

Turnout in the European Union



How perception of democracy
in the European Union
influences electoral
participation

Bachelor Thesis

University of Twente,
School of Management and
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by Stefan Michel

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Democracy is the government of the people, by the people, for the people

- Abraham Lincoln -

Stefan Michel

Address:

Neustraße 26
48599 Gronau - Germany

Study:

Bachelor European Studies

Student number:

s0148032

Supervisors:

Dr. Martin Rosema
Political Science and Research Methods (MB)

Dr. Kostas Gemenis
Political Science and Research Methods (MB)

Abstract

This Bachelor-Thesis, being part of a project dealing with the European elections 2009, deals with the topic of perception of democracy and electoral participation. Turnout rates show differences between national and European elections, with an average of 22,6% higher turnout for national elections in the EU member states. Why is this the case? This paper seeks to explain how the perception of a certain government (in this case the EU) might influence the decision whether to vote or not. The research question is:

"What is the perception of European citizens towards the degree of democracy (democratic elements) in the European Union, and in how far does this affect the decision whether or not to vote in European Parliament elections?"

Data was collected by a survey in the Netherlands and Germany around the European elections, in total n = 727 answered questionnaires could be used. Analyzing the data shows that there in fact is a relationship between the perception of democracy and electoral participation. The more democratic the people think the EU works, the more likely they are to vote in European elections. This relationship is also tested against two different third factors, age and education, which are both being regarded as influencing the decision whether to vote or not. Although the initial relation between perception of democracy and electoral participation could not be shown for each of the categories of age and education, clear general tendencies were found. It seems likely that there actually is a relationship between what people think of the EU in democratic terms and whether they will vote or not.

Nevertheless further research has to deepen and broaden the knowledge about this topic, and has to investigate further. For example similar studies could be extended to more European countries (EU members), or include more third variables to test the initial relationship.

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Abbreviations

"democraticness"	-	is used as a word for "level of democracy"
EB	-	Eurobarometer
EP	-	European Parliament
EU	-	European Union
UN	-	United Nations
WHO	-	World Health Organization

1. Introduction

1.1 Aim of the study

Since 1979, the European Parliament is being elected directly, and since then, the average turnout rates are decreasing. While in Germany the average voting turnout for national elections in the period of 1987 until 2002 was at 80.48% (Europarlament), the respective average for electoral participation in European elections was at 57,98% (ibid) during the time of 1979-1999. There are several theories why elections on the European level seem to be not as interesting for citizens when compared to national ones (taking into account turnout rates in the member states). One argument which is constantly part of the discussion is the (un)democratic character of the European Union (EU) (Thomassen and Schmitt, 2004). The discussions about how democratic the EU actually is, are often led by experts on the scientific level. On this level as well the low turnout rates are sought to be explained. With this paper I want to shift the focus away from experts' opinions about the nature of the EU towards the voters' opinions, in order to partly explain the low turnout rates for the European Parliament elections. To be more precise, the perception of people towards the level of how democratic the European Union is, in my view, has an important influence regarding the electoral participation and the peoples' choice whether to vote or not.

There is no doubt that the perception of how democratic the European Union, and especially the role of the European Parliament, is, does not constitute the only reason for individuals in their decision whether to vote or not to vote. There are other factors that play a role, or to put it in the words of John Matsusaka and Filip Palda: "[T]he individual decision whether or not to vote is observationally equivalent to random behavior. ...Individual voting decision appears to be more-or-less random..." (Matsusaka and Palda 1999: 432). I do not support their view that electoral participation is random, since one must keep in mind that there are multiple factors influencing the decision of voting or not voting. For some people, this makes it a too blurry construct to understand, which leads to the notion of *random electoral participation*. Nevertheless, other influences on the personal decision to vote are numerous and often discussed in literature: they range from individual opinions towards systematic conditions, and include the set-up of election days (during the week or at the weekend), political rules (compulsory voting), the rational-choice theory (and Downsians paradox) and outside factors like the economic recession (Mattila, 2003).

It is important to know about the complex system that influences voting behavior, and it is even more important to acknowledge it in the sense of being aware of as much factors as possible. But not all of these factors can be taken into account when conducting the research on how democratic the European Union and its functioning is being seen, and in how far this would be reflected in the actual turnout. The aim of this study is not to explain the turnout in its completeness, but rather to explore and highlight the role of perception of the European structure and degree of democracy in the decision whether to vote or not. To be precise, I will study, using a survey, how much the perception about the

democratic character of the EU influences the elections' turnout. This means that individuals will be asked about their opinion towards the EU (and its democratic state), and their intention to vote. But in order to do so, subquestions have to be answered concerning possible other factors of influence.

1.2 Motivation

Extended interest in the European Union can best be described by the unique nature this political entity has. There is no other organization, union or any form of cooperation worldwide that was able to increase and deepen integration between sovereign states in a similar way. And because the European Union is so exceptional, phenomena occurring within and around it cannot be easily described and explained by comparison. For example in the case of democracy, would it be fair to compare the European Union to a nation state? Or should we see the European Union as an international organization like the World Health Organization (WHO) or the United Nations (UN)? These are questions that occur automatically when being confronted with EU issues, although today it seems that they increasingly remain unanswered, or put aside for reasons of simplicity. That is why a study concerning the European Union's election process is admirable, and there have been plenty of essays dealing with this topic. What is rarely done, however, is an exploration of individuals' feelings and perceptions towards the EU when it comes to the level of democracy.

Further, it cannot be ignored that the EU has become an international power, rather in economic than in political terms (see the differentiated views on the war on Iraq, *e.g.*). But why then does it appear that European citizens do not take part in the decision-making process to an extent as they do nationally? There are several possible answers for this question, and one of special interest is the democratic element within the EU. From my point of view, it might well happen that in 100 years the EU will have grown bigger, having developed into a "United States of Europe", as Winston Churchill has called for as early as in 1945 (Mauter 1998: 67). Would the people finally see European elections as *national* ones? By conducting the research amongst European citizens, German and Dutch more specifically, one must try to understand in how far people are influenced in the electoral participation decision by their opinion towards the democratic character of the EU. As this is a topic that is both highly debated and highly complex, one cannot answer all questions at once. As much as possible has to be known about this topic, and that only works by observing, describing and explaining.

1.3 Problem statement

As mentioned in the introduction, turnout rates in European states show high differences regarding European elections and national ones (for a complete table, see Appendix A). Although there are slight changes between the member states, the overall trend cannot be ignored. Table 1 provides an overview of turnout rates, compared between national and

European elections in several countries. It is noticeable that the countries which show almost equally high numbers do use obligatory voting and, in the case of Belgium for example, hold the elections at the same day. These of course are factors which are likely to increase turnout for both national and European elections (Mattila, 2003).

Table 1: Turnout nationally and European for EU-27; source: europarl.europa.eu and <http://www.parties-and-elections.de>

	EU elections 2009	National elections *	Difference
NL	36,8%	80,4%	43,6%
SE	45,5%	82,0%	43,5%
...
DE	43,3%	70,8%	27,5%
...
BE	90,4%	91,2%	0,8%
LU	90,8%	85,2%	-5,6%
Average (EU 27)	46,2%	69,3%	22,6%

* Different years of national elections, data taken from the most current available, range: 2002-2009

The trend of lower turnouts for European elections is clearly visible, although the difference in percentages ranges from -5,6% in the case of Luxembourg to 43,6% in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, one cannot deny the obviously weaker performance in European elections when compared to national ones (with an average of 22,6%). From my point of view, these results can partly be explained by the relation between perception of “democraticness” of a government (either the nation state or the EU), and turnout. If this model will be proven as correct, then not only would individuals with a lower perception of the democratic character of the EU be less likely to vote in European elections, but also would people who will vote (or already have voted) in national elections be more likely to show a more positive perception of the democratic character of their own national government.

