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Turnout Decline in Western Europe:

Apathy or Alienation?

by

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Abstract

What is driving the general decline of voter turnout in established democracies in the 21st century? In this study, I develop a holistic framework that incorporates explanations on the aggregate and individual levels, as well as the broader literature on democratic developments hitherto largely ignored in studies of turnout decline. I argue that there is an important, overarching debate within this literature that has yet to be tested longitudinal, cross-country analyses of changing political behaviour: that between political *apathy* on one hand and political *alienation* on the other. In other words: are modern citizens voting less than earlier electorates because they are simply less interested in politics or because they are still interested but instead alienated from the specific type of formal politics dominant in today's democracies? To what extent are these dynamics particular to particular generations of citizens coming of age and what is the role of citizens' changing education levels? In order to provide answers to these questions, I conduct multilevel logistics regression models and age-period-cohort (APC) analyses on an extensive new dataset, consisting of over 250.000 respondents from 121 national election studies conducted in eleven Western European countries in the period between 1956-2017 and merged specifically for the purposes of this study. I present descriptive data for various measures of turnout, apathy and alienation in all of these countries before focusing in on the four "turnout decline countries" (TDC), where the available survey data reflects a gradual trend of turnout decline, and comparing dynamics in these countries with the rest of the countries in this study. The results suggest that political apathy has in fact been declining across the region, while alienation has been rising substantially. However, the negative effect of apathy on turnout has become much stronger: apathetic citizens today are much less likely to vote than apathetic citizens in the past. This development accounts for most of turnout decline in the TDC and is significantly stronger there than in the other group of countries. Furthermore, I find that this effect is largely (but not entirely) particular to younger generations of citizens, but there is also a growing education gap in turnout that these dynamics do not fully explain. These results have important implications for studies of turnout decline and broader democratic developments, as well as for public policy in the fields of citizenship and participation – and for anyone interested in re-engaging citizens with their democratic systems.

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Table of Contents

Table of Tables

Table of Figures

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I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

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3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
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6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
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Introduction

What is happening to democracy in the 21st century? What does the general decline of voter turnout in established democracies tell us about the evolution of modern democracy and societies? Does it signify mass public indifference about democratic politics, or does it indicate a more specific disillusionment with the way formal politics are conducted in the modern world? If we strive towards democratic ideals, do we simply need to get people more interested in politics or do we need to make more fundamental reforms to our political systems?

In this study, I will ask and attempt to answer the question: *what is driving the decline of voter turnout in established democracies*? Are citizens in established democracies becoming apathetic about politics generally or are they still interested but instead alienated from the formal political systems of our day? To what extent (if any) are these developments particular to younger generations of citizens coming of age and to citizens of particular education levels, and what are the implications of this for the future of democracy in our societies?

In order to provide answers to these questions, I will analyse an extensive new dataset compiled specifically for this study, consisting of over 250.000 respondents from national election study (NES) surveys conducted after 121 elections in eleven countries in Western Europe from 1956-2017: The United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland. This dataset far exceeds those used in prior individual-level studies of turnout decline in Western Europe at least; both in terms of respondents, countries, elections and the time period covered. Furthermore, this will be the first multi-level, longitudinal analysis of turnout decline in Western Europe that incorporates and tests a theoretical divide important in the academic debate about democratic developments: that between political *apathy* and political *alienation* (Henn, Weinstein and Wring, 2003; O'Toole *et al.*, 2003; e.g. Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007; Hay and Stoker, 2009; Chou *et al.*, 2017).

Democratic participation has always been a subject central to politics and political science, but it has become especially prevalent and urgent in recent times, with voter turnout (Lijphart, 1997; Pintor and Gratschew, 2002; Norris, 2011; Hooghe and Kern, 2016; i Coma, 2016), party membership (Mair and van Biezen, 2001; Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012) and other traditional means of political participation sharply declining throughout the world of established democracies in recent decades (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Mair and van Biezen, 2001; Stoker, 2006). Since voting is a condition for the democratic nature of society in even the most minimal conceptions of democracy,

the causes of declining voter turnout should be of concern for democratic theorists and policy-makers of almost any political persuasion.

According to Russell Dalton, "The success of democracy is largely measured by the public's participation in the process and the responsiveness of the system to popular demands" (Dalton, 1996, p. 1). Most democratic theorists value public participation in itself as central to democracy (Mill, 1861; Pateman, 1970; Dahl, 1971; Budge, 1996; Norris, 2002) and while some theorists (i.e. those adhering to "minimalist" theories of democracy (Almond and Verba, 1963; Held, 1995; Amnå and Ekman, 2013)) might not see a decline of voter turnout as a concern per se, the causes of this development should be of concern to them as well: they might signify more fundamental threats to the health and sustainability of democratic societies (Fieldhouse, Tranmer and Russell, 2007; Hay, 2007; Martin, 2015). In other words, declining voter turnout can be considered a disease by itself, but it may also be a symptom of an underlying disease developing within established democracies.

While the puzzles of turnout decline and broader democratic developments in the Western world have been framed and answered in very many different ways in the academic literature, an overarching distinction between apathy and alienation has been made explicit in recent work: in short, apathy theories argue that citizens have become less interested in politics, while alienation theories argue that citizens are just as interested in politics (if not more) but instead do not identify with the formal political systems and avenues for participation that they are presented with (Henn, Weinstein and Wring, 2003; O'Toole *et al.*, 2003; e.g. Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007; Hay and Stoker, 2009; Chou *et al.*, 2017). While many recent academic studies cite the decline of voter turnout in established democracies as one major indicator of either rising apathy or alienation, none of these have put that relationship to an empirical test (Hay and Stoker, 2009, p. 226; Smith, 2009, pp. 3–4; Flinders, 2012a, p. 1; Wattenberg, 2012; Dalton, 2016, p. 13; Chou *et al.*, 2017, p. 17).

Conversely, prior quantitative studies of turnout decline have often been conducted exclusively on the aggregate level (Franklin, 2004; Hooghe and Kern, 2016) or confined to single countries (Blais, Gidengil and Nevitte, 2004; Wass, 2008; Konzelmann, Wagner and Rattinger, 2012; Blais and Rubenson, 2013; Górecki, 2013; Persson, Wass and Oscarsson, 2013; Fox, 2015), instead of testing these different individual-level mechanisms that have been proposed. Some have studied turnout decline at the individual level across countries, finding that generational differences (Blais, Gidengil and Nevitte, 2004; Gallego, 2009; Grasso, 2016), differences in education levels (Gallego, 2009; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2017b) and civic duty norms (Blais and Rubenson, 2013) play important roles, but none of these have tested the important distinction between apathy and alienation.

As well as empirically extending the study of turnout decline across space and time, this study is driven by a desire to bridge this academic divide – or "disciplinary divorce" (Elklit, 1994; Smith, 2009) – between theoretical work on democratic developments and quantitative studies of long-term turnout decline, in hopes of bringing closer together these two different but crucially related pathways of political science. Empirically testing the roots of turnout decline and the respective roles of political apathy and alienation is of fundamental significance to academics, politicians and publics alike. Public indifference towards politics is likely to adversely affect democratic governance and accountability through lack of scrutiny, input and feedback and this may have to be countered with measures to spark citizens' interest in politics. Likewise, alienation and dissatisfaction erode the link between governors and the governed, hinders the formation and enforcement of public policy and might threaten the health and stability of the entire democratic project. If modern publics are in large numbers turning away from the conceptualizations, institutions and means of democratic participation that are ingrained in our formal political systems, this may therefore imply a need to fundamentally rethink these systems (Norris, 1999, 2011; Dalton, 2004a; Stoker, 2006; Smith, 2009).

More specifically, if citizens have become politically apathetic, we may need to find ways to get them more interested in politics and democracy more generally, e.g. via citizenship education, media and public relations efforts of governments and social movements (Geissel, 2008; Pontes, Henn and Griffiths, 2017). If they are, however, still interested in politics but instead alienated from the specific channels of democratic and political participation that are on offer in their respective societies, this might imply a more deep-rooted necessity for making substantial changes to our democratic systems, e.g. by providing more diverse types of formal political participation, whether through direct, deliberative and/or participatory democratic reforms and innovations (Dalton, 2004a, 2009; Goodin, 2008; Gallego, 2009; Smith, 2009).

In terms of answering this question, a great deal has been written on the topic of voter turnout per se and very many studies have been carried out on its drivers and explanations, as the issue provides several interesting puzzles. These studies have found that everything from population size, political institutions and extent of electoral competition through social capital, education and socio-economic status to individual political interest, knowledge and efficacy and personality traits such as altruism and extraversion can significantly affect aggregate voter turnout levels and individuals' propensity to vote (Putnam, 2000; Franklin, 2004; e.g. Blais, 2006; Vecchione and Caprara, 2009; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014).

As noted above, the more specific phenomenon of the gradual decline of voter turnout in established democracies has been cited as one manifestation of broader democratic developments, but academics differ on the nature of these developments (Hay and Stoker, 2009, p. 226; Smith, 2009, pp. 3–4; Flinders, 2012a, p. 1; Wattenberg, 2012; Dalton, 2016, p. 13; Chou *et al.*, 2017, p. 17). Most of these arguments take the social process of "post-modernization" (Bell, 1973; Inglehart, 1997) as a sort of vantage point, but their conclusions differ fairly widely in nature. Some studies, broadly categorized as "apathy" theories here, conclude that citizens have become more individualistic and less interested in social affairs in modern times (e.g. Putnam, 2000), leading to "disaffected democracies" (Pharr and Putnam, 2000), possibly because of a "hollowing out of democracy" in governance (Rhodes, 1997; Mair, 2013).

On the other hand, various other theories argue that citizens are still interested in politics and want to engage with democracy, but that they do not identify with the institutions and channels for participation that their formal political systems offer. Some see a "democratic phoenix" of participatory democracy rising out of the ashes of traditional, formal politics (Norris, 2002) and argue that a "democratic deficit" (Norris, 2011) has grown between the performance of government and the expectations of more educated, post-material citizens. These developments are thought to present "democratic challenges" to our societies which are facing "democratic choices" (Dalton, 2004b) about if and how to respond to this "new engagement" (Zukin *et al.*, 2006) led by new generations of citizens (Dalton, 2009). Still others see a "counter-democracy" (Rosanvallon, 2008) evolving, where "monitorial citizens" (Schudson, 1996; Hooghe and Dejaeghere, 2007) are not exactly disinterested or disaffected but instead keeping their distance; on "standby" at the side-lines of democracy (Amnå and Ekman, 2013) and preferring "stealth democracy" (Bengtsson and Mattila, 2009), where they can observe the actions of government and only participate in politics when they deem it necessary.

In this study, I develop a theoretical framework for analysing voter turnout and turnout decline, based on an overview of the literature briefly summarized above. The general framework will incorporate factors on both the aggregate and individual levels that may explain variance in voter turnout generally and from this general framework, I proceed to develop the more particular theory of turnout decline that I test in this study. In developing that theory, I will discuss the overarching distinction between political apathy and alienation and the potential roles that each of these might play in turnout decline, as well as how they can be appropriately operationalized in empirical analysis. Furthermore, the review of prior studies leads me to complement this core analysis by looking at the importance of differences between different birth cohorts (generations) of citizens in

the electorate, as well as the potential role of differences in voter turnout between citizens of different education levels.

The core subject of this study is this heavily empirical puzzle and I use quantitative and statistical methods to test different theories about drivers of turnout decline in established democracies. The study therefore derives from a naturalistic ontology and empiricist epistemology (Woolhouse, 1988; Hollis, 1994; Rosenberg, 1995) but that does not free me altogether from conceptual, subjective and normative concerns. These concerns tend to be too confined to the field of political theory and to qualitative political research, creating what academics such as David Beetham and Graham Smith have called a "disciplinary divorce" between these fields and the field of more quantitatively oriented, empirical political science (in which this thesis is primarily located), each being conducted largely in separation of the other despite some obvious common concerns (Beetham 1994, pp. 34-36; Smith 2011, 897). I concur with Beetham and Smith when they argue for bridging these divides; although I will not be able to delve deeply into political theory or qualitative concerns here, I will aim to be conscious of the dialogue between these respective fields throughout.

In that spirit, I recognize here that contested definitional and normative assumptions should be made explicit and clear to readers at the outset of any study, as they always impact the research process or at least the theoretical discussion and conclusions on some level (e.g. King, Keohane and Verba, 1994; Rosenberg, 1995; Marsh and Stoker, 2010). In simple terms, I would not be studying turnout decline and its determinants if I did not think that widespread political participation and citizen satisfaction with government, politics and democracy were normatively important. This is by no means an undisputed point: it follows the traditions and ideals of direct, participatory and deliberative democratic thought (Mill, 1861; Pateman, 1970; Mansbridge, 1995; Elster, 1996; Saward, 1998; Dryzek, 2000; e.g. Budge, 2008) against the "protective paradigm" (for an overview of this, see Stoker, 2011, pp. 34–38); the more minimal, elite-oriented theories of electoral democracy (see Schumpeter, 1942, pp. 252–271; Sartori, 1962; Beetham, 1994; Parry and Moyser, 1994; Held, 1995; Cunningham, 2002) and the "pluralist" and "liberal" accounts of democracy dominant in much of 20th century political science (see Gunnell, 2011). In short, when I say that the puzzle addressed in this study is important for "democracy", I am essentially employing the term in the sense of political equality and popular rule, not just in terms of electoral competition or representative authority.

On that basis, this study will cover several established democracies in Western Europe: The United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland. This technically means that the study covers the more specific region of

*North*western Europe, not all of Western Europe, but I use the latter term throughout this study as the more colloquial shorthand. Aside from their geographical and cultural proximity, these countries are the European welfare states in Bonoli's (1997) classification, excluding the "Southern" states that are considered to have less mature or extensive welfare systems (Arts and Gelissen, 2002). Iceland is added to that group here, as it is the remaining Nordic country and has intimate political relations and social similarities to the other countries in that group, as well as it being relatively under-represented in comparative political research. We are then left with a regional group of European countries that are some of the oldest, most established and successful democracies in world history.

As such, looking at these stable democracies provides a test of different theories about the development of democracy in a region where democracy is arguably at its most mature. If voter turnout is only falling in countries where it has not gained a strong foothold to begin with, that development could be attributed to their lack of formal, functioning democratic institutions and cultures; a failure to fully establish democratic rule and cultures in the first place. However, if societies with long, stable traditions of democracy are experiencing turnout decline and related trends, this raises more fundamental questions about the development of democracy per se in the modern world. This leaves us with a "most similar" research design to the extent that these are all mature, established and relatively well-off Western democracies, but they are also different in terms of the trends in voter turnout that are the topic of this study.

To analyse turnout decline and related developments in these countries, I use an extensive new dataset combined specifically for this study. This dataset consists of national election study (NES) data, partly derived from the European Voter (EV) project (Thomassen, 2006) but also sought directly from the original national election study projects, especially for countries (France, Belgium, Finland, Ireland and Iceland) and years (2001-2017) not included in the EV dataset. In the first chapter of this thesis, I also use officially reported aggregate turnout statistics from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (Pintor and Gratschew, 2002; Pintor, Gratschew and Bittiger, 2004) to present the background for this study. I will then conduct multi-level, random effects logistics regression models on measures of turnout, apathy and alienation included in these datasets, incorporating age-period-cohort (APC) analyses and factor analyses in parts of the study.

The outline of this thesis is as follows: *Chapter 1* provides a step-by-step review of the extant academic literature on voter turnout, turnout decline and democratic developments more broadly. I start the chapter by introducing the key concept of voter turnout and the theoretical models for analysing this phenomenon: especially rational choice models, resource-based models and

psychological models. I then narrow the focus in on the more specific topic of the gradual decline of voter turnout in established democracies in recent decades. This discussion starts with a presentation of official turnout data to identify the trends we are dealing with more precisely, separating them by regions of the world and then zooming in on the countries that form the subject of this study. This then leads me to review previous studies of explanations for the general trend of turnout decline identified, discussing the lessons we can learn from these studies and the gaps that they have left in this field of research.

Identifying these gaps leads me to take a step back in the literature review, to take better account of the literature on broader democratic developments: citizens' changing democratic attitudes and behaviours in recent decades. This account includes some historical background about voter turnout as a social phenomenon as well as an overview of writings on modernization, post-modernization and electoral dealignment, leading me to discuss a particular debate that has developed within this literature: that between theories of political apathy on one hand and political alienation on the other. I also discuss some narratives about democratic developments that fit less neatly within that framework, especially those of citizens' supposedly growing rationality and changing civic duty norms, which will lead me to further explore if the effects of apathy and alienation on turnout may have been changing over time. Finally, I discuss the importance of generational replacement in the electorate that has been identified in more recent work: the idea that overall changes in democratic values, attitudes and behaviour in the electorate may well have their roots in the process of particular cohorts of citizens coming of age in recent decades, experiencing their formative years in different times that have instilled them with different values, attitudes and behaviours.

All of this will provide the foundations for developing a theoretical framework for voter turnout in *Chapter 2*. This framework will build on the findings identified in the previous chapter and hope to bridge gaps between studies of turnout on the aggregate and individual levels, as well as gaps between studies of turnout decline and studies of broader democratic developments. I start by presenting a general framework for voter turnout that includes macro-level variables such as political institutions and legal arrangements of voting, as well as the more fluctuating macro-level variables of electoral context, inequality, affluence and globalization. I will then discuss the important inclusion of individual-level variables, not only traditional demographics such as age, education and income but also the traits, values and attitudes of individuals that are likely to influence their democratic participation.

Following the construction of this general framework for analysing voter turnout, I will consider how this can be applied to the more specific analysis of the drivers of turnout decline in recent decades. In short, this involves adding year (or another measure of time) as an independent variable in regression analyses of turnout and testing if other independent variables can account for its expected negative correlation with turnout; especially if and to what extent the posited rise of political apathy and/or alienation do so. This leads me to a further discussion of how to define and operationalise the concepts of political "apathy" and "alienation" in empirical analysis, considering prior literature on these concepts and arriving at the relatively concrete definitions of a lack of political interest and a lack of political system identification, respectively. In the last part of this chapter, I proceed to derive the hypotheses that I will test in this study: on rising apathy and alienation in the Western world in recent decades, their respective roles in explaining turnout decline and relationship between these dynamics and citizens' birth cohort and education level.

In *Chapter 3,* I will introduce in more detail the research design, data, variables and methods that I will use in order to test these hypotheses. I present the large dataset combined specifically for this study and the individual national election studies it consists of, including 121 election studies from 11 countries in the period from 1956-2017. I also present the methods that I use to test the hypotheses in this dataset, with the research design consisting of three steps: the first step presents descriptive statistics from the combined dataset as well as a more rigorous analysis of trends, using predicted probabilities from multi-level regression models. The second step is a multi-level analysis of the role of political apathy and alienation, their effects on turnout in these countries and the extent to which they can account for turnout decline. The third and final step of the analysis introduces the age-period-cohort (APC) analysis of the generational dynamics of turnout and their role in turnout decline, as well as the analysis of the role of citizens' education levels and the turnout gap between different education groups.

Chapter 4 presents the first stage of the analysis: the cross-national long-term trends in reported turnout, political apathy and alienation as well as various different measures that are of theoretical interest, harvested from the national election study datasets. On top of the descriptive trends, the chapter will present the results of multi-level regression models of each central variable on year, to determine and illustrate their overall trends in the region when controlling for country-specific fluctuations and levels and the non-uniform distribution of data from different countries and years in the dataset.

Chapter 5 will then present the core analysis of this study: the multi-level, longitudinal analysis of the role of apathy and alienation in turnout decline in Western Europe from 1956-2017. In this analysis, I focus in on the "turnout decline countries" (TDC) in the dataset: the four countries where the available data reflects a gradual trend of turnout decline in the period (France, Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom). In the chapter, I examine to what extent the inclusion of the main measures of apathy and alienation might account for the negative trend of turnout in those countries, as well as the role of the potentially changing effects of these variables on turnout over time. As an alternative test of these explanations, I also run multi-level regression models on the entire dataset and interact these central variables with TDC status and the trend variable, to examine to what extent differences in these dynamics might account for differences in turnout trends between the two groups of countries.

In *Chapter 6*, I present the age-period-cohort (APC) analysis of these dynamics. I start by classifying respondents in the combined datasets into birth cohorts, before analysing the potential of disentangling the effects of cohort membership from the effects of age and period in the combined dataset used in this study. I start with diagnostics of the fit of models using different cohort classifications and derive a three-cohort classification based on prior studies but adapted to the data: the "golden age" generation, the "protest" generation and the "post-materialist" generations. Based on this classification, I present descriptive data for turnout, apathy and alienation by cohort in the period as well as multi-level analyses of the role of generational differences in turnout decline, when accounting for the effects of life cycle and period. In the latter part of the chapter, I look at the role of citizens' education level in turnout decline, the turnout gap between citizens of different education levels and how this has developed over time.

In a concluding chapter, I summarize the findings of these analyses, their limitations and their implications for studies of turnout decline and for theories of broader democratic developments, apathy and alienation across established democracies. I also briefly discuss the implications of these results for normative democratic theory, for democratic reforms and innovations and for public policy and debate on democratic developments more generally.

1 Literature Review

In this chapter, I will gradually review the existing academic literature on voter turnout and democratic developments, to form the foundation for the theoretical framework that I will develop in the next chapter. I start by broadly covering previous studies of voter turnout, with a focus on the different analytical models of rational choice, social resources and psychological factors and proceeding to an overview of the different variables on different levels of analysis that have been shown to be related to turnout. This leads me to an inspection of turnout decline in recent decades, starting with a presentation of official aggregate data available for turnout trends throughout the world since 1945. I then review prior empirical studies that have attempted to explain the observed phenomenon of turnout decline in established democracies, discussing their implications and the gaps remaining in that field of study.

Identifying those gaps leads me to take a step back and survey the broader literature on the topic of democratic developments in the Western world in the 20th and 21st century, as these are important for our understanding of citizens' changing values and attitudes and the relationship of this with turnout decline. I argue that prior studies of turnout decline have not adequately taken these broader theories into account and proceed to discuss in more depth the still contesting theories of how exactly citizens' political attitudes and behaviours have been changing in recent decades. This leads me to focus on the major distinction made in this study between political apathy and political alienation, before discussing related theories of rising rationality, changing civic duty norms and the role of generational socialization as well.

1.1 Voter Turnout

Voter turnout is in essence a rather straightforward empirical concept: it describes whether an individual turned out to vote in a particular election or not (regardless of whether they voted for a particular party/candidate or submitted an empty/invalid ballot) (e.g. Hooghe and Marien, 2013).[1] To understand the puzzle of declining voter turnout, a logical starting point is to query the general

[1] Reported as an aggregate measure, operationalisations of the concepts have varied: sometimes it is reported as the percentage of registered voters who turn out to vote in an election, sometimes it is the percentage of the entire population legally eligible to vote, i.e. the Voting Age Population (VAP) (Pintor and Gratschew, 2002; IDEA, 2004; Geys, 2006). As I primarily use individual-level survey data in this study, this will not be an issue for most of the analysis, but I will address it further when using aggregate turnout data for presenting trends in official turnout throughout the world later in this chapter.

nature of the phenomenon of voter turnout and its relationship with other social, personal and political phenomena – i.e. what generally affects aggregate levels and patterns of voter turnout and the propensity of an individual to turn out to vote.

Voter turnout was for a long time the primary or even sole focus of studies of political participation, a term which sometimes was employed exclusively in terms of voting (Tingsten, 1937; Almond and Verba, 1963; Barnes and Kaase, 1979; Amnå and Ekman, 2013). The academic treatment of the concept of political participation became more complex and segmented in the latter part of the 20th century, however, with different forms of political participation being taken into account, followed by differences on how broadly the concept could be stretched (e.g. Norris, 2002; van Deth, 2014; Fox, 2015). A great deal of work has been carried out on the topic of voter turnout, although some authors have pointed out that we still know remarkably little about the subject for certain (Blais, 2006) and what we "know" often seems to account for a remarkably small part of the variation in voter turnout (Matsusaka and Palda, 1999). It is also worth keeping in mind that research has shown that determinants of turnout differ between types of elections - i.e. between local, regional and national elections and those in democracies or non-democracies (i Coma, 2016) - and that this study focuses specifically on national level elections to parliaments in eleven Western European democracies.

In the early days of political science, academics largely drew on "rational choice" theory (that had been especially prevalent in the field of economics) to explain political behaviour, including the propensity to turn out to vote, as a function of a rational maximisation of individuals' cost-benefit analysis of their self-interests in different contexts (Franklin, 2004; Hindmoor, 2010; Marsh and Stoker, 2010). According to this framework, individuals should vote when they are sufficiently convinced that the results of the elections will determine policy outcomes that have a sufficiently beneficial or harmful impact on them (Boechel, 1928; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968; Franklin, 2004). However, by the middle of the century, political scientists had noted that the chances of any one voter's vote to swing elections in their material favour were so infinitesimal that it could never outweigh the costs of voting (let alone that of informing one's vote-choice). This presented a major refutation of the rational choice model for analysing political behaviour, seeing as how vast numbers of people do nonetheless turn out to vote (Downs, 1957; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968; Franklin, 2004).

This conundrum led authors like Morris Fiorina and Bernard Grofman to ask if voter turnout was the "paradox that ate rational choice theory?" (Fiorina, 1990; Grofman, 1993; Franklin, 2004) and other approaches to the analysis of voter turnout consequently gained prominence. In Smets et

al.'s (2013) meta-analysis of individual-level research on voter turnout, these different approaches are identified as: the "resource model", which emphasises the role of individuals' political resources such as income, socio-economic status and education (see also Verba and Nie, 1972; Franklin, 2004); the "mobilization model", which emphasises the role of social pressure as well as mobilization by political parties, candidates and interest groups (see also Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995; Franklin, 2004); the "socialization model", which focuses on the effect of socialization and habit-formation (Plutzer, 2002; Gerber, Green and Shachar, 2003); and the "psychological model", which stresses the role of more personal factors such as psychological traits, values and attitudes (Rentfrow *et al.*, 2009; Vecchione and Caprara, 2009; Blais and St-Vincent, 2011; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014).

This development has, however, not so much eaten rational choice theory as it has reshaped it. Alongside these developments, many rational choice theorists have incorporated what has been called the "D term", to include non-material motivations such as social norms and "system benefits" to form a type of "extended" rational choice theory for explaining political behaviour (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968; Dowding, 2005; Smets *et al.*, 2013; Blais and Galais, 2016). This does run the risk of only amounting to the tautology that people are motivated to vote because they have some sort of motivation to vote, but it is not without merit: the cost-benefit perspective inherent to rational choice models has been useful for explaining why turnout is different from one election to another and between countries, even if it cannot explain why most people vote in the first place (Franklin, 2004). Mark Franklin (2004) has dubbed this perspective *marginal rational choice theory*: the idea that there may be a non-rational basis for why most people generally vote, but that rational calculations might still affect how many of them actually do so in each election, at the "margins" of the overall tendency of citizens to vote.

Franklin further developed this line of thinking to incorporate socialization theory, mobilization and political messaging into a sort of *collective rational choice theory*, which adds considerations of strategic interactions with other individuals' voting behaviour to the original, more atomized model. According to this strategic model, activists who believe that their political group can win (and that this would bring them benefits) are motivated to mobilize others within their social group to vote, who in turn become motivated by these mobilization efforts, political messaging, comradery and peer pressure. This larger group of supporters do not exactly consider their individual vote to be pivotal, but rather that their group could win if all of them vote and that they have no excuse not to do so themselves (Franklin, 2004).

These later variations of the rational choice perspective are consistent with what Smets et al. (2013) call "institutional models" of turnout: those that explain turnout variations with reference to the institutional and political context of each election in each polity. More generally, aggregate-level studies of the importance of macro-level factors such as the electoral context, population characteristics and socio-economic conditions have been prominent in studies of voter turnout, in addition to the more proximal and individual-level models mentioned above (Geys, 2006; Cancela and Geys, 2016). Despite the aforementioned lack of concrete answers, we can draw on all of these traditions to make some more or less tentative claims about the determinants of voter turnout in established democracies, here grouped roughly according to the above overview into three interacting levels of turnout drivers: the *electoral context, social context* and *individual factors* (see also Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014).

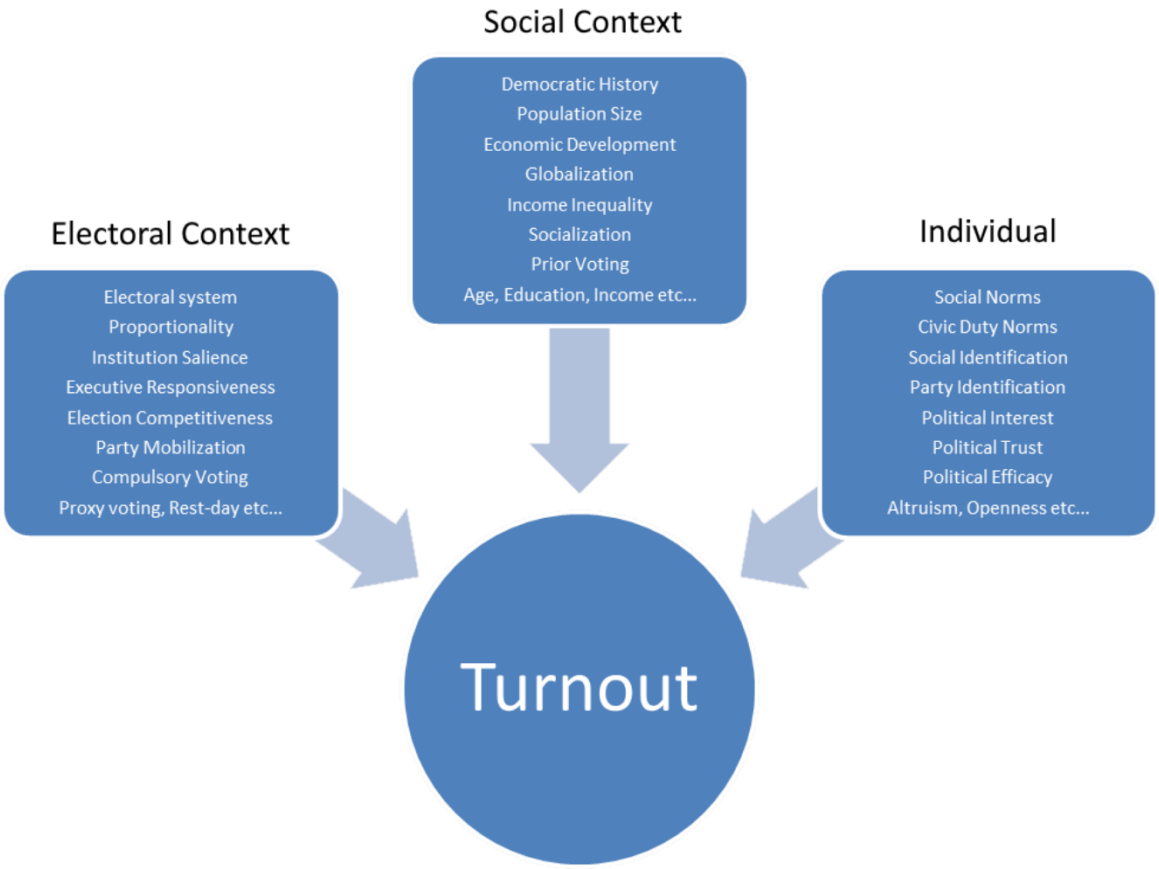


Figure 1.1 Determinants of voter turnout grouped into three broad categories and examples of factors within each category. Note that these factors are assumed to have an interactive relationship with voter turnout, rather than a direct causal relationship.

Starting from the macro-level *electoral context,* studies have shown that voter turnout is related to the political system in each country as well as the electoral context in each election: turnout is generally higher when elections are closely contested, when party polarization is higher, when political groups mobilize voters more extensively and where the margin of victory on a national and/or district level is lower. This also seems to be the case when members of more powerful institutions are being elected (which we could call "institutional salience"); e.g. where the political complexion of the executive is more responsive to the legislature ("executive responsiveness") and where parliaments are being elected within unicameralist, unitary and/or parliamentary systems (Franklin, 2004; Blais, 2006; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014).

Turnout has also been found to be higher in countries using proportional representation (PR) electoral systems and generally in more proportional variations of electoral systems than in First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) and other less proportional electoral systems, although these findings have not been confirmed in studies of Latin American and other less established democracies (Pintor and Gratschew, 2002; Blais, 2006). More practical legal and administrative arrangements are also related to voter turnout: it is generally higher where postal, advance, and proxy voting is allowed, where electoral regulations are simpler, where voting takes place on a rest day and/or different elections take place at the same time (concurrent ballots). Most importantly, compulsory voting and its effective enforcement has been one of the factors most consistently and strongly found to induce higher voter turnout (Pintor and Gratschew, 2002; Blais, 2006; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014).

On the *social contextual level* prominent in socialization and resource models of voter turnout, it has been shown that turnout is generally higher in more economically developed countries, countries with long democratic histories, more extensive civil liberties and freedoms and higher literacy rates but lower in countries with more income inequality (Solt, 2008) and higher globalization levels (Steiner, 2010; Marshall and Fisher, 2015). Turnout has also been found to be lower in countries with larger populations (although the difference is mostly between the group of smallest nations and others), less stable populations and higher shares of minority groups (Norris, 2002; Pintor and Gratschew, 2002; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014; Fox, 2015).

In more proximal social terms, one of the most definitive results of the literature is that you are more likely to vote if you have voted before, and this effect is strongest in citizens' formative years; i.e. if a citizen votes in his/her first election(s), the likelihood of them voting throughout their lifetime is greatly increased, and vice versa (e.g. Franklin, 2004; Blais, 2006). Voter turnout has also been found to be higher among citizens that grew up in a political environment that encouraged

political discussion, with parents who were politically active and interested and in classrooms that fostered discussion about controversial social issues and differing opinions (Crick, 1998; Hahn, 1998; Torney-Purta *et al.*, 2001; Barrett and Zani, 2015).

A strong correlation between political participation and other types of civic engagement has also long been documented: citizens who participate in trade unions, religious organizations, youth voluntary associations and other associational and civic activity are more likely to vote and participate in politics more generally, although the causal direction of these relationships are difficult to entangle (Putnam, 2000; McFarland and Thomas, 2006; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014). Last but not least, mobilization efforts by both partisan and non-partisan actors who contact voters individually and personally have been found to substantially increase turnout, but this depends importantly on the type and approach of these mobilization efforts (Zukin *et al.*, 2006; Smets *et al.*, 2013; Green and Gerber, 2015).

It is also widely established that young people vote less than older people, although this relationship is curvilinear (the very oldest vote less than younger age groups), and that less educated citizens vote less than more educated citizens. Citizens of lower socio-economic status (SES) also vote less than those of higher SES, married citizens vote more than single citizens and members of various social and religious organizations tend to vote more than others. Less consistently, ethnic minorities have also been found to vote less than other social groups (Pintor and Gratschew, 2002; Blais, 2006; Fieldhouse, Tranmer and Russell, 2007; Norris, 2011; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014; Fox, 2015).

Turning to micro-level *psychological factors*, fundamental personality traits such as altruism, openness and extraversion (Vecchione and Caprara, 2009; Blais and St-Vincent, 2011) have been found to be positively related to voter turnout. The same is true for more directly political attitudes such as internal, external and collective political efficacy (respectively: the sense that you can personally influence politics, that politics are generally susceptible to influence and that you can influence politics in collaboration with your social group); political, social and institutional trust; political and civic knowledge and, last but not least, political interest (Zukin *et al.*, 2006; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014).

The notion that voting is a civic duty has also been found to be strongly related to the propensity to vote (Blais and Rubenson, 2013; Wang, 2016) and beliefs about good citizenship, social and political party identifications and a sense of belonging and community have also been found to have a strong relationship with levels of political participation (Blais and Achen, 2010). Zukin et al. (2006) combined some other personal aspects – attention to political issues, internal efficacy and

political knowledge – with a sense of civic duty into a concept of "political capital" and found this to be the most consistent predictor of all forms of participation (Zukin *et al.*, 2006; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014). Furthermore, Wang (2016) found that notions of civic duty mediated the effect of political trust on turnout in Taiwan, the United States and the United Kingdom.

Overall, multiple variables of different types have been found to be related to the propensity to vote, although causal relationships are hard to disentangle and we still have a lot left to explain. Some of these findings are consistent with the marginal rational choice model defined above: contextual factors that determine how close the elections are, how effectively your vote will be translated (proportionality) and how consequential the results are likely to be (benefits of voting), as well as legal and practical arrangements that reduce the cost of voting can affect how many citizens choose to vote. Other contextual and social factors are more consistent with the collectivist rational choice theory that incorporates notions of socialization; including the size, homogeneity, education and political salience of the social group that voters belong to. Still others go beyond rational choice theory to show that non-material personality factors determine the propensity to vote, such as how altruistic, extravert, politically efficacious and politically interested citizens are.

This survey of prior findings in the study of voter turnout and the general drivers of citizens' propensity to vote provides a foundation for the more particular puzzle that drives this study: the decline of voter turnout in established democracies in recent decades. Before I turn to prior studies of explanations for this decline, it is worth consulting the official data available, to illustrate to what extent turnout has in fact been in a trend of decline and to provide an empirical backdrop for the theoretical discussion that follows. Therefore, in the next section, I proceed to present aggregate data on voter turnout trends in the world in recent decades, gradually focusing in on the countries of interest in this study.

1.2 Trends in Voter Turnout

The major departure point of this study is a general trend of decline of voter turnout in established democracies in recent decades. A logical prerequisite for this analysis is to inquire whether this trend has indeed been the case, to what extent and how this varies between countries and regions. A supposed decline of voter turnout and a general "crisis of democracy" (Ercan and Gagnon, 2014; van der Meer, 2017; Dryzek *et al.*, 2019) has long preoccupied both academics and publics, but this has not always been substantiated by convincing data on long-term changes. Indeed, a general trend of turnout decline was a highly contested assertion not too many years ago (e.g. Norris, 2002), but the

accumulation of data in recent years has brought about a near-consensus on the fact, although important fluctuations and country differences in turnout persist (Pintor and Gratschew, 2002; Norris, 2011; Hooghe and Kern, 2016; i Coma, 2016).

To illustrate and substantiate this claim, I now turn to the official data available on voter turnout throughout the world since the end of World War II, using the database collected and published by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (Pintor and Gratschew, 2002; Pintor, Gratschew and Bittiger, 2004). IDEA reports two kinds of voter turnout statistics: the percentage of *registered voters* who turn out to vote in an election and the percentage of the *entire population of legal voting age,* i.e. the Voting Age Population (VAP) (Pintor and Gratschew, 2002; Pintor, Gratschew and Bittiger, 2004; Geys, 2006).

Each figure has its advantages and disadvantages. The former does not account for the different extent of the franchise and other legal and administrative barriers to registration between countries. This is especially problematic when comparing the state of democracy between countries, because countries that restrict the right to vote (whether legally or practically) and exclude large parts of their population (e.g. women and ethnic minorities, felons and citizens in mental institutions, resident aliens and immigrant populations lacking full citizenship rights) often report very high voter turnout, which presents a very biased image of citizens' political participation in these societies (Norris, 2002). Conversely, the use of VAP statistics provides an account of the extent of actual citizen participation in elections, taking legal and administrative barriers into account.

On the other hand, the VAP statistic includes (often large) parts of the population that cannot vote, while excluding franchised citizens living abroad. Importantly for the purposes of this study, this is a very biased measure of citizens' willingness to vote, which is at the core of the research question here. It is not my goal here to compare the state of democratic inclusiveness between countries using voter turnout data, but to focus on the extent to which individuals *choose* to vote when they can and to discern *trends* in this propensity. Using VAP for these purposes would count disenfranchised citizens as unwilling to vote and indicate changes in turnout when the franchise is extended or legal and administrative barriers changed, while the proportion of registered voters should consistently reflect the proportion of citizens who are allowed to cast a vote that choose to do so (Pintor, Gratschew and Bittiger, 2004, p. 78).

However, the registered voter statistic has been criticized for being unreliable and too reliant on each country's government's counting procedure, legal arrangements and executive eccentricities (Gray and Caul, 2000; Mellon *et al.*, 2018). Inspecting the IDEA database for parliamentary elections

throughout the world from 1945 to 2017, it becomes clear that this figure is not always reliable and by no means reflects the general extent of citizens' willingness to participate in elections in a given country. In 340 out of 1850 parliamentary elections in the period (18,4%), reported voter turnout is 95% or higher - and most of these numbers belong to less established democracies. For example, registered voter turnout in Somalia in 1984 was supposedly 99,86%, in Laos it was 99,9% in 2002, in the Dominican Republic it was 100% in 1947 - and the Bahamas in 1972 and Bolivia in 1978 report over 100% turnout!

Because of the different strengths and weaknesses of these different measures, I report both in this chapter, although I removed 96 obvious outliers with 98% reported registered voter turnout or more from the latter. I should also note that the validity of both types of IDEA data has come under criticism in a recent working paper (Mellon *et al.*, 2018) which notably finds that, when looking at the turnout of registered voters, errors in voter registration data (most notably dual-registration of voters) could account for a reported turnout decline of 18% in the United States and a 11,5% underestimation of turnout in the United Kingdom. This could be due to the rising proportion of immigrants in these countries, as they are ineligible to vote yet part of the VAP, and to inconsistencies in the criteria for turnout figures between years in these countries, but the estimates of actual turnout rates which the authors compare these figures to are preliminary and may well be inflated (Mellon *et al.*, 2018). Regardless, the IDEA database is widely utilized and each statistic tells us something important about levels and trends in voter turnout, so I will be content with that data for now. When I turn to the main analysis of this study in later chapters, I will be using individual-level survey data which does not rely on these official statistics.

Figure 1.2 starts by presenting the official government statistics collected by IDEA for the turnout of registered voters, starting with the average of this proportion in every country in the whole world in the period 1945-2016, including a regression trendline that shows a gradual downward trend. This trend is not gigantic (note that the graph starts at 50%) but still fairly substantial, showing a decline of around 10% (from about 75-80% to 65-70%) in average voter turnout throughout the world in the period, and this trend of decline notably begins to occur around 1990.[2] However, Figure 1.3 graphs the same for the VAP statistic and shows that this has been basically trendless over the period, rising in the early decades and then declining after the 1980s.

[2] Note that this graph does not present the proportion of the entire world population that turns out to vote, but the global average of this proportion within all independent states that hold legislative elections.

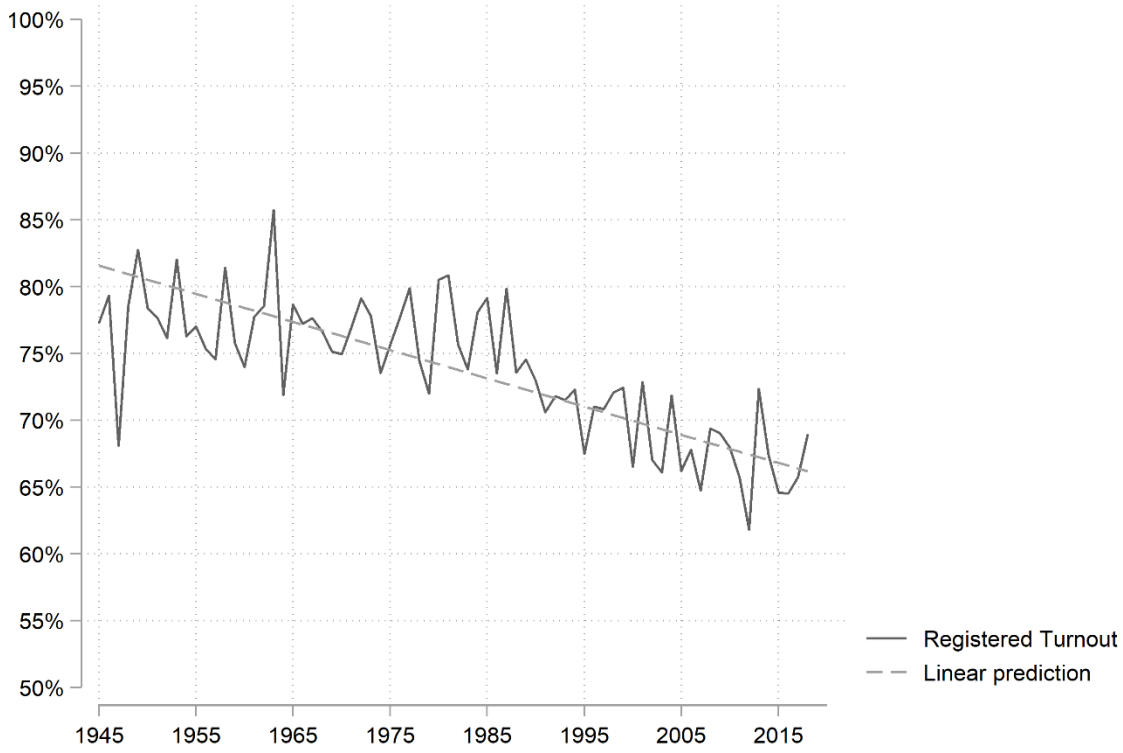


Figure 1.2 Average official voter turnout in the world from 1945-2017, proportion of registered voters. Source: the IDEA database.

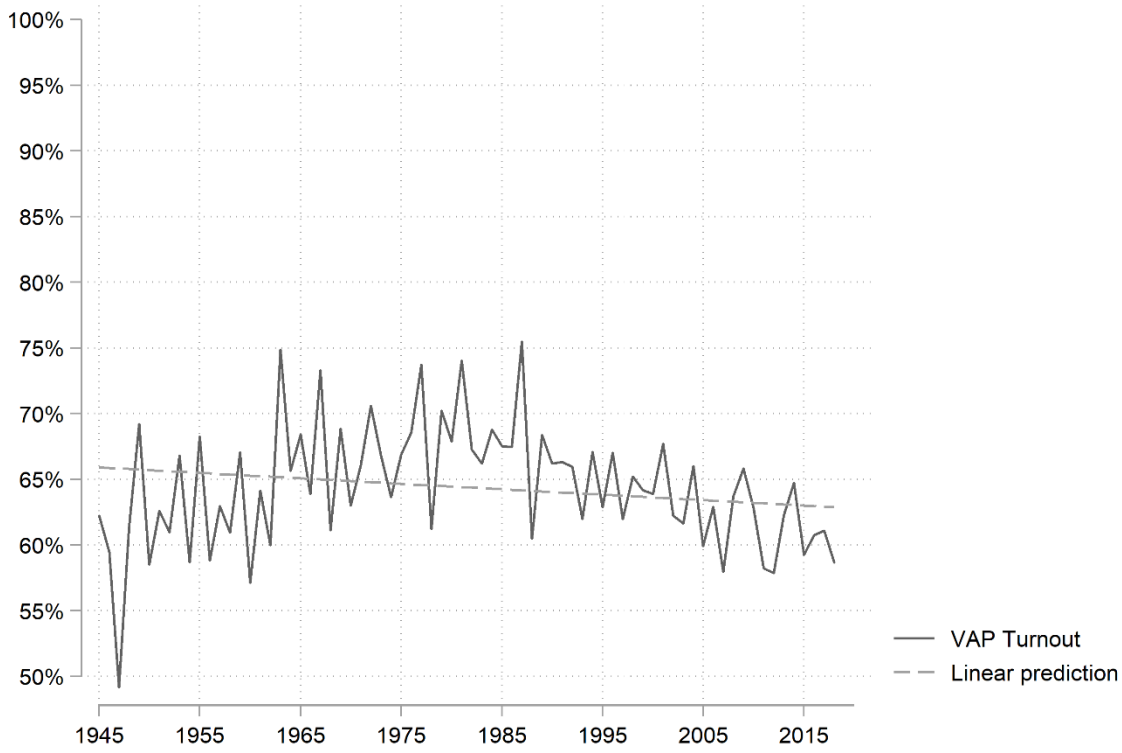


Figure 1.3 Average official voter turnout in the world from 1945-2017, proportion of the voting-age population (VAP). Source: the IDEA database.

To examine the roots of these differences, and to start disentangling the global dynamics of turnout trends, Figure 1.6 separates both of these trends by continent and shows that the global differences between them seem to be due to VAP turnout being much lower than registered turnout in the Americas, and in some years in Asia, in the earlier decades, but that these trends have converged since the middle of the period. This is likely because in the decades after the second world war, large portions of the voting age populations in these regions were not allowed to vote and thus the proportion of the VAP turning out to vote grew rapidly with the expansion of the franchise in the following decades. This trend seems to conceal turnout decline in the global averages, as there is a very high consistency between these two statistics in later decades; especially in Europe and Oceania where there is a clear and consistent decline in both measures of turnout in the period.

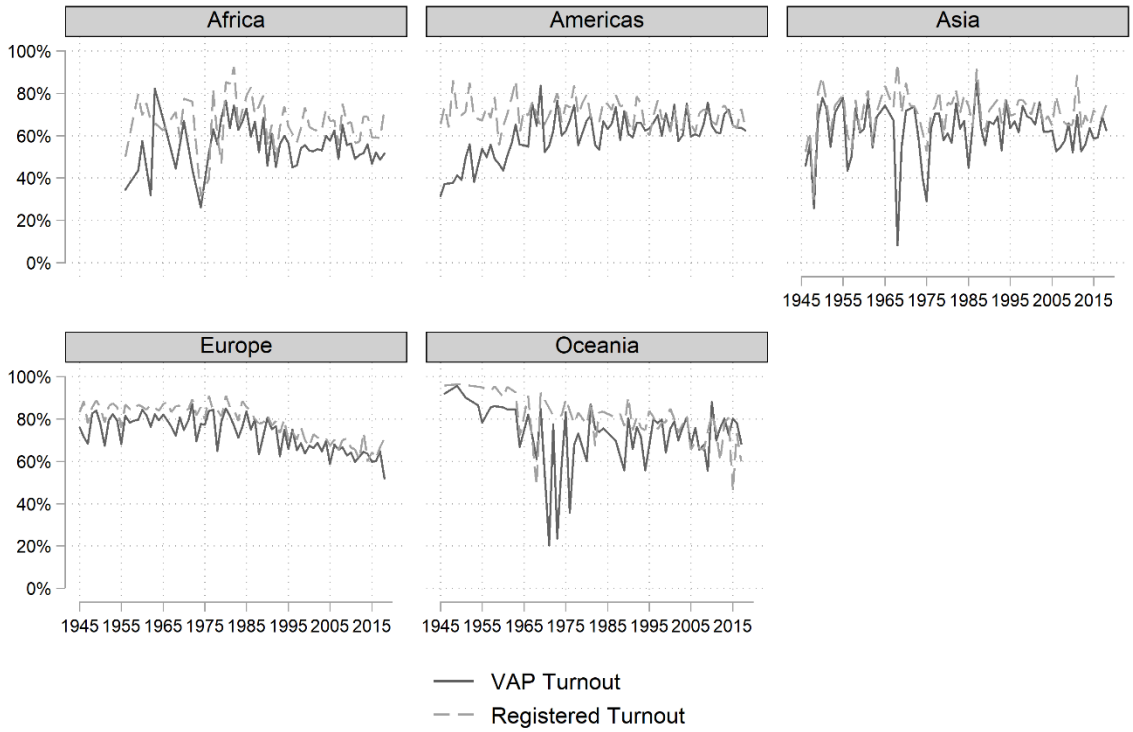


Figure 1.4 Average official voter turnout in 1945-2016, separated by continents. Proportion of registered voters and proportion of the VAP. Source: the IDEA database.

Turning to individual countries, Figure 1.5 graphs trends in registered voter turnout in several large countries from 1945-2018.[3] Oceania is an interesting case: it consists of many small island states with limited data and large fluctuations, along with the much more populous countries of Australia and New Zealand; the former implements compulsory voting and thus keeps turnout levels high, while turnout has fallen rapidly in the latter (from around 95% in the 1950's to 77% in 2014). Turnout in Japan declined from 72% in 1946 to 52,7% in 2014 but in India it has been fairly stable around 60%. In South Africa since the end of Apartheid, turnout has declined from 86,9% in 1994 to 73,5% in 2014.

Turning to the Americas, turnout in Canada had fluctuated between 70-80% until the 1990s, when it started declining to between 60-70% (see also Blais, Gidengil and Nevitte, 2004) but in Brazil it has been relatively stable around 80% since the 1960s, after some large fluctuations before that time and barring a drop in the early 2000s. The presidential systems and changing registration procedures in the United States and Mexico make comparison of turnout less straight-forward there,

[3] For clarity of presentation and because of the differences disentangled in the discussion above, I leave VAP statistics out of Figures 5 and 6.

as it is highly dependent on whether parliamentary elections are concurrent with presidential elections, so it is more helpful to look at each in turn: in the US, turnout has gone from 80% in the concurrent elections of 1972 to 65% in 2016 and from 70,3% in the non-concurrent elections of 1970 to 42,5% in 2014 (see also Lyons and Alexander, 2000), although it rose considerably in 2018, up to 53,4% (Jordan Misra, 2019). In Mexico it has declined from 74% in the concurrent elections in 1952 to 62,5% in 2012 and from 69,2% in the non-concurrent elections in 1955 to 47,7% in 2015. On average, turnout in the 30 OECD countries has declined from about 77% in 1945 to about 69% in 2018 (Pintor and Gratschew, 2002). Based on these findings, Figure 1.6 compares the trends in average registered voter turnout between Europe and the OECD countries on one hand, and the rest of the world on the other. The results are clear: turnout has been declining from about 85% to about 65% on average in the former group of countries, while it has been fluctuating without clear trends in the latter.

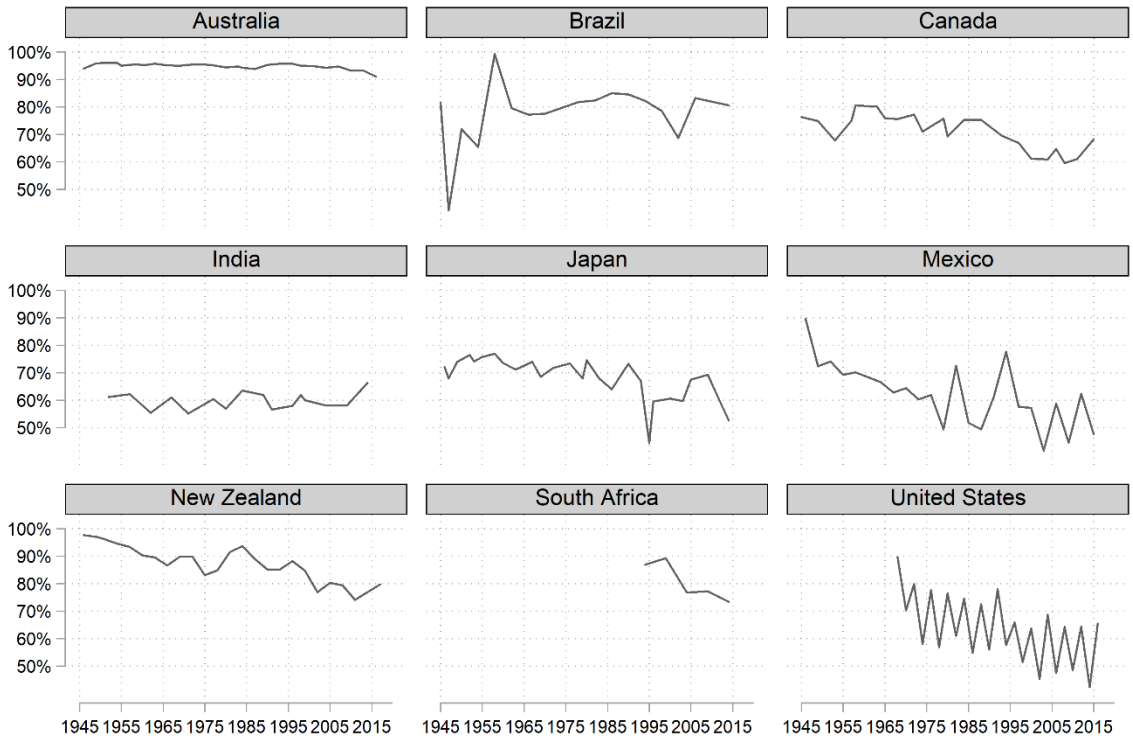


Figure 1.5 Turnout in selected countries. The average proportion of registered voters that turned out to vote in national legislative elections in selected countries between 1945-2018. Source: the IDEA database.

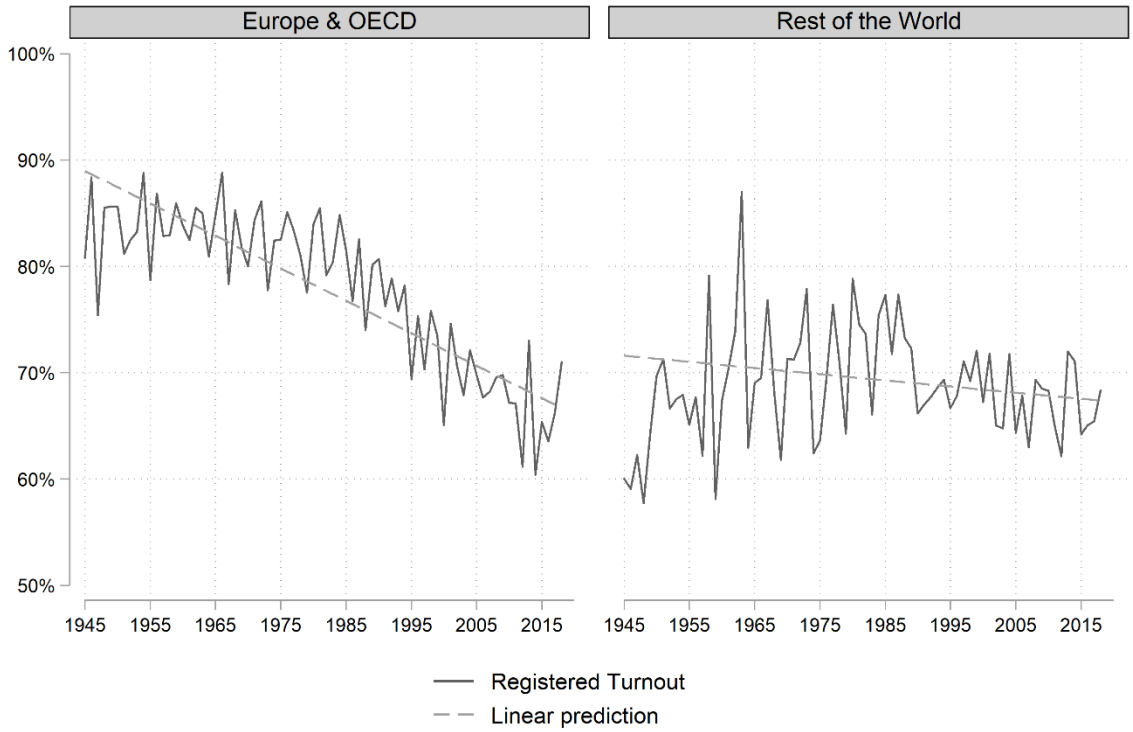


Figure 1.6 Turnout in Europe and the OECD vs. the rest of the world. The average proportion of registered voters that turned out to vote in national legislative elections in the countries of Europe and the OECD between 1945-2018, compared with the rest of the world. Source: the IDEA database.

It is of course plausible that the trend of decline in Europe is at least partly explained by a different sample of countries being included in different years; e.g. because of the addition of a number of Eastern and Southern European countries towards the end of the 20th century. Zooming further into the specific subject of this study, Figure 1.7 presents trends in voter turnout (both of registered voters and the VAP) in the Nordic countries and Figure 1.8 presents the same for the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. The general trend of turnout decline is clear in both measures in France, Finland and Iceland as well as Germany; in the latter, part of the overall trend may be explained by reunification (with lower turnout rates in the states of the former German Democratic Republic) but figures separated by state do suggest that turnout has indeed been gradually declining across the country (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2013). A long-term trend is also evident in the United Kingdom and Ireland, despite recent increases, and Norway has been experiencing decline since the 1960s, although earlier levels were lower. Belgium has had consistently high levels of turnout as they have enforced compulsory voting since 1893 and with the exception of VAP turnout in 1946, they have always experienced high levels of turnout. Perhaps more interestingly, Denmark has not been experiencing any clear trend of decline in the

period, a recent rise in turnout in Sweden means there has not been a clear overall trend of decline there (although turnout has declined there since its high points around the 1970s) and an earlier trend of decline in Netherlands (especially after the abolishment of compulsory voting there in 1980) seems to have been at least partly reversed in recent elections.

