

Rain falls
on all of us

but some manage to get
more wet than others

***Political context and
electoral participation***

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RAIN FALLS ON ALL OF US
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POLITICAL CONTEXT AND ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

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preface

The making of this dissertation has been quite a journey. It took twice as long as planned, it took me to places I had never planned to live in, and it got me into contact with a lot of people that I'm glad I met (and a few others). Now that it's done, I can sincerely say that it's been well worth it.

A few people deserve special mentioning. Quite a few will go unmentioned here - as they probably know themselves, that is *not* because I do not appreciate what they've done for me. Daniel Dorling and Henrik Oscarsson helped me acquire data vital for the British and Swedish analyses. Pat Lyons was always available for advice on the intricacies of the English (and Gaelic) language, and came up with the three c's of electoral participation and closeness. I would like to thank them very much.

Nan Dirk de Graaf played a vital role in starting out this project, and in the beginning stages of what has eventually become this book. Although the project has turned out considerably different from its original plan, I want to thank him sincerely for the help he has given me. Wout Ultee was right there when I needed him - and had time to have a drink afterwards, which helped a lot when times got rough and the pressure mounted. And of course I want to thank Cees van der Eijk, the supervisor who not only got me into this, but also got me through it. His manic-didactic approach to political science, life and the universe as a whole has always been stimulating, if at times exhausting, and reminded me why I want to do this. In addition, he's also an extremely nice person, with interesting views on the connection between contextual influences on electoral participation and ice-skating.

Then there are those who helped me in a non-professional way. Rob and Sabine became very good friends in the time I spent in Nijmegen. Toril taught me everything there is to know about staying as an ex-pat in Dublin and Trondheim. Céline and Anne gave me some invaluable insights into the female French mind, and Heinz and Marion never taught me much German - but that's all forgiven now. I'd like to thank Rob Johns for his insights into underrated and overrated bands, amongst other things.

The friends I have neglected in the manic last year(s) of finishing this dissertation will hopefully forgive me, eventually. And I know Dionne will forgive me if I promise her I will never write a dissertation again. Which I gladly do.

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Introduction

Explaining Electoral Participation

This book is not about weather forecasts, the impact of rain on the individual or the influence of the greenhouse effect on worldwide precipitation patterns. Sincere apologies to all who have read the title, yet not the subtitle. This book is about electoral participation, and how the characteristics of an election may affect the individual voter's decision to participate or not¹.

Electoral participation is a widely studied subject, so one might justifiably wonder what this study aims to add to all that's been said before. This chapter outlines the added insight into the understanding of electoral participation this research intends to offer.

1.1 Who Votes?

If voting is of concern, the obvious first question is: who votes in elections? Not everybody votes: some vote at every election, while others never vote. And then there are those who vote sometimes, but not always. Especially this latter, may-or-may-not-vote group will be of special interest for this research. What may explain that people participate in one election, but not another?

There is a substantial amount of literature that explains to us why people do vote. The typical approach is to investigate participation in election Y, held in country Z by using information on individual voters, typically collected in a large-scale survey at the time of the election. The data are entered in an analytical model, and the best predictors for electoral participation are revealed. A typical analysis may show that young people vote less frequently than older people, while the higher educated show a high tendency to vote, compared to lower educated. Frequent churchgoers tend to vote more often than the less religiously persuaded, while politically interested voters show an unsurprisingly higher chance to participate than those who indicate that they care less about politics. A similar pattern is often detected for political efficacy. Union membership frequently proves a positive indicator for electoral participation, while gender sometimes make a difference in the rate of participation as well. Depending on information gathered through the election survey, even more predictors of participation can be determined. Income, party identification, and even marital status, class or social economic status are but a few.

1.2 Why Vote?

Why then do the higher educated vote more often than lower educated? Why does a frequent act of religious worship instigate people to vote? Why would the frequent reading of a

¹ Throughout this work, referring to the electorate as 'voters and non-voters' will become tedious and tiresome. Therefore, the term 'voters' will be used throughout to refer to voters and non-voters alike. This means that with the term 'voter' a prospective voter is meant; a member of the electorate, eligible to vote, who, come Election Day, may or may not turn out to cast a vote. Where specifically 'voters' or 'non-voters' is meant, this will be made clear in the text.

newspaper, or discussing the affairs of the day with others encourage someone to take the trouble of voting on Election Day? To answer that, it is helpful to take the pros and cons of voting into account. Voting can be more or less troublesome, and it can be more or less attractive. The direct benefit of voting is obvious: taking part in determining the course of the country. How large this benefit is depends on several factors, one of which is the perception people have of the degree to which politics is actually able to steer the course of events in a country, or the degree to which they believe politicians will take the average voter's opinion for granted. Such factors may limit the benefit of voting. Benefits of voting, sometimes less obvious, can be thought of as well. If one is part of a community where electoral participation is highly valued, participation in an election may offer a chance to identify with that community. I vote, because I am part of and care for this community.

On the other hand, voting takes effort as well. The most obvious effort is perhaps the time it takes to go out to the voting booth. That may be more to ask of someone who works 80 hours a week than of a part time employee, just as it may be more to ask of a remote farmer than of a city dweller not two steps away from the polling station. And that's leaving rain or shine still out of the equation. But other costs of voting exist as well. To make a choice for a party or candidate, information on the vote options is required. That information may be collected through a thorough examination of newspapers, election broadcasts and party manifestos. But shortcuts may also be taken. If a trusted source, which could be anyone ranging from a life partner to the vicar or the union leader, says Party X is the best option, reaching a decision becomes a far less strenuous affair.

Milbrath and Goel use the terms *facilitative* and *motivational* to distinguish between individual characteristics that facilitate or motivate people to participate in an election (Milbrath & Goel, 1979). Facilitative factors influence the amount of effort that a voter has to overcome to partake in the election. Examples can be cognitive skills, or access to information regarding the elections. Education can thus function as a facilitative factor, as can religion or union membership, when respected leaders give cues for best possible vote options.

Motivational factors influence the amount of effort a voter is willing to overcome to participate in an election. One potential positive motivational factor is group membership. Some social groups perceive voting as a civic duty, and will place a positive incentive on electoral participation, or, adversely, condemn electoral abstention. Examples of such groups are certain religious denominations, socio-political associations such as political parties or labor unions or the higher educated. For members of these groups voting may be a way to express that they belong to the group. As Durkheim (1897) argued, people will abide to social norms, depending on their level of integration into social groups. Conversely, a strong belief that politicians will do as they please irrespective of electoral outcomes certainly lowers the benefits of voting, and diminishes a person's inclination to participate. Political cynicism and efficacy are thus characteristics that affect an individual's motivation to vote.

Facilitative factors thus raise or lower the barriers to voting, while motivation factors influence the willingness of a voter to overcome those barriers. Although the notion of facilitative and motivational factors may be useful to understand how certain individual characteristics work to influence the likelihood to vote, the system is not perfect. There are characteristics that contain both facilitative and motivational aspects. Education, to give an example, helps lowering information costs by making political news and information easier

to process (facilitative) while it may also work to ingrain civic norms that value electoral participation, making voting per se an appreciated act (motivational). Being less than perfect, the notion of facilitative and motivational factors still provides a useful insight in the logic of voting.

1.3 A Stable Vote?

Let us return to the stereotypical analysis of voting presented above. It was aimed at explaining electoral participation in election Y in country Z. What now, if time passes, and another election presents itself? Well, again typically speaking, another analysis is performed, predicting electoral participation in what now has become election Y+1. Again individual electoral participation is predicted on the basis of information gathered around election time. Roughly the same kind of information is entered into the model, and in virtually all cases, outcomes remarkably similar to those achieved for the previous analysis are obtained. Age again shows a positive relationship with voting, as do education and religiosity, while the politically cynical voters still tend to participate in fewer numbers.

Such a similar outcome is of course quite a relief. The explanation regarding facilitative and motivational factors influencing voters, the barriers and incentives to voting, would lose its value if analyses proved that the relationship between individual characteristics and the chance to vote fluctuated considerably between elections. And the loss of this explanatory scheme put aside, more seriously would be our concern if for instance the higher educated voters voted in large numbers in one election, while abstaining in another, without the real world having been turned on its head as well. At best, that would be a suggestion that we have not captured the relation between education and electoral participation very well.

Apparently then, we have nailed down the factors that determine electoral participation with analyses replicated over time and space. They are found to work in single analyses, and they work in largely the same way in follow-up analyses. Moreover, the reader can rest assured: these factors have been shown to work in virtually similar ways in a very comprehensive range of analyses of electoral behavior. Does that mean we know now what determines electoral participation? Well not quite, as Figure 1-1 will make clear.

Figure 1-1 Turnout Rates - Sweden, the Netherlands and Great Britain, Parliamentary Elections 1970-2000

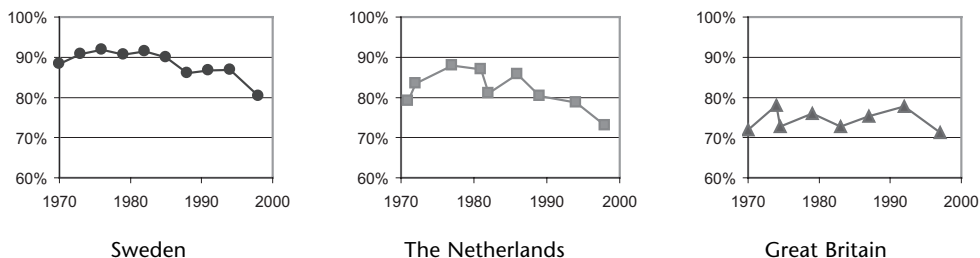


Figure 1-1 shows turnout rates for parliamentary elections in three European countries: Sweden, the Netherlands and Great Britain. These countries are selected here for illustrative purposes: they are not extreme cases of the democratic universe. It is a revealing picture indeed: it shows that turnout figures do vary substantially between elections. Since it was

established above that the influence of individual characteristics on electoral participation is very stable over elections, the variation in turnout figures cannot be attributed to variation in the influence of personal characteristics. Alternative explanations are therefore required.

If the nature of the relationship between individual characteristics and electoral participation - the strength and the direction of the effect, in technical terms - does not vary, the 'outcome' of the equation, namely turnout rates, can only vary if the individual characteristics vary. This means that either the composition of the electorate changes substantially, or the individual characteristics vary substantially within persons. Of course, there is also the possibility of omitted variables: we may simply have not found the complete answer to the question of electoral participation. For characteristics at the individual level, however, research into electoral participation has evolved well enough to preclude this option.

To explain the pattern reflected in Figure 1-1 on the basis of compositional changes alone, is rather difficult. If, as we have just seen, the relationship between determinants of electoral participation does not change over time, then variation in turnout would have to be explained by variation in, e.g., the educational composition of the electorate. The number of highly educated voters should increase in elections where turnout is high, while these higher educated should vanish again in elections that show lower turnout. In other words, to explain variation in turnout rates through individual characteristics requires the sum of these characteristics to change accordingly, since their relationship with electoral participation remains stable. In view of the fact that some of the largest fluctuations in turnout appear between elections that follow each other rather quickly (cf. the Netherlands, for the elections in 1981 and 1982, or Great Britain, for the two elections held in 1974), these changes would have to be quite dramatic at times. We would therefore have to conclude that either personal characteristics (an individual's level of education) or the composition of the electorate as a whole (the number of higher and lower educated people in a country) are expected to be markedly volatile.

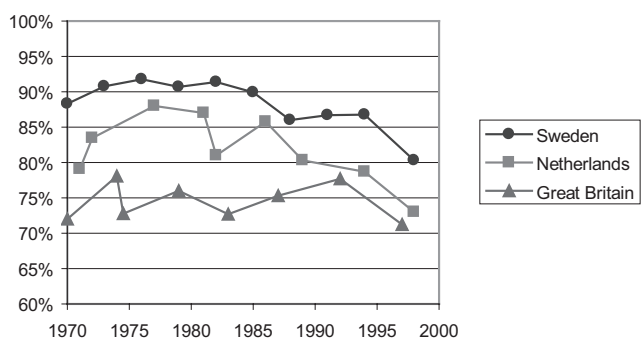
In principle this volatility may occur for some variables. For others this is very unlikely. The degree of political interest or efficacy, the level of education or religiosity of a person can of course change over time, but it is difficult to imagine how someone may go down in level of education over time. Variation in the electorate through entry of new, young voters and exit of older generations - cohort replacement - or possibly immigration may shift the balance between voters and non-voters. But such compositional changes do not occur as frequently and as quickly as the fluctuations in turnout figures would require (cf. van der Eijk & Niemöller, 1983, p72-76). An influx of higher educated youngsters might hypothetically serve as explanation for the high turnout figures in the first election held in 1974 in Britain, but that explanation is thwarted if the second election in 1974 is taken into account where we see turnout go down again considerably. Surely all those hypothetical highly educated new voters could not have vanished within less than a year. The electoral composition argument therefore does not suffice in explaining the turnout variations of Figure 1-1.

Could personal characteristics vary sufficiently to explain the turnout variations of Figure 1-1? Could, over the space of 5 years, levels of political interest in the Netherlands have gone up, down and up again for individual voters to explain the marked drop and recovery in turnout rates during the elections of 1981, 1982 and 1986? In theory, yes. Political interest is a characteristic that may vary over time, far more so than, e.g., education, which typically increases during one's youth, after which it remains stable. It is not inconceivable

that a person's political interest increases and decreases over time. But it is unlikely that whole segments of the Dutch electorate went on a synchronized political interest roller-coaster ride in 1981, 1982 and 1986, to produce the dip and recovery in turnout rates observed for these elections, unless they were affected by an outside influence. Individual variations in personal characteristics are not at all inconceivable, but they are likely to be randomly dispersed between individuals, and thus cancel each other out at the aggregate level. To produce variations in turnout at the aggregate level, such individual variations would have to occur in unison for (segments of) the electorate. The explanation for the picture presented in Figure 1-1 then becomes the following. People tend to be rather stable in most of their personal characteristics and behavior, and if they do change, this is likely to be cancelled out by another voter changing in another direction. But the surroundings voters find themselves in change as well, sometimes slowly, sometimes rather abruptly and significantly. These contextual changes can affect the behavior of large segments of voters, which explains the variations in aggregate turnout shown in Figure 1-1.

Variations in the circumstances of the election, which may be called context factors or the contextual characteristics of the election, hold the key to explaining the variation in turnout between elections, determining which election will see a high turnout, and which a low turnout. The argument is made easier if Figure 1-2 is inspected, below. Figure 1-2 may illuminate why the step of turning to context characteristics to explain variations in turnout levels is so much easier made when comparing countries.

Figure 1-2 Turnout - Sweden, the Netherlands and Great Britain Compared, Parliamentary Elections between 1970 and 2000.



From Figure 1-2, it is evident that turnout rates show considerable variation between countries as well as within. Although the elections held in these three countries over the period 1970-2000 show considerable variation in turnout rates, at the same time there is little overlap in the bandwidth of this variation between the countries. Comparing turnout over the decades depicted in Figure 1-2, Swedish turnout rates are consistently higher than Dutch ones, while these in turn are consistently higher than the British.

It is tempting to argue again that the differences in turnout rates between these three countries are to be attributed to differences in the composition of the electorate. But although each of these countries is unique in itself, they do not differ enough to explain the marked differences in individual characteristics that would be required to create such

different turnout levels between countries. Britain is not a country filled with uneducated politically disinterested non-voters, nor is Sweden made up of politically aware, socially integrated and extremely high-educated voters. With regard to the point that aggregate levels of political interest or efficacy do indeed vary between these countries, this is more likely to be the result of other, contextual, characteristics, than an inherent trait of the Anglo-Saxons or the Nordic people. Should the Swedish social and political landscape come close to reflecting the British one, Sweden's high turnout rates will become a thing of the past. It is in other words the context of the election, determined by political, systemic and societal characteristics, that matters. The electoral system, the time between elections, the number of political parties, the day elections are being held, the number and size of constituencies, single party or coalition governments and a whole host of other characteristics of a society, political and non-political, have been shown to influence the willingness of voters to partake in elections. Some of these characteristics are very stable. The electoral system, or the day elections being held are typically matters that vary between countries, but remain unchanged for long periods within a country. This explains the consistency in the difference in turnout rates between Sweden, the Netherlands and Great Britain. Other factors, such as the closeness of an election race, or the time between two elections, show much more short-term variation. These more variable contextual characteristics can help to explain variation in turnout that is much less structural, such as for instance the difference in turnout between the two elections held in 1974 in Great Britain, or 1981 and 1982 in the Netherlands. These latter, more variable contextual characteristics may help us understand why turnout is high in one election, while lower in another, even though the country need not have changed fundamentally. Such contextual characteristics can offer us explanations that work within a political system, as well as between political systems, and these will form the focus of this research.

From the discussion of Figure 1-1 and Figure 1-2 it already becomes evident that it only makes sense to talk about contextual influences when making comparisons over time or space. Only if we look at the rate of turnout for several elections, or differences in turnout between countries, can we include contextual factors into the equation. A model that focuses on the influence of individual characteristics in a single election is unable to capture the influence of the political context, since that context will be a constant for all voters in that election. But it would be a mistake to assume that, since it is a constant, the context of the election is without influence on individual voters.

Why then is research on electoral participation not focused on context effects solely? Well, for one reason of course, that would be to ignore the individual voter completely. Which is odd, to say the least, as in the end the rate of turnout is determined by voters, not by the constitutional make-up of the country, or the political landscape as it was at the moment of the election. Aggregate turnout figures are the sum of individual actions, they are not independent of individual voters. Eventually, any change at the system level will therefore have to be explained by bringing in the individuals that do or do not vote. Analyses at the level of the political system may present us with plausible suggestions on the causes of a rise or fall in electoral participation, but, as will be shown in the subsequent chapters, only at the individual level can hypotheses be tested. Macro analysis can never be a substitute for micro analysis.

1.4 Placing the Individual within the Context

Combining information from both levels of analysis, placing the individual voter within the context of the election, is a natural step forward in explaining electoral behavior. It permits testing hypotheses on the influence of individual and context level characteristics on electoral participation. It creates an analytical model that does not treat individuals isolated from the context they live in, and treats the electoral context as influential, without neglecting the fact that voters in the end make the decision to participate or not. Most importantly, it enables an explanation for fluctuations in turnout, without making excessive assumptions about individual characteristics or the composition of the electorate. Combining information on individuals and context leads to a better and more informative model of electoral participation. A model that allows the explanation of individual behavior, as well as variation in turnout found at the aggregate level. This is therefore exactly what will be undertaken in Chapter 2.

In line with recent researchers who have taken the same step (to be discussed in Chapter 3), Chapter 2 will be a first exploration of the practical possibilities of combining individual and contextual level information into a single model. Chapter 2 presents an analysis of electoral participation in the Netherlands. This choice of country is arbitrary; any other democratic system would do as well, as long as empirical data is available. It is therefore not the explanation of electoral participation in the Netherlands per se that is of interest. It is the explanation of the electoral participation of voters in a political system, utilizing information on those individuals and the political system they find themselves in.

Chapter 2 presents an analysis of electoral participation in parliamentary elections in the Netherlands in the period 1970 to 2000. In these three decades, nine elections were held in the Netherlands, all of which have data available for analysis. This enables investigating the influence on participation of individual effects in combination with contextual effects. A full model, presenting all the 'usual suspects' in explaining electoral participation is presented, to which a number of contextual characteristics are added.

The contextual characteristics included in the model in Chapter 2 aim to measure the awareness of the election among the electorate, the perceived relevance of the election and the link between the social cleavages in the country and the political system. Factors influencing the awareness of the election are facilitative in nature, by influencing the ease with which information is made available to the electorate. In Chapter 2, these facilitative factors will be explored through the use of contextual characteristics that influence the media's attention to the election. Factors affecting the relevance of the election are motivational, as they influence the benefits to be reaped from participating. In Chapter 2, these are indicated by characteristics influencing the clarity of the political consequences of an election. Likewise, the time between elections is seen as an indicator of perceived relevance, as quickly ensuing elections may undermine voter motivation. The closeness of the election race may have a motivational function as well, by giving voters the impression that their vote might just swing the balance. Lastly, a strong link between social cleavages and the political party landscape may motivate people to participate as a way to express they belong, as well as facilitate them by lowering information costs involved in seeking out a viable party to vote for. If the church or the union recommends a party, why invest extra time in seeking out other options?

The choice of contextual characteristics in Chapter 2 is in line with the exploratory nature of this chapter. The findings will be used as a starting point for further theorizing in the subsequent chapters. The differential influence of contextual factors on individual voters is explored through the use of cross-level interactions.

The conclusions that can be drawn from the analyses of Chapter 2 are twofold. Firstly, and importantly, adding contextual information to a model explaining individual behavior improves the predictive power of the model substantially. This is illustrated in Chapter 2 by comparing actual turnout rates in Dutch elections with predictions that are derived of models with and without contextual information. The models including contextual information consistently outperform models without such information, the difference being considerable.

The second conclusion to be drawn from the model in Chapter 2, is that the model does not conceptualize the influence of context on the individual voter. Although the inclusion of contextual information leads to a better predictive model of individual behavior, the implicit assumption is that contextual characteristics are equally influential to all voters, regardless of individual characteristics. This assumption is theoretically not very plausible, for various reasons. First, context effects cannot influence voters who are already certain of voting on the basis of their individual characteristics. And other voters may simply never vote, regardless of any contextual influences. The influence of contextual factors will thus depend on individual characteristics, and may be different for different voters. Much like rain will fall down on all of us, yet somehow some get more wet than others. Some may carry an umbrella, while some may stay inside. And some may be caught out in the rain and get thoroughly soaked.

1.5 Individualizing Context

Already in Chapter 2, a first attempt is made to ‘tailor’ the influence of the context to the individual. This is done by introducing interaction effects between some contextual and individual characteristics. As virtually no theory on these interactions is available, however, the theoretical logic of doing so is a matter that should be addressed first.

Chapter 3 gives an overview of how electoral participation may be explained at the individual and the aggregate level. With the aid of a graphical representation of the explanatory model, it is shown how both the aggregate level model as well as the individual level model virtually ignore the other. Chapter 3 also shows how this can be amended, and how the two levels of information can be used to explain individual and also aggregate level electoral participation. It is shown how a simplistic form of adding contextual information inherently implies that context effects are assumed to be equal to everyone. An untenable assumption, as argued above. Therefore, Chapter 3 suggests an alternative model, in which it is made explicit that the influence of the context is dependent on individual characteristics. It is argued that such a depiction of the model forces the researcher to specify explicitly what the expected influence of the context on different kinds of voters is.

If contextual influences are not expected to affect the whole of the electorate in a singular way, it becomes necessary to hypothesize how these effects are expected to vary. The theoretical justification for the inclusion of a variable in an explanatory model - so natural at the individual level - is often neglected when contextual level characteristics are concerned. In Chapter 3 the risks of such a ‘lazy’ way of theoretical modeling are elaborated. For different contextual characteristics, differential effects are theorized. One of these, of

particular importance for subsequent chapters, is the "closeness" of the election, a factor that can play a facilitative as well as a motivational role.

Next to theoretical issues, Chapter 3 also addresses more practical issues. Not stopping at theory alone, Chapter 3 also investigates which of the various contextual factors discussed stands the best chance of generating differential effects in actual empirical analysis. It is argued that the closeness of an election is the most promising, and theoretically interesting. Chapter 3 subsequently examines more comprehensively on a theoretical level why it is that some voters are, while other voters aren't likely to be affected by the closeness of the election race. Voters' party preferences are of pivotal importance for the degree to which a voter is likely to be affected by the closeness of the election. Chapter 3 argues that three categories of voters are to be distinguished. These three categories will be identified as *Convinced*, *Confounded* and *Condemned* voters. Convinced voters - who support only one of the parties in the lead, while strongly rejecting the other - will strongly react to the degree of closeness of an election, while Condemned voters - who do not support any of the parties in the lead - are expected to be hardly affected. Confounded voters - who support both of the leading parties - may prove rather unpredictable in their response to the closeness of the election. Subsequent chapters will therefore focus on the differential effect of this contextual factor on electoral participation.

1.6 Making Close Calls

If we know then from Chapter 3 who may be influenced by closeness, the next step is then taken in Chapter 4: when might closeness be influential? In other words, in what kind of elections can we expect closeness to be of influence? Obviously, in two-party elections the race between these two parties is expected to be of influence. But in a more general way, we may hypothesize that closeness can be influential in other systems comprising more parties as well. Chapter 4 argues that closeness can indeed be of influence in a variety of party systems. Chapter 4 examines how the concept of closeness can be operationalized in various political systems, and shows that the common interpretation of closeness as pertaining only to two-party systems is needlessly restrictive.

Chapter 4 is consciously staying 'at the surface', it analyses closeness at the aggregate level of turnout. This allows a quick scan of a variety of systems and preliminary conclusions from where to embark on more detailed analyses at the individual level. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 are dedicated to such in-depth analyses. The impact of closeness on individual voters will be examined for Great Britain and Sweden, respectively. Here again the value of the 'quick scan' in Chapter 4 is made clear, as it was shown that these are two countries that prove susceptible to closeness, at least at the aggregate level. The question to be answered in the two chapters following Chapter 4 is therefore whether the hypothesized individual-level differences in the effect of the contextual factors do indeed occur, and what magnitude they have.

Great Britain is an interesting case where the influence of the closeness of an election is concerned for more than one reason. First and foremost of course, it is a 'first-past-the-post' system dominated by two parties, where the closeness of the race between these two main parties is a frequent theme in the election campaign, used by both the parties to mobilize voters. Nevertheless, the two main parties are not the only actors on the political stage, and they are not even the leading actors on some of the election stages: i.e., within the different constituencies. Although elections are a national affair, in the end the influence of each

individual voter is limited to the local constituency. As a consequence of this, the shape of the political battle that a voter is confronted with in his or her local constituency may differ substantially from what is going on at the national stage.

Chapter 5 examines the electoral participation of individual voters in parliamentary elections in Great Britain between 1970 and 2000. This analysis uses information relating to both the national as well as to the local (constituency) level race. Thus, analysis will examine whether voters are influenced more by the closeness of the race in their own constituency, or the closeness between the two major parties at the national level. As it turns out, the findings of Chapter 5 suggest that voters focus more on the national level than on the race in their own constituency, even though the British electoral system provides voters only direct influence on the local level.

In Sweden, the constituency level is not as significant as it is in Great Britain. More importantly, Sweden has a multi-party system, and proportional representation elections. Some analysts describe the Swedish system as a one-plus party system because of the dominance of the Social Democratic Labor Party (SAP). Chapter 6 shows, however, that Sweden's multi-party system can be defined as a two-bloc system, pitching the social democratic bloc against the 'bourgeois' bloc. Swedish elections focus frequently on the question which of these two blocs will gain government power, although perhaps a more accurate phrasing for most of the second half of the twentieth century is "whether the SAP will retain government power". As was shown in the aggregate analysis of Chapter 4, the result is that the closeness between these two blocs is a factor of considerable influence in Sweden. Chapter 6 demonstrates that this can also be shown at the individual level, by using Swedish election studies for the period 1979-2000.

