EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE
Department of Political and Social Sciences

Individual and Systemic Determinants of Electoral Abstention in Western Europe

by

Eva Anduiza-Perea

Thesis submitted for assessment with
a view to obtaining the Degree of Doctor of the
European University Institute

Florence, November 1997

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis analyses the determinants of electoral abstention in national parliamentary elections of sixteen Western European democracies. The aim is to disentangle which individual and systemic characteristics make people less likely to abstain.

In representative democracies voting is the most important form of political participation. Its relevance comes from two sources. Firstly, no other form of political participation involves a greater number of citizens. Secondly, a key part of the political game is still played in the electoral arena. It is therefore important to look at those citizens (one out of four on average) who choose not to participate in elections.

Are most of those who abstain at the periphery of politics, lacking socio-economic resources, socially isolated and politically apathetic, far from the mobilising effects of political parties and institutions? Or are these individual characteristics irrelevant in explaining the difference between voters and non-voters? The implications of the political exclusion of disadvantaged electors have been studied,[1] but what are the consequences of resourceful, integrated, politically involved non-voters? To what extent can abstention be reduced through direct incentives for voting, stronger links between parties and social groups and more decisive elections? Which electors are more likely to be affected by these systemic incentives to participation? These are all questions to which this research tries to give tentative answers. They are all related to the problem of the interaction between individual and systemic determinants of non-voting.

Most studies of electoral participation have focused either on individual characteristics (such as age, education, or political interest) *or* on systemic incentives to participation (such as compulsory voting or the degree of competitiveness of the elections, for instance). An analysis considering only the individual determinants of voting implies either a limitation in the capacity of generalising conclusions, or the

[1] See for instance Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995.

assumption that the individual-level relationships found in a particular place or election are the same in all contexts. Conversely, an aggregate analysis considering only systemic explanations for turnout variation is somehow forced to assume that the impact of the systemic features included as predictors of abstention is the same for all individuals.

Only a handful[2] of studies have considered simultaneously individual and systemic determinants of electoral abstention, and among those, even less have actually looked for the presence of interaction effects between these two sets of factors.[3] The fact that the effect of individual characteristics is conditioned by the presence of systemic incentives such as compulsory voting is relatively well established. However, the other side of the interaction — the fact that the effect of systemic incentives can be conditional upon the presence of certain individual characteristics — has hitherto been neglected.[4]

A fundamental aim of the research presented is to see whether the effect of systemic participation incentives is in fact the same for all people. The two key questions are, first, which electors are most sensitive to the political context where they live, and second, to what extent can systemic incentives to participation reduce the abstention rates of those least likely to vote?

The thesis is structured into five main parts. Chapter I places the theoretical basis of the thesis within the framework of previous research on electoral abstention. It deals, in the first place, with the ambiguous position that electoral participation has had within both the elitist and the participatory theories of democracy. The next two sections present the main empirical approaches to the study of electoral participation, as well as the main conclusions reached by previous work in the field. Finally the last section of chapter I outlines the explanatory model of abstention that will be tested throughout the thesis. This model is based on the idea that the processes that motivate non-voting are complex, and require the specification of interaction effects between individual and systemic incentives.

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[2] See for instance Powell 1986, Franklin 1996a, Pattie and Johnston forthcoming.

[3] See for instance Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis 1996, Leighley and Nagler 1992, Oppenhuis 1995.

[4] Only in the American context some attention has been given to the effect of registration requirements over the turnout of electors with different socio-economic status (see for instance Highton 1997).

Chapter II deals with the methodological questions of the thesis. It reviews the assets and liabilities of the two main methodological approaches to the quantitative analysis of electoral abstention, the aggregate and the individual analysis, and exposes the need for a strategy that combines both levels. A second section presents the details of the cross-level research design of the thesis, the techniques of analysis (essential for the understanding of the results) and the data to be exploited. Finally the last section of this chapter deals with the operationalisation of the explanatory variables included in the model, both individual and systemic, and with the measurement problems related to the analysis of abstention.

Chapter III starts the analysis by exploring the relationship between individual characteristics and the likelihood of abstaining in parliamentary elections, using survey data from fifteen Western European surveys. A first section analyses the relationship between the level of socio-economic resources and the likelihood of abstaining; a second section relates levels of social integration with non-voting, and finally a third section explores the relationship between political involvement and electoral participation. The analysis of these individual determinants of abstention is performed in each of the fifteen countries as well as for the whole Western European electorate.

Chapter IV moves up to the systemic level, and exposes the conclusions drawn from an aggregate analysis of abstention rates in elections held in the same group of countries between 1945 and 1994. After a brief exploratory analysis of the evolution of abstention rates across elections to the lower house elections, this variation is explained in terms of political factors: the amount of institutional incentives to participation, the strength of the links between parties and society, and the degree of election decisiveness.

After having performed these two traditional analyses of electoral abstention (one only at the individual level, the second only at the election level), chapter V will challenge the assumptions that lay behind them, and will focus particularly on cross-level interaction effects. This chapter distinguishes between two different analytical questions. The first one regards the *magnitude of the effects* of individual and systemic variables over the likelihood of abstaining: Which electors are most sensitive to their environments? Which institutional and political contexts allow individual features to play a major role in determining the likelihood of abstaining? The second question is related to the *consequences of such effects* in terms of changes in abstention rates. To

what extent can systemic incentives decrease the probability of abstaining? This is particularly relevant for electors that, according to their individual characteristics, are less likely to vote.

The analysis includes all Western European democracies with the exception of two small countries, Iceland and Luxembourg.[5] The analysis of chapter IV thus regards elections held between 1945 and 1994 in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, West Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Great Britain. Chapter III and V, however, analyse only one election per country — the most recent for which survey data were available — and Austria had to be dropped because of lack of appropriate survey data.

A number of reasons might have led me to analyse abstention in the frame of European Parliament elections. Abstention rates are higher, which maximises the variance to explain, and there are homogenous cross-country survey data ready to be analysed (the Eurobarometers). However, this thesis is concerned about non-voting in lower-house national elections. Firstly, because national parliamentary elections are still given more importance by electors; they are truly "first order elections".[6] Secondly, because the interaction between individual and systemic determinants of electoral abstention has already been studied in the context of European elections,[7] but to my knowledge not for national parliamentary ones. A final reason is that precisely their relatively low level of abstention may be hiding interesting things.

[5] No survey data were found for Iceland, and the Luxembougeois sample in the Eurobarometers did not include enough non-voters. Northern Ireland is also excluded.
[6] See Reif and Schmitt 1980.
[7] See Oppenhuis 1995, Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis 1996.

CHAPTER I

THE ANALYSIS OF ELECTORAL ABSTENTION
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to place the theoretical basis of the thesis within the framework of previous research on electoral abstention.

The first section deals with the ambiguous position that electoral participation has had within both the elitist and the participatory theories of democracy. Voting is disregarded by participativists because they consider it as a minor form of political participation, far too limited to be considered as relevant for individual self development or an expression of the democratic essence. On the other extreme, elitists consider electoral participation as the only form of political participation required in a democratic system, but only in so far as it guarantees competition among political leaders. The fact that an important percentage of the citizenry stays out of the electoral process is not considered as a problem. Section 2 revises these two positions and presents the arguments in favour of minimising non-voting.

Section 3 and 4 present the main empirical approaches to the study of electoral participation. Explanations of abstentionism have been given within two different frameworks. The first one looks at differences between voters and non-voters, as well as at differences between systems with high and low abstention rates. This inductive perspective has produced a substantive amount of empirical research, but since the 1950s the theoretical basis of individual determinants of abstention have remained untouched, while some questions regarding systemic variables are still unclear. Section

3 briefly presents the main theories within the inductive approach to the study of electoral turnout.

The second approach to the study of electoral abstention is based on rational choice theories. In this case the situation is reversed, for while these works are based on solid and highly formalised theoretical models, confrontation with reality has produced very puzzling results. It is as if reality was contradicting what the models were predicting. Section 4 presents the characteristics of this deductive approach to the study of electoral participation.

Finally, the last section of the chapter outlines the explanatory model of abstention that will be tested throughout the thesis. This model is based on the idea that the processes that motivate non-voting are complex, and require the specification of interaction effects between individual and systemic incentives.

2 Participation and democratic theory

The multitudinous attempts to give a precise and satisfactory definition of the term 'democracy' have taken two general forms. On the one hand, a prescriptive approach seeks to develop an ideal conception of what the perfect society, political system, or form of government should be like, and then calls this ideal type 'democracy'. The descriptive approach, on the other hand, consists in looking at reality and disentangling the main characteristics of the societies, political systems or forms of government that are commonly considered democracies (Dahl 1956, Kirkpatrick 1980, Sartori 1987:7).

The former approach is commonly identified with a normative theory of democracy, while the latter is usually defined as the empirical theory of democracy. The qualification *empirical* should not be interpreted narrowly for "what democracy *is* cannot be separated from what democracy *should be*" (Sartori 1987:7). Thus, both approaches to the theory of democracy are concerned with what a democracy ought to be, and thus both have a prescriptive, normative side.

A main implication of this normative concern shared by both approaches is that, either from a descriptive or from a prescriptive perspective, any theory of democracy must address at least three fundamental questions: what kinds of political action are

acceptable and should be performed, how intensely, and by whom (Verba and Nie 1972:7). Citizens' participation in the government of the polity is thus a major concern of democratic theory. If political participation is defined as "those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or to support government and politics" (Milbrath and Goel 1977:2, Nie and Verba 1975:1) then every definition of the term democracy includes among its components, more or less explicitly, some degree of citizen participation in politics, either as a means to select officials among competing political leaders and assure government responsiveness, to allow for direct citizen decision making, or as a necessary condition for individual self-fulfilment.

The manner in which these questions concerning political participation have been addressed differs largely between different theories of democracy. Section 1.1. presents the main features, assumptions and implications regarding political participation of two theories of democracy, the elitist and the participativist. Their relationship to the specific case of electoral participation and its empirical study are discussed in section 2.2.

2.1 Two theories of democracy

The descriptive perspective has produced the so-called elitist[8] theory of democracy, also called revisionist or competitive, whose main representative is Joseph Schumpeter. The term *revisionist* indicates that the definition of democracy advocated by this theory was born mainly as a critique of the traditional eighteenth-century theory of democracy. According to the classical doctrine as presented by Schumpeter, democracy was considered "the institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realises the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will." (Schumpeter 1979:250).

In Schumpeter's opinion, there is no such thing as a unique determined common good that everyone could agree on, and which would give definitive answers to individual problems. The idea of the common will is pleasant but non-existent. Schumpeter criticised this traditional theory because of its lack of realism, heuristic and

[8] The term elitist was introduced to indicate the links of this theory with the Mosca-Pareto tradition of thought (see Sartori 1987:157).

explanatory power when applied to contemporary representative democracies. Instead, he proposed a revised definition of the *democratic method*, understood as, "that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote" (Schumpeter 1979:269).

This new definition of democracy is based on the idea of keeping politics for the politician and the private sphere to the citizen, whose only public role is to select, by casting his or her vote, the government authority among competing leaders. This argument is based on the assumption that individuals are if anything, only marginally interested in politics, and that this is fair enough. Legitimate participation in politics is reduced to voting.

> "The typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyses in a way which he would readily recognise as infantile within the sphere of his *real* interests. He becomes a primitive again. His thinking becomes associative and affective (...) the typical citizen would in political matters tend to yield to extra-rational or irrational prejudice and impulse (...)." (Schumpeter 1979:262, my emphasis) "The voters outside of parliament must respect the division of labour between themselves and the politicians they elect. They must not withdraw confidence to easily between elections and they must understand that once they have elected an individual, *political action is his business and not theirs*."(295, my emphasis)

The heirs of this line of thought have justified apathy and low levels political participation — including electoral participation — as beneficial for the polity and indicative of overall satisfaction with the political system, stressing the importance of passive citizens in the democratic system (Almond and Verba 1963, Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954, Dahl 1956, Eckstein 1966, Lipset 1969, Ranney 1983, Sartori 1962). According to this view, the fundamental defining characteristic of democracy is not participation but competition among elites. So electoral participation is the only form of political participation that is really needed, for it guarantees competition among elites, but it does not even need to be very high.

The Schumpeterian conception of democracy contrasts with and has been severely criticised by the so-called participatory theory of democracy (also referred to as anti-elitist or anti-revisionist). The latter considers *generalised participation* as the essential element of democracy (Bachrach 1967, Barber 1984, Pateman 1970). High levels of participation are thus not only good in themselves, but also necessary to make

a system truly democratic. The first argument is that participation brings about individual improvement and self realisation:

> "To be a citizen, to be a man acting upon a public stage is to be a better man, to extend capacities and achievements by moving in a public dimension inaccessible to the purely private person (...) Both the right and the obligation [to participate] rest on the supposition that citizenship enlarges and improves the lives of individuals, not by enabling them to shackle collective power to their individual ends but by engaging them as communal persons in the life of the community." Lively (1975:134)

If democratic control, that is the control of the ruling elite by the citizenry, implies the "subjection of the expert to the ignorant" (Lively 1975:5), this view argues that participation turns ignorants into experts, by making people feel more efficient, more interested, by raising the level of political education and by reducing feelings of alienation or apathy towards the political system.

What constitutes something positive for the individual implies as well a fundamental benefit for the political system. Citizen involvement in politics is the only means by which government responsiveness can be guaranteed, for it is highly unlikely that governments will respond to the needs of those who remain inactive. Only through extensive and intensive citizen involvement in politics can democracy and democratic values be truly achieved. Participation is therefore precious in itself, and it is considered the defining characteristic of democracy.

This theory, however, has two important drawbacks. Firstly, although the term participation is repeatedly used, it is not clearly defined. Participativists emphasise, in clear opposition with the elitists, that electoral participation is not enough,[9] but they do not always clarify what type of generalised, extensive and intensive political participation would be enough, and especially, how this prescription should be implemented in large and complex societies.[10] As Bachrach says,

> "On its face it would appear that the democrat is left with a Hobson's choice: a theory which is normatively sound but unrealistic, or a theory which is realistic but heavily skewed toward elitism." (1967:99)

[9] "If public seeing requires public willing, and if public willing cannot be reduced to mere choosing, then it seems evident that voting is the weakest rather than the strongest expression of the spirit of democracy and that the majority principle corrupts rather than nourishes political judgement." (Barber 1984:202)

[10] But see Barber 1984.

Secondly, the participatory theory of democracy it is too strongly associated with ideals of classical direct democracy and self-government, and thus the relationship between representative democracy and participation is not well worked out.[11] Participativists care more about direct involvement in politics than about representation, and therefore pay limited attention to the form of participation that is basically addressed to produce representation, electoral participation in parliamentary elections. Other forms of participation are considered more important.

The following section expands on why electoral abstention is wrongly underevaluated by both perspectives.

2.2 Democratic theory and electoral participation

As has been argued, the elitist and the participatory theories of democracy hold fundamentally opposite views as far as political participation is concerned. While for the former participation is just a means to obtain competing and accountable elites, for the later it is a fundamental element of democracy itself. This section deals with the relationship between these two theories and the specific type of political participation that is the object of this thesis.

Let us first analyse voting as a specific type of political participation. Verba and Nie (1972) distinguish four main dimensions which they use to classify different types of political participation: the type of influence exerted, the scope of the outcome, the conflict involved and the degree of initiative required.[12]

Firstly, voting tends to exert a relatively high degree of pressure on political elites, as compared to other forms of conventional participation, given that it determines whether they stay in power or not. On the other hand it communicates little information about the elector's preferences, since the choice is between broad, predetermined options.

Secondly, voting has a very broad scope, since the result of the election will affect the whole citizenry. The broader the scope, however, the more other citizens will

[11] Schattschneider (1975:126ff) offers a very harsh critique on this point, related to the idea of placing public opinion in the centre of the notion of democracy. See also Sartori (1987) on referendum democracy.

[12] The types of political participation initially included in their analysis are voting, campaign activity, co-operative activity and citizen-initiated contacts. The last two are redefined as communal activity and particularised contacts after some empirical analysis (Nie and Verba 1972, chapters 3 and 4).

participate, and thus the less influence each single individual will have on the outcome. In other types of participation aiming at solving very specific problems, i.e. with a narrow scope, the contribution of a single individual is relatively larger.

Thirdly, the broader the scope of the outcome, the more likely the case that the issue will involve opposing views and thus conflict, and this is indeed the case of voting in competitive elections. The conflict dimension, however, is clear only at the systemic level, that is, at the level of the electoral outcome; the provisions of secrecy in principle prevent the voter from interpersonal or intergroup conflict.

Finally, voting requires relatively little time, skills or initiative from the individual; the time and the procedures are given to the individual, who must merely follow the rules. The initiative in this case comes from the political elite and/or from the institutional rules more than from the individual.

Verba and Nie do not distinguish very clearly between the individual and the systemic dimensions of these four dimensions. Particularly as far as the influence, the scope of the outcome, and the conflict involved are concerned, this distinction is fundamental.

From a systemic point of view voting creates high pressure over elites, it has a broad scope and is conflict generating. From an individual point of view, however, voting communicates little information about the elector's preferences and ideas and requires little initiative. The contribution of each citizen in terms or personal influence in the outcome and the conflict arisen is also very small indeed.

This contradiction between the individual and the systemic levels has important consequences concerning how much significance is given to voting as a form of political participation. If the main level is considered to be the systemic, voting is regarded as the major form of political participation, given its fundamental consequences for the political system. If the main level is considered to be the individual, other forms of participation, more demanding but with more significance for the individual are given priority. This distinction, as we shall see, can be applied to the elitist and participatory views of electoral participation.

In Schumpeter's theory of democracy voting is indeed considered to be the fundamental and only necessary form of political participation. Elections and thus some degree of electoral participation are required conditions to generate competition among political leaders. However, this does not necessarily imply that a high turnout is

essential to a healthy democratic political system. As mentioned before, many authors are in favour of moderate to low levels of turnout, arguing that an excessively high level of electoral participation may be dysfunctional for the polity. The Fourth French Republic and the Weimar Republic are often quoted as examples of excessive mass mobilisation that led to a crisis of governability and regime fall.[13] Elitist scholars do not put too much emphasis on high electoral participation rates since in principle competition among parties or candidates is guaranteed even with low levels of turnout.

Indeed, low electoral participation may not be a problem for the stability of a democratic political system: actually two of the most stable democracies (according to a procedural definition of the term democracy), Switzerland and the United States, show extremely low levels of turnout. However, the elitist disregard of non-voting as a problem can be challenged on three grounds.

Firstly, there is no solid empirical evidence linking high electoral turnout to political instability or even to political violence (see Powell 1982:201, Dittich and Johansen 1983). Secondly, high levels of abstention may create a problem of legitimacy, since they mean that only a limited percentage of the electorate actually takes part in the process that represents the essence of democracy — free competitive elections —. Here, the motives for abstaining, that is for remaining outside the electoral process, become extremely relevant. A satisfied core of abstainers is very different from an apathetic or alienated dissatisfied group of non-voters. Only in the first case can abstention not be considered "a social disease" (Ranney 1983). And again in this case empirical evidence points rather to apathy, alienation, and political cynicism as causes of abstention than to satisfaction with the political system.

Thirdly, low turnout may also produce a problem of political inequality if the voting population is not representative of the electorate as a whole. If everybody voted, there would be no room for individual level differences in abstention rates (see Hirczy 1992:76). As Verba and Nie put it,

> "Political participation has often been justified as a means by which social or economic inequalities can be reduced. Those of lower status — workers, the poor, farmers, new immigrants — would use their political influence associated with participation to induce the government to carry out policies beneficial to them. This belief leads to pressure for an equalisation in the opportunities to participate and the removal of legal restraints to that participation. Yet the opening of opportunity does not equalise participation rates (...) for whatever reason they participate more, the result is that those who may need governmental

[13] Milnor 1969, Lipset 1969, see also Jones 1954.

> assistance the least participate the most -i.e. those already at the top of the stratification hierarchy are likely to be the most active." (Verba and Nie 1972:8)

Participatory theory, in turn, dismisses to a certain extent the relevance of electoral participation for exactly the opposite reason: even if the whole citizenship turns out, the presence of generalised electoral participation is not sufficient for a political system to be democratic. The extent to which a system is democratic is given by the degree of citizen involvement in politics and thus other types of political action are fundamental. The focus here is not on the system, but on the participating individual:

> "Clearly, it would be sanguine to expect an active, co-operative and public-spirited civil character to result merely from voting in elections at infrequent intervals (...) For democracy to exert its beneficial effects on character it was necessary for men to be involved personally in social issues and organisations." (Lively 1975:140)

Without denying the importance of other forms of political participation, it could be argued that voting once every several years may not provide *enough* citizen involvement for a 'truly' democratic political system. However one should be careful not to confound *insufficiency* with *irrelevance*. Whatever definition of representative democracy we take, voting is still a *necessary* condition for it, as well as a fundamental form of political participation. From the individual point of view, voting is the only form of political participation that combines universality of access, equality of influence and a private and irresponsible character (Rokkan 1961:132). It was through these three exceptional characteristics that voting was intended to integrate the whole citizenry into the political system without leaving aside the less favoured social groups, thereby reducing political inequalities and producing system legitimacy and political integration. Besides the utility of elections as a means to selecting a government — the dimension emphasised by the elitist theory — they remain the major source of political legitimacy in contemporary democracies.

Thus, the level of electoral abstention[14] of contemporary democracies continues to be a fundamental question of democratic theory. Initially, the attention was directed to the process of suffrage extension, how it took place and the consequences it had.

[14] It is worth noting that electoral participation, as opposed to other forms of participation has a fixed intensity (one person, one vote) and thus the dimension that is usually analysed is the one of quantity. For other types of participation this is not the case.

Now, the question of how to keep the citizenry integrated into the electoral process — and the electoral process as a source of legitimacy — remains wide open, especially if as Rokkan himself pointed out,

> "What we tend to find is a cumulation of forces making for a narrowing of the alternatives for national politics, a fragmentation of the networks of policy-influencing organisations, and a consequent decline in the importance of the decisions of the electorate-at-large. This may tend to lower the level of general political participation and to alienate from politics sizeable sections of the once enfranchised citizenry, leaving the basic decisions to a bargaining process between interest organisations, parties and agencies and departments of the national bureaucracy." (Rokkan 1961:152)

To sum up, the elitist view takes voting to be the only essential form of extensive political participation, since only when at least *some* voters turn out can parties and candidates compete for their votes, but it does not inevitably consider a high overall turnout rate a necessary condition for a healthy democracy.[15] If one wants to make this assertion compatible with the principles of legitimacy and political equality, it remains to be proven that non-voting is the result of overall satisfaction and not alienation or deep disenchantment, and that it is not linked to less favoured socio-economic characteristics.

The participatory view considers other forms of political action as more important. The exceptionality of voting as a form of political participation, however, cannot be overemphasised, since it is the only one that makes citizens equal in terms of potential influence. Indeed, the overall consensus today seems to favour the view that high levels of turnout are indeed a positive feature in any democratic political system, specially as overall rates are declining in a number of countries. Non-voting is considered to indicate apathy, disenchantment and alienation rather than general satisfaction with the political system.

[15] "If an increase in political activity brings the authoritarian minded into the political arena, consensus on the basic norms among the politically active certainly must be declining. To the extent that consensus declined, we should expect (...) that, after some lag, polyarchy would also decline. In the light of all this we cannot assume that an increase in political activity is always associated with an increase in polyarchy (...)." (Dahl 1956:89).

3 The inductive approach to electoral turnout

The theoretical questions linked to the relationship between electoral participation and democracy have lead to a certain amount of empirical research whose aim has been to identify the causes of abstention, that is, why some people vote and others do not. In order to present findings and basic research questions in a concise manner I have divided the existing literature according to two dimensions: the nature of the explanatory factors (whether priority is given to sociological vs. political factors), and the unit of analysis (the individual vs. larger units of aggregation). The four resulting approaches are presented in table 1.1, with some examples of the emphasised variables and the related theories as examples. The factors and theories mentioned, however, are not an exhaustive list of those considered in the existing literature.

Table 1.1. Determinants of electoral abstention and related theories

	Sociological	**Political**
Systemic (constituencies, elections, countries)	*Modernisation Theory* industrialisation, literacy urbanisation *Community model* community size	*Institutional theory* electoral system, registration laws compulsory voting *Mobilisation theory* election characteristics, party mobilisation
Individual (citizens, electors)	*Socio-economic status model* age, gender, education, income, class, occupation *Columbia model* social integration communicational networks	*Michigan model* Interest in politics, political efficacy, civic duty, party identification

This classification is an acceptable framework to briefly outline the main theories dealing with the explanation of electoral participation. However, it must be emphasised that empirical analyses of abstention do not necessarily stick to one single cell or theory when selecting explanatory variables. If there is agreement on anything, it is on the multivariate character of the determinants of electoral participation, and on the plurality of approaches to analyse it.

While political and sociological explanations of abstentions can be considered complementary, and its link has been fruitfully studied, individual and systemic approaches differ not only in the level of aggregation of their analyses, but also in the specification of their theoretical explanatory models. These are often so different that

> "a set of conditions explain individual voting and a quite different set of conditions account for national participation rates which, after all, merely summarise individual choice behaviour". (Lane and Ersson 1990:462)

The distinction between individual and systemic analysis is of a more technical nature than the distinction between political and social explanatory factors. If in principle abstention is a phenomenon that occurs at the individual level (it is the individual who decides whether to vote or not), in many occasions abstention is analysed at an aggregate level, looking at cross-national or cross-sectional variation, or, less often, at its evolution along time. The analysis of aggregate data, much too dishonoured after the publication of Robinson's article (1950) presents, however, a number of advantages if handled with care,[16] and is particularly important where survey data are not available or are inadequate for the analysis of electoral participation.

The following sections will focus on the distinction between sociological and political factors. The discussion on different levels of analysis is left for chapter II.

3.1 Sociological explanations of abstention

From a macro sociological perspective, two main theories aim to explain differences in abstention levels. On the one hand what could be called the *Modernisation theory* states that industrialisation and urbanisation processes produce higher rates of participation for several reasons: they bring with them an increase in environmental stimuli (mass media, communication society), reduced voting costs, the development of secondary organisations (mainly trade unions and political parties), changes in the political culture, and increases in the size of middle classes, who are more likely to react to these inducements to participate.[17] Thus participation should be higher in highly developed and urbanised areas.

[16] See Brunner and Hug 1993, Achen and Shively 1995.
[17] See Almond and Verba 1963, Deutsch 1961, Nie, Powell and Prewitt 1969, Weiner 1966, Lane 1959:256ff, Milbrath and Goel 1977:106.

The alternative *Community model*, postulates that participation is fostered by the social integration, intimacy and identification present in communities of manageable size, and more difficult to find in anonymous urban milieus.[18]

> "(...) in contrast to rural areas where an individual is a member of a small integrated community, the city resident is part of an atomized mass society. Politics in the city often become impersonal, complicated and distant. Social relationships may become diffuse and less intimate, cutting down on the level of group activity." (Milbrath and Goel 1977:109)

According to this theory, the more autonomous and well defined a community is, the easier it becomes for the citizens to identify and take sides in the political conflicts, and the higher the expected turnout. The social pressure found in small population centres, where there is no anonymity, may also increase the incentives to carry out a civic duty such as voting.

From a more micro perspective, the *Columbia model* of electoral behaviour also stresses the role of social integration as an important factor favourable to participation.[19] Socio-economic status as well as other factors such as residence stability, marital status, house ownership, etc., are all socio-demographic characteristics that imply better access to information and culture, a more dense network of inter-personal communications, and thus an environment more likely to promote participation via stimuli and social pressure.

The *socio-economic resources model*, in turn, states that educated, well-off, upper class citizens go more to the polls, because they are more likely to perceive them as important, because they are more interested in them, because, in sum, they are more likely to develop the kind of attitudes that favour participation.[20] Through politicisation, socio-economic resources are transformed in political attitudes that favour participation. But socio-economic status is in itself important in this model because its impact on participation determines the degree of socio-economic bias of the participant population. The scope of this impact, depends, in turn, on other factors, mainly the degree and type of affiliation to political and non political organisations (Verba and Nie 1972:174ff).

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[18] See Dahl 1967, Verba, Nie, Kim 1978, Eagles and Erfle 1989.

[19] Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954, Knoke 1990, Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1944.

[20] See for instance Corbetta and Parisi 1994, Justel 1995, Lipset 1969, Verba and Nie 1972, Verba, Nie and Kim 1978, Parry, Moyser and Day 1992, Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980.

The underlying problem in both the social integration and the socio-economic resources models is the fact that people are being left out of the electoral process because of their marginal position within society. Attitudes are important intervening variables, but the attention of these studies is mainly focused on socio-demographic inequalities in electoral participation.

3.2 Political explanations of abstention

In recent years, explanations of nonvoting in political terms have gained attention of many scholars, for it seems that traditional socio-demographic characteristics are losing explanatory power as far as voting behaviour is concerned.[21] Rational choice based theories have also contributed to the emphasis on political factors as explanations of turnout variation, as it will be shown in the next section.

From the individual point of view the relationship between the individual and the political system is defined in terms of political attitudes such as feelings of self efficacy, interest in politics, civic duty, and/or political identities (with parties, politicians, ideologies or the whole democratic system).[22] Here the basic guidelines were established by the *Michigan model* of electoral behaviour developed in the 1950s, which explains voter decisions in terms of long term political attitudes, dismissing to some extent the explanatory role socio-economic characteristics as determinants of voting (Campbell, Converse, Stokes and Miller 1960:36). The importance of such political attitudes and beliefs (psychological involvement in politics, sentiment of civic duty, party and group identification, political efficacy feelings, alienation, cynicism, distrust, etc.) is emphasised by most of the literature on participation.[23] A more psychological interpretation relates participation to personality traits (sociability, self-confidence, etc.).[24]

Later on, political attitudes have been complemented with system level characteristics, taking into account the effect of the different political contexts on the voter's behaviour. This context includes both structural and more dynamic factors. Structural factors include the basic institutional framework, that defines the costs and

[21] See Justel 1995.
[22] Budge and Farlie 1976, Campbell, Converse, Stokes and Miller 1960, Chen 1992.
[23] See Milbrath and Goel 1977:43 for a survey of the literature.
[24] See Lane 1959:97ff, Milbrath and Goel 1977:74ff.

incentives of voting (registration procedures, compulsory voting facilities, electoral systems), and the characteristics of the party system, that determine the characteristics of the electoral supply (number and types of parties, polarisation, patterns of competition, links with social structure, etc.).[25] More dynamic elements include the characteristics surrounding each specific election, how finely balanced the result is, the degree of partisan mobilisation, etc.[26]

Cross-national analyses of turnout variations, have had an outstanding statistical performance (R^2s of more than 0.9[27]). In theoretical terms the success has been less pronounced (see Hirczy 1992:78ff). In part, the problem of cross-national analysis of turnout is due to the high level of correlation of the explanatory variables, which produces the mixing up of several different factors at the same time, as well as problems of estimation. Partly, the problem is also that in many cases, the same factor can *a priori* be interpreted to increase or decrease non-voting.[28]

Further research should try to overcome these problems in two ways. Firstly, by elaborating in the definition and operationalization of potential explanatory factors both at the system and at the individual levels, which are often treated too roughly. Secondly, by refining the theoretical links between all explanatory variables, also within the individual and systemic levels, but mainly *between* them. It could well be that the effect of some systemic factors is not the same for all citizens.

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[25] Blais and Carty 1990, Crepaz 1990, Franklin 1996a and 1996b, Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis 1996, Hirczy 1992, Jackman 1987, Jackman and Miller 1995, Powell 1980, 1986, Subileau and Toinet 1993.

[26] See for instance Burnham 1979, 1980, Cox and Munger 1989, Caldeira, Clausen and Patterson 1990, Colomer 1991, Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992, Leighley 1995, Montero 1984, 1986c, Patterson and Caldeira 1983, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993 and the literature on rational choice and turnout (see for instance Whiteley 1995 and works quoted there).

[27] See Colomer 1991, Jackman 1987 for instance.

[28] The case of the impact of electoral systems on turnout is paradigmatic. On the one hand a plurality system can encourage voting as far as the choice between government and opposition alternatives is *usually* clear in these systems, and the decision of whom to vote is easier to make. On the other hand a PR system is supposed to incentive voters to participate in as far as there are less "wasted votes", and it makes it more difficult to have non-competitive districts. But PR may also act as a deterrent for turnout because the line dividing government and opposition, renovation of confidence or punishment, is *usually* less clear. A complex ballot, offering the possibility of expressing preferences for a particular candidate may seem more appealing for sophisticated voters, but also more complicated for less experienced ones. A multiparty systems may be more attractive because of its many political options but it also may confuse voters with respect to a clear two-party system.

4 The deductive approach: economic theories of participation

The economic approach[29] to the study of politics is based on utility theory, a mathematical theory closely related to probability theory, which aims to represent decisions and explain individual behaviour deductively. The paradigmatic example of this approach in Political Science is Downs' (1957) *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, in which he tries "to discover what form of political behaviour is rational for the government and citizens of a democracy" (1957:20) applying utility theory. From then on, there has been a flood of books and articles that have tried to explain participation in politics and, more specifically, voter turnout, by using rational choice theory.

4.1 Rationality assumptions

As a deductive theory, this approach aims to explain and predict the behaviour of some actors (being those citizens, parties, governments, etc.) from a set of assumptions, called in this case rationality assumptions. Downs (1957:6) considers a person to be rational when: she can make a decision when confronted with several alternative actions; she can rank all the possible alternatives in a complete order of preference so that each outcome is either preferred to, indifferent to, or inferior to each other; the preference ranking is transitive; the action chosen is the most preferred one; and she makes the same decision whenever she is confronted with the same situation.

This conception of rationality is thus instrumental; it implies that the means used to get the desired pre-determined goal are the most adequate, but it says nothing about the goal itself. Economic analysis requires, however, the *identification of such goals*, which in utility theory are said to be the maximisation of utility.

> "Utility is a measure of an actor's preferences over the outcomes that reflects his or her willingness to take risks to achieve desired outcomes and avoid undesirable outcomes (...) We calculate an expected utility for an action by *multiplying the utility of each possible outcome by the probability that it will occur* if the action is chosen and then summing across all possible outcomes. Utilities for outcomes are chosen so that the magnitude of expected utilities concur with preferences over actions. Given the probabilities that actions produce outcomes and preferences over actions, we can calculate utilities over outcomes so that actions with larger expected utilities are preferred." (Morrow 1994:16, my emphasis)

[29] The terms economic approach and rational choice approach are used interchangeably here.

Any decision problem can then be formalised (using Morrow's notation) in terms of (1) a set of acts, A, among which one will be chosen as the decision; (2) a set of states of the world, S, among which one and only one will occur; (3) a set of outcomes C, one for each combination of states and acts. Considering these elements, the expected utilities for each action can be calculated through the following function,

$$EU(A) = \Sigma\, p(S) \cdot u[C(S,A)],$$

where EU(A) is the expected utility of choosing act A, $\Sigma p(S)$ is the sum of the probabilities of each state of the world S happening, and u[C(S,A)] is the utility that the individual gets from outcome C given the act and the state of the world.

A rational individual is expected to chose the action A that maximises EU(A), and thus he is expected to perform some probability calculus at the light of the possible states of the world, i.e., at the light of the behaviour he expects from other actors. Tsebelis reformulates the implications of the assumption of rationality as follows:

> "In particular, rational actors must be consistent (have no contradictory beliefs or desires), *decide according to the rules of probability calculus*, and interact with other actors according to the prescriptions of game theory." (Tsebelis 1990:18,[30] my emphasis)

4.2 The basic rational choice model of voter turnout

Voting in elections and participation in politics in general have been profusely studied as rational choice problems, initially because they are fundamental elements in the understanding of the political process, and then because they proved to be particularly problematic when analysed within a rational choice framework. In short, when these theories stick to their assumptions, they fail to explain why anyone should ever vote. This section presents the basic economic model of voter turnout and the modifications it has undergone in order to cope with the so-called paradox of voting.

The economic approach to turnout considers voting as a means to select a government. It is important to keep in mind that although the theory does not make any assumptions about the type of goals individuals pursue, it nevertheless requires the specification of *one single goal*. This is fundamental since the same behaviour can be

[30] He immediately adds to these requirements the following remark: "Consequently, the reasonable question becomes not whether people ever deviate from rationality, but whether people ever conform to it. In fact, most of the objections to the rational choice approach suggest that the rationality assumption is not trivial, but rather unrealistically demanding..."

rational with respect to some ends, while irrational with respect to others. As Down (1957) himself pointed out, even if voting is irrational from the perspective of selecting a government or contributing to maintain democracy, it may be very rational from the point of view of keeping domestic peace. Now, one must be clear when specifying the goals to which the act of voting is directed, whether those are government selection or spiritual harmony. This is of utmost importance especially when considering that while the first goal implies a choice under risk (situation where utility theory applies), the other does not.

In this case the possible outcomes of the game are therefore the outcomes of the election which are supposed to determine the government. For instance, in a two candidate election we can build the following simple decision table with two possible outcomes and three possible actions.

Table 1.2. Decision table for a simple rational choice model of turnout

	States of the World	
Preferred candidate wins	Candidates tie	Preferred candidate loses
B - C	B/2-C	0 - C
	0-C	0 - C
	0	0

[illegible] are payoffs in utilities to the decision maker. B is the utility that the actor gets when C1 wins. C are the costs of voting.

Comparing the payoffs of different actions, voting for the least preferred candidate is discarded, for it is a dominated strategy (whatever happens, you are never better off than with any of the two other possible actions). Moreover, the probability that C1 wins (the aimed goal) is smallest if the actor votes for C2 than if he votes for C1 or abstains.

The choice in a two-candidate race is then between voting for the preferred candidate or abstaining. The citizen will vote when the expected utility of voting is larger than the expected utility of nonvoting:

$$u(\text{vote C1}) > u(\text{abstain}), \text{ that is when}$$
$$[p(\text{C1 wins|vote C1}) - p(\text{C1 wins|abstain})]\, B > C.$$

The difference between these two probabilities is the probability that the vote of the actor determines the result of the election. Thus, the simplest economic model of turnout can be written as,

$$R = P \cdot B - C,$$

where R is the reward of voting. If R>0 then the individual will vote, while if R<0 the rational individual will not. R is a function of B, defined as the party differential or the expected benefit that the voter would get if her favourite candidate or party won. B is multiplied by P, the probability that the vote that the individual casts will determine the outcome of the election. Finally, R is also inversely related to the costs of voting.

The main problem with this model is related to the P term. The probability that one's vote determines the outcome of the election is so small[31] that, even if the costs of voting are limited, they will always outweigh the expected benefits, and thus in most cases the rational behaviour would be to abstain. The citizen is not likely to determine the outcome of the election and thus, if rational, she would rather save the costs of voting. When changing the goal of the game to the preservation of the democratic political system, the conclusions are basically the same, for one's vote would almost never determine the permanence or breakdown of democracy (see Downs 1957). And still, many citizens *irrationally and systematically* turn out.

4.3 Improvements and failures of the rational choice approach to turnout

In order to give an answer to this paradox a number of suggestions have been made. The first one argues that the P term is not a real but a subjective probability, and that people tend to overestimate the likelihood that their vote might determine the election outcome. Even if small, P·B might still be higher than C (Morrow 1994:212, Darvish and Rosenberg 1988). Ulhaner (1995:67ff) has also developed an interesting model where the P term is based on calculations made by leaders on the basis of their ability to mobilise identified groups.

A second re-elaboration of Down's model stresses the importance of the costs, and predicts a level of turnout slightly over 50 per cent (Morrow 1994:213ff, also Ledyard 1984, Palfrey and Rosenthal 1985). The problem becomes then, how to

[31] As small as, for instance, 10 e-8 (Riker and Ordeshook 1968:25), or one in 10 million for the case of the US 1992 election (Gelman, King and Boscardino forthcoming).

estimate these costs of voting, which are difficult to operationalise. It can also be assumed that costs are extremely low anyway (Niemi 1976, Crewe, Fox and Alt 1977), or that they are negatively correlated with D and P·B (Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Neither of these two solutions really improves the performance of the model, for even if they explain some degree of participation, they do not explain the fact that most people vote.

A third proposal consists in including in the function benefits that are directly attached to the act of voting, and not linked to its instrumental value as a means to select government. Voting is then considered as an act of consumption more than investment, and as something that has intrinsic benefits, in terms of satisfaction from compliance with the ethic of voting, affirming allegiance to the political system, affirming partisan preference, satisfaction from deciding and going to the polls, affirming one's political efficacy in the political system, and so on and so forth (see Riker and Ordeshook 1968). The problem of this argumentation is what Green and Shapiro (1994) have called *ex post theorisation*. In order to overcome the contradiction, the definition of the game is changed and where the previous goal was the selection of a government now there is some kind of personal satisfaction that can hardly avoid the tautological conclusion that every man's behaviour is rational because (1) it is aimed at some end, and (2) its returns must outweigh its costs in his eyes or he would not have undertaken it (Downs 1957:6, see also Barry 1978). Down's model is basically reduced to:

$$R = D - C^{32}$$

Finally, the minimax regret model (Ferejohn and Fiorina 1974,1975) turns the notion of maximised utility into the minimised regret: probabilities into possibilities. Since probability calculations are difficult to make in many contexts, they argue, a different reasoning is behind the rational calculus of voting, that is to say, "If it turns out that a given state of the world is true, would you have any regret that you chose the action that you did, and if so, how much regret?" (Aldrich 1993:253). Again here utility theory is left aside, but problems related to probability calculations are not solved.[33]

As compared to the inductive approach, which considers participation in elections as generally determined by socio-economic characteristics and long term

[32] Pushed to the limit this model would predict a rate of turnout independent of the states of the world, that is independent of political factors.
[33] See Aldrich 1993:259, Beck 1975, Mayer and Good 1975, and Tullock 1975.

political attitudes, the rational choice approach re-introduced in the debate the importance of the political context as something relevant in explaining voter behaviour. Some empirical work has been devoted to operationalise the P factor in terms of election closeness or competitiveness, with limited success from a theory whose roots are in methodological individualism.[34]

Considering voting an instrumental action whose goal is to select a government, is obviously too reductionist, while at the same time including expressive or selective benefits turns everything into rational, weakening the explanatory value of the rational choice approach, as an approach based on utility theory. This paradox limits the potential explicative value of rational choice models of turnout, which however have contributed considerably to define the three important elements affecting turnout, namely (expressive or purposive) benefits, costs, and the probability of affecting the election outcome.

5 A cross-level explanatory model of electoral abstention

The political importance of electoral abstention depends in the first place on the extent to which voters and non voters are different in terms of individual characteristics. If voters and abstainers are very much alike in terms of resources, social integration and political attitudes, there is no reason to think that any specific population group is excluded from the political process. However, if non-voters come disproportionately from peripheral social groups then there are reasons to worry. The analysis of electoral participation should therefore start by looking at the individual determinants of non-voting.

However, abstention among resourceful, integrated and politically involved citizens may also be problematic, for in this case non-voting can be considered not as a passive attitude due to a personal situation that does not provide incentives to

[34] While some relationship between turnout and closeness has been found at the aggregate level (see Denver and Hands 1974, 1985, Mughan 1986), analyses at the individual level do not support the hypothesis that higher closeness (thus higher P) implies higher likelihood of voting (Matsusaka and Palda 1993, Denver 1995). The role of parties as mobilising agents (devoting more resources where they perceive the result as closest) seems to be the key factor (see Hansen and Rosenstone 1993, Pattie and Johnston forthcoming).

participate, but as an active form of protest or as political alienation (Nuvoli and Spreafico 1990, Corbetta and Parisi 1994).

Thus, whatever the individual determinants of non-voting are, high electoral participation is a desirable goal, as a source of legitimacy and political inclusion. Then attention should also be paid to the extent to which contextual variables increase the average level of voting. Some of this variables will be difficult to manipulate (such as the structure of the party system), but some others could be used to increase participation in settings where this is particularly low (for instance, compulsory voting or voting facilities).

Finally, a fundamental research question should also be addressed, namely the extent to which systemic or contextual factors may reduce or increase disparities among groups in the level of electoral turnout. This brings us to the question of interaction effects between individual and systemic determinants of abstention.

The first two research questions (the impact of individual and contextual factors on the likelihood of abstaining) have been relatively well studied as discrete topics, although findings have not always been conclusive as we shall see. However, the interaction between individual and systemic determinants of electoral participation has been analysed far less often,[35] even though it is fundamental for a proper understanding of the processes that underlie the voting/non-voting decision.

From an individual point of view, electoral participation is low-cost low-benefit activity, which implies that it is subject to the influence of small changes in a wide diversity of variables. This has hampered the performance of individual-level explanatory models of turnout.

> "The data suggest that the micro-analytic approach does not embrace the full range of phenomena relevant to define the context of that behaviour. And the less satisfactory the analysis of the psychological dimensions of involvement, the more important the contextual variables become." (Campbell et al. 1960:286)

The importance of the systemic dimension is therefore fundamental, not only in itself, but in its relation to the citizen. The questions of foremost theoretical interest are those concerning the relationship of the individual with the political system. We are interested in knowing which features of the political system, the party system, and the electoral context, make people participate in politics at least in the minimalist form of

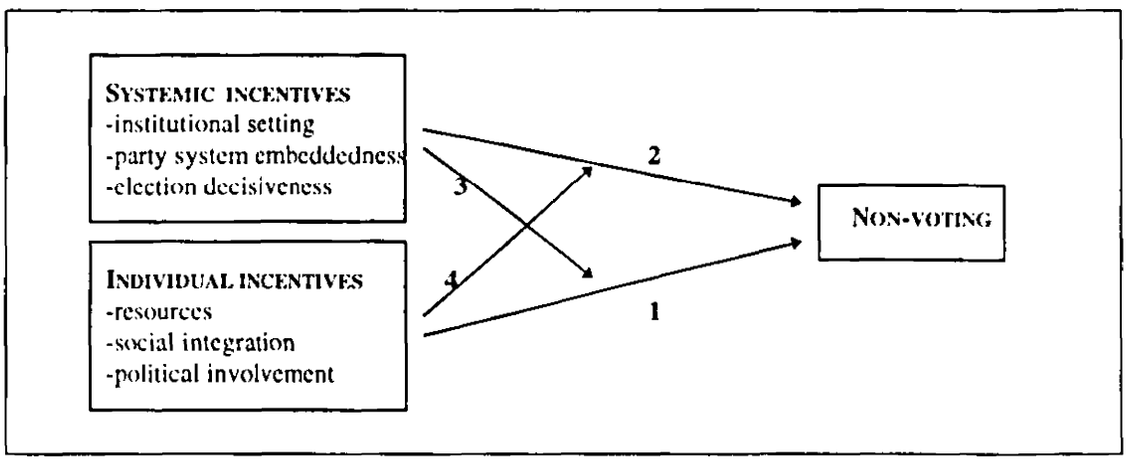
[35] But see Oppenhuis 1995, Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis 1996, as well as the literature on voting legal arrangements and socio-economic bias (for instance Calvert 1996, Highton 1997, Martínez 1997, Teixeira 1993, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).

electoral participation. But it would be particularly important to see *whom* does the political system affect, that is, whether some citizens, more than others, are particularly sensitive to their political environment.

The study of the cross-level interaction between individual and systemic variables is extremely attractive for another reason, that is, it may help to solve the problem presented by the fact that hypotheses concerning the systemic determinants of electoral participation are often ambiguous and can be formulated in contradictory ways. Only through the study of interaction effects between individual and systemic factors can we disentangle the complex ways in which these factors affect the level of abstention.

Broadly speaking the model presented here can be summarised as follows: whether someone votes or abstains in an election depends on his/her resources and motivations (arrow 1 in figure 1.1) and also on the incentives provided by the political environment (arrow 2). However, things are likely to be more complicated than that. I also expect that the effect of individual factors *varies* across different settings, just as we expect that the effect of systemic variables will not be the same for all individuals (arrows 3 and 4 represent these interactive relationships).

Figure 1.1. A cross-level explanatory model of electoral abstention



For this reason, the model of electoral participation presented in the next pages is composed of three main parts: the individual dimension (section 5.1), the systemic dimension (section 5.2) and the interaction of both levels (section 5.3). The following pages present only the outline of the model. Operationalisation of concepts is dealt with

in chapter II. Major discussions of previous findings in the literature are left to chapters III, IV and V, where the analysis is performed.

5.1 Individual incentives: resources, integration and political involvement

Voting is the form of political participation performed by most people in all Western societies, and it is probably the least demanding one too. However, as with any other political action, it requires a certain amount of resources in order to be accomplished. Citizens will vote only if they can afford devoting at least some time and skill to gather information, make up their minds and cast the ballot. At the same time, voting is an activity that is stimulated if the elector is socially integrated in a community that considers voting as a civic duty. The more social contacts the elector has, the more likely he/she is to vote. Finally a high level of involvement in politics will also increase the likelihood of participation. Electors that are not interested in politics or that lack identities with parties or ideologies will be more likely to abstain. Thus, electors with low levels of resources, social integration and political involvement will be more likely to abstain.

