Master Thesis

The impact of television news exposure and political talk on voter turnout

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THE IMPACT OF TELEVISION NEWS EXPOSURE AND POLITICAL TALK ON VOTER TURNOUT

by

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Abstract

This paper uses data from the European Election Studies (EES), to investigate the determinants of voter turnout in the 2004 European Parliamentary Elections. It introduces measures of television news exposure and political talk into models of electoral participation and finds that the frequency of watching general television news is not a significant predictor for voter turnout, whereas watching a program about the elections on television as well as political talk are. A binary logistic regression model of turnout and television news exposure and political talk shows that individuals who more frequently watch a program about the elections on television and show higher levels of political talk with friends and family are more likely to turnout to vote, whereas general television news exposure does not have a significant impact on voter turnout.

Keywords: Voter turnout, television news exposure, political talk

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Question description

"Man is a social being, and as such he always participates in social life"

(Cited in Schwartzman, 1968, p.2)

Verba et al (1995:38) define political participation as *"the activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government actions"*. Its importance has been underlined by Hollander (1997) and Norris (2002), who argue that participation is the lifeblood of representative democracy. Forms of political participation can include voting in elections, standing as a candidate in an election, joining a non-governmental group, a political party, or taking part in a demonstration. Electoral participation, also referred to as voter turnout, is one of the most widely studied topics in political science. It is defined as a method of an electorate to make a decision or express an opinion. Individuals cast their vote mainly to express their support for a political party or candidate running for office (Norris, 2002).

But why do people vote? In studying the explanatory factors behind voting, scholars such as Norris (1996) and Newton (1999) place great importance on political information. As Levendusky argues, *"information matters a great deal"* (Levendusky, 2011:42). Informed citizens care more about politics and are more likely to engage in behaviors that define "good" citizenship, such as voting (Deli Carpini and Keeter, 1996).

Numerous scholars (Newton 1999; Norris 19966; Bendiner, 1952; Glaser 1965) consider television as the most influential source of political information. Its penetration is so widespread that it gets to a large and diverse section of the public. Mobilization theory argues that easier access to political information has helped to politically mobilize citizens. Norris finds that watching television is associated with higher levels of political participation, while Newton and Dalton find that television is strongly associated with political mobilization (Dalton 1986; Newton, 1999; Norris, 1996). Television news about the EU and the European Parliamentary elections in specific has been found to strongly influence public opinion (Semetko, 2003). A similar argument has been made by Norris, with respect to the role of news for public opinion formation about European affairs and political participation (Norris, 2000).

Another determinant of voter turnout is political talk. It is widely presumed that everyday political discussion is beneficial for democratic processes. Indeed, through it, people connect their personal experiences with the world of politics. Kim et al mention its importance: *"Those who talk politics frequently are likely to have more consistent, considered and clearer opinions"* (1999:6). Peer political discussion as well as having a politically active discussant both increase the likelihood of voting (Kenny, 1992; Klofstad, 2005). Knowledgeable political discussants provide access to information that helps people recognize and reject dissonant political views, develop confidence in their attitudes, and avoid attitudinal ambivalence, thereby making participation more likely.

The present study deals with the issue of whether television news exposure and political talk mobilize voter turnout, by using the European Elections Studies (EES), which is a unique dataset containing information on voter turnout in different countries within the European Union. The 2004 European parliamentary (EP) elections were an

unprecedented exercise in democracy, with more than 350 million people in 25 countries having the opportunity to vote. This rich dataset of the 2004 European parliamentary elections allows this research the examination of voter turnout including a number of factors such as (mainly) television news exposure and political talk, but also a number of secondary variables such as political trust, political interest and economic voting that have often been found to have a significant impact on electoral participation. The main research question is;

RQ: ***Do television news exposure and political talk mobilize voter turnout?***

The European Union has come a long way to its inception. Yet, one area that has received little examination so far is the area of the European Parliament elections. Although several researchers (Norris, 1996; Newton 1999; Glaser, 1965; Schmitt-Beck, 2003 etc) have used television news exposure and political talk to explain voter turnout, very few have used the European Parliament elections of 2004 (Claes H. de Vreese, 2006) to test this relationship, and no existing studies (at least to the author's knowledge) have taken both factors into account when examining voter turnout. This study contributes to the scientific community by reporting the findings of an EU-wide study of the news media coverage of the European Parliament elections of 2004, while taking into account political talk that other scholars in political behavior and communication have neglected to do. New findings are expected, that is that the coexistence of both television news consumption and political talk heightens citizens' interest in politics, which will eventually lead them to an increased electoral

participation in the elections. The social relevance is also important; voter turnout is a key contributor to democracy. Television, as a widely distributed source of information and every day political talk, heavily influence peoples' political behavior and are able to heighten political interest and hence their willingness to vote. In EU there exists a democratic deficit; people perceive EU and the European Parliament as a superstructure that seems dethatched from the citizenry, whereas the decisions taken considerably affect the lives of the European citizens. Television coverage of the European Parliament can bring people and the EU institutions closer and increase the knowledge and trust towards them and in response, mobilize turnout in elections.

The examination of the European Parliamentary elections of 2004 is important; the 2004 EP elections were an unprecedented exercise in democracy with more than 350 million people having the opportunity to vote. The Treaty of Nice (2003) provided the space for an increase in the EU public sphere, after an enlargement of the number of seats in the European Parliament to 732, which exceeded the cap established by the Treaty of Amsterdam. The elections took part only weeks after the accession of 10 new member states to the EU-the largest enlargement ever. With the addition of new members states, there are (at least) 25 different media systems where news coverage about the EU is plenty (Banducci, 2005). Most voters in both the old EU-15 and the 10 new member states experience politics primarily through media (Claes H. de Vreese, 2006). Particularly in the case of low-salience, second order elections, most of what citizens know about the campaign stems from the media. Empirical knowledge about the media's coverage of the European elections is a prerequisite for assessing the well-being of democratic processes in Europe and for informing the ongoing discussion about the EU's democratic and communication deficits.

Using data from the European Election Studies[2], this paper will demonstrate that while the frequency of general television news exposure is not significantly associated to voter turnout, the increased frequency of watching a program about the elections on television is significantly related to increased turnout rates. The findings also suggest that political talk with friends and family significantly raises turnout in the elections. In short, higher visibility of EU elections news in the media in the weeks before the elections is likely to mobilize voters if they are exposed to this news, while discussing about politics is also likely to mobilize voters to participate in the elections.

1.2 Overview of Thesis

The question that is addressed in this study is whether television news exposure and political talk increase voter turnout, by examining the post European parliamentary election surveys in 2004. The paper is structured as follows; Section 2 presents an overview of the existing literature that was used to answer the research question. Section 3 introduces the EES data and the methodology employed in the analysis. Section 4 presents the results of the analysis and finally section 5 concludes.

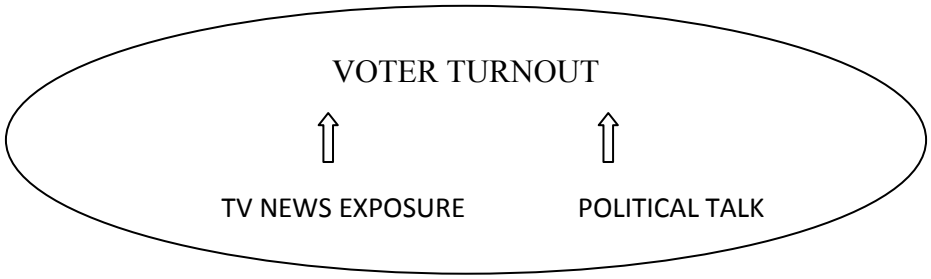
[2] Data analyzed in the thesis come from the 2004 European Parliamentary elections across the 26 European countries that took part in the elections of that year. The principal investigators for the EES can be found in the bibliography.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The determinants of Voter Turnout

The literature on electoral participation has established a number of key factors that influence voter turnout. This section discusses the impact of television news exposure and political talk as the variables of main interest, but also some political motivation factors such as interest and partisanship, a set of socioeconomic factors as well as some common demographic characteristics such as gender and age on electoral participation in detail. The theoretical model that was used to answer the research question of this project assumed that each of the independent variables of main interest increases the likelihood of the dependent variable occurring. Figure 1 illustrates this model;

Figure 1: *Voter turnout model*



Television news exposure and the mobilization hypothesis

Media is one of the most common channels of communication between parties and voters as they allow parties to reach wide audiences, including less partisan voters (Norris, 2006). Mobilization theory argues that easier access to ever larger amounts of political information through television has helped to mobilize citizens, both cognitively and behaviorally (Newton, 1999). Numerous studies have mentioned the impact of television news exposure on voter turnout. In Britain, Norris (1998) finds that watching television news is associated with high levels of political participation. Inglehart claims that the rising level of cognitive mobilization through exposure to television news is one of the predominant features of modern politics, and it is associated with higher levels of political participation among the mass publics of the West (Inglehart, 1990). In European Parliamentary elections voters regard television as their main source for election news (Semetko, 2003). The 2009 European Parliamentary Elections offered a unique opportunity for the study of the effect of television on voting. More politically informed citizens were more likely to be interested in the matters of politics and then, more likely to vote (Bilska, 2011).

Several studies contribute to the link between media and voter turnout. Studies based in the United States have found that television can reduce the costs of voting and increase turnout by providing information about the elections and candidates (Gerber, Karlan and Bergan, 2006; Goldstein and Freedman, 2002; Iyengar and Simon, 2000). Also, promotional campaigns conducted by the American Heritage Foundation have shown that more people recall reminders to vote through television than through other media. The campaigns presented the evident salience of television, ranking at or near the top among all types of media use, when recalling reminders to vote by type of media

user (Glaser, 1965:73). Gentzkow also mentions television's superiority that dates back since its introduction; when television was introduced, it grew rapidly. In many markets, penetration went from zero to seventy percent in roughly five years, and even in the earliest years the average television household was watching more than four hours per day (Gentzkow, 2006).

European citizens participate in the EU policy making by voting in the European elections and delegating their countries' representatives to the European Parliament. To make a sensible and educated decision and vote for a candidate that really represents voters' values, the voters need to have enough substantial information about the candidate and the EU. Studies have shown that citizens across Europe rely on the media for information about European affairs, the EU and European integration. More than two thirds of the EU citizens consistently name television as their most important source of information and the majority also identifies television as its preferred method for receiving the news about the EU specifically (European Commission, 2002).

Television news: Underlying mechanisms influencing turnout

When it comes to vote choice, media can fulfill several roles; they can strengthen one's preferences (reinforcement), point out salient issues (agenda-setting), shape parties' images and voting preferences (persuasion), and urge people to go vote or to vote for a specific party (mobilization) (Norris, 2006).

Newton (1999) argues that high exposure to television news gives people a better understanding of politics, heightens their subjective efficacy and therefore mobilizes them politically. Bendiner (1952) claims that television has direct effects by

continually reminding people to vote through exhortations in spot announcements and in speeches. Television raises interest by graphic representations of the news and by creating a close contact between a candidate and the viewer. As television presents the viewer face-to face with messengers and persuaders, one might think that it is particularly effective. Glaser (1965) agrees; television reminders are recalled more often because they are encountered more often. Recollection of a reminder is associated with higher turnout.

News, as well as televised ads might also stimulate turnout directly by encouraging voters to take an interest in the campaign and to acquire voting preferences. Greater coverage of a campaign can signal voters that the outcome of the election is important. Increased coverage reduces uncertainty about choices and gives voters greater confidence in choice. Similarly to the impact of television news, Freedman, Franz and Goldstein (2004:725) argue that campaign ads aired through television inform people exposed to them about the candidates and their messages, and partially as the result of this enhanced knowledge, increase their interest in the election and their sense of the stakes involved. These increased levels of information and interest lead to higher levels of participation on Election Day (Freedman, 2004).

