UNIVERSITY TWENTE, ENSCHEDE

Bachelor Thesis

European Public Administration

The effect of two types of political interest on individual-level turnout

- Examining contextual differences -

Helen Brünger – s1493698

Date of Submission: June 28, 2016

Date of Presentation: June 30, 2016

First supervisor: Dr. Henk van der Kolk

Second supervisor: Prof.dr. Bas Denters

I would like to thank my supervisors, Prof.dr. Bas Denters and especially Dr. Henk van der Kolk, for their support, their criticism and suggestions. I've learned an awful lot from you!

Abstract

This study examines the moderating effect of contextual variables on the relationship between two types of political interest and individual-level turnout. The data for the cross-sectional research stems from the first post election survey of the European Election Study 2014 polling more than 30.000 European citizens in the 28 Member States (MS).

As an addition to the existing literature, political interest is more carefully conceptualized by pertaining to two different dimensions. Unfortunately, these two types could not be tested separately, though. Moreover, a thorough set of control variables is included in the analysis, and explicit theoretical justification improves the knowledge on the underlying mechanisms.

There is no significant interaction found for the importance of elections, and only a small effect concerning the interaction with concurrent elections and Sunday voting.

Table of contents

List of tables and figures

1 Introduction

This study investigates the extent to which the relationship between two types of interest in politics and the decision to go to the polls changes under contextual differences. Thereby, the rational voting calculation is chosen as theoretical framework for it allows to expect certain behavioural patterns and to predict the influence of external factors under given circumstances. The decision to vote is thus understood as the outcome of weighing the costs incurred against the benefits obtained in combination with the probability of affecting the electoral outcome.

Studying electoral participation has a long tradition in political science research. Many variables are associated with the decision to vote but consensus on a 'universal' model of determinants is yet to emerge. However, one of the most robust findings in the academic literature is that political interest is positively related to individual-level turnout (Smets & van Ham, 2013).

Van Deth (2000) found two types of political interest that should be distinguished between. On the one hand, there is *subjective interest*, which captures the absolute importance attributed to political matters. This type is usually meant when analysing political interest. On the other hand, he associates the second type with *political saliency*, which is the relative importance assigned to politics as opposed to other activities.

Differentiating between these two types is necessary as they could have different impacts on individual-level turnout. High levels of subjective interest imply being curious about politics and willing to naturally pay attention to the political sphere (van Deth, 2000, p. 119). Individuals with sincere subjective interest tend to acquire information and are involved in media coverage on political news which creates a solid knowledge basis. Ultimately, the costs of voting become smaller. Moreover, a rise in information enables the voters to understand governmental actions and institutions more easily. This generates trust and political efficacy, which further benefit electoral participation.

While political saliency implies potential openness towards the political system, it is not expected to have an effect on the decision to vote. Displaying high levels of saliency does not suffice to convince someone to turn out. Instead, these persons are more likely to be motivated by other forces.

It is worthwhile researching the effect of the two distinct types of political interest on the decision to vote more closely, but this study even goes a step further and examines the moderating effect of contextual variables on the relationships. Originally, contextual factors were studied as explanatory variables in aggregate-level turnout research (Buhlmann & Freitag, 2006, p. 24; see Geys (2006) for a review). As the scientific community became more open towards survey-based research, attention shifted towards explaining turnout and the propensity to vote through individual behaviour. In order to overcome this "midlife crisis" as termed by Curtice (Buhlmann & Freitag, 2006, p. 15), that scientific research faces because of neglecting either the contextual framework or the variables accounting for individual behaviour, combining both the aggregate contextual variables with the individual-level

behaviour variables is necessary.

The scientific community already realized that time has come to combine country-specific variations in electoral participation with individual motivations to vote. In this sense, several contextual variables have already been studied, also in connection to a moderating effect with political interest. Soderlund, Wass and Blais (2011), for instance, found that the relationship between interest and individual-level turnout is significantly reduced by the salience of elections, presence of compulsory voting and the closeness of elections.

This study, however, concentrates on contextual factors that may be manipulated so as to increase individual participation. Of course, it is technically possible to enforce compulsory voting, and since it has a strongly positive effect on turnout while reducing the impact of interest in politics it seems reasonable to introduce mandatory electoral participation. Nevertheless, there are some severe drawbacks that make an introduction of compulsory voting both unlikely and undesirable. Hill (2006, p. 221) briefly summarizes that despite some functional problems which complicate mandatory procedures, cultural and ideological barriers constitute the greatest obstacles. In a liberal-democratic tradition, each citizen has the right *not* to vote, and that right is just as valid as the right to a vote.

Therefore, this study focuses on three contextual variables that may be manipulated and are at the same time reasonable to take into account. The first contextual factor pertains to the *importance of elections*, which is positively associated with electoral participation by means of perceived influence on the shape of the executive, increased mobilization efforts and media coverage as well as a sense of duty. The second variable takes into account the *concurrency of elections*. Holding elections on the same day benefits turnout rates through greater media attention, campaigning and mobilizing forces. Besides, costs are equally spread over the ballots which reduces the relative amount of costs incurred. Thirdly, the conditional effect of *Sunday voting* is included. The majority of the population – the working part – has got more spare time during the weekend than from Monday to Friday which reduces stress regarding the reconciliation of family, job and civic responsibility. Ultimately, more people should come to the conclusion that they want to turn out.

This study improves the existing literature in several ways. Firstly, it explores quite new avenues by conceptualizing political interest not in the common unidimensional way. Hence, it is possible to find out whether the contextual variables moderate the two types of interest differently.

Secondly, political science literature provides only little information on the exact mechanisms that are responsible for the observed relationships. However, clearly spelling out the specific functioning behind the variables is just as important as finding statistical support for one's hypotheses as only this gives meaning to the data. Therefore, by delivering thorough theoretical explanations and enriching the scarce availability of mechanism-related justifications, a big gap in literature is being closed.

Thirdly, by including Smets and van Ham's (2013, p. 356) set of control variables, a more complete view on the relationships is obtained as it becomes possible to see which other variables may account

for the them.

The relevance of studying the factors influencing the decision to vote becomes evident when taking into account that political and electoral participation is vital for healthy democracies. Admittedly, not all scientists agree that little electoral participation is necessarily a bad thing. From the individual-level standpoint it is clear that non-voting may be more rational than casting a vote. As soon as the costs incurred from making the effort of turning out outweigh the benefits, a rationally calculating person will come to the conclusion that it is better to abstain. Some political authors have argued that this is indeed desirable for a country as extreme interest can lead to extreme political orientations which will be problematic for democratic principles on a larger scale. Moreover, it is argued that little participation as a result of political ignorance solves many problems due to the fact that agreeing on a compromise is being facilitated (Niemi & Weisberg, 1993, p. 15).

Nevertheless, dissenting voices will not acquiesce with this attitude. Political apathy resulting in low turnout may lead to alienation from the political system. This becomes especially dangerous if it leads to insurgency and violent behaviour. Additionally, in a democracy the mere act of voting is considered an indicator of pride and self-respect, thus it becomes a value of its own. If abstention was to be tolerated or even encouraged, the foundations of democracy become undermined (Niemi & Weisberg, 1993, p. 18). On top of that, declining turnout rates, especially among younger generations, are said to be indicators of crises that the established democracies face (Fieldhouse, Tranmer, & Russell, 2007, p. 797). The problem with this is that the level of turnout experienced during the first elections influences the individual development of habitual voting (Franklin & Hobolt, 2011, p. 69). Consequently, a downward spiral in terms of electoral participation might occur if overall turnout is being constantly reduced.

To halt this vicious circle, factors benefitting the propensity to vote have to be figured out to be able to undertake measures counteracting this process. By contributing to the approach of combining both individual-level factors with contextual differences that can be manipulated, new information on electoral participation can be generated, opening up further ways of reacting to the evidence of democratic crises.

2 Research Question

The research question this study wants to answer is

> To what extent are the effects of the two types of political interest on individual-level turnout moderated by contextual factors in 21st century Europe?

The independent, ordinal variable is *level of political interest* as conceptualized by *subjective interest* and *political saliency*, and the dependent variable is *decision to vote* in the 2014 European and recent national election, which is a dichotomous variable. The effects of the two types of political interest on the dependent variable are expected to vary in different contexts, which are *electoral importance*, *concurrent elections* and *Sunday voting*.

The sub-questions are:

1. What is the level of turnout in the 2014 EP election and the recent national elections?
2. To what extent are individuals subjectively interest in politics?
3. To what extent do individuals consider politics as relatively important?
4. Which type of interest influences the decision to vote more strongly?
5. To what extent are the effects of the two types of interest moderated
    a. By the importance of elections?
    b. By elections held concurrently?
    c. By Sunday voting?
6. To what extent do other factors account for the found relationships?

3 Theory

3.1 Introducing the theoretical framework: a rational approach

When it comes to solving the puzzle of turnout, there are numerous ways of approaching this. While some theories are quite conventional, such as sociological explanations, others suggest alternative hypotheses as in the attempt to trace individual-level turnout back to the genetic code (see Smets & van Ham (2013) for an overview of the most common approaches).

While each of the theories offers valuable insights, this study rests on the foundations laid by the classical rational voter model which gained prominence in the 1970s (Niemi & Weisberg, 1993, p. 9). Inspired by an economic mind-set focusing on utility maximization and self-interest, political scientists started to apply the same assumptions to the disentanglement of why people vote. An advantage of this theory is that certain behavioural patterns can be expected under given circumstances and prediction regarding the influence of external factors is made possible (Niemi & Weisberg, 1993, p. 9).

As one of the early and influential works, Anthony Downs stated that the basic parameters of the electoral participation-equation are *C*, which are the costs incurred, *P* as the probability that one's vote affects the outcome of the election, and *B* that is defined as the benefits associated with voting for a particular candidate (Niemi & Weisberg, 1993, p. 16). The final decision to vote depends on a rational calculation of these components. If $PB - C$ equals a positive value, or is bigger than C, then a rational person will turn out. If not, which is the case when the costs outweigh the product of benefits and chances of affecting the electoral outcome, it would be irrational to vote.

As another factor exerting influence on the decision to vote, Downs suggested taking into account the desire to preserve democracy. He argued that without a minimum amount of participation, the democratic principles would be endangered. This was labelled term *D* and added to the baseline equation. Subsequent research extended the meaning of *D* to the perception of civic duty and expressing partisanship or loyalty towards a certain candidate (Aldrich, 1993, p. 251). The addition of *D* implies that voting becomes a value of its own. Leaving *D* out of the equation reduces the act of casting a vote to a mere instrumental function that serves as a means to obtain the goal, which are the benefits (Niemi & Weisberg, 1993, p. 16).

The costs incurred from voting are subjective and dependent on individual perceptions. Moreover, they are likely to be quite small. Especially in highly important elections with a lot of campaigning and media coverage, even individuals who do not seek information on purpose will acquire at least some information which reduces the costs 'by accident'. On the other hand, when assuming rational behaviour, arriving at the conclusion that it is better to abstain also entails certain costs to be paid (Aldrich, 1993, p. 262). Furthermore, having to admit that one did not vote although it is considered a

civic duty that is necessary for the functioning of a democracy might lead to feelings of guilt which increases the term *D*.

At the same time, the benefits derived from going to the polls are likewise negligible (Niemi & Weisberg, 1993, p. 17). For instance, if two candidates show no difference regarding their positions, the outcome of the election hardly matters. Besides, the probability of casting a pivotal vote is extremely small. In a close race between two or more parties, though, *P* should be higher. Also, the size of the electorate further influences the perception of *P* (Aldrich, 1993, p. 252).

Ultimately, the decision to vote is a marginal one (Aldrich, 1993, p. 263). Both benefits and costs can be expected to be roughly equal thus even a small change on either side can be decisive. According to Aldrich (1993, p. 264), this very fact may be the reason why so many variables correlate with turnout and no full-fleshed model has been developed yet. In fact, it is unlikely to ever find out about every single variable that plays a role in shaping one's voting behaviour due to the small effect each cost and benefit has. Taking contextual factors into account, they can play a crucial role by tipping the balance of almost equal costs and benefits towards a positive or negative decision to vote.

3.2 Political interest and individual-level turnout

While studying individual-level turnout determinants, a recent review found that in the past decade the scientific community has studied about 170 explanatory variables, without one variable being included in all models (Smets & van Ham, 2013). Smets and van Ham (2013) did find some variables to be consistently linked to individual-level turnout, though. Among them ranks political interest - more than 80% of those articles having interest in politics included found it to be significantly positively related to turnout rates.

Following the assumption that individuals act rationally in their decisions in order to obtain the greatest benefits and to minimize the associated costs, the relationship between political interest and the decision to vote functions through three main mechanisms.

3.2.1 Information procurement

The most intuitive mechanism links political interest to an increased tendency to procure political information which reduces the costs (Denny & Doyle, 2008, p. 298; Soderlund et. al, 2011, p. 691). While the scientific community describes only scarcely why this is the case, one can easily imagine the reasons for this connection. Politically interested persons are likely to care about political matters which makes them want to read, hear or watch news on the respective issues. Thus, the natural exposure to political information is greater if one indicates interest in politics. Over time, these persons acquire knowledge that builds up a basis for understanding and mastering the decision-making process. At election day, their costs of voting are lower compared to uninterested persons for they already have a sufficient amount of knowledge 'in stock' that they can draw on. Technically, they do

not need to reach out to additional information on the parties and candidates for they are already familiar with the political arena. However, if one frequently seeks information on politics the likelihood of being exposed to media coverage by default is greater in comparison to citizens lacking political interest.

