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IMPROVING HUMAN RESEARCH POTENTIAL  
AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC KNOWLEDGE BASE

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

*Voter Turnout in the Republic of Ireland*

Pat Lyons & Richard Sinnott

Institute for the Study of Social Change  
Public Opinion & Political Behaviour Research Programme

University College Dublin  
Ireland

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## **Introduction**

Since approximately 1970, substantial falls in turnout in national elections have occurred in seven of the current member states of the EU. Average turnout in the countries of the Union as a whole has dropped by over eight percentage points. As Table 1 shows, however, Ireland is at the bottom of the table in terms of average turnout in the period since 1970 (71.2 per cent), second from the bottom in terms of turnout in the most recent election (63 per cent in 2002) and third from the top in terms of the size of the fall in turnout over the last three decades (15 percentage points).

<< **Table 1, about here** >>

In addition to general elections, Ireland has a variegated set of other electoral contests, including sub-national elections, supranational elections, presidential elections and a large number of referendums, many of which have confronted issues of major importance. Accordingly, as well as being of interest to this study on account of its low and declining rate of turnout, Ireland presents an interesting instance of electoral participation (and non-participation) across a wide range of levels of governance. As such, it is another of the “natural experiments” in variations in turnout that are presented to us by different systems of multi-level governance.

### **1. The extent of the problem: Trends in electoral participation and abstention**

Turnout in local elections in recent decades has mirrored the decline in turnout in general elections (see figure 1). Prior to 1997, turnout in presidential elections tended to be steady, even rising slightly in 1990 (against the trend in other contests). However, the 1997 presidential election showed a much larger fall in turnout in a single election than that seen over even an extended period of time in general or local elections.

<< **Figure 1, about here** >>

European Parliament elections present a major difficulty when it comes to identifying trends, as turnout in them is overwhelmingly affected by whether or not they are held concurrently with either a general election (as occurred in 1989) or with local elections (1979 and 1999). Leaving EP elections that were held concurrently with

other elections to one side, one can see a slight decline in EP turnout over the remaining two cases (1984 and 1994).

Ireland presents copious instances of contests in a quite different arena of electoral participation – referendums. In the Irish case, all the referendums that have been held have arisen from the constitutional requirement that change to the constitution can only be made by “decision of the people”. The combination of this requirement and a constitution that set forth very specific provisions on a wide range of matters has led to the holding of twenty–six referendums since the enactment of the present constitution in 1937. These referendums have included, contests on, *inter alia*, divorce, abortion, the death penalty, the constitutional position of the Catholic Church, proportional representation, the definition of the national territory and the related claim to sovereignty over the territory of Northern Ireland, the decision to join the European Economic Communities, and each subsequent step on the road to supranational integration.

Religious/moral issues (divorce and abortion) elicit the highest rates of participation in referendums, with a suggestion of a tailing–off in participation in the most recent case in this category (a referendum on abortion in March 2002). Turnout in referendums on EU issues has varied enormously – from the 70 per cent recorded in the referendum on accession to what was then the EEC to the 35 per cent in the first referendum on the Treaty of Nice (June 2001). While a substantial part of the ground lost on that occasion was made up in the second Nice referendum (October 2002, turnout 49.5 per cent), in general the trend in referendums on European issues has been downwards.

<< **Figure 2, about here** >>

As figure 2 illustrates turnout in referendums on other “regime” issues has also varied very widely, but this is less remarkable than the variation in referendums on European issues since such referendums have dealt with a very diverse range of issues. Thus referendums on alteration of the provisions for university representation in the Senate (1979) and on the restriction of the right to bail (1996) elicited turnout of 29 per cent in each case. In contrast, in 1998 another referendum in the regime category – that on the Good Friday Agreement ratifying the peace process in Northern Ireland –

produced a turnout of 56 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Without wishing to anticipate later argument, the university representation and right to bail referendums might be taken as indicating a floor below which turnout is unlikely to go because minimal level is sustained by a pure sense of civic duty.

As the map in Figure 3 shows, there was a striking difference in voter turnout as between urban and rural constituencies in the general election of 2002. Specifically, turnout tended to be substantially lower in most of the Dublin constituencies, in the Dublin “commuter belt” constituencies of Kildare, Meath, Westmeath and Louth and in the north city constituency of Cork North Central. Higher levels of turnout occurred in an area that is, broadly speaking, west of a line drawn from Louth (the north–eastern–most county in the Republic) to Cork city. With one exception (Donegal South–West), the constituencies west of this line that have relatively lower levels of turnout all have substantial urban or suburban populations (i.e. Limerick East, Clare and Galway).

Turnout in the Nice Treaty referendum of June 2001 shows almost the reverse of this geographical pattern. With just a couple of exceptions, areas of high turnout are almost all east of the Louth–to–Cork northeast–southwest line and the low turnout is concentrated in the midlands and western seaboard constituencies that are the main areas of high turnout in general elections. This inversion of the “normal” (i.e. general election) pattern of turnout is not unique to the Nice referendum or even to referendums on EU issues. It is found in all referendums, even in those dealing with the issues of divorce and abortion, issues in relation to which one might have anticipated high turnout in rural areas. It is clear that an important part of our task in accounting for turnout and abstention in Ireland will be to explain this striking shift in the geographical pattern as one moves from one level of governance to another.

## **2. Systemic facilitation**

Traditionally, polling day in Ireland has been a weekday – generally a Thursday, or, beginning with the divorce referendum of 1997, a Friday. A by–election in 2001 broke with precedent and introduced weekend (Saturday) voting. However, the second referendum on the Nice Treaty (October 2002) was the first nationwide contest to be held on a Saturday. In this case the move was justified by the

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<sup>1</sup> The referendum on the Good Friday Agreement was held on the same day as the referendum on the Amsterdam Treaty but it seems most likely that, if anything, the former boosted turnout in the latter, rather than vice versa.

government as an effort to ensure that those who study or work in Dublin but whose main place of residence is outside the capital would have the opportunity to return home to vote at the weekend.

As their timing is determined by the prevailing balance of political forces (either by way of capitalising on government advantage or bowing to actual or impending government defeat), general elections have occurred in a variety of months and seasons, with some indication of a preference for early summer (six out of eleven elections since 1969 have been held in May or June). The date of local elections has been entirely at the discretion of the Minister for the Environment and Local Government. As such, their timing might indicate something of the preferences of politicians for one electoral season rather than another (all local elections since 1974 have been held in June). The timing of referendums has been determined either by the urgency of the issue involved or by the convenience of staging the referendum in conjunction with an election. Pooling the information on the dates of all electoral contests suggests that the most popular electoral months are June and November.

The hours of voting have varied substantially in recent years. In the general election of 2002, polling stations were open for a record fifteen hours. In the past, voters have generally had ten to twelve hours in which to cast a ballot. The density of polling stations in Ireland is determined at the local level by an officer of the Circuit Court, in consultation with local government representatives. While the actual density of polling stations has not been estimated on a nationwide basis, evidence from a survey after the last general election indicated that 95 per cent of electors live within three miles of the polling station, with about 60 per cent living within one mile.

The provision of postal voting in Ireland has until recently been restricted to specific occupations – the military, diplomats, police officers (*Gardaí*) – and to those with debilitating illnesses. However, more recently greater efforts have been made by government to facilitate voting in this way. Postal voting is now also offered to voters with occupations that would prevent them from casting a ballot at their local polling station on election day. This category includes students in full-time education who live away from home but within the jurisdiction.

The concept of institutional facilitation extends to the regulation of electoral campaigns. The 1997 Electoral Act covers provisions for the disclosure of campaign spending, imposes spending limits for elections and provides limited state support for general, presidential and European elections. Provisions governing local elections are

somewhat less restrictive.<sup>2</sup> Public funding for electoral purposes is limited to registered political parties that won two per cent or more of the national vote in the previous election. Payments to parties during an election year can be quite substantial with Fianna Fáil (Ireland's largest party) receiving approximately 1.9 million euro in 1997.<sup>3</sup> Data for the most recent general election are not yet available.

The regulation of referendum campaigns in Ireland has been made quite complex by a series of High Court and Supreme Court judgements that found that it was unconstitutional for the government to spend taxpayers' money on promoting one side of the issue in a referendum. The main direct consequences of these judgements have been (a) an end to the practice of governments spending public money on campaigns in support of their proposals for constitutional change; (b) the abandonment by RTE (the publicly owned national broadcasting station) of party political broadcasts during referendum campaigns and (c) the establishment of successive referendum commissions with varying terms of reference to assist in putting the issues before the people.

