

# **The Effect of Political Trust on the Voter Turnout of the Lower Educated**

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**Abstract** *The current research examines what the role of political trust is in explaining the low voter turnout among the lower educated, using data from the 2010 European Social Survey. We find that the lower a person is educated, the less trust he/she has in the country's parliament, the legal system and politicians (while controlling for age, gender and political interest). Furthermore, those with lower levels of trust are less likely to vote in the national elections. The most remarkable finding of this study is the difference between forms of trust in 'permanent' political actors (the country's parliament and the legal system) and trust in 'changeable' actors (political parties and politicians). Whereas the lower educated have less trust in the permanent actors than the higher educated, this effect is much less visible for trust in the changeable actors. This evidence suggests that improving the trust of the lower educated in politics as a whole needs attention in society.*

**Keywords:** Voting, Political Trust, Education, European Social Survey, Political Participation

## **Introduction**

It is a common finding in literature about political participation that the lower educated vote less than the higher educated (Bovens & Wille, 2010; Kam & Palmer, 2008; Tenn, 2007; Marien, Hooghe & Quintelier, 2010). Since voting is generally seen as the political activity which requires the least effort and for which everyone has the most equal opportunity to participate (Bovens & Wille, 2010), it is a cause for concern that the lower educated take significantly less part in this act than the higher educated. The idea of a functioning democracy is that all citizens are equally represented. When a specific group in society significantly participates less in the act of voting, this can be a threat to the representation of this group in the government of a country.

Research has also shown that the lower educated have more feelings of distrust towards politicians and politics in general than the higher educated (Marien et al., 2010). However, is this lack of political trust the cause of low political participation of the poorly educated? Do the lower educated abstain from voting because they do not have trust in politicians, political parties, the parliament and the legal system?

Not only do the lower educated participate less in institutionalised forms of participation like voting, but they also participate less in non-institutionalised forms of political participation, such as signing petitions and donating money. Several studies have shown that the costs of participation are lower in non-institutionalised forms of participation than in institutionalised forms of participation (Li & Marsh, 2008; Marien, Hooghe & Quintelier, 2010). This is the case because non-institutionalised forms of participation are less demanding since participants have to make few commitments. For example, it is argued that new, non-institutionalised forms of political participation such as internet activism lower the barriers for participation and have the potential to engage the lower educated in politics. It is therefore often argued that those groups that participate less in institutionalised forms of participation such as voting compensate this by participating in non-institutionalised forms of participation, hereby solving their lack of representation in politics in general.

However, whereas this is the case for differences in institutionalised participation between men and women and between older and younger generations, this does not seem to be applicable for the lower educated (Marien et al. 2010). Women tend to participate less in institutionalised forms of participation, but they participate more often in non-institutionalised forms of participation. In this same manner, younger generations participate more in non-institutionalised forms of participation than older generations. Therefore, while women and younger people do have lower turnout rates, they are not less represented in politics in general. However, the lower educated are not well represented in the political participation field, since they participate less in institutionalised forms of participation as well as in non-institutionalised forms of participation (Marien et al. 2010). Empirical research suggests that even most forms of online participation require many resources and cognitive skills that the majority of the lower educated does not possess. These cognitive skills are relevant, for example, to deal with the great amount of political information available on the internet (Hooghe et al. 2012). Since the

lower educated participate less in institutionalised as well as non-institutionalised participation, they are unequally represented in politics. Because Marien et al. (2010) conclude that non-institutionalised forms of participation cannot be a solution to engage the lower educated in politics, this research aims at trying to find out what can in fact engage the lower educated in politics.

What increases the concern of unequal representation is that political parties often exist of an unequal share of highly educated people (Bovens & Wille, 2010). There is no mobilized party with a clear shared interest demanding equal rights for the lower educated. If the elected politicians would act on behalf of the lower educated, then an unequal share of highly educated people among elected politicians would not have to be a threat to representation (Bovens & Wille, 2010). Nonetheless, empirical research suggests that the higher educated have different political preferences than the lower educated, meaning that the political preferences of the lower educated are less well represented (Marien et al., 2010). For example, Bovens and Wille (2010) have shown that the higher educated favour much more liberal policies regarding cultural integration, crime fighting and refugees and that they are more in favour of European unification. The conclusion can be drawn that the more politically active and more liberal view of the higher educated is more represented than the lower educated, the more passive and less liberal the view of the lower educated population is.

The current research aims at finding an explanation for the low number of voters amongst the poorly educated. It is suggested that the direct impact of education on voter turnout is overestimated (Brady, Verba, Lehman & Schlozman, 1995). For example, research has shown that political interest is an important factor in explaining voter turnout for the lower educated. A lot of research has been done to determine why the lower educated vote less and a lot of research has been done about the lower educated having lower levels of political trust and higher levels of cynicism towards politicians than the higher educated (Bovens & Wille, 2010). A past study has also focused on what the role of trust is in explaining political participation, but this research has led to ambiguous findings (Levi & Stoker, 2000). However, no research has linked the political trust and participation literature with the literature on political participation and education.

In this research we examine the role of trust in the country's parliament, the legal system, political parties and trust in politicians in explaining the low voter turnout among the poorly educated. We state that the lower the political trust is for the lower educated, the lower the chance they will vote in the national elections. This relationship could be an indication that lack of political trust is the cause of the low participation rate of the lower educated, meaning that a solution to a more equal political representation between the lower and the higher educated should be sought in increasing the levels of trust that the lower educated have in politics.

