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Mobilization and Attitudes Equals Turnout - A Simple Equation?

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1. Introduction

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

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

However, with the 2004 European Elections there seemed to come up an event of historical relevance, which can be barely overestimated. The last enlargement of the European Union had moved the borders of the community far beyond the former iron curtain to the East. The 2004 EP Elections can be called the founding elections of the new Europe overcoming the obsolete East-West divide. It was for the first time that the sovereigns, the people, in the East could express their belonging and indicate their preference for the political course of the Union. And, it was the chance for the people in the old member states to demonstrate the historical significance of the event by participating in it. Nothing of this happened. Turnout was on average extremely low in the new member states, and even in the old member states it was a little lower than 1999.

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

1. Mobilization deficit hypothesis

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

2. Political community deficit hypothesis

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

3. Political System deficit hypothesis

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

All three hypotheses aim at explaining individual turnout in a first step, and differences in turnout between countries in a second step. The paper is organized in four sections: 2. a brief review of turnout in EP elections; 3. a theoretical exploration of the relationship between political community, evaluation, mobilization, and turnout; 4. the generation and presentation of the independent variables; 5. the analysis of the relationship between attitudes, mobilization, and turnout at the individual and cross-country level; and finally some conclusions.

2. Turnout at the European Parliament Elections 2005 compared

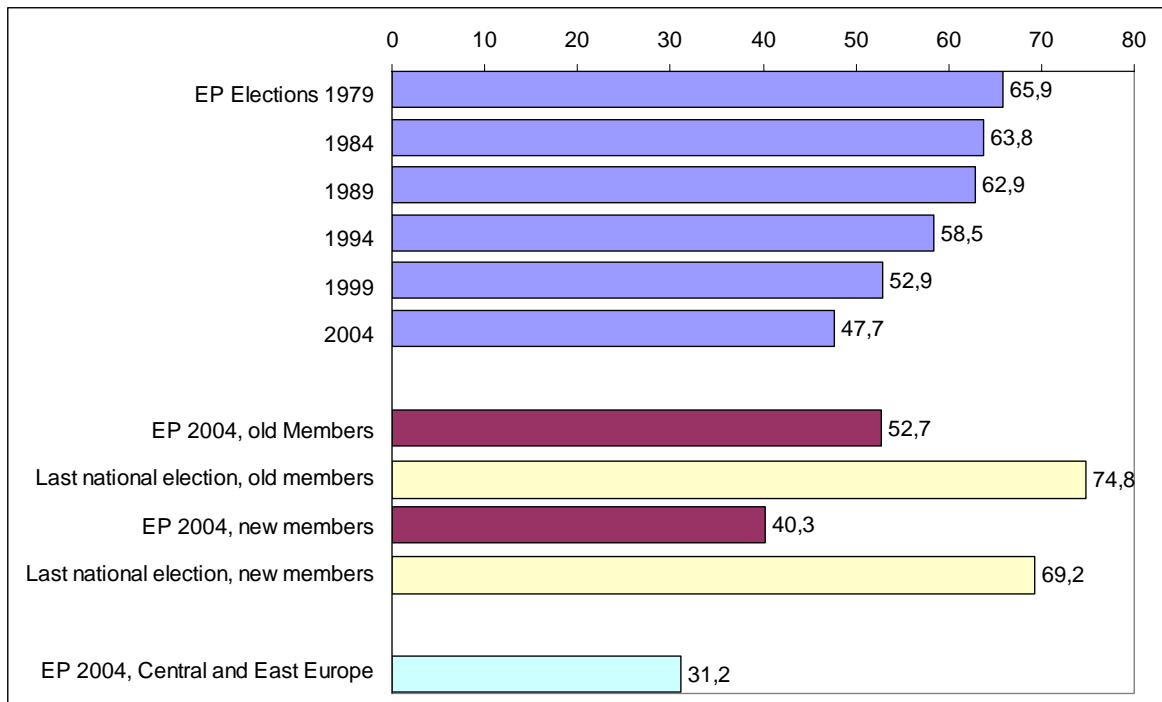
The EP elections of 2004 mark a second historical juncture after system transformations in Central and East Europe 1989/1990. Beside the fact, that prior to these elections the EU experienced the biggest enlargement since its existence it was the first joint opportunity for the citizens to articulate their will and to determine who should become the representatives at the European level. In this sense, the 2004 elections were the “Founding Elections” of a common Europe.

