Abstract

Turnout as the most frequent form of political participation is often supposed to be linked to a relevant degree of political information of citizens. Non-voting on the other hand, is often assumed to be a decision caused by indifference or uninformedness. These stereotypes notwithstanding, there may be good reasons for informed citizens not to cast a vote, just as uninformed citizens may have good reasons to actually do cast a vote. This paper tries to combine two different views of the effects of political information on electoral participation: (a) the commonplace argument of participatory studies that informed citizens are more likely to take part in the political process and (b) the remark of partisan dealignment approaches that electoral behaviour of modern and cognitive mobilized voters is less stable and predictable. Heteroskedastic Probit models of electoral participation in the European Parliament Election 1994 demonstrate that political information increase the likelihood of turnout and decrease the predictability of the decision at the same time.
1. Two Effects of Political Information

Empirical studies of political participation frequently revealed that the likelihood of turnout as well as the likelihood of participation in general is increased by political information (e.g. Milbrath, 1965; Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Palfrey & Poole, 1987). According to traditional argumentation, information heightens stability of political attitudes, it allows for distinctive party preferences, and therefore increases the probability of turnout. Furthermore, well informed respondents feel not only more competent to vote but are also more likely to have positive evaluations towards the democratic process, what also might mobilize them to turnout (Berelson et al., 1954; Campbell et al., 1954; Campbell et al., 1960).

Studies of ‘electoral change’, on the other hand, demonstrate that traditional patterns in electoral behaviour are realigning, to a certain extent as a result of increasing levels of cognitive mobilization in recent decades.\(^1\) Turnout was high when social constraints and party loyalties were still active but became in recent decades more variable and dependent on specific circumstances of an election (Dalton et al., 1984; Franklin et al., 1992).\(^2\) In this sense, political informedness also has further implications for the choice of whether citizens cast a vote or abstain: politically informed respondents do not simply follow longstanding loyalties but re-consider costs and benefits of casting a ballot in each election again.\(^3\) Presumably, they are more sensitive to the specific context of an election, like the closeness of the race, the possibility of coalition governments or political scandals. The central hypothesis of this paper is that political information not only increases the likelihood of turnout as it is usually argued, but that informed citizens also

---

1 Increasing educational levels and easy accessible political information by modern mass media are often mentioned in this respect (Dalton et al., 1984).
2 In addition to this, labelled by the term of the ‘participatory revolution’, scholars state that the increase in political informedness of electorates broadened the repertoire of political participation, especially to unconventional forms of participation (Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Kaase, 1984; Fuchs, 1991). It is argued that highly mobilized citizens increasingly discover electoral abstention as a way to express political preferences or protest effectively. (Kleinhenz, 1995)
3 Examples for stable turnout caused by longstanding loyalties could be party attachments but also civic duties. Voters participate in elections because they feel obliged to fulfil their duties as ‘good’ citizens or party supporters (Campbell et al., 1954; Campbell et al., 1960; Almond & Verba, 1963).
base their decision to turnout on more considerations, which makes their less predictable and more uncertain.\(^4\)

The hypothesis is general in its scope and should therefore be tested across different societies and different levels of electoral behaviour. The European Election Study 1994 (EES’94)\(^5\) and the Dutch National Election Study 1994 (NES’94)\(^6\) are suitable data sources in this respect. The assumption will firstly be tested for turnout in European elections in a pooled model across 12 European countries.\(^7\) Secondly, the results of turnout in European elections will be compared with participation in national and local elections, as illustrated by the single country case the Netherlands. The Dutch sample of the EES’94 and the NES’94 appear highly comparable since all three elections were held between March and June 1994. Besides, starting from European elections is also sensible for the reason that they are commonly described as low information elections (Blumer, 1984).\(^8\) Thus, effects of political information are presumably less apparent in European