1.4 Research question

This paper tries to explore and explain as much as possible the connection between the low turnout rates for European elections and the degree of democracy within the European Union. To be more precise, not the degree of democracy within the European Union is studied, but rather what European citizens *think* about it.

Other studies have approached the topic of voters' behavior and the choice of whether or not to vote before. There were also studies devoted to explaining the voting behavior in European elections, but the present study seeks at combining two different concepts: the perception of people towards the degree to which the European Union functioning and working can be called democratic, and the behavior of these people. In order to formulate hypotheses and testing them, specific questions have to be formulated

and asked. It is very important not to ignore different factors influencing turnout in (European and national) elections. There are system level factors like the voting system, the timing of the election day, obligatory vs. mandatory voting and so on (Mattila, 2003). But on the other hand there are also individual level factors that play an important role; some examples are the social status or the level of education. Seemingly minor things like the weather on the day of election can also play a role, some people will abstain when it is raining on the day of election. From this wide range of influences, I will focus on only one, but keeping in mind that voters' behavior is a complex field with several causes and relationships forces the check for other variables as well. Because age and education are often thought to be amongst the most influential factors, they will be controlled for as well (Matsusaka and Palda, 1999).

Focusing on one specific aspect of all, the following **research question** will be the guideline of my study:

What is the perception of European citizens towards the degree of democracy (democratic elements) in the European Union, and in how far does this affect the decision whether or not to vote in European Parliament elections?

In order to answer this question in the best possible way, underlying questions (sub-questions) have to be addressed as well:

1. What are the main factors influencing electoral participation?
2. What is the perception of people towards the degree of democracy in the EU?
3. Does the perception of people towards the degree of democracy in the EU affect their decision whether to vote or not?
4. Are there other factors explaining the possible relation between perception of democracy and voting behavior?

1.5 Structure of the report

Following this introductory chapter, the basis will be laid for the rest of the paper. In order to be able to put the findings of the empirical research (Chapters 4 and 5) into the right light, Chapter 2 will provide background information about the two main issues of this paper, namely the so called "Democratic dilemma of the EU" with its current debates in the Academia, and theory about voters' behavior and electoral participation. In Chapter 3, the empirical study will be explained into detail; in chapter 4 the analysis of the outcomes will be discussed. This paper ends with a conclusion summarizing the main findings, as well as providing input/ideas for further research.

2. Background Theory

2.1 Electoral participation

Before trying to find out what impact a citizen's opinion towards the democratic elements of the European Union plays in his choice whether to cast a vote or not, it is necessary to explore the range of variables that influence this choice as well.

As Kim, Petrocik and Enokson stated already in 1975, a difference can be made between two major fields of variables influencing electoral participation. On the one hand, there are the so called *socio-economic* factors, relating to the individual differences between persons. These include age, level of education, religion and a lot more. On the other hand, there are the *system level* effects, meaning that electoral systems and legal provisions play another important role (Kim *et al.*, 1975).

Fortunately, research on this topic is extensive, and seemingly able to provide us with answers of whether people turn out to vote or not. Anyhow, these answers are less than sufficient to fully explain or even predict turnout. Matsusaka and Palda in 1999 found out that only a small part of variations in turnout actually can be explained by standard variables. This is how they introduced the topic: "A healthy empirical literature has discovered a long list of variables that impact voter turnout at the margin, such as age, education, and income. However, the overall explanatory power of these variables (as opposed to their marginal effect) is a neglected research issue." (Matsusaka and Palda, 1999: 431). Hence, the authors took into account two different sets of variables, the individual factors (as explained above) on the one hand and the district factors (also called system level effects) on the other. These variables ranged from age, level of education, income, marital status, whether a person was contacted by a campaign worker, to religion, place of residence, community size, race and so on. One can see that almost all common variables theoretically connected with turnout are present in his study. Nevertheless, the outcome was surprisingly negative: "Despite inclusion of a large number of theoretically relevant variables, the logits have almost no predictive power. Evidently the estimated models leave a large part of the voting story untold." (Matsusaka and Palda, 1999: 438). To solve this problem, Matsusaka and Palda introduced two levels of variables that, in his view, were neglected in the past time: the time-stationary variables like citizen's duty and non-stationary factors like weather. Testing for the first of these variables, the authors found that the factor whether individuals voted in the past elections (which he sees as a measure for citizen's duty), together with the other explanatory variables introduced above, allows for a better prediction of whether people will decide to vote or not. On the other hand, his conclusion offers a different explanation: "Both the benefits and costs of voting are small. Consequently, we expect the turnout decision to be sensitive to small variations in benefits and costs [...] our results open the door to the possibility that turnout is driven by idiosyncratic costs like the weather, the traffic, personal health, and so on" (Matsusaka and Palda, 1999: 442). To summarize this, his research showed that most of the common

variables which are thought to be explaining electoral participation do not have the expected power. More likely, there is a huge amount of factors coming together, decreasing each single influence to a minimum and hence decreasing our ability to test them without consideration of the others. What Matsusaka and Palda also conclude is that the influences of non-stationary factors like weather or traffic play a big role in the decision, and that this could be the reason why electoral participation for researchers sometimes appears to be random.

In order to connect the topic of electoral participation to the current paper, it is important to find out whether there are aspects that lead people to vote or to abstain that are correlated with the European Union and its nature, and hence cannot be identified by studying nation states and their elections only. An article by Mattila (2003) aims at finding possible differences between EU member states' turnout in the elections of 1999, as well as exploring their impact. He therefore introduces two different groups of factors, where "in the first group [there] are factors that are related to electoral systems used in EU member countries (e.g. compulsory voting, use of party lists). The second group consists of factors that are more related to the European Union as a political system (voters' support for the EU membership, whether the country is a net contributor or net beneficiary in the EU budget)" (Mattila, 2003: 450). Considering the first group of factors, these have been introduced already earlier in this paper, specifically relying on Pini's elaborations. Hence, the aspects introduced by Mattila concerning the second group become more interesting (also, because they are highly unable to be changed within a short period of time). Unfortunately, in his paper, Mattila studies the system level factors only, relying on second-order data or an aggregation thereof. He hence lacks the analysis of individual factors that would be able to describe differences within a country between national and European elections, but rather focuses on analyzing differences between Member States in European elections.

A similar approach was used by Mark N. Franklin (2001), who describes three different explanations for why people turn out to vote or not. These are the *resources*, *mobilization*, and the *instrumental motivation* to vote. While the *resources* concept circles around individual characteristics like knowledge, wealth, or time (see Franklin 2001: 5), *mobilization* deals with the public political discussions that make people vote, e.g. media attention or party mobilization. However, Franklin mostly relies on the *instrumental motivation* to vote, as it is best suited to explain differences in average turnout between countries, according to the author (ibid: 7). This concept mainly explores the influence of people believing that they are actually shaping the outcome of the election, and that the elected in fact have an influence on the voters. Although Franklin describes this *instrumental* concept as one that can best describe differences in average turnout between countries (ibid: 7), it is also suitable for this paper: elections for the European Parliament differ from national ones in the sense that they rely on a highly divergent institutional set-up, as the EP has other competences and influences than a national one. Also, naturally, the EU as a whole covers different aspects of governance than a national government does.

