

Turnout in the EP Elections 2014

A comparative study of the
EU Member States



Hermann Schmitt
Sebastian Adrian Popa

Hermann Schmitt and Sebastian Adrian Popa

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– SIEPS 2016:8 –

Report No. 8
June 2016

Published by the Swedish Institute for European Policy
Studies

This publication is available at www.sieps.se
The opinions expressed in the publication are those of
the authors.

Cover design by LuxLucid
Printed by EO Grafiska AB

Stockholm, June 2016

ISSN 1651-8942
ISBN 978-91-86107-65-9

Preface

One of the key challenges facing the European Union is the democratic deficit. The elections to the European Parliament have shown a considerably lower voting turnout compared to national parliamentary elections. This fact has rendered European Parliamentary elections the academic term “second-order elections”. Voting turnout went down even more after the major 2004 enlargement. In light of the Lisbon Treaty bestowing the European parliament with greater powers in the EU decision making process, strengthening democratic legitimacy of the European Parliament has regained political priority.

In 2014 the Ministry of Justice commissioned from SIEPS a comparative study investigating the variation in turnout across the EU Member States in the 2014 elections. This report, written by Hermann Schmitt and Sebastian Popa of Mannheim University, is part of the outcome of this project. The report investigates the turnout of the 2014 elections to the European Parliament throughout the EU. The research focuses on the effects of the electoral promotion campaigns made by the European Parliament Information Offices as well as the institutional innovation of the *Spitzenkandidaten* with each European party groups presenting their respective lead candidate for the position as President of the European Commission.

Eva Sjögren
Director

About the authors

Hermann Schmitt is a professor of political science. He holds a Chair in Electoral Politics at the University of Manchester and is a research fellow of the MZES and Professor at the University of Mannheim. He was a visiting professor at the University of Michigan (1996-7), Science Po Paris (2001-2), the Australian National University (2003), the IAS in Vienna (2005), and the UAM in Madrid (2008). He received his doctorate from the University of Duisburg, and holds a *venia legendi* from both the Free University of Berlin and the University of Mannheim. He has been participating in a number of comparative projects; perhaps most important is his involvement, from 1979 on, in the series of European Election Studies. He received substantial research grants from European, German and British institutions. He is the author and editor of numerous books and articles on electoral behaviour in multilevel-systems, and on political representation in the European Union.

In the late 1980s and during the 1990s, he was heading a university-based research centre which supported the Eurobarometer unit of DG10 in the European Commission by building integrated Eurobarometer databases and conducting analyses on their behalf. During those years he also co-operated closely with the fieldwork agencies in charge of conducting the Eurobarometer surveys.

Sebastian Adrian Popa is a research fellow of the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES), University of Mannheim. He has received a PhD in Political Science from the Central European University in Budapest (2015). He has been participating in a number of comparative projects; most notable here is his involvement in the 2014 European Elections Studies. His research interests cover topics such as: political behavior in a comparative perspective, political knowledge, European Parliament elections and the genetics of political behavior. His work was published in scientific journals such as: *Party Politics*, *European Union Politics*, *Electoral Studies*, *Politics & Gender*.

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Executive summary

This report provides an overview of turnout in EP elections with a special focus on the 2014 EP elections. It starts out by putting the turnout in EP elections in a diachronic perspective and investigates the possible cause of the almost constant decline in turnout that was recorded since the first EP elections in 1979. It continues by analysing the factors that lead to the halting of this decline in the 2014 EP elections.

In European elections, both of a first- and a second-order kind, turnout decline has been running in parallel, caused by the same generational differences and an on-going depolarization of electoral competition. In addition, in recent years, the decrease in turnout in EP elections has been more of a compositional matter. For example, the 2004 enlargement of the EU brought in eight “low turnout” post-communist countries which significantly lowered EU-wide turnout. However, the most recent EP elections in 2014 saw turnout decline come to a halt across the entire EU (and there was even a minor increase in turnout if we disregard Croatia, which was not yet participating in the EP election in 2009).

The report provides an aggregate-level analysis of country level factors which affected the 2014 EP elections turnout. Among them are turnout levels in national elections (the baseline), compulsory voting provisions, the simultaneous organization of national elections, and a Western European context; all these are associated with higher turnout levels.

These aggregate correlates can neither explain the stabilization of turnout patterns in 2014 nor can they accurately account for the voting decisions of individual citizens. As regards the individual level, the report shows that Euroscepticism is by no means the driving force behind low turnout in EP elections. It is rather that in these “less important elections” less is (or seems to be) at stake. It was the level of political engagement of citizens that decided whether they cast a vote or not in the 2014 EP elections.

In addition to the general factors that explain turnout in the 2014 EP elections this report also explores factors that are particular to the 2014 election. Chief among those are the *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure. The Parliament and Commission agreed (but not the Council) that after the 2014 EP elections the largest EP group would be given the opportunity to nominate the next president of the EC. The report shows that the activities of list leading candidates managed to produce a small but significant increase in turnout. Those who recognized the candidates and the EU party they stood for, and those living in countries visited by the *Spitzenkandidaten*, had a higher propensity to cast a vote.

A second factor that could increase the perceived importance of the EP elections is the information environment of voters. Where voters have had more information regarding the elections in particular and the role of the EP in general, they were expected to be more likely to cast a vote. In this regard, the report analyses the effect of the information campaigns conducted by the EP Information Offices (EPIO) in the different member states. The report indeed shows that in countries where citizens have more information about the EP elections and the EP in general turnout is generally higher. But it cannot accurately assess the role the EPIO information campaign has played in this regard due to a lack of sufficient information from the side of the EPIOs. The analysis of available data shows, however, that the effect of the EPIOs' campaign is at best minimal.

Even if the 2014 EP elections brought turnout decline to a halt, the overall turnout situation is generally grim. Turnout in EP election is approximately 20 percentage points lower than turnout in national legislative elections. This is not due to Euroscepticism but rather to a lack of political mobilization and hence, a lack of interest in EU and EP affairs. This is bad news given the increasing powers of the EP, and it also might have negative consequences for democracy in general. Increasing turnout would be easy by organizing EP elections simultaneously with other more important elections. Another solution would be to introduce compulsory voting throughout the EU. But even in the absence of such solutions the picture might not look as grim since it seems the turnout levels do not influence the composition of the EP. Even if turnout would be higher the composition of the EP would remain largely unchanged.

1 Historic evolutions and general causes of low turnout

1.1 General determinants of turnout

Low turnout is generally viewed as problematic for democracy since it is considered to be an indicator of disengagement, unequal representation, and absence of civic virtues (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Dalton 1999; Franklin 2004; Norris 1999; Wattenberg 2002). The motivation to (not) vote is one of the most studied phenomena in the voting behaviour literature. Several mechanisms have been identified as influencing the motivation of people to vote. Probably the most employed one is related to the utility that citizens associate with the process of voting, i.e. people vote because they consider the act of casting a vote to be important (Blais 2000; Downs 1957; Fowler 2006; Franklin 2004; Gerber and Rogers 2009; Riker and Ordeshook 1968). Another stream of literature links high level of turnout with a more intense process of social and political mobilization (Gerber and Green 2000; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Zuckerman, Dasovic, and Fitzgerald 2007). Individual resources (time, money and skills) are also regarded as strong predictors of turnout (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Finally in recent years the propensity to vote has been linked to the processes of socialization and habituation which regard voting as a “learned” experience (Denny and Doyle 2009; Dinas 2012; Franklin 2004; Plutzer 2004).

Previous studies have shown that these mechanisms can be linked with higher levels of turnout at both an individual but also at the country level. Thus a multitude of contextual factors (e.g. margin of victory, type of government, political fragmentation, campaign expenditure, the information environment, size of electorate, importance of elections, electoral systems, compulsory voting, registration requirements, polarization, economic indicators, structure of the electorate) have been shown to be related to the level of turnout (Ashworth, Geys, and Heyndels 2006; Blais 2000, 2006; Franklin 2004; Karp, Banducci, and Bowler 2008; Pacek, Pop-Eleches, and Tucker 2009; Siaroff and Merer 2002).

1.2 Specific factors responsible for low turnout in EP elections

Participation levels in European Parliament elections started out at a low level in the first direct elections in 1979, and declined even further over the subsequent elections (for a compositional explanation of this, see Franklin 2001). As

a consequence, individual-level analyses of EP electoral participation have concentrated on the meaning of non-voting, and particularly on the question of whether electoral abstention is indicative of critical or even hostile attitudes on the part of non-voters about European integration in general and/or the institutions and policies of the European Union in particular. Indeed, the most popular view in the media is that Euroscepticism is a major driving force behind European election abstentions. But there are also a number of scholarly pieces of research that have pointed in this direction (Blondel, Sinnott, and Svensson 1998; Evans and Ivaldi 2011; Mattila 2003; Steinbrecher and Rattinger 2012).

However, so far the tenor of the analyses of individual level participation seems to point in a different direction. In line with the second-order elections model, the expectation is that the main factor behind non-voting is the fact that so little is at stake in these elections (the reverse of Jackman's unicameralism argument), for at least two reasons: the first is that the campaign efforts of the competing parties in the past notoriously turned out to be shallow; and the second is that Euroscepticism is not a convincing explanation since in member-states where a significant Eurosceptical voter segment existed in the electorate, political entrepreneurs in general did not fail to compete for these votes and represent them in the European Parliament (as members of one or the other Eurosceptical group in the house). Individual-level analyses of turnout in European Parliament elections have repeatedly identified the same factors that contribute to our understanding of participation in first-order elections: social and political integration (being married, union membership and church attendance), habituation, political involvement (interest in politics, partisanship) and resources (education) are relevant here. On the supply side, the availability of suitable choice options (minimal left-right distance, max-ptv) has also been shown to play a significant role (van der Eijk and Schmitt 2009; Schmitt and van der Eijk 2007, 2008; Schmitt and Mannheimer 1991; Wessels and Franklin 2009). This is not to say that Euroscepticism has never played a role in shaping turnout, or never will become an important co-determinant of non-voting. But, so far, the main determinants of electoral participation in European elections have been the conventional ones rather than citizens' attitudes about the EU. Building on this, we might expect that Spitzenkandidaten, through their mobilizing efforts, could contribute to raising individuals' propensity to turn out to vote.

But in this European domain as well, we have contextual properties in addition to individual attitudes and pre-dispositions that are known to support (or cause) higher levels of turnout and others that are known to depress turnout levels. The research literature addressing those contextual factors starts with a forceful work by Franklin et al. (1996). Analysing national turnout figures for the 1989 European Parliament elections, they consider systemic and political context predictors. On the systemic side, the first and perhaps most important factor is compulsory voting: all else being equal, participation is expected to be higher if

citizens are legally obliged to participate in an election. Franklin et al.'s second contextual property is Sunday-voting – as opposed to workday – voting; the argument here is that it is far costlier for citizens to turn out on a workday than it is if an election is held on a Sunday when people have much more disposable time for their act of voting (see e.g. Powell 1980, 1986; Crewe 1981, 1992). The third and final systemic property which Franklin et al. consider is the (dis-) proportionality of the electoral system. The respective country scores are established with regard to the previous national election. The argument is that disproportionality discourages turning out because the likelihood that a citizen's vote does not count is higher the higher the disproportionality is. The primary point of reference for this are national first-order elections because this is the environment in which voting habits are developed – which are known to have a large and significant effect on citizens' propensity to turn out to vote (see e.g. Franklin 2004; Schmitt and Mannheimer 1991).

With regard to the political context, the only factor which they consider is the distance in time to the next general election. The argument here is that the political climate gets hotter the closer it gets to the next general election. Importantly, no attitudinal measure regarding EU support was considered among the predictors. Altogether, with this very limited set of contextual factors, the analysis was able to account for 92% of the variance in national turnout levels.

A few years later, Franklin (2001) in a dynamic perspective suggested that the constant decline of EU wide turnout might very well be understood as a compositional effect. The subsequent rounds of enlargement of the Union diminished the number of compulsory voting systems and thus – quasi mechanically – reduced the EU wide participation levels. Again, the timing of the EP election in the national electoral cycle was found to be a factor with significant “saliency”, as well as the presence of first EP election “boosts” in countries after admittance to the Union.

This was the state of play in 2001. Two years later Mattila (2003) reconsidered the issue. He also found that levels of turnout in EP elections follow largely the same rules as those in national first-order elections. However, he also identifies some minor effects of EU specific factors – in particular the level of general EU support in an electorate (the more support, the higher the turnout) and the level of material support a country is receiving from the EU (net payer/receiver ratio – participation being higher in net receiver countries).

Another effort to understand aggregate participation levels was made in view of the 2004 election in a significantly enlarged European Union. In this round of enlargement eight post-communist countries (plus Cyprus and Malta) were admitted, in addition to the previous 15 members (Schmitt 2005). This study found again the well-established pattern of general factors associated with aggregate turnout, but the post-communist past of a country was also found

to have a significant negative effect on aggregate participation levels. This was understood as a result of the background of limited electoral experience and socialisation in the new Eastern European member countries. Interestingly, national EU approval rates were not found to be affecting turnout levels.

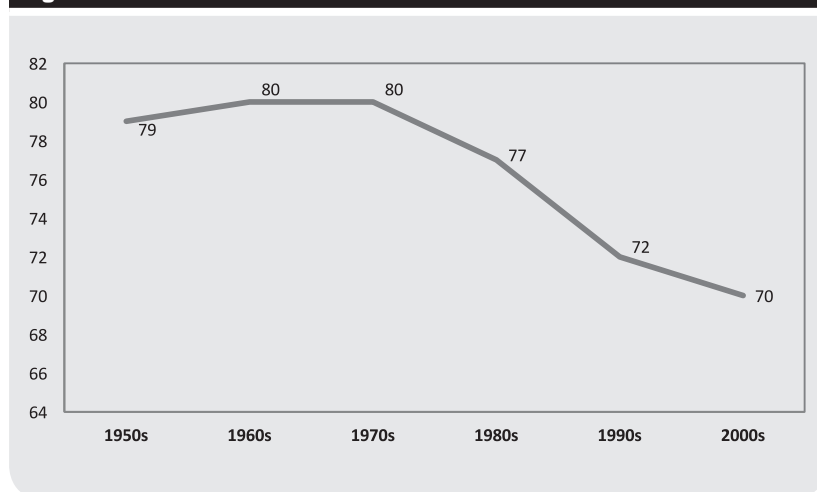
1.3 Turnout decline

With the notable exception of the Scandinavian countries, turnout in general elections has been declining over time, from the 1950s onwards. In 19 “old” democracies, average proportions of national populations turning out to vote on election day has shrunk from around 80% in the 1950s to some 70% in the 2000s (Dalton 2008, 37). This evolution is summarized in Figure 1.

Scholars disagree to some extent in their explanations of this tendency. For some, the main reason is a generational mechanism – a value change among the young incoming generations with the consequence of a loss of a sense of duty to turn out and vote (Blais and Rubenson 2012; Blais, Gidengil, and Nevitte 2004). Summarising the results of their broad cross-nationally comparative study, Blais and Rubenson write in the conclusion:

The empirical evidence is more consistent with the interpretation that young voters are less inclined to vote because their generation is less prone to construe voting as a moral duty and is more sceptical about politicians’ responsiveness to their concerns. We have shown that the most recent generation is more likely to abstain even after controls for life cycle effects, that they have a weaker sense of duty and external political efficacy, and that these attitudes affect turnout.
(pp. 112–113)

Figure 1 Turnout Decline in 19 Old Democracies



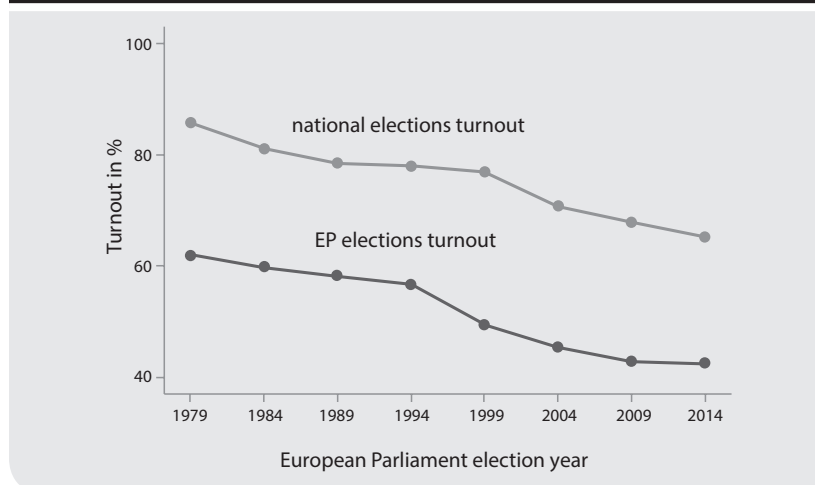
Source: Dalton (2008)

But Blais and Rubenstein also admit that this in all likelihood is not the whole story and that contextual explanations also have their merits in helping us understand what is going on. Here, it is mostly the changing character of elections, which have become less competitive over the years and decades, partly as a result of an on-going process of depolarization of party competition (Schmitt and Freire 2012), which has contributed, among other things, to a decline of partisanship among the citizenry at large (Vegetti and Schmitt forthcoming).

Also, the proliferation of the number of elections that are being held – for example in the European Community/European Union after the introduction of the direct election of members to the European Parliament in 1979 – has obviously contributed to that secular decline. Scholars have shown that in the member countries of the EU those cohorts in national electorates that reached voting age shortly ahead of a “low stimulus” European Parliament election remain less likely to participate in subsequent “high stimulus” first-order elections, like elections of the members of the national parliaments (e.g. Dinas 2012; Franklin and Hobolt 2011).

Against the background of this general decline in electoral participation in first-order national elections, it is well known among Europeanists and beyond that participation is even lower in second-order European Parliament elections. Figure 2 presents the available evidence on a high level of data aggregation. If we take the average of participation rates in all EC/EU member countries in the national first-order election ahead of an EP election and show the overtime trend, we identify a similar picture compared to the one cited from Dalton (2008) although there are some differences in the details. For the EC/EU countries, we

Figure 2 Turnout in EP and national first-order elections (member countries of the EC/EU)



see some turnout decline in national first-order elections in the 1980s, relative stability in the 1990s, and some more pronounced decline again in the 2000s. It is important to note here that the membership of the EU is expanding over time, so unlike Dalton we are not comparing the same set of countries over time. We need to come back to that observation in a moment.

The most important message of Figure 2 however is a more or less consistent turnout gap between first-order national elections and European Parliament elections. This gap is always in excess of 20% – 20% of the citizens that are entitled to vote (often somewhat more than that), who vote in national legislative elections of the EU member countries, do not participate in European Parliament elections. What is also important here is to note that the two trends somehow move in parallel. This seems to suggest that the turnout difference between national and EP elections has EU specific reasons while the overall turnout decline has not. More specifically, there is no significant trend in the direction of an increase in this characteristic turnout difference – neither in the direction of an increase nor in the direction of a decrease of that difference.

We move on to compositional considerations. As we have said before, EU membership is a moving target. It might be helpful to list here the subsequent enlargements (without paying attention to historical “details” like Saarland in the case of West Germany or Greenland in the case of Denmark), which can nicely demonstrate that neither the set of national election participation rates nor that of the EP election participation rates that we analyse here remained the same over time. In fact, the quietest time in that regard were the first 20 years (1952–1973) – when national delegations to the European Parliament were still indirectly elected by national legislatures.

- Original members (1952): Belgium, France, Germany (West), Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands
- 1st enlargement (1973): Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom
- 2nd enlargement (1981): Greece
- 3rd enlargement (1986): Portugal, Spain
- 4th enlargement (1990): East Germany (rather the enlargement/reunification of a member country and thus an indirect enlargement of the Union)
- 5th enlargement (1996): Austria, Finland and Sweden
- 6th enlargement (2004): Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia**
- 7th enlargement (2007): Bulgaria, Romania
- 8th enlargement (2013): Croatia

It is obvious from the above that the 6th enlargement of the EU, which included eight Eastern European member countries (plus Cyprus and Malta), did change

the EU electorate quite drastically. And this change did not come just size-wise, but also in terms of relevant voter characteristics like partisanship and electoral habits, political values which are known to affect the propensity of citizens to participate in elections. It would therefore come as a surprise if this change in the composition of the Union would not have had a visible impact on EP turnout trends: eight post-communist countries which recently became integrated in the EU-wide electorate must be expected to decrease EU wide turnout significantly.

Figure 3 Turnout trends in EP elections, EU wide vs. Western Europe

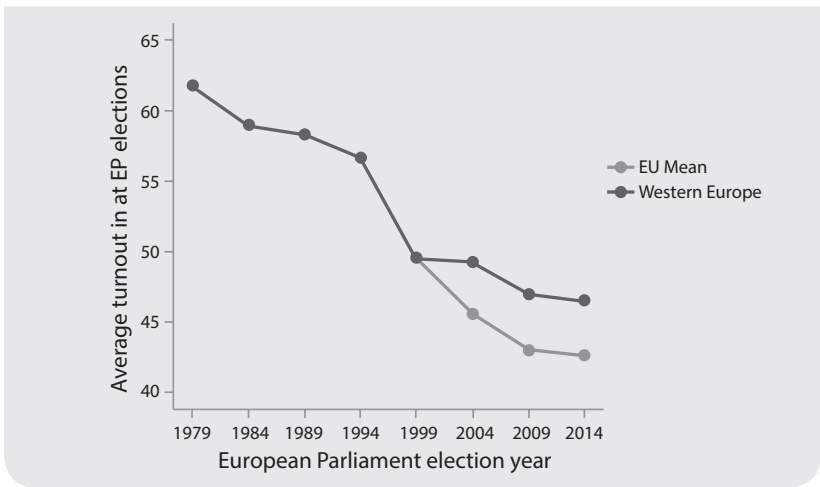


Figure 4 Turnout trends in EP elections, Western Europe vs. Eastern Europe

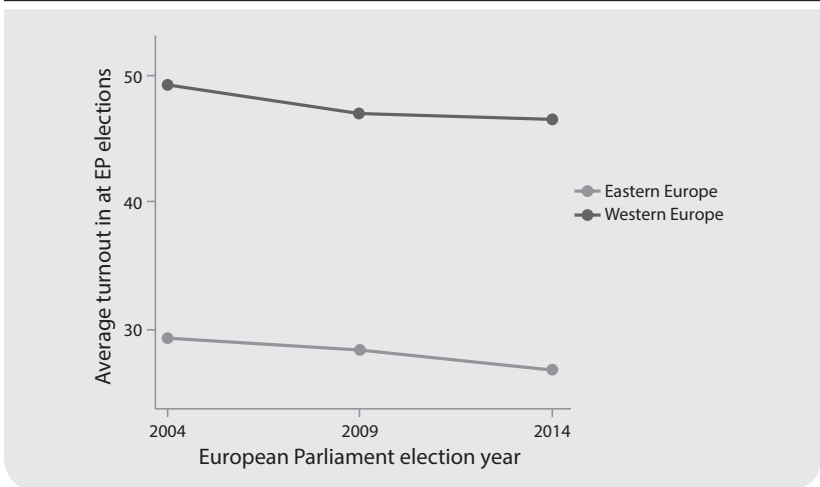


Figure 3 shows exactly this. EU wide, turnout in EP elections decreased steeply after the 2004 enlargement, both in 2004 and 2009. This decline came to a halt in 2014. We will put a particular focus on the 2014 EP elections in subsequent sections. What Figure 3 also shows is that turnout decline was much more moderate in the Western part of the European Union from 1999 onwards. This proves the presence of a compositional effect in overall turnout rates, which is due to the Eastern enlargement of the Union in the 2004 election.

