

Representation and voter participation

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Abstract. This paper presents results from a study of turnout in the 1994 European Parliament elections which inserted several new questions into the post-election Eurobarometer, including some open-ended questions. It distinguishes between circumstantial and voluntary abstention and shows how each type varies depending on the institutional arrangements for the election. Using both the subjective reasons given for abstention and a range of more objective measures of attitudes, it makes the case that conventional views as to the impact of Sunday-voting and the proportionality of the electoral system and as to the non-impact of attitudes to the European Union need to be modified. It concludes by identifying some practical institutional and political measures that could encourage higher levels of participation.

The extent of the problem

Representation is linkage. Turning out to vote is a necessary condition of such linkage. But turnout in European Parliament elections is low and falling – average turnout across the member states was 65.9% in 1979, 63.8% in 1984, 62.8% in 1989, and 58.5% in 1994 (see Table 1). These averages mask a wide range and some remarkably low rates of turnout in individual countries. In 1994 turnout was 36% cent in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Portugal and 44% in Ireland. The extent of the problem can be seen by comparing average turnout in European Parliament elections to average turnout in general elections held between 1979 and 1994. The discrepancy is a startling 41 percentage points in the United Kingdom, 36 points in Denmark and 35 points in the Netherlands (Table 1). It is smaller but still substantial in Portugal (25 points), Germany (24), France (17) and Ireland (16). These discrepancies represent normally politically active citizens who, for one reason or other another, do not vote in European Parliament elections. The question is: what are these reasons?

The research problem

Some indications of the sources of variation in European Parliament election turnout between countries can be gleaned from Table 1. The most obvious

Table 1. Percentage turnout in European and national elections, 1979–1994

	European elections mean turnout						Last national election	Mean turnout in		Differences between European and national elections
								European elections	National elections	
	1979	1981	1984	197	1989	1994		1979–94	1979–94	
Belgium	91.4		92.2		90.7	90.7	85.0	91.3	91.7	–0.4
Denmark	47.8		52.3		46.2	52.9	82.2	49.8	85.3	–35.5
France	60.7		56.7		48.7	52.7	69.0	54.7	71.2	–16.5
Germany	65.7		56.8		62.3	60.0	77.8	61.2	84.8	–23.6
Greece	n.a.	78.6	77.2		79.9	71.7	81.5	76.9	82.2	–5.3
Ireland	63.6		47.6		68.3	44.0	68.5	55.9	72.2	–16.3
Italy	84.9		83.4		81.0	74.8	86.1	81.0	88.0	–7.0
Luxembourg	88.9		88.8		87.4	88.5	88.5	88.4	88.4	0.0
Netherlands	57.8		50.6		47.2	35.6	78.3	47.8	83.0	–35.2
Portugal	n.a.		n.a.	72.6	51.2	35.5	68.2	53.1	78.0	–24.9
Spain	n.a.		n.a.	68.9	54.6	59.1	77.2	60.9	73.7	–12.8
UK	32.3		32.6		36.2	36.4	77.7	34.4	75.6	–41.2
Mean – all member states	65.9		63.8		62.8	58.5	79.2	62.7	82.2	–19.5
Mean - states without compulsory voting and without coinciding European and national elections	54.7		49.4		49.5	47.0	74.9	50.2	78.0	–27.8

EP turnout figures from *European Election Results*, Strasbourg: The European Parliament (1995). National turnout figures for the period 1979–89 are based on data in Mackie & Rose (1991) and, for the period 1990–94, on data in Electoral Studies. The latter source does not include invalid votes. This gives rise to some problems, particularly in the case of Belgium, in comparing average turnout in national elections over the whole period to turnout in the most recent national election.

factor is some form of legal obligation to vote. In countries with compulsory or quasi compulsory voting (Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy and Greece),¹ voters turn out in European Parliament elections at much higher rates. In addition, and not surprisingly, holding European and national elections at the same time increases European Parliament election turnout. Ireland provides a good illustration. When the EP election was combined with a national election in 1989, turnout in the European Parliament election increased by 20 percentage points on 1984; in 1994 it fell by more than that to 44 per cent. A third institutional difference is that in some countries (Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) voting takes place on a weekday while in other countries it takes place on a Sunday. The data in Table 1 do seem to suggest that voting on a weekday is associated with lower turnout, a notable exception being Portugal in 1994, where, despite Sunday voting, turnout was among the lowest in the Union. The final institutional influence on turnout that is often cited is variation in the kind of electoral system used, the argument being that, *ceteris paribus*, turnout tends to be higher in countries that use some system of proportional representation.² Apart from Britain, which uses the first-past-the-post or plurality system, all other EU countries have proportional representation systems in European Parliament elections; it may be significant, therefore, that average turnout in Britain in elections to the European Parliament election is the lowest of all.³ These institutional explanations of turnout in European Parliament elections are emphasised by Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis, who, following an elaborate multivariate analysis, concluded: 'In summary, turnout is high in political systems where voting is compulsory or where votes are translated into seats with a high degree of proportionality. . . . Sunday voting helps, but more important is the question of whether political power is at stake, indicated in our data by the presence of concurrent national elections' (Franklin et al. 1996: 328–329).

Institutional variations only tell part of the story however. First, there is the problem of variation in turnout between national and European elections *within* countries. With very few exceptions, the institutional factors discussed above do not vary between national and European elections. Consequently they simply cannot account for the very large differences in turnout between national and European elections within most of the states of the Union that are such a marked feature of Table 1. Secondly, the conclusions about institutional determinants of turnout are based on system-level observations and inferences of the kind: turnout is higher in systems with attribute X, therefore X causes high turnout. Ideally, such inferences would be confirmed by the identification of some causal connection at the individual level between the institutional characteristic (the day of voting, for example, or the type of electoral system) and the individual decision to participate. Finally, the value of attempting

to explain turnout differences in terms of two of the principal institutional factors mentioned – compulsory voting and concomitant national elections – is not very clear, a point to which we shall return in the concluding section of this paper.

Apart from institutional factors, what do we know about the causes of turnout in European Parliament elections? Franklin et al. provide the following summary: ‘Where such contextual characteristics leave any room for individual variation, the quality of communications between parties and voters makes up the bulk of the difference. The three variables involved are political interest, campaign mobilisation and the appeal of the most attractive party’ (Franklin et al. 1996: 329). They emphasise that attitudes and orientations towards the European Community or Union do not affect turnout in EP elections: ‘Particularly noteworthy is the fact that EC-related attitudes, preferences and orientations play no significant role in the explanation of electoral participation in European elections, in contrast to the findings of some earlier, less elaborate studies’ (Franklin et al. 1996: 322).