In this paper, nevertheless, the focus will be laid on individual factors influencing the decision to vote or not, more specifically and most importantly the perception of “democraticness” of the EU. Not the real difference between institutional set-ups is considered to be decisive, but the perception of people towards them. Further, and in order to account for possible side factors influencing the main relationship to be examined, age and level of education will be studied as well. It is therefore inevitable to describe these three factors’ theory in more detail.

Age and education are often combined in studies relating to turnout (decline). As Gallego (2008) states: “[there are] two groups that are voting at particularly low rates: the young and the poorly educated” (p. 24). Meaning, that both age and education do have an influence on the voters’ behavior, and affecting it in a way that likelihoods can be estimated. For the impact of level of education, there is one theory that is most spread in the Academia, which is the civic education theory (Tenn, 2007). It models that people with a higher degree of education, or more years of schooling do have an increased sense of political affairs, civic duties and the public life and hence tend to participate more actively in the political sphere, e.g. by turning out to vote. On the other hand, studies about the impact of levels of education do not show such a clear picture and do not support this theory completely. Tenn concludes that one additional year of education only has a small to no impact on voters’ behavior, whereas “results show that being a student has a significant positive effect on both voter turnout and voter registration” (Tenn, 2007: 458). Anyhow, the status of being a student does not prolong for a whole life, and hence even this influence is doubted. Although there are several other studies assuring the relation between level of education and the casting a vote, it is not clear whether it is really non-spurious and not altered by outside factors or biased sampling.

Concerning the impact of age on turnout, Fieldhouse, Kranmer and Russell (2007) have identified three theories that might explain why young people tend to vote less likely than older ones. To begin with, the rational choice theory is used to explain that voting neither is random nor fully predictable. Following the idea that the expected outcome of any election will contain a gain for each voter, the costs of voting as such can be measured. In an economic kind of way a cost-benefit analysis, following this theory, is sufficient to predict whether an individual turns out to vote or not. What connects this to the topic of age are the different costs and benefits for different age groups. Though, Fieldhouse *et al.* rarely explain these differences between age groups, but rather focus on finding proof that voting as such “does reflect a rational calculation” (2007: 812).

Secondly, the theory of social capital is introduced, arguing that “voluntary activity (belonging to or taking part in local organizations) instills trust in others and encourages political activism” (ibid: 812). This means that every participation in the political sphere enhances the chance of an individual to vote, since social capital is built by political activity. As this activity increases with age, so does the social capital, and hence older people are more likely to vote than younger people.

As a third theory, civic voluntarism is mentioned. It “encompasses a wide range of different concepts [...]. First is the level of engagement of the respondent. This includes how

often the respondent watches, listens to or reads about current affairs; whether he or she regularly reads newspapers or discusses politics; and his or her level of interest in politics" (ibid: 814). Self-explaining, this model or theory is similar to the second one introduced, although it does not mainly focus on political activity, but political awareness and interests, put simply. Several authors (Parry *et al.* 1992; Park 2000; Wattenberg 2002) report that the younger generation, individuals between the age of 18-25, show less civic voluntarism, or less interest in politics than older ones do. This, in consequence, leads to a less informed youth, which explains the lower turnout rates for this age group.

For this paper, however, age and level of education only play a minor role, serving as control variables. Meaning that people of different age or with a different level of education can show the same intention to vote, on average, because their perception towards the "democraticness" of the EU is supposed to be the most influential factor. It does not mean though, that different age groups will likely have the same turnout rates, but the initial relation between perception of democracy and voting should not be altered by age or level of education.

A deeper insight in the topic of electoral participation is provided by Blondel, Sinnott and Svensson (1997), who were the first ones to conduct a survey on both European and national elections using open-ended questions in order to understand abstention from voting. In general, Blondel *et al.* introduce a division of non-voters into two very rational categories: the ones who were circumstantially not able to vote and the others who voluntarily abstained (see Blondel *et al.*, 1997, p. 247ff). Since the ratio of people who were not able to vote because of absence through *e.g.* vacation or business trips or illness is supposed to be almost equal between different member states, it is also likely to assume that this ratio is the same for national elections compared to European ones. Though, one should not forget that circumstantial reasons can be used as an excuse for the initial lack of willingness to vote. So if less people vote, more people think that elections are unnecessary, undemocratic, or that they have too little information. These can also be reasons why some people plan to have their holiday trip during the time the elections are held.

However, the reasons why people deliberately abstain from voting in European, but not in national elections, are the most important and probably the least simple ones to clearly name and describe, overlaps and interconnections are likely to occur. Table 2 gives an overview of the most given answers to the question of why people did not vote, with the top four being "lack of interest, distrust of or dissatisfaction with politics and politicians, lack of knowledge and dissatisfaction with the European Parliament electoral process" (Blondel *et al.*, 1997: 254).

Table 2: Reasons for deliberately abstention in 1994 European elections by country (only non-compulsory participation regimes); source: Blondel *et al.* , 1997: 255

Note: all given numbers are percentages

	Den	Fr	UK	Ger (W)	Ger (E)	Irl	Neth	N. Irl	Por	Sp	All non-compulsory countries
Lack of knowledge	36	23	39	15	20	18	24	7	23	9	23
Lack of interest	31	46	33	43	32	61	39	51	49	27	41
Rarely or never votes	2	4	8	3	2	3	2	10	2	3	4
Political distrust or dissatisfaction	13	33	16	28	26	37	15	17	24	55	26
Opposed to EU	10	8	7	13	22	1	10	3	3	2	8
EU not relevant or has no effect	1	3	2	1	1	5	5	0	9	4	3
EP not relevant	0	2	2	2	0	2	1	0	1	1	1
Dissatisfaction with EP electoral system	23	31	12	19	7	12	19	10	12	15	17
Dissatisfaction with EP as an institution	5	2	2	7	2	6	5	0	2	2	4
Vote has no consequences	16	7	16	16	13	10	6	20	3	7	11
N	167	194	259	182	140	224	262	59	218	136	1841

This article by Blondel *et al.* suggests that the most important factor determining whether people vote or abstain, notably only in the field of individual (as opposed to systemic) reasons, together with the relation between voting in national but not in European elections is the lack of interest. This single reason makes up for 41% of all non-voters in the countries where voting is not compulsory, but this of course is only one survey from 1994, when the EC still looked a lot different from how the EU of today looks like.

In the following subchapter, a deeper insight will be given into the topic of democratic dilemma and the theory of perception.

2.2 Perception of democracy

A lot has already been written about the so-called democratic dilemma which the European Union faces, and there are as many different definitions of this dilemma. Although this thesis deals with the question of how people perceive the EU to be, specifically its level of democracy, it is important to have a look at literature and theories about this phenomenon. To begin with, Scharpf has, in his book *Governing in Europe: effective and democratic* (1999), described two different layers of a functioning legitimization of democracy: the input legitimacy and the output legitimacy. These two concepts serve as a basis for considering the democratic dilemma of the EU.

