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The Role of Normative and Evaluative Attitudes in Electoral Participation of Youth and Ethnic Minorities

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Abstract

Electoral participation is crucial for establishing the legitimacy of representative democratic political systems. Yet, low or decreasing turnout characterizes many contemporary democracies. The problem seems even more pronounced among the younger generations and various minority groups. Among the reasons for low electoral participation, the literature often emphasizes deficiencies in political culture and dissatisfaction with mainstream politics. However, it is unclear whether these factors are equally valid explanations for low participation among youth and minority groups. This paper examines the relative influence of these two factors—normative and evaluative—on electoral participation in a comparative context, focusing on youth and ethnic/racial minority groups. Data collected in CSES Module 5, comprising 56 election studies and a total unweighted N ≈ 114k respondents, were used in the analysis. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting voting turnout by youth, minority status, normative support for democracy, and evaluative factors of participation, while controlling for relevant individual (gender, education) and contextual variables (compulsory voting, type of regime, and Freedom House ratings), was performed. The findings confirm that younger individuals and minorities are less likely to vote, while normative support for democracy and positive evaluations of the system increase voter turnout. However, the link between normative democratic support and voting was weaker among minority groups. Unlike the majority population, for whom positive evaluations of the system's performance encouraged participation, minorities did not exhibit the same pattern. These results are discussed in light of their theoretical significance and potential implications for democratic practices.

1. Introduction

Electoral participation is crucial for establishing the legitimacy of representative democratic systems. Normative political theory emphasizes the importance of citizen participation in elections and treats it as an indicator of acceptance of the democratic order and of the 'health of democracy'. Lijphart, for example, states that turnout is an "excellent indicator of democratic quality" (Lijphart, 1999, p. 284). In the same spirit, Mark Franklin highlights: "Participation is the lifeblood of democracy... Indeed, the health of democracy is often seen in the level of turnout" (Franklin, 2002, p. 148). Yet, low and/or decreasing turnout characterizes many contemporary democracies, especially since the 1980s (e.g., Hooghe & Kern, 2017). The problem seems particularly pronounced among younger generations and various minority groups (e.g., Pammett & LeDuc, 2003).

Research consistently shows that young people vote less than older individuals across Europe and other advanced democracies (Berry & McDonnell, 2014; Quintelier, 2007; Fieldhouse et al., 2007; Phelps, 2004). The turnout gap between young and older voters is particularly pronounced in the UK (Berry & McDonnell, 2014) and the U.S.A. (Dalton, 2015; Lawless & Fox, 2015). Research on ethnic minority voting behavior in the UK and Europe reveals complex patterns. While ethnic minorities in Britain predominantly support Labour, their voting calculus is influenced by factors like partisanship, valence considerations, and perceptions of discrimination (Sanders et al., 2014). In Europe more broadly, ethnic and linguistic minorities show similar overall political participation rates to majority populations, with only national election voting turnout displaying a significant gap (Sandovici & Listhaug, 2010). These findings highlight the complexity and heterogeneity of ethnic minority political behavior - and the need for more research.

Among the reasons for low electoral participation in general, the literature often emphasizes the inadequacy of democratic political culture, i.e., the insufficiently developed civic awareness of the importance of political participation (e.g., Almond & Verba, 1963; 1980; Blais, 2000). From an evaluative perspective, dissatisfaction with the system's performance in general and negative evaluations of government performance are also seen as contributing to citizen apathy and, therefore, electoral abstention (e.g., Grönlund & Setälä, 2007; Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2016; Burden & Wichowsky, 2014). However, it remains unclear whether these factors explain low participation among youth and minority groups as effectively as they do for the general population.

This paper explores the comparative relevance of two key factors — normative and evaluative attitudes — on electoral participation, with a specific focus on youth and ethnic minority groups. The normative aspect encompasses variables such as general political interest, engagement with electoral campaigns, and both internal and external political efficacy. These

indicators reflect the underlying beliefs and motivations that drive individuals to participate in the electoral process, and could be subsumed under the "duty term" in the standard models of turnout (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968). On the other hand, evaluative factors include assessments of governmental performance, perceptions of corruption, satisfaction with democratic processes, and both prospective and retrospective evaluations of economic conditions. These dimensions provide insight into how citizens gauge the effectiveness and integrity of their government, which in turn may influence their likelihood of participating in national elections.

To account for the broader context, this study also examines the impact of macroeconomic variables and electoral system characteristics, acknowledging that these structural elements can significantly shape trends in political participation.

The analysis is based on data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) Module 5, which includes 56 election studies from 45 countries worldwide. Our approach is structured as follows. First, we will outline the main theoretical framework that informs our hypothesis regarding the interactions between youth and minority groups, as well as the normative and evaluative factors influencing voter turnout. Next, we will provide a detailed description of the study's methodology. Finally, we will present and discuss the results.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Youth and turnout

Age is among the three most frequently analyzed variables in turnout research (Smets & Van Ham, 2013). "Young adults are notorious abstainers," concluded Smets and van Ham (2013, p. 348). This phenomenon appears to be universal (with a few exceptions), as research shows that young people are less likely to vote in established democracies, such as the U.S.A. (e.g., Zhu, 2021; Bergan et al., 2021; Dalton, 2015; Lawless & Fox, 2015), the UK (Briggs, 2017; Berry & McDonnell, 2014; Phelps, 2004), France (Romaniuc et al., 2024), European countries (Sloam, 2013; Quintelier, 2007; Fieldhouse et al., 2007), as well as in Africa (Resnick & Casale, 2011), Asia (Mohd Hed, 2017; Steel, 2021), Latin America (Carreras & Castañeda-Angarita, 2012), and worldwide (Norris, 2001; Norris, 2004). Some studies report that, in many countries, turnout continues to increase beyond the 'youth' age, up to 60 and beyond, depending on society's life expectancy (Matsubayashi & Lu, 2021). Stanojević et al. (2023) similarly find that within the youth category (aged 15–35), turnout increases continuously with age.

Two approaches have emerged to explain this phenomenon: *the life-course approach* and *the generational shift approach*. The first approach suggests that young people, upon entering the political scene, lack sufficient resources, knowledge, and information about politics (Sloam, 2007; Bergan et al., 2021; García-Albacete, 2014). They need time to gather enough information about candidates and programs and understand the technical voting requirements (registration, polling locations, voting methods) (Grumbach & Hill, 2022). Therefore, young people who are better educated and have more resources and information tend to engage in politics earlier.

The second approach indicates that it is not just about age but also a generational shift characteristic of late modernity. A shift from materialist to post-materialist values (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005) and the contemporary democratic deficit (Norris, 2011) have led to alienation and apathy (Zhu, 2021), making traditional forms of participation neither appealing nor relevant to new generations (Briggs, 2017). Young people are avoiding conventional channels and are increasingly turning to unconventional, deliberative forms of participation (Coe & Vandegrift, 2015; Renström et al., 2020; Norris, 2004; Furlong & Cartmel, 2012; Henn & Foard, 2014). A variant of this view portrays younger citizens as less likely to participate in politics because of their pessimistic political attitudes and general disengagement (Dalton, 2015; Lawless & Fox, 2015). That such a view continues to have some merit is confirmed by a recent study by Courtney Juelich and Joseph Coll (2021), who found that shifts to voting systems that encourage civility and campaign contact are accompanied by higher youth turnout.

