VOTER ABSTENTION IN KOSOVO
-Empirical Evidence on the Micro-Level

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Voter Abstention in Kosovo - Empirical Evidence on the Micro-Level.

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VOTER ABSTENTION IN KOSOVO - EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ON THE MICRO-LEVEL.

1. VOTER TURNOUT IN KOSOVO

Since its declaration of independence in 2008, Kosovo has made substantial progress towards democratic consolidation, economic liberalization and political transformation (European Commission 2013; World Bank 2014; Bertelsmann Stiftung 2014; European Commission 2012). In June 2014, Kosovo held its fifth democratic national elections. While the first two elections were administered by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the three following elections were monitored by the international community and were considered to be generally fair and free (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2014; EU Election Observation Mission 2014). However, while two-thirds (64.30%) of all Kosovar citizens participated in the first election in 2001, the turnout decreased significantly in the following elections and sunk as low as 41.54% in the 2014 national elections. This phenomenon does not appear to be limited to Kosovo: Stojanov (2012) finds that many post-socialist societies in Eastern Europe experience low voter turnout during periods of increasing democratic development. Yet, the Kosovo case is unique and worth a closer look. Prior to the establishment of UNMIK, Kosovo had never been self-governed, and, thus, inhabitants of Kosovo had never had the possibility to participate in shaping Kosovo's political agenda in such a direct way as electing Kosovo's parliament. Therefore, it is even more interesting why so many Kosovars choose not to vote and instead prefer to abstain from voting in parliamentary elections. This empirical analysis can make a great contribution in understanding this phenomenon by identifying variables that make Kosovar citizens more or less likely to vote in elections and, by this means, can serve as a basis for identifying necessary changes in policy and its implementation.

2. THEORY AND HYPOTHESIS

Studies examining the cross-national differences in voter turnout have mostly identified institutional factors as having the greatest explanatory power. The institutional determinants that are shown to have the greatest impact on voter turnout include compulsory voting (Jackmann 1987; Franklin 2004), the electoral system – in particular, proportional representation has been shown to foster voter turnout (Blais/Carty 1990; Kastodinova 2003) – and finally vote-facilitating rules like those that address voting by mail (Southwell 2004; Rallings/Thrasher 2006), advance or proxy voting (Blais et. al. 2003) or the number of polling days (Norris 2002). However, those institutional approaches fail to explain the variance on the micro-level, i.e. they cannot easily explain why some individuals tend to vote while others abstain. In the last two national elections in Kosovo, voter turnout has been considerably low, at a level of less than 50%. This might be partly due to a huge diaspora community living abroad or due to inaccurate voter lists (EU Election Observation Mission 2014:5). However, the voter turnout in Kosovo still appears to be significantly low and – like in other post-communist countries – lagging behind the turnout in Western European democracies (Pacek et. al. 2009; Kostadinova 2003; Kostadinova/Power 2007).

Therefore, it seems relevant and meaningful to analyze which variables make some Kosovar citizens more likely to vote than other citizens. As our object of analysis is just one

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country, and we are just comparing the last two national elections[1], the macro-level variables do not vary significantly. Thus, they can be assumed to be relatively constant. On the micro-level, we broadly differentiate between psychological factors and socio-economic factors (Sigelmann et. al. 1985). First, we want to identify psychological factors that are possible, meaningful predictors for voter abstention before briefly describing the socio-economic variables that impact voter abstention. With regard to the psychological factors, we distinguish two theoretical concepts that identify trust in the electoral process and political alienation, respectively, as key psychological determinants that affect political participation. While we expect trust in the electoral process to have a positive impact on the likelihood to vote, we assume that political alienation, in contrast, has a negative effect on the likelihood to cast a ballot.

Trust in the general electoral process, in the parliament as institution, and in political parties as the main democratic actors in a competitive electoral system has been shown to have a significant effect on various forms of democratic participation, such as participating in elections and casting a ballot (Hooghe/Marien 2013; Cox 2003). According to Grönlund and Stelälä (2007), at the individual level, trust in parliament, in particular, fosters an increased likelihood of voting. If an individual trusts in the parliament, it is more likely that he or she perceives the decision to participate in the elections as meaningful and worth the costs involved in going to the polls. This kind of institutional trust might, according to Putnam (1993), be also linked to a higher level of interpersonal trust and causes an increase in the likelihood to vote. Likewise, if an individual has a great amount of trust in the political parties running for election, he or she is assumed to be more likely to vote than somebody who has a lower level of trust in the political parties. This assumption implies that high levels of trust in the political system might be crucial for convincing voters that the benefits of casting a ballot outweigh the costs of voting. Consequently, we formulate the following hypotheses:

> *H1a: The higher the individuals' trust in the parliament, the more likely they vote in the National Elections.*
> *H1b: The higher the individuals' trust in the political parties, the more likely they vote in the National Elections.*

The theory of trust in institutions as a determinant of political participation also suggests that trust is closely linked to the performance of the institutions and, thus, can be considered as a rational response to successful policy implementation. This may be especially true for post-communist countries (Mishler/Rose 2001) that are in need of many reforms to foster a fully successful transformation. Hence, the perceived degree of democracy in Kosovo appears to be an appropriate proxy for citizens' trust in institutions. Therefore, the more democratic a country is perceived to be in general and the more satisfied individuals are with the democratic situation in their country, the more likely they will vote. This leads to hypotheses 2a and 2b:

> *H2a: The more democratic Kosovo is perceived to be overall by individuals, the more likely they vote in the National Elections.*
> *H2b: The more satisfied individuals are with the democracy in Kosovo, the more likely they vote in the National Elections.*

Birch (2010) furthermore argues that confidence in the electoral conduct has a significant, yet understudied, impact on the likelihood that an individual will cast a ballot. In her paper, she finds that citizens are more likely to go to the polls if they are confident that the election will be free and fair than if they are afraid that democratic standards of electoral integrity might not be

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[1] The decision to limit the analysis to the last two national elections is mostly due to lack of available data on previous elections.