Individual resources are individual features expected to facilitate the act of voting because they make it less relatively costly. Education provides skills to deal with abstractions, to understand politics, to assimilate environmental flows of information, and to deal with procedural matters related to voting (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980:35ff, Jackson 1993). High income implies a lower relative cost of voting, for energy and time must not necessarily be spent in first need activities, and can be devoted to politics (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980:20, Downs 1957:235, Lane 1959:220ff, Milbrath and Goel 1977:96). Also, high income is usually accompanied by exposure to social norms and pressures that increase the probability of voting as a means of showing support for the political system. Finally, age provides experience, which may substitute education as a source of skills (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, Campbell et al. 1960, Lane 1959).

Individual social integration also plays an important role, for people's attitudes and behaviour are also determined by their personal relations and their interactions with their closest environment. People living alone, recently moved, and/or not participating in social activities and organisations will find it harder to gather the necessary

information, to make up their minds about how to vote and, to actually go and vote. Conversely, those citizens well integrated in society will be exposed to communication flows, will create opinion and try to convince others, or will be convinced about how to vote by their family, friends, colleagues; they will be exposed to social norms and pressures that encourage electoral participation. In short, these citizens will live in an environment favourable to participation (Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954, Knoke 1990, Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1944, Squire, Wolfinger and Glass 1987).

Finally, motivation for voting may come from a direct relationship with the political system. The more *politically involved* electors are, the less likely they are to abstain. Political involvement may come from a general interest in political matters, or from identities with political parties, organisations or ideologies. People with an interest in politics, concerned about governmental matters, or supporting specific parties or political views are expected to vote more than those lacking such attitudes (Campbell, Converse, Stokes and Miller 1960).

These three sets of sets of variables are by no means independent. Not only is there a tendency for people with high levels of resources to also have high levels of social integration and political involvement, but these factors are furthermore likely to interact with each other. A high level of political involvement may cancel out the effect of scarce resources, leading to a less biased participant population in terms of socio-economic characteristics. However, the analysis of interactive relationships between these individual factors and voting will remain outside the scope of this thesis.

Chapter III will test the following hypotheses:

H_{11}: At very low levels of resources (age, income, education) abstention is higher than at medium or high levels.

H_{12}: Social integration facilitates the gathering of information, the making of an opinion and the exposure to social contacts favourable to participation. Therefore, higher levels of social integration will result in lower probabilities of abstention.

H_{13} :The higher the level of political involvement (interest, politicisation), the lower the likelihood of abstaining.

5.2 Institutions, parties and elections

Electoral participation is considered here as an individual action: ultimately, the decision of whether to cast a vote or abstain lies with the citizen. However, this does not mean that the factors that determine this choice must only be found in the individuals themselves. On the contrary, individual-level explanations of turnout are in fact, often unsatisfactory when confronted with empirical reality, at least in terms of variance explained. Moreover, if the approach taken for the development of an explanatory model of electoral abstention involves cross-national comparisons, then it is essential to include the characteristics of the different political contexts as potential explanatory variables of different abstention levels.

Institutions produce facilities and constraints to the act of voting that are likely to affect people's behaviour. Parties align, mobilise and in some cases de-mobilise potential voters. Elections provide different degrees of incentives to participate. All these factors are likely to have an impact on the overall rate of voting. They are also likely to affect the characteristics of the participant population, making differences between voters and non-voters in terms of socio-economic characteristics and political attitudes more or less pronounced. And as will be argued later, they are not expected to affect all citizens in the same way or to the same extent.

I shall distinguish between institutional incentives, party system embeddedness, and decisiveness of the electoral outcome as the three main systemic factors affecting the level of abstention.

5.2.1 Institutional incentives

The institutional setting shapes the set of constraints in which individuals are to take decisions. Some institutional arrangements may facilitate the act of voting to a considerable extent, or conversely, render it more costly. Within the broad category of institutional incentives for participation we may distinguish two main dimensions.

Firstly there are legal dispositions whose goal is to directly foster high turnout by reducing the cost of voting or by increasing the cost of abstention. Secondly, electoral systems may produce certain more indirect incentives for voting.

Among the *direct legal incentives,* the presence of mandatory voting laws is said to influence turnout to an important extent, even if penalties are not important or not

even implemented.[36] Compulsory voting is a clear institutional incentive to vote, criticised by some arguing that it produces somehow a less meaningful type of participation, for it is no longer the result of some voluntary interested action, but the result of increasing the costs of abstention. Other studies have shown, however, that compulsory voting increases the degree to which less favoured social sectors are represented in the participant population, thus increasing the degree of political equality (De Winter and Ackaert 1994, Lijphart 1997).

The provision of special voting facilities such as flexible voting hours, proxy voting or postal vote also facilitates the task and thus diminishes the costs of casting one's vote, although their weight as institutional incentives is likely to be much more limited than mandatory voting. Countries vary in the extent to which they allow citizens to use such special facilities which benefit a small but specific part of the population, such as the emigrants, the disabled, elderly people, etc. (Crewe 1981). It has also been said that abstention is usually lower if the election is held on a Sunday rather than on a working day (Blondel et al. 1996, Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis 1996).

Besides direct legal incentives for voting, the *electoral system* provides other more indirect institutional incentives. The effect of electoral laws on party systems has been extensively studied; less research has been devoted to the way in which they may directly affect individual behaviour, for this type of influence is much more difficult to grasp. Electoral systems may have an impact on the level of abstention in two different ways.[37]

Firstly, electoral systems differ in the extent to which they facilitate the obtention of representation for small political parties. In the case of PR systems with low effective thresholds of representation (Lijphart 1994), voters may be quite confident that unless the percentage of the vote obtained by their favourite party is really small — smaller than the threshold —, it will get some representation and thus their vote will not be wasted. In the same way, all parties would have incentives to mobilise voters in all districts (Powell 1986, Jackman 1987).

On the contrary, in a plurality system, where each seat is if anything contested by the two largest parties or candidates, potential voters of third parties can be certain that their vote will be wasted in terms of helping their favourite candidate or party to

[36] Colomer 1991, Hirczy 1994, Jackman 1987, Powell 1980, Tingsten 1975 [1937].
[37] On the effect of electoral systems on turnout see Blais and Carty 1990, Blais and Dobrzynska forthcoming, Jackman 1987, Powell 1980.

get a seat. These electors face three possible alternatives: stick to their first preference probably *wasting* their vote (but still expressing their preference), vote strategically for their (second) favourite candidate among those more likely to win, or abstain. In the same way, parties will concentrate their mobilising efforts in districts where they have a chance to win.

Secondly, electoral systems vary in the extent to which they allow citizens to express their preferences in a precise way. This may go from being forced to choose one and only one of the competing parties or candidates (single member districts and PR with closed lists), expressing preference for one or more candidates within one party list (most of Northern Europe), having two votes to distribute among parties and/or candidates (German or current Italian system), or, even more unrestrained, ordering several preferences across different parties or candidates (panachage, STV).

The relationship between ballot structure and abstention is however more complex, for where the benefit of voting is higher (in terms of being able to express qualified preferences) the cost is also higher: the higher the degree of choice available to the elector, the more difficult the decision of how to vote becomes. The cost of the choice increases especially whenever indicating a candidate preference is required (as in Finland or Ireland) and not voluntary.

It is not unreasonable to expect that the relationship between ballot structure and turnout works one way for some citizens (those with more resources and motivations will certainly appreciate the possibility of expressing preferences, while they will be little affected by a slightly more complex procedure), and another way for others (those with less resources and motivations will feel put off by the increasing costs, rather than attracted by the possibility of expressing preferences). I shall come back to this in section 5.3.

The effects of the institutional incentives of voting on the level of abstention can be summarised in the following hypotheses, that will be tested in chapter IV:

> *H_{21}: Legal dispositions aimed at incentive voting (mandatory voting laws and special voting facilities) decrease the level of abstention.*
>
> *H_{22}: The higher the likelihood that any party gets representation, the easier it will be for electors to stick to their first preference (even if for a small party) without having to "waste their vote", and therefore the more likely they will be to turn out. Also, the more incentives for parties to mobilise everywhere, the lower the expected level of abstention.*

H_{21a}: The more the ballot structure allows for a precise transmission of information about preferences, the lower the level of abstention. But,

H_{21b}: The more complicated the ballot structure, the higher the costs of voting and therefore the higher the level of abstention.

5.2.2 Party system embeddedness

The institutional factors that have been presented in the previous section constitute the framework in which the two actors of the electoral process interact: parties and electors. Political parties provide people with clues to understand the political world, and more or less stable political options. They constitute a set of familiar political alternatives among which people orient themselves and choose. Thus, their characteristics are expected to affect the level of electoral participation. Among all the potential dimensions of the party system that can be studied in relation to turnout, one of the most relevant is the extent to which they are deeply rooted and embedded in society (Powell 1980, 1986).

The way in which political parties create these links with electors is very much related to the way in which full-suffrage party systems emerged and organised themselves, translating the fractures that crossed XIXth century European societies into different electoral alternatives.

Once the cleavage lines were generated and crystallised in conflicts over public policy,[38] political *entrepreneurs* could choose between two different mobilisation strategies: either to engage in actions through pre-established diffuse community networks, or develop a distinctive membership organisation (Rokkan 1977:564).

The first type of link between parties and social groups is based on *cultural segmentation* or *verzuiling*. The presence of cultural segmentation depends, first of all, in the presence of socio-cultural heterogeneity. While some countries present clear religious and/or ethnic differences, some others are relatively homogeneous in their social structure. These two cleavages, religious and ethno-linguistic, are particularly important because of the imprint they leave on individuals. Not only they do have a clear cultural character, that by definition is likely to produce high degrees of differentiation between the sides of the cleavage, but their level of closure is likely to be

[38] Rokkan distinguished four critical junctures or dimensions of opposition: centre-periphery, State-Church, land-industry and owner-worker, generated by the National Revolution and the Industrial Revolution (Rokkan 1970b:112)

higher than in the case of other cleavages such as class. While increasing social mobility enlarges the possibility of changing sides in the class cleavage, it is far less unlikely that people change their language or the religion within they were brought up.

However, the concept of cultural segmentation implies as well some amount of "interlocking between cleavage-specific organisations active in the corporate channel and party organisations mobilising for electoral action." (Rokkan 1977:565). In highly culturally segmented societies these two types of organisations would tend to overlap and to be deeply interlinked so as to produce "the organisation of social movements, educational and communication systems, voluntary associations and political parties along the lines of religious and ideological cleavages" (Lorwin 1971:141). In this way, voters remain *indirectly linked* to political parties through their ancillary corporate organisations.

The second type of party-group linkage is of a more direct nature. The level of *organisational encapsulation* is defined by Bartolini and Mair (1990b:231) as "the extent to which individual electors and groups are likely to be linked to political parties via organisational membership of the parties themselves, (or of other ancillary interest organisations which may be outside the electoral market but which are linked to agencies of electoral mobilisation)." Organisational encapsulation represents the extent to which parties create *direct* links with the electorate.

Thus, strong links between parties and electors can be based on either cultural segmentation, where the organisations in the corporate channel coincide with the organisations in the political channel, or on organisational encapsulation where there is a high level of penetration of political organisations. These two dimensions of party system embeddedness are expected to decrease abstention.

> *H_{24}: The higher the level of cultural segmentation, the lower the level of abstention.*
>
> *H_{25}: The higher the level of organisational encapsulation, the lower the level of abstention.*

These two types of party system embeddedness do not necessarily go together. In fact is has been argued that a higher level of cultural segmentation is associated with relatively lower levels of organisational density.[39] In the analysis we shall see which of

[39] "...it is as if the cultural segmentation of a society, and the inevitable richness of its social organisational networks, already creates a degree of encapsulation which obviates the need for autonomous political organisational intervention." (Bartolini and Mair 1990b:283).

these two types of party system embeddedness has a stronger impact on abstention, or in other words, whether the determinants of electoral mobilisation correspond more to socio-cultural or to organisational links to political parties.

5.2.3 Decisiveness of the electoral outcome

The decisiveness of the electoral outcome refers to the importance, in terms of the consequences of the electoral outcome, of the parliamentary elections in a given institutional and political context. In principle, we should expect more decisive elections to have a lower level of electoral abstention.

Parliamentary elections do not have the same degree of *importance within the overall institutional structure of each political system*. In the case of federal states, for instance, state parliaments hold powers that belong to the national parliament in centralised states. Having national parliaments more competencies in centralised than in federal states we should expect national parliamentary elections to arouse a higher level of interest and participation in the latter than in the former. The direct election of the head of State may reduce the stature of parliamentary elections. Finally, in countries where direct democracy procedures are frequently used, citizens participate in the legislative decision-making directly through referendums, and not only indirectly through parliamentary or other type of elections.

Thus, the presence in the system of other institutions with important levels of decision-making power that are also elected (or voted) may render voting in lower house elections relatively less important. Abstention in lower house elections should be higher in systems with a direct election of the head of State, in politically decentralised systems, and in countries with frequent use of direct democracy institutions (Jackman 1987, Jackman and Miller 1995, Blais and Dobrzynska forthcoming).

Besides this institutional component of the decisiveness of elections there is also a *political dimension*. Parliamentary elections vary in the extent to which they actually determine the formation of the new government that would eventually implement a different set of policies.

From this perspective, the political decisiveness of elections depends in the first place on a clear-cut definition of who is in government and who in opposition. If there have been changes in the party composition of a government during the legislature, or if a minority government has governed with the support of non-governmental parties to be

able to pass laws, or if governmental coalitions are oversized and involve most of the main parties, electors and parties are likely to perceive that government permanence or change is more dependent on elite bargaining than on the election outcome (Bartolini 1996b:22).

Moreover, when the line between incumbents and opposition is blurred, electors will find it harder to assign responsibility for governmental actions (Powell and Whitten 1993) and consider potential alternatives. Therefore, the vaguer the line between government and opposition, the less likely it is that the election will be perceived to determine potential governmental change or permanence, and the higher abstention is expected to be.

Government and opposition not only need to be distinguishable in terms of which parties belong to each of them. They also need to be different in terms of the policy alternatives offered. People are expected to turn out for an election more often when there are clear differences between the alternatives than when these are misty and ill-defined (Campbell et al. 1960).

Finally a third dimension of political decisiveness of elections is the expectations of change or vulnerability of the incumbent (Bartolini 1995). In this sense, the relationship between closeness of the election and turnout has often been analysed, according to the idea that a high level of uncertainty of the electoral outcome increases party mobilising efforts and electors' feeling that their vote may contribute to decide the outcome more than if the result is clearly predictable, and therefore should reduce the level of abstention.[40]

To sum up, the level of abstention is expected to be minimised when national parliamentary elections are fundamental within the overall institutional structure of the country, when there is a clear distinction between government and opposition, when clearly different political alternatives are available, and when the election is expected to bring a government change.

> *H_{26}: The direct election of the head of State, decentralised political structures and systems that frequently use direct democracy institutions, are expected to produce higher levels of abstention.*
>
> *H_{27}: The higher the level of decisiveness of the election (in terms of clear division between government and opposition parties, differentiation of political alternatives, and expected change), the lower the level of abstention.*

[40] See Cox and Munger 1989, Denver and Gordon 1985, Ferejohn and Fiorina 1975, Kirchgässner and Schimmelpfening 1992, Matsusaka 1993, Zimmer 1985.

These systemic variables, institutional incentives, party system embeddedness and election decisiveness, can also present some interesting interaction effects among themselves. Institutional incentives, particularly mandatory voting laws, are likely to blur the effects of both the degree of party system embeddedness and election decisiveness. A weak party system, i.e., a party system with few and frail links with society is likely to produce fluctuating participation rates more dependent on the level of electoral decisiveness. However, as with the case of individual variables, these interactions are left outside the scope of this thesis.

5.3 The citizen and the context: interaction effects

To sum up, participation in elections is determined by two broad sets of factors: individual characteristics and features of the political context where elections take place.

Some scholars, aware that a single level approach was insufficient, have merged both types of explanatory factors in their models of electoral participation, and tried to see which level accounts for more variance in the dependent variable. Pattie and Johnston (forthcoming), for instance, analyse individual and constituency characteristics for the 1992 British elections, coming to the conclusion that the former are more important than the latter, a result similar to the one obtained by Leighley and Nagler (1992) for the American states in presidential elections.[41] Other authors, however, give priority to contextual or systemic factors: Hirczy (1992), Powell (1986), Patterson and Caldeira (1983), Cox and Munger (1989), Franklin (1996b), Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis (1996). Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) and Kim, Petrocik and Enokson (1975) accord importance to both types of factors.

The question of the relative importance of individual and systemic factors, is, without doubt fundamental. If we are to minimise non-voting: what shall we change, systems or individuals? But another fundamental question regarding the consideration of both individual and systemic determinants of electoral participation has deserved far less attention. It is the possibility of cross-level interaction effects. In spite of including individual and systemic variables, most of the studies quoted above do not consider this

[41] See also King 1996.

possibility or do it only for very specific questions.[42] Thus, for individual level analysis the relationships found between socio-economic factors or political attitudes and abstention are assumed to be constant across different settings.[43] Equally, the effect of systemic or contextual variables is presumed to be the same for all citizens. The main point of this thesis is to challenge these assumptions and stress the importance of *interaction effects* between levels.

The analysis of interaction effects between individual and systemic determinants of participation can be studied with two different objectives in mind. Although the differences among them may not seem apparent at first sight, it is important to make a clear distinction.

A first way to look at interactions is to analyse whether the *effect* of variables on one level is contingent on the variables at the other level. That is to say, whether the effect of individual determinants of abstention depends on the characteristics of the institutional setting, the party system or the election, and viceversa, whether the effect of those systemic variables is or not the same for all individuals. *Which individuals are most sensitive to the characteristics of their environment? Which contexts enhance the explanatory effect of individual characteristics?* This approach has been used to analyse the stability of individual level relationships (Leighley and Nagler 1992, Shields and Goidel 1997) along time. Oppenhuis (1995) and Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis (1996) have also checked for interaction effects between systemic and individual determinants of electoral participation in European elections.

A second goal may be to disentangle the *consequences*, in terms of participation rates of different variables. *To what extent does participation increase if we introduce systemic incentives to vote? Is this change equal for advantaged and disadvantaged electors? To what extent does abstention decrease due to individual resources and motivations? Is this change equal in all contexts?* This approach is used by all scholars who have assessed the impact of voting requirements among most disadvantaged

[42] To my knowledge, only Oppenhuis (1995) and Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis (1996) have systematically checked for cross-level interaction effects between systemic and individual variables and this in the framework of European Parliament elections. Rosenstone and Hansen 1993 have looked only at the interaction between the legal organisation of elections and race in the US. Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, Teixeira 1993, Rose 1975 have checked for the interaction between registration laws and socio-demographic factors. See also Verba, Nie and Kim 1978, though their indicator of group forces is in fact an individual-level variable.

[43] But see Leighley and Nagler 1992, Shields and Goidel 1997, who look at changes along time and across states in the effect of individual-level variables.

electors (for instance Calvert 1996, Highton 1997, Martínez 1997, Teixeira 1993, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).

The last part of the model concentrates on these two questions, effects and consequences of individual and systemic incentives to electoral participation.[44]

5.3.1 Who cares about the system?

The presence of such patterns of cross-level interaction would imply first that not everyone is equally sensitive to the characteristics of the institutional context or the political environment. If we look at the arguments of previous analyses, it seems that the behaviour of those citizens with fewer resources, lower integration and little involvement is influenced to a larger extent by the features of the political system in which they live (Verba, Nie and Kim 1978, Oppenhuis 1995, Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis 1996). Since these people lack individual motivations to vote, their participation will depend heavily on systemic incentives.[45]

Although this seems perfectly reasonable and intuitive, I would argue that testing for the contrary hypothesis is worthwhile. For one question arises: if citizens with high levels of resources, integrated in their social environment and politically involved are likely to care more about elections, to be better informed about political events, *why should they be less influenced by the political context?*

The first of our hypotheses regarding cross-level interactions, to be tested in chapter V, will therefore be the following:

> *H_{II} :The higher the level of individual resources, social integration and political involvement, the higher the awareness and sensitiveness to the political context. Thus, the effect of systemic factors over the* ***likelihood***[46] *of abstaining will be relatively* ***larger for advantaged***[47] *electors than for disadvantaged electors.*

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[44] There is a third possible aim (which will not be considered in this thesis), namely, the assessment of the *degree of equality* in participation, that is, the extent to which the participant population is representative of the whole of the electorate, or whether, on the other hand there is some bias towards more advantaged groups (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, Shields and Goidel 1997, Verba, Nie and Kim 1978, Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).

[45] Note that arguing that some systemic characteristics reduce the impact of some individual features is equivalent to say that some individual characteristics reduce the impact of some systemic features.

[46] Note that I use the term likelihood and not the term probability, which has a very specific meaning. Chapter II will elaborate more on this distinction.

[47] Note that the term advantaged is used to refer to citizens that enjoy a high level of individual incentives to participation, i.e., resources, social integration and political involvement. Conversely, the term disadvantaged is used to refer to those who lack this individual characteristics.

Hirczy has argued that "the very phenomenon being explored (aggregate turnout) sets the parameters for individual-level relationships within systems" (1992:77). Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis (1996:316) say that "to the extent that systemic and compositional influences determine turnout, they will thus limit the extent to which individual-level influences can do so." I could invert their reasoning and argue, for instance, that because highly politicised electors vote at a very high rate everywhere, the political system where they live does not have any effect on their likelihood of voting.

The absence of such an effect, however, could be nothing but a ceiling effect. Because participation cannot be higher than 100 per cent, it would seem that systemic incentives to participation do not have any impact among advantaged voters (who already vote in massive numbers). The whole question then becomes how to find some tool that allows us to measure effects without the constraint of ceiling and floor effects? Chapter II discusses this issue in detail.

5.3.2 What does the system change?

Even using the most advanced statistical tool to measure effects without any constraint, ceiling and floor effects do exist in reality, and they should be taken into account. Because advantaged electors abstain very little, there is very little room to decrease their abstention level. On the contrary, because disadvantaged electors abstain far more, systemic incentives may decrease their abstention rates substantially. So a *large relative effect* of systemic incentives to participation among advantaged electors (as postulated in hypothesis 3.1) does *not* necessarily imply a *large change* in their rate of abstention.

The second of our hypothesis concerning cross-level interactions, therefore, regards changes in the probabilities of abstaining of different electors due to the presence or absence of systemic incentives to participation.

> *H_{32} :Because advantaged individuals abstain very little in any case, there is little room for systemic incentives to decrease even more their level of abstention. However, the probability of abstaining of disadvantaged electors will be importantly affected by the presence of these systemic incentives. In other words, the consequences of systemic incentives over the **probability** of abstaining are expected to be **higher among disadvantaged** electors.*

Although these two hypotheses may seem contradictory, they are not so. The first one has an heuristic value: to know how different settings affect different people. This has to be evaluated without any constraint from overall abstention rates, for these may change in the future. The second one has a more practical value: to know to what extent participation of different groups increases or decreases according to different levels of systemic incentives.

Chapter II (section 3.2) expands on how these two hypotheses can be tested, while the analysis is performed in chapter V.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the methodological aspects of the thesis. The research design, techniques of analysis and operationalisation of variables are fundamental sections in any empirical enquiry, and they must be clearly spelled out. Firstly, they involve choices that will dramatically affect the findings. Results will be different depending on whether we choose an individual or an aggregate level analysis, whether we use OLS or logistic regression to estimate relationships, whether a variable such as education is defined as the maximum qualification attained or as respondent's age when he or she left school. Hence, in order to properly interpret any findings, it is fundamental to present in detail how we came to them.

However, in this specific case the methodological section is particularly important, because one of the contributions of the thesis to the analysis of electoral abstention is of a methodological nature: a research design that merges individual and systemic explanations of abstention, and that analyses in detail the interaction effects between these two sets of factors. Therefore, it is particularly important that the tools and procedures used to carry out this task are clearly presented.

Section 2 of the chapter reviews the assets and liabilities of the two main methodological approaches to the quantitative analysis of electoral abstention, the aggregate and the individual analysis, and exposes the need for a strategy that combines both levels. Section 3 presents the details of this cross-level research design, the techniques of analysis (essential for the understanding of the results) and the data to be exploited. Finally, Section 4 deals with the operationalisation of the explanatory

variables included in the model, both individual and systemic, and with the measurement problems relative to the analysis of abstention.

2 Methodological approaches to the study of electoral abstention

Empirical research carried out on electoral participation — as in the field of electoral behaviour in general — can be broadly classified from the point of view of the methodological approach according to the level of aggregation at which the analysis is performed. In theory, the substantive question behind any analysis of the determinants of electoral abstention is fundamentally the same, namely, under what conditions are people more likely to participate in elections. However, in practice, the choice of the level of analysis brings with it other choices related to the model specification — the choice of explanatory variables and of the functional form of their relationship with the dependent variable, the type of data collection and measurement, and to some extent also the techniques of data analysis.

Table 2.1. Research strategies in the field of electoral abstention

Dependent variable	Explanatory variables	Limitations and problems
Percentage of abstainers in the election	System characteristics, aggregated individual characteristics	Ecological fallacy. May ignore the impact of some individual characteristics.
Likelihood of an individual abstaining	Individual characteristics	Individualistic fallacy. May ignore the impact of the contexts in which citizens decide.
Likelihood of an individual abstaining	Individual characteristics, aggregated individual variables and system characteristics.	Introduce different levels of observation which may produce problems of estimation.

The basic question is whether to perform the analysis of the determinants of electoral abstention at the level of the smallest possible unit — the individual —, or at higher levels of aggregation — such as the district, the constituency, or the country. Furthermore, the level(s) of observation must also be specified, and these may be different from the level of analysis. If the chosen level of analysis is the individual — that is, we are ultimately trying to obtain explanations of individual behaviour, this by no means implies that characteristics of the institutional, social and political environments should be left outside the model. Thus, observations can be taken from different levels simultaneously, even if the analysis remains at a single one. Table 2.1 presents three different methodological approaches obtained from the combination of different levels of analysis and observation. Each one of them is developed in the following subsections.

2.1 Aggregate analysis: advantages and problems

The first empirical analyses of electoral participation were based on official reported figures of electoral results and potential electors, and were thus performed at aggregate levels. These works focused on territorial units within one or several countries.[48] At an even higher level of aggregation, cross-national studies take as unit of analysis elections or country averages of abstention.[49]

The emphasised type of variation has very frequently been cross-sectional, that is, turnout differences across constituencies within one country or across countries. Temporal variation has received much less attention[50] and even been considered as insignificant from a cross-national perspective (Crewe 1981:238, Lane and Ersson

[48] See for instance Goguel 1951, Gosnell 1930, Key 1986 [1949], Siegfried 1913. Although the first empirical enquiries into voting behaviour were based on aggregate data, they clearly pointed to many of the individual correlates of voting patterns and abstention (see for instance Gosnell 1930, Siegfried 1913). As early as in 1924 Merriam and Gosnell published their analysis on the socio-economic characteristics and alleged motivations of non-voters in the majorial elections of Chicago. Also, in 1937, Tingsten related gender, age and occupation and social status to electoral turnout.

[49] See Blais and Dobrzynska forthcoming, Colomer 1991, Crepaz 1990, Hirczy 1994, Jackman 1987, Jackman and Miller 1995, Powell 1980, 1986.

[50] Except in the US, where these studies on turnout decline are numerous. See for instance Abramson and Aldrich 1982, Boyd 1981, Burhnam 1979,1980, Cassell and Hill 1981, Cassell and Luskin 1988, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, Shaffer 1981.

1990:461, Powell 1980:8). Analyses that consider both cross-national and cross-temporal variation are extremely scarce.[51]

In aggregate analyses of turnout the dependent variable is defined as the percentage of people voting[52] over either the registered electorate, or the voting age population in the chosen unit of analysis. In most Western countries there are official figures on all these three items, number of voters, number of registered electors, and voting age population. The accuracy of these figures, however, varies from country to country, especially as far as the electoral census is concerned.[53] When turnout is calculated as the percentage of voters over registered electors, as is the most frequent case, the type of registration and revision procedures are fundamental in determining the degree and direction of measurement error in the dependent variable. When turnout is calculated over the voting age population, then the denominator includes non-citizens and other people without the right to vote, which makes turnout lower than it would be if calculated over the registered electorate (Glass, Squire and Wolfinger 1984:50).

The continuous (though bounded) nature of the dependent variable (usually a percentage) favours the application of relatively simple techniques of multivariate analysis, mainly linear regression, which allows the researcher to disentangle the relative influence of each of the specified explanatory factors over the dependent variable. Moreover, data about some of these explanatory factors are better measured at aggregate levels than at the individual level, in particular certain socio-demographic and economic characteristics. This avoids problems of data validity and reliability so often found in survey analysis, as we shall see later.

In spite of these advantages, ecological analyses declined dramatically in number after the publication of Robinson's (1950) article, in which he found large differences between individual and aggregate correlations of the same variables. The devastating impact of this article for the analysis of ecological or aggregate data, together with the development of survey analysis, resulted in the idea that only

[51] See Armingeon 1993, Ditrich and Johansen 1983, Flickinger and Studlar 1992, Montero 1984.

[52] In some cases only valid votes are reported. Although the percentage of blank and invalid votes is frequently small, it has increasingly grown in importance, particularly in countries with compulsory voting. Some authors (particularly in the French, Italian and Spanish literature, very rarely in the Anglo-Saxon tradition) use the percentage of non-voters.

[53] The problem seems to be particularly acute in Greece, where official figures report almost 9 million potential electors (see Mackie and Rose 1991) over an estimated population (over 15 years) of 8.5 millions (OECD Labour Force Statistics, Paris: OECD 1996). The same problem seems to account for much of the increase in electoral abstention in Portugal (see Bacalhau 1994, Bruneau 1997).

correlations at the level of the individual were *meaningful.*[54] Ecological inferences — inferences about individual behaviour obtained from aggregated data — were avoided by making conclusions applicable to districts, constituencies or countries, and not to individuals, which can be questionable from a theoretical point of view, given that ultimately, conclusions should be about electors (Brunner and Hug 1993:20).

Reactions to this critique of ecological analysis tried to spell out under what conditions ecological inference was legitimate and which procedures allow to draw conclusions at the individual level.[55] These technical solutions were often impractical or required too demanding assumptions. Hanushek, Jackson and Kain (1974) focused on the ecological fallacy as a problem of model specification. Aggregation eliminates idiosyncratic variance of individuals around the group mean, showing stronger relationships between variables than at the individual level. This has a double sided consequence. On the one hand the percentage of explained variance in turnout reaches extremely high values in some studies, especially compared to individual level analyses. On the other hand, the omission of a relevant variable from the model may produce serious bias if it is correlated with any of the explanatory variables included in the model. Since the amount of bias is dependent on the strength of this correlation, it would be much larger in the case of aggregated data. The problem of correct specification may thus be more important than that of ecological inference.

To sum up, ecological inference about individual behaviour is feasible and presumably correct if one takes into account the consequences of aggregation (Brunner and Hug 1993:21ff).[56]

2.2 Individual level analysis: assets and problems of survey analysis

The development of survey analysis applied to the study of mass political behaviour after World War II offered the possibility of finally observing and analysing

[54] See Blalock 1982, particularly chapter 7.

[55] See Duncan and Davis 1953, Goodman 1953 and 1957, Shively 1969, Wanat 1979, and for a summary Achen and Shively 1995.

[56] Firstly, standard errors of the coefficients will be biased and must be corrected using, for instance, Generalised Least Squares. Secondly, regression coefficients will also be biased if the grouping is carried out by the dependent variable or by a variable related to both the dependent and the independent variable. Since this is likely to happen, for instance when using constituencies or other geographical entities as units, one must specify the model in such a way as to make these useless as predictor of the dependent variable (Achen and Shively 1995).

at the level of the individual, and thus to overcome problems or ecological inference and aggregation.[57] It also allowed scholars to include in their models variables as determinants of electoral behaviour that had been difficult to measure before, such as values and attitudes. Some data such as education, income, religious or ethnic composition of the area, and so on can be gathered at an aggregate level, but unless we ask people directly we will not have any information about their level of interest in politics, their attitudes towards parties, or their ideological identities, and we will not be able to asses the impact of these factors on electoral abstention.

In spite of all the possibilities opened up by survey analysis, abstention was relatively little studied compared to other aspects of electoral behaviour; most of the analyses focused on one single country or election, and would end up explaining little variance. Also, political scientists and sociologists became familiar with the statistical techniques able to properly handle dichotomous dependent variables only in the 1980s (see Aldrich and Nelson 1984, DeMaris 1992).

Individual level analysis has also its own risk of fallacious inferences, which come precisely from putting too much emphasis on individual characteristics as determinants of turnout and ignoring the fact that individuals live in contexts that should be taken into account, because they are also likely to have an impact on the level of turnout. As Brown (1991:43) puts it,

> "... the individual-level fallacy and the equilibrium fallacy ... are, respectively, the danger of (1) extracting individuals from a context dependent process, and (2) extracting individuals or aggregates from a dynamic process. These fallacies generate problems at least as severe as the traditional bogeyman, the ecological fallacy."

The ecological fallacy is not necessarily more frequent than the individualistic fallacy, both are the result of faulty specifications (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1993). The exclusion of relevant contextual and systemic factors from the model may have significant consequences. If individual level characteristics are correlated with contextual measures, the exclusion of the latter will produce an incorrect attribution of effects of systemic factors to individual characteristics (Leighley and Nagler 1992:722),

[57] In fact some analyses had been performed at the individual level long before the survey era, by studying electoral census records or even carrying out independent surveys (see Merriam and Gosnell 1924, Tingsten 1937). Census records, however, are not easily available and usually contain information relative to few if any, socio-demographic variables. However, they present the advantage of smaller measurement error and a large number of cases.

and thus we would overestimate the influence of individual features on turnout. At least in the USA, the dominance of the Michigan model, which ignored context but achieved representativeness of the whole country, over the Columbia model, which had a local focus that took into account context, accounts for the scant attention paid to contextual variables in micro analysis of the determinants of voting (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1993:284).

Although there have been enormous advances in the literature concerning the design and implementation of survey questionnaires, as well as on attitude and behaviour measurement,[58] survey analysis is subject to limitations that do not affect aggregate or macro analysis. These come particularly in the forms of errors, both in the design, and in the execution of the survey (Weisberg and Bowen 1977:81ff): errors in the sample design (not sampling correctly from the target population), errors in the questionnaire construction (asking the wrong questions or in a form that is biased towards a particular answer), errors in actually interviewing the defined sample (because of people who are not available or refuse to answer). These are all systematic errors that will damage the accuracy of the results. Their consequences for the analysis of electoral participation are analysed in section 4.3.

2.3 Cross-level analysis

Three conclusions come out of the two previous sections. First, a properly specified model of electoral abstention requires the observation of variables located at different levels. Some determinants of abstention refer to the individual and others to the system within which individuals live. When limited to one single level of observation, either individual or systemic, results of the analysis are likely to be biased because variables correlated both with the dependent and the included independent variables are left outside the model. Secondly, when individual-level analysis is not possible and only aggregate data are available, inferences about individual behaviour should be drawn cautiously. Thirdly, operationalisation and measurement of the dependent and independent variables must be performed with care in order to reduce the amount of (inevitable) bias and uncontrolled error.

[58] See for instance Blalock 1974, 1982, Lazarsfeld and Barton 1951, Nunnally 1978, Zeller and Carmines 1980.

The problem of inferences from one level of analysis to another, as well as the lack of data that combine observations at different levels, has produced a separation of approaches, both theoretically and methodologically. Nonetheless, the question of how to disentangle the influence of systemic or contextual factors from the influence of individual characteristics is crucial in comparative analyses of electoral behaviour. As Huckfeldt and Sprague (1993:281) put it,

> "the actions of individual citizens are to be understood as the intersection between individually defined circumstance and the circumstances of surrounding individuals (...) Measurements on the environment, as well as theoretical arguments based on the environment, occupy fundamental positions in the logical structure underlying theories of individual political behaviour that appeal to explanatory contextual hypotheses."

The cross-level approach that this research takes aims to encompass both individual and systemic explanations of abstention. The analysis of individual characteristics is complemented with the analysis of contextual features. Since the units of analysis and observation are both the individuals and the countries, inferences do not represent a problem, for conclusions can be directly obtained at both levels and do not require inference from one to the other.

The main problem lies, instead, on how to combine in the same model, factors that belong to different levels, not only so as to evaluate their relative importance,[59] but mainly to see the way in which they interact with each other.

It has been argued that the inclusion of individual and higher-level variables in the same regression equation produces problems of estimation[60] that affect hypothesis testing. Multilevel techniques have been recently developed in the field of sociology of education, with the objective of evaluating the relative importance of both individual characteristics and the characteristics of their environment as independent correlates of attitudes and behaviour. Applications of multilevel modelling to the field of electoral behaviour are still very few (Jones, Johnston and Pattie 1992).

Paterson (1991) has given two reasons for using multilevel regression. Substantively, ordinary regression of survey data works only at the individual level, and

[59] As it will be argued in chapter V, the relative weight of systemic vs. individual variables in affecting the likelihood of abstaining depends to a large extent on the amount of variance that is located at each level, which depends, particularly at the systemic level, on the selection of cases.

[60] When the presence of a hierarchical structure of the data is not recognised (people within wards, wards within constituencies, constituencies within countries) the standard errors of the estimates will be biased, because the presence of variation at levels higher than the individual is not recognised (Woodhouse et al. 1993).

therefore is normally not concerned with the influence of systemic factors. Multilevel techniques allow one to disaggregate the relationship between two or more variables into two components. The within-system component describes the relationship inside the system, and is therefore addressed to compare the relationship at the individual level in different settings. The between-systems component takes into account the differences among systems. The final step of multilevel analysis is to explain differences in individual level relationships through system characteristics.

Technically, when using ordinary regression and including variables from different levels of observation (individual, election, country) the standard errors of the coefficients are misleadingly small. This is because systems introduce an extra random component, that is to say, more uncertainty. When the relationship of two individual-level variables is considered within one system we have a smaller error term than when we consider this relationship in different systems. An analysis that includes individuals living in different systems and does not consider systemic factors understates the effect of unmeasured influences.

Although the ideal technique to be applied in this research was clearly multilevel (not only the observation, but also the analysis is carried out at two levels) the limited number of cases at the upper level (elections) and the small amount of variance in the dependent variable did not make it possible.[61] The analysis is therefore performed at the individual level, although observations are taken both from the individual and from the context. The following sections specify in detail the research design and the techniques of analysis.

3 Research design, techniques of analysis and data sources

3.1 Research design

I have chosen to analyse the phenomenon turnout-abstention from the perspective of abstention for both technical and substantive reasons. Technically, figure

[61] Apart from the complication of applying multilevel analysis to a dichotomous dependent variable (see Goldstein 1991), multilevel modelling requires a sufficient number of cases at the higher levels (at least 100) and enough variance in the dependent variable to break it into different levels, a condition that is missing in our data set. However, interaction effects can be modelled using standard logistic regression.

representation is clearer for values between 0 and 20 per cent than for values between 100 and 80 per cent (Hirczy 1992:27). Substantially, we are more interested in abstention than in participation. Even if from a rational choice perspective the puzzling question is why people vote, as far as democratic theory is concerned, the interest is in how to reduce abstention particularly among those with less individual resources and motivations, that is, among those less likely to vote.

The research design of this dissertation covers in fact the three approaches presented in table 2.1. The first part deals with the relationship between individual resources, social integration and political involvement, and the likelihood of an individual's abstaining (chapter III). The individual is taken as the unit of analysis, and both observation and analysis are carried out only at the individual level. Electors are assigned the value 1 if they abstained and 0 if they voted. The relationship between this dummy dependent variable and each of the individual explanatory factors will be analysed for each of the countries (using survey data relative to an election), as well as for the overall sample (including all surveys) to get a reference threshold.

The first question to answer is whether these individual characteristics do indeed affect the levels of abstention, that is, whether electors with high levels of resources, social integration and political involvement abstain less than those with low levels of such individual incentives. Secondly, the analysis should further show whether there is cross-country variation in the extent to which individual characteristics affect the individual likelihood of voting, in other words, whether the influence of individual characteristics homogenous or rather changes from one country to another.

The second part of the analysis, presented in chapter IV, focuses on the systemic level, and disentangles the effect of systemic or contextual factors on aggregates level of electoral abstention. Both observation and analysis are now carried out at the systemic level. In this case the unit of analysis is the election within the country, and the dependent variable is the percentage of registered electors that did not turn out to vote on election day. After an exploratory analysis of the evolution of abstention rates in Western European countries since 1945, the impact of systemic factors (institutions, parties and elections) on the election level of abstention is analysed.

Finally the third and most original part of the research merges individual and systemic observations. In chapter V the main goal is to disentangle the relative impact of each of these two types of variables over the individual likelihood of abstention, as

well as to detect interaction effects. Therefore, there are two levels of observation: the individual and the country, although the individual is defined as the unit of analysis. Variables measuring levels of institutional incentives, party system embeddedness, and election decisiveness are added to the database where individual resources, social integration, and levels of political involvement are included, and the analysis is performed including in the same model both sets of variables and specifying interaction effects.

First, the *effect* of systemic incentives is compared for different types of individuals in order to see which are more sensitive to their contexts, and the *effect* individual incentives on abstention is compared across different settings, to see under what conditions they have a more important role. Secondly, *expected abstention rates* are compared for individuals with different levels of resources and motivations across different institutional and political settings.

3.2 Techniques of analysis

The relationship between abstention and each of the considered explanatory factors (in chapters III and IV) will first be analysed from a bivariate perspective, comparing percentages of abstention for each of the categories of the independent variables, both individual and contextual. If differences in these percentages are substantively important,[62] it will be concluded that the considered explanatory factor has an influence on abstention levels.

The bivariate analysis, however, is not enough, since abstention is a phenomenon determined by multiple factors which are correlated among themselves. It is thus necessary to use an adequate statistical tool that will allow us to estimate the relative impact of each of the factors included in the model controlling for all others.

The most widely used multivariate technique is ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis. Regression coefficients estimate the change produced in the value of the dependent variable by a unit change in the independent variable(s) controlling for

[62] Statistical significance is reported in the individual analysis (chapters III and V), however the main emphasis is put on substantive significance (see Achen 1982, Morrison and Henkel 1970). The same relationships are likely to appear as significant in some countries and non-significant in others just because of differences in sample sizes. In the aggregate analysis (chapter IV) tests for statistical significance are not reported since no inference to any population is intended.

the effect of all other variables included in the model. These coefficients may be compared, for the same variable, from one sample to another.[63] Standardised regression coefficients in turn, represent the change produced in the dependent variable by an standard deviation increase in the independent variable. They allow us to compare the effect of different variables (usually measured on different scales and thus incomparable if not standardised) on the outcome, within the same model.

The multivariate analysis of abstention at the aggregate level (chapter IV) will be performed using OLS regression to explain cross-election variation.

However, for the individual level analysis OLS regression presents a number of problems. The data do not meet the usual OLS assumptions,[64] since the dependent variable is dichotomous: citizens either vote or do not vote. The parameter estimates will be unbiased, but they will not be efficient. Heteroscedasticity would produce incorrect standard errors making it impossible to correctly test hypotheses.

A linear probability model can still be used, if standard errors are corrected using weighted least squares and predicted values outside the 0-1 interval are corrected (Aldrich and Nelson 1984). Although the dependent variable does not in practice take any values other than 0 or 1, a latent continuous variable representing the probability of abstaining can still be imagined. The B coefficients will then represent the change produced on the probability of abstaining by a unit change on the explanatory variable.

The problem with a linear probability model is that it is subject to ceiling and floor effects (the probability of abstaining cannot be smaller than 0 nor larger than 1), particularly if the dependent variable is very skewed as it is our case.[65] Ceiling and floor effects are particularly important when we are interested in the interaction between

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[63] Note that the variables are carefully coded so that (with the exception of age, education and income) the minimum is coded as 0 and the maximum as 1. So all B coefficients may be interpreted as the effect over the dependent variable (be it percentage of non-voters or log odds of non-voting) of increasing the predictor from its minimum to its maximum value.

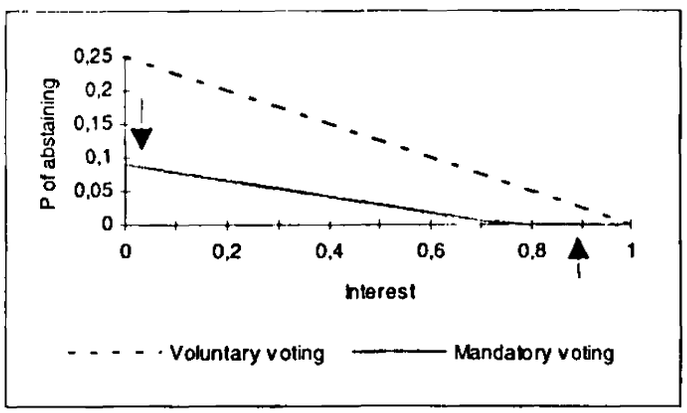
[64] The error term has 0 mean ($E(\varepsilon_i) = 0$), and, if the model is properly specified, it will be uncorrelated with the explanatory variables. This two assumptions are respected even with a dichotomous dependent variable, and guarantee that the parameter estimates are unbiased. However, the distribution of the error term is no longer normal; as the dependent variable, it can only take two values and thus the OLS estimators will not be efficient (i.e. other unbiased estimators will have smaller sampling variances). Nevertheless, the main problem arises from the violation of the assumption of homoscedasticity.
If $var(\varepsilon_i) = P_i (1-P_i)$, being P_i the probability of an individual abstaining, the variance of the error term will be largest when $P_i = .5$ and smallest when $P_i = 0$ or $P_i = 1$. This means that the variance of the error is not equal for all values of the dependent variable and the consequence of heteroscedasticity are biased standard errors.

[65] Note than in the sample only 11 per cent of respondents admit to not voting. In order to ignore this floor effects we would need an abstention rate close to 50 per cent.

individual and systemic variables. Suppose that we wanted to examine the interaction between compulsory voting and individual interest in politics. We might easily conclude from bivariate analysis that both variables decrease the likelihood of abstaining: electors abstain less when voting is mandatory and when they are interested in politics. However, is the effect of having an interest in politics equal when voting is compulsory and when it is not? Is the effect of compulsory voting equal independently of the level of interest?

With a linear probability model we would be *imposing* our data to show that the *effect* of individual interest is smaller where voting is compulsory, because on the one hand compulsory voting decreases the likelihood of abstaining (see left side arrow in figure 2.1), while on the other hand the probability of abstaining cannot be smaller than zero (see right hand arrow in figure 2.1), so the line representing the probability of abstaining under compulsory voting is forced to be flat, just because it is close to the limit of the probability,[66] that imposes a floor effect.

Figure 2.1. The effect of interest in politics on the probability of voting with and without compulsory voting estimated via OLS



If we are interested in measuring the magnitudes of the effects of individual variables and compare them in different contexts, then we must be able to do it independently of the overall level of abstention that those contexts impose, and

[66] This *flattening* effect does not mean that by definition we would have smaller effects of interest in politics under compulsory voting than under voluntary voting. It could be (although it seems extremely unlikely) that there is no effect whatsoever of interest in politics over the probability of abstaining under voluntary voting. In this case the discontinuous line would be flat, and the continuous line could have a larger slope. What the floor effect implies is that the continuous line is flatter than it would be if probabilities did not have a minimum value of 0.

independently of ceiling and floor effects imposed by a dependent variable defined as a probability.

Hence, the dependent variable must be manipulated in order to become unbounded. To get rid of the upper limit (P_i=1) we can use the odds instead of the probability of abstaining (P_i). The odds of abstaining are defined as the ratio between the probability of abstaining and the probability of voting ($P_i /(1- P_i)$). The odds of abstaining vary between 0 (when the probability of abstaining is 0) and +∞ (when the probability of abstaining is 1). So there is no longer a ceiling effect when using the odds of abstaining instead of the probability of abstaining.

To get of the lower limit (P_i=0) we can take the log of the odds ($\ln (P_i /(1 - P_i))$), and then our dependent variable varies between -∞ (when the odds of abstaining are 0) and +∞ (when the odds of abstaining are ∞). Using the log odds of abstaining the floor effect is eliminated.

The logistic regression model is one in which the dependent variable, the log odds (also called logit), is unbounded and maintains a linear relationship with the explanatory variables, defined as follows:

$$Z_i \equiv \ln (P_i /(1 - P_i)) = \Sigma B_k x_k + e_i. \qquad [2.1]$$

There are four possible ways of interpreting the results of a logistic regression. The first one is to use the coefficient B_k itself, which indicates the effect of a unit change in the independent variable k on the logit or the log odds of abstaining ($\ln (P_i (1- P_i))$). Since the log odds or logits are not very intuitive, the coefficients may be exponentiated, in order to interpret them in terms of odds.

