

Civic Duty and Voter Turnout in Japan and South Korea*

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Democratic governments rely on participation by all citizens for balanced and equitable election outcomes. What maintains voter turnout, this central aspect of democratic health? Civic duty is a powerful force in getting citizens to the polls, and yet it has often been misunderstood or neglected in empirical studies. By contrast, political theory has developed a rich literature on the obligations of democratic citizens. We show that a new statistical model based on political theorists' analysis of duty substantially improves the understanding of turnout in Japan and South Korea.

Keywords: Civic duty, Democratic health, Obligations of democratic citizens, Comparative study on election in Korea and Japan

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...doing such actions, not from inclination, but from duty
(Kant 1997 [1785], 11).

I . Introduction

Why do people vote? One reason is that they have a strong preference among the candidates or parties. Thus journalists often interpret high turnout in an election as a sign that the voters were more engaged than usual. Similarly, political scientists have long used opinion survey data to demonstrate that those who care about the outcome of an election are much more likely to vote (Campbell et al, 1960, 103-105). However, in every election survey around the world, a great many people report that they do not care much about politics, and yet they vote. The civic participation of this second group proves to be the clue that explains, not only their own vote, but that of many other citizens as well.

We argue that the desire to fulfill one's civic duty is a key factor in generating voter turnout, and that its impact is just as large as caring about the candidates. The power of civic duty in producing turnout has long been noted (Campbell et al, 1960, 105-106), but it was largely overlooked in recent decades because the rele-

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vant survey questions were omitted from most national election studies. In Japan, for example, duty has played only a minor role in most studies of turnout (for example, Horiuchi 2005; Yamamura 2011). However, now that civic duty questions have begun to reappear in election surveys, their importance has become evident.

First, a sense of civic duty is widespread in democratic electorates. People believe that they should vote. Blais and Achen (2011) provide evidence from several Western nations, but the same finding holds in East Asian democracies—perhaps even more so. In Japan, over 95% of respondents said that voting is “a citizen’s duty” or “something that a citizen really should do,” according to the 2005 Japanese Election Study. In Taiwan’s 2011 TEDS survey, the proportion of respondents with a sense of duty was 68%.¹⁾ Of course, these beliefs are reinforced in every country by schools, political elites, and sometimes also by religious authorities.

Thus many citizens believe that they have a duty to vote. But of course, others do not. Blais and Achen (2011) show that this ethical diversity in the population has important consequences for the analysis of voter turnout. In this paper, we extend their argument to two East Asian democracies. For Japan, we show that the

1) As we shall see, Japan’s question probably encourages over-reporting of duty, while Taiwan used a survey question designed to minimize false acquiescence. Thus the two duty proportions are not truly comparable. Our point is simply that by any measure, large proportions of each country report that they feel a duty to vote. Unfortunately, the Taiwan survey was released just as this article was going to press, and we did not have the opportunity to study it in detail.

same pattern holds as in the West. For South Korea, where the available data have limitations, we make more restricted claims. However, the available evidence suggests that civic duty matters for turnout in South Korea in much the same way as it does in Japan.

II. Sense of Civic Duty and the Study of Turnout

In recent years, Kanazawa (1998), Blais (2000, 112) and Campbell (2006) have directed scholars' attention once again to the importance of civic duty. Yet it has not been obvious how to use a measure of civic duty in a statistical model of turnout. Riker and Ordeshook (1968) argued that one should simply add a term *D* ("duty") to the statistical model. But such a model corresponds poorly to the canonical Western treatments of duty, as in Kant (1997 [1785]). In that tradition, a duty is what one must do, even if it is difficult or unpleasant. Thus for Nowell-Smith (1954, 210), "A moral obligation is, like a natural obligation, something which obliges me to act in a way that, but for the obligation, I would not have acted." The morally motivated voter simply does what is right. In particular, the non-ethical appeal of an act is disregarded, or at least downgraded, when the act is done out of duty.