guaranteed. This argument might gain special importance when considering the fact that Kosovo, as a transition country, still faces considerable challenges in ensuring democratic standards (European Commission 2013). Therefore, we hypothesize:

> *H3: The more individuals believe the elections to be fair and free, the more likely they are to vote in the National Elections.*

Before analyzing the effects of political alienation, it seems necessary to first define the concept of political alienation: Olsen (1965) defines political alienation as "attitudes of estrangement of the political system" (Olsen 1965:288) and differentiates between political incapability, caused by the individual's environment, and discontentment, caused by the individual's own choice to alienate himself or herself. Furthermore, the spatial voting literature argues that voters either abstain due to alienation as a result of parties being too distant from them, or they abstain due to indifference as a result of parties being too similar to each other. In terms of justifying the costs of voting, both scenarios fail to offer benefits that outweigh the costs (Adams et. al. 2006:66).

In line with Zipp (1985) and Leighley/Nagler (2013), we assume that any individual will be more likely to vote when he or she is offered policy choices that are close to his or her own policy preferences. Thus, when none of the parties running for election are similar to the individual in terms of their policy options or general party identification, the individual may become alienated from the electoral competition and less likely to cast a ballot. Therefore, we hypothesize:

> *H4: Individuals who do not feel closer to one particular political party over the other parties are less likely to vote in the National Elections.*

Sigelmann (1985) and Downs (1957) argue that citizens are more likely to vote if they can perceive clear differences between the parties and, thus, between the different voting options. However, if citizens believe the parties to be more or less interchangeable and without clear alternatives in regards to their programs or their ability to govern, it makes possible voters indifferent and less likely to go to the polls and cast a ballot (Plane/Gershtenson 2004). Consequently, we hypothesize:

> *H5: The less individuals perceive that different political parties in Kosovo offer clear alternatives to one another, the less likely they vote in the National Elections.*

Moreover, we try to measure alienation from and dissatisfaction with the political system by employing another variable related to the personal importance placed on enjoying the freedoms and rights of living in a democracy. This variable might be meaningful for transitioning countries like Kosovo, in particular, since it can be considered as a proxy for measuring the acceptance of the newly-established democracy. In contrast to hypothesis H2a and H2b[2] that are related to attitudes concerning the state of democracy in Kosovo, with this variable we try to measure the citizens' general assessment of the importance of living in a democratically governed country and, thus, try to identify the alienation of citizens who do not value any merits of a democratic political system.

> *H6: The less important it is for individuals to live in a country that is governed democratically, the less likely they vote in the National Elections.*

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[2] While the variable might appear very similar to the perceived overall democracy and the satisfaction with the democracy in Kosovo, it is empirically not closely related to both variables (Pearson's r around 0.20 in the 2014 data, while 0.02 in the 2010 data).

In addition to these attitudinal or psychological variables, we include socio-demographic variables that might have an impact on an individual's likelihood to cast a ballot. In previous cross-national studies, the education level and age in particular have been shown to have an influence on the likelihood to vote (Hooghe/Marien 2013; Birch 2010; Franklin 1996; Letki 2004). We also take the household income, the status as an ethnic minority, the current occupation and finally the region of residence into account. Moreover, we also control for a variation in the general political interest of individuals.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

To test the hypotheses, we use the dataset from the sixth round[3] of the European Social Survey (ESS). The data was collected in 2012/2013 and covers the national elections in 2010. However, to achieve a more comparative perspective and to be able to assess more recent trends in voter turnout, Group for Legal and Political Studies (GLPS) conducted a survey in May 2014 that addressed all relevant ESS variables in order to test the hypotheses in this report. Consequently, we use two cross-sectional datasets that include data relevant to the last two Kosovar national elections in 2010 and 2014 in order to understand and analyze the factors that affect electoral participation and voter turnout in Kosovo.

The 2014 GLPS questionnaire mirrors the ESS questionnaire but with one main difference. While the ESS survey, which was conducted in Kosovo in February and March 2013, employs a recall-item to measure past voting behavior in the Kosovar national elections in late 2010, the GLPS survey, which was conducted in May 2014, employs a question measuring the respondents' intention to vote in the national elections in June 2014. Survey questions that measure voter turnout are very susceptible to social desirability or "over-reporting"[4] and have been criticized for being widely used in political science research without accurately reflecting real voting behavior (Rogers 2012). Yet, since it is neither our intention to predict the voting behavior nor to fully explain the exact voter turnout by means of a model that solely employs micro-level factors, we still consider the self-reported data to be at least a valid proxy for an individual's willingness to make use of his or her civic rights and participate in the elections.

To measure the trust in the electoral process, five variables from the ESS are employed in the model. They are all constructed according to a scale ranging from 0 to 10 and, thus, consist of eleven categories, where 0 means no trust at all and 10 implies full trust in the respective part of the electoral process. Four more variables are used to measure political alienation. Two of them are similarly constructed on a scale from 0 to 10 to measure the degree of political alienation. In contrast, the closeness to a particular party question uses a dummy variable that takes the value 1 if an individual claims to feel close to a particular party and 0 if otherwise.

In addition to the relevant attitudinal variables, we include several socio-economic variables as control variables. Yet, it seems also relevant to explore whether any of those socio-economic variables have a significant impact on an individual's probability of turning out for national elections. The socio-economic variables include the gender of the respondents, their age[5] and education level. To measure an individual's education we differentiate between a

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[3] In the sixth round of the ESS, Kosovo was included for the first time.

[4] "Over-reporting" of the voting behavior is a more serious concern for the 2014 data than for the data related to the previous national elections in 2010 (88.3% of the respondents claim to intend to vote in 2014, whereas just 66.1% claim to have voted in 2010). This might be due to a higher perceived social-desirability immediately before the elections than a desirability caused by a recall-item referring to an election that already took place more than two years earlier.

