



FIFTH FRAMEWORK RESEARCH PROGRAMME (1998-2002)



IMPROVING HUMAN RESEARCH POTENTIAL
AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC KNOWLEDGE BASE

***Democratic Participation and Political Communication in Systems of
Multi-level Governance***

**A Report Prepared for the European Parliament Task Force
On Voter Participation in the EP election of 2004**

**The determinants of turnout/abstention in European Parliament
elections - a summary of research findings and a framework for
policy development**

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April 15, 2003

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report summarises the findings of research on the determinants of turnout/abstention in European Parliament elections.
2. The evidence is drawn from studies of the 1994 and 1999 elections co-funded by the European Parliament and on the results derived from the set of questions inserted in Eurobarometer 57 on behalf of the European Parliament.
3. The analysis points to a wide variety of socio-demographic, communication and attitudinal factors associated with propensity to vote/abstain in EP elections.
4. In order to make sense of the multiplicity of factors involved, the paper puts forward a fourfold typology of the variables that influence voter turnout in EP elections.
5. The typology is based on the distinction between facilitating and mobilising turnout, recognising that these processes operate at an institutional and at an individual level.
6. Application of the typology leads to the identification of three areas of potential policy intervention - administrative facilitation, cognitive facilitation and political mobilisation. The report identifies specific target groups under each of these headings.
7. In terms of administrative facilitation, the EP should encourage the members states to maximise access to voting by addressing the issues of the month and day of the election, of voter registration procedures, of extending the hours of polling and the availability of postal voting and of providing publicity relating to all of the above.
8. The success of any campaign of political mobilisation depends on the success of the process of cognitive facilitation, that is on the success of the neutral information campaign that improves the citizens' cognitive capacity to receive and respond to political messages and appeals.
9. Given the evidence contained in the report that demonstrates the remoteness of European institutions and of the European Parliament for many people, the building up of this cognitive capacity is particularly important in the case of European Parliament elections.
10. There are two bases on which people can be mobilised to vote. The first is by addressing their underlying attitudes to European integration and to the European Union. The second is by presenting them with meaningful choices between parties and candidates and by appealing to their partisan and candidate preferences.
11. The range of penetration of various channels for communicating EU-related information varies substantially - from the wider audience of television to the much narrower internet user-community. It is necessary to stimulate greater use of the more specialised channels of communication and to sharpen the focus of EU information in the channels of communication with more widespread uptake.
12. Finally, the evidence underlines the crucial importance of contact between the MEPs and the citizens if the related problems of the communication deficit and abstention in European Parliament elections are to be addressed.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to summarise the findings of recent research on turnout/abstention in European Parliament elections and to put forward an analytical framework that can be used to translate the research findings into policy recommendations. The report is divided into three parts. The first part deals briefly with the findings of research conducted in the context of the 1994 and 1999 European Parliament elections. The second part provides a more detailed account of the correlates of propensity to vote in European Parliament elections based on a special set of questions inserted in EB 57 (spring 2002) on behalf of the European Parliament. The third part presents a fourfold typology of the variables that influence the level of voter turnout and a model that specifies the main causal links between turnout/abstention and the four types of variables. Taken together, the typology and the model provide a framework for the development of policy recommendations with a view to enhancing turnout in the European Parliament election of 2004.

Before addressing the issue of the sources of turnout/abstention in European Parliament elections, it is important to emphasise that the trend in turnout in national elections in most member states has also been downwards. Furthermore, Eurobarometer data points to a downward trend in support for European integration across the Union as a whole since the early 1990s. These two trends suggest that the problems are wider than the issue of turnout in European Parliament elections. This is not to say that the European Parliament doesn't have a turnout problem. The stark fact remains that, in the majority of member states, turnout in European Parliament elections is between 20 and 40 percentage points lower than turnout in national elections. Secondly, turnout in European Parliament elections has been declining at the very time when the power of the European Parliament has been steadily increasing. In short, even taking into account the background trends in turnout in national elections and in attitudes to integration in the 15 member states, one must conclude that the European Parliament faces a substantial problem in its relationship with its electorate.

THE LESSONS FROM 1994 AND 1999

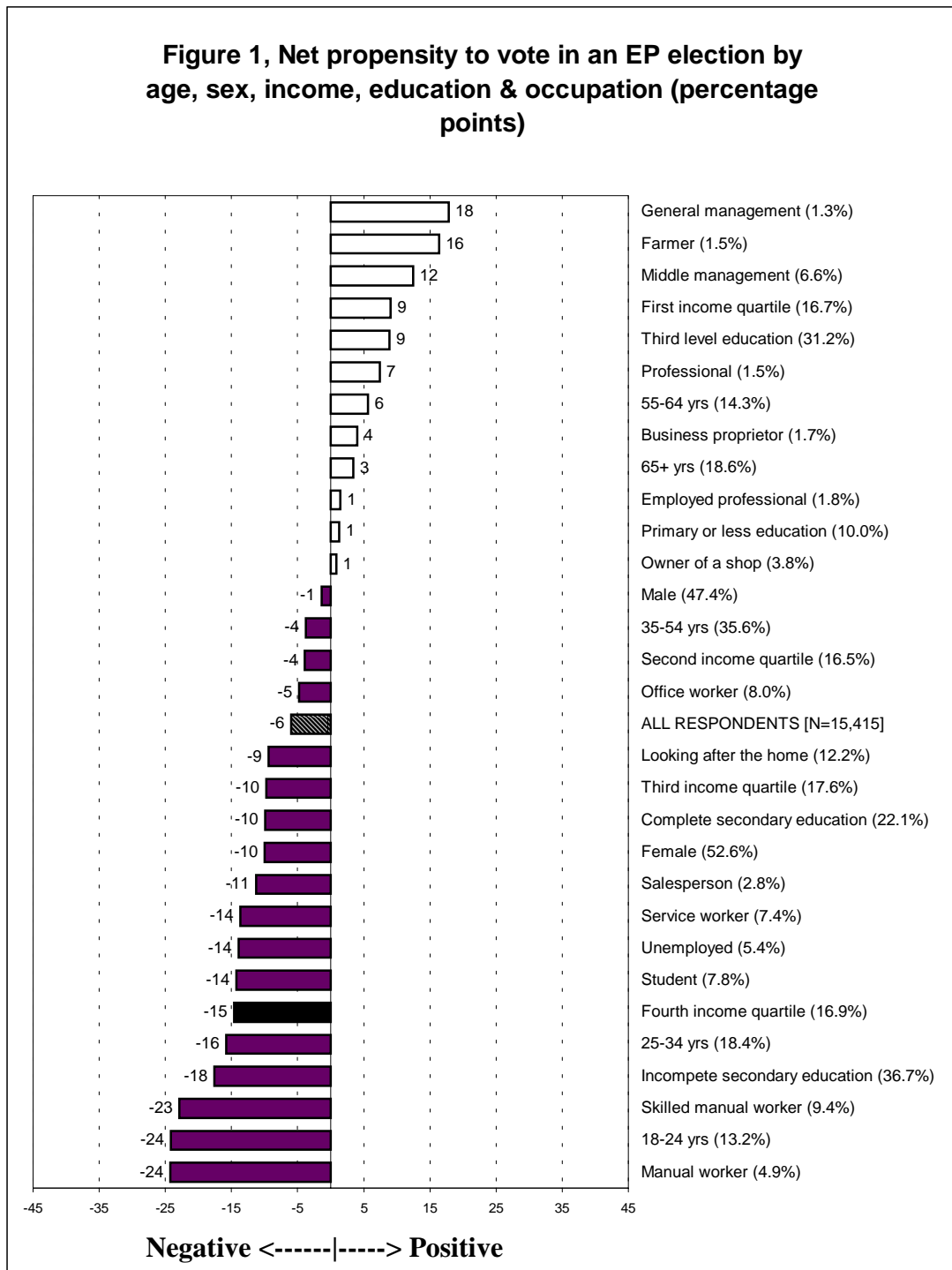
Research on the European Parliament elections of 1994 and 1999 showed that turnout/abstention in European Parliament elections is related to a combination of institutional, socio-demographic and attitudinal factors (Blondel, Sinnott and Svensson, 1998 and 2001).¹ Leaving aside the question of compulsory voting, the main institutional factors affecting turnout are the day of voting, the month of voting, holding sub-national elections on the same day as EP elections and the nature of the electoral system. The main socio-demographic factors are age, occupation and education. The research also showed that national political attitudes and predispositions (e.g., having a sense of party attachment) have an effect on turnout. Of most significance in the present context, however, it is the fact that the research also showed that attitudes to European integration and the extent of an individual's sense of involvement in the European integration process are associated with a tendency to turn out to vote in European Parliament elections. Similarly, it showed that perceptions of the reliability of the European Parliament, perceptions that it matters which parties and which candidates gain or lose seats in the election, and active exposure to the EP elections campaign lead to increased turnout. The important lesson in all of this is that the level of turnout in European Parliament elections is, to a significant extent, affected by factors that are at least partially amenable to intervention by the Parliament and by MEPs.