2.2 Ethnic/Racial Minorities and Turnout

The situation is more difficult to summarize when it comes to minority groups, partly because research results are less consistent, and because there are fewer studies in the first place, not least because of varying definitions of who belongs to

'minorities'. Concerning the last, an important distinction may be between minorities of immigrant background, and, so to say, 'native minorities', i.e., those that are not of recent immigrant origin. For instance, the Roma minority in some societies might be a 'native minority', while in others they may be recent immigrants. Their political behavior may differ across contexts, but this topic still awaits more detailed exploration. Just (2022) for instance, found that the usual turnout gap mostly characterizes societies where minorities are "composed largely of Muslims and recent immigrants", while the gap was reversed in some cases of "long-standing ethnic groups" (e.g., Russians and Ukrainians in Poland and Lithuania, for instance, Just, 2022). Bird, Saalfeld, and Wüst (2011) in their volume devoted mostly to political participation and representation of immigrants (a narrower conception of 'minorities'), conclude based on 11 case studies of mostly developed western nations, that "the turnout of recent immigrants and their descendants tends to be lower than the turnout levels found among autochthonous voters" (p. 270). They also found that, in some cases, differences between various immigrant groups are large, so that the turnout gap for some immigrant groups is "minimal", while the gap tends to be larger for "visible minority immigrants" (Bird et al., 2011, pp. 26–27).

In any case, minority electoral behavior varies depending on factors such as the country, the specific minority group, the historical context, and the issues at stake in the election. In some contexts, some ethnic or racial groups may vote at lower rates due to barriers such as voter suppression, socio-economic factors, or lack of trust in the political system. In other contexts, however, particularly where issues of ethnic or racial identity are prominent, these groups may vote at higher rates, especially when mobilized by targeted outreach efforts or when their rights or interests are perceived to be at stake (for an overview, see Just, 2022; Bird et al., 2011). For instance, Bhatti and Hansen (2016) report that immigrant youth (children of immigrants) vote less in Denmark, because they "dissociate from politics" (see also Simonsen, 2021).

Being a minority can certainly become an important mobilizing factor within particular contexts. Nevertheless, some literature finds that members of ethnic or racial minority groups have lower voter turnout compared to the general population for several reasons (e.g., Sandovici & Listhaug, 2010; Fraga, 2018; Simonsen, 2021; Bird et al., 2011). Often, these factors may be subsumed under the term "resources", such as lower socio-economic status, education, time, or political involvement that results in being disenfranchised (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980; Xu, 2005; Just, 2022). However, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady found that when one controls for the resource disparities, turnout can be similar to or even higher than in the general population (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). On the other hand, Xu (2005) found a persistent turnout/participation gap among the Asian minority in the U.S.A., despite their not being economically disadvantaged, suggesting a need for a more context-sensitive approach.

More recently, Bernard Fraga (2018) examined disparities in voter turnout between racial and ethnic minority groups and white voters in the U.S.A. He concluded that structural inequalities, voter suppression, and differences in political mobilization contribute to this turnout gap, exacerbating political inequality. Fraga, moreover, notes a particular interaction among factors that commonly influence turnout and that is particularly relevant for the present paper: minorities are generally more dissatisfied with democracy and less interested in politics, while targeted mobilization can affect their turnout. In other words, youth and minorities may be low on resources known to be relevant to participation, but their political outlook, views of democracy, and evaluations of the system's performance should be taken into account (cf. Just, 2022).

2.3 Turnout in the context of normative and evaluative attitudes

Various explanations have been put forward for the (occasionally) observed tendencies among youth and minorities. As stated previously, several factors contribute to this phenomenon, including lifecycle effects, differing political participation preferences, and limited conceptions of politics, i.e., incomplete democratic political socialization among youth (Quintelier, 2007) and minorities/immigrants (Just, 2022). Overall, both individual-level characteristics and election-specific factors contribute to variations in youth and minority turnout (Fieldhouse et al., 2007). Factors singled out as influencing minority political participation include socio-economic status, experiences of discrimination, and social pressures (Just, 2022). Importantly, minority voters are more likely to engage when they perceive their votes as influential in shaping election outcomes (Fraga, 2018). The research emphasizes the heterogeneity of minority groups and the importance of considering various factors beyond ethnicity when examining electoral behavior (Sandovici & Listhaug, 2010; Bevelander & Pendakur, 2007; Just, 2022).

Presently, we focus on the association between turnout and normative and evaluative attitudes, and on the interaction between youth and minority status and **normative** and evaluative considerations. The importance of normative support for democracy has long been emphasized in the context of electoral turnout (e.g., Downs, 1957; Riker & Ordeshook, 1968; Gerber, Green & Larimer, 2008; Blais, 2000; Todosijević & Pavlović, 2020). Subsequent scholars often emphasized the role of the "Duty factor", in various ways, but commonly found that normative investment in democracy is a strong and consistent correlate of turnout. Thus, we expect that individuals with stronger, so to speak, normative investment in democracy should be more numerous at the polls than those relatively low on this dimension.

Although economic evaluations, both retrospective and prospective, have been among the core variables in various models of vote choice, they have a somewhat more ambiguous place in models of electoral turnout. Obviously, both satisfaction and dissatisfaction with economic and political developments could motivate individuals to turn out at the polls, and the results are ambiguous. Kinder & Kiewiet (1981), for instance, briefly addressed the relationship between economic evaluation and turnout, noting limited research and citing an unpublished study that found personal economic adversity reduced participation in U.S. congressional elections, i.e., it does not stimulate turnout, which is in line with their view that voters tend to be sociotropic in their reasoning about politics (see also Rosenstone 1982). Radcliff (1994) explicitly emphasizes the influence of economic evaluations on turnout, finding that positive evaluations are associated with higher turnout in the U.S.A.

Arceneaux (2003) adds further complexity to the relationship between evaluations and turnout, reporting that "those facing economic adversity are more likely to vote when they blame the government for economic outcomes". In other words, the evaluation of government performance affects turnout, not just the experience of economic downturn.

In line with this, we hypothesize that positive evaluations of a country's economic and political developments should be associated with increased participation, as reflected in higher electoral turnout. Negative evaluation, rather than motivating participation, should lead to passivization and electoral absentism (e.g., Radcliff, 1994; Arceneaux, 2003; Todosijević & Pavlović, 2020). The intermittent progress in understanding this link underscores the importance of our study and the need for more cross-cultural evidence. In the current information age, voters may integrate personal and societal economic evaluations more effectively.

2.4 Interaction between youth and minority status with normative and evaluative attitudes - Bird's view perspective

Our study goes beyond examining the effects of normative and evaluative factors on electoral participation, a topic that has been sporadically explored in the existing literature (Todosijević & Pavlović, 2020). We aim to investigate whether these factors are associated differently with participation among youth and minority groups.

There are reasons to hypothesize such interactions. It takes time and learning effort to adopt the norms of liberal democracy as broadly socially relevant. Hence, we expect that the association between the acceptance of the norms of democracy shows a different pattern of association compared to the one observed among the adults, primarily because of political learning that needs to take place in the period each new generation is enfranchised. A similar reasoning applies to the evaluative dimension and to the interaction with youth and minority statuses. Here as well, political socialization needs to take place, although evaluations are easier to develop compared to more sophisticated normative support for democracy (remember the psychologists' dictum that "preferences need no inferences", Zajonc, 1980).

We expect interaction regarding both youth and minority respondent status. However, it is important to emphasize the key differences between these indicators, as they may affect subsequent associations with other variables. "Youth" status is, so to speak, a biological category; each individual passes through that stage. It has some similar characteristics across different societies, and therefore, clear and consistent tendencies are likely to be observed in aggregate analyses. In brief, "youth status" is a simple, uncontroversial measure for cross-cultural research.