In the research of media and the EU, links have been established between media coverage of the EU and citizen engagement in elections. Particularly, in European Elections, when examining the media campaign effects, three aspects of media coverage influence public perception of European Union; visibility of EU news (or quantity of coverage), the European nature of the news (whether the EU news actually talk about the EU or about national issues that are being related to the EU) and the tone of the campaign (how the news evaluate the EU and its institutions) (Semetko, 2003).

Contributing to a European public sphere, increased visibility of the elections in the news gives voters an indication of the salience and importance of the election. Higher intensity and visibility of news about the European Elections is related to higher turnout in European parliamentary elections, as they make voters perceive the elections and their vote as important (De Vreese, 2005).

Thus, the visibility of the EP elections matters. Visible news coverage is expected to give voters information about candidates and party positions, making them more knowledgeable, hence, mobilizing turnout. Information about key democratic moments such as elections in the news is necessary for enhancing public awareness and possible engagement in politics. The EU, faced with challenges of legitimacy and unclear structures for political accountability, is dependent upon media coverage to reach its citizens (De Vreese, 2005; Semetko, 2003).

Before proceeding, though, the paper should acknowledge that a major limitation of cross-sectional survey analysis is the problem of causality; on the one hand, it seems most plausible that watching television news about public affairs would encourage people to become more active in politics. Through paying attention to the news people should become more aware of the serious problems facing their community, the nation or the EU, and the role of the governments, voluntary associations and community groups to try solving these problems. On the other hand, it might be that those who are already actively involved in public life to turn to the news media to find out more about current events. The relationship is probably somewhat reciprocal, and without panel survey data the researcher cannot be certain about the direction of causality. Even though the researcher analyzed the associations between media use and civic engagement with claiming to develop a comprehensive causal

model, it was not possible to do a causal test due to the fact that the cross-sectional survey data that were used did not allow disentangling the direction of causality.

Deriving from the previous literature on television news exposure, the first hypothesis of this paper is formulated;

H1: *"People with higher levels of television news exposure are more likely to vote"*

Political Talk and the mobilization hypothesis

"Strange as it seems in this day of mass communication, democracy still begins in human conversation"

(Cited in Anderson, Darddenne & Killenberg 1994; 13)

According to a widespread agreement, talk increases turnout (Kenny, 1993; Toka, 2010; McClurg, 2006). Research shows that politicized social networks are correlated with higher levels of political action (Kenny, 1992; Knoke, 1990; Lake and Huckfeld, 1998; Lerghley, 1990, McClurg 2003). McClurg (2006) finds that increasing the level of political discussion from "*never*" to "*most times*" in a discussion dyad increases the level of participation among college graduates. The impact of a discussion network on participation depends on how much support a person experiences when talking to network discussants. Homogeneous discussion networks encourage political mobilization; like-minded individuals can encourage one another in their viewpoints, promote recognition of common problems and spur one another into collective action (Mutz, 2002). On the other hand, if they disagree with a certain person's political views,

then he or she is less likely to be involved (McClurg, 2006). Finally, Klofstad (2007) argues that there is a positive relationship between how much people talk about politics and participation in civic activities like voting. Data from Europe point to consistency in reports of European citizens engaging in political talk over an extended period of time. Reviews of Eurobarometer data from 1973 to 1992 find remarkable stability in the propensity of Europeans to discuss politics (Bennett, 2000).

How political talk influences voter turnout?

Klofstad (2007) claims that political talk influences voter participation does it in three ways; by providing individuals with information on how to become active, by increasing engagement with politics and by explicitly asking people to participate in civic activities. Klofstad places emphasis on peer discussions in explaining how people decide to vote. The individual might obtain information with greater ease through conversation with peer groups. McClurg (2006) claims that political discussion increases electoral participation in two ways; it increases respondent sophistication and improves a person's ability to integrate political information into his opinions.

Also, politically sophisticated partners provide information that helps respondents integrate persuasive information in their belief systems. In addition, respondents with discussion partners with political expertise can "check" their reactions against each other, in order to see how to react to information, meaning whether to reject or accept it as a relevant consideration (McClurg, 2006). Klofstad (2007) claims that the messages transferred through political discussions are important. Intense interpersonal communication with persons who want to vote and express clear party

preferences encourage the intention to vote. Finally, if the opinion of a discussant is shared by other network members, the voter feels confirmed, which will increase the acceptance of this particular message, thus making it more likely to participate (Schmitt Beck, 2003).

Deriving from the previous literature on television news exposure and political talk, the second hypothesis of this paper is formulated;

H2: ***"People with higher levels of political talk are more likely to vote"***

It was in this study's expectations that the higher the levels of television news exposure of the respondents, the higher would be their voter turnout in the elections as a result. The amount of general television news exposure and exposure to television news related to the elections were both expected to be positively correlated to voter turnout. Similarly, it was expected that the more people talked about politics with friends or family, the more likely they were to vote in the European Parliamentary elections of 2004.

When the analysis is concentrating on explaining turnout in the EP elections in particular, this is affected partly by the same factors that according to previous literature have been found to be crucial for voter turnout in any given election. The distinction is made between political motivations (political trust, interest and partisanship), social class, economic voting and education as socioeconomic factors, as well as some

common demographic characteristics (age, gender, employment status and attendance at religious services).

Political motivations

For the past 30 years political trust has occupied the minds of many political scientists devoted to the study of democratic governance. Trust in politics and politicians is essential for the proper functioning of democracy and central to understand the way people behave in it. Previous research considers political trust as an important resource of democratic political systems as it is believed to determine the willingness of citizens to commit public resources to public policy ends, to accept political decisions and to comply with them. When people trust the regime and its institutions they are more likely to participate in politics in order to change their lives (Claes, 2012). Political trust can be conceptualized as a form of diffuse support that the political system receives from the citizens of a society. Scholars such as Hetherington (1998) have profitably defined political trust as a basic evaluative orientation towards the government, founded on how well the government is operating according to people's normative expectations. Miller and Listhaug define political trust as "*a summary judgment that the system is responsive and will do what is right even in the absence of constant scrutiny*" (Listhaug, p. 381).

Individual level explanations of turnout in the EP elections in particular are usually related to the attitudes of European citizens. For instance, different levels of trust in the EU's institutions in general or in the European Parliament in particular may explain why EU citizens decide to vote or stay at home. Empirical research has

provided quite convincing evidence that political trust has strong effects on electoral behavior. Institutional trust refers to the fulfillment of an individual's normative expectations towards institutions (Setala, 2007). Cox (2003) finds a statistically significant relationship between trust in political institutions, European Parliament and turnout. Greater trust and satisfaction increase citizens' likelihood to vote. People showing more trust in politicians and the European Parliament report higher turnout in elections (Setala, 2007). Cox argues that confidence in political institutions (such as the Council of Ministers) results to greater electoral participation (Cox, 2003).

What is more, a common explanation capturing variations in turnout rates is interest in politics. Numerous studies have found a positive relationship between political interest and turnout (Verba, Schlozmann and Brady, 1995; Parry, Moyser and Day, 1992). There are several reasons why interest in politics may affect turnout; firstly, people with high interest in politics are likely to process more information about the political system, lowering the costs and increasing the probability to vote. Also, Feddersen and Pesendorfer (1996) develop a game-theoretic model of voting to show that it can be optimal for uninformed voters to abstain from voting even if they care about the outcome of the election, as by abstaining they defer the decision to the informed voters who, by definition, should vote for the correct policy. Another theoretical model developed by Matsusanka demonstrates how the decision to vote depends on how interested a voter is in politics; an individual with greater interest in politics might believe that his or her choice is more informed, which will increase his or her utility from voting, hence, increasing the probability to vote (Matsusanka, 1995).

Previous literature based in Europe (Denny and Doyle, 2005), argues that interest in politics is a consistent determinant of voter turnout. Voters with greater

interest in politics are shown to have higher turnout rates. Being interested in politics significantly reduces the costs of voting, as the voter already possesses information about the political process, and as such he or she does not have to seek out information at election time. In addition, political interest may also increase the benefits from voting and as such individuals derive greater psychological rewards from it (Denny and Doyle, 2005).

Continually, Gronlund and Setala (2007) find that partisanship increases the probability to vote. Survey-based studies in Europe (Whitely and Seyd, 1994) have shown that reported contact by a party to a partisan has a positive impact on turnout. Bartels (2000) claims that the significance of partisanship depends upon the level of partisanship in the electorate but also upon the extent to which it influences voting behavior. People are activated to vote in elections through the mobilizing efforts of political parties they belong to. Communication between parties and voters increases the probability of the latter to vote in elections (Caldeira, 1990). Partisanship both reflects and reinforces an individual's psychological involvement in politics and concerns over election outcomes, thus encouraging electoral participation.

Party support is viewed as an important motivation for individual political participation. If a party encourages political action, those who belong to it will be more likely to turnout. Karp and Banducci (2007) argue that parties everywhere have an intensive to reduce the costs of mobilization efforts by targeting probable voters and targeting voters that are less costly to reach. Parties may reduce the costs of voting by supplying information about candidates or even arranging transportation to the polls. Party contact might also make citizens aware of the importance of their votes. Several voter characteristics might make them easier to contact or identify as probable voters;

citizens who are known to have a history of participating in previous elections or member of groups such as unions are examples of characteristics that could be used to identify probable voters. Since is it assumed that every party encourages its adherents to vote, it is expected that party identifiers will be more likely to engage in turnout in elections than those who do not identify with a political party (Finkel and Opp, 1991).

Socioeconomic factors

There is a large body of cross-national research examining the link between the state of the economy and the vote. The basic claim is that individuals change their votes in response to the state of the economy. Much ink has been spilled on the search for evidence of retrospective economic voting. Previous research has shown that citizens' willingness to vote is affected by their perceptions of the economy and that electoral accountability is typically equated with sociotropic and retrospective economic voting[3]. When people perceive the previous economic situation as good, they are more likely to participate in elections (Roberts, 2008). Studies focusing on European countries have shown that the explanatory power of the economic voting theory depends on the importance of the elections and particularly of political context; greater impact of the economy on the amount of votes is expected where greater clarity of responsibility for the state of the economy is present. Economics ought to matter more in elections where representatives to dominant institutions of the political system are elected, as these

[3] Retrospective economic evaluation means basing attitudes towards the economy of a state on reactions to past performance, while prospective economic evaluation means basing attitudes towards the economy of a respondent's country on reactions to future expected performance.

institutions have the most power to shape the macroeconomic policies of the state (Jastramskis, 2011).

Rosenstone argues that poverty and a decline in financial well-being decline voter participation. When a person suffers economic adversity, his scarce resources are spent holding body and soul together, not concerning about politics. Economic problems both increase the opportunity costs of political participation and reduce a person's capacity to attend politics. The author argues that the reason why people with financial difficulties are less likely to vote is that economic adversity is stressful; it causes a preoccupation with personal economic well-being, and as a result the citizen withdraws from such external matters such as politics because the poor are financially strained, despite income security programs. The poor are more likely to be preoccupied with personal economic concerns than the rest of the population and they often must cut back financially, apply for welfare and food stamps, and move into cheaper housing. Citizens whose main worry is making ends meet, holding onto their job, or finding one, one may well find any interest they might have in the broad affairs of politics deflected to coping with finding a way to deal as soon as possible with the most immediate and pressing surviving problems (Rosenstone, 1982).

Also, social class has been found to be a crucial factor affecting voter turnout in elections. Among many other definitions, social classes have been identified as *"large groups among which unequal distribution of economic goods and/or preferential division of political prerogatives and/or discriminatory differentiation of cultural values result from economic exploitation or political oppression"* (Outhwaite, Bottomore et al. 1994). Poor and working classes generally vote in lower frequencies than middle and upper classes do (Beeghley, 1986). Ben Rogers argues that the rich vote more than the

poor. Despite the fact that in most European countries the working class turnout trails upper class turnout by about 10%, in countries with compulsory voting participation in the ballot box tends to be increased by 10-15% and narrow the gap between the rates at which rich and poor vote (Rogers, 2005). Also, evidence from studies that examined European Elections between 1989 and 2009 has shown that upper (rich) classes participated in the elections more than the lower classes did (Horn, 2011). Indeed, compared to members of the lower-class, those who are part of the upper- and middle-class on average, are more likely to follow politics and vote.