However, the election outcome itself does not very much reflect this historical significance. The elections mobilized a smaller proportion of voters than in all other European elections before. This continues a trend, which already started with the second EP elections of 1984 and was never broken. Electoral participation as an indicator of symbolic self-assignment to a political system took not place on a level expected from the historical significance of the event. Thus, measured in terms of turnout, the EP elections of 2004 were nothing special, old experiences continued. On average, turnout has dropped about 3,8 percentage points in the old member states

from one election to the other. Not all countries experienced the same: Austria a decline of -12,6 since its first participation in 1996, Finland the largest single decline of -28,9 percentage points between 1996 and 1999, in Great Britain turnout increased by 1,3 percentage points on average, and in Ireland the highest single increase of 20,7 percentage points could be observed between 1984 and 1989. Variation is large, but on average, there is decline.

From 1999 to 2004, it is not dramatic with respect to the old member states (-0,2 percentage points). However, this is a continuation of the trend. More significant is the turnout in the new member states. Here, where it could have been a signal of self-assignment, much less voters felt attracted that in the old member states. Whereas in the old member states on average a little more than half of the electorate (52,7) went to the voting booth, it where only 40,3 on average in the new member countries. And this figure is so high, because turnout in Malta and Cyprus was extraordinary high (71,2, and 82,4 respectively). The electorates of the new member states in Central and East Europe where abstinent by more than a two third majority. Turnout was as low as 31,2 percent (figure 1).

Figure x: Turnout at European Parliament Elections 2004 compared



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

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

3. Turnout, Mobilization, and Political Community

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

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

However, there is more to elections than the output-side of the system. The other side of the coin is the participation of citizens in elections. Democracy is more than or needs more to be than an instrumental mechanism between rulers and ruled. The acceptance of the rules of the game, procedures as well as decisions, demand for a support by affective generalization, which is self-assignment and identification with the political order (Fuchs 1999; Fuchs/Klingemann 2002). If this is true, identification with the political community should matter for turnout. The relationship of elections to political community can be demonstrated by looking to the functions of elections. Rose and Mossawir define the function of elections as follows: elections allow citizens 1) to select the representatives, 2) to exchange influence, 3) to develop an identification with the system, 4) the satisfaction of expressive needs, 5) the expression of distance from the system. Or elections can be meaningless, because they do not allow 6) choices, or do not generate affiliation and identification with the system. Part of these functions relate to the instrumental, part to the affective aspects

of democracy and democratic elections. Instrumental or output-related are in particular points 1 and 2. “The emphasis here is upon the extent to which the need for election or re-election will lead incumbents and candidates to alter their policies in order to retain or gain office“ (Rose/Mossawir 1969: 170). Elections should, however, not only be effective, but should also produce an affection of citizens to the norms and symbols of the system (points 2 and 3). They should “contribute to the development or maintenance of an individual’s *allegiance* to the existing constitutional regime“ (Rose/Mossawir 1969: 171). These functions lead in a general sense to a commitment and identification with the political community. Mackenzie has described the route to identification in the following way: „It may be said that electoral procedure is functionally analogous to procedure in a marriage ceremony: ‚Do you take this man (or woman) to be your lawfully wedded husband (or wife)?‘ ‘I do’. The point in time at which ‘I do’ is said is not psychologically a moment of choice or decision – that came earlier; it is the point at which an individual preference becomes a social commitment” (W. J. M. Mackenzie/S. Rokkan 1968: 5).

This argument relates directly to turnout and its relationship to political community and thus to the *political community deficit hypothesis*. If it is true that the decision for electoral participation is prior to the decision on choice, and the reason for this is the social commitment to the political order, European identity should matter for turnout.

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

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

4. Political Community, Political Evaluations, and Mobilization

If the claim of the three hypotheses is correct, turnout should be influenced 1) by the instrumental aspect as to which degree elections are effective and the system is responsive, 2) by the degree of identification with the political community, and 3) by information and mobilization efforts of political actors.

4.1 Evaluation of Electoral Effectiveness, Responsiveness, and Political Identity

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

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

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

Possible answers: “Yes, rather”; “No, rather not”; [DK/NA].