THE EVIDENCE FROM EUROBAROMETER 57

The questionnaire for EB 57 (spring 2002) included a number of specially designed questions inserted on behalf of the European Parliament. These included a series of questions on citizens' probability to vote (on a scale of 1 to 10) and also new measures of citizens' attitude to the Parliament and of their experience of contact and communication with the Parliament and with MEPs. In combination with the standard set of questions asked in Eurobarometer 57, these items enable us to examine

¹ Blondel J., Sinnott R. & Svensson P.: "The sources of declining turnout in European Parliament elections: a preliminary analysis of the survey research evidence." Draft paper presented at the first meeting of Fifth Framework Programme project 'Democratic Participation and Political Communication in Systems of Multi-level Governance', Dublin, 18-21 May, 2000.

in some detail the determinants of the propensity to turn out or to abstain in European Parliament elections (see Figures 1 to 5).



Source: Eurobarometer 57.1, Spring 2002. Only eligible voters aged 18 years or more were used for analysis (N=15,415).

Demographics

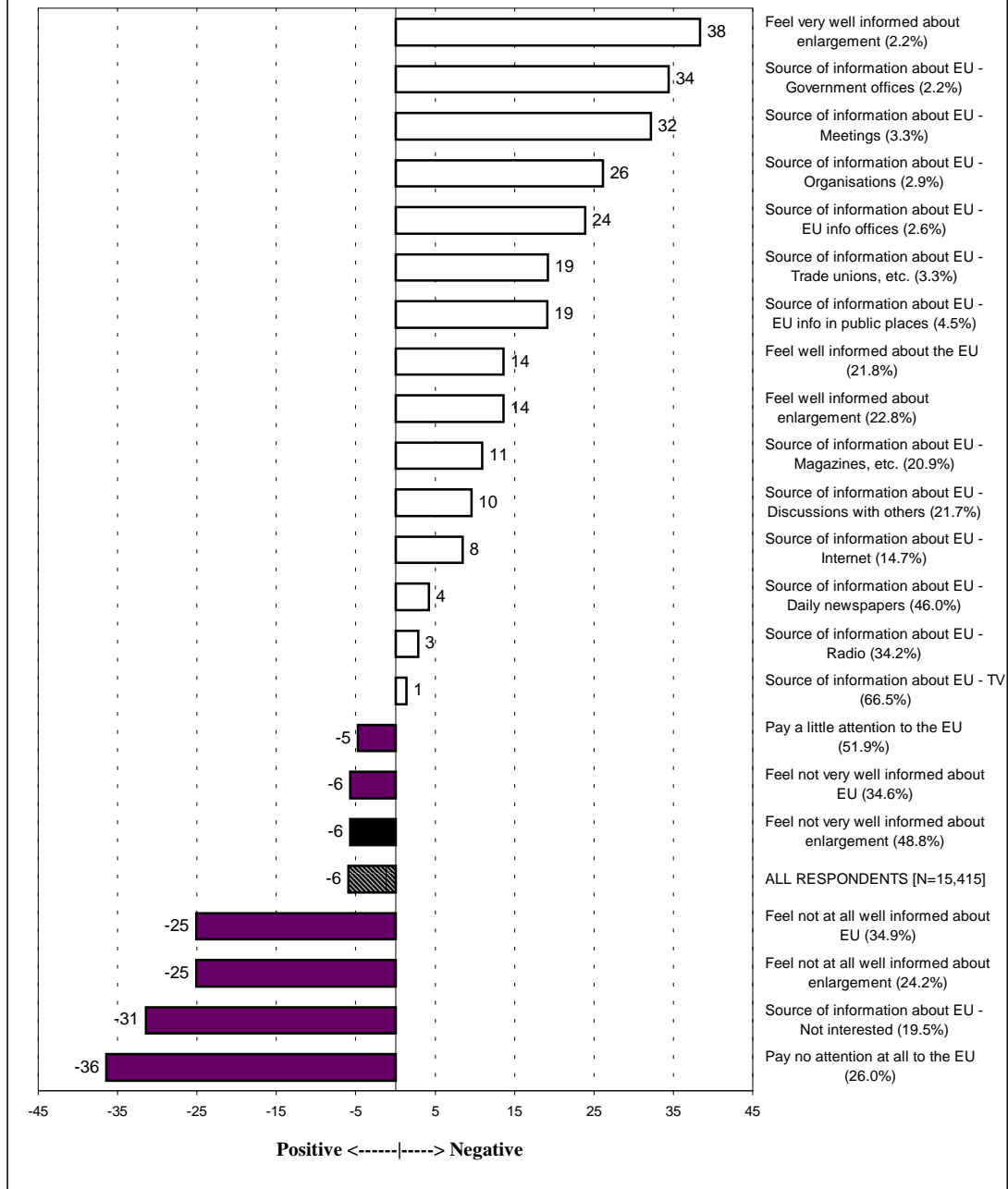
Figure 1 shows that the European Parliament's problem with turnout is partly due to the fact that the demographic groups with the highest net propensity to turn out to vote² in European Parliament elections tend to be small. The highest net positive propensity to vote in European Parliament elections is found among general management, among farmers and among middle management. Somewhat lower but still positive net propensities to turn out are found among those in the highest income quartile, those with third level of education, those in professional occupations and those aged 55-64 or 65 plus. On the other end of the scale, the socio-demographic groups with a substantial net negative propensity to vote in European Parliament elections are much larger. They include manual workers (skilled and unskilled), young people (both those aged 18 to 24 and those aged 25-34) and people with incomplete secondary education. To put it bluntly, the people most likely to turn out to vote in European Parliament elections are older people drawn from an educational and social elite; the people least likely to do so are manual workers, the less well-educated and the young.

