

# *Authoritarian Regimes and Their Permitted Oppositions: Election Day Outcomes in Cuba*

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## ABSTRACT

Electoral opposition to long-established authoritarian regimes may be loyal or rejectionist. Loyal oppositionists vote to send a selective signal to rulers; rejectionist oppositionists vote blank or void the ballot in full disapproval. In Cuba, the number of candidates equals the number of seats, yet voters may vote blank, void, or selectively (choosing some but not all candidates on the ballot), although the Communist Party has campaigned for all candidates. This article uses a unique dataset for Cuba's 2013 National Assembly elections to study aggregate opposition outcomes. It shows the emergence of a loyal opposition, which sometimes votes for and sometimes against Communist Party candidates. The rejectionist opposition, stable over time, never votes for Communist Party candidates; it is found where the Communist Party behaves monopolistically. This combined opposition has better national-level political information; it comes from more educated or larger urban areas or areas closer to Havana.

**H**ow do citizens express opposition to long-stable authoritarian regimes? Is all opposition equally threatening to the regime? Answering these questions is often challenging because it is difficult to observe opposition mass behavior in authoritarian regimes and to capture variations in this behavior. Analysis of self-reported political positions in surveys (Shi 1999) or social media (King et al. 2013) risks incurring the bias that Timur Kuran (1997) calls “public lies”; that is, citizens keep their actual preferences confidential. On the other hand, risk-bearing public rejection of the political regime is unusual, so few people ordinarily embrace it. This study examines the best available behavioral measure of opposition to a communist regime on election day: opposition through the ballot. We show that not all opposition is the same and that only through the study of elections do we approximate

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observing Kuran's "private truths." Engaging in opposition on election day incurs fewer risks than other types of opposition, and thanks to ballot secrecy, elections allow the expression of more nuanced levels of opposition than other forms of protest.

We distinguish between two types of opposition through the ballot. The loyal opposition uses the ballot to send a "useful signal" to the government. They explicitly disagree with the ruling party's recommended voting preferences, voting for some candidates on the official slate but not for all. Loyalists may oppose some official candidates, or may simply prefer some official candidates over others, but need not oppose the political regime. Loyalists act publicly under the laws and the constitution of the authoritarian regime to change it in some way. Loyalists choose some candidates over others to improve the quality of rule or the prospect that closet democrats in the national leadership would sponsor a democratic transition. Loyalists are loyal in the same sense that predemocratic England centuries ago developed the concept of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition. Loyalists sustain the political regime through their loyalty and signal support for those whom they perceive as better representatives; that is, they choose candidates for quality.

Rejectionists, in contrast, oppose the regime while remaining law-abiding because they express their rejection through the ballot. Rejectionists vote blank or void the ballot in order to repudiate the Communist Party as well as unfree and unfair elections. Rejectionists obey the law but employ the election rules to express unvarnished opposition. We call the sum of loyalist and rejectionist voting "non-conformist voting."

Several authoritarian regimes have held regular direct elections for decades—albeit with rules that ensure ruling party victory—ranging from Brazil's military dictatorship and Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party to China and the Soviet Union. Scholars have reasons to explain why authoritarian regime leaders hold elections. Elections may permit the lawful expression of a limited, controlled opposition (blank votes, null or void votes, hereafter BNV votes); that is, some authoritarian regimes provide "political safety valves" (Brownlee 2011, 823). Elections allow regime elites to assess the effectiveness of cadres (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Blaydes 2006; Shi 1999). They also help rulers to understand the level of opposition and support in the population (Magaloni 2006). Elections may co-opt opposition elites (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007), and they may be proxies for plebiscitary approval of the incumbent, showing support and deterring opposition (Simpser 2013; Malesky and Schuler 2009).

We enter this debate by linking our understanding of different types of opposition behaviors at the polls to the interests of the regime, which can gather opposition signals and assess loyalist and rejectionist challenges. This information incentive is one reason for an authoritarian regime to hold elections (Malesky and Schuler 2011; for the utility of loyalist signaling for the regime, see Miller 2015).

This article also bears on the question of whether elections accelerate the demise of the authoritarian regime. Autocratic regimes with elections are more durable than those without them (Geddes 1999). However, elections also have proved useful to

terminate authoritarian regimes, from the former communist regimes in Europe to several authoritarian regimes in Latin America (Linz and Stepan 1996). Furthermore, short of authoritarian regime downfall, elections in such regimes may lead to “liberalizing outcomes” that may result in less authoritarian practices (Howard and Roessler 2006).

The dual nature of elections under authoritarian regimes is well presented by Samuel Huntington, who observes, “Rulers sponsored [freer] elections believing they would either prolong the regime or their rule or that of associates” (1991, 175). Huntington also argues, however, that authoritarian rulers would probably be defeated through elections; at key junctures, “democratizations moved forward on the false confidence of dictators” (Huntington 1991, 182) who eventually called an election that they would lose, inducing Huntington to urge democratic opposition groups not to boycott elections.

“Self-confident authoritarian regimes,” O’Donnell and Schmitter also argue, at a key juncture called a freer election “aimed at attaining electoral ratification and popular legitimation for what has always been the most sensitive internal management problem for authoritarian rulers; namely, succession to top executive office” (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986, 20). Fortunately for democrats, “the rulers were almost always disappointed” (Huntington 1991, 175). Cuba is not at this juncture, but its regime did, in 2013, change its practice to permit a freer vote.

This article shows how elections provide opportunities to different types of opposition to express themselves while simultaneously enabling the regime to gather nuanced information. At critical regime-risking junctures, elections enable the ruler to ascertain the size and strength of the opposition and whether it is loyal (critical but engaged with the regime) or rejectionist (objecting to the regime itself).

With the case of Cuba, this study shows qualitatively and quantitatively the similarities (level of education, urbanism, and proximity to the capital) and differences (relationship with the ruling party) of loyalist and rejectionist oppositions on election day. It analyzes the voting behavior for Cuba’s National Assembly in 2013. Because of severe data limitations, this article, necessarily exploratory, formulates a theoretical perspective and illustrates it with the available data, thereby inducing subsequent research.

We argue, first, that voters in more highly educated areas, voters in the City of Havana and near Havana, or in large urban areas discern that some official candidates will probably govern better than others, and therefore they become selective voters. These voters see national politics up close and choose between official candidates. (“Better” may imply more effective policymaking or higher likelihood of supporting a democratizing transition; all that can be shown is that these voters support some, yet also oppose other official candidates.)

Second, we argue that the likelihood of law-abiding rejectionist voting depends on how monopolistic the Communist Party’s behavior seems to voters in specific districts. Under Cuba’s electoral law, in the 2013 election, each voter was asked to vote for several candidates, none of whom was at risk because in every district the

number of candidates to be elected equaled the number of seats up for election. Across provinces, however, the number of candidates who were Communist Party members varied. Voters in every district could vote for the entire official slate, vote selectively for some but not all of the official candidates, or vote blank or void, although all candidates would win. The likelihood of selective voting is unrelated (statistically insignificant) to the presence of Communist Party candidates on the ballot; this is not surprising, because selective voters are predisposed to choose between officially sponsored candidates. In contrast, the rejectionist opposition, which for best effectiveness votes blank, is strongest where the average proportion of Communist Party members on the ballot is particularly high; that is, when all or nearly all candidates on the ballot are Communist Party members. When the ballot shows that the Communist Party monopolizes the list of candidates, the likelihood of blank or void voting rises.