Scharpf states:

Thus the input perspective, deriving democratic legitimacy from a pre-existing collective identity, emphasizes the irremediable aspects of the European democratic deficit. By contrast, the output perspective allows for the consideration of a much wider variety of legitimizing elements. [...] What is required is no more than the

perception of a range of *common interests* that is sufficiently broad and stable to justify institutional arrangements for collective action.

(Scharpf, 1999: 10f; emphasize in original text)

Hence, according to Scharpf, these two different kinds of legitimization can be described as input- and output- levels, each of which is in need of a different solution. While the former requires a common *demos*, or a common people, with the same history, language, background and any other form of identity, the latter might well be divided by heritage, as long as its interests in the present are coherent. By this statement, Scharpf not only introduces the topic of democratic deficit of the EU by depriving it of the ability to overcome half of its legitimization problems, it also offers a solution to the other half. But, this is not the only view on this topic.

Thomassen and Schmitt (2004) have brought up another standpoint. According to them, identity and common *demos* are not the prerequisites of a functioning democratic state, but rather something that stands in an intertwined relation with it. Following this argument, "in many European countries the formation of the state pre-ceded the development of the nation" (Fuchs, as cited in Thomassen & Schmitt, 2004: 10). This means that first a constitution or at least the state has been set up, before the actual identity would arise. For example, it could be important to declare everyone a national citizen if he or she is born on the ground of that specific state. Like this, a common identity would evolve by itself. Hence, in the opinion of Thomassen and Schmitt, the European Union could undergo a similar development.

Further, there are other theories about the democratic dilemma of the EU, some of them being summarized by Frank Decker (2002). In general he introduces three different models aiming to describe the complete scope of the democracy and legitimacy problem.

To start with, the hybrid form of intergovernmentalism and supranationalism is seen as hindering the democratization of the EU. While the former stands for the EU as being a platform of negotiations between equally legitimate member states defending their own position, the latter, according to Decker, has to be seen as the institutions of the EU bringing up starting- and standpoints in the decision-making process (see Decker, 2002: 258). Because the member states in the first model have full veto power and are able to vote against anything that does not fit their national agenda, legitimization through national citizens is not harmed. Decker further argues that it is the supranational part of the institutional set up that is disturbing democratic legitimacy. In his view, the citizens lack influence and representation in the EU institutions that operate supranationally, and hence facilitate the democratic problem.

Additionally, Decker considers the institutional aspect, mainly talking about the European Parliament (EP).

The democratic deficit of the EP is that it lacks in part or in whole the most important right of a popular representative body in a parliamentary system, namely the right to appoint or dismiss the government. It is still the case that representatives of national governments decide on the members of the Commission. [...] [I]ts composition is not in the least affected by the composition of Parliament.

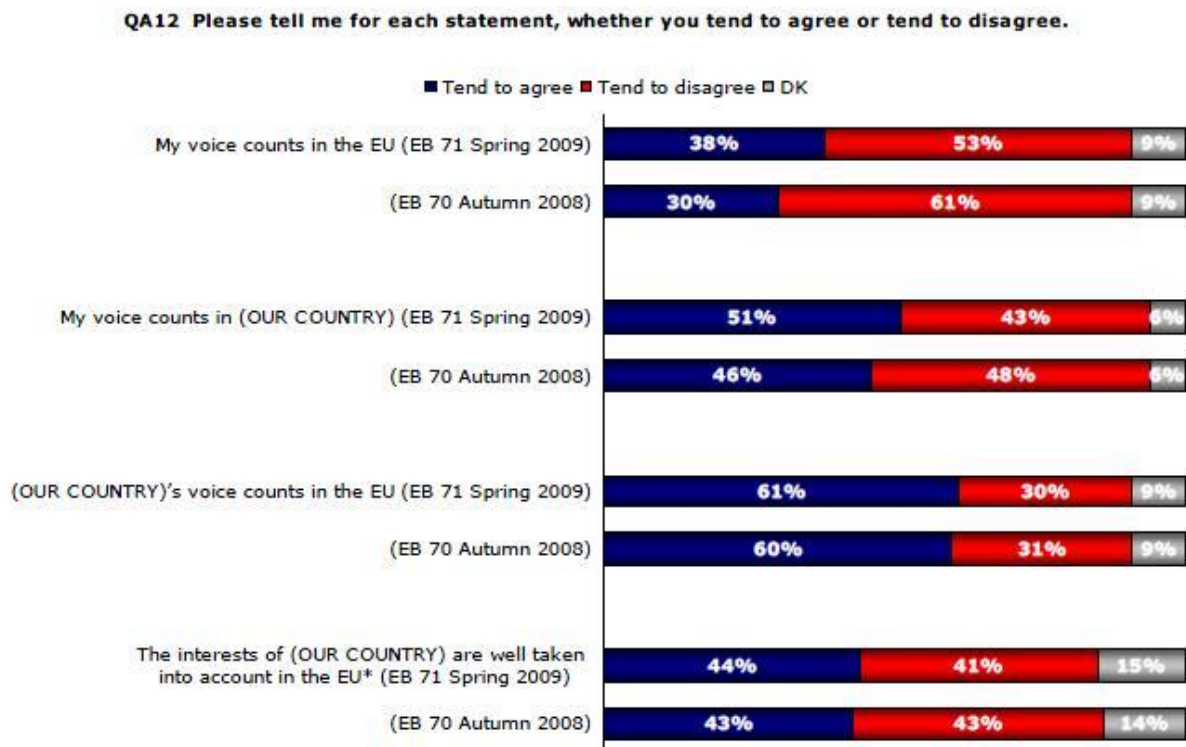
(Decker, 2002: 260f)

This again turns a supposedly democratic element, the EP, into an element that is *supposedly democratic* in its literal sense. In fact, according to Decker, it is undemocratic. The argument proceeds with the notion that the lack of the Commission's responsibility towards the EP is the factor that makes the EU undemocratic, somewhat combined with the first aspect introduced above. The supranational character of the Commission and the EP do not provide for a clear system of checks and balances that would be necessary.

The third aspect introduced by Decker is the absence of a common European identity, which I previously described in this chapter. There is not much more to say than Decker does not share the opinion of Thomassen & Schmitt and other authors who do not see the need of a pre-existing European common *demos* or identity. Rather, he argues that no other nation state has ever developed in the absence of such an identity, or people.

But this of course is just a short introduction to the topic of the EU's democratic deficit; and instead of discussing the real existence of it, for this paper it is important to know whether the people who are eligible to vote *think* that the EU has a problem with its democratic elements. A starting point to investigate this could be the Eurobarometer (EB), a survey that is held approximately every six months throughout Europe to capture the citizens' feelings and opinions towards political, economic, personal, national and European topics. Some of the questions asked in the EB71 (published September 2009), correspond to the peoples' feelings towards the democracy in the EU. The most important question asked regarding the topic of this paper might be the one about whether respondents think that their vote counts in the EU (EB71 QA12, 2009). To illustrate the outcome, consider Figure 1. What hits the eye directly supports the theories explained above, namely that only 38% of the people asked considered their vote to have an influence on the EU. Opposed, 53% stated that their vote would not make a difference. It is also considerable that this is not a problem of representative democracies as such, since the corresponding number for the respondents' countries are somewhat different: here 51% of the people asked said their vote would be influential, whereas 43% tend to disagree with that statement.