Figure 4 highlights these compositional effects. We note that even from the first EP election after the Eastern enlargement of the Union in 2004, there is a substantial difference between turnout levels in Western Europe and turnout in Eastern Europe. Even in 2004, when at least according to the conventional wisdom we should have expected that the initial excitement around the first EP election vote should have led to high turnout levels in Eastern Europe (Franklin 2001), the difference is approximately 20 percentage points. This difference between East and West remained more or less constant over the next two elections (with some indications of a rising gap in 2014). Nevertheless, we need to note that if in Western Europe 2014 brought a halt to the decline in EP elections turnout, the same cannot be said about Eastern Europe. In the latter case, turnout in the 2014 EP elections declined by 1.5 percentage points compared to 2009.

1.4 Turnout in EP elections

Table 1, gives national-specific turnout information for the 2014 and the 2009 EP election, as well as the most recent previous national legislative election. What we see here is that turnout in Eastern European member countries is low also in national legislative elections, not just in EP elections: 15 of 28 member countries exhibit national legislative turnout rates below the EU mean figure (67,47 %). Of these 15 countries, eleven are Eastern European (and two of the Western cases are disqualified – France because legislative elections there just after the presidential race are effectively second order elections, and Britain because of the general dampening effect of the majoritarian electoral system on turnout). This suggests that low turnout in the East of Europe has generic rather than EU-specific sources, although we cannot ignore that the turnout difference between first-order national elections and European Parliament elections is also particularly large in the East.

Bringing further support to the analysis presented in Figure 4, we can note that, besides a generally lower turnout, Eastern European countries also record the most significant drop in turnout on the occasion of the 2014 EP elections. Most spectacular are the drops in turnout of around 30% in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (countries that already held the record for the lowest turnout in the 2009 EP elections) and even a 43% drop in Latvia. In this context, Lithuania is an extreme outlier, as in this case we can note that turnout in the 2014 EP elections doubled when compared to 2009. But on closer inspection we realize

that one single factor is responsible for this seemingly spectacular increase in turnout: the 2014 EP elections in Lithuania were held simultaneously with the second round of the presidential elections in the country.

Table 1 Turnout in the 2014 EP elections

<i>Country</i>	<i>Turnout in the 2014 EP elections</i>	<i>Turnout in the 2009 EP elections</i>	<i>Difference in turnout (EP2014-EP2009)</i>	<i>Turnout in the previous legislative elections</i>
Austria	45.39%	45.97	-0.58%	74.91%
Belgium	89.64%	90.39	-0.75%	89.45%
Bulgaria	35.84%	38.99	-3.15%	52.49%
Croatia	25.24%	20.84*	4.40%	54.17%
Cyprus	43.97%	59.4	-15.43%	78.70%
Czech Republic	18.2%	28.22	-10.02%	59.48%
Denmark	56.3%	59.54	-3.24%	87.74%
Estonia	36.52%	43.9	-7.38%	63.53%
Finland	39.1%	38.6	0.5 %	67.37%
France	42.43%	40.63	1.8%	57.23%
Germany	48.1%	43.27	4.83%	71.55%
Greece	59.97%	52.61	7.36%	62.47%
Hungary	28.97%	36.31	-7.34%	61.73%
Ireland	52.44%	58.64	-6.2%	70.05%
Italy	57.22%	65.05	-7.83%	75.19%
Latvia	30.24%	53.7	-23.46%	59.49%
Lithuania	47.35%	20.98	26.55%	52.93%
Luxembourg	85.55%	90.76	-5.21%	91.15%
Malta	74.8%	78.79	-3.99%	92.95%
Netherlands	37.32%	36.75	0.57%	74.56%
Poland	23.83%	24.53	-0.7%	48.92%
Portugal	33.67%	36.77	-3.1%	58.03%
Romania	32.44%	27.67	4.77%	41.76%
Slovakia	13.05%	19.64	-6.59%	59.11%
Slovenia	24.55%	28.37	-3.82%	65.60%
Spain	43.81%	44.87	-1.06%	68.94%
Sweden	51.07%	45.53	5.54%	84.63%
UK	35.6%	34.7	0.7%	65.10%
EU mean	42.61%	43.00%	-0.46%	67.47%
EU mean (without Croatia)		43.00%	0.78%	

* Turnout level in the 2013 EP election

Based on previous findings we know that organizing other elections simultaneously with EP elections is one of the main factors that can boost EP elections turnout (Mattila 2003). In fact, in the other instance when Lithuania organized the EP elections simultaneously with presidential elections in 2014, the turnout level was very similar (i.e. 48.32%). Luxembourg can be viewed as the opposite case with respect to this phenomenon; there the 2014 EP elections marked the first instance where legislative and EP elections were held at different dates. As a result, in 2014 we can note a drop of more than 5 percentage points in EP elections turnout, resulting in the lowest level of EP elections turnout in the history of Luxembourg.

There is one additional piece of information in this table worth mentioning. It concerns the fact that if we hold the EU membership in the 2014 EP election constant to that of the 2009 election, EP turnout decline actually came to a halt or even saw a minimal increase. Discarding Croatia, which did not participate in the 2009 EP election, EU wide turnout in the 2014 EP election was almost one per cent higher than it was in 2009.

In Table 2 we take a more in-depth look at the factors that favoured a high level of turnout in the 2014 EP elections. Thus, we chose to pursue an aggregate (i.e. country level) analysis) where our dependent variables are the official country turnouts. We explain the country difference in the level of turnout by making use of the factors that were previously identified as having the potential to boost turnout in EP elections.

Based on our review of the scholarly evidence above, we include in our analysis of aggregate turnout levels in the 2014 election the following factors:

- Following Franklin et al. (1996), we use compulsory voting as a predictor of aggregate turnout. Participation should be higher in systems which at least in theory do penalise the “act” of non-voting.
- We also consider whether EP elections were accompanied by concurrent national elections as a predictor. Franklin et al. (1996) used the distance to the next first-order election instead but this information is not yet available for all 28 countries which participated in the 2014 election. Concurrent national elections are expected to raise national turnout levels in European Parliament elections.
- Weekend voting. The expectation is that it is easier (less “costly”) to go and vote on a Sunday than on a workday.
- Following Mattila (2003), we also consider EU specific factors as facilitators of EP turnout. In particular, we use the level of support for EU integration in an electorate, and the material support a country is receiving from the EU (net payer/receiver ratios).
- Building on Schmitt (2005), we also consider the communist legacy of a country as a factor that is expected to depress turnout levels.

- In addition to these substantive predictors, we also include in our baseline model the turnout level in the previous national election. The higher this previous national turnout, the higher we expect the EP election turnout to be.
- Furthermore, we also control for a number of factor that where shown to be a significant predictor for EP elections turnout in particular, i.e. electoral disproportionality in the previous national elections, and for turnout in general, i.e. having open PR lists and multiple electoral constituencies.

We start from a basic model (i.e. Model 1) that builds on the important predictors of turnout in EP elections we discussed above, i.e. turnout in national elections, organizing other elections simultaneously with the EP elections and an

Table 2 Predicting country level turnout in the 2014 EP elections

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 1b</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>	<i>Model 5</i>	<i>Model 6</i>	<i>Model 7</i>
Intercept	2.98 (15.76)	12.70 (13.68)	-8.11 (14.40)	-16.89 (13.77)	3.57 (18.22)	-7.80 (16.92)	8.94 (19.05)	3.33 (16.06)
Turnout in national elections	0.57* (0.21)	0.48* (0.18)	0.36* (0.20)	0.80** (0.21)	0.57* (0.23)	0.65** (0.21)	0.51* (0.24)	0.58* (0.21)
Compulsory voting	15.77* (6.51)	12.62+ (6.11)	16.61** (5.73)	15.81+ (7.68)	15.71* (6.71)	12.70+ (6.66)	15.84* (6.61)	15.03* (6.83)
Concurrent elections	9.76+ (5.11)		8.87+ (4.50)	13.22* (5.38)	9.92+ (5.71)	10.93* (5.03)	9.93+ (5.19)	11.51+ (6.52)
Concurrent first-order elections		23.01** (7.64)						
Eastern Europe	-10.10+ (4.62)	-15.38** (4.62)	-10.82* (4.63)		-10.13* (5.38)	-9.26* (5.15)	-11.47* (5.84)	-10.52* (5.43)
EU a good thing			0.46* (0.17)					
EU Net contributor				-0.88 (2.63)				
Disproportionality					-0.03 (0.50)			
Weekend voting						7.36 (4.88)		
Open list							-3.11 (5.40)	
Multiple constituencies								-2.83 (6.37)
Adj. R2	0.66	0.71	0.73	0.60	0.64	0.67	0.65	0.64
Num. obs.	28	28	28	28	28	28	28	28
Standard errors in parenthesis; + p<0.1, *p<0.05, ** p<0.01								

Eastern European context, while also controlling for a well-established predictor of turnout in general, i.e. having compulsory voting provisions.

As expected, all four variables have a substantial and statistically significant effect on turnout levels. The effect of the turnout in the previous national election is of course a substantial one – this is the baseline to compare to as the national participation cultures are embedded in these figures. If we turn to the numbers, a percentage point increase in national elections turnout lead to a 0.6 percentage points increase in EP elections turnout.

While holding everything else constant (i.e. controlling for all the other variables), based on Model 1 we can estimate that in countries where compulsory voting provisions are in place turnout in EP elections is on average almost 16 percentage points higher. To put it bluntly, we would expect that introducing compulsory voting provisions would increase EP elections turnout in a given country by around 16 percentage points. The effect of organizing other national elections at the local, regional, or national level simultaneously with EP elections has a smaller but still quite substantial effect. We can expect that organizing EP elections simultaneously with other national elections would on average increase EP elections turnout by almost 10 percentage points. Furthermore, this effect is even stronger in counties where EP elections are organized at the same time as first-order elections (i.e. legislative or presidential elections), in such countries a turnout increase of 23 percentage points could be expected, while controlling for all other factors (see Model 1b).

In Models 2 to 7, we further test a number of factors that were previously related to higher levels of turnout in EP elections. The percentage of the population that considers the EU to be a good thing in a given country (Model 2), weekend voting (Model 3), a given country's net contribution to the budget of the EU (Model 4),¹ electoral disproportionality in the previous national elections (Model 5), having a PR system where citizens can order the candidates on the list (Model 6), and the country being split into multiple constituencies (Model 7) have been all previously theorized as being linked to either EP elections turnout or turnout in general. We need to note the small number of cases (i.e. 28 countries) only allows us to simultaneously include a limited number of predictors;² thus, we added one by one the above-mentioned predictors to our baseline model (i.e. Model 1). From all

¹ In Model 4 we excluded the effect of Eastern European countries, as this is negatively and highly correlated with net contribution to the EU budget. Including highly correlated variables in the same model increases the uncertainty of the estimates.

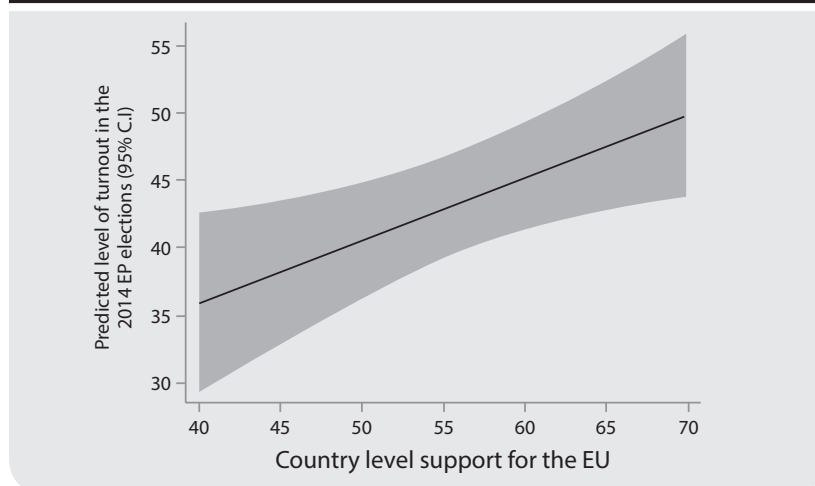
² Overfitting the models (i.e. including all predictors in the same model) would lead to biased coefficients, and thus lead to erroneous conclusions.

the above variables only one has a statistically significant effect on turnout³ – the percentage of the population that considers the EU to be a good thing in a given country (see Model 2). As this is an indicator that indicates support for the EU the interpretation is straight forward, a one percentage point increase in the support for the EU would lead, on average, to a 0.46 increase in EP elections turnout.

Last but not least, even if we control for the three previously mentioned factors we can note that Eastern European countries have on average a turnout that is lower by 10 percentage points. It also needs to be mentioned that by using only these four predictors we are able to explain 66% of how much the turnout in EP elections varies across member states.

A clearer illustration of this effect can be seen in Figure 5, where we can note that while also taking into account the effect of the other variables in Model 3 the difference in turnout between the country with the lowest level of support and the country with the highest level of support for the EU is of approximately 15 percentage points. Thus one could conclude that low turnout in EP elections is at least partly a function of Euroscepticism. But such a conclusion might be erroneous, as it might as well be the case that in countries where support for the EU is generally low, those who do not support the EU are disproportionately more likely to vote than does those who are supportive of the EU. In addition,

Figure 5 Predicted level of country level turnout in the 2014 EP elections, based on support for the EU



³ In further models we also tested for the effects of population size (measured as the natural logarithm of the population) and economic conditions (measured as the change in GDP from 2014 to 2013). Neither of the two effects was statistically significant.

we need to mention that the strength of this predictor is rather limited given that it only explains an estimated 5% of the variance in turnout.

All in all, based on the results presented in Table 2 we can infer that five country level predictors had an effect on turnout in the 2014 EP elections: turnout in national elections (the baseline), organizing other elections simultaneously with the EP elections, an Eastern European context, compulsory voting provisions, and support for the EU in a given country. From a public policy perspective, it is obvious that some of these are easier to alter than others. Introducing compulsory voting provisions and organizing the EP elections simultaneously with local, regional, or national elections would have an immediate effect on increasing EP elections turnout. However, we need to warn the reader that the estimates presented above only explain country level patterns, and do not explain why individual citizens chose to vote or to stay at home. Therefore, in Section 2.6 we will further analyse how these variables impacted the propensity to vote of individuals (the results are presented in Table 4).

Given that the previously analysed factors are rather static, they cannot account for the stabilization of the turnout decline in the 2014 EP elections. The countries that have compulsory voting are the same as in 2009 and the proportion of countries organizing other elections simultaneously with the EP elections remained largely unchanged. If anything the decline in national elections turnout (see Figure 2) and the declining support for the EU due to the Euro crisis would lead us to expect a decline and not a halt to the decline in turnout in the 2014 EP elections. Thus, in the next two chapters we investigate two possible factors that may have led to the halt to the decline in turnout (or the slight increase, if we do not take into account Croatia) in the 2014 EP elections when compared to the turnout in the 2009 EP elections. As we identified earlier, the low stakes of these elections are the main reason for non-voting; as a result, any effort to increase turnout should be aimed at increasing the perceived importance of these elections among both parties and EU citizens. The first factor that could have such an effect is the introduction of the *Spitzenkandidat* system that allowed the EP group with the most votes in the election to nominate a candidate for the presidency of the European Commission. One of the aims of this institutional innovation was to transform the nature of the elections to the European Parliament by creating a genuine contest for the top executive job and a choice between alternative political platforms. The hope is that this would raise the stakes and mobilize citizens to take greater interest in and participate in the elections in greater numbers.

The second factor that we consider as having the potential to increase the stakes of the EP elections is an information environment in which citizens would think that voting in the EP elections is important because of the role the EP plays in their daily lives. To be more specific it might also be the case that the 2014 EP election campaign created a richer information environment which

enabled citizens to better understand what is at stake in these elections. One of the principal mechanisms that could lead to such a change would be the information campaign carried out by the European Parliament Information Office (EPIO). Thus we expect EP elections turnout to be higher in countries where the information campaign conducted by the national EPIOs benefited from more resources and reached more citizens.

2 Spitzenkandidaten as an effort to increase turnout⁴

2.1 Introduction

Ahead of the 2014 elections, the European Parliament (EP) boldly proclaimed that “This time it’s different.” At the heart of this claim was a constitutional innovation in the Lisbon Treaty’s article 17, which stated that the results of the European Parliament elections should be taken into account when selecting the next Commission President. To reinforce this link, the member parties of the major political groups of the European Parliament decided to each rally behind a common lead candidate (or *Spitzenkandidat* in the commonly used German term). Hence, for the first time in the history of the European Parliament, the extra-parliamentary party organisation of five major political groups of the European Parliament offered voters a choice regarding the next President of the European Commission: Jean-Claude Juncker (European People’s Party, EPP), Martin Schulz (Party of European Socialists, PES), Guy Verhofstadt (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, ALDE), Ska Keller and José Bové (European Green Party), and Alexis Tsipras (Party of the European Left).⁵ The European Parliament’s hope was that this innovation would, firstly, mobilize voters to take a greater interest in European elections and, secondly, increase its own power *vis-à-vis* the Council. While the attempt of the Parliament to impose the leading candidate of the largest group as Commission President was met with some opposition,⁶ the EP ultimately won the inter-institutional battle when Juncker was appointed to be the new Commission President. However, this leaves the question of what impact, if any, the innovation of candidates competing for the Commission presidency had on the nature of the elections.

One crucial concern about electoral democracy in the Union is the persistently low turnout in European Parliament elections, with less than half the electorate turning out to vote since 1999. The potential to increase political participation was therefore also at the heart of the European Commission’s support for the *Spitzenkandidaten* innovation, as they hoped this could “contribute to raising the

⁴ This section is a considerably extended version of the following article: Schmitt, Hermann, Sara B. Hobolt, and Sebastian Adrian Popa. 2015. “Does Personalization Increase Turnout? Spitzenkandidaten in the 2014 European Parliament Elections.” *European Union Politics* 16(3): 347–68.

⁵ Among the political groups that decided not to put forward candidates were the mildly Eurosceptic European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and the strongly Eurosceptic Europe for Freedom and Democracy (EFD).

⁶ The governments of the United Kingdom and Hungary were most openly opposed to this decision.

turnout for European elections by strengthening the link between the election of the representatives of the citizens with the selection and election process of the head of the European executive” (European Commission 2013: 6). Critics of the European Parliament’s claim to provide a democratic mandate for the next Commission president, however, have argued that there was generally very little awareness of the lead candidates among voters, and that their impact on turnout and vote choices was thus most likely negligible (see e.g. Open Europe 2014). This study contributes to this politically salient debate by examining the extent to which *Spitzenkandidaten* mobilized voters to turn out in the elections.

In this section we analyse whether and how the lead candidates affected the voting behaviour of EU citizens in the 2014 European Parliament election. Analysing the 2014 European Election Study (EES) post-electoral survey (Schmitt et al. 2015) we find a mobilizing effect of candidate recognition and campaign activity of the three most visible candidates in the race (i.e. Juncker, Schulz, and Verhofstadt) on turnout. We also demonstrate that candidate recognition reinforces the effect of campaign activities on the propensity to turn out. This has implications for the study of electoral democracy in the European Union (EU) and our understanding of campaign effects more generally.

2.2 The history of Spitzenkandidaten of EU-wide political parties running in EP elections

There were high hopes in Brussels that a stronger link between vote choice in European Parliament elections and the election of the Commission President would bolster interest in European elections and thereby strengthen the legitimacy of the EU as a whole (European Commission 2013; European Parliament 2014). At the heart of the argument in favour of *Spitzenkandidaten* was the expectation that this innovation would strengthen executive accountability in the European Union. One of the central concerns about the so-called democratic deficit is that the EU has until recently lacked mechanisms for citizens to hold the EU executive to account, or “to throw the rascals out” of executive office, through the process of competitive elections. The EU is a trans-national system of multi-level governance (Hooghe and Marks 2001, 2003) with many of the features of national democracies, such as direct elections on the transnational route of political representation (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999). However, unlike in national parliamentary systems, there is no clear link between the party choice in parliamentary elections and the executive (the European Commission), at least not until recently. Prior to the Maastricht Treaty, the Commission President was chosen by the national governments of the member states by a unanimous vote. The public therefore had no direct way of influencing the election of the EU’s “executive” or hold it to account for its actions. The fact that European elections did not lead to the formation of a “government” has long been regarded as a key reason for the fact that citizens are much less likely to vote in these second-order elections (see Franklin and Hobolt 2011; Reif and Schmitt 1980; van der Eijk and Franklin 1996).

The Parliament's powers vis-à-vis the EU's executive have been strengthened in successive treaty revisions: the Maastricht Treaty (1993) introduced a new "investiture procedure" whereby the Council must consult the European Parliament on their nominee for the Commission president and Parliament's approval was required before the Member States could appoint the President and Members of the Commission as a collegiate body. The Amsterdam Treaty (1999) took matters further by requiring Parliament's specific approval for the appointment of the Commission President, prior to that of the other Commissioners. Parliament also introduced hearings of Commissioners-designate in 1994. These reforms, however, did little to strengthen the link between voters and the EU executive, or mobilize citizen interest in EP elections (e.g. Hix and Lord 1997; Lodge 1996). Due to their perceived insignificance, the elections continued to be "second-order national elections" (Reif and Schmitt 1980), where a majority of voters stayed at home, and others cast a vote in protest against their national government or with their hearts without any regard to government formation (e.g., Hix and Marsh 2007; Marsh 1998; van der Eijk and Franklin 1996).

These problems led scholars and politicians alike to suggest constitutional innovations that could remedy the perceived democratic deficit of the European Union. The idea of Euro-parties nominating competing candidates was already discussed in the 1990s by scholars such as Simon Hix (see Hix 1997, 1998). The core objective was to inject real political, personal choice into the EP election campaigns by having competing candidates for Commission President, with alternative political agendas, nominated by Euro-parties, and the candidate of the winning party group would in turn be nominated by the Council and elected by the European Parliament to become the President of the Commission. As Hix noted optimistically in 2008, such changes could lead to "public identification of the policy options on the EU table and the winners and losers in the EU. In short, there would be democratic politics in the EU for the first time" (Hix 2008, 164).

These discussions about how to strengthen electoral accountability and enhance public interest in European Parliament elections also played a central role in the debates leading to the failed Constitutional Treaty process and, in turn, the Lisbon Treaty (2009). In the Lisbon Treaty the investiture procedure was revised to emphasize that the European Council should 'take into account the elections' before nominating a candidate and that the European Parliament subsequently 'elects' the Council nominee:

Taking into account the elections to the European Parliament and after having held the appropriate consultations, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall propose to the European Parliament a candidate for President of the Commission. This candidate shall be elected by the European Parliament by a majority of its component members. If he does not obtain

the required majority, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall within one month propose a new candidate who shall be elected by the European Parliament following the same procedure. (Article 17(7) TEU).