Chapter 6 shows a notable additional finding: the effect of closeness is of equal magnitude for the whole of the Swedish electorate. This seems at odds with the hypotheses from Chapter 3, which argue that closeness will only affect voters for whom the closeness of the election matters. Section 6.6 of Chapter 6 points at some important data limitations that could explain the absence of individual variation in the influence of closeness. However, even from a theoretical point of view it is not unfeasible that we find closeness equally affects all voters in Sweden. The absence of individual variation in the influence of closeness may well be due to the fact that the two party-blocs comprise the whole of the Swedish political spectrum. As a result of this, closeness affects the whole of the Swedish electorate in virtually the same way. Indeed, if it rains in Sweden, everyone appears to get wet.

This study argues that contextual factors cannot be ignored when explaining individual behavior. At the same time however, it also argues that this influence should be modeled at the individual level - and not only at the aggregate level - as the strength of context effects is dependent on individual characteristics. For some, the context may be irrelevant, namely for voters who will turn out in every election held in the country, irrespective of political or economic conditions. These dependable voters may well be called 'habitual voters'. Equally irrelevant is the context for a - typically much smaller - segment of the electorate that will never vote in any election. Reasons for such complete lack of electoral participation might include complete detachment from society (e.g., the homeless people, the mentally impaired and so forth), radical opposition to the political system or simply a complete lack of interest. These characteristics will ensure complete electoral abstention, typically unaltered as long as personal characteristics also remain unchanged.

That leaves the middle ground to the occasional voter, where there is room to maneuver. This is where voters typically are inclined to participate, but no guarantees are given. Occasional voters may participate in virtually every parliamentary election, but local elections may at times be given a miss. Or they may express a genuine intention to vote, but in the end find themselves missing out on Election Day for some reason or other. The occasional electorate determines the ebb and flow of the turnout tide. We demonstrate for one contextual factor, electoral closeness, how the occasional electorate is affected by it, and under which circumstances this aspect of the electoral closeness makes them vote, or abstain.



Electoral Participation in the Netherlands: Individual and Contextual Influences

2.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, this research examines the interplay between contextual and individual level characteristics on the individual voters' decision to participate in an election. The current chapter takes the first step in this undertaking, and investigates the possible benefits of adding contextual information to a model aimed at explaining individual behavior. It will be shown that adding contextual information to a model containing individual level information increases the predictive quality of a model considerably. In addition, it will be argued that the approach taken in this chapter is insightful as an initial exploration of context effects, but nevertheless ultimately insufficient in showing the true influence of contextual effects on individual voters.

In this chapter, an empirical analysis will be presented based on individual level data collected for parliamentary elections in the Netherlands. The case of the Netherlands is presented as an example; there is no reason to expect the Dutch political system to be a special case where contextual characteristics have a particularly large or small influence on the electorate. It is simply a country where sufficient comparable individual level data is available. Through the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (DPES), individual level data for nine parliamentary elections is available to us for the period of 1971-1998. Contextual level data, describing the characteristics of the parliamentary elections is sufficiently available, so that the analyses will examine electoral participation in the Netherlands for the last three decades of the twentieth century.

The electoral system in the Netherlands is a proportional representation system, with the electoral quotient as the only threshold. This implies that the effective electoral threshold is a relatively low 0.66 percent of the vote as the total number of seats in the Lower House is 150. Although not formally, with regards to the division of seats the Netherlands is effectively a single constituency system, which ensures that the theoretical electoral threshold of 0.66 percent is close to the actual effective threshold. As a consequence, the Dutch system is a multi-party system where typically between 8 and 15 parties are represented in parliament. Since the 1970s, however, the period studied in this chapter, three to four parties tend to dominate the party landscape and are commonly referred to as 'the large parties'. These are the liberal (right-wing) VVD, the Christian-democratic (center) CDA and the labor (left-wing) PvdA. The fourth member of this set is the (left-liberal) D66, which is often placed ideologically between the CDA and PvdA, although its unstable electoral appeal has made its membership of the 'big parties' set unwarranted at times. As a consequence of the Dutch electoral system and its multi-party landscape, coalition government is unavoidable in the Netherlands. No single party stands a chance of winning a parliamentary majority and the

coalition negotiations are an unavoidable consequence of any election, as pre-election coalition agreements are rare.

Table 2-1 The Netherlands - Turnout Figures for Parliamentary Elections, 1971-1998 (percentages)

Year of election	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998
Turnout	79.1	83.5	88.0	87.0	81.0	85.8	80.3	78.7	73.0

Table 2-1 presents the turnout rates for national elections in the Netherlands from 1971 until 1998. It shows us that turnout in the Netherlands on average varies somewhere around the 82 percent mark - a relatively high figure compared to other western democratic systems (cf. Franklin, 2002). However, we also see that considerable between-election variation in turnout exists, with a high of 88 percent and a low of 73 percent. As argued in Section 1.3 of Chapter 1, it is not likely that these turnout fluctuations can be explained at the individual level. Individual characteristics such as education or political interest can vary between elections, but variation to such a degree that turnout levels will be affected is unlikely to occur unless affected by an outside influence. The variation in turnout levels of Table 2-1 suggests that contextual factors - outside influences - are at work, affecting the level of electoral participation in the Netherlands. The aim of this chapter will be to identify these contextual factors, and determine their influence on individual voters.

2.1.1 Explaining Dutch Electoral Participation

To assess the influence of individual and contextual characteristics on electoral participation in the Netherlands empirically, we will analyze the behavior of voters in parliamentary elections the last three decades of the twentieth century, as described in Table 2-1. We will start with a brief overview of the factors that have proved to be of importance in explaining electoral participation in the Netherlands.

The notions of facilitative and motivational factors influencing electoral participation have already been introduced in Chapter 1 (Cf. Milbrath & Goel, 1979; see also Verba & Nie 1972; Oppenhuis 1995). Individual characteristics as well as contextual characteristics can influence the ease with which a voter may cast the ballot, in other words facilitate the act of voting. Individual and contextual characteristics can also influence a voters' incentive to participate, and thus affect the motivation - both positively and negatively - to go out and vote. As will become apparent below, while the facilitative or motivational effect of factors may be clearly distinguished theoretically, in actual empirical research many variables have both a facilitative as well as a motivational effect. Although this may appear confusing at first, it need not be an obstacle to the analysis. Rather, the various effects of variables may help the reader to recognize that the simple act of voting is in the end not so simply explained.

The selection of explanatory variables to be introduced at the individual level has been guided by previous research into electoral participation in general, and the Netherlands in particular. Existing research on non-voting in national elections in the Netherlands can be found in Schmidt (1981, 1983) Jaarsma *et al.* (1986), Castenmiller & Dekker (1987), Schram (1989) Leijenaar (1989), Van der Eijk & Oppenhuis (1990), Smeenk, De Graaf & Ultee (1995), De Graaf (1996), Aarts (1998) Castenmiller (2002) and Dekker (2002).

Although the analytical methods and aims differ, a number of comparable results are found. These indicate that the chance of voting increases with age and religiosity, as well as with income, education and class. Less consistent in their influence are the gender and occupation variables, the influence of which is often found to be dependent on the other characteristics controlled for. Next to these socio-demographic characteristics, political interest and involvement have a strong positive influence on turnout.

Contextual effects have not been widely used in research on national elections in the Netherlands². Jaarsma et al. (1986), Schram (1989) and De Graaf (1996) use dummy indicators to identify the separate election years in an aggregate analysis. This approach allows election-related variance to be detected. However, the source of this variation cannot be clarified: dummy indicators do not identify what may explain the variance detected. By introducing theoretically interpretable contextual variables, improvement over the nominal level information (and, indeed, proper name characteristic) of year-dummies is made. This is in line with Przeworski and Teune (1970), who propose using theoretical constructs, rather than nominal labels in comparative social research.

Whether, and if so how, individual and contextual influences interact is a matter that will be investigated in this chapter. Individual voters, with all of their individual characteristics, live and vote within the context of their political system. In the absence of any relation between contextual and individual characteristics, the estimates of the effects of contextual characteristics will be constant for all voters. However, as argued already, this is not expected to be the case. To determine whether the impact of a contextual characteristic varies between groups of voters, interaction terms between context and individual characteristics will therefore be introduced into the model. If these interactions prove statistically significant, they indicate that the influence of contextual characteristics varies across individuals.

2.2 A Model Incorporating Individual and Contextual Characteristics

An empirical model examining the influence of individual and contextual influences simultaneously requires data on the behavior of individual voters under different circumstances. To this end, DPES surveys held in concurrence with parliamentary elections in the Netherlands from 1971 to 1998 were combined, yielding a coded dataset that contains information on a large number of individuals under varying contextual circumstances³. Such a combination of surveys allows us to assess the influence of contextual characteristics on different groups of individuals, and to determine whether a certain factor exerts equal influence for all voters or whether it is especially strong for some, while less consequential for others.

2.2.1 *Contextual Characteristics*

The characteristics of the context that will be entered into the analytical model will refer to three theoretical notions. First, it is expected that a voter is more likely to participate if their

² Indeed, even in a recent study on explanations of an alleged trend of ever lower turnout rates in the Netherlands, Dekker et al. (2002) state explicitly that their research will not focus on contextual (systemic) characteristics.

³ See the Appendix for documentation on the datasets used.

awareness of the election increases. To vote, a voter needs to be aware that an election will take place. The amount of information available concerning the election is expected to affect electoral participation. Contextual factors that affect the amount of information available through, for example, media coverage of the election, are therefore expected to affect the voters' *awareness* of the election, and hence electoral participation.

Second, it is expected that voters are more likely to participate if the *outcome* of the election is more *consequential*, in other words, if more is at stake. If the outcome of the election will be a long and confusing series of coalition negotiations this is less likely to induce electoral participation than clear government alternatives, in which the voters decides between one or the other.

Thirdly, voters are expected to participate in greater numbers if the likeliness to affect the outcome of the election increases. A close election race, in which each vote could make the difference, is more likely to make voters participate than an election race that is a foregone conclusion.

A large number of factors can influence the awareness or the consequences of an election, some structural and some more election-specific. Selecting suitable variables for empirical analysis is therefore a difficult task, and idiosyncrasy should be avoided. Structural influences typically are systemic characteristics. As these change only infrequently, they are mainly constants in an over-time comparison, and hence better studied in a country-comparative model. Election-specific influences can be studied in the design proposed here, but these influences are difficult to capture in indicators that can sensibly be used in each of a series of elections. All sorts of affairs, ranging from political scandals to economic fiascos and human or ecological catastrophes - as well as achievements - may have their influence on an ensuing election. Finding a way to make such events comparable is problem ridden.

Based on the two theoretical notions set out above, a total of four contextual indicators was selected⁴. These indicators refer to the salience and frequency of elections, the clarity of the choice options offered in the election and the closeness of the election race. The expected influence of each of these indicators will be discussed here. As will become apparent, a contextual indicator can influence voters in more than one way, both facilitative as well as motivational, and by increasing the awareness of the election as well as the consequences of the election outcome.

Government Collapse

One election-specific characteristic that may be of consequence can be introduced into the analytical model through hindsight: whether or not the government coalition fell before the election. In the Netherlands, a fall of the coalition typically - though not necessarily - leads to early elections; for the period under study here a fall of the government always lead to early elections⁵. In any case however, high media attention will be the result of the fall of the government. This makes government collapse a facilitative factor, as it reduces information costs for the electorate in the upcoming election. In addition to this, coalition break-ups tend

4 The limited number of elections - i.e., contexts - available for study puts restrictions on the statistical model (see below). The number of variables indicating contextual characteristics was therefore kept to a minimum.

5 An overview of elections that saw a government collapse, as well as the other contextual characteristics is presented in Table 2.2.

to increase between-party rivalries, clarifying choice options - at least for the short term. Elections following the breakdown of a coalition are thus expected to see an increased awareness - and consequently turnout.

The fall of the coalition can also function as a motivational factor, since more will be at stake in the election. As a reconstruction of the old coalition is unlikely, the coming election will most likely produce a change in government direction, often coinciding with a change in leadership for some of the parties involved as well. These factors ensure that a fall of the coalition increases the consequences of the election, and motivates voters to turn out.

Time Since Previous Election

The time since the previous election, the second contextual variable introduced in the analytical model, may affect voters in two ways. One is facilitative, by affecting parties' ability to make voters aware of the election through campaigning. The second is motivational, through 'election fatigue'.

The awareness of the election can be influenced by campaign efforts of political parties. Although parties' first aim in electoral campaigning is to increase their support, the awareness of the election among the electorate will automatically increase in the process. In the Netherlands, parties receive subsidies based on their share in representative bodies, but no direct campaign funding is made available by the state. A number of elections held shortly after another may exhaust parties' campaign funds and consequently restrict campaign intensity, and thus also parties' ability to increase the awareness of the election among the electorate (see also Franklin, van der Eijk & Oppenhuis 1996, p. 313).

Parliamentary elections at short intervals may also create some sort of election fatigue, decreasing the motivation of voters to participate (cf. Franklin, 2002). Voters may get the impression their vote is less important, as their vote in a recent previous election was evidently not sufficient to solve matters. Frequent elections, or rather a short period between two elections, may have a negative effect on the consequences of the elections as perceived by voters, and consequently a voters' willingness to participate.

Coalition Seeks Re-election

The consequences of the election will be influenced by the choice options a voter is confronted with. As the Netherlands is a multi-party system, the number of choice options - political parties - is large. However, as no party ever comes near to a majority, party choice options do not easily translate into government choice options. Coalition negotiations take place only after the result of an election is known, and are thus largely beyond the influence of the voter. Both the electoral system and political mores in the Netherlands prevent a change in this, except for the few occasions when major parties explicitly announce a coalition preference before the election. This may occur when an incumbent coalition expresses the intention to stay together after the election if an electoral majority can be obtained.

A coalition seeking re-election helps voters, by offering voters a clear choice of government, not only of party in the election. Such a situation is expected to facilitate voters in choosing for or against the incumbent coalition, and thus have a positive influence on turnout. In addition, a coalition seeking re-election may have a motivational influence, stimulating government supporters to keep their favored coalition in power, while voters for the opposition may be induced to prevent this.

Closeness of the Election

The closeness of the election race influences the consequences of the election. If a clear favorite for the election exists, voters may feel their influence can only be marginal, and consequently decide to stay home. If, on the other hand, the outcome is uncertain and a close race is likely, voters may feel that their vote could just swing the balance, thus enhancing their influence and their likeliness to participate. Thus, the closeness of the election may have a direct motivational effect on participation.

The closeness of the election can also create a facilitative effect, by increasing media attention paid to the election. A neck and neck election race is attractive material for news media, generating more media attention than would otherwise be the case. The increased amount of information offered to voters reduces the cost of information and increases the awareness of the election, facilitating electoral participation.

The Netherlands is not a majority system where the election winner automatically ends up in government. The typical notion of a close race in which the two largest parties fight each other for government power does not readily apply. The largest party need not end up in government, or a new coalition might eventually contain both of the parties that were earlier tied in a neck and neck race. Nevertheless, becoming the largest party is of consequence, and the race for the lead is of significance in the Dutch political system. Since 1972 it is the custom that the largest party initiates coalition negotiations. In a party system where the typical election results in more than one coalition option, this custom is of considerable consequence in coalition negotiations.

One contextual characteristic deserves some additional attention, although the variable is a constant in the period of 1971-1998. A mandatory voting law was in effect in the Netherlands in the period before 1971, making 1971 the first parliamentary election where participation was not compulsory. The possible consequences of this will be examined in the analysis, where relevant.

2.2.2 Individual Characteristics

At the individual level, the selection of variables included in the model was again based on existing research. These individual level variables can be of a facilitative or a motivational character as well, and, just as at the contextual level, some variables have both a facilitative as well as a motivational influence. The variables included will now be discussed.

The variable education is a facilitative factor. To understand the complex matter of politics, and to make an informed decision whether to vote and for whom, a certain level of cognitive skills is required. Education provides these cognitive skills. A positive influence of this facilitative factor is therefore expected on electoral participation. Education may have an added motivational effect since schools often encourage voting as a civil duty. Prolonged education ensures a prolonged exposure to this norm.

A number of variables included in the analytical model function as proxy-indicators for a motivational concept, namely social integration. In democratic societies, voting is one of the main opportunities for citizens to collectively influence the political course of the country. Integration into society increases the level of commitment to society, and will induce citizens to participate in the political process (Cf. Verba & Nie, 1972; Milbraith & Goel, 1977; Putnam, 2000). Therefore, a positive influence of social integration on the chance to vote is expected. Social integration cannot be measured directly, so that proxy-indicators have been

selected to indicate the degree of integration into society. *Income*, *class* and *age* are all positively correlated with the degree of integration (Cf. Hout & Knoke, 1975; Rose, 1974) *Income*, *class* and *age* are therefore expected to have a positive effect on electoral participation. Apart from these three proxy-indicators for social integration, an even stronger positive effect on turnout is expected from membership of specific groups in society that hold strongly to a norm of voting as a civic duty. In the Netherlands, this is especially relevant for members of the 'traditional' religious denominations (Roman Catholics, Dutch Reformed and Calvinist Protestants) as well as for labor unions members. *Religious denomination* and *religiosity*, as well as *union membership* are therefore added to the set of independent variables and expected to positively influence the chance to vote. *Religiosity* and *union membership* can both have an additional influence on voters in case the church or the union advise their followers to vote for a particular party. This may aid voters in determining what party is best for them, and thus have a facilitative effect.

A strong positive influence on electoral participation is expected from *Party attachment*, *political interest* and *political efficacy*. *Political interest* and *political efficacy* are both expected to have a motivational effect, since elections provide an opportunity for voters with high political interest and efficacy to influence matters that they care about. This motivational effect is expected for *party attachment* as well, in addition to a possible facilitative effect, since close party adherents will have an easier task in selecting the party to vote for.

As already mentioned, the influence of *gender* on turnout is not entirely straightforward, and its impact tends to vary with the number of other characteristics that are being controlled for (cf. Leijenaar, 1989, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis, 1990). *Gender* will therefore be included in the model without prior assumptions towards both the existence and the nature of a difference in turnout between men and women.

2.2.3 *Mediating the Context through the Individual*

Combining data on the individual level and the contextual level may not only allow more accurate estimates for characteristics on both of these levels. It also offers the opportunity to examine whether contextual influences are equal for all voters, or more influential for some, and less for others. In technical terms, this means that statistically significant interactions may be found between contextual and individual characteristics. Since existing knowledge on the interaction between contextual and individual characteristics regarding electoral participation is limited, expectations will be of a general nature.

The influence of the contextual characteristics included in the model is not expected to be equally strong for all voters. It is expected that individuals with a relatively low chance of participation are potentially more strongly affected by contextual characteristics than individuals with a high propensity to participate. The latter group will most likely participate in the election regardless of the specific circumstances, while voters who derive a smaller likelihood to participate from their individual characteristics may require some added incentive from the contextual level to actually participate. Part of this difference between voters may be attributed to a ceiling effect: if the likelihood to vote derived from individual characteristics is very high, it simply cannot rise anymore. The ceiling effect is handled by the logistic regression model.

In the analytical model, this variable influence of contextual characteristics on different voters is explored by introducing interaction terms between a personal characteristic that is a

strong predictor of electoral participation - political efficacy - and the contextual characteristics in the model. If these interaction terms prove statistically significant this means that the influence of contextual characteristics varies depending on individual characteristics. As political efficacy is expected to be positively related to electoral participation, higher political efficacy implies less influence for contextual characteristics. The expected sign of the interaction terms is therefore the reverse of the sign expected for the contextual effects. Since all of the contextual effects introduced in the model are expected to be positive, all of the interaction terms are expected to be negative (see below).

2.3 Data and Operationalization

To test the influence of contextual characteristics on turnout rates through their effect on individual behavior, nine National Election Studies administered in concurrence with the national elections held in the Netherlands in the period 1971-1998 were selected. These studies offer variation at the contextual and individual level, while at the same time ensuring a sufficient degree of comparability over all nine surveys. Of course, confining ourselves to only one political system inherently introduces limitations on the variance to be explored as well. Constitutional arrangements such as the existing electoral formula, the existence of weekday voting and the absence of mandatory voting laws are all constants for the Netherlands in the period under scrutiny. Their effects can therefore not be studied in this analysis.

The nine Dutch election studies offer a total of 14,284 cases available for initial analysis⁶. In the Netherlands, a relatively large number of respondents refuse to answer some questions especially regarding personal income, creating the necessity to deal with the problem of missing data. To minimize the number of cases lost, data imputation was applied where missing values were replaced by the reference category score for the variables income, class and education. To detect whether these substitutions were permissible and hence whether respondents with missing data do not deviate in behavior from respondents with the actual scores, the following procedure was applied. Dummy variables were created for the variables income, class and education. These dummy variables were scored positive in case a respondent failed or refused to answer the particular question, while the missing values in the original variable were replaced by the imputed value. The dummy variables were then included in the analytical model. A statistically significant effect of one of these dummy variables then indicates that the respondents with missing data differ significantly from respondents with the actual score on that variable. Listwise deletion was applied for variables where data imputation was not acceptable. After deletion for missing data, 13,868 cases were available for analysis (97 percent of all available cases).

To ensure that no bias was introduced due to different sample sizes in the aggregated data set, each year was weighted to an equal sample size. In addition, the data were weighted to reflect actual turnout rates. Although non-voters show a consistently lower rate of participation in the Dutch election studies, no clear evidence has been found to assume that the sampled fraction is not a correct representation of the total group⁷. Therefore, it is

6 See the Appendix for details on the individual level variables employed in the analytical model.

7 Visscher (1995) disagrees with this, although Smeets (1995) found no evidence for his claims. See also Jaarsma et al. (1986) The under-representation of non-voters is common to election research and not confined to the Dutch election studies. See Katosh and Traugott, 1981.

permissible to weigh the data according to actual turnout rates, allowing us to make population predictions on the basis of our model.

Since a complete structural model is not our aim, a regression model is the most suitable technique for our analysis. Since data at both the individual and the contextual level are used, this needs to be taken into account as well. The main problem arising from this is that the degrees of freedom at both levels differ. One remedy for this difference is to use multi-level modeling, to take complete account of the nested data structure of individual voters within electoral contexts. This will be done in chapters 5 and 6. In view of the exploratory character of this analysis, a regression analysis with robust standard errors is applied⁸. The problem with combining different contexts and modeling contextual characteristics as conducted in this research is that the standard errors are estimated incorrectly because the assumption of independent samples is not met, and contextual characteristics are operationalized as if they were individual level characteristics. This results in a consistent underestimation of the standard errors of estimated parameters, rendering estimates statistically significant where this may not be warranted. To correct this, an alternative estimate of variance is used, known as the Huber/White Sandwich estimator, which produces robust standard errors (Huber 1967; White 1980). The typical result - compared to non-robust standard errors - is a larger standard error.

In view of the dichotomous character of the dependent variable (did vote or not) and its skewed distribution, a logistic regression rather than OLS regression will be used. Logistic regression is a non-linear multiplicative technique that allows us to estimate the influence of a variable on the chance that a person will vote, given all the other characteristics of that person. So, the influence of a characteristic can change over different values of the other characteristics. The result of this is that the predicted chance to vote will remain within the logical boundaries of 0 and 1.

The four contextual characteristics that will be introduced into the model are operationalized as follows. The *Government Collapse* indicator indicates that the election follows the collapse of the government coalition. *Government Collapse* is expected to have a positive effect on electoral participation through increased media attention and increased perceived importance of the election. It is important to point out that this variable need not indicate that the election is called early. In the Netherlands, it is possible for a coalition to take on a caretaker role and keep to the original election cycle as occurred in 1977, although there is a significant relationship between *Government Collapse* and *Time Since Previous Election*.

The indicator labeled *Time Since Previous Election* indicates the years since a previous parliamentary election was held, and performs a double role. It is a proxy indicator for campaign efforts. Since no direct data on campaign efforts exist, the time since a previous election will be used as an alternative, on the expectation that quickly ensuing consecutive elections will deplete party funds. In addition, *Time Since Previous Election* is an indicator for the perceived relevance of the election, as frequent elections may create election fatigue, depressing turnout. For both interpretations, the expected relationship is positive, with longer time between elections encouraging turnout numbers. To improve interpretation the indicator has been transformed, by dividing the number of years since the previous election by the

8 Stata 7 was used for the estimations (StataCorp 2001).

number of years of a regular parliamentary term (four years, in the Netherlands) so that a score of one 1 corresponds to a full parliamentary term.

Coalition Seeks Re-election is a dummy variable indicating whether the incumbent coalition made reelection an election goal. A positive influence on turnout is expected. However, as this situation has only occurred twice in the period under study, in 1986 and 1998, caution is required in interpreting the outcomes for this variable.

The *Closeness of the Election* is measured with the aid of opinion polls⁹. These polls are typically published in the media in the run up to the election. The measure is constructed by taking the gap in percentage points between the two largest parties. The relationship between the closeness of the election and electoral participation is not expected to be linear: a 2 percent point change in the degree of closeness is relevant if the gap is very small, but not of great importance if the gap between the two largest parties is large. To reflect this non-linear character, the actual variable used is 1 divided by the gap in percentage points. This creates a variable that becomes (much) larger in closer elections. As a consequence, a positive influence is expected of the variable *Closeness of the Election*.

Table 2-2 The Netherlands - Values of Contextual Characteristics for the Period 1971-1998

Year of Election	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998
Government Collapse	no	yes	yes	No	yes	no	yes	no	no
Time Since Previous Election[#]	1.02	.42	1.13	1	.33	.92	.83	1.17	1
Coalitions Seeks Re-election	no	no	no	No	no	yes	no	no	yes
Closeness of the Election (gap in percentage points)	.213 (4.7)	.103 (9.7)	.303 (3.3)	.667 (1.5)	.714 (1.4)	.122 (8.2)	10 (0.1)	.263 (3.8)	.078 (12.9)

Note #: Time Since Previous Election is indicated in four-year terms.

The individual characteristics have been operationalized as follows. Class is measured on a five-point scale based on type of occupation. The categories are *unskilled manual labor*, *skilled manual labor*, *self-employed*, *routine non-manual labor* and *skilled non-manual labor*. The reference category is *unskilled manual labor*, to which all other categories are coded as contrast. Those who could not be assigned to any class category were included in the base category and identified through a separate variable.

Education is coded into three categories, ranging from primary (base reference category) through secondary to tertiary (polytechnic/university) level education. Each level is coded as a contrast to the preceding level, to show the impact of an additional level of education. To determine the difference of tertiary versus primary level education, the parameters for secondary and tertiary education thus need to be added. Respondents who failed or refused to give information regarding their education were included in the base category (primary education) and identified through a separate variable.