For Cubanist scholars, this is the first systematic analysis of a Cuban election. We demonstrate that the two kinds of opposition that have developed through the ballot complement other forms of opposition discussed more often in the scholarly literature (domestic dissidence, political exile). We note the large size of the nonconformist electorate and the nuanced way that many Cuban voters use their admittedly limited opportunities for electoral choice.

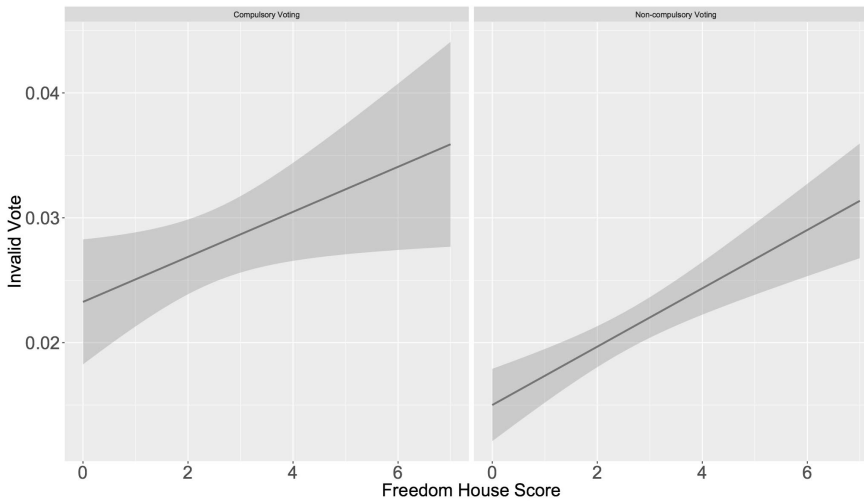
## OPPOSITION THROUGH THE BALLOT IN AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

Nonconformist voting is relatively common in nondemocratic elections. The positive correlation observed in figure 1 shows the relationship between the Freedom House score for the prevalence of democratic practices across countries, years, and elections, where higher values indicate less democratic political systems, and invalid votes (the sum of blank and void votes). The relationship is the same in electoral systems with compulsory or noncompulsory voting. The less democratic the political system, the greater the likelihood that blank or void votes will be cast. The dataset used for figure 1 comes from International IDEA and includes 2,771 presidential or legislative elections from 199 countries over 71 years, of which 2,078 are in non-compulsory voting systems and 693 in compulsory voting systems.<sup>1</sup>

Numerous examples across the world confirm that invalid voting (blank or void) is a form of protest in authoritarian regimes or under competitive authoritarianism. Various communist regimes that sought to use the elections as forms of endorsement of the system or a stimulus for the national unity (Swearer 1961) witnessed protests at the ballot.

The former Soviet Union had direct elections for the Supreme Soviet, where the number of candidates equaled the number of seats, with only one candidate per seat per district. Voters could abstain, vote blank, or void the ballot but could not choose between candidates competing against each other; for example, no selective voting (Gilison 1968). Gilison describes the USSR's blank vote as the "missing one percent."

Figure 1. Democracy Scores and Invalid Votes: Relationship Between Invalid Votes and the Democratic Level



Notes: Relationship as defined by Freedom House. Higher score values represent lower democratic levels. The invalid vote (blank and null/void) is calculated as a proportion of the electorate. The figure is divided on the basis of the voting system: compulsory voting systems are on the left and noncompulsory are on the right.

Source: IDEA 2015.

It would be difficult to quarrel with the prevailing view of Soviet elections in regard to the functions they perform for the 99 percent. But what of the others? Every year in which elections are held . . . approximately two million votes are cast against the official candidates, under an electoral procedure which . . . makes this act difficult, at least potentially disadvantageous, and largely ineffectual. . . . These people have apparently taken the word 'election' literally, and have made the only choice Soviet procedure allows. (Gilson 1968, 815)

Similarly, in Czechoslovakia in 1948, blank voters protested against the Communist Party, at the time the official single party on the ballot; the blank vote reached 11 percent, with peaks of 50 percent in some districts (700,000 Czechs Cast Blank Protest Ballots 1948).

The People's Republic of China has not had direct elections for its national parliament; members of the National People's Congress are chosen indirectly. However, since 1979, limited-choice elections have been introduced at the local level, in Chinese enterprises, government organizations, and academic institutions (Shi 1999). In local elections, educated voters in search of a democratic transition appear to use their limited choice to send a message to the regime regarding the quality of the candidate (Shi 1999).

Noncommunist regimes are not immune to this form of protest. In the 2004 legislative election in Iran, 1.4 million people (6 percent of the voters) “indicated their dissent by casting spoiled or voided ballots” (Samii 2004). The theocratic regime’s constraints on candidacy access generated both apathy and protest. The use of spoiled ballots was evident in some of the major urban areas (Samii 2004, 419). Starting in the 1970s, the blank vote also became a common protest option in Indonesia. The movement was called the *Golongan Putih* (blank votes group or “white” party, *Golput* for short). During President Suharto’s New Order dictatorial regime (1968–98), the blank vote was a form of protest against the regime and his many re-elections (Bayuni 2009; Ananta et al. 2005).

Even in democratic regimes, the use of blank and null votes and other forms of nonconformist voting represents conscious political decisions reflecting discontent.<sup>2</sup> Rosenthal and Sen (1973) account for blank voting as an option in their model of voting behavior. They demonstrate that this vote is influenced by short-term political factors by comparing the first and second ballot in French elections from 1958 to 1968. Herron and Sekhon (2005) show also that U.S. African American voters significantly change their rate of invalid voting depending on the presence of a black candidate on the ballot. Uggla’s 2008 cross-national analysis shows that blank and null voting is a function of the political choices available to voters through the election. Driscoll and Nelson (2014) found that both self-reported blank and null voting were driven by political concerns.<sup>3</sup>

## CUBA’S ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Cuba’s electoral system permits different forms of regime opposition. The 1976 Constitution created a National Assembly, the members of which were chosen indirectly (Domínguez 1978, 243–47). Following the collapse of European communist regimes in 1989–91 and the massive protests at Tiananmen Square, Beijing, in 1989, Cuba’s Fourth Communist Party Congress in 1991 agreed to amend the constitution and the electoral law to permit, for the first time since revolutionary victory in 1959, a direct popular vote for National Assembly deputies. In October 1992, the National Assembly approved the new electoral law. (For the law in effect for the 2013 election, see *Granma* 2005; for a sympathetic account, August 2013, chap. 7; for a critique published in Cuba, Rafuls Pineda 2014.) The key characteristics of the National Assembly’s elections pertinent to this analysis are the following:

- Single party. The Communist Party of Cuba is the only lawfully authorized party (1976 Constitution, Article 5).
- Self-nomination is prohibited. Candidacy commissions, whose members are drawn from the officially sponsored mass organizations (*Ley Electoral*, Article 68), screen candidates before they are considered by the municipal assembly (*Ley Electoral*, Article 89).
- One seat, one candidate. Only municipal assemblies choose candidates for deputy, and they must choose only one candidate for each post to be filled

(Ley Electoral, Article 92). Candidates may but need not be Communist Party members.

