

# Electoral Turnout of Non-Citizens Under Voluntary and Compulsory Voting: Evidence From Chile

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## Abstract

It is often argued that non-citizens are less interested in the political processes of the host country and, therefore, vote less than citizens. We discuss this using Chile’s administrative electoral census for the 2012–2023 elections. We choose Chile for three reasons. First, it is one of the few countries worldwide that allows non-citizens to vote in local and national elections. Second, Chile requires only five years of permanent residence for non-citizens to vote. Third, Chile implemented a voluntary voting system between 2012 and 2021 and a compulsory voting system in 2022. This latter particularity means that voting is compulsory for non-citizens registered on the electoral roll. How much and how did the electoral participation of citizens and non-citizens change with the introduction of compulsory voting? Four results stand out. First, citizen turnout averaged 44.7% under voluntary voting, while non-citizen turnout averaged 17.1%. Second, with the introduction of compulsory voting, the figures narrowed. Citizens averaged 86.3% and non-citizens 60.0%, tripling their turnout compared to elections organised under voluntary voting. Third, there is a gender gap in voter turnout in favour of women, both among citizens and non-citizens. Fourth, since 2020—when a constitutional referendum was held during the Covid-19 pandemic—there has been a higher turnout of young people in citizen and non-citizen groups. These results are beneficial for assessing the institutions that regulate the right and exercise of the vote for non-citizens, the impact of compulsory voting on electoral participation, and the re-boosting of youth participation.

## Keywords

administrative censuses; Chile; compulsory vote; electoral turnout; non-citizens

## 1. Introduction

The increase in migration flows represents a substantial political challenge for democracies, especially regarding transferring citizenship rights to resident aliens (Altman et al., 2023; Benhabib, 2004; Earnest, 2008; Finn, 2020; Kayran & Erdilmen, 2021; Koopmans & Michalowski, 2017; Tonkiss & Bloom, 2015). The most discussed right in literature is the right to vote (Altman, 2022; Escobar, 2007, 2015; Ferris et al., 2020; Wegschaider, 2023), with some consensus that non-citizens tend to participate less than citizens (Arrighi & Bauböck, 2017; Herrera & Morales, 2023; Spies et al., 2020). However, most of these studies are based on opinion polls or aggregate data per country. The objective is often to perform cross-country comparisons, identifying the political predispositions of non-citizens and their interest in participating in elections. Chile represents an exceptional case study in the analysis of electoral behaviour, particularly regarding the turnout of the non-citizen population (Herrera & Morales, 2024). Globally, only a few countries allow non-citizens to vote in all local and national elections. This distinctive feature of the Chilean electoral system provides a unique opportunity to examine turnout dynamics under different electoral contexts, especially considering that only five years of permanent residency—and not nationality—are required for non-citizens to vote. This particularity allows for comparing how non-citizens and citizens respond to the specific characteristics of national and local elections.

Additionally, the Chilean case becomes even more relevant when considering a large-scale institutional change. Between 2012 and 2021, Chile implemented a system of automatic enrolment in the electoral registers and voluntary voting (see Contreras & Morales, 2014, 2017). Meanwhile, in 2022, a system of automatic registration and compulsory voting was implemented. The particularity of all this is that compulsory voting with effective sanctions also applies to non-citizens. Like nationals, non-citizens who did not vote were fined between US\$32 and US\$200. Consequently, a substantial increase in non-citizens' electoral participation is expected. Chile, then, has become an exception worldwide. Although there are other countries where non-citizens are allowed to vote in compulsory voting (Uruguay and Ecuador, for example), they must comply with an administrative procedure to register on the electoral roll. In Chile, conversely, non-citizens are automatically registered on reaching the age of 18 and are obliged to vote. In light of this, it is worth asking the following question: How does non-citizens' electoral turnout vary between voluntary and compulsory voting elections? Is there a gender gap in non-citizens' turnout? To what extent and in which direction does age influence electoral turnout? Classic and contemporary literature on electoral turnout has systematically addressed these questions (Frank & Martínez i Coma, 2023; Goerres, 2007; Niemi et al., 1984; Wolfinger et al., 1990). However, this exercise has not been done to emphasise the non-citizen population, with a few exceptions mentioned above.

Our central hypothesis is that compulsory voting generated the effect expected in theory regarding the increase in citizens' electoral participation (Birch, 2016; Frank & Martínez i Coma, 2023; Jackman, 1987; Lijphart, 1997), but also, and much more significantly, on the participation of non-citizens. In addition, we suggest, following Goerres et al. (2022), that variables such as gender and age have a similar effect on voter turnout for both citizens and non-citizens. The analysis of these hypotheses opens a space for a broader debate on citizenship rights, particularly on the power that non-citizens acquire in electoral outcomes. In the case of Chile, non-citizens represent around 5% of the electoral roll. However, in local elections where a simple majority electoral system elects mayors, non-citizens represent around 30% of the electoral roll in some municipalities (Pérez Cosgaya & Palomera Valenzuela, 2024). Non-citizens thus become an essential

electoral force, even more so in a context where voting is compulsory and, in the case of non-voting, voters risk sanctions (fines).

To answer these questions and test our hypotheses, we used an administrative electoral census that accumulated more than 145 million voters of Chile's local and national elections from 2012 to 2023. This electoral census includes the voters' sex, age, nationality, municipality of residence, and electoral participation—that is, whether the voter voted or not. Unlike other studies, the database is a census. The Electoral Service of Chile provides the complete electoral roll information for each election, along with voter data. Naturally, this information does not include personal details that would allow for the identification of voters. However, it provides a unique opportunity to study turnout without the overrepresentation issues often found in surveys.

