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THE IMPACT OF A VOTING REGISTRATION LAW ON  
TURNOUT AND PARTISANSHIP: A CASE IN KANSAS

by

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A MASTER'S REPORT

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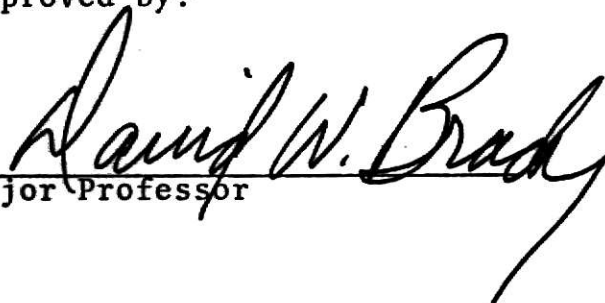
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## INTRODUCTION

That there exists a connection between institutional structural election arrangements and electoral behavior is not in doubt. Maurice Duverger among others<sup>1</sup> has shown that electoral structures do indeed affect such variables as the number of people voting, the number of parties in the system as well as the electoral results -- who wins. Further, politicians themselves are not adverse to expending great efforts to affect these institutional electoral structures. While this conceptual scheme has engendered a number of studies demonstrating the effects of electoral arrangements on elections and party systems, there remains a void: that is, we do know that structural voting arrangements make a difference, but we do not have many precise quantitative studies detailing the specific electoral effects of such arrangements. The basic question to be addressed in this descriptive study concerns the effect of voter registration laws on electoral turnout and outcomes in the state of Kansas. During the 1960 to 1968 election period, voters living in rural areas of Kansas voted without prior registration, whereas their urban counterparts were required to register.<sup>2</sup> Did this law benefit either major party in the state? What is

the effect of non-registration in rural areas on the proportion of eligible voters casting ballots? These questions obviously have relevance to political science as a discipline and also appear to have been relevant to practicing politicians in the state of Kansas.

We believe that registration for voters should be the same for all Kansans regardless of the area or community in which they live. Currently, it is mandatory to register in certain cities and counties. All Kansans are not treated fairly and equally in this respect.<sup>3</sup>

#### Report Organization

The body of this report is divided into the following five sections. Section one provides an overview which establishes the base from which we can begin our study. Three separate, yet related topics concerning American voting behavior will be examined. First, the political party will be discussed as a major determinant of how the voter casts his ballot. Second, we will examine the establishment of a "normal" or baseline vote among the electorate. Finally, we will discuss the ebb and flow of voting in America with the alternations of Congressional and Presidential elections. The discussion of these three topics and their relationships will provide a structural foundation from which the research paper can be developed. Section two will present the methodology

to be used throughout the paper. The data to be used and their derivation will be discussed as will the methods used in the statistical analysis of the data. The third section establishes the parameters of the vote for the state of Kansas. In sections four and five, findings and conclusions will be presented.

### Theoretical Overview

One of the first systematic studies of voting behavior was conducted by Paul Lazarsfeld. This study investigated the impact of mass media on individual vote choice during a Presidential campaign. The findings, as reported in The People's Choice,<sup>4</sup> was acclaimed as an important contribution to the understanding of American electoral behavior. Lazarsfeld's work precipitated similar efforts by other scholars. In 1948, for example, the Survey Research Center demonstrated the importance of scientific survey research by predicting that Truman would be a winner. It will be remembered that the popular newspaper polls predicted a Republican victory. In 1960, using data gathered by the Survey Research Center during the 1952 and 1956 Presidential elections, Angus Campbell and associates published the most impressive work on American electoral behavior.<sup>5</sup> This study, The American Voter,<sup>6</sup> emphasized partisanship and political attitudes and will be called on extensively during the course of this paper

as will two other studies by Campbell et al. The first of these studies concerns the "normal" or baseline vote. Converse presents a manner for its determination employing party identification.<sup>7</sup> The ebb and flow of voting in America, in relation to Presidential and Congressional elections, is presented in "Surge and Decline: A Study of Electoral Change."<sup>8</sup>

### Partisanship

The work of Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes<sup>9</sup> has led to the conclusion that partisanship is the single most important factor affecting electoral behavior in the American setting. Partisanship has a greater impact on voter choice and attitudes than either social class or political ideology and is therefore important in seeking an answer to the question posed by this paper.