Figure 1: Perceived influence; source: EB 71, 2009



*Question only asked in the EU27

But how do citizens develop their opinion about democracy in the EU? What are the influences, the theories behind it? To answer these questions, Sarsfield and Echegaray (2005) have developed three different theories/rationales using an example of Latin America, although the ideas as such are applicable for the EU as well.

To begin with, the *utility rationality* comes close to what the rational choice theory is for voting behavior. People make cost-benefit calculations containing the outcomes of certain regimes and their use for the individual itself. Hence, if a democratic government works well, and produces desirable outputs, citizens tend to be more content with the democracy as such, and will value this form of government higher (Sarsfield and Echegaray, 2005). This is somewhat, though not fully, comparable to one of three theories that Karp, Banducci and Bowler (2003) introduced, aiming to explain satisfaction with democracy in the EU. Their theory is called *economic benefits* and hence focuses on the economic side of the *utility rationale*. Nevertheless, the reasoning behind both theories is similar and relies on rational calculations explaining the (dis)liking of a certain democracy.

The other two rationales introduced by Sarsfield and Echegaray are quite alike, the one (*instrumental rationality*) supporting the view that citizens might not be interested in sudden outcomes of a regime, as long as they have the overall view that democracy can achieve preferable outcomes. This includes accepting the negative, but quick decisions in the short-term as a means to achieving positive outcomes in the end. The third rationale is called *axiological rationality* and is similar to the former one because it states that citizens have

belief in democracy, concerning its outcomes and implications. Its difference, though, lies in the fact that this belief is seen to be so strong that neither positive nor negative outcomes play any role in influencing the evaluation of democracy.

On the other hand, Karp *et al.* (2003) introduce two other theories which are more specifically aimed at explaining the satisfaction with democracy in the EU. *Institutional confidence* describes how people will evaluate single institutions of a regime (the EU in this case) in order to develop their overall satisfaction. This could be measured, *e.g.*, by asking people about their trust in several institutions. The third theory by Karp *et al.* is called *cognitive mobilization*, and it is an ambiguous one. In general, it states that knowledge about the EU influences the satisfaction with democracy, but it cannot be said whether this relation is positive or negative: "Persons with more political knowledge may find the EU more familiar and less threatening. [On the other hand] politically knowledgeable individuals may be more likely to know that the EP, even though directly elected, is not analogous to their own parliaments in terms of control over policy" (Karp *et al.*, 2003: 275). This short citation represents best the two ways this theory could or should be interpreted.

The results of the EB give us an impression of the perception of citizens towards the EU and the status of democracy in it, and whereas the theory provides a background for the analysis of this paper. Still, it is known that there are several factors influencing the opinion of individuals concerning the EU, although the exact answer would be a mixture of all with stronger tendencies to the one theory or another.

2.3 How perception influences turnout

The perception of individuals towards their national government or towards the EU is shaped in many ways, sometimes even connected, and results in different outcomes. First of all, the perception as such is part of an individuals' opinion, of its own state of mind. Whether someone feels the EU is a well functioning democratic system, or whether he/she feels the opposite, even if someone does not have any own opinion about this topic at all, this attitude forms part of the individual level factors which influence the decision whether to vote or not. Voting is an expression of activism or taking part in the democratic system, a way of making one's voice count, of influencing in which way a country (or international organization) will work and develop. But only if people have the feeling that their voice *will be heard*, and that their *vote will count*, then they will head to the polling station and actually cast their vote.

In the EU member states, turnout in national elections is, on average, higher than in European elections. The reasons for this, however, are manifold. Concentrating on the individual level, perception (of the "democraticness") might play a big role in influencing the decision. Putting the theories explained above together, one can derive that the happiness with the government, or more specifically, the degree as to how democratic the government (both national and European) is, influences the people in their decision to vote or not. This

supposes that there is a relation between the perception and turnout, and the direction of this relation can be anticipated. The better people think of the working of democracy in a certain institution (or regime), the more they feel that their voice is heard and that their vote counts. Hence, the more they are willing to actually cast a vote and to participate in the democratic process. Nevertheless, if people are unhappy with how democracy works for them, or if they even think that the system at stake does not follow democratic principles, their vote would not make any difference at all, and accordingly they rather stay at home.

2.4 Expected outcomes – modeling the topic

Deriving from the theory, an insight in the discussion about a democratic deficit could be given, as well as the division between individual and systemic effects. When trying to summarize the theoretical aspects introduced and elaborated above, it is important to keep in mind the overall aim of this paper: to find out the relation between perceived democratic status and the electoral participation. Therefore it is necessary to focus on the individual level, since systemic factors like the institutional set up of the elections will have no influence on the relation. Further, no countries using compulsory voting are being studied and hence this important factor influencing the decision whether to vote or not can be ruled out. The hypothesis to be tested in the empirical part (how this is going to happen will be explained in the following chapter) is:

Main hypothesis (H1)

People who tend to think that the EU suffers from a democratic problem are less likely to turn out to vote in European elections than people who do not think that the EU suffers from a democratic problem.

In order to test this hypothesis, other aspects have to be taken into account. Although practically impossible, third factors influencing this relationship should be ruled out. This results in the checking of a third and fourth variable (level of education and age) that might have an effect on the both dependent and the independent variable. As explained above (see chapter 2.1 Electoral Participation) these two factors are highly likely to play a role in affecting turnout. Hence the analysis about turnout has to take these factors into account.

The effect will be tested by observing the relationship between each of the “third” variables in connection with both the dependent and the independent variables. The theory, though, states that both variables to be tested (H2, H3, H4 and H5) do not have an influence. Only if this is proven to be wrong, one can expect the additional variables to influence my initial relation.

Additional hypothesis (H2)

Among highly educated citizens, those with a positive picture of the EU's "democraticness" are more likely to vote in the EP elections than those with a negative picture of the EU's "democraticness".

Additional hypothesis (H3)

Among low educated citizens, those with a positive picture of the EU's "democraticness" are more likely to vote in the EP elections than those with a negative picture of the EU's "democraticness".

Additional hypothesis (H4)

Among younger citizens, those with a positive picture of the EU's "democraticness" are more likely to vote in the EP elections than those with a negative picture of the EU's "democraticness".

Additional hypothesis (H5)

Among older citizens, those with a positive picture of the EU's "democraticness" are more likely to vote in the EP elections than those with a negative picture of the EU's "democraticness".

3. Methodology

3.1 Choice of research method

The methodology being used to conduct research on the topic of electoral participation, in combination with the field of citizen's opinions, beliefs and perception, is mostly based on Babbie (2007) and Shadish *et al.* (2002). In general, this research is conducted by collecting and analyzing survey data.

The survey was held before (1st to 3rd June in NL and 1st to 6th June in GER) and after the European elections (8th to 14th June) in the Netherlands and Germany. The two countries do have similar system level characteristics, making it possible to compare the results jointly. Since European citizens without either the Dutch or German nationality are also eligible to vote, they are not excluded from the results, because they were also in the situation with the same system level factors in the two countries. This research set-up allows for focusing on the individual factors, indifferent of the nationality (if it is one of the European Union member states).