The latter finding is rather puzzling. Can it really be that attitudes to Europe – what people know and think and feel (or do not know and think and feel) about the European Union and its institutions – play no role in determining whether or not they vote in a European Parliament election? This sense of puzzlement leads to the wider question of whether voters and non-voters differ in other ways that are not included in the Franklin et al. model? In the interests of parsimony, they argue against including intervening variables that may affect turnout (Franklin et al. 1996: 328). But, if such variables are ignored, is there not a risk of omitting too much? In terms of understanding the decisions of voters other than those obliged by law to vote or who are actually turning up to vote in a concomitant national election, are we indeed really that far removed from the bleak conclusion reached by Schmitt and Mannheim in their analysis of the data from the 1989 European Parliament Elections Survey: ‘It may be that electoral participation to a large degree is caused by non-systematic – and that means specific to one’s individual situation or idiosyncratic – factors, which are beyond the reach of large scale survey research’ and that ‘despite all our efforts, participation in the European elections of 1989 has hardly been explained. Why is it that some people participate while others abstain? We do not know much about it’ (Schmitt & Mannheim 1991: 50).

One can think of the research problem in terms of the metaphor of the funnel of causality used in the classic study *The American Voter*. Campbell et al. introduce the notion as follows: ‘We wish to account for a single behaviour at a fixed point in time. But it is behaviour that stems from a multitude of prior factors. We can visualise the chain of events with which we wish to deal as

contained in a funnel of causality' (Campbell et al. 1960: 24). The relevance of the metaphor is reinforced by the inclusion in the funnel not just of events but also of institutions, cognitions, perceptions and motivational states, thus emphasising the notion of layers or levels of explanation and their associated sets of variables. Particularly if we take an enlarged view of the lower segment of the funnel, we can ask what are the perceptions, experiences and attitudes of the electors both in terms of how they respond to the institutional context in which they find themselves and in terms of how their individual situation and their orientations to the European Union may affect their propensity to vote. This paper seeks to fill in some of this part of the picture.⁴

Voting and abstention: Some basic distinctions

As well as recording whether respondents voted in the European Parliament election, the survey data collected for this project include information on participation in the last national election.⁵ This makes it possible to distinguish between four types of citizen: European and national voters, European-only voters, European-only abstainers and European and national abstainers. More importantly, answers to an open-ended question reveal European abstainers' stated reasons for not voting in the European election. This is the first time a study of voting in European Parliament elections has used an open-ended question to probe the sources of abstention. While one must be wary of rationalisations in responses of this sort, there is a large difference in the nature and significance of not turning out to vote between the respondent who said 'I was in Canada on business at the time' and the one who said she had not voted because 'I didn't feel any of the candidates represented my views. We had very little literature in the post. I just feel that we know so little about the MEPs there is no point in voting. We are not arm-chair politicians; we like to know what is going on'. There is yet a larger difference between these two and the one who said 'I don't vote for anything, not even local councils. I haven't voted since I came out of the forces. I don't particularly follow any party . . .'. These three responses are taken from the British sample but the varieties of motivation they exhibit are multiplied across the member states.

On the basis of these data, one can distinguish between those who abstain in a European Parliament election for some circumstantial reason (absence from home, illness or disability, pressure of work, registration problems, etc.) and those who can be described as voluntary abstainers, namely those who did not vote because they felt they were uninformed about, or uninterested in, or critical of the European Union, or were uninterested in or distrustful of politics or because of some other political attitude. Clearly, the distinction is not an absolute one. On the one hand, those who abstain for circumstantial

Table 2. Types of participation and abstention, European Parliament elections, 1994 (%)

	Voted in national election	Did not vote in national election
Voted in European election	National and European voters 72	European-only voters 3
Did not vote in European election for circumstantial reasons	Circumstantial European-only abstainers 7	Circumstantial European and national abstainers 3
Did not vote in European election for voluntary reasons	Voluntary European-only abstainers 10	Voluntary European and national abstainers 5

Source: EB 41.1 (N = 11473).

reasons have various attitudes and perceptions and certain levels of knowledge and interest and, in the case of any individual circumstantial abstainer, if these attitudes or whatever had been different, he or she might have overcome the inhibiting circumstances and voted. On the other hand, voluntary abstainers may also be constrained by circumstances that lower the likelihood of voting. While this qualification will need to be borne in mind and will become apparent from the analysis, the distinction remains fundamental.⁶ Applying it to the initial categorisation suggested above yields six types of participation and abstention,⁷ as shown in Table 2. In the present context, the main interest lies in the contrast between those who voted in the European Parliament election (row one of the table) and the four types in the lower two rows of the table. These latter four types are, in order of size, voluntary Euro-only abstainers (10%), circumstantial Euro-only abstainers⁸ (7%), voluntary Euro and national abstainers (5%) and circumstantial Euro and national abstainers⁹ (3%).

Reasons for abstention and institutional effects

Although there might be some variation due to different rates of participation in the workforce, in general circumstantial factors that affect turnout should not vary much from country to country, that is, one would not expect people in one country to be sicker or busier or more frequently absent from home, etc. than people in another. The fact that they do vary illustrates – and clarifies – the effects of the different institutional arrangements in the various countries. Take compulsory voting. Voters in a compulsory voting regime do

Table 3. Type of reason given for abstention in European Parliament elections by type of participation regime (%)

	Participation regime		Total
	Non-compulsory	Compulsory	
Neither	10	5	10
Circumstantial	35	65	37
Voluntary	48	26	46
Both	7	4	7
N	2932	226	3158

Note: Entries are percentages.

Source: EB 41.1.

not need to be interested in or informed about or committed to politics in order to be motivated to vote (though defenders of compulsory voting may argue that participation will tend to increase levels of interest, knowledge and commitment). They turn out more or less regardless of these kinds of political motivation. When they abstain, they do so mostly because of circumstances. As Table 3 shows, 65% of those who did not vote in the European Parliament elections in the four compulsory voting countries cited purely circumstantial reasons;¹⁰ the corresponding figure in non-compulsory voting countries was 35%. Furthermore, the circumstantial reasons cited in compulsory voting countries were quite specific – illness (30%), non-registration (24%)¹¹ and absence from home, including absence on holidays (23%) (see Table 4). In non-compulsory voting countries, illness and registration problems appear with considerably less frequency (illness down by 15 percentage points and registration problems down by 9 points). Instead there is an increase in the proportion citing absence from home, including absence on holiday (up 7 points) and a very substantial jump in the proportions not voting because of being too busy, having no time or because of some specifically work related reason (up 20 points).

Thus the effects of the institutional arrangement of compulsory voting are traceable, first, in the predominance of circumstantial over voluntary abstention and, secondly, in the nature of the circumstances referred to. But these effects are patently obvious; their obviousness was one of the reasons why it was suggested above that explaining turnout and abstention in European Parliament elections in terms of compulsory voting or, for that matter, in terms of concomitant national elections, does not represent much progress. The other institutional factors which are seen as affecting turnout (mainly the day of voting and the electoral system) provide a more fruitful field of

Table 4. Circumstantial reasons for abstention by type of participation regime (%)

	Participation regime		Total
	Non-compulsory	Compulsory	
Sick/disabled/elderly	15	30	17
Away from home	22	16	21
On holiday	8	7	8
Too busy/no time/work	29	9	27
Involved in leisure activity	2	0	2
Family responsibility	6	3	5
Postal voting problems	3	1	3
Registration/voting card problems	15	24	16
Other circumstantial reasons	10	15	11
N	1376	176	1552

Note: Entries are percentages.

Source: EB 41.1.

inquiry and can be considerably clarified by examining the reasons given for not voting.

Facilitating participation?

