



# What do we know about turnout?

A background to discussing innovation in voter participation

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## Election Mechanics

Turnout goes up with...

- Easy access to polling stations
- Facilities for the disabled
- Mobile ballot boxes - but integrity issues!
- Absentee voting - but both cost and integrity issues!
- Rest day voting?



## Political environment

Turnout is higher in...

- An election that is close overall
- A close election in an individual district

Turnout is lower in...

- An election where the political system is fragmented



# Design of Institutions and Electoral Systems

Turnout goes up linked to...

- Compulsory voting - but only if enforced
- Electoral system choice - PR increases participation (average about 8%)
- Making electoral districts competitive - boundary delimitation matters
- Election results that make a difference to what government does and how effectively!



## Who participates?

- Once their right to vote is well established, more women than men vote
- Most of the people who engage in other political activity are voters as well
- In some countries, more interest in politics but turnout going down!  
Explanation - less automatic party loyalty



## Votes at 18 - or.....?

- 'A well-intentioned decision with the unanticipated consequence of giving rise to a lifetime of disenfranchisement for many of the intended beneficiaries' (Mark Franklin)
- Especially true of young people who move around
- Not practical politics to abolish votes at 18
- Would 16 be better - or even worse?



## Socialisation to vote

- The three election principle - if you're not a voter after your first three elections, you never will be
- Voter education for the over 30s may win awards but be almost useless!
- How do people gain political knowledge?
- How can local elections engage the young and mobile?



## Urgent action, but caution!

- If today's young people are not engaged, turnout is going to get worse before it gets better
- In developing countries, young people are a high proportion of the electorate
- It may take 10 years to show effects of changes - and another 40 may be needed to undo them





## Innovation - how far are we prepared to go?

- At an election about ten years ago, everyone who voted in a local election in Evenes, northern Norway, was entered in a lottery.
- The lottery winner received an air ticket to the Mediterranean which could be used during the Norwegian winter.
- Turnout went up by about 10%...