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How Education and Political Information Affect Turnout in Different Electoral Systems

Draft version. Comments are most welcome!

**Paper prepared for the European Consortium for Political Research,
Joint Sessions of Workshops. Università di Torino, 22-27 March 2002
Workshop 22: Political Participation and Information**

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Introduction

Political scientists normally see people's political participation as a vital part of democracy (e.g. Verba and Nie 1972, Kaase and Marsh 1979: 27-56, Barber 1984). Participation is seen as a positive action that strengthens democracy: "Government by the people". On the one hand, there is a normative view that taking part in democratic decision-making is desirable¹. On the other hand, there is a discussion on the prerequisites for taking part in politics. This is where the knowledge of the political system plays a central role. Thus, political information is an essential part in most individual-based theories of voting. Especially rational choice theories tend to emphasise the costs related to acquiring information in order to vote. Downs (1957) defined instrumental rationality and pointed out that the costs of gaining information normally exceed the returns, i.e. individual votes are indecisive at elections. In spite of this, a majority of eligible voters tend to vote in democracies. This fact is normally referred to as the "paradox of voting".

Even though I do not wish to test rational choice theories *per se*, the role of information is central in the present paper. It analyses political participation empirically and in a comparative manner. The causes of voting are expected to be both structural and individual. This contextual approach is possible thanks to a survey material that has been collected within the project "Comparative Study of Electoral Systems" (CSES). Education and political information are seen as independent variables causing individuals to vote, or abstain, at elections. Since a structural variable, the electoral system, influences turnout at the macro level, it will be treated as an intervening variable and held constant in the analyses at the individual level.

My operationalisation of political participation is narrow – it is restricted to voting at parliamentary elections. This can be motivated by the fact that voting is the most important and common political act that citizens take in representative democracies (Aldrich 1993: 246-247). Naturally, the concept of political participation covers a variety of dimensions beyond that of voting. In the last fifty years, the study of political participation has witnessed an expansion in the forms of participation. In a contemporary European survey-project on political participation, "Citizenship,

¹ It must, however, be pointed out that a high level of participation is not necessarily good for democracy (c.f. Tingsten 1937: 225-226)

Involvement, Democracy (CID)", the respondents are even asked about memberships in sports clubs, youth associations and investment clubs (van Deth 2001: 15-16).

Electoral system and turnout

There are several systematic attempts to establish the impact of the electoral system on political participation. These analyses are normally cross-national, and the level of participation is measured through voter turnout (e.g. Crewe 1981; Powell 1980, 1982, 1986; Blais and Carty 1990; Franklin 1996). To my knowledge, the most thorough and covering study has been carried out by Blais and Dobrzynska (1998). Their survey involves all electoral democracies in the world 1972-1995. Moreover, all lower house parliamentary elections in these 91 democracies are included in the analysis. Altogether, voting in 324 national elections is analysed. According to Blais and Dobrzynska, proportional electoral systems encourage voting. The main difference in turnout is between PR systems (including corrective mixed systems) and all other systems (Ibid. 248). Further, the socio-economic macro environment is found to affect turnout. GNP per capita (log) activates and illiteracy (squared) passivates. Even size matters. There is a negative logarithmic relationship between the size of population and turnout. This indicates that there is a substantial difference between small countries and all other countries. Voters in small countries vote more frequently than voters in large countries. Turnout varies across continents, even when other socio-economic variables are controlled for. Turnout is particularly high in Oceania and low in Africa and North America² (Ibid. 243-244).

Even though comparisons between countries tell us a lot of the effects of different electoral systems, they encounter a possible dilemma. How can we be sure that turnout in PR systems is higher because of the electoral system, and not because of some nation-specific variables³? This is where analyses within nations come in handy. There are, in fact, countries where the electoral system varies within the nation. This is mostly possible at local elections. In an analysis of Swiss communal elections, Ladner and Milner find significant differences between the communes who make use of the PR and communes who have a majoritarian system. Voters in PR communes vote more frequently, even when the authors control for the size of the municipality (Ladner and Milner 1999). In another recent study, Bowler et al. (2001) trace turnout effects of cumulative voting (CV), a semi-proportional system used in about 80 jurisdictions at the local level in the USA. They hold variations in social, cultural and, naturally, national, context constant. The effect of the CV system is

² North America covers even Central America and the Caribbean.