⁹ The data used is collected on a weekly basis by NIPO Inc., the Netherlands Institute of Public Opinion and Marketing Research.

¹⁰ As mentioned already the largest party typically takes the lead in coalition negotiations after the elections.

Dummy indicators were constructed to signify respondents from the *Lowest Income Quartile* and for *Female* voters, while *Age* was measured in years. Again, respondents for which no income information was ascertained were included in the base category (not lowest quartile) and identified through a separate variable.

Religion was operationalized both according to denomination and religiosity, measured by frequency of church attendance. In the Netherlands, three dominant religious denominations exist: *Calvinist*, *Dutch Reformed* and *Roman Catholic*. In addition, an *other* category is included. This category contains a wide variety of religious denominations, some of which actually oppose electoral participation, as is the case for Jehovah's Witnesses. This category is therefore expected to show a lower chance to vote than the three main denominations. The reference category for religion is not-religious. Since the 1960s, the Netherlands has shown a steady decline in church adherence, especially in the Catholic Church. This has led to a situation where information on merely the denomination could be misleading. To remedy this, a measure of religiosity in the form of frequency of church attendance is introduced. Where useful, interactions between denomination and church attendance were explored.

Party Attachment and *Union Membership* are indicated by dummy variables, coded positive if a respondent expressed a preference for a political party or is a member of a labor union. *Political Interest* and *Political Efficacy* are each measured on five point scales from low to high¹¹.

2.4 Predicting Individual Electoral Participation

Table 2-3 shows the results of the logistic regression analyses of electoral participation. Four models are presented. It has been argued (cf. Campbell, Converse, Miller & Stokes, 1960; van Deth 1989) that socio-demographic characteristics such as *Class*, *Income* or *Education*, are mediated in explanatory models of electoral participation through psycho-political characteristics such as *Party Attachment*, *Political Interest* and *Political Efficacy*. To assess this, the first model contains socio-demographic characteristics only. In the second model, the psycho-political characteristics are added. Socio-demographic effects that are mediated through psycho-political characteristics are then expected to decrease, compared to the first model. In the final two models, first contextual characteristics, then individual-contextual interactions are added. Robust standard errors are presented in conjunction with the estimated coefficients. Bold type indicates statistically significant estimates at $\alpha=.05$. Pseudo R-squared is based on Judge *et al.* (1985).

¹¹ The variables are additive index-scores, based on Mokken-scales of four separate items each. See Anker & Oppenhuis, (1995) pp. 323-330 on the construction of these scales.

Table 2-3: The Netherlands - Logistic Regression of Electoral Participation, 1971-1998
(robust standard errors)

Model	I		II		III		IV	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
<i>Age</i>	.021	.002	.012	.002	.017	.002	.017	.002
<i>Female</i>	.171	.071	.408	.075	.399	.076	.399	.077
<i>Class (reference: unskilled manual labor)</i>								
<i>Skilled manual labor</i>	.120	.109	.083	.114	.094	.115	.100	.115
<i>Self employed</i>	.381	.155	.246	.160	.221	.161	.216	.161
<i>Routine non-manual labor</i>	.330	.104	.128	.107	.131	.108	.129	.109
<i>Skilled non-manual labor</i>	.601	.116	.392	.122	.349	.123	.338	.124
<i>No class assigned</i>	.414	.093	.201	.096	.157	.099	.161	.100
<i>Education (reference: primary education)</i>								
<i>Secondary vs primary education</i>	.439	.075	.168	.079	.220	.080	.192	.080
<i>Tertiary vs secondary education</i>	.835	.133	.548	.139	.540	.139	.524	.140
<i>No education level ascertained</i>	-.162	.219	-.346	.230	-.240	.239	-.293	.237
<i>Lowest Income Quartile</i>	-.234	.081	-.157	.086	-.152	.086	-.144	.086
<i>No income ascertained</i>	-.015	.084	.086	.086	.067	.089	.065	.089
<i>Religion (reference: no religion)</i>								
<i>Catholic</i>	-.131	.079	-.077	.081	-.073	.081	-.071	.082
<i>Dutch reformed</i>	.318	.105	.290	.108	.280	.109	.259	.109
<i>Calvinist</i>	.849	.195	.670	.200	.676	.201	.666	.202
<i>Religious: other denomination</i>	-.209	.190	-.234	.197	-.236	.196	-.256	.199
<i>Church attendance: at least...</i>								
<i>Weekly church attendance</i>	.844	.117	.761	.120	.765	.122	.753	.122
<i>Monthly church attendance</i>	.464	.118	.387	.122	.392	.121	.389	.122
<i>Weekly church attendance with Religious: other denomination</i>	-1.520	.284	-1.218	.284	-1.251	.286	-1.227	.290
<i>Union member</i>	.479	.090	.395	.090	.380	.091	.372	.091
<i>Psycho-political characteristics</i>								
<i>Party attachment</i>			1.085	.068	1.117	.068	1.095	.069
<i>Political interest</i>			.355	.036	.340	.037	.325	.037
<i>Political efficacy</i>			.225	.027	.240	.028	.855	.144
<i>Contextual characteristics</i>								
<i>Time since previous election</i>					.455	.158	1.512	.278
<i>Government collapse</i>					.374	.110	.846	.190
<i>Coalition seeks re-election</i>					.532	.103	.144	.173
<i>Closeness of the election</i>					-.026	.014	-.056	.026
<i>Interactions individual-contextual level</i>								
<i>Time since previous election with Political efficacy</i>							-.632	.130
<i>Government collapse with Political efficacy</i>							-.303	.083
<i>Coalition seeks re-election with Political efficacy</i>							.185	.071
<i>Closeness of the election with Political efficacy</i>							.019	.011
<i>Constant</i>	-.283	.127	-1.362	.142	-2.226	.240	-3.203	.340
<i>Pseudo R-square</i>		.083		.163		.168		.173
<i>Log Likelihood</i>		-5984		-5461		-5430		-5394

The socio-demographic model (Model I) shows a rather low pseudo-R² of .083 although it has to be noted that pseudo-R² estimates tend to be low in comparison to ‘normal’ OLS R² values. A look at the parameter estimates shows that all statistically significant effects are in the hypothesized direction. Age and education tend to have a positive influence on individual electoral participation. The estimate for gender suggests that women show a higher

probability to vote than men, other characteristics held equal. Class proves influential, especially with the 'higher' classes showing a larger propensity to vote. Initially when looking at religion, marked differences between the three denominations could be identified. However, here the crucial factor proves to be church attendance. The analyses show that especially weekly, but also monthly church attendance has a positive influence on electoral participation. However, this is not a uniform effect: regular church attendance has a negative influence for the 'religious: other' category. This is demonstrated by the interaction term between weekly church attendance and the 'religion: other' indicator in Model I¹². Only weekly church attendants of the 'other' denominations show a lower chance to vote; a separate effect of the 'religious: other' category itself is not statistically significant. A likely explanation is that the 'religious: other' category is indeed quite a mixed bag, consisting for a substantial part of first and second generation immigrants that attend church regularly, but are known to have a lower propensity to participate in elections (cf. Fennema & Tillie, 1999). Another religious group showing comparable behavior are Jehovah's witnesses. The analyses underline that especially for Catholics church attendance proves to be the determining factor. Model I shows, when controlling for church attendance, that being Catholic by itself does not affect the probability of voting, which indicates that Catholics who do not go to church regularly do not differ significantly in their electoral participation from unreligious voters. The other integration indicator, union membership, shows the positive influence on electoral participation that was expected.

The non-significant effect of the 'no education level ascertained' indicator suggests that those who failed or refused to answer this question show behavior comparable to those respondents with primary level education only. The most likely explanation is that for most of these respondents their education *is* at primary level. For income, the 'no income ascertained' indicator also proves not to be significant. It is therefore unlikely that these respondents belong to the lowest income quartile, an assumption that is bolstered by practical wisdom of survey research, which states that it is those in the higher income brackets that are more likely withhold information on this question. For class however, there is a substantial effect related to not having a class level ascertained. This may be caused by the fact that a substantial part of this group will have no class score since they have no full time or part time occupation. These people show a distinct electoral behavior.

Adding psycho-political characteristics in Model II improves the pseudo-R² value substantially to .163. Model II also confirms that a large part of the socio-demographic influence is indeed mediated through the psycho-political characteristics. This is reflected in a decrease in the effect estimate for a number of socio-demographic characteristics, notably class, education and income, and to a lesser degree age, union membership and religion and church attendance. The noteworthy exception is gender, which shows a substantially larger influence once the psycho-political effects are taken into account. This suggests that it is with regard to political interest, political efficacy and party attachment where women trail behind men. If we keep the level of political interest, political efficacy and party attachment equal for men and women, which is what happens if we include the psycho-political characteristics in the model, we see that women are more likely to participate than men.

12 Other interactions were tested but proved not statistically significant.

In Model II the influence of class is almost completely mediated through other characteristics, with only the difference between unskilled manual labor versus skilled non-manual labor remaining statistically significant. This suggests that, in line with the expectations set out above, class is a powerful predictor of the psycho-political characteristics, but has little additional influence on electoral participation in the Netherlands. Education, religion and church attendance remain influential, although their influence is reduced. The three psycho-political characteristics, political interest, party attachment and political efficacy, show the expected significant positive influence on electoral participation.

2.4.1 Contextual Effects

Model III makes the first step of adding contextual information to the model, by including four indicators for contextual characteristics. The addition of the contextual characteristics increases the pseudo-R² value only minimally to .168, although the substance of this improvement of the model will become more apparent in section 2.5 below. With the exception of the closeness indicator, the estimates for the contextual characteristics are all in the expected direction. Closeness, as operationalized, was expected to have a positive influence on voting, but instead shows a negative effect. It should be noted however, that this effect is not statistically significant.

In agreement with expectations, longer periods between elections have a positive effect on turnout, as does a coalition seeking re-election, although caution needs to be taken with the latter indicator, since it applies to only two elections. As hypothesized, a coalition collapse does indeed tend to increase electoral participation.

The individual level estimates show only minimal change when the contextual characteristics are added to the model. However, the control variable for an absence of class information now proves to be no longer statistically significant, so that the only remaining additional influence of class on electoral participation is for skilled non-manual labor.

2.4.2 Individual-contextual Interactions

The model analyzed here does not allow extensive testing of numerous individual-contextual interactions. The number of contexts available is simply not sufficient. This section will therefore not present an exploration of all possible interactions between individual and contextual level characteristics, but rather go for one 'safe bet'. Interactions will be modeled between all contextual characteristics and political efficacy, an important predictor of electoral participation. If individual level variations in the influence of contextual effects exist, they are most likely to manifest themselves through these interactions.

The interactions between political efficacy and the contextual characteristics are presented in Model IV. Again, the pseudo-R² increases, though again only marginally to .173. The estimates for individual level characteristics show very little change compared to the previous model, with the obvious and unsurprising exception of the direct estimate for political efficacy.

At the contextual level, the estimates show substantial change. Again this is to be expected because of the interaction terms. The direct effects of the contextual characteristics now indicate the influence on voters with the lowest level of political efficacy, to which the composite terms of the interactions have to be added to complete the equation. Since the signs for all interaction terms are indeed the reverse of the direct estimates of the contextual effects,

this indicates that the influence of contextual effects decreases as political efficacy increases. This finding is statistically significant for all four interactions, and in line with the expectations set out in Section 2.2.3. Apart from this general corroborating finding, there are some more specific findings that are a bit more confusing. Again the estimate for the closeness of the election is opposite from what was expected. Moreover, it is statistically significantly different from zero. The negative estimate suggests that turnout is actually higher in elections where the gap between the two leading parties is larger. In comparison to the previous model, the estimate for the direct effect of a coalition seeking re-election has substantially decreased in size and is no longer statistically significant.

2.5 Predicting Turnout Levels

The previous section showed that the political context is not of equal importance to all voters. The context-individual interaction terms proved that the influence of the contextual characteristics is less for voters with higher levels of political interest and political efficacy than for the less politically interested and for voters with lower political efficacy. This improves our understanding of electoral participation. The question remains however, whether adding contextual information gives us a better understanding of electoral participation only, or whether it also improves our capacity of predicting who will vote or not. To answer this, in this section turnout rates will be predicted, based on the models presented in Table 2-3, specifically models II and IV. These two models represent the full individual level model, and the model with contextual characteristics and interaction terms added.

For each individual, the predicted value was computed. The predicted value reflects the probability that individual will participate, as predicted by the model. Because of the use of logistic regression, this value will always be between zero and one. Aggregating the predicted values produces the predicted turnout rate for the complete sample. As was mentioned already, each of the samples has been weighted so as to reflect the actual turnout rate of the election, so that sample composition will not obfuscate the predictions based on the statistical model. Table 2-4 presents the predicted turnout rates per election in percentages, based on the individual model (II) and the context and individual level model (IV). The actual turnout figures are presented on the last row.

Table 2-4 The Netherlands - Turnout (percentages), Actual and Predicted by Individual and Context & Individual Model and Average Absolute Deviance from Actual Turnout (percentage points)

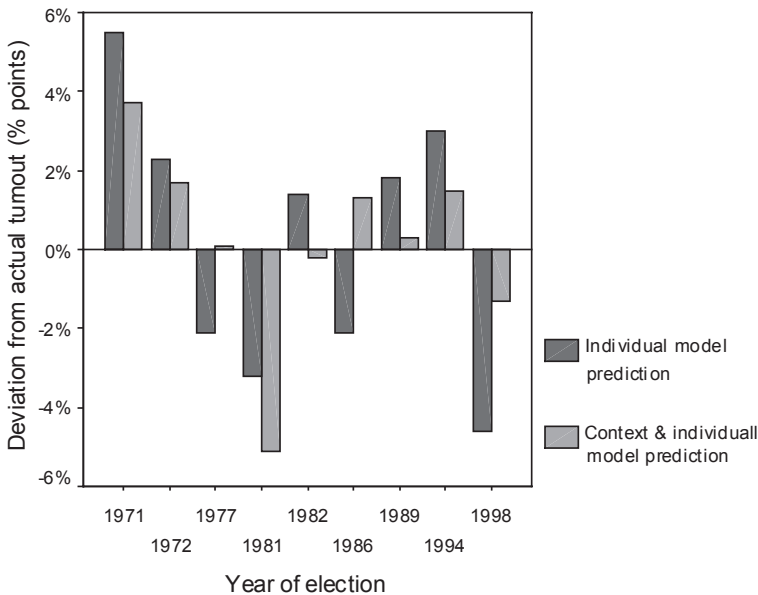
Year	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998	Deviance
Individual model (II)	84.6	85.8	85.9	83.8	82.4	83.7	82.1	81.7	68.4	2.53
Context & Individual model (IV)	82.8	85.2	88.1	81.9	80.8	87.1	80.6	80.2	71.7	1.69
Actual turnout	79.1	83.5	88.0	87.0	81.0	85.8	80.3	78.7	73.0	-

The two models produce clearly different turnout predictions. The inclusion of contextual information does alter the predictive accuracy of the model, even though the difference in R-square is minimal. It does not produce a consistent over or under-estimation of the turnout level, as turnout rates are not consistently too high or too low. The last column of Table 2-4 shows that the predictions from the Context & Individual model are on average 1.69

percentage points off the actual outcome, while the Individual model is less accurate with an average deviation of 2.53 percentage points. Indeed, as Figure 2-1 shows even more clearly, the predictive power of the model greatly increases as contextual information is added. The contextual-individual model outperforms the individual level only model in all elections but one.

Figure 2-1 presents the deviation from actual turnout for the predicted turnout levels of the two models. In essence, it shows how far the predictions are off, and whether they fall short or overshoot the mark. For each election, actual turnout is represented by the zero-line, with deviations given in percentage points. The improved prediction of the contextual-individual level model is obvious. Only in 1981 is it further off the mark than the individual level model.

Figure 2-1 The Netherlands - Predicted Turnout Levels, Deviation from Actual Turnout



2.6 Conclusions: Does Context Matter?

This chapter explored the influence of contextual characteristics on individual electoral participation in the Netherlands between 1971 and 1998. At the individual level, most characteristics behaved in the way expected. The influence of gender proved to be interesting. In the analyses presented here, women show a higher propensity to vote than men, particularly when controlling for the relevant psycho-political characteristics (political interest, political efficacy and party attachment). This is in contrast with findings in other countries (Blais and Carty 1990; Lipset 1981; Verba et al. 1978; Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980). Previous Dutch research did not come up with a single consistent outcome (Leijenaar 1989; van der Eijk & Oppenhuis, 1990). It appears that the influence of gender is strongly dependent on the other characteristics included in the model, with the psycho-political characteristics playing a key role. With regard to religion, the key factor appears to be

religiosity, as indicated by church attendance. Only Dutch Reformed and Calvinists show a greater likelihood to participate in addition to the separate effect of church attendance. Catholics who do not attend church frequently do not distinguish themselves from the non-religious, although the parameter estimate by itself suggests that Catholics that do not attend church regularly vote less often than the not-religious.

There was strong support for the thesis that contextual characteristics affect individual voters over and above the influence of individual characteristics. In addition, the interaction terms showed that individual level characteristics determine the degree to which stimuli from the electoral context affect voters. These findings help explain between-election fluctuations in turnout figures. The accuracy of turnout prediction was increased considerably by including characteristics of the election and the political system in which it was held.

There are also limitations to the analyses presented. The ability to draw unequivocal conclusions on contextual influences on turnout is hampered by data limitations. The relatively low number of contexts - i.e., elections - puts a restriction on the model, and especially on the number of explanatory variables on the aggregate level. The next chapter will treat this subject more extensively, and suggest a more in-depth exploration of the influence of a single contextual characteristic - the closeness of the election - on individual behavior, rather than a wide exploration of several contextual characteristics.

three

Rain Falls on All of Us (But Some Manage to Get More Wet than Others) Individual Variation in Contextual Effects

As Chapter 2 showed, individual electoral participation can be explained better when information at the contextual level is included in the model. The accuracy of the analytical model used in Chapter 2 was substantially increased when information at the individual and the contextual level was included: prediction of actual turnout levels improved. The improved predictions indicate that our ability to explain variations in turnout rates that occur *between* elections has improved over that of models based on individual level information alone.

In addition, Chapter 2 also showed that some voters may be affected by a contextual effect more than others. This phenomenon will be further reflected upon in the current chapter. Although the addition of contextual level information tends to increase the predictive power of the model as a whole, caution should therefore be taken in this matter, since the effect of contextual level characteristics is not necessarily a uniform effect. Empirically, this was shown in the analyses of Chapter 2. Table 2-3 showed that the effect of all contextual characteristics showed significant interactions with political efficacy. This indicates that the influence of the contextual characteristics varies with individual characteristics of voters - in this case political efficacy. This concept of a variable influence of the political context - not to be confused with variability of the political context - will form the main theme of this and the following chapters. This chapter argues that combining the contextual and individual level of explanation is more than merely adding extra variables to an equation that is to be estimated. Rather, it requires a complete integration of the two levels in both theory and empirical analysis.

First, the theoretical framework that allows the integration of contextual and individual level information will be presented here. The explanatory model at both levels will be depicted, after which the integration of the two models is presented. Subsequently, a theoretical exploration of the influence of three contextual characteristics on individual voters is presented. In this exploration, the main focus is on individual variation of the effect of these contextual characteristics. Can a theoretical argument be developed that would lead us to hypothesize that the effect of contextual characteristics is unlikely to affect voters uniformly?

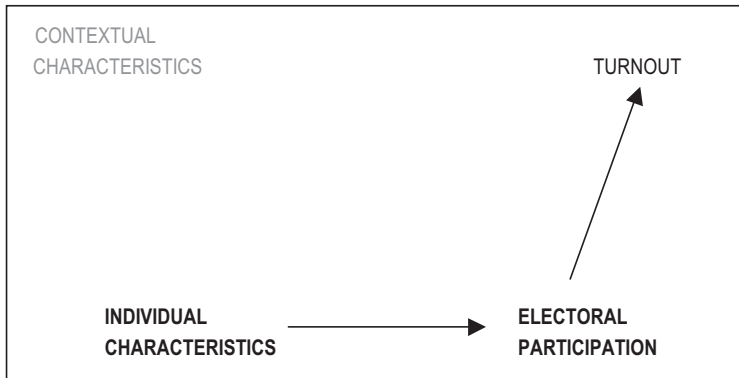
On the basis of practical arguments, one contextual characteristic is then selected for further empirical exploration: the 'closeness' of the election. The effects of this aspect of the (political) context on individual voters are elaborated empirically in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 of this study.

3.1 The Need for Context

Chapter 2 showed that contextual information helps explain individual behavior. This section will lay out step by step how electoral participation can be explained through these two levels of information, and how these two explanation can be combined in a single model.

Individual characteristics such as age, education or gender help us explain why some people tend to vote, while others do not. They explain differences within the electorate, and they tend to do so consistently across contexts. Higher education tends to go with an increased tendency to vote, as does age, up to the point where health becomes an inhibiting factor. Gender tends to have a varying impact between countries, but the effect is typically very stable within a country. If women vote more - or less - than men, they tend to do so consistently in the various elections held within a country. Figure 3-1 shows graphically how individual characteristics explain electoral participation, which in term determines turnout¹.

Figure 3-1 Electoral Participation and Turnout Explained by Individual Characteristics



Although individual characteristics tend to have a very stable influence on electoral participation, this does not mean that variations in turnout between elections do not occur. Changes in the strength of the effects of individual characteristics are possible. Across decades, we may find that, e.g., age becomes less powerful in the explanation of electoral participation, as may gender or education. Such differences will be reflected by different values of the effect parameters, depicted as the bottom arrow in the graph.

Equally, shifts in the composition of the electorate may cause changes in turnout levels. Improved access to educational facilities may bring about an increase in the level of education of the electorate, while an influx of young voters may shift the age composition of the electorate. Such changes in the composition of the electorate will affect the level of turnout, and are reflected by the right hand arrow of the graph.

Although theoretically they could, empirically these changes are not observed to take place overnight, and they also do not tend to happen frequently. Especially where socio-demographic characteristics are concerned, these changes are very gradual processes. The level of education of a country does not increase or decrease greatly

¹ Note that the right hand arrow from electoral participation to turnout does not indicate a causal effect in the traditional sense, but rather reflects that the sum of individual actions (electoral participation) determines the aggregate outcome, i.e. turnout.

between two elections, nor does the average age of the electorate.

Other individual characteristics however, such as party evaluations, political interest or political efficacy *can* theoretically change dramatically, and virtually overnight. Although such dramatic changes are only seldom observed, they form a potential explanation of between-election fluctuations in turnout that cannot be explained by socio-demographic characteristics. But in practice this explanation is merely shifting the focus of the question. To affect turnout levels, large numbers of voters would have to change their behavior in similar ways. The question then becomes: why would the party evaluation or the level of political interest of such a substantial amount of voters change in unison?

Outside influences - beyond the individual voter - are a viable explanation for the short-term, substantial changes in turnout that can be observed between virtually every election. Contextual characteristics - characteristics describing the political, economic, institutional and societal make up of the country - can affect the composition of the electorate, as well as the influence of individual characteristics on electoral participation. Thus, contextual characteristics can explain fluctuations in turnout that may not be explained satisfactorily by individual level characteristics. Examples of contextual characteristics that can explain short-term fluctuations are political and economic characteristics such as incumbency of a candidate, (changes in) the party landscape, economic factors and any type of gaffe or, conversely, success, of any of the main political actors.

Contextual characteristics may also be of a more stable nature. Systemic characteristics such as the institutional make up of a country, the voting system or the day of the week elections are held are examples of these. Variations within countries in these systemic characteristics are typically few and far between. They do however serve as more plausible explanations for the variation found in turnout levels between countries than individual characteristics do (cf. Lijphart 1999; Franklin 2002).

In short, contextual characteristics provide explanations for short-term turnout variation within a country as well as long-term variation within and between countries. However, as Figure 3-2 shows, this solution comes at a price.

Figure 3-2 Turnout Explained by Contextual Characteristics

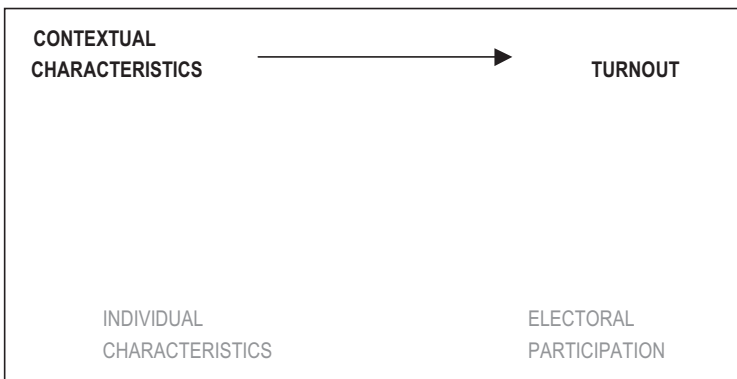


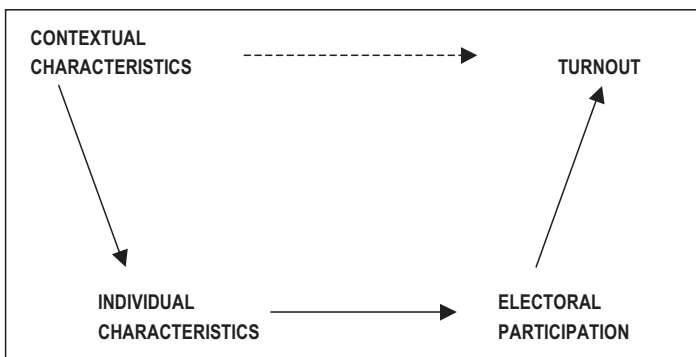
Figure 3-2 shows that the contextual approach explains variation in turnout by differences in contextual characteristics. It also shows something else: how the contextual approach ignores the individual voter completely. Individual behavior is not part of the model, turnout is presumed to be solely determined by contextual characteristics. Although it is unlikely that any researcher focusing on contextual explanations will actually believe that turnout rates are the product of voting systems, shifts in the party system and the economic mood alone, the absence of the individual voter in an equation of which the outcome is ultimately dependent on this individual voter is of course a structural flaw of the contextual approach. Contexts do not vote - voters do. Turnout is the result of individual level behavior, and a contextual level explanation will therefore have to make clear how contextual characteristics affect individual voters.

An integration of the two levels of information into a single model is therefore a potentially fruitful exercise. The model will become more complete, by taking account of influences at the contextual and individual level that voters are exposed to when deciding to vote. The past decade has indeed seen the establishment of a research tradition that aims to overcome the shortcomings of the individual as well as the contextual approach by combining the two into one model (e.g., Franklin 1996; Anduiza Perea 1997; van Egmond, de Graaf & van der Eijk 1998). Individual electoral participation and aggregate level turnout is in this approach explained with the use of both individual and contextual characteristics. This way, the voting decision is modeled at the individual level, while it is at the same time acknowledged that an individual voter does not operate in a vacuum, but in a context that influences the individual, through factors connected to the political system and the present day situation in the society that the political system is part of.