The wording of the treaty is ambiguous when it comes to the powers of the European Parliament to impose its own candidate. But the European Parliament seized upon the treaty change by deciding that the European political groups would nominate lead candidates for the post of European Commission president. In a resolution agreed to on 22 November 2012, the European Parliament presented its main argument:

[The Parliament] urges the European political parties to nominate candidates for the Presidency of the Commission and expects those candidates to play a leading role in the parliamentary electoral campaign, in particular by personally presenting their programme in all Member States of the Union; stresses the importance of reinforcing the political legitimacy of both Parliament and the Commission by connecting their respective elections more directly to the choice of the voters.⁷

This message was reinforced by a resolution of the European Commission (2013).⁸ Both institutions thus echoed the message found in the academic literature concerning the key objectives of the reformed process of nominating and electing the Commission president. The first aim was to transform the nature of the elections to the European Parliament by creating a genuine contest for the top executive job and a choice between alternative political platforms. The hope was that this would mobilize citizens to take part in the elections and, in turn, contribute to the EU's legitimacy.

Secondly, the politicisation of European issues should also allow voters to vote on the basis of issues that matter to EU policy-making rather than treating the elections as a mid-term 'beauty contest' for national governments. This may, in time, strengthen electoral accountability in the EU; EP elections will also voters to provide the executive with a genuine democratic mandate, and to subsequently reward or punish them based on the degree to which they fulfilled this mandate. Finally, the objective was that by increasing electoral accountability in EP elections, this would also contribute to the legitimacy (so-called input legitimacy) of the European Union. In addition to these high democratic hopes, there may also have been more prosaic inter-institutional reasons for the *Spitzenkandidaten*. By introducing its own candidate with the democratic legitimacy conveyed by the vote of Europe's citizenry, the European Parliament would put significant pressure on national governments to nominate

⁷ European Parliament Resolution of 22 November 2012 on the elections to the European Parliament in 2014 (2012/2829(RSP)).

⁸ Commission Recommendation of 12 March 2013 on enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament (2013/142/EU)

the elected candidate and to accept informally, if not formally, the Parliament's right to appoint the EU's executive, as eventually happened (Schimmelfennig 2014). However, this paper focuses on the extent to which there is any evidence that the *Spitzenkandidaten* had the desired impact on the campaign and the vote, by raising the stakes of the vote, personalising the electoral campaign, and thus attracting more voters to the polls.

2.3 Spitzenkandidaten in the 2014 campaign

While the Parliament's slogan that "this time is different" held plenty of promise, there were significant challenges to overcome for the *Spitzenkandidaten* in order to have any real impact on the campaign and the elections. The first of these challenges was the lack of an EU wide common public sphere with a common media, not to mention the lack of a common language in which alternative political visions could be more easily discussed. Recent studies have shown an increasing 'parallelization' of public spheres across Europe, where similar if not the same issues are being debated at the same time (see Koopmans and Statham, 2010; Kriesi and Grande, 2014). However, whether this allows for a Europe-wide public debate on the elections akin to what we know from federal systems is an open question. Second, while the candidates were officially nominated by Euro-parties, it is still national parties that dominate the election campaigns. The lead candidates' impact on national campaigns was therefore crucially dependent on the extent to which national parties and media involved the Pan-European candidates in their national campaigns. As predicted by the second-order elections framework (Marsh and Mikhaylov 2010; Reif and Schmitt 1980), such parties had strong incentives to fight on domestic issues (e.g. national opposition parties against the national government) and even to deliberately disassociate themselves from the *Spitzenkandidaten* (as happened in the UK). Third, the procedures adopted by the two major groups to nominate their candidates resulted in the nomination of two Brussels insiders, Juncker (former Prime Minister of Luxembourg and head of the Eurozone) and Schulz (President of the European Parliament). It was argued that the two had been selected for their European credentials rather than for their broad electoral appeal. Finally, the candidates faced substantive logistic hurdles in running an EU wide campaign. In the absence of support from a "real party organization" and with a relatively small campaign budget the candidates mostly had to rely on a very small band of semi-professional campaign staffers. These hurdles were more obvious in the case of Juncker who as a late-comer to the race only had a limited amount of time to organize a proper campaign. His campaign manager, Martin Selmayr, only started his job on 1 April, while taking unpaid leave from his job in the cabinet of vice-president Reding. Furthermore, the campaign team was composed mostly of interns "coming" from the national parties' organisations and pushing the agendas of those parties. Schulz was in a much better position as his candidacy was made public in late 2013 and benefited from a constant media presence and social media exposure as the President of the EP. But his dual role as President of the EP and candidate also imposed restriction

in terms of the freedom he could take in what he did and said. Additionally, his campaign co-ordinator Julian Priestley had an ambiguous status as he was not officially part of the PES staff and did not have control of the campaign budget. Also, the PES staff did not benefit from the support of PES volunteers and the “full-time communication team was tiny” (Nereo Peñalver and Priestley 2015).

Despite these challenges, the lead candidates did make efforts to run a distinctly European campaign. The five candidates had a total budget of €4.5 million (Pop 2014), with Schulz, Juncker and Verhofstadt commanding most of it (this can be compared to the estimated \$2.6 billion spent in the last US presidential election). Among the more eye-catching initiatives were the nine televised debates between the *Spitzenkandidaten* that took place between 9 April and 20 May 2014. They were conducted in French, English and German, and broadcast on the internet, on Euronews and on selected national channels. A post-election survey of citizens in 15 EU countries suggests that 15% of European citizens saw at least one of the TV debates (AECR 2014).⁹ Not surprisingly, these debates generated the most interest in the “home countries” of the lead candidates: in Luxembourg (Juncker) and in Greece (Tsipras) where 36% and 26% of respondents respectively reported to have watched one of the debates whereas only 6% of Dutch and British citizens had seen any of the debates. An important role was also played by the language in which the debates were carried out. A further example is provided by the debate on 8 May, when Schulz and Juncker opposed one another and the debate was carried out in German and broadcasted in Austria and Germany. It gained quite significant traction and was watched by 330 000 viewers in Austria (i.e. 13% the market share) and 1.8 million people in Germany (i.e. 6% of the market share) – much more than other political talk shows in the two countries. In contrast, the “big debate” on 15 May gained significantly less attentions and failed to capture a significant part of the audience. Although this debate was translated different into national languages and was broadcasted by 25 TV stations across most EU countries, its success was hampered by the fact that very few of the major TV stations chose to broadcast the debate.

In addition to these debates, the candidates also had a substantial presence on the ground. This is probably best summarized by a quote of the campaign chief of the Juncker campaign, Martin Selmayr: “Our wives don’t know us anymore, we don’t know where our bed is”. And this seems to be true given the intensity of the campaign activities of the three most visible candidates. In the two months prior to election day Schulz made 38 campaign visits in 20 countries, Juncker covered 17 countries and made 34 campaign visits (i.e. the total numbers of visits by a candidate in a given country), while Verhofstadt had

⁹ The survey was conducted by AMR GmbH Dusseldorf on behalf of the AECR. The poll was in the field on 25 and 26 of May and had a sample population of 12,132 respondents across 15 EU countries (6,083 voters and 6,049 non-voters).

a more “modest” presence with only 29 visits to 12 countries. These numbers might underestimate the true effort of the candidates, as they do not take into account that they often visited several cities or attended several campaign events on the same day (see Appendix 2 for a description of the campaign events). Most of these visits were classic campaign events, such as meeting party activists and party supporters, participating in large campaign gatherings, or meeting national candidates or national leaders. In terms of countries covered, we can note further similarities between the two main contenders – i.e. Juncker and Schulz. They both concentrated their campaign efforts in Germany which was to be expected given that this is the country with the highest numbers of seats in the EP and given the fact that both candidates knew the language and could count on the support of strong national party organizations (Nereo Peñalver and Priestley 2015). At the same time, none of the candidates campaigned in one of the major battleground countries, Great Britain. The reasons were quite different; while Juncker could not rely on a national party organization the other two “suffered from a de facto British travel ban” (Nereo Peñalver and Priestley 2015, 110). Also, all the candidates concentrated their efforts on countries where they could rely on a strong national party organization to support their campaign effort. Thus, while Schulz focused on France, Italy, and Spain – all of which are big countries in which the PES had the infrastructure to organize big events – Juncker concentrated on Eastern European countries where the EPP was particularly strong and Verhofstadt favoured his native country, Belgium (Nereo Peñalver and Priestley 2015, 123–131).

There were also few differentiations in policy terms between the messages of the candidates, especially between Juncker and Schulz who are ideologically rather close. For example, while all three candidates generally agreed with the austerity and bailout packages as being the solution to the Euro crisis, Schulz and Verhofstadt were a bit more critical and tried to associate the idea of “blind austerity” to Juncker. In terms of external relations, all three supported TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment partnership) and had minor disagreements regarding the handling of the Ukraine crisis. Other differences concerned tax evasion, where Juncker was attacked for his role in making Luxembourg a tax heaven for big companies, and digital services, where Schulz stood out by raising issues regarding privacy rights (Nereo Peñalver and Priestley 2015, 129–130).

Still, the campaigns of both Schulz and Juncker each had distinct qualities. First, Schulz had several events in which he directly addressed trade union members or factory workers, although this is not surprising considering that these groups are the traditional base of the European Socialists. Most notably here were his campaign activities in Spain and Germany where he got standing ovations from the party activists attending the respective events (Nereo Peñalver and Priestley 2015, 128). Second, and probably more important, Juncker had several meetings with the heads of national governments and other important national and European political figures. For example, he had private meetings with

the German, Polish, Greek, Portuguese, Finnish, and Latvian Prime Ministers and the former PMs of France, Germany, and Malta (see Appendix 2). When we take into account that he was the favourite to win the nomination to be President of the European Commission, these meetings were most likely an attempt to secure the nomination, especially bearing in mind the somewhat ambiguous text of the Lisbon treaty.

In addition, the candidates and their campaigns had a significant online presence. For example, even if the TV debate on 15 May was far from breaking any audience record on TV it gained significant attention on social media as the hashtag "#TelleUROPE" trended in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, and the UK and was mentioned in 110,000 tweets (<http://www3.ebu.ch/contents/news/2014/05/ebu-makes-history-with-the-eurov.html>). Regarding the candidates, Schulz was the most active in the online environment with approximately 110,000 twitter followers and almost 250,000 mentions during the two months before the elections and 130,000 Facebook followers. Verhofstadt also had a non-trivial presence with 22,000 Facebook followers and 26,000 Twitter followers and 105,000 Twitter mentions in the same period, whereas Juncker was the least active twitter user of the three.¹⁰ Worth mentioning here is the fact that Juncker's lack of online success can be explained by the fact that at the beginning of the campaign he did not have a significant social media presence. He only started building a profile when the campaign was well in its way and managed to get a considerable base only by the end of the campaign when the number of his Twitter followers reached 37,000 and only 17,000 Facebook fans. We now turn to the question of whether these campaign activities – off- and online – managed to mobilize voters to take part in the elections.

2.4 Spitzenkandidaten and turnout in European Parliament elections

Union-wide participation in European Parliament elections started at the low level of 62% in the first direct elections in 1979 and declined further to just 43% over subsequent elections. However, it is worth noting that this decline in the average level of turnout in EP elections can be largely accounted for by the changing composition of the EU electorate due to the multiple EU enlargements, which incorporated countries with lower turnout habits in general elections.¹¹ Nonetheless, these low levels of turnout have attracted a great deal of attention among both policy-makers and scholars. Much of the focus has been on whether

¹⁰ The source of these numbers is the TNS leader watch, available at <http://www.tnsglobal.com/what-we-do/european-leader-watch>.

¹¹ Analyses have shown that there has been little or no decline in individual countries, beyond a one-time drop often seen following the founding election in a country, but EU enlargement has brought into the Union countries with lower turnout (both in EP and national elections) and the EU's changing composition has certainly yielded lower turnout over the EU as a whole (see Franklin 2001; Trechsel, De Sio and Garcia 2014).

low turnout is a reflection of critical or even hostile attitudes towards the European Union. Indeed, it is a popular view in the media that Euroscepticism is a major driving force behind European election abstention (see Blondel et al. 1998; Evans and Ivaldi 2011; Mattila 2003; Steinbrecher and Rattinger 2012). However, the tenor of the analyses of individual level participation seems to point in a different direction.

In line with the second-order elections model, the main factor explaining low turnout seems to be the fact that so little is at stake in these elections. Individual-level analyses of turnout in European Parliament elections have repeatedly identified the same factors that contribute to our understanding of participation in first-order elections: social and political integration (being married, union membership, and church attendance), habituation, political involvement (interest in politics, partisanship), and resources (education) are relevant here. On the supply side, the availability of suitable choice options has also been shown to play a significant role (van der Eijk and Schmitt 2009; Wessels and Franklin 2009). This is not to say that Euroscepticism has no influence on turnout, but that the evidence suggests that the main determinants of electoral participation in European elections are the conventional ones, these are what drive voting abstention rather than citizens' attitudes about the EU. Building on this, we explore how *Spitzenkandidaten*, through their mobilizing efforts, can contribute to raising individuals' propensity to turn out to vote.

We focus on two distinct mechanisms through which *Spitzenkandidaten* can increase voter mobilization. The first is *personalization*. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) were among the first to put forward this argument. Looking beyond the classical explanations, which focus on resources and attitudes, they emphasized the importance of the strategic effort of political leaders and the competition between them in mobilizing the electorate. This is even more important in the context of elections where there is a low level of participation, such as the elections to the European Parliament. In this context, party leaders (e.g. *Spitzenkandidaten*) play a more important role in mobilizing voters, as they offer citizens the opportunity to identify with individuals who personify their political goals and objectives (McAllister 2007; Milner and Ladner 2006). Therefore, regardless of whether citizens like them or not, the mere presence of identifiable leaders should increase the probability of voting (McAllister 2007).¹² The arrival of competing pan-European personalities in EP election campaigns is expected to have exactly the same effect, namely that it will offer the European citizenry

¹² We need to acknowledge that it might also be the case that *Spitzenkandidaten* do not mobilize voters, but citizens who are mobilized to vote by other facets of the campaign are more motivated to acquire information (Shineman 2012) and hence also gain information about the existence of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Nevertheless this seems less likely given that previous research clearly shows that the acquisition of information during electoral campaigns, in our case being aware of the existence of competing candidates for the presidency of the EC, increases the propensity to turn out to vote (Larcinese 2007; Lassen 2005).

the opportunity to associate EP party groups with identifiable leaders and thereby increase turnout. The low level of competitiveness was previously seen as a major cause of non-voting in EP elections (van der Eijk and Schmitt, 2009). We thus expect that those individuals who are aware of the lead candidates and their role during the campaign would be more likely to turn out, as the presence of pan-European candidates could increase the interest in and potentially highlight the significance of the European elections. This leads to our first hypothesis:

H1: Individuals who are able to recognize one or more of the lead candidates for the position of president of the European Commission are more likely to turn out to vote in European Parliament elections.

The second mechanism refers to the *campaign activities* of the lead candidates. Previous research emphasizes that parties and candidates play a substantial role in mobilizing the electorate during an electoral campaign (Gerber and Green 2000; Jackson 1996; Karp, Banducci, and Bowler 2008; Leighley 1995). Although this is usually measured at the individual level, by assessing the impact of canvassing and contacts on the propensity to cast a vote, the research clearly shows the important mobilizing effect of party and candidate mobilization efforts on voter turnout across contexts (Gerber and Green 2000; Karp, Banducci, and Bowler 2008). All in all, an active campaign is expected to engage, inform and motivate voters, leading to a higher turnout (Hillygus 2005; Holbrook and McClurg 2005; Jackson 1997). Starting from similar premises, Jones (1998) indeed showed that in the context of US elections turnout was higher in the counties which were visited by the presidential candidates. Given the campaign effort of the *Spitzenkandidaten* described in an earlier previous section, we can expect that their campaign activities had a similar mobilizing effect. We therefore formulate our second hypothesis:

H2: In political systems where the *Spitzenkandidaten* actively campaigned, individuals are likely more to turn out.

This is not to say that the effects of personalization – operationalized here as candidate recognition – and campaign activities are unrelated. We argue that candidate recognition reinforces the effect of campaign activities on turnout. The relationship could also be one where higher recognition rates are at least in part an outcome of the candidates' campaign activities, since campaign activities increase the political information available to voters about individual candidates (Jacobson 1992; Shineman 2012). However, we believe that in the case of the *Spitzenkandidaten*, this is less likely for a number reasons. The top three contenders were not complete unknowns before the campaign.¹³ Moreover,

¹³ As we have pointed out earlier, Schulz was the President of the European Parliament at the time of the election campaign, Juncker was the former Prime Minister of Luxembourg and head of the Eurozone, and Verhofstadt had been the Prime Minister of several previous Belgian governments.

given that citizens have a higher propensity to pay attention to the campaign of the candidates they favour (Vavreck, Spiliotes, and Fowler 2002), we can also expect that they pay more attention to the campaign activities of candidates who they already know about. Thus, we anticipate that recognition facilitates the effect of the candidates' campaign activities. Previous research has also shown that campaign activities (like visits and TV appearances) have a greater effect on citizens that have at least some basic previous knowledge of the candidates that campaign (Joslyn and Ceccoli 1996; King and Morehouse 2004; Vavreck, Spiliotes, and Fowler 2002). Based on all of this, we formulate our final hypothesis:

H3: In political systems where the *Spitzenkandidaten* actively campaigned, individuals are more likely to turn out if they can recognize them.

2.5 Data and methods

To test these hypotheses, the paper presents the first results of an analysis of the European Election Study (EES) 2014 Voter Study (Schmitt et al. 2015).¹⁴ Following in the tradition of previous European Election Studies, this is a nationally representative post-election survey that was conducted in each of the 28 member countries of the EU. Approximately 1,100 respondents were interviewed in each EU member country, which adds to a total sample size of 30,064. The study was commissioned in collaboration with the Public Opinion Monitoring Unit of the European Parliament and was carried out by TNS Opinion in collaboration with its local partners between 30 May and 27 June 2014. All the interviews were carried out face to face (by way of Computer Assisted Personal Interviews, or CAPI).¹⁵

The dependent variable of this paper is turnout. It is measured by a standard self-reported turnout question that also includes a memory cue (the date of the elections) and a “face saving” statement (“For one reason or another, some people in [OUR COUNTRY] did not vote in these elections”).

Our key explanatory variables capture individual-level awareness of the *Spitzenkandidaten* as well as cross-national variations in exposure to their campaign activities. The difficulties in pinpointing campaign effects empirically are well-known, not least when using observational cross-sectional data, such as the EES. A key concern is that it is hard to distinguish between campaign effects that are the result of actual mobilization efforts that occurred during the

¹⁴ The EES part of the study was funded by a consortium of private foundations, led by the Volkswagen Foundation and supported in addition by the Mercator Foundation, the Swedish Riksbank Foundation, and the Portuguese Gulbenkian Foundation. The study benefited in addition from the generous support of TNS Opinion.

¹⁵ More details regarding the study can be found at <http://eeshomepage.net/voter-study-2014/>; questionnaires in both English and French are available at the following link: eeshomepage.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Master-Questionnaire.pdf

campaign and those that are due to pre-existing differences between people who are more exposed to the campaign (e.g. the more politically interested) and those who are not (e.g. the less politically interested). To be more specific, those who recognized the *Spitzenkandidaten* and those who did not may also differ on a number of other dimensions related to their likelihood to turn out, leading to a possible over-estimation of the recognition effect (Levendusky 2011, 45). One solution would be to rely on experimental research – either embedded in the survey, in the laboratory, or in the field – which avoids many of these inferential problems. In this study, however, where we are interested in the effects of a particular constitutional innovation in the EU and how its implementation has varied across member states, experiments are not ideal. Relying on cross-national survey data has the advantage of greater external validity compared to the artificial setting of a laboratory experiment, and the much more limited geographical scope of most field experiments. While causality can never be established with complete certainty using an observational design, we do take several steps to reduce causal inference problems in our study.

First, we operationalized awareness of *Spitzenkandidaten* using a factual knowledge question rather than a subjective assessment of knowledge, since that is more likely to capture people who have actually been exposed to information about the candidates. We used a “name-party” recognition battery that requires respondents to identify which EP party group or which national party supports the nomination of each of the three most important candidates – Jean-Claude Juncker, Martin Schulz, and Guy Verhofstadt. This requires voters to be familiar with both the candidates and to be able to associate them with a specific party. The respondents were offered four response options,¹⁶ so that a random guess was less likely to produce a correct answer. Second, we minimized the “omitted variables bias” by controlling for all the key factors, such as campaign engagement, education, political interest, partisanship and political efficacy, which are likely to be associated with both turnout and awareness of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. These control variables are discussed in more detail below. Third, in addition to measuring the mobilizing effect of the candidates at the individual level, we also captured their campaign activities as a context-level predictor (H2), and importantly we examined whether recognition can moderate the effect of the campaign context (H3).

As a proxy for campaign activity we measured the number of campaign visits of each candidate per member country. Taking into consideration both the limited campaign budgets of the candidates and their considerable activities on

¹⁶ “Socialists & Democrat (S&D)” (identified e.g. in Germany by mentioning the SPD), “European People’s Party (EPP)” (identified in Germany by the CDU/CSU), “Liberals and Allies Group (ALDE)” (identified in German by the FDP), and finally “The Greens” (identified in Germany by Die Grünen). In countries where two or more parties were expected to join an EP group, the biggest party was mentioned. In countries where there was no party supporting one of the four EP groups, only the name of the EP group was provided.

the ground, these visits seem to be the most important campaign tool of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Moreover, campaign visits to a specific country were likely to be covered by the national press, which in turn would result in greater exposure to the lead candidates' messages.¹⁷ To test H3, we included an interaction term between campaign visits and individual candidate recognition. This allows us to examine whether individual-level candidate awareness reinforces the effect of the campaigning context on turnout.

We also used an alternative measure of campaign activity that is meant to capture a possible effect of the social media campaigns of the candidates on turnout. In order to measure this effect, we relied on their Twitter activity and we acquired all the tweets that mentioned the candidates in the last two months of the campaign from which we could get geo-location data. These only represented around 1.5% of all tweets mentioning the candidates, but they can be considered a random sample of all tweets mentioning the candidates and thus indicative of the outreach of their social media campaigns in each country. In order to account for the fact, the intensity of twitter communication also depends on the size of the country we weighted the number of tweets that are geo-located by the population size.

