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The Effect of Making Election Day a Holiday: An Original Survey and a Case Study of French Presidential Elections Applied to the U.S. Voting System

Caitlyn Bradfield and Paul Johnson

Introduction

Voter turnout in the U.S. has lagged behind other developed democracies for decades. Exactly what causes this discrepancy has been an issue of debate. Ironically, "voters [in the United States] are more politically aware and involved than citizens in any other democracy, yet the levels of voter turnout are consistently far below the democratic average" (Powell 1986, 17).

We theorize that voter turnout is largely dependent on the ability and relative ease that voters have to vote, typically related to time and responsibility constraints. To assess this hypothesis and predict the effect of introducing a national election holiday on voter turnout, we conduct a case study comparing two relatively similar democracies: the U.S. and the French Republic. In developed democracies, eligible voter turnout averages around 80% in general elections (Ibid., 17). However, elections in the U.S. present a different story as turnout is much lower, often averaging around 50% of all eligible adults (Gans 2012) and 75% of all registered, eligible adults (IDEA 2016). In the 2012 election, registered voter turnout reached a low of 67% of eligible adults. In order to maximize voter turnout, we theorize that designating Election Day in the U.S. a national holiday would rapidly increase voter turnout in the U.S. by minimizing possible obstacles that voters face on Election Day.

Voter turnout among registered American voters averaged 75.16% of all registered voters between 2002 and 2012.¹ Existing research suggests that turnout in America is encouraged by a unique set of "political attitudes" that, if possessed by other democracies, would increase their turnout (Powell 1986, 18). However, while this benefit exists, "institutional factors" and difficult registration laws dramatically reduce turnout among American voters (Ibid.). Indeed, additional research suggests
that voter turnout among democracies is a result of political institutions and electoral law (Jackman 1987, 405). While many countries schedule Election Day on a weekend or create a national holiday for elections, the U.S. has designated the Tuesday after the first Monday in November as Election Day.

We hypothesize that the day on which general elections are held in the U.S. serves as a barrier and reduces voter turnout among working class Americans who are already registered to vote. While polls are generally open 7:00 a.m.–7:00 p.m., many working adults who are eligible to vote face long commutes to work or may work longer hours than the average American. In addition, voters with families may struggle to find time to wait in line. Reports indicate that average wait times vary dramatically state to state, with wait times averaging two minutes in Vermont and nearly 40 minutes in Florida (Ansolabere and Schaffner 2012). It is estimated that 500,000–700,000 votes are lost due to voters being deterred by long lines (Stewart and Ansolabehere 2013). Most of these long lines are caused by workers getting in line to vote before or after work. We believe wait times would be reduced with the implementation of our hypothesis, as it would open up more hours of the day in which workers could potentially vote.

**Literature Review**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau in 2014, individuals cited a variety of reasons for failing to vote. Nearly 30% of voters who failed to vote in 2014 cited being “too busy” to cast their vote, followed by 16% being “not interested.” In that same year, 11% of voters did not vote due to illness whereas 10% did not vote due to being out of town. Among the many other reasons to skip an election were: “forgot to vote,” “disliked candidates/issues,” “registration problems,” “inconvenient polling place,” and “transportation issues” (United States Census Bureau 2014). We theorize that most of these reasons could be reasonably resolved with the implementation of our hypothesis and will hereafter explore in more depth why we believe a national holiday for Election Day would not increase the number of voters who miss due to being out of town.

Anthony Downs, in his influential research about the costs of voting, found that “where voting is costly, individuals will consider both how much they care about the outcome and the likelihood that their vote will influence the outcome (be pivotal).” Downs’ theory was later developed into a model, which outlines expected behavior by voters, as $R = (B^* P) - C + D$. Essentially, the cost of voting ($C$) must be outweighed by the potential outcomes from voting (the positive benefit of voting and the probability of the vote making a difference multiplied by the gain of the preferred outcome).