As a result of these court cases, a Referendum Commission was established in 1998 to prepare general explanations of referendum proposals, to publish appropriate information both for and against proposed constitutional amendments and to facilitate public debate. Following criticism of the role of the Referendum Commission and publication of a report on referendums by the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution, the Referendum Act 2001 abolished the Commission's functions of preparing and publishing arguments for and against the proposal and of fostering and promoting debate and added the function of promoting public awareness of the referendum and encouraging the electorate to vote (Referendum Act, 2001, section 1).

It is very difficult to identify the effects, if any, of institutional facilitation by analysing the situation in one country. This is partly because variations in institutional facilitation within a country tend to be quite limited. The second reason, however, is that such changes in facilitation as do occur tend to have been introduced to combat declining turnout. Accordingly, the fact that turnout does not increase following a facilitating change may simply reflect the fact that, without the change, turnout would have actually declined. Take, for example, the move from weekday to

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<sup>2</sup> Benoit & Marsh, (2002).

<sup>3</sup> Laver & Marsh (1999: 156-9).

Saturday voting in the Tipperary South by–election in June 2001. As it happens, a by–election had also been held in the same constituency almost exactly one year previously and, as was the norm at the time, that by–election was held on a weekday. The fact that turnout was almost identical (at 58.0 and 58.5 per cent) in the two contests does not necessarily show that weekend voting does not facilitate turnout. Bearing these qualifications in mind and acknowledging that the main use of the data on institutional facilitation will be in the comparative analysis we shall return to the institutional aspects of the facilitation of turnout in the concluding section of this working paper.

### **3. Systemic mobilisation**

At first sight, Ireland seems to be a clear case of a system with a high degree of concentration of power and therefore a system with high institutional mobilisation in general elections. It is a centralised unitary state that is governed at the national level by a parliamentary–style government, the shape of which tends to be determined by the choice the electorate has made between competing alternatives rather than by post–election horse–trading between competing parties. However, two qualifications need to be made in this regard. The first arises from the growth, especially since the late 1980s, of neo–corporatist forms of governance in which the elected government is only one player, albeit the most important one, in a complex process of negotiation that extends well beyond “pay and conditions” to issues of taxation, social welfare and social exclusion. The second qualification arises from the extent of the transfer of power to the European Union or, in other words, from the significant dispersal of power along a territorial axis that extends beyond the boundaries of the state. In the context of the present study, it can of course be argued that this process applies equally to all member states of the EU. The counter argument is that the formal transfer of power may be much more significant for small states than for large states.

The institutional evidence also suggests that Ireland is a system with a low level of institutional mobilisation at the sub–national level of governance. Local government, which is conducted mainly by 29 County or City Councils, has very limited budgetary powers and is obliged to defer to national government ministries or national–level quasi–governmental agencies on most policy issues. The chief executive – the County or City Manager – is a government appointee, and mayors are indirectly elected for terms of office of one year. Given the formal allocation of

power as between national and local government, what is striking are the relatively high levels of turnout in local elections. The explanation may lie in the existence of an informal but widespread practice of constituency service in which elected representatives (both local and national) act as intermediaries in the relationship between the citizen and the state as a provider of services. As well as raising the profile of the local elected representatives, this practice links electoral competition at the local level to competition at the national level. Both factors undoubtedly contribute to reducing the gap between turnout at local and national levels of governance. A final institutional factor that may also work in the same direction is that the elected local councillors form the electoral college that is responsible for filling more than two-thirds of the seats in the upper house of the legislature (the Seanad or Senate).

Presidential elections in Ireland would seem to be prime examples of low institutional mobilisation. The presidency is a largely ceremonial office of head-of-state and the minimal reserved powers vested in the office are of little or no practical political import. Despite these indications of low institutional mobilisation, presidential elections have produced quite high turnout in all but one instance – turnout in the first five presidential elections averaged 63 per cent; in the sixth and most recent one (1997), it was 46 per cent.

The PR STV electoral system is used for all elections other than presidential elections (in the latter the electoral system reverts, in effect, to the alternative vote). Consequently, changes in turnout or variations in turnout across levels cannot be attributed to this factor. Likewise, electoral cycle effects are difficult to pin down because of the fact that local and presidential elections are held relatively infrequently.

Referendums can be thought of as majoritarian electoral systems for the making of choices between two alternative issue positions. As such, they constitute a significant feature of the system of institutional mobilisation. How significant this feature is depends on the number and importance of the issues submitted to decision of the people by referendum. Even the brief listing of the range of issues dealt with in referendums in Ireland given in the introduction to this working paper would seem to suggest that the institutional arrangements have provided lots of material for mobilising the voters. As we have seen, and not unexpectedly, turnout in referendums in Ireland has varied over time and by type of issue. This variation provides

potentially useful evidence on what kinds of issues do and do not mobilise voters. It also draws attention to a wider and potentially powerful *demobilising* effect of the practice of holding referendums. This is that, by diverting certain issues to a referendum channel for decisive resolution, the practice of holding referendums may rob elections of some of the issues that would otherwise have galvanised more party effort and more voter involvement in the main electoral arena.

At present there is no empirical data that would allow an estimation of the intensity of the different type of election campaigns or of the direction of media coverage of such campaigns. Accordingly, this aspect of the framework can only be tapped by examining the effects of such aspects of systemic mobilisation as they work themselves out in the campaign exposure experienced by individual citizens.

#### **4. Individual facilitation**

Individual facilitation variables comprise all the characteristics of the individual elector that make the act of voting easier. In this section we look at a range of resources that are potentially relevant to the act of voting, namely education, media consumption, political knowledge, income, occupation and, finally, age. Some of these variables, for example occupation and age, clearly have potential effects other than those that are captured in the notion of facilitation. For the moment, however, what is of interest are the potential facilitating effects associated with these variables. Other aspects of these variables are taken up in the section on political mobilisation.

##### *Education*

Education facilitates voting by providing resources that make voting and, in particular, the preparation for voting easier. The resources in question are knowledge and, equally if not more importantly, the skills to process politically relevant information. Assessing the impact of education on voter turnout is complicated by the fact that different surveys use different measures of education. For example, Eurobarometer uses age at which the respondent left full-time education, whereas the ASES study used number of years in school and level of education reached. For the purposes of comparison over time all education measures used were recoded to six education levels. While this involves some rough approximations, it does allow at least some comparisons to be made.

With minor exceptions, the evidence from our two surveys that deal with general elections fails to confirm the expected relationship between level of education and turnout. Thus, the reported level of turnout in the 1997 general elections among those with primary education or less, according to the ASES Survey, is 89 per cent; the level of reported turnout in the sample as a whole is 85 per cent. Similarly, in 1973, 89 per cent of males with primary education claimed to have voted in the previous general election, while 88 per cent of the entire sample made a similar claim.

Low levels of education, however, do seem to play a role when it comes to turnout in European Parliament elections. In 1994, 64 per cent of those with primary education only indicated that they had not voted in the European Parliament election, compared to a sample total of 40 per cent. The figures for the 1999 European Parliament election are less clear, possibly reflecting the substantial lapse of time between the date of the election and the date of the survey. However, even in this survey, the highest level of reported non-voting occurs among those with the lowest level of education.

The different roles played by education in these very different elections makes sense. In a general election, all sorts of cues and signals provide multiple incentives to vote. In a low salience European election, however, such signals and stimuli are much less prevalent. The net result is that those with higher levels of education manage to get by in the low information environment while those with low levels of the education abstain.

The fact that the effects of the educational variable are complex and depend on a number of contextual factors is confirmed by analysis of the constituency-level data (see figures 4 & 5). Thus, aggregate analysis shows that the relationship between turnout and education in the 1981 general election was very different in urban and rural constituencies.

**<< Figures 4 & 5, about here >>**

In rural areas there was little or no relationship between the percentage with secondary education and turnout. However, in urban areas this relationship was strong and positive. Pursuing the education-as-facilitation interpretation, the argument would be that education facilitates turnout where mobilising factors are weak. This would account for the relationship between education and turnout in European Parliament elections. In rural areas that have low levels of education,

however, some other variable (higher levels of social integration perhaps, or more intensive party mobilisation) overrides the negative effect of low educational levels by bringing turnout in areas with low levels of education up to the level of turnout of those with high educational levels.<sup>4</sup>

### *Media consumption*

Our findings in this area are indicative only, as the measures used in different surveys tend to be very different, referring variously to general media use (the 1973 survey), reading or watching the news via particular media (the Eurobarometer) or frequency of following accounts of political or governmental affairs in local, national or international media (ASES). Bearing that qualification in mind, however, there is evidence, admittedly only bivariate evidence, of a relationship between media consumption and turnout. Moreover, the pattern of these effects shows some similarity to the patterns that were evident in the turnout and education data.

