

Chapter 7

Mobilization and Attitudes Equals Turnout - A Simple Equation?

Bernhard Wessels
Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin

1. Introduction

Since the first European Parliament elections, turnout has been in decline. This is just the opposite of what one would expect from the increasing relevance of the European Union as a more and more powerful political system and the increasing significance of the European Parliament within this system.

The decline in turnout has raised many questions and worries. Whereas the level of turnout compared across countries may not signify political satisfaction where it is high, nor the opposite where it is low, decline across time certainly does indicate that something is going on. Mark Franklin demonstrated the strong impact of demographic change in the composition of the eligible population by lowered voting age. But even then the question remains; why is or was the European system not able to attract (new) voters.

However, the 2004 European Election seems to be an event whose historical relevance can hardly be overestimated. The previous enlargement of the European Union had moved the borders of the community far beyond the former iron curtain to the East. The 2004 EP Elections can be called the founding elections of the new Europe, overcoming the obsolete East-West

divide. For the first time that the sovereign people in the East could express their longing and indicate their preferences for the political course of the Union. And, it was a chance for the people in the old member states to demonstrate the historical significance of the event by participating in it. None of this happened. Turnout was, on average, extremely low in the new member states, and even in the old member states it was a little lower than that of 1999.

In order to explore a partial explanation, two different approaches will be used: an information/mobilization approach, and an attitudinal approach. The two approaches are chosen to investigate the following hypotheses:

1. Mobilization deficit hypothesis

The basic notion of this hypothesis is that political actors, namely parties and politicians, fell short of making the relevance of the election clear to the voters attracting them.

2. Political community deficit hypothesis

The general claim of this hypothesis is that identification with Europe or the EU is too weak to engage political commitment and participation. More specifically, the basic claim is that European identity or the strength of the political community is weaker in the East than in the West, contributing to the difference in turnout.

3. Political System deficit hypothesis

The third hypothesis states that the outcome of the evaluation of particular features of the EU is too weak to generate commitment and participation.

All three hypotheses aim at explaining individual turnout as a first step, and differences in turnout between countries as a second step. The paper is organized into four sections: a brief review of turnout in EP elections; a theoretical exploration of the relationship between political community,

evaluation, mobilization, and turnout; the generation and presentation of the independent variables; the analysis of the relationship between attitudes, mobilization, and turnout at the individual and cross-country level. Finally we draw some conclusions.

2. Turnout at the European Parliament Elections 2005 compared

The EP elections of 2004 mark a second historical juncture after system transformations in Central and East Europe 1989/1990. Not only had the EU experienced the biggest enlargement in its existence prior to these elections but it was the first joint opportunity for the citizens to articulate their will and to determine who should become their representatives at the European level. In this sense, the 2004 elections were the “Founding Elections” of a common Europe.

However, the election outcome does not itself greatly reflect this historical significance. The elections mobilized a smaller proportion of voters than in all previous European elections. This continues a trend, which started with the second EP elections of 1984 and has never been broken. Electoral participation as an indicator of symbolic self-assignment to a political system did not take place on the level which might be expected from the historical significance of the event. Thus, measured in terms of turnout, the EP elections of 2004 were nothing special, old experiences continued. On average, turnout has dropped about 3.8 percentage points in the old member states from one election to the next. Not all countries experienced the same fall: Austria has had a decline of -12.6 since its first participation in 1996, Finland showed the largest single decline of -28.9 percentage points between 1996 and 1999, in Great Britain turnout increased by 1.3 percentage points on average, and in Ireland the highest single increase of 20.7 percentage points could be observed between 1984 and 1989. Variation is large, but on average, there is decline.

From 1999 to 2004, this decline was not dramatic with respect to the old member states (-0.2 percentage points). However, this is a continuation of the trend. More significant is the turnout in the new member states. Here, where it could have been a signal of self-assignment, many less voters felt attracted that in the old member states. Whereas in the old member states on average a little more than half of the electorate (52.7%) went to the voting booth, the corresponding figure was only 40.3% on average in the new member countries. And this figure is so high because turnout in Malta and Cyprus was extraordinary high (71.2%, and 82.4% respectively). The electorates of the new member states in Central and East Europe abstained by more than two thirds. Turnout was as low as 31.2% (figure 1).

Figure 1: Turnout at European Parliament Elections 2004 compared



The reason for this cannot be found in the fact that turnout in Central and East Europe is lower in general. Average turnout at the last national elections is somewhat lower than in the West, but not much. The so-called “Euro-gap”, the difference in turnout at national and the European elections, is considerable higher in the East.

