

Voter Turnout in the 2009 European Elections: Media Coverage and Media Exposure as Explanatory Factors

Abstract

This study examines the impact of European Union (EU) news coverage and of media exposure on voter turnout in the 2009 European parliamentary elections in the 27 EU member states. Using logistic regression, it analyses media content data and voter survey data from the PIREDEU project and builds the hypotheses on the existing literature on media coverage, media exposure, voter turnout, and the second-order elections theory. The study matches data on the amount and tone of EU news in countries' media outlets with voters' usage of these media outlets. This allows for examination of the effects of exposure to individual outlets on one's likelihood to vote in the European elections. The study argues that people exposed to media in which the EU news coverage is highly visible and biased in a positive or a negative direction are more likely to vote in the European election. It further shows that the traditional factors used to explain voter turnout in European elections in the established democracies, such as compulsory voting, Sunday voting, concurrent election, and the time left until the next national election, do not have such a strong explanatory power when applied to the post-Communist countries. The study finds differences in media coverage and media exposure patterns between the countries and specifically concentrates on explaining the variations between the established EU member states and the post-Communist member states. The findings of the study offer a comparative perspective on voter turnout in the European elections which is lower than in national elections, varies greatly between the countries, and is much lower in the post-Communist member states than in the established member states. Such low voter turnout may signify voters' lack of interest in the EU and low level of their knowledge about the EU, especially among voters in the post-Communist member states. The results further indicate the lack of EU's external communication and a further deepening of the democratic deficit in the EU.

Marketa Bilka
Sabanci University, Istanbul
marketa@sabanciuniv.edu

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INTRODUCTION

Media play a very important role in the democratic political process and especially during election campaigns. “Election campaigns are a staple of modern democracies” and receive much attention from the media (Esser and D’Angelo 2006: 44). However, if a campaign is not salient, such as in the case of European Parliament (EP) elections, then the media coverage is equally low and may leave voters uninformed and, often, not interested in the elections or politics in general. Availability of information is necessary for a quality decision making for both public and policy makers; for the public to vote for those who really represent their views and for policy makers to respond to people’s needs (Norris 2004). Considering they are a part of the decision making in the European Union (EU), European citizens should have the ability and the desire to gain as much knowledge about the EU as possible to be able to make an informed and reasonable choice when electing their country’s representatives to the European Parliament. Yet, the turnout figures show that Europeans do not take advantage of their unique opportunity to participate in the EU’s democratic process. The voter turnout at European election keeps decreasing since the first direct election in 1979. The average turnout for, then, nine member states was 61.99 percent while in 2009 it dropped to 43 percent among 27 states (European Parliament 2009). This is quite a paradox considering that the EP has gained more power and competences since 1979. The EU itself has also enlarged, thus expanding its sphere of influence, and it has become a part of many people’s daily lives.

Voting is the central element of democratic political systems. The EU is a democratic entity, so a high turnout in European elections is a prerequisite for well-functioning democracy in the EU (de Vreese et al. 2006). High visibility of news about the EU in the media is thus desirable because media are the most important source of information for the public, especially about remote issues such as the EU (de Vreese et al. 2006; Mughan and Gunther 2000). Voting is an act with low benefits and high costs, and especially in the European elections, the benefits are merely present. To boost the participation rate, the benefits need to be increased and/or the costs decreased. Having easier access to information, such as from media, can lower costs associated with voting. Higher campaign coverage in national media could thus increase turnout as it would decrease the cost of voting by providing information to the citizens. More politically informed citizens are more likely to be interested in the matters of politics and are then more likely to vote. Low turnout is undesirable for a democratic country as it signifies distorting patterns of representation and

decreasing legitimacy of democratic institutions because those who do not vote are usually the less well-off citizens who are then underrepresented in the European Parliament (in the case of European elections) (Lassen 2005; Mattila 2003: 449-450).

Despite the notion that the turnout in the European elections declined greatly over the years, it actually decreased only slightly among the established member states. It is the new member states from the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) that brought in the trend of very low turnout in the 2004 European election quite in contradiction to the “first-election boost” theory (see Franklin 2006, Mattila 2003). The difference between the turnout in the old and the new member states is referred to as the "Euro-Gap". The average turnout in the national elections is somewhat similar in both these groups (75.2% in the established members, 69% in the new members in the last national elections), but the difference in the average turnout in the 2004 European election was larger: 52.8% in the old members and 40.3% in the new members (Rose 2004: 4). Yet this is dividing strictly old and new members. If we divide the countries according to "established democracies" and "post-Communist countries" (i.e. move Malta and Cyprus to the first group) we get even more striking difference: 55.6% turnout in European elections in the established members and 31.1% for post-Communist countries. In 2009, the numbers are quite similar: 54.35% for the old member states and 31.95% for the new CEE members (excluding Romania and Bulgaria). See figure 1 for detailed analysis of voter turnout in the 2004 and 2009 European elections.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Turnout among the CEE member states varies greatly; therefore, there is a need to study specifically these countries as they have introduced new variables affecting turnout, and we need to understand their characteristics in order to understand the decreasing turnout in European elections. This study examines factors that affect turnout. Some studies have found that although the act of voting is done by individuals, individual characteristics do not have as strong explanatory power as systemic and contextual factors, the country level characteristics (van der Brug and Franklin 2005). This paper provides evidence that some individual level characteristics, such as exposure to media during the election campaign matter in determining the turnout.

In the Western countries, variables, such as compulsory voting, time until next national election and the first time holding the election explain 80 percent of between-countries variation in turnout in the European elections (Franklin 2006). Such analysis,

however, is not well applicable in the CEE countries because many of the variables, including Sunday voting, electoral system, compulsory voting, first-election, and concurrent election do not differ between the countries. The time until next national election differs among the countries, but studies have shown that the position of the European election in the national election cycle does not matter in the CEE member states (Schmitt 2005). This paper searches for additional variables that can explain the turnout in the CEE countries. Media exposure can fulfill this role as media are an important part of many people's daily lives.