If this ethical tradition is applied to the decision to vote, the effect of civic duty will not be simply additive. Instead, it will

change the way voters decide. In the presence of duty, other factors matter less to the turnout decision. Indeed, as we shall demonstrate, standard explanatory factors behave differently for those voters who believe that it is their moral obligation to show up at the polls. Thus a different modeling strategy is needed for those voters. Hence an appropriate statistical model of turnout must take into account both citizens with this kind of ethical motivation and those without it.²⁾

Blais and Achen (2011) show that the simplest way to incorporate duty into models of turnout is to include both duty and caring about the election as explanatory variables. That much is standard. However, they argue for an additional explanatory factor, an interaction term between duty and caring. This interaction term is expected to have a negative coefficient. That is, both duty and caring about the outcome have separate impacts on turnout. But when the sense of duty is strong, the negative interaction term reduces the impact of caring. This is precisely the way political theorists in the Kantian tradition have treated duty: When duty is present, other factors matter less. The negative interaction term captures that effect.

Using both American and Canadian data, Blais and Achen (2011) show that this new model fits the data better than the conventional approach of throwing a garbage can of explanatory vari-

2) We take no position in this paper as to who is right. Our point is simply that both kinds of voters exist in the population, that they behave differently, and hence that good empirical studies must take account of the difference.

ables into the turnout equation. They find that caring about the outcome is approximately as powerful as duty in explaining turnout, but that its impact diminishes as duty increases, just as Kantian theory would suggest. They also find that those two variables alone are powerful predictors of turnout. For American voters in 2008 who had neither a sense of duty nor cared about the election, turnout was 6%. For voters who both had a strong sense of duty and also cared strongly who won, turnout was 92%. Thus these two variables alone accounted for much of the American variation in who voted. Other standard explanatory factors such as partisanship and age mattered less.

In Canada, duty was slightly higher in the population, and caring about the outcome dramatically lower, in 2008 than for the U.S. Overall, these two factors roughly cancelled, making Canadian turnout just slightly lower than the American rate. But, and this is the crucial point, within each combination of duty and caring about the outcome, Canadian and American turnout rates were virtually identical. For example, high-duty, high-caring individuals voted at a 92% rate in both countries. In short, just those two variables—duty and caring about the outcome—predicted each country's turnout patterns very well. The theoretical patterns were the same, too. Most importantly, the impact of caring about the election declined as duty increased. Thus the Kantian approach to voter turnout received powerful confirmation in these two North American cases.

East Asian democracies are significantly younger than their

American counterpart, but we expect the same basic dynamic between duty and preference to hold. For duty is not a uniquely Western idea. Even in pre-democratic years, through both admirable and haunting events, the East Asia region has shown powerful examples of citizen duty to the state. In this paper, we assess how that sense of duty to the state has evolved in the democratic era. We start with Japan, the oldest of the East Asian democracies.

III. Duty and Preference in the 2005 Japanese House of Representatives Election

We use the Japanese Election Study (JES) III,³⁾ a national election survey similar to those in many other democracies. JES III is a nine-wave panel survey spanning four years, from 2001 to 2005. It contains four sets of pre- and post-election surveys for two rounds of Diet elections and one pre-election survey for a Prefectural Assembly election. Among these, we focus on the most recent, the 2005 House of Representatives pre- and post-election survey. The sample size for all waves is always close to 1500 respondents, and

3) The data for this secondary analysis, "Nation-wide Longitudinal Survey Study on Voting Behavior in the Early 21st Century, 2001-2005, JES III Project Team (Ken'ichi Ikeda, Yoshiaki Kobayashi, Hiroshi Hirano)," was provided by the Social Science Japan Data Archive, Center for Social Research and Data Archives, Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo.

all interviews are conducted in-person.

The JES duty question asks respondents whether they see voting as every citizen's duty, something that a citizen should do, or something that a citizen is not obliged to do. A possible shortcoming of the question format is that it does not offer respondents an equally acceptable non-duty alternative, thereby possibly overestimating the proportion of respondents who have a legitimate sense of duty. By contrast, recent North American versions of the duty question offer respondents a non-duty option involving "choice," a word with strong positive valence in that culture (Blais and Achen 2011). About half of Canadian and American respondents select "choice" rather than "duty." (The precise question wording is given in Appendix 1.) We return to this point below.

To measure preference, we use a question that asks how much attention the respondent paid to the campaigns of candidates and parties. It is not a direct measure of how much one cares who wins, but we believe that it is a reasonable proxy. The assumption is that those who care more or have a stronger preference will be motivated to pay more attention to the campaign. The correlation coefficient between the preference question and the standard political interest question is only 0.3, confirming that the measure is tapping something different from a habitual attention to politics. The JES III provides English translations for both duty and preference measures used here; see Appendix 2.