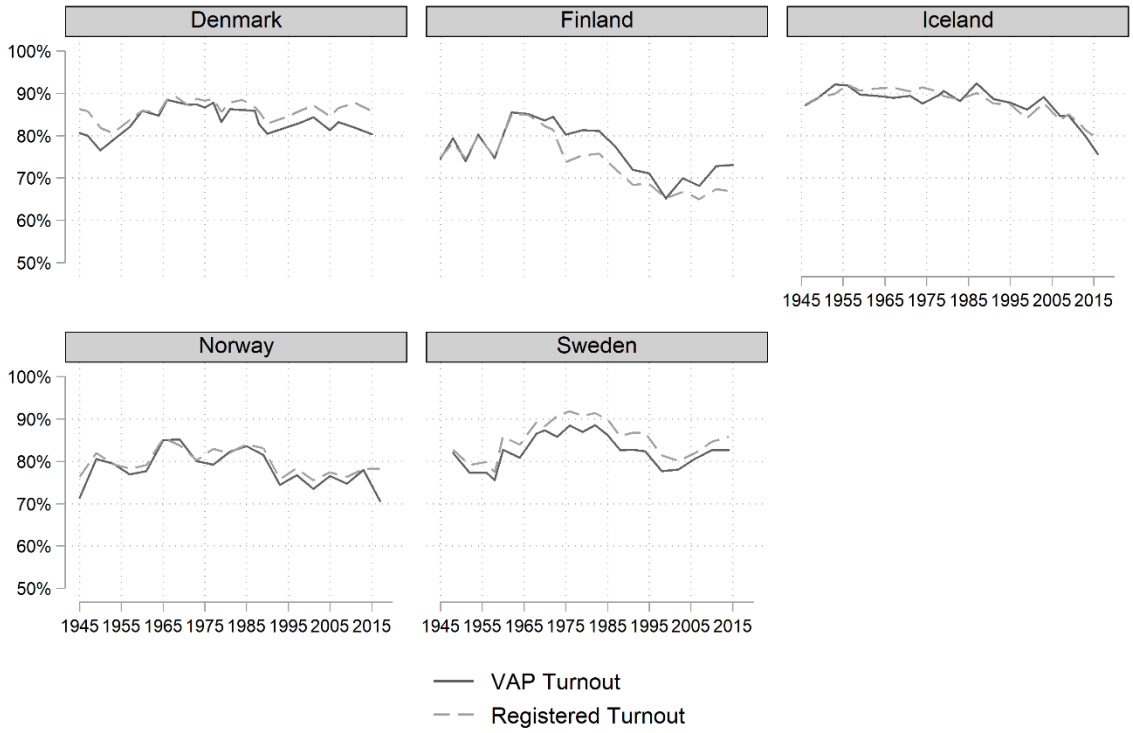


Figure 1.7 Average voter turnout in the Nordic countries. Turnout in Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland from 1945-2016, proportion of registered voters (source: the IDEA database)

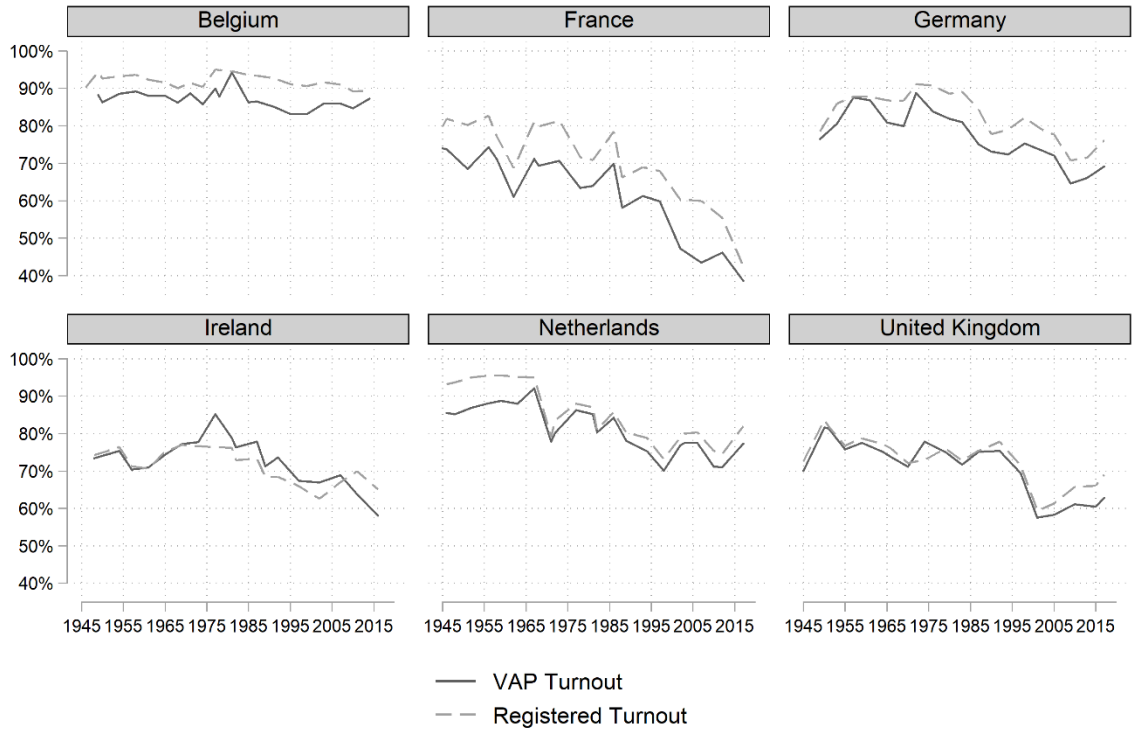


Figure 1.8 Average voter turnout in the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Germany, The Netherlands and Belgium from 1945-2016. Proportion of registered voters (source: the IDEA database)

This contrast provides a rather nicely diverse group of cases. While the general Western trend of declining voter turnout is apparent in many of our countries, we also have contrary examples: some (Belgium and Denmark) experiencing stable turnout and others (Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Ireland) experiencing decline until a (partial) reversal in recent elections. This allows us to compare "most similar" cases of countries and ask if the potential drivers of turnout decline are absent, or less extensive, in these countries. These issues are the empirical subject of this study and now that I have set the scene of turnout decline in Western Europe, I turn to trying to solve the puzzle of why this is happening, starting with a survey of prior studies of turnout decline in the academic literature.

1.3 Turnout Decline

Aside from the various studies that have analysed the general determinants of variation in voter turnout and the drivers of individuals' propensity to vote, a few important studies have specifically dealt with the topic that we have now established and is central to this study: the gradual trend of turnout decline in established democracies in recent decades. Although a few studies (especially

more recent ones) attempt to incorporate each, these studies can broadly be categorized into studies that deal with *aggregate-level voter turnout* on one hand, and studies that deal with the *individual-level propensity to vote* on the other.

Perhaps the most seminal of aggregate-level studies of turnout decline is Mark Franklin's (2004) book *Voter Turnout and Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies*, in which Franklin studied the explanations for turnout decline in 22 established democracies from 1945-1999. His study was based on two major theoretical premises: the first of these is that the character of elections shapes turnout through voters' rational decision-making that is "infused with considerations of strategic interaction" (Franklin, 2004, p. 38). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, his "collective rational choice" model postulates that citizens do not only evaluate the costs and benefits of their individual vote, but are influenced by considerations of whether the elections are close and whether a coalition of voters that they identify with could affect the results to their benefit (Franklin, 2004, chapter 2). The second premise is that these strategic considerations are by far most effective in shaping the turnout of citizens in the first (few) elections in which they are eligible to vote and that these effects leave a "foot-print" that strongly determines their propensity to vote throughout their lives (Franklin, 2004, chapters 3 & 4).

On this basis, Franklin posited several important hypotheses. Perhaps the most notable of these was that having been franchised at the age of 18 (instead of 21) would cause a cohort to have less turnout throughout their lifetime than earlier cohorts, because of the generally different socialization processes – and therefore strategic considerations in elections – dominant at the point of the first elections in which they were eligible to vote. Another important hypothesis that Franklin put forward was that the closeness and competitiveness of elections (along with more stable factors such as the responsiveness of the executive to the legislature) was the biggest single influencer of the propensity to vote in these first elections. Combined with his "foot-print" model, he expected this to almost exclusively have an effect on the turnout of the cohort entering the electorate in each respective election (Franklin, 2004, chapters 4 & 5).

Franklin finds empirical support for all of these hypotheses and reports that they explain around 80% of the variance in voter turnout while adding individual, cultural and social variables adds nothing significant towards such an explanation. On the basis of this, he quite simply concludes that: "Turnout change is not brought about by changes in the character of society or of its members" (Franklin, 2004, p. 147), flying decidedly in the face of any individual-level explanation of the propensity to vote and of turnout decline. However, this conclusion is in my view highly premature.

First, Franklin only uses aggregate data (aside from a single chapter, in which he only looks at Germany and deduces indirect aggregate effects) and he uses a multi-variate regression model instead of a multi-level model, even though the latter is the most empirically rigorous and (now) conventional way to deal with cross-sectional overtime data, whether aggregate or individual (Franklin, 2004; see also: Blais and Rubenson, 2013; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014; Eder, Mochmann and Quandt, 2014b; Grasso, 2014, 2016). Therefore, his analysis risks artificially reduced standard errors, data clustering and biased estimates of variable effects.

Second, the models that include dummy variables for country and/or past turnout levels to control for country-specific levels and dynamics, obviously inflate the explanatory power of those models by including the average and/or prior turnout in each country as predictive variables for the levels of turnout in each election. Third, Blais and Rubenson (2013) point out that Franklin finds that a small mean margin of victory and a more cohesive party-system foster turnout, even though voter turnout has been declining over the same period as the mean margins of victory have been decreasing and party cohesiveness has increased. This casts doubt on his explanation, although Franklin might point out that in his analysis, the crucial factor is the state of these affairs in the respective formative years of different cohorts, not simply in the present elections under study.

Fourth – and in my view most importantly – in all of his models, Franklin uses the "culminated proportion of young initiation" as an explanatory variable for the level of voter turnout; that is, the proportion of the electorate that started voting after the legal voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 years of age. This means that this variable *does not indicate whether the voting age was lowered in the particular election, but the proportion of the electorate that was born after a certain point in time*. In other words, this variable is an almost (aside from different cohort sizes) perfect substitute for time passed since some decades ago. In other words, he is explaining the decline of voter turnout in recent decades by the different turnout rates of cohorts coming of age in recent decades.

This is of course a valuable finding in itself and many other studies have found that the decline of voter turnout is (almost exclusively) attributable to lower turnout levels of younger cohorts of citizens compared to older ones (Blais, Gidengil and Nevitte, 2004; Rubenson *et al.*, 2004). What raises concerns is that Franklin attributes all of this to the fact that the voting age was lowered decades ago instead of allowing for the possibility that these later cohorts are different in other aspects as well as the lower legal voting age in their first eligible elections. It is true that Franklin addresses this criticism at one point (Franklin, 2004, p. 140), saying that he tested this possibility by splitting the dataset into pre-1970 and post-1980 parts and found no significant difference, but this is

hardly a robust test for explaining a gradual trend of decline that has mostly been documented since 1980. He also points to his cohort-level analysis earlier in the book as evidence counter to this possibility, even though this analysis (2004, p. 72) shows that the first cohorts coming of voting age after its lowering to 18 years did not vote uniformly less than earlier cohorts and that later cohorts voted even less than those cohorts.

Nevertheless, Franklin's book is a foundational work in this field of study and it does provide us with some important lessons and ideas in the study of voter turnout, including his framework of collective (or strategic) rationality as well as his argument that any effects on voter turnout are most likely to affect younger cohorts of voters and that past historical contexts in the formative years of different electoral cohorts should be taken seriously into account when explaining current turnout levels. He also shows that aggregate and institutional measures are important and that the degree of electoral competition and salience is perhaps the most important of these.

Hooghe and Kern (2016) expanded on Franklin's analysis in their aggregate analysis of official turnout data from 20 established democracies in 1945-2015, using a trifold framework of systemic (contextual), demographic (generational replacement) and normative (civic duty norms) explanations. In short, they found no support for the idea that systemic, electoral or demographic contexts could explain declining voter turnout in recent decades, but they do discern a clear "tipping point" in turnout in 1980, after which point turnout started to gradually, and remarkably uniformly, decline. They take this as an indirect indication that the explanation must lie in citizens' changing norms and attitudes, reinforced by social conformance. In line with my argument here, they duly highlight that they could not use individual-level data to investigate possible changing characteristics of the electorate and that doing so might prove highly relevant (Hooghe and Kern, 2016).

Another very different type of aggregate-level studies of turnout decline are those that have focused on the role of globalization, or international economic integration, in driving these trends (Steiner, 2010, 2016; Steiner and Martin, 2012; Marshall and Fisher, 2015). The basic argument is that individual national governments have become less able to provide benefits to their citizens after elections because they have less control over their economies and non-governmental (or supranational) actors have become more consequential for national fortunes: national economies around the world have become more integrated with each other, trade has become a more important part of these economies, corporations have more ability to transfer their operations between countries and markets and capital are more free-flowing and international (Steiner, 2010; Marshall and Fisher, 2015).

According to this argument, this increasing "policy constraint" of national governments – their more limited capacity to influence society and the national economy – essentially means that they are less able to implement their respective policies and that this leads to a policy convergence among political parties; that there is less difference between the parties on offer and less choice for the voter (Steiner and Martin, 2012; Ruiz-Rufino and Alonso, 2017). This is also related to an argument within the "anti-politics" literature about the "hollowing out of the state" (Rhodes, 1997) by means of the privatisation and outsourcing of government responsibilities to private actors and agencies in Western countries, which is said to further decrease the capacity of the state and of political actors to actually influence society (Rhodes, 1997; Hay, 2007; Hay and Stoker, 2009; Maloney, 2009). All of this, the argument goes, means that the results of elections matter less for the economy and for the lives of ordinary citizens, meaning that they derive (or at least, perceive) less potential benefits from these results – leading to their declining propensity to vote, in accordance with the rational choice model detailed earlier in this chapter (Steiner, 2010, 2016; Marshall and Fisher, 2015).

This is a compelling argument and has indeed received considerable empirical support in at least two major aggregate-level studies of turnout decline (Steiner, 2010; Marshall and Fisher, 2015). These studies find that a large part of the aggregate variation in voter turnout between countries, and its decline in the Western world in recent decades, can be explained by the objective variance (and general rise) of economic integration in these countries. These results are fairly convincing on the aggregate level (although there is always an issue of potential endogeneity, i.e. globalization may have gone together with other unobserved developments in these cases instead of being a primary cause) but they only tell a part of the story: all of these authors submit that globalization is affecting voter turnout *through a mechanism of changing individual-level perceptions and attitudes towards voting*. However, only a single study, covering a single election and (therefore) limited to a subjective measure of the perceived room to manoeuvre of national governments (instead of objective economic integration) has actually examined these individual-level mechanisms (Steiner, 2016).

In other words, while rising globalization may be driving broader social developments, changing citizens' perceptions of politics and therefore their political behaviour, this does not tell us how this mechanism operates. It does not answer the fundamental question of how citizens' perceptions and attitudes are changing with globalization, just that they vote less where there is more extensive globalization for some reason. In other words, people must be *choosing* to vote less for some reason(s) and the nature of those dynamics is still unclear. Indeed, this is explicitly acknowledged by the authors who have pioneered these studies, or in the words of Nils Steiner (2016, p. 119):

> *These studies, however, only test for the association of the two ends of what is arguably a long causal chain[...] As any association between globalisation and turnout must necessarily be established through the thoughts and actions of individual citizens, the literature on economic globalisation and voter turnout is missing a crucial link.*

These authors have proposed theoretical individual-level explanations for these aggregate relationships: that globalization erodes the competence of national governments to act (or increases policy constraint) and that this in turn reduces people's perceived benefits from voting (Steiner, 2010; Marshall and Fisher, 2015) and/or that this reduced competence leads to party policy convergence that subsequently leads to people's rising indifference between the parties on offer in elections (Steiner and Martin, 2012). The former is basically external efficacy (the sense that your vote makes a difference to the governing of society) and the latter is basically party differentiation or identification. The former has only been tested in a single study while the latter mechanism has not, to my knowledge, been empirically tested thus far, but I will argue in later chapters that this forms part of the conception of political alienation.

This brings me to the second major category of studies of turnout decline: those that focus on individual-level developments. A major pillar of work in this category is that of André Blais and Daniel Rubenson, primarily focussed on the US and Canada. Like Franklin (and unlike globalization studies), they have focused on generational (cohort) differences in turnout, but contrary to Franklin, they have turned their attention towards individual-level variables in explaining these differences; most notably citizens' sense of civic duty (to what extent they adhere to the social norm that voting is a civic obligation) and their political interest. In one (2004) study, they found that the generational gap in turnout in Canada in 2000 could be explained entirely by differences in socio-economic status, social capital and attitudes, indicating that the cohort differences found by Franklin and others may actually lie in individual-level differences. In another study published in the same year, using the same data, Blais et al. (2004) find that the main explanation for turnout decline in Canada is the low turnout propensity of younger cohorts, again finding that civic duty and attention to politics play a large role.

In a more recent study, Blais and Rubenson (2013) directly pit their theory of value-change against Franklin's theory of electoral contexts. Before levelling a few criticisms (partly echoed here) of his findings, they test these competing models using multi-level regression models and an impressive array of data. First, they use election study data from the United Kingdom, Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden since the 1950s. They do find that having been able to vote at age 18 has a significantly negative effect on the likelihood to vote, even after controlling for generational replacement (comparing pre-boomers, boomers and post-boomers), but that the effects of generational differences when controlling for that effect are even stronger, indicating that the legal voting age is only a part of the explanation.

More surprisingly, they find no statistically significant effect of electoral competition on turnout and no interaction of these terms with cohort membership; i.e. they do not find that electoral contexts more strongly affect the voter turnout of younger cohorts than older ones. They proceed to test the same explanations in British elections from 1974-2005, adding the closeness of the local constituency race as a variable, and find that there, the effect of the variable for legal voting age is not statistically significant while the local margin of victory is.

Another type of recent studies has focused on generational differences as well as the role of individuals' education levels in turnout decline. These studies find that despite rising education levels, the turnout gap between citizens with different levels of education has been growing substantially and that this effect is strongest where turnout has decreased the most (Gallego, 2009; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2017b). Together, these findings from individual-level studies suggest that the story told by Franklin, about the generational footprints of electoral contexts and the lowering of the legal voting age, is not sufficient to explain turnout decline in the Western world in recent decades. As argued above, it seems very likely that by ignoring individual-level variables, coding recent cohorts by the year of lowering the voting age concealed a large part of the explanation: the other ways in which recent cohorts are different from earlier ones. It should be noted, however, that Blais and Rubenson's study does not entirely test or refute Franklin's model, as it does not assess the potential effects of *past electoral contexts* on the voter turnout of today's older cohorts, who were in their formative years at the time. The direct contradiction between their analysis and Franklin's aggregate-level analysis of the differential effects of electoral contexts on different cohorts is an empirical puzzle that does not seem entirely settled.

This also relates to a misleading aspect of Blais and Rubenson's framing: they dub the competing theories the "generation school" and the "context school" and claim to be testing the

relative validity of each within a single model (Blais and Rubenson, 2013, pp. 96–100). However, generational replacement is an absolutely central aspect of Franklin's electoral context theory (e.g. Franklin, 2004, chapter 3). Blais and Rubenson's definition of the "generational school" suggests that this may be a misnomer; they are not actually referring to theories that focus on generational effects but to those that focus on changes in values such as civic duty and political interest:

> *"On one side are those who think that the generational gap in turnout reflects a larger cultural value change. These scholars argue that new generations are less interested in politics, and/or have different priorities, and/or are less inclined to conceive of voting as a civic duty[…] We refer to this as the "generation school." (Blais and Rubenson, 2013, p. 96)*

Although Blais and Rubenson claim to test this school against that of context theories, they in fact do not include political attitudes or value change in their first analysis – of Canada and seven European countries – and they do not include macro-level, contextual variables in their later analysis of attitudes in the US. In other words, they did not directly test the respective explanatory power of value-changes and electoral contexts for turnout decline in established democracies.

One study that comes close to doing that is one which was conducted by Fieldhouse, Tranmer and Russell (2007) and followed up on Franklin's research with a multi-level, cross-national analysis of turnout differences between 22 European countries. Using a trifold theoretical framework of rational choice (roughly Franklin's aggregate approach), social capital (associational activity and socialization) and civic voluntarism (attitudes and engagement), they found support for the idea that the turnout of young citizens is more varied between countries and more affected by electoral contexts than that of other cohorts, but they also showed that these younger citizens followed trends within their respective electorates as well. Fieldhouse et al. argued for retaining individual-level variables in any analysis of voter turnout and found that when controlling for electoral contexts, factors such as partisanship, political interest and civic duty were still significantly related to voter turnout. Their study interestingly complements Franklin's aggregate analysis and contradicts his rejection of individual-level factors as explanations for voter turnout, but it does not directly analyse explanations for turnout *decline*, since their the data was cross-sectional, not longitudinal.

Taken together, prior studies of voter turnout have only been able to account for a relatively small part of its variation between countries and periods, and studies that purport to explain the decline of voter turnout in established democracies in recent decades are lacking in some important respects. Aggregate studies have either overstated their explanatory power by lumping generational differences into dubious summary variables (e.g. having had the right to vote at the age of 18) or have not adequately tested the individual-level mechanisms that they claim underlie aggregate

developments, while other studies have shown that those mechanisms contribute importantly to the story.

However, I argue that these individual-level studies of turnout decline have failed to take into account some important insights from the vast academic literature on the development of citizens' democratic values, attitudes and behaviours in recent decades and their purported relationship with turnout decline and other electoral and political trends. This literature traces its roots to the origins of voting as a democratic activity and to the nature of broader social developments that are thought to be gradually but fundamentally changing citizens' values and attitudes. In the rest of this chapter, I will therefore review the substantial literature on broader democratic developments, which will lead me to draw out and clarify the major distinction made in this study and thus far ignored in studies of turnout decline: between political apathy and alienation.

1.4 Democratic Developments

To understand how we can properly examine individual-level changes in democratic values, attitudes and behaviours in recent decades and their relationship to turnout decline, we must understand the historical context and development of voter turnout and the literature that has dealt with the broader social developments in which it is nested. Voter turnout has always been central to research on political participation (e.g. Almond and Verba, 1963; Barnes and Kaase, 1979) and this is no coincidence: voting is the primary act that provides ordinary citizens with the most effective, formal link with their political system in democracies and it has profound practical implications for the workings of these systems (whether strictly representative or more direct). This is not to imply that voting is where democracy begins and ends, but it does underline the importance of voter turnout and developments in voting behaviour for studies of democracy in the modern world.

This importance of the act of voting is also reflected in the historical development and background of modern democracies. As voting is the central democratic activity of contemporary societies, the right to vote is widely considered the most fundamental political right and has been at the centre of democratic struggles throughout history. This political right, the suffrage, has by no means always been widespread, even among citizens in the nominal Western democracies of the 18th and 19th century. As T.H. Marshall detailed in his seminal lectures on "Citizenship and Social Class", civil rights such as the freedom of expression were established in several Western societies in the late 18th century, but political rights only gradually followed in the 19th and 20th century (Marshall,

1950). The right to vote was initially very limited to the economic standing of a small minority of citizens and women did not gain the suffrage until the 20th century.

In the modern age, the fight for democracy originally manifested itself as a fight for an expansion of the suffrage; of the right to vote for the representatives of already existing legislative and executive institutions. European and North American legislatures had for centuries been comprised of social elites that dealt with public affairs (usually on behalf of a monarch) and these had been chosen by, and accountable to, only a very small part of the population. The democratic demands of those days were demands for allowing adult citizens of other classes to take part in choosing these representatives, and for the executive being accountable to them instead of the monarch (Dahl, 1989, pp. 215–218; Pitkin, 2004).

Therefore, the act of voting was not only central to studies of democracy and political participation, the right to do so was also the most dominant demand of the wave of democracy that started with the French revolution. Extensive popular voting rights for national legislatures were gradually achieved throughout the Western world in the 20th century, accompanied with a corresponding rise of social movements and articulation of class cleavages that competed for representation in these legislatures. The working classes gradually started to exercise their political rights to further their social rights and standing, by forming workers' unions and demanding the right to collective bargaining and other benefits, with the upper classes rallying around more bourgeoisie interests (Marshall, 1950). In the 20th century, these movements consolidated themselves through political parties and were pivotal in mobilizing their respective supporters to the polling stations (Webb, 2009; Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012).

However, in the late 20th and early 21st century, these important social institutions – political parties – started to erode and have less significance for voting behaviour in many Western societies, in a process that has been dubbed political "dealignment" (Dalton, 1984b; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Phelps, 2012; Amnå and Ekman, 2013; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2016; Grasso *et al.*, 2017). Membership of trade unions, churches and political parties declined dramatically and these institutions seemed to lose much of their social and psychological relevance to citizens as mechanisms for the expression of social identity, and therefore their effectiveness at mobilizing citizens to engage in political participation (Mair and van Biezen, 2001; Webb, 2009; Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012).

This apparently dramatic decline in citizens' social and psychological identification with political parties ("party identification") and partisan loyalty in elections (at least in several important

countries) (Dalton, 2000, 2016) has seen voters increasingly voting for different parties between and even within ("splitting the ballot" when voting for more than one office) elections (Dalton, McAllister and Wattenberg, 2000). This has led to rising electoral volatility in recent decades, making overall swings in parties' vote shares larger and more difficult to predict between elections (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). While many have interpreted these developments as normatively desirable indications that citizens have become more independent and substantive in their voting behaviour, studies have also shown that this may have gone hand in hand with a rise in dissatisfaction with the workings of the party system, politicians and politics more generally (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Dalton, 2004a; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2016).

These developments have been nested within the wider processes of social transition in recent decades and centuries that have become known as *social modernization* and *post-modernization*. First, rapidly rising affluence and the wider socio-economic developments accompanying industrialization, such as growing literacy and education, communications technology advancements, urbanization and suburbanization and a rise of the working class, trade unions and class cleavages are thought to have led to a tide of democratisation and rising citizens' mass-participation in politics and civic affairs in the latter part of the 20th century (Bell, 1973; Inglehart, 1977, 1990, 1997; Norris, 2002; Stoker and Evans, 2014). However, before the turn of the 21st century, some authors started noting that this process of modernization was not necessarily linear and the concept of "post-modernization" slowly gained prominence, especially with the writings of Daniel Bell and Ronald Inglehart (Bell, 1973; Inglehart, 1990). This development is characterized by a further shift in economic production from the manufacturing to the service industries and accompanying developments such as the growth of the suburbanized middle class, growing gender equality and social mobility, rising education and human capital and, last but not least: globalization and the transition towards more multicultural, diverse societies (Bell, 1973; Inglehart, 1990, 1997; Norris, 2002; Inglehart and Welzel, 2010).

This last point relates interestingly to a strand of studies covered in the previous section, which posit globalization as the primary explanation for turnout decline in recent decades. Those studies have found significant aggregate-level support for that hypothesis and their authors have posited a particular individual-level mechanism through which globalization supposedly decreases people's propensity to vote: that of national policy constraint leading to a convergence of political parties, less diverse vote-choice and therefore less perceived benefits from the results of an election (Steiner, 2010, 2016; Steiner and Martin, 2012; Marshall and Fisher, 2015). But as I discussed above, this latter individual-level mechanism has never been demonstrated; it could well be that globalization has

gone together with other kinds of individual-level attitude-changes that drive the decline of voter turnout.

Illustrating this, many authors who have focused on globalization as part of a broader process of post-modernization argue that this has led to a gradual change in the *values* and value priorities of citizens in Western societies. Inglehart (1977, 1990, 1997; 2005) has led a rich tradition of research that further elaborates these value changes as a rise of "post-materialist" values, where citizens focus less on material needs and concerns (in large part because they have less need to) and more on post-material values such as self-expression, autonomy, democratic ideals, human rights, gender equality, environmental protection and a critical approach to authority – with various consequences for political attitudes and behaviour (Inglehart, 1997; Hay and Stoker, 2009; Williamson, 2009; Snell, 2010; Norris, 2011).

Although people have long raised concerns about supposed civic declines, it is in these "post-modern" times that those concerns have arguably reached new levels, spearheaded by Robert Putnam's seminal publication at the turn of the 21st century - *Bowling Alone* – that decried the downfall of American "social capital" and cohesion (Putnam, 2000); of inter-personal trust, associational activities, trade unions, hobby clubs and other types of social activities in local communities. Putnam argued that the youth of his day was less socially engaged and interested than earlier generations, in large part due to these declining associational activities and a more individualised consumption of television, media and culture (Ibid).

Putnam's work is one of the pillars of a body of writings that argue that citizens have, since the latter part of the 20th century and ongoing through our day, become gradually more *apathetic* about (less interested in) politics and social activities more broadly. However, Inglehart and other influential authors (such as Pippa Norris and Russell Dalton) have interpreted democratic developments in this period in an importantly different way. According to them, post-materialist Western citizens have changed their conceptions of democracy and their approach to politics, instead of losing interest in them. There are many variations of this argument, but they can be summarized broadly under the heading of political *alienation*: the idea that citizens today are still interested in politics but instead estranged from the formal political systems and traditional means of participation on offer to them; systems and means that have been inherited from an earlier, more materialist and hierarchical world. This is the contemporary debate about the nature of democratic developments that is at the heart of the present study and I will discuss in more depth below.

1.5 Apathy or Alienation?

In the academic literature on individual-level value-changes in established democracies in recent decades, there is an important distinction between two broad schools of theories: between theories of political *apathy* and political *alienation*. The first school of theories argues that citizens in Western democracies have simply become less interested in politics (and other social affairs) since the latter part of the 20th century. These apathy theories are perhaps the most straightforward and colloquial type of explanations for turnout decline: that citizens just don't care as much about politics anymore and therefore can't be bothered to vote. This explanation is regularly voiced in public debate (see Fox (2015) for an overview), with several important academics following Putnam in advocating and finding support for this explanation (Pirie and Worcester, 1998; Park, 2000; Pattie and Johnston, 2012; Phelps, 2012; Wattenberg, 2012). Many recent authors have cited this explanation as the "mainstream view" or "conventional wisdom" in academia before opposing it (e.g. Norris, 2002; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007; Deželan, 2015; Fox, 2015), but it has arguably regained credibility in recent years, after a period of going out of fashion (G. G. Albacete, 2014; Fox, 2015; Grasso, 2016).

A variety of theories challenge this "mainstream" view in one way or another. Following Marsh, O'Toole and Jones (2007) and other recent work (Henn, Weinstein and Wring, 2003; O'Toole et al., 2003; Hay and Stoker, 2009; Fox, 2015; Chou et al., 2017), I collectively dub these diverse theories "alienation" theories here. I do this acknowledging that, as Citrin et al. (1975, pp. 2–3) wrote more than four decades ago: "Political alienation has come to function as a catchall term signifying almost any form of 'unhappiness' about politics or dissatisfaction with some aspect of society". This is still the case: in most writings, the term is used along with several related concepts without discrimination. Those studies that do operationalise the term sometimes conceptualize it as including multiple dimensions relating to political efficacy, distrust and deprivation (Finifter, 1970; Fox, 2015), while others define it simply as the distance that a voter feels from any political party or candidate on offer, whether in terms of issues or likability (Brody and Page, 1973; Plane and Gershtenson, 2004; Rubenson *et al.*, 2004; Adams, Dow and Merrill, 2006; Wuttke, 2017). Here, I understand and apply the term in a broader sense that derives from the original definition of political alienation as an "orientation which implies long-standing feelings of estrangement from some aspect of the individual's political environment", as "active non-identification" (Finifter, 1970; Fox, 2015, p. 146), or a 'sense of estrangement from existing political institutions, values and leaders' (Citrin *et al.*, 1975, p. 3)(Citrin *et al.*, 1975). I thus understand the term broadly as a lack of identification with the formal political system, as distinct from a lack of interest in politics more generally.

Under this broad heading, a number of important authors have posited explanations for democratic development. Many of these alternative theories are situated within the literature on "anti-politics", which focuses on citizens' distrust and dislike of politics and politicians (Hay, 2007; Flinders, 2012b; Corbett, 2015). These authors build on research that has indicated a trend of decline in trust in politicians and political institutions in this same period (Nye, 1997; Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Dalton, 2005; Wattenberg, 2012) and see declining voter turnout as a worrying symptom of this decline in political trust. They tell a story of citizens' rising dissatisfaction with and disconnection from the reality of formal politics, where they feel much less sympathy and identification with the politics, parties and candidates on offer to them. According to this argument, citizens have started to shun formal politics as they manifest in the modern world, including traditional acts of political participation such as voting (Henn and Weinstein, 2006; Hay, 2007; see also Corbett, 2015; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2016). Importantly for our purposes, the argument of most of these authors is that modern citizens are *not* more apathetic about politics in general*,* but *instead* disgruntled with formal politics and the way that politics is conducted in the modern world. Many of these authors explicitly reject the idea of modern political apathy, e.g. as Colin Hay and Gerry Stoker (2009, p. 226) put it:

> *The real issue is the prevalence - and the inadvertent nurturing - of an anti-political culture. Contemporary political disaffection is not, we suggest, a story of the decline of civic virtue, nor is it a story of political apathy – it is one of disenchantment, even hatred, of politics and politicians. It is not that we have stopped caring – we remain impassioned and animated by politics – but our intuitive and emotional responses to politics are increasingly negative in tone and character.*

Some of these authors relate these developments to rising consumerism and individualistic values that have supposedly combined with the mass media to create a political culture of alienation, distrust and a general public dislike of politics and politicians (Hay, 2007; Hay and Stoker, 2009; Flinders, 2012b; Corbett, 2015). By this account, the rising support for populist politicians and parties in the Western world might be explained by this rising public political discontent, disgruntlement or disenchantment and could have seriously adverse long-term consequences for the health and stability of modern democratic societies (Dalton, 2004a; Fieschi and Heywood, 2006; Rooduijn, van der Brug and de Lange, 2016).

Not all of these "alienation" theories focus on distrust or disenchantment as such, however. Many posit the analysis of a politically interested but traditionally disengaged citizenry as providing a justification and perhaps a necessity for various democratic innovations and reforms, intended to reengage these citizens with democracy (Dalton, 2004b; Hay and Stoker, 2009; Smith, 2009; Newton,

2012a). In that vein, Pippa Norris sees a "Democratic Phoenix" rising from the ashes of traditional democracy, where "critical citizens" still participate actively in democracy but through different processes and institutions ("agencies", "repertoires" and "targets" in her framing) than formal politics offer (Norris, 1999, 2002, 2011). Other authors write in similar terms: Russell Dalton sees "cognitively mobilized" citizens posing a "democratic challenge" by participating in more autonomous and diverse ways (Dalton, 1984a, 1996, 2004b, 2009); Henrik Bang argues that modern citizens are "everyday makers" who participate autonomously in politics on a project-oriented basis (Bang *et al.*, 1999; Bang, 2005); and David Marsh and Therese O'Toole (O'Toole *et al.*, 2003; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007) conclude that young people today are interested in politics but conceive of them in different ways than the political system accommodates. Furthermore, many of these authors explicitly link this distinction with a decline in formal political participation, e.g. when Chou et al. (2017, p. 17) write that:

> *"Rather than always talking about apathy, and its corollary civic deficit, we perhaps need to pay equal attention to alienation, and its corollary disenchantment. It is the latter, rather than the former, which will help account both for youth disengagement from formal political arenas and their turn to informal political practices".*

And while not all of these writings are framed in that way, many studies in this field have explicitly framed this distinction in terms of a distinction between "apathy or alienation" (Henn, Weinstein and Wring, 2003; O'Toole, 2004; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007; Sloam, 2007; G. G. Albacete, 2014; Fox, 2015). These authors generally share the thesis that citizens are voting less, *not* because they are less interested in politics, but because they identify less with their formal political systems and with traditional modes of political participation. In that sense, they can all be placed broadly under the collective heading of political alienation, originally defined as *non-identification with the political environment* (Citrin *et al.*, 1975; Fox, 2015). Therese O'Toole (2004, p. 2) described this divide in the literature well:

> *"A number of recent studies […] suggest that young people are indeed turning away from formal, mainstream politics, but this does not mean that they are necessarily politically apathetic – rather young people are reasonably interested in politics and political issues, but cynical about politicians and formal mechanisms for political participation."*

Many authors in this group of theories (who would likely not all agree with the label of "alienation" for their work) focus specifically on the different conceptions that more educated and self-expressive post-material modern citizens (especially younger generations) supposedly have of politics and democracy than earlier generations did. According to this argument, post-materialist citizens have different, less hierarchical and more directly democratic conceptions of democratic participation than earlier generations and these changing conceptions manifest themselves in alternative forms of

political participation (Barnes and Kaase, 1979; Norris, 2002; O'Toole *et al.*, 2003; Zukin *et al.*, 2006; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007; Dalton, 2009). From this perspective, declining voter turnout may even be indicative of a participatory revolution: a transformation of democratic participation in the Western world towards a more active, dynamic and direct engagement with politics, through various channels that are not confined to the election booth.

These new forms of participation are said to manifest themselves through various innovative forms of political debate and advocacy such as protests, demonstrations, strikes and political consumerism (boycotting and "buy-cotting") as well as through new social movements, social media, the internet and other types of information and communications technology (ICT). These developments are commonly explained with reference to the process of social (post-)modernization covered above; where more dynamic, fast-paced, horizontal and issue-oriented means of participation are thought to be more appealing to post-modern, self-expressive and less hierarchically minded citizens than the traditional, formal avenue of the voting booth (Inglehart, 1997; Norris, 2002; Dalton, 2004b).

Authors have pointed to many promising examples of such developments in recent decades, but attempts to provide empirical support for a general trend towards a considerable rise in these forms of participation have been less than successful (Phelps, 2012; Deželan, 2015; Grasso, 2016). Recent statistical analyses of long-term trends have found evidence that largely contradict these expectations: although a rise in protests and related activities has been found in the 1990s, recent studies have not detected a marked rise after that period and they have directly contradicted the expectation that younger generations of citizens are engaging more in these types of participation than their earlier counterparts, or that these types are serving as substitutes for - as opposed to complements to – more conventional forms of participation (G. G. Albacete, 2014; Linssen *et al.*, 2014; Grasso, 2016).

This important debate between theories of apathy and alienation is at the core of this study as it is a major distinction in debates within the academic literature, has been highlighted by several previous authors and is of direct relevance to normative democratic theory and public policy. There are various academic studies and proposed interpretations of recent democratic developments that are more difficult to neatly situate within either of these broad categories but some of them do deserve discussion here, as many of them also address the (supposedly) changing democratic character of modern citizens, providing important insights and serving to enlighten our hypotheses and theoretical interpretations.

1.6 Rationality and Civic Duty

The different explanations for democratic value-change among Western citizens in recent decades that have been posited can very broadly be distinguished by whether they ascribe to the (once) "conventional view" that citizens have become less interested in politics or not. However, the latter group of theories is more heterogenous than this distinction might suggest, as many nuanced explanations which are more or less difficult to test empirically have been put forth in the literature and not all of these can reasonably be dubbed "alienation". Even if the major focus of this study is on the distinction between apathy and alienation and these nuances might only be tested indirectly, they deserve particular attention as they have found fairly strong support in both empirical and theoretical work and can serve to enlighten our analysis (Dalton, 1984b, 2004a; Blais, Gidengil and Nevitte, 2004; Blais and Rubenson, 2013).

Russell Dalton (1984b, 2013) has provided one prominent argument of this type, claiming that a new type of "dealigned" voter, or "cognitively mobilized" citizen has entered the electorate. This type of citizen represents something like the ancient ideal of an independent-minded citizen, who rationally and substantively weighs the pros and cons of the different political parties and candidates that he or she could vote for – and whether it is worth his/her time to vote in the first place. Dalton distinguishes this type of cognitively mobilized citizen from "apolitical" citizens, arguing that the growth in the number of "apartisans" in the electorate does not stem from this, but from a more "open" electorate making truly informed choices from each election to the other about not only who to vote for, but whether to vote at all (Dalton, 2009, 2013; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2016).

This type of argument is often related to the literature on post-materialism discussed earlier in this chapter: post-material citizens are thought to be more critical of authority, hierarchy and convention, more autonomous and more oriented towards self-expressive forms of behaviour (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005, 2010). Connecting this with the rational choice model of political behaviour more educated, affluent and post-materialist citizens may better fit that model than before; by only voting if they deem it to be worthwhile, i.e. relevant to them and their priorities. Advocates of this argument often believe that citizens are indeed still interested in politics but tend to vote less for reasons that are importantly different from those posited by the alienation theorists discussed above: because more educated and rational citizens increasingly make an informed decision not to vote.

Therefore, it is less plausible to call these citizens "alienated" from the political system, because they may well be satisfied with its workings and follow it relatively closely from the sidelines,

simply choosing not to interfere. One example of this argument can be drawn from the "stealth democracy" literature, which essentially argues that most citizens would prefer to trust government enough to not have to follow its actions, get informed about or involved in politics; preferring to go about their daily business in peace (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002; Bengtsson and Mattila, 2009). However, there are several variations of these theories and indeed, many of these citizens might be actively dissatisfied with democracy, vigilantly holding government and politicians to account through alternative means, forming a kind of "counter-democracy" (Rosanvallon, 2008). Other theories are more neutral on this aspect and instead generally posit that citizens are "monitoring" democracy from the side-lines, on "standby" and ready to intervene if they feel the need to do so (Schudson, 1996; Theiss-Morse and Hibbing, 2005; Hooghe and Dejaeghere, 2007; Rosanvallon, 2008; Berger, 2009; Amnå and Ekman, 2013).

A related type of argument turns our attention to political theory, more specifically to norms of civic duty: the notion that voting is not only a political right but every citizen's moral obligation. Earlier generations of citizens are said to have been socialized into this sense of obligation and to have identified with it as an important social norm, especially those citizens who had earlier experienced living under undemocratic rule. This social norm, according to this argument, becomes a non-material motivation (i.e. the "D term" mentioned in section 1.1) that drives these citizens to vote regardless of their political interest, trust or efficacy and independent of any material consideration of the vote choice and its effects (Blais and Achen, 2010; Achen and Hur, 2011; Blais and Galais, 2016; Wang, 2016).

Drawing our attention to these norms, André Blais and other prominent academics have argued that younger generations of citizens have different notions of civic duty than earlier cohorts, that they are much less likely to consider voting a moral obligation and therefore less driven to vote (Blais, Gidengil and Nevitte, 2004; Rubenson *et al.*, 2004; Blais and Achen, 2010; Blais and Galais, 2015). Indeed, this hypothesis has found considerable empirical support, with studies finding that these changing norms of civic duty can explain a large part of turnout decline in the US and Canada (Blais, Gidengil and Nevitte, 2004; Blais and Rubenson, 2013). This perspective has resonance with the more recent versions of rational choice theories discussed in section 1.1, which recognize that individuals can be driven by "non-material" interests such as adhering to social norms. From this quasi-rational perspective, turnout can be expected to decline if there is a decline in this perception of non-material interest: if citizens were more likely to vote in the past simply because they felt it was a civic duty to do so, their interest and other more material considerations would have mattered less for this decision. While considering voting a civic duty is hardly an "irrational" attitude as such, it

should nonetheless have the effect that more proximal factors in each election would play a weaker role; factors which would be given the more classical label of rationality. In fact, studies by Fieldhouse et al. (2007) and Martin (2015) have found that contextual electoral factors such as the closeness of elections do seem to have a bigger effect on the propensity of younger cohorts of citizens to vote than that of older generations.

Bringing these different perspectives together, they would suggest that more educated, post-material citizens are voting less because they are more likely to decide on an election-to-election basis whether it is worth their while to vote, let alone to get informed about the voting decision, instead of habitually doing so out of a sense of duty. These theories are similar to theories of apathy and alienation in that they focus on individual-level explanations, i.e. on changes in the values and attitudes of citizens themselves as opposed to changes in the social and electoral context. But rationality is in many ways a more difficult concept to operationalize (and test) than political interest or identification, especially with the available data. There may however be ways to approximate this idea, to test it indirectly, and I will return to this issue in later chapters.

1.7 Generations

A common feature of all the individual-level explanations covered in this chapter is that they have regularly been framed and analysed in terms of political generations. In other words, a large number of studies have analysed the extent to which these changes in behaviours and attitudes have been particular to different (younger) generations, or birth cohorts, of citizens. These studies look at the role of the different social and political socialization of different cohorts in their formative years; how this leaves an imprint of differences in their values, attitudes and behaviour; the role of this in driving democratic developments; and the significance that this would have for democracy's future in light of ongoing generational replacement in the electorate (Miller and Shanks, 1996; Norris, 2002; Zukin *et al.*, 2006; Rosanvallon, 2008; Dalton, 2009; G. G. Albacete, 2014; Fox, 2015; Grasso, 2016).

Broadly speaking, the literature on political generations derives from research on the role of socialization, the social processes and historical circumstances through which individuals come of age, in shaping political norms and behaviour throughout our lives (Franklin, 2004; G. G. Albacete, 2014; Martin, 2015). These effects are thought to be especially important in the formative years of youth and to more or less persist through an individual's lifetime, creating inertia or a "foot-print" of (political) values, attitudes and behaviours (Franklin, 2004; Grasso, 2016). This means that young people today can be fundamentally different from the young people of yesterday, and that older

citizens could be shaped more by their past than our present, all depending on the historical and social context of their formative years. While some "socialization" theories focus more on the different historical events and contexts that have shaped different generations in non-linear ways, "modernization" theories tend to see these effects in a more linear sense, with each successive cohort reflecting more of the consequences of modernization and post-modernization (Grasso, 2016).

These arguments can and have been applied both to the current generation of young people, the "Millennials" (or "Generation Y") born from around 1981-1995, and to the preceding "Generation X", born between around 1965-1980, often comparing these with the "Baby-boomers" born after the second world war, from 1946-1964. The precise line of birth year around which the boundaries between generations are drawn vary, some simply prefer to demarcate between decades of birth years, while various studies conducted in different social contexts such as Germany (Konzelmann, Wagner and Rattinger, 2012), Finland (Wass, 2007), Sweden (Górecki, 2013; Persson, Wass and Oscarsson, 2013), Norway (Gallego, 2009) and across Europe in elections to the European Parliament (Bhatti and Hansen, 2012) have developed different variants of cohort categories. Zukin et al. (2006) classify US citizens into *dutifuls* (born before 1945), *baby-boomers* (born 1946–64), *genXers* (born 1965–76) and *dotnets* (born in 1977 and onwards) while Blais and Rubenson (2013) divide them into "pre-boomers", "boomers" and "post-boomers" but use the different cut-off point of 1970 in Canada, finding that citizens born after this point vote much less than earlier cohorts (Rubenson *et al.*, 2004).

Whichever boundary of age is drawn between generations of citizens, this perspective draws our attention to the possibility that any observed changes in the electorate's political attitudes and behaviour might in fact be concealing even larger differences between younger and older generations. If that is the case, these changes will likely magnify as years go by with generational replacement in the electorate, with even more profound social and normative implications than if they were uniform across generations. More to the point: if turnout decline is caused by a general rise of apathy and/or alienation in Western electorates, this is an interesting finding in its own right. However, whether this rise is uniform across the electorate or specific to younger cohorts of citizens is of fundamental importance: if the latter is the case, we might expect this development to accelerate as time goes by and turnout to decline even more accordingly. This brings our attention back to the normative importance and policy implications of each of these major school of theories about the individual-level value-changes underlying turnout decline.

In that respect, it has important implications whether modern citizens, and perhaps especially younger generations of citizens, are less interested in politics or still interested but instead alienated from their democratic systems. It is an important normative question about the nature of democracy and a crucial practical one about if and how citizens can be re-engaged with democratic systems of government. If they simply care less about politics, we may want to try to increase their interest e.g. through civic education (García-Albacete, 2013; Pontes, Henn and Griffiths, 2017) or compulsory voting (Wattenberg, 2012; Henn and Foard, 2014). If they are still interested but instead estranged from their political systems, this may imply a more fundamental need to reform modern democratic systems and cultures. This latter explanation is the fundamental justification for many projects for democratic innovation: if people are indeed still interested but do not identify with traditional channels of political participation, this would arguably support calls for providing more participatory venues within and without formal political systems (Dalton, 2004a; Goodin, 2008; e.g. Smith, 2009).

To summarize, the debate between theories of political apathy and political alienation is directly empirical and they draw on competing theoretical frameworks of broader social developments. Empirically speaking, proponents of the two types of explanation for turnout decline disagree on whether citizens are voting less because they have become less interested in politics in general *or* if they are still interested in politics but are instead more alienated from the particular realities of modern politics. Importantly, the latter type of theories generally *reject* claims about rising political apathy and draw from this distinction some conclusions that are fundamental to their framework. In addition to this, a number of theories argue that today's post-material citizens are not exactly apathetic or alienated as such, but instead approach the decision of whether to vote or not more "rationally", depending on their interest and the electoral context. Of course, all of these theories could be true to an extent, but they are qualitatively different and proponents of each cite turnout decline as a symptom of these developments. The extent to which each of these explanations is true is not only interesting in terms of explaining voter turnout and its decline but also as an indication of the validity of these broader frameworks for understanding democratic developments and citizens' value transformations in the modern world. Furthermore, various studies have found that turnout decline and related developments are especially pronounced among younger generations of citizens and if this is true, we may see these trends sharpen in coming times, with even more profound implications for democracy.

2 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will develop a holistic theoretical model for analysing voter turnout, based on the lessons learned from the literature review in the previous chapter and with the aim of developing an overarching model that incorporates the many different approaches covered there in a logical, relatively parsimonious way. On the basis of this overall model of voter turnout, I will proceed in later sections of this chapter to develop a theory for explaining turnout decline that focuses on individual-level explanations; specifically, political apathy and alienation as well as the strength of their effect on turnout over time (an indirect test of the "rationality" hypothesis). I then discuss different ways to measure and operationalize these concepts and argue that one valid approach is to measure political apathy as a lack of general political interest and political alienation as a lack of party (system) identification on the part of politically interested citizens. In the last part of this chapter, I will derive hypotheses on the basis of this theoretical framework.

To build the general framework for analysing voter turnout on both the individual and aggregate levels, it is necessary to think about the nature of voter turnout and why people do or do not feel inclined to turn out to vote. We can start with the observation that almost "ate rational choice theory": that in most democracies, most people do vote despite the practical costs of the activity obviously outweighing the expected material benefits of their single vote (Riker and Ordeshook, 1968; Grofman, 1993; Franklin, 2004). In their attempts to solve this puzzle, researchers have over time incorporated into rational choice models non-material considerations that have been shown to influence the propensity to vote, such as psychological traits, political interest, the notion of voting being a civic duty and other social norms and political attitudes (Crick, 1998; Hahn, 1998; e.g. Blais, 2006; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014; Barrett and Zani, 2015). These later models have been called "thin" or "extended" rational choice models and include the "D term" of subjective benefits (Hix, Noury and Roland, 2006; Smets *et al.*, 2013).

Mark Franklin further proposed a "collective" rational choice model that incorporates the strategic action of social groups, arguing that electoral contexts mostly influence individuals' propensity to vote through the rational considerations of the groups which they are part of. According to this model, activists and other active members of social groups assess to what extent their coalition might have a chance of winning an election, and if they believe that they do and that this would benefit the group as a whole they therefore encourage other individuals within that group to vote more when those chances are better. The individuals within the group thus become more

likely to vote, because they tend to identify with the social group and feel the effects of internal socialization and peer pressure (Franklin, 2004).

Whether we dub these subjective motivations "rational" or not, it may indeed still be useful to analyse the propensity to vote in a sort of cost-benefit model, where (subjective or material) benefits increase this propensity and (subjective or material) costs decrease it. When we include subjective and personal factors, it makes sense to say that you benefit from voting in some way if you are politically interested and committed to social affairs, if you belong to a social environment that places importance on political matters and values participation and if you have been socialized to value voting in its own right. In other words, you are more likely to derive "experiential benefits" from voting; emotional, cognitive and social benefits such as pleasure, an improved sense of self-image and social belonging, when you have these attitudes, traits and values and/or adhere to these social norms (see also Shepsle, 2010). From this perspective, further personal factors that have not been as prominent in such research might also influence your motivation to vote; e.g. your general idealism, empathy and normative commitments, your ambition for political success and contribution and a simple motivation to "have things your way" in your social surroundings.

This broader rational choice model fits better with later socialization models of turnout, as socialization can encourage some of these inclinations. This is the case when it comes to fostering social norms such as ideas of civic duty and perceptions of politics and voting as important, as well as to political mobilization and peer pressure coming from social groups, political parties and candidates. One of the most important socialization effects on turnout is the simple effect of an individual having voted in earlier years, which has been found to form a habit of voting that greatly increases the likelihood of that individual voting in later years (Franklin, 2004; Blais, 2006). This is the formative or "foot-print" effect: having voted in the first (few) elections in which you were eligible to vote has been shown to be one of the most powerful predictors of the propensity to vote in later elections (Ibid.).

Resource models of turnout also make sense from this perspective, entering from the other side of the equation: social and political resources can influence your propensity to vote by making it less costly to vote and to inform yourself about your choice in elections. This applies both to macro social contexts such as population size, income inequality, GDP, ethnic diversity and social stratification but also to the more proximal social context such as people's income, education, class and general social standing; including their social support networks, family and school environment (Blais, 2006; Solt, 2008; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014).

This perspective also allows us to understand why more traditionally "rational" factors such as electoral competition and party polarization, national policy constraints, political institutions and legal-practical arrangements have consistently been found to be related to aggregate levels of turnout between countries and years, even though they cannot explain why most people vote in the first place (Boechel, 1928; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968; Franklin, 2004; Blais, 2006; Steiner, 2010; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014). This makes sense from a comparative statics perspective (see also Levine and Palfrey, 2007): when you include all of the above in an analysis and say *that given a particular level* of political resources, habit and what we might call "political motivation" (i.e. someone's political interest (or apathy), party (system) identification (or alienation), altruism, sense of civic duty etc.), more material cost-benefit considerations can still affect people's propensity to vote.

Where possible, analysis of turnout should therefore incorporate the electoral and social context, social and personal resources as well as different types of the subjective political motivation of each individual at each election to explain their propensity to vote. Ideally, analyses should also follow Franklin's (2004) example in taking particular note of individuals' socialization in their formative years, e.g. the legal voting age and other social and electoral contexts at the time, as well as taking an individual's birth cohort membership more generally into consideration (Henn, Weinstein and Wring, 2002; Dalton, 2009; Blais and Rubenson, 2013; G. G. Albacete, 2014; e.g. Grasso, 2016; Linek and Petrúšek, 2016).

From this, we get a multi-level theoretical model that is well suited to analysing the role of citizens' values and attitudes, the effect of social and electoral contexts and the possible interaction between these individual and aggregate level factors in determining the propensity to vote. In actual multi-level analysis, the aggregate component of course requires multiple different elections and some variation in the values of aggregate variables and this is by no means always the case. But at least in theory, such a model would ideally include some variables from many or all of the interlinked spheres and levels of analysis presented in Figure 2.1.

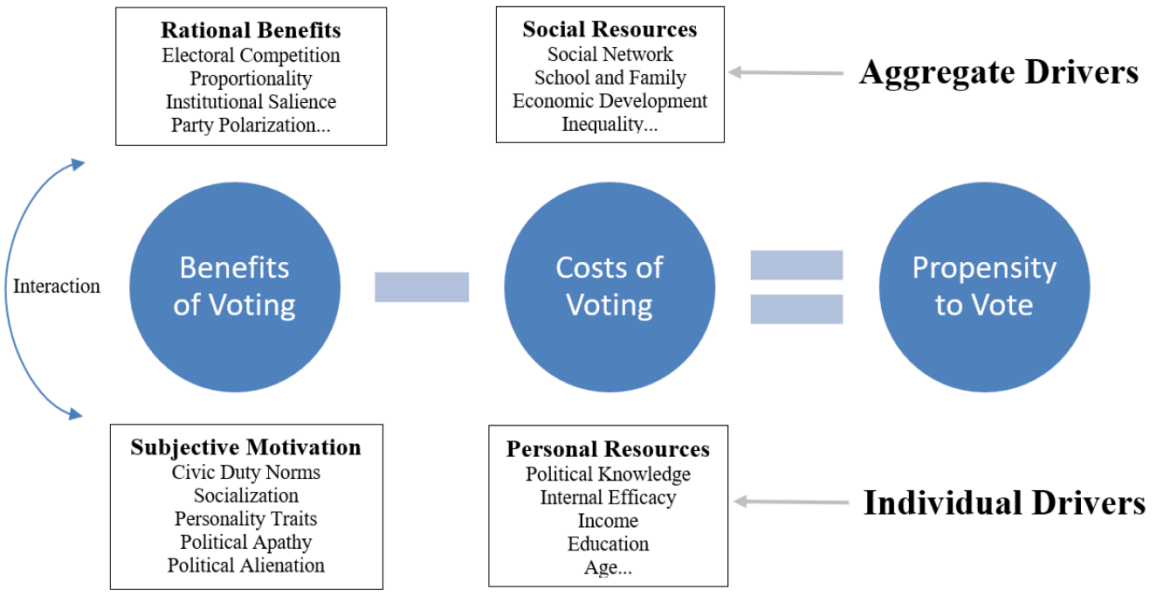


Figure 2.1 Drivers of voter turnout. The different levels and spheres of drivers of the propensity to vote in the theoretical framework of voter turnout developed here, with some examples of their components.

Note that the model presented in Figure 2.1 is a relatively exhaustive one and would usually be quite difficult to test in a single analysis, not only because of data availability but also because (especially multi-level) regression models quickly become over-crowded: if you input too many related variables, they can take away explanatory power from each other and the models often tell you less than the underlying relationships may warrant (e.g. Goldstein, 1995). One approach to dealing with this issue is to explore the effects of these variables in different models and another is to combine a few highly correlated variables into scalar variables, but each of these approaches should be theoretically guided, justifying how the chosen measures should capture the underlying phenomena of interest. However, the available data usually only provides one or a few potential measures (if that) of each category in the model and Figure 2.1 only presents a few important examples of such variables, without stipulating exactly which of them are necessary or ideal measures of the underlying concepts.

This is the general holistic model proposed here for a cross-sectional, long-term analysis of voter turnout, but a model for more specifically explaining turnout decline can be derived from this. Such a model would include the passage of time *t* (e.g. year) as an explanatory variable, where the correlation of this variable with voter turnout (whether aggregate turnout or the turnout of individuals in representatively sampled surveys) should be significantly negative where there is a trend of declining voter turnout. If the variation in other factors over time does indeed explain why turnout has been declining, the inclusion of variables measuring these should shrink the correlation

of time with turnout and ideally eliminate it or make it insignificant. In other words, to solve this major puzzle, analysis should show that when holding the explanatory variables constant, turnout in fact would remain stable over the period – or at least considerably more stable than it has. Having developed an overall theoretical framework for analysing voter turnout in general, I now turn to the more specific topic of theorizing and analysing the phenomenon of turnout decline. Because of the scope of this particular study and the lack of variation in most aggregate variables in the region and period covered here, I will focus on specific individual-level factors and their role in turnout decline, as these have in my view been understudied in prior research. The role of other, especially aggregate-level, factors detailed above would be well warranted in future research, but there are also theoretical reasons for why I believe a study focussed on the specific puzzle of turnout *decline* – as opposed to one attempting to dissect the drivers of the propensity to vote more generally – should primarily focus on individual level factors. In the following section, I begin to develop a theory about this particular puzzle, on the basis of the framework provided here.

2.1 A theory of turnout decline

Having developed a general theoretical framework for analysing voter turnout, I now turn to developing the more specific theory of turnout decline that will guide the analysis of this study. In section 1.5, I discussed the distinction between apathy and alienation and I argue that these different supposed democratic developments should not only be incorporated into studies of turnout decline for conceptual and methodological accuracy, but also that distinguishing between these is one of the more important and normatively interesting aspects of the study of turnout decline. Of course, studying other attitudes as well as aggregate factors such as the electoral and institutional context is also important; aside from enhancing our understanding of social dynamics generally, the different effects of different electoral systems and legal arrangements can be an important normative guide for policy-makers tasked with designing or reforming these systems and arrangements. But I contend that individual-level attitudinal changes are both an essential requirement for understanding the normative implications of turnout decline, as well as a logical focus point from an empirical perspective.

