voting as a means to express their identification, affiliation, preferences, or protest concerning a candidate, party, ideology, or policy (Campbell et al. 1960). The third category, which we term *ethics*, considers voting as a way to comply or deviate from societal norms, including a sense of civic duty, obligation, or responsibility (Blais and Achen 2019). The fourth category is *allegiance* meanings of voting, which involves voting to affirm a commitment to the political system and its institutions. This includes an understanding of voting as a way to support or defend democracy or exercise your rights (Blais 2000; Downs 1957). Finally, the final category, *anti-voting* meanings, are interpretations that do not value the act of voting itself. These may include perceptions of voting as inconsequential, burdensome, or unpleasant. Having established a definition and a categorization, next we deal with its measurement.

How to measure the meaning of 'voting'

Sidney Verba (1999) once argued that

> . . . an individual's beliefs and values relevant to democracy are hard to elicit. They would be revealed only across a range of choice situations, observed over time, in varying contexts. Surveys, with their simple questions asked uniformly of a sample, run the danger of oversimplifying what is there, missing the main points, and perhaps creating rather than recording the reality we are studying.

Such consideration is particularly pertinent for the study subject of this book. In fact, to appreciate whether voting has a meaning that exists in voters' minds or not, we must prompt an answer from respondents while influencing that answer as little as possible. This means that to study people's conceptualization of voting, we cannot rely on a number of conceptual approximations and survey questions proposed by large sociological mass surveys (Bruter and Lodge 2013). The methodological problems linked with closed, standardized questionnaires are that they only offer limited elements or definitions of voting from which the respondents can choose or on which they can give ratings; further, they are often 'decontextualized' in order to achieve identical wording (Heath et al. 2005). This restricts the number and types of meanings we can study. But the main problem is that, in this way, the researchers draw the respondents' attention to certain meanings and initiate processes of priming, social desirability, and evaluation (Frankenberger and Buhr 2020). To avoid this, the empirical analysis presented in this book relies primarily on an open-ended inquiry where people are left free to define

their meanings of voting as extensively as they want. The question reads as follows: 'What does "voting" mean to you?'. Open-ended questions have been used before to reveal important insights on citizen views and understanding of abstract terms like democracy (Dalton et al. 2007) and political ideology (Fitzgerald 2013).

According to Popping (2015), the most important advantages of an open-ended question are: (1) there is no limitation to the reply alternatives; (2) it is well suited to explore (new) dimensions in reply behaviour; (3) the replies can be given by the respondents from their own world view, definitions and contexts; and (4) the replies can also be examined for their salience for the respondents. Open-ended questions are extremely powerful to capture both the saliency of certain concepts and the *definitions* and *understandings* participants may have (McGuire and McGuire 1992) without forcing respondents to evaluate predetermined meanings that can bias the results (Krosnick 1999). We use two follow-up questions: 'Does "voting" mean anything else to you?' only if the preceding question received an answer from the respondent. Such 'What else?' prompts further reflection and is essential to fully understand response articulations (Canache 2012; Haddock and Zanna 1998). The willingness to offer more responses does not automatically translate into more meanings of voting, as people may simply reiterate the same concept in the follow-up questions. Rather, the possibility that the respondent may provide more than one answer allows us to capture with more certainty whether people consider (or not) multiple meanings of voting.[1] The follow-up questions also address the issue that some respondents might, as when asked the first time, only provide one answer, while others might immediately offer more than one answer when prompted. This may happen for a variety of reasons, including personal character, cultural differences, questionnaire fatigue, and so forth. Hence, follow-up questions allow for higher validity.

Employing open-ended questions does offer a potential strategy, but note that, on its own, it may not entirely address the challenge of social desirability bias when probing about voting behaviours (Holbrook and Krosnick 2010). In fact, responses to open-ended questions have their own drawbacks. Firstly, people's views may not be clear or well-articulated (Kammeyer and Roth 1971). Additionally, open questions may demand verbal skills that some individuals may lack, which may produce irrelevant information and lead

[1] In Canache (2012), almost 20% of respondents gave three replies, therefore providing an answer to an initial question on the meanings of democracy and to its two follow-ups, but only 8% of respondents actually defined democracy using three substantially distinct meanings. Later in the chapter we provide information on how many replies and distinct meanings people provide across questions in our project.

respondents to provide their most accessible answer, rather than their most accurate. We return to this issue in Chapter 4 when we compare the results of an open-ended question with those of a closed-ended question also intended to capture meanings of voting.

Before using the open-ended questions in the large comparative data collection effort on which the empirical chapters of this book are based, we tested them using qualitative pilot interviews and a citizen-science website. Acknowledging the drawbacks of open-ended questions, we specifically used this exploratory step to see how much relevant information respondents provide in open-ended answers. Specifically, the focus groups, the interviews, and the citizen-science website were aimed to provide qualitative information about the cognitive processes behind the open-ended answers. The research design also aimed to allow us to grasp non-attitudes (Pennycook et al. 2015), to explore the necessity of prompting the meanings of voting, and to examine whether question order during the interview impacted the meanings citizens provided about voting. After this exploratory step, we engaged in both a qualitative and quantitative measurement in comparative perspective, drawing upon what was learned on this first, exploratory step. We now describe these steps in detail.

Step 1: Exploratory techniques

Qualitative semi-structured pilot interviews

To the best of our knowledge, no study has directly asked citizens about their own meanings of voting and the content of such meanings. Thus our first step for us was to organize pilot interviews and focus groups, which resulted in qualitative data coming from 13 in-depth interviews and four focus groups with English-speaking participants recruited in metropolitan Vienna. The initial project idea aimed to gather data across multiple countries, maximizing variation through focus groups and interviews with citizens in different languages. However, due to the persistent presence of COVID-19 during our 2021 fieldwork, we revised our original plan and concentrated exclusively on segments of the less-vulnerable population. The additional data collection efforts discussed in the sections that follow specifically target segments of the population not covered by these focus groups and interviews.

In detail, 13 participants were recruited for individual interviews, and a total of 21 participants for focus groups (with 4–6 participants per focus group). Recruitment was conducted via flyers or through associations'

mailing lists.[2] The interviews took place during October and November 2021. The duration of the focus groups were 1–2 h, while the individual interviews ranged from 40 min to 90 min, depending on the protocol. Participant ages ranged from 18 and 65 years, with an average of 27 years old. A total of 22 participants were men and 12 were women. Most participants were Austrian (38%), but participants' nationalities were quite diverse, with a total of 14 different nationalities. Table A2.1 provides socio-demographic information on all participants of the interviews and focus groups. As well as the health considerations mentioned, we specifically targeted Vienna's student community to investigate the three considerations discussed earlier (i.e., cognitive processes behind the open-ended answers, need for prompts, and question ordering effect) with a relatively homogenous sample of respondents at least in terms of age and education level. The focus groups and interviews were conducted and recorded in English, then transcribed with the help of a transcription software.

To explore the effects of question ordering on meanings of voting, we rely on four different research protocols. The first question of every protocol aimed at launching the conversation by discussing broad interest in politics. The subsequent questions varied depending on the protocols. The baseline group was asked directly: 'What does voting mean to you?' In the second protocol, that is, *election protocol*, two questions were asked to interviewees before going into the meaning of voting. These were: 'How do you think elections should be organized?' and 'What are the meanings of elections for you?' In the third protocol, that is, *public life protocol*, the key question on the meaning of voting was preceded by a sorting exercise of topic cards, each consisting of one image—with no verbal captions—designed to refer to a topic related to public life. Participants were invited to arrange the images 'based on how they may be linked' and an opportunity to explain their choices. The purpose of the exercise was to get participants to talk about voting starting from a more general discussion. The use of prompt cards covering familiar topics of public life (e.g., politics, democracy, and daily life) to encourage discussions in focus groups has already been tested (e.g., Marsh et al.'s 2007 study on political apathy and alienation, and White's 2011 research on political allegiance and European integration).[3] Finally, the last protocol, that is, *complete protocol*, combines all these activities. The key question of 'What does voting mean to you?' was preceded by the two questions on elections and then

[2] Flyers were mainly distributed at university campuses and libraries or online via student's general mailing lists.

[3] Although no list can be comprehensive, the intention was to cover familiar topics about politics, democracy, and daily life as a starting point for the discussion.

the sorting of different images. These different protocols thus enabled us to test the extent to which priming respondents into thinking about elections or public life before asking them about their meanings of voting influences the extent of their definition of voting and their conceptualizations.

Table 2.1 provides a summary of the key points mentioned during the individual interviews. Looking back at the aims of this pilot interviewing effort, four main aspects are clear. First, non-attitudes are rare, and respondents mention a variety of meanings spanning from a duty or a right, to an influence on future decisions and direction of the country. Second, it is quite common for people to simultaneously hold several types of meanings of voting, but within such variety the different meanings they provide usually fit together well. For example, when participants mention that voting is useful, they also tend to give additional meanings that confirm this initial view. Third, it seems participants felt comfortable discussing voting in either positive or negative light and some admitted they had no answer to the questions asked. Finally, it also appears that more complex protocols (in particular, activities 3 and 4) prompted more answers related to the expressive and instrumental meanings of voting (see Chapter 1 for a fuller explanation of these meanings), hence influencing the content of the answers itself. We reached the same conclusions looking at the results of the pilot focus groups.

Of course, the fact that we were unable to conduct pilot interviews in different languages as originally planned had some serious drawbacks. For example, we did not anticipate the significant challenges posed by the translation of the word 'meaning' across various languages because the nuances and cultural connotations attached to it varied greatly. These challenges only appeared when we started collecting data via structured interviews across countries with varying languages. This oversight led to a considerable and often time-consuming process of expert and native speaker consultation to avoid potential misunderstandings and inaccuracies in our data collection process. This crucially highlights the importance of linguistic and cultural considerations in cross-cultural research endeavors.

Citizen-science website

In parallel to the interviews and focus groups, we set up a citizen-science website. Citizen science is understood as the active involvement of citizens and their knowledge, commitment, and resources—regardless of age, gender, social background, or expertise—for both data collection (crowdsourcing) and development of methods (participatory science). Citizen-science websites are used in a wide range of scientific disciplines, albeit more often in

Table 2.1 Keywords in pilot interviews (first answer only about meanings of voting)

Activity	Answers
Activity 1: *Voting protocol*	Participant 1: • Voting is something you have to do. • It doesn't really influence what happens in government and policy and in the world around us. Participant 2: • Really not sure. • I don't really like the current voting system. • Vote partly matters, because it only partly covers my opinion. Participant 3: • Right now I have like no passive or active voting rights. • It is pointless for me to vote because everything is already decided elsewhere.
Activity 2: *Election protocol*	Participant 1: • Choosing the people that I think that are closer to my own political views. Participant 2: • Voting is important aspect of people's lives. • It's important to take part in the future decisions in politics and laws. Participant 3: • That's actually quite hard. • I'm afraid I don't have an answer. • I've never really thought about the meaning of my vote that might differentiate itself from the meaning of elections and voting.
Activity 3: *Public life protocol*	Participant 1: • First of all, duty. Participant 2: • It's an essential right that you have as a citizen. • It's a human right. • It's a way to influence also what happens around you. Participant 3: • Voting for me is something very active. • Opportunity in a very formal way to say whether I agree or disagree in what. • Voting for me is very important.
Activity 4: *Complete protocol*	Participant 1: • Final act of elections. • A way to express yourself. • Which one you like the most or which one you think you might be feeling represented the most. Participant 2: • Process where something gets decided. • I have a say in that. Participant 3: • Very emotional thing for me. • Something that excites me personally very much. • It's an honour, it's a necessary thing.

Note: The table includes only examples of answers from the individual interviews not the focus groups.

astronomy, ecology and environmental science, geology, and climate science (e.g., Bonney et al. 2016). We designed the citizen-science website to encourage people to contribute to the scientific objective of our project by sharing their meanings of voting wherever, whenever, and as extensively as they wanted, thus overcoming the typical time and territorial constraints of electoral surveys.[4] The website was launched at the end of 2021 and included four activities. The data described next come from the period of observation between September 2021 and October 2023. We received 41 participants across the five languages of the website (i.e., English, Italian, Spanish, German, and French).[5]

Activity 1 replicates the open-ended question asked in the pilot interviews and focus groups. Participants filled out an empty text box to answer 'What does voting mean to you?'. Completing this first activity was mandatory for participants to take part in the remaining three activities. This was implemented to prevent participants from answering the question on the meaning of voting after being prompted to think about voting in specific ways during the subsequent activities. Figure 2.1 shows the most frequent terms mentioned in Activity 1, with words appearing larger based on their frequency of occurrence. The wordcloud shows the most common words were opinion, country, right, able, choice, democracy, people, election, and change. Interestingly, despite having only 41 participants, a large variety of meanings appear in Activity 1, giving support to what we found with the pilot interviews and focus groups.

Activity 2 on the citizen-science website asks participants where their definition of voting comes from. They are presented with an extensive list of possible sources to select from, including family member (e.g., brother, mother, son), colleague, party, politician, celebrity, teachers, etc. Additionally, participants are asked how often they discuss voting in their social circle, among strong or weak social ties. Meanings came mostly from family members, with mother, father, sister, brother, son, daughter, etc., among the most mentioned sources of the meanings of voting. This was followed by professors and teachers, and party and politicians. Friends and colleagues were also often mentioned, and to far less extent neighbours. Only one

[4] The website can be accessed here: https://www.votemeanings.eu (last accessed July 2024). It was professionally designed by SPOTTERON, who have designed many citizen-science websites across the globe, and followed the ethics standards of *Österreich forscht*, one of the largest platforms for citizen-science projects. The website was promoted via partnerships with European and national-level citizen-science platforms like the European Citizen Science Association, as well as via social media and science fairs.

[5] Although an analysis of how the citizen-science project worked in terms of response rate is beyond the scope of the book, we recognize here the low response, albeit in line with response rates normally observed in citizen-science projects.

Figure 2.1 Activity 1 of citizen science.

Note: Wordcloud showing the results of the most frequent terms mentioned when participants responded to 'What does voting mean to you?'. Words appear larger based on their frequency of occurrence.

participant mentioned a celebrity. Most of the participants declared they discussed voting only rarely or sometimes.

Next, Activity 3 gives participants the possibility to collect data and contribute to our research project by providing additional definitions of voting they might have encountered, along with the source of this information. This could range from definitions provided by a political party, party manifesto, social media, celebrity, newspapers, and so forth. In Activity 3 we experienced a drop in participation with roughly half of the total participants taking part. Among those who did answer, the majority identified non-political organizations as the source of the additional meanings of voting they know. The identified meanings were similar to those highlighted in Activity 1.

Finally, Activity 4 asks participants' assistance in categorizing meanings of voting previously derived from the existing literature. Participants are solicited to first identify from a list of meanings those in which they recognize themselves, and then, for each recognized meaning, to evaluate its importance. In line with the previous activities, meanings related to rights, duty, and opinions prevail over all other meanings, yet all listed meanings receive some level of acknowledgement.[6]

From these exploratory steps, we learned that, in terms of qualitative information on the cognitive processes behind the open-ended answers and non-attitudes, our individual interviews, focus groups, and citizen-science endeavours indicate that a majority of respondents possess meanings of voting and are capable of articulating them. When it comes specifically to the content of these meanings, there were no major surprises compared to our expectations based on the existing literature, except for the discovery that, while some individuals do not hold any meanings, other respondents often simultaneously hold multiple meanings of voting. These pilot studies also allowed us to test a draft version of the codebook used in open-ended answers in structured interviews, which we describe later. Moreover, the results show that, while some citizens need to be slightly prompted into thinking about voting, others seem to be relatively comfortable discussing non-meanings or anti-voting meanings at least in a more personalized setting, such as in-person interviews. We noticed no substantial difference in the propensity to discuss anti-voting meanings between the interviews and focus groups.

We discovered that the order of questions during the interviews potentially impacts participant answers. Our results suggest that longer protocols in which the open-ended question about voting was preceded by questions on elections and public life prompted somewhat different types of meanings. Based on these considerations, in the large comparative data collection effort using standardized interviews, we rely on open-ended questions to measure meanings of voting. We use two follow-up questions to prompt further meanings, and we ask these questions at the very beginning of the interview protocol, before we ask any other politics-related questions. This was to maximize the chances that the open-ended question measures respondents' opinions without their being influenced by researchers and without limiting the answers to a given set of options. The objective is for respondents'

[6] The most frequent mentions refer to right (24), duty (21), followed by freedom of expression (19), having a say in public policy (17), expressing a preference (16), choosing politicians (16), showing support for a party (13), and sense of community (13). Other concepts, such as, legal obligation, fun activity, habit, punish the government, waste of time, and nothing (no meaning) receive fewer than seven mentions each.

answers to reflect what first came to their minds when asked about their own meanings of voting.

Step 2: Open-ended answers in structured interviews in comparative data

For this book, we surveyed 25,317 respondents across 13 countries holding *national legislative* elections between March 2022 and May 2023: Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Kenya, Nigeria, Serbia, Sweden, Tunisia, Türkiye, and the United States (US). Chapter 3 discusses our aims to (1) go into the field about two months before the election to avoid the election campaigns massively influencing the meanings of voting, and (2) to collect quota representative data on age, gender, region, and education. In Hungary and the US, we ran two additional survey waves re-interviewing the same citizens twice; once about two weeks before, and the second time the week after, election day. Respondents were interviewed online or face-to-face via a tablet. The survey question to measure the meanings of voting asked respondents 'What does "voting" mean to you?' Each participant was presented with an empty box, allowing them to provide an answer without any text limit. If they tried to skip the question, a prompt at the top of the screen or from the interviewer in case of face-to-face unassisted interviews encouraged respondents to answer. If they attempted to skip the question again, two further prompts occurred: one at the top of the screen encouraging them to answer or select the option 'Voting has no meaning for me', and a second prompt below the empty text box offering the possibility to tick 'Voting has no meaning for me'. Following this, respondents encountered two follow-up questions: 'Does "voting" mean anything else to you?' and 'Here you have the opportunity to give one more answer. Does "voting" mean anything else to you?' This ensured that the follow-up questions were only presented (online or in person via tablet) or asked (in person interview) to those who had answered the preceding question.

While none of the respondents ticked the prompt 'Voting has no meaning for me' in the first question, some wrote that voting has no meaning for them in the text box. In Wave 1, about 79% of the respondents provided an answer to all three questions, albeit only about half of them provided three substantially distinct meanings of voting across the three questions.[7]

[7] In Wave 1, respectively 87% of the respondents in Hungary and 65% in the US provide three answers. In Wave 2, these numbers drop to 46% in Hungary and 40% in the US. In Wave 3, respectively 24% of the respondents in Hungary and 17% in the US provide three answers.

Once data on the meanings of voting were obtained for each country, we proceeded with the following three phases. In Phase 1, the answers from the open-ended questions[8] that were not been originally collected in English were translated into English by a native speaker with the support of the translating software DeepL. All in all, we collected almost a million words about the meanings of voting. Figure 2.2 shows the distribution of the number of words for the first question and the two follow-ups, across countries. We can see that the mean of words is higher for the first question (M = 8.72, SD = 8.99) compared to the first follow-up (M = 4.94, SD = 6.25) and second follow-up (M = 5.19, SD = 7.51). The calculation of the means for the follow-up questions includes only those who answered the follow-up, excluding those that did not see these questions due to routing (i.e., the system used in surveys or questionnaires to direct respondents to specific follow-up questions based on their earlier responses). Columbia was the country with the highest word count across all three questions, with Kenya, Serbia,

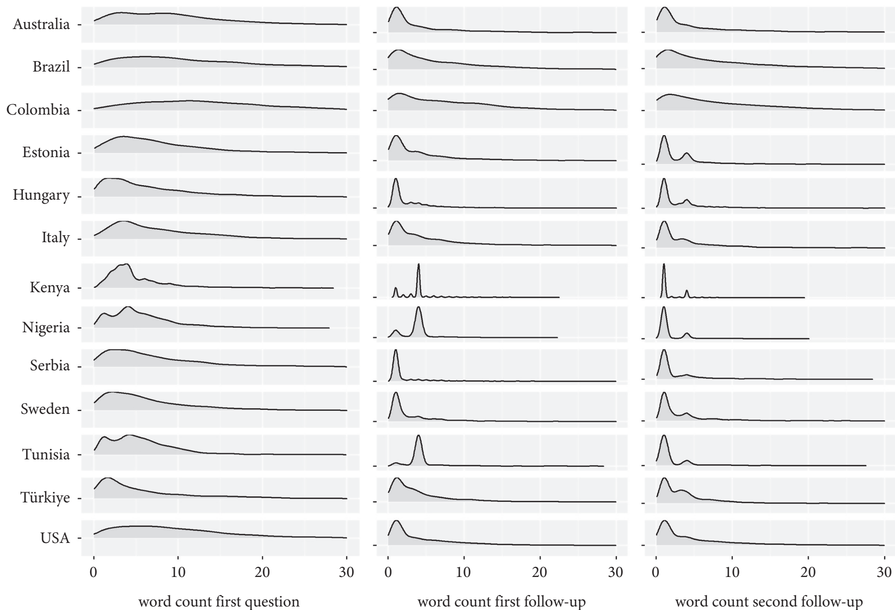

Figure 2.2 Number of words across questions.

Note: To enhance visualization, we cut the maximum number of words to 30. The maximum number of words in the first question is 195, 145 for the first follow-up, and 208 for the second follow-up. Less than 5% of the respondents go above 30 words. All those respondents who do not answer follow-up questions due to routing are set at 0.

[8] Recall that we use an open-ended question and two follow-up questions to prompt meanings of voting; hence this is why we use the plural when talking about the open-ended questions.

and Sweden all coming in at the bottom. After setting 0 for the number of words for all those who did not answer follow-up questions due to routing, the correlation between the number of words in the first question and the first follow-up question is quite high (Pearson's *r* 0.43) and similar to the correlations between the number of words in the first question and the second follow-up (Pearson's *r* 0.38) and between the two follow-up questions (Pearson's *r* 0.42). This implies that respondents who share more information initially also tend to provide more information in follow-up questions.

In Phase 2, each answer is broken into single statements called 'chunks' or quasi-sentences. Team members followed a chunking codebook devised for this purpose prior to seeing the answers.[9] Each chunk contains a single unique message. In this process, we strictly followed the chunking rules of the American National Election Study (ANES) (Lupia 2018).[10] Chunking is needed because some respondents provide only one message when answering the open-ended questions, while others provide multiple messages in a single answer. The average sum of chunks in Wave 1 across the three questions is 3.00, with 1.99 standard deviation. We had a total of 94,359 chunks in Wave 1, with approximately 11.3% of the respondents having one chunk only. The highest number of chunks was recorded in Colombia and Brazil in question three, with 17 chunks. The correlation between the number of chunks in the first question and the first follow-up is also relatively high (Pearson's *r* 0.30), with similar values to the correlations between the chunks in the first question and the second follow-up (Pearson's *r* 0.26) and between the two follow-up questions (Pearson's *r* 0.47). The correlation between the number of words and the number of chunks is higher for the first question (Pearson's *r* 0.68) and it slightly declines for the second (Pearson's *r* 0.52) and third question (Pearson's *r* 0.48). This suggests that respondents who say more in the first question tend to have more to say overall across all questions. Again, setting to 0 chunks all those respondents that have not answered the follow-up questions due to routing, while the mean of the number of chunks is higher in the first open-ended answers (M = 1.63, SD =1.05), it is quite similar in the follow-up questions (M = 1.10, SD = 0.77 and M = 1.00, SD = 0.83 respectively).[11]

[9] Each country file was chunked by one team member with a second team member checking for consistency.

[10] The files from the ANES 2008 Open Ended Coding Project are open-access and available here: https://electionstudies.org/2008-open-ended-coding-project/ (last accessed August 2023).

[11] Chunks containing repetitions are included in these calculations but not in the analysis of the data presented in this book. We consider a repetition an answer or chunk that is exactly the same—word for word—as the one already provided by the same respondent.

In Phase 3, each chunk is coded by trained coders. Coders were recruited from students pursuing a master's degree in political science at the University of Vienna who were not familiar with the content of this project before the coding. We had four initial coders in total, splitting the work along country lines. Coders were trained on a sample of chunks randomly selected across several countries and their answers checked against each other and against the training of the core project team. The training was done in two sessions, each lasting about a week. The first session allowed us to also make initial modification to the codebook to enhance comprehension and reliability before launching Phase 2 and the entire coding exercise. Intercoder reliability was enhanced, albeit not substantially, between the two training sessions (discussed later). After Phase 2, each chunk contains a distinct message. We then asked coders to classify each chunk based on the originally created codebook in Phase 3. We explain the coding procedure and the codebook next.

Step 3: Data coding and the codebook

For the initial countries, the data was coded by two coders independently so that intercoder reliability could be assessed. Measures ranged between kappa = .92 and kappa = .61 (see Table A2.2).[12] The remaining data was coded by one coder only. The categories that the coders used to code each chunk are mutually exclusive in the sense that no chunk can be coded simultaneously into more than one category, as all chunks were created to contain only a single meaning. For answers containing more than one chunk, however, each chunk can be coded using a different coding category, if applicable. This aligns with the notion, as identified in the pilot studies, that an individual can simultaneously hold multiple meanings of voting.

The same codebook has been consistently used for all survey waves and all countries. The coding categories in the codebook have been theoretically derived and relate to the categorization outlined earlier. This means that, with a few exceptions (discussed later), all coding categories of our codebook can be traced back to broad conceptualizations in the existing literature on voting and voting decisions as listed in Table 2.1. Coders were provided with a list of

[12] Cohen's kappa values for the countries in which we had two coders are reported in Table A2.2. Since we have a nominal variable, a large sample, and two coders we use Cohen's kappa instead of Krippendorff's alpha to assess intercoder reliability. Often-recurring chunks (e.g., 'nothing', 'right', 'duty') are coded automatically. Automatically coded answers represent about a third of the chunks. Intercoder reliability was assessed including and excluding the automatically coded items, serving as a liberal and conservative measure.

categories, a definition of each category and several examples selected by the core team from the collected data. The overarching coding categories are: no meaning, meaning (any), and a residual category composed of answers related to 'don't know/NA/refused'. Within the meaning (any) category, we further differentiate between ethics, allegiance, expressive, and instrumental meanings.

Two additional categories were available to coders when none of the main categories were able to adequately grasp the meaning of a specific chunk. These categories were 'broad and/or not classifiable in any of the previous categories' (for answers like 'yes, it has a meaning' that signal that participants find voting meaningful but were too broad to classify in another category) and 'other' (for the discovery of new meanings that are not classifiable in any of the remaining categories and could potentially signify meanings not considered yet by the existing literature). For the 'other' category, after coding was completed, we hired and trained a new coder—who had not seen or worked with the data before—to extract the anti-voting meanings category (see definition in Chapter 1). While the anti-voting meanings are part of the empirical analysis of subsequent chapters, the remaining answers, which consist of rather general responses, are exclusively used for discussion. Table 2.2 lists all the categories of our codebook with definitions and specific examples.

For the empirical analysis presented in this book, we combined the chunks per participant and recoded our data so that for each participant a (type of) meaning is either present or absent, leading to six binary variables: (i) no meaning, (ii) ethics, (iii) allegiance, (iv) expressive, (v) instrumental, and (vi) anti-voting meanings. Each binary takes value 1 when a respondent mentions a specific meaning and 0 when they do not mention that meaning, regardless of whether they do so in the initial question or in one of the follow-up prompts. While the category (i) no meaning and (ii) meaning (any) are mutually exclusive, the categories meaning(any) plus ethics, allegiance, expressive, instrumental, and anti-meanings meanings of voting are not mutually exclusive, as participants could give multiple meanings simultaneously in their open-ended responses, and we discuss this in more detail later.

Next, inconsistencies in the coding between the trained coders (for intercoder reliability) were reconciled by two core team members per inconsistency, blind from the respondents' answers to any other questions. Finally, all country files were checked to identify inconsistencies and/or biases in the coding across coding categories, chunks and countries. This final check is executed via Python, using SentenceTransformer, a tool for understanding

Table 2.2 Coding categories of the open-ended answers

Typology	Explanation	Example of quotes from our respondents
No meaning		No/none/nothing
Ethics	To participate	To take part in the election
	To exercise a duty	It is my duty/my obligation
	To do an act expected of me	It is an important social event
	To do something that others convinced me to do	I was convinced by my father
	To do something I always do: voting as a habit	I always go voting/habit
Allegiance	To do/support/enhance/defend democracy, the political system, the existing regime	Dictatorship or democracy/to support democracy
	To exercise/do my right mostly from a democratic legal perspective	It is my right/a privilege
	To have/use the opportunity to voice/empowerment	To be able/to be free/make my voice known/an opportunity
	To have the capability of making an informed political decision	To keep myself informed
Expressive	To express support and opinions regardless of who wins the election/future decision-making processes	To express my preferences
	To protest	To protest against the politicians
	To affirm identity, affiliations, loyalty, commitment, trust, attachment	It means putting my trust in a person/I am a Republican
Instrumental	To make/organize collective decisions	The future of our country/to decide for the welfare of the community
	To influence the formation of the government	Making sure the PD forms the government/electing someone that I want to win
	To support/aversion for policies/issues to influence the future	Better healthcare/better housing policies
	To choose/elect rulers/parties/representatives	Choosing who will lead the country/elect politicians to manage the country
	Mentions of representation in any form	Elect those who will represent me in parliament
	To punish/reward rulers/parties/representatives	Replace old politicians/to let the government know that they did a bad
	To avoid guilt/regret	Because if he wins he will destroy everything/people cannot complain if they don't vote

Continued

Table 2.2 *Continued*

Typology	Explanation	Example of quotes from our respondents
Anti-voting		Pointless/waste of time/I do not like to vote Garbage; stupid thing; anxiety; unnecessary procedure; frustration
Broad		Yes, important/hope/great/everything
Other		Politics/election/maybe/will
Don't know, Refuse, Not an answer		Cannot answer/refuse/ NA/pass/no comment

and working with text data, based on word embeddings[13] that capture the context and meaning of the text. This allows us to spot automatically, among a large number of coded chunks, those with low text similarity within each category. Chunks with low similarity scores (which represent less than 5% of all chunks) are double checked by the core team members to make sure they have not been mistakenly coded in the wrong category and rectify any potential misclassifications. This meticulous verification process is fundamental, particularly considering the ambitious manual coding undertaken involving more than four coders and 13 countries in total.

The data shows that the meanings of voting are prevalent across different countries and over time. Categories indicating no meaning are consistently low across countries, with some variation depending on the survey mode. The instrumental category is generally the largest, while anti-voting is the least common. Notable differences exist between countries, such as the small allegiance category in Estonia and the large instrumental category in Kenya and Tunisia. Over time, the meanings of voting tend to remain stable, with minor variations, particularly in allegiance and broad/other categories. Specific election contexts, like those in Hungary and the US, show that meanings of voting can shift, with general voting being more focused on ethics and allegiance, while election-specific voting is more instrumental. The next chapters study these variations across countries, over time, and across individuals in details. The data and the codebook are available via the AUSSDA website both for the cross-sectional dataset (Plescia et al. 2025a) and the panel dataset (Plescia et al. 2025b).

[13] The specific model being used is 'paraphrase-multilingual-mpnet-bade-v2'.

Summary and conclusion

We started this chapter asking *Can we measure the meanings of 'voting' for citizens, and if so, how?* To answer this question, we first provided a definition of meanings of voting and then explored the challenges to measure them. Next, the chapter focused on the ambitious research design and data collection to overcome these challenges. Here we discuss what we learned about the research design process, the measuring of meanings of voting, the difficulties we encountered, and how it all relates to the following chapters of the book.

Starting with the research design process, we designed our empirical analysis to capture citizens' own meanings of voting. We wanted to capture the personal and subjective perspectives of individuals. To accomplish this, we followed two main steps of data collection, starting with an exploratory phase involving qualitative semi-structured interviews and focus groups coupled with a citizen-science project, and then quantitative data collection. The qualitative data collection provided valuable insights not only about the measurement of the meanings of voting per se, but also about the cognitive processes behind open-ended answers and the effects of question ordering. Our interviews, focus groups, and citizen-science initiatives revealed that most respondents can articulate their views on voting, and feel comfortable discussing their meanings in all three settings. The insights from these exploratory steps helped us in the design of the structured questionnaires for the quantitative data collection by allowing us to refine our interview structure and codebook. We found that question ordering can influence responses, so in our large-scale data collection, we prioritized open-ended questions at the beginning of the survey questionnaire to capture respondents' unfiltered opinions. This approach aimed to minimize researcher influence and encourage genuine responses. The inability to conduct pilot interviews in multiple languages as planned due to COVID-19 had some drawbacks during the phase of data collection via structured interviews. Notably, unexpected challenges arose during the translation of both the questionnaires and respondent's answers from English to each country's official language. A clear example is the use of the word 'meaning', which is at the core of our research and has subtle differences, translations, and cultural interpretations across languages, related to simple definitions, understandings, significance, and so on. This issue made necessary extensive consultation with country experts and native speakers to ensure accuracy, highlighting the importance of linguistic and cultural considerations in cross-cultural research.

When it comes to quantitatively measuring the meanings of voting, data collected via open-ended questions has the potential to capture rich and diverse perspectives, providing insights into respondents' nuanced views and beliefs and deeper insights into respondents' perspectives. The data shows that the meanings of voting are prevalent across different countries, most of the citizens holding an opinion about voting, and the vast majority of these opinions are classifiable within the classification scheme theoretically derived from Chapter 1. However, the interpretive nature of such data requires careful analysis to ensure reliability and validity, two topics we explore more extensively in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of this book. Our coding procedure was quite time consuming, requiring almost two years to complete. Specifically, we realized that, for the binary coding measurement used in this book, our codebook was far too detailed. In hindsight, we could have saved time by deciding not to make additional distinctions *within* meanings, but rather only *across* meanings. This decision is particularly relevant given that citizens often imperfectly articulate their views and opinions. For example, making a distinction between 'making collective decisions' or 'supporting specific policies' within the instrumental category variable can be particularly challenging in a one-word answer. Methods based on artificial intelligence were also not standard and fully accessible in the discipline at the time of our coding, but may provide a good alternative for future endeavours (see Chapter 4; see also Gilardi et al. 2023). Beyond the measurement, this chapter uncovered some interesting patterns in the data we use in the remaining chapters of the book. Chapters 8 and 9 discuss the broader implications of these patterns, both in substantive and empirical terms.

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3
The Data, Their Quality, and Their Linkage Potentials

María Belén Abdala, Carolina Plescia, and Markus Wagner

Introduction

Finding the answer to 'What voting means to citizens' involves generating new concepts and coming up with good ways to measure them. Chapter 2 explained that for this endeavour we rely on an open-ended question that allows respondents to provide detailed and nuanced answers that capture the complexity of their thoughts and experiences, rather than limit them to predefined options. Chapter 4 examines the validity and reliability of such measures and demonstrates that using open-ended questions enables us to gain deeper insights into respondents' perspectives. First, however, Chapter 3 describes the comparative research design and data collection carried out to measure the meanings of voting. It focuses particularly on the methodological challenges from a survey data quality perspective to ensure cross-cultural validity and reliability of these measurements across a large and diverse set of countries, while accounting for cultural nuances in data collection and interpretation. Collecting survey data across diverse regions—including Africa, Europe, Latin America, North America, and Oceania—inevitably presents trade-offs. This chapter explores the main goals during data collection, what was accomplished, and the challenges encountered, while also maintains transparency about the limitations of this ambitious data collection process and methodology.

The chapter focus revolves around three crucial aspects of this endeavour. First, we delve into the rationale behind our case selection and explore the aims and implications of studying the meanings of voting worldwide. Next, we concentrate on two key methodological challenges: one relevant to any survey (i.e., survey quality) and one specific to the comparability of responses from different countries (i.e., equivalence of meaning).

María Belén Abdala, Carolina Plescia, and Markus Wagner, *The Data, Their Quality, and Their Linkage Potentials*.
In: *The Meanings of Voting for Citizens*. Edited by: Carolina Plescia, Oxford University Press. © Carolina Plescia (2025).
DOI: 10.1093/9780198946335.003.0003

As discussed by Heath et al. (2005, 314), among others, 'the spread of public opinion research to a greater number and diversity of countries almost certainly entails greater problems of equivalence of meaning and consistency of survey quality'. Hence, in this chapter, we focus on both these criteria and provide essential background information for the empirical analyses featured in subsequent chapters of this book. Finally, we discuss the broader use of these data beyond the scope of this book and showcase its potential for seamless integration with other existing datasets at the individual, party, and country level of aggregation. To do this, we build on previous individual-level data collection efforts like the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) and discuss strategies for making our data findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable. At the end of the chapter, we provide a list of the main lessons learned from studying concepts worldwide, collecting survey data worldwide, and ensuring the data are findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable.

The goals and challenges of case selection

The starting point of our comparative research design refers to the scope of our survey data collection. We intended to delve into the meanings people attribute to voting, explore the various meanings of voting that exist, and pinpoint the factors that shape these interpretations at individual, group, and country levels. Hence, in our quest to explore the meanings of voting, we have set out to maximize a global coverage that extends beyond the confines of WEIRD (western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) countries (Henrich et al. 2010), which are frequently examined and often revolve around western democracies (Song 2019). Our intention was to encompass countries with diverse historical trajectories, which may influence how citizens think about voting. For instance, countries with colonial legacies, as is the case of most Latin American and African countries, may have developed different forms of democratic culture compared to those without such legacies (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992). However, existing research on collective action and the rise of social movements has also highlighted substantial regional disparities within the context of evolving global economic and political landscapes (Escobar and Alvarez 2018). So, a global coverage was deemed necessary.

Opting to include cases from the Americas, Africa, Europe, and Oceania presents a unique opportunity for us to assess the applicability of our own approach beyond conventional settings and potentially challenge

established notions of political behaviour. While the meanings of voting could theoretically be studied in all countries—including those that do not regularly hold elections—logistical, organizational, and financial limitations in survey data collection dictated some limitation in data coverage. Therefore, while considering the total universe of countries before us, we established several criteria to guide the case selection. The first was essential: the chosen countries needed to hold *national legislative* elections between January 2022 and May 2023, which aligned with the time span of the project data collection. This is because we wanted to examine meanings of voting when those are at least partially salient. The second was equally imperative: the country conditions needed to ensure complete safety for researchers, interviewers, and participants regarding topics such as elections, political parties, and policy preferences. The third and fourth criteria were preferable but not essential: our selection aimed to include a range of *levels of democracy* (as measured via the V-DEM with the liberal democracy index) spanning electoral autocracies to liberal democracies and encompassing newer and more established democratic systems. Additionally, we sought to cover diverse *types of electoral systems*, including majority, proportional, and mixed electoral systems, which blend elements of majoritarian and proportional representation in their electoral formula and ideally also span countries with compulsory and non-compulsory voting. The inclusion of variation in the levels of democracy as well as in the electoral system stems from previous research indicating that citizens' electoral attitudes and behaviours are shaped by the characteristics of the context, be it social, political, or institutional, in which they live (Blais and Dobrzynska 1998; Bowler and Donovan 2002; Geys 2006; Karp and Bowler 2001; Kostelka and Blais 2021; Magaloni 2009; Milner and Ladner 2006; Morse 2012).

With these criteria in mind, we regularly monitored worldwide announcement of elections (both scheduled and snap) between January 2022 and May 2023 to identify potential cases for our study. We also assessed the safety of the countries to be studied, ensuring that only those permitting data collection on voting behaviour and political views without endangering researchers or respondents were included. This approach has led to the collection of survey data in 13 countries: Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Kenya, Nigeria, Serbia, Sweden, Tunisia, Türkiye, and the United States (US). Our fieldwork (see Table 3.1) encompassed a wide array of electoral systems and democracies. For instance, among our cases, the US, Sweden, and Australia stand as old and established democracies, while Brazil has been a democracy since 1985. Hungary and Serbia are undergoing notable political changes, Colombia is an example of a consolidating democracy, and Tunisia

Table 3.1 Case selection

Country	Date	Compulsory voting	Liberal democracy index	Electoral system
Australia	04.2022	Yes	0.81	Majority (alternative vote)
Brazil	11.2022	Yes	0.52	Proportional representation
Colombia	03.2022	No	0.54	Proportional representation
Estonia	03.2023	No	0.85	Proportional representation
Hungary	04.2022	No	0.34	Mixed-member proportional representation
Italy	03.2023	No	0.77	Mixed-member proportional representation
Kenya	08.2022	No	0.43	Majority (first-past-the-post)
Nigeria	02.2023	No	0.32	Majority (first-past-the-post)
Serbia	04.2022	No	0.27	Proportional representation
Sweden	09.2022	No	0.87	Proportional representation
Tunisia	12.2022	No	0.22	Two-round system in single-member constituencies
Türkiye	05.2023	Yes	0.12	Proportional representation
US	11.2022	No	0.74	Majority (first-past-the-post)

Note: The liberal democracy index is taken from V-Dem (2023). The source for the electoral system is IDEA (2022). Election type: All legislative elections but in Brazil, Kenya, Nigeria, and Türkiye, also concomitant presidential election.

is currently experiencing a complex democratic backsliding marked by the formal dissolvement of the legislature by the President in 2022 and a new electoral law that abolished political parties in the country. Estonia, following its independence from the Soviet Union in 1990, quickly became one of the most digitized countries in the world, pioneering full-scale internet voting and e-government systems. In 2023 Italy adjusted the voting age limits, allowing 18–24-year-olds to vote in Senatorial elections for the first time.

Incorporating such a diverse array of countries posed specific challenges. Although there is no strict division, as for much other cross-national survey research (Heath et al. 2005; Lupu and Michelitch 2018), we faced two main challenges. The first, survey quality, consisted of maintaining the same high standard of data collection quality across vastly different contexts. This implied the need for precise and comprehensive knowledge of each country covered, all of which have distinct institutional rules, party systems, and political cultures, as well as data infrastructure and accessibility barriers. The aim was to ensure survey quality not only in affluent democratic societies, but also in countries outside the traditional core of comparative research.

To navigate this complexity, we proactively consulted with at least two experts for each country before embarking on fieldwork. These experts were selected from among university professors and individuals with extensive experience in international data collection efforts, such as the World Values Survey (WVS) and CSES. There were two objectives in mind when in reaching out to country experts.

First, we needed to assess the feasibility of conducting election surveys in a manner that ensured safe, accurate, and representativeness within each setting. Engaging in dialogue with these experts proved crucial and, in many instances, resulted in the exclusion of otherwise compelling countries that met our criteria for case selection. For example, experts warned us about conducting face-to-face surveys in Angola in July 2022 due to adverse weather conditions, which could have posed significant travel risks. Consultation with experts also led to the exclusion of both Angola and Guinea-Bissau based on advice cautioning against fieldwork due to concerns regarding the safety of survey participants stemming from intimidation and the potential for political violence. Similarly, the security landscape in Thailand and Bangladesh rendered it improbable to elicit honest responses on political opinions from citizens or safely to gather sensitive personal information. Additional concerns about data quality feasibility led us to omit countries with small populations, where we realized it was not possible to achieve nationally representative samples. These concerns affected our inclusion of Andorra's parliamentary elections in April 2023 and Fiji's elections in December 2022. Countries announcing snap elections too close to the election day were also excluded due to the tight timeline, which prevented us from adhering to our established roadmap (e.g., Portugal, Denmark).

A second challenge pertained to the equivalence of meaning, for which three issues in particular are relevant: poor translation due to language diversity; varying interpretation of common concepts across countries; and (perhaps most fundamentally) the possibility that there may simply not be common concepts to measure. These problems are more pronounced

when using closed-ended questions since these are often 'decontextualized' in order to achieve identical wording (Heath et al. 2005). Yet, translation issues also concern the use of open-ended questions and their back translation. To handle this, we translated our master questionnaire into all the main languages spoken in each country to prevent the systematic exclusion of population subgroups. For example, in Nigeria the four most spoken languages are English, Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo. However, the distribution of these languages varies within the country, across factors such as region, age group, and education level. While English is predominantly used in urban areas, especially among younger and more educated individuals, Hausa and Yoruba are prevalent in the northern and southwestern regions of the country. Additionally, the presence of numerous local dialects further complicates the linguistic landscape. Consequently, in most countries included in our study, we developed a multilingual survey questionnaire based on advice of the country expert. To tackle semantic challenges in translation, we excluded countries with more than three main languages other than English from our sample. Simultaneously, we engaged native speakers to translate the questionnaires, ensuring accuracy and clarity in our communications. Furthermore, in complex settings like Nigeria where multiple local languages coexist, we recruited local interviewers capable of translating questions into local dialects as needed. Despite the considerable financial implications, these measures were indispensable in addressing fundamental issues of uniformity and data quality in our data collection process.

Consistency in survey quality

Our questionnaire comprises a core section dedicated to exploring the meanings of voting, supplemented by additional variables and rotating country-specific modules. Together, these components allow us to investigate individual- and country-level differences in the meanings ascribed to voting, as well as the evolution of these perceptions over time.[1] This section describes the strategies used to standardize research protocols, discusses the achieved sample size and participation rates, and explains how we ensured survey

[1] Respondents were only allowed to take part in our study after reading and agreeing on an extensive information and consent form designed in line with the guidelines of the Ethics Committee of the University of Vienna. Every data collection effort described in this book (and in general every data collection within the project) received ethics approval before data collection started.

representativeness. In particular we focus on coverage error, non-response error, sampling error, and measurement error (see also Heath et al.2005).

Standardization of protocols

Across the 13 selected countries, we conducted cross-sectional surveys, entering the field approximately two months before election day. This timing was chosen to capture citizens' meanings before their views on voting could be influenced by the specificities of the election campaign and its outcome. In addition, we aimed to investigate potential variations in the meanings of voting within countries over the span of election campaigns. To observe shifts in the meanings and study their link to population characteristics, behaviours, and opinions over time, we conducted three-wave panel studies in Hungary and the US, coinciding with the 2022 national legislative and congressional elections, respectively. These panel surveys were limited to two countries because of the considerable costs (in time, effort, and money) related to planning and executing recontact studies. The selection of Hungary and the US aligns with the logic behind our general case selection: focusing on national legislative elections and on countries with varying levels of democracy and electoral systems. The surveys were conducted at three different moments. The first wave, mirroring the cross-sectional data collection, took place two months before election day. The second wave was administered two weeks before the election, capturing responses during the campaigns' peak. The third and last wave began the day after the election. Tracking shifts in the meanings of voting over time within the same group enhances our confidence in establishing the direction of causality for the mechanisms investigated, as discussed in subsequent chapters.

We strove to maintain consistency in both cross-sectional and panel studies conducted across countries by meticulously standardizing survey administration protocols, questionnaire formats, and data-coding procedures. The aim was to establish a uniform framework that could be seamlessly applied across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. Such standardization not only facilitated accurate data comparison, but also enhanced the overall reliability and validity of the survey results. Standardizing the administration of protocols involved considerations of the survey mode, with online surveys being the primary mode in most countries, leveraging the relatively high internet penetration rates. We opted for online surveys primarily to accommodate the use of open-ended questions described in Chapter 2 (Denscombe 2008) and

to reduce potential biases stemming from interviewer influence. However, exceptions were made in Kenya, Tunisia, and Nigeria, where face-to-face interviews were conducted to avoid skewing the representativeness of the survey to younger and more urban demographics. Respondents in these countries were approached in person and given the option to self-complete interviews using a tablet or to be assisted by an interviewer in the field.[2] The diversity in data collection modes presents potential limitations for our analysis, particularly if we believe that respondents' answers vary based on factors (e.g., social desirability) when interacting with an interviewer in person versus privately recording their responses. Nevertheless, existing research suggests that the mode of data collection has minimal impact on inferences made by scholars (e.g., Dassonneville et al. 2020).

Another critical aspect of survey administration protocols was ensuring uniformity in survey programming across countries and survey modes. Ensuring that survey questions, response options, and any programmed logic remains consistent across various countries and survey modes helps maintain the reliability and validity of the collected data by minimizing variations in responses due to differences in survey structure or wording. Additionally, uniform programming facilitates comparability between different groups or regions, simplifies quality control measures, and streamlines the data analysis process. To achieve such uniformity, we attempted to handle the programming ourselves in all countries where feasible. Table A3.1 indicates that in 6 out of the 13 countries covered in this book, this was not possible due to the requirements of the survey company. Table A3.1 summarizes this information and details the survey companies responsible for data collection, survey modes, and the teams responsible for programming.

To strive for uniformity, prior to fieldwork a rigorous test of the survey was conducted by the survey company and the project's team. The test was supplemented by feedback from native speakers to ensure accuracy and reliability, notably in the programming. All surveys, regardless of whether they were conducted online or in person, were programmed simultaneously for use on computers, smartphones, or tablets. All questionnaires were initially designed in English and translated by native speakers into the main official language(s) spoken in each country. After data collection, the same

[2] Despite the relevance of standardization, survey administration protocols had to be slightly adapted based on survey mode considerations, as face-to-face surveys require the mobilization of large research teams resulting in longer fieldwork compared to online surveys. This impacted our timeframe as we had to move forward the start date of our fieldwork in Kenya, Tunisia, and Nigeria to ensure the smooth execution of the surveys.

translators back-translated the answers to the open-ended questions to maintain accuracy. Table A3.1 describes the languages in which the interviews were conducted, as well as the variables used in each country survey.

Sample size and participation rates

In addition to standardizing the protocols, we concentrated on the sample size and respondent's participation rates to ensure data quality. In terms of coverage, 'population' in all our surveys is defined as the adult population eligible to vote in each respective country. Hence, non-citizens, respondents under the voting age (typically 18 years old in the countries covered except for Brazil), and those who did not provide initial consent were systematically excluded from the questionnaire through screen-out questions at the beginning.[3] In all countries in which we conducted online interviews we opted for quota sampling in which certain characteristics of the population are represented proportionally in the sample. Where such proportional representation with quota sampling was not feasible, we opted for face-to-face probability sample specifically stratified or cluster sampling.

The sample size for the cross-sectional surveys, comprising the total number of respondents who completed each survey before data processing, averaged 1,500 respondents per country. The lowest response count was recorded in Colombia (1,375) and the largest in Türkiye (2,006). The countries in which we conducted panel studies had a much larger sample size in Wave 1 (n ~ 4,000 responses) with the aim of reaching a size of at least 1000 participants in Wave 3. Figure 3.1 presents the cooperation rates of each survey, calculated as the number of completed surveys divided by the number of surveys begun. While this outcome information, alongside other indicators such as response rates—the number of eligible sample units that cooperate in a survey—alone are insufficient to determine how much survey error exists, calculating these rates is a critical first step to understanding the performance of the survey and ascertaining survey quality, as they indicate the potential presence of survey error related to nonresponse bias. Yet the systematic decline in responses across all modes of survey administration have now undermined their role as the primary arbiter of survey quality

[3] These exclusion criteria were also carefully monitored during and after data collection was finished. Participants who failed to meet these minimum prerequisites and still answered the survey due to, for example, errors in the screen-out during the design, were removed from the final dataset. We also eliminated respondents who completed the survey more than once (i.e., respondents with double IP addresses), those with all empty/blank answers, individuals experiencing technical errors with their IDs, or, in the case of face-to-face interviews, participants who were flagged for poor participant quality.

(AAPOR 2023). Thus, besides reporting our achieved rates, we additionally compared our survey estimates to benchmark data from country census and large governmental sample surveys.