Therefore, the costs of voting are reduced in two ways: Firstly, because of a knowledge foundation that makes the decision-making process easily accessible and secondly, due to a natural contact with the election-specific campaigns providing further information on the political situation.

3.2.2 Trust and political efficacy

Two again sparsely described mechanisms link political interest to trust in the political system and political efficacy (Smets & van Ham, 2013, p. 354). Political efficacy combines an indicator of individually perceived competence (internal efficacy) with an assessment of how well the political system responds to the voters' demands (external efficacy) (Valentino, Gregorowicz, & Groenendyk, 2009, p. 308). Hooghe and Marien (2013) acknowledge that especially the combined presence of both indicating trust and being able to understand the system fosters political participation, and particularly voting. Drawing on previous work, they state that without competence and positive sentiments towards the political system, one will not engage in politics (Hooghe & Marien, 2013, p. 133). It can be expected that persons who are eager to know more about politics and who tend to inform themselves – as established above – will be better able to grasp the whole political process. This explains why internal efficacy is higher. The more interested one is the higher the involvement in political news and events, which eventually leads to a better understanding of politics. The costs of voting will be lower since one feels able to participate due to sufficient information.

On top of that, external efficacy also rises together with interest because acquiring information on political discussions increases awareness of the actions taken by the government. Admittedly, if a voter is not at all able to influence political affairs, the interested persons will find out which would annul any positive correlation between the two variables. However, on the supposition that a democratic government does respond to the citizens' needs, individuals who are engaged in politics will notice that they are indeed able to impact on the political direction. Eventually, this adds to the benefit-side of the turnout equation. The contribution to a system that takes into account the vox populi increases satisfaction on part of the voter who just cast a vote which provides an additional incentive.

Thirdly, the higher the interest in politics, the greater is someone's trust in the political system. Frequently dealing with political information increases the transparency of the institutions for interested persons have a better understanding of the underlying processes. They can relate to governmental or institutional actions more easily thanks to the natural information acquisition. Ultimately, they are capable of developing trust in the system because of their ability to understand and interpret politics. Contrarily, rational persons who are not politically interested and thus not

informed are far more likely to adopt a sceptical attitude – basically because they do not understand the government and the institutions. Regarding the rational voter behaviour, the degree of trust in the political arena adds to the *D* term.

3.2.3 Confidence

Denny and Doyle (2008, p. 298) discuss a further mechanism by studying the behaviour of persons lacking political interest who will take no notice of political news. Ultimately, they feel insecure about voting. Reversing the argumentation, interested individuals feel more confident about voting as they have a sufficient amount of knowledge 'in stock'. The fact that they are well informed enables them to evaluate all options and to confidently vote for the best party which increases their benefits.

These mechanisms lead to the following 1st hypothesis:

> H1a (political interest): The level of political interest has got a positive impact on the individual-level decision to vote.

3.3 Political interest distinguished

Van Deth (2000) suggests breaking down political interest into two types. Those are (1) subjective political interest, conceptualized by the degree of arousing curiosity, and (2) political saliency, pertaining to the relative importance assigned to politics as opposed to other activities. He finds that social capital increases subjective political interest due to greater education, for instance, but decreases the level of political saliency. Although individual autonomy and the scope of opportunities rise, the tendency to be scarce leads to the conclusion that attention cannot be paid to every aspect of life. Apparently, more autonomous and resourceful persons are in the position to regard political matters as 'background noise' inferior to personal issues.

Ultimately, a rise in social capital resulting in subjective interest implies being potentially ready to participate in the democratic decision-making process by means of natural attention paid to the political sphere. The above-mentioned mechanisms (section 3.2) are responsible for a positive relationship between subjective interest and individual-level turnout.

Political saliency, on the other hand, does not involve any assumptions on the decision to vote. Theoretically, it does sound reasonable to expect that when politics are valued more highly among the vast number of other topics or activities, people should be somewhat open towards the political process in general. However, this should not suffice for convincing someone to turn out. The perceived relative importance is not associated with general awareness of the political process which could lower *C* or increase *B*.

Therefore, ranking politics higher or lower than other matters is unlikely to have a remarkable influence on the decision to turn out. Instead, voters who indicate high political saliency are more

likely to be motivated by other forces that convince them to turn out. Ultimately, the degree of perceiving politics as important in relation to other spheres of interest should not lead to the same strength in positive relationship to individual-level turnout – if there is a relationship at all.

This leads to the following 2nd hypothesis:

> H1b (subjective interest/political saliency): The positive effect of subjective interest in politics on the decision to vote is stronger than the effect of political saliency.

3.4 Contextual factors

When thinking in terms of higher-order variables, there are three distinctions that can be made in order to prevent confusion. At the lowest level, aggregate variables pertain to the mean-level characteristics of individuals. At the intermediary level, factors in the context can also refer to relational levels which focus on relationships between individuals. At the highest level are contextual variables that describe characteristics specific to countries. In this case and when speaking of contextual factors, the latter level is meant.

While political participation is strongly affected by individual-level characteristics, it cannot be studied in isolation. The environment exerts a variety of influences on the decision to vote that an individual can hardly escape from (Huckfeldt, 1979, p. 579). This is an important part within the explanation of aggregate-level turnout variation across countries. Over the course of time, individual characteristics prove to be rather stable in terms of their influence on the decision to vote. Moreover, there is no country that is home to only highly educated or extremely politically interested individuals, as opposed to a state with purely uneducated and ignorant people. Thus, there must be something decisive about the context that adds to the decision to vote or abstain (van Egmond, 2003, p. 6).
Taking the discussion of contextual influences back to the individual level is informative due to the fact that it is still essentially *individuals* who decide (not) to vote. Recall that the rational voter-calculation is roughly balanced concerning the costs and benefits. Contextual factors can be the decisive factor on either side that swings the decision to vote from a yes to a no and vice versa.
Conclusively, the final decision to cast a ballot is a combination of individual features and contextual factors, that can be best captured if both aspects are studied jointly.

3.4.1 Importance of elections

Soderlund et al. (2011) show that the effect of interest in politics on turnout appears to be smaller in a national as opposed to the European context. Their findings are based on Reif and Schmitt's work, which characterizes elections as being of first- or second-order nature. The distinctive feature of the

latter type is that there is less at stake leading to lower importance[1]. While national elections are first-order in character, EP elections constitute a second-order election (SOE).

The electoral importance shapes in various ways the outcome of the rational calculation to vote. Firstly, in first-order elections the votes have an influence on the composition of the executive which increases the benefits. People who care about their country and its political direction will be more motivated to go to the voting booths as they can express their opinion on the future governmental set-up.

Secondly, media coverage is smaller in less important contexts, and greater in important elections as they attract more attention (Cutler, 2008, p. 493). Irrespective of a conscious decision to acquire information on the upcoming election, people are thus to some extent exposed to information anyway, which builds up a knowledge basis. This natural contact with election-specific media reports shrinks the costs of voting.

Likewise, partisan and environmental mobilization efforts are also greater in high-profile elections which further produces political knowledge – the opposite is the case in an SOE (Cutler, 2008, p. 493). The costs incurred are reduced since less additional information has to be sought. Furthermore, the pressure that may be exerted from parties and one's environment augments the notion of duty. If one does not vote, other people and also oneself will make one feel like a 'bad' citizen who does not discharge his civic duties.

Taking these mechanisms together, it comes clear that in important elections more people will turn out as benefits rise, costs are being reduced and the duty to vote poses an extra incentive. Ultimately, the turnout equation should equal a number greater than 0; or $PB + D > C$, respectively.

Less important elections lack the aforementioned mechanisms as the voters do not contribute to the shape of the executive and media coverage, partisan as well as environmental mobilization are less present. Besides, the sense of duty is weaker. In conclusion, the costs in the turnout equation will gain the upper hand.

Subjective political interest

In a context of highly important elections, more people indicating less subjective interest will be attracted to the polls. The opposite will be true for second-order elections. The above-mentioned mechanisms are responsible for this phenomenon. Those who are highly interested in political matters and are thus well informed will turn out anyway, irrespective of the level of information conveyed by the media or mobilization forces. Obviously, the likelihood to participate in an election cannot rise to infinity; van Egmond (2003, p. 19) refers to this as the ceiling effect. For the highly interested persons, the chances of voting cannot rise to the same extent as for less interested persons since for them there is much more room for improvement.

[1] Soderlund et al. (2011) refer to it as "salience of elections", yet this term would be confusing in this context as it interferes with political saliency.

Thus, persons who are less subjectively interested are the target population of mobilization efforts and campaigns. They benefit from the knowledge that they acquire due to the increased attention, which makes additional concern about the candidates less necessary. Besides, the perception of civic duty and the notion that one (theoretically) influences the composition of the government provide additional incentives for the less interested part of the population. Since SOEs lack these elements, mostly subjectively interested persons participate.

Conclusively, a highly important context increases benefits from voting for a candidate, entails feelings of civic duty and reduces the costs incurred from turning out especially for less interested persons. Conversely, less relevant elections do not offer any additional benefits or external pressure obliging one to vote, whereas they involve greater costs as it is more difficult to acquire knowledge on the electoral topics and candidates. For people who are less subjectively interested in politics, the cost side will outweigh the benefits. This leads to abstention on part of the uninterested persons which rebuilds the strong relationship between subjective interest and individual-level turnout.

This leads to the following 3rd hypothesis:

> H2a (subjective interest*importance): The effect of subjective interest on individual-level turnout is greater in EP elections as compared to the effect of subjective interest on individual-level turnout in national elections.

Political saliency

Political saliency is originally expected to have only a small, if not no effect at all on the decision to vote. In a second-order context, any effect between political saliency and the decision to go to the polls will be absent, too. Those who turn out in the tightened conditions of minor importance will not be led by the fact that they consider politics as relatively (un)important.

Nevertheless, the mechanisms mobilizing people in a first-order context could lead to a small but positive effect between saliency and individual-level turnout. Those citizens who indicate that the area of politics has got a meaningful position among the vast diversity of other topics can be expected to be at least somewhat open towards political decision-making procedures which makes them attentive to the rise in media attention and mobilizing forces. They will incidentally acquire knowledge that reduces the costs of voting for them. Ultimately, voting is being facilitated which will swing the rational voting calculus towards a positive decision.

This leads to the following 4th hypothesis:

> H2b (political saliency*importance): The effect of political saliency on individual-level turnout is greater in national elections as compared to the effect of political saliency on individual-level turnout in EP elections.

3.4.2 Concurrent elections

In some countries, EP and national elections are held at the same time. Official reports to the EP 2014 elections have acknowledged that in these countries, turnout was significantly higher (European Commission, 2014). The scientific community developed a variety of hypotheses on the effect of conducting different elections at the same day on both aggregate and individual-level turnout; sometimes lending support to a positive relationship, but also indicating negative or no effects.

Geys' (2006, p. 652) aggregate-level review of turnout determinants found evidence that concurrent elections indeed increase turnout. For one thing, media attention is expected to be greater due to the fact that there are several events to be reported about.

For another thing, if there are two or more elections happening at the same time the parties will do their best in trying to win over the voters for their election and their concerns. Ultimately, parties are increasingly engaged in campaigning and spend more money on mobilization if there are several contests. Both mechanisms – media attention as well as campaign and mobilization efforts – make the population more aware of the political events happening and enhance the overall level of information. And again, the more one knows about an election 'by default' the less additional information has to be sought. This reduces the costs incurred from voting for a certain candidate or party.

As a third mechanism, the costs for making the effort of going to the voting booths are fixed. They do not rise with the number of ballots cast; instead the costs are being distributed among the votes. This means that the costs from turning out in one election are divided in half if there are two elections combined. Ultimately, the costs to be paid for a single vote drop in relation to the number of elections held.

Smets and van Ham (2013), however, found that on the individual level, there is no relationship between concurrent elections and the decision to turn out. Neither positive nor negative mechanisms, proved to be significant. Consequently, further research is needed regarding this aspect, especially in view of possible interaction effects.

Subjective political interest

Concerning the interaction with subjective interest, two elections taking place at the same time will affect especially those persons who are not certain about voting which reduces the effect of the original relationship.

Increased campaigning and media coverage do not affect highly interested persons to the same extent as subjectively uninterested persons. People indicating high interest in politics are expected to go to the voting booths irrespective of the number of elections held. The costs they have to pay are lower anyway, for example because they do not have to reach out to extra information on the elections as they already have a sufficient knowledge 'in stock', and their perceived benefits are greater.

However, the occasional voters who indicate less interest in politics might be convinced to turn out (van Egmond, 2003, p. 38). The above-stated mechanisms of increased chances of media attention

devoted to at least one of the elections, greater partisan campaigning next to a rise in mobilization efforts trigger the same factors as sincere political interest does: both the level of information and individual awareness of the political process rise. Therefore, individual costs are reduced for the less interested persons which might convince them to turn out.