The tendency of higher-class citizens to participate in politics at greater frequencies than lower-class citizens has been attributed to the former's higher educational attainment levels, perceived stake in public affairs, and higher levels of interaction with people active in politics. It is generally argued that when compared to higher status persons, those of lower status are less interested in politics, less aware of the need for the possible benefits of participation, less politically efficacious, less likely to possess those social and political skills that facilitate participation, and less likely to have the time, money, and energy to expand in the political arena. (Spiller, 2012).

Education is also one of the most often cited explanations of electoral participation; generally, individuals with higher educational levels have a higher propensity to vote. As Burden (2009) claims, the more people are educated, the more aware they are of politics and thus, the more they participate in politics through voting. Knowledge facilitates greater understanding of politics, which often demands more abstract thought than everyday activity does. Education makes for easier navigation of voter registration requirements and other impediments to voting. Also, classroom

instruction and the social networks in which higher educated people are situated expose them to elite recruitment efforts (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980).

Education has been shown to affect turnout through various channels; first, it reduces both the cognitive and material costs of voting. Though education, the necessary cognitive skills that help voters to process complex political information are developed, such as decoding sophisticated political rhetoric, understanding the issues at stake, selecting the appropriate party or candidate running for office and providing them with the necessary skills to deal with the bureaucracy of voting (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Burden, 2009, Nie, 1996). Education is also able to improve the socio-economic status of people who as a result might turn to higher participation, as they have greater interest in election outcomes. Also, it may enhance a sense of civic duty, by fostering democratic values and beliefs and encouraging participation in social activities or increase levels of political interest (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980). Campbell shows that turnout is influenced by the civic culture that prevailed in the high school that the individual attended (Campbell, 2005).

The relationship between education and electoral participation in some European countries such as Britain is less unambiguous. Dalton finds a very low correlation between the two in European elections (Dalton, 2002). Yet, other studies have found that education does have an impact on voter turnout in these countries (Johnson, 2011). Matilla moves in the latter direction in her study about the determinants of voter turnout in European elections. She claims that well-educated people are more likely to vote than the less educated (Matilla, 2003). Finally, Malkopoulou, in her study on participation in EU elections, finds that abstainers in the European Parliament elections are mostly

citizens with lower education. According to her, citizens with lower educational levels are more prone to abstention than people of higher education (Malkopoulou, 2009).

Demographic characteristics

Continually, a stable relationship has been identified between voter turnout and a number of individual characteristics and studies usually agree that the most important individual variables affecting voter turnout are the age and the gender of citizens, as well as their employment status and their regular attendance at religious services (Norris, 1999, 2000; Newton, 1999; Frazer, 1999; Rogers, 2005 etc).

Age has often been identified as one of the leading predictors of voter turnout. In general, older citizens are more likely to vote in any given election than younger citizens are, but it has often been suggested that this relationship is curvilinear, with the likelihood of voting increasing through late middle age but declining thereafter (Sigelman, 1985). Similarly, previous literature mentions the youth disengagement from electoral participation; European-based studies (Gallego, 2009) have shown that the youngest age cohorts to enter the electorate have been voting at particularly low rates, and that this seems to be the result of generational, rather than life-circle or period effects. Across generations, political engagement will increase as individuals move from young adulthood to middle age. It has been found that there is a robust correlation between age and voter turnout: voting generally increases with age (Thomas and Young, 2006).

The prevailing explanation for the relationship between age and voting is that younger people tend to be less settled (single and geographically mobile) than older and

less involved in politics (Nevitte, 2000). Two distinct phenomena characterize young people's electoral behavior in Europe; political disengagement which turns into abstention, and protest activity which is expressed in European Elections as keeping distance from the polls. Young people's low turnout can thus be explained by their use of new forms of political engagement. This could reflect a general criticism of politics as usual, as offered by traditional parties or candidates, but also criticism of the idea of representative democracy itself, which is the foundation of modern politics. Protesting might be a substitute for the political participation of the youngsters, who express themselves not by voting, but by organizing manifestations, occupations of public buildings, or public meetings to discuss political issues (Pini, 2009).

Gender is also a common predictor of voting behavior. In general terms, men are expected to vote more frequently than women. Studies on gender differences in political engagement and participation have concluded that these gender differences can be traced to women's lesser access to key resources, such as income, education and socio-economic status. These gender differences stem largely from women's disadvantage with respect to income, education and occupational status, all of which are associated with political activity, and as such, voting (Thomas and Young, 2006). However, in some countries such as Denmark and the Netherlands the reverse appears to hold. A plausible explanation why in northern countries women might vote more than men is that there are more single mothers and more women working, that they are very interested in things like their children's education and health care, and they vote to meet their expectations (Oppenhuis, 1995).

What is more, employment status has conceptually been linked to political participation, including voting behavior in two different ways; being full-time paid

work force is sometimes taken to signify a measure of stability that is sufficient to encourage voting participation. Employment is also linked to holding some politically relevant skills such as attending meetings that facilitate political participation. Thus, the expectation is that citizens who are employed are more likely to be voters than the unemployed or retired ones (Verba, 1995b). Economic well-being is related to voting participation. Employed individuals are significantly more likely to vote than the unemployed. More restricted occupation-related learning experiences work to shield people from voting (Spiller, 2012). People with financial difficulties are less likely to vote. The reason might be that economic adversity is stressful; it causes a preoccupation with personal economic well-being, and as a result, the citizen withdraws from such external matters as politics. Economic duress reduces a person's capacity to participate in politics because the poor and unemployed are financially strained (Rosenstone, 1982).

Finally, regular church attendance is strongly associated with a higher probability of voting. It has been found that those who attend church services more often will present higher turnout rates (Gerber, Gruber and Hungerman, 2008). Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) argue that those who report attending church every week or almost every week are 15.1 percentage points more likely to report voting in elections than those who do not attend religious services. Scholars have found that religion takes a prominent place in contemporary European politics; in terms of voter turnout, one of the most important and lasting political cleavages in many European countries is the religious-secular divide (Mascherini, 2009).

There are two main explanations for how church attendance might cause greater voter turnout; first, participation in a church builds civic skills and thereby increases a

citizen's capacity for participation. Those who attend church regularly have opportunities to interact with and to work with each other, and might participate in decision making processes regarding church affairs, plan meetings, or give speeches. These activities help develop general civic skills that might aid political involvement outside of church. Also, church members are part of a community and there are political by-products of this civic association. Churches might also be used for political mobilization through the distribution of voting guides or other political material, and members may be especially responsive to requests to participate made by other church members or the church leadership. As such, churches are important sources of political information and recruitment (Gerber, Gruber and Hungerman, 2008). Additional research on religious involvement has also shown that it is associated with the production resources that promote all forms of political participation including voting. There is evidence indicating that "frequent churchgoers have a stronger sense of voting duty" than those not or only loosely affiliated with a religious community (Oppenhuis, 1995).

3. Data and Methodology

3.1 Data and Case Selection

To investigate the factors affecting turnout in the EU member countries that took part in the 2004 European elections, this study used voter survey data from the 2004 European Election Study (http://www.ees-homepage.net/). The European Election Studies (EES) are mainly concerned with electoral participation and voting behavior in European Parliamentary elections. The available data set allowed the examination of the individual level results in each country that participated in the 2004 European Parliament elections.

The 2004 European Election study was based on surveys administrated to random samples of the population in each of the 26 European countries that took part in the elections (Austria, Belgium, Britain, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden). The majority was completed shortly after the European Parliamentary elections of 2004 were held (until before the end of July), while some (Denmark, Ireland and Sweden) the surveys were completed in early October. The Belgian survey was conducted in December 2004-January 2005. In the original study, a total of 28.861 interviews were conducted, in sample frames of telephone interviews, mail surveys and face-to-face interviews. As each of these surveys was conducted independently of each other, this study illustrates the comparative response rates across

techniques; for telephone interviews the mean was 39.0%, for mail 44.5% and for face-to-face interviews 69.0%. Exact question wording can be found in the Appendix.

Of the original dataset, this study took into account 20 countries (Appendix, Table 1). The rest of the countries (Belgium, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Malta, Italy, and Sweden) were excluded from the analysis because they had certain variables missing (Appendix, Table A4). Austria was treated as the reference country. All the countries that were included in the analysis had a total sample of 10.520 participants.

3.2 Operationalization and measurement

In order to proceed with the analysis, the recreation of the original measures for each of the variables to new ones was necessary. A table describing the types of recoding that were used is presented in the Appendix (Table A5).

Voter turnout. The dependent variable was a dichotomous variable indicating the self-reported voter turnout in the 2004 European Parliamentary elections. To measure the dependent variable of voter turnout, the respondents were asked whether they voted or not in the European Parliamentary elections of June 13th, 2004. This dichotomous variable was recoded from its original values to "1" representing those who reported having voted and "0" identifying respondents who indicated not having voted. Respondents with "*don't know*" and "*no answer*" responses were reported as missing. Also, a dichotomous indicator to control for the countries that have compulsory voting in the European Parliament elections (Greece and Cyprus) was created. The new

variable was coded as "1" for the countries with compulsory voting, and as "0" for those without compulsory voting in the EP elections.

Variables of main interest. The individual level measurement of the amount of the weekly television news watching and the frequency of watching a program about the elections on television were also used in the data analysis. Additionally, the individual level measurement of voters' frequency of political talk with friends and family was included.

Television news exposure. The independent variable of television news exposure was made up of the weekly general television news exposure and the frequency of watching a program about the elections on television. General television news exposure was measured with the following question; "*How many days of the week do you watch the news on television?*" Respondent's weekly exposure to television news was measured on a ratio level (count) on a scale from zero to seven (*days*). Elections-specific television news exposure was measured on a 3-point scale question; "*How often did you watch a program about the elections on television?*" Respondent's amount of watching a program about the elections on television was recoded from the original measurement to values between 0 (*never*) to 2 (*often*) for the needs of this paper. "*Don't know*" and "*no answer*" responses were reported as missing.

Political Talk. The independent variable of political talk was made up of the frequency of discussing about politics with friends and family. Political talk was measured by asking "*How often did you talk to friends or family about the election during the three or four weeks before the European Election?*" measured on a 3-point scale. Respondents' amount of political talk was recoded from the original measurement

to values between 0 (*never*) to 2 (*often*) to match the rest of the variables' values. Respondents with "*don't know*" and "*no answer*" responses were reported as missing.

Political motivations. Several variables that are traditionally used in turnout studies were applied to the model: political trust, political interest and partisanship.

Political trust variables were made up of trust in the European Parliament, trust in the European Commission and trust in the Council of Ministers. Questions that were asked to measure trust were; "*How much do you trust the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of Ministers*?" and *"How much confidence do you have that the decisions made by the EU will be in the interest of your country?"* Each of them was rescaled from the original values to values of 0 (*no trust at all*) to 9 (*complete trust*). Additionally the amount of respondents' confidence that decisions of the European Union would be in the interest of their countries was recoded form the original measures to values between 0 (*no confidence at all*) to 3 (*a great deal of confidence*). "*Don't know*" and "*no answer*" responses were reported as missing.

Respondents' political interest was made up of their interest in European Parliamentary elections and their general interest in politics. Measuring respondents' interest in the elections they were asked; *"Thinking back to just before the elections for the European Parliament were held, how interested you were in the campaign for those elections*?" measured on a 4-point scale. Measuring their levels of general political interest, respondents were asked *"To what extent would you say you are interested in politics?"* also measured on a 4-point scale. Respondents' interest in European Parliamentary elections as well as their general interest in politics was recoded from the original measures to scales ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 3 (*very*). Respondents with

"*don't know*" and "*no answer*" responses were reported as missing. Finally, measuring partisanship, the respondents were asked; "*Do you feel yourself close to any particular party?"* Their partisanship rates were recoded to values to 0 (*no*) and 1 (*yes*), to indicate any party preference. Respondents with "*don't know*" and "*no answer*" responses were reported as missing.