The latter point has a relatively straightforward rationale: *turnout has been in a gradual trend of decline, while there has been no discernible corresponding trend in electoral drivers of turnout*; at least not in the direction that could explain the former (Gray and Caul, 2000; Blais and Rubenson, 2013). In the group of established Western democracies that have seen turnout declining, there has been no uniform trend towards e.g. more majoritarian electoral systems, more restrictive voter

registration processes or less compulsory voting. In fact, both electoral competition and party cohesiveness seem to have been on the rise in this period (Blais and Rubenson, 2013) and so have demographic social-resource factors that are positively related to voter turnout, such as education levels (Gray and Caul, 2000; Franklin, 2004). In the vocabulary of our extended rational model of cost-benefit analysis, people's material costs of voting have hardly been on the rise (as affluence and education levels have generally been rising, not falling) in the Western world in recent decades and electoral contexts and institutions have not generally been changing in such a way that might increase the material benefits of voting.

Some societal factors have certainly been changing and may be related to turnout decline: for instance, at least some types of income inequality have been on the rise in the Western World in recent decades (Brandolini and Smeeding, 2009) and this has been found to be importantly related to voter turnout (Solt, 2008). As discussed in section 1.3, globalization (often measured in terms of economic integration) has also been rising rapidly at the same time as turnout has been declining, and these developments have been found to be strongly related (Steiner, 2010; Marshall and Fisher, 2015). These findings suggest that income inequality and globalization are important parts of the picture, as broad social developments that may be underlying and driving individual-level changes in perceptions and attitudes that lead to turnout decline. But this does not tell us what those attitudinal changes are and therefore does not enable us to fully understand their normative implications or likely long-term consequences for democracy (beyond the simple prediction that turnout levels may continue to decline).

To theorize these attitudinal changes, it is useful to follow the extended rational model of voting: the material costs of voting do not seem to have been rising (at least in established democracies) and similarly, the material benefits of it have hardly been rising overall; i.e. each voter's potential chances of deciding an election have hardly increased and it seems implausible that the benefits accrued to the average voter from different election results been rising substantially. What then remains is the possibility that citizens' *perceptions* of the costs or benefits of voting – the subjective "D-term" in extended rational choice theory – have been changing. While it is logically possible that citizens might perceive more costs than before from the act of going to a polling station to vote on election day, it is hard to think of reasons for this (given the stable material cost and rising resources) and it seems more plausible that people value the benefits of voting less than before for some reason. This "some reason" (or reasons) that this logical deduction leads us to is therefore at the heart of this study: why do people feel less motivated to vote now than before? Turning to the major theoretical distinction identified in the previous chapter, apathy theories post that citizens

generally value *politics* less because they are less interested in them (Park, 2000; Putnam, 2000; Wattenberg, 2012; Fox, 2015), while alienation theories argue that people value *the particular act of voting* less, because they identify less with the formal political system of which voting is a part, while still valuing politics more generally (Norris, 2002; e.g. Zukin *et al.*, 2006; Dalton, 2009; Deželan, 2015).

Perhaps people are simply less bothered about politics than before, because they have become less socially oriented, more affluent and individualistic and/or preoccupied with other things (e.g. Putnam, 2000; van Deth, 2000). It seems likely that if people value politics less in their lives, they perceive less subjective benefits from voting and are therefore generally less motivated to do so, resulting in a trend of turnout decline. On the other hand, it also seems plausible that citizens today value voting less per se, whilst still valuing politics generally as much as before. This could be because more educated (and possibly more "rational"), post-material citizens of the globalized world of today perceive less benefits from the more particular act of voting, i.e. because they perceive more constraints to national governments than before, because they dislike politicians and/or because they conceptualise politics and democracy differently; as a more dynamic, participatory process that should not be so centred around the act of voting.

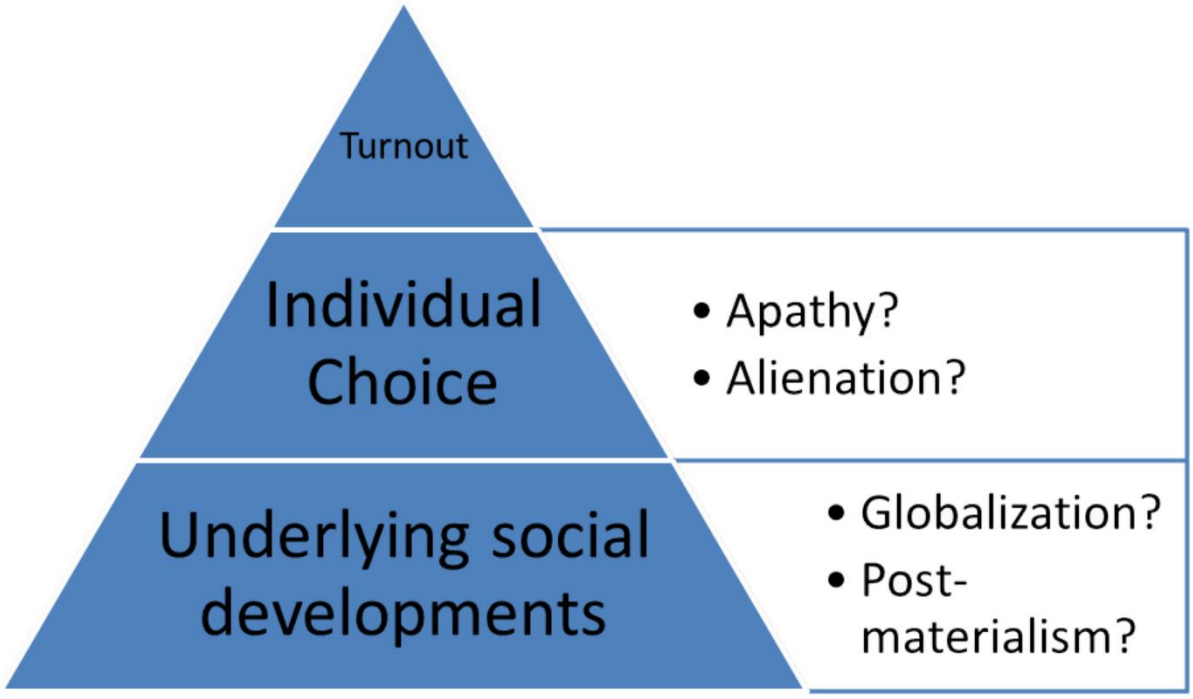


Figure 2.2 Contexts of turnout decline. Underlying social developments operate through individual choice.

As detailed earlier in this chapter, social norms, personal values, attitudes and perceptions might certainly be changing in ways that do not neatly fall into this distinction between apathy and alienation. This is particularly true of the theories detailed in section 1.6, that turn our attention to civic duty norms and the rationality of voting. These theories basically argue that the rational model for explaining voting behaviour has become more powerful in recent times, that voters today make a more conscious, contextual decision on whether to vote or not in a particular election. This implies that other, less "rational" factors have less influence on this decision, including notions of civic duty and the socialized habit of voting (Dalton, 1984b, 2013; Blais and Achen, 2010). If this is true, one would expect that more citizens voted regardless of rational considerations in the past, while in later times their decision has been influenced to a greater extent by more "rational" factors; such as interest in politics, their perceptions of the different candidates/parties on offer and the competitiveness and salience of the elections.

It is difficult to make a confident prediction in one direction or the other about the relative validity of each of these theories based on existing knowledge, because several studies and various authors have found support for each of them. Furthermore, while many of the proponents of each explanation explicitly reject the others, there does not seem to be a logical or empirical basis for claiming that only one of these processes could be occurring or explaining turnout decline. Simply speaking, some citizens might be abstaining because they are more politically apathetic, others might be doing so because they are alienated from formal politics and the act of voting more specifically and still others might just be approaching the decision in a more calculated way. I therefore argue here that the validity of these different theories might be a matter of extent rather than a binary question; that this debate might reveal an underdetermination of the individual-level processes at play when looking at each side of the debate in isolation.

There are therefore considerable nuances to the dynamics of turnout decline being examined in this study, but it is also important not to lose sight of the theoretical and normative importance of the overarching distinction being tested here: that between apathy and alienation. Even though prior authors may have presented the "apathy or alienation" debate within too much of an either/or framing, I do agree with authors on both sides who argue that the extent to which each theory is true is of high importance. I have already alluded to this in prior chapters: those who care about democratic ideals, and even those who are more practically concerned with the stability and health of democratic societies, should care whether and to what extent turnout decline is telling us that citizens are becoming generally apathetic about politics or if they are more specifically alienated from the formal politics on offer.

This is because public participation and satisfaction is important from the perspective of most democratic ideals and is also practically important because it provides more diverse and inclusive representation in politics, greater regime legitimacy and more input, feedback and scrutiny for government policy and action (see also Stoker, 2006). If declining participation is due to rising apathy, we might therefore be well advised to tackle this e.g. through the education system, civil society and political culture. If turnout decline is due to rising alienation, however, this implies a more fundamental need to change our democracies themselves in innovative ways, e.g. with different opportunities for democratic participation that are more in line with more participatory, post-materialist conceptions of democracy. At the same time, it may signal more hope for the democratic project: if people are still interested in politics, they might still be encouraged to engage with democracy via reforms to political systems and culture (Dalton, 2004a; Goodin, 2008; Smith, 2009). Lastly, if citizens are simply becoming more "rational" about their voting decision, deciding on an election-by-election basis rather than going to the polling station in every election out of a sense civic duty, this may call for more extensive mobilization efforts by political organizations, greater appeals to notions of civic duty or, from a different normative perspective, it may suggest that we should in fact not be too worried about turnout decline (Rosanvallon, 2008; Dalton, 2013).

These issues become even more pertinent when we consider the generational perspective discussed in section 1.7 . Whether apathy, alienation or more nuanced changes such as rationality are driving turnout decline, several prior studies have found that these different democratic developments are most pronounced among, and perhaps exclusive to, younger generations of citizens, which will gradually become a more dominant part of the electorate as they replace older generations (e.g. Blais, Gidengil and Nevitte, 2004; Franklin, 2004; G. G. Albacete, 2014; Fox, 2015). Therefore, even though all understanding of the determinants of voter turnout is important for academics, policy-makers and publics, I argue that understanding the potential individual-level drivers of turnout decline and their nature is of fundamental importance. The people are central to democracy and their values, attitudes and behaviour in the democratic realm should be of central concern to us; not only from a (direct and participatory democratic) normative perspective, but also from the perspective of those who care about the stability and survival of democratic regimes, which rely on the ongoing support and engagement of the people.

2.2 Apathy and Alienation

In developing the theoretical framework for turnout decline in this chapter, I have placed the distinction between apathy and alienation at the centre of individual-level explanations, while not claiming that this distinction is exhaustive. As noted in the introduction to this study, when studying relatively broad and contested concepts like political apathy and alienation in an empirical way, it is essential to develop a clear operationalization of these concepts at the outset of the analysis and to derive and defend this with reference to the relevant theoretical literature and to prior research. Quantitative political science should generally take note of the emphasis placed in qualitative social research and political theory on the contested and often inconsistent definitions of concepts when building empirical analyses and this is especially important when we are studying ubiquitous and/or normatively laden political concepts such as democracy, apathy and alienation (e.g. Beetham, 1994; Hay, 2007; Hooghe, Hosch-Dayican and Deth, 2014; van Deth, 2014).

Although apathy and alienation have been two of the more frequently bandied around terms in public and academic debate about democratic developments in recent decades, their meaning is not entirely straightforward on closer inspection. These concepts have sometimes been used in confusing and interchangeable ways in the literature and public debate (for an overview, see Fox, 2015) and many people might in fact see these as two words for basically the same thing, or at least so similar that there is little sense in distinguishing between them. This understanding might be entirely valid – after all, concepts are ultimately nothing but human and subjective constructs – but I argue that when looking at the use of these terms throughout the literature (see section 1.5), as well as their roots and dictionary definitions, there is an important distinction between the two that has importantly different implications for studies of democracy and for democracy itself. To illustrate this, I will start this section by dissecting the words themselves, followed with an overview of their definition and operationalization in the literature to date and a theoretical argument about how to resolve these differences appropriately.

Beginning with political apathy, this concept can be said to have at least two importantly different meanings that are not often clearly separated: the online Cambridge Dictionary defines apathy as "behaviour that shows no interest or energy and shows that someone is unwilling to take action, especially over something important" (Cambridge Dictionary, no date b). Similarly, the Oxford English Dictionary defines apathy as "…indifference to what is calculated to move the feelings, or to excite interest or action" (Oxford English Dictionary, no date b). These definitions refer to two distinct orientations: 1) a lack of interest and 2) unwillingness to take action. Although these two

sentiments may often be related in reality (which is one of the subjects of this study), they are not the same.

Similarly, in the context of political science, political apathy has been defined either as a general lack of interest in, or awareness of, politics (Thompson & Horton 1960) *or* as a lack of motivation to *engage with / participate in* politics (Rosenberg, 1954). Although related, an important distinction must be made between these two definitions: The former is attitudinal, the latter is primarily behavioural. A lack of interest in politics may often lead to a lack of motivation to engage with them, but the two are not the same and not necessarily interchangeable; some people may at least vote in elections without being particularly interested in politics and vice versa. Despite these differences in classic definitions of the term, however, the academic literature in recent decades has largely converged on the former conceptualization (van Deth and Elff, 2000; Ekman and Amnå, 2012; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014) and that is the definition I adopt here: a lack of interest in politics. This is usually operationalized by simply asking people how interested a person is in politics, but also sometimes in terms of attentiveness to politics, caring about a particular election or as a motivation to follow political news and affairs and to adopt knowledge and opinions about politics (e.g. Ekman and Amnå, 2012; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014).

Of course, these two different definitions of apathy drive at the heart of the present study. More specifically, the extent to which rising unwillingness to engage with politics through the act of voting is driven by a general lack of interest in politics, as opposed to an unwillingness to engage for other reasons, is the major puzzle identified here. If we were to construe apathy as broadly as "an unwillingness to engage" with (formal) politics, the term could of course include alienation and any other reason that an individual might have for choosing not to vote. This would be a rather tautological individual-level explanation and would also make the existing literature on "apathy or alienation" (Henn and Weinstein, 2004; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007; Stoker and Evans, 2014; Fox, 2015; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2016; Chou *et al.*, 2017) seem nonsensical, as well as the more general debate between these two competing accounts, which has been detailed in previous chapters. In light of that debate and the prior literature that has indeed highlighted this distinction, I argue that it is the most helpful major divide in terms of which to approach the topic of this study, even though there are nuances and some theories that do not neatly fit in either camp.

The academic debate about democratic developments even suggests that apathy and alienation are not only different concepts, they can be seen as mutually exclusive: theorists in the alienation camp typically argue that citizens are alienated *and not* apathetic. As already quoted in the

previous chapter, Therese O'Toole (2004, p. 2) cites a body of literature suggesting that "young people are reasonably interested in politics and political issues, but cynical about politicians and formal mechanisms for political participation" and Colin Hay and Gerry Stoker claim that "Contemporary political disaffection is not […]a story of the decline of civic virtue, nor is it a story of political apathy – it is one of disenchantment, even hatred, of politics and politicians" (Hay and Stoker, 2009, p. 226). I argue on this basis that it is misleading and inaccurate in the context of the academic literature to brand someone as alienated from the current political system if they simply don't care about politics overall. Figure 2.3 illustrates this distinction with a decision-tree, where those who are not interested in politics are deemed apathetic, while those who are not are either "engaged" (in a cognitive sense, not necessarily a behavioural one) or "alienated", depending on their identification with the formal political system.

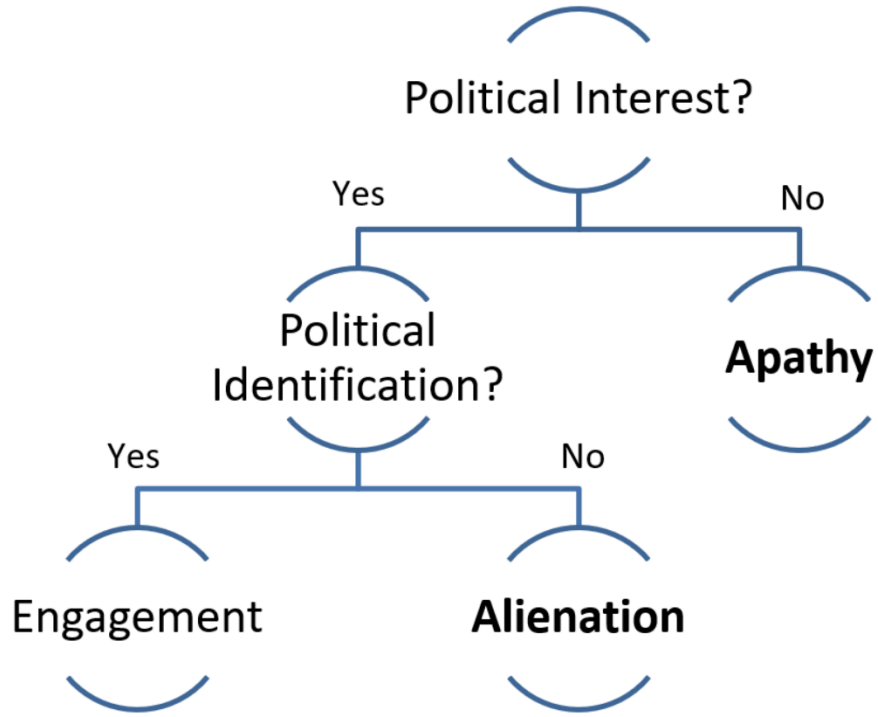


Figure 2.3 Apathy or alienation? The conceptual distinction between apathy and alienation developed in this study.

Based on the discussion until this point, political alienation could potentially entail any sort of attitude that makes a politically interested person unwilling to engage with politics; e.g. anti-political sentiments, lack of internal or external efficacy, changing notions of civic duty and/or a more rational approach to the act of voting. However, this definition would be very broad and does not in and of itself tell us much, as alienation would then be a catch-all concept with hardly any tangible substance of its own. Although there are many variants and debates within this literature, it is necessary to

attempt to bring the concept from the level of abstract umbrella-term to a more concrete, meaningful construct that can be more clearly tested and interpreted in empirical studies.

A review of prior studies and definitions can help us arrive at a more substantive conceptualization of the term. First, the online Cambridge Dictionary defines *alienation* as "the feeling that you have no connection with the people around you" and the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as "estrangement; the state of being estranged or alienated" (Cambridge Dictionary, no date a; Oxford English Dictionary, no date a). These definitions can be summarized in a political context as a sense of estrangement or disconnection from politics and that conception is in line with the historical treatment of the more specific concept of *political* alienation: this has been defined as an "orientation which implies long-standing feelings of estrangement from some aspect of the individual's political environment" (Finifter, 1970; Fox, 2015) or as "active non-identification", the perception that the political environment is in some sense "alien" to someone (Citrin *et al.*, 1975; Fox, 2015). In line with the literature overviewed in section 1.5 (Norris, 2002; Dalton, 2004b; Zukin *et al.*, 2006; e.g. Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007; Fox, 2015), I argue that political alienation refers not just to a general estrangement from politics, but instead to an estrangement from particular political realities that are not necessarily inherent to politics per se. This includes the political system, culture, institutions and actors that inhabit the current political scene in each time and place and the traditional venues of political participation they provide, especially formal types of political participation such as voting (Fox (2015) dubbed the latter "formal political alienation").

Ada W. Finifter's early work conceptualised and analysed political alienation as having four dimensions: those of "powerlessness", "normlessness", "meaninglessness" and "deprivation". Some later research has followed this approach (Finifter, 1970; Citrin *et al.*, 1975; Fox, 2015) and Flinders (2012b) added the dimension of "self-serving alienation". In short, *powerlessness* refers to the perception that the system is such that one cannot influence political decisions (which is very close to the concept of external political efficacy); *normlessness* refers to the perception that norms, morals and rules are not upheld in politics (closely related to political distrust and other negative evaluation of politics and politicians); *meaninglessness* refers to the perception that politics are too complex and/or that one lacks the personal capacities to influence them (a lack of internal political efficacy); *deprivation* refers to the perception that the system is unjustly structured and one does not get one's just deserts from it (dissatisfaction with the way democracy works, system distrust) and *self-deprivation* refers to self-serving individualism that undermines civic values (Finifter, 1970; Flinders, 2012b; Stoker and Evans, 2014; Fox, 2015).

However, all of these dimensions can themselves be difficult to operationalise when attempting to measure political alienation as some sort of overarching concept, let alone weighing and combining them into a single measure of alienation. All of them are supposed to represent different manifestations of a lasting, active orientation of estrangement and non-identification towards some aspect of the political environment (Finifter, 1970; Southwell, 2012; Fox, 2015, p. 148), but Finifter's own original study empirically identified only two of these four dimensions (powerlessness and normlessness). To my knowledge, the only attempt at such an empirical identification since Finifter is Fox's (2015) recent study of apathy and alienation, which did identify all four dimensions but found only a weak correlation between them (Fox, 2015, pp. 160–161). In that study, Fox also operationalized deprivation as a lack of life satisfaction but then rejected it as a valid measure of alienation as it did not significantly influence abstention or non-mainstream voting when accounting for other factors (Fox, 2015, p. 173).

What this means is that while prior studies have found valid measures of external political efficacy (powerlessness), internal political efficacy (meaninglessness), political trust (normlessness) and system/life satisfaction (deprivation), studies of political alienation have not really established an empirical basis for treating these as different dimensions or manifestations of a single underlying feeling of alienation. This empirical confusion requires us to bring theory back in: are all these constructs really valid, necessary and equal operationalizations of the concept of political alienation? To take a step back, alienation is defined in dictionaries as a lack of connection or estrangement from ones surroundings, and all of the authors cited above have summed political alienation up in similar terms: as an *active estrangement from or non-identification with some part of the political environment* (Finifter, 1970; Citrin *et al.*, 1975; Southwell, 2012; Fox, 2015)

So what we are dealing with is in essence a lack of *identification* with the political environment, in our case the formal political system that voting is a central part of (what Fox (2015) calls formal political alienation). This raises the question, what is identification in this context? Sigmund Freud said that "identification is the original form of emotional tie with an object" (Freud, 1991, p. 137) and today, the Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines it as a "psychological orientation of the self in regard to something (such as a person or group) with a resulting feeling of close emotional association" (Merriam-Webster, no date). As the word itself suggests, this emotional association is closely related to one's identity, i.e. feeling in some sense a part of something else (or vice versa). In a political context, this "something else" would be the political environment or some part(s) of it, e.g. the institutions, processes and actors that dominate the political sphere in one's society at a given time. According to this, it is this psychological sense of identification with the

political system that lies at the root of the concept of alienation, as well as the emotional ties and attitudes towards the system that are likely tied to that sense.

This conception of alienation as lack of identification with the political system is further substantiated when we consider the various arguments in the academic literature discussed in section 1.5. Many authors explicitly argue that citizens today *identify* less with the formal political institutions, actors and processes on offer for various reasons: because they have different conceptions of democracy and politics (e.g. Norris, 2002; Dalton, 2004b; O'Toole, 2004; Zukin *et al.*, 2006; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007; Rosanvallon, 2008; Deželan, 2015); because of a "democratic deficit" driven by higher expectations of politics by more educated citizens (Norris, 2011); because of a rising culture of "anti-politics" (Hay, 2007; Hay and Stoker, 2009; Flinders, 2012a; Corbett, 2014; Whiteley *et al.*, 2016); because globalization has led to declining national political competences of governments and therefore declining external efficacy of citizens (Marshall and Fisher, 2015; Steiner, 2016); or because more post-material citizens have more self-expressive, autonomous, direct democratic conceptions of politics that do not fit as well with the current political system(s) on offer (Inglehart, 1997; Norris, 2002; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005).

On the basis of this literature and the argument above, I argue that a core meaning of the concept of alienation is a lack of identification with the (formal) political system and that this can also entail other types of emotional attitudes towards the political environment, as per the psychological conception of identification. From this perspective, it may make sense to include attitudes such as confidence in political institutions, trust in political parties and politicians (the major actors in modern politics) and satisfaction with democracy, politics and/or government (the processes of politics) in an overarching theoretical concept of alienation. However, it seems less clear why political efficacy, life satisfaction or economic deprivations should be considered dimensions of political alienation; even if they may well be empirically related, they are conceptually different phenomena. In other words, believing in your own capability to influence politics, not being satisfied with your life or being economically deprived are not the same thing as not identifying with your political system.

This core conception of alienation as non-identification with the political system has also been reflected in a strand of research that uses the framing of "indifference or alienation?", where a common measure of alienation is an individual's attitudinal or affective distance from the closest political party or candidate on offer in each case (Brody and Page, 1973; Rubenson *et al.*, 2004; Adams, Dow and Merrill, 2006; Steinbrecher, 2014). Based on this core conception and closely related to the operationalization in that strand of literature, I propose that one of the more

commonly available measures in political survey research has thus far been under-utilized as a proxy for political alienation: that of *party identification (PI)* (see Campbell, Gurin and Miller, 1954; Campbell *et al.*, 1960; Miller and Shanks, 1996). While this concept has been measured in several importantly different ways across countries and there is an ongoing debate on that subject (Bartle, 2003; Johnston, 2006; Thomassen and Rosema, 2006; Dalton, 2016), they all share the aim of measuring to what extent respondents *identify* with political parties in their particular political environments. The different survey-measures of party identification and issues with comparing these will be discussed further in later chapters, but for now I will note that the two major approaches - the original approach of trying to capture long-standing psychological identification (Campbell *et al.*, 1960; Bartle, 2003; see also Thomassen and Rosema, 2006) and the "revisionist" approach of measuring cognitive closeness to a party (Fiorina, 1981; Bartle, 2003; see also Thomassen and Rosema, 2006) - both approximate an idea of "identification" that is useful for the purposes of capturing alienation as defined here. In other words, not feeling a psychological connection to any political party and not feeling cognitively close to any political party can each be considered manifestations of a type of estrangement from an important part of the political system.

These measures of party identification are commonly used for identifying partisanship, i.e. with *which* political party respondents identify, but they also have the prospect of measuring a type of political alienation, as they can also indicate whether respondents identify with *any* political party on offer to them or not. Since political parties are one of the most essential components of the traditional, formal political system (e.g. Schattschneider, 1942), I argue that this is therefore a theoretically valid measure of a type of political alienation as non-identification with the formal political system. Logically, whether someone identifies with any political party at all gives us an indication of whether they identify with the political party system as a whole, and therefore whether they identify with a large and important part of the formal political system itself. As per the theoretical distinction made in this study and detailed above, I go further and distinguish between respondents who are interested in politics but do not identify with any political party and those who are neither interested nor identify with a party. In line with the argument of the alienation literature discussed above, I only label the former group "alienated" while the latter group may be considered more fundamentally "disengaged" from politics, in a cognitive sense of the word (as opposed to the behavioural sense of disengagement as not voting or participating in politics in other ways). Nomenclature is always a subjective issue here, but it is important in the analysis to separate non-identifiers by interest to test the argument of alienation authors, and it will also be worthwhile to

examine if and how uninterested non-identifiers might play a distinct role in democratic developments.

Of course, political parties and the party system are only *part* of the political system, and there may well be other dynamics underlying lack of party identification in any particular election that are not related to political alienation as such, but I would nevertheless argue that overall (i.e. over time and countries), this provides a useful and valid measure of a type of political alienation that has not been utilized fully thus far. In other words, while party identification is a particular concept with its own short-term dynamics, it is logical to assume that if citizens have started to identify less with their political system (alienation), they would be less likely to identify with political parties in general, as they are a central part of this system. Therefore, regardless of short-term, country-specific fluctuations in partisanship, rising alienation should manifest itself in a long-term trend of declining party identification.

This is not to say that every other measure of political alienation used thus far is invalid, or that (lack of) party identification is a perfect measure of this. It should be noted that many prior studies have found a strong relationship between this measure on one hand and measures of political trust and democratic satisfaction on the other (Dalton, 1999; Holmberg, 2003; Söderlund and Kestilä-Kekkonen, 2009; Hooghe and Oser, 2017) and more generally, it is reasonable to assume that there is no single "perfect" measure of the concept of political alienation, no more than you can perfectly measure how "liberal", "feminist" or "confident" an individual is by looking at one survey measure. Other measures of political alienation that have been used may well be considered theoretically valid measures of the underlying phenomenon of non-identification, particularly trust in politicians and political institutions and satisfaction with democracy. If we take a personal analogy, it can be argued that feeling close to someone is intrinsically related to trusting them and being satisfied with their conduct and place in your life. The underlying concept of political alienation is therefore likely to manifest itself in all of these measures, but imperfectly in any one of them: it is hard to argue conceptually that a politically interested individual with no party identification but a lot of trust in politicians and satisfaction with democracy is alienated – but it would also be difficult to call someone alienated who has little trust in politicians but is very satisfied with democracy and has a strong party identification.

The real-world relationships between each of these measures and attitudes are of course an empirical subject, but determining the extent to which each of them actually captures the underlying concept of alienation is largely a question of theoretical interpretation. In that respect, I argue that

while most of these measures are likely to be related to alienation, some are more conceptually related than others: identification with the political system – whether conceived of as psychological attachment or as a tally of positive evaluations – seems most closely related to alienation, while trust in the political system and its actors, as well as satisfaction with the functioning of democracy, are closely related, but an individual's confidence in being able to affect the functioning of politics or an individual's general life-satisfaction much less so. Ideally, one would want to use as many of these measures as feasible in any analysis of political alienation, but each of them can still give us a useful – albeit imperfect – idea of the overall extent of alienation in a society at a given point and its long-term trends over time. This conceptual hierarchy of manifestations of political alienation is illustrated in Figure 2.4.

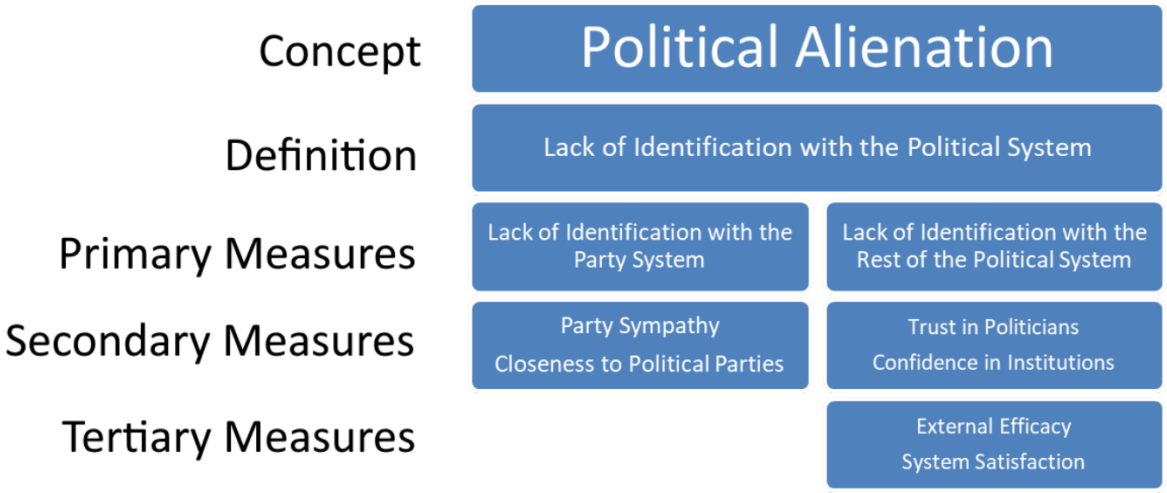


Figure 2.4 Mapping the concept of alienation. The conception of (formal) political alienation developed here, the definition adopted and the measures suggested, in descending order of theoretical relevance to the concept.

This operationalization is not without complications. For instance, some authors have found that political alienation channels itself through "protest votes" and support for anti-establishment, protest parties (Saunders, 2014; Fox, 2015; Katsanidou and Eder, 2015). Voters who do not identify with the political system might still (perhaps consequently) identify with marginal and/or anti-establishment parties. Several studies have indeed found that identification with radical right wing parties and other anti-status quo parties has a different (weaker or negative) relationship with political trust and democratic satisfaction than general party identification does (Paskeviciute, 2005; Söderlund and Kestilä-Kekkonen, 2009; Anderson and Just, 2013). For this reason, examining *lack of*

identification with establishment (or mainstream) parties as well as lack of identification with any political party, and disentangling the two in empirical analyses, may be in order.

To summarize, like most concepts – especially contested political concepts – apathy and alienation can and have been defined and measured in various ways. In this chapter, I have surveyed the dictionary definitions of these terms as well as their definition and use in prior research, to arrive at concrete operationalizations for empirical research. My definition of political apathy is in line with most of the literature: a lack of general political interest. The definition of political alienation is a more complicated subject but I have argued here that we should be guided by a clear conception of the core meaning of the term when constructing our measures, instead of using every potential measure at our disposal indiscriminately. I argue that this core can be defined as a *lack of identification with the political system* and that this can be measured by looking at whether respondents identify with any (establishment) political party, while measures such as political trust, satisfaction and efficacy may also be valid proxies of this underlying phenomenon. Furthermore, the more specific alienation argument identified in this study is mutually exclusive from the concept of apathy: if you are not interested in politics, you are apathetic, but if you are interested in politics but do not identify with the political system, you are alienated. In the next section, I will proceed to derive testable hypotheses on the basis of this framework.

2.3 Hypotheses

Each of the major schools of explanations for turnout decline (and democratic developments more broadly) outlined here is multi-faceted, nuanced and cannot be concretely proven or disproven by any single variable (or indeed, any single study). Accordingly, there are several possible ways to operationalize and test these theories empirically, and which methods and variables should ideally be chosen for that purpose will always be a matter of debate. Even more importantly, the reality of data availability (and lack thereof) greatly limits the options for actually testing these theories like we would ideally want, especially when we are dealing with theories about dynamics that stretch back several decades. Simply speaking, we must do the best we can with the data and methods at our disposal. Based on the theoretical framework and definition of key concepts detailed in this chapter so far, I believe that some relatively concrete and important hypotheses can nonetheless be posited. Moreover, I believe they can be operationalized in a theoretically valid way that can provide us with some answers, even with relatively minimal variable selection. I will return to this issue in the next chapter, detailing the data and variables used to test these hypotheses, but for now, I will simply present the broad hypotheses that logically arise from the theoretical framework outlined above

As illustrated in section 1.2, voter turnout has been in a trend of decline in Western Europe in recent decades, but there is less clarity on trends in apathy and alienation. While some authors have reported declining political interest (Park, 2000; e.g. Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Wattenberg, 2012; Albacete, 2014), others have reached the opposite conclusion (e.g. van Deth and Elff, 2000). Relatedly, while declining party membership is well established (Mair and van Biezen, 2001; Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012) and some studies have recorded declining political trust (Pharr and Putnam, 2000; e.g. Dalton, 2004b; Torcal and Montero, 2006), comparative trend analyses of party *identification* is much less common (for an exception, see Dalton, 2016)and some studies have found inconclusive trends in different potential measures of alienation (Mariën, 2011; Norris, 2011; Eder, Mochmann and Quandt, 2014a; Newton, 2014; Fox, 2015). Because of this, a logical starting point when we ask if rising apathy and alienation can explain turnout decline, is to establish if the former trends have indeed been occurring. Therefore, the first two hypotheses of this study are simply descriptive hypotheses about trends in these political attitudes in the period:

H1: **Political apathy** *has been rising in established democracies in recent decades.*

H2: **Political alienation** *has been rising in established democracies in recent decades.*

From that, we can continue to the hypotheses that are more central to answering the research questions themselves: to what extent can citizens' political apathy or political alienation explain the decline of voter turnout in established democracies in recent decades?

H3: Rising political **apathy** *accounts for the decline of voter turnout in established democracies in recent decades*

H4: Rising political **alienation** *accounts for the decline of voter turnout in established democracies in recent decades*

The last type of explanations discussed in this study, that of declining civic duty norms and more "rational" approaches to the voting decision, is more difficult to test directly, as measures of civic duty norms and rational approaches to voting are very rare in surveys in Western Europe, let alone consistently over the past decades. Therefore, I explore this possibility indirectly by asking if the effect of apathy or alienation on the propensity to vote has grown stronger over time. The logic behind this, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is that when citizens take a more "rational" approach to the voting decision, their levels of apathy or alienation are more likely to influence this decision than when they are more strongly influenced by habit or civic duty norms (the latter factors should prompt them to

vote regardless of their interest or identification with the system). Therefore, hypotheses 5 and 6 become:

> *H5:* **A stronger effect of apathy on turnout over time** *accounts for the decline of voter turnout in established democracies in recent decades*
>
> *H6:* **A stronger effect of alienation on turnout over time** *accounts for the decline of voter turnout in established democracies in recent decades*

The last two hypotheses supplement the core analysis of this study by looking at how these dynamics might be playing out for citizens of different generations and of different education levels, following the findings of prior studies that both factors are an important part of the story of turnout decline (Franklin, 2004; Gallego, 2009; Grasso, 2014; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2017b). Hypothesis 7 asks to what extent turnout decline can be accounted for by younger generations (birth year cohorts) of citizens voting less, while hypothesis 8 asks the same for citizens of lower education levels:

> *H7:* ***A lower propensity of younger generations of citizens to vote*** *can account for the decline of voter turnout in established democracies in recent decades.*
>
> *H8:* ***A lower propensity of citizens with lower levels of education to vote*** *can account for the decline of voter turnout in established democracies in recent decades.*

I am then left with 8 separate but inter-related hypotheses about turnout decline, apathy and alienation and how these dynamics play out for citizens of different generations and different education levels. The first two hypotheses refer to descriptive trends in the independent variables, while the next two hypotheses are at the core of our research question: the role of apathy and alienation in explaining turnout decline. The following two hypotheses offer indirect tests of the role of the alternative theories of rationality and civic duty norms in turnout decline, while the final two complement this core analysis by asking whether generational differences or educational differences can account for turnout decline. In the next chapter, I will detail the research design; data, variables and methods applied in this study to test these hypotheses.

3 Research Design

To test the hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework developed in the previous chapter, I will use extensive longitudinal survey data to analyse turnout dynamics in several countries in Western Europe: the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland. As noted in the introduction, this more specifically leaves me with a group of countries in *North*western Europe that have been classified as the "European Welfares States", with mature welfare systems and long traditions of liberal democracy. Aside from the theoretical novelty of incorporating apathy and alienation theories into studies of turnout decline, I will utilize a novel and extensive cross-national dataset prepared exclusively for this study and consisting of combined data from 121 National Election Study (NES) surveys in these eleven countries.

A large part of this dataset does have its origins in the dataset already compiled by the European Voter (EV) project (Andersen *et al.*, 2005) for the United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands in the period 1956-2001. However, additional variables not included in that project have been added to the combined dataset from the original national election study datasets and so has data for France, Belgium, Finland, Ireland and Iceland and data for the years 2001-2017, none of which is included in the EV dataset. This results in a combined dataset consisting of over 250.000 respondents from 121 national election studies in these eleven countries in the period 1956-2017, as further detailed in the next section.

The analysis in this study will be presented in three parts: in the first part, I present descriptive data for reported turnout, political apathy and the different measures for political alienation available in the national election datasets, as well as multi-level logistics regression models for overall trends in these variables, accounting for data clustering and country-effects. In the second part, I focus on the countries for which the data shows a significant trend of turnout decline in the period, to see how other dynamics might account for that trend in part or whole. In this second part, I provide the central analysis of this study and test hypotheses 3-6 by conducting multi-level random effects regression models of the effects of different measures of apathy and alienation on turnout, as well as their interaction terms, to see if and how the trend of decline is related to these dynamics. In the third and final part of the analysis, I will bring the generational and educational perspectives to bear, testing hypotheses 7 and 8 with an age-period-cohort (APC) analysis of turnout decline as well as a multi-level analysis of the effects of education level and how this has been changing over time.

In this third part, I will also explore how these latter dynamics relate to apathy and alienation, how these may be different by generation and education groups and how they interplay in turnout decline. In the rest of this chapter, I will further detail the data, variables and methods that I will use in the analysis.

3.1 Data

The primary data used in this study comes from national election studies (NES) conducted after legislative elections in each of the eleven Western European countries of this study, with the help of data from the "European Voter" (EV) project, a cross-country research endeavour that collected NES data from six Western European countries (the United Kingdom, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and Sweden) in the period 1956-2001 and was published in 2005 (Andersen *et al.*, 2005). For the purposes of this study, I have compiled these data into a single dataset as well as adding some variables that were not included in the EV dataset, from the original NES datasets. Furthermore, I have added all available NES data in these six countries from 2001-2017 as well as all data available from five countries that were not included in the EV project: Belgium, Finland, France, Iceland and Ireland. In total, the EV project included about 130.000 respondents from 68 NES in six countries in the period 1956-2001, but the resulting dataset that I have collected for this study includes over 250.000 respondents from 121 NES in eleven countries in the period 1956-2017.

The data for **Norway** comes from the Norwegian Election Study (NSD), a national election study project conducted by the Institute for Social Research (ISF) in Norway along with (more recently) Statistics Norway around parliamentary elections there from 1957-2013 (NSD, 2017).[4] Data for **Sweden** is from the Swedish National Election Study (SNES), today led by Professor Henrik Ekengren Oscarsson and the Department of Political Science in Gothenburg (The Swedish National Election Studies, 2017), from 1965-2010 (Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2004; Holmberg *et al.*, 2008; Holmberg, Oscarsson and University of Gothenburg, 2010). Data for **Denmark** is from the Danish National Election Study (DNES) from 1971-2011 (Danish National Election Study, 2017).

Data for **Finland** is from the Finnish National Election Study (FNES) initially led by Professor Pertti Pesonen in 1991 and then again in 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015 as face-to-face post-election

[4] For Norway, the data applied in the analysis in this publication are based on "Election Survey, 1957-2013". The data are provided by Statistics Norway and Institute for Social Research, and prepared and made available by NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data. Neither Statistics Norway, Institute for Social Research nor NSD are responsible for the analyses/interpretation of the data presented here.

interviews (Pesonen, Sänkiaho and Borg, 1991; Karvonen, Lauri Paloheimo, 2003; Paloheimo, 2007; Borg and Grönlund, 2011; Grönlund and Kestilä-Kekkonen, 2015; Finnish Election Study Portal, 2017). Data for **Iceland** is from the Icelandic National Election Study (ICENES), a random-sample post-election face-to-face and telephone interview surveys led by Professor Ólafur Þ. Harðarsson from the first study in 1983 and then after each parliamentary election, in collaboration with Dr. Eva Heiða Önnudóttir and the Social Science Research Institute (SSRI) at the University of Iceland in later years, leaving us with data for eleven elections from 1983-2017 (Félagsvísindastofnun, 2017; Social Science Research Institute of Iceland, 2018).

Data for **the United Kingdom** is from the British Election Study (BES), with data for elections from 1964-2017. BES is an address-based random probability sample survey conducted via face-to-face interviews with around 3000 eligible voters in England, Scotland and Wales immediately after every general election since 1964 (Fieldhouse, E. *et al.*, 2015, 2018; British Election Study, 2017). The data for **Ireland** comes from the Irish National Election Study (INES), which was a five-wave panel survey of (initially) 2663 respondents conducted through the period 2002-2007 and led by Professor Michael Marsh,[5] including post-election face-to-face interviews after the Irish general elections of 2002, 2007, 2011 and 2016 (INES, 2017). It should be noted here, however, that the data from Ireland should be interpreted with caution. The appendix to Marsh et al. (2018) explains that "The methodology used in these recall polls was to conduct a quota controlled sample of 1,000 among a random representative sample of voters who had been called across the 12 polls in the run up to the general election." The samples in these later surveys seems to have consisted only of voters who had already agreed to participate in previous surveys and was therefore likely to be more interested than the general electorate.

Data for **Germany** is from the German National Election Study (GNES) from 1961-1998 in TEV, with added data from German national election studies in 2002 and 2005 (Weßels and Schmitt, 2005; Kühnel, Niedermayer and Westle, 2012) and The German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) for 2009 and 2013 (GLES, 2017; Rattinger *et al.*, 2017). Data for **the Netherlands** is from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (DPES), a stratified random sample survey conducted with face-to-face interviews of between 2000-3000 eligible voters in the Netherlands after every parliamentary election in the country since 1971 (Mokken and Roschar, 1975; Dutch Parliamentary Electoral Studies, National Electoral Research and Dutch Parliamentary Electoral Studies, 2017). Data from 1971-1998 is included in TEV and for this analysis, data for four elections from 2002-2012 was added

[5] I am grateful to Professor Marsh for providing me with this data and some important information about it.

(Irwin, Holsteyn and Ridder, 2003; Centraal Bureau Voor De Statistiek - CBS *et al.*, 2007; Stichting Kiezersonderzoek Nederland - SKON *et al.*, 2012; Stichting Kiezersonderzoek Nederland – SKON *et al.*, 2012).

Data for **France** is from the French Post-Election Study (Enquête post-électorale française) conducted after the legislative elections of 1958, 1962, 1978, 1986, 1993, 1997 and 2007 (for the 1986 and 1993 elections, these were actually conducted after the presidential elections two years later, but also contained questions about participation in the legislative elections prior to those) and after the presidential elections in 2012 (Conseil superieur de la Recherche, 1958; CEVIPOF, 1962, 1978, 1988, 1995, 1997; Européennes Centre d'Études (CEE), 2007, 2012).[6] Data for **Belgium** is from the General Election Study Belgium, conducted after the Belgian general elections of 1991, 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2007 and directed by Professor Marc Swyngedouw[7] (Billiet *et al.*, 1991; Billiet, Swyngedouw and Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1995; Swyngedouw *et al.*, 1999; Swyngedouw and Institute of Social and Political Opinion Research ISPO - KU Leuven, 2003; Swyngedouw, Frognier and KU Leuven - Interuniversitair Steunpunt Politieke-Opinieonderzoek (ISPO), 2008). Finally, data for aggregate turnout of registered voters and the voting-age population (VAP) from the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) (Pintor and Gratschew, 2002) was reported in the first chapter of this study and will be revisited in the first part of the analysis in Chapter 4.

The combined dataset in this study therefore includes 252.300 respondents from 11 countries (the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland) and 121 country-years (elections) in the period between 1956-2017. The data is by no means evenly split between countries or years, however: while Sweden and the United Kingdom have around 40.000 respondents from 17 election years between 1956-2010 and 14 election years between 1964-2017, respectively, Ireland and Finland have around 7000 respondents for five election years between 1991-2015 and four election years between 2002-2016, respectively. Similarly, the year 2007 has data from six countries while the years 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2014 have no data. The number of observations from each country and year is summarized in 0.

[6] I am grateful to Professor Martial Foucault and the CDSP for providing me with this data and some valuable assistance in working with it.
[7] I am grateful to Professor Swyngedouw for providing me with this data.

Table 3.1 The combined dataset. The number of respondents from each country and year in the combined dataset

Year	BE	DK	FI	FR	DE	IS	IR	NL	NO	SE	UK	Total
1956										1131		1131
1957									1544			1544
1958				1650								1650
1959												0
1960										758		758
1961					1715							1715
1962				1512								1512
1963												0
1964										1418	1769	3187
1965					1305				1623			2928
1966											1874	1874
1967												0
1968										1463		1463
1969					1158				1595			2753
1970										1340	1834	3174
1971		1302						2495				3797
1972					2052			1526				3578
1973		533							1149	1256		2938
1974											4823	4823
1975		1482										1482
1976					2076					1444		3520
1977		1602						1856	1730			5188
1978				4507								4507
1979		1959								1612	1893	5464
1980					1001							1001
1981		932						2296	1596			4824
1982								1541		1680		3221
1983					1622	1003					3955	6580
1984		1931										1931
1985									2180	1663		3843
1986				4032				1629				5661
1987		3968			1954	1745					3825	11492
1988		3189								1618		4807

1989								1754	2195			3949
1990		1008			2070							3078
1991	4511		1472			1491				1291		8765
1992											3534	3534
1993				4078					2194			6272
1994		2021			2046			1809		1508		7384
1995	3667					1721						5388
1996												0
1997				3010					1239		3615	7864
1998		2000			2019			2097		1484		7600
1999	4239					1631						5870
2000												0
2001		2019							2329		3035	7383
2002					2000		2661	1907		1894		8462
2003	2225		1270			1446		1271				6212
2004												0
2005		2253			2540				2005		4161	10959
2006								2623		1706		4329
2007	2048	4018	1422	2000		1595	1152					12235
2008												0
2009					2095	1385			1777			5257
2010								2617		1561	3075	7253
2011		2078	1298				1853					5229
2012				2782				1677				4459
2013					1893	1479			3964			7336
2014												0
2015			1587								2987	4574
2016						1295	1000					2295
2017						2073					2194	4267
Total	16690	32295	7049	23571	27546	16864	6666	27098	27120	24827	42574	252300

This uneven distribution of observations in different countries and years calls for some methodological solutions and careful interpretations. First, the different social contexts and dynamics in the different countries are likely to mean that the levels, trends and relationships in our main variables are different between countries, biasing the results of simple models of the pooled dataset when these countries are disproportionally represented in the data and within each year.

For instance, Belgium has compulsory voting and consistently very high levels of turnout, but the first election study there is from 1991 and therefore this would inflate overall turnout levels in the latter part of the overall period, if not controlled for. Similarly, the proportion of party identifiers is unusually low – and the proportion of alienated respondents unusually high – in the Irish and Dutch NES, and the first Irish data comes from 2001. The proportion of apathetic respondents in the 2016 Irish NES is also unusually low, perhaps due to issues with the methodology of that study which likely exaggerated non-response bias in that year (Marsh, Farrell and Redid, 2018, Appendix). More generally, the "pool" of countries is larger and more diverse in the latter part of the period than the first few decades. Nevertheless, while only France and Sweden are included in the few years before 1960, five countries (France, Sweden, Germany, Norway and the UK) are included in the 60s, seven in the 70s (with the addition of Denmark and the Netherlands) and by 1992, data from nine countries is included.

Nonetheless, this would lead to highly biased estimates of any simple pooled analysis of the combined dataset and there is an obvious need to control for these country-specific biases and the uneven inclusion of countries in the dataset; overall and in different time periods. More technically, as discussed in more detail in the final section of this chapter, the respondents in the dataset are *nested* within each survey (or country-year), which again are nested within their respective countries, causing clustered error terms within them which are likely to inflate standard errors and can bias estimates. This highlights the importance of employing multi-level modelling strategies in the analysis, an issue I will return to in the last part of this chapter.

The problem is not only one of modelling strategy, however, but also of consistency between surveys administered in 11 different countries and roughly as many languages across six decades. Aside from the general problem of precisely translating the exact same meaning between different languages, different countries have tended to use different variations of the same fundamental questions (especially in earlier years) and within countries, there are often slight (and sometimes important) differences in wording between years, and/or a different number and wording of response categories. The general caveat for now is that we should be cautious of interpreting anomalies in the measures between individual countries and years, and instead focus on the overall trends and relationships apparent in the combined dataset. Below, I detail the variables used from these different datasets in this study and the issues that arise from these differences.

3.2 Variables

In this section, I provide further information on the variables used in this study – how they were extracted and constructed from the different datasets – and discuss some issues that arose in that process and how I have approached them. Starting with reported turnout, this is usually a fairly straight-forward variable indicating whether a respondent reported to have voted in the last legislative election in their country or not. This measure is largely consistent between countries and elections, with some minor variations and exceptions.[8] In Sweden from 1956, Norway from 1965, the United Kingdom from 1987 and Ireland in 2002 and 2007, the NES data also includes respondent's actual turnout validated against the national register and this validated turnout variable will be used in the descriptive part of the analysis.

The measure of political interest is available in most of the NES datasets, although it is missing from the British Election Studies between 1964-1970 and 1983-1992 (where they instead asked whether respondents cared about the outcome of the particular elections) and also in Denmark from 1984-1988, Belgium in 1991 and France in 2007. Political interest is usually measured by simply asking people how interested they are in politics (e.g. van Deth and Elff, 2000), although there are nuances in translation and some studies ask about politics "generally" while others seem to skip that qualification. For example, the question was asked in the British Election Study (BES) from 1974-1979 without the qualification, the question was dropped altogether from 1983-1992 but then asked again in 1997, as "How much interest do you generally have in what is going on in politics?". In the Swedish data, the question is similarly translated into English as "Generally speaking, how interested in politics are you?" for all years of the study while Norway, Iceland and apparently Denmark[9] simply ask "Would you say you are…" and then list options that end with "… interested in politics".

The wording of the options given in response also tend to vary by language and some studies use a 4-point scale while others use a 5-point scale. For most years in the British Election Study (BES), the options were "A great deal of interest", "Some", "Not much" and "None at all", while in 1997 the option "Quite a lot" was added after the first one and in 2015, they went back to a 4-point scale but this time with the options "Very interested", "Fairly interested", "Not very interested" and "Not

[8] In some (earlier) studies, they only asked *what* respondents voted for, with "Didn't vote" as one option, and in others they had more options for how respondents voted or why they didn't, but the effects of this variation should be minor. A few respondents in some Swedish surveys (between 2-44) reported turnout in some but not all elections (without indication of which election); these were coded as missing in this analysis.
[9] The exact wording is not available from the Danish documentation or data, which simply has the heading "Interest in Politics".

interested at all". The Swedish and Norwegian surveys use options that are usually translated into English in the same way, although there is some variation,[10] while in Denmark, the second option is translated with "Somewhat" and the third one as "Only slightly" and Iceland uses a 5-point scale that directly translates as something like "Very much/Much/Some/Little/No interest".

In addition to Iceland and some years of the BES, the Belgian study also uses a 5-point scale for political interest (in the years in which the question was included) and the German studies had such a scale except in the years 1972, 1976, 1998 and 2002. In the latter two years they used a 4-point scale but in the former two, they actually used a 3-point scale where the options were "Yes" (i.e. interested), "Not particularly" and "Not at all" and similarly, all studies in the Netherlands gave three options: "Very interested", "Fairly interested" and "Not interested" (according to the combined dataset and codebook). This different number of options can influence how many respondents choose the least interested options (the apathy variable here is recoded so that 1 = little or no reported interest) so in robustness checks in Appendix A I also run the central models without the measures that used 3 or 5 options, to confirm that the main findings are robust to those differences.[11]

With these caveats in mind, all of these measures are intended by experts in each respective country to measure general political interest on a scale from least to most interest, so while we should be wary of treating the variables as continuous or directly comparable between studies, they do nonetheless serve the purposes of this study. Namely, all of these measures can be recoded into a binary variable where reporting "little" or "no" political interest indicates apathy, and all of them have alternative categories for reporting some level of political interest (i.e. "a great deal of interest", "quite a lot of interest" or "very interested"): this common distinction gets at the core of the concept of political apathy that is in focus here. For robustness checks for differences in wording, I also create an additional apathy variable, which only counts those as apathetic that report "no interest", as there is far less variation in the wording of this option. In the descriptive part of this study, I also report the ordinal variable for reported political interest, where there are four categories roughly indicating "no interest", "little interest", "some interest" and "a great deal of interest", keeping the

[10] The second-to-last option is sometimes "little interest" instead of "not very interested".
[11] In France in 1958, political interest is measured from "not at all" (pas du tout), to "little" (peu) and "very" (trés) interested but there are few respondents in the last category and peu seems to have a different meaning from "little interest" in this context so I do not code those respondents as apathetic, only the first category (which has plenty of respondents). From 1962, there are four options and "un peu" is coded as apathetic there (but "Assez" and "Beacoup" as not apathetic).

wording differences noted above in mind (where there were 5 options given, I recode the mid-category as missing in this variable).

Measures of party identification are also available in most of the NES datasets, although they are missing from some of the earliest years and from Denmark in 1984-1988, Belgium in 1991 and 1999 and the Netherlands in 1981 and 2003, and differences between measures of party identification in different countries (and at different times) are sometimes quite substantive. There is a long history of debate within the field of political science about how to measure party identification, what the concept actually means and implies (Bartle, 2003; Thomassen and Rosema, 2006; Dalton, 2016). The original measures of this in the United States asked respondents "do you think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" (Campbell, Gurin and Miller, 1954; Campbell *et al.*, 1960; Dalton, 2016) and a parallel measure has been used in the United Kingdom for decades; with the 2017 British Election Study asking "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, [Scottish National/Plaid Cymru in Scotland/Wales] or what?" (Bartle, 2003; Fieldhouse, E. *et al.*, 2015, 2018). However, most European countries did not find this measure suitable to their multi-party systems and therefore adopted different ways of measuring the underlying concept of party "identification", with most studies asking about something equivalent to being an "adherent" or a "supporter" of a particular party. The cross-country Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) project has adopted the wording: "Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular party?", resulting in a higher degree of consistency in later years (Thomassen and Rosema, 2006; Dalton, 2016).[12]

Although surveys conducted in different languages and contexts usually struggle to use entirely consistent measures, it has been noted that there is an important difference between the US/UK approach and the CSES approach in that the former asks about a respondents' psychological identity while the latter asks about a sort of cognitive proximity to political parties (Thomassen and Rosema, 2006; Dalton, 2016). This difference is not coincidental either, as the latter follows a "revisionist" approach to measuring party identification as more of a cumulative tally of impressions of political parties (Fiorina, 1981) than as a long-standing, socialized psychological identification (Campbell *et al.*, 1960; see also Thomassen and Rosema, 2006). Furthermore, in some surveys,

[12] While the BES asked about party identifiers; the NSD, DNES and ICENES studies asked about party "supporters", SNES asked about "adherents" and Ireland used the CSES wording, with the other countries also adding that measure in later years.

respondents are asked first if they identify with any party and then which party that is, while in others they are only asked the latter, with an option for "no party / none".[13]

Regardless of these differences, I argue that each type of measure taps a kind of identification with a part of the (formal) political system that is a valid operationalization of a form of political alienation. These different measures have been used in prior studies to compare the extent and nature of partisanship between different countries, on the grounds that they are all intended to measure roughly the same underlying phenomenon but have been adapted by researchers in different countries to their different political contexts, so they are presumably considered to be the most appropriate measure of party identification by experts in each country (Dalton, 2016, p. 3). While these differences should caution cross-country comparison, their overall trends and dynamics across the continent should broadly reflect the underlying dynamics of political non-identification that are the focus here, albeit perhaps to different extents between individual countries and country-years. As any measures of political interest and party identification are likely to be incomplete and different surveys routinely have slight differences in language and wording, these differences in measurement should therefore serve as a caution for comparison between different countries and years rather than a cause for outright dismissal, as they were all judged to be valid measures of the underlying phenomena of interest and identification in their respective political and linguistic contexts.

Therefore, I use these measures of party identifications to create a binary variable where 1 = respondent identifies with a political party and 0 = does not identify with any political party ("Don't know" and other non-valid responses are coded as missing). As discussed in detail in Chapter 2 (and section 1.5), the theoretical argument that I am putting to the test here more specifically claims that turnout decline and related developments can be explained by a rising proportion of citizens *who are interested in politics* but do not identify with the political system. Therefore, I create two measures that reflect a lack of identification with any political party: one for those that don't identify with any political party but are also apathetic and another that reflects the more particular conception of alienation covered here, those who report interest in politics but no identification with any party.

[13] In the combined dataset, I add a dummy variable indicating this difference, to test whether it changes the results of the analysis. The datasets that lack a separate question for identification generally are from the UK, France (except 2007), Germany (except 2002 and 2013), Norway (except 1997) and Finland in 1991. The last example was unique in that they first asked about which party respondents would vote for and then asked how close they felt to that party; those who said not very close, or responded to the earlier question that they wouldn't vote, were coded as alienated.

The latter measure provides the test of hypotheses 2 and 4, while the former provides an anchor for comparison and a potentially alternative explanation which I dub "disengagement" here.

I acknowledge that the term disengagement can be construed in many ways (as the terms apathy and alienation have) – including as a lack of participation, lack of interest or lack of identification with the system – but here I employ it as short-hand for this combination of attitudes which suggests that someone is politically disengaged in a cognitive (not just behavioural) sense from politics, as they are neither interested in politics nor identify with any political party. Table 3.2 illustrates the relationship between these central variables used in this study, although it should be noted that these are not four entirely separate groups in the analysis because in this study, I will also classify "disengaged" citizens as apathetic, while I do not classify alienated citizens as "engaged". In Chapter 4, I also report descriptive trends in the overall variable for party identification, regardless of political interest.

Table 3.2 Apathy and alienation measures. The central variables used in this study and how they are derived from measures of political interest and party identification.