In theoretical terms, this study mainly relies on the proposal of Spies et al. (2020) and Goerres et al. (2022) regarding the usefulness of traditional models of voting behaviour applied to the foreign population. The variables typically used, for example, to explain the electoral participation of national voters, work similarly in the foreign-born population. We refer specifically to gender and age. Consequently, although we should find differences in the volume of electoral participation comparing citizens and non-citizens, the distribution by gender and age should be similar between the two groups. However, we must assess whether this theory works efficiently for a case like Chile, especially given the transition from voluntary to compulsory voting, representing a significant institutional change (Renwick, 2010). Indeed, Chile is a unique case worldwide, as non-citizens are obliged to vote in all types of elections, be they local, national, or constitutional referendums.

This article is divided into four sections. First, we show the general theory of the electoral participation of non-citizens and point out our hypotheses. Second, we describe the case of Chile, emphasising institutional changes related to the electoral regime of voluntary and compulsory voting. Third, we analyse our data and test the hypotheses. Finally, we present our conclusions.

## 2. Theory and Hypotheses

An extensive array of literature focuses on the electoral turnout of non-citizens in Europe (Bevelander, 2015; Bhatti & Hansen, 2012; Borkowska & Luthra, 2024; Giugni & Grasso, 2020; Mügge et al., 2019; Wass et al., 2015), the United States (Barreto, 2005; Tuckel & Maisel, 1994; Wong, 2000), Canada (Black, 1987; White, 2017), and in some Latin American countries such as Chile (Herrera & Morales, 2023; Umpierrez de Reguero et al., 2023), Uruguay (Margheritis, 2022), Ecuador (Finn, 2021), and Colombia (Escobar et al., 2015). Most of these studies use survey data, although recently there has been an incorporation of administrative electoral census data (Herrera & Morales, 2024). In general, it is concluded that non-citizens vote to a lesser extent than citizens and that the political incorporation of non-citizens fundamentally depends on sociodemographic variables such as sex and age (Bevelander, 2015; Herrera & Morales, 2024), on the social capital that migrants have developed in the host country (Berger et al., 2004; Giugni & Grasso, 2020), on family ties derived from marriage or children born in the host country (Qian & Lichter, 2007), and on the institutional characteristics of the country of origin regarding the electoral regime—that is, whether voting in the country of origin is compulsory or voluntary (Umpierrez de Reguero & Dandoy, 2022).

More specifically, the electoral participation of non-citizens is a response to the social capital built in the receiving country, either through their incorporation into social organisations or the construction of contact networks (Giugni & Grasso, 2020), contributing to the generation of political engagement (Guarnizo et al., 2017). For others, non-citizen electoral participation is explained by the characteristics of the country of origin in terms of the electoral regime (compulsory vote/voluntary vote), level of democracy, and economic development (Herrera & Morales, 2024; White et al., 2008). For example, Ferwerda et al. (2020) find that non-citizens in Norway vote in more significant proportion when incorporated early in the electoral roll, especially those from weak democracies or dictatorships. Another group of authors estimates that the electoral participation of non-citizens will increase to the extent that more inclusive educational policies, especially for adolescents, and greater flexibility in granting citizenship are implemented (Kim & Seltzer, 2024). Finally, other authors argue that the classic models of voting behaviour used to measure the predisposition to vote or the political preferences of nationals—for example, the Michigan model—work efficiently for the case of the foreign population (Goerres et al., 2022; Spies et al., 2020). Therefore, it would not be necessary to construct new theoretical models of non-citizen electoral participation. Herrera and Morales (2023), for example, concluded that both the gender gap and age-biased electoral participation apply similarly for both nationals and non-citizens.

However, despite all these advances, there is limited understanding, for example, about the electoral turnout of non-citizens in contexts of institutional change. Specifically, this includes the transition from compulsory to voluntary voting, or vice versa, and focuses on two commonly studied variables in electoral turnout: gender and age. While other research has provided insights into these areas, it is noteworthy that, except for Herrera and Morales (2024), no other study in Latin America has utilised official administrative data on a scale that enables more broadly applicable conclusions.

There is broad consensus on the advantage of compulsory voting systems over voluntary voting systems in terms of increasing voter turnout (Blais, 2008; Blais & Aarts, 2005; Gallego, 2009; Jackman, 1987; Mackerras & McAllister, 1999). However, this result also depends on the mechanisms used for voter registration. On one hand, some systems rely on voluntary registration, while others implement mandatory registration. According to Powell (1986), registration mechanisms significantly impact voter participation, particularly when voters must complete bureaucratic registration procedures. In voluntary registration systems, those who do not register are effectively excluded from voting, which leads to higher abstention rates. These individuals differ from registered voters who actively choose not to participate in an election.

Implementing compulsory voting in Chile for the 2022 and 2023 elections represents a significant institutional shift expected to have distinct effects on voter turnout (Contreras & Morales, 2024). Before this change, Chile experienced persistently low electoral participation, exacerbated by the voluntary voting system (Morales, 2020). Compulsory voting, by removing the choice to abstain without consequences, is predicted to increase overall participation, especially among typically underrepresented groups, such as young voters and non-citizens (Lijphart, 1997).

Regarding non-citizens, while a vast body of literature investigates the effects of variables such as socialisation, assimilation, and exposure on voter turnout (Black, 1987; Wass et al., 2015; White, 2017; White et al., 2008), less attention has been given to the Latin American context. In the case of Chile, although some studies have examined migrant turnout—either as a right (Umpierrez de Reguero et al., 2023) or in terms of their electoral

behaviour (Herrera & Morales, 2023)—few have explored in depth the effects of institutional mechanisms and generational and gender differences on the voting behaviour of both citizens and non-citizens. Access to a more extensive database that allows studying these effects over time is a significant advantage.