Socioeconomic factors. To measure respondents' social class, they were asked; "*If you were asked to choose one of these five names for your social class, which would you say you belong to-the working class, the lower middle class, the middle class, the upper middle class or the upper class?"* Their social class answers were recoded from the original scaling to values of 0 (*upper class*) to 4 (*working class*). "*Don't know*" and "*no answer*" responses, as well as "*other*" answers, were reported as missing. The independent variables of respondents' economic voting were made up of their retrospective sociotropic and their prospective sociotropic economic evaluation.

Measuring respondents' past and future economic evaluations, they were asked; a. "*What do you think about the economy? Compared to 12 months ago, do you think that the general economic situation of your country was…",* and b. *"Over the next two months, how do you think the general economic situation in your country will be?"* respectively (both on 5-point scale). They were also recoded from their original scaling on scales from 0 (*a lot worse*) to 4 (*a lot better*), to match the rest of the variables' values sequence. In the latter variable, "*don't know*" and "*no answer*" responses were

reported as missing. To measure respondents' educational levels (age when a respondent finished full-time education[4]), no additional recoding was necessary.

Demographic characteristics. The individual level variables constituted of the control variables of demographics; Age, gender, employment status and attendance at religious services. The "year of birth" of the respondents was computed into a new variable - Age^2, as there was proposed a curvilinear relationship to exist between the ages of the respondents and voting in the EU elections. Respondents were asked their gender with the following question; "*Are you 1. Male or 2. Female?*" and was recoded to a scale of 0 and 1.

To measure respondents employment status, they were asked; *"What is your current work situation?"* Employment status could not be treated merely as a scale and be included in the regression analysis as such. Thus, it was treated as a categorical variable (on a nominal level) and was recoded from the original measurement on values from 0 (*employed*) to 6 (*other*). Finally, to measure respondents' frequency of attendance at religious services, they were asked; *"How often do you attend religious services?"* The variable of attendance at religious services was recoded from the original scaling, on a scale ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*several times a week*). "*Don't know*" and "*no answer*" responses were reported as missing.

[4] It has to be kept in mind for the needs of this study, that as low education is widely presumed primary education (up to 11-13 years of age), secondary education-the final stage of compulsory education (until the age of 18) and higher education-university attendance (from 18 years and older).

Missing values. Generally, missing values were either coded as "-1" indicating a process-generated missing value (when a question is not asked in a specific country) or as "9", "99", "999" etc. indicating a respondent-generated missing value (e.g. when a respondent "*doesn't know*", provides "*no answer*" or "*refuses*" to answer). In the variables taken into account, these answers were set to missing, thus excluding these respondents from the analysis.

3.3 Data Analysis

To assess the hypothesized relationship between television news exposure and voter turnout as well as political talk and voter turnout, a binary logistic regression analysis was conducted between the independent variables and the dependent variable of this study.

In the beginning of the analysis of the data, the researcher conducted a correlations test to see the relation measures of association between the variables and tested how well the model fitted the data with the multiple correlation coefficient R-statistic, which is a partial correlation between the outcome variable and each of the predictor variables and it can vary between -1 and 1. A positive value indicates that as the predictor variable increases, so does the likelihood of the event occurring. A negative value implies that as the predictor variable increases, the likelihood of the outcome occurring decreases. If a variable has a small value of R then it contributes only a small amount to the model (Field, 2009).

Afterwards, a logistic regression analysis was conducted to analyze how much the independent variables predicted voter turnout. Logistic regression specifies a

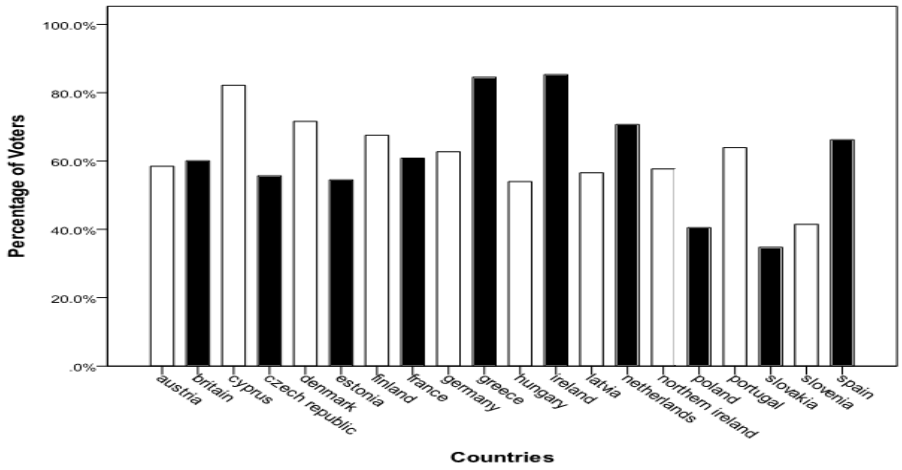
dichotomous variable as a function of a set of explanatory variables (Field, 2009). With logistic regression it became possible to model whether a person voted with predictors the several independent variables of the study.

4. Empirical Results

Of the eligible original population (*N*=28.861), (Appendix, Table A1), the analysis was conducted taking into account only respondents that fully completed the whole questionnaire (*N*=10.520, 20 countries), from which 6.468 (61.5%) voted, whereas 4.052 (38.5%) did not vote. They were about similar male and female participants with an average age of 46 years (*SD* = 15.72). Generally, respondents stopped education at the age of 19 years (*SD* = 5.08), which seemed similar across voters (*M* = 19.47, *SD* = 5.50) and nonvoters (*M* = 18.84, *SD* = 4.49). As can be seen from figure 2, on average more than half of the people voted within each country. Greece and Cyprus were the upper exception due to obligatory voting, whereas Slovakia presented the lowest voting percentage.

Figure 2

The country-specific voter turnout rates included in the analysis



The research hypothesis posed to the data was that the likelihood that somebody will vote would be positively related to both television news exposure (general and European Parliamentary elections specific) and political talk. In the logistic regression analysis that was conducted to test the research hypothesis were taken into account the dependent variable of voter turnout and the independent variables of television news exposure (general and elections specific) and political talk as the most important, as well as several demographic and secondary variables (trust, interest, partisanship etc). The outcome variable of voter turnout was people turning out to vote (*yes/no*) and its predictors were respondents' television news exposure (general and European parliamentary elections specific). All tests were evaluated on a 0.05 alpha significance level.

At first, a correlation matrix (samples are given in Tables 2.1 to 2.5) was computed to assess how the independent variables were related with each other as well as with the dependent variable. The main predictors were all significantly positively correlated with the outcome variable of voter turnout (Table 1). As can be seen from Table 1, the assumption of no multicollinearity[5] was met with no correlation between the predictors above .5, with the exception of the relation between interest in politics and interest in European elections (r = .535, p < .001). However, diagnostics of multicollinearity did not show any values of tolerance below .1 or VIF above 5. The assumption of linearity seems to have been met, with no significant interaction effect between the variables and their Ln-transformation, indicating that the main effects in the model did not violate linearity.

[5] VIF value larger than 5 indicates a multicolliearity problem

Table 1. *Coefficients**

Variables	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	**VIF**
Days of week watch TV	.856	1.168
Watch a program about the elections on TV	.688	1.453
Political Talk	.724	1.380
Trust in European Parliament	.303	3.295
Trust in European Commission	.215	4.662
Trust in Council of Ministers	.252	3.692
Confidence to the decisions of EU	.684	1.462
Interested in EP elections	.584	1.711
Interest in politics	.597	1.674
Retrospective economic evaluation	.665	1.504
Prospective economic evaluation	.653	1.532
Age^2	.683	1.464
Age stopped fill-time education	.839	1.191
Gender	.949	1.054
Employment Status	.719	1.390
Social class	.847	1.181
Attendance at religious services	.929	1.076
Partisanship	.902	1.109
Austria	.540	1.852
Britain	.544	1.838
Cyprus	.719	1.391
Czech Republic	.718	1.393
Denmark	.535	1.870
Estonia	.709	1.410
Finland	.609	1.643
France	.562	1.781
Germany	.693	1.444
Greece	.751	1.331
Hungary	.535	1.869
Ireland	.552	1.812
Latvia	.669	1.494
Netherlands	.572	1.749
Poland	.743	1.346
Portugal	.686	1.458
Slovakia	.598	1.673
Slovenia	.686	1.458
Spain	.586	1.707

a. Dependent variable: vote in ep elections

Table 2.1 *Measures of association between the predictor variables*

	Days of week watch TV	**Elections TV**
Days a week watch TV		
Elections TV	.292*	
Political talk	.152*	.394*

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 2.2 *Measures of association between voter turnout and the predictor variables*

	Vote in ep elections
Days a week watch TV	.142*
Elections TV	.239*
Political talk	.245*

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 2.3 *Measures of association between the predictor variables*

	Days a week watch TV	**Elections TV**	**Political Talk**
Trust in EP	.044**	.134**	.123**
Trust in EC	.042**	.126**	.118**
Trust in CM	.048**	.135**	.119**
Confidence EU	-.057*	.118*	.068*
Interested elections	.199**	.456**	.420**
Interested politics	.222**	.374**	.387**
Retrospective economic voting	.042**	.030**	.011
Prospective economic voting	.045**	.019*	.006*
Partisanship	.119**	.170**	.152**
Age^2	.253**	.179**	.073**
Education	.000*	.033**	.116**
Employment Status	.116**	.066**	-.023**
Social class+	-.007	.067**	.142**
Religious attendance	.047**	.042**	.033**

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-sided)

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

+ Spearman Rho Correlation

Table 2.4 *Measures of association between voter turnout and the predictor variables*

	Vote in ep elections
Trust in EP	.181**
Trust in EC	.152**
Trust in CM	.163**
Confidence of EU	.119**
Interested in elections	.373**
Interest in politics	.284**
Retrospective economic evaluation	.110**
Prospective economic evaluation	.088**
Partisanship [x]	± .230**
Age[2]	.176**
Education	.080**
Employment status [x]	.020*
Social class +	++.103**
Religious Attendance	.146**

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-sided)

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

[x]. Point-biserial correlation

± Phi, + Spearman Rho, ++ Rank biserial

Table 2.5 *Correlations-Gender*

	Vote in ep elections	**Days of week watch TV**	**Elections TV**	**Political Talk**
Gender[x]	± .02*	-.022*	-.050*	.005**

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-sided)

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-sided)

± Phi, [x] point biserial correlation

Univariate tests:

Univariate tests (Table A3) were conducted to assess whether voters and nonvoters differed with regard to the predictor variables. The results indicated that those who voted watched significantly more television news (M = 5.85, SD = 1.81) than those who did not vote (M = 5.27, SD = 2.17), t (10518) = 14.66, $p < .001$. Also, those that voted watched significantly more news about the elections on television (M = 2.01, SD = .66) than those who did not vote (M = 1.67, SD = .65), t (10.518) = 25.24, $p < .001$). Regarding political talk, the univariate test was in line with the results. Those who voted talked significantly more (M = 2.01, SD = .68) than those who did not vote (M = 1.66, SD = .66), t (10.518) = 25.89, $p < .001$.

Political motivations. Furthermore, those who voted trusted the European Parliament significantly more (M = 4.93, SD = 2.21) than those who did not vote (M = 4.08, SD = 2.29), t (10.815) = 18.87, $p < .001$.Also, voters showed higher levels of trust towards the Council of Ministers (M = 4.77, SD = 2.16) than the nonvoters (M = 4.03, SD = 2.23), t (10.815) = 16.95, $p < .001$. Voters showed more confidence towards the decisions of the EU than those who did not vote (M = 2.38, SD = .75 and M = 2.20 and SD =.79 respectively), t (10518) = 12.27, $p < .001$. Also, voters were significantly more interested in the elections (M = 2.51, SD = .89) than the nonvoters (M =1.80, SD = .80) t (10.518) = 41.18, $p < .001$, while they showed significantly more interest in politics (M = 2.71, SD = .83), than those who did not vote (M = 2.21, SD = .85), t (10518) = 30.19, $p < .001$. Furthermore, the univariate analysis indicated that party identifiers voted more (68.4%), than those who did not belong to a party (45.2%), x^2 (1) = 557.38, $p < .001$.