Figure 3.1 shows that the cooperation rates range from around 30% in Estonia to almost 100% in Hungary. This disparity can be attributed to various factors, for example, the quality of the initial sample on which the survey company recruits respondents. Given the global spread of our data collection,

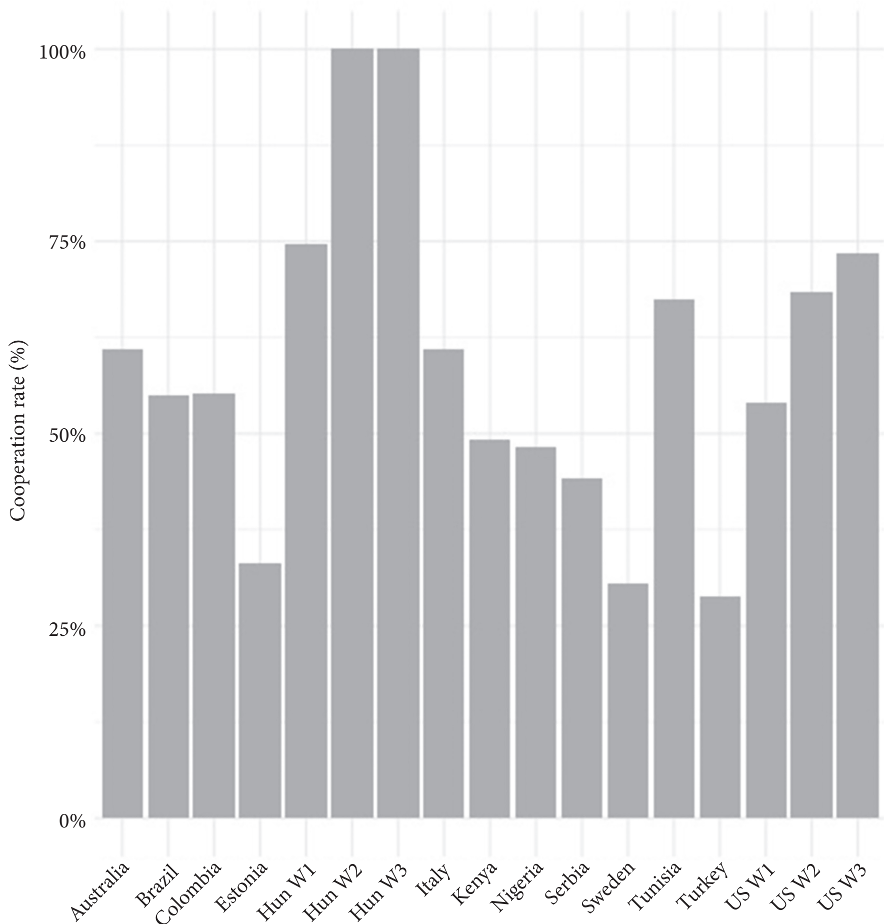

Figure 3.1 Cooperation rates per country and country-wave.

Note: Cooperation rates (%) are calculated as the number of complete interviews divided by the number of surveys started (complete plus partial interviews). This calculation follows AAPOR's Standard Definitions and is used as a proxy to response rate and is explained by the requirements of survey companies, which were unable to provide the total number of invitations sent out or, specifically, the number of non-interviews (refusal and breakoff plus non-contacts) and cases of unknown eligibility. More information is available in the Appendix of Chapter 3.

we did not manage to work with the same company across all countries, and this factor might have influenced the cooperation rates shown in Figure 3.1. However, this is unlikely since we worked exclusively with companies that guarantee a certain level of data quality in each country. For example, both Estonia (the country with the lowest cooperation rate) and Hungary (the country with the highest cooperation rate) were surveyed by local companies and we do not see substantial differences in data quality. It is also unlikely that factors like barriers to participation play a role since in both countries data were collected via online surveys, and Estonia has one of the highest internet penetration rates in the world, higher even than that in Hungary. Therefore, any disparities must be attributed to factors, including cultural norms and engagement efforts, that we cannot explain.

Cooperation rates are especially challenging in panel studies. In Hungary, participants from the Wave 1 were contacted for Wave 2 between 14–28 March 2022. Of these, slightly more than half (n = 2,054) responded and completed the survey. Wave 3 immediately followed the election (between 4–18 April), including respondents from Wave 2. However, attrition for this last survey was relatively high at 48.30%, resulting in a sample size of n = 1,062. Despite lower response rates, cooperation was notable: all respondents who began Waves 2 and 3 completed each questionnaire. In the US, cooperation rates also remained relatively high across waves; respondents who started the survey were likely to finish it. However, Wave 2 exhibited a surprisingly high initial attrition at 78.85%. We partly attribute this to the survey coinciding with a sunny holiday season, potentially impacting respondents' availability. Additionally, the observed attrition level may reflect broader trends in US panel surveys, showing decreasing response rates in recent years (König and Sakshaug 2023). To address this, we undertook additional recruitment efforts. We recontacted participants who did not complete Wave 1 (971) and invited new participants (3,864), resulting in a total of n = 2,496 for Wave 2. Subsequently, Wave 3, conducted 9–23 November 2022, saw attrition levels within expected parameters, requiring no further efforts.

Ensuring survey representativeness

In each country, the sampling frame of both online and face-to-face surveys were meticulously designed to mirror the demographic composition of national populations as closely as possible. Indeed, we intended to pursue representative samples across the 13 countries covered by this book and to

achieve this, we implemented quotas on age, gender, and region (as hard quotas or strict targets that need to be met precisely during the sampling process), as well as education groups (as soft quotas or more relaxed targets that could be adjusted based on practical considerations), which we closely monitored throughout the data collection phase. Given our focus on understanding the meanings of voting, our attention was directed towards citizens above the voting age.[4] Indeed, the distribution achieved in our cross-sectional data collection closely mirrored that of the national population in terms of age, gender, and region as well as education, albeit to a lesser extent. However, despite our diligent efforts to target hard-to-reach population groups, we did observe some noteworthy deviations. Figure 3.2 illustrates the maximum deviation for each country's sample across the categories of our quotas. Specifically, in Serbia we note under-representation of older generations (65+ years of age), in Türkiye, Brazil, and Sweden individuals with lower levels of education, and in Colombia over-representation of those with higher levels of attained education. These slight variations, however, are not uncommon in online survey research, as both older and less-educated groups tend to be more challenging to reach (Sue and Ritter 2012; Tourangeau 2014). Our results support this and show, in fact, that age and education quotas were more easily met in the face-to-face countries. This was also the case in the panel data. While non-response to later waves of panel surveys can potentially introduce biases if drop-outs differ systematically, we found no significant imbalances in our samples in the panel studies compared to country census and large governmental sample survey, which we used as benchmarks.[5] The data for both studies are balanced and in line with the intended quotas, with only a small increase in respondents 65+ years of age in Wave 2 and a slight underrepresentation of the Pacific region in Wave 3 of the US. This makes it possible for us to analyse the across-time dynamics. Full information on the sample sizes, quotas, and achieved sample distribution in each country, as well as the number of respondents excluded from the final cross sectional and panel surveys, are found in the codebook (Plescia et al. 2025a; 2025b).

In political terms, our surveys also maintained a considerable balance, as shown in Figure 3.3. When looking at the level of interest in politics on a

[4] Although neither online nor face-to-face surveys imposed an upper age limit, participants were interviewed up to 99 years of age.

[5] This is also supported by our quality checks (speeding, straight-lining, and attention checks), as discussed in greater detail in the Appendix of Chapter 3. In Hungary, the number of respondents that failed two or more checks remains quite stable across waves: only 154 participants failed two or more of the quality checks in Wave 1 (4.03%), 77 in Wave 2 (3.75%), and 47 in Wave 3 (4%). In the US, only 171 respondents failed two or more criteria in Wave 1 (4%), 132 participants in Wave 2 (around 5%), and 34 in Wave 3 (2.8%).

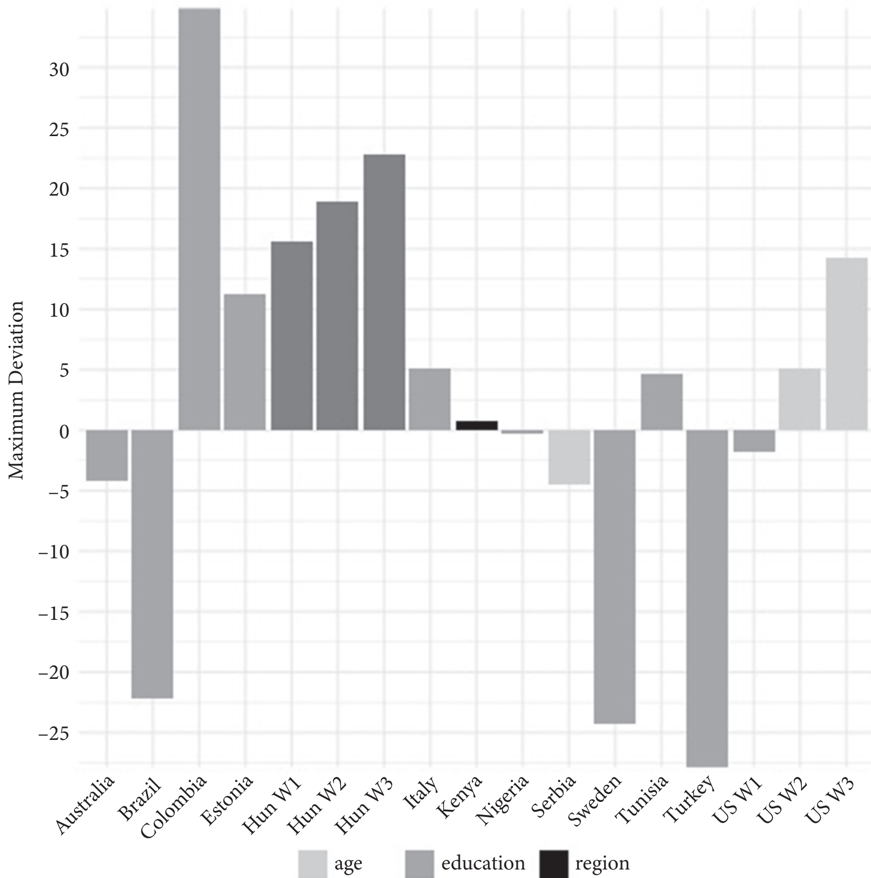

Figure 3.2 Maximum deviation from set survey quotas.

Note: The figure shows the maximum deviation in our sample compared to the corresponding quota. Deviations are calculated by subtracting the obtained sample percentages from each quota on age, education, gender, and region. Gender is not shown in the graph since it never displayed maximum deviation.

scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very) interested, we see that most respondents have medium levels of interest with a mean score of 2.75 (SD = 0.99). This is relevant considering that online surveys pose the risk of only attracting respondents that place themselves on higher ends of the scale. In this regard, note that we did not attract more politically interested respondents in the online surveys compared to the face-to-face surveys. This suggests that if there is a general issue with political surveys being answered more by politically engaged respondents (which we know exists, see also Bailey 2024), the survey mode makes no difference. In particular, the generally low level of political interest tends to alleviate our concern that we might be

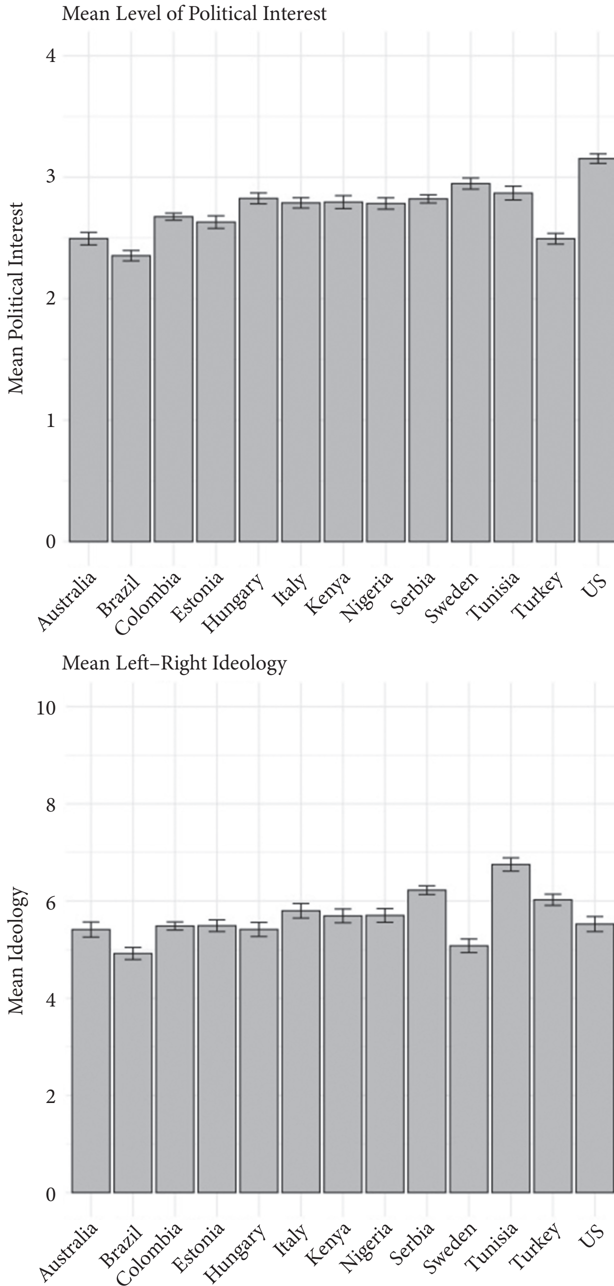

Figure 3.3 Mean distribution of political variables in our sample.

Note: The bars represent, respectively, the mean reported level of political interest on a 0–4 scale, and the mean reported level of left–right ideology on a 0–10 scale in each country survey, with the confidence interval.

overestimating the number of people who see a meaning in voting versus those who do not, which might be more prevalent among the uninterested (see also Chapter 6). The country that stands out is Türkiye, with the highest levels of interest (M = 3.25, SD = 0.89). This could be explained by the proximity of the survey to a devastating earthquake of 7.8 magnitude that hit the country in February 2023, which could increase the salience of some political topics related, for example, to disaster relief. Likewise, the ideological distribution of the population in our country samples (measured on a 0–10 left–right scale) is quite balanced, with a mean score of 5.71 (SD = 2.90). This closely aligns with left–right measurements from previous surveys, such as LAPOP's 2018 fieldwork conducted in Brazil and Colombia.

Regarding voter turnout, Figure 3.4 shows the mean reported voting intention from our survey, accompanied by the corresponding confidence

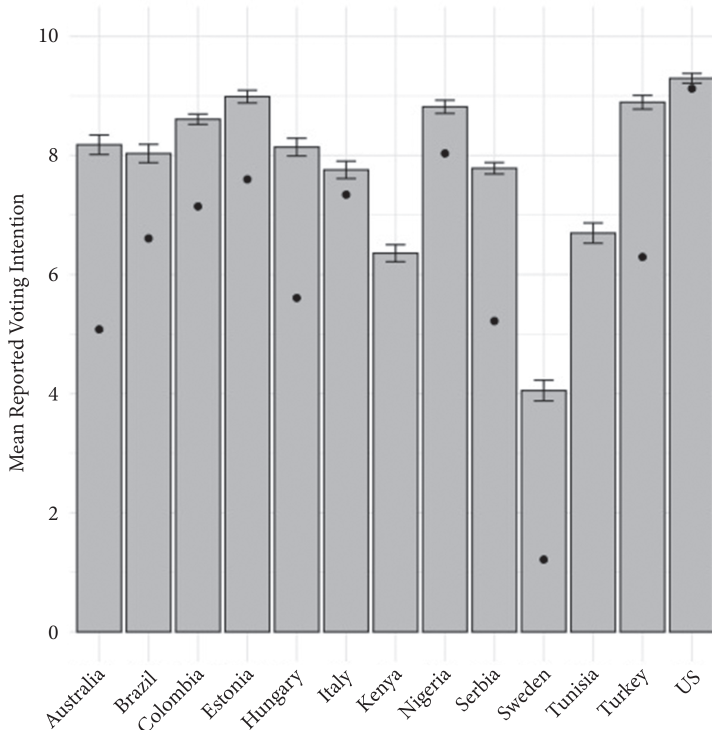

Figure 3.4 Reported voting intention and turnout.

Note: The bars represent the mean reported voting intention in each country survey on a 0–10 scale, with the confidence interval. The dots present the actual turnout on each election, calculated as the percentage of voters of population above voting age and rescaled to range from 0–10 to ease the comparison with the voting intention scale. As of March 2024, no official data on voter turnout has been published for the 2022 and 2023 legislative elections in Kenya and Nigeria, respectively.

intervals, and the actual turnout in each election, calculated as the percentage of voters over the voting age population. Across all countries (except for Türkiye and to some extent Brazil, as both countries have compulsory voting) there exists a consistent pattern of turnout being overestimated. While the exact reasons for this discrepancy remain uncertain, it is recognized that voting intention questions in survey research are susceptible to social desirability bias (Achen and Blais 2015). This overestimation was particularly pronounced in Colombia and Tunisia, where turnout figures were approximately 50.8% and 12.2%, respectively. Despite these seemingly balanced samples, we remained vigilant in addressing any potential issues regarding the representativeness of our data or imbalances in sample size and drop-out rates. Hence, we also calculated socio-demographic weights incorporating country-level demographics for age, gender, education, and region, as well as design weights accounting for variations in sample sizes across countries that we use in the following chapters of the book.

Equivalence of meaning: Addressing contextual relevance and question length

The potential questions about how people think, act, and feel about voting are limitless. However, existing research indicates that the length of questionnaires affects the quality of responses (Ganassali 2008; Iglesias and Torgerson 2000). To craft our research protocol, we aimed to strike a balance between our scientific curiosity, which pushed us to include more measures on the meanings of voting, variables, and country-specific questions, and maintaining a relatively concise questionnaire of an overall length below 20 minutes. Consequently, we made a distinction between the core module about the meanings of voting and its key correlates and opted to include additional variables in rotating modules. The main section of the questionnaires, which was kept constant across countries, was about the meanings of voting. This core module included both open- and closed-ended questions, which were pre-tested in pilot interviews and focus groups (see Chapter 2). The additional modules were only included in a selected number of countries. All of them were related to specific themes relevant to the potential factors and outcomes associated to the meanings of voting, either as cross-sectional data or survey experiments. This approach allowed us to explore a wide range of topics while effectively managing the overall length of questionnaire.

The first survey question asks 'What does "voting" mean to you?'. In online interviews and those in-person interviews assisted with a tablet, respondents

were presented with an empty box, allowing them to provide an answer without any text limit. If they tried to skip the question, a prompt appeared at the top of the screen encouraging them to answer. If they attempted to skip the question again, two prompts appeared: one at the top of the screen encouraging them to answer or select the option 'Voting has no meaning for me', and a second prompt below the empty text box offering the choice to tick 'Voting has no meaning for me'. Following this, respondents encountered two follow-up questions: 'Does "voting" mean anything else to you?' and 'Here you have the opportunity to give one more answer. Does "voting" mean anything else to you?'. These follow-up questions were asked only if the preceding question received an answer. In face-to-face interviews, the interviewer is instructed to proceed in exactly the same way, aiming to extract as many meanings as possible without priming participants to provide specific answers.

Quality checks were conducted prior to data cleaning, and only responses deemed invalid, such as those containing single letters or symbols, were excluded during data processing. Overall, the incidence of invalid responses to the first open-ended question is remarkably low across countries, although these values increase slightly in the subsequent questions in line with other surveys (Geer 1988).[6] The open-ended questions yielded approximately a million words of text about voting and elections across a variety of languages and countries, providing valuable insights for analysis and future research. We exploit some of this text data in Chapter 4, which also covers additional ideas for future research.

In addition to open-ended questions, closed-ended questions were used as a robustness check, prompting respondents to indicate their level of agreement on a 0–10 scale on 27 items identified in the literature with potential conceptualizations of voting. These measures were distributed across multiple pages to minimize respondent strain, and quality checks were conducted to ensure data reliability.[7]

The core module is supplemented with the most important covariates for the study of electoral participation and voting behaviour that may be associated with this central element of politics. We include traditional measures of interest in politics, party identification, electoral and non-electoral forms

[6] For example, while only 94 respondents provided invalid answers to the first question on the meanings of voting in Hungary Wave 1 (2.45%), this number increases in the follow-up questions, with 263 invalid answers in the second question (6.87%), and 641 in the third question (16.74%).

[7] We investigated the levels of straightlining, that is, the longest string of identical answers within the closed-ended questions per page. Our results indicate that on average less than 50% of this string of answers per participant were identical, with small differences across pages. These levels of straightlining are close to the values of other batteries of similar length that include reverse coded questions, and to the other surveys (Zhang and Conrad 2014). General data on the levels of speeding, straightlining, and attention checks are also available in the Appendix of Chapter 3.

of political participation, pre-election voting intention, reported vote choice, satisfaction with democracy and government performance, internal and external political efficacy, trust in institutions, political knowledge, perceptions of election integrity, like/dislike of main political parties and/or candidates and left/right party placements. For each country we also collected information on age, gender, education, region, and urban/rural residency of the respondent.

In the panel studies specifically, Wave 1 closely followed the cross-sectional questionnaire featuring the core module on the meanings of voting and additional political, socio-demographic, and attitudinal controls. The following waves differed in several ways. Wave 2 featured the core module on the meanings of voting and included more concrete questions about the specific upcoming election in the country. Wave 3 also included the core module and incorporated specific questions regarding participation and vote choice in the previous election, satisfaction with the results, and other attitudes and behaviour associated with the vote.

The diversity of countries covered posed additional challenges related to the standardization of the survey. In terms of the questionnaire design, our aim was to maintain consistency by asking the same core questions across all countries. However, certain variables lack empirical relevance in specific contexts. For example, shortly before the 2022 election in Tunisia, political parties were banned from competing. Consequently, questions regarding citizens' preferences for specific political parties and parties' positioning on a left–right scale had to be dropped, and the question about their voting intention replaced with an open field to allow for this uncertainty.

A third challenge manifested in the analysis of open-ended questions, where words and language served as our primary source of information. As mentioned, responses were originally recorded in each country's native language(s) and later translated into English by native speakers. The translation process aimed to maintain fidelity to the original text to minimize potential interpretations added by the translators and preserve the nuances of the language. For instance, the interpretation of notions such as 'ideology' can vary wildly across countries (Zechmeister and Corral 2013). Additionally, some words can hold multiple meanings, as we discovered in Estonia, where 'hääletamine' could be translated to both 'hitchhiking' and 'voting', making each full answer particularly relevant to extract the content and meaning. In this specific case, answers that clearly referred to hitchhiking could not be categorized under any of our established criteria and were instead classified within the residual category of 'broad answers' (see Chapter 2 for a detailed description of our codebook). Translating responses into a common language, rather than analysing them directly in their original language,

enables us to keep the coders constant and to apply the same analytical techniques to all responses, regardless of the original language. This uniformity also makes the data more accessible to a broader audience who may not be proficient in the original languages, while also promoting a more direct comparison of findings across different linguistic and cultural contexts as it ensures accuracy and clarity in the analysis. Despite our best efforts, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations inherent to this approach. Linguistic systems differ from one another, and while we tried to be as consistent as possible with the translation, subjectivity is an integral component that cannot be completely eliminated (Scholz et al. 2022). There is room for interpretation due to unclear or missing contextual cues, which could lead to biases or errors (Behr 2015). Nevertheless, these efforts add valuable insights to our dataset, giving us a deeper understanding of the diverse perspectives in the open-ended responses.

Making the data findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable

Finally, we looked into making our data findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable to ensure that researchers across disciplines and geographic locations can leverage our findings for further exploration and analysis. To guarantee that the data collected within the realm of this book can be easily findable and used by others, all the data presented in this chapter will be made publicly available to other researchers via AUSSDA, the Austrian Social Science Data Archive alongside the publication of the book (Plescia et al. 2025a; 2025b).

A second point relates to accessibility: all data will be made accessible as openly as possible. Indeed, all the variables captured in our study will be published, but we will assign pseudonyms to all answers in our data collection. The data will be made public without including direct identifiers to protect the identity of respondents. The quantitative data specifically will be made available in several formats, including proprietary formats common in social sciences (Stata, SPSS) and non-proprietary formats. To make the data accessible we had to check open-ended answers manually and automatically to avoid any personal information reaching the final dataset. This was challenging, given the large amounts of text and the many ways in which people could provide sensitive information. Hence, we implemented rigorous data validation processes and combined automated algorithms with manual review to ensure compliance with privacy regulations and safeguard the confidentiality of respondents' personal information. Additionally, we

established strict data anonymization protocols to further protect individuals' privacy while maintaining the integrity and usability of the dataset for analysis purposes.

A third concern was the interoperability of the data, that is, ensuring that our data can be combined with other existing data to explore new avenues for research. Over the past decades, social scientists have been able to take advantage of an increasing number of various types of data at the party, voter, and country levels. Researching multifaceted phenomena requires this information to be analysed jointly (van der Eijk and Sapir 2010) by linking separate datasets. Our dataset also attempts to take a step in this direction. Indeed, we will publish all the data documentation, including the codebook, which details how the questions were asked and coded. In addition to our own data, the dataset will be supplemented with various macro-level data, including measures of economic development, turnout, and the electoral system. These contextual indicators have been drawn from various sources. At the country level, we included data on the level of democracy using the V-Dem (Bjørnskov and Rode 2020; Coppedge et al. 2022). We also considered the institutional rules and included variables to code the type of election; whether or not a country has compulsory voting; the electoral formula (to distinguish between majoritarian, proportional, and mixed member systems); and whether the country has a parliamentary system, a presidential system, or semi-presidential system, using data from the ACE project, IDEA International (IDEA 2022), and CSES Modules 1 and 2. Finally, we included two measures of turnout: the ratio of the number of voters over the number of registered voters; and the ratio of the number of voters over the number of people of voting age.

At the party level, researchers conducting comparative electoral studies have argued for the relevance of party-system variables, such as the number of effective parties and ideological polarization, to explain among other things the role of partisan attachments and individual-level satisfaction with (and acceptance of) election results (Blondel 1968; Downs 1957; Lipset and Rokkan 1967). We therefore included in our dataset party-level data from CHES and the Manifesto Project on the Effective Number of Electoral Parties, the Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties, the Gallagher Index of Disproportionality, and the degree of party competition. Additional party-level indicators will also be included, using the party name variable as key identifier from Manifesto Research on Political Representation (MARPOR).

However, the project's scope created difficulties accessing complete information for aggregate-level variables for all countries covered. In many cases, the data available is outdated or entirely missing. For example, we were unable to gather data on party positioning for some countries holding

elections in 2023 as this data was unavailable at the time of completing the codebook. For this reason, when possible, we gathered data from the most recent year available. We took special care to annotate in the codebook the year and source of all the data presented as well as the reasoning behind any missing values.

Lastly, we wanted the data to be reusable by designing, managing, and organizing data in a way that makes it easy for others to discover and understand the data and use it effectively. We opted first to process some of our key variables so that they closely matched multiple sources and remain easily interpretable. On this, we have standardized the country names and party names. Following the CSES codebook, we set out the day, month, and year in which each specific election took place (Plescia et al. 2025a; 2025b). Regarding our study specifically, we included information on the year in which the study was carried out, the day in which the fieldwork started, the duration of fieldwork, as well as the day, month, and year for each interview, the mode of interview, and language in which it was conducted.

We expect that the data we have collected can be a useful resource for both comparativists and country experts interested in political behaviour and public opinion, beyond the meanings of voting and the topics addressed by this book. The link between our data and various available data sources can shed light onto several key questions related to political behaviour and public opinion research.

Summary and conclusion

This chapter described a complex research design that uses multiple components to bring together complementary perspectives on the meanings of voting and beyond. The chapter first focused on the data collection, delineating the scope and set-up of the fieldwork conducted in 13 countries as well as the questions asked and the data itself. Building as well on Chapter 2, we presented the case selection, rationale for sample size, the main variables that form the basis of this book and discuss how they were measured. Finally, we explored the potential for our data to be integrated and used with other existing datasets seamlessly across various levels of aggregation. During each step, we presented what we did, discussed the rationale behind our decisions, and made transparent both the benefits and limitations surrounding our comparative research design.

Our approach is focused on providing an innovative measurement of the meanings of voting: we wanted to capture an overview of the various meanings people have of voting and the extent to which these evolve. To do

so, we concentrated on a selection of 13 countries that encompass and move beyond the traditional WEIRD countries and have both different types of electoral systems and varied levels and ages of democracy. We used surveys and ask both unprompted (open-ended) and prompted (closed-ended) questions, before, during, and after a national legislative election. The focus of our measurement was therefore to capture the existence (or not) of the meanings of voting and the (wide array) of meanings that do exist. Yet, as thoroughly discussed in this chapter, conducting comparative survey research presents a series of challenges related to the diversity of the countries covered and to the need to ensure data quality and to ask relevant questions in a systematic way. In this regard, in this chapter, we focused in particular on two main challenges: survey quality, which consists in keeping the same high standard of data collection quality across vastly different contexts; and the equivalence of meaning. For the latter there exist three issues in particular that are relevant: poor translation due to language diversity; varying interpretation of common concepts across countries; and (perhaps most fundamentally) the possibility that there may simply not be common concepts to measure. We summarize the main lessons in Box 3.1. Overall, understanding complex phenomena related to how people think about voting, how they view institutions, political elites, parties, and the context in which elections take place, as well as the behavioural consequences of these perceptions, requires diverse sets of information to be analysed jointly, rather than separately. The following chapters represent an initial step towards this goal and aim to establish a framework of principles for conducting high-quality survey research in political science that enables meaningful comparisons. Acknowledging the challenges of collecting comparable data beyond traditional contexts does not signify abandoning the pursuit of understanding political behaviour. Instead, it sheds light on a journey that is not only more stimulating and intricate, but also more impactful in its outcomes.

Box 3.1 Summary of Chapter 3's main lessons

When studying political concepts worldwide, it is important to:

- proactively rely on country experts for questions about the number of languages to be covered, the difficulty of translating concepts like 'meaning', the security and safety concerns for all involved, as well as the possibility of obtaining honest answers to questions about political preferences;

- consider that several countries may have rapidly changing political environments, such as opposition boycotts and coalition formation, that may hamper the validity and reliability of answers to standard questions about voting turnout and party choice;
- manage uniform translations of questionnaires across countries while carefully considering linguistic variations and local dialects, which may prove particularly important when trying to reach groups of the population that may be outside of major urban areas.

When collecting survey data worldwide, it is important to:

- evaluate the types of data needed and the timeframe, and acknowledge that panel survey data are prohibitively expensive in a vast majority of countries;
- evaluate trade-offs in questionnaire length between open-ended and close-ended questions, especially if different countries require various mode of interviews;
- standardize questionnaires for comparability across countries while considering that, in some places, some variables (e.g., party choice) may not make sense;
- standardize survey administration protocols and ensure data quality while making surveys compatible across devices used, survey modes, questionnaire formats, and programming;
- remember that the hardest-to-reach population groups by far are those with low levels of education, not the youngest age groups, so low-education groups might need specific targeting and incentives.

When making the data findable, accessible, interoperable, and reusable, it is important to:

- develop robust data management systems and implement standardized metadata practices to streamline processes well before data collection starts;
- organize data in a systematic and accessible way in password-protected computers;
- provide standardized identifiers and codes for key variables that are transversal to various research projects (e.g., country names, party IDs, election years) since the very beginning of the project;
- check open-ended answers both manually and automatically to avoid any personal information reaching the final dataset before publication.

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PART II

MEANINGS OF VOTING: A PORTRAIT

4

How Do Citizens Think and Feel about Voting?

Overview and validation of meanings of voting

María Belén Abdala, Petro Tolochko, and Carolina Plescia

Introduction

Chapter 1 of this book provides an overview of our conceptualization of the meaning of voting. Since this is a new concept related to how individuals think and feel about voting, Chapter 2 delves into its measurement, while Chapter 3 presents the data collected for studying the meanings of voting, addressing some of the main challenges of capturing precisely this somewhat abstract concept worldwide. In this chapter we take two steps further: we provide a descriptive overview of the meanings of voting we found, and we then validate and test these findings. As Gerring (2012) so eloquently reminds us, the two main goals of measurement are reliability (i.e., precision) and validity. A reliable measure provides consistent information across repeated measurements, whereas validity concerns whether the measure accurately captures the underlying theoretical concept intended by the researcher. While Chapter 2 examines the reliability aspect, this chapter delves into the question of *validity* and *testing* of our measurement of the meanings of voting.

In terms of validity, which encompasses various aspects, we focus on content validity and construct validity. Content validity evaluates how well a measurement tool covers all aspects of the construct it measures. This is crucial when manually coding open-ended questions to ensure all possible responses are captured. We generated two measures to investigate this: one assessing manual coding's classification of responses and its deviations from closed-ended questions. Construct validity examines whether an indicator correlates with others as theoretically expected, answering if the measure reflects the intended construct. Establishing construct validity involves

María Belén Abdala, Petro Tolochko, and Carolina Plescia, *How Do Citizens Think and Feel about Voting?*.
In: *The Meanings of Voting for Citizens.* Edited by: Carolina Plescia, Oxford University Press. © Carolina Plescia (2025).
DOI: 10.1093/9780198946335.003.0004

demonstrating convergent and divergent validity. Convergent validity, also known as triangulation, checks if a test correlates with other tests of the same construct. We compare our open-ended question results with closed-ended ones to show convergent validity. For example, we analyse how well responses categorized as 'no meaning' in open-ended questions align with lower scores in closed-ended responses.

When it comes to testing, we leverage artificial intelligence (AI) advancements to assess the codebook's robustness. We collected nearly one million words on the meanings of voting, with manual coding taking about two years and involving overall six trained coders. Finalizing the codebook took six months, and ten translators covered the languages from 13 countries. This posed challenges in maintaining consistent coding standards and coordinating a large, multilingual team while ensuring nuanced responses were accurately captured. This chapter uses large language models (LLMs)—machine learning models that can comprehend and generate human language text—to test the codebook's robustness and explore whether using these LLMs can streamline future coding processes and match human coder accuracy.

Our key concept and overview

To discuss the validity of a measure, the starting point is the theory and, more precisely, the concept that we aim to measure: the meanings of voting. As discussed in Chapter 1, we adopt a comprehensive approach to define the various dimensions of these meanings, which encompasses the notion of voting as an action (a noun), the execution of the act (a verb), and the underlying incentives for this act. While there are numerous specific interpretations to be unveiled, we distinguish five overarching categories of voting meanings, four of which originate from the influential work of Riker and Ordeshook (1968). With our data collection, the primary aim is to capture how much of these meanings exist.

Rooted in the rational choice theory of voting, we identify *instrumental* meanings of voting, where individuals vote with the aim of achieving a particular outcome. These outcomes may be directly linked to the vote, such as winning an election or shaping the composition of a parliament or government, or they may pertain to more loosely associated consequences, like advancing or hindering a policy or selecting competent leaders (Cox 1997; Fiorina 1981; Nie et al. 1976). The vote primarily serves as a means

to attain these ends. In contrast, *expressive* meanings of voting emanate from the perspective of voting to express identification, allegiance, preference, or protest concerning a candidate, party, ideology, or policy (Campbell et al. 1960). Unlike instrumental interpretations, this expression is fulfilled at the time of the vote, regardless of the election's outcome. Additionally, research has demonstrated that citizens may view voting as conforming to or deviating from a societal norm (Blais and Achen 2019), which we term adherence to an *ethics* meaning of voting, which encompasses a sense of duty. A fourth category is *allegiance* meanings of voting, which involves voting to affirm one's commitment to the political system and its institutions. This includes citizens who vote to support or defend democracy (Downs 1957) or simply because they possess the right to vote (Blais 2000). Finally, we identify *anti-voting* meanings, which are interpretations that are disinclined towards voting itself. These may include perceiving voting as inconsequential, arduous, or even unpleasant. These five interpretations may either be absent (i.e., no meanings), indicating that citizens do not attribute any meaning to voting, or they can coexist in various combinations. In principle, they are not mutually exclusive, as citizens can simultaneously embrace multiple interpretations of voting. Furthermore, we do not assert that these are the sole types of interpretations citizens can hold, and our measurement approach is open to accommodating other meanings that may not fit into these predefined categories.

Chapter 3 explained that we use the core module of our survey data to find out how much of these meanings exist. This included an open-ended question asking citizens about their understanding of voting. The question asks respondents: 'What does "voting" mean to you?', with two follow-up questions: 'Does "voting" mean anything else to you?' and 'Here you have the opportunity to give one more answer. Does "voting" mean anything else to you?' The programming was done in such a way that the follow-up questions were asked only if the preceding question received an answer. This question was asked in all 13 countries covered by this book. In addition, in Hungary and the United States (US), where we collected panel data, respondents participating in two follow-up waves were asked this same question in each following wave.[1] The open-ended questions represent the main source of data for this book. The answers have been manually coded according to the procedure described in Chapter 2, which discusses the accuracy of our

[1] Wave 1 was conducted in the first two months before the election. Wave 2 was in the field two weeks before the election and Wave 3 within the two weeks right after the election.

manual coding through inter-coder reliability analysis. This chapter provides an overview of the answer and validate the manual coding of the open-ended question as described below.

Overview

Here we present the data to show that categories of the meanings of voting described in this book are abundant in the population cross-sectionally and over time. Figure 4.1 shows the distributions of the overarching categories across countries in Wave 1. Results are plotted as proportion of respondents, since respondents cannot appear simultaneously in *no meaning* and *meaning (any)*. It also includes the residual category of respondents comprising those who answer *do not know/refused/NA*. The figure shows that the proportions

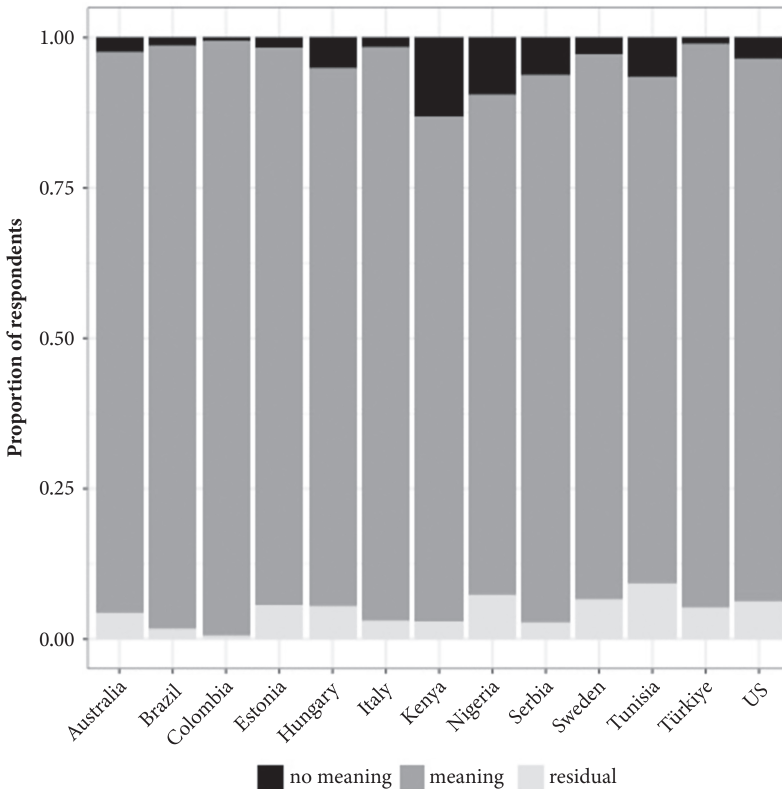

Figure 4.1 Distribution of no meaning and meaning (any) across countries and respondents.

Note: The figure shows the proportion of respondents in each overarching categories across countries in Wave 1. Respondents cannot appear simultaneously in more than one category.

of respondents indicating no meaning are consistently very low across all countries, notably in Colombia and Türkiye. Although the amount of no meaning is somewhat higher in Kenya and Nigeria, where data collection relied on a face-to-face mode, it is worth noting that Serbia and Tunisia have nearly identical proportions of no meaning, despite the data being collected through online and face-to-face survey modes, respectively. This suggests that the mode of the survey alone may not account for the observed differences.

Figure 4.2 shows the distribution of types of meanings within the meaning (any) category. The figure plots results as proportions of chunks because respondents can appear simultaneously in more than one meaning category. It is possible to spot some interesting patterns that are similar across all countries, namely the anti-voting category is among the categories that appear least frequently while the instrumental category is almost everywhere the

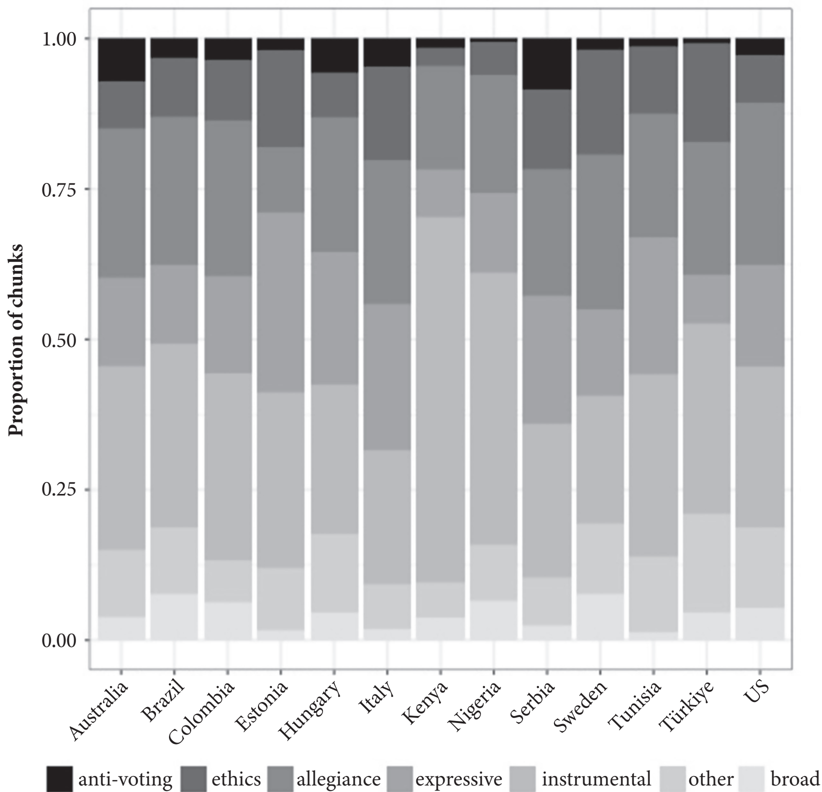

Figure 4.2 Distribution of meanings of voting across countries and chunks.

Note: The figure shows the proportion of chunks in each meaning of voting categories across countries in Wave 1. Respondents can appear simultaneously in more than one category.

largest. However, there are considerable differences. For example, the allegiance category is particularly small in Estonia compared to almost all other countries, while the instrumental category is particularly large in Kenya and Tunisia. Chapter 5 looks at the cross-country variation.

We now focus on the over-time variation in meanings. For this task, we concentrate on two countries, Hungary and the US, where we collected panel data. In these two countries, we conducted two additional survey waves approximately two weeks before and directly after the elections. We asked, 'What does "voting" mean to you?' as well as 'How about the meaning of voting for you in the election that will take place on [DATE HERE] in [COUNTRY OF STUDY]?' Unlike the first question, which allows is to measure the meanings of voting in general, the latter focuses on the meanings of voting cast in a specific election. The presence of both questions as well as the panel design allow us to determine whether or not the meanings of voting change over time in the context of a specific election and whether or not there are substantial differences between voting in general and voting in a specific election.

If the meanings of voting are attitudes, we would expect them to remain quite stable during the short time span of an election campaign. Converse's (1966) foundational work on belief systems suggests that attitudes related to belief systems tend to constrain individuals over time (Hernández 2019). The source of these constrains can be long-term socialization but also shorter-term influences such as those from an individual's political or social environment. These central belief systems that we all possess produce a number of broad stances that are used as political heuristics guiding further beliefs (e.g., Ares et al. 2024; Krosnick 1991; Mader and Schoen 2023; Rohrschneider 1993). We expect that views of voting in general pertain to long-term, deep-seated beliefs linked to individuals' political socialization, which is known to shape their long-term political beliefs and voting behaviour (see also Chapter 6).

Figure 4.3 shows the distribution across the three waves of types of meanings of voting in general (Figure A4.1 shows the distribution of no meaning and meaning across countries and waves, which remain unchanged). The figure plots results as proportions of chunks because respondents can appear simultaneously in more than one meaning category. While we do observe some variation across countries, meanings of voting tend to remain quite stable across waves. For example, while we see fewer expressive interpretations of voting in the US than in Hungary, these proportions do not substantially change over time. Perhaps the two categories that show some movement, albeit not substantial, are the allegiance and broad/other categories. For the former, it seems that the proportion of allegiance is higher after the election

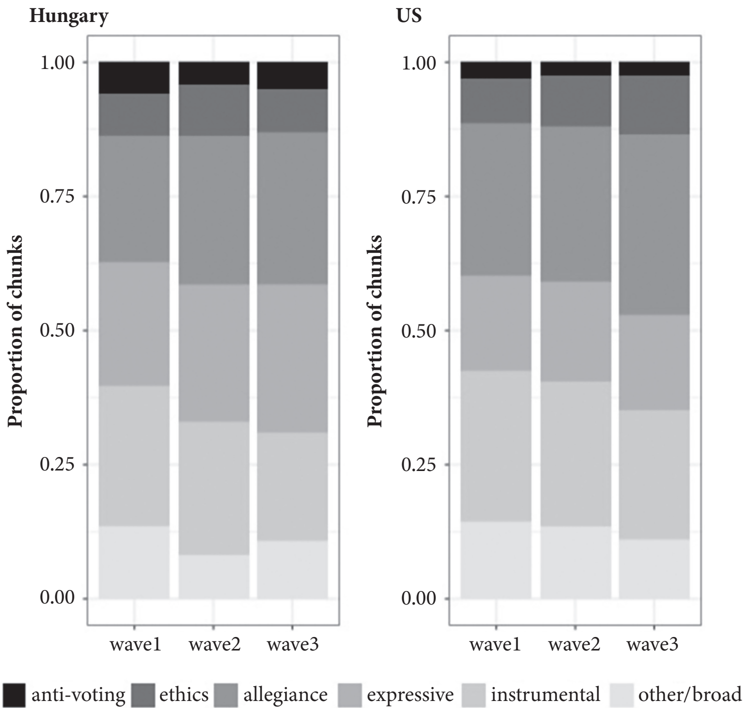

Figure 4.3 Distribution of meanings of voting across countries, chunks, and waves.

Note: The figure shows the proportion of chunks in each meaning categories of voting across countries and waves. Respondents can appear simultaneously in more than one category.

compared to before. Conversely, the amount of other/broad seems to diminish over time, especially in the US. But again, what voting means in general in each country remains relatively consistent over time.

We compare this to patterns in the meanings of voting in a specific election. Since elections are defining moments in democratic politics, it is reasonable to expect that what voting means in a particular election can differ from what voting means in general and can itself change as the election approaches. It is well known that elections make politics, political issues, parties, and candidates more salient to the general public, set the stage for divisions, mobilize participation, and so forth (e.g., Shamir et al. 2015). This implies that the meaning of voting in general will be far less focused on issues specific to the election and the election campaign compared to when respondents are asked about voting in this specific election. In other words, we should observe more expressive and instrumental interpretations of voting in this election, compared to the ethics and allegiance conceptualizations, which should be more common in the meanings of voting in general.

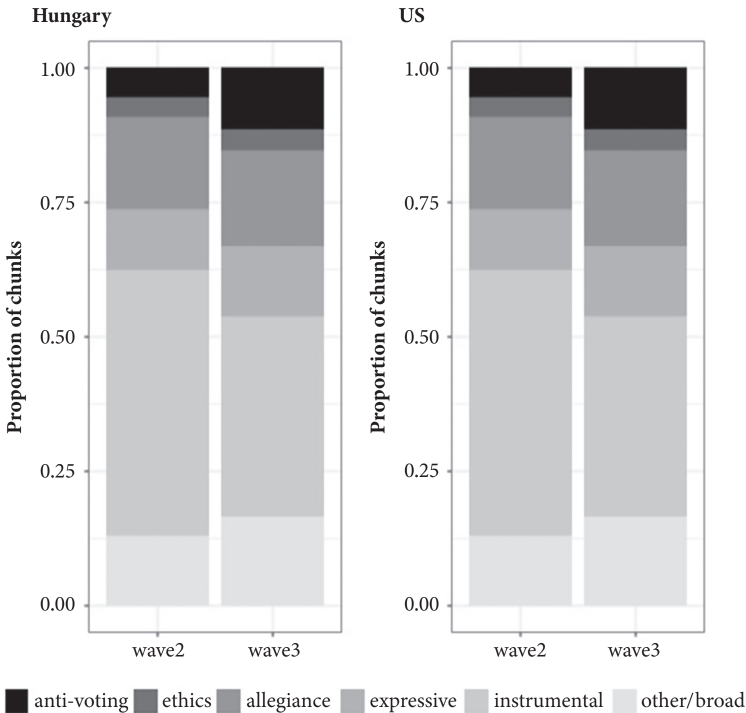

Figure 4.4 Distribution of meanings of voting in this election across countries, chunks, and waves.

Note: The figure shows the proportion of chunks in each meaning categories of voting in this election across countries and waves. Respondents can appear simultaneously in more than one category.

Starting with the differences across questions, Figure 4.4 shows that meanings of voting in general tend to be more focused on ethics and allegiance interpretations compared to the meanings of voting in this election. Also the data supports the expectation that the meanings of voting in this election would be more focused on instrumental meanings compared to the meanings of voting in general. However, we do not find that the meanings of voting in this election are more expressive that those of voting in general. Notably, there seems to be a stronger presence of allegiance and less focus on instrumental meanings in the general concept of voting compared to the specific election context.

Validity

Validity refers to the extent to which a measurement tool accurately captures what it claims to measure. It assesses the appropriateness and usefulness of the inferences made from the measurement and is often seen as an assessment

of systematic error in a measurement. Systematic measurement error or bias occurs when there is a consistent difference between the measured value and the true value of the variable being measured. This can lead to inaccurate or distorted results and affect the validity of the measurement. While validity encompasses various aspects, we focus on content validity and construct validity. In both cases, we rely on an alternative measure of the meanings of voting based on closed-ended questions as well as additional survey questions available in our dataset.

Closed-ended question

We discussed the multiple advantages of an open-ended inquiry in Chapter 2. Yet, responses to open-ended questions may come with several disadvantages as well. First, views can be imperfectly articulated in citizens' minds or, in the words of Kammeyer and Roth (1971, 61): 'are usually less than completely clear; they often contain ambiguous words and phrases; and they are frequently ungrammatical and poorly worded'. Additional main drawbacks include the following: (1) open questions require respondents to have verbal skills, which some respondents may not possess; (2) in some cases, open questions yield irrelevant information; (3) and respondents may provide only the answer that is most accessible and plausible to them (referred to as top-of-the-head information by marketing specialists) or may not formulate certain information simply because it is too evident. To address these concerns, we also incorporate closed-ended questions. These are asked in our surveys immediately after the open-ended question about the meanings of voting and serve two main purposes in this book. The first is to validate the content of the coding derived from the open-ended answers in this chapter. The second purpose is empirical, and it consists of providing a possible robustness check for the empirical analysis, which relies on open-ended questions, presented in the following chapters of the book.