The structural reasons for differences in turnout in general are well-known: at the individual level these are age and social structure (Franklin 2002), at the country level compulsory voting and concomitant national elections (Franklin, van der Eijck, Oppenhuis 1996; Rose 2005; Schmitt 2005). In this paper, a different route is taken. We will ask to what extent information/mobilization, identification, and evaluations matter for turnout.

3. Turnout, Mobilization, and Political Community

Elections generate a reciprocal relationship between electors and elected. On the one hand, there is a simple instrumental consideration: elections ought to translate distributions of preferences among the electorate into the distribution of representatives of those preferences in parliament. Thus, elections should provide an effective translation of preferences, and should guarantee the responsiveness of the political institutions and actors. If this is a correct perception of what democratic theory says and democratic systems aim at, then elections make sense in so far as they provide these outputs. If they do, it is worthwhile voting – if they do not, the voter may stay at home.

This consideration is directly related to the *political system deficit hypothesis*. If the system leaves the voters with the impression that elections neither provide an effective translation of preferences nor guarantee responsiveness of the elected, the system has a deficit and voters have little reason to vote.

However, there is more to elections than the output-side of the system. The other side of the coin is the participation of citizens in elections. Democracy is more than or needs to be more than an instrumental mechanism between rulers and ruled. The acceptance of the rules of the game, procedures as well as decisions, demands support in the form of self-assignment and identification with the political order (Fuchs 1999; Fuchs, Klingemann 2002). If this is true, identification with the political community should

matter for turnout. The relationship of elections to political community can be demonstrated by looking to the functions of elections. Rose and Mossawir define the function of elections as follows: elections allow citizens 1) to select the representatives; 2) to exchange influence; 3) to develop an identification with the system; 4) the satisfaction of expressive needs; 5) the expression of distance from the system. Or elections can be meaningless, because they do not allow 6) choices, or do not generate affiliation and identification with the system. Some of these functions relate to the instrumental, some to the affective aspects of democracy and democratic elections. Instrumental or output-related functions are, in particular, points 1 and 2. “The emphasis here is upon the extent to which the need for election or re-election will lead incumbents and candidates to alter their policies in order to retain or gain office“ (Rose, Mossawir 1969: 170). Elections should, however, not only be effective, but should also produce an affection of citizens for the norms and symbols of the system (points 2 and 3). They should “contribute to the development or maintenance of an individual’s *allegiance* to the existing constitutional regime” (Rose, Mossawir 1969: 171). These functions lead, in a general sense, to a commitment and identification with the political community. Mackenzie has described the route to identification in the following way: “It may be said that electoral procedure is functionally analogous to procedure in a marriage ceremony: ‘Do you take this man (or women) to be your lawfully wedded husband (or wife)?’ ‘I do’. The point in time at which ‘I do’ is said is not psychologically a moment of choice or decision – that came earlier; it is the point at which an individual preference becomes a social commitment” (W. J. M. Mackenzie, S. Rokkan 1968: 5).

This argument relates directly to turnout and its relationship to political community and thus to the *political community deficit hypothesis*. If it is true that the decision to participate in an election is taken prior to making a choice about how to vote, and the reason for this is social commitment to the political order, European identity should matter for turnout.

However, given the fact that elections should generate a reciprocal relationship between electors and elected, it can also be claimed that it is not only voters who have a duty to deliver to the system, but also political actors and representatives. As already mentioned, they should be responsive. But in a democracy with competitive elections this is not all. They have to get their message to the people. That message is two-fold from their perspective. It is very much in their own interest to differentiate their respective political offers from those of the competitors, and thus to make choice meaningful. Beside this, it is also their duty to (re-)produce the attachment of the people to the system by mobilization. This is more or less in line with the huge debate about whether there is a European public. The foreign minister of the Federal Republic of Germany claims in a paper: “Generating a public means generating the cement for the future of any political order. Without a minimum political public, the European Union cannot develop further.” A public does not generate automatically. A public is a forum that needs speakers, mediators and an audience (Neidhardt, Koopmans, Pfetsch 2000). Election campaigns are the ideal occasion to generate a public – at least temporarily. It seems to be natural to assume that the speakers at these times are candidates, parties and other officials.

However, if they do not care, why should voters? Given the observation that turnout in EP elections is low rather than high, the *mobilization deficit hypothesis* comes into play: the less efforts there are to inform and mobilize electorates the lower will be the turnout.

4. Political Community, Political Evaluations, and Mobilization

If the claim of the three hypotheses is correct, turnout should be influenced 1) by the instrumental aspect as to how far elections are effective and the system is responsive, 2) by the degree of identification with the political

community, and 3) by the information and mobilization efforts of political actors.

