

Exploring how corruption affects voter turnout in Portuguese mayoral elections: A fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis

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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, i.e. the strength of preference as such is practically irrelevant. However, the majority of voters in fact vote. To overcome this “rational voter paradox”, it has been pointed that the act of vote cannot be restricted to a selfishness assumption, because it can be rational on the basis of a social motivation. This study aims to understand whether corruption is a social mobilizer for electoral participation. Indeed, it was emphasized that citizens do not know the personal harms of corruption, but they do know that corruption jeopardizes the social contract and harms democracy. Given the social harms of corruption, citizens can be mobilized to go to the polls to punish politicians involved in corruption. The influence of corruption on voter turnout could therefore be primarily due to a social motivation, which helps to clarify the “rational voter paradox”. This exploratory study uses fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis to investigate whether corruption and other socioeconomic factors (education, inequality and government efficacy) are necessary or sufficient conditions for high or low voter turnout in Portuguese mayoral elections. The results suggest that corruption is an important mobilizing factor in Portuguese local elections and helps to understand why people vote. Overall, the results point to rational voter behavior in Portuguese municipal elections. They indicate that voters mobilize to protest, suggesting that the local political system in Portugal seems to be fulfilling its function as a collective expression of citizens' preferences.

Keywords

Voter turnout; corruption; rational voter paradox; fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis; local elections, government efficacy.

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