In the specific, we use 22 closed-ended items shown in Table 4.1. Respondents are asked:

> Voting can have different meanings to different people, or no meaning at all. Some of these meanings are shown below. Using a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means 'strongly disagree' and 10 means 'strongly agree', please indicate to what extent voting in general has the following meanings to you.

The genesis of these items stem from meticulously revising the existing literature on why and how people vote. We identified key, longstanding works

Table 4.1 Items and classification: 'To me, voting is . . . '

Item	Classification	Cronbach alpha (raw)
. . . a duty of every citizen	*ethics*	0.62
. . . an obligation	*ethics*	
. . . something that others expect of me	*ethics*	
. . . a right as a citizen	*allegiance*	0.78
. . . a privilege	*allegiance*	
. . . a way to uphold democracy	*allegiance*	
. . . a way to express my support for democracy	*allegiance*	
. . . a way to express my preference for a politician or party	*expressive*	0.87
. . . a way to express my aversion for a politician or party	*expressive*	
. . . a way to express which politician or party I feel closest to	*expressive*	
. . . a way to express my trust in a politician or party	*expressive*	
. . . a way to express my distrust in a politician or party	*expressive*	
. . . a way to express which policies I prefer	*expressive*	
. . . a way to express which policies I reject	*expressive*	
. . . a way to reward a politician or party	*instrumental*	0.76
. . . a way to punish a politician or party	*instrumental*	
. . . a way to affect the composition of government/parliament	*instrumental*	
. . . a way to affect public policy	*instrumental*	
. . . a way to protect my interests or the interests of people close to me	*instrumental*	
. . . an act without consequence	*anti-voting*	0.72
. . . an unpleasant or difficult activity	*anti-voting*	
. . . a meaningless act	*anti-voting*	

published on top journals of political science in the last 70 years and classified them into macro areas pertaining the ethics, allegiance, expressive instrumental and anti-voting meanings of voting (see also Chapter 1). We also considered the meanings derived from the pilot interviews, focus groups, and citizen science website discussed in Chapter 2. Following this, we designed and pre-tested the items to ensure their clarity and relevance related to these macro areas of the existing literature. Initially, we used 27 items in total but dropped five from the list in Table 4.1 since factor analysis showed that their loading in the respective group did not fit. The excluded items are: (1) a

way to express a voice that is never heard; (2) an enjoyable activity; (3) a habit; (4) a sense of community; and (5) a way to dismantle existing political structures. The inadequate fit might have occurred for various reasons, including issues with translation. Dropping any additional item brought no improvement to the scales (see Appendix for more details).

Since we force respondents to score their level of agreement on each item listed in Table 4.1, we have by default no missing cases. However, in the face-to-face interviews, survey length constraints led to some variation in data collection. Indeed, the closed-ended items were either not been asked in Kenya, and half of the items were randomly assigned to respondents to keep survey length manageable in Nigeria and Tunisia. The Appendix provides details on the missing cases across countries and dimensions. We have no missing cases for Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Serbia, Sweden, Türkiye, and the US.

We used Cronbach Alpha to assess the internal consistency of each battery of items. In Table 4.1 all scales show very good internal consistency scores; the only exception is the scale for the ethics items that show only good internal consistency. The values do not differ significantly across countries, and we can notice only a few country-specific deviations. In Serbia both the anti-voting scale and the ethics perform less well, while the allegiance scale Cronbach alpha is particularly high for US and Sweden (0.85 and 0.87, respectively).

Content validity

As mentioned, we use closed-ended questions to assess content and construct validity. We start with content validity. Content validity aims to assess the extent to which a measurement tool adequately covers all aspects of the construct being measured. Several aspects matter when examining content validity in the context of manual coding of open-ended questions. Firstly, it is essential to ensure that the coding comprehensively capture the range of possible responses that participants may provide. To investigate this, we generated two types of measures. The first measure examines the classification of individuals into each meaning category through manual coding, assessing any deviations from what would have been classified using closed-ended questions.

Table 4.2 shows the results of this first comparison. The *exclusive* group measures the percentage of respondents who exclusively exhibit each type of meaning category, excluding those who hold more than one type of meanings

Table 4.2 Percentage of respondents in each meaning category

Meaning		Manual Coding	Closed-ended	Difference
No Meaning	*exclusive*	3.59	4.55	−0.96
	combined	—	—	—
Ethics	*exclusive*	1.89	1.61	0.28
	combined	20.39	53.11	−32.72
Allegiance	*exclusive*	4.53	2.75	1.78
	combined	43.96	58.82	−14.86
Expressive	*exclusive*	5.65	1.02	4.63
	combined	33.42	54.08	−20.66
Instrumental	*exclusive*	13.96	0.82	13.14
	combined	55.83	52.21	3.62
Anti-voting	*exclusive*	2.26	14.17	−11.91
	combined	7.01	45.86	−38.85

Note: In percentage. *Exclusive*, the percentage of respondents that only have each type of meaning category, excluding all others. *Combined*, the percentage of respondent that have each type of meaning category, without excluding overlaps.

simultaneously or mention additionally do not know/NAs/broad/other. In the closed-ended coding, this means excluding people that score above the mean in more than one category. The combined group considers all respondents; for each meaning category, it encompasses respondents who have that meaning, regardless of how many other meanings they might have or which other meanings they hold. In the manual coding, this means including everyone that mentions a meaning category, regardless of any additional statements. In the closed-ended, this means including everyone that scores above the mean for any meaning category.

A comparison between a classification based on the manual coding and the closed-ended coding shows quite clearly that we would systematically have more people in each meaning category when using the closed-ended question compared to using the open-ended questions. Sometimes the differences are minimal, for example, in the case of no meaning and ethics only, but most of the time the differences are rather substantial. We also observe that the differences are particularly pronounced in the case of the exclusive category, since respondents are almost never classified as exclusively categorized as ethics or instrumental when using the closed-ended question. These differences between manual coding of the open-ended question and the closed-ended question might be due to several reasons. Chiefly, the literature shows that when people are primed with issue importance in closed-ended questions, they tend to agree more with categories they might not otherwise think of spontaneously when using open-ended measures (Fournier

et al. 2003); our results seem to show something similar. While closed-ended measures can help us understand how much people agree with different meaning categories, using this measure alone might lead to an overestimation of the types of meanings that exist in an individual's mind. Interestingly, this trend is present for most of the meanings considered in this book, including anti-voting, and also for no meaning. Instead, this is reversed for instrumental meanings, which are mentioned more often across the aggregate and inclusive measures of the manual coding classification method than in the closed-ended answers.

As a second measure of content validity, we examine the percentage of responses that cannot be classified into our manual coding categories. Specifically, we look at the percentage of respondents who do not fit into any of the six categories. This helps us understand how many respondents are altogether excluded from our analyses. Figure 4.5 shows the percentage of respondents that have been classified as exclusively broad or as exclusively other category. The broad responses are those considered having a meaning of voting, but this meaning is not classifiable within one of our specific meaning categories (i.e., instrumental, expressive, ethics, allegiance, or anti-voting) because it is too broad. Examples include answers such as 'good', 'yes, voting has a meaning', and 'voting is important'. Figure 4.5 shows that the percentage of respondents that would appear exclusively in the broad category (grey bars) is well below 5% in all counties. The country with the highest percentage is Sweden and the country with the lowest percentage is Colombia. We do not see clear patterns in this regard, for example, between countries where we used face-to-face (Kenya, Nigeria, and Tunisia) rather than online interviews (all other countries).

Figure 4.5 displays in black the percentage of responses that were classified as exclusively *other* in the different countries. The chunks classified as other are those that cannot be subscribed into any of the meaning category within our codebook but could potentially signify meanings not considered yet by the existing literature. So, effectively the other category in Figure 4.5 represents the percentages of responses that in each country would have an answer that our codebook misses out completely. These answers range from anything from answers completely unrelated to the question posited, to one single word like 'election', or simply repeating the question. The percentages are well below 10% in all countries with values small in most of the countries. Some exceptions in this regard are Tunisia, Nigeria, and (to some extent) Sweden and the US. In Nigeria and Tunisia, the vast majority of responses classified as other consist of a single word, like 'election' or 'conduct of election', indicating some concerns about whether the question was

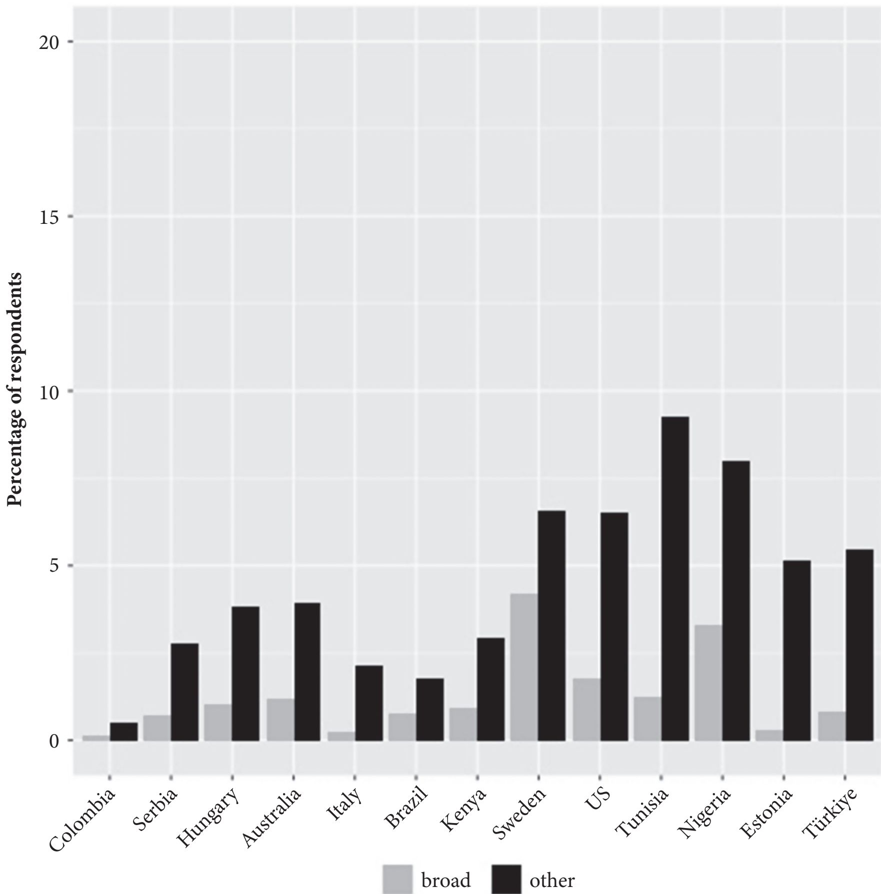

Figure 4.5 Percentage of respondents exclusively classified as broad or other across countries.

Note: The figure shows the percentage of respondents that have been classified as exclusively broad (in grey) or as exclusively other category (in black).

fully understood by the respondent. Note that there is no correlation in any country between being in the only other category and having a lower level of education.

Construct validity

Construct validity aims to assess whether a given indicator is empirically associated with other indicators in a way that conforms to theoretical expectations about their interrelationship. It answers the question if the test or

measure reflects the construct that it is supposed to measure? To establish construct validity, one must demonstrate both convergent and divergent (or discriminant) validity. Convergent validity (triangulation) shows whether a test that is designed to measure a particular construct correlates with other tests that assess the same construct. In terms of convergent, we show the extent to which our open-ended question correlates with closed-ended questions. We also look at how well the open- and closed-ended answers correlate; if we classify open-ended answers correctly; and, for example, how many people categorized as no meaning in the open-ended question also have lower scores in the closed-ended answer.

Table 4.3 displays the correlations between the open-ended categories (rows) and the mean value of the scales for the closed-ended categories (column). The correlations indicate that the coding from the open-ended answers broadly aligns with the findings from the closed-ended questions. While this is good news in terms of triangulation, the correlation coefficients are relatively low. Notably, respondents classified as no meaning with the open-ended questions also score relatively low in all closed-ended items,[2] with the exception of the closed anti-voting dimension. Similarly, those who score higher in the anti-voting closed dimension are also more likely to have no meaning or anti-voting. Each meaning in the open-ended dimension is positively correlated with the respective meaning in the closed-ended dimension, with values being relatively higher in the cases of allegiance and

Table 4.3 Correlation between open- and closed-ended categories of meanings of voting

	Closed-ended				
Open-ended	**Ethics**	**Allegiance**	**Expressive**	**Instrumental**	**Anti-voting**
No Meaning	−0.214	−0.241	−0.228	−0.190	0.068
Ethics	0.183	0.163	0.103	0.097	−0.168
Allegiance	0.226	0.299	0.218	0.174	−0.186
Expressive	0.065	0.105	0.114	0.074	−0.102
Instrumental	0.182	0.212	0.173	0.136	−0.166
Anti-voting	−0.226	−0.260	−0.173	−0.206	0.154
Other	0.043	0.036	0.053	−0.191	0.149
DK and NAs	−0.067	−0.078	−0.048	−0.035	0.035

Note: All correlations are significant at $p < 0.05$.

[2] We could have also used a no meaning item within the closed-ended questions but we opted against it because it naturally represents the opposite construct for all other items, rendering construct reliability more problematic.

expressive meanings. These correlation patterns provide validity to our coding. However, while there is indeed consistency between the two methods, open-ended answers capture a broader range of responses—something discussed in Chapter 9. The correlation values displayed in Table 4.3 are quite similar across countries with no special deviation.

Broadly speaking, divergent (or discriminant) validity shows whether two tests that should not be highly related to each other are indeed unrelated. Here, however, we assess how different our concept is of meanings of voting from turnout and traditional measures such as trust. We explore whether our newly developed scales capture distinct dimensions of voter attitudes beyond those typically associated with other pre-existing constructs. Broadly speaking, as a confirmation of validity we would like to see no meaning and anti-voting negatively correlated with behavioural and attitudinal variables and the opposite being true for the other meanings of voting. However, we also expect correlations to be relatively low if the meaning of voting is a concept on its own. Table 4.4 shows that this is indeed the case.

In detail, being classified into the no meaning and anti-voting category is consistently negative and significantly correlated with lower intention to vote (especially in the case of no meaning), lower satisfaction with democracy

Table 4.4 Correlation between open meanings of voting and key variables

Open-ended	Intention to Vote	SWD	Parliament Trust	Support Democracy
No Meaning	−0.222	−0.080	−0.084	−0.202
Ethics	0.177	0.043	0.063	0.138
Allegiance	0.230	0.073	0.037	0.214
Expressive	0.118	0.032	0.025	0.111
Instrumental	0.149	0.018	0.024	0.120
Anti-voting	−0.140	−0.195	−0.193	−0.098
Other	0.044	0.059	0.055	0.040

Notes: All correlations are significant at $p < 0.05$ except for Instrumental and Satisfaction with Democracy (SWD) and Other and Support for Democracy. Intention to Vote asks respondents: 'Will you vote in the upcoming [national/federal—TYPE OF ELECTIONS] elections in [COUNTRY OF STUDY]? Use a scale from 0, meaning that you "will definitely not vote", to 10 meaning that you "will definitely vote"'. SWD is measured asking respondents: 'On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [COUNTRY OF STUDY], where 0 means "not at all satisfied" and 10 means "completely satisfied"'? Parliament Trust is measured asking respondents: 'Please rate how much trust you have in [NAME OF NATIONAL PARLIAMENT] on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means "no trust at all" and 10 means "complete trust"'. Support for Democracy is measured asking respondents: 'How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically? On this scale where 0 means it is "not at all important" and 10 means "absolutely important", what position would you choose?' The question on support for democracy was not asked in Italy.

(SWD), and lower trust (especially in the case of anti-voting), as well as lower support for democracy (especially in the case of no meaning). Being in any meaning category—ethics, allegiance, expressive, instrumental—is instead consistently positively correlated with behavioural and attitudinal variables, especially in the case of allegiance and intention to vote or support for democracy. The strong correlation between allegiance and these two variables is not surprising, since allegiance includes answers related to voting as a norm and an obligation, as well as answers related to supporting the country and the democratic regime. Interestingly enough, the only two non-significant correlations are between instrumental meaning and SWD and between other and support for democracy. While these patterns are closely investigated in Chapter 6, Chapter 7, and Chapter 8 of this book, relying on both cross-sectional and panel data we here limit ourselves and note that the meanings of voting do indeed seem to be a concept of their own.

As a final test of validity, we investigated the extent to which these meanings evolved (or not) over time. As mentioned, it is reasonable to anticipate that meanings of voting in general are closely intertwined with long-term, foundational beliefs shaped by individuals' political socialization (see Chapter 6). Hence, we broadly expected that what we measure when asking respondents 'What does voting mean to you?' would not change during the short-time frame of an election campaign. To this end, we looked at the correlations between meanings across the three waves for the meanings of voting in general and meanings of voting in a current election. Starting with the meanings of voting in general, we see in the case of Hungary that the correlation between waves for each meaning category is moderate, with a Pearson correlation value below .36, except for allegiance meanings, which reach .50 between Waves 1 and 2, and .54 between Waves 2 and 3. This is also the case in the US, albeit for instrumental and expressive meanings the Pearson correlation is below .29. The correlation between Waves 2 and 3 is higher, especially for allegiance (.50), ethics (.52), and anti-voting (.47) meanings. Conversely, the correlation between Waves 2 and 3 of the meanings of voting in a current election remains substantially low for all meaning categories in both Hungary and the US. Interestingly, the Pearson correlation values across waves are negative for ethics (Hungary = −0.019; US = −0.023) expressive (US = −0.04), allegiance (Hungary = −0.01), and anti-voting (Hungary = −0.01; US = −0.02) meanings. Overall, this correlation analysis suggests that meanings of voting in general are quite stable over time and substantially more stable compared to meanings of voting in a current election (Figure A4.2 displays the correlation matrix for each country).

Testing

The many intricacies involved in investigating the meanings of voting produced a series of challenges from the outset of the project. While the thorough preparation and collaborative efforts of the team enabled us to achieve a reliable and valid dataset (discussed here and in Chapter 2), we decided also to employ recent developments in AI to test differences in coverage and robustness of our codebook across categories of meanings of voting and within the dataset across countries, as well as whether technological advancements might streamline the coding process in the future, particularly by using LLMs to classify open-ended questions and assessing if they yield similar results to human coders. Before reporting the test results, we briefly introduced the method.

Method

For testing, we relied on two models: the open-source model Meta Llama 3 (8 billion parameters) (AI@Meta 2024), and the closed-sourced model Open AI GPT-4 (Achiam et al. 2024). The Llama 3 model was run locally, while GPT-4 was queried via the Open-AI API. The already-translated open-ended questions were used for this comparison. Both models received similar instructions and followed procedures similar to those used by human coders. For each of the categories (ethics, allegiance, expressive, instrumental, no meaning, and anti-voting), we created a separate prompt.[3] These prompts also included specific instructions for the model 'Your task is to annotate open responses in the dataset.' The models were prompted only to return a binary variable (0 if the category was not present, or 1 if the category was present). Furthermore, similar to the codebook instructions given to human coders, the models were first prompted with the question 'What does "voting" mean to you?' and then with the follow-up questions.[4]

[3] The prompt was: Your task is to annotate open responses in the dataset based on the provided codebook. The codebook is as follows: {category_codebook}. Available annotations are: (1) The category described in the codebook is present in the response and (0) The category described in the codebook is not present in the response. You will receive several responses. Each response is delineated with '***'. If the category is present in at least one of them, return 1. Do not return the provided texts. Always only return 1 or 0. Responses to annotate: {response} 'category_codebook' object is the category description from the codebook for each of the categories. 'Response' is an object created by concatenating together the questions about the meanings of voting.

[4] We used few-shot learning (a machine learning approach to classify data using only a small number of training examples) and set the model's temperature hyperparameter to the default value of 0 (though the OpenAI API actively tunes this using log-probability) to determine the randomness in the model's output. However, we do not know the model size for GPT.

Testing differences in coverage and robustness across models and meanings categories

In order to understand whether the LLMs converge to human-coded answers, we have calculated F1 scores treating human annotations as the ground truth. An F1 score combines precision and recall to provide a single measure of a model's accuracy. By calculating F1 scores across categories, we ensure that both false positives and false negatives are accounted for, resulting in a balanced assessment of the model's performance. Figure 4.6 shows a bar chart of F1 scores across different meaning categories for both Llama 3 and the GPT models. The figure shows that the F1 scores differ substantially across the different categories of meaning, ranging from 0.81 (instrumental/GPT model) to 0.11 (no meaning/Llama). Both models have generally low F1 scores across the majority of categories compared to what might be expected from human coders. This suggests that, while they can capture some patterns in the data, the models are not as reliable or accurate as human coders in interpreting and categorizing open-ended questions. Furthermore, we calculate percentage agreement to understand whether the

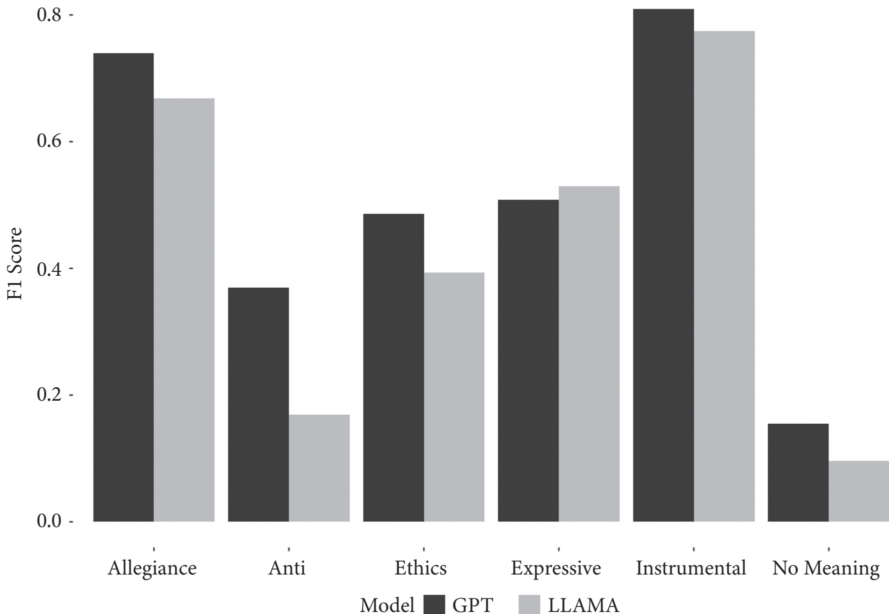

Figure 4.6 F1 Scores for Llama and GPT models for individual categories.

Note: The figure shows a bar chart of F1 scores across different meaning categories for both Llama 3 and the GPT model.

models actually classify open-ended questions in a similar fashion. The scores are presented in the Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 shows that the percent agreement scores also vary significantly across the individual categories. The high agreement in categories like allegiance (0.75), ethics (0.73), and instrumental (0.76) indicates that both models often produce similar results when coding these types of open-ended questions. This similarity suggests that, despite their lower accuracy compared to humans, the models may be consistently capturing certain aspects of the data in these categories, and 'interpret' the codebook in a similar way. Other categories, however, exhibit inconsistent patterns across models, especially for anti-voting meanings, which could stem from the complexity or ambiguity inherent in the open-ended answers associated with this category. The diverse responses within the category may pose challenges for the models to establish a consistent and agreed-upon interpretation, thereby affecting the reliability of the results. Similar challenges were encountered during the manual coding process, which highlighted the difficulty in categorizing responses in this category (see discussion in Chapter 2).

Next, we look at F1 scores not only across meaning categories, but also across countries. Here, the main purpose was to assess the extent to which precision and recall can depend on the geographical and cultural context. By analysing F1 scores across different countries, we aimed to uncover patterns and variations in the performance of our model that may be influenced by local language usage, dialects, and semantic nuances. This examination included comparing the model's effectiveness in different semantic categories across various countries to see if certain meanings are universally well-predicted or if there are significant country-level differences. Additionally, we investigated the balance between precision and recall in different countries, as disparities in these metrics may indicate challenges in identifying certain meanings. Figures 4.7 and 4.8 show a remarkable similarity of results across countries and across meanings. For example, the meaning categories with the highest F1 scores (i.e., instrumental and allegiance; see also Figure 4.6) consistently exhibit the highest F1 scores across all countries

Table 4.5 Percent agreement scores for both models on individual categories

	Category					
	Allegiance	**Anti-voting**	**Ethics**	**Expressive**	**Instrumental**	**No Meaning**
GPT vs Llama	0.75	0.46	0.73	0.56	0.76	0.56

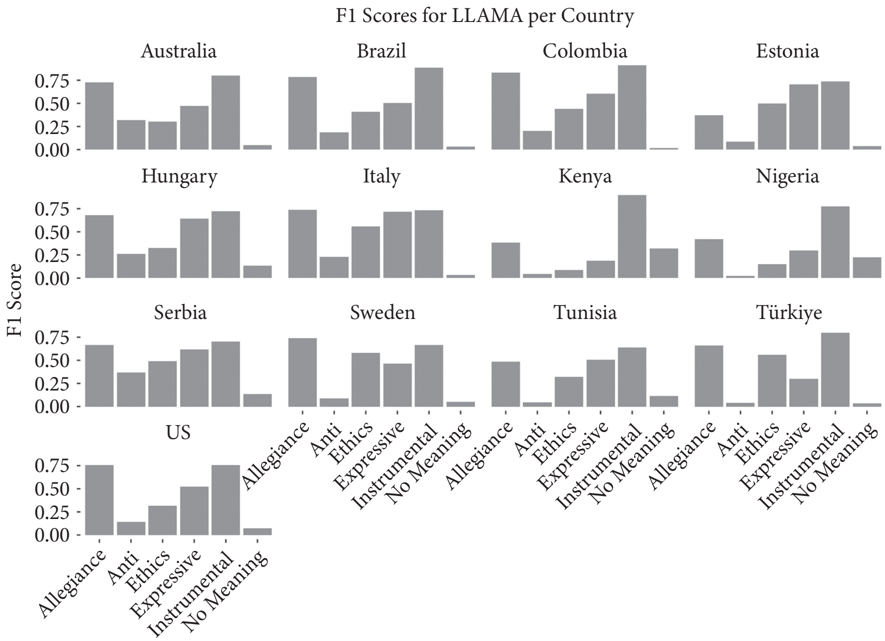

Figure 4.7 F1 Scores for the Llama model for individual categories per country.

Note: The figure shows a bar chart of F1 scores across different meaning categories for the Llama 3 model across countries.

without exception. The same pattern is observed for the meaning categories with the lowest F1 scores, specifically, anti-voting and no meaning. This consistency suggests that certain semantic categories are universally easier or harder for the model to predict, regardless of the geographical or cultural context. The uniformity in high and low F1 scores across different countries indicates that the model's ability to distinguish these categories is influenced more by the inherent characteristics of the categories themselves, rather than by regional language variations. This could imply that instrumental and allegiance categories possess clearer, more distinct features that the model can easily recognize, while anti-voting and no meaning categories are inherently more ambiguous or context-dependent, making them more challenging to classify accurately.

Overall, both models perform somewhat less well in Kenya, Nigeria, and to some extent Tunisia, and this is especially true for Llama (see Figure 4.9). While the findings underscore the robustness of our models in maintaining performance levels across diverse linguistic environments, they also highlight some potential challenges. Kenya and Nigeria are the countries with the most challenging cultural and linguistic conditions, given the existence of

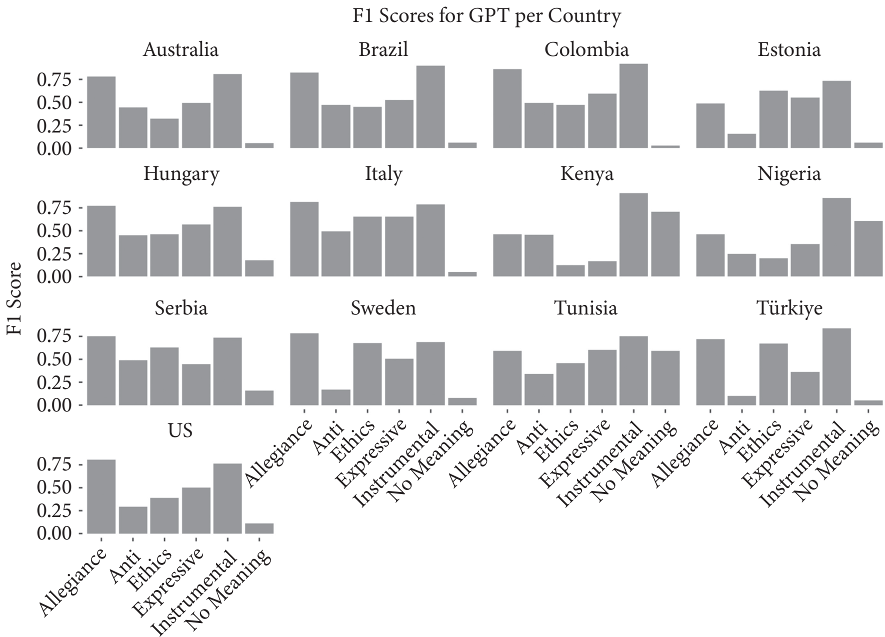

Figure 4.8 Scores for the GPT model for individual categories per country.

Note: The figure shows a bar chart of F1 scores across different meaning categories for GPT model across countries.

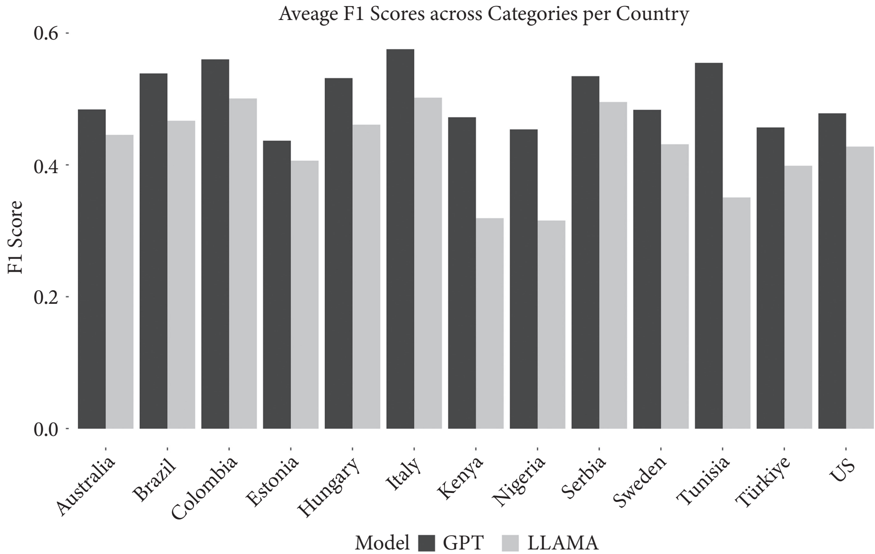

Figure 4.9 Average country F1 scores for both the Llama model and the GPT model across individual categories.

Note: The figure shows a bar chart of mean F1 scores across all meanings across countries.

multiple official languages and significant regional dialects that might present unique difficulties. The findings from this analysis do highlight the need for model adaptation or localization strategies to improve performance in specific regions. More broadly, they also speak to the general applicability of our coding procedure in these most challenging contexts. Specifically, enhancing the model's ability to handle the more challenging categories might involve incorporating more nuanced linguistic features or additional context-specific training data.

Testing how to streamline the coding process

The process of coding open-ended questions with LLMs is significantly less laborious than using human coders. The program that performs the annotation is only around 100 lines of Python code. Timewise, both LLMs took several days to annotate the complete dataset. However, while the GPT annotation speed is limited by Open AI's API request limits, open-source models (like Llama 3) are limited by the hardware—the more powerful the GPU, the faster the model runs. In terms of monetary value, annotating all categories for the complete dataset cost around US$40. However, it is important to note that Open AI frequently changes its pricing model; therefore, this cost will likely be very different in future. All in all, delegating the coding of open-ended answers to LLMs could save significant time and money compared to human coders. However, the worry persists that algorithm-coded data may not be as reliable for analysis (see, for example, He and Schonlau 2020).

The low F1 scores observed for the GPT and Llama models may potentially be mitigated by making the prompts used for each categorization more explicit and comprehensive. After a qualitative inspection of each model's 'reasoning' behind the annotations, it became apparent that both models tend to interpret tasks very directly and lack the nuanced ability to discern whether a data point truly belongs to a specific category without clear guidance. Like humans, LLMs understand natural language instructions and we can therefore teach them much as we would a typical research assistant (Mellon et al. 2024). Extending the codebook with detailed definitions and numerous examples for each category can provide the models with more precise instructions on how to classify the data accurately.

Another way to potentially improve the accuracy of model annotations is model fine-tuning specifically for the task at hand, which can lead to significantly increased accuracy as it allows the models to better capture the unique characteristics and nuances of the data they are processing (Alizadeh et al. 2024). Fine-tuning involves adapting the models' parameters based on the

specific dataset and coding criteria, making them more adept at interpreting and categorizing the data correctly. However, fine-tuning is an expensive and resource-intensive task that requires substantial computational power and time. Thus, the benefits of fine-tuning a model would be maximized when integrated into the project's planning and execution from the beginning. Both open-source models (like Llama 3) and commercial platforms (like Open AI) allow for this functionality.

Summary and conclusion

This chapter set out to provide a descriptive overview of our findings regarding the meanings of voting and to show the results of validating and testing these findings.

The descriptive overview shows that the vast majority of citizens attribute meanings to voting. Across all countries, most citizens hold one or more meanings of voting. The most common types of meanings are instrumental, followed by allegiance and expressive. The rejection of voting, which we label as anti-voting meaning, is low everywhere. The over-time analysis shows that meanings of voting remain quite stable during the short time span of an election campaign, and we conclude that they are indeed attitudes, rather than fleeting opinions. Yet, what voting means in a particular election differs from what voting means in general, and it changes as the election approaches. Instrumental meanings are more present before the election, while expressive meanings are more present in the aftermath of the election. This might represent a double-edged sword for democracy. On the one hand, when people find voting essentially meaningful and important, the specifics of an election campaign are unlikely to trigger substantial changes in the immediate decision-making process. On the other hand, when people consider voting a waste of time, it is unlikely that the short time span of an election campaign will change an interpretation of voting to something considered meaningful and important.

We also discussed that while validity may encompass several different aspects, our study focused on content and construct validity. The former aims at ensuring that our coding of the open-ended questions comprehensively covers the construct it assesses. We used two measures to examine content validity: whether the coding comprehensively captures the full range of possible responses provided by participants; and the amount of broad or unclassified answers and deviations from what would have been classified using closed-ended questions. Construct (convergent and divergent)

validity is about whether an indicator correlates as expected with other measures. In this case, we checked how much the meanings derived from open-ended questions and our coding are empirically associated with other indicators, such as turnout, trust, and support for democracy, in a way that conforms to theoretical expectations. Overall, the validation exercise shows that the thorough preparation and collaborative efforts of the team enabled us to achieve a reliable and valid dataset that provided valuable insights into the meanings of voting across diverse populations, both within and across countries.

While we are convinced that manual coding was the best choice for analysing open-ended answers and theory building, it was also a huge endeavour that posed challenges in maintaining uniform coding standards across languages and cultural contexts. Despite these challenges, we achieved a reliable dataset. In this chapter, we discussed using AI to test the codebook's robustness and explore if LLMs can streamline future coding processes. Our findings indicate that, while they perform well for some annotation categories, state-of-the-art models struggle to match human coders in others, especially in few-shot prediction scenarios. This discrepancy may be attributed to the complexity of the categories and the creation of the codebook. The approach involved adapting a modified version of a codebook designed for human coders into an LLM prompt. This 'anthropomorphizing' of the model may lead to errors, as we might incorrectly assume the model possesses human-like reasoning abilities that may result in flawed prompting scenarios. For example, in few-shot classification, there should be a clear semantic correspondence between the provided examples and the texts being annotated. Unlike humans, who can draw on memory and reasoning, models require a rigid set of rules. Future research should investigate various prompting strategies that deviate from the human-focused codebook for annotation tasks.

Overall, our findings align with existing literature on the use of LLMs in social science research. Social scientists have tested LLMs with mixed results. For instance, LLMs have matched or surpassed non-expert human performance in assessing sentiment in tweets, categorizing tone in political adverts or labelling manifesto ideology (e.g., Ornstein et al. 2022), as well as explaining hate speech classifications (e.g., Huang et al. 2023). However, they have underperformed compared to modern supervised methods in tasks such as predicting personality and suicidal tendencies (Amin and Rahman 2023), among others. While we recognize LLMs as powerful tools, particularly for tasks like zero-shot classifications—machine learning approaches to classify data using only a small number of training examples, which are challenging

for humans (e.g., Gilardi et al. 2023)—we accept that they are not yet fully reliable on their own. This necessitates human validation and careful prompt creation and testing in the research pipeline (e.g., Jansen et al. 2023; Törnberg 2024). Nevertheless, recent research shows that fine-tuned LLMs, even on a small sample of texts, significantly outperform baseline models (Alizadeh et al. 2024) and can be applied to a wide range of annotation tasks. More broadly, the use of LLMs for social science research is promising, with the potential to increase the efficiency and accuracy of analysing qualitative data, such as open-ended survey questions. However, due to the nascent and recent adoption of the technology, understanding how LLMs fit into social science research and what they can or cannot do well remains an active area of research.

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5

Does Voting Have the Same Meaning in Different Countries?

Anna Lia Brunetti, Cal Le Gall, and Carolina Plescia

Introduction

This chapter explores variation in citizens' meanings of voting across countries. We focus on three key variations. First, we check in which countries we find more meanings of voting and where we find fewer. Second, we focus on the different types of meanings of voting and in which countries they occur. In this regard, we focus on whether citizens view voting as a duty or civic obligation (*ethics* meanings); as a way to support the political regime or institutions of the country (*allegiance* meanings); to express preferences for specific political choices (*expressive* meanings); as an instrument to achieve specific goals after the elections (*instrumental* meanings); or as something completely useless (*anti-voting* meanings). Third, the investigation extends to assess whether these meanings are held in isolation or in combination with one another.

To do this, we rely on survey data collected in 13 countries: Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Kenya, Nigeria, Serbia, Sweden, Tunisia, Türkiye and the United States (US). These countries encompass different degrees of democracy, varying levels of compulsory voting requirements, and diverse types of electoral systems, all of which make this country sample composition suitable to explore the meanings of voting across different institutional and political contexts. We first look at the variation in the meanings of voting using descriptive plots and then move on to multilevel regression models, which allow us to draw more precise conclusions on the relations between meanings of voting and degrees of democracy, levels of compulsory voting requirements, and types of electoral systems, while controlling for other country-level and individual-level factors.

The chapter clearly shows that a great majority of citizens holds one or more meanings of voting, and this seems to be true across all countries. The

Anna Lia Brunetti, Cal Le Gall, and Carolina Plescia, *Does Voting Have the Same Meaning in Different Countries?*.
In: *The Meanings of Voting for Citizens*. Edited by: Carolina Plescia, Oxford University Press. © Carolina Plescia (2025).
DOI: 10.1093/9780198946335.003.0005

most common type of meaning is instrumental, followed by allegiance and expressive meanings. Rejection of voting, which we label as anti-voting meaning, is relatively low across all countries. Levels of democracy matter more for the *types* of meanings, rather than for the total *number* of meanings. In fact, liberal democracies and electoral democracies do not significantly diverge in terms of the total amount of meanings of voting. However, we find that expressive and ethics meanings are more common in liberal democracies, while exclusive instrumental meanings of voting are more common in countries with lower levels of democracy. Countries with proportional representation seem to have slightly more expressive meanings, while majoritarian systems seem to favour instrumental meanings in particular. Finally, countries with compulsory voting have the lowest number of no meaning responses and score considerably high in terms of allegiance meanings of voting, regardless of their level of democracy.

We believe these results have significant implications for the literature on voting, voting behaviour, and democratic participation. We suggest that electoral system design and the democratic context significantly influence how citizens approach voting and, ultimately, their role in the electoral process. For scholars, this emphasizes the need to study electoral systems' impact on voter behaviour and attitudes in diverse contexts. For policymakers, understanding these dynamics can help in crafting policies that enhance democratic engagement by fostering environments where voting is perceived as both meaningful and ethical. By identifying the institutional factors that influence citizens' meanings of voting, this study provides actionable insights for improving electoral integrity and democratic participation. Policymakers can use these findings to inform the design of electoral systems that better align with democratic principles, potentially increasing voter turnout and satisfaction. For instance, promoting proportional representation could enhance expressive and ethical voting, while addressing the causes of anti-voting sentiments in countries with democratic backsliding can restore trust in the electoral process. We return to these points in the last section of this chapter.

What are meanings of voting?

In line with the rest of the book, we employ a maximal definition of the meanings of voting, including meanings of the act itself (a noun), the performance of the act (a verb), and the motivation behind that act. First and foremost, we argue that some citizens might lack a meaning of voting and might not

hold any conceptualization of the act of voting (no meaning). When citizens do find a meaning in voting, these meanings can be of different types and can be held in multiple combinations. Among the potential meanings that they can give to voting, four are derived from the foundational work of Riker and Ordeshook's (1968). We discern instrumental meanings of voting, that is voting to reach a certain outcome. These outcomes may be directly related to the vote (e.g., winning an election, composition of parliament or government) or to a more loosely related result (e.g., promoting or preventing a policy or selecting (non-specific) good leaders). Expressive meanings of voting stem from the insight that people view voting as a way to express identification with, preference for, or protest against a candidate, party, ideology, or policy (Campbell et al. 1960). In addition to these categories, research has shown that citizens experience voting as complying (or not) with a societal norm (Blais and Achen 2019). We call this adherence to an ethic of voting, including a sense of duty or an obligation, ethics meanings of voting. A fourth category is what we call allegiance meanings of voting—voting to affirm one's allegiance to the political system and its institutions. This includes citizens who vote to support or defend democracy (Downs 1957), or citizens who vote because they have the right to do so (Blais 2000). Finally, a fifth category not necessarily present in the long-standing literature on voting is what we define as anti-voting meanings, namely meanings of voting that are averse to voting itself. These might include finding voting inconsequential, difficult, or simply unpleasant. While people cannot simultaneously hold a no meaning and a meaning of voting, they can simultaneously hold instrumental, expressive, ethics, allegiance, and anti-voting meanings.

As for the rest of the book, to measure the meanings or voting, we rely on an open-ended question 'What does "voting" mean to you?', with two follow-ups ('Does "voting" mean anything else to you?' and 'Here, you have the opportunity to give one more answer. Does "voting" mean anything else to you?'). The two follow-up questions were only asked to those respondents who gave an answer to the preceding question. In a nutshell, the answers given were first split into separate 'chunks' or quasi-sentences carrying a single message and then manually coded into no meaning, ethics, allegiance, instrumental, expressive, and anti-voting (the procedure for the operationalization of the open-ended measurement is discussed in full details in Chapter 2). The resulting codes are binary variables: 1 if the respondent mentions a certain type of meaning in any of the answers given, 0 if not.

For example, the no meaning variable takes a value of 1 when respondents answered 'none', 'nothing', or 'no'. Examples of answers for ethics meanings

are 'something I am forced to do', 'a duty to vote', and 'it is every citizen's responsibility'. Allegiance meanings can include references to the democratic process, as in 'electing people that will preserve democracy' or 'democratic right', to citizenship, such as 'freedom of every citizen of the nation', or to empowerment, like 'the opportunity to have a say'. Instrumental meanings, on the other hand, refer to a specific goal: examples are 'making a decision', 'elect someone to represent you', or 'choose who sits in the government'. Next, expressive meanings can range from 'to have an opinion' to more specific meanings, for instance 'supporting your favourite party' or 'lodge a protest vote against those unworthy of my vote'. Last, anti-voting meanings are 'I hate voting', 'it is a waste of time', and 'it makes no difference whether I vote or not'. Additionally, respondents might also provide answers that are not classifiable into these categories; however, there are relatively few of those answers (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 for a precise discussion) and we do not look at them in this chapter.

Where can we find meanings of voting?

This chapter examines variation in the meanings of voting across countries. The 13 countries we study are listed in Table 5.1 (see Chapter 3 for a thorough discussion of the country case selection). According to the V-Dem index of liberal democracy (Coppedge et al. 2022), ranging from 0 to 1, with 1 representing full democracies, our country selection comprises a variety of cases on the democratic dimension. In particular, Hungary, Kenya, Nigeria, Serbia, Tunisia, and Türkiye score below 0.5 and are therefore classified as electoral autocracies in this book, while the rest of the countries surpass this threshold and are classified as liberal democracies (Lührmann et al. 2017). Australia, Estonia, and Sweden are the highest-scoring countries, with levels of democracy above 0.8. Furthermore, three of the 13 countries under investigation, namely Australia, Brazil, and Türkiye have compulsory voting systems. In terms of electoral systems in the national legislature, four countries in our sample—Australia, Kenya, Nigeria, and the US—have majoritarian systems, while the remaining countries have proportional representation. Despite Hungary and Italy being frequently classified as mixed electoral systems (e.g., IDEA 2022), we count them as proportional to reduce complexity in the discussion here, also because the results from the empirical analyses are identical for proportional and mixed systems. Although it is difficult to make a definitive argument about the impact of these factors on the meanings of voting with only 13 countries, such variation is nonetheless useful to explore the

Table 5.1 Cases of study and classification

Country	Liberal Democracy Index	Compulsory Voting	Electoral System
Australia	0.81	Yes	Majority (alternative vote)
Brazil	0.52	Yes	Proportional representation
Colombia	0.54	No	Proportional representation
Estonia	0.85	No	Proportional representation
Hungary*	0.34	No	Proportional representation*
Italy*	0.77	No	Proportional representation*
Kenya	0.43	No	Majority (first-past-the-post)
Nigeria	0.32	No	Majority (first-past-the-post)
Serbia	0.27	No	Proportional representation
Sweden	0.87	No	Proportional representation
Tunisia	0.22	No	Proportional representation
Türkiye	0.12	Yes	Proportional representation
US	0.74	No	Majority (first-past-the-post)

Note: The liberal democracy index is taken from V-Dem (2022). The source for the electoral system is IDEA (2022). The source for compulsory voting is IDEA (2023). *The electoral systems for Hungary and Italy are often classified as mixed. However, in this chapter we code them as proportional systems to reduce complexity in the discussion. Please note that the results of the empirical analysis are identical for proportional and mixed systems.

extent to which meanings cluster around certain institutional and/or political variables, so we focus on these three variables when discussing country-level variation in meanings of voting.

For each country, Figure 5.1 shows the percentage of each meaning or no meaning in grey, calculated over the total number of meanings and no meanings in that country.[1] For instance, 9.1% of ethics meanings in Australia

[1] We had 1471 respondents who provide answers that could not be classified into one of our main categories. These answers, exclusively categorized as broad meanings, other meanings, or DK/NA, were

Figure 5.1 Percentages of no meanings and meanings across countries.

Note: Grey: The percentage of each meaning or no meaning calculated over the total number of meanings and no meanings in that country. Black: The percentages of meanings in each category that are expressed exclusively, rather than in combination with other meanings.

means that over the total number of meanings and no meanings that respondents in Australia have, roughly 9% are classified as ethics. Because people can hold multiple meanings simultaneously, we also consider the amounts of meanings in each category that are expressed exclusively rather than in combination with other meanings (black bars in Figure 5.1). Also for Australia, about 1.5% out of the 9% of ethics meanings expressed are mentioned exclusively. By examining how these meanings interact, we gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of meanings and where they exist. This analysis also allows us to discern the relative significance of different meanings of voting. The full dataset is available via Austrian Social Science Data Archive (AUSSDA) (Plescia et al. 2025).

No meanings of voting

Starting with no meanings (top-left plot in Figure 5.1), we see that only a relative minority of respondents across countries holds no meaning of voting. In line with Canache's (2012) work on citizens' conceptualizations of democracy, which shows that, even in countries with relatively low levels of democracy most ordinary citizens can formulate a definition of democracy, we find that most citizens have meanings of voting and can articulate them in their own words. Likewise, this echoes the findings in Dalton et al. (2007), namely, that citizens living in non-democratic countries hold meanings of democracy almost as much as those living in full democracies. At the same time, Figure 5.1 shows that the largest share of no meanings is found in Kenya with 11.5%, followed by Nigeria and Tunisia. The country with the lowest amount of no meanings is Colombia (less than 1%) followed by Italy and Brazil. Hence, our data shows that the highest proportion of no meanings is found in electoral autocracies, suggesting that more democratic environments foster more democratic attitudes (Mishler and Rose 2007).[2]

dropped, reducing the overall sample size from N = 25,317 to N = 23,846. The number of respondents in each country are: 1420 in Australia, 1957 in Brazil, 1363 in Colombia, 1420 in Estonia, 3577 in Hungary, 1505 in Italy, 1435 in Kenya, 1322 in Nigeria, 1452 in Serbia, 1416 in Sweden, 1339 in Tunisia, 1896 in Türkiye, and 3744 in the US.

[2] It is worth mentioning that, as explained in Chapter 3 of this book, we conducted face-to-face interviews in the countries in the top three positions— Kenya, Nigeria, Tunisia—as online data collection was deemed unsuitable. While the cultural and political contexts of these countries can play a role here, these results might also indicate that online surveys are a better medium for data collection when it comes to more politically sensitive topics (Höglinger et al. 2016). Put differently, citizens might be more comfortable expressing their meanings of voting in contexts without the presence of an interviewer. Nonetheless, Hungary and Serbia also rank high on no meanings, both are electoral autocracies, and both were surveyed in online mode. Hence, we suggest that the link between no meanings and electoral autocracies goes beyond the survey mode.

This aligns with the logic of learning theory (Rohrschneider 1999), which proposes that democratic ideas and values are indeed 'learned' from democratic experiences, a topic more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 6. There are two exceptions to this pattern. One is Türkiye which, despite being classified as an electoral autocracy, has one of the lowest percentages of no meanings. The second is Sweden, which is the country with the highest level of democracy in our sample, but which has almost the same amount of no meanings as Serbia. We can only speculate about these two countries being exceptions in their own group. Türkiye has historically had high voter turnout rates and has a compulsory voting system. This indicates a high level of political engagement among the population that is also visible in high levels of civic engagement, political sophistication, and unconventional participation (Chrona and Capelos 2017). Further, our results show that Turks tend to believe that voting is an essential civic duty much more than in other electoral autocracies. However, in Sweden, as one of the highest-rated democracies, citizens might feel that their individual vote is less critical because the system is already functioning well and delivering good outcomes. This complacency/satisfaction with the status quo can lead to a sense that voting is less impactful or necessary, paradoxically mirroring sentiments found in countries with very different political environments, like Serbia.

Further, the top three countries in terms of largest share of no meanings are all majoritarian democracies, while the bottom four countries have all proportional representation. Interestingly, this result aligns with studies on spoiled ballots, which show that a high level of multi-party competition (typically higher in proportional compared to majoritarian systems) increases the choices available to voters, eventually reducing the incidence of spoiled ballots (Solvak and Vassil 2015). In this case, we suggest that a low level of party competition also increases indifference to voting by lowering viable choices. Finally, among the five countries with the lowest amounts of no meaning, three have compulsory voting, including Türkiye, hinting that being forced to vote could indeed increase interest in politics and political sophistication (Sheppard 2015).