Furthermore, improving the political trust for the lower educated is important because trust is essential for a functioning democracy. Low political trust suggests that something in the political system is not functioning properly. This could be either that the government is performing poorly or that the citizen's expectations are too high, but low levels of political trust imply that some part of the

political system is not working the way it is supposed to be working (Newton, 2001). Furthermore, low political trust can also be an incentive for extremist voting behavior (Marien et al. 2010).

Improving the political trust of the lower educated can thus be seen as a goal per se. With our research we will stress the need for improving the political trust of the lower educated because higher political trust should lead to a higher voter turnout, meaning that the lower educated will be more equally represented. As discussed earlier, this will contribute to a well-functioning democracy. Therefore, the main question of this research is:

*What is the effect of political trust on the voter turnout of the lower educated?*

### **Education and Trust**

Research has shown that the lower educated have lower levels of political trust than the higher educated (Borgonovi, 2012; Hetherington, 1998; Hooghe, Marien & Vroome, 2012; Bovens & Wille 2010). One explanation for this phenomenon is that the higher educated are in general more intelligent, and hence that for them it is easier to recognize signals of defection or untrustworthy behaviour. Another explanation is that the higher educated have higher social positions. These privileged positions cause that it is easier for the higher educated to express trust in the political system, since it is this system that made it possible for them to acquire those privileged positions. In this sense, education is indirectly related to trust rather than directly. Education provides access to high social positions, and these high positions are a source of trust (Hooghe et al., 2012).

Moreover, research shows that lower educated people are far more cynical and distrustful than higher educated people (Bovens & Wille, 2010). A study in the Netherlands has shown that the lower educated far more often than the higher educated report that they distrust politicians, that politicians do not care about their opinions and that they think politicians cannot solve problems in society. In the study of Bovens and Wille (2010), the lower educated often reported that they feel that prime ministers and political parties are not interested in their opinions. These findings suggest that lower educated often have a feeling of being distanced from the political process and that they do not identify with the governing political elite. This hypothesis is widely used in the political trust literature and is named the disaffection hypothesis (Bovens & Wille, 2010). It suggests that citizens with low education levels have a low or decreasing amount of trust in government and politics because they feel excluded from meaningful political and social participation. This leads us to state the following hypotheses:

*1. The lower a person is educated, the less political trust he has.*

*1a. The lower a person is educated, the less trust he has in the country's parliament.*

*1b. The lower a person is educated, the less trust he has in the legal system.*

*1c. The lower a person is educated, the less trust he has in political parties.*

Also, research shows that lower educated have lower levels of generalized trust than the higher educated (Borgonovi, 2012). It has been argued that general trust and political trust are related. If one does not have trust in mankind in general, one does not have trust in elected officials either. Political trust is in this sense seen as a more specific kind of trust than trust in mankind (Cole, 1973).

People tend to have more trust in people who are similar to them, for example in people of the same social group (Alesina & La Ferrara, 2002). We assume that people from the same social group could mean people with the same education levels. Since often the majority of the elected politicians is higher educated (Bovens & Wille, 2010), this could be a source of distrust for the lower educated because politicians are from a different social group than themselves. This leads us to the hypothesis:

*Id. The lower a person is educated, the less trust he has in politicians.*

### **Trust and Political Participation**

The rational choice theory, which is a common approach within the research of political participation (Blais, 2000), tries to explain voter turnout in terms of costs and benefits. That is, every individual has his own goals and achievements and chooses his actions rationally in order to obtain these goals (Whiteley, 1995). Whether an individual decides to vote or not, depends on the costs made by the process of voting versus the benefits that an individual can get out of voting. For instance, the time spent on gathering and digesting information about the election and the candidates is a clear example of the costs in the process of voting. On the other hand, benefits could for example be the positive outcome of the election, the personal influence in the group process and moral justification (Feddersen, 2004). This theory is shown in the following formula:  $PB + D > C$ . This formula was developed by Riker and Ordeshook in 1968, based on the economic theory of political action of Anthony Downs (1957). This formula still forms one of the most important theories about voter turnout (Whiteley, 1995). In this formula, P stands for the probability that a citizen's vote will affect the outcome of the election. B stands for the personal benefits an individual is likely to get as a result of his vote and D is the so called 'duty' he feels to answer his civic duty. At last, the letter C stands for the costs a citizen makes to vote. According to this formula, a citizen will only vote when the first part of the formula outweighs the costs. In order to make this intelligible in terms of our theory we will speak about the benefit part and the cost part.

Both on the benefit side as well as on the cost side, it is more likely for a higher educated individual to vote. At first, the model suggests that if the higher educated have more access to information about candidates and issues, their turnout will be greater than the turnout of the lower educated (Feddersen, 2004). When the higher educated have more access to information about candidates and political issues, their costs will be lower than the costs for the lower educated. The lower educated have to put more effort in gathering information and so their costs will be higher. Secondly, higher educated have higher benefits when voting, because due to their higher civic skills they feel more engaged in politics (Tenn, 2007). Gimpel, Lay and Schuknecht (2003) found in their

research on political participation that high status people gain more knowledge about participating in a political institute and simultaneously, these people are more likely to experience the results of their efforts. From this we can conclude that the benefits for the higher educated are actually higher and so it is more likely for them to vote.