	No Party ID	Party ID
Little or no interest	*Disengagement*	*Apathy*
Fairly or very interested	*Alienation*	*Engagement*

I also construct alternative measures of "establishment" political alienation, where respondents who do not identify with any "establishment" political party (and report political interest) are coded as alienated as well as those who do not identify with any party at all, based on the discussion in section 2.2 about alienation potentially being reflected in this (Saunders, 2014; Fox, 2015; Katsanidou and Eder, 2015). Of course, which party is "anti-establishment" or "establishment" and in what way can be the subject of extensive and normatively loaded debate, but this measure is mostly intended as a rough test of whether this alternative operationalization makes an important different to the analysis. I do not claim to capture every political party out there that is in some way outside the establishment party system, but I do attempt to capture identification with the "anti-establishment" or "populist" parties that have been said to be on the rise in Western politics in recent decades as a result of rising political alienation (Ford, Goodwin and Cutts, 2012; Mudde, 2013; e.g. Rooduijn, de Lange and van der Brug, 2014; Rooduijn, 2015; Griesser, 2016).

To capture identification with populist parties, I create two separate variables: the first aims to capture identification with "right-wing" populist parties and the second includes several parties from

the left that have been labelled populist as well (Kitschelt, 1988; Hartleb, 2015; Griesser, 2016; S., I. and Ioannis, 2017). Following the categorization provided by Mudde (2013) and Rooduijn (2015), I include identification with the following "Populist Radical Right Parties" (PRRP) in the first variable: The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in the UK, Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland) in Germany, the National Front (Front National) in France, the Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid) in the Netherlands, Flemish Interest (Vlaams Belang/Blok) and the National Front (Front National) in Belgium, The Swedish Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna) in Sweden, the Progressive Party (Fremskrittspartiet) in Norway, the Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti) in Denmark and the True Finns / Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset) in Finland.

In line with Hartleb's (2015) discussion of anti-establishment parties from the left, the second alternative alienation variable includes respondents who identify with socialist left parties in Germany and France (Die Linke and Parti de Gauche) along with the ecological green parties in Germany and the UK (in line with Herbert Kitschelt's (1988; 1990) discussion of left-libertarian anti-establishment parties) and the Pirate parties in Germany, Sweden, Finland and Iceland. This is arguably a less cohesive group of parties and they also form either a very small part of the electorate (such as the Pirate Parties in Germany, Sweden and Finland) or such a large one that they could be argued to be part of the establishment (such as the green parties, Die Linke in Germany and the Pirate Party in Iceland in recent years), so this variable should be interpreted with caution if any effects are found. It should also be noted here that since these "establishment alienation" measures are defined in terms of identification with more *recent* anti-establishment parties, they will by definition be rising at least somewhat overtime, so they do not provide a basis to test hypothesis 2 (about rising alienation). However, they can help to determine if alienation, thus operationalized, has an important role to play in turnout decline.

For the age-period-cohort (APC) analysis of this study, the variable for respondents' age – and therefore birth-year and cohort[14] – is available in nearly all of the datasets. However, in several cases this was only reported in categories (e.g. 18-24 years instead of 18, 19 etc…).[15] Because of the importance of age for the APC analysis in this study, I have recoded these variables into the continuous age variable so that each category takes the value of the mid-point age in that category

[14] In Chapter 6, I detail how cohort membership is coded on the basis of birth year.
[15] This is the case in Sweden from 2002-2010, in Denmark in 1975 and 1981 and France in 1958 and 2012.

(e.g. 21 years in the 18-24 years category),[16] which is of course an imperfect measure of actual age but should be better than nothing for the purposes of the analysis. For robustness, I also run the APC models without these 5658 cases (presented in Appendix A) and the results are not affected. In all of the models, I include this variable as well as respondents' gender (male=1, female=2) and marital status (1 = married or legal partnership, 0 = single, divorced or widowed) as controls. In Chapter 6 I look at the role of respondents' education and this is measured by a categorical variable where 1 = primary education or less, 2 = secondary (including vocational) education and 3 = higher (university) education. In some of the original datasets, these boundaries were not entirely clear or consistent, but in all cases the variable for education was recoded so that it corresponded closely to those categories.

In addition to these central variables, I harvested several measures from the NES datasets that I identified as potential alternative measures for alienation. These measures are: satisfaction with the way democracy is working in respondents' country; trust in politicians, parliament and political parties; agreeing that voting makes no difference (or disagreeing with the reverse); agreeing that politics are too complicated for ordinary people; agreeing that political parties are only interested in votes and conversely, agreeing that politicians *are* interested in people's opinions. All of these variables have much fewer observations than the other variables in the combined dataset and are also disproportionally included in more recent datasets and in certain countries (partly because the "Comparative Study of Electoral Systems" (CSES) project has worked towards including more consistent and comparable measures in different NES projects since the 1990s) (The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, 2018).

This means that these measures are less suited to the core purpose of this study: to analyse the *long-term* and generational trends of attitudes and to isolate their effects on turnout decline from country-specific contexts. There is also even more variation in the wording and response options used in these questions between countries and years than is the case with other measures (in some cases, statements were framed in different "directions" between studies, i.e. either stating that politicians did or didn't care about people's opinions or that voting was important or that it didn't make a difference), making cross-country and overtime comparison even more difficult.[17] The

[16] The last categories tend to have no upper limit, e.g. "65+", so I code these to take a value somewhere in the 70s, depending on the range and distance between the other categories in each case. In France in 2012, I code "35-49 years" as 45 years old instead of 42 years, to avoid leaving an empty cohort category.

[17] The most common approach to these statements was a 5-point likert scale but in the Netherlands, many of them just had the option to agree or disagree and the trust questions had different categories between years in many countries, with some of them going from an ordinal worded scale to a 10-point scale at some point,

questions about trust were variously measured as yes/no questions, on 4-7-point worded scales or 10-point numbered scales and satisfaction with democracy was sometimes measured on 4-point scales and sometimes on 5-point scales.[18]

Again, despite these differences, most or all of these measures were constructed in order to measure the same (or a very similar) underlying attitude in their respective political contexts and the "noise" of differences between country-years will hopefully be cancelled out in the overall dataset. Nevertheless, these differences mean that these measures only warrant tentative exploration and comparison. I have collapsed all of them into dichotomous variables where 0 equals disagreement with the statement / distrust / dissatisfaction with democracy, while 1 equals agreement / trust / satisfaction.[19] In that way, we can learn something about trends in attitudes in the region and their relationship with turnout, while being very careful about interpreting differences between individual countries and country-years.

Table 3.3 lists the variables extracted from the NES and EV datasets into the combined dataset of this study. The variables for self-reported turnout (in the most recent parliamentary elections), political interest and party identification form the core of the analysis of this study. As the table shows, the reported turnout variable has a value for most of the cases in the dataset (as always, some respondents have missing values; e.g. those that did not respond to the question, did not know or did not want to say if they voted), although it was missing for the Netherlands in 2003 and France in 2012. All of the countries and most of the country-years also include questions about political interest and party identification, although there are some notable exceptions as detailed above, meaning that the variables for alienation and disengagement are missing in all years where either of those measures are missing. The demographic control variables for gender and marital status are also widely available, as is information for respondents' education and age, while the alternative measures of alienation are much less consistently available.

making overtime comparison difficult. In Norway, there were three options ("most are trustworthy", "mostly/generally trustworthy" and "few are trustworthy") from 1981-1993 and 2001, a six-point scale in 1997 and a 10-point scale from 2005-2013. Denmark used a 5-point scale in most early years but a 7-point scale in 1981 and a 4-point scale from 2001. In the UK, respondents were asked about their "feeling about politicians" (happy/unhappy) in 1974 but then on a 10-point scale from 2005. In France in 1962, respondents were asked if they trusted politicians to "defend their interests".

[18] Satisfaction with democracy was usually measured on a 4-point scale but it was measured on a 5-point scale in the Netherlands in 2002, Belgium in 2007, Denmark in 1981, 1994 and 1998, Germany in 2002, 2009 and 2013 and a 6-point scale in Germany in 2005.

[19] In all cases, where there is a mid-point, I code this as a missing value.

Table 3.3 Variables in the combined NES/TEV dataset. The number of valid observations for each, the first and last year they are included in and a list of countries that do not include them in any year

Variable	Valid Observations	First Year	Last Year	Countries with no observations
Gender	251.568	1956	2017	None
Age	235.163	1957	2017	None
Marital status	242.418	1956	2017	None
Turnout	230.620	1956	2017	None
Education	216.764	1956	2017	None
Apathy (Political Interest)	204.051	1958	2017	None
Party ID	203.715	1956	2017	None
Alienation / Disengagement	179.315	1958	2017	None
Satisfaction with Democracy	119.296	1977	2017	None
Politics is complicated	83.525	1956	2013	Iceland
Voting makes no difference	64.832	1971	2017	Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden
Trust in Politicians	62.982	1974	2017	Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands
Politicians are interested in peoples' opinions	49.674	1971	2012	Iceland, Ireland, Germany, Sweden, United Kingdom
Parties are only interested in votes	63.886	1971	2011	France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland
Trust in Political Parties	27.215	1974	2015	Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Sweden
Trust in Parliament	25.646	1989	2015	Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Sweden

3.3 Methods

The research design of this study consists of three steps: in the first step, I review the combined dataset and provide descriptive graphs for trends in the different measures by country, as well as providing statistical tests for trends in apathy and alienation throughout the region (hypotheses 1 and 2). In the second step, I test the central hypotheses (3-6) of this study by conducting multi-level regression models with turnout as the dependent variable and examining the role of apathy, alienation and their interaction with year. In this second step, I look at the role of different measures for apathy and alienation and I start by focusing in on the countries where turnout decline is significantly reflected in the national election study data, before looking at the entire dataset and comparing this group of countries with the other countries in the region. In the third and final step of this study, I explore the role of other factors in these dynamics, testing hypothesis 7 and 8 by looking at the role of education and birth cohort.

As the dataset analysed here consists of individual-level respondents nested within country-years (surveys) that are in turn nested within countries, the data is clustered within those two levels: observations within these clusters are likely to be related in unpredictable ways that are likely to bias estimates and standard errors in any pooled regression models (Blais and Rubenson, 2013; e.g. Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014). In other words, individuals surveyed after the same elections are likely to have patterns of attitudes and behaviours that are related in ways that we can't fully predict and models are unlikely to fully capture, causing systematic "errors" - clustered standard-errors - in estimations for that group and generally underestimated standard errors in the models. Similarly, individuals surveyed within the same country, regardless of election-year, are likely to have some similarities that our models can't fully account for, that set them apart from the rest of the sample and bias the standard errors (Fieldhouse, Tranmer and Russell, 2007; Norris, 2011; Blais and Rubenson, 2013; Persson, Wass and Oscarsson, 2013; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014; Eder, Mochmann and Quandt, 2014a).

Therefore, I run random effects multi-level logistical (as all of the dependent variables are dichotomous) regression models on three levels: country, country-year and individual respondent. The data in each country-year is weighted according to the inverse of sample size and overestimation of official turnout: each survey dataset is weighted as if there are 1000 respondents and the larger the gap between average self-reported turnout in the survey and official reported in the most recent elections, the less respondents in that survey weigh in the overall analysis (see also Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2017). In the supplementary material, I present models without weights or controls as

well as fixed effects multi-level models and diagnostics, which do not substantively alter the findings of the study. The data management and coding of the dataset was all done using the statistical software Stata 13.1 but I run the multi-level models with the MLwiN software through Stata, using the runmlwin user-created command (Rasbash et al., 2009; Leckie and Charlton, 2013). Most of the models are fitted using an iterative generalized least squares (IGLS) method with second order penalized quasi-likelihood linearization (PQl2), where estimates from IGLS first order marginal quasi-likelihood linearization (MQL1) models are used as initial values, although some of the APC models in section 6.1 are fitted using the Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) method, to facilitate model fitness comparison. The multi-level models for turnout decline thus look like this, where the predicted log odds of having voted in an election ($\log\frac{\pi_{ijk}}{1-\pi_{ijk}}$) are a function of the overall constant (β_0), a year variable on the second (study or country-year) level ($\beta_1 x_{jk} year$) and individual (first) level variables (such as apathy and alienation) for respondents ($\beta_1 x_{ijk}$ …), as well as the un-estimated variance (or error) at the country (v_{0k}), country-year (u_{0jk}) and individual (e_{ijk}) levels:

$$\log\frac{\pi_{ijk}}{1-\pi_{ijk}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{jk} year + \beta_2 x_{ijk} \ldots + v_{0k} + u_{0jk} + e_{ijk}$$

As discussed in section 1.7, a large body of research on democratic behaviour and attitudes highlights the importance of generational differences and in Chapter 6 I will explore this issue using age-period-cohort (APC) analysis. In short, this involves separating the "cohort" effects of having been socialized in a particular social and political environment in your formative years, from the "age" effects of being at a particular stage in the life-cycle and the "period" effect of the contemporary circumstances of the particular elections, which affect all age-groups in those elections. However, disentangling these cohort effects in APC analysis is notoriously difficult because the measure of the first term (year of birth) is statistically a simple product of measures of the latter two terms (age and year of survey), causing serious multicollinearity issues and what has become known as the "identification problem" (Grasso, 2014, e.g. 2016; Neundorf and Niemi, 2014; Smets and Neundorf, 2014; Stegmueller, 2014).

The identification problem means that it is difficult to *identify* whether differences between respondents of different ages in a survey are a product of their different stage in their life-cycle (age) or because of their membership of a different birth cohort or generation, which has gone through different processes of socialization than other generations. Furthermore, even if one has survey data for different years and there is an apparent difference between respondents of the same age in different years, it is difficult to identify whether this is a product of their membership in different

birth cohorts or just an effect of the historical context of that time (period), which affects all cohorts of citizens more or less equally in that year and could be purely temporary. While a traditional regression model would simply control for two of these factors when looking at the third, doing so in this case generally does not work statistically because each variable is a product of the other two (age = survey year – birth year); i.e. age and year of birth are perfectly correlated within each year.

This problem is partly met when we have data with observations (i.e. respondents surveyed) at different time points because in the overall dataset, the relationship between the three factors is no longer perfect in this case (because respondents born in the same year can be of different ages if they are surveyed at different time points). That relationship does still persists within each year in those cases, however, resulting in "multi-collinearity"; a problematically high correlation between the three variables when attempting to control for all of them at once in statistical models, meaning that separating their independent effects is difficult and may result in spurious estimates. Various methods for dealing with this issue have been proposed within the literature on APC analysis: including using cohort and year as separate levels in cross-classified random-effects hierarchical models (Yang & Land 2000; Persson et al. 2013) or holding two of the coefficients arbitrarily constant in "constrained generalized linear models" or else calculating an "intrinsic estimator" which uses a "null-vector" as its constrained estimator (Yang et al. 2004; Luo 2013; O'Brien 2011).

These statistical solutions have been claimed to mathematically obscure, rather than solve, the identification problem (Bell & Jones 2018; Luo 2013) and while there have been careful responses offered to those criticisms (e.g. Reither et al. 2015) and this study is no place to hash out those debates, there is a more theoretically straightforward approach to this problem which I will utilize here. This approach entails limiting the correlation between the three terms in repeated cross-sectional datasets by splitting respondents into broader categories of birth-year cohorts, based on theory and prior research on historically distinctive formative periods. In this study, I base the initial categorization of cohorts on one which prior studies have found to be valid and theoretically meaningful when analysing political participation in Western Europe (Grasso et al. 2018; Grasso 2014; Fox 2015). This categorization is based on the years in which respondents experienced a majority of their formative years and yields the following cohorts of citizens:

1) *Pre-WWII generation:* Born before 1926
2) *Post-WWII generation:* Born between 1926-1945
3) *60s and 70s generation:* Born between 1946-1957
4) *80s generation:* Born between 1958-1968
5) *90s generation:* Born between 1969-1981

6) *Millennial generation:* Born after 1981

In the APC analysis of this study, I will use this theoretical categorization as the vantage point. However, those prior studies have not used the combined dataset that I am using in this study, so I will start the APC analysis in Chapter 6 with an exploration of whether this or an alternative cohort categorization is most appropriate in terms of multicollinearity in this dataset and substantive value for the topic of this study. To disentangle these effects from age and period effects, the variables for the year of survey and respondents' age are also included, as well as a squared term for age, to control for the potentially biasing effect of the curvilinear relationship between age and turnout (e.g. Blais, 2006; Fieldhouse, Tranmer and Russell, 2007; Smets *et al.*, 2013; Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014).[20] Adding these terms to the general turnout decline model written above thus results in the following equation, where we add respondents' age ($\beta_2 x_{ijk} age$), age squared ($\beta_3 x_{ijk} age^2$) and a categorical variable for which cohort they are a member of, where the first cohort is the reference category and the subsequent cohorts form subsequent factorial terms in the regression:

$$\log \frac{\pi_{ijk}}{1-\pi_{ijk}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{jk} year + \beta_2 x_{ijk} age + \beta_3 x_{ijk} age^2$$

$$+ \beta_4 x_{ijk} cohort2 + \beta_5 x_{ijk} cohort3 + \beta_5 x_{ijk} cohort \ldots + v_{0k} + u_{0jk} + e_{ijk}$$

In the third step of the analysis, I first examine the descriptive generational trends in turnout, apathy and alienation and then run multi-level regression models where I control for the effect of life-cycle (age) and period (year) to tease out the independent role of generational differences in those trends and their role in the dynamics of turnout decline. In the second part of this final step of the analysis , I look at the role of respondents' education levels by looking at trends and differences in turnout, apathy and alienation by education group and then running regression analyses to test whether turnout decline can be accounted for by a growing gap in the propensity to vote between citizens of different education levels. Finally, I look at the interactions between these various factors to explore how birth cohort, education and political attitudes might interplay in accounting for the decline of voter turnout.

[20] These two terms are highly correlated and the VIF for them is high but my intent here is not to disentangle their respective effects, but to control for both when looking at cohort effects. Dropping either term shrinks the VIF of the other to acceptable levels, indicating that the multicollinearity caused by them is with respect to each other instead of the other variables.

4 Trends in Turnout, Apathy and Alienation

4.1 Voter Turnout in Western Europe

In this chapter, I start the first stage of the analysis of this study, following the research design detailed in the previous chapter. The analysis is based on the dataset combined exclusively for this study, which consists of over 250.000 respondents in 121 national election study (NES) surveys from 11 countries in the period between 1956-2017: the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Iceland. In this first stage of the analysis, I will focus on exploring the trends in the combined dataset by country, starting with trends in self-reported turnout and comparing this with trends in other measures of turnout in the same countries and period. In the following sections, I proceed to present trends in the different measures of apathy and alienation available in these NES datasets and analysing these trends using multi-level regression models and correlational analyses.

Starting with descriptive statistics for turnout measures in the combined dataset, trends in the average of self-reported turnout from 1956-2017 are presented in Figure 4.1, separated by country. In Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Iceland and the Netherlands, reported turnout has been fluctuating without discernible trends in the respective periods for which NES data is available. On the other hand, Denmark stands out with a notable trend of rising turnout in the latter part of the period, while France, Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom all show a gradual trend of decline. Perhaps more accurately, it appears that in all of these countries, turnout fell considerably at one point and has since stayed at lower levels than before.

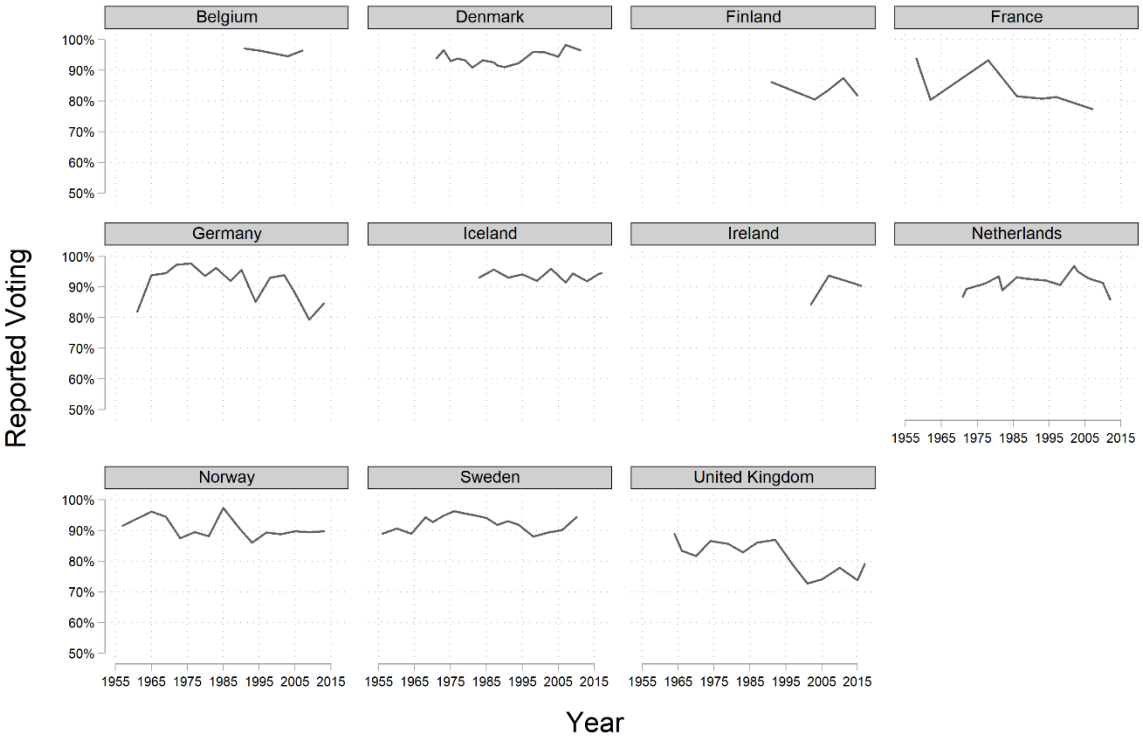


Figure 4.1 Reported turnout in Western Europe. Average reported turnout in parliamentary elections in eleven Western European countries from 1956-2017. Sources: The European Voter dataset and national election studies (see supplementary material).

Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3 compare these trends in self-reported turnout with trends in the aggregate measures of turnout presented in section 1.2 (officially reported turnout and voting-age-population (VAP) turnout, presented in Figure 1.7 and Figure 1.8) as well as the variable for respondent turnout validated against national voter registers (in the studies where that measure is available). These graphs are also presented in two parts here for clarity of presentation and legibility: first for the five Nordic countries and then for the six other countries in the dataset. These figures show that official turnout levels are consistently over-estimated by the reported turnout measures (and to a lesser extent, the validated turnout measure) in the NES data, as is a well-known issue for survey measures of turnout and likely derives both from non-response bias and falsely reported turnout (Fullerton, Dixon and Borch, 2007; Selb and Munzert, 2013). However, the *trends* and country-differences in these measures seem highly consistent, indicating that the data should nevertheless be well suited to a study of turnout decline and the dynamics of turnout trends (Blais and Young, 1999; Gallego, 2009; see also Blais and Rubenson, 2013; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2017b)h. For instance, the overall

correlation between self-reported turnout and officially reported turnout figures in the collapsed country-year dataset (N=118) is quite high: 0,79 Pearson's R.[21]

Nevertheless, there are some important differences. In Figure 4.2, we see that the trends in different turnout measures seem largely consistent in Norway and Sweden, but the stability of official turnout rates in Denmark actually appears as a *rise* in the self-reported turnout rates. In the Finnish NES, turnout is generally overestimated more than in the other Nordic NES, but there does not appear to be a clear trend in that overestimation in the few data-points we have there. Iceland is a curious case, as self-reported turnout has remained stable there despite a recent, sharp decline of about 5-10% in official turnout figures. While a recent working paper has argued that official turnout figures might be systematically biased, registered voter turnout in countries with population registers is noted as an exception to that problem (Mellon *et al.*, 2018) and Iceland and Denmark are two of those countries (Danish Parliament, 2011; Registers Iceland, 2018) so this may indicate a growing sampling bias in these studies, e.g. with regards to respondent's age, education and/or political interest.

Overall, there appears to be more consistency in the trends in different turnout measures in the countries presented in Figure 4.3, although the over-estimation of turnout in the Irish NES is particularly stark. As noted in section 3.1, the data for the different waves of this study was gathered sequentially in a way that could be expected to exaggerate the sampling bias towards more interested respondents, which may well explain the particularly high levels of self-reported turnout in the later waves of this study. Despite a curious rise in the 60s and 70s, the French NES data appears largely in line with official turnout trends and the same broadly applies to the data from the United Kingdom, Germany and Belgium (although the latter has relatively few waves). The Netherlands is another curious case similar to Iceland and Denmark, where the gap between self-reported and official measures appears to be growing. Because of this, the decline of officially reported turnout in the Netherlands is not reported in the Dutch NES data.

[21] In the 39 country-years where the validated turnout variable is available, the correlation of this measure is 0,88 with reported turnout and 0,94 with officially reported turnout.

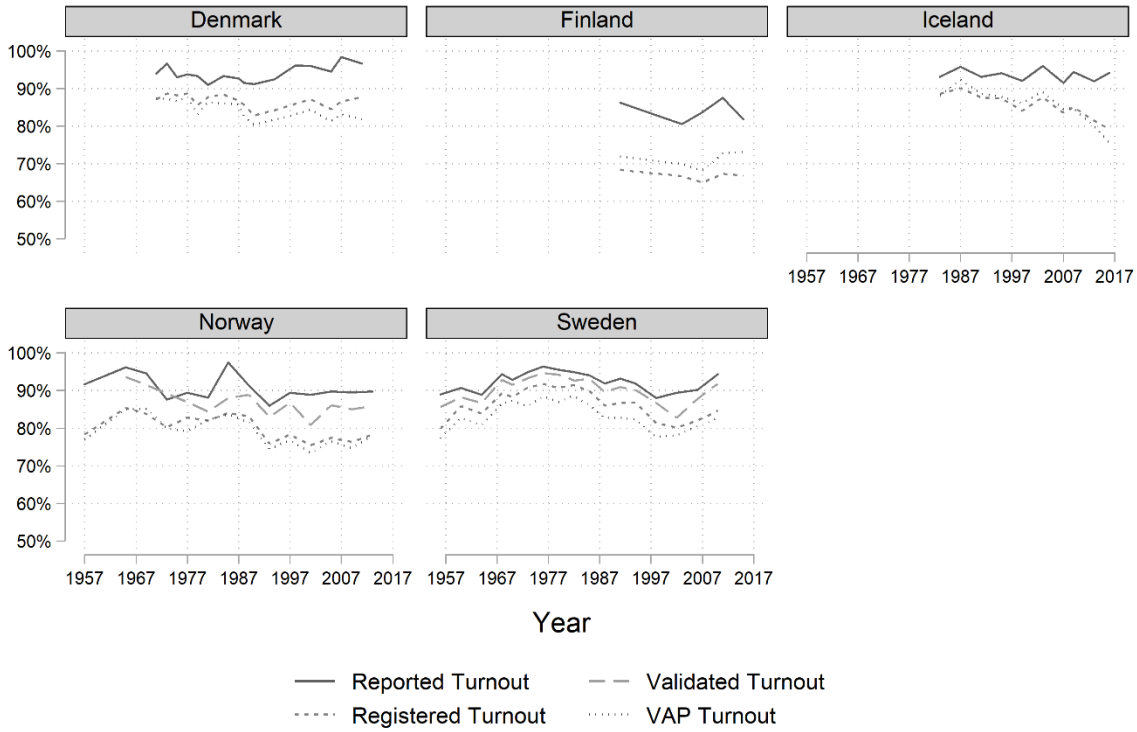


Figure 4.2 Average reported turnout in the Nordic countries from 1956-2017. Compared with aggregate turnout of registered voters and validated respondent turnout from national election studies (NES). Sources: The European Voter dataset, national election studies and the IDEA dataset.

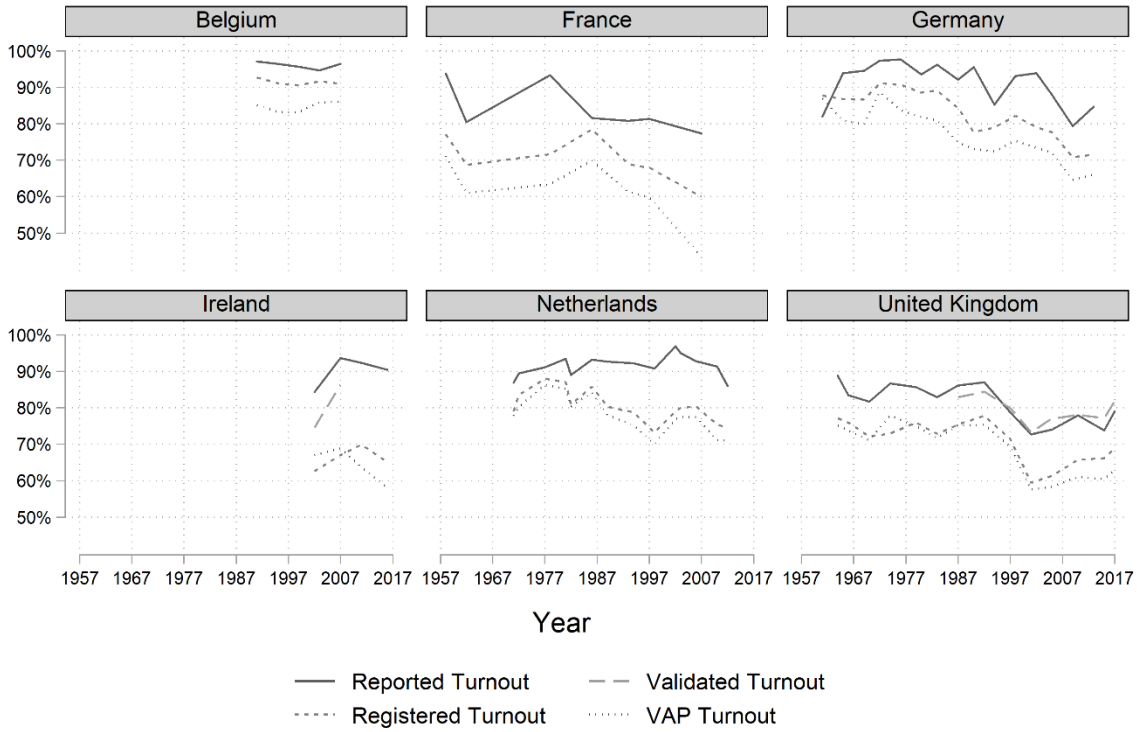


Figure 4.3 Average reported turnout in five Western European countries from 1956-2017. Compared with aggregate turnout of registered voters and validated respondent turnout from national election studies (NES). Sources: The European Voter dataset, national election studies and the IDEA dataset.

Therefore, there are indications that in at least three countries out of the eleven in the combined dataset, there is a growing gap between self-reported turnout levels in NES data and official turnout figures. Figure 4.4 illustrates this by graphing this gap over time and by country. Here, we see that this gap has indeed been growing in Denmark, Iceland and the Netherlands and that this also appears to be the case in Germany and perhaps in Sweden. Despite this, the overall consistency between turnout trends in the NES data and the official figures is very high and, importantly for our purposes here: the NES data for the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Norway all show a gradual trend of decline in reported turnout in the period which is consistent with other measures of turnout in those countries. Therefore, these will form the group of „turnout decline countries“ (TDC) that will be the focus of the central analysis in this study, while the rest of the countries provide useful counter-examples for comparison in models of the entire dataset.

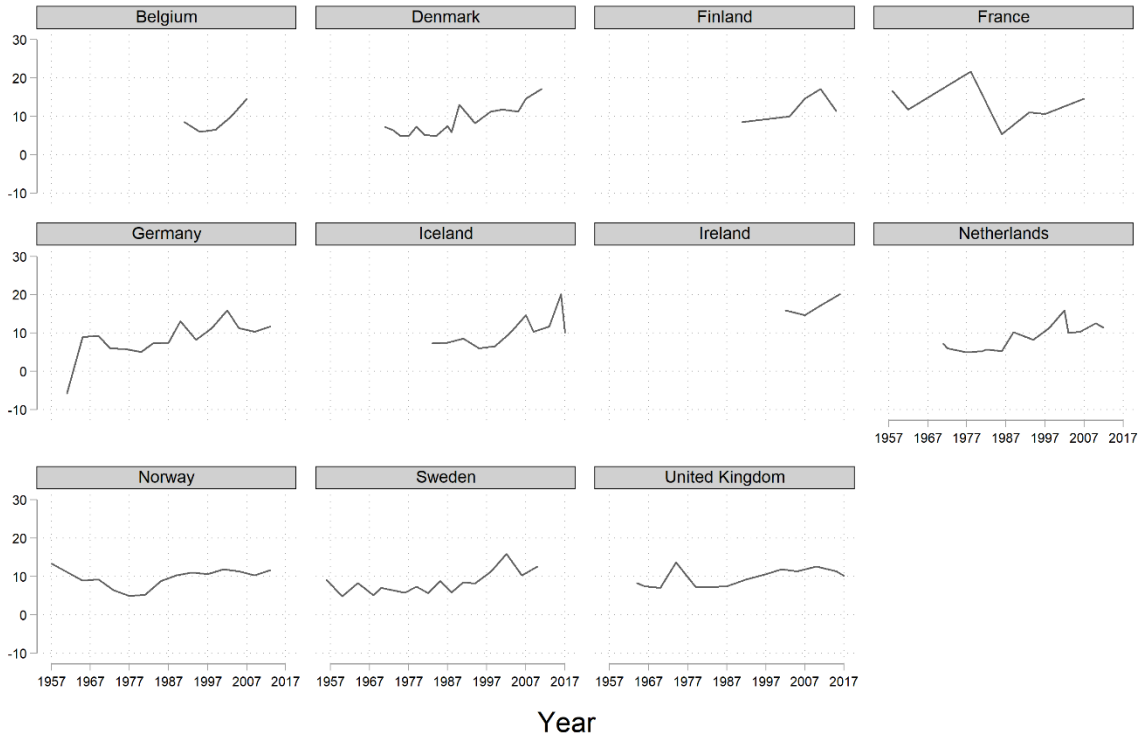


Figure 4.4 Percentage point gap between self-reported turnout (from NES datasets) and officially reported turnout (from the IDEA database).

4.2 Apathy and Alienation in Western Europe

In this section, I turn to testing the first two hypotheses of this study: that political apathy (H1) and political alienation (H2) have been rising in established democracies in recent decades, using the data from 1956-2017 in these 11 Western European countries. I start by presenting trends in the variables that the central measures of apathy and alienation are based on, with Figure 1.6 presenting the mean scores of the ordinal variable for reported political interest (where 1 indicates "no interest" and 4 indicates the highest level of interest, usually "great deal of interest" or "very interested") by country and year in the combined dataset. These figures indicate that mean political interest has been stable in most countries in the period, rising in some (Finland, France, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway) and the only sign of decline is in the latest years in the United Kingdom.

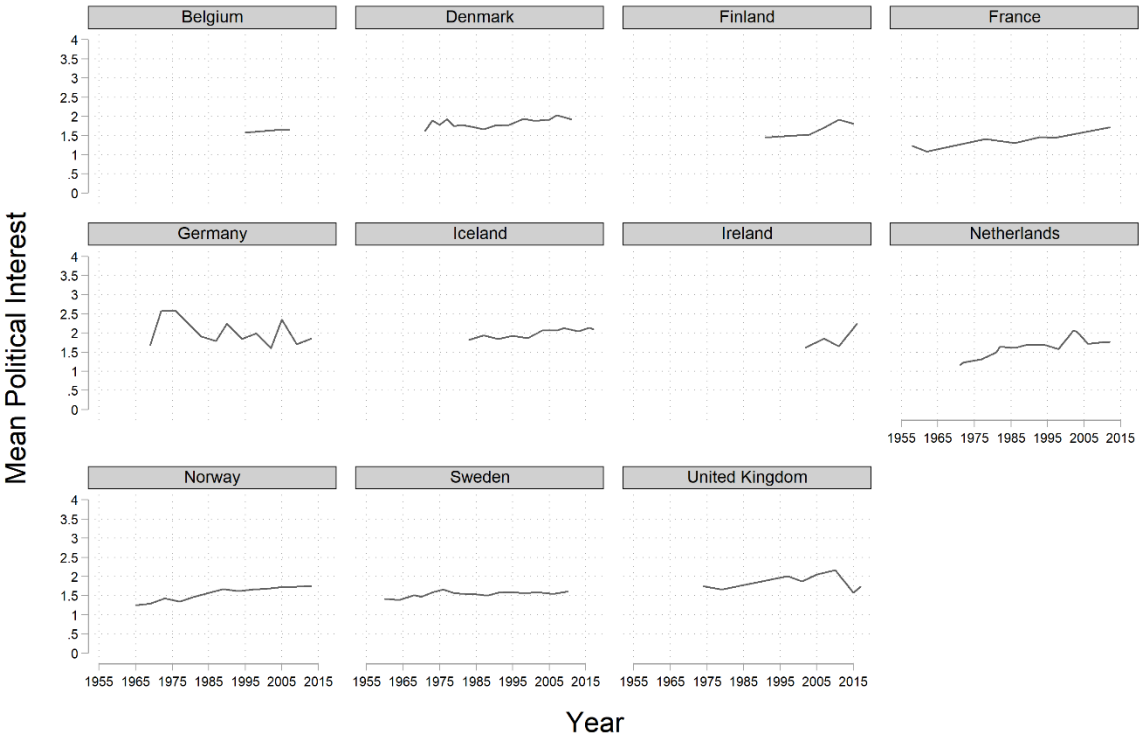


Figure 4.5 Trends in political interest. Mean score of political interest (1 = no interest, 4 = great deal of interest / very interested) in 11 Western European countries from 1956-2017. Sources: National Election Studies and The European Voter dataset.

Figure 4.6 shows the proportion of citizens who are coded as apathetic in the main variable for apathy used in this study: those who report "little" or "no" political interest. Here, the trends are even more stark: the proportion of apathetic citizens has declined in effectively every country in the combined dataset except the United Kingdom, where there has been a recent rise, and Belgium, where it has been relatively high but stable since 1991. The Irish dive in 2016 should be interpreted

with caution (for reasons of methodology already noted) but the decline of apathy is particularly remarkable in the Netherlands and France. Figure 4.7 shows the proportion of respondents who pick the lowest level of interest in each survey, usually “no interest” or “not at all interested”, and here the trends are very similar. In Norway, there is a sharp decline between 1985 and 1989 and this is almost certainly because the wording of the response options was changed in 1989, where the second-lowest category was changed from “somewhat interested” to “little interest”, wording that seems obviously more likely to be selected by apathetic citizens. Aside from providing many more cases and therefore more discriminatory power, this discrepancy provides support for using the former version of the apathy variable in this study.

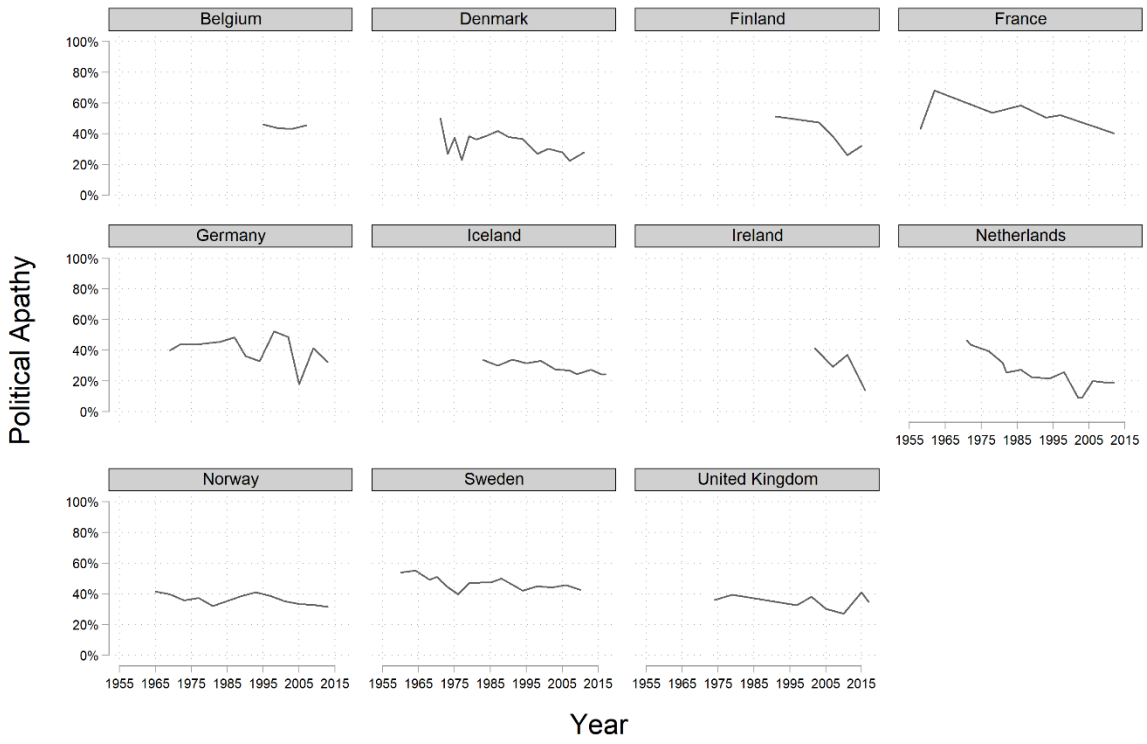


Figure 4.6 Trends in political apathy. Average political apathy (reporting little or no political interest) in 11 Western European countries from 1956-2017. Sources: National Election Studies and The European Voter dataset.

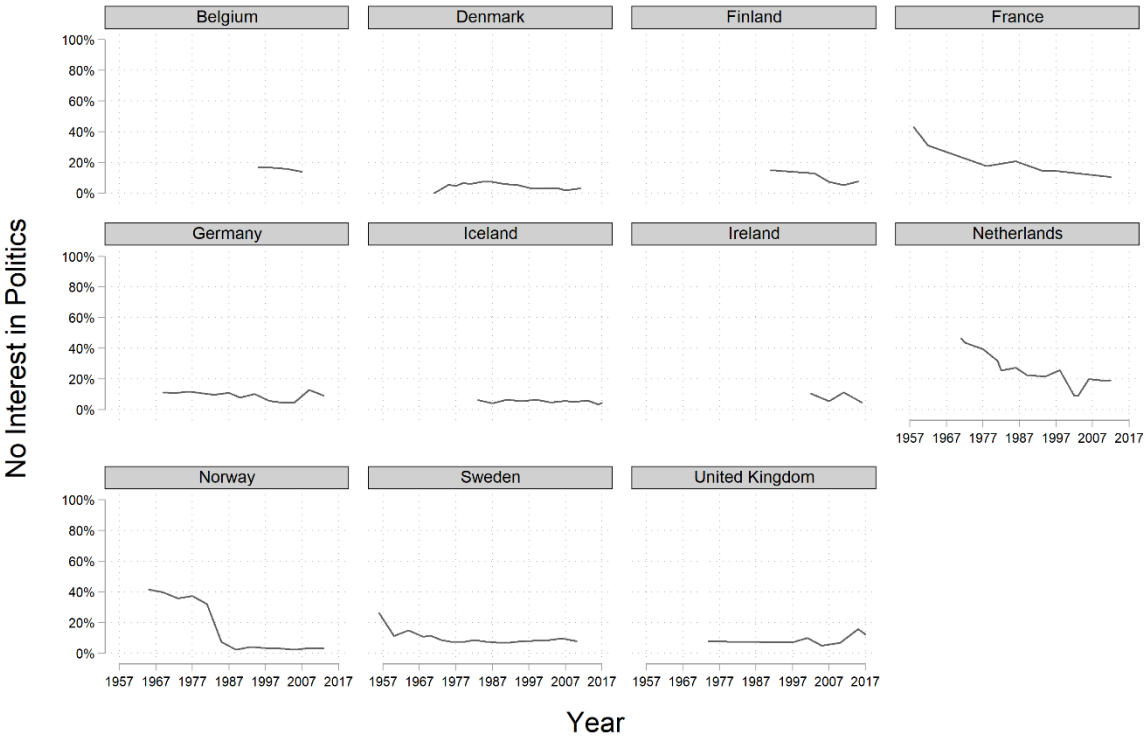


Figure 4.7 Trends in strong political apathy. Proportion of respondents who report "no interest" in politics. Averages in 11 Western European countries from 1956-2017. Sources: National Election Studies and The European Voter dataset.[22]

Therefore, all of the data available here goes against the expectations of the first hypothesis in this study (about rising political apathy): on the contrary, it appears that political apathy has been *declining* in most of the countries in this study. Moving on to hypothesis 2, about the rise of political alienation, Figure 1.8 starts by showing trends in the proportion of respondents who identify with a political party in each country and year from 1956-2017.[23] Aside from Denmark, Ireland (only included since 2001), Belgium (which only included this question in 1995, 2003 and 2007) and some anomalies in the very first years (in which questions were often phrased somewhat differently), there is a clear downward trend in this measure across the region since 1957. It should be noted that the

[22] In Norway from 1965-1981, there were only three options, with no option for „little interest", which likely explains the much higher proportion that chose the least interested option in those years.

[23] I do not display the German studies for 2002 and 2013 in this graph or in the next graph, for the political alienation variable, since they have a far lower proportion of party identifiers (37,7% and 48,5%, respectively, compared with over 64% in all other years) and this is almost certainly explained by the different way the question was asked in these years; they started by asking generally whether respondents identified with a political party, while in the other years they asked straight away which party the respondent identified with. This would indicate a misleading break in the actual underlying trends, but I still include these years in statistical analysis as they are still valid measures of party identification when analysing the overall dynamics of party identification in the region. Dropping these years from the models does not substantively change the results of the analysis.

sharp decline in France may be partly a product of successive changes in wording between the 1997, 2007 and 2012 surveys there[24] but nonetheless, the decline had already started in 1997 (dropping to 82,8% from 89,5% in 1993 despite the same wording). Combined with declining political apathy, one might intuitively infer from these overall results that the number of politically interested citizens that don't identify with political parties (the main measure of alienation used in this study) must be rising, but this intuition would strictly speaking be committing the holistic fallacy; inferring from aggregate trends to individual-level relationships (it could be, for example, that these trends have been occurring in different parts of the electorate or that the propensity of apathetic citizens to identify with political parties has declined).

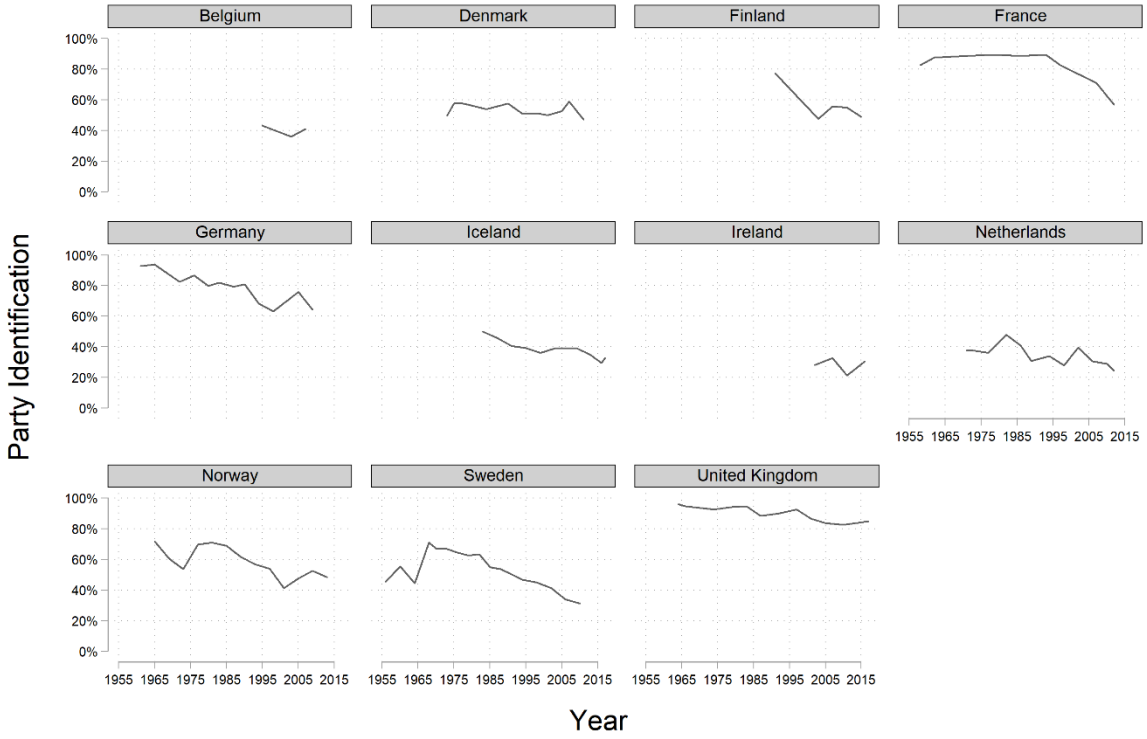


Figure 4.8 Trends in party identification. Average party identification (proportion of respondents who identify with any political party) in 11 Western European countries from 1956-2017. Sources: National Election Studies and The European Voter dataset.

[24] Until 1997, the survey listed different political parties and asked respondents to say which one they felt closest to ("Pouvez-vous me dire duquel vous vous sentez le plus proche ou disons le moins éloigné?"), giving them the option of none ("Aucun"). In 2007, they were asked if there was generally a political party they felt close to ("D'une manière générale, ya t il un parti ou un mouvement politique dont vous vous sentez proche?") and could only respond in the affirmative (oui) or negative (non). In 2012, they were asked "Would you say that you are usually [very close / fairly close / not very close / not at all close / (Refusal / NR / DK)] to a particular political party?" ("Diriez-vous que vous êtes habituellement [Très proche/Assez proche/Peu proche/Ou pas proche du tout/(Refus/NR/NSP)] d'un parti politique en particulier ?") and could choose one of those options, with only the last of these being coded here as not identifying with any party.

Turning to the individual-level measure of this relationship between political interest and party identification, Figure 4.9 shows the trends for the main measure of political alienation used in this study: the proportion of citizens who report some political interest (more than "little" or "no" interest) but no identification with any political party. Contrary to political apathy, these figures show a clear and substantial rise in political alienation in every single country included in this study, with a significant rise in every country and a rapid rise in most of them. Of course, political alienation has been measured in various ways in previous studies and there are some issues with the comparability of this measure between countries as well as between years within countries. Nevertheless, the overall trend is quite clear and unlikely to be explained by individual country-year anomalies. Therefore, hypothesis 2 gets strong support in the data used here.

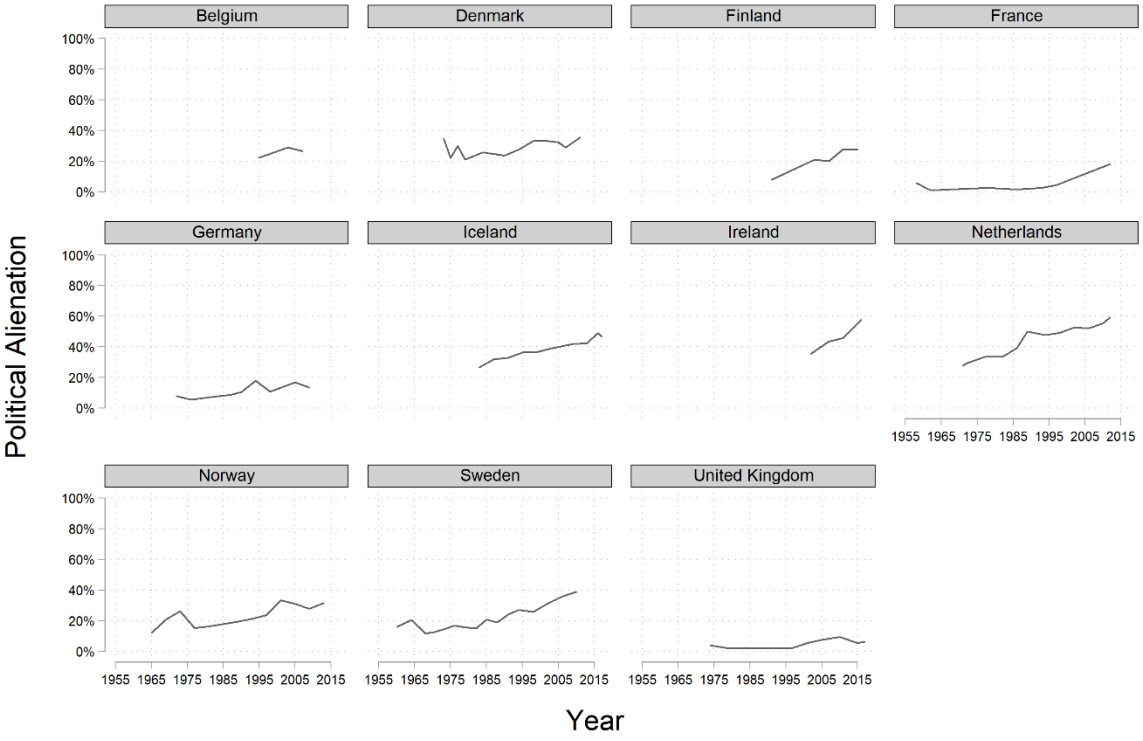


Figure 4.9 Trends in alienation. Average political alienation (reporting political interest but no identification with any political party) in 11 Western European countries from 1956-2017. Sources: National Election Studies and The European Voter dataset.

For comparison, Figure 4.10 presents the proportion of "disengaged" respondents in the dataset: those who report no identification with any political party *and* little or no political interest. Here, the trends are much more difficult to parse: the proportion has been stable in most countries while it has risen slightly in some (especially in Sweden, France and the United Kingdom) and declined in the Netherlands as well as Ireland (although, again, the latter should be interpreted cautiously) and perhaps Iceland and Denmark. This suggests that the decline of party identification in the region is

largely driven by larger parts of the electorate that are interested in politics but do not identify with any political party, rather than by apathetic citizens who do not. This provides further support for hypothesis 2 and the more specific argument that citizens are still politically interested but instead alienated from their political systems.

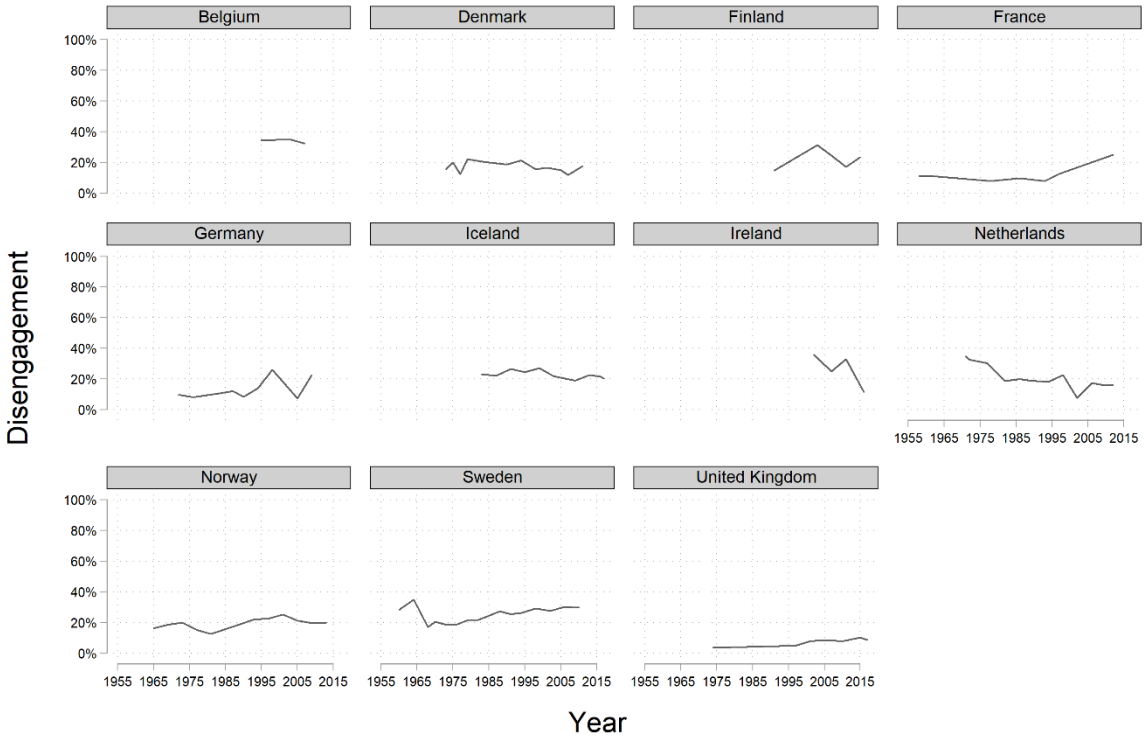


Figure 4.10 Trends in disengagement. Proportion of respondents who are "disengaged" (report no party identification as well as little or no political interest) in 11 Western European countries from 1956-2017. Sources: National Election Studies and The European Voter dataset.

To get a clearer overall sense of these trends in different measures of voter turnout, apathy and alienation that I have thus far presented descriptively by country, I now proceed to conduct multi-level regression models on these variables in the combined dataset, to parse out the overall trends in the region when controlling for country-specific peculiarities and fluctuations. As explained in section 3.3, these models are random effects multi-level logistics regression models run on three levels: country, country-year and respondent, and weighted so that each study weighs as if it has 1000 respondents and studies with higher over-estimation of turnout weigh less in proportion to that. To get a clearer sense of the overall trends in the combined dataset, I start by running regression models where the dependent variables are, in turn, reported turnout, apathy, alienation and disengagement. In these models, the independent variables are just the trend (year) variable, the binary variably for TDC status (which takes the value 1 for respondents in any of the four turnout

decline countries and 0 for respondents in the other countries) and their interaction, since at this stage I am simply looking to establish trends in these different variables in the dataset, regardless of other factors.

Table 4.1 presents the results for these multi-level regression models of trends in the combined dataset and model 1 confirms that the trend in reported voter turnout has been significantly negative in the TDC but not in the rest of the dataset. Model 2 suggests that political apathy has also been declining across the region but this trend has been significantly more modest in the TDC (the interaction is significantly positive but substantively smaller than the overall trend of decline), while model 3 suggests that the levels of "disengagement" (respondents who are both apathetic and do not identify with any political party) have been rising slightly in the TDC but stable in the rest of the region. Model 4 suggests that political alienation (politically interested non-identifiers) has been rising considerably, that this trend is roughly equal across the two groups of countries and that it is the most pronounced of all the trends examined here. Figure 4.11 illustrates these trends by plotting the predicted probabilities from these models; the estimated likelihood of a respondent falling into each category by year, separated by the TDC (France, Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom) and the rest of the countries (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden). Here, the differences in political interest between the two groups of countries stand out: overall apathy has been declining in the TDC but much more modestly, the prevalence of disengagement has been rising slightly there and the levels of alienation have been rising less (even if the latter difference does not appear significant in model 4).

Table 4.1 Trend regression models. Multi-level logistics regression models on trends in the main variables of this study in the combined dataset, separated by two groups of countries (the four "Turnout decline countries" (TDC) and the other 7 countries in the dataset). Sources: national election studies and The European Voter dataset.

