Political Interest and Voter Turnout: A Different Relationship in West- and Eastern-Europe

Lennart Burgmeijer - Sociology Bachelor thesis

Abstract
Since equal participation is considered to be of central importance in democracies, a large amount of scholarly attention has been given to determinants of voter turnout. However, on the other hand, surprisingly few scholars have looked so far at how the relationships of these determinants with voter turnout differs across regions. Yet, one of these few studies, comparing post-communist Eastern-Europe to Western-Europe, has found the relationship between political interest and voter turnout to be stronger in Western-Europe than in Eastern-Europe. Based on this finding, this study has tried to find an explanation for this phenomena: why does this relationship differ across these regions? Two explanations were examined: differences in levels of party identification and political trust. In this paper, evidence was found that the different relationship of political interest with voter turnout between the East and West of Europe can partly be explained by different levels of political trust whereas party identification does not play a role.

Faculty of Social Sciences
Department of Sociology
Utrecht University
Supervisor: J.J.H. Lössbroek
13th of June, 2019

1. Introduction

Many of the democratic regimes worldwide have different mechanisms by which they allow their citizens to express their political voice. Although only being one of many forms of participation, electoral voting is probably the best-known form and it is a central aspect of democracies (Ashworth, 2012; Geys and Mause, 2016). Perhaps for this reason, scholars have given great attention to the variation in time, place and the personal characteristics of the people who vote. According to Cancela and Geys (2016), there are only a few topics in political science that have generated a comparable volume of literature. Particularly the past few years, the number of articles on voter turnout has rapidly expanded: in 2014, the number of articles on voter turnout was four times as large as it was in the year 2000 (Cancela and Geys, 2016). Despite their shared focus on turnout at elections, a distinction can be made between studies focusing on explaining aggregate turnout in time and place (explaining differences in turnout rates between different elections) and studies focusing on individual determinants for voter turnout. For the reason that this study aims to explain how the influence of individual determinants differs across countries, the aforementioned will be less relevant here.

Different arguments can be given for why unequal participation on basis of individual determinants is undesirable. Not only does unequal participation undermine the ideals underlying democracies as it prescribes that people should be included in the political decisions affecting their interests (Young, 2000; Shapiro, 2001). Besides this, unequal participation makes policy-making biased, leading to greater economic inequality. This on its turn creates a downward spiral since greater economic inequality will further decrease political equality (Solt, 2008).

Over years, several determinants have been identified as influencing individual voter turnout. As shown by the meta-analysis of individual-level turnout research by Smets and Van Ham (2013), these determinants can be categorized into five groups: 1. Resource differences (e.g. education, age, income); 2. Mobilization differences (e.g. organisational membership, union membership and media exposure); 3. Socialization differences (e.g. parental influence during adolescence, political discussion); 4. Rational choice model (e.g. personal benefits, costs of voting) and 5. Psychological differences (e.g. party identification, political interest). Although many of these determinants are being recognised as influencing

the voter turnout of individuals across different regions such as education, political interest and media exposure (Smets and Van Ham, 2013), the question arises whether the influence of these determinants is similar in different contexts. This question is highly relevant question since regional differences in these determinants might require different measures for tackling unequal participation.

Remarkably, there is currently very little research on this topic. So far, the majority of cross-regional studies have focused solely on explaining turnout rate differences between regions (e.g. Mahler, 2008; Ezrow and Xezonakis, 2016). Nevertheless, there are some exceptions to this. Leighley and Nagler (1992) for example compared in their analysis the north and the south of the United States and found some indications that sex and race have different influences on turnout in both regions. Shifting the focus to Europe, Smith (2009) has compared the individual determinants between European countries with and without a former communist regimes. Also in the case of Smith, dissimilarities were found. This time, the results suggested that the influence of occupational status, religion and political interest on turnout were different in both contexts.

Of the three factors playing different roles in post- and non-post-communist context, one of them is most striking: political interest. For some reason, political interest seemed to be far less important as determinant for voter turnout in the Eastern-European countries than in Western-European countries. But why is this the case? In what possibly relevant ways are post-communist countries different from non-post-communist countries? One key difference is the political system in their recent past. This expresses itself in two ways: party identification, the extent to which an individual identifies itself with a political party; and political trust, the extent to which citizens trust political institutions and political actors. Because post-communist countries had until recently no true multi-party system, a large share of the population lacked the possibility to develop party identification through parental socialization (McDevitt, 2005), and therefore the level of party identification will most likely be lower on average. Also, communism has led to a legacy of distrust towards state organisations according to Howard (2002). Although the moderating effect of both characteristics on the relationship between political interest and voter turnout have not been studied so far, it is plausible to expect this relationship to exist. Therefore, the following research question will be studied in this paper:

"Is political interest more important as a determinant for voter turnout Western-European (non-post-communist) countries compared to Eastern-European (post-communist)-countries and if so, how can this difference be explained by party identification and political trust?"

For the reason that regional differences and moderating effects between individual determinants of voter turnout are barely investigated in the literature on voter turnout, this study might be a contribution to the academic literature for two reasons: it will provide us with more insight about cross-regional differences regarding determinants of voter turnout; and more specifically, it will give us more information of how party identification and political trust affect the relation between political interest and voter turnout.

2. Theoretical framework

In this section of the paper, an overview of previous research is given from which six hypotheses will be derived. The first thing to be addressed is the general relationship between political interest and voter turnout. Secondly, I will turn to how this relationship differs across countries with and without communist backgrounds as found by Smith (2009). This brings us to the discussion of two possible explanations for differences between both contexts. Eventually the abovementioned hypotheses will be presented in a figure to give the reader a better overview.

2.1. Political interest and voter turnout

The extent to which political interest determines voter turnout is one that has oftentimes been studied. Based on the meta-analysis by Smets & Van Ham (2013), political interest was even among the five most studied individual-level determinants of the 90 empirical studies conducted between 2000-2010 that were included in this analysis. Among these studies in which political interest was included, the vast majority of them indeed found it to be a predictor for individual voter turnout. According to Verba, Schlozman & Brady (1995), political interest is not simply one of many factors influencing individual turnout. Instead, they argue that political interest is even one of the strongest predictors of political participation. Also they claim that the effect usually found between education and voting is largely caused by an increase in political interest.

Although the context might slightly differ, political interest also seems to predict different forms of local political participation (Vedlitz and Veblen, 1980; Mcleod, Scheufele and Moy, 1999). As shown in the model presented by Mcleod et al. (1999), political interest has next to its direct influence on political participation also indirect influence through interpersonal discussion. This finding is compatible with the mechanism underlying the relationship between political interest and voting states as sketched by Denny and Doyle (2008). As these authors argue, people who are more interested in politics are more likely to possess information about the political system and are more certain about the correctness of their political view. From a rational-choice perspective this means that the politically interested enjoy lower voting costs because they do not have to seek out information at election time. Besides, politically interested also derive a higher utility from voting because they are more

certain that their decision for a particular party matches their actual preference. From the above literature we can draw the following hypothesis:

H1: The more politically interested people are, the more likely they are to vote.

2.2. Political interest and voter turnout in different contexts

In the section above we have discussed the relation between political interest and voter turnout. Yet, what has not been dealt with so far is how this relationship varies across different contexts. As found by Smith (2009), political interest seemed to be of lesser importance for predicting voter turnout in post-communist countries compared to the western non-post-communist countries. For this reason, I expect to find similar results and therefore the following hypothesis will be tested:

H2: The relationship between political interest and voter turnout is moderated by West (= no former communism) and therefore, voter turnout is more important as predictor of voter turnout in Western-European countries than in Eastern-European countries.