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

Responsiveness characterizes the ability of political actors, political institutions, and the system as a whole to react to needs and demands of the citizens. Item c) is an evaluation of the European Parliament in this regard. An indirect indicator of the perception of responsiveness might be the trust in the EU (item d). Trust is an advancement on the future based on the assumption that the one who be trusted will behave according to ones own expectation. Trust will be provided if the experience is

that actors behaved according to expectations and will do so in the future. Thus, trust can be read as an indicator of responsiveness.

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

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

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

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

Pooled data, 25 countries; 24063 respondents; samples of almost equal size.

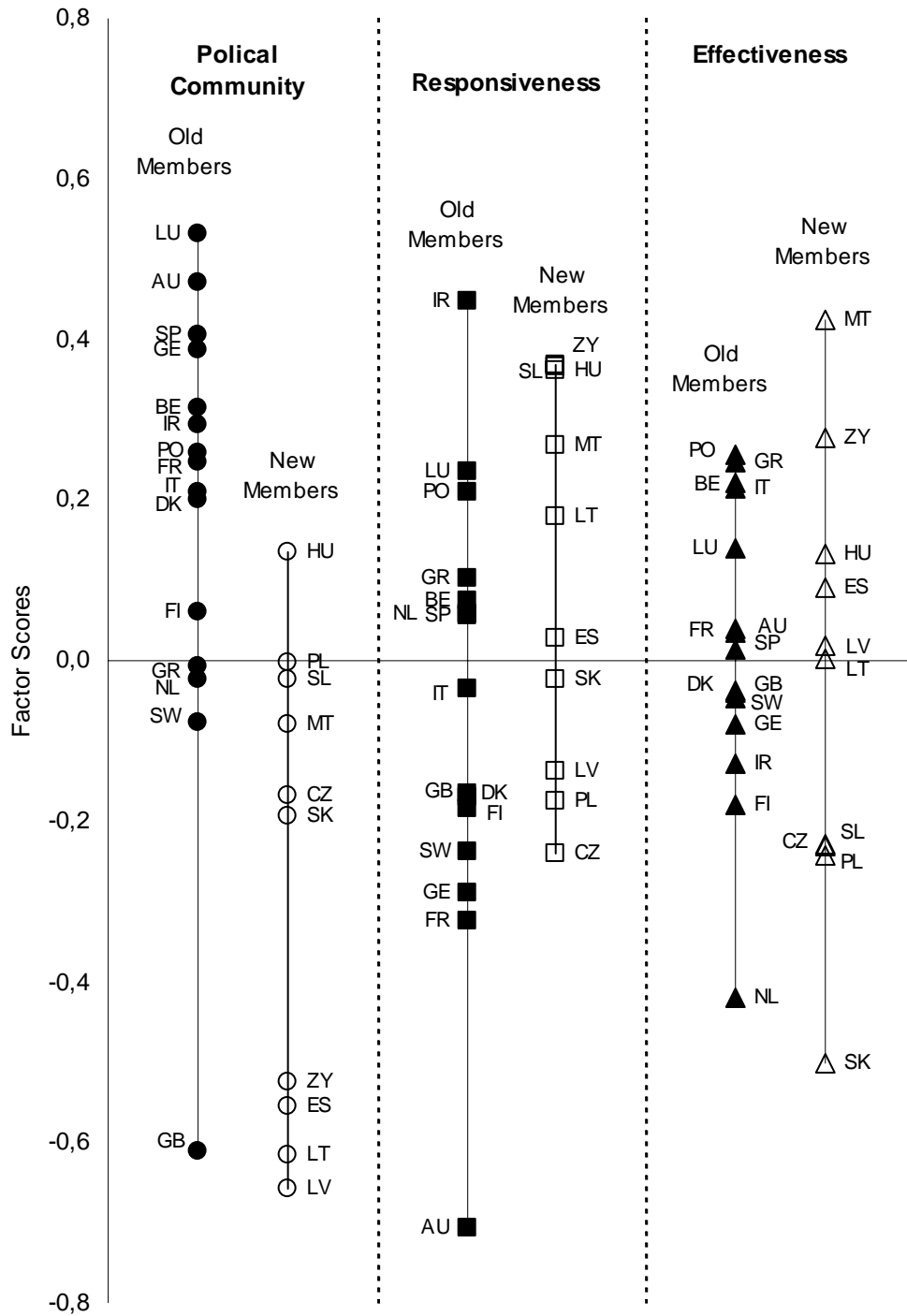
Source: Eurobarometer Flash 162, EOS Gallup, Post European Election Survey 2004.