[5] The exact age is not used in our models, but a centered-age variable as well as the respective squared variable that aims to take a non-linear relationship into account. This method has been found in previous studies.

primary, secondary and tertiary education and include respective dummy-variables in the model.[6] Concerning the occupation of the individuals, we differentiate between six different occupation types and, respectively, include five dummy-variables in our models (employee as base category). To control for differences in the voter turnout patterns amongst the different regions of Kosovo, we include a dummy-variable for every region in Kosovo. Finally, the citizens' interest in politics is measured on a scale ranging from 1 – not at all interested in politics – to 4 – very interested in politics. All ordinal variables are considered to be quasi-metrical.[7]

The multivariate analysis uses a logistic regression model to estimate the effects that the trust in the electoral process and the political alienation have on the likelihood to vote. Since we expect the concepts of hypotheses 1a and 1b as well as those of hypotheses 2a and 2b to be very closely related to each other,[8] we aim to prevent multicollinearity by evaluating four models in total for each year. While model 1 to 4 refer to the 2010 elections, model 5 to 8 directly mirror model 1 to 4 but refer to the 2014 elections. The equations of the models are as follows:

(1)   Voting = β_0 + β_1 Trust (Parliament) + β_2 Democracy (Overall) + β_3 Fair Elections + β_4 Closeness + β_5 Importance of Democracy+ β_6 Alternatives + $\beta_{7\text{-}11}$ Socio-economic variables + β_{12} Political Interest

(2)   Voting = β_0 + β_1 Trust (Parliament) + β_2 Democracy (Satisfaction) + β_3 Fair Elections + β_4 Closeness + β_5 Importance of Democracy+ β_6 Alternatives + $\beta_{7\text{-}11}$ Socio-economic variables + β_{12} Political Interest

(3)   Voting = β_0 + β_1 Trust (Parties) + β_2 Democracy (Overall) + β_3 Fair Elections + β_4 Closeness + β_5 Importance of Democracy+ β_6 Alternatives + $\beta_{7\text{-}11}$ Socio-economic variables + β_{12} Political Interest

(4)   Voting = β_0 + β_1 Trust (Parties) + β_2 Democracy (Satisfaction) + β_3 Fair Elections + β_4 Closeness + β_5 Importance of Democracy+ β_6 Alternatives + $\beta_{7\text{-}11}$ Socio-economic variables + β_{12} Political Interest

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[6] The results are interpreted relative to primary education level which is used as base category.
[7] However, since the variable measuring political interest just consists of four categories, it is more difficult to guarantee a quasi-metrical structure. Therefore, we also estimate a model that includes k-1 dummy-variables. Yet, these models reveal very similar results.
[8] The empirical analysis reveals that the correlation for both variable pairs is indeed on a high level: Pearson's r of the perception of the overall state of democracy in Kosovo and satisfaction with regards to democracy in Kosovo is 72.41% (68.54% in 2014), while 65.68% (66.83% in 2014) for trust in parliament and trust in political parties.

Table 1: Description of the Variables

Variable	Level of Measurement	Description
Voting	Nominal	Individual's self-reported voting behavior
Trust (Parliament)	Ordinal	Individuals' trust in the parliament in Kosovo
Trust (Political Parties)	Ordinal	Individuals' trust in the political parties in Kosovo
Democracy (Overall)	Ordinal	Individuals' evaluation of democracy in Kosovo
Democracy (Satisfaction)	Ordinal	Individuals' satisfaction with democracy in Kosovo
Fair elections	Ordinal	Individuals' evaluation of the fairness of elections in Kosovo
Closeness	Nominal	Individuals' closeness to a particular party in Kosovo
Political Interest	Ordinal	Individuals' general interest in politics
Importance of Democracy	Ordinal	Individuals' estimation of the general importance to live in a democracy
Alternatives	Ordinal	Individuals' evaluation of clear differences among the parties
Income	Ordinal	Individuals' household's income
Age	Ratio	Individuals' age
Ethnicity	Nominal	Individuals' belonging to an ethnic minority
Education	Nominal	Dummy-Variables for primary, secondary and tertiary education as individual's highest education
Unemployed (active)	Nominal	Individual is unemployed, but actively looking for a job
Unemployed (inactive)	Nominal	Individual is unemployed and not looking for a job
Household	Nominal	Individual is doing household, looking for his/her children or for other persons
Student	Nominal	Individual is a student
Pensioner	Nominal	Individual is retired
Region	Nominal	Dummy-variables for the seven different Kosovar regions

4. MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

First, we discuss the diagnostics and the model fit of the multivariate model in order to assess the explanatory power of the hypothesis, and we follow with an evaluation of the results of the multivariate analysis in the next step. Afterwards, we check the results for robustness by evaluating the impact of influential observations and outliers. Finally, we critically evaluate the limitations of the findings and discuss some possibilities for future research.

4.1 Diagnostics and Model Fit

The diagnostics reveal that both models related to the 2010 and to the 2014 election are adequately specified. The link-test[9] proves that our models are neither subject to a link error, nor

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[9] The so-called "link-test" estimates the original model in a first step, while refitting it in the second step with two new variables - the model's linear predicted value and the linear predicted value squared. In the case that the model is properly specified, has all the relevant predictors, and the linear combination of them is sufficient, the squared predicted value should not be significant in the model (UCLA: Statistical Consulting Group 2011).

that the linear combination of our predictors is insufficient. Furthermore, the variance inflation factor (VIF) provides evidence that the model is not impaired by high multicollinearity. All VIF-values are below three – and therefore below the critical value of ten (Kutner 2005:409) – thereby showing that no variable can be explained by a linear combination of all other variables. The Pseduo-R^2 values[10] of our model can serve as a first assessment of the model-fit. While for the 2010 data, they range between 21.2% and 22.3%, for the 2014 data, they vary between 45.2% and 46.1%. Therefore, both models seem to have a very acceptable model-fit. As an even more telling indicator of the model fit, the adjusted Count-R^2 can be assessed; it shows the relative frequency of correctly classified observations in comparison to a "naïve" model, which always predicts the value that is more prevalent in the data. The 2014 model is able to predict individual voting behavior by around 26% better than a naïve model would be able to. For the 2010 model, this improvement of prediction is even higher, at 29.6%, which indicates a great model fit. Regarding the accuracy of the prediction, both the 2010 model and the 2014 model achieve a very high share (77% and around 92%, respectively) of correctly classified observations. However, the model's specificity – i.e. the correct prediction that an individual is not casting a ballot – is considerably lower (around 50%) than the sensitivity (around 90%), implying that the model is more successful at correctly predicting an individual's decision to vote than predicting his or her abstention. Having discussed the diagnostics and the models' goodness of fit, we now move to evaluate the explanatory power of our different hypotheses.