- Posting photos and biographies and limiting campaigns. Only the electoral district commissions—not the candidates—may draft the biographies and post them and the photos of the candidates (Ley Electoral, Article 30ch). These biographies follow a standard format and are posted outside each voting location for voters to see before voting. Candidates do not campaign.
- Multiple candidates per district. Each district votes on at least two candidates for at least two seats. The most populous electoral districts may elect more deputies, though the number of candidates always equals the number of seats to be filled (Ley Electoral, Articles 14 and 15).
- Voter choice. A voter “may vote for as many candidates as may appear” on the ballot, with an X next to each name, but if “the voter wishes to vote for all the candidates the voter may write an X at the circle that appears at the top of the ballot” (Ley Electoral, Article 110). The voter may leave the ballot blank, or void it. No candidate for deputy in the National Assembly has been defeated.

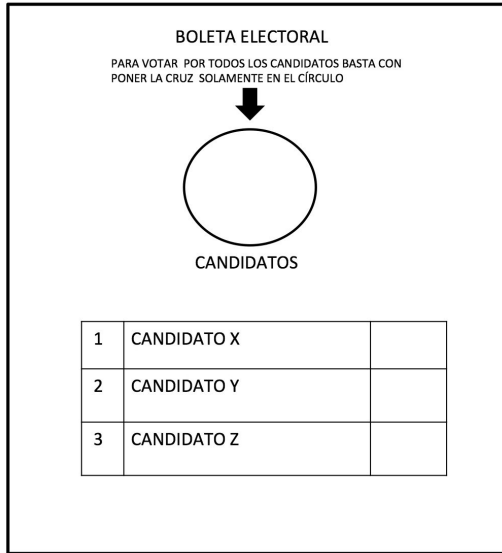
Therefore, the Cuban electoral law allows every voter to support *el voto unido*, marking an “X” for the entire official slate, or to vote for some but not all of the candidates, even though all candidates will be elected. Voters may express support or displeasure at the voting booth by voting blank, voiding the ballot, or voting selectively. The blank and void voters are the rejectionists; the selective voters are the loyalists.

Figure 2 shows the ballot. Voting is secret; the counting of the ballots is public and held at each voting district (Ley Electoral, Article 112). The ballot features the option for the official united slate front and center, and then lists the individual candidates for voters who choose to vote for some but not all of them. Table 1 shows the voting patterns for the National Assembly. Turnout is defined as the number of actual voters as a percentage of registered voters; it was consistently high, although it dropped from 97 percent to 91 percent between 2008 and 2013.

Between the first direct election for the National Assembly in 1993 and the 2008 election, the loyalist and rejectionist share of the votes cast varied little. It took opposition voters until the 2008 election, the first under Raúl Castro, to prefer the selective vote over blank or void (figure 3). Between 2008 and 2013, the three forms of nonconformist voting increased, but the selective vote rose the most. In 2013, the official press refrained from calling for *el voto unido* for the first time ever (August 2014, 89), though the ballot did not change. In 2013, nearly a quarter of Cuban voters were nonconformists; that is, the combined loyalist and rejectionist opposition—more than 1.8 million voters.

Selective voters always vote for at least one official candidate, thereby sustaining the regime, but contrary to the Communist Party’s preference, never for the entire slate, thereby signaling opposition. Selective voters no doubt include some who lack information about the candidates and therefore skip those they do not know. The

Figure 2. Example of a Ballot for a District with Three Candidates



The note at the top says: “To vote for all candidates it suffices just to put a cross in the circle.”  
Reproduction from the original ballot in *Granma* 2013a.

spike in selective voting during the 2013 election, however, responds to increased permissible choice in advance of that election. Selective and blank/void vote shares diverge in 2013 because the selective vote reflects this new opportunity whereas the blank/void vote option remains unchanged. Rejectionist voters never vote for an official candidate, thereby opposing the entire slate.

### CUBA’S POLITICAL CONTEXT

Examining Cuba’s political context yields qualitative evidence of the existence of loyal and rejectionist opposition. Cubans have debated the desirability and wisdom of a loyal or rejectionist opposition since the early 1990s. The principal nonelectoral example akin to the loyalist opposition was the Proyecto Varela, led by the late Oswaldo Payá. Cuba’s 1992 Constitution, Article 88g, accords voters the right to initiate legislation, provided that ten thousand voters sign the petition. In 2002, Payá presented a legislative initiative with 11,200 signatures, and in 2004 he presented another with 14,000 signatures. His initiatives addressed various topics, including electoral law reform to permit candidate self-nomination and multiple candidates per seat. Payá’s projects exemplified the loyalist opposition because he acted under the constitution to propose a new law via citizen initiative. The National Assembly did not accept the petitions, alleging that they did not meet some legal requirements.



Table 1. Voting for Cuba's National Assembly elections (percentages)

	1993	2008	2013
Selective vote (loyalists)	4.6	9.1	18.7
Blank vote (rejectionists)	N.A.	3.7	4.6
Void/null vote (rejectionists)	N.A.	1.0	1.2
Rejectionist total (blank + void/null)	7.0	4.8	5.8
Nonconformist total (loyalists + rejectionists)	11.6	13.9	24.5
Turnout	N.A.	96.9	90.9

Source: *Granma* 1993, 2008c, 2013.

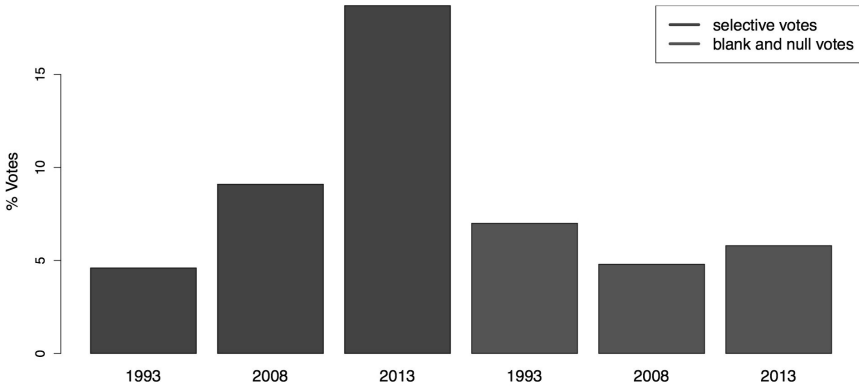
Another public debate opened up near the start of the 2010s. The main proponents of the “loyal opposition” concept were Roberto Veiga and Lenier González, the editors of *Espacio Laical*, a magazine founded in 2005, sponsored by the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Havana. It addressed social, economic, political, and religious topics. In 2014, González and Veiga resigned as the magazine’s editors, founded the civic organization Cuba Posible, and continued to advocate for the concept of a loyal opposition, applying it to themselves. “In practice,” González has written, “the loyal opposition would face the concrete challenge of pushing against the prevailing systemic limitations toward broader civic and political liberties, preserving the social and political achievements since 1959. . .” (*Cuba Posible* 2015, 9).