\(^{4}\) As will be elaborated later, uncertainty is conceptualised by the residual variance of statistical models explaining turnout. It is therefore expected that models of turnout produce more residual variance for well-informed- than for less-informed respondents. There are two reasons possible why the decision to turnout or abstain may become less predictable or uncertain: either considerations which are central for the explanation of turnout among well-informed respondents are omitted in standard models of turnout, or, the decision of well-informed respondents is more random. Although the first explanation seems more plausible and is adopted in this paper, two arguments can be found in the literature, which support the explanation of information-generated randomness. According to Zaller (1992), instability is due to an overload of information, which remains unstructured in most cases. Even though Zaller made his argument with respect to attitude stability over time, the underlying idea may also apply to the decision to participate in the democratic process. Another possible explanation for decision-variability of informed persons is given by psychological studies of what is called the ‘tolerance of ambiguity’. Perhaps, uninformed respondents tend to make decisions consistent with given knowledge and to avoid deviations during choice processes. Informed respondents on the other hand show more often inconsistencies between considerations and choice. This may be explained by the acceptance of conflicting opinions in a complex decision making process. Informedness increases possibly the confidence in the own decision and in turn increases the likelihood that ambiguous decisions are made (Furnham & Ribchester, 1995).

\(^{5}\) The analyses of this paper are based on the 1st post-election survey of the EES’94. The data are obtained in a Union-wide, nationally representative mass survey administrated by telephone immediately after the European Parliament Election of 1994. For more detailed information and question wordings see the homepage of the EES: http://shakti.trincoll.edu/~mfrankli/EES.html

\(^{6}\) Analyses are based on the post-election survey of the Dutch National Election Study of 1994. For more information on the survey see Anker & Oppenhuis (1995).

\(^{7}\) Another possible data source providing data on the international comparison of electoral behaviour would be the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). The EES seems here preferable because it contains more variables on turnout. Besides, CSES focuses on a variety of institutional country differences, which possibly influence individual behaviour. Validating an individual level hypothesis across countries is therefore rather be obtained under less contextual variation of European elections.

\(^{8}\) Oppenhuis et al. (1996) describe electoral behaviour in 1st order national elections as driven by head and in 2nd order European elections as driven by either heart or boot depending on (dis-)satisfaction. The notion of 1st and 2nd order elections refers to the observation that voters tend to express evaluations of national politics also in 2nd order European elections rather than to respond to circumstances of the European Election itself (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Schmitt & Mannheimer, 1991; Schmitt & van der Eijk, 2001).
elections than in other forms of political participation, which provides a tough basis for testing the hypothesis.  

2. Design

This paragraph firstly has the aim to outline the construction of variables included in the model of turnout in the European parliament election of 1994 and secondly to explicate how uncertainty in choice processes can be tested empirically.

The selection of independent variables follows previous studies of turnout in general and European elections in particular (Oppenhuis, 1995; Franklin et al., 1996; Schmitt & van der Eijk, 2001). The model includes variables for the socio-demographic background of respondents, party adherence and campaign mobilization.

Furthermore, a dichotomous variable for compulsory voting controls for contextual variation in this respect and a variable of EU approval reflects the evaluation of the European Union in general.

Measuring political information is a task that is, due to the complexity as well as the latent form of the construct, not straightforward and moreover continuously under debate (Converse, 1964; Klingemann, 1979; Luskin, 1987). In the literature, different

---

9 Nie and Verba (1975) describe voting compared to other modes of political participation as less information demanding. Therefore, voting itself is a tough basis for testing the assumption of the uncertainty of participation.

10 To keep tables manageable, effects of individual characteristics age, class, church attendance, union membership and urbanisation are summarized in the ‘socio-demographic-effect’ variable. The variable contains linear predictions of turnout in the European election of 1994 of those social characteristics. The so called y-hat approach does not disturb the estimation of other independent variables in the overall model but combines the effects that need not necessarily be distinguished. In accordance to previous analyses, it turned out that age, class, church attendance, union membership, and residence in a rural area increase the likelihood of turnout. (compare for example Milbrath (1965) pp 110 ff)

11 ‘Party adherence’ is measured by a four point scale of (1) no -, (2) weak -, (3) moderate -, and (4) strong party adherences.

12 The additive 4 point scale of ‘Campaign Mobilization’ is constructed by three dichotomous variables of awareness of the European Election campaign with regard to (a) newspapers -, (b) TV and radio -, and (c) family and friends. The applied Mokken measurement model estimates a scalability measure of those three items of $H=0.47$ for the model of all 12 EU member states, weighting the data with equal importance of the included countries. Separate country analyses of the scale result in comparable scalability measures. $H$-measures between 0.3 and 0.4 are usually seen as weak scales, between 0.4 and 0.5 as moderate scales and $H$-values greater than 0.5 are usually supposed to reflect a strong underlying continuum. Mokken scaling was obtained by MSP (Mokken Scale Analysis for Polychotomous Items). For information on MSP see Debets & Brouwer (1989) and for more detailed descriptions of the method see Mokken (1971) and Molenaar (1982).