We begin with Table 1, the joint distribution of duty and preference.⁴⁾ Quite a different picture from the American case

Table 1 | Duty and Preference Distribution in the 2005 Japanese Sample (weighted by final wave k sampling weight)

	Duty none	Duty weak, some	Duty strong
Pref little, weak	3	15	20
Pref somewhat	2	12	26
Pref a lot	0	5	17
unweighted N=1397	5	32	63

emerges here. More than 60% of the Japanese sample express a strong duty to vote, almost double the number of Americans with strong duty (Blais and Achen 2011). Fully 95% of Japanese respondents say that they feel a strong sense of duty or at least see voting as something a citizen should do, whereas only about half of American respondents have even a weak level of civic duty. It appears that the idea voting is a duty constitutes a near consensus in Japan.

Table 2 shows reported Japanese turnout as a function of duty and preference. As in the American case, each variable shows powerful effects. Having a preference (as we measure it) alone raises the probability of voting by more than 40 percentage points. Duty is even more powerful. No matter how little or much the voter cares about who wins, once she sees voting as a duty, the probability of voting is always at least 87%. With more than 9 out of 10 respondents saying that they have at least some level of civic duty, it appears that in Japan, civic duty would be powerful enough to sustain the high rate of citizen participation in elections

4) In all following analyses, descriptive and inferential, we use the sampling weights supplied for Wave K, the 2005 post-election survey.

Table 2 | Percent Turnout by Duty and Preference in the 2005 Japanese House Election
(weighted by final wave k sampling weight)

	Duty none	Duty weak, some	Duty strong
Pref little, weak	54	87	96
Pref somewhat	84	94	97
Pref a lot	100	96	98
unweighted N=1397			

on its own.

The impact of Kantian duty is very clear in Table 2. Those who don't care about the election, or who care very little, vote at a 96% rate if they have a strong sense of duty. Adding a strong sense of preference raises turnout only to 98% among those with duty. Either way, duty gets nearly everyone to the polls. Adding preference to duty raises turnout only by two percentage points.

By contrast, when citizens have no sense of duty, adding a strong preference increases turnout nearly 50 percentage points. Without duty, people need strong preferences to motivate them. Thus there is evidence of a negative interaction effect between duty and preference. When duty is high, preference matters less. Without duty, it matters more. This is precisely the dynamic between duty and preference for which we have argued. Kantians carry out their duties regardless of how strongly they feel otherwise about the action. Non-Kantians depend on the stimulation of the current political campaign.

We now address the issue of over-report in the JES III. Japan's high level of civic duty and its powerful relationship to turnout may be due at least in part to over-report of both duty and

turnout. For example, the reported turnout in the survey is 93%, well above the actual Japanese turnout in 2005. The official turnout rate for the 2005 House of Representatives election, as reported by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, was 67.5%. Over-report is a universal problem for surveys, but an over-report of 25 percentage points is high among academic election surveys.⁵⁾

We suspect that the same kind of social pressures that led to the high over-report for turnout also affected reported levels of duty. While over-report is not necessarily a problem for statistical inference about relationships among explanatory variables, it is far more damaging for descriptive analysis. Thus we qualify our earlier conclusions about the dutifulness of the Japanese electorate. While we would guess that the Japanese people have a greater sense of civic duty than their North American counterparts, the current evidence available to the international political science community does not permit a decisive test.

We now move ahead with a statistical test of our argument, using JES III. Table 3 shows alternate specifications of turnout as a function of preference, duty, and both. All variables in the models were rescaled from 0 to 1 for comparability.

The first model is a standard probit model of turnout, with preference as the only predictor. We build our full model on this

5) In the United States, turnout over-report in the best academic surveys such as the ANES usually range between 10 to 15 percentage points (Cassel, 2004).