Table 2: Logit Regression on Probability to Vote

VARIABLES	(1) Vote2010	(2) Vote2010	(3) Vote2010	(4) Vote2010		(5) Vote2014	(6) Vote2014	(7) Vote2014	(8) Vote2014
Trust (Parliament)	1.128***	1.136***				1.225*	1.223*		
	(2.813)	(2.921)				(1.908)	(1.951)		
Trust (Parties)			1.055	1.055				1.413***	1.419***
			(1.170)	(1.148)				(2.875)	(2.872)
Democracy (Overall)	1.083**		1.101**			0.998		1.031	
	(1.990)		(2.423)			(-0.0210)		(0.366)	
Democracy (Satisfaction)		1.060		1.091*			0.993		0.998
		(1.311)		(1.945)			(-0.0618)		(-0.0216)
Fair Elections	1.067	1.064	1.084**	1.080*		1.231**	1.232**	1.241**	1.254**
	(1.578)	(1.514)	(1.964)	(1.887)		(2.120)	(2.123)	(2.268)	(2.376)
Closeness	1.439*	1.481**	1.424*	1.477**		8.132***	8.169***	7.060***	7.025***
	(1.876)	(2.031)	(1.818)	(2.014)		(4.599)	(4.613)	(4.247)	(4.241)
Importance of Democracy	1.042	1.051	1.046	1.057		1.008	1.004	1.015	1.010
	(1.016)	(1.245)	(1.114)	(1.392)		(0.143)	(0.0688)	(0.254)	(0.168)
Alternatives	1.029	1.038	1.029	1.038		1.274**	1.272**	1.204*	1.204*
	(0.796)	(1.021)	(0.790)	(1.015)		(2.156)	(2.114)	(1.705)	(1.686)
Gender	1.244	1.268	1.261	1.276		1.382	1.388	1.563	1.550

[10] McFadden's Pseudo R^2 (1973) measures the extent of the improvement of the Maximum-Likelihood estimation and, therefore, provides (in analogy to the classical R^2 of the OLS-estimation) the level of improvement, comparing the complete model to the null-model with all coefficients except of the constant being zero. Since even with a perfect fit of the model, one can never reach value 1, values ranging between 0.2 and 0.4 are generally considered to indicate a really good model fit.

	(1.014)	(1.115)	(1.079)	(1.146)	(0.966)	(0.978)	(1.309)	(1.287)
Secondary Education	1.361	1.380	1.400	1.411	1.016	0.997	0.889	0.854
	(1.349)	(1.413)	(1.483)	(1.520)	(0.0337)	(-0.00565)	(-0.255)	(-0.342)
Tertiary Education	2.217**	2.284**	2.273**	2.361**	2.889*	2.927*	2.512	2.472
	(2.343)	(2.432)	(2.433)	(2.547)	(1.702)	(1.714)	(1.488)	(1.454)
Political Interest	1.051	1.025	1.071	1.048	2.296***	2.273***	2.082***	2.069***
	(0.498)	(0.252)	(0.687)	(0.475)	(4.256)	(4.213)	(3.672)	(3.634)
Age (centered)	1.043***	1.041***	1.043***	1.041***	1.017	1.015	1.016	1.013
	(5.306)	(5.107)	(5.290)	(5.039)	(1.086)	(0.976)	(0.988)	(0.824)
Age (centered, squared)	0.999***	0.999***	0.999***	0.999***	1.000	1.000	0.999	0.999
	(-3.044)	(-2.999)	(-2.802)	(-2.721)	(-0.322)	(-0.198)	(-0.763)	(-0.624)
Household's Income	1.024	1.019	1.022	1.017	0.944	0.956	0.944	0.954
	(0.478)	(0.386)	(0.447)	(0.346)	(-0.643)	(-0.494)	(-0.649)	(-0.511)
Minority	0.915	0.836	0.871	0.803	0.417*	0.424*	0.439*	0.422*
	(-0.319)	(-0.655)	(-0.502)	(-0.806)	(-1.842)	(-1.884)	(-1.727)	(-1.890)
Houseman /Housewife	0.861	0.929	0.858	0.921	2.431	2.501	2.471	2.500
	(-0.599)	(-0.299)	(-0.614)	(-0.335)	(1.526)	(1.567)	(1.537)	(1.552)
Student	0.677	0.611	0.651	0.583	2.494	2.393	2.517	2.396
	(-0.982)	(-1.235)	(-1.093)	(-1.369)	(1.546)	(1.467)	(1.529)	(1.440)
Unemployed (active)	2.720***	2.763***	2.544***	2.606***	0.778	0.815	0.727	0.751
	(3.359)	(3.458)	(3.141)	(3.265)	(-0.585)	(-0.469)	(-0.733)	(-0.653)
Unemployed (inactive)	1.661*	1.659*	1.636*	1.642*	0.725	0.735	0.753	0.757
	(1.722)	(1.725)	(1.663)	(1.684)	(-0.387)	(-0.370)	(-0.343)	(-0.335)
Retired	0.801	0.885	0.763	0.838	0.397	0.387	0.497	0.480
	(-0.517)	(-0.290)	(-0.634)	(-0.423)	(-1.101)	(-1.119)	(-0.805)	(-0.842)
Observations	849	852	849	851	903	904	903	904
Pseudo R²	0.223	0.218	0.217	0.212	0.452	0.447	0.461	0.455

z-statistics in parentheses, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.
All models include regional dummies and weights. Constant is not displayed.