Within an overall project concerning EU elections and democracy, the survey was held as a form of questionnaire and spread both via internet and personal contact. The questions in the paper (personal contact) version were the same as those which were spread online, so no difference will be made in the evaluation of the responses. There were only slight differences between the pre- and the post-election version of the surveys. While in the pre-election survey the question "Will you vote in the upcoming European elections?" was asked, this was changed in the post-election survey to "Did you vote in the recent European elections?". Nevertheless, the results were combined, so that a "Yes" answer for either of those questions was counted as actual voting. For the spread of the link university channels were used, as well as personal relations. Through the occurrence of a "snowball effect", the survey was able to spread into other disciplines. Further, the paper version of the questionnaire was filled in by randomly selected people (who are eligible to vote) in different cities in Germany and the Netherlands using self-administered questionnaires.

The overall number of respondents is $n = 727$. Women and men are represented almost equally, with a percentage of 51,6% (men) and 48,4% (women). Nevertheless, more Germans filled in the questionnaire, having a share of 70,4%, with 26,9% Dutch respondents, and 1,1% coming from another EU member state. The missing 1,5% were non-EU nationals and hence could not be used for the analysis. The average age of the respondents was 29, with a standard deviation of 13,5 years, a minimum of 14 (which could not be used for analysis) and a maximum of 88.

3.2 Conceptualization

This paper uses four important concepts, namely perception of "democraticness", age, level of education, and turning out to vote. Age and turning out to vote appear to be the two simplest of these when it comes to measurement. Nevertheless, there are several ways of doing so. As age is not supposed to influence anything when differentiated into each year, I

chose for age groups. The first one ranges from 18 to 24 and is supposed to represent the young-, often first-time voters. Those between and including 25 and 44 form the group that represents the younger section of working people who finished their education, and 45 and older represents the older part of this group and retired, or pensioned people. The oldest respondent of the survey was 88 years old at the point of filling it in.

Turning out to vote was tested differently in the pre-election version than in the post-election one. Before the actual elections were held, the question asked about the voting intention, and after the elections took place the question asked whether people voted or not. The variable being tested was transformed using the two different questions from the pre- and the post-election survey.

The level of education, however, is harder to measure since there are different shades of possibilities when comparing the Netherlands to Germany. To make this comparison possible, only three categories will be used, ranging from "finished school", through "finished vocational training" to "finished university education". Of course, the question considered the highest level of education achieved. Within the first range, every possible degree counts that can be attained in (high)school. The second group consists of people who have finished their school with whatever degree, and additionally have a degree that is specialized for the labor market, for example being a certified baker. The last group contains people who have finished their university education, which includes Bachelor degrees as well as Masters and PhDs. Respondents who were students while filling in the questionnaire hence belonged to the first group mostly, since all of them have finished school, and almost no one of them has a finished vocational education. If that is the case, of course, he/she belongs to the second group.

The most difficult to measure, however, is the concept of perception towards the EU. In this paper the focus is set on the democratic working, or the degree to which the EU is considered to be democratic. Several questions were used to test the different aspects of "perception of democracy". One of the most straightforward questions is about satisfaction with democracy, on a scale between "highly satisfied" and "highly dissatisfied" and using "fairly satisfied" and "fairly dissatisfied" for further distinctions. A 1-5 scale was also used during the other three questions in the survey¹, which were "trust in institutions", "influence of government levels" and whether "voting makes a difference". The answers can be ordered from 1) good picture regarding the EU and its democracy to 5) bad picture regarding the EU and its democracy. Using these four questions, which were not only asked for the EU as such, but sometimes for different institutions inside the EU, or different government levels (like local, national and European), an average rate can be computed for each respondent which indicates his or her perception of democracy (for the EU, but also for his nation-state). To create greater N for all of the categories, categories 1 and 2 were combined, as well as 4 and 5. The distinctions between "high ..." and "fairly ..." were

¹ The questions also contained a fifth possibility, the „I don't know“ answer. If this answer was given, it was assigned a 3 on the 1-5 scale; which is the middle position and represents the indifferent position of the respondent towards the question.

abandoned and resulted in one single group, for positive and negative trends respectively. "1" is a positive picture, "3" a negative one, and "2" stands for an indifferent view. A low rate (< 2) indicates a positive picture about the EU, a higher rate (> 2) indicates a bad picture. This rate, in turn, can be compared to the other three factors, being age, level of education, and voters' behavior.

3.3 Shortcomings

The survey being conducted was spread both via the internet and by self-administered questionnaires in two different countries. Nevertheless, due to restricted resources in a Bachelor thesis project, only few locations were used to collect answers "on the streets", whereas most of the responses were collected online. Hence, the survey was carried out using non-probability sampling, which has a high risk of receiving not a perfect sample of the group being studied. More particularly *reliance on available subjects* and *snowball sampling* were the main means of collecting data (see Babbie, 2007: 183). This in fact limits the extent to which findings can be validly generalized. For both ways of receiving answers the willingness of possible respondents plays a big role, it can be estimated that only people with interest in the topic were willing to fill out a survey. Additionally the way of spreading the online link was biased, since most of the contacts came from a similar background, being students and young people in general. Although several answers were given by older people, the trend shows that the younger are represented more strongly.

Due to three students cooperating on this project and the making of the survey, the questionnaire turned out to be long and filling it out required a long time (with an average of 15 minutes and 28 seconds). Especially in self-administered questionnaires this may bias results by leading to more people dropping out and not finishing the survey.

Although this survey focuses on individual level factors, and two countries were chosen with similar system level factors, these two countries do not have the same background conditions. Whatever the result may be, it will be only true for individuals residing in countries with the same (or similar) system level factors like Germany and the Netherlands, since other factors were not controlled for. These factors were held constant in the current survey, but this does not guarantee that they have no influence at all.

4. Empirical Part

After introducing the topic including theories, and laying the basis for empirical analysis by describing the survey and data collection methods, it is now time to have a closer look at what the outcomes are.

4.1 Single statements

To provide an overview over the data collected and the tendencies, several single statements might help. These are questions that have been asked during the survey, but are later, for the purpose of analysis, combined. These questions dealt with identity, whether voting makes a difference, the influence of the government, trust in institutions and satisfaction with democracy.

When it comes to identity, respondents could chose between four positive answers (where the perceived identity was stated) and three negative ones, being "neither", "different", and "I do not know". Table 3 provides an overview of the frequencies. It is remarkable that the highest share of respondents feels "first national, then European" (55,0%). This, with great distance, is followed by "only national" (15,0%) and "first European, then national". These data point to the fact that still the majority of citizens feels mostly connected to their own nation state, though realizing that the EU plays a big role as well.

Table 3

Identity	Numbers	Percentages
Only national	109	15,0
First national then European	400	55,0
First European then national	82	11,3
Only European	16	2,2
Neither	70	9,6
Different	6	0,8
DK/nA	44	6,1
Total	727	100

source: own data

According to the rational choice theory, voting is a low cost and low benefit action, and people know that their vote has only a minimal decisive power. Nevertheless, numbers show that 77% of the respondents believe their vote has at least some influence on the working of the EU, with 14,7% believing in "a lot of influence" and 24,7% assigning their vote a "fair amount of influence. For all of the data, see Table 4.

Table 4**Does your vote make a difference?**

	Numbers	Percentages
no difference	132	18,2
some difference	287	39,5
fair amount of diff.	171	24,7
a lot of difference	102	14,7
DK/nA	35	4,8
Total	727	100

source: own data

The influence of the government (in this case the EU) on the personal life of the respondent is another component of the government by the people and for the people. Here, the results show an even more positive picture: only 3,6% stated that the government would have “no influence” at all, whereas the majority said that it would have a “fair amount of influence”.