³ Naturally, comparing voting in all democracies makes this risk minuscule.

clear, and turnout is approximately 5 percentage points higher under CV than in similar plurality settings.

Education, political information and turnout – the scope of the paper

The aim of my paper is to test what how two micro variables, the levels of education and political information affect turnout at the individual level. Moreover, the contextual effect of a macro variable, the electoral system, is controlled for. Thus, education and information are treated as independent variables, whereas the electoral system acts as an intervening variable. At a later stage, this pure setting will be enlarged with a set of control variables at the individual level. I control for age, sex, and income, as well as private vs. public sector employment, rural vs. urban environment, and finally turnout of the electoral district.

Education is a classic as a micro level independent variable in the study of political participation. Ever since the early electoral studies, the universal rule has been: “the better-educated people have more political interest than the less educated” (Berelson et al. 1954, 25). It has been established that education is a key to political participation and to democratic values and practices (Almond and Verba 1963: 315-324, Lipset 1983: 40). Corresponding to their higher interest and understanding, the highly educated vote more frequently than the less educated. Exploiting CSES data for nine countries⁴, Blais (2000: 51-53) finds that education and age are the most important variables explaining voting, followed by religiosity. There are contradictory findings as well. In a European analysis of voting in 16 countries 1960-1992, turnout was not found to vary according to the level of education (Topf 1995: 48-50).

Possessing information about politics and political parties is a logical precondition to voting. Is political knowledge falling among the young? In the USA, for instance, younger generations (people born after 1964) seem to have less political knowledge and interest than older generations. This is reflected in a declining voter turnout (Putnam 2000: 35-36). Political information is one the micro variables, or more correctly a set of variables, whose effects on turnout is studied in the present paper. Political information is a vast concept and needs to be operationalised. It can at least cover two aspects. First, information can pertain to the individual’s level of knowledge of the political system. Second, information can cover the individual’s knowledge of everyday politics. The two types of information are separable. If you were, say, a political science professor, you could have a solid understanding of the law-making processes of the national parliament. You could even relate the relations of the

⁴ Australia, Czech Republic, Great Britain, Israel, Poland, Romania, Spain, Taiwan and United States.

democratic bodies of your own country to other countries' institutions. Simultaneously, you could be totally unaware of the current policy debate on the amount of child allowance. Naturally, the two dimensions may be collinear. Theoretically, however, they are distinct. Since I treat political information as an independent variable, it would be ideal to measure people's knowledge level of the political system, not current affairs. If a voter has a high knowledge of everyday politics, it is most likely that he or she will cast a vote at the election. A variable of this kind might not be distinct enough from the dependent variable.

Since the electoral system affects voter turnout at the macro level, it will be treated as an intervening variable. Methodically, these effects will be dealt with by holding the electoral system constant. Therefore, the theoretical approach model in Figure 1 does not include these system effects. The figure combines the levels of education and political information. In two of the cross-tabulated cases, the hypotheses are clear. As previous research demonstrates, we can anticipate that voters with low education and political information levels do not go to the polls as frequently as other voters. In the same way, highly educated voters with a lot of political information are expected to vote to a large extent. The remaining two cells are expected to represent average turnout, since people with these characteristics are not expected to differ from the national mean of turnout. It remains to be seen if the conflicting dimensions really override each others effects.

Figure 1. The theoretical approach model of the study.