Table 3 | Alternate Models of Turnout in the 2005 Japanese House Election (weighted)
Coefficients with standard errors in parentheses

	probit	probit	probit	probit
Preference	0,92*** (,17)	0,57*** (,18)	1,61*** (,46)	1,17** (,51)
Duty		1,21*** (,20)	1,63*** (,28)	0,92*** (,29)
PrefixDuty			-1,47** (,58)	-1,20* (,64)
Age				5,97*** (2,30)
Age ²				-4,96** (2,17)
Education				-0,02 (,26)
Interest				0,53** (,21)
PID strength				1,44*** (,24)
constant	1,16*** (,07)	0,50*** (,14)	0,24 (,17)	-1,52*** (,56)
log pseudolikelihood	-723,5	-570,0	-561,84	-483,15
Unweighted N	1487	1397	1397	1360

*** significant at .01, ** significant at .05, * significant at .10

first one, consecutively adding duty, the interaction term, and other powerful covariates of turnout. We can see from the third and fourth models that even in Japan, the impact of Kantian duty on voting thrives. Not only is the duty coefficient significant and positive, but it also interacts with preference in the way that we have argued, as evident from the negative sign of the interaction term. Even with powerful covariates of turnout added, the interaction term maintains the expected sign and is statistically significant at the 10% level.

Japanese voters, like American voters, are more likely to vote when they see voting as a duty, even if they care very little about the candidate or the election itself.

IV. Duty and Preference in the 2010 South Korea Local Election

Our second East Asian case is South Korea. For the fifth time now, the Korean Social Science Data Center (KSDC) and the Korean Association for Electoral Studies have jointly conducted surveys of local elections. To our knowledge, this is the only Korean election survey in the KSDC data bank that contains a duty to vote measure. Here, we use the most recent 2010 post-local election survey. All interviews are conducted in-person, and the sample size of 1,000 makes the survey comparable to both our American and Japanese data.

Unfortunately, our use of the Korean data is limited by the usual difficulties of comparability across surveys from different countries. For our purposes, the survey suffers from two shortcomings. First, the design of the duty question is not similar to either the Japanese version or to those used in the U.S. The question does not ask specifically about civic duty to vote, but rather, lists duty as one of the five possible reasons for turning out to vote. (See the English version of the question in Appendix 3.) As a result, it is impossible to measure varying strengths of civic duty. Duty can only be studied as a binary variable.

Second, and more problematically, the survey was designed to ask the duty question only of self-reported voters. That is, the duty question is a follow-up for people who say they voted. As a result, direct comparison with surveys from the United States and

Japan becomes difficult. With respect to the duty question, we are essentially working with different sample populations. In Korea, the population studied is restricted to (reported) voters, while in Japan and most other countries that have asked about civic duty, the sampled population consists of all eligible voters.

Thus the Korean sample design limits inferences about duty to just those who voted. Hence the survey also impedes any statistical analysis between duty and turnout, since in the sampled population, those who have duty voted at a 100% rate, and those who have no sense of duty also voted 100% of the time. That is, among reported voters, the turnout rate is always 100 percent. We have no way to assess how much duty matters to turnout.

For these reasons, we present here just an initial exploration of our argument for South Korea. We start with the distribution of civic duty. Table 4 shows that among people who report that they voted, 70% say that they did so mainly out of a sense of duty. The second and third highest responses, “to support my candidate” and “to prevent the party I dislike from winning,” trailed far behind at 13% and 10%, respectively. These two responses arguably best capture the idea of voting as a choice. Together, they comprise only 23% of voters, paling in comparison to the importance of duty. Thus respondents report that civic duty – not government campaigns, social networks, or even good candidates – brings most Korean voters to the polls.

For comparison, we matched the Japanese sample to the Korean one, looking at the distribution of duty only for voters.

Table 4 | Duty distribution in 2010 Korean Sample vs. 2005 Japanese Matched Sample
(weighted percent of the total sample)

	Korea		Japan	
	No Duty	Duty	No Duty	Duty
Voters	30	70	4	96
Non-Voters			27	73

Table 4 shows the distribution, which is highly skewed in the Japanese case, as we have seen. Perhaps due to over-report, 96% of Japanese voters say that they have at least some level of civic duty. Table 4 also shows that the Korean duty distribution among reported voters is less one-sided than Japan's. In fact, it is more similar to that of the non-voters in Japan. This suggests that civic duty is lower in South Korea than in Japan, or less powerful in producing turnout. It is impossible to know which is true without seeing the distribution of duty among non-voters, which we do not have. And, of course, differences in the question format could also be responsible for the differences between the two countries.