Table 5**Influence of government**

	Numbers	Percentages
no influence	26	3,6
some influence	182	25,0
fair amount of infl.	264	36,3
a lot of influence	226	31,1
DK/nA	29	4,0
Total	727	100

source: own data

Another important aspect is the amount of trust people put in institutions. In the case of the European Parliament, again only 10,5% of the respondents claimed to have “no trust”. Nevertheless, only 6,6% have “a lot of trust”, whereas “fair amount of trust” (44,7%) and “some trust” (32,2%) were the most given answers. For all numbers, see Table 6.

Table 6**Trust in institutions: EP**

	Numbers	Percentages
no trust	76	10,5
some trust	234	32,2
fair amount of trust	325	44,7
a lot of trust	48	6,6
DK/nA	44	6,1
Total	727	100

source: own data

As already mentioned, data of four different questions were combined in order to measure the real satisfaction with democracy (whether voting makes a difference, influence of government, trust in institutions and satisfaction with democracy). This last variable was directly asked in the surveys, and later combined with the other data to increase the scope of the variable. When asking the question directly, a rather negative picture shows, with (combined) 34% having a more or less positive opinion, and 50% a rather negative one. While the numbers and percentages concerning the less extreme opinions are equally divided, the extreme positions show the strong dissatisfaction with democracy in the EU (1,2% are very satisfied, while 16,7% are very dissatisfied).

Table 7**Satisfaction with democracy - EU**

	Numbers	Percentages
very satisfied	9	1,2
fairly satisfied	246	33,8
fairly dissatisfied	242	33,3
very dissatisfied	121	16,7
DK/nA	109	15
Total	727	100

source: own data

4.2 Perception of democracy and electoral participation

4.2.1 Perception of democracy

The comparison between the views on democracy of either the nation state or the EU offers an interesting insight. The perception is slightly more negative concerning the EU, with a mean of 1,89 on the 1-3 scale, with the responding number being 1,73 for the nation state. This can also be observed by the respective percentages, where the nation state shows to have a more positive picture concerning its level of "democraticness". For the exact numbers, see Table 8.

Table 8**Perception of democracy**

	Nation State		EU	
	Numbers	Percentages	Numbers	Percentages
Positive	252	34,7	194	26,7
Indifferent	419	57,6	411	56,5
Negative	53	7,3	117	16,1
Total	724	99,6	722	99,3
Missing	3	0,4	5	0,7

source: own data

4.2.2 Electoral participation

When comparing the hypothetical electoral participation for both levels, it strikes that the turnout in the nation state is higher (85,5%). In the EU, this value is at 78,5%. Still, the difference is not as high as the average difference between national and European elections (compare subchapter 1.3).

This can have several reasons, for one, the questionnaire was partly filled out after the elections, meaning that respondents *had* actually voted in the 1-2 weeks before filling out the survey. National elections were either long ago (as in Germany), or far ahead (as in the Netherlands). The topicality of the EU elections might thus have influenced the answers given in the questionnaire. Also, the number of respondents having either no opinion (“don’t know”) or being not entitled to vote (mostly because of age reasons) is comparably higher when it comes to the nation state. Again, this could be because of the great time span between national and European elections. All data are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Electoral Participation

	Nation State		EU	
	Numbers	Percentages	Numbers	Percentages
Yes	512	85,5	521	78,5
No	87	14,5	143	21,5
Total	599	100	664	100
Missing*	128		63	

source: own data | *including “don’t know” and “not entitled to vote”

4.2.3 Are they correlated?

To test the main hypothesis (H1), however, it has to be controlled for if there is a correlation between the perception of democracy in the EU and the (intention to or actual) vote in European elections. In order to find that out, a chi-square test was performed using $\alpha = 0,05$.

Table 10

Perception of democracy and electoral participation: EU

Perception of democracy in EU		Electoral participation EU		
		Yes	No	Total
Positive	Indifferent	84,1%	15,9%	100% (N=176)
	Negative	78,8%	21,2%	100% (382)
	Total	67,9%	32,1%	100% (106)
	Total			664
	Missing			63

chi-square test = 21,859 | df = 4 | p < 0,001

source: own data

Hence, as is shown in Table 10, the result is statistically significant². This means that there is a relationship between the perception of democracy in the EU and turning out to vote. Since the label "1" in the former variable (= "Positive") would be the most positive picture one can have of the EU, and the label "1" in the latter variable (= "Yes") means that people will vote or have voted, the chi-square test also shows us the direction of the relation. It is a positive relation, and hence the higher the score on one variable, the higher it will be on the other. In this case it means that *people with a more positive picture of the EU are also more likely to vote in the EU elections*.

4.3 Influence of Education on European turnout

To make sure that the initial relation found in the subchapter above does not have third (or fourth) factors influencing it, the two variables Education and Age also have been controlled for.

4.3.1 Education and electoral participation

First, it was tested whether education is correlated to electoral participation, using a chi-square test and $\alpha = 0,05$.

Table 11
Education and electoral participation EU in percentages

		Electoral Participation		
		Yes	No	Total
Education	School	79,1%	20,9%	100% (N=383)
	Vocational	63,2%	36,8%	100% (117)
	University	90,4%	9,6%	100% (156)
Missing				71

chi-square test = 29,651 | df = 2 | p < 0.001

source: own data

Here, again, a positive relation was found. This means that education also has an influence on the decision whether to turn out to vote or not, but it does not yet dismiss or replace the relation found in the above section.

² Note that SPSS uses a null hypothesis, thus rejecting it means the opposite in this paper, where the H1 is a positive one. Therefore it can be said that we failed to reject H1 although SPSS shows p < 0,05.

4.3.2 Education, perception of democracy and electoral participation

In order to check whether the initial relation still holds (true), we must compare the relation between perception of democracy in the EU and electoral participation with the education variable being held constant. Again, a chi-square test with $\alpha = 0.05$ was used for each of the categories.

Table 12

Perception of democracy in EU and electoral participation with Education held constant

Level of education		Electoral participation			
		Yes	No	Total	
School	Perception of democracy in EU	Positive	81,6%	18,4%	100% (103)
		Indifferent	82,5%	17,5%	100% (212)
		Negative	64,7%	35,3%	100% (68)
383					
chi-square test = 17,030 df = 4 p1 = 0,002 < 0,05					
Vocational	Perception of democracy in EU	Positive	73,3%	26,7%	100% (30)
		Indifferent	60,5%	39,5%	100% (76)
		Negative	54,5%	45,5%	100% (11)
117					
chi-square test = 4,307 df = 3 p2 = 0,230 > 0,05					
University	Perception of democracy in EU	Positive	100%	0%	100% (41)
		Indifferent	88,6%	11,4%	100% (88)
		Negative	81,5%	18,5%	100% (27)
156					
chi-square test = 19,283 df = 4 p3 = 0,001 < 0,05					

source: own data

Contrary to the hypotheses deduced above, the relationship between perception of democracy and electoral participation cannot be proven for all levels of education. Although it still is present for school graduates and people who reached a university degree ($p1 = 0,002$ and $p3 = 0,001$), it is not for respondents who have finished a vocational education ($p2 = 0,230$).

4.4 Influence of Age on European turnout

This now leads us to another variable that is often said to be influential for turnout. Using the same procedure, first it will be checked whether age is related to electoral participation in this sample, and then it will be used as a constant when re-testing the relationship between perception of democracy in the EU and electoral participation.