Information and communication relating to the EU

Figure 2 shows the net propensity to vote in an EP election broken down by the kind of orientation people have to EU information and EU communication. As occurred in the case of the breakdown of propensity to vote by demographic characteristics, those with very high net propensities to vote in EP elections tend to be few in number, i.e. those who feel very well informed or who resort to specialised sources for their information (e.g., government offices, meetings, EU information offices, trade unions etc.). Again, as with the demographic correlates of propensity to vote, the groups with a high negative propensity to vote are all very substantial in size - varying from one-fifth to one-third of the citizens. These groups are characterised by low levels of attention to the European Union, low levels of interest in information about the EU and low levels of confidence in their knowledge of the EU and of enlargement.

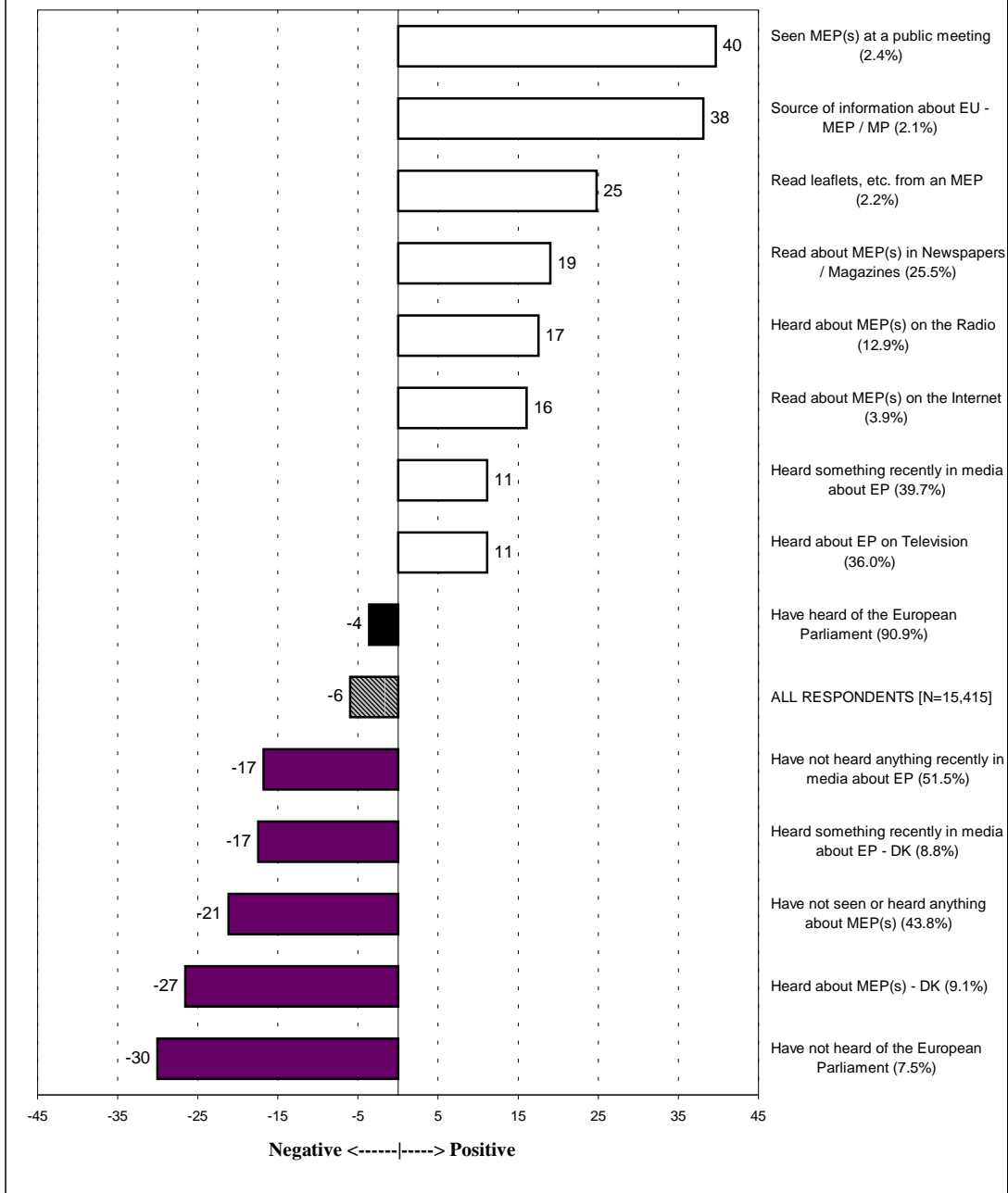
² Net propensity to turn out to vote in European Parliament elections is measured as follows; [(options 9 + 10) – (options 1 to 8) * (1 – (Don't know / 100))]. This procedure ensures that the net figure receives a lower weight if the share of respondents who picked the don't know option was large.

Figure 2, Net propensity to vote in an EP election by orientations to EU information and communication channels (percentage points)



Source: Eurobarometer 57.1, Spring 2002. Only eligible voters aged 18 years or more were used for analysis (N=15,415).

Figure 3, Net propensity to vote in an EP election by orientation to EP information and communication channels (percentage points)



Source: Eurobarometer 57.1, Spring 2002. Only eligible voters aged 18 years or more were used for analysis (N=15,415).

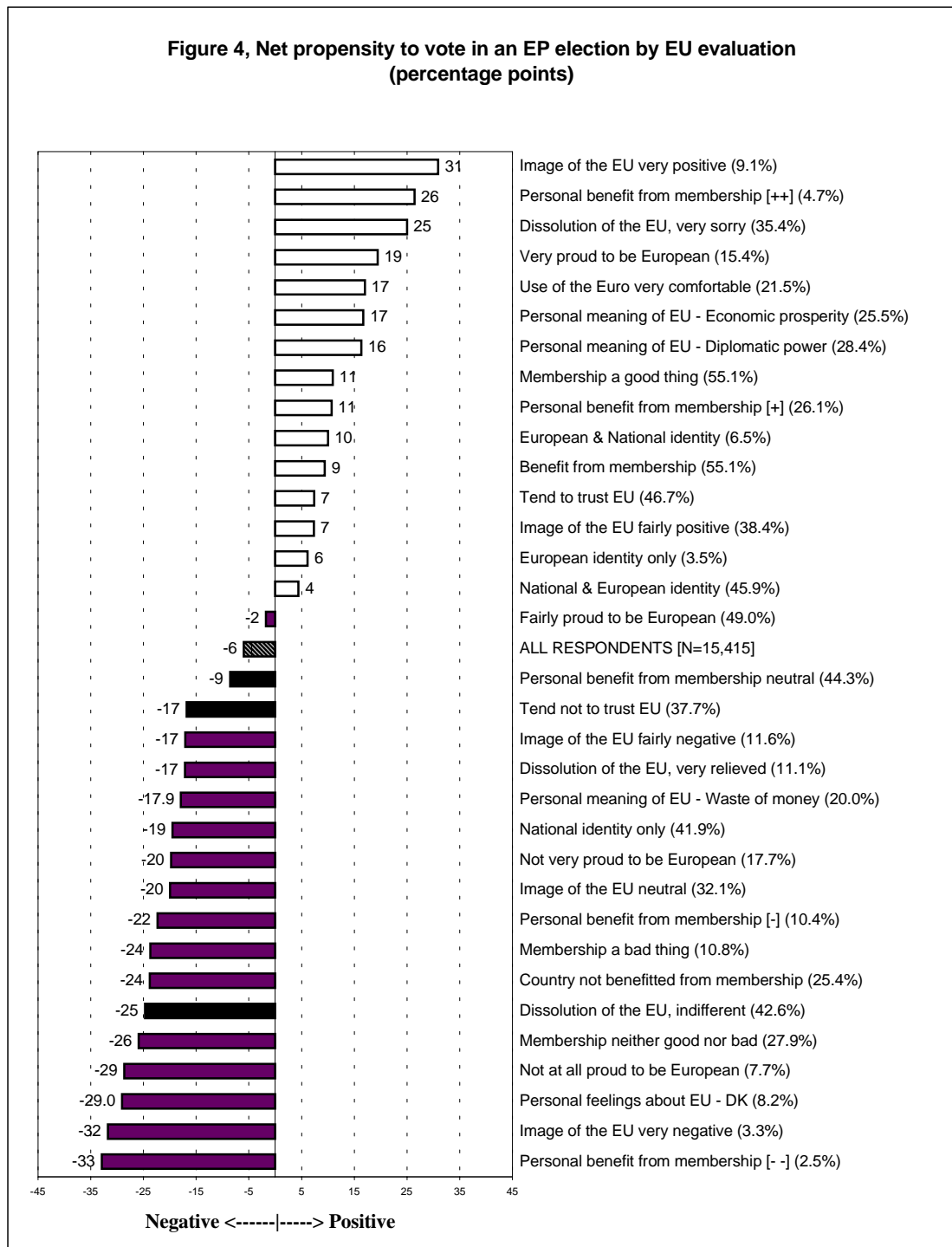
Information and communication relating to the EP