Of the ten cases with non-compulsory voting systems for which data are available,¹² five voted on a weekday and five on a Sunday. As noted above, previous research has concluded that this particular institutional difference is likely to lead to differences in turnout and, specifically, that Sunday voting is a facilitative factor (Franklin et al. 1996: 322). In order to investigate this further, the circumstantial reasons for abstention are presented for both groups of countries and for each of the individual countries in each group in Table 5. The most prominent circumstantial reasons for abstention in these countries as a whole are pressure of work, being too busy, or simply 'having no time', which together account for 29% of circumstantial abstention. However, the occurrence of these reasons varies considerably, being particularly high in Denmark (46% of circumstantial abstainers), the Netherlands (42%), Ireland (41%), and Northern Ireland (40%), all of which vote on a Thursday. In Britain, circumstantial abstention is less dominated by this factor but, even there, it is cited more frequently than in any of the Sunday voting systems (see Table 5). Overall, what might be summarised as the 'no time' factor accounts for 38% of circumstantial abstention in countries that voted on a weekday

compared to 19% in countries that voted on a Sunday – ample confirmation, it would seem, that Sunday voting facilitates turnout.

On the other hand, one-in-five circumstantial abstainers in countries that vote on a Sunday could find no time or were too busy to vote; the proportion was as high as one-in-four in West Germany and France. In the German and French cases, one should probably add in the 12% and 4% who did not vote on the Sunday in question because of ‘leisure activities’. Furthermore it seems that Sunday voting may increase non-participation due to absence from home. More than one quarter of all circumstantial abstainers in Sunday voting countries cited this reason compared to one-sixth in the non-compulsory countries.

The highest proportion saying they did not vote because they were not at home was in Portugal. This figure helps to explain the unusually low 1994 Portuguese turnout that was pointed out in the discussion of Table 1 above. In Portugal, Sunday 12 June 1994 occurred between two major holidays – Friday 10 June was Portugal Day and the prominent Roman Catholic feast day of Corpus Christi fell on Thursday 16 June. Of itself, the occurrence of Portugal Day on the Friday would have encouraged many Portuguese to take a long weekend with the consequent high probability of missing out on voting on the Sunday. The occurrence of another holiday on the following Thursday increased the likelihood of absence from home by providing the opportunity to take a week-long holiday at the expense of only three working days.

Adding together those in Sunday-voting countries who abstain because of lack of time or because of absence from home or because of leisure activities indicates that, although turnout as a whole tends to be higher in these countries and although Sunday voting as such contributes to this higher rate, it can also inhibit participation in various ways; this is true in particular in West Germany, France and Portugal. Portugal in 1994 was a special case but West Germany and France were not. It may therefore be worth illustrating with examples from these countries some of the ways in which Sunday-voting can reduce participation. The problem is that the European Parliament must compete for the time and attention of its potential voters and weekend voting may tip the balance the wrong way: ‘Ich hatte kein Interesse dafür, meine Wochenendplanung aufzugeben. Ich glaube nicht, dass das Europaparlament so wichtig ist’. Moreover, it is not just a matter of those who are in a position to say ‘On est parti en week-end’; for some, Sunday is the only day of rest: ‘Je n’ai pas le temps. Le dimanche c’est mon seul jour de repos’. For others, a particular Sunday may carry specific obligations (‘Je n’ai pas eu le temps, c’était la communion de mon fils’) or specific counter-attractions ‘Weil endlich mal schönes Wetter war, bin ich mit meinem Freund ausgeflogen’.

Table 5. Circumstantial reasons for abstention by country and Sunday versus weekday voting (non-compulsory participation regimes only) (%)

	Weekday-voting countries						Sunday-voting countries					
	Den	UK	Irl	Neth	N. Irl	Total	Fr	Ger (W)	Ger (E)	Por	Sp	Total
Sick/disabled/elderly	13	14	12	10	18	13	12	17	25	20	17	17
Away from home	20	16	25	9	9	16	22	25	21	37	23	27
On holiday	5	11	9	13	18	10	5	10	0	7	7	6
Too busy/no time/work	46	28	41	42	40	38	24	25	19	12	17	19
Involved in leisure activity	0	0	1	7	0	1	4	12	0	3	1	4
Family responsibility	9	6	6	6	5	6	8	4	8	2	7	5
Postal voting problems	12	2	0	0	4	3	1	15	2	0	0	3
Registration/voting card problems	2	22	13	11	14	14	24	5	17	16	20	17
Other circumstantial reasons	15	9	4	16	5	10	19	4	15	7	9	11
N	130	247	158	153	57	745	179	94	53	213	92	631

Note: Entries are percentages.

Source: EB 41.1.

The argument is not that these people, or any or all of those shown in Table 5 to be in such situations, would definitely have voted on a weekday. Indeed the twenty-eight year-old who headed off with her boyfriend to enjoy the good weather was in two minds about how she would vote anyway ('Hätte aber nicht gewusst, wen ich da wählen sollte') and this might have been enough to cause her to abstain. The point is that, in these cases, Sunday voting lowered the probability of participation. Clearly, the generally held belief that Sunday voting facilitates turnout while weekday voting inhibits it is too simple. The implications of these findings are taken up in the conclusion.

Proportional representation is the other main institutional characteristic that is said to have a positive effect on turnout; the argument is that having a proportional representation system is better than not having one and the greater the degree of proportionality the better. Again some light is thrown on this question by consideration of non-voters' stated reasons for abstention; in this case, however, it is the stated reasons of voluntary abstainers that are relevant. Before turning to these, two other more minor institutional factors that are reflected in the circumstantial reasons for abstention merit consideration – registration and voting card requirements and procedures and the timing of the elections in mid-June. The first of these is a major preoccupation of research on turnout in the USA (Rosenstone & Wolfinger 1978) and has often been assumed to be a negligible factor in Europe. The data in Table 5 suggest that it is not negligible. Fifteen percent of circumstantial abstainers in non-compulsory-voting countries refer to registration or voting card problems; these problems are most widespread in France (24%), Britain (22%) and Spain (20%). As a proportion of the total electorate, these groups of non-voters are quite small. Nonetheless, it may be worth investigating the procedures and requirements related to registration and voting cards in different countries to see if they can be arranged to facilitate greater participation.

Overall, 9% of circumstantial abstainers in non-compulsory voting countries said that they did not vote because they were on holiday. The figure ranged from 5% in Denmark to 13% in the Netherlands. Commercial research has shown that, while July to September is still the peak holiday period, only 41% of holidays abroad are now taken in these months. The period April to June accounts for 31% of holidays abroad; almost certainly the majority of these were concentrated in June.¹³ Coupled with the evidence that being on holiday prevented a small but noticeable number of people from voting, this suggests that it may not be such a good idea for the European Parliament to arrange its elections for the middle of June.