The research question proposed in this paper is not new but offers a different perspective on the turnout issue by looking specifically at media explaining differences in turnout in a group of countries that is often looked at as one item. Apart from comparing the established member states with the CEE member states, I look at the CEE countries as individual cases to examine their unique characteristics. Despite the many similarities in political and media systems in the CEE countries caused by the Communist past, I expect to find different magnitude of media coverage having diverse effects on the citizens exposed to these media across the EU member states. The next section examines the existing literature about voter turnout, media and campaign effects, European elections and the characteristics of the CEE countries that relate to voting. Then, the data and methods used in this paper are presented, followed by the results of data analysis and discussion.

FACTORS AFFECTING TURNOUT

There have been many studies on what factors affect voter turnout in national elections, and these studies usually agree that the most important determinants are education, level of political information, and country specific characteristics, such as those describing the political, party and electoral systems (Lassen 2005; Mattila 2003). Blais offers an excellent literature review of the various factors affecting turnout (Blais 2006). Turnout in European election is often examined using the same explanatory factors as turnout in national election, but there are some additional variables that need to be considered. It has been agreed that the turnout in European election is lower than in national or local elections and that it varies between countries. It has also been constantly decreasing since the first European election. Whether one casts a vote or not depends on a great number of factors which can be divided according to the level of explanation: system and individual. System level indicators include institutional and social context, such as type of electoral system, compulsory voting, Sunday voting, linkages between parties and citizen groups, the amount of choices voters have, the existence of concurrent national election, and the position of European election in

electoral cycle. The individual level variables are age, education, income, gender, group membership, knowledge about the EU, the support for the EU, and political interest (Franklin et al. 1996; Marsh and Franklin 1996; Mattila 2003).

The impact of media exposure on voter participation has been studied and discussed extensively. Many have agreed that although media are such an important source of information, they are often to be blamed for the lack of EU news (Semetko et al. 2000; Banducci 2005; de Vreese 2007; Toka 2007). The low media coverage may as well be a consequence of the lack of EU's external communication, referred to as the communication deficit, that is often connected to the EU's democratic deficit (Peter and de Vreese 2004). The studies about EU news coverage agree that the coverage of EU issues in the news is generally very low and only peaks around important events, such as the European elections, introduction of Euro or referenda about EU issues (de Vreese et al. 2006; Peter and de Vreese 2004: 5; Semetko et al. 2000). The possible effects of media on participation are usually discussed along with the content of the news and the tone of the news measured by whether they portray the EU in a negative or a positive tone. See figure 2 for information on the visibility and tone of the EU news and turnout in the 27 EU member states. In his analysis of information effects on voting behavior in European elections, Toka (2007) found that voters' level of information matters when they make a vote choice and suggested an explanation for the low turnout in European elections: parties and candidates do not campaign enough; therefore, media do not cover the elections enough, and, consequently, citizens do not have enough information and do not vote (see also Schmitt 1980, Banducci 2005).

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

Such analysis is common in the studies about the European elections. Research about the low importance of European elections and its consequences escalated in the foundation of "the second order national election theory" (Franklin and van der Eijk 1996; Franklin 2006; Schmitt 1980). Reiff and Schmitt (1980) called the European election the "second order national election" because it plays no role in deciding who rules the country and because there is "less at stake" than in national elections; yet, at the same time, often the same candidates and parties compete in both first and second order elections and they both are often about the same national issues. Of the three crucial characteristics of the second order election theory, the first one forms the basis for this paper: turnout in the second order

elections is lower than in first order elections, major and government parties do poorly, and small parties do better than in previous national election (Marsh and Franklin 1996: 11). Furthermore, despite the situation changing since the first European election and voters knowing more about the EU today, they still have little knowledge about the EU compared to their national politics, and they often see the EU affairs as irrelevant to their everyday lives. They also rarely have preferences for EU policies, which makes them less likely to vote in the European election (Mattila 2003). Higher intensity of campaign and higher visibility of news about European elections could increase turnout as voters would perceive elections as of greater importance. Banducci (2005) found that higher visibility of campaign in the news mobilizes voters in European elections, and this effect is weaker for habitual voters and people with high level of political interest who would vote anyway (Banducci and Semetko 2003; Banducci 2005). However, the European election campaigns and their media coverage are rarely as prominent as the campaign for national elections, keeping the turnout low and unaffected.

Turnout in European election is likely to increase when the election takes places for the first time because of the initial enthusiasm about EU membership (Franklin 2006; Mattila 2003). This hypothesis is well supported by evidence from the established EU member states, but it does not hold for the new member states: in 2004, turnout in the new members was lower than in the old ones, and in 2009, four of the new members had higher turnout than in 2004. Some suggest that in 2004, voters in the new member states suffered from “election fatigue” as only a year earlier many of them voted in referenda on EU accession and many also had general or presidential elections. For many voters and political elites in the CEE countries, the EU accession was an issue of highest priority, and once that was achieved, they did not find a reason strong enough to make them vote in the European election and, similarly, the campaign was not salient and failed to mobilize them (Franklin 2007: 54; Lodge 2005).

There are numerous reasons for why the turnout in the CEE countries is so low. For example, the EU is often perceived as too far from people’s daily lives thus the election itself or the campaign are able to gain much interest from voters (Batory 2005). Also, many CEE countries have not completely stabilized their democracies; therefore the countries often go through times of governmental crises, corruption scandals, or other political turmoil. Some of them, including the Czech Republic, Poland and Latvia, went through such time during their first European election, which may have prevented many voters to cast their votes (Rovna 2005a; Szczerbiak 2005). Furthermore, small countries such as Estonia, Latvia and Slovenia

have only a few representatives in the EP which make them see the EP and thus the European election as irrelevant and not worth leaving their home to go vote (Brinar: 2005).