13 Compulsory voting in European elections can be found in Belgium, Greece, Italy and Luxemburg.

14 ‘EU Approval’ is measured by a 5 point scale constructed by 4 dichotomous items. The items are (a) whether the EU is a good thing, (b) whether the EU is beneficial for owns own country, (c) whether the respondent is in favour of the European Unification, and (d) whether the respondent is sorry for EU dissolution. Mokken scaling estimates scalability of $H=0.66$ in the overall model. The overall model was, again, weighted with equal importance of the 12 EU member states.
measures based on different indicators can be summarised under the term ‘political information’. I will use the term as a collective of all those concepts. Assuming that a unidimensional latent variable of the political information -level of respondents exists, it was tested for scalability of several indicators of the trait using a Mokken measurement model. As it turned out, only interest in politics and the ability to answer political knowledge questions can reliably be added up to a unidimensional scale, which will in the following analyses be used as measure for ‘political information’.

Political information presumably does not only consist of different elements but depends also on political domains. Alongside general political informedness, respondents might be informed in issues that are of high salience for them. High general political informedness not necessarily implies high informedness with regard to the political issue of interest and vice versa. This may particularly be of importance in European Elections, where EU-specific informedness is usually assumed to be exceptionally low. Therefore, effects of political information on turnout in European elections will be measured by a variable of general-, and a variable of EU-specific informedness of citizens. As it

---

15 Previous examples of measuring political knowledge, sophistication, conceptualisation, awareness or involvement are based often on indicators like education, political interest, attention to political issues, issue familiarity, self- and party placements on ideological scales, political knowledge, consumption of political media or the stability of opinions. Although different measures and different terms are used, with respect to effects on political participation, this does in my opinion not always go along with differences in substantial interpretations.

16 The term ‘political information’ is understood in this paper following Converse’s (1975) use of the term. He distinguishes three sources of informedness: the capacity, the willingness and the sophistication of citizens. The capacity encompasses the cognitive ability of respondents to process information in general. This dimension is mainly linked to the education and knowledge of respondents. The second dimension, the willingness, denotes the degree to which respondents consciously collect political information, like media usage but also the interest in politics. The third dimension, the political sophistication, describes the ability of respondents to link information to pre-existing political belief systems (PBS). “A person is politically sophisticated to the extent to which his or her PBS is large, wide-ranging, and highly constrained.” (Luskin 1987: 860) Each of the dimensions contributes to what here is called ‘political information’ and using single indicators may therefore be too concise to cover the whole phenomenon. For example, high educational levels do not imply that those respondents necessarily make use of their capacities, nor does high attention to political issues imply that those respondents are able to make use of the information in terms of information processing or coherent political belief systems. A solution where different indicators of political information can be combined to a single scale seems therefore preferable (compare also van Deth & Elff, 2000; Zaller 1992: 333ff).

17 I used variables of education, interest, knowledge and the ability of respondents to place themselves and the mayor parties on the left-right scale but also on mayor issues regarding European politics. Testing scalability was performed by several variations in the construction of indicators.

18 This is a 3 point scale with (1) low informed respondents, who do not answer the knowledge questions correctly and are not interested in politics, (2) moderate informed respondents, who either fail answering knowledge questions correctly or are not interested in politics, and (3) high informed respondents, who answer the knowledge questions correctly and are interested in politics. For information on the measurement model see footnotes 19 and 20.

19 The 3-point scale of ‘general political informedness’ consists of interest in politics and the ability to answer two political knowledge questions (naming the national minister of finance and the national minister of foreign affairs). All three groups are approximately of equal size. A scalability measure of H=0.57 was estimated. The overall model was weighted with equal importance of the 12 EU member states.
turned out, both variables are closely related and ‘EU specific informedness’ will therefore be controlled for ‘general informedness’.\(^{21}\) Hence, the variable of ‘relative EU-informedness’ reflects the amount of EU specific information going beyond the general informedness of the respondent.