On the other side, minority status varies significantly across different societies, and within the same country different minority ethnic groups can have rather different social and cultural positions. In some countries, there is a single minority group, but in

others, there are multiple minority groups. In some cases, minority groups are so-called historical groups, i.e., groups that have resided in the country's territory for a long historical period. In other cases, minorities may be recent immigrants. In third cases, groups of different characters and origins may coexist within the same country, and these characteristics are relevant to political participation (e.g., Just, 2022). Instead of trying to disentangle the character and social position of different minority groups within each country, we opted for the "bird's view perspective", i.e., to differentiate the "titular group", i.e., the one that "owns" the nation (e.g., Poles in Poland, and typically 'Whites' in immigrant societies such as Canada, or the U.S.A.), from all the other groups who would be categorized as being a minority. Note also that our data do not allow for a much finer distinction between minority groups. For instance, we could not consistently distinguish the immigrant status of individual members of the categorized ethnic minorities.

This approach provides a consistent definition of which groups are defined as minorities, but it results in heterogeneous groups being categorized as minorities. This "bird's view" can yield the most general finding about the effect of minority status, regardless of whether this status entails social and political disadvantage, discrimination, or privilege. And this applies both to the definition of what groups constitute minorities within countries, and also to the global perspective on the issue - we have a fairly diverse set of countries within the CSES Module 5 sample (45 polities, 56 election studies), so that we can claim to be able to provide the evidence that has been lacking in the field.

3. Method

The present study has two aims: descriptive and explanatory. The descriptive aim is to determine whether youth status and minority status (ethnic/racial), defined more generally and in a global perspective, are associated with different electoral participation rates in the most recent data. Most of the extant studies are focused on much narrower samples - culturally and politically. We take here a 'bird's view' (or perhaps a 'space station perspective') to check whether, in the global context, youth and minorities are indeed relatively less electorally active. In the case of minorities, there are reasons not to be surprised if we obtain otherwise, in particular because minorities are not necessarily politically and economically disadvantaged and/or demobilized groups. Also, various within-country minority groups can have different cultural, political, and economic statuses. Some might have problematic political histories vis-à-vis the majority, while others might have cooperative relationships.

Our second aim is to examine to what extent normative and evaluative factors that are commonly found to affect participation (a) affect relatively lower youth and minority participation, and (b) interact with youth and minority statuses in influencing participation. We introduce the basic control variables at the individual and aggregate levels to retain focus on the individual-level analysis and control for system-level variations.

3.1 Data

The present study is based on the CSES Module 5 Dataset. The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) is a collaborative research program among election study teams from around the world. Participating polities include a common module of survey questions in their post-election studies. The resulting data are deposited along with voting, demographic, district, and macro variables. The CSES project focuses on respondents' behavior and attitudes during a national election, with particular emphasis on voting and turnout.

CSES Module 5 included a total of 45 polities, 56 Election Studies, and a total unweighted N≈114k respondents (The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, 2023; data and documentation are available to download from the CSES MODULE 5 study page at: https://cses.org/data-download/cses-module-5-2016-2021). Data are weighted for the analysis using the E1014_2 weight (or E1014_1 where _2 is not available), which is generally designed to compensate for demographic and sampling biases within each election study while giving equal weight to each election study.

3.2 Variables and measures

Electoral turnout. Electoral turnout was operationalized by the CSES variable E3012, which indicates turnout at the main election within the polity. In parliamentary systems, this typically refers to parliamentary elections, whereas in presidential systems, it

refers to presidential elections. Turnout in the CSES M5 sample ranges from as low as 35% in Tunisia 2019 and 52% in El Salvador 2019 to 93% in Australia 2019 and 94% in Turkey 2019 (the last two countries have compulsory voting systems).

Youth status. All respondents aged 30 or younger are considered 'youth'. This is a conventional definition of youth status (e.g., Furlong 2012; Stanojević et al., 2023).

Minority status. Minority status is primarily determined by the ethnicity variable (E2016), which records respondents' ethnic identity. Where not available or not applicable for our purpose, we used Race identification (E2015). Where CSES collaborators regarded neither of these variables as applicable to their cases, these variables were not asked, and all respondents were coded as belonging to the 'majority'. We opted to do this to avoid excluding studies without minorities from analyses of the combined effects of both minority and youth status. Youth status was, of course, available in every study.

In 24 studies, minority status was determined by the ethnicity variable. The proportion of minorities in studies varies from as low as 38 individuals in Thailand and 39 in Poland (approximately 2.5% of cases in those polities), to 42% in Peru and 44% in Montenegro. In India, nearly 69% of all cases are categorized as belonging to some minority group. In two U.S.A. studies and in Brazil, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Mexico, the minority variable is based on race. In Brazil, nearly 85% of cases are categorized as minority - only 'Whites' are categorized as the majority, while Black, Brown, Yellow, and Indigenous are classified as minorities. In some other Latin American cases, the proportion of ethnic/racial minorities is also quite high: Mexico 83%, and El Salvador, 78%.

In some cases, it was not easy to differentiate majority-minority status. For instance, in the Canadian study, we classified as the 'majority' those who described themselves as Canadian, English, Irish, British, French, Scottish, French Canadian, or Quebecois, while all other responses were placed in the 'Minority' category. So, in total, we have ethnic/racial minorities indicated by our variable in 30 election studies. Obviously, 'minority' status is not based on numerical ratios, but rather on a sociological definition that involves social status differentials within a society.

Normative support for democracy or "Duty factor" is operationalized presently by five items available in the CSES Module 5 questionnaire:

- *Q01. How interested would you say you are in politics?* (1 - very interested / 4 - not at all interested).
- *Q02. And how closely do you follow politics on TV, radio, newspapers, or the Internet?* (1- very closely / 4 - not at all?).
- *Q03. You feel you understand the most important political issues of this country* (1 - strongly agree / 4 - strongly disagree).
- *Q14a. Some people say that it doesn't make any difference who is in power. Others say that it makes a big difference who is in power. Using the scale on this card (where ONE means that it doesn't make any difference who is in power and FIVE means that it makes a big difference who is in power), where would you place yourself?*
- *Q14b. Some people say that no matter who people vote for, it won't make any difference to what happens. Others say that who people vote for can make a big difference to what happens (1 - voting won't make any difference to what happens / 5 - voting can make a big difference).*

The five items are correlated with one another, and reliability analysis showed that they indeed converge on a common, more general attitudinal dimension. Alpha reliability coefficient for the 5 items is Alpha=.67, and both item-test and item-rest correlations are relatively high. Thus, the summarized index can be regarded as a fairly integrated measure of the normative support for democracy, although not ideal. Higher scores on this measure imply stronger normative support of democracy.

Evaluative factors of participation. We measured the evaluative factors of participation using five items:

- *Q07. How widespread do you think corruption, such as bribe taking, is among politicians in [COUNTRY]?* (1- very widespread / 4 - it hardly happens at all),
- *Q09. Now thinking about the performance of the [government in [CAPITAL]/President] in general, how good or bad a job do you think the [government/President in [CAPITAL]] did over the past [NUMBER OF YEARS SINCE LAST GOVERNMENT TOOK OFFICE, BEFORE THE CURRENT ELECTION] years?* (1 - a very good job / 4 - A very bad job),

- *Q11. Would you say that over the past twelve months, the state of the economy in [COUNTRY] has gotten much better, gotten somewhat better, stayed about the same, gotten somewhat worse, or gotten much worse?*,
- *Q21. On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in [COUNTRY]?*,
- *Q04c. Most politicians are trustworthy.* (1 - strongly agree / 4 - strongly disagree).