	(1) Turnout	(2) Apathy	(3) Disengagement	(4) Alienation
FP1				
Year	0.002	-0.016***	-0.005	0.024***
	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.004)
TDC	29.550***	-20.083*	-37.071*	4.775
	(5.028)	(8.805)	(16.950)	(13.115)
TDC*Year	-0.015***	0.010*	0.018*	-0.003
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.008)	(0.007)
Constant	-0.687	31.814***	8.678	-48.496***
	(4.606)	(8.586)	(11.742)	(7.216)
RP3				
Level3: Country	0.173**	0.082***	0.101*	0.350**
	(0.065)	(0.024)	(0.046)	(0.135)
RP2				
Level2: Country-year	0.113***	0.067***	0.122**	0.088**
	(0.024)	(0.015)	(0.045)	(0.031)
Observations	230620	200277	176815	176815

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

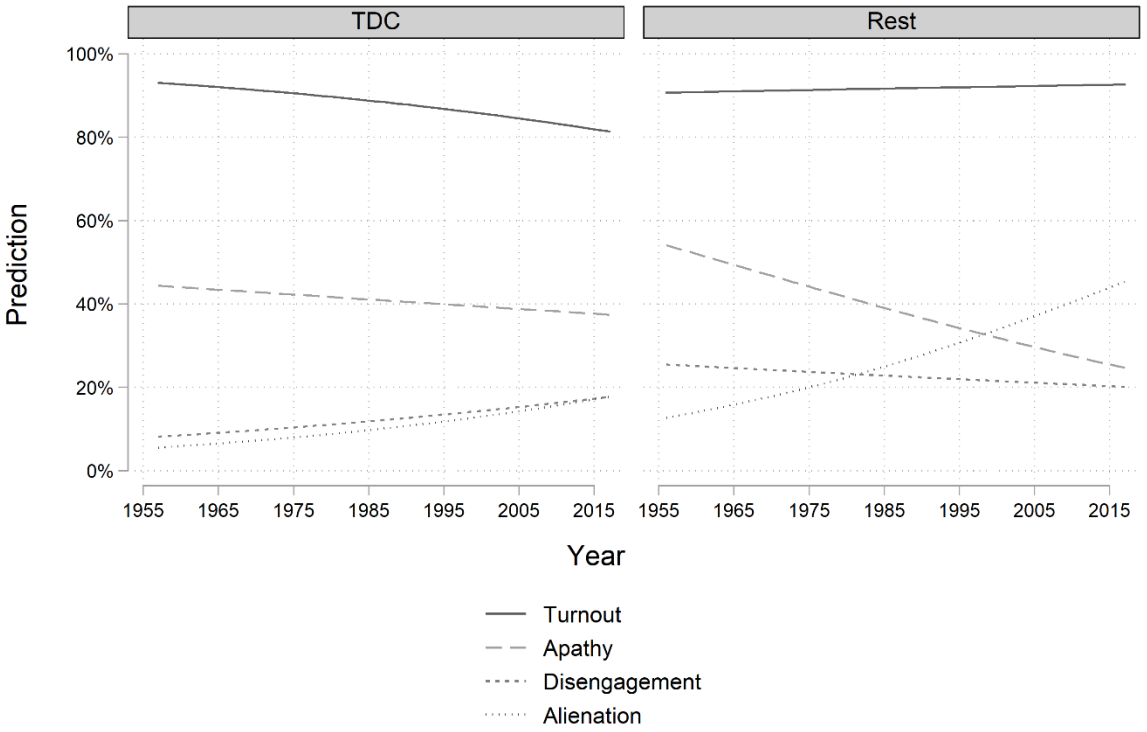


Figure 4.11 Predicted trends. The predicted probability of individuals reporting turnout, being apathetic, being apathetic without any party identification and being alienated in the combined dataset from 1956-2017, separated by group of countries.

4.3 Alternative Measures of Alienation

In this section, I present descriptive statistics for the two variations of the main measures of alienation used in this study – including respondents who identify with anti-establishment parties – and other potential measures of alienation that were included in some of the national election studies and harvested for the purposes of this study. As detailed in section 3.2, the first of the alternative alienation measures includes respondents who identify with so-called "Populist Radical Right Parties" (PRRP) and the latter includes these respondents as well as those who identify with some far-left socialist parties, green parties and pirate parties (LG). The first thing to note is that there are not very many respondents who report identification with anti-establishment parties in the surveys included here: the number of respondents coded as alienated on the core variable is 41.769 in the combined dataset, including PRRP identifiers brings the number up to 43.278 and including LG identifiers brings it up to 44.199. Illustrating this, Figure 4.12 and Figure 4.13 graph the proportion of respondents in each category by year and country (again separately for two groups of countries, as presenting these trends together in one graph would make it difficult to eye-ball the small differences in trends of the different measures), indicating that there is little substantive difference in most countries although it comes closest in Finland, France and Germany.

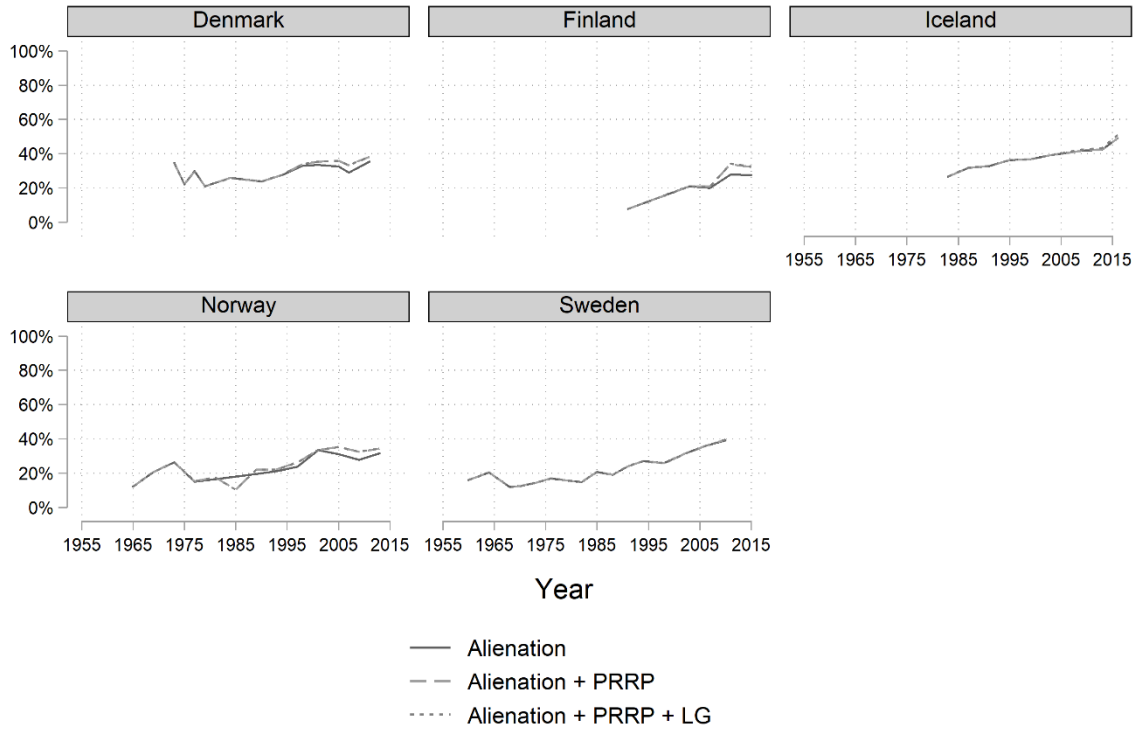


Figure 4.12 Establishment alienation in the Nordics. Average political alienation as measured in three alternative ways in the five Nordic countries from 1956-2017. Sources: National Election Studies and The European Voter dataset.

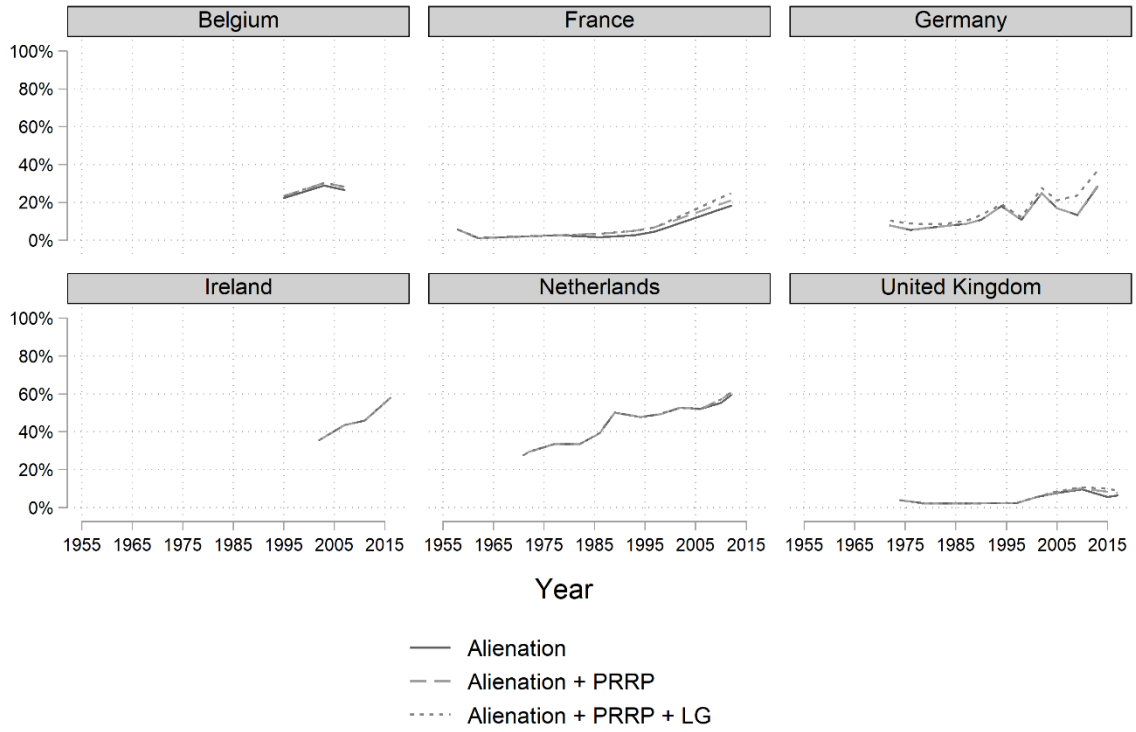


Figure 4.13 Establishment alienation in six countries. Average political alienation as measured in three alternative ways in 6 European countries from 1956-2017. Sources: National Election Studies and The European Voter dataset.

Moving on to other potential measures of alienation, they are generally not available for nearly as many country-years as the central variables, but apart from the measures of trust in parliament and trust in political parties, all of them are nevertheless available for over 50.000 respondents (see Table 3.3). Figures 25-30 graph the trends for these variables where they are available (keeping in mind that the measures are not always included in every successive study from the first study in which it was included). In the combined dataset, each question has been recoded into a dichotomous variable where 1 equals agreement with the statement, trust or satisfaction and 0 equals disagreement, distrust and dissatisfaction; the graphs show the proportion of respondents in each survey that are in the former category. For readability, the measures are presented in several different graphs, but the most traditional measures of political support (see also Valgarðsson and Devine, 2019) are presented together: Figure 4.14 graphs the trends in satisfaction with democracy, trust in politicians, trust in political parties and trust in parliament in the five Nordic countries and Figure 4.15 graphs the same for the other countries in the dataset.

The trends in these different measures of support are generally similar within countries but diverse across the region and no overall trend of decline is apparent. Although there seems to have

been a decline in political support in some of these countries following the financial crisis of 2008, it seems to have bounced back since then (this dynamic is particularly clear in Iceland, where the effects of the crisis were particularly swift and dramatic (The Special Investigation Commission (SIC), 2010)). Where there are notable overall trends in these measures of political support, they are generally in the other direction: political trust seems to have risen in Sweden and Finland and satisfaction with democracy seems to have grown in France and Germany.

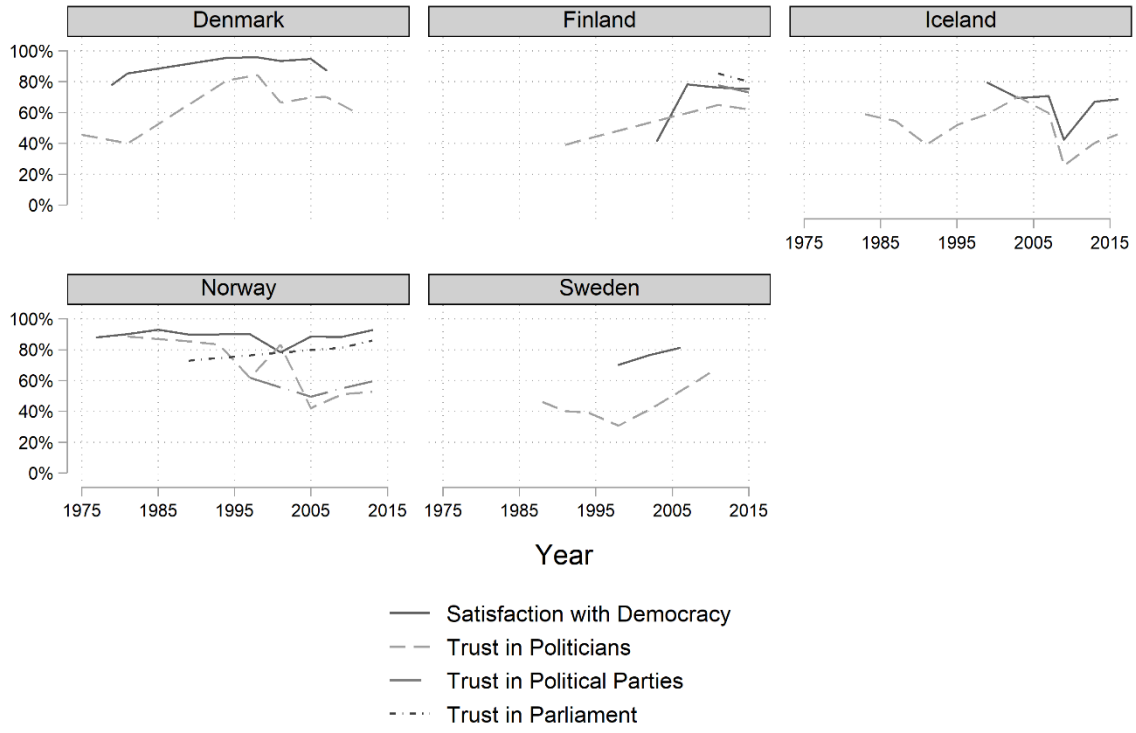


Figure 4.14 Political support in the Nordics. Satisfaction with democracy, trust in politicians, trust in political parties and trust in parliament in the five Nordic countries from 1977-2017. Sources: National Election Studies and The European Voter dataset.

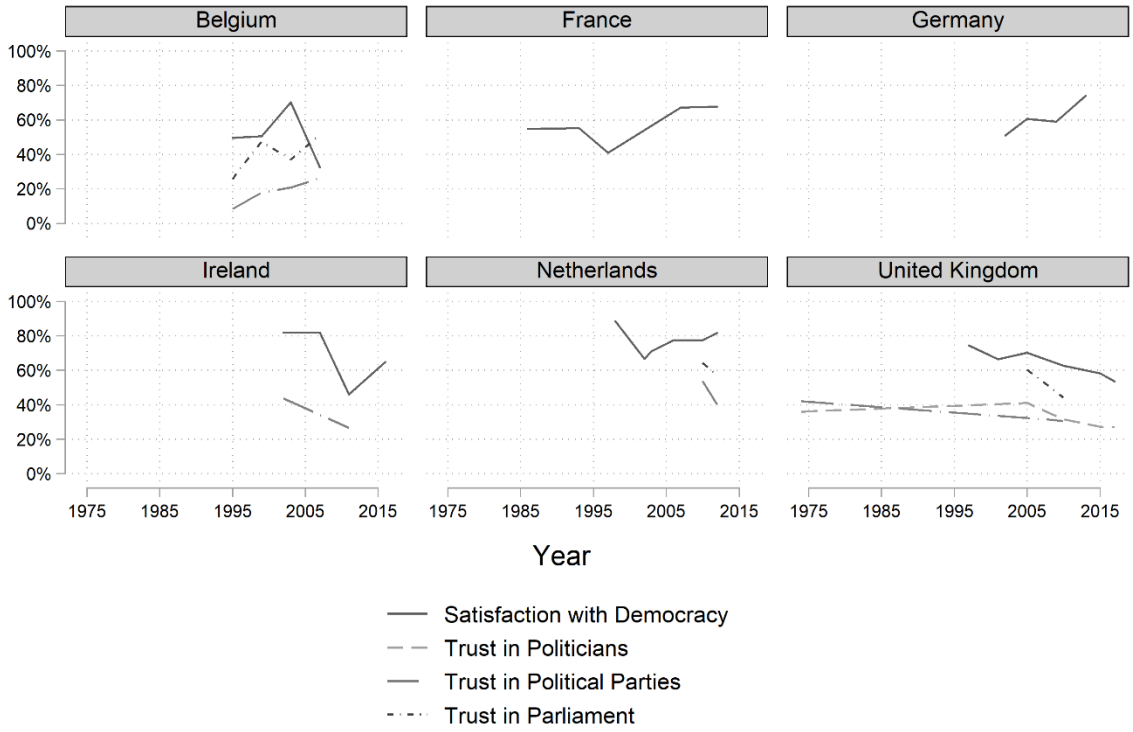


Figure 4.15 Political support in six countries. Satisfaction with democracy, trust in politicians, trust in political parties and trust in parliament in six European countries from 1977-2017. Sources: National Election Studies and The European Voter dataset.

Figures 27-30 present the proportion of respondents that agreed with several statements in the surveys where these were included, but here it is important to keep in mind that these variables are relatively rough constructions from different questions that were intended to measure the same sentiments but were often asked in different ways and sometimes in the opposite "directions" (i.e. "voting makes a difference" versus "voting doesn't make a difference"). These graphs are therefore intended to capture any overall trends in these sentiments instead of comparing particular years or countries. Figure 4.16 presents the figures for thinking that voting makes no difference (a common measure of external political efficacy (e.g. Blais and St-Vincent, 2011)) and shows no clear overall trends, although there seems to be a slight decline in this sentiment in Norway and the Netherlands.

Moving on to the other statements, Figure 4.17 shows interestingly divergent trends in thinking that parties are only interested in people's votes, where respondents in Norway and the United Kingdom seem to increasingly think so but respondents in Finland and the Netherlands seem to decreasingly think so.[25] Relatedly, Figure 4.18 shows that in Germany and the Netherlands, people

[25] In the surveys in the United Kingdom and Finland, this question is followed by the qualification "not opinions", but not in Norway or the Netherlands.

seem to increasingly think that politicians care about people's opinions but the reverse is apparent in France. Figure 4.19 shows that in most countries, people decreasingly think that politics is too complicated, indicating rising internal political efficacy (e.g. Barrett and Brunton-Smith, 2014) as opposed to a decline. Therefore, there are few overall trends apparent in these measures in the region: trends are notably different between countries, most measures of political support appear trendless and if anything, satisfaction with democracy is rising in some countries and political efficacy also appears to be rising in many of the countries. The only trend that may seem consistent with turnout decline in the TDC is that respondents in Norway and the UK increasingly think that parties are only interested in their votes, which probably reflects a type of rising alienation.

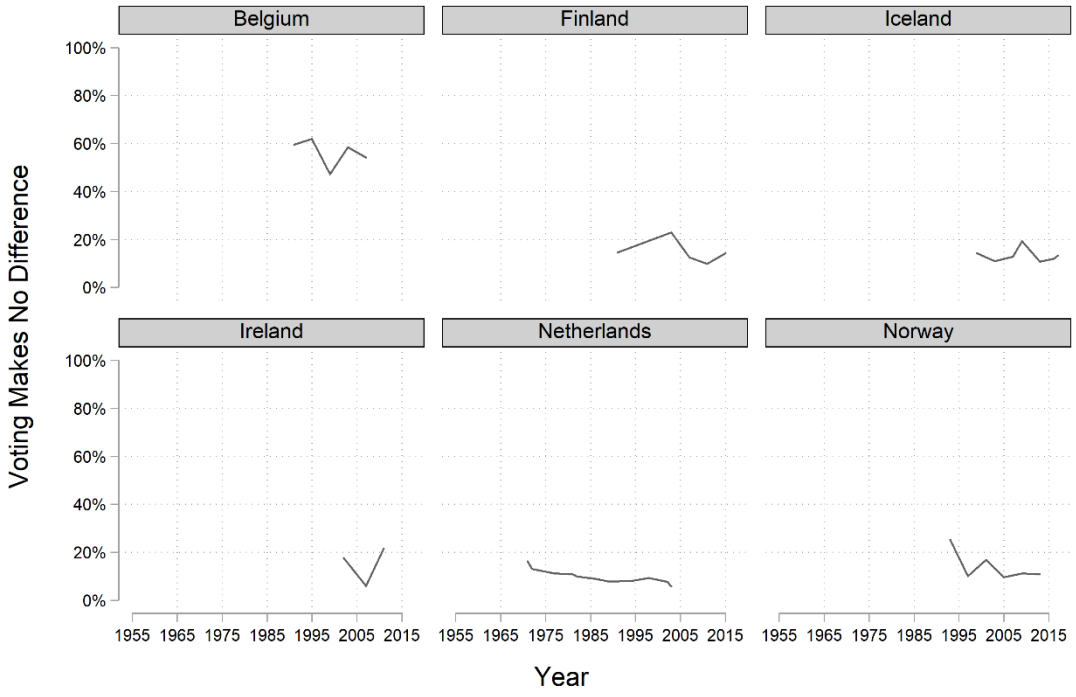


Figure 4.16 Voting doesn't make any difference? Agreement with the statement "Voting doesn't make any difference" (and slight variations of this) in 6 European countries from 1976-2017. Sources: National Election Studies and The European Voter dataset.

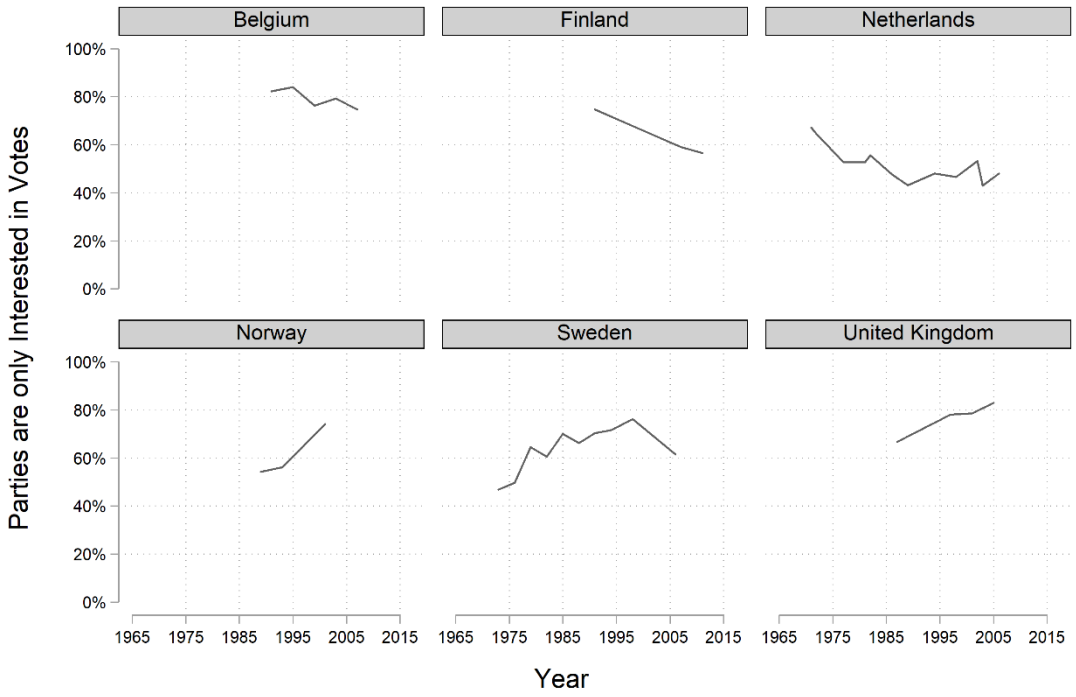


Figure 4.17 Parties are only interested in votes? Agreement with the statement "Parties are only interested in votes" (and slight variations of this) in 6 European countries from 1967-2017. Sources: National Election Studies and The European Voter dataset.

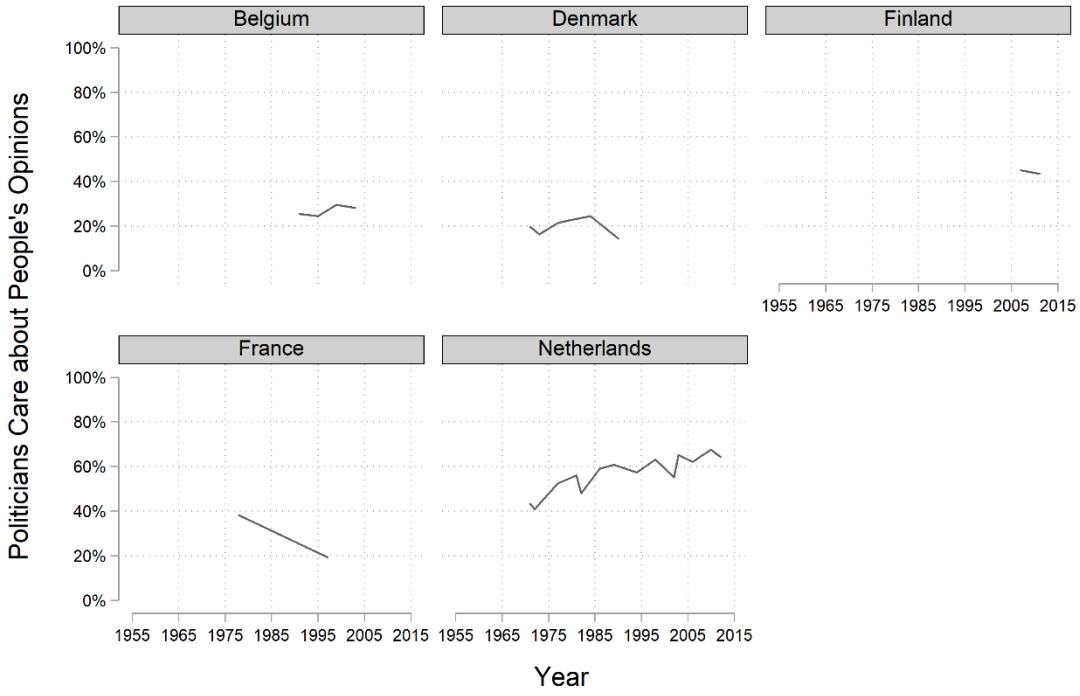


Figure 4.18 Politicians care about people's opinions? Agreement with the statement "Politicians care about people's opinions" (and slight variations of this) in 6 European countries from 1967-2017. Sources: National Election Studies and The European Voter dataset.

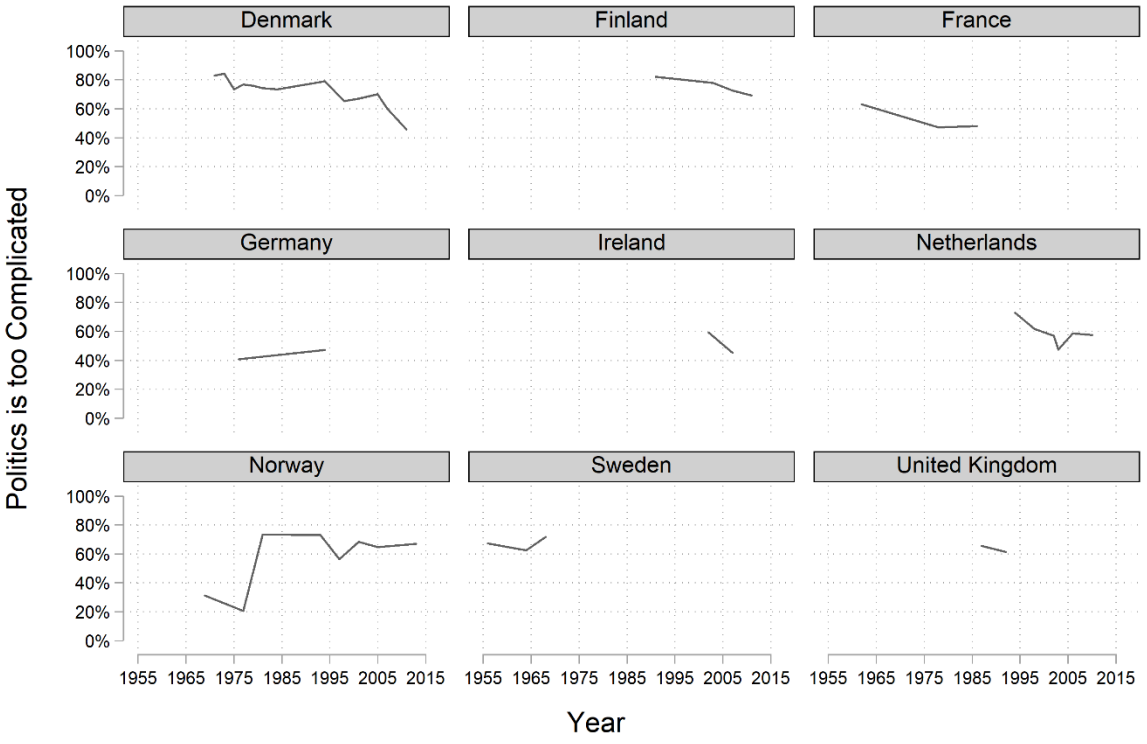


Figure 4.19 Politics is too complicated. Agreement with the statement "Politics is too complicated (for ordinary people)" (and slight variations of this) in 11 Europeans countries from 1977-2017. Sources: National Election Studies and The European Voter dataset.

Turning to a more sophisticated exploration of the patterns in these measures and to what extent they may be measuring the same underlying constructs, I start by looking at the bivariate correlations between each pair of measures, presented in Table 4.2. Here, we see that the measure of satisfaction with democracy has a moderately strong correlation with measures of trust in politicians, political parties and parliament, but only a fairly weak correlation with the other measures. The three different measures of political trust have strong (over 0,6 Pearson's R) correlations with each other and the measures of trust in parliament and political parties have fairly strong correlations with some of the other measures but, interestingly, the same does not apply for trust in politicians (available for about twice as many cases). The three statements that seem to measure external political efficacy (i.e. the feeling that the political system is susceptible to influence by people like yourself) have fairly strong internal relationships but interestingly, they are only weakly related to the measure of internal efficacy; the feeling that politics are too complicated for someone like yourself.

Table 4.2 Correlations of various measures. Pairwise correlations between different potential measures of alienation in the combined dataset

	SWD	Trust Pol.	Trust Parl.	Trust PolPar.	Complicated	No Difference	Parties Only...	Politicians Care
Satisfaction with Democracy	1,000							
Trust in Politicians	0,342	1,000						
Trust in Political Parties	0,382	0,618	1,000					
Trust in Parliament	0,294	0,769	0,688	1,000				
Parties Only Interested in Votes	-0,020	-0,126	-0,129	-0,144	1,000			
Politics too Complicated	-0,210	-0,195	-0,560	-0,399	0,151	1,000		
Voting makes no Difference	-0,217	-0,286	-0,416	-0,512	0,236	0,374	1,000	
Politicians Care about Opinions	0,294	0,297	0,422	0,474	-0,197	-0,332	-0,571	1,000

Based on these different trends, correlations and the conceptual relations between the different measures, I ran factor analyses and reliability tests of scales created from various combinations of these measures. The results of these tests, not presented in detail here, indicated that the measures of satisfaction with democracy and internal efficacy seem largely independent from the other measures, while the different measures of trust and external efficacy could be combined into two reliable scales which presumably reflect those underlying phenomena. More specifically, combining the three trust measures into one scale resulted in an alpha value of 0,87 and combining the three statements of "parties are only interested in votes", "voting makes no/a difference" and "politicians (don't) care about people's opinions" resulted in an alpha value of 0,71.

Table 4.3 presents the results of multi-level regression models (same specifications as above, except with linear regression on the two scales) of each of these measures on year, standardized to take values from 0-1. Figure 4.20 presents the trends in predictions of each measure by year and by group of country. Here, some interesting distinctions emerge: while internal and external efficacy appear to have risen gradually across the region, internal efficacy (disagreeing with the statement

that politics is too complicated) appears to have risen less in the TDC and perhaps more notably, political trust has declined significantly there while it has risen significantly in the rest of the region and the same appears to be true for internal political efficacy (there are hints of this satisfaction with democracy as well, but those trends are not significant). However, from the descriptive trends in Figure 4.19, internal efficacy appears to have been stable or rising in Germany and Norway, while the apparent decline is isolated to France and very limited data from the United Kingdom.

Table 4.3 Regression models of alternative variables. Multi-level logistics regression models on trends in alternative measures of alienation available in the combined dataset, by group of countries (TDC vs. rest).

	(1) Trust	(2) SWD	(3) External Efficacy	(4) Internal Efficacy
FP1				
Year	0.005*	0.005	0.003***	0.026***
	(0.002)	(0.016)	(0.001)	(0.004)
TDC	19.161**	22.286	2.238	32.782***
	(5.892)	(35.881)	(3.055)	(8.974)
TDC*Year	-0.010**	-0.011	-0.001	-0.016***
	(0.003)	(0.018)	(0.002)	(0.004)
Constant	-8.852*	-9.627	-5.226**	-53.356***
	(3.993)	(31.849)	(1.624)	(7.309)
RP3				
var(cons)	0.027	0.523**	0.028+	0.189**
	(0.024)	(0.199)	(0.017)	(0.067)
RP2				
var(cons)	0.015***	0.380***	0.007***	0.061***
	(0.004)	(0.089)	(0.002)	(0.008)
Observations	83198	115558	108597	82265

Standard errors in parentheses
+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

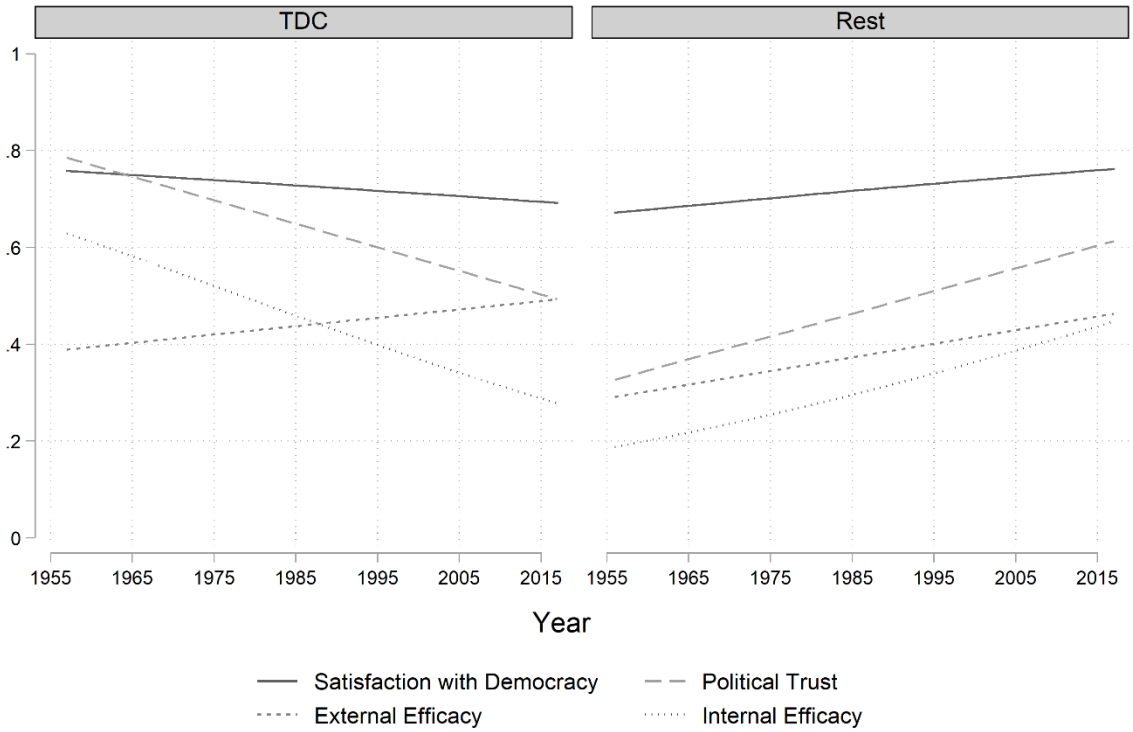


Figure 4.20 Trends in alternative measures of alienation. Predicted probabilities from logistical multi-level regression models of measures of satisfaction with democracy and internal efficacy (reverse of "politics is too complicated"), along with predicted values from linear multi-level regression models of combined scales for political trust and external efficacy.

The diverging trends in political trust between the two groups of countries seem to be starker and may contribute to an explanation of turnout decline, something I will explore in later chapters. It is important to note, however, that out of the four TDC, these measures are not available in France or Germany, meaning that the decline of trust apparent in the region only reflects data from the United Kingdom and Norway. Table 4.4 details the availability of these measures by year in each country and also illustrates that the first measure, of trust in politicians, is available for about twice as many cases in both countries than each of the other two measures. There are various differences in the wording of these questions between surveys but in all cases, choosing an option that indicates more trust than not (e.g. on the upper end of a numerical trust scale or on the trusting side of a worded scale) is distinct from choosing an option that indicates less trust, with mid-points coded as missing here.[26]

[26] In the United Kingdom, respondents in 1974 were asked "... how you feel about..." "Politicians in Britain today?" and "The Political parties?" (among other things) and given seven options between "Very happy" and "Very unhappy" (the other options were „happy", „satisfied", „mixed feelings", „not satisfied" and „unhappy"), with all who responded on the "happy" end of the scale were coded as trusting on the binary variables used here, but from 2005 they were asked about their "trust" in "politicians generally", "Westminster Parliament" and „political parties". In Norway, respondents were asked in 1981, 1989 and 1993 whether politicians were "trustworthy" with three options that are translated as "most", "mostly" and "few" except in

Therefore, the growing tendency of respondents in these countries to choose the latter gives important indications that declining trust in politicians may play a role in turnout decline at least in these countries. I will return to this possibility in later chapters.

Table 4.4 Political trust variables. Number of cases in each country-year for which three different measures of political trust are available in NES datasets.

	Trust in Politicians		*Trust in Parliament*		*Trust in Political Parties*		
Year	Norway	UK	Norway	UK	Norway	UK	Total
1974	0	2166	0	0	0	2382	4548
1981	1544	0	0	0	0	0	1544
1989	2117	0	1541	0	0	0	3658
1993	2142	0	0	0	0	0	2142
1997	1179	0	0	0	882	0	2061
2001	2001	0	0	0	0	0	2001
2005	1433	3114	1641	3189	1378	0	10755
2009	1258	0	1453	0	1223	0	3934
2010	0	2391	0	2357	0	2375	7123
2013	2460	0	2910	0	2424	0	7794
2015	0	2426	0	0	0	0	2426
2017	0	1812	0	0	0	0	1812
Total	14134	11909	7545	5546	5907	4757	49798

Similarly, while there appears to be a slight increase in external efficacy (the sense that politics is susceptible to being influenced by people like oneself) in both groups of countries in the period, this could be due to the differential inclusion of different measures between country-year, as shown in Table 4.5. Two of these measures are again only available in Norway and the UK and they are not equally dispersed over time, which could bias these results, especially because the "voting makes no difference" is more available in later years and the other two measures in earlier years. Nevertheless, trends towards increasing efficacy are apparent (and significant when running regression models on each measure separately) in both this measure and the other measure available over a period in the TDC: the sense that parties are only interested in people's votes. As shown in Table 4.2, the three

1993, when the first two options are "the majority" and "generally". In 1997, they used a six-point scale for trust in politicians but in 2001 they used the original 3-point scale again and from 2005-2013 they used an 11-point scale (0-10). In 1989 they were asked about their trust in parliament on a 10-point scale (1-10) and from 2005-2013 the same on an 11-point scale. In 1997, they asked about trust in political parties on a 9-point scale (1-9) but from 2005-2013 they used an 11-point scale.

measures also have fairly high pairwise correlations and the scale formed by combining those measures has a high reliability alpha value, so these results provide interesting indications even if they are not conclusive.

Table 4.5 Efficacy variables. Number of cases in each country-year for which three different measures of external political efficacy are available in NES datasets.

	Voting makes no difference		*Parties are only interested in votes*		*Politicians care about people's opinions*		
Year	Norway	UK	Norway	UK	Norway	France	Total
1978	0	0	0	0	4296	0	4296
1987	0	0	0	2794	0	0	2794
1989	0	0	1851	0	0	0	1851
1993	2032	0	2026	0	0	0	4058
1997	1066	2503	0	2469	2995	710	9743
2001	1598	0	1988	2513	0	0	6099
2005	1670	0	0	758	0	0	2428
2009	1495	0	0	0	0	0	1495
2013	2814	0	0	0	0	0	2814
Total	10675	2503	5865	8534	7291	710	35578

4.4 Discussion

I started the analysis in this chapter by providing descriptive data for several variables harvested from the national election study datasets used in this study, in order to provide empirical foundations for the main analysis of this study, describe the novel dataset and shed some light on trends in reported turnout, apathy and alienation in the region. Starting with self-reported turnout, the data presented in section 4.1 indicates that there is a high degree of consistency between the trends and fluctuations of self-reported turnout from surveys on one hand, and aggregate data for the officially reported voter turnout and the proportion of the voting-age-population that turned out to vote on the other hand (Pintor and Gratschew, 2002; Pintor, Gratschew and Bittiger, 2004). As is well-known from prior studies, self-reported turnout substantially overestimates official turnout rates (Fullerton, Dixon and Borch, 2007; Selb and Munzert, 2013) and in some countries this gap does appear to be growing over time, which is cause for some concern in the administration and analysis of survey data.

While it has been argued that official turnout figures have become less reliable because of errors in voter registers (Mellon *et al.*, 2018) this does not seem like a likely explanation at least in those countries included here that have reliable voter registers based on their national registers (including Iceland and Denmark (Danish Parliament, 2011; Registers Iceland, 2018)). Alternatively, this growing gap may suggest that people are falsely reporting turnout to a greater extent or that the non-response bias of surveys (at least in these national election studies) in these countries has been growing, i.e. because of a growing bias in terms of respondents' education, age and/or political interest compared to the electorate as a whole. It should be noted that I did not utilize study-specific weights in this study, as they are inconsistently available and constructed in different ways between studies so pooling them seemed like a problematic endeavour and likely to bias the overall analysis more than the more parsimonious approach, but weighting the data might nonetheless provide part of the explanation for the apparently growing non-response bias in these studies. Despite these concerns, the trends in the different measures of turnout are highly consistent overall and the trend of turnout decline apparent in official data is reflected in the survey data for four countries included in this study: France, Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom.

Next, I proceeded to present descriptive trends in the different measures of political apathy and alienation that are available in the national election study datasets, to examine and compare their long-term trends. As discussed in detail in sections 2.2 and 3.2, various variables and approaches can and have been used to define and measure the underlying phenomena of political apathy and alienation, but the most straightforward and common measure of political interest is to simply ask people how interested they are in politics generally, and the main measure of apathy that I have used in this study is if a respondent choice the option equivalent to "little" or "no" interest as opposed to a higher level of interest. Graphing the proportion of respondents who did so in each country and year showed clear and rather interesting trends: it has declined in almost all and risen in none of the 11 countries in this study. The same was true when I graphed the mean of the 4-category variable for political interest (i.e. average interest has been rising across the region) or the proportion of respondents who chose "no interest". This is in stark contrast to the social capital arguments and findings discussed in section 1.4, that citizens have become more apathetic about politics in the modern world; the reverse seems to be the case. *Therefore, hypothesis 1 finds no support here.*

Political alienation is an even more fraught term to define and measure: one strand of work has conceptualized it as including multiple dimensions relating to political efficacy, distrust and deprivation (Finifter, 1970; Fox, 2015), while another has defined it simply as the distance that a voter feels from any political party or candidate on offer, whether in terms of issues or likability

(Brody and Page, 1973; Plane and Gershtenson, 2004; Rubenson *et al.*, 2004; Adams, Dow and Merrill, 2006; Wuttke, 2017). While all of these factors might to different extents capture what we understand by the word "alienation", I argued in section 2.2 that they should not be treated indiscriminately as equally valid manifestations of an umbrella term but rather as differently valid proxies for a common core conception of alienation. Based on the original definitions of the term as an "orientation which implies long-standing feelings of estrangement from some aspect of the individual's political environment" (Finifter, 1970; Fox, 2015, p. 146), or as "active non-identification" (Citrin *et al.*, 1975), I have thus argued and applied the term here as a lack of identification with the formal political system, as distinct from a lack of interest in politics more generally.

Nevertheless, this argument of a core conception of alienation does not amount to a rejection of different measures of this core, no more than arguing for a particular conception of other contested concepts - such as democracy, liberalism or feminism – amounts to advocacy for only one true measure of those concepts. Rather, I argue that a lack of identification with ones political system should be likely to be manifested in a lack of identification with the political party system and the parties that inhabit it, even if it can also be manifested in declining political trust and/or satisfaction with the democratic system as a whole. Therefore, from the national election study datasets used in this study, I harvested various measures that may potentially capture this concept of alienation. The most widely available of these measures is that of not identifying with any of the political parties on offer: while this is likely to fluctuate between elections and vary between different political and electoral systems, I have argued here that a long-term trend of rising alienation should also manifest itself in a long-term trend of a declining tendency to identify with any political party.

Furthermore, based on the arguments made in the alienation literature, I separated this measure by respondents' political interest: because a common argument in this literature is that citizens are politically interested but do not identify with their political system, I only classify those respondents who report political interest, at the same time as no identification with any political party, as alienated. Of course, it is also worthwhile to explore the group of citizens who are both apathetic *and* do not identify with any political party, but this is less in line with the alienation arguments discussed here so I have dubbed these citizens "disengaged", employing that term in a cognitive rather than behavioural sense. In section 4.2, I presented trends in both measures by country and found that there are few and weak overall trends in the proportion of disengaged citizens, while there is a stark rise in the proportion of alienated citizens across practically every country in the region: *hypothesis 2 is strongly supported by the analysis.*

In section 4.3, I also presented various alternative measures of alienation available in the combined datasets. First, I included a measure where I classified those respondents who identify with right-wing anti-establishment parties ("Populist Radical Right Parties"), as well as those who identify with no party, as alienated. Second, I constructed another measure which also adds those who identify with "left-socialist" and green parties as alienated (see section 3.2 for details of how these variables were coded). However, neither of these measures included very many respondents or showed any remarkable trends in the combined dataset.

Towards the end of this chapter, I also explored various different measures of political attitudes, trust and satisfaction available over time in some of the surveys used here. These alternative measures are both less consistent in their wording and implementation between countries and years and also available in much fewer country-years, so those results should be taken with a grain of salt and there may well have been other trends in the underlying factors that these measures do not capture. However, from this exploration it appears that they are measuring at least four separate underlying attitudes: satisfaction with democracy, trust in politics/politicians, internal efficacy (the sense that you can influence politics) and external efficacy (the sense that the political system is itself susceptible to change). Furthermore, where there are apparent trends in these attitudes, they seem to be divergent: internal and external efficacy seem to be rising across the region while political trust has been declining in the TDC but rising in the other group of countries. Based on this, it does not appear empirically supported to treat these different measures as different manifestations of the same underlying attitude, as some prior studies on alienation have suggested (Finifter, 1970; Fox, 2015). Of course, one could claim that alienation is a term that can apply to more than one, independent political attitude and that therefore you will get different results depending on whether you understand it as normlessness (lack of political trust), meaninglessness (lack of internal efficacy), powerlessness (lack of external efficacy) or deprivation (lack of system trust), but bundling these together in a single scale in empirical analyses seems unwarranted.

It is also clear that out of all the potential measures of alienation available overtime in more than a few countries in the region, the main alienation measure developed in this study shows the clearest trends by far: in practically all countries in the region, there has been a substantial rise in the proportion of politically interested citizens who do not identify with any political party. There are also some indications that political trust has been declining where turnout has been declining, but those measures are only available in two out of four TDC so those differences are less susceptible to generalizations about the nature of turnout decline in Western Europe (or established democracies more generally). Therefore, in the central analysis in the following chapters, I will continue to focus

on the role of the first measure of alienation, while exploring the role of other measures where feasible.

5 Apathy or Alienation?

In the previous chapter, I presented the descriptive trends and some exploratory analysis of the main measures available in the NES data and used in this study. Using various measures of turnout, apathy and alienation from 121 national election study surveys in 11 Western European countries, this analysis strongly suggested that this data reflects significant turnout decline in at least four of these countries, dubbed the "Turnout Decline Countries" (TDC) here: France, Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom. The trends in these survey measures of turnout were largely consistent with official and aggregate measures of turnout, suggesting that the data can be used for a broadly representative analysis of political attitudes as well. Moving on to that, attitudinal measures from those surveys suggested that political apathy has been stable or declining in all of these countries, while the proportion of respondents who are politically interested but do not identify with any party has risen substantially across the region. The latter is the main measure of political alienation used in this study and the other potential measure of that concept showed unclear and divergent attitude, although there were indications that political trust may be declining in the TDC as well.

In this chapter, I continue on the basis of these findings to conduct the central analysis of this study: testing the expectations of hypotheses 3-6, about the role of apathy and alienation in turnout decline. For that purpose, I will run multi-level logistics regression models of turnout on year in the combined dataset, including different variations of the main measures of apathy and alienation as well as their interactions. I start by running models of turnout on year only for cases for which each measure (of apathy and alienation) is available (so that the comparison of trends between models is unbiased by the number of cases included) in the TDC. I then add the background variables used here to control for non-response bias (gender, age and marital status) and then add each attitudinal measure in turn to examine to what extent these might account for the significant trend of turnout decline observed in the survey data for these countries. In the first part of this chapter, I analyse the role of different apathy measures (hypothesis 3), in the next section I examine the role of alienation (hypothesis 4) and in the third part I look at their interactions with year (hypothesis 5 and 6) and present overall models of the entire dataset, including all measures in turn and examining whether their dynamics are different between the TDC and the other countries. In the next chapter, I will look at the role(s) of birth cohort (generation) and education levels in these dynamics, testing hypotheses 7 and 8.

5.1 Apathy and Turnout Decline

Beginning with hypothesis 3, about the role of rising political apathy in turnout decline, Table 5.1 presents multi-level regression models for different variations of the main apathy measure in the TDC. Model 1 starts with the "empty" model of turnout regressed on year for observations where the apathy measure is available, while model 2 adds the main apathy measure developed here (a binary variable for respondents who report "little" or "no" political interest"). Given that we established in the previous chapter that apathy has been declining in almost every country in the region, and the significant, negative effect of this variable on turnout, it is not surprising that this cannot account for turnout decline in the TDC. In fact, controlling for this apathy measure exaggerates the negative trend of turnout in the model, which can by the same logic be expected.

Model 3 includes the raw measure of political interest in the dataset which the apathy variable is derived from: a categorical variable with 4 categories that correspond roughly to "no interest", "little interest", "fairly interested" and "very interested", although here the variations in wording between country-years are more significant. Nevertheless, model 3 again indicates that accounting for political interest would exaggerate turnout decline rather than account for it, and here that effect is even larger than in model 2 (note that this model is conducted as a linear regression rather than a logistics regression as in the other models). Similarly, model 4 is run on the alternative apathy variable that only counts respondents who report "no interest" as apathetic, and here the negative trend of turnout is even larger. For reasons detailed in section 3.2, I will in subsequent models keep using the main measure of apathy developed here, but these models suggest that regardless of the operationalization, political apathy cannot explain turnout decline in the TDC. In fact, these models indicate that if not for the decline of political apathy in the region, turnout would have declined more than it has. *Thus, hypothesis 3 is not supported by the data.*

Table 5.1 The role of political apathy in turnout decline. Multi-level regression models of turnout on year in the turnout-decline countries (TDC): France, Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom, between 1957-2017, with and without different measures of political apathy / interest. Source: National election study datasets.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Year	-0.026***	-0.028***	-0.033***	-0.037***
	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.005)	(0.004)
Apathy		-1.208***		
		(0.141)		
Political Interest			0.774***	
			(0.088)	
No political interest				-1.525***
				(0.213)
Gender	-0.067	0.111	0.161+	0.041
	(0.067)	(0.081)	(0.083)	(0.071)
Age	0.029***	0.028***	0.028***	0.029***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Age^2	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Marital Status	0.463***	0.455***	0.446***	0.442***
	(0.044)	(0.045)	(0.047)	(0.047)
Constant	52.506***	56.964***	63.583***	73.610***
	(14.842)	(15.531)	(10.357)	(8.994)
Level3: Country var(cons)	0.207**	0.181*	0.166*	0.170**
	(0.064)	(0.085)	(0.077)	(0.066)
Level2: Country-year var(cons)	0.166***	0.201**	0.161***	0.176***
	(0.049)	(0.063)	(0.035)	(0.020)
Observations	77737	77737	77737	79784

Standard errors in parentheses
+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

5.2 Alienation and Turnout Decline

Turning to hypothesis 4, about the potential role of rising political alienation in turnout decline, Table 5.2 shows regression models for the different variations of the main measure of political alienation used here. Model 1 shows the "empty" multi-level regression models of the turnout trend in the TDC for observations where measures for both political interest and party identification are available, confirming significant turnout decline in this sub-sample. Model 2 includes a variable for respondents who are both apathetic *and* do not identify with any political party, to explore the role of this "disengaged" group in turnout decline and to be able to focus more specifically on the hypothesis derived here from the alienation literature: that turnout decline is rooted in a rising proportion of citizens who *are* interested in politics but do not identify with any political party (see sections 2.2 and 3.2). Model 3 includes the core variable for alienation developed here, while model 4 adds those who identify with "Populist Radical Right Parties" (PRRP) as alienated and model 5 further adds those who identify with left-green and socialist (LG) parties (see section 3.2). Finally, model 6 looks at the role of the latter two groups specifically, by including the core alienation measure along with binary measures for respondents who identify with each group of party.

From these models, it appears that declining party identification generally accounts for part of the observed turnout decline in the region, but that only a small additional part of decline can be accounted for by the group of *interested but alienated* citizens identified here. Models 4 and 5 suggest that the alternative measures of alienation, including identification with non-establishment parties, do not add to an explanation of turnout decline and indeed, their negative relationship with turnout is slightly weaker. Model 6 illustrates this by showing that in fact, identifying with a PRRP or LG party has a significant, positive effect on the propensity to vote. While these measures are only broad approximations and not based on very many cases (see sections 3.2 and 4.3), they suggest that at least in the context of voter turnout, identification with non-establishment parties does not contribute to the measure of alienation.

Table 5.2 The role of political alienation in turnout decline. Multi-level regression models of turnout on year in the turnout-decline countries (TDC): France, Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom, between 1957-2017, with and without different variations of the main measure of political alienation as a control. Source: National election study datasets.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Year	-0.027**	-0.024**	-0.023**	-0.023**	-0.023**	-0.023**
	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Disengaged		-1.605***	-1.700***	-1.691***	-1.679***	-1.685***
		(0.193)	(0.216)	(0.219)	(0.214)	(0.212)
Alienation			-0.456**			-0.438**
			(0.145)			(0.140)
Alienation +PRRP				-0.393**		
				(0.151)		
Alienation +PRRP+LG					-0.314**	
					(0.099)	
PRRP id						0.240**
						(0.079)
LG id						0.698***
						(0.177)
Gender	-0.059	0.039	0.031	0.029	0.031	0.033
	(0.070)	(0.074)	(0.074)	(0.073)	(0.073)	(0.074)
Age	0.028***	0.026***	0.025***	0.025***	0.025***	0.026***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Age^2	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Marital Status	0.461***	0.446***	0.443***	0.443***	0.443***	0.446***
	(0.048)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.047)
Constant	55.277**	48.430**	46.292**	46.271**	46.459**	47.045**
	(18.261)	(16.049)	(15.418)	(15.430)	(15.511)	(15.647)
Level3: Country var(cons)	0.208**	0.357**	0.386**	0.381**	0.380**	0.381**
	(0.069)	(0.114)	(0.129)	(0.129)	(0.126)	(0.126)
Level2: Country-year var(cons)	0.172***	0.193***	0.191***	0.192***	0.190***	0.193***
	(0.047)	(0.058)	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.058)
Observations	73105	73105	73105	73105	73105	73105

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

To quantify the different extent to which these different variables can account for part of the trend of turnout decline in the TDC, Table 5.3 reports the predicted probabilities of voting at the beginning and end of the period (for which data on the alienation variables is available in the dataset) from the different models. In the first row, we see that the predicted probability of voting in the empty model drops from 95.5% in 1958 to 81.0% in 2017, indicating a 14.5 percentage point overall decline of turnout in the period in these four countries. In the subsequent rows, I report these probabilities *for respondents who do not fall into each respective category* in the subsequent models. Row 2 shows that the predicted probability of respondents who either have political interest *or* identify with a political party (are coded as 0 on the "Disengagement" variable) voting declines by about 9.7 points between 1958-2017, indicating that this measure can account for about 4.8 points of turnout decline in the TDC.

In row 3, we see that the probability for respondents who identify with a political party, regardless of political interest, voting declines by 8,7 percentage points, indicating that accounting for the more specific group of interested but alienated citizens explains an additional percentage point of turnout decline in the TDC observed in the data.[27] Figure 5.1 illustrates this by plotting the predicted probabilities of respondents voting in each year, first by only including the background controls (holding them constant at their overall means) and then by plotting the probabilities from models 2 and 3 for those citizens who do not fall into each respective category, i.e. accounting first for apathetic non-identifiers (disengaged) and then for all non-identifiers (disengaged and alienated). The other alienation variables do not (or barely) reduce this predicted decline, further supporting the more parsimonious approach of sticking with the basic alienation variable in subsequent analyses. *Therefore, hypothesis 4 (that alienation accounts for turnout decline in Western Europe) is partly but not strongly supported* in the data: while declining party identification generally accounts for 5,8 out of the 14,5 percentage point of turnout decline in the TDC, only 1 of these points is accounted for by interested but alienated citizens, with the rest being accounted for by apathetic citizens who do not identify with any political party.

[27] It should be noted that the confidence intervals of these predictions are fairly wide so these differences are not "statistically significant" in the traditional sense of inference to the population in each election year. In this context I am more interested in the substantive size and changes in the negative turnout trend when accounting for different factors than in statistical significance levels, partly because we already know that the turnout decline observed in the dataset reflects a very similar trend of decline in officially reported aggregate turnout statistics, as shown in section 4.1.

Table 5.3 Voting by alienation. Predicted marginal probabilities of voting in 1958 and 2015, controlling for each variable in models 2-5 in 0. The probabilities reported are the probabilities for respondents who do *not* fall into each respective category.

Predicted probality of voting	1958	2017	Decline
(1) Empty model	95,5%	81,0%	14,5%
(2) Without disengaged	96,4%	86,7%	9,7%
(3) W/o alienated	96,5%	87,8%	8,7%
(4) W/o alienated + PRRP	96,5%	87,8%	8,7%
(5) W/o alienated + PRRP+LG	96,4%	87,6%	8,8%

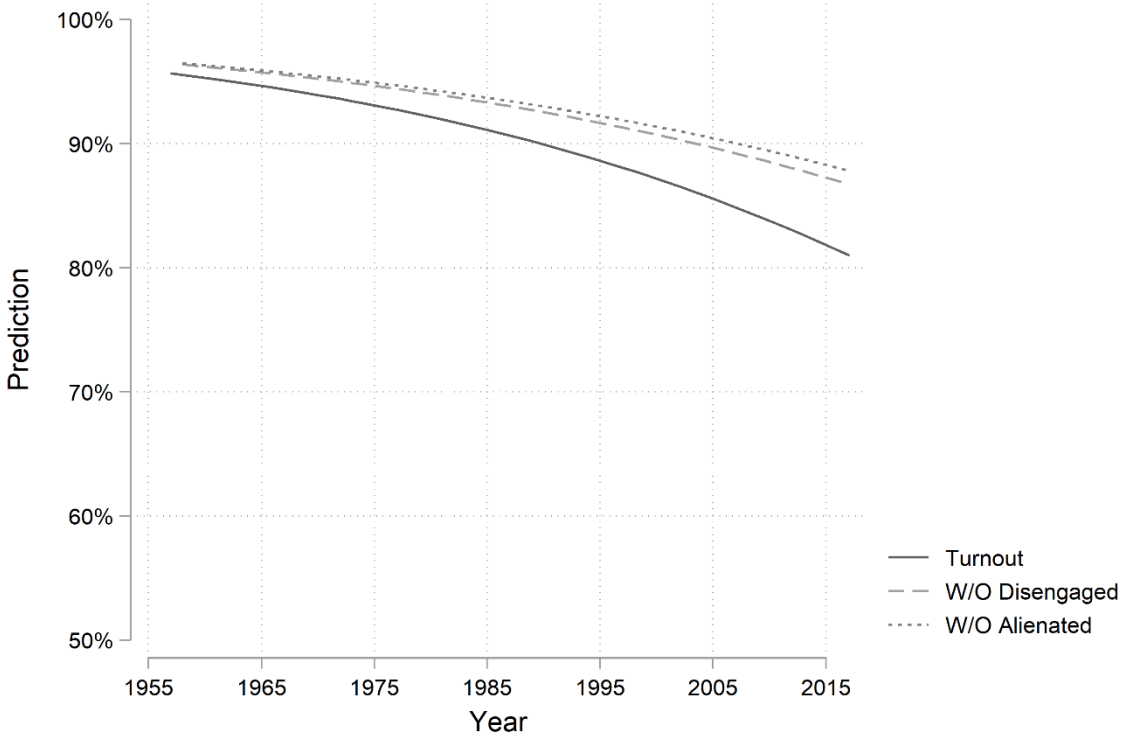


Figure 5.1 Turnout decline, accounting for alienation. Predicted probabilities of reported turnout from multi-level regression models in four turnout-decline countries between 1958-2017. First line is the predicted turnout of all respondents, second is from models excluding "disengaged" citizens and third line excludes disengaged as well as alienated citizens.