Studies examining the differences in voting behavior between the old and the new member states found that the post-Communist countries do not exhibit the same characteristics as other emerging democracies where, usually, strong group loyalties and social structures are the main determinants of one's vote rather than policy and strategic considerations (van der Brug and Franklin 2005). The old and new member states do not differ too much in the determinants of voting behavior, but the variables used explain less variance in the new member states than in the old; therefore, there must be another explanatory factor missing in the study (van der Brug and Franklin 2005). This paper aims to fill the gap by including media exposure and media content as the factors influencing voter participation in European elections.

MEDIA EFFECTS

Media are one of the most common channels of communication between parties and voters as they allow parties to reach wide audience, including less partisan voters (Norris 2006: 6). When examining the effects of media coverage of election campaign on voter behavior, both context of media (content, media system) and media use (patterns of exposure of individuals to media) need to be considered. Two main theories are discussed concerning the possible influence of media on turnout: the videomalaise theory, claiming that media drive voters away from voting by covering politics in a negative light and creating distrust in and cynicism toward not only media themselves but also politics and political elites; and cognitive mobilization, suggesting that the information in media makes people more likely to vote (Baek 2009; de Vreese and Semetko 2002; Norris 2006).

Voting is an act that rational actors undergo if they evaluate it as having more benefits than costs. Voting in European election has extremely low benefits for a voter; therefore, the costs need to be lowered in order for the voters to come to the polls. Media can reduce costs of voting, thus increase turnout by providing information about the election and candidates. Numerous studies based mainly in the USA have found that exposure to newspapers and television affects (increases) turnout, increases learning by providing information, and is also likely to alter voters' opinions and preferences or reinforce their already existing preferences (Della Vigna and Kaplan 2006; Gerber, Karlan, and Bergan 2006; Goldstein and Freedman 2002; Iyengar and Simon 2000).

Political knowledge plays a role in conditioning the effects of media on voter participation. Normally, people with higher prior knowledge are more likely to receive a message from the media but less likely to allow it to change their attitudes. However, the probability of receiving a message and letting the message alternate one's opinion also depends on the intensity of the information flow: in a low/medium intensity information flows, those with medium/higher level of political knowledge are more likely to receive the message and thus alter their opinions. On the other hand, in high intensity information flows, such as during election campaigns, even those with lower levels of political knowledge can receive the message and these are then more likely to alter their opinion (McGuire 1968; Zaller 1992).

When it comes to vote choice, media are generally believed to have minimal effects regarding voting behavior, but there are several roles they can fulfill. They can strengthen one's preferences (reinforcement), point out salient issues (agenda-setting), shape parties' images and voting preferences (persuasion), and urge people to go vote or to vote for a specific party (mobilization) (Norris 2006). A lot of research has been done, generally in the USA, about "attack advertising", i.e. the effect of negative campaigning on voters, mostly reaching different conclusions than were the original demobilizing hypotheses (as in, for example Ansolabehere et al. 1994 and 1999 or Finkel and Geer 1998). Recent studies found that negative ads can in fact increase turnout (Brooks 2006, Goldstein and Freedman 2002, Martin 2004). This is why I consider both positive and negative bias of news as potentially increasing turnout.

When examining the media campaign effects in the European elections, three aspects of media coverage have been found to influence public perception: visibility of EU news (the amount of news about the EU and EU-related issues among other political and economic news), the European nature of the news (whether the EU news actually talk about the EU or about national issues that are being related to the EU), and the tone (how the news evaluate the EU and its institutions) (de Vreese et al. 2006). Additionally, higher visibility of EU news can induce higher turnout (Banducci and Semetko 2003, 2004). I will consider the effects of the visibility and tone of the EU news in the context of 27 EU countries during the campaign of the 2009 European Parliament elections.

THE CEE COUNTRIES

Many studies distinguish between the old and the new member states, but the proper distinction should be, and sometimes is, made between the established and post-Communist

democracies, i.e. shifting Malta and Cyprus into the first group. The voting context in post-Communist countries can be described as “limited electoral experiences and underdeveloped norms of electoral participation” that lead to lower turnout than in the West (Schmitt 2005: 9). Low turnout in Poland as well many other CEE countries can be explained by the lack of tradition of voting. "Poles are not particularly keen on using their vote in any type of elections, as shown by the statistics of the last 20 years of independent statehood" (Gagatek et al. 2009: 141). This hypothesis is supported by the data analysis in this paper. There is significantly less habitual voters in the post-Communist countries than in the established EU members, and there is a negative correlation between a post-Communist country and being a habitual voter.

In her qualitative study with focus groups in Bulgaria and Poland, Guerra (2010) examines the reasons for why voting behavior in national and European elections differs in the new democracies and makes several important theoretical points. First, the second order election theory is not properly applicable in the new member states as their party systems are different than those in the West: they are unstable, not consolidated, and show high volatility (both in national and European elections; see also Schmitt 2005). Second, new parties emerge and disappear often, or they change their names and alliances, making it difficult for the voters to develop party loyalties or identify with a certain party; consequently, less people identify with a party in the CEE countries than in the West (Guerra 2010, Schmitt 2005). Finally, the political environment in CEE countries is still under the influence of their Communist past which is reflected in voters' distrust in politics and politicians, a trend that originated with the corruption and bribery scandals during the transformation and has projected into the perception of EU politics as well (Guerra 2010, Schmitt 2005). Nevertheless, the trust in EU institutions is higher than trust in domestic institutions in many CEE countries because “the EU accession was perceived as a chance to ‘substitute’, or at least control, those domestic authorities that do not work properly” (Karnikova 2009: 66).

Distrust in media and the belief that they are influenced by the government, opposition parties, or political elites is widely spread among citizens (Guerra 2010, Schmitt 2005). Because of the distrust, media have lower potential to affect turnout by covering the European election campaign (Guerra 2010). This paper, however, bases its arguments on the assumption that when people are exposed to media with intensive information flow and, in this case, a high amount of news about the EU, they are likely to be affected by the messages even if they do not trust the media.