Higher scores on the summarized scale (Alpha=.72) imply positive evaluation of government and democracy in the respondent's country. The normative and evaluative dimensions are positively associated, but the correlation coefficient is relatively low (r = .25, p < .001), leaving room to explore the separate associations of these dimensions with turnout.

Control variables: Compulsory voting. Created based on the CSES E5046 variable, which indicates if voting is compulsory in lower house elections, which is generally the same as for presidential elections if presidential elections are the main election. We created a binary variable, where 1 (meaning there is compulsory voting) represents two original codes: 1. YES; STRICTLY ENFORCED SANCTIONS & 2. YES; WEAKLY ENFORCED SANCTIONS, while 0 represented 3. YES; WITHOUT SANCTION FOR VIOLATION, and 5. NO. Coded this way, compulsory voting is observed in six CSES Module 5 election studies.

Other macro variables. We also controlled for the *type of regime* (E5051, 1. PARLIAMENTARY REGIME, 2. MIXED REGIME, 3. PRESIDENTIAL REGIME), and the electoral formula in all election segments (E5055, whether the country uses a 1. MAJORITARIAN, 2. PROPORTIONAL, or 3. MIXED system in all of its electoral segments/tiers). Namely, the debate among scholars about electoral laws and ethnic diversity centers on whether proportional representation (PR) systems politicize ethnicity. In PR systems, parties can form easily based on ethnic lines, giving even small groups representation. Some argue that this is beneficial because it prevents alienation by ensuring that all groups have a voice (Lijphart, 1977). Others, however, contend that this politicization should be avoided, advocating instead for electoral systems that encourage cross-ethnic coalitions, such as vote-pooling rules, to diffuse ethnic salience in politics (Horowitz, 1985). In a very interesting paper, J. Huber finds that both 'camps' could be right. Namely, he finds that PR systems do not necessarily strengthen the link between ethnic identity and voting behavior, as Lijphart suggests. Instead, PR systems tend to weaken this relationship compared to majoritarian systems. This happens because PR allows the formation of parties that appeal to diverse interests beyond ethnic identity, leading to a more diverse distribution of votes across parties and often reducing the salience of ethnicity in elections. Thus, PR may promote good governance by diminishing the emphasis on ethnicity in the electoral process (Huber, 2012). The implication is that both ethnic minorities and majorities should be more prone to participate in PR systems for the same reason – because the system allows for more diversity.

Finally, we also include Freedom House country rating at the time of election, which presents the average of the 'political rights' and 'civil liberties' scores (https://freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world).

Individual background controls. The following individual background variables were controlled: *education level* (categories by the International Standard Classification of Education, ISCED 2011, provided by the UNESCO), *gender* (1. Male, 2. Female, with a third category used only sporadically), and *income* (in quintiles, sample quintiles, not population). We are not developing a complete causal model - it is much beyond our scope; therefore, we introduce the most basic controls, to keep the model simple while securing the validity of the conclusions, and making sure we avoid the so-called 'bad controls' (Cinelli et al., 2024).

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive results: Are youth and minority statuses associated with lower turnout?

We begin with a descriptive analysis that provides a clear, concise overview of the data, highlighting key patterns. More complex tests of specific hypotheses regarding the predictive values of youth and minority status for voting turnout will follow.

Age and turnout

As noted, youth turnout has been consistently reported as relatively low, and our recent CSES data do not provide grounds to change this global impression: the probability of voting increases with age (Fig. 1). In the global sample, appropriately weighted, age is strongly associated with turnout, rising steadily from the legal voting age until around 70–79. This effect extends beyond youth, with older respondents more likely to vote than their slightly younger counterparts. Most election studies show significant effects. The relationship between turnout and age forms a curvilinear pattern, with participation rising in early adulthood as voting habits and norms develop, and declining in later life (Cutler & Bengston, 1974; Jankowski & Strate, 1995).

Figure 1. Voting turnout probability by age group

, *Cross-national sample*

Ethnic and racial minorities and turnout

According to the results presented in Fig. 2, our minimalistically defined ethnic/racial minorities tend to participate less often in elections compared to the majority ethnic or racial groups. The effect is smaller than that of the youth variable, and, when examined in individual election studies, it is statistically insignificant in a number of them. However, our primary focus is on the broader trend of lower turnout among minority groups. Identifying the specific factors influencing individual variations is a task for future research. In this study, we aim to present a comprehensive overview of the general pattern.

The next insight worth mentioning in this descriptive overview is that youth and minority statuses make additive contributions to the reduction in turnout. If we plot turnout probabilities by combining youth and minority status variables, we observe that being 'only' young results in a larger drop in voting probability than being 'only' of minority status (see Fig. 3). Individuals with a minority status alone are less likely to vote compared to those who are neither young nor part of a minority. However, being both young and a minority further reduces turnout probability, even below that of 'only' youth. Thus, the two characteristics that result in political self-exclusion produce a combined effect that is stronger when they occur together. However, note that this is an initial descriptive bivariate analysis, and that the subsequent analyses will provide a more reliable, multivariate and multilevel examination of these relationships.

4.2 Voting turnout and evaluative and normative factors

The relevance of different types of evaluations can be summarized as follows: positive evaluations are, as expected, associated with higher turnout (Table 1). More specifically, people who evaluate government performance and the state of the economy more positively vote more, as well as those who are more satisfied with democracy, more trusting in politicians, and less inclined to perceive widespread corruption in society.

Table 1
The relationship between voter turnout and the evaluative factors

	Evaluative factors scale		Perception of corruption		Government performance evaluation		Economy evaluation		Satisfaction with democracy		Trust in politicians	
Voting turnout	.146	*	0.141	*	-0.031	*	-0.073	*	-0.127	*	-0.124	*

* $p < .05$.

Similarly, the various facets of the normative support for democracy are meaningfully and significantly related to turnout (Table 2). Low political interest and less frequent news consumption are associated with lower turnout. Different measures of internal and external political efficacy, as well as the belief that the will of the majority should always prevail, are conducive to higher turnout.

Table 2
The relationships between voter turnout and normative factors

	Normative scale		Political interest		Follow politics		Internal efficacy		Will of the majority		Who is in power makes difference		Who people vote for makes a difference	
Voting turnout	.331	*	-0.298	*	-0.239	*	-0.213	*	0.058	*	0.187	*	0.205	*

* $p < .05$.

To summarize, the descriptive analysis showed that the likelihood of voting increases with age, and decreases with (ethnic/racial) minority status (although this effect varies significantly by country, but we do not present results on between-country variations). The analysis also indicates that youth status has a stronger and more consistent relationship with voting turnout than minority status. Evaluative and normative factors also play a crucial role in voting behavior – positive evaluations of government, the economy, and democracy, as well as higher political interest and efficacy, are associated with higher voting turnout. All said, the need for a more systematic analysis to test the relevance of both individual-level variables and context-specific factors seems obvious, and that is the analysis we are turning to.

4.3 Multivariate and Multilevel model of turnout based on cross-national CSES data

Given the nature of the data and research question, we will use multilevel and multivariate modeling. We are primarily interested in individual-level sources of variance, and our substantive hypotheses relate to this level of analysis. Our sample comprises 56 independent election studies, and a fixed-effects multilevel approach is ideal for controlling for macro-level variance and ensuring proper statistical inference. However, the macro-level variables are not of primary research interest presently, and we do not dwell on their potential theoretical relevance.