Secondly, the likelihood that the occasional voter is at least somewhat attracted to one of the elections held rises with the number of elections offered. If one already made the effort of walking to the next ballot box because of election A, chances are very high that a further vote for election B is also being cast. Eventually, although the absolute amount of costs to be paid does not decrease, the relative costs do, which initiates especially less interested persons to participate in concurrent elections.

Theoretically, concurrent elections can also affect the interest-turnout relationship quite differently by preventing people from turning out. Especially uninterested persons and even those indicating higher levels of interest in politics could refuse to cast a vote by means of a phenomenon called 'voter fatigue'. This occurs when increased attention devoted to a number of political issues results not in greater awareness and information that drive people to the polls, but rather in an overall sense of tiredness that leads to abstention. Then, the originally perceived reduction in costs turns into a decline in benefits. Moreover, partisanship as well as the desire to display loyalty towards a certain candidate as mirrored by the term *D* are being reduced for people start being bored by the political arena. Then, $PB - C + D$ equals 0; or $PB + D < C$, respectively.

Nonetheless, the official EP election report comes to the conclusion that concurrent elections have increased turnout which provides support for the following 5th hypothesis:

> H3a (subjective interest*concurrent elections): If EP and national elections are held concurrently, the effect of subjective interest in politics on the decision to vote is smaller as compared to when they are held separately.

Political saliency

As established in section 3.4.1, people indicating that they are relatively interested in politics are expected to be at least somewhat open towards the political sphere. Due to the fact that media attention, campaign spending and mobilization efforts increase when two or more elections are scheduled for the same day, the general levels of awareness and information rise. In combination with political openness this might suffice to convince someone to turn out who attributes greater relevance to politics as opposed to other activities. The reduction in costs could be enough so as to swing the outcome of the rational voting calculation and make these persons realize that it is more rational to vote than to abstain.

Ultimately, individuals who consider politics as relatively more important than other topics are more likely to be stimulated to make the effort of casting a vote than those who attribute no relative importance to politics. Without concurrent elections, however, this positive relationship will be absent.

This leads to the following 6th hypothesis:

> H3b (political saliency*concurrent elections): If EP and national elections are held concurrently, there is a positive effect between political saliency and the decision to vote. There is no effect if elections are not held concurrently.

3.4.3 Sunday voting

A further contextual difference between the EP and national electoral systems is the chosen day of election. Some countries opt for Sunday voting whereas other systems favour a different day. Concerning the 2014 EP elections, the countries avoiding Sunday voting were the Czech Republic, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands and Slovakia as well as the United Kingdom (European Commission, 2014).

Generally, scheduling an election during the weekend is considered to have a positive effect on the overall participation rate, mainly due to the fact that the working population as well as students do not have to reconcile their work with the additional duty of turning out. In this case, voting costs are reduced (van Egmond, 2003, p. 38).

However, when taking a closer look at individual groups, choosing Sunday as Election Day is likely to have varying effects. Those who do not belong to the working population, for example, might not be affected by weekday voting to the same extent as their counterparts are. To them, the exact day of election should not be decisive when setting their mind on the question of voting or abstaining as each day encounters the same amount of costs. Regarding people working in shifts during the weekend, such as doctors or policemen, it is hard to tell which effect Sunday voting will have. Probably, any effect will be cancelled out as some happen to have or be willing to take the time to go voting, whereas others will not be able to.

Concerning younger workers, the scientific community found evidence of a negative reaction to Sunday voting. The argument is that especially the so-called 'new worker' generation does not want to spend its rare leisure time for such a thing as voting. To them, the costs of driving to the voting booths on a Sunday outweigh the potential benefits. During the week, though, the costs would be lower as the 'new worker' generation is on the move anyway (van Egmond, 2003, p. 39).

On top of that, one's religious background might further interact with Sunday voting. Those who traditionally consider Sundays as sacred, which is typically true for (deeply religious) Christians, will show higher chances of abstaining for they are not willing to pay the high costs (van Egmond, 2003, p. 39).

Subjective interest

Usually, the weekend leaves more free time to people than business days do, thus stress regarding the reconciliation of job, family responsibilities and voting is being reduced. Eventually, this shrinks the amount of costs incurred. It is expected that this reduction appeals especially to less subjectively

interested persons while those who indicate deep interest are likely to cast a vote independent of the day of the week for their benefits outweigh the costs either way. Therefore, as the stress level drops and it becomes easier to make time for voting, more people with less interest come to the conclusion that it is more rational to vote than to abstain. Ultimately, Sunday voting is likely to reduce the effect of subjective political interest on the decision to vote.

If the opposite turns out to be the case then that might be evidence for the notion of a new generation of workers who prefer to spend their relaxation day with different activities. To them, the costs of voting outweigh the benefits so that they find it more reasonable to abstain.

This leads to the following 7th hypothesis:

> H4a (subjective interest*Sunday voting): If elections are held on a Sunday, the effect of subjective interest in politics on the decision to vote is smaller as compared to when they are held during the working days.

Political saliency

Concerning political saliency, there are two different impacts possible. Firstly, the introduction of Sunday voting to the saliency-turnout relationship can have a positive effect. This functions by means of a basic mechanism: spending one's leisure time with activities that are considered relevant creates much more benefits than being involved with relatively unimportant matters. Thus, as soon as someone regards politics as a highly salient topic, there is a greater chance that the leisure time will be spent with voting. As the benefits from spending one's time in a meaningful way increase, the rational voter calculation should equal a positive value, or outweigh the costs, respectively.

Secondly, it is also possible that Sunday voting has no effect on the original relationship. If a person attributes greater importance to politics as opposed to other activities, and if this implies that he or she is potentially willing to bear the costs of voting because it is understood as a meaningful activity generating benefits, then this should also apply during business days. Technically, regarding something as relevant entails that one is inclined to make sacrifices – here in terms of time spent – in order to do what is considered as relatively more important. In this case, the benefits that arise from voting are independent of the chosen day of election. This leaves the relationship between political saliency and decision to vote unaltered.

Nevertheless, since job responsibilities still put severe constraints on one's free time management during working days, and as the voting decision is a marginal one in which each side – cost and benefits – can easily outweigh the counter-side by means of a slight change, it is reasonable to expect that Sunday voting creates a positive effect between political saliency and individual-level turnout.

This leads to the following 8th hypothesis:

> H4b (political saliency*Sunday voting): If elections are held on a Sunday, there is a positive effect between political saliency and the decision to vote. There is no effect if elections are held during the working days.

3.5 Control variables

In the course of a review studying individual-level turnout, Smets and van Ham (2013) find several variables to be consistently linked to turnout and advise including them as control variables so as to make sure that there are no third variables confounding the observed relationships.

3.5.1 Age

Age is found to have a curvilinear relationship with political participation, notably individual-level turnout (Smets & van Ham, 2013, p. 348). Jankowski and Strate (1995, p. 91) summarize why turnout is highest for middle-agers but lower for those at the beginning and end of life span.

Young adults tend to refrain from voting as they are busy with building up their life and get easily distracted by other forces which appear to be much more important at that moment, such as education and career development. They have not settled down yet which typically makes them lack community attachment that would foster political involvement, though. Moreover, young persons have not had enough voting experience so as to become a habitual voter.

Over the course of time, stability and community settlement rise. Features such as greater income, church attendance and partisan affiliation contribute to increasing electoral participation. Besides, adults tend to pay more attention to political media coverage. This leads to greater political knowledge that reduces the costs incurred from forming an opinion in order to cast a vote. Also, middle age generations develop a habit of voting as voting experience rises. This further drives turnout.

As time goes by, however, individual-level turnout decreases. Elderly persons are confronted with the ageing process involving health problems and signs of disability. Ultimately, the ability to follow news on political matters becomes aggravated. In combination with a decrease in mobility, political participation starts to be too difficult so that increasing age oftentimes leads to non-voting.

3.5.2 Education

The level of education correlates highly with political participation, and is oftentimes found to have the strongest predictive power as opposed to other variables (Sunshine Hillygus, 2005, p. 26). Most importantly, it develops skills and knowledge necessary for understanding the political process and democratic decision-making (Sunshine Hillygus, 2005, p. 27). It capacitates the individuals to participate in politics and reduces material and cognitive costs.

Secondly, education influences turnout by means of one's social network position (Sunshine Hillygus, 2005, p. 28). The more educated individuals are more closely situated at the center of politically important social networks. This makes political engagement less troublesome.
Thirdly, the relationship between education and turnout could be confounded by intelligence (Sunshine Hillygus, 2005, p. 29). The more intelligent a person is, the more likely he or she is to be involved in political discussions, to follow the news and acquire knowledge on political issues as well as to participate in democratic activities. Hence, a high IQ increases the number of years spent in school and at the same time triggers a rise in the degree of political involvement.

3.5.3 Residential mobility

Smets and van Ham (2013, p. 350) establish that the more mobile a person is, the lower the chances of electoral participation, or the longer someone stays at the same place, the higher the likelihood of voting, respectively. A study conducted in the American context (Highton, 2000) researches this more closely and finds that moving outside of one's community has got a less strongly negative impact on turnout than moving within the community. This highlights that the hurdle of re-registering in the new place has got a stronger effect than the loss of social connections (Highton, 2000, p. 117).

3.5.4 Region

There is mixed evidence on part of the effect that urbanization has on electoral participation. Monroe (1977) studies the relationship on an aggregate level in an American context and finds evidence that more rural areas tend to turn out at higher rates, which might be the outcome of greater 'boundedness' within less urban communities (Monroe, 1977, p. 77). Smets and van Ham (2013, p. 350) acknowledge also for the European context that the relationship used to be a clearly negative one due to the fact that the associational ties between the individuals are greater in more rural areas, yet they suggest that the negative impact on the decision to vote has become out-dated by now.

3.5.5 Media exposure

Media exposure, and especially the engagement with news, is positively correlated to turnout. For one thing, it transfers relevant information that helps in understanding the political decision-making process and its institutions. For another thing, it leads to a development and support of attitudes and resources that benefit voting, such as trust and political efficacy (Corrigal-Brown & Wilkes, 2014, p. 408-409). Ultimately, a basis of knowledge is being established which positively impacts on the decision to vote through cost-reductions and benefit-increases.

Bakker and de Vreese (2011) further distinguish between different types of media and find that news consumption by means of Internet, newspaper and TV usage are positively correlated with political participation (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011, p. 10-11).

3.5.6 Political knowledge

Smets and van Ham (2013, p. 354) find that the more knowledge a person has, the greater his/her chances of turning out. Unfortunately, the scientific community is very brief in giving theoretic arguments why this would be the case. However, the mechanisms are likely to revolve around cost reductions due to easier access to the decision-making process and increased levels of information. Furthermore, greater political education might lead to higher levels of trust in the system and confidence in oneself – both influence the decision to vote positively.

3.5.7 Party mobilization

Smets and van Ham's review (2013, p. 351) detects a positive relationship between party mobilization and the decision to vote. Partisan contacts prior to an election, e.g. by means of canvassing or Get Out The Vote phone calls, contain valuable information on the polls and the party positions, which adds to the individual's overall level of knowledge. Consequently, the costs to be paid for turning out decrease as the amount of additional information to be sought shrinks.

3.5.8 Party identification

If an individual identifies strongly with a certain party, meaning he or she displays partisan support, then the chances of becoming politically active, notably to vote, rise. This has been oftentimes researched and almost always found to be true (Finkel & Opp, 1991, p. 339). The underlying mechanism is that the attachment to a party mirrors concern for political issues, interest in the political arena and in the outcome of an election (Finkel & Opp, 1991, p. 340). Ultimately, these attributes lead to a greater propensity to vote.

3.5.9 Gender

For a long time and by many scholars, a gender gap regarding the involvement in political processes has been observed as men are considered to be more likely to engage and be interested in politics than women. (Verba et al., 1997, p. 1051). The reason for this is considered to be the unequal distribution of resources that are necessary for political involvement, as well as the traditional role allocation between men and women (Verba et al., 1997, p. 1052).

Coffé (2013), however, argues that this gap reflects the fact that common measures of political interest capture only national levels of politics. Women are not less interested in politics, they are just differently interested due to their focus on local issues, whereas male interest focuses on the national and international arena (Coffé, 2013, p. 334).