		Political information level	
		Low	High
Education	High	Normal turnout	High turnout
	Low	Low turnout	Normal turnout

Data and methods

Since we are dealing with an international survey, the set of questions varies slightly from country to country. Data on the dependent variable, voting, are missing for Chile, Lithuania, Peru and Thailand. Therefore, they cannot be included in the study. Unfortunately, the central independent variables measuring political information are missing in the Danish and Slovenian case. In the Danish case even the level of education is missing. Alas, these countries must be excluded from the analysis. Even Australia, which alone represents a country with effective compulsory voting amongst

the CSES countries, is left aside⁵. It is clear that a study of genuine political participation through turnout must be limited to democratic systems. Further, this distinction excludes Mexico, South Korea and Ukraine. Altogether, we have 17 countries corresponding to 31.345 respondents. The countries are presented in table 1. I have included some relevant data; the electoral system of the country is shown in the second column, the number of respondents in the CSES material in the third column. The election at which the survey was conducted is given in the fourth column, followed by the national turnout in that election and, finally the mean of turnout in the parliamentary elections since 1945.

Table 1. The Countries from which respondents are included in the study.

Country	Electoral system	N	Election year	Turnout (in per cent)	Mean turnout 1945-1998
Canada	SMP	3,949	1997	57.1	68.4
Czech Republic	PR	1,229	1996	49.1	84.8
Germany	MMP	2,019	1998	75.3	80.6
Hungary	MMM	1,525	1998	59.0	64.1
Israel	PR	1,091	1996	84.7	80.0
Japan	MMM	1,327	1996	59.8	69.0
Netherlands	PR	2,101	1998	70.1	84.8
New Zealand	MMP	4,080	1996	83.0	86.2
Norway	PR	2,055	1997	76.9	79.5
Poland	PR	2,003	1997	48.8	52.3
Romania	PR	1,175	1996	78.2	77.2
Spain	PR	1,212	1996	80.6	77.0
Sweden	PR	1,157	1998	77.7	83.3
Switzerland	PR	2,048	1999	34.9	49.3
Taiwan	MMM	1,200	1996	75.1	70.1
United Kingdom	SMP	2,931	1997	69.4	74.9
USA	SMP	1,534	1996	49.1	48.3

Electoral systems: SMP (Single Member Plurality), MMM (Mixed Member Majoritarian), MMP (Mixed Member Proportional) PR (Proportional Representation)

Turnout source: IDEA.

As can be seen in table one, we have a somewhat biased division regarding the intervening variable, the electoral system. There are three plurality systems, five mixed member systems, of which three are majoritarian and two proportional. The

⁵ Blais (2000) included Australia in his analysis, as described above. It is clear that there is no comparability in voting and abstaining between a country with effective compulsory voting and a country where the choice of casting a vote is free. Therefore I have chosen to exclude Australia from the analysis.

remaining nine countries have a proportional electoral system. The electoral systems have been classified according to Farrel (2001). Even though PR systems dominate, every category is represented by at least two countries. Thus, it is possible to hold the electoral system constant in the statistical analyses.

The set of countries is ideal when it comes to another possible structural variable, the size of the population. Blais and Dobrzynska (op. cit.) found that voter turnout is higher in the smallest countries, whereas there were no substantial differences among the rest of the countries. In the present paper, none of the countries is diminutive in terms of population. Therefore, this intervening variable is held constant through the initial setting, the selection of countries.

It should be noted, that the variables education and political information are not collinear in the present survey material. Kendall's tau is .04 in the whole data material. Even within the electoral systems it does not rise to a statistically risky level; the coefficient does not exceed .3 in any system. In the CSES material, education is measured through the level of highest achieved education. The variable has eight different values. Political information is measured through three questions pertaining to the political system or everyday politics. Unfortunately, the variables are not fully comparable across nations. In some countries the questions truly measure the respondents' knowledge of the political system. In the Czech case, for instance, people were asked if they knew the electoral threshold in parliamentary elections, the name of the minister of transport, and the number of seats in the Czech Parliament. In some countries, like in the USA, the questions were much easier. The American respondents were asked to identify the office held by the persons whose names were read⁶. Even though the validity of the measuring political information suffers from the variation, it is random when it comes to the intervening variable, the electoral system. Luckily enough, the question types vary within electoral categories.