4.1 *Evaluation of Electoral Effectiveness, Responsiveness, and Political Identity*

The “EOS Gallup Post European Elections 2004 Survey” has a set of indicators, which are well suited to testing the hypotheses. One battery of questions covers the attitudinal, instrumental and affective aspects, namely the questions on electoral effectiveness, political responsiveness and European identity. The following seven questions were asked:

“For each of the following propositions, please tell me whether it corresponds or does not correspond to your attitude or your opinion:

- a It is very important for you which particular political party gained the most seats in the European Parliament elections
- b It is very important for you which particular candidates win seats and become MEPs in the European Parliament elections
- c The European Parliament takes into consideration the concerns of European citizens
- d You trust the institutions of the European Union
- e The membership of [COUNTRY] in the European Union is a good thing
- f You feel you are a citizen of the European Union
- g You feel attached to Europe”

Possible answers: “Yes”; “No”; [DK/NA]

Questions a) and b) are directly related to *electoral effectiveness*. They contain the evaluation of whether it makes a difference who gets the majority and who to vote for. If voters assume that it is important who gets seats and which party gains most seats, this implies that they assume that voting makes a difference.

Responsiveness characterizes the ability of political actors, political institutions, and the system as a whole to react to needs and demands of the citizens. Question c) is an evaluation of the European Parliament in this regard. An indirect indicator of the perception of responsiveness might be the trust in the EU (question d). Trust is an evaluation of the future based on the assumption that the one who is trusted will behave according to one's own expectation. Trust will be provided if the experience is that actors behaved according to expectations and will do so in the future. Thus, trust can be read as an indicator of responsiveness.

Finally, questions e, f, and g, relates to identification with the political community. Question e is somewhat more evaluative than the clearly affective questions f and g. But it also relates to the affective or generalized aspect of the country's belonging to the community.

Although, the questions can be sorted clearly in analytical terms, one must ask whether voters do the same. In order to explore the dimensionality of the question battery, an exploratory factor analysis has been performed. The result is obviously in line with the analytical considerations. Three factors could be extracted, with loadings separating clearly between effectiveness, responsiveness, and identity (table 1).

Using factor scores for the respective factors as variables, effectiveness, responsiveness, and political community show huge variations across countries.

With regard to the evaluation of electoral effectiveness, country averages show a greater range in the new member states than in the old. This is, however, a result of the very positive evaluations of the Maltese and Cypriot populations. Otherwise, the range is smaller and the mean evaluation less positive than in the old member states. In both groups of countries, the range

is from rather positive to rather negative evaluations of electoral effectiveness (figure 2).

With regard to the evaluation of the responsiveness of the European political system, the range is narrower across the new members, and on average somewhat more positive than in the older member states. Again, for both groups of countries, evaluations range from negative to positive.

Table 1: Dimensions of Attitudes towards Europe: Political Community, Responsiveness, and Effectiveness

Indicator	Political Community	Responsiveness	Effectiveness
You feel attached to Europe	0,854	0,094	0,089
You feel you are a citizen of the European Union	0,794	0,243	0,084
The membership of [COUNTRY] in the European Union is a good thing	0,510	0,508	0,079
The European Parliament takes into consideration the concerns of European citizens	0,082	0,848	0,068
You trust the institutions of the European Union	0,262	0,756	0,124
It is very important for you which particular candidates who win seats and become MEPs in the European Parliament elections	0,094	0,062	0,863
It is very important for you which particular political party gained the most seats in the European Parliament elections	0,076	0,122	0,854
„Explained“ Variance (in %)	38,9	18,4	12,2

Pooled data, 25 countries; 24063 respondents; samples of almost equal size. Source: Eurobarometer Flash 162, EOS Gallup, Post European Election Survey 2004. Possible Answers: Yes, No, Don't know, No Answer. Coding: 1 (Yes), 0 (Don't know, No Answer) und -1 (No).

Lastly, with regard to political community or European identity a clear and sharp difference can be observed between new and old members. Only one new member country shows a weak positive identification on average: Hungary. All other countries are at the midpoint or the negative side of the scale. Interestingly enough, Malta and Cyprus, where voters were quite positive with regard to effectiveness and responsiveness, show little