The reasons for voluntary abstention

Four main reasons lie behind voluntary abstention in European Parliament elections – lack of interest, distrust of or dissatisfaction with politics and politicians, lack of knowledge and dissatisfaction with the European Parliament electoral process. Taking the eight non-compulsory voting countries as a whole, lack of interest is the foremost reason, being referred to by two out of every five voluntary abstainers (see Table 6). Whereas it is a very prominent reason for abstention in Ireland (61%) and somewhat less so but still quite prominent in Portugal (49%), France (46%) and West Germany (43%), it accounts for relatively fewer voluntary abstainers in Spain (27%), Denmark (31%), former East Germany (32%) and the UK (33%). Not surprisingly, perhaps, the responses tended to simply declare lack of interest, without any further elaboration and, in most cases, it is not possible to infer whether this was lack of interest in Europe or in politics as such or what. There was one outstanding exception to this lack of specificity – in France, 55% of those who cited lack of interest as a reason for not voting referred specifically to lack of interest in the European Parliament elections. This amounts to about one-quarter of all French abstainers and 5% of the French electorate and is part of a pattern of negative French responses to the European Parliament election itself which will be examined in more detail below.

The second most prominent voluntary reason, though a good way behind lack of interest, was dissatisfaction with or lack of trust in politicians or politics or both (26%). Given that such a feeling is likely to be rooted in people's immediate experience of politics, one would expect it to vary between countries; so it does: from the negligible 13 to 16% in Denmark, the Netherlands, and the UK to 37% in Ireland and 55% in Spain (virtually no Spanish responses of this type referred to European politicians whereas one-quarter of the Irish responses did).

The third most prominent reason was a declared lack of knowledge, in fact, at 23%, it is more or less equal to distrust as a reason. Though more specific than lack of interest, one still cannot be sure in most cases whether it is a matter of lack of knowledge of Europe or of politics in general; a German response was typical: 'Von was man nichts versteht, kann man auch nicht wählen'. French respondents were again exceptional in this regard: almost half of the French respondents who said they did not vote because they did not have enough knowledge were quite specific, referring to lack of knowledge of the Euro-candidates and what they stood for.

The last of the four main reasons for not voting was dissatisfaction with the EP electoral process. This was expressed by 17% of voluntary abstainers across all eight countries. Again, France is distinctive, expressing the highest level of dissatisfaction (31%). In addition to general complaints about too

Table 6. Voluntary reasons for abstention by country (non-compulsory participation regimes only) (%)

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

Note: Entries are percentages.

Source: EB 41.1.

many lists and having to vote for unknown quantities ('... donner des chèques en blanc a quelqu'un que je ne connais pas'/'Pas beaucoup d'intérêt pour moi à élire des gens inconnus'), there were quite explicit criticisms of the list system as such: 'Je trouve que voter juste pour un parti politique, cela n'est pas normal. Il aurait dû y avoir plusieurs personnes de différents partis. Je trouve cela un peu plus juste que rien qu'un parti politique'. Taken together with the already noted French lack of interest in the European Parliament elections as such, these responses suggest that the conclusion that 'turnout is high . . . where votes are translated into seats with a high degree of proportionality' (Franklin et al. 1996: 328) needs to be qualified by reference to the negative effects that the passage from a candidate-based non-proportional electoral system for National Assembly elections to a list-based proportional system for European Parliament elections would appear to have in the French case. It also implies that turnout considerations should be borne in mind in any further discussions of a common electoral system for European Parliament elections. In considering the impact of different electoral systems on turnout, it is also worth noting that complaints among abstainers that their vote has no consequence are not any more prevalent in the UK than in several cases which practice various forms of proportional representation (see the figures for Denmark, Germany and Northern Ireland in Table 6).

Except for French attitudes to the European Parliament elections and the general category of dissatisfaction with the EP electoral process (the last of the four main reasons described above), the specifically European categories in the coding scheme picked up relatively few responses – opposition to the EU was given as a reason by only 8%, dissatisfaction with the EU as an institution by 4% and perception of the EU as irrelevant by 3%. This would seem to lend weight to the view, described above as puzzling, that EU-related attitudes and preferences do not affect turnout in European Parliament elections. The evidence from the open-ended questions, however, is not precise. If a respondent says, 'I'm just not interested' and does not provide any elaboration, one simply does not know whether this is an attitude to the elections, or to Europe or to politics in general. In order to ascertain the impact of EU-related attitudes, it is essential, therefore, to move on to other measures of attitudes and orientations. The survey carried out as part of this study has a wide range of such measures, too many to deal with within the limits of this paper. Accordingly, attention will be confined to the electorate's experience of the campaign, objective level of information about Europe, engagement with EU issues and images of the European Parliament.

Participation and abstention: Campaign exposure, information, involvement and image

In the following discussion, groups one and two of the typology of participation and abstention (European and national voters and European only voters) will be combined. The latter group is very small and of little inherent interest from the point of view of a study of non-participation in European Parliament elections. One approach to the next two types (circumstantial European-only abstainers and circumstantial European and national abstainers) would be to set them aside also, on the grounds that, if circumstances had been different, they would have voted. This may be too purist an assumption. As suggested above, circumstantial abstention may also be partly a function of low motivation. Furthermore, within the category of circumstantial non-voters there is the small group of those who also abstained in the last national election. This is an important but ambiguous piece of evidence as to the political behaviour of this group. It is ambiguous because we do not know whether their abstention at that stage was also circumstantial. The double abstention may well be a pointer to an underlying lack of interest or of political resources or whatever. In any event, it is clear that circumstantial abstainers cannot simply be set to one side; apart from the details of the circumstantial reasons they give, which have already been described in detail, it is essential to examine their political involvement, resources and outlook.

With voluntary abstainers (groups 5 and 6) we come to the heart of the problem. According to their own accounts, they abstained mainly because they were not interested, or because they distrusted or were dissatisfied with politics or politicians or because they lacked sufficient knowledge or were unhappy with the European Parliament electoral process. While these are vital clues as to the source of their behaviour, they are incomplete. The question is what else differentiates them, both the voluntary Euro-only and the voluntary European and national abstainers, from voters?

Experience of the campaign

Election campaigns are only partly about winning votes from the other side; they are also about 'getting out the vote' and mobilising latent support (see Rosenstone & Hansen 1993: 20–36). The focus in what follows is not on the campaigns themselves but on the campaigns as experienced by the electorates and, in this sense, on the success of the campaigns in getting across to potential voters. The channel most frequently identified as the one through which the campaign came to people's attention was 'coverage of the campaign on TV and radio' (65%). Newspaper coverage was substantially behind this (at 43%) and was matched by mechanisms that are more directly related to the

efforts of the parties and the candidates, i.e. election leaflets (identified by 40%) and advertising (39%). The hypothesised process of a two-step flow of communication¹⁴ is fairly widespread, with 26% saying that the campaign had come to their attention through ‘family, friends or acquaintances discussing the European election’. The sixth mechanism for communicating with voters or mobilising the vote (‘party workers called to your home to ask for votes’) was far down at the bottom of the list (7%).

Considerable variations in this general picture appear when campaign exposure is examined at national level (Table 7). Exposure to even the most pervasive mechanism (TV/radio coverage) varied from upwards of three-quarters of voters (Denmark, Greece, Germany, and Portugal) to less than half (France, Belgium, and Spain). The penetration of newspaper coverage varied even more, ranging from high levels of penetration of 73% in Denmark, 67% in former East Germany, 62% in Ireland and 57% in West Germany to lows of 17% in France and 12% in Spain. Political advertising appears to have a substantial reach in only three countries – Germany (68%), Ireland (62%) and Denmark (57%); in the other member states it touches only one-third of the population or less, in some cases, far less (see Table 7).