2.3. Explanations for variation between different contexts

As was hypothesised in the previous paragraph, political interest will not be of equal importance in Western non-post-communist countries compared to Eastern post-communist countries. For this reason I looked for characteristics that would typically stem from communism that could possibly explain the difference: party identification and political trust. In the first section of this chapter it was already noted that the relation between political interest and voter turnout can be understood from a rational-choice perspective. Because those who are more politically interested derive a higher utility from voting, they have more reason to do so. However, the question is whether political interest can be seen in isolation from other rational-choice factors. Below, the two other rational-choice determinants for voter turnout, party identification and political trust, are further elaborated. For each determinant this will be done in three steps: first, I will discuss the difference of the determinants in East- and West-Europe; secondly, I will explain the moderation effect on the relationship between political interest and voter turnout; and lastly, it will be explained how the moderation effect of West is mediated by the determinants.

2.3.1. Party identification

According to Philip Converse's (1969) *Of Time and Partisan Stability*, party identification is mainly the result of a combination of parental socialization and life-cycle processes. Evidence for this parental socialization mechanism of party identification was found by for example McDevitt (2005) and Jennings et al. (1979). The latter studied the party identification of children of pre-voting age and found similar party dispositions for parents and children. This social learning model poses a problem to the post-communist countries (and new democracies in general) as a large though decreasing number of the population cannot have developed this kind of party identification in a political system without multiple parties. On the other hand, the mechanism also suggests the strengthening of party identification as years pass by because social learning becomes a possibility for an increasing part of the population. Although social learning seems to become less relevant in the western older democracies, it can still be argued that the social learning model can possibly account for differences found in party identification between post-communist countries (Dalton and Weldon, 2007).

Although the relation between party identification and voter turnout has oftentimes been studied (several scholars such as Powell, 1986; Matsusaka, 1995; Birch, 2010 have found a positive association between party identification and one's probability to vote), it has not been examined so far how party identification relates to the influence of political interest on voter turnout. However, it seems plausible that such a relationship does exist. Take for example the situation in which there is a person who does not identify him- or herself with any political party and for this reason also does not care about who wins the elections. It seems likely that the relationship between political interest and voter turnout will be weak in this case since this person would have little reason to vote. However, the more a person will identify with a political party, the more likely it will be that political interest will play a role as a determinant for voter turnout.

When it is indeed found that Western-European countries have higher levels of party identification and when it is found that party identification moderates the relationship between political interest and voter turnout, it will most likely be the case that part of the moderation effect of West can be explained by party identification. Consequently, the moderation effect of West on the relationship between political interest and voter turnout

will weaken and therefore this relationship will be more similar in Eastern- and Western-Europe. From the above we can come to the following two hypotheses:

H3a: Non-post-communist (Western) countries have higher levels of party identification than in post-communist (Eastern) countries.

H3b: Party identification moderates the relationship between political interest and voter turnout and therefore (partly) mediates the stronger positive relationship in Western-Europe compared to Eastern-Europe.

2.3.2. Political trust

With regards to political trust in a cross-national context it becomes clear that levels of political trust are lower in the Eastern-European former-communist countries. In a study by Catterberg and Moreno (2005), five dimensions of political trust were distinguished. Stable democracies of Western Europe tended to score higher than the new- and transitional democracies of Central- and East-Europe on all five dimensions. A similar conclusion was drawn by Marien (2011). She also concludes that levels of political trust are higher in the established democracies of West-Europe than in the new democracies of Central- and West-Europe. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these lower levels of political trust coincide with higher perceptions of corruption in almost all these countries (Transparancy International, n.d). Also Stockemer, LaMontagne and Scruggs (2013) suggested a similar connection between corruption and political trust in their study in which they found higher levels of corruption coinciding with lower levels of voter turnout. This fits within the framework drawn by Wagner et al. (2009). According to them, political actors cannot be trusted when demanding bribes and engaging in discrimination.

In the case of political trust, there is also a large amount of literature showing that people who have more trust in politics, tend to vote more often (e.g. Bélanger and Nadeau, 2005; Grönlund and Setälä, 2007). However, also in this case, there is no previous literature on how the relationship between political interest and voter turnout is moderated by political trust. Nevertheless, a similar example as in the previous subsection can be used to demonstrate that such a relationship will most likely exist. Imagine a person with no trust in political actors and the political institutions. Regardless of whether this person is interested in politics or not, he/she has no incentive to vote. In other words, political interest will have little to no influence on individual turnout in this case. On the contrary, if a person has to an

increasing extent more trust in political actors- and institutions, it seems likely that being more interested in political issues will also increase one's propensity to vote. In this case, the effect of political interest on voter turnout will be strengthened by higher levels of political trust.

Here as well, if we find Western-European countries to have higher levels of political trust and political trust to be a moderator for the relationship between political interest and voter turnout, it will most likely be the case that part of the moderation effect of West will be explained by political trust. This will on its turn lead to a weakened moderation effect of West on the relationship between political interest and voter turnout, and therefore there will be less of a difference in this relationship between political interest and voter turnout if Eastern- and Western-Europe are compared. This brings us to the following hypotheses:

H4a: Non-post-communist (Western) countries have higher levels of political trust than post-communist (Eastern) countries.

H4b: Political trust moderates the relationship between political interest and voter turnout and therefore (partly) mediates the stronger positive relationship in Western-Europe compared to Eastern-Europe.

The above standing six hypotheses can be traced back in the figure below.

Figure 1. The relationship between political interest, voter turnout, party affiliation, political trust and west (non-post-communism).
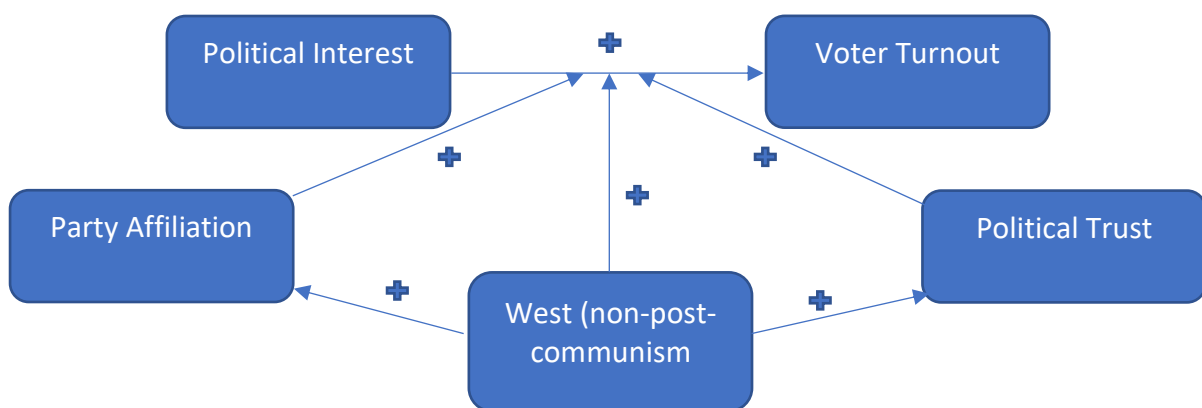
3. Data, operationalisation and methods

3.1. Data

The analysis in this study is based on secondary data provided by the second round of the European Social Survey (ESS). Respondents of the ESS were selected by strict random probability methods in which the aim was to collect a representative sample of all persons aged 15 and over. Subsequently, data was collected via face-to-face computer-assisted personal interviewing in all participating countries (European Social Survey, n.d.). The questions asked in these interviews comprised of a wide variety of subjects such as media and social trust, politics, subjective wellbeing and sociodemographic factors. In total, 47,537 interviews were conducted between August 2004 and July 2006 in 25 countries across Europe. Two out of these 25 countries, Turkey and France, will not be included in the analyses that will be conducted. The reason for excluding Turkey has to with its geographical, cultural and political deviation from both the western countries as well as the eastern countries. The main deviation from the first group has to do with its geography, its non-membership of the European Union and Schengen-zone and their deviating economic situation. Turkey's main difference from the Eastern-European countries has to do with its non-communist past. From a cultural religious point of view, Turkey even differs from all other countries since it is the only country in which most inhabitants are Islamic. The reason for leaving France out of the analysis is wholly different. Because in the French survey no question about internet use was asked, the outcomes cannot be compared to the other countries in the sample.