In the case of turnout in general elections (represented in the 1973 mobility survey and by the ASES survey, table not shown), the crucial difference is between those reporting zero and those reporting occasional media usage. In the case of the European Parliament election of 1999 by contrast, the crucial (and more substantial) difference occurs between those with high frequency usage and those with a level of media usage that is anything less than that. This contrast in the cut-off point at which media consumption becomes effective as between general elections and European Parliament elections is consistent with the findings regarding the effects of education noted above. That is, in a high salience election, the absence of very high levels of media consumption is compensated for by other factors. In a low salience European Parliament election, by contrast, there is nothing to make up for the gap in access to political information that results from lower levels of media consumption.

### *Political knowledge*

The evidence from the five surveys that include measures of political knowledge (table not shown) confirms that there is a substantial relationship between political knowledge and turnout. The range of variation in turnout is some 20 percentage

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<sup>4</sup> Evidence from the 2002 election suggests that the different effects of education in an urban and rural context may be peculiar to the specific period represented in Figure 5. In the very much changed Ireland of the 21st century, when turnout had fallen in both urban and rural areas, the clear relationship between education and turnout in urban areas does not seem to hold.

points in the 1994 EP election and 35 points in the 1999 EP elections. The evidence also shows that knowledge is related to participation in general elections, the range of variation in relation to the 1997 and 2002 elections being about the same as that found in the 1994 EP elections. It must be emphasised that, since the items on these knowledge scales vary in level of difficulty, one cannot make inferences about the absolute level of knowledge at which turnout increases. It is notable however, that the variation in turnout that is associated with levels of knowledge in general elections tends to occur at one end of the knowledge scale; in contrast, the variation in turnout in European Parliament elections and in the Nice referendum is spread across all or most points on the scale.<sup>5</sup>

### *Income*

In examining the relationship between income and turnout, it is important to keep in mind that response rates to questions on income tend to be low; for example they are below 50 per cent in Eurobarometer surveys. However, for the 1973 Social Mobility survey, there was a high response rate, and, in the case of the ASES survey, it was possible to use interviewers' assessments of the wealth of respondents to fill in the missing data. Looking first at the data (table not shown) relating to general elections of 1973 and 1997, what is striking is the lack of relationship between income and turnout. And in the 1994 European elections the evidence seems to show that those with *higher incomes were less likely to vote*. This counter-intuitive finding is partly repeated in 1999, except that in 1999 those in the lowest income bracket also voted less. There are two possible confounding factors here – the first is the already noted fifty per cent non-response to the income question in Eurobarometer surveys; the second is the fact that the European election of 1999 was held concurrently with local elections and there is some evidence (from aggregate data) of higher levels of both working class and lower middle class participation in local elections. Whatever the reasons, be they methodological or substantive, there is not much evidence here to support the hypothesis that higher income facilitates voter turnout.

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<sup>5</sup> It is also worth noting that the 1994 EP data and the Nice referendum data show no relationship between level of knowledge and *circumstantial abstention*. This is, of course, as it should be; otherwise the abstention would not be truly circumstantial. In contrast to the other surveys in Table 5, both these surveys operationalised the distinction between voluntary and circumstantial abstention via an open-ended question, thus increasing one's confidence in the validity of the measure.

*Social class*

Given the difficulties and complexities associated with the conceptualisation and measurement of, for example, social class and income using survey data, and because of the problem of the over-estimation of turnout in survey research, we turn at this stage to ecological inference, using the ECOL programme and applying it to election results and census data at the constituency level for the five general elections of the 1980s. This evidence (table not shown) suggests that farmers have the lowest level of abstention of all occupational groups.

**<< Figure 6, about here >>**

This is certainly consistent with the cartographical analysis and with previous multivariate analysis of the constituency and census data (Sinnott, 1995). Thereafter the evidence is less in accord with expectations and certainly does not support any simple occupation-as-facilitation interpretation. According to this analysis, skilled manual workers have the second lowest rate of abstention, followed by unskilled manual workers, higher professionals and salaried employees. The highest rates of abstention are found among intermediate manual and semi-skilled manual workers. If this ranking of occupational groups is confirmed by further analysis, this evidence will certainly lead to a more complex picture of the effects of social class on turnout and abstention. The “if” must, however, be underlined – this is a very preliminary ECOL analysis and definitive judgements must await application of ECOL at a much lower level of aggregation and, in consequence, with a much larger number of cases. This brings us to our final facilitating variable namely age.

*Age*

The relationship between age and turnout is straightforward and (almost) universal. Turnout increases with age. This is true of both European and general elections, as Table 2 shows. Note that Table 2 does not show the full complexity of the relationship between age and turnout, as there is some tendency for turnout to tail off at age 75 or 80 and above.

**<< Table 2, about here >>**

Before considering how we should interpret this relationship, one other observation is worth making: the biggest increment in age-related turnout occurs at different points on the age scale, depending on whether we are dealing with a national or a European Parliament election. As Table 2 shows the jump in turnout occurs at age 25 or between the 18 to 24 year-old age group and the 25 – 34 year-old group in the case of general elections.

### **5. Individual mobilisation**

Our analysis of voter facilitation and mobilisation up to this point has been done on a bivariate basis, with all the limitations that implies. Pursuing these relationships for all general elections between 1981 and 2002 at the constituency level shows that the only factor that has remained consistently important is the percentage of farmers in a constituency. Variables such as education and age were important until 1992, while the impact of unemployment was only influential in 1981 at the start of an economic depression that lasted most of the 1980s. To conclude from this that variations in turnout in Ireland are all due to higher turnout among farmers would clearly be to run foul of the ecological fallacy.

<< **Table 3, about here** >>

What the “farmer” variable in Table 3 is telling us is that there is something about rural Ireland that gives rise to substantially higher turnout in general elections. The finding is specific to general elections; in particular it does not apply to referendums, not even to those in which the interests of rural Ireland and of farmers in particular might seem to be at stake. This would seem to suggest that the crucial factor in bringing about higher turnout in rural areas is party mobilisation rather than, say, social integration or higher levels of social capital or civic duty, all of which would, presumably induce higher turnout across the board.

#### *District electoral division (DED) analysis of turnout in the 1997 general election*

For the 1997 general election we have data for the smallest census unit – the district electoral division (DED) where the population is approximately four hundred people rather than about seventy-five thousand within each constituency. Turnout data per ballot box was aggregated to the DED level and matched with census data. A

regression analysis was undertaken in which the key factors already identified as being most strongly connected with voter participation, i.e. age, education, social class / occupation and rurality were examined in more detail. In addition, two other factors noted within the literature as being strong determinants of participation – social deprivation and level of political competition were also investigated. One well-known characteristic of the dependent variable to suffer from “ceiling effects” at high and low values, consequently this variable was transformed to a logit scale for ordinary least squares regression (Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980).

At the sub-constituency level various indicators of political competition were tested on early models but none of these proved to be significant and so were left out of the subsequent analysis reported in table 4.<sup>6</sup>

**<< Table 4, about here >>**

The results in table 3 show rurality has a very strong impact on participation in Irish general elections. At the DED level this is especially true. However, as noted earlier, knowing that rurality is strongly positively correlated with turnout is not entirely satisfactory in the absence of some reasoned expectations as to why this should be the case.

In order to examine more closely the effect of rurality (as measured by the percentage of farmers in a DED) a sequential or hierarchical regression was initially undertaken (results not reported).<sup>7</sup> This analysis shows that rurality on its own can explain 28 per cent of the variance of voter turnout. Other factors such as age, education, class and social deprivation explain a further 10 percent of the total variance. The two regression models shown in table 4 illustrate a similar picture using two separate models but have the advantage of showing which variables are significant when the rurality factor is excluded – thus providing some information of what rurality is indicating.

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<sup>6</sup> A DED model using a similar specification to the constituency models in table 7 (including also measures of political competition and social deprivation) concurs with the results found in constituency level models developed for previous elections. The disappearance of age and education effects at the constituency level from 1992 onwards suggests that Irish constituencies are becoming more internally heterogeneous, making resort to the lower level of aggregation essential if we are to be able to draw any firm conclusions from this kind of analysis.

<sup>7</sup> Sequential or hierarchical regression is used here to control for the effect of farmers on voter turnout and estimate the amount of variance explained by the other independent variables. Technically this model is a limiting case of the more general procedure of stepwise regression where the choice of initial model is chosen on a priori basis for diagnostic purposes.