Accordingly, our hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Voter turnout of citizens and non-citizens is higher in elections organised under compulsory voting than in elections organised under voluntary voting.

Hypothesis 2: The gender gap in voter turnout—in favour of women—applies to both citizens and non-citizens.

Hypothesis 3: The age distribution of voter turnout is similar for both citizens and non-citizens.

### 3. Analysis

In this analysis, we incorporate several types of elections: municipal elections (for mayors and councillors), regional elections (for regional governors and regional councillors), and national elections (referendums, presidential, and congressional elections). What we call “local elections” include municipal and regional elections, which are held simultaneously. The election of regional governors was only introduced in 2021. Presidential and legislative elections are also held together but in a different year from the local elections.

In terms of the electoral system, various formulas are used. The D’Hondt proportional representation system is applied to councillors, regional councillors, deputies, and senators. Regional governors are elected through a qualified majority system with a 40% threshold. Mayors are elected by simple majority, while presidential elections require an absolute majority to secure a win. In this context, “councillors” refers to the individuals elected to draft the constitutional project, which was ultimately rejected. They were elected using the same electoral system as deputies, with a gender quota incorporated.

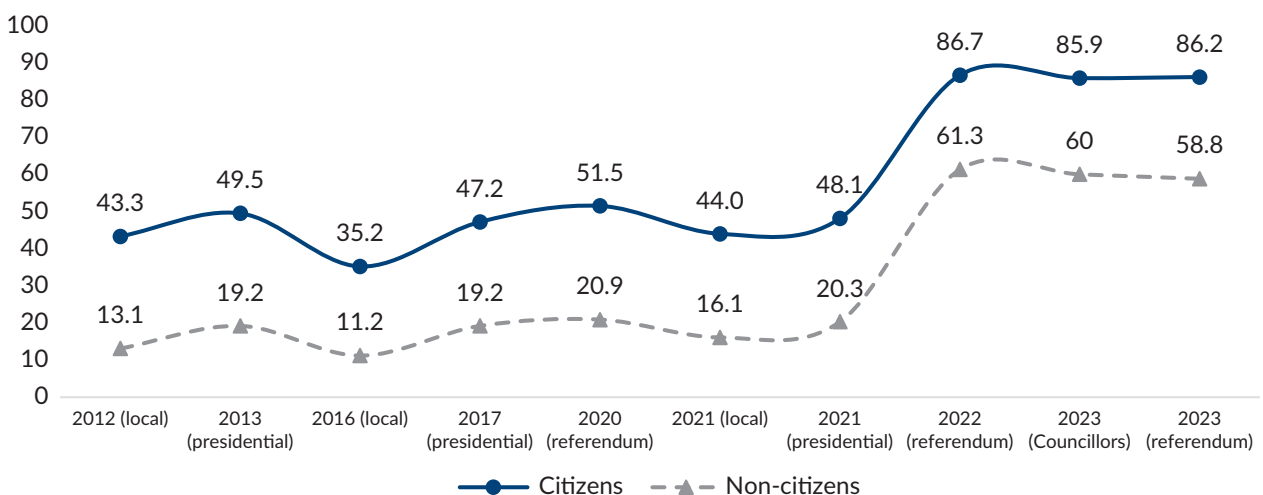
Regarding the electoral regime, as noted earlier, Chile transitioned from a system of automatic voter registration with voluntary voting to one of automatic registration with compulsory voting. Concerns about inequality in voter participation under the voluntary system partly drove this change. Contreras et al. (2015) argue that the combination of age and socioeconomic status is crucial in explaining electoral participation. Specifically, young people from wealthier backgrounds were significantly more likely to vote than their poorer peers, although this disparity tended to diminish with age.

Below, we show the evolution of citizen and non-citizen voter turnout in the 2012–2023 time frame. Our inferential analysis, in which we evaluate our three hypotheses, compares the two most similar elections held under a voluntary and compulsory voting system. We refer to the 2020 and 2022 constitutional referendums. After a violent “social outburst” in October 2019, the Chilean political class decided to open a process of constitutional change as a response to citizens’ demands (Navarrete & Tricot, 2021; Sáez-Vergara et al., 2022). The first phase consisted of an “input” referendum in which voters were asked whether they wanted a constitutional change. In addition, they were asked about the type of representative body they preferred to draft the new constitution. The second phase, which took place in 2021, involved the election

of the representatives who would form part of the constituent body. These two electoral processes were organised under the voluntary voting system (see Belmar et al., 2023; Tagle et al., 2023). The third phase, meanwhile, was an “exit” referendum, in which voters were asked whether they approved or rejected the constitutional proposal drafted by the representative political body.

In Figure 1, we panoramically show the percentages of electoral participation of citizens and non-citizens from 2012 to 2023. Although there are significant differences in magnitude, the evolution of participation is very similar. Voter turnout for citizens remained relatively stable between 2012 and 2021, with a sharp increase after introducing compulsory voting in 2022, reaching around 86%. While consistently lower, non-citizen turnout also saw a significant rise after 2021, peaking at 61.3% in 2022 but showing a slight decline by 2023. Our time series begins in 2012, as it was in that year that Chile’s Electoral Service made individual voter turnout data freely available. Before this date, we have no official and reliable information regarding the electoral participation of non-citizens.