Table 3 presents the results of a hierarchical multiple regression model predicting voting turnout using a set of relevant individual variables and controlling for three macro-level variables. In this basic model, we can observe that both the minority and youth statuses are significantly associated with turnout. Controlling for gender and education, younger people and people of minority groups vote less. So even in this heterogeneous, global sample, where minorities are defined regardless of their relative social status, belonging to a non-titular ethnic group is associated with relatively lower turnout. Nonetheless, the youth status has a clearly stronger effect - the regression coefficient is nearly three times higher.

Table 3
Fixed-effects multilevel logistic regression results: The basic model

	Model 1		
	Coefficient		**Robust s.e.**
Individual predictors			
Minority status (reference: Majority)	− .212	**	.082
Youth status	− .646	***	.043
Education	.956	***	.017
Gender (Female)	.125	**	.044
Normative support	1.147	***	.068
Evaluative attitudes	.214	***	.054
Macro predictors			
Compulsory voting	1.261	***	.323
Freedom House democracy score	.087		.107
Regime type (Ref.: 1. Parliamentary) 2. Mixed regime	− .485		.287
3. Presidential regime	− .605	*	.252
Constant	1.760	***	.210
Variance (constant)	.496		.093
Wald χ^2 (10)	652.26		
ICC	.131		
$N_{respondents}$	105,872		
$N_{countries}$	56		

***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05.

Data source: CSES Module 5 dataset. Weighted by E1014_2 or E1014_1.

Next, both normative support for democracy and evaluations of system performance are strongly linked to turnout, with the former having a particularly strong impact. The more respondents endorse pro-democratic attitudes, such as political efficacy, interest, and involvement in democratic politics, the higher the electoral participation. While we considered that both positive and negative evaluations of political outcomes might motivate electoral participation, the present evidence shows that positive evaluations are indeed associated with higher turnout.

Among the individual-level control variables, it is worth noting that both education and gender are associated with turnout. Education is well known to be correlated with higher turnout, and our results simply confirm the usual observation. The results also showed that women are somewhat more inclined to participate in elections.

Among the election study-level, or macro-level, control variables, the presented model includes an indicator of whether voting is compulsory in a polity, the Freedom House democracy indicator, and an indicator of whether the system is parliamentary, presidential, or mixed (CSES variable E0501). As shown in Table 3, voting turnout is expectedly positively predicted by its

compulsory status (cf. Frank & Martínez i Coma, 2023) and by the type of regime, being lower in presidential than in parliamentary systems.

In addition, unreported analyses included family income as a variable, which was generally associated with higher turnout, similar to other resource-related variables such as education. However, we excluded it from the final analyses presented here due to the large number of missing values, its absence from two of the election studies, and because its inclusion or exclusion did not affect the other relationships. The unreported analyses also included the Human Development Index to control for the level of socio-economic development. However, the preliminary analyses showed that this variable was not a significant predictor of electoral turnout and was therefore dropped from the reported models.

In the second part of the analysis, we are looking for features of political participation specific to youth and minorities regarding normative and evaluative attitudes. Table 4 presents the results, now including interaction terms between youth and minority statuses and the normative and evaluative attitudes. We can first observe that the inclusion of the interaction terms did not affect the non-interacting terms much, i.e., they remained similarly related to voting as in the basic regression model - being a minority or a young person implies voting less. Thus, we can focus our attention on what is new in this table - the interactions.

First, it is important to note that the interaction between youth and minority statuses does not significantly predict voting turnout. Thus, while both 'components' reduce turnout/participation, their interaction does not have a synergistic, mutually reinforcing effect. The minority status has two statistically significant interactions with both normative and evaluative attitudes. On the other hand, youth status has not produced significant interactions with either normative or evaluative attitudes.

Table 4
Fixed-effects multilevel logistic regression results: the model with interactions

	Model 2		
	Coefficient		**Robust s.e.**
Individual predictors			
Minority status (Ref.: Majority)	− .476	***	.097
Youth status	− .648	***	.048
Minority * Youth	.095		.086
Normative support	1.199	***	.071
Evaluative attitudes	.273	***	.053
Normative * Minority	− .384	***	.093
Evaluative * Minority	− .240	*	.126
Normative * Youth	.059		.054
Evaluative * Youth	− .063		.058
Education	.094	***	.017
Gender	.125	**	.045
Macro predictors			
Compulsory voting	1.324	***	.346
Regime type (Ref.: 1. Parliamentary) 2. Mixed regime	− .502		.279
3. Presidential regime	− .569	*	.242
Constant	1.813		.152
Variance (constant)	.505		
Wald χ^2 (14)	833.63		
ICC	.133		
$N_{respondents}$	105,872		
N_{groups}	56		

***p<.001; **p<.01; *p<.05.

Data source: CSES Module 5 dataset. Weighted by E1014_2 or E1014_1.

Interactive relationships are easier to grasp with a graphical presentation. Figure 4 plots the predictive margins (with 95% confidence intervals) separately for the ethnic/racial majority and minority groups. The interaction is clearly visible: among ethnic/racial minorities, the slope is less steep. In other words, electoral participation tends to increase with normative support for democracy among both the ethnic majority and the minority, but the effect is *weaker* among minorities.

The second significant interaction, between ethnic/racial minority status and evaluative attitudes, is illustrated in Fig. 5. In this case as well, the association seems weaker among ethnic/racial minority members. In this case, the relationships appear

nonexistent among minorities, whereas they are positive and significant within majority groups. The finding indicates a disparity in how perceptions of government performance, economic conditions, satisfaction with democracy, trust in politicians, and views on corruption influence voting turnout between ethnic/racial majority and minority groups. For the majority, these factors significantly boost voting rates. For minorities, these same factors might have little to no effect, probably due to various potential barriers and feelings of political disenfranchisement.

The conclusion from these two interactions seems clear: normative and evaluative attitudes are important factors that enhance electoral participation. However, their effects appear weaker among ethnic minorities. Thus, while positive evaluation of the system's performance contributed to participation by the majority population, the effect on minority members seems nonexistent.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Our descriptive analysis confirmed the main expectations: in a global perspective, youth and minorities tend to show up at the polls in relatively smaller numbers than adults and majorities. This tendency cannot be explained away by the systemic differences often studied as important covariates of turnout, such as regime type, proportional electoral system, and compulsory voting. However, the minority and youth statuses did not show a significant combined effect in the multilevel model. There may be a limit to the reduction in turnout that the age variable could achieve. A more interesting possibility is that it is actually minority youth who receive additional stimulus for participation, and therefore, on the aggregate levels, do not differ from the non-youth majority. In any case, it requires additional, more detailed research before more reliable interpretations can be offered.

Drawing on the literature on political participation, we sought to explore the normative and evaluative dimensions, particularly their interactions with youth and minority statuses. Normative commitment to democracy proved to be a particularly powerful predictor of electoral participation both among youth and more mature publics, as well as among minorities and majorities. 'The duty factor' proved strongly associated with turnout, both directly, regardless of age and minority status, and in particular *interaction* with the minority status. The interaction is such that, among minorities, the positive association between normative support for democracy and turnout is weaker (though still highly significant).