It has been agreed that the post-Communist EU member states are different from the established member states in many aspects, including voting behavior. Therefore, understanding the political background in these countries with their Communist legacies is crucial for making any conclusion about voting behavior of their citizens especially when explaining why it is different from the Western countries. In the time around the 2009 European elections, the Czech Republic, for example, held the EU council presidency in the first half of 2009 “which brought European issues closer to the Czech door” and showed that “the Czech Republic is not just a small insignificant country in the EU” (Karnikova 2009: 66). One would think that this would strengthen the awareness about the EU among the public and even increase the turnout in the European election. However, this did not happen; the Czech Republic had one of the lowest turnout figures in the 2009 European elections, followed only by Lithuania, Poland and Slovakia. This may have been also caused by the current political situation that the country found itself around the time of the election. The 2009 European election in the Czech Republic as well as in Hungary and Poland took place during a governmental crisis, quite common in the CEE countries, which lead to a tense campaign and to lots of negative feelings toward politics in general (Batory 2009; Gagatsek et al. 2009; Karnikova 2009).

Lithuania presents an interesting case as its turnout decreased by 27 percent between 2004 and 2009. In 2004, Lithuania held its presidential election on the same day as the European election, but in 2009, the presidential election took place about a month earlier only very short time for campaign for the European election. Although this was not part of the analysis in this paper, we can assume that holding concurrent presidential election boosted the turnout in 2004, while in 2009, Lithuania voters experienced “election fatigue” (Mieñkowska-Norkiene and Kavoliunaite 2009: 122). To turn to a more positive note, Estonia had one of the highest turnout figures among the new member states, and it is also the only CEE country that uses advance internet voting. Although it is not part of this study, it is suggested that advance internet voting lowers the costs of voting, thus possibly enhancing participation (Sikk 2009: 7). Despite Estonia’s turnout being relatively high compared to other CEE countries, yet it was still much lower than in the rest of the EU.

Since the traditional variables explaining turnout in the European elections in the established EU member states are not as powerful in the post-Communist countries, this paper examines whether the content of media and voters’ exposure to the media affect voter participation rate. The paper aims to find empirical evidence to the following research

question: *After controlling for contextual and individual level variables, to what extent do media (content and exposure) explain voter participation in the 2009 European Parliament elections and how does the strength of the effects differ between the established EU member states and the post-Communist countries?* The hypotheses to be confirmed by the data are as follow:

H1: *Higher visibility of EU news and higher amount of biased EU news in media (i.e. positive and negative news) increases voter participation.*

H2: *The effects of media content and exposure are stronger in the post-Communist countries than in the established EU members.*

RESEARCH METHOD AND DATA

To investigate the hypotheses stated above, this study uses voter survey data from the 2009 European Election Study (EES 2009; van Egmond et al. 2009) and media content analysis data from the Media Study (Schuck et al. 2010), both part of PIREDEU¹, for the 27 EU countries². The Media Study analyses content of three newspapers and two evening news on television channels in each country³ three weeks before the European election. In total, 52,009 news stories were coded. The list of outlets can be found in Schuck et al. (2010). The Voter Study was carried out during four weeks after the European elections in June 2009. It consists of independently-drawn samples of about 1,000 respondents in each of the 27 EU member states. Using the media data, I created two variables describing the amount and tone of EU news per media outlet in each country. See Appendix 1 for detailed description of the questions and variables used. These variables were then matched with media exposure data from the voter surveys and weighted exposure measures to individual outlets, in relation to the amount and tone of EU news in these outlets, were created. See Appendix 2 for detailed description of these variables.

The traditional variables explaining turnout in European elections mostly do not apply to the CEE countries. Compulsory voting is not present in any country, and the type of electoral system is the same in most of these countries. Sunday voting also does not vary

¹ Providing an Infrastructure for Research on Electoral Democracy in the European Union (www.piredeu.eu).

² 28 country contexts are examined here as Belgium is taken as two contexts: Wallonia and Flanders.

³ There are three newspapers in each country and two television channels in most countries except for Germany (four television channels), Slovenia and Spain (three television channels) and Luxemburg (one television channel). For the analysis in this paper I used two television channels for all countries (except for Luxemburg that has only one) because the additional channels in the three countries did not add up statistically significant explanatory power to the analysis.

among the countries as all countries vote on Sunday or on the weekend⁴. Concurrent election in was held only in Latvia among the post-Communist countries. The only country level variable that varies among the post-Communist countries is the time left until the next national election, but this has been found to have no significant effect on mobilization and participation in these countries. The year of EU accession is also used as independent variable in the analysis here as some studies have found an evidence of the effect of the length of EU membership both on media coverage of the EU and on participation. Furthermore, several country-level aggregates of media characteristics are also used in the data analysis in this paper: the average country level of the amount of EU news and of the amount of positive, negative and biased EU news in the media⁵.

The individual level variables then constitute of the control variables and the media variables of interest. Habitual voting, party ID, education, age, and gender are used as control variables. Furthermore, the data analysis also examines variables indicating respondent's interest in politics, evaluation of the goodness of EU membership, and the level of satisfaction with democracy in respondent's country. The main interest of this paper is media and the election campaign in the media; therefore, variables indicating respondent's interest in the election campaign and actual involvement in the campaign are used. The independent variables of interest are made up of media content and media exposure data. Respondent's exposure to individual outlets was matched (and multiplied) with the amount of EU news and the amount of positive, negative, and biased EU news in these outlets. For a detailed description of this method of linking the exposure data to media content see Banducci and Xezonakis (2010).