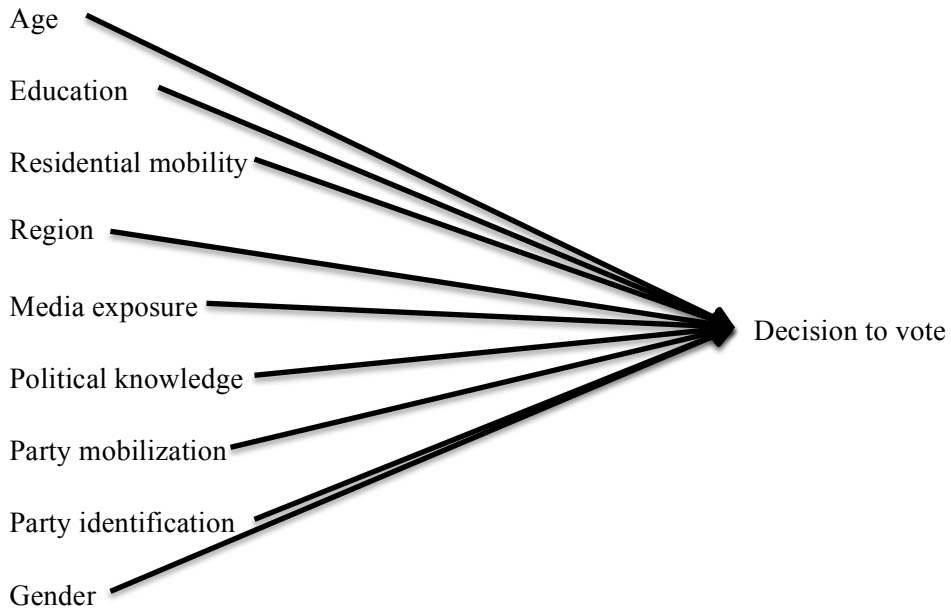

Figure 1. Model of control variables

Additionally, *religion* and *occupational status* are also included into the analysis as they might confound the interaction between *Sunday voting, subjective interest* and *individual-level turnout*.

4 Research methodology

4.1 Research design

In order to answer the research question, data from the first post-election survey of the European Election Study (Voter Study) 2014 is analysed. It captures several valuable indicators producing quantitative data on questions answered by the sampling population. The research design is cross-sectional since many people are studied at the same time.

When researching causal relationship, there are three things to take care of. It has to be established that the two variables correlate and that the cause precedes the consequence in time. Thirdly, possible spuriousness should be eliminated to reduce the danger of neglecting a third (actually responsible) variable. In a cross-sectional design, it is possible to take care of the correlation between the variables. However, time order and spuriousness cannot be properly researched, which is problematic for ensuring internal validity. Therefore, several control variables that are found to be possible confounders (see Smets & van Ham, 2013) are included into the regression model.

Besides these common control variables, Denny and Doyle (2008) found that political interest and turnout might be jointly determined by personality traits and cognitive abilities. While it would be interesting and valuable to research such a relationship, the data does not allow for this. There is no appropriate questionnaire item that would capture either of these variables.

4.2 Case selection and sampling

The units of analysis and observation are individuals. The setting is the 2014 EP election and the most recent MS national election. More than 30.000 EU citizens of voting age residing in the 28 different countries are included. Circa 1.100 interviews per country were conducted. For Malta and Luxembourg, however, the sample size is smaller (500 each). Concerning the United Kingdom, roughly 1,300 interviews were conducted (European election studies, n.d.).

The data stems from computer-assisted face-to-face interviews, which were carried out shortly after the May 2014 EP elections in the respective national language. The data collection method is multistage random sampling, which means constructing clusters within the population of interest, and then dividing them into second-stage clusters. These clusters are only referred to as “sampling points” and are not more closely defined (TNS opinion, n.d., p. 2). Finally, the individual households are randomly selected within this sub-cluster and recruited over the phone (TNS opinion, n.d., p. 5).

The Election Study 2014 constitutes an ideal basis for comparing different attitudes towards national and EU voting participation as the questions included are similar across all countries. Moreover, since the MS vary in the contextual factors, e.g. sometimes elections are taking place concurrently, the interaction effects of these differences become visible.

4.3 Data analysis

Due to the fact that the dependent variable is a dichotomy taking either the value 0 or 1, linear regression is not appropriate in order to analyse the relationships. Instead, logistic regression has to be used. It gives the effect of a independent variable on the logit and odds ratio of the dependent variable, which is reported in the B and Exp(B)-coefficients. The bigger the B-coefficient, the greater is its effect. Moreover, a positive number implies a positive effect, whereas a negative number hints at the opposite impact. Regarding the Exp(B), though, the value 1 marks the cutting point: a number greater than 1 signifies a rise in odds, while a coefficient smaller than 1 suggests a decrease.

The following example gives an idea of how to interpret the coefficients (independent variable *age*, dependent variable *decision to vote*):

B-value = .033

The logit to vote vs. not to vote increases for each additional year with .033 / The effect of age on the logit equals .033.

Exp(B)-value = 1.033

With every year, the odds to vote vs. not to vote rise by a factor of 1.033, or 3.3%, respectively.

Eventually, the probability, which ranges between 0 and 1, of the response variable being present or absent can be calculated on the basis of these coefficients.

5 Operationalization

Each of the ordinal variables has been centred at its median in order to give meaning to the interpretation of the constant of the logistic regression. This means that the category which divides the respondents into halves (upper and lower 50%) is coded 0, and the remaining categories are aligned. For example, the median category for *subjective interest in politics* is 'not really interested' as the cumulative percentage indicates that more than 50% of the responses fall into and below this category. Consequently, the following encoding appears:

Table 1
Subjective interest in politics: median-centred

Category	Value
Not at all interested	-1
Not really interested	0
To some extent interested	1
Definitely interested	2

5.1 Dependent variable

Regarding the dependent variable *individual-level turnout*, there are three common ways of operationalizing it (Smets & van Ham, 2013, p. 347). Most often, individual-level turnout is measured via post-election surveys capturing self-reported turnout. As an advantage, it is easiest to obtain, however, it might be prone to recall bias and social desirability. Ultimately, the actual turnout rate might be lower than it appears according to the survey. The second way of measuring voter participation, using validated turnout data, accounts for this as it draws on officially released records. It is strongest in ensuring validity, yet it is less often available. The third option, measuring the individual propensity through pre-election surveys runs the greatest risk of being biased, though. The 2014 European Election Study is a post-election survey, thus belonging to the first type of measurement (European election studies, n.d.).

The dependent variable pertains to two different levels leading to two distinct variables. The question "[…] Did you vote in the recent European Parliament elections" gauges individual-level turnout on the European level. Respondents could indicate 'voted', 'did not vote', or 'don't know'. The same question was posed in relation to the previous national general election with the EP election substituted by the respective national election. The category 'voted' is coded with a 1, whereas 'did not vote' equals a 0.

These two questionnaire items have been concatenated into one so as to have only one dependent variable as opposed to two. This means that the national individual-level turnout data is now stacked

'underneath' the European data which doubles the sample size. It seems as if there are more people who participated in the study, yet they are still the same participants appearing twice. This does not make a difference for the results of the analysis, though, as the values on the remaining variables are kept the same.

5.2 Independent variable

The variable *political interest* pertains to two dimensions. The first one captures the subjective importance attached to politics, whereas the second one relates to the relative importance of political matters in contrast to other topics. Distinguishing between these conceptualizations is important as they might have different relationships towards individual-level turnout.

Subjective interest in politics is measured by the survey statement "You are very interested in politics." Respondents are asked to which degree they agree on a four-level scale ranging from 'Yes, definitely' to 'No, not at all'.

The second dimension – *political saliency* – is more difficult to measure. Van Deth (2000) suggests using rankings of different items, such as family, work, politics, etc. Unfortunately, the Election Study does not entail such a question. A reduction in quality has to be accepted by choosing an alternative.

The survey question "[…] How often would you say you discuss national/European/local political matters?" constitutes a second-best solution. The optional answers range from 'frequently', to 'occasionally' and 'never'. If one hardly ever discusses any political topics, then the relative importance of politics should be low.

In order to be able to meaningfully execute the logistic regression, it has to be assessed whether some of the variables actually measure the same thing. Thus, the degree of correlation has to be checked. Some correlation is in fact useful since with no correlation it makes no sense to check the effect of the main predictor on the response variable while holding the controls constant. Nevertheless, if two variables have a strongly linear relationship it is wise to exclude one of them from the analysis so as to prevent multicollinearity. Therefore, the variables have been checked beforehand by means of association measures. The choice of measure depends on the variable's level of measurement. Concerning a correlation between two ordinal variables, Kendall's tau or Spearman's Rho has to be used.

The survey data offers three levels of political saliency – national, European and local. Kendall's tau-b shows that they correlate highly with each other as r ranges between .581 and .707. Moreover, these types of saliency further signify high values of Kendall's tau-b in correlation with subjective interest (r = .419 (national), r = .394 (European)). This militates against distinguishing between the two types of interest and advocates using only of them one in the regression analysis. Hence, the hypotheses pertaining to the relationships and interaction effects of *political saliency* (H1b, H2b, H3b, H4b) will unfortunately not be tested.

An alternative to excluding *political saliency* completely from the analysis would be to construct a scale by using the distinct types of interest as related indicators of the overall construct *political interest*. However, due to timely pressure, this will not be further pursued.
The correlation scores of the remaining variables are found to be suitable in order to proceed with the logistic regression.

In the regression analysis, there are two options regarding the treatment of a variable. Actually, *subjective interest* is an ordinal variable and could be marked as categorical. However, the model would then become quite extensive. Table 2 compares the probabilities of turning out between an ordinal vs. scale level of measurement. It shows that there are small but no major differences. Therefore, treating the variable as a scale constitutes the better and more parsimonious option.

Table 2
Estimated probability of voting in an election by subjective interest – categorical vs. scale

Level of subjective interest	Categorical	Scale	Difference
Not at all	.383	.409	2.6
Not really	.632	.607	2.5
To some extent	.784	.774	1.0
Definitely	.851	.884	3.3
Difference between the most and least interested	.468	.475	0.7

Note. Read below for the calculation of the probabilities

5.3 Control variables

As suggested by Smets and van Ham (2013), several control variables are included in the analysis (see section 3.5). As the Election Study 2014 does not contain an appropriate item, though, *residential mobility* cannot be taken into account.
As an addition to the Smets and van Ham (2013) model, *religion, occupational status* and *gender* are also controlled for. Table 3 gives an overview of these variables and their categories.

Table 3

Overview of control variables

Variable	Question posed	Categories
Age	How old are you?	16/18-24
		25-34
		35-44
		45-54
		55-64
		65+
Education	How old were you when you stopped full-time education?	15-[2]
		16-19
		20+[3]
Region	Would you say you live in a …?	Rural area or village
		Small or middle sized town
		Large town
Media exposure:	How often do you follow the news on	Never
TV	TV/Internet/Newspapers?	Less often
Internet		Once a month
Newspapers		Several times a week
		(Almost) everyday
Political knowledge	You had all the necessary information in order to choose who to vote for in the recent European elections.	No, not at all
		No, not really
		Yes, to some extent
		Yes, definitely
Party mobilization	Did anyone from one of the national political parties contact you regarding your vote in the recent European elections?	No
		Yes
Party identification	Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular party?	No
		Yes
Religion	Do you consider yourself to be…?	Non-Christian
		Christian
Occupational status	What is your current occupation?	Not working
		Working
Gender	-	Male
		Female

Unfortunately, it is not possible to detect whether age has got a curvilinear relationship with *voting* as the variable combines the lifespan from 65 years and on into one category.

[2] Including 'no full-time education'

[3] Including 'still studying'

5.4 Moderating variables

The first moderating variable *importance of elections* belongs to the concept of second-order elections and refers to the degree of how much is at stake. Due to the fact that European elections do not shape the executive, they typically classify as a second-order election with low importance (Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2015, p. 293). Ultimately, it is a dichotomous variable in which the EP elections are coded 0 for importance is low, and national general elections are coded 1 since they determine the shape of their national executive (governments).

The second moderating variable *concurrent elections* also has two values. It equals 1 if the European and national 2014 elections took place at the same time, and 0, if they were held separately. Regarding the former, the following countries are meant: Belgium, Lithuania, Greece, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Malta and the UK. The elections of the remaining MS did not concur (European Commission, 2014).

Thirdly, the dummy variable *Sunday voting* is coded in the same manner. Most of the MS have their elections scheduled during the weekend, only the following few do not: the Czech Republic, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovakia and the UK (European Commission, 2014).

Table 4 summarizes the encoding of the moderating variables.

Table 4

Overview of moderating variables

Variable	Categories	Meaning
Importance of an election	0	Low
	1	High
Concurrent elections	0	No
	1	Yes
Sunday voting	0	No
	1	Yes

6 Empirical analysis

In this section, the analysis of a logistic regression testing the hypotheses is presented. Firstly, the most important assumptions are discussed. Secondly, an overview of descriptive statistics is given. Afterwards, the individual hypotheses are tested and discussed.

6.1 Fulfilling assumptions

There are several assumptions to be fulfilled in order to be able to carry out a logistic regression (Aldrich & Nelson, 1984, p. 48-49). Firstly, the dependent variable has to be dichotomous meaning to have only two values. As *decision to vote* involves only two answer-categories (yes vs. no), this assumption is fulfilled.

Secondly, independence of observations as well as mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories in the response variable are necessary. The latter is true for this data set. However, the fact that the dependent variable has been concatenated poses a threat to the degree of independence. The trade-off between a quality reduction of the statistical model and the ability to include only one and not two dependent variables in the analysis (which would have been the case without stacking it) is problematic and should be kept in mind when interpreting the outcome.

Lastly, it was checked whether the distribution of the variables is approximately normal. This was done by means of histograms which are found to be roughly fine. Due to timely restrictions, no additional tests have been executed. This might further reduce the quality of the analysis to some extent.

6.2 Descriptive statistics

Table 5 shows the most important descriptive facts of the included variables. The column "category coded 0 (median)" is important at a later stage of the regression analysis in order to keep track of what the meaning of the constant is.