As mentioned above, we also included a host of control variables that are customarily used to explain the propensity of turnout in order to isolate the mobilizing effect of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. The first group of controls seeks to capture campaign engagement (i.e. exposure to the campaign, campaign involvement, and contact by a party) and general political engagement (interest in politics, level of political discussion, internal political efficacy, partisanship, and news consumption). These variables are generally considered to be proxies for political mobilization (Gerber and Green 2000; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Zuckerman, Dasovic, and Fitzgerald 2007) and individual resources (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), both of which are known to be strong predictors of turnout. Including these indicators thus allows us to control for possible confounding factors that determine both candidate recognition and the propensity to vote. Endogeneity problems can never be entirely ruled out in observational studies, since the decision to turn out in the election may lead people to seek out the relevant information that would help them make the best choice (Downs 1957; Lassen 2005), which could, in turn, increase candidate recognition (i.e. reverse causality). However, by controlling for the level of political engagement of respondents, we reduce the possibility that the relation between recognition and propensity to participate is a result of previous knowledge or of information acquired during the electoral campaign. Thus, we can argue with greater

¹⁷ Given the distribution of the variable (see Appendix 1) and the limited campaign time, we chose to use a dummy variable that takes the value 1 if the candidate visited a country and 0 otherwise.

certainty that any effect of candidate recognition on the turnout is a result of the “mobilizing effect” of the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

We also control for social background variables that are indicative of social integration and individual resources. Historically these were among the primary variables used to explain individual turnout (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). They include union membership, church attendance, rural vs. urban residence, but also age, education, gender, marital status, employment status, immigrant status, and internet use. Finally, we also include attitudes towards political institutions that have been shown to be associated with turnout – trust in national parliaments, trust in EU institutions, and attitudes towards EU membership. At the macro level, we control for compulsory voting, whether other elections took place at the same time as the EP elections, the number of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in a given political system (as a proxy for population size), and turnout in the last legislative election before the EP elections¹⁸, as these are all factors that have been shown in previous studies to have a strong influence on turnout in EP elections (e.g. Franklin and Hobolt, 2011; Wessels and Franklin, 2009). Furthermore, given the specificity of these elections, we also controlled for a possible “home country” effect by using a dummy variable that takes the value 1 for the three countries of the candidates (Germany, Luxembourg and Belgium) and zero otherwise.¹⁹ All independent variables were rescaled to have values between a theoretical minimum of 0 and a theoretical maximum of 1, thus allowing for a direct comparison of the strength of their effects (see Appendix 1 for a complete description of all variables).

In order to test our hypotheses, we proceed in two steps. First we present country level descriptive data, which provide illustrative evidence of the aggregate relation between turnout and the mobilisation efforts of the candidates. Second, we estimate a series of multilevel logistic regression models to identify the mobilization effects of the *Spitzenkandidaten* on the propensity to vote in the 2014 EP elections.²⁰ Our unit of analysis at the highest level is party

¹⁸ It is worth mentioning that post-communism, the level of GDP per capita and turnout in the previous national elections are highly correlated. Controlling for any of the three yielded a very similar pattern of results (i.e. the significance levels for the effects of interest were the same).

¹⁹ Using the log of the population or the actual size of the population instead of the number of MEPs reveals a very similar pattern of results. Another option would be to weight the number of visits by the population size (i.e. number of MEPs). Still, as population size was previously linked to turnout, we thought that mixing the two indicators in one variable was not the best solution. Another robustness check consists of including individual level turnout in the previous legislative elections in our models. Even if this is a stringent robustness test, the results presented in Table 6 hold (i.e. they are very similar to the ones in Table 4). This indicates that even after taking into account whether respondents are habitual voters, our results hold.

²⁰ The analysis is conducted in R, using the lme4 package version 1.1-7.

systems rather than countries.²¹ We used random intercepts and random slopes for the variables measuring candidate recognition and grand mean centring for aggregate level variables (Enders and Tofghi 2007).

2.6 Empirical analysis

We start with some descriptive statistics showing turnout levels in the 2014 EP elections and the country-specific campaigns of the *Spitzenkandidaten* (recognition and campaign activity).

Turning to the campaign effects of the lead candidates, our data shows that the proportion of citizens who recognized the candidates (i.e. was able to link them to the correct party) is far from impressive. Only 19% of respondents recognized Juncker and 17% recognized Schulz. These numbers are even lower for the candidate of the smallest of the three political groups that we consider (Guy Verhofstadt), who was only recognised by 9% of all respondents. Of course there are significant country differences, as the candidates were better known in their countries of origin and the neighbouring countries than elsewhere.

To test whether individual candidate awareness and campaign activities had an effect on turnout, we estimated a series of multilevel models shown in Table 4. Model 1 serves mostly as a reference model because it includes all the relevant variables except for the recognition of candidates and the number of their visits. A quick inspection of this model shows that the coefficients generally support the extant literature. As all variables were standardized to assume values between 0 and 1 so that we could compare the strength of their effects by looking at the size of the coefficients in Table 2. We can note that the strongest predictors are those measuring the political engagement of individuals and thus relate to the utility an individual associates with the act of casting a vote. To be more specific, consistent with previous findings, the variables that have the strongest effect are campaign involvement and political efficacy. Other variables that measure the political engagement of an individual – i.e. political knowledge, political interest, partisanship and contact with politicians – also increase the propensity to vote, but their effect is substantially smaller than the effect of political efficacy and campaign involvement. As an example, if an individual who has a maximum level of political efficacy is approximately, keeping everything else constant, 40 times more likely to vote than an individual who feels that he or she has no say in politics; the difference is smaller in the case of political knowledge – i.e. a very knowledgeable respondent is only around 0.6 times more likely to vote than an individual who is totally ignorant about politics. A second group of factors

²¹ Both in Belgium and in the UK, there are effectively two party systems in operation: The Walloon and the Flemish in the Belgian case, and the British and Northern Irish in the UK case. Furthermore, in the case of the UK, Northern Ireland and Great Britain have very different electoral systems in place to select the EP candidates. However, using country as a nesting unit reveals a very similar pattern of results).

Table 3 Candidate recognition, country level descriptives

Country	Candidate recognition			Number of campaign visits (i.e. starting two months before the elections)			Number of geo-located tweets that mention the candidates, (1.5% of total number of tweets)		
	Juncker	Schulz	Verhofstadt	Juncker	Schulz	Verhofstadt	Juncker	Schulz	Verhofstadt
Austria	43.90%	39.77%	15.80%	1	1	1	7	46	9
Belgium	31.09%	25.55	69.46	4	2	8	13	142	51
Bulgaria	13.45%	17.63%	4.63%	1	1	0	8	7	1
Croatia	11.97%	10.58%	4.08%	0	1	1	1	0	0
Cyprus	17.17%	12.08%	5.66%	2	0	0	1	0	1
Czech Republic	4.5%	5.69%	3.40%	0	1	1	3	0	0
Denmark	17.42%	11.34%	3.23%	0	1	0	0	21	3
Estonia	4.32%	5.24%	2.12%	0	0	0	0	0	1
Finland	25.18%	17.24%	11.50%	1	1	0	2	5	1
Flanders	34.40%	26.72%	77.28%	3	5	8			
France	12.48%	16.67%	2.42%	3	5	4			
Germany	63.65%	66.93%	8.01%	8	11	1	41	694	65
Great Britain	8.4%	2.03%	1.2%	0	0	0	26	294	85
Greece	21.84%	18.25%	1.76%	2	0	2	6	42	18
Hungary	9.15%	9.69%	6.16%	0	0	0	3	35	7
Ireland	13.41%	5.00 %	13.15%	0	1	1	3	309	46
Italy	13.20%	20.26%	8.71%	1	2	5	0	0	6
Latvia	14.69%	4.17%	2.75%	2	0	0	2	0	0
Lithuania	5.47%	7.48%	4.11%	0	0	0	2	4	2
Luxembourg	80.48%	45.91%	23.05%	1	1	0	2	1	1
Malta	34.37%	49.82%	4.23%	1	1	0	3	35	7
Netherlands	23.44%	16.00 %	24.16%	1	0	1	0	135	51
Northern Ireland	10.36%	9.17%	4.73%	0	1	0	6	23	0
Poland	5.56%	6.79%	5.15%	1	1	1	3	18	5
Portugal	12.58%	9.20%	4.94%	2	1	0	5	4	3
Romania	5.42%	11.64%	3.34%	0	1	1	4	10	0
Slovakia	6.58%	6.48%	5.11%	1	0	0	4	0	0
Slovenia	17.67%	15.84%	8.92%	0	1	1	0	3	0
Spain	10.94%	10.32%	3.35%	1	3	1	8	497	58
Sweden	21.15%	11.54%	5.16%	0	1	1	5	16	5
UK	8.87%	3.73%	2.04%	0	0	0	6	65	18
Wallonia	25.58%	23.97%	58.82%	5	3	7			
EU mean	18.91%	16.87%	8.78%						

are related to the individual resources of individuals, measured via their social background. Thus the two socio-demographic variables that have the strongest impact are age and nationality, with younger people and immigrants being substantially less likely to vote. But other variables that describe the social background of an individual, like being married, religiosity, union membership and internet use, also have a positive and statistically significant effect on the propensity to cast a vote. The last group of factors relates to support for the EU, measured by trust in European institutions and a belief that EU membership is a good thing. Going against the popular view in the media that Euroscepticism is a major driving force behind European election abstention, a view that has also been supported by some academic work (see Blondel et al. 1998; Evans and Ivaldi 2011; Mattila 2003; Steinbrecher and Rattinger 2012), we do not find any substantial evidence to support these claims. Thus although Euroscepticism decreases the propensity to vote, as respondents who do not trust the institutions of the EU and who think that EU membership is a bad thing are less likely to vote, the size of these effects is rather negligible. For example, respondents who do not trust EU institutions are only nine per cent less likely to vote than those who trust EU institutions. When we compare this to the effect of variables measuring political engagement and socio-demographics variables we can safely conclude that Euroscepticism is by no mean a major factor driving abstention in EP elections.

Moving to the country level variables, the analysis presented in Table 4 provides a re-evaluation of some of the main findings presented in Table 2 in Chapter 1. As a reminder, we found that turnout in national elections, organizing other elections simultaneously with the EP elections, an Eastern European context, compulsory voting provisions, and support for the EU in a given country all contribute to higher level of turnout in the 2014 EP elections. We need to mention that this model does not include support for the EU in a given country, as this was included as an individual level predictor, nor does it include Eastern European context, since in this case this is strongly related to national level turnout.²² The results presented here confirm the importance of the having compulsory voting, organizing other elections simultaneously with EP elections, and generally high levels of turnout in the country, since these were all found (not for the first time though) to be associated with a higher propensity of individuals to vote in the 2014 EP elections. To be more specific, while holding all other factors constant, individuals who live in countries with compulsory voting are approximately 2.5 times more likely to vote, while those who live in countries that organized other elections simultaneously with the EP elections are approximately 2.6 times more likely to vote. At the same time, an increase of 1 percentage point in national elections turnout increases the propensity of a citizen to cast a vote by 1.5%.

²² This is true even when including Eastern European countries in the models.

Table 4 Effect of candidate recognition and campaigning on turnout, main effects

	<i>Model 1: Without the candidates</i>		<i>Model 2: Juncker</i>		<i>Model 3: Schulz</i>		<i>Model 4: Verhofstadt</i>	
<i>Fixed effects</i>								
Intercept	-4.403***	(0.171)	-4.410***	(0.216)	-4.684***	(0.222)	-4.524***	(0.192)
Candidate recognition			0.248***	(0.058)	0.314***	(0.067)	0.177*	(0.087)
Married	0.082*	(0.035)	0.082*	(0.035)	0.083*	(0.035)	0.083*	(0.035)
Secondary education	-0.026	(0.045)	-0.026	(0.045)	-0.029	(0.045)	-0.025	(0.045)
Tertiary education	-0.017	(0.051)	-0.025	(0.051)	-0.024	(0.051)	-0.016	(0.051)
Age	1.655***	(0.107)	1.611***	(0.107)	1.605***	(0.107)	1.647***	(0.107)
Female	0.127***	(0.034)	0.140***	(0.034)	0.143***	(0.034)	0.131***	(0.034)
Unemployed	-0.060	(0.058)	-0.063	(0.058)	-0.060	(0.058)	-0.060	(0.058)
Rural	0.054	(0.035)	0.054	(0.036)	0.058	(0.036)	0.057	(0.036)
Religious	0.332***	(0.060)	0.331***	(0.060)	0.337***	(0.060)	0.338***	(0.060)
Union member	0.140**	(0.048)	0.140**	(0.048)	0.140**	(0.048)	0.141**	(0.048)
Immigrant	-1.760***	(0.116)	-1.752***	(0.116)	-1.773***	(0.116)	-1.776***	(0.116)
Internet use	0.133*	(0.059)	0.120**	(0.059)	0.115+	(0.059)	0.128*	(0.059)
Political knowledge	0.508***	(0.067)	0.459***	(0.067)	0.453***	(0.067)	0.493***	(0.067)
Interest in politics	0.451***	(0.065)	0.425***	(0.065)	0.426***	(0.065)	0.448***	(0.065)
Political discussion	0.121+	(0.071)	0.114	(0.071)	0.113	(0.071)	0.116	(0.071)
Political efficacy	3.812***	(0.126)	3.815***	(0.126)	3.811***	(0.126)	3.802***	(0.126)
Partisanship	0.580***	(0.035)	0.572***	(0.035)	0.568***	(0.035)	0.573***	(0.035)
News consumption	0.141	(0.090)	0.142	(0.090)	0.144	(0.090)	0.145	(0.090)
Exposure to campaign	0.032	(0.038)	0.030	(0.038)	0.028	(0.038)	0.032	(0.038)
Campaign involvement	1.911***	(0.107)	1.889***	(0.107)	1.880***	(0.107)	1.904***	(0.107)
Contact by politician	0.293***	(0.054)	0.288***	(0.054)	0.294***	(0.054)	0.289***	(0.054)
Trust national parliament	-0.228***	(0.040)	-0.230***	(0.040)	-0.225***	(0.040)	-0.228***	(0.040)
Trust EU institutions	0.082*	(0.039)	0.084*	(0.040)	0.078*	(0.040)	0.082**	(0.040)
EU membership	0.116**	(0.038)	0.104**	(0.038)	0.104**	(0.038)	0.115**	(0.038)
Compulsory voting	0.895*	(0.362)	0.769*	(0.361)	0.925**	(0.315)	0.887**	(0.329)
Concurrent ntl election	0.979***	(0.252)	0.858**	(0.277)	1.046***	(0.224)	0.897***	(0.230)
Turnout in national elections	0.015+	(0.008)	0.010	(0.008)	0.011	(0.007)	0.015*	(0.008)
Number of MEPs	-0.003	(0.005)	-0.006	(0.005)	-0.004	(0.004)	-0.002	(0.004)
Candidate nationality	-0.129	(0.398)	-0.181	(0.364)	-0.517	(0.318)	-0.180	(0.330)
Candidate campaign visits			0.177	(0.216)	0.520**	(0.195)	0.305+	(0.180)
<i>Random effects (variance)</i>								
Intercept		0.253		0.276		0.285		0.281
Candidate recognition				0.019		0.046		0.073
Residual (median)								
Observations (individual)		24137		24137		24137		24137
Observations (system)		30		30		30		30
Log Likelihood		-11,673		-11,655		-11,641		-11,661
AIC		23,406		23,378		23,350		23,389

Table 4 (continued)

	<i>Model 5: Juncker</i>		<i>Model 6: Schulz</i>		<i>Model 7: Verhofstadt</i>	
<i>Fixed effects</i>						
Intercept	-4.415***	(0.224)	-4.498***	(0.232)	-4.363***	(0.198)
Candidate recognition	0.255**	(0.097)	0.084	(0.121)	-0.063	(0.126)
Married	0.082*	(0.035)	0.083*	(0.035)	0.083*	(0.035)
Secondary education	-0.026	(0.045)	-0.029	(0.045)	-0.026	(0.045)
Tertiary education	-0.025	(0.051)	-0.025	(0.051)	-0.017	(0.051)
Age	1.611***	(0.107)	1.602***	(0.107)	1.647***	(0.107)
Female	0.140***	(0.034)	0.142***	(0.034)	0.131***	(0.034)
Unemployed	-0.063	(0.058)	-0.061	(0.058)	-0.060	(0.058)
Rural	0.054	(0.036)	0.058	(0.036)	0.058	(0.036)
Religious	0.331***	(0.060)	0.337***	(0.060)	0.336***	(0.060)
Union member	0.140**	(0.048)	0.141**	(0.048)	0.142**	(0.048)
Immigrant	-1.752***	(0.116)	-1.771***	(0.116)	-1.775***	(0.116)
Internet use	0.120*	(0.059)	0.115+	(0.059)	0.129*	(0.059)
Political knowledge	0.459***	(0.067)	0.452***	(0.067)	0.493***	(0.067)
Interest in politics	0.425***	(0.065)	0.425***	(0.065)	0.446***	(0.065)
Political discussion	0.114	(0.071)	0.113	(0.071)	0.116	(0.071)
Political efficacy	3.815***	(0.126)	3.814***	(0.126)	3.804***	(0.126)
Partisanship	0.572***	(0.035)	0.568***	(0.035)	0.573***	(0.035)
News consumption	0.142	(0.090)	0.144	(0.090)	0.144	(0.090)
Exposure to campaign	0.030	(0.038)	0.028	(0.038)	0.032	(0.038)
Campaign involvement	1.889***	(0.107)	1.879***	(0.107)	1.902***	(0.107)
Contact by politician	0.288***	(0.054)	0.295***	(0.054)	0.289***	(0.054)
Trust national parliament	-0.230***	(0.040)	-0.226***	(0.040)	-0.228***	(0.040)
Trust EU institutions	0.084*	(0.040)	0.078*	(0.040)	0.081*	(0.040)
EU membership	0.104**	(0.038)	0.104**	(0.038)	0.115**	(0.038)
Compulsory voting	0.767*	(0.362)	0.925**	(0.322)	0.897**	(0.329)
Concurrent ntl election	0.858**	(0.277)	1.056***	(0.227)	0.868***	(0.231)
Turnout in national elections	0.010	(0.008)	0.012	(0.007)	0.014+	(0.008)
Number of MEPs	-0.006	(0.005)	-0.005	(0.004)	-0.002	(0.004)
Candidate nationality	-0.179	(0.365)	-0.492	(0.331)	-0.163	(0.337)
Candidate campaign visits	0.185	(0.237)	0.243	(0.221)	0.010	(0.204)
Rec candidate X visits	-0.010	(0.116)	0.313*	(0.140)	0.416*	(0.162)
<i>Random effects (variance)</i>						
Intercept	0.274		0.64		0.257	
Candidate recognition	0.019		0.031		0.050	
Residual (median)	0.250		0.247		0.249	
Observations (individual)	24137		24137		24137	
Observations (system)	30		30		30	
Log Likelihood	-11,655		-11,639		-11,657	
AIC	23,380		23,347		23,385	

Logit coefficients, standard errors in parenthesis; +denotes $p < 0.1$; *denotes $p < 0.05$; **denotes $p < 0.01$; ***denotes $p < 0.001$.

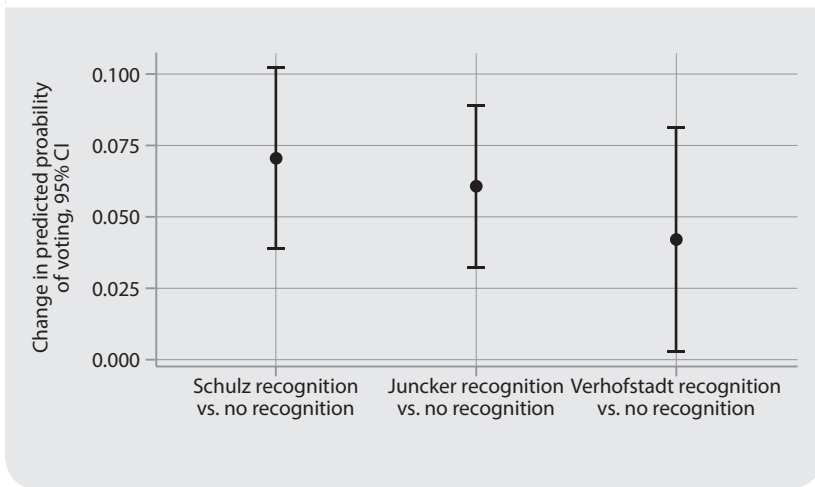
All in all, the results in Model 1 show that disengagement and a lack of interest in EP elections are the main factors responsible for low turnout. As the *Spitzenkandidaten* system was designed, at least in part, as a way to boost interest and engage citizens in the EP elections we now move to the main variables that capture the impact of the *Spitzenkandidaten* on turnout. The first thing to be noted is that all subsequent models in Table 2 have a better fit than Model 1, providing tentative evidence to support the fact that the *Spitzenkandidaten* had an impact on the propensity to vote of individuals.

Given the multicollinearity between recognizing the candidates (the correlation between recognizing Schulz and recognizing Juncker is 0.61), we chose to investigate these effects separately for each candidate. First, we noted that the effects of recognition reached statistical significance for all three candidates. Furthermore, these effects are quite substantive and comparable in size to the effects of political knowledge and political interest – two well established explanatory factors of turnout (see Figure 6).²³ In the case of Schulz, recognizing him increased the likelihood of casting a vote by 37%. All else being equal,²⁴ this corresponds to an increase of 7 percentage points (from 32–49%) in the predicted probability that respondents who recognized him cast a vote. The effects are similar for those who recognized Juncker. The predicted probability that they cast a vote was 44% compared to 38% for those who did not recognize him. Taking into account that roughly one in seven respondents recognized the candidate we can infer that the presence of Schulz and Juncker helped to boost the aggregate level of turnout by approximately 1 percentage points. For Verhofstadt, the size of the effect was much smaller; recognizing him increased the probability to vote by only 4 percentage points (from 37–41%). This is probably due to the fact that he was the least likely of the three to be nominated for the presidency; recognizing him therefore did very little to boost the interest in the EP elections and to mobilize citizens to go out and vote. Overall, campaign personalization by the *Spitzenkandidaten*, measured as recognition, had a substantial effect on the individual's propensity to turn out. Importantly, this effect remains when controlling for potentially confounding factors such as political engagement (both general and campaign specific). Since the effects of the variables capturing political engagement basically remain the same after including candidate recognition, it appears that the latter is not simply a facet of

²³ Everything else being equal, the predicted probability to vote for citizens who live in a country in which Schulz campaigned was 44% compared to a baseline predicted probability of 32% for those who live in another country. In the case of Verhofstadt the effect is equally noteworthy, the predicted probability of a citizen living in a country in which he campaigned is 44% compared to 37% for those living in other countries.

²⁴ All predicted probabilities were computed using simulations based on the normal distribution of coefficients, while keeping all continuous variables at their mean and all categorical variables at zero.

Figure 6 Unconditional effect of recognition (changes in predicted probabilities)



the former.²⁵ This does not mean that we can fully correct for any bias resulting from the potentially endogenous relationship between recognition and turnout, but including the confounding factors certainly reduces the bias. Finally, given the rather small proportion of respondents who actually recognized the *Spitzenkandidaten*, we need to acknowledge that the impact of personalization on the overall level of turnout is bound to have been rather small.