I am not interested in the effects of individual media outlets, but in what kinds of outlets (judged by their visibility of EU news and tone of EU news) are more likely to make a respondent participate when exposed to these outlets. I created two models: one includes an outlet (outlets – separating television and newspapers) to which the respondent was exposed

⁴ The voting days in the Czech Republic are traditionally Friday and Saturday, and in Slovakia, people vote on Saturday. I believe this can still be considered "Sunday voting" as it is not (only) a working day. All other countries vote on Sunday.

⁵ The average for the three newspapers and two television channels in each country examined in the content analysis of the Media Study.

the most⁶. The other model includes the average of respondent's exposure to all outlets and the content indicators of these outlets⁷.

$y(\text{epvote}) =$

M1: amt_allnp + amt_alltv + bia_allnp + bia_alltv + pos_allnp + pos_alltv + neg_allnp + neg_alltv

M2: want_all + wbia_all + wpos_all + wneg_all

BOTH MODELS: campF + intcamp + intpol + habv + pID + male + age + edu_yrs + stil_stdy + EUmb_good + dem_satf_ctry + ctry_amtEU + ctry_posEU + ctry_negEU + ctry_biaEU + access + comps + postc + nextNE

To explain the variation in participation in the European election within and across the EU countries, this paper utilize multi-level analysis, because neglecting the hierarchical structure of the EES data could lead to an underestimation of standard errors and spurious inferences (Steenbergen and Jones 2002). Furthermore, a random effects model allows for modeling differences in participation across the 27 countries (Hobolt and Spoon 2010). In the latter part of the data analysis, a method of combing is used to distinguish the variables that account for between-country variables (see Franklin and van der Eijk 1996).

RESULTS

To get a general overview, I first ran a logit model (not included in the two sets) that contained only country-level variables. The results show (see table 1) that the strongest (demobilizing) country-level predictor for voting is the post-Communist dummy and also that the aggregates of media outlets' content variables are significant and vary between the established EU members and the post-Communist countries. When the country-level aggregates are then included in the other (multi-level) models, in most of them, only the amount of negative EU news has a negative, statistically significant, and the amount of biased EU news has a positive, statistically significant effect on participating in the election. These effects are interesting considering that the amount of biased EU news is the amounts of positive and negative EU news added together, and the proportion of positive EU news to the negative EU news is very low. However, such effect can be explained by the negative news

⁶ First, interaction terms between respondent's amount of exposure to an outlet with the amount of EU news (and with the amount of positive, negative and biased EU news, i.e. four different interactions for each outlet) in this outlet were created, then the measure of the most used outlets was created using rowmax function in Stata.

⁷ These averages (averages of media content and exposure) were created using rowmean Stata function from the interaction terms of the exposure to an outlet with the amount of EU news in this outlet. This was then repeated for the amounts of positive, negative and biased EU news (four different variables were created).

being more memorable, thus a respondent gaining more (political) information which then makes her more likely to participate in the election (Banducci and Semetko 2003).

I ran models that included only media content variables with no exposure indicators, but the results of these models were very unclear. Therefore, it is crucial to include also the exposure measures in order to test the hypotheses. I estimate two sets of models: one (M1) includes an outlet (outlets – separating television and newspapers) to which the respondent was exposed the most; the other model (M2) includes the average of respondent's exposure to all outlets and the content indicators of these outlets (as described above).

When examining the 27 countries together and using the most often used media outlet (M1), the interaction terms of the amount of EU news in both television and newspapers (weighted by the amount of exposure) have positive, statistically significant effects (see table 2). When the non-significant variables are dropped from the model, but all the media variables are kept, the effects of the interaction terms of the amount of biased EU news in both television and newspapers (weighted by the amount of exposure) become statistically significant but demobilizing. However, when all non-significant variables are taken out from the model, the effect of biased EU news diminishes, the effect of the amount of EU news in newspapers decreases in half while the effect of the amount of EU news in television slightly increases. In the second model (M2) including the averages for all outlets, the amount of EU news in all outlets and the amount of biased EU news (both weighted by the amount of exposure) have significant, positive and negative, respectively, effects (see table 3).

A model that includes only individual-level variables (variation of M1) gives interesting results. When examining the media variables, exposure only to television (not newspapers) is significant when interacting with all media content variables (the amount of EU news, the amount of positive, negative and biased EU news), and all the effects are positive except for the effect of biased EU news which is negative. Although the effect of biased EU was expected to be the same as the effect of negative news (because negative news make up most of the biased EU news), the effect is opposite which could be explained that when receiving biased news, the respondents can be overwhelmed by the various messages that do not have a unified tone; therefore the potential mobilizing effects of biased news can cancel each other, thus leaving the respondent demobilized. When the same model is run separately for established EU members and post-Communist countries, in the established EU members it is again the television exposure and content variables have a significant effect, while in the post-Communist countries, the newspaper exposure and content variables yield statistically significant effects. Additionally, the interaction of television exposure with the

amount of EU news has a significant, demobilizing effect in the post-Communist countries (as opposed to its mobilizing effect in the established member states), suggesting the distinct programming and, possibly, the lack of political news on television in the post-Communist countries. The strength of all the other effects varies, but generally, they are weaker and mobilizing in the established democracies and stronger and demobilizing in the post-Communist countries.

The two models, one with the most used outlet and the other with the average of all outlets, showed similar results. Generally, it is the visibility of EU news in the media and the negative tone of EU news that are likely to increase voters' participation in the European elections in the whole EU.

The traditional and control variables all have expected effects. Higher interest in politics, higher age, higher level of education and being a habitual voter all increase the likelihood of voting. Only gender differs as its effect is not statistically significant in any model. The models also included a dummy variables (*stil_stdy*) indicating whether a respondent still studies. This dummy variable has shown to have a negative, demobilizing effect on participation. Such a conclusion goes along with the theories as the 'still studying' respondents are likely to be the younger ones who tend to participate less in elections. Furthermore, as has been established in previous studies, positive evaluation of the 'goodness' of the EU and a satisfaction with one's country democracy have positive effects on the likelihood of participating in the European elections. However, although the elections studies here are about the EU, the respondent's satisfaction with the democracy in the EU did not prove statistically significant and was dropped from the analysis.