We do not have a straightforward explanation for this, but we can offer certain speculation and encourage further research concerning this puzzling finding. Minorities may tend to be somewhat more skeptical about how democratic norms operate in their polities and more cynical about how democratic politics works. This could be one mechanism that could reduce the association between normative factors and turnout. In general, ethnic/racial minorities might face systemic barriers or discrimination that make it harder for them to participate in elections, regardless of their level of support for democracy. Or, minorities might feel less confident that their vote will make a difference or that the political system represents their interests, reducing their likelihood of voting even if they support democratic ideals. There could be differences in how political parties and institutions engage with or reach out to minority communities, which could affect their participation rates. Overall, this finding highlights an important nuance: while support for democratic values tends to encourage voting, its impact is not uniform across demographic groups. Addressing the barriers faced by ethnic/racial minorities could help make the democratic process more inclusive and equitable (Just, 2022). Thus, political education and the promotion of democratic values and norms may still be a direction to pursue if one is trying to devise policies to increase participation (cf. Quintelier, 2007).

The evaluative factor also proved directly associated with turnout, in line with the sociotropic view of politics: the more the public seems positive about the political system's deliverables, the higher the probability of turnout. Our results haven't provided any evidence to support the contrary view - that dissatisfaction with the outputs may provide additional motivation for participation, neither for the majority nor for minorities. However, the evaluative dimension seems to operate somewhat differently among ethnic/racial minorities. While among the majorities, the association is positive - positive evaluation of the system (various aspects) is associated with higher turnout, this association seems to be absent among minorities, as the interaction graph showed. It certainly requires additional research before one could provide a more reliable interpretation of the observed interaction. It remains to be seen whether this is because system evaluation is measured in ways that are appropriate

for ethnic majorities, and less so in cases where there are politically mobilized ethnic minorities. For instance, "strongly satisfied with the way democracy works in the country" may have different political connotations in polities where ethnic identities are politicized.

In any case, for various reasons, the link between positive evaluation and participation might be severed among ethnic/racial minorities. For example, ethnic/racial minorities might feel politically alienated or disenfranchised. Even if they have positive views about the government or economy, they might not believe that their vote will influence outcomes or that the system represents their interests adequately. Systemic discrimination or historical marginalization could lead minorities to distrust the political system or feel less connected to it, reducing the impact of positive evaluations on their voting behavior. The political, social, and economic context might affect minority and majority groups differently. For instance, while the majority groups may be more responsive to changes in government performance or economic conditions, minorities might be influenced more by issues of representation, equality, and systemic change. Addressing these disparities requires understanding and mitigating the specific challenges faced by minority communities in the political system.

In a recent paper, Spies, Mayer, and Goerres (2020) boldly concluded that "standard approaches can be used fruitfully to explain immigrant voter turnout [...] and immigrant-specific variables can add very little to them" (p. 5). For the German 2017 federal election, they found that variables such as indicators of ethnic identity, experiences with discrimination, and similar, provide little additional explanatory value as long as the "standard model" is well captured. Our results suggest that their conclusion may not generalize well beyond their specific case study. There might still be something to the perception of society and politics from the perspective of ethnic/racial minorities, especially if we consider more diverse cases and examine the interactive effects of variables relevant to minorities.

If the two variables, the minority and youth indicators, are compared, we can make several additional observations. The youth status has a stronger and more consistent direct effect. But, youth status does not interact with attitudinal variables, which is surprising, since we expected an interaction, especially with the normative dimension, because learning and internalizing the democratic norms takes time and experience. However, despite the need for political socialization and education, the interaction between youth status and the normative endorsement of democracy was not observed. Perhaps, youth status reflects a more fundamental characteristic (and more universal) of individuals, a biological feature - a stage that individuals pass through on the way to their 'normal' role in politics (e.g., the usual activism level, etc.).

On the other hand, minority status seems to be a more complex variable, not only because its content varies from country to country. From a global perspective, it shows some consistent effects on participation. The negative association with turnout is not as strong as for the youth status, but it is clearly visible. One aspect in which minority status differs from youth status is that it can be accompanied by locally specific meanings and stigmas that may be more or less encouraging for regular political activism. Presently, we did not investigate local contexts; rather, we wanted to focus on the most general picture. In future research, it would be useful to provide a more fine-grained picture of minorities with differing attitudes towards participation in national politics.

While the study provides valuable insights into the factors influencing electoral participation among youth and minority groups, several potential limitations warrant consideration. Firstly, reliance on CSES Module 5 data, while comprehensive, may not fully capture the nuanced experiences of different minority groups or the rapidly evolving dynamics of electoral participation. Future studies should address the issue of minority status in more detail, such as differentiating between ethnic and racial minorities. Additionally, the study's use of hierarchical multiple regression, though rigorous, might not fully account for intersectional factors that could influence participation, such as socio-economic status or cultural barriers. More detailed case-study analysis of specific countries could shed additional light on their relevance. The focus on normative and evaluative factors might overlook other critical influences, such as historical disenfranchisement or systemic discrimination, which could affect turnout differently across various demographic groups. Lastly, the study's cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the impact of normative support and evaluative factors over time, potentially limiting understanding of long-term trends in electoral participation.

Declarations

Author Contribution

B.T. wrote the draft of the manuscript; all authors worked on subsequent phases and revisions.

Data Availability

The present study is based on the CSES Module 5 Dataset. The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) is a collaborative research program among election study teams from around the world. Participating polities include a common module of survey questions in their post-election studies. The resulting data are deposited along with voting, demographic, district, and macro variables. The CSES project focuses on respondents' behavior and attitudes during a national election, with particular emphasis on voting and turnout. CSES Module 5 included a total of 45 polities, 56 Election Studies, and a total unweighted N≈114k respondents (The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, 2023; data and documentation are available to download from the CSES MODULE 5 study page at: https://cses.org/data-download/cses-module-5-2016-2021).