As previously mentioned, the dataset used in this study comes from the Electoral Service of Chile and is an unprecedented electoral database that includes the complete voter registry. By compiling data from 10 official electoral censuses conducted by the Electoral Service of Chile between 2012 and 2023, we constructed an extensive dataset of 145,812,848 electors. Of that total, 141,952,609 (97.3%) are citizens and 3,860,239 (2.7%) are non-citizens. We reiterate, however, that the portion of non-citizens has increased steadily over time. If in 2012 they represented 1.67% of the electoral roll, in 2023 they increased to 3.91%. The use of electoral censuses offers a significant advantage over traditional opinion polls, as electoral censuses provide official and verifiable data on voter participation. Unlike surveys, where “over-reporting” or “under-reporting” of electoral behaviour can skew results (Cox & Morales, 2022), electoral censuses offer irrefutable evidence of turnout. This is particularly important during electoral regime change, as Cox and Morales (2022) note that such moments tend to show the most significant discrepancies between survey results and actual electoral data. The transition from voluntary to compulsory voting in Chile highlights the value of using electoral data, as surveys may fail to capture the full extent of shifts in voter behaviour during such changes. However, a limitation of using electoral census data is that it provides less detailed information than opinion polls, which



**Figure 1.** Electoral turnout of citizens and non-citizens, 2012–2023. Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).

often include a broader range of variables. As a result, the number of hypotheses that can be tested with this type of data is somewhat constrained. Nevertheless, using electoral data remains crucial for this study, as it allows for robust and reliable analysis of voter turnout trends over time, offering insights that would be difficult to achieve with survey data alone.

#### 4. Findings

We conducted our data analysis, testing the three hypotheses suggested above. We stress that, for this purpose, we have compared two elections: the 2020 constitutional referendum (voluntary vote) and the 2022 constitutional referendum (compulsory vote). The total number of voters is 30,029,648. Of these, 29,136,191 (97%) are citizens and 893,457 are non-citizens (3%). Table 1 reports the overall data for the 2020 and 2022 constitutional plebiscites. In October 2019, Chile experienced a social outburst characterised by widespread mobilisations and multiple acts of violence (Morales, 2021). Citizens took to the streets to protest the injustices of the neoliberal model, abuses by private companies, inequality, and the slow pace of lawmakers in producing better social legislation. Amidst this crisis, the political elite decided to initiate a constitutional change process to find a way out of the social upheaval the country was experiencing. This process began in October 2020 through a plebiscite—with voluntary voting—in which 78% of voters approved drafting a new Constitution. The electoral turnout was 51%. Subsequently, a Constitutional Convention was chosen, composed of 155 representatives elected in 28 electoral districts, with one year to write the new text. This proposal was voted on in a new plebiscite in September 2022, with compulsory voting. The participation was 86%, and the proposed text was rejected by 62%. Later, and although not analysed here, a second constitutional process was opened that concluded with the same result. A Constitutional Council composed of 50 elected representatives drafted a proposal that almost 56% of the voters rejected. As expected, voter turnout increased significantly in elections organised under compulsory voting, albeit with a very substantial increase in invalid voting (Contreras & Morales, 2024).

The results indicate the following trend when comparing the percentages of electoral turnout between citizens and non-citizens in the 2020 referendum (voluntary voting) and the 2022 referendum (compulsory voting). While citizens increased their participation from 51.6% to 86.7%, non-citizens almost tripled their participation

**Table 1.** Voter turnout in the 2020 and 2022 constitutional referenda.

2020 (Voluntary Vote)			
	Registered	Voters	Percentage
Citizens	14,417,368	7,431,911	51.6
Non-Citizens	378,829	79,212	20.9
Total	14,796,197	7,511,123	50.8
2022 (Compulsory Vote)			
	Registered	Voters	Percentage
Citizens	14,659,301	12,714,315	86.7
Non-Citizens	514,628	315,537	61.3
Total	15,173,929	13,029,852	85.9

Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).

from 20.9% to 61.3%. This is not surprising despite the magnitude of the change in voter turnout between elections. The literature on voter turnout around the world notes the positive effect of compulsory voting on voter turnout (Blais, 2008; Fornos et al., 2004; Frank & Martínez i Coma, 2023; Mackerras & McAllister, 1999), but there is a dearth of academic work examining the effect of compulsory voting on non-citizen turnout. Following our first hypothesis, compulsory voting generates a significant increase in electoral turnout. This is not surprising at all. However, it is striking that in the case of non-citizens, voter turnout is almost three times higher than that recorded for elections organised with voluntary voting.

Following hypothesis 2, Table 2 shows voter turnout by gender. In 2020 and 2022, there is a substantial gender gap in favour of women, an issue analysed by Cox and Morales (2022, 2023). This finding challenges the “traditional gender gap” concept in the literature, which suggests men’s higher political turnout compared to women due to their broader information and interest in politics (e.g., Almond & Verba, 1963; Dassonneville & Kostelka, 2021; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). However, recent literature shows this “traditional gender gap” has disappeared and even reversed in Latin America (Carreras & Castañeda-Angarita, 2014). Except for the work of Herrera and Morales (2024), the gender gap among non-citizen voters has not received much attention.

The gender gap in favour of women was more significant for citizen than non-citizen women in 2020 and almost identical by 2022. Women’s greater interest in participating is due to different factors. Non-citizen women often engage more with Chilean state services in health and education for their children, besides developing stronger socialisation links (Herrera & Morales, 2024). On the other hand, women have become rapidly incorporated into the labour market (Cebula & Alexander, 2017), favouring a greater interest in public affairs, an issue that also applies to non-citizen women.