As table 4 indicates, the strong effect of rurality tends to mask the impact of third level education, those aged 50-59 years and the percentage of upper middle class in a DED. This evidence suggests that the growth of the middle class in Ireland (and a simultaneous process of embourgeoisement and urbanisation) as indicated by greater participation in third level education and growth of professional, managerial and technical occupations is associated with DEDs that have relatively low levels of electoral participation. One theory explaining this change is that the rurality factor is capturing the effects of an evolution from a traditional to a modern society (or to use Tönnies well-known terminology, a move from a cultural pattern of *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*) where civic duty norms toward behaviour such as voting have changed.

There are two possible mechanisms that might underlie this change.<sup>8</sup> First, older and younger generations exhibit different propensities toward electoral participation that reflects differing political socialisation patterns. Those who grew up in the early decades after the foundation of the Irish State have a stronger sense of duty toward voting in comparison to younger cohorts who grew up since the 1960s when the process of industrialisation had begun in earnest. Second, there is little difference between generations. It is the ageing process that generates differences in turnout and this is not related to age *per se* but rather length of time in the electorate where a process of political learning takes place through the life cycle. The decline in participation is due to an overall decline across all age groups because of a common cause such as party dealignment – a process well documented within Europe since the 1970s.

In this respect, Tilley (2003: 344) has found in Britain that the decline of party identification is mainly due to the ageing process where repeated electoral participation increases party attachment. It is quite plausible to think that party dealignment has reduced participation and party attachment levels for all voters regardless of age since the 1970s. From this perspective, electoral participation and party attachment are primarily the product of a learning process which are measured by length of time in the electorate and age. This would help explain why trends in both factors have been declining and how these two important variables are linked to one another through the age patterning evident in the data.

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<sup>8</sup> These mechanisms are based on arguments put forward by Abramson (1976) – the ‘generational thesis’ and Converse (1975) – the ‘ageing thesis’ to explain decline in party attachment. Both decline in party attachment and electoral participation have occurred almost simultaneously and are undoubtedly strongly interrelated for the obvious reason that if a person does not support any party the motivation for participation is much less.

While the current DED level dataset can only be indicative with regard to these mechanisms the results in table 4 do point the way to future fruitful avenues of research. For example, the impact of social deprivation seems counter-intuitive where higher levels of deprivation are associated with more participation! A more detailed analysis should investigate if there is a negative association with turnout in urban areas and a positive association in rural areas. If this is the case the common practice of treating all geographical units in the same manner may not be sensible because the assumption that all voters are the same regardless of urban and rural context may be invalid.<sup>9</sup> In the next section, we will turn our attention to examination of the factors influencing electoral participation at the individual level where use will be made of survey data for recent European and general elections.

*Individual level analysis of European elections (1994 & 1999)*

The individual level analysis undertaken for 1994 and shown in table 5 indicates age was the most important factor, followed by feeling close to a political party, being interested in politics along with seeing the European Parliament as having power and believing that it matters which candidates win seats in the European Parliament. For the 1999 elections age emerges once again, with education also having significant effects.

Knowledge of the EU and exposure to the election campaign were also significant influences on turnout. In addition, the perceived differences between national parties and European parties are important for voter turnout.

**<< Table 5, about here >>**

It seems that left–right ideology, perceived differences between national political parties, satisfaction with democracy and attitudes toward the current and desired speed of integration have little impact on turning out to vote in European elections.

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<sup>9</sup> The ecological inference analysis (ECOL) used in this paper already incorporates this observation and is based on identifying homogenous political regions within a country.

*Individual level analysis of general elections (1997 & 2002)*

In order to examine voter turnout in recent general elections at the individual level use will be made of two datasets. The first dataset measures turnout in the 1997 general, albeit three years after the event, and is part of an extensive cross-national study looking at political attitudes in Europe and Asia.<sup>10</sup> This survey has the particular advantage of including questions relating to civic duty, confidence in political institutions and sense of identity that have been rarely asked in studies undertaken in Ireland. The second dataset is a two-wave panel survey implemented by IMS for the 2002 general election. This dataset deals with voter turnout asking about intention to vote before the election and recollection of having voted less than two weeks after polling day. This survey also asks questions on factors such as distance to the polling station, which have not been asked in previous Irish public opinion polls. The IMS and ASES surveys are complementary in that the former focussed on details of mobilisation during the 2002 election campaign while the latter has more appropriate measures of long term mobilisation such as partisanship, ideology and civic duty.

Looking first at the ASES dataset, which deals with the 1997 general election, we see that the most powerful factors influencing turnout were mobilising factors which tend to operate over the long-term, that is partisanship (feeling close to a party) and having a sense of civic duty. It has been argued that explanations of voting that rely on 'I vote because I feel I should vote' or 'people vote because they like to' do not explain voter turnout.<sup>11</sup> Use of a civic duty explanation, while not ideal, does however allow one to identify those voters whose main motivation for voting is *not* determined by partisanship or some weighing up of the costs and benefits of participation. Significantly, the number of voters who believe voting is a duty has declined over time and this may be one of the key reasons why turnout has also fallen.<sup>12</sup> Recent research based on the British National Election Study has shown that having a sense of civic duty attitude gives a voter a high probability of voting.<sup>13</sup>

Quite obviously then a strong sense of civic duty is an important feature of electoral participation – despite significant differences such as type of electoral

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<sup>10</sup> The Asia Europe Survey (ASES) survey was undertaken in October-November of 2000. There were 1,010 respondents, 970 of which would have been eligible to vote in 1997 general election.

<sup>11</sup> See, Tsebelis, (1997).

<sup>12</sup> See, Blais, (1999: 92-114).

<sup>13</sup> Harold D. Clarke, et al. (2002).

system and the fact that both countries have the lowest participation rate in the EU over the last three decades (see table 6).

**<< Table 6, about here >>**

Seeing oneself as right wing and seeing this as being important increases the likelihood of voting. The other important mobilising influence on turnout was 'national identity' that is a sense of 'feeling Irish' and saying that this is important. Examination of facilitation effects indicates that the most important factors here are social connectedness and knowledge. Being willing to get together with others to deal with some community problem and often attending religious services are positively associated with voting. Having an interest in politics and more than a primary level of education also seem to increase the probability of voting.

Moving on to de-mobilising effects, our results show that confidence in institutions, concern about political corruption and a sense of political inefficacy do *not* influence voter participation in general elections. It is significant, that despite the extensive media portrayal of political corruption from 1997 to late 2000, when the ASES was undertaken, political corruption and confidence in political institutions seem to have no direct impact on the probability of voting.

The results of regression analysis in table 7 show that abstention in the 2002 election was a function of seven key variables, four of which have to do with mobilisation effects, and three of which relate to facilitation. The important mobilising effects are: having no particular preference regarding the shape of the government that might emerge from the election, having a low level of political knowledge, believing politicians will not keep their promises and not having watched the debate between the leaders of the two largest parties on the Tuesday before polling day.

**<< Table 7, about here >>**

Abstention was boosted by being under 25, having a skilled or unskilled manual occupation and living in an urban area. Significantly, all the talk during the campaign about the issues of health and crime etc., none of these concerns had any independent effect on increasing turnout. Also, distance from the polling station (as measured in this survey) has no appreciable effect on the rate of participation.

## **Conclusion**

Ireland has the lowest average rate of voter participation in the European Union for general elections over the last thirty years. However, this pattern is not replicated for elections at other levels of governance. Average turnout in EP elections is slightly lower than the EU average and is in fact between the levels witnessed in France and Germany, both founding members of the Union.

Leaving to one side cross-national comparisons the key trend is that turnout in all types of elections in Ireland has declined consistently since the 1970s. However, the evidence from participation in nineteen referendums from 1981 to 2002 shows that the perceived importance, or context, of elections does help increase turnout on polling day. The fact that all elections are not seen by voters to be equally important is also evident in the differential decline in turnout for elections at different levels of governance. Nonetheless, the relative hierarchy among election types has remained largely constant over time. General elections are the most important for voters in Ireland, followed by local, presidential, and European contests. As a class of elections, referendums exhibit the lowest levels of participation. In fact, only the most important referendums on divorce, abortion, accession to the EEC and the future of Northern Ireland have resulted in turnout rates comparable to those of local or presidential elections.

Within this paper an attempt has been made to give as complete an account as possible of voter participation in Ireland in recent times using evidence gathered from aggregate (DED and constituency) level election results and individual level mass surveys. The overwhelming weight of this evidence points to declining turnout which has motivated the Irish government and its electoral administration to begin implementing systemic facilitation policies such as extending polling hours and changing the polling day to the weekend. While these recent initiatives have not increased turnout – their real impact may have been to stem the decline.