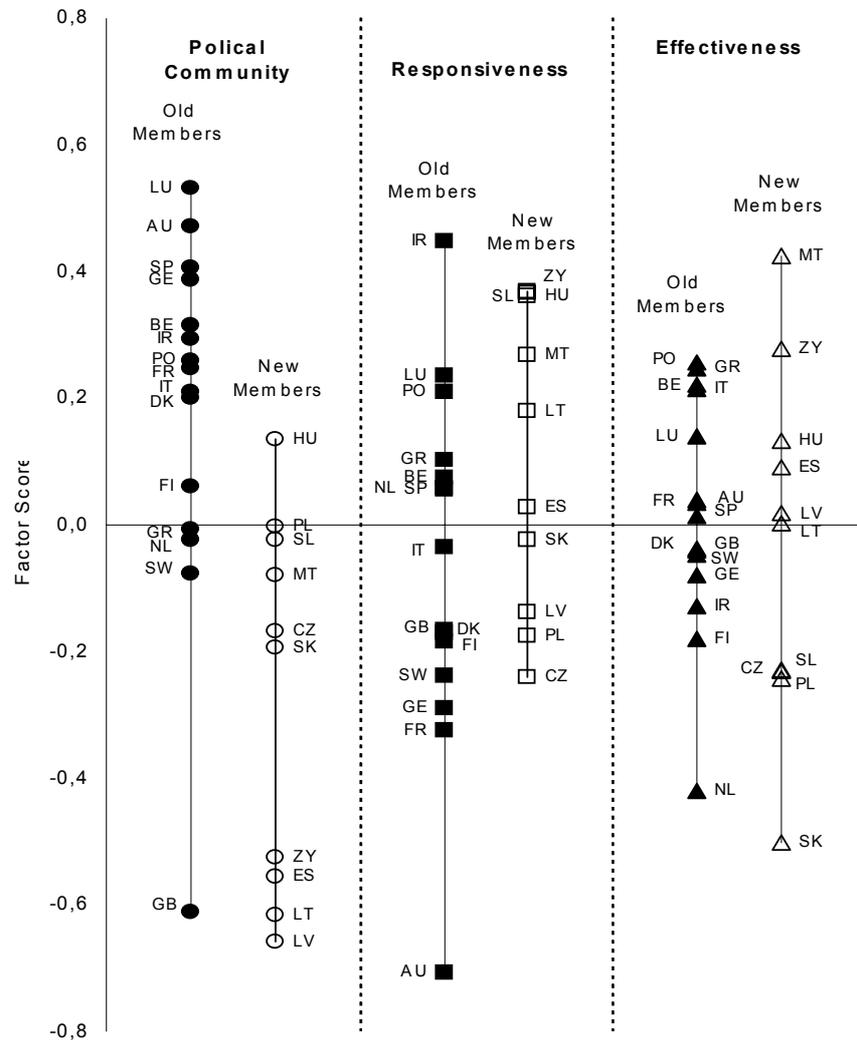
identification with Europe. In contrast, most of the old member states are in the positive end of the scale, the exceptions being Greece, the Netherlands, and, lowest of all, Great Britain. The clear difference in overall level of political community feeling between the new and the old member states seems to reflect what has been argued above: identity needs time, which the new members do not yet have.

4.2 Political Information and Political Mobilization

Election campaigns are generally the periods during which the attention which citizens pay to the political system is increased and attachment actualized. The cyclical development of political interest, party support, and attentiveness between elections supports this observation. Furthermore, it has been shown that support for European integration also follows this path. European Election campaigns serve to re-actualize and re-mobilize support (Wessels 1995).

Clearly this leads to the expectation that election campaigns should also engage electoral participation. What can be assumed to be the traditional channels of information and mobilization? Firstly the most central role in political communication is that of the mass media. Secondly, information seeking also plays an important role. Thirdly, during election campaigns the direct communication between voters and candidates or parties is normally at its greatest. It is likely that these three means of political information serve different purposes: the media producing the agenda, information seeking producing choices, and direct contacts producing mobilization. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this. Instead the information and mobilization environment of electorates will be explored and related to turnout.

Figure 2: Attitudes – Perception of A European Political Community, European Responsiveness, and European Effectiveness in Old and New Member States (Factor scores)



The “EOS Gallup Post-European Elections 2004 Survey” provides a number of questions on these matters. They read as follows:

“Political parties and candidates campaigned for votes in the European Parliament elections we have just had. For each of the following, please tell me if you have been in this situation or not...”

- a You have seen or heard things concerning the electoral campaign on television or on the radio
- b You have seen advertisements for parties or candidates
- c You have read about the electoral campaign in the newspapers
- d You received leaflets concerning the European Elections in your mailbox
- e You have been contacted by political parties or candidates or their representatives by phone
- f Political parties or candidates or their representatives called to your home
- g You have been approached in the street by political parties or candidates or their representatives
- h You have searched for information on the European Elections on the internet
- i You took part in public gatherings or meetings concerning the European Parliament Elections
- j You have discussed the European Parliament Elections with your family, friends or acquaintances
- k You have been aware of a non-party campaign or advertisement encouraging people to vote in the European Parliament elections”

Possible Answers: Yes, No, Don't know, No Answer.