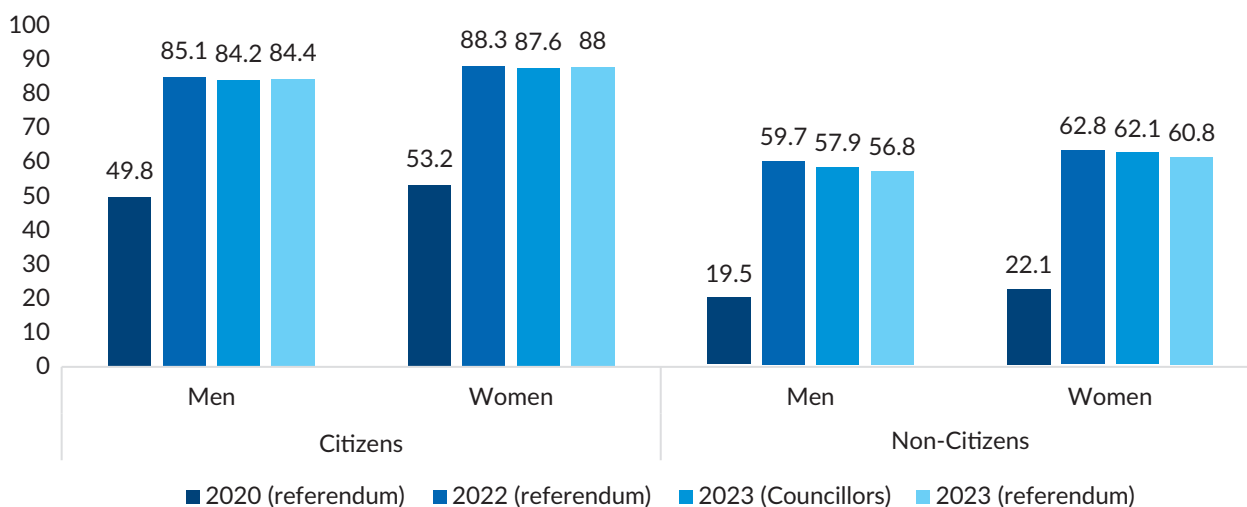
After the failed process of constitutional change in 2022, Chile’s political elite insisted on a new process. This time, the timeframe for drafting the constitutional proposal was shorter, and the political-representative body was a Constitutional Council composed of 50 members. As in the previous process, a constitutional referendum was held in which voters were to indicate whether they were for or against the proposal. This referendum was held on 17 December 2023, and a compulsory vote was implemented. Again, the option against a new constitution won. Figure 2 compares the voter turnout of men and women in the three

**Table 2.** Voter turnout by gender, 2020–2022.

2020 (Voluntary Vote)				
	Men	Women	Total	Gender Gap
Citizens	49.8	53.2	51.6	3.4
Non-Citizens	19.5	22.1	20.9	2.6
Total	49.0	52.4	50.8	3.4
2022 (Compulsory Vote)				
	Men	Women	Total	Gender Gap
Citizens	85.1	88.3	86.7	3.2
Non-Citizens	59.7	62.8	61.3	3.1
Total	84.2	87.4	85.9	3.2

Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).





**Figure 2.** Voter turnout by gender, with voluntary (2020) and compulsory voting (2022 and 2023). Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).

referendums: 2020 (voluntary vote), 2022 (compulsory vote), and 2023 (compulsory vote). The figure further segments between citizens and non-citizens. The results are in line with the previous analysis. The gender gaps in voter turnout favour women under both voluntary and compulsory voting, functioning similarly in the group of citizens and non-citizens.

Following hypothesis 2, Table 3 reports the distribution of turnout by age. Two striking issues emerge here. First, under both voluntary and compulsory voting, voter turnout is higher among voters under 40 than the rest. Second, among non-citizen voters, age groups vote similarly under voluntary voting but with higher turnout among voters under 40 under compulsory voting. These data may be surprising if we look at the classic literature on the lower voter turnout of younger voters (Blais, 2008; Franklin, 2004; van Biezen et al., 2012; Wass, 2007), but less so if we look at the literature questioning the age gap (Rubenson et al., 2004; Sturgis & Jennings, 2020). Young non-citizens' increased turnout may stem from their socialisation during Chile's highly politicised and polarised 2019 social crisis and the subsequent constitutional process initiated

**Table 3.** Voter turnout by age, 2020–2022.

	2020 (Voluntary Vote)			
	18–39	40–59	60 and over	Total
Citizens	55.4	52.7	43.9	51.6
Non-Citizens	19.8	22.8	18.4	20.9
Total	54.5	51.7	43.5	50.8

	2022 (Compulsory Vote)			
	18–39	40–59	60 and over	Total
Citizens	89.4	87.2	82.1	86.7
Non-Citizens	66.2	62.1	43.3	61.3
Total	88.6	86.2	81.4	85.9

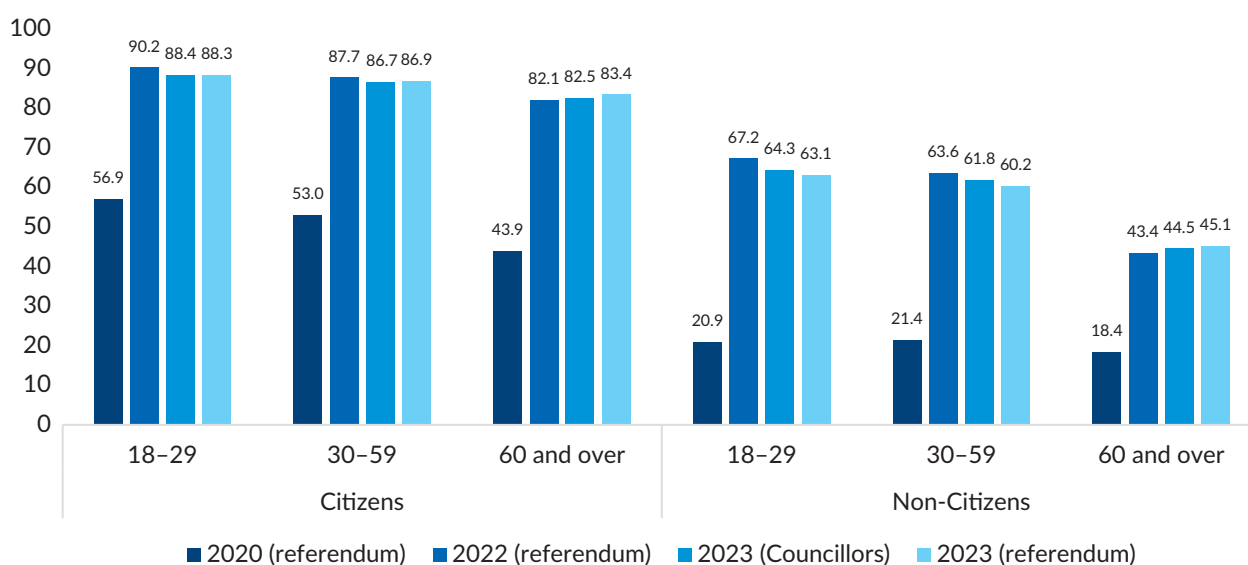
Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).