Indeed, conventional wisdom suggests inherent costs in voting. Voting is time intensive and may conflict with other “demands and preferences” (Stein and Vonnahme 2008, 487). For working Americans, poll-voting times may be inconvenient, especially in cases where commutes to work are required (Gimpel and Schuknecht 2003, Dyck and Gimpel 2005, Gimpel, Dyck, and Shaw 2006). Most polls are open
between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. A significant portion of Americans annually fail to vote due to time constraints.

In addition, voters who must wait for extended periods of time in order to vote are dramatically less likely to vote, and Stewart and Ansolabehere predict that 500,000-700,000 votes are lost due to lines at polls (2013). The number of votes lost due to avoidable situations is often a politicized debate. In the 2016 Arizona democratic primary, voters in Maricopa County were forced to wait hours in line to vote since Maricopa County “only had one polling site for every 21,000 voters” (Rayman, O'Dell, and Cano 2016). Many voters are unable to devote large amounts of time per day to spend at polls and are forced away by long lines when other priorities require attention. We argue that resolving the many issues surrounding voting in the U.S. is an ethical issue and thus of utmost importance.

As such, it is sufficiently evident that voters are deterred for a variety of reasons. Most prevalent among all, however, are reasons relating to time management and inconvenience. As the data illustrates, voters in America often face a conflict of interest on Election Day between managing important personal affairs and their civic responsibilities.

Countries apply a variety of approaches in order to combat low voter turnout rates. In Australia, for instance, voter turnout nears 100 percent. It is worth noting that Australia’s Election Day occurs on a Saturday and is mandatory (Australian Electoral Commission 2017). However, research shows that mandatory turnout laws are “not necessary for high levels of participation” (Hirczy 1994). Evidence of this is visible in France. Turnout in France averaged 81.37 percent in the years 2002–12 without mandatory voting laws (Table A1). France schedules elections on weekends to minimize the possibility that voters may be unable to vote due to various time and responsibility constraints.

France and Australia are not alone in their efforts. Germany, New Zealand, and other countries either vote on a weekend or designate Election Day as a national holiday (Federal Returning Officer 2017, Electoral Commission of New Zealand 2017). While many countries vote on a weekend, we hypothesize that establishing Election Day as a national holiday will be more beneficial to voter turnout as it would solve many of the issues that voters cite for failing to vote without requiring a constitutional amendment. Martin Wattenberg succinctly summarized the benefit that this would have toward Americans when he said, “This would send a strong signal about the importance our country attaches to voting” (1998).

**Case Study: France**

*Why France?*

The idea that making Election Day a national holiday would increase registered voter turnout is the result of a case study comparing the U.S. and France. We believe that the only significant difference between these countries in relation to voter turnout is the day of the week on which Election Day is held. This is the principal reason
we have chosen to compare France and the United States. Because there is no work or other weekday responsibilities, voters turn out at higher rates, averaging 81 percent over the last three general elections.\(^2\) We believe that a national holiday Election Day would simulate this type of result in the U.S. and even increase it as people are less likely to be out of town on a Tuesday than on a Sunday.

**France and the U.S. as Most Similar Cases**

We intend to show that France and the U.S. are similar in all election-relevant ways except for a particularly critical difference: Election Day. France and the U.S. have been used as most similar cases in previous research on governmental structure and political involvement, thus laying the foundation for a study on elections (Holtz-Bacha, Kaid, and Johnston 1994, Conley 2007). In literature by Holtz-Bacha, Kaid, and Johnston, it was concluded that “there are definite shared cultural and political values that give rise to similar electoral strategies” between the France and the U.S. (1994).

We find that France and the U.S. are comparable in terms of government structure. Previous research shows that the two exclusively possess an explicit presidential government (Jackman 1987, 413). Both countries have executive branches independent of the parliamentary branch, unlike other comparable countries (Jackman 1987, 413). The term lengths for the president of France and the U.S. are similar, at five and four years respectively. In fact, the executives in the U.S. and France are nearly identical, even down to the veto powers and way the cabinet systems operate (Conley 2007).