Socioeconomic factors. The univariate tests indicated that those that voted evaluated the past economic condition of their country significantly better (M = 2.85, SD = .99) than those who did not vote (M = 2.62, SD = 1.00), t (10.815) = 11.34, p < .001. As for the self-reported social class, the univariate test indicated that respondents who belonged to upper classes voted more (M = 2.47, SD = 1.08) than those who belonged to lower social classes (M = 2.22, SD = 1.08), t (23695) = 11.63, p < .001. Also, voters were significantly more educated (M = 19.66, SD = 5.41) than those who did not vote (M = 18.84, SD = 4.46), t (10.815) = 8.08, p < .001.

Demographic characteristics. The univariate tests indicated that voters were significantly older (M = 49.15, SD = 15.65), than the nonvoters (M = 19.55, SD = 15.5), t (8819.438) = 19.58, p < .001. Male voters were also significantly more that the female voters (SD = .487 and SD = .004 respectively), χ^2 (1) = 4.08, p < .05. Finally, voters and nonvoters were significantly different considering their employment status, χ^2 (6) = 112.2, p < .001. Voters and nonvoters were significantly more often self-employed and retired, whereas nonvoters were more often employed and unemployed. The employed ones voted more (67.0%) than the unemployed ones (33.0%), t (10.815) = 2.763, p < 0.01 (Table 4). Finally, those who voted attended religious services in church significantly more (M = 2.74, SD = 1.15) than those who did not vote (M = 2.40, SD = 1.13), t (10.815) = 11.63, p < .001.

Turnout was regressed on a logistic regression analysis, with all of the described predictors as the independent variables, in order to test the research hypothesis regarding the relationship between the likelihood that somebody would turn out to vote

and his or her television news exposure (general and elections specific) and political talk.

Results demonstrated that the overall model explained between .25% (Cox & Snell) and 33.9% (Nagelkerke) explained variance and was more effective than the null model ($\chi 2$ (42) = 3017.45, $p < .0001$). The likelihood ratio and Wald tests were both significant, indicating an improvement over the base line prediction. The Homer-Lameshow (H-L), χ^2 (8) = 12.751, $p = .121$, indicated that the model was a good fit for the data. In other words, the null hypothesis of a good model fit to the data was tenable.

Table 3 and Figure 4 (Appendix) show the comparison between the baseline and final model, on the predicted values of the dependent variable based on the full logistic regression model. The overall percentage gives the overall percent of cases that were correctly predicted by the model. As can be seen from Table 3, the baseline model correctly predicted an overall percentage of 61.8%, whereas the final model correctly classified an overall percentage of 73.9%.

Table 3 *Classification Table**

	Observed	Predicted Percentage correct
Baseline model	Overall percentage	61.8%
Final model	Overall percentage	73.9%

*The cut value is .500

The assessment of Cook's distance, leverage average and BF beta were all within the normal range[6], indicating that no influential cases were present in the proposed predictive model. Also, no outliers were found. None of the participants had standardized residuals above 3, indicating that there were no outliers in the dataset that was used in this project.[7]

Table 4 *Logistic Regression*

Variables	**B**	**S.E.**	**Sig.**	**Odds Ratios**	**95% CI**	
					Lower	**Upper**
TV/week	.008	.013	.533	1.008	.983	1.033
Program about elections TV	.129	.042	.002	1.137	1.047	1.235
Talk	.274	.040	.000	1.315	1.216	1.423
Trust in European Parliament	.060	.018	.001	1.062	1.025	1.101
Trust in European Commission	-.015	.023	.501	.985	.942	1.030
Trust in Council of Ministers	.050	.021	.017	1.052	1.009	1.096
EU interest	-.009	.037	.808	.991	.921	1.066
Interest in EU elections	.651	.034	.000	1.918	1.794	2.050
Interest in politics	.127	.035	.000	1.135	1.060	1.215
Partisanship	.008	.004	.000	1.008	1.000	1.016
Retrospective economic voting	.063	.030	.038	1.065	1.004	1.129
Prospective economic voting	.041	.031	.186	1.042	.980	1.107
Age^2	.000	.000	.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Gender	.029	.049	.558	1.029	.935	1.132
Education	.022	.006	.000	1.022	1.011	1.034
Employment Status						
Self-employed	.185	.091	.042	1.203	1.007	1.437
Student	-.150	.134	.265	.861	.662	1.120
Working in the household	.059	.102	.561	1.061	.869	1.294
Retired	-.318	.086	.000	.727	.614	.862
Unemployed	-.199	.096	.037	.819	.679	.988
Other	-.265	.180	.141	.767	.539	1.091
Social class	.063	.025	.011	1.065	1.015	1.118

[6] Influential cases: Cook's distance [> 1], Average leverage [> 2 (k+1) / n], DF Beta [>1].

[7] Outliers & Residuals: Standardized residuals [any > 3. 1 % > 2.5, 5 % > 2].

Religion	.183	.023	.000	1.200	1.148	1.255`
Countries						
Britain	.502	.135	.000	1.652	1.269	2.151
Cyprus	1.258	.200	.000	3.519	2.377	5.207
Czech Republic	.349	.158	.027	1.418	1.041	1.932
Denmark	.550	.130	.000	1.734	1.343	2.238
Estonia	-.468	.155	.003	.627	.462	.849
Finland	.320	.139	.021	1.378	1.049	1.809
France	.571	.124	.000	1.771	1.390	2.256
Germany	.464	.152	.002	1.591	1.181	2.143
Greece	1.707	.206	.000	5.514	3.685	8.252
Hungary	.209	.131	.111	1.232	.953	1.594
Ireland	1.241	.140	.000	3.460	2.629	4.555
Latvia	.357	.143	.012	1.430	1.081	1.891
Netherlands	.669	.160	.000	1.951	1.426	2.671
Northern Ireland	.530	.118	.000	1.699	1.347	2.142
Poland	-1.056	.164	.000	.348	.252	.480
Portugal	.207	.147	.161	1.230	.921	1.642
Slovakia	-.428	.132	.001	.652	.503	.844
Slovenia	-.690	.148	.000	.502	.375	.670
Spain	.712	.134	.000	2.038	1.569	2.649
Compulsory voting	-1.024	.211	.000	.359	.237	.543
Constant	-5.030	.206	.000	.007	--	--

*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$

Note: In *employment status*, the *employed* individuals were used as the reference category. Austria was treated as the reference country. Belgium, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta and Sweden were excluded from the analysis due to missing values.

The beta's[8] indicated the relation between x (independent) and the logit of Y, and can be assessed like correlation; above zero higher, Y higher (positive) and below zero higher, Y lower (negative). The results indicated that the log odds of someone to vote/someone not to vote in the European Parliament elections were $\frac{Exp(B)}{1+Exp(B)} = \frac{6.86}{1+6.86} = 13.72$.

[8] Similar to the OLS regression, the prediction equation is: Log (p/1-p).
$=b0+b1*x_1+b2*x_2+b3*x_3+\ldots+bk*x_k$, b: the values for the logistic regression equation for predicting voter turnout form the independent variables. They are log-odds units.

Variables of main interest. Watching a program about the elections on television and political talk were both significant predictors of voter turnout, whereas the frequency of watching general television news was not. According to the results, the likelihood of somebody to vote was not significantly positively related to general television news exposure, with log odds of .008. On the other hand, when the analysis was broken down by frequency of watching a program about the elections on television, the results revealed positive patterns; the likelihood of somebody to vote was significantly positively related to television news exposure with log odds of .129. The odds ratio for watching a program about the elections on television indicated that when holding all other variables constant, for each one unit increase on the three point television scale, the odds of voting increased by 1.137/1+1.137=2.27 times. That said the hypothesis that the higher frequency of television news watching tends to increase voter turnout rates was partly supported. As the results indicated, general television news watching was not significantly positively associated with higher levels of voting, whereas the results on watching a program about the elections on television were in line with the hypothesized relationship between television news exposure and voter turnout, indicating that more frequent exposure to television news was associated with higher levels of turnout in the elections.

When the analysis was broken down by frequency of discussing about politics with friends and family, the results indicated that the likelihood of somebody to vote was significantly positively related to the amount of political talk, with log odds of .274. The odds ratios for political talk indicated that when holding all other variables constant, for each one unit increase on the three political talk scale, the odds of voting

increased by 1.315/1+1.315= 2.63 times. The interpretative graphs for television news exposure and political talk are presented below (Figures 3, 4 and 5).

Figure 3. *Days of week watching TV*

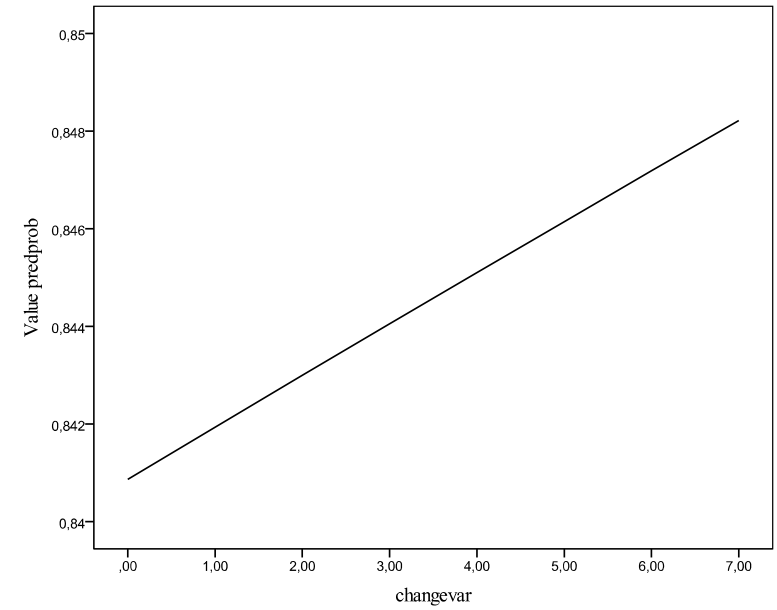


Figure 4. *Watching a program about the elections on TV*

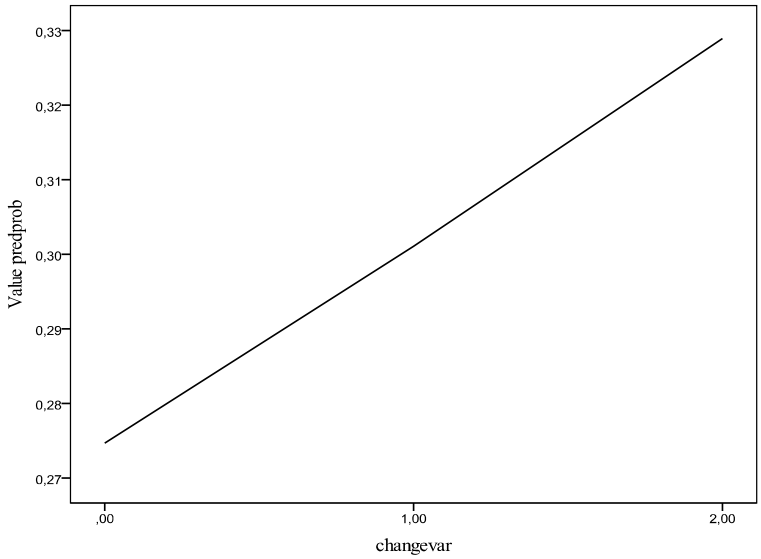
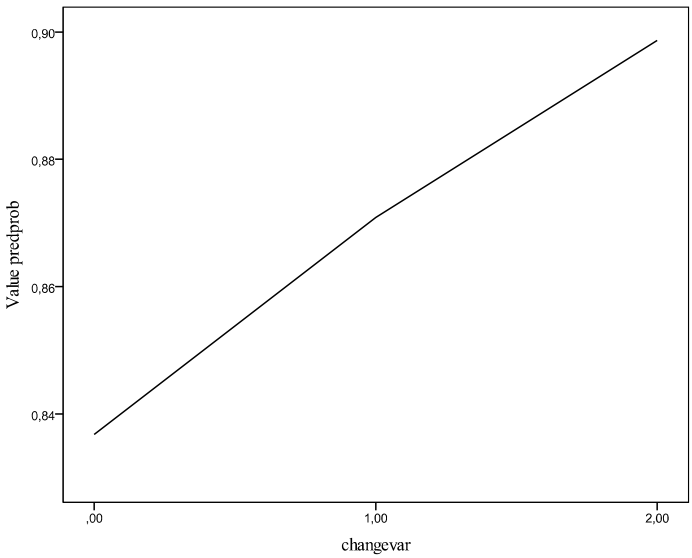


Figure 5. *Political Talk*



Political motivations. Of the political motivation factors, trust in European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, interest in EU elections and general interest in politics as well as partisanship were all significant predictors of voter turnout, whereas trust in the European Commission and confidence that the decisions of EU would be in the interest of respondents' countries did not significantly predict whether respondents voted or not in the EP elections of 2004.