4.2 RESULTS OF THE MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

The results of the logit regression analysis are displayed in Table 2 for 2010 (model 1 to 4) and for 2014 (model 5 to 8). We find strong support for Hypothesis H1a: the higher an individual's trust in the Kosovar parliament, the more likely he or she will cast a ballot. The variable that measures trust in the parliament is significant in all models and can therefore be considered as a valid predictor of the likelihood to vote on the individual level. In contrast, trust in political parties seems relevant only for the 2014 elections, and it does not have any significance in the 2010 elections. Thus, we partly fail to confirm Hypothesis H1b.[11] Regarding the assessment of how

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[11] However, the outlier analysis (next section) proves evidence that trust in political parties has a significant influence for the 2010 data as well if very influential observations are not taken into account. In case of Hypothesis H1b, just 33 out of 850 observations cause the variable of trust in political parties not to be significant on the 5% level.

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democratic Kosovo is overall and how satisfied citizens are with the democracy in Kosovo, there appears to be no significant effect of these two variables on voter turnout. While the bivariate analyses of each of these variables and voting behavior show a highly significant (p<0.01%) correlation, this relationships are not sustained when controlling for other variables. This suggests that the perceived degree of democracy in Kosovo is not correlated to voter turnout. Other variables – less abstract than perceptions of overall democracy – seem to have a stronger impact on the citizens' temporary satisfaction with the political system and, therefore, make them more likely to vote. Such a variable is the perceived fairness of the elections. In both the 2010 and the 2014 models, we find support for hypothesis H3, suggesting that Kosovar citizens are more likely to go to the polls if they are confident that the election will be free and fair.[12] The greater the fear that democratic standards of electoral integrity might not be guaranteed, the less likely citizens are to vote in the elections.

      With regards to the variables measuring political alienation in Kosovo, we find strong support for hypothesis 4: if individuals in Kosovo feel closer to a certain party than to all other parties, they are more likely to go to the polls. This, in turn, implies that if none of the parties running for election are similar to voters either in regards to their policy options or to the general party identification, voters become alienated from the electoral process and are less likely to cast a ballot. Related to the voters' closeness to a certain party and to the theory of spatial voting, we also find some support for hypothesis 5: in the 2014 data, the diversity of the parties running for election is a significant predictor of the citizens' likelihood to participate and make use of their civic rights. However, in the 2010 data, the relationship between perceived differences among the parties and voter turnout is only significant in the bivariate analysis and becomes insignificant when controlling for other variables in the multivariate model.[13] Nonetheless, the 2014 results provide some empirical evidence for our hypothesis 5: the fewer differences that Kosovar citizens can perceive between the various parties running for election, the less likely they are to turn out for elections. This suggests that, while political alienation may affect citizens in Kosovo, indifference might also be a factor that contributes to the low voter turnout. Finally, we do not find any support for hypothesis 6, which assumes that the more important it is for citizens to live in a democratically governed country, the more likely they are to cast their ballot. While the importance placed on democracy is strongly associated with the likelihood to vote in the bivariate analysis, the variable's explanatory power fails to sustain itself in the multivariate models where we controlled for other factors that influence voting behavior.

      With regard to the socio-economic variables included in the models, we find a positive effect of age on an individual's likelihood to go to the polls, which is in line with other cross-national studies (Hooghe/Marien 2013; Birch 2010). There is also some evidence that suggests that people who have a stronger general political interest are more likely to turn out to vote. However, this relationship only holds for the 2014 data. Occupational status seems to partly matter as well: people who are currently unemployed are more likely to vote than those who are employed. Yet, the results are similarly mixed for the two cross-sectional data. The only socio-economic variable that has a remarkably consistent and significant effect on voter turnout is the education level. Kosovars who enjoyed a tertiary education are more likely to go to the polls compared to citizens with just a primary education, which mirrors similar findings in previous

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[12] Yet, the variable is not significant in model 1 and model 2 in the 2010 data. Since the variable just very slightly misses to reach the 10% level of significance in those two models and is significant throughout all other models, we still consider the results to support hypothesis 3.

[13] When leaving out 33 observations (outliers), we find a significant positive impact of the variable on likelihood to vote for the 2010 data as well.

studies (Franklin 1996; Letki 2004). Additionally, it is noteworthy that, in contrast, the income variable is not a valid predictor for individual voting behavior.

Regarding the strength of the association between the abovementioned variables and voter turnout, the odds ratios displayed in Table 2 are important for an initial assessment of the relationships. For instance, according to model 5, somebody's chance to go voting who feels close to a certain party is approximately 8 times the chance of somebody who does not feel close to a certain party, *ceteris paribus.* However, since the odds ratios are still not as conclusive or easy to interpret as the coefficients in the OLS model, we illustrate, in the next step, the substantive effect strength of the significant predictors by calculating adjusted predictions at representative values (APRs).[14] For the calculation of those effects, variations in other significant variables are taken into account. We choose to compare the influence strength first across the closeness to a certain party variable since this variable is included in all models and is a very stable, significant predictor of the voting behavior. Second, we assess the influence strength across the tertiary education dummy-variable. Not only is the tertiary education variable the only socio-economic variable that is significant across both the 2010 and the 2014 data, it also appears to be very meaningful for analyzing possible education-specific differences in the influence strengths of the significant variables. All other variables are held at their sample mean. When referring to the calculated probability of turning out to vote in the 2014 data, it is noteworthy to mention that the absolute probability might be very misleading due to the high overestimation of voter turnout. However, the differences relating to the changes in probabilities can serve as an interesting and meaningful way to illustrate the influence strength more precisely.