It is not within the scope of this study to examine the total spectrum of psychological bases of political attitudes in America, but we should have some knowledge concerning the members of the population that are more likely to be or become members of one of the two major political parties in the United States. Admittedly, social class, ideology, and partisanship must all be considered in any general explanation of political behavior. In the American system, ideology and partisanship is determined to a great extent by the conditions of a



person's social life. Ideology and partisanship mutually influence one another and in turn determine vote choices and position on issues.

While the principle of class conflict or loyalty is normally renounced by parties in the United States, an analysis of their appeals and support suggests that they do symbolize the interests of different classes. "The Democrats from the beginning of their history have drawn more support from the lower strata of society, while the Federalist, Whig, and Republican parties have held the loyalties of the more privileged groups."<sup>10</sup>

Based on the above it is plain to see that Democrats are much more likely to come from the homes of manual laborers than Republicans, while white-collar households are much more likely to produce Republicans than Democrats. Members of minority groups are likely to be Democrats as are those who are less educated. Catholics are more likely to be Democrats than Republicans. While there is a mixture of these social characteristics all along the partisan dimension, the fact remains that the social groupings that appear to be Democratic come from the lower strata of the American electorate which are concentrated in urban areas.

A further variable that is important to examine is the relationship between regional distribution and partisan

politics. Southern political patterns are normally distinguished from the rest of the country and within other regions of the country, commentary often refers to "the urban vote" or "the rural vote." The actual regional and community size composition of strong Democratic and strong Republican<sup>11</sup> partisans is shown in Table 1.1. As can be seen from the table, Southern Democrats account for 40 percent of all Democrats, while the remaining Democrats are spread rather evenly over the remaining three sections. Of importance to the current study is the fact that the Northern Democratic Party is disproportionately urban in contrast to the Southern wing. The Republican Party is disproportionately the party of small towns and medium-sized cities.

We have determined that while the two major political parties of America are heterogeneous based on social characteristics, the composition of the parties are indeed related to class cleavages. To quote Lipset

...polling studies show that in every American election since 1936...the proportion voting Democratic increases sharply as one moves down the occupational or income ladder.<sup>12</sup>

Further, it has been shown that partisans appear to fall into general regional categories. That is, the South

TABLE 1.1

THE COMPOSITION OF STRONGLY PARTISAN DEMOCRATS AND  
REPUBLICANS ACCORDING TO REGION AND COMMUNITY SIZE IN  
1968

	Strong Democrats		Strong Republicans	
South	40%		14%	
Cities		10%		2%
Towns		15		4
Rural		15		8
East	22		30	
Cities		12		6
Towns		8		12
Rural		2		12
Midwest	25		35	
Cities		8		7
Towns		11		20
Rural		6		8
Far West	13		21	
Cities		5		8
Towns		5		8
Rural		3		5
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%
n=		294		142

Source: Survey Research Center, University of Michigan.

aside, Northern Democrats are disproportionately urban, while Republicans are disproportionately found in small towns and medium-sized cities.

Finally, the most stable element among the variables that account for the voting choices of the electorate is party identification. In the past two decades the general sympathy for, and identification with, the two political parties has fluctuated very little. Table 1.2 presents the patterns of partisanship from 1952 through 1968. Partisanship is the most important variable in influencing political opinions and voting behavior.

#### The Normal Vote

The discussion concerning partisans did not cover the independent voter or the non-voter. While these segments of the population are important in any extensive study on American voting behavior, non-participants have been dropped from this study since they are not useful in accounting for variation in actual vote totals. On the other hand, independent voters are more easily shifted from one party to the other, but are more likely to vote during high impact elections and cannot be counted on to provide a basis for computing a baseline vote.