Economically, the two countries are also relatively similar. GDP per capita in the U.S. averages $54,000, whereas GDP per capita in France is $43,000 (Find the Data 2016). France and the U.S. also share many demographic similarities. While the two countries are inherently different, we find evidence to suggest that the demographics and political institutions are comparable, as do scholars in previous studies.

Voting procedures in France mandate that elections be held on Sunday in order to maximize voter turnout. France averaged about 81.34 percent turnout in between 2002–12, which is comparable to averages for other developed democracies (IDEA). France’s weekend Election Day is comparable to a holiday, since both provide traditionally non-work days for voters to cast ballots. We expect that a national Election Day holiday will increase voter turnout to levels that are consistent with and perhaps even higher than other developed democracies as more individuals will be granted time off.

We choose to compare voter turnout using turnout percentage of registered voters from 2002–12. Using the percentage of registered voters instead of the traditional VAP (voting age population) measure eliminates “not registered” as a reason that people do not vote and allows us to focus on day-of inconveniences. In addition, it minimizes the disproportional effect that immigration may have on voter turnout. This is particularly important today as France and the U.S. have large numbers of non-eligible adults (either due to their criminal or immigration status), which may distort the VAP ratings. We used data from IDEA\(^3\) to examine the executive election turnout in both countries in each election occurring in this time frame.
Over the last decade, with the exception of the year 2004, the America has seen a decrease in voter turnout. We suspect the exception in 2004 was a result of great American patriotism that followed the 9/11 terror attacks and the war in Iraq. However, qualifying 2004 as an outlier, the general trend indicates voter participation has declined, according to IDEA (2016).

We suspect that the National Voting Act of 1993 influenced the number of eligible voters who became registered voters, at a lagged rate, since voter registration became as simple as checking a box at the DMV. France has automatic voter registration at age 18, thus the registered voting age population is very high. We believe that these countries are increasingly comparable as the United States’ National Voting Act of 1993 increased the percentage of the voting age population that are registered to vote. Of note is the idea that registration is voluntary in the United States. Theoretically, voter turnout in the U.S. among registered voters should even be higher than turnout in France since American citizens must be politically interested enough to register.

We hypothesize that the large difference in turnout in executive elections is a result of the day of week that each country chooses to hold elections. In France, elections are held on Sunday and in the U.S. they are held on Tuesday. We believe that Sunday elections make voting more accessible to the general population than a midweek election. Moving Election Day to a Sunday in the U.S. would require a constitutional amendment, which is not the most feasible of plans. We propose instead that an Election Day holiday be instituted, as it is similar to holding elections on a weekend and would be more likely to be instituted by Congress.

There are several additional advantages to making Election Day a holiday over moving it to a weekend. First, Tuesday has been Election Day in the United States since 1845 and has become an ingrained part of American tradition. Second, a Tuesday Election Day minimizes the number of people that would fail to vote due to travels, as they would need to be in town for work on Monday and Wednesday. Failing to vote is easier if Election Day is on a weekend when many voters have more time off and choose to travel. We found that 19 percent of those that did not vote in a recent election failed to do so because they were “out of town.” This number would only increase if we gave greater ability for travel on Election Day. While a holiday Election Day would fail to solve the problem of many workers who travel for extended periods of time for business, it would not increase the likelihood of travel among other citizens significantly.

Methodology
Survey: Why Registered Voters Fail to Vote

To provide quantitative support for our hypothesis, we conducted a case study administered through Brigham Young University’s Research Project in American Politics class. The survey included a variety of questions from students performing research. Our specific questions will address three topics: reasons an individual did not vote in previous elections, useful methods to make voting easier, and an opinion question on making Election Day a national holiday. The survey questions follow:
There are a variety of reasons people do not vote in Presidential elections. In fact, only 53% of eligible voters made it out to the 2012 Presidential election. Please rank the following reasons that have previously prevented you from voting in an election. (Rank: 1 being the biggest reason you have been unable to vote)

- Work or too busy
- Family demands
- Not enough time or long lines
- My district is not competitive; my vote does not count
- Out of town or not a registered voter
- Illness or disability
- Forgetting to vote
- Other

Would making election day a national holiday solve the problem of “$\{q://QID33/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithLowestValue\}$”?