The benefits of this approach are substantial. Fluctuations in turnout that cannot be explained by changes in individual characteristics or in the distribution of those characteristics alone may now be explained. And suggestions regarding the influence of the political context on individual voters that cannot be tested in contextual level models - as in these models the individual level is absent - may now be tested since the causal link between the two levels is part of the model.

The graphical representation of this model is given in Figure 3-3². The causal link between contextual characteristics and turnout is not a direct one, as the influence of the context is mediated through the individual level, indicated by the dashed top arrow.

Figure 3-3 Electoral Participation and Turnout Explained by Individual and Contextual Characteristics



Empirical analyses that reflect the theoretical model presented in Figure 3-3 are typically cast in the form of a regression model, most often a logistic regression to acknowledge the dichotomous character of the dependent variable. Included in the model are indicators for individual level characteristics (age, education, etcetera) explaining the dependent variable: individual electoral participation. Added to this is information regarding the context of the election, typically through the use of variables added to the model as if they were individual characteristics. All respondents that are sampled from a particular context thus have identical scores. In this way individual and contextual level information is used to predict individual behavior, and both individual characteristics of voters and characteristics of the elections are given their rightful place in the explanatory model. An example of such a model is found in Chapter 2, for the analyses on participation in Dutch parliamentary elections.

Is the model in Figure 3-3 sufficient to explain electoral participation using contextual and individual characteristics? Unfortunately, no. The model in Figure 3-3 contains a serious theoretical flaw: contextual characteristics are assumed to be equally influential for all voters. Regardless of their individual characteristics, the model of Figure 3-3 implies that all voters are affected by the electoral context in the same way, without individual variation. The model in Figure 3-3 imposes uniform contextual effects since it does not specify any interaction between contextual and individual level characteristics. This is not a feasible assumption, as can be demonstrated by way of a few examples.

Let us take the example of media attention. Awareness of the election, an obvious individual-level prerequisite of electoral participation, is generally thought to be positively influenced by the volume of media attention for an upcoming election. It is irrelevant what causes media attention, economic or political scandal, an extremely close election race, the entrance of a new player in the political arena and so forth. The main expectation is that media attention positively affects voters' consciousness of the election. However, for a voter to be influenced by media attention, exposure to the media is required. Either directly, by picking up a newspaper or not zapping away when the TV-news comes on, or indirectly through discussions with friends or colleagues when politics is a topic of conversation. In the absence of exposure, media attention will not reach, and therefore not affect voters. As not all voters are equally exposed to media - directly or indirectly - the assumption of uniform contextual effects lacks plausibility.

Another example can be found in the discussion about the effects of Sunday voting. A number of authors have suggested that weekend voting may increase turnout figures (cf. Crewe 1981; Oppenhuis 1995; Franklin 1996). Oppenhuis suggests that weekend voting may be a facilitative contextual factor as the time pressure of the hectic working week is absent and voters will therefore find it easier to participate. This is a plausible line of argument, leading to the expectation that Sunday voting will indeed influence turnout rates positively. Yet this effect only applies to some voters. It applies to those who have a hectic working week, and a relaxed weekend. It does not apply to those who are far more flexible in their daily schedule such as part-time workers, pensioners, students, the unemployed and perhaps housewives (m/f). This part of the electorate may well be able to find the time to vote at any day of the week, and hence will not be affected by the day of the week the election is held.

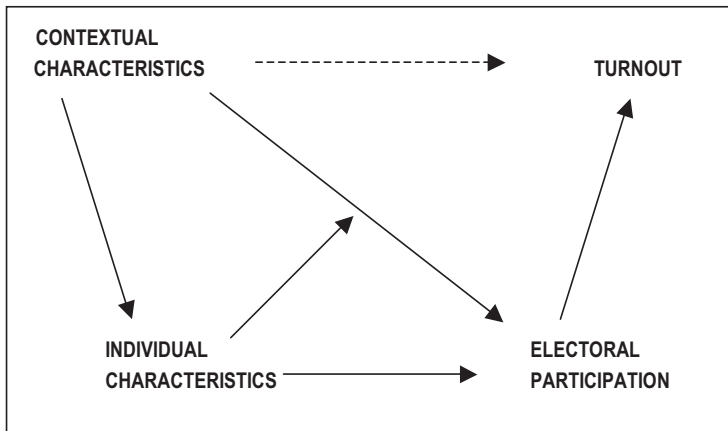
2 Cf. Coleman, 1990.

And obviously, Sunday voting will actually be an obstacle to those who have to work on Sundays - bartenders, nurses, but also those working Sunday-shifts.

Lastly, argued from a different starting point, there must be room for influences of the electoral context. For some parts of the electorate, however, the combination of personal characteristics ensures that they always will participate - or that they never will - come hell or high water. For such voters, contextual effects have no impact. For other parts of the electorate there is room for contextual effects, as their (non-) participation is not fully fixed by other factors. It follows therefore, that the influence of the electoral context is not necessarily equal to all voters.

To accommodate the potential variability of contextual effects, an amendment of the model presented in Figure 3-3 is needed. Such a model is presented in Figure 3-4. It is the same model as presented in Figure 3-3, including individual and contextual level information to predict individual level behavior. In addition, an interaction term between contextual and individual level characteristics is made an explicit part of the model. It is represented by two arrows: one arrow from contextual characteristics to electoral participation, with a second arrow from individual characteristics pointing at it, reflecting the dependency on individual characteristics of the contextual influence. These two additional arrows reflect contextual influences that are dependent on individual characteristics. As argued above, this is a more plausible representation of the influence of political context. In addition, the explicit interaction term also forces the researcher to make explicit how the contextual characteristic is expected to influence voters, rather than unthinkingly opt for the assumption of a uniform contextual influence.

Figure 3-4 Electoral Participation and Turnout Explained by Individual and Contextual Characteristics, Allowing for Individual Variation in Contextual Influence



In Figure 3-4 contextual effects form an integral part of the model explaining electoral participation, but the influence of contextual effects is not presumed to be equal for all voters. By doing so, the model explicitly calls for hypotheses about possible variation of contextual effects for different kinds of voters. The model still allows the context to be treated as a uniform phenomenon, much like rain falling down on all of us. Yet this model also allows,

and even invites, individual variation in the effects of this uniform context. Yes, rain does fall on all of us, but some still happen to get more wet than others - determined by individual characteristics. Some individuals carry umbrellas at all times, providing useful protection against precipitation. But there are also some poor souls without anything to shield them from the vagaries of the weather (or, the context of an election).

3.2 What Context, and What Effect?

The current section will explore how uniform contextual effects may have a variable influence on the electorate, affecting voters in different ways. Three examples will make the variable impact of contextual characteristics concrete.

Contextual characteristics can be determined by the institutional arrangements of the polity, the (party-) political landscape or other politically relevant circumstances. Some of these characteristics will be rather stable when viewed from within one polity, such as for instance the electoral threshold, or Sunday versus weekday voting. As a consequence, variation in such a contextual characteristic can usually be found between different political systems, not within a single system over time. Other characteristics can be more variable, and show considerable fluctuations between elections in a single system, as well as between different political systems. Examples of such characteristics are the closeness of the election race, or whether there is an incumbent candidate or a coalition endeavoring to remain in office.

Three characteristics will be discussed here. First, Section 3.2.1 will discuss a motivational contextual characteristic, the presence or absence of concurrent elections. Does the combination of two elections held on the same day affect voter turnout? Secondly, the day of the week elections are held will be discussed, a facilitative factor. Sunday versus weekday voting was already mentioned briefly above, and will be further discussed in Section 3.2.2. Lastly, the closeness of the election may have both a motivational and a facilitative effect on voters. It will be discussed further in Section 3.2.3. The possible influence each of these characteristics may have on voters will be discussed at the theoretical level. Expectations and assumptions regarding the influence of the contextual effect on individual voters will be made explicit. Subsequently, the practicalities of testing these assumptions and hypotheses empirically will be discussed, taking into account restrictions regarding availability of data and actual variation found in the contextual characteristics.

3.2.1 *Concurrent Elections*

Political commentators often suggest - especially after an election showed a disappointingly low turnout - that elections for several political bodies should be held concurrently, so as to improve turnout. In this way, less prominent second-order elections may benefit from the interest that first-order elections generate (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Reif 1984). It is not the aim of this study to make policy recommendations about such proposals, but rather to show how concurrent elections may have an effect on some, but not on other voters.

The main argument for concurrent elections is that many people are inclined to vote in some elections, but not in others. Voters will deem some elections important enough to turn out, whereas other elections cannot generate such interest and are given a miss. For these 'unpopular' elections, turnout may be improved by combining them with more important elections. However, concurrent elections need not be an incentive to all voters. Individual

level research has shown that not all potential voters stand an equal chance to participate, or, put differently, are likely to give the election a miss. Certain individual characteristics make for habitual voters: voters that participate in virtually all elections. For these voters, moral considerations, genuine political interest or loyalty towards a political party or social group are incentives strong enough to ensure their participation in all elections, regardless of the perceived importance of that election. Contextual influences - including concurrent elections - will for these voters not affect their likelihood to participate, since they participate anyway. If individual behavior is constant over contexts, characteristics of context become irrelevant.

The above implies that concurrent elections as a contextual influence can only affect the occasional voters: the complement of the habitual voters whose participation in the election is not certain. Depending on the political system, a smaller or larger part of the electorate will be immune to contextual influences, and the size of this segment of the electorate is actually a system characteristic in its own right. In most western democratic systems, these immunized voters are likely to share certain individual characteristics. One example of such an individual level characteristic is having a high level of education. Apart from providing cognitive skills, schools also teach pupils about the norms and values of a society. In democratic systems, electoral participation is a civic duty that is part of the norms and values of society. An extended education engrains this sense of civic duty, and, as a consequence, highly educated citizens tend to be part of the immunized segment of habitual voters (cf. Wittebrood 1995). The same sense of civic duty may ensure that religious voters will also be habitual voters in certain countries. The church ensures that these voters participate, regardless of the context of the election. Habitual voters may also be found among party members, or strong party adherents, for whom an election provides an opportunity to express their party loyalty. These are but a few individual characteristics that can ensure electoral participation, regardless of whether elections are held concurrently - or, for that matter, any other aspect of the electoral context.

The hypothesized variation in the impact of concurrent elections is testable in empirical analyses. A significant interaction between the contextual characteristic - election is held concurrently or not - and personal characteristics that identify habitual voters is expected. Concurrent elections are expected to increase turnout, but only for occasional voters whose participation is uncertain. A highly politicized system with many habitual voters is likely to see a relatively small overall change, should it switch to concurrent elections to boost turnout.

3.2.2 *Sunday Voting*

A number of researchers have suggested that Sunday or weekend voting will have a positive effect on electoral participation, although their theoretical explanations of this often remain remarkably scanty. Crewe simply states that holding elections on a rest day "presumably raises turnout by a fraction" (Crewe 1981, p. 241). Oppenhuis restates this, but adds "[i]t is hard to tell why this would be so" (Oppenhuis 1995, p.30). Like Franklin (1996), he suggests that it is because work or school does not get in the way of electoral participation on a free day. This would imply that Sunday voting only has a positive influence on workers and students. However, this distinction is not reflected in the analytical models, in which "Sunday voting" is included as a dummy variable to influence everyone. An interaction term with occupation, or a specific indicator signifying whether Sunday is a day off would be more appropriate here, so that a positive influence on workers, and an absence of such an effect on

non-workers could be detected. As was already discussed in Section 3.1, for some voters Sunday voting will facilitate participation, while for other voters it will not make a difference, or even hinder participation. Even then, however, matters may be more complicated.

Research into European elections has shown that - regardless of occupation - Sunday voting may for some people actually have an adverse effect on turnout. Some respondents indicated that after a week of hard work, they were not going to sacrifice their day of relaxation to the call of the voting booth (Blondel, Sinnott & Svensson 1996). Rather than spending their valuable free time voting, the 'new worker' generation indicated they would opt for spending their leisure time outside in the park. If any, the effect of weekend voting would not be positive for this group. This flies directly into the face of the previous reasoning, as it pertains even to the same segments of the electorate who would, according to this hypothesis, be less inclined to vote, rather than more inclined. However, this alternative effect of Sunday voting need not necessarily affect the whole of the workforce: possibly, only the younger generations share this 'leisure is sacred' attitude, which would call for an interaction term taking age or cohort into account, to fully tease out the differential impact of Sunday voting.

A different effect yet may exist for groups that hold Sundays as sacred, although in more traditional terms. Devout Christians may be opposed to the conduct of such worldly affairs as an election on a Sunday. If we take the Dutch case presented in Chapter 2 as an example, we can see that the consequence of turning to Sunday elections will be twofold. Dutch Reformed and Calvinist voters - staunch voters in the Netherlands - would cease to participate, leading to a lower turnout in Sunday elections. As a sidestep, these voters are also known to primarily support specific parties, notably the Christian parties, so that not only turnout, but also the election outcome is likely to differ for Sunday elections.

Although it is unlikely that elections are actually held on Sundays in countries where a large part of the population objects to this on religious grounds, the effect of Sunday elections may still be a factor in countries where the religious section of society is less dominant. The effect of Sunday versus weekday elections on religious voters therefore calls for interaction terms to control for this. To make matters even more complicated: workers may turn out more in Sunday elections, but not religious workers, or younger workers. Although politically interested younger workers might participate in greater numbers on Sundays than they would on weekdays.

3.2.3 *Closeness of the Election*

A substantial amount of research includes the degree of party competition or the closeness of the election race as a contextual influence on electoral participation (cf. Powell 1980; Crewe 1981; Rallings & Thrasher 1990; Flickinger & Studlar 1992; Franklin 1996, 1999; Blais & Dobrzynska 1998; van Egmond, De Graaf, & van der Eijk 1998; Pattie & Johnston 1998). Invariably however, a close race between the two largest parties is treated as a contextual factor that is expected to have a generic, positive effect on turnout³.

3 Pattie and Johnston (1998) specifically point to the gap between "...an analysis of individuals taken out of their local contexts, or of contexts with no individuals." (p. 267) and express the explicit aim to bridge this gap, but then nevertheless proceed to enter contextual indicators in an individual level model, without reference to possible individual variation in this influence.

It is not inconceivable that a close race between the two leading parties or candidates will have a positive influence on turnout for the whole of the electorate. A close race is likely to create extra media attention, which in turn is likely to increase awareness of the election among the electorate and hence increase the chance to participate. However, as argued above, this heightened awareness will only affect those voters who were not already certain about participating.

Another positive effect a close race may have on turnout is likely to affect an even more specific segment of the electorate. Voters may be more likely to participate in a closely fought election since they may feel their vote might just tip the scale and thus determine the outcome of the election. However, this incentive will not affect all of the electorate. It is understandable that strong supporters of the parties vying for the lead will regard a close election as an extra incentive to vote. It is rather unclear, however, why a supporter of any of the other parties should feel affected by the closeness of the election race - a race between parties other than the one the voter cares about. For these voters, the closeness of the race is a contextual characteristic that may well be without significance. Any analysis considering the influence of a close election race on turnout should therefore include information on support for the different parties. Based on this information, hypotheses regarding the expected influence of election closeness on different voters can then be specified and tested.

3.3 When Theory Meets Practice

So far in this chapter, the discussion has remained at the theoretical level. As in Chapter 2, however, it is the aim of this study to test theoretical assumptions with empirical analysis. But when theory meets practice, problems abound.

3.3.1 *Methodological Considerations*

Combining information at the individual and the contextual level in one model adds complications to the empirical analysis⁴. Multiple levels of influence call for an analytical model that takes into account that the information and influence on individuals stem from separate levels - context and individual. This is the point that has been raised in Section 3.1 of this chapter, and led to the model presented in Figure 3-4.

Many authors argue that logistic or OLS regression is unsuited as a method of analysis for such data, and multi-level models should be used instead. The problem is of a statistical nature. If individuals are influenced by their political context, and we take samples of individuals in different political contexts, the individuals in each of the samples have something in common: their political context. In survey-analytical terms this implies that there is no independence of observations between the members of the same samples, as far as the contextual variables are concerned. Independence of observations is one of the underlying assumptions of regression analysis and related methods. If this condition is not met - if the observations are clustered - the estimation of the standard errors is biased. The typical result, in the case of positive correlation between the clustered observations (so called positive intra-class correlation), is that the standard errors of parameters representing contextual effects will be underestimated. Underestimated standard errors increase the risk of

4 On this matter, see Goldstein, 1995, and for a recent overview Steenbergen and Jones, 2002.

a Type I error. As a consequence, OLS regression may falsely suggest that contextual effects are statistically significant where in reality they are not⁵.

This problem has been recognized in the literature, and especially so in the literature on educational research, where the influence of the school class on the achievements of individual students is a comparable analytical problem. Here too, information at the level of the individual - the pupil - as well as the context - the school class - is analyzed in a single model. The statistical solution developed in that field is multi-level modeling, also known as random effects modeling (cf. Goldstein, 1995). This solution is now becoming more popular in political science as well (see for instance Steenbergen & Jones, 2002).

Multi-level modeling is essentially a regression model that allows for explanatory variables at different levels. Using regression analysis parlance, the model is estimated based on the individual level explanatory variables, but the intercept and/or the slope of the regression are allowed to vary between contexts. Multi-level modeling assumes that the contextual characteristics are values drawn randomly from a distribution of values describing those contexts, which explains the alternative name of random effects modeling. The model thus estimates a regression line based on individual characteristics, and a distribution around that regression line based on variation that can be explained by the contextual characteristics. In doing so, it also takes account of the different number of degrees of freedom at the various levels of information.

While multi-level modeling provides an elegant solution to the analytical problem of how to take clustered contextual information into account, this solution does come at a price. The emphasis on contextual variation in the model puts rather strict requirements on the empirical data to be used in a multi-level analysis and on the way they are collected. Whereas traditional data collection in political science aims for a large degree of variation at the individual level, a proper multi-level design requires sufficient variation at the contextual level as well. Depending on what is defined as the contextual level, the difficulties this can create are clear. In analyzing the impact of the political context on electoral participation, the contextual level is the election, which means that a substantial number of elections have to be combined in one way or another, be it over time or between countries. As elections remain rather infrequent events, and elections from which individual level data are available even scarcer, this may imply that the analytical model is expected to do more than is technically desirable.

3.3.2 *Empirical Complications*

Apart from technical analytical problems, there are problems of an empirical nature to be dealt with as well. Choosing the correct analytical method to analyze the available data is only part of the problem. Making sure that those data are available and of sufficient quality to enable empirical analysis is the other issue to be dealt with. In this section the practical obstacles for testing hypotheses regarding concurrent elections, Sunday voting and a close race empirically will be examined, to establish which of these contextual characteristics is amenable to fruitful empirical analyses.

⁵ In the analyses of Chapter 2, this aspect was not given full attention so as not to burden the exploratory analyses. In the analyses of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 multi-level models are used.

To investigate the influence of a contextual characteristic of any kind, variation in that characteristic is essential. Variation can be obtained by combining cases (i.e., elections) between systems, by combining cases from one system over time or by a combination of the two, provided of course that this actually yields contextual variation. As different political systems tend to vary on more characteristics than just the one under study, comparison within one system may be preferable so that the confounding influence of other system characteristics is minimized. With this in mind, the possibilities for empirical analysis of the three examples given above will now be evaluated.

Concerning concurrent elections, two cases immediately spring to mind: Sweden and the USA. Perhaps the best example of a system with variation in concurrent elections is the United States House elections. In 'on' years, these elections are held concurrently with presidential (and at times gubernatorial, senatorial and a slew of additional) elections, while in 'off' years no presidential elections are held. This is the perfect 'field experiment' for concurrent elections, since US House elections occur frequently, offering a large number of cases for analysis at the contextual level. In addition, variation is within the political system, which ensures that confounding influences, encountered when comparing countries, are kept to a minimum. In addition, there is a large amount of individual level data available for US House elections, both in 'on' years as well as 'off' years.

In Sweden, elections for government bodies at different levels (national, local) are at present held concurrently, while before 1970 they were held separately. Swedish research does indicate that turnout in *local* elections increases substantially held when these elections are held concurrently with national elections (research by Oscarsson, personal correspondence).

Outside the USA and Sweden, concurrent elections occur only sporadically. Luxembourg has held elections for the European Parliament concurrent with national elections ever since the former started in 1979, allowing for comparisons with other EU member states that do not hold EP elections concurrently with national parliamentary elections (cf. van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996). Because of the relatively limited number of cases, the influence of concurrent elections is best analyzed in a within-country analysis. Between-country comparisons of the effect of concurrent elections are much more difficult to establish.

The day of the week elections are held is generally determined by law, and applies to all elections held in a country, regardless of the body elected. This means that a comparison of the influence of Sunday versus weekday voting will in practice only be possible between political systems. The number of control variables required will then likely far outnumber the number of countries available for analysis. Reducing the number of explanatory variables increases the risk of an omitted variable problem. As a consequence, the analytical model becomes unsolvable. To test the influence of Sunday versus weekday voting on the individual level may therefore prove unsatisfying.

A close race suffers less from the limitations in variation found with the two previous examples. Although certain party systems may show a structurally low or high degree of competition, limiting within-system variation, a substantial number of polities remain in which the outcome of the election may be an easy victory in one election, while a fierce battle in the next. This ensures that comparison is possible both within and between systems, so that an abundant amount of data is available for analysis. This is not to say that the modeling of

individual variation of the influence of close election races will be simple and straightforward, as other complications remain. Nevertheless, it appears that analyzing the influence of a close election race offers the best chance of testing hypotheses empirically. The remainder of this chapter will elaborate further on how a close race may affect voters - individually.

3.4 Up Close, and Personal: A Close Election Race

How may closeness affect individual voters? This section aims to shed light on that question by deriving hypotheses for specific categories of voters. As no research specifying the workings of closeness at the individual level is available, the assumptions and hypotheses will be based on broader notions regarding political participation. This exercise in hypothesizing underlines the contention made earlier in this chapter, that the effects of contextual characteristics should preferably be theorized at the individual level.

The influence of a close election race on voters may be of a motivational or of a facilitative nature. The facilitative effect may follow from an increased awareness of the election among the electorate as a result of increased media attention and intensified campaigning. Voters may be made more aware of the election and, consequently, show a greater propensity to vote. In today's mass media societies this facilitative influence may affect nearly the whole electorate, although it is also the case here that individual variation is possible, as media consumption is typically not uniform. This facilitative effect of closeness will be returned to briefly in Chapter 4, but will not form the focus of this research.

The motivational influence of closeness is based on an expected increase in the perceived significance of the election to voters, as in a close election each vote may be seen as being crucial. Voters may perceive the opportunity to swing the balance as an incentive to vote. The focus of this research will be on this latter, motivational effect of a close election race.

Why then should the effect of a contextual constant in an election - the size of the gap between the leading parties - vary between voters? After all, the facts that define the contextual characteristic remain objectively the same and equal to the whole of the electorate: a 1 percent gap between two parties (as indicated by opinion polls) is simply a 1 percent gap. However, the influence of this context characteristic effect will not be the equal to all voters. The explanation for that is quite simple: in general, voters do not care about all parties equally. Neither need they therefore be equally stimulated by the gap between any two parties. Voters may care for one, or for several parties, while they may not care at all for other parties⁶. It is reasonable to assume that a close race will affect a voter if one of the parties in the lead is a party he or she cares about. By the same token however, it is also reasonable to assume that a close race will affect a voter rather less if the parties in the lead are parties that voter does not care about. In that case, it actually does not matter how close the race is, since it is a race between two options that are both unattractive. The motivational influence of a

6 It is important to distinguish here between a *choice* made in the voting booth, which is usually restricted to a single party in most western democratic systems, and a *preference*, that is not necessarily restricted to one party. Even though voters will commonly have to limit their choice to one party or candidate, there is ample research underlining that voters hold preferences for more than one party, and also that their dislikes for not-preferred parties vary between parties, which may influence their behavior (Cf. van der Eijk & Oppenhuis 1991; Tillie 1995; van der Eijk & Franklin 1996).

close election race will thus not affect these voters, but only affect voters who consider voting for either of the parties in the lead. This implies that the motivational influence of a close election race is dependent on individual characteristics, more specifically party preferences. Put in simple terms, to be affected by the closeness of the race between two parties, a voter will have to care for at least one of these parties, and thus consider at least one of the parties in the lead as a viable option to vote for.

With this reasoning as a starting point, a threefold categorization of voters will now be introduced. The three categories will be named the *Convinced*, the *Confounded* and the *Condemned* voters. The determining factor in establishing which 'C' will fit the voter is preference for the political parties in the lead - or lack thereof.

3.4.1 *Categorizing Voters: the Convinced Voters*

The motivational influence of a close race is most obvious for voters who support one of the leading parties. Obviously these voters will want to support their preferred party in the election and thus will participate. They may therefore be aptly called Convinced voters. For these voters, a close election is of most significance as their party stands a good chance of winning the election - or losing it - and the opportunity to secure this victory or avert defeat should work as an incentive to turn out on election day. Consequently, these voters are expected to be most susceptible to the influence of a close race. This effect may even be augmented for part of the Convinced voters, if the rival party in the lead is evaluated negatively. Then it becomes a race not just about good, but about good versus evil, which should enhance the influence of closeness.

3.4.2 *The Confounded voters*

The situation becomes somewhat more complicated for voters who are attracted to both parties in the lead. These voters will be labeled Confounded voters, as their wealth of choice may actually become a problem. As already mentioned, even though most political systems allow their voters to choose only one candidate or party, this does not mean that voters will consider only one option during the process of determining which candidate or party to vote for. They may hesitate between several parties or candidates, all offering various attractive policy standpoints. Voters may therefore find themselves in a situation where they have narrowed down their options to a few, or even two parties, and these may be the two parties in the race for the lead.

Voters who are attracted to both parties in the race for the lead may show distinctive, possibly even surprising behavior. These voters are *cross-pressured*: they are tugged at from opposing sides as both their favored parties are in the race for the lead and thus in desperate need of their vote. A vote for one party would be a vote against the other: they are damned if they do, and damned if they don't. To make matters worse, it is an important vote as well, since in a close election any single vote could tip the scales. The outcome of this conundrum could be that the tugging from both sides results in no movement at all. Instead of participating in the election, voters faced with an abundance of attractive electoral alternatives may opt out and stay at home, so as not to vote against either of their favored parties⁷. The severity of this predicament will increase with the intensity and balance of their support for the leading parties, and the closeness of the election. Therefore, Confounded voters are expected to show a reduced propensity to vote in close elections.