in the wake of that year’s citizen mobilisations (Morales, 2021). This opens a new research space about non-citizens who acquire their right to vote during a particularly convulsed political environment.

We hypothesised that compulsory voting would have similar effects for all age groups; however, the evidence did not support this. For citizens, youth participation averaged 89% for the three elections, significantly higher than the 82.7% recorded for adults aged 60 and over. In the case of non-citizens, the differences were even more striking. While young people averaged 64.9%, adults aged 60 and over barely reached 44.3%, a difference of more than 20 percentage points (see Figure 3).

This result can be explained as follows. Chilean electoral law establishes fines for those who do not vote. However, the same law provides a series of excuses for those who cannot vote, allowing them to avoid this fine. These include being ill on election day or having physical problems travelling to the polling stations. This condition is most likely to affect older people, which could explain their lower levels of electoral participation compared to the rest of the population. In the case of the foreign population, we propose an alternative explanation. Electoral law includes another excuse to avoid the fine: if voters are more than 200 kilometres from their polling place. It could then be that first-generation non-citizens—mainly Peruvians, Bolivians, Ecuadorians, and Colombians—have entered the country through the Northern border, which is the border with Peru and Bolivia, and have declared electoral domicile in some municipalities in that geographical area, and then moved to the capital, Santiago, which is more than 2,000 kilometres away from the border. By not updating the new address before the Electoral Service, these voters can be excused for not voting because they are more than 200 km away from the place where they should vote.

We conclude with four statistical probit models—two for citizens and two for non-citizens—whose results are shown in Table 4. The dependent variable is dichotomous, assuming “0” if the person did not vote and “1” if they voted. The independent variables are the following: Gender (0 = Man; 1 = Woman), Age (categorised into 14 five-year intervals ranging from 18–19 to 80 and over), the quadratic of Age (to identify likely diminishing marginal returns), Electoral Regime (0 = 2020 with voluntary voting; 1 = 2022 with compulsory voting), and



**Figure 3.** Voter turnout by age, in elections with voluntary (2020) and compulsory voting (2022 and 2023). Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).

two interaction terms. Two comparisons are conducted: one between gender and electoral regime to assess changes in the gender gap across both elections, and another between age and electoral regime to analyse the impact of age on electoral turnout in both elections.

The probit statistical models have the following structure:

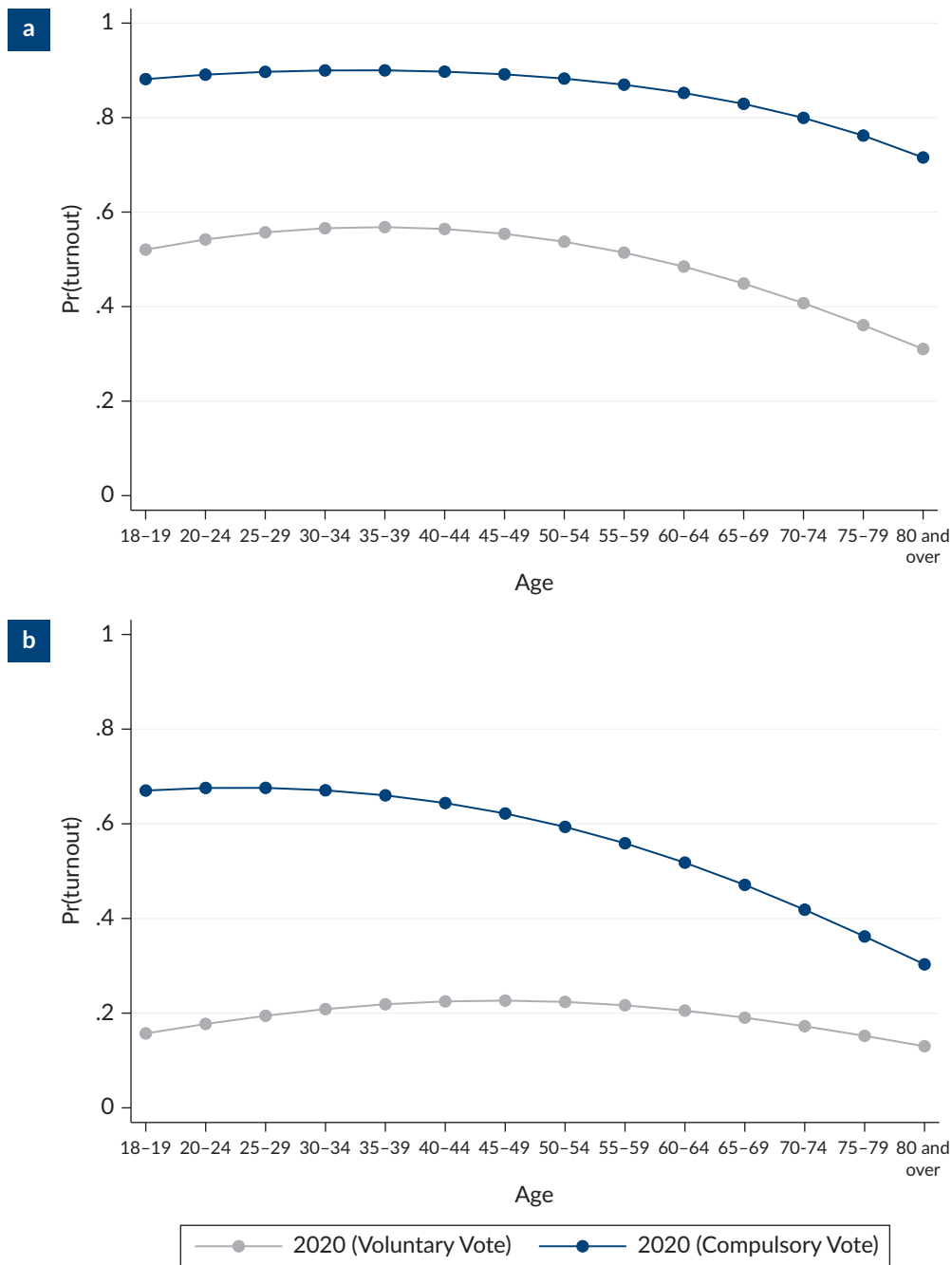
$$P(y = 1|x) = \phi(\beta_0 \text{Gender} + \beta_1 \text{Age} + \beta_2 \text{Age}^2 + \beta_3 \text{ElectoralRegime} + \beta_4 \text{Gender} \times \text{ElectoralRegime} + \beta_5 \text{Age} \times \text{ElectoralRegime})$$