Initially, the data set comprised 30,064 responses. Due to the fact that the variable capturing individual-level participation has been concatenated so as to comprise both European and national electoral participation, the entire data set been "doubled." Compared to the total number of cases (N = 60,128) the response rate is for each variable comparatively high. Only the variable *party identification* has got more than 8,000 missing cases, which belong to the categories 'refused', 'don't know' and 'no answer possible.' Hence, there are many persons who are not willing or able to answer this question, maybe because of sensitivity.

Table 5

Descriptives

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category coded 0 (median)
Voting (concatenated)	60,059	0	1	.66	.474	No
Level of subjective interest	59,718	-1	2	.41	.983	Not really interested
Age	60,128	-3	2	.04	1.647	45-54
Education	59,022	-1	3	.31	.848	Age left school: 16-19
Region	60,084	-1	1	-.06	.777	Small/middle sized town
TV exposure	60,004	-5	0	-.81	1.378	Everyday/almost everyday
Internet exposure	59,700	-1	4	1.19	2.158	Less often
Newspaper exposure	59,822	-3	2	-.41	2.015	Once a week
Political knowledge	58,470	-2	1	-.14	.972	To some extent
Party mobilization	59,724	0	1	.14	.345	No
Party identification	52,068	0	1	.6	.49	No
Religion	58,704	0	1	.75	.434	Not Christian
Occupational status	60,128	0	1	.47	.499	Not working
Gender	60,128	0	1	.55	.498	Male
Importance of elections	60,128	0	1	.50	.500	Low
Concurrent elections	60,128	0	1	.30	.459	No
Sunday voting	60,128	0	1	.75	.432	No

Note. The median was calculated only for ordinal variables

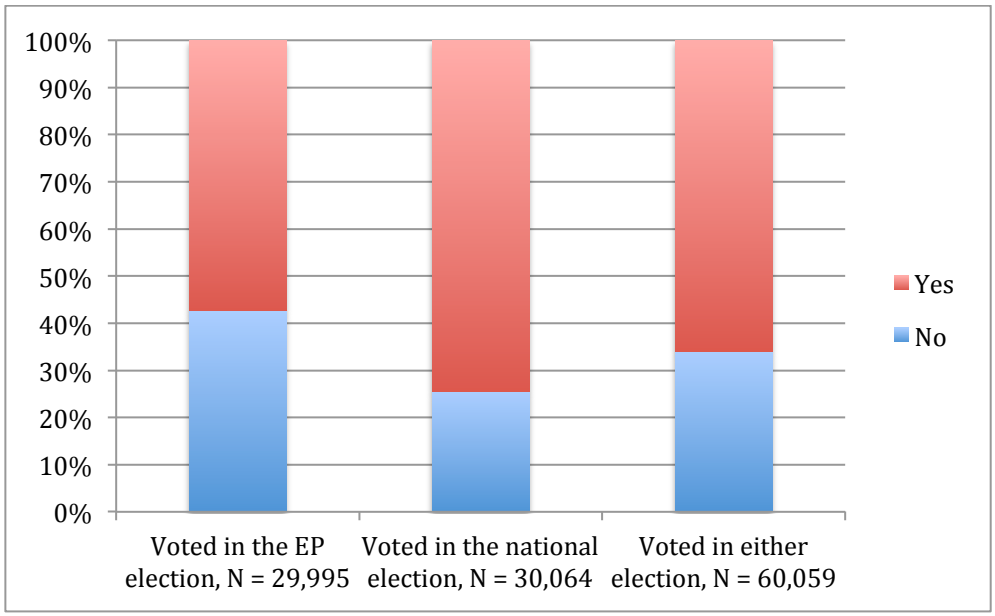

Figure 2. Electoral participation by EP, national and combined elections

In figure 2, the distribution of the electoral participation is shown. For the 2014 European Parliament election, self-reported turnout amounts to 57.4%. This is higher than the official voting record number equalling 42.6% (table 7) (European Commission, 2015).

Regarding national elections, it can be stated that 74.4% of the survey participants indicated that they voted. Of course, this number refers to the different elections of the 28 MS, there is no single national election for all MS which reports 74.4% turnout. Furthermore, it has to be clear that the stacked variable *voting* pertains to the participation in either election – both the respective national and the European one. It amounts to 65.9%.

Tables 6 and 7 give a more detailed overview on the participation rates of each national election and the 2014 EP election. In most cases, there is a discrepancy between the actual and self-reported turnout rate, which is bigger in the case of EP elections. For one thing, it is possible that a memory loss took place, if the most recent elections are a couple of years ago. For another thing, the respondents might feel ashamed if they did not cast a vote, which makes them answer in a socially more desirable way.

Table 6

Overview of turnout rates in recent[4] national elections (%)

Country	Percentage voted	Official turnout rates	Differences
Belgium	85.9	89.4	-3.5
Denmark	93.4	87.7	-5.7
Greece	85.6	62.5	-23.1
Spain	75.9	68.9	-7.0
Finland	82.4	67.4	-15.0
France	70.9	80.4	+9.5
Ireland	74.7	70.0	-4.7
Italy	75.7	75.2	-0.5
Luxembourg	63.6	91.1	+27.5
The Netherlands	89.4	74.6	14.8
Austria	73.8	74.9	+1.1
Portugal	68.4	58.0	-10.4
Sweden	93.6	85.8	-7.8
Germany West; East	82.8; 77.3	71.5	-11.3; -5.8
Great Britain; Northern Ireland	62.0, 59.8	65.8	+3.8; +6.0
Bulgaria	70.5	51.1	-19.4
Cyprus	73.0	81.6	+8.6
Czech Republic	58.7	59.5	+0.8
Estonia	75.0	63.5	-11.5
Hungary	67.1	61.8	-5.3
Latvia	76.5	58.8	-17.7
Lithuania	72.5	52.9	-19.6
Malta	93.8	93.0	-0.8
Poland	54.0	48.9	-5.1
Romania	72.3	64.1	-8.2
Slovakia	64.1	59.1	-5.0
Slovenia	71.0	51.7	-19.3
Croatia	65.5	54.2	-11.3

Note. From Eurostat – IDEA Voter turnout database. (2016). *Voter turnout in national and EU parliamentary elections*. Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tsdgo310&plugin=1

[4] „Recent“ refers to prior to the 2014 European Election Study.

Table 7

Overview of turnout rates in 2014 EP election (%)

Country	Percentage voted	Official turnout rates	Differences
Belgium	88.5	89.64	+1.14
Denmark	76.3	56.32	-19.98
Greece	80.5	59.97	-20.53
Spain	55.8	43.81	-11.99
Finland	57.2	39.10	-18.1
France	48.6	42.43	-6.17
Ireland	65.4	52.44	-12.98
Italy	70.6	57.22	-13.38
Luxembourg	71.1	85.55	+14.45
The Netherlands	66.6	37.32	-29.28
Austria	60.1	45.39	-14.71
Portugal	49.3	33.67	-15.63
Sweden	84.1	51.07	-33.03
Germany West; East	63.5; 63.9	48.10	-15.4; -15.8
Great Britain; Northern Ireland	50.1; 54.1	35.60	-14.5; -18.5
Bulgaria	58.0	35.84	-22.16
Cyprus	54.1	43.97	-10.13
Czech Republic	31.4	18.20	-13.2
Estonia	53.2	36.52	-16.68
Hungary	49.8	28.97	-20.83
Latvia	41.2	30.24	-10.96
Lithuania	67.1	47.35	-19.75
Malta	86.6	74.80	-11.8
Poland	35.7	23.83	-11.87
Romania	53.0	32.44	-20.56
Slovakia	29.4	13.05	-16.35
Slovenia	41.2	24.55	-16.65
Croatia	39.8	25.24	-14.56
Overall turnout	57.4	42.6	-14.8

Note. From European Parliament. (n.d.). *Results of the 2014 European elections*. Retrieved from http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/turnout.html

The tables 9a and 9b summarize the results of the logistic regression with *voting in an election* as dependent variable. Firstly, only the baseline model is assessed. Secondly, the main independent variable *subjective political interest* is included. Thirdly, the control variables are added. Fourthly, the individual effects of the moderating variables *importance of* election, *concurrent elections* and *Sunday voting* are checked. Finally, the interaction terms join the model.

The statistically significant reductions in -2 Log Likelihood (deviances) (69,263.023 in model 1, table 9a, vs. 47,342.159 in model 4, table 11) indicate that the additions of the variables constitute an

improvement of the model in comparison to each previous model. This signifies that the included variables help in disentangling the puzzle of voting determinants.

Moreover, Nagelkerke's pseudo R^2 increases over the models (15.7% in model 1, table 9a, vs. 32.7% in model 4, table 11). This shows that with the addition of the variables, more variation in the dependent variable is explained. Hence, the models get better.

6.3 Is political interest positively related to individual-level turnout?

The baseline model (model 0, table 9a) does not contain any predictors, thus the B-value of the constant (B = .664) reports how many people have decided to cast a vote (irrespective of the election type). Converting it into the probability of voting, this value is very close to the reported turnout number (65.9%).

The following formula enables to calculate the probability of voting. It will be used every time when probabilities are needed.

$$p_{voting} = \frac{e^{(a+B_1X_1+\ldots)}}{e^{(a+B_1X_1+\ldots)}+1}$$

With the constant inserted, the following calculation appears:

$$p_{voting} = \frac{e^{(.664)}}{e^{(.664)}+1} \approx .6602 \approx 66.02\%$$

In model 1 (table 9a), only *subjective political interest* is included. Table 8 reveals that the respondents are almost equally divided into no/less and more/full interest in politics (cumulative per cent for 'no, not really': 51.5%) but the smallest share belongs to the 'definitely interested'-category.

The variable is statistically significant at the .01-level and has got a positive effect on the decision to vote vs. to abstain. This is reported in the B and Exp(B)-values (model 1, table 9a). The effect of a rise in subjective interest on the logit is equal to .798, and the odds to vote vs. not to vote increase by a factor of 2.222.

However, what are the probabilities of voting for the levels of interest? They can be created both manually (see the above-mentioned formula) and through SPSS. The following calculation is an example of how to obtain the probability of voting for someone who is 'not at all interested' in model 1 (table 9a):

$$p_{voting} = \frac{e^{(.434+.798*(-1))}}{e^{(.434+.798*(-1))}+1} \approx .4099 \approx 40.99\%$$

Table 8

Estimated probability of voting in an election by subjective interest

Level of subjective interest	Probability	Distribution within sample (%)
Not at all	.409	22.3%
Not really	.607	28.8%
To some extent	.774	34.9%
Definitely	.884	.14%
Difference between the most and least interested	.475	-

Table 8 summarizes the probabilities of casting a vote by the levels of subjective interest. The right-hand column reports how many persons belong to each level; thus the amount of people that 'have' the indicated probability. For persons who are not at all interest in politics (22.3% of the participants), the probability to vote is 47.5 percentage points lower than the probability of voting for the 'definitely interested'-individuals who have a 88.4% probability of turning out.

These probabilities are also illustrated in figure 3.

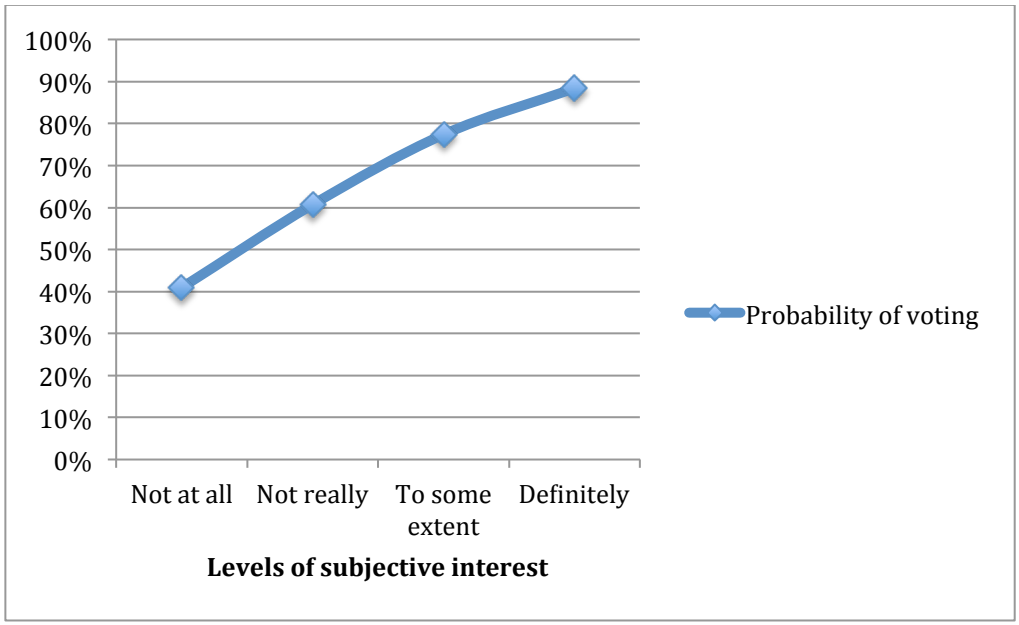

Figure 3. Probability of voting by levels of subjective interest

In H1a it was hypothesized that the level of political interest has got a positive impact on the decision to vote. Due to the fact that scientists commonly refer to the general type of political interest in the form of a subjective and independent perception of interest the variable *subjective interest in politics* is studied for this hypothesis (van Deth, 2000, p. 120).