The group and, more important, the point of view is opposition because it explicitly disagrees with the Communist Party’s voting preferences and because it seeks genuine political change, including a change in the electoral law to permit effective competition between candidates and their organizations. It is loyal because it operates under the law; it disavows political violence and the subversive intent associated with the U.S. policies under the rubric of the Helms-Burton Act (The Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidary Act of 1996). Cuba Posible’s published articles feature even the views of its critics, who reject the regime thoroughly (*Cuba Posible* 2015).

The public debate fostered by Cuba Posible has unfolded thus far mainly among intellectuals with Internet access; it has not referred to voting behavior, yet the terms of this Cuban debate dovetail with the voting behavior concepts this article explores. The selective vote is one operational indicator of what Cuba Posible participants may mean by their self-identification as a loyal opposition; Cuba Posible widens the prospects for civic and political liberties under Cuban law. Its critics illustrate the rejectionist opposition, many of whom reside outside Cuba—an existential substitute for the blank or void vote.

Senior officials keep track of nonconformist voting. For example, following the nationwide April 2000 municipal elections, the president of the National Election Council (*Comisión Electoral Nacional*, CEN), Roberto Díaz Sotolongo, noted with satisfaction that voting abstention and the proportion of blank and void ballots had fallen from the 1997 nationwide municipal election. Díaz added that

Figure 3. Nonconformist Voting in Cuba’s National Assembly in Three Elections (percentages)



Source: *Granma* 1993, 2008, 2013b.

voting in Cuba offered the option of voting for no candidate (Mayoral 2000). Moreover, regime-sponsored neighborhood Committees for the Defense of the Revolution and groups of students are officially tasked with contacting voters to turn out, and job promotions or the allocation of benefits may include verification of having voted.

These contacts increase turnout but may create apprehension about the possible adverse consequences of voter abstention (López 1993, 52; Guanche 2012, 78). Until the 2008 National Assembly election, regime-sponsored mass organizations urged voters to vote for the single slate (*Granma* 2008a). The official newspaper’s report on the 2008 election highlighted the “triumph of the united vote” (*Granma* 2008b), thereby calling attention to voting other than for the entire slate. Because officials have emphasized the united vote, the selective vote has become a form of opposition within the regime; for example, citizens are not behaving as the Communist Party wants them to behave.

Cuba’s context makes the job of regime-sponsored organizations easier and a public debate difficult. The state owns and operates all television and radio stations and all the daily newspapers. Individual candidate campaigning is prohibited, as is financing for individual campaigns. Only the Communist Party of Cuba is legal. In such a low-information, authoritarian context, voters look for the few available clues to determine whether to vote for the entire official slate, vote selectively, or vote blank or void. One clue is a set of officially generated short biographies of each National Assembly candidate; these are posted in each district and are visible at or near the polling places.

This study focuses on the February 2013 National Assembly election, the first for which the government published the pertinent data and for which official institutions did not intensively campaign in favor of casting a ballot for the entire official single

slate. It was the first when both loyalist and rejectionist opposition voters blossomed.

Cuba's gross domestic product per capita in constant prices fell 34 percent from 1990 to 1993. There followed a slow recovery until the start of the new century, a growth spurt in mid-decade, followed by a marked deceleration, and very slow growth since the 2008–9 financial crisis (Pérez Villanueva 2004, 51; 2012, 22; 2016). Raúl Castro replaced his brother Fidel as Cuba's president (acting president August 2006–February 2008, president since then). His fall 2010 announcement of a new economic policy, called the Lineamientos, was associated at the start with the reduction in state employment, which fell by 550,500 employees from 2010 to 2013—a 13.2 percent cut (computed from ONEI 2012, table 7.2; 2014, table 7.2). That may have spiked unease and loyalist selective voting in the 2013 election.

By 2013, the voters felt freer to choose. Cuba experienced a gradual opening of the public sphere under Raúl Castro's presidency. There was a more open and vigorous debate at the University of Havana regarding economic and social policies. In the 1990s, *Temas*, a social sciences journal written for a general university-educated reader, began publication and, during Raúl Castro's years, widened its scope. In 2005, *Espacio Laical* was launched. Raúl Castro's daughter, Mariela, became a public advocate for gay rights, helping to shift the government from its hitherto homophobic policies (1960s to 1980s).

In 2008, the Communist Party's official newspaper, *Granma*, resumed publishing weekly letters to the editor, which had been suspended a quarter-century earlier (*Granma* 2008d). Subsequently, *Granma*'s digital edition began to publish comments on some of its articles, as did the Communist Youth Union's official newspaper *Juventud Rebelde*'s digital edition. In 2013, Cuba had only 90 personal computers per thousand people, and 261 people per thousand had some Internet access (ONEI 2015, table 17.4). Cuba Posible runs an Internet site to which the Cuban government permits access.

Cuba's online political debate expanded among that small minority of its citizens with Internet access. In February 2015, in anticipation of municipal elections, *Juventud Rebelde* hosted an online forum about the Cuban electoral system with members of the CEN (*Juventud Rebelde* 2015). Online participants raised the following challenges to the electoral law, which the newspaper's online edition published:

- The president and the vice presidents of the Council of State should be elected by direct popular vote, not indirectly by the National Assembly, as is currently the case.
- Blank votes should be counted to prevent the election of unpopular candidates. A candidate should win a majority of the votes cast, not merely a majority of the votes cast after discounting blank and void votes.
- The number of candidates should exceed the number of seats up for election.
- There should be more than one political party able to contest an election.

These are the views of a loyal opposition; all indicate that the Cuba Posible intellectuals have a real constituency that favors wider political change under the

law. These critics take Cuban elections seriously but want them to become more competitive, enabling choice without the prevailing restrictions.

## DATA, HYPOTHESES, AND VARIABLES

Our units of analysis are, for the likelihood of selective voting, Cuba's municipalities (168) and, for that of blank and null voting, Cuba's provinces (16), since blank and null voting has been reported only at the provincial level. We collected and coded the officially published biographies of all 621 National Assembly members elected in 2013 and aggregated them by municipality. The biographies include a photograph, information about the candidate's life, education, employment, awards won, participation in various organizations, and previous political experience. One-third of the candidates mentioned membership in the Communist Party of Cuba (CCP), and five hundred held a university degree. We also have data on each candidate's vote share in 2013; it ranges from 99.993 percent to 66.629 percent. The CCP newspaper, *Granma*, published the biographies and the vote shares for the first time ever in 2013; Cuba has published no additional information for this or previous elections.

There are no individual or other public opinion data on voting or voting intention. Ours is not a study of individual voting behavior but of voting outcomes for the official slate. Therefore we employ aggregate data at the municipal and provincial levels to understand aggregate outcomes—voting for the official slate, selectively, or not at all.