The exponent of B_k can be interpreted as the effect of the explanatory variable on the odds of abstaining ($P_i /(1- P_i)$) of a unit increase in the explanatory variable. Thus, if $\exp(B_k)$ is 1, it means that the variable does not affect the likelihood of abstaining vs. voting. If $\exp(B_k)$ is smaller than 1, it means that the variable reduces the odds of abstaining vs. voting, and if $\exp(B_k)$ is larger than 1, it indicates that the variable increases the odds of abstaining vs. voting.

$\text{Exp}(B_k)$ may also be transformed in the percentage change on the odds of abstaining produced by a unit change in the independent variable. This percentage change is given by the formula $100[\exp(B_k)-1]$ (DeMaris 1992:46).

However the problem with $\exp(B_k)$ (and also with the percentage change in the odds as defined above) is that it has a lower limit: $\exp(B_k)$ is never 0, and the percentage

change is never equal or smaller than -100 per cent, even if B_k is very large and negative, as figures 2.2 and 2.3 show.

If all relationships were positive, this would not be problematic for there is no upper limit for $\exp(B_k)$. However, in our case most of the relationships are negative (the independent variables as defined in the next chapters usually *reduce* the likelihood of abstaining) and therefore, if we use $\exp(B_k)$ or the percentage change in the odds we would again be subject to floor effects in the measurement of the magnitude of the effects, which is precisely what we are trying to avoid. Hence, in order to measure the *magnitudes of the effects* of the different determinants of electoral abstention I shall use B_k.

Figure 2.2. Exp(B) by B

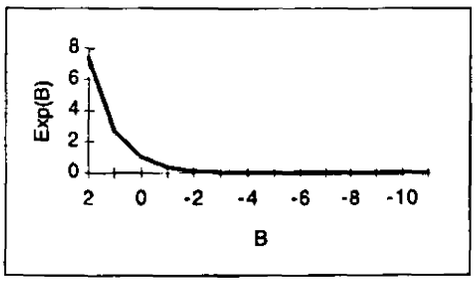
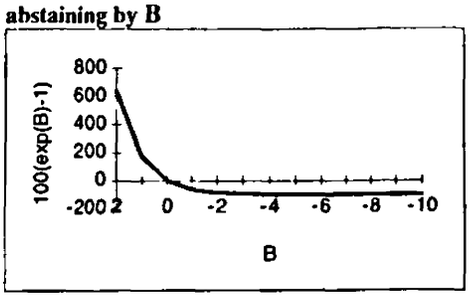


Figure 2.3. Percentage change on the odds of abstaining by B



Finally, the fourth possible interpretation of logistic regression results is to use the coefficients to calculate expected probabilities. Clearing up P_i in equation [2.1],

$$P_i/(1 - P_i) = e^{Z_i} \qquad [2.2]$$

$$P_i = e^{Z_i} / (1 + e^{Z_i}) = 1/(1 + e^{-Z_i}) \qquad [2.3]$$

$$P_i = 1/(1 + e^{-\Sigma B_k x_k + \alpha}) \qquad [2.4]$$

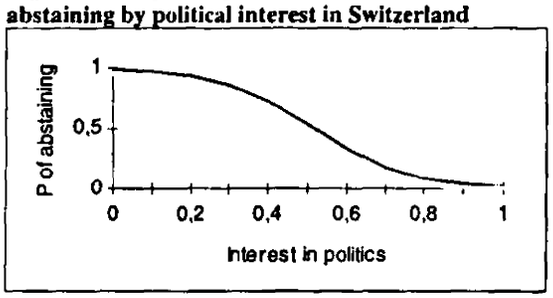
Expected probabilities of voting can thus be calculated for different combinations of values of the explanatory factors through equation [2.4]. Unlike logits, predicted probabilities are not linearly related to the explanatory variables. The model is inherently non-linear and non-additive. It presupposes[67] that (a) the effect of each variable depends on the probability of an individual's voting, and will be stronger for those people whose probability of voting is around 0.5 than for those for whom this probability is close to 0 or to 1, and (b) that the marginal change in the likelihood of an individual voting depends upon values of other factors. Predicted probabilities are

[67] It is important to keep in mind that these are assumptions, constrains imposed on the data by the logit model, and not findings about relationships.

useful to interpret because they represent the *consequences, in terms of expected abstention rates, of the different effects measured in logits*. In other words, an effect may be large in terms of logits but still produce little change in the expected probability of voting, as the analysis in chapter V will clearly show.

An example of how the expected probabilities look according to different levels of an explanatory variables is presented in figure 2.4. As we can appreciate, the slope of the curve is larger when the probability of abstaining is around 0.5 than at the extremes.

Figure 2.4. Expected probabilities of abstaining by political interest in Switzerland



Thus, when taking about the *magnitude of the effects*, I will interpret the logistic coefficient (B_k), and when talking about the *consequences of the effects* I will use predicted probabilities (or predicted percentages of abstention, multiplying the probabilities by 100).

The logistic regression model will be used to analyse the determinants of electoral abstention at the individual level, in chapter III (only individual determinants) and in chapter V (individual and systemic determinants).

A summary of the techniques of analysis adopted for each specific research question is presented in table 2.2.

Table 2.2. Research questions and research techniques

Research questions	Research techniques	Chapter
• Are there differences in the abstention rate of citizens with different individual characteristics? • Which of these three factors (resources, identifications, political attitudes) best explains abstention? • Is the effect of these individual characteristics equal across countries?	• Bivariate: differences and ratios of abstention means by categories of the independent variables and by country. • Multivariate: logistic regression of individual characteristics on abstention by country.	Chapter III
• To what extent is there cross-country and time variation in electoral abstention? • Are there differences in the abstention rate of elections with different contextual characteristics? • Which is the relative impact on abstention of those different contextual factors?	• Analysis of variance. Regression of country dummies on abstention. • Bivariate: differences and odds of abstention by contextual characteristics. • Multivariate: linear regression of contextual factors on the rate of abstention.	Chapter IV
• Is the effect of individual characteristics the same across different institutional and political contexts? • Is the effect of systemic characteristics the same for individuals with different levels of resources and motivations? • What is the relative impact of individual vs. systemic factors on the likelihood of abstaining? • What are the consequences of individual and systemic characteristics in terms of expected changes in the level of abstention?	• Logistic regression with specification of cross-level interaction effects. Interpretation of the B coefficients. • Estimation of the predicted probabilities of abstaining for different values of the individual and systemic determinants of abstention.	Chapter V

3.3 Data sources

3.3.1 Individual-level data sources

Individual-level data about electoral behaviour in national parliamentary elections, socio-economic characteristics and political attitudes, are obtained from post-electoral surveys and Eurobarometers. Eurobarometers present the enormous advantage of being almost[68] entirely comparable and ready to use, in the sense that cross-country homogenisation has been realised at the moment of designing the questionnaire. However they present also several liabilities. Firs, since they are not mainly focused on electoral behaviour but on European public opinion on the EU, they do not include many items measuring political attitudes that would be relevant in our analysis.

Secondly the time passed from the election to the interview is not constant for all countries — from almost four years in Germany, to a few days in Italy — which may produce non-random measurement error. In almost all cases, the question from which we take our dependent variable refers to an act that occurred some time before the moment of the interview. While our explanatory variables are measured by the time of the interview, the dependent variable (non-voting), is related to something that happened some months or even some years before. Not only the situation and characteristics of people may have changed from the election to the interview, but there may also be some recall error in the dependent variable.

Post-electoral surveys, on the other hand present the reverse characteristics. They are hard to merge in a comparable frame, but they are realised immediately after the election and include detailed information about political attitudes, allowing the construction of indices measuring complex attitudes.

Table 2.3 presents the data used for the analysis. The Eurobarometer to be used is the 41.1, realised just after the European Parliament elections of 1994, which includes a direct question on whether the respondent voted in the last general election of his/her country. Even though Eurobarometers were available for more cases than those where they are actually used (Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands and Great Britain), post-electoral data were preferred, given its ad-hoc character to the study of electoral phenomena, its larger sample size and its proximity to the election date. Only in the

[68] Only a few variables have different codings for the different countries, among which, inexplicably, size of locality. In general, however, the Eurobarometers provide a large set of common indicators.

case of Ireland were the Eurobarometer data preferred to the only post-electoral survey available (the 1989 Lansdowne panel study), since although the latter included extensive information about reported reasons of non-voters for abstaining, it was very incomplete regarding the explanatory variables included in our model.

In the case of Spain reference will be made to both sets of data, the post electoral and the Eurobarometer to try to cover all variables in the best and most accurate way, but where no specification is made, data are taken from the postelectoral survey. Note also that the German database is not a postelectoral survey but the merger of a monthly barometer that includes among many other public opinion variables, electoral behaviour in the past election. This increases the sample size considerably, but results in less quality for our purposes since it does not include a specific question on whether the elector turned out to vote,[69] nor many indicators on the relevant variables of our model, as we shall see later. Due to the particular characteristics of the 1990 German election (the first after the reunification), only the West is considered.

[69] Here, as in most Eurobarometers, respondents are directly asked to which party they voted for, assuming electoral participation. This usually results in an larger under-representation of non-voters, for some respondents that abstained are discouraged from acknowledging it.

Table 2.3. Survey data characteristics

Country and election date	Survey and Source (1)	Sample size	Electorate
Belgium 24.11.91	1991 General Election Study (ISPO, K.U. Leuven)	4,511	7,144,884
Denmark 12.12.90	Danish Election Study 1990 (DDA 1564)	974	3,941,499
Finland 17.3.91	Finish Parliamentary Election Study 1991 (Research Institute for Social Sciences, University of Tampere)	1,472	4,060,778
France 21.03.93	Eurobarometer 41.1 postelectoral EP elections 1994 (ICPRS 6535)	966	37,871,350
West Germany 02.12.90	Politbarometer West (January-December 1991)- German Election Study (ICPRS 6390)	11,269	48,099,251
Greece 10.10.93	Eurobarometer 41.1 postelectoral EP elections 1994 (ICPRS 6535)	920	8,972,258
Ireland 25.11.92	Eurobarometer 41.1 postelectoral EP elections 1994 (ICPRS 6535)	875	2,557,036
Italy 28.03.94	Eurobarometer 41.1 postelectoral EP elections 1994 (ICPRS 6535)	984	47,435,689
Netherlands 06.09.89	Dutch Paliamentary Election Study 1989 (ICPRS 9950)	1,754	11,112,189
Norway 13.09.93	Norvegian Election Study 1993 (Nowegian Social Sciences Data Services)	2,194	3,259,967
Portugal 06.10.91	Eurobarometer 41.1 postelectoral EP elections 1994 (ICPRS 6535)	874	8,322,481
Spain 06.06.93	Postelectoral 1993 (CIS 2061)	5,001	31,030,511
Sweden 15.09.91	Swedish Election Study 1991 (SSD 0391)	3,700	6,413,172
Switzerland 20.10.91	Analyse des Elections Fédérales 1991	1,002	4,510,784
	British General Election Study 1992 (ESRC 33066)	2,855	43,275,316

(1) See appendix x.x for more details.

3.3.2 System-level data sources

For the system level characteristics the following sources have been used. Abstention levels for each lower-house election included in the analysis of chapter IV are taken from Mackie and Rose 1991, Mackie 1991 and 1992, and from the Political Data Yearbooks published by the European Journal of Political Research (1992, 1993, 1994).

Information on the presence of compulsory voting and voting facilities is taken from Cadart 1983, Crewe 1981, Herman and Mendel 1977, and Mackie and Rose 1991. Data on the characteristics of the electoral systems are from Cadart 1983, Clogg 1983, Katz 1986, Lijphart 1994, Mackie and Rose 1991, Müller 1996b, Sternberger and Vogel 1969 and Vegleris 1981.

Data on religious segmentation are taken from Bartolini and Mair 1990b, Lijphart 1984 and Lorwin 1971. Information on ethno-linguistic fragmentation was kindly offered by Bartolini (see Bartolini and Mair 1990b) and completed with Clogg 1987, Flora 1983, and Lane and Ersson 1987.

Data on party and trade union density were as well offered by Bartolini (see Bartolini 1983 and 1996a, Bartolini and Mair 1990b) and completed with Bruneau and Macleod 1989, Day and Degenhardt 1980, von Beyme 1985, Clogg 1983 and 1987, Grunner 1977 and 1984, Katz and Mair 1992, Jacobs 1989, Morlino 1995, Schmitter 1995, Traxler 1992 and Vilrokx and Leemput 1992.

Data on the institutional and political decisiveness of the election are from Budge 1994, Gallagher, Laver and Mair 1995, Huber and Inglehart 1995, Woldendorp, Keman and Budge 1993, and the European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbooks.

Each table in chapter IV makes reference to the original sources.

4 Variable operationalisation and measurement

Both at the individual and at the systemic level the explanatory variables presented in chapter I are broad concepts (resources, integration, political involvement, institutional incentives, party system embeddedness, decisiveness of the elections). An important part of the research is the conceptualisation of each of the elements and the

relationship between them and the dependent variable, so that they result in answerable research questions, presented in the form of testable hypotheses.

Once these have been formulated, a second task must be performed, namely the measurement of these properties whose relationships we are to study, which must be defined in terms of empirical indicators. Operational definitions involve causal theories that link properties with some observable indicators that can be directly measured (Blalock 1982:26). Even if operational definitions always look meagre when compared to the conceptual definitions, they too must have strong theoretical underpinnings.

Two main problems occur related to the operationalisation processes: how to operationalise and measure complex concepts, and how to find indicators that are equivalent across different settings, which becomes specially important in a comparative perspective.

If measurement is the assignment of numerals to objects according to some rules,[70] the key point is how to define these rules, that is, the criteria to assign one numeral and not another to each individual or case. With some properties, the choice of the rule will be clear: gender, country, year. Most properties, however, are much more difficult to measure. The concept of interest in politics may appear easily measurable through a single indicator, for instance asking people to report their own level of interest in politics. Single indicators, however, need to be good, in the sense of accounting for most of the variation of the unobserved variable. Reported evaluations are often not so reliable, and specially when measuring political attitudes, they may be not the best indicator in terms of validity. It is more advisable to combine several different indicators into an index or use multiple indicators procedures, which would provide more valid and reliable measures of the concept.[71]

Index construction may vary according to the number of items included, the weights assigned to particular items, the manner in which the items are combined. The use of indices solves problems of multidimensionality and missing data, and at the same time cancels the effects of non-random error term associated with a single measure.

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[70] It is important to keep in mind that numerals have no quantitative meaning unless we decide to give them one, they are simply symbols of a special kind. Numerals with quantitative meaning become numbers (Kerlinger 1973:427).

[71] Validity refers to the extent to which we are measuring what we think we are measuring, that is, the extent to which the chosen measurable indicator(s) truly reflects the variance of the underlying unmeasurable variable. Reliability refers to the accuracy or precision of our measurement instrument. On validity and reliability see for instance Zeller and Carmines 1980, Nunnally 1978.

They also contribute to model parsimony helping to deal with many variables, as in the case of this research.

Once the measurement rules have been specified (one or several indicators have been selected, and/or combined in an index in order to measure a given property), then the problem of their equivalence arises. This is particularly important as far as individual data are concerned, given that the same survey question may make reference to different underlying variables in different political contexts. In the case where common indicators do not guarantee equivalence, they should be complemented with case specific indicators in order to achieve equivalence. Therefore, indices of individual level variables may be based upon different questions in different countries.

In our case, the criticism of non-comparability of indicators and/or indices may be raised, not only because of the comparative nature of the research, but also because of the fact that the same variable may be measured with one poor indicator in one country, and with a very complete set of questions in another.[72] Such is the case of interest/apathy, measured with one single indicator in Germany or the Eurobarometer, and with four in Belgium, Denmark or Sweden. It can always be argued that if any of the expected cross-national differences in relationships are found they can be due to different operationalisations as much as to different political contexts. Beyond being aware of this limitation, there is not much in reply to answer to this criticism until more effort is made in co-ordinating electoral surveys cross-nationally:

> "The collation of comparative tables from independently designed surveys will invariably look tricky and the interpretation of findings from such 'secondary analysis' will often be fraught with hazards, but this is clearly an essential step in the development of systematic research on the dynamics of mass reactions to politics in systems of different structure." (Rokkan 1970a:15)

The following sections present the processes of operationalisation, description of indicators and index creation for each of the relevant variables.

[72] In fact one political attitude (attempting to measure levels of political alienation) was removed from the analysis given the very different indicators available from country to country.

4.1 Individual variables

In chapter I three main individual sets of characteristics were identified as determinants of abstention: level of resources, the intensity of social integration, and the degree of political involvement. The path towards a common coding posed different difficulties for both variables and countries. Some individual characteristics are easy to measure because they are conceptualised in units that we use every day: such is the case of age, or income. Others are categories created for the purpose of the analysis and thus (ignoring measurement error), easy to identify (for instance, new electors, or non-voters). Finally, others are much more vague constructs that had to be defined and operationalised via different ad hoc indicators included in the existing surveys, which were not always the most appropriate but were nevertheless the only available.

The problem of operationalisation was further complicated by the fact, already mentioned, that the original surveys were very different from one another, some of them including very good data on all relevant variables as well as a number of indicators for the construction of each of the indices on political attitudes. Belgium, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden had very good questionnaires and large sample sizes. On the contrary, the Eurobarometer, the German and the Spanish data lacked enough/appropriate indicators for the measurement of political attitudes, and did include no information on income nor on social integration. In the next sections we shall give a closer look at the way in which the coding scheme was constructed.

4.1.1 Resources

Individual resources include measures of age, education and income, all of them usually available in survey data. Table 2.4 presents the number of items available in each survey to measure these variables.

Table 2.4. Indicators of individual resources available for each country

	Be	Dk	Fi	Ge	Ne	No	Sp	Se	Sw	GB	Eb(1)
Resources											
Years of age	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Level of education	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Income	1	2	1	-	1	1	-	1	-	1	1

(1) Eurobarometer 41.1 used for France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

Table 2.5. Operationalisation of education

Country	Coding
Belgium	1: None or primary 2: Secondary/vocational 3: Higher/university
Denmark	1: Folkeskole 2: Mellemskole 3: Studentenreksamen
Finland	1: Elementary school 2: Comprenhensive/vocational/likeo/highschool 3: Matriculation/upper vocational/university
France	1: Up to 16 years old 2: 17 to 19 3: Over 19 years old
Germany	1: (keine) Hauptschulabschluss 2: Mittleschulabschlusse 3: Abitur, hochschulreife, noch in der schule
Greece	1: Up to 12 years old 2: 13 to 18 3: Over 18 years
Ireland	1: Up to 15 years 2: 16 to 18 years 3: Over 18 years
Italy	1: Up to 14 years 2: 14 to 18 3: Over 18 years
Netherlands	1: Elementary 2: VGLO,LAVO,LTS,LEAD,HBS,MAVO,MEAD,UTS,MMS,HAVO,Gym, Lyceum, Atheneum 3: HTS, HEAD, SPD, SPA, University
Norway	1: Grunnskole 2: Gymnasium 3: University
Portugal	1: Up to 11 years 2: 12 to 15 3: Over 15 years
Spain	1: Primaria, bachiller elemental, EGB, none 2: Bachiller superior, BUP, FP 3: Superior
Sweden	1: Primary/comprenhensive school 2: Secondary/vocational/highschool 3: University/higher
Switzerland	1: Primaire, primaire superieure, secondaire, regionale 2: Ecole profesionelle 3: Collège, gymnase, technicum, école normale, université, Poly, EPUL, HEC
Great Britain	1: No qualifications 2: CSE, O levels, A levels 3: Degree or higher education over degree

Age and income do not present particular problems of measurement. Age was measured as years of age, and income as to which of the four income quartiles of each country's income distribution the respondent belonged. Education however, is far more problematic to measure given the variety of educational systems and ways of coding it present in our sample of countries. For the countries that included a categorical original classification, three broad categories have been distinguished: primary education or less, some or completed secondary education and some or completed higher education. However the Eurobarometer data only included a variable measuring respondent's age when s/he left full time education. This way of measuring education, although resulting in a nice comparable continuous variable, incorporates some measurement error, for two different people may leave full time education at the same age having obtained very different qualifications. In this case we have simply opted for dividing each country's sample into three groups of equal size.

4.1.2 Social integration

As indicators of social integration only church attendance and marital status were available. None of them presented any specific problems of operationalisation. Both variables are presented in a dichotomised nature to homogenise countries to the maximum level. These variables represent, therefore, frequent or regular church attendance and living with a permanent partner respectively.

Table 2.6. Indicators of social integration available for each country

				Ge	Ne	No(1)	Sp	Se	Sw(1)	GB	Eb(2)
[illegible] integration											
Church attendant	1	--	1	1	1	1	--	1	1	1	1
Married or living as	1	1	1	1	1	1	--	1	1	1	1

(1) In Norway and Switzerland there was no indicator for frequency of church attendance. Religious appartenance is taken as a proxy. (2) Eurobarometer 41.1 used for France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

4.1.3 Political involvement

Both apathy and politicisation, are measured through indices built upon available items. Interest in politics is measured through reported general attitudes of interest and/or apathy towards political matters, as well as by three more objective standard indicators of interest in politics: frequency of discussions about politics,

frequency of reading on political matters, and knowledge about certain political questions and/or personalities.

Table 2.7. Indicators of interest in politics available for each country

	Be	Dk	Fi	Ge	Ne	No	Sp	Se	Sw	GB	Eb(1)
Interest in politics											
Reported interest	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	1	-	1
Frequency of discussions	1	1	1	-	1	1	-	1	3	1	-
Frequency of reading	1	1	1	-	1	-	-	1	-	1	-
Political knowledge	12	-	5	-	-	-	-	7	6	10	-
Total interest/apathy	4	3	4	1	3	2	-	4	2	3	1

(1) Eurobarometer 41.1 used for France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

The index is computed according to the following formula:

Index of interest = sum (items)/(n of items - n of missing items)

For instance, the index of interest/apathy in Finland is calculated as the sum of four items (one for interest in politics, one for frequency of reading about politics, one for frequency of political discussions and one combined indicator of political knowledge built on the 12 items), divided by 4 minus the number of missing values that each individual reports in all those four variables. If a case has information on the four items, then the divisor is 4 (no missing values), and the index has the value of the average of the four item. If a case has information on just one, the index takes the value of that item. This way the number of cases out of the analysis because of missing information is reduced, something particularly important in the analysis of abstention given the scarcity of non-voters.[73]

The index of politicisation incorporates four items: party membership, trade union membership, party closeness and whether or not the respondent places herself in the left-right continuum. The index is calculated following the same procedure.

[73] On the side of the liabilities, this way of calculating the index presents a problem of reducing the variance that the variable would have were missing values absent (see Little and Rubin 1987).

Table 2.8. Indicators of politicisation available for each country

	Be	Dk	Fi	Ge	Ne	No	Sp	Se	Sw	GB	Eb(1)
Politicisation											
Party member	1	-	1	-	1	1	-	1	1	-	-
Trade union member	1	1	1	1	-	1	-	1	1	1	1
Party closeness	1	1	1	1	1	1	13[74]	1	1	1	1
Situated in L-R dimension	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	-	1
Total politicisation	3	3	4	3	3	4	2	4	4	2	3

(1) Eurobarometer 41.1 used for France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

4.1.4 Index of individual incentives

In cross-country comparisons of the effect of individual resources, as well as in the analysis of interaction effects between individual and systemic variables, it would be useful to employ a single index that summarised all individual factors that are positively related to electoral participation. The use of such an index facilitates the analysis at least in two was. First, it simplifies it, by handling one single individual-level variable instead of seven. Secondly it reduces the number of missing values, for even if one country lacks information on a specific variable, the index can still be computed on the basis of all other variables.

The index of individual incentives is created by adding 1 for each of the following characteristics that the individual has: middle age (between 30 and 60 years old), high education, high income (above the country median), married, regular church attendant, highly interested and highly politicised (above the country median). The total sum is then divided by 7 minus the number of missing values, as in the case of political involvement. A value of 0 expresses the lowest possible level of individual incentives to participation, while a value of 1 represents the maximum value, according to the information available for each individual.

Table 2.9 presents the coding scheme for the individual determinants of abstention introduced in the analysis.

[74] The Spanish question for party closeness was very different from all other countries. Instead of one indicator for the intensity of closeness towards a specific party, Spanish respondents were asked to locate themselves in a scale of closeness/distance with respect to each of the 13 largest parties. So electors could acknowledge, for instance, that they were close to two or more parties.

Table 2.9. Variable coding: individual incentives

Variable name	Coding
Age	Respondent years of age
New elector	1: Respondent is for the first time entitled to vote (age requirement) 0: Respondent has already been able to vote in a previous general election
Education	Respondent's level of education 1: Low education (primary education or less) 2: Medium education (secondary education) 3: High education (higher or university education)
Income	Respondent's household income (where unavailable, respondent him/herself) belongs to the 0: lowest quartile 1: second quartile 2: third quartile 3: highest quartile of the country's sample income distribution
Church attendance	1: Respondent goes to church regularly 0: Respondent does not go to church regularly
Marital status	1: Respondent is married or lives with a permanent partner 0: Respondent does not live with a permanent partner
Interest	Index made of the average score of four indicators (reported interest, reading, discussing and knowledge about politics) where available. Ranks from 0 (highest level of apathy towards politics) to 1 (highest level of interest in politics).
Politicisation	Index made of the average score of available indicators (ability to locate oneself on the left-right dimension, closeness to a political party, party and trade union membership). Ranks from 0 (lowest level of politicisation) to 1(highest level of politicisation).
Individual incentives	Index made out of the previous variables (age, education, income, church attendant, married, interested in politics, politicised), ranks from 0 (minimum level) to 1 (maximum level).
Non-voter	1: Respondent did not vote in the last general election of his/her country 0: Respondent voted in the last general election of his/her country

4.2 Systemic variables

At the systemic level the link between the three main broad explanatory factors and the indicators is more problematic than in the case of individual level variables. These three features, institutional incentives, party system embeddedness and decisiveness of the election are clearly multidimensional and thus require more careful operational definitions. Table 2.10 shows the three main explanatory factors, their dimensions and the indicators for each of them.

Table 2.10. System level characteristics, dimensions and indicators

Characteristics	Dimensions	Indicators
Institutional incentives	Direct legal incentives	Compulsory voting Voting facilities
	Electoral system incentives	Electoral threshold Ballot structure
	Cultural differentiation	Religious segmentation Ethno-linguistic fragmentation
	Organisational encapsulation	Trade union density Party density
		Direct election of the head of State Political decentralisation Direct democracy
		Visibility of the incumbent/opposition dimension Differentiation of political offers Expected change as a result of electoral outcome

4.2.1 Institutional incentives

Two types of institutional incentives for participation must be operationalised: direct legal incentives and indirect incentives related to the electoral system.

Compulsory voting is measured in a dichotomous way: the variable scores 1 when mandatory voting is present, and 0 when not. Apart from a few ambiguous cases (see chapter IV section 3.1), this operationalisation does not involve major problems.

The index of voting facilities scores from 0 (no voting facilities present) to 1 (maximum level of voting facilities). The index summarises the effect of five potential voting facilities: proxy voting, advance voting, postal voting, Sunday voting and any

other facility that affects, that is not restricted to any specific population group (such as armed forces or residents abroad).[75]

Index of voting facilities = Number of facilities available / 5

Table 2.11. Variable coding: institutional incentives

Variable name	Coding
Compulsory voting	1: Compulsory voting 0: Not compulsory
Voting facilities	Index of voting facilities scoring from 0 (no voting facilities) to 1 (all voting facilities). When dichotomised 0 is below the median and 1 above.
Effective threshold	Index of effective threshold as defined by Lijphart. When dichotomised, 0 is below 10% and 1 above.
Preference expression	1: Preference expression possible 0: Preference expression not possible

The electoral system's effective threshold is considered as an indicator of the cost of getting representation for a party. It depends on the electoral formula, the district magnitude and the presence of legally established thresholds. I have taken Lijphart's operationalisation,[76] which defines the effective threshold as the average between the threshold of representation (minimum share of the vote a party needs to have guaranteed a seat under the most unfavourable circumstances) and the threshold of exclusion (minimum share of the vote a party needs to be able to win a seat under the most favourable circumstances)[77]:

Effective Threshold = [50%/(M+1)] + [50%/2M]
being M the number of seats

The second characteristic of the electoral system that is expected to affect turnout is the presence or absence of the possibility of expressing preferences within or across parties. Closed lists and uninominal districts are considered as not offering candidate preference expression channels, while two-vote systems, STV and lists including preference voting are considering as offering the possibility of expressing support for a specific candidate.

[75] See table 4.4 in chapter IV.
[76] See Lijphart (1994:25ff).
[77] Of course in the presence of legal thresholds the effective threshold may be modified.

4.2.2 Party system embeddedness

Strong links between parties and society can be based on either high levels of cultural differentiation or on the development of strong organisational encapsulation networks as defined in chapter I.

The extent of cultural differentiation will only be measured for two cleavages: the religious and the ethno-linguistic. The religious cleavage is probably the most complex one, for it includes four different dimensions deeply interlinked: countries may differ on whether they are Catholic vs. Protestant, religiously homogeneous or heterogeneous, polarised or not polarised around the relationship between the Church and the State, and on the extent to which they are religiously segmented.[78]

The last of these four elements of the religious cleavage is taken to operationalise the level of cultural differentiation along religious lines. The extent to which the religious vs. the non-religious groups constitute separate subcultures, i.e., the level of segmentation, requires indicators that grasp the intensity and the type of links between social groups, political parties and other voluntary, cultural and/or interest representation associations. Unfortunately data on this matter are difficult to gather and the operationalisation will be based mainly on previous classifications by other authors (Lorwin 1971, Lijphart 1984, Bartolini and Mair 1990b).[79] With a few problematic cases,[80] this variable has finally been operationalised as a dummy, distinguishing between high to medium segmentation levels and medium to low segmentation.

As for indicator of ethno-linguistic fragmentation Rae's (1968) index of fractionalisation can be applied to social ethno-linguistic groups instead of to parties:

$$F = 1 - \Sigma t_i^2$$

being t_i the proportion of the population belonging to the ith group

[78] See chapter IV section 4.1.1.

[79] These classifications take the country and not the cleavage as unit of analysis, and therefore do not consider the possibility that these links between electoral and corporate organisations may vary along time within one country (see Méndez Lago forthcoming for an analysis of the electoral consequences of depillarisation).

[80] France is included in the category of medium segmentation by Lijphart and Lorwin, while Bartolini and Mair "consider France not just a case of difficult or ambiguous location, but rather as probably the best European example of lack of cleavage saturation" (1990b:247). Finland is considered as a case of low level of segmentation by Lorwin, while Lijphart and Bartolini argue for a medium level. Finally Switzerland is considered as highly segmented by Bartolini and Mair and Lijphart, but in the medium category for Lorwin.

The index ranks from 0 to 1 and can be interpreted as the probability that picking two individuals within a country, they will belong to different ethno-linguistic groups. As it will be seen in chapter IV this index clearly divides ethno-linguistic heterogeneous countries from homogeneous ones.

As far as the level of organisational density is concerned, the operationalisation and measurement are relatively simpler. For each country I shall take the number of party and trade union members over the national electorate and the dependent labour force respectively (Katz and Mair 1992).

Party density = Number of party members / Electorate
Trade union density = Number of trade union members / Dependent labour force

Table 2.12. Variable coding: party system embeddedness

Variable name	Codes
Religious segmentation	1: High-medium segmentation 0: Low-medium segmentation
Ethnic fragmentation	1: Ethnically heterogeneous 0: Ethnically homogeneous
Party density	Index of party density, scoring from 1 (maximum density) to 0 (minimum density) When dichotomised 0 stands for below the overall mean, and 1 for above.
Trade Union density	Index of trade union density, scoring from 1 (maximum density) to 0 (minimum density) When dichotomised 0 stands for below the overall mean, and 1 for above.

4.2.3 Decisiveness of election

Parliamentary elections can be important in two ways: in the extent to which Parliaments are central institutions within the overall political system, and in the extent to which parliamentary elections actually determine the formation of the new government.

The first element implies putting parliamentary elections in the broad institutional context of each political system. The presence of direct elections of the president or head of State and regional parliaments, are considered as indicators of a lesser relative importance of the national parliamentary elections. Above all, the existence of effective extra-parliamentarian modes of law enacting, such as referendums, is likely to remove importance from the lower chamber thereby also

reducing the significance of parliamentary elections. All these factors are introduced as dummy variables.

The political importance of elections makes reference to the more fluid idea of political context. Firstly, as far as the incumbent-opposition dimension is concerned, the presence of a single party majority or a majority coalition government is considered as an indicator of clear division between government and opposition, while coalition and minority governments in the previous legislature are assumed to indicate a more blurred distinction. Another indicator of unclear government-opposition limits will be the presence of changes in the composition of the government in the previous legislature.

The distinctiveness of political offers can be operationalised through a variety of ways: by using voters location of parties in an ideological left-right scale (Sani and Sartori 1983), through expert judgements (Castles and Mair 1984 and 1997, Hubert and Inglehart 1995), or even through party policy positions (Budge, Robertson and Hearl 1987). Unlike experts' judgement or party statements, voter's location of political parties can be used to compute differences or distances as perceived from the electorate. By computing the standard deviation of each party position, we can also grasp how clear the perceptions of the differences are. However, not all survey data include questions considering the voters position of political parties on the left-right dimension.

I shall thus take expert location of political parties and transform it into an indicator of ideological distance between parties. Since the distance in the left-right continuum may be affected by the number of parties in the system (see Bartolini and Mair 1990a), we shall take the distance between the two main parties or core divergence (Sani and Sartori 1983, Castles and Mair 1997).

Distance = Difference between two main parties / difference between extreme values of scale

Finally, as argued in chapter I, elections are considered to be more decisive the more they bring expectations of change, or the closer the result is expected to be. In principle, as far as electoral participation is concerned, only potential change matters, for what we are postulating is a psychological effect of a perception prior to the election that would increase turnout independently of whether actual change arises or not (Cox 1988:769). The actual outcome of the election cannot influence a behaviour that is produced before it is known.

The problem here is that while most of the measures of closeness are conceptually ex-ante (they refer to the expected result in order to explain a behaviour that happens before the election outcome is known), at the same time they are operationally ex-post (they measure differences in terms of votes or seats of the actual electoral outcome). Since pre-electoral surveys were not available for all elections analysed, an ex-post indicator of closeness of the election has been used: the difference in seats between the two main competing parties or coalitions. The smaller the distance, the higher the probability of change, even if it finally does not occur. Actual change in government as a result of the election has also been introduced as a proxy for expected change.

Table 2.13. Variable coding: decisiveness of the election

Variable name	Codes
Direct election of the head of State	1: Direct election of a head of State 0: Not directly elected
Political decentralisation	1: Federal/Autonomic State 0: Centralised State
Direct democracy	1: Over 1 referendum a year between 1945 and 1993 0: Less than 1 referendum a year
Government-opposition division	1: Clear 0: Unclear
Distinctiveness of political options	Ideological distance between 2 main parties relative to scale. When dichotomised 0 stands for below the median and 1 for above.
Change as a result of the election	1: Change 0: Stability
Closeness	Difference in % of seats between main parties or blocks. When dichotomised 0 stands for below the median and 1 for above.

4.3 Measurement problems in the analysis of abstention

Measurement problems not only concern the explanatory variables, but also the dependent variable itself. This section defines the operationalisation of electoral abstention and reviews some problems that may arise when measuring and analysing it.

Table 2.14. Reported and real abstention

Country	Percentage of non-voters in sample (N) (1)	Percentage of non-voters in population	Under-representation of non-voters (2)	Percentage of non response in sample (3)
Belgium	2.9 (123)	7.3	- 4.4	6.1
Denmark	8.7 (182)	17.2	- 8.5	9.0
Finland	13.7 (182)	31.6	- 17.9	9.9
France	20.1 (191)	30.7	- 10.6	1.6
Germany	9.6 (1041)	21.4	- 11.8	3.3
Greece	3.6 (33)	21.8	- 18.2	0.7
Ireland	13.5 (112)	31.5	- 18.0	5.0
Italy	3.7 (35)	12.7	- 9.0	3.7
Netherlands	7.4 (111)	19.7	- 12.3	14.1
Norway	14.0 (306)	24.2	- 10.2	0.3
Portugal	14.6 (125)	31.8	- 17.2	1.8
Spain	14.0 (694)	23.6	- 9.6	1.1
Sweden	6.4 (165)	13.2	- 6.8	1.9
Switzerland	36.3 (362)	54.0	- 17.7	0.6
Great Britain	12.5 (356)	22.2	- 9.7	0.1

(1) Percentage of respondents that admitted not having voted in the countries last general election over those that gave an answer (yes/no) to the question. (2) Difference between real and reported percentage of non-voters. (3) Percentage of respondents that did not answer to the question of whether they voted or not in the last general elections over the total sample size.

At the aggregate level electoral abstention is defined as the proportion of non-voters over the electorate, that is over the number of people included in the electoral census.[81] Conversely, the turnout is defined as the proportion of voters over the electorate. This definition does not regard the content of the vote, neither whether it is valid or invalid, filled in or blank. All votes cast are considered as participative acts, whatever their content may express.[82] As far as the denominator is concerned, this definition also takes a restrictive approach, by considering the electorate (and not the voting age population), as the reference. The voting age population includes a number of people without the legal right to vote, which would be artificially inflating the abstention rate. Problems related to enfranchisement and registration procedures are out of the scope of this thesis. The number of electors and of votes cast are available for all the countries in this study in official publications, and thus the rate of abstention can be computed easily.

At the individual level, a person is considered a non-voter when s/he declares not to have voted in the last general election of her/his country. Here again the content

[81] In order to convert a proportion into a more convenient percentage, this quantity is multiplied by 100.
[82] For other operationalisations see for instance Hirczy 1992.

of the vote is ignored. The rate of abstention for a specific election can also be computed on the basis of survey data, dividing the number of people that declare not having voted by the sample size.[83] We can then compare the sample estimate of abstention with the official abstention rate. As table 2.14 shows, results in this respect are rather discouraging. The difference between the estimated (sample) and the real (population) abstention is over 10 per cent in 9 of our 15 samples.[84]

There are a few sources of error (apart from sampling error) that may account for this difference between population parameters and sample estimates: bias due to non-response, bias due to quota sampling, socially desirable answers and inflated electoral census.

Survey analysis is based on the idea of making inferences from a sample of individuals obtained from a population. In order to make valid inferences with a known probability of error, each individual from the population must have a known probability of being included in the sample. Individuals are selected at random and then interviewed. However, even if individuals are selected at random, some of them will refuse to answer the whole questionnaire, will not be at home, and so on. This would not be a problem if non-respondents were evenly composed of voters and non-voters, but this seems extremely unlikely. For the very same reasons that non-voters did not vote, they may be less willing to answer a questionnaire on political attitudes and behaviour, and thus they are likely to be underrepresented (Font 1992:129).[85]

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[83] People without the right to vote where eliminated whenever they were identifiable (under 18 years old, not national, etc.).

[84] However, Swaddle and Heath (1989) have compared the effect of various determinants of electoral participation both using survey reported and official records of turnout, and they conclude that survey data show weaker, but not different relationships. So if anything, survey data underestimate the effect of individual characteristics on the likelihood of voting.

[85] "Even with probability sampling, the sampled and the target population usually differ because of the presence of 'refusals', 'not-at-homes', 'unable to classify' and so on. The consequence of these disturbances is that certain sampling units, although assigned a known chance of selection by the sampling plan, did not in fact have this chance in practice." (Cochran, Mosteller and Tukey 1970:15). This can be corrected so that sample and population marginals are equal. Disparities in the relative sizes of segments — groups of people with specific characteristics — in the sample as compared with the population, whether accidental or planned, must be taken into account when we attempt to estimate averages over the whole population. One way in which this adjustment can be performed consists in weighting each individual in the sample by the ratio "fraction of population in that segment/fraction of sample in that segment". The result of this adjustment is a new 'sampled population' — one such that the relative sizes of its various segments are very nearly correct. Since the weights are the same for all the sample individuals in a given segment, adjustment does nothing to redress any selectivity which may be present *within* segments. (Cochran et al. 1970:13)

The problem is more acute when quota sampling is used as a cheaper substitute for the expensive random sampling method. In this case interviewers are free to select their respondents following specific quotas of age and gender. In principle, if the sampling selection criteria is unrelated to the dependent variable, i.e., non-voting, the results obtained from a quota sample would be very similar to the results obtained from a random sample. However, if the selection procedure is correlated with the dependent variable the results of the analysis will be biased.[86]

Thirdly, there may be a tendency of included non-voters to hide their non participation, either saying that they have voted or refusing to answer at all. Voting is in most countries considered to be a civic duty, and abstainers are not willing to acknowledge that they have not fulfilled it (Adamany and Dubois 1975, Silver, Anderson and Abramson 1986). When the question wording is not carefully considered, the amount of non-random measurement error can prevent any meaningful analysis.[87]

Finally, real abstention may be overestimated if electoral registers are not adequately and regularly updated to remove people who have died, or changed residence. As has already been mentioned, this overestimation is likely to be substantial in some countries.

[86] Turnout happens to be related to age, but the potential bias is avoided if age is included in the model.

[87] This is the case of some of the Eurobarometers, where electoral participation is only indirectly asked to respondents when they are inquired about the party for which they voted in the last general election of their country. Either because they want to hide abstention, or because they do not want to reveal their party preference, as many as 60 per cent of the sample of some countries do not answer the question (Eurobarometer 32). Comparing reported and real turnout, it is clear that these missing values are not evenly distributed between voters and non-voters; in some countries most of them are likely to be non-voters, while in other cases they must be voters.

CHAPTER III

RESOURCES, SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT
INDIVIDUAL DETERMINANTS OF ELECTORAL ABSTENTION

1 Introduction

This chapter explores the relationship between individual characteristics and the individual likelihood of abstaining. The basic image has already been summarised by Lipset:

> "Patterns of voting participation are strikingly the same in various countries: Germany, Sweden, America, Norway, Finland and many others for which we have data. Men vote more than women; the better educated, more than the less educated; urban residents more than rural; those between 35 and 55, more than younger or older voters; married persons, more than unmarried; higher-status persons, more than lower; members of organizations, more than nonmembers." (1969:182)

In the literature concerning the differences found between voters and non-voters in terms of their individual characteristics can then be divided into three broad theoretical approaches, as introduced in chapter I.

In the first place, the socio-economic status model (Verba and Nie 1972) has focused on the effect of the position on the socio-economic scale on the likelihood of voting. That is, income, education, social class, occupational status, etc., are analysed as determinants of electoral participation. Their importance comes both from the fact that they act as resources that facilitate voting, and also from their positive relationship with political attitudes that predispose citizens to participate. Moreover, a strong effect of these variables produces a participant population that is not representative of the overall electorate. Hence, this approach, pays significant attention to the way in which social inequalities are translated into political inequalities.

The second model is based on patterns of social integration, communication and interaction. The Columbia model of electoral behaviour (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944), focuses on the extent to which individuals are integrated in their environment and hold central positions in communication flows. According to this theory, socially integrated electors will be more likely to vote than those isolated, because they are more likely to be exposed to political stimuli that would propitiate participation (information, mobilisation, social pressure, etc.).

Finally, there is the explanation based on political attitudes that developed within the Michigan model of electoral behaviour (Campbell et al. 1960), which related turnout to the degree of psychological involvement into politics: interest in the campaign, concern about the outcome, sense of political efficacy, sense of citizen duty, and to a smaller extent party identification, were all variables found to be positively related with the likelihood of voting.

From these three models the following hypotheses will be tested:

H_{11}: The lower the level of resources of an individual, the higher the likelihood of abstention.

H_{12}: The better integrated and individual is in society, the more likely s/he is to receive stimuli from her/his environment and thus the less likely s/he is to abstain.

H_{13}: Lack of political involvement is expected to increase the likelihood of abstention.

Although these three models put the emphasis on different elements, they complement one another. The analyses carried out in the following sections do not pretend to choose between any single one of them, but rather to disentangle how all these different sets of individual characteristics affect the likelihood of abstaining, and whether these relationships vary significantly across countries.

The analysis presented in this chapter is based on survey data for Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, West Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Great Britain.[88] For each of the three sets of individual characteristics, the analysis is first performed in a bivariate form, comparing percentages of abstention by categories of the independent variable. The comparison of abstention percentages across groups with different individual

[88] See chapter II section 3.3 for a detailed description of the data.

characteristics can be made using the arithmetic difference, or the ratio between the two percentages. Both are presented since they may lead to different interpretations.[89] Following the bivariate analysis, a logistic multivariate regression presents the effects of each factor while controlling for the effects of all others.

All analyses are performed within countries, so as to see patterns of cross-country variation in the levels of abstention of people with the same individual characteristics, and in the effects of the explanatory variables over turnout. However, in order to have some reference values against which compare within-country analyses, the analysis is also performed for a pooled sample that includes all individuals from all countries. This overall sample is weighted so that each country's sample is proportional to the size of its electorate (see Appendix B).

2 Individual resources and electoral abstention

One of the first elements pointed out by scholars studying political participation was that participants are usually better educated, better off, and occupy higher positions in the occupational scale. As Verba and Nie remark,

> "Political participation has often been justified as a means by which social or economic inequalities can be reduced. Those of lower status -workers, poors, farmers, new immigrants - would use their political influence associated with participation to induce the government to carry out policies beneficial to them. This belief leads to pressure for an equalization in the opportunities to participate and the removal of legal restraints to that participation. Yet the opening of opportunity does not equalize participation rates... for whatever reason they participate more, the result is that those who may need governmental assistance the least participate the most -i.e. those already at the top of the stratification hierarchy are likely to be the most active." (Verba and Nie 1972:8)

Individual resources are expected to increase the likelihood of voting in a direct way, by lowering the costs of voting through experience, intellectual skills and time available; and in an indirect way, by favouring the development of political attitudes positive to participation.

[89] While the arithmetic difference between two percentages of abstention depends on how close the percentages are to 0 or 100, the ratio between these quantities does not. The ratio is easily interpreted: when it takes a value of one, it means that both groups are equally likely to abstain. When it takes a value smaller than 1 it means that the disadvantaged group (always in the numerator) is *less* likely to abstain. When its value is over 1, the disadvantaged group is *more* likely to abstain than the advantaged one.

Following the previous literature, I have selected education and income as indicators of resources (Verba et al. 1972, 1978, 1993, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).[90] I have also included age, as a proxy for experience (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980:37ff, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993:137).

The effect of these three variables chosen here as indicators of individual resources should be analysed separately not only because they may relate to abstention in different ways (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980:13ff), but also because the theoretical implications of their effect on turnout are quite different. A strong positive relationship between education or income and turnout would indicate that socio-economic inequalities are translated into political inequalities, with parts of the population disadvantaged or marginalised in both arenas, and others well off, well educated and integrated into the electoral process. On the contrary, a consistent effect of age on turnout would not necessarily produce an unfair bias: if the effect of age is assumed to be a life cycle effect, most of the population will pass by the different phases and thus will participate in the electoral process at some point in their lives. However this effect of age may as well be, at least partly, hiding a cohort effect by which some generations are less participative than others, in which case we will be facing a far more important problem: that of new generations being excluded from this form of political participation.[91]

2.1 Age

As has just been mentioned, the relationship between age and political participation has been explained according to two main theories. The *life-cycle hypothesis* states that as people grow older they acquire resources that facilitate participation: familiarity with parties, candidates, political and electoral processes, integration in the community, political knowledge and skills, etc. (see Strate, Parrish, Elder and Ford 1989). They also tend to become more attached to parties and to internalise ideologies more deeply (see Converse 1976). Finally, as age increases, so does the intensity of social contacts and the integration in society, and therefore the

[90] I have discarded occupational status because of the difficulties in finding a homogeneous coding scheme among all surveys.

[91] Unfortunately, since we only have one observation on time we can not disentangle which of the two (life cycle or generational) is the main effect.

likelihood to be exposed to political stimuli and mobilisation (see Converse and Niemi 1971, Verba and Nie 1972:138ff).