After excluding the French and Turkish data, 43,875 respondents were left. Besides this, I also decided to remove the respondents who were not eligible to vote and respondents below the age of 18. Although citizens in some countries are allowed to vote below the age of 18, for conveniency as well as comparability reasons, I have chosen not to include them in my analysis. Afterwards, 39,503 respondents were left for the analysis. Then, another reason for a substantial loss of respondents was the creation of occupational ranks (ISEI). Most losses were a consequence of the inability to adopt unemployed respondents into a scale of occupational ranks. Next to this, a much smaller number of respondents were lost because their occupation could not be transformed into an occupational rank. In total, 35,758 respondents were left afterwards. Furthermore, missing cases on "satisfaction with

politics" dropped the number of respondents to 33,143. This further decreased after taking missing cases on "political trust" (31,968) and subsequently "party identification" (29,887) into consideration. However, contrary to the earlier mentioned variables, the reason for these missing cases is less obvious. Lastly, missing cases on the other remaining variables eventually led a total of 27,966 respondents that were left for the analysis. Remarkably, the number of missing cases for each of these variables (not looking at the exclusion of France and Turkey) was slightly higher in Eastern-Europe. In total, 42% of all missing cases were registered in Eastern-Europe whereas initially this group contained 32% of the respondents. Unfortunately, it is unknown why this is the case. Perhaps, Eastern-European respondents were more afraid that their anonymity could not be guaranteed at the moment they criticized the official authorities.

Like these missing cases, differences in response rates between the 23 included countries were also clearly visible. The lowest response was registered Switzerland with a response rate of 48.6%. In contrast, the highest response was to be found in Estonia with a response rate of 79.1%. These response rate differences might have caused biased samples and therefore the differences found between countries would not have been found when samples were representative for the population. Similar to the large differences in response rates, also sample sizes range from (N=3026) in Czechia to (N=579) in Iceland in the same round.

3.2. Variables

In this section, the variables that will be used in the statistical analysis will be further specified. First, I will turn to the dependent variable, then I move on to the independent variables, and lastly, I will clarify the control variables.

3.2.1. Dependent variable

Voter turnout: This variable was measured by the question: • "*Some people don't vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last [country] national election in [month/year]?*" Answers: *1 = yes, 2 = no, 3 = not eligible to vote*. Because only the cases in which people made the decision to vote or not vote were relevant in this paper, I only used the first two answers and transformed them into: *0 = no; 1 = yes* for the analyses.

3.2.2. Independent variables

Political interest: The measurement of this construct was done in the same fashion as was the case for Smith (2009). For this reason, the following three standard questions were used to construct this variable: • *"How interested would you say you are in politics?"* Answers: *1 = very interested, 2 = quite interested, 3 = hardly interested* and *4 = not at all interested;* • *"How often does politics seem so complicated that you can't really understand what is going on?"* Answers: *1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = occasionally, 4 = regularly* and *5 = frequently;* • *"How difficult or easy do you find it to make your mind up about political issues?"* Answers: *1 = very difficult, 2 = difficult, 3 = easy nor difficult, 4 = easy* and *5 = very easy*. The above method seems appropriate because it includes, next to self-reported interest in politics, also more indirect indications of an individual's interest in politics. For creating the variable, the two above standard questions were first recoded in such a way that a higher score indicates a higher level of political interest. Secondly, a principle component analysis (PCA) was used to construct the new variable. This analysis showed that 61% of the variance of the underlying variables can be explained by this new variable together with factor weights of respectively .73, .80, and .80. Also, a reliability analysis showed that these three variables measured approximately the same as a Cronbach's alpha of .67 was found.

Party identification: This variable was constructed from the following two standard questions: • *"Is there a particular political party you feel closer to than all the other parties?"* Answers: *1 = yes* and *2 = no;* • *"How close do you feel to this party? Do you feel that you are ..."* Answers: *1 = very close, 2 = quite close, 3 = not close* and *4= not at all close.* Both questions were transformed into the ordinal variable "party affiliation" with five categories. This resulted into the following scale: *1 = not closer to one particular party, 2 = closer to one particular party but not at all close to this party, 3 = closer to one particular party but not close to this party, 4 = closer to one particular party and quite close to this party* and lastly *5 = closer to one particular party and very close to this party*. I have chosen to measure party identification by looking at someone's subjective feeling of party identification rather than partisan membership. Although I expect much overlap between both measures, the subjective feeling of party identification comes closer to what I intend to measure here, namely the extent to which an individual identifies him- or herself with a political party.

Political trust: This variable was constructed by using four sub-questions of the question below. These sub-questions relate to the following institutions: the parliament, the legal

system, politicians, and political parties. • *"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."* Besides the four institutions mentioned above, respondents were also asked the same question about the police, the European Union and the United Nations. However, since these institutions are farther removed from national politics, I have decided to leave these institutions out. Subsequently, I used a PCA and a reliability analysis to determine whether the above variables could be transformed into one scale. This seemed to the case as the PCA showed factor weights of respectively .87, .78, .92, and .90 with 76% of the underlying variance explained by this new variable. Also, the reliability analysis shows that a scale with these four variables works well as a Cronbach's alpha of .89 was found.

West: This dummy variable was created to distinguish Western-European countries without communist past on the hand, and Eastern-European countries with a communist past on the other. Because Germany was split into communist East-Germany and non-communist West-Germany until 1990, both regions were grouped in a different region. This is an often-used approach by scholars looking at these two regions (e.g. Smith, 2009; Marien, 2011). The group West contains the countries Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and West-Germany. The countries classified as East (West = 0) are Czech Republic, East-Germany, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

3.2.3. Control variables

Below, an overview is given of the control variables that will be used in the analyses. These specific variables have been selected in order to replicate the findings by Smith (2009). I critically reviewed the way in which Smith has measured concepts such as social trust, satisfaction with politics, and social network. They seem appropriate for what I aim to measure in this study. As demonstrated by Smith, all these variables seemed to have a significant relationship with voter turnout. Besides, Smets and Van Ham (2013) have shown that these variables have more often demonstrated to be related with voter turnout. However, for some of these variables this seems to be an exception rather than the rule.

ISEI: Occupational status of respondent. This variable was acquired by the conversion of International Standard Classifications of Occupations (ISCO) scores into Economic Index of Occupational Status scores according to Ganzeboom's (2010) conversion matrix.

Education (in years): This variable was measured by the question: • *"How many years of full-time education have you completed? [To be reported in full-time equivalents, including compulsory/mandatory years of schooling]".*

Gender: Dummy variable for sex of respondent (1 = female, 0 = male).

Age and age2: Age of the respondent, and age squared to capture non-linear effects. Mean centering was used for the latter to prevent multicollinearity.

Social trust: This variable was constructed by using the following three standard questions: • *"Would you say that most people can be trusted (= 10), or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people (= 0)?";* • *"Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance (= 0), or would they try to be fair (= 10)?";* and lastly • *"Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful (= 10), or that they are mostly looking out for themselves (= 0)?".* The new variable showed factor weights of respectively .84, .85, .80, while 69% of the underlying variance was explained by this new variable. According to the reliability analysis, a Cronbach's alpha of .77 was found.