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

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

With regard to the evaluation of electoral effectiveness, country averages show a greater range in the new member states than in the old. This is, however, a result of the very positive evaluations of the Maltese and Cyprian populations. Otherwise, the range is smaller and the mean evaluation less positive than in the old member states. In both group of countries, the range is from rather positive to rather negative evaluations of electoral effectiveness (figure 2).

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



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

Lastly, with regard to political community or European identity a clear and sharp difference can be observed between new and old members. There is only one new member country, which, on average, shows a weak positive identification: Hungary. All other countries are at the midpoint or the negative side of the scale. Interestingly enough, Malta and Cyprus, ranging rather positive with regard to effectiveness and responsiveness, show little identification with Europe. In contrast to this, most of the old member states are in the positive range of the scale, the exceptions being Greece, the Netherlands, and, lowest of all, Great Britain. The clear difference in overall level of political community feeling between the new and the old member states seems to reflect what has been argued above: identity needs time, which the new members do not have had yet.

4.2 Political Information and Political Mobilization

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

The expectation from this is very clear: election campaigns should also gear electoral participation. What are traditionally the channels of information and mobilization, which can be assumed? The most central role in political communication can be found with the mass media. Secondly, information seeking also plays an important role. Thirdly, in election campaigns, the more or less direct communication between voters and candidates or parties reaches normally its heights. It is likely that these three means of political information serve different purposes: the media producing the agenda, information seeking producing choices, and direct contacts producing mobilization. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this. Rather, the information and mobilization environment of electorates will be explored, and related to turnout.

The “EOS Gallup Post European Elections 2004 Survey” provides a number of questions on these matters. The respective question battery reads as follows:

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

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

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

The items cover the three relevant aspects of information and mobilization. Items a, b, c, and d deal with mediated information, information seeking is covered by items h to k. Items e, f, and g refer to direct contacts of candidates and parties with voters.

Again, a factor analysis has been performed to check for dimensionality and to reduce data complexity. The result very nicely fits the distinction between mediated information, information seeking, and direct contacting. Media or mediated information items bind most of the variance, followed by direct contacts. Information seeking is the “weakest” factor (table 2).