Table 5 shows the joint distribution of duty and preference in Korea. To measure strength of preference, we used a question asking about interest in the current election. The English versions of the South Korean duty and preference questions appear in Appendix 2.

Table 5 shows that, just as in Japan, duty and strength of preference are positively associated with each other in South Korea. Only a very small percentage of the sample has a sense of duty but little or no preference. On the other hand, 62% of those who have a sense of duty also care at least somewhat who wins.⁶⁾ The

Table 5 | Duty and Preference Distribution in 2010 Korean sample (weighted percent of reported voters)

	Korea	
	No Duty	Duty
Pref little, weak	6	8
Pref somewhat	14	38
Pref a lot	10	24
unweighted N=789	30	70

more they care, the more likely they are to have a sense of duty. At the upper end of preference strength, 70% have a sense of civic duty. Thus, as in Western countries, engagement with politics and a sense of duty to vote tend to go together in both Japan and South Korea.

We cannot do more with the Korean data due to the limits of the sample design. Even at this stage, however, we can say that Kantian duty toward voting is not limited to the West. In fact, a larger percentage of Japanese and Korean citizens say they have civic duty than American citizens do. In Korea, duty is the predominant reason why self-reported voters say that they turned out to vote. In Japan, civic duty to vote is so prevalent that not having it is the exception. Indeed, long ago Steiner (1965, 377) observed in his account of Japanese civic life that “abstention from voting amounts to shirking a duty to the collectivity.” After more than three decades of democratic life, that sense of duty appears to be

6) We remind the reader that we are using interest in the election as a proxy for caring who wins. The latter attitude is the theoretically relevant one; the former is the only measure we have.

flourishing.

For citizens with civic duty, caring who wins matters less in their turnout decision. Blais and Achen (2011) have shown that relationship for the U.S. and Canada; we have shown that it is true in Japan as well. Given the high level of civic duty in Japan, this suggests that turnout rates in Japan, and possibly in Korea too, will be less susceptible to fluctuations—in the excitement or closeness of elections—that alter strength of preference. For an electorate so firmly grounded in civic duty, preference simply matters less for turnout.

V. Conclusion

We have shown that some people construe voting in ethical terms, and that those who do so are more likely to vote and also less inclined to pay attention to non-ethical considerations. Some citizens are Kantians when they approach elections, and being Kantian makes a difference. Analysts need to include measures of duty, preference strength, and their interaction in statistical models of turnout.

This study also exposes the dearth of comparable duty questions across the East Asian national election studies. For future cross-national comparisons, Asian scholars will need comparable survey questions for many different attitudes and behaviors. When

Japanese, Korean, and Taiwan election studies ask the same question in the same format, international comparisons will become more reliable and much more interesting.

As always, survey questions for international comparisons need to be written skillfully. For example, civic duty questions will work best if they give respondents the option to choose a non-duty alternative that is attractive within the national culture. The goal, of course, is to help respondents avoid mere lip-service agreement with the cultural norm of voting. Moreover, such questions need to be asked of all respondents, not just voters, so that the impact of duty on the turnout decision can be assessed.

The study of civic duty and voting presents a rich agenda for researchers. One natural question that follows from our comparative study concerns the sources of civic duty. Why does the strength of civic duty apparently vary so widely across countries? A likely answer is culture. Different cultures can provide different moral bases to think of voting as a duty (Hur 2011). For example, in the U.S., the dominant Christian culture provides a religious ethic in which voting comes to be seen as a moral obligation. In Japan and possibly other East Asian countries, socially embedded Confucianism, which preaches duty to authority and to the collective, can be the moral foundation for voting—a citizen's duty to the state. South Korea would be an interesting case to study further, given the co-existence of deep Confucian roots and widespread Christian faith.

If civic duty is grounded in culture, and if certain cultures have

stronger ethical foundations for developing duty toward voting, and if Confucianism is one of those cultures, then we arrive at a controversial conclusion: Perhaps Confucianism in East Asia —often stereotyped as authoritarian and thus harmful to democracy— is a blessing, not a curse, for the democratic potential of the region.

We also believe that our results suggest an important lesson for contemporary political science. Over the last half-century, political theory and empirical political science have come to occupy the “separate tables” that Gabriel Almond (1988) warned us of. But a more serious problem is the walls dividing political science in different countries. In many cases, we are not just at separate tables, but in different rooms entirely.