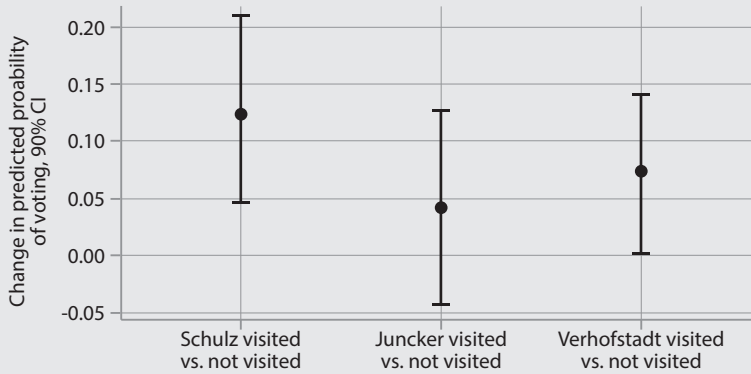
We also examined the impact of the campaign activities of the lead candidates, measured as visits to a country during the campaign. Our basic expectation is that campaign visits facilitate interest in and awareness of the forthcoming European Parliament election and thus mobilizes turnout. When looking at the main effects of the campaign visits, we only record statistically significant effects for Schulz (Model 3) and Verhofstadt (Model 4). In both cases the effects are substantial, but we need to note that the effect of Schulz’s campaign visits was almost twice as strong in comparison with the effect of Verhofstadt’s campaigning visits (see Figure 7).²⁶

What is rather puzzling is the lack of effect of Juncker’s campaign activities, even though he campaigned more than Verhofstadt. One possible explanation

²⁵ Among other indicators, our models take into account political knowledge and political interest that are the most likely “suspects” for possible factors that are endogenous to recognition

²⁶ Everything else being equal, the predicted probability to vote for citizens who live in a country in which Schulz campaigned is 44% compared to a baseline predicted probability of 32% for those who live in another country. In the case of Verhofstadt the effect is equally noteworthy, the predicted probability of a citizen living in a country that he campaigned was 44% compared to 37% for those living in other countries.

Figure 7 Unconditional effect of campaigning (changes in predicted probabilities).



might lie in his campaign style. Verhofstadt’s campaign involved more grassroots activities such as traditional campaign rallies and meetings with party activists and supporters. Juncker’s campaign, by contrast, concentrated on meetings with top level politicians, organized press briefings, participation in gala dinners, and so on – all of which might have been more conducive to securing a possible appointment to the presidency of the Commission after the election than mobilising electoral support in the first place (see Appendix 2 for the description of the campaign visits).

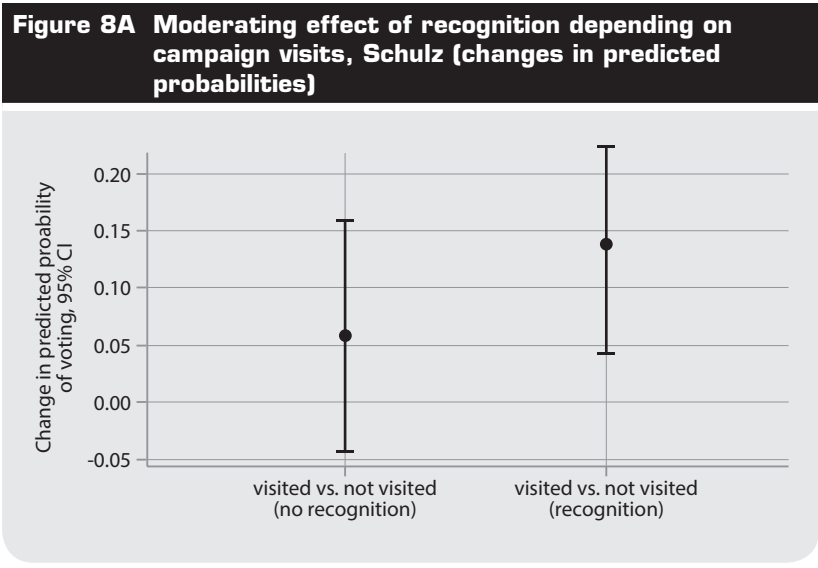
It is also important to note that Models 2 to 5 have a better fit than Model 1 (as shown by the reduction in the AIC and $-2 \log$ likelihood). Moreover, we can clearly show that the effects of recognition (see Figure 6) and campaign visits (see Figure 7) are indeed quite substantial.²⁷

In addition to their direct effect on turnout, we expected these two facets of mobilization to be related. More specifically, we expected that the effect of campaigning would be stronger among those who recognized the candidates (*H.3*). The cumulative effect of recognition and campaign visits is presented in Models 5 to 7. We note that the interaction reaches statistical significance for Schulz (Model 6) and Verhofstadt (Model 7) but not for Juncker. These findings are confirmed by the joint significance of the interaction terms, which is statistically significant for Schulz ($F=5.05$, $df=1$, significant at $p<0.05$) and Verhofstadt ($F=6.60$, $df=1$, significant at $p<0.05$) but not for Juncker ($F=0.01$,

²⁷ What is still puzzling is that while the effect of campaign visits in Models 3 and 4 is statistically significant, it does not help to explain the random variance of the intercept.

df=1, not statistically significant). The lack of an interactive effect in the case of Juncker is not surprising given that we did not find any effect of his campaign visits on turnout. Figures 8A, 8B and 8C support our understanding of these interaction effects

When plotting the change in predicted probability to vote depending on the visits of the candidates (see figures 8A, 8B and 8C), both in the case of Schulz (Figure 8A) and Verhofstadt (8B), we note that visiting a country during the campaign had a statistically significant effect only for those who recognized them (i.e. only for those who recognized the candidates; the difference between visited and not visited is greater than zero and statistically significant).²⁸ In the case of Schulz, the campaign visits increased the probability of voting by around 15 percentage points for those who recognized him as the S&D nominee. The effect was somewhat weaker for Verhofstadt (Figure 8B); citizens residing in countries that he visited and who are able to identify him as the ALDE nominee are about 10 percentage points more likely to vote compared to those who recognize him but live in a country he did not visit. Furthermore, campaign visits had no effect for those who did not recognize these lead candidates. For Juncker, we cannot detect any moderating effect of campaign intensity. This is unsurprising given that the differences between the groups are only driven by the extent to which he was recognized by citizens while his campaign intensity does not have a statistically significant effect per se.



²⁸ The mean difference between groups is significantly greater than zero, which shows a statistically significant interaction effect (Afshartous and Preston 2010). This is the case both in Figure 8A and Figure 8B.

Figure 8B Moderating effect of recognition depending on campaign visits, Verhofstadt changes in predicted probabilities)

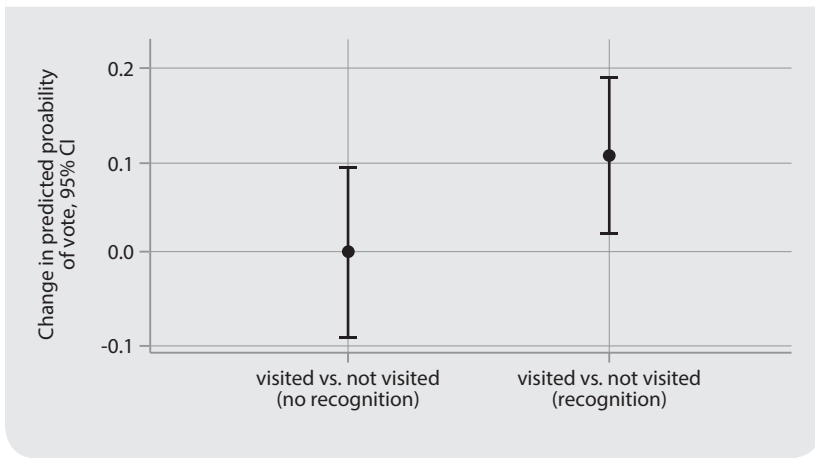
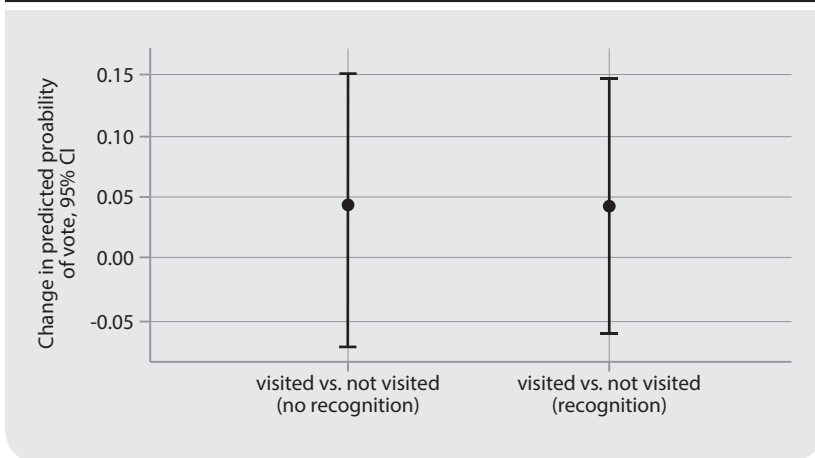


Figure 8C Moderating effect of recognition depending on campaign visits, Juncker (changes in predicted probabilities)



All in all, we find strong evidence for the moderating effect of personalization on campaign effects (i.e. visits). As we anticipated, campaign efforts only have a mobilizing effect for those who have at least some information regarding the candidates. Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that the highest probability of casting a vote was recorded among respondents who were able to identify Schulz and/or Verhofstadt as the lead candidates of their respective European parties and who live in a region which the candidates visited.

Table 5 Effect of candidate Twitter activity on turnout

	<i>Model 8: Juncker Twitter mentions</i>		<i>Model 9: Schulz Twitter mentions</i>		<i>Model 10: Verhofstadt Twitter mentions</i>		<i>Model 11: All Twitter mentions</i>	
<i>Fixed effects</i>								
Intercept	-4.262***	(0.173)	-4.306***	(0.170)	-4.370***	(0.167)	-4.332***	(0.160)
Candidate recognition	0.268***	(0.057)	0.329***	(0.068)	0.184**	(0.087)	0.273***	(0.046)
Married	0.066*	(0.036)	0.068*	(0.036)	0.067*	(0.036)	0.067*	(0.036)
Secondary education	-0.031	(0.046)	-0.035	(0.046)	-0.029	(0.046)	-0.034	(0.046)
Tertiary education	-0.040	(0.052)	-0.040	(0.052)	-0.029	(0.052)	-0.041	(0.052)
Age	1.634***	(0.108)	1.630***	(0.108)	1.673***	(0.108)	1.624***	(0.108)
Female	0.145***	(0.034)	0.147***	(0.034)	0.135***	(0.034)	0.147***	(0.034)
Unemployed	-0.061	(0.059)	-0.057	(0.059)	-0.059	(0.059)	-0.060	(0.059)
Rural	0.046	(0.036)	0.050	(0.036)	0.048	(0.036)	0.050	(0.036)
Religious	0.343***	(0.060)	0.350***	(0.060)	0.348***	(0.060)	0.355***	(0.060)
Union member	0.136***	(0.049)	0.139***	(0.049)	0.135***	(0.049)	0.131***	(0.049)
Immigrant	-1.625***	(0.119)	-1.634***	(0.119)	-1.652***	(0.119)	-1.642***	(0.119)
Internet use	0.095	(0.060)	0.092	(0.060)	0.105*	(0.060)	0.092	(0.060)
Political knowledge	0.474***	(0.068)	0.468***	(0.068)	0.509***	(0.068)	0.464***	(0.068)
Interest in politics	0.440***	(0.066)	0.440***	(0.066)	0.463***	(0.066)	0.441***	(0.066)
Political discussion	0.110	(0.072)	0.108	(0.072)	0.115	(0.072)	0.105	(0.072)
Political efficacy	3.871***	(0.127)	3.874***	(0.127)	3.861***	(0.127)	3.854***	(0.127)
Partisanship	0.573***	(0.035)	0.570***	(0.035)	0.577***	(0.035)	0.568***	(0.035)
News consumption	0.145	(0.091)	0.147	(0.091)	0.145	(0.091)	0.145	(0.091)
Exposure to campaign	0.037	(0.039)	0.034	(0.039)	0.039	(0.039)	0.035	(0.039)
Campaign involvement	1.911***	(0.108)	1.900***	(0.108)	1.928***	(0.108)	1.906***	(0.108)
Contact by politician	0.297***	(0.054)	0.304***	(0.054)	0.297***	(0.054)	0.295***	(0.054)
Trust national parliament	-0.250***	(0.040)	-0.247***	(0.040)	-0.251***	(0.040)	-0.255***	(0.040)
Trust EU institutions	0.083**	(0.040)	0.077*	(0.040)	0.081**	(0.040)	0.084**	(0.040)
EU membership	0.104***	(0.038)	0.105***	(0.038)	0.115***	(0.038)	0.109***	(0.038)
Compulsory voting	0.816***	(0.303)	0.671**	(0.320)	0.709**	(0.281)	0.733***	(0.279)
Concurrent ntl election	0.599**	(0.239)	0.811***	(0.219)	0.924***	(0.207)	0.859***	(0.201)
Turnout in national elections	0.009	(0.008)	0.013*	(0.008)	0.009	(0.008)	0.012	(0.008)
Candidate nationality	-0.595*	(0.319)	-0.59*	(0.324)	-0.556*	(0.325)	-0.478	(0.312)
Candidate Twitter mentions	0.031	(0.044)	0.011	(0.025)	0.126	(0.094)	0.009	(0.011)
<i>Random effects (variance)</i>								
Intercept	0.262		0.260		0.242		0.289	
Candidate recognition	0.018		0.041		0.066		0.033	
Residual (median)	0.254		0.252		0.254		0.251	
Observations (individual)	23,273		23,273		23,273		23,273	
Observations (system)	28		28		28		28	
Log Likelihood	-11392		-11381		-11398		-11384	
AIC	22850		22828		22863		22833	

Note: Table entries are logit coefficients with standard errors in parenthesis;
+ p<0.1, *p<0.05, **p<0.01.

Last but not least we turn to the impact of the social media campaign of the candidates. As previously mentioned, we expected that in the countries where the candidates had a more active social media campaign (i.e. where their official Twitter handles were more often mentioned in the Twitter communication) they would be benefiting from this increased exposure on Twitter and turnout would be higher there. Investigating the results presented in Table 5, we did not find any conclusive evidence to support this hypothesis. Although the sign of the coefficients indicates a positive relationship between twitter mentions and the propensity to vote, these effects failed to reach statistical significance.

2.7 Discussion

The European Parliament election of 2014 will be remembered as a triumph for the Euro-sceptical parties, such as the United Kingdom Independence Party and Front National in France. But there was another significant innovation introduced in the electoral process of that election which in the long run might prove to be more consequential. The members of the eighth directly elected European Parliament were chosen in an electoral campaign which was headed by pan-European *Spitzenkandidaten* from each of the five major political groups in the European Parliament, who campaigned as candidates for the Presidency of the European Commission. This “democratic innovation”, building on the Lisbon Treaty, was supported by both the European Parliament and the European Commission. For the first time in the history of direct elections to the European Parliament voters would have a real choice, one that could be consequential for the election of the head of the EU’s executive body. The question was whether this innovation would matter with respect to voter turnout in the election. The likelihood for it to have an effect was not high. A meagre campaign budget, a short campaign, the diversity among local member parties representing the EU-wide party federations on the ground, the obstacles introduced by the variety of different languages spoken in the member countries – all of these factors posed a challenge to the mobilizing efforts of the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

Nonetheless, our results suggest that they indeed did manage to make a difference. Based on the analysis of the representative post-election European Election Study, we find that individual candidate recognition did positively affect the likelihood of EU citizens to participate, contributing to roughly a 1% increase in the aggregate turnout. Citizens who knew the lead candidates were also more likely to turn out. The ground campaign efforts of these candidates also had a significant effect on electoral participation, both directly and through the interaction with personalization: campaign visits of the *Spitzenkandidaten* helped to further increase the likelihood of turnout among citizens who recognized them. Not the same thing can be said regarding their social media campaigns, as we did not find any evidence suggesting their Twitter “presence” had an effect on turnout.

To be sure, these are fairly minor effects. Only a minority of our respondents, and hence of the members of the EU electorate, were able to identify correctly

which political parties the lead candidates belong to. And, of course, this varies starkly between member countries. As a result, the mobilizing effect of the *Spitzenkandidaten* was limited as well. We also need to acknowledge that due to the cross-sectional nature of our data we cannot be sure that we were able to fully correct for the possible endogenous relationship between candidate recognition and the decision to vote. We did, however, take measures to minimize this potential problem by controlling for all of the key factors that are normally associated with turnout. Moreover, given that we were able to find significant mobilizing effects in 2014, there are good reason to believe that this innovation of there being lead candidates might have an even greater effect on turnout in the next election when voters will have an “incumbent” president to vote on.

3 EP efforts to increase turnout

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this section is to evaluate whether the actions of the European Parliament Information Offices (EPIO) in the 28 EU countries had an impact on turnout. For this purpose, we attempted to gather all the possible information we could from all EPIOs across the European Union on the information campaigns they carried out before the 2015 European Parliament (EP) elections. Given that in the 2014 EES post-electoral survey 42% of respondents reported that they did not have all the necessary information to vote, our general expectation was that in countries where the EPIOs carried out a successful information campaign – i.e. a campaign that benefited from a substantial budget and had a significant reach – turnout would generally be higher. To be more specific, we expected that citizens would perceive EP elections to be more important in countries where they had more information about how the EP influences their daily lives. Therefore, the information campaigns carried out by the national EPIOs should have a positive effect on turnout by raising awareness about the election and by offering citizens the necessary information to make an informed choice. In order to test this expectation, we attempted to collect information that would offer us concrete indicators regarding the budget of the campaigns carried out by the EPIOs, the type of activities that were carried out, and the reach of the information campaign.

The process of collecting information consisted of five steps involving: 1. an online search for information, 2. phone-calls to national EPIO offices, 3. email requests directed at the national EPIO offices, 4. a second round of phone calls, and 5. a second round of e-mail requests. As a preparatory stage we collected all the information available on the websites of each EPIO. Although the amount of information available online – i.e. on the websites of national EPIOs – varied across countries and was, overall, somewhat unstructured and incomplete, it gave us a broad idea about the general type of activities that the EPIOs conducted as part of their information campaigns. Thus we had a more or less solid base from which to start the second step of our information collection process, which involved direct phone calls to each EPIO, inquiring about their activities. During the first round of the calls, from 17 to 22 February 2016, we successfully contacted almost all the European Parliament Information offices (EPIO). The EPIOs reacted positively to our request and we therefore, immediately after the initial call, sent follow-up emails to the official EPIO emails (see Appendix 3 for email template)²⁹ with more detailed questions. Although the EPIO in Bratislava,

²⁹ In certain cases, we contacted the EPIO employee responsible for the campaign directly.

Slovakia, was not answering the phone, we nevertheless sent them an email with our request for information. After the first round, we received the necessary information from the EPIOs in the United Kingdom, Austria, and Belgium.

Thus, the reminder emails were sent on 7 March 2016 to other EPIOs and several more calls were made as well. After that, two additional EPIOs in Cyprus and Slovenia sent further, more complete information. The offices of Hungary, Estonia, Poland, Bulgaria, and Sweden responded with information which was not valuable for our research. Given the low response rate we carried out a further web search during which we identified a report on the information campaign carried by the EPIO in Slovakia.

Table 6 Summary of efforts to contact EPIOs

	<i>Number of emails sent</i>	<i>Number of Responses with complete Information</i>	<i>No response</i>	<i>Total Number of Responses</i>
1st Wave (17.02-22.02)	28	2 (Austria, UK)	24	4
2nd Wave (7.03-15.03)	26	2 (Slovenia, Cyprus)	19	7

Besides the country reports, we were able to acquire the Global Report of the EU wide information campaign. This was provided by the Head of Horizontal and Thematic Monitoring Unit of the European Parliament. Although this was an internal report that we are not allowed to distribute or publish, we were given the permission to use the content of the report for this specific research. The document includes the information on the activities implemented by the EPIOs in the EU member states and is based on the inputs given by different national offices. Therefore, we also tried to acquire the reports of the national offices centrally from the Head of Horizontal and Thematic Monitoring Unit of the European Parliament. These attempts, however, were unsuccessful.

In the following sections we, firstly, summarize the global report and discuss its implications. Subsequently, we provide information on country-specific activities with a focus on the countries from which we had complete information – i.e. Austria, Cyprus, Slovakia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, due to the lack of cooperation from most national EPIOs we are not able to conduct any quantitative analysis regarding the impact of the information campaign on turnout. We can only provide a qualitative assessment of the effect the information campaigns of the EPIO had on turnout based on the Global Report and on the five country reports we gained access to.

3.2 EPIO activities across the EU, Global Report

An institutional communication campaign by the EPIO on European Elections

2014 was conducted from September 2013 until May 2014, and it included activities on different levels: online campaigns, public events, mass, social and print media promotions. The campaign consisted of three main phases: the Kick-off campaign, the Thematic campaign, and the Go to Vote campaign. The overall aim of the activities carried out as part of the information campaign was to inform stakeholders about the EP elections and to use different outreach tools to spread information through the stakeholders (e.g. NGO's, journalists, politicians, bloggers) involved in the process.

3.2.1 Phases

The first phase of the campaign was the **Kick-off**, which included 39 events, 4,784 participants and 1,440 stakeholder organizations. The aim of the event was to target the stakeholders and partners and to inform them in detail about the EP elections information campaign, its phases and its elements, and encourage them to participate in promoting the elections and in spreading the campaign message. According to the Global Report, this phase had a multiplier effect and had a potential reach of millions of EU citizens.

The **Thematic phase** aimed to increase turnout in the EP elections by attracting attention to the important role the EP plays in the daily life of EU citizens. Thus, the aim of this stage was to offer information about the important role and decisions taken by the European Parliament with respect to specific areas, such as jobs, Europe in the world, money, quality of life, and the economy. ReACT events were developed for the campaign as an interaction platform between stakeholders, MEPs and partners, and its purpose was to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to debate and exchange views in order to develop new ideas. There were 25 MEPs, 473 stakeholders, and 8,500 participants who took part in these types of events organized by EPIO. The main ReACT events took place in Paris, Rome, Frankfurt, Madrid, Warsaw, and 20 other cities. The whole thematic phase consisted of 298 events with 246,278 participants and 10,704 stakeholder organizations.

The **Go to Vote phase** aimed to call on citizens to vote and it was most active in the week before the election through wide range of activities, such as seminars, conferences, workshops, meetings for youth, aimed at stakeholders and public. In total, 689 events were held with 517,410 participants and 13,160 stakeholder groups.

Over the three stages of the campaign the EP reached more than 20,000 stakeholder groups and entered into direct contact with approximately 750,000 citizens, representing roughly 0.2% of the population of EU's eligible voters. Given this low direct contact rate, one cannot expect a significant effect of the EPIO information campaign on turnout. Still, this number does not account for the total reach of these events due to the potential multiplying effects of the stakeholders that took part in the events further spreading the information. The

broader reach of the EPIO information campaign and its effects on turnout will be discussed in what follows.

3.2.2 Target groups

In their effort to spread and multiply information regarding the EP in general and the EP elections in particular, national EPIOs focused on certain target groups. One of the main groups targeted were organizations and individuals that have an extended capacity to reach broad groups of voters and thus increase the reach of the campaign. Thus, out of the 2,618 events organized by all the EPIOs, 25% targeted NGOs (116 events), stakeholders (308 events), and other partners (public authorities, media). These were selected based on their potential reach.

Another 25% of the activities were targeted to reach young people, especially first-time voters as this group had very low turnout in the previous elections. In total, 946 events were organized for youth and educational purposes – 157 events within the Go to Vote phase targeting 683 youth groups; 20 Euroscola events that actively involved around 10,000 people. But as the European Election Studies post-electoral surveys show, the turnout among young people did not increase and only 39% of people between the ages of 18 and 24 said that they had voted, compared to 56.4% in 2009.

