

# Impact of Electoral Reforms on Voter Participation in Bulgaria and the EU (2021-2024)

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## *Electoral Effects of Political Finance Regulation in the European Union (2012–2024)*

### Research Question

This study examines how different regulatory models across the EU shape electoral competition, party system structure, and the effectiveness of campaign spending in the digital era.



Comparative dataset covering all 27 EU member states

### Method

Hierarchical cluster analysis (Ward–Euclidean) identifies:

#### Regulatory models:

- Light-rule / enforcement-driven
- Transparency-centered
- Comprehensive (maximalist)

#### Campaign regimes:

- High-spend / low-return
- Lean & effective
- Low-spend / low-engagement

### Core Findings

- Restrictive regimes increase stability but reduce adaptability
- Public funding stabilizes but may cartelize
- Generous subsidies reinforce party institutionalization and raise entry barriers

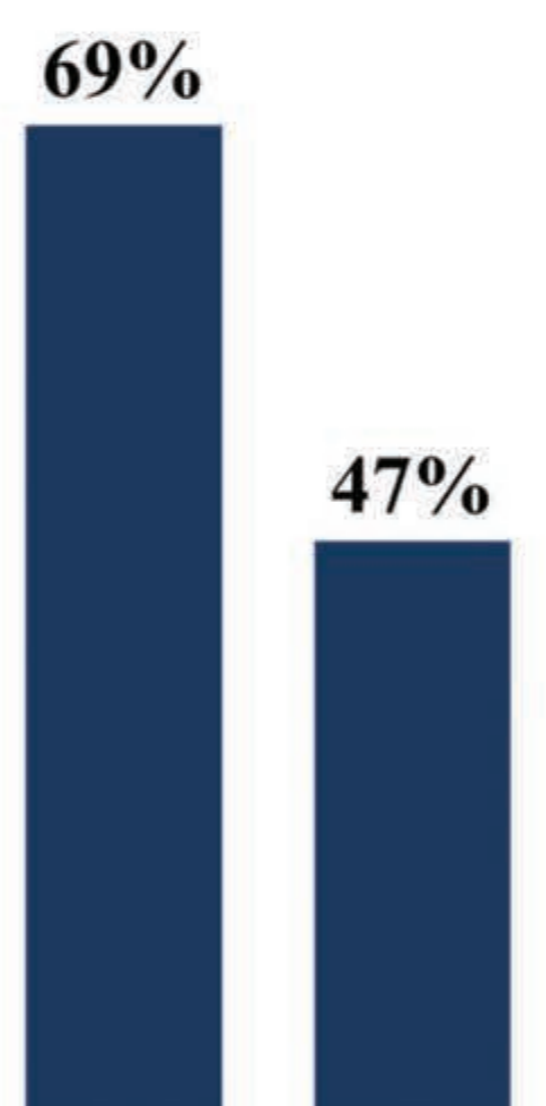
## *The Resilience and Limits of the Second-Order Model: A Comparative Turnout Analysis of EU Elections (1999–2024)*

### Research Question

The study evaluates the empirical validity of the second-order elections model across all EU Member States over a 25-year period.

### Method

- Turnout in subsequent national elections rebounds to pre-EP levels, confirming cyclical demobilization
- The turnout gap narrows slightly after 2014, driven by declining national participation, not increased EU mobilization



Average turnout: National and European elections

**Turnout remains significantly higher in national elections**

### Core Findings

- European Parliament elections remain structurally peripheral within national electoral hierarchies
- Since 2014, weaker second-order patterns suggest growing politicization, crises, and institutional integration

## *Electoral Management in Bulgaria: Effects on Voter Participation and Democratic Quality*

### Research Question

Bulgaria combines chronically low voter turnout with exceptionally low public trust in electoral integrity. The study investigates whether deficiencies in electoral management—rather than purely political factors—contribute to declining participation and democratic quality.

### Method

Based on 12 interviews with election officials, focusing on the experiential dimension of election administration.

#### Themes:

Process development · Preferential voting · Machine voting · Invalid ballots · Polling administration · Surveillance · Reform proposals



Process in polling stations (case context)

### Core Findings

- Low turnout reduces administrative strain but masks capacity limits
- Preferential voting increases counting complexity and errors
- Machine voting improves accuracy but weakens trust due to inconsistent use and low transparency

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Elections are shaped less by formal rules and more by how institutions function in practice

European elections remain secondary, with little fundamental change after 2014

Lower turnout gaps reflect not stronger EU engagement, but weaker national participation

Participation and competition depend on institutional design, capacity, and funding structures