These questions cover the three aspects of information and mobilization which we sought to examine. a, b, c, and d deal with mediated information, information seeking is covered by h to k. and e, f, and g refer to the direct contacts of candidates and parties with voters.

Again, a factor analysis was performed to check for dimensionality and to reduce data complexity. The result fits the distinction between mediated information, information seeking and direct contacting very nicely. Media or

mediated information items bind most of the variance, followed by direct contacts. Information seeking is the “weakest” factor (table 2).

Again, cross-country variations are striking. The general pattern is that the range of variation is larger among the old member states than among the new member states. On average, media information shows a similar mean across the two membership groups, but both positive and negative extremes are much smaller in the new member states. The highest level of media information in the West can be found in Ireland, the best in the new member states in Hungary. The lowest score for media information can be found in Greece and in the Czech Republic for the West and new members respectively. Direct contacts range positively on the scale only in Ireland, Italy, Great Britain and Belgium for the old members, and only in Malta, Cyprus, and the Czech Republic for the new member states. Info-Seeking is highest in Finland and lowest in Ireland among the old members, and highest in Hungary and lowest in Malta for the new members (figure 3).

The question is, whether these differences also translate into differences in turnout as the *mobilization deficit hypothesis* assumes.

5. Results: Political Community, Political Evaluations, Mobilization and Turnout

5.1 Individual Levels of Turnout

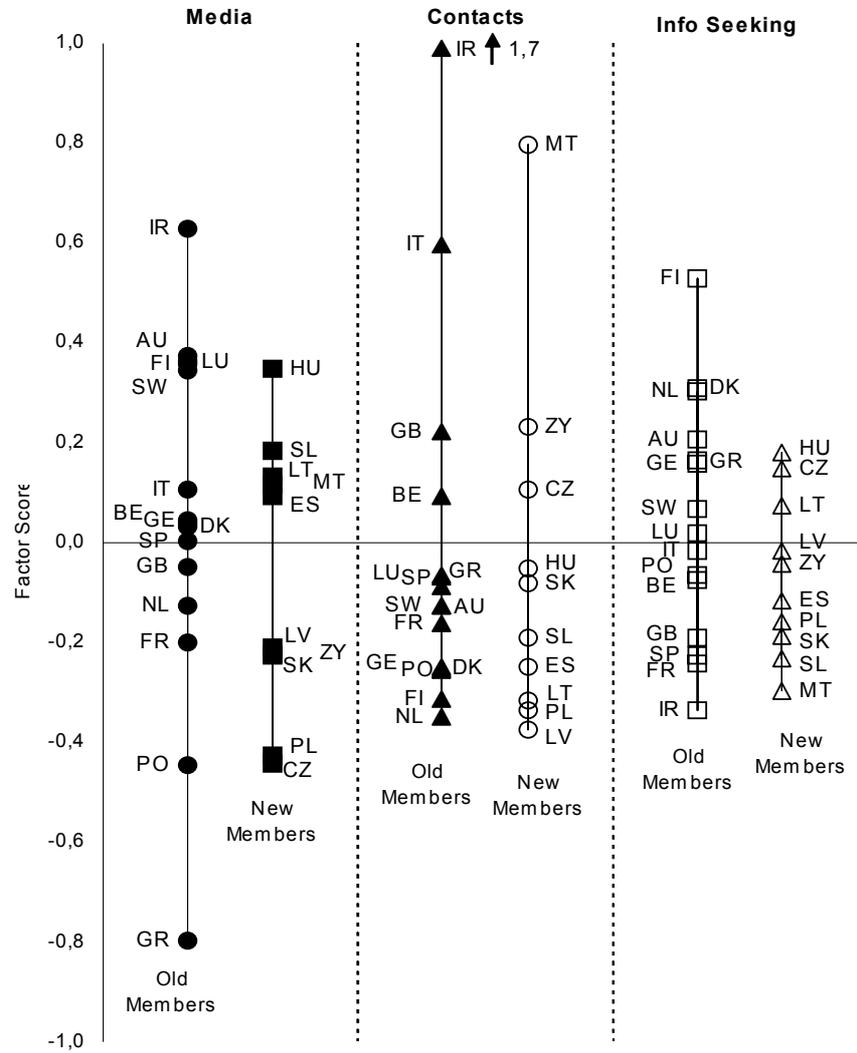
For a first exploration of the relationship between political evaluations and European identity on the one hand, and political information and mobilization on the other hand, factor scales have been recoded and related to means of reported turnout.