To determine this "normal" vote we turn to Converse and a technique which employs party identification in determining the baseline vote.

TABLE 1.2  
 PARTY IDENTIFICATION OF THE ELECTORATE, 1952-1968

	1952	'54	'56	'58	'60	'62	'64	'66	'68
Democrats	47%	47%	44%	47%	46%	47%	51%	45%	45%
Independents	22	22	24	19	23	23	22	28	29
Republicans	27	27	29	29	27	27	24	25	24
Nothing, Don't know	4	4	3	5	4	3	2	2	2
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
n=	1614	1139	1772	1269	3021	1317	1571	1291	1552

Source: Survey Research Center, University of Michigan.

The voting record of the American public reveals discernable partisan fluctuations. At the same time, "...a serene stability in the distribution of party loyalties [is] expressed by the same public."<sup>13</sup> This apparent contradiction can be explained by considering two components. The short-term component or force can be defined as any peculiarity associated with any particular election (an extremely attractive candidate for example). The long-term component or force simply reflects the distribution of underlying party loyalties which is stable over substantial periods of time.<sup>14</sup>

The election outcome in the population or sub-population, then, may be construed as the result of short-term forces acting upon a certain distribution of party loyalties which have characterized the population.<sup>15</sup>

The behavior of party identifiers "...varies systematically as a function of the level of stimulation accompanying a given election, and as a function of the short-term...forces created by the election."<sup>16</sup> The high rate of turnout in presidential elections is reflective of high stimulation, while the great reduction in overall turnout in off-year Congressional elections shows a sharp reduction in stimulation. This leads to the proposition that

responsiveness of turnout rate to the level of stimulation varies inversely with the mean strength of party identification.<sup>17</sup>

The influence of short-term partisan forces tend to move peripheral voters toward the advantaged party, while the strong members of each party move only slightly toward the advantaged party. It follows then that:

responsiveness of the vote division to short-term partisan forces varies inversely with the mean strength of party identification.<sup>18</sup>

The fact that underlying loyalties in America have remained essentially unchanged in the past decade has been established.<sup>19</sup> In order to determine the baseline vote of the population or sub-population, one must account for the patterns of variations in turnout and partisanship as a function of short-term forces. The important point is the establishment of a "zero-point" from which we can measure a normal vote.

For the purpose of this paper, we shall establish the baseline vote by using the Congressional elections from 1960 to 1968. This is done in light of the low stimulation accorded Congressional elections and due to the fact that the peculiarities associated with short-term forces are less likely to be encountered. What is important to this argument is that strong members of

both parties vote during Congressional elections along well established party lines. Independent voters and those weakly identified with either major party drop out of these elections. The party division established then is the baseline vote.

### Ebb and Flow

While there are several variables that relate directly to voter turnout,<sup>20</sup> we shall be concerned here with the ebb and flow of voting in America with the alternation of Congressional and Presidential elections. Angus Campbell has labeled elections as "low-stimulus" and "high-stimulus."

The essential difference between a low-stimulus and a high-stimulus election lies in the importance the electorate attaches to the choice between the various party-candidate alternatives which is offered.<sup>21</sup>

We would expect that, when the interest of the electorate is high, the turnout also would be high. While few elections take on a great significance for many voters in America, most conceive of Presidential elections as important because of the traditional importance attached to the office, the issues that quickly become identified with the candidates for President, the coverage of the mass media, and candidate appeal.