However, the missing link in the connection between higher benefits and higher voter turnout for the higher educated is the factor of trust. Because the lower educated have lower levels of trust, they will perceive their benefits from going to vote to be less than the higher educated perceive their benefits to be. We assume that if one distrusts politicians and political parties, one is less likely to believe that politicians and political parties will do what is in his interest. Besides, we assume that it is less likely for an individual to answer his civil duty when the level of political trust is low. Therefore, our second hypothesis is:

*2. The lower the level of political trust, the lower the chance of voting in national elections.*

*2a. The lower the level of trust in the country's parliament, the lower the chance of voting in national elections.*

*2b. The lower the level of trust in the legal system, the lower the chance of voting in national elections.*

*2c. The lower the level of trust in political parties, the lower the chance of voting in national elections.*

*2d. The lower the level of trust in politicians, the lower the chance of voting in national elections.*

### **Education and Political Participation**

Verba and Nie (1972) came up with the 'standard socioeconomic status model', which is considered as the foundation of the research on political participation (Leighley, 1995). Briefly, this model states that political participation is driven by personal resources. These resources consist of time, money and skills. Besides these resources, Verba and Nie analyzed civil orientation as a major predictor of political participation. This civil orientation consists of the attitude towards politics and politicians. The model states that individuals with higher socioeconomic status have more personal resources and a civil orientation, which results in political activity.

These individuals are often living in a social environment that leads to more resources and will encourage them to have more participating norms. For example, it is plausible to assume that these people have more people in their social networks that are politically engaged. This political engagement makes it more likely for them to vote. Furthermore, a higher education also encourages political engagement because of democratic norms in education institutions (Hillygus, 2005). As a result of their study, Verba and Nie found that every part of the socioeconomic status is positively related to participation. Among many other researchers, Converse (1972) found that education is the strongest predictor of political participation. At the same time, socioeconomic status is predicting

every form of participation, not only voting. The effect of socioeconomic status on political participation has been studied before. Among many others, Bennett (1970) states that there is a strong relationship between income, education and occupation on the one side and political participation on the other side. Converse (1972, p 324) concludes that "education is everywhere the universal solvent, and the relationship is always in the same direction". Converse (1972) stated that even when every other socioeconomic variable is considered, education is always the predicting variable. Converse found this positive relationship true for every form of political participation.

Even though a lot research has already been done on this topic (Bovens & Wille, 2010; Kam & Palmer, 2008; Tenn, 2007; Marien, Hooghe & Quintelier, 2010), we will test whether this hypothesis is true for our population as well. This leads us to state the hypothesis:

*3. The lower a person is educated, the lower the chance that he will vote in the national elections.*

**This research**

The current research therefore aims at investigating whether there is not only a positive relationship between education and political trust, but also a positive relationship between low levels of political trust and refraining from voting in national elections. This relation could be an indication that the lower educated do not vote because they do not have political trust, and would hence be a cause for further research in order to provide a solution for the low voter turnout among the lower educated. Furthermore, we want to investigate whether political trust, in four different forms, influences the relationship of education and voting.

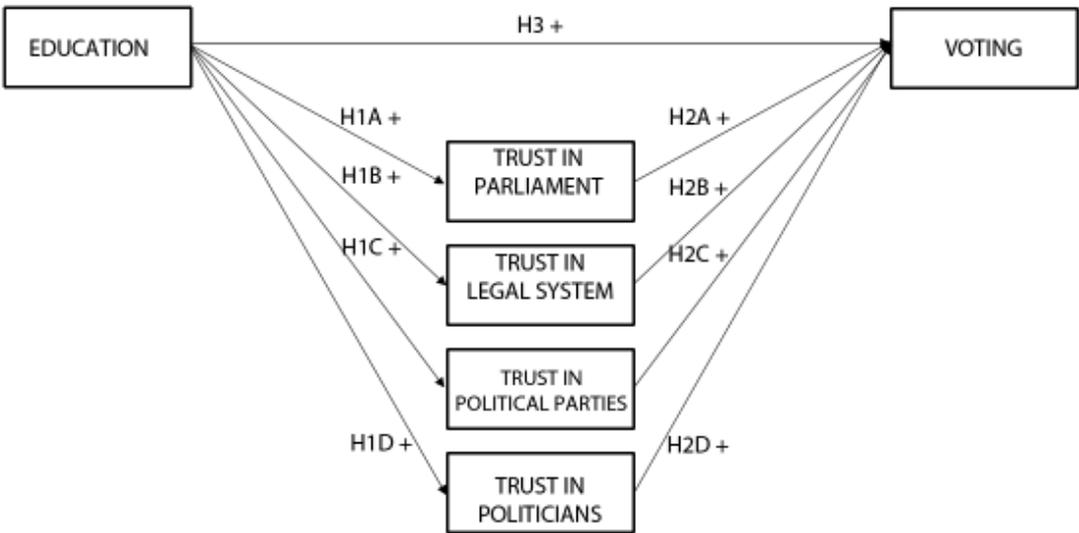


Figure 1. Model explaining voter turnout.