3.4.3 *The Condemned Voters*

The third category is the Condemned voter. This concerns voters who find neither of the parties in the lead acceptable at all as an option to vote for. The situation for these non-supporters should be rather less complicated than for the Confounded voters. In essence, Condemned voters are condemned to vote for a party they know will not win. They are therefore not expected to be affected by the closeness of the election race. After all, why meddle in a race in which none of the potential winners is attractive? To Condemned voters, none of the *leading* parties are acceptable alternatives in the voting booth. It then follows that such a voter will not derive a motivational incentive from a close election race, since affecting the outcome of the race - by voting for one of the leading parties - is not a valued option⁸.

Table 3-1 Voter Categorization - Expected Motivational Influence of Closeness

<i>Type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Affected by closeness?</i>	<i>Effect on participation</i>
Convinced	Favors one of the parties in the lead	Very likely	Positive
Confounded	Favors both of the parties in the lead	Possibly	Negative
Condemned	Favors neither of the parties in the lead	Unlikely	Absent

Table 3-1 summarizes the expected motivational effect of closeness on the three categories of voters. Convinced voters favor only one of the parties in the lead, they are expected to be affected by closeness, by showing an increased propensity to vote in close elections. Confounded voters favor both parties in the lead. Their chance to vote may, through cross-pressure, be affected by closeness in a negative way. Condemned voters favor none of the parties in the lead and are not expected to be affected by closeness - at least not the motivational effect of closeness. An effect on participation is therefore expected to be absent.

Table 3-1 also underscores the risk of a Type II error in an aggregate level analysis. As the aggregate level model assumes contextual effects to be uniform for the whole of the electorate, it follows that variation of influence at the individual level will find its way into such a model as an aggregation of these individual level effects. Table 3-1 shows that the expected effects of closeness at the individual level do not all run in the same direction. Depending therefore on the composition of the electorate - the ratio of the respective Convinced, Confounded and Condemned voter segments - the individual level influences may cancel out in an aggregate level analysis. The conclusion from an aggregate level analysis could therefore be that closeness does not affect electoral participation or turnout

7 Compare Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee (1954) and Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1948) who find that voters under cross-pressure both delay their choice and tend to downplay the importance of the election.

8 Some might argue that a Condemned voter may be in a different position if they decide to 'vote tactically', in other words vote for one of the parties that do stand a chance of winning. For Condemned voters this is not an option however, since they do not prefer either of the parties in the lead. Tactical voters will at least have a certain preference for one of the parties in the lead, although the party may not be their first preference.

- but this would be a false conclusion at the individual level, as closeness may certainly affect electoral participation, although differently for different kinds of voters. Whether these different individual effects combine to an aggregate effect is, of course, only dependent on the composition of the electorate

3.5 Conclusions

This chapter aimed to integrate the two approaches to explaining electoral participation generally used. The benefits of integration have already been brought to the fore in Chapter 2. But an integrated model is more than two levels of information simply added together. It is the argument of this chapter that next to hypotheses regarding the influence of explanatory factors on electoral participation at the aggregate and the individual level, an integrated model requires hypotheses about the interaction between these two levels of influence. Figure 3-4 presented a graphical representation of such an integrated explanatory model.

Section 3.2 proceeded to make the argument of a contextual effect with a varying impact at the individual level conceivable. Three contextual characteristics were selected that are frequently included in models analyzing aggregate level turnout. For concurrent elections, Sunday versus weekday voting and a close election race it was discussed how the influence of these characteristics may vary between voters, depending on their individual characteristics.

The remainder of the chapter laid the groundwork for applying the theoretical model to actual empirical analysis. Problems regarding the method of analysis, as well as empirical data available for research were discussed, on the basis of which one contextual characteristic - the closeness of the election race - was selected for further empirical analysis in this book. The possible effects of closeness on different categories of voters were subsequently explored.

The descriptions of the categories of voters given in the previous section all implicitly referred to an as yet not specified political system with at least two parties. The following chapter will show that the party landscape is actually of crucial importance to the influence of closeness as a contextual characteristic. In Chapter 4, the impact of closeness on turnout is examined at the aggregate level. It will show from a theoretical starting point that closeness may be an important factor in some political systems, but not in others. In some countries, the closeness of the election is unlikely to affect any voter. No aggregate level effect can be established for these countries, since there is no individual level influence. Confusingly however, the absence of an aggregate level effect may also be caused by a balancing out of individual level influences, or an individual level influence that affects too few voters to be noted at the aggregate level. Chapter 5 and 6 will therefore investigate the influence of closeness at the individual level in two systems, namely Great Britain and Sweden. In these two countries an aggregate level effect can be established, as Chapter 4 will show. Since an aggregate level effect can be established, the closeness of the election will affect British and Swedish voters at the individual level as well. The only question to be answered in Chapters 5 and 6 after the aggregate level analyses of Chapter 4, is whether the closeness of the election affects all voters equally.

One concluding remark concerns the generalizability of the argument presented here. The remainder of this study will deal with the influence of closeness on electoral participation. However, the general argument regarding the varying impact of context

characteristics on the individual is by no means restricted to the realms of electoral participation, or political behavior in general. Far more broadly, the theoretical model used is applicable to virtually all of the social sciences, or any research that chooses to look at the behavior of individuals, while simultaneously taking into account the context these individuals act in.

four

Different Races, Different Outcomes? Assessing the Influence of Closeness at Aggregate Level

Chapter 3 argued that the influence of contextual characteristics need not be uniform to voters, and attempted to show how contextual effects vary in impact depending on voters' individual characteristics. This argument was elaborated for three contextual characteristics: concurrent elections, Sunday voting and the closeness of the election. The closeness of the election appeared the most viable variable for an empirical demonstration of this general theory. The differential impact of closeness on different segments of the electorate was hypothesized to be linked to differences in affect for political parties. These differences were explicated in a threefold distinction between Convinced, Confounded and Condemned voters. Specific expectations about the nature and direction of the effect of closeness on these categories were derived.

The current chapter continues our exploration of the influence of 'closeness' on voters. But to go forward, first we have to take one step back. A more detailed description of the influence of closeness on the individual voter will help our understanding of the influence of closeness. Chapters 5 and 6 will examine the influence of closeness at the individual level. The second part of the current chapter will examine the influence of closeness at the aggregate level. We will therefore start out with an explanation of the impact of closeness on the individual voter from the Downsian perspective (Downs, 1957), as well as from the viewpoint of expressive voting (Harrop & Miller, 1987). We will see that a close election is likely to have an impact on all kinds of voters, irrespective of whether they behave in Downsian or expressive manner.

The next question that must be addressed is what is meant by a close election? There is no single answer to this. The examples of various countries that will be presented below demonstrate that defining closeness requires a country-specific approach. When made concrete, the abstract concept of a close election refers to different specifications of what is compared with what in a political system. The theoretical concept of closeness therefore requires a practical specification tailored to specific political systems. And, as will be shown, this custom-made concept of closeness may even require to be time-specific, in order to take into account temporary features of the political arena or the political agenda. After elaborating the concept of closeness, an additional section will discuss when we may deem an election close.

After having established how closeness affects voters, and what it is that makes an election a close one, we will need to establish how to measure closeness. More than one option is available here, and the choice between them will be determined by theoretical as well practical arguments. The pros and cons of the different options will be discussed in Section 4.2.2 below, and explored empirically in the analyses that make up the last part

of this chapter. The outcome of the discussion will determine the empirical indicator of closeness that will be used in the individual level analyses in Chapters 5 and 6.

The implications of the points introduced above will materialize in the second part of this chapter. On a per country basis, the concept of closeness will be operationalized and its impact examined. In doing so, we will follow an approach often taken in the literature, by examining the effect of closeness on turnout levels. An aggregate level approach, in other words. This approach allows us to get a quick and informative view of the overall influence of closeness in various political systems, and is helpful in selecting countries for the individual level analysis of Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. If we find at the aggregate level that closeness is influential, we know that closeness must also be influential at the individual level. The next step, taken in Chapters 5 and 6, is then to find out whether closeness is important for all voters, or only for some voters. It should be noted that the aggregate level approach presented in this chapter has obvious shortcomings when attempting to draw conclusions at the level of the individual voter (cf. Chapter 3).

The country analyses presented in the second part of this chapter will show that, at the aggregate level, demonstrable effects exist of closeness on turnout, and hence on voters - at least in some countries. But the analyses will not allow demonstration of the opposite: that no effect of closeness on voters can be established, simply because no effect on turnout levels can be established. As the previous chapter argued, individuals need not respond to contextual effects uniformly. As a consequence, aggregate level analyses cannot be tests of individual level hypotheses. Small segments of the electorate may be affected - too small to yield unequivocal results at the aggregate level. Opposite effects of contextual characteristics on different segments of the electorate may cancel out, again falsely suggesting an absence of the contextual effect. And the presence of aggregate level effects may even lull us into a false sense of certainty: that closeness affects turnout figures, and hence all voters in the estimated fashion. Chapter 5 will show that, in spite of the convincing aggregate level findings that will be presented in the current chapter, the closeness of the elections does not affect *all* voters uniformly, or equally. Subsequently however, Chapter 6 will show that this individual level variation in contextual influence is not a uniform truth over different political systems.

4.1 Why More Turnout in Close Elections?

In the work of Downs (1957), closeness of an election is, *ceteris paribus*, expected to increase turnout. Downs described a rational voter weighing the costs and benefits of his actions, set within a perfect two-party system. Such a two-party system provides clear choice options - there are only two parties to vote for. It also provides for clear consequences of the vote-choice in terms of the allocation of government power following the election outcome. In this setting, a neck and neck race between the two parties is expected to increase turnout, as a voters' expected benefit increase and the costs connected with voting fall.

Figure 4-1 Effects of a Close Election Race

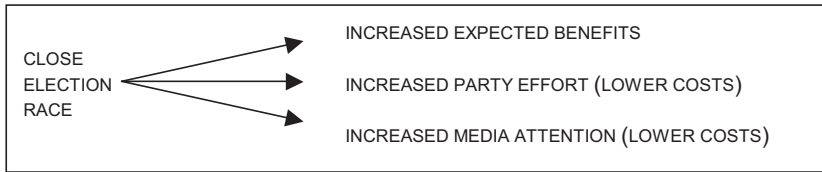


Figure 4-1 summarizes the effects a close election race. For the voter, the benefit of voting consists of contributing - through one's vote - to the election of a government whose policy standpoints and preferences best match those of the voter. The probability of this expected benefit is highest in an election in which the two contenders are tied in a close race, since the chance to swing the election is greatest. The possible influence of a voter is thus at its maximum, and rational choice argues that as the probability of the preferred outcome increases, while the costs remain unchanged, the probability of participation in the election will increase. Moreover, a close election race is expected to increase the campaign and mobilization efforts made by parties. With victory uncertain, yet within reach, candidates and parties will go all out to win votes and get convinced supporters to the polls. This means that in a close election a higher than average portion of the electorate may be expected to be exposed to these campaign efforts.

Finally, resulting in part from increased party efforts, media attention devoted to the election can be expected to increase the closer a race is. A neck and neck race is attractive material for news reporters (cf. Norris, Curtice *et al.* 1999; Donovan 1998; Brants & van Praag jr. 1995) It produces a clear and easily conveyed summary of what the election is about, which makes for captivating news-reports that quickly get the picture across. In addition, candidates and parties will try their utmost to create attractive sound-bites and picture opportunities to make sure that their efforts will be covered by reporters. Continuous updates of the current standings through opinion polls (the 'horse race') will illustrate just how close the candidates are. All in all, it ensures that more people are likely to hear or read about elections the closer they are. The relatively low complexity of a news message when it is framed to highlight the closeness of the race, ensures that even a modest interest in the news is enough to get a grasp of what the election is about. Increased campaign efforts as well as heightened media attention increase the awareness among the electorate of the election and of what is at stake. Thus, both help to lower the information costs associated with making a choice in the election, which will increase the chance to participate.

The Downsian approach has been criticized for being too strict a model of human behavior, as its own reasoning could not account for the fact that people bother to vote at all. The chance that a single vote would make the difference in an election is so small, that the costs will always outweigh the expected benefits of voting. By definition, voting can therefore not be rational behavior¹. In reaction to this, the argument has been made that the Downsian model should be read in a semi-collective way. Although the chances of one voter determining the election outcome are minute, voters are likely to see themselves as part of a

1 For a recent overview of this discussion, see Blais, 2000.

group of voters that will respond in the same way to the electoral circumstances. The probability that such a group will affect the outcome of the election is far more realistic².

Does the argument above imply that closeness can only be influential if one assumes voters to be sensitive to (changes in) expected costs and benefits? What influence can closeness exert if the act of voting is not regarded as instrumental, but rather as an expressive deed reflecting sociological or socio-psychological loyalties that are not affected by costs or benefit considerations? Actually, the outcome is rather similar to that predicted by the rational choice model. If the act of voting is seen as an opportunity to express one's allegiance to a political party (or social class, or religious group, etcetera) then the possible influence of closeness is dependent on the steadfastness of that allegiance.

For steadfast backers of their particular political party, closeness should not be of influence. Indeed, if nothing can keep loyal voters from turning out to support their party, by the same token no room is left - nor required - for an additional incentive such as a close election. However, some voters may typically identify with a party, but not always make it to the polls, for example because their loyalty is less strong. These occasional voters may still see elections as an opportunity to express their loyalty to a political grouping, but their electoral participation is less stable than that of the habitual voters discussed above. For the occasional voters, for whom participation is uncertain, the closeness of the election can be a significant influence, as it may give them the extra push they sometimes need.

In essence then, an expressive explanation of voting will predict comparable effects of closeness as the rational choice model does. If voting is seen as wholly expressive with all voters having exceedingly strong loyalties to parties, then voters will participate regardless of anything else, including closeness. If voters' loyalties prove themselves to be of all kinds of degrees, then closeness will be of influence, just as it will be in the rational choice model.

4.2 Determining the Closeness of the Election

After having established how a close election may influence voters, the next natural question is: when is an election close? This question contains two further ones. First: which phenomena are to be compared for establishing closeness? Second: is closeness a dichotomy, or a continuous variable, and how do we expect it to be related to turnout? With respect to the first question, when comparison is being made, the party landscape will be the deciding factor. In a two-party or two-candidate system, it is relatively easy to perceive what the election race will be about. There are only two contenders, so if they are neck and neck, the election is going to be a close one³. If support for the two contenders is less equal, the election will be less close.

Few countries, however, exist that have pure two-party systems, and consequently we may also say that there is more than one form of closeness, although in practice it is more of a variation upon a theme. Party systems with more than two parties may complicate the practical definition of who competes with whom, but it does not mean that the concept of a close election race is not applicable to these systems. A straightforward extension of the two-

2 It is important to notice that such a group of voters need not be organized in any way. The knowledge among groups of voters that other voters will act "just like me" suffices.

3 There is a - near academic - caveat here. If the two contenders derive their support from an electorate that is extremely stable in its choices, then even if the election is close, the outcome will still be a foregone conclusion, since the (slightly) smaller party will not overtake the (slightly) larger one.

party race is a competition between two groupings of parties. Such groupings can be long-standing associations - the left vs. the right, religious vs. secular, et cetera - but they may also be less long-lived alliances, such as for example an incumbent government coalition versus the opposition. If the alternative party groupings are discernable to the electorate, the competition between these blocs can meaningfully be interpreted as the closeness of the election. Section 4.3 below, will present several of such long-standing or *ad hoc* party groupings.

But there is a third alternative operationalization of an election race conceivable, one that does not even require more than one contender. A party need not necessarily compete with other parties, but may also race to beat a threshold. Such a threshold is sometimes imposed by the electoral system of the country, to limit the number of parliamentary parties. But, perhaps less easily recognized, such thresholds may also be self-imposed. A party that is part of an incumbent government coalition may exit the coalition if it fails to retain its share of the electorate or any other self-imposed target. A dominant party may refuse to take up governmental responsibility if does not win an absolute majority, or a certain share of the vote. If these thresholds are recognized by the electorate and are conceived as real thresholds, not just empty campaign rhetoric, the same concept of a close election is applicable as the more readily recognizable one in a two-party race.

From the above it is clear that the concept of the closeness of an election is not limited to the traditional two-party race. Different political landscapes can create different sorts of races, and Section 4.3 will present a number of empirical examples. It is unlikely that each and every political system (let alone each election) can be characterized as more or less close in one respect or another, as will become evident in Section 4.3. But the applicability of the notion of closeness is not limited to two-party systems alone. In Section 4.4 we will return to the question of which circumstances make the closeness of an election a relevant factor for voter participation.

4.2.1 *Close Enough?*

Thus far, ‘the closeness of the race’ and ‘close elections’ have been used rather arbitrarily to describe the same concept: an election in which two competitors are running neck and neck. As we have seen in the previous section, that need not be limited to two competitors, and it could even be one competitor in a race of its own, but the important question is: when do we call a race close?

There is no reason to regard closeness as a dichotomous variable. Even though elections may be dubbed ‘close’ or ‘not close’, in reality this will mean that the race is close to a certain degree. It may vary from extremely close to not close at all. The closeness of an election is a continuum, with the degree of closeness expected to influence turnout. The nature of the relationship need not be linear, however: if a party is far ahead, it does not make much difference whether the lead is, say, 20 or 25 percent. It becomes a different story if the lead is not so large: a 7 percent lead is considerably different from a lead of 2 percent. When it gets this tight, the closeness of the election is likely to be of influence to voters.

Figure 4-2 Closeness and Turnout - Hypothesized Relationship

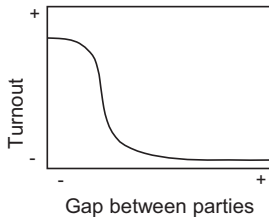


Figure 4-2 shows the hypothesized relationship between closeness, indicated in this example as the gap between the two leading parties, and turnout. As the gap between the parties increases, the election becomes less close, and turnout is expected to fall. There is no clear theoretical lead that may suggest beyond what point along the horizontal axis an election will no longer be considered close by the electorate of a given country. This point is to be established empirically, and is likely to vary between different systems. However, the complicated nature of the hypothesized relationship between closeness and turnout implies that a substantial amount of data (i.e., a large number of elections) is required to provide us with unequivocal answers. The analyses presented below will not allow us to establish the fall off point for the influence of closeness, since we will not be able to control for other factors affecting turnout. Figure 4-2 is therefore a stylized picture: other factors influencing the level of turnout are assumed to be controlled for. We can only expect to empirically find the pattern of Figure 4-2 in countries where contextual factors other than closeness are not of influence - an assumption that is not feasible. In addition, the pattern of Figure 4-2 can only be detected empirically if all voters are affected by the closeness of the race, a matter that is contested in Chapter 3.⁴ In inspecting the empirical data presented below, the reader may want to keep in mind that Figure 4-2 reflects the relationship at the individual level.

4.2.2 Measuring Closeness

Measuring closeness is not an easy task. Argued very strictly, it should be done on an individual basis: closeness is an impression that is in the eye of the beholder. Often, such thorough measurement is unattainable, and alternative indicators have to be sought. Part of the contradictory empirical findings regarding closeness and turnout (cf. Blais, 2000, p. 59) may actually be based on the data used to indicate closeness. A discussion of conceivable indicators is therefore appropriate.

Blais (2000, p. 58) argues that closeness can be measured in two ways, namely objectively and subjectively. Subjectively, it refers to a subjective perception of the closeness of the election, i.e. how close the individual voter expects the election to be. Such data would indeed be most preferable, as indeed the individual perceptions, *not* the actual facts, will count when voters make up their mind. This however, requires survey data collected shortly before the election.

The objective measures of closeness that Blais refers to are actual election results. The

⁴ Actually, the upper boundary of the inverted s-curve, the point beyond turnout will not rise, is determined by the proportion of consistent non-voters in the electorate. The lower boundary, the point below turnout will not fall, is determined by the proportion of constant voters in the electorate. See also Chapter 7.

assumption is that the electorate will correctly anticipate these actual results (Blais, *ibidem*). Actual election outcomes seem at first instance attractive for indicating closeness. As election returns are usually well documented, data availability is typically not a problem, which means that virtually all elections ever put on record can be analyzed. In addition, election outcomes are also the most correct information in determining (retrospectively) how close the elections actually turned out to be. Not surprisingly therefore, election returns are commonly used to assess the influence of closeness on turnout. There is a drawback to this, however, which appears to elude many researchers who use election results for indicating closeness:⁵ election outcomes tend not to be known before the actual affair is over. As the actual result of an election is not available to voters before the election, voters cannot base their behavior on this result. Consequently, the actual election outcome need not be an indicator of the closeness of the election, which we expect to affect voters' behavior. This point is most clearly brought out in elections with 'surprising' outcomes. If the actual outcome differs substantially from prior expectations, closeness based on actual outcomes would give us an incorrect value. If an election is commonly perceived as particularly close, we expect turnout to be positively affected, at least among some segments of the electorate (cf. Chapter 3). If actual election results subsequently show that it was not that close a race after all, analyses of closeness and turnout based on the election outcome would suggest that turnout was uncommonly high for an election that was not very close. An example of this is found in the 1992 elections in Great Britain. For the elections of that year, the opinion polls predicted a dead heat, with Labour leading the Conservatives by as little as one percent. The actual result saw a Conservative lead of over 7 percent. Based on actual election outcomes, we would conclude that the election was not very close, and a high turnout would not be expected. The opposite is equally possible: an election that was expected to be a forgone conclusion could turn out to be a dead heat between the main contenders. In such a case, turnout would be strikingly low for an election that proved very close in *hindsight*. Both situations obscure our view of the influence of closeness. The British election of 1992 is an example of a *false negative*: an election appears not close in hindsight, but was experienced as very close by the electorate when it decided to participate or not. The second case is an example of a *false positive*: an election that proved in retrospect to be very close, but was not expected to be so beforehand. However, since the election was not expected to be close, and voters were not aware of how close it would turn out to be, the closeness of the election can not have motivated people to participate.

Other sources of information regarding the closeness of the election are therefore preferred, sources of information in line with the theoretical concept of closeness as an impression in voters' minds. For this impression to take form, the information needs to be available *before* an election. A valid indicator of closeness should therefore be based on information that is available before the election. Such an indicator 'before the facts' that is often readily available can be obtained from opinion polls. Opinion poll data is often available to the electorate before the elections. Indeed, in many countries, the 'race' as reflected by the polls has become a central part of the media coverage of elections. Newspapers and TV news programs thus ensure that the latest figures are directly brought to

5 Note Cox (1988) as an exception.

the public, typically in conjunction with the changes since a previous poll. Any voter interested in politics is thus likely to be informed about the parties' standings of the moment, and the easily digestible character of the information ensures that even a marginally interested audience is likely to pick up some of the information in passing. In as far as these data are still available after the election, they are a much better indicator of closeness as conveyed to and perceived by the electorate at the time of the election.

For opinion poll data to form an acceptable indicator for the closeness of the election, some requirements have to be met. First, the data will have to be available to the public, in other words published in the media, and published shortly before the elections. Opinion polls published six months before an election are of no use, since voters' preferences can change substantially in the intervening period. Second, the opinion polls will have to show a certain degree of consistency. Typically more than one poll is presented in the run up to the election, often from competing polling agencies. Contradictory opinion polls result in a situation that is difficult to interpret, for both voters and researchers of electoral participation. Thirdly, the polls need to be reliable and credible. Implausible opinion poll predictions will be dismissed by voters, and will not influence them.

The final part of this chapter will compare the closeness-turnout relationship for actual outcome data and opinion poll data, respectively. Based on the argument set out above, closeness based on opinion polls is expected to be a better predictor of turnout than closeness based on election outcomes, if indeed closeness is of influence at all.

Ironically, the actual accuracy of opinion polls is not of real importance. Opinion polls by themselves create the reality (i.e., the character of the context in which an election takes place) to which the electorate may respond in the run up to the election. If the polls turn out to be 'wrong', voters will only find that out after they have already acted on them. The exception to this argument is of course a track record that is so bad that voters lose confidence in the polls, and will no longer regard them as valid indicators of the political situation. In such a case, it is likely that the attention devoted to opinion polls by the media will also decrease.

While opinion polls are more widely obtainable than subjective measures of closeness, their availability is still not universal, especially in comparison to election outcome data. Not all countries have an established history of polling, moreover, their transient news value often leads to poor documentation and archival of polls. All of this puts restrictions on the number of elections that may eventually be analyzed.

4.3 Different Countries, Different Races

This section will make the step from theory to practice. The potential influence of the closeness of an election on turnout will be analyzed for a number of political systems. As was argued in Section 4.2, different political systems call for different operationalizations of the closeness of the election. Determining what the race is about in each country will therefore form an important part of the current section.

As mentioned already, the analyses presented here are all at the aggregate level. Turnout rates will be compared to see the extent to which the election was close. This allows a quick but informative overview of the influence of the closeness of the election on turnout in different political systems and of different interpretations of closeness. But, as was already mentioned in the first section of this chapter, these analyses are inconclusive with respect to

the effect of closeness on individual voters. Where there is reason to do so, we will discuss this in the analyses below, which may help the reader to get a better understanding of the concept of closeness, and how it may affect some parts of the electorate, but not others. The implications of these explorations at the individual level will further be analyzed in Chapter 5 and 6.

The political systems and elections that will be analyzed are the US Presidential Elections, and parliamentary elections in the UK, the Netherlands, Ireland, Norway, Sweden and Germany. This selection allows us to explore the relationship between closeness and turnout in several political systems, varying in several characteristics such as party landscape and electoral system. The limited number of elections available for each of these systems implies however that the analyses are exploratory in character: when data are available for a small number of elections to study, the number of degrees of freedom is small, so that the complexity of models is restricted here. The following analyses therefore present plots of turnout vis-à-vis the closeness indicators, measured by election outcomes and opinion polls, respectively. Linear regression lines are included in the plots. Although the actual relationship between closeness and turnout is not expected to be linear (cf. Figure 4-2, above), a linear relationship will be used as a heuristic in describing the relationship. A visual inspection of graphs and regression lines will indicate whether or not this way of summarizing the relationship falls short. In inspecting the following plots, the reader may therefore want to keep Figure 4-2 in mind.

4.3.1 *U.S. Presidential Elections*

The one-dimensional, two-party system that was used by Downs to develop his original model of rational interactions between voters and parties is a very favorable context for the notion that a close election will increase turnout levels. There are two parties that compete for a single prize, which is indivisible. Niche parties that cater to the preferences of small segments of the electorate are not natural to, or encouraged by, the system. Accepting the assumption that a close race mostly affects voters who support one of the parties in the race, and that the two main parties cater to the preferences of the majority of the electorate, such a two-party system ensures that a close race will affect a large portion of the interested voters and not just a small segment of the electorate. As turnout is the sum of the actions of all voters, the influence of an election race affecting a large part of the electorate will most likely be visible in a statistical analysis at the aggregate level.