- Yes
- No

Law-makers have created certain measures to make voting easier. Which of these measure would make you more likely to vote? (Select all that apply).

- Same-day voter registration
- Absentee ballots
- Making election day a national holiday
- Vote centers
- Moving election day to a weekend
- Mail-in voting
- Early voting
- Absentee ballots that do not require a reason

Respondents were also asked a variety of demographic questions and whether or not making Election Day a national holiday would resolve the main deterrents that kept them from voting in a recent election. This survey was administered via MTurk.

We hypothesize that these questions will provide information showing that voters fail to vote primarily due to inconveniences such as commuting or work hours. Just as Sunday voting removes most obstacles and inconveniences, we hypothesize that a national holiday would have a similar effect. These questions, in addition to demographic questions, allow us to run a logit model in order to predict what effect making Election Day a national holiday would have on those who did not vote for a variety of reasons. The dependent variable in the question is, “Would making Election Day a national holiday solve the problem of x” and the independent variable of interest is the reason people failed to vote.
Results

To analyze the survey responses, we ran a logit model.\textsuperscript{7} The model contained the variables of interest (work/too busy, familial demands, not enough time/long lines, forgetting to vote) ranked as a first response. The model shows the predictive margins and the resulting percent change. Using this model, we also analyzed specific groups of respondents by race, income, ideology, and by whether they lived in a rural area.

We find that respondents who cited the variables of interest as the number one reason they do not vote would be able to vote if Election Day was a national holiday.

\textbf{Table 1: Logit Model: Would making an Election Day a Holiday solve the problem?}

\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|l|}
\hline
Reasons failed to vote & =0 & =1 & Expected change (in percentage) \\
\hline
Work/too busy & .35 & .85 & 50\% \\
Family demands & .52 & .78 & 26\% \\
Not enough time/long lines & .50 & .86 & 36\% \\
Forgetting to vote & .51 & .78 & 27\% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

This logit was run with controls. These reasons indicate a voters first reason they did not vote. To see the full output see Table A2 in the appendix.

Discussion

Our findings give credence to our hypothesis that voter turnout would be increased through eliminating barriers to voting in a way similar to what France has done. In addition, the quantitative results of our survey corroborate our hypothesis.

\textbf{Main Findings}

We uncover several interesting statistics through our survey. The graph below visually displays the general predicted effect of a making Election Day a national holiday on voter turnout among those who ranked one of the variables of interest as first. We would see significant increases in voter turnout among those respondents that cited our variables of interest as the primary reason they fail to vote.

For individuals who failed to vote in a previous election due to work or being too busy, we found that creating a national holiday for Election Day would increase voter turnout by 50\%. For those that did not vote due to familial demands, we expect voter turnout to increase by 26\%. A significant portion of respondents did not vote due to not having enough time or lines being too long. We estimate that voter turnout for these individuals will increase by 36\%. Lastly, we found that voter turnout will increase by 27\% for those who “forgot to vote” in a recent election. With at least a 25\% increase per variable, these findings are significant. All of these findings were consistent with data derived from the 2010 Census.

A brief analysis of the data set suggests that about 50\% of our sample selected one of our variables of interest (work/too busy, familial demands, not enough time/long lines, and forgetting to vote) as the first or second reason they were
likely to have failed to vote. Extrapolated to the general population, if we were to address the problem that 50% of non-voting Americans faced in 2012, we would have seen an increase in turnout by registered voters from about 67% to about 83%. That translates to just under 32,000,000 additional votes. This increase would put American voter turnout on par with, and even above, the average turnout rate for most developed democracies. While not every person in that group would choose to vote, there could reasonably be an increase by 16,000,000 votes given a registered voter turnout of 67% in 2012.