## Data

In this study, data are used from the European Social Survey (ESS). This survey was established in 2001 to explain the interaction between Europe's changing institutions and the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of the different populations of Europe. The ESS is conducted twice a year in 32 countries by conducting interviews with the respondents.

The main reason why the ESS is chosen for this research is because it is one of the few surveys that in addition to generalized trust also measures political trust. Furthermore, the accuracy of the ESS has been tested several times and it has been proven to be highly reliable (Reeskens & Hooghe, 2006).

Data will be used from only the most recent wave that is available, the one from 2010. In this research we use data from the Western European 'established democracies', the countries that have been stable democracies over the last decades (Catterberg & Moreno, 2005). We have chosen these countries because we assume that because of their long-term political stability, political trust is comparable among these countries. Moreover, choosing eleven countries results in a high amount of respondents, which makes it more suitable to provide reliable answers to our research question. The countries included in the current research are therefore: Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom, Sweden and Switzerland.

Respondents that did not answer one or more of the questions that are used in this study are excluded. Furthermore, respondents who were not eligible to vote, either due to their age or their citizenship status, were excluded. We filtered out all respondents aged under 18 years as well, because those aged under 18 years are not eligible to vote, and thus their answers to the question whether they voted are invalid. Also, we use years of education to measure education, and this is not an adequate measure for those younger than 18. The few respondents that reported to have more than 50 years of full-time education were excluded since these are outliers that might bias our results. After excluding these respondents, there are 18 491 respondents left who will be included in our research.

Table 1. General descriptives of the population

Source: ESS (2010 \*(0=female, 1=male), \*\*(0=did not vote, 1=voted)

	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. deviation</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Mode</b>
	18491						
Gender		0	1	.489*	.499	0	0
Age		18	101	50.27	17.402	50	62
Years of education		0	50	13.16	3.955	13	13

Table 2. Descriptives of voter turnout and education system per country.

Country	Last national election (before 2010)	Voter turnout last national election		Education system*
		National election (V.A.P.)	ESS data (V.E.P)	
Belgium (N=1519)	2007	86.00%	89.14%	6 years primary school and 6 years secondary school.
Denmark (N=1384)	2007	83.2%	92.27%	9 years primary school and secondary school combined
Germany (N=1620)	2009	64.61%	82.15%	4 years primary school and 6 years secondary school
Finland (N=1642)	2007	68.18%	80.51%	9 years primary school and secondary school combined
France (N=1494)	2007	43.43%	72.02%	5 years primary school and 4 years secondary school
United Kingdom (N=2141)	2005	58.32%	73.25%	6 years primary school and 5 years secondary school
Ireland (N=2256)	2007	68.89%	73.36%	6 years primary school and 6 years secondary school
The Netherlands (N=1693)	2006	77.48%	84.11%	7 years primary school and 4 years of secondary school
Norway (N=1340)	2009	74.74%	87.31%	7 years primary school and 3 years of secondary school
Sweden (N=1327)	2006	80.60%	94.35%	4-8 years of primary school and 4-8 years secondary school (combined 12 years)
Switzerland (N=1084)	2007	39.79%	65.68%	4-6 years primary school and 5-3 years secondary school (combined 9 years)
<i>Total</i> (N=18491)		67.75%	80.88%	

Sources: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, ESS (2010)

\*education system contains information about the distribution between the minimum amount of years of (compulsory) primary school and secondary school. Thereafter, in every country one can move on to intermediate vocational education, higher education or university. This is not appointed in the table.

In the descriptive tables of the population, one can see that almost 81% of our population voted in the last national election. However, on average only 68% of the European citizens (older than 18) of the countries involved in this research voted in the last national election of their countries. From this fact

we can infer that there is quite a large gap between the voter turnout of our population and the actual voter turnout of the eleven countries in their last national elections. This can be partly explained by the fact that the voting age population (V.A.P.), the population used for measuring the voter turnout of all European citizens, used by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), contains every citizen above 18 years and hence also citizens that are not eligible to vote. However, the population of this research contains only voting eligible people (V.E.P). Since there could be citizens that are not eligible to vote, but are aged 18 years or older, this could cause a difference between the two voting populations. Moreover, respondents are likely to give socially desirable answers, meaning that they are more likely to report to have voted while in fact they did not. It could also be due to the fact that the characteristics that are associated with voting are often the same characteristics that are associated with participating in survey research (Marien et al. 2010). Moreover, the number of respondents that reported to have voted became higher after we filtered out the people that did not answer on some of the relevant questions; those who were not eligible to vote and those aged under 18. It could be the case that some respondents under 18 replied 'no' to the question whether they voted, instead of reporting that they were not eligible to vote. It could also be the case that those who have missings on other variables are less likely to vote, and that therefore the number of voters increased after we filtered out these respondents.

From these descriptives it is hard to conclude whether our population is representative for the actual population of the eleven involved countries in this study. This is due to the fact that we only use voting eligible people for our research, which makes it hard to compare these data with the actual data of all the citizens of these European countries. However, we find that the amount of women is comparable with the actual number of women in Western Europe. Derived from the data of worldstat.info, we find that each of the eleven countries has slightly more females than males, exactly the same as our population. Furthermore, we assume that the representativeness of our population is rather high, because of the high number of respondents (N=18491) and the high reliability of the dataset (Reeskens & Hooghe, 2006).