Table 3.1. Non-voting by age categories

Country	18 to 29 years	30 to 39 years	40 to 49 years	50 to 59 years	60 to 69 years	70 or older
Belgium	3.3	2.1	2.4	2.1	4.4	6.5
Denmark	14.0	6.2	8.0	6.3	8.3	10.8 (74)
Finland	31.4	15.6	7.1	6.4	3.9	9.9 (81)
France	36.8	20.2	16.1	13.6	8.1	6.4
Germany	15.2	9.5	7.9	6.4	7.0	6.6
Greece	11.5	1.1	2.0	0.0	1.9	2.6 (76)
Ireland	35.9	10.8	7.8	3.9	3.1	9.5 (74)
Italy	4.6	3.0	2.2	1.3	3.3	10.7 (84)
Netherlands	13.8	6.5	4.0	3.9	5.2	7.5
Norway	24.1	14.6	10.6	10.9	6.5	7.0
Portugal	36.3	15.4	6.8	10.7	6.5	10.0
Spain	19.4	14.9	10.1	11.2	9.5	15.7
Sweden	10.7	6.7	4.4	3.2	5.4	5.5
Switzerland	49.8	37.4	33.2	27.4	25.0	37.1
G. Britain	19.0	11.6	10.6	11.3	10.0	10.6
All (1)	19.1	11.1	8.6	7.7	7.0	10.0

When cases are less than 100 the number of cases is reported in brackets. (1) Pooled sample with all surveys weighted by w1 (see Appendix B).

The *generational hypothesis* is based on the idea that what determines participation is the common socialising process particular of each cohort, that would push some generations whose first years of political socialisation have been particularly mobilised to participate more than others.[92]

> "If late adolescence and early maturity are periods of political crystallisation, whole generations have been 'fixed' by the events which caught them at this age level. It is in this sense that Mannheim, Heberle, and Lipset, et al. speak of 'political generations' —generations who have endured similar experiences at roughly the same stage in life and so had their thinking similarly, and perhaps permanently, affected by these experiences". (Lane 1959:219)

Empirical evidence from previous research tends to give priority to the life-cycle interpretation of age differences in turnout (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993:141, Topf 1995). The nature of our data, as has already been mentioned, does not make it possible to disentangle both effects. I shall therefore assume that we are taking about a life cycle effect. Since in the multivariate analysis we will be controlling for the effects

[92] See Burnham 1979, Miller 1992 but also Glenn 1972, Abramson 1976.

of social and political involvement, we shall consider the remaining effect of age as the result of experience with political matters, and therefore as a resource.

The general pattern in the relationship between age and abstention, common to almost all countries and in agreement with previous literature on political participation (Milbrath and Goel 1977:114), is the following: abstention is usually highest among the youngest age category, then decreases more or less pronouncedly as electors approach middle age, with the lowest levels of abstention among people between 50 and 69 years of age, and finally increases again for the eldest age group.

From the perspective of a life-cycle effect, there seem to be two types of resources associated with age. On the one hand, age represents experience, and thus young inexperienced citizens seem to be less likely to vote. The category of 18 to 29 years is in all but the Belgian and Italian cases the one showing the highest level of abstention.

This hypothesis can be further tested by comparing abstention levels of newly enfranchised electors and experience electors, that is, those that for the first time are entitled to vote because they have reached the voting age, with those that were already entitled in the general election previous to the one analysed here. Table 3.2 presents the percentage of abstention for recently enfranchised electors (second column) and for experienced electors (third column). The abstention rates of these two categories can be compared by analysing the arithmetic difference between the two (fourth column) or the ratio (last column).

All countries but Belgium, Denmark, and the Netherlands show significant differences between these two groups, which reach almost 50 per cent in Ireland, over 30 per cent in Portugal, and over 20 per cent in France, Greece, and Switzerland. Although these huge differences may be due to a cohort effect more than to a life cycle effect, or to the association of other variables with age (for instance higher levels of apathy or depoliticisation among young people) there seems to be enough evidence that experience plays an important role as a resource that facilitates the act of voting.

However, the arithmetic difference between two percentages is not the best indicator to measure the strength of the relationship between age (or any variable) and abstention and to compare it across countries. An arithmetic difference is not independent from the overall abstention level, so by definition, the lower the overall level of abstention, the smaller the difference between the two groups. This is why

besides the difference, we have also calculated the ratio between the abstention levels of new and experienced electors. The figures, presented in the last column of the table, are easily interpretable. A value of 1 means that new electors are as likely to abstain as experienced ones (as happens in Belgium and Denmark); a value higher than 1 means that new electors are more likely to abstain than experienced ones. For instance in Greece, new electors are 12 times more likely to abstain than experienced ones; Irish new electors are 6 times more likely to abstain than Irish experienced electors; British new electors are twice as likely to abstain than British experienced electors, and so on and so forth. This measure is independent of the overall level of abstention, and tells us that the relationship between the fact of being a new elector and abstention is particularly strong in Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Italy (in spite of the low level of abstention in this latter country), while it is irrelevant in Belgium and Denmark. Finland, France and Switzerland, which showed very large differences in abstention levels for the two groups, display relatively low ratios. This is so because the differences were somehow reflecting the overall high level of abstention in these three countries.

Table 3.2. Non-voting among new and experienced electors

Country	Abstention among newly enfranchised electors	Abstention among experienced electors	Difference	Ratio
Belgium	2.8	2.9	- .1	1.0
Denmark	10.0 (20)	8.7	1.3	1.1
Finland	31.5 (73)	12.5	18.8*	2.5
France	40.6	16.8	23.9*	2.4
Germany	13.7	9.4	4.3*	1.5
Greece	29.3 (41)	2.4	26.9*	12.2
Ireland	60.0 (55)	10.2	49.8*	5.9
Italy	14.3 (35)	3.3	11.0*	4.3
Netherlands	12.0 (50)	7.2	4.8	1.7
Norway	28.1	12.7	15.4*	2.2
Portugal	44.6 (74)	11.7	32.9*	3.8
Spain	21.7	13.4	7.3*	1.6
Sweden	14.4	6.0	8.4*	2.4
Switzerland	57.4 (54)	35.1	22.3*	1.6
Great Britain	24.8	11.5	13.2*	2.2
All (1)	27.4	10.1	17.2*	2.7

* Significant at $p<0.05$. (1) Pooled sample weighted by w1 (see Appendix B).

The second way in which age may act as a resource is related to all the limitations associated with old age: isolation, illness, mobility problems, etc. Confirming this hypothesis is the fact that turnout drops for the highest age category in all countries but Finland and France, and it does so particularly in Ireland, Italy, Spain and Switzerland (see table 3.1). However, elderly people still participate more than youngsters in all cases but Italy and Belgium. Whether this curvilinear effect is due to the lowest educational level of elderly groups as some authors have argued (Glenn and Grimes 1968, Riley and Foner 1968), remains to be tested in the multivariate analysis.

2.2 Education

According to previous research education is the dimension of status most relevant to matters of political participation.[93] Education not only increases the moral pressure to vote but:

> "perhaps more importantly, education imparts information about politics and cognate fields and about a variety of skills, some of which facilitate political learning. Reading is the most important and obvious skill. Schooling increases one's capacity for understanding and working with complex, abstract and intangible subjects, that is, subjects like politics (...) Learning about politics doubtless heightens interest, the more sense one can make out of the political world, the more likely one is to pay attention to it. If we assume that incomprehension produces anxiety and avoidance, then anything that increases understanding facilitates interest. Furthermore education increases one's ability to handle the humdrum bureaucratic requirements of registering and voting... In a number of respects, then, education cuts the costs of the voting decision and of the act of voting." Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980:18)

Thus, education is expected to exert a direct influence over abstention (the higher the level of education the lower the costs of voting and thus the lower the likelihood of abstaining), but also an indirect effect, by spreading the kind of political attitudes that favour participation.

In spite of these clear claims, this variable does not show a clear relation with abstention in all countries, as was the case with age. In the analysis including all cases abstention is approximately equal for the lower two categories of education, and lower for the highest educational group. In the within-countries analysis, abstention decreases as education increases for the cases of Denmark, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Germany, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland, and Great Britain, confirming the suggestion of

[93] See Milbrath and Goel 1977:96 for a summary.

the literature. However, the relationship between abstention and education is clearly positive in Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland. In France, Finland and East Germany the pattern is non-linear, with highest abstention in the middle category.[94]

The presence of a curvilinear relationship between schooling and abstention has already been noticed by some scholars, who explain it as a hidden age effect: mature and elderly people, who abstain less than youngsters, are disproportionately over-represented among the lowest education categories (Bennet 1990). Multivariate analysis should enable us to check whether these interpretations are correct, that is, whether this unexpected relationship between turnout and education is in fact due to the effect of other variables.

Table 3.3. Non-voting by levels of education

Country	Low	Medium	High	Ratio (low/high)
Belgium	3.7	2.6	2.7	1.4
Denmark	10.5	8.3	5.5	1.9
Finland	9.4	20.0	11.4	.8
France	15.2	27.0	18.2	.8
Germany	11.4	10.3	5.0	2.3
Greece	1.9	4.5	4.5	.4
Ireland	10.0	13.0	16.8	.6
Italy	5.3	3.8	2.2	2.4
Netherlands	11.7	7.3	3.5	3.4
Norway	17.1	14.9	9.5	1.8
Portugal	11.0	12.1	20.0	.6
Spain	13.5	15.0	16.1	.8
Sweden	8.3	6.2	3.2	2.6
Switzerland	48.8	35.1	29.6	1.6
Great Britain	14.6	12.4	9.3	1.6
All (1)	11.7	12.9	9.0	1.3

(1) Pooled data weighted by w1 (see Appendix B)

Looking at the ratio between the percentage of non-voters in the lowest and the highest educational category, does not show any clearer pattern. In Denmark, Germany, Italy the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden electors with the lowest levels of education are twice as likely to abstain than those with high levels. However, in Finland, France,

[94] These positive and/or non-linear relationships between abstention and education remain with slight changes in the operationalisation of the explanatory variable, that is to say, they are not due to the chosen coding scheme. My results are consistent with Topf's (1995) for Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland, but inconsistent for France, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Great Britain.

Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain those less educated are less likely to abstain than those more educated.

In fact, previous research has already pointed to the ambiguous role of education as a determinant of electoral participation. Dalton (1996) also found a weak relationship between education and voting participation in Germany and Britain, and Topf has argued that there is "no generalized education effect for voting" across European countries (1995:48). Controlling for age, Justel (1995:257) finds no effect of education in the Spanish case, nor do De Winter et al. (1991) in Belgium. Corbetta and Parisi (1994:433) also have found that abstention increases for the top educational level. The analysis performed here confirms the weak and inconsistent effect of education as a determinant of electoral participation for the Western European case.

2.3 Income

Three main arguments can be offered as explanations of the relationship between income and turnout. The *smaller cost* argument, the *stake at the system* argument, and the *attitudes towards participation* argument.

The "reduced costs" argument is based on the assumption that poor people lack the energy and time to think about secondary matters such as voting (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980:21ff). Downs (1957) as well, argues that the higher the income, the higher the time available to gather the necessary information and vote. Other authors question these arguments: Lane (1959) points out to the fact that more leisure is not necessarily associated to more participation (as lower participation among the eldest age groups shows); Filer, Kenny and Morton (1993) call attention to the fact that higher absolute salaries also imply a higher opportunity cost for voting.

The second argument is based on the idea that richer people have a higher stake at the system. Filer et al. (1993:64) argue that,

> "If candidates differ over the progressivity of the redistribution, individuals with relatively high incomes have more to gain or lose from the outcome of the election and will exhibit higher turnout rates. "

Their view is shared by Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980). Lane, however, questions that low income people have less at stake in elections. In his view, the

difference comes from the way in which government impinges its policies and makes them visible differently to different social classes:

> "It is psychologically more painful to be threatened with deprivation of something you have than it is psychologically rewarding to be offered something you want but have never experienced. On such grounds as this, perhaps, more emotion is invested in a 10 per cent increase in taxation than in a 10 per cent increase in standard of living due to federal subsidy of housing... Perhaps even more importantly than the extent and nature of the relevant policies and the means available to affect them is the degree to which they are visible to the affected groups... society distributes education and access to sources of information unequally to the several social classes, and that the media make visible the relevance of governmental policy to upper status groups when they do not do so to the same degree for lower status groups." (1959:225)

Finally, it seems to be accepted that higher income implies usually living in an environment (personal and professional) where there is intense social pressure to vote as well as personal characteristics and political attitudes (political involvement, citizen duty, self efficacy, etc.), that tend to be positively related with participation.

Table 3.4. Non-voting by income quartiles

Country	Lowest income quartile	Second income quartile	Third income quartile	Highest income quartile	Ratio (lowest/highest)
Belgium	3.7	2.2	3.1	1.9	1.9
Denmark	13.3	8.1	6.8	3.4	3.9
Finland	13.1	15.3	17.2	8.2	1.6
France	27.0	21.1	16.2	10.6	2.5
Germany	--	--	--	--	--
Greece	3.6	4.3	2.6	2.0	1.8
Ireland	13.9	13.3	8.9	6.5	2.1
Italy	3.7	4.2	1.5	2.7	1.4
Netherlands	10.1	8.1	5.4	4.9	2.1
Norway	19.6	14.2	11.9	8.4	2.3
Portugal	12.8	12.8	17.6	13.9	.9
Spain (1)	8.0	10.5	16.1	14.2	.6
Sweden	11.5	7.7	4.3	3.0	3.8
Switzerland	--	--.	--	--	--
G. Britain	18.5	11.5	9.5	8.4	2.2
All (2)	14.5	11.4	9.6	6.7	2.2

(1) Data were not available in the country's post-electoral survey and were taken from Eurobarometer 41.1. However these data were not included in the pooled sample. (2) Pooled data weighted by w1 (see Appendix B).

Income was originally measured in each country's currency. In this case problems of comparability in finding a common scale were solved using a relative

measure. The original variables were recoded so as to form four categories, each one containing one quartile of the country's sample size. Our measure of income, therefore is purely relative to each country's distribution of wealth.

In our data income shows a clearer association with abstention than education, with an overall decreasing trend in abstention as income increases. The relationship is clearly negative in Denmark, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Great Britain. Belgium, Greece, and Italy, however, show very little differences between categories. In all but in five cases (Finland, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain), electors in the lowest income quartile category vote less than any of the others. Finland, Portugal and Spain show a particular curvilinear pattern where abstention increases along the first three quartiles and then drops in the fourth one, slightly in Spain, moderately in Portugal, markedly in Finland. Greece and Italy show the highest level of abstention in the second income quartile.

On average, low income electors are twice more likely to abstain than high income electors. This effect is particularly strong in Denmark and Sweden, where people in the lowest income category are four times more likely to abstain than those in the highest income quartile. Conversely, in Portugal and Spain, high income electors are, unexpectedly, more likely to abstain than low income citizens.

2.4 Multivariate analysis of resources

Elderly people tend to be less educated than young people, educated people tend to earn more than those with no qualifications. Middle aged people usually have a higher income than young or elderly people. These associations between explanatory variables make a bivariate analysis not enough if we want to see how much each of these three variables affects turnout independently from the others.

In the case of a dichotomous dependent variable, the multivariate technique of analysis to be applied is logistic regression. In logistic regression the dependent variable is defined as the log odds of abstaining vs. voting ($y = \ln(P_{abstaining}/P_{voting})$) and the coefficients represent the net effect of a unit change in the explanatory variables over the log of the odds of abstaining versus voting, just as in OLS. The relationship represented by the coefficients (between the explanatory variables and the log-odds of abstaining) is linear, and free from ceiling effects (see chapter II section 3.2 for a

detailed explanation). Thus, they can be interpreted as indicators of the magnitude of the effects of the explanatory variables over the likelihood (but not the probability!) of abstaining.

Table 3.5 presents the estimated coefficients of a logit model based only on what here has been defined as resources: age, education and income.[95] One equation has been estimated for each country. The last two rows reports the estimated coefficients for the pooled sample including all countries and weighted.

Table 3.5. Logistic regression analysis of resources

Country	Age	Age ^{2}	Education	Income	Constant	Chi square	df	N
Belgium	-.08*	.001*	-.11	-.08	-1.81*	8 ·	4	3,708
Denmark	-.07	.001	-.35*	-.40*	.66	19*	4	816
Finland	-.17*	.001*	-.46*	-.07	3.79*	93*	4	1,187
France	-.07*	.0002	-.11	-.38*	1.50*	81*	4	841
Germany	-.10*	.001*	-.56*	--	1.22*	280*	3	10,885
Greece	-.41*	.004*	-.51	-.33	7.18*	42*	4	690
Ireland	-.27*	.003*	.16	-.45*	4.61*	44*	4	459
Italy	-.28*	.003*	-.80*	.13	2.82	17*	4	646
Netherlands	-.13*	.001*	-.72*	-.13	2.22*	44*	4	1,439
Norway	-.03	- .0001	-.48*	-.23*	.77	104*	4	1,908
Portugal	-.21*	.002*	.07	-.18	3.55*	58*	4	764
Spain	-.08*	.001*	-.05	--	.05	55*	3	4,880
Sweden	-.06 ·	.0004	-.64*	-.32*	.55*	66*	4	2,471
Switzerland	-.11*	.001*	-.52*	--	3.26*	52*	3	982
G.Britain	-.06*	.0004*	-.14	-.36*	.48	62*	4	3,034
All (1) beta	-.11*	.001*	-.21*	-.28*	1.63*	1027*	4	19,150
r	-.14	.10	-.05	-.10				
All (2) beta	-.12*	.001*	-.33*	--	1.55*	1347*	3	38,575
r	-.16	.13	-.09	--				

* Significant at $p<0.05$. (1) Analysis for the pooled data weighted by w1 with income included.
(2) Analysis for the pooled data weighted by w1 with income excluded.

When running a multivariate regression only cases that have information on all variables are included. Therefore, in the logistic regressions including all surveys as a single sample, entire countries may be left out because their data sets did not include a question on a specific variable. In the case of resources, for instance Germany, Spain and Switzerland did not include data on income. I have thus presented two models, one

[95] Although education and income are not continuous variables they have been introduced as such in order to obtain only one coefficient. Age has been included not in categories as in the bivariate analysis but as years of age. When only age categories where available in the original country survey they have been recoded into the mid point.

including income (and thus excluding Germany, Switzerland and Spain), and another one excluding income (and thus including these three countries).

In the analysis of all merged samples all coefficients are in the expected direction and statistically significant. The effect of age is the strongest of all factors,[96] with younger people being less likely to vote than middle age and elderly people. In order to model the non-linearity found in the theory and supported by the bivariate analysis, the square of age was also included in the equation. The positive sign of the coefficient associated to this term indicates that the effect of age on the likelihood of abstention decreases as age itself increases.

As it may be expected, the effect of education is much larger when income is excluded, not only because education is positively correlated with income, but also because it is an important determinant of abstention in such a large country as Germany, which remains excluded from the analysis if we include the variable income.[97]

Moving to the within country analysis, in all instances the model Chi square is significant at $p<0.01$. This assures that, at conventional probability levels, resources as defined here do play a role in explaining electoral abstention not only in the sample but also in the electorate. Age confirms its negative relationship with abstention in all countries. Only in Denmark, Sweden and Norway the effect is so small so as to become non-significant. In this latter country the clear relationship between age and abstention shown by the bivariate analysis disappears after controlling for education and income. On the other hand, a strong (it is only larger in Greece and Ireland) and significant negative relationship between age and abstention shows up in Italy.

The effect of age on abstention, taking into account the fact that elderly people are more likely to have lower levels of education, is particularly large in Greece, Ireland, Italy and Portugal. The positive sign of the age squared coefficients in the equation implies that the effect of age is stronger for younger citizens. This could indicate that experience-related resources are of larger importance than age-associated liabilities. In all but four countries, this term that aims to model the non linear character of the relationship between age and abstention, is statistically significant.

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[96] The r coefficient gives us an indication of the relative strength of each of these variables, comparable to the standardised beta in linear regression.

[97] Eurobarometer data report an effect of education not statistically significant after controlling for income in Germany (-0.15 at $p>.4$). In Spain the coefficient is both statistically and substantially non-significant ($b=0.09$, $p=.6$).

Education presents mixed results also in the multivariate analysis. In all cases but Ireland and Portugal the relationship between this variable and abstention is negative as expected, and it is particularly strong in Finland, Germany, Greece ($p<0.2$), Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. In Belgium, France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and the Great Britain the effect is small and not significant.

Finally, the negative effect of income over the likelihood of abstaining is confirmed all countries[98] but Italy, where the relationship is positive though not significant. The effect seems to be particularly strong in Denmark, France, Ireland, and Britain, while in Belgium, Finland, and the Netherlands it is small and not significant.

3 Social integration and abstention

The resources model is not in the slightest incompatible with other explanations of electoral participation. In fact, the same book that develops the SES model contains a chapter developing and testing the *decline of community model,*[99] based on the assumption that,

> "Persons close to the center occupy an environmental position which naturally links them into the communication network involved in policy decisions for the society. They receive from and send more communications to their persons near the center. They have a higher rate of social interaction, and they are more active in groups than persons on the periphery. This central position increases the likelihood that they will develop personality traits, beliefs and attitudes which facilitate participation in politics. There are many more political stimuli in their environment, and this increases the number of opportunities for them to participate (...)." (Milbrath and Goel 1977:89)

Thus, a second explanatory perspective of electoral participation puts the emphasis on the patterns of social interaction and communication flows that the individual has with her/his environment. The works of authors such as Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee (1954), Eulau (1980), Knoke (1990), or Lazarsfeld, Berelson

[98] The German polit-barometer did not include a question on income. The same logistic regression model, applied to Eurobarometer data gives a significant coefficient for West Germany of -0.36 (with a sample size of only 820 respondents). The Spanish survey did not include a question on income either. The same model with Eurobarometer data gives a coefficient of -0.17 ($p<0.2$), with a sample size of 630 cases.

[99] See Verba, Nie and Kim (1978) chapter 13 and works quoted in Milbrath 1977:88-89, 113-114.

and Gaudet (1944), emphasise personal contacts over other elements in the explanation of voting behaviour.

Personal contacts are non-purposive and precisely because of this, they encounter less resistance than other types of influence, they are flexible and offer rewards when there is compliance, they may persuade people without necessarily convincing them (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944:150ff). They are therefore likely to affect the propensity of an individual to vote, with individuals having the higher level of integration in society and exposure to personal contacts being more likely to participate than those more isolated. As Hansen and Rosenstone put it,

> "...[P]eople with dense webs of social contacts learn more about the candidates, the issues and the opportunities to take part. They have greater exposure to social incentives... Thus the better connected people are socially, the more likely they are to take part in electoral politics." (1993:157)

Lancelot (1968) interprets his whole sociological analysis in terms of the importance of integration as a determinant of electoral abstention,[100] and so do other authors for other European countries (se for instance Marroni 1989,[101] Armingeon 1993[102]). The more integrated in society an individual is, the more he or she will develop a sense of civic duty with respect to voting, the better he or she will be aware of and informed about the election, and thus the more he or she will be likely to vote.

Factors like the number of years living in the same place, number of adults living in the household, participation in associations, marital status, frequency of church attendance, etc. are expected to increase the likelihood of voting. Unfortunately, we do not have detailed information on each individual social network, but we have at hand two valid indicators of the level of social integration: frequency of church attendance and marital status.

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[100] "En analysant l'influence de la condition sociale des électeurs sur leur propension à s'abstenir, j'ai été amené à évoquer à plusieurs réprises l'importance décisive de l'intégration à la société. Les conclusions de l'analyse politique avaient déjà permis de dégager ce facteur d'interpretation mais l'analyse sociologique en a montré la généralité. Qu'il caractérise la situation d'une catégorie sociale par rapport à l'ensemble de la societé ou la situation d'un individu par rapport à son groupe d'activité, le degré d'intégration conditionne très largement le niveau de la participation électorale." Lancelot (1968:216)

[101] "Il grado d'integrazione nel tessuto sociale del singolo elettore appare infatti essere nella Germania federale un aspetto assai importante nella prediposizione o meno dei cittadini a recarsi alle urne. Potremmo dire che -sulla base degli studi presi in esame - il tasso di partecipazione al voto e la disponibilità a recarsi alle urne sono *direttamente proporzionali* al grado d'integrazione nella società." (Marroni 1989:285)

[102] In his study on the causes of electoral abstention in Western democracies the author concludes that explanations based on resources and integration in the socio-political system fit the data better than those based on protest or rational choice theories.

3.1 Church attendance

Church attendance can be considered as an indicator of integration in a (religious) community that supplies stimuli to participate and support and encouragement to compliants.

> "(...) involvement in a religious institution might augment the individual's potential for political activity in two ways: by providing opportunities to practice civic skills and by providing exposure to political stimuli, either explicit political messages or requests to become politically active." (Verba et al. 1995:381)

Frequent church attendance is a clear determinant of abstention, according to table 3.6, and confirming previous research (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993:158, Lancelot 1968:205,[103] Cautrès et Bréchon 1987).

Table 3.6. Non-voting by church attendance

Country	No regular attendance	Regular attendance	Difference	Ratio
Belgium	3.5	1.9	1.7*	1.8
Denmark (2)	4.9	3.9	1.0	1.3
Finland	26.7	11.9	14.7*	2.2
France	25.3	13.7	11.6*	1.8
Germany	14.2	7.9	6.3*	1.8
Greece	3.9 (26)	3.6	.2	1.1
Ireland	28.2 (71)	11.7	16.5*	2.5
Italy	3.6	3.5	.1	1.0
Netherlands	8.9	5.2	3.7*	1.7
Norway (1)	14.6	13.9	.7	1.1
Portugal	23.7	12.8	11.0*	1.9
Spain (2)	16.3	11.0	5.3*	1.5
Sweden	9.8	4.5	5.3*	2.2
Switzerland (1)	53.7 (67)	35.1	18.7*	1.5
Great Britain	15.1	8.5	6.6*	1.8
All (3)	15.6	8.4	7.2*	1.9

* Significant at $p<0.05$. (1) In the Norwegian and Swiss surveys there were no indicators of church attendance. However respondents were asked whether they belonged to any religion, and this variable has been used as a proxy for frequency of church attendance. (2) Data were not available in the country's post-electoral survey and were taken from Eurobarometer 41.1. However these data were not included in the pooled sample. (3) Pooled data weighted by w1 (see Appendix B).

[103] Analysis of French voting behaviour have emphasised the importance of religion vs. other cleavages like class. Lancelot's analysis makes no reference to frequency of church attendance but to "appartenance religieuse", finding that Catholics are more likely to vote than those belonging to other minority religious groups.

In all countries regular church-goers abstain less than those who rarely or never go to church, although the differences are very small (less than 1 per cent) and not statistically significant in Denmark, Greece, Italy or Norway.

The overall distance between regular church-goers and others is over 7 per cent. The gap between religious and non religious citizens is particularly striking (over 10 per cent) in countries as Switzerland, Ireland, Portugal, France or Finland, and between 5 and 10 per cent in Germany, Spain (data from Eurobarometers), Sweden and Great Britain. If we look at the ratios, the relationship between church attendance and abstention is particularly strong in Finland, Ireland and Sweden, where non attenders are more than twice as likely to abstain than attenders. Conversely, in Greece, Italy and Norway, the fact of going regularly to church does not affect the likelihood of abstaining.

3.2 Marital status

Personal isolation may also contribute to making social integration more difficult and reducing the amount of communicational networks in which the individual participates. The status of living with a permanent partner vs. not is one the possible indicators of personal isolation: the partner is expected to be the closest person with whom communication is exchanged. People living alone are subject to less informational exchange with their environment, and may prove to have more difficulties in gathering the necessary information and making their minds up on how to vote (Merten 1988, Brunner 1993).

Previous analysis have found a significant impact of marital status on the likelihood of voting,[104] in some cases even larger than the effect of other socio-demographic variables. As Glaser says (1959:569),

> "Voting tends to be a joint household activity, with the members either voting or staying at home as a unit."

Our data show clearly clear that people living with a permanent partner abstain on average almost 7 per cent less than single, divorced or widowed people. The differences between the two groups are in the expected direction in all countries, and

[104] See for instance, Glaser 1959, Justel 1995:281, de Winter and Ackaert 1994, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980.

particularly high in France, Ireland, Portugal, and Switzerland. Only in Belgium, Denmark and Germany are these differences smaller than 5 per cent. According to the ratio, marital status is particularly important in Greece, Ireland and Italy (in spite of the small differences in the two countries with compulsory voting), where single, divorced or widowed people are more than three times more likely to abstain than married people.

Table 3.7. Non-voting by marital status

Country	Single, divorced or widowed	Married or living as married	Difference	Ratio
Belgium	4.9	2.1	2.8*	2.3
Denmark	12.0	7.4	4.6*	1.6
Finland	19.4	11.3	8.1*	1.7
France	27.4	15.8	11.5*	1.7
Germany	11.7	8.2	3.5*	1.4
Greece	7.4	2.0	5.3*	3.7
Ireland	23.1	7.8	15.3*	3.0
Italy	6.2	2.1	4.1*	3.0
Netherlands	10.4	5.5	4.9*	1.9
Norway	20.9	11.0	9.9*	1.8
Portugal	24.7	10.5	14.2*	2.4
Spain (1)	18.5	9.9	8.7*	1.9
Sweden	11.1	4.2	6.9*	2.6
Switzerland	47.7	29.1	18.6*	1.6
Great Britain	18.4	10.4	8.1*	1.8
All (2)	15.4	8.5	6.7*	1.8

* Significant at $p<0.05$. (1) Data were not available in the country's post-electoral survey and were taken from Eurobarometer 41.1. However these data were not included in the pooled sample. (2) Pooled data weighted by w1 (see Appendix B).

3.4 Multivariate analysis of social integration

The multivariate analysis confirms what the bivariate analysis already indicated: both frequent church attendance and living with a permanent partner decrease the likelihood of abstaining.[105] In the overall sample both variables have approximately the

[105] Only in Italy does there seem to be a small positive relationship between church attendance and abstention, which is anyway far from being statistically significant ($p<0.85$). In fact Italy and Greece present some specific problems concerning sample sizes. In Italy, both the percentage of no church-goers and the percentage of abstainers are very low (14.8 and 3.5 per cent respectively, once missing values have been removed). About 85 per cent of both voters and abstainers go to church regularly, and over 96 per cent of both church-goers and no church-goers voted in the 1994 election. This means that in our sample there are only 5 individuals that are neither church attendants nor voters, and 28

same strength. However, the relative weight of the coefficients varies across countries. The effect of church attendance is particularly large in Finland, France, Ireland and Portugal, while that of living with a permanent partner is very strong in Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Sweden.

Table 3.8. Logistic regression analysis of social integration

Country		Regular church attendance	Married or living as married	Constant	Chi square	df	N
Belgium		-.58*	- .88*	-2.79*	30*	2	4,201
Denmark		--	- .53*	-2.00*	4*	1	886
Finland		-.98*	- .63*	- .60*	72*	2	2,642
France		-.75*	- .67*	- .69*	35*	2	931
Germany		-.61*	- .32*	-1.65*	110*	2	10,835
Greece		-.05	-1.35*	-2.48*	14*	2	908
Ireland		-.88*	-1.23*	- .48·	45*	2	824
Italy		.10	-1.33*	-2.79*	13*	2	944
Netherlands		-.49*	- .65*	-2.02*	18*	2	1,503
Norway		-.03	- .75*	-1.31*	34*	2	2,173
Portugal		-.80*	-1.08*	- .45·	36*	2	846
Spain (1)		-.38	- .65*	-1.31*	15	2	895
Sweden		-.73*	- .96*	-1.70*	55*	2	2,479
Switzerland		-.73*	- .78*	.58*	42*	2	994
Great Britain		-.57*	- .63*	-1.31*	66*	2	3,457
All (2)	beta	-.67*	-.64*	-1.34*	853*	2	32,737
	r	-.12	-.12				

Both variables are included as dummies. * Significant at p<0.05. (1) Data were not available in the country's post-electoral survey and were taken from Eurobarometer 41.1. However these data were not included in the pooled sample. (2) Pooled data weighted by w1 (see Appendix B).

4 Political involvement and electoral abstention

Individual resources and social integration have a direct effect not only over electoral participation. They also increase the likelihood of an elector voting indirectly because they favour the development of political attitudes that facilitate participation: interest in politics, political skills and competence, political efficacy, involvement in

individuals that go to church regularly but do not vote (that is, show an unexpected pattern of behaviour according to their individual characteristics). These small numbers make it very difficult to draw conclusions. In Greece we have only one respondent who claims to be both abstentionist and not to attend church, 25 who are voters and non church-goers, and 32 that are abstentionists and church-goers. The vast majority, therefore, are both voters and church-goers. Interpretations should be made very carefully.

political conflict, civic mindedness, etc. (Verba and Nie 1972:83ff, Milbrath and Goel 1977).

The influence of political attitudes on voting behaviour has been widely studied, particularly by the Michigan model. For Campbell and his associates, long-term political attitudes (with a special emphasis on party identification) occupy an intermediate causal position between socio-demographic factors and short-term political factors (issues, candidates). For the specific case of turnout their findings can be summarised in the strong relationship found political involvement[106] and turnout (Campbell, Converse, Stokes and Miller 1960:96ff).

Although the model was severely criticised,[107] criticism arose always within its own limits. It dominated the field of electoral behaviour for at least two decades.

> "The rise of the Michigan Model, drawing upon measures of attitudes through survey research techniques, and its ensuing hegemony imposed a social psychological framework on explanations of the vote decision, pushing the sociological approach to the background. Attitudes became the primary explanatory variables at the expense of social groups." (Beck 1986:261)

Unfortunately, I am unable to include all political attitudes studied in relation with electoral participation along the last decades.[108] On the line started by Font (1992) and followed by Justel (1995) I shall distinguish between interest and identification as the main determinants of electoral abstention among political attitudes.

4.1 Interest in politics

"The extent to which the individual expresses an interest in and is attentive to political matters" (Verba and Nie 1972:83) has been considered as a fundamental determinant of electoral participation in almost all micro analyses.[109] It is certainly to be

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[106] Political involvement in this case includes attitudes like interest in the campaign, concern about the election outcome, sense of political efficacy, sense of civic duty.

[107] Main criticisms involved weak conceptualisation of candidate and issue evaluations, questioning of the appropriateness of the party identification index, and under-evaluation of the importance of ideology and socio-demographic factors (see Beck 1986: 249ff)

[108] I have dropped variables such as sense of civic duty, political efficacy, political cynicism, confidence in government, political alienation etc. widely used in the explanations of abstention (see Verba and Nie 1972, Parry, Moyser and Day 1992, Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, for instance) because of lack of comparable indicators across samples.

[109] See Almond and Verba 1963, Bennet 1986, Campbell et al. 1960, Dalton 1996, Farago 1996, Font 1992, Inglehart 1990, Justel 1995, Lancelot 1968, de Winter and Ackaert 1994, Wolfinger, Glass and Squire 1990, among others.

expected that people who declare themselves as uninterested in politics will be less familiar with election issues, candidates and voting procedures, will have lower levels of political efficacy and competence, and thus will be less motivated to vote.

Lack of interest does not necessarily mean a negative attitude towards the political system, it is simply a careless attitude, a value-free passive attitude.

> "By political apathy we mean no interest and no involvement in politics... these people are totally separated or estranged from politics, or politics is simply not in part of their life or psyche. They do not necessarily distrust government or its officials, but simply don't concern themselves about government operation at all. They do not necessarily feel inefficacy but simply are not interested in political affairs and activities at all or don't bother to think about whether they can affect politics, and about whether government officials are responsive enough." (Chen 1992:12)

While complete disregard for political matters may imply complete disinterest on elections and thus on voting, the feeling that there is something at stake in political outcomes may, on the other hand, push people to try to have a say by voting. This does not mean that all voters are politically interested, nor that all non-voters are politically apathetic. There are other motivations to vote, and strong interest in politics may produce abstention when, for instance, it appears combined with high levels of alienation from or rejection of the political system (Sigelman and Feldman 1983).

The relationship between the two variables, interest and participation, is so close that it has been argued that explaining electoral participation in terms of interest in politics is in fact not explain anything, but pushing the question one step beyond: why is it that some citizens are interested while others are not? However, as Justel argues, it may be going to far to assume that high levels of political interest necessarily imply a high level of political and electoral participation (Justel 1995:265). As we shall see, the fact is that interest in politics does not affect the likelihood of voting with the same intensity in all circumstances, which means that in some cases highly interested electors fail to vote, while apathetic citizens turn out on election days.

Lack of interest in politics in general is a clear disincentive for participation, as expected, with abstention being 10 per cent higher among apathetic electors than among interested ones. This gap is in the same direction in all countries. However, the differences are far from being homogeneous, for they go from less than 5 per cent in Belgium, Italy, Greece, Spain or Portugal (in this latter country the difference is not statistically significant) to over 10 per cent in Denmark, Finland, France, Norway or

Germany, and as much as 40 per cent in Switzerland. Interested citizens vote well above their country's average turnout in all cases, and particularly so in Switzerland, where abstention among them is only 13 percent. On the contrary, the level of abstention of apathetic citizens varies from 4 per cent in Belgium, up to over 20 per cent in Finland, France, or Norway, and 54 per cent in Switzerland.

Table 3.9. Non-voting by interest in politics

Country	Apathetic	Interested	Difference	Ratio
Belgium	3.9	1.9	2.0*	2.1
Denmark	16.2	3.0	13.2*	5.4
Finland	21.3	6.5	14.8*	3.3
France	27.3	11.1	16.2*	2.5
Germany	15.0	2.8	12.3*	5.4
Greece	5.0	1.6	3.4*	3.1
Ireland	17.2	8.5	8.6*	2.0
Italy	5.2	1.4	3.8*	3.7
Netherlands	10.7	4.6	6.1*	2.3
Norway	20.5	7.0	13.5*	2.9
Portugal	15.4	13.7	1.7	1.1
Spain (1)	15.1	10.2	4.9*	1.5
Sweden	9.7	2.8	6.9*	3.5
Switzerland	54.1	12.5	41.6*	4.3
Great Britain	17.1	7.7	9.4*	2.2
All (2)	15.3	5.7	9.7*	2.7

* Significant at $p<0.05$. (1) Data were not available in the country's post-electoral survey and were taken from Eurobarometer 41.1. However these data were not included in the pooled sample. (2) Pooled data weighted by w1 (see Appendix B).

Overall, apathetic electors[110] are almost three times more likely as likely to abstain as interested electors. The relationship between interest and turnout is particularly strong in Denmark and Germany, where apathetic electors are five times more likely to abstain than interested ones. Portugal is the only case where this individual attitude does not seem to have any effect on the likelihood of abstaining.

[110] In order to approach the bivariate analysis in a simplified way I have dichotomised the two continuous explanatory variables that are assumed to work as motivations for voting or abstaining. In each country the sample has been divided in two equal halves according to the scores in each of these two variables.

4.2 Politicisation

The concept of politicisation aims to capture the extent to which electors develop relationships of identity with the political world. In words of Nie and Verba (1972:84) politicisation would be the extent to which respondents are oriented to the conflictual aspects of politics.

According to Percheron (1985:195) the development of partisan and/or ideological identities can take four different forms. First, there can be a declared identification with a party that comes together with a relatively clear idea of the cleavages according to which the system is structured (Italy, Great Britain for instance). Secondly, the identification with a party can take a relatively vague and non-conflictual form (Norway). Thirdly, the identification may be established more or less explicitly, with respect to values or symbols, and not necessarily with political parties (France). Finally there is also the case of those that consciously refuse to establish any links of identification with traditional ideologies or political parties, although these 'negative-identifications' are difficult to distinguish from 'non-identifications'.

Since different countries have different processes of developing political identities, our measurement of politicisation must include not only indicators of identities with political organisations, but also indicators of identities with political ideologies.

The importance of party closeness or party identification as a determinant of electoral participation has been pointed at in many studies: people are more likely to vote the stronger their party preference. Conversely, those without any preference or identity for any party would in principle have a more costly decision making process. According to Budge and Farlie (1976:114ff), party identification is the variable that shows the strongest and most consistent relationship with turnout.[111] Here again the problem arises of the explanatory power of a variable being so closely linked to electoral participation; voting and partisan choice can hardly be considered as independent decisions.[112]

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[111] This is as comparing the effect of party identification with that of age, sex, education, region, income, church attendance, religion, occupation, subjective social class, union membership, class of family when respondent was young, father's occupation when respondent was young, urban or rural upbringing, and parents' party, in a number of Western democracies.

[112] "The very good performance of party identification is of course consistent with either of the two viewpoints stated previously. One could use its performance on the one hand to assert that it is an

Not only closeness, but also membership of political organisations (Dalton 1996:55), acts as a form of group-based resources and motivations[113] that facilitate voting particularly among those lacking individual based resources.

> "Membership of groups can provide the individual with information about politics and actions which may affect his or her life. Through interacting with others who have like interests, persons become more aware of their social and political environment. Still more should this be so if a person is a member of a multiplicity of groups. In a sense, one has then an upward relationship with the group, using it as a resource. Secondly, where persons are members of a group, they are available to be mobilised in a downward relationship by the group and its leaders. The group invites them to act in its own interests." (Parry, Moyser and Day 1992:85)

Finally, political ideologies may also function as references that ease the choice between different political alternatives. Montero summarises the effect of left-right identities for the stability of electoral preferences, which can be clearly applied as well for the case of electoral abstention:

> "Sobre la base de la excepcional flexibilidad mostrada por los términos *izquierda* y *derecha* para adaptarse a las cambiantes circunstancias del mundo político, cabría apuntar como hipótesis que aquella estabilidad ha favorecido los procesos de identificación de los electores con algún espacio del continuo ideológico. De este modo, la división expresada en la dimensión izquierda-derecha podría funcionar como un anclaje para muchos votantes, pero, particularmente, para quienes carecen de identificación partidista. Se trataría entonces de una especie de alineamiento ideológico que serviría para anclar a los votantes en un espacio ideológico determinado (...) En cuanto mecanismo identificador sustitutivo en cierta medida del anclaje partidista, el ideológico gana todavía más en importancia si las dimensiones organizativas de la política son también débiles o insuficientes." (Montero and Gunther 1994:498)

Thus, the concept of politicisation synthesises the identification that electors may feel towards parties or political values. The more electors develop political identities, the more they will feel involved in any political process, and thus also in elections. Close ties with parties and ideologies facilitate the understanding of political processes and the choice between different political alternatives. Thus, politicised electors are expected to vote more than depoliticised electors, as a means to express support for the organisations to which they belong or the ideas they defend.

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antecedent of voting behaviour, among other things; or one could maintain that it simply reflects current voting intention." (Budge and Farlie 1976:114)

[113] Verba, Nie and Kim (1978) were the first to develop the concept of group based resources and motivations, that were expected to compensate the effect of individual resources. See also Parry, Moyser and Day 1992.

The level of politicisation is an important determinant of the abstention rates in all countries analysed here: depoliticised electors are significantly more likely to abstain than politicised ones in every country. Differences between groups range from barely 2 per cent in Belgium, to over 10 per cent in Finland, the Netherlands, Portugal and Norway, over 15 per cent in France, Spain, and Great Britain and as much as 30 per cent in Switzerland.

Table 3.10. Non-voting by politicisation

Country	Low politicisation	High politicisation	Difference	Ratio
Belgium	4.0	2.0	1.9*	2.0
Denmark	11.8	4.0	7.8*	3.0
Finland	18.9	6.4	12.5*	3.0
France	30.2	13.1	17.1*	2.3
Germany	14.9	5.9	8.9*	2.5
Greece	5.0	1.4	3.5*	3.6
Ireland	18.7	7.6	11.1*	2.5
Italy	5.2	1.5	3.7*	3.5
Netherlands	17.1	3.4	13.7*	5.0
Norway	21.9	8.3	13.6*	2.6
Portugal	24.1	10.1	14.0*	2.4
Spain (1)	24.1	7.7	16.4*	3.1
Sweden	8.6	1.6	7.0*	5.4
Switzerland	51.5	20.9	30.6*	2.5
Great Britain	23.8	7.5	16.4*	3.2
All (2)	17.0	7.0	10.0*	2.4

* Significant at $p<0.05$. (1) Data were not available in the country's post-electoral survey and were taken from Eurobarometer 41.1. However these data were not included in the pooled sample. (2) Pooled data weighted by w1 (see Appendix B).

The effect of politicisation is substantive and significant in all countries analysed. In Sweden and the Netherlands electors with low levels of politicisation are five times more likely to abstain than those with highest levels. Comparing the relative strength of the relationship across countries, Switzerland, Ireland, Norway and Portugal show a relatively weak effect of politicisation (always considering that the effect is remarkable everywhere), although the differences in the percentage of abstainers were relatively large. Conversely, Italy and Greece showed small differences in abstention between politicised and depoliticised electors, though the relationship is in fact rather strong: depoliticised electors are 3.5 times more likely to abstain than politicised citizens.

4.4 Multivariate analysis of political involvement

Politicised people are likely to be interested in politics, while apathetic citizens are likely to be depoliticised. Since interest and politicisation are likely to be related (the correlation coefficient is 0.24 for the whole sample), multivariate analysis will enable us to appreciate the relative independent effect of each of these two variables on the likelihood of abstaining.

Table 3.11. Logistic regression analysis of political involvement

Country		Interest	Politicisation	Constant	Chi square	df	N
Belgium		- 1.24*	- 1.73*	- 2.44*	30*	2	4,233
Denmark		- 4.12*	- 3.36*	.79*	98*	2	886
Finland		- 3.23*	- 2.77*	.78*	144*	2	1,326
France		- 1.56*	- 2.02*	.12	68*	2	950
Germany		- 2.89*	- 1.44*	- .43	67*	2	972
Greece		- .88	- 2.68*	- 1.78*	17*	2	913
Ireland		- 1.21*	- 2.30*	- .53*	47*	2	831
Italy		- 2.15*	- 2.01*	- 1.77*	25*	2	945
Netherlands		- 1.58*	- 4.09*	- .01	95*	2	1,506
Norway		- 2.40*	- 2.52*	.43*	186*	2	2,187
Portugal		.13	- 2.00*	- .99*	20*	2	,848
Spain		--	- 2.14*	- .71*	296*	1	4945
Spain (1)		- .48	- 2.62*	- .71*	39*	2	902
Sweden		- 3.44*	- 2.81*	- .09	143*	2	2,487
Switzerland		- 8.40*	- 2.96*	- 2.23*	367*	2	996
Great Britain		- 2.65*	- 2.70*	- .11	226*	2	3,532
All (2)	beta	-2.00*	-1.97*	- .51*	1451*	2	23,938
	r	- .19	- .16				

The indices of apathy and politicisation have been introduced in the continuous form (ranking from 0 to 1). * Significant at $p<0.05$. (1) Data were not available in the country's post-electoral survey and were taken from Eurobarometer 41.1. However these data were not included in the pooled sample. (2) Pooled data weighted by w1 (see Appendix B).

In the whole sample including all countries both variables have large negative independent effects on the likelihood of abstaining, with the effect of interest being slightly stronger. In the within-countries analysis interest affect abstention in the expected direction, with the only exception of interest in Portugal, where the relationship is unexpectedly positive but non-significant ($p=0.8$). The effect of interest is particularly strong in Finland, Switzerland, Denmark, and Sweden, but small and non-significant in Greece.

In the case of politicisation the multivariate analysis confirms what the bivariate analysis had already shown, namely that, as expected, this factor is an important motivation for voting in all countries, and particularly in the Netherlands and Denmark. The impact of this variable seems to be rather homogeneous all throughout Europe. Though in the overall analysis interest is the most important variable, the level of politicisation outweighs the effect of interest in Belgium, Finland, Greece, the Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

5 Individual resources, social integration and political involvement as explanations of electoral abstention: multivariate analysis

The three sets of factors so far analysed are not independent of each other. Resources, social integration and political involvement are surely correlated: the degree of politicisation and the frequency of church attendance are likely to increase with age; education and income are positively correlated with interest and among themselves too; in general, people in the higher levels of the socio-economic scale as well as socially integrated people are more likely to develop attitudes that favour participation, that is, political involvement (see Verba and Nie 1972). That is why if we want to assess the relative impact of each of these factors while controlling by the effect of all others we need to combine in the same model all variables. Such a model is presented in table 3.12 for the pooled sample and in table 3.13 for each country. The B coefficients presented in tables 3.12 and 3.13 represent the change produced in the log of the odds of abstaining by a unit increase in the explanatory variable. The interpretation of the r coefficients is similar to the standardised betas in OLS, that is, they allow to compare the effect of variables measured in different units.

As has already been mentioned, there is a trade off between the variables included in the model and the countries to which the model can be applied: the more variables, the fewer countries, because some of them lack information on some properties. I have therefore presented a number of models in the pooled sample varying the number of variables included. Model 1 includes all variables and is therefore restricted to a few countries that contain information on all of them (Belgium, Finland,

France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Great Britain). Model 2 includes all countries but excludes income, church attendance and interest in politics, for these variables are missing in at least one country. Finally model 3 includes all variables but income and all countries but Spain and Denmark.

In the overall sample variables behave in the expected direction, that is, all of them reduce the likelihood of abstention. The strongest effect comes from the two indicators of political involvement (interest and politicisation), followed by church attendance and then age and marital status (model 3). The effect of age is non-linear, stronger for younger age categories than for elderly people. The effect of education when income is included in the equation is the only effect that results so small as to become statistically non-significant (model 1). Income, in turn, has a moderate negative effect on the log-odds of abstaining.