A positive B-coefficient and an odds ratio bigger than 1 provide evidence for such a positive relationship which can also be seen in figure 3. The conclusion "the higher the level of subjective interest, the greater the probability to turn out" supports H1a.

6.4 Which effects do the control variables have?

Apparently, there is indeed a positive effect of *subjective interest in politics* on the decision to vote in an election. However, it is possible that this correlation may be the reflection of some other variables influencing the observed relationship. Thus, it is crucial to control for confounding factors.

As can be seen in model 2 (table 9a), the introduction of the control variables has reduced the impact of subjective interest on individual-level turnout. The effect of the level of interest on the logit now equals .471, and the odds to vote vs. not to vote only rise by a factor of 1.601. Nevertheless, it is still positive and statistically significant.

The type of region one lives in has got a negative impact on the decision to vote as can be seen in the negative B-coefficient (-.015) and an odds ratio smaller than 1. Connecting this with the meaning of the categories of the variable *region*, this implies that an election taking place in a rural area attracts more people to the voting booths than in a large town. Nevertheless, this is purely theoretic as the variable is not statistically significant.

Age, *political knowledge*, *party mobilization*, *party identification* and *occupational status* are strongly connected to the decision to vote. The odds of voting vs. non-voting are 2.121 times higher for someone who identifies with a party as opposed to someone who does not. Regarding party mobilization, the odds of voting vs. abstaining are 1.669 times higher if someone has been mobilized by a party in contrast to experiencing no mobilization efforts. Besides, having political knowledge vs. no knowledge raises the odds of turning out by a factor of 1.423. Furthermore, the odds of voting are 1.296 times higher if one is working as opposed to not working. Also, with an increase in age, the odds of voting vs. not voting rise by a factor of 1.276 which means that the older a person gets, the higher the odds of casting a vote.

Education, *media exposure* (TV, Internet, Newspapers), *religion* and *gender* are moderately positively related to the decision to vote. For instance, the odds of voting vs. non-voting are 1.138 times higher for women as opposed to men.

In comparison to the effect that subjective interest has, the majority of the variables increases (decreases regarding *region*) the odds of voting vs. abstaining to a lesser extent. *Party mobilization* and *party identification*, however, have a bigger impact on the odds ratios of individual-level turnout.

After controlling for several variables that are potential confounders, *subjective interest in politics* has lost some of its strength, yet it is still positively and significantly correlated to the decision to vote. Therefore, it can be concluded that the observed relationship is indeed a true one.

Table 9a

Logistic regression analyses on voter turnout in elections (B-coefficient (odds ratios)) I

	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2
	B-coefficient (OR)	B-coefficient (OR)	B-coefficient (OR)
Subjective interest	-	.798 (2.222)	.471 (1.601)
Age	-	-	.243 (1.276)
Education	-	-	.067 (1.070)
Region	-	-	-.015 (.985)°°°
TV	-	-	.053 (1.054)
Internet	-	-	.053 (1.054
Newspaper	-	-	.059 (1.061)
Political knowledge			.353 (1.423)
Party mobilization (yes)	-	-	.512 (1.669)
Party identification (yes)	-	-	.752 (2.121)
Religion (Catholic)	-	-	.159 (1.173)
Occupational status (working)	-	-	.259 (1.296)
Gender (female)	-	-	.130 (1.138)
Importance of elections (high)		-	-
Concurrent elections (yes)	-	-	-
Sunday voting (yes)	-	-	-
Importance*Subjective interest	-	-	-
Concurrent*Subjective interest	-	-	-
Sunday voting*Subjective interest	-	-	-
Sunday voting*Religion			
Constant	.664 (1.943)	.434 (1.544)	-.094 (.911)
Deviance (-2 LL)	-	69,263.023	50,131.302
Nagelkerke pseudo R^2 (%)	-	15.7	26.3
N	-	59,652	48,429

Note. All relationships significant at $p < .01$ except for ° ($.01 < p < .05$), °° ($.05 < p < .1$), °°° ($p > .1$)

Table 9b

Logistic regression analyses on voter turnout in elections (B-coefficient (odds ratios) II

	Model 3
	B-coefficient (OR)
Subjective interest	.484 (1.623)
Age	.270 (1.310)
Education	.085 (1.089)
Region	-.039 (.962)
TV	.061 (1.063)
Internet	.064 (1.066)
Newspaper	.062 (1.064)
Political knowledge	.370 (1.448)
Party mobilization (yes)	.488 (1.629)
Party identification (yes)	.791 (2.206)
Religion (Christian)	.074 (1.077)
Occupational status (working)	.306 (1.358)
Gender (female)	.148 (1.160)
Importance of elections (high)	1.064 (2.899)
Concurrent elections (yes)	.532 (1.702)
Sunday voting (yes)	.409 (1.506)
Importance*Subjective interest	-
Concurrent*Subjective interest	-
Sunday voting*Subjective interest	-
Sunday voting*Religion	-
Constant	-1.034 (.356)
Deviance (-2 LL)	47,380.695
Nagelkerke pseudo R^2 (%)	32.6
N	48,429

Note. All relationships significant at $p < .01$ except for ° ($.01 < p < .05$), °° ($.05 < p < .1$), °°° ($p > .1$)

6.5 Which direct effects do the contextual factors have?

In model 3 (table 9b), the contextual factors *importance of election*, *concurrent elections* and *Sunday voting* are added to the model. As a result of the addition, most of the variables report an increase in their impact on individual-level turnout, except for the B-values of *party mobilization* – it loses some of its effect which becomes evident in a drop from .512 to .488 – and *religion*, which drops from .159 to .074. The other B-coefficients rise if they are positive, and fall if negative. Notably, *region* becomes statistically significant.

Each contextual factor has a positive and statistically significant effect on the decision to vote. Interestingly, the variable *importance of election* has the strongest impact. Its effect on the logit equals 1.064, and concerning the odds ratios, the odds to vote vs. not to vote increase by a factor of 2.899 if an election is important.

The conversion of the B-values into probabilities for the moderating variables is shown in table 10.

Table 10

Estimated probability of voting in an election by moderating variables

	Model 3	Model 4
	P	P
Importance of election	.507	.492
Concurrent elections	.377	.362
Sunday voting	.349	.334
No variable present[5]	.262	.250

Note. The remaining variables of the models are held at their median, or for dummy variables at the category coded 0, respectively.

For each of the contextual variables it holds true that if they are present (individually) and all other variables are held constantly at their median, the probability to vote is bigger as opposed to when they are not present. This is made clear when comparing the probabilities of the respective contextual variable being present (fixed at value 1) to the probability of the entire model set at its 0-value, or the median, respectively. This is shown in the last row of table 10 in which no variable is present.

For instance, if an election is important, the probability of casting a vote (P = .507 in model 3, table 10) is almost twice as high as for elections of minor importance (p = .262 in model 3, table 10).

Subsequently, the interaction effects of the contextual variables will be analysed and discussed.

[5] Probability calculated of the constant, which is the entire model held at their median, respectively value 0.

Table 11

Logistic regression analyses on voter turnout in elections (B-coefficient (odds ratios) III

	Model 4
	B-coefficient (OR)
Subjective interest	.570 (1.768)
Age	.270 (1.310)
Education	.085 (1.088)
Region	-.038 (.963)°
TV	.062 (1.064)
Internet	.064 (1.066)
Newspaper	.062 (1.064)
Political knowledge	.369 (1.447)
Party mobilization (yes)	.485 (1.625)
Party identification (yes)	.793 (2.210)
Religion (Christian)	.130 (1.139)
Occupational status (working)	.308 (1.361)
Gender (female)	.148 (1.160)
Importance of elections (high)	1.065 (2.901)
Concurrent elections (yes)	.573 (1.774)
Sunday voting (yes)	.486 (1.626)
Importance*Subjective interest	.006 (1.006)°°°
Concurrent*Subjective interest	-.164 (.849)
Sunday voting*Subjective interest	-.060 (.942)°
Sunday voting*Religion	-.082 (.921)°°°
Constant	-1.097 (.334)
Deviance (-2 LL)	47,342.159
Nagelkerke pseudo R^2 (%)	32.7
N	48,429

Note. All relationships significant at $p < .01$ except for ° ($.01 < p < .05$), °° ($.05 < p < .1$), °°° ($p > .1$)

6.6 Is the effect of subjective interest on individual-level turnout greater in less important elections?

In model 4 (table 11) in which the interaction terms are included, the previously added variables remain largely stable regarding their effects on the decision to vote. Interestingly, *subjective interest* reports a statistically significant increase in the B and Exp(B)-coefficients (B .484 vs. .570, Exp(B) 1.623 vs. 1.768).

Table 12 shows the calculated effects of the interaction terms with the remaining variables held at their median, or 0-category, respectively.

Table 12

Effects of interaction terms on the decision to vote (B-coefficients (OR))

	B-coefficient (OR)
Subjective interest if importance = 0	.570 (1.768)
Subjective interest if importance = 1	.576[6] (1.779)[7]°°°
Subjective interest if concurrent elections = 0	.570 (1.768)
Subjective interest if concurrent elections = 1	.406[8] (1.501)[9]
Subjective interest if Sunday voting = 0	.570 (1.768)
Subjective interest if Sunday voting = 1	.510[10] (1.665)[11]°
Sunday voting if religious background = 0	.486 (1.626)
Sunday voting if religious background = 1	.404[12] (1.498)[13]°°°

Note. All relationships significant at p < .01 except for ° (.01 < p < .05), °° (.05 < p < .1), °°° (p > .1)

It was hypothesized that the effect of subjective interest on individual-level turnout is greater in EP elections (importance low) as compared to national elections (importance high).

The B-coefficient of *subjective interest* in model 4 amounts to .570 (table 11). This shows that if the variable *importance of election* equals 0, which means no important election, the effect of interest on the logit is positive and statistically significant. Consequently, the effect on the odds of voting vs. not voting is also positive and significant.

If an election is important, meaning that the variable has got a value of 1, there is a very small increase in the effect of subjective interest on both the logit (B .576) and the odds ratio (OR 1.779). Yet, it is highly insignificant (p = .814).

---

[6] $B = .570 + .006 = .576$

[7] $Exp(B) = e^{.576} \approx 1.779$

[8] $B = .570 + (-.164) = .406$

[9] $Exp(B) = e^{.406} \approx 1.501$

[10] $B = .570 + (-.060) = .510$

[11] $Exp(B) = e^{.510} \approx 1.665$

[12] $B = .486 + (-.082) = .404$

[13] $Exp(B) = e^{.404} \approx 1.498$

Table 13 (column: importance) and figure 4 show the calculated probability of voting for each level of subjective interest as moderated by the importance of an election. The graphic illustration shows quite easily that the probability to vote – independent of the level of interest – is much higher in an important election. In both contexts, the relationship between subjective interest and probability of voting is quite linear.

The difference in probability to vote between the highest and lowest level of interest is greater for important elections (.3981 vs. .3519). As this indicates a steeper relationship between the variables, this would hint at a stronger connection to important elections as opposed to less important ones. This implies a rejection of H2a as well as the theoretical justification, and leads to the conclusion that the effect of subjective interest on the decision to vote is more visible if an election is important. However, the odds ratio of subjective interest on individual-level turnout is only marginally bigger if the election is important (OR = 1.768 vs. OR = 1.779). Most importantly, though, the interaction term proved to be highly insignificant. Therefore, H2a has to be rejected. The effect of subjective interest on the decision to vote is not bigger for less important elections.

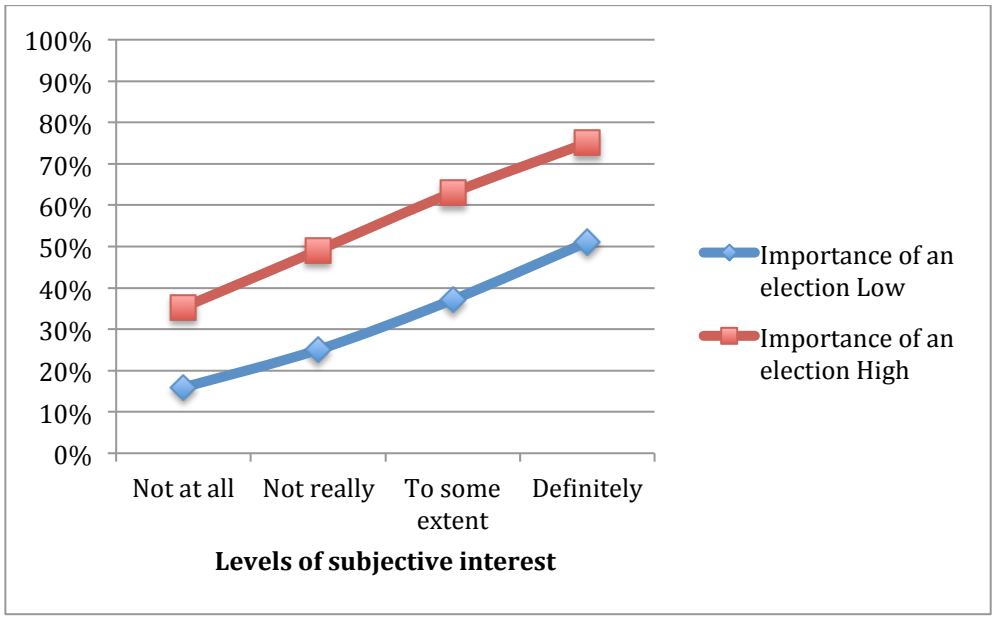

Figure 4. Probability to vote by interaction between subjective interest and importance

Table 13

Estimated probability of voting by levels of subjective interest, moderated by importance of election, concurrent elections, Sunday voting

Levels of subjective interest	Importance		Concurrent elections		Sunday voting	
	Low	High	No	Yes	No	Yes
Not at all interested	.1588[14]	.3527[15]	.1588	.2213	.1588	.2243
Not really interested	.2503	.4908	.2503	.3345	.2503	.3383
To some extent interested	.3712	.6302	.3712	.4705	.3712	.4748
Definitely interested	.5107	.7508	.5107	.6111	.5107	.6151
Difference between the most and least interested	.3519	.3981	.3519	.3898	.3519	.3908

Note. The footnotes show an example of the underlying calculation

6.7 Is the effect of subjective interest on individual-level turnout smaller when two elections concur?

Hypothesis H3a expects that if two elections are held concurrently, the effect of subjective interest on individual-level turnout is smaller as opposed to when they do not concur.