Figure 3 presents the evidence from EB57 on how propensity to turn out to vote in European Parliament elections is related to people's experience of and orientation to communication from the European Parliament and MEPs. Direct contact with an MEP is associated with very high propensities to vote. This kind of contact, however, is limited to very small groups of people, each group constituting no more than between 2 and 3 per cent of the citizens. However, there are additional and larger groups of citizens who have had indirect contact with MEPs (through newspapers / magazines, hearing about MEPs on the radio or through getting information about MEPs on the internet) and who have a moderately positive net propensity to vote. On the other hand, merely seeing MEPs on television and recalling having heard something recently about the European Parliament in the media are associated with only minimally positive propensities to vote. Finally, not having heard anything about the European Parliament as a whole or not having seen or heard anything about any MEPs are both associated with quite high negative net propensities to vote. In sum, the evidence in Figure 3 shows a substantial association between being in receipt of information and communication from the EP, in particular being in receipt of information directly or indirectly through MEPs, and positive net propensity to vote in European Parliament elections.

Attitudes to the European Union

Figure 4 shows that strongly positive attitudes to the European Union or European integration are associated with a high propensity to vote in European Parliament elections. In this case, the proportions involved are not necessarily small. For example, 35 per cent of the EU citizens would be very sorry if the EU were dissolved; such people have a net propensity to vote in European Parliament elections of plus 25 percentage points. Figure 4 also shows that the main correlates of net negative propensity to vote in European Parliament elections are indicators of indifference to the EU rather than indicators of opposition to integration. Thus, net propensities to turn out to vote of minus 20 to 25 points are found among the quite substantial groups of citizens who believe that their country's membership of the EU is neither good nor bad, who would be indifferent to the dissolution of the EU or who have a neutral image of the EU. Of course, outright opposition to European integration is also

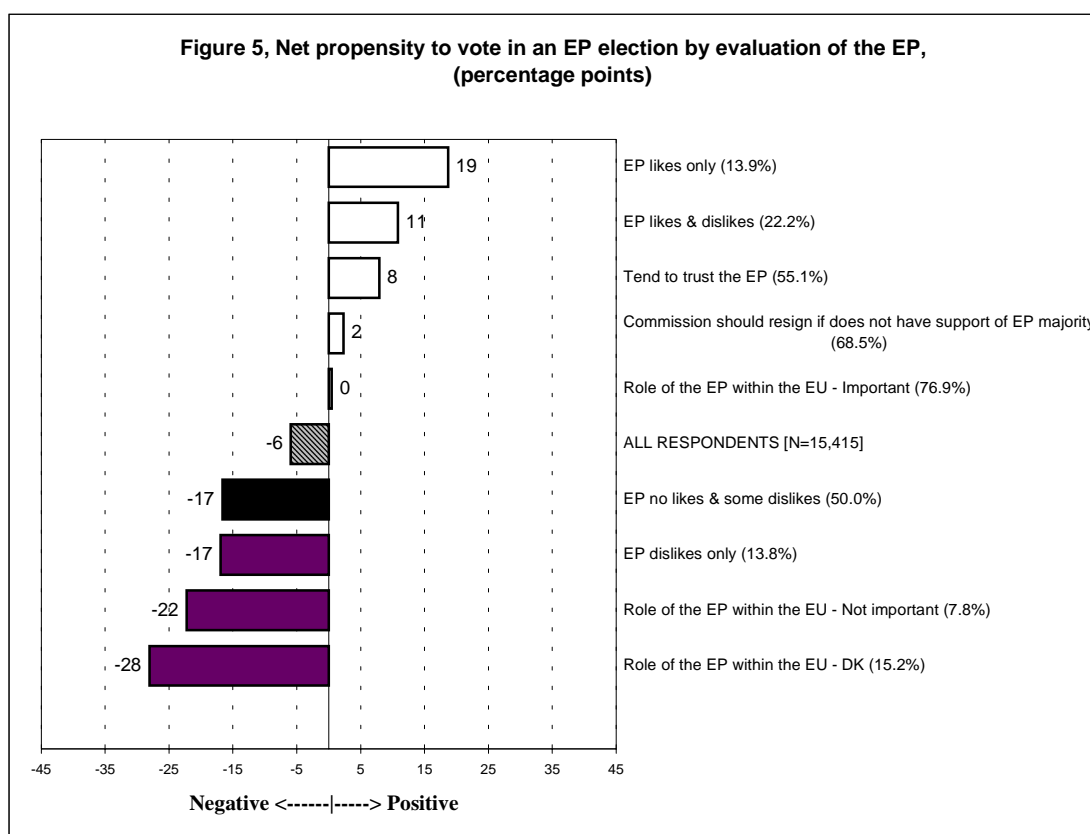
associated with net negative propensity to turn out to vote but the groups involved are considerably smaller.



Source: Eurobarometer 57.1, Spring 2002. Only eligible voters aged 18 years or more were used for analysis (N=15,415).

ATTITUDES TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

As indicated by the limited number of items in Figure 5, the Eurobarometer tends to have relatively few questions dealing with evaluations of the European Parliament. Despite this limitation, the data in Figure 5 provide valuable indications as to the kinds of attitudes to the Parliament that are associated with propensity to vote in European Parliament elections. On the positive side, citizens who have a purely positive image of the European Parliament³ have a moderately positive net propensity to vote in European Parliament elections. Those whose image of the European Parliament includes both positive and negative aspects also have a positive net propensity to vote (of about 10 percentage points). The only other variable to make any difference on the positive side is the tendency to trust the European Parliament but this relationship is rather weak.



Source: Eurobarometer 57.1, Spring 2002. Only eligible voters aged 18 years or more were used for analysis (N=15,415).

³ A positive-only image is held by people who can identify things that they like about the European Parliament but nothing that they dislike (EB 57, questions 48 & 49).

Note that a long-standing Eurobarometer indicator of attitude to the European Parliament (assessment of the importance of the role of the Parliament) bears very little relationship to respondents' propensity to vote. This means that the positive responses to this question, which are very widespread (77 per cent in EB 57), are of little or no value as an indicator of whether people are likely to turn out to vote or are likely to abstain. Similarly endorsement of the view that the President of the European Commission and the European Commissioners ought to resign if they do not have the support of a majority in the European Parliament bears little or no relationship to the likelihood of people voting in a European Parliament election.