The analysis indicated that the likelihood of somebody to vote was significantly positively related to trust in the European Parliament, with log odds of .060. The odds ratios for trust in the European Parliament indicated that when holding all other variables constant, for every one unit increase on the nine point trust scale, the odds of voting increased by 1.062/1+1.062= 2.12 times. The odds ratios indicated that the more one trusted the European Parliament, the more likely he or she was to vote. Furthermore, the likelihood of someone to vote was significantly positively related to trust in the Council of Ministers, with log odds of .050. The odds ratios for trust in the Council of Ministers indicated that when holding all other variables constant, for each one point increase on the nine point trust scale, the odds of voting increased by 1.052/1+1.052= 2.10 times. Thus, the more one trusted the Council of Ministers, the more likely he or she was to vote.

The overall results of trust towards these institutions demonstrated that the more people trusted the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, the more likely they were to turnout. Thus, the hypothesized positive relationship between political trust in institutions and higher voter turnout was supported. On the other hand, the likelihood of somebody to vote was not significantly negatively related to trust in the European

Commission and confidence that decisions of European Union would be in the interest of respondents' countries, with log odds of .015 and .009 respectively.

Also, the likelihood that someone would vote was significantly positively related to interest in EU elections, with log odds of .651. The odds ratio for interest in the elections indicated that when holding all other variable constant, for each one point increase on the four point trust in the elections scale, the odds of voting increased by 1.918/1+1.918= 3.83 times. Thus, the more interest one showed towards the elections, the more likely he or she was to vote. Continually, the likelihood of somebody to vote was significantly positively related to general interest in politics, with log odds of .127. The odds ratio for general interest in politics indicated that when holding all other variables constant, for each one point increase on the four point interest scale, the odds of voting increased by 1.135/1+1.135 = 2.27 times. The odds ratio showed that the more interested one was in politics, the more likely he or she was to vote in the elections. The results confirmed the hypothesized positive relationship between interest in politics and higher voter turnout.

Finally, the results of the analysis indicated that the likelihood of somebody to vote was positively significantly related to partisanship, with log odds of .008. The odds ratio for partisanship indicated that when holding all other variables constant, for each one point increase on the two point partisanship scale, the odds of voting increased by 1.008/1+1.008 = 0.50 times. In short, the odds ratios indicated that those who belonged to a party were more likely to vote in the elections than those who did not.

Socioeconomic factors. The results on retrospective sociotropic economic evaluation indicated that the better one evaluated the past economic performance of his

or her country's government, the more likely he or she was to vote. According to the proposed model, the likelihood of somebody to vote was significantly positively related to past economic evaluations of respondents' countries' economy, with log odds .063. The odds ratio for retrospective economic evaluation indicated than when holding all other variables constant, for each one point increase on the five point retrospective economic evaluation scale the odds of voting increased by 1.065/1+1.065= 0.51 times.

On the other hand, the analysis showed that the likelihood of somebody to vote was not significantly positively related to future economic evaluations of respondents' countries economy, with log odds of .041. Finally, the likelihood of somebody to vote was significantly positively related to self-reported social class, with log odds of .063. The odds ratio indicated that when holding all other variables constant, those who belonged to upper classes voted by 1.065/1+1.065 = 0.51 times more than those who belonged to lower classes. Furthermore, the likelihood of someone to vote was significantly positively associated to the age when a person stopped full-time education, with log odds of .022. The odds ratio indicated that when holding all other variables constant, for each one unit increase on the age when a respondent stopped full-time education, the odds of voting increased by 1.022/1+1.022 = 2.04 times. In short, the odds ratios showed that the more educated someone was the more likely he or she was to vote in the EU elections.

Demographic characteristics. Age and attendance at religious services were significant predictors of voter turnout, whereas gender was not. The likelihood of someone to vote was significantly positively related to the age of the respondents, with log odds of .000. The odds ratio for the age of the respondents indicated that when holding all other variables constant, for each one point increase on the age scale, the

odds of voting increased by 1.000/1+1.000 = 0.50 times. In short, the odds ratio showed that older individuals were more likely to vote. On the other hand, according to the proposed model, the likelihood of somebody to vote was not significantly positively related to respondents' gender. The results indicated that females were not significantly more likely to vote than males, with log odds of .029.

As for the employment status of the respondents, the results indicated that respondents who identified their employment status as self-employed, where more likely to vote in the elections than the employed, with log odds of .185. The results indicated that when holding all other variables constant, self-employed individuals were 1.203/1+1.203 = 2.4 times more likely to vote than the employed ones. Respondents who identified their employment status as working in the household were not significantly more likely to vote in the elections than the employed, with log odds of .059. Retired individuals were significantly less likely to vote in the elections than the employed, with log odds of .318. The odds ratio indicated that when holding all other variables constant, retired respondents were .727/1+.727 = 1.45 times less likely to vote than the employed. Unemployed individuals were also significantly less likely to vote than the employed, with log odds of .199. The odds ratio indicated that when holding al other variables constant, unemployed individuals were .767/1+.767 = 1.5 times less likely to vote than the employed ones. Also, respondents who identified their employment status as "*other*" were not significantly less likely to vote than the employed ones, with log odds of .265.

Finally, the likelihood of somebody to vote was significantly positively related to frequency of attendance at religious services, with log odds of .183. The odds ratio indicated that when holding all other variables constant, for each one unit increase on

the five point attendance at religious services scale the odds of voting increased by 1.200/1+1.200 = 2.4 times. Thus, the hypothesis that regular church attendance would be strongly associated with a higher probability of voting was confirmed.

Country differences

Figure 2 illustrates the country-specific turnout rates of the European Parliamentary elections in 2004. As can be seen from the figure, on average, more than half of the people voted within each country. Greece and Cyprus were the upper exception due to obligatory voting, reporting an average percentage of voters of over 85%. Germany and Ireland also presented high turnout rates in the EP elections (close to 65% and 85% respectively). On the other hand, Slovakia, Poland and Slovenia presented the lowest average percentages of voters (35%, 40% and 40% respectively). Finally, Austria, Britain, France and Latvia, presented an average percentage of voters of around 60%.

5. Conclusion-Discussion

This paper was primarily concerned with the impact of television news exposure and political talk on voter turnout, in the context of the European Parliamentary elections of 2004. This study provides insights into the first elections in the enlarged EU. Nearly 360 million voters from 25 Member states were invited to elect their representatives to the European Parliament from 10 to 13 June of 2004. However, the results did not indicate a high overall voter turnout in the 2004 European elections (61.5%). The low and constantly decreasing turnout at the European elections shows the tendency of citizens to not vote for their representatives in the European Parliament (Clark, 2010). The voter turnout at the European Parliament elections has been decreasing since the first direct election in 1979. Generally, European elections are usually characterized by a larger number of blank or invalid ballots than the national ones, as well as Euroskepticism in certain Member States, factors that might partly explain the low turnout results of this study.

Voting is the central element of democratic political systems. The EU is a democratic entity, so a high turnout in European elections is a prerequisite for a well-functioning democracy in the EU. But which are the individual as well as social factors that contribute to voter turnout or abstention from it? From a standpoint of democratic citizenship, media consumption, as well as political talk, both play a crucial role in people's electoral participation. In line with the expectations, the results of the current study showed that both television news exposure regarding the elections as well as political talk between friends and family had a significant positive impact on voter turnout.

5.1 Results

Television News exposure. Media play a crucial role in the democratic political process, especially during election campaigns. Through an extensive EU news coverage especially in the weeks before the European elections, media can potentially increase the levels of political information of voters, helping them reduce the costs of voting and boosting their electoral participation rate. The results of this study were in line with previous key literature that has identified a positive impact of television news exposure on voting. Specifically, the analysis showed that elections-related news consumption was a significant and positive predictor for voter turnout, with the odds ratio indicating that people who more frequently watched a program about the elections on television were more likely to vote in comparison to those who watched less. On the contrary, the frequency of watching general television news was not a significant predictor for voter turnout. Thus, this paper was able to partly support the first hypothesis that people with increased levels of television news exposure will tend to present higher levels of voter turnout.

Key studies in electoral participation confirm these findings; in Britain, Norris (1998) has found that frequently watching television news is strongly associated with increased levels of political participation. Also, studies across Europe have shown that citizens rely on the media for information regarding European affairs, the EU and European integration. More than two thirds of the European citizens consistently name television as their most important source of information and identify it as their preferred method for receiving the news about the EU (European Commission, 2002). It seems that the visibility of EU news, the European nature of the news and the tone of the campaign (how the news evaluates the EU and its institutions) as the main three aspects

of media coverage that influence public perception about the EU, can potentially increase electoral turnout in European elections (Semetko, 2003). The generalization of these findings outside the European context might be possible, as previous studies in the US have also identified the positive impact of television exposure on voting, as it can reduce the costs of voting and increase electoral turnout by providing information about the elections and candidates (Gerber, Karlan and Bergan, 2006; Goldstein and Freedman, 2002; Iyengar and Simon, 2000).

Political Talk. The positive relationship between discussing about politics with social circles and participation in civic activities has been well documented in previous research. Similarly, in line with the expectations, in the current study the overall turnout increased when frequency of political talk was taken into account. Discussing politics with friends and family was a significant and positive predictor for voter turnout. The odds ratio indicated that people who more frequently discussed about politics where more likely to vote. Thus, the second hypothesis of the study that people with higher levels of political talk would tend to present higher levels of voter turnout was also supported. Previous key studies on electoral turnout support these findings. Of the most influential scholars is Klofstad who argues that political talk might increase overall self-reported turnout in elections in three ways; by providing individuals with information on how to become active, by increasing engagement with politics and by explicitly asking individuals to participate in civic activities. Intense interpersonal communication with persons who want to vote and who express clear party preferences can potentially encourage peoples' intention to participate in the elections (Klofstad, 2007).

Political motivations. The analysis of levels of trust towards the institutions of the European Union showed mixed results; while trust towards the European Parliament was a significant and positive predictor for higher voter turnout in the elections, trust towards the European Commission and the Council of Ministers as well as confidence that the decisions of the European Union would be in the interest of respondents' countries were not. The results regarding the European Parliament were in line with the expectations, indicating that the more one trusted the European Parliament, the more he or she would vote in the elections. This finding was in line with previous key studies on political trust and electoral participation which have provided quite convincing evidence that political trust has strong effects on electoral behavior. This study was able to reconfirm Setala (2007) and Cox (2003) who have indicated that greater trust and satisfaction increases citizens' likelihood to vote. People showing more trust in the European Parliament in particular reported higher turnout in the elections.