Instrumental meanings

Instrumental meanings are the most common type of meaning we find in our data (see Figure 5.1). If we consider the total amount of instrumental meanings of voting, the three countries with the highest percentage are Kenya, Nigeria, and Türkiye. The highest scores of exclusive instrumental meanings

are in Kenya, Nigeria, and Tunisia. Hence, all countries in our sample leading the ranking on instrumental meanings, regardless of whether we consider them in combination with other meanings or exclusively, are those with the lowest levels of democracy. The pattern is quite clear and resonates with studies on patronage voting in autocratic countries, where citizens tend to vote for more instrumental or materialistic reasons, such as direct transfer via vote-buying, or rewarding the regime or a specific leader for the economic performance that they know will be provided for their region (e.g., Blaydes 2011; Magaloni 2006). Among the most common answers in Kenya, Nigeria, and Türkiye we find a focus on choosing the right leader to lead the future of the country and have good governance.

The three countries at the bottom of the ranking for instrumental meanings—Italy, Sweden, and Serbia—have proportional representation, suggesting that the electoral system matters. In particular, citizens in proportional voting systems seem to have fewer instrumental considerations when thinking about voting (e.g., Cox 1997). We also find evidence that compulsory voting has some influence: the three countries with mandatory voting in our sample (Türkiye, Brazil, Australia) are in the top half of the ranking and show very similar proportions of instrumental meanings. This implies that mandatory voting might foster strategic considerations. In fact, we know that compulsory voting encourages political engagement and transmits incidental knowledge among citizens (e.g., Sheppard 2015), factors that are at the basis of strategic voting (Schlegel et al. 2023).

Allegiance meanings

Allegiance meanings of voting are the second most common set of meanings in our data and focus on associating voting with patriotism, citizenship, democracy, and empowerment. From Figure 5.1, we see that, when considering allegiance in combination with other meanings, the three top-ranking countries are the US, Sweden, and Brazil. However, the majority of countries in the top half have similar percentages of allegiance meanings: for instance, electoral autocracies like Türkiye and Hungary score very similarly to Australia and Italy. At the same time, however, four of the six countries with the largest share of exclusive allegiance meanings—Nigeria, Türkiye, Tunisia, and Kenya—are all electoral autocracies. Hence, while we do not necessarily find substantially higher proportions of allegiance meanings in more democratic countries, we find more exclusive allegiance meanings in societies where democratic norms are less pronounced. This indicates that

viewing voting as a way to express allegiance to the political system is not necessarily something that easily connects to other definitions of voting and implies that the link between levels of democracy and allegiance meanings of voting is more nuanced than the existing literature suggests (see also Letsa 2020).

In fact, two very interesting patterns stand out: there is a strong negative correlation between allegiance and instrumental meanings in all these electoral autocracies, while the correlation is very low and non-significant in the US, Sweden, and Brazil.[3] Also, while the correlation between allegiance and anti-voting meanings is negative in these three countries, the correlations are extremely low and non-significant or close to non-significant in the electoral autocracies.[4] This suggests that the allegiance meanings mentioned in established democracies are more often expressed in combination with positive feelings compared to electoral autocracies, which seems correct, considering that citizens in these countries are likely to experience greater political stability and freedom in their political institutions. To explore this further, we also assess if the answers classified as allegiance differ substantially in qualitative terms, based on whether an allegiance meaning is mentioned in combination with other meanings or alone, but this does not seem to be the case. Regarding answers that are classified exclusively into allegiance, the three words mentioned the most in the top-ranking countries are 'voice', 'right', and 'freedom' in the US, and 'democracy', 'right', and 'voice' in Sweden. We note that these are the exact same words we find mentioned in Nigeria, Kenya, Tunisia, and Türkiye.

The picture is quite mixed when it comes to the electoral system. On the one hand, most of the countries at the top of the ranking of allegiance meanings in Figure 5.1 are proportional systems and those at the bottom are majoritarian systems. At the same time, the country ranked first is the US, a majoritarian democracy, and the country ranked last is Estonia, which has a proportional system. Eventually, it is difficult to make any claim regarding the potential effects of electoral design on allegiance meanings. Conversely, the picture on compulsory voting seems more defined, as Australia, Brazil, and Türkiye score considerably high in terms of levels of allegiance meanings, regardless of their level of democracy. This parallels findings in the existing literature, which show that mandating participation is positively correlated with pro-democracy orientations in the public, even though recent studies

[3] Pearson correlation between allegiance and instrumental meanings. Nigeria ($r = -0.27$; $p = 0.00$); Türkiye ($r = -0.25$; $p = 0.00$); Tunisia ($r = -0.23$; $p = 0.00$); Kenya ($r = -0.15$; $p = 0.00$); US ($r = -0.01$; $p = 0.62$); Sweden ($r = 0.01$; $p = 0.63$); Brazil ($r = 0.04$; $p = 0.10$).

[4] Pearson correlation between allegiance and anti-voting meanings. Nigeria ($r = -0.04$; $p = 0.20$); Türkiye ($r = -0.05$; $p = 0.02$); Tunisia ($r = -0.07$; $p = 0.01$); Kenya ($r = -0.04$; $p = 0.09$); US ($r = -0.18$; $p = 0.00$); Sweden ($r = -0.15$; $p = 0.00$); Brazil ($r = -0.22$; $p = 0.00$).

have demonstrated that not all voters respond in a similar fashion to such electoral design (for a review, see Dassonneville et al. 2023 and Singh 2018). At the very least, this result hints that compulsory voting can trigger discussions around democracy among the mass public (Singh and Roy 2018) and even eventually strengthen democracy (Engelen 2007).

Expressive meanings

We find the highest scores of expressive meanings in Estonia, followed by Italy and Hungary. These three highest-ranking countries have a proportional electoral formula; in contrast, among the countries with the lowest ranking in expressive meanings (i.e., Nigeria, Türkiye, and Kenya), two have majoritarian rules. This finding seems consistent with the literature on the psychological effects of electoral systems, which argues that citizens have more incentives to express a vote closer to their political preferences when they are guaranteed some form of political representation (e.g., Banducci et al. 1999; Blais and Carty 1991). On the contrary, the descriptive findings in terms of levels of democracy are less certain: in fact, while all three bottom-ranking countries are classified as electoral autocracies, we find both liberal democracies and electoral autocracies at the top of the ranking. In particular, Hungary has the third highest percentage of expressive meanings, followed by Tunisia and Serbia, which are also classified as electoral autocracies. In this sense, it is clear that citizens can have non-instrumental reasons for voting in electoral autocracies, as suggested by Letsa (2020) for Cameroon. Most interestingly, we compare the words appearing the most in answers classified as expressive in Estonia, the top-ranking country, known for its proportional and established democracy, and in Kenya, the bottom-ranking country, characterized by a majoritarian system and a low level of democracy. The most mentioned words in Estonia are 'casting' and 'expressing', while in Kenya they are 'choosing' and 'leadership'. This divergence in the words used suggests a notable difference in the content of the meanings of expressive voting in these two countries and further strengthens the idea that citizens in majoritarian systems, even when expressing preferences, can view voting as a choice, rather than a voicing tool. Finally, in terms of compulsory voting, we see that Brazil, Türkiye, and Australia are all in the second half of the ranking and show comparably low levels of expressive meanings of voting. This first suggests that being forced to cast a ballot does not necessarily have a direct impact on the will or capacity of (uninterested) voters to express political preferences or voice interests, as it is sometimes suggested (Engelen 2007), eventually mitigating the normative appeal of compulsory voting in this particular aspect of voting.

Ethics meanings

Regarding ethics meanings, that is, voting as a moral duty or as a legal obligation to participate, Figure 5.1 shows Sweden, Türkiye, and Estonia at the top of the ranking, while Hungary, Nigeria, and Kenya are at the bottom. The percentage of exclusive ethics meanings are low everywhere, with the exception of Serbia, Tunisia, Türkiye, and Sweden. The three lowest-ranking countries have comparatively low democracy scores, but at the same time, Sweden and Türkiye are at the top, which are the countries with respectively the highest and lowest level of democracy in our sample. We thus conclude that the level of democracy does not strictly determine the ranking for ethics meanings. Note that Reuter (2021) shows that viewing voting as a civic duty extends even to electoral autocracies. The duty to vote can exist in the absence of strong democratic norms, although in this case such a conceptualization of voting may be rooted in communal attachments instead, which seems to be the case also in the qualitative answers we receive to the open-ended questions.

Regarding the electoral formula, the evidence in Figure 5.1 suggests that ethics meanings are comparably less frequent under majoritarian than under proportional rules, given that Nigeria, Kenya, Australia, and the US are among the countries with the lowest amount of ethics meanings. To the best of our knowledge, there exists no study evaluating the relationship between electoral systems and civic duty, one of the most prominent features of ethics voting. This leaves us with only suppositions as to why there is such a negative association. For example, majoritarian systems could weaken the sense of civic duty by promoting negative campaigning, which tends to portray politics and politicians negatively, and evidence shows this can affect civic duty (Bowler and Donovan 2013). Likewise, the picture seems also quite mixed in terms of compulsory voting, with Türkiye and Brazil being quite high in the ranking of ethics meanings, but Australia appearing in the bottom half in Figure 5.1. To further explore this puzzle, we look into potential qualitative differences in the understanding of ethics between countries with compulsory voting rules and those without. In countries where voting is mandated, open-ended answers containing ethics meanings of voting tend to emphasize obligation and commitment more than duty or responsibility. This suggests that the enforcement of voting laws might shape the ethical perceptions and behaviours of citizens, highlighting a sense of civic obligation and engagement. Conversely, in countries without compulsory voting, ethical considerations might be viewed more as personal responsibilities, allowing for a broader interpretation of civic duty.

Anti-voting meanings

Finally, anti-voting meanings occur the least often in our data. The countries with the highest percentage of anti-voting meanings are Serbia, Australia, and Hungary, while the countries at the bottom in Figure 5.1 are Tunisia, Türkiye, and Nigeria. Australia is placed second in terms of anti-voting meanings held in combination but has similar scores to Italy and the US when it comes to anti-voting meanings as exclusive mentions. We delve a bit more into the qualitative evidence and the content of the answers given in order to understand the nuanced perspectives behind these scores. By analysing respondents' explanations and the context of their statements, we aim to uncover the underlying reasons for these anti-voting sentiments. When looked at in detail, respondents in Australia appear particularly keen to qualify voting as 'a waste of time' or as an 'annoyance' and this seems true in almost all liberal democracies. On the contrary, in electoral autocracies such as Hungary and Serbia, but also Nigeria and Kenya, respondents are more likely to evoke problems of 'fraud', 'rigged elections', or 'deception'. We can thus discern differences between autocratic and democratic regimes in terms of content, whereby some anti-voting meanings can relate more to a lack of trust in the system, while others are more linked to a candid dislike of the act of voting. The evidence is quite mixed both in terms of electoral rules and compulsory voting. Indeed, anti-voting meanings are high across proportional systems (Serbia, Colombia, Hungary, and Italy) and majoritarian systems (Australia), while there are also the lowest in countries with differing electoral formulas (Nigeria, Türkiye, and Sweden). Therefore, our descriptive analysis does not allow us to find consistent patterns on this dimension. This is also true when looking at compulsory voting: anti-voting meanings are both very frequent in Australia and rather scarce in Türkiye, while they are neither frequent nor scarce in Brazil.

There are four key takeaways from this section. First, while the proportion of no meanings is generally low in almost all countries, discernible patterns emerge in how meanings appear across liberal democracies and electoral autocracies: most importantly, the former group of countries tends to have more meanings overall and fewer instrumental meanings compared to the latter. Second, countries with proportional rules seem to have more expressive meanings compared to majoritarian systems, but overall, the differences are not substantial. Third, allegiance and ethics meanings seem to appear almost everywhere, regardless of a country's level of democracy. However, allegiance meanings are qualitatively different in countries with lower and higher levels of democracy and ethics meanings found in countries with

compulsory voting are content-wise distinct from ethics meanings expressed in countries with voluntary voting. Interestingly, we also find ethics meanings to be less frequent under majoritarian than under proportional rules. Finally, anti-voting meanings are the least frequent type of meaning everywhere, but they differ qualitatively, being substantially more concerned with fraud and manipulation in countries where elections suffer significantly from integrity issues compared to liberal democracies. In this latter group of countries, the anti-voting sentiments are mostly expressed in terms of waste of time.

The next section links this descriptive analysis to multilevel models to enhance the depth of our understanding. These models allow us to examine how the country-level factors interact with the meanings of voting measured at the individual level. This approach not only enriches the interpretation of the descriptive results but also facilitates the identification of mechanisms underlying the observed patterns and informs the development of more precise theoretical frameworks.

The ebb and flow of meanings of voting

The data we use in this section are individual-level data where each respondent appears as one. Our dependent variables are all binary variables measuring whether the respondent has a specific meaning of voting or not, and whether that meaning is classified in ethics, allegiance, instrumental, expressive, or anti-voting. The three key independent variables are those discussed in the previous sections: level of democracy measured via the V-Dem index of liberal democracy (Coppedge et al. 2022), compulsory voting, and the electoral system (see Table 5.1). The liberal democracy index is used as continuous variable on a 0–1 scale with 1 indicating full democracies (M = .52, SD = .24). Compulsory voting (M = .22, SD = .42) and the electoral system (M = .67, SD = .47) are operationalized as binary variables, with 1 signalling compulsory voting and 0 as proportional representation, respectively. At the individual level we control for age (M = .34, SD = .2), gender (woman, M = .51, SD = .5), education (M = .52, SD = .35), and political interest (M = .57, SD = .33), which are standard controls used in analyses on electoral participation and voting behaviour.[5] The variables age, education, and political interest are recoded to a 0–1 scale, so that all independent variables are on the same scale. Post-stratification weights on age, gender, region,

[5] The results of the multilevel models do not change significantly when we add other individual-level control variables used in Chapter 6 (urbanization, subjective income, party identification, centrism, affective polarization) and in Chapter 8 (national identity).

and education, and design weights, to account for the differing sample sizes in the countries, are applied to the data for the analysis. Running the regression models without the post-stratification and the design weights does not alter the substantial conclusions discussed below (see Table A5.3).

Despite multilevel models being susceptible to omitted variable bias on the country level and problematic when the number of upper units is small, they are still appropriate in this case since we want to explicitly test the effects of country-level variables (Elff et al. 2021). We therefore run multilevel regressions and rely on random-intercept models: we first start with empty random-intercept models to assess whether there are between-cluster differences (i.e., between-country differences) that make multilevel modelling necessary. Following Sommet and Morselli (2021), we consider the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) and the Design effect (DEFF) to assess the degree of dependence of the residuals. Across our models, the ICC ranges between .06 and .21, meaning that between 6 and 21% of the variance in our data can be explained by between-country differences; the DEFF ranges between 110.74 and 378.33, which is well above the typical threshold of DEFF < 2, indicating that the hierarchical structure of the data cannot be ignored (see Table A5.1). In a second step, we run the full multilevel models, including the country-level and individual-level independent variables and our dependent variables, as explained earlier. The results of the country-level variables are illustrated in Table 5.2; the results for the control variables appear in Table A5.2.

Starting with no meanings, Table 5.2 shows a negative relationship between no meanings of voting and level of democracy, yet with the coefficient not being statistically significant, this does not fully support our descriptive analysis. Compulsory voting also does not seem to make a difference for whether or not people hold a meaning. In contrast, having a proportional electoral system is negatively linked to no meanings compared to majoritarian systems, suggesting that a lack of viable alternatives can indeed decrease the probability to have a meaning. When it comes to the specific meanings, Table 5.2 shows a negative relation between levels of democracy and instrumental meanings, albeit only significant for exclusive instrumental meanings. This confirms the descriptive patterns and is in line with previous studies showing that citizens care more about instrumental considerations in electoral autocracies (e.g., Letsa 2020; Magaloni 2006). At the same time, having a proportional system is negatively related to 'instrumental' meanings, but again, only significant for exclusive instrumental meanings. Once more, compulsory voting does not seem to make a difference when it comes to instrumental meanings. None of the country-level variables we consider

Table 5.2 Multilevel regression results

	No Meaning	Instrumental		Allegiance		Expressive		Ethics		Anti-voting	
	(combi)	(combi)	(excl)	(combi)	(excl)	(combi)	(excl)	(combi)	(excl)	(combi)	(excl)
Democracy	−1.02	−0.24	−1.49***	0.50	−1.05	1.20*	0.93	0.87*	−0.12	1.70	1.16
	(0.67)	(0.50)	(0.43)	(0.65)	(0.63)	(0.47)	(0.64)	(0.34)	(0.71)	(0.92)	(0.82)
Ref. Majority											
Proportional	−0.87*	−0.19	−0.96***	0.46	−0.62	0.91***	0.18	1.22***	0.53	0.74	0.69
	(0.37)	(0.27)	(0.24)	(0.35)	(0.34)	(0.25)	(0.35)	(0.19)	(0.39)	(0.50)	(0.45)
Compulsory	−0.64	0.42	−0.13	0.49	0.30	−0.37	−1.15**	0.44*	0.02	0.50	0.22
	(0.40)	(0.29)	(0.26)	(0.38)	(0.37)	(0.28)	(0.38)	(0.20)	(0.42)	(0.54)	(0.48)
Constant	0.00	−0.12	0.67*	−2.30***	−1.97***	−2.66***	−2.34***	−3.79***	−3.39***	−3.13***	−2.63***
	(0.51)	(0.37)	(0.33)	(0.49)	(0.47)	(0.36)	(0.48)	(0.27)	(0.55)	(0.70)	(0.63)
Control vars	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Num.Obs.	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751
AIC	7838.9	27,326.9	19,839.4	26,029.4	10,722.0	25,004.7	11,390.3	20,688.6	5922.4	9867.6	5271.4
BIC	7911.6	27,399.6	19,912.1	26,102.1	10,794.6	25,077.4	11,463.0	20,761.3	5995.1	9940.3	5344.1

Notes: Log coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$. Results for the control variables in Table A5.2. For the electoral system, majoritarian electoral systems are the reference category. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion.

here, namely level of democracy, proportional systems, and compulsory voting, seem to matter to explain allegiance meanings, which is something we would have expected from the previous discussion in this chapter.

The picture is a bit different when looking at expressive and ethics meanings of voting. First, we find that expressive meanings and ethics meanings, when considered in combination with other meanings, are positively and statistically significantly related to the level of democracy. Regarding the electoral system, the results on expressive and ethics meanings are in line with the descriptive plots: in proportional electoral systems, citizens seem to view voting more as a way to express their preferences, as their duty, or as a responsibility. Since a feeling of duty is assumed in the academic literature to be one of the main drivers of electoral participation (e.g., Blais 2000), this latter finding provides further valuable evidence as to why studies have found lower turnout in majoritarian systems (Banducci and Karp 2009; Ladner and Milner 1999). In terms of compulsory voting, we find a negative relationship with exclusive expressive meanings and a positive relationship with ethics meanings. Put differently, we see that compulsory voting systems can hamper the expressive function of voting but encourage a sense of duty or obligation towards voting. Finally, on anti-voting meanings, it seems that they are more frequent in liberal democracies, in proportional and in compulsory voting systems, but none of the relationships are statistically significant at $p = .05$.

Given that the countries in our sample also diverge substantially in terms of economy, we re-ran our models controlling for GDP/capita (PPP, at constant 2017 international dollars), a commonly used measure of economic development. The correlation between level of democracy and GDP in our sample is Pearson $r = .64$, $p < 0.001$, in line with the literature (e.g., Baum and Lake 2003). Almost all the results can be confirmed except for the fact that the negative associations between the level of democracy and no meaning, and the level of democracy and allegiance meanings now become statistically significant. Likewise, the negative association between proportional representation and allegiance meanings is statistically significant in the set of models including GDP/capita.

The findings from the multilevel models confirm the basic results of the descriptive analysis, namely, that levels of democracy matter more for the *types*, rather than the total *amounts*, of meanings. Expressive and ethics meanings are more likely to be mentioned in liberal democracies, while exclusive instrumental meanings of voting are more common in countries with lower levels of democracy. Countries with proportional representation tend to have more meanings of voting, including more expressive and

ethics meanings, while majoritarian systems seem to have more instrumental meanings. Countries with compulsory voting have the lowest number of no meanings. However, the most significant result in this regard is the higher amount of ethics meanings in countries that mandate voting, which is coherent with our theoretical framework where ethics meanings are about voting being a social, moral, or legal obligation for citizens.

Summary and conclusion

This chapter examined whether and the extent to which citizens' conceptualizations of voting differ across the 13 countries under investigation in this book. We did so via an exploratory approach focusing on where we find more meanings and where we find less, while also looking closely at the different types of meanings. At the same time, we examine whether the meanings are held in isolation or in combination with other types of meanings. Despite the relatively low number of countries, they encompass different degrees of democracy, varying levels of compulsory voting requirements, and diverse types of electoral systems. Hence, the sample is well-suited for exploring the meanings of voting across different institutional and political contexts.

The descriptive analysis first shows that the great majority of citizens finds a meaning in voting, regardless of the democratic level of the country in which they find themselves. Put differently, even in those contexts where elections are not completely free and fair, voting is a tangible concept for citizens. This is largely in line with the field of research on the meanings of democracy (Canache 2012; Dalton et al. 2007). At the same time, our descriptive analysis shows that citizens hold slightly fewer meanings of voting in countries with mandatory voting, majority voting, and with lower levels of democracy, the only exception being Türkiye. Further, it seems that countries ranking highest in instrumental meanings of voting are characterized by a blend of majority voting and reduced democratic practices. In such contexts, voters may be more inclined to view their electoral participation as a means to achieve specific outcomes, rather than as an expression of broader democratic principles. Interestingly, we also find that voting is more associated with exclusive allegiance meanings in societies with weaker democratic norms. Proportional electoral systems, on the other hand, seem to matter more for expressive and ethics meanings, suggesting that these systems provide citizens with incentives to voice their preferences through the ballot (Banducci et al. 1999; Blais and Carty 1991) but also enhance their sense of responsibility by increasing the potential for representation. Lastly, the

proportion of anti-voting meanings is generally low in all countries, but two aspects are worth mentioning. First, we find the highest proportions of anti-voting meanings in countries facing democratic backsliding, such as Hungary and Serbia. Second, we can discern slight differences between autocratic and democratic regimes in terms of content, whereby anti-voting meanings relate much more to an honest dislike of the act of voting in liberal democracies, compared to a lack of trust in the system in electoral autocracies.

Next, the findings from the multilevel models are in line with the descriptive analysis but add important insights regarding the relative importance of the country-level factors. In line with the literature on meanings of democracy (Canache 2012; Dalton et al. 2007), we first confirm that the amount of meanings of voting are not systematically related to a country's level of democracy. That being said, our analyses nonetheless indicate that the tendency to express a preference and the probability to perceive voting as an ethical act is higher in countries with higher levels of democracy, while the opposite is true for instrumental meanings, in accordance with the literature on voting behaviour in more autocratic countries (Letsa 2020; Reuter 2021). In addition, we find that electoral systems also matter to explain meanings of voting, validating our findings from the descriptive analyses. Especially, our models indicate that citizens are less likely to view voting as a way to express a duty or a preference in majoritarian systems but, in contrast, they are more inclined to perceive voting as instrumental, corroborating, once more, an important literature on strategic voting (e.g., Cox 1997) and political representation (Anckar 1997).

The greatest difference in findings between the descriptive analysis and the multilevel models regards compulsory voting: while it seems that the proportions of anti-voting meanings are higher in countries with compulsory voting in the descriptive analysis, the models suggest only a weak relationship when controlling for other factors. Likewise, whereas the proportions of no meanings are lower in countries with compulsory voting in the descriptive analysis, the relationship is rather weak in the multilevel models. We also showed the robustness of these findings in various additional analyses.

The analysis presented in this chapter has limitations, and three are worth mentioning. First, the relatively low number of countries under investigation means that we cannot be definitive in terms of generalizability. For example, except for the US, all majoritarian systems in our sample are electoral autocracies, making it difficult to disentangle the effect of the electoral system from that of the level of democracy with the data at hand. Another important limitation concerns the purely descriptive nature of this chapter. While we firmly believe in the power of descriptive analysis (Gerring 2012), future research

should aim to incorporate more inferential methods to strengthen the findings and further investigate the relationships uncovered in this chapter and understand the mechanisms behind citizens' perceptions of voting. Finally, given the exploratory focus of this chapter, note that we did little theorizing about the underlying mechanisms driving the observed patterns, which should be addressed in subsequent studies (see also Chapter 9).

More broadly speaking, our findings underline the resilience of the concept of voting across various political contexts. This suggests that future research should delve deeper into understanding the intrinsic value of voting, even in non-democratic regimes. The strong relationship between electoral systems and the meanings citizens ascribe to voting underscores the need for comparative studies on electoral system design and its influence on political behaviour and attitudes. The nuanced findings regarding compulsory voting call for more sophisticated analyses that account for contextual variables. Researchers should investigate the conditions under which compulsory voting might either enhance or diminish the perceived legitimacy and ethical significance of voting. The higher proportions of anti-voting meanings in countries experiencing democratic backsliding compared to electoral autocracies highlight the urgent need for studies on trust in electoral processes and institutions in these contexts. In conclusion, this chapter provides a comprehensive overview of how citizens across diverse political systems conceptualize voting. It sets the stage for future research to explore the complex interplay between electoral systems, compulsory voting, and democratic norms in shaping political attitudes and behaviours and their meanings.

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6

Does Voting Have the Same Meaning for Different People?

Ming M. Boyer, María Belén Abdala, and Carolina Plescia

Introduction

Thus far, this book describes what citizen meanings of *voting* are, how we measure them, and how we can use this data to study meanings of voting. Specifically, Chapter 5 explores how these meanings differ between countries. While this macro-level approach has taught us that citizen meanings of voting depend on a country's level of democracy and (to some extent) institutional factors (e.g., electoral systems and compulsory voting), it cannot logically account for all—or even most—of the variation in citizen meanings of voting. Therefore, this chapter turns to the micro level and investigates how meanings of voting align—or not—with citizens' individual differences.

With meanings of voting, we point towards all conceptualizations of voting, which encompass citizens' views of the act, as well as the motivations to vote or not, and who to vote for. We theorize that individual differences might impact these meanings of voting through two mechanisms. First, certain groups (like male, older, and higher educated citizens) undergo more extensive and formal political socialization than others (Bos et al. 2022; Guhin et al. 2021; Wiseman et al. 2011). We focus on political socialization as defined by Merelman (1986, 279) as 'the process by which people acquire relatively enduring orientations toward politics in general and toward their own political system'. In this process of learning about politics, citizens also learn what voting means—or should mean. Therefore, through differences in political socialization, individual differences may align with meanings of voting. Second, some groups (like urban residents, partisans, and mainstream party voters) tend to enjoy better electoral representation than others (Banducci et al. 1999; Benoit 2001; Carey and Hix 2011; Kim et al. 2010).

Ming M. Boyer, María Belén Abdala, and Carolina Plescia, *Does Voting Have the Same Meaning for Different People?*.
In: *The Meanings of Voting for Citizens*. Edited by: Carolina Plescia, Oxford University Press. © Carolina Plescia (2025).
DOI: 10.1093/9780198946335.003.0006

We argue that extended underrepresentation through elections may affect the way that citizens make sense of what voting means. These mechanisms are both intertwined with broader societal imbalances between social groups, and we do not aim to disentangle them in this chapter. Rather, we study their consequences: how individual differences correlate with citizens' meanings of voting.

As individual differences, we include variables that are related to political socialization and representation. These can be divided into two categories: demographics (like gender, age, education, or urban residency) and political attitudes (like centrism, partisanship, and affective polarization). The main aim of this chapter is to investigate whether and to what extent these individual differences are empirically reflected in the meanings that citizens hold of voting itself. After a discussion of what we mean by 'meanings of voting' (see Chapter 1 for a thorough conceptualization), we first explore how differential political socialization among individuals and across groups influences the meanings of voting, followed by a discussion of how they might be affected by (lack of) electoral representation.

We find that general societal imbalances are strongly reflected in the extent to which citizens hold meanings of voting. Social and political groups that go through more extensive political socialization and/or those that are better represented in the political system more often hold a meaning of voting, are less likely to report having no meaning of voting and have fewer meanings that are averse to voting altogether. We also theorize that underrepresented groups may understand voting less as a way to make a change than groups that are well-represented through elections. However, while there are some interesting nuances between the various individual differences and meanings of voting, the general tendency is that well-represented groups hold each meaning more often than underrepresented ones. We discuss the implication of these individual differences in citizen meanings of voting for potential inequalities and barriers to political engagement in the conclusion of this chapter.

Meanings of voting

As explained in Chapter 1 of this book, we consider citizens' meanings of voting to consist of their conceptualizations of voting as well as their motivations to vote (or not) and for whom to vote. We employ a maximal definition of meanings of voting, including meanings of the act itself (a noun), the performance of the act (a verb), and the motivation behind that act.

While there are many specific meanings to be uncovered, we start by discerning those who have no meanings of voting at all. For citizens that do not hold a meaning, voting consists of having no substantive conceptualization. For citizens who do hold a meaning of voting, these meanings may be myriad. However, research investigating such meanings of voting is relatively scarce. One way of interpreting them is to distinguish between voting to support one candidate or to undermine another (Aldrich et al. 2018; Garzia and da Silva 2022). However, it is well known that voting means more to citizens than a mere contribution to a tally, for example, considering voting as a civic duty (Blais and Achen 2019; Reuter 2021) or a contribution to democracy (Downs 1957; Letsa 2020). For that reason, we discern between five specific categories of meanings of voting, four of which stem from the influential work of Riker and Ordeshook (1968).

Firstly, tracing back to rational choice theory of voting, we discern *instrumental* meanings of voting: voting as a way to reach a certain outcome. These outcomes may be directly related to the vote (e.g., winning an election, composition of parliament or government) or to a more loosely related outcome (e.g., promoting or preventing a policy or selecting (non-specific) good leaders). The vote is, above all, a mean to such ends.

In contrast, *expressive* meanings of voting stem from the insight that people view voting as a way to express identification with, preference for, or protest against a candidate, party, ideology, or policy (Campbell et al. 1960). The difference from instrumental meanings of voting is that such an expression is fulfilled at the time of the vote and unrelated to the outcome of the election, or its consequences. Rather, the value of the vote lies in the ability to express oneself.

In addition to these categories, research has shown that citizens experience voting as complying with a norm (Blais and Achen 2019). This may include voting as a personal civic (Blais 2000) or societal duty (Fowler 2006a; Fowler 2006b), an obligation (Dassonneville et al. 2023; Singh 2011), or a socially desirable act (Pizzorno and Scardino 1986). We call this adherence to an ethic of voting *ethics* meanings of voting.

The fourth category is what we call *allegiance* meanings of voting—voting to affirm one's allegiance to the political system and its institutions. This includes citizens who vote to support or defend democracy (Downs 1957) or, in democratic countries, because they have the right to do so (Beckman 2008). In autocratic countries, voting might be additionally considered a way to show satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the autocratic regime, which may include using (lack of) turnout or (blank or spoiled) ballots (Blaydes 2011b; de Miguel et al. 2015).

In addition to Riker and Ordeshook's (1968) four categories, that describe ways in which citizens assign value to voting, we discern *anti-voting* meanings. With anti-voting meanings, we understand the meanings of voting that are averse of voting itself. This aversion can be due to a perceived poor functioning of the system (e.g., voting is a farce), a perceived lack of influence (e.g., voting as inconsequential), or even as simply an unpleasant or difficult activity.

These types of meanings of voting can be absent (when citizens have no meaning of voting) or can be held in multiple combinations. They are not mutually exclusive, as citizens can—and often do—hold multiple meanings simultaneously. Moreover, as noted, we do not believe that these are the only types of meanings citizens can possess; we are open in our measurement to other types of meanings that cannot be classified into any of these categories. However, a lion's share of the meanings that we encountered can be classified into this broad categorization (see Chapter 2) and they are therefore the focus of the analysis presented here.

Even though voting can mean all of these things to citizens, we claim that they might mean something different to different groups of citizens. While some citizens primarily understand voting as a way to reach a certain outcome, others might see voting as a combination of an expression of their beliefs and a way to support democracy. We theorize that this might be due to two related processes. The first entails the way that citizens learn about politics and voting, and the second relates to citizens' experiences with elections and the votes that they have cast in the past—or their outlook to future votes.

Learning what voting means

Citizens start learning about politics as children and continue to do so as young adults. *Political socialization* is the development of increasingly complex ideas about politics as citizens age and are exposed to political topics (Hyman 1959). Neundorf and Smets (2017) discuss two mechanisms of political socialization. The first mechanism is very much related to the idea that, starting in early childhood, socialization processes lead to political predispositions fundamental in a person's belief system later in life (Zaller 1992). This is not to imply that new information is disregarded, but rather that this new information later in life will be stored within our set of beliefs and values gathered during these socialization processes. Fundamental agents of such mechanism of socialization are primarily teachers, parents, and peers (Durmuşoğlu et al. 2023; Hatemi and Ojeda 2021; Wanders et al. 2021).

The second mechanism of political socialization is the concept of habit formation, which has primarily been studied in relation to individual voter turnout—essentially, that individuals develop the habit of voting (or not) early in their adult life, and this early behaviour (a sort of political learning process) tends to predict their future behaviour (e.g., Dinas 2014; Green and Shachar 2000). Political socialization has important consequences for citizens' political minds in adulthood as it shapes the associations between everyday life and political decision making, as well as the conceptualizations of important points of view in political life (Bos et al. 2022; Gidengil et al. 2016; 2021; Guhin et al. 2021; Wiseman et al. 2011). As such, it is likely that political socialization affects citizens' conceptualizations of voting. In other words, citizens develop and learn what voting means through the same process through which they learn about other political concepts. We can make use of previous knowledge on political socialization to form expectations of which groups may hold more or fewer meanings of voting.

Particular attention has been devoted to the role of education, especially within the socialization processes starting in early childhood that shape political predispositions fundamental to a person's belief system later in life. Education is itself highly correlated with political knowledge, interest, and participation. Although extensively debated in the existing literature, it is suggested that these relationships exist because education acts as a proxy for social class or cognitive ability, or because it serves as a sorting mechanism that divides the population into higher and lower statuses (Campbell 2009; Denny and Doyle 2008; Neundorf and Smets 2017). Moreover, girls seem to be socialized to view politics not only as male-dominated, but also as more appropriate for men than women (Bos et al. 2022). Within this concept of *gendered political socialization*, children tend to develop a view of the political world and come to understand that it is male-dominated and characterized by masculinity (Cassese et al. 2014; Lay et al. 2021). As such, it seems logical to expect that gender and education may affect citizen meanings of voting through differences in political socialization.

Aligned more with the second perspective on political socialization is the concept of political learning with age and social context. Political learning with age refers to the process by which individuals acquire political knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours over the course of their lives (e.g., Dinas 2014; Green and Shachar 2000). As people age, they are exposed to various political experiences and social influences that shape their understanding of and engagement with the political world. This lifelong process can lead to increased political knowledge, interest, and civic attachment in older age (Jankowski and Strate 1995; Strate et al. 1989) but also to changes in political

perspectives (also known as cohort effect; see Neundorf and Smets 2017). Moreover, the social context in which one is brought up may impact political socialization considerably, which may include (but is not limited to) whether one lives in a rural or urban area (Percheron 1982). As such, citizens tend to be politically socialized more thoroughly in urban areas (Masood and Adnan 2021). Therefore, if meanings of voting are shaped through this process of socialization, age and urban residency should have an important impact on citizens' meanings of voting.

Certainly, the historical backdrop in which individuals mature plays a crucial role and shapes their political attitudes and behaviours (Heyne 2019; Voicu and Bartolome Peral 2014). In fact, individuals who reach maturity in a democratic environment or encounter factors fostering democratic attitudes in their pre-adult years are more inclined to endorse democracy (Mishler and Rose 2007; Sears and Valentino 1997). This is in line with Rohrschneider's (1999) *logic of learning* theory, which suggests that democratic ideas and values are indeed 'learned' from democratic experience. These studies emphasize the necessity of controlling for the level of democracy when analysing the relation between age and meanings of voting. This expectation is exacerbated by the robust finding that these descriptive variables, like age (Geys et al. 2022), education (Gallego 2010), gender (Inglehart and Norris 2000; Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006), and living in a rural area (Johnson and Scala 2021; McKee 2008), relate to citizens' voting behaviour. As such, it seems probable that variables like age, gender, and education may affect citizen meanings of voting through differences in political socialization.

To sum up, from the literature about political socialization we can distil several expectations about individual differences in meanings of voting. Due to differences in political socialization, we expect younger citizens, women, less-educated citizens, and citizens in rural areas to have fewer meanings of voting than older citizens, men, citizens with greater levels of education, and citizens in urban areas, respectively. However, due to the lack of knowledge about *which* meanings of voting individuals develop through different stages of political socialization (and through which channels), it is more difficult to say how differences in socialization affect specific meanings in which specific contexts.

Grasping the significance of voting via representation

Above and beyond citizens' socialization into politics through their parents, education, and peers, lived experiences with representation may influence

meanings of voting. While the socialization perspective treats citizens as relatively passive in the formation of political attitudes (Guhin et al. 2021), citizens might also actively influence their meanings of voting in the relatively short term due to their experiences with politics in general, and representation in particular.

The patterns of (under)representation closely mirror those of political socialization. Firstly, while in many countries women are equally (or sometimes even more) likely than men to vote, they are underrepresented in parliaments and governments around the globe (Paxton et al. 2007). This likely has to do with their underrepresentation as choices on ballots to begin with (Lawless and Pearson 2008). Recently, gender representation has become politicized in certain countries—as depicted by the incline in female officeholders for the Democratic party and a decline for the Republican party in the United States (US) (Sanbonmatsu 2020). Similarly, younger voters also face severe underrepresentation in parliaments, cabinets, and candidacies (Stockemer and Sundström 2018; 2022). Very little is known about the descriptive representation of rural citizens in contemporary political institutions, and malapportionment often leads to more electoral weight being addressed to rural area votes in the electoral process (Boone and Wahman 2015; García del Horno et al. 2023). However, more than their urban counterparts, rural citizens feel as if their votes do not matter—even (but less strongly) when their votes are appointed more weight (García del Horno et al. 2023). As such, rural voters tend to be less satisfied with democracy (Lago 2022). Finally, working-class citizens are also underrepresented through the electoral process (Best 2007). Crucially, while this has long been thought to lack translation into policy, more recent research shows that the descriptive underrepresentation of the working class also translates into substantive underrepresentation (Carnes and Lupu 2015). Regardless of class identity, citizens in concentrated poorer areas are represented less well than those in concentrated affluent areas (Flavin and Franko 2020). The prolonged (real or perceived) electoral underrepresentation is expected to affect the way citizens make sense of what voting means—in other words, their *meanings* of voting.

Again, the likelihood that we might find differences in meanings of voting is underlined by differences in voting patterns for such groups, in relation to their overrepresented counterparts (Smets and van Ham 2013). Beyond the differences between gender and age groups, as well as the role of rural or urban residency, the turnout gap between age groups is driven by a lack of descriptive representation of young people (Angelucci et al. 2024). Moreover, income or socio-economic status also influences voting—albeit mostly

subjective class position or subjective marginalization drives voters towards the radical left and right (Bolet 2023; Sosnaud et al. 2013). However, actual wealth additionally affects voting, such that wealthier voters vote more, and vote more conservatively (Nadeau et al. 2019).

Patterns of (under)representation may influence meanings of voting, although it is difficult to theorize the direction. For example, experience with a lack of electoral representation may mean that these groups have experienced or witnessed repeated disappointments through voting. In time, members of such groups may stop counting on any kind of outcome resulting from their votes, and the outcome of the vote becomes of less importance. Structural disparities in material (e.g., money and time) and psychological (e.g., political interest and partisanship) resources are traditionally associated with a decrease in voter turnout among underrepresented and/or minority groups (Brady et al. 1995). This could also be translated into their meanings of voting. In other words, people who feel (or are) underrepresented may hold fewer meanings overall and fewer instrumental meanings of voting in the specific.

Nonetheless, some underrepresented groups exhibit higher participation rates than one would predict on the basis of their resources alone (Smets and van Ham 2013). Citizens who are—or feel—underrepresented might instead vote simply because they feel that they should (ethics meaning), place more importance in supporting democracy (allegiance meanings), or vote simply to express themselves (expressive meanings). Indeed, women value those democratic institutions that minimize, rather than maximize, their underrepresentation (Hansen and Goenaga 2021). Previous works argue that underrepresented groups have more to gain from participating than better represented groups (Turnbull-Dugarte and Townsley 2020). They are often expected to vote as if their rights depended on it, to maximize or protect their own personal welfare and that of their group (Cho et al. 2006; Pantoja et al. 2001). Yet, in the most severe cases, citizens might also form anti-voting meanings when they experience underrepresentation, which may increase their perceived distance from political institutions and actors.

However, not only descriptive social groups experience differences in electoral representation. Certain political *ideas* are also represented better than others. For instance, more extreme ideas are represented less through elections (Plane and Gershtenson 2004). Therefore, the expectation is that supporters of fringe parties or ideologies have a different view on voting than those in the mainstream: that is, when the party you support is unlikely to hold office, an instrumental meaning of voting might be less likely, while expressive meanings of voting could be more important. In political systems

where parties are the vehicles of representation through voting, the same might be true for those who identify less strongly with a political party. In political systems where parties are the vehicles of representation through voting, those who do not identify with them should feel less represented than those who do. To take this one step further, elections also allow for a certain 'negative representation', that is, feeling *more* represented when parties one disagrees with fare badly. This suggests that people's perception of representation extends beyond merely supporting the party or candidate of their choice. It can also involve feeling represented by the exclusion or underperformance of their political adversaries. As such, citizens who are strongly affectively polarized—who have a strong disdain towards one or more outgroup parties (Iyengar et al. 2012)—might experience representation differently than those who do not, possibly altering their meanings of voting.

Again, these individual differences are also visible in citizens' voting behaviour. Partisanship is one of the most important predictors of voting behaviour known to scholars today (Bartels 2000; Moral 2017), especially in low-information environments (Peterson 2017). Indeed, affective polarization influences both democratic attitudes and voting behaviour (Wagner 2021). While citizens with access to much information are both ideologically extreme and likely to turn out to vote (Palfrey and Poole 1987), ideologically extreme citizens are also often unrepresented by vote options and therefore less likely to vote (Lefkofridi et al. 2014; Plane and Gershtenson 2004). Electoral representation—either descriptively or substantially—might thus change citizens' meanings of voting and shape the individual differences we see in society.

Summing up, we can distil several expectations about individual differences in meanings of voting—in addition to those based on political socialization (see Table 6.1). Due to a (perceived) lack of electoral representation, we expect women, younger citizens, less-educated citizens, rural citizens, and citizens with a lower income to have more anti-voting meanings and fewer instrumental meanings of voting. The same is expected of independents (compared to partisans and leaners), citizens with less affective polarization and citizens with more extreme ideologies.

Method and analysis

This chapter presents citizen meanings of voting divided over different attributes of the citizens that hold them. As explained in Chapter 2 and

Table 6.1 Expectations based on the literature on socialization and representation

	Younger citizens Women Lower educated Rural areas	Lower income Independents Less affective polarization More extreme ideologies
Mechanism	Socialization Underrepresentation	— Underrepresentation
Meanings of voting	Fewer meanings of voting More anti-voting meanings Fewer instrumental meanings	— More anti-voting meanings Fewer instrumental meanings

Chapter 3 of this book, we leverage on individual-level original data collected in 13 countries with national legislative elections between March 2022 and May 2023: Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Kenya, Nigeria, Serbia, Sweden, Tunisia, Türkiye, and the United States (US). The sample consists of 25,317 participants, spans across five continents, and includes countries with different levels and durations of democracy and different political systems. Including both liberal democracies and electoral autocracies creates the additional advantage of being able to study the extent to which our findings hold in both contexts. Within each country, the samples are descriptively representative of the population on age, gender, region, and to some extent education. For the main analyses of this paper, we exclude those participants that only answered 'don't know' or gibberish answers in the open-ended field that forms the basis of our measure of citizen meanings of voting, resulting in a sample of N = 23,933. When analysing individual differences in the specific meanings of voting, we only consider those who mentioned at least one meaning of voting in their open-ended field (N = 23,023).

Importantly, due to the survey design and inclusion of many variables in the models, the dataset includes some missing values. Firstly, this is because certain variables were not measured in each country (see Table 6.2, column *Imputed Country*). Secondly, this is due to most variables offering participants the possibility to respond with 'don't know' or 'refused' (see Table 6.2, column *Imputed Missing*). While the 'don't know' and 'refused' options allow us to avoid the problem of including invalid answers in our sample, the disadvantage is that we must manage the missing values in these countries and for these variables. To do this, we engage in conservative data imputation. For the missing data within each country, we have imputed the data with the

Table 6.2 Descriptive statistics individual differences

Variable	N	M/%	SD	Imputed Country	Imputed Missing
Age	25,308	43.79	16.71		9
Gender (male)	25,227	0.51	0.50		90
Education	25,317				
... Low	6094	24.07%			
... Middle	12,538	49.52%			
... High	6685	26.41%			
Urban residency	21,491	3.39	1.44	3826 (Hungary)	
Income (subjective)	20,437	2.52	0.95	4030 (US)	850
Partisanship	22,400				2917
... Independents	7337	32.75%			
... Leaners	2919	13.03%			
... Partisans	12,144	54.21%			
Ideological centrism	22,119	2.70	1.90		3198
Affective polarization	24,721	2.17	1.40		596

Note: N: number of respondents. M: mean. SD: Standard deviation. Imputed missing: Missing values due to participants who answered 'other', 'don't know', 'refused', or reported an invalid date of birth.

mean score of that variable of the valid participants within that country. For the variables that are missing in an entire country, we have imputed the missing values with the mean score over all valid participants. This conservative approach to data imputation is more likely to underestimate (than overestimate) correlations, warranting the correlations described later on unlikely to be false-positive results due to data imputation. To be sure that our results do not depend on this data imputation, we re-run all models without imputed values, as we discuss in the analysis strategy.

Measurement—meanings of voting

The measurement of meanings of voting is described in-depth in Chapter 2 of this book. We rely on two types of measurement. The first, of which we present the results in the main text of this chapter, is based on participants' answers to the open question 'What does "voting" mean to you?', followed by two prompts to gauge their additional meanings of voting. These open answers were divided into chunks and coded (such that each chunk contains exactly only one 'message') to include an ethics, allegiance, expressive, instrumental, anti-voting, or broad meaning of voting. Broad meanings of voting

are those answers that signal importance of voting, but cannot be categorized into one of the categories, such as 'important'. Each chunk can belong to only one category, but respondents can have multiple chunks in multiple meaning categories simultaneously. In other words, one can hold none, one, or several at the same time. Having no meaning represents about 3.6% of respondents in our sample, while about 90.9% report at least one meaning.[1] Within the respondents with a meaning of voting, we recoded our data so that for each participant a (type of) meaning is either present or absent, leading to five binary variables for (i) ethics (22.4%), (ii) allegiance (48.3%), (iii) expressive (36.8%), (iv) instrumental (61.4%) and (v) anti-voting (7.7%) meanings. Note that these meanings of voting are not mutually exclusive, as participants could give multiple meanings in their open-ended responses.

Chapter 4 explained how we also used closed-ended questions to gauge citizens' meanings of voting. Leveraging on a series of 22 closed-ended items on a scale from 0 to 10, we created six comparable variables through the mean scores of several items per category (no meaning, ethics, allegiance, expressive, instrumental, and anti-voting meaning). No meaning is considered a low score on all items. These continuous variables are used to validate the results based on the open-ended questions. The descriptive statistics for the closed-ended items can be found in Table A6.1.

Measurement—individual differences

All descriptive statistics of citizens' individual differences appear in Table 6.2. Each variable is measured using closed-ended items, except for participants' age, which was measured through an open field in which they noted their date of birth. This led to nine invalid answers in the date of birth question. In this cross-sectional analysis, we focus on age, rather than cohort, effects because our expectations are related to socialization over an individual's life span, as well as citizens' representation in parliaments in terms of age, rather than cohort differences. In countries where it is relatively safe to identify outside of the male/female gender binary (all countries except Kenya, Nigeria, and Tunisia), participants had the option to choose 'other' in addition to male, female, or 'prefer not to say'. Due to their low prevalence, these cases (N = 52; 0.21%) are considered missing in the analyses, as are those who preferred not to answer (N = 38; 0.15%). We used the International Standard Classification of Education scales (ISCED) as the basis for the education measure, which was adapted for each country's education system. The answers are

[1] Note that participants that reported that they don't know or reported gibberish answers (5.5%) are excluded from analysis, as they can be assigned neither to the meaning nor the no-meaning category.

recoded such that anything below 'finished secondary school' is considered low education, 'between secondary school and a university degree' is considered middle education, and 'university degree or higher' is considered high education. Urban residency is measured on a five-point scale from 'village' (1) through to 'large city' (5). In the countries in which we collected data face to face, this question is answered by the interviewer. Participants' subjective income is measured on a four-point scale from 'finding it very difficult on present income' (1) through 'living comfortably on present income' (4) (Plescia et al. 2025).[2]

Partisanship is measured through two questions. First, we asked whether participants feel close to a particular political party (coded as 'partisans'). If they didn't, we asked whether they feel a little closer to one party than the others (coded as 'leaners'). If participants answered both questions with 'no', they are considered independents. As the opposite of ideological extremism, centrism is measured with an 11-point left-to-right self-placement item, where the final measure is the inverted absolute distance to the middle score, i.e., a score of 0 means an extreme ideology and a score of 5 is equal to the centre of the original left–right scale. Finally, affective polarization is measured using like/dislike ratings of the five or six most important political parties. Following Wagner's (2021) method, it is measured as the mean distance to the average affect towards political parties. This method creates a measure for the average difference in liking various parties that can be employed for both two-party and multi-party systems.

Analysis strategy

We present the analyses of citizens' meanings of voting in two steps. First, we investigate citizens' demographics, including age, gender, education, the urbanization of their place of residence, and their subjective income. After that, we turn to the relation between meanings of voting and political attitudes, which consist of analyses investigating partisan identification, ideological extremism, and affective polarization—while controlling for citizens' demographics. We investigate citizens' demographics without their political attitudes included because these attitudes may be correlated with both citizens' demographics and their meanings of voting; therefore, these attitudes may obscure individual differences in meanings of voting that are present in society.

[2] In most countries we also asked our respondents about their objective income in local currency. However, this variable suffers from extreme low response rate and so we do not use it in this chapter.

All significance tests are the result of logistic regression models, with the individual differences predicting each meaning of voting while controlling for a dummy variable for each country. This strategy ensures that we investigate the effects within each country while avoiding confounding by country-level differences in meanings of voting or any of the variables under study. However, it is less vulnerable to omitted variable bias on the country level than multi-level modelling with such a relatively small sample (Möhring 2012). All models are weighted based on both descriptive factors within countries (correcting for deviations from the population in terms of age, gender, education, area), as well as design factors between countries (correcting for differences in sample size per country). As discussed, we present models that use a conservative imputation of missing values. All non-binary variables are standardized to enable comparison of the effect sizes across predictors. Due to the large number of analyses, we present the regression table only in Table A6.2 and rely on a visual representation of the relevant data in this chapter.

To check for the robustness of our design choices, we also include in the Appendix (a) analyses using closed-ended measures for meanings of voting (Table A6.3), (b) unweighted analyses (Table A6.4), and (c) analyses without data imputation (Table A6.5). In addition, we include in the Appendix (d) subgroup analyses of liberal democracies (Table A6.6) and electoral autocracies (Table A6.7) to deal with important system differences in what voting means, and (e) analyses controlled for the number of chunks in each answer to correct for the length and complexity of participants' answers (Table A6.8). For most variables, the robustness checks show no structural deviations from the main analysis presented in this chapter. However, when it does, we discuss those differences in the main text and refer to the analysis in the Appendix.