Relationships between attitudes to the European Parliament and propensity to vote in European Parliament elections tend to be more obvious on the negative side of the propensity to vote scale. Those who have no image of the European Parliament (no likes and no dislikes) have a negative net propensity to vote in European Parliament elections of minus 17 percentage points. The implications of this finding are magnified by the fact that this lack of image of the European Parliament is found among 50 per cent of respondents. Other groups on the negative side of the scale are substantially smaller but all have moderate to strong propensities to abstain in European Parliament elections (see Figure 5).

A CLASSIFICATION OF THE FACTORS AFFECTING TURNOUT IN EP ELECTIONS

The data presented in Figures 1 to 5 point to a wide range of variables that are correlated or associated with propensity to vote or to abstain in European Parliament elections. However, major difficulties in interpreting these findings remain. These difficulties apply to working out the meaning and policy implications of individual findings such as the association between age and turnout or between occupation and turnout. More generally, there is the problem posed by the proliferation of particular factors affecting turnout that makes it very difficult to identify general determinants and overall patterns and, consequently, that makes it difficult to devise appropriate policy responses. What is needed, especially from a policy point of view, is a classification or typology of the influences on turnout that would enable us to identify the underlying processes involved. This would make it possible to take the vital next step, which would be to consider how one might intervene in these processes so as to increase turnout.

The kind of classification or typology required can be developed on the basis of two simple distinctions. The first distinction is that between facilitating turnout and mobilising turnout. Facilitation refers to any process that makes voting easier. Mobilisation is any process that provides incentives to vote. The second essential distinction is based on the recognition that the processes of facilitation and mobilisation operate both at the level of institutions and organisations and at the level of individuals. Cross classifying the two distinctions leads to the typology of influences on turnout/abstention displayed in Figure 6.

Institutional facilitation consists of two sets of variables that are not usually put in the same box. The first is the set of practical *administrative* arrangements that govern the way in which the election is conducted (e.g., the presence or absence of compulsory voting, the month in which the election takes place, whether polling takes place on a weekday or at the weekend, the hours of polling, the accessibility of polling stations, the availability of postal voting etc.). There is an obvious sense in which factors such as these can be said to facilitate voting. But there is a second set of institutional processes that also facilitate voter participation by increasing citizens' capacity to deal with political issues and by increasing their level of political knowledge. This can be thought of as a process of cognitive facilitation. It includes neutral information campaigns related to the election or to the institution in question (in this case the EP); it also includes the extent and quality of media coverage of electoral politics and election campaigns, the availability of free television air-time for party broadcasts, the occurrence of televised debates related to the election, the availability of adequate resources for mounting election campaigns etc. Given the remoteness of the European Union and of the European Parliament from the day-to-day concerns of many people, cognitive facilitation variables of this kind are particularly important in the context of European Parliament elections.

Institutional mobilisation has long-term and short-term aspects. In the long term, the characteristics and the role of the elected body – in this case the characteristics and the role of the European Parliament – lead to stronger or weaker incentives to vote. These characteristics include the degree of concentration of power in the elected body, the scope of its policy competence, its relationships with other institutions of governance, the nature of the electoral system etc. The short-term aspects of

institutional mobilisation include above all the campaigns by the parties and the candidates, but they also include partisan media coverage and non-partisan campaigns urging higher turnout.

Individual facilitation refers to the attributes of the individual that make voting easier or more difficult. These attributes include practical matters such as, for example, disposable time, residential stability, proximity to the polling station, etc. However, they also include politically relevant resources and capacities such as the individual's level of education, level of media consumption, political knowledge (in this case of the EU and the EP) and sense of political competence.

Individual mobilization comprises the attributes of individuals that provide incentives to vote. These include attitudes to politics as such, for example, prior political interest, issue preferences and party identification. However, as the study of the 1994 European Parliament election showed, individual mobilisation variables also include people's attitudes for or against European integration as well their European party and candidate differentials (i.e. believing that it matters which parties or candidates win more or fewer seats in a European Parliament election).

The advantages of this fourfold classification of the variables affecting turnout can be illustrated by considering a number of examples. We know that turnout is strongly related to age. The problem is that it is not immediately apparent what this means or what the implications are. The typology in Figure 6 helps to clarify the issue by bringing out the fact that the relationship between age and turnout can be a matter of facilitation or a matter of mobilisation and can indeed reflect different processes of facilitation and different processes of mobilisation. Thus, the typology suggests that the relationship between age and turnout can reflect different aspects of the process of facilitation - the relationship being due to practical considerations such as residential mobility / stability or due to cognitive factors, older people having learned by experience about how political institutions at the national or supranational level function. Alternatively, the typology suggests that the relationship between turnout and age can be due to a different form of political learning, i.e. learning to have partisan preferences and a party identification, in short, becoming politically mobilised. Finally, according to Figure 6, the relationship between age and turnout

can reflect a process of generational mobilisation or demobilisation in which different generations acquire habits of political participation or non-participation in early adulthood and carry those habits forward into later life.

A second example of the value of the typology is the manner in which it brings out the different ways in which occupation can be related to turnout – occupation can act as a resource that facilitates discussion of politics and of issues in the election; on the other hand it can be an indicator of the presence or absence of an occupation-related time constraint that makes voting more difficult or easier in practical terms. Finally, occupation may be a mobilizing or de-mobilising factor in so far as it gives a person a stake in the political process at national or at supranational level.

On the institutional side of things, the typology helps to clarify the differences between various forms of communication and how these are related to one another. Thus, there are fundamental differences between efforts to increase the facility or capacity with which citizens approach elections and efforts to persuade citizens to act in a certain way (i.e. to turn out to vote or to vote this way or that). The crucial point is that the success of the latter (that is of mobilizing efforts) is heavily dependent on the success of the former (that is, especially, on the success of cognitive facilitation). If people have no image whatsoever of the European Parliament, it is a very difficult to persuade them to turn out to vote in a European Parliament election or to prefer this or that party or this or that candidate⁴. Contrariwise, increasing people's knowledge and understanding of EU institutions and of the European Parliament makes it much more likely that they will notice and respond to appeals to turn out to vote or appeals to support particular parties or candidates.