Also, in line with the expectations, both interest in the European elections and general interest in politics were found to be significant and positive predictors for voter turnout. The odds ratio indicated that those who showed more interest in the elections and in politics were more likely to vote than those who were not interested that much. The results reconfirmed previous findings claiming that interest in politics is a consistent determinant of voter turnout. Voters with greater interest in politics are being identified to show greater turnout rates, as being interested in politics significantly reduces the costs of voting, because the voter already processes information about the political process. Political interest might possibly increase the benefits from voting and as such, individuals can derive greater psychological rewards from it (Denny and Doyle, 2005).

When the analysis was focused on partisanship, the odds ratio confirmed the expectations that party identifiers were significantly more likely to participate in the elections. Key studies in previous research shows the same tendency; individuals who report strong identification with a political party are more likely to vote. If a party encourages political action, those who belong to it will be more likely to turnout. Since it is assumed that every party encourages its adherents to vote, it is expected that party identifiers will be more likely to engage in turnout in elections, than those who do not identify with a particular party (Finkel and Opp, 1991).

Socioeconomic factors. Past economic evaluations of the economy indicated results that confirmed the expectations; people who better evaluated the past economic conditions of their country's economy were more likely to vote than those who did not evaluated the economy as good. Also, self-reported social class significantly predicted whether one would vote in the elections. Respondents belonging to upper social classes voted in higher percentages, reconfirming in that way Roger's (2005) arguments that the rich vote more than the poor, and Horn's (2011) findings that in European elections upper classes participate more than the lower classes. On the other hand, when the analysis was broken down by evaluations of future economic conditions of respondents' countries, the results did not indicate a statistical significant relationship with turnout in the elections.

Additionally, the results on the age when respondents finished full-time education were in line with previous literature claiming that the more people are educated, the more aware they are of politics and thus, the more they vote. Knowledge

and critical thinking skills facilitate greater understanding of politics, and it makes for easier navigation of voter registration requirements (Burden, 2009). Though education, the necessary cognitive skills that help voters to process complex political information are developed, such as decoding sophisticated political rhetoric, understanding the issues at stake or selecting the appropriate party or candidate running for office (Nie, 1996). For European elections in specific, the findings reconfirmed previous researchers who have found that in European elections well-educated citizens are less prone to abstention than people of lower education (Matilla, 2003; Malkopoulou, 2009).

Demographic characteristics. Age and attendance at religious services were both positively significant predictors for voter turnout in the European elections. Elderly citizens and people who often attended church meetings, were more likely to vote than younger citizens and those who were not attending religious services that often. Gender was not found to be a statistically significant predictor for voter turnout in the elections.

Finally, the results regarding employment status reconfirmed Spiller's and Verba's observations that employed and self-employed individuals vote more than the unemployed, students or the retired ones (Verba, 1995b). Economic well-being seems to be related to voting participation. On the other hand, economic duress may reduce a person's capacity to participate in politics because the poor and unemployed are financially strained The reason might be that economic adversity is stressful; it causes a preoccupation with personal economic well-being, and as a result, the citizen might withdraw from such external matters like politics. (Rosenstone, 1982).

5.2 Importance of study

The intent of this study was to report how the media shape public perceptions across the EU member states in order to better assess the possible role that the media play in enhancing EU democracy. Structured knowledge about the media's coverage of EU elections is only emerging and there is virtually no knowledge about which factors closely interrelated with media consumption mobilize or demobilize people to vote. Studies of the European public sphere tend to focus on mass media coverage and the way it influences peoples' participation in politics (Claes H. de Vreese, 2006; Semetko, 2003). This study contributes to the existing debate on the media and the EU public opinion by taking into account another important factor influencing public perceptions about politics that other studies have not yet examined in the same study with media consumption; frequent political talk, that is discussion about politics with social circles that has been found to be beneficial for democratic processes, as through it people connect their personal experiences with the world of politics.

Although this analysis buttresses earlier conclusions about the relevance of television news exposure and political talk to explain voter turnout, it goes further to show the relationship in the context of the 2004 European Parliamentary elections which has not been studied that often. The relationship between television, talk and voter turnout has been examined in the past, but mostly in national contexts, with only limited cross-national European research. This paper offers an explanatory investigation on the structure of voter turnout in European elections, measuring television news exposure as well as political talk between citizens in the EU.

This research attempts to contribute to the debate on the European public sphere by utilizing a rich dataset of 20 member states of the European Union, which allows the inclusion of a number of political motivations, socioeconomic as well as demographic factors that matter for electoral participation. The inclusion of such numerous variables manages to present a clearer image of the factors that matter for citizens when they vote in European elections. The researcher was unable to find studies including all the variables that were taken into account in this study, making this study useful to be included in the existing literature. In addition, the broader importance of these results comes from what they imply about the potential for participatory politics in European Union.

Continually, this study differs, as by using such measures (television news exposure, political talk, political motivations and socioeconomic factors) it offers insights into the intrinsic motivations of voting and helps explain variations in voter turnout at the individual level. Also, as a secondary focus, the data reported in this study are useful resources for researchers examining voter turnout in elections and media influences as well as political talk in the context of European Union.

Finally, in studies of voter turnout across Europe, there exists the case of obligatory voting. Due to compulsory voting in some of the EU member states, respondents might answer that they vote, even if they do not, under fear of state penalties. The researcher was unable to find specific studies controlling for this fact, thus, it was a meaningful act to create a new variable with a dichotomous indicator of voter turnout for the countries with compulsory voting in European elections (Cyprus and Greece). The European Union Information Website (EurActiv 2004) and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA 2011) database

provide information on voter turnout rates in different countries; in countries with compulsory voting in European elections (Belgium, Cyprus, Greece and Luxembourg) these rates were significantly higher (*M*=80%) than in counties with no compulsory voting (*M*=41%).

5.3 Limitations

However, this study has a number of limitations which should not be neglected. The researcher used a secondary analysis to examine the hypothesized relationship between television news exposure and voter turnout and political talk and voter turnout. However, some more complex explanations for the outcome variable might be lost when using a survey in a secondary analysis; particular information that the researcher would like to have may not have been collected and the variables might have been defined and categorized differently. For instance, it would have been useful to measure the content of the information received by television news as well as the content of the discussion between the respondents. Measuring the content of the messages communicated through television news and political discussion-whether they are positive or negative towards certain policies, politicians and the EU-it would have been possible to provide some more complex explanations on the reasons that mobilize or demobilize people to turnout in elections. However, the unavailability of such data made it impossible to do so.

Also, this study is limited due to the exclusion criteria and the number of cases. The researcher decided to take out of the analysis the variable of income, because of missing cases in nineteen out of the twenty six countries included in the original

analysis. Also, a number of other variables were missing in certain counties, making it impossible to take them into account (Appendix, Table A4). It has to be kept in mind though, that when income was included into the analysis to test its impact on the overall model, the results did not change meaningfully.

In general terms, income has been identified as an important factor predicting turnout in national as well as in European elections. Excluding income from the analysis posed limitations for the generalization of the results, as, from the population of the original study (N = 28.861), the researcher was able to undertake the analysis with less than half (N = 10.520). There were two possible ways to deal with this problem; either to include income in the analysis and take into account only a very small number of countries, or exclude income and lose the rest of the participants. The researcher decided to choose the second option, as keeping a very few number of countries would not have made it possible for a meaningful comparison of the turnout rates between the different member states in the EU. The researcher was aware of the fact that the sample would possibly be characterized as biased, but keeping the majority of the countries in the analysis was a more meaningful act for a study measuring electoral turnout in the European elections across its member states.

Additionally, the generalization ability of the results outside Europe is weak due to the fact that is concerns only European countries in the context of the 2004 European Parliament elections. This research is limited because it is confined to 20 countries, living aside some others. Whether television news exposure and political talk would have the same impact on voter turnout in national elections in different time periods and spatial grounds is questionable.

Furthermore, although the author claimed to develop a comprehensive causal model between television news exposure and voter turnout, he was unable to do a causal test, due to the unavailability of data that would allow doing so. Finally, the European elections seem, as yet, to be far from the forefront of the thoughts of European citizens, who are preoccupied by immediate economic problems. Accordingly, their voting criteria combine European and national issues without any real distinction. Europeans are inclined to put their economic concerns at the centre of the electoral campaign. The key question is therefore to determine whether these elections are truly European or whether they simply represent the accumulation of different national elections.

Finally, the polling date plays a negative role on voter turnout, given the supranational scale of EU elections. A rather discouraging factor has been the preference for the month of June, when schools and university holidays begin in northern states. Thus, lots of voters that might otherwise have been present in the elections, might have not voted, which limits the number of the overall respondents and the generalization ability of the results, for the overall population of the member states of the European Union. A European Parliament proposal pending since 1998 to bring forward the elections form June to May has never been followed up.

5.4 Contributions for future research

The contributions of the present study for future research are worth mentioning; as a secondary focus, the data reported here might be a useful resource for researchers examining public opinion, elections, media and political talk influences in the context of the EU. Future researchers in political behavior and communication might find the

results on the impact of political talk particularly interesting, as no existing studies (at least to the author's knowledge) have added political talk to media consumption in order to examine voter turnout. Thus, these results might offer the ground for the investigation on the interrelation of these two important factors influencing political participation in democratic societies.

The results of the analysis that identified television news exposure and political talk as explanatory factors for voter turnout, could offer the ground for future research on the effects of television and discussion on peoples' participation in politics, regardless of geographical and time limits. The agreements as well as the disjunctions between existing theory and the findings in this paper lead to an obvious question; how significant is the amount of watching television news and discussing politics for electoral participation, but also, how relative determinants of voting participation are partisanship, the level of education as well as interest in the elections and in politics and trust in various political institutions in European elections? Without doubt, these questions must be reexamined, to test the current results' strength in different time periods and geographical spaces. Therefore, future studies must consider both individual-level and social-level explanations of individual behavior in elections, in order for researchers to extend the understanding of why individuals choose to participate or abstain in the processes of democratic governance.

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7. Appendix

Table A1 *Frequencies*

Countries	**N**
Austria	1010
Belgium	889
Cyprus	1500
Czech Republic	500
Denmark	889
Estonia	1317
Finland	1606
France	1406
Germany	596
Greece	500
Hungary	1200
Ireland	1154
Italy	1553
Latvia	1000
Lithuania	1005
Luxembourg	1335
The Netherlands	1586
Northern Ireland	1582
Poland	960
Portugal	1000
Slovakia	1063
Slovenia	1002
Spain	1208
Sweden	2100
N	28861

Table A2 *Descriptive Statistics*

	Mean	St. Dev
Turnout in the 2004 EP elections	.61	.487
Days of the week watch TV	5.63	1.977
Watch a program about the elections on TV	1.88	.678
Political talk with friends and family	1.88	.691
Interested in EP elections	2.24	.928
Interested in politics	2.52	.872
Confidence to the decisions of the EU	2.31	.760
Trust in European Parliament	4.60	2.281
Trust in European Commission	4.61	2.233
Trust in the Council of Ministers	4.49	2.216
Retrospective economic evaluation	2.76	1.002
Prospective economic evaluation	2.95	.963
Partisanship	41.36	45.23
Age stopped full-time education	19.34	5.084
Gender	1.50	.500
Employment Status	2.74	1.955
Social class	2.38	1.085
Attendance at religious services	2.61	1.155
Observations	10.520	