There are two campaign-related variables that I am interested in: the respondent's interest in campaign (*intcamp*) and respondent's actual engagement in the campaign (*campF*, see Appendix 2 for the construction of this measure). Both these variables have strong, mobilizing statistically significant effects in all countries. Such results confirm expectations and add more evidence to findings from previous studies indicating that campaigns do play a crucial role in mobilizing citizens before elections, including the European elections. The campaign interest variable has a stronger effect in the established EU members, while the campaign engagement variable has a stronger impact on participation in the post-Communist countries. This suggests that citizens in the post-Communist countries need to be actually engaged in a campaign in order to be mobilized; being interested in the campaign is not enough.

When it comes to the contextual measures on the country-level variables (when run in a multi-level model), the strongest predictor of participation, as expected, is compulsory voting (not present in any post-Communist country). The position of the European election in the national election cycle (i.e. the time in months until the next national election) has also significant, mobilizing effect in the analyses.

Country differences

I used the combing method to examine the differences in the effects of the media interaction variables across countries. The significance and strengths of these effects vary, but some patterns can be found. However, a more detailed examination of these factors is needed and will be done. As of now, when looking for variables to explain the differences between the countries, the media variables do not offer more explanation than the traditional variables. Using the media indicators from model 1 (the most used outlets), generally, the effects of the media variables are positive across the pos-Communist countries but are significant only in, for example, the Czech Republic, Latvia or Hungary. When using the media variables indicating the averages for all outlets from model 2, they actually explain more variance across the established EU member states rather than in the post-Communist countries. Among the post-Communist countries, only a few countries, including Latvia, Hungary or Poland, show statistically significant effects of the media variables, suggesting that the media in these countries play an important role in mobilizing the voters in the European elections.⁸

CONCLUSION

The EU and its policies often seem very remote and complicated to the ordinary European citizens. They usually cannot experience or learn about the EU first-hand; therefore there is an enormous need for an effective political communication to give the public information about the EU and to ensure that the EU functions properly and legitimately. European citizens participate in the EU policy making by voting in the European election and delegating their countries' representatives to the EP. To make a sensible and educated decision and vote for a candidate that really represents voters' values and goals, the voters need to have enough substantial information about the candidate and the EU. The low and constantly decreasing turnout at the European election shows, however, that citizens mostly choose to not be a part of the European democratic process. By an extensive EU news

⁸ This part of the paper is greatly underdeveloped but I keep working on it and will show more results soon.

coverage (not only) in the weeks before the European elections, media can increase the level of political information of voters, thus help reduce the costs of voting.

This study examines factors affecting turnout. Previous studies have found that individual characteristics do not have as strong explanatory power as country level characteristics. This paper provides evidence that some individual level characteristics, such as exposure to media during the election campaign matter in determining the turnout. Furthermore, this study finds differences in the effects of various factors between the established EU member states and the post-Communist countries as well as within the post-Communist countries. Previous studies have shown that the variables that explain turnout in Western countries, such as compulsory voting, time until next national election and the first time holding the election, do not apply well in the post-Communist countries, thus there is a need for additional explanatory factors. Media exposure can fulfill this role as media are an important part of many people's daily lives.

Using data from the media and voter study of the PIREDEU, this paper examines the factors affecting turnout in the 2009 European elections in the 27 EU member states. Specifically, it considers the effects of the exposure to newspapers and television when the content of these media, the amount and tone of EU news, is considered. This paper not only compares the effects of media in the established EU member states and in the post-Communist countries, but it also looks into the differences among the group of post-Communist countries, a group that is often looked at as a single case.

This paper found differences between the 27 countries in the EU news coverage in the weeks before the European elections and in the patterns of exposure to the media. Furthermore, the analysis discovered differences in the strength of explanatory power of the media exposure variables between the established EU member states and the post-Communist countries. Similarly, even within the ten post-Communist countries, the media effects differ. The patterns of these differences reflect the nature of the content of the media in the examined countries as well as the country-specific political cultural and media tradition. A more in-depth study looking specifically at the characteristics of the media systems is needed to clarify and explicate the differences among the post-Communist countries.

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APPENDIX 1

Media Study; Content Analysis (see Schuck et al. 2010)

AMOUNT OF EU NEWS

In the 2009 media study codebook, there is a filter variable (V13) asking, “Does the story mention either the European Union (EU*), its institutions or policies or the European Parliamentary elections or the campaign?”

* or synonyms such as ‘Brussels’ (when EU is meant), Europe (when EU is meant), EU countries (if explicitly referred to as such), EU member states (if explicitly referred to as such). EU institutions include the European Central Bank (ECB), for instance” (Schuck et al. 2010).

1 = no

2 = yes

When chosen “yes”, the coder was directed to answer numerous questions about content. One of these questions asked to choose a topic from the specific EU- topic list. This filter variable allowed me to use this measure directly and by simple cross tabulation get the share of EU news from there.

TONE OF EU NEWS = AMOUNT OF BIASED EU NEWS

When it comes to the tone of the news, the 2009 media study asks for explicit evaluation. I was interested in obtaining the amount of positive news (i.e. news positively evaluating the EU; including answers ‘positive’ and ‘rather positive’), negative news (i.e. news negatively evaluating the EU; including answers ‘negative’ and ‘rather negative’), and biased news (adding up positive and negative news). I obtained a percentage of news in a certain tone for each media outlet.

Here is the wording of the question (V26) from the codebook:

“Explicitly: Does the story evaluate the EU, and if so, how? ‘The EU’ here refers to the EU as a political institution as such, not to single, more specific institutions such as the EP or the EC. Also code if synonyms are used which clearly refer to the EU as such, e.g., “Europe” (when in fact the EU is meant / but not if Europe is only referred to as a geographical entity) or “Brussels” (when in fact the EU is meant).”