The Effect on Subgroups

We explored different subgroups of the population that tend to have lower voter turnout and the reasons that they cite (United States Census Bureau 2014). We ran the logit model and included a condition at the end that would reflect the subgroup of interest, then ran the predictive margins for each subgroup. The results of the predictive margins are below in Table 2. We chose each of these subgroups for theoretical reasons that we will explain below.

BLACK RESPONDENTS

Based on census data and established literature we recognize that racial minorities turn out at lower rates than white voters. We found that in each of the relevant reasons respondents fail to vote that turnout among black voters may be increased by up to 34 percent.
Table 2: Break-down by Subgroup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Reason failed to vote</th>
<th>= 0</th>
<th>= 1</th>
<th>Expected change (in percent increase)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Work/too busy</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Familial demands</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not enough time/long lines</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forgetting to vote</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>Work/too busy</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;$10,000</td>
<td>Work/too busy</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000-$250,000</td>
<td>Work/too busy</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>Work/too busy</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not enough time/long lines</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forgetting to vote</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"=0" and "=1" indicate the predicted margins for each subgroup and for the specified reason the respondent failed to vote.

We suspect that the actual effect is higher. Many people can easily cite multiple reasons they do not vote, so solving only the "not enough time/long lines" problem may not have elicited a positive response for our dependent variable. Since many people selected one of the variables of interest as both the first and second reason they do not vote we believe that instituting an Election Day national holiday would solve many of the problems that black voters may face.

We also recognize that it is possible black citizens just choose not to vote at comparable levels, a problem our solution cannot solve. Even if this is the case, 34 percent of respondents claimed a national holiday would give them incentive to turn out when they fail to vote due to a lack of time or long lines. We hypothesize that this would substantially impact the percentage of registered black voters that make it to the polls on Election Day.

This is especially important because racial minorities are egregiously underrepresented on Election Day. Increasing black voter turnout during a presidential election has important implications for more accurately representing the demographic makeup of the United States.

LOW-INCOME RESPONDENTS

A main reason cited by low income individuals that they did not vote was "work/too busy." Traditionally, low-income individuals are too focused on making ends meet to worry about who will be the president in two months. This conundrum is well explained by Theory of the Calculus of Voting which states that voters must balance civic engagement with their other priorities (Farber 2010). Correspondingly, "work/too busy" was met with the most positive response among low-income registered voters. We observe a 50 percent increase in potential voter turnout among low-income individuals who cite work or too busy as the primary reason they were unable to vote.
HIGH-INCOME RESPONDENTS

Again drawing on the census data, we observe that the primary reason high-income individuals failed to vote was “work” (United States Census Bureau 2010). We believe this is because of the work ethic among high-income voters. This voting bloc typically prioritizes work over voting, so even though they are probably able to incur the cost of voting, the benefit of voting does not adequately compensate for the high cost of taking time off of work (Ibid.). We predict that eliminating this cost would potentially increase turnout a full 55 percent among high-income voters who fail to vote due to “work/too busy.”

MODERATE RESPONDENTS

Literature consistently claims that moderates are the least likely group to vote, which leads to polarized candidates and polarized political leaders. Furthermore, it is intuitive that moderates also claim a higher cost to vote than ideologues because moderates tend to be less invested in politics.

We expect that removing the costs of voting will improve turnout for moderates as we found it would for Black voters. We find impressive results with moderates who claimed “not enough time/long lines” as the primary reason they failed to vote achieving a potential increase of 38 percent. Those who cited “work/too busy” would potentially see turnout increase by up to 52 percent.

Of particular interest are moderates who cited “forgetting to vote.” Moderates are probably the most likely group to forget about Election Day. Creating a national holiday would make it very difficult to forget. Indeed, we could see an increase of up to 45 percent among this group of moderates.