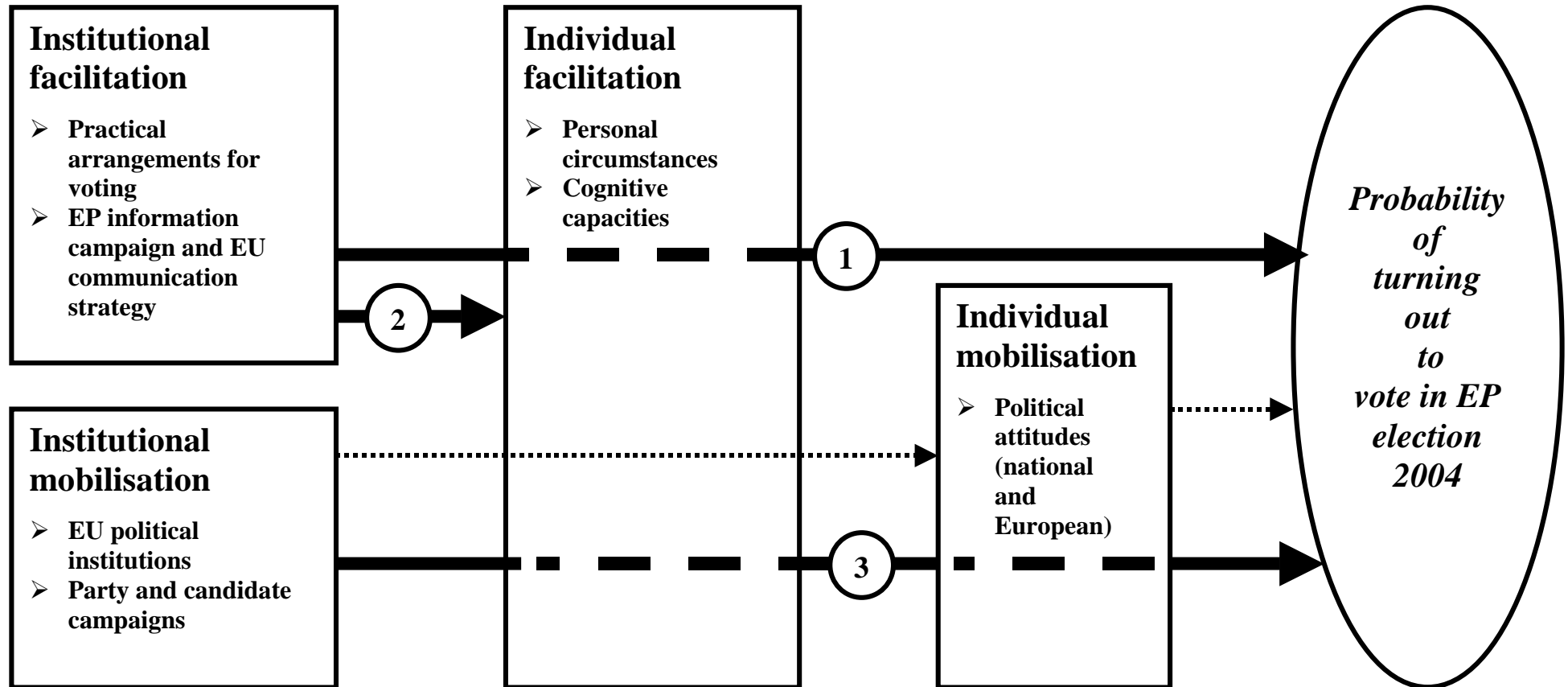
In sum, the classification of the variables affecting turnout in European Parliament elections in Figure 6 provides a useful way of thinking about the individual variables affecting turnout and the connections between them. The next section of this paper seeks to spell out these connections in a more systematic way.

⁴ Other than invoking their pre-existing national political attitudes and preferences.

Figure 6: A typology of the variables affecting voter turnout in EP elections

<i>Nature of the effect</i>	<i>Location of the variable</i>	
	<u>Institutional</u>	<u>Individual</u>
<u>Facilitation</u>	<p>Institutional facilitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ease of voter registration • Month of voting • Day of voting • Hours of polling • Density of polling stations • Ease of postal voting • Funding of campaigns • Extent of media coverage of the EU/EP and of the election campaign • Civic education in schools • Information campaign aimed at raising the level of understanding of the EU, the EP and the elections 	<p>Individual facilitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age as indicator of residential mobility/stability • Age as indicator of political learning (civic) • Occupation as time constraint • Occupation as resource • Income as resource • Level of education • Social integration as communication network • Media consumption and focus of media attention • Knowledge of EU/EP • Access to polling station • Political efficacy (internal)
<u>Mobilisation</u>	<p>Institutional mobilisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Power of EP • Scope of policy competence of EP • Electoral system for EP elections • Concomitant elections • Electoral cycle • Party manifestos • Party campaigns • Candidate campaigns • Partisan media coverage • Non-partisan campaigns designed to raise turnout 	<p>Individual mobilisation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceptions of power of EP • Perceptions of scope of policy competence of EP • Age as indicator of political learning (partisan) • Age as indicator of generational demobilisation • Social integration as mobilisation • Occupation as stake in election • Sense of civic duty • Support for European integration • Attitudes to EP • Party attachment • Issue salience/preference • Euro-party differentials • Euro-candidate differentials • Campaign exposure (active) • Political efficacy (external)

Figure 7: Main influences on voter turnout in EP election, 2004



Summary of main influences on voter turnout in EP elections 2004 (numbered arrows):

- 1 = Administrative arrangements for the election facilitate (or fail to facilitate) voting (effects depend on age, occupation, etc.)
- 2 = Information campaigns and communication strategies increase (or fail to increase) the facility and the cognitive capacity with which citizens approach the election and the issues and choices it poses
- 3 = Election campaigns mobilise (or fail to mobilise) citizens by appealing to underlying attitudes and loyalties and by providing choices between policies and candidates (effects vary depending on the cognitive capacity with which citizens approach the election (see arrow 2) and depending on their prior political attitudes (national and European).

CONNECTIONS AND AREAS OF INTERVENTION

The connections between the four types of variables and turnout are summarised in Figure 7. The three numbered arrows represent the main causal connections to or influences on turnout that are relevant to the process of preparing for the 2004 election. Focusing on these three connections and taking into account the empirical evidence presented in Figures 1 to 5, we can now look at the kinds of intervention that are most likely to make a difference to the level of turnout in the 2004 European Parliament election.

1. Administrative facilitation (arrow 1 in Figure 7)

Research has shown that a substantial amount of abstention in elections is due to the circumstances in which individuals find themselves around the time or on the day of the election. This “circumstantial abstention” can be reduced by practical measures to facilitate the act of going to the polls to cast a vote. Accordingly, the European Parliament should immediately approach the appropriate authorities in the member-states with a view to encouraging them to do all they can to facilitate voting in the election of 2004. In an ideal world, and probably beyond the realm of practicality, polling in the next European Parliament election in each member state would be spread over two days, as was indeed discussed in the Anastassopoulos Report.⁵ The preferred polling days in such a scheme would be Sunday and Monday to take account of existing preferences for Sunday versus weekday voting in the various member states and to facilitate both types of voters - those for whom Sunday is inconvenient or unacceptable and those for whom weekday voting poses practical problems. Also in an ideal world, though perhaps a bit more within the realm of the practicable, is the proposal to move the election from June to an earlier date (this issue was also raised in the Anastassopoulos Report). Finally, and in very practicable terms, the initiative taken by the European Parliament should encourage the national electoral management bodies to make sure that the voter registration lists in all Member States are as up-to-date as possible, that the hours of opening of polling stations are as long as possible, that the option of postal voting is as widely available and as simple as possible and that information about these and all other practical aspects of the election be as widely disseminated as possible.

⁵ A4-0212/98.

Main targets of administrative facilitation: Administrative facilitation measures are potentially relevant to all citizens and particularly so in the context of European Parliament elections where the low salience of the issues and the low level of mobilization need to be counterbalanced by ease of access to the voting process. However, the administrative measures in question are likely to have a particular effect on turnout among young people and among those whose occupation or other commitments make voting within a very constricted time period difficult. Accordingly, the specific target groups for this intervention include working women, young people, skilled and unskilled manual workers and those on lower incomes in weekday voting countries, and students. Drawing on the demographic data presented in Figure 1 above, Table 1 lists these main target groups in order of their size as a proportion of the European electorate and also indicates the extent of their net propensity to vote.