Voter turnout in Ireland is also influenced by factors that facilitate voting at the individual level. For example, in the 2002 general election there were limited efforts by community groups and some political parties to facilitate voting in certain socially deprived areas through the provision of information about the election and transport to polling stations. More generally, education appears to play a greater role in elections that are less salient such as EP elections where the signals for voting are less strong than during general election campaigns. A similar pattern also exists for media

consumption where high media usage has a greater impact on participation in lower salience elections than in general elections. There are some social class or occupational differences in electoral participation in Ireland. Ecological inference (ECOL) analysis suggests farmers vote most in general elections while manual workers vote least. Such analysis does however show that the relationship between class and participation is a complex one requiring further work. Ireland is similar to most other countries in that voter turnout seems to increase with age, with a transition taking place away from abstention toward participation among citizens during their mid-twenties.

Examination of electoral participation at the constituency level for all general elections over the last two decades indicates that the only consistent factor influencing turnout is rurality as measured by the percentage of farmers. This is not to suggest that there is something special about farmers themselves but is undoubtedly an indicator of social integration and communication that operates differently in urban areas that also happen to have lower levels of turnout. It is important to note, however that this pattern only exists for general elections – a less distinct relationship is observed for participation in Ireland's system of direct democracy.

Initial analysis at the lowest level of aggregation – the DED level for the 1997 general election indicates that age, education, rurality, social class and social deprivation are important influences on turnout in general elections. While the results at the DED level are similar to those at the constituency level, the DED level analysis does provide more variance for theorising and investigating the link between rurality, age, education and turnout with potentially an important link with another important facet of recent electoral history – decline in party attachment. In addition, further research at the sub-constituency level will delve more deeply into exploring the reasons for the strong and sustained rurality effect that seems to be particularly salient in the Irish case.

Individual level analysis for the 1994 and 1999 EP elections shows that age, education, political knowledge, ideology and attitudes toward the EU are important factors influencing turnout. For general elections facilitation effects such as age, social class and rurality were important in 1997 and 2002. Turnout at the individual level in general elections is also strongly influenced by mobilising factors such as partisanship and having a sense of civic duty – which are significantly socio-political characteristics which develop and operate over the long term. Further research will

examine a series of questions asked in Eurobarometer 57 (Spring 2001) dealing more directly with attitudes toward participation in three main types of multilevel elections, local, national and European. The aim here will be to extend the results of this working paper toward consideration of the characteristics of those citizens who vote consistently in all elections and those who are mobilised only to vote in some elections.

Why people vote in some kinds of elections and not others and why there is a general decline in turnout for all elections are complex questions. Within this working paper using a facilitation and mobilisation classification at the individual and institutional levels we have identified common factors in all elections such as age and more specific factors such as education and media use which are more influential in European elections. With this empirical evidence derived from individual and aggregate level data sources we are now in a position to begin the task of elaborating more general answers to these two important questions. This is the goal of the next phase of our research.

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## APPENDIX – OVERVIEW OF THE DATA

In tackling the problems and puzzles presented by the variations in turnout over time and across levels of governance, we can rely on a wide range of data, both at the aggregate and at the individual level. Inevitably, these data are of varying quality and, as a result, present a range of methodological challenges and caveats. This section briefly considers those problems and concludes by outlining how we set about making the best use of the available data.

Results of most electoral contests in Ireland are published only at the constituency level (currently forty–two cases). From the point of view of aggregate data analysis, the published local election results are somewhat more satisfactory, being based on Local Electoral Areas (approximately 114 cases), while European Parliament election results are the least satisfactory, being only published at Euro–constituency level (four cases). The Irish wing of this project is currently in the throes of constructing a DED level dataset for the 1997 and 2002 general elections and for recent referendums using ballot–box level official turnout records and unofficial counts of votes undertaken by political party volunteers (known as “tallymen”) across the entire country. These ballot–box data are being aggregated to match the smallest census unit (DEDs) giving us an aggregate level dataset of over two thousand three hundred cases, thereby substantially increasing the analytical potential of aggregate analysis. This analytical advantage is partly offset by the short time span covered by this dataset. Accordingly, the aggregate data analysis in the current version of this paper relies mainly on data from the constituency level covering 8 elections and 19 referendums since 1981.

In addition to the foregoing aggregate data, six individual–level datasets will be used to examine voter turnout in Ireland. The Irish Mobility Study (August 1973 to July 1974) – a mass sample survey of 2,291 males aged 18–65 years – was concerned primarily with respondents’ occupational and social mobility. However, it also includes measures of religion, and general attitudes toward social, economic and political issues (including Northern Ireland) along with participation in the 1973 general election and partisanship. Previous empirical research using this dataset to examine the social bases of partisanship in Ireland argued that the selection bias involved in a male–only sample is small net of other effects such as age and social class.<sup>14</sup>

Within a month of the European elections in 1994, the Eurobarometer fielded a wide range of questions on party support, turnout, reasons for abstention, impact of the campaign, attitudes toward institutions and policies of the EU.<sup>15</sup> Following the most recent European election in June 1999, Eurobarometer 52 asked a more limited number of questions relating to electoral participation. However, this survey was fielded four to five months after the election. It also had a different operationalisation of certain key variables, such as reasons for not voting, thus adding to the problems of comparing the 1994 and 1999 data.

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<sup>14</sup> See, McAllister Ian & Derek O’Connell: ‘The Political Sociology of Party Support in Ireland: A Reassessment’. *Comparative Politics*, January 1984, 191–204.

<sup>15</sup> For more details of this dataset see; Blondel J., R. Sinnott & P. Svensson: *People and Parliament in the European Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

The fourth survey data set used in this working paper is a general political attitudes survey conducted in autumn 2000 as part of the ASES comparative survey.<sup>16</sup> The ASES data set allows us to examine a wide range of potential influences on voter turnout in Ireland and in particular to test the frequently stated view that current high levels of abstention are a function of disillusionment with the political process occasioned by allegations of political corruption that have been the subject of a number of long-running judicial tribunals of inquiry.

Finally, in the case of the most recent general election (2002), we make use of a two-wave panel survey conducted by Irish Marketing Surveys (IMS). This survey has specific items on turnout, reasons for abstention, support for parties and policies, measures of political knowledge, distance to the polling station, but does not have measures of education or income.

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<sup>16</sup> The Asia Europe Survey (ASES) is coordinated by Professor Takashi Inoguchi, Institute of Oriental Culture, University of Tokyo and is funded by the Japanese Ministry of Education and Science.

**Table 1, Average voter turnout in the selected states (currently members of the EU) c.1970–c.2002 (in percent)**

Country	Average general election turnout	Election turnout c.1970	Election turnout c.2002	Change from 1970–2002	Compulsory voting	Average turnout in Euro elections 1979–99	Type of Electoral system	Sunday / Weekday voting
Belgium	92.78	91.50	90.60	-0.9	Yes	89.40	PR	Sunday
Austria	88.74	91.80	80.40	-11.4	No	58.30	PR	Sunday
Sweden	88.51	88.30	81.40	-6.9	No	39.90	PR	Sunday
Luxembourg	88.33	90.10	86.50	-3.6	Yes	89.60	PR	Sunday
Italy	88.08	93.20	81.40	-11.8	Yes until 1993	79.10	Mixed	Sunday
Denmark	86.85	87.20	87.10	-0.1	No	50.20	List PR	Weekday
Germany	85.35	91.10	82.20	-8.9	No	58.00	PR	Sunday
France	82.24	84.20	79.70	-4.5	No	53.20	Majority	Sunday
Netherlands	81.84	79.10	73.20	-5.9	No	44.60	PR	Weekday
Greece	81.01	79.60	89.00	+9.4	Yes	78.60	PR	Sunday
Portugal	77.00	91.70	61.00	-30.7	No	49.80	PR	Sunday
Spain	73.64	79.40	73.80	-5.6	No	61.90	PR	Sunday
Finland	73.64	83.60	65.20	-18.4	No	45.20	PR	Sunday
UK	72.99	72.20	59.40	-12.8	No	32.30	Plurality	Weekday
Ireland	71.23	77.80	62.70	-15.1	No	53.90	PR STV	Weekday
<b>Average</b>	<b>82.15</b>	<b>85.39</b>	<b>76.91</b>	<b>8.48</b>		<b>58.93</b>		

Source: IDEA, Stockholm, Sweden; Franklin (2001: 311)

Notes: Elections examined took place after 1970 until June 2002. Voter turnout is measured as total number of votes as a percentage of the total number of registered voters rather than total eligible population. Data for France refers to the second round in Presidential elections.