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

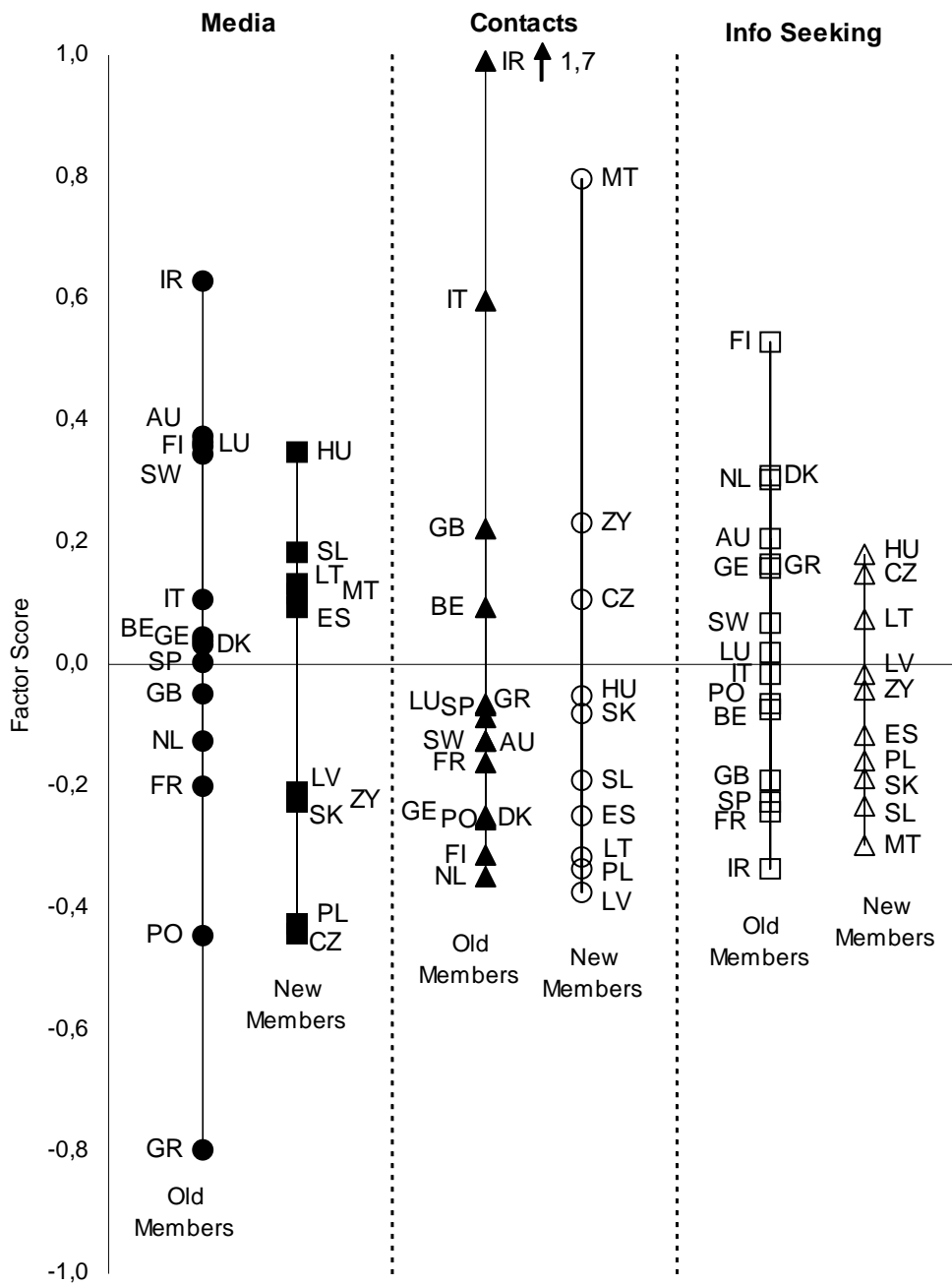
The question is, whether these differences also translate in differences in turnout as the *mobilization deficit hypothesis* assumes.

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

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

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

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



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

5.1 Individual Levels of Turnout

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

Results can be reported straight-lined. According to the *system deficit hypothesis*, turnout should be the lower, the less effective the elections and the less responsive the system. As can be seen in table 3, this is indeed the case. Individuals, who show a factor score value smaller than half a standard deviation below the mean, report on average a turnout of 39,5 and 50,0 percent respectively. For those, showing scale values higher than a half standard deviation above the mean, turnout is 77,3 and 69,2 respectively. In terms of Eta, effectiveness has the more clear impact than responsiveness. The *political community deficit hypothesis* claims that low identity goes with low turnout, strong identity with high turnout. Again, this pattern can be observed across all individuals in the analysis. The pooled analysis shows that these differences are even true despite country level differences.

Table 3: Turnout in %, Depending on Attitudinal Evaluations

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

Low: Factor scale value < -0.5 StdDev.

Medium: -0.5 to +0.5 StdDev.

High: >+0.5 StdDev.

N. of Cases: 24063.

Table 4 reports results in a similar fashion for the three factors of information and mobilization. The *mobilization deficit hypothesis* claims that the lower the information/mobilization level, the lower the turnout. This is indeed the case. The difference in turnout between the lowest and the highest levels of mediated information, information seeking, and direct contacts is roughly around twenty percentage points. Eta's of all three factors are rather similar.

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

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

Low: Factor scale value < -0.5 StdDev.

Medium: -0.5 to +0.5 StdDev.

High: >+0.5 StdDev.

N. of Cases: 24063.

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.2 Estimating Country-Differences in Turnout

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

The first route, estimating individual probabilities to vote and compare country means to official turnout figures shows that the model very much captures country differences. The (aggregate) R-square between the means of probabilities and the countries’ turnout figures is 0,75. However, the estimates for probabilities are clearly too high. The regression coefficient indicates that at the lower end, probabilities overestimate turnout by a ratio of 2:1. At the higher end, there is no overestimation (figure 4).