**Table 1: Administrative facilitation targets in order of size
(as proportion of the electorate)**

Target groups	Net propensity to vote in EP election	% of the Electorate
Women	-10.0	52.6
Persons aged 25-34 years	-15.8	18.4
Fourth income quartile	-14.6	16.9
Persons aged 18-24 years	-24.2	13.2
Skilled manual workers	-22.9	9.4
Students	-14.3	7.8

2. Cognitive facilitation (arrow 2 in Figure 7)

The European Union, the European Parliament and EP elections are remote from very many people. Accordingly it is necessary to facilitate participation in European electoral politics by such people by improving their understanding of the basic institutions of the Union and of the importance of the European Parliament and by providing them with a way of relating the issues that concern them to the representative political process at European level. This is where the European Parliament's neutral information campaign for the EP elections comes into play. The purpose of this campaign must be not just to convey facts about the Union and about

the Parliament but to increase people's capacity to receive and respond to the political messages and signals emanating from the Parliament and to relate these to their own situation and interests. In this context, the overall communication strategy of the European Commission is also extremely relevant. Becoming a voter depends on learning about politics and the evidence suggests that much of this learning takes place in adulthood rather than in school. Learning about European Union politics is more difficult than learning about national politics. An effective European Parliament and EU communication strategy can accelerate the learning process and, in this way, substantially increase turnout in the election.

Main targets of cognitive facilitation: The targets of cognitive facilitation measures include both demographic groups and groups defined in terms of their level of attention to or knowledge of the European Parliament and the European Union (see Table 2).

Table 2: Cognitive facilitation targets in order of size (as proportion of the electorate)

Target groups	Net propensity to vote in EP election	% of the Electorate
Not heard/seen anything recently in media about EP	-16.8	51.5
EP no likes & no dislikes	-16.6	50.0
Not seen or heard anything about MEP(s)	-21.1	43.8
Incomplete secondary education	-17.6	36.7
Feel not at all well informed about EU	-25.1	34.9
Pay no attention at all to the EU	-36.4	26.0
Source of information about EU - Not interested	-31.4	19.5
Persons aged 25-34 years	-15.8	18.4
Persons aged 18-24 years	-24.2	13.2
Persons looking after the home	-9.4	12.2

The three largest target groups consist of people who have no image of the European Parliament or who have no sense of being in communication with the Parliament or with an MEP or MEPs. As of spring 2002, exactly half the European electors had not heard or seen anything recently in the media about the European Parliament and, more fundamentally, had no affective image of the European Parliament in the sense they were unable to specify anything they like about the European Parliament or anything that they dislike about it. Following closely behind these two groups as major targets for the EP's information campaign are the 44 per cent who have not seen or heard

anything about any MEP since the last European Parliament election. The evidence suggests that communication efforts must also be directed at the smaller but still substantial groups who pay no attention to EU affairs and do not feel informed about them - these groups have a particularly high negative net propensity to vote in European Parliament elections. Finally, the socio-demographic evidence suggests that these communication or cognitive facilitation measures should be directed in particular at three key demographic groups - those with only incomplete secondary education, those aged under 25 and those aged 25-34.

3. Political mobilisation (arrow 3 in Figure 7)

In the case of European Parliament elections, there are in fact two bases on which people can be *mobilised* to vote. The first is by addressing their underlying attitudes to European integration and to the European Union. The second is by presenting them with meaningful choices between parties and candidates and by appealing to their partisan and candidate preferences.

Main targets of political mobilization: The first target of a campaign to mobilise participation in European Parliament elections must be the substantial sections of the European electorate that have positive attitudes to European integration. Such individuals show a significantly greater propensity to vote in European Parliament elections and the challenge is to ensure that this propensity is carried forward into actual behaviour. Given their underlying positive attitudes, an important aspect of mobilizing them to vote will be to encourage them to think of voting in the European Parliament election as a way of expressing their support for integration and to remind them of this in the weeks immediately preceding the election.

As noted in the discussion of Figure 4 above, attitudes of indifference to European integration and a lack of any real consciousness of the European Parliament are or also quite widespread and, in some cases, more widespread than the corresponding positive attitude. These indifferent citizens are an especially important target in any campaign, the aim being to convert them from indifference to positive attitudes (always an easier task than conversion from negative to positive attitudes), thus increasing their propensity to turn out to vote.

On the other end of the spectrum, the levels of outright opposition to integration or of outright negative attitude to the European Parliament are quite low. In particular, such groups are much smaller than the proportion who feel indifferent to

integration or to the European Parliament. Needless to say, those who are opposed to European integration or have entirely negative views about the European Parliament are also an essential target in any campaign designed to mobilise participation in a European Parliament election. In this case, the aim would be to persuade them to take a more positive attitude to integration or, failing that, to mobilise them to express their views through parties or candidates that represent their reservations about or opposition to current integration developments and policies.

In considering the foregoing targets of a political mobilisation campaign, it is worth noting that, according to Eurobarometer evidence, support, and in particular, enthusiasm for the Union were much higher and indifference to the Union was much lower around the time of the 1989 European Parliament election than it is now (see Figure 8). It is surely not insignificant that turnout in the 1989 election was some 10 percentage points higher than turnout in the 1999 election. The challenge for European elites in 2004 is to recreate the level of support and especially the level of enthusiasm for integration that characterised the late 1980s and very early 1990s.

The second type of campaign mobilisation in European Parliament elections consists of course of the partisan campaigning efforts of the parties, groups and individuals contesting the election. We know from the 1994 and 1999 European Parliament elections that having a European party differential, that is believing that it matters which parties win seats in the European Parliament election, has a positive effect on turnout. In 1994, citizens who had a highly developed sense of how much difference it makes which parties win seats were much more likely to turn out to vote than citizens with a fairly low or very low European party differential.

Accordingly, in pinpointing the targets of a campaign of political mobilization, Table 3 includes evidence from the study of the 1994 European Parliament election that clearly illustrates the importance of generating a sense that it matters which parties win seats in the European Parliament. We also know that, despite the relatively minor role that individual candidates play in European Parliament elections under the electoral systems operative in many of the member-states, candidate differentials, that is believing that it matters which candidates win or lose seats in a European Parliament election, increases people's propensity to vote.

Figure 8: Attitudes to the European Union on three Eurobarometer indicators (unification, membership and dissolution) in all member states, 1973-2002