In order to make the analyses easier to interpret, I have recoded all the independent variables into a scale from zero to one if the variable is ordinal, or into a dummy (0/1), if the variable is dichotomous. Age, however, is in years and is not recoded. The dependent variable, voting at the individual level, is dichotomous and calls for logistic regression analysis. I will produce several regression models in order to establish the importance of education and information, even controlling for age, sex, and other variables. The primary interest of the study is in the individual variation across different electoral systems, leaving national variation aside. Therefore, the analyses are carried out with unweighted data.

⁶ These were Al Gore, William Rehnquist and Newt Gingrich.

Results

Let us start with a visual observation that follows the typology of the hypotheses in figure one. Table two cross-tabulates education and political information in the four electoral systems. We have four types of electors and four electoral systems – 16 cells altogether. Each cell represents respondents who have cast a vote at the parliamentary election. In order to make the numbers more comparable, they are given as a relative share of the total electorate within each category. The absolute number of voters who have cast a vote is given within parentheses. It can easily be seen that the highest turnout in all electoral systems is among the highly educated and informed voters. Practically all of them vote in every system. In the same way, the initial hypothesis seems to hold for voters with a low education and information level. It must be noticed, however, that voters in this category in the MMP system seem to cast their votes much more frequently than in other electoral systems. The remaining two categories, fall between the extreme cases as anticipated. Education seems to have a greater impact in the PR systems than in the other systems, where political information seems to be a more important independent variable. In order to test the significance of the differences, we shall now turn to logistic regressions analysis.

Table 2. Turnout in per cent according to education and political information at the individual level in different electoral systems. The absolute number of voters in each category is given within parentheses.

		Political information level			
		Low		High	
Education	High	SMP (782) 75.7	MMM (247) 79.4	SMP (989) 92.3	MMM (418) 90.3
		MMP (507) 93.2	PR (842) 83.5	MMP (522) 99.1	PR (1,319) 94.1
	Low	SMP (1,440) 70.2	MMM (1,396) 75.6	SMP (767) 88.9	MMM (665) 91.3
		MMP (1,853) 91.3	PR (2,808) 68.3	MMP (578) 98.6	PR (2,059) 85.9

Table three consists of logistic regression analyses within the four electoral systems. In the analyses, I have used four independent dummy variables. We can test the effects of each dummy function, since their categories do not represent the whole electorate in any system⁷. The categories of voters, i.e. the dummy independents,

⁷ Of the total 31,619 respondents with a value on education and political information, all in all 21,902 score positively on one of the dummy variables, which are coded in a standard binary manner (0/1).

are presented in rows. As can be seen, all the differences in voting between these extreme voter groups and the rest of the electorate are significant in the first-past-the-post systems. In the remaining three electoral systems, a majority of the differences are significant. Further, the hypotheses presented in figure one seem to gain partial support. Voters with a low education and political information level abstain in all systems. The odds ratio is approximately one unit lower for these voters, being highest (-1.26) in the MMP systems. Likewise, highly educated and informed voters cast a vote more frequently than the rest of the electorate.

Table 3. Logistic regression measuring the combined effects of education and political information in four electoral systems.

	SMP			MMM			MMP			PR		
	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p
lowedu lowinfo	-.88	145.1	.000	-.77	36.4	.000	-1.26	66.0	.000	-.92	280.6	.000
lowedu highinfo	.34	7.7	.005	.46	6.9	.009	.67	3.1	.079	.12	2.69	.101
highedu lowinfo	-.60	43.7	.000	-.55	9.1	.003	-1.00	21.1	.000	-.06	.4	.525
highedu highinfo	.74	33.8	.000	.33	2.9	.088	1.04	4.9	.027	1.08	79.6	.000
Model Chi-square		333.4	.000		136.9	.000		132.4	.000		652.4	.000