**Table 2 Voter turnout and reasons for abstention by age for the 1994 and 1999 European elections and the 2002 general election (per cent)**

<b>European election 1994 (EB 41.1)</b>						
[Actual turnout 44.0 pct]						
	<i>18–24 yrs</i>	<i>25–34 yrs</i>	<i>35–54 yrs</i>	<i>55+ yrs</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>N</i>
Respondent voted	45.5	49.2	66.7	72.1	<b>60.8</b>	565
Voluntary abstainer	29.2	27.6	20.5	16.3	22.4	208
Circumstantial	19.5	20.6	11.9	10.8	14.7	137
Other reasons	5.8	2.5	0.9	0.8	2.0	19
N	154	199	336	240	929	929
<b>European election 1999 (EB 52.0)</b>						
[Actual turnout 50.2 pct]						
	<i>18–24 yrs</i>	<i>25–34 yrs</i>	<i>35–54 yrs</i>	<i>55+ yrs</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>N</i>
Respondent voted	42.7	56.2	80.5	79.7	<b>69.6</b>	624
Voluntary abstainer	17.3	19.8	9.1	7.3	11.9	107
Circumstantial	21.3	18.5	8.3	10.2	12.8	115
Other reasons	18.7	5.6	2.1	2.8	5.7	51
N	150	162	339	246	897	897
<b>General election 2002 (IMS survey)</b>						
[Actual turnout 62.9 pct]						
	<i>18–24 yrs</i>	<i>25–34 yrs</i>	<i>35–54 yrs</i>	<i>55+ yrs</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>N</i>
Respondent voted	73.7	85.6	90.9	92.6	<b>88.3</b>	757
Voluntary abstainer	14.9	2.6	3.2	2.1	4.2	36
Circumstantial	10.5	11.1	5.1	5.0	6.9	59
Other reasons	0.9	0.7	0.8	0.3	0.6	5
N	114	153	253	337	857	857

**Table 3 OLS regression analysis of voter turnout in general elections at the constituency level, 1981–2002**

	1981	Feb 1982	Nov 1982	1987	1989	1992	1997	2002
Constant	61.646*** (9.48)	67.113*** (8.928)	65.388*** (8.695)	73.835*** (6.957)	50.608*** (9.625)	67.606*** (8.126)	66.664*** (7.941)	72.545*** (8.933)
Secondary education %	0.479*** (0.122)	0.419*** (0.115)	0.488*** (0.112)	0.380*** 0.089	0.441*** (0.124)	0.382*** (0.089)	0.186 (0.112)	-0.188 (0.155)
Farmers %	0.386*** (0.077)	0.285*** (0.073)	0.344*** (0.071)	0.194*** 0.057	0.396*** (0.079)	0.215** (0.071)	0.502*** (0.085)	0.640*** (0.124)
20-29 years %	-1.029*** (0.207)	-1.06*** (0.195)	-1.256*** (0.190)	-1.139*** 0.152	-0.470** (0.210)	-0.732*** (0.141)	-0.173 (0.194)	-0.284 (0.256)
Unemployed %	0.939** (0.441)	0.220 (0.415)	0.231 (0.405)	-0.432 (0.324)	0.164 (0.448)	-0.135 (0.160)	-0.408 (0.212)	-0.200 (.110)
N	41	41	41	41	41	41	41	42
Adjusted R squared	0.800	0.787	0.850	0.852	0.738	0.734	0.786	0.767

*Note: the dependent variable is percentage turnout. The independent variables are the percentages of the various socio-demographic groups in each of the constituencies. Standard errors are in parentheses.*

*\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .05$*

**Table 4 OLS regression analysis of factors that influenced voter turnout in the 1997 general election at the DED level (N=2,400)**

	<b>MODEL 1</b> Unstandardised coefficients	<b>MODEL 2</b> Unstandardised coefficients
Percentage with primary education	0.004 ** (-0.001)	-0.007 *** (0.001)
Percentage with third level education	-0.007 *** (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
Percentage of population between 20 & 29 years	-0.027 *** (0.002)	-0.023 *** (0.002)
Percentage of population between 30 & 39 years	-0.019 *** (0.003)	-0.013 *** (0.003)
Percentage of population between 40 & 49 years	-0.013 *** (0.004)	-0.010 ** (0.004)
Percentage of population between 50 & 59 years	-0.009 ** (0.004)	-0.004 (0.003)
Percentage of population between 60 & 69 years	0.019 *** (0.003)	0.019 *** (0.003)
Percentage upper middle class (professional workers; managerial & technical)	0.004 ** (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Percentage working class (semi-skilled and unskilled)	0.005 *** (0.001)	0.008 *** (0.001)
Social deprivation index (SAHRU) †	-0.128 *** (0.009)	-0.054 *** (0.009)
Percentage of farmers (socio-economic grouping)		0.012 *** (0.001)
Constant	1.538 *** (0.143)	1.085 *** (0.138)
R Square	0.31	0.38
Adjusted R Square	0.31	0.38
Std. Error of the Estimate	0.34	0.32

*Note: the dependent variable is voter turnout in the 1997 general election on a logit scale. The independent variables are percentages of the various socio-demographic groups in each of the District Electoral Divisions (DED's). Standard errors are in parentheses.*

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ ; \*\*  $p \leq .05$

† The SAHRU social deprivation index is the academic property of the Small Area Health Research Unit (SAHRU), Department of Community Health & General Practice, Trinity College Dublin. This index is constructed from five 1991 census indicators; The proportion of the economically active population (15-64 yrs) unemployed or seeking a first time job (economic dependency ratio); The proportion of the population (social classes 1-6 only) in social classes 5 & 6; The proportion of conventional private household with no motor car; The proportion of households which live in rented accommodation (private & local authority) or in the process of being purchased from a local authority; The average number of rooms per person in conventional private houses. The deprivation variable is constructed into quintiles so as to have a range of values 1 to 5. Roughly speaking, a DED with a value of 1 would fall into the 20% least deprived (most affluent) DEDs in Ireland, whereas one with an index of 5 would fall within the 20% most deprived DEDs.

**Table 5 Individual level analysis of factors which influenced voter turnout in European elections (1994 & 1999)**

	European election 1994			European election 1999		
	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	B	Sig.	Exp(B)
<i>Individual mobilisation</i>						
Party attachment	<b>0.244</b>	<b>0.001</b>	<b>1.277</b>			
Interest in politics	<b>0.260</b>	<b>0.031</b>	<b>1.296</b>			
Knowledge of national politics	0.043	0.770	1.044			
Left–right self placement	0.083	0.410	1.087	–0.013	0.750	0.987
Not at all satisfied with national democracy	0.083	0.549	1.087	–0.330	0.387	0.719
National party differential	–0.119	0.198	0.888			
Perceived power of the European Parliament	<b>0.209</b>	<b>0.011</b>	<b>1.233</b>	0.081	0.219	1.084
Difference in power of EP and national parliament	0.021	0.902	1.022			
European party differential minus national party differential	–0.009	0.973	0.991	<b>–0.110</b>	<b>0.067</b>	<b>0.896</b>
Support for the EU as it is	0.085	0.486	1.089	–0.051	0.559	0.950
Support for rapid European integration	–0.042	0.735	0.959	0.021	0.802	1.021
Level of involvement in the integration process	0.039	0.757	1.039			
Knowledge of the EU	0.089	0.249	1.093	<b>0.343</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>1.410</b>
Perceived reliability of European Parliament	0.116	0.176	1.123			
European party differential	0.045	0.734	1.046			
European candidate differential	<b>0.136</b>	<b>0.061</b>	<b>1.146</b>			
Exposure to the EP election campaign	0.120	0.265	1.127	<b>0.298</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>1.347</b>
<i>Individual facilitation</i>						
Age 25<	<b>–0.751</b>	<b>0.007</b>	<b>0.472</b>	<b>–1.416</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.243</b>
Age 25–35	<b>–0.491</b>	<b>0.023</b>	<b>0.612</b>	<b>–0.968</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.380</b>
Age 81>	–0.145	0.867	0.865	–1.070	0.171	0.343
Manual	–0.339	0.117	0.712	0.196	0.516	1.217
Education	0.035	0.389	1.036	<b>0.047</b>	<b>0.030</b>	<b>1.048</b>
Religious practice	0.187	0.036	1.205			
Registered to vote at another address	–0.576	0.157	0.562			
Constant	–2.289	0.650	0.101	–1.845	0.019	0.158
–2 Log likelihood	816.05			569.90		
Cox & Snell R square	0.17			0.21		
Nagelkerke R square	0.23			0.30		
Percentage correctly classified	71.80			79.60		
Cases included in analysis	731			588		
Missing cases	199			309		
Total	930			897		

Source: EB 41.1 & 52. Note: the dependent variables are voter turnout in 1994 & 1999 European elections Dichotomous recoding of the turnout item – There was a European Parliament election on [date of election]. For one reason or another, many people in Ireland did not vote in that election. Could you please think back to [date of election], did you yourself vote in the European election? (Yes=1, No/DK/refused=0). Analysis was undertaken with unweighted data.