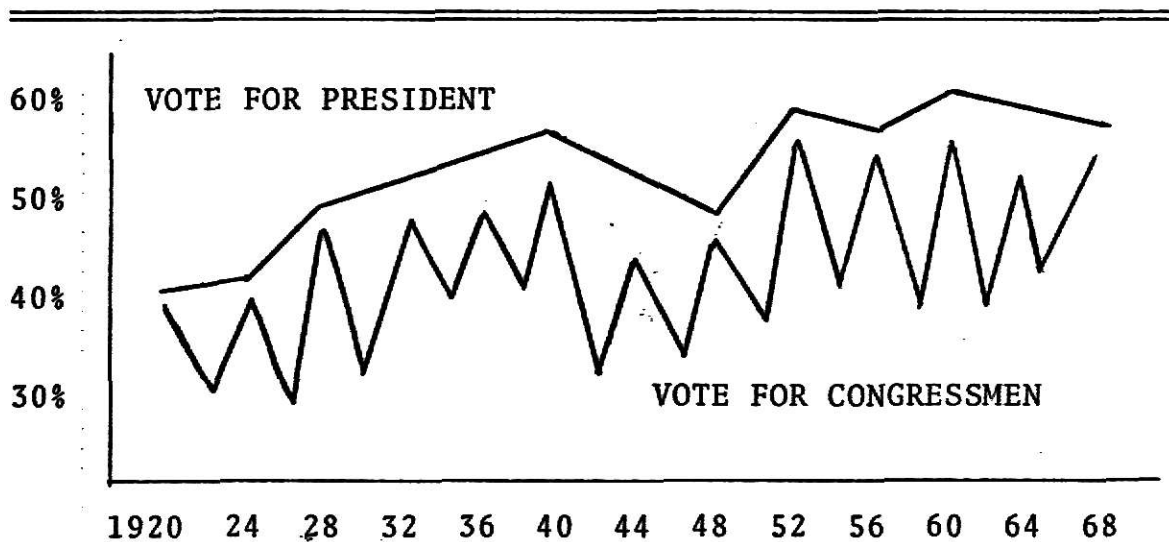
Table 1.3 shows that while there has generally been an increase in the proportion of people voting there are fluctuations in both Presidential and Congressional elections. The most consistent pattern in the table reveals that in non-presidential years there is always a great decline in voter turnout. Interestingly enough, fewer people vote in Congressional elections even in a Presidential year. This peculiarity can also be explained by the importance, or lack of importance, the electorate attaches to the two kinds of elections.

According to Campbell "a low-stimulus election tends to follow party lines."<sup>22</sup> The importance attached to Presidential elections brings to the polls many citizens who are much less stimulated by political circumstances than partisans.

An excited election situation in which a stirring issue or an attractive candidate makes the party-candidate choice seem unusually important may bring these peripheral voters to the polls in large numbers. In an election of lesser apparent importance and weaker total stimulation the participation of these peripheral voters declines, leaving the electoral decision largely to the high-interest core voters.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, concerning the ebb and flow of voting behavior of the American electorate, the conclusion is that high turnout is a result of greater interest in the electorate and low turnout a result of little interest. American

TABLE 1.3

TURNOUT OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS IN PRESIDENTIAL AND  
CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS, 1920 - 1968

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, Statistical Abstract of  
the United States: 1969, Washington, D.C. 1969.

people have a greater interest in Presidential elections than they do in Congressional elections, and partisans tend to carry low-stimulus elections.

The three topics thus far discussed are interrelated and affect the voting results of the American electorate. Partisanship is strongly tied to both stability in national voting patterns and stability in the political system. During high-stimulus elections, such as that for the Presidency of the United States, large numbers of peripheral voters are drawn to the polls. The non-partisans shift more readily from one party to another, and they add disproportionately to the vote for one Presidential candidate, normally the winner. During low-stimulation elections, such as Congressional elections, these less committed voters do not turnout and the partisans, who are much less likely to shift their vote, cast their ballot along party lines. This being the case, there is a decline in the support for the party that had disproportionately large numbers of peripheral voters in the previous Presidential election. Since partisan voters are the primary actors in Congressional elections, we have discussed the establishment of baseline vote as reflected through Congressional elections. As can be seen partisanship is an important factor in explaining surge and decline of American voting behavior and the establishment of a "normal" vote.