Satisfaction with politics: This variable was constructed by using the questions: • "On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]*?";* • *"Now thinking about the [country] government, how satisfied are you with the way it is doing its job?";* and lastly • *"On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in [country]?".* Answer categories ranged from *0 = extremely dissatisfied* to *10 = extremely satisfied* for all three questions. The new variable showed factor weights of respectively .84, .88, .85, while 74% of the underlying variance was explained by this new variable. According to the reliability analysis, a Cronbach's alpha of .82 was found.

City and Village: Dummy variables created based on the standard question: • *"Which phrase on this card best describes the area where you live?"* Respondents who reported to be living in *1 = a big city* were given the value 1 on "City" (1= yes, 0 = no) whereas the people who reported to be living in a *4 = farm village* or in *5 = a farm or home in the country side* were given the value 1 on "Village" (1= yes, 0 = no). The reference category for these variables are the people who live in *2 = the suburbs/outskirts of a big city* or in *3 = towns/small cities.*

Religiosity: This variable was measured by the question: • *"Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are?"* Answers ranging from *0 = not at all religious*, to *10 = very religious*.

Member of labour union: Dummy variable created by the following standard question: • *"Are you or have you ever been a member of a trade union or similar organisation? IF YES, is that currently or previously?"* Respondent who reported to be a member of a labour union at this current moment were given the value 1 whereas other respondents were given the value 0.

Student: Dummy variable based on the standard question: • *"Which of these descriptions best describes your situation (in the last seven day)?"* (Respondent could select one option)*.* Respondents who answered "*in education*" were assigned the value 1 whereas other respondents were given the value 0.

Social Network: With this variable I aimed to measure how large a respondent's social network was. The following standard questions were used to construct this variable: • "How often do you meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues?" Answers: *never (= 1), less than a month, once a month, several times a month, once a week, several times a week, and every day (= 7);* • *"Compared to other people of your age, how often would you say you take part in social activities?"* Answers: *much less than most (= 1), less than most, about the same, more than most, and much more than most (= 7);* • *"How often do you use the internet, the World Wide Web or e-mail – whether at home or at work – for your personal use?"* With answers ranging from 1 to 7 on a similar scale as the first question. The new variable showed factor weights of respectively .77, .74, .60, while 51% of the underlying variance was explained by this new variable. According to the reliability analysis, a Cronbach's alpha of .39 was found. Even though this is relatively low, I still decided to adopt this scale to be ensured that the finding by Smith (2009) would match my starting-point.

Country dummies: Country dummies were created to filter country-specific deviation. Inhabitants of a certain country were assigned the value 1 on this specific country dummy whereas the respondents from other countries were assigned the value 0 on this variable.

3.3. Methods

In order to test the hypotheses in this research, I made use of t-tests and logistic regression analyses. In addition, for the dichotomous variables included in the analyses I also looked at

the phi-coefficient to find out whether the regions West and East differed with respect to the value distribution of these variables. First, after computing the descriptive variables for the full sample, West, and East, I used a t-test to determine whether West and East differed with regards to levels of party identification and political trust. Afterwards I moved on to logistic regression analyses to look at the effects of different variables on voter turnout. I used this statistical method for two reasons: 1. To make this study more comparable to Smith's (2009) study; and 2. Because our dependent variable, voter turnout, is a dichotomous variable (in the discussion I will come back to this). One precondition for using this analysis is the non-multicollinearity assumption. This assumption was satisfied after mean centering was used for constructing the interaction variables. In the first regression model, I looked at the effect of political interest on voter turnout while all other control variables as well as "West" were also added to the analysis. Subsequently, I used the same approach after splitting the file into East-Europe and West-Europe. For both regions the analysis was executed separately (except for the variable West since in these analyses all respondents scored either 0 or 1). After this analysis, I conducted the fourth logistic regression with interaction variables for all previously included variables with west (e.g. west * political Interest). Also, the original variables used to create the interaction variables were included in this analysis. This method was used to acquire insight in whether and how the relationship of the variables with voter turnout differed between East and West.

In order to test the hypotheses with regards to the different relationship for political interest in East and West, I used three additional logistic regression analyses. In these analyses, I built further on the approach used in the fourth analysis. In the fifth analysis, I added the variables party identification as well as the interaction between political interest party identification. Subsequently in the sixth analysis, I substituted the variables party identification and the interaction with political interest for political trust and an interaction between political trust and political interest. In the last regular analysis, both party identification and political trust together with their interactions with political interest were added to the same analysis.

Finally, for the sensitivity analysis I used the same approach as in analyses 4 to 7. However, in contrast to these previous analyses, data from Belgium and Luxembourg was excluded from the analysis.

4. Results

In this section of the paper I will discuss the results of the statistical analyses that were used to test the hypotheses set up in the theory section of this paper. First, I will give the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the analysis before I move on to the results of the logistic regression analyses. In the first part of the logistic regression discussion I will focus on hypotheses 1 and 2 whereas in the second part of this section my focus will be on hypotheses 3 and 4. In the final part of this chapter the results of a sensitivity analysis are shown to reflect on the consequences of decisions that were made earlier on.

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Looking at the descriptive statistics (**Table 1**) we can see that there are a few differences between the post-communist East and the non-post-communist West. First of all, the sample of Western-Europe is considerably larger (N=20,009) than the sample of Eastern-Europe (N=7,957). With regards to our dependent variable "voted last national election" the number of people who declared to have voted in the West (*M*=.83) is sizable larger (Φ=.126, *p*<.001) than in the East (*M*=.72). In contrast, even though the level of political interest is significantly higher (*t*(15,135) = 9,96; *p*<.001) in Western-Europe (*M*=2.35; *SD*=.97) compared to (*M*=2.22; *SD*=.94), the difference is small. Moving to party identification and political trust, the two elements expected to explain differences in the relationship between the earlier mentioned political interest and voter turnout, differences between both contexts are also clearly visible. The levels of both party identification (*t*(27,964)=22,927; *p*<.001) and political trust (*t*(15,145)=56,576; *p*<.001) are considerably larger in Western-Europe (respectively *M*=2.61; *SD*=.78 and *M*=2.21; *SD=.94*) than in the East (respectively *M*=2.16; *SD*=.89 and *M*=1.51; *SD=.94*) which supports hypotheses 3a and 4a.

Besides the differences described above, both regions do also differ significantly on all other variables but age. Particularly with regards to social trust and satisfaction with the government the differences are noticeable. For the other variables and especially these of education and student, the dissimilarities are less outstanding.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the variables.