Figure 1 and 2 show the probabilities for voting based on an individual's level of trust in parliament, closeness to a political party, and tertiary education level. The graphics illustrate that the effect strength of the level of trust in the Kosovar parliament becomes especially pronounced if an individual does not feel close to a certain political party and his or her highest education level is not tertiary. Calculating the exact margins reveals that, in 2014, someone who has no trust in the parliament at all is, *ceteris paribus,* 16.6% less likely to go to the polls than someone who has full trust in parliament. For the 2010 data, this difference is even higher, at 20.2%.

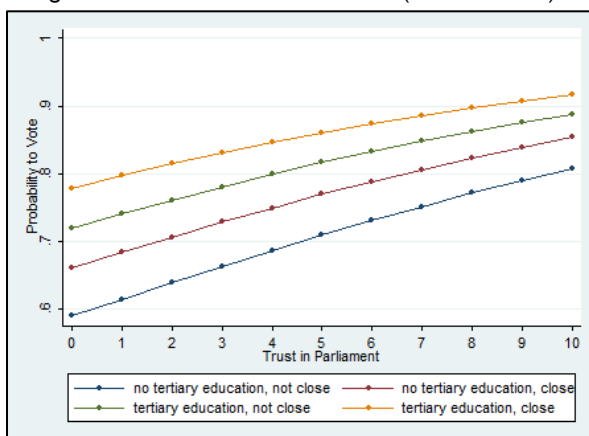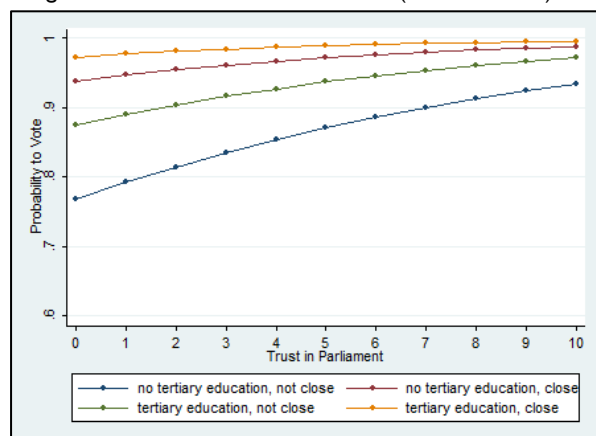Figure 1: APRs of Trust in Parliament (2010, Model 1)   Figure 2: APRs of Trust in Parliament (2014, Model 1)

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[14] APRs are one possible way to calculate the marginal effects of the coefficients on the respective dependent variable. We prefer to calculate adjusted predictions at representative values over simple adjusted predictions at the means (APMs), since it allows us to combine the analysis of the effects of discrete and continuous variables simultaneously. By employing APRs, we evaluate how the influence strength of the significant predictors varies across a chosen range of plausible values for one or more continuous independent variable (Bornemann/Williams 2013:571).

Likewise, the influence strength of the perceived fairness and freeness of elections variable varies considerably depending on a citizen's education level and a citizen's feelings of closeness to a certain party. Someone who does not feel close to a certain party but has obtained a tertiary education and believes the national elections to be completely free and fair is, *ceteris paribus,* 11.7% (12.7% for 2010) more likely to cast a ballot than a similar individual who perceives the elections to be not at all free and fair. The influence strength of the perceived fair- and freeness of the elections variable varies more for the 2014 elections than for the 2010 elections. Figure 3 and 4 show the respective APRs.

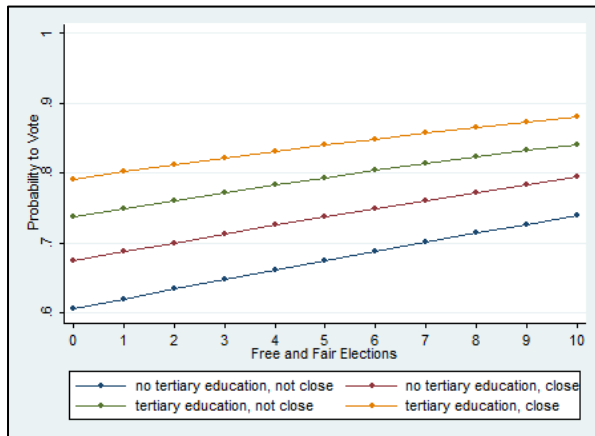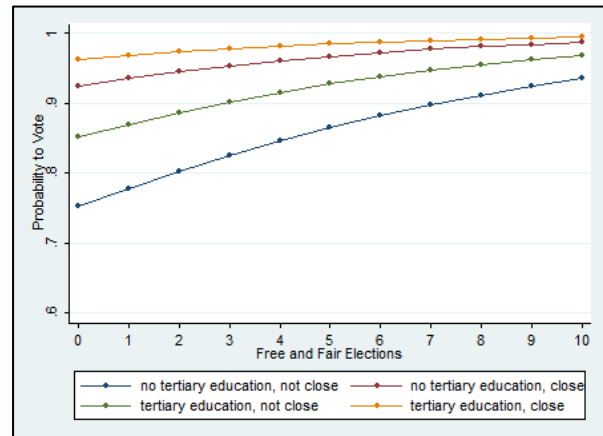Figure 3: APRs of Fair Elections (2010, Model 3)   Figure 4: APRs of Fair Elections (2014, Model 3)

Lastly, we assess the impact strength of the coefficients, measuring the variable that accounts for the perception of differences between the various political parties running for election. Since the variable is just significant in the outlier model for the 2010 data (see next section), we use this model and omit 30 observations. Figure 5 and 6 show the relationship between the perceived differences between parties and the probability of voting depending on an individual's education level and closeness to a certain party. While the impact strength of this variable is generally lower for the 2010 data than for the 2014 data, it also varies across the education level and the closeness to a political party to a greater extent when using the 2014 data.