Interestingly, this interaction term is the only one that is significant at a .01-level. The coefficients are smaller for concurrent elections *yes* as compared to *no* (table 12). Concerning the logit, the effect of subjective interest on the decision to vote vs. not to vote in a context of concurrent elections equals .406. This is lower than .570 which is the effect on the logit if elections do not concur. With regards to the odds ratio, the effect of subjective interest on individual-level turnout if elections are taking place at the same time is equal to 1.501. This is again smaller than 1.768, which are the odds of voting vs. abstaining if elections are kept separately.

Figure 5 illustrates the probability of voting as summarized in table 13 (column: concurrent elections). Independent of the level of interest, the probability to vote vs. abstain is higher if two elections take place at the same time. If someone is not interested at all but there are concurrent elections, the probability that he/she decides to cast a vote equals 22%. This is a higher percentage as opposed to the same level of interest in the case in which there are separate elections (P = 16%).

Moreover, the difference between the most and least interested is greater for *no concurrent elections* (.3898 vs. 3519, table 13) which hints at a slightly steeper relationship that can also be traced in figure 5.

Ultimately, H3a can be accepted. The effect of subjective interest on the odds ratio is bigger if elections do not concur – smaller if they do concur – and the difference between the highest and

[14] $P = \frac{e^{-1.097+0.57*(-1)+.006*0+1.054*0}}{(e^{-1.097+0.57*(-1)+.006*0+1.054*0)}+1} \approx .1588$

[15] $P = \frac{e^{-1.097+0.57*(-1)+.006*1+1.054*1}}{(e^{-1.097+0.57*(-1)+.006*1+1.054*1)}+1} \approx .3527$

lowest level of subjective interest becomes reduced if elections are scheduled on the same day. Nevertheless, the size of the effect is very small, which can be seen in figure 5 – the two graphs look quite similar. It becomes visible, however, due to the big sample size.

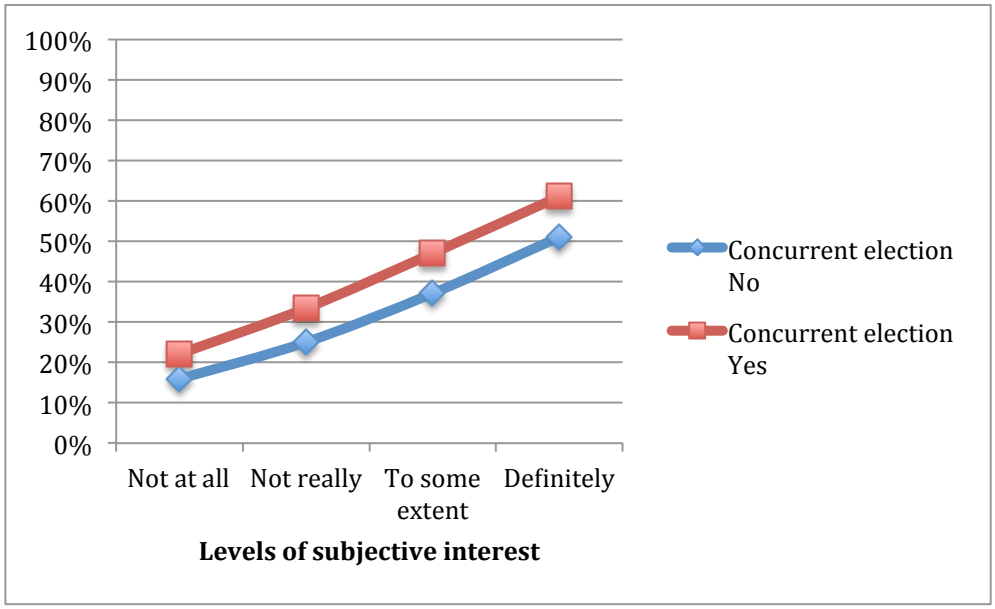

Figure 5. Probability to vote by interaction between subjective interest and concurrent elections

6.8 Is the effect of subjective interest on individual-level turnout smaller if elections are scheduled on a Sunday?

The expectation is that if elections are held on a Sunday, the effect of subjective interest on the decision to vote is smaller as for weekday voting. Moreover, it is expected that there is some interaction between Sunday voting and one's religious background. Regarding the latter, the interaction appears to be positive (OR = 1.498, table 12) yet it is not statistically significant (p = .145). Thus, being Christian or non-Christian should not make a difference in the relationship between *Sunday voting* and *individual-level turnout*.

The p-value of the Sunday voting-interest interaction equals .034, thus the interaction is not significant at the .01 level. However, it is significant at an α of .05. According to the coefficients (table 12), the effect of *subjective interest* on the odds ratio is slightly smaller if elections are held on a Sunday (OR 1.665) in comparison to the event of voting during the week (OR 1.768). This would mean that the level of subjective interest is a bit more important if elections are not held on a Sunday but at a working day.

The probability of voting summarized in table 13 (column: Sunday voting) and graphically illustrated in figure 6 show that for both contexts, the relationships are positive. For Sunday voting *yes* it appears to be slightly more linear and a bit steeper than for Sunday voting *no*. This is indicated by the fact that

the difference between the least and most interested categories is bigger (.3908 vs. .3519). However, this difference is negligibly small.

Therefore, as the odds ratios imply a statistically significant (at a .05 level) bigger effect of subjective interest on the decision to vote if elections are scheduled during the week, H4a can be accepted. However, the effect is only marginal and probably hardly visible in real-life voting.

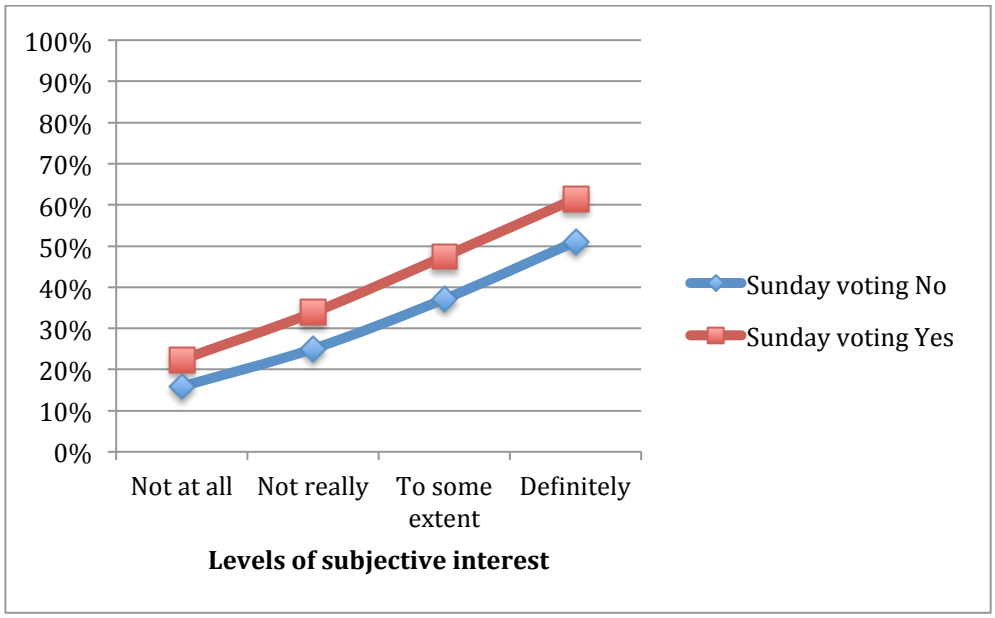

Figure 6. Probability to vote by interaction between subjective interest and Sunday voting

7 Estimating probabilities for individuals

Concerning the individuals' probability to vote, there are very many combinations possible. The probabilities depend on the indicated categories, for instance scoring a 1 in region (if someone lives in a large town), a 2 in age (because he/she is 65 or older) and so on. They can be calculated by means of the above introduced probability formula. For example, this is how to obtain the probability of voting for a woman, with the rest of the model held at value 0:

$$P_{voting} = \frac{e^{((-1.097)+.148*1+.570*0+.270*0+\ldots)}}{e^{((-1.097)+.148*1+.570*0.270*0+\ldots.)} + 1} \approx .2791 \approx 27.9\ \%$$

Table 14 presents the probability of voting for each of the variables based on model 4 (table 11) if the remaining factors are held constant. In case of ordinal variables, only the probabilities of the highest and lowest categories are included.

For someone who is definitely interested in politics and

- Is 45-54 years old
- Was 16-19 years when leaving education
- Lives in a small/middle sized town
- Follows the news
    - On TV everyday
    - On the internet less often
    - In the newspapers once a week
- Has to some extent political knowledge
- Has not been mobilized by a party
- Does not identify with a party
- Is not Christian
- Is not working
- Is male

the probability of casting a vote in an election equals 51.1%. This person is quite likely to cast a vote.

Table 14

Probabilities of voting by each variable (%), based on model 4 (table 11)

Variable	Probability (%)
Subjective interest (not at all interested)	.1588 (15.9%)
Subjective interest (definitely interested)	.5107 (51.1%)
Age (16/18-24)	.1293 (12.9%)
Age (65+)	.3642 (36.4%)
Education (15-)	.2347 (23.5%)
Education (20+)	.2666 (26.7%)
Region (Rural area or village)	.2575 (25.8%)
Region (Large town)	.2432 (24.3%)
TV exposure (never)	.1967 (19.7%)
TV exposure ((almost) everyday)	.2503 (25.0%)
Internet exposure (never)	.2385 (23.9%)
Internet exposure ((almost) everyday)	.3013 (30.1%)
Newspaper exposure (never)	.2170 (21.7%)
Newspaper exposure ((almost) everyday)	.2743 (27.4%)
Political knowledge (not at all)	.1376 (13.8%)
Political knowledge (definitely)	.3256 (32.6%)
Party mobilization (yes)	.3516 (35.2%)
Party identification (yes)	.4246 (42.5%)
Religion (Catholic)	.2755 (27.6%)
Occupational status (working)	.3124 (31.2%)
Gender (female)	.2791 (27.9%)
Importance of elections	.4920 (49.2%)
Concurrent elections	.3719 (37.2%)
Sunday voting	.3518 (35.2%)

Note. The other variables are held at their median, or at the category coded 0, respectively

The probability to vote if all variables are held at their median, or category coded 0, respectively, is captured in the constant of the regression models. Surprisingly, they vary to a great extent (B = .664 model 0 without any predictors, table 9a, vs. B = -1.097 model 4, table 11). Possibly, this reflects the strong impact of the dummy variables which are not median-centred but 'randomly' no-centred. As in model 2 (table 9a) it became apparent that *party mobilization* and *party identification* – two of the dummy variables – have the biggest effect on the response variable, they could be the reason why the probability to vote is being downgraded over the course of the models.

8 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which the relationship between two types of interest in politics and the decision to go to the polls changes under contextual differences. Thereby, the goal was to generate new information on electoral participation so as to point out possible ways of reacting to declining turnout rates. Moreover, the mechanisms underlying the relationships were more clearly spelt out than in previous research. This closes a big gap in political science literature. On top of that, a thorough set of control variables has been included which increases the meaningfulness of the found relationships.

Unfortunately, distinguishing between political interest as *subjective interest* (the degree of arousing curiosity) and *political saliency* (the relative importance assigned to politics) was not possible with the underlying dataset. Hence, the overall question cannot be answered in its entirety. The extent to which the respondents consider politics as relatively important, which type of interest influences individual-level turnout more strongly as well as the hypotheses pertaining to the saliency-aspect remain unstudied and left for further research.

Moreover, there are several other limitations of this study to be mentioned. The Election Study 2014 did not cover all of the suggested control variables, thus there is the possibility of omitted variables. Besides, as Denny and Doyle (2008) suggested, it would have been interesting to add psychological factors to the analysis. For the future it could be valuable to detect in how far the relationship between political interest and the decision to vote changes or even will be rendered void due to spuriousness if these factors are included.