Variable	Min	Max	Full sample (N = 27,966)		Western-Europe (N = 20,009)		Eastern-Europe (N = 7,957)		$(M_w - M_e)$
			Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	T-test/Phi-coefficient
Voted last national election (1= yes)	0.00	1.00	0.80		0.83		0.72		.11 ***
Political interest	0.00	4.62	2.31	0.96	2.35	0.97	2.22	0.94	0.13 ***
Party identification	1.00	5.00	2.48	1.49	2.61	1.48	2.16	1.47	0.45 ***
Political Trust	0.00	4.74	2.01	0.99	2.21	0.94	1.51	0.94	0.70 ***
ISEI	16.00	90.00	43.00	16.52	43.38	16.63	42.04	16.22	1.34 ***
Education (in years)	0.00	44.00	12.19	3.84	12.16	4.10	12.27	3.11	-0.11 *
Gender (1=female)	0.00	1.00	0.51		0.50		0.52		-0.02 **
Age	18.00	96.00	48.16	16.38	48.26	16.44	47.90	16.23	0.36
Social trust	0.00	5.02	2.64	0.87	2.80	0.94	2.21	0.94	0.41 ***
Satisfaction with politics	0.00	4.80	2.31	0.99	2.52	0.93	1.76	0.93	0.76 ***
City	0.00	1.00	0.19		0.18		0.22		-0.04 ***
Village	0.00	1.00	0.38		0.38		0.36		0.02 ***
Town/small city/suburbs (ref.)	0.00	1.00	0.44		0.44		0.43		0.01 *
Religiosity	0.00	10.00	4.75	2.92	4.96	2.83	4.23	3.09	0.73 ***
Member of labour union	0.00	1.00	0.27		0.32		0.13		0.19 ***
Student	0.00	1.00	0.03		0.04		0.02		0.02 ***
Social Network	0.00	4.97	2.55	0.98	2.70	0.94	2.16	0.96	0.54 ***
West	0.00	1.00	0.71						

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

4.2. Logistic regression analyses

4.2.1. Political interest and voter turnout in East and West-Europe

In this part of the section, a logistic regression analysis was used to answer hypotheses 1 and 2. These hypotheses were read as follows:

H1: The more politically interested people are, the more likely they are to vote.
H2: Party identification moderates the relationship between political interest and voter turnout and therefore (partly) mediates the stronger positive relationship in Western-Europe compared to Eastern-Europe.

The results of the logistic regression analysis for the effects of the different variables on voter turnout for respectively the full sample (model 1), Western-Europe (model 2) and Eastern-Europe (model 3) are shown in in the table below (**Table 2**). Furthermore, in the rightest column (model 4) it can be seen whether and to what extent the influence of these

variables on voter turnout differs across both contexts. The method that was applied to come to these results is described in the methods section of the previous chapter. It is important to note that the coefficients that can be seen model 4 are not related to the same variables as the coefficients in the other models. While original variables were used for these three models on the left, interaction terms between the original variables and west (e.g. political interest * west) were used for model 4. The coefficients in model 4 equals the difference between model 2 and 3 (e.g. for age: .033 - .025 = .008). Because of rounding, a difference of .001 does occur in some cases.

Table 2. Logistic regression of the effect on voter turnout in the full sample, Western-Europe and Eastern-Europe, and effect differences between the East and West.

| Variable	Model 1 Full sample B (s.e.)	Model 2 Western-Europe B (s.e.)	Model 3 Eastern-Europe B (s.e.)	Model 4 [1] Differences ($B_w - B_e$) B (s.e.)
Constant	-3.739*** (.148)	-2.930 *** (.184)	-3.395 *** (.225)	-2.217 *** (.144)
Political Interest	.476 *** (.020)	.531 *** (.025)	.376 *** (.033)	.154 *** (.041)
ISEI	.010 *** (.001)	.008 *** (.002)	.013 *** (.002)	-.004 (.003)
Education (in years)	.029 *** (.006)	.024 ** (.007)	.047 *** (.012)	-.023 (.014)
Gender (1=female)	.165 *** (.034)	.194 *** (.043)	.111 (.057)	.084 (.071)
Age	.030 *** (.001)	.033 *** (.002)	.025 *** (.002)	.008 ** (.002)
Age^2	-.001 *** (.000)	-.001 *** (.000)	.000 *** (.000)	.000 (.000)
Social trust	.142 *** (.020)	.141 *** (.026)	.136 *** (.032)	.004 (.041)
Satisfaction with politics	.215 *** (.021)	.207 *** (.027)	.223 *** (.033)	-.016 (.042)
City	-.219 *** (.046)	-.207 *** (.059)	-.240 ** (.073)	.033 (.094)
Village	.215 *** (.038)	.226 *** (.048)	.195 ** (.063)	.031 (.079)
Town/suburb (ref.)				
Religiosity	.045 *** (.006)	.053 *** (.008)	.029 ** (.010)	.025 (.013)
Member of labour union	.345 *** (.046)	.388 *** (.054)	.239 ** (.091)	.150 (.106)
Student	-.159 (.089)	-.096 (.103)	-.287 (.182)	.191 (.209)
Social Network	.184 *** (.020)	.211 *** (.026)	.143 *** (.032)	.068 (.041)
West (1=yes)	1.037 *** (.130)			-.902 *** (.158)
Country dummies	Not shown	Not shown	Not shown	Not shown
Nagelkerke R^2	**.229**	**.225**	**.189**	**.231**
N	27,966	20,009	7,957	27,966

* *p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001*

---

[1] Model 4 in the right column shows interactions with variable west instead of original variables.

With regards to hypothesis 1, it can be seen from model 1 in **Table 2** that political interest has a large effect on voter turnout. After whether living in a Western-European (or post-communist) country or not, political interest seems to be the most important factor for voting ($B=.476$, $p<.001$). Furthermore, as was expected, all but one control variables seemed to be significantly related to voter turnout. The only control variable for which this was not the case is for "student". Looking at the specific models for West and East, similar results are shown. As was the case for the full sample, being a student or not did not seem to be significantly related to voter turnout in either region. For all other included variables, a significant relationship with turnout was found in Western-Europe. Although this was to a large extent also true for Eastern-Europe, there was one minor difference. In this area, gender did not seem to matter with regards to voting.

Despite the above-mentioned similarities, model 4 shows that two variables have significantly different relationships across the two regions: age and more importantly, political interest. Even though political interest is significantly related to voter turnout in both Western-Europe ($B=.531$, $p<.001$) as well as Eastern-Europe ($B=.376$, $p<.001$), it can be seen from the moderation effect that, as was hypothesised, the relationship is significantly stronger in the West than in the East ($B=.154$, $p<.001$). In **Figure 2**, the effect sizes of the relationship between political interest and voter turnout have been split up per country. Although there are some exceptions (Belgium in particular), it can clearly be seen that political interest is generally more important in West-Europe than in East-Europe.

Figure 2. The effect size of political interest on voter turnout in different countries.
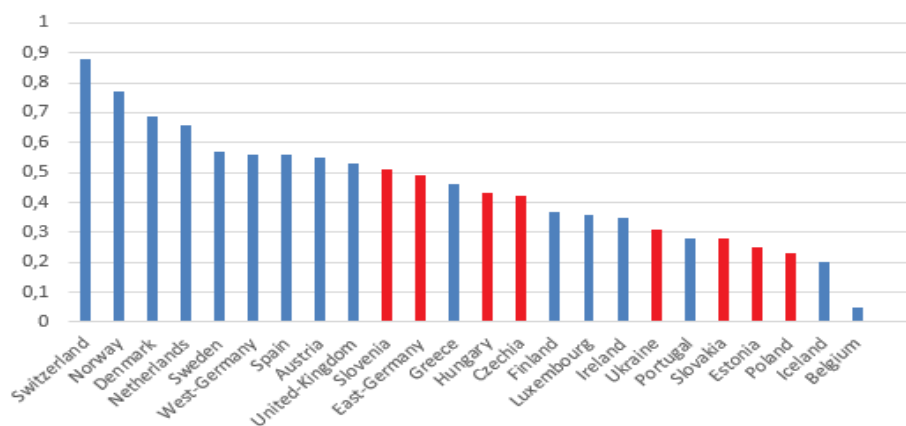
4.2.2. Explaining the difference: party identification and political trust

Under this subheading of the paper I will build further on the results shown in the model 4 of the above standing table (**Table 2**). To give the reader a clearer overview these same results are also shown in model 1 of the table below (**Table 3**). The East-West differences that can be seen here will be further examined by the following hypotheses:

H3a: Non-post-communist (Western) countries have higher levels of party identification than in post-communist (Eastern) countries.
H3b: Party identification strengthens the relationship between political interest and voter turnout and therefore (partly) mediates the stronger positive relationship in Western-Europe compared to Eastern-Europe.