There are quite different styles of party campaigning in different countries. For example, the distribution of campaign leaflets reaches almost saturation point in Ireland (86%) and is extremely widespread in the UK (75%), but achieves very low coverage (one-quarter to one-sixth) in France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Greece, and Spain, and moderate levels of coverage (about 40%) elsewhere. Canvassing in European Parliament elections – party workers calling to people’s homes to ask for votes – is almost unique to Ireland, where it reaches 43% of voters; it plays some small part in Northern Ireland (16%), the UK (11%) and Spain (9%) but is virtually unknown, in European Parliament elections at any rate, in other countries. Finally, there is the process referred to above as the two-step flow of communication – voters discussing the election with family, friends and acquaintances and thus amplifying the public debate and the campaign. This was fairly widespread (in excess of one-in-three) among the electorates of Greece, Denmark, and Ireland but occurred among only one-in-five in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.

The last line in Table 7 indicates the proportion who said that the campaign did not come to their attention in any of the ways mentioned. The inverse of this proportion represents the limits of campaign penetration via these particular mechanisms. Campaign penetration in this sense varied from 95% or thereabouts in Denmark, Germany, Greece and Ireland, to 73% in Belgium, 68% in France and only 59% in Spain.

Table 7. Type of campaign experience by country and type of participation regime (%)

	Non-compulsory											Compulsory				All	
	Den	Fr	UK	Ger (W)	Ger (E)	Irl	Neth	N. Irl	Por	Sp	Total	Bel	Gre	It	Lux		Total
Party workers called	0	1	11	3	2	43	1	16	5	9	8	2	3	4	7	4	7
Election leaflets posted	40	24	75	37	39	86	23	89	20	17	42	43	17	39	45	35	39
Advertising for candidates	57	15	33	68	68	62	31	49	23	18	42	33	29	26	34	30	38
Newspaper coverage	73	17	43	57	67	62	49	51	21	12	45	31	44	28	54	37	42
TV/radio coverage	87	48	68	75	81	68	66	57	74	35	67	42	86	60	52	61	65
Family/friends etc, discuss	42	20	22	29	28	34	19	23	16	15	25	19	49	24	27	30	26
None of the above/DK	4	32	11	5	5	6	21	6	18	41	15	27	6	20	18	18	15
N	979	981	1015	1052	1024	930	968	291	948	942	9130	946	937	984	483	3350	12480

Note: Entries are percentages.

Source: EB 41.1.

In the countries with compulsory voting none of this really matters as far as turnout is concerned. Belgium was below average on almost all of the channels of communication and one-quarter of the Belgian electorate did not experience the campaign in any of ways mentioned, but Belgium had over 90% turnout. Table 7 shows, indeed, that in respect of all the channels except 'family and friends discussing the election', compulsory voting countries as a whole had less experience of the campaign; being able to rely on the law, perhaps parties do not campaign quite as hard.

Even in non-compulsory voting regimes, however, campaign penetration is not highly correlated with turnout. France and Spain have the lowest overall level of campaign penetration and have moderate levels of turnout by EP election standards. Ireland has very high and very varied campaign penetration and, except in situations of concomitant national or local elections, is among the countries with very low turnout. On the other hand, the individual level data show that the different types of voters and abstainers experienced the campaign to varying degrees and in different ways, suggesting that there is some relationship between campaign penetration and turnout.

A rough measure of the degree of campaign exposure of any individual can be devised by simply adding the number of campaign channels he or she has experienced. In non-compulsory voting countries the probability of voting in the European Parliament elections increases steadily with each step on the scale: participation rose from 56% cent among those with no campaign exposure to 77% among those who experienced the campaign through five or more channels. But it is not just the cumulation of campaign exposure that matters. The channels listed in Table 7 above vary in the degree of involvement they require of the citizen. Advertising, TV and radio coverage and even leaflets handed out or delivered can be categorised as mainly passive channels; reading about the election in the newspapers or discussing it with friends or acquaintances require active involvement. In this respect, circumstantial Euro-only abstainers are marginally different from those who turned out to vote, whereas voluntary abstainers are substantially different – the campaign was experienced in an active way by 58% of voters, 53% of circumstantial Euro-only abstainers, 44% of voluntary Euro-only abstainers and just 35% of voluntary Euro-abstainers who had also abstained in the last national election (see Table 8). In this respect, double abstainers who gave a circumstantial reason for non-participation in the EP election look much more like voluntary than circumstantial abstainers. This suggests low interest and motivation on their part, though it could be that the circumstantial reason which prevented them from voting in the EP election also prevented them from voting in the last national election and reduced their ability to follow the European campaign closely.

Table 8. Nature of campaign experience, knowledge of EU, involvement with EU issues and image of the European Parliament by type of participation/abstention (non-compulsory participation regimes only) (%)

	Euro voter	Circumstantial Euro-only abstainer	Circumstantial Euro and national abstainer	Voluntary Euro-only abstainer	Voluntary Euro and national abstainer	Total
(1) Nature of campaign						
Active	58	53	36	44	35	54
Passive	29	33	37	36	38	31
None	13	14	27	20	27	15
N	5620	771	226	1158	531	8306
(2) Knowledge of EU office holders						
Both	42	34	23	32	18	38
One only	25	26	22	22	21	24
None	34	40	54	46	61	38
N	5614	774	228	1157	531	8304
(3) Involvement with EU issues						
Positive	36	37	33	22	23	33
Mixed	10	6	7	6	7	9
Negative	22	23	13	27	15	22
None	32	35	47	46	56	36
N	5621	774	228	1159	531	8313
(4) Image of European Parliament						
Positive	12	12	11	7	8	11
Mixed	33	27	19	21	16	29
Negative	22	19	14	31	25	23
None	33	42	56	42	51	37
N	5632	774	228	1159	531	8315

Note: Entries are percentages.

Source: EB 41.1.

Information

The respondent's level of information about the European Union was measured in the survey by a twofold test of knowledge; knowledge of the membership of the European Union and knowledge of two European public figures (the president of the European Commission and a Commissioner from the respondent's state). The scale used here is that of knowledge of the two European office holders. Even when provided with a list of ten names that included those of Jacques Delors and of the senior (or in the case of the smaller states,

the only) national member of the European Commission (as well as a couple of very obvious decoys – Henry Kissinger and Bill Clinton!), two out of every five of the citizens of the member states scored zero on the European office holders scale and a further one-quarter scored 1. The maximum score of 2 (for correctly naming both office holders) was obtained by a little over one-third of respondents. Table 8 shows the variation in the proportions obtaining these scores in the different categories of participation and abstention. Lack of European knowledge is no bar to participation – one-third of EP voters obtained a score of zero. The corresponding figure for voluntary Euro-only abstainers, however, was 46% and, for voluntary double abstainers, it was 61%. Only 18% of the latter group scored two. The pattern for circumstantial abstainers on this variable is rather similar to that found on the campaign involvement variable – circumstantial Euro-only abstainers are only slightly different from voters, whereas circumstantial abstainers who also abstained in the last national election are closer to the voluntary double abstainers. This confirms the finding from the previous section that the small group of voters who abstain in both and blame circumstances for their Euro abstention are in fact quite disengaged from the European political process.