In section 4.3, I reviewed the data available for various other measures of political attitudes that may provide alternative tests of trends in political alienation and its role in turnout decline in the region. This exploration indicated that there had been no significant trends in satisfaction with democracy in the region and that internal and external efficacy had been rising in both the TDC and the rest of the

countries in the dataset. However, there were also indications that political trust had been declining in the period in the two TDC where this measure is available, while it had been rising in the rest of the region, which suggests that this may play a role in turnout decline. To put this suggestion to a more robust test, I reverse the trust scale (which consists of three highly correlated measures of trust: in politicians, parliament and political parties) and create additional variables for distrust of politically interested and apathetic citizens separately (where the measure of interest is available).

Table 5.4 presents these multi-level regression models for the cases in the United Kingdom and Norway where these variables are available (from 1974-2017, see section 4.3 for details of when these cases are included). Model 1 shows that even in this limited sub-sample of the dataset, turnout has a significantly negative trend, but when accounting for the political distrust scale this becomes insignificant. In models 3 and 4, I run the regression separately with the variables for the distrust of politically interested and apathetic citizens in turn and these indicate that the portion of turnout decline accounted for by rising political distrust is confined to apathetic, distrusting citizens, rather than interested but distrusting citizens (including the former variable makes the turnout trend insignificant but that trend stays the same when including the latter variable). While this analysis is only conducted on two of the 11 countries in this dataset, this provides important indications that the rising political distrust of apathetic citizens may be behind turnout decline, rather than a rise in the levels of apathy per se.

Table 5.4 The role of political distrust in turnout decline. Multi-level regression models of turnout on year in the United Kingdom and Norway, between 1974-2017, with and without different variations of the scale for political distrust (consisting of measures of trust in politicians, parliament and political parties). Source: National election study datasets.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Year	-0.014**	-0.011	-0.010	-0.014**	-0.009
	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.007)
Distrust Scale		-0.770***			
		(0.052)			
Distrust - Apathy			-1.420***		-1.443***
			(0.042)		(0.019)
Distrust - Interest				0.590***	-0.058
				(0.048)	(0.036)
Gender	0.054	0.054*	0.150***	0.085**	0.149***
	(0.037)	(0.026)	(0.002)	(0.028)	(0.003)
Age	0.031***	0.030***	0.029***	0.030***	0.029***
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Age^2	-0.000*	-0.000***	-0.000**	-0.000+	-0.000**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Marital Status	0.550***	0.525***	0.524***	0.547***	0.522***
	(0.038)	(0.041)	(0.050)	(0.044)	(0.051)
Constant	27.984**	22.162	19.411	28.555**	19.097
	(10.148)	(13.632)	(13.432)	(8.845)	(13.349)
RP3					
Level3: Country	0.277***	0.119***	0.159***	0.401***	0.153***
	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.002)
RP2					
Level2: Country-year	0.032***	0.053***	0.054***	0.025***	0.055***
	(0.004)	(0.010)	(0.012)	(0.002)	(0.013)
Observations	26432	26432	26432	26432	26432

Standard errors in parentheses
+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

5.3 The Role of Apathy and Alienation

Thus far, the analysis of the combined dataset has shown that political apathy has been stable or declining in all countries in the period while political alienation has been rising rapidly, but the latter can only explain a relatively small part of turnout decline. However, there are indications that declining party identification and rising political distrust of those citizens who *are* apathetic might explain a substantial part of turnout decline in the region, even if they are a lower proportion of the electorates today than before. These findings bring us to the possibilities captured by hypotheses 5 and 6 of this study: that the *effects* of apathy or alienation have grown stronger over time, or more accurately that apathetic or alienated citizens today are less likely to vote than apathetic or alienated citizens were before.

These hypotheses are largely derived from the prior findings that changing civic duty norms explain turnout decline (Rubenson *et al.*, 2004; Wass, 2008; Blais and Rubenson, 2013) and the argument that citizens today are "cognitively mobilized" and therefore more likely to decide on an election-to-election basis whether they should vote or not, rather than simply following habit or the idea that voting is a civic obligation. If this is indeed the case, we would expect citizens' political interest and, perhaps to a lesser extent, other political attitudes during a particular election to have more influence on their propensity to vote. In other words, this argument suggests that in the past, most people would have voted regardless of their political interest and attitudes – e.g. out of habit and obligation – but that today, their attitudes towards the elections and politics more generally would factor more strongly in their decision-making. Therefore, a stronger effect of apathy on turnout would provide indirect support for this argument, although it would still not put the question to rest as there could be other forces at play that explain such a trend: e.g. declining pressure from peers, social capital, class cleavages, trade unions and mobilization by political parties and movements. But to ask those questions, we first need to understand whether the stronger effects of apathy and alienation that these theories would predict are indeed occurring.

Therefore, Table 5.5 starts by presenting multi-level regression models on turnout in the TDC, including the central variables of this study along with their interactions with year in subsequent models. *Here, hypothesis 5 gains rather strong support* in model 2: the negative effect of apathy on turnout seems to have grown much stronger over time and this accounts for a good deal of turnout decline. Figure 5.2 illustrates this by graphing the predicted probabilities of voting in different years by political apathy, i.e. predicting the probability of voting in each year for politically interested and apathetic citizens separately. Here, we see that the downward slope is much steeper for apathetic

citizens than for interested citizens: the predicted probability of interested citizens voting declines by about 6.5 percentage points (96.64-90.16) in the period while for apathetic citizens it declines by almost 29 points (94.41-65.81).

Model 3 shows similar results for the sub-sample of "disengaged "respondents (apathetic respondents who also do not identify with any political party), while model 4 shows on the contrary that the interaction between alienation and year is positive, indicating that alienated citizens today are more likely to vote than before, *in contrast to the expectations of hypothesis 6*. This can make sense considering how much more widespread alienation, as defined here, is in later years: even though rising alienation can account for a part of turnout decline, the group of alienated citizens is so much larger that a higher *proportion* of them is still voting than before. Model 5 adds all of these variables together, primarily to be able to tease out whether the stronger apathy effect is due to apathetic citizens being less likely to identify with political parties or because only that sub-group of apathetic citizens are less likely to vote: in short, that does not appear to be the case. The coefficient for the general apathy interaction term does shrink when including this sub-group of disengaged citizens and the interaction of this variable with year, but it is still substantial.

The substantive nature of these dynamics is presented in Figure 5.3, which graphs predictions for all four combinations of political interest and party identification (corresponding to Table 3.2 in section 3.2) from model 5, which takes into account the changing effects of these factors over time (as well as the control variables). Unsurprisingly, the group of citizens that is apathetic and does not identify with any political party ("disengaged") has always been least likely to vote and indeed, their propensity to vote has declined most sharply in the period. Nevertheless, apathetic citizens who identify with a political party have also become much less likely to vote over time, indicating that something other than party identification is (also) at play here. In this final model, the predicted turnout decline of interested party-identifiers is reduced to about 4.6 points (97.08-92.50%), down from about 14.5 (95.55%-81.02%) turnout decline in model 1. Therefore, even if alienation's negative effect on turnout has grown weaker over time, the rise in levels of alienation still accounts for a large part of the turnout decline of politically interested citizens.

Table 5.5 The role of apathy and alienation. Regression models for the effect of apathy and alienation on turnout and their interactions with year, controlling for country dummies. Source: National election study datasets.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Year	-0.027**	-0.019*	-0.020**	-0.024***	-0.017**
	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.007)	(0.006)
Apathy		33.570***			23.341***
		(6.538)			(6.034)
Apathy*Year		-0.017***			-0.012***
		(0.003)			(0.003)
Disengagement			21.262***	-1.699***	3.128
			(3.986)	(0.216)	(6.610)
Disengagement *Year			-0.011***		-0.002
			(0.002)		(0.003)
Alienation				-21.303***	-7.161
				(6.340)	(7.735)
Alienation*Year				0.010**	0.003
				(0.003)	(0.004)
Gender	-0.059	0.110	0.038	0.029	0.115
	(0.070)	(0.084)	(0.073)	(0.073)	(0.083)
Age	0.028***	0.028***	0.026***	0.025***	0.026***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Age^2	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Marital Status	0.461***	0.452***	0.446***	0.443***	0.441***
	(0.048)	(0.048)	(0.046)	(0.047)	(0.050)
Constant	55.277**	39.733*	41.833**	49.138***	34.860**
	(18.261)	(15.991)	(15.735)	(14.415)	(11.872)
RP3					
Level3: Country	0.208**	0.184*	0.356**	0.389**	0.368**
	(0.069)	(0.085)	(0.112)	(0.126)	(0.135)
RP2					
Level2: Country-year	0.172***	0.203***	0.196***	0.187***	0.204**
	(0.047)	(0.061)	(0.059)	(0.056)	(0.065)
Observations	73105	73105	73105	73105	73105

Standard errors in parentheses
$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

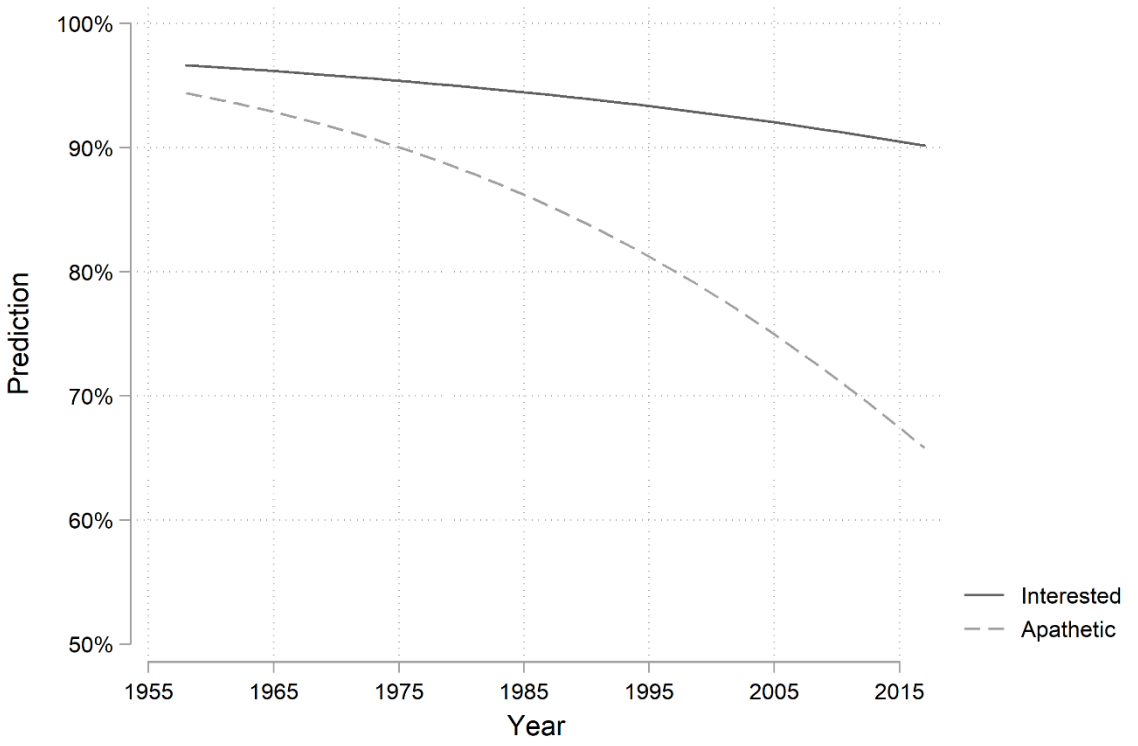


Figure 5.2 Voting by apathy over time. Predicted probabilities of turning out to vote from a multi-level regression model including variables for background controls, political apathy and the interaction between apathy and year, plotted by year between 1957-2016. Source: National election study datasets.

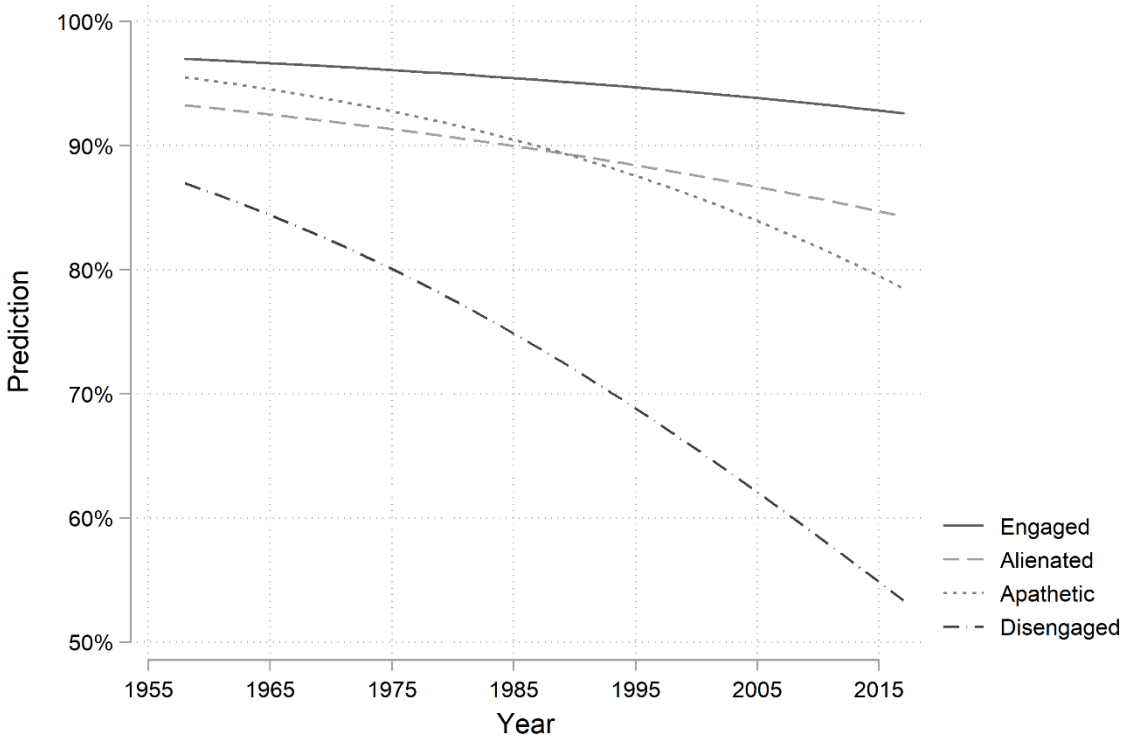


Figure 5.3 Voting by apathy and party identification over time. Predicted probabilities of turning out to vote from a multi-level regression model including variables for background controls, political apathy, alienation and their interactions with year, plotted by year between 1957-2016. Source: National election study datasets.

Following the exploration of the role of alternative measures of alienation thus far, I also explore if their effects have been changing over time by including each along with their interaction term in subsequent models in Table 5.6. Model 1 runs the regression for cases where values for the distrust scales are non-missing, for comparison with model 2 where the variable and its interaction with year are added, but the latter is insignificant. Models 3 and 4 do the same for the external efficacy scale and here, the interaction term is significantly positive, while the subsequent models for internal efficacy ("politics is too complicated") and satisfaction with democracy do not show significant interactions. As already noted in section 4.3, the scale for external efficacy is based on three measures that are not dispersed equally over time (and it is "only" based on 28,854 observations in three TDC), but its significant interaction with year is nonetheless an interesting finding, especially in the context of the important interaction of apathy with year discovered above. Figure 5.4 plots the predicted probabilities of voting from model 4 by levels of efficacy (where high efficacy = 1 on the combined scale, medium = 0.5 and low = 0) and shows a substantial gap, with highly efficacious citizens growing more likely to vote but citizens with low efficacy becoming much less likely to vote.

Table 5.6 Alternative measures and interactions. Alternative measures of alienation and their interaction with year in the TDC, compared in turn with models of turnout decline for respondents who are non-missing on each respective measure.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Year	-0.014**	-0.003	-0.019	-0.035***	-0.017	-0.018	-0.018***	-0.023+
	(0.005)	(0.010)	(0.018)	(0.006)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.003)	(0.012)
Distrust Scale		26.843						
		(19.167)						
Distrust *Year		-0.014						
		(0.010)						
External Efficacy				-104.847**				
				(32.021)				
External Efficacy *Year				0.053***				
				(0.016)				
Internal Efficacy						-8.682		
						(8.389)		
Internal Efficacy *Year						0.005		
						(0.004)		
SWD								-14.134
								(25.211)
SWD* Year								0.007
								(0.013)
Gender	0.052	0.054*	0.028	0.029	-0.018	0.013	-0.038	-0.031
	(0.038)	(0.026)	(0.051)	(0.046)	(0.098)	(0.105)	(0.088)	(0.085)
Age	0.031***	0.030***	0.027***	0.028***	0.025***	0.026***	0.032***	0.032***
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Age^2	-0.000*	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.001***	-0.001***	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Marital Status	0.551***	0.522***	0.417***	0.403***	0.496***	0.500***	0.448***	0.433***
	(0.038)	(0.039)	(0.098)	(0.091)	(0.064)	(0.063)	(0.061)	(0.060)
Constant	28.066**	6.399	38.255	70.125***	35.330+	36.547+	35.521***	45.737+
	(10.120)	(20.127)	(35.729)	(12.505)	(21.213)	(22.180)	(5.473)	(24.568)
RP3 Level3: Country	0.277***	0.122***	0.136*	0.045	0.000	0.000	0.214***	0.164***
	(0.003)	(0.001)	(0.068)	(0.036)	(.)	(.)	(0.057)	(0.039)
RP2 Level2: Country-year	0.032***	0.046***	0.114**	0.131*	0.184	0.183	0.135**	0.142***
	(0.004)	(0.012)	(0.037)	(0.062)	(0.114)	(0.115)	(0.044)	(0.041)
Obs.	26474	26474	28854	28854	32082	32082	50860	50860

Standard errors in parentheses
+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

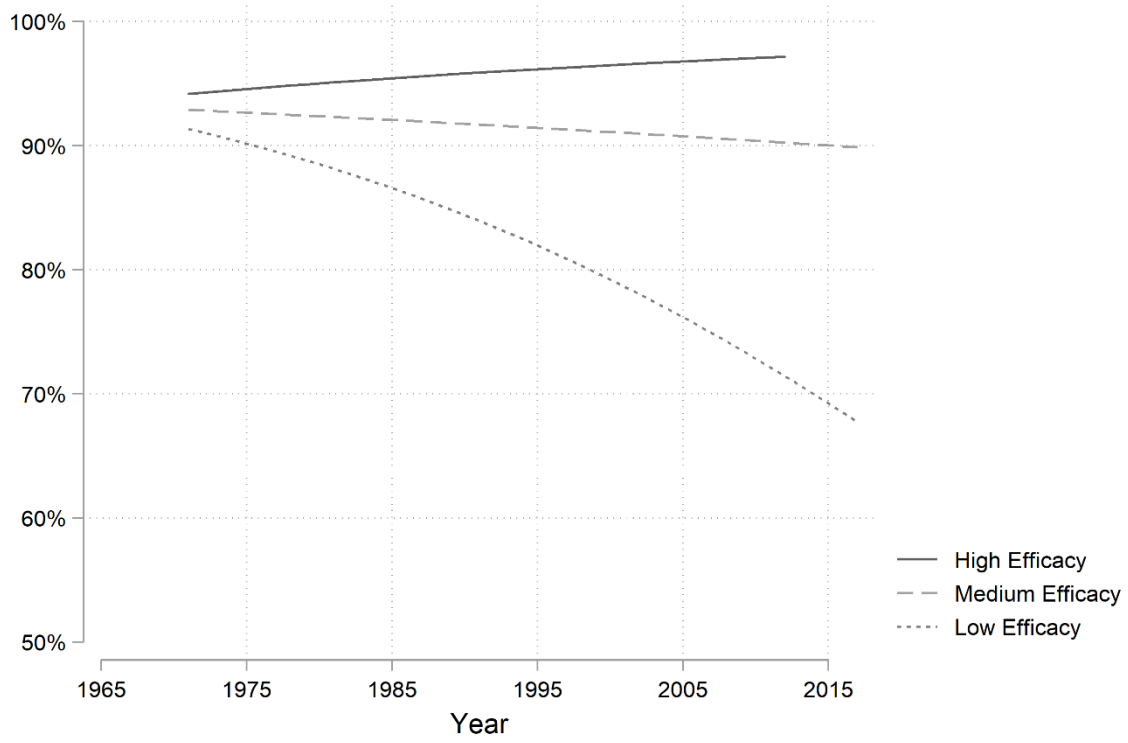


Figure 5.4 Voting by efficacy over time. Predicted probabilities of turning out to vote from a multi-level regression model including variables for background controls, a scale measuring external efficacy and its interaction with year, between 1965-2016. Source: National election study datasets.

These results, combined with indications in the previous chapter that declining political trust of apathetic citizens may account for turnout decline at least in the UK and Norway, raise the interesting question of whether these dynamics are related to the substantial strengthening of the effect of apathy on turnout and its role in turnout decline, discovered in this chapter. In other words, it may be that apathetic citizens today are less inclined to vote because they are less trusting of politicians and/or that their faith in the potential of politics to change is more important for their voting decision than before. Table 5.7 explores these possibilities by first regressing turnout on apathy, year and their interaction on only the cases where each respective scale is non-missing and then adding those scales to see if they affect the coefficient for the apathy interaction. Model 2 shows that adding the distrust scale appears to account for a small part of this interaction but model 4 shows that the same hardly applies for external efficacy and its apparently strengthening effect on turnout. In other words, it appears that rising political distrust of apathetic citizens is part of the reason that they are less likely to vote than before, but that this does not tell the whole story.

Table 5.7 The role of efficacy, distrust and the apathy interaction. Exploring the relationship between a strengthening effect of apathy and efficacy on turnout and rising political distrust in the TDC. Multi-level regression models on turnout with apathy and its interaction with year, adding the political distrust scale and external efficacy scale in turn.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Year	-0.007	-0.005	-0.008	-0.025*
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.023)	(0.012)
Apathy	27.941***	22.501***	44.369**	42.193***
	(2.563)	(3.554)	(15.003)	(4.617)
Apathy*Year	-0.015***	-0.012***	-0.023**	-0.022***
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.008)	(0.002)
Distrust Scale		-0.584***		
		(0.040)		
External Efficacy				-79.990*
				(36.223)
Apathy*Efficacy				-9.067
				(27.303)
External Efficacy*Year				0.041*
				(0.018)
Efficacy*Apathy *Year				0.005
				(0.014)
Gender	0.224***	0.218***	0.180*	0.166*
	(0.042)	(0.032)	(0.072)	(0.066)
Age	0.029***	0.028***	0.027***	0.028***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Age^2	-0.000*	-0.000**	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Marital Status	0.530***	0.513***	0.424***	0.413***
	(0.059)	(0.058)	(0.107)	(0.100)
Constant	13.778	10.743	15.823	51.214*
	(9.325)	(11.884)	(46.150)	(23.185)
RP3				
Level3: Country	0.282***	0.172***	0.215*	0.080
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.102)	(0.051)
RP2				
Level2: Country-year	0.040**	0.058**	0.087*	0.097*
	(0.013)	(0.018)	(0.038)	(0.050)
Observations	26432	26432	26065	26065

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Finally, I provide a different test of the dynamics of turnout decline discovered so far in this chapter, by running multi-level regression models on the entire dataset (here, I add a control at the country-level for Belgium's compulsory voting) where I interact the trend variable on TDC status (a dummy variable for whether a country is one of the TDC) and then add each of the main variables and their interaction with TDC in turn, to see if differences in these can account for (part of) the more negative trend of turnout in these countries. Model 1 in Table 5.8 confirms that turnout has declined significantly more in the TDC than the other countries in the dataset, while model 2 suggests that a more modest decline of general political apathy in these countries is not responsible for that. However, model 3 suggests that a rise in the proportion of citizens who are "disengaged" (both apathetic *and* do not identify with any political party) accounts for part of the more negative trend of turnout decline in the TDC.

Model 4 suggests that differences in alienation levels (i.e. *interested* citizens who do not identify with any political party) do not seem to explain these differences in turnout trends but model 5 suggests that the strengthening negative effect of apathy on turnout explains a part of those differences. Indeed, the negative coefficient for the three-way interaction between apathy, year and TDC status indicates that the effect of apathy on turnout may have been strengthening more in the TDC, although this is only significant at the 10% level here (curiously, this term becomes significant at the 5% level when dropping the background controls and at the 0,1% level when the sampling weight is not used). Finally, model 6 suggests that for those countries where measures of political distrust are available, this has been rising significantly more in the TDC (Norway and the UK) than in the other countries (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden) and that this accounts for a large part of turnout decline, indeed making the negative coefficient for the interaction of TDC and year insignificant. Taken together, these models support the findings of this chapter so far, that alienation has indeed been rising and apathy declining across the region but that the main root of turnout decline appears to be that those citizens who are apathetic are less likely to vote than before, partly because they are less likely to identify with political parties and partly because they have lower levels of political trust.

Table 5.8 Turnout decline in the combined dataset. Multi-level regression models of reported turnout in 11 countries on year, including various explanations for turnout decline in turn and interacted by TDC status.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Year	0.003	-0.003	-0.003	-0.003	0.002	-0.001
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.006)
TDC	42.995***	42.231**	33.278**	41.688**	34.222***	17.247
	(10.790)	(12.991)	(12.366)	(14.748)	(9.572)	(16.521)
TDC*Year	-0.022***	-0.021**	-0.017**	-0.021**	-0.017***	-0.009
	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.005)	(0.008)
Apathy		-1.232***			14.965*	
		(0.081)			(6.989)	
TDC*Apathy		0.081			15.171+	
		(0.148)			(8.948)	
Disengagement			-1.364***			
			(0.088)			
TDC *Disengagement			-0.125			
			(0.171)			
Apathy*Year					-0.008*	
					(0.004)	
TDC*Apathy *Year					-0.008+	
					(0.004)	
Alienation				0.298***		
				(0.055)		
TDC*Alienation				-0.226		
				(0.157)		
Distrust Scale						-1.038***
						(0.081)
TDC*Distrust						0.281**
						(0.090)
Gender	-0.037	0.131**	0.084+	-0.019	0.128**	0.056*
	(0.036)	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.040)	(0.043)	(0.028)
Age	0.022***	0.022***	0.020***	0.024***	0.022***	0.021***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Age^2	-0.001***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.001***	-0.000***	-0.000**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)

Marital Status	0.434***	0.456***	0.454***	0.466***	0.455***	0.497***
	(0.048)	(0.045)	(0.046)	(0.048)	(0.045)	(0.035)
Compulsory voting	0.956***	1.043***	1.030***	0.854***	1.056***	1.003***
	(0.190)	(0.202)	(0.212)	(0.193)	(0.206)	(0.168)
Constant	-4.835	7.400	8.222	6.674	-2.290	4.478
	(5.855)	(6.446)	(5.578)	(7.615)	(4.432)	(12.661)
RP3						
Level3: Country	0.160**	0.163***	0.222***	0.162***	0.163***	0.127*
	(0.053)	(0.044)	(0.062)	(0.048)	(0.044)	(0.062)
RP2						
Level2: Country-year	0.091***	0.085***	0.084***	0.095***	0.085***	0.069***
	(0.010)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.016)
Observations	205725	174436	156470	156470	174436	74967

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

5.4 Discussion

In this chapter I have presented the central analysis of this study: of the role of apathy and alienation in turnout decline in Western Europe. The foundations for this were laid in Chapter 4, where I presented trends in the central variables compared between the group of four "turnout decline countries" (TDC) and the rest of the countries in the dataset. This comparison interestingly suggested that while apathy has been declining in both groups of countries, that trend is much less pronounced in the TDC than in the other countries. Similarly, the proportion of "disengaged" citizens has been rising slightly in the TDC while it has been stable in the rest of the region, and the proportion of alienated citizens has risen less dramatically in the TDC (although this last difference was not statistically significant). Even more strikingly, political trust appeared to have been declining significantly in the TDC, while it has been *rising* in the rest of the region (this finding comes with the caveats that those measures differ more between country-years and are only available in two of the four TDC (Norway and the United Kingdom)).

In this chapter, I proceeded on that foundation to conduct statistical models of turnout decline in the TDC. These models suggest that, unsurprisingly given its decline, political apathy cannot account for turnout decline there, *in contrast to the expectation of hypothesis 3*. However, declining overall party identification does appear to account for part of turnout decline, but most of this is attributable to "disengaged", rather than alienated, citizens. The predicted probabilities of respondents turning out to vote from the multi-level regression models decline by about 14.5 percentage points between 1958-2017 in the TDC when only including the trend variable (year) and

the demographic controls, excluding disengaged citizens from those predictions shrunk that decline to about 9.7 percentage points but excluding alienated citizens as well only shrunk it further to 8.7 points. Therefore, rising alienation as thus defined can account for a small part of turnout decline but much more of it can be attributed to citizens who are both apathetic *and* do not identify with any political party, so *hypothesis 4 finds only very limited support here*.

The role of disengaged citizens in turnout decline in the TDC might be linked to the findings of the next section of this chapter, where I discovered that the negative "effect" of political apathy on turnout has strengthened substantially over time in the TDC: apathetic citizens today are for some reason much less likely to vote than apathetic citizens in the past. Illustrating this, the predicted probabilities of non-apathetic citizens voting declines by about 6.5 percentage points (96.64-90.16) in the period but the probability of apathetic citizens voting declines by almost 29 points (94.41-65.81)! In other words, even if the group of apathetic citizens is a smaller part of the electorate today than before in the TDC, this phenomenon of a strengthening negative effect of apathy on turnout appears to explain a large part of the decline of overall voter turnout, *providing strong support for hypothesis 5*. On the other hand, the negative effects of political alienation and disengagement on turnout have not strengthened significantly over time (the effect of alienation has indeed become significantly less negative), *rejecting hypothesis 6*.

So why are apathetic citizens less likely to vote today than before? There are numerous potential explanations for this and perhaps the most prominent of these was discussed in section 1.6 and formed the rationale for hypothesis 4: that citizens today are less likely to vote because they are less likely to consider it to be a civic duty, presumably meaning that their other attitudes, such as political interest, would be more likely to influence their decision on whether to vote or not (Blais, Gidengil and Nevitte, 2004; Wass, 2007; Blais and Achen, 2010; Blais and Rubenson, 2013). This possibility cannot be directly tested with the available data but might provide part of the explanation, while similar factors such as the force of habit, parental influence, social pressure, social class identification and trade union membership might all be related to those dynamics as well.

Additional analysis in this chapter provides some hints as to the nature of this development: it appears that where those measures are available, rising political distrust in the TDC and a strengthening effect of external political efficacy each account for a part of turnout decline and there are indications that the former is related to the strengthening apathy effect, which weakens (but is still relatively strong) when accounting for rising distrust. This indicates that at least part of the reason that apathetic citizens are voting less today than before is that they are also less trusting of

politicians, political parties and parliaments. While the effect still persists, this raises the possibility that if more diverse measures of their attitudes towards politics and politicians were available over time in the TDC, they might account for these developments more fully. In other words, perhaps apathetic citizens today are more "fundamentally" or deeply disaffected by politics than apathetic citizens were before and therefore less likely to vote, even if general interest in political affairs has grown in the electorate. This would suggest a type of polarization of political engagement within the electorate, which could explain turnout decline and perhaps other developments such as the rise of social movements and populist political parties (Saunders *et al.*, 2012; Mudde, 2013; Katsanidou and Eder, 2015; Rooduijn, 2015).

These questions suggest interesting avenues for further research if more of these measures are available in different longitudinal survey datasets in Western Europe, or in other established democracies where the effect of apathy on turnout may also have strengthened. In the next and final analytical chapter, I explore these different possibilities indirectly to shed further light on these dynamics as well as on the role of generation and education more generally in turnout decline. In other words, is turnout decline driven by younger generations of citizens voting less and/or is it driven by citizens with lower levels of education voting less than those with higher education? Are apathetic citizens today less likely to vote than before because they are more or less educated and is this a generational phenomenon?

6 Generations and Education

In previous chapters, we have discovered that political apathy appears to have been declining in most of the 11 Western European countries analysed in this study, and stable in others, while the proportion of citizens who are politically interested but do not identify with any political party has grown drastically across the region. However, most of the latter group is still voting, although controlling for this does account for some of the turnout decline of interested citizens observed between 1958-2017. What seems to explain a much larger part of turnout decline, in the four countries where that trend is reflected in the NES data, is that those citizens who are apathetic are much less likely to vote today than apathetic citizens were in the past. Furthermore, these apathetic citizens seem to be less likely to identify with political parties in the turnout decline countries (TDC) and they also seem to have higher levels of political distrust, and both of these trends appear to be part of the explanation for why they are voting less than apathetic citizens in the past. In this chapter, I will look at the role of two other important factors in these dynamics: those of citizens' birth cohort membership (generation) and their level of education.

6.1 Generations of Turnout Decline

Starting with the generational dynamics of turnout decline, apathy and alienation in Western Europe, hypothesis 7 posits that a lower propensity of younger generations of citizens to vote could account for the turnout decline observed in the four TDC countries in this study. As discussed in section 3.3, I begin the APC analysis in this chapter at the vantage point provided by prior studies, which yields the following birth cohort categorization, based on the years in which respondents experienced a majority of their formative years (Fox, 2015; Grasso, 2016):

1) *Pre-WWII generation:* Born before 1926
2) *Post-WWII generation:* Born between 1926-1945
3) *60s and 70s generation:* Born between 1946-1957
4) *80s generation:* Born between 1958-1968
5) *90s generation:* Born between 1969-1981
6) *Millennial generation:* Born after 1981

As this classification has been used and supported in prior longitudinal research on political participation in Western Europe, it serves as the vantage point for the APC analysis in this study. However, as noted in section 3.3, disentangling the simultaneous effects of age, period and cohort in

a longitudinal dataset is a difficult undertaking and can depend on the nature of a particular dataset. Since the variable for birth cohort membership is based on respondents' birth year, which in turn is a direct product of the other two terms in an APC analysis (age and year), the correlation – or multicollinearity – between the three terms can be too high to reliably separate the independent effects of each in statistical analysis. This collinearity can be different between different longitudinal datasets and to test for this issue in the combined dataset used here, I start by running collinearity diagnostics of the baseline variables to be used in the APC analysis: reported turnout, year, age, birth cohort membership, gender and marital status.

This collinearity analysis results in a VIF value of 10.98 and a tolerance value of 0.09. Since the traditional threshold for acceptable collinearity is that it should be no higher than 10 (and some place that threshold lower) (Anderson and Goodyear-Grant, 2008; Persson, Wass and Oscarsson, 2013; Dassonneville, 2015a), this suggests a problematic level of collinearity which might yield redundant coefficients in APC analysis. Collapsing these cohort groups into fewer groups should limit the correlation of the cohort variable with age (and therefore the overall collinearity in the models) but there are no obvious or entirely objective ways to decide which of the groups to collapse. As the initial classification was based on the findings of previous studies that are informed by developed theory about the different socialization periods through which these birth cohorts supposedly came of age (Fox, 2015; Grasso, 2016; Grasso *et al.*, 2018, no date), I will proceed on those grounds and examine the explanatory value of several different combinations of these groups for turnout.

Table 6.1 presents the results of multi-level logistics regression models of turnout in the TDC on the background variables and different cohort classification variables in turn. All of these models partly support the basic expectation of hypothesis 7 – that lower turnout levels of younger birth cohorts account for part of the overall trend of turnout decline: even if that trend is still significant, it is substantially smaller than in earlier models and most of the coefficients for younger cohorts are significant and negative. All of the alternative cohort classifications, presented in models 2-6, also reduce the VIF value of collinearity to acceptable levels of 4.16-4.79 (depending on the model), indicating that all of them appear to be able to disentangle cohort effects from life-cycle and period effects.

To determine which of the alternative cohort classifications presented in 6.1 best reflects the phenomenon of generational differences in turnout, I employ two statistical methods for model fitness comparison: post-estimation Wald tests and the Bayesian Deviance Information Criterion (DIC). The first of these tests for whether the inclusion of each coefficient in each model (i.e. each

particular cohort group) appears to improve the overall fit of the model for predicting turnout and it can also be used to test for the equality of the different coefficients, i.e. if there appears to be a significant difference in the estimated effects of subsequent cohort groups. Table 6.2 presents the results of these Wald tests for the first two models in Table 6.1. The tests for the initial cohort classification suggest that including the Post-WWII generation does not improve the fitness of the model and the insignificance of the coefficient for this cohort group in model 1 in Table 6.1 suggests the same. The Wald tests in Table 6.2 also suggest that while the other coefficients do appear to be different and significantly improve the fitness of model 2, this difference is strongest between the 80s generation and the 60s-70s generation (reflected in the size of the chi^2 values); the same is indicated by the size and significance of the coefficients of these different groups in the models in Table 6.1.

These differences in the Wald tests and coefficient sizes in the 6 and 5 cohort classifications led me to explore different combinations of 3 and 4 cohort classifications to see which of them lead to better models of generational differences in turnout. Here I turn to the second method of model fitness comparison: the Bayesian Deviance Information Criterion (DIC). Because this and other conventional model fitness statistics are not available from the quasi-likelihood regression models used for most of the analysis in this study, the models in Table 6.1 were fit using the Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) method, which is a statistically sophisticated method for multi-level regression analysis of binary outcomes and also offers the potential to compare model fitness between different models, via the DIC statistic (Browne, 2009). Lower values of the DIC indicate better model fitness so comparing this value between models 1-6 supports the impression from the Wald statistic, that combining the oldest two cohorts and the youngest three cohorts (the 80s generation, 90s generation and millennial generation) provides the best model fitness; that this cohort classification best captures generational differences in turnout (at least of the alternatives explored here).

Table 6.1 Age-Period-Cohort (APC) analysis of voter turnout in the TDC using six different variations of birth cohort classification. These multi-level logistics regression models are run using the Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) method, to provide statistical comparison of model fitness.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Year	-0.016***	-0.016***	-0.016***	-0.016***	-0.022***	-0.016***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Age	0.021***	0.019***	0.018***	0.020***	0.025***	0.020***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Age^2	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Gender	-0.053*	-0.059**	-0.057**	-0.050*	-0.062**	-0.053*
	(0.022)	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.023)
Marital Status	0.455***	0.455***	0.456***	0.458***	0.460***	0.455***
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.025)	(0.024)
Constant	32.913***	33.578***	33.058***	33.847***	44.669***	33.459***
	(0.176)	(0.144)	(0.177)	(0.418)	(0.283)	(0.186)
Post-WWII	0.029					
	(0.050)					
60s-70s	-0.095					
	(0.067)					
80s	-0.400***					
	(0.079)					
90s	-0.359***					
	(0.094)					
Millennials	-0.409***					
	(0.119)					
60s-70s		-0.146**				
		(0.050)				
80s		-0.463***				
		(0.067)				
90s		-0.439***				
		(0.088)				
Millennial		-0.504***				
		(0.120)				
60s-70s			-0.168***			
			(0.042)			

80s/90s			-0.491***			
			(0.052)			
Millennials			-0.564***			
			(0.084)			
60s-70s				-0.127**		
				(0.040)		
80s				-0.436***		
				(0.048)		
90s & Millennials				-0.414***		
				(0.063)		
60s/80s					-0.161***	
					(0.043)	
90s & Millennials					-0.199**	
					(0.066)	
60s-70s						-0.137***
						(0.041)
80s/90s/ Millennial						-0.444***
						(0.052)
RP3						
Level3:	0.383	0.586	0.412	0.462	0.461	1.178
Country	(0.808)	(1.079)	(0.877)	(0.817)	(1.190)	(1.786)
RP2						
Level2:	0.186***	0.183***	0.178***	0.185**	0.187***	0.183***
Country-year	(0.053)	(0.051)	(0.048)	(0.056)	(0.054)	(0.054)
Observations	73105	73105	73105	73105	73105	73105
DIC statistic	53124.244	53122.613	53121.207	53122.538	53185.941	53120.911

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 6.2 Wald tests of the inclusion of different cohort groups, in regression models of turnout, and their equivalence.

6 cohorts	**Model improvement**		**Same as older cohort?**	
Wald test	Chi^2	Prob>	Chi^2	Prob>
Post-WWII	0.32	0.57	N/A[28]	N/A
60s-70s	2.02	0.16	8.09	0.00
80s	25.88	0.00	64.97	0.00
90s	14.48	0.00	1.00	0.32
Millennial	11.89	0.00	0.79	0.37

5 cohorts	**Model improvement**		**Same as older cohort?**	
Wald test	Chi^2	Prob>	Chi^2	Prob>
60s-70s	8.68	0.00	N/A	N/A
80s	47.46	0.00	60.79	0.00
90s	25.17	0.00	0.33	0.56
Millennial	17.68	0.00	1.27	0.26

Based on these findings, the rest of the APC analysis and the descriptive graphs in this chapter will be based on this trifold cohort classification. Of course, what we should call these three categories of birth cohorts is a subjective matter, but since "Pre/Post-WWII", "60s-70s" and "80s, 90s and Millennial" is rather unwieldy terminology, some of the prior literature can provide foundations for a more parsimonious one. First, while the term is usually cited in the recent academic literature to object to it, the first part of the 20th century and until the 1960s is sometimes referred to as the "Golden Age" of politics, where citizens supposedly had higher levels of political participation, trust and general civic virtue (Bennett, 2001; J., 2002; Norris, 2002, 2011; Clarke *et al.*, 2018). Second, the generation of citizens that came of age in the 60s and 70s has been referred to as the "protest generation", referencing the growth of social movements and protests in many Western countries in these decades (Grasso *et al.*, no date; Jennings, 1987; Grasso, 2016). Third, as discussed in detail in section 1.4, a rich body of research has argued that the generations of citizens coming of age in the 1980s and especially after that are distinguished by their "post-material" values in post-modern times (Inglehart, 1997; Norris, 2002; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Dalton, 2009; Grasso, 2016). On this basis, in the rest of this thesis I will refer to these three (groups of) birth cohorts as the "Golden Age", "Protest" and "Post-Material" generations, respectively.

[28] The oldest cohort is the reference group in the regression models and therefore they do not have a coefficient to compare with. The significance level of this coefficient in the model gives essentially the same information, i.e. if there is a significant difference between the effects of these two cohort groups.

Proceeding to descriptive trends in turnout and political attitudes by these three generations, as before I split these by two groups of countries for better visual inspection: presenting the five Nordic countries in the first graph and then the six other countries in the dataset in the next one. Figure 6.1 indicates that there seem to be some cohort differences in turnout in Finland and Norway regardless of period and age, while these differences are minimal or not apparent in the other Nordic countries. This is noteworthy because Norway is one of our TDC and official figures for turnout, that go further back in time, show that turnout has also been declining in Finland in recent decades, even if this is not reflected in the available NES data. Figure 6.2 indicates cohort differences in turnout in France and the United Kingdom but much less so in the other countries: in these two TDC, younger generations of citizens appear to be turning out less than older generations, although this does not appear to be as clearly the case in Germany (the remaining TDC).

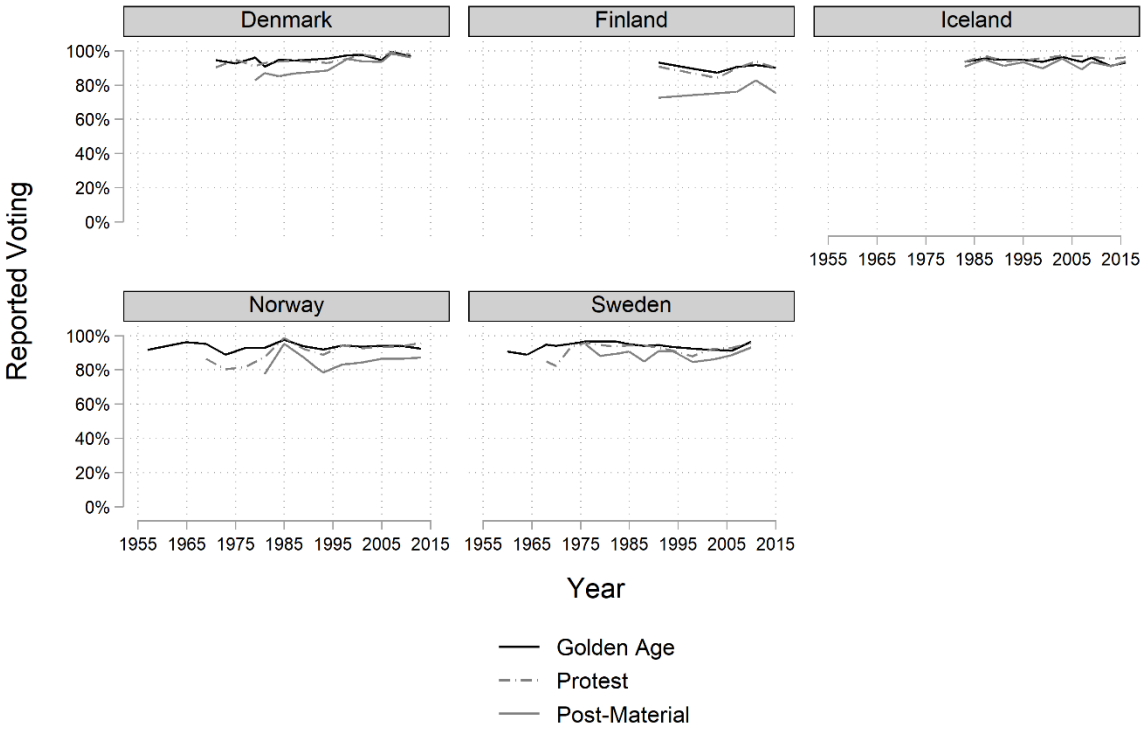


Figure 6.1 Average reported turnout by birth cohort and year in the five Nordic countries from 1956-2017.

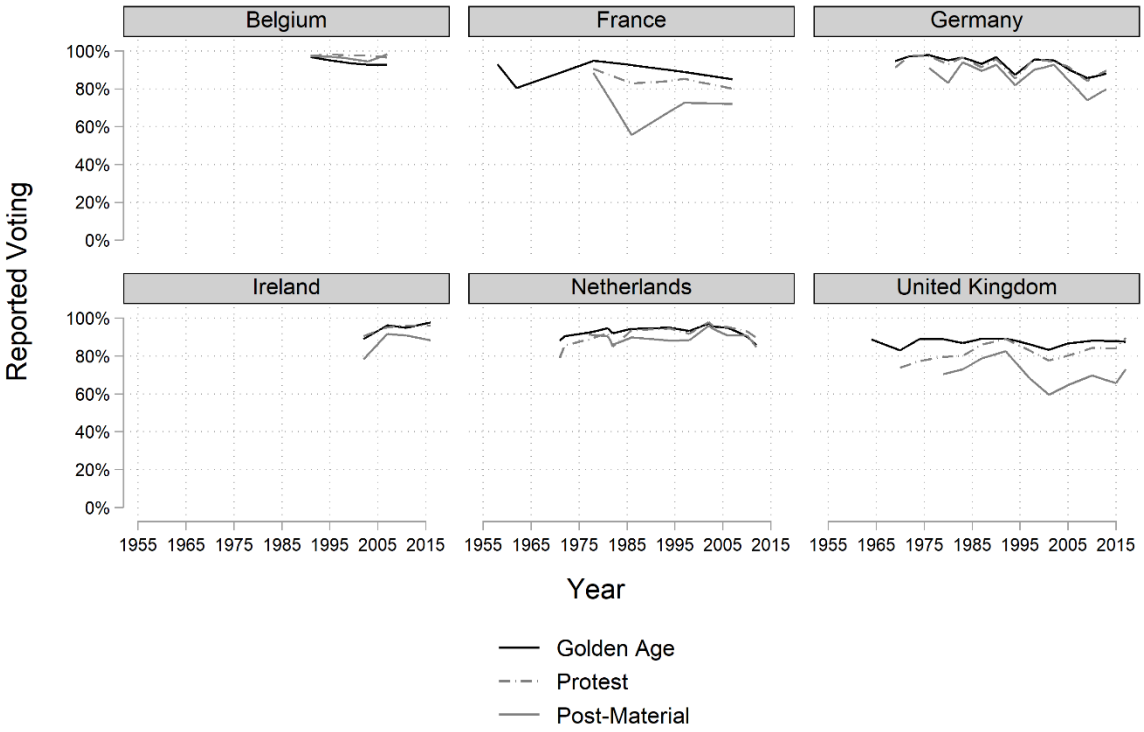


Figure 6.2 Average reported turnout by birth cohort and year in six Western European countries from 1956-2017.

Turning to political apathy, Figure 6.3 indicates that later generations are more apathetic in Norway and there are hints of these differences in Sweden, Iceland and Finland but those are not large and there appear to be almost no cohort differences in Denmark (which is the one country in this dataset that has actually seen an increase in reported turnout in the period). Figure 6.4 shows indications of apathy being more widespread among the youngest generations in the United Kingdom and perhaps France and Germany (all TDC countries), but these differences are small and not apparent in the other countries. Turning to the proportion of respondents who are both apathetic *and* do not identify with any political party, Figure 6.5 suggests that younger cohorts may indeed be more likely to fall in this category in all of the Nordic countries except possibly Iceland in recent years. Curiously, Figure 6.6 does not suggest that this is the case in any of the other countries, with the possible exception of the United Kingdom. Finally, the trends in political alienation by cohort in Figure 6.7 and Figure 6.8 show clear cohort differences in most of the Nordic countries and, especially, the Netherlands (with younger generations being more alienated there) but these differences are interestingly not seen in the three TDC of Germany, France and the United Kingdom.

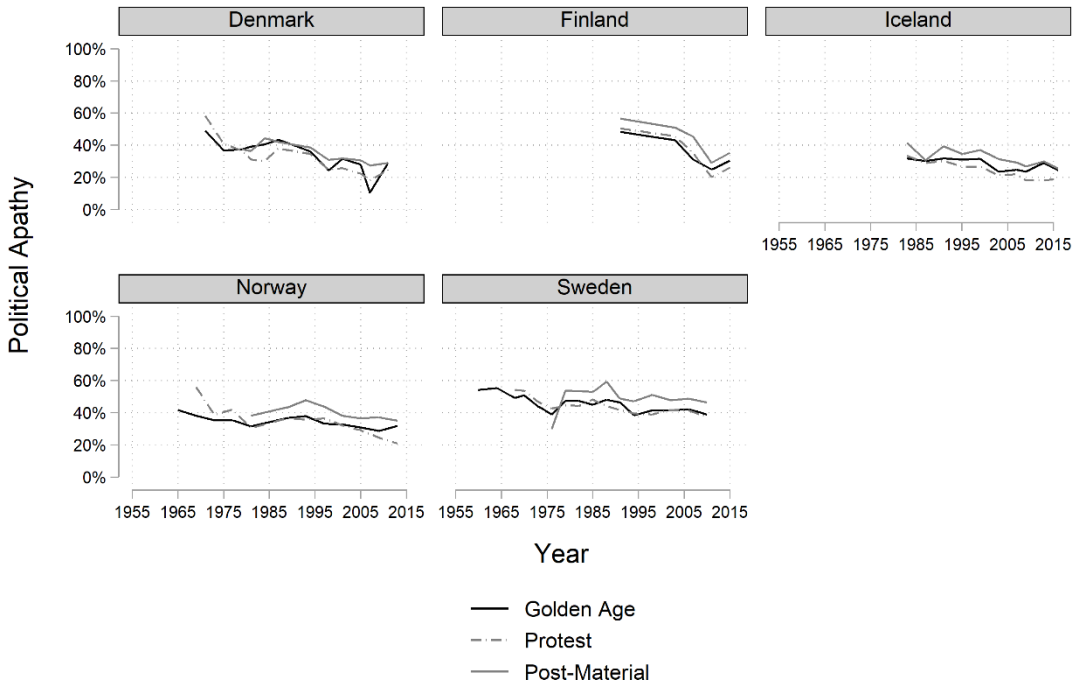


Figure 6.3 Average political apathy by birth cohort and year in the five Nordic countries from 1956-2017.

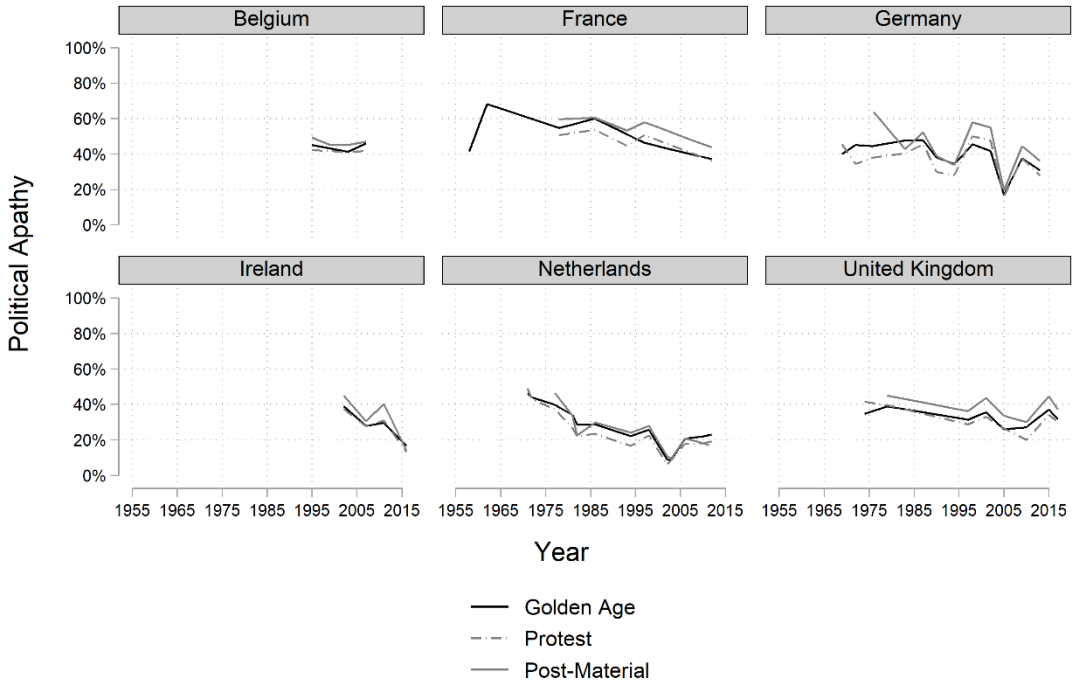


Figure 6.4 Average political apathy by birth cohort and year in six Western European countries from 1956-2017.

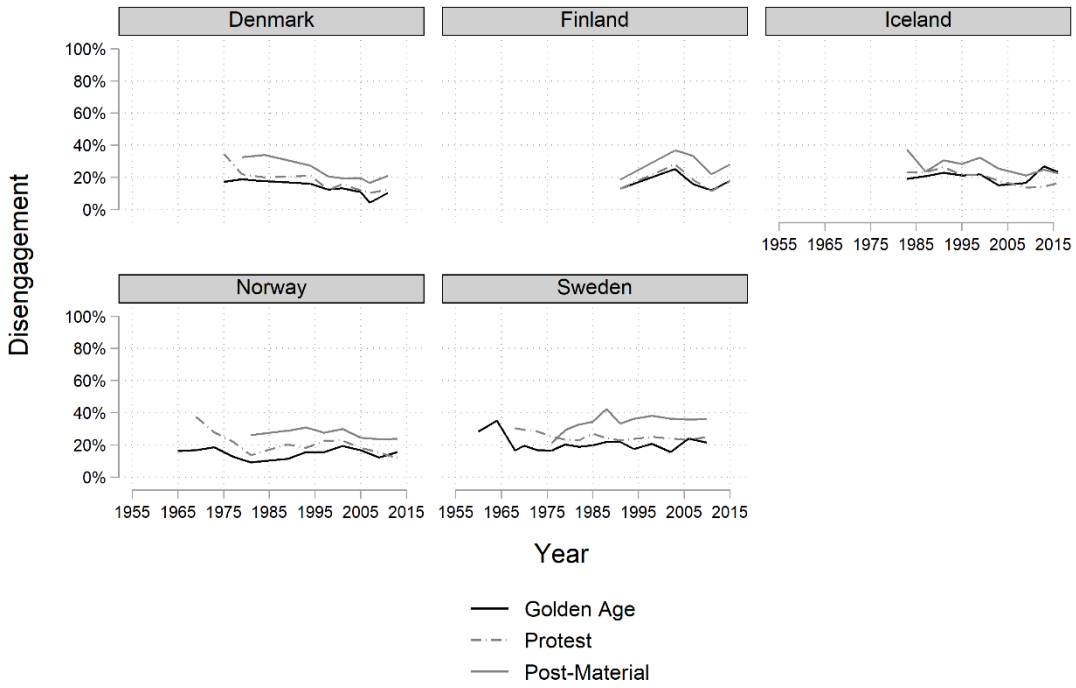


Figure 6.5 Average "disengagement" by birth cohort and year in the five Nordic countries from 1956-2017.

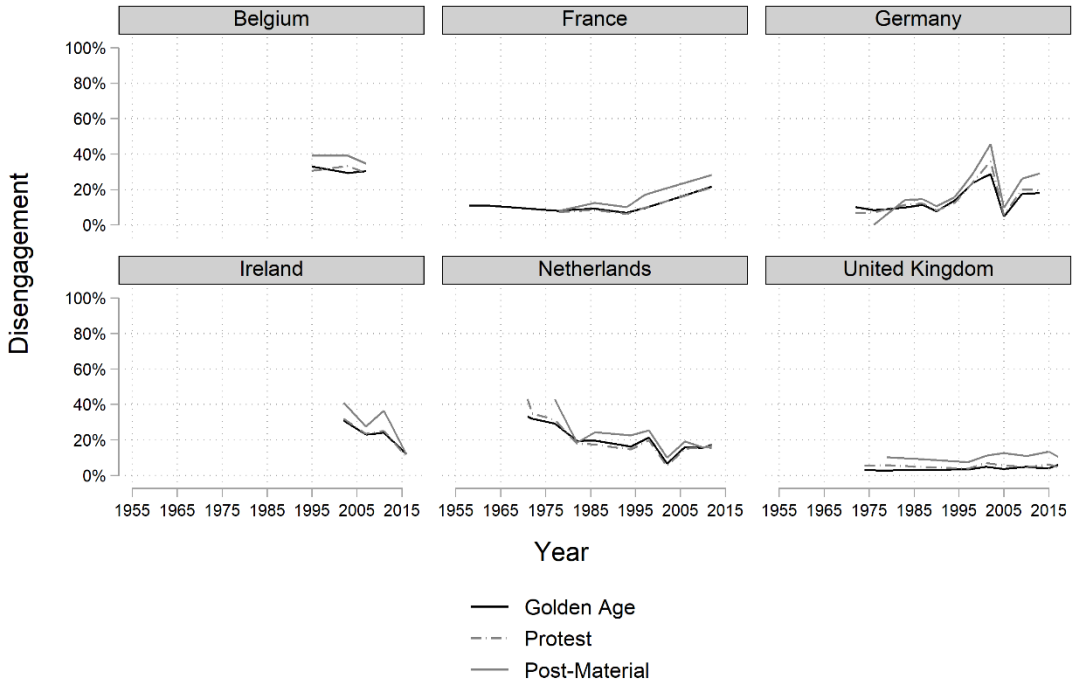


Figure 6.6 Average "disengagement" by birth cohort and year in six Western European countries from 1956-2017.