True two-party or two-candidate systems are rare: against all odds, third-party candidates with absolutely no chance of winning⁶ seem bound to appear wherever an election is called. This is true for the USA as well, where third party candidates often vie for the presidency. For all practical purposes however, these minor party candidates may be ignored, not in the least since the far majority of the electorate does so as well. Taken this into account, the Presidential elections of Downs' native USA usually qualify as a two-party system⁷. Presidential elections can justifiably be viewed from a national perspective, and they also

6 Winning is defined here in the narrow sense of the word, of capturing (some of) the office(s) to be filled by the election. Of course, a third party can deem its quest fruitful with smaller successes: in the 2000 US presidential elections Ralph Nader was content with a vote share that would win him federal funding, rather than the presidency.

7 With a few notable exceptions, such as the candidacies of McCarthy, Anderson and Perot.

tend to be the dominant political race in the country, which makes them very suitable for testing the influence of closeness on turnout.

Figure 4-3 USA - Presidential Elections

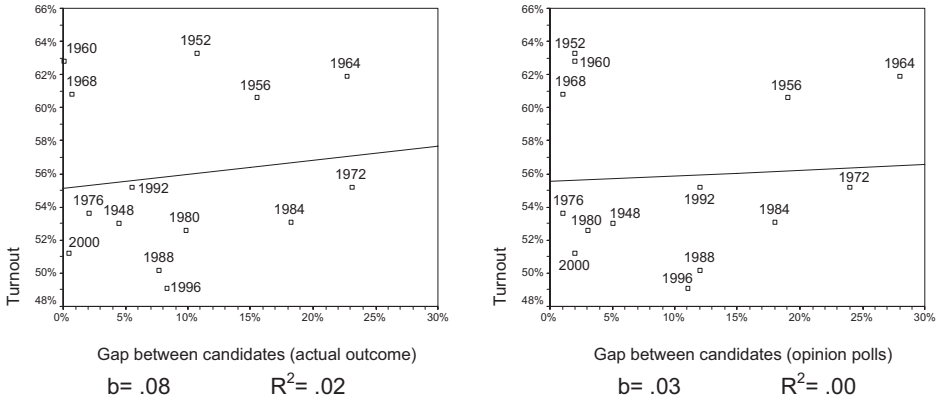


Figure 4-3 indicates that the expectation of an aggregate effect of closeness on turnout is not warranted on the basis of either national election outcomes or opinion poll predictions. Moving from left to right, turnout is expected to fall, and a downward sloping regression line is expected. This is clearly not observed. Moreover, the regression model is unable to explain the variance in turnout at all. A visual inspection of the separate data-points does not suggest that the poor fit is caused by forcing a linear equation on a non-linear relationship.

An explanation for the apparently absent influence of closeness on national turnout levels may be found in an erroneous implicit assumption. Although the presidential election is a race between two national candidates, the Electoral College ensures that it is rather a situation of 50 simultaneous statewide elections than a single national race. Even in the closest race, only a few states are ‘battlegrounds’ where the race is close and where the state’s results may determine the national outcome. A state-level analysis may therefore be more appropriate than the national analysis presented here.

Figure 4-4 USA - Turnout per State in 2000 Presidential Elections as Compared to 1996 Turnout, Battleground versus Non-Battleground States (solid line indicates non-battleground average, dotted line indicates battleground average. USA average = +2.2%)

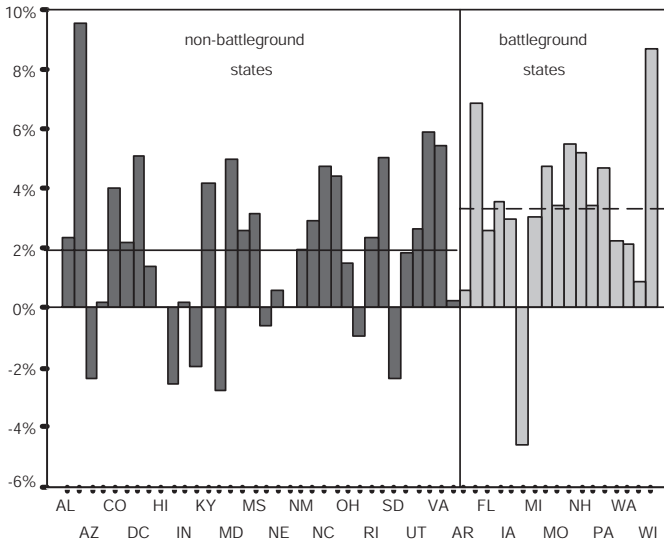


Figure 4-4 presents such a state-level analysis, comparing turnout rates per state for the 2000 and 1996 presidential elections⁸. For conciseness of presentation, rather than presenting closeness as a continuous variable, a somewhat crude dichotomy has been introduced: whether or not a state was regarded as a ‘battleground’ state in the final weeks of the 2000 elections⁹. Battleground states are states that are expected to show a very close election race, and are often the focal point of the electoral campaigns of both candidates. Figure 4-4 shows that the increase in turnout from 1996 to 2000 indeed is higher in the 17 battleground states than elsewhere. All but one (Maine) show an increase in turnout over the 1996 election, and all but four (Arkansas, Maine, Washington and West Virginia) show an increase in turnout that exceeds the average increase in turnout of 2.2 percent for the USA as a whole. Where the non-battleground states show an average increase in turnout of 1.9 percent (lower line), the average turnout increase is 3.3 percent for the battleground states (upper line). These figures suggest that closeness is of importance for turnout in the American system - but only if one knows where to look: at the level of the actual races rather than at the (artificial) national tally. At the national level, the impact of closeness is negligible. At the state level however, it significantly influences turnout, at least in 2000.

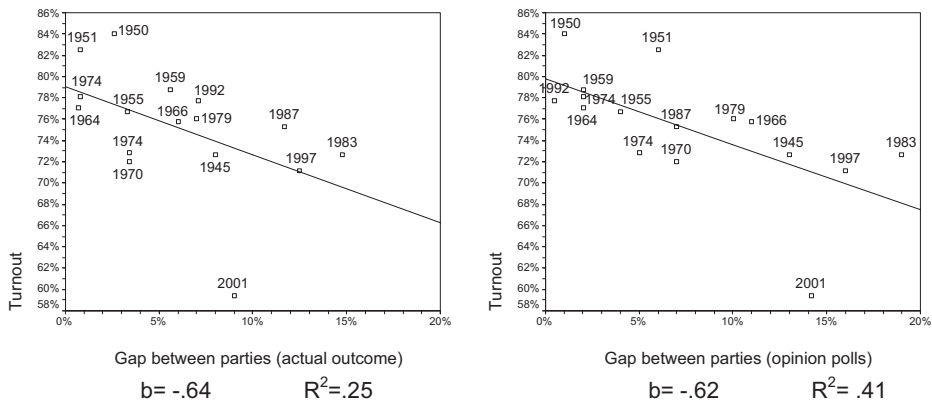
8 Figure 4 4 presents the turnout rate per state as compared to turnout in that state in the previous Presidential election. Structural turnout variations between states, caused by different levels of education, voting regulations and so forth would render a state by state comparison of turnout rates fruitless.

9 Selection of battleground states based on Erikson and Sigman, 2000.

4.3.2 Great Britain

Apart from the United States, there are other examples of two-party or two-candidate competitions, such as the parliamentary elections in Great Britain. In Britain, two large players, Labour and the Conservatives, dominate political competition. These are the only two viable alternatives for a majority in the House of Commons, and the majoritarian electoral system almost ensures that the ‘race’ will therefore be between these two parties, with all other parties being close to insignificant as far as the ‘prize’ of winning a parliamentary majority is concerned. That part of the electorate which considers voting for either of these parties is the part that is most likely to be affected by the closeness of the race between the Conservatives and Labour¹⁰. This is however not the entire electorate. For supporters of the smaller parties such as the Liberals and Social Democrats, and national parties such as SNP and Plaid Cymru, a close election may be far less relevant. Closeness is thus likely to affect a large part, but not necessarily the entire electorate.

Figure 4-5 Great Britain - Two Largest Parties



The influence of closeness at the national level is much more apparent in the British than in the American case. There is a clear linear relationship between closeness and turnout, without any trace of nonlinearity, which is highlighted by the regression line and the substantial explained variance. One could even consider the 2001 elections an outlier¹¹. The linear trend does not contradict the relationship hypothesized in Figure 4-2, as that figure refers to the individual level. The influence of closeness appears strongest if opinion poll data is used, as was hypothesized.

In Britain too, we may consider the election itself a multi-level one (like in the USA), with separate constituencies, and an overall result in parliament. This raises the question whether closeness matters more from a national perspective or from a local one. This question will be left for later (Chapter 5) where it will be discussed in detail.

10 See also the discussion in Chapter 3, summarized in Table 3 1.

11 If the 2001 elections are removed from the analysis, the b estimate is -.48, with an R2 of .32 for the actual outcome data, while b is -.43 and R2 is .43 for the opinion poll data. Although the concept of outliers may appear non-applicable to an analysis of actual election outcomes, the reader is reminded that other contextual factors may influence the election and are ignored in this analysis.

4.3.3 Calling a Multi-party Race - The Netherlands

The straightforward nature of closeness in a two-party system is changed dramatically if closeness is applied to a multi-party political system. Determining what the race is about, and determining who is in the lead and by what measure, can become very complicated.

In the Netherlands, single-party governments are inconceivable and the political landscape is sufficiently fluid for coalitions to be formed from a relatively large collection of parties. This makes the outcome of an election, in terms of coalition formation by no means a predictable affair. As not even the largest party is guaranteed a place in government, parties tend to keep their options open before the election, merely hinting at coalition preferences and only rarely ruling out any options before the election takes place. ‘Never say never’ is a vital rule for prospective coalition partners in Dutch politics.

Obviously, this presents serious problems in operationalizing the concept of closeness in such a political landscape. Indicating closeness by measuring the gap between the largest two parties lacks substantive political meaning. Although it is an unwritten rule that the largest party takes the lead in coalition negotiations, in the end the largest party may still not even be part of the coalition. Any relationship between turnout figures and closeness measured as the gap between the two largest parties is therefore likely to be weak, at best.

Figure 4-6 The Netherlands - Two Largest Parties

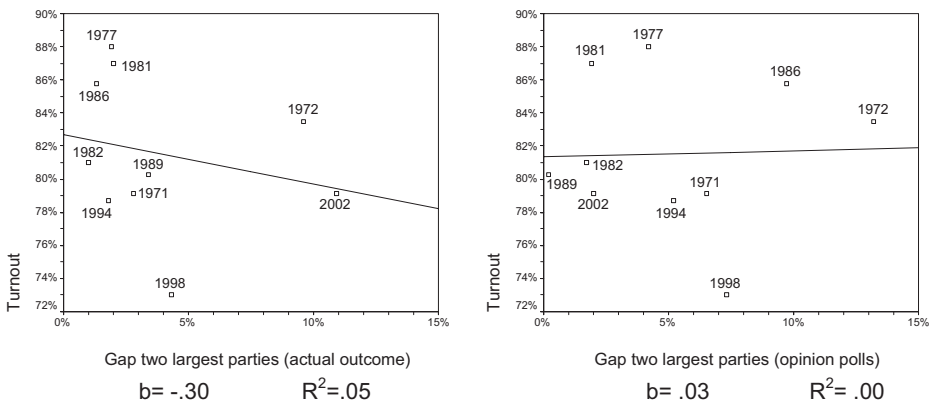


Figure 4-6 present a rather mixed image. If we look at the actual outcome data, a linear relationship can be detected, but only if we consider the elections of 1972 and 2002 as outliers. A strong negative trend can then be detected. However, for the opinion poll data there is no argument for removing the 2002 data from the model. The 1972 data could still be regarded an outlier, but so could the 1986 data. Indeed, if a strong negative slope is not hypothesized, then the elections of 1998, 1981 and 1977 may also be regarded outliers. Since the removal of one or two data-points has such a strong impact on the relationship between closeness and turnout, the conclusion will have to be that the influence of the closeness of the election is not straightforward in the Netherlands. However, this does not mean that factors apart from closeness may explain the particular results for 1972, 2002 or any of the potential outliers. Explaining these is not the particular aim of this chapter.

An alternative form of closeness can be conceived of as well for the Netherlands. This would look at elections as a race between the incumbent government coalition versus the 50 percent mark of parliamentary seats. The question then becomes whether or not the governing coalition is able to maintain its majority in the elections. This presupposes, of course, that a coalition actively seeks a renewal at the end of its mandate to govern. This is actually relatively rare in the Netherlands: in the last three decades, only two of a total of nine cabinets made continuation their election-goal¹². Defining closeness as the gap between coalition support and a 50 percent majority mark presents us with only two cases. To make matters more complicated: usually there are no alternative coalition alliances or ‘shadow cabinets’ presented as alternative to the incumbent coalition. Parties may hint at coalition preferences before an election, but only on one occasion (1972) were firm commitments made before the election. Figure 4-7 presents the influence of closeness defined as the gap between the two largest parties, as in Figure 4-6, with the exception of 1972, 1986 and 1998, when closeness is defined as the gap between the incumbent or proposed coalition and 50 percent of the vote.

Figure 4-7 The Netherlands - Parties and Coalitions

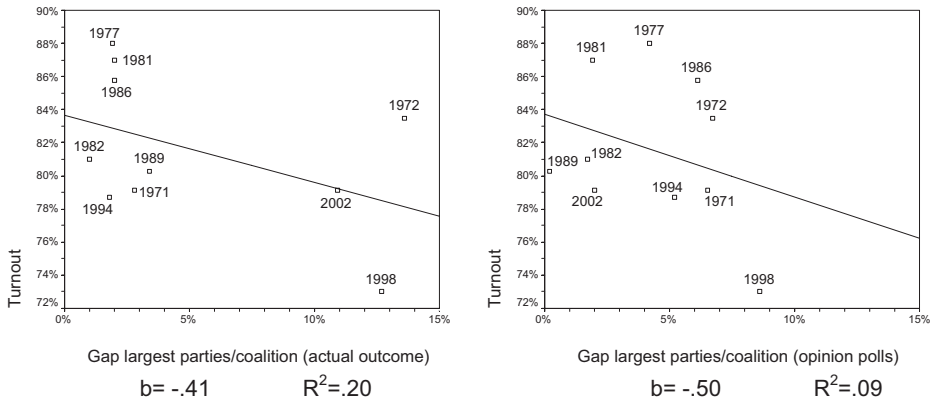


Figure 4-7 shows that the relationship remains weak and susceptible to the influence of outliers. Although the results improve somewhat, closeness still appears a concept of limited value in explaining Dutch turnout figures. It appears to be a concept that needs to be defined for each election.

4.3.4 Ireland: One or More Parties?

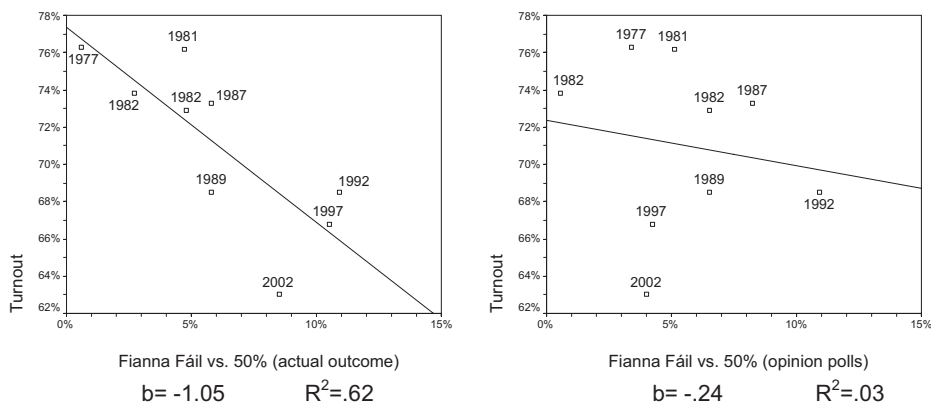
The Irish political party system can be described as a multi-party system, although the balance of power is far more skewed than in the Dutch political landscape. Since gaining government power in 1932, Fianna Fáil has dominated the political system, only infrequently handing government power over to a coalition formed by Fine Gael and the Labour Party. Well into the 1980s, the Irish political landscape showed Fianna Fáil pitched against the rest of the field, reinforced by Fianna Fáil’s refusal to enter into any coalition governments

¹² This occurred in the 1986 elections, when the incumbent CDA/VVD coalition sought re-election, as well as in 1998, when the PvdA/VVD/D66 or ‘purple’ coalition vied continuation (Cf. Table 2 2, Chapter 2).

whatsoever (cf. Mair & Marsh 1999). Forced by electoral misfortunes, this stance was abandoned from 1989 onwards, after which the Irish political landscape became considerably more open. Consequently, government formation have become far less predictable as old barriers gave way and coalitions previously unthinkable were formed.

For the period until the mid-1980s, closeness may be operationalized as the gap between Fianna Fáil's support and a majority¹³. From the mid-1980s onward, any influence that this sort of closeness may have had is likely to diminish, as by that time a Fianna Fáil majority had become unlikely. It is hard to provide an acceptable alternative to this race, as no other single party has come close to a majority and as the coalition preferences of parties were rarely proclaimed before an election (the sole occasion is 1997, when Fianna Fáil and the Progressive Democrats proposed a coalition before the elections were held). Closeness - as depicted by the gap between Fianna Fáil's share of the vote and 50 percent - may therefore show an influence on electoral participation in Ireland until into the 1980s, although its impact is likely to diminish after that.

Figure 4-8 Ireland - Fianna Fáil vs. 50%



The difference in findings based on actual outcomes and opinion poll data is remarkable, and contrary to expectation. A healthy relationship between turnout and closeness exists based on election outcomes, while the opinion poll data suggests an absence of any relation. Apart from suggestions that the Irish would simply tell opinion pollsters one thing and then do something other at the polling station, an alternative explanation might be found in the specific operationalization of closeness in Ireland. Imagine a 'frozen' electorate where between-party fluctuation at elections is zero. The degree to which the - otherwise stable - voters turn out will determine each party's share of the vote. Differential turnout between party adherents will determine who will win or lose, and how close the race is¹⁴. As a result,

13 Actually, 50 percent of parliamentary seats are essential in a parliamentary system, not necessarily a majority of the popular vote. The complicated nature of Ireland's STV system makes the exact translation of electoral support measured in opinion polls into seats virtually impossible. Therefore, in the analyses undertaken popular vote share was used as indicator.

14 Although the absolute deviation is used, for the period observed here only once did Fianna Fáil actually gain more than 50 percent of the vote. A decrease of closeness therefore implies a decrease in Fianna Fáil's support.

closeness will be dependent on differential turnout of party loyalists, not vice versa. The degree of closeness will be associated with the willingness of the different segments of the electorate to participate in a particular election. This process may elude us when using opinion poll data if no provision for individual turnout probability is made, and could therefore explain the findings of Figure 4-8. As a provision for turnout probability is inherently reflected in actual election outcomes, opinion polls may thus prove confusing, rather than illuminating. In addition to this, the race in Ireland is actually a multi-level race as well, with elections taking place in multi-member constituencies. Aggregate analyses seem therefore insufficient in determining the influence of the closeness of the election on turnout in Ireland.

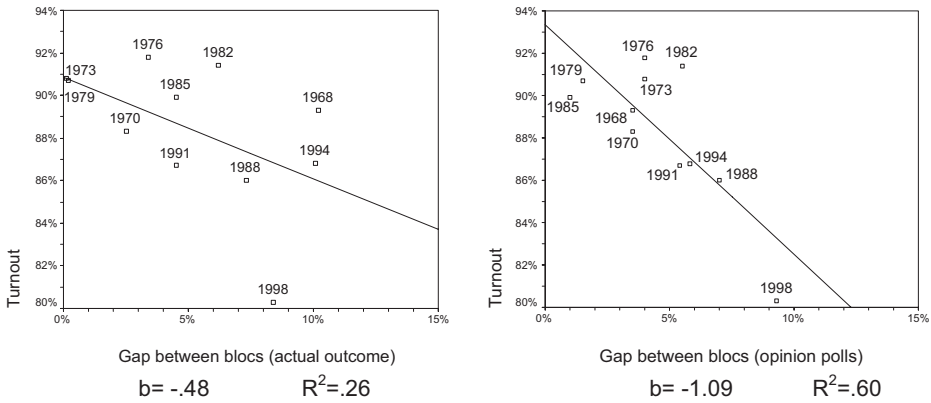
4.3.5 A Scandinavian Two-bloc Race

As in Ireland, the party system in Norway and Sweden has been dominated for most of the modern era by a single large party, in both countries the Social Democrats, opposed by a number of smaller parties. In such a multi-party political landscape the concept of closeness as a race between the two largest parties is not meaningful, since the gap will be too large to be meaningful if a relationship at the individual level is hypothesized as illustrated in Figure 4-2. However, in both countries it has become commonplace to look at the party system in terms of two opposing blocs. On the one hand, the social-democratic bloc formed by the social-democratic party combined with parties further to the left, and a bourgeois bloc consisting all other parties on the other hand. In Norway, these two blocs are composed of *Det Norske Arbeiderparti* (Labor party) together with the *Sosialistisk Venstreparti* and the *Rød Valgallianse* on the left, and *Høyre*, *Kristelig Folkeparti*, *Senterpartiet*, *Venstre*, and the *Fremskrittspartiet* on the bourgeois side, together with small (and usually short-lived) emerging parties on both sides. For Sweden, the left side is made up by the SAP (labor party), the *Vänsterpartiet* and in recent years the green *Miljöpartiet*, while the bourgeois camp is made up of the Center party, *Moderaterna*, *Folkpartiet*, *Kristdemokraterna* and, for a short period, the *Ny Demokrati* party.

The political landscape in Norway and Sweden is viewed as a two-bloc structure - by both the electorate and the political elite.¹⁵ Elections are therefore seen as competitions between blocs, frequently focusing on whether or not the social democrats will be strong enough to form the government. In periods that 'bloc-discipline' is high, the multi-party political landscape in these countries overlays a more basic division in two camps. By defining closeness of an election as the gap between these two blocs, this concept is applicable to the Swedish and Norwegian cases. Defined in this way, closeness may affect turnout levels, especially because the bloc competition involves virtually the entire electoral spectrum, in other words almost the entire electorate.

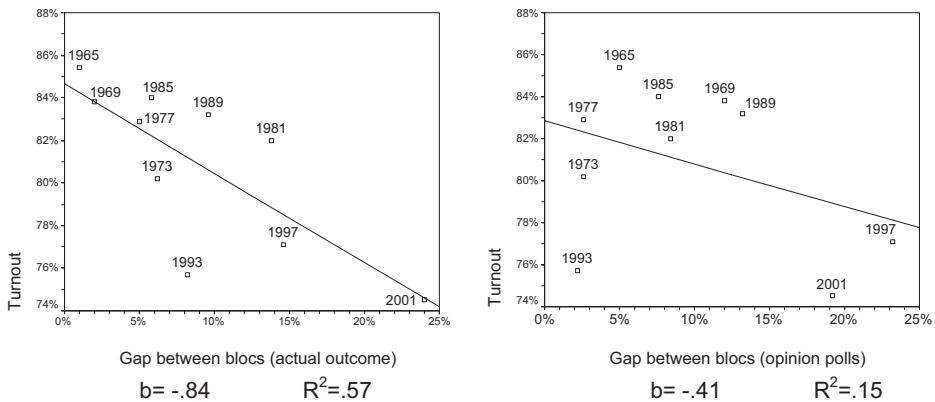
¹⁵ Especially in Norway, the strength of 'bloc-discipline' varies over time. Sometimes parties do not opt or only temporarily commit themselves to a bloc. In the nineties, there appears to be a downward trend in bloc-discipline, as the European community issue consistently splits the traditional party alignment.

Figure 4-9 Sweden - Two Blocs



For Sweden, the data suggests an aggregate level relationship between closeness and turnout, as can be seen in Figure 4-9. This relationship is visible when looking at election outcomes, and even more so when looking at opinion poll data.

Figure 4-10 Norway - Two Blocs



Although the Norwegian party system shows a bloc division similar to that in Sweden, the ‘bloc adherence’ of political parties is typically not as strong. The issue of EU membership proved a challenge to the bloc structure particularly in the elections of 1973 and 1993, when pro and con positions cut straight through bloc-lines. In spite of this, Figure 4-10 demonstrates the presence of a relationship between closeness and turnout for both opinion poll and actual outcome data.

Excluding the EU dominated elections of 1973 and 1993, the effect of closeness on turnout in the Norway is very strong: b is -.90 with an R² of .84 for the actual outcome data, while b is -.87 with an R² of .65 for the opinion poll data. This finding supports the thesis that the EU-membership issue cuts across the traditional bloc structure, making these elections less susceptible to the effect of closeness as defined between blocs.

4.3.6 Germany: a Race between Parties or Coalitions?

Closeness can be defined in several ways in the German political system. The ‘traditional’ close race is about government power, but that does not yet solve the question how to define it. Two large parties dominate the political landscape: the Christian Democratic CDU/CSU and the Socialist SPD. Absolute majorities are rare: only once, in 1957 did the CDU/CSU obtain 50.2 percent of the vote. Neither of the two large parties can expect to attain an absolute majority by themselves. Grand coalitions are equally rare, and have happened only once (from 1966-1969). Consequently, the competition for government power is between these two large parties, where each strives to be the leader of coalitions with one of the minor parties, while the chancellor is either the CDU/CSU or SPD leader. From this view, closeness concerns the gap between the two dominant parties.

Figure 4-11 Germany - Two Largest Parties

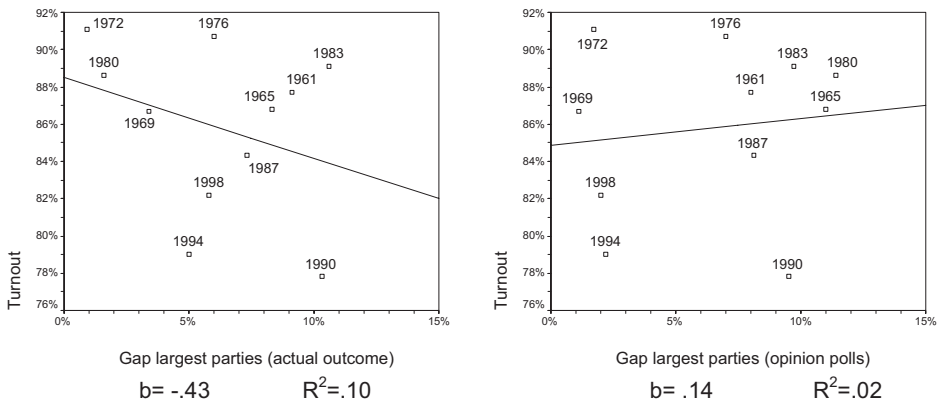
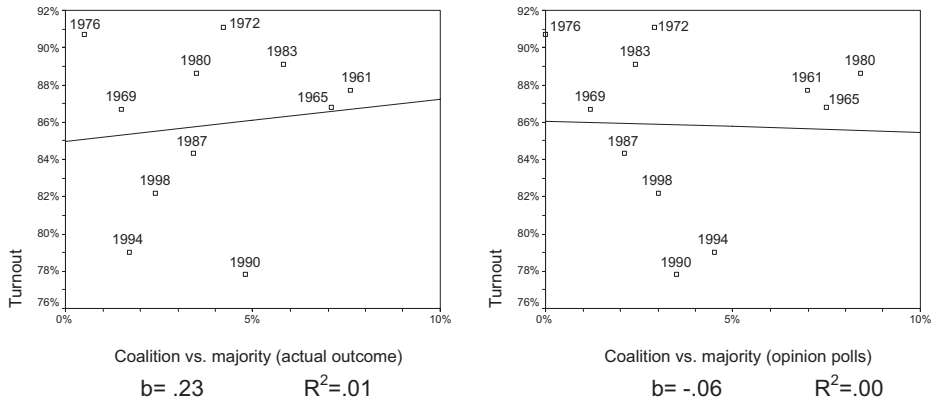


Figure 4-11 shows that closeness defined as the gap between the two largest parties appears to have little influence at the aggregate level in Germany. However, using actual outcome data, a weak relationship can be detected. If opinion poll data is used, virtually no relationship between closeness of the election and turnout can be established.

