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ABSTRACT

Voter turnout in Portuguese local elections: a fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis of the impact of risk of corruption and other socio-economic factors

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Voter turnout has been studied in detail since the emergence of the rational choice question - why do people vote at all? In fact, the chance of one person changing the outcome of an election is practically zero. In the cost-benefit calculus of citizens, therefore, no one should vote no matter how much he or she cares. Given the difficulties of the rational model in explaining voter turnout, many social arguments have emerged in recent decades to understand the determinants of turnout. Drawing on this literature, this study examines the influence of corruption prevention, education, inequality and government efficacy on voter turnout in Portuguese municipal elections. Specifically, fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis is used to determine whether these factors (individually or in combination) are necessary or sufficient conditions for high or low voter turnout in the elections of Portuguese municipal governments. Overall, the results indicate that in local elections, corruption mobilizes voters and inequality keeps voters away from the polls. It also shows that higher levels of education are not associated with higher voter turnout in populous and urban municipalities and that citizens respond to bad governance by voting.