Placebo Tests

For our final placebo test, we ran the second logit model again and included a variable that, according to our theoretical framework, would not be correlated to making Election Day a national holiday. If this variable was statistically insignificant, then we could be sure respondents were not just claiming making Election Day a national holiday would be helpful independent of reasons they failed to vote. We found the test variable to be statistically insignificant with a p-value of over 0.6. Thus, our results have both statistical and substantive significance.

The first variable, “illness or disability” should not be affected by making Election Day a national holiday. Changing the status of Election Day is unrelated to health, and thus the ill would still fail to vote. Correspondingly, we found not only were the results insignificant at the .05 level, but were they significant there would be an inverse relationship with a coefficient of -0.134 (standard error of 0.324) meaning that making Election Day a national holiday would yield no effect on the “ill or disabled” respondents.

Limitations

While the results that we found proved to be both statistically and substantively significant, the study is not without its weaknesses. Our research is limited to a compar-
Table 3: Placebo Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coef</th>
<th>Std Er</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illness or disability (First Response)</td>
<td>-1.34</td>
<td>.324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/too busy (First Response)</td>
<td>.719*</td>
<td>.197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family demands (First Response)</td>
<td>.744t</td>
<td>.370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time/long lines (First Response)</td>
<td>.655t</td>
<td>.324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgetting to vote (First Response)</td>
<td>.533†</td>
<td>.315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/urban</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>-.041</td>
<td>.059</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.018</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.199</td>
<td>.163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.167</td>
<td>.046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>.821</td>
<td>.549</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* is significant at the .01 level, †is significant at the .05 level and the ‡ is significant at the .1 level

ison of only one other country: France. This poses several problems. First, the U.S. and France are not identical. There may be some truths about French voters that cause them to turnout at higher rates than voters in the U.S. for which we are unable to observe or control. However, these risks will always be inherent in a case study. We minimize these risks by choosing a country that is most similar to the United States. Further, we will take note of additional factors we discover that might result in higher voter turnout.

Additionally, there may be problems with our survey. First, we are only asking three questions. We combat this problem by being as specific as possible in the questions that we do ask. There are also many options for respondents to choose from in the questions; we worry that excessive options will distract respondents from accurately answering the question. However, given our limits on how many questions we are allowed to ask, we believe these specific questions are our best option.

While we do not have the resources necessary to mount a full-scale experiment in which we make Election Day a holiday in a small sample of U.S. precincts, our study yielded limited, yet important, results. Internal validity is a limitation of particular concern. Since Election Day has been on a Tuesday, we have no empirical evidence to which we can compare our results. External validity is also a concern. Case studies have poor external validity, but we combat this by using survey questions which will bridge the gap and make our results more externally valid.

Despite these limitations, we believe that our findings have implications for future research. We suggest future research expand our findings through looking at all countries that have made voting day either a weekend or a national holiday. Our findings, for the time being, can create a stepping stone for future research and can work to persuade law-makers to consider the potential impact that making Election Day a national holiday could have on increasing voter turnout.
Conclusion

Abraham Lincoln once taught that a government “of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the Earth.” However, voting trends indicate that Americans are much less involved in the political process than citizens of most developed democracies. If a government “by the people” is so important to American political thought, then working to resolve the issue of America’s dismal turnout is of utmost importance.

Many have suggested reasons as to why voting is important. MassVote, an organization dedicated to improving voter turnout levels in the United States, has called voting “the cornerstone of democracy” (MassVote 2016). Research suggests that elected officials are most responsive to likely voters (White, Nathan, and Faller 2014), thus implying that elected officials in a democratic republic must have high turnout levels to accurately represent the will of the people. From a moral perspective, one might argue that those with the ability to vote have a responsibility to do so in order to exert their inherent right to influence government and policy.

Little work has been done to suggest ways to remedy the problem of low voter turnout in America. Unlike other measures instituted to increase turnout, making Election Day a national holiday decreases the associated cost of voting and would be relatively easy to accomplish. Implementing the simple creation of a national holiday for Election Day would improve turnout dramatically.