In the within-country analyses things are far more complicated: the effects found in the overall sample are not homogeneous across-countries, as table 3.13 shows. The effect of age is relatively strong in Greece, Ireland, Italy and Portugal, all cases where it is as well significantly non-linear. In the cases where age has an effect in the unexpected direction, it is not statistically significant (Belgium, Germany, Norway and Sweden).

After controlling for income, education retains a strong negative effect on abstention in Finland, Greece (but not significant), Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden, while its effect is positive in France, Ireland, Portugal and Spain (all four statistically non-significant effects). Income, in turn, has an important negative impact on abstention in France, Greece (non-significant), and Ireland. In Italy, however, higher income is associated with higher levels of abstention (so as in Finland and Belgium to a very small extent).

As far as the indicators of social integration are concerned, church attendance has a remarkable effect in France, Portugal and Switzerland, while its impact is irrelevant in Greece and Norway. Surprisingly, in Italy the effect is of some substantive weight in an unexpected direction, though not statistically significant. Marital status is also an important determinant of abstentionist behaviour in Belgium, Italy and Sweden.

Table 3.12. Logistic regression analysis of resources, integration and political involvement as determinants of abstention (pooled sample)

	Model 1 (1)		Model 2 (2)		Model 3 (3)	
	B	r	B	r	B	r
Age	- .07*	-.07	-.11*	-.14	- .07*	-.08
Age squared	.0005*	.05	.0009*	.11	.0005*	.06
Education	- .009	.00	-.30*	-.08	- .15*	-.04
Income	- .16*	-.05	--	--	--	--
Church-goer	- .71*	-.12	--	--	- .61*	-.11
Married	- .32*	-.05	--	--	- .34*	-.05
Interest	-1.48*	-.12	--	--	-1.95*	-.17
Politicisation	-2.21*	-.16	-2.39*	-.20	-1.90*	-.15
Constant	2.14*		2.40*		2.25*	
df	8		4		7	
Model chi sq.	1309*		2910*		2108*	
N	18176		38,572		22,686	

Church-goer and *Married* are dummies. All other variables are introduced as continuous. * Significant at p<0.05. (1) Model 1 includes all variables but excludes Germany, Denmark, Spain and Switzerland. (2) Model 2 includes all countries but excludes income, church attendance, marital status and interest. (3) Model 3 includes all variables but income and all countries but Denmark and Spain.

Table 3.13. Logistic regression analysis of resources, integration and political involvement as determinants of abstention (country analyses)

	Age	Age²	Educ.	Inc.	Church	Married	Inter.	Polit.	Ct.	Chi²	df	N
Be	.002	.0002	-.01	.11	-.56*	-1.08*	-1.21*	-1.47*	-2.31*	50.9*	8	3677
Dk	-.03	.0002	-.15	-.09	--	- .02	-4.27*	-3.55*	2.42·	97.9*	7	816
Fn	-.06*	.0002	-.22*	.01	-.59*	- .17	-2.78*	-2.70*	3.85*	354.5*	8	2372
Fr	-.02	-.0001	.13	-.26*	-.76*	- .39·	-1.60*	-1.67*	1.78*	126.1*	8	824
Ge	.01	-.0004	-.57*	--	-.27	- .34	-2.62*	-1.37*	1.14	86.7*	7	970
Gr	-.38*	.003*	-.40	-.25	.12	- .04	- .68	-3.04*	7.79*	51.2*	8	687
Ir	-.25*	.002*	.27	-.36*	-.82	.16	- .57	-2.34*	5.65*	59.1*	8	457
It	-.24*	.003*	-.66*	.50·	.72	- .79	-2.90*	-3.69*	3.78	44.4*	8	637
Ne	-.09*	.001·	-.30	-.01	-.29	- .40·	-1.27*	-4.22*	3.13*	119.5*	8	1436
No	.01	-.0005	-.22·	-.05	-.11	- .52*	-3.15*	-1.73*	1.96*	243.1*	8	1904
Po	-.18*	.002*	.01	-.07	-.95*	- .50·	- .12	-2.23*	4.98*	95.4*	8	743
Sp	-.07*	.001*	.05	--	--	--	--	-2.29*	1.15*	374.1*	4	4880
Se	.05	-.0006	-.29·	-.17·	-.65*	- .73*	-2.86*	-2.71*	.71	186.4*	8	2463
Sw	-.06*	.0005·	-.12	--	-1.35*	- .04*	-8.37*	-2.26*	5.32*	393.1*	7	980
GB	-.02	.0002	-.09	-.10	-.39*	- .34*	-1.76*	-2.08*	1.01*	202.3*	8	2976

* Significant at p<0.05

Finally, interest in politics and politicisation have significant effects on the likelihood of abstaining. The importance of interest is particularly striking in Switzerland and Denmark, while it has almost no impact in Portugal, Greece, or Ireland. Politicisation in turn, is particularly effective at depressing abstention in the Netherlands, while its effect is much more limited in Belgium, Germany or France.

The multivariate analysis performed in this section was useful for the purpose of estimating, both in the overall sample and in each country included in the analysis, the relative impact of each individual variable on the likelihood of abstaining controlling for the influence of all other factors. It also allowed the comparison of the cross-national impact of each variable, though results should be interpreted carefully given the small number of non-voters in some of the samples (particularly in Italy and Greece). However, it does not give a very clear idea of what is the relative weight of the whole set of individual characteristics on the likelihood of abstention in each country. The next section will deal with this question through the analysis of an index of individual incentives to participation.

6 Individual incentives to participation: cross-national comparison

This section analyses the impact of the whole set of individual characteristics on the likelihood of abstaining, and its cross-national variations. With this purpose, an index of individual incentives[114] has been created.

The index ranks from 0 (lowest level of individual incentives) to 1 (highest level of individual incentives). Not only does it simplify the analysis — we go from nine individual level variables to only one, but it also reduces the number of missing values in the sample. The index can be calculated (albeit with less accuracy) even for individuals for whom there is missing information on some variable(s).[115] I shall first analyse the influence of individual incentives for the overall sample and then turn to cross-country variations in the effects.

[114] See chapter II section 4.1.4. A value of 0 expresses the lowest possible level of individual incentives to participation, while a value of 1 represents the maximum value, according to the information available for each individual.

[115] In some countries this missing information covers the whole sample, as is the case of Germany, Spain and Switzerland, whose surveys do not include information on income.

Overall, the index is strongly related to electoral abstention. If we divide it into three categories,[116] about 18 per cent of those individuals scoring low in the index of individual incentives (disadvantaged) abstain from voting, while 10 per cent of those scoring medium abstain, and only 6 per cent of the electors with high levels of individual incentives (advantaged) refrain from voting.

A simple bivariate logistic regression between the level of individual incentives and the likelihood of abstention shows that going from the minimum to the maximum level of individual resources (that is, increasing one unit in the independent variable) reduces the log odds of abstaining in -2.4.[117]

Table 3.14. Logistic regression of the index of individual incentives on abstention

	B	s.e.	df	N	Chi-square
Index of individual incentives	-2.39*	.07	1	38,919	1,198*

* Significant at p<.00. Pooled data weighted by w1 (see Appendix B).

From the B coefficient we can calculate the expected probabilities of abstention. These probabilities are computed taking into account the effects of all individual

[116] The categorisation is made on a country basis, in a way that each of the three categories (high, medium, low) include about 33 per cent of the country's sample.

[117] There are four possible ways of interpreting the results of a logistic regression. The first one is to use the coefficient itself, which indicates the effect of a unit change in the independent variable on the log odds of abstaining (that is, on the logarithm of the odds of abstaining vs. voting, or expressed mathematically ln (P of abstaining/P of voting), also called logit). Since the log odds or logits are not very intuitive, the coefficients may be exponentiated. The exponent of B can be interpreted as the effect on the odds of abstaining vs. voting (P of abstaining/P of voting) of a unit increase in the explanatory variable. Thus, if exp(B) is one, it means that the variable does not affect the likelihood of abstaining vs. voting. If exp(B) is smaller than one, it means that the variable reduces the odds of abstaining vs. voting, and if exp(B) is larger than one, it indicates that the variable increases the odds of abstaining vs. voting. Exp(B) may also be transformed in the percentage change on the dependent variable (the odds of abstaining) produced by a unit change in the independent variable. This percentage change is given by the formula 100[exp(B)-1] (DeMaris 1992:46). However the problem with exp(B) (and also with the percentage change in the odds as defined above) is that it has a lower limit: exp(B) is never 0, and the percentage change is never equal to or smaller than -100 per cent. If all relationships where positive, this would not be problematic for there is no an upper ceiling for exp(B). However, in our case most of the relationships are negative (the independent variables *reduce* the likelihood of abstaining) and therefore, if we use exp(B) or the percentage change in the odds we would again be subject to ceiling effects, which is precisely what we are trying to avoid. Finally, the fourth possible interpretation of logistic regression results is to use the coefficients to calculate expected probabilities, again subject to ceiling effects, as we have already mentioned and we will confirm later. Thus, when taking about the *magnitude of the effects*, we will interpret the logistic coefficient (B), and when talking about the *consequences of the effects* we will talk about predicted probabilities (or predicted percentages of abstention, multiplying the probabilities by 100). See chapter II Section 3.2.

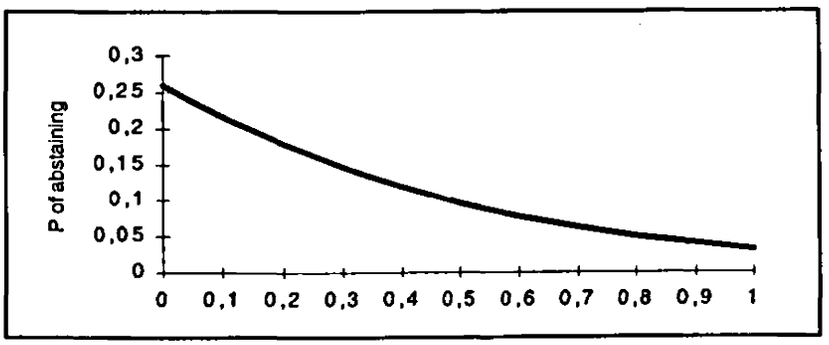
variables included in the equation (in this case, only the index of individual resources), according to the following formula:

$$P_i = 1 / (1 + e^{-\Sigma B_k x_{ik} + c_i})$$

The B are given by the model, and the X rank from the minimum (0) to the maximum value (1). As it can be clearly seen from figure 3.1, the probability of abstaining of an elector with the lowest level of individual incentives is just over 0.25, while the same probability for a citizen with high levels of individual resources and motivations is smaller than 0.05.

Note also that the line representing predicted probabilities becomes flatter as individual incentives increase. This is so because of course probabilities cannot be smaller than 0, and this produces a floor effect. However, we must be careful so as not to conclude that the effect of individual incentives is smaller as they increase. This follows from the fact that as the probability of abstaining becomes closer to zero, there is less room for the predictor to show its effect. This will become very important when interpreting interactions between this individual-level variable and the systemic characteristics, for it makes the crucial difference between two analytical questions: how do different variables affect the likelihood of abstaining, and what are the consequences of such effects in terms of changes in abstention rates.

Figure 3.1. Expected probabilities of abstention by index of individual resources



The logistic regression estimates (B) for the effect of individual incentives on abstention by country are shown in table 3.15. It also presents the expected probabilities of abstaining for citizens with the lowest and highest levels of individual resources.

The effect of individual incentives on the likelihood of abstaining is strongest in Switzerland, Sweden, Italy and the Netherlands, and weakest in Portugal (where the relationship is not statistically significant), Spain, Greece and Ireland. Already at first

sight it can be seen that it is not necessarily where abstention is highest that the effect of individual incentives is strongest (if this effect is measured free from floor effects). In fact, the relationship seems to be the contrary, the lower the level of abstention, the stronger the negative effect of individual incentives (the correlation coefficient between abstentionism and effect of individual resources is -0.22[118]).

The magnitude of the effect of individual incentives, controlling for the potential floor effect, can be very large even in countries where abstention is very low. If we turn to the analysis of predicted probabilities the interpretation of the results changes dramatically. If individual incentives decrease the likelihood of abstaining, and this reduction cannot go beyond zero, then of course we will not find much cross-national variation in the probability of abstaining of advantaged citizens: their abstention levels will always be close to zero. On the contrary, the predicted probability of abstaining for disadvantaged electors depends heavily on the average level of abstention of the country (r=0.90). From the interpretation of the expected probabilities we would conclude that disadvantaged electors are more influenced by the context where they live. From the interpretation of the B coefficients, as we shall see, we would conclude that, free from floor effects, advantaged electors are more sensitive to their contexts.

Table 3.15. The effect of individual incentives by country

Country	B	Ct.	Chi ^{2}	df	N	P(abs) low incentives	P(abs) high incentives
Belgium	-2.79*	-2.39*	10*	1	4,234	.08	.01
Denmark	-3.17*	-1.20*	24*	1	886	.23	.01
Finland	-2.41*	- .72*	35*	1	2,652	.33	.04
France	-2.77*	- .18*	310*	1	951	.46	.05
Germany	-2.75*	-1.02*	194*	1	10,895	.27	.02
Greece	-1.61*	-2.54*	4*	1	914	.07	.02
Ireland	-1.71*	-1.03*	6*	1	831	.26	.06
Italy	-4.36*	-1.49*	189*	1	954	.18	.003
Netherlands	-4.01*	- .96*	65*	1	1,506	.28	.01
Norway	-2.89*	- .44	22*	1	2,187	.39	.04
Portugal	- .26	-1.63*	.5	1	858	.16	.13
Spain	- .95*	-1.52*	39*	1	4,945	.18	.08
Sweden	-4.70*	- .88*	38*	1	2,578	.29	.004
Switzerland	-5.58*	2.04*	155*	1	996	.89	.03
Great Britain	-3.38*	- .54*	374*	1	3,532	.37	.02

* Significant at p<0.05

[118] The level of abstention is calculated according to survey data (average for country).

Figure 3.2 represents graphically what the B coefficients in table 3.15 say. In order to simplify interpretation, four countries have been chosen according to two dimensions, the overall abstention level and the magnitudes of the effect of the index of individual incentives.

	High level of abstention	**Low level of abstention**
High effect of individual incentives	Norway	Italy
Low effect of individual incentives	Portugal	Greece

Norway and Portugal show a high level of abstention, but while the former presents a high effect of individual incentives the latter displays no effect of this variable. Italy presents low abstention and important effect of individual incentives, while Greece presents low abstention together with small individual level effects.

The figure shows clearly how cross-national variation in the effects (distance between the lines in the Y axis) is larger as individual incentives increase. For low individual incentives the log odds of abstaining vary between -0.5 and -2.5, while for high incentives the variation is between -2.5 and -6.0. This means that, independently from the fact that they vote a lot, advantaged electors are more likely to be influenced by the context in which they live.

However, the figure representing the predicted probabilities by country (3.3) shows something that is apparently in contradiction with figure 3.2: precisely for low individual incentives the expected probabilities of abstaining vary between 0.07 and 0.4, while in the case of advantaged electors the variation is between 0 and 0.15. This is so because *by definition of the logit model*, the changes in the probability of abstaining produced by a unit change in the level of individual incentives are largest when the probability of abstaining is close to 0.5, and smallest when this probability approaches 0 or 1. So since disadvantaged electors abstain more (their probability of abstaining is closer to 0.5), there is more room for contextual factors to play a role. Advantaged electors, on the contrary, vote in massive numbers and therefore contextual factors cannot show their effect.[119]

[119] Note that the differences in the expected participation rate between advantaged and disadvantaged electors depend both on the magnitudes of the effect and on the overall participation levels.

Figure 3.2. The effect of individual incentives in the log odds of abstaining in Greece, Italy, Norway and Portugal

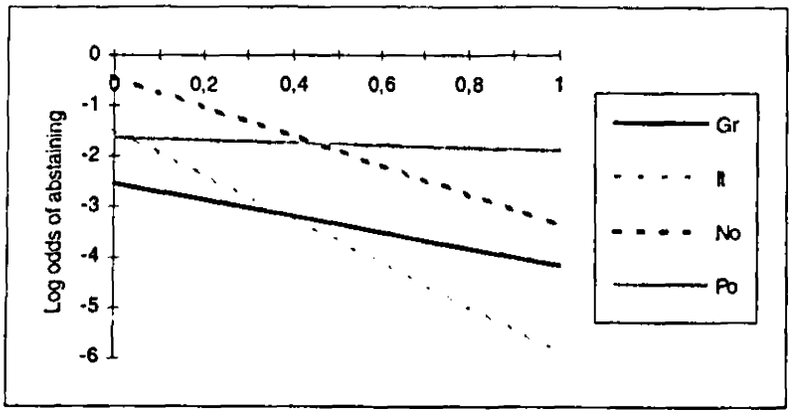
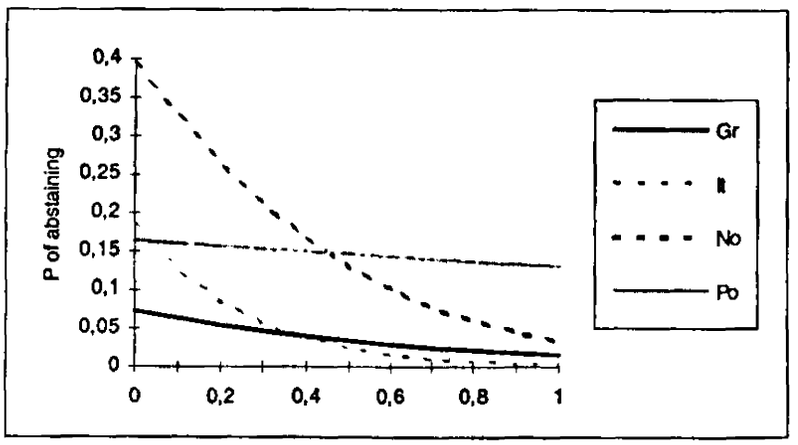


Figure 3.3. The effect of individual incentives on the probability of abstaining in Greece, Italy, Norway and Portugal



7 Summary

In this chapter the effect of individual resources, social integration and political involvement over the likelihood of abstaining has been analysed. Interest in politics and degree of politicisation come up as the most important determinants of electoral participation. Only in Portugal do these factors fait to have a significant effect.

Social integration is the second main determinant of abstention. Church attendance has an important effect in most countries, after controlling for all other factors, and the fact of being married or living with a permanent partner is an important

determinant of abstention in five of our fifteen countries (Belgium, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Great Britain).

On the side of resources, age is doubtless the most important one, particularly in countries such as Finland, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Portugal. Income and especially education have a limited and irregular effect, depending on the country. Income seems to be important, after having controlled for all other variables, in France and Ireland, while education decreases the chances of abstaining only in Finland and Italy.

Comparing the magnitude of the effect of individual incentives over the likelihood of voting we find important cross country variations that do not depend on the overall participation level. That is, we find countries where overall abstention is very small and still the effect of individual factors is important (such as Italy, Sweden, Belgium) and countries where abstention is relatively high and still individual factors have a limited effect (Portugal, Spain, Ireland).

This individual level analysis has clearly shown the importance of context: individual resources and motivations do not have the same influence everywhere; cross-national variations are important, and thus the next chapter is devoted to the analysis of the effect of systemic factors on the overall levels of electoral abstention.

CHAPTER IV

INSTITUTIONS, PARTIES AND ELECTIONS
THE SYSTEMIC DETERMINANTS OF ELECTORAL ABSTENTION

1 Introduction

For some scholars, explanations for turnout variation should be made in terms of individual motivations, and not of ecological or environmental characteristics. Lane and Ersson (1990), for instance, argue that,

> "The identification of relationships between macro properties of social systems as expressed in lawlike statements is incomplete as long as it is not shown that these relationships can be understood in terms of the motives of the actors in the social systems. Statistical explanations at the macro or aggregate level in terms of correlations and regression parameters remains an incomplete step in the process of interpretation as long as they are not capable of being derived from micro properties of the participants." (457) "(...) macro hypotheses are difficult to interpret because they cannot be derived from any plausible theory about human motivation." (465)

Still, many authors have emphasised the relevance of contextual factors as determinants of electoral abstention.[120] Non-voting varies substantially across countries, and as chapter III has shown "micro properties of the participants" are far from explaining all this variation. Therefore it is not unreasonable to suspect that the likelihood of an individual's voting is not only determined by his or her characteristics, but also by the context in which the election takes place. Moreover, the relationship between individual characteristics and the likelihood of abstaining is not constant across

[120] See Blais and Carty 1990, Blais and Dobrzynska forthcoming, Colomer 1991, Crepaz 1990, Denters 1995, Franklin 1996a and 1996b, Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis 1996, Hirczy 1992, 1994, 1995, Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992, Jackman 1987, Jackman and Miller 1995, Justel 1995, Lancelot 1968, Montero 1986c, Narud and Valen 1996, Rokkan 1970b.

countries. Thus, the characteristics of the political context are probably affecting the extent to which individual resources and motivation affect participation.

This chapter will address the first of these two questions, that is, the direct effect of systemic factors on abstention, from an aggregate perspective that assumes that this effect is equal for all electors. Chapter V will then analyse the question of the interaction between individual and systemic determinants of electoral abstention.

The choice of explanatory variables at the systemic level has been far more restricted than in the case of individual factors. Explanations of turnout variation at the systemic level have ranged from levels of urbanisation and literacy rates to electoral laws, including political culture variables, parties and party systems, election competitiveness, etc. Some selection ought to be made through all the potential explanations of differences in abstention rates across elections.

A first approach to the question has focused on the relationship between economic and political development, coming to the conclusion that countries with higher levels of economic development also score high in terms of political participation.[121] The process of modernisation, "the industrial penetration of traditional societies" (Milbrath and Goel 1977:124) brought about changes in the social structure and in the political culture that in turn increased the levels of political participation. On the one hand, the process of modernisation produced an increase in the size of middle classes who were more likely to be informed and to develop attitudes favourable to participation. On the other hand, economic development also brought the expansion of "secondary" institutions (voluntary organisations, unions, parties, etc.) with an important effect on increasing political awareness and participation. Without denying the relevance of socio-economic factors in the explanation of cross-national differences in electoral abstention, our sample of countries is relatively homogeneous in terms of socio-economic development (as compared for instance, to the sample analysed by Blais and Dobrizynska forthcoming). I shall therefore take this set of variables as parametrised.

A second important set of explanatory factors is related to political culture variables. If attitudes contribute to explain participation at the individual level, they should also show some effect at the aggregate level. Almond and Verba's comparative

[121] See Blais and Dobrizynska forthcoming, Deutsch 1961, Huntington 1968, Almond and Verba 1963, Lipset 1969, Nie, Powell and Prewitt 1969, Verba, Nie and Kim 1978, Weiner 1966.

analysis of political orientations (1963) however, has some puzzling results as far as electoral participation is concerned. If political attitudes favourable to participation (interest, trust, sense of civic duty, political efficacy, etc.) were highest in the US, followed by Britain, Germany and then Italy, they certainly do not explain the low levels of turnout in the former and the high level of turnout in the latter countries (Crewe 1981:260). Other studies taking into account political attitudes have also questioned the explanatory power of these variables at the aggregate level.[122]

Finally, a last block of explanations for turnout variation is related to the incentives and constraints related to the political environment where elections take place, and it is on this group of variables that this chapter will focus. The literature on the political determinants of electoral participation has grown rapidly in the last few years. Broadly, three different sets of factors can be distinguished.

Firstly, the institutional setting, and particularly the electoral law, may produce selective incentives to vote or to stay at home, may facilitate or render more complex the act of voting. Section 3 of this chapter analyses the relationship between institutional incentives and electoral abstention. Secondly, the party system, and particularly the strength of its links with society are also potentially important determinants of participation. I shall analyse the form and strength of those links between parties and society and its effect on abstention rates in section 4. Finally, the degree of decisiveness of the election, both institutionally and in terms of the political context is also expected to affect abstention. The more important elections are perceived to be, the higher the level of electoral mobilisation. This is analysed section 5.

Thus, after an exploratory analysis of the evolution of electoral abstention in 16 Western Europe democracies, presented in section 2, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H_{1I}: Institutional incentives for voting decrease the level of abstention.

H_{1T}: The stronger the links between parties and society, the lower the level of abstention.

H_{1T}: The higher the level of decisiveness of elections, the lower the level of abstention.

[122] See Flikinger and Studlar 1992, Glass, Squire and Wolfinger 1984, Jackman 1987, Jackman and Miller 1995, Powell 1986, Wolfinger, Glass and Squire 1990

2 Exploratory analysis of abstention rates in Western Europe

This section gives a brief descriptive look at the variation to be explained in the rest of the chapter. This variation is both cross-national and, within countries, along time.[123]

2.1 Cross-national variation

Table 4.1 presents the average abstention levels of 16 Western European countries between 1945 and 1994.[124]

Table 4.1. Average abstention by country 1945-1994

Country	Mean	Standard deviation	Number of elections
Belgium	7.2	1.6	16
Austria	7.7	3.9	15
Italy	8.9	2.6	13
Netherlands	11.6	6.6	15
Sweden	13.7	4.6	16
Germany	14.4	4.5	13
Denmark	14.4	2.6	21
Mean	*18.0*	*9.4*	
Norway	19.5	3.0	13
Greece	19.6	3.4	15
Portugal	19.7	8.0	8
France	22.7	5.6	15
Finland	22.7	4.9	14
Great Britain	23.4	3.4	14
Ireland	26.3	2.8	15
Spain	26.4	4.7	6
Switzerland	41.3	10.1	12
N			221

Sources: Mackie and Rose 1991, Mackie 1991, 1992, Political Data Yearbooks (EJPR 1992, 1993, 1994).

The first conclusion that we draw from table 4.1 is that even if parliamentary elections have the highest participation rate, as compared to local, regional or European elections, on average 18 per cent of those *registered* to vote prefer to abstain, and this

[123] Within countries there is also variation across other sub-national units, such as regions or electoral districts, which is left out of this analysis.
[124] Excluding Greece 1946 and 1950 for which data on the registered electorate are not available.

figure rises to over 25 per cent in Ireland or Spain and even to 40 per cent in Switzerland.[125]

The set of countries can be divided into five clusters according to the level of non-voting. In the first place, Belgium, Austria and Italy stand out as the three countries whose abstention rates, on average do not reach 10 per cent of the electorate. The high level of turnout has kept particularly stable in Belgium, with the lowest standard deviation, but has clearly decreased in the other two countries, as we shall see in the next section. In the 1990s Belgium remains as the only country with abstention rates below 10 per cent (see table 4.3).

The second cluster is formed by the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, and Denmark, with abstention rates varying between 10 and 15 per cent of the electorate and with standard deviations that accuse a higher level of variation. This reflects the increase in abstention due to the removal of compulsory voting in the case of the Netherlands[126] as well as the increasing trends that started in the 1970s in Sweden and Germany. The Danish level of turnout has fluctuated but with no clear trend.

Norway, Greece and Portugal form the third cluster, with average abstention close to 20 per cent, slightly above the grand mean. These three countries show a very different pattern of evolution. In Norway the level of participation increased all along the 60s, 70s and 80s, but suddenly dropped in the 1993 election to its lowest level since 1945 (see Narud and Valen 1996). Portugal's transition to democracy was characterised by very high levels of electoral mobilisation for a country without compulsory voting (92 per cent in the 1975 election). However the downward trend in turnout has been dramatic since then, falling from an average abstention of 12 per cent in the 1970s to over 30 per cent in the 1990s.[127] Finally, Greece is the country with compulsory voting that presents lowest levels of participation, below the European average.[128]

A fourth rather heterogeneous set of countries if formed by the less participatory ones: France, Finland, Great Britain, Ireland and Spain. While the first three are around

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[125] This does not imply the existence of a permanent body of non voters. On the contrary, there seems to be a significant amount of citizens that participate in some elections and abstain in others, while only a few admit to be permanent non-voters (see Crewe, Fox and Alt 1977).

[126] Mean abstention in the Netherlands was 5.4 per cent with compulsory voting, as compared to 18.1 per cent once it was made voluntary. See Irwin 1974.

[127] Bacalhau (1994) argues, however, that the real level of abstention is overestimated by official election results in about 50 per cent, due to an inflation on the electoral register, which is 13 per cent higher than the national census.

[128] This, however may partly be due to the fact that the Greek electoral register seems to be inflated as well (see Clogg 1987, Mackie and Rose 1991).

the 23 per cent abstention, the latter two reach over 26 per cent average. In all these countries abstention has increased consistently at least for the last three decades. Only Spain presents an upwards trend when looking at decade averages of turnout as we shall se in the next section. In Great Britain, where the increase in abstention started as soon as in the 1960s, the 1992 election presented however lower rates of abstention than in previous decades, in fact the lowest since 1974.

Finally the case of Switzerland stands out as an outlier, with abstention rates as high as twice the European average which have doubled between the 1940s and the 1990s. This will force the analysis to be performed in most cases with and without this country, in order to avoid (or at least be aware of) the bias that its inclusion may produce.

Table 4.2 presents the results of an analysis of variance that includes country as a factor. The results confirm the idea that country-specific characteristics are of a great importance in explaining turnout differences: about 76 per cent of the total variance[129] in the dependent variable (percentage of abstention over the electorate) is between countries, and the remaining within countries, which suggests that it is country specific factors (and not so much election specific characteristics) that explain abstention variation. However, the evolution along time of the levels of abstention also presents some interesting features that we shall discuss in the next section.

Table 4.2. Analysis of variance

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	η^2
Between countries	14,947	15	998.3	44.4	0.76
Within countries	4,609	205	22.5		
Total	19,584	220	89.0		

[129] The η^2 coefficient is calculated dividing the between groups sum of squares by the total sum of squares, and represents the proportion of the total variance in the dependent variable that is located between groups, in our case, countries. Note that significance is not reported since inferences to any universe are not made in this part of the analysis.

2.2 Time variation

Table 4.3 presents the average levels of abstention by decade in the 16 countries. The table shows some interesting patterns, among which the increase in the level of non-voting (starting at different points and with different magnitudes) is the most general and outstanding. Since the 1960s, when average abstention was 16 per cent, the percentage of non-voters has increased to 17 per cent in the 1970s, 20 per cent in the 1980s and 22 per cent in the first half of the 1990s. Only Belgium, Norway, Greece and Spain out of the 16 countries do not show a consistently increasing level of electoral abstention.

The other 12 countries can be divided in two blocks according to the magnitude of the change: Italy, Great Britain, Denmark, Sweden and Ireland show moderate increases in abstention rates, always smaller than 6 or 7 per cent. In the first two cases the increasing pattern started in the 1950s, while in the other three it was after the mobilised 1970s that abstention started increasing. In turn, Austria, the Netherlands, Germany, Finland, France, Portugal and Switzerland show a severe decrease of the level of abstention (see figure 4.1): 12-13 per cent decrease for Austria, France and Germany, 16-17 per cent for the Netherlands, Germany, and Finland, and over 20 per cent for Portugal and Switzerland. The gap has been particularly wide between the 1980s and the 1990s in Austria, the Netherlands, Germany, Portugal and Finland. France shows a larger increase in abstention between the 1970s and the 1980s.

Figure 4.1. Percentage of abstention by decade and country: increasing patterns

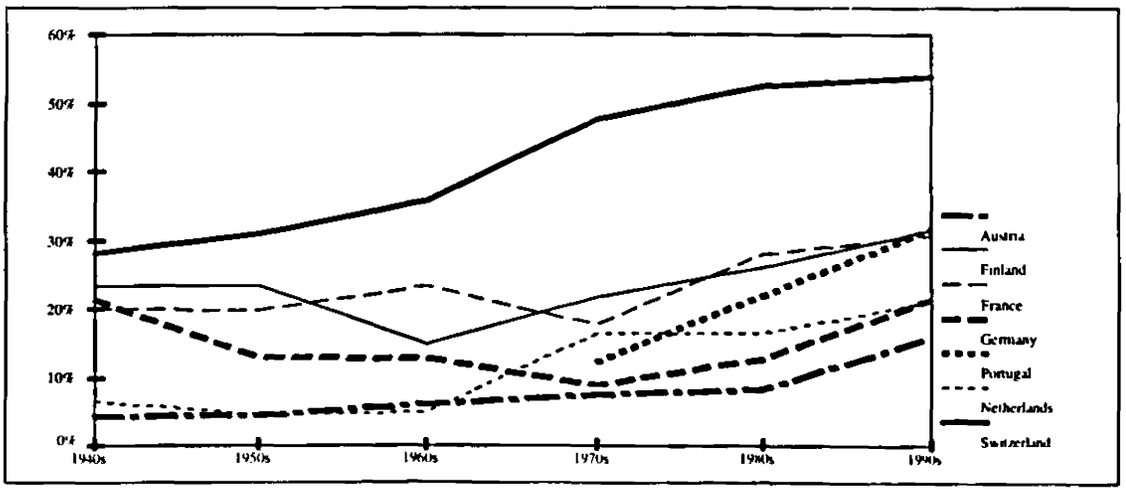
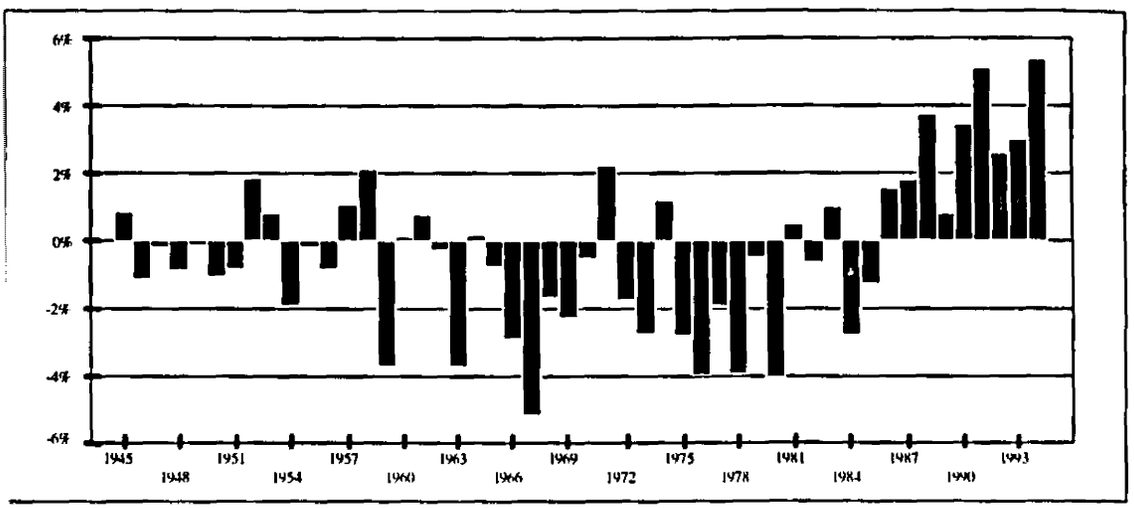


Table 4.3. Abstention means by decade and by country

Country	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s
Belgium	7.7	6.9	8.7	7.1	6.1	7.2
Austria	4.5	4.7	6.2	7.7	8.5	16.0
Italy	9.4	6.4	7.2	7.4	10.3	13.3
Netherlands	6.6	4.6	5.0	16.5	16.5	21.2
Sweden	17.3	21.3	13.6	9.6	10.9	13.2
Germany	21.5	13.2	12.9	9.1	12.9	21.6
Denmark	14.0	18.3	12.7	12.5	14.0	16.3
Norway	20.8	21.2	19.5	18.7	16.4	24.2
Greece	--	24.2	17.8	19.7	16.5	19.3
Portugal	--	--	--	12.5	22.0	31.8
France	20.1	20.0	23.4	17.8	28.1	30.7
Finland	23.5	23.5	15.0	21.8	26.1	31.6
Great Britain	27.4	19.8	23.4	24.9	25.9	22.2
Ireland	25.8	25.7	25.8	23.6	27.1	31.5
Spain	--	--	--	27.5	26.6	23.6
Switzerland	28.3	31.0	35.9	47.7	52.5	54.0
Means	16.0	17.7	16.2	17.0	19.6	21.7
St.dev.	8.0	8.3	8.2	10.5	10.1	9.9
N	22	42	37	49	49	22

Sources: See table 4.1. Countries ordered from lowest to highest average abstention for the whole period as in table 4.1.

Figure 4.2. Evolution of the relative level of abstention



As mentioned before, Spain represents the only country where turnout seems to have increased consistently, though this somehow hides a rather fluctuating pattern with relatively high turnout in the 1977, 1982, 1993 (and 1996) elections, and a low turnout in 1979, 1986 and 1989. Greece and Norway show a decrease in abstention as well, but only until the 1990s. The last elections in these two countries have joined the more general pattern of decreasing electoral participation.

Comparisons of the evolution of abstention along time across different countries are complicated by the fact that a high or a low level of abstention of a specific election makes sense only when interpreted in relation to the overall country mean. The variation of turnout within countries should not be looked at in absolute terms but in relation to the country mean. In order to do this we shall elaborate a measure of relative level abstention that subtracts the country average abstention for the whole period from the specific election abstention rate. A high positive value on this variable represents a case where abstention was particularly high as compared to the average level in the country, while a large negative value represents a case of very high electoral mobilisation where abstention was lower to the average country level. Figure 4.2. presents the evolution of this measure of relative abstention along time

The figure shows clearly that all elections since the mid 1980s have presented levels of abstention that are higher than the means for each country. The last decade, therefore, has been one of electoral demobilisation. This contrasts particularly with the 1960s and 1970s, where the bars show levels of abstention lower to the mean in all but a few years. In the 1940s and 1950s differences with respect to the mean were smaller and in both senses.

Country differences explain 75 per cent of the variance on average abstention.[130] If we include the variable decade, the percentage of variance explained increases to 77 per cent. Since most of the variation in abstention seems to be concentrated between countries, we shall thus have a close look at country specific factors as fundamental explanatory factors. But since there is also within country variation, whenever possible the election and not only the country will be taken as unit of analysis.

In the next few sections I shall analyse electoral abstention substituting the variables "country" and "decade", that is, space and time, by explanatory variables related to the institutional setting, the party system and the election characteristics.

[130] The adjusted R^2 for a regression including country names as dummies (Switzerland as reference category) is 0.75.

3 Institutional incentives

This section introduces the first set of factors supposed to affect electoral abstention. For the case of institutional incentives we have gather information of all electoral laws in each of the countries, including presence of compulsory voting, voting facilities and characteristics of the electoral system. This enables us to perform an analysis with the election as the unit of analysis. The relative large number of cases (over 200) allows to even include several variables at the same time.

I shall first analyse the impact of direct legal incentives (compulsory voting and voting facilities), and then the effect of the electoral system (strategic voting incentives and ballot structure). Finally in the last subsection we shall look at their joint impact.

3.1 Direct legal incentives: compulsory voting and voting facilities

Table 4.4 presents the different direct legal incentives that are available in each country: whether voting is compulsory or voluntary, the number of days the election polls are open, the provisions for advance, proxy and postal voting, as well as other kinds of available voting facilities.

The presence of compulsory voting is the most straightforward incentive for voting. There are mandatory voting laws in Belgium, Greece, and partially in Austria and Switzerland. In Italy voting is constitutionalised as a civic duty, though not considered strictly compulsory. Unjustified failure to vote is recorded for five years, but has no significant consequences. In spite of that, Italy is usually considered as a case of compulsory voting.[131] In the case of Portugal, although voting is not compulsory, unjustified non-voters are registered and considered ineligible for one year. In our analysis we have considered as countries where voting is compulsory only Belgium, Greece and Italy, as well as the Netherlands until 1970.

[131] "Il legislatore ordinario, dunque, ha coerentemente determinato il dovere di voto in un obbligo sanzionato come illecito amministrative, confermando le stesse sanzioni "lievi" prescritte dal decreto n.74/1946. A carico dell'elettore che si astiene dal voto, senza giustificazione, è stata posta una ulteriore sanzione: la menzione "non ha votato" da sciati dal Sindaco, per gli usi di legge, ai cittadini, astenutisi dal voto senza un giustificato motivo." (Cordini 1988:125). See also Lombardo 1996.

Table 4.4. Direct legal incentives

Country	Comp. voting	Work or rest day	Advance voting	Proxy voting	Postal voting	Other facilities
Austria	No (1)	Rest	No	No	No	Polls in hospitals and old age homes; absentees may vote in any district; residents abroad may vote since '92.
Belgium	Yes	Rest	No	Yes	Yes	
Denmark	No	Work	No	No	Yes	Transport facilities for handicapped/ elderly people.
Finland	No	Rest (3)	Yes	No	No	Residents abroad may vote in diplomatic offices.
France	No	Rest	No	Yes	Until '75	
Germany	No	Rest	No	No	Yes	
Greece	Yes	Rest	No	No	No	
Ireland	No	Work	No	No	Rest (7)	
Italy	Yes	Sun & Mon	No	No	No	Travel facilities; voting in hospitals, prisons, hospices; voting in other constituency allowed.
Netherlands	Until '70	Work	No	Yes	Yes	Residents abroad may vote in diplomatic offices.
Norway	No	Sun & Mon	Yes	No	Yes	Residents abroad may vote in diplomatic offices and ships.
Portugal	No	Rest	No	No	Yes	
Spain	No	Rest (4)	No	No	Yes	Residents abroad may vote in diplomatic offices.
Sweden	No	Rest	Yes	Yes(5)	Yes	Residents abroad may vote in diplomatic offices. Polls in hospitals, old age houses, prisons.
Switzerland	No (2)	Rest	Yes	No(6)	Yes (8)	
Great Britain	No	Work	No	Yes	Yes	Polls in hospitals, old age homes, prisons.

Sources: Cadart 1983, Crewe 1981, Herman and Mendel 1977, Mackie and Rose 1991.

(1) In Austria voting is not compulsory at the national level but can be made mandatory by the lander. It is the case of Steienmark, Tyrol and Vorarlberg (26 per cent of the electorate) (Nohlen 1995). (2) In Switzerland voting is compulsory in Aargau, Thurgau, Schaffhausen and St. Gallen (17 per cent of the electorate) (Nohlen 1995). (3) The 1991 elections were the first one in which the polls were open only on Sundays, and not on Sundays and Mondays as before. (4) When voting in working days electors have several hours free from work to vote. Voting in working days is thus considered as a facility. However, since 1986 elections are always held on Sundays. (5) Spouses and relatives can be used as messengers before witness. (6) Varies by canton. (7) Obligatory for armed forces and police. (8) Varies by canton, obligatory for those doing the military service.

The bivariate analysis presented in table 4.5 confirms the findings of previous research on compulsory voting and turnout.[132] In countries where voting is mandatory abstention is 9 per cent lower than countries where it is not. In terms of likelihood, electors under voluntary voting are almost twice as likely to abstain than those living in systems with compulsory voting provisions.[133]

Table 4.5. Percentage of non-voters with and without compulsory voting

Voluntary voting	Compulsory voting	Difference	Ratio
20.0 (170)	11.0 (53)	9.0	1.8

Number of cases in parenthesis.

The second main institutional incentive is the level of voting facilities available. Voters who expect to be absent or unable to vote in the election day may authorise some relative to vote on their behalf (proxy voting), vote by mail following a special procedure (postal voting) or vote a few days before the election (advance voting). These facilities may be more or less restricted or may even not be present at all. Other voting facilities available in the election day are for instance the installation of polls in hospitals, old age homes and prisons, allowing voting in other than one's circumscription, travel facilities in election day, etc. All these dispositions lower the amount of effort required to vote, and for some people even render it possible. Therefore are expected to reduce the level of abstention.

The celebration of elections on Sunday is more questionably considered as a voting facility. Sunday voting has been considered as an incentive to vote arguing that electors should have more time to vote than in a working day (see Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis 1996:323). However, this is not always the case. In Spain, for instance, voting in a working day (in use until the 1986 election) operated as an incentive given that electors had a number of paid working hours to go and vote. Other

[132] See Colomer 1991, Crewe 1981, Gosnell 1930, Hirczy 1994, Irwin 1974, Jackman 1987, Lijphart 1997, Powell 1980, de Winter and Ackaert 1994.

[133] The ratio between the percentages of abstention in the two categories of the independent variable is used as in chapter III, as an indicator of the strength and direction of the bivariate relationship.

authors have argued that voting on a Sunday may not increase turnout if electors give preference to their leisure activities (Blondel, Sinnot and Svensson 1996:11).[134]

An index of voting facilities has been computed including, with the same weight, the main types of voting facilities: advance, postal and proxy voting, Sunday voting and other facilities listed in the last column of table 4.4. The index scores from 0 (lowest level of voting facilities) to 1 (highest level of voting facilities). Ireland and the Netherlands have the lowest possible value of voting facilities (0.0) followed by Greece and Italy (0.2), while Sweden stands as the country with the highest level (1). Belgium, France before 1975, Norway, Switzerland and Great Britain, are also considered to have a relatively high level of voting facilities (0.6). Finally Austria, Denmark, Finland, France after 1975, Germany, Portugal and Spain score a medium to low value (0.4)

Table 4.6 presents a comparison of abstention means in countries with high and low levels of voting facilities.[135] The results are no more encouraging than those reported by Crewe (1981) or Dittrich and Johansen (1983), who fail to confirm any negative effect of the voting facilities over the level of abstention. It seems that countries with a higher level of voting facilities have on the whole a lower level of turnout though the difference is only about 3 per cent. This may indicate the fact that standard voting facilities are introduced as a result of low turnout, and are, in any case, not very effective. When the case of Switzerland is excluded from the analysis the difference in abstention between elections with high and low levels of voting facilities disappears.

Table 4.6. Percentage of non-voters by voting facilities

	Low voting facilities	High voting facilities	Difference	Ratio
All cases	16.8 (81)	20.0 (140)	-3.2	.8
Without CH	16.8 (69)	16.3 (140)	.5	1.0

Number of cases in parenthesis.

[134] The difference in abstention for elections with and without Sunday voting is small (0.67 per cent lower for those countries with Sunday voting, which becomes 2.63 per cent if Switzerland is excluded from the analysis) but enough to consider Sunday voting as a facility.

[135] Countries that score less than in the index 0.5 are coded as lacking voting facilities, while those scoring 0.5 or more are coded as providing them.

3.2 Electoral systems: strategic incentives and expression of preferences

Electoral systems constitute the second type of institutional structure that may affect abstention. Appendix C presents the main features of the electoral systems of the 16 countries that constitute the basis of this analysis for the period between 1945 and 1994.

The work of scholars that have studied electoral systems has not paid much attention to their effect over electoral participation (Rae 1971, Taagepera and Shugart 1989, Lijphart 1994[136]). However, almost all works that focus on electoral participation mention some dimension of electoral system as a potentially important determinant of abstention rates.

The relationship between electoral systems and electoral participation is an ambiguous one, not only because effects are not clearly isolated from other variables such as the number of parties, but also because it is not clear which dimension of the electoral system (degree of proportionality, constituency size, electoral formula) is actually affecting turnout.

According to the literature, single member majority systems are expected to increase abstention because their distorted ratio between votes and seats may discourage from voting supporters of minor parties (Crewe 1981, Blais and Carty 1990). As Jackman states,

> "highly disproportional systems require minor parties to accumulate many more votes to achieve a given degree of legislative representation, which lowers the benefits of voting for the supporters of these parties. The greater the disproportionality then, the more likely are the votes of minor party supporters to be wasted." (1987:408)

Moreover, in systems with single member constituencies, some districts will be non-competitive, and thus hopeless even for second main parties. While in electoral systems with multimember districts parties are more likely to have incentives to mobilise everywhere across the country, in systems with single member districts they would focus mainly in those that are marginal (Crewe 1981, Blais and Carty 1990, Powell 1980:12). As early as in 1930 Gosnell stated that plurality systems:

[136] But see and Nohlen 1995 (364) and Valles and Bosch 1997 (187-188). The former finds the electoral system to be irrelevant, though his analysis is not very thorough, while the latter find proportional systems to encourage participation.

> "tend(s) to discouraged voting in districts where one party has clear ascendancy", while "the list systems (...) give definite recognition to the various party organisations and encourage full vote on the part of each of them." (1930:201)

However, majority single-member districts also present some features that could be expected to increase the motivations to vote: the logic of the system is easier to understand, and the relationship between the representative and the constituency is usually closer. Considering that disproportional systems usually reduce the number of parties present in parliament and are designed to favour the formation of clear government majorities, the electorate seems to have a more direct intervention in the selection of the executive, which does not depend on negotiations among political parties (Powell 1980, Crewe 1981, Blais and Carty 1990, Jackman 1987). From this point of view proportional systems produce less decisive elections and therefore should show lower turnout.

Empirical evidence on the effect of electoral systems over turnout is weak. Powell (1980) and Jackman (1987) find that after controlling for other systemic variables (registration laws, compulsory voting), proportional representation does not strongly effect turnout. Blais and Carty (1990) find that PR systems produce higher participation rates than majority or plurality systems, but paradoxically the degree of proportionality comes out as a non significant intervening variable. Crewe (1981) finds some positive effect of proportional representation over turnout if it comes together with multipartism.