Results

Starting with our socialization expectations, we expected that older citizens, men, and highly educated citizens have more meanings of voting than younger citizens, women, and less-educated citizens, respectively. These results are convincingly confirmed (Table A6.2, Figure 6.1—upper left pane), although the relation between gender and having a meaning of voting is only significant in liberal democracies and not in electoral autocracies (Tables A6.6 and A6.7). Similarly, we find a positive relation between urban residency

and having a meaning in democracies, but not in electoral autocracies. Subjective income does not seem to be related to whether or not citizens have a meaning of voting.

Turning to the political attitudes, we find significant relationships between partisanship, centrism, and affective polarization and the probability of having a meaning of voting (Table A6.2, Figure 6.2—upper left pane). However, the relation with partisanship seems stronger and with less variation in electoral autocracies, compared to democracies—the correlation of having a meaning and leaners (vs independents) is not even significant in liberal democracies (Tables A6.6 and A6.7). Additionally, there is only a correlation of centrism and having a meaning in electoral autocracies, while the effect of affective polarization is stronger in democracies, although it is present in both cases.

We also expected that groups that are less well-represented through elections hold more anti-voting meanings. Looking at Figures 6.1 and 6.2 (bottom right pane, Table A6.2), we can establish that, indeed, all the underrepresented groups discussed hold anti-voting meanings more often than their well-represented counterparts. Again, in some cases, this is dependent on the level of democracy. The relationship of anti-voting meanings with education and urban residency is only present in liberal democracies and not in electoral autocracies, and vice versa, as regards the relationship of anti-voting meanings with age (Tables A6.6 and A6.7).

We expected that instrumental meanings would be stronger among the well-represented than those who are less represented. Although we find evidence for this claim overall (Table A6.2, Figures 6.1 and 6.2—middle right pane), there is no significant relation for gender and leaners, and even a negative correlation for subjective income (in electoral autocracies; Table A6.7). In addition, the relations of age and higher education are only significant in electoral democracies and those of urban residency and centrism in electoral democracies. This relationship thus seems somewhat dependent on the level of democracy.

We find significant relations of all demographic variables with ethics meanings of voting—except for gender and urban residency (Table A6.2, Figure 6.1—upper right pane). In addition, there are significant correlations of the political attitudes with ethics meanings of voting (Figure 6.2—upper right pane). However, the relation of centrism is only significant in electoral democracies (Table A6.7) and the relation of affective polarization is only significant in liberal democracies (Table A6.6). Overall, representation seems to be related to ethics meanings of voting, although urban residency and gender

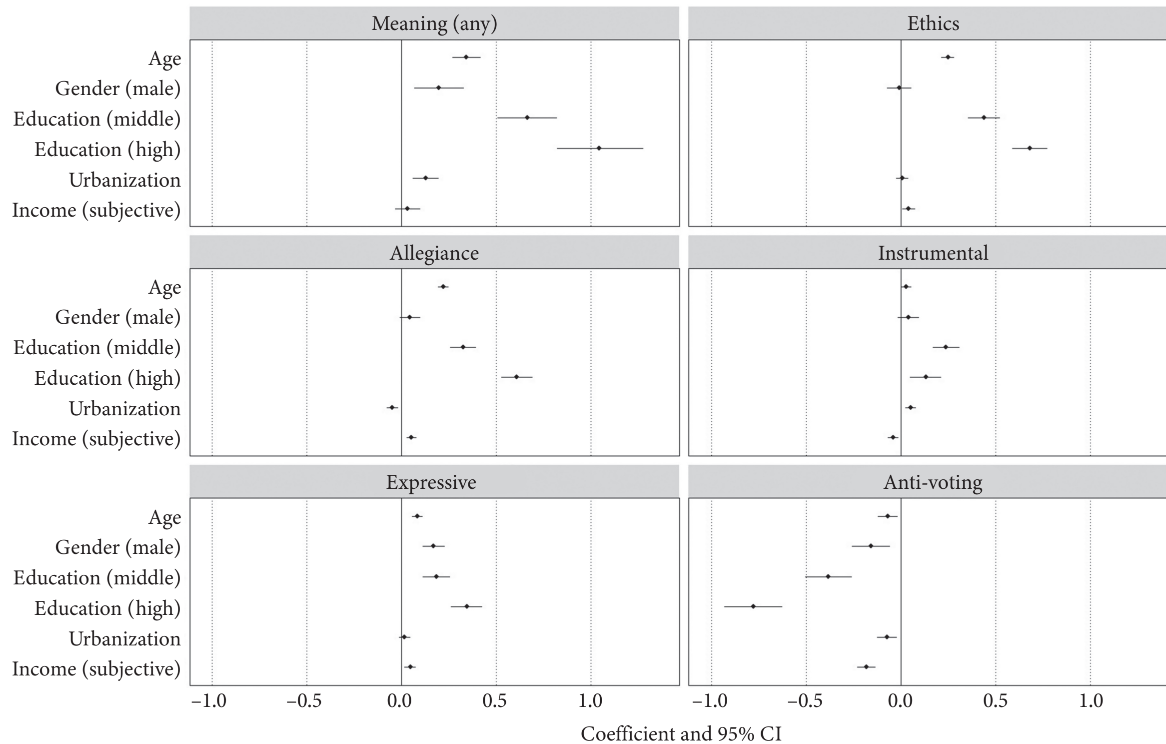

Figure 6.1 Relation between meanings of voting and demographic variables (with 95% confidence intervals).
Note: Full results in Table A6.2.

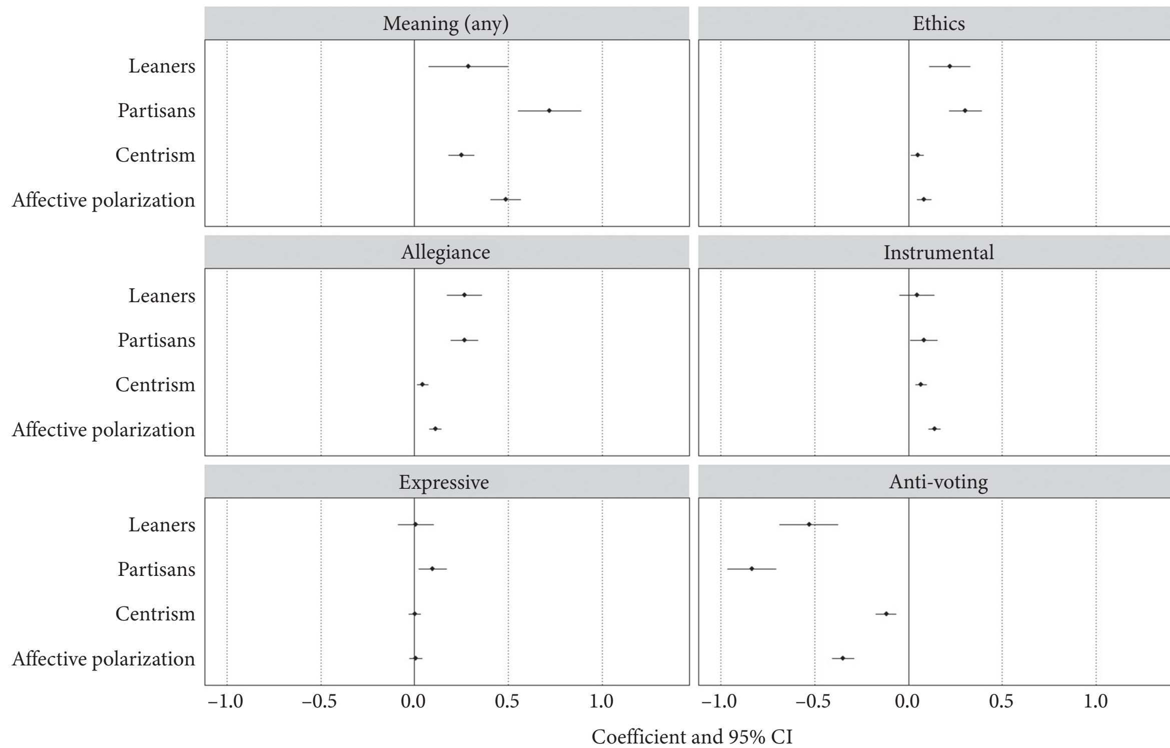

Figure 6.2 Relation between meanings of voting and political attitudes (with 95% confidence intervals).

Note: Full results in Table A6.2.

are exceptions, and the effects of centrism and affective polarization depend on the level of democracy.

The overall findings for allegiance meanings of voting are similar to those of ethics meanings (Table A6.2, Figures 6.1 and 6.2, middle left pane). We find significant positive correlations for all variables, except gender (no correlation) and urban residency (negative correlation). However, in democracies gender does seem to be related with allegiance meanings, and the negative relation between urban residency and allegiance meanings is only present in electoral autocracies (Tables A6.6 and A6.7). Moreover, centrism and affective polarization are only related to allegiance meanings in liberal democracies and not in electoral autocracies.

Finally, expressive meanings seem to be related mostly with descriptive variables (Table A6.2, Figure 6.1—lower left pane), and less with political attitudes (Figure 6.2—lower left pane). Indeed, there are significant relations of expressive meanings of voting with age, gender, education, and subjective income, regardless of the level of democracy. Only urban residency is not related with expressive meanings of voting. Looking at political attitudes, the only significant relation with expressive meanings of voting (partisans vs independents) is only significant in electoral autocracies and not in democracies (Tables A6.6 and A6.7). Expressive meanings of voting thus seem mostly related to citizens' demographics.

The robustness checks in Tables A6.3, A6.4, A6.5, and A6.8 corroborate the findings discussed here, with a few notable exceptions concerning the closed-ended scale for meanings of voting. First, using the closed-ended measure of meanings of voting shows a positive relation between gender and ethics and allegiance meanings of voting, and a negative with instrumental meanings of voting. Some unexpected negative relations that we find using the open-ended measure are not corroborated with the closed-ended scale. Unexpectedly, the closed-ended scale is always negatively related with centrism. And finally, there are significant relations of leaners (vs independents) using the closed-ended scales for instrumental and expressive meanings of voting.

Discussion of findings

To explore the individual differences in citizens' meanings of voting, we examined the relation of each meaning of voting with citizens' descriptive characteristics and political attitudes. The results show a very clear pattern

in the tendency for those who undergo the most thorough political socialization, and those who are well-represented through elections, to have more meanings of voting than those who are underrepresented. As many of these groups are also less inclined to go out and vote (Gallego 2010; Inglehart and Norris 2017; Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006; Smets and van Ham 2013), these patterns in citizens' meanings of voting may be both a cause and a consequence of this relationship.

Turning to the more specific meanings of voting, we can add some nuance to these rather uniform findings. Indeed, it seems as though the specific meanings that drive them depend on specific demographic characteristics. Firstly, for older voters, the higher likelihood of holding a meaning of voting seems to be driven more by differences in ethics and allegiance meanings than instrumental and expressive meanings. This could be related to older citizens being more habitual voters and their current higher levels of turnout compared to younger citizens (Smets 2012). However, in industrialized societies this may be a generational effect as well, where younger cohorts of voters are socialized in a system that values self-expression more than material goods (Abramson and Inglehart 1987). The same is true for highly educated citizens. In contrast, there is no difference between men and women in ethics or allegiance meanings of voting, a particularly interesting finding considering current discussions in the literature about whether women are more dutiful than men (Galais and Blais 2019). Instead, the difference between men and women seems to be driven mostly by men holding more expressive meanings of voting, and fewer anti-voting meanings.

The relation between meanings of voting and political attitudes is also driven, to varying extents, by different specific meanings. First, partisanship, centrism, and affective polarization are positively related to ethics, allegiance, and instrumental meanings of voting and negatively correlated with anti-voting meanings. However, expressive meanings of voting seem largely unrelated to citizens' political attitudes. This is surprising considering that expressive accounts of voting were initially linked to identification with candidates or parties (Schuessler 2000). This finding might indicate that, in contrast to the other meanings of voting under study, expressive meanings are more strongly related to socialization processes that differ between demographic groups (Bos et al. 2022; Guhin et al. 2021) than to representation.

In some cases, the relationship between individual differences and meanings of voting are quite different in liberal democracies and electoral autocracies. While the topic of differences between regime types is mostly covered in Chapter 5, we do find that older citizens hold fewer anti-voting meanings

in electoral autocracies and not in liberal democracies. Conversely, education and urban residency are negatively correlated with anti-voting meanings in democracies, but not autocracies. Instrumental meanings also differ relatively strongly, as they are driven by age and education in democracies, but by urban residency and income (negatively) in autocracies. This finding is particularly relevant, as previous research on electoral autocracies often links voter turnout to material gains (Blaydes 2006). The argument is that individuals, especially those in low-income communities, vote to support or punish ruling parties based on whether they offer patronage or clientelist access to the regime (Blaydes 2011a; Lust-Okar 2006; Magaloni 2006). This explanation, which highlights instrumental meanings of voting, has been the central approach to understanding the political behaviour of (low-income) voters in autocracies compared to those of liberal democracies. In addition, we find that affective polarization is related to ethics, allegiance, and instrumental meanings in democracies, but not as strongly in autocracies. This evidence supports as well newer literature on turnout in autocracies that focuses on non-economic reasons for voting, including feeling patriotism (allegiance) and civic duty (ethics) as key motivations to vote (Letsa 2020; Reuter 2021). Instead, centrism is related to ethics and instrumental meanings in autocracies, but to allegiance meanings in democracies. This may be related to the finding that, in autocratic countries, voting might be a way to show satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the autocratic regime (Blaydes 2011b; de Miguel et al. 2015). And, finally, the relationship between partisans and expressive voting seems to be driven by citizens in autocracies, rather than democracies. Since partisanship in electoral autocracies is mostly defined in terms of incumbent and opposition supporters (Jöst et al. 2022), expressive voting may become more prevalent (and substantially important) under electoral autocracies than under democratic rule. All in all, the differences in voting meanings between liberal democracies and electoral autocracies appear to be strongly linked to the specific characteristics of each type of political regime. In particular, different levels of political competition and the nature of the relationship between citizens and the regime significantly shape the processes of socialization and political representation.

Summary and conclusion

This chapter discussed important individual differences in citizens' meanings of voting, relating to their descriptive characteristics and political attitudes. The individual differences regarding descriptive characteristics reflect

societal imbalances. In general, underrepresented groups hold fewer meanings of voting (of each kind of meaning) and more anti-voting meanings than well-represented groups. As expected, some differences occur between liberal democracies and electoral autocracies, yet the overall pattern holds true across the board.

These compelling findings are not unaffected by certain limitations of this study. Firstly, while the findings that we describe are important and valid overall, this analysis does not consider the variability of these effects between the specific countries in this study—beyond their level of democracy. Country differences in meanings of voting can be found in Chapter 5, but the relation between individual differences and meanings of voting may differ between countries as well. Moreover, while it includes a comparatively broad selection of countries in terms of electoral system, strength and duration of democracy, and geographical location, the generalizability of the findings to other countries is limited—especially to autocratic countries that do not hold elections. Finally, the compelling correlations found in this chapter are not to be confused with causal effects. Chapter 7 discusses causal analysis regarding citizens' meanings of voting.

Still, this crucial step in understanding citizens' relation to voting opens a multitude of research avenues for those searching to understand democracy from a citizens' perspective and may contribute to healthy democracies around the world.

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PART III

MEANINGS OF VOTING AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

7

The Empirical Consequences

How do meanings of voting affect citizens' political behaviour?

Anna Lia Brunetti, Ming M. Boyer, and Carolina Plescia

Introduction

An overwhelming amount of evidence points towards a substantial decline of political participation and in particular voter turnout across a variety of countries (e.g., Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Kostelka and Blais 2021; Wattenberg 2022). One argument is that declining rates of turnout across the globe are a consequence of eroding trust in and perceived legitimacy of political institutions (e.g., Hooghe and Kern 2017; Kostelka and Blais 2021). A series of contending arguments are far less pessimistic and see declining levels of electoral participation as a sign that citizens, especially younger cohorts, may simply participate in politics in a different manner (Dalton 2008, 2013; Zukin 2006) or as empirical evidence that the electorate is rather content with the way things are going (Jackman 1987; Kostelka and Blais 2018; Lipset 1960, 217). This latter point relates to studies that empirically show how, over time, citizens' increasing satisfaction with democracy is related to decreasing levels of turnout, in the sense that satisfaction can also hamper the demand for change in citizens (Ezrow and Xezonakis 2016). Vice versa, citizens' 'disenchantment' with the political system could also have a mobilizing effect on electoral participation (Pacek et al. 2009).

This chapter examines more closely what voting actually means to ordinary citizens by asking them directly. We propose a nuanced examination of the link between the meanings of voting and electoral participation, and also between the meanings of voting and other avenues for civic engagement, for example, working for a political party or participating in protest activities. Since citizen political involvement is key for the resilience of democratic institutions and for the legitimacy that such institutions enjoy

Anna Lia Brunetti, Ming M. Boyer, and Carolina Plescia, *The Empirical Consequences*. In: *The Meanings of Voting for Citizens.* Edited by: Carolina Plescia, Oxford University Press. © Carolina Plescia (2025).
DOI: 10.1093/9780198946335.003.0007

(Norris 2014), the link between the meanings of voting and different forms of political participation is essential for the resilience of contemporary democracies.

We present and test three main arguments. The first argument highlights turnout or abstention in elections being closely tied to the meaning(s) an individual associates with voting. For example, viewing voting as a duty, a right, a means to influence public policy, or an expression of liking or disliking certain candidates makes it worthwhile to vote and, hence, is positively related to voter turnout. The second argument suggests that these conceptualizations of voting extend to higher propensities not just for voting, but also for engaging in other political actions, thus demonstrating the link between various forms of political involvement. This is because the motives behind voting and other forms of participation often stem from similar underlying factors, such as ideological alignment, perceived efficacy, and societal values (Griffin and Newman 2005; Schlozman et al. 2012). The third argument is an important qualification to the first two and emphasizes a critical distinction between *anti-voting* meanings, other meanings of voting, and a complete absence of meaning. Those with an anti-voting meaning feel disillusioned or unhappy about voting so they are unlikely to vote; however, they may still feel compelled to express their opinions or discontent through non-electoral channels, known as the *voice route* (Portos et al. 2020). Conversely, individuals lacking any meaning of voting are less inclined to participate in any political activities due to their overall lack of orientation towards politics, referred to as the *exit route* (Portos et al. 2020).

To test our arguments, we rely on survey data collected in eight countries—Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Hungary, Italy, Serbia, Sweden, and the United States (US). While the book covers five additional countries (i.e., Estonia, Kenya, Nigeria, Tunisia, and Türkiye), in this chapter we can only include the countries where the module on political participation was included in the survey. We examine the relation between meanings of voting and political participation relying on two kinds of measures: electoral and non-electoral participation. While electoral participation focuses on voting, non-electoral participation encompasses a variety of other forms of political participation, such as contacting officials, working for a party, wearing a badge, signing a petition, protesting, and online engagement.

The findings from this chapter integrate the existing literature on political behaviour and its link with citizen perceptions towards participation and politics. We find that meanings of voting are linked to the political behaviour of ordinary citizens, both in the electoral and non-electoral sphere. Finding a meaning in voting is positively linked to both electoral and non-electoral participation, while holding an anti-voting meaning leads to less engagement

in voting, but more engagement in non-electoral activities (voice route). Not finding any meaning in voting is negatively linked to all forms of political participation (exit route). These results are even stronger in electoral autocracies compared to full democracies, suggesting that meanings of voting might be even more crucial for enhancing political engagement and thus political legitimacy in countries with lower levels of democracy. We discuss the broader implications of these findings in the conclusion of this chapter.

Why and how do citizens participate in politics?

Political participation is fundamental for democratic legitimacy (e.g., Anderson et al. 2005; Dahl 1956). Because citizen involvement in politics is considered vital for the survival of democratic political systems, many academic studies have investigated how it can be explained and encouraged. Most famously, the resource model of participation (e.g., Brady et al. 1995; Verba and Nie 1972) describes how individual participation is fostered by time, money, and civic skills, all of which can be acquired, but that are distributed unevenly in society. Another line of research focuses on political socialization that an individual experiences during their lifetime (Hyman 1959; Plutzer 2002). Some studies find that certain political attitudes, most notably political knowledge, political efficacy and political interest, correlate positively with political participation (Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Finkel et al. 1989). Another important contribution to the literature on political participation are the theories on mobilization strategies of political actors, which underscore external factors affecting political participation, such as door-to-door canvassing (e.g., Green and Gerber 2019; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

In recent decades, increasing emphasis has been placed on studying the determinants of political participation beyond voting (e.g., Alvarez et al. 2017; Dalton 2013; Norris 2002). This trend in the academic literature occurred primarily because of a shift in the way citizens participate. Declining rates of voter turnout (e.g., Hooghe and Kern 2017) were first believed to signal the beginning of a 'crisis of democracy' (Marsh 2014; Merkel 2014); this downtrend in electoral participation was explained by a general decrease in partisanship and weakening feelings of political efficacy (Abramson and Aldrich 1982), generational effects, and habitual voting (Aldrich et al. 2011; Franklin 2004; Wattenberg 2022). Yet, subsequent evidence showed that some citizens distance themselves from the electoral arena to increasingly engage in other political activities (e.g., Brannen et al. 2020; Dalton 2013; Oser 2017).

There are different reasons for this growing participation in different contexts. In post-industrial societies, it is often traced back to a general increase in the standard of living and to a greater sense of socio-economic security in contemporary societies that has given rise to a gradual cultural shift in focus from mere survival to a higher need for self-expression (Inglehart 1989; 1997; Oser 2022a; 2022b). This stays in contrast with findings in Latin America, for example, where activists increasingly started combining authorized and unauthorized forms of political actions during the 1990s and 2000s, in view of promoting their redistributive and social agendas (Alvarez et al. 2017). Moseley (2015) explains this trend with the persistence of flawed democratic institutions and the incapacity of governments to fulfil the expectations of citizens.

With citizens seeking out different modes of engagement that complement, not fully substitute, electoral participation (Norris 2002), it is essential to understand the role they ascribe to voting and why they decide (or not) to combine voting and other political activities. This focus on the importance of individual perceptions in explaining participation is in line with Blais et al. (2004), who emphasize that the decline in voter turnout is part of a larger cultural change, where younger citizens are voting less precisely because they do not see voting as a moral duty. This connects to other studies on citizenship norms, showing that older generations who tend to view voting as a duty engage more in electoral participation, whereas this view is less prevalent among younger citizens who engage in more direct and individualized forms of participation, with the goal of shaping policy beyond the electoral sphere (Dalton 2013; Norris 2002; Oser 2017; 2022a; 2022b).

Based on these considerations, we argue that how citizens conceptualize voting, namely the meaning they assign to voting, is vital when examining all forms of political participation. We argue that it is reductive to merely look at electoral participation to understand contemporary patterns in political participation. Following the multidimensional taxonomy proposed by Theocharis and Van Deth (2018), we believe that participation is no longer only an instrumental action, whose aim is merely to influence a political outcome (Verba and Nie 1972). Rather, it can encompass a multitude of creative, self-expressive, individualized, and digitally networked acts that can affect civil society or encourage changes or social behaviour (Norris 2002; Theocharis and Van Deth 2018).

Note that these political acts are grouped very differently in the academic literature and that these groupings do not necessarily coincide. Barnes and Kaase (1979), for instance, use the term ‘conventional participation’ to indicate voting, and ‘unconventional’ participation when discussing activities

like petition signing or boycotting. Other authors rely on the distinction between institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms of participation, where the former includes more traditional activities, such as attending political meetings or working in a political party, and the latter comprises activities that have a more indirect impact on the political system, namely, protesting or political consumerism (e.g., Marien et al. 2010). At the same time, we know from other empirical studies that this very strict distinction in conventional/unconventional, or institutionalized/non-institutionalized, types of political participation has become blurred, as citizens combine different political acts and might raise their demands through multiple channels (Ezrow and Xezonakis 2016; Norris 2002, 190–191; Oser 2022a). In this chapter, we do not distinguish among forms of non-electoral participation and focus instead on the relationship between, on the one hand, meanings of voting and voting, and, on the other hand, between meanings of voting and various forms of non-electoral participation, as grouped in Figure 7.1. Still, considering that the activities grouped under non-electoral participation do not constitute a homogeneous group, we also examine the relationship between the meanings of voting and each type of non-electoral participation separately in the empirical analysis.

Meanings of voting and political participation

To study the meanings of voting, we draw upon the distinction introduced in Chapter 1 of this book: meanings encompass citizens' conceptualization and comprehension of the term 'voting'. Some citizens may not attribute any meaning to voting, rendering it an empty concept. Yet, when citizens do ascribe one or more meanings to voting, (we categorize them into our

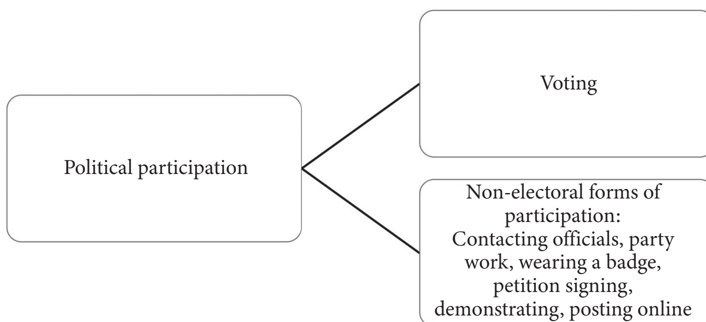

Figure 7.1 Forms of political participation.

five overarching categories. Four possible initial typologies emerge from the influential work of Riker and Ordeshook (1968). The first category, termed *instrumental*, revolves around the perception of voting as a tool to attain specific ends, whether directly or indirectly linked to particular election outcomes. Within this typology, one may include considerations such as shaping the destiny of future generations, selecting the governing party, or exercising influence to oust disliked political actors. Conversely, framing voting in *expressive* terms means seeing voting as a conduit for articulating identification with, preference for, or opposition against candidates, parties, or certain ideologies. Unlike instrumental meanings, expressive meanings manifest regardless of the electoral outcome. Additionally, citizens might conceive voting primarily in *ethical* terms, as something one should do, either stemming from peer pressure, or general civic duty. A fourth delineation, *allegiance* meanings, discerns the perception of voting as an affirmation of commitment to political regimes and may include considerations such as demonstrating allegiance to democratic principles, exercising a political right, or signalling civic consciousness. A novel addition to this theoretical framework lies in the introduction of a fifth category, *anti-voting*. Within this typology, individuals regard voting as trivial, burdensome, or even distasteful. But how are these meanings of voting related to voting and other types of political participation?

We put forward three main arguments about the relation between meanings and political participation. First, for people to engage in voting, they should have an *ethics*, *allegiance*, *instrumental*, or *expressive* meaning (or a combination of these) of voting, regardless of the actual valence of such connotation. For example, within the perspective of ethics meanings, a person considering voting a moral duty of any good citizen and another seeing voting as a duty that is forced upon her by a compulsory voting system are both equally likely to vote. Similarly, the need for expression can encompass both protest voting via a blank ballot, for example, or expressing the preference for a specific party. Citizens holding either of these conceptions are likely to go to the polls. To sum up, we expect that holding any meaning of voting among ethics, allegiance, expressive, or instrumental meanings, or any combinations of these, is positively related to voting.

Second, building on Bean's (1991) argument that every type of participation is driven by a broader 'orientation towards politics', a spill-over effect beyond voting can be expected: holding a meaning of voting implies seeing political activities as needed, important, or worthwhile. Consequently, citizens holding these meanings of voting will have not only a higher propensity to vote, but also engage in other political activities. This connection between

meanings of voting and other types of political participation exists because the motivations behind voting and other types of participation often share common roots, such as ideological alignment, perceived effectiveness, and societal values (Griffin and Newman 2005; Oser 2022b; Schlozman et al. 2012). For example, individuals who perceive voting as a civic responsibility may also feel obliged to pursue other avenues of political action. Similarly, those who cast their votes to advance specific policy agendas or uphold certain principles may actively seek out alternative means, such as activism or advocacy, to advance these objectives outside the realm of elections.

The third and final argument builds on the theoretically crucial distinction between *non-meanings* and anti-voting meanings. On the one hand, some academic findings indicate that a lack of interest in politics or a feeling of cynicism and dissatisfaction about politics are related to lower levels of overall political participation (e.g., Bynner and Ashford 1994; Giugni and Grasso 2019). On the other hand, perhaps the political alienation these citizens feel could motivate them to pick up other forms of political participation that have a more formal and direct impact, or are more elite-challenging, and not related to the electoral process or political institutions at all (Citrin 1974; Hooghe and Marien 2013). Put differently, disaffected citizens have the choice between an exit option, disengaging from politics, or a voice route, consisting in the expression of discontent through non-electoral channels (Portos et al. 2020). We expect citizens with anti-voting sentiments to be disappointed and unhappy with voting, and to be inclined to find alternatives in non-electoral activities. Because they are engaged with politics, they believe that seeking change through alternative means (the voice route) is more effective. Conversely, those with no meaning of voting lack any incentive to participate and are hence less likely to engage in any form of participation (exit route).

Data and methods

For our analysis of the relation between meanings of voting and political participation we rely on a cross-sectional analysis, based on data from an online survey administered about two months prior to the 2022 national/federal legislative elections in Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Hungary, Italy, Serbia, Sweden, and the US (N = 17,346).[1] This time frame guaranteed that citizens'

[1] For the analysis, we drop 197 respondents with missing values simultaneously on all the participation items, and 767 respondents with open-ended answers on the meanings of voting categorized as 'other/don't know/NA' (N = 16,382).

meanings of voting and participation were not affected by the specific campaigns of these elections, and we counted on this data to provide us with a broad investigation of correlations between meanings of voting and political participation. Within each country, the data is descriptively representative on age, gender, and region, and approximating representativeness on education as well (see Chapter 3 for details on the sample composition and on the case selection). While the book covers 13 countries (i.e., Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Kenya, Nigeria, Serbia, Sweden, Tunisia, Türkiye, and the USA), in this chapter we can only include those countries for which questions on political participation have been asked, namely Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Hungary, Italy, Serbia, Sweden, and the USA (Plescia et al. 2025a).

The measurement of the meanings of voting is based on the open-ended questions 'What does "voting" mean to you?' and two follow-ups ('Does "voting" mean anything else to you?' and 'Here you have the opportunity to give one more answer. Does "voting" mean anything else to you?'), which were posed to all respondents. All the answers given to these questions were first 'chunked' into single messages and the content of the chunks was then manually coded into specific meanings (see also Chapter 2 for details on the chunking and coding). For the analyses in this chapter, we consider the chunks coded as ethics, allegiance, instrumental, expressive, anti-voting, and broad meaning. Responses categorized as instrumental mention things like 'determining the fate of future generations', 'choosing the party to govern', or 'exercising the power to remove someone I dislike'. Answers categorized under expressive meanings encompass responses like 'choosing a candidate who resonates with your values' or 'using it as a means to highlight dissent'. Furthermore, citizens may view voting primarily as ethics or as duty of responsible citizenship when they say 'duty' or 'something I have to do'. Responses in the category of allegiance include 'expressing dedication to democracy', 'exercising a fundamental right', or 'signifying civic awareness'. When it comes to anti-voting, answers might be about voting being a 'a waste of time', 'nonsense', or 'insignificant'. Broad meanings are those that signal broad importance or positivity but cannot be classified into any of our five theoretically derived categories (see also Chapter 2). Examples are 'yes, voting has a meaning', 'important', or 'valuable'. In line with the other chapters of this book, the chunks coded as 'other' or 'don't know' (DK) are not considered in the analyses.

The resulting variables on the meanings of voting are binary, coded 1 if the respondent mentions a certain type of meaning in any of the answers given, 0 if not. Only about 2.9% of respondents find no meaning in voting at

all. When it comes to the specific meanings, about 58.3% have instrumental meanings, 53.9% have allegiance meanings, 39.4% have expressive meanings, about 22.3% have ethics meanings, 11.1% have broad meanings, and 9.7% have anti-voting meanings. As explained and shown in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, these meanings are not mutually exclusive and are often held in combination.

Regarding the various forms of political participation, voting is measured using voting intention in the upcoming parliamentary elections using a scale from 0 'will definitely not vote' to 10 'will definitely vote'. We recode the continuous variable into a dummy where a score of 10 corresponds to 1 and 0–9 to 0.[2] This constitutes our voting variable. The non-electoral participation variable takes a value of 1 if respondents have engaged in at least one activity among the following in the last 12 months: (a) contacted a politician, government, or local government official; (b) worked in a political party, action group, or another type of political association; (c) worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker; (d) signed a petition; (e) taken part in a public demonstration; or (f) posted or shared anything about politics online, for example, on blogs or on social media (e.g., Facebook or X). These different items are commonly used in the academic literature and the question wording for their measurement is directly taken from other major surveys, such as the World Values Survey (Haerpfer et al. 2020) or the European Social Survey (ESS 2020).

About 60.7% of respondents reports being very likely to vote, which is broadly in line with the general trend of global voting turnout (Kostelka and Blais 2021). In total, about 52.2% of respondents engage in at least one non-electoral activity with substantial variation across the different activities. The most recurring non-electoral activity is petitioning (31.3%), followed by posting online (29.9%), and contacting politician or official (18.4%). At the bottom we find protesting (about 15%), wearing a badge (11.8%), and party work (8.3%). We consider missing only respondents that have answered 'don't know' or 'refused' to all non-electoral items simultaneously, which are less than 1% of the respondents.

Figure 7.2 shows the percentages of reported voting intention and non-electoral participation across countries. Looking at participation, we see that reported voting intention varies between countries, ranging from 51.1% in the US to 73.1% in Australia; likewise, the share of non-electoral activities ranges from 41.1% in Hungary to 60.9% in Serbia. Most interestingly,

[2] Note that slight deviations from this coding, for example, using a dummy where a score of 9 and 10 corresponds to 1 and 0–8 to 0, do not alter our substantial conclusions.

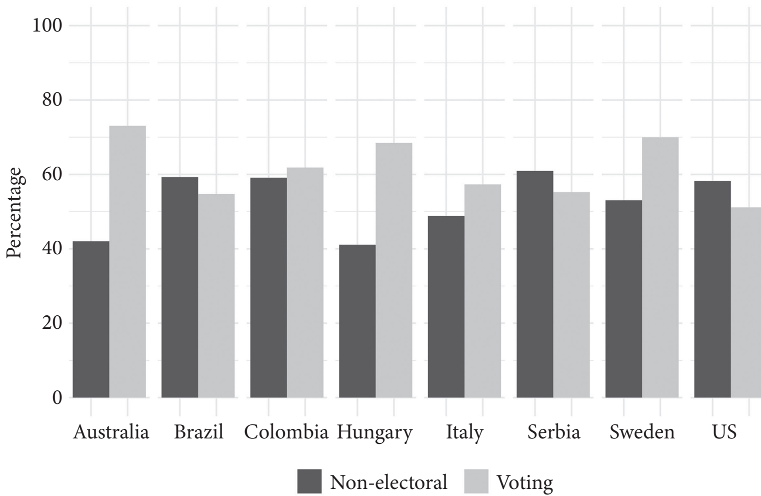

Figure 7.2 Percentage of electoral and non-electoral participation across countries.

Note: The figure shows the percentages of reported voting intention and non-electoral participation across countries.

non-electoral participation is slightly more frequent than voting in Brazil, Serbia, and the US. On the other hand, the biggest differences between electoral and non-electoral participation are found in Australia and Hungary, where voting is 31 and 27.4 percentage points more frequent, respectively. Within the non-electoral forms of participation, petitioning and posting online are the most frequent activities everywhere. Table A7.1 reports the percentage of each specific activity in the different countries.

While explaining the cross-country differences in Figure 7.2 is not an aim of this chapter, this variation is interesting. The US and Serbia, but also Brazil and Colombia, show the highest levels of non-electoral participation; the high political disenchantment in countries like Serbia, Brazil, and Colombia might play a significant role in explaining this (e.g., Campbell and Wolbrecht 2020; Greenberg 2010; Kingstone and Power 2017). Conversely, in Australia, Hungary, and Sweden, where electoral participation is significantly higher, other factors might come into play. For instance, Australia has compulsory voting, which generally leads to high levels of electoral participation, but not always (e.g., Brazil). Further, a proportional electoral system (e.g., Sweden) can have a similar effect (e.g., Blais and Carty 1990). When it comes to Hungary, we suspect that the 2022 parliamentary elections had a particularly strong mobilizing effect as, for the first time, a non-Fidesz government seemed like a real possibility.

Since both our dependent variables of political participation are binary (with 1 indicating that a respondent engages in that type of participation and 0 otherwise), we rely on binary logistic regression models; post-stratification weights on age, gender, region, and education, and design weights to correct for different sample sizes in the countries, are included in the models.[3] In all models, we control for age, gender, education, and political interest, since these variables have been shown to affect political participation (Brady et al. 1995; Franklin 2004; Gallego 2010). In addition, we use country fixed effects since our observations are clustered within countries.

Additional analyses

Our data allows us to run a series of additional analyses. First, we leverage on the panel data we have available in Hungary and in the US to re-run the binary logistic regression models with the same independent and control variables as in the main analysis, but using actual political participation during the election measured in Wave 3 as dependent variable (Plescia et al. 2025b). As mentioned in previous chapters of this book, for Hungary and the US, we re-interviewed the same respondents twice after the first wave; the first time right before the election (Wave 2) and a third time the week after the election (Wave 3). Studying additionally the relation between meanings of voting in Wave 1 and participation measured in Wave 3 allows us to test whether the relationship we uncover holds when studying participation in the election and during the campaign. While the main analysis uses intention to vote and political participation in the last 12 months, in the additional analysis we rely on actual turnout in the election and non-electoral participation during the election campaign.[4] For voting we relied on the question 'There are many citizens who do not vote or cannot vote at elections for good reasons. What about you, which of the following statements applies to you?', with the options 'I did not vote in the last national [TYPE OF ELECTIONS] election on [DATE]'; 'I thought about voting, but I did not do so this time'; 'I usually vote, but I did not this time'; and 'I am sure that I voted'. Respondents selecting the last option were coded as 1. For non-electoral participation we asked 'During the recent election campaign, have you done any of the following?' and the items presented to the respondents were exactly the same as in

[3] The empirical analysis yields the same results when using unweighted data (Table A7.5).
[4] Weights are applied at time of measurement of the dependent variable, namely at Wave 3.

the main analysis. A total number of 1,567 respondents participated in both Wave 1 and Wave 3.[5]

Compared to the cross-sectional data, we find similar proportions of the meanings of voting in the panel data. About 3.2% find no meaning in voting at all. Out of those that do find a meaning in voting, 56.6% have allegiance meanings, 54.2% have instrumental meanings, 46.2% have expressive meanings, 19.6% have ethics meanings, 8.7% have anti-voting meanings, and 8.5% have broad meanings. Regarding political participation, reported voting turnout is higher than the actual turnout in the election (reported = 87.28% and actual = 70.21% in Hungary, reported = 72% and actual = 46.8% in the US), which is common in most academic works (Achen and Blais 2015). As for the measure of political participation in the main analysis, petitioning and posting online are also the most frequent activities during election times. The overall share of non-electoral activities is very similar in Hungary and in the US (35.81% and 35.16%, respectively).

Further, we replicate the analysis using a closed-ended battery of the meanings of voting. To do this, we rely on 22 closed-ended items on a 0–10 scale, group them and create six variables based on the mean score of the items in the same category (meaning, ethics, allegiance, instrumental, expressive, anti-voting). The resulting continuous variables are then used as independent variables in the regression models (see also Chapter 2); the descriptive statistics of the closed-ended measurement can be found in Table A7.2. Then, we run separate models with the single items on political participation (voting, contacting, party work, wearing a badge, petitioning, protest, posting online) as dependent variables on a subsample including only those respondents with valid answers on all the participation items (N = 13,743). In this subsample, 2.2% find no meaning in voting, which is a slightly smaller proportion than in the full sample. With respect to the specific meanings, 59.8% have instrumental meanings, 56.7% have allegiance meanings, 40.4% have expressive meanings, 23.6% have ethics meanings, 11.0% have broad meanings, and 9.0% have anti-voting meanings. As for political participation, the proportions of the single political activities are similar to the full sample. About 66.9% of respondents report intending to vote, compared to 60.7% in the full sample. The most frequent forms of non-electoral political participation are petitioning (33.3%), closely followed by posting online (31.7%). Further behind we find contacting officials (19.4%), protesting (15.7%), wearing a badge (12.1%), and working in a political party (8.1%).

[5] For the analysis, we drop 14 respondents with missing values simultaneously on all the participation items, and 56 respondents with open-ended answers on the meanings of voting categorized as 'other/don't know/missing'.

Finally, we re-run the models on two sets of countries, as we have a very diverse sample of countries with differing levels of democracy and differing levels of economic development. On the one hand, we categorize the countries in democracies and autocracies using the V-Dem liberal democracy score (Coppedge et al. 2022) and the sample mean as a cut-off point. This gives us Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Italy, Sweden and the US as democracies (liberal democracy scores of 0.81, 0.52, 0.54, 0.77, 0.87, and 0.74, respectively), and Hungary and Serbia as autocracies (liberal democracy scores of 0.34 and 0.27, respectively). On the other hand, we classify countries in emerging economies and industrialized countries, based on their GDP per capita (PPP, constant 2017 USD) (World Bank 2020) and the sample mean as cut-off. This results in Australia, Italy, Sweden, and the US as industrialized countries (GDP per capita of 51,090, 44,292, 55,316, and 64,623, respectively) and Brazil, Colombia, Hungary, and, Serbia as emerging economies (GDP per capita of 15,093, 15,617, 35,357 and 20,886, respectively). We discuss the replication results next.

Meaning, anti-voting meaning, or no meaning

In the first part of our analysis, we contrast having a meaning to having an anti-voting meaning and not having a meaning at all. Yet, we cannot estimate the effect of these three independent variables in a single model, as meaning and anti-voting meaning together are nested in the reference category of non-meanings. For this reason, we conduct four regression models. In Model 1, the dependent variable is 'voting' and the main independent variables are 'having a meaning', where 1 stands for having an ethics, allegiance, instrumental, expressive, or broad meaning, and 0 stands for not having any of these meanings, as well as anti-voting meaning, where 1 stands for having an anti-voting meaning and 0 stands for not having an anti-voting meaning. In Model 2, the dependent variable is 'voting' and the main independent variable is no meaning, where 1 stands for not having an ethics, allegiance, instrumental, expressive, broad, or anti-voting meaning, 0 if this is the case. The other two models are structured similarly, but what changes is the dependent variable. In Model 3, the dependent variable is 'non-electoral participation' and the main independent variables are having a meaning and anti-voting meaning. In Model 4, the dependent variable is 'non-electoral participation' and the main independent variable is no meaning. The results of Models 1–2 for voting and Models 4–5 for non-electoral participation are shown in Figure 7.3 (full regression results are available in Table A7.3). In Figure 7.3 the results

for the cross-sectional analysis are in black while the results using the panel data are in grey.

Starting with our first argument, we posited that having a meaning of voting should be positively related with the act of voting. In support of our expectation, Figure 7.3 shows a significant positive relationship between the two variables. We also find evidence for the second argument, namely, the argued spill-over effect of having a meaning of voting on engaging in non-electoral forms of political participation. Having a meaning of voting is thus important for the engagement in all forms of political participation. Conversely, non-meanings of voting show a negative relationship with both voting and non-electoral activities, albeit the latter coefficient does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Anti-voting meanings, on the other hand, have the expected mixed relationship with participation: they are negatively linked to voting, but positively linked to non-electoral activities, in line with our third argument. This suggests that anti-voting meanings are an important and distinct category in citizens' voting conceptualizations.

Concerning the analyses using the panel data, Figure 7.3 (full results in Table A7.4) shows that the results are broadly in line with the analysis based on the cross-sectional data, despite the different sample sizes and the different types of data used. Having a meaning is positively related to all forms

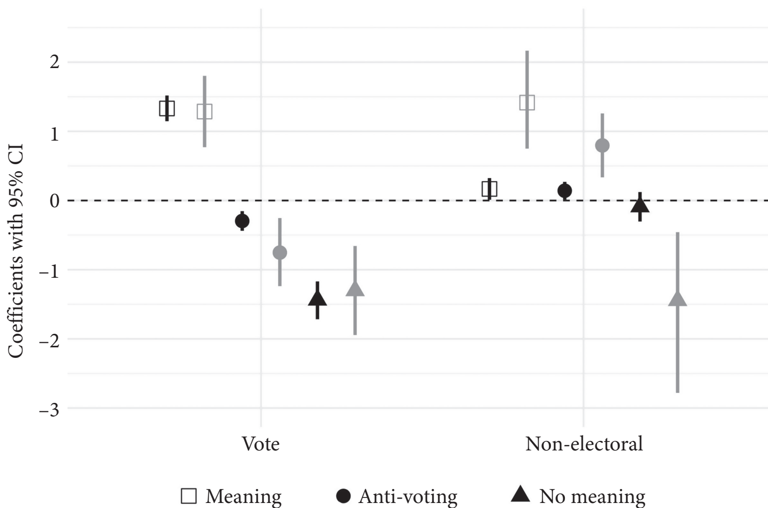

Figure 7.3 Coefficient plot of binary logistic regression models.

Note: Log coefficients with 95% confidence intervals. Results based on the cross-sectional data are displayed in black, additional analysis with panel data in grey. Full results in Table A7.3 and A7.4.

of participation and there is thus proof for the hypothesized spill-over effect of having a meaning of voting on non-electoral participation; as mentioned, anti-voting meanings are negatively related to voting and positively related to non-electoral activities. Most importantly, whereas the relationship between non-meanings and non-electoral participation was not statistically significant in the cross-sectional analysis, it is negative and statistically significant when using the panel data; this fits our third argument, according to which citizens with non-meanings of voting do not engage in any participation form.

The regression results using the closed-ended questions (Table A7.6) are also broadly in line with the conclusions drawn using the cross-sectional and panel data. In particular, we can confirm that having a meaning is positively related with voting as well as with non-electoral participation, while anti-voting meanings are negatively correlated with voting. Yet, whereas in the cross-sectional analysis both having a meaning and anti-voting meanings are positively associated with non-electoral participation, we find confirmation only for the former effect since the coefficient of anti-voting meanings using the closed-ended question is not statistically significant.

Further, we open up the group of non-electoral participation activities and study the single items on political participation as dependent variables (see Tables A7.7–A7.12). The main analysis has shown a positive relationship between having a meaning and non-electoral participation, but it is small and barely significant. In fact, the additional models with each non-election participation activity separately clarify that having a meaning is positively related only to petitioning, as for all the other activities the relation is either negative and significant (i.e., party work and wearing a badge) or not significant at all (i.e., contacting, protest, and posting online). Hence, we can only partially confirm the spill-over effect of having a meaning of voting on engaging in non-electoral forms of political participation, demonstrating the differentiated nature of the non-electoral participation activities. This is also true when it comes to no meanings of voting, which are positively related to contacting, party work, and wearing a badge, but are unrelated to the other non-electoral participation activities. Moving on to anti-voting meanings, we find a positive relationship with petitioning and posting online, whereas the relationship with party work is negative; all the other relationships are not significant.

What emerges from these findings is that party work and wearing a badge behave quite differently from petitioning and posting online, while contacting politicians and protest are more difficult to explain with our models. In the academic literature, party work and wearing a badge are typically

classified as 'institutional forms of participation' because they take place inside the formal political sphere, while the others are outside this sphere (Marien et al. 2010; Oser 2022b). In this regard, our findings confirm the different relation between views of voting and institutional activities, compared to non-electoral participation that happens outside the institutional sphere. The varying impact of having a sense of meaning of voting on different types of non-electoral participation activities can be attributed to a range of factors, such as varying psychological motivations behind participation, structural barriers and facilitators, and broader cultural and societal norms that shape individual engagement preferences and opportunities. These factors should be taken into consideration in future research.

Lastly, we also look into whether the results hold across different sets of countries, that is, liberal democracies versus electoral autocracies (full results in Tables A7.13–A7.14). Regarding the level of democracy, the results confirm the findings from the main analysis when it comes to voting. Yet, it seems that having a meaning and having an anti-voting meaning are more relevant for non-electoral participation in autocracies than in democracies: there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between meaning and anti-voting meaning, and non-electoral participation in autocracies, whereas the relationships are not statistically significant in democracies. This finding is interesting insofar as it points to the importance for ordinary citizens to find a meaning in voting in countries with lower levels of democracy, in view of fostering their political involvement to enhance the resilience and legitimacy of democratic institutions. Given that the countries we classify as democracies are mostly industrialized countries, and most of the autocracies are emerging economies, the results are the same when it comes to economic development.

Specific meanings of voting

The second part of the analysis investigates the specific meanings contained within the 'having a meaning' category. In this analysis, only participants that have a meaning are included, thus reducing the number of respondents to N=15,231. We conduct two regression models, where we regress ethics, allegiance, instrumental, and expressive meanings against two sets of dependent variables, namely, voting and non-electoral participation. In both models, we control for anti-voting meanings. The results are depicted in Figure 7.4 (full regression results in Model 3 and Model 6 in Table A7.3). Again, the results for the cross-sectional analysis are in black, while the results based on panel data are in grey.

Looking closer at the different types of meanings, Figure 7.4 shows that citizens with ethics meanings of voting show higher levels of electoral participation, which is to be expected given that voting in this category of meanings is viewed as a duty and/or an obligation. At the same time, ethics meanings are the only type of meaning that is not related to non-electoral participation. These findings are largely in line with the literature on duty-based voting (e.g., Blais 2000; Blais and Achen 2019) and on citizenship norms (Dalton 2008; Oser 2017; 2022a), which suggests that, while it drives electoral participation, viewing voting as a duty may depress engagement in non-electoral activities. Further, allegiance meanings are positively associated with both voting and non-electoral participation, albeit the association is stronger with the former than with the latter. Likewise, instrumental meanings are positively related to both forms of participation, but the association is stronger with voting than with non-electoral activities. Most interestingly, expressive meanings have a very similar positive relationship with both voting and non-electoral activities—which is, however, not statistically significant at the p = 0.05 level. Taken together, we can say that allegiance and instrumental meanings are vital for political participation, while ethics meanings are only related to voting and expressive meanings do not seem that important for political participation more broadly.

The results of the analyses with the panel data, Figure 7.4 (see Table A7.4 for full results) broadly confirms those using the cross-sectional data. Most

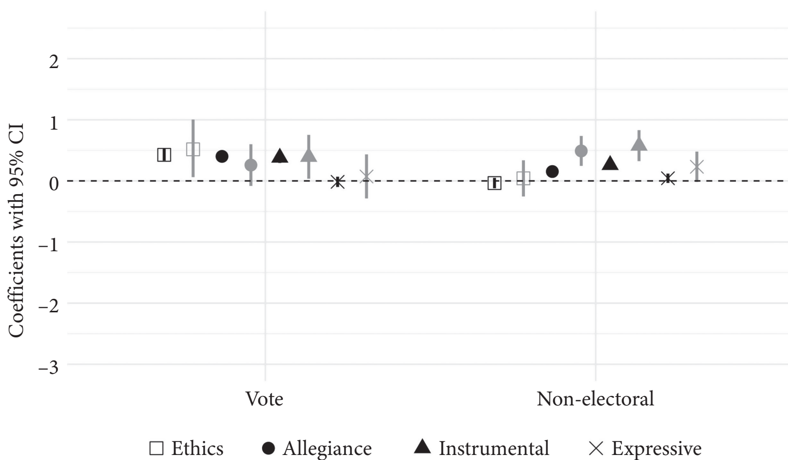

Figure 7.4 Coefficient plot of binary logistic regression models.