In our effort to determine the effect that a national holiday might have on voter turnout, we conducted a case study and an original survey to provide statistical support to our hypothesis. We found strong evidence suggesting that designating election day as a national holiday will have both statistically and substantively significant results. Indeed, if low voter turnout in the U.S. is cause for concern, which we believe it must be, then the solution should be to create a national holiday for Election Day. Our findings confirm that doing so will minimize many of the largest barriers to voting.

NOTES
1. See Table A1.
2. See Table A1.
3. See table A1 for results.
4. Our study focused on turnout of registered voters in the U.S. and in France in order to minimize the disproportional and negative impact that non-registered adults may have on voter turnout. We eliminated respondents from the survey that were not registered to vote.
5. We grouped “out of town” and “not a registered voter” into the same category because both of these reasons cannot be solved by making Election Day a national holiday. We limited the respondents’ options to prevent them from becoming bored with or tired of the survey so some of the categories were grouped together with other “like” categories.
6. In order to ensure respondent honesty, we asked an additional question to survey respondents. The question reads similarly to that in Figure 1, but this time asking specifically why respondents thought their neighbors failed to vote in a recent election. The question reads, “There are a variety of reasons people do not vote in Presidential elections. In fact, only 53 percent of eligible voters made it out to the 2012 Presidential election. What are some reasons your neighbors are unable to make it to a polling location on Election Day? (Rank: 1
being biggest reason my neighbors are unable to make it to a polling place).” We added this additional question to gauge whether or not respondents answered accurately the question in Figure 1 honestly under the assumption that people answer for their neighbors as they would themselves. Further, we omitted an “I always vote” option to ensure honest answers and avoid any unintended biases. Someone who truly believed they had never missed an election could choose “other.” We found no statistical difference in any of the answers except “other.” See Figure A5 for visual.

7. See Table 1.

8. We believe it is important to note that Congress would correspondingly become more representative as ballots do not only ask for voters’ preferred presidential candidate. This is not the focus of the paper; however, we suspect that overall representation (at all levels of government up for election) would become much more demographically representative.

APPENDIX

Table A1: Voting in France vs. Voting in the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Votes Cast</th>
<th>Registered Voters</th>
<th>Percent Registered Voters who voted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>37,016,309</td>
<td>46,066,307</td>
<td>80.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>37,342,004</td>
<td>44,472,733</td>
<td>83.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>32,832,295</td>
<td>41,191,169</td>
<td>79.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>107,190,608</td>
<td>131,730,209</td>
<td>81.37*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Votes Cast</th>
<th>Registered Voters</th>
<th>Percent Registered Voters who voted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>129,085,403</td>
<td>193,653,908</td>
<td>66.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>133,944,538</td>
<td>190,461,401</td>
<td>70.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>125,736,000</td>
<td>142,070,000</td>
<td>88.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>388,765,941</td>
<td>526,185,309</td>
<td>73.88*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This number was achieved by adding the total votes cast in each election to the total number of voters registered in each election. We considered using this method to control for population size from year to year but found the difference between this measure and the other to be similar enough to use the other, as this is how it is more commonly calculated in literature. **This is the average voter turnout over the three elections we observe in each country. These are the numbers we use in our discussion.
Table A2: Logit Model: Would making an Election Day a holiday solve the problem?
Pseudo $R^2 = .223$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coef</th>
<th>Std Err</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work/too busy (First Response)</td>
<td>2.57*</td>
<td>.220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family demands (First Response)</td>
<td>1.58*</td>
<td>.358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time/long lines (First Response)</td>
<td>2.25*</td>
<td>.355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgetting to vote (First Response)</td>
<td>1.67*</td>
<td>.314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural/urban</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td>.120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>-.057</td>
<td>.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td>.089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.015</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology</td>
<td>-.068</td>
<td>.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-1.19</td>
<td>.617</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at the .01 level. Controls included.

Figure A5: Reasons Respondents or Respondent’s Neighbors Failed to Vote

Reasons Voters Failed to Vote

![Chart showing reasons for not voting]
REFERENCES