On top of that, the short amount of time available was not sufficient to extensively test the assumptions of the logistic regression model. Due to the fact that the dependent variable has been concatenated, the observations are not independent of each other anymore. Therefore, it is quite likely that the quality of the analysis has been overestimated. As a suggestion for further research, the assumptions thus should be taken care of more elaborately, and a statistical analysis model other than logistic regression could be considered.

Likewise, future research might think about weighing turnout. As mentioned in section 6.2, there is a discrepancy between the official voting records and this data. This should not have problematic implications for the outcome of this analysis, yet it would be more representative to have an individual-level turnout figure that matches the real-life situation.

Of course, other contextual factors should also be researched towards their capability of increasing or decreasing the impact of *subjective interest* on the decision to vote in an election so as to discover other possible ways to raise the electoral participation rates.

Nevertheless, there are still some important findings of the analysis that are worth mentioning. The reported level of turnout in the 2014 EP and recent national elections is oftentimes higher than the

official voting records state, yet this does not affect the overall interpretation of the relationships. The participants are almost equally divided into no/less and more/full interest in politics, with the modal category being 'to some extent interested'. The smallest share of persons is definitely interested.

It was found that *subjective interest in politics* indeed has a strong and positive impact on the decision to vote. The underlying mechanisms of greater information procurement by means of media exposure, increased trust as well as political efficacy and higher confidence in one's competence lead to the fact that the more interested individuals show also higher probabilities of turning out.

After controlling for potential confounders, the relationship between *subjective interest* and *individual-level turnout* remains largely unchanged. With the exception of *region*, the control variables themselves have statistically significant impacts on the response variable, yet the main relationship is not being annulled which hints at a 'true' effect of *interest* on *decision to vote*.

The contextual variables also have a direct and positive effect on the decision to vote, notably the importance of elections. This means that working on the importance of the EP elections, holding them together with a national contest, and choosing Sunday as Election Day will benefit the turnout rates.

Concerning the interactions, *concurrent elections* and *Sunday voting* are found to moderate the impact of *subjective interest*. If two elections are scheduled on the same day, the effect of *subjective interest* is smaller than if they are held separately. The same holds true for the day of election: In the case of Sunday voting, the impact of *subjective interest* on the decision to vote is smaller as compared to weekday voting. Theoretically, it would be therefore wise to use the mobilising effect of a national election to spill over to the European contest in order to converge the participation rate of the least/less interested to the voting propensity of the more/most interested persons, and to use the advantage of Sunday voting. However, the effect sizes are fairly small – it is not very likely to notice these impacts in real-life situations.

Furthermore, manipulating the context is not possible each and every time as national elections might be due at an earlier or later stage of the year; or even in a different year, for example. Thus, holding two elections at the same time can become complicated.

It was not possible to find evidence that the effect of *interest* on the dependent variable is greater in less important contests. The interaction term is statistically not significant at conventional levels and shows hardly any difference between the odds ratios. This implies that while this contextual factor has a strongly positive, direct impact on individual-level turnout, it does not mobilize more or less interested persons to the voting booths.

Conclusively, contextual factors are indeed found to have a powerful impact on individual-level turnout, especially individually and to a small extent in interaction. Therefore, it is advised to take them into account for future elections in order to be able to positively influence the individual propensity to cast a vote. However, further research is needed to the end of detecting contextual

variables that moderate the impact of subjective interest on individual-level turnout more substantially than concurrent elections and Sunday voting do.

References

Aldrich, J. H. (1993). Rational Choice and Turnout. *American Journal of Political Science, 37*(1), 246-278. doi:10.2307/2111531

Aldrich, J. H., & Nelson, F. D. (1984). *Linear probability, logit, and probit models*. California: Sage Publications, Inc.

Bakker, T. P., & de Vreese, C. H. (2011). Good News for the Future? Young People, Internet Use, and Political Participation. *Communication Research*. doi:10.1177/0093650210381738

Buhlmann, M., & Freitag, M. (2006). Individual and contextual determinants of electoral participation. *Swiss Political Science Review, 12*(4), 13-47. doi:10.1002/j.1662-6370.2006.tb00059.x

Coffe, H. (2013). Women Stay Local, Men Go National and Global? Gender Differences in Political Interest. *Sex Roles, 69*(5-6), 323-338. doi:10.1007/s11199-013-0308-x

Corrigall-Brown, C., & Wilkes, R. (2014). Media exposure and the engaged citizen: How the media shape political participation. *Social Science Journal, 51*(3), 408-421. doi:10.1016/j.soscij.2014.03.009

Cutler, F. (2008). One voter, two first-order elections? *Electoral Studies, 27*(3), 492-504. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2008.01.002

Denny, K., & Doyle, O. (2008). Political interest, cognitive ability and personality: Determinants of voter turnout in Britain. *British Journal of Political Science, 38*, 291-310. doi:10.1017/s000712340800015x

European Commission. (2014). *Report on the 2014 European Parliament elections*. Retrieved May 2, 2016, from http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/files/report_european_parliament_elections_2014_en.pdf

European Commission. (2015). *Looking back on the 2014 European Elections*. Retrieved June 20, 2016 from http://ec.europa.eu/justice/citizen/files/factsheet_2015_european_elections_en.pdf

European Election Studies. *Voter Study 2014*. (n.d.). Retrieved June 20, 2016, from http://eeshomepage.net/voter-study-2014/

European Parliament. (n.d.) *Results of the 2014 European Elections*. Retrieved June 20, 2016, from http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/turnout.html

Eurostat - IDEA Voter Turnout Database. (2016). *Voter Turnout in National and EU Parliamentary Elections*. Retrieved June 20, 2016, from http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tsdgo310&plugin=1

Fieldhouse, E., Tranmer, M., & Russell, A. (2007). Something about young people or something about elections? Electoral participation of young people in Europe: Evidence from a multilevel analysis of the European Social Survey. *European Journal of Political Research, 46*(6), 797-822. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6765.2007.00713.x

Finkel, S. E., & Opp, K. D. (1991). Party identification and participation in collective political action. *Journal of Politics, 53*(2), 339-371. doi:10.2307/2131763

Franklin, M. N., & Hobolt, S. B. (2011). The legacy of lethargy: How elections to the European Parliament depress turnout. *Electoral Studies, 30*(1), 67-76. doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2010.09.019

Geys, B. (2006). Explaining voter turnout: A review of aggregate-level research. *Electoral Studies, 25*(4), 637-663. doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2005.09.002

Highton, B. (2000). Residential mobility, community mobility, and electoral participation. *Political Behavior, 22*(2), 109-120. doi:10.1023/a:1006651130422

Hill, L. (2006). Low voter turnout in the United States - Is compulsory voting a viable solution? *Journal of Theoretical Politics, 18*(2), 207-232. doi:10.1177/0951629806061868

Hooghe, M., & Marien, S. (2013). A comparative analysis of the relation between political trust and forms of political participation in Europe *European Societies, 15*(1), 131-152. doi:10.1080/14616696.2012.692807

Huckfeldt, R. R. (1979). Political Participation and the Neighborhood Social Context. *American Journal of Political Science, 23*(3), 579-592. doi:10.2307/2111030

Jankowski, T. B., & Strate, J. M. (1995). Modes of participation over the adult life span. *Political Behavior, 17*(1), 89-106. doi:10.1007/bf01498785

Monroe, A. D. (1977). Urbanism and Voter Turnout: A Note on Some Unexpected Findings. *American Journal of Political Science, 21*(1), 71-78. doi:10.2307/2110448

Niemi, R. G., & Weisberg, H. F. (1993). *Classics in voting behaviour*. Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc.

Schmitt, H., & Teperoglou, E. (2015). The 2014 European Parliament Elections in Southern Europe: Second-Order or Critical Elections? *South European Society and Politics, 20*(3), 287-309. doi:10.1080/13608746.2015.1078271

Schmitt, Hermann; Hobolt, Sara B.; Popa, Sebastian A.; Teperoglou, Eftichia; European Parliament, Directorate-General for Communication, Public Monitoring Unit (2015): *European Parliament Election Study 2014, Voter Study, First Post-Election Survey*. GESIS Data Archive, Cologne. ZA5160 Data file Version 3.0.0, doi:10.4232/1.12384

Smets, K., & van Ham, C. (2013). The embarrassment of riches? A meta-analysis of individual-level research on voter turnout. *Electoral Studies, 32*(2), 344-359. doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2012.12.006

Soderlund, P., Wass, H., & Blais, A. (2011). The impact of motivational and contextual factors on turnout in first- and second-order elections. *Electoral Studies, 30*(4), 689-699. doi:10.1016/j.electstud.2011.06.013

Sunshine Hillygus, D. (2005). The Missing Link: Exploring the Relationship Between Higher Education and Political Engagement. *Political Behavior, 27*(1), 25-47. doi:10.1007/s11109-005-3075-8

TNS Opinion. (n.d.) *European Parliament Election Study 2014 - Voter Study - First Post-Election Survey - Methods/Technical Report.* Retrieved June 20, 2016, from https://dbk.gesis.org/dbksearch/sdesc2.asp?no=5160&db=e&doi=10.4232/1.5160

Valentino, N. A., Gregorowicz, K., & Groenendyk, E. W. (2009). Efficacy, Emotions and the Habit of Participation. *Political Behavior, 31*(3), 307-330. doi:10.1007/s11109-008-9076-7

Van Deth, J. W. (2000). Interesting but irrelevant: Social capital and the saliency of politics in Western Europe. *European Journal of Political Research, 37*(2), 115-147. doi:10.1023/a:1007088702196

Van Egmond, M. (2003). *Rain falls on all of us (but some manage to get more wet than others)*. Academisch Proefschrift.

Verba, S., Burns, N., & Schlozman, K. L. (1997). Knowing and caring about politics: Gender and political engagement. *Journal of Politics, 59*(4), 1051-1072. doi:10.2307/2998592

Appendix

Type	Variable	Operationalization	Which countries?	Coding
Dependent	Individual-level turnout	The European Parliament elections were held on the 22nd May 2014. For one reason or another, some people in the UK did not vote in these elections. Did you vote in the recent European Parliament elections? The General Elections were held on the 6th May 2010 here in the UK. For one reason or another, some people in the UK did not vote in that election. Did you yourself vote in the Local Election?	-	No, I did not vote: **0** Yes, I voted: **1**
Independent	Level of political interest: subjective interest	You are very interested in politics	-	No, not at all: **-1** No, not really: **0** Yes, to some extent: **1** Yes, definitely: **2**
	Level of political interest: political saliency	How often would you say you discuss national political matters?	-	Never: **-1** Occasionally: **0** Frequently: **1**
	Level of political interest: political saliency	How often would you say you discuss European political matters?	-	Never: **-1** Occasionally: **0** Frequently: **1**
	Level of	How often would you say you	-	Never: **-1**

	political interest: political saliency	discuss local political matters?		Occasionally: **0** Frequently: **1**
Moderating	Importance of elections	EP vs. national elections	1: national elections 0: EP elections	Importance low: **0** Importance high: **1**
	Concurrent elections	Countries with concurrent elections vs. countries without concurrent elections	1: Belgium, Lithuania, Greece, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Malta, UK 0: remaining countries	No concurrent elections: **0** Concurrent elections: **1**
	Sunday voting	Countries having Sunday voting vs. countries not having Sunday voting	1: remaining countries 0: Czech Republic, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovakia, UK	No Sunday voting: **0** Sunday voting: **1**
Controls	Age	How old are you?	-	16/18-24: **-3** 25-34: **-2** 35-44: **-1** 45-54: **0** 55-64: **1** 65+: **2**
	Education	How old were you when you stopped full-time education?	-	15-; no full-time education: **-1** 16-19: **0** 20+; still

				studying: **1**
	Region	Would you say you live in a …	-	Rural area or village: **-1** Small or middle sized town: **0** Large town: **1**
	Media exposure TV	How often do you follow the news on TV	-	Never: **-5** Less often: **-4** Once a month: **-3** Once a week: **-2** Several times a week: **-1** Everyday/almost everyday: **0**
	Media exposure internet	How often do you follow the news on the internet	-	Never: **-1** Less often: **0** Once a month: **1** Once a week: **2** Several times a week: **3** Everyday/almost everyday: **4**
	Media exposure newspapers	How often do you follow the news in the newspapers	-	Never: **-3** Less often: **-2** Once a month: **-1** Once a week: **0** Several times a week: **1** Everyday/almost everyday: **2**
	Partisan mobilization	Did anyone from one of the national political parties contact you regarding your vote in the recent European elections?	-	No: **0** Yes: **1**

	Party identification	Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular party?	-	No, you do not feel close: **0** Yes: **1**
	Political knowledge	You had all the necessary information in order to choose who to vote for in the recent European elections	-	No, not at all: **-2** No, not really: **-1** Yes, to some extent: **0** Yes, definitely: **1**
	Religion	Do you consider yourself to be	-	Not Catholic: **0** Catholic: **1**
	Occupational status	What is your current occupation?	-	Not working: **0** Working: **1**
	Gender	-	-	Male: **0** Female: **1**