1 = not mentioned

2 = mentioned but not evaluated

3 = negative

4 = rather negative

5 = balanced/mixed

6 = rather positive

7 = positive

APPENDIX 2

Voter study (see van Egmond et al. 2009) – construction of measures; 2009 EES Questions (using UK survey wording)

VARIABLE	DESCRIPTION	SURVEY QUESTION
<i>Dependent var</i>		
Ep_vote	Vote in the 2009 European election	Q24. A lot of people abstained in the European Parliament elections of June 4, while others voted. Did you cast your vote? (1) yes, voted (2) no, did not vote
<i>Country level vars</i>		
NextNE	Months until next national election	
Postc	Post-Communist dummy	
Comps	Compulsory voting dummy	
Access	Year of EU accession	
ctry_amtEU	Amount of EU news in a country's media	
ctry_posEU	Amount of positive EU news in a country's media	
ctry_negEU	Amount of negative EU news in a country's media	
ctry_biaEU	Amount of biased (positive+negative) EU news in a country's media	
<i>Individual level vars</i>		
pID	Party identification	Q87. Do you consider yourself to be close to any particular party? If so, which party do you feel close to? --I created a dummy variable: answers mentioning a party we coded as 1 (i.e. as identifying with a party), others as 0
habv	Habitual voter, i.e. voted in the last national election, dummy	Q27. Which party did you vote for at the General Election of xxxx? --then a list of parties was offered. I recoded all responses answering a name of a party or 'voted blank' as 1 and the others as 0
Edu_ysr	Age when finished full time education	Q100. How old were you when you stopped full-time education? (age in years, 2 digits) (98) still studying
Stil_stdy	Still studying dummy	
Age	Age in years	Q103. What year were you born?
Male	Gender	Q102. Are you male or female?
Intpols	Interest in politics	Q78. To what extent would you say you are interested in politics? Very, somewhat, a little, or not at all?
EUmb_good	Evaluation of EU membership is good	Q79. Generally speaking, do you think that [your country's] membership of the European Union is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?
dem_satf_ctry	Satisfaction with democracy in respondent's country	Q84. On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [your country]?
campF	Factor of engagement in the European election	Factor of a batter question: How often did you do any of the following during the four weeks before the European

	campaign	election? How often did you: Q16. watch a program about the election on television? Q17. read about the election in a newspaper? Q18. talk to friends or family about the election? Q19. attend a public meeting or rally about the election? Q20. look into a website concerned with the election? → often/sometimes/never
intcamp	Interest in the European election campaign	Q23. Thinking back to just before the elections for the European Parliament were held, how interested were you in the campaign for those elections: very, somewhat, a little, or not at all?
amt_alltv/amt_allnp	Weighted exposure to EU news – in the most often used television/newspaper	
bia_alltv/bia_allnp	Weighted exposure to biased EU news – in the most often used television/newspaper	
pos_alltv/pos_allnp	Weighted exposure to positive EU news – in the most often used television/newspaper	
neg_alltv/neg_allnp	Weighted exposure to negative EU news – in the most often used television/newspaper	

<i>Media vars</i>	
d_med1-5	the amount of exposure of individual for each outlet (coded between 0-1)
amt_med1-5	the amount of EU news (%) per each outlet
pos_med1-5	the amount of positive EU (%) news per each outlet
neg_med1-5	the amount of negative EU news (%) per each outlet
bia_med1-5	the amount of biased - both positive and negative - EU news (%) per each outlet
wamt_med1-5	weighted exposure to the amount of EU news (%) per each outlet (simply, the amount of EU news in the outlet multiplied by the amount of exposure)
wpos_med1-5	weighted exposure to the amount positive of EU news (%) per each outlet
wneg_med1-5	weighted exposure to the amount of negative EU news (%) per each outlet
wbia_med1-5	weighted exposure to the amount of biased EU news (%) per each outlet
wamt_all	weighted exposure to the average amount of EU news in all media per country
wpos_all	weighted exposure to the average amount of positive EU news in all media per country
wneg_all	weighted exposure to the average amount of negative EU news in all media per country
wbia_all	weighted exposure to the average amount of biased EU news in all media per country

APPENDIX 3: TABLES AND FIGURES⁹

Table 1: Country level variables

Vote in the EP election	coef	s.e.	beta
access	-0.001	(0.001)	-0.030
comps	0.863	(0.062)***	0.682
postc	-1.198	(0.136)***	-1.271
nextNE	0.106	(0.013)***	0.309
ctry_amtEU	-0.005	(0.002)*	-0.141
ctry_posEU	0.122	(0.022)***	1.378
ctry_negEU	0.036	(0.020)	0.421
ctry_biaEU	-0.044	(0.019)*	-0.517
PC_ctryamt	0.023	(0.003)***	0.826
PC_ctrypos	-0.180	(0.023)***	-2.098
PC_ctryneg	0.054	(0.020)**	0.632
Constant	2.333	-2.768	

Notes: Observations 27,069; *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

Table 2: Model 1: the most used outlets

Vote in the EP election	beta	s.e.		beta	s.e.
amt_allnp	0.00961***	(0.00167)	edu_yrs	0.0126***	(0.00353)
amt_alltv	0.00944**	(0.00313)	stil_stdy	-0.914**	(0.280)
bia_allnp	-0.0579	(0.102)	EUmb_good	0.155***	(0.0187)
bia_alltv	-0.0646*	(0.0295)	dem_satf_ctry	0.0899***	(0.0212)
pos_allnp	0.0386	(0.102)	ctry_amtEU	-0.00920	(0.00894)
pos_alltv	0.0364	(0.0296)	ctry_posEU	0.00810	(0.0350)
neg_allnp	0.0206	(0.102)	ctry_negEU	-0.113*	(0.0468)
neg_alltv	0.0548	(0.0289)	ctry_biaEU	0.110*	(0.0524)
campF	0.852***	(0.0545)	access	-0.00590	(0.00718)
intcamp	0.713***	(0.0226)	comps	1.229***	(0.262)
intpol	0.0784***	(0.0224)	postc	-0.446	(0.305)
habv	0.450***	(0.0364)	nextNE	0.146*	(0.0711)
pID	0.254***	(0.0348)	Constant	8.092	(14.02)
male	-0.0585	(0.0325)	Insig2u	-1.772***	(0.282)
age	0.0211***	(0.00110)			
Observations	27,069		*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05		
Number of t103	28				

⁹ These tables are only preliminary and I will have more specifics tables before the paper presentation.