**Table 6 Individual level analysis of factors which influenced voter turnout in the 1997 general election**

	<i>B</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
<b>Individual mobilisation effects</b>			
Feel close to a political party	<b>2.124</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>8.362</b>
Right self-placement * importance	<b>1.586</b>	<b>0.018</b>	<b>4.884</b>
Citizens have a duty to vote in elections	<b>1.349</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>3.855</b>
Feeling of being Irish * importance of being Irish	<b>0.554</b>	<b>0.049</b>	<b>1.740</b>
Widespread corruption in politics	-0.147	0.685	0.863
Worried about political corruption	0.262	0.384	1.300
Have confidence in Dáil	0.168	0.696	1.183
Have confidence in parties	0.552	0.233	1.736
Have confidence in political leaders	-0.508	0.203	0.602
No say in what the government does	0.239	0.514	1.269
Politics and government are complicated cannot understand them	-0.060	0.847	0.942
Since many people vote, it doesn't matter whether I vote or not	-0.380	0.229	0.684
People who are elected stop thinking about the public's interest	-0.586	0.072	0.556
Government officials don't care what I think	0.531	0.136	1.700
<b>Individual facilitation effects</b>			
Get together with others to deal with some community problem	<b>1.145</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>3.142</b>
Interested in politics	<b>0.614</b>	<b>0.072</b>	<b>1.849</b>
Local newspaper, magazine or radio	<b>0.690</b>	<b>0.011</b>	<b>1.994</b>
National newspaper, magazine or radio	-0.148	0.563	0.863
Often attend religious services	<b>0.657</b>	<b>0.034</b>	<b>1.929</b>
Have more than a primary level of education	<b>1.465</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>4.329</b>
Can name the current Minister of Foreign Affairs	0.428	0.190	1.533
Aged 18 to 24 years	<b>-2.425</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.088</b>
Aged 25 to 34 years	<b>-1.507</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.221</b>
Student	<b>-2.133</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.118</b>
Subjective social class (household income quintiles)	-0.176	0.332	0.839
Rurality – lives in a town/village with pop.< 1,500	-0.322	0.350	0.725
Constant	-3.058	0.001	0.047
- 2 Log likelihood	421.57		
Cox & Snell R square	0.35		
Nagelkerke R square	0.60		
Percentage correctly classified	91.0		
Cases included in analysis	970		
Missing cases	40		
Total	1010		

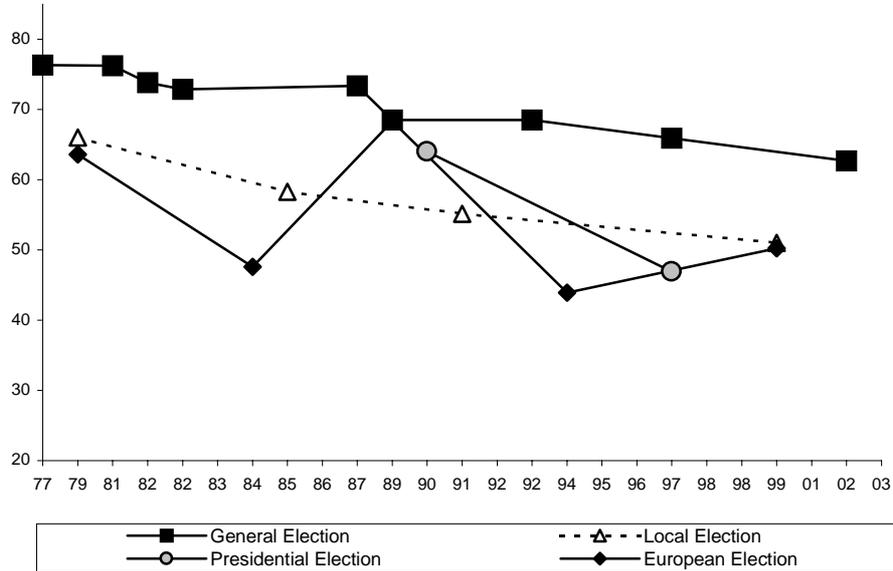
Source: ASES (Oct. – Nov. 2000). Note: the dependent variable is voter turnout in 1997 general election (basis support for parties) PLUS Don't remember & Refused; Not qualified to vote were excluded from the logistic regression analysis (1 = voted in general election in 1997; 0 = abstained). Analysis was undertaken with unweighted data.

**Table 7 Individual level analysis of factors which influenced voter turnout in the 2002 general election**

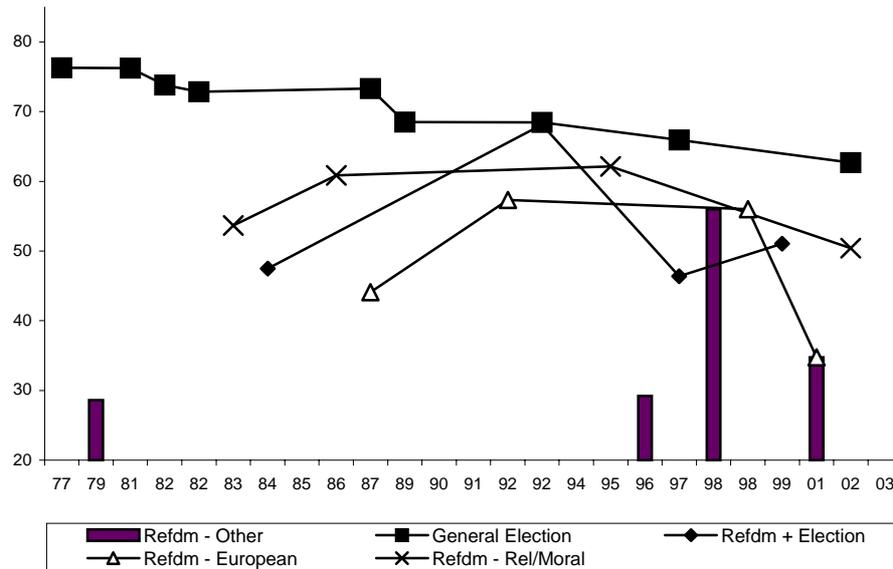
	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
<b>Individual mobilisation effects</b>				
Watched TV debate	<b>0.375</b>	<b>0.234</b>	<b>0.108</b>	<b>1.455</b>
Politicians will not keep their promises	<b>-0.502</b>	<b>0.255</b>	<b>0.049</b>	<b>0.605</b>
Preferred election result, none of the options listed	<b>-2.035</b>	<b>0.319</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.131</b>
<b>Election campaign mobilisation issues</b>				
Health	0.348	0.300	0.245	1.417
Crime	0.136	0.270	0.614	1.146
Drugs	-0.243	0.314	0.438	0.784
Spending on roads and public transport	-0.085	0.365	0.816	0.919
Education	-0.198	0.341	0.562	0.821
Local issues	-0.039	0.229	0.864	0.962
Living standards, will be better next year	0.048	0.261	0.853	1.049
<b>Individual level facilitation</b>				
18–24 years old	<b>-0.699</b>	<b>0.294</b>	<b>0.017</b>	<b>0.497</b>
25–34 years old	-0.086	0.293	0.770	0.918
C2DE social classes	<b>-0.734</b>	<b>0.245</b>	<b>0.003</b>	<b>0.480</b>
Respondent is employed	-0.363	0.240	0.131	0.696
Respondent is unemployed	-0.214	0.448	0.633	0.807
Respondent lives in an urban area	<b>0.566</b>	<b>0.232</b>	<b>0.015</b>	<b>1.761</b>
Low political knowledge (2 out of 5 answers correct)	<b>-1.301</b>	<b>0.244</b>	<b>0.000</b>	<b>0.272</b>
Constant	2.672	0.621	0.000	14.472
– 2 Log likelihood	567.30			
Cox & Snell R square	0.16			
Nagelkerke R square	0.28			
Percentage correctly classified	87.20			
Cases included in analysis	857			
Missing cases				
(Non-registered/ineligible voters [n=19])	19			
Total	876			

Source: IMS, May 13 & 28, 2002. Note: Dichotomous recoding of turnout item – Did you, yourself, manage to vote in the general election on Friday May 17th, or not? (Yes=1, No/refused=0). Logistic regression analysis was undertaken using unweighted data.