The results are in line with the descriptive analysis. First, a gender gap in favour of women is confirmed for both citizens and non-citizens. Second, age has a positive effect on turnout, but with particularly low coefficients, and according to the sign of the quadratic of age, it quickly finds diminishing marginal returns. Third, as expected, compulsory voting is associated with higher voter turnout. Fourth, the interaction variable's coefficient suggests a slightly more significant gender gap favouring women under compulsory voting among citizens. However, no variation is found for non-citizens. Fifth, voter turnout decreases among older voters, and this decrease is more accelerated among non-citizens. Figure 4 shows this result more clearly, indicating the predicted probability of electoral turnout for citizens and non-citizens under voluntary and compulsory voting. The increase in young non-citizens is evident when comparing electoral turnout with voluntary and compulsory voting. For example, the predicted probability of electoral turnout of an 18–19-years-old is less than 20% in 2020 and close to 65% in 2022. In contrast, a non-citizen between 60 and 64 years old registers a 21% probability of voter turnout in 2022, rising to almost 55% in 2022.

**Table 4.** Determinants of electoral turnout of citizens and non-citizens.

Variables	Citizens Model 1	Citizens Model 2	Non-citizens Model 3	Non-citizens Model 4
Hypothesis 1: Electoral Regime (0 = Voluntary; 1 = Compulsory)		0.000544*** (6.24e-07)		0.000746*** (3.94e-06)
Hypothesis 2: Gender (0 = Man; 1 = Woman)	0.114*** (0.000490)	0.105*** (0.000664)	0.0572*** (0.00268)	0.0843*** (0.00463)
Hypothesis 3: Age	0.0689*** (0.000287)	0.0783*** (0.000306)	0.0651*** (0.00199)	0.102*** (0.00219)
Age <sup>2</sup>	-0.00700*** (1.87e-05)	-0.00802*** (2.00e-05)	-0.00768*** (0.000134)	-0.00741*** (0.000140)
Gender * Electoral Regime		3.83e-05*** (5.29e-07)		4.52e-06 (2.90e-06)
Age * Electoral Regime		-2.58e-06*** (7.24e-08)		-3.19e-05*** (5.18e-07)
Constant	0.398*** (0.000979)	-0.0722*** (0.00113)	-0.219*** (0.00683)	-1.146*** (0.00884)
Observations	29,136,191	29,136,191	893,457	893,457
Pseudo-R	0.0126	0.139	0.0106	0.136
Log-Likelihood	-1.780e+07	-1.550e+07	-606,708	-529,606
Chi-squared	452,045	5.011e+06	13,056	167,260
Prob Wald	0	0	0	0

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ . Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).



**Figure 4.** Predicted voter turnout values for (a) citizens and (b) non-citizens, 2020–2022. Source: Own elaboration based on Servel (n.d.).

## 5. Conclusions

This analysis leads to five key conclusions. First, the case of Chile, because of the institutional conditions that favour the incorporation of non-citizens, deserves more theoretical attention. As we have noted, Chile is one of the most permissive countries in the world regarding the acquisition of political and social rights for non-citizens. They are only required to have five years of residence to vote, and from that moment on, a non-citizen can also join a political party. Therefore, there is an easy process of institutional incorporation for

non-citizens in the host country. Although the electoral turnout of non-citizens has hovered around 20% since 2012, for the 2022 constitutional referendum, non-citizens tripled their electoral turnout. This is explained mainly by Chile's adoption of an automatic registration system in electoral rolls and compulsory voting, which involves financial sanctions for those who do not vote. This impact will be much more significant for the 2024 municipal elections. Although the total number of non-citizens eligible to vote represents 4.4% of the electoral roll—as measured for 2023—their distribution is not random. There are communes in the Metropolitan Region—including the capital, Santiago—where the percentage of non-citizens registered in the electoral roll approaches 30%. Therefore, while the impact of the non-citizens' vote is marginal at the national level, they constitute a decisive electorate at the communal level, potentially determining the winning mayoral candidate in certain municipalities.