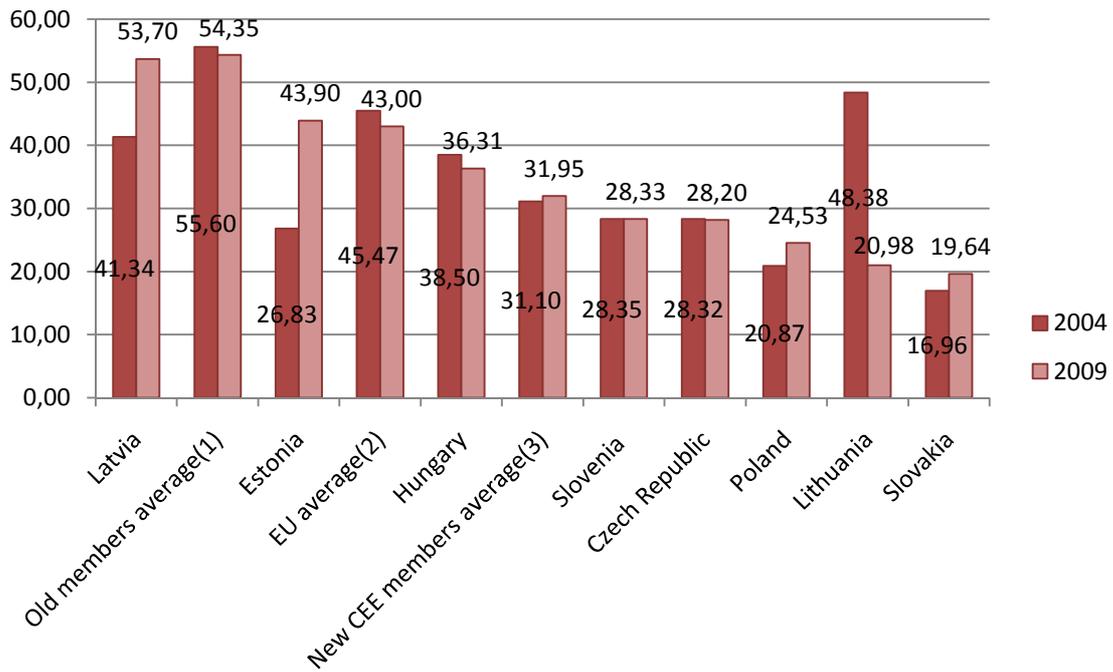
Table 3: Model 2: average of a country's outlets

Vote in the EP election					
	beta	s.e.		beta	s.e.
wamt_all	0.0254***	(0.00451)	EUmb_good	0.159***	(0.0187)
wbia_all	-0.0718**	(0.0242)	dem_satf_ctry	0.0924***	(0.0212)
wpos_all	0.0152	(0.0460)	ctry_amtEU	-0.00929	(0.00912)
campF	0.861***	(0.0544)	ctry_posEU	0.00460	(0.0358)
intcamp	0.714***	(0.0226)	ctry_negEU	-0.107*	(0.0478)
intpol	0.0828***	(0.0224)	ctry_biaEU	0.106*	(0.0535)
habv	0.454***	(0.0364)	access	-0.00527	(0.00733)
pID	0.255***	(0.0348)	comps	1.275***	(0.267)
male	-0.0586	(0.0324)	postc	-0.439	(0.312)
age	0.0214***	(0.00108)	nextNE	0.142	(0.0726)
edu_yrs	0.0134***	(0.00353)	Constant	6828	(14.32)
stil_std	-0.977***	(0.280)	lnsig2u	-1.726***	(0.281)
Observations	27,069		*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05		
Number of t103	28				

Table 4: Individual variables

Vote in the EP election			
	coef	s.e.	beta
amt_allnp	0.011	(0.001)***	0.500
amt_alltv	-0.001	(0.002)	-0.027
bia_allnp	-0.156	(0.103)	-1516
bia_alltv	-0.074	(0.024)**	-0.773
pos_allnp	0.153	(0.102)	0.646
pos_alltv	0.096	(0.024)***	0.674
neg_allnp	0.119	(0.102)	0.909
neg_alltv	0.083	(0.022)***	0.577
campF	0.905	(0.050)***	0.797
intcamp	0.657	(0.021)***	1361
intpol	0.098	(0.021)***	0.193
habv	0.386	(0.034)***	0.387
pID	0.250	(0.033)***	0.274
male	-0.079	(0.031)*	-0.086
age	0.017	(0.001)***	0.638
edu_yrs	0.013	(0.003)***	0.549
stil_std	-0.943	(0.258)***	-0.485
EUmb_good	0.184	(0.017)***	0.355
dem_satf_ctry	0.155	(0.019)***	0.291
Constant	-3379	(0.097)***	
Observations	27,069	*** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05	

Figure 1: Voter turnout in 2004 and 2009 European Elections



(1) EU 15 + Cyprus + Malta

(2) 2004: EU 25, 2009: EU 27

(3) 8 CEE members from 2004 enlargement (Bulgaria and Romania not included in 2009)

Figure 2: 2009 European Parliament Elections, country data