As a result of the comparative perspective of the analysis, distributional effects of political information between electorates may disturb substantive findings. Controlling for those compositional effects in pooled models is necessary if political informedness impacts on turnout but political information are not equally distributed between regional units (McAllister & Studlar, 1992; Marsh, 2001). By splitting informedness in an individual- and a compositional effect, it should be prevented that systemic differences between countries are included unintentionally since the individual variable of informedness is distributed differently across clusters (Zorn, 2000). This is done by calculating the mean informedness of national electorates and subtracting this mean from the individual informedness of respondents. The between-country-information\(^{22}\) encompasses different levels of informedness between electorates whereas the within-country-information\(^{23}\) denotes the individual informedness relative to the country level of political information. Hence, the first varies solely across individuals and the second solely across countries.

After defining relevant variables explaining electoral participation, the question is how effects of political information on the likelihood- and on the variability of turnout can be modelled empirically. As proposed in the literature, uncertainty in choice processes can be tested using heteroskedastic Probit models (Alvarez & Brehm, 1995, 1997; Alvarez, 1997; Greene, 2001). In these kinds of models, direct effects of an independent variable on the likelihood of the choice can be estimated simultaneously with the effect of the variable on the residual variance of the choice.\(^{24}\) Behind this approach stands the idea that high residual variance within specific groups of the sample indicates that choice in those

---

\(^{20}\) The 3-point scale of ‘EU specific political informedness’ consists of interest in EU related politics and the ability to answer two political knowledge questions regarding the EU (naming the President of the European Commission and the European commissioner of the own country). The scalability measure is $H=0.32$. The overall model was weighted with equal importance of the 12 EU member states.

\(^{21}\) ‘Relative EU specific information’ is a residual-variable of an OLS regression of general political information on EU specific information. General informedness and relative EU specific informedness are uncorrelated. In the overall model of all 12 EU countries, general political informedness explains 53% of the variance of the specific informedness.

\(^{22}\) Between-country-informedness is the country mean of the informedness variable (Zorn, 2000).

\(^{23}\) Subtracting the mean informedness in one country from the individual informedness. The mean of the ‘within-country-informedness’ in each country is therefore 0. (Zorn, 2000).

\(^{24}\) Both parts are also graphically divided in the tables reporting the results of the models in a choice-model and a variance-model.
groups is affected by more unobserved considerations than it is true for the rest of the sample.\textsuperscript{25} High residual variance is interpreted in accordance to other applications of the method as uncertainty or variability in decision processes (Alvarez & Brehm, 1995, 1997). Therefore it can be determined whether or not the amount of information increases the uncertainty of the choice to participate in the democratic process. If the hypothesis of this paper holds, political information should not only increase the likelihood of turnout but should also increase the residual variance of the choice.

4. Results: Political Information and Turnout

Table 1 provides results of the analysis of electoral participation in the European election of 1994. The analysis includes all 12 member states of the EU in one model and independent variables are standardized to produce comparable estimates in terms of effect sizes. The comparison between an ordinary Probit and a heteroskedastic Probit model has the aim to illustrate to what extent heterogeneity in standard Logit or Probit models may possibly produce biased estimates. In addition it shows that substantive interpretations of the relationship between political information and participation can therefore be distorted.

\textsuperscript{25} In regression frameworks the residual variance is often described as the sum of unobserved variables and the error variance. The assumption of homogeneity in the residual variance in this sense means that the number of unobserved considerations and the variance of the error are constant across respondents. To confirm the hypothesis of the paper that information increases the number of considerations in the choice what makes it less predictable, a significantly higher residual variance in the model should be observable for highly informed respondents. But as mentioned before, it is still unclear whether heterogeneity is caused by omitted variables or a more random choice, although the first explanation seems more plausible.
Table 1: Probit and Heteroskedastic Probit Models of Electoral Participation in the European Parliament Elections 1994 in an EU wide analysis with equal weight of the 12 EU member states (EES’94)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Choice Model: $\beta$</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Probit</td>
<td>Heteroskedastic Probit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>Robust Standard Error</td>
<td>Robust Standard Error</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-Demographic Effect</td>
<td>0.327 0.016</td>
<td>0.312 0.016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Adherence</td>
<td>0.187 0.016</td>
<td>0.176 0.016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campaign Mobilization</td>
<td>0.076 0.016</td>
<td>0.079 0.015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU Approval</td>
<td>0.052 0.015</td>
<td>0.049 0.015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory Voting</td>
<td>0.451 0.017</td>
<td>0.473 0.020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Political Information Within Countries</td>
<td>0.221 0.015</td>
<td>0.256 0.018</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative EU Specific Information Within Countries</td>
<td>0.113 0.015</td>
<td>0.125 0.020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Information Between Countries</td>
<td>0.034 0.015</td>
<td>-0.009 0.016</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative EU Specific Information Between Countries</td>
<td>-0.088 0.012</td>
<td>-0.076 0.011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.656 0.015</td>
<td>0.685 0.017</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Variance Model: $\sigma$</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Political Information Within Countries</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.080 0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative EU Specific Information Within Countries</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.010 0.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Information Between Countries</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.141 0.027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative EU Specific Information Between Countries</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.024 0.022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model Fit</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-5547.758</td>
<td>-5283.134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heteroskedasticity Test: $\chi^2_{[4]}$</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>47.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>11163</td>
<td>11163</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First of all, the variance part of the heteroskedastic Probit model shows that individual general informedness actually affects the residual variance of the model positively - meaning that political information increase significantly the uncertainty of turnout. This confirms the central hypothesis of this paper that information not only adds to the likelihood of electoral participation, but also produces a more complex and
therefore less predictable choice.\textsuperscript{26} EU specific information does not have the same effect on the error variance. Apart from the individual level effect of informedness on the residual variance, political informedness of electorates generates a more certain choice process.\textsuperscript{27}