Yet civic duty, like many other central democratic concepts, is by no means uniquely American or Western. In fact, we suggest that there is significant intellectual gain to be had by examining it cross-culturally. We have tried to show that, by reaching, not just across sub-fields, but across different countries as well, we can begin to achieve a richer and more accurate understanding of one of the most basic questions in political science, namely why people vote.

Appendix 1.

The question wording for duty in the Blais-Achen (2011) surveys of the 2008 Canadian and American federal elections:

Different people feel differently about voting. For some, voting is a DUTY. They feel that they should vote in every election however they feel about the candidates and parties.

For others, voting is a CHOICE. They feel free to vote or not to vote in an election depending on how they feel about the candidates and parties. [The order of these two statements was varied randomly.]

For you personally, voting is FIRST AND FOREMOST a:

- | | |
|---|----------|
| 1 | Duty |
| 2 | Choice |
| 9 | Not sure |

[If respondent chose “Duty”] How strongly do you feel personally that voting is a duty?

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| 1 | Very strongly |
| 2 | Somewhat strongly |
| 3 | Not very strongly |

Appendix 2

The question wording for duty in the JES III (wave 8) is:

J6. In regard to voting, several opinions are shown on the list. Choose one that best reflects your own.

1. Voting in elections is a citizen's duty, and all citizens are

obliged to vote.

2. Voting in elections is something that a citizen really should do.
3. Voting in elections is each citizen's decision. One should not be obliged to vote.

We have no direct measure of preference in JES III (in wave 9). In its place, we estimate strength of preference by asking about the respondent's behavior during the campaign. The assumption is that those who pay more attention to the campaigns will care more about who wins the election.

K4 During the recent House of Representatives election, how much interest did you have in the campaigns the different parties and candidates conducted? Did you have a great deal of interest, some interest, hardly any interest, or no interest at all?

1. I had a great deal of interest in the campaigns.
2. I had some interest in the campaigns.
3. I had hardly any interest in the campaigns.
4. I had no interest at all in the campaigns.

The interest question was asked as part of the post-election survey, so that it is vulnerable to bias from post-hoc justification or rationalization. After the outcome is determined, respondents may convince themselves that they paid more attention to it than they actually did. Thus our results should be interpreted with appro-

priate caution.

Appendix 3.

The question wording for duty in the 2010 South Korean survey:

[For those who voted] What is the main reason you voted?

1. To support my candidate
2. Voting is a democratic citizen's duty
3. The National Election Commission's voter turnout campaign
4. Urging from people around me
5. To prevent the party I dislike from winning
6. Other

The question is asked as a follow-up for people who answered “yes” to the turnout question. We coded everyone who selected the duty response as “1” and all others as “0,” making the question a dichotomous measure of civic duty.

For preference strength, we used a question very similar to the Japanese measure:

How interested were you in this local election?

1. Very interested
2. Somewhat interested
3. Somewhat disinterested
4. Very disinterested

The question concerns interest in this particular election, not in general, hence differentiating itself from the standard political interest question. We coded the responses into three levels of preference strength, ranging from caring none to little (responses 3 and 4), caring some (response 2), and caring a lot (response 1).

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일본과 한국에서의 시민의 의무감과 투표 참여

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민주 정부는 균형 잡히고 공정한 선거 결과를 위해 모든 시민에 의한 참여에 의존하고 있다. 그렇다면 이러한 ‘민주주의 건강’에 있어서의 핵심 요소인 투표 참여를 유지하는 것은 무엇인가? 시민의 의무감은 유권자를 투표장으로 가게 만드는 강력한 요인이지만, 경험적 연구에서 자주 오해되거나 혹은 경시되어 왔다. 이와는 대조적으로, 정치이론가들은 민주시민의 다양한 의무에 대해 많은 연구를 수행해 왔다. 의무에 대한 정치이론가들의 분석에 바탕하여 만들어진 새로운 통계적 모형이 일본과 한국에서의 투표참여율에 대한 우리의 이해를 더욱 증진시켜준다는 사실을 본 연구는 보여주고 있다.

주제어: 시민의 의무(감), 투표 참여, 민주주의 건강, 일본과 한국의 선거 분석