Note: Log coefficients with 95% confidence intervals. Results based on the cross-sectional data are displayed in black, additional analysis with panel data in grey. Full results in Table A7.3 and Table A7.4.

importantly, we can confirm the positive association between expressive meanings and non-electoral activities, which is statistically significant when studying participation in the election and during the campaign. This suggests that expressive meanings might be more relevant in explaining political participation in an election-specific setting.

The regression results with the closed-ended measurement of the meanings of voting are somewhat in line with the results of the main analysis (see Table A7.6). Indeed, ethics, allegiance, and expressive meanings are positively associated with voting. However, when it comes to non-electoral activities, we find a negative and statistically significant relationship with allegiance meanings, which is not observed in the analysis based on cross-sectional data. This discrepancy might be attributed to the different nature of non-electoral activities during an election campaign compared to outside of it. During an election campaign, allegiance typically means broader participation, whereas allegiance to the system is primarily demonstrated by voting in the election itself.

Moving on to the additional analysis with the single non-electoral participation items, we see that the effect of ethics, allegiance, instrumental, and expressive meanings is different across the different items of non-electoral participation (see Tables A7.7–A7.12). Ethics meanings are negatively related to party work and wearing a badge but have no association with other non-electoral activities. The negative association with party work and wearing a badge is found also for allegiance and instrumental meanings of voting but not for expressive meanings. This is interesting insofar as it suggests that the engagement in these institutional non-electoral activities is negatively driven by seeing voting as a duty, a commitment, or as a means to an end. This negative relationship suggests that individuals who prioritize civic engagement based on moral obligations or instrumental goals may perceive these activities as less appealing. This could be because activities like party work require ongoing voluntary commitment and engagement, which may not align with a duty-bound or instrumental approach to civic participation. The only other significant relations we find are between allegiance and instrumental with petitioning and between instrumental and expressive for posting online. The significant relationships between different meanings of voting (such as allegiance, instrumental, and expressive) and specific forms of non-electoral participation (like petitioning and posting online) can be understood through the lens of individual motivations and perceptions. When individuals view voting as an act of allegiance or commitment to a cause, they may be more inclined to participate in activities like petitioning,

which allows them to advocate for issues aligned with their allegiances. Similarly, those who see voting as a means to achieve specific goals or as a way to express their values are more likely to engage in online platforms to discuss and promote their viewpoints. These findings suggest that the alignment between personal motivations and the nature of civic activities plays a crucial role in determining how people choose to participate beyond electoral processes.

Finally, the regression results in Tables A7.13–A7.14 show that the conclusions we can draw from the cross-sectional analysis hold when looking at different sets of countries. In other words, ethics, allegiance, instrumental, and expressive meanings of voting are positively related to voting and to non-electoral forms of participation, no matter whether the country is democratic or autocratic. Considering that the countries categorized as democracies primarily consist of industrialized nations, and the majority of autocracies are found in emerging economies, the findings remain consistent regarding economic development.

Summary and conclusion

This chapter shows that meanings of voting matter for all types of political participation, both electoral and non-electoral. More specifically, this chapter discussed our three main arguments on the relation between meanings of voting and political participation. The first argument underscores the relation between an individual's perception of the significance attributed to voting and voter turnout. In particular, seeing voting as a responsibility, a privilege, a way of influencing public policy, or an expression of support or opposition to specific candidates fosters a sense of value in voting, thus positively impacting voter turnout. We find this to be true but with some nuances worth discussing. While the existing literature broadly highlights the importance of party or candidate preferences for voting, the findings of the main analysis indicate that expressive meanings are the least related to the voting decision. Conversely, conceiving voting in allegiance terms, a largely neglected perspective of voting in the existing literature, is far more significant and at least as important as seeing voting as a duty.

A second argument posits that these interpretations of voting also translate into heightened tendencies not only to vote, but also to engage in various other political activities, indicating a connection between different

forms of political engagement. This link likely arises because the motivations driving voting and other forms of participation often originate from comparable underlying factors, such as ideological alignment, perceived effectiveness, and societal principles (Griffin and Newman 2005; Schlozman et al. 2012). We find evidence for the hypothesized spill-over effect from electoral to non-electoral participation, emphasizing a positive link between various forms of political involvement. Instrumental motives and an allegiance view of voting are particularly significant for comprehending various forms of political engagement. Conversely, while ethics-based interpretations of voting primarily influence voting behaviour, they may lack the capacity to inspire participation in other civic activities. Further, expressive meanings also seem not to matter much for non-electoral participation.

A third argument introduces a crucial qualification to the preceding two arguments and highlights a significant differentiation between conceptions of anti-voting, other interpretations of voting, and a complete absence of significance associated with voting. Individuals feeling disillusioned or dissatisfied with voting are less likely to engage in voting. Yet, they may still feel compelled to express their opinions or voice their discontent through non-electoral means, known as the voice route (Portos et al. 2020). Conversely, individuals lacking meaningful attachments to voting are less inclined to engage in any form of political activity due to their overall disinterest in politics, a phenomenon referred to as the exit route (Portos et al. 2020). It is thus clear that both no meanings of voting and anti-voting meanings are important additions to the literature on voter psychology, given that they have a very distinct effect on political participation, compared to the other types of voting conceptualizations. Most importantly, we find that dissatisfaction with voting can lead to abstention, but is simultaneously an incentive for non-electoral participation, which is supported precisely by the view that voting is important, but not enough to sustain electoral democracy. Chapter 8 discusses the normative implications of this chapter's findings.

Finally, another important conclusion is that the relation between anti-voting meanings and non-electoral participation is very relevant in electoral autocracies. Although the findings in Chapter 5 show that anti-voting meanings are slightly more frequent in liberal democracies, we find that this type of meaning has an even more important function in electoral autocracies. This might be explained by the lack of change that elections may incite in electoral autocracies—forcing politically interested citizens

to engage in other forms of participation to satisfy their political needs. In liberal democracies, this spill-over effect is absent since citizens might already feel their political needs fulfilled by voting. Moreover, although the relationship between anti-voting and non-electoral participation is not statistically significant in democracies, the negative effect suggests that those disillusioned by voting might also be disillusioned by non-electoral participation.

In terms of the broader puzzle with which we opened this chapter—namely, whether declining turnout rates across the globe signify eroding trust in and perceived legitimacy of political institutions, or rather indicate that voting alone is insufficient and citizens may engage in politics in diverse ways—our findings indicate that ordinary citizens' conceptualization of voting is linked to their political behaviour not only in the electoral sphere, but also beyond. However, voting might not suffice when it is perceived as a waste of time or ineffectual, and this will lead people to use alternative forms of participation. In terms of broader implications, the analysis presented in this chapter underscores that how individuals perceive the act of voting significantly influences their political engagement, both through voting and non-electoral means. For 'get out the vote' campaigns, understanding these varied meanings—whether as a responsibility, a method of influence, as a preference expression or as an expression of allegiance—can be crucial. Campaigns that emphasize the broader societal impacts of voting, beyond mere candidate preferences, may better mobilize voters by appealing to these deeper motivations. Moreover, linking these insights with literature on protests and non-electoral forms of representation reveals a continuum of civic participation driven by similar underlying motivations. For instance, individuals who view voting as instrumental or aligned with their ideological beliefs are more likely to participate in both electoral and non-electoral activities. Conversely, those disillusioned with voting may seek alternative avenues to express their dissatisfaction, such as protests or advocacy work, highlighting the interconnectedness of these forms of political engagement.

There are some limitations to these important findings worth mentioning. Primarily, while we theoretically place the meanings of voting in causal order before participation, the reverse may also be true (e.g., Quintelier and Van Deth 2014). Our analysis cannot precisely test this causal order. Second, while we include a relatively broad selection of countries, it would be interesting to test the generalizability of these findings with an even larger number of countries since we find important differences when comparing

liberal democracies to electoral autocracies. Further, the countries in our sample differ on more dimensions, such as level of democracy, electoral system, or compulsory voting, but we do not examine any of them in detail in this chapter (but see Chapter 5 where we discuss country-level differences in meanings of voting).

Regardless of these limitations, this chapter highlights the importance of citizen meanings of voting in political participation and is therefore crucial to understanding the changing participation patterns worldwide. Especially in the current 'era of disengagement' (Parvin 2018), the question of countering this trend is increasingly important. Our results essentially show that any view about voting guarantees some form of political engagement, while not associating anything with voting can have negative implications for the overall involvement in politics. In this sense, we argue that encouraging the formation of political opinions and the political awareness of individuals is key to addressing this trend in contemporary societies.

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8

The Normative Implications

Taking stock of meanings in designing voting systems

Carolina Plescia and André Blais

Introduction

Election laws correspond to the whole set of rules pertaining to the conduct of elections including the voting system (majoritarian or proportional or a mix) and compulsory voting. Electoral laws are designed to govern the process by which representatives are elected, and they play a crucial role in shaping the democratic process. Chapter 5 of this book provides findings on how citizens view voting in a variety of countries including both liberal democracies and electoral autocracies with varying electoral rules and in the presence or absence of compulsory voting. In this chapter we reflect upon these findings to discuss the implications for what a good voting system is or should be. In terms of electoral rules, we centre our attention on voting being compulsory or not: that is the only legalized form of mandating participation in elections. With the term *electoral systems* we refer to whether elections operate under a majoritarian or proportional system; hence, the way votes are translated into the election of decision makers (Blais 1988). As with the rest of the book, this chapter focuses on both liberal democracies and electoral autocracies. This distinction remains important because electoral laws play a different role in the latter set of countries, sometimes being tailored to consolidate power for the ruling regime rather than to facilitate democratic governance (e.g., Levitsky and Way 2002).

One could discuss at length what a 'good electoral law' is. An honest answer will certainly recognize that what constitutes good can vary depending on the goals and values of a given society. Despite this, there are key principles we know matter for a good system, albeit each comes with trade-offs that are at the core of debates in the comparative politics literature (Carter and Farrell 2010; Herron et al. 2018).

Carolina Plescia and André Blais, *The Normative Implications*. In: *The Meanings of Voting for Citizens*. Edited by: Carolina Plescia, Oxford University Press. © Carolina Plescia (2025). DOI: 10.1093/9780198946335.003.0008

One central debate concerns the trade-off between representation and governability: maximizing the representation of groups of citizens means allowing more parties to run and gain representation in legislative chambers which inevitably makes governance and accountability more challenging, as this entails the formation of coalition governments (Blais et al. 2021). Proportional representation may leave citizens unsatisfied because of the complexity of translation of their vote into who will exercise power in the end, while majoritarian representation may frustrate citizens as they might feel that they are not allowed to express their sincere preferences for weak candidates and parties that have no chance of winning seats.

Another key conundrum concerns compulsory voting. While it is obviously the case that compulsory voting favours participation in elections and hence has the potential to foster the perceived legitimacy of electoral institutions (Birch 2008; Blais 2006; Geys 2006), coercion and punishment have been proven to actually reduce satisfaction with democracy (Singh 2016) and increase blank and spoiled balloting (Singh 2019). In a recent book, Dassonneville et al. (2023) show that while support for compulsory voting is widespread in Australia with more than 70% of respondents in favour of it, in Brazil the opposite is true.

In this chapter, we link meanings of voting and voting systems. More specifically, we ascertain whether electoral laws such as the voting system (majoritarian or proportional or a mix) and compulsory voting are associated with the amount of supportive and unsupportive meanings people hold. We additionally focus on which countries display the highest level of supporting meaning among losers of the elections. In democracies, losers' consent is crucial for social harmony, governmental legitimacy, and stability. It ensures smooth transitions of power and upholds democratic principles like the rule of law. Thus, we believe the strongest systems are those where losers display the highest support. In the conclusion section of the chapter, we discuss potential insights for electoral reform.

Meanings of voting

As thoroughly discussed in Chapter 1 of this book, to conceptualize and classify citizen meanings of voting, we start from influential works on why and how people vote (Blais and Young 1999; Downs 1957; Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Schuessler 2000). Citizens can hold no meaning, but when citizens hold meanings (i.e., view voting as *meaningful*), such meanings can be of different nature and different valence. We notably talk about meaning*s* in

plural because these meaning categories are not mutually exclusive, as citizens may hold multiple meanings simultaneously—or none at all. In this book, we have studied the prevalence of these meanings and their correlates in 13 countries holding national, legislative elections between 2022 and 2023.

We study the *meanings* of voting, and not *why* people vote. The advantages of studying voting as an *attitude*, rather than an *act*, are threefold. First, citizens can hold multiple meanings simultaneously, which may be obscured by considering their vote as a single act. Second, meanings of voting can be held by voters and non-voters alike, which may help explain abstention. Third, a given single vote may reflect quite different meanings for different people.

In Chapter 1, which presented and discussed the conceptualization of meanings of voting, we recognized that each meaning can be held with a positive or a negative valence, or both. Retrospective/prospective voting (Fiorina 1981; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2013), for example, can be both positive (rewarding/stimulating) and negative (punishing/preventing). Another example is that of strategic voting, which in its classic form assumes voters to focus their choice on viable candidates or parties (Aldrich et al. 2018). The intention of strategic voting can be positive and negative, depending on whether one tries to maximize the chances of one government to form or to block certain parties or candidates from being elected (see also Garzia and da Silva 2022). In much of the existing literature, duty is seen under a positive valence, hence voting is a (socially) desirable action (Pizzorno and Scardino 1986) or an act expected of a good citizen (Mackie 2014; Putnam 1995). However, recent works stress the potential negative valence of civic duty. Aytaç and Stokes (2018) distinguish between an intrinsically (ethics) and an extrinsically (duty to others) motivated sense of duty. In the latter case, people may feel discomfort or other forms of displeasure when they go out to vote (Coleman 2013).

What is crucial in this chapter is not whether a meaning has a 'positive' or 'negative' valence (i.e., whether it is to achieve something or to avoid something from happening), but rather whether there are good or bad meanings of voting from a democratic perspective. That is, whether certain meanings are consistently positively correlated with those variables that the existing literature considers being positive for the quality of the democratic process and for legitimacy, namely, attitudes such as support for democracy and democratic elections. In doing so, we seek to identify under which electoral rules citizens are more prone to hold meanings that are deemed to be supportive or *unsupportive* from a democratic perspective.

Supportive and unsupportive meanings of voting

Our aim is to discern which specific conceptualizations of voting are most and least intricately linked with the endorsement and promotion of democracy broadly speaking, and support for electoral democracy in particular. By understanding the meanings of voting that correlate most strongly with support for electoral democracy, we can gain deeper insights into the foundational values and principles that underpin democratic processes and the conduct of elections. To understand how supportive or unsupportive each meaning is, we examine the correlations between each type of meaning and two attitudinal criteria: support for democracy and support for democratic elections. This allows us to arrange the different meanings in order from the least to the most supportive, based on their association with the highest level of these two chosen criteria. We also discuss correlations with a behavioural criterion: turnout at elections.

Table 8.1 shows Pearson correlation values between support for democracy and support for democratic elections and types of meanings of voting (full dataset available via AUSSDA, see Plescia et al. 2025). Support for democracy is measured by asking respondents 'How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically? On this scale where 0 means it is "not at all important" and 10 means "absolutely important", what position would you choose?'. Support for democratic election is measured with the following survey question: 'How important is it for you to have the right to vote in free and fair elections? On this scale where 0 means it is "not at all important" and 10 means "absolutely important", what position would you choose?'. The former question is asked in all countries except for Italy. The latter question is asked in all countries except Brazil, Estonia, Italy, and Türkiye, due to survey time constraints. Table 8.1 shows that, regardless of the measure used for democratic support, *allegiance* meanings consistently have the highest correlation values. Hence, seeing voting as a way to be part of a political system and its institutions, as a legal right or as an opportunity to voice empowerment, or to show allegiance to the political system is the most supportive meaning of all (see Table A8.1 for correlations when meanings are not held in combination).

The correlations between allegiance meanings and the two variables of support are the highest across all countries with only three exceptions. In Kenya, the highest correlations by far are between the support variables and *instrumental* meanings of voting, while in Nigeria and Türkiye, they are with *ethics* meanings. These three countries represent outlier cases among the electoral autocracies in our sample. Interestingly, in electoral autocracies

in Europe, namely Hungary and Serbia, the highest correlations between allegiance and support variables are still observed. Perhaps the notion of allegiance does not hold the same weight in countries entrenched in long-standing electoral authoritarianism, for example, Nigeria and Kenya. Note that allegiance meanings are also more strongly correlated with intention to participate in the elections and this is also true in the case of Nigeria, albeit not for Estonia and Türkiye (where ethics meanings seem to matter most for turnout; see also Chapter 7 in this regard).[1] Table 8.1 clearly shows that the correlation for allegiance meanings is much higher than the other meanings, while the other three meanings are quite close together. Clearly then, the allegiance meaning can be considered the most supportive from a democratic perspective.

Table 8.1 shows that the variable least correlated with support variables is having no meaning at all; this is true across all countries, with the notable exception of Colombia. Note that the *anti-voting* meaning is less negatively correlated with democratic support variables compared to not having a meaning at all. The consequences of this finding are vast and can be put in relation especially with the findings from Chapter 7, which shows that, while those with no meaning of voting do not participate in any form of political participation, holding an anti-voting meaning leads to less engagement in voting but more engagement in non-electoral activities (e.g., petition or

Table 8.1 Pearson correlation values between support for democracy and support for democratic elections and types of meanings of voting

Support for Democracy		**Support for Democratic Elections**	
Meaning	**Correlation**	**Meaning**	**Correlation**
Allegiance	0.214	Allegiance	0.250
Ethics	0.138	Expressive	0.153
Instrumental	0.120	Instrumental	0.149
Expressive	0.111	Ethics	0.145
Anti-voting	−0.098	Anti-voting	−0.099
No meaning	−0.202	No meaning	−0.251

Notes: Table 8.1 shows correlation values across all respondents with that meaning, regardless of how many other meanings that respondent holds. Table A8.1 reports correlation values when only that type of meaning is present and shows that the results are substantially the same. Using t-test instead would lead to substantially identical results.

[1] Intention to vote is measured using the survey question: 'Will you vote in the upcoming [national/federal—TYPE OF ELECTIONS] elections in [COUNTRY OF STUDY]? Use a scale from 0, meaning that you "will definitely not vote", to 10 meaning that you "will definitely vote".

demonstration). Hence, it seems that individuals with anti-voting sentiments harbour disenchantment and dissatisfaction with the voting process but do not shun involvement in political actions. This is why they seek alternatives through non-electoral avenues (see Chapter 7). Conversely, those who do not attribute any particular meaning to voting seem to lack any interest in politics in general. In short, having no meaning of voting can be considered the most unsupportive meaning from a democratic perspective.

When considering the remaining meanings—ethics, *expressive*, and instrumental—Table 8.1 presents mixed findings. Regarding support for democracy, ethics appears to rank first among these three meanings, but expressive ranks first when considering support for democratic elections. However, Table 8.1 shows that the correlation values for these three meanings of voting are extremely similar, and the actual ranking among the three varies across countries as well. We then consider these three meanings to be very similar when it comes to being supportive from a democratic perspective.

On the basis of these considerations, we create a supportive meaning index, with four values that go from 0 to 1. The least-supportive meaning (no meaning) is given a score of 0, followed by anti-voting meaning with a score of .33. The most supportive meaning, allegiance, gets 1, while ethics, expressive, and instrumental are scored .66.

Supportive meanings: A macro perspective

We wish to determine in what kinds of contexts people are more prone to think of elections in ways that are associated with system-supporting attitudes and behaviours. From a systemic perspective, we start with the level of democracy; we distinguish democracies from electoral autocracies, in which elections are de facto not an instrument of choice (Schedler 2009). If citizens are aware that their country is not really a democracy, one would expect them to see voting as an opportunity to show allegiance to the system, and even to develop more adverse views about voting because of a flawed party competition and a lack of decisiveness of the vote. Empirically, we do not find democracy to correlate with having or not having a meaning of voting, nor even with having anti-meanings, but we do find that the level of democracy in a country correlates with the amount of allegiance, expressive, and ethics meanings (Chapter 5).

When compulsory voting is in place, we find fewer non-meanings but more anti-meanings. This is consistent with our expectations: if citizens are compelled to vote, they are more likely to think about it and to find a meaning

in voting. Yet because they are forced to go to the polls, they are also more prone to develop negative feelings. Note, however, that allegiance meanings are more common in compulsory voting systems, which suggests that making voting mandatory can instil a sense of belonging among citizens that leads to seeing voting as a means to express democratic support.

Chapter 5 showed that there are more instrumental and fewer expressive meanings in majoritarian electoral systems, which indicates that, in this type of electoral system, citizens have more strategic considerations in mind when thinking about their ballot. It is the opposite in proportional electoral systems, where citizens are less instrumental and more expressive: they put more emphasis on voicing their political preferences than on impacting the outcome of the election. There are somewhat more non-meanings, albeit fewer anti-meanings in majoritarian systems.

To study more systematically in which country we find more supportive and unsupportive meanings, we create a variable, which we call 'support'. We obtain this variable by computing the mean of the various meanings that people possess. For instance, if a respondent has allegiance meanings (a score of 1 on the support index) and ethics meanings (a score of .66 on the support index), this gives a score of .83 on the support variable. We call this variable 'support' meaning because a high score on the variable indicates that a given meaning is positively associated with attitudes like support for democracy and support for democratic elections, which are deemed to be desirable in a successful democracy. Based on this variable, we can assess in which country we find more supportive or unsupportive-oriented meanings of voting. Table 8.2 ranks countries based on the mean levels of this variable, where higher scores denote higher levels of supportive-oriented meanings of voting.

The first-ranked country is Türkiye, followed by Sweden, Colombia, and Brazil. All four countries have proportional rules and two (i.e., Türkiye and Brazil) have compulsory voting rules. Among the first six countries listed in Table 8.2, three have compulsory voting rules (i.e., Australia, Brazil, and Türkiye) but the countries with the highest means are Türkiye and Brazil. Proportional systems rank highest, regardless of whether democracy is consolidated in that country (see Sweden) or still to some extent consolidating (see Colombia) or even an electoral autocracy (see Türkiye). This is even though the 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections in Türkiye were the first in a long time in which the opposition had some chance of winning the election.[2]

[2] https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Turkey/Turkey-s-elections-a-new-chance-for-the-opposition-225139 and https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/03/13/turkey-erdogan-elections-istanbul-ankara-local-akp/

The countries at the bottom of Table 8.2 are those that score below 0.5 on the V-DEM liberal democracy index and that we consider electoral autocracies: Nigeria, Serbia, Tunisia, and Kenya. A couple of exceptions are worth mentioning. The US has majoritarian rules and non-compulsory voting, but it ranks quite high in Table 8.2 for supportive meanings. One explanation for this finding is that the US, alongside Colombia and Türkiye, rates high in national identity, which in turn is highly correlated with allegiance meanings. Allegiance meanings intersect with national identity by reflecting a commitment to the political system and the values of one's country. National identity encompasses a sense of belonging and attachment to a nation, often linked to shared political ideals and principles. Therefore, having an allegiance meaning may stem from a strong identification with the nation's democratic principles, institutions, and political regime, or vice versa. This connection also underscores how individuals' perceptions of national identity can influence their engagement with and support for democratic values. As regards Estonia, here we speculate that a mixture of two elements may contribute to Estonia ranking considerably low in Table 8.2. First, despite it being considered overall a democratic success story (Rovny 2014), reduced

Table 8.2 Countries ranked by mean value of supportive meaning

Country	N	Mean	SD	Proportional	Compulsory	Electoral Autocracy
Türkiye	2006	0.742	0.146	1	1	1
Sweden	1548	0.737	0.188	1	0	0
Colombia	1373	0.731	0.127	1	0	0
Brazil	2000	0.730	0.151	1	1	0
US	4030	0.726	0.199	0	0	0
Australia	1502	0.706	0.186	0	1	0
Italy	1561	0.704	0.162	1	0	0
Hungary	3826	0.677	0.216	1	0	1
Tunisia	1508	0.671	0.224	0	0	1
Estonia	1492	0.669	0.123	1	0	0
Nigeria	1476	0.651	0.255	0	0	1
Serbia	1506	0.644	0.221	1	0	1
Kenya	1489	0.610	0.267	0	0	1

Note: N: number of respondents. SD: Standard Deviation. The electoral autocracy dummy is derived by dichotomizing the liberal democracy index taken from V-Dem (2023). The index ranges from 0 to 1 and within our sample from 0.12 in Türkiye to 0.87 in Sweden. Countries that score below the 0.5 mean are considered electoral autocracy. The source for the electoral system is IDEA 2022. Italy and Hungary have mixed proportional representation.

power alternation has characterized Estonian politics for many years, potentially fuelling alienation (Mikkel 2017). Second, the relatively low level of nationalism might contribute to this pattern due to what Cianetti (2018) describes as ethnic-majority technocracy and the exclusion of minorities from politics over a long period of time.

These patterns are to a large extent confirmed by a regression analysis (see Table 8.3). The first model in Table 8.3 includes exclusively the country-level variables just discussed (i.e., proportional rules, compulsory voting, and autocracy, which are all dummy variables; see Table 8.2) and additionally GDP per capita (constant 2017 international dollars at the year of the election study) as a measure of economic development (in log form). The regression analysis results show that the coefficients for proportional rules and compulsory voting are positive (albeit only the second is significant at $p < 0.1$) while the coefficient for autocracy is negative, albeit non-significant in Model 1. These results hold in Model 2, where we control for socio-demographic variables such as age (in years), gender (dummy with female coded 1), and education (coded from 0 low to 1 high education). The results hold also in Model 3, where we control additionally for some individual-level attitudes such as nationalism (coded from 0 to 1 from an original scale of 0–10 of how

Table 8.3 Explaining supportive meaning

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Proportional	.02 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.02 (.01)
Compulsory	.03 (.02)	.04 (.02)	.02 (.01)
Autocracy	−.03 (.02)	−.03 (.02)	−.03 (.01)*
GDP	.02 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)
Female		.01 (.00)***	.02 (.00)***
Age		.00 (.00)***	.00 (.00)***
Education		.06 (.00)***	.03 (.00)***
Nationalism			.10 (.00)***
Political interest			.15 (.00)***
Constant	.39 (.24)	.58 (.24)*	.42 (.17)*
AIC	−10,382.11	−10,808.19	−12,650.52
BIC	−10,325.82	−10,727.77	−12,554.02
Log Likelihood	5198.06	5414.10	6337.26
Num. obs.	22,973	22,973	22,973
Num. groups: COUNTRY	13	13	13
Var: COUNTRY (Intercept)	.01	.001	.001
Var: Residual	.037	.036	.034

Notes: ***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$. Random effect models.

proud one feels for being a citizen of that country)[3] and political interest (coded from 0 to 1 from an original scale of 1–4 showing political interest). While the models in Table 8.3 are random effect models, the results are substantially the same if we opt for standard errors clustered by country instead.

Supportive meanings: Winner and losers

Next, we focus on a key group of citizens within these countries: losers of the elections. Losers' consent is essential for the functioning of a democracy because it promotes social harmony, maintains the legitimacy of the government, ensures stability, and upholds the fundamental principles of democratic governance, including the peaceful transition of power and the rule of law. Without it, a democracy is prone to conflict and dysfunction (Anderson et al. 2005). Thus, the best system is the country in which the losing side of the elections displays the highest level of support. Hence, we replicate Table 8.2 for the losers of the elections. Since we rely on data collected roughly two months before the elections, the losers in our sample are those that express the intention to vote for the parties trailing in the polls before the election at the time the survey was in the field. In most of the countries in our sample, these 'prospective' losers correspond to the actual losers after the election since the elections brought no big surprises in terms of the election outcome. Two notable exceptions are Brazil and Türkiye, where in each the outcome of the election was more uncertain. For simplicity, we classify as losers all those respondents that express an intention to vote for a party that is not the largest in each country.[4]

Table 8.4 displays country ranking based on the mean level of supportive meaning among losers of the election. The first five ranked countries in Table 8.4 are the same as in Table 8.2, albeit in a slightly different order; hence the countries that do better overall also do better among losers, although the top country this time is the US. Using data from 11 European democracies,

[3] In Brazil a question on nationalism was not asked, hence we input values for Brazil using the mean score across all countries.

[4] We adopt a conservative approach and exclude from a classification of winners and losers all those respondents that were not sure, at the time of the survey, which party they would support. In this way we can classify into losers vs winners 77% of our sample in Australia, 54% in Brazil, 54% in Colombia, 74% in Estonia, 67% in Hungary, 60% in Italy, 76% in Kenya, 65% in Nigeria, 48% in Serbia, 75% in Sweden, 85% in Türkiye, and 74% in the US. We used the national level also in the US, despite the survey being fielded just before the congressional election in November 2022. There are two reasons for this: one is for comparability purposes with all other countries; two, as the existing literature shows that national level victories are comparably more important than local level victories (see Stiers et al. 2018).

Anderson and Guillory (1997) show that losers in more consensual systems display higher levels of satisfaction with democracy than do losers in systems with majoritarian characteristics. The opposite seemed to hold true for winners of the elections. Our findings support the view that, in systems where citizens have more opportunities for input and access, some of the negative consequences of losing the elections are muted. Contrary to Anderson and Guillory (1997), however, we do not find that winners have more supportive meanings of voting in majoritarian systems. In fact, the ranking of countries in Table 8.4 is rather similar to the ranking we would obtain by looking at winners instead.[5] There are two possible explanations for this. On the one hand, this might be due to the fact that meanings of voting are more stable than satisfaction with democracy. On the other hand, we rely on pre-electoral measurement and there may be some wishful thinking among (future) losers of the elections. This might especially be the case in Brazil and Türkiye, the two countries in which the election result was more uncertain prior to the elections and that score among the top for both losers and winners of the election. Notably in Türkiye, the most frequent word mentioned by prospective winners of the elections and supporters of the Erdogan party in the allegiance meaning is 'right'; prospective losers of the elections and supporters of the

Table 8.4 Countries ranked by mean value of supportive meaning *among losers* and *winners*

Country	Losers N	Mean	SD	Country	Winners N	Mean	SD
US	1765	0.765	0.152	Sweden	373	0.767	0.161
Brazil	706	0.757	0.110	Colombia	205	0.760	0.086
Türkiye	1078	0.756	0.140	US	1222	0.757	0.152
Colombia	540	0.752	0.093	Brazil	379	0.743	0.131
Sweden	795	0.743	0.162	Türkiye	631	0.743	0.128
Italy	713	0.733	0.125	Italy	232	0.729	0.112
Hungary	1575	0.726	0.154	Australia	489	0.726	0.163
Australia	669	0.724	0.166	Nigeria	342	0.706	0.197
Serbia	464	0.690	0.161	Hungary	1006	0.697	0.187
Nigeria	619	0.677	0.222	Estonia	376	0.682	0.096
Estonia	734	0.676	0.110	Serbia	261	0.671	0.192
Kenya	769	0.640	0.239	Kenya	320	0.662	0.208

[5] The rank correlation coefficient between the two is 0.998.

main opposition party instead mention 'democracy'. Countries with proportional and compulsory voting rules also score higher among both voters and abstainers (see Table A8.2).

Summary and conclusion

Citizen support is central to a thriving democracy and effective governance. Ensuring that a minimum level of legitimacy beliefs exist among the population is also crucial for the enduring stability of autocratic regimes (e.g., Mauk 2020). While voting plays a key role in underpinning such supportive processes, we argue that beyond the act of voting, we need to study what that act *means* for citizens. The previous chapters show not only that meanings of voting vary considerably among countries and citizens, but also that some of these meanings are more consequential in terms of those behaviours and attitudes that the literature considers good for democracy (e.g., electoral participation and support for democracy). We classify these meanings into allegiance meanings: voting as a way to affirm one's adherence to the political system and its institutions, which includes citizens who see voting as a way to support or defend democracy (Downs 1957) or to exercise a key right or even a privilege they have as citizens (Blais 2000).

This chapter shows that allegiance meanings are most clearly correlated with support for democracy and democratic elections. Conceptualizing voting as ethical, instrumental, or expressive is also positively correlated with these two variables, though to a lesser extent, and there is a less clear ranking among them. It is therefore fruitful to distinguish meanings of voting from that perspective. Additionally, we observe that having no meaning, rather than anti-voting meaning, is most strongly negatively correlated with support for democracy and democratic elections. This latter finding suggests that the presence of any meaning attached to voting is better for supporting democratic values than a complete lack of meaning.

This chapter looked specifically at whether electoral laws, including the voting system (majoritarian or proportional or a mix) and compulsory voting affect the amount of supportive and unsupportive meanings people hold. We find more supportive meanings of voting under proportional systems than majoritarian systems. This is true above and beyond any other country's features. The fact that countries as diverse as Brazil, Colombia, and Sweden score consistently high in this respect suggests that supportive meanings of voting thrive under conditions of better representation of diverse viewpoints and the inclusion of losers in decision making, regardless of geography and

cultural differences. Mandating participation in elections via compulsory voting is the second key country feature that is positively related to supportive meanings. Despite compulsory voting having some negative consequences (Dassonneville et al. 2023; Singh 2016; 2019), we find support for Lijphart's (1997) claim that, all in all, mandating turnout contributes to the legitimacy of electoral democracy. This is true even in Türkiye—a country classified as an electoral autocracy.

Yet, excepting Türkiye, electoral autocracies consistently display fewer supportive meanings of voting—which is in line with existing theory about support for democracy in autocratic regimes (e.g., Mauk 2020). In such systems, voters may feel that their options are predetermined or restricted, or that elections are a mere formality, rather than a meaningful exercise of choice, hence reducing the perceived significance of their vote. In a true democracy, where there is greater political competition, transparency, accountability, and a wider range of political alternatives, citizens are more likely to view voting as a meaningful way to express their preferences and shape the direction of their country. Besides the system-level variables examined here, at the individual level nationalism, namely, how proud citizens are of their country, seems to reinforce the story around allegiance meanings and helps us explain some outlier cases. Colombia has proportional rules but also the highest level of nationalism among the countries we study. The US is a majoritarian democracy, but it is the country with the second highest level of nationalism in our sample. Estonia, on the other hand, ranks consistently low in terms of supportive meanings despite being proportional, a full democracy, and having a relatively high level of nationalism.

Due to institutional inertia and status quo bias (Bowler and Donovan 2007; 2013), electoral reforms are seldom enacted. Still, substantial electoral reforms have been implemented in a few countries and in several more there is currently extensive discussion of electoral reforms. New Zealand and Japan are often cited as successful examples of electoral reforms going from majoritarian to proportional and mixed system respectively in 1993 and 1994 (Gallagher and Mitchell 2005). In the US, besides debates centred on issues such as gerrymandering, voter suppression, and campaign finance, calls have been made to move to rank voting (Nielson 2017). Changing an electoral system is a complex decision that reflects the unique political and historical context of each country. However, this chapter shows that some electoral rules hold more potential than others when it comes to fostering citizens' supportive meanings. In particular, reforms aimed at improving the fairness, transparency, and representativeness of elections, as well as rules to mandate voting, can influence how voters perceive the act of voting.

Taken together with the preceding chapters of this book, this chapter demonstrates the usefulness of distinguishing between the meanings of voting as we do. Specifically, it highlights the importance of viewing voting as an attitude with specific meanings, rather than simply as an act. Additionally, this chapter makes it clear that not all meanings are the same; some, in addition to their association with turnout, are more normatively desirable because of their strong relation to support for democracy and democratic elections, which in turn sustains social harmony, governmental legitimacy, and the stability of political institutions. Conversely, the complete lack of meaning is most problematic, as it suggests a profound disengagement or indifference towards democratic processes. This disengagement can lead in the long run to a weakened democratic system overall, as individuals without any meaning attached to voting are less likely to support or uphold democratic values and institutions. We return to these considerations in Chapter 9.

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9

Understanding the Meanings of Voting

Why, how, and with what implications?

Carolina Plescia, Sylvia Kritzinger, and André Blais

Introduction

This final chapter revisits the core focus of the book: exploring the meanings of voting for ordinary citizens, and reporting evidence from not just the 'usual suspect' countries generally receiving attention from international social survey programmes, but from a broad cross-section of political and democratic experiences. Throughout this book, we delve into the intricate facets of meanings of voting, examining both qualitative and quantitative dimensions that shed light on the nature and factors that influence ordinary citizens' meanings of voting. We also discuss the implications of these findings for electoral practices and democratic participation. Furthermore, in the different chapters, we address the limitations encountered during our research and propose directions for future studies to build upon our insights. This chapter is structured to summarize our key findings, reflect on their significance, and chart a course for further exploration in this crucial area of inquiry.

The objectives

The objective of the book is to examine the meanings of voting for citizens. We examined this general question cross-nationally without geographical limitations. Therefore, we monitored election timing throughout the globe during 2022 and 2023 and entered the field in those countries where conditions were safe for both the participants and interviewers to inquire about voting, elections, and political attitudes and preferences. We excluded snap elections and countries with a population size too low for concerns related to the timing of the survey and the representativeness of the country population,

Carolina Plescia, Sylvia Kritzinger, and André Blais, *Understanding the Meanings of Voting*. In: *The Meanings of Voting for Citizens*. Edited by: Carolina Plescia, Oxford University Press. © Carolina Plescia (2025).
DOI: 10.1093/9780198946335.003.0009

respectively. After applying the selection criteria thoroughly discussed in Chapter 3, we were able to cover 13 countries with national, legislative elections that encompassed different degrees of democracy, varying levels of compulsory voting requirements, and diverse types of electoral systems.

According to the V-Dem index of liberal democracy (Coppedge et al. 2022), ranging from 0 to 1 with 1 representing full democracies, Hungary, Kenya, Nigeria, Serbia, Tunisia, and Türkiye score below 0.5 and are therefore classified as electoral autocracies, while the rest of the countries examined in this book (Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Estonia, Italy, Sweden, and the United States (US)) surpass this threshold and are seen as liberal democracies (Lührmann et al. 2017). Furthermore, three of the 13 countries under investigation (Australia, Brazil, and Türkiye) have compulsory voting systems (e.g., IDEA 2022). In terms of electoral systems in the national legislature, four countries in our sample (Australia, Kenya, Nigeria, and the US) have majoritarian systems, while the remaining countries have some forms of proportional representation. Although it is difficult to make a definitive argument about the impact of these factors on the meanings of voting with only 13 countries, such variations are nonetheless useful to explore the extent to which meanings cluster around certain institutional and/or political variables.

As mentioned, this book does not study 'voting' as an *act* but rather as an *attitude*. The advantages for such an approach are threefold. First, citizens can hold multiple meanings of voting simultaneously, and this heterogeneity or complexity may not be immediately apparent when considering their vote only as an act and not also as an attitude. Second, meanings of voting can be held by voters and non-voters alike, which may help explain abstention or other forms of political participation. In other words, citizens who do not vote may still attach meanings to voting and these meanings may partly be the reason that these citizens abstain or look for other forms of political participation. Third, two people may have the exact same voting behaviour but assign different meanings to their choices, which can be related to their differing views of the electoral process or democracy more generally. For these reasons, we contend that it is crucial to explore the meanings that citizens attach to voting as attitudes. In this manner, we acknowledge the possibilities that citizens may have more nuanced meanings of voting, and that they may also hold these meanings of voting if they do not vote, for whatever reason. This approach allows for a deeper exploration of the reasons behind voter decisions, shedding light on issues such as political participation, representation, and democratic legitimacy.

Meanings of voting refer to how citizens understand or define 'voting'. We have adopted a maximal definition of meanings since it can respond better to

the challenge of developing a conceptualization that needs to be as applicable as possible across time and geography, even outside the realm of established liberal democracies, a challenge this book sets to achieve. Chapter 1 discusses how people may (or may not) have meanings of voting—hence, voting can be meaningful, or voting may have no meaning to it. Chapter 1 also delineated five categories of meanings of voting. The first category, *instrumental*, aligns with rational choice theory, where individuals vote to achieve broadly defined or specific outcomes such as influencing the country's future, shaping government composition, winning elections, or advocating for specific policies (e.g., Cox 1997; Fiorina 1981). *Expressive* meanings involve using the ballot as a mean to express identification, affiliation, preferences, or protest towards candidates, parties, ideologies, or policies (e.g., Campbell et al. 1960). *Ethics* meanings view the act of voting as a mean to comply with or deviate from societal norms, encompassing a sense of civic duty, obligation, or responsibility (Blais and Achen 2019). *Allegiance* meanings entail affirming commitment to the political system and its institutions, including supporting or defending democracy and exercising one's rights (Blais 2000; Downs 1957). Lastly, *anti-voting* meanings refer to negative attitudes towards the value of voting itself, perceiving it as inconsequential, burdensome, or unpleasant. Individuals may attribute multiple meanings simultaneously. This book studies how many and how much of these meanings exist (Chapter 4), in which countries we find more or fewer of these meanings (Chapter 5), who holds these meanings and why (Chapter 6), and with what potential consequences (Chapter 7 and Chapter 8).

The methodology

The approach

Asking people directly is often considered the most effective method for studying their attitudes (Krosnick et al. 2018). We asked citizens, via online and face-to-face interviews, about their meanings of voting using the open-ended question: 'What does "voting" mean to you?' Respondents were presented with an empty box, allowing them to provide an answer without any text limit. If they tried to skip the question, a prompt would appear at the top of the screen (when they took the interview online or face-to-face via a tablet) or the prompt was given by the interviewer (in case of face-to-face unassisted interviews) encouraging respondents to answer. If they attempted to skip the question again, two prompts would appear: one at the top of the screen encouraging them to answer or select the option 'Voting has no

meaning for me', and a second prompt below the empty text box offering the possibility to tick 'Voting has no meaning for me'.

Following this, respondents encountered (or were asked) two follow-up questions: 'Does "voting" mean anything else to you?' and 'Here you have the opportunity to give one more answer. Does "voting" mean anything else to you?'. These follow-up questions were asked only if the preceding question received an answer. Our goal was to extract as many meanings as possible without priming respondents to provide specific answers. These follow-up questions prompted further reflection, as the literature shows that they are essential to fully understand response articulations (Canache 2012; Haddock and Zanna 1998). While the willingness to offer more responses does not automatically translate into more meanings of voting (Chapter 2), the opportunity to provide more than one answer allows us to capture whether or not people think in terms of multiple meanings of voting. Using an open-ended question has the clear advantage of allowing respondents to articulate their opinions using their own words. This is in contrast with the standard survey practice of formulating closed questions with identical wording across different countries. We believe that the 'decontextualization' required to achieve identical wording of closed-ended questions is problematic when we aim to cover diverse world regions, including Africa, Europe, Latin America, and the Americas (see also Heath et al. 2005).

The interviews to gather meanings of voting were conducted approximately two months prior to the legislative elections. Since the aim is to study the meanings of voting in general, rather than focusing on a particular election campaign, this timeframe was crucial to ensure that the height of the election campaign would not substantially influence citizens' responses. Additional data collection in two countries (Hungary and the US) followed a panel design (with an additional two waves—one pre-election during the peak of the election campaign and one immediately following the elections when voting is more salient among citizens) during which we asked the same respondents three times about the meanings of voting. This allowed us to investigate (Chapter 2 and Chapter 4) whether or not the meanings of voting change over time. In addition, during panel data collection we also asked the same respondents about the meanings of voting in that particular election. This allowed us to further investigate (Chapter 4) how different are meanings of voting in general from meanings of vote choice in a specific election.

We believe that expanding the scope of investigation to include any country holding elections during the research timeframe is one of the highlights of the book, as it allows for the study of cases beyond the usual and most commonly

studied cases of WEIRD (western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) countries (Henrich et al. 2010). However, it introduces additional complexity (Chapter 3). In particular, studying electoral participation and voting behaviour presents unique challenges in electoral autocracies where political freedoms are restricted and elections may be manipulated or controlled, or in countries with relatively little internet penetration across urban and rural areas. For example, while we wanted to keep the survey mode constant across countries, the online mode was not an option to achieve a national representative sample of citizens in Kenya, Nigeria, and Tunisia. Thus, for these countries we had to opt for face-to-face interviews. The choice of survey mode holds particular significance, especially concerning open-ended inquiries. Given that responses to survey questions about voting tend to be influenced by a social desirability bias (e.g., Holbrook and Krosnick 2010), the presence or absence of an interviewer may significantly impact respondents' responses. While the consistent findings across countries from both face-to-face and online interviews offer reassurance, we needed to keep the transition in modes in mind when analysing our data.

To be sure of their suitability, before using the open-ended questions in the large comparative data collection effort on which the empirical chapters of this book are based, we tested them using qualitative pilot interviews and a citizen science website (Chapter 2). This was a crucial step in determining how much relevant information respondents would provide in response to open-ended answers. This explorative research design allowed us to grasp non-attitudes (Pennycook et al. 2015), to explore the necessity of prompting the meanings of voting, and to examine whether question ordering during the interview impacted citizens' responses. The exploratory steps revealed that most respondents understood and could articulate their meanings of voting, with some holding multiple meanings and others none. The studies tested a draft codebook for open-ended responses and found that while some needed prompts, many participants were comfortable discussing their views. Question order impacts responses: therefore, open-ended questions are asked first in structured interviews to capture authentic opinions.

Categorizing meanings

Following the procedure of the American National Election Study (Lupia 2018), the open-ended answers were first broken down into chunks of semi-sentences, each containing a single meaning. The most prevalent and single-word responses were coded automatically (e.g., coding 'duty' as ethics

meaning or 'nothing' as no meaning). The remaining chunks were coded by multiple coders to represent one (or none) of each meaning of voting. Finally, each meaning was coded as 1 if it was present in one or more chunks from one participant and 0 if it was not—leading to one binary variable for each of the five meanings. The categories that the coders used to code each chunk are mutually exclusive in the sense that no chunk can be coded simultaneously into more than one category. For answers containing more than one chunk, however, each chunk can be coded using a different coding category, if applicable. This implies that one respondent can be assigned more than one meaning category.

The exact same codebook has been consistently used for all survey waves and all countries. The coding categories in the codebook have been theoretically derived and relate to the categorization outlined here. As a consequence, with the few exceptions discussed, all coding categories can be traced back to broad conceptualizations in the existing literature on voting, as listed in Table 1.1. Coders were provided with a list of categories, a definition of each category, and several examples selected by the core team from the collected data. The overarching coding categories are: no meaning, meaning (any), and a residual category composed of answers related to 'do not know/NA/refused'. Within the meaning (any) category, we further differentiate between ethics, allegiance, expressive, instrumental, and anti-voting meanings.

Two additional categories were available to coders when none of the main categories were able to adequately characterize the meaning of a specific chunk. These categories were 'broad and/or not classifiable in any of the previous categories', for answers like 'yes, it has a meaning' (and nothing else), and 'other', for responses that are not classifiable in any of the remaining categories and could potentially signify meanings not considered yet by the existing literature. When it comes to the latter, after coding was completed, we hired and trained a new coder—who had not seen or worked with the data before—to extract anti-voting meanings (Chapter 1) from this other category. While the anti-voting meanings are part of the empirical analysis of subsequent chapters, the remaining answers, which consist of rather general responses, are exclusively used for discussion mostly in Chapter 4.

Alternative measures

We discussed the multiple advantages of an open-ended inquiry in Chapter 2. Yet, responses to open-ended questions may come with several disadvantages as well. Citizens' views often lack clarity, with ambiguous language and poor

expression. Other drawbacks include: (1) the need for verbal skills, disadvantaging those with low education levels or neurodiversity; (2) the potential for irrelevant responses; and (3) the tendency to offer only readily available or obvious information.

Chapter 4 focused precisely on the validity aspects of our open-ended enquiry and categorization. While validity may encompass several different aspects, we concentrated on content and construct validity. The former aims at ensuring that our coding of the open-ended questions comprehensively covers the construct it assesses. We ensured that the coding comprehensively captures the range of possible responses that participants provide, looking at the amount of broad or unclassified answers and deviations from what would have been classified using closed-ended questions. Construct (convergent and divergent) validity is about whether an indicator correlates as expected with other measures. In this case, we checked how much the meanings derived from open-ended questions and our coding are empirically associated with other indicators (e.g., turnout, trust, and support for democracy) in a way that conforms to theoretical expectations. Overall, the validation exercise in Chapter 4 shows that the thorough preparation and collaborative efforts of the team enabled us to achieve a reliable and valid dataset that provides valuable insights into the meanings of voting across diverse populations, both within and across countries.

Methodological outlook

Chapter 4 also tested the coverage and robustness of our codebook across different categories of meanings and countries, and assessed whether technological advancements, such as large language models (LLMs) like Meta Llama 3 (8 billion parameters) and Open AI's GPT-4, could streamline future coding processes and achieve results comparable to human coders. After all, we gathered nearly a million words on the meanings of voting, which involved a rigorous two-year manual coding effort with six coders trained by three core team members. Finalizing the codebook alone took almost six months, including testing three subsequent versions during the initial coding phases. To cover data from 13 countries, ten translators assisted in translating open-ended questions, presenting challenges such as maintaining uniform coding standards across languages and managing logistical complexities with a large, multilingual team. Cultural nuances in responses were carefully considered to ensure accurate coding. Hence, it seems fair to ask whether recent AI advancements can improve future coding accuracy and efficiency.

Chapter 4 indicates that while they perform well for some annotation categories, state-of-the-art models struggle to match human coders in others, especially in more complex and vague categories like anti-voting meanings. This suggests that we cannot assume the AI models possess human-like reasoning abilities, and rather that they require clear semantic correspondence between the provided examples in codebooks and the texts being annotated. Unlike humans, who can draw on memory and reasoning, models require a rigid set of rules. Future research should investigate various prompting strategies that deviate from the human-focused codebook for annotation tasks (Chapter 4).

Findings

Who holds which meanings and where?

The figures in Chapter 4 show that, overall, the percentages of respondents indicating no meaning are consistently very low across all countries, notably in Colombia and Türkiye. Although the percentage of no meaning is somewhat higher in Kenya and Nigeria, where data collection relied on a face-to-face mode, note that Serbia and Tunisia have nearly identical percentages of no meaning, despite the data being collected through both online and face-to-face survey modes. This suggests that the mode of the survey alone may not account for the observed differences. When it comes to specific categories, anti-voting is among the categories that appear least frequently, while the instrumental category is almost everywhere the largest. However, there are considerable differences across countries. For example, the allegiance category is particularly small in Estonia compared to almost all other countries, while the instrumental category is particularly large in Kenya and Tunisia. Chapter 5 focused specifically on the cross-country variation in meanings of voting. Since the 13 countries studied in this book encompass varying degrees of democracy, levels of compulsory voting requirements, and diverse types of electoral systems, we focused specifically on variation across these three dimensions. As people can hold multiple meanings simultaneously, we look at the amount of a meaning held in isolation or in combination with other types of meanings by country.