Specific activities were directed at engaging other target groups, such as women (32 events specifically targeted this groups, as historically women are less likely to vote), experts, academics, politicians, and businessmen. Another 787 events were aimed at the general public.

3.2.3 Outreach tools

As was mentioned above, the EPIOs focused on informing agents and stakeholders with the aim of getting them to spread and multiply campaign messages, and for this purpose different types of tools, such as social media, websites, TV and radio, building decorations, and other ads were used.

Social media and online campaign tools in general seem to be the most reliable source to measure the reach of these efforts, since they offer concrete numbers regarding impressions and website visits. Thus, the Global Report puts the social media reach of the campaign at approximately 59,000,000 Facebook impressions³⁰ (36 million only during the “Go to Vote” campaign) and 66,000,000 potential Twitter users reach. In addition, the EPIOs aimed to engage young people in discussions and to encourage them to participate in the elections by creating a platform for transparent discussions and organizing blogging seminars. Additionally, there were quizzes, photo contests, and videos with celebrities distributed on social media. Also the EPIOs’ websites on the election campaign had 500,000 unique visits in the period of 22–25 May 2014.

³⁰ By Facebook impressions we mean the total number of likes and comments.

All in all, the effect of the outreach effort using online tools was very high, at an estimated level of over 120 million citizens reached by the campaign. At first glance, these numbers seem impressive, as apparently the online campaign carried out by the national EPIOs reached one in three EU voters. Unfortunately, the report falls short of identifying how many unique users had direct contact with the online campaign. Thus we believe that these numbers do not offer a fully realistic estimate of the number of citizens reached by the EP campaign.

The second most efficient tool of the outreach effort was mass media communications, such as TV and radio spots. The EPIOs were able to negotiate with 900 TV channels in order to get free airings of their TV spots in several countries, and by doing so it appears they saved 5.9 million Euros. As a result, the European election “Go to Vote” TV spots were broadcasted 33,376 times on 332 channels for free. An interesting outreach tool used by the EPIOs was cinema ads, which were aired 20,000 times in 1,650 cinemas, reaching more than 2,300,000 people. Furthermore, the radio spots were broadcasted on 1,068 radio stations a total of 12,640 times (by 153 stations for free, which saved €807,000). In addition, ads were posted on various types of transport vehicles, such as buses, trains and other means of local transport, plus in airports and train- and bus stations. There were visuals (banners and laser projections) relating to the Go to Vote campaign put up in 80 cities. The EPIOs used building decorations with the “Go to Vote” logo in on 30 buildings where information offices were housed.

Last but not least, the EPIOs profited from inter-institutional cooperation with the European Commission Information Offices. Overall, there were 251 activities at a cost of €5,731,578. The subdivisions providing cooperation were: Share Europe Online (spreading information on social media platforms), Europe Direct Network, European Public Spaces, and Management Partnership with a budget of €3,000,000. Within the Europe Direct Network there were 500 Information centres (EDICs), where 1,400 events were organized with around 440,000 participants.

All in all, the reach of the information campaign reported by the national EPIOs and summarized in the Global Report is impressive, but judging by the slight decrease in turnout when comparing all of the Union members with the 2009 turnout numbers, and the slight increase when comparing the 2009 member countries only (i.e. not counting Croatia), we can only conclude that this campaign did not fully reach its goal of increasing turnout. Another distinct possibility is that these numbers represent a very optimistic projection and hence do not accurately reflect the actual reach of the campaign. In the absence of most of the individual country reports of the national EPIOs (as a reminder: we were only able to collect 5 out of the 28 national reports), an independent accurate assessment of the effect of the information campaigns of the EPIO on turnout across the 28 countries is not possible at this point.

3.2.4 Budget and events

An alternative measure of the effort made by the EPIO to increase turnout is the budget they had at their disposal. This measure can be particularly useful given that the numbers on how many people they reached provided by the EPIOs may be, to some degree, on the optimistic side. Unfortunately, when collecting information regarding the budget, we encountered the same problem as in the case of the estimates of the reach of the campaign, i.e. only four countries' EPIOs provided us with the requested information. In the absence of the country-specific budgets, which would allow for a statistical analysis that would at least point to the success rate of the information campaigns, we can only report about the total budget of the campaign.

The Global Report states that 251 events were conducted in cooperation with the European Commission and the EP Information Office with an overall budget of €5,731,578. Furthermore, the campaign was able to save €10,700,000. This amount of money consists of €6,800,000 as a result of the negotiations with TV channels and radio stations, €3,000,000 from the Management Partnership, and €870,000 from the Europe Direct Network. Contradicting these numbers, the report from the Slovak EPIO stated that the European Information Office planned to spend 16 million euros for the information campaign in 28 countries in 24 languages. Therefore, even the total budget of the whole campaign is unknown since the information provided by the country representatives and the headquarters do not overlap. As we did not receive detailed information on the campaigns from each country, we were not able to determine the total budget. Nevertheless, we can put these numbers into perspective. Relying on the Global Report we can estimate the total costs of the information camping at 16 million euros, which means that the EU spent around 4 cents per eligible voter. Moving beyond the fact that it is unrealistic to expect a change in turnout with only 4 cents spent per voter, this budget does by no means match similar publicly funded campaign efforts carried out at the time in connection with other second order elections. For example, the UK Electoral Commission spent approximately 16 million pounds (approximately 19 million euros) on the 2011 alternative vote referendum public awareness campaign.³¹ Adjusted for population size, this means 10 times more money was spent on the referendum than was spent by the EIOPs on the information campaign for the 2014 EP elections. Furthermore, even in a less affluent country – i.e. the Czech Republic – the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs spent 7.4 million euros on the information campaign carried out before the 2003 Referendum on whether to join the EU.³² This means approximately 90 cents were spent for each of the 8.3 million registered voters.

All in all, given the small budget it is unrealistic to expect that the information campaign had a significant effect on turnout. This does not exclude the

³¹ Source (David Cowling 2013): <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-24842147>

³² Source: <http://www.revuepolitika.cz/clanky/818/nekolik-poznamek-k-referendu-o-vstupu-cr-do-eu>

possibility that by relying on bigger budgets or by making better use of existing resources, national EPIOs were successful in raising awareness regarding the EP and thus increasing turnout. We will investigate this possibility by describing the information campaign activities and their reach in the member countries.

3.3 European elections 2014 information campaign in member countries

For the 28 EU member states we can only provide a comprehensive description the EPIO campaigns activities in five countries. To be more specific, we have a complete report of the activity of the EPIOs in Austria, Cyprus, Slovakia, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom. With respect to the rest of the countries we are only able to present incomplete information that is based on our online research and extracts from the Global Report.

3.3.1 Austria

The information campaign in Austria consisted of public events and an online and offline campaign. Firstly, conferences on the European election were held and election-related print products (e.g. pamphlets, flyers) were distributed starting in the beginning of January 2014. However, the hot phase of the campaign began in March 2014 when 40 famous Austrian personalities were displayed with their quotes about the election on various channels of communication, such as on social media, at events, and in newspapers. Then, the campaign continued in April and culminated in May before the election.

Altogether, the EPIO held around a hundred conferences on the European election from January until May 2014, with an overall attendance of more than 5,000 participants. Furthermore, on 13 April 2014 approximately 800 people along with 2 MEPs participated in the Vienna City Marathon wearing the same T-shirt “European Elections on 25 May 2014 - I am joining in. ACT-REACT-IMPACT.” Moreover, news about the event reached approximately 260,000 people via TV, 1,721,000 readers through written articles, and 3,774,000 people online.

Besides this, the online campaign consisted of information on the websites of several organizations, such as the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns (outreach of 4,675,000 views), the Austrian Medical Chamber (40,700 views), and Österreichische Automobil, Motorrad und Touring Club (1,900,000 views). Furthermore, neutral information on the European elections in 2014 appeared on the public intranets of the Vienna Insurance Group (23,200), Voestalpine AG (46,400), Austrian Federal Railways (39,500), and Raiffeisen Zentralbank (60,700).

The offline campaign was represented by several different types of advertisements. First, more than a thousand posters were posted in trains and railway stations, which cost €120,000. Second, info-screens in the subways of Austrian cities

were installed just a few days before the election. Backlight slides promoted the campaign in the Vienna International Airport and 25,000 folders on the election were distributed by a partner on behalf of the EPIO to 370 schools in Austria. Next, information brochures were sent twice to 3.2 million and 4.2 million Austrian households respectively, for a total reach of 7,794,000 and 8,400,000 people respectively. Besides this, more than 70 radio spots were broadcasted at a cost of €30,000; free airings of TV spots were arranged as well during the last weeks before the election. Finally, cinemas throughout Austria were paid €80,000 during the last month before the election to broadcast ads, reaching 940,000 affected visitors.

In summary, the Austrian EPIO conducted an intense information campaign. Relying on resources that went beyond the ones made available by the central EPIO office, we can estimate that the campaign effectively reached almost all eligible voters. However, even such an extensive and diverse information campaign does not guarantee success. Looking at the official turnout reports we can note that turnout decreased by 0.6% compared to the 2009 EP elections. A possible explanation is given by the fact even if the reach of the information campaign covered the entire population of eligible voters, only 61% of Austrian respondents in the EES 2014 Voter Study (Schmitt et al. 2015) stated that they had “all the necessary information” to make an informed choice in the election. This speaks again to the fact that the numbers on the reach of the campaign estimated by the EPIOs do seem not to be very indicative when compared to the impact the campaign had on both the information it provided to voters and its effect on turnout.

3.3.2 Cyprus

The information campaign run by the Cyprus EPIO largely consisted of the same type of activities as in Austria. Nevertheless, the preparation phase already began in autumn 2013. To be more specific, on 13 September 2013 a kick-off event attended by past and present Cypriot MEPs, media, and major stakeholders was organized. Furthermore, all national TV stations covered the event, which led to potentially more than 500,000 people being reached by the campaign. Then, more than 20 thematic events were arranged with tens of thousands of people being reached on Facebook through the more than 350 articles covering the events. During the first half of 2014 more than 20 events were held, usually in the capital of Cyprus, Nicosia. For instance, the conference about an economic recovery in Cyprus promoted the European election with banners and leaflets. The mobile information unit of the European Parliament Roadshow visited 41 high schools and 20 universities and reached around 48,000 people. Besides this, other events were organized, such as a round table discussion on EU-Turkey relations or on the positive impact of the European Union on human rights. During these debates, materials about the election were distributed and many of these events were covered by the relevant media.

According to the online campaign, the Facebook page of the EPIO in Cyprus increased its number of followers from 1,800 at the beginning of the campaign to 3,268 by election night on 25 May 2014. These figures were reached thanks to the Facebook Photo Competition and the application “Coffee with Europe”. Furthermore, the EPIO in Cyprus co-produced the viral video “Size Doesn’t Matter”, which garnered 115,616 views, 748 clicks, and 274 likes/shares on Facebook, and 4,186 views on YouTube. Nevertheless, Twitter was omitted.

Finally, the EPIO in Cyprus reports that approximately 1,200 media articles about the European elections 2014 were published in Cyprus from September 2013 until June 2014. Moreover, 321 articles covered the thematic events organized by the EPIO. Besides this, the acting head of the EPIO in Cyprus was active in the media as well – 17 articles or interviews, 22 radio appearances and 27 television appearances were documented.

Taking into account the small size of the country and based on the number of people reached according to the local EPIO, we can conclude that their information campaign effectively reached all eligible voters (i.e. approximately 6,000,000 people). Furthermore, based on the report, a substantial percentage of the population actively interacted with the campaign either directly as part of the organized events or indirectly via social media. Nevertheless, Cyprus is another example of where a seemingly successful information campaign did not contribute to an increase in turnout. On the contrary, turnout in the EP elections was only 43.97%, a decrease of more than 15% from 2009, and this in a context where 67% of respondents to the EES 2014 Voter Study (Schmitt et al. 2015) declared that they had “all the necessary information” to make an informed choice in the election. A tentative conclusion, based only on Cyprus, would indeed suggest that turnout in EP elections has very little to do with the information voters have at their disposal.

3.3.3 Slovakia

The campaign in Slovakia included a range of different activities on the national and regional levels. The focus seems to have been primarily on youth groups, as the EPIO organized discussions and seminars with university students across the country. Furthermore, competitions such as photo contests, essay contests, and quizzes for students were arranged as well. Additionally, the EPIO in Slovakia put together online campaigns, forums, seminars and printed ads.

The information campaign in Slovakia started with the kick-off event in September 2013, where partners, stakeholders, and media representatives met for an information briefing. The event was attended by a total of 85 participants. The event was followed by seminars and discussion forums on a wide range of topics related to the elections and the importance of the EU and EP to different parts of Slovakia. One of the events with wide reach was the regional discussion forum in Trnava on the issues of unemployment, the international status of EU,

and the EP election of 2014 reached 820,000 people and had 120 participants and 12 “multipliers”. Another event that had a wide reach was the working lunch with bloggers on the topic of the election in Bratislava, where 13 bloggers and journalists discussed the strategies of the election information campaign; this event is estimated to have reached 1,250,000 citizens. Seminars for regional journalists explained the goals and features of the campaign. For instance, the one in Banská Bystrica had 18 participants and reached an estimated 420,000 people and received 1,529 Facebook impressions (i.e. likes and comments). Additionally, there were similar seminars in Košice, Trenčín. The pre-election seminar for 17 Slovak journalists in Brussels had reached an estimated 1,500,000 citizens and had 1,018 Facebook impressions. There were several discussions with students on the future of Europe and the European election of 2014 in Bratislava, Trenčín, Prešov, Žilina, Nitra, Revúca, Trnava (which reached 515,000), Kežmarok, Komárno, and Trebišov. The ReACT event was organized to facilitate interaction between MEPs and students in different cities on the importance of the upcoming election.

The EPIO also conducted several competitions in order to engage citizens, especially young citizens. For instance, there was a blog article writing competition; another competition was about guessing the Slovak turnout, which involved 287 people and had 15,796 Facebook impressions and reached an estimated 39,051 people. An English Essay competition on European election was organized in which 1,060 students participated and the winner was given an award by the EPIO. A logo competition involved 120 people taking photos with the European election logo; it received 12,833 Facebook impressions and reached 12,752 Twitter users. Moreover, a quiz for university students was organized in Bratislava which reached an estimated 260,000 citizens and had 135,000 Facebook impressions.

Besides this, conferences on social rights were organized which reached an estimated 150,000 people. The topics for seminars, conferences, and forums covered issues concerning the importance of the European Parliament, the European Union and questions of unemployment, the financial crisis, water, self-governance or business. To encourage voters cast a vote the EUVOX voting advice application was promoted by the EPIO in Slovakia.

The major offline events underlined in the report were the celebration of the 10th anniversary of Slovakia’s membership in the European Union. The celebration in Bratislava hosted 75,000 people and 55 stakeholders and reached 8,480 Facebook and 5,341 Twitter users. Furthermore, in Žilina 20,500 people attended the event and total number of people reached was estimated at 95,000 people. In sum, including the celebrations in Košice and Banská Bystrica, the events attracted an estimated of 279,500 participants and were covered on Facebook, Twitter, TV channels, and radio. The visit of the president of the European Council attracted the attention of mass and social media and the outreach effort impacted 75,600 citizens, 95 stakeholders, 5,502 Facebook impressions (likes and comments)

and 1,514 Twitter users, and it was broadcasted on 5 TV channels, 1 radio station, and was covered by seven online articles. In addition, other information spreading tools were used, such as the airing of 474 television spots, twelve radio spots, and billboards in airports, train stations, and at the EPIO office.

Slovakia is yet another example where, based on the number of people reached according to the EPIO, we can conclude that the information campaign reached almost all the 4.4 million eligible voters. And this is probably the case where the mismatch between the reported success of the EPIO information campaign and empirical reality is most obvious. Slovakia has one of the lowest proportion of respondents – 50% – who stated that they had “all necessary information to choose who to vote [for]” according to the 2014 EES Voter Study (the only two countries with lower averages where the Czech Republic and Portugal). Furthermore, the country recorded the lowest turnout rate in the EU with a participation rate of only 13%. Even if the number of people reportedly reached by the Slovak EPIO is overly optimistic, the campaign seemed to do little to stimulate turnout in Slovakia.

3.3.4 Slovenia

The hot phase of the information campaign in Slovenia took place starting in the beginning of March 2013. Overall, two national conferences were conducted in Maribor and Ljubljana with 129 and 212 participants respectively. Moreover, four regional round tables with 138 participants in total were organized during April 2014. Furthermore, the EPIO organized 36 workshops on active citizenship in secondary schools which were attended by 843 students.

To continue, the online campaign was conducted on a webpage and on the Facebook, Twitter and YouTube profiles, although these had a limited scope. By the end of the campaign, the Facebook page had 930 fans, the Twitter account had 102 followers, and the YouTube channel had 2,956 video views in total. Also, €1,435 were spent on 10 articles published on the local web media (sobotainfo.com and maribor24.si). To be more specific, the articles dealt with issues like the history and powers of the European Parliament, European political parties, the role of youngsters in the European election, and participation in the election as such. Overall, the articles are estimated to have reached 35,000 people.

Furthermore a handbook about the decision-making process in the European Union was published and 2,500 copies were distributed. Additional promotional materials, such as folders and pencils, were spread among the citizens. Besides this, three radio programs of one-hour length were broadcasted during March and April 2014. Overall, the information campaign was covered by more than 100 articles and cost €55,877.³³

³³ It is important to note we have received all the information from the Europe Direct contact points in Slovenia, not from the EPIO.

The information campaign of the Slovenia EPIO had a limited budget and the extent of the events is clearly more limited than in the three countries discussed earlier. The estimates of the Slovenian office on how many people they reached are also much smaller and seemingly more realistic. Nevertheless, the proportion of respondents who reported in the EES 2014 Voter Study (Schmitt et al. 2015) that they had “all the necessary information” to make an informed choice in these elections was 62%, the same as in Austria which had a more intense information campaign. Furthermore, turnout declined by only 3.8%, which is far less than the 13% drop in Cyprus, another country where the reported reach of the campaign covered the entire population of eligible voters. This represents another piece of evidence that shows that the campaigns of the EPIOs had at best a marginal impact in offering useful information to voters and on turnout levels.

3.3.5 The United Kingdom

The information campaign in the United Kingdom spent €23,000 on online activities, €45,000 on information publications, and €18,000 on public events. With a total budget of less than €86,000, the EPIO campaign costs are just a fraction compared to 19 million euros the UK Electoral Commission spent on the 2011 Referendum public awareness campaign. Given this difference we can anticipate that it is unlikely that the London EPIO campaign had an effect on turnout.

The campaign was started by the distribution of promotional materials in November 2013. For instance, 10,000 election folders, 2,725 notebooks, 2,600 pens, and 365 USB cards with the European election 2014 logo were spread among the public. Then, the next wave of such materials was sent out in March 2014. For instance, it consisted of 2,000 postcards, 10,270 folded mini posters, 1,500 leaflets on “protected rights”, 800 leaflets on acting within the European Union, and 615 round badges claiming “I’ll vote on 22 May 2014”. Thus, in total around 15,000 election materials were distributed to the general public by the UK EPIO. By way of comparison, for the 2011 Referendum the UK Electoral Commission distributed by post almost 50 million items of campaign literature.

Besides this, the online campaign consisted of advertising the Eurovision Presidential Debate on the websites of the two largest Scottish daily newspapers (The Herald and The Scotsman). To summarize, it made a large impression, garnering 759,036 views and 2,322 clicks. Furthermore, REACT style events were promoted online as well. For instance, an event on how Wales’s cultural life had been enriched by European immigrants reached 269,319 people on Facebook and 48,200 users on Twitter. Similarly, the event in London reached 201,132 people via Facebook and 104,642 via Twitter.

The offline campaign targeted many people both directly on the streets and indirectly through the media. For example, a light projection on the General

Register House in Edinburgh highlighted the European election and reached more than five million people on television. The Europe Day event on George Square in Glasgow engaged hundreds of people from the public and had an estimated outreach of one million. Furthermore, regional radio ads aimed at getting young people to vote in the European election. Radio ads on commercial and local radio stations were based on the winning entries of the “Audio Europa” competition and reached 1,399,334 people right before the election.

All in all, we can estimate the reach of UK EPIO campaign at around 3 million citizens, which is rather low considering that this number represents only around 7% of the population of eligible voters, but it is quite impressive considering the reduced budget. Given both the reach and the budget, one can expect that the effect of the EPIO information campaign was limited.

3.3.6 Information campaigns in other EU countries

In what follows we offer a description of the EPIO information campaigns in the remaining countries. As the national EPIO offices from the following countries either ignored our requests for information regarding the details of their campaigns or replied without providing any relevant information, the description is based only on information gathered from the web or on extracts from the Global Report. Unfortunately, this information is scattered and incomplete, thus cannot be used for a quantitative analysis. Thus, we limit ourselves to a summary of the scattered information we managed to gain access to.

In Belgium, folders and letters were sent to every European citizen living in the country. These materials gave an explanation of how to be a voter in the European election 2014 in Belgium. The leaflets were also accessible on the website in several languages. Even if the reach of the campaign is impressive, the mandatory turnout laws applied in the country and the fact that the EP elections were organized simultaneously with legislative elections meant that the turnout levels were around 90%. Thus, it is hard to believe that the EPIO information campaign could have had a real impact on boosting turnout.

In the Czech Republic, the EPIO organized one ReACT event with 100 participants but without any media reporting on it. Although the EPIO communicated on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, it reached only hundreds of people in total. Moreover, pre-campaign videos were published just a few days before the election. Nevertheless, the EPIO arranged 1,615 free airings of television spots. In Estonia, the EPIO organized 9 regular and 48 election events with 2,500 participants in total. Moreover, the local media covered the event in 250 articles. Besides this, both Facebook and Twitter accounts were employed, which garnered 2,545 fans and 460 followers respectively in May 2014. Finally, the interviews concentrating on the European election were broadcasted on Estonian Public Broadcasting, with maximum audience of 79,000. In Finland,

100,000 leaflets with the European election design were issued by an interest group organization of agriculture producers. In France, overall, 251 free airings of television spots were arranged to be broadcasted on 12 TV channels, like Arte, TV5 Monde and France 24. In Germany, seven TV channels, including the two main public TV channels (ARD and ZDF), broadcasted television spots for free, as had been negotiated by the EPIO. Also, a private news producer for Pro7, SAT1, and Kabel 1 – N24 – broadcasted the TV spot. Thus, the savings were estimated at €917,000. In Hungary, 22 TV channels broadcast particular television spots 944 times for free. In Italy, the same deal was arranged with 22 TV channels, including RAI and Mediaset channels. Therefore, the savings were €383,808 EUR for 764 free airings. In Lithuania, 20,000 table pads on Taste of Europe were distributed to restaurant chains in Vilnius. In Luxembourg, official postage stamps with the European election logo were spread among the public. In Poland, television spots were broadcasted 22,487 times for free, saving an estimated €1,954,695. Furthermore, radio spots were aired as well, saving an estimated €256,044. In Portugal, a set of post stamps was devoted to the European election. Besides this, television spots were broadcasted for free on 126 TV channels. In Romania, television spots were aired 2,860 times on 36 national and regional channels for free. Furthermore, radio spots were broadcasted as well, saving an estimated €71,400. In Spain, charity lottery tickets with the European election visuals were issued by the National Organisation of Spanish Blind People. Besides this, television spots were broadcasted 1,001 times on 17 TV channels, including the public broadcaster TVE for free, saving an estimated €436,500. Moreover, radio spots were broadcasted as well, saving an estimated €108,000.