I shall adopt Lijphart's index of effective threshold as an indicator of the average cost of representation for a party (Lijphart 1994). This variable depends on the electoral formula, the district magnitude and the presence of legally established thresholds. Lijphart's operationalisation defines the effective threshold as the average between the threshold of representation (minimum share of the vote a party needs to have guaranteed a seat under the most unfavourable circumstances) and the threshold of exclusion (minimum share of the vote a party needs to be able to win a seat under the most favourable circumstances).

From the perspective of electors, the effective threshold represents the incentives that the electoral system produces to vote for any given first preference. In cases where parties need to get a relative high percentage of the vote in order to gain seats, voters whose first preference is a small party will be pushed to vote strategically

to a larger party or, eventually, to abstain. Conversely, where such effective threshold is low, voting for the first preference, what ever this is, is encouraged and thus abstention should be lower.

From the point of view of political parties, the effective threshold can be considered as well an indicator of what Powell calls "nationally competitive election districts" (Powell 1986). Systems with small effective thresholds produce incentives for political parties to try and obtain votes all over the territory. Systems with high effective thresholds on the contrary, would push largest parties to concentrate their mobilising efforts in marginal constituencies, at the same time that they would impel small parties to centralise mobilisation in districts where they have a chance of gathering a percentage of the vote above the threshold.

Table 4.7. Percentage of non-voters by electoral threshold

High effective threshold	Low effective threshold	Difference	Ratio
24.0 (54)	15.8 (159)	8.2	1.5

Number of cases in parenthesis.

Table 4.7 presents the average percentage of abstention is system with high and low effective thresholds. In the cases where the effective threshold is higher than 10 per cent of the vote abstention is 8 per cent higher than in cases where this threshold is low, a difference almost as high as the one made by compulsory voting. Electors in systems with high effective thresholds are 1.5 times more likely to abstain. So the hypothesis that electoral systems that discourage voting for small parties show higher abstention rates is confirmed.

A second feature of the electoral system that may affect abstention corresponds to the possibility of expressing preferences, with systems where electors can express preferences for individual candidates expected to have higher levels of turnout. However, again a contradictory hypothesis can be developed, for some authors have argued that the shorter and simpler the ballot is, the easier voting becomes, and thus the lower abstention should be (See Gosnell 1930, Rokkan 1962b).

In this case I have distinguished between those systems in which the voter basically accepts the candidate(s) proposed by the party, and those systems in which the voter has some kind of possibility to express preference for a particular candidate. The

first system includes closed lists (mainly Spain and Portugal) and uninominal districts (Great Britain and France[137]), while the second includes two-vote systems (Germany and Italy since 1994) and systems where voters can express a preference.[138]

Table 4.8 presents the means differences in abstention between systems that allow for the expression of candidate preferences and those which do not. Abstention is almost 6 per cent higher in countries where the electoral system does not allow for preference expression. However, it is likely that at least part of this effect is due to the fact that most of the systems that do not offer the possibility of expressing a preference are as well systems with high effective thresholds.

Table 4.8. Percentage of non-voters by expression of preferences

No preference expression	Preference expression	Difference	Ratio
22.5 (50)	16.6 (171)	5.8	1.4

Number of cases in parenthesis.

3.3 Institutional incentives: multivariate analysis

Finally we shall have a look at the impact of both direct legal incentives and electoral system characteristics at the same time. For this purpose I have run a regression including the four main variables as dummies. The first important point to stress is the fact that both compulsory voting and high effective threshold are the main determinants of abstention. Incentives to vote for the most preferred party, whatever its size may be, and especially compulsory voting, increase participation rates in a clear way. The impact of the effective threshold on abstention is particularly clear if Switzerland is excluded from the analysis, for then it becomes even more important

[137] The data on abstention for France correspond to the first round. In the second round some electors will be excluded from voting (those registered in constituencies where the winner has obtained an absolute majority of the votes). For other voters, the decision to vote may be tougher: "When French voters cannot repeat their first ballot partisan choice at the second ballot, they will vote for another party only if one is available for which they feel a certain amount of sympathy. If they regard the only parties available with disfavour, they will either spoil their ballots or abstain." (Converse and Pierce 1986:345).
[138] A further distinction between effective and ineffective preference expression can be made (see Katz 1987, Gallagher, Laver and Mair 1995), but this did not show any significant effect on the levels of abstention.

than compulsory voting, the variable that the literature points out as the main institutional determinant of abstention levels.

Secondly, voting facilities seem to be strangely related to turnout, for wherever these are present abstention is about 3 per cent higher (1 per cent only if Switzerland is excluded). Finally, the hypothesis that the possibility to express a preference for a specific candidate should decrease abstention is confirmed by the multivariate analysis, but the impact of this variable is very small.

The joint impact of these four institutional incentives accounts for 30 per cent of the variance of abstention in our sample of 221 elections. If the exceptional case of Switzerland is removed, the percentage of variance explained is over 50 per cent.

Table 4.9. Regression analysis of the institutional determinants of abstention

	All cases			Without CH		
	B	**beta**	**s.e.**	**B**	**beta**	**s.e.**
Compulsory voting	- 9.3	- 0.39	1.4	- 6.8	- 0.37	0.9
Voting facilities	2.9	0.15	1.1	- 1.3	- 0.08	0.8
High effective threshold	5.6	0.25	1.5	7.6	0.45	1.0
Preference voting	- 1.4	- 0.06	1.5	- 3.0	- 0.17	1.0
Constant	18.3		1.6	18.5		1.0
Adj. R^2	.30			.54		
N	212			200		

4 Party system embeddedness

Electoral participation is the most institutionalised form of political participation and it is almost entirely channelled by political parties. Voting in parliamentary elections usually means choosing among party candidates; parties help citizens to interpret political information, they create identities that facilitate the choice among different options, and they mobilise electors. Inevitably, the characteristics of parties and party systems must affect the patterns and intensity of electoral participation.

There are many dimensions of party systems that are said to affect electoral turnout: their number, their degree of polarisation, their level of competitiveness.[139] This

[139] See Crepaz 1990, Capron and Kruseman 1988 for instance.

section, however, focuses only on other element of party systems that has been less frequently studied in relation to electoral participation: their degree of embeddedness in society (Crewe 1981, Powell 1980, 1986). As Powell (1980:13) has stated,

> "where the national parties represent different, meaningful, cleavage groups, the electoral outcomes take on an easy identifiable significance. Where these linkages are relatively stable, they provide cues to even poorly informed and less interested voters as to the interpretation of issue and candidate choices in given elections. Therefore, we expect that voting participation will increase to the extent that political parties are linked with nationally identifiable cleavage groups. The critical empirical question here is not one of the party labels and aspirations, but of the de facto success of the parties in creating these linkages".

There are two ways in which a party system can be said to be deeply embedded in society, and the origins of both come to the processes of cleavage crystallisation and political mobilisation that took place during last century in Western Europe (see Rokkan 1970b, Bartolini and Mair 1990b).

The first type of links between parties and electors was developed on the basis of pre-existing community networks and identities. In some societies with high levels of cultural heterogeneity, political parties were created with close links to other organisations and social groups (trade unions, associations, churches, etc.) resulting in what Verba, Nie and Kim call "a fairly well structured pattern of cleavage in a society" (1978:160), or what other authors have called a plural or a segmented society (see Lijphart 1984, Lorwin 1971).

The second type of party system embeddedness is its degree of organisational encapsulation, which reflects the extent to which parties penetrate in society via membership in their own organisation or in others directly related to electoral mobilisation such as trade unions (see Bartolini and Mair 1990b, Powell 1986).

A high degree of embeddedness through cultural differentiation and/or through organisational encapsulation is expected to mobilise electors by bringing parties closer to electors, providing identities of facilitating contacts that render choices and decision making easier and more important for citizens. The relationship between cultural differentiation, organisational encapsulation and electoral abstention is analysed in sections 4.1 and 4.2 respectively. Finally the joint impact of these two factors is studied in sections 4.3.

4.1 Cultural differentiation

At the time of the formation of political parties, Western European societies were broken according to four cleavage lines: the State-Church cleavage, the centre-periphery cleavage, the urban-rural cleavage and the class cleavage (see Rokkan 1970b). From these four lines of division, only two will be considered in this analysis, the religious cleavage and the ethno-linguistic cleavage. Religion and ethnic identities are likely to remain constant along the electors' lives, much more than class or rural-urban identities. They constitute the basis for cleavages with a higher level of closure and thus, wherever party systems are structuctured according to religious or ethno-linguistic cuttings, they will be considered as being embedded in society through cultural segmentation.[140]

4.1.1 Religious segmentation

The religious cleavage is one of particular complexity. If one is to classify countries according to the relevance of religious divisions for the structure of the party systems, four different dimensions deeply interlinked come up: Catholicism vs. Protestantism, religious homogeneity vs. religious heterogeneity, religious polarisation, and religious segmentation.

The first dimension differentiates Catholic from Protestant countries. In Protestant countries the State would control the different National Churches (Great Britain, Scandinavia, Prussia, the Netherlands), while in Catholic countries the State allied itself to the Roman Catholic Church (Spain, Italy, France, Austria, Belgium).

The second dimension distinguishes between homogeneous and heterogeneous countries. The religious frontiers between Catholicism and Protestantism went through the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland, where even though the State controlled the National Church, there was a strong Catholic minority with an impact upon the structure of the party system.

Thirdly, there is the question of the polarisation around the State-Church issue, centred especially over the control of the machineries of mass education by the States. In some countries, there was an opposition between a national-secular movement and a

[140] Powell (1986) operationalised the strength of the links between parties and social groups by using the extent to which variables like religion or social class enable to predict voting behaviour. He found a significant impact of this variable on electoral turnout in a cross-country analysis.

Catholic-traditionalist (Catholic countries, Protestant countries with strong Catholic minorities), while in others there was no such opposition between the National Churches and the nation-builders. Although this second type is typical of Protestant homogeneous countries, Ireland would fall into this category, for the Catholic Church was never a land-owner and it was an ally of the State builders.[141]

Finally, the last important dimension is the one that grasps the degree of segmentation, that is the development of vertical networks of associations and institutions to endure maximum loyalty to each church and to protect the supporters from cross-cutting communications and pressures.

> "In the Lutheran countries, steps were taken as early as in the seventeenth century to enforce elementary education in the vernacular for all children. The established national churches simply became agents of the State and had no reason to oppose such measures. In the religiously mixed countries and in purely Catholic ones, however, the ideas of the French Revolution proved highly divisive... The parties of religious defence generated through this process grew into bread mass movements after the introduction of manhood suffrage and were able to claim the loyalties of remarkably high proportions of the church-goers in the working class... The church movements tended to isolate their supporters from outside influence through the development of a wide variety of parallel organizations and agencies: they did not only build up schools and youth movements of their own, but also developed confessionally distinct trade unions, sports clubs, leisure associations, publishing houses magazines, newspapers, in one or two cases even radio and television stations." (Rokkan 1970b:103)

According to these four elements we can classify Western European countries as in the following table.

Table 4.10. The religious cleavage in Western Europe

	State-Church polarisation		No State-Church polarisation
	Segmented	**Medium or not segmented**	
Protestant			Sweden Denmark Finland Norway
Mixed	Netherlands	Germany Switzerland	Great Britain
Catholic	Austria Belgium	Italy Spain France Portugal	Ireland

[141] "The outcomes of the early struggles between State and Church determined the structure of national politics in the era of democratization and mass mobilezation three hundred years later. In Southern and Central Europe, the counter-Reformation had consolidated the position of the Church and tied its fate to the privileged bodies of the *ancien régime*. The result was a polarization of politics between a national-radical-secular movement and a Catholic-traditionalist one." (Rokkan 1970b, 117-118).

The number of cases available is two small to analyse the effect of all these four variables over electoral abstention. After a few preliminary analysis,[142] segmentation was considered to be the best indicator for cultural differentiation regarding the religious cleavage. Austria, Belgium, and the Netherlands are considered the paradigm or religiously pillarised societies, while Switzerland, Germany, and Italy have a medium level of religious segmentation. Great Britain, Ireland, France, the Scandinavian countries, Spain, Portugal and Greece have low levels of segmentation.[143]

Though in principle it should be ideal to use indicators reflecting the progressive de-pillarization of segmented societies (Irwin 1989, Franklin et al. 1992), unfortunately we lack data on this. Therefore, the measure of segmentation remains constant within each country.

Table 4.11. Percentage of non-voting by religious segmentation

	Medium-low segmentation	High segmentation	Difference	Ratio
All countries	20.2 (137)	14.3 (84)	5.9	1.4
Without CH	20.2 (137)	9.8 (72)	10.4	2.1

Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Switzerland included as high religious segmentation.

In the bivariate analysis presented in table 4.11, abstention is 6 percentage points higher in countries which are not religiously segmented, and this difference increases if Switzerland is removed from the analysis up to 10 percentage points. In segmented countries, electors are twice less likely to abstain than in non segmented countries.

[142] Average abstention was 18 per cent in Catholic countries, 21 per cent in heterogeneous countries (13 per cent in Switzerland is excluded) and 18 per cent in Protestant countries. Religiously polarised countries show an average abstention of 16 per cent (13 per cent when excluding Switzerland) against 21per cent in religiously not polarised countries.

[143] There are a few differences between authors in the classification of countries according to their level of segmentation, partly due to the fact that while Lorwin refers only to religious segmentation, while Lijphart and Bartolini and Mair refer also to ethno-linguistic fragmentation. For instance, Switzerland is considered as highly segmented by Lijphart but as mediumly segmented by Lorwin. Finland is considered as a case of low segmentation by Lorwin, but as medium segmentation by Lijphart and Bartolini. France is considered as mediumly segmented by Lorwin and Lijphart, but as not segmented by Bartolini and Mair. Spain is considered as plural by Lijphart (see Lijphart 1984:42-44).

4.1.2 Ethno-linguistic fragmentation

The presence of cultural identities based on the ethno-linguistic cleavage is measured by the level of ethnic fragmentation. Fragmentation is operationalised through a simple index that can be interpreted as the probability that taking two individuals at random from a country, they will belong to different linguistic groups.[144] If the country is completely homogeneous the index will score 0, while a maximum level of heterogeneity would be indicated by a value of 1.

The index of ethno-linguistic fragmentation offers a very clear distinction between a majority of countries whose population is relatively homogeneous (Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and Sweden) and those clearly heterogeneous (Belgium, Spain, Switzerland and Great Britain). Finland stands somehow in the middle with is highly politicised Swedish minority, which amounts to only about 5 per cent of the population.

Table 4.12. Ethno-linguistic fragmentation by country

High	Medium	Low
Belgium (0.50) Spain (0.44) Switzerland (0.50) Great Britain (0.32)	Finland (0.15)	Austria (0.05) Denmark (0.0) France (0.0) Germany (0.0) Greece (0.09) Ireland (0.04) Italy (0.0) Netherlands (0.0) Norway (0.0) Portugal (0.01) Sweden (0.0)

Index of ethnic fragmentation (average country values) in parenthesis. Data from Bartolini and Mair (1990b), Clogg (1987) for Greece pre-1974, Flora 1983, Lane and Ersson (1987) for Belgium, Finland (for the period 1979-91), Greece (after 1974), Italy, Spain and Portugal.

The number of countries that present ethno-linguistic heterogeneity is too small to come to definitive conclusions. Moreover one of them also has as well compulsory voting (Belgium) and another a very particular institutional structure that produces extremely high abstention rates (Switzerland). On top of this the link between this social division and the party system is not as clear as in the case of religious segmentation, where all segmented countries by definition had religious parties. In the case of Great Britain for instance, territorially based parties are very small, and some authors have pointed out at the limited role played by ethno-linguistic differences in

[144] $F=1-\Sigma p^2$ where p is the proportion of the population belonging to a given group. See Rae 1971.

electoral behaviour in this country.[145] In turn, Belgian party politics are determined by the linguistic cleavage, with the peculiarity that Walloon and Flemish parties only actually compete with each other in the region of Brussels. Thus, the results presented here are to be interpreted with utmost care.

Table 4.13 does not confirm our original hypothesis that cultural differentiation along ethno-linguistic lines increases electoral participation. Whether we exclude cases with compulsory voting from the analysis, or the exceptional case of Switzerland, countries with low levels of ethno-linguistic fragmentation also show lower levels of electoral abstention.

Table 4.13. Percentage of non-voting by ethno-linguistic fragmentation

	Low fragmentation	High fragmentation	Difference	Ratio
All countries	16.6 (173)	22.8 (48)	- 6.2	0.7
Without CH	16.6 (173)	16.7 (36)	- 0.1	1.0
Countries with voluntary voting	17.6 (138)	30.6 (32)	-13.1	0.6

Belgium, Spain, Switzerland and Great Britain are included in the category of high ethnic fragmentation.

4.1.3 Multivariate analysis of cultural differentiation

Table 4.14 presents the regression coefficients for both types of cultural differentiation, religious and ethno-linguistic, controlling for the effect of compulsory voting. Explanatory variables have been coded as dichotomous (low 0, high 1), so coefficients may be interpreted as mean differences in abstention controlling for the effect of all other included variables. The table presents the estimated coefficients both with and without Switzerland.

When Switzerland is included in the analysis, religious segmentation and ethno-linguistic fragmentation have a strong effect on the likelihood of abstaining, but in opposite directions. Once the deviant Swiss case is excluded, religious segmentation maintains its strong impact reducing the likelihood of abstaining (larger than compulsory voting), while the effect of ethno-linguistic fragmentation is significantly reduced.

[145] See Bartolini and Mair 1990b:249 and works quoted there.

Table 4.14. Regression analysis of cultural differentiation on abstention

	All cases			Without CH		
	B	beta	s.e.	B	beta	s.e.
Religious segmentation	- 4.9	- 0.36	1.3	- 9.2	- 0.59	.9
Ethnic fragmentation	8.6	0.48	1.2	2.0	0.10	1.0
Compulsory voting	- 8.0	- 0.36	1.3	- 3.4	- 0.19	1.0
Constant	19.8		.7	20.3		.5
R^2	.31			.47		
N	220			209		

4.2 Organisational encapsulation

As the level of cultural differentiation was considered as an indicator of indirect identity links between parties and society, the level of organisational density of parties and trade unions can be considered as an indicator of direct embeddedness of the party system in society. Table 4.15 presents the average values of party and trade union density in the 16 countries analysed.

Table 4.15. Organisational encapsulation

Country	Party density		Trade Union density	
	Mean	St.dev.	Mean	St.dev.
Austria	24.9	1.6	60.0	3.7
Belgium	8.6	0.8	53.7	13.1
Denmark	11.6	5.0	66.7	10.0
Finland	16.1	2.1	53.1	21.4
France	1.9	0.4	23.6	11.7
Germany	3.7	0.8	37.9	2.1
Greece	5.4	3.2	35.2	0.0
Ireland	5.4	0.2	48.2	7.2
Italy	11.0	1.5	43.9	8.7
Netherlands	4.6	2.0	37.6	4.8
Norway	14.9	1.0	59.6	9.0
Portugal	4.7	1.3	32.1	1.0
Spain	1.9	0.2	20.3	8.1
Sweden	21.8	1.5	77.7	9.1
Switzerland	10.2	0.2	34.3	3.0
Great Britain	6.4	2.3	46.2	4.0
Average	11.1	7.3	49.3	17.7
N	109		187	

Source: Bartolini 1983, 1996a, Bartolini and Mair 1990b, Bruneau and Macleod 1989, Day and Degenhardt 1989, Clogg 1983, 1987, Gruner 1977, 1984, Jacobs 1989, Katz and Mair 1992, Morlino 1995, Schmitter 1995, Traxler 1992, Vilrokx and Leemput 1992 and Von Beyme 1985.

The level of trade union density is about five times higher than the level of party density. On average, only one out of ten European electors is a member of a political party, while almost one out of two dependent workers belongs to a trade union. These figures hide a very high cross-country variation. In France and Spain, only 2 per cent of the electorate is a member of a party, while in Austria and Sweden this figure is above 20 per cent. In the same way, less than 25 per cent of the French or Spanish workers are unionised, while in Austria, Denmark or Norway this figure close or above 60 per cent, and in Sweden reaches 77.7 per cent.

The levels of party and trade union density also show a higher level of within country variation than the variables used to operationalised cultural segmentation. This is particularly the case for trade union density, whose standard deviation is above 10 per cent in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, and France. As for party density, variation within countries is much smaller, reaching a maximum of 5 per cent in Denmark, where party membership has steadily declined since 1960.[146]

The negative relationship between level of organisational density and electoral abstention is already clear from the figures presented in table 4.16, which includes the average level of abstention by levels of party and trade union density. It is clear that where organisational density is high,[147] abstention is lower. The difference in abstention levels is slightly higher between high and low trade union density (about 6 per cent) than between high and low party density (about 5 per cent).

Table 4.16. Percentage of non-voting by organisational density

	Low density	High density	Difference	Ratio
Party	19.5 (133)	14.8 (76)	4.7	1.3
Trade Union	20.6 (124)	14.6 (97)	6.0	1.4

[146] The levels of within country variation in party membership should be interpreted with care, though, for the reflect also the fact that information on the evolution of organisational density levels is not available for all points in time in all countries. Thus France, Greece, Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Switzerland have fewer observations than all other countries, and therefore show lower standard deviations.

[147] The categories high and low are defined as higher and lower than the overall mean.

However, since these two variables are highly correlated (0.61) some multivariate analysis is needed in order to estimate their relative impact. The results of this analysis are presented in table 4.17, controlling as usual by the effect of compulsory voting. Variables are introduced as dummies, coding densities as high (1) if they where above the overall mean and as low (0) if they where below. Both party and trade union density seem to have a similar effect over abstention. When these densities are above the mean, abstention decreases in about 4 per cent, once controlling for the effect of compulsory voting.

Table 4.17. Regression analysis of organisational encapsulation on abstention

	All cases			Without CH		
	B	**beta**	**s.e.**	**B**	**beta**	**s.e.**
Party density	- 4.4	- .22	1.3	- 3.2	- .21	1.1
Trade Union density	- 4.7	- .24	1.3	- 3.1	- .20	1.0
Compulsory voting	-12.4	- .53	1.3	-10.5	- .58	1.1
Constant	24.2		.8	21.5		.7
Adj. R^2	.37			.36		
N	208			196		

4.3 Party system embeddedness: multivariate analysis

This section is to asses the relative impact of the two forms of party system embeddedness that we have so far analysed independently, i.e., cultural differentiation and organisational encapsulation density. The aim of this analysis is to estimate and compare the relative effect on the level of abstention of each of these two sets of variables, which represent two different forms of party system embeddedness, one relative to cultural identities as mobilising forces, another one focused on party organisational strategies of membership mobilisation. I shall compare the relative strength of both variables in determining levels of electoral abstention.

Table 4.18 presents the regression coefficients for a multivariate analysis including religious segmentation, ethno-linguistic fragmentation, party and trade union density and compulsory voting. All variables decrease the likelihood of abstention, except for ethno-linguistic fragmentation, as the bivariate analysis already showed.

In the analysis including all cases, compulsory voting decreases abstention in about 11 per cent, followed by high trade union density (5 per cent) and religious segmentation (4 per cent). Party density only decreases abstention in 2 per cent.

If Switzerland is excluded from the analysis then religious segmentation becomes the most important determinant of abstention, reducing it more than compulsory voting (9 vs. 6 per cent). Ethnic fragmentation loses any effect and party and trade union density reduce abstention in about 3 per cent each.

Table 4.18. Regression analysis of party system embeddednes on abstention

	All cases			Without CH		
	B	**beta**	**s.e.**	**B**	**beta**	**s.e.**
Compulsory voting	-10.82	-.46	1.37	-5.54	-.31	1.01
Religious segmentation	- 4.26	-.22	1.14	-8.66	-.55	.84
Ethnic fragmentation	6.80	.30	1.31	.74	.04	.99
Party density	- 2.28	-.11	1.31	-2.83	-.18	.90
Trade Union density	- 5.01	-.26	1.18	-3.39	-.22	.81
Constant	23.38		.96	23.40		.65
Adj. R^2	.45			.59		
N	208			196		

We can therefore conclude that among the two dimensions of party system embeddedness that have been distinguished, electoral participation is enhanced more by cultural differentiation than by organisational encapsulation, and within the former it is religious segmentation that reduces the likelihood of abstaining. The limited effect of party density over abstention is a surprising conclusion, although some authors have already arrived at similar results in the study of electoral stability.[148]

[148] "Si tenemos en cuenta que la estabilización del sistema de partidos y la baja volatilidad electoral se han producido en países cuyos partidos manifiestan unos escasísismos niveles de afiliación (como en Portugal), o niveles de afiliación descendentes (como en los restantes países), no parece arriesgado subrayar que la afiliación juega un papel secundario en la estabilización de las preferencias electorales (...) En términos generales, puede conluirse que, en España, la fuerza organizativa de los partidos en los niveles provinciales desempeñó un escaso papel, si es que tuvo alguno, en la movilización del electorado" (Montero and Gunther 1994:510).

5 Decisiveness of the election

Section 3 analysed abstention rates in terms of costs of voting/abstaining by looking at direct legal stimulus and electoral system related incentives. Section 4 examined the impact of systemic motivations related to the degree of social embeddedness of the party system in terms of cultural and organisational elements on the levels of abstention. Finally, this section aims to examine the effect of the decisiveness of the election on abstention levels.

This consideration of the degree of election decisiveness is two-fold. On the one hand parliamentary elections do not have the same importance in all institutional settings; they would be expected to have more relevance wherever parliaments are the only or main directly elected institution, and/or whenever parliaments themselves are play a fundamental role in decision making regarding the legislative and the government formation processes. Section 5.1 analyses the decisiveness of the election from this institutional point of view.

On the other hand, within a given institutional setting not all elections are equally important; their decisiveness depends on whether their outcome (and not elite bargaining) decides government formation, whether the alternatives are clear, and whether they are expected to produce a turnover in government. Section 5.2 analyses this political decisiveness of elections and its relation to abstention for a subset of our sample.

5.1 Institutional decisiveness

The institutional decisiveness of parliamentary elections depends on the institutional importance of national parliaments. The question has been analysed by several authors.[149] Here it shall be assumed that parliaments would reach their maximum level of autonomy and relevance wherever there is (1) no direct election of an executive or head of State, (2) no decentralised structure with regional/state parliaments with political competencies, and (3) no frequent practices of direct democracy that would remove decision making from the parliamentary arena.

[149] See Blais and Dobrzynska forthcoming, Crewe 1981, Franklin 199b, Jackman 1987, Jackman and Miller 1995, Powell 1980.

Table 4.19 presents three indicators for each of these three factors: direct election of the head of State, decentralised structure of the State, and number of referendums held between 1945 and 1993.

The case of Switzerland deserves a special mention, since it is indeed the country that proves the exception to almost every generalisation about the determinants of national turnout (Crewe 1981:257). There are at least two reasons related to the institutional decisiveness of elections that explain the low turnout rates of the Swiss case, in spite of its PR electoral system, its multiparty system that reflects religious, linguistic and class divisions, and its compulsory voting in four cantons. The first one, as already pointed out is the fact that the Swiss political system is based on the institution of direct democracy, that puts directly on the electorate the possibility of deciding on numerous issues.

> "En Suisse, parallèlement aux élections, les votations, portant sur des *objets précis*, offrent une autre possibilité d'influencer la politique. Une comparaison entre ces deux moyens d'expression politique permet de constater que les élections son généralement jugées comme secondaires: seuls 17% des votants et 10% des non-votants trouvent qu'elles son plus importantes que les votations." (Farago 1995:18)

In addition, the Swiss government is based since 1956 on the so called *magic formula*, that grants two ministers to the Radicals, two to the Socialists, two to the Christian Democrats and one for the People's Party. As Powell put it,

> "Since the late 1930s, the four major parties, each linked to a cleavage group, have guaranteed themselves roughly equal place in the shared collective national executive (which has a rotating chairmanship). Unless a new party should suddenly break into the big four, the party electoral outcomes at the national level are virtually meaningless (...) there is little incentive for the voters to go to the polls, or for the major parties to try to mobilise them." (1980:17).

Therefore Switzerland is the paradigmatic case of lack of institutional decisiveness of elections, as opposed to other parliamentary systems where the role of the parliament more relevant. Its exceptional institutional structure, and its exceptionally low level of electoral participation have justified throughout the chapter its exclusion from the analyses performed.

Switzerland is furthermore a federal state, as Austria, Belgium (post-reform), and Germany. Spain is not federal state, but the Autonomous Communities enjoy a very high degree of autonomy, and have their own elected parliaments.[150]

[150] This degree of autonomy is, however, rather asymmetrical, both in terms of competencies and in terms of political structure. Only in four Autonomous Communities (Galicia, Andalucia, Basque

Table 4.20 presents average abstention levels for parliamentary elections held in countries with and without direct presidential elections, decentralised structures of the State, and direct democracy.

Table 4.19. Institutional decisiveness of parliamentary elections

Country	Direct election of head of State	Decentralised structure of the State	Number of national referendums 1945-1993
Austria	Direct	Yes	1
Belgium	No	Yes since '88	1
Denmark	No	No	13
Finland	Direct since '91	No	0
France	Direct since '62	No	IV: 4, V: 8
Germany	Indirect	Yes	0
Greece	Indirect	No	4
Ireland	Direct	No	17
Italy	Indirect	No	29
Netherlands	No	No	0
Norway	No	No	1
Portugal	Direct	No	0
Spain	No	Yes since '83	4
Sweden	No	No	2
Switzerland	Indirect	Yes	275
Great Britain	No	No	1

Source: Gallagher, Laver and Mair 1995, Butler and Ranney 1994.

Table 4.20. Percentage of non-voting by institutional importance of elections

	Present	Absent	Difference	Ratio
Head of State directly elected				
All cases	22.8 (18)	17.5 (203)	5.2	1.3
Without CH	22.8 (18)	16.0 (191)	6.7	1.4
Decentralisation				
All cases	20.2 (44)	17.4 (177)	2.8	1.2
Without CH	12.3 (32)	17.4 (177)	- 5.1	.7
Direct democracy	41.3 (12)	16.6 (209)	24.6	2.5

At a first sight it looks like all three factors have a positive effect on the level of abstention. The non-voting rate is higher in systems with directly elected presidents, decentralisation and direct democracy. However, in the case of decentralisation, the difference is entirely due to the Swiss case. When it is removed from the analysis

Country and Catalonia) the regional government can call for regional elections. In all others regional elections are held at fixed dates.

centralised countries have lower abstention rates than centralised ones. This results partly correspond to the findings of Blais and Dobrzynska (forthcoming) although they merge direct election of the president and of other bodies.

The multivariate analysis of institutional decisiveness is presented in table 4.21, controlling as usual for the effects of compulsory voting. The main effect belongs to the dummy variable for direct democracy, which is in fact a dummy for the Swiss case. Direct democracy increases abstention rates in almost 28 per cent controlling for all other factors. Direct election of the president has a small positive effect on abstention. Finally decentralisation has an effect contrary to our expectations, with decentralised countries having higher levels of turnout.

Table 4.21. Regression analysis of institutional decisiveness on abstention

	B	beta	s.e.
President elected	3.4	0.10	1.6
Decentralisation	- 6.9	- 0.29	1.3
Direct democracy	28.7	0.69	2.2
Compulsory voting	- 8.2	- 0.37	1.1
Constant	19.4		.6
Adj. R^2	.53		
N	220		

In conclusion, the influence of the institutional decisiveness of elections is concentrated in the case of Switzerland, an outlying case in the extremely low profile of its parliament both in terms of the limits imposed by direct democracy and by its restricted role in the formation of the new government. Besides, the direct election of the head of State also increases the abstention rates.

5.2 Political decisiveness

The second dimension of the decisiveness of the election refers to the importance of the former in terms of its political consequences. Here the focus is more in the political context and circumstances that surround the election, and the cross-national research design used here is probably not the most appropriate to test hypotheses that are related to election specific factors, within a given institutional framework. What this section presents is only an exploratory analysis justified by the

relevance that questions related to the political decisiveness of election have enjoyed within the turnout literature. Therefore, the analysis focuses only on a subset of elections,[151] and, due to the limited number of cases, will be only bivariate.

A number of authors have pointed out to the fact that electors tend to turnout to vote more when they perceive elections to be important.[152]

> "There are occasions when non of the(se) components of the world of politics seems important to the electorate, resulting in what we will refer to as a *low-stimulus* election. In other years dramatic issues or events may stir a great deal of interest; popular candidates may stimulate widespread enthusiasm. Such an election, in which the electorate feels the combined impact of these various pressures, we will speak of as a *high-stimulus* election." (Campbell 1966:41)

I have distinguished three factors related to the political decisiveness of the election which would be assumed to affect the level of abstention: the clearness of the distinction between parties in government and parties in opposition, the distinctiveness of those parties in ideological terms, and the expectation that the election will bring about a change. These three elements will be analysed in turn.

5.2.1 Clearness of the government-opposition division

The idea underlying the postulated effect of the first of these elements is that people do not vote only in terms of institutional incentives or cultural/partisan identities, but also as a means to express their agree or disagree with the current government and thus as a way to make it accountable (see Schumpeter 1979, Rose and McAllister 1992). The better defined the distinction between the government and the opposition parties, the easiest it would be for an elector to judge its behaviour, and thus the more incentive to vote.

The clearness of the government-opposition division thus is operationalised in two indicators (see table 4.22). The first one distinguishes single party majority and majority coalitions as types of government whose parties that can be clearly distinguished from the opposition, from minority and oversized coalition governments, where this distinction is more fluid. Minority governments need the support of other parties in order to carry their duty out, and therefore they are not totally independent from the opposition. In turn oversized coalition governments leave no room for a

[151] The elections included in this section are those for which the individual-level analysis has been performed in chapter III.

[152] Burnham 1979, Campbell 1966, Key 1955, Lipset 1969, Milbrath and Goel 1977:138, Montero 1986c.

credible government alternative without any of the parties already in government (Powell and Whitten 1993, Bartolini 1996b).

The second indicator is the presence of government changes during the legislature, which also blurs the distinction between which parties are in government and which in opposition.

Table 4.22. Political decisiveness of elections: clearness of the government-opposition division

Country and election	Type of government in the previous legislature (1)	Changes in government in the previous legislature	Clearness
Aus '90	CC (SPO+OVP)	No	Low
Bel '91	MC (CVP/PSC+PVV/PRK) CC (CVP/PSC+PSB/SPB+VU)	Major (PVV/PRL out, PSB/SPB in), minor (VU out)	Low
Den '90	mc (KF+V+RV)	Minor (RV out)	Low
Fin '91	MC (KOK+SDP+SMP)	Minor (SMP out)	High
Fra '93[153]	mc (PS+MRG)	No	High
Ger '90	MC (CDU/CSU+FDP)	No	High
Gre '93	M (ND)	No	High
Ire '92	CM (FF+PD)	Minor (PD out)	High
Ita '94	MC (DC+PSI+PSDI+PLI)	No	High
Net '89	MC (CDA+VVD)	No	High
Nor '93	mc (SP+KRF+V), m (DNA)	Major (SP,KRF,V out, DNA in)	Low
Por '91	MC (PPD/PSD+CDS)	No	High
Spa '93	M (PSOE)	No	High
Swe '91	m (S)	No	Low
Swi '91	CC (PSS+PRS+CVP+UDF)	No	Low
GB '92	M (CP)	No	High

Sources: Woldendorp, Keman and Budge 1993, Political Yearbooks of the EJPR. (1) M= single party majority, m= single party minority, C= coalition majority, cm= coalition minority

Results are in fact opposite to what we would expect, for the lowest level of abstention is attained in those elections where the distinction is less clear (see table

[153] In France the government did not have the technical absolute majority at the moment of the 1993 election (the PSF and the MRG had only 48.4 per cent of the seats). However I consider it as a case of clear distinction between government and opposition parties.

4.23). The instrumental dimension of voting does not seem to count as an incentive to participation.

Table 4.23. Percentage of non-voting by clearness of the government-opposition division

	No clear distinction	Clear distinction	Difference	Ratio
All cases	21.6 (6)	24.9 (10)	- 3.3	0.9
Without CH	15.2 (5)	24.9 (10)	- 9.7	0.6

Attention should be drawn to the fact that all cases of unclear government/opposition division have either a high degree of cultural segmentation or high level organisational encapsulation, which, as we saw in the previous section are important determinants of turnout. Conversely, most of the cases where the division between government and opposition is clear have electoral systems with high effective thresholds. Therefore, it is difficult to come to conclusions about the role of this factor in the explanation of turnout variation without performing a multivariate analysis.

5.2.2 Distinctiveness of political options

Is not enough to have clearly defined government and opposition parties, there must also be clearly distinguishable positions, for if the electorate does not perceive any difference between them, then it would care less about who wins or remains in power, and the costs of gathering information and making a decision increase, particularly among citizens in the periphery of politics (Rokkan1962a). As Campbell puts it,

> "The essential difference between a low-stimulus and a high-stimulus election lies in the importance the electorate attaches to the choice between the various party-candidate alternatives which it is offered. If the alternatives are generally seen as implying no important differences if one candidate or the other is elected, the stimulation to vote will be relatively weak." (1966:41)

One possible indicator of the presence of clear differences between alternatives is the ideological distance between parties. Ideological polarisation is usually measured as the distance between most extreme parties relative to the scale in which they are located (see Sani and Sartori 1983). However, this measure poses two important problems. Firstly, these extreme parties may be very small, and irrelevant from the point of view of the party system. Secondly, not always all extreme parties are included

to be located in the left-right continuum. Thus the level of polarisation may change depending on whether all or only a few parties are included.

I prefer to take as indicator of distinctive ideological alternatives the distance between the two main political parties (those getting the highest percentage of the vote).

Table 4.24. Political decisiveness of elections: ideological distance between main parties

Country	Ideological distance between two main parties	Overall degree of ideological polarisation
Austria ♦	1.5 (OVP, SPO)	5.8
Belgium ♦	1.7 (PS/SP, PSC/CVP)	3.9
Denmark	3.3 (KF, SD)	7.1
Finland	2.6 (SDP, KESK)	5.5
France	3.8 (PS, RPR)	9.0
Germany	2.6 (SPD, CDU)	7.8
Greece	n.a.	n.a.
Ireland	1.2 (FF, FG)	5.6
Italy	3.8 (PDS, DC)[154]	8.3
Netherlands	1.4 (PvdA, CDA)	7.7
Norway	3.9 (DNA, H)	7.9
Portugal	1.5 (PSP, PSD)	4.8
Spain	3.5 (PP, PSOE)	6.5
Sweden	2.9 (SdAP, KDS)	6.5
Switzerland ♦	3.4 (PSS, PRD)	5.7
Great Britain	3.3 (LAB, C)	3.3
Average	2.7	6.3
r^2 with abs (all cases)	.21 (13)	.08 (13)
r^2 with abs (without ♦)	-.43 (10)	-.11 (10)

Source: Huber and Inglehart 1995. ♦ Both parties in government

At first sight it seems that a higher ideological distance between the two main parties leads to a higher level of abstention (r=0.21), contrary to what we would expect. However, if one looks carefully at the parties considered, the cases of Austria, Belgium and Switzerland show a particular characteristic. Both main parties made part of the government coalition ruling in the period before the election. This means that although the distance between the two may be large, they constituted actually the same government alternative. If these three countries are excluded from the analysis, results change substantially: the higher the level of ideological distance between the main parties, the lower the level of abstention (r=-0.41).

[154] Note that the two main competing blocks in the Italian 1994 elections were the Polo and the Progressisti, but data on ideological polarization were only found for the Italian "First Republic" parties.

5.2.3 Expectations of change

Finally, whether the election is expected to bring some change or not will also tend to influence the participation rate. An election foreseen as a short interlude between two legislative periods of stability will offer less incentives to vote than an election expected to bring new parties to power. In the former case, those in favour of change would feel there is little interest in voting, given that things will go on pretty much as before, while those that prefer continuity can safely stay at home. In the latter case, the expectations of change are likely to mobilise those that favour it, in order to get it, while they would as well mobilise those that oppose it, in order to avoid it.

Table 4.25. Political decisiveness of elections: expected change in the election

Country and election	Change in government as a result of the election	Difference in % of seats between two main parties or blocks	
Aus '90	No	10.3	SPO-OVP ♦
Bel '91	No	2.8	(SPB+PSB) - (CVP+PSC) ♦
Den '90	No	4.0	(SD+SF+UL)-(CD+KF+RV+V+KRF+FRP)
Fin '91	Major (SDP out, KESK in)	21.5	(SDP+VAS)-(KESK+KOK+SKL+SMP)
Fra '93	Major (PS, MRG out, RPR in)	34.6	RPR-PS
Ger '90	No	12.1	CDU-SPD
Gre '93	Major (ND out, PASOK in)	19.7	PASOK-ND
Ire '92	Minor (PD out, L in)	13.3	FF-FG
Ita '94	Major (FI, AN in, DC out	24.3	Polo-Progressisti
Net '89	Major (VVD out, PvdA in)	3.3	CDA-PvdA
Nor '93	No	8.2	(DNA+SV+REA)-(H+SP+KRF+FRP+V)
Por '91	Minor (CDS out)	27.4	PDS-PSP
Spa '93	No	5.1	PSOE-PP
Swe '91	Major (S out, M, FP, C, KDS in)	11.8	(SdAP+V)-(C+FP+M+KDS+NYD)
Swi '91	No	1.5	PRS-PSS ♦
GB '92	No	10.0	C-LAB
r^2 with abs			
(all cases)		.17 (14)	
(all but ♦)		.64 (11)	

Source: Political Yearbooks EJPR. ♦ Both parties in government

Two indicators have been used to operationalise the perceived likelihood of change (see table 4.25). First *actual* government turnover after the election is taken as a proxy for *expected* government turnover. Lacking indicators of expectations before the election, we shall use this limited measure. It should be kept in mind, however, that there are elections that bring change unexpectedly, and others that although they may result in stability, were close to bring about a change in government.

To palliate these drawbacks, a second indicator of expected change is taken: the difference in the percentage of seats between the two most voted parties. The level of

closeness of the race has been analysed as a potential determinant of abstention.[155] When the competing parties are close to each other and there is no clear winner already from the polls, people are more likely to perceive that their vote will make a difference, while at the same times parties will find more incentives to perform a "get out and vote" campaign.

However, as it has already been argued, the concept of closeness is problematic whenever competition is between many actors that may end up being coalition partners. Whenever two main competing parties could not be clearly determined (mainly the Scandinavian countries), blocks of potential coalition partners have been defined and treated as single parties.

Table 4.26. Percentage of non-voting by change in government as an outcome of the election

	No change	Change	Difference	Ratio
All cases	23.1 (8)	24.3 (8)	-1.2	1.0
Without CH	18.6 (7)	24.3 (8)	-5.7	.8

Our data do not confirm the hypothesis that a change in government produced as a result of the election decreases participation. The lowest level of abstention is given by those elections that produce government stability, although the difference is very small. Excluding the Swiss election of 1991 stability elections score almost 6 per cent less abstention than elections that bring change (see table 4.26).

The level of closeness has at a first sight a very small effect on abstention, but in the expected direction: the higher the distance between parties, the higher the level of abstention (r=0.17). However, looking closely to the data, the same problem than when analysing ideological distance arises: the distance in seats in some cases is computed between government partners, which may but may not be regarded as real competitors. If these cases are excluded from the analysis then there is a clear relationship between closeness and abstention, by which the smaller the distance between the main parties or blocks, the smaller the abstention rate (r=0.64).

So to sum up, this section has brought support for some initial hypotheses, and rejection for some others. The clearness of the government-opposition division does not seem to be an important incentive for voters, but the ideological distance between main

[155] See for instance Jackson 1997, Kirchgässner and Schimmelpfenning 1992, Patterson and Caldeira 1983, Zimmer 1985.

competitors is. In the same way, whether the election brings about change or stability does not seem to affect turnout levels, but as the distance of the two main parties or blocks decreases so does abstention (see table 4.25). All these results should be interpreted with great care given the small sample size.

6 The systemic determinants of abstention: multivariate analysis

Table 4.27 includes the results of a multivariate regression analysis including all variables analysed in this chapter that have a substantive effect over the likelihood of abstaining.

The variable showing the largest effect is direct democracy, which as already mentioned is an equivalent of a dummy variable that makes up for the specificity of the Swiss case. Controlling for the effect of direct incentives for voting, the electoral system, and the degree of party system embeddedness, Swiss electors abstain 30 per cent more than the rest of Western Europe. The peculiarities of their political system, and in particular the limited decisiveness of their parliamentary elections, certainly account for this gap.

The second major point is the large effect of religious segmentation, which decreases abstention by 7 per cent, more than compulsory voting (4 per cent). A high effective threshold of representation increases abstention in more than 5 percentage points, ranking second in the set of most important systemic determinants of abstention. High trade union density reduces abstention by less than 3 per cent. Finally voting facilities reduce non-voting by less than 2 per cent, controlling for the effect of all other variables.

The possibility of expressing preference for a particular candidate in the ballot, the levels of ethnic fragmentation and party density, decentralisation of the State and the direct election of the president are excluded because their effect is neither substantially nor statistically significant. Variables related to the political decisiveness of elections are also excluded because they were available only for a point in time in each country.

Table 4.27. Multivariate regression analysis of the systemic determinants of abstention

	B	beta	s.e
Compulsory voting	- 4.06	-.17	1.02
Effective threshold	5.34	.24	1.00
Voting facilities	- 1.64	-.08	.78
Religious segmentation	- 6.92	-.35	.98
Trade union density	- 2.61	-.14	.81
Direct democracy	29.67	.71	1.85
Constant	20.15		.84
Adj. R^2	.72		
N	212		

With these six systemic variables, we account for 72 per cent of the variation in the level of abstention of our data set, just as much as if we included a dummy variable for each country (see conclusion of section 2 in this chapter), but with a model that is both theoretically sound and parsimonious.

7 Summary

From the previous analyses a few conclusions have been drawn. As far as the institutional incentives for voting are concerned, compulsory voting and the effective threshold are the main determinants of electoral abstention. High levels of voting facilities has a small negative effect over abstention, while the possibility of expressing a preference for a candidate does not have the expected effect.

Concerning the level of party system embeddedness, both religious segmentation and trade union density have the negative impact on abstention that was expected from our initial hypothesis. However ethno-linguistic fragmentation and party density do not show any effect in the multivariate analysis.

The use of direct democracy institutions (combined with the very limited role of the parliament in the Swiss case as far as government formation is concerned) proved to be the only important determinant of turnout related to the institutional decisiveness of parliamentary elections. As far as the political decisiveness is concerned, the ideological distance between main competing parties and the level of closeness of the race decrease abstention, while neither the clearness of the distinction between government and

opposition parties, nor the fact that the election produces changes in government have the anticipated relationship with turnout.

Throughout this chapter, the relationship between these factors and electoral abstention has been analysed under a strict assumption: that their effect was constant for all individuals, independently of their resources and motivations. In the next chapter I shall release this assumption and consider whether the effect of institutional incentives for voting, party system embeddedness and election decisiveness is indeed constant for all citizens.

CHAPTER V

INDIVIDUAL AND SYSTEMIC DETERMINANTS OF ELECTORAL ABSTENTION

1 Introduction

This chapter will analyse the joint effect of systemic and individual features on electoral abstention. I will discuss interactive relationship of individual and systemic variables with electoral non-voting for a number of reasons.

The first aim is to see whether the effect of systemic features simply adds to the effect of individual characteristics, or whether on the contrary, there is an interactive relationship between these two sets of variables. In other words, the first purpose of this analysis is to test the null hypotheses that the effect of individual characteristics is constant in all contexts, and vice versa, that the effect of systemic variables is the same for all individuals.

Previous research has found that individual factors have a stronger impact wherever there are few systemic incentives to participate. Oppenhuis (1995:83) concludes that in European Parliament elections, compulsory voting reduces the effect of church attendance and interest in politics, while concurrent national elections decrease the effect of party adherence. Sunday voting seems also to reduce the effect of interest in politics. Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis (1996), have found that the impact of three important individual determinants of electoral participation in European Parliament elections (political interest, campaign mobilisation and appeal of best choice) is smaller in countries with compulsory. Verba, Nie and Kim (1978) found that the absence of structured party competition (i.e., segmentation) allowed individual socio-economic forces to have an important role determining political participation. In

the particular case of the US, several authors have argued that easing registration laws would have a stronger effect among less educated and less well off citizens (Highton 1997, Teixeira 1993, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980).