H4a: Non-post-communist (Western) countries have higher levels of political trust than post-communist (Eastern) countries.
H4b: Political trust moderates the relationship between political interest and voter turnout and therefore (partly) mediates the stronger positive relationship in Western-Europe compared to Eastern-Europe.

Results relating to the hypotheses 3a and 4a can be found in the descriptive table (**Table 1**) and function as a precondition for hypotheses 3b and 4b. These results were already discussed under the "descriptive statistics" section. For the results relating to hypotheses 3b and 4b, we should shift our focus to **Table 3**.

As can be seen in model 1 of this table – and as already discussed in the previous section – political interest seems to have a significantly stronger relationship with voter turnout in Western-Europe (*B=.154, p<.001*). This is still the case after taking party identification and the moderation effect of party identification on the relationship between political interest and voter turnout into account as can be seen in model 2. This corresponds with the insignificance of the moderation effect as seen in the interaction between party identification and political interest (*B=-.020, p=.151*) For this reason, no support was found for hypothesis 3b. Besides, it can be seen that there is a relatively strong and significant relationship between party identification and voter turnout (*B=.360, p<.001*).

Table 3. Logistic regression of the effect differences between East-Europe and West-Europe ($B_w - B_e$) on voter turnout.

Variable	Model 1 B (s.e.)	Model 2 B (s.e.)	Model 3 B (s.e.)	Model 4 B (s.e.)
Constant	-2.217 *** (.144)	-2.479 *** (.149)	-2.264 *** (.146)	-2.500 *** (.151)
Political Interest	.154 *** (.041)	.154 *** (.042)	.095 * (.043)	.109 * (.044)
Party Identification		.360 *** (.013)		.350 *** (.013)
Party identification * Political interest		-.020 (.014)		-.028 * (.014)
Political trust			.254 *** (.025)	.193 *** (.025)
Political trust * Political Interest			.085 *** (.019)	.067 *** (.019)
ISEI	-.004 (.003)	-.004 (.003)	-.004 (.003)	-.004 (.003)
Education (in years)	-.023 (.014)	-.024 (.015)	-.022 (.014)	-.023 (.015)
Gender (1=female)	.084 (.071)	.069 (.073)	.088 (.071)	.073 (.073)
Age	.008 ** (.002)	.009 *** (.002)	.009 ** (.002)	.009 *** (.002)
Age^2	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)
Social trust	.004 (.041)	.008 (.042)	-.002 (.041)	.004 (.042)
Satisfaction with politics	-.016 (.042)	-.029 (.043)	-.018 (.042)	-.031 (.043)
City	.033 (.094)	.054 (.096)	.000 (.094)	.028 (.096)
Village	.031 (.079)	.059 (.096)	.051 (.080)	.074 (.081)
Town/suburb (ref.)				
Religiosity	.025 (.013)	.027 * (.013)	.024 (.013)	.026 * (.013)
Member of labour union	.150 (.106)	.150 (.106)	.153 (.106)	.173 (.108)
Student	.191 (.209)	.223 (.213)	.175 (.210)	.209 (.213)
Social Network	.068 (.041)	.074 (.042)	.070 (.041)	.076 (.042)
West (1=yes)	.902 *** (.158)	.691 *** (.161)	.824 *** (.159)	.642 *** (.162)
Country dummies	Not shown	Not shown	Not shown	Not shown
Nagelkerke R^2	**.231**	**.270**	**.236**	**.273**
N	27,966	27,966	27,966	27,966

* *p*<.05, ** *p*<.01, *** *p*<.001

In contrast to party identification, political trust does seem to affect the relationship between political interest and voter turnout. After adding political trust and the interaction effect of political trust with political interest to the analysis (model 3), a decrease in East-West effect difference for political interest showed up while at the same time the p-value rose ($B=.095$, $p=.026$). This supports the view that the moderation effect of West is mediated by political trust. As expected, this coincided with a significant interaction effect between political trust and political interest ($B=.085$, $p<.001$) as was hypothesised in hypothesis 4b. In other words, support was found that political trust moderates the relationship between political interest and voter turnout. Also in this case, a direct relationship between political interest and voter turnout was found ($B=.254$, $p<.001$). Model 4, in which all four variables were added simultaneously, little relevant changes are shown compared to models 2 and 3. Although it is surprising that a significant negative moderation effect of party identification on the relationship between political interest and turnout was found, the relationship is weak and hardly significant ($B=-.028$, $p=.049$). Furthermore, the effect difference of political interest seemed to increase a little ($B=.109$, $p=.012$) and for this reason we still find support for a moderation effect of West. Also, the interaction effect with political interest and political trust slightly dropped ($B=.067$, $p<.001$). Nevertheless, support for the mediation effect of political trust and therefore hypothesis 4b is still found whereas the opposite is true for hypothesis 3b about party identification. Also, the direct effects of party identification ($B=.350$, $p<.001$) and political trust ($B=.193$, $p<.001$) on voter turnout became somewhat weaker in this model.

4.3. Sensitivity analysis

Since I have made decisions earlier on in this paper that could possibly have led to distorted results, I will conduct a sensitivity analysis to find out whether this is the case and if so, how these results differ. The sensitive choice that I have made concerns the inclusion of respondents from Belgium and Luxembourg into the group of respondents from Western-Europe. In contrast to the other countries included in the dataset, Belgium and Luxembourg have a system of compulsory voting (Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [IDEA], n.d). Previously, such a compulsory voting system has already been suggested by different scholars to make participation more equal (Birch, 2008; Engelen, 2007; Lacroix, 2007). It is argued that the higher levels of turnout with compulsory voting leads to a reduction in inequality of participation. For the same reason this might be true for political interest as well. If this is the case, the earlier observed effect difference for political interest in East- and West-Europe might even be underestimated. In the table below (**Table 4)**, the result of the sensitivity analysis can be found.

Looking at the results in **Table 4**, it does indeed seem to be the case that the effect of political interest on voter turnout is suppressed by Belgium and Luxembourg. Since the group of Eastern-European countries has been left untouched, the only possible explanation for the increased moderation effect of West (*B=.*182, *p<.*001, compared to *B=.*154, *p<.*001 in the model without the exclusion of Belgium and Luxembourg as can be seen in **Table 3**) is an increased effect of political interest on voter turnout in Western-Europe. Except for a stronger effect difference for political interest in all four models, the results are quite similar compared to the analysis with Belgium and Luxembourg (**Table 3)**. The moderation effect of political trust became somewhat stronger while the direct effects of party identification and political trust on voter turnout remained nearly the same. Lastly, the interaction effect between political interest and party identification also seemed to have no effect after the exclusion of Belgium and Luxembourg.

Table 4. Logistic regression of the effect differences between East-Europe and West-Europe ($B_w − B_e$) on voter turnout after the exclusion of Belgium and Luxembourg.