Moreover, there are some noteworthy differences between the countries. For instance, Denmark and Belgium scored rather high on voter turnout, whereas Switzerland scored rather low on voter turnout. Finally, we want to note that the education systems differ between the countries in this research. This is an important factor for the analyses, which will be further explained in the results paragraph.

## **Measures**

The independent variable in this study is education. In the European Social Survey education is measured with two questions<sup>1</sup>. Respondents are asked what the highest level of education is that they

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1 for the entire questions (ESS, 2010) used in this research.

achieved, but since this is a country specific question, we have chosen to measure education with the question how many years of full-time education the respondents have completed.

The moderating variable in this study is political trust. In the questionnaire there are several questions regarding the issue of political trust. The respondents were asked to tell on a ten point scale how much trust they have in certain institutes, with zero meaning they have no trust at all and ten meaning they have complete trust in the institute. We used the answers of this question for the country's parliament, the legal system, politicians and political parties. The dependent variable in our study is political participation in the form of voting. To measure this, we used the question whether one voted in the last national election in their country.

Whereas political trust is measured in the present (do people have trust in, for example, the country's parliament at this moment?), voting is measured in the past. The respondents are asked whether they voted in the last election. The political environment might have been different during the time of the elections than it was at the moment the survey was conducted. Because of this, it was preferred to have used the question whether one would vote if there were elections today or tomorrow. However, this question was not included in the survey.

We know that younger generations and women participate less in the act of voting than older generations and men (Marien et al. 2010), so in the analysis we control for age and gender. We also include political interest as a control variable because political interest is a strong predictor of voter turnout (Brady et al. 1995).

## **Results**

After doing the analyses we can say if education and political trust have an effect on voting behaviour. If so, we can also get an impression of what these effects are. The first hypothesis is tested by a multiple regression with four different forms of political trust as the dependent variables. The multiple regression measure is best suitable for this kind of analysis because both the education variable and the political trust variable are continuous variables. Education is controlled for gender, age and political interest. It is found that education is significantly related to all forms of political trust, except for the trust one has in the country's political parties, controlling for gender, age and political interest. Another remarkable finding is the difference in strength of the prediction of education for the four different forms of political trust. Education is rather strongly related to trust in parliament and trust in the legal system, but is not very strongly related to trust in politicians and is not significantly related to trust in political parties at all. Furthermore, the R-square is also slightly different between the different dependent variables. Adding education to our regression model explains 9,4% of the variance with trust in parliament as the dependent variable, 7,9% of the variance with trust in legal system as the dependent variable and 7,5% of the variance with trust in parliament as the dependent variable. The explained variance is the highest with education predicting trust in parliament. Hence, it can be concluded that education is a predictor for trust in parliament,  $R^2 = .094$ ,  $F(6, 18484) = 317,787$ ,  $p$

<.01; for trust in legal system,  $R^2 = .055$ ,  $F(6, 18484) = 197,921$ ,  $p < .01$  and for trust in politicians  $R^2 = .075$ ,  $F(6, 18484) = 263,617$ ,  $p < .01$ . This confirms hypothesis 1, with the exception of education having an association with political parties.

Table 3. Hypothesis 1: Regression analysis predicting the effect of education on four different forms of political trust.

	<i>Trust in parliament</i>			<i>Trust in legal system</i>			<i>Trust in political parties</i>			<i>Trust in politicians</i>		
	B	S.E.	Beta	B	S.E.	Beta	B	S.E.	Beta	B	S.E.	Beta
Gender	.133***	.034	.028	.194***	.034	.041	-.101***	.032	-.023	-.119***	.032	-.026
Age	.0	.001	-.031	.002	.001	.012	-.002*	.001	-.019	.002***	.001	.014
Political interest												
hardly	1.350***	.056	.258	.972***	.056	.187	1.260***	.052	.261	1.202***	.053	.245
quite	1.929***	.054	.396	1.218***	.055	.253	1.851***	.050	.413	1.795***	.051	.393
very	2.138***	.067	.310	1.272***	.068	.186	1.912***	.062	.301	1.869	.063	.289
Education	.053**	.005	.086	.079***	.005	.131	.008	.004	.014	.017**	.004	.029
	*									*		
	R <sup>2</sup>			R <sup>2</sup>			R <sup>2</sup>			R <sup>2</sup>		
	.094			.055			.079			.075		

Source: ESS (2010), The dependent variable is the level of trust in: country's parliament; country's legal system; country's political parties; country's politicians. The independent variable is education, measured in amount of years of followed education, \*significant at  $p < .05$ , \*\*significant at  $p < .01$

Finally, it can be noted that the control variables have different effects on the level of trust. For instance, gender is positively predicting the trust in parliament ( $B = .133$ ) and the trust in legal system ( $B = 1.94$ ), but it predicts trust in political parties ( $B = -.101$ ) and politicians ( $B = -.119$ ) contrariwise. This means, according to the regression analysis, on the one hand men are more likely to have higher levels of trust in the parliament and the legal system and on the other hand women are more likely to have higher levels of trust in political parties and politicians.