Thus, a review of the scarce previous literature on the relationship between individual and systemic determinants of electoral participation would lead us to expect that the effect of systemic incentives over the likelihood of abstaining would be largest among disadvantaged individuals, while the effect of individual incentives would be largest in contexts that produce little systemic incentives to participate.[156] As was mentioned in chapter I, I think there is room to challenge at least the first of these hypotheses, because if citizens with high levels of resources, integrated in their social environment and politically involved are likely to care more about elections and to be better informed about political events, *why should they be less influenced by the political context?*[157]

The second objective of this chapter is to estimate how much abstention would change if we could manipulate some variables that affect it, both at the individual and at the systemic level. In particular, we are interested in knowing how the participation of disadvantaged groups can be enhanced via contextual variables, because these are the citizens who are less likely to vote. Of course, not all variables can be manipulated: increasing the number of voting facilities is not the same as to modifying the structure of the party system. However, we are interested in estimating the consequences that certain changes may bring into the participation rate in a given context or in a given population group.

Here our expectations follow what previous research has found, that is, that reductions in the expected rate of abstention due to the introduction of systemic incentives to participation are small for advantaged electors (whose abstention level is already very small even in contexts not particularly favourable to participation) but

[156] Note that when specifying interaction effects, the conclusion that, for instance, compulsory voting reduces the effect of interest in politics, brings along the conclusion that interest in politics reduces the effect of compulsory voting. In most cases the interpretation of these interaction effects is made in the sense that certain systemic factors reduce the effect of individual characteristics. Less often interactions are considering as the possibility that individual characteristics determine the impact of systemic factors.

[157] Not many previous works support this hypothesis, although some analysis of the impact of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 go in this direction. Calvert 1996 and Martínez 1997 have found that voter registration facilities are used mainly by those that are anyway likely to register and vote. Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, and Verba 1996 agree in the fact that "the forces of mobilisation bring in the same people who would be active spontaneously." (Verba 1996:7)

considerable for disadvantaged electors.[158] In the same way, individual incentives to participation will reduce abstention only in contexts where there is enough room to do so, that is, where systemic incentives do not make almost everyone vote.[159]

These two questions are to be dealt with *separately*. In the first part of the analysis we are interested in understanding the process that motivates electoral abstention. Fundamentally the main questions are, firstly, *which individuals are most sensitive to their environments*, and secondly, *which institutional and political contexts allow individual features to play a major role* in determining the likelihood of abstaining. We shall need an indicator of these effects that is not constrained by ceiling or floor effects.

To give an example, it could be that the effect of voting facilities, is larger among advantaged electors, because they are more likely to be aware that these facilities exist. Disadvantaged electors are less likely to vote and may also be less aware of the incentives to participate offered by the system. However, since the abstention rate of advantaged electors is very close to 0 per cent (6 per cent in our sample), using simple percentage comparison of abstention rates will give us a very small effect of voting facilities over the likelihood of abstaining of advantaged electors. We therefore need to measure the effect of voting facilities *independently* of the abstention rate of this group, that is, independently of how much room there is for this effect to appear clearly at first sight. As it has been argued in chapter II, logistic regression coefficients give us the effect of the predictor variables independently of floor effects.

However, the second question deals with the *consequences* of these relationships, and thus must take floor effects into consideration: after all, abstention cannot be reduced below 0 per cent. Even if the *effect* of voting facilities is very high among advantaged electors, its presence or absence will not result in very large changes of abstention for this group, since advantaged electors vote massively anyway. Thus, we are particularly interested in analysing the *consequences* of systemic variables for those electors whose abstention is high and could be reduced. Disadvantaged electors have an average abstention rate of 18 per cent[160] in our sample. Even if for them the effect of voting facilities (measured controlling by floor effects) may be relatively smaller than

[158] See Highton 1997, Teixeira 1993, Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, Verba, Nie and Kim 1978.
[159] See Hirczy 1992, Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis 1996.
[160] The average abstention rate in the whole weighted sample is only 11 per cent, lower than the real abstention rate for the reasons discussed in chapter II, mainly sampling bias and measurement error.

for advantaged electors, the presence or absence of this systemic feature may have important consequences for the average abstention rate of this group. Thus, in a second part of the analysis I shall look at the effect of systemic variables on the abstention levels of those citizens whose participation rate may be increased in a substantive quantity.

There are as well a number of methodological questions to be dealt with when analysing the interaction between individual and systemic factors. I have chosen an individual level analysis for two reasons. In the first place, voting or not voting is fundamentally an individual action, even though it may depend on more than individual features. Secondly because the aim of comparative research is to substitute proper names by variables (Przeworski 1970), and this is best done by ignoring the country names and focusing on individuals that not only have different personal characteristics but also live in different political environments.

A second important methodological choice is related to the way in which we define and operationalise the interactions. Potentially we have 126 (nine times fourteen) cross-level interactions, that is, as many as the product of individual by systemic variables. In principle, the effect of each individual variable may depend on each system characteristic, and the effect of each system characteristic may depend on the values of each individual variable. However, if all of them were to be presented, the analysis would become extremely cumbersome and the model would lack parsimony.

I have therefore decided to simplify the analysis in the side of individual features, and use as the only variable at the individual level the index of individual incentives that was introduced in section 6 of chapter III.

The next three sections analyse the effect of this index of individual incentives in different contextual settings, defined according to the three sets of systemic variables as defined in chapter IV: institutional incentives, party system embeddedness, and election decisiveness. In each of these three sections the analysis focuses first on the interactive effects of individual and systemic variables and then on the consequences of these effects on the expected abstention rates.

2 Individual incentives and the institutional setting of the vote

2.1 Compulsory voting and voting facilities

In this section we shall see which electors are most influenced by the presence of compulsory voting and voting facilities, the two direct institutional incentives of voting. I shall also look at how the effect of individual incentives varies depending on whether voting is made mandatory or not, and on whether voting facilities are made available.

Two models are presented in table 5.1 regarding compulsory voting. The first includes only individual incentives and compulsory voting, while the second also includes the interaction effect between these two variables. According to the first model, both variables have a negative and statistically significant effect on the likelihood of abstaining. The presence of compulsory voting decreases the log odds of abstaining by -1.4, while moving from the minimum to the maximum level of individual incentives decreases the log odds of abstaining by -2.3.[161]

The second model shows that there is a significant interaction effect among the two variables considered: that is, the effect of compulsory voting on the odds of abstaining depends on the level of individual incentives, and in turn, the effect of individual incentives is different depending on whether voting is compulsory or not.

Table 5.1. Individual incentives and compulsory voting

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Individual incentives	-2.28	.07	-2.18	.07
Compulsory voting	-1.40	.05	- .78	.12
Interaction	--		-1.62	.30
Constant	- .89	.03	- .92	.03
Chi-square	2,180		+31	
df	2		+1	
N	38,919		38,919	

[161] In all tables all coefficients are significant at the usual probability level ($p<0.05$) unless otherwise stated (coefficient in parenthesis). The statistical significance of a coefficient can be easily calculated by dividing the former by its standard error. If the ratio is higher than 2 the coefficient is statistically significant at a 2 tailed probability level of 0.05.

The negative sign of the interaction effect proves that the effect of individual incentives is *stronger* under compulsory voting and the effect of compulsory voting is *larger* the higher the level of individual resources.[162]

Thus, under voluntary voting, individual incentives decrease the log odds of abstaining by -2.2, while under compulsory voting, individual incentives decrease the log odds of abstaining by -3.7. In the same way, when individual resources are at their lowest level, the presence of compulsory voting decreases the log odds of abstaining by -0.8, while when the level of individual incentives is maximised the decrease in the log odds of abstaining due to mandatory voting is -2.3.

Figure 5.1 represents graphically the relationship between these two explanatory variables and the log odds (also called logit)[163] of abstaining according to the model that includes the interaction effect. The X-axis represents the level of individual incentives (ranking from 0 to 1), while the Y-axis represents the log odds (logit) of abstaining vs. voting. Since compulsory voting is a dichotomous variable, the continuous line shows the effect of individual incentives when compulsory voting is present, while the discontinuous line shows the effect when this systemic characteristic is absent.[164]

Figure 5.1. The effect of individual incentives on the log odds of abstaining by compulsory voting

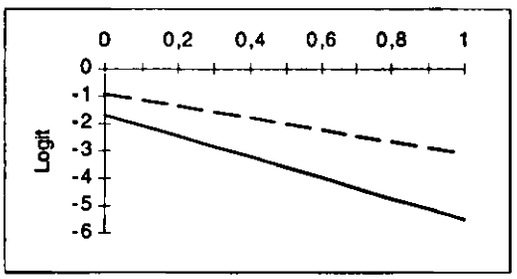
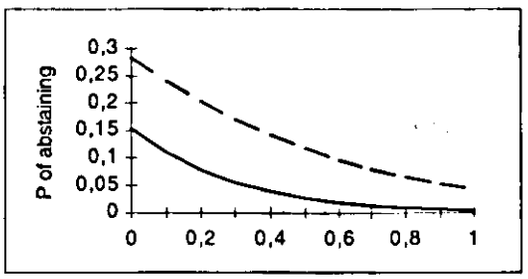


Figure 5.2. The effect of individual incentives on the probability of abstaining by compulsory voting



[162] Once the interaction term is included the interpretation of the coefficients changes. The coefficient of individual incentives represents the effect of this variable *under no compulsory voting* (-2.18), while the effect of individual incentives *under compulsory voting* is given by the sum of the coefficients of the variable "individual incentives" and the interaction term (-2.18-1.62 = -3.70), so the effect of individual incentives is larger under compulsory voting than under voluntary voting. Equally, the difference in the log odds of abstaining is -0.78 when we move from voluntary to mandatory voting for low individual incentives, but for high individual incentives, the difference is -0.78-1.62= -2.30. So the effect of compulsory voting is larger for high individual incentives than for low individual incentives, independently of floor effects.

[163] The model works as a normal regression ($Y_i = \alpha+\beta_k x_i$) but where $Y_i = \ln(P_{\text{of abstaining}}/P_{\text{of voting}})$, so $\ln(P_{\text{of abstaining}}/P_{\text{of voting}}) = \alpha+\beta_k x_i$. The dependent variable is not whether the individual voted or abstained, nor the probability of abstaining, but the logarithm of the odds of abstaining vs. voting.

[164] In all the graphs in this chapter the continuous line represents presence of the systemic characteristic while the discontinuous line represents absence of the characteristic. Thus, to simplify interpretation, all systemic variables have been operationalised as dummies.

As said before, while interpreting the coefficients, in both cases the relationship is negative: as individual incentives increase, the log odds of abstaining decrease; when compulsory voting is present, the log odds of abstaining decrease. However, it is clear from figure 5.1, that the line representing the effect of individual incentives is steeper where voting is mandatory, so the effect of individual incentives is stronger in this case. This finding, which can be counter-intuitive at the first sight, can be interpreted as follows: in countries where voting is compulsory, only electors extremely disadvantaged do not vote.[165] In countries without mandatory voting laws, on the other hand, some voters with individual incentives stay out of the electoral process, thus leading to a smaller effect of individual incentives over abstention.

Figure 5.1 also shows that the difference in the log odds of abstaining between cases where there is compulsory voting and those where there is not, is smaller for low levels of individual resources and motivations. So compulsory voting seems to affect *relatively more* people with high levels of resources and motivations than people with low levels. This is congruent with our initial hypothesis that advantaged electors are more sensitive to systemic incentives to participation than disadvantaged ones.

As it has been previously said, logit coefficients are not affected by ceiling or floor effects. In fact, if we use logits (log odds) instead of the probability of abstaining then we get rid of a limited dependent variable that does not respect regression assumptions.[166] However, if we are to transform the logits into predicted probabilities, we are again working with a limited variable: probabilities are never smaller than zero nor larger than one (while the log odds of abstaining is an unbounded variable). When analysing predicted probabilities, and as we move to the extremes, effects are hidden by ceiling and floor effects. This is why the interpretation of predicted probabilities can be very different from the interpretation resulting from the logit coefficients.

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[165] The non-voter population of countries with compulsory voting is made in a 60 per cent of electors with low levels of individual incentives and only in a 10 per cent of electors with high levels of individual incentives. In countries with voluntary voting, these figures are 46 and 16 per cent respectively.

[166] The transformation of the dependent variable into a logit (a log odd) is a procedure to get rid of a limited dependent variable (the probability of abstaining) that cannot be larger than 1 nor smaller than 0. To get rid of the upper limit we take the odds (Pi/1-Pi) instead of the probability and to get rid of the lower limit we take the log of the odds. So the logit is an unbounded (and thus not subject to ceiling or floor effects) dependent variable that has a linear relationship with the predictors. When we transform logits into probabilities the relationship is not linear any longer, and because probabilities are limited, the dependent variable is again bounded.

Figure 5.2 shows the predicted probabilities of abstaining obtained from the coefficients presented in the second model of table 5.1. If we are to interpret this graph, we will conclude that individual incentives are more important where there is no compulsory voting (since the discontinuous curve is steeper than the continuous one) and that compulsory voting is more important where individual incentives are lowest (because the distance between the two curves is largest there). However, this interpretation is a result of the fact that the probabilities cannot go below zero. So, if on the one hand compulsory voting lowers abstention with respect to no compulsory voting and on the other hand the probability of abstaining cannot be smaller than zero, by definition we will find a smaller slope in the line representing the effects of individual incentives under compulsory voting.[167] The effects as shown by the expected probabilities are therefore dependent on how close we are to the extremes of those very same probabilities: the closer to the extremes, the smaller the effect shown because of the ceiling effect.

Hence, although predicted probabilities are more intuitive to interpret than the logits, they are subject to floor and ceiling effects, and thus may be confusing in the sense that the effects of the predictors over the probability of abstaining are by definition smaller as we approach the extremes of the probability. Logits do not have this problem for they are not bounded, so they allow us to properly appreciate the strength of the effects and therefore to state properly to what extent behaviour is influenced by individual and contextual factors for all electors independently of their abstention rate.[168]

Thus, from the point of view of the *consequences* of these effects (i.e., the expected level of abstention), the interpretation is quite different. In this case, floor effects should be taken into account, for abstention cannot be lower than 0 per cent. This means that although the effect of compulsory voting is relatively larger for electors with high levels of individual incentives, this may not result in any substantial change

[167] Unless, of course, there was no effect whatsoever of individual incentives for countries with no compulsory voting and the discontinuous line was flat.

[168] When Hirczy argues that "micro-level relationships must weaken and ultimately disappear by logical necessity as aggregate turnout approaches 100 %" (1992:76) he does not considers the *magnitude* of the effects independently of ceiling effects, but the fact that if every one voted there would be no room for individual differences in participation. What is weakened by a near universal turnout rate is the *differences in the percentage of abstention across categories*, but not necessarily the effects themselves if they are measured without ceiling and floor effects. If we are comparing individual level effects in settings with different levels of abstention, we need to control for these different levels of abstention.

in abstention for this group, for they already abstain very little. Instead, the smaller effect found for disadvantaged electors may result in an important decrease in the abstention rate of this group. Thus, the analysis of the effect of systemic variables is of particular importance for those electors who have low levels of individual motivation and resources, whose rate of abstention is high, and therefore, susceptible of being reduced significantly.

In section 2.3, we shall therefore look at how much each of the contextual variables analysed here reduces the abstention rate of disadvantaged electors (i.e., electors with low levels of individual incentives). From figure 5.2, however, we can already see that in terms of expected abstention change, the *consequences* of compulsory voting are far more important for disadvantaged individuals than for advantaged ones.[169]

As far as voting facilities are concerned, results are presented controlling for compulsory voting.[170] A high level of voting facilities (introduced as a dummy variable to simplify the interpretation) seems to have an unexpected, though very small positive effect on abstention, controlling for the effect of individual incentives. The log odds of abstaining increase by 0.1 when voting facilities are present, according to the first model presented in table 5.2.

Table 5.2. Individual incentives and voting facilities

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Individual incentives	-2.29	.07	-2.00	.08
Compulsory voting	-1.39	.03	-1.40	.05
High voting facilities	.09	.03	.58	.07
Interaction (1)	--		-1.28	.30
Constant	- .91	.03	-1.01	.04
Chi-square	2,180		+56	
df	3		+1	
N	38,919		38,919	

(1) Voting facilities x individual incentives. Compulsory voting is included to control for its effects.

[169] Note that this would not be the case if advantaged electors abstained more. If the probability of abstaining of advantaged electors was closer to 0.5, the consequences of compulsory voting would be larger for them than for disadvantaged electors!

[170] The limited number of cases at the higher level (countries) as well as problems of collinearity, does not allow us to include many more terms in the model.

The model including the interaction term between individual incentives and voting facilities shows, however, that this positive effect is not present for all levels of individual incentives. When individual incentives are low, it is true that voting facilities *increase* the log odds of abstaining, which is a rather bizarre finding. However, when individual incentives are high, voting facilities do in the end *reduce* the log odds of abstaining.[171]

The interactive relationship between voting facilities and individual incentives is best seen in the graph representing the effect of individual incentives over the log odds of abstaining (figure 5.3). When individual incentives are low, voting facilities increase the odds of abstaining. For advantaged electors, voting facilities decrease the likelihood of abstaining.

The effect of this systemic variable only works in the expected direction for highly motivated individuals. Here the question is not so much whether the effect of the contextual variable is smaller for some electors than for others, but that its effect actually changes direction depending on the level of individual incentives. Only advantaged individuals actually take advantage of voting facilities.

As with compulsory voting, it also seems that the effect of individual incentives is larger where voting facilities are present than where these are absent (the sign of the interaction effect is negative, and thus it adds to the negative effect of individual incentives), which can be observed in the figure 5.3 as the larger slope of the continuous line (representing presence of high levels of voting facilities).

Figure 5.3. The effect of individual incentives on the log odds of abstaining by voting facilities

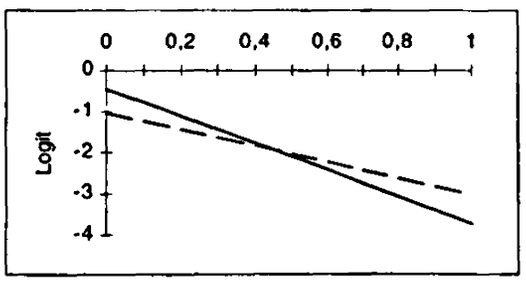
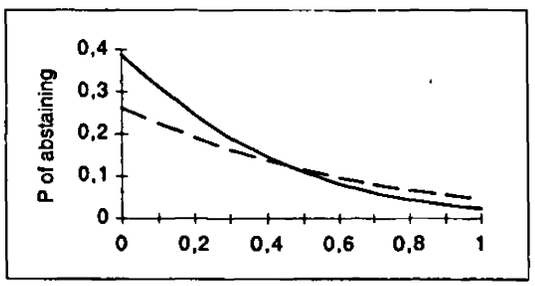


Figure 5.4. The effect of individual incentives on the probabilities of abstaining by voting facilities



[171] Note that the coefficient for the influence of voting facilities for the highest level of individual incentives is the sum of the coefficient for voting facilities and the interaction coefficient. Since this latter is negative and larger than the former the effect of voting facilities for high levels of individual incentives is negative (B = 0.58-1.28 = -0.79).

The predicted probabilities (see figure 5.4) cover to some extent the negative effect of voting facilities for advantaged electors, again due to the floor effect. But the main pattern remains the same: voting facilities decrease the probability of abstaining only after a certain level of individual incentives is attained.

2.2 Effective electoral threshold and preference expression

Two variables related with the electoral system are expected to influence the likelihood of abstaining: the presence of a high effective electoral threshold for a party to obtain representation, and the possibility of expressing preferences for individual candidates in the ballot (see chapter IV). I shall examine in turn how the impact of these two systemic factors is influenced by the level of individual incentives to vote, and conversely how these systemic factors related to the electoral system influence the weight of individual characteristics.

As expected, the presence of a high electoral threshold increases the likelihood of abstaining as the model 1 in table 5.3. shows (in 0.2 log odds). Introducing the interaction term between effective threshold and individual resources brings a number of important changes.

Table 5.3. Individual incentives and effective threshold

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Individual incentives	-2.21	.07	-2.70	.12	-2.57	.08
Compulsory voting	-1.27	.05	-1.29	.06	-1.27	.06
High threshold	.21	.03	(-.10)	.07	--	
Interaction (1)	--		.77	.15	.58	.07
Constant	-1.04	.04	- .83	.06	- .90	.03
Chi-square	2,222		+27		2,247	
df	3		+1		3	
N	38,919		38,919		38,919	

(1) High threshold x individual incentives. Compulsory voting is introduced to control for its effects.

Firstly, the coefficient for effective threshold stops being significant (see model 2), which implies that for the lowest level of individual incentives, there is no difference in the likelihood of abstaining between electors under a system with high

electoral thresholds and electors in systems with low electoral thresholds. In other words, the intercept for both lines is the same, which means that electors with low resources and motivations are insensitive to this feature of the electoral system as far as participation in elections is concerned. As figures 5.5 and 5.6 show, the lines representing presence (continuous line) and absence (discontinuous line) of a high effective threshold meet at the Y-axis (minimum level of individual incentives).

However, for a high level of individual resources the effect of a high electoral threshold increases the log odds of abstaining by 0.6. Again here it seems that it is advantaged electors who are aware of the (dis)incentives produced by the system, and therefore they are the ones that are affected by them.

Figure 5.5. The effect of individual incentives on the log odds of abstaining by effective threshold

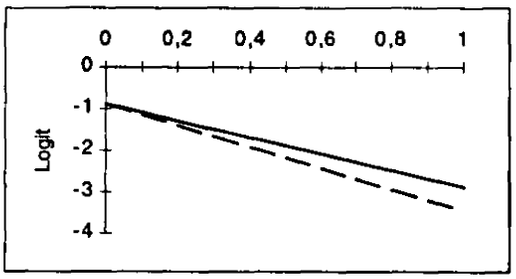
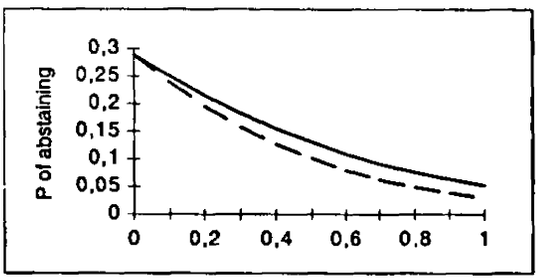


Figure 5.6. The effect of individual incentives on the probabilities of abstaining by effective threshold



The fact that the interaction term is significant and positive, also implies that the effect of individual resources is smaller in places where the electoral threshold is high. While in the cases where the electoral threshold is low going from the minimum to the maximum level of individual incentives decreases the log odds of abstaining by -2.6, while in the case where the electoral threshold is high this effect is -2.0.

The case of preference expression proves to be one of the most interesting, for it shows how the same systemic variable may behave as a cost for certain electors, and as an incentive for others. As it was argued in chapter I (see hypotheses 2.3a and 2.3b), the possibility of expressing a preference for a candidate makes the vote more meaningful and give to it a certain nuance that may encourage people to vote. However, it is also true that it makes the choice and the voting procedure itself more complicated. So for advantaged electors it may be an incentive to participate, but for disadvantaged electors

it may be felt like a cost, and thus increase abstention. This is exactly what the data show.

Table 5.4. Individual incentives and preference expression

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Individual incentives	-2.21	.07	-1.82	.08
Compulsory voting	-1.28	.06	-1.30	.05
Preference expression	- .25	.03	.24	.07
Interaction (1)	--		-1.24	.15
Constant	- .82	.03	- .96	.04
Chi-square	2,242		+66	
df	3		+1	
N	38,919		38,919	

(1) Preference expression x individual incentives. Compulsory voting is included to control for its effects.

In the simplest model presented in table 5.4, without including the interaction term, preference expression reduces the log odds of abstaining vs. voting by -0.25. Overall, thus, it acts as an incentive for voting. If the interaction term is introduced, then we can see that for low levels of individual incentives, the possibility of expressing a preference slightly *increases* the log odds of abstaining by 0.24. In this case, therefore, the contextual variable can be considered a cost that increases the chances of abstaining. For a high level of individual incentives, instead, it *decreases* the log odds of abstaining by -1.0 (0.2-1.2) and can be considered as an incentive to vote.

Figure 5.7. The effect of individual incentives on the log odds of abstaining by preference expression

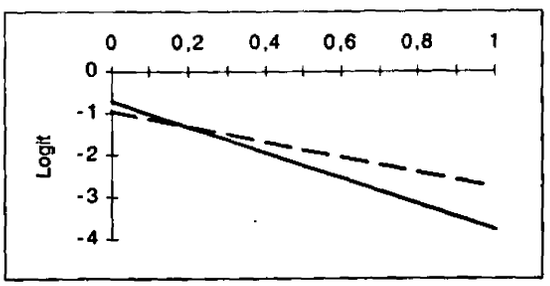
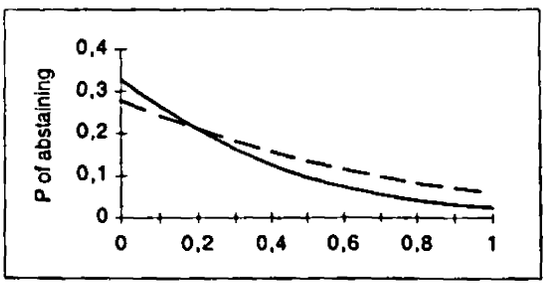


Figure 5.8. The effect of individual incentives on the probabilities of abstaining by preference expression



Conversely, it can also be said that the effect of individual resources and motivations is stronger where there is the possibility of expressing a preference, as the negative sign of the interaction term indicates. Obviously if preference expression

increases the probability of abstaining of disadvantaged electors and reduces this very same probability for advantaged electors, this is reflected on a bigger weight of individual incentives under systems where there is the possibility of expressing a preference.

2.3 The consequences of different effects

The results of this first piece of cross-level analysis have been surprisingly coherent with our challenging hypothesis (see hypothesis 3.1 in chapter I). It seems that advantaged individuals are more sensitive to the institutional environment where they live than disadvantaged electors. If disadvantaged electors do not vote because they lack resources, or are socially isolated and politically uninvolved, these very same characteristics may prevent them from being influenced by they institutional incentives/disincentives to vote present in the political system. Thus, we appreciate a larger effect of institutional variables for highly resourceful and motivated individuals.

If we divide our sample into three groups with low, medium and high levels of individual incentives, and calculate the effects of the institutional factors analysed here for each of these three groups we can clearly see that compulsory voting, voting facilities, high effective threshold and possibility of preference expression reduce the log odds of abstaining relatively more for highly motivated individuals (see table 5.5, entries under "effects").[172]

These effects are independent of the level of abstention of each group, that is, independent of floor effects. Of course, if among advanced individuals abstention is very low, even a very large effect of the systemic variable will not be able to reduce abstention much. Instead, among disadvantaged individuals, where abstention is higher, a relatively smaller effect may produce a larger change in the expected likelihood of voting. So, although effects are larger for advantaged electors this may not be reflected on very large absolute changes on abstention for advantaged electors, since they already have abstention rates close to the minimum level.

[172] This analysis is very similar to the one performed before in the models with the specification of the interaction term. However, in previous models we lacked information on the significance of the effect of the systemic variable at the point where individual incentives are high. This information is available here. The effect of all these variables is statistically significant for all levels of individual incentives. Non-significant coefficients are indicated within brackets.

Table 5.5. The consequences of institutional incentives by levels of individual incentives

Indiv. incentives	Changes(1) Low	Medium	High	Effects(2) Low	Medium	High
Compulsory voting	-16.3	-9.4	-6.2	-1.45	-1.63	-1.70
Voting facilities (3)	2.0	-2.2	-1.7	.11	- .22	- .26
High threshold (3)	3.6	2.2	2.1	.21	.21	.29
Preference (3)	-2.8	-2.3	-3.6	- .16	- .22	- .51

(1) Entries are the expected change in the percentage of abstention produced by the systemic variables on the left hand column by individual incentives. (2) Entries are B coefficients for the influence of explanatory variables on the left hand column by levels of individual incentives. (3) Controlling for compulsory voting.

Entries under the heading "changes" in table 5.5 show the consequences of these effects in terms of expected levels of abstention. Each entry is the difference in the expected percentage of abstention between a situation where the institutional factor is present and a situation where it is absent, for a given level of individual incentives. For instance, the expected abstention rate for disadvantaged individuals where there is mandatory voting is 6 per cent, while where voting is voluntary the average abstention level is 22 per cent.[173] The difference between these two values (-16 per cent) is reported in the table. Compulsory voting reduces the expected level of abstention by 16 percentage points for disadvantaged electors. This reduction is more limited for advantaged electors (-6 per cent), for their abstention level is closer to the minimum possible.

Voting facilities do not reduce the abstention rate of disadvantaged individuals, but they do reduce (moderately) the abstention level of electors with medium and high levels of individual incentives. Although the effect on the log odds of abstaining is larger for the highest level of individual incentives, the change in the probability of abstaining is larger for medium levels of the individual level variable.

The presence of a high effective threshold increases the likelihood of abstaining for all levels of individual incentives. Although the effect is larger for the highest level, the consequences in terms of expected increase in percentage of abstention are largest for the lowest levels of individual incentives.

Finally the possibility of expressing a preference decreases the likelihood of abstaining for all categories of the individual variable but especially for the highest one.

[173] This quantity is calculated from the B coefficients according to the standard formula of the predicted probabilities ($P_i=1/(1+e^{-\Sigma \beta k\, xk + ei})$) and multiplied by 100.

In this case the effect is so much larger for the highest level of individual incentives that it is reflected also by a larger decrease in the percentage of non-voters for this category.

Thus the interpretation of the results depends on whether we focus on the effects themselves, independent of limiting floor effects, or on the consequences of these effects in terms of the expected abstention rate, which are necessarily subject to these ceiling or floor effects. Both are necessary to understand the process of how individual and systemic factors interact in determining the likelihood of abstention and its repercussions on abstention rates.

In conclusion, one can state that the electors with the highest levels of individual incentives are comparatively more sensitive to the institutional context where they live. Although these larger effects can do little to increase their already high level of turnout, they *would become fundamental if the abstention rate of these advantaged citizens increased.*

The abstention rate of disadvantaged electors can be significantly reduced by some of these institutional factors, especially by the presence of compulsory voting (by 16 per cent). Voting facilities do not reduce the likelihood of abstention of this group of electors, but affect in the expected direction only those who have medium or high levels of individual incentives. Finally, a low effective threshold and the possibility of expressing a preference for a candidate reduce the abstention rate of disadvantaged electors by about 3 per cent each, net of the effect of compulsory voting.

3 Individual incentives and party system embeddedness

The degree of embeddedness of the party system was disaggregated into two dimensions: cultural differentiation and organisational encapsulation. Electoral participation may be increased by a party system that is deeply rooted in society, either in an indirect form (by the presence of different subcultures that are reflected in the party system) or in a direct way (by the development of organisational networks that encapsulate the electorate). In this section we shall see how these two dimensions of party system embeddedness interact with individual characteristics.

3.1 Cultural differentiation

Two indicators of cultural differentiation have been chosen: the degree of religious segmentation and the presence of different ethno-linguistic subcultures. Chapter IV showed that while the former increased participation substantially, the latter reduced it.

Table 5.6. Individual incentives and religious segmentation

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Individual incentives	-2.23	.07	-1.91	.08
Compulsory voting	-1.28	.06	-1.30	.06
Religious segmentation	-0.21	.03	.32	.07
Interaction (1)	--		-1.34	.16
Constant	-0.85	.03	-0.96	.04
Chi-square	2,220		+65	
df	3		+1	
N	38,919		38,919	

(1) Religious segmentation by individual incentives. Compulsory voting included to control for its effects.

Controlling for the effect of individual incentives and compulsory voting, religious segmentation reduces the log odds of abstaining decrease by -0.2 (see model 1 in table 5.6). But we also find that there is an important interaction effect between this systemic variable and the level of individual incentives, as the size and significance of the interaction coefficient show in model 2. In fact, it seems that for a low level of individual incentives, the presence of religious segmentation increases the log odds of abstaining by 0.3, while for a high level of individual incentives religious segmentation reduces the log odds of abstention by -1 (0.3-1.3). This can be seen in figures 5.9 and 5.10, where the lines representing presence (continuous) and absence (discontinuous) of religious segmentation cross at some point of individual resources.

The sense of this interaction can also be interpreted as individual incentives' having a larger effect on the likelihood of abstaining when religious segmentation is present (which is graphically represented in the larger slope of the continuous line in figure 5.9). Indeed, when this is the case the change from the minimum to the maximum level of individual resources reduces the log odds of abstaining -3.25 (-1.91-

1.34), while when the system is not segmented along religious lines the reduction produced by individual incentives in the log odds of abstaining is of more modest, though still considerable (-1.91).

Figure 5.9. The effect of individual incentives on the log odds of abstaining by religious segmentation

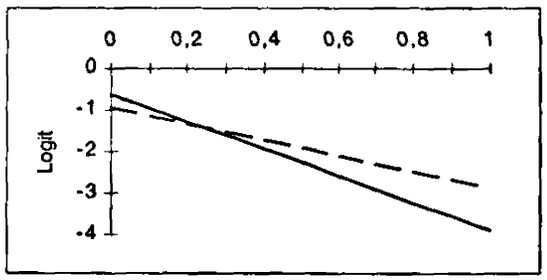
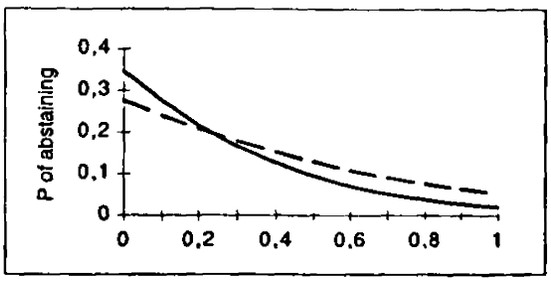


Figure 5.10. The effect of individual incentives on the probabilities of abstaining by religious segmentation



In the case of ethno-linguistic fragmentation, results are very different. Controlling by compulsory voting and by individual incentives, ethno-linguistic fragmentation decreases the log odds of abstaining over voting, in this case by -0.1.[174]

If an interaction term is included in the model (see model 2 in table 5.7) it appears that this systemic variable reduces the likelihood of abstention for electors with the lowest level of individual incentives. For those, it decreases the log odds of abstaining by -0.4. But for electors with high levels of incentives the effect is instead, positive, increasing the log odds of abstaining more or less by the same amount (-0.4+0.8= 0.4).

Table 5.7. Individual incentives and ethnic fragmentation

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Individual incentives	-2.31	.07	-2.70	.10
Compulsory voting	-1.42	.05	-1.43	.05
Ethnic fragmentation	- .08	.03	- .39	.06
Interaction (1)	--		.83	.14
Constant	-1.13	.03	-0.68	.04
Chi-square	2,187		+33	
df	3		+1	
N	38,919		38,919	

(1) Ethnic fragmentation by individual incentives. Compulsory voting included to control for its effects.

[174] This contradicts the results of the aggregate analysis, where, without controlling for individual incentives, ethnic fragmentation increased the likelihood of abstaining.

Unlike the religious cleavage, the ethno-linguistic cleavage does soften the effect of individual incentives: their effect is smaller when it is present than when it is absent, which is a logical consequence of the fact that ethno-linguistic fragmentation decreases the log odds of abstaining by disadvantaged individuals, while it increases the log odds of abstaining by advantaged electors.

Figure 5.11. The effect of individual incentives on the log odds of abstaining by ethno-linguistic fragmentation

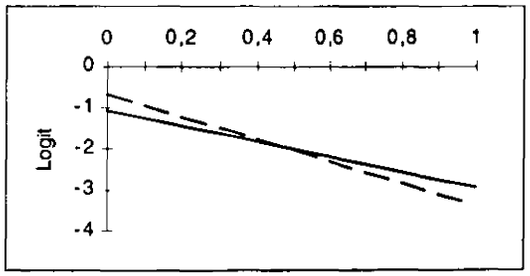
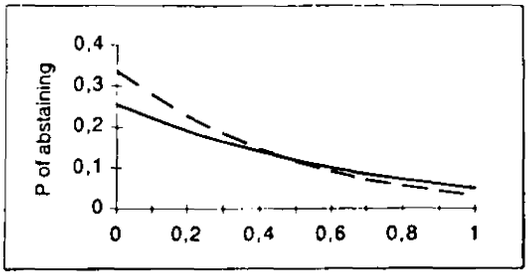


Figure 5.12. The effect of individual incentives on the probabilities of abstaining by ethno-linguistic fragmentation



3.2 Organisational encapsulation

The level of organisational encapsulation, the second dimension of the degree of party system embeddedness is indicated by the ratio of trade union and party members over the dependent labour force and the enfranchised electorate respectively. In the case of trade unions, membership above average[175] reduces the likelihood of abstention by -0.2 units (see model 1 in table 5.8), net of compulsory voting and controlling for individual incentives.

However, this negative effect over the log odds of abstaining is present only among advantaged electors, as the model including the interaction term shows. When individual incentives are at their minimum, the effect of a high level of trade union membership over the log odds of abstaining is unexpectedly positive (0.3) although small. For a maximum level of individual incentives high trade union density decreases the log odds of abstaining (0.3-1.2=-1.0).

[175] The average is calculated from each country level of trade union density at the moment when the election for which the survey has been realised takes place, or the closest point in time. Countries scoring high in the level of trade union density are Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Norway and Sweden. Countries scoring high in level of party density are Belgium, Finland, Italy, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland

Table 5.8. Individual incentives and trade union density

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Individual incentives	-2.27	.07	-2.13	.07
Compulsory voting	-1.25	.07	-1.26	.07
High union density	-0.20	.05	.26	.10
Interaction (1)	--		-1.16	.22
Constant	-0.87	.03	-.91	.03
Chi-square	2,195		+28	
df	3		+1	
N	38,919		38,919	

(1) High union density x individual incentives. Compulsory voting is introduced to control for its effects.

Figure 5.13. The effect of individual incentives on the log odds of abstaining by trade union density

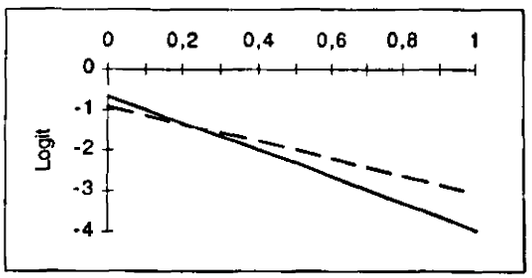
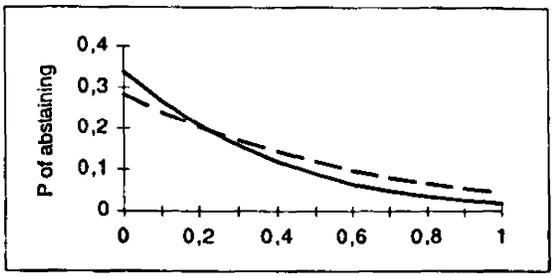


Figure 5.14. The effect of individual incentives on the probabilities of abstaining by trade union density



The case of party density is an extreme version of the "unexpectedness" found in the relationship between trade union density and abstention. Controlling for individual incentives and for compulsory voting, a high level of party density increases the log odds of abstaining by 0.4. But for disadvantaged electors, once the interaction term is introduced, this increase raises to 1.0. For advantaged electors, however, a high level of party density decreases the log odds of abstaining by -0.6 (1.0-1.4).

The effect of individual incentives is larger where there are high levels of party density, as it can be clearly seen in figures 5.15 and 5.16 by checking the different slope of the two lines. Although this may seem very counterintuitive, it is understandable if we look at the countries that fall into each category. If cases with compulsory voting are excluded, only Finland, Norway, Switzerland and Sweden remain as high party density countries, and all but Sweden show relatively high levels of non-voting (the average in the weighted sample for the four countries is 17.3 per cent). Moreover, in all these

countries, individual incentives play an important role as determinants of abstention (see chapter III). On the contrary, the average level of abstention for countries with low party density is 13.3 per cent in the weighted sample, and among these cases, Ireland, Spain and Portugal are characterised by the small impact of individual incentives on the likelihood of abstaining.

Table 5.9. Individual incentives and party density

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Individual incentives	-2.32	.07	-2.11	.08
Compulsory voting	-1.69	.06	-1.73	.07
High party density	.38	.05	.96	.10
Interaction (1)	--		-1.41	.21
Constant	- .91	.03	- .99	.03
Chi-square	2,244		+48	
df	3		+1	
N	38,919		38,919	

(1) High party density x individual incentives. Compulsory voting is introduced to control for its effects.

Figure 5.15. The effect of individual incentives on the log odds of abstaining by party density

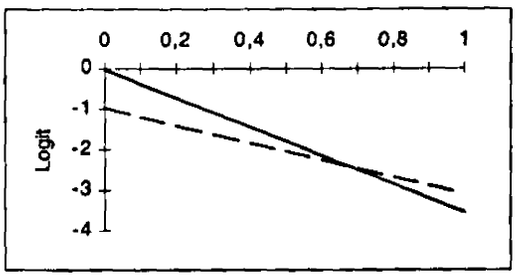
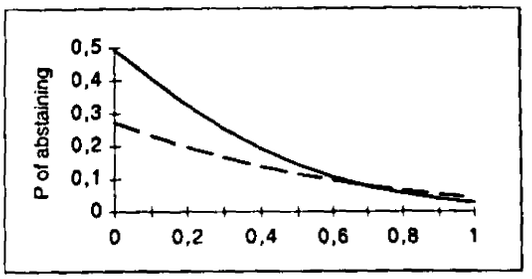


Figure 5.16. The effect of individual incentives on the probabilities of abstaining by party density



The first conclusion to take from this section is that there is definitely an important interactive effect among the level of individual incentives and these systemic variables: in all cases the sign of the effect of the contextual factors changes depending on whether individual resources and motivations are high or low. For disadvantaged individuals, religious segmentation, trade union density and party density increase the odds of abstention (little in the first two cases, considerably in the third one); ethno-linguistic fragmentation, on the contrary, decreases the log odds of abstaining. For advantaged individuals the relationships are the opposite: religious segmentation, trade

union and party density decrease the log odds of abstaining while ethno-linguistic fragmentation increases them. In the next section we shall look at how these effects are translated into changes in aggregated electoral abstention.

3.3 The consequences of party system embeddedness

This section will compare the magnitudes of the effects of party system embeddedness with its consequences in terms of changes in the expected abstention for different levels of individual resources and motivations. Table 5.10 presents both. As in section 2.3, the sample is divided into three groups according to the distribution of the index of individual incentives, and effects and abstention changes due to systemic variables are calculated for each of them.

As far as the effects are concerned, advantaged individuals seem to be more sensitive to their environment, as was the case with institutional incentives, but only for some cases. The impact of religious segmentation and trade union density is larger the higher the level of resources and motivations. For ethno-linguistic fragmentation and party system embeddedness, results are somehow more difficult to interpret. In the case of ethno-linguistic diversity, this systemic variable does not have any significant effect on the log odds of abstaining for the lowest level of individual incentives, it reduces the likelihood of abstaining for an intermediate level, and finally it increases the log odds of abstaining for the highest level of resources and motivations. Party density shows the positive effect over abstention already mentioned, which is stronger for the lowest level of individual incentives.

Table 5.10. The consequences of party system embeddedness by levels of individual incentives

Indiv. incentives	Changes(1) Low	Changes(1) Medium	Changes(1) High	Effects(2) Low	Effects(2) Medium	Effects(2) High
Religious segm.	0.0	-2.0	-2.9	(.004)	-.20	-.42
Ethnic fragm.	0.0	-2.4	1.8	(.06)	-.13	.24
Union density	-4.9	-2.2	-3.2	-.30	-.22	-.55
Party density	8.2	2.0	0.0	.43	.18	(-.08)

Controlling for compulsory voting. (1) Entries are the expected change in the percentage of abstention produced by the systemic variables on the left hand column by individual incentives. (2) Entries are B coefficients for the explanatory variables on the left hand column by levels of individual incentives. Non-significant coefficients are in parenthesis (p>0.05).

Turning to the changes in the expected percentage of abstention produced by this systemic characteristics for different levels of individual incentives, we can see that for disadvantaged individuals, abstention is only reduced by a high level of trade union density (by 5 percentage points). None of the other variables, once we have controlled for the effect of compulsory voting, decreases the expected abstention rate for this group of electors, and a high level of party density even increases it to a considerable extent. In turn, electors with medium levels of individual incentives see their abstention rate decrease if there is high trade union density, religious segmentation and/or ethno-linguistic fragmentation. Finally, for advantaged electors, only religious segmentation and trade union density seem to decrease abstention (by about 3 per cent each).

4 Election decisiveness and individual characteristics

4.1 Institutional decisiveness

The institutional decisiveness of parliamentary elections is measured through three indicators: the presence of a head of State elected by the citizenry, the presence of a decentralised political structure where there are directly elected regional assemblies, and the presence of direct democracy structures of decision-making that are widely and regularly used. When these three characteristics are present, it is hypothesised that parliamentary elections lose relevance, and therefore abstention in these elections is expected to increase.

As expected, in cases where there is a direct election of the head of State, the log odds of abstaining are larger than in systems where it is hereditary or indirectly elected. This effect is the same for all levels of individual incentives, that is, there is not one group that is particularly affected by this systemic factor. This is the interpretation that we can make out of the non-significant coefficient of the interaction term included in table 5.11. In the this case, therefore, there is no interaction with the level of individual resources and motivations: the effect of the systemic variable is the same for all levels of individual incentives, and so the lines in figure 5.17 are parallel.

Table 5.11. Individual incentives and direct election of the head of State

	B	s.e.
Individual incentives	-2.43	.08
Compulsory voting	-1.21	.05
Direct election of head of State	.63	.07
Interaction (1)	(-.02)	.16
Constant	-1.01	.04
Chi-square	2, 518	
df	4	
N	38,919	

(1) Direct election x individual incentives. Compulsory voting is introduced to control for its effects.

If we look at the predicted probabilities (figure 5.18), however, we can observe that this equal effect increases the abstention rate of disadvantaged electors more than advantaged electors, in probability terms. For the highest level of individual incentives, direct election of the head of State does not increase the probability of abstaining beyond 0.1, while for a minimum level of individual incentives this very same probability reaches 0.4. I shall return to this when talking about the consequences of the effects of election decisiveness, in section 4.3.

Figure 5.17. The effect of individual incentives on the log odds of abstaining by direct election of the head of State

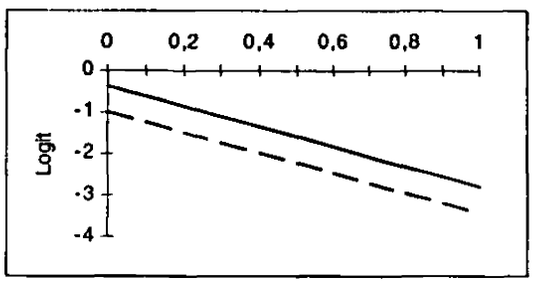
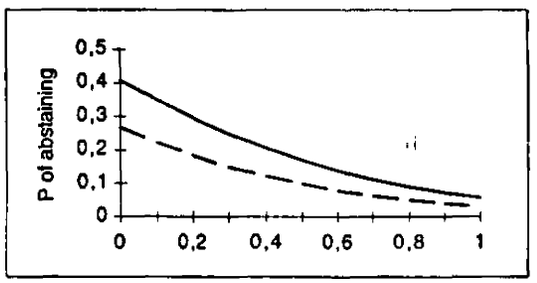


Figure 5.18. The effect of individual incentives on the probabilities of abstaining by direct election of the head of State



In the case of decentralisation, effects are consistent with what was found in the analysis performed in chapter IV. The main effect is of reduction in the likelihood of abstaining.[176] In a model with the specification of interaction effects, decentralisation seems to increase the log odds of abstaining only for advantaged electors (-0.7+1.1-=0.4), while for the disadvantaged ones it has the opposite effect (it reduces the log

[176] The coefficient for decentralisation (controlling by compulsory voting and individual incentives, but without including the interaction term) would be, -0.28 (s.e. 0.03).

odds of abstaining by -0.7). So this variable has this balancing effect that we have so rarely found so far: it increases the likelihood of voting of the disadvantaged while it decreases the likelihood of voting of the advantaged, and thus it reduces the effect of individual incentives, as it can be seen by the smaller slope of the continuous line in figure 5.19.

Table 5.12. Individual incentives and political decentralisation

	B	s.e.
Individual incentives	-2.82	.10
Compulsory voting	-1.48	.05
Decentralisation	- .67	.06
Interaction (1)	1.05	.14
Constant	- .56	.04
Chi-square	2,312	
df	4	
N	38,919	

(1) Decentralisation x individual incentives. Compulsory voting is introduced to control for its effects.

Figure 5.20 shows how the effect of decentralisation for disadvantaged individuals reduces the probability of abstaining from over 0.35 to less than 0.25, while for advantaged electors it slightly increases their likelihood of voting.