Table 2: Dimensions of Mobilization in the European Elections 2004 – Information Channels,– pooled Analysis. 25 Countries

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
	Media	Contacts	Info Seeking
You have seen or heard things concerning the electoral campaign on television or on the radio	0,6608	-0,0513	-0,0223
You have seen advertisements for parties or candidates	0,6537	0,0506	0,0032
You have read about the electoral campaign in the newspapers	0,6275	-0,0100	0,2575
You received leaflets concerning the European Elections in your mailbox	0,4728	0,3281	-0,1919
You have been contacted by political parties or candidates or their representatives by phone	0,0714	0,7192	-0,0599
Political parties or candidates or their representatives called to your home	-0,0517	0,6670	0,0508
You have been approached in the street by political parties or candidates or their representatives	0,0612	0,5368	0,2275
You have searched for information on the European Elections on the internet	-0,0223	-0,0266	0,7414
You took part in public gatherings or meetings concerning the European Parliament Elections	-0,0274	0,3238	0,5263
You have discussed the European Parliament Elections with your family, friends or acquaintances	0,4321	-0,0091	0,4415
You have been aware of a non-party campaign or advertisement encouraging people to vote in the European Parliament elections	0,3152	0,0410	0,3254
„Explained“ Variance (in %)	18,8	12,5	9,9

Possible Answers: Yes, No, Don't know, No Answer. Coding: 1 (Yes), 0 (Don't know, No Answer).

Figure 3: Extent of Mobilization – Media Information, Direct Contacts, Information Seeking in Old and New Member States (Factor scores)



Results can be reported straight-lined. According to the *system deficit hypothesis*, the less effective the elections and the less responsive the system the lower turnout should be. As can be seen in table 3, this is indeed the case. Individuals who show a factor score value smaller than half a standard deviation below the mean, report average turnouts of 39.5% and 50.0 % respectively. For those showing scale values higher than a half standard deviation above the mean, turnout is 77.3% and 69.2% respectively. In terms of Eta, effectiveness has a clearer impact than responsiveness. The *political community deficit hypothesis* claims that low identity goes with low turnout, strong identity with high turnout. Again, this pattern can be observed across all individuals in the analysis. The pooled analysis shows that these differences are true despite country level differences.

Table 3: Turnout in %, Depending on Attitudinal Evaluations

	Community	Responsiveness	Effectiveness
Low	51,0	50,0	39,5
Medium	64,8	61,6	68,0
High	64,1	69,2	77,3
Eta	0,126	0,168	0,347

Low: Factor scale value < -0.5 StdDev. Medium: -0.5 to +0.5 StdDev. High: >+0.5 StdDev.
N. of Cases: 24063.

Table 4 reports results in a similar way for the three factors of information and mobilization. The *mobilization deficit hypothesis* suggests that the lower the information/mobilization level is, the lower will be the turnout. This is indeed the case. The difference in turnout between the lowest and the highest levels of mediated information, information seeking and direct contacts is roughly around twenty percentage points. Etas of all three factors are quite similar.

Table 4: Turnout in %, Depending on Levels of Information and Mobilization

	Media	Contacts	Info Seeking
Low	48,6	56,2	52,1
Medium	60,3	58,5	60,5
High	68,8	72,9	72,4
Eta	0,156	0,120	0,139

Low: Factor scale value < -0.5 StdDev. Medium: -0.5 to +0.5 StdDev. High: >+0.5 StdDev.

N. of Cases: 24063.

These descriptive results all support the hypotheses. Does this finding hold up in a multivariate analysis? The simple answer is “yes”. Introducing all six independent variables encompassing the attitudinal and the information/mobilization variables and adding a compulsory voting dummy in a logistic regression produces a model, which “explains” about 20% of the variance in reported turnout. All effects are significant, which does not come as a surprise given the high number of cases (table 5). Among the attitudinal variables, electoral effectiveness has the largest effect. This indicates that if people believe that what they determine with their vote is not relevant, they regard voting as useless. Other aspects being constant, the probability of participation in the European election 2004 increases by 64% if effectiveness increases by one scale point. All other individual level variables increase the probability by somewhat over 50%.

The most influential factor is, of course, compulsory voting. The difference between compulsory and non-compulsory voting in terms of probability of electoral participation is 82%.

However, even if compulsory voting is excluded from the model, it produces a reasonable score of “explained” variance. It is still 15% for the Cox&Snell R-square, and 20% for the Nagelkerke R-square (see table A1 in the appendix).