Subsequently we test hypothesis 2, the effect of the four forms of political trust on voting. This hypothesis is tested by a logistic binomial regression analysis. This method is chosen because of the dichotomous dependent variable, namely voting (0=did not vote, 1=voted). As a consequence, this method is the best suitable for this analysis. The binomial logistic regression analysis is done in order to provide answers to hypothesis 2 and 3. In this regression analysis the four different forms of trust are tested as predictors for voting, as well as the association between education and voting. In the analysis we controlled for gender, age and political interest. Thereby, we tested whether the different forms of political trust have a moderating effect on the relationship between education and voting. We generated six different models (model 0 – model 5). In each model one or more variables are added in order to test the moderating effect of these added variables on the relationship between education and voting behaviour. In model 0 the control variables are tested, in model 1 education is added and in model 2 to 5 we added respectively trust in the country's parliament, trust in the country's legal system, trust in political parties and at last trust in politicians.

It is found that trust is positively related to voting. Each point of a higher level of trust in the country's parliament (on a scale of 1 to 10) will increase the odds of voting by 1.121. For trust in the

country's legal system it will increase the odds of voting by 1.107. For trust in political parties it will increase the odds of voting by 1.121 and for trust in politicians it will increase the odds of voting by 1.105. From this it can be concluded that the odds for an individual to vote increase with 1.121 for each point higher on the scale of trust in the parliament (OD=1.121,  $p<.01$ ). The odds for an individual to vote increase with 1.107 for each point higher on the scale of trust in the legal system (OD=1.107,  $p<.01$ ). The odds for an individual to vote increase with 1.121 for each point higher on the scale of trust in political parties (OD=1.121,  $p<.01$ ). Finally, the results show that the odds for an individual to vote increase with 1.105 for each point higher on the scale of trust in the parliament (OD=1.105,  $p<.01$ ). Hence, it can be stated that people with higher levels of political trust are more likely to vote than people with lower levels of political trust. Furthermore, the analysis shows that political trust has a moderating effect on the relationship between education and voting. In table 2 it can be seen that the addition of trust in the country's parliament or legal system is moderating the relationship between education and voting behaviour. Whereas the odds ratio of education is 1.089 in model 1, this odds ratio decreases to respectively 1.084 and 1.081 in model 2 and model 3, when trust in parliament and legal system are added to the analysis. From this it can be concluded that adding trust in the country's parliament or legal system to the analysis model measuring the effect of education on voting behaviour, is moderating this relationship. However, it should be noted that this moderating effect is rather low and is not applicable on trust in political parties and politicians.

The Nagelkerke  $R^2$ , which tries to explain the variance in the models, is .175 for model 2, .173 for model 3, .173 for model 4 and .175 for model 5, which means that our analysis models explain between 17,3% and 17,5% of the variance in the prediction of voting behaviour. However, it should be noted that the Nagelkerke  $R^2$  is a so called pseudo R square. This means, the Nagelkerke  $R^2$  is not a highly reliable instrument in order to explain the variance of this model. This is a result of the fact that logistic regression does not provide good possibilities to explain the variance.

For hypothesis 3, it can be concluded that individuals with more years of followed education are more likely to vote. Each year of followed education increases the odds of voting by 1.089 (OR=1.089,  $p<.01$ ), controlled for gender, age and political interest. From this it can be inferred that higher educated people tend to vote more than lower educated people. The Nagelkerke  $R^2$  is .162. According to the Nagelkerke  $R^2$ , 16,2% of the variance is explained by this model (model 1).

Table 4. Hypothesis 2 & 3: Binomial regression analysis predicting the effect of four different forms of political trust and education on voting, controlled for gender, age and political interest. (N=18491)

	<i>Model 0</i>			<i>Model 1</i>			<i>Model 2</i>			<i>Model 3</i>			<i>Model 4</i>			<i>Model 5</i>		
	B	S.E.	Odds ratio															
Gender	-.171*	.040	.843	-.131*	.040	.877	-.140*	.040	.870	-.147*	.040	.863	-.117*	.040	.890	-.117*	.040	.890
Age	.023*	.001	1.024	.030*	.001	1.030	.030*	.001	1.031	.030*	.001	1.030	.031*	.001	1.031	.030*	.001	1.030
Political interest:																		
hardly	.871*	.053	2.389	.819*	.053	2.269	.672*	.054	1.959	.728*	.054	2.072	.680*	.054	1.975	.704*	.054	2.021
quite	1.653*	.055	5.221	1.515*	.056	4.550	1.309*	.058	3.702	1.405*	.057	4.074	1.317*	.058	3.733	1.347*	.058	3.848
very	2.092*	.085	8.104	1.876*	.086	6.526	1.650*	.088	5.207	1.761*	.087	5.819	1.676*	.088	5.342	1.703*	.088	5.492
Education				.085*	.006	1.089	.080*	.006	1.084	.078*	.006	1.081	.086*	.006	1.089	.085*	.006	1.088
Trust in:																		
parliament							.114*	.009	1.121									
legal system										.101*	.008	1.107						
pol. parties													.114*	.009	1.121			
politicians																.100*	.009	1.105

Source: ESS (2010) The dependent variable is self-reported turnout in the last Federal Election (0=did not vote, 1=voted), independent variables are political trust in: country's parliament; country's legal system;

country's political parties; country's politicians and education in years. Controlling variables are gender (0=female, 1=male), age in years and political interest (reference variable = 0, not interested) \*significant at p <