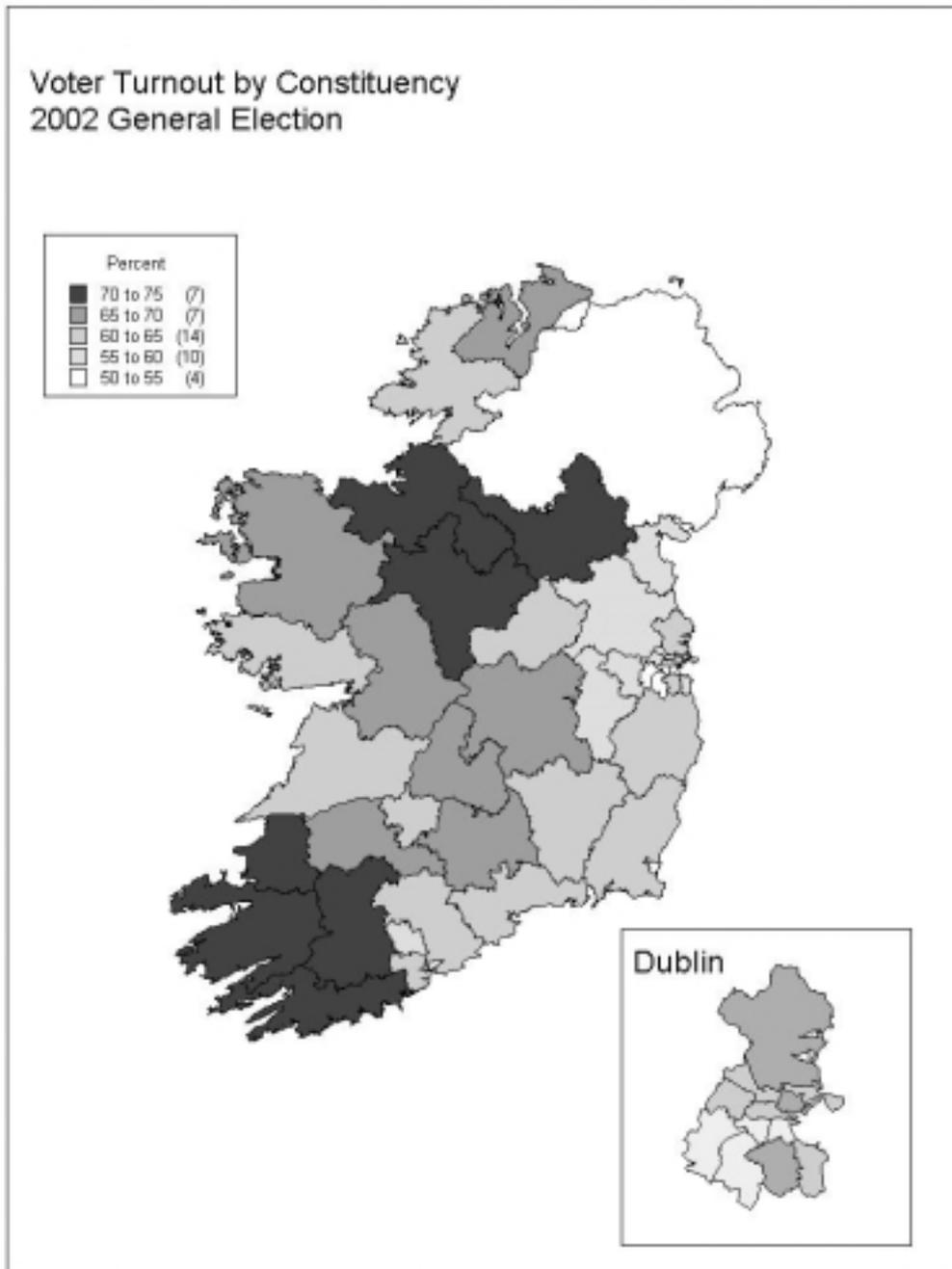
**Figure 1: Voter turnout in general, local, presidential & European elections and referendums, 1977-2002 (per cent)**



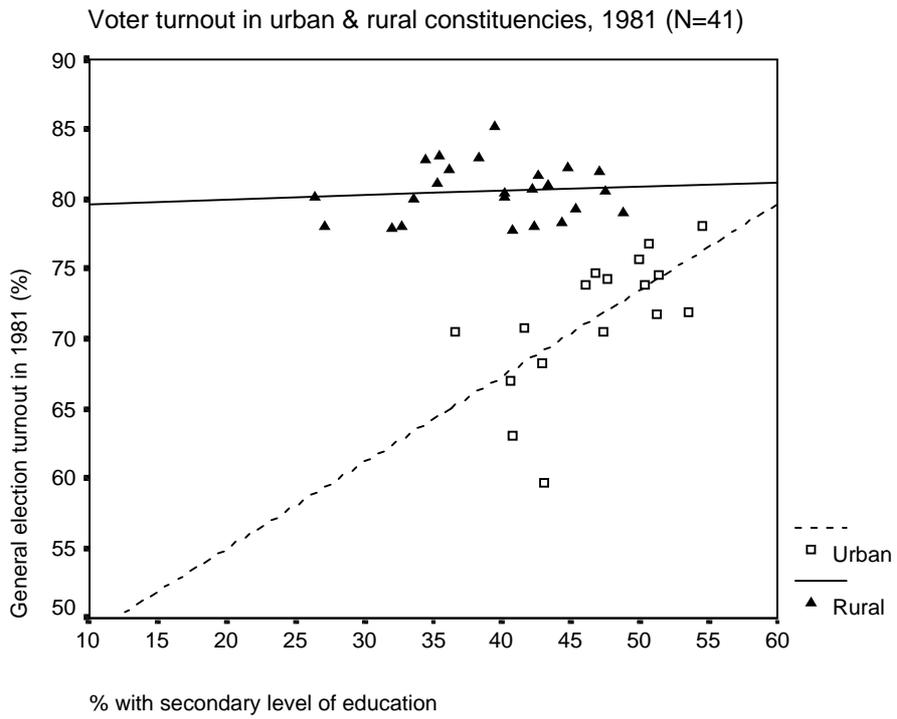
**Figure 2: Voter turnout in general elections and referendums, 1977-2002 (per cent)**



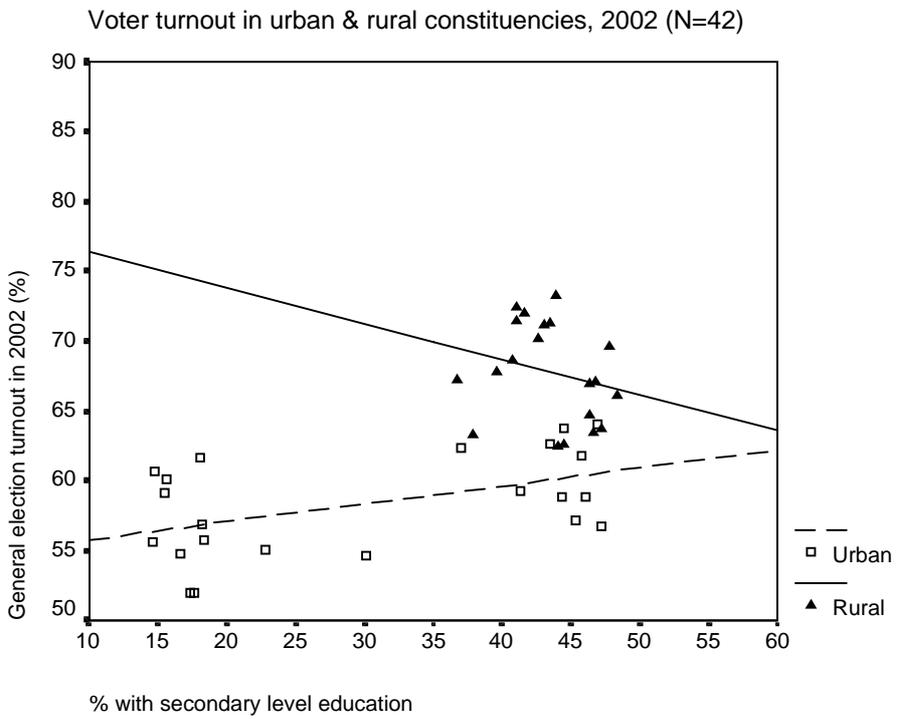
**Figure 3, Voter turnout by constituency in the 2002 general election**



**Figure 4**



**Figure 5**



**Figure 6: Voter abstention rates among different socio-economic groups for general elections in the 1980's (N=41)**