Involvement with EU issues

Involvement with EU issues here means not just having an opinion on this or that issue but rather having a view on the general issue of the range and scope of European Union decision-making. An important feature of the questions¹⁵ was that the card presented to respondents included the category ‘I have not really thought about it’. This response has been combined with the don’t know responses to give a measure of non-involvement with EU issues. On this measure, more than one-third had no degree of involvement, positive or negative, with the affairs of the Union. The now familiar contrast between types of participants and abstainers is clear here too: circumstantial Euro-only abstainers are very like voters; the other three types of abstainers (voluntary Euro-only, and circumstantial and voluntary double abstainers) are significantly less involved, with non-involvement rising to 56% among voluntary double abstainers. Table 8, however, shows up an additional fault line. Circumstantial double abstainers turn out to have pro-European views with about the same frequency as voters and circumstantial Euro-only abstainers. They differ from voluntary Euro-only abstainers in two respects – they are more likely to hold a positive view (33% as compared with 22%) and less likely to hold a negative view (13% as compared to 27%). This contrast in the characteristics of circumstantial double abstainers, i.e., being more like voluntary abstainers in regard to degree of involvement and more like voters in regard

to positive and negative attitudes, is repeated in the next and final variable to be considered – images of the European Parliament.

Images of the European Parliament

In answer to the explicit question ‘Is there anything you dislike about the European Parliament?’, opinion in the European Union as a whole was divided fifty-fifty. The 50% who said there was nothing they disliked about the Parliament did not necessarily have a positive image of it; when asked if there was anything they liked about the Parliament, 38% of the sample expressed some positive image and 62% had nothing to say. Combining these responses shows that 11% had a purely positive image of the Parliament, 27% had a mixed positive and negative image, 22% had a purely negative image and 40% had no image at all. The final section of Table 8 examines the incidence of these images and non-images among types of voters and abstainers in non-compulsory voting countries. Voluntary abstainers of both sorts are less likely than any of the other three types to have a purely positive image of the Parliament and more likely to have a purely negative image. They are also less likely to have a mixed (positive and negative) image. A useful summary measure of the image of the Parliament among the groups can be obtained by subtracting the proportion with a purely negative image (row three) from the proportion with a purely positive view. All groups show a deficit on this measure but, whereas the deficit is –10 percentage points for voters, –7 for circumstantial Euro-only abstainers, and –3 for circumstantial double abstainers, it is –23 points for voluntary Euro-only abstainers and –15 for voluntary double abstainers. The other main contrast on this measure relates to having no image of the Parliament at all. This ranges from 33% among voters to 51% among voluntary double abstainers and to 56% among circumstantial double abstainers.

Added to the evidence regarding the relationship between voting and knowledge of the EU and level of involvement with EU issues, these differences suggest that attitudes and orientations towards the EU play at least some role in determining who turns out to vote and who does not. It is clear from what has already been said that this proposition runs counter to the conclusions of some previous research, in particular of that reported in Franklin et al. (1996). The matter can be tested by running a regression analysis with turnout in the European Parliament election as the dependent variable and the systemic effects usually cited (compulsory voting, Sunday voting and proportional representation), a set of individual-level control variables and the set of EU-related orientations whose effects are in question as the independent variables.¹⁶ In order to take account of the impact of circumstances in preventing citizens from voting, which has been amply documented above, all

Table 9. Regression of turnout in the European Parliament elections of 1994 on orientations to the European Union and to the European Parliament, controlling for systemic, political and socio-demographic effects

	Beta	t	Sig t
Systemic effects			
Compulsory voting	0.192	18.70	0.0000
Sunday voting	0.159	14.70	0.0000
Proportionality	0.033	3.44	0.0006
Political and socio-demographic control variables			
Political interest	0.090	7.93	0.0000
Party attachment	0.117	11.82	0.0000
Education	0.045	4.36	0.0000
Age	0.143	14.67	0.0000
EP campaign			
Campaign exposure	0.094	9.61	0.0000
EU/EP orientations			
Opposed to EU membership	-0.055	-5.72	0.0000
No image of EP	-0.043	-3.89	0.0001
Negative image of EP	-0.071	-6.83	0.0000
Negative issue engagement	-0.018	-1.76	0.0790
No issue engagement	-0.053	-4.97	0.0000
Knowledge of EU office holders	0.060	5.64	0.0000
Adjusted R ²	0.176		

those giving a purely circumstantial reason for abstention were omitted for the purpose of this analysis.¹⁷ The results of the analysis, which are reported in Table 9, show that virtually all the EU-related orientations described in Table 8 have a significant independent effect on the propensity to vote in a European Parliament election. This is so even when the effect of overall opposition to EU membership is taken into account. The only exception is one aspect of the issue involvement variable (a negative attitude to the scope of EU decision-making); note, however, that the fundamental aspect of this variable – whether or not a respondent has any involvement with EU issues – does have a significant effect. The space available here does not permit further comment on Table 9 or further refinement of the model. In any event the purpose was simply to check whether the relationships between turnout and the EU orientations and attitudes reported in Table 8 would stand up to a multivariate test; the results indicate that the relationships reported there stand.

Conclusions and recommendations

Several conclusions emerge from this analysis. First, at a conceptual and methodological level, it must be noted that abstention in European Parliament elections is a highly differentiated phenomenon. A distinction has to be made between European-only and European-and-national abstainers and, most importantly, between circumstantial and voluntary abstainers. Secondly, in terms of substantive findings, conclusions can be drawn under two headings, institutional and attitudinal.

Four main institutional variables have been put forward as explanations of turnout. The two usually regarded as being most important in EP elections, compulsory voting and concomitant national elections, are really of little interest. For one thing, the explanations are so obvious as to be almost tautological. Of course, if there are laws which say people must vote, more people will vote.¹⁸ Even more obviously, since turnout in national elections is consistently and substantially higher than turnout in EP elections, holding the two events on the same day increases EP turnout. Furthermore, the compulsory voting and concomitant national election explanations do not, indeed cannot, address the most challenging aspect of low turnout in European Parliament elections, namely the discrepancy between turnout in national elections and turnout in European elections.

The two other institutional variables commonly discussed – proportional versus non-proportional electoral systems and weekday versus Sunday voting – are more interesting. Their effects are, however, more complex than usually imagined. Thus, in the case of the proportional representation variable, the evidence suggests that the move from the majority system normally used in French elections to a list system of proportional representation for the European Parliament elections may well have had the effect of depressing turnout by distancing the candidates from the voters and by giving rise to confusion and to dissatisfaction with the electoral process. Likewise, in regard to the facilitating or inhibiting effects of the day of voting, it is a considerable oversimplification to say that Sunday voting increases turnout *tout court*. Sunday voting may facilitate turnout to the extent that work and time pressures are the main inhibiting factors associated with voting on a weekday. But Sunday voting also brings with it its own inhibiting factors – the probability that significant numbers of voters will be otherwise engaged or away from home for the weekend or even just for the day and, as a result, will not be able to vote. The evidence suggests that such inhibiting factors were at work in the 1994 elections, particularly in Germany, France and Portugal.