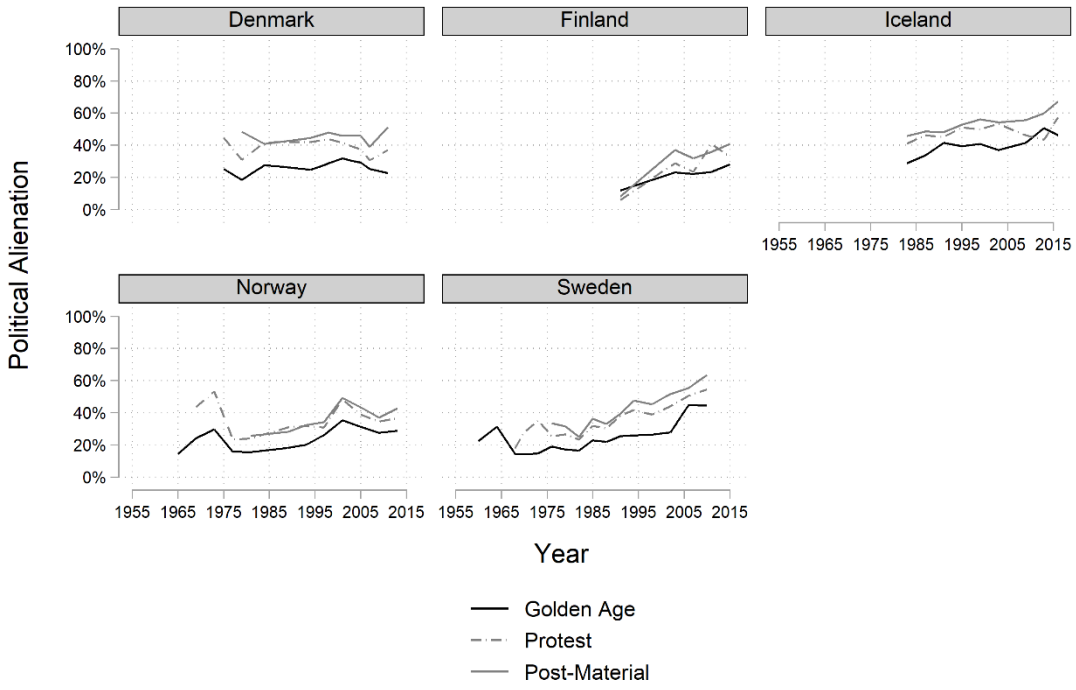


Figure 6.7 Average political alienation by birth cohort and year in the five Nordic countries from 1956-2017.

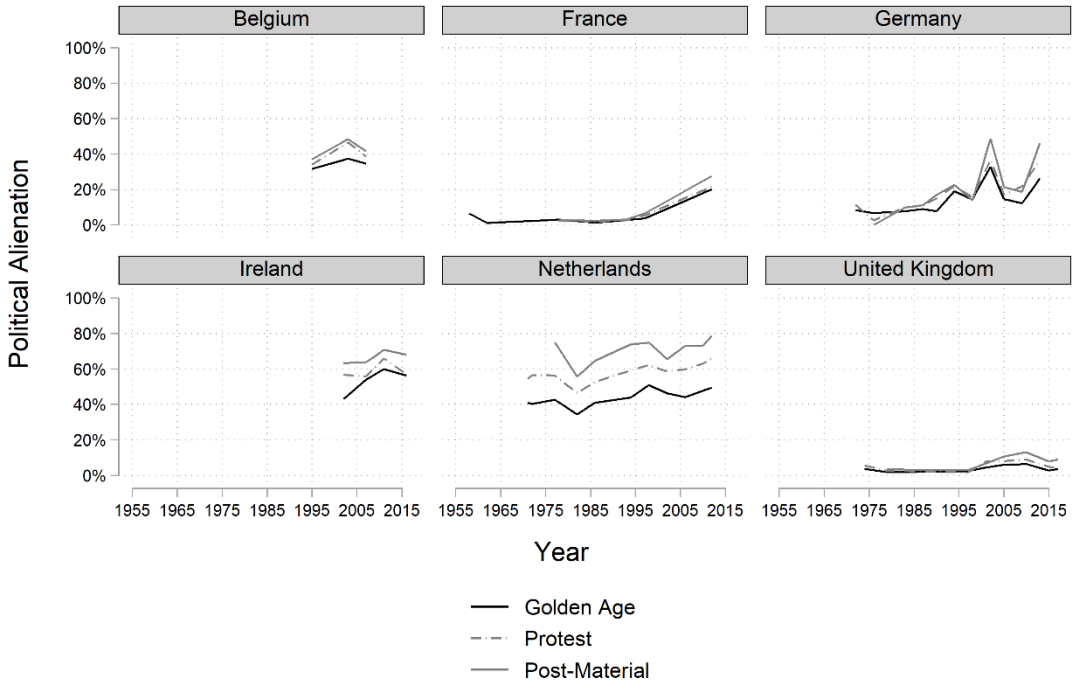


Figure 6.8 Average political alienation by birth cohort and year in six Western European countries from 1956-2017.

Turning to statistical analyses of these cohort trends when separated from the effects of life-cycle (age) and period (year), Table 6.3 presents these APC analyses with regression models on each variable in turn in the entire dataset. These models include terms for birth cohort membership and age (and a squared age term) along with the other background variables in multi-level regression models, interacting cohort membership by TDC status to see if these trends are significantly different between the two groups of countries. Model 1 suggests that there are no significant cohort differences in voter turnout across the region but that on the other hand, the youngest generations are significantly less likely to vote than older generations in the TDC, controlling for the overall differences in turnout trends between these two groups of countries. These differences are highly significant and appear substantive, so in Figure 6.9 I plot the predicted probabilities of turnout by cohort, separated by these two groups of countries. There, the protest generation is slightly less likely to vote than the "golden age" generation, when controlling for age and period effects, but this difference is much larger for the post-material generations, who are much less likely to vote than even the protest generation. On the other hand, practically no cohort differences are apparent in the other group of countries. The other models in Table 6.3 show few differences, except that the protest generation appears significantly more alienated than the other generations and also (and perhaps relatedly) slightly less apathetic.

Table 6.3 APC analysis of trends in the combined dataset. Multi-level logistics regression models on reported turnout, apathy and different measures of alienation by birth cohort, age, age2 and year.

	(1) Turnout	(2) Apathy	(3) Disengagement	(4) Alienation	(5) Distrust
Year	0.004	-0.022***	-0.006	0.027***	-0.003
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.002)	(0.003)
TDC	28.964*	-29.515**	-35.799+	8.071	-17.608*
	(12.762)	(9.617)	(19.359)	(14.216)	(7.808)
TDC*Year	-0.015*	0.015**	0.018+	-0.005	0.009*
	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.004)
Protest	0.136	-0.082*	-0.047	0.111***	-0.024
	(0.096)	(0.037)	(0.042)	(0.028)	(0.020)
Post-Material	0.023	0.100	0.067	0.086	-0.042
	(0.160)	(0.067)	(0.075)	(0.056)	(0.027)
TDC*Protest	-0.323***	0.017	0.046	-0.060	0.014
	(0.097)	(0.057)	(0.105)	(0.072)	(0.045)
TDC*Post-Material	-0.512**	0.084	0.132	-0.132	0.033
	(0.176)	(0.079)	(0.137)	(0.090)	(0.052)
Age	0.015***	-0.003	-0.013***	-0.009***	-0.001
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.001)
Age	-0.001***	0.000***	0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Gender	-0.038	0.592***	0.468***	-0.220***	0.020*
	(0.037)	(0.039)	(0.040)	(0.027)	(0.010)
Marital Status	0.431***	-0.097*	-0.103**	-0.021	-0.041***
	(0.050)	(0.040)	(0.037)	(0.026)	(0.007)
Compulsory voting	0.868***	0.563***	0.630***	-0.442*	0.214***
	(0.191)	(0.140)	(0.089)	(0.177)	(0.037)
Constant	-6.261	43.037***	10.655	-53.569***	7.366
	(8.533)	(9.437)	(12.467)	(3.662)	(5.993)
RP3					
Level3: Country	0.158*	0.064*	0.080+	0.319*	0.010*
	(0.069)	(0.025)	(0.045)	(0.128)	(0.005)
RP2					
Level2: Country-year	0.103***	0.064***	0.138**	0.086*	0.014***
	(0.011)	(0.017)	(0.051)	(0.036)	(0.002)
Observations	205767	183002	162321	162321	77007

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

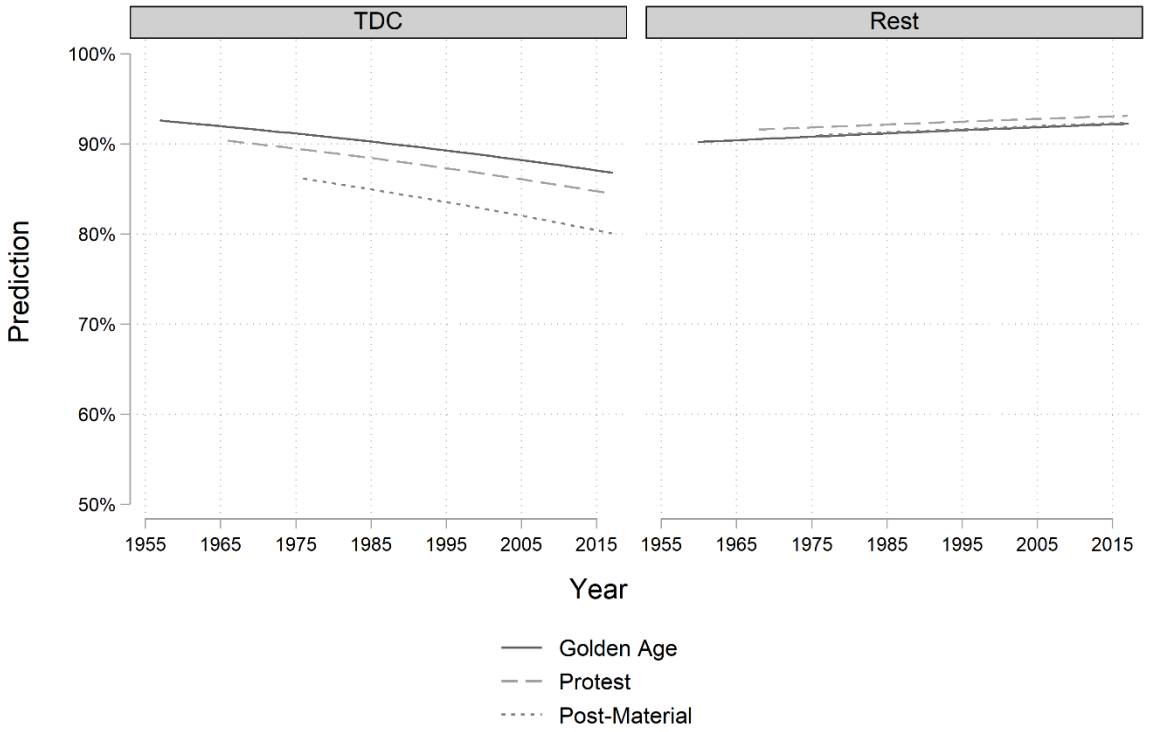


Figure 6.9 The predicted probabilities of respondents of different birth cohorts voting, separated by group of countries.

Focusing in on turnout decline in the TDC, Table 6.4 runs multi-level regression models on turnout in the TDC, including the generational variables and exploring how these interact with the dynamics of apathy and turnout decline discovered in the previous chapter. Here, we see again that the protest and post-material generations are indeed significantly less likely to vote in the TDC, controlling for age and period effects, and that the trend of turnout decline shrinks and is only significant at the 5% level when including this cohort effect, providing strong if not complete support for hypothesis 7.

Model 3 includes apathy and its interaction with year (for comparison) and model 4 adds the categorical cohort variable to that, showing that their combined role accounts for a large part of turnout decline (making the coefficient for year insignificant) but that each separate effect is still significant and the apathy interaction term stays the same. This indicates that overall cohort differences in turnout do not account for the strengthening apathy effect, which we might have expected e.g. if the younger generations were both more apathetic and less likely to vote and that this was behind this strengthening effect. Model 5 goes a step further in testing these dynamics by adding three-way interaction terms between apathy, year and cohort membership, to test if the apathy effect has strengthened more for some cohorts than for others.

Here, something interesting emerges: the overall cohort differences become insignificant, the overall apathy interaction term weakens considerably but the three-way interaction terms for both cohorts are significant, negative and strongest for the post-material generations. In short, this indicates that the strengthening apathy effect on turnout is primarily (although not entirely) concentrated with successively younger generations of citizens, who are less likely than older generations to vote if they are apathetic. Figure 6.10 illustrates this by plotting the predicted probabilities of voting from model 5, by birth cohort and political apathy. Here, the nuanced picture painted by the analysis so far emerges: there is still an apparent (if statistically insignificant) trend of turnout decline across groups and there are some indications of overall cohort differences (with post-material generations generally less likely to vote) but the most notable dynamic is the growing difference in turnout between politically interested and apathetic citizens. That difference is apparent across cohorts but considerably stronger for the protest generation than the golden age generation and again considerably stronger for the post-material generation than for the protest generation.

Table 6.4 APC analysis of turnout decline in the TDC. Multi-level logistics regression models on reported turnout on cohort, apathy, interactions and background variables.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Year	-0.027**	-0.019*	-0.019*	-0.011	-0.016
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.010)
Apathy			33.570***	33.701***	13.222*
			(6.538)	(6.486)	(5.523)
Apathy*Year			-0.017***	-0.017***	-0.007**
			(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Protest		-0.132***		-0.170**	-11.346
		(0.040)		(0.052)	(6.192)
Post-Material		-0.433***		-0.451***	-28.126
		(0.064)		(0.073)	(33.623)
Protest*Apathy					21.540***
					(1.883)
Post-Material* Apathy					55.317**
					(18.316)
Protest*Year					0.006
					(0.003)
Post-Material*Year					0.014
					(0.017)
Protest*Apathy* Year					-0.011***
					(0.001)
Post-Material* Apathy*Year					-0.028**
					(0.009)
Age	0.028***	0.020***	0.028***	0.019***	0.019***
	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Age^2	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Gender	-0.059	-0.056	0.110	0.113	0.113
	(0.070)	(0.071)	(0.084)	(0.086)	(0.087)
Marital Status	0.461***	0.457***	0.452***	0.449***	0.446***
	(0.048)	(0.049)	(0.048)	(0.049)	(0.051)
Constant	55.277**	39.950*	39.733*	23.855	34.307
	(18.261)	(19.098)	(15.991)	(17.533)	(20.026)

RP3					
Level3: Country	0.208**	0.207**	0.184*	0.186*	0.186*
	(0.069)	(0.071)	(0.085)	(0.088)	(0.084)
RP2					
Level2: Country-year	0.172***	0.171***	0.203***	0.202**	0.204***
	(0.047)	(0.048)	(0.061)	(0.063)	(0.062)
Observations	73105	73105	73105	73105	73105

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

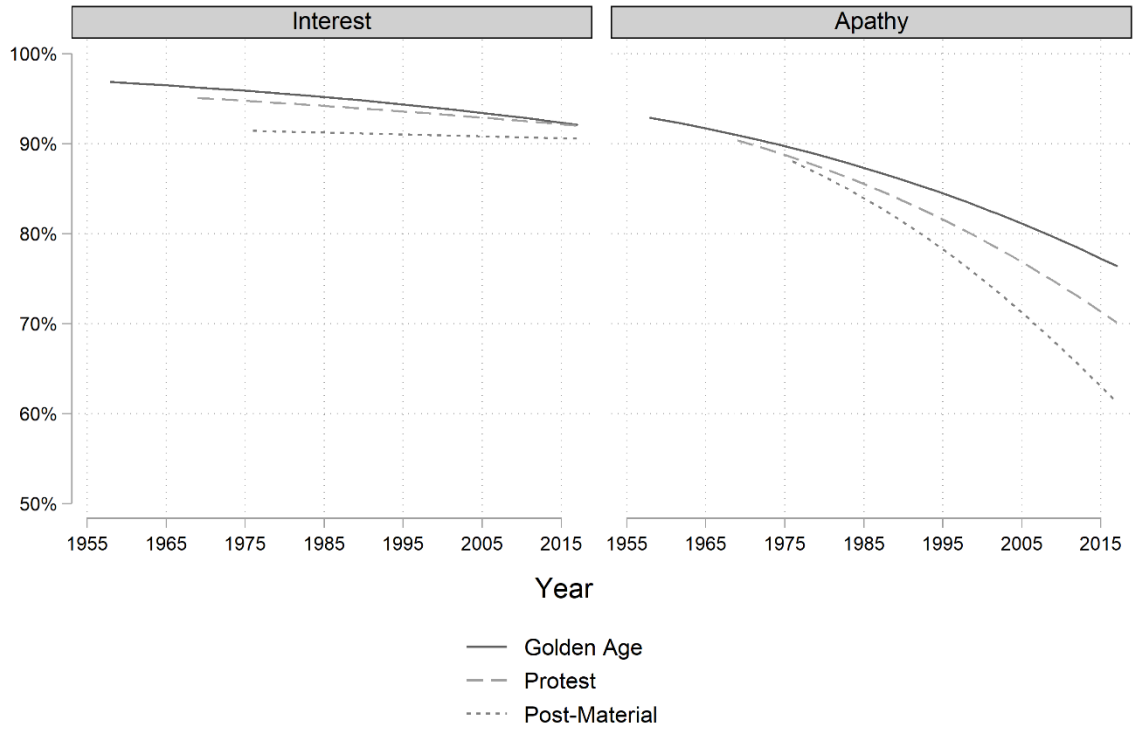


Figure 6.10 The predicted probabilities of respondents of different birth cohorts voting in the TDC, separated by political apathy.

6.2 The Education Gap in Turnout

In this last part of the analysis, I turn to the role of education in all of this, with a particular focus on differences in turnout between citizens of different education levels and the potential role of this gap in turnout decline. While education level distinctions have not been perfectly consistent in these eleven countries in the past 60 years, most of the NES include a variable for respondents' education which could be recoded approximately into three categories: primary education (or less), secondary (including vocational) education and higher (university) education. To start this analysis, I begin with presenting descriptive trends in the proportion of respondents in each education group by country and year in Figure 6.11. There are some anomalies between country-years which make trends in those cases less reliable[29] but overall, there is a clear trend towards rising education levels across the region; as expected, a much higher proportion of respondents have higher education in later years.

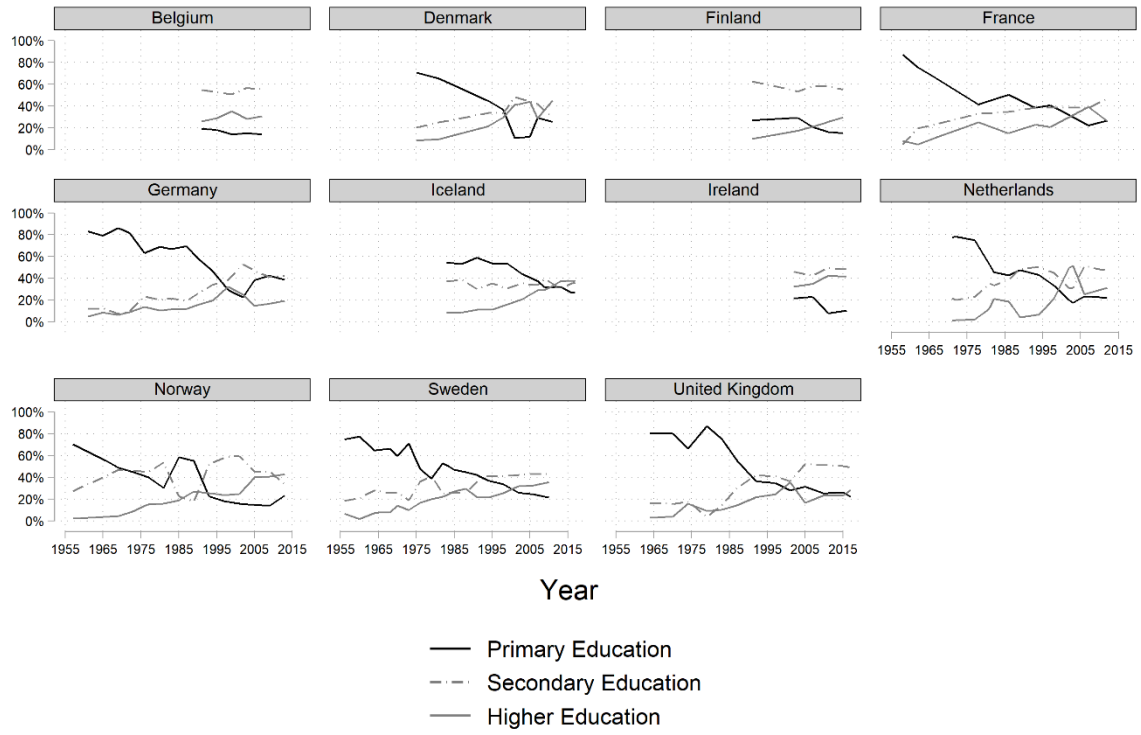


Figure 6.11 Education levels in Western Europe. Education levels in eleven Western European countries from 1956-2017.

[29] There appear to be some differences in coding practices in Norway in the 1980s and Germany in the 2000s, the sample size is larger in Netherlends in 2006 and 2010 than in most other years (and this seems related to a higher proportion of respondents with secondary education).

Moving on to trends in the dependent variables by education group, I start with descriptive graphs parallel to those presented in the previous section. Starting with the main dependent variable of this study, Figure 6.12 shows the trends in voter turnout by education level in the five Nordic countries, showing (unsurprisingly) that respondents with higher (university) education tend to be more likely to vote across the period, but there are no clear indications that this gap is growing, except perhaps in Finland. Figure 6.13 presents these trends for the other six countries and here, educational differences are hardly noticeable in Ireland, Belgium and France, but in the United Kingdom and Germany, there are some indications of a growing education gap in turnout.

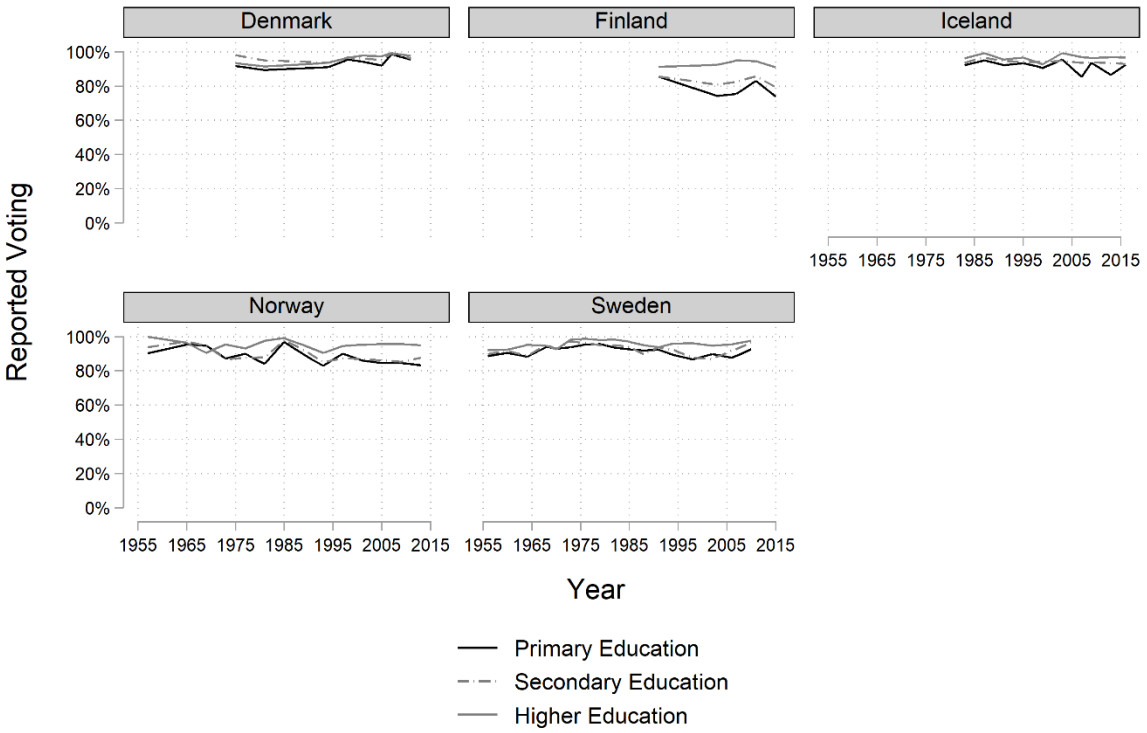


Figure 6.12 Average reported turnout by education level and year in the five Nordic countries from 1956-2017.

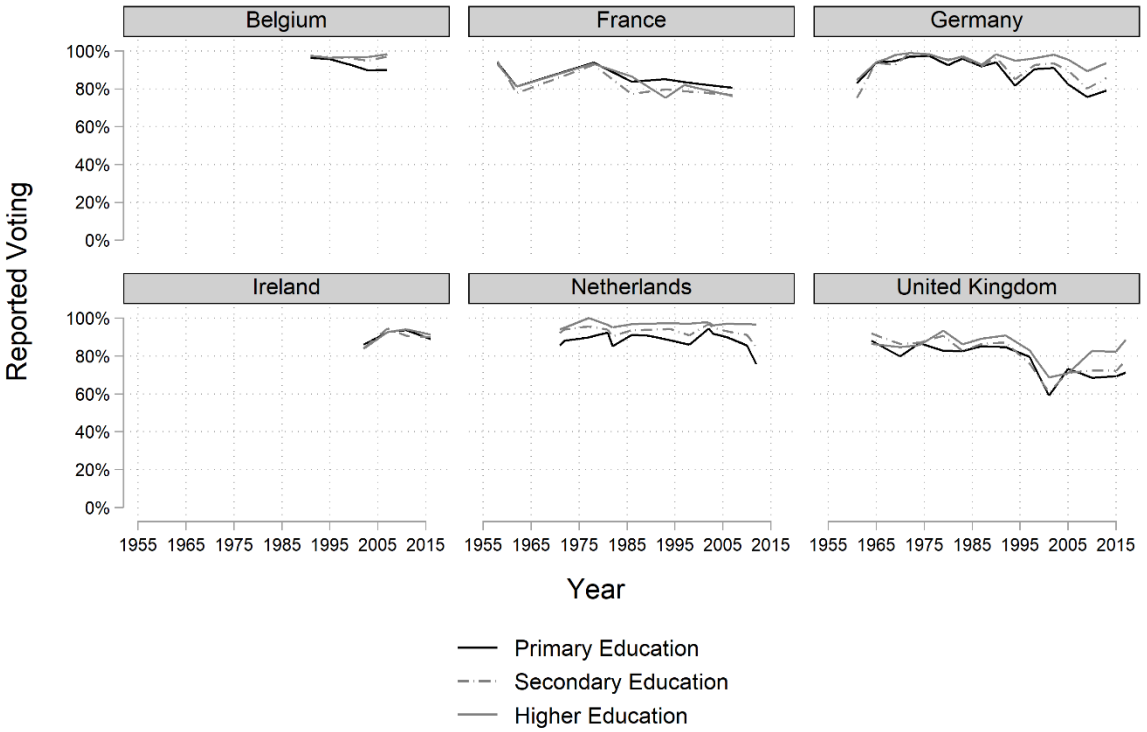


Figure 6.13 Average reported turnout by education level and year in six Western European countries from 1956-2017.

Turning to political apathy and alienation, Figure 6.14 and Figure 6.15 show that there are large and consistent differences between respondents of different education levels across the region and over the whole period with regards to political apathy; with more educated citizens being less likely to be apathetic, while again it is difficult to discern a growing gap, except perhaps in the United Kingdom. Figure 6.16 and Figure 6.17 show basically the same dynamics for respondents who are both apathetic and do not identify with any political party (although here the differences are generally smaller). Figure 6.18 and Figure 6.19 show that in most of these countries, more educated citizens are more likely than less educated citizens to be politically interested while not identifying with any political party. Interestingly, however, these differences are much less clear in three of the four TDC: The United Kingdom, Germany and France.

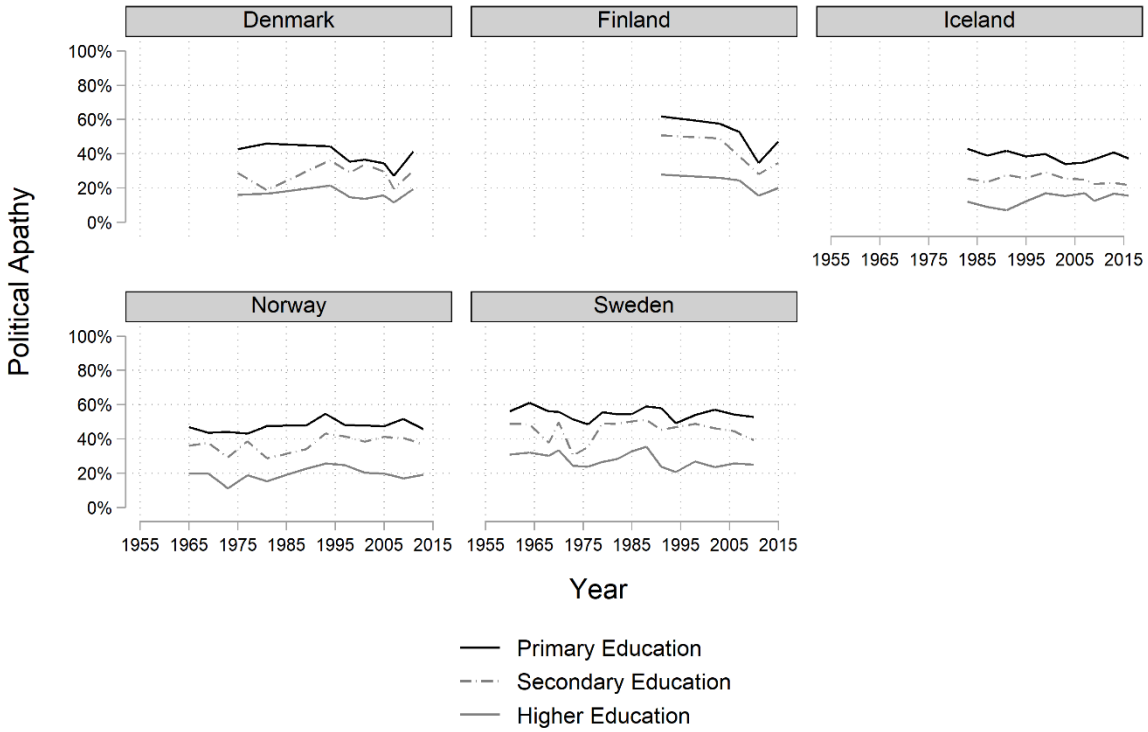


Figure 6.14 Average political apathy by education level and year in the five Nordic countries from 1956-2017.

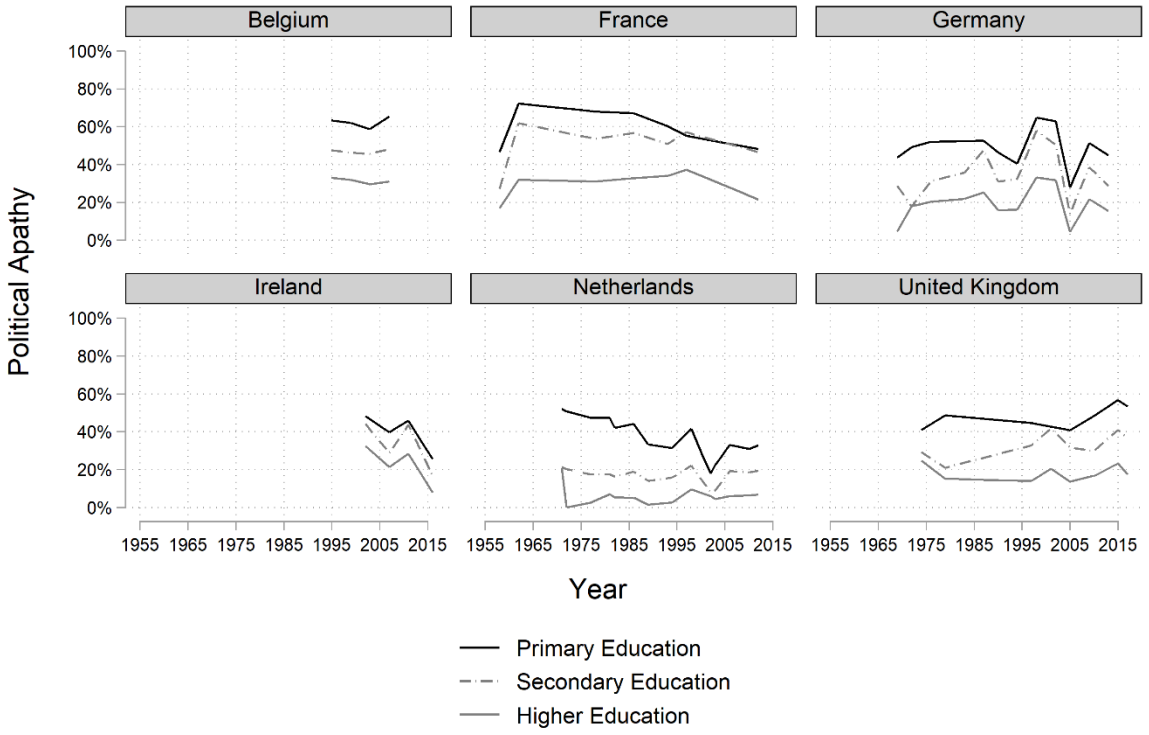


Figure 6.15 Average political apathy by education level and year in six Western European countries from 1956-2017.

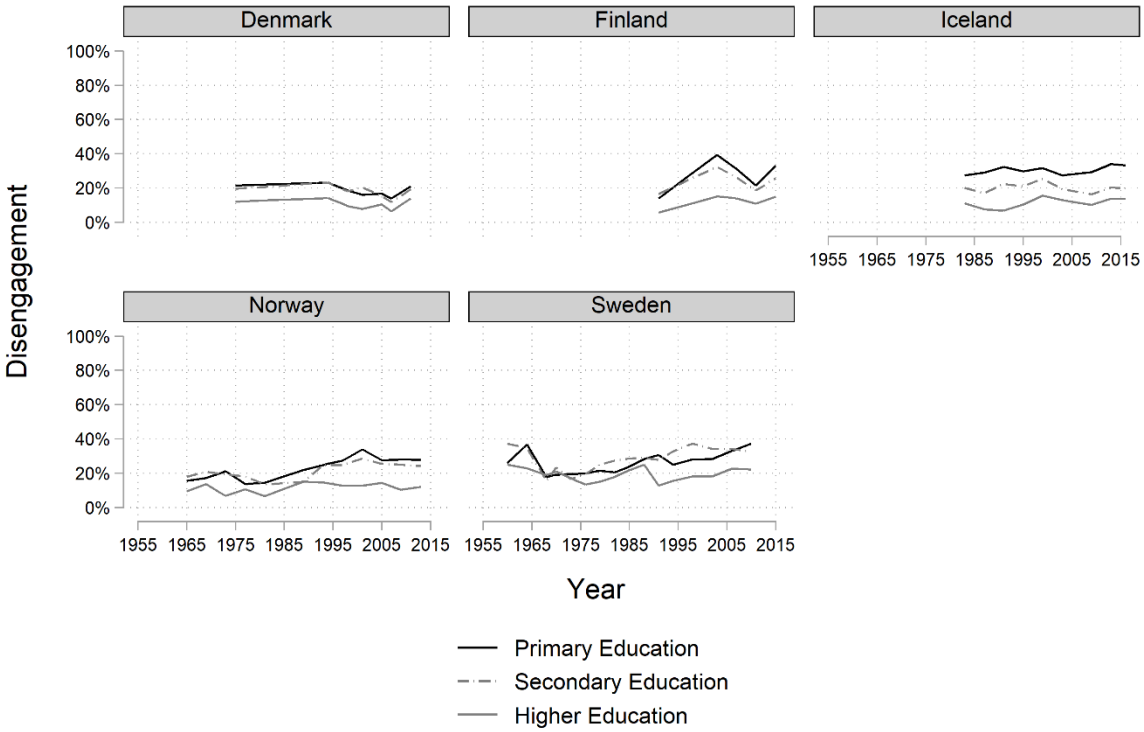


Figure 6.16 Average "disengagement" by education level and year in the five Nordic countries from 1956-2017.

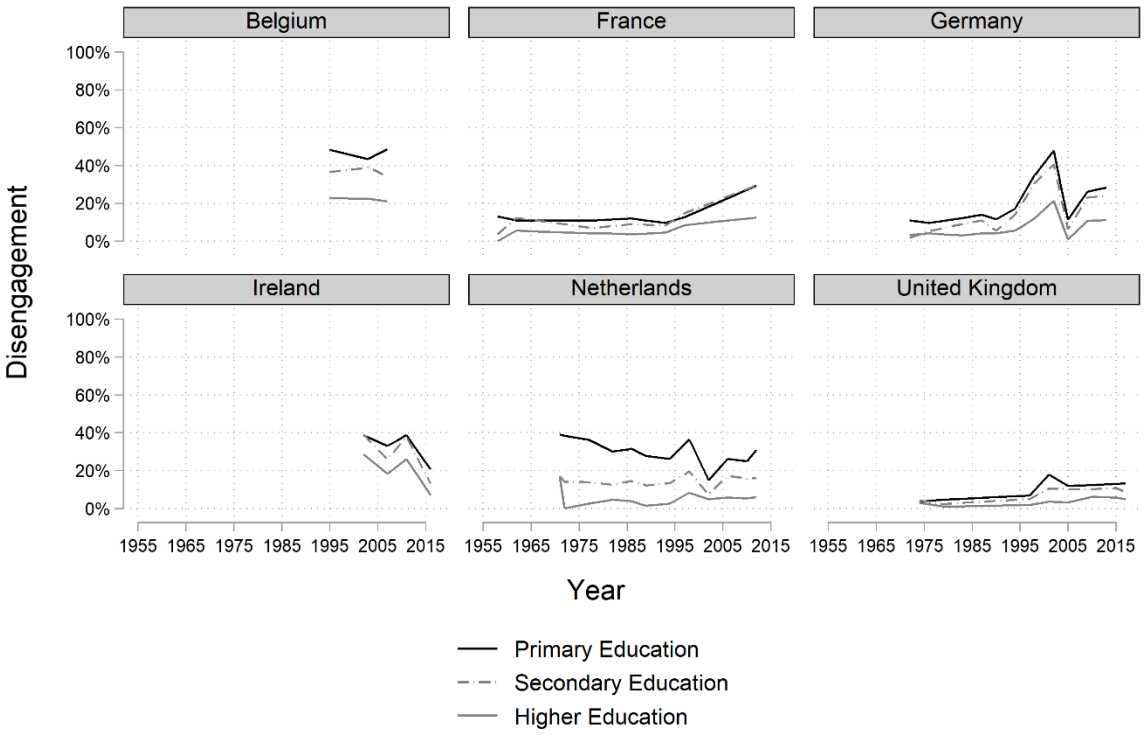


Figure 6.17 Average "disengagement" by education level and year in six Western European countries from 1956-2017.

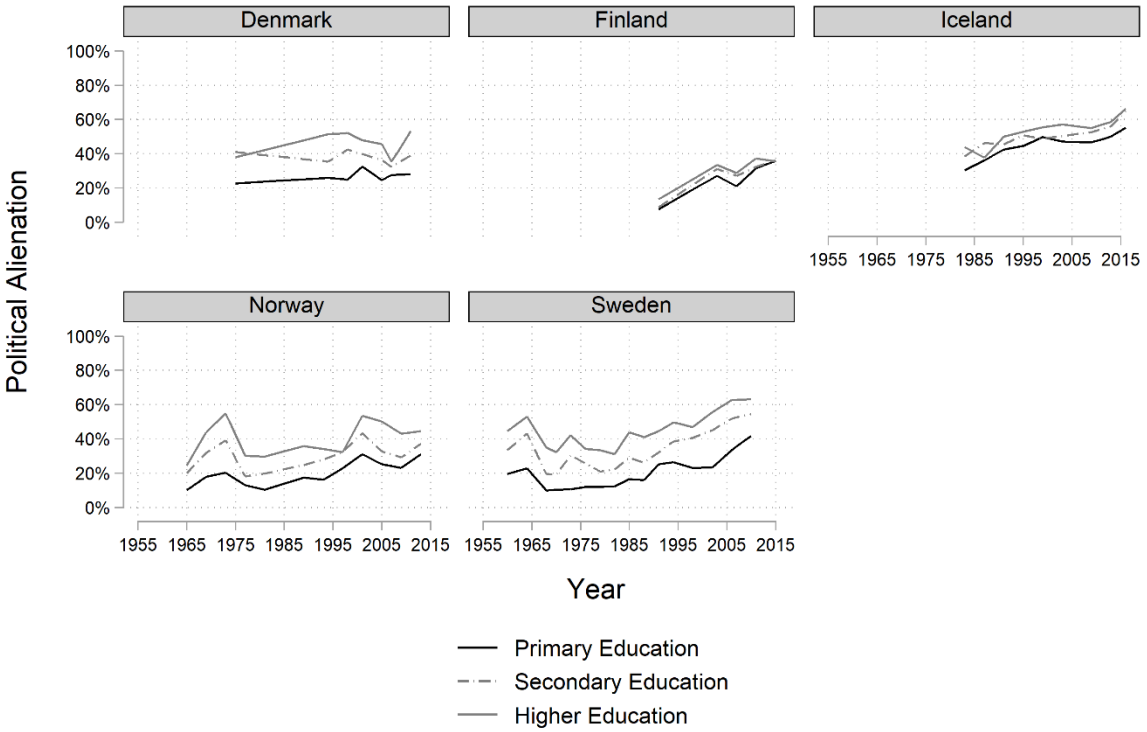


Figure 6.18 Average political alienation by education level and year in the five Nordic countries from 1956-2017.

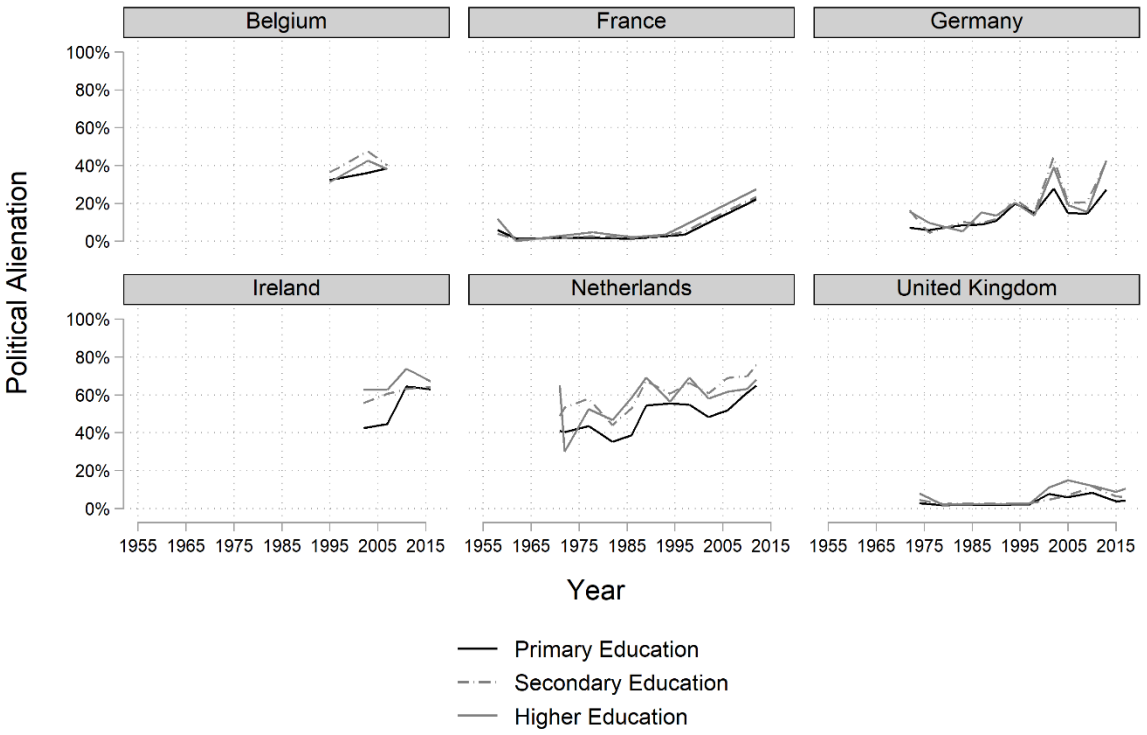


Figure 6.19 Average political alienation by education level and year in six Western European countries from 1956-2017.

Turning to the statistical analyses of these dynamics, Table 6.5 presents multi-level regression models of trends in the main variables across the region, interacted on TDC status and including the categorical variable for respondents' education level. Model 1 unsurprisingly indicates that respondents with higher levels of education are more likely to vote across the region, but it also shows that the difference between the secondary and primary education groups is smaller in the TDC. The subsequent models confirm the impressions from the descriptive trends above: more educated respondents are less likely to be apathetic but more likely to be alienated. Model 5 regresses the political distrust scale and indicates that less educated respondents are more likely to be distrusting of politics. However, none of these dynamics appear to be different between the two groups of countries.

Table 6.5 Trends and education level. Multi-level regression analysis of trends in reported turnout, apathy and different measures of alienation in the combined dataset by education level and demographic controls.

	(1) Turnout	(2) Apathy	(3) Disengagement	(4) Alienation	(5) Distrust
Year	-0.006*	-0.007*	0.005	0.021***	-0.003
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.002)	(0.003)
TDC	38.651***	-26.316***	-35.347*	8.810	-18.249*
	(11.119)	(7.668)	(17.931)	(15.549)	(7.513)
TDC*Year	-0.020***	0.013***	0.017^{+}	-0.005	0.009*
	(0.006)	(0.004)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.004)
Secondary Education	0.571***	-0.686***	-0.485**	0.446***	-0.070***
	(0.080)	(0.099)	(0.149)	(0.054)	(0.013)
Higher Education	1.096***	-1.431***	-1.167***	0.768***	-0.147***
	(0.135)	(0.090)	(0.182)	(0.111)	(0.023)
TDC*Secondary	-0.269*	0.105	0.102	-0.098	0.066
	(0.123)	(0.115)	(0.180)	(0.077)	(0.048)
TDC*Higher	-0.343	0.015	0.028	-0.040	0.064
	(0.226)	(0.102)	(0.216)	(0.181)	(0.058)
Age	0.024***	-0.013***	-0.020***	-0.005**	-0.001*
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.000)
Age^{2}	-0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Gender	-0.025	0.587***	0.471***	-0.203***	0.019^{+}
	(0.040)	(0.045)	(0.039)	(0.037)	(0.010)

Marital Status	0.450***	-0.096*	-0.095**	-0.037	-0.036***
	(0.046)	(0.039)	(0.035)	(0.023)	(0.007)
Compulsory voting	0.731***	0.750***	0.749***	-0.526**	0.233***
	(0.206)	(0.176)	(0.126)	(0.183)	(0.040)
Constant	12.066*	14.489*	-10.859	-42.312***	7.290
	(5.597)	(7.388)	(9.072)	(4.350)	(5.834)
RP3					
Level3: Country	0.173*	0.089**	0.096+	0.319**	0.012*
	(0.071)	(0.030)	(0.053)	(0.117)	(0.005)
RP2					
Level2: Country-year	0.109***	0.071**	0.154**	0.092*	0.013***
	(0.012)	(0.023)	(0.059)	(0.037)	(0.003)
Observations	185092	167846	151539	151539	71810

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Turning to the more specific question of whether turnout decline can be accounted for by a lower propensity of citizens with lower levels of education to vote (hypothesis 8), Table 6.6 presents multi-level regression models of turnout in the TDC, including education levels, apathy and their interactions. Model 1 shows the trend of turnout decline for comparison and model 2 shows that accounting for education exaggerates this, indicating that if not for rising education levels in these countries, turnout would have declined more in the period there than it has. Model 3 adds the interaction of education with year and here, it seems that the education gap in turnout has indeed grown over time: the turnout of respondents with higher education levels has declined significantly less than that of those with primary education (shown by the positive interaction coefficients of higher and secondary education with year).

Figure 6.20 illustrates this by plotting the predicted probabilities of voting from model 3 by education level, showing that the education gap in turnout has grown considerably over time, as the propensity of primary and secondary educated citizens to vote appears to have declined much more than that of citizens with higher education. *Therefore, hypothesis 8 gains considerable support here*. It may seem counterintuitive to say that this effect "accounts" for turnout decline since the negative trend of turnout becomes larger in these models, but it should be kept in mind that education levels have been rising in the period. The models indicate that this latter trend has worked to counter turnout decline because citizens with lower education levels have become less likely to vote, so that turnout would have declined even further if education levels would not have risen as much as they have.

Model 4 introduces the apathy variable and its interaction with year and model 5 adds education and its interactions, showing that accounting for the smaller turnout decline of respondents with higher education levels shrinks the apathy interaction coefficient marginally. Finally, model 6 includes the three-way interaction terms between apathy, year and education levels and this further weakens the apathy interaction substantially, indicating that a large part of this strengthening effect is tied to education levels: it appears that the negative effect of apathy has strengthened more for respondents with higher education. This may seem counterintuitive given that turnout has mostly declined among respondents with lower levels of education but Figure 6.21 may shed more light on that finding. There, I plot the predicted probabilities of voting from model 6 by education level and political apathy. These probabilities show that while apathetic citizens of all education levels have become less likely to vote and apathetic citizens with lower education have the lowest overall propensity to vote, politically interested citizens with lower education have also become less likely to vote whereas politically interested respondents with higher education have not. This likely explains why the difference between apathetic and interested citizens with higher education levels is higher in relative terms.

Table 6.6 The education gap in the TDC. Multi-level logistics regression models on reported turnout on education levels, apathy, interactions and background variables.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Year	-0.025***	-0.032***	-0.037***	-0.017**	-0.026***	-0.030***
	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.009)
Secondary Education		0.382***	-14.639*		-9.834	-22.488*
		(0.082)	(6.395)		(5.498)	(10.107)
Higher Education		0.927***	-42.836***		-32.277***	-46.218***
		(0.179)	(7.309)		(7.472)	(12.075)
Secondary *Year			0.008*		0.005	0.011*
			(0.003)		(0.003)	(0.005)
Higher *Year			0.022***		0.016***	0.023***
			(0.004)		(0.004)	(0.006)
Apathy				34.205***	28.736***	15.646***
				(5.116)	(4.285)	(3.418)
Apathy*Year				-0.018***	-0.015***	-0.008***
				(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Secondary *Apathy						20.845*
						(8.246)

Higher *Apathy						28.584* (11.592)
Secondary *Apathy*Year						-0.010* (0.004)
Higher *Apathy*Year						-0.014* (0.006)
Age	0.027*** (0.004)	0.032*** (0.003)	0.032*** (0.003)	0.026*** (0.004)	0.030*** (0.004)	0.030*** (0.004)
Age	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000** (0.000)	-0.000** (0.000)	-0.000** (0.000)	-0.000** (0.000)
Gender	-0.090 (0.063)	-0.068 (0.066)	-0.076 (0.064)	0.081 (0.080)	0.079 (0.079)	0.079 (0.079)
Marital Status	0.494*** (0.051)	0.492*** (0.041)	0.486*** (0.042)	0.487*** (0.041)	0.482*** (0.038)	0.481*** (0.038)
Constant	51.005*** (14.639)	64.053*** (15.926)	74.042*** (17.467)	34.928** (12.669)	52.882*** (15.677)	61.387*** (17.384)
RP3						
Level3: Country	0.208** (0.066)	0.210** (0.072)	0.213** (0.071)	0.187* (0.086)	0.191* (0.087)	0.191* (0.087)
RP2						
Level2: Country-year	0.176*** (0.044)	0.174*** (0.037)	0.164*** (0.039)	0.210*** (0.059)	0.199*** (0.053)	0.200*** (0.054)
Observations	70957	70957	70957	70957	70957	70957

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

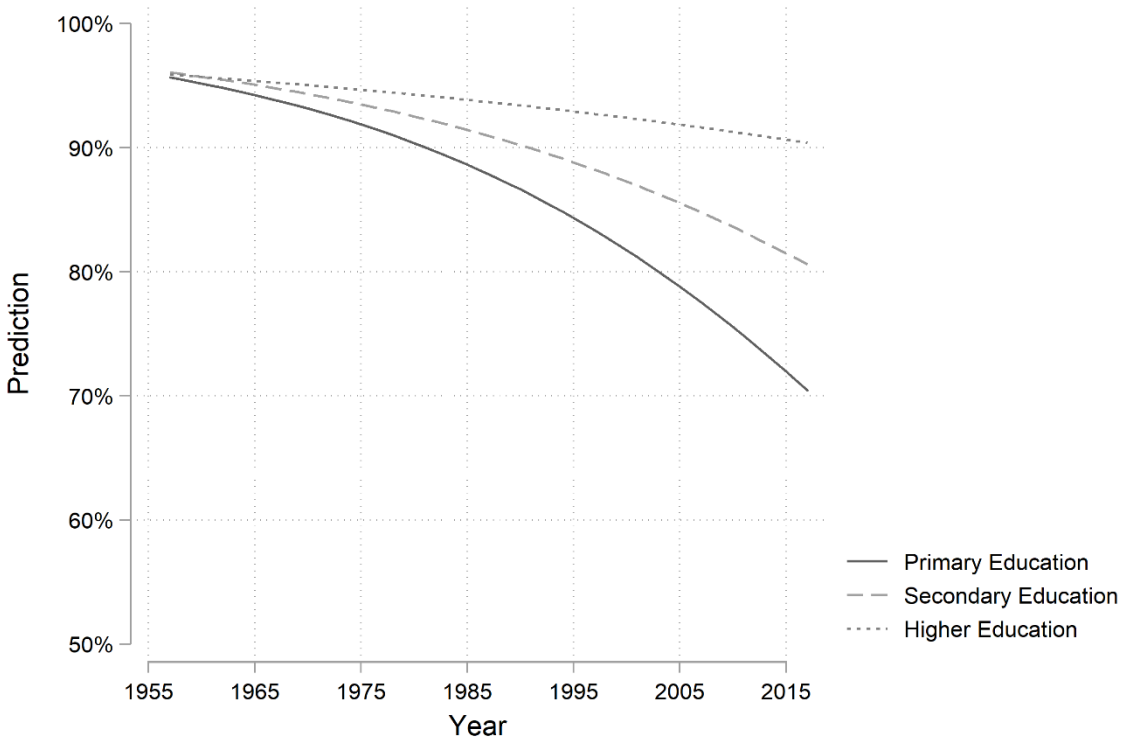


Figure 6.20 The predicted probabilities of respondents of different education levels voting in the TDC between 1956-2017.

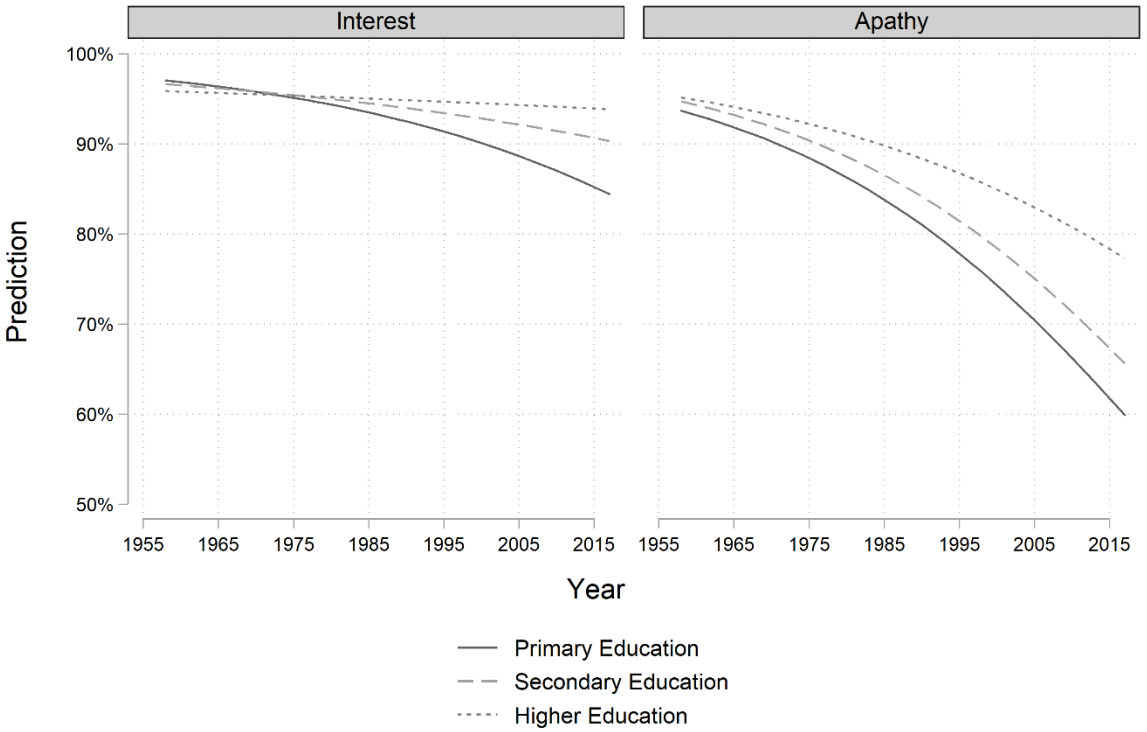


Figure 6.21 The predicted probabilities of respondents of different education levels voting, separated by political apathy, in the TDC between 1956-2017.

So far in this chapter, we have discovered several interesting generational and educational dynamics of turnout decline: in the previous section, we learned that it appears that part of the decline of turnout in the TDC is due to younger generations of citizens voting less than older generations. The fact that apathetic citizens have generally become much less likely to vote than in the past still plays a role, but when looking at this by generation it becomes apparent that most – but not all – of this is due to apathy being a more decisive factor for the youngest generations of citizens. In this section we have seen that there is also a growing gap in turnout between citizens of different education levels in the TDC and that turnout has declined considerably more for citizens with lower education levels than those with higher education. While apathetic citizens of all education levels have become less likely to vote, it appears that rising education levels and the stable turnout propensity of interested citizens with higher education has worked to counteract the overall trend of turnout decline.

But what is the relationship between these different factors and the broader dynamics of turnout decline in Western Europe? In other words, are the significant differences in turnout between cohorts and between citizens of different education levels inter-related or are they different, independent drivers of turnout decline? In a final explorative test, I try to get answers to these questions by running multi-level regression models with a perhaps disorienting – but perhaps also fascinating – number of variables and interaction terms. First, to frame that analysis, it is useful to look at the general relationship between birth cohort and education level in the dataset, so in Figure 6.22 I present the descriptive trends of average education level (where primary education = 1, secondary education = 2 and higher education =3) by birth cohort. This indicates that while education levels have been rising across generations, younger generations appear to have considerably higher levels of education throughout the period.

Figure 6.22 Education levels in Western Europe. Education levels in eleven Western European countries from 1956-2017.

To analyse the interplay of these factors in turnout decline, Table 6.7 presents the results of multi-level regression models on turnout in the TDC including variables for both birth cohort and education levels, along with political apathy and interactions between these variables. Model 1 includes the variables for birth cohort and education level and their interaction, indicating that cohort differences in turnout as well as significant effects of education level on turnout remain, while it also indicates that higher education has an even stronger positive effect on the turnout of younger generations, especially the post-material generations. Model 2 includes the cohort dynamics discovered in the previous section – the three-way interaction between cohort, apathy and year – and again, these are still significant when adding the education variable and its interactions with birth cohort. Interestingly, here the interactions between generation and education level are no longer significant, indicating that the stronger effect of education on the turnout of younger generations may be acting through higher interest levels of more educated respondents of younger generations.

Finally, model 3 adds the interactions for education and in this final model, the growing education gap is still significant (the turnout of respondents with higher education has declined significantly less than of those with primary education) but the interaction of higher education with apathy is no longer significant. On the other hand, the three-way interactions between cohort,

apathy and year are still highly significant, which indicates that the (modestly significant) interaction of apathy with higher education in the previous models was mostly a manifestation of the higher education levels of younger generations (although the interaction with secondary education is still significant, it is also smaller than before). In other words, these models indicate that the strengthening apathy effect is largely concentrated among younger generations, which have higher average education levels, while there is also a separate dynamic of a growing turnout gap between respondents of different education levels. Figure 6.23 illustrates these rather nuanced dynamics by plotting the probabilities of voting by education level, birth cohort and political apathy. There, we see that the turnout gap between different education groups has grown regardless of birth cohort and political interest, although it appears to have grown more among younger generations. We also see that politically interested citizens with secondary and higher education are voting at similar levels as before while apathetic citizens of all generations and education levels have started to vote less, but this last dynamic is most pronounced among the youngest generations.