Alternatively, competition for government power - and hence closeness - may be defined as a race between coalitions, or one coalition against the 50 percent mark of the vote. German governments are virtually always coalitions, and from the 1960s until 1998, these coalitions were typically between the FDP and either CDU/CSU or SPD. Rather than wait for the outcome of the election and then determine their choice between either of the two large political parties, the coalition preference of the FDP was virtually always known before the election (cf. Bawn 1999; Roberts, 1988). Therefore, closeness of the race may also be defined as the gap between the coalition - the incumbent or a newly proposed coalition - versus a legislative majority.

Figure 4-12 Germany - Coalition vs. 50%



Neither of these interpretations of closeness appears fruitful in explaining turnout fluctuations in Germany. Figure 4-12 displays a largely unstructured pattern, regardless of whether the race between parties or coalitions is examined, and regardless of whether opinion polls or actual outcomes are used. Closeness does not appear to be a relevant concept in German political participation - at the aggregate level. Whether closeness is without influence at the individual level cannot be established from these aggregate level analyses.

One explanation for a possible absence of an effect of closeness on turnout in Germany may be found in the particular make-up of the German political landscape, in which the two largest parties have for a very long time been at the mercy of the FDP's coalition preferences. Having fallen from grace with the FDP, the only route to government power left open to SPD or CDU/CSU is an absolute majority, an outcome never achieved after 1957. The red-green coalition of 1998 is the first example of a break in kingmaker role of the FDP (apart from the Grand Coalition of 1966). For the electorate, it therefore appears that there is not much left to choose after the FDP has made up its mind, while the FDP is unlikely to opt for a coalition that is not certain to gain a majority. As a result of this, closeness measured as the gap between the two largest parties or coalitions is a concept that may lack substantive meaning and influence in the German system.

There are, however, other possibilities for looking at close races in the German system. For each of the smaller parties, there is a race that involves whether or not they gain parliamentary representation. Such races typically involve the FDP, but in a somewhat less comfortable position. The German electoral threshold of 5 percent was consciously set up to prevent a host of splinter parties from entering - and potentially paralyzing - parliament, a reaction to the experiences of the Weimar republic. This device has indeed proved successful in keeping the number of parties relatively limited. Occasionally, however, it also proves a hurdle for some of the parties that have already been well established as part of the regular German landscape, notably the FDP, the Grünen and recently the PDS¹⁶. A close race for

16 Gaining a minimum of 5 percent of the nationwide vote is not the only way to enter parliament: gaining at least 3 seats directly through 'Erststimmen' is sufficient as well, an approach that has proved successful for the (regionally concentrated) PDS. For the 'other' minor parties this is an even more remote option than the 5 percent hurdle.

these parties and their supporters means making sure they get enough votes to make it into the Bundestag. When their support threatens to fall below the 5 percent, these parties are forced to engage in extra campaign efforts to avert this, which in turn leads to additional media attention. Considering the vital role the minor parties play in the coalition formation, their exclusion from parliament is not an altogether trivial affair. The impact of such a form of close race on turnout rates at the aggregate level is however likely to be small, as it will affect only a limited section of the electorate, namely those who sympathize with these parties and - possibly - their potential coalition partners. At the aggregate level the effects of closeness defined in this way will therefore be marginal, although at the individual level they may well be of importance, be it only to specific segments of the electorate. At the aggregate level, significant results are therefore unlikely to show up. Empirical analyses confirm this: for both the FDP and the Grünen the explained variance is very small, while the b-estimate is often positive where it is expected to be negative¹⁷.

4.4 Comparing Closeness

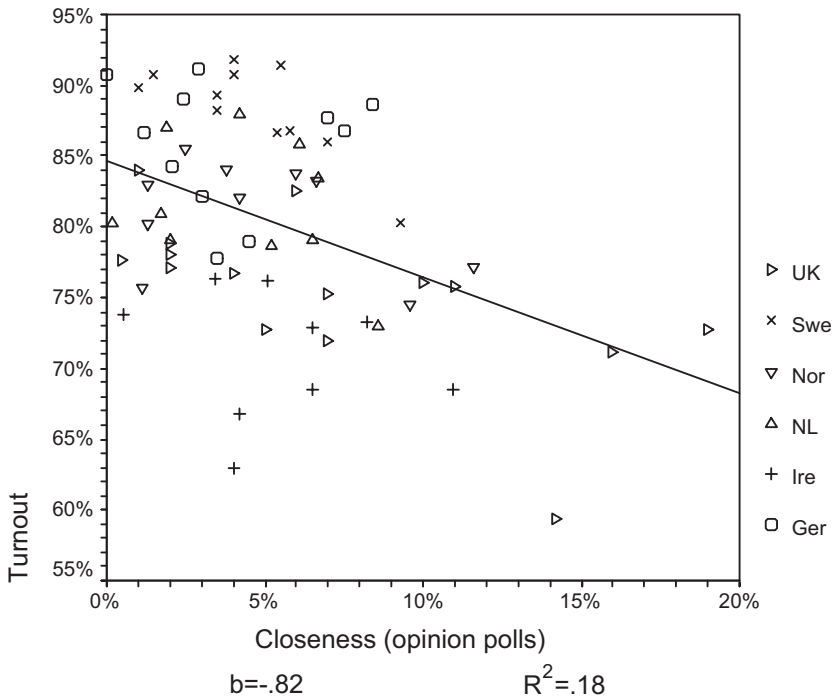
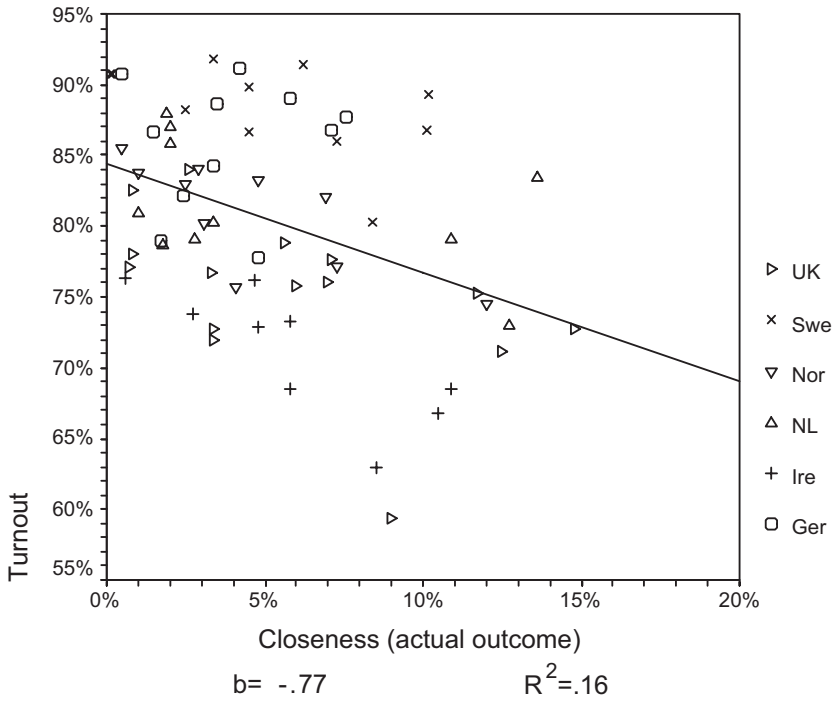
The aim of this chapter was to determine whether closeness affects turnout levels in different political systems, going beyond the two-party setting originally described by Downs (1957). In the empirical journey of this chapter, a few findings stand out. For one, it has become apparent that the concept of closeness is useful in different political and electoral systems. Closeness is a concept that can be applied in different systems and under different circumstances. That is not to say that the specification of this concept is identical in all systems. In the approach taken in this chapter, it was not attempted to force closeness into the straightjacket of one identical universal operationalization, which would have been the gap between the two largest parties. As we have seen already, for certain countries, e.g., Sweden, Norway, such an approach would hardly make sense. Rather, cross-cultural equivalence or comparability was sought in which closeness is comparable in meaning and practical operationalization, allowing for comparisons between countries that a strict identical operationalization would not allow¹⁸. In practical terms, this means that the operationalization of closeness applied in this chapter varies from one system to the other. Indeed, in some systems it varies even from one election to the next. These variations are based on a single theoretical concept of closeness, which will be discussed further below. But first let us see how the different concepts of closeness match up in a combined analysis.

A combined graphical analysis of closeness versus turnout for the political systems treated in this chapter is presented below. All but one system is presented; as was already established above, for the USA closeness should not be measured at the national, but rather at the state level. As sufficient information at the state level was not available, especially regarding opinion polls, the USA is left out of this comparative analysis.

17 Estimates for the FDP are .05 for b, R^2 equals .00 for actual outcome data, b is .25 with an R^2 of .01 for opinion poll data. For the Grünen b equals .67 with R^2 of .03 for actual outcome data, b equals -.51 and R^2 equals .05 for opinion poll data. Only in the last case is the relationship in the expected direction.

18 On the notion of cross-cultural equivalence or comparability see Mokken, 1971, who also refers to Przeworski and Teune, 1966.

Figure 4-13 Closeness and Turnout - Between-Countries Comparison

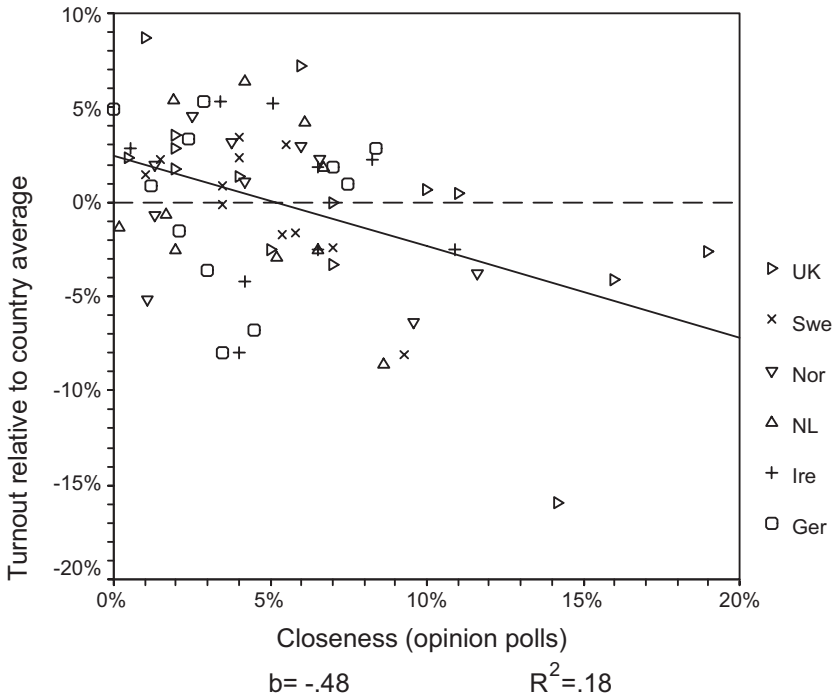
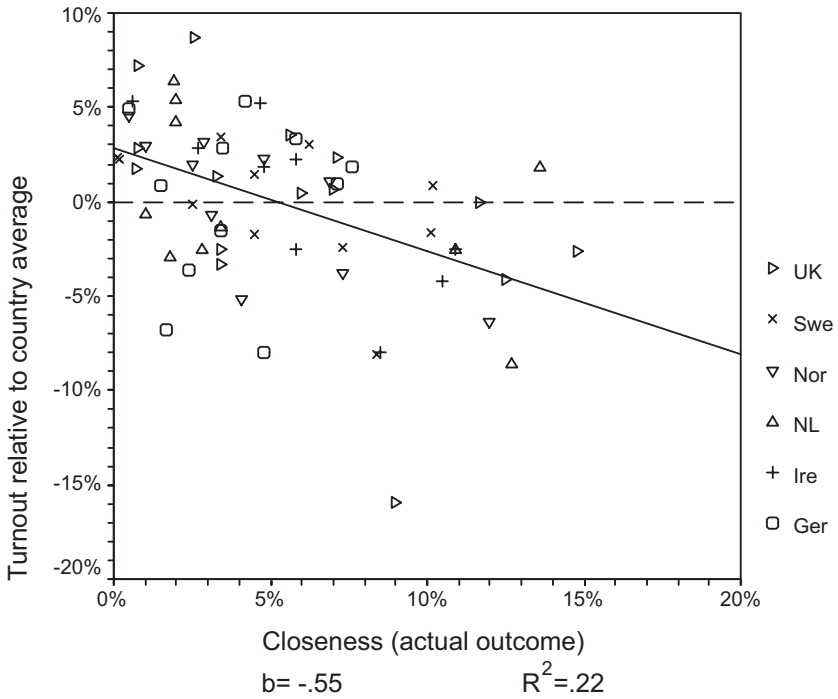


In this overall analysis, a clear downward trend can be detected, as Figure 4-13 shows. The explained variance shows that here is a moderate relationship between closeness and turnout. The relationship is of about the same magnitude for the two indicators for closeness, actual election outcome data and opinion poll data.

In the analysis of Figure 4-13 we are no longer focusing on one country, but comparing between countries. As a consequence, the influence of contextual characteristics is likely to increase. Differences between elections from different countries are typically greater than differences between elections within a single country. In the graphs of Figure 4-13 this is reflected by patterns in the data from a single country. For example, the Irish elections tend to cluster in the lower half of the graphs. These patterns are an indication of omitted variables, explaining turnout differences between countries. Ideally, variables describing contextual differences should explain this between-country variation in a comparative analysis such as that presented in Figure 4-13. However, such an analysis falls beyond the scope of this chapter. In Figure 4-14 we nevertheless attempt to correct for these country characteristics.

Figure 4-14 attempts to balance out the between-country differences. The graphs again present closeness vis a vis turnout, but this time turnout is presented in an amended form. For each country, turnout per election is presented as the deviation from the average turnout for that country. A positive turnout figure thus indicates that turnout for the particular election was above average for that country, while a negative turnout figure indicates that turnout was below the country average turnout. The expectation is that close election will see a positive turnout figure, while turnout is expected to drop in less close elections. The interrupted line indicates the zero line, or average turnout. The uninterrupted line is again the linear regression estimate.

Figure 4-14 Closeness and Turnout - Deviation from Average Country Turnout



The graphs presenting turnout as deviation from the average per system turnout present a somewhat tighter pattern, especially in the case of actual election outcomes. For the opinion poll predictions, the pattern is about the same as in Figure 4-13, although a clear linear trend can still be detected. Our efforts to establish a comparable notion of closeness have thus paid off.

4.4.1 *Defining Closeness*

So what then is closeness? What defines a close race, if we decide to go beyond the needlessly restrictive definition of the gap between the two largest parties? Elements of the answer have already been suggested in our discussion of closeness for the different political systems in this chapter.

Closeness as treated in this chapter can be broadly defined as '*a race for something*'. It is a race in which a party strives to make it beyond a certain hurdle. This hurdle may take different shapes, making closeness a flexible concept. In the classic case, closeness is regarded as the horse race between two parties or candidates. The hurdle to overcome is thus a relative one: the vote share of the competing party. This implies that in this case the line is not drawn at 50 percent, but could well be lower, if third parties manage to gain a sizable share of the vote as well.

In other forms of closeness the line may well be drawn at 50 percent, the hurdle to overcome being a majority of the popular vote¹⁹. In the case of a pure two-party or two-candidate race, this amounts to closeness to one's opponent. If more than two parties are involved, several forms of closeness may be defined. It may be a simple race of the two largest parties fighting for the lead. Alternatively, one party may be pitted against a number of other parties. The latter group may propose to form a coalition government, but that is not a requirement. Thirdly, groups of parties may compete for a majority, as seen in the case of Sweden and Norway. Lastly, closeness may be defined as the race of one or several parties against a self-imposed or constitutionally imposed hurdle.

A constitutional hurdle is introduced in some political systems if electoral regulations impose an electoral threshold that will have to be met, making elections for small parties a race against parliamentary extinction if they fail to beat the threshold. Closeness for these parties and their electorate is about making it beyond the hurdle of the electoral threshold.

Lastly, the hurdle to overcome may be self-imposed. To aim to better their electoral chances, and convince their electorate that the heat is on this election, parties may sometimes connect political consequences to their electoral success that are not necessarily imposed by the electoral system or the political landscape. A large (or even the largest) party may indicate in advance that it will refuse to take part in government if it does not win a certain share of seats in the election. Smaller coalition parties may also adopt this strategy. Even though an electoral majority may not be at stake, the message communicated to the electorate is still that there are hurdles to be overcome, where their vote is vital.

19 Of course, for parliamentary elections parties will generally be more focused on gaining a large share of the seats that of the popular vote. In general, however, the latter is required for the former, even in so-called non-proportional and district systems.

4.4.2 *What Makes Closeness Work?*

Determining what different forms and shapes closeness may take is one thing, but it is not enough to ensure that the electorate will be receptive to it. For that, a few more conditions will have to be met.

First, the race will have to be relevant and significant to the electorate. The gap between the two largest parties can always be determined in any established democratic system, but this does not mean that it will be important for the electorate. In the Dutch multi-party landscape, coalition negotiations following the election play a crucial and determining role. Being the largest party after an election is at best a good hint that the party will end up in government. However, the shape and course of that government is strongly dependent upon other parties - frequently including the runner-up in the race as well. Closeness in the form of a race between the two largest parties may therefore bear little significance to the Dutch electorate. A declared intention of the incumbent coalition to continue after the election may make closeness a very relevant concept, especially if an electoral victory for the coalition is in peril²⁰.

Second, the aspect of the election to which the concept of closeness applies will have to be recognizable or identifiable for some segments of the electorate. This means that it has to be clear to voters what the race is about, and who is a viable contender in the race. That may sound trivial in a two-party or two-candidate system, but this merely underlines the advantage these systems have when it comes to the possible influence of closeness in comparison to systems with a more complex party landscape. It seems plausible that an electorate that is accustomed to a certain concept of closeness - be it two competing parties, two competing blocs, or one party trying to beat the threshold - will be more likely to respond to the degree of closeness, not only because of the actual political reality of the race, but also because they have learned to understand elections and the political process in the terms that define closeness in their system. An electorate that is unaccustomed to closeness in a particular form is likely to react less strongly to it or in a less predictable or uniform way. In other words, closeness is likely to be more influential if it 'grows' on the electorate.

Thirdly, closeness will need to be communicated to the public. As closeness is in essence dependent on the behavior of others, a voter will need to be "informed" of this intended behavior of others in some way or another. One mechanism for this is, of course, everyday conversations, but the most important role is likely to be played by the mass media. If the concept of closeness, and the closeness of the race is a frequent news item, its influence is potentially far greater than in a situation where media attention is focused on other aspects - be they substantial policy standpoints or candidate-focused human-interest items. Horse-race journalism and the frequent presentation of opinion polls convey a clear message to the electorate that something is at stake and this is the race to follow. This point is of course not unconnected to the previous two points. Even though one might be an optimist and expect the (news-) media to play an educational role, it is unlikely that the choice of topics presented in news bulletins and on front-pages will be wholly unconnected from the way the public is accustomed to view elections and the political process. Thus, in systems where the race is not

²⁰ This is a hypothetical condition, of course. In practice, the political instinct of the professionals that make up the government coalition concerned will certainly think twice before committing themselves to a coalition that is in danger of losing its majority.

between the two largest parties, the media are unlikely to focus on this aspect of the election. It is therefore not unlikely to assume that different political systems create different media styles as well. In a system with two large dominant parties such as Great Britain, horse race journalism and a strong emphasis on opinion polls is in some sense encouraged by the political reality and its party landscape. That is not to say however that trends of ‘internationalization’ in the media, where national news providers tend to copy the approach taken by international news providers such as CNN or BBC World, may not introduce an aspect of horse-race journalism which is initially unfamiliar to a country. This could in turn influence the way the electorate perceives the election and the campaign (Cf. de Vries & van Praag, 1995).

4.5 Discussion

This chapter aimed to do two things: to determine whether closeness is a concept that can be applied fruitfully outside two-party or -candidate systems, and whether some previous confounding findings regarding closeness might be better explained with the aid of data from opinion polls, rather than actual election outcomes. The answers derived for the first question have proved themselves to be valid when applied in empirical analysis. With regard to the second question the evidence provided by data analysis is ambiguous.

4.5.1 Reading Opinion Polls

The findings of this chapter do not allow for a single straightforward interpretation regarding the comparison between opinion poll and actual election outcome data. While in certain countries the fit of the model was better based on opinion poll data (e.g., Sweden, Great Britain), in other countries this pattern was not found. A number of factors stand in the way of a clear and unambiguous judgment, although these factors may prove to be useful leads in future work.

Data quality may be one of our problems. One of the major advantages of actual election outcome data is that it is widely available, and of very dependable quality. Election outcomes simply tend to be documented very well, for obvious reasons. This is less true of opinion poll data, although this has improved considerably in recent years. However, especially for earlier decades, data from opinion polls may be hard to come by, and if retrieved, its quality may be dubious. Their timing may be poor (e.g., polls held very early in the campaign), the exact wording of the question may be an unfortunate one or not comparable over time. It is hard to ascertain to what degree the opinion poll actually gained media exposure before an election. As was already mentioned, opinion polls are important as means for voters to gain information about the potential outcome of elections that are still to be held. Communication of this knowledge through the media is therefore vital. If media attention to results from an opinion poll is poor, then it cannot be expected to influence the electorate, and closeness measured by it cannot be a good predictor of aggregate turnout. Ideally therefore, a measurement of the degree of media exposure for each opinion poll should be included in the analytical model. Such information is currently unavailable. Therefore, the analyses in this chapter are based on the assumption that all opinion polls utilized have had sufficient media exposure. This may have been an overly optimistic assumption.

Apart from the quantity of media attention to opinion polls, the quality of this attention may also be of influence. The presentation and interpretation of polls in the media may not

always be unequivocal. Election outcomes are objective facts over which ultimately no discussion is possible. Opinion polls tend to be presented in the form of predictions, which is of course why they are of interest to the media, voters and parties. Predictions, however, are not objective facts, and as we all know, few things lend themselves better to subjective interpretation than electoral predictions based on opinion polls. What is presented to the public may thus be information that is packaged in a multitude of different interpretations, which is likely to lower the polls' impact.

Perhaps however the findings of this chapter lend insight to a matter that has been touched upon already in section 4.4.2 and the current section. We argued that the impact of closeness is likely to be dependent on horse-race journalism and media attention given to opinion polls. This style of campaign coverage by the media is not equal over countries. The superior performance of opinion poll data in certain political systems may indicate that media coverage of opinion polls reinforces the perception of an election as a 'race', with important political consequences. As was suggested already, this is more likely to be the case in systems where the definition of the closeness of the race is relatively unambiguous and transparent, such as in two-party systems.

4.5.2 Analytical Limitations

A second important consideration when putting the findings of this chapter into perspective is the issue of omitted variables. This has been referred to implicitly in some of the discussions of country findings, and explicitly in the country comparison of Figure 4-14 that presented turnout relative to country average.

It has not been the assumption of this research that closeness is the sole factor determining turnout for the countries and elections analyzed. As has been discussed in Chapter 2, a multitude of variables exist that may explain turnout variations at the aggregate level and the aim of this chapter is not to slight their importance. The reasons to focus on one contextual characteristic instead of several have been set out in Chapter 3. But this choice may have had important consequences for the analysis presented in the current chapter.

Outlying data points that now work against the fit of the simple model presented may be explained by factors not included in the model. It may be that we incorrectly attribute little explanatory power to closeness, because of under-specification of the model. A clear example is Norway, where the EU-issue cut across the traditional two-bloc division in the 1973 and 1993 elections. Less easily identifiable factors should not be ruled out for all of the systems presented in this chapter. Nonetheless, the consequences of omitted variables should be seen as grounds for moderate optimism. This is because omitted variables cause 'false negatives', in other words, a relationship that actually exists may be hidden from view. The findings in this chapter may thus constitute a minimum that may be improved upon should relevant control-variables be included in future models.

The alternative, a relationship incorrectly attributed to closeness - a situation of a 'false positive' - is worrisome too. Since the analyses presented here are bi-variate, the possibility that effects attributed to closeness should be ascribed to other factors cannot be denied. It seems unlikely however that the findings presented here are completely spurious.

4.5.3 *A Further Look at Closeness*

The focus of this chapter was on the comparability of closeness between systems. It was shown that closeness is of relevance in several political systems - not just the typical two-party polity. But the aggregate level approach adopted in this chapter means that part of the influence of closeness remains beyond our view here.

In the German example presented, it was argued that closeness may be of influence for small parties as well. The electoral threshold is not a trivial obstacle for a number of parties in the German system, and it is not unlikely that it affects the behavior of voters and potential voters of these parties. Yet, in the analyses presented in this chapter none of this showed up - no significant relationship whatsoever could be detected. This is not very surprising in view of the fact that these parties cater to small segments of the electorate. It is unreasonable to expect effects on turnout in these small segments to show up in the midst of the much larger complement that may be unaffected by the race for survival of small parties. An individual level analysis is required to investigate the influence of closeness on these smaller groups within the electorate.

Individual level analysis is also a requirement for another goal of this research: determining individual variation in the influence of closeness on voters, as argued in Chapter 3. The current chapter showed that several political systems are affected by closeness, at least at the aggregate level. For such a relationship to become visible at the aggregate level large sections of the electorate will have to be affected - the reverse of what was the case for the small party race in Germany. Sweden and Great Britain did show strong effects of closeness at the aggregate level, suggesting that sizable segments of the electorates of these countries do indeed respond to closeness. The following two chapters will investigate whether these electorates react to closeness in a single, uniform way, or whether the hypotheses formulated in Chapter 3 can be supported, namely that contextual factors (such as closeness) affect different kinds of voters in different ways.