We combine the data on individual candidates with the features and characteristics of the municipalities where these candidates ran for national deputy. The demographic and socioeconomic data for the municipalities come from the *Anuarios Estadísticos Municipales 2013*, while their distance from the capital city of each municipality is from Google maps (see descriptive statistics, appendix table 3). The provincial data come from the official reports of the election results, published by *Granma* (see descriptive statistics, appendix table 4).

We focus on selective voting and blank and void voting. Selective voting may be studied at the municipal level, whereas blank and void voting, as a proportion of registered voters in 2013, can be studied only at the provincial level. At the provincial level, our key explanation focuses on the average proportion of party members who are candidates in a municipality.

Each type of opposition uses a different form of nonconformist voting. Our expectation about these two types of opposition is in line with that of Shi (1999) for China's local elections. Shi found that with a small opening and some possibility of choice after 1979, better-educated and -informed citizens shifted from abstention to express their choice; some voters signaled the regime regarding the quality of the local candidates, even if they also hoped for a larger systemic opening. Similarly, Bahry and Silver's 1990 study of Soviet immigrants in the United States shows that those who were younger, educated, interested in politics, and unhappy with the

political and economic system were more likely to be “unconventional” participants (including nonvoters).

Therefore, in Cuba, we expect nonconformist voting to be more likely in areas with more educated voters, with a higher percentage of urban population, or voters living closer to Havana. Better-informed people are more likely to be highly educated and to live in or near Havana or in other large urban areas. Moreover, in a highly centralized regime, Havana is the nerve center for political rule. (We expect the individuals with lower education and lower interest in politics to choose the “united vote,” the option that requires no effort and minimal information.)

Loyalists would not necessarily reject the CCP candidates; they vote selectively among candidates regardless of the affiliation. However, rejectionist blank and null voters are tougher regime opponents. Rejection should still be more likely in educated areas and where more information is available (in cities or geographically closer to Havana). Voting blank or voiding the ballot is a more complex choice than staying home, given that voting is not compulsory, and yet turnout was 90 percent in the 2013 elections. As in Czechoslovakia in 1948, rejectionists might repudiate the CCP and protest its monopoly over the ballot. This leads to the following hypotheses:

- H1. The loyalist opposition votes selectively within the official slate and does not systematically reject the ruling party. Therefore, selective voting should not correlate with the percentage of CCP candidates in a municipality.*
- H2. The rejectionist opposition repudiates the CCP. Therefore, blank and null voting should correlate positively with the average proportion of CCP candidates on the ballot: the higher the proportion of CCP candidates, the higher the proportion of blank and null votes.*
- H3. All forms of opposition require information. Therefore, nonconformist voting should be more common closer to the capital, in urban areas, and in areas where people are more educated. The more urban, closer to the capital city, or better-informed voters are more likely to vote selectively, blank, or void.*

In H3, distance is a proxy for less-strict political control and more access to nonofficial information, including political, intellectual, and civic debates.

## **THE MUNICIPAL-LEVEL ANALYSIS: SELECTIVE VOTING**

This section uses municipal-level data. The dependent variable is *selective voting* as an outcome for the entire official slate, here operationalized at the level of the slate as 1 minus the lowest vote share in each municipality; this is the most precise measure of the proportion of voters who supported at least one but never all of the candidates on the official slate.<sup>4</sup> As key independent (explanatory and control) variables, we use the *proportion of CCP*, which represents the average proportion of CCP candidates per municipality; the *distance in km* (kilometers) between each municipality

and the City of Havana; the percentage of the *urban population* in each municipality; and the level of *education*, defined as the number of secondary (junior high school) graduates (ages 13–15) in each municipality in 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013 as a proportion of those between the ages of 15 and 19 in 2013.<sup>5</sup>

Further controls are the proportion of black candidates (*black proportion*), male candidates (*male proportion*), and *new candidates* (candidates participating in their first election), all for the official slate as a whole.<sup>6</sup> In addition, we include the logarithm of the population (*log population*). All else equal, larger populations offer more opportunities for political discussion among those with similar political attitudes; we also control thereby that the relationship between education and votes would not be completely captured by the size of the population. All specifications include either *district magnitude group* dummies (we assigned a 1 to  $M < 2.5$ , 2 to  $2.5 < M < 3.5$ , 3 to  $3.5 \leq M < 4.5$ , 4 to  $M \geq 4.5$ ) or a simple dummy equal to 0 if the district is of  $M = 2$ , and 1 if larger. The inclusion of these variables keeps constant in our analysis those structural features of the ballots that might influence different levels of selective voting. By including dummy variables for the district magnitudes, we compare the prevalence of selective voting within groups of municipalities where voters had the same number of options in terms of candidates to choose from. Having more or fewer options could have an effect on voters' behaviors. Furthermore, columns 1–3 and 6 and 7 in table 2 add *province* dummies to control for the political features of the different provinces. Our analysis in this section has four explanatory variables: distance from Havana, CCP presence, percentage of the population that lives in urban areas, and education.

The estimations use two different samples. Figure 4 shows that there is a strong and positive relation between education and the use of selective voting up to the 95th percentile of the distribution. The figure also shows that there are three outliers in the education data, which are close to 1 or higher than 1; this would mean that everyone between the ages of 15 and 19 graduated from junior high school between 2010 and 2013. Because this is most probably due to measurement error, we exclude these observations and use the resulting sample (sample 1) in table 2.<sup>7</sup> In table 2, we also use a more restricted sample (sample 2) that excludes the province of Havana to show that our results do not depend entirely on the data from Havana.

Table 2 shows a strong positive relationship between the level of education and the likelihood of selective voting. The results hold when we use different district magnitude dummy variables and also when we exclude the province of Havana (sample 2). These results support hypothesis 3.

Both variables *distance from Havana* and *percentage of urban population* are indicators for relative ease of voter information acquisition. In the city of Havana and in other larger cities, voters are more likely to have good access to information about the candidates. Columns 4 and 5 test the relationship between the distance from Havana and selective voting. All else equal, the negative coefficient of distance in table 2 shows that the municipalities far from Havana are less likely to harbor selective voting.<sup>8</sup> Columns 6 and 7 test this relationship using instead the percentage of the population that lives in urban areas in the municipality. The results show a pos-

Table 2. Selective Voting as a Function of Education, Party Presence, Percentage of Urban Population, and Distance from Havana