Table 6.7 Dynamics of generation, education and apathy in the TDC. Multi-level regression models of turnout on year, birth cohort, education level, political apathy and their interactions in the TDC between 1956-2017.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
FP1			
Year	-0.023*	-0.023*	-0.026*
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Apathy*Year	-0.001***	-0.001***	-0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Protest	-0.234*	-24.261***	-12.080**
	(0.094)	(6.240)	(4.458)
Post-Material	-0.690***	-41.046	-26.418
	(0.086)	(34.389)	(32.279)
Secondary Education	0.218***	0.235***	-20.465***
	(0.059)	(0.053)	(5.418)
Higher Education	0.263	0.294	-42.190***
	(0.162)	(0.160)	(7.309)
Protest*Secondary	-0.009	-0.028	-0.058
	(0.079)	(0.083)	(0.071)
Protest*Higher	0.222***	0.198***	0.154***
	(0.046)	(0.039)	(0.045)
Post-Material	0.142	0.116	0.038
*Secondary	(0.079)	(0.074)	(0.088)
Post-Material	0.553***	0.503***	0.284*
*Higher	(0.115)	(0.120)	(0.132)
Protest*Apathy		31.696***	17.674***
		(4.182)	(4.034)
Post-Material		68.033***	54.515**
*Apathy		(20.002)	(17.534)
Protest*Year		0.012***	0.006**
		(0.003)	(0.002)
Post-Material*Year		0.020	0.013
		(0.017)	(0.016)
Protest*Apathy*Year		-0.016***	-0.009***
		(0.002)	(0.002)
Post-Material		-0.034***	-0.027**
*Apathy*Year		(0.010)	(0.009)
Secondary*Apathy			10.464*

			(5.038)
Higher*Apathy			17.621
			(9.880)
Secondary*Year			0.010***
			(0.003)
Higher*Year			0.021***
			(0.004)
Secondary *Apathy*Year			-0.005*
			(0.003)
Higher*Apathy*Year			-0.009
			(0.005)
Age	0.020***	0.019***	0.019***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Age	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Gender	0.094	0.092	0.089
	(0.088)	(0.087)	(0.087)
Marital Status	0.480***	0.478***	0.472***
	(0.038)	(0.041)	(0.043)
Constant	46.485*	47.356*	54.129*
	(21.552)	(22.674)	(22.658)
RP3			
Level3: Country	0.193*	0.195*	0.197*
	(0.096)	(0.091)	(0.091)
RP2			
Level2: Country-year	0.212***	0.209***	0.202***
	(0.051)	(0.052)	(0.051)
Observations	67986	67986	67986

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

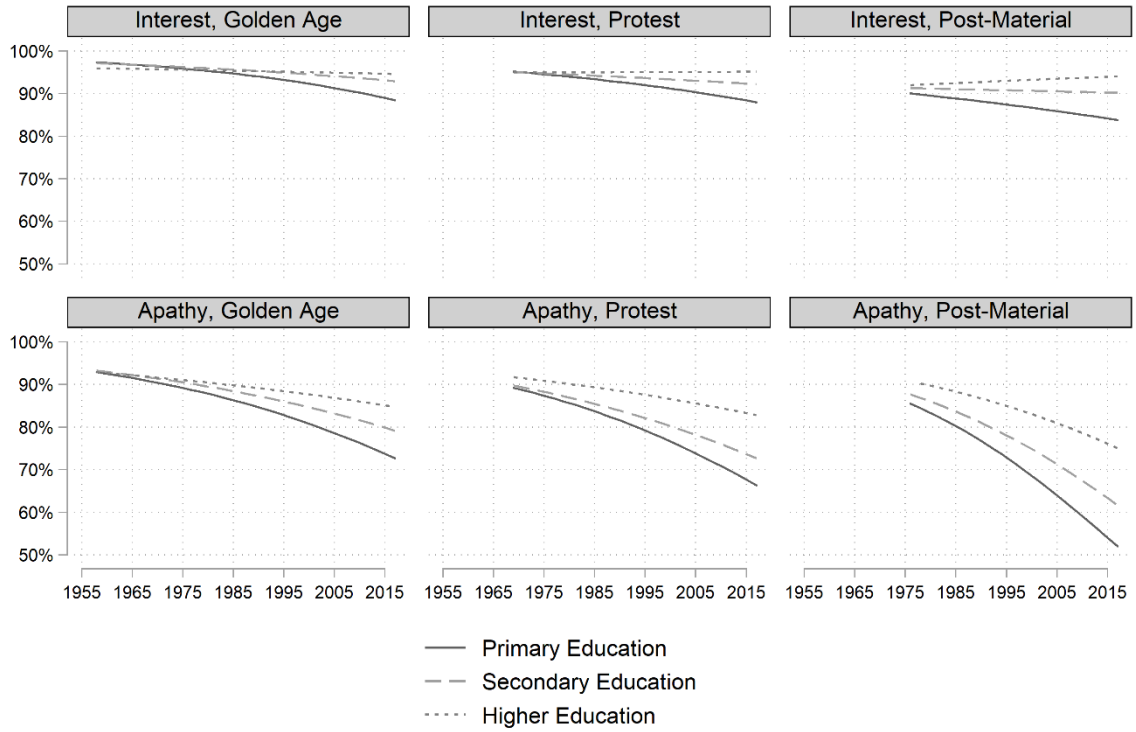


Figure 6.23 The predicted probabilities of respondents of different education levels voting, separated by political apathy and by generation, in the TDC between 1956-2017.

6.3 Discussion

In this chapter, I have explored turnout decline in Western Europe from the perspective of two different factors found to be important in prior research on turnout decline and democratic developments: generation and education. In other words, prior research suggests that citizens' membership of different birth cohorts plays an important role in democratic developments (Franklin, 2004; Franklin, Lyons and Marsh, 2004; Blais and Rubenson, 2013; G. G. Albacete, 2014; Fox, 2015; Grasso, 2016) and that turnout has primarily declined among citizens with lower levels of education (Gallego, 2009; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2017b). Based on this prior research, I classified respondents in the combined dataset into three levels of education (primary (and lower), secondary and higher education) and initially the six generations of birth cohorts used in prior studies (Fox, 2015; Grasso, 2016). However, statistical analysis showed that including these six cohorts led to multicollinearity issues: this cohort variable was too highly correlated with the variables for age and year in the combined dataset to disentangle the three in an age-period-cohort (APC) analysis. To resolve this multicollinearity issue, I collapsed these cohort categories and to determine the best cohort classification, I used Wald tests and model fitness statistics from multi-level regression models of turnout using various alternative classifications. This resulted in classifying respondents into three broad birth cohorts: the "Golden Age" generation born before 1946; the "Protest" generation born between 1946 and 1957 (coming of age in the 60s and 70s) and the "Post-Materialist" generations, born after 1957.

The APC analysis of these different generations (controlling for the effects of age and period) indicated that there are few discernible differences between these different generations with regards to the political attitudes available in the combined dataset, although the protest generation appears to be significantly more alienated than the other generations. However, both of the younger generations were indeed significantly and successively less likely to vote than older generations in the TDC (when controlling for their younger age), while this was not the case in the rest of the region. This confirms the finding of prior studies and *provides some support for hypothesis 5*: a lower propensity of younger generations to vote appears to account for part of turnout decline in the TDC, although a general period effect of decline persists, meaning that this does not tell the whole story.

Perhaps more interestingly, a three-way interaction of respondents' birth cohort, apathy and year suggested that the strengthening of the negative apathy effect on turnout has been primarily (but not entirely) confined to younger birth cohorts: the importance of political interest for the turnout decision has mostly grown for citizens of younger generations and indeed, controlling for this

makes overall cohort differences in turnout insignificant. In other words, politically interested citizens of the post-materialist generations are almost exactly as likely to vote as politically interested citizens of the "golden age" generation but being apathetic has grown to have a much stronger depressing effect on the former generation's propensity to vote. To be clear, political apathy has grown to matter more for the turnout of citizens of all generations, but *most* of this effect is particular to the youngest generations of citizens.

In terms of education levels, the analysis in this study confirms the familiar finding that voter turnout is higher for respondents of higher education levels, while their political apathy is lower (Franklin, 2004; Blais, 2006; Gallego, 2009; Stolle and Hooghe, 2011; Coffé and Michels, 2014; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2017b). Furthermore, analysis of the TDC does indeed suggest, like prior studies (Gallego, 2009; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2017b), that turnout decline has been most pronounced for citizens of relatively lower education levels, *providing some support for the expectation of hypothesis 8.* However, all education groups have become less likely to vote so again, this provides only part of the explanation, while it appears that rising education levels in the region have helped mitigate the trend of turnout decline; controlling for education exaggerated that trend even further. It is difficult to make any causal claims from these findings, since rising education levels have counteracted turnout decline per se but they may also have contributed to growing social polarization between citizens of different education levels, which may play a role in the declining turnout propensity of citizens with lower education levels.

The analysis of the role of education also suggested that the strengthening effect of political apathy was actually more pronounced for more educated respondents, as interested respondents with higher education appear just as likely to vote as in the past. However, combining this analysis with the APC analysis in the first part of this chapter suggested that this finding was mostly a manifestation of the higher education levels of the younger generations of citizens, for which the negative apathy effect on turnout has strengthened most. These final models suggested that there are two important, largely independent types of dynamics behind turnout decline in Western Europe: a) a declining turnout propensity of citizens with lower education levels, regardless of cohort and political interest b) a growing importance of political interest for the propensity to vote, an effect which is apparent among all cohorts and education groups but strongest among the youngest and most educated generations of citizens.

Drawing these findings together, it seems that a lot more citizens across the region have become alienated – in the sense that they are interested in politics but do not identify with any

political party – but that most of these citizens are still voting, at almost (but not entirely) the same levels as those who identify with political parties. Political apathy, on the other hand, has declined in almost all countries, but it has become much more important for citizens' voting decision, and this growing importance of apathy accounts for most of turnout decline in the four TDC. Furthermore, this mostly seems to be due to apathy becoming much more important for the voting decision of the youngest, "post-material", generations of citizens, although this dynamic is also apparent across birth cohorts and education levels and appears to be related to growing political distrust, where measures of that are available. Aside from these dynamics, there is also a growing gap in turnout between citizens of different education levels, which is not fully accounted for by other dynamics explored here. In the following, final chapter of this thesis, I will discuss these findings further; their implications for future research and for our understanding of democracy in the modern age.

7 Conclusion

Voting is the fundamental link between governors and the governed in modern democracies. The extent to which citizens willingly participate in this democratic process is widely considered one of the major indicators of the health of democratic societies, and the primary legitimizing function of government (Mill, 1861; Almond and Verba, 1963; Pateman, 1970; Dahl, 1971; Dalton, 1996; Norris, 2002). If citizens in established democracies are gradually taking part less and less in this activity, this can in itself be considered a problem for the substantive representation of diverse societies in their political systems, as well as for the nurturing of a vibrant and democratic civic society. Furthermore, the reasons for this declining inclination to vote should be of concern for political scientists and publics alike, since they are likely to tell us important things about fundamental attitudes of citizens towards politics and government (Fieldhouse, Tranmer and Russell, 2007; Hay, 2007; Martin, 2015). In this concluding chapter, I highlight the theoretical, conceptual and empirical contributions that I have made in this thesis and discuss the limitations of the analysis as well as its implications for theoretical debate and the future of democracy.

I have argued in this study that within the field of political science there is a "disciplinary divorce" (Elklit, 1994; Smith, 2009) between theoretical and qualitative literature about the nature of democratic developments on one hand, and quantitative studies of long-term democratic trends on the other. A major distinction made in much of the theoretical debate on democratic developments is between political *apathy* and political *alienation*: whether citizens have grown less interested in politics generally or are instead still interested but do not identify with their formal political systems (Henn, Weinstein and Wring, 2003; O'Toole *et al.*, 2003; e.g. Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007; Hay and Stoker, 2009; Chou *et al.*, 2017). However, a specific example of the disciplinary divorce is that in these debates, the decline of voter turnout in established democracies is often cited as one indicator (Hay and Stoker, 2009, p. 226; Smith, 2009, pp. 3–4; Flinders, 2012a, p. 1; Wattenberg, 2012; Dalton, 2016, p. 13; Chou *et al.*, 2017, p. 17), while that empirical relationship has not been put to the test in quantitative studies of long-term turnout decline.

This thesis contributes to these theoretical debates by bringing these two different but crucially related pathways of political science together: testing the respective roles of apathy and alienation in turnout decline in Western Europe. Thus, I elaborate and develop a theoretical framework that has been made explicit in prior qualitative studies and operationalize and apply it to a longitudinal quantitative analysis of 11 European countries. In this sense, I am putting to the test a

theoretical framework that has been developed in prior studies (Henn, Weinstein and Wring, 2003; O'Toole *et al.*, 2003; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007; Fox, 2015), but I also develop it conceptually by dissecting the core distinction made between apathy and alienation and its normative implications. In that respect, I argue here that the two terms should not simply be used interchangeably as two words to describe public disengagement from politics, but that they instead signify fundamentally different perspectives on the reasons for that disengagement: either people don't care about politics anymore, or they care but politics are failing them. That conceptual clarification is important because these two explanations have very different implications for the nature and future of democracy: if citizens have grown less interested in politics generally, this may guide reforms to the education system and civic education projects (McFarland and Thomas, 2006; Geissel, 2008; Kisby and Sloam, 2009; Pontes, Henn and Griffiths, 2017) but if they are still interested in politics but alienated, this implies that they might be re-engaged with democracy through reforms of political systems and projects for democratic innovations that offer effective opportunities for democratic participation through alternative channels (Goodin, 2008; Smith, 2009; Geissel, 2012; Newton, 2012a; Dryzek *et al.*, 2019).

Thus, this theoretical debate has important practical implications and it is also important normatively, if we value citizens consent as the building block of government and adhere to the norm of popular rule as a foundation of democratic government (Dahl, 1971; Saward, 1994; Budge, 2008). Because voting in elections is still the fundamental formal democratic activity in almost all modern democracies, understanding the dynamics and drivers of this activity and the declining propensity of citizens to partake in it is thus fundamental for the field of political science, for the ideals of democratic theory and for the practice of democracy and politics in the real world. This study contributes to these fundamental questions in theoretical debate about democratic developments and to the empirical evidence for changes in political participation and attitudes by analysing a novel, longitudinal dataset consisting of merged data from 121 national election study (NES) surveys conducted in 11 Western European countries in the period between 1956-2017.

From these diverse datasets, I drew comparable measures of respondents' self-reported turnout in the past legislative elections, their political interest and party identification, their attitudes towards several political statements and information about their age, gender, marital status and education level. I started the analysis by providing descriptive data and exploratory analyses of these different measures, establishing that while the self-reported turnout measure consistently overestimates officially reported turnout, trends and between-country differences are highly consistent between the two measures. The available NES data reflected the officially reported trend

of turnout decline in four countries, referred to here as the "Turnout decline countries" (TDC): France, Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom, although it should be noted that in three of the latter countries (Finland, Iceland and the Netherlands), official turnout statistics indicate a trend of turnout decline whereas the available NES data does not. The descriptive analysis also showed that in fact, political apathy has been declining substantially in the region while political alienation has been rising sharply: the share of respondents who report little or no interest in politics has gradually decreased, while the share of those who are interested but do not identify with any political party has grown considerably in all of the eleven countries. At the same time, the proportion of respondents who are "disengaged" – are apathetic *and* do not identify with any political party – has been largely stable across the region but it seems to have been rising slightly in the TDC, while political trust seems to been declining in the two TDC where those measures are available, but rising in the other countries examined in this study.

The multi-level regression analyses in chapters 5 and 6 shed further light on the more specific question of the role of these dynamics in turnout decline, as well as the roles of birth cohort membership and education levels that prior research has found to be important (Franklin, 2004; Gallego, 2009; Blais and Rubenson, 2013; Grasso, 2016; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2017b). In short, this analysis revealed that while alienated citizens account for a much larger part of the electorate today than before, most of these citizens are still voting, at almost (but not entirely) the same levels as those who identify with political parties. Conversely, while there are considerably fewer citizens who are politically apathetic today, they are much less likely than apathetic citizens in the past to vote and this appears to account for most of the negative trend of turnout in the four TDC. Furthermore, this mostly seems to be due to apathy becoming much more important for the voting decision of the younger, more highly educated "post-material" generations of citizens, although this development is also apparent across birth cohorts and education levels. These dynamics appear to largely account for the cohort differences in turnout discovered but it does not account for another trend discovered in prior studies and supported here: the gap in turnout between citizens of different education levels has grown and this is apparent regardless of birth cohort and political interest, although it seems to have grown more among younger generations.

Overall, these findings indicate some interesting differences between the group of countries where data reflects significant turnout decline (the "TDC") and those where it does not. For instance, while political apathy appears to have been declining in the TDC like across the region, this decline has been much more modest than in the other group of countries and the proportion of disengaged citizens has grown slightly there while it has been stable in the rest of the region. Furthermore,

political trust appears to have been declining significantly in the TDC but *rising* in the other group of countries, although it should be kept in mind that these measures are less consistent between country-years than the central measures used in this study and, among the TDC, they are only available in the United Kingdom and Norway. The negative "effect" of apathy on turnout also appears to have strengthened slightly more in the TDC than in the rest of the countries, although that difference was only significant at the 10% level.

Finally, the APC analysis in Chapter 6 indicated that there are indeed significant cohort differences in turnout in the TDC (controlling for the effects of age and period) while these are insignificant in the other group of countries: the post-material generation is voting significantly less in the TDC than older generations. Drawing these findings together, one might postulate that the growing importance of political interest for the propensity to vote has affected the TDC more than the other countries because interest has grown less there – and because political trust appears to have declined there while it has risen in the other countries. Since this strengthening apathy effect is strongest among the youngest generations of citizens, this might also explain why there are significant differences in turnout between generations in the TDC but not in the other group of countries.

This study has been quite broad in nature, which is both a strength and a limitation. No prior study has tested the huge empirical puzzle of turnout decline with such an extensive dataset or across so many countries on the individual level. On the other hand, such a broad, longitudinal, dataset only includes a very limited number of comparable measures, which limits the depth of interpretation and can raise questions about measurement validity; the extent to which the measures can capture the underlying concepts of interest and do so consistently over time. Based on these broad findings, I cannot claim a direct causal relationship between apathy, alienation and turnout decline: these dynamics are of course related to other social dynamics and attitudes, but empirically establishing these relationships is nonetheless a vital first step towards further understanding those dynamics. Based on these results, we can say that apathetic citizens today are much less likely to vote than before and that turnout decline has been largely concentrated among this group, but we cannot fully explain why this is happening. However, knowing that it is in fact happening is a new finding that moves our understanding of turnout decline further, pointing future research in the direction of exploring why apathetic citizens today are voting less than before; in what ways are they different? While I have interpreted this as potentially related to post-materialism and civic duty norms, that interpretation is only based on indirect tests (and prior findings) and

various other factors could be at play, including declining trade union membership, changes of habit, and socialization.

These results also further our understanding of democratic developments more broadly, providing a long-term empirical foundation for alienation theories that has thus far been lacking: citizens in Western Europe are more interested in politics than ever before, but a much larger proportion of them are interested without identifying with any political party. However, the concept of political alienation is nuanced and measured in various ways in the literature, so any further studies looking at non-identification with political parties in combination with other measures of alienation would broaden our understanding of this important phenomenon; its dimensions, drivers and role in turnout decline. At the same time, we should not descend into pure semantics about how we prefer to conceptualize the term "alienation". It is a substantively important finding that there has been a dramatic rise in the proportion of citizens who are interested in politics but do not identify with any political party, regardless of terminology. Aside from using different measures of apathy and alienation, conducting similar analyses using data from other countries in Europe and in other parts of the world would also be worthwhile, as would bringing aggregate-level factors and further individual-level dynamics into such analyses.

Nevertheless, the empirical results of this study are clear and important in their own right. But what do they mean for the theoretical framework outlined in this study; for theories of turnout decline and broader democratic developments and for the nature and future of modern democracy? First, popular claims about rising political apathy among citizens in established democracies appear to be pretty strongly rejected, at least in the countries of Western Europe studied here. Even the findings of some prior studies (Park, 2000; G. G. Albacete, 2014) that younger generations of citizens are significantly more apathetic than older generations do not seem to be true across this region, although they appear to apply to an extent to the United Kingdom, Finland, Norway and Sweden. Conversely, there appears to be considerable truth to the argument that today's citizens are still interested in politics but do not identify with their formal political systems (Bang *et al.*, 1999; Norris, 1999, 2011; Wordwide, 2001; Dalton, 2004a, 2009; Marsh, O'Toole and Jones, 2007; Rosanvallon, 2008), at least as far as the latter can be measured by identification with the political parties that form an important core of that system. On the other hand, proponents of that argument seem less warranted in citing turnout decline more specifically as a symptom of those developments, as only a marginal part of that trend can be accounted for by this trend of rising alienation.

However, it is interesting to note that while this more specific alienation argument identified here has limited explanatory value for turnout decline as such, the overall decline of party identification in the electorate did explain about 5,8 out of the 14,5 percentage point of turnout decline in the TDC. Most of this (4,8 of the 5,8 percentage points) was accounted for by the group of citizens dubbed "disengaged" here, however; those who do not identify with any political party and are also apathetic. While this is not exactly in line with the "Democratic Phoenix" (Norris, 2002) alienation argument about a participatory transformation of democracy, it does lend some support to other arguments about the role of system identification. One such argument has been made in studies of the role of globalization in turnout decline and discussed earlier in this thesis: that globalization has constrained the policy competence of national governments so that citizens have less diverse policy alternatives to vote for in elections and are therefore less likely to vote (Steiner, 2010, 2016). The fact that citizens are generally less likely to identify with political parties and that this explains part of turnout decline seems to be in line with this argument, even if it does not directly demonstrate that causal mechanism (Devine, 2019). Nevertheless, the negative effect of apathy on turnout has also strengthened substantially among citizens who identify with political parties, as shown by the detailed analysis in section 5.3, so this would only provide part of the explanation.

Therefore, what emerges from this study as the most important explanation of turnout decline is that apathetic citizens today are much less likely to vote than apathetic citizens were in the past. The hypotheses regarding this were derived from the academic literature that argues that with the onset of social post-modernization and rising education levels, affluence and globalization in Western societies, there has been a rise in post-materialist value priorities: modern citizens and younger generations are thought to be less likely to prioritize material concerns and more likely to prioritize "post-material" values such as autonomy, democracy and equality; to be more critical and less likely defer to social authority and hierarchy (Inglehart, 1977, 1990; Norris, 1999, 2011; Dalton, 2004a; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005, 2010; Zukin *et al.*, 2006; Rosanvallon, 2008). This is related to an argument made prominently by Russell Dalton: that modern citizens have become "cognitively mobilized", are "apartisan" rather than "apolitical" and more likely to make "rational" election choices (Dalton, 1984b, 2013; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000). According to this argument, citizens today are more likely than before to conduct an independent assessment of the parties and candidates on offer in each election and to decide on that basis whether and for whom to vote, rather than just uncritically going to the polling booth like their parents or peers would do. This argument also speaks directly to the findings of prior studies that younger generations of citizens are

less likely to consider voting to be a civic duty and that this trend can account for an important part of turnout decline (Blais, Gidengil and Nevitte, 2004; Wass, 2007; Blais and Rubenson, 2013).

Based on these arguments, we would expect people's political interest and related attitudes to have a stronger effect on their propensity to vote today than it did before: if citizens would just vote out of a sense of civic obligation (or of habit, parental influence or social pressure) before, their interest would not have mattered as much for that decision. If younger generations are, conversely, taking a more "rational" and critical approach to the voting decision – deciding in each election if it feels worthwhile to them to vote or not – their interest in politics, political efficacy and other attitudes about politics should matter more for that decision. The strengthening apathy effect is only an indirect test of these theories, since measures of civic duty norms are not available in the data analysed here, but it is nevertheless interesting that these expectations gather such strong support from the analysis conducted here: apathetic citizens today are 29% less likely to vote than apathetic citizens in the late 1950s.

We cannot tell for certain from this data whether this particular change is due to post-materialist values or cognitive mobilization and rationality as such, but the analysis in Chapter 6 does provide some further interesting indications in this respect. There, we saw that this strengthening apathy effect has been most pronounced for the youngest generations, which is exactly what we would expect from the post-materialist argument which often focuses on generational differences and the "post-modern" or post-materialist socialization of younger generations of citizens (Norris, 2002; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Grasso, 2016). Similarly, while education is probably a very imperfect measure of "rationality" per se, rising rationality in the sense applied by the post-materialist literature suggests that a rise in general education levels has been one of the most important factors in making citizens more critical of authority and more autonomous in their approach to politics and here, we again find what these theories would expect: the effect of apathy has grown most for the most highly educated citizens, although this relationship is weaker and appears partly tied to the higher education levels of younger generations. In both cases, however, it should be noted that while not equal between citizens of different generations or education levels, these developments have still been occurring across those groups, just to different extents.

The finding that citizens are much more likely to be interested in politics but alienated from their political systems, or at least the political parties on offer, also resonates with these arguments about "partisan dealignment" and "apartisan", rather than apolitical, citizens (Dalton, McAllister and Wattenberg, 2000; Dalton, 2013). But these apartisans mostly appear to be voting, unless they are

apathetic as well. And even if political apathy has declined substantially in Western Europe, those citizens who are apathetic may be more profoundly disengaged from politics than before, in that there are indications that they are generally less trusting of politicians and they also see less reason to take part in the democratic process when it doesn't spark their interest.

These explanations of turnout decline invite different theoretical interpretations and therefore different potential pathways for solutions. The fact that citizens are less likely to vote if they don't care about politics may, again, be seen as entirely rational, and many democratic theorists might not find this especially problematic (Caplan, 2007; Brennan, 2009; Selb and Munzert, 2013). In fact, the moral philosophical question of whether it is in fact a civic obligation to vote is not a straightforward one: many would consider it a right granted to citizens in a liberal, democratic society instead of an obligation to be enforced upon them (Brennan, 2009; Brennan and Hill, 2014). However, inequalities in voter turnout can easily lead to substantial inequalities in the political representation of different social groups and an especially inefficient translation of preferences from the public into the political system. These inequalities and erosion in the link between governors and the governed can have substantial and often detrimental social effects, leading some to argue for the implementation of enforced compulsory voting to combat these developments (Gallego, 2009; Wattenberg, 2012; Henn and Foard, 2014).

This disagreement in interpretation may partly be a disagreement over the more precise nature and causes of these developments, but it also harks back to what I mentioned in the introduction to this study: democracy is an "essentially contested concept" and there is no consensus in academic or public debate about what exactly it means, how it should look like in reality or what ideals it entails (or how these should be prioritized) (Beetham, 1994; Newton, 2012a). For instance, the "Democratic Theories Database" has in recent years collected more than 2.000 different terms and adjectives for democracy (Gagnon, 2014, 2018; Jean-Paul Gagnon, Mark Chou, Selen Ercan, 2014), while the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project more modestly proposes five varieties of democracy: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian democracy (Gerring *et al.*, 2017; Varieties of Democracy, 2017). In the academic literature, a broader distinction has been made between electoral, "elitist", "minimal" or "protective" accounts of democracy that primarily value strong political party systems that can rule effectively and be "accountable" to citizens through competitive elections (Schumpeter, 1942, pp. 252–271; Sartori, 1962; Beetham, 1994; Parry and Moyser, 1994; Held, 1995; Cunningham, 2002; Gunnell, 2011; Stoker, 2011) and more direct, popular and participatory democratic ideals that emphasise the value of public participation, engagement

and influence in a democracy (Mill, 1861; Pateman, 1970; Mansbridge, 1995; Elster, 1996; Saward, 1998; Dryzek, 2000; e.g. Budge, 2008).

From the protective perspective, turnout decline that is simply due to apathetic citizens being less likely to vote than before might therefore be seen as unproblematic, if it is not rooted in more active disaffection that might destabilize the functioning of the political system itself. Other democrats who emphasize the value of representative democracy but are less "protective" in that conceptualization of democracy might well agree, however, that unequal substantive representation is a problem in itself even for strictly representative systems of democracy (Phillips, 1995; Wessel, 2009; Dinas, Trechsel and Vassil, 2014; Golder *et al.*, 2017). From the perspective of more participatory theories of democracy, declining citizen participation in democracy is a problem in itself: participation is considered to encourage positive civic and social qualities, educate and grow citizens and foster social capital and community cohesion in societies (Mill, 1861; Pateman, 1970; Mansbridge, 1995; Putnam, 2000). In a more specifically direct conception of democracy, it is actually about realising the intrinsically equal right of humans to influence the practice of authority to which they are subjected, and from this perspective, the ideal of popular rule implies that the populace should take part in this rule in an active way and declining participation would therefore signify a decline in the quality of democracy (Dahl, 1971, 1989; Budge, 1996; Rawls, 1999; Goodin *et al.*, 2007; Miller, 2009).

Therefore, from the perspective of many representative democrats as well as more participatory and direct democrats, declining participation in elections is a concern regardless of its causes. This might call for civic education, social movements and cultural campaigns attempting to both increase citizens' general interest in politics as well as their sense of the importance of voting per se. Indeed, the recent spikes in voter turnout in the 2017 British general elections, the 2018 mid-term elections to the US congress and the UK referenda on Brexit and Scottish Independence may suggest that modern citizens can turn out in remarkably high numbers when there is a widespread perception of a particular election being of high importance. Alternatively, we might simply enforce compulsory voting to ensure higher levels of turnout, but this runs the risk of masking underlying disaffection and also of reducing the quality of the vote and perhaps the civic value and benefits of that act of political participation (Henn and Foard, 2014; Singh, 2016; Hooghe and Stiers, 2017).

Moving beyond the particular act of voting and towards a broader view of democratic developments, the finding that the proportion of citizens who are interested in politics but do not identify with any political party has risen dramatically throughout Western Europe has stark

implications for normative theory and the practice of democracy. The likely practical implications of this have been documented before: social movements grow in strength, new and populist parties sweep elections while established parties struggle and electoral fortunes generally fluctuate rather wildly from election to election (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Wordwide, 2001; Rattinger and Wiegand, 2014; Rooduijn, de Lange and van der Brug, 2014; Dassonneville, 2015b; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2017a). While this might be rooted in citizens being more educated and critical and therefore less likely to defer to political authority and more likely to make autonomous decisions, this is nevertheless rather obviously problematic from the more direct and participatory perspectives of democracy: if politically interested citizens do not identify with their formal political systems and the main avenues that they provide for democratic engagement, there would appear to be a fundamental disconnection between the political system and the ideal of popular rule.

How this disconnection can be bridged exactly is of course a complicated and contested question; perhaps one of the biggest questions of our age. It is outside the scope of this study to adequately review the rich literature on democratic reforms and innovations or the vast variety of reform projects attempted in recent decades (Smith, 2005, 2009; Goodin, 2008; Geissel, 2012; Newton, 2012a; Participedia, 2019). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that while many challenges remain and the experience with different projects is mixed (Ryan, 2014), various studies have found promising and positive effects of various alternate channels for citizen participation in democracy: be it the use of referenda and initiatives in Switzerland and various US states (Stutzer, 2006; Maduz, 2010; Kriesi, 2012); participatory projects towards constitutional change (Ólafsson, 2014; Landemore, 2015) or electoral reform (Newland, 1982; Marsh, 1985; Lijphart, 1994; Karvonen, 2004); *Participatory Budgeting* events (Smith, 2009; Davidson and Elstub, 2014; Piper, 2014; Spada and Allegretti, 2014); *Deliberative Polling* (DP) (Ackerman and Fishkin, 2008; Fishkin, 2012; Davidson and Elstub, 2014) or other mini-publics and citizen assembly projects such as the "*British Columbia Citizens' Assembly* (BCCA)" (Newton, 2012b), Irish citizen assemblies (Suiter, Farrell and O'Malley, 2016) or the Oregon "Citizens' Initiative Reviews" (CIR) project (Gastil *et al.*, 2010; Knobloch *et al.*, 2013). Empirical studies of a multitude of such deliberative mini-publics conducted throughout the world have indeed suggested that these may be a promising way forward to respond to the "crisis of democracy" that we currently appear to be experiencing (Elster, 1996; Bächtiger *et al.*, 2009; Niemeyer, 2011; Davidson and Elstub, 2014; Fishkin and Mansbridge, 2017; Dryzek *et al.*, 2019).

Whatever future research and debate will reveal about the most desirable ways forward from our current era of alienation, the findings of this study would appear to support the notion that most citizens in Western Europe now want more from politics and democracy than their political systems

offer. While some of the rise in alienation documented here may be rooted in a relatively innocent tendency to refrain from "identifying" with institutions such as political parties, it seems that we would want citizens who are interested in politics to be able to identify with at least some of the alternatives for influence and participation that they are being offered. If we value citizens' satisfaction and engagement with their democratic systems, this striking trend should be of major concern; especially if we follow participatory and direct democrats in valuing participation and the ideal of popular rule. This ideal quit simply implies that if citizens do not identify with their democratic systems, these systems need to be changed.

Appendix A Further Models

A.1 Fixed effects multi-level regression models (dummy variables for country), with cluster-robust standard errors for country-year: TDC

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Year	-0.023***	-0.025***	-0.020***	-0.019***	-0.015***	-0.012**
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Apathy		-1.146***			35.187***	29.695***
		(0.089)			(6.805)	(6.830)
Alienation				-0.449***		-0.840***
				(0.083)		(0.082)
No PID or Interest			-1.530***	-1.625***		-1.080***
			(0.108)	(0.120)		(0.101)
Apathy*Year					-0.018***	-0.015***
					(0.003)	(0.003)
Gender	-0.060	0.107*	0.033	0.024	0.101*	0.102*
	(0.039)	(0.048)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.047)	(0.048)
Age	0.028***	0.027***	0.025***	0.025***	0.027***	0.025***
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Age^2	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Marital Status	0.472***	0.463***	0.466***	0.464***	0.460***	0.455***
	(0.037)	(0.035)	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.035)	(0.035)
Germany	0.651**	0.545*	0.885***	0.948***	0.563*	0.859***
	(0.219)	(0.246)	(0.243)	(0.244)	(0.241)	(0.255)
Norway	0.632***	0.501*	0.915***	1.015***	0.516**	0.918***
	(0.191)	(0.196)	(0.199)	(0.202)	(0.192)	(0.204)
United Kingdom	-0.256	-0.436*	-0.331+	-0.334+	-0.422*	-0.438*
	(0.162)	(0.170)	(0.173)	(0.177)	(0.165)	(0.178)
Constant	46.015***	49.807***	40.088***	38.274***	29.915***	24.662**
	(7.820)	(8.178)	(7.653)	(7.591)	(8.341)	(8.655)
Observations	73105	73105	73105	73105	73105	73105
Pseudo R-	0.079	0.121	0.125	0.127	0.123	0.145

squared						
Log likelihood	-27004.652	-25775.440	-25645.455	-25584.347	-25716.507	-25069.205

Standard errors in parentheses
+ p < 0.10, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

A.2 No weights: Random effects multi-level regression models on the TDC

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Year	-0.027***	-0.029***	-0.024***	-0.023***	-0.019***	-0.016**
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Apathy		-1.198***			33.774***	26.598***
		(0.026)			(3.576)	(3.681)
No PID or Interest			-1.594***	-1.692***		-1.154***
			(0.035)	(0.038)		(0.038)
Alienation				-0.454***		-0.846***
				(0.041)		(0.045)
Apathy*Year					-0.018***	-0.014***
					(0.002)	(0.002)
Gender	-0.059**	0.114***	0.038	0.030	0.110***	0.114***
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.024)
Age	0.028***	0.028***	0.025***	0.025***	0.028***	0.026***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Age^2	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Marital Status	0.461***	0.453***	0.443***	0.441***	0.451***	0.439***
	(0.025)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)	(0.026)
Constant	55.081***	58.986***	48.048***	46.001***	39.117***	33.161**
	(9.927)	(10.768)	(10.427)	(10.387)	(10.843)	(10.930)
Level3: Country var(cons)	0.206	0.185	0.350	0.380	0.185	0.362
	(0.162)	(0.150)	(0.267)	(0.288)	(0.150)	(0.276)
Level2: Country-year var(cons)	0.173***	0.206***	0.190***	0.189***	0.202***	0.203***
	(0.045)	(0.054)	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.053)	(0.053)
Observations	73105	73105	73105	73105	73105	73105

Standard errors in parentheses
+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

A.3 No weights: Random effects multi-level regression models on the full dataset

	(1) Turnout	(2) Apathy	(3) Disengagement	(4) Alienation	(5) Turnout
Year	0.003	-0.021***	-0.005	0.028***	0.002
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)
TDC	42.995***	-30.161***	-43.386***	8.108	34.222***
	(8.602)	(7.607)	(11.610)	(9.644)	(9.668)
TDC*Year	-0.022***	0.015***	0.021***	-0.005	-0.017***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Apathy					14.965***
					(3.519)
Apathy*Year					-0.008***
					(0.002)
TDC*Apathy					15.171**
					(4.773)
TDC*Apathy*Year					-0.008**
					(0.002)
Gender	-0.037*	0.589***	0.464***	-0.223***	0.128***
	(0.014)	(0.010)	(0.013)	(0.012)	(0.016)
Age	0.022***	-0.005***	-0.015***	-0.009***	0.022***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Age^2	-0.001***	0.000***	0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Marital Status	0.434***	-0.101***	-0.101***	-0.022	0.455***
	(0.016)	(0.011)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.018)
Compulsory voting	0.956*	0.564+	0.631+	-0.441	1.056*
	(0.457)	(0.299)	(0.372)	(0.613)	(0.465)
Constant	-4.835	40.084***	8.418	-56.435***	-2.290
	(6.446)	(5.243)	(7.991)	(6.667)	(6.639)
Level3: Country var(cons)	0.160* (0.073)	0.061* (0.030)	0.075+ (0.040)	0.294* (0.131)	0.163* (0.075)
Level2: Country-year					

var(cons)	0.091***	0.064***	0.140***	0.091***	0.085***
	(0.014)	(0.010)	(0.023)	(0.015)	(0.014)
Observations	205725	185505	164820	164820	174436

Standard errors in parentheses

$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

A.4 Core analysis without political interest measures that use 3 or 5 point scales

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
FP1						
Year	-0.020***	-0.021***	-0.018**	-0.018**	-0.010	-0.010
	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Apathy		-1.095***			40.929***	33.474***
		(0.211)			(6.099)	(5.921)
No PID or			-1.395***	-1.429***		-0.926***
Interest			(0.169)	(0.176)		(0.146)
Alienation				-0.169		-0.598***
				(0.135)		(0.122)
Apathy*Year					-0.021***	-0.017***
					(0.003)	(0.003)
Gender	-0.056	0.082	0.009	0.006	0.076	0.076
	(0.088)	(0.115)	(0.111)	(0.112)	(0.113)	(0.118)
Age	0.031***	0.030***	0.028***	0.028***	0.030***	0.028***
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Age^2	-0.000***	-0.000**	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000**	-0.000**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Marital Status	0.460***	0.470***	0.461***	0.460***	0.468***	0.467***
	(0.066)	(0.054)	(0.065)	(0.065)	(0.054)	(0.061)
Constant	41.441***	42.898***	37.949**	37.666**	20.664+	20.558
	(11.978)	(9.859)	(13.777)	(13.921)	(11.808)	(13.664)
RP3						
var(cons)	0.240**	0.298*	0.631**	0.649**	0.313*	0.657**
	(0.085)	(0.145)	(0.203)	(0.209)	(0.145)	(0.225)
RP2						
var(cons)	0.076+	0.074+	0.081+	0.083+	0.069+	0.077+
	(0.039)	(0.044)	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.039)	(0.042)
Observations	44081	44081	44081	44081	44081	44081

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

A.5 Core analysis without age values derived from categories

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
FP1						
Year	-0.021**	-0.021***	-0.019*	-0.019*	-0.010	-0.010
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Apathy		-1.096***			41.370***	33.860***
		(0.211)			(6.465)	(6.209)
No PID or Interest			-1.394***	-1.429***		-0.925***
			(0.170)	(0.177)		(0.147)
Alienation				-0.170		-0.599***
				(0.136)		(0.122)
Apathy*Year					-0.021***	-0.017***
					(0.003)	(0.003)
Gender	-0.056	0.082	0.010	0.007	0.077	0.077
	(0.088)	(0.115)	(0.111)	(0.112)	(0.113)	(0.118)
Age	0.031***	0.030***	0.028***	0.028***	0.030***	0.028***
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Age^2	-0.000***	-0.000**	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000**	-0.000**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Marital Status	0.459***	0.469***	0.460***	0.460***	0.468***	0.467***
	(0.067)	(0.054)	(0.065)	(0.066)	(0.055)	(0.061)
Constant	41.938**	43.433***	38.394**	38.121*	20.937+	20.859
	(12.964)	(10.917)	(14.832)	(14.993)	(12.555)	(14.489)
RP3						
var(cons)	0.239**	0.298*	0.630**	0.648**	0.313*	0.656**
	(0.085)	(0.145)	(0.204)	(0.209)	(0.145)	(0.225)
RP2						
var(cons)	0.078+	0.075+	0.082+	0.084+	0.070+	0.078+
	(0.040)	(0.045)	(0.044)	(0.045)	(0.040)	(0.043)
Observations	43900	43900	43900	43900	43900	43900

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

A.6 APC analysis without age values derived from categories

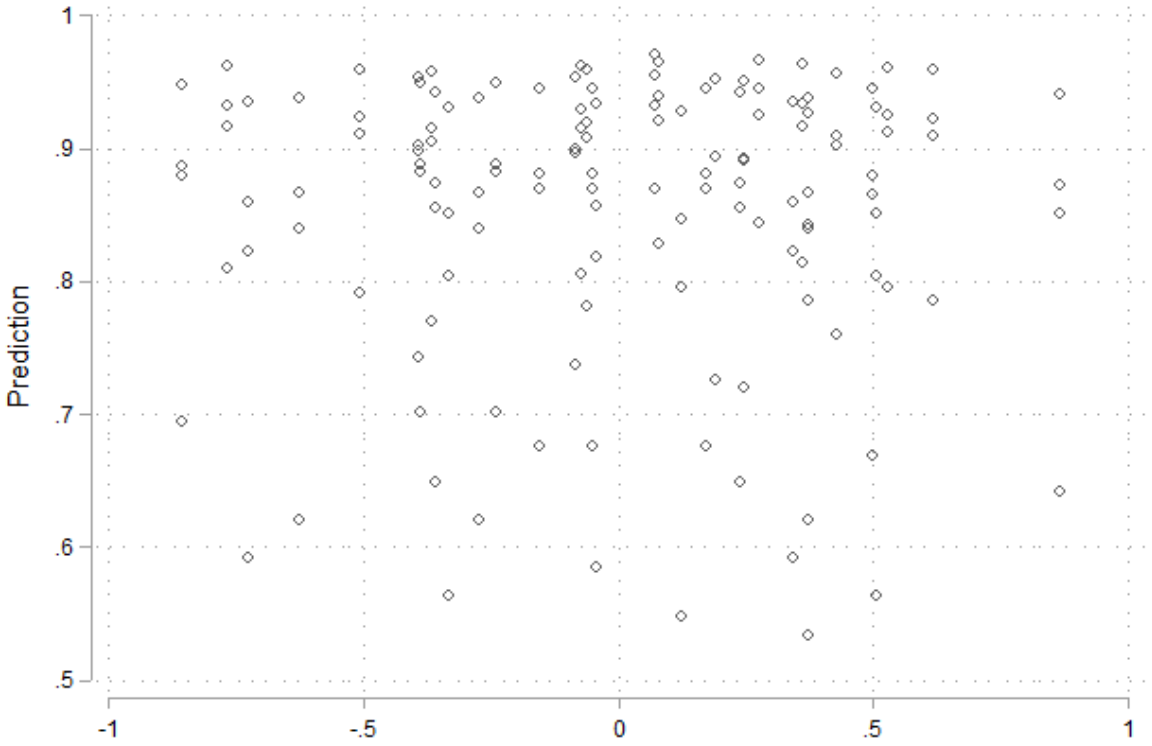
	(1)	(2)	(3)
FP1			
Year	-0.028**	-0.019*	-0.011
	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.009)
Apathy			33.873***
			(6.710)
Apathy*Year			-0.018***
			(0.003)
Protest		-0.131***	-0.168***
		(0.038)	(0.051)
Post-Material		-0.430***	-0.449***
		(0.062)	(0.072)
Age	0.028***	0.020***	0.019***
	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Age^2	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Gender	-0.059	-0.056	0.113
	(0.070)	(0.071)	(0.086)
Marital Status	0.460***	0.457***	0.448***
	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.050)
Constant	55.709**	40.111*	23.891
	(18.509)	(19.268)	(17.680)
RP3			
Level3: Country	0.205**	0.207**	0.186*
	(0.069)	(0.072)	(0.088)
RP2			
Level2: Country-year	0.173***	0.172***	0.203**
	(0.047)	(0.048)	(0.063)
Observations	72924	72924	72924

Standard errors in parentheses

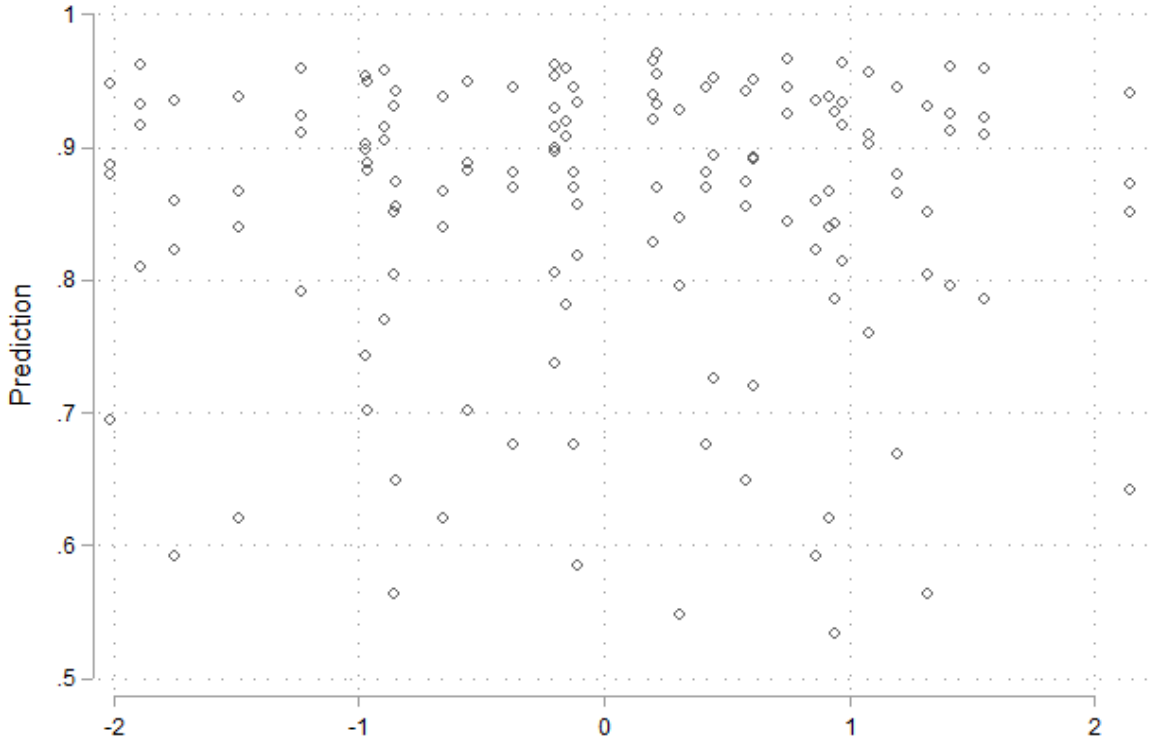
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Appendix B Diagnostics

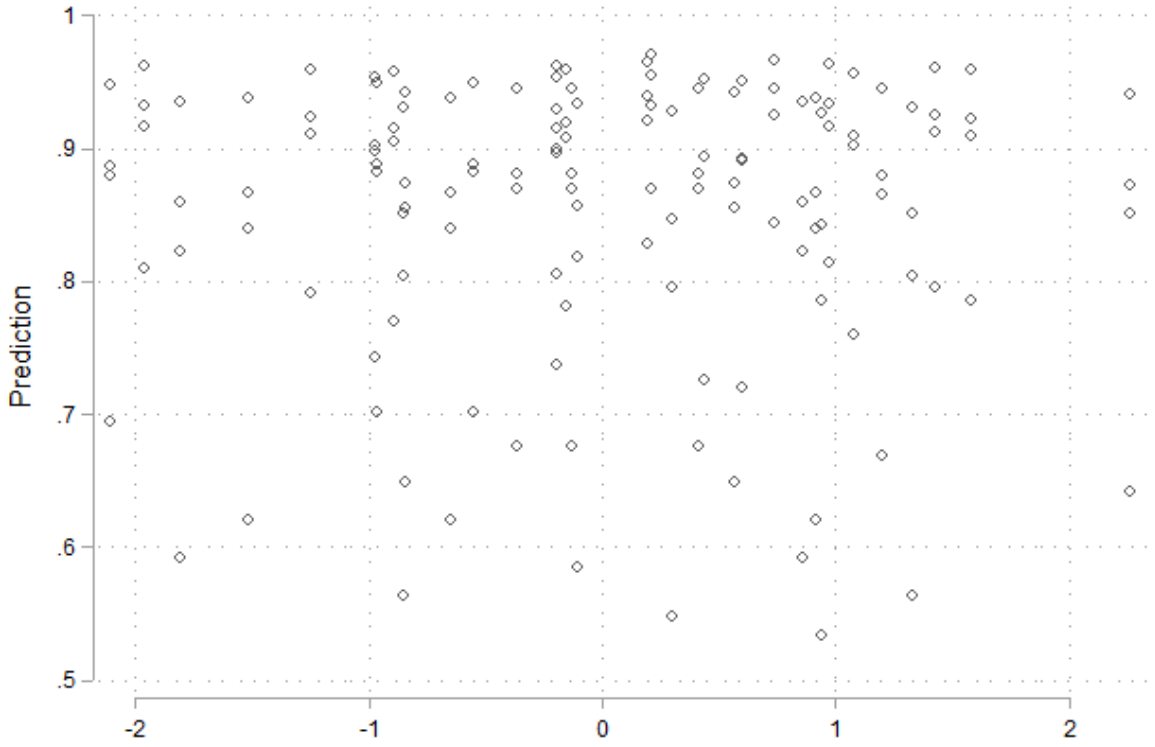
B.1 Scatterplot of predicted values vs. Pearson residuals estimates from the full multi-level regression model on turnout decline countries



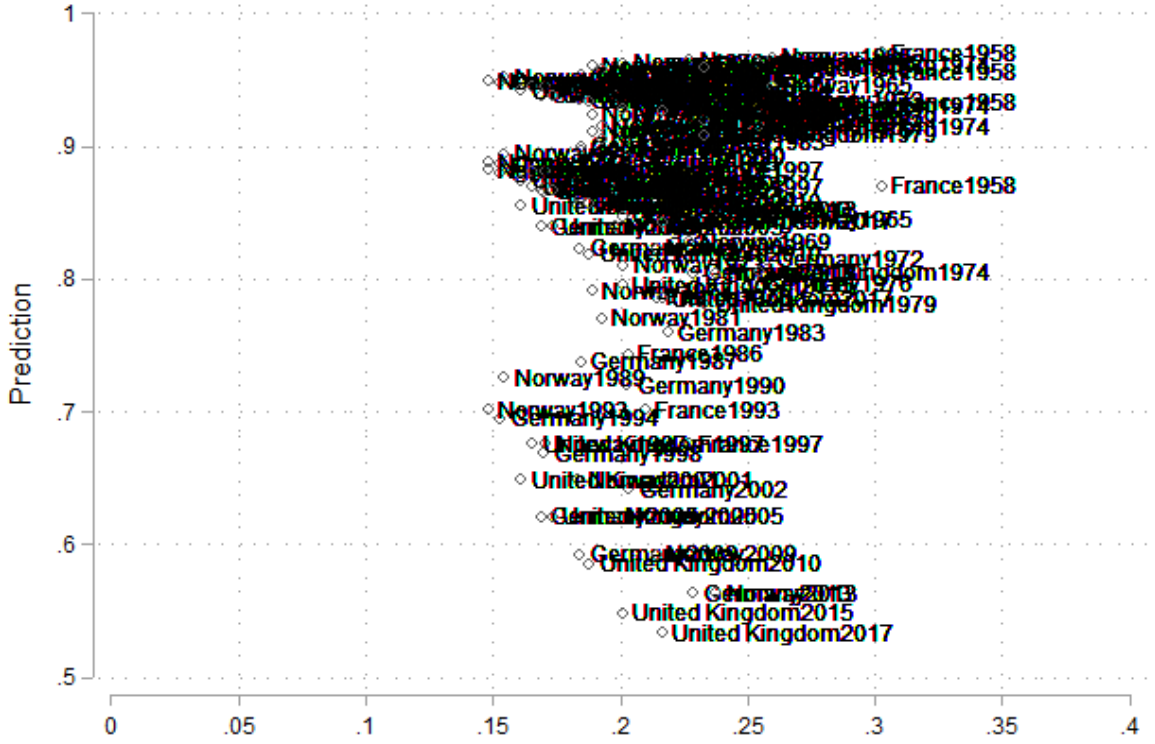
B.2 Scatterplot of predicted values vs. residual standard errors in the full model



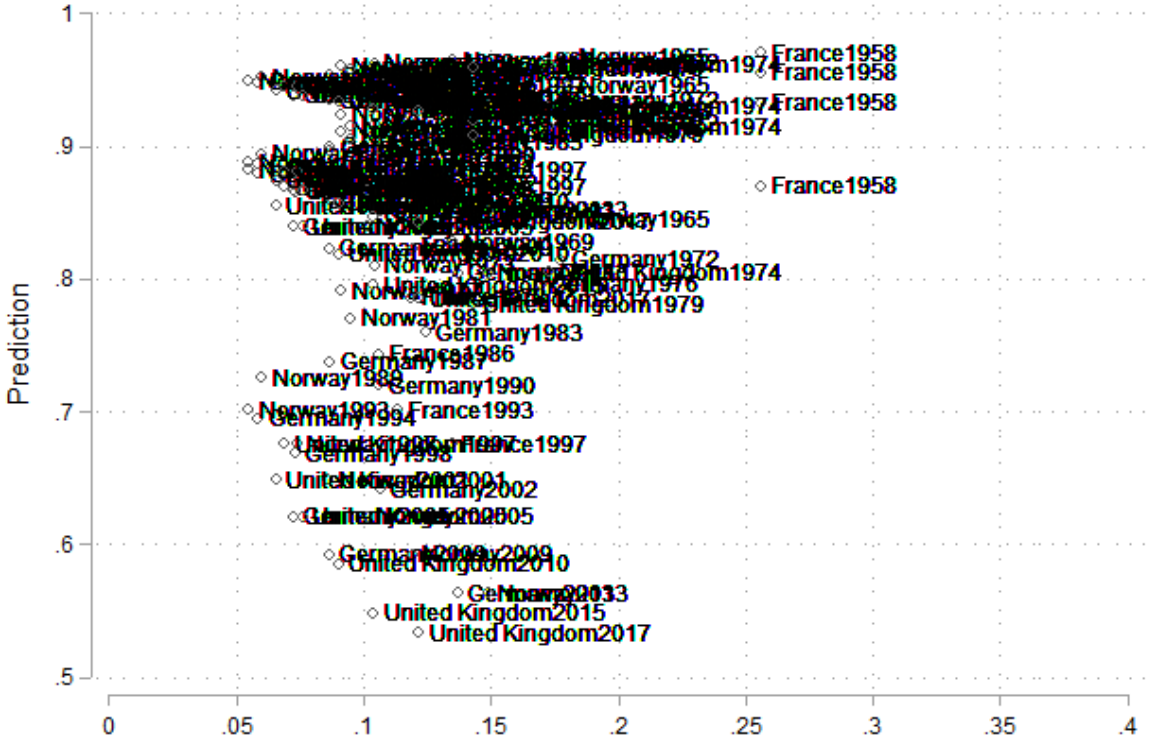
B.3 Scatterplot of predicted values vs. deletion residuals in the full model



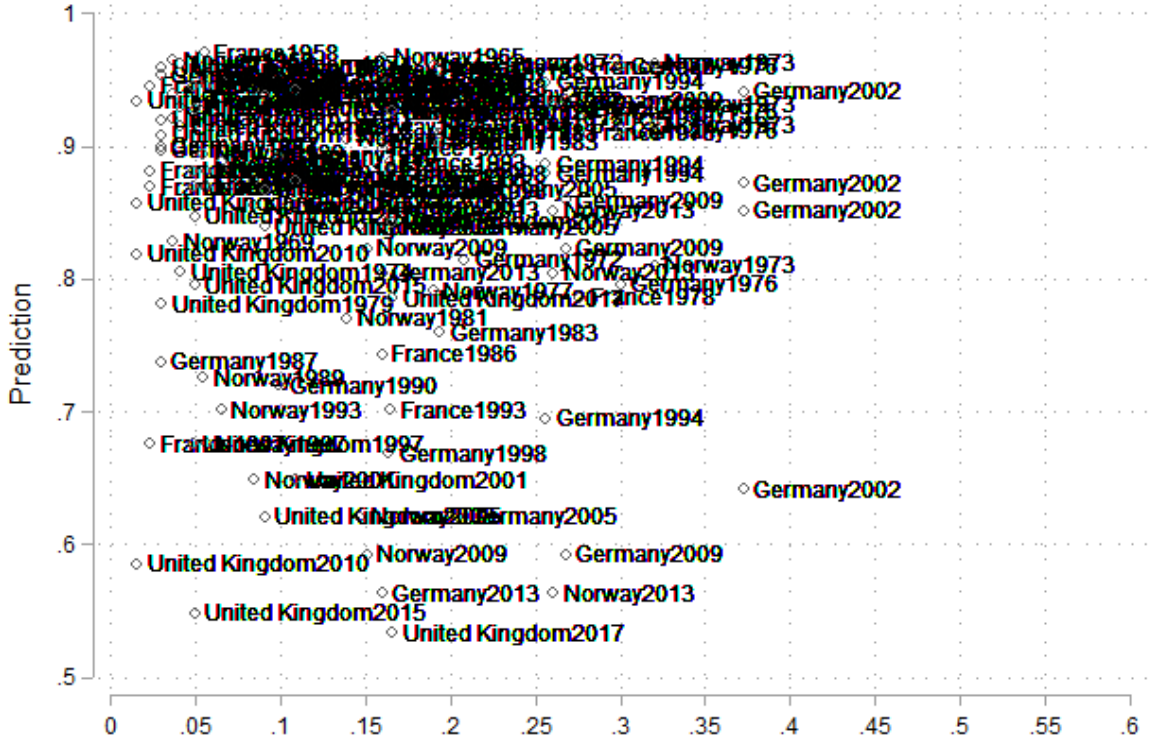
B.4 Scatterplot of predicted values vs. standardised residuals in the full model (labels for country-year)



B.5 Scatterplot of predicted values vs. leveraged residuals in the full model (labels for country-year)



B.6 Scatterplot of predicted values vs. influence residuals in the full model (labels for country-year)



The first few scatterplots look fine but the plots of leveraged residuals and influence residuals suggest that the data from France in 1958 and Germany in 2002 could be problematically different and influential in the regression analyses. To explore this, I run the random effects models for the turnout decline countries excluding these two country-years. The results are presented in the table below and do not alter the findings of this study.

B.1 Excluding the flagged data from France in 1958 and Germany in 2002

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Year	-0.028**	-0.031**	-0.024*	-0.023*	-0.021*	-0.017^{+}
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.009)
Apathy		-1.205***			34.120***	27.343***
		(0.157)			(7.332)	(4.598)
No PID or Interest			-1.626***	-1.720***		-1.176***
			(0.215)	(0.238)		(0.200)

Alienation				-0.457**		-0.851***
				(0.149)		(0.152)
Apathy*Year					-0.018***	-0.014***
					(0.004)	(0.002)
Gender	-0.056	0.117	0.040	0.032	0.113	0.117
	(0.070)	(0.088)	(0.077)	(0.077)	(0.087)	(0.086)
Age	0.029***	0.028***	0.026***	0.026***	0.028***	0.026***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Age^2	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***	-0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Marital Status	0.467***	0.460***	0.454***	0.451***	0.457***	0.448***
	(0.050)	(0.048)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.049)	(0.050)
Constant	56.913**	63.300**	49.647*	47.158*	42.367*	34.698+
	(21.488)	(23.039)	(19.429)	(18.537)	(19.572)	(17.817)
Level3: Country var(cons)	0.190**	0.160*	0.335**	0.367**	0.163*	0.344**
	(0.062)	(0.080)	(0.106)	(0.120)	(0.077)	(0.127)
Level2: Country-year var(cons)	0.180***	0.210***	0.180***	0.175***	0.205***	0.189***
	(0.047)	(0.055)	(0.045)	(0.043)	(0.055)	(0.049)
Observations	70736	70736	70736	70736	70736	70736

Standard errors in parentheses

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

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