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Footnotes

1. For psychometric virtues of sum scores, see Sijtsma et al., 2024.

Figures

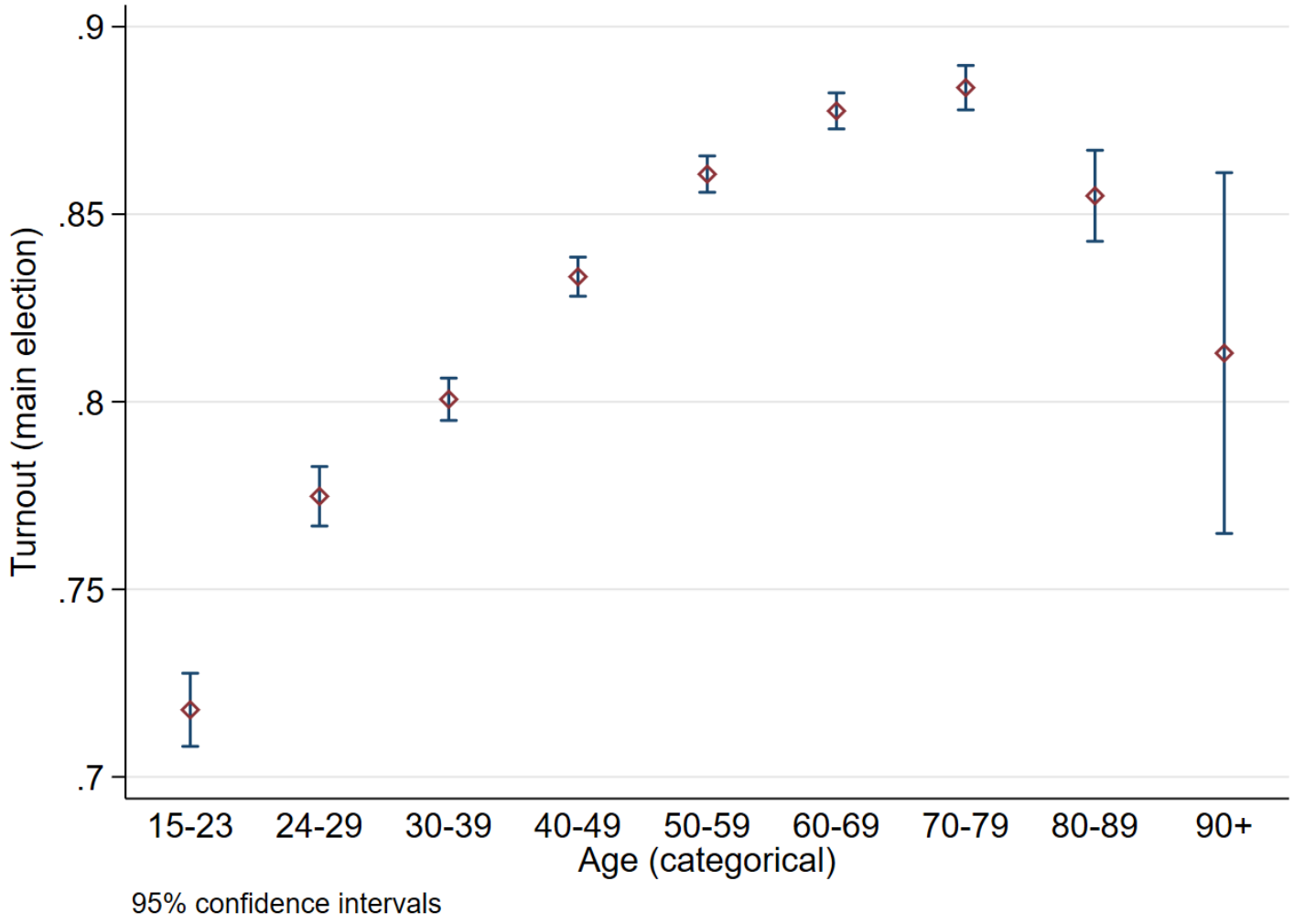


Figure 1

Voting turnout probability by age group, Cross-national sample

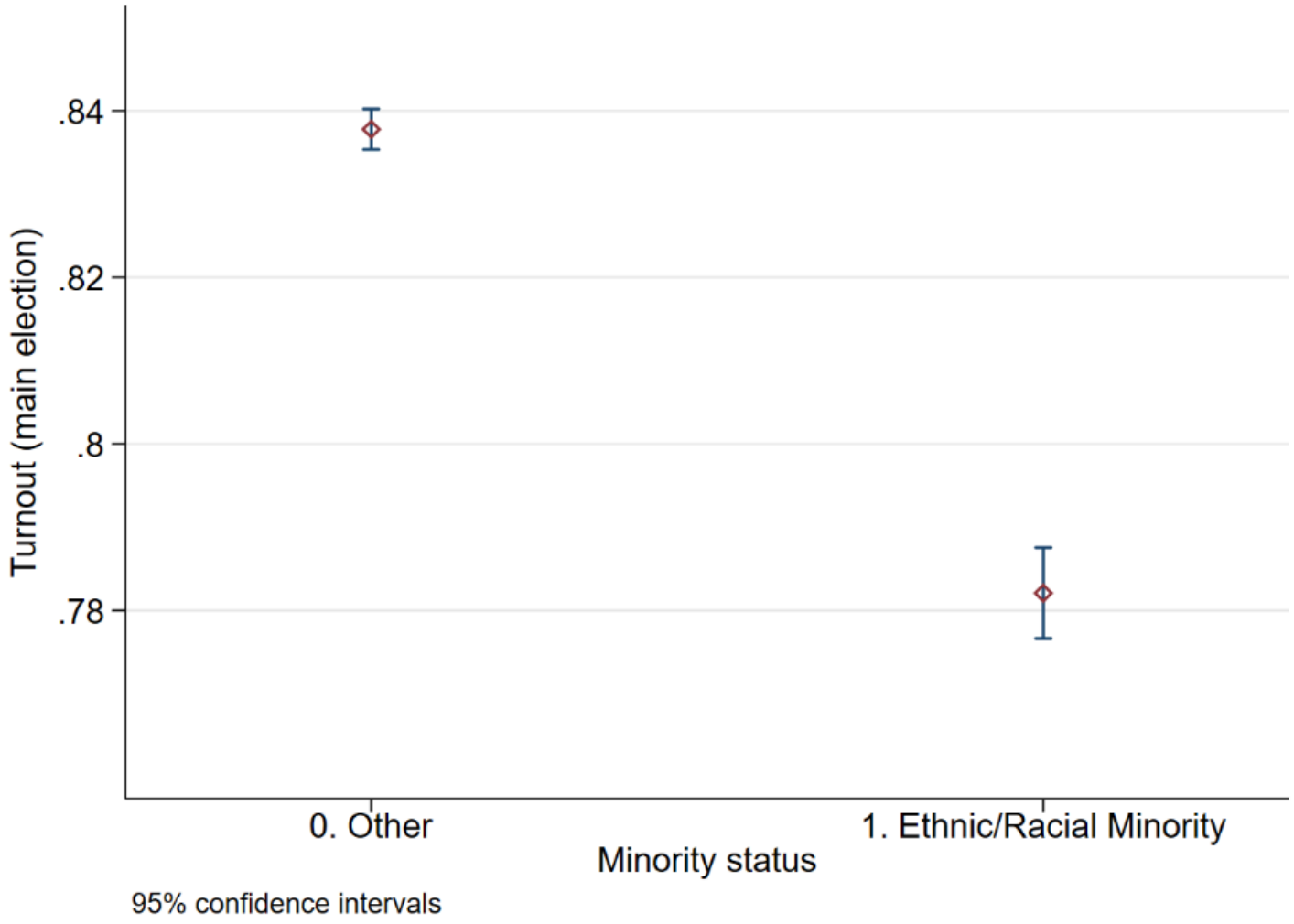


Figure 2

Voting probability of (ethnic/racial) minority versus (ethnic/racial) majority status

Figure 3. Voting probability by (ethnic) minority, youth status, and their combination

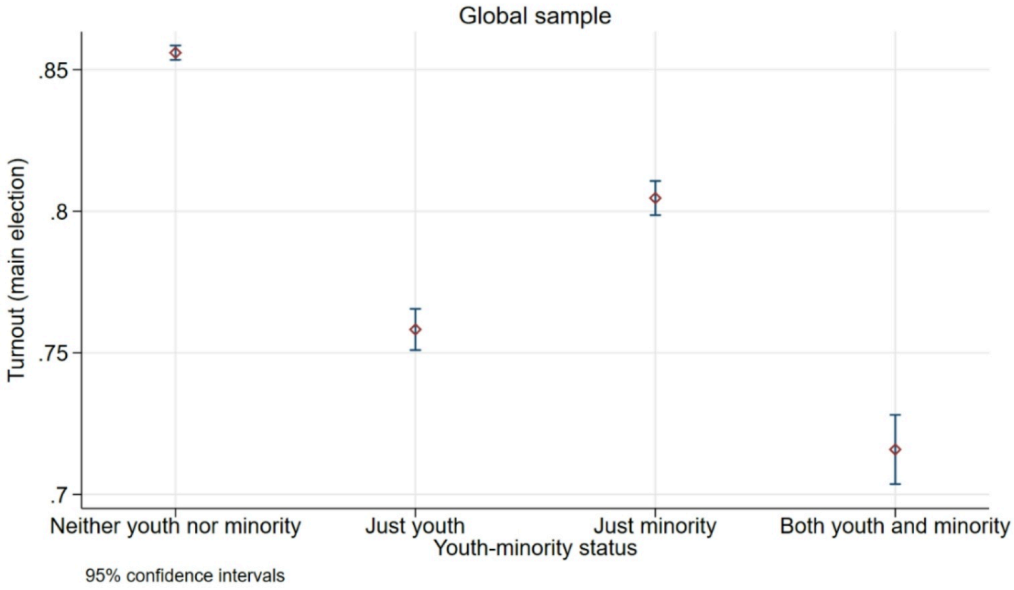


Figure Combined youth and minority turnout levels, Global sample

Figure 3

Voting probability by (ethnic) minority, youth status, and their combination

Figure 4. Predicted probability of voting by interaction terms between minority status and normative support for democracy