Even with the absence of national reports we can notice that the information campaigns in these countries followed the pattern we observed in the five countries for which we have more detailed reports. Therefore, it is unlikely that the effects of the information campaigns of the EPIOs in these countries were very different from what we noted in the five countries from which we had full reports. All in all, our tentative conclusion is that although the EPIOs claim that their information campaigns reached an impressive number of people, their effect on raising awareness regarding the election and thus increasing turnout was at best minimal.

We were aiming to carry out a quantitative analysis in order to accurately evaluate the effect of the EPIO information campaigns on turnout. Unfortunately, given the lack of a comparable set of measure across all the relevant countries makes this impossible. Nevertheless, given that our original expectation was that the EPIO information campaigns could impact turnout only indirectly by raising awareness regarding the 2014 EP elections, what we can do is to study whether the richness (or the poverty) of the information environment surrounding the 2014 EP elections in a given country had an impact on turnout. We need to emphasize that by no means is the degree to which citizens regard themselves as

informed regarding the 2014 EP elections only a result of the efforts of the EPIO campaigns. Other organizations probably made a much bigger contribution towards raising awareness regarding these elections. Political parties play one of the biggest roles in mobilizing and informing the electorate around the time of elections (Campbell et al. 1960; Diamond and Gunther 2001; Norris 2011; Popa 2015) . Still, if the information environment in a given country has a minimal or no impact on turnout, we also can conclude that the efforts of the EPIOs had no effect on turnout. Therefore, we devote the next subsection to presenting the results of a comprehensive analysis which evaluates whether the richness of the information environment in a given country has an effect on turnout.

3.4 The information environment and turnout

As previously discussed, we analysed the effect of the information environment in a given country by the propensity of individuals to cast a vote. To measure the information environment in any given country we use an aggregate measure based on data provided by the EES 2014 Voter Study. To be more specific, we used the percentage of respondents who answered “Yes” to the survey item: “You had all the necessary information in order to choose whom to vote for in the recent European elections”. Thus we can assume that in countries where the proportion of respondents giving a positive answer to this question is higher, more information regarding the EP and the EP elections was available. Still, we need to acknowledge that as an aggregate measure based on a survey item, this is just a very crude proxy we use to measure the amount of information regarding the elections citizens in a given country had at hand. Furthermore, we are unable to directly evaluate how the EPIO campaign influenced the amount of information citizens had at their disposal to make an informed choice. But our expectation is that if any such effect exists it would be minimal for at least two reasons. On the one hand, the existing literature points to the fact the electoral campaigns carried out by parties are the main source of information for voters during election times (Popa 2015). On the other hand, the anecdotal evidence we presented in the previous section points to a minimal effect of the EPIO campaign on the information environment. All in all, only a relatively small portion of any information environment effects we are able to identify could be attributed to the EPIO information campaigns.

The analysis we carried out here builds on the results presented in section 2 of this report. Except the measure for the national information environment described above, we employ the same variables as those used in Section 2.5 (see the full description in Appendix 1). The results presented in Table 7 are therefore almost identical to the ones presented in Tables 4 and 5. *The novel results presented in Model 2 of Table 7 is the effect of the information environment on the propensity to cast a vote.* The results of the analysis are such that we can note, as expected, that the effect of the information environment on turnout is positive and (marginally) statistically significant. Bluntly put, citizens that live

Table 7 Effect of information environment on the propensity to vote.

	<i>Model 1: Basic model</i>		<i>Model 12: Juncker</i>	
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Intercept	-4.350**	(0.170)	-4.349**	(0.167)
Candidate recognition	0.287**	(0.044)	0.287**	(0.044)
Married	0.082*	(0.035)	0.082*	(0.035)
Secondary education	-0.031	(0.045)	-0.031	(0.045)
Tertiary education	-0.030	(0.051)	-0.031	(0.051)
Age	1.604**	(0.107)	1.603**	(0.107)
Female	0.143**	(0.034)	0.142**	(0.034)
Unemployed	-0.061	(0.058)	-0.061	(0.058)
Rural	0.056	(0.036)	0.057	(0.036)
Religious	0.342**	(0.060)	0.342**	(0.060)
Union member	0.140**	(0.048)	0.140**	(0.048)
Immigrant	-1.755**	(0.116)	-1.749**	(0.116)
Internet use	0.120**	(0.059)	0.120*	(0.059)
Political knowledge	0.446**	(0.067)	0.446**	(0.067)
Interest in politics	0.422**	(0.065)	0.420**	(0.065)
Political discussion	0.109	(0.071)	0.108	(0.071)
Political efficacy	3.804**	(0.126)	3.807**	(0.126)
Partisanship	0.568**	(0.035)	0.569**	(0.035)
News consumption	0.145	(0.090)	0.144	(0.090)
Exposure to campaign	0.028	(0.038)	0.027	(0.038)
Campaign involvement	1.877**	(0.107)	1.876**	(0.107)
Contact by politician	0.291**	(0.054)	0.291**	(0.054)
Trust national parliament	-0.231**	(0.040)	-0.232**	(0.040)
Trust EU institutions	0.085**	(0.040)	0.084*	(0.040)
EU membership	0.109**	(0.038)	0.109**	(0.038)
Compulsory voting	0.819*	(0.347)	0.822*	(0.331)
Concurrent ntl election	1.052**	(0.265)	1.066**	(0.253)
Turnout in national elections	0.011	(0.008)	0.003	(0.009)
Candidate nationality	-0.374	(0.397)	-0.404	(0.379)
Population size	-0.079+	(0.044)	-0.045	(0.048)
Information environment			2.291+	(1.389)
<i>Random effects (variance)</i>				
Intercept	0.251		0.226	
Residual (median)	0.250		0.250	
Observations (individual)	24137		24137	
Observations (system)	30		30	
Log Likelihood	-11,652		-11,650	
AIC	23,365		23,364	

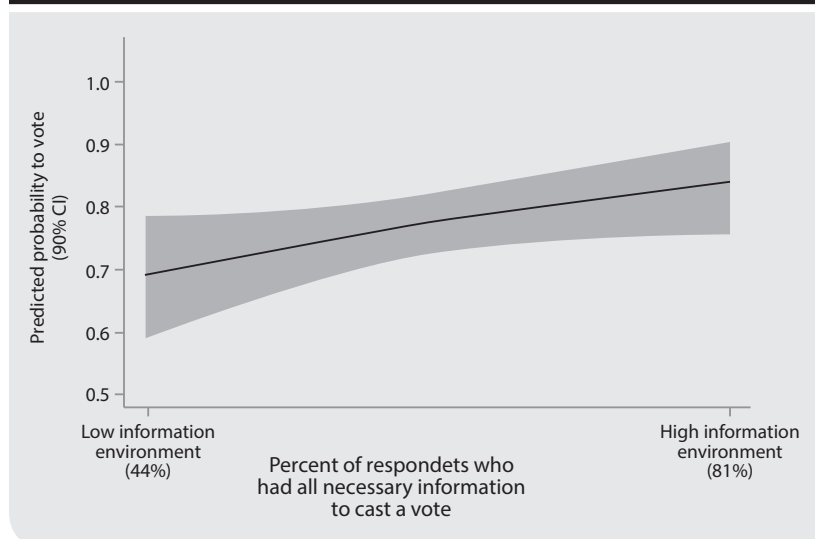
Note: Table entries are logit coefficients with standard errors in parenthesis; + p<0.1, *p<0.05, ** p<0.01, ***p<0.001

in countries with a “richer” information environment were more likely to cast a vote in the 2014 EP elections. In order to evaluate the size of the effect we turn to Figure 9, which shows the effect of the information environment while holding all other variables constant.

More specifically, we note that individuals that live in the country where the information environment is the highest (i.e. Malta where 81% of the survey respondent mentioned that they had all the necessary information to cast their vote in the EP elections) are approximately 11 percentage points more likely to vote than citizens from the country where the information environment is the lowest (i.e. the Czech Republic, where 44% of the survey respondents mentioned that they had all the necessary information to cast their vote in the EP elections). In a nutshell: if the only differences between individuals would be a product of the information environment regarding the elections available in the country they live in, citizens living in high information environments would be 11 percentage points more likely to turn out to the ballot box compared to individuals living in countries where the available information is at its lowest.

This effect is quite substantial and comparable to the effect of a *Spitzenkandidat* visiting the country. But yet again we need to remind the reader that this result is based on a proxy measure of the information environment. Moreover, based on our qualitative analysis, only a small part of these effects can probably be attributed to the EPIO information campaign.

Figure 9 Effect of the information environment on the probability to vote



3.5 Discussion

At the start of this section our initial expectation was that a richer information environment would contribute to increasing the turnout in the 2014 EP elections by making citizens better understand what is at stake in these elections. We further expected that by providing information regarding the elections and the activities of the EP, the campaigns carried out by the national EPIOs at the time of the 2014 EP elections would significantly contribute to creating a richer information environment. Therefore, in countries where the EPIOs' campaigns benefited from a substantial budget and reached a significant amount of people, voters should have had more information at their disposal, and consequently turnout should generally have been higher.

What we do successfully show in this section is that a richer information environment is linked to turnout. By using a proxy measure constructed by aggregating a survey item, we established that information has a positive effect on turnout, but this effect is only marginally statistically significant. Furthermore, given that only 7% of those who reported that they did not vote in the EES 2014 Voters Study (Schmitt et al. 2015) mentioned as a reason for not voting a lack of information about the EU, the EP, or the EP elections, increasing the information available to citizens can only do so much to increase turnout.

What we did not manage to accomplish is to accurately establish how the information campaign that was carried out by the national EPIOs was related to turnout. As we were only able to obtain information regarding the campaign activities of five EPIOs, conducting a quantitative analysis was not possible. Such an analysis would have allowed us to accurately establish the effect of EPIOs activities on the information citizens have in a given country and subsequently about to what extent this has an impact on turnout. The scattered evidence which we gathered points to the fact that although the EPIOs report reaching very high number of people through their campaigns, the impact of these campaigns on both the information environment and turnout was at best minimal. Illustrative here are the examples of Cyprus and Slovakia, where, according to the EPIO statistics on the reach of their campaigns, the information campaigns reached almost all eligible voters. Nevertheless, in both countries the proportion of people claiming to have all the necessary information regarding these elections was relatively low, and more importantly turnout decreased significantly in comparison to the 2009 EP elections, with Slovakia having the lowest turnout level in the EU.

All in all, our tentative conclusion is that the information campaigns conducted by the EPIOs before the 2014 EP elections did little to raise awareness and inform voters about what is at stake in these elections. Thus, even considering that the information environment in a given country is positively related to turnout, we must assume that the information campaign of the EPIOs did little to raise turnout levels. In fact, we think it is highly unlikely that the EP information campaigns had an impact on turnout.

4 Conclusions

The aim of this report is to provide an overview of turnout in EP elections with a special focus on the 2014 EP elections. We start by putting the EP elections in a temporal perspective and investigate the possible cause of the almost constant decline in turnout that has been recorded since the first EP elections in 1979. We continue by analysing the possible factors that led to the halt of this decline in the 2014 EP elections.

At first glance, the analysis of the trends in turnout in EP elections points to a worrisome conclusion. Since the first EP elections, turnout has decreased by more than 20 percentage points. In light of this, and in a context where low turnout is generally indicative of disengagement, unequal representation and absence of civic virtues, the future of EU level democracy does not seem to be in good shape. However, a closer inspection of turnout trends across all elections in Western Europe shows that turnout in EP elections just follows the general decrease caused by both generational differences and the on-going depolarization of political competition. Furthermore, in later years the decrease in turnout in EP elections is more a question of compositional effects. More specifically, the 2004 enlargement of the EU brought in a number of post-communist countries that are generally characterized by lower levels of turnout. Thus, we can note that in Western Europe, starting in 1999 turnout levels in EP elections remained more or less stable, registering levels between 49.5% and 47%. What's even more encouraging is the fact that the 2014 EP elections brought the decline in turnout in EP elections to a general halt across the entire EU. In fact, excluding the youngest EU member-country – i.e. Croatia – our analysis presented in the first part of the report shows that the 2014 EP elections can also be characterised by a small increase in turnout of almost 1%. With this positive aspect in mind, in the next two sections we look for both the general factors that favoured higher levels of turnout in the 2014 EP elections and also for the factors that can possibly explain the small increase in turnout recorded during these elections.

We start by presenting an aggregate analysis of the general country level factors that favoured a higher level of turnout in the 2014 EP elections. We note that while the higher levels of turnout in national elections, other elections being organised simultaneously with the EP elections, the Western European context, and compulsory voting provisions were all related to the generally higher levels of turnout in the 2014 EP elections (see Table 2), they can neither explain the stabilization of turnout patterns nor can they accurately account for the voting patterns of individual citizens. Thus, we move to an individual level analysis that clearly shows that, against popular belief, Euroscepticism is by no means the driving force behind the low turnout levels recorded in EP elections. Simply put, the cause of the low turnout is that not enough is at stake in these elections.

Thus, both parties and voters are generally less interested in EP elections. From the point of view of voters these elections are simply not important enough for them to go out and vote. Our analysis presented in Table 4 confirms these previous findings. We show that the level of political engagement is the main factor that motivated voters to cast a vote in the 2014 EP elections. To be more precise, only individuals who associate a very high utility with the act of voting – i.e. those who are highly engaged in the campaign and think that they can influence the political realm – are very likely to cast a vote in these elections. In comparison to these factors, indicators of Euroscepticism, such as trust in the institution of the EU and the perceived benefit of being part of the EU have a minimal effect on the propensity of individuals to cast a vote.

As previously mentioned, besides the general factors that explain turnout in the 2014 EP elections, we are also interested in the particular factors that might be responsible for the virtual increase in turnout seen in the 2014 EP elections. Since we identified the low stakes associated with these elections as the main factor responsible for the low turnout levels, we concentrate on two factors that could change the way in which voters perceive these elections. First, we analyse the main institutional innovation brought by the 2014 EP elections, i.e. the *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure. In a move designed to increase both the stakes of the elections and the legitimacy of the EU, it was agreed (between Parliament and Commission, but not the Council at least not from the start of the process) that the EP group that wins the most seats after the 2014 EP elections would be given the opportunity to nominate the future president of the EC. One of the expected impacts of this institutional innovation was that it would lead to an increase in turnout. And our empirical analyses indeed found that by personalizing the election and mobilizing voters during their campaign activities, the presence of the leading candidates on the lists managed to produce a small but significant increase in turnout. To be more specific, those who were able to recognize the candidates and what they stood for, and those living in countries visited by the *Spitzenkandidaten*, had a higher propensity to cast a vote in the 2014 EP elections.

A second factor that could change how voters perceive the importance of the EP elections is the information environment that they have access to. In countries where citizens have at their disposal more information regarding the EP elections in particular and the role of the EP in general, they are going to be more likely to consider these elections to be important and thus have a higher likelihood to cast a vote. Here we concentrated on analysing the possible effect of the information campaigns conducted by the European Parliament Information Office (EPIO) in each of the member states. Our initial expectations were that in countries in which EPIOs had more resources and conducted a more successful campaign, citizens would benefit from more available information about the general importance of the EP, and thus they would be more likely to perceive the elections to be more important and consequently more likely to cast a vote. We

indeed show that in countries where citizens had more information about the EP elections and the EP in general turnout was generally higher. But we cannot accurately assess the role the EPIOs' information campaigns played in this regard. The lack of sufficient information means we have not had the opportunity to accurately quantify how the EPIO campaigns contributes to increasing turnout levels by having an impact on the information environment surrounding the EP elections. Nevertheless, our qualitative analysis shows that, if there is any, the effect of the EPIO campaign is at best minimal. This conclusion is based on the observation that in countries where the EPIOs reported a successful campaign characterized by impressive figures about the number of people reached, we did not see either a higher availability of information or a higher level of turnout. On the contrary, the figures on the number of people reached reported by the EPIOs seem to be overly optimistic, given the noted impact of the information campaign.

Even if the 2014 EP elections brought a small increase in turnout (compared to the 2009 EP elections), the overall turnout situation with regard to EP elections is generally grim. Even if in the last two or three EP elections turnout levels have stabilized at around 45%, this still means the turnout in EP elections is approximately 20 percentage points lower than turnout in national legislative elections. As previously mentioned, this is not due to Euroscepticism but more to the lack of political mobilization and hence, a lack of interest in EU and EP affairs. Citizens do not understand what is at stake, and hence do not think that voting in EP elections is worth their while. This is bad news for EU democracy, especially given the increasing powers of the EP. Furthermore it also has negative consequences for democracy in general, as it has been shown that cohorts that became of voting age at the time of "low stimulus" EP elections remain less likely to participate in subsequent "high stimulus" national legislative elections (Dinas 2012; Franklin and Hobolt 2011). A relatively easy fix for this grim state of affairs and to increase turnout would be to organize EP elections simultaneously with other elections. More elaborate solutions should aim to introduce compulsory voting laws and improve the publics' perception of the EU. But even in the absence of such solutions, the picture might not be as grim since it seems that the turnout levels do not influence the composition of the EP, as van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Sapir (2011) have shown that even if turnout would be higher the composition of the EP would remain largely unchanged (see Bernhagen and Rose 2012 for identical findings based on a different methodological approach).

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Svensk sammanfattning

Europaparlamentet (EP) är en unik folkvald församling. Sedan 1979 hålls direktval i Europeiska unionens (EU) medlemsstater till Europaparlamentet. Parlamentet har en mycket betydande roll som medlagstiftare i den sammantaget mycket omfattande lagstiftning som sker i EU. EP har varit en viktig institution för att stärka den demokratiska legitimiteten. Som direktvald församling härrör denna legitimitet, till skillnad från EU:s övriga institutioner, direkt från folket. Parlamentet har sett sitt inflytande utökas i takt med att fördragen har ändrats. Trots utökat inflytande ökar dock inte valdeltagandet i EP-valen. Valdeltagandet har sjunkit över tid, till stor del till på grund av ett lågt valdeltagande i de nya medlemsstaterna. Det har i sin tur lett till en diskussion om parlamentets legitimitet. I valet 2014 avstannade trots allt den nedåtgående trenden och valdeltagandet landade på 42.6 procent.

Redan efter det första direktvalet till EP konstaterades i forskningen att det bästa sättet att tolka valet var som ett *second-order national election*, ett sorts andra rangens nationella val. Det är andra rangens, eftersom den första arenan som väljarna förhåller sig till är de nationella parlamentsvalen. Det är ett nationellt val eftersom partierna man röstar på är nationella och debatterna som påverkar valen är nationella snarare än europeiska. Detta mönster har återkommande bekräftats, trots att EP har fått allt större betydelse och trots att allt fler politiska frågor av stor vikt avgörs på EU-nivå.

I den här rapporten analyseras valdeltagande i Europaparlamentsval. Fokus ligger på valet 2014, där jämförelser görs mellan EU:s alla 28 medlemsstater. Även jämförelser över tid ingår för att redogöra för de trender som kan skönjas. I rapporten görs en övergripande analys av länderfaktorer som påverkade valdeltagandet i 2014 års val. Bland dessa faktorer finns valdeltagande i nationella val, obligatorisk röstning, parallella val till andra (nationella) församlingar och en västeuropeisk politisk kontext. Samtliga dessa faktorer är associerade med högre valdeltagande, men sammantaget kan de inte förklara stabiliseringen av valdeltagandet 2014 eller precisat avgöra de individuella motiven för att rösta. När det gäller den individuella nivån visar rapporten att EU-skepsis inte är en drivande faktor bakom det låga valdeltagandet, utan snarare handlar det låga deltagandet om att så lite står (eller uppfattas stå) på spel i dessa val. Det är nivån på medborgarnas engagemang som avgör huruvida de röstar eller inte, snarare än hur skeptisk eller välvilligt inställd man är till EU.

I valet 2014 fanns en nyordning. Det var första gången som de europeiska partigrupperna (dock inte alla) gick fram med ledande kandidater till posten som EU-kommissionens ordförande. Systemet, som har varit mycket omtvistat, kom att kallas för *Spitzenkandidaten*. Artikel 17:7 i Lissabonfördraget anger

att ”Med hänsyn till valen till Europaparlamentet och efter lämpligt samråd ska Europeiska rådet med kvalificerad majoritet föreslå Europaparlamentet en kandidat till befattningen som kommissionens ordförande. Denne kandidat ska väljas av Europaparlamentet med en majoritet av dess ledamöter”. Den tolkning av denna paragraf som de europeiska partifederationerna gjorde var alltså att föra fram personer som skulle kandidera i valet. Ett särskilt kapitel i denna rapport behandlar om denna process. Syftet med denna nyordning var dels att göra kommissionens ordförandes politiska koppling till Europaparlamentet starkare och att höja insatserna för väljarna, dels att åstadkomma en europeisk, politiserad dimension i valet. Fem Europapartier tog fram kandidater som kampanjande runt om i Europa. I slutändan blev EPP största partigrupp i Europaparlamentet och dess kandidat Jean-Claude Juncker blev, trots visst missnöje från vissa medlemsstater, vald till kommissionens ordförande. Som analysen kommer att visa, ledde denna nyordning till en liten men signifikant ökning av valdeltagandet.

Ett annat sätt att höja valdeltagandet handlar om vilken informationsmiljö väljarna befinner sig i. När väljarna har mer information om vad valen handlar om samt om vilken roll EP har, borde sannolikheten för att de deltar öka. För att ta reda på detta undersöks i denna rapport om informationskampanjer som bedrivits av Europaparlamentets informationskontor i medlemsstaterna har lyckats höja deltagandet. Rapporten visar att i de länder där medborgarna har mer information om EP och valet till EP är deltagandet högre. På grund av knapphändiga uppgifter kan dock inte de insatser som gjorts av Europaparlamentets informationskontor värderas. Analysen av tillgängliga data visar dock att effekten av informationskontorens bidrag är som bäst minimal.

Även om valen 2014 ledde till att nedgången i valdeltagande bröts, är det alltså mycket lågt. Deltagandet i EP-val är i genomsnitt 20 procent lägre än i nationella val. Detta ska inte (enbart) ses som ett uttryck för EU-skepsis hos väljarna, utan snarare som en brist på politisk mobilisering och ett bristande intresse för EU och Europaparlamentet. Detta är givetvis negativt i ljuset av EP:s ökande makt. Det kan också innebära negativa konsekvenser för demokratin som sådan. Ett enkelt sätt att öka valdeltagandet i EP-val vore om de hölls samtidigt som nationella val. Ett annat alternativ är att göra röstning obligatoriskt. Å andra sidan är kanske inte ett lågt valdeltagande så dramatiskt: Europaparlamentets sammansättning verkar inte ha påverkats. Även om valdeltagandet hade varit högre skulle Europaparlamentet knappast ha fått en helt annan sammansättning.