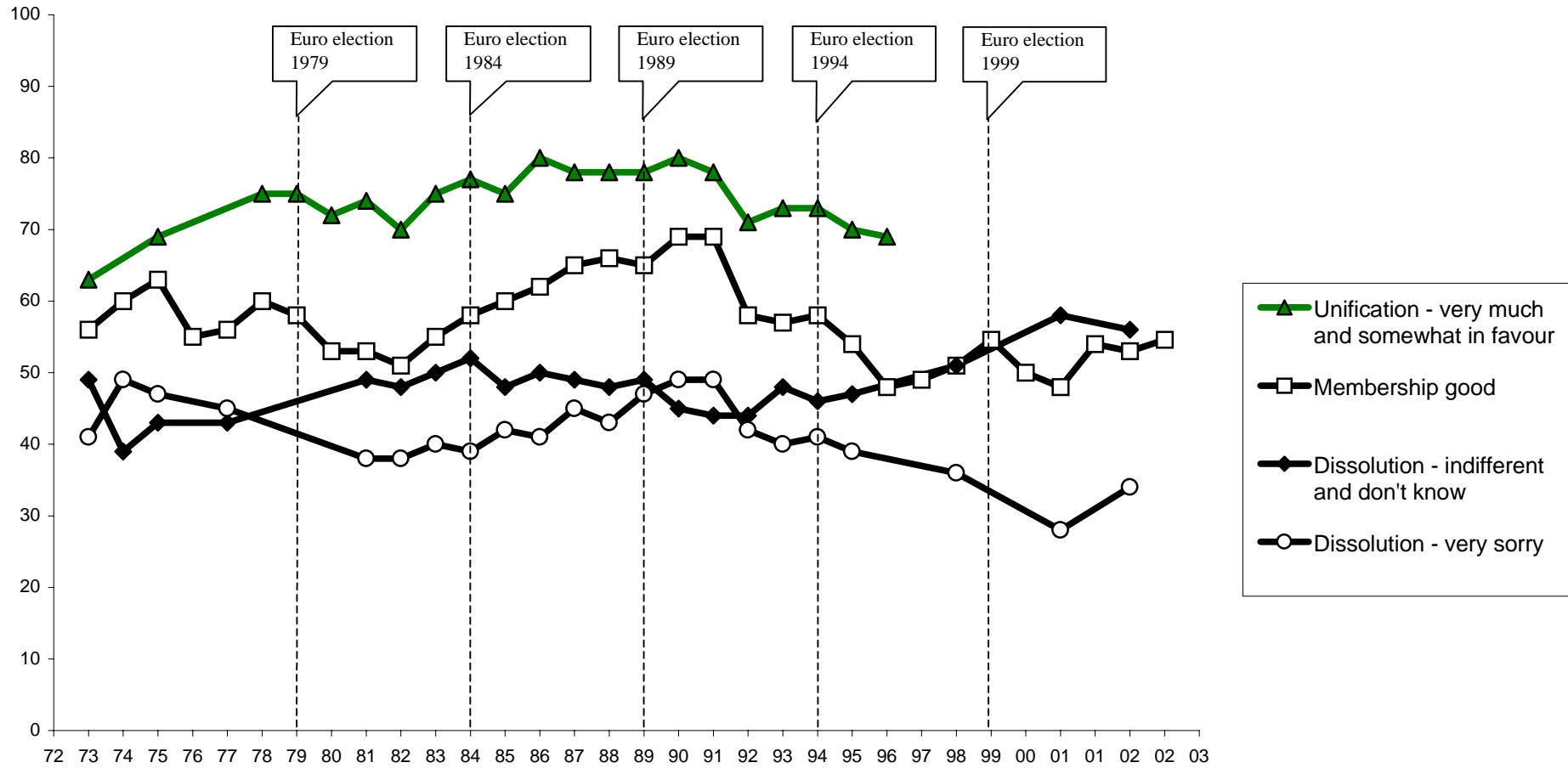


Table 3: Campaign mobilisation targets

Target groups	Net propensity to vote	% of the Electorate
Positive attitudes to European integration and the EP		
Membership a good thing	+11.2	55.1
Dissolution of the EU very sorry	+25.3	35.4
EP likes and dislikes	+11.1	22.8
Indifference to European integration and the EP		
EP no likes & no dislikes	-16.6	50.0
Dissolution of the EU, indifferent	-24.7	42.6
Membership neither good nor bad	-25.9	27.9
Negative attitudes to European integration and EP		
EP dislikes only	-16.9	13.8
Dissolution of the EU - very relieved	-17.2	11.1
Membership a bad thing	-23.7	10.8
European party-related attitudes		
Very high European party differential	78.2*	25.2
Fairly high European party differential	73.4*	39.3
Fairly low European party differential	64.2*	21.1
Very low European party differential/don't know	48.8*	14.3

* These percentages refer to proportions at each level of party differential who report having voted in the 1994 European Parliament election (non-compulsory voting countries only) - source EB41.1

Finally, in terms of the political campaign, we know that getting the citizens actively rather than merely passively involved in the campaign increases the probability that they will turn out to vote. Active involvement here refers to either reading about the campaign or discussing the campaign or doing both these things, as opposed to simply watching it on television or seeing leaflets or advertisements etc. relating to it.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS FOR COGNITIVE FACILITATION AND POLITICAL MOBILISATION

Cognitive facilitation and political mobilisation require effective use of appropriate channels of communication. The available channels vary significantly in terms of their penetration of the European electorate. Specifically as sources of information about the European Union, the prevailing channels of communication elicit a response varying from two-thirds in the case of television to just under one-sixth in the case of the internet. At the lower end of the scale one finds interpersonal discussions and use

of magazines (one-fifth penetration in each case) and, halfway along the scale, newspapers (46 per cent) and radio (34 per cent).

Table 4: EU-related communication channels

Channels	Net propensity to vote	% of the Electorate
Source of information about EU - TV	+1.4	66.5
Source of information about EU - Daily newspapers	+4.2	46.0
Source of information about EU - Radio	+2.8	34.2
Source of information about EU – Discussions with others	+9.6	21.7
Source of information about EU - Magazines, etc.	+10.9	20.9
Source of information about EU - Internet	+8.5	14.7

The problem is that these communication channels also vary in their capacity to influence behaviour. Thus, the mass media, while they have a wider reach, have less effect on propensity to vote (see Table 4). In contrast, the three more specialised channels of communication (discussions, magazines and the internet) are associated with significantly higher propensities to vote. The task, therefore, is twofold - to stimulate greater use of the more specialised channels of communication and to sharpen the focus of EU information in the channels of communication with more widespread uptake.

In relation to the specialised channels of communication, it is unlikely that any European Parliament campaign will get people to change their reading habits. On the other hand, efforts can be made to increase the presence of material relating to the European Parliament in magazines and other specialised media. It may also be possible to increase the rate of discussion of issues related to the European Parliament election in the interpersonal networks to which people belong. Such discussion has a potential multiplier effect in spreading and reinforcing the message. In order to bring this about, it is necessary to work through the networks and associations that people are involved in. Among the many such networks, those that are related to the educational system may be particularly important since material disseminated through schools may spill over into the family environment.

In addition to existing programmes in this area, the European Parliament might consider encouraging the organisation of mock European Parliament elections in second-level schools in the period immediately preceding the 2004 elections. This

would mobilise both students and their families to discuss European issues and, as we know, such discussion is likely to be related to voter participation both in the case of the students of eligible age and in the case of other people drawn into the discussion of European issues by this means. Still focusing on the educational network, a campaign of information and encouragement to vote directed at university students and channelled through university networks (for example, student branches of the European Movement or the European Commission's network of Jean Monnet professors and programmes) could also pay substantial dividends in so far as such a campaign would reach a very specific target group (the general body of students) that has a significantly lower than average propensity to vote in a European Parliament election.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The first implication of this analysis is that the factors that affect turnout in European Parliament elections can be identified. The second implication is that this identification can only lead to sensible policy recommendations if the empirical findings are considered within an appropriate analytical framework. Accordingly, this paper has presented an analytical framework that is designed to a wide range of empirical findings and to enable all recommendations to be assessed and prioritised. The framework is based on the distinction between facilitating and mobilizing participation and on the recognition that both these processes operate at an institutional and at an individual level.

Probably the most important implication of the evidence considered and of the framework presented is that the European Parliament's information campaign and the political campaigns by the parties and candidates interact with each other. Specifically, the success of the political campaign is dependent on the success of the information campaign, i.e. it depends on the effectiveness of the information campaign in increasing the facility and cognitive capacity with which voters receive and respond to European political messages and appeals. The importance of this dependency is indicated by the evidence that there is a very large swathe of the European electorate whose facility in dealing with issues related to European Parliament elections ranges from very low to zero.

In addition, however, both the evidence considered and the analytical framework put forward underline the crucial importance of contact between the MEPs

and the citizens if the related problems of the communication deficit and abstention in European Parliament elections are to be addressed.