Table 5: Regressing Individual Turnout on European Attitudes, Mobilization Factors, and Compulsory Voting (Logistic Regression)

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Pol. Community	0,238	0,015	267,465	1	0,000	1,269
Responsiveness	0,228	0,015	239,244	1	0,000	1,256
Effectiveness	0,587	0,015	1500,044	1	0,000	1,799
Media	0,287	0,015	352,991	1	0,000	1,333
Contacts	0,257	0,017	234,034	1	0,000	1,294
Info Seeking	0,251	0,016	241,317	1	0,000	1,286
Compulsory Voting	1,512	0,051	875,925	1	0,000	4,537
Constant	0,311	0,016	391,803	1	0,000	1,365
Cox & Snell R Square		0,191				
Nagelkerke R Square		0,258				

It is particularly interesting that all other factors beside electoral effectiveness and compulsory voting have a similar weight on turnout. Mediated information is somewhat more important than direct contacts and information seeking; all three are a slightly stronger than political community and responsiveness. However, overall they are of equal weight. Given the fact that the model works without country specific factors other than compulsory voting, the question is whether it can explain country-differences.

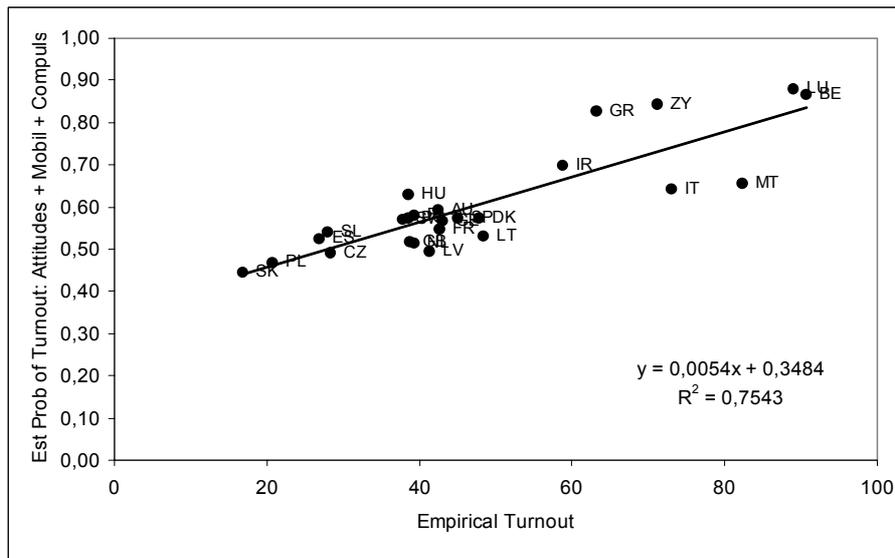
5.2 Estimating Country-Differences in Turnout

It is always helpful to identify individual-level factors which can explain why some citizens participate in elections and why others do not. However, the proof of the pudding is whether individual level models contribute to outcome. In order to check this, two different routes are taken in this paper. One is to estimate individual-level probability to vote and to compare country means to the official turnout rates in those countries. The second is to take the aggregate information (means) about the distribution of attitudes and information/mobilization across countries and estimate turnout at the aggregate level. The outcome of this equation is then compared to official turnout figures.

The first route, estimating individual probabilities to vote and comparing country means to official turnout figures, shows that the model captures

country differences very well. The (aggregate) R-square between the means of probabilities and the countries' turnout figures is 0.75. However, the estimates for probabilities are clearly too high. The regression coefficient indicates that, at the lower end, probabilities overestimate turnout by a ratio of 2:1. At the higher end, there is no overestimation (figure 4).

Figure 4: Turnout and Probability of Individual Turnout Estimated by Levels of European Attitudes, Mobilization, and Compulsory Voting Compared



Comparing different models, i.e. one using only the attitudinal variables, one only the information/mobilization factors and one including all of them, reveals that attitudes alone estimate probabilities almost as well as the full model, and that information/mobilization factors alone do rather poorly (table 6). Furthermore, the comparison shows that the full model without compulsory voting is almost as good as the one including compulsory voting.

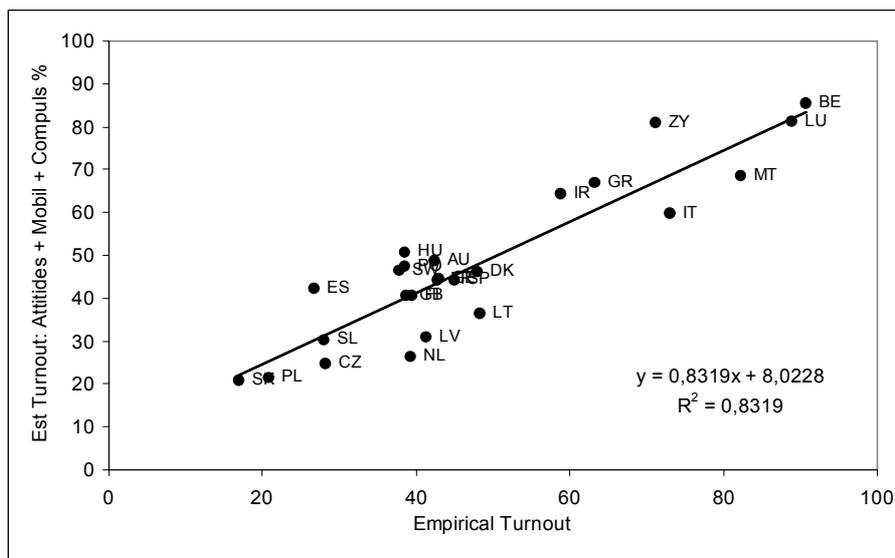
In the second route turnout is estimated by country-level aggregate information about the means of the respective variables. The result is even more convincing: the (aggregate) R-square is even higher, and the slope is