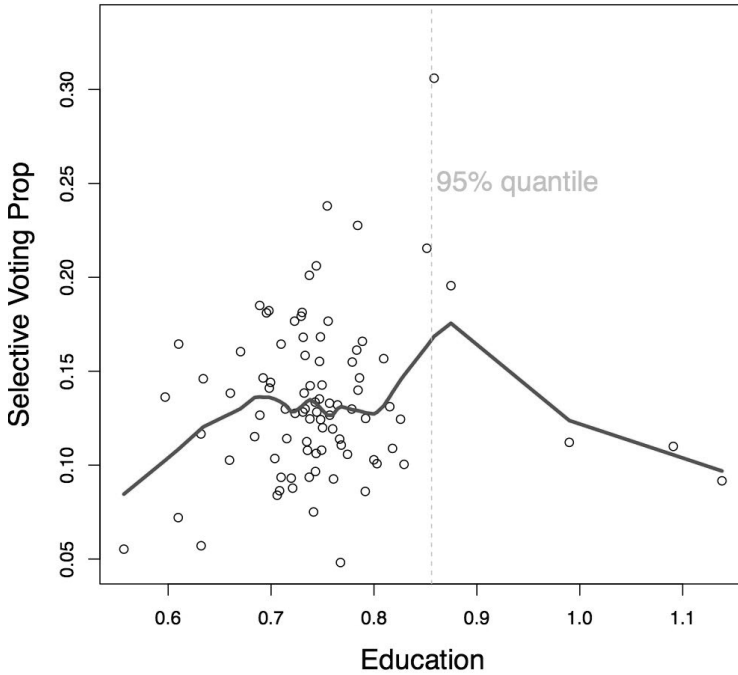
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Sample 1 <sup>a</sup>	Sample 1	Sample 2 <sup>a</sup>	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 1	Sample 2
Education	0.188** (0.077)	0.181** (0.077)	0.166* (0.090)	0.185*** (0.070)	0.173** (0.079)	0.145** (0.070)	0.119 (0.082)
Distance (unit: 100 km)				-0.0045*** (0.001)	-0.0037** (0.002)		
Proportion urban						0.155*** (0.039)	0.152*** (0.041)
Proportion CCP member	0.0194 (0.015)	0.0191 (0.015)	0.0225 (0.016)	0.0138 (0.015)	0.0180 (0.015)	0.0181 (0.014)	0.0201 (0.015)
Proportion new candidates	-0.0031 (0.013)	-0.0026 (0.013)	0.0007 (0.014)	0.0007 (0.013)	0.004 (0.013)	-0.0077 (0.012)	-0.004 (0.013)
Log population	0.0248** (0.010)	0.0267*** (0.010)	0.0255** (0.011)	0.0307*** (0.008)	0.0245** (0.010)	0.0089 (0.010)	0.0094 (0.011)
Proportion black	-0.0104 (0.019)	-0.0096 (0.019)	-0.0069 (0.021)	0.0046 (0.017)	0.0041 (0.018)	-0.0110 (0.017)	-0.0069 (0.019)
Proportion male	0.0011 (0.017)	0.0006 (0.017)	0.0044 (0.019)	0.0150 (0.015)	0.0153 (0.016)	0.0037 (0.015)	0.0075 (0.017)
District magnitude group dummies	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District magnitude: 2 or higher	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Province fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	85	85	75	84	74	85	75
R-squared	0.490	0.488	0.382	0.383	0.254	0.592	0.508

<sup>a</sup>Sample 1 excludes the municipalities in the top fifth percentile of the distribution in terms of levels of education. Sample 2 excludes, in addition, the province of Havana.

Standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Figure 4. Education and Selective Voting Relationship



Note: Includes outliers with values close to or above 1.

itive relationship between a more urban population and the use of selective voting.<sup>9</sup> These results also support hypothesis 3.

In addition, there is no significant relationship between the proportion of CCP party members and selective voting in any of the models. This confirms hypothesis 1: selective voting does not imply a rejection of the CCP or the regime.

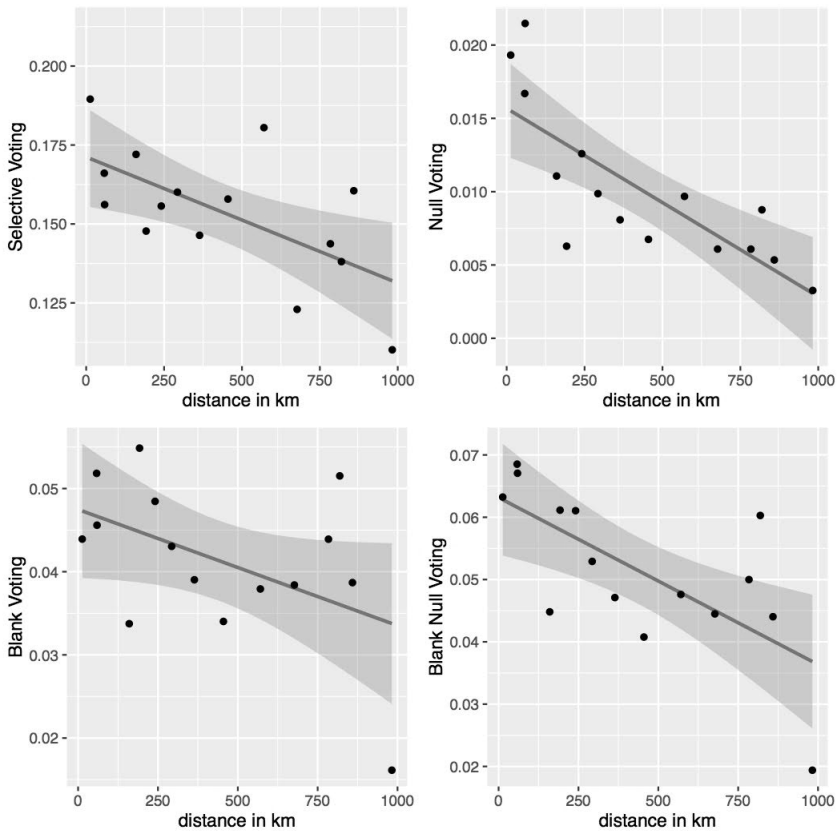
### THE PROVINCIAL-LEVEL ANALYSIS: BLANK AND VOID VOTING

We next look at the outcome for the entire official slate at the provincial level because blank and void votes are reported only at this level. In this section, nonconformist voting is treated as a proportion of the electoral census population in each province (registered voters). The three provinces with the highest levels of blank and null votes are Havana and two neighboring provinces, Artemisa and Mayabeque, which were part of Havana Province until 2011.

The concentration of the blank and null vote in Havana and its neighboring provinces is shown in figure 5. All three forms of nonconformist voting (selective, blank, and void voting) are more likely in areas close to Havana. As previously



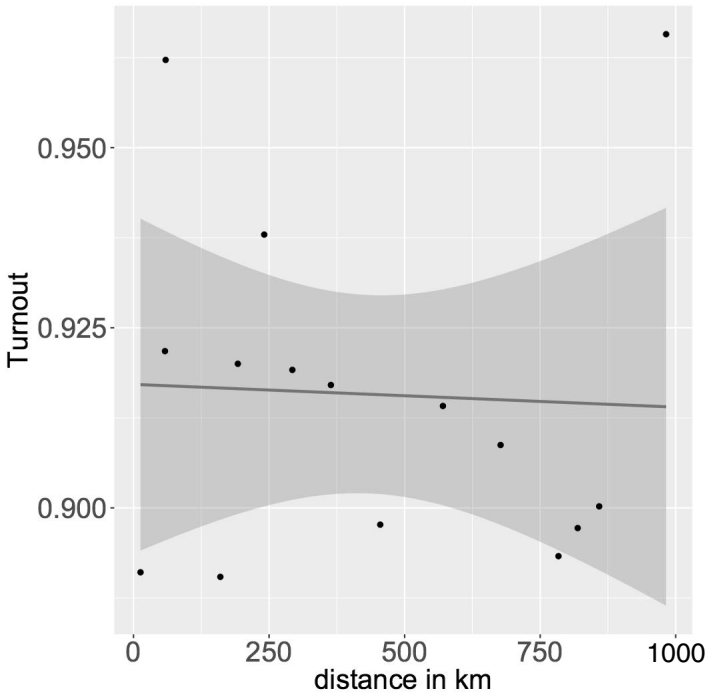
Figure 5. Nonconformist Voting and Distance from Havana



noted, opposition of any kind is more likely in areas with more exposure to political debate and politics in general; this further supports hypothesis 3.