If we put the results in the initial typology, we get the following results (figure 2). As can be seen, voters in PR systems act according to the hypotheses. In the PR systems, the two variables education and information are reinforcing; only low-low and high-high combinations make a difference. In other systems, however, the highly educated do not vote if they are not informed, whereas poor education is overridden by political information. In a matter of fact, education does not seem to have any effect in majoritarian and mixed electoral systems. Political information level explains turnout differences in them. There is also a reservation to be made about the levels of voting in MMP systems, which are high overall in the present survey material. The levels “high” and “low” are naturally in comparison of the turnout within systems, not across them.

Figure 2. Turnout among four groups of voters.

		Political information level	
		Low	High
Education	High	Low turnout (Normal turnout in PR)	High turnout
	Low	Low turnout	High turnout (Normal turnout in PR)

The analyses of variance above were done with categories of voters and seem to suggest that political information is a more important explanatory variable than formal education. I will now turn to a more conventional use of regression and compare how the two independent variables affect the probability of voting. Table four consists of three competing models. In the first model, only education and information are entered. The second model also controls for three individual characteristics: sex, age and income. The third model is the vastest. It includes a dummy for persons, who work within the public sector, an ordinal variable that measures the environment of the respondent on a rural-urban scale (0-1), and the district level turnout in per cent. These control for specific contextual effects. Finally, a regression model with the best fit and the lowest amount of independent variables is produced.

All the regression models are significant in every system, as the Chi-square values witness. Moreover, model 2 has more prediction power than model 1 in every system. Model 3, which tests the largest number of independent variables, seems to suffer from the number of variables entered. In the final model, the most important variables have been chosen. I have not used any of the conditional entering or removing procedures of SPSS. Instead, the choice has been made on the basis of the previous models. The main result is clear. In all electoral systems, three independent variables are the most important. Age, political information and education make a difference everywhere. Age, in fact, is at least equally important in explaining voting or abstaining as political information. If we multiply the B-coefficient, which, interesting enough, equals to .03 in all systems, with 10, we see the change in age cohorts of ten years. Consequently, there is a substantial difference in the odds ratio of voting between a 20-year-old and a 60-year-old voter. It is exciting to notice that there is no difference in voting between men and women in any system. The income level adds the probability of voting in all systems, apart from the MMM. In the final model, however, I have excluded income, since the model performed equally well without it.

Table 4. Logistic regression models for voting in different electoral systems.

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Final model		
SMP	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p
polinfo	1.65	290.9	***	1.27	113.1	***	1.00	13.0	***	1.39	195.7	***
education	.73	26.8	***	1.13	36.6	***	1.43	9.7	**	1.31	74.6	***
sex				-.14	3.3		-.03	.0				
age				.03	148.2	***	.04	42.9	***	.03	191.3	***
income				.63	30.66	***	.99	13.8	***			
public							-.01	.0				
urban							.08	.2				
district							.04	9.4	**			
Model Chi-sq.		398.5	***		439.0	***		113.7	***		606.3	***
MMM	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p
polinfo	1.18	105.8	***	1.37	100.8	***	2.07	59.2	***	1.22	107.8	***
education	.31	2.9		1.32	30.8	***	1.70	13.9	***	1.10	28.8	***
sex				.07	.5		-.07	.2				
age				.03	79.0	***	.03	49.4	***	.03	120.5	***
income				.02	.0		.35	2.3				
public							.18	.5				
urban							.12	.2				
district							.01	.6				
Model Chi-sq.		142.4	***		255.0	***		189.9	***		271.3	***
MMP	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p
polinfo	2.46	130.1	***	2.04	72.3	***	1.96	47.9	***	2.01	80.0	***
education	.83	6.7	**	1.46	14.5	***	1.40	9.5	**	1.49	17.6	***
sex				-.26	3.6		-.32	4.1				
age				.03	42.6	***	.04	42.1	***	.03	49.1	***
income				.91	16.0	***	1.11	16.6	***			
public							.06	.1				
urban							-.11	.2				
district							.03	3.2				
Model Chi-sq.		182.6	***		231.2	***		204.9	***		237.5	***
PR	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p	B	Wald	p
polinfo	1.23	339.4	***	1.04	199.3	***	1.47	114.6	***	1.41	237.6	***
education	1.60	213.4	***	2.08	243.2	***	1.36	41.7	***	1.36	89.0	***
sex				.10	3.5		-.05	.4				
age				.02	198.0	***	.03	71.2	***	.03	177.7	***
income				.39	26.5	***	.56	16.4	***			
public							.15	1.3				
urban							-.26	4.9	*			
district							.05	349.6	***	.05	689.4	***
Model Chi-sq.		752.5	***		883.4	***		842.7	***		1373.4	***