Yet, for individuals who have obtained a tertiary education and who feel close to a political party, the influence strength of the perception of party differences variable is lowest in both models. Those two factors – education level and closeness to a political party – already contribute greatly to a high likelihood that an individual turns out for elections. Still, someone who perceives no differences between the parties at all is 3.1% more likely to cast a ballot (2.8% in 2010), *ceteris paribus,* than someone who perceives the greatest amount of differences between parties. However, according to the 2014 data, this difference is even higher, at 20.8%, if an individual, in contrast, has not obtained a tertiary education and does not feel close to a certain political party *ceteris paribus.*
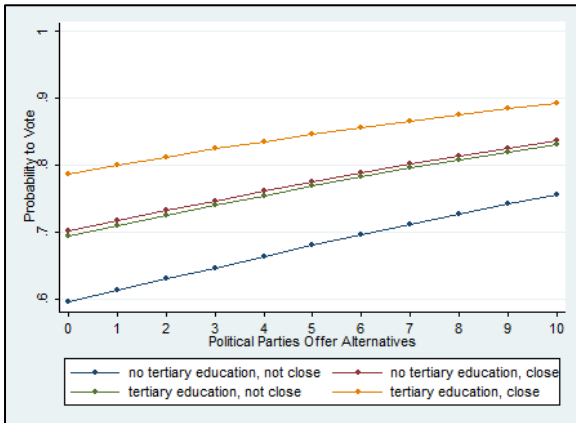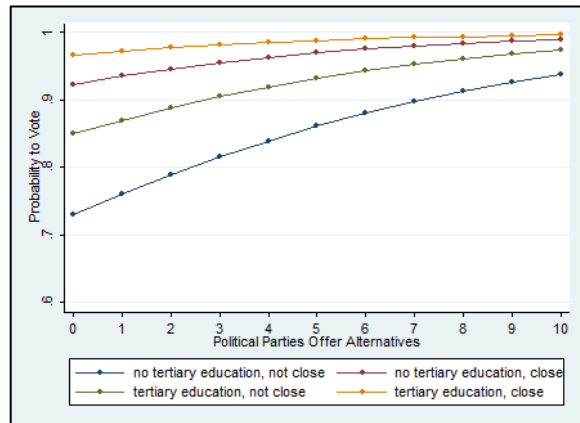
Figure 5: APRs of Differences between Parties

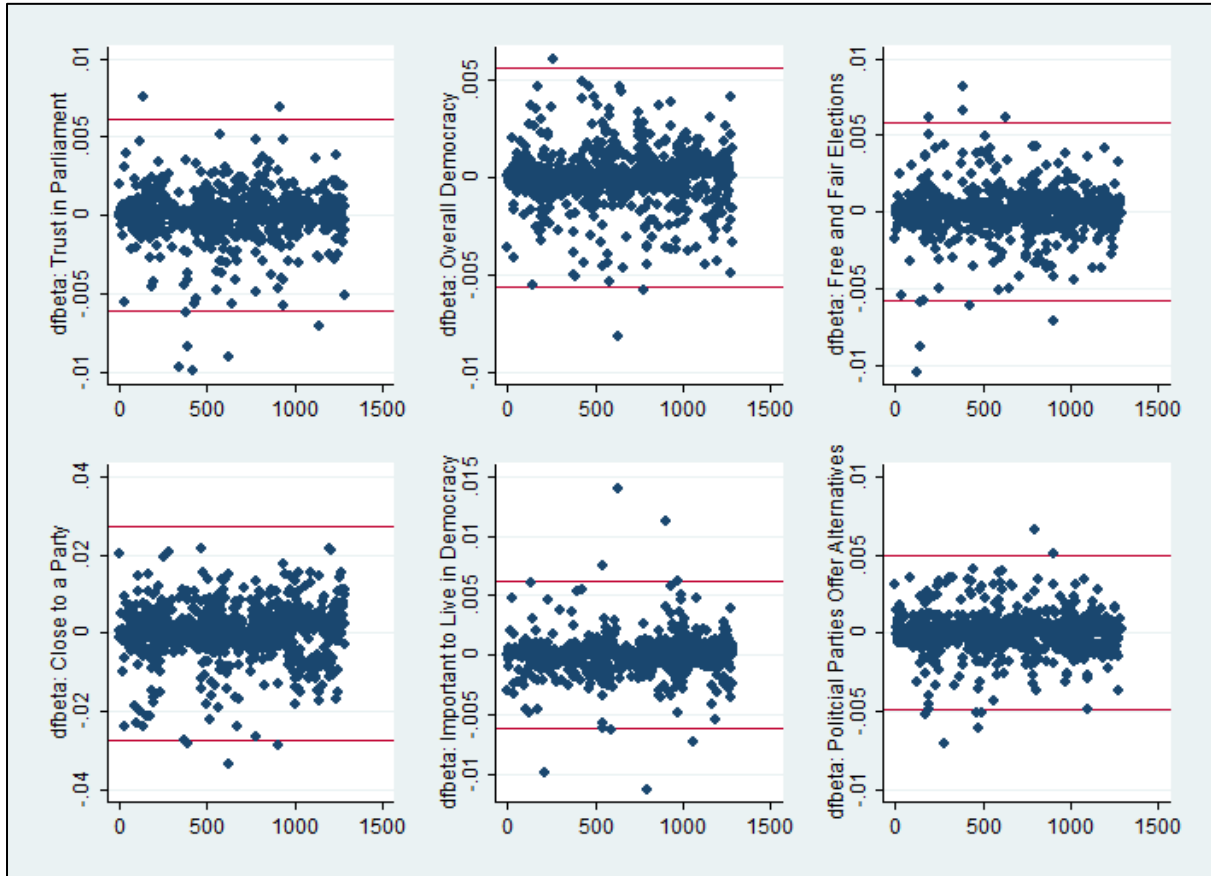Figure 4: APRs of Differences between Parties

4.3 ROBUSTNESS

In order to assess the robustness of the results and to ensure that the effects of the variables are not determined by some highly influential outliers, we conduct an outlier analysis.