close to 1 which indicates that not much over- or underestimation is going on (figure 5).

Table 6: Models Compared: Turnout and Probability of Individual Turnout

Models	Without Compulsory Voting Corr coeff.	With Compulsory Voting Corr coeff.	Without Compulsory Voting B	With Compulsory Voting b
Mobilization factors only	0,49	0,85	0,24	0,72
Attitudes only	0,77	0,85	0,59	0,71
Mobilization and Attitudes	0,81	0,91	0,65	0,83

Figure 5: Aggregate Estimation: Turnout and Turnout Estimated by Levels of European Attitudes, Mobilization, and Compulsory Voting Compared



Although using seven variables to estimate a model for 25 cases may be problematic, the result is quite convincing. The overall model is significant, and three variables, electoral effectiveness, direct contacts, and compulsory voting, clearly stand out as significant in the whole model. Using only the information/mobilization and compulsory voting variables, the prediction is

still quite good (adj. R-square 0.66), and information seeking proves insignificant. Taking the attitudinal variables alone, the model predictivity is as good and responsiveness shown to be insignificant.

6. Conclusion: Mobilization and Attitudes Equals Turnout - A Simple Equation?

This paper started out with three deficit hypotheses, claiming that each of the related factors contributes positively or negatively to turnout. The reason why the hypotheses are formulated in terms of deficits is that turnout in the 2004 European Elections was unexpected low. These elections mark a historical juncture because they can be regarded as the “Founding Elections” of a common Europe of East and West which has overcome the obsolete “iron curtain”. However, the electorates obviously did not feel that way.

Thus, the basic assumption must have been that there are deficits – deficits in the strength of the political community, deficits in the institutional system of the EU, and deficits in mobilization. These factors are related to each other to a greater or lesser degree. Prior analysis has shown that institutional factors, namely electoral effectiveness and institutional responsiveness, determine the strength of political community. Media information and information seeking, and, to a lesser extent, direct contacts of candidates and parties with voters, influence the feeling about effectiveness, responsiveness and political community. One may assume, that all three general factors – the evaluation of the institutional system, information and mobilization, and attachment to the political EU community – form a syndrome of deficits which prevent voters from feeling sufficiently attracted to engage in the process of voting.

Empirically, the analyses show that all three general factors contribute to turnout – or more accurately prevent turnout. At the individual level, except for electoral effectiveness, there is little difference in the impact of the remaining variables, namely the evaluation of responsiveness and political

identity with regard to the attitudinal variables and media information, direct contacts with political actors, and information seeking with regard to the information/mobilization variables.

However, when we estimate country level turnout, results show that some factors may be more important than others. The attitudinal model performs better in the comparison of estimates of voting probability and turnout than the information model. In the aggregate model, evaluation of electoral effectiveness and direct mobilization, i.e. contacting the voters, stand out.

These results certainly allow us to conclude that political actors, namely candidates, parties and EU officials have to put more effort into making it clear to the voter that voting makes a difference, and into informing and mobilizing them. Although the traditional model of democracy is very much a bottom-up model this is not true in reality. Just as citizens should feel a commitment to the political order and a duty to engage, political actors should feel a duty to attract and to attach citizens to that order. Obviously this can be done – otherwise there would not be such a clear result with regard to country differences.

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Appendix

Table A1: Regressing Individual Turnout on European Attitudes, Mobilization Factors, - Compulsor Voting Excluded (Logistic Regression)

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Pol.						
Community	0,252	0,014	316,603	1	0,000	1,287
Responsiveness	0,278	0,014	372,574	1	0,000	1,321
Effectiveness	0,619	0,015	1733,781	1	0,000	1,857
Media	0,222	0,015	230,727	1	0,000	1,248
Contacts	0,254	0,017	233,087	1	0,000	1,289
Info Seeking	0,232	0,016	212,700	1	0,000	1,261
Constant	0,506	0,015	1190,340	1	0,000	1,659
Cox & Snell R.Square		0,154				
Nagelkerke R.Square		0,208				