Variables: polinfo (mean of three items), education (ordinal from 0 to1, eight values), sex (dummy, 1=male), age (in years), income (in quartiles), public (dummy, public sector employment=1), urban (ordinal from 0=rural to 1=urban), district (turnout in per cent).

Significance: * at the .05-level, ** at the .01-level *** at the .001-level.

Voters in PR systems differ from the other systems in one aspect: district turnout is highly significant (Wald = 689). Thus, its real impact, in terms of the probability to vote, is somewhat unclear. Even though turnout varies within nations (e.g. in the Spanish election of 1996, between 67 and 84 per cent at the district level), this variation is normally less dramatic than the variation in age among voters. Nevertheless, it is an interesting discovery. We might, of course, deduce that voters in the PR systems are less inclined to vote strategically than voters in more complicated systems. Thus, to vote or not to vote might reflect a local social norm in the PR systems, especially if the voter does not fall into any of the extreme classes on the three explanatory variables age, information and education.

Conclusions

The results above indicate that mainly three variables explain voting at the individual level. Age and political information seem to be the most important independent variables, followed by education. It is interesting to notice that education is an important independent variable when we analyse voting in the whole electorate (table 4), but did not have as large an effect on individuals with extreme characteristics (with the exception of voters in PR systems). High political information guarantees high turnout regardless of education, and low political information leads to low turnout, no matter how educated you are.

The results seem convincing enough, but the concept of political information bothers me somewhat. How valid is it in the end? Is political information in the way it is operationalised in the paper, just another way of measuring political interest? Within electoral research, we are sometimes keen on finding high statistical inference so desperately that theoretically valid reasoning is overlooked. Party identification is a concept widely used in the study of political behaviour. Unfortunately, it is sometimes used in a misleading way. Since the concept was introduced by “Michigan-school” in 1950s (e.g. Campbell, et al. 1960), a whole research tradition has been based on the theory. Party identification is no doubt an important milestone in deciphering the mystery of voting. How children are socialised into political beings or how the environment affects people’s values and their feelings towards political parties, are and were important supplements to known macro associations, such as class voting. But party identification is not a genuine independent variable whose explanatory power can be measured against other variables, say, education or social position. Party identification is a result of several variables, such as family background, education and social class. Therefore, it has no explanatory power in itself. Or is it fruitful to conclude that people vote for the party they like best? No, we must ask why

someone likes a particular party and dislikes another. With the concepts of political interest and political information, we encounter a similar dilemma.

In the light of the critic above, how tautological are my results? Am I merely saying that people vote because they want to vote, i.e. along the lines of Riker's and Ordeshook's (1968) D-term? In the CSES data, there is a weak positive correlation between education and political information on the one hand and age and information on the other hand. Since the phenomena seem intertwined, I will add a new control function. I treat both voting and the level of political information as dependent variables and have calculated turnout and the mean of political information for four groups of respondents. These are young people with low education, young people with high education, old people with low education and old people with high education⁸. The figures are cross tabulated in table 5. The electoral system is held constant.

Table 5. Voter turnout and the mean of political information among four groups of respondents in different electoral systems. The total number of respondents in each category is given within parentheses.