Variable	Model 1 B (s.e.)	Model 2 B (s.e.)	Model 3 B (s.e.)	Model 4 B (s.e.)
Constant	-2.356 *** (.147)	-2.631 *** (.153)	-2.423 *** (.149)	-2.667 *** (.155)
Political Interest	.182 *** (.042)	.183 *** (.043)	.117 ** (.043)	.132 ** (.044)
Party Identification		.366 *** (.014)		.356 *** (.014)
Party identification * Political interest		-.019 (.014)		-.027 (.014)
Political trust			.258 *** (.026)	.195 *** (.027)
Political trust * Political Interest			.099 *** (.019)	.081 *** (.020)
ISEI	-.004 (.003)	-.003 (.003)	-.004 (.003)	-.003 (.003)
Education (in years)	-.026 (.015)	-.026 (.015)	-.025 (.015)	-.026 (.015)
Gender (1=female)	.063 (.073)	.050 (.074)	.068 (.073)	.053 (.074)
Age	.010 *** (.002)	.010 *** (.003)	.010 *** (.002)	.010 *** (.003)
Age^2	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)	.000 (.000)
Social trust	.026 (.042)	.031 (.043)	.020 (.042)	.026 (.043)
Satisfaction with politics	.008 (.042)	-.005 (.044)	.005 (.043)	-.008 (.044)
City	.054 (.095)	.080 (.097)	.019 (.096)	.052 (.098)
Village	.000 (.081)	.027 (.082)	.020 (.081)	.043 (.083)
Town/suburb (ref.)				
Religiosity	.033 * (.013)	.036 ** (.014)	.033 * (.013)	.035 * (.014)
Member of labour union	.120 (.108)	.145 (.110)	.125 (.108)	.146 (.110)
Student	.188 (.211)	.219 (.215)	.166 (.212)	.199 (.215)
Social Network	.074 (.042)	.083 (.043)	.076 (.042)	.084 (.043)
West (1=yes)	.940 *** (.159)	.724 *** (.163)	.860 *** (.160)	.675 *** (.163)
Country dummies	Not shown	Not shown	Not shown	Not shown
Nagelkerke R^2	**.236**	**.276**	**.241**	**.279**
N	25,852	25,852	25,852	25,852

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

5. Conclusion and discussion

In in this section I will formulate an answer to the central research question of this paper, namely: *"Is political interest more important as a determinant for voter turnout Western-European (non-post-communist) countries compared to Eastern-European (post-communist)-countries and if so, how can this difference be explained by party identification and political trust?"* In the final part of this section, limitations of the present study and recommendations for future research will be discussed.

As we saw in the introduction, voter turnout is one of the most studied topics in the political sciences (Cancela and Geys, 2016). Among these studies concerned with voter turnout, a large part focuses on the explanation of individual determinants on voter turnout. However, something that has received far less attention from scholars is how these different determinants influence voter turnout in different contexts. This is an important issue since promoting equal participation might require different methods in different places. Nevertheless, it has been shown by Michael Smith (2009) that for political interest the influence on voter turnout does differ between the non-post-communist countries of Western-Europe and the post-communist countries of Eastern-Europe. Although Smith found political interest already to be a strong predictor of voter turnout in Eastern-Europe, this was even to a much larger extent the case for Western-Europe. Yet, why this difference was found is exactly what I have tried to explain in this paper. In order to do so, I have made use of quantitative research methods. The data that was used originates from round 2 (2004) of the European Social Survey (ESS).

For explaining why the relationship between political interest and voter turnout is different in both regions, I looked at two characteristics that were shared among all countries in one region that differed from the countries in the other region: party identification and political trust. In the theory section of this paper I hypothesised that levels of party identification would be lower in Eastern-Europe because of the communist system without multiple political parties. Since it seems that party identification is to a large extent the result of parental socialization (Converse, 1969; Jennings et al., 1979; McDevitt, 2005), a much larger proportion of the population of Eastern-European relative to the population of Western-European lacks this possibility. Also, with regards to political trust I expected the levels to be lower in Eastern-Europe because of the higher levels of corruption in Eastern-Europe

(Transparancy International, n.d). These lower levels of party identification and political trust in the post-communist East would on their turn, as was hypothesised, lead to a relative weaker influence of political interest on voter turnout. After all, even if you are interested in politics, why would you vote if you do not agree with any political party or if you do not trust the politicians and the political system? In contrast, if you trust politics and feel more connected to one political party, it will be more likely that political interest will be the decisive factor in your decision to vote.

In the results section, the above standing expectations were tested. First of all it seemed indeed that political interest functions as a determinant for voter turnout in either West- and East-Europe. Similar to Smith, I also found the influence of political interest on voter turnout to be stronger in the West compared to the East. In other words, Western-Europe seemed to strengthen the general relationship between political interest and voter turnout. Then I moved on to party identification and political trust, the possible explanations for this difference. The first question was of course, do East- and West-Europe really differ with regards to party identification and political trust? This turned out to be the case. Levels of both were lower in the East than in the West. Subsequently, I moved on to testing the hypotheses about the "relationship strengthening influence" of party identification and political trust on the relationship between political interest and voter turnout. Here, I only found support for the latter. Stated differently, unlike political trust, party identification does not strengthen the relationship of political interest on voter turnout and therefore does not play a role in explaining why political interest is not equally important in the East and West. As we saw for political trust, this was different. After taking this factor into account, there still seemed to be a significant difference between East and West regarding the relationship between political interest and voter turnout. However, the initially observed difference seemed to weaken after we took into account that political trust affects the relationship between political interest and turnout. Also a sensitivity analysis was conducted to find out whether the above results could have been distorted as a consequence of a sensitive decision made earlier. For this reason, it was examined whether excluding Belgium and Luxembourg (countries with compulsory voting) would lead to different results. Despite the larger East-West differences with regards to the relationship between political interest and voter turnout, the sketched mechanism in which political

27

trust strengthened the relationship of political interest with turnout remained stable. Hence, evidence was found that political interest matters more as determinant for voter turnout in West-Europe than in East-Europe, partly because levels of political trust are higher in Western-Europe. Party identification on the other hand does not seem to be a reason for why the relationship between political interest and voter turnout differs across both regions.

This brings us to the discussion of the limitations of this present study. First, it could be argued that the distinction between East-Europe and West-Europe assumes more homogeneity than actually exists. One could for example point at the geographical diversity (e.g. some Western countries such as Greece lie further East than some Eastern countries such as Czech Republic). Also, it could be argued that with regards to political past, countries such as Portugal and Spain are more closely related to the former communist countries than to the Western-European countries. Because both countries turned into democracies only 15 years before this was the case in a country such as Poland, whereas many Western countries were already considered to be democracies since at least WW II (Roser, n.d.). However, at the moment of data collection, Spain and Portugal were already democracies for at least twice as long as the post-communist countries in Eastern-Europe and therefore both groups can be distinguished in my opinion. Nevertheless, it could be an idea for future research to take into consideration for how a long a country already has a democratic political system. A second limitation of this study is the selection of countries. Particularly for the group of Eastern-European countries it can be said that the included countries are rather unrepresentative for all former communist countries of Eastern-Europe. Six out of these seven included Eastern-European countries became EU-member in 2004 while several non-EU members such as Albania, Macedonia and Serbia were left out in this analysis. It is likely that Eastern-European EU members are more like Western-European countries than non-EU members because these countries fulfilled the requirements of this originally Western-European organisation. Third, because the information about voter turnout was collected by self-reporting, we must deal with the phenomena of overreporting (e.g. Silver, Anderson and Abramson, 1986). Consequently, the situation sketched in this study might somewhat deviate from the real situation. Fourth, I excluded of French respondents because of missing cases on the question about social network. Although it would have

been suitable to conduct a sensitivity analysis with the inclusion of these respondents, I have decided not to do this because of time and space constraints. As a fifth and last remark I should say something about the decision to use a logistic regression analysis. Even though the logistic regression is seen as the true method in the case that you study a dichotomous dependent variable, this popular belief is a disputed by Hellevik (2007). According to this author, a linear regression is still reliable, even if the homoscedasticity assumption is violated. One big advantage of using a linear regression instead of a logistic regression is the meaningful interpretation of coefficients. Nevertheless, because the aim of this paper was to offer an explanation for what was found by Smith (2009), I made the decision to stick as much as possible to the approach used by this author.