4.4.1 Age and electoral participation

A chi-square test with $\alpha = 0,05$ was used to explore the relation between age and electoral participation. The relationship was proven by this sample. It could be expected that age is related to electoral participation, as previous research has shown (e.g. Matsusaka and Palda, 1999).

Table 13
Age and electoral participation EU in percentages

Age	Electoral Participation		
	Yes	No	Total
18-24	77,1%	22,9%	100% (N=353)
25-44	78,8%	21,2%	100% (156)
45+	87,2%	12,8%	100% (117)
Missing			101

chi-square test = 10,957 | df = 3 | p = 0,012 < 0,05

source: own data

4.4.2 Age, perception of democracy and electoral participation

Because there is, in this sample, a relation between age and electoral participation, it is possible that age might have an influence on the relation between perception of democracy in the EU and electoral participation. To test this, age was held constant and the initial relation was tested using a chi-square test with $\alpha = 0,05$. The results are twofold: in the youngest age group, the initial relation is still present, with $p_1 = 0,039$. For the middle and the oldest age group, however, $p_2 = 0,093$ and $p_3 = 0,176$ show the influence of age on the relationship between perception of democracy and electoral participation (see table 14). Again, p_2 especially (but also p_3) are relatively small, and close to the α -frontier. This inability to reject an influence of age on the initial relation could result from biased sampling. On the other hand, it is also known that age does have influence on electoral participation. From that point of view, it seems that the perception of democracy plays a bigger role in younger ages, while the older ones "vote anyways".

Table 14
Perception of democracy in EU and electoral participation with Age held constant

Age		Electoral participation			Total
		Yes	No		
18-24	Perception of democracy in EU	Positive	78,7%	21,3%	100% (94)
		Indifferent	80,2%	19,8%	100% (192)
		Negative	65,7%	34,3%	100% (67)
					353
chi-square test = 10,089 df = 4 p1 = 0,039 < 0,05					
25-44	Perception of democracy in EU	Positive	90,9%	9,1%	100% (33)
		Indifferent	78%	22%	100% (100)
		Negative	65,2%	34,8%	100% (23)
					156
chi-square test = 7,970 df = 4 p2 = 0,093 > 0,05					
45 and older	Perception of democracy in EU	Positive	92,7%	7,3%	100% (41)
		Indifferent	81,3%	18,8%	100% (64)
		Negative	100%	0%	100% (12)
					117
chi-square test = 4,938 df = 3 p3 = 0,176 > 0,05					

source: own data

5. Conclusion

Why do people vote less on European elections than they do on national ones? This is a question which some researchers find impossible to answer, and I also agree to the comment that it can never fully be understood. There are too many factors influencing the decision whether to vote or not, and they range from the system level (e.g. voting on a weekday, obligatory voting) to the individual level (e.g. age, education, but also illness, vacation, weather etc).

In this paper the focus was set on what people think about the EU, and if and how this influences voting. More specifically, the research question was concerned with the perception of the people regarding the level of democracy in the EU. This is a narrow and a broad field at once, since democracy and perception thereof can be defined in several different ways, whereas on the other hand the perception of democracy might only play a smaller role in determining the voters' participation.

In order to test the relation, a survey was being conducted in two different countries, divided again into a pre-election and a post-election survey. The data were combined and used to test the main hypothesis ("People who tend to think that the EU suffers from a democratic problem are less likely to turn out to vote in European elections than people who do not think that the EU suffers from a democratic problem") and the additional ones which included a third and a fourth variable (age and education).

The statistical testing showed that there in fact exists a relation between the perception of democracy in the EU and the electoral participation in EP elections. This already points at the fact that people not only abstain from voting because of system level factors in the nation states, or do so because of the weather, but that people are also interested in the EU and take into account their picture of the EU when deciding about their vote. They - to put it in different words - make their own cost-benefit calculation, since if people believe that the EU does not function in a democratic way, their vote would not make any sense. But if they believe that the EU actually is democratic, than voting would make a difference and can have an influence on the working of the EU.

To make sure that the initial relation is non-spurious, it was tested against education and age. This inclusion of a constant variable showed that the relation between perception of democracy and electoral participation is still valid for people with a higher level of education as well as for people with a lower level of education. Though when it ranged somewhere in the middle between "high" and "low", the initial relation could not be proven anymore.

When tested for different age groups, the initial relation was changed even more drastically. While for "young" aged participants to the study the relation was still valid, it was not for the "middle" and "old" age group. It should be noted here, though, that the sample showed an uneven distribution amongst the age groups, where "45 and older" had a n = 117 and "18-

24" a n = 353. Considering the time span both groups represent, seven years for the young age group and realistically 35 to 40 years in the older one, this biased distribution becomes even more obvious.

Nevertheless clear tendencies have been found, pointing to the direction that electoral participation in European elections is partly dependent on the view that citizens have regarding the level of democracy in the EU. These results can be used in several ways, but the most important of course is the capability of increasing turnout for European elections. One can imagine different ways in doing so, ranging from marketing strategies with the aim to improve the picture about the EU when it comes to "democraticness", to institutional changes that would make the European system more similar to a national one. However, it has to be kept in mind that 1) not the real level of democracy is deciding, but rather the peoples' perception of it and 2) that this of course is not the only reason why people decide to vote or not to vote.

This paper is only a small contribution to electoral studies in the field of European elections, but it does offer a different view on what influences electoral participation. Research on the perception of democracy and its influence on the decision whether to vote or not is small, and it would be interesting to study it in more detail and more length. I suggest a similar survey that could be extended to more than two member states of the European Union; several other possible third factors could be controlled for. Even if not entirely proven by this paper, the influence of perception of the level of democracy in the European Union on the electoral participation in EP elections seems highly likely and deserves further research.

6. References

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7. Appendix

A

	EU elections 2009	National elections *	Difference
NL	36,8%	80,4%	43,6%
SE	45,5%	82,0%	43,5%
CZ	28,2%	64,5%	36,3%
SK	19,6%	54,7%	35,1%
SI	28,3%	63,1%	34,8%
AT	46,0%	78,8%	32,8%
HU	36,3%	67,8%	31,5%
CY	59,4%	89,0%	29,6%
PL	24,5%	53,8%	29,3%
ES	44,9%	73,9%	29%
EL	52,6%	70,9%	28,3%
FI	40,3%	67,9%	27,6%
LT	21,0%	48,6%	27,6%
DE	43,3%	70,8%	27,5%
DK	59,5%	86,5%	27%
UK	34,7%	61,3%	26,6%
PT	36,8%	59,7%	22,9%
BG	39,0%	60,2%	21,2%
FR	40,6%	60,2%	19,6%
EE	43,9%	61,0%	17,1%
IT	65,1%	80,5%	15,4%
MT	78,8%	93,3%	14,5%
RO	27,7%	39,2%	11,5%
LV	53,7%	62,3%	8,6%
IE	58,6%	63,0%	4,4%
BE	90,4%	91,2%	0,8%
LU	90,8%	85,2%	-5,6%
Average	46,2%	69,3%	22,6%

B

Frequencies - types of survey

	pre-election	post-election
online	197 (27,1%)	280 (38,5%)
paper	140 (19,3%)	110 (15,1%)
Total	337 (46,4%)	390 (53,6%)

source: own data