Turning to the impact of attitudes on turnout, the main reason given for abstention is lack of interest; this is referred to spontaneously by two out of every five abstainers in non-compulsory voting countries. Three other

reasons are fairly frequently given: political distrust or dissatisfaction, lack of knowledge and dissatisfaction with the electoral system. In addition, the multivariate analysis confirms the findings of previous studies that general political interest, party attachment and experience of the campaign affect turnout. On the question of the impact of attitudes to the European Union or to the European Parliament, however, the findings reported here run counter to prevailing views. European attitudes do matter: low levels of knowledge of European affairs, non-involvement with European issues, a negative attitude to membership of the European Union, failure to form any image of the European Parliament or having a purely negative image of it are all associated with abstention. This conclusion emerges from the present analysis even though, for reasons of space, attention was confined to only a fraction of the data on attitudes to European integration in our study.

Since the European Parliament is a system of representation in the making, it is pertinent to ask whether our findings point to any actions that might be taken to improve the quality of representation at the European level. Here it must be noted that the dominant explanations in the literature (compulsory voting and concomitant national elections) are uninteresting in a practical sense. This is because their introduction for European Parliament elections is inconceivable. Compulsory voting has in fact been dropped in Italy (for both national and European elections); the notion of starting to herd voters in the other European countries to the polls for a European Parliament election is outlandish. With the exception of Luxembourg, concomitant national elections occur rarely and largely by chance. Making national and European elections concomitant in all member states would solve the European turnout problem at a stroke and would, for a variety of reasons, be a giant leap forward in European integration.¹⁹ Precisely because of this and because of the revolution in the political and constitutional systems of the member states that it would involve, it is simply not available as a means of tackling the problem. In short, as well as being intellectually unsatisfactory in themselves, the compulsory voting and concomitant national elections explanations do not provide any practically useful answers to the problem of low turnout in European Parliament elections.

The other two institutional variables are at least amenable to change by political decision. Indeed, in regard to the electoral system variable, the European Union is constitutionally committed to the adoption of a uniform electoral system in all member states and there is no doubt but that such a system would be a PR system. Here, however, caution is indicated. The evidence from the French case that the adoption of proportional representation does not necessarily produce a uniformly positive effect on turnout suggests that if, in fulfilment of the original treaty mandate, the European Parliament were

to adopt a uniform electoral system, careful thought would need to be given to the effects the type of system adopted could have on turnout.

The day of voting is the systemic factor that is most readily alterable by political decision, though 'readily' is relative and the process would undoubtedly be subject to at least the usual degree of convolution that characterises European decision-making. If change in this regard were to be contemplated, however, the best step would appear to be not simply to move to Sunday voting in all countries, but to make the more radical move of allowing voting on both a Sunday and a weekday (i.e., on a Sunday and Monday). In terms of facilitating voting, there is a trade-off between Sunday and weekday voting; one can capitalise on this trade-off by allowing those whose work makes voting on a weekday difficult to vote on the Sunday and allowing those who might be away from home or otherwise engaged on a Sunday to vote on the Monday. There are obvious cost implications and administrative difficulties involved in such a proposal; there may also be cultural obstacles. However, two considerations should be borne in mind. First, European citizens are now both more highly mobile and under considerably more time pressure than were the preceding generations for whom the original choice of day of voting was made. Secondly, in the present state of political and constitutional development of the Union, European Parliament elections have relatively low salience. Supporters of the European Parliament and European integrationists generally might wish it were otherwise, but this does not alter the fact. Pending large-scale structural and political change which would move the European Parliament to centre-stage, everything that can be done to facilitate participation in European elections should be done. Combined Sunday and Monday voting would make a small but significant contribution in this direction. The point was succinctly made by two of our respondents: a Frenchman, 47 years of age, professional occupation, who said he had not voted '*parce qu'il faisait beau, j'étais à la plage; le jour où ils feront les élections les jours de semaines, j'irai voter*' and his weekday-voting fellow European citizen across the Channel (a 24 year-old, again in a professional occupation) who said: 'I did not get time, I was at a meeting. It's the wrong day of the week; should be on a Sunday like the rest of Europe'. Significantly, both reported having voted in the last national election in their respective countries.

Improvements in other practical aspects of the arrangements for voting should also be considered. The combined evidence from the present study and from research on patterns of holiday-taking suggests that the possibility of moving European Parliament elections to late April or early May should be examined. A thorough investigation of regulations and procedures regarding registration and voting cards should also be conducted with a view to reducing

the real or perceived obstacles that these seem to present in certain member states.

Do the findings regarding the attitudes underlying abstention at European Parliament elections suggest any means of tackling the problem? Bearing in mind that it has not been possible to explore the attitudinal determinants of turnout fully within the compass of the present article, there are some pointers in the findings so far. The main reason given for abstention was lack of interest, followed by political distrust and lack of knowledge. These are problems that are endemic to contemporary politics and one cannot expect the European Parliament to abolish them. It can, however, tackle the specific problems of the extensive ignorance of European Union politics, of the lack of any image whatsoever of the European Parliament among two-fifths of the citizens of Europe and of the widespread disengagement from European issues. One approach to these problems would be to concentrate on fundamental structural reform of the institutions of the European Union so that elections to the European Parliament would be seen to be allocating real power over relevant issues and would no longer be 'second-order' elections. Even if such a goal were realised, however, the danger would be that the reforms would fail to break through the lack-of-interest barrier that is already firmly established. Be that as it may, there is also the problem that focusing on the ultimate solution may distract attention from intermediate measures to deal with the present problem. What, if anything, can be achieved by increased efforts at campaigning and mobilising or otherwise motivating voters?

Campaigning has an effect; on the other hand, the quite striking variations in election campaign penetration between countries do not, in themselves, account for differences in levels of turnout. Simply turning up the volume of the current campaign efforts, as it were, will not solve the problem. But, while campaigning is not everything, it does account for something – abstention, other than circumstantial abstention that is specific to the European Parliament election, is related to lower campaign exposure. Over and above campaign exposure, people are motivated to vote by their attitude to Europe and to European questions and to the Parliament. Thus, in addition to arguing for fundamental structural changes, in addition to undertaking changes in the practical arrangements for European Parliament elections and in addition to engaging in more intensive campaigning, those who are committed to improving the quality of representation at the European level must work at securing greater involvement in and knowledge of European affairs generally and at developing more widespread positive images of the European Parliament.