Outliers can have an enormous influence on the results of regression analyses when they scatter in a way that causes the outcomes of the entire regression to be biased. Consequently, it seems necessary to examine a subsample that does not take these cases into account in order to gain some information about their potential influence on the complete regression results. For this purpose, we calculate so-called DF-Beta values for the logistic regressions. These DF-Beta values measure how influential a single observation is, in terms of its impact on the entire model, by repeating the regression several times wherein each time a different observation is omitted (Pregibon 1981). As the DF-Beta coefficients only range between 0 and 1in a logistic regression, it seems reasonable to define outliers relative to the average influence of all observations. Therefore, we define outliers as observations that are more than four standard deviations away from the average mean. Figure 7 graphically illustrates how the single observations' impacts scatter. After calculating the DF-Beta values for each observation, we run the models for the respective subsample omitting 28 to 33 outlier observations, i.e. roughly three percent of our sample. The results still show support for all of the hypotheses confirmed in section 4.2. Hence, we can conclude that our results are not determined by a few, very influential observations, but are still valid when these outliers are omitted.

Furthermore, as another measure to ensure the robustness of our analysis, we employ the probit rather than the logit model, which reveals similar results. Having tested the robustness of our results, we move to critically discuss the limitations of our findings in the following section.

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Figure 7: Outliers and DF-Beta values (2010, Model 1)

4.4 DISCUSSION

The results of this analysis greatly contribute to understanding micro-level patterns of voting behavior in Kosovo. So far, there is no study that examines why many Kosovar citizens choose to abstain from voting in elections. Considering the extremely low voter turnout in the last two national elections, the empirical insights resulting from our study gain special importance. However, it is necessary to emphasize the limitations of this research. As already pointed out in the third section of this report, self-reported voting behaviors can only be considered as a rough proxy for actual voting behavior. Voting as a form of political participation is vulnerable to social-desirability, misreporting and even to effects of the interview itself (Traugott/Katosh 1979:376). Additionally, the effects of the aforementioned issues may differ in their extent when respondents are either asked to recall information (and voting behaviors) from the last national elections more than two years ago or when asked to indicate intended voting behaviors in the next national elections in the next month. An additional limitation of this study results from the lack of panel-data; both datasets used in this study are cross-sectional. Employing a panel-survey rather than multiple cross-sectional datasets would allow for analysis on the trends of and developments in individual voting behaviors. It could be very valuable to observe changes in the individual abstention or turnout and to ask for the reasons of these alterations. However, our study certainly represents a major step forward in overcoming the empirical gap on voter turnout

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and micro-level voting behavior in Kosovo. Future research projects can make use of the empirical findings in this report and build on the results of our analysis.

5. CONCLUSION

Voter turnout in Kosovo has reached an all-time low in the 2014 National Elections. While wide-spread corruption, organized crime, lack of economic improvement, and slow progress towards the European Union are certainly factors that contributed to the low voter-turnout on the macro-level (Bytyci/Robinson 2014), there had been little previous research or analysis relating to the micro-level factors that affect voting behaviour in Kosovo. Hence, this paper tried to fill the empirical gap regarding individual factors that determine voter turnout in Kosovo. We employed a multivariate analysis to test our hypotheses, using two cross-sectional datasets that included information on the last two Kosovar national elections in 2010 and 2014. Those elections were the first two national elections after Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008. Not only does this paper contribute to the academic debate and discussion on voter turnout in post-socialist societies, this report also serves as a basis for identifying the measures needed to increase voter turnout and guide policy implementation in Kosovo.

We find that the following micro-level variables have the greatest influence on an individual's decision to cast a ballot: 1) a high level of trust in parliament and in the political parties, 2) the perception that elections are fully fair and free, 3) the perception of differences between the parties running for election, and 4) the individual's closeness to a certain party over others. These insights can be utilized by policy-makers to identify important and necessary changes for their policies. It seems worthwhile to investigate what makes people distrust the political parties or parliament in Kosovo and to develop strategies for enhancing the trustworthiness of those institutions. With regards to ensuring fair and free elections, Kosovo has already made substantial progress in recent years (EU Election Observation Mission 2014). However, given the high levels of fraud and irregularities in the past, it may take some time for perceptions to change. Kosovo can try to accelerate these shifts in perspective by launching campaigns, by transparently dealing with all kinds of irregularities, and by ensuring that fraudulent electoral practices are condemned in the legislation and punished accordingly. Our results suggest that, in addition to alienation from the political sphere, indifference also leads to voter abstention. If citizens do not perceive clear differences between the parties running for election, they are less likely to go to the polls. Therefore, it seems meaningful for the Kosovar parties to distinguish themselves by specifying their programs and by developing substantial agendas that go beyond broad promises and, instead, offer clear policy options and plans for implementation.

This research also highlights the fact that higher education fosters political participation and voter turnout. This result emphasizes the need to improve the political integration of all socio-economic groups and communities and, thereby, strengthen political awareness and feelings of political efficacy. Normatively speaking, the legitimacy of a democratic political system depends on a high rate of voter turnout. As such, low voter turnout can be considered a serious problem for democracy, especially when it is concentrated among certain groups of society (Lipjhardt 1997). Therefore, the empirical evidence resulting from this study can contribute to understanding and addressing the challenges that Kosovo faces in terms of its low voter turnout.

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POLICY REPORTS

Policy Reports are lengthy papers which provide a tool/forum for the thorough and systematic analysis of important policy issues, designed to offer well informed scientific and policy-based solutions for significant public policy problems. In general, Policy Reports aim to present value-oriented arguments, propose specific solutions in public policy – whereby influencing the policy debate on a particular issue – through the use of evidence as a means to push forward the comprehensive and consistent arguments of our organization. In particular, they identify key policy issues through reliable methodology which helps explore the implications on the design/structure of a policy. Policy Reports are very analytical in nature; hence, they not only offer facts or provide a description of events but also evaluate policies to develop questions for analysis, to provide arguments in response to certain policy implications and to offer policy choices/solutions in a more comprehensive perspective. Policy Reports serve as a tool for influencing decision-making and calling to action the concerned groups/stakeholders.