.01

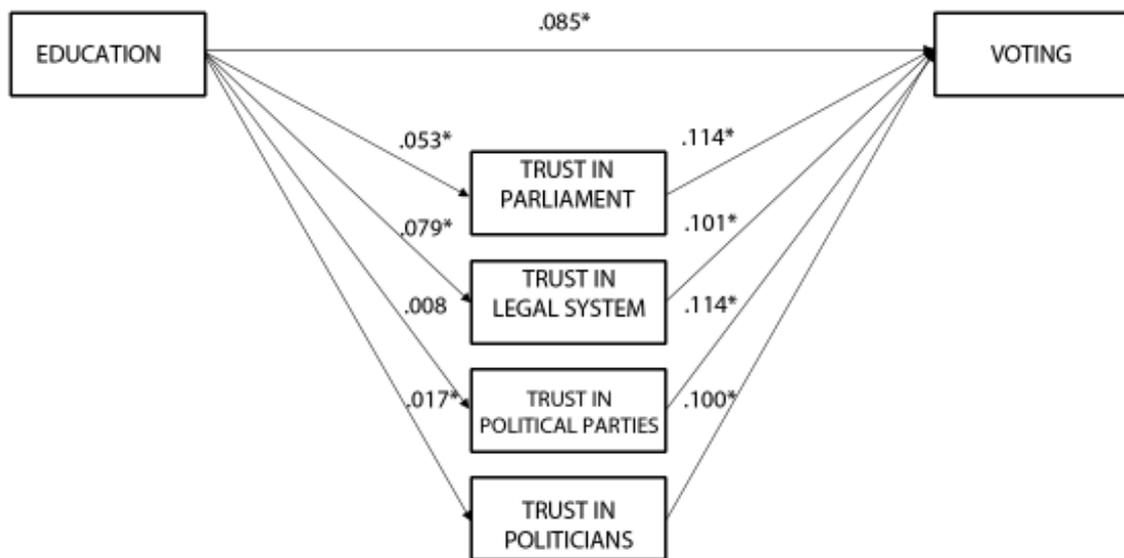


Figure 2. Empirical model. The effect of education and four different forms of political trust on voting, \*significant.<sup>2</sup>

Overall, the hypotheses of this research are mostly confirmed. We find that political trust is a slightly moderating factor in the relationship between education and voting. Thereby we find that the indirect effects of education on voting via political trust are rather low. On the basis of a path analysis it can be seen that the indirect effect of education on voting via political trust is in succession: .006 via trust in parliament, .008 via trust in the legal system and .0017 for trust in politicians. These indirect effects of education on voting via the four different forms of political trust are clearly lower than the direct effect of education on voting. It should be noted that these indirect effects are measured by the b-coefficients of the multiple regression analysis and the b-coefficients of the binominal regression analysis combined. However, the research value of these two kinds of results differ. Whereas the multiple regression analysis can best be interpreted by the b-coefficient, this is not applicable for the binominal regression analysis, which is better interpretable by the odds ratios. However, in the model both b-coefficients are shown to generate the best accessible model.

<sup>2</sup> Note: in this model, results are shown with the b-coefficient. This coefficient is not interpretable in the same way for the multiple linear regression analysis at the left side of the model and the binominal regression analysis at the right side of the model.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

The aim of this research was to find out what the effect is of political trust on the voter turnout of the lower educated. In order to answer this question, we tested whether the lower educated have lower levels of political trust than the higher educated, and furthermore that those with low levels of political trust tend to vote less in the national elections. Also, the common finding in literature on political participation that the lower educated vote less than the higher educated was tested. We tested these hypotheses with data from the 2010 European Social Survey. The data of eleven West-European countries were used.

In line with the expectations, the current research has shown that the lower educated have lower levels of political trust than the higher educated. The disaffection hypothesis, which states that citizens with low education levels have a low amount of trust in government and politics because they feel excluded from meaningful political and social participation (Bovens & Wille, 2010), is partly confirmed in this study. Education is strongly related to trust in the legal system and trust in the country's parliament. Lower educated people also have less trust in politicians, so it is plausible that lower educated people distrust politicians because of the fact that they are not similar to them. For trust in political parties, we find no relationship with education. Hence, data from the current research confirm that the lower educated have low levels of trust in the legal system and the parliament, but cannot confirm that this is the case for politics in general, as stated by the disaffection hypothesis that is widely used in the literature on political participation (Bovens & Wille, 2010). The difference between trust in the more 'permanent' political actors -the parliament in a country and the legal system- and the more 'changeable' political actors -politicians and political parties- has not been found in previous research. This makes our research an important addition to the existing literature and the research field of political trust.

We find only a small effect or no effect at all of education on trust in the changeable political actors. This could be explained by the fact that there are several different politicians and political parties, while of the permanent political actors there is only one. When a citizen is asked the question whether he has trust in the country's parliament, every citizen thinks of the same parliament. However, when asked the question whether one has trust in political parties, each citizen can think of a different party. Many people can think of a political party which they trust, so they might be more likely to report to have trust in political parties in general. For example, Bovens & Wille (2010) state that the lower educated tend to identify more strongly with populist parties. Perhaps a citizen does not trust the legal system, but he does trust a certain (populist) political party, and therefore reports having trust in political parties. This might be the cause we find only a weak relationship or no relationship at all between education and trust in politicians and political parties, and we do find a rather strong relationship between education and trust in the country's parliament and the legal system. Whereas the

lower educated more often distrust the country's parliament and the legal system, the lower educated perhaps often do have trust in a certain politician or political party. Future research would have to prove whether the lower educated do have lower levels of trust in the permanent political actors, but not in the changeable actors within the system. This can be done by asking respondents which political parties and politicians they trust, and which ones they do not trust. This will provide a better insight in which actors are trusted by citizens.