		Age			
		Young		Old	
Education	High	SMP (766)	MMM (198)	SMP (463)	MMM (101)
		78.8 %	79.7%	92.6%	97.0%
		.61 info	.70 info	.68 info	.67 info
	MMP (350)	PR (726)	MMP (258)	PR (359)	
	95.8%	88.9%	98.1%	95.1%	
	.58 info	.64 info	.75 info	.76 info	
Low	SMP (526)	MMM (300)	SMP (1,354)	MMM (917)	
	61.4%	62.6%	85.5%	84.3%	
	.37 info	.35 info	.56 info	.32 info	
MMP (657)	PR (1,367)	MMP (1,257)	PR (2,706)		
86.3%	61.6%	97.1%	81.0%		
.30 info	.46 info	.58 info	.52 info		

Political information varies between zero (lowest) and one (highest).

I have also tested if the turnout and political information levels among the groups of respondents differ from the corresponding levels within the whole sample of the related electoral system. Turnout levels within the electoral systems in the material

⁸ The coding has been done as follows. Age: Young people are between 18 and 35 years old. Old people are at least 55 years old. Education: Low education is up to incomplete secondary school (secondary school would qualify for entry into university or other degree level higher education). High education is at least an incomplete university undergraduate degree (thus, including university students).

are the following: SMP (81.2), MMM (82.3), MMP (95.2), and PR (80.5). The arithmetic means of political information within the electoral systems are as follow: SMP (.56), MMM (.46), MMP (.53), and PR (.57). The means within voter groups were tested with the one sample t-test. Statistically significant deviations are marked in bold.

Let us concentrate on age first. High age increases both political information and turnout levels. Especially if education is held constant, it is easy to see how older respondents both know more and vote more frequently. There is one exception. Within the MMM systems, age does not increase information, even though old people vote more frequently than the young. Some differences are striking. Look at voters with a low education in PR. It is true that these people score less on the information items than the whole sample. But within the group of people with low education, there is no real difference between the young and the old (it is merely.06 points). Why, then, is the turnout almost 20 percentage points higher among the old than the young? The same applies to voters in the MMM systems. Education does indeed increase both political knowledge and turnout. But only highly educated voters in PR actually vote more frequently than the less educated, regardless of age.

In short, political information seems to possess an explanatory power of its own. Even if we control for individual variables such as education and age, structural variables such as electoral system, or contextual variables such as district turnout, we cannot explain who votes and why with perfect accuracy. After all, we operate with probabilities. In some cases we can be almost certain that someone votes. If you have a university degree and are at least 55 years old, the probability that you vote approaches one (at least in the present sample), regardless the electoral system. Political information is closely related to political interest. It is reasonable to conclude that you want to gather information of something you are interested in. In rational choice terms, there are no information costs for the politically interested. Politics are pure pleasure⁹. But how did you become interested in the first place? It is important to find out what causes the fact that people distribute themselves along a continuum from the sociable man via the political man to the ideological man, as so convincingly summarised by Berelson et al. (1954: 323). Or is political interest just one of nature's normal distributions? For this purpose, amongst others, large cross-national, longitudinal and consistent survey projects, like the CSES, are needed. In an age when the survey techniques were still young, a prominent political scientist put the methodological problem in a nutshell: "As surveys are conducted under more and more differing conditions, it becomes evident that many of the variables once thought to be determinative of individual voting behavior are determinative only under particular conditions, which have not been

⁹ The real paradox is the group of voters who possess neither interest nor information but vote anyway.

specified with precision. The marked changes in the relevance of socio-economic status for the vote since 1940 perhaps best illustrate the point. The comments do not, of course, lead to the conclusion that the sample survey technique is inappropriate for the study of politics. The argument means, if anything, that many more surveys should be conducted and that we need to strain our ingenuity to the direction of survey analysis toward the truly refractory problems of politics." (Key 1961: 56).

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