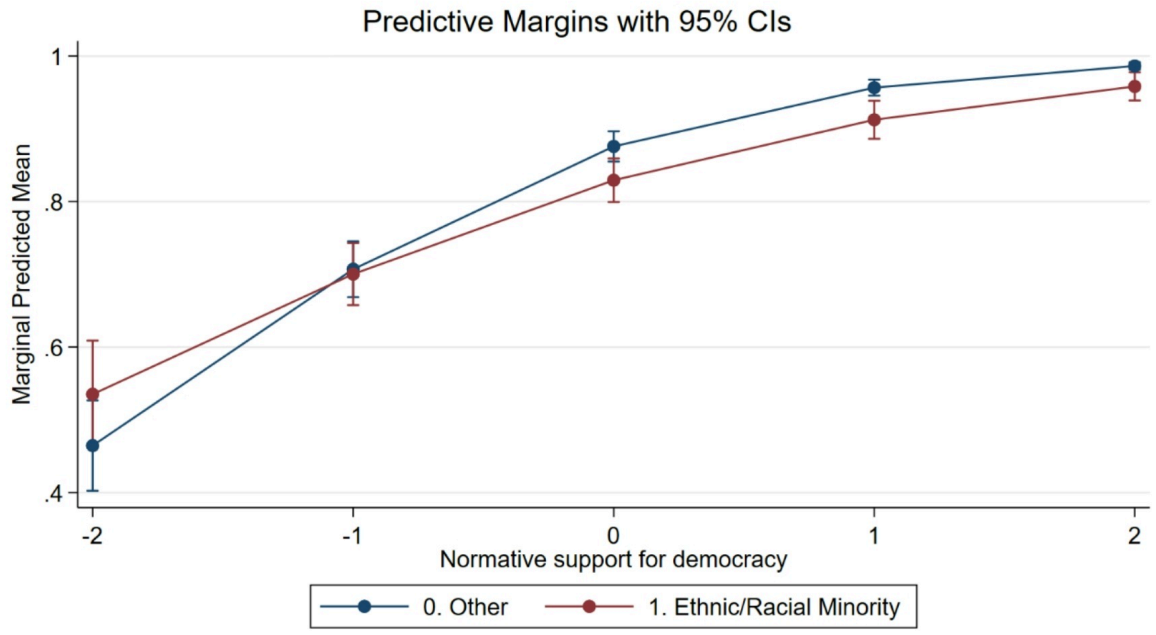


Figure Predictive margins for the interaction between ethnic/racial minority status and evaluative attitudes

Figure 4

Predicted probability of voting by interaction terms between minority status and normative support for democracy

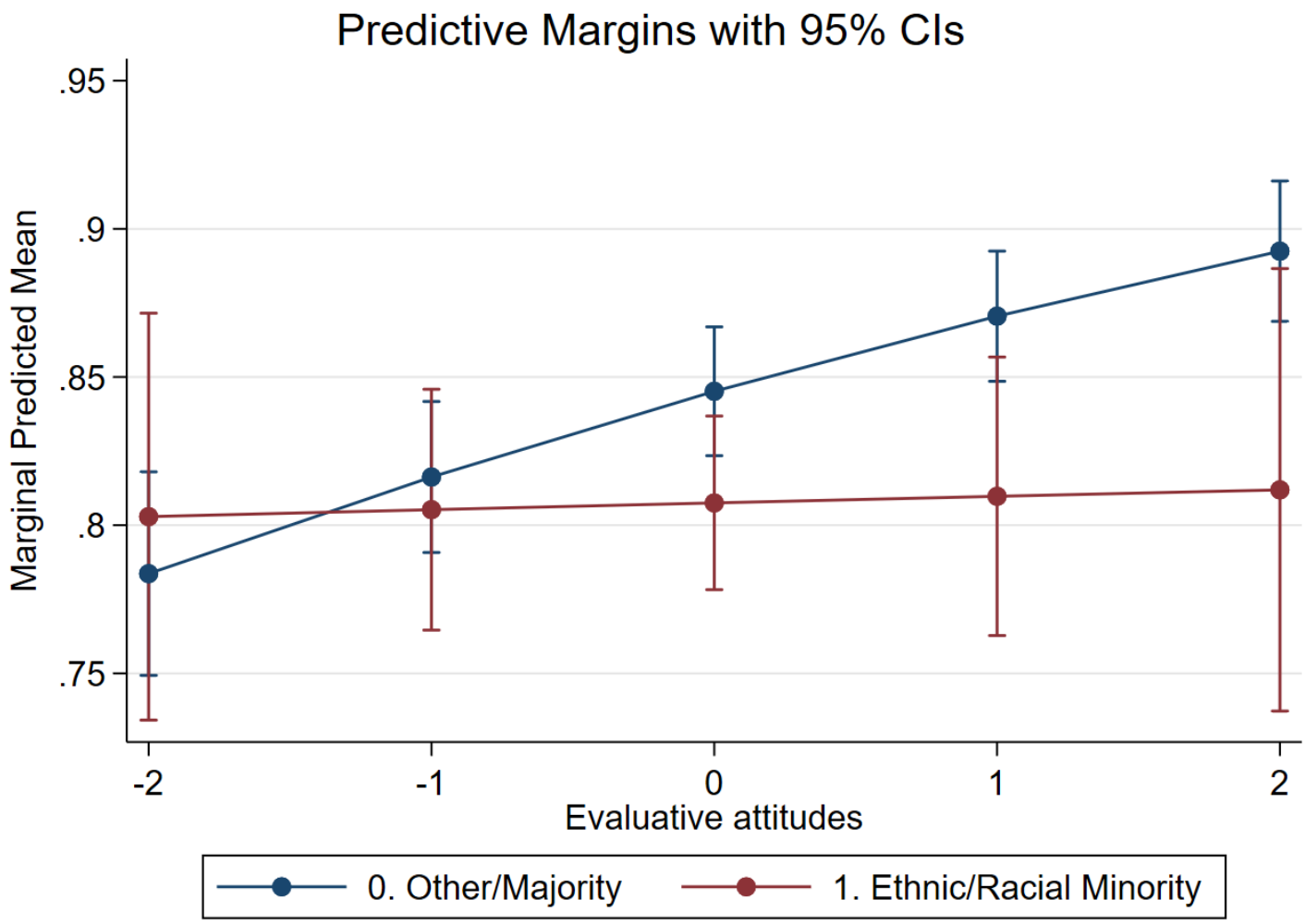


Figure 5

Predicted probability of voting by interaction terms between minority status and evaluative attitudes