The highly significant $\chi^2$-test of heteroskedasticity illustrates that the assumption of homogeneity in the residual variance, made by standard Logit or Probit models, is clearly violated. In contrast to OLS regressions where heteroskedasticity produces inefficient but still unbiased estimates, this holds not true for binary choice models where heteroskedasticity generates even inconsistent estimates (Alvarez, 1997). Whereas the ordinary Probit model estimates a positive effect of the general political informedness of electorates on the likelihood of turnout, the comparison with the heteroskedastic Probit model reveals that this effect is most likely an artefact of the method rather than a substantive result: unlike the Probit model predicted, the country-level of political information does not affect the likelihood of turnout significantly. This also fits more with the in several countries observed contradiction that turnout rates are declining while levels of cognitive mobilization are rising. Obviously, standard Probit models can produce inconsistent estimates due to significant heterogeneity. Modelling participation as suggested by heteroskedastic models is therefore not only useful from a conceptual perspective but might well also be a statistical necessity.

Comparing effect coefficients of independent variables explaining the likelihood of turnout in the choice model shows that most of the variance reduction is accounted for by compulsory voting followed by social constraints and political information. Campaign mobilization and party adherences have a lesser impact on the decision to turnout. General information appears to be more important than EU specific information. This result in combination with the fact that EU approval also does not affect turnout decisively can be seen as a confirmation of previous observations that European elections are hardly affected by EU politics, but are more closely related to national political affairs (Schmitt

\textsuperscript{26}Significant heteroscedasticity effects can be found in separate country analyses in 4 out of 12 cases.

\textsuperscript{27}This result is problematic for the central hypothesis of the paper and needs further explanation: why does the individual informedness increase- but the aggregate informedness reduce uncertainty? A possible explanation could be covariation with other contextual characteristics. One can think of a situation where institutional arrangements of countries increase the degree of political informedness and the turnout rate at the same time because both follow the same logic. Powell (1980), Jackman and Miller (1995) or Blais and Dobrzynska (1998) show that among other factors, competitiveness, proportionality and compulsory voting increase the turnout-rate across countries. Gordon and Segura (1997) on the other hand show- based on a partly similar argumentation- that exactly those variables increase the sophistication of electorates. Perhaps, the informedness of electorates covariates strongly with institutional settings that provide basis for clear party preferences and more predictable turnout.
What is worrisome for EU politics is the fact that the information-level regarding the EU of electorates even decreases electoral participation in European elections of those electorates.\textsuperscript{28}