Our descriptive analysis revealed that the vast majority of citizens attribute meanings to voting, irrespective of their country's democratic status. The chapter shows that across all countries a great majority of citizens hold one or more meanings of voting. The most common types of meanings are instrumental, followed by allegiance and expressive. Rejection of voting, which we

label as anti-voting meaning, is low across all countries. Levels of democracy matter more for the types, than for the total number, of meanings. In fact, liberal democracies and electoral democracies do not significantly diverge in terms of the total number of meanings of voting. However, we find that expressive and ethics meanings are more common in liberal democracies, while exclusively instrumental meanings are more common in countries with lower levels of democracy. Countries with proportional representation seem to have slightly more expressive meanings, while majoritarian systems seem to favour instrumental meanings in particular. Countries with compulsory voting have the lowest number of no meanings and score considerably high in terms of levels of allegiance, regardless of their level of democracy. Allegiance meanings are most common in liberal democracies and countries with compulsory system and proportional rule. This is also true even in Türkiye, classified as electoral autocracy by V-DEM but characterized by compulsory voting and proportional rule.

Chapter 6 delves into the diverse meanings that individuals associate with voting. We propose that individual differences could influence these interpretations through two mechanisms. Firstly, certain groups (such as males, older individuals, and those with higher education) undergo more comprehensive and formal political socialization compared to others (Bos et al. 2022; Guhin et al. 2021; Wiseman et al. 2011). Political socialization, defined by Merelman (1986, 279) as 'the process by which people acquire enduring orientations toward politics in general and their own political system', includes learning about the meaning and significance of voting. Thus, variations in political socialization may align with different understandings of voting. Secondly, some groups (such as urban residents, partisans, and mainstream-party supporters) typically experience better electoral representation than others (Banducci et al. 1999; Benoit 2001; Carey and Hix 2011; Kim et al. 2010). We argue that prolonged underrepresentation in elections can shape citizens' perceptions of what voting signifies. These mechanisms are intertwined with broader disparities among social groups, which we do not aim to unravel. Instead, we focus on examining their implications: how individual differences correlate with citizens' interpretations of voting. As for individual differences, we consider variables related to both political socialization and representation. These variables fall into two main categories: demographics (such as gender, age, education, and urban residency) and political attitudes (including centrism, partisanship, and affective polarization).

Chapter 6 highlights a clear pattern whereby individuals from groups typically undergoing thorough political socialization and enjoying better electoral representation attribute more varied meanings to voting, which

contrasts with socially disadvantaged groups, such as younger citizens, women, less-educated individuals, rural residents, low-income earners, non-partisans, and those with extreme ideologies or low affective polarization. These patterns may both reflect and contribute to disparities in political engagement, since many of these groups exhibit lower voter turnout rates (Gallego 2010; Inglehart and Norris 2017; Iversen and Rosenbluth 2006; Smets and van Ham 2013). Furthermore, specific nuances in the meanings of voting emerge among different demographic groups. For instance, older citizens' tendency to attribute meaning to voting appears more rooted in ethics and allegiance than in instrumental or expressive purposes, possibly due to their higher turnout rates compared to younger generations (Smets 2012). Higher-educated citizens exhibit similar patterns, but gender differences do not significantly impact ethics or allegiance meanings; instead, men tend to associate voting more with expressive than with anti-voting sentiments, contrasting with women (Galais and Blais 2019).

Moreover, the relationship between political attitudes and voting meanings varies across categories. Partisanship, ideological centrism, and affective polarization correlate positively with ethics, allegiance, and instrumental meanings of voting, while showing less relevance to expressive meanings, despite initial associations with candidate or party identification (Schuessler 2000). Interestingly, these relationships differ notably between liberal democracies and electoral autocracies. In liberal democracies, factors such as age and education strongly influence instrumental meanings, whereas in autocracies, urban residency and income play a more significant role in shaping anti-voting sentiments. This disparity underscores how different political systems and levels of political competition influence the motivations behind voting behaviour, with autocracies often emphasizing economic gains or patriotism and civic duty (Blaydes 2006; 2010; Letsa 2020; Lust-Okar 2006; Magaloni 2006; Reuter 2021). Overall, these distinctions between liberal democracies and electoral autocracies highlight the specific characteristics and dynamics inherent to each political regime, shaping processes of socialization and representation in significant ways, and consequently on the meanings of voting as well.

Meanings and behaviours

Chapter 7 studied the link between the meanings of voting and different forms of political participation, including electoral participation (i.e., voting) and non-electoral participation (e.g., demonstrating, contacting officials,

and signing a petition). Going beyond electoral participation is essential since it provides a more comprehensive understanding of civic engagement and its broader impact on democratic processes, especially today with the increase and prevalence of non-electoral participation among younger citizens (Dalton 2013; Norris 2002; Oser 2017; 2022). We presented and tested three main arguments. The first emphasizes that voter turnout (or abstention) in elections is closely linked to individuals' meanings of voting. Viewing voting as a duty, a right, a means to influence public policy, or an expression of preference towards candidates encourages voter participation. Thus, we expected these perceptions to be positively associated with voter turnout. The second argument suggests that these views of voting also correlate with heightened engagement in other forms of political participation. This broader involvement stems from shared motivations such as ideological alignment, perceived effectiveness, and societal values (Griffin and Newman 2005; Schlozman et al. 2012). The third qualifies the first two by highlighting the critical distinction between anti-voting sentiments, other meanings of voting, and a complete absence of any meaning associated with voting. Individuals with anti-voting sentiments feel disillusioned or disaffected with voting and are less likely to participate in elections. However, they may still engage in non-electoral forms of expression, known as the 'voice route' (Portos et al. 2020). In contrast, individuals who lack any specific meaning of voting tend to abstain from political activities altogether due to a general disinterest in politics, described as the 'exit route' (Portos et al. 2020).

Chapter 7 reveals a strong link between citizens' conceptualizations of voting and their political behaviour, extending beyond electoral spheres. Firstly, ethics, allegiance, expressive, and instrumental meanings of voting are all positively related to voter turnout, although the importance of expressive meanings is less pronounced than commonly believed. In fact, expressive meanings are the least strongly correlated with turnout. Conversely, viewing voting in allegiance terms proves influential, rivalling the significance of ethics-bound perceptions of meanings of voting when it comes to turnout. Secondly, meanings of voting correlate with engagement in various political activities like signing a petition, contacting politicians, and political engagement online, with instrumental motives and allegiance views particularly impactful. Note that ethics-based meanings primarily influence voting behaviour. rather than broader civic engagement. Lastly, anti-voting meanings display a negative correlation with voting, but a positive one with other forms of participation.

This suggests that they may discourage electoral participation but spur non-electoral engagement, as individuals seek alternative means to express

discontent—a phenomenon observed particularly in electoral autocracies. This stands in contrast to no meanings of voting, which are negatively correlated with both electoral and non-electoral participations. Yet, it seems that having a meaning and having an anti-voting meaning are more relevant for non-electoral participation in autocracies than in democracies. This finding is interesting as it highlights the necessity for ordinary citizens in countries with lower levels of democracy to find some meaning in voting. This may be because the act of voting per se cannot be trusted in electoral democracies.

Good and bad meanings

Chapter 8 explored whether there are meanings of voting that align more or less favourably with democratically relevant variables. Specifically, we investigated whether certain meanings consistently correlate positively with attitudes that are traditionally viewed as beneficial for the quality and legitimacy of democratic processes, such as supporting democracy and democratic elections. Our goal was to uncover how electoral rules influence citizens' tendencies to adopt meanings that are perceived as either supportive or unsupportive from a democratic standpoint. More specifically, we studied the correlations between support for democracy and support for democratic elections and types of meanings of voting. Support for democracy is gauged by asking respondents 'How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?' Support for democratic elections is assessed with the question 'How important is it for you to have the right to vote in free and fair elections?' We find that allegiance meanings of voting show the highest correlation with both measures of democratic support. This suggests that perceiving voting as a means to engage with the political system, as a legal entitlement, or as a way to express empowerment or allegiance to the political system, is the most supportive meaning overall. Interestingly, even in electoral autocracies like Hungary and Serbia, allegiance meanings maintain significant correlations with our support variables, underscoring their perceived importance despite authoritarian electoral contexts. Conversely, no meanings show consistently lower correlations with support variables across all countries. Surprisingly, anti-voting meanings exhibit lower negative correlations with democratic support variables compared to having no meaning at all. When considering the remaining meanings—namely ethics, expressive, and instrumental—they behave extremely similarly, and hence we consider

these three meanings to be very alike when it comes to being supportive from a democratic perspective.

These findings have profound implications, especially when juxtaposed with insights from Chapter 7, which illustrates that individuals who indicate no meaning of voting tend to abstain from political participation entirely, whereas those with anti-voting sentiments engage less in voting but are more inclined towards non-electoral actions like petitions or demonstrations. This suggests that anti-voting individuals harbour discontent with voting processes but remain politically engaged through alternative means. Conversely, individuals lacking any meaningful stance on voting generally exhibit disinterest in politics overall. In summary, having no specific meaning of voting can be viewed as the least supportive stance from a democratic perspective. Regarding other meanings—ethics, expressive, and instrumental—the correlation values for these meanings are closely clustered, suggesting they share similarities in their democratic supportiveness across different national contexts.

Based on these findings, Chapter 8 presents a supportive meaning index ranging from 0 to 1. The least supportive meaning (no meaning) is given a score of 0, followed by anti-voting meaning, with a score of .33. The most supportive (allegiance) meaning gets 1, while ethics, expressive, and instrumental are scored .66. We then checked in which institutional settings we can find more or fewer of these supportive meanings. We find that proportional systems foster more supportive meanings of voting compared to majoritarian systems, transcending other national characteristics. Countries like Brazil, Colombia, and Sweden consistently score high in supportive meanings, indicating that diverse representation and inclusive decision making promote positive views on voting, regardless of geographical or cultural differences. Compulsory voting also positively correlates with supportive meanings. Despite some negative effects (Dassonneville et al. 2023; Singh 2016; 2019), our study supports Lijphart's (1997) claim that mandatory turnout enhances the legitimacy of electoral democracy, even in electoral autocracies like Türkiye. However, by the same token, cautious interpretation is needed, as other electoral autocracies display fewer supportive meanings, aligning with theories about democratic support in such regimes (e.g., Mauk 2020): then voters may perceive elections as predetermined or meaningless, reducing the significance of their vote. Beyond system-level variables, individual factors such as nationalism play a role. High national pride appears to reinforce allegiance meanings, explaining some outliers. For example, Colombia, with proportional rules and high nationalism, and the US, a majoritarian

democracy with high nationalism, both show strong supportive meanings. Conversely, Estonia, despite being a proportional full democracy with relatively high nationalism, ranks low in supportive meanings. Thus, while some institutional tendencies can be observed, at the same time no clear patterns emerge.

Theoretical implications

Assessments of electoral participation and voting behaviour represent one of the most researched avenues of political science. More than 70 years of scholarship have produced an enormous knowledge bank about why and how citizens vote. The literature provides expectations about the way citizens may define voting, which we used to construct our conceptualization. For example, the concept of voting as an ethic duty is not new. Many ethical theorists, from John Stuart Mill to Aristotle to Kant, as well as many political philosophers, imply voting to be a duty. Blais and Achen (2019) among others have employed a definition of voting as a duty (see also Mackie 2014). Furthermore, one of the most widely employed definition of voting as a choice (i.e., voting as an expression of a preference to achieve representation) is directly related to our conceptualization of expressive meanings of voting. People vote if they have a clear preference for a candidate or party, and they abstain if they do not (e.g., Blais 2000; Campbell et al. 1960; Converse 1966). The idea of instrumentality in voting is also not new, as voting to strategically affect the outcome of elections (Downs 1957), to not waste your vote (Cox 1997), or to support the implementation of particular policies (Kedar 2005) has a long tradition in the literature. However, the problems are that these conceptualizations have always be en exclusively associated with *behaviours* and never studied on their own as *attitudes*. Additionally, inferring such concepts without directly probing them and empirically testing them by asking citizens directly is deeply unsatisfactory. In fact, such an approach restricts citizens' views to researcher-defined options and hampers our ability to study whether (or not) and to what extent citizens actually hold these meanings—and where and to which extent they go beyond.

This book underscores the significance of differentiating between the various meanings associated with voting. By emphasizing the importance of viewing voting not merely as a mechanical act, but rather as an attitude imbued with specific meanings, this book sheds light on the complexities underlying political behaviour—and thus also on the complexity of understanding and explaining it—as well as acknowledges the limitations of previous research design.

We find that meanings are often intertwined. This suggests that people's views of voting are not strictly expressive or instrumental; rather, a combination of meanings underlies specific patterns of participation and behaviour. For instance, our research reveals that allegiance meanings, not ethical considerations as commonly assumed, are most strongly correlated with voter turnout, support for democracy, and confidence in democratic elections. Moreover, reflecting on non-electoral participation, we observe a spectrum from disengagement—where individuals attribute no particular meaning to voting at all—to active resistance, where voting has not lost its meaning completely, but it is so negative that participation itself is motivated by opposition to traditional electoral processes, but simultaneously encourage alternative participation modes. Understanding these nuances in motivations is crucial for comprehending the diverse ways beyond voting in which individuals engage with political systems. Some of these findings seem to be even stronger in electoral autocracies, suggesting that meanings of voting may be even more crucial for enhancing political engagement and thus political legitimacy in countries with lower levels of democracy.

While the existing literature underscores the importance of party or candidate preferences for voting, the findings of the main analyses indicate that expressive meanings are only weakly related to the voting decision. This suggests that, while they undoubtedly play a crucial role in shaping electoral outcomes, party or candidate preferences may not fully capture the multifaceted motivations driving individuals to cast their ballots in the first place. Conversely, conceiving voting in allegiance terms, a largely neglected perspective of voting in the existing literature (see also Chapter 1), is at least as important as seeing voting as a duty. Another notable result is that meanings of voting translate into heightened tendencies not only to vote, but also to engage in other forms of political engagement. This is contrary to the general tendency in the existing literature to study non-electoral participation as an alternative to voting (but see Oser 2017; 2022 for notable exceptions). While previous research often focuses on non-electoral forms of political engagement, such as activism, protest, or community organizing, our study highlights the unique role of voting as a fundamental mediating mechanism of various forms of democratic participation.

The findings from this book reveal a stark contrast between the meanings of voting in general and the pragmatic reality of meanings of voting in a particular election. Views of voting in general are characterized by a sense of optimism, reflecting a belief in the potential transformative power of democratic participation. In this conceptualization, voting is seen as a fundamental civic duty, a means of expressing one's voice, a way to influence the future of the country, and a symbol of democratic empowerment. This is especially true in

countries that are relatively new to democracy, such as Colombia. Moreover, the meanings of voting in general have a rich and complex variation, recognizing that people may be driven by myriad personal values, social identities, ideologies, and party considerations. In contrast, questions on trust, like–dislike for parties, or satisfaction with democracy often elicit frustration with the political choices available. Within the context of a given electoral contest, voters may feel disillusioned by the limited choices available, disheartened by negative campaigning or political polarization, or sceptical about the efficacy of their vote in effecting meaningful change. This juxtaposition between meanings of voting in general and the pragmatic reality underscores the complex interplay between normative aspirations and practical constraints and can well explain the rising levels of abstention and distrust in politics. It highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of voting behaviour that accounts for both the aspirational ideals that underpin democratic citizenship and the contextual factors that constrain electoral decision-making processes.

Normative and practical implications

When studying voting as a meaning, it becomes apparent that voting is not merely an act, but rather a reflection of deeply ingrained, long-term attitudes towards civic participation. As such, efforts to enhance turnout through reforms such as early voting may not always achieve their intended goals because voting is fundamentally more than just an easily accessible process—it embodies individual beliefs and values regarding civic engagement. Similarly, 'get out the vote' campaigns face challenges when voting is perceived as ineffectual or a waste of time. This perception often leads individuals to seek alternative forms of participation and campaigns deemed more impactful. Campaigns aimed at mobilizing voters can benefit from recognizing the diverse meanings people attribute to voting—as a civic responsibility, a means of exerting influence, an expression of personal preferences, and/or an affirmation of societal values. Highlighting the broader societal impacts of voting beyond individual candidate or party choices may resonate more deeply with voters' underlying motivations. Furthermore, we show that non-electoral forms of civic engagement are driven by similar voting meanings. Individuals who view voting as instrumental or aligned with their ideological beliefs are more likely to engage in both electoral and non-electoral activities. Conversely, disillusionment with traditional voting

practices may lead individuals to seek alternative avenues, such as protests or advocacy work.

This book makes clear that not all meanings are the same; some, such as allegiance meanings, in addition to their association with turnout, are more normatively desirable because of their strong relation to support for democracy and democratic elections, which in turn sustain social harmony, governmental legitimacy, and the stability of political institutions. Conversely, the complete lack of meaning is most problematic, as it suggests a profound disengagement or indifference towards democratic processes. While our book reveals that voting holds no meaning for only a minority of people, acknowledging the existence of this group is crucial. Democracies must continuously engage citizens to ensure that the meaningfulness of voting, and by extension democracy itself, remains high. Continuous efforts to offer inclusive and resonant civic education and engagement opportunities can help sustain the perceived value of democratic participation. Disengagement can lead in the long run to a weakened democratic system, as individuals without any meaning attached to voting are less likely to support or uphold democratic values and institutions. Yet, while the book shows that in the short term of an election campaign meanings of voting are unlikely to change, specific institutional rules, like voter registration procedures, and ballot design complexities can pose significant barriers, impacting not only perceptions of election integrity and participation, but also meanings of voting. Conversely, certain institutional aspects, such as mandating voting or proportional seat allocation, have the potential to foster more supportive meanings of voting.

Analysing outliers such as the US (where strong nationalism intersects with concerns over perceptions of election integrity), Türkiye (where voting is seen as a national duty influencing identity), and Estonia (where debates over the effectiveness of technological advancements in voting persist) provides valuable insights into the diverse contexts that shape such meanings of voting. In fact, notably, the book shows that the distinction of liberal democracy versus electoral autocracy is less consequential for the *number* of meanings citizens hold but more so for the *type* of meanings and their relation to normatively desirable outcomes (e.g., turnout) but also support for democracy and democratic elections. It also shows that such supportive meanings can exist for a variety of reasons and can become problematic in some contexts. For example, in the US, supportive meanings seem to be related to a very strong nationalistic attachment, which (as we have seen in recent years) can be used by political actors to their advantage, turning them into 'sore losers' when election outcomes are 'unsatisfactory'.

Moreover, discussions about voting as a duty and allegiance extend beyond citizenship to encompass immigrants. This raises critical normative questions: Who should have the right to vote? At what age should citizens be eligible to vote? Who can run for elections, and at what age? These questions are essential to the democratic process and reflect broader debates about what constitutes good citizenship (see also Wegschaider et al. 2024). These discussions are intrinsically linked to the meanings people attribute to voting. For instance, viewing voting as a civic duty implies that all members of society, regardless of their background, should be encouraged and enabled to participate in elections. This perspective promotes the inclusion of immigrants in the electoral process and reinforces the idea that political engagement is a fundamental aspect of good citizenship. While the vast majority of countries requires citizenship for its residents to vote, some do not, albeit this does not automatically mean enfranchisement for everyone (see Massicotte et al. 2004). By extending voting rights and participation opportunities to these groups, societies can foster a sense of belonging and integration, which is crucial for social cohesion and the democratic fabric.

Furthermore, considering voting as an expression of allegiance highlights the symbolic nature of the act. It underscores the connection between individual identity and the collective values of a democratic society based first and foremost on electoral representation (Bloemraad and Schönwälder 2013). For immigrants, participating in elections can be a powerful affirmation of their commitment to their new country, symbolizing their integration and acceptance within the community. Addressing who can run for elections and at what age also ties back to the meanings of voting. If voting is seen as a means of influence and representation, it follows that eligibility criteria for candidacy should be inclusive and reflective of the population's diversity. Encouraging young people and immigrants to run for office can enhance the representativeness of political institutions and ensure that a broader range of perspectives and experiences is brought into policymaking. These normative questions and their associated policies have profound implications for political socialization and issues of immigration in which voting becomes a mean to help immigrants and young citizens to politically socialize over the medium and long term (see also the discussion in Bender 2021). By recognizing and addressing the diverse meanings of voting, societies can create more inclusive and participatory democratic processes. This approach not only enhances electoral participation but also strengthens the overall health of democracy by ensuring that all segments of the population are engaged and represented (Gay 2002). In summary, the meanings attributed to voting—whether as a duty, an allegiance, or a means of influence—are central to

discussions about the rights and responsibilities of all people constituting the citizenry of a country.

Future directions of research

This book does not examine meanings of voting in terms of sentiments and tonality in people's responses. While meanings can have a valence dimension that intersects with the substantive categorization presented here, this aspect requires separate investigation not provided in this book. While some work is already looking in this direction (Boyer et al. 2024), it makes sense to further explore the valence dimension of meanings of voting to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the emotional and evaluative components that influence electoral behaviour and democratic attitudes.

Our categorization of meanings of voting recognizes six overarching categories: no meaning, ethics, allegiance, expressive, instrumental, and anti-voting. These overarching categories contain several subcategories within them. For example, within the category of meaning as ethics, there are references to participating or taking part in the election, as well as exercising a duty, such as 'my responsibility', 'my obligation', and 'my commitment'. It also includes references to voting as an act expected of oneself, something that others convinced one to do, or even as a habit. Similarly, within the category of meaning as instrumental, there are both broad references to voting as an act of prospective voting, formulated in general terms such as 'future/fate/destiny', and more specific references to changing the current political situation, strategically influencing the formation of the government or the outcome of the election, supporting or opposing policies/issues, or choosing/electing rulers/parties/representatives. However, while our coding also made distinctions within each of these categories, we did not use these subcategories as our primary focus was to establish the broader overarching categories to provide a general framework for understanding the meanings of voting. Using the subcategories requires a more detailed and granular analysis, which was beyond the scope of our study.

We make our data open access precisely to encourage an expansion of the scope of this book (Plescia et al. 2025a; 2025b). Along with the methodological guidance provided in Chapter 3, we believe this book provides a good starting point. The open-ended responses provided by survey participants offer a richness of data unparalleled in its depth and potential for further exploitation. For example, in the category of allegiance meanings, some answers are incredibly similar across diverse contexts, for example, in

Kenya and Sweden. However, an initial qualitative exploration indicates that losers and winners think of voting in different ways. In Türkiye, for instance, the most frequent word mentioned by prospective winners of the elections and supporters of the AKP—Erdoğan party—is 'right', whereas prospective losers of the elections and supporters of the main opposition party frequently mention 'democracy'. This richness of data underscores the potential for comparative studies and the exploration of how similar and distinct themes emerge in different political and cultural contexts, and which implications it may have. The open-access nature of our data and our methodological insights are intended to encourage and facilitate such in-depth, nuanced research in the future.

In future research, it is important to use panel data to examine the stability of voting meanings over a long period of time. Analysing the perceptions of voting at age 15, before gaining the right to vote, and tracking how these evolve after participating in an actual election could provide valuable insights into the impact of first-hand electoral experience on voter attitudes. One could also look into important questions about the cognitive aspect of voting meanings, specifically whether certain citizens lack the cognitive competence to form coherent views about voting. Understanding the extent to which cognitive abilities influence electoral attitudes and decision making can illuminate the inclusivity and effectiveness of democratic processes.

We also hope the ideas presented in this book provide guidance and impetus for future research into the meanings of other key concepts in political science. While we focus on the *meanings* of voting in this book, we believe that studying the meanings of other critical concepts, such as protest or representation, could be equally illuminating. Understanding the meanings of protest could reveal how different individuals and groups perceive and engage in acts of dissent and political activism. This could help elucidate the motivations behind protests and the various forms they take in different cultural and political contexts. Additionally, investigating the meanings associated with violent protest behaviour could provide insights into the conditions under which individuals resort to violence and the justifications they use for such actions. This is particularly relevant in understanding and addressing issues related to democratic backsliding, where increasing dissatisfaction can lead to more frequent and intense protests, including violence. Similarly, exploring the meanings of representation could uncover how citizens view their relationship with elected officials and the political system as a whole. This could shed light on the factors that influence political trust, engagement, and

satisfaction with democracy. In the context of democratic backsliding, understanding these meanings becomes even more crucial. As trust in democratic institutions erodes, citizens' perceptions of representation and their engagement with the political process are likely to shift, potentially exacerbating political polarization and instability. By extending the research framework to these and other concepts, future studies could deepen our comprehension of political behaviour and attitudes. This approach would also contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of how citizens interact with and perceive the political world around them. We encourage researchers to build on our work, using the methodological tools and open-access data we provide, to explore further these important areas of political science. In doing so, they will contribute valuable insights into the dynamics of democratic governance and the opportunities and challenges posed by contemporary political developments.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX Chapter 2

How to Measure the Meanings of Voting?

Table A2.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of participants for focus groups and interviews

Number	Type	Protocol	Age	Gender	Student	Diploma	Nationality
01	Interview	Activity 1	19	Male	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Western Europe
02	Interview	Activity 1	26	Female	No	I do not study	Southern Europe
03	Interview	Activity 1	26	Female	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Eastern Europe
04	FG	Activity 1	28	Male	Yes	Master's degree	North Europe
05	FG	Activity 1	29	Female	No	I do not study	Oceania
06	FG	Activity 1	26	Male	Yes	PhD	Eastern Europe
07	Interview	Activity 2	22	Male	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Western Europe
08	Interview	Activity 2	25	Male	No	I do not study	East Asia
09	Interview	Activity 2	23	Male	Yes	Master's degree	Turkish
10	FG	Activity 2	52	Female	No	Master's degree	Western Europe and North America
11	FG	Activity 2	40	Male	No	I do not study	Western Europe
12	FG	Activity 2	65	Male	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Western Europe
13	FG	Activity 2	36	Male	Yes	PhD	South America
14	FG	Activity 2	47	Male	No	I do not study	East Europe
15	Interview	Activity 3	24	Male	Yes	Master's degree	Western Europe

Continued

Table A2.1 *Continued*

Number	Type	Protocol	Age	Gender	Student	Diploma	Nationality
16	Interview	Activity 3	19	Male	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Eastern Europe
17	Interview	Activity 3	35	Female	No	I do not study	Eastern Europe
18	FG	Activity 3	24	Male	Yes	Master's degree	Western Europe
19	FG	Activity 3	20	Female	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Western Europe
20	FG	Activity 3	22	Male	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Western Europe
21	FG	Activity 3	27	Female	Yes	Master's degree	Eastern Europe
22	FG	Activity 3	19	Male	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Western Europe
23	FG	Activity 3	24	Male	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Western Europe
24	FG	Activity 3	18	Female	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Eastern Europe
25	Interview	Activity 4	23	Other	Yes	Master's degree	North America
26	Interview	Activity 4	24	Female	Yes	Master's degree	Western Europe
27	Interview	Activity 4	21	Male	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Western Europe
28	Interview	Activity 4	24	Female	Yes	Master's degree	Southern Europe
29	FG	Activity 4	24	Male	Yes	Master's degree	North America
30	FG	Activity 4	26	Male	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Western Europe
31	FG	Activity 4	27	Female	Yes	Master's degree	Western Europe
32	FG	Activity 4	29	Male	Yes	Master's degree	South Asia
33	FG	Activity 4	21	Female	Yes	Bachelor's degree	Western Europe
34	FG	Activity 4	26	Male	Yes	Master's degree	Western Europe

Note: While we know the specific nationality of the respondents, for anonymization and safety concerns, we report nationality information at a broader level.

Table A2.2 Cohen's kappa values for intercoder reliability

Dataset	With Auto Coding		Without Auto Coding	
	Cohen's kappa	N	Cohen's kappa	N
Hungary Wave 1	0.83	14,956	0.65	7729
Hungary Wave 2	0.85	8080	0.67	3920
Hungary Wave 3	0.87	3996	0.69	1757
Australia Wave 1	0.85	6814	0.78	5022
Serbia Wave 1	0.88	6222	0.77	3312
Kenya Wave 1	0.92	4903	0.91	4511

Note: Recall that one-word recurring chunks have been auto-coded using macros in Excel. Examples of these chunks are 'right', 'duty', 'none', 'nothing', etc. We present the intercoder reliability values of two datasets for each country, one including and one excluding the auto coded chunks. While Cohen's kappa values for intercoder reliability are lower when we exclude the auto-coded, those were precisely the easiest answers to code.

APPENDIX Chapter 3

The Data, Their Quality, and Their Link Potentials

The information regarding the number of invitations sent, survey starts, and survey completes (pre-exclusion) is based on the first delivery of the data from the survey company to the University of Vienna, rather than any subsequent amends or revisions. In the case of face-to-face interviews, the number of invitations sent is calculated as the number of surveys starts and the number of refusals when approached to take part. The number of invitations does not include reminder surveys. The missing values in terms of the number of invitations sent refer to countries covered by the survey company Dynata. In this case, there is no clear number of invitations sent because participants could simply start the survey in the Dynata online system. Regarding incentives, Opinium panels were paid in 'reward points', which are then exchanged for vouchers, for example. In terms of monetary value, a 20-minute online survey is usually equivalent to £0.07 in rewards. Dynata uses an incentive scale based on set time increments

Table A3.1 Summary of the survey mode, language, survey company, and programming

Country	Survey Mode	Languages Survey	Survey Company	Programming
Australia	Online	English	Dynata	internal
Brazil	Online	Portuguese	Dynata	internal
Colombia	Online	Spanish	Dynata	internal
Estonia	Online	Estonian and Russian	Norstat	internal
Hungary (all waves)	Online	Hungarian	Dynata	internal
Italy	Online	Italian	Dynata	internal
Kenya	F2F	English and Swahili	Opinium	Opinium
Nigeria	F2F	Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba	Opinium	Opinium
Serbia	Online	Serbian	Dynata	internal
Sweden	Online	Swedish	Opinium	Opinium
Tunisia	F2F	Tunisian Arabic and French	Opinium	Opinium
Türkiye	Online	Turkish	Opinium	Opinium
US (all waves)	Online	English	Opinium	Opinium

Note: For internally programmed surveys, we utilized Qualtrics software. F2F: Face-to-face: self-complete and interview assisted.

Table A3.2 Summary of data collection and cooperation rate per country

Country	Invitations Sent	Survey Starts	Survey Completes (Pre-exclusion)	Internal Exclusion	Survey Completes (Post exclusion)	Cooperation Rate
Australia	n/a	2463	1502	0	1502	60.98%
Brazil	n/a	4067	2236	236	2000	54.98%
Colombia	n/a	2494	1375	2	1373	55.13%
Estonia	8123	4522	1500	8	1492	33.17%
Hungary W1	n/a	5135	3829	3	3826	74.57%
Hungary W2	n/a	2067	2067	13	2054	100.00%
Hungary W3	n/a	1063	1063	1	1062	100.00%
Italy	n/a	2581	1572	11	1561	60.91%
Kenya	3786	3052	1500	11	1489	49.15%
Nigeria	3486	3103	1501	25	1476	48.37%
Serbia	n/a	3413	1506	0	1506	44.13%
Sweden	10,301	5085	1550	2	1548	30.48%
Tunisia	16,233	2234	1508	0	1508	67.50%
Türkiye	16,352	6933	2006	0	2006	28.93%
US W1	19,613	7480	4032	2	4030	53.90%
US W2	4835	3647	2496	0	2496	68.44%
US W3	1766	1602	1176	0	1176	73.41%

Note: Decisions on incentives were left to each survey company in line with their panel policies. However, it usually ranges from a few euros or dollars to points for vouchers. W: survey wave.

and panellist characteristics. All incentives are awarded only once the survey has been completed. The incentive options allow panellists to redeem from a large range of gift cards, points programmes, charitable contributions, and partner products or services. The exclusion criteria by this project, includes the exclusion of respondents with double IPs, underaged respondents, technical errors with IDs, and issues with interviewer quality in face-to-face interviews. The response rate is calculated as the number of finished surveys before exclusion over the total number of surveys starts.

Speeding, straightlining, and attention checks

When it comes to speeding, we looked at the median speed for each country and regarded speeders as the fastest 20% of the country sample. To identify straightliners, we took each matrix question included in the survey, looked at the percentage of identical answers to the items in that given battery of questions using the same response scale and considered as straightliners those respondents that gave more than 80% identical answers on average over these questions. Finally, we included an attention check question that asked respondents to select the colour green among a list of four colours. While these criteria were not set out to determine the exclusion of respondents that failed to meet them, they help us monitor the quality of our data collection compared to well-established standards. In most country, the proportion of respondents who failed two or more criteria is 3–4% of each country sample. In the face-to-face interviews, we also included an additional question to check for respondents' attention, which, in line with the online questionnaire, was not considered as an exclusion criterion. Interviewers were asked to assess the extent to which participants were interested in the questionnaire on three options: 'very interested', 'a bit interested', or 'not interested'. The interviewers rated the participants as 'not interested' in 1.67% of the sample in Kenya, 3.47% in Nigeria, and 6.93% in Tunisia.

How Do Citizens Think and Feel about Voting?

Overview and validation of meanings of voting

As a measure of validity, we use exploratory factor analysis. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measures sampling adequacy and it is used as a measure of factorability. According to guidelines, a suggested cut-off for determining the factorability of the sample data is KMO ≥ 60. The total KMO is above ≥ 90 for each country, indicating that, based on this test, we can conduct

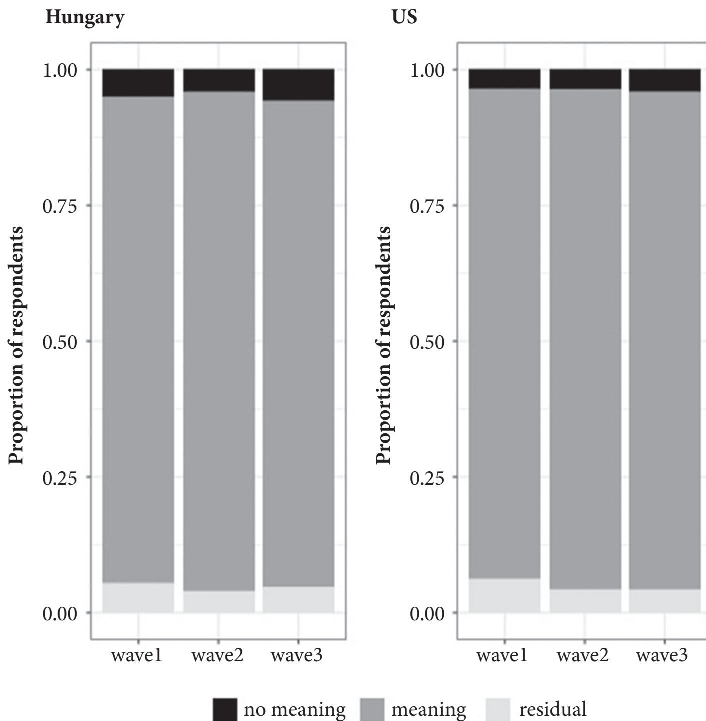

Figure A4.1 Distribution of no meaning and meaning across countries and waves

Notes: shows the proportion of chunks in the overarching categories across countries and waves. Respondents can appear simultaneously in more than one category.

a factor analysis. For all countries together, the eigenvalue method ('Kaiser's rule') is telling us that between three and four factors may be best. The scree plot is putting us somewhere between three and four factors. But parallel analysis is revealing eight factors. Recall that theoretically driven we would have five factors. So, we tried exploratory factor analysis with three, four, five, and six factors.

The exploratory factor analysis suggests that the best solution would be three–five factors. The three- and four-factor solutions are quite effective in distinguishing between valence types of positive and negative meanings, as well as 'anti-voting' meanings. However, the exploratory factor analysis does not seem to effectively distinguish between expressive and instrumental voting. Therefore, as a measure of validity, we further explore the five-factor solution using confirmatory factor analysis. Using the items listed in Table 4.1 and the five theoretically derived factors (anti-voting, ethics, allegiance, expressive, and instrumental), results in a comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.85 and a Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) of 0.82 slightly below the good fit value of 0.90, but with a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) indicating however a good fit of 0.93. Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is at an optimal level well below 0.10. The results are very similar across countries. The scales are also quite consistent with Cronbach's alpha values being 0.72 for anti-voting, 0.73 for ethics, 0.78 for allegiance, 0.88 for expressive, and 0.76 for instrumental.

Table A4.1 shows a correlation matrix summarizing how much the five categories of the meanings of voting correlate with each another, as measured by the closed-ended question. We find positive correlation coefficients for the meaningful categories and especially between the instrumental and expressive, as well as the ethics and allegiance dimensions. The correlations are quite high, suggesting not only an overlap between meanings, but also a strong relationship among the variables being measured. For example, Pearson correlation of 0.70 between ethics and allegiance suggests an almost perfectly collinearity between holding these two meanings. The anti-voting meanings instead present smaller positive associations with instrumental meanings, and negative correlations with experimental, ethics, and especially allegiance meanings. The slightly positive correlation with the instrumental meaning makes sense because people might want, for example, their vote to have an influence but feel at the same time, that it does not.

Missing cases for closed-ended questions in Tunisia

The anti-voting dimension has three items. About 24.6% have no measure on any of these three items, about 44% have two missing values, about 27.8% have one missing value, and

Table A4.1 Correlation between closed-ended categories of meanings of voting

	Meaning all	Ethics	Allegiance	Expressive	Instrumental	Anti-voting
Meaning all	1					
Ethics	0.79	1				
Allegiance	0.79	0.71	1			
Expressive	0.84	0.61	0.68	1		
Instrumental	0.85	0.59	0.63	0.76	1	
Anti-voting	0.23	−0.12	−0.19	−0.05	0.04	1

Note: All correlations are significant at $p<0.001$.

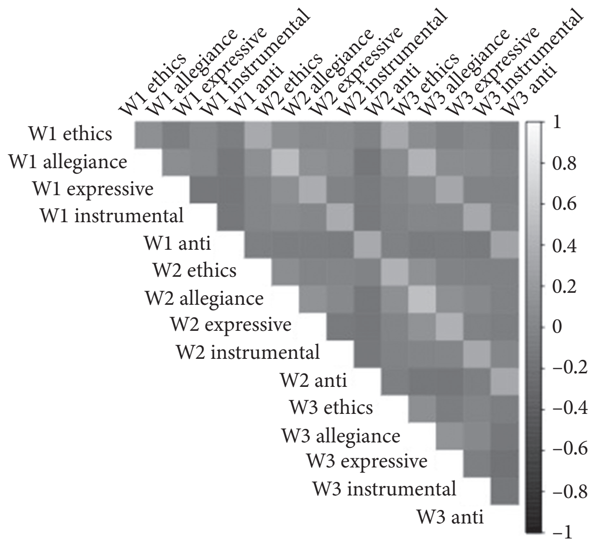

Figure A4.2 Correlation between closed-ended categories of meanings of voting. (a) Correlation matrix for the meanings of voting in general – Hungary. (b) Correlation matrix for the meanings of voting in general – USA. (c) Correlation matrix for the meanings of voting in this election – Hungary. (d) Correlation matrix for the meanings of voting in this election - USA

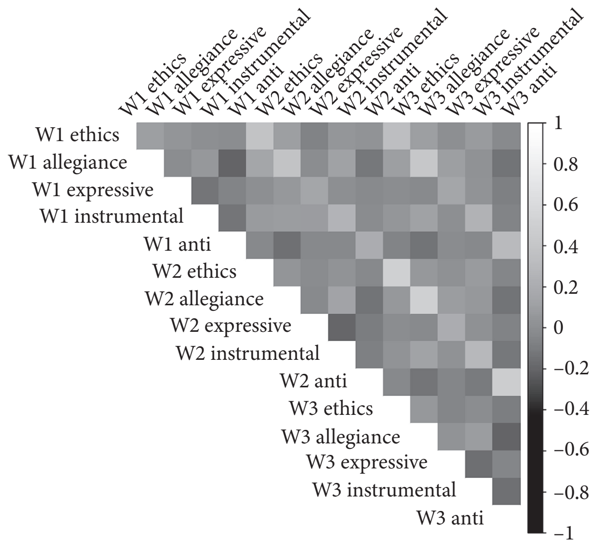

Figure A4.2 *Continued*

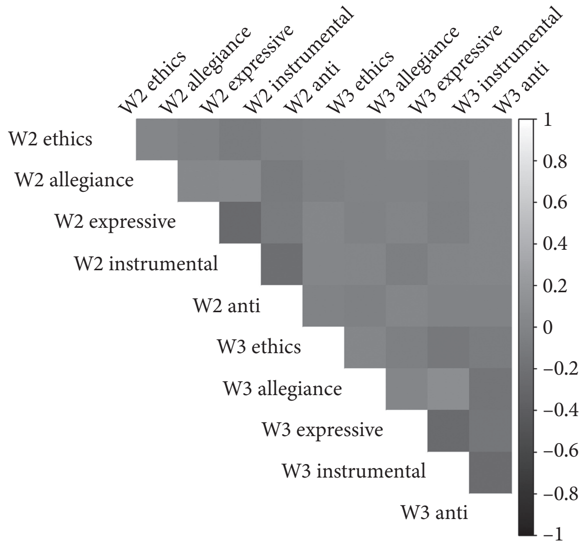

Figure A4.2 *Continued*

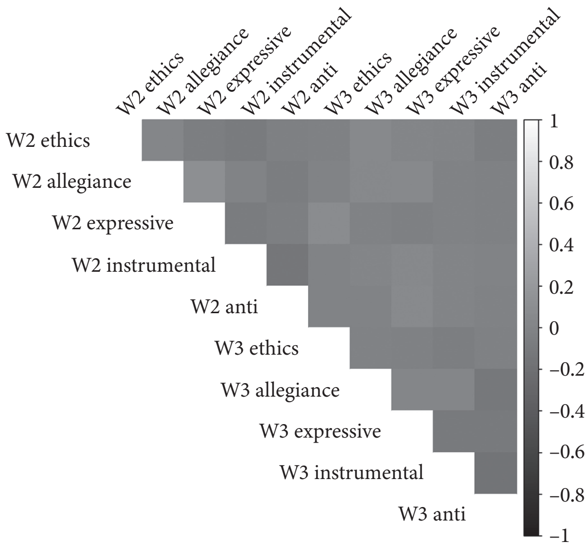

Figure A4.2 *Continued*

about 3.6% have no missing values. The ethics dimension has three items. About 20.4% of the respondents have no measure on any of these three items, about 38.1% have two missing values, about 27.5% have one missing value, and about 2.5% have no missing value. The allegiance dimension has four items. About 13.9% of the respondents have no measure on any of these four items, about 33% have three missing values, about 35% have two missing values, about 11.8% have one missing value, and about 1% has no missing value. The expressive dimension

has seven items. About 1.7% of the respondents have no measure on any of these seven items, about 13% have six missing values, about 33% have five missing values, about 33.9% have four missing values, about 16% have three missing values, about 2.4% have two missing values, and less than 1% have one or no missing values. The instrumental dimension has five items. About 5% of the respondents have no measure on any of these five items, about 28.6% have four missing values, about 46.5% have three missing values, about 16.6% have two missing values, about 3% have one missing value, and less than 1% have no missing value. There is only one respondent that has 18 items missing (over 22 we are using), and 17 respondents for which 16 of the 22 items we use are missing.

Missing cases for closed-ended questions in Nigeria

The anti-voting dimension has three items. About 24.5% have no measure on any of these three items, about 44.6% have two missing values, about 26.3% have one missing value, and about 4.6% have no missing values. The ethics dimension has three items. About 21% of the respondents have no measure on any of these three items. About 49.5% have two missing values, 26.8% have one missing value, and about 3% have no missing value. The allegiance dimension has four items. About 9% of the respondents have no measure on any of these four items, about 50% have three missing values, about 34% have two missing values, about 11% have one missing value, and less than 1% have no missing value. The expressive dimension has seven items. About 1.3% of the respondents have no measure on any of these seven items, about 14.6% have six missing values, about 32.7% have five missing values, about 30.4% have four missing values, about 17% have three missing values, about 3.9% have two missing values, and less than 1% have one or no missing values. The instrumental dimension has five items. About 6.5% of the respondents have no measure on any of these five items, about 29.3% have four missing values, about 39.9% have three missing values, about 21.1% have two missing values, about 3% have one missing value, and less than 1% have no missing value. There are no respondents that have all items missing, and three respondents for which 17 of the 22 items we use are missing.

Overall, when using the mean score across items for each dimension, we have the following number of missing: for the anti-voting dimension, we have 1489 missing from Kenya, 371 from Tunisia, and 361 from Nigeria; for the ethics dimension, we have 1489 missing from Kenya, 307 from Tunisia, and 310 from Nigeria; for the allegiance dimension, we have 1489 missing from Kenya, 209 from Tunisia, and 139 from Nigeria; for the expressive dimension, we have 1489 missing from Kenya, 26 from Tunisia, and 19 from Nigeria; for the instrumental dimension, we have 1489 missing from Kenya, 74 from Tunisia, and 96 from Nigeria. In Kenya, the third country in which we conducted face-to-face interviews, the closed-ended items were not asked.

APPENDIX Chapter 5

Does Voting Have the Same Meaning in Different Countries?

Table A5.1 Multilevel regression results (empty models)

	No meaning	Instrumental		Allegiance		Expressive		Ethics		Anti-voting	
		(combi)	(excl)	(combi)	(excl)	(combi)	(excl)	(combi)	(excl)	(combi)	(excl)
Constant	−3.11***	0.37**	−1.46***	−0.26	−2.66***	−0.73***	−2.62***	−1.42***	−3.60***	−2.82***	−3.54***
	(0.21)	(0.13)	(0.20)	(0.17)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.26)	(0.20)
SD	0.75	0.46	0.72	0.62	0.70	0.69	0.76	0.73	0.67	0.92	0.69
N	23,846	23,846	23,846	23,846	23,846	23,846	23,846	23,846	23,846	23,846	23,846
AIC	8428.5	27,834.8	20,130.3	27,339.8	10,802.9	25,419.3	11,507.9	21,234.0	5980.0	10,524.7	6039.1
BIC	8444.7	27,851.0	20,146.5	27,355.9	10,819.1	25,435.5	11,524.1	21,250.1	5996.2	10,540.8	6055.3
ICC	0.15	0.06	0.14	0.10	0.13	0.13	0.15	0.14	0.12	0.21	0.13
DEFF	269.08	110.74	252.90	192.08	238.16	230.43	273.34	257.93	223.64	378.33	233.53

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: Number of respondents. SD: Standard deviation. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion. ICC: Intraclass Correlation Coefficient. DEFF: Design effect. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Table A5.2 Main analysis multilevel regression results predicting meanings of voting

	No meaning	Instrumental		Allegiance		Expressive		Ethics		Anti-voting	
		(combi)	(excl)	(combi)	(excl)	(combi)	(excl)	(combi)	(excl)	(combi)	(excl)
Age	−1.51***	0.13	−0.93***	0.90***	0.31*	0.41***	−0.48***	1.13***	−0.11	0.11	−0.65**
	(0.18)	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.14)	(0.08)	(0.13)	(0.09)	(0.20)	(0.14)	(0.21)
Woman	−0.42***	0.16***	0.04	0.16***	−0.03	0.23***	−0.10*	0.04	−0.20*	−0.33***	−0.61***
	(0.06)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.08)
Pol. interest	−1.89***	0.86***	−0.24***	1.32***	0.42***	0.56***	−0.57***	0.41***	−0.85***	−1.99***	−3.27***
	(0.10)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.13)	(0.09)	(0.15)
Education	−0.71***	0.16***	−0.57***	0.53***	−0.28***	0.40***	−0.27***	0.69***	0.14	−0.44***	−0.75***
	(0.10)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.11)	(0.08)	(0.13)
Constant	0.00	−0.12	0.67*	−2.30***	−1.97***	−2.66***	−2.34***	−3.79***	−3.39***	−3.13***	−2.63***
	(0.51)	(0.37)	(0.33)	(0.49)	(0.47)	(0.36)	(0.48)	(0.27)	(0.55)	(0.70)	(0.63)
N	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751
AIC	7838.9	27,326.9	19,839.4	26,029.4	10,722.0	25,004.7	11,390.3	20,688.6	5922.4	9867.6	5271.4
BIC	7911.6	27,399.6	19,912.1	26,102.1	10,794.6	25,077.4	11,463.0	20,761.3	5995.1	9940.3	5344.1

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table A5.3 Multilevel regression models predicting meanings of voting, unweighted

	No Meaning	Instrumental		Allegiance		Expressive		Ethics		Anti-voting	
		(excl)	(combi)	(excl)	(combi)	(excl)	(combi)	(excl)	(combi)	(excl)	(combi)
Democracy	−0.86	−0.30	−1.54***	0.53	−0.83	1.19*	0.89	0.90**	−0.04	1.68	1.06
	(0.70)	(0.52)	(0.45)	(0.66)	(0.67)	(0.48)	(0.67)	(0.35)	(0.74)	(0.96)	(0.87)
Ref. Majority											
Proportional	−0.90*	−0.16	−0.97***	0.43	−0.65	0.89***	0.18	1.23***	0.53	0.74	0.64
	(0.38)	(0.28)	(0.24)	(0.35)	(0.36)	(0.26)	(0.36)	(0.19)	(0.41)	(0.52)	(0.47)
Compulsory	−0.83*	0.46	−0.09	0.48	0.27	−0.39	−1.12**	0.38	0.03	0.53	0.23
	(0.42)	(0.31)	(0.26)	(0.38)	(0.39)	(0.28)	(0.40)	(0.21)	(0.44)	(0.56)	(0.51)
Age	−1.79***	0.09	−1.14***	1.21***	0.02	0.47***	−0.66***	1.33***	0.02	−0.02	−0.80***
	(0.18)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.13)	(0.07)	(0.13)	(0.09)	(0.20)	(0.14)	(0.20)
Woman	−0.49***	0.12***	−0.03	0.23***	0.04	0.23***	−0.11*	0.07	−0.26**	−0.28***	−0.51***
	(0.06)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.08)
Pol. interest	−2.00***	0.82***	−0.24***	1.30***	0.40***	0.48***	−0.56***	0.45***	−0.91***	−1.94***	−3.11***
	(0.10)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.13)	(0.09)	(0.14)
Education	−0.77***	0.19***	−0.51***	0.47***	−0.39***	0.39***	−0.18*	0.66***	0.07	−0.36***	−0.74***
	(0.11)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.12)	(0.08)	(0.12)
Constant	0.05	−0.04	0.78*	−2.42***	−1.97***	−2.61***	−2.33***	−3.89***	−3.43***	−3.17***	−2.62***
	(0.52)	(0.40)	(0.34)	(0.50)	(0.51)	(0.37)	(0.51)	(0.27)	(0.57)	(0.73)	(0.67)
N	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751	23,751
AIC	7998.6	30,568.7	21,491.9	29,527.6	12,323.6	28,902.4	12,542.7	22,967.6	6011.4	11,199.0	5932.5
BIC	8071.2	30,641.4	21,564.6	29,600.2	12,396.3	28,975.1	12,615.4	23,040.2	6084.1	11,271.7	6005.1

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

APPENDIX Chapter 6

Does Voting Have the Same Meaning for Different People?

Table A6.1 Descriptive statistics closed-ended measure of meanings of voting

	N	M	SD
Meaning (any)	23,828	6.13	1.73
Ethics	23,211	7.06	2.56
Allegiance	23,480	7.41	2.35
Expressive	23,783	6.89	2.35
Instrumental	23,658	6.15	2.38
Anti-voting	23,096	3.12	2.75

Note: N: number of respondents. M: mean. SD: Standard deviation. Imputed missing: Missing values due to participants who answered 'other', 'don't know', 'refused', or reported an invalid date of birth.