Comparing different models, i.e. one including only the attitudinal variables, one only the information/mobilization factors, and the one including all of them, reveals, that attitudes alone estimate probabilities almost as good as the full model, and information/mobilization factors alone do rather poorly (table 6).

Furthermore, the comparison shows that the full model without compulsory voting is almost as good as the one including compulsory voting.

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

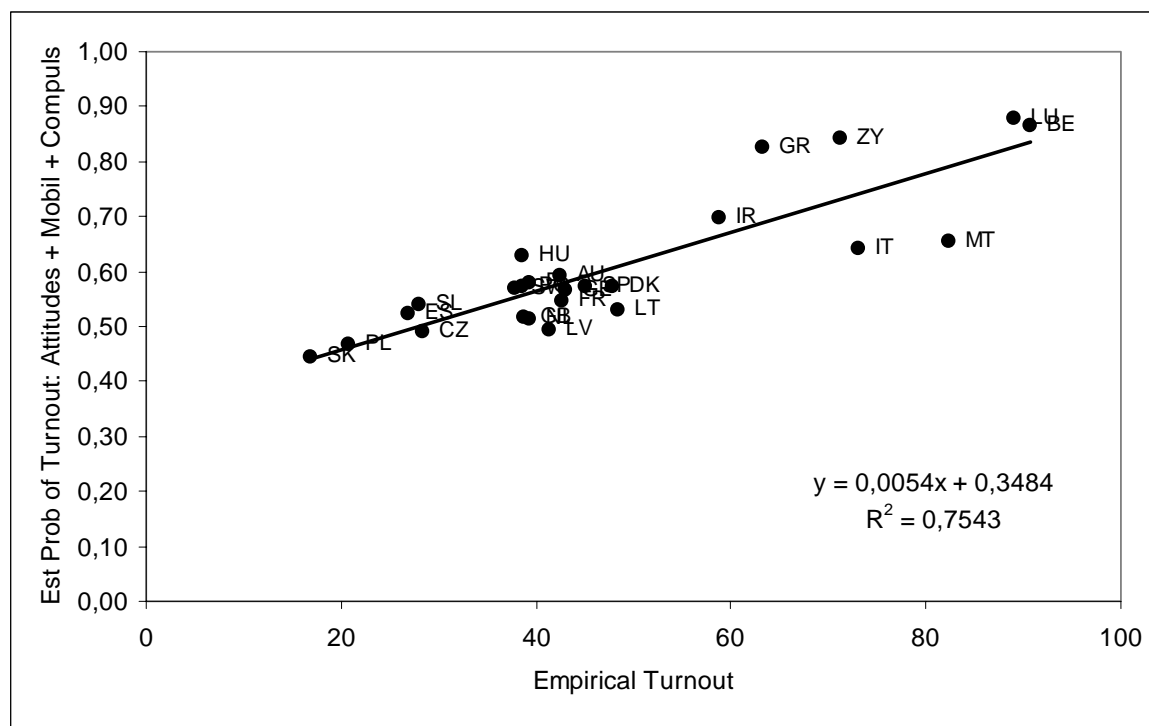


Table 6: Models Compared: Turnout and Probability of Individual Turnout

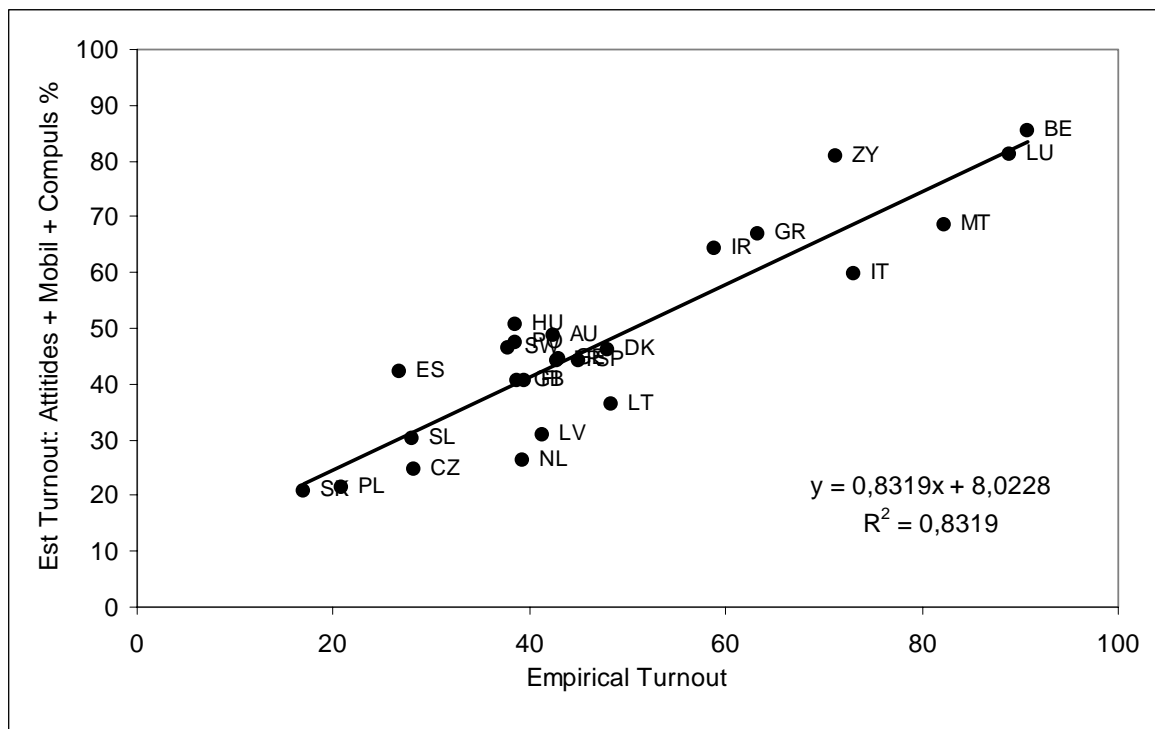
Models	Without Compulsory Voting Corr coeff.	With Compulsory Voting Corr coeff.	Without Compulsory Voting B	With Compulsory Voting b
Mobilization factors only	0,49	0,85	0,24	0,72
Attitudes only	0,77	0,85	0,59	0,71
Mobilization and Attitudes	0,81	0,91	0,65	0,83

Turning to the second route, turnout is estimated by country-level aggregate information about the means of the respective variables. The result is even more convincing: the (aggregate) R-square is even higher, and the slope is close to 1 which indicates that not much over- or underestimation is going on (figure 5).

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

quite good (adj. R-square 0,66), and information seeking proofs to be insignificant. Taking the attitudinal variables alone, the model prediction is as good, and responsiveness shows to be insignificant.

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



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

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

Thus, the basic assumption must have been that there are deficits – deficits in the strength of the political community, deficits in the institutional system of the EU, and deficits in mobilization. These factors are related to each other, some stronger, some weaker. Prior analysis has shown that the institutional factors, namely electoral effectiveness and institutional responsiveness, determine the strength of political