Secondly, the case of Chile helps evaluate the factors that explain electoral turnout by comparing citizens and non-citizens under two electoral regimes: automatic registration and voluntary voting from 2012 to 2021 and automatic registration and compulsory voting from 2022. As noted, the literature in political science has been particularly prolific in identifying predictors of electoral turnout. However, the same is not valid for the electoral turnout of non-citizens, either due to the absence of reliable data or because they represent a minimal percentage of electoral rolls internationally. According to our evidence, and as expected, there was a substantial increase in electoral turnout in citizens and non-citizens upon the institution of compulsory voting. As noted, the voter turnout of non-citizens almost tripled in the first election with compulsory voting. Unlike other countries where voting is also compulsory, such as Ecuador or Uruguay, in Chile, non-citizens are automatically registered on the electoral roll after five years of permanent residence. They do not need to go to any Electoral Court or Electoral Service to register and vote. Therefore, it is a straightforward process. This has generated a debate in the political class. Some propose that voting should be voluntary for non-citizens, while others argue that voting should be compulsory for non-citizens but only in local elections. The substantial increase in migration to Chile in recent years, especially of Venezuelans fleeing Nicolás Maduro's dictatorship, has accelerated this debate.

Thirdly, and in line with the previous conclusion, we found that explanatory factors for voter turnout, such as gender and age, apply similarly to citizens and non-citizens. We conclude, among other things, that gender gaps in voter turnout favour women in both groups. Most strikingly, this gender gap in favour of women occurred under both elections organised with voluntary voting and elections organised with compulsory voting. Consequently, and as suggested by Spies et al. (2020) and Goerres et al. (2022), the classic models of electoral behaviour are equally efficient in explaining the electoral participation of citizens and non-citizens, compared to models specially designed to study non-citizens. To be sure, there may be different motivations or perceptions among both groups regarding the importance of elections and democracy, but if we analyse the sociodemographic variables most present in the literature, their effect is similar for citizens and non-citizens. Regarding the effect of age, we found significant changes. While in citizens, electoral turnout has similar variations in each age group, in non-citizens, the positive variation with compulsory voting is substantially more significant in young people than in older voters. Under voluntary voting, the likelihood of a 20-year-old voting is the same as that of a 75-year-old adult, but under compulsory voting, that 20-year-old's probability is double that of the 75-year-old. This can be explained, in principle, because older voters have greater possibilities of reducing or even avoiding the fine for not voting due to health-related issues. On the other hand, younger non-citizens seek to keep their records clean to obtain a permanent residency visa in the host country. Therefore, exposing themselves to a sanction for not voting can be

interpreted by these non-citizens as an obstacle to permanently settling in the host country. This argument also coexists with an additional issue. Since 2020, given the turbulent Chilean constitutional process that originated from a violent social outburst with a solid youth presence, young people have begun to vote in more significant proportion. Therefore, it is not dismissible that this recent process of political socialisation has also impacted the younger non-citizen population. In this sense, while institutional changes matter, alternative hypotheses are linked to political sociology and the impact of critical junctures like a solid and prolonged social explosion.

Our fourth conclusion is methodological and empirical. We conclude that the provision of administrative censuses favours a more precise analysis of non-citizens' electoral turnout and its political impact on public decision-making, compared with opinion polls. This represents a significant complement to analysing non-citizens' electoral turnout using opinion surveys. Administrative censuses have the advantage of covering the universe of voters. Of course, the number of independent variables is smaller than in a survey, but the data are official and indisputable. In our case, we cover over 145 million data points, and we know with certainty which groups are voting more according to gender and age and what the specific effect of establishing the automatic registration regime in electoral rolls with compulsory voting was. In Latin America, except for the recent work by Herrera and Morales (2024), studies on the electoral turnout of non-citizens are done with opinion surveys, whose sampling process is particularly complex. Generally, these are surveys with non-random samples and, therefore, with little certainty of representativeness. This is explained by the difficulties in defining the universe of non-citizens and in capturing a sufficiently reliable sample. Indeed, while these surveys provide valuable results, it is beneficial to complement these studies with data from administrative censuses.

The fifth conclusion pertains to the utility of this article for comparative politics. Why could a small country like Chile potentially guide international analysis of non-citizens' electoral turnout? Beyond the reasons we have pointed out, Chile constitutes an interesting case study to evaluate the impact of institutional designs on the political incorporation of non-citizens. Specifically, we refer to barriers to accessing citizenship, the mechanism enabling the right to vote, the rules regulating non-citizen electoral turnout in political parties, and even the possibility of being candidates in popular elections. At the same time, the transition from voluntary to compulsory voting with effective sanctions could be studied as a kind of "accelerator" of political incorporation for non-citizens, especially in younger groups. It would not be so surprising if, in future elections, the electoral turnout of non-citizens approaches the national average, and their membership in political parties increases substantially. All this could improve our understanding of migratory waves in the United States, Europe, and Latin America, optimising the classic models of resistance, assimilation, exposure, or transfer (White et al., 2008).

In summary, we might be looking at a case—Chile—where the political incorporation of non-citizens—at least taking electoral turnout as a reference—occurs institutionally, rapidly, and effectively, without necessarily mediating processes of inclusion derived from social capital. Instead, the institution of compulsory voting facilitates assimilation dynamics, weakening those of resistance. Of course, we know that electoral turnout is just one of the many dimensions linked to political participation, but at least theoretically, it is one of the most relevant.

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## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

## Data Availability

The database and syntax can be found at the following URL: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/8F1JN2>

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