Table A6.2 Main analysis regression models predicting meanings of voting with individual differences

	Meaning (any)		Ethics		Allegiance		Instrumental		Expressive		Anti-voting	
Age	.34***	.27***	.25***	.23***	.22***	.19***	.03*	.01	.08***	.08***	−.07*	.04
	(.04)	(.04)	(.02)	(.02)	(.01)	(.02)	(.01)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)
Male	.20**	.21**	−.01	.004	.04	.05	.04	.04	.17***	.17***	−.16**	−.19***
	(.07)	(.07)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.05)	(.05)
Education	.66***	.59***	.44***	.42***	.32***	.30***	.24***	.22***	.18***	.18***	−.38***	−.32***
(middle)	(.08)	(.08)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.06)	(.06)
Education	1.04***	.98***	.68***	.66***	.61***	.59***	.13**	.12**	.34***	.34***	−.78***	−.73***
(high)	(.12)	(.12)	(.05)	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.08)	(.08)
Urbanization	.13***	.12***	.01	.01	−.05***	−.05**	.05***	.05***	.01	.02	−.07**	−.07**
	(.03)	(.04)	(.02)	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)
Income	.03	.02	.04**	.04*	.05***	.04**	−.04**	−.04**	.04**	.04**	−.18***	−.16***
(subjective)	(.03)	(.03)	(.02)	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)
Leaners		.29**		.22***		.27***		.05		.01		−.53***
		(.11)		(.06)		(.05)		(.05)		(.05)		(.08)
Partisans		.72***		.30***		.27***		.08*		.10*		−.83***
		(.09)		(.05)		(.04)		(.04)		(.04)		(.07)
Centrism		.25***		.05**		.04**		.07***		.002		−.12***
		(.04)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.03)
Affective polarization		.49***		.08***		.11***		.14***		.01		−.35***
		(.04)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.03)
Anti-voting			−.71***	−.63***	−1.31***	−1.22***	−1.39***	−1.33***	−1.22***	−1.20***		
			(.07)	(.07)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.07)	(.07)		
Serbia	−2.36***	−2.64***	.02	−.05	−1.08***	−1.18***	−1.31***	−1.41***	.15*	.15*	.79***	1.01***
	(.25)	(.26)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.10)	(.10)
Hungary	−2.06***	−2.59***	−.72***	−.87***	−.99***	−1.17***	−1.32***	−1.44***	.18*	.16*	.21*	.68***
	(.26)	(.26)	(.09)	(.09)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.11)	(.11)

Australia	−.90**	−1.50***	−.62***	−.79***	−.79***	−.98***	−.80***	−.94***	−.49***	−.52***	.54***	1.07***
	(.30)	(.31)	(.09)	(.09)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.10)	(.11)
Italy	−.18	−.69*	.51***	.36***	−.64***	−.82***	−1.41***	−1.53***	.61***	.57***	−.12	.36**
	(.33)	(.33)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.11)	(.11)
Brazil	−.62*	−.87**	.11	.04	−.19**	−.29***	−.25**	−.30***	−.36***	−.37***	−.31**	−.05
	(.28)	(.28)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.11)	(.11)
Kenya	−2.43***	−3.17***	−1.74***	−1.95***	−1.84***	−2.06***	.07	−.07	−1.67***	−1.73***	−2.16***	−1.49***
	(.24)	(.24)	(.14)	(.14)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.10)	(.19)	(.19)
Sweden	−1.26***	−2.03***	.30***	.10	−.80***	−1.04***	−1.74***	−1.90***	−.55***	−.59***	−.72***	−.02
	(.27)	(.28)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.08)	(.13)	(.14)
US	−1.70***	−2.25***	−.64***	−.83***	−.59***	−.78***	−1.23***	−1.36***	−.29***	−.33***	−.51***	.04
	(.26)	(.27)	(.09)	(.09)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.12)	(.13)
Tunisia	−2.04***	−2.25***	−.24**	−.28**	−1.37***	−1.43***	−1.66***	−1.72***	−.19**	−.19**	−1.78***	−1.67***
	(.25)	(.25)	(.08)	(.09)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.18)	(.18)
Nigeria	−2.27***	−2.87***	−1.17***	−1.30***	−1.61***	−1.77***	−.97***	−1.11***	−1.10***	−1.12***	−2.75***	−2.27***
	(.24)	(.25)	(.11)	(.11)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.26)	(.26)
Estonia	−.47	−1.31***	.11	−.10	−2.42***	−2.65***	−1.29***	−1.47***	.55***	.52***	−.98***	−.29*
	(.33)	(.33)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.14)	(.15)
Türkiye	−.57	−1.40***	.52***	.29***	−.90***	−1.16***	−.86***	−1.04***	−1.29***	−1.35***	−1.79***	−1.02***
	(.30)	(.30)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.18)	(.18)
Constant	4.32***	4.61***	−1.44***	−1.50***	.61***	.59***	1.43***	1.50***	−.50***	−.53***	−1.70***	−1.76***
	(.23)	(.24)	(.06)	(.07)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.07)	(.05)	(.06)	(.08)	(.09)
N	23,933	23,933	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Table A6.3 Regression models predicting meanings of voting with individual differences using the closed-ended measure of meanings of voting

	Meaning (any)		Ethics		Allegiance		Instrumental		Expressive		Anti-voting	
Age	.14***	.10***	.12***	.08***	.12***	.08***	.14***	.10***	.16***	.11***	–.12***	–.09***
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Male	.01	.03*	.05***	.07***	.06***	.07***	–.06***	–.05***	–.0002	.02	–.06***	–.05***
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Education (middle)	.12***	.08***	.14***	.12***	.15***	.14***	.09***	.07***	.12***	.10***	–.28***	–.25***
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
Education (high)	.21***	.17***	.24***	.22***	.28***	.27***	.19***	.17***	.16***	.14***	–.37***	–.34***
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
Urbanization	.02**	.02***	.01*	.02*	.02*	.02**	.02**	.02***	.04***	.04***	–.01*	–.01
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Income (subjective)	.05***	.03***	.03***	.02*	.04***	.03***	.03***	.01	.02**	.002	–.01*	–.01
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Leaners		.19***		.16***		.18***		.20***		.18***		–.11***
		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)
Partisans		.39***		.34***		.32***		.39***		.38***		–.07***
		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)
Centrism		–.05***		–.03***		–.02***		–.04***		–.04***		–.08***
		(.01)		(.01)		(.01)		(.01)		(.01)		(.01)
Affective polarization		.13***		.14***		.19***		.15***		.19***		–.23***
		(.01)		(.01)		(.01)		(.01)		(.01)		(.01)
Anti-voting			–.10***	–.06***	–.19***	–.14***	.05***	.09***	–.03***	.02*		
			(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)		
Serbia	–.17***	–.21***	–.26***	–.32***	–.34***	–.43***	.17***	.10***	–.08**	–.17***	.27***	.39***
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Hungary	–.07*	–.23***	–.12***	–.28***	–.35***	–.55***	.33***	.15***	.16***	–.05	.06*	.24***
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)

Australia	.23***	.05	−.02	−.23***	−.07*	−.31***	.33***	.10**	.17***	−.08**	.63***	.82***
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Italy	−.02	−.24***	−.22***	−.44***	−.13***	−.37***	.22***	−.02	.02	−.24***	.17***	.34***
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Brazil	.07*	−.05	.05	−.07*	.11***	−.02	.17***	.04	.06*	−.08**	−.08*	.01
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Sweden	.19***	−.09**	−.06*	−.34***	.20***	−.12***	.36***	.05	.14***	−.20***	.33***	.54***
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
US	.30***	.04	.01	−.25***	.20***	−.09**	.38***	.09**	.29***	−.03	.45***	.62***
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Tunisia	−.38***	−.42***	−.32***	−.37***	−.51***	−.58***	−.18***	−.23***	−.41***	−.48***	.08*	.16***
	(.03)	(.03)	(.04)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Nigeria	.14***	−.09**	.03	−.20***	.01	−.27***	.13***	−.13***	.03	−.27***	.28***	.50***
	(.03)	(.03)	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)	(.03)	(.04)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Estonia	−.16***	−.41***	−.32***	−.56***	−.21***	−.49***	.18***	−.09**	.05	−.25***	−.10**	.15***
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Türkiye	.76***	.37***	.66***	.30***	.45***	.05	.81***	.41***	.58***	.14***	.13***	.38***
	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)
Constant	−.23***	−.26***	−.09***	−.10***	−.10***	−.08***	−.31***	−.33***	−.19***	−.18***	.09***	−.05*
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
N	23,828	23,828	20,787	20,787	20,892	20,892	21,049	21,049	21,142	21,142	23,096	23,096
Adjusted R^2	.10	.16	.10	.15	.13	.20	.08	.15	.08	.16	.07	.11

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. $^{*}p < 0.05$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Table A6.4 Regression models predicting meanings of voting with individual differences, unweighted

	Meaning (any)		Ethics		Allegiance		Instrumental		Expressive		Anti-voting	
Age	.42***	.33***	.27***	.25***	.26***	.23***	.02	−.01	.09***	.08***	−.07*	.03
	(.04)	(.04)	(.02)	(.02)	(.01)	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)
Male	.19**	.21**	.02	.02	.09**	.10***	.02	.02	.18***	.18***	−.09	−.11*
	(.07)	(.07)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.05)	(.05)
Education (middle)	.62***	.56***	.43***	.40***	.33***	.30***	.23***	.22***	.20***	.19***	−.27***	−.23***
	(.08)	(.08)	(.05)	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.07)	(.07)
Education (high)	1.23***	1.17***	.68***	.66***	.59***	.57***	.20***	.19***	.35***	.34***	−.60***	−.56***
	(.13)	(.13)	(.06)	(.06)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.08)	(.08)
Urbanization	.13***	.13**	.01	.01	−.04**	−.04**	.04*	.04*	.03	.03	−.07*	−.06*
	(.04)	(.04)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)
Income (subjective)	.09*	.06	.03	.03	.06***	.05**	−.03*	−.04*	.04**	.04**	−.18***	−.16***
	(.04)	(.04)	(.02)	(.02)	(.01)	(.01)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)
Leaners		.43***		.20***		.27***		.08		.03		−.43***
		(.11)		(.06)		(.05)		(.05)		(.05)		(.08)
Partisans		.77***		.25***		.30***		.07		.16***		−.77***
		(.09)		(.05)		(.04)		(.04)		(.04)		(.07)
Centrism		.22***		.05**		.07***		.05***		.03*		−.08**
		(.04)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.03)
Affective polarization		.50***		.09***		.14***		.14***		−.003		−.27***
		(.04)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.03)
Anti-voting			−.68***	−.61***	−1.29***	−1.20***	−1.33***	−1.27***	−1.17***	−1.15***		
			(.08)	(.08)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)		
Serbia	−2.69***	−2.92***	−.03	−.09	−1.14***	−1.24***	−1.45***	−1.53***	.06	.06	.63***	.73***
	(.40)	(.40)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.12)	(.12)
Hungary	−2.47***	−2.97***	−.79***	−.92***	−1.02***	−1.21***	−1.46***	−1.58***	.16*	.14*	.18	.49***
	(.39)	(.39)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.11)	(.11)

Australia	−1.36**	−1.90***	−.70***	−.85***	−.80***	−1.01***	−.92***	−1.05***	−.54***	−.58***	.52***	.91***
	(.44)	(.44)	(.10)	(.10)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.10)	(.08)	(.08)	(.12)	(.12)
Italy	−.61	−1.09*	.42***	.29***	−.70***	−.88***	−1.53***	−1.64***	.56***	.53***	−.09	.28*
	(.46)	(.46)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.13)	(.13)
Brazil	−.71	−.94*	−.03	−.08	−.21**	−.29***	−.32***	−.37***	−.41***	−.40***	−.26*	−.10
	(.43)	(.43)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.09)	(.07)	(.08)	(.12)	(.13)
Kenya	−2.71***	−3.46***	−1.82***	−2.00***	−1.84***	−2.08***	−.05	−.17	−1.71***	−1.78***	−2.21***	−1.67***
	(.39)	(.39)	(.16)	(.16)	(.09)	(.10)	(.11)	(.11)	(.11)	(.11)	(.22)	(.22)
Sweden	−1.72***	−2.51***	.31***	.13	−.87***	−1.12***	−1.86***	−2.00***	−.65***	−.70***	−.96***	−.40*
	(.42)	(.42)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.16)	(.17)
US	−2.09***	−2.61***	−.72***	−.88***	−.63***	−.84***	−1.34***	−1.46***	−.35***	−.39***	−.59***	−.17
	(.39)	(.39)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.12)	(.12)
Tunisia	−2.46***	−2.62***	−.35***	−.37***	−1.44***	−1.49***	−1.67***	−1.72***	−.22**	−.22*	−1.93***	−1.92***
	(.40)	(.40)	(.10)	(.10)	(.09)	(.09)	(.10)	(.10)	(.08)	(.08)	(.21)	(.21)
Nigeria	−2.60***	−3.19***	−1.23***	−1.34***	−1.65***	−1.83***	−1.04***	−1.17***	−1.12***	−1.14***	−2.98***	−2.63***
	(.39)	(.39)	(.12)	(.13)	(.09)	(.09)	(.10)	(.10)	(.09)	(.09)	(.32)	(.32)
Estonia	−.79	−1.60***	.04	−.14	−2.45***	−2.71***	−1.42***	−1.57***	.49***	.44***	−1.01***	−.49**
	(.47)	(.47)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.17)	(.17)
Türkiye	−.80	−1.64***	.38***	.18*	−1.02***	−1.30***	−.90***	−1.06***	−1.38***	−1.44***	−1.80***	−1.16***
	(.45)	(.45)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)	(.09)	(.19)	(.20)
Constant	4.74***	4.97***	−1.37***	−1.42***	.61***	.59***	1.55***	1.60***	−.47***	−.53***	−1.88***	−1.85***
	(.39)	(.39)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.11)	(.12)
N	23,933	23,933	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	25,317	25,317

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table A6.5 Regression models predicting meanings of voting with individual differences, without data imputation

	Meaning (any)		Ethics		Allegiance		Instrumental		Expressive		Anti-voting	
Age	.33***	.23***	.22***	.19***	.19***	.15***	.02	.004	.08***	.06**	.02	.09**
	(.05)	(.05)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)
Male	.17*	.13	−.02	−.02	.03	.04	.04	.03	.20***	.20***	−.17**	−.20**
	(.08)	(.09)	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.06)	(.06)
Education (middle)	.71***	.55***	.46***	.48***	.28***	.24***	.25***	.24***	.19***	.16***	−.38***	−.33***
	(.10)	(.11)	(.05)	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.07)	(.08)
Education (high)	.88***	.77***	.68***	.71***	.58***	.53***	.13**	.10*	.37***	.35***	−.82***	−.80***
	(.13)	(.15)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.09)	(.09)
Urbanization	.15***	.15**	.02	.01	−.06***	−.07***	.07***	.07***	.02	.02	−.05	−.04
	(.04)	(.05)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)
Income (subjective)	.01	−.02	.04*	.02	.07***	.06***	−.04*	−.05**	.04*	.04*	−.19***	−.17***
	(.04)	(.05)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)
Leaners		.71***		.21**		.36***		.08		.04		−.51***
		(.16)		(.06)		(.06)		(.06)		(.06)		(.10)
Partisans		.93***		.36***		.35***		.10*		.09*		−.81***
		(.11)		(.05)		(.04)		(.04)		(.05)		(.08)
Centrism		.24***		.06**		.03		.09***		−.02		−.11**
		(.05)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.03)
Affective polarization		.36***		.08***		.06**		.14***		.01		−.31***
		(.06)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.04)
Anti-voting			−.69***	−.56***	−1.29***	−1.20***	−1.37***	−1.27***	−1.20***	−1.16***		
			(.08)	(.09)	(.07)	(.07)	(.06)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)		
Serbia	−2.16***	−2.62***	.07	−.06	−1.10***	−1.18***	−1.34***	−1.46***	.19**	.23**	.73***	.85***
	(.26)	(.32)	(.08)	(.09)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.07)	(.08)	(.10)	(.11)
Australia	−.73*	−1.25**	−.59***	−.76***	−.80***	−.97***	−.82***	−.95***	−.44***	−.43***	.47***	.86***
	(.32)	(.39)	(.09)	(.09)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.07)	(.08)	(.10)	(.11)

Italy	−.18	−.68	.55***	.42***	−.66***	−.85***	−1.42***	−1.51***	.66***	.62***	−.17	.15
	(.33)	(.41)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.07)	(.08)	(.11)	(.12)
Brazil	−.37	−.71	.15	.07	−.21**	−.26***	−.24**	−.20*	−.33***	−.33***	−.38***	−.30*
	(.30)	(.37)	(.08)	(.09)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.07)	(.08)	(.11)	(.12)
Kenya	−2.03***	−2.94***	−1.72***	−1.99***	−1.92***	−2.17***	.07	−.10	−1.66***	−1.74***	−2.21***	−1.78***
	(.25)	(.31)	(.14)	(.15)	(.08)	(.09)	(.09)	(.10)	(.10)	(.11)	(.19)	(.21)
Sweden	−1.22***	−2.14***	.34***	.09	−.81***	−1.05***	−1.75***	−1.87***	−.55***	−.59***	−.83***	−.34*
	(.28)	(.34)	(.08)	(.09)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.13)	(.15)
Tunisia	−1.92***	−2.20***	−.21*	−.28**	−1.41***	−1.53***	−1.72***	−1.77***	−.14*	−.15	−2.22***	−2.48***
	(.26)	(.32)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.07)	(.08)	(.21)	(.24)
Nigeria	−2.22***	−2.89***	−1.18***	−1.40***	−1.72***	−1.91***	−.99***	−1.10***	−1.06***	−1.08***	−3.08***	−2.83***
	(.25)	(.31)	(.11)	(.12)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.08)	(.09)	(.29)	(.30)
Estonia	−.46	−1.43***	.15	−.06	−2.44***	−2.67***	−1.31***	−1.46***	.59***	.61***	−1.05***	−.60***
	(.33)	(.39)	(.08)	(.09)	(.08)	(.09)	(.08)	(.09)	(.07)	(.08)	(.15)	(.16)
Türkiye	−.53	−1.39***	.56***	.30***	−.94***	−1.17***	−.91***	−1.10***	−1.24***	−1.37***	−1.89***	−1.24***
	(.30)	(.38)	(.08)	(.09)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.08)	(.09)	(.18)	(.19)
Constant	4.30***	4.70***	−1.47***	−1.56***	.68***	.65***	1.48***	1.53***	−.56***	−.58***	−1.71***	−1.61***
	(.24)	(.30)	(.07)	(.08)	(.06)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.06)	(.07)	(.08)	(.10)
N	15,877	14,387	15,372	13,978	15,372	13,978	15,372	13,978	15,372	13,978	16,668	15,071

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Table A6.6 Regression models predicting meanings of voting with individual differences, liberal democracies

	Meaning (any)		Ethics		Allegiance		Instrumental		Expressive		Anti-voting	
Age	.40***	.28***	.29***	.26***	.24***	.19***	.07***	.04*	.07***	.07***	.02	.12***
	(.07)	(.07)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)
Male	.49***	.47***	−.03	−.03	.09*	.09*	.05	.05	.20***	.20***	−.14*	−.16*
	(.14)	(.14)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.06)	(.06)
Education (middle)	.88***	.81***	.45***	.43***	.34***	.32***	.24***	.23***	.22***	.22***	−.36***	−.30***
	(.16)	(.16)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.05)	(.07)	(.07)
Education (high)	1.48***	1.40***	.69***	.68***	.60***	.60***	.20***	.20***	.33***	.33***	−1.08***	−1.04***
	(.24)	(.24)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.05)	(.05)	(.10)	(.10)
Urbanization	.32***	.33***	.001	.003	.01	.01	−.01	−.01	.01	.01	−.08*	−.08*
	(.07)	(.07)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)
Income (subjective)	.04	.03	.04	.04	.08***	.07***	−.03	−.03	.04	.04	−.17***	−.15***
	(.07)	(.07)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)
Leaners		.26		.22**		.21**		.07		.01		−.62***
		(.22)		(.07)		(.06)		(.07)		(.06)		(.11)
Partisans		.39*		.25***		.24***		.08		.05		−.84***
		(.17)		(.06)		(.05)		(.05)		(.05)		(.08)
Centrism		.12		.02		.06**		.04		−.01		−.10**
		(.07)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.03)
Affective polarization		.70***		.09***		.18***		.16***		.02		−.32***
		(.08)		(.03)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.04)
Anti-voting			−.63***	−.55***	−1.44***	−1.34***	−1.40***	−1.33***	−1.25***	−1.23***		
			(.09)	(.09)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)		
Australia	−1.17***	−1.73***	−.64***	−.79***	−.83***	−1.06***	−.83***	−.98***	−.48***	−.50***	.48***	.99***
	(.31)	(.32)	(.09)	(.09)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.08)	(.10)	(.11)

Italy	−.17	−.66	.49***	.34***	−.63***	−.84***	−1.48***	−1.61***	.61***	.58***	−.24*	.23*
	(.34)	(.34)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.11)	(.11)
Brazil	−.65*	−1.00***	.12	.04	−.20**	−.31***	−.24**	−.31***	−.36***	−.38***	−.36***	−.10
	(.28)	(.29)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.11)	(.11)
Sweden	−1.26***	−2.01***	.28***	.09	−.81***	−1.08***	−1.81***	−1.99***	−.55***	−.59***	−.90***	−.24
	(.28)	(.30)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.08)	(.13)	(.14)
US	−1.88***	−2.34***	−.66***	−.84***	−.61***	−.84***	−1.27***	−1.41***	−.30***	−.34***	−.66***	−.14
	(.27)	(.29)	(.09)	(.09)	(.07)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.08)	(.13)	(.13)
Estonia	−.56	−1.42***	.09	−.10	−2.44***	−2.72***	−1.36***	−1.54***	.55***	.52***	−1.08***	−.44**
	(.33)	(.35)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.08)	(.14)	(.15)
Constant	4.22***	4.77***	−1.43***	−1.47***	.60***	.63***	1.44***	1.52***	−.53***	−.53***	−1.67***	−1.71***
	(.24)	(.27)	(.07)	(.07)	(.06)	(.06)	(.07)	(.07)	(.06)	(.06)	(.08)	(.09)
N	12,841	12,841	12,602	12,602	12,602	12,602	12,602	12,602	12,602	12,602	13,506	13,506

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Table A6.7 Regression models predicting meanings of voting with individual differences, electoral autocracies

	Meaning (any)		Ethics		Allegiance		Instrumental		Expressive		Anti-voting	
Age	.30***	.25***	.16***	.14***	.18***	.17***	−.04	−.05*	.10***	.09***	−.15**	−.07
	(.05)	(.05)	(.03)	(.03)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)	(.05)	(.05)
Male	.10	.13	.04	.07	−.002	.01	.03	.04	.12*	.13**	−.16	−.22**
	(.08)	(.08)	(.05)	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.05)	(.05)	(.08)	(.09)
Education	.56***	.50***	.37***	.32***	.29***	.27***	.19***	.17**	.13*	.12*	−.08	−.02
(middle)	(.09)	(.10)	(.08)	(.08)	(.05)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.13)	(.13)
Education	.85***	.80***	.61***	.58***	.58***	.57***	−.004	−.02	.37***	.36***	−.07	−.02
(high)	(.14)	(.14)	(.08)	(.08)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.07)	(.07)	(.14)	(.14)
Urbanization	.07	.05	.02	.03	−.13***	−.13***	.14***	.14***	.03	.03	−.02	−.004
	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)	(.03)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)	(.05)	(.05)
Income	.03	.01	.04	.03	.03	.02	−.06**	−.06**	.05*	.05*	−.17***	−.14**
(subjective)	(.04)	(.04)	(.03)	(.03)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.04)	(.04)
Leaners		.28*		.23*		.35***		.03		−.01		−.35**
		(.13)		(.09)		(.07)		(.07)		(.07)		(.12)
Partisans		.83***		.42***		.29***		.11		.17**		−.73***
		(.10)		(.07)		(.06)		(.06)		(.06)		(.12)
Centrism		.29***		.08**		.03		.09***		.01		−.12**
		(.04)		(.03)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.05)
Affective		.41***		.06		.02		.10***		−.02		−.25***
polarization		(.05)		(.03)		(.03)		(.03)		(.03)		(.05)
Anti-voting			−.90***	−.82***	−1.03***	−.98***	−1.39***	−1.34***	−1.18***	−1.16***		
			(.13)	(.13)	(.10)	(.10)	(.09)	(.10)	(.11)	(.11)		
Hungary	.27	.04	−.71***	−.80***	.11	.03	−.01	−.04	.04	.02	−.40***	−.21
	(.15)	(.16)	(.09)	(.09)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.07)	(.10)	(.11)

Kenya	−.24	−.71***	−1.84***	−2.04***	−.85***	−.96***	1.34***	1.30***	−1.78***	−1.87***	−2.58***	−2.16***
	(.15)	(.16)	(.15)	(.15)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.10)	(.11)	(.11)	(.21)	(.21)
Tunisia	.29	.38*	−.32***	−.29**	−.23**	−.20*	−.46***	−.44***	−.33***	−.34***	−2.30***	−2.38***
	(.16)	(.16)	(.09)	(.10)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.19)	(.19)
Nigeria	−.02	−.27	−1.26***	−1.33***	−.53***	−.57***	.25**	.24**	−1.23***	−1.25***	−3.28***	−3.06***
	(.14)	(.15)	(.11)	(.12)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.09)	(.27)	(.27)
Türkiye	1.73***	1.19***	.44***	.26**	.22**	.10	.37***	.32***	−1.44***	−1.52***	−2.25***	−1.77***
	(.23)	(.23)	(.08)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.09)	(.19)	(.20)
Constant	2.12***	2.05***	−1.35***	−1.52***	−.46***	−.61***	.22**	.18*	−.33***	−.38***	−1.55***	−1.41***
	(.14)	(.15)	(.09)	(.10)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.14)	(.15)
N	11,092	11,092	10,421	10,421	10,421	10,421	10,421	10,421	10,421	10,421	11,811	11,811

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Table A6.8 Regression models predicting meanings of voting with individual differences, controlled for the number of chunks

	Meaning (any)		Ethics		Allegiance		Instrumental		Expressive		Anti-voting	
Age	.27***	.22***	.23***	.21***	.18***	.17***	−.02	−.03	.05***	.05***	−.04	.05
	(.04)	(.04)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)
Male	.20**	.23**	−.04	−.03	.001	.01	.003	.001	.15***	.15***	−.15**	−.19***
	(.07)	(.07)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.03)	(.05)	(.05)
Education (middle)	.53***	.47***	.36***	.34***	.19***	.18***	.12**	.11**	.10**	.11**	−.35***	−.30***
	(.08)	(.08)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.06)	(.06)
Education (high)	.83***	.79***	.57***	.55***	.43***	.42***	−.07	−.07	.23***	.23***	−.74***	−.71***
	(.12)	(.12)	(.05)	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)	(.08)	(.08)
Urbanization	.11**	.10**	.01	.01	−.07***	−.07***	.05**	.05**	.01	.01	−.06*	−.06*
	(.04)	(.04)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)
Income (subjective)	.02	.01	.05**	.04**	.06***	.06***	−.04*	−.04*	.05**	.05**	−.17***	−.15***
	(.03)	(.04)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.03)	(.03)
Leaners		.22		.17**		.18***		−.03		−.04		−.52***
		(.11)		(.06)		(.05)		(.05)		(.05)		(.08)
Partisans		.66***		.23***		.14***		−.04		.02		−.84***
		(.09)		(.05)		(.04)		(.04)		(.04)		(.07)
Centrism		.23***		.04*		.02		.05**		−.01		−.10***
		(.04)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.03)
Affective polarization		.45***		.06**		.07***		.10***		−.02		−.30***
		(.04)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.02)		(.03)
Anti-voting			−.76***	−.69***	−1.53***	−1.48***	−1.57***	−1.55***	−1.28***	−1.28***		
			(.08)	(.08)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.06)	(.07)	(.07)		
Number of chunks	1.26***	1.25***	.23***	.23***	.52***	.52***	.48***	.47***	.22***	.22***	.05***	.08***
	(.06)	(.06)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Serbia	−1.77***	−2.05***	.39***	.33***	−.64***	−.71***	−.96***	−1.02***	.47***	.49***	.72***	.94***
	(.26)	(.26)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.10)	(.11)
Hungary	−1.16***	−1.68***	−.30**	−.42***	−.39***	−.51***	−.83***	−.89***	.56***	.58***	.13	.59***
	(.26)	(.27)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.08)	(.11)	(.11)

Australia	−.31	−.86**	−.37***	−.50***	−.44***	−.55***	−.50***	−.57***	−.26***	−.25**	.49***	1.01***
	(.31)	(.31)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.08)	(.10)	(.11)
Italy	.51	−.01	.91***	.79***	−.13	−.23**	−1.02***	−1.08***	.95***	.96***	−.11	.40***
	(.33)	(.34)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.07)	(.11)	(.11)
Brazil	−.38	−.56	.16*	.11	−.13	−.19*	−.17*	−.19*	−.34***	−.34***	−.33**	−.09
	(.29)	(.29)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.09)	(.07)	(.07)	(.11)	(.11)
Kenya	.62*	−.12	−.90***	−1.08***	−.39***	−.53***	1.44***	1.38***	−.93***	−.93***	−2.11***	−1.38***
	(.27)	(.28)	(.14)	(.15)	(.09)	(.09)	(.10)	(.10)	(.10)	(.10)	(.19)	(.20)
Sweden	−.28	−1.04***	.76***	.60***	−.19*	−.33***	−1.27***	−1.34***	−.17*	−.16*	−.79***	−.09
	(.28)	(.29)	(.08)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.13)	(.14)
US	−1.02***	−1.56***	−.30***	−.44***	−.09	−.21*	−.86***	−.91***	.01	.02	−.58***	−.02
	(.27)	(.28)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.07)	(.08)	(.13)	(.13)
Tunisia	.99***	.79**	.59***	.54***	.09	.04	−.37***	−.42***	.56***	.56***	−1.79***	−1.61***
	(.28)	(.28)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.18)	(.19)
Nigeria	.83**	.22	−.29*	−.41***	−.07	−.19*	.42***	.33***	−.32***	−.31***	−2.75***	−2.20***
	(.27)	(.28)	(.11)	(.12)	(.08)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.27)	(.27)
Estonia	.68*	−.15	.59***	.43***	−1.89***	−2.03***	−.72***	−.81***	.98***	1.00***	−1.00***	−.31*
	(.33)	(.34)	(.08)	(.09)	(.09)	(.09)	(.08)	(.09)	(.07)	(.08)	(.15)	(.15)
Türkiye	.32	−.53	.95***	.77***	−.32***	−.48***	−.36***	−.43***	−.96***	−.96***	−1.82***	−1.03***
	(.30)	(.31)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.08)	(.09)	(.18)	(.18)
Constant	−.46	−.11	−2.69***	−2.71***	−1.81***	−1.78***	−.68***	−.58***	−1.64***	−1.65***	−1.99***	−2.18***
	(.30)	(.30)	(.08)	(.09)	(.08)	(.08)	(.08)	(.09)	(.07)	(.07)	(.10)	(.11)
N	23,933	23,933	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	23,023	25,317	25,317

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

APPENDIX Chapter 7

The Empirical Consequences

How do meanings of voting affect citizens' political behaviour?

Table A7.1 Descriptive statistics of political participation per country (in percentage)

Form of Participation	Australia			Brazil			Colombia			Hungary			Italy			Serbia			Sweden			US		
	No	Yes	NA	No	Yes	NA	No	Yes	NA	No	Yes	NA	No	Yes	NA	No	Yes	NA	No	Yes	NA	No	Yes	NA
Voting	24.1	73.07	2.83	38.15	54.72	7.12	34.69	61.85	3.47	27.61	68.47	3.92	37.79	57.32	4.88	39.63	55.24	5.14	27.12	69.97	2.91	45.08	51.14	3.78
Contacting	78.6	16.51	4.89	71.14	19.67	9.19	75.42	15.2	9.37	80.21	16.59	3.2	79.46	13.24	7.29	77.52	16.17	6.32	74.9	18.72	6.38	72.01	24.22	3.78
Party Work	89.58	6.8	3.61	86.16	8.31	5.52	86.05	6.86	7.08	94.28	3.05	2.66	89.16	4.82	6.02	85.29	9.23	5.48	79.82	14.01	6.17	82.83	13.45	3.72
Wearing a Badge	88.8	6.59	4.61	79.14	16.42	4.44	82.95	10.77	6.27	93.25	4.48	2.27	88.9	4.95	6.15	86.75	8.05	5.2	78.71	14.63	6.66	73.77	21.94	4.29
Petitioning	65.84	29.41	4.75	68.97	25.76	5.27	67.9	25.76	6.35	73.26	24.05	2.69	60.8	32.98	6.22	46.91	47.19	5.9	61.23	31.76	7	58.1	36.97	4.93
Protest	88.16	8.08	3.76	72.64	22.3	5.06	69.52	25.24	5.24	88.48	9.05	2.47	76.25	16.92	6.82	73.56	19.85	6.59	78.85	15.26	5.89	81.14	14.2	4.66
Posting Online	76.97	18.5	4.54	52.66	42.8	4.54	54.32	40.07	5.61	71.41	25.25	3.34	69.16	23.68	7.16	68.15	24.84	7.01	67.34	26.7	5.96	61.96	34.24	3.8
Non-electoral	57.97	42.03	0	40.73	59.27	0	40.89	59.11	0	58.91	41.09	0	51.17	48.83	0	39.07	60.93	0	46.95	53.05	0	41.79	58.21	0

Note: Dependent variables used in main analysis in *italics*. N(Australia) = 1,411; N(Brazil) = 1,937; N(Colombia) = 1,355; N(Hungary) = 3,568; N(Italy) = 1,495; N(Serbia) = 1,441; N(Sweden) = 1,442; N(US) = 3,733. N: number of respondents.

Table A7.2 Descriptive statistics of the meanings of voting, closed-ended

Type of Meaning	Mean	Min	Max	SD	N
Meaning	6.94	0	10	1.97	16,382
Anti-voting	3.09	0	10	2.66	16,382
Ethics	7.07	0	10	2.45	16,382
Allegiance	7.50	0	10	2.22	16,382
Instrumental	6.20	0	10	2.25	16,382
Expressive	6.99	0	10	2.25	16,382

Note: No missing values. SD: Standard deviation. N: number of respondents.

Table A7.3 Main analysis binary logistic regression results, weighted data

	Voting			Non-electoral Participation		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Having a Meaning	1.33***			0.17*		
	(0.09)			(0.08)		
Anti-voting	−0.30***		−0.32***	0.14*		0.19*
	(0.07)		(0.08)	(0.07)		(0.08)
No Meaning		−1.44***			−0.09	
		(0.14)			(0.11)	
Ethics			0.43***			−0.04
			(0.05)			(0.04)
Allegiance			0.40***			0.15***
			(0.04)			(0.04)
Instrumental			0.38***			0.26***
			(0.04)			(0.04)
Expressive			−0.02			0.04
			(0.04)			(0.04)
Broad			0.11			0.42***
			(0.06)			(0.06)
Age	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	−0.01***	−0.01***	−0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Woman	0.28***	0.33***	0.28***	−0.01	−0.01	−0.03
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Education	0.09**	0.11***	0.05	0.15***	0.15***	0.18***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Political Interest	0.53***	0.59***	0.49***	0.66***	0.66***	0.63***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Ref. Australia						
Brazil	−0.71***	−0.65***	−0.87***	0.60***	0.59***	0.54***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)

Continued

Table A7.3 *Continued*

	Voting			Non-electoral Participation		
	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**	**(6)**
Colombia	−0.50***	−0.43***	−0.62***	0.75***	0.75***	0.68***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
Hungary	−0.21*	−0.21*	−0.06	0.00	0.00	0.05
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Italy	−0.96***	−0.93***	−0.95***	0.27***	0.26***	0.33***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
Serbia	−0.54***	−0.54***	−0.46***	0.92***	0.92***	1.02***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
Sweden	−0.42***	−0.36***	−0.33***	0.52***	0.50***	0.47***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
US	−1.30***	−1.24***	−1.24***	0.63***	0.62***	0.65***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Constant	−3.32***	−2.34***	−2.34***	−1.90***	−1.73***	−1.99***
	(0.15)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.11)	(0.12)
N	15,614	15,614	14,617	16,305	16,305	15,163
AIC	15,398.6	15,601.9	14,291.2	17,889.0	17,891.9	16,521.1
BIC	15,505.7	15,701.4	14,427.8	17,996.8	17,992.0	16,658.3

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Table A7.4 Binary logistic regression results, panel data, weighted data

	Voting			Non-electoral Participation		
	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**	**(6)**
Having a Meaning	1.29***			1.42***		
	(0.26)			(0.36)		
Anti-voting	−0.75**		−0.99***	0.80***		0.84**
	(0.25)		(0.30)	(0.24)		(0.26)
No Meaning		−1.30***			−1.44*	
		(0.33)			(0.57)	
Ethics			0.52*			0.04
			(0.24)			(0.15)
Allegiance			0.26			0.49***
			(0.17)			(0.12)
Instrumental			0.39*			0.58***
			(0.18)			(0.13)
Expressive			0.07			0.23
			(0.18)			(0.13)
Broad			0.26			−0.26
			(0.32)			(0.21)

	Voting			Non-electoral Participation		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Age	0.02***	0.03***	0.02***	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Woman	−0.13	−0.06	−0.01	−0.07	−0.08	−0.07
	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
Education	0.57***	0.55***	0.44**	0.13	0.14	0.10
	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
Political Interest	0.39***	0.51***	0.37***	0.64***	0.63***	0.60***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Ref. Hungary						
US	−1.51***	−1.37***	−1.57***	0.09	0.08	0.04
	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.18)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
Constant	−1.59***	−0.95*	−0.65	−4.17***	−2.72***	−3.20***
	(0.47)	(0.42)	(0.49)	(0.47)	(0.34)	(0.37)
N	1452	1452	1359	1494	1494	1395
AIC	1145.7	1183.8	1004.9	1895.8	1906.0	1793.3
BIC	1187.9	1220.7	1067.4	1938.2	1943.2	1856.2

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table A7.5 Binary logistic regression results, unweighted data

	Voting			Non-electoral Participation		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Having a Meaning	1.34***			0.28***		
	(0.09)			(0.08)		
Anti-voting	−0.27***		−0.27***	0.23***		0.30***
	(0.07)		(0.08)	(0.07)		(0.07)
No Meaning		−1.36***			−0.20	
		(0.13)			(0.11)	
Ethics			0.47***			0.05
			(0.05)			(0.04)
Allegiance			0.38***			0.16***
			(0.04)			(0.04)
Instrumental			0.32***			0.27***
			(0.04)			(0.04)
Expressive			0.02			0.12**
			(0.04)			(0.04)
Broad			0.10			0.41***
			(0.06)			(0.06)

Continued

Table A7.5 *Continued*

	Voting			Non-electoral Participation		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Age	0.03***	0.03***	0.03***	−0.01***	−0.01***	−0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Woman	0.28***	0.31***	0.26***	−0.05	−0.05	−0.08*
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Education	0.11***	0.13***	0.09**	0.14***	0.15***	0.16***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Political Interest	0.61***	0.66***	0.57***	0.70***	0.70***	0.67***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Constant	−4.00***	−2.92***	−3.12***	−1.41***	−1.13***	−1.53***
	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.12)
N	15,614	15,614	14,617	16,305	16,305	15,163
AIC	17,310.9	17,536.8	16,134.4	20,390.5	20,402.5	18,935.5
BIC	17,418.1	17,636.3	16,271.0	20,498.3	20,502.6	19,072.7

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion. Country fixed effects included but not shown. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Table A7.6 Binary logistic regression results, closed-ended, weighted data

	Voting		Non-electoral Participation	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Having a Meaning	0.45***		0.09***	
	(0.01)		(0.01)	
Anti-voting	−0.23***	−0.22***	−0.01	−0.03***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Ethics		0.20***		0.02
		(0.01)		(0.01)
Allegiance		0.14***		−0.05***
		(0.02)		(0.01)
Instrumental		0.03*		0.04***
		(0.02)		(0.01)
Expressive		0.09***		0.07***
		(0.02)		(0.01)
Age	0.02***	0.02***	−0.01***	−0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)

	Voting		Non-electoral Participation	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Woman	0.15***	0.14**	−0.04	−0.02
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Education	0.01	0.00	0.14***	0.17***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Political Interest	0.34***	0.34***	0.59***	0.60***
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Constant	−3.75***	−3.95***	−1.24***	−1.11***
	(0.14)	(0.16)	(0.11)	(0.13)
N	15,614	14,617	16,305	15,163
AIC	13,509.3	12,580.4	17,827.3	16,509.1
BIC	13,616.5	12,709.5	17,935.1	16,638.8

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion. Country fixed effects included but not shown. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table A7.7 Binary logistic regression results, contacting, weighted data

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Having a Meaning	0.00 (0.14)		
Anti-voting	0.12 (0.10)		0.21* (0.11)
No Meaning		0.39* (0.19)	
Ethics			−0.01 (0.06)
Allegiance			−0.05 (0.05)
Instrumental			0.01 (0.06)
Expressive			−0.01 (0.05)
Broad			0.44*** (0.07)
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Woman	−0.16*** (0.05)	−0.16** (0.05)	−0.15** (0.05)
Education	0.07* (0.04)	0.07* (0.04)	0.09* (0.04)
Political Interest	0.67*** (0.03)	0.67*** (0.03)	0.67*** (0.03)
Constant	−3.34*** (0.20)	−3.35*** (0.16)	−3.53*** (0.17)
N.	13,687	13,687	12,921
AIC	10,262.6	10,258.2	9766.2
BIC	10,367.9	10,356.0	9900.6

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion. Country fixed effects included but not shown. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table A7.8 Binary logistic regression results, party work, weighted data

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Having a Meaning	−0.94*** (0.18)		
Anti-voting	−0.50** (0.17)		−0.36* (0.18)
No Meaning		1.28*** (0.21)	
Ethics			−0.19* (0.08)
Allegiance			−0.44*** (0.07)
Instrumental			−0.35*** (0.08)
Expressive			−0.08 (0.08)
Broad			0.54*** (0.09)
Age	−0.02*** (0.00)	−0.02*** (0.00)	−0.02*** (0.00)
Woman	−0.27*** (0.07)	−0.28*** (0.07)	−0.22** (0.07)
Education	0.12* (0.05)	0.12* (0.05)	0.20*** (0.05)
Political Interest	0.84*** (0.04)	0.84*** (0.04)	0.92*** (0.05)
Constant	−2.72*** (0.26)	−3.68*** (0.22)	−3.67*** (0.25)
N	13,687	13,687	12,921
AIC	5793.0	5783.9	5346.7
BIC	5898.3	5881.7	5481.1

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion. Country fixed effects included but not shown. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Table A7.9 Binary logistic regression results, wearing a badge, weighted data

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Having a Meaning	−0.56** (0.17)		
Anti-voting	−0.32* (0.15)		−0.23 (0.16)
No Meaning		0.83*** (0.21)	
Ethics			−0.17* (0.08)
Allegiance			−0.21** (0.07)
Instrumental			−0.16* (0.07)
Expressive			−0.07 (0.07)
Broad			0.36*** (0.08)
Age	−0.02*** (0.00)	−0.02*** (0.00)	−0.02*** (0.00)
Woman	−0.11 (0.06)	−0.11 (0.06)	−0.08 (0.06)
Education	0.05 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	0.07 (0.05)
Political Interest	0.77*** (0.04)	0.77*** (0.04)	0.80*** (0.04)
Constant	−2.82*** (0.24)	−3.39*** (0.19)	−3.33*** (0.21)
N	13,687	13,687	12,921
AIC	6987.0	6981.5	6623.4
BIC	7092.3	7079.3	6757.8

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion. Country fixed effects included but not shown. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Table A7.10 Binary logistic regression results, petitioning, weighted data

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Having a Meaning	0.27* (0.11)		
Anti-voting	0.20* (0.08)		0.25** (0.09)
No Meaning		−0.12 (0.16)	
Ethics			−0.03 (0.05)
Allegiance			0.13** (0.04)
Instrumental			0.23*** (0.05)
Expressive			0.01 (0.04)
Broad			0.29*** (0.06)
Age	0.00* (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Woman	0.25*** (0.04)	0.26*** (0.04)	0.25*** (0.04)
Education	0.24*** (0.03)	0.24*** (0.03)	0.26*** (0.03)
Political Interest	0.53*** (0.02)	0.53*** (0.02)	0.50*** (0.03)
Constant	−3.18*** (0.16)	−2.91*** (0.13)	−3.20*** (0.14)
N	13,687	13,687	12,921
AIC	13,680.5	13,685.3	12,953.0
BIC	13,785.8	13,783.1	13,087.4

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion. Country fixed effects included but not shown. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Table A7.11 Binary logistic regression results, protest, weighted data

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Having a Meaning	−0.14 (0.14)		
Anti-voting	0.19 (0.10)		0.22* (0.11)
No Meaning		0.34 (0.20)	
Ethics			−0.11 (0.06)
Allegiance			−0.08 (0.06)
Instrumental			−0.06 (0.06)
Expressive			−0.06 (0.06)
Broad			0.31*** (0.08)
Age	−0.02*** (0.00)	−0.02*** (0.00)	−0.02*** (0.00)
Woman	−0.13* (0.05)	−0.14** (0.05)	−0.08 (0.05)
Education	0.21*** (0.04)	0.21*** (0.04)	0.24*** (0.04)
Political Interest	0.65*** (0.03)	0.64*** (0.03)	0.66*** (0.03)
Constant	−1.74*** (0.19)	−1.83*** (0.15)	−2.02*** (0.17)
N	13,687	13,687	12,921
AIC	9347.5	9349.6	8840.7
BIC	9452.9	9447.4	8975.1

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion. Country fixed effects included but not shown. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

Table A7.12 Binary logistic regression results, posting online

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Having a Meaning	0.03 (0.12)		
Anti-voting	0.22** (0.08)		0.27** (0.09)
No Meaning		0.11 (0.17)	
Ethics			−0.03 (0.05)
Allegiance			0.07 (0.05)
Instrumental			0.17*** (0.05)
Expressive			0.13** (0.05)
Broad			0.32*** (0.06)
Age	−0.01*** (0.00)	−0.01*** (0.00)	−0.01*** (0.00)
Woman	−0.09* (0.04)	−0.09* (0.04)	−0.10* (0.04)
Education	0.13*** (0.03)	0.13*** (0.03)	0.14*** (0.03)
Political Interest	0.74*** (0.03)	0.73*** (0.03)	0.72*** (0.03)
Constant	−1.82*** (0.16)	−1.76*** (0.12)	−2.10*** (0.14)
N	13,687	13,687	12,921
AIC	12,920.4	12,925.4	12,262.9
BIC	13,025.8	13,023.2	12,397.3

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion. Country fixed effects included but not shown. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table A7.13 Binary logistic regression results, democracy, weighted data

	Voting			Non-electoral Participation		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Having a Meaning	1.21*** (0.12)			−0.13 (0.10)		
Anti-voting	−0.34*** (0.09)		−0.31** (0.10)	−0.10 (0.08)		0.02 (0.09)
No Meaning		−1.29*** (0.18)			0.40** (0.14)	
Ethics			0.47*** (0.06)			−0.04 (0.05)
Allegiance			0.46*** (0.05)			0.14** (0.04)
Instrumental			0.43*** (0.05)			0.22*** (0.05)
Expressive			−0.03 (0.05)			0.02 (0.05)
Broad			0.17* (0.07)			0.46*** (0.06)
Age	0.03*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)	0.03*** (0.00)	−0.02*** (0.00)	−0.02*** (0.00)	−0.02*** (0.00)

	Voting			Non-electoral Participation		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Woman	0.30***	0.34***	0.30***	−0.02	−0.01	−0.04
	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Education	0.10**	0.13***	0.06	0.18***	0.19***	0.20***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Political Interest	0.51***	0.57***	0.47***	0.63***	0.64***	0.60***
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Constant	−3.76***	−2.82***	−3.11***	−0.63***	−0.79***	−1.03***
	(0.17)	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.11)	(0.12)
N	10,828	10,828	10,294	11,306	11,306	10,704
AIC	11,794.7	11,931.0	10,996.8	13,620.7	13,612.4	12,772.5
BIC	11,882.2	12,011.2	11,112.6	13,708.7	13,693.1	12,888.9

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion. Country fixed effects included but not shown. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

Table A7.14 Binary logistic regression results, autocracy, weighted data

	Voting			Non-electoral Participation		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Having a Meaning	1.49***			0.57***		
	(0.15)			(0.14)		
Anti-voting	−0.25*		−0.33*	0.62***		0.62***
	(0.12)		(0.14)	(0.12)		(0.14)
No Meaning		−1.58***			−0.68***	
		(0.22)			(0.18)	
Ethics			0.27**			0.01
			(0.10)			(0.09)
Allegiance			0.20*			0.22**
			(0.08)			(0.08)
Instrumental			0.23**			0.38***
			(0.09)			(0.08)
Expressive			0.02			0.07
			(0.09)			(0.08)
Broad			−0.12			0.17
			(0.15)			(0.14)
Age	0.02***	0.02***	0.02***	0.01*	0.01*	0.01**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Woman	0.24**	0.31***	0.22**	0.06	0.05	0.05
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
Education	0.05	0.08	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.03
	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)

Continued

Table A7.14 *Continued*

	Voting			Non-electoral Participation		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Political Interest	0.64***	0.71***	0.61***	0.72***	0.71***	0.73***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Constant	−3.74***	−2.71***	−2.38***	−2.18***	−1.51***	−2.05***
	(0.26)	(0.24)	(0.26)	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.24)
N	4786	4786	4323	4999	4999	4459
AIC	3591.9	3659.4	3278.1	4198.7	4215.8	3703.9
BIC	3643.7	3704.8	3354.5	4250.9	4261.5	3780.8

Note: Logistic coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N: number of respondents. AIC: Akaike Information Criterion. BIC: Bayesian Information Criterion. Country fixed effects included but not shown. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

APPENDIX Chapter 8

The Normative Implications

Taking stock of meanings in designing voting systems

Table A8.1 Pearson correlation values between support for democracy and support for democratic elections and types of meanings of voting (exclusively meaning only)

Support for Democracy		Support for Democratic Elections	
meaning	**correlation**	**meaning**	**correlation**
allegiance	0.24	allegiance	0.26
ethics	0.18	ethics	0.20
expressive	0.19	expressive	0.24
instrumental	0.17	instrumental	0.22
anti-voting	−0.07	anti-voting	−0.07

Note: Pearson's correlation values when only that type of meaning is present.

Table A8.2 Countries ranked by values supportive meaning *among voters and abstainers*

Voters				Abstainers			
Country	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Country**	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**
US	3187	0.759	0.154	Brazil	473	0.666	0.206
Sweden	1390	0.751	0.170	Türkiye	117	0.647	0.240
Colombia	1145	0.750	0.095	Colombia	228	0.633	0.202
Brazil	1527	0.748	0.124	US	843	0.595	0.285
Türkiye	1889	0.748	0.137	Sweden	158	0.594	0.287
Italy	1290	0.730	0.129	Australia	132	0.577	0.277
Australia	1370	0.717	0.171	Italy	271	0.571	0.233
Hungary	3287	0.710	0.175	Estonia	130	0.568	0.220
Nigeria	1063	0.687	0.213	Nigeria	413	0.565	0.318
Serbia	1237	0.682	0.180	Serbia	269	0.475	0.296
Estonia	1362	0.678	0.106	Kenya	279	0.475	0.335
Kenya	1210	0.641	0.237	Hungary	539	0.449	0.315

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