As mentioned before, European elections appear to be a tough test for information effects on turnout because they are as 2\textsuperscript{nd} order elections often assumed to be low-information-elections. Since turnout in 1\textsuperscript{st} order elections can be described as more tactical and less expressive, direct effects of information on the likelihood- and information-originated uncertainty of turnout are presumably more evident in 1\textsuperscript{st} order national elections than in 2\textsuperscript{nd} order national elections, such as European- or local elections. The replication of the results for turnout in national and local elections on basis of the Dutch National Election Study 1994 and the Dutch sample of the European Election Study of 1994 has two objectives: firstly to validate the hypothesis of the uncertainty of turnout across different electoral levels and secondly to assess whether effects of information are more relevant in 1\textsuperscript{st} than in 2\textsuperscript{nd} order elections. Both surveys were conducted at almost the same time, since the Dutch national parliament- local- and European parliament elections all were held in spring 1994. Table 2 contains similar models of turnout for the three elections.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{28} This maybe an indicator for either a poor performance of EU politics or for negative media coverage of European issues. Either way, when public attention towards the EU causes a decline in turnout and when the individual level of EU-information and EU-approval only increase the likelihood of turnout marginally, it probably refers to democratic deficits of the European Union. (for the relationship between negative media coverage of the EU and the representation deficit see Peter & de Vreese, 2002)

\textsuperscript{29} The models do not include variables on campaign mobilisation or approval since equivalent variables do not exist for either national or local elections. To allow for comparability of the results, the applied models contain only variables that presumably affect all three levels of electoral participation. The construction of the included variables follows the proceeding describes above. ‘Political information’ is measured by an additive scale of (a) interest in politics (1 very interested; 0 else) and (b) the ability of respondents to answer at least three out of four political knowledge questions correctly. (Here: recognising four politicians by pictures and naming the political functions of those politicians). A Mokken measurement model estimates a scalability of $H=0.44$ of both dummies. It may be objected that those knowledge questions are more closely related to national parliament-than to local or European elections. I tested the applied models therefore using a political interest score instead of the variable ‘political information’. But it turned out that substantive conclusion also hold for this indicator.
Table 2: Heteroskedastic Probit Models of Electoral Participation in National-, European- and Local Elections 1994 in the Netherlands, Dutch National Election Study 1994 (NES’94) and Dutch sample of the European Election Study 1994 (EES’94)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHOICE MODEL: $\beta$</th>
<th>National Election (NES’94)</th>
<th>European Election (EES’94)</th>
<th>Local Election (NES’94)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Socio-Demographic Effect</td>
<td>0.27 (0.08)</td>
<td>0.39 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.38 (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Adherence</td>
<td>0.14 (0.08)</td>
<td>0.17 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.25 (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Information</td>
<td>1.51 (0.54)</td>
<td>0.19 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.37 (0.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.27 (0.30)</td>
<td>0.08 (0.05)</td>
<td>1.12 (0.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VARIANCE MODEL: $\sigma$</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Information</td>
<td>0.49 (0.17)</td>
<td>0.03 (0.08)</td>
<td>0.17 (0.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODEL FIT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-131.62</td>
<td>-565.11</td>
<td>-273.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heteroskedasticity Test: $\chi^2_{[1]}$</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>920</td>
<td>683</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing effects of political information on the variance model of electoral participation on different levels offers no evidence for a more variable choice of informed respondents in 2nd order European and local elections, but strong heteroskedasticity in 1st order national elections. It appears that uncertainty caused by political information is a phenomenon that depends largely on the form of participation. More demanding forms of participation in terms of political informedness or involvedness, presumably cause also uncertainty and unpredictability of decisions among informed citizens. Therefore it can be expected that information generated uncertainty is especially evident in participation in demonstrations, parties, or interest groups.
5. Conclusion

All analyses show a similar pattern: although informed citizens are in general more likely to participate in elections, high levels of information also seem to cause variability in the decision. Presumably, this is caused by changes in the perception of turnout: informed citizens increasingly incorporate more considerations in their decision to participate or abstain in an election. It is argued that they increasingly regard both options as valid and weigh pros and cons of actually casting a ballot according the contextual situation of the election. This appears especially to occur in the more important first order national elections, whereas effects of information on turnout are less crucial in second order elections, such as European parliament- and local elections.

The connection between the two effects of information on turnout may also provide a different view on the contradictory finding of increases in educational levels and declines in turnout rates of whole societies. What can be expected from a trend to higher political informedness - according to the results of the paper - is an increase of the rate, but also of the variability of turnout. Electoral participation will fluctuate more if citizens use abstention occasionally as an effective way to express political preferences. The results of the paper lead to the assessment that higher cognitive mobilization increases turnout levels potentially, but more importantly, enlarges also the range of possible turnout rates. As long as incentives are omitted for highly informed citizens to cast a ballot, turnout will be at the lower end of its potential.

References


30 This holds only for informedness. Decreasing levels of church attendance and party identification might weigh out the positive effects of a higher political mobilization.