Figure 5.19. The effect of individual incentives on the log odds of abstaining by decentralisation

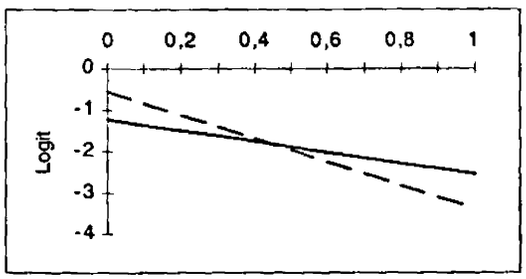
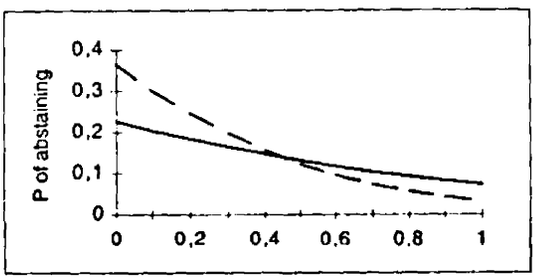


Figure 5.20. The effect of individual incentives on the probabilities of abstaining by decentralisation



Finally the analysis of the effect of direct democracy practices is of a particular nature, for in fact this variable encapsulates the specificity of the Swiss political system,[177] where most decisions concerning important pieces of legislation are taken via referendums, and where the composition of the government does not depend on the

[177] The variable "direct democracy" has been introduced as a dummy, and its value is 1 for Switzerland and 0 for all other cases.

outcome of the election, nor even on post-election negotiations, but on a *magic formula* that has been at use since the 1950s. The Swiss political system is one in which the decisiveness of parliamentary elections is indeed minimal.

Table 5.13. Individual incentives and direct democracy

	B	s.e.
Individual incentives	-2.27	.07
Compulsory voting	-1.35	.07
Direct democracy	3.01	.24
Interaction (1)	-3.34	.51
Constant	-.94	.03
Chi-square	2,556	
df	4	
N	38,919	

(1) Direct democracy x individual incentives. Compulsory voting is introduced to control for its effects.

The analysis shows the impressive effect of this systemic variable and its strong interactive relationship with individual incentives. Overall, direct democracy increases the log odds of abstaining by 1.5 units, after controlling for the effect of compulsory voting.[178] However if we introduce an interaction term we can appreciate how this positive effect is concentrated on disadvantaged individuals (see table 5.13). For those, the presence of direct democracy increases the log odds of abstaining by -3.0 units, while for advantaged electors there is almost no difference in the log odds of abstaining between systems with or without direct democracy institutions. In other words, advantaged electors in Switzerland are not affected by the lack of decisiveness of elections, and they vote as much as any other advantaged elector in any other country (if not slightly more). Instead, disadvantaged electors are highly discouraged from voting. While in systems without direct democracy their probability of voting is 0.3, in Switzerland this probability is 0.9 (see figure 5.22).

These results can be conversely interpreted as the fact that, given the lack of institutional decisiveness of parliamentary elections in Switzerland, a very high level of individual resources and motivations is required in order to vote. Thus, the impact of individual incentives is far stronger where institutional decisiveness is small, as is the case in Switzerland. The slope of the line representing presence of direct democracy

[178] Results not shown on table.

institutions is in fact larger than the one representing absence of this institutional characteristic (figure 5.21).

Figure 5.21. The effect of individual incentives on the log odds of abstaining by direct democracy

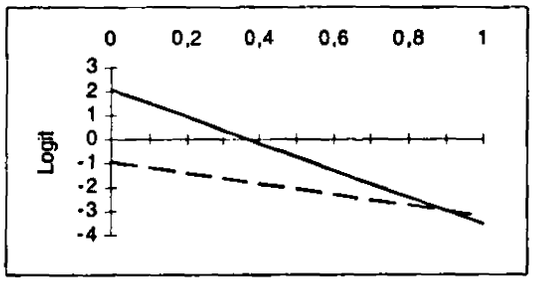
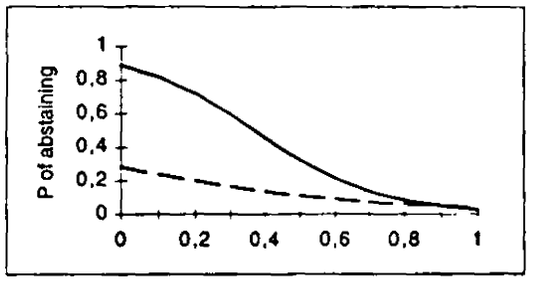


Figure 5.22. The effect of individual incentives on the probabilities of abstaining by direct democracy



4.2 Political decisiveness

The level of political decisiveness of an election is measured through three indicators. Firstly, whether or not there is a clear distinction between the party or parties in government and those in opposition. The clearer the line between the two blocks, the easier to choose whether to renew or withdraw confidence in the current government, and thus, the easier the choice. Conversely, if this line is blurred, by changes in the government composition along the legislative period, or by a lack of proper opposition capable of becoming an alternative (for instance in the case of oversized coalitions), then the judgement on the government's policies becomes more difficult to carry out, because responsibility cannot be clearly assigned, or because there simply is no alternative.

Secondly, the more different political options are, the more decisive the election will be. If all parties present the same political programs, the election will not be decisive for whoever wins, there will be no different policies. Differentiation of political offers is measured through the level of ideological polarisation of the two main parties.

Finally the election will be more decisive the more likely it is to bring change. When the result is a foregone conclusion, the contest will arise less interest among electors and less mobilising efforts among parties. As a proxy for expected change we have used the difference in seats between the two main parties or blocks.

The presence of a clear distinction between parties at each side of the government and opposition line reduces the log odds of abstaining, and it does so particularly among disadvantaged electors. So among these, the odds of abstaining are reduced by -0.7, while among advantaged electors this systemic variable increases slightly the log odds of abstaining by 0.5 (-0.7+1.2=0.5).

Table 5.14. Individual incentives and clearness of the government-opposition division

	B	s.e.
Individual incentives	-3.31	.18
Compulsory voting	-1.61	.06
Clearness	- .74	.09
Interaction (1)	1.20	.20
Constant	- .25	.03
Chi-square	2,550	
df	4	
N	38,919	

(1) Clearness x individual incentives. Compulsory voting is introduced to control for its effects.

A clear line between government and opposition encourages participation from the disadvantaged electors, probably by simplifying the decision of how to vote (either for or against the incumbent) easier. Thus, when this division is present the level of individual incentives has a smaller effect on the likelihood of voting, as can be seen from figure 5.23.

Figure 5.23. The effect of individual incentives on the log odds of abstaining by clearness of the government-opposition division

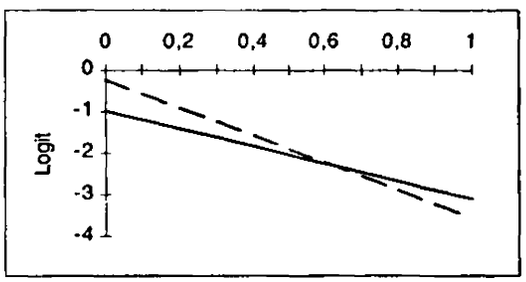
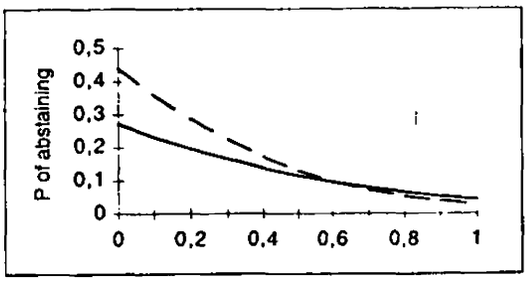


Figure 5.24. The effect of individual incentives on the probabilities of abstaining by clearness of the government-opposition division



After controlling for individual incentives and compulsory voting, the ideological distance between the two main parties unexpectedly increases the odds of

abstaining, although the effect is very small[179]. Moreover, this effect is constant for all levels of individual incentives, as the non-significance of the interaction term implies (see table 5.15). This may reflect the fact that the ideological distance between parties is in fact produced by the parties themselves, and is not really recognised by the electorate as representing truly different political options that would provide a motivation to vote.[180]

Table 5.15. Individual incentives and ideological distance between main parties

	B	s.e.
Individual incentives	-2.26	.14
Compulsory voting	-1.50	.05
Distance between main parties	.34	.08
Interaction (1)	(.13)	.17
Constant	-1.15	.07
Chi-square	2,327	
df	4	
N	38,919	

(1) Large distance x individual incentives. Compulsory voting is introduced to control for its effects.

Figure 5.25. The effect of individual incentives on the log odds of abstaining by distance between two main parties

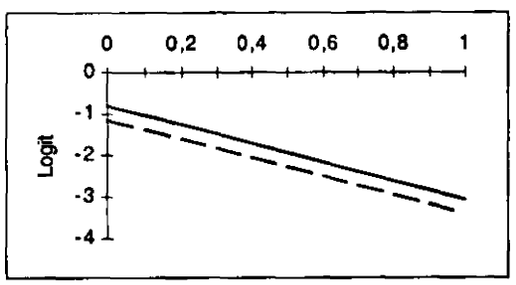
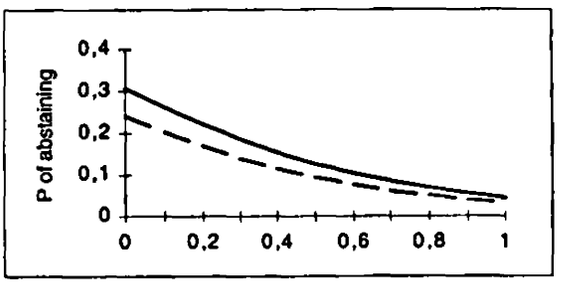


Figure 5.26. The effect of individual incentives on the probabilities of abstaining by distance between two main parties



The closeness of elections is expected to increase the likelihood of voting in two ways. Firstly, electors would perceive that their vote is relatively more important than in an election where the outcome is clearly foreseeable. Secondly, parties will increase

[179] The coefficient for polarisation without specifying the interaction term is 0.39 (s.e 0.03).Excluding cases in which both parties are in government at the time of the election (as we did in chapter IV) does not substantially alter the results.

[180] Bartolini and Mair (1990a:15) have argued that there is "quite a sharp contrast between ideological polarisation, on the one hand, and policy differences, on the other". So the ideological distance between the two main parties could be in fact a faulty indicator of the degree of distinctiveness of the political options available.

their mobilising efforts, in order to get to the polls those citizens more likely to stay at home. Previous research has found that the mechanism under the relationship between election closeness and turnout is rather the latter than the former. Some authors fail to find a correlation at the individual level between the perceived closeness of the race and the likelihood of abstaining (Matsusaka and Palda 1993), but still at the aggregate level several studies support the association between closeness or marginality, intensity of the campaign and high participation.[181]

If the effect of closeness was to come through perceived influence on the outcome, we would expect it to be concentrated among the most advantaged electors, who are more likely to be aware of whether the race is close or not. If instead the effect of closeness of the election was to come from intense mobilisation from parties, we would expect it to affect particularly disadvantaged electors.

Table 5.16. Individual incentives and closeness of the election

	B	s.e.
Individual incentives	-2.72	.10
Compulsory voting	-1.48	.05
Close election	-.46	.06
Interaction (1)	.67	.14
Constant	-.61	.04
Chi-square	2,246	
df	4	
N	38,919	

(1) Close election x individual incentives. Compulsory voting is introduced to control for its effects.

Figure 5.27. The effect of individual incentives on the log odds of abstaining by closeness of the election

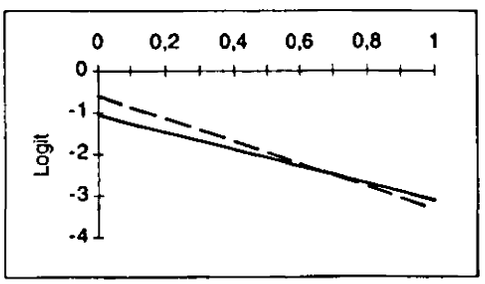
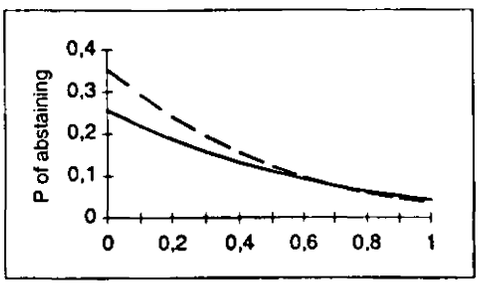


Figure 5.28. The effect of individual incentives on the probabilities of abstaining by closeness of the election



[181] Pattie and Johnston forthcoming, Denver and Hands 1974, 1985, Cox and Munger 1989.

Table 5.16 shows that, controlling for the impact of compulsory voting and individual incentives, a close election[182] reduces the log odds of abstaining only among disadvantaged electors. Our data, therefore, support the theory that links closeness of the race with party mobilisation and high turnout.

4.3 The consequences of election decisiveness

The institutional decisiveness of the election does matter even after controlling for individual incentives to participate: direct election of the head of State and frequent use of direct democracy institutions increase the odds of abstaining in parliamentary elections. In the case of frequent use of referendums as a decision making tool, this positive effect over abstention is particularly strong among disadvantaged electors. As for decentralisation, it increases the odds of abstaining for advantaged electors and reduces them for disadvantaged electors, but, contrary to our expectations, on the whole it does not reduce the odds of abstaining.

Some of the indicators of political decisiveness also show interactive effects with the level of individual incentives. A clear division between government and opposition, plus a close race, reduce the odds of abstaining for disadvantaged electors. On the other hand, a large ideological distance between the two main parties slightly increases the odds of abstaining for all electors.

As in the cases of institutional incentives and party system embeddedness, we shall now turn to compare the magnitudes of the effects of these six systemic variables, with the consequences of such effects in terms of the expected percentages of abstention. In this case it seems that disadvantaged electors are more sensitive to the decisiveness of the election, at least for direct democracy and a clear line between government and opposition, and the changes in the expected levels of abstention should reflect this.

Turning to the consequences of these effects in terms of expected changes in the probabilities of abstaining (see table 5.17), we can clearly see how the abstention rate of disadvantaged electors is dramatically increased by the presence of direct democracy (almost by 40 per cent for the lowest category of individual incentives, and over 20 per

[182] The elections of Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and Great Britain were coded as close (see table 4.25).

cent in the intermediate category). The changes in the expected abstention rate run parallel with the strength of the effects in this case. The direct election of the head of State also increases abstention substantially, particularly for disadvantaged citizens. Decentralisation does not change the expected probability of abstention for any level of individual incentives: dividing the sample by individual incentives and controlling for compulsory voting, decentralisation does not have any significant effect on the log odds of abstention and thus it is not expected to change the expected probabilities.

Table 5.17. The consequences of election decisiveness by levels of individual incentives

Indiv. incentives	Changes(1) Low	Medium	High	Effects(2) Low	Medium	High
Elected head State	7.2	6.3	3.5	.39	.55	.45
Decentralisation	0.0	0.0	0.0	(-.02)	(-.01)	(.01)
Direct democracy	38.8	22.0	5.5	1.71	1.35	.61
Clear gov.-opp.	-4.4	0.0	0.0	-.24	(-.12)	(.19)
Distance	8.1	3.4	2.0	.49	.34	.29
Closeness	-1.6	-3.3	0.0	-.09	-.31	(.10)

Controlling for compulsory voting. (1) Entries are the expected change in the percentage of abstention produced by the systemic variables on the left hand column by individual incentives. (2) Entries are B coefficients for the explanatory variables on the left hand column by levels of individual incentives. Non-significant coefficients are in parenthesis (p>.05).

The presence of a clear line between government and opposition reduces the expected percentage of abstention by over 4 per cent, but only in the case of a low level of individual incentives. For the other two categories, it has no significant impact. A relatively high level of ideological distance between the two main parties increases abstention particularly among disadvantaged electors. Finally, a close election reduces the expected level of abstention for the two groups with the lowest individual incentives, but not for the third one.

5 Systemic and individual incentives

The analysis of the interaction effects of individual and systemic variables over electoral abstention has proved to be very fruitful. Results have confirmed the importance of specifying cross-level interaction effects when studying the impact of

individual characteristics or systemic features on electoral participation, as well as the need to use technical approaches that allow to measure the impact of each predictor independently from ceiling or floor effects.

The first interesting result of the analysis has been that in many cases *individuals with high levels of resources and motivations are more sensitive to their contexts than disadvantaged electors.* As has already been mentioned, low levels of resources, of social integration and of political involvement not only make electors less likely to vote, they also make them relatively less likely to be influenced by factors such as compulsory voting, voting facilities, high effective electoral thresholds, the possibility of expressing a preference in their ballot, religious segmentation, or trade union density.

In the presence of such things as direct democracy institutions, a clear line between government and opposition, or a close election, we found confirmation for the hypothesis that disadvantaged electors experience a stronger reductive effect of these contextual variables over their likelihood of abstaining.

However, for other systemic variables we found results that, beyond interaction effects, are hard to interpret, such as the positive effect over abstention of a high level of party density or ideological distance between parties, factors a priori expected to reduce abstention.

Table 5.18. The effect of individual and systemic incentives on electoral abstention

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	s.e.	r	B	s.e.	r
Individual incentives	-2.30	.07	-.18	-1.71	.12	-.08
Systemic incentives	-1.82	.06	-.16	-1.11	.14	-.04
Interaction	--			-1.75	.31	-.03
Constant	- .37	.04		- .61	.06	
Chi-square	2,128			+32		
df	2			+1		
N	38,919			38,919		

So for almost all the systemic variables here analysed we have found that they interact significantly with the level of individual incentives when affecting the likelihood of abstaining. This not only means that the effect of a given systemic variable may be stronger for some electors than for others, but in some cases it even

implies *that the direction of the effect of the systemic variable is reversed for different levels of individual incentives* (such as for instance, ethno-linguistic fragmentation or voting facilities).

Table 5.18 summarises the basic findings of this chapter. It presents the coefficients obtained from regressing the indices of individual and systemic[183] incentives on the log odds of abstaining, with and without their interaction.

From the first model (without the interaction term) it is clear that both individual and systemic incentives reduce the log odds of abstaining, the effect of individual resources being slightly larger than that of systemic incentives.[184] The interaction term in the second model shows clearly that the negative effect of systemic incentives increases as the level of individual incentives increases: for the minimum level of individual incentives systemic incentives reduce the log odds of abstaining by -1.1, while for the maximum level of individual incentives this effect is -2.9 (the sum of the coefficients for systemic incentives and the interaction term).

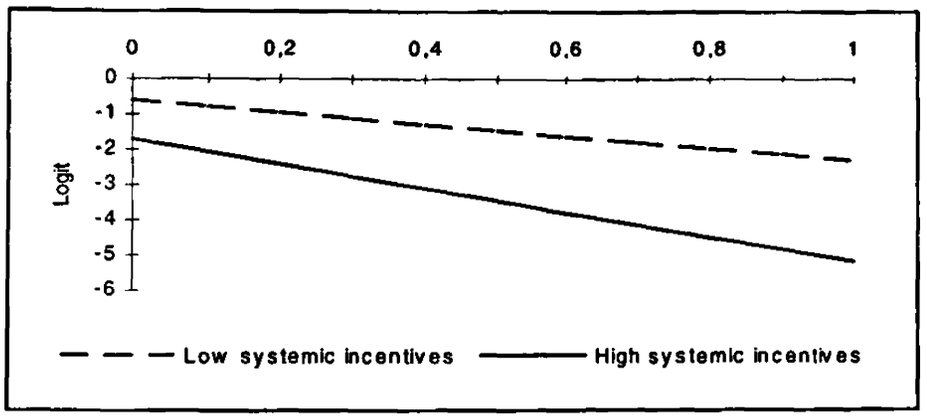
Conversely, the weight of individual incentives increases as systemic incentives increase. For the minimum level of contextual incentives, the weight of individual characteristics is -1.71, while for the highest level of systemic incentives this weight reaches -3.5.

Thus, *a lower level of abstention, the direct consequence of systemic incentives, does not necessarily mean smaller individual level relationships* as figure 5.29 clearly shows. In this figure the X-axis displays the level of individual incentives, while the Y-axis represents the log odds or logits of abstaining vs. voting. The continuous line, representing the values of the logits for the highest level of systemic incentives, has a larger slope than the discontinuous line, which represents the same values for the lowest level of systemic incentives.

[183] The index of systemic incentives has been calculated as the index of individual incentives, including all those systemic variables that were found to reduce the likelihood of abstaining. It ranks from 0 (lowest level of systemic incentives) to 1 (highest level of systemic incentives). In its dichotomous form, Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden are considered countries with high systemic incentives.

[184] The r coefficient reported in table 5.18 can be interpreted as a standardised coefficient in OLS regression. Since for both variables 0 means minimum level of incentives and 1 means maximum level, we could take the same conclusion from the B coefficient itself.

Figure 5.29. The effect of systemic and individual incentives on the log odds of abstaining



However, *these results by no means imply that systemic incentives play a minor or irrelevant role for disadvantaged electors.* On the contrary, because this group of elector has a higher abstention rate, there is more room for these effects to increase their participation level. So, although in many cases the effects of these systemic characteristics are comparatively smaller for disadvantaged than for advantaged electors, disadvantaged electors will see their abstention rates decrease by a considerable extent as a result of introducing systemic incentives, while for advantaged electors the consequences of these larger effects will be smaller, given that they already vote to a large extent even with a low level of contextual incentives.

Table 5.19. Average percentage of non-voters by levels of individual and systemic incentives

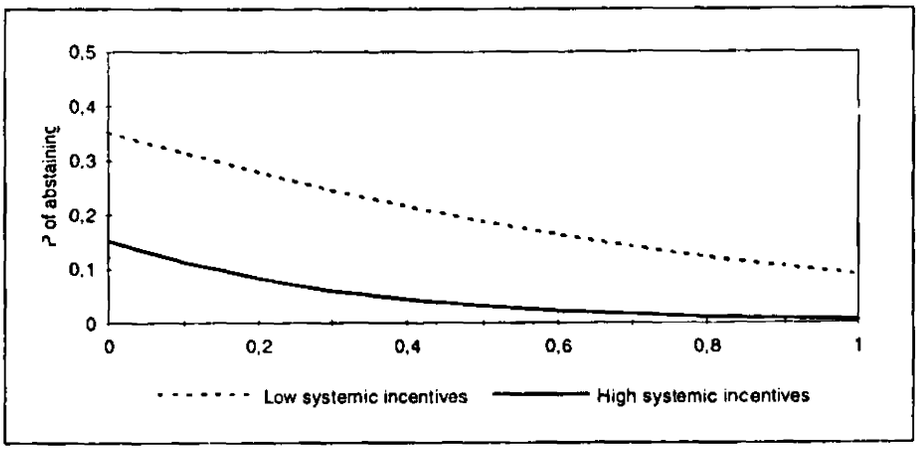
	Systemic incentives		
	Low	**Medium**	**High**
Individual incentives			
Low	25	20	7
Medium	15	9	2
High	11	5	1

This is clearly seen in table 5.19, which presents the average abstention rates for different combinations of individual and systemic incentives. For disadvantaged electors (first row), the introduction of systemic incentives reduces the average level of abstention from 25 to 7 per cent. For advantaged electors (third row) this reduction is from 11 to 1 per cent. In the same way, individual incentives produce larger changes in the average abstention rate where systemic incentives are low (from 25 to 11 per cent), than where these are high (from 7 to 1 per cent). But we must be aware that these

figures do not allow us to measure the strength of the effects, only their consequences in terms of changes in abstention levels.

The important consequences of systemic incentives, both for advantaged and disadvantaged individuals can be seen also in figure 5.30, that presents the expected probabilities of abstaining (calculated from the second model in table 5.18). Here the X-axis presents, as before, the level of individual characteristics, while the Y-axis now represents the expected probability of abstaining.

Figure 5.30. Expected probabilities of abstaining by individual and systemic incentives



The figure shows that for the lowest levels of individual incentives the probability of abstaining goes from 0.35 to 0.15 when systemic incentives are introduced. For the most advantaged electors in terms of their individual characteristics the reduction is from 0.1 to almost 0. In turn, going from the minimum to the maximum level of individual incentives in a context where systemic incentives are low reduces the probability of abstaining from 0.35 to 0.1, while in a political system that offers high incentives to participation the reduction is from 0.15 to almost 0.

6 Summary

To sum up the major findings of this chapter, it has been demonstrated that there is an important interaction effect between individual and systemic incentives of voting. Not only does the effect of systemic factors have a different magnitude for different

levels of individual incentives, but this effect may also have a different sense for advantaged and disadvantaged electors.

I have also shown that individuals with low levels of resources and motivations are not necessarily the most sensitive to the level of systemic incentives. On the contrary, in many instances it is advantaged electors who are relatively more influenced by the systemic incentives that they encounter.

Finally, we have revealed how, in spite of the fact that many systemic characteristics have a stronger effect for advantaged electors (controlling for ceiling and floor effects), this is not automatically translated into higher levels of electoral participation, for this group of citizens already votes massively. Instead, disadvantaged electors can see their abstention levels substantially reduced by variations in systemic factors.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions that can be drawn from this thesis regard three different elements: substantive implications for the understanding of how individual and systemic variables affect the likelihood of abstaining; methodological implications for the analysis of electoral participation, and potential measures to be taken in order to minimise non-voting. I shall discuss each of them in turn.

I

The thesis has shown that there is an important interactive relationship between individual and systemic determinants of electoral abstention. The characteristics of the institutional setting, the party system, and the elections do not have the same effect over the likelihood of abstaining of different citizens. At the same time, individual characteristics play an important role in some countries, while they may not make much difference in others.

Institutional incentives for voting (such as compulsory voting, voting facilities, the possibility of expressing a preference for a candidate, or low effective electoral thresholds) have a greater effect on the likelihood of abstaining of advantaged electors than on disadvantaged electors. It seems that these systemic incentives for voting affect the level of turnout when voters *perceive* that they exist. Electors with higher levels of resources, social integration and political involvement are more aware of the presence or absence of these incentives, and therefore their participation rates are relatively more affected by these factors.

On the other hand, the degree of decisiveness of elections seems to affect particularly disadvantaged electors. These are more affected than advantaged citizens by the presence of direct democracy institutions, by a clear difference between

government and opposition, and by close election races. Thus, a highly decisive election mobilises particularly electors with low levels of individual resources, social integration and political involvement, probably through the intervening role of political parties, although this remains to be tested.[185]

Finally, the analysis of the effects of party system embeddedness has led to some puzzling conclusions. Religious segmentation and trade union density decrease the likelihood of abstaining particularly for advantaged electors. However, a high level of party density increases the level of non-voting for disadvantaged electors, while it makes no difference for advantaged citizens. Further research should try to disentangle which other factors are behind these unexpected findings, and elaborate alternative operational definitions of the links between parties and elections.

The fact that some systemic incentives have a larger impact on advantaged electors than on disadvantaged ones is related to the degree of sensitiveness of different electors to their political environment. However, a very high degree of sensitiveness to environmental factors (that is, a large effect of systemic variables over the likelihood of abstaining) is not necessarily translated into major abstention changes. If citizens with high levels of resources, social integration, and political involvement vote massively, compulsory voting or voting facilities cannot do much to increase their already high level of participation. This ceiling effect (turnout cannot be higher than 100 per cent) is what has often lead to the conclusion that advantaged electors are less affected by contextual factors than disadvantaged ones.

It is for this reason that the distinction between *magnitude of the effects*, and *consequences of the effects* is fundamental. Consequences of systemic factors (i.e., changes in the percentage of non-voters), are larger for disadvantaged electors, for the simple reason that they vote less and thus there is more room to increase their participation level.

Hence, two different analytical questions are involved. The first one is to what extent are electors sensitive to systemic incentives; the second one is to what extent can systemic incentives reduce abstention rates? It could be argued that the only relevant question from a theoretical point of view is the second: if the abstention rate of

[185] See Oppenhuis (1995:76) for a similar conclusion regarding salience of elections, party mobilisation and the effect of political interest on turnout.

advantaged electors is relatively low in any case, what does it matter, if they are very sensitive to systemic incentives to participation?

The truth is that when systemic incentives are introduced, the abstention rate of disadvantaged electors decreases more than that of the advantaged. However, imagine a situation of relatively high abstention rates (of around 40 per cent average, slightly lower among advantaged citizens and somewhat higher for disadvantaged electors). If we then introduced compulsory voting, according to the results presented here, we would find that we have increased the overall participation rate, but especially the participation rate of *advantaged* electors.

A situation like this one is not fictitious. The recent introduction of voter registration facilities in the United States[186] has puzzled a number of scholars who were expecting to find that this would reduce the socio-economic bias of the participant population. However, as it happened, it was those from a higher socio-economic status that mainly took advantage of the new facilities, while the participation rate of those from the lower socio-economic groups of society did not increase very much.

The larger relative effect of registration facilities over turnout for advantaged than for disadvantaged electors can be appreciated in the United States, because abstention rates are high even among advantaged electors, and thus floor effects do not limit the interpretation of the analyses. But the same happens in Western Europe as far as institutional incentives are concerned, even if higher turnout rates do not make it evident. The more abstention increases, the more we have to take into account the true effects of systemic incentives to participation.

A second major finding of the thesis is the fact that the effect of individual characteristics does not depend on the overall level of abstention, controlling for floor and ceiling effects. In a country with very high participation rates, it is obvious that at least some disadvantaged electors must vote. But still the non-voter population may be particularly skewed towards disadvantaged electors. What is more, precisely in contexts of high mobilisation we are likely to find than non-voters are mainly from the most disadvantaged groups, those lacking resources and motivation, those unaware of

[186] The National Voter Registration Reform Act of 1993, often called 'motor voter', mandates all states to provide registration opportunities at drivers' license bureaux and other sites. See Calvert and Gilchirst 1993, Calvert 1996, Martínez 1997.

systemic incentives to participation, those out of the reach of the mobilising efforts of political parties.

The following table shows that there are cases of low levels of abstention and large effects of individual incentives (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden), where although most people turn out, those that abstain are mainly from disadvantaged groups. Only the case of Greece combines a high level of turnout with a low effect of individual incentives, that is, the few non-voters are not very different from the many voters.

In France, Norway, Switzerland and Great Britain quite a few stay out of the electoral process and these are particularly from the disadvantaged groups. In these countries, the level of individual incentives determines to a large extent who votes and who does not. On the contrary, in Finland, Ireland, Portugal and Spain quite a few abstain, and these are both from the disadvantaged and the advantaged groups. Some disadvantaged electors do not participate (presumably, because of their lack of resources and motivations), but a fair proportion of those who have such advantages also choose to abstain.

	High level of abstention[187]	**Low level of abstention**
Large[188] **effect of individual incentives**	France, Norway, Switzerland, Great Britain	Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden
Small effect of individual incentives	Finland, Ireland, Portugal, Spain	Greece

It seems that institutional incentives to participation, and a high degree of party system embeddedness are related to larger effects of individual incentives, precisely because the few that do not vote are mainly disadvantaged citizens. Large effects of individual incentives also appear in cases of low election decisiveness, basically due to the demobilisation of disadvantaged electors.[189]

[187] Countries are divided according to whether their abstention rate (measured from survey data) is above or below the percentage of non-voters calculated from the pooled weighted sample including all surveys.

[188] Countries are divided according to whether the effect of the index of individual incentives is larger or smaller than the effect for the pooled weighted sample including all surveys.

[189] This, however, does not imply that these systemic variables produce a less representative participant population. The representativeness of the participant population in terms of the individual characteristics of voters (at least as measured by Rosenstone and Hansen 1993, Martínez 1997), depends on the overall

II

From a methodological perspective the thesis has shown the importance of specifying interaction effects between individual and systemic determinants of electoral participation. The effect of systemic incentives is not the same for all citizens, and in more than one case it was found that the direction of the effect actually changed depending on the level of individual resources and motivations. Conversely, the effect of individual incentives also varies across different contexts. This should be properly specified (or at least tested for) in models including both individual and systemic determinants of electoral abstention.

A second major methodological conclusion regards the interpretation of logistic regression analysis. This is usually done through the estimation of expected probabilities, which are understood more intuitively than the coefficients. Predicted probabilities grasp the *consequences* of the explanatory variables in terms of expected changes in abstention rates. However, they do not allow us to properly measure the magnitude of the *effects* because of the limits imposed by a bounded dependent variable (the probability of abstaining cannot be larger than 1 nor smaller than 0).

Particularly when comparing the effect of individual characteristics in contexts with different overall abstention rates, or the effect of systemic factors for groups of citizens with different characteristics and different levels of abstention, it is fundamental to measure these effects independently of ceiling and floor effects. Thus, when using logistic regression analysis, the interpretation of the results should be based both on the logistic coefficient (to measure the magnitude of the effect) and on the expected probabilities (to measure the consequences of such effects).

---

level of turnout. It can happen that with a very high level of turnout the participant population is very similar to the overall electorate, while at the same time the very few non-voters are very distinctive in terms of individual features. In this sense, whether we look at voters or at non-voters would lead us to very different conclusions.

III

Without claiming any dramatic consequences of relatively low levels of turnout, this thesis has assumed that high electoral participation is desirable. In the first place, voting is a unique form of political participation in that it combines universality of access and equal influence from all participants. It may not be the most important one from the point of view of a very active citizen, but it certainly is the most important one from the point of view of a democratic system.

Secondly, a high level of abstention implies the exclusion of a part of the citizenry from a fundamental aspect of democracy. If the excluded are basically disadvantaged, then political exclusion comes on top of social exclusion.[190] If advantaged electors are also excluded, things do not look much better, for this implies that even those with resources and motivations to vote prefer to stay out of the electoral process. This may be reflecting some kind of opinion-based abstentionism, as opposed to the previous alienation-based abstentionism.[191]

Thirdly, voting should be encouraged not only in order to 'reflect' political integration, but because it is likely to produce it. People that participate in elections may feel stimulated to become more informed, more involved and to take part in other forms of political participation.[192]

Beyond the understanding of the way in which different elements may affect the level of abstention, the practical question then becomes how to minimise the level of non-voting in contemporary democracies. In other words, is it by changing the political system or the individual characteristics that we will obtain high participation?

The first answer that we can give to this question at the light of the analysis performed here is clear: non-voting can be minimised by increasing the levels of individual incentives to participation, and more specifically, the level of involvement in politics. This is the variable that has a largest impact on the likelihood of abstaining,

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[190] For the debate on whether the outcomes of the elections would change if all electors voted see for instance Bennet and Resnick 1990, Crewe et al. 1977, Radcliff 1995, Pacek and Radcliff 1995, Teixeira 1992.

[191] See Corbetta and Parisi 1994.

[192] See Lijphart 1997.

and not only that, it also makes people more sensitive to institutional incentives (such as compulsory voting) and less sensitive to the disincentives (such as the use of direct democracy institutions). Of course, such a conclusion pushes the problem one step back, that is, how do we increase the level of political involvement? The answer to this major question is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis.

The second suggestion for increasing turnout is to change what is easily changeable, that is, the institutional direct incentives for voting. The other systemic incentives (such as the embeddedness of the party system or the degree of decisiveness of elections) may be as difficult to change as increasing the level of political involvement among the citizenry (and in fact they may be closely related questions). Direct institutional incentives such as compulsory voting or voting facilities can be introduced relatively easily. The latter can even be addressed to specific groups that show particularly high non-voting rates. Beyond compulsory voting (and registration facilities in the US), it is surprising how little attention direct incentives of electoral participation have deserved in the literature dealing with turnout. Further empirical research should also try to fill this gap.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY DATA SOURCES

The data utilised in this thesis were collected and made available by the following institutions and researchers. Neither the original collectors of the data nor the centres bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.

Table A.1. Survey data sources

Country	Survey	Institution	Researchers
Belgium	1991 Election Study	PIOP-ISPO	Jacques Billiet, Ann Carton Roeland Beerten, André-Paul Frognier, Anne-Marie Aish-Van Vaerenbergh and Serge Van Diest, Marc Swyngedouw
Denmark	DDA 1564	Danish Data Archives	
Finland	1991 Election Study	University of Tampere	Sami Borg, Risto Sänkiaho, and Petti Pesonen
Germany	ICPSR 6390, 1991 Politbarometer West	International Consortium for Political and Social Research	Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (Mannheim)
Norway	1993 Election Study	Norwegian Social Sciences Data Services	Bernt Aardal and Henry Valen
Spain	CIS 2061 Post-electoral 1993	Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas	
Sweden	SSD 0391 Swedish Election Study 1991	Swedish Social Science Data Archives	Sören Holmberg, Mikael Gilljam
Switzerland	1991Vox Election Study	Universities of Genéve, Bern and Zürich	Sibylle Hardmeier, Claude Longchamp, Hanspeter Kriesi
Great Britain	SN 2981 British Election Study 1992	Economic and Social Research Council	Anthony Heath, R. Jowell John Curtice, J.A. Brand, J.C. Mitchell
Denmark, France, Italy, Greece, Germany, Spain Portugal	Eurobarometer 41.1	European Union	Reif Karlheinz, Eric Marlier

APPENDIX B

WEIGHTS CONSTRUCTION

The effect of individual characteristics over the likelihood of abstaining was analysed in chapter III on a country by country basis. That made possible cross-country comparisons of the abstention rate of citizens with specific individual characteristics and of the effect of each explanatory variable over the likelihood of an individual's abstaining.

The cross-country comparisons are highlighted if there is some overall reference value against which to compare each country. This overall reference value can be constructed in one of two ways, depending on whether one gives priority to the country or to the individual as unit of analysis that defines the calculation of that reference value.

The overall reference estimates could be calculated by computing the average of all country estimates. In this case each country is considered as a unit and contributes to the same extent on the overall value, independently of each country's sample size and of the size of its electorate. This procedure however, does not consider the presence of a "European electorate" where every citizen counts the same and where relationships can be studied as within any single country.

This thesis goal is to establish under what conditions (both contextual and individual) people are more or less likely to abstain not only in each country, but also on the whole of Western Europe. In order to analyse the determinants of abstention in the whole area I merged all individual and systemic data in one single database.

However, although each country's sample is representative of the country's electorate, the sample sizes are not proportional to the electorate sizes. For instance, Belgium, with about 7 million potential voters, has a sample of over 4,500 respondents (a ratio of about 1,500 electors by each respondent), while Italy, with over 47 million electors has a sample size of only 987 people (that is, a ratio of almost 50,000 electors per respondent). This violates the assumption, required in order to infer relationships

from the sample to the population, that every individual in the population has the same probability of being selected in the sample.

In order to obtain an overall sample representative of the whole electorate of all countries introduced in the analysis, we must weight our data so that each country's sample size is proportional to the electorate it represents.

The weights are defined as the quantity by which we should multiply our actual sample size (n_i) in order to obtain our desired sample size (n_i^*). So:

$$n_i^* = w_i \cdot n_i ,$$

$$w_i = n_i^* / n_i ,$$

where n_i^* is the corrected sample size for country i and n_i is the actual sample size. The corrected sample is computed so that for each country, the proportion its electors in the sample over all merged samples, and of the electorate over the sum of all electorates is the same, that is,

$$n_i^* / \Sigma n_i^* = P_i / \Sigma P_i$$

where P_i is the electorate in country i. We know P_i for each country (see chapter II, section 3.3.2 for sources), an thus also ΣP_i. We set the sum of our corrected sample sizes to be the same than the sum of our real sizes ($\Sigma n_i^* = \Sigma n_i$) in order to obtain proper standard errors and thus be able to perform significance testing for the overall sample. Then we can find out the value of n_i^* for each country,

$$n_i^* = (\Sigma n_i^* \cdot P_i) / \Sigma P_i = (\Sigma n_i \cdot P_i) / \Sigma P_i ,$$

from where

$$w_i = (\Sigma n_i^* \cdot P_i) / (\Sigma P_i \cdot n_i) = (\Sigma n_i \cdot P_i) / (\Sigma P_i \cdot n_i).$$

The sample sizes taken as reference to calculate the weights are the total of respondents over 18 years old. Table B.1 presents the value of the weight for each country. Table B.2 displays the number of cases and the percentage over the whole sample of each country, both weighted and unweighted.

Table B.1. Weights

Country	Electorate	Sample size	Weight (w1)
Belgium	7,144,884	4,511	.291
Denmark	3,941,499	974	.743
Finland	4,060,778	1,472	.507
France	37,871,350	966	7.198
Germany	48,099,251	11,269	.784
Greece	8,972,258	920	1.791
Ireland	2,557,036	875	.537
Italy	47,425,689	984	8.850
Netherlands	11,112,189	1,754	1.163
Norway	3,259,967	2,194	.273
Portugal	8,322,481	874	1.748
Spain	31,030,511	5,001	1.139
Sweden	6,413,172	3,700	.318
Switzerland	4,510,784	1,002	.827
England	36,071,067	2,428	2.728
Wales	2,194,218	149	2.704
Scotland	3,885,131	957	.745
Total	266,782,265	40,030	

Table B.2. Frequencies and percentages for weighted and unweighted data by country

Country	Unweighted		Weighted	
	F	%	F	%
Belgium	4,511	10.9	1,312	2.6
Denmark	974	2.3	724	1.5
Finland	1,472	7.1	746	3.0
France	966	2.3	6,954	14.0
Germany	11,269	27.2	8,832	17.8
Greece	920	2.2	1,647	3.3
Ireland	875	2.1	470	.9
Italy	984	2.4	8,708	17.5
Netherlands	1,754	4.2	2,040	4.1
Norway	2,194	5.3	599	1.2
Portugal	874	2.1	1,528	3.1
Spain	5,001	12.1	5,698	11.5
Sweden	3,700	8.9	1,178	2.4
Switzerland	1,002	2.4	828	1.7
England	2,428	5.9	6,623	13.3
Wales	149	0.4	403	.8
Scotland	957	2.3	713	1.4
Total	40,030	100	40,030	100

APPENDIX C

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

Table C.1. Characteristics of the electoral systems

Country and period	Electoral formula (number of districts)	Average district magnitude	Effective threshold	Ballot structure
Aus 94	LR Hare (43 regions) LR Hare (9 lander) d'Hondt (1 national)	4.6 20.3 183	12.0[193]	Party lists contains candidate names, voters can write one name. A candidate with a number of preferences equal to half of the votes required to win a seat, or with 1/6 of the party vote, will win a seat. At the land level preferences must equal the number of votes needed for a seat. Voting age from 19 to 18.
Aus 71-90	LR Hare (9 lander) d'Hondt (2)	20.3 91.5	2.6	Voters choose between party names but can write the name of their favourite candidate (which are not included in the ballot). Ineffective.
Aus 45-70	LR Droop (25) d'Hondt (4)	6.60 41.25	8.5	*Lose gebundere Liste*. Voters rank candidates from the party list. Potentially effective but very little used (0.65 % in 1966).
Bel 46-91	LR Hare (30 arrond.) d'Hondt (9 prov.)	7.04 23.5	4.8	Voters can choose between marking a list or a candidate within a list. About 50 % of the voters use preferential voting, particularly CVP, but it is very ineffective.

[193] The average threshold in this case is the average of the representation and exclusion thresholds as reported by Mueller (1996b:11) for the 1994 election.

Table C.1. Characteristics of the electoral systems (cont.)

Country and period	Electoral formula (number of districts)	Average district magnitude	Effective threshold	Ballot structure
Den 64-94	Mod. St. Laguë (23) LR Hare (national)	7.30 175	2.0 (N)	Voters can mark one preference within party lists (effective where lists have no official order).
Den 53-60	Mod. St. Laguë (19) Hare (national)	5.87 175	2.6 (N)	
Den 45-A53	d'Hondt (18.5) LR Hare (national)	4.83 148.50	1.6 (N)	
Fin 45-91	d'Hondt (15.5)	13.21	5.4	Voters *must* mark a preference within the party list (effective). The order of party lists depends on the voting outcome. Before 1953 closed party lists.
Fra 88-93	Maj-plurality (555)	1	35	Candidate.
Fra 86	d'Hondt (96)	5.79	11.7	Closed list.
Fra 58-81	Maj-plurality (470.14)	1	35	Candidate.
Fra 51-56	Mixed (Paris Hare; other areas majority, apparentement, and d'Hondt)	5.28	12.7	Closed list.
Fra 45-N46	d'Hondt (102 départ.)	5.19	12.9	Closed lists in 1945. One preference in 1946 (ineffective).
Ger 87-94	Plurality LR Hare (national)	1 497	5 (N[194])	Double vote.
Ger 57-83	Plurality d'Hondt (national)	1 496.88	5 (N)	Double vote.
Ger 53	Plurality d'Hondt (9 lander)	1 54.11	5 (N)	Double vote.
Ger 49	Plurality d'Hondt (11 lander)	1 36.55	5 (R)	Closed list.

[194] In the 1990 elections, the first after the reunification of the country the 5 per cent national legal threshold applied within each of the two former states, and not on the whole united Germany.

Table C.1. Characteristics of the electoral systems (cont.)

Country and period	Electoral formula (number of districts)	Average district magnitude	Effective threshold	Ballot structure
Gre 89-93	HB (56 distr.) LR Hare (13 regions) d'Hondt (1 national)	5.14 22.15 12	3.3	Closed list.
Gre 85	d'Hondt (56 lower, 9 medium, 2 national)	4/4/18/12	14.7	Closed list.
Gre 77-81	d'Hondt (56 lower, 9 medium, 1 national) LR Hare (national)	4/4 /18/12	16.1 (17N)	One or two preferences (*stavrodotisi*) effective. Age to vote lowered from 21 to 20 in 1977 and to 18 in 1981. The 17% national threshold applies to alocation of seats in the upper levels.
Gre 74	d'Hondt (56 lower, 9 medium, 1 national) LR Hare (1 national)	3/10/18/12	18.8 (17N)	One or two preferences (*stavrodotisi*) effective. The 17% national threshold applies to alocation of seats in the upper levels.
Gre 61-64	Hagenbach-Bischoff (55 districts, 9 upper)	5.5	15 (N)	One preference. Nation-wide threshold was lowered to 10% in 1963.
Gre 58	Hagenbach-Bischoff (55 districts, 9 upper)	5.5	25 (N)	One preference.
Gre 56	Majority (in 9 districts), mixed (70-30 per cent in 26), PR (in 6)	7.3	15 (N)	One preference. Women's vote.
Gre 52	Majority (99 districts)	3.03	20.8	One or two preferences given to different parties.
Gre 51	Hare (41 lower, 9 higher)	6.3 28.7	10.8 (17 N)	One preference within a party list. The 17% nation-wide threshold is required to be able to gain seats in the higher level of allocation.
Ire 48-92	STV	3.75	17.2	Ordinal
Ita 94	Plurality (475 collegi) LR Imperiali (27 reg.)	1 5.7	4 (N)	Double vote
Ita 58-92	LR Imperiali (32) LR Hare (1national)	19.55 625.75	2.0 (N)	3 or 4 preferences within party list until 92, effective. In 1992 only 1 preference.
Ita 48-53	Reinforced LR Hare (1 national)	582	2.4 (N)	3 or 4 pref. within party list, effective.
Ita 46	LR Droop/Imp. (31) LR Hare (1 national)	17.94 556	0.1	3 or 4 pref. within party list, effective.
Net 56-93	d'Hondt (1 national)	150	0.67 (N)	Voters can mark one preference but this is ineffective. In order to change the order, a candidate must get at least half of the votes of the list quotient (v/2s).
Net 46-52	d'Hondt (1 national)	100	1 (N)	

Table C.1. Characteristics of the electoral systems (cont.)

Country and period	Electoral formula (number of districts)	Average district magnitude	Effective threshold	Ballot structure
Nor 89-93	Mod. St. Laguë (19 lower and 1 nat.)	8.26 165	4 (N)	Voters can change list order (at least half of the party voters must prefer another candidate in the first place to alter order, so ineffective).
Nor 53-85	Mod. St. Laguë (19.6)	7.80	8.9	
Nor 45-49	d'Hondt (20)	7.50	9.2	
Por 75-91	d'Hondt (20 distritos)	12.40	5.7	Closed party list
Spa 77-93	d'Hondt (52 prov.)	6.73	10.2	Closed party list.
Swe 70-94	Mod.St. Laguë (28 lower and 1 nat.)	11.07 349.3	4 (N)	Preference within party list, ineffective.
Swe 52-68	Mod.St. Laguë (28)	8.27	8.4	
Swe 48	d'Hondt (28)	8.21	8.5	
Swi 47-91	Hagenbach-Bischoff (24 cantons)	8.20	8.5	Cumulative vote and panachage, effective with no official cumulation. 1971 women enfranchisement.
U. K 45-92	Plurality (434 constituencies)	1	35	Candidate.

Sources: Cadart 1983, Clog 1983, Lijphart 1994, Mackie and Rose 1991, Katz 1986, Sternberger and Vogel 1969, Vegleris 1981. N= Legal threshold at the national level; R= Legal threshold at the constituency level

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