community. Also do media information and information seeking, and – to a lesser extent – direct contacts of candidates and parties with voters, influence the feeling about effectiveness, responsiveness, and political community. One may assume, that all three general factors, the evaluation of the institutional system, information and mobilization, and attachment to the political EU community form a syndrome of deficits which prevent voters to feel attracted to an extent that they think its worthwhile to engage.

Empirically, the analyses show that all three general factors contribute to turnout – or better, prevent from turnout. At the individual level, except for electoral effectiveness, there is not much difference in the impact of the remaining variables, namely the evaluation of responsiveness and political identity with regard to the attitudinal variables, and media information, direct contacts with political actors, and information seeking with regard to the information/mobilization variables.

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

It is certainly not a wrong conclusion from these results to say that political actors, namely candidates, parties, and EU officials have to put more effort in making clear to the voter that voting makes a difference, and to inform and mobilize them. Although the traditional model of democracy is very much a bottom-up model, this is not true in reality. As much as citizens should feel the commitment to the political order and the duty to engage, political actors should feel the duty to attract and to attach citizens to that order. Obviously, there is a way – otherwise there would not be such a clear result with regard to country differences.

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Appendix

Table A1: Regressing Individual Turnout on European Attitudes, Mobilization Factors, – *Compulsory Voting Excluded* (Logistic Regression)

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