Then I will move on to some recommendations for future research. First, it would be good for upcoming research to examine whether the current East-West difference with regards to the relationship between political interest and voter turnout would still be found with more recent data. If this is the case, it would also be useful to know how this difference evolved over time and whether the difference has become smaller or larger. By doing this we can increase our understanding of the observed phenomena and also, we can explore whether these results are in line with previous findings on this topic. Furthermore, as I already touched upon in the previous paragraph, the Eastern-European countries included in this study were unrepresentative for the entire post-communist-East. For this reason, I would recommend future studies on this same topic to include more non-EU countries in the group of Eastern-European countries.

Since there are different (ideological) reasons for why unequal voter participation should be prevented, it is important to examine the foundations of this phenomenon. With this research I have tried to provide a valuable contribution to the existing knowledge in the field of voter turnout, and more specifically in explaining why there are differences in determinants of voter turnout in different contexts. Although the data used in this research might be not be very recent, I have shown how political trust can affect the extent to which political interest influences voter turnout. This finding might be useful in the light of tackling unequal participation in democratic elections. Although it might seem encouraging with regards to equal participation that political interest is less important as a determinant for voter turnout in Eastern-Europe, its cause, lower levels of political trust, is perhaps even

more objectionable in a democracy. For this reason, I would argue that it is way better for national and local governments to focus on equalizing levels of political interest. This could possibly be done by providing additional education in schools to these groups with lower levels of interest. Nevertheless, we should also accept that a certain extent of freedom is another ideal in our democratic system. For this reason, we should perhaps allow that some differences in political interest do exist.

Bibliography

Ashworth, S. (2012). Electoral accountability: recent theoretical and empirical work. *Annual Review of Political Science, 15*, 183-201.

Bélanger, É. & Nadeau, R. (2005). Political trust and the vote in multiparty elections: The Canadian case. *European journal of political research*, 44(1), 121-146.

Birch, S (2008). *Full Participation: A Comparative Study of Compulsory Voting.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Birch, S. (2010). Perceptions of electoral fairness and voter turnout. *Comparative Political Studies*, 43(12), 1601-1622.

Brady, H. E., Verba, S. & Schlozman, K. L. (1995). Beyond SES: A resource model of political participation. *American political science review*, 89(2), 271-294.

Cancela, J. & Geys, B. (2016). Explaining voter turnout: A meta-analysis of national and subnational elections. *Electoral Studies, 42*, 264-275.

Catterberg, G. & Moreno, A. (2005). The individual bases of political trust: Trends in new and established democracies. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *18*(1), 31-48.

Converse, P. E. (1969). Of time and partisan stability. *Comparative political studies*, *2*(2), 139-171.

Dalton, R. J. & Weldon, S. (2007). Partisanship and party system institutionalization. *Party Politics*, *13*(2), 179-196.

Denny, K. & Doyle, O. (2008). Political interest, cognitive ability and personality: Determinants of voter turnout in Britain. *British Journal of Political Science*, *38*(2), 291-310.

Engelen, B. (2007). Why compulsory voting can enhance democracy. *Acta Politica 42*(1): 23–39.

European Social Survey. (n.d.) *ESS Methodology.* Retrieved on 8 May 2019, via: *https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/methodology/*

Ezrow, L. & Xezonakis, G. (2016). Satisfaction with democracy and voter turnout: A temporal perspective. *Party Politics, 22*(1), 3-14.

Ganzeboom, H.B.G. (2010). *International Standard Classification of Occupations ISCO-08 With ISEI-08 scores.* Retrieved on 7 May 2019, via: http://www.harryganzeboom.nl/isco08/isco08_with_isei.pdf

Geys, B. & Mause, K. (2016). The Limits of Electoral Control: Evidence from Last-Term Politicians. *Legislative Studies Quarterly, 41*(4), 873-898.

Grönlund, K. & Setälä, M. (2007). Political trust, satisfaction and voter turnout. *Comparative European Politics*, 5(4), 400-422.

Howard, M. M. (2002). The weakness of postcommunist civil society. *Journal of democracy, 13*(1), 157-169.

Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance [IDEA]. (n.d.). *Compulsory Voting.* Retrieved on 4 June 2019, via: https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voter-turnout/compulsory-voting

Jennings, M. K., Allerbeck, K.R, Rosenmayr, L., Barnes, S.H. and Kaase, M. (1979). 'Generations and Families', in Samuel Barnes and Max Kaase et al. (eds) *Political Action: Mass participation in five western democracies.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lacroix, J. (2007). A liberal defence of compulsory voting. *Politics 27*(3): 190–5.

Leighley, J. E. & Nagler, J. (1992). Individual and systemic influences on turnout: Who votes? 1984. *The Journal of Politics, 54*(3), 718-740.

Mahler, V. A. (2008). Electoral turnout and income redistribution by the state: A cross-national analysis of the developed democracies. *European journal of political research, 47*(2), 161-183.

Marien, S. (2011). Measuring Political Trust Across Time and Space. In: Hooghe M., Zmerli S. (Eds.), *Political Trust. Why Context Matters.* (pp. 13-46). Colchester: ECPR Press.

Matsusaka, J. G. (1995). Explaining voter turnout patterns: An information theory. *Public choice*, 84(1-2), 91-117.

McDevitt, M. (2005). The partisan child: Developmental provocation as a model of political socialization. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 18*(1), 67-88.

McLeod, J. M., Scheufele, D. A. & Moy, P. (1999). Community, communication, and participation: The role of mass media and interpersonal discussion in local political participation. *Political communication*, *16*(3), 315-336.

Powell, G. B. (1986). American voter turnout in comparative perspective. *American Political Science Review,* 80(1), 17-43.

Quintelier, E., Hooghe, M. & Marien, S. (2011). The effect of compulsory voting on turnout stratification patterns: A cross-national analysis. *International Political Science Review*, *32*(4), 396-416.

Roser, M. (n.d.) *World maps of political regimes over 200 years*. Retrieved on 7 May 2019, via: https://ourworldindata.org/democracy

Shapiro, I. (2001). *Democratic Justice*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Silver, B., Anderson, B. & Abramson, P. (1986). Who Overreports Voting*? American Political Science Review*, 80(2), 613-624.

Smets, K. & Van Ham, C. (2013). The embarrassment of riches? A meta-analysis of individual-level research on voter turnout. *Electoral studies, 32*(2), 344-359.

Smith, M. L. (2009). The inequality of participation: Re-examining the role of social stratification and post-communism on political participation in Europe. *Sociologický časopis/Czech Sociological Review, 45*(3), 487-517.

Solt, F. (2008). Economic inequality and democratic political engagement. American Journal of Political Science, 52(1), 48-60.

Stockemer, D., LaMontagne, B., & Scruggs, L. (2013). Bribes and ballots: The impact of corruption on voter turnout in democracies. International Political Science Review, 34(1), 74-90.

Transparancy International. (n.d.). *Corruption Perceptions Index 2012*. Retrieved on 7 May 2019, via: 2019, from: https://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results

Vedlitz, A. & Veblen, E. P. (1980). Voting and contacting: Two forms of political participation in a suburban community. *Urban Affairs Quarterly*, *16*(1), 31-48.

Wagner, A. F., Schneider, F. & Halla, M. (2009). The quality of institutions and satisfaction with democracy in Western Europe—A panel analysis. *European Journal of Political Economy, 25*(1), 30-41.

Young, I. (2000). *Inclusion and democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press