Moreover, the results found in this study confirm that political trust is related to voting behavior. As expected, the higher the level of political trust a person has, the more likely he is to vote in the national elections. Trust in the parliament and trust in political parties are the strongest predictors of voting. Following the rational choice model (Blais, 2000), we assume that the lower educated have lower levels of political trust, and therefore they perceive their benefits from voting to be lower than the higher educated. According to the results, this could be why the lower educated vote less often than the higher educated.

Furthermore, we find that the lower educated vote less often in national elections than the higher educated do. The evidence confirms the common finding in literature on political participation that the lower educated are, measured by their participation in voting, less represented in politics than the higher educated.

The results found in this study are reliable because of the high number of respondents (18941), this can be seen in the high levels of significance of almost every relationship. Thereby, the study reveals results about eleven comparable democracies in Western European countries. This makes the findings of the results in this study suitable for generalization to other western democracies.

We have to note that the question whether one voted in the last national election is a question about the past, whereas the question about whether one has trust in the country's parliament is a question about the present. It could be possible that the political environment at the moment of the elections was different than at the moment the survey was taken. It could be that a person did not have trust in politics during the time of the elections and that therefore he did not vote. It is a possibility that this person during the time of the survey did report having a high level of political trust, for example because the leading politicians have changed and one finds these politicians more trusting than the leading politicians at the time of the elections. The relationship between political trust and voting might therefore actually be slightly different from the relationship that we found in this study. A study that includes the question whether one would vote if there were elections today would have to show whether this is true and provides data in order to get potential causal relationships.

This research emphasizes that the lower educated have lower levels of political trust and that they vote less than the higher educated. Their lack of participating in the act of voting is a threat to democracy, and that political trust is related to education and voting might be an indication that a

solution to this threat lies in improving the political trust of the lower educated. If lack of political trust indeed is an incentive for not voting in the national elections, then improving the levels of trust among the lower educated could solve the problem of the unequal representation of the lower educated. This research emphasizes that further research is necessary in order to find out what role political trust can play in making democracy work.

Further research has to provide an answer to the question what actually motivates the lower educated to vote or what their incentives are for staying at home during the national elections. From the available data we can conclude that political trust and voting are related. However, we are unable to state that there is a causal relationship between these two variables, between the low levels of political trust among the lower educated and their low voter turnout. Also, why it is that the poorly educated have lower levels of political trust than the higher educated remains a topic for further research. It is suggested that the privileged positions of the higher educated in society make it easier for them to express trust in the system and the actors that made these privileged positions possible (Hooghe et al. 2012). This could also be an explanation for why we find a stronger relationship between education and trust in the legal system and parliament than the relationship between education and trust in political parties and politicians. It is a possibility that a person is jobless and therefore does not have faith in the system and the parliament, while one does have trust in a certain political party or politician, for example a political party or politician that is not part of the parliament.

This research is an essential addition to the existing literature, since it finds that there is a difference between trust in the permanent political actors and trust in the changeable political actors. However, longitudinal research, for example, could provide more specific answers to the question why the lower educated vote less often than the higher educated and why they have lower levels of political trust. Longitudinal research is also a more appropriate instrument to test why the lower educated have lower levels of trust in the parliament and the legal system, but not in political parties and politicians. Moreover, longitudinal research could also give data in order to provide causal relationships between lower levels of trust in (certain) political actors and its effect on voter turnout.

This research stresses that a solution to the problem of representation of the lower educated lies in improving trust in the legal system and the country's parliament. Therefore, political events and actors that the lower educated do have trust in, should be more visible in the political field. Moreover, lower educated citizens should be more involved in the functioning of the legal system and the parliament. This could be done by integrating politics in lower educations, making politics more accessible to lower educated citizens and bringing more positive political news in the media.

The most remarkable finding of this study is the difference between trust in the more permanent political actors (the parliament and the legal system) and trust in the more changeable political actors (politicians and political parties). Apparently the problem with the lower educated and political

participation is that they do not have trust in the system as a whole, whereas they do have trust in some specific actors that are part of this system, namely politicians and political parties. The lack of representation of the lower educated is not a complete dissociation from politics in general, rather it is a dissatisfaction with the country's parliament and the legal system.

## **Appendix A: Questions used from the European Social Survey**

**Question F2:** *Sex (male/female)*

**Question F3** *And in what year were you born? (age)*

**Question F16:** *About how many years of education have you completed, whether full-time or part-time? Please report these in full-time equivalents and include compulsory years of schooling.*

**Question B11:** *Some people don't vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last [country] national election in [month/year]?*

Response categories: Yes, No, Not eligible to vote, Don't know

**Question B1:** *How interested would you say you are in politics – are you...*

Response categories:

very interested,

quite interested,

hardly interested,

or, not at all interested?

(Don't know)

**Question B4-B7:** *Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust. Firstly...*

Response categories:

**B4** ...[country]'s parliament?

**B5** ...the legal system?

**B7** ...politicians?

**B8** ...political parties?

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