## METHODOLOGY

This report will seek the answers to two questions: Did the registration law requiring urbanites to register prior to voting, while their rural counterparts were not required to register, benefit either major political party? and, What is the effect of non-registration in rural areas on the proportion of eligible voters casting ballots? Since, as Lipset points out in Political Man<sup>24</sup> it is the Democrats who live in urban areas and, as we shall see, Kansas is a relatively rural state, the two questions above can be combined into one general question. Did the registration law which required the urban population to register prior to voting, benefit the Republican Party in the State of Kansas during the period 1960 through 1968?

This report uses census data collected from U. S. Government and State of Kansas publications.<sup>25</sup> The following data will be used to assist in answering the questions set out above:

- a. votes cast for Presidential electors and Congress, by party and total turnout, 1960 through 1968;
- b. voting population by county; and
- c. the proportion of urbanness by county.

Since the study has to do with the electoral institutional structure as it pertains to voting behavior in Kansas (that is, what was the affect of the voting registration law requiring urbanites to register prior to voting), it was first necessary to decide which counties were urban and which were rural. The simplest solution was to use the halfway point in dividing the counties. If a county was called 50 percent rural or greater by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, it was called rural in the first gross separation of rural/urban counties for use in this report. Using that simple measure, we found that 68 counties were rural and 37 urban.

In order to refine the measure of ruralness further, frequency distribution analysis was conducted to determine the clusterings of counties according to population distribution. It was evident that the counties tended to cluster; that is, there was a group of counties from 10-30 percent rural, a group from 50-70 percent rural, and, a group 100 percent rural. The counties were therefore grouped according to their ruralness as follows:

0 - 40 percent = urban  
41 - 79 percent = mixed rural  
80 - 100 percent = rural

In numbers, this meant that 23 counties were urban, 36 were mixed rural, and 46 were rural.

Another key variable pertinent to the report concerns the proportion of the population that votes. Therefore, it was necessary to determine by county, the proportion of the eligible voting population that actually cast ballots in Kansas during the Presidential and Congressional elections from 1960 through 1968. This was determined by dividing the number eligible to vote into the number of people voting. This then provided us with:

- 1) proportion of eligible voters casting ballots for Presidential electors in 1960, 1964 and 1968;
- 2) proportion of eligible voters casting ballots for Congress during Presidential elections; and
- 3) proportion of eligible voters casting ballots for Congress during the off-years of 1962 and 1966.

Once the turnout of voters was determined, we turned to the "party vote". The partisan vote of each county was determined by dividing the number of people voting for either of the two major parties into the number of Republican votes cast. This gave us:

- 1) the proportion of Republicans and Democrats<sup>26</sup> casting ballots for Presidential electors in 1960, 1964 and 1968;
- 2) the proportion of Republicans and Democrats casting ballots for Congress during Presidential years; and
- 3) the proportion of Republicans and Democrats casting ballots for Congress during the off-years of 1962

and 1966.

The result of the data collection was a set of data for each county containing population of the county, ruralness of the county, voting age population, the proportion of the population voting in Presidential and Congressional elections, 1960 through 1968, and the proportion of the electorate voting either Democratic or Republican.

PARAMETERS OF THE VOTE FOR THE  
STATE OF KANSAS

This section will establish the relevance of both the baseline vote and surge and decline, as posited by Campbell,<sup>27</sup> for the state.

When we consider the two party distribution of electoral results in Kansas, it is evident that the state can be characterized as stable Republican.<sup>28</sup> Which is to say, that the long term component of party identification reflects that the state is strongly Republican. This is not to say that short-term forces have not acted upon the characteristic distribution of the Republican majority in the state. That in fact is what determines the outcome of elections. A good, recent example of this can be found in 1964 during the Presidential election when, despite a relatively high statewide turnout of 63 percent, only 45 percent voted Republican. Contrast this to the 1960 and 1968 Presidential elections when 61 and 60 percent respectively went Republican. While the period of time covered is historically short, it illustrates very well the influence of a short-term partisan force (in this case an unpopular candidate) acting upon the established distribution of party loyalties. The return to normalcy can be seen during the 1968 Presidential election in so far as the proportion voting Republican approached a more