There is, however, no clear relationship between turnout and distance from Havana (figure 6). The nonconformist voting variables depend on law-abiding citizens' turning out on election day. The lack of correlation between turnout and distance from the capital city is a good check concerning a possible alternative interpretation of a relationship between nonconformist voting and distance. Some observers might suspect that official organizations manipulate the vote; thus the relationship between nonconformist voting and distance from the capital might be a proxy of official control on the population far from Havana. However, if this were the case, we would also see that same variable having high impact on turnout, given that regime-sponsored organizations have continued to mobilize to turn out the vote. Yet these official organizations succeed only in equalizing turnout across the national territory; they do not have comparably uniform effects on how citizens vote. Official clout works on turnout, not on voting.

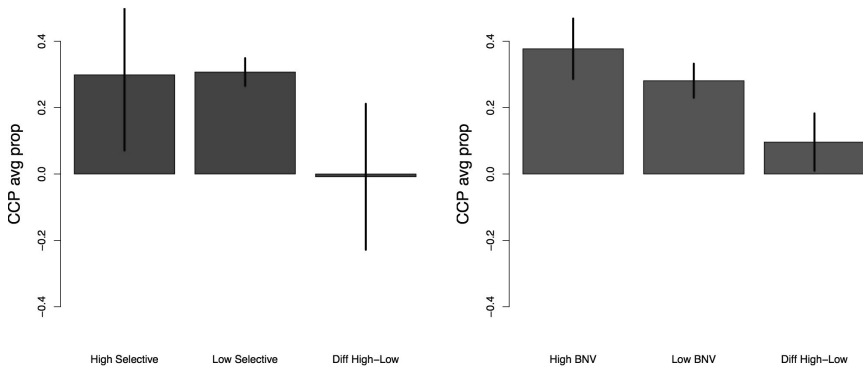
Figure 6. Turnout and Distance



We turn to the key variable to explain the difference between selective voting and blank and null voting; namely, the relative proportion of Communist Party members on the ballot. While the selective voting is a “loyal” form of opposition that does not reject the regime, blank and null votes are expected to be negatively correlated with the presence of CCP members (hypotheses 1 and 2).

Given the limitation of the data (16 observations), we can test our expectation only with simple differences in means tests (t-tests), the results of which are plotted on the bar plots of figure 7. We distinguish between provinces with high levels of selective voting and provinces with high blank and null voting (defined as higher than the third quartile of the distribution).<sup>10</sup> We operationalize CCP average presence as the provincial average of the proportions of CCP members at the municipal level. The panel on the left shows that there is no difference in the average presence of CCP members on the ballot across different levels of selective voting (table 2 shows a similar finding at the municipal level). The panel on the right presents, by contrast, quite different results for blank and null voting (BNV) as a proportion of the census population per province. Compared to other provinces, CCP presence on the ballot is significantly higher in provinces with high blank and null votes. The difference in the proportion of CCP members is around 10 percent, significant at the .95 percent confidence level.

Figure 7. Average Presence of Party Members on the Ballot and Nonconformist Voting



Note: Selective voting on the left and blank and null voting together on the right.

Moreover, the expected relationship between nonconformist voting and education is confirmed only for the selective vote and null vote, while the evidence of the impact of education on blank voting is inconclusive (see figure 8 in the appendix), thereby slightly qualifying hypothesis 3 for the blank vote component.

## CONCLUSIONS

Cuba's 2013 National Assembly election increased the choices available to Cuban citizens. That Cuba holds such a direct parliamentary election stands in contrast to the People's Republic of China, which does not. In 2013, the Communist Party of Cuba, state media, the mass organizations, and other official entities continued to promote a high turnout but, for the first time, did not press every voter to vote for every candidate on the ballot. In such Cuban elections, the number of seats equals the number of candidates (as in the former Soviet Union), but Cuba's electoral law features multiple-member districts. This allows a voter to vote selectively for some but not all candidates (unlike in the former Soviet Union), while still ensuring that all candidates will be elected. Cuban elections have long permitted voters to vote blank or to void their ballots. These electoral law features permit, as scholars of authoritarian regimes have long argued, the lawful manifestation of discontent ("safety valves"), and also enable top elites to monitor the size of the opposition and the effectiveness of their own cadres.

This article has focused on the opposition outcomes through the ballot; that is, election day outcomes at odds with Communist Party preferences. We distinguish between two kinds of oppositions at the ballot, the loyalists and the rejectionists. This is the first article to do so for the study of Cuba, highlighting the size and variation of forms of opposition on election day. The loyalists are oppositionists because

they never follow the Communist Party's preference to vote for the entire slate. Loyalists vote selectively for some but not all candidates within the official slate, yet their loyalty also sustains the regime, voting for the better official candidates and choosing them for quality (as in local elections in China). The rejectionists remain law-abiding but indicate their much stronger opposition to the regime by voting blank or nullifying their ballot. The sum of loyalists and rejectionists we have called the nonconformist voters. This study has analyzed official slate outcomes, employing aggregate municipal and provincial data.

From analyses at both the municipal and provincial levels, this study has shown that all kinds of nonconformist voting are more likely in or near the capital city, Havana, in larger urban areas, and in more highly educated areas, in all of which political information and public debate are more prevalent. This is what the nonconformists have in common. But nonconformists differ in their responsiveness to the Communist Party. The loyalists vote selectively within the official slate and seem agnostic with regard to the party; the relationship between the likelihood of selective voting and the proportion of Communist Party candidates on the ballot is not statistically significant. In contrast, the ire of the rejectionists is evident when Communist Party candidates monopolize the official ballot; blank and null voting is higher in such instances.

Our findings clearly support the scholarly findings that blank and null voting reflects political concerns. It remains for future research to ascertain whether Cuban leaders listen to the message of the two kinds of opposition that nearly a quarter of their citizens report on election day, and thus to assess whether either type of electoral opposition has impact on the behavior of rulers beyond the election.