Appendix 1

Variable description

Dependent variable:

Turnout: question wording ‘European Parliament elections were held on the (INSERT CORRECT DATE ACCORDING TO COUNTRY). For one reason or another, some people in (OUR COUNTRY) did not vote in these elections. Did you yourself vote in the recent European Parliament elections?’ recoded to 1 voted 0 did not vote.

Explanatory variables, individual component (level 1), original question available at the following link: eshomepage.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Master-Questionnaire.pdf

Junker recognition: original question QPP24, recoded 1 for those who correctly identify the European People’s Party /(NATIONAL PARTY) as supporting Juncker’s nomination and 0 otherwise. ‘Don’t Know’ answers were coded as incorrect answers as we consider that they reflect a degree of ignorance similar to the one reflected by incorrect answers (see Hansen, 2009; Luskin and Bullock, 2006; Sturgis *et al.*, 2008)

Schulz recognition: original question QPP24, recoded 1 for those who correctly identify the Socialist & Democrats /(NATIONAL PARTY) as supporting Juncker’s nomination and 0 otherwise. ‘Don’t Know’ answers were coded as incorrect answers as we consider that they reflect a degree of ignorance similar to the one reflected by incorrect answers (see Hansen, 2009; Luskin and Bullock, 2006; Sturgis *et al.*, 2008)

Verhofstad recognition: original question QPP24, recoded 1 for those who correctly identify the Liberals and Allies Group/(NATIONAL PARTY) as supporting Juncker’s nomination and 0 otherwise. ‘Don’t Know’ answers were coded as incorrect answers as we consider that they reflect a degree of ignorance similar to the one reflected by incorrect answers (see Hansen, 2009; Luskin and Bullock, 2006; Sturgis *et al.*, 2008) _

Note: in countries where two or more parties were expected to join an EP group, the biggest party was mentioned. In countries where there was no party supporting one of the four EP groups, only the name of the EP group was provided.

Political Knowledge: measure of political knowledge that ranges from 0 to 5, reflecting the correct True/False answers given by each respondent to. “Don’t Know” answers were coded as incorrect answers as we consider that they reflect a degree of ignorance similar to the one reflected by incorrect answers (see Hansen, 2009; Luskin and Bullock, 2006; Sturgis *et al.*, 2008).

- QPP23.1. Switzerland is a member of the EU. True/False
- QPP23.2 Each Member State elects the same number of representatives to the European Parliament. True/False
- QPP23.3. There are [150% of real number] members of the [COUNTRY Parliament]. True/False
- QPP23.4 NAME OF THE HEAD OF GOVERNMENT) belongs to (NAME OF CORRECT PARTY). True/False

Interest in politics: original wording QP6.9 Answers order was reversed and rescaled in the analysis, the final variables takes values for 0 reflecting 'No, not at all' to 1 reflecting 'yes totally'.

Exposure to campaign: original wording QP8, responses was recoded to 0 reflecting 'No, not don't remember' and 1 reflecting 'yes, remember'.

Political discussion: a mean of three items (Cronbach alpha= 0.87): d71_1 (discussion about national politics matters) d71_2 (discussion about European politics matters) d71_3 (discussion about local politics matters), final variables recoded to take values between 0 reflecting a low frequencies and 1 high frequency of discussion.

Political efficacy: a mean of seven items (Cronbach alpha= 0.76): QP6.4, QP6.7, QP6.8, QPP9.2, QPP9.3, D72.1 D72.2, reflecting internal and external political efficacy at both national and EU level, final variables recoded to take values between 0 reflecting a low sense of efficacy and 1 a high sense of efficacy.

Partisanship: wording of question QPP21 Recoded in 1 yes if R is feeling close to any party and 0 if the response is no

News consumption: variable computed as the maximum of three items QP9.1 (TV news), QP9.2 (online news) and QP9.3 (newspaper news): recoded to take values from 0 'never following the news' to 1 reflecting 'following the news every day/almost every day'

Campaign involvement: mean of five items (Cronbach alpha= 0.7): QP11.1 (watched a programme about the European election), QP11.2 (read in newspapers about the European election), QPP11.3 (talk to friends of family about the European election), QPP11.4 (attended a meeting or a rally about the European election) and QPP11.5 (read online about the European election), recoded to take values from 0 reflecting no involvement to 1 reflecting strong involvement

Contact by party: original question wording QP12, recoded to 1 'yes, contacted' and 0 'no, not contacted'

Trust national parliament: original question wording QPP1.1, recoded to take values form 0 reflecting no trust in the national parliament to 1 reflecting high trust in the national parliament.

Trust EU institutions: original question wording QP6.2, recoded to take values form 0 reflecting no trust in the EU institutions to 1 reflecting high trust in the EU institutions.

EU membership: original question wording QP7, recoded to take 1 'EU membership is a good thing' and 0 otherwise.

Married: original question D7c, recoded to 1 married and 0 otherwise.

Secondary education: original question VD11, recode 1 for those who ended their education between the age of 16 and 19 and 0 otherwise.

Tertiary education: original question VD8, recode 1 for those who ended their education after the age of 20 and 0 otherwise.

Age: original question VD11.

Female: original question D10, recode to 1 'female' and 0 'men'.

Unemployed: original question C14, recode to 1 'unemployed' and 0 'otherwise'.

Rural: original question D25, recode to 1 'rural residence' and 0 'otherwise'.

Religious: original question D75, recode to take values between 0 'never attends religious services' to 1 'attends religious services more than once a week'.

Union member: original question D76, recoded 1 if respondent and/or somebody else in the household is union member and 0 otherwise

Immigrant: original question D2, recode 1 if respondent of citizen of the country and 0 otherwise

Internet use: maximum of three items: D61.1 (home internet usage), D62.2 (work internet usage) and D63.3 (somewhere else internet usage), recode to take values from 0 'never use internet' to 1 'use internet every day'.

Explanatory variables, macro component (level 2)

Compulsory voting: coded 1 for countries that have compulsory voting and 0 otherwise (source: http://www.idea.int/vt/compulsory_voting.cfm).

Concurrent national Election: coded 1 if any other national, regional or local elections took place in the same day as the EP elections and 0 otherwise (source).

Turnout in national elections: official turnout in the previous legislative election.

Candidate nationality: code 1 for the three countries of the candidates (Germany, Luxembourg and Belgium) and zero otherwise.

Number of MEPs: number of MEPs in each political system. Recoded to take values from 0 (corresponding to the political system with the lowest number of MEPs, i.e. Northern Ireland with 3 MEPs) to 1 (corresponding to the political system with the lowest number of MEPs, i.e. Germany with 96 MEPs)

Population size: natural log of the population size

Juncker campaign visits: number of campaigning days Juncker spent in a given country in the two month before the EP elections, recode 1 if he campaigned in the country and 0 otherwise.

Schulz campaign visits: number of campaigning days Schulz spent in a given country in the two month before the EP elections, recode 1 if he campaigned in the country and 0 otherwise.

Verhofstadt campaign visits: number of campaigning days Verhofstadt spent in a given country in the two month before the EP elections, recode 1 if he campaigned in the country and 0 otherwise

- Juncker campaign visits:** number of geo-located tweets that mentions Juncker’s official twitter account (i.e. @JunckerEU) in a given country divided by population size (measured in millions) of that country.
- Schulz campaign visits:** number of geo-located tweets that mentions Schulz’s official twitter account (i.e. @MartinSchulz) in a given country divided by population size (measured in millions) of that country.
- Verhofstadt campaign visits:** number of geo-located tweets that mentions Verhofstadt’s official twitter account (i.e. @GuyVerhofstadt) in a given country divided by population size (measured in millions) of that country.
- Information environment:** Proportion of respondents that replied with “Yes” to item qp6_1: “You had all the necessary information in order to choose who to vote for in the recent European elections”.
- Eastern Europe:** Coded “1” for countries belonging to the Eastern European block (i.e. countries with a communist past) and “0” otherwise.
- EU good thing:** Proportion of respondents in a given country that responded that ‘EU membership is a good thing’ to item QP7.
- Disproportionality:** Electoral system disproportionality (measured using the Gallagher index) in the previous legislative elections.
- EU net contributor:** Measured as the total contribution of a country to the EU budget (in millions of EURO) divided by the total EU expenditure in the give country (in millions of EURO).
- Weekend voting:** Coded “1” for countries that organized the EP elections on a Saturday and/or Sunday and “0” otherwise.
- Open list:** Coded “1” for countries that had a PR system where voters could indicate their preferred order of the candidates on the list and “0” otherwise.
- Multiple constituencies:** Coded “1” for countries in which the population was split into more than one electoral district and “0” otherwise.

Appendix 2

Campaign calendars

Table 8 Juncker's campaign schedule

<i>Date</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Type of Event</i>
3/25/2014			
3/26/2014			
3/27/2014			
3/28/2014			
3/29/2014			
3/30/2014			
3/31/2014			
4/1/2014			
4/2/2014			
4/3/2014			
4/4/2014	Germany	Munich	Keynote speech at IHK Akademie
4/5/2014	Germany	Berlin	Press Conference + Keynote Speech at CDU Congress
4/6/2014			
4/7/2014			
4/8/2014	Belgium	Nivelles/ Antwerp	Press Conference (Nivelles) + Meeting EPP politicians (Nivelles/Antwerp) + Speech for the press (Antwerp)
4/9/2014			
4/10/2014			
4/11/2014	Netherlands	Utrecht	Campaign Speech at the CDA party conference
4/12/2014			
4/13/2014			
4/14/2014			
4/15/2014	France	Pfettisheim / Strasbourg	Visiting the farm of EPP President Joseph Daul + Speech on his candidacy and the importance of the Common Agriculture Policy + Press Point
4/16/2014	Finland	Helsinki	Campaign Event with National Coalition Party (EPP) + meeting with Prime Minister + press conference
4/17/2014	Latvia	Riga	Meeting with former Prime Minister + Live TV Debate with former Prime Minister and MEP Ivars Godanis
4/18/2014	Latvia	Riga	Meeting with Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma + press conference



4/19/2014			
4/20/2014			
4/21/2014			
4/22/2014			
4/23/2014	Belgium	Brussels	Press Conference
4/24/2014			
4/25/2014	Poland	Poznan	Summit of EPP regional and local political leaders and Prime Minister Donald Tusk
4/26/2014	Germany	Braunschweig	Campaign with CDU (EPP) and German lead candidate David McAllister
4/27/2014	Bulgaria	Sofia	Event launching the European campaign of Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB)
4/28/2014			
4/29/2014			
4/30/2014	Germany	Düsseldorf	Meeting with CDU-politicians and press conference
5/1/2014			
5/2/2014	Malta	Valetta	Campaign of the Nationalist Party + Meeting with (former) Prime Minister + meeting EPP-politicians
5/3/2014	Cyprus	Nicosia	Meeting with President of the Republic, President of the Democratic Rally and attendance of a ceremony celebrating the 10th anniversary of Cyprus's accession to the EU
5/4/2014	Cyprus	Nicosia	Keynote speech at the electoral Congress of DISY
5/5/2014			
5/6/2014	Slovakia	Bratislava	Gala Dinner celebrating 10 years of Slovakia's EU Membership
5/7/2014	Austria	Vienna	Meeting with ÖVP-politicians (EPP), Campaign Events of ÖVP and press conferences
5/8/2014	Germany	Berlin	Event of Junge Union Berlin
5/9/2014	Italy	Florence and Rome	Meeting with young EPP party activists from Italy
5/10/2014	Germany	Rotenburg an der Fulda	Campaign of the CDU in Hesse
5/11/2014			
5/12/2014	Spain	Madrid	Campaign Event with Partido Popular
5/13/2014	France	Bordeaux	Meeting with former Prime Minister Alain Juppé and participation in round table
5/14/2014	France	Paris	Press Breakfast



5/15/2014	Belgium	Brussels	Press Briefing
5/16/2014	Germany	Ludwigshafen	Talk with Bundeskanzler a.D. Helmut Kohl
5/17/2014	Portugal	Porto	Meeting with Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister
5/18/2014	Portugal/ Greece	Lisbon/ Athens	Campaign Event with Alliance for Portugal (Lisbon)/ Press Briefing (Athens)
5/19/2014	Greece	Athens	Meeting with Prime Minister Antonis Samaras and other ministers
5/20/2014			
5/21/2014	Belgium	Brussels	Receiving of the Youth-EPP campaign Vans + Press Conference
5/22/2014	Luxembourg	Esch	Campaign Event of the CSV
5/23/2014	Germany	Saarlouis	Campaign Event of the CDU with prime minister Angela Merkel
5/24/2014			

Table 9 Schulz's campaign schedule

<i>Date</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Type</i>
3/25/20	Denmark	Copenhagen	Meeting with Danish Social Democrats
3/26/20			
3/27/20			
3/28/20	Finland	Helsinki	Meeting with Finish Social Democrats
3/29/2014	Germany	Hamburg	Campaign Event of the SPD with Martin Schulz
3/30/20	Spain	Madrid	Campaign Event of the PSOE (PES)
3/31/2014			
4/1/2014			
4/2/2014			
4/3/2014			Meeting with NGO's
4/4/2014	Belgium	Brussels	Speech at a three-day conference of the PES in
4/5/2014			
4/6/2014	Germany	Berlin	Conference of the SPD for the EP Elections 2014
4/7/2014			
4/8/2014			
4/9/2014			



4/10/2014			
4/11/2014	Czech Republic	Prague	Round table discussion with European PES politicians
4/12/2014			
4/13/2014			
4/14/2014			
4/15/2014	Luxembourg	Luxembourg	Campaign Event of the Luxembourg Socialist Party (LSAP)
4/16/2014	Germany	Offenburg	Campaign Event of the SPD
4/17/2014	France	Paris	Speech at the launch of PS France's European Election Campaign + on economic governance to an audience of trade unionists, entrepreneurs and academics (Porto)
4/18/2014			
4/19/2014			
4/20/2014			
4/21/2014			
4/22/2014	Germany	Weimar/ Erfurt	Round table discussion (Weimar)/ Campaign Event of the SPD (Erfurt)
4/23/2014	Germany	Cottbus/ Magdeburg	Speech at a conference of work councils (Cottbus)/Campaign of the SPD with local SPD candidates for the EP
4/24/2014			
4/25/2014	Bulgaria	Sofia	Speech at the launch of the BSP European Election Campaign
4/26/2014	Romania	Bucharest	Speech at the party Congress for the EP Elections of the PSD
4/27/2014			
4/28/2014			
4/29/2014	Ireland	Dublin	Campaign Event of the Irish Labour Party
4/30/2014	Northern Ireland	Belfast	Campaign Event of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)
5/1/2014	Poland	Warsaw/Lodz	International Labour Day and Campaign with SLD
5/2/2014	Germany	Essen/ Dortmund/ Bremen	Visiting EU-financed project (Essen)/ Campaign Event of the SPD + with Martin Schulz (Dortmund) + SPD Campaign Event (Bremen)
5/3/2014	Germany	Kiel/Wismar	SPD Campaign Events with Martin Schulz
5/4/2014			
5/5/2014	Germany	Saarbrücken/ Mainz	Campaign Event of the SPD with Martin Schulz (Saarbrücken) + Meeting working councils and trade union members



5/6/2014	Portugal	Lisbon/ Setubal/ Porto	Visiting factories and two social projects (Lisbon) + press conference with leader of Portuguese Socialist Party (Seguro) + Keynote Speech
5/7/2014	Belgium	Brussels	Press Conference to present the policy programme
5/8/2014			
5/9/2014	Italy	Florence	Speech in front of hundreds of trade union representatives in a steel factory + Meeting of Martin Schulz with Italian Prime Minister and Party Leader of Partito Democratico Matteo Renzi
5/10/2014	Malta	Valetta/Paola	Meeting with the Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat + Campaign Event of the Maltese Labour Party with Joseph Muscat
5/11/2014	Spain	Malaga	Campaign Event of the Spanish Socialists (PSOE)
5/12/2014	France	Rezé	Campaign Event of the PS France
5/13/2014	France	Brest	Visiting agriculture and maritime industries + speech at the University of Brest about youth unemployment
5/14/2014	Italy/ Slovenia	Verona/ Trieste/ Ljubljana	Round table discussion + Campaign Event Partito Democratico (PES) + Campaign Event (Ljubljana)
5/15/2014			
5/16/2014	France	Forbach (Lorraine)	Meeting local entrepreneurs, trade unionists, and public sector workers + round table discussion + meeting local PS France politicians
5/17/2014	Sweden	Umea	Martin Schulz joint Swedish Social Democrats (SAP) for door to door canvassing + meeting local SAP politicians
5/18/2014			
5/19/2014	Germany	Nürnberg/ Berlin	Campaign Events SPD with Martin Schulz
5/20/2014	Germany	Hannover	Campaign Event SPD with Martin Schulz
5/21/2014	Spain	Barcelona	Campaign Event PSOE (PES) and Catalan Socialist Party (PSE)
5/22/2014	Austria	Vienna	Campaign Event SPÖ
5/23/2014	Croatia/ France	Zagreb/Lyon	Martin Schulz + Croatian Social Democratic Party informing about the Balkan Flood Situation/ Campaign Event of the PS France (Lyon)
5/24/2014	Germany	Frankfurt a.M./Aachen	Campaign Event SPD with Martin Schulz

Table 10 Verhofstadt's campaign schedule

<i>Date</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Type of Event</i>
3/25/2014			
3/26/2014			
3/27/2014			
3/28/2014			
3/29/2014	Belgium	Brussels	Campaign event of VLD
3/30/2014			
3/31/2014	Slovenia	Ljubljana	Participation in a debate about the future of the EU
4/1/2014	Netherlands	Den Haag	Campaign Event of D66
4/2/2014			
4/3/2014			
4/4/2014	Belgium / Croatia	Brussels/	Meeting with Ban-Ki Moon (Brussels)/Campaign Event with Croatian Liberals IDS-DDI and HNS
4/5/2014	Italy	Rome	Campaign Event with Italian liberals Scelta Europea
4/6/2014			
4/7/2014	Romania	Bucharest	Campaign Event with Romanian liberals PNL
4/8/2014			
4/9/2014			
4/10/2014	Belgium	Brussels	Participation in a book presentation about Arab spring
4/11/2014			
4/12/2014	Italy	Milano	Congress of Italian liberals Scelta European
4/13/2014			
4/14/2014			
4/15/2014	Belgium	Brussels	ALDE Press Conference
4/16/2014			
4/17/2014	Germany	Karlsruhe	Campaign Event of German liberals FDP
4/18/2014			
4/19/2014			
4/20/2014			
4/21/2014			
4/22/2014			
4/23/2014			
4/24/2014	Poland	Katowice	Campaign Event with polish liberals Twoj Ruch
4/25/2014	Belgium	Brussels	Press Conference to launch election campaign



4/26/2014			
4/27/2014			
4/28/2014			
4/29/2014			
4/30/2014	France	Lyon	Campaign Event with French Liberals Les Europeens
5/1/2014			
5/2/2014	Austria	Vienna	Campaign Event with Austrian liberals NEOS
5/3/2014	Italy	Napoli	Campaign Event with Italian liberals Scelta Europea
5/4/2014			
5/5/2014	Sweden	Uppsala/ Stockholm	Campaign Event
5/6/2014	Ireland	Dublin	Discussion about digitalisation in Europe + Visiting Google + campaigning
5/7/2014			
5/8/2014			
5/9/2014	Italy	Florence	Campaign Event with Scelta Europea after TV-Debate with other Candidates
5/10/2014	Belgium	Brussels	Campaign Event with Open VLD
5/11/2014			
5/12/2014			
5/13/2014	France	Paris	Campaign Event with French liberals
5/14/2014	Spain	Bilbao/ Barcelona	Meeting with liberal politicians + representatives from civil society and entrepreneurs + campaign event in Barcelona
5/15/2014	Belgium	Brussels	Presenting plan for Europe at the European Business Summit
5/16/2014	Czech Republic	Prague	Campaigning with Czech liberals ANO2011
5/17/2014	Italy	Milano	Campaigning with Italian liberals Scelta Europea
5/18/2014	France	Paris	Campaign Event with French liberals
5/19/2014			
5/20/2014			
5/21/2014	Belgium	Hasselt	Final Open VLD Campaign Event
5/22/2014	France	Lille	Campaign Event with Drench liberals
5/23/2014	Greece	Athens	Campaign Event
5/24/2014	Greece	Athens	Campaign Event

Appendix 3

Template email to EPIOS

Subject: European Election Studies - European Parliament Election 2014
Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is XXXXXXX and I work as a research assistant at Mannheim Centre for European Social Research. Recently, I have contacted you by the phone on behalf of the project on European Election Studies. Could you please provide more information on the following issues:

- What specific activities (events, online campaigning, publishing printed materials, television campaigning etc.) have you organized in your country to increase voting turnout in European Parliament election 2014? Please, write it as detailed as possible.
- What kind of materials did you use during these activities? How many of these materials (e.g. number of handbooks, flyers, billboards, spots) did you distribute?
- How much did you spend on these particular activities and overall on the whole campaign?
- What was the number of people affected by these particular activities (people participated on events, number of social media followers, media outreach etc.)?
- How do you evaluate the actual efficiency of these activities on increasing the voting turnout in European Parliament Election 2014?

I would like to thank you in forward on behalf of Mannheim Centre for European Social Research for answering the questions. Beside this, we will appreciate any relevant numbers, charts and tables you can provide us. This information is highly valuable for our research project.

Best regards,
XXXXXX

XXXXXX@mail.uni-mannheim.de
University of Mannheim
Mannheim Centre for European Social Research

Project website: <http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/d7/en/projects/european-election-study-2014>

Appendix 4

Template reminder emails to EPIOS

Subject: REMINDER on European Election Studies – European Parliament Election 2014

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is XXX and I work as a research assistant at Mannheim Centre for European Social Research. On the “insert initial contact date” I sent the email to your office on behalf of the project on European Election Studies. Nevertheless, we have not received any reply from your side yet, even though your knowledge of the situation is truly valuable for us. Could you please provide more information on the following issues:

- What specific activities (events, online campaigning, publishing printed materials, television campaigning etc.) have you organized in your country to increase voting turnout in European Parliament election 2014? Please, write it as detailed as possible.
- What kind of materials did you use during these activities? How many of these materials (e.g. number of handbooks, flyers, billboards, spots) did you distribute?
- How much did you spend on these particular activities and overall on the whole campaign?
- What was the number of people affected by these particular activities (people participated on events, number of social media followers, media outreach etc.)?
- How do you evaluate the actual efficiency of these activities on increasing the voting turnout in European Parliament Election 2014?

I would like to thank you in forward on behalf of Mannheim Centre for European Social Research for answering the questions. Beside this, we will appreciate any relevant numbers, charts and tables you can provide us. This information is highly useful for our research project.

Best regards,
XXXXXXXXXXXX@gmail.uni-mannheim.de
University of Mannheim
Mannheim Centre for European Social Research

Project website: <http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/d7/en/projects/european-election-study-2014>

“Simply put, the cause of the low turnout is that not enough is at stake in these elections. Thus, both parties and voters are generally less interested in EP elections. From the point of view of voters these elections are simply not important enough for them to go out and vote.”

Hermann Schmitt and Sebastian Adrian Popa



SIEPS carries out multidisciplinary research in current European affairs. As an independent governmental agency, we connect academic analysis and policy-making at Swedish and European levels.