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Notes

1. Compulsory voting was abolished in Italy in the 1993 electoral law (legge 277/1993). Prior to that, the penalty for not voting was publication of the list of names of non-voters in the 'albo comunale' and the recording of the fact of abstention in the citizen's 'certificato di buona condotta'. In the present analysis Italy is bracketed with the compulsory voting countries for two reasons – most citizens are unlikely to have been aware of the change in the law and, in any event, the prior existence of compulsory voting may have an effect for some time after its abolition. On the other hand it is notable that European Parliament turnout in Italy declined from 81.5% in 1989 to 74.8% in 1994. In Greece the obligation to vote derives from the Greek Constitution (article 51, paragraph 5). The sanction is that abstention can give rise to difficulties in obtaining or renewing one's passport. The legal situation in Belgium is that fines may be imposed for non-voting.
2. Some object to PR-STV being described as a proportional representation system. True, it is different from list systems of PR. It is clear, however, that the underlying purpose of PR-STV is to enhance proportionality and that it goes a long way toward achieving this (for a discussion of the proportionality of electoral outcomes in the Republic of Ireland, see Sinnott 1993: 77–79). Its distinctiveness is handled better by focusing on the precise difference in question (the centrality of candidate-based preference voting) than by denying that it is a proportional system.
3. The effects of proportional representation and other 'macro' factors on turnout in national elections are examined in Crewe (1981: 239–257); see also Blais & Carty (1990).
4. This is a preliminary report from a research project on turnout in European Parliament elections that employs both aggregate and survey data analysis. The present paper focuses on the survey data, and especially on the data derived from a series of open-ended questions. The latter yield rich and detailed answers which help to capture the complexity and the texture of the citizens' own views and experiences. The drawback is that, even when these answers have been classified and coded or content-analysed, the measurement assumptions of most advanced statistical techniques are rarely met. Accordingly, in focussing on open-ended questions much of the data analysis that follows is limited to crosstabulation. When the results of this analysis appear to conflict with the findings of previous research, however, a multivariate approach, in so far as it is applicable, will be used in an attempt to resolve the issue. On the use of aggregate data methods to analyse turnout in European Parliament elections, see Sinnott & Whelan (1992).
5. Reported turnout in survey research, whether dealing with national or European Parliament elections, is subject to systematic overestimation – see Budge & Farlie (1976) for comparisons of reported and actual turnout in national elections and Schmitt & Mannheimer (1991) for the 1989 European Parliament elections. An individual-level comparison between actual turnout based on the official records and turnout as reported by respondents in the British Election Survey concluded, however, that misreporting accounted for only one-quarter of the discrepancy between actual and reported turnout,

- with response bias accounting for another quarter and the remainder being due, in indeterminate proportions, to residential mobility and redundancy in the electoral register (Swaddle & Heath 1989). While we do not know to what extent this pattern is repeated in other countries, there is some reassurance in the fact that misreporting by respondents may be as low as it appears from the British study.
6. The validity of the distinction and of our measure of it is supported by an analysis of the results of a question on the main reason for not voting that was used in the 1989 European election survey. The 1989 question was a closed-question which presented a card to the respondent with nine precoded response categories and allowed for just a single response. Two of the categories refer, at a fairly general level, to forms of circumstantial abstention. Given the different methodologies involved, one would not necessarily expect identical results from the two questions. It is therefore reassuring that the level of circumstantial abstention found in 1989 is quite similar to the level reported in Table 3 (1989: 43% circumstantial). While, for reasons which will become apparent presently, we would argue that the open-ended question is a much more effective means of probing the sources of abstention, our confidence in the open-ended question is reinforced by this comparison. We are grateful to Michael Marsh for suggesting it. The 1989 data has been used to analyse turnout in Ireland, distinguishing between 'non-voters by accident' and 'non-voters by design'; see Marsh (1991). Ragsdale & Rush also distinguish between various types of voters; indeed, they deplore the failure of previous research to make such distinctions (Ragsdale & Rush 1993: 722–723). However, their own otherwise comprehensive set of distinctions fails to include the vital difference between voluntary and circumstantial abstention.
 7. Because the classification is based in part on participation or abstention in the last national election, respondents who were too young to vote in that election have been omitted. Likewise the small number of respondents who gave no reason for abstention in the European Parliament are omitted.
 8. Circumstantial abstainers are those who only mentioned a circumstantial reason. Those who mention a circumstantial and a voluntary reason are categorised as voluntary abstainers.
 9. In order to avoid the constant repetition of the awkward phrases 'circumstantial Euro and national abstainer' and 'voluntary Euro and national abstainers', these groups will sometimes be referred to in the text as circumstantial double abstainers and voluntary double abstainers respectively. It must be remembered, however, that their circumstantial or voluntary reason applies only to their European abstention.
 10. Voluntary abstention is somewhat higher in the Italian case as compared with the other countries with compulsory voting (43% in Italy compared to 21% in the other three), an indication perhaps of the effect of the formal ending of compulsion in Italy in 1993, or of a weakening of the norm of obligatory voting in Italy's changing political system, or of both. Though the number of respondents in this category in the Italian case is small (46), it is worth noting that more than two fifths of them cited lack of political trust as their reason for not voting in the European Parliament election of 1994. This proportion was well ahead of most other countries and, as we shall see in a moment, was exceeded only in Spain where an actual majority of voluntary abstainers cited this reason.
 11. There is one major variation between the four countries concerned in this pattern of responses, namely the very high frequency of occurrence of registration and or polling card problems in Greece (66% of all circumstantial abstainers). This may account for the fact that in Greece the combination of circumstantial abstention in the European election with abstention in the last national election is also exceptionally high; presumably the registration difficulties apply to both.
 12. Data are available from 10 systems because of the extra samples taken in former East Germany and in Northern Ireland. They are retained here as separate samples because both present potentially interesting contextual contrasts. Note, however, that the Northern Ireland sample has an N of only 300.

13. Source: European Travel Monitor (1993).
14. See the discussion of various models of the flow of communication and influence in the context of attitudes to the European Union in Wessels (1995).
15. The wording of the question was: 'There has been a lot of discussion recently about the European Union (European Community). Some people say that too many issues are decided on by the European Union (European Community), others say that more issues should be decided on by the European Union (European Community). Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?'
16. The proportionality estimates relate to national elections and are taken from van der Eijk & Oppenhuis (1996: 425–26). Variables used in the Franklin et al. model and omitted here are concomitant national elections (in 1994 this situation only arose in Luxembourg, which also has compulsory voting) and 'appeal of best choice'. The latter variable is not available in our data set; its effect should, however, be partly incorporated in the party attachment variable. Differences in the way of measuring some of the other variables should also be noted. Franklin et al. used a composite measure of socio-demographic effect whereas the present approach simply uses age and education. Again this should not be a major problem since age and education are the main components of the composite. In regard to campaign mobilization, the measure used here – the campaign exposure index referred to in the text – is likely to be at least as valid a measure as the respondent's subjective evaluation of campaign effect used by Franklin et al. Finally, the measure of party attachment is different and, again, arguably a more comprehensive measure (for a discussion of the intricacies of measuring party attachment using Eurobarometer data, see Sinnott 1998).
17. This procedure ignores the possibility that the exclusion of the circumstantial abstainers creates a systematically biased sample. This will be investigated in further research. It should also be noted that the analysis is based on the linear probability model. Logit or probit models, while preferable in principle, would be unlikely to alter the results (see Maddala 1983: 22–27).
18. The effects are quantified in Hirczy (1994).
19. It would of course have the effect of masking significant evidence of the substantial legitimacy problems attaching to the European integration project, evidence which, in the interests of that project, it would be better not to ignore.

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