Table A3 *Voter and nonvoter comparisons on predictor variables*

	Voters M(SD)	Nonvoters M (SD)	*t*-test	*p*-value
General TV	5.85 (1.81)	5.27 (2.17)	14.66	$p < .001$
Elective TV	2.01(0.66)	1.67 (0.65)	25.24	$P < .001$
Political Talk	2.01 (0.68)	1.66 (0.66)	25.89	$P < .001$
Trust EP	4.93 (2.21)	4.08 (2.29)	18.87	$P < .001$
Trust EC	4.88 (2.16)	4.19(2.28)	15.79	$P < .001$
Trust CM	4.77 (2.16)	4.03 (2.23)	16..95	$P < .001$
Interest in Elections	2.51(0.89)	1.80(0.80)	41.18	$P < .001$
Interest in Politics	2.71(0.83)	2.21(0.85)	30.19	$P < .001$
Confidence	2.38 (0.75)	2.20(0.79)	12.27	$P < .001$
RSEE	2.85 (0.99)	2.62 (1.00)	11.34	$P < .001$
PSEE	3.02 (0.95)	2.85 (0.97)	9.04	$P < .001$
Age	49.15 (15.5)	43.10 (15.36)	19.58	$P < .001$
Education	19.66 (5.41)	18.84 (4.461	8.08	$P < .001$
Religion	2.74 (1.15)	2.40 (1.13)	15.02	$P < .001$
Social class	2.47 (1.08)	2.22 (1.08)	11.63	$P < .001$

Note RSEE = Retrospective socio economic evaluation, PSEE = Prospective socio Economic, Education = age stopped with education, religion = attendance at religion services

Figure A1 *Vote in ep elections * days of week watch TV*

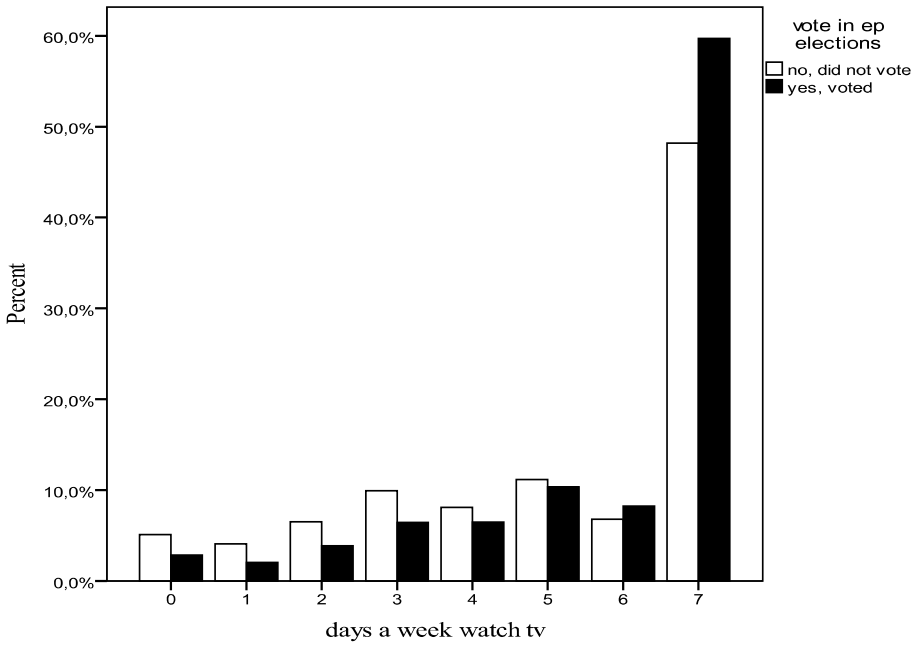

Figure A2 *Vote in ep elections * watch a program about the elections on TV*

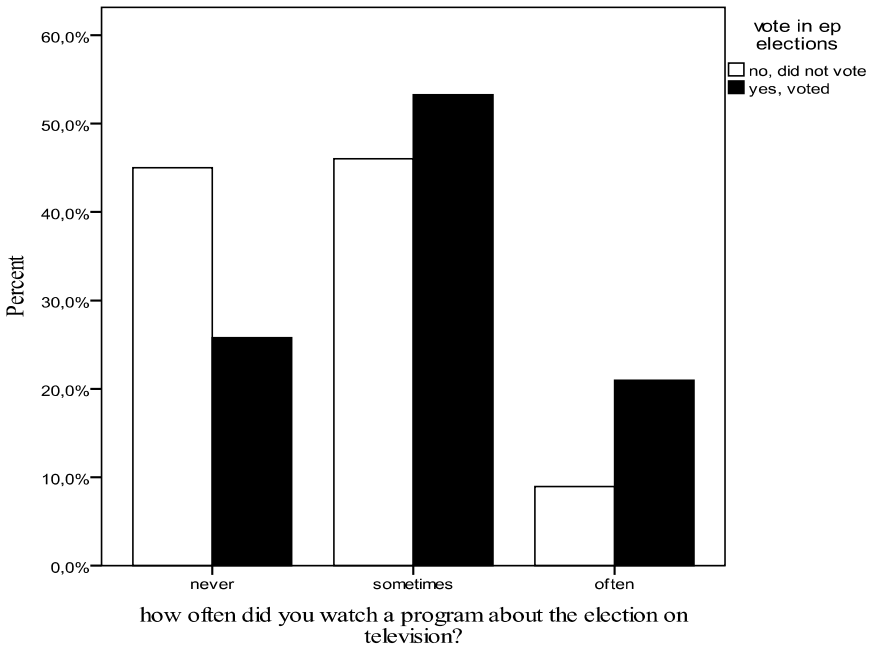

Figure A3 *Voted in ep elections * political talk*

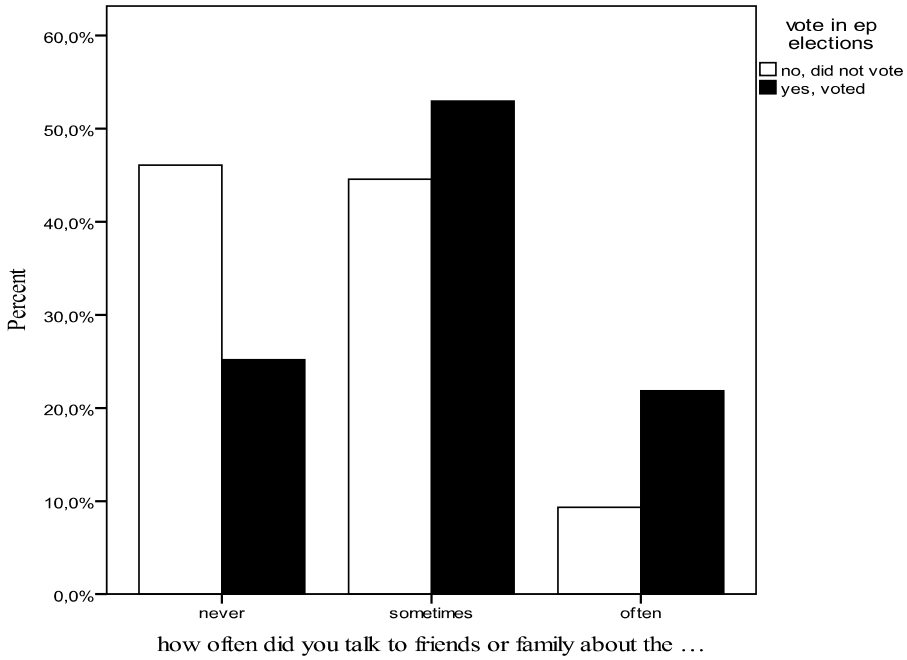

Table A4 *Missing Cases*

Countries	*Belgium*	*Italy*	*Luxemburg*	*Malta*	*Lithuania*	*Sweden*
Variables						
Vote in elections						
Days of week/TV						
Program about election on TV						
Politic talk						
Trust in EU						
Trust in EC						
Trust in CM						
EU interest of (country)						
Interested in elections						
Partisanship						
Year of birth						
Gender						
Social class						
Religion						
Income						

Table A5 *Recoding*

	Type of Coding	**Original coding**	**New coding**
Gender	Reverse Coding	1 (male) 0 (female)	0 (male) 1 (female)
Employment status	Reverse coding	1 (self-employed) 2 (employed) 3 (student) 4 (working in the household) 5 (retired) 6 (unemployed) 7 (other)	0 (employed) 1 (self-employed) 2 (student) 3 (working in the household) 4 (retired) 5 (unemployed) 6 (other)
Social class	Reverse coding	1 (working class) 2 (lower middle class) 3 (middle class) 4 (upper middle class) 5 (upper class)	0 (upper class) 1 (upper middle class) 2 (middle class) 3 (lower middle class) 4 (working class)
Attendance at religious services	Reverse coding	1 (several times a week) 2 (once a week) 3 (a few times a year) 4 (once a year or less) 5 (never)	0 (never) 1 (once a year or less) 2 (a few times a year) 3 (once a week) 4 (several times a week)
Trust in European Parl.		1 (no trust at all) To 10 (complete trust)	0 (no trust at all) To 9 (complete trust)
Trust in European Com.		1 (no trust at all) To 10 (complete trust)	0 (no trust at all) To 9 (complete trust)
Trust in Council of Min.		1 (no trust at all) To 10 (complete trust)	0 (no trust at all) To 9 (complete trust)
EU the interest of (country)	Reverse coding	1 (a great deal of confidence) 2 (a fair amount) 3 (not very much) 4 (no confidence at all)	0 (no confidence at all) 1 (not very much) 2 (a fair amount) 3 (a great deal of confidence)
Interested in the elections	Reverse coding	1 (very) 2 (somewhat) 3 (a little)	0 (not at all) 1 (a little) 2 (somewhat)

		4 (not at all)	3 (very)
Interest In politics	Reverse coding	1 (very)	0 (not at all)
		2 (somewhat)	1 (a little)
		3 (a little)	2 (somewhat)
		4 (not at all)	3 (very)
Partisanship	Simplified coding	1 (party 1) – 34 (party 34)	1 (yes)
		96 (no)	0 (no)
Retrospective and prospective economic voting	Reverse coding	1 (a lot better)	0 (a lot worse)
		2 (a little better)	1 (a little worse)
		3 (stayed the same)	2 (stayed the same)
		4 (a little worse)	3 (a little better)
		5 (a lot worse)	4 (a lot better)
TV news exposure (elections)	Reverse coding	1 (often)	0 (never)
		2 (sometimes)	1 (sometimes)
		3 (never)(sometimes	2 (often)
Political Talk	Reverse coding	1 (often)	0 (never)
		2 (sometimes)	1 (sometimes)
		3 (never)	2 (often)

Questions from the Questionnaire of the voters' study - European Elections Study 2004

A. Question on voter turnout:

Q11. A lot of people abstained in the European Parliament elections of June 13th, while others voted. Did you cast your vote?

1. Yes, voted
2. No, did not vote
3. dk
4. na

B. Questions on television news exposure:

Q5. Normally, how many days of the week do you watch the news on television?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 (dk) (na)

Q8a. How often did you watch a program about the election on television, during the three or four weeks before the European election? Often, sometimes or never?

1. often
2. sometimes
3. never
4. dk
5. na

C. Question on political talk:

Q8c. How often did you talk to friends or family about the election, during the three or four weeks before the European election?

1. often
2. sometimes
3. never
4. dk
5. na

D. Questions on political trust:

Q15. Please tell me on a score of 1-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 1 means that you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust.

1. The European Parliament
2. The European Commission
3. The Council of Ministers

Q31. How much confidence do you have that decisions made by the European Union will be in the interest of your country?

1. a great deal of confidence
2. a fair amount
3. not very much
4. no confidence at all
5. dk
6. na

E. Questions on political interest:

Q9. Thinking back to just before the elections for the European Parliament were held, how interested were you in the campaign for those elections: very, somewhat, a little, or not at all?

1. Very

2. Somewhat
3. A little
4. Not at all

Q21. To what extent would you say you are interested in politics? Very, somewhat, a little or not at all?

1. Very
2. Somewhat
3. A little
4. Not at all
5. dk
6. na

F. Question on partisanship:

Q30a. Do you feel yourself to be close to any particular party?

G. Questions on economic voting:

Q17. What do you think about the economy? Compared to 12 months ago, do you think that the general economic situation of your country is:

1. A lot better
2. A little better
3. Stayed the same
4. A little worse
5. A lot worse
6. dk
7. na

Q17a. Over the next two months, how do you think the general economic situation of your country will be?

1. A lot better
2. A little better
3. Stayed the same
4. A little worse
5. A lot worse
6. dk
7. na