## **APPENDIX: MUNICIPALITIES INCLUDED IN THE ANALYSIS**

Abreus, Aguada de Pasajeros, Alquízar, Amancio Rodríguez, Antilla, Arroyo Naranjo, Artemisa, Banes, Baraguá, Bauta, Bayamo, Bejucal, Boyeros, Buey Arriba, Cabaiguán, Cacocum, Caibarién, Caimito, Camagüey, Camajuani, Campechuela, Candelaria, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Centro Habana, Cerro, Cienfuegos, Cifuentes, Ciro Redondo, Corralillo, Cruces, Cueto, Cumanayagua, Diez de Octubre, Encrucijada, Esmeralda, Florencia, Florida, Fomento, Frank País, Gibara, Guáimaro, Guanabacoa, Guanajay, Guantánamo, Güines, Güira de Melena, Holguín, Isla de la Juventud, Jatibonico, Jesús Menéndez, Jobado, Lajas, La Lisa, La Siempre, Madruga, Marianao, Martí, Mayarí, Media Luna, Moa, Nuevitas, Palma Soriano, Palmira, Placetas, Playa, Plaza de la Revolución, Quemado de Güines, Quivicán, Rafael Freyre, Ranchuelo, Remedios, Río Cauto, Rodas, Sagua de Tánamo, Sagua la Grande, San Antonio de los Baños, San Cristóbal, Sancti Spiritus, San Miguel del Padrón, San Nicolás, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz del Sur, Santo Domingo, Segundo Frente, Sibanicú, Sierra de Cubitas, Taguasco, Urbano Noris, Vertientes (total 168).

Table 3. Summary Statistics of Municipalities

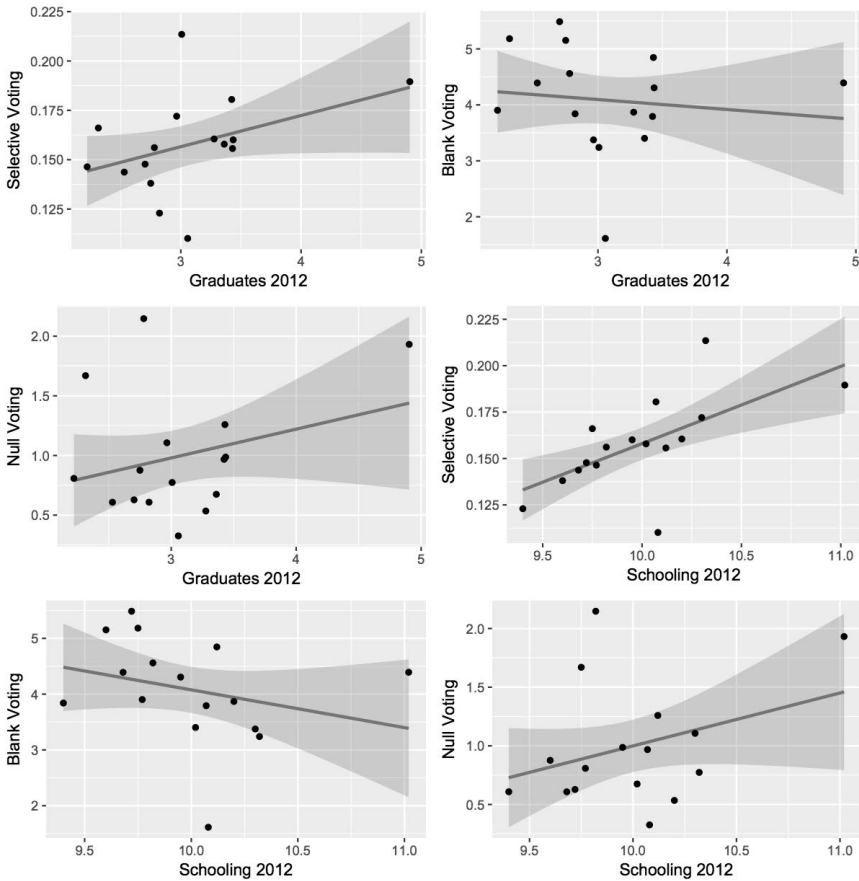
	1st		Median	Mean	3rd		N
	Minimum	Quarter			Quarter	Maximum	
Selective voting	0.048	0.103	0.125	0.130	0.148	0.334	168
Education	0.557	0.710	0.743	0.748	0.774	1.138	89
Proportion female	0	0.429	0.5	0.509	0.667	1	168
Prop. CCP	0	0	0.333	0.293	0.5	1	168
Prop. black	0	0	0	0.193	0.477	1	168
Prop. incumbent	0	0	0.25	0.274	0.5	1	168
Prop. new candidates	0	0.2	0.5	0.412	0.5	1	168
Population in 2013	9,219	30,022	42,766	66,919.24	74,193	508,528	167
Distance in km.	1	146	340	42,689	765	1,085	166
Percentage urban	0.101	0.567	0.682	0.670	0.807	1	168

Table 4. Summary Statistics of Provinces

	1st		Median	Mean	3rd		NA
	Minimum	Quarter			Quarter	Maximum	
Selective voting proportion	.11	.15	.16	.16	.17	.21	0
BNV	0.02	0.04	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.07	0
Mean prop. CCP	0.18	0.24	0.29	0.31	0.33	0.50	0
Null voting	0.003	0.006	0.008	0.01	0.01	0.02	0
Blank voting	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.06	0

Provinces included in the analysis: Artemisa, Camagüey, Ciego de Ávila, Cienfuegos, Granma, Guantánamo, Holguín, Isla de la Juventud, La Habana, Las Tunas, Matanzas, Mayabeque, Pinar del Río, Sancti Spiritus, Santiago de Cuba, and Villa Clara (total 16).

Figure 8. Nonconformist Voting and Education at the Provincial Level



### NOTES

1. In the original dataset from IDEA.int, six elections in Burundi, Germany, and Indonesia were missing the compulsory system variables. However, none of these countries has ever had compulsory voting systems, so we recoded them as “No.”

2. For a different position, see McAllister and Makkai 1993 and their study of Australian elections.

3. In support of this argument, see also Stiefbold 1965; Zulfikarpasic 2001. For findings on the possible multiple nature of this vote, see Damore et al. 2012; Power and Garand 2007.

4. For the cases in which municipalities had more than one district, we averaged this measure of selective voting across districts to get a municipality-level measure; our demographic data are available only at the level of the municipality.

5. Regarding the proportion of graduates, a few municipalities had unexpectedly large values for 2013. Therefore we use the total sum of the graduates from the years 2010, 2011,

2012, and 2013 as a proportion of the population of the relevant age in 2013. Junior high school (*secundaria básica*) ends at age 15, so including at least four years of its graduates gives a better count of the proportion of 15-to-19-year-olds who have graduated from that level of schooling.

6. The race variable was assigned by coders who looked at the pictures and compared the candidates to a skin color chart. We then dichotomized this variable using only black and white. We used the chart that LAPOP (Latin American Public Opinion Project) developed for its 2012 survey. It has a scale of 11 colors to classify its survey respondents.

7. The estimations using the full sample are available on request.

8. We do not include province fixed effects along with the distance variable because this would compare cases within the provinces, and the distance variable would then display too little variation to estimate the effect properly. The results including province fixed effects in the regressions with the distance variable are available on request.

9. We examine distance from Havana and percentage of urban population separately because they are highly collinear.

10. We tested the same with the .9 quantile as the threshold; the results were consistent. Using the median, we got consistent substantive results but with a smaller difference between high and low BNV, which was not statistically significant.

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