The individual level analyses for Sweden and Great Britain will be executed on a country-by-country basis. The reason for this is to keep to a minimum the otherwise disturbing effects of differences in system characteristics. Chapter 5 will analyze the influence of closeness at the individual level in Great Britain, while Chapter 6 will do the same for Sweden.



Closeness and Electoral Participation in Great Britain

This chapter investigates the influence of a close election race on individual voters in Great Britain. While the previous chapter looked at the impact of closeness on turnout at the aggregate level, the focus of this and the following chapter is on the individual level. Chapter 3 argued that on theoretical grounds closeness is expected to be of influence in Britain, and Chapter 4 showed this to be true at the aggregate level. This chapter therefore need not prove that closeness is of influence in Great Britain. It will however analyze what individual-level effects produce these aggregate results, and in doing so demonstrate that the influence of closeness is not uniform at the individual level.

Suitable empirical data at the individual level are available for the national parliamentary elections during the period 1970 until 1997¹. Turnout figures for that period are presented in Table 5-1. As was the case for turnout figures presented for the Netherlands in Chapter 2, turnout rates show a decided amount of stability in Great Britain, although there is still a fair amount of variation, ranging from 71 to 78 percent.

Table 5-1 Great Britain - Turnout Figures in Parliamentary Elections, 1970-1997 (percentages)

Year	1970	1974Feb	1974Oct	1979	1983	1987	1992	1997
Turnout	72.0	78.1	72.8	76.0	72.7	75.3	77.7	71.2

In the British party system, the Labour and the Conservative parties dominate and provide the only two viable parties for forming a government at the national level. However, since MP's are elected in local constituencies, the constituency level offers an additional arena for competition. The two parties leading the national race need not necessarily be the leading parties in the local constituencies. The interplay between races at the national and local (constituency) level will therefore be an important aspect of the analysis in this chapter.

5.1 Closeness of Elections in Britain

5.1.1 What is the Race?

First we need to determine what comprises the closeness of an election in Britain, in other words what the race is about. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the political consequences of finishing first in an election vary according to the make-up of the electoral system. It may be less consequential in a system where coalition government is necessary, as representation and

¹ The political situation in Northern Ireland is so different from the situation in Great Britain that inclusion in the analytical model would not prove informative. The analyses in this chapter are therefore limited to Great Britain only. See Curtice (1994) for an overview on the history of British election studies.

participation in governing power is conceivable for the number two party - or for numbers 3 to 15, for that matter - as well as for the leading party, just as being the largest party does not guarantee the acquisition of government power². The British system, with its first past the post system with single mandate constituencies and a long tradition of single party government leaves little room for questions about the 'prize' that is at stake. Moving into 10 Downing Street requires achieving a majority - plain and simple. There are no prizes for finishing second. Secondary race, such as the struggle of a small party to pass an electoral threshold, or a self declared minimum number of seats to be won in an election are not applicable to the British system³. It is gaining a majority that matters.

While the grand prize is national government, that prize is to be won through winning separate races at the level of the local constituencies. It is thus important to establish which of these two levels to focus on.

5.1.2 *Double Vision?*

Winning a majority of the seats in Westminster is vital in the British system - it is the way to acquire government power in a system that does not require coalition government. As the consequences of winning control in Westminster are far greater than winning any single constituency, it is to be expected that attention will gravitate to this national level, rather than the constituency level. The voters' direct influence, however, is restricted to the constituency level. Voters have no way of influencing the race beyond the borders of their constituency. This leads to a rival expectation, namely that closeness at the constituency level, and not the national level, is most influential on voter behavior. These two expectations are not, however, mutually exclusive. If the race is very close at the national level this may have a spillover effect on participation at the constituency level, enticing people to turn out and vote. If, however, the chances of one's preferred local candidate are effectively nil, then no matter how close the race is at the national level, one's choice for that candidate will only be a token influence. In a constituency where the gap between the leading parties is very large, or where the two leading parties do not correspond with the nationally leading parties, the potential influence of a close national race may be limited⁴. But whether in practice the influence of the national level will indeed be subordinate to the influence of the local constituency is a matter that hinges on another factor: information.

The initially trivial observation that voters can only be influenced by a close race when they know about the closeness of the race becomes less trivial when the information potency of the election at the national level and at the constituency level is considered. The most obvious way of obtaining information on the closeness of the race before the actual election is of course an opinion poll. Opinion polls held at the constituency level

2 As was the case for example following the 1977 elections in the Netherlands.

3 Although the Liberal Democrats' attempt to become the second party in the land in the 2001 election might arguably qualify as a secondary race.

4 This argument foregoes of course the possibility that people may have other reasons to decide on their vote, apart from electing their preferred party into government, such as electing the Member of Parliament that will be most effective in representing their local interests. Such motives would enhance the influence of the closeness of the race at the local constituency level.

that are actually available to the public tend to be very scarce⁵. Information on the closeness of the race at the constituency level is thus limited, certainly when compared to the information available at the national level, where opinion polls make up a substantial part of news reporting in the mass media. In this way, voters are offered a lopsided information package: abundant information on the national race, and only a limited amount on the local race. Voters may then easily confuse or mix these two levels, or use information from one level as a cue for the other. In this mix, the national level with its abundance of information is prone to be dominant. Without wanting to do so, or even being aware of it, voters may act on information from the national level, which may actually show little relation to the situation in their own local constituency. Taking these considerations into account, it is not unthinkable that the national level will dominate voters' behavior, even though the electoral system in Britain determines that voters can only exert influence in their local constituency. Because of these considerations, both levels of competition will therefore be examined in our analyses in the remainder of this chapter.

5.1.3 *Who is Affected?*

Contextual characteristics, though constant at the aggregate level to all voters within that context, will not be equal at the individual level, as individual characteristics 'shape' the personal context. A close race between Labour and the Conservatives will mean a close race for supporters of those parties, but it will not mean the same thing - in effect, it may not have any meaning at all - to staunch adherents of, say, Plaid Cymru. Hesitant voters of Labour or the Conservatives may be affected by the context, but voters of Plaid Cymru will have to find their motivation elsewhere.

Chapter 3 already argued that party preference and party evaluation play a crucial role in determining who will be affected by a close election race, and in what way. Three categories of voters were distinguished, each of which can be expected to show a specific reaction to closeness. Voters with a strong preference for only one of the leading parties are expected to be strongly affected by closeness. It is not clear what those who hold strong positive feelings for both of the leading parties will do. People who have no preference whatsoever for either of the leading parties, in effect respondents who expressed a dislike for the leading parties, are not expected to be influenced by the closeness of the election. A summary of the expected effects was given earlier in Table 3-1.

In the analyses that follows, the categories of voters will be indicated by the labels introduced in Chapter 3: Convinced, Confounded and Condemned voters. To make the distinction more explicit, the Convinced label was only applied to voters that combined support of one of the leading parties with an expressed dislike of the other leading party. In addition to these three categories of voters, a sizeable group exists that does not fit in these categories. This remainder consists of voters who hold moderately positive feelings for both leading parties, or a moderately positive feeling for one leading party, combined with a positive or negative feeling for the other leading party. It is tempting to extend the alliteration and call this category the 'constant' voters. However, this would be misleading as the term

⁵ Polls held at the constituency level may well be funded by local candidates or their organization, in which case it is unlikely that this information will be freely available to the general public.

‘constant’ implies unaffected - which is not necessarily the case. Consequently, this segment of the electorate will be referred to as the Base category of voters. These Base category voters are still expected to be positively affected by the closeness of the election through across-the-board effects that a close election generates, for instance by way of increased media attention. Although this effect of closeness is expected to be smaller for Base category voters than for Convinced voters, it is expected to be more influential for Base category voters than for Condemned voters. To avoid incorrect associations, this group of voters will therefore not be labeled constant voters, but referred to with the somewhat technical label of Base-category voters.

As both the national and the constituency level will be taken into account, voters may be Convinced voters at the national level, but Condemned voters in their local constituency. In terms of the British party landscape, this could be the situation for a Tory supporter in a Scottish constituency where Labour and the SNP are the two leading parties. A Scottish nationalist in that same constituency would then be a Condemned voter nationally, but Convinced at the local level.

5.2 Analysis

The individual level data used for the analyses stem from the British Elections Studies (BES). These studies have been held from 1964, and preferably all of these would have been included in the analyses to provide as much context level variation as possible. Unfortunately, not all of these studies contain preference scores for all political parties, a prerequisite for our analyses. As a consequence, we can analyze only 8 parliamentary elections, held in the period 1970-1997.

To classify respondents in the Convinced, Confounded, Condemned or Base categories, an evaluation of all of the parties is required. The actual choice made at the election, the party voted for, is not suitable for this classification⁶. A good party evaluation indicator would consist of a rating of the likelihood that the respondent will vote for each party in the political system, preferably measured on an interval scale. In this way, not only the likes, but also the dislikes of respondents, and the intensity of their preferences can be taken into account when classifying the respondents.

Table 5-2 Great Britain - Categories of Voters per Election at National Level (percent of sample)

Election	Convinced	Confounded	Condemned	Base
1970	32.2	1.0	5.4	61.4
1974 Feb	28.5	2.8	2.5	66.2
1974 Oct	24.0	3.2	2.6	70.2
1979	26.5	5.4	1.7	66.4
1983	30.0	5.0	0.9	64.1
1987	24.2	0.1	4.0	71.7
1992	22.9	0.0	3.2	73.9
1997	33.9	0.6	5.6	59.9

⁶ Using the party actually voted for would of course be impossible where non-voters are concerned.

Based on party evaluation scores, dummy variables indicating the three categories of voters were constructed⁷. Table 5-2 presents the distribution of the sample over the categories of voters at national level. Table 5-3 presents the same distribution, but at the constituency level. Rather than leaving election studies with poor operationalizations of the party preference indicators out of the analyses (notably, the 1983 elections), it seemed preferable to look at the outcomes for all elections, albeit with caution. This is further warranted by the fact that variation in the distribution of the Convinced, Confounded and Condemned voters ought to be a normal feature of a dynamic political landscape instigated for instance through changes in the degree of political polarization. Distinguishing this actual fluctuation from artifacts caused by questionnaire differences is not possible, given the limited information available. The irregular distribution pattern of the dummy indicators may, however, have an effect on estimates for in particular the Confounded and Condemned voters

Table 5-3 Great Britain - Categories of Voters per Election at Constituency level (percent of sample)

Election	Convinced	Confounded	Condemned	Base
1970	18.4	0.7	11.4	69.5
1974 Feb	25.0	2.4	17.3	55.3
1974 Oct	26.4	1.5	17.2	54.9
1979	25.5	2.8	16.2	55.5
1983	7.7	2.8	0.4	89.1
1987	7.6	0.1	1.1	91.2
1992	21.9	4.4	2.4	71.3
1997	25.5	3.1	11.7	59.7

As Tables 5-2 and 5-3 show the size of the Base category ranges from 60 to 91 percent for the constituency level, and from 60 to 73 percent of the respondents at national level. The very high number of 91 percent at the local level is for 1987, and is most almost certainly an artifact of the poor scale that was used in that election study.

The impact of closeness on electoral participation is of course greatly dependent on the actual degree of closeness, both at the national and constituency levels. As Chapter 4 already argued, closeness should not and need not be viewed as a dichotomous variable. In the analysis undertaken in this chapter closeness will therefore be treated as an interval variable that is expected to have a relationship with turnout as depicted in Figure 4-2.

Table 5-4 presents figures for closeness as predicted by opinion polls and as realized in the actual election, at the national level. An indicator of the closeness in constituencies is provided by the percentage of respondents (*not* of the whole electorate, see note 9 of this chapter) residing in constituencies where the gap between the leading parties was less than 5 percent⁸. Turnout is presented in the last column of Table 5-4.

7 See the Appendix for details on the construction of the dummy variables.

8 The five percent figure is an arbitrary, but reasonable figure for what may be called a close election. It is presented here for ease of presentation, and will play no role in the actual empirical analyses. Note that interpreting the figures of Table 5 4 as representative indicators of the degree of closeness at constituency level for each election is hazardous because of variation in the (number of) constituencies selected

Table 5-4 Great Britain - Degree of Closeness at National and Constituency Level (percentages)

Election	Gap in Polls	Actual Gap	Constituency Gap <5% ^a	Turnout
1970	7.0	3.4	18.9	72.0
1974 Feb	2.0	0.8	13.9	78.1
1974 Oct	5.0	3.4	12.7	72.8
1979	10.0	7.0	11.6	76.0
1983	19.0	14.8	12.3	72.7
1987	7.0	11.7	10.3	75.3
1992	0.5	7.1	14.4	77.7
1997	16.0	12.5	10.6	71.2

Note a: Percentage of BES respondents where the gap at constituency level is smaller than 5 percent.

If we look at closeness based on opinion poll data, the table shows three close elections in the period under study at the national level (the 1974 and 1992 elections). Three other elections (1979, 1983 and 1997) were certainly not close elections. Comparing the actual gap with the gap predicted by the polls, a striking six out of eight elections turn out to be closer than predicted. The correlation between predicted and actual closeness is a strong .78. For the elections that were predicted to be close, only the 1992 elections - which saw Major win an unexpected Tory victory - proved not at all close. The correlation between the predicted gap between the leading parties and turnout is -.68, while the correlation between the actual gap and turnout is considerably weaker at -.38.

Between 10 and 18 percent of the respondents reside in what may reasonably be called a close constituency, where the gap between the leading parties is less than 5 percent. The closeness at the constituency level can show a far greater variation than closeness at the national level: in constituencies where one single party (or candidate) dominates all others, the gap may well be over 50 percent. Table 4 in the Appendix presents an overview for each election of closeness at the constituency level⁹. However, in the analyses to follow the five percent mark will play no role, since closeness will be entered into the model as an interval variable.

5.2.1 The Model - Theory and Expectations

As Section 3.3.1 of Chapter 3 already discussed, to analyze a model containing individual and contextual level information, an analytical technique that takes these separate levels of information into account is required. Multi-level modeling is such a technique. The analyses in this and the following chapter are therefore carried out using MLwiN, a program that allows for multi-level modeling, including models for dichotomous dependent variables. The hierarchical data structure for the analysis is represented as follows. Individuals, the respondents of the election studies, make up the lowest level of analysis. The top level of analysis is formed by the constituencies in which the respondents reside. The middle level is made up of the election that is analyzed. The fact that not all constituencies have been included in all election studies is

⁹ Table 4 in the Appendix presents percentages for respondents, rather than constituencies. As not all constituencies have been sampled, descriptives of the actual dataset analyzed are presented rather than figures for Great Britain as a whole.

not a problem for the multi-level model. This data structure suggests that, over different national elections, the elections held in a single constituency have more in common than the elections in all constituencies for a single national election do¹⁰. The data structure acknowledges that individuals reside within constituencies, with different elections providing variation in the circumstances of the election.

The variables used at the individual level have been selected on the basis of existing research into individual electoral participation. Because of incompatibilities of the datasets used, only a limited number of individual level variables have been introduced in the model. Nevertheless, the most commonly used explanatory variables of electoral participation have been included. These are age, gender, education, political interest and income. All, with the exception of gender, have consistently shown a positive and significant relation with electoral participation. The influence of gender has not been consistent, and has been shown to differ dependent on country and additional variables included¹¹. This variable will be entered into the analysis without any explicit expectations. Education has been transformed to improve comparability between studies, using a linear transformation¹². The same procedure has been used for political interest, where the varying indicators included in each election study make standardization necessary¹³. For both the education and political interest indicators, the respondents' scores were subsequently transformed to deciles. This was done only to counter multicollinearity in the analyses. To standardize income, centralization around the mean value, followed by a log transformation was used. Prior to this transformation, missing values were replaced with the mean income value, while a dummy variable was created to distinguish respondents with missing values on income (cf. Chapter 2). All these transformations enable comparability.

At the aggregate level, the number of variables was kept to an absolute minimum, in view of the limited number of degrees of freedom at the national election level. As it is not the aim of this research to present the best explanation of electoral participation, but rather to demonstrate that closeness of the election interacts with individual level characteristics, only aggregate level information concerning the closeness of the election was included in the model. To account for the assumed non-linear character of this data (cf. Chapter 4, Figure 4-2) the indicator used for closeness of the election race is a transformation of the actual gap between the leading two parties, namely 1 divided by

10 The latter model would require the top level of analysis to be elections, while constituencies would make up the middle level. Respondents (voters) remain at the lowest level.

11 See the discussion in Chapter 2.

12 Actually, a transformation was chosen where the education indicators available were regressed on a standardizing variable, in this case electoral participation, enabling maximum use of the information available. The predicted value of electoral participation for each case - in essence a linear transformation of all education indicators - was then taken as education indicator. This proved to be the most useful manner of increasing comparability among the different indicators of the various editions of the BES.

Although this may appear to artificially inflate the explained variance in the subsequent analysis, this is actually not the case: in the original regression equation ($y_i = a_i + b \cdot x_i + e_i$) the predicted value y_i ('y-hat') is determined by $a_i + b \cdot x_i$. In the subsequent analysis, y_i takes the place of $a_i + b \cdot x_i$. The variance explained is determined by e_i , which remains unaltered. Hence, the explained variance ('the R²') remains unaltered by the transformation. See van der Brug, van der Eijk and Franklin (2002), and van der Eijk and Franklin (1996, Chapter 20).

13 To keep information loss to a minimum, in this transformation missing values on any of the separate indicators were recoded to the lowest interest category, in effect treating missings as not politically interested.

the gap in percentage points. The result of this transformation is a variable that attains higher values as the race is closer, which is therefore expected to be positively related to electoral participation¹⁴.

In the 'traditional' way of modeling contextual influence, in which no distinction is made between voters, information regarding the closeness is added to the model through a single indicator for closeness. As argued above, such an analytical approach treats all voters as influenced by closeness equally. This 'across-the-board' effect of closeness will then be an amalgam - a weighted average, in a sense - of the various individual effects. In the analyses presented below, several terms (one for each category of voters, plus an interaction term for each category) are added to the model. As a result, the blanket effect is likely to diminish. It need not evaporate completely, as some of the influence of closeness may well be shared by the whole of the electorate.

The source of information regarding closeness would preferably be data from opinion polls that were conducted - or at the least published - shortly before the election, as this would represent the information available to voters at the moment of the election. Such data is available at the national level. At the constituency level, however, such information is virtually impossible to obtain, to a large degree because such data was never gathered for a number of constituencies¹⁵. This creates two problems, one practical and one theoretical. Both have been countered by assumption. The practical obstacle that this lack of information at the constituency level presents is that no data exists about the expected closeness of the election. As a proxy for this, actual election outcome data has been used, based on the assumption that people will have had some indication about the outcome of the election. The theoretical problem is that if no opinion poll data were available before the election, voters will not have had the opportunity to use such information to estimate the expected closeness of the race. We assume therefore that the actual outcome will generate leading cues in local press and radio from which voters will have some inkling of the closeness of the election in their constituency. To the degree that this assumption does not hold, and people are indeed unaware of the closeness in their local constituency, we cannot expect closeness at the constituency level to have any systematic impact on voters' chance to participate.

The expected individual variation in the influence of closeness on voters is introduced into the model by the use of dummy indicators, distinguishing the three categories of voters and the Base category. The dummy variables are called Convinced, Confounded and Condemned, respectively, according to the conceptualization presented in Chapter 3. The effect of closeness on these voters - additional to the blanket effect - is introduced through the interaction between these dummy-indicators and the closeness of the election, dubbed Convinced*Closeness Interaction, Confounded*Closeness Interaction and Condemned*Closeness Interaction, respectively. It is important to realize that only the interaction terms take closeness into account. The dummy variables themselves indicate how a respondent relates to the parties that are in the race for the lead, *not* whether it is a close race for the lead.

14 Because the gap between the parties is the denominator, with a constant numerator of 1, the resulting transformation is non-linear.

15 Crewe (1997) reports 78 single constituency polls were held in 52 constituencies in the 1987 campaign, while in 1997 there were 29 polls published in the media, held in 26 constituencies.

The political landscape being what it is in Britain, a Convinced voter at the national level invariably indicates that the respondent is a supporter of either Labour or the Conservatives, disapproving of the Conservatives or Labour, as appropriate. At the constituency level, the range of leading parties is not limited to Labour and the Conservatives. A local Convinced voter could therefore back any of the three main national parties, as well as Plaid Cymru or the SNP, as long as they disapprove of the other leading party - whichever one that may be. As Chapter 3 argued, Convinced voters are likely to show a higher overall turnout rate independently of the closeness of the race, which will be indicated by a positive Convinced dummy effect, and they are also expected to be strongly and positively affected by the closeness of the race, which will be indicated by a positive parameter for Convinced* Closeness Interaction.

Confounded at the national level identifies voters who consider both Labour and the Conservatives as a viable option to vote for. Not surprisingly, the number of respondents in this category is rather small. Although there is no real logical reason for this, inspection of Table 5-3 reveals that Confounded voters are a rarity at the constituency level as well. As was argued in Chapter 3, Confounded voters may react to closeness in two possible ways. If these voters see their choice between two leading parties as an impossible predicament, their chance to participate is expected to be low (small Confounded estimate), and fall even with a close election (negative Confounded* Closeness Interaction parameter). Alternatively, if these respondents see no objection in voting against one of their favored parties, their behavior should resemble that of the Base category voters, which will result in statistically non-significant estimates. As statistical non-significance may to a large degree be the result of group size, rather than an actual non-existent effect, it is in this case important to look at the parameter estimate, as well as at statistical significance

Condemned voters at the national level will be third party voters (e.g., SNP, Plaid Cymru, Liberal/Democrat etcetera) or respondents that object to all of the political parties. At the local level, Labour or Conservative supporters may also find themselves in constituencies where their party is not among the two largest, and thus find themselves to be Condemned voters as well. Condemned voters are not expected to be affected by the closeness of the race, although it may well be - especially at the constituency level - that they show a lower chance to participate in an election race in which they know their candidate will not win. The lower chance of participation will be reflected by negative parameter estimates for the Condemned voters indicator (since the blanket effect affects these voters as well), while the Condemned* Closeness Interaction term may be close to zero and/or not significant.

Whether it will make a difference that the local political arena resembles the national political arena, in other words whether, for instance, one is a Convinced national but Condemned local voter, or other possibilities, will be explored in section 5.2.4, where such cross-level interactions will be analyzed.

5.2.2 Outcomes - National Level

The first results are presented in Table 5-5. The interpretation of a multilevel model is largely comparable to that of a standard OLS regression or, in our case, the logistic regression model. For the models presented here, the difference with standard logistic regression results is the estimates of variation at the different levels of analysis. The estimates of variation at the different levels can be interpreted as the amount of variation that can be explained by the

grouping variables: in our analyses the constituency (level 3) and the election (level 2).

The second and third column present what may be called the ‘traditional’ model: the aggregate level effect of closeness is included as a single variable, thus of equal influence to all, although the model uses multi-level analysis. The last two columns present the integrated model, in which the influence of the context effect is dependent on individual characteristics. Estimates are unstandardized b-estimates; standard errors are presented in italics. Bold figures indicate statistical significance at the .05 level. Likelihood values, as well as the dichotomous R² value (Snijder & Bosker, 1999) are presented in the bottom row.

Table 5-5 Great Britain - Traditional Model vs. Individual Context Model (national level)

	<i>'Traditional'</i>		<i>'Individual Context'</i>	
	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>
<i>Age</i>	0.014	<i>0.001</i>	0.013	<i>0.001</i>
<i>Female</i>	0.206	<i>0.040</i>	0.197	<i>0.040</i>
<i>Education</i>	0.071	<i>0.008</i>	0.074	<i>0.008</i>
<i>Political interest</i>	0.245	<i>0.008</i>	0.232	<i>0.008</i>
<i>Income</i>	0.255	<i>0.030</i>	0.260	<i>0.030</i>
<i>Income missing – dummy</i>	-0.121	<i>0.061</i>	-0.112	<i>0.061</i>
<i>National level:</i>				
<i>Closeness</i>	0.231	<i>0.035</i>	0.212	<i>0.038</i>
<i>Convinced voter</i>			0.385	<i>0.059</i>
<i>Convinced* Closeness Interaction</i>			0.220	<i>0.104</i>
<i>Confounded voter</i>			-0.054	<i>0.183</i>
<i>Confounded* Closeness Interaction</i>			0.741	<i>0.889</i>
<i>Condemned voter</i>			-0.495	<i>0.112</i>
<i>Condemned* Closeness Interaction</i>			0.159	<i>0.160</i>
<i>Constant</i>	-0.560	<i>0.070</i>	-0.544	<i>0.071</i>
<i>Variation constituency (3rd) level</i>	0.057	<i>0.020</i>	0.055	<i>0.020</i>
<i>Variation election (2nd) level</i>	.061	<i>0.028</i>	0.064	<i>0.028</i>
<i>Likelihood, R²_{dicho}</i>	11753	<i>.175</i>	11229	<i>.188</i>

Standard errors in italics. Bold figures indicate statistical significance at p < .05.

The logistic transformation that is required because of the binary character of the dependent variable makes the interpretation of the parameters a little less straightforward than in OLS models. Put in simple terms, the effect of the independent variables on the dependent variable is contingent on the values of the other independent variables; the change in propensity to vote between men and women is different for, high and low levels of education, for example. Nevertheless, the effect will invariably be in the direction of the model estimates.

For the ‘traditional’ model all estimates for the individual characteristics, presented in the top part of Table 5-5 are statistically significant and show positive signs, with the exception of the dummy-variable that indicates a no-answer on the income question. The estimates indicate that the chance to vote increases with higher age, education, political interest and income, and that women have a greater propensity to vote than men, when controlling for these characteristics. The negative and significant estimate for the income-missing dummy variable indicates that those who refused indicate their income are actually

somewhat less likely to vote than those with an average income. With the exception of this last finding, the findings for individual characteristics are very much in line with results as generally found by individual level research into electoral participation.

The next estimate presented from the traditional model is for closeness of the election at the national level, as measured by opinion poll data. The transformation applied (1 divided by the opinion poll gap in percentage points) creates a variable that increases with closeness. The positive estimate is therefore in line with expectations. It is statistically significant and of substantial size.

The bottom pane of the table presents the variation explained by the constituency and election level, since the multi-level design takes the variation at these levels into account. The figures reported are small although significant, indicating that there is some between constituency and between-election variance left in the model¹⁶. This is not unexpected, and neither is it of paramount interest for this research.

Based on this 'traditional' model, and leaving the very small level 2 and 3 variation aside for a moment, a female respondent of about average education, political interest and income, aged 45 would have a probability of voting of 86.8 percent in an election where the gap predicted by the opinion polls is 10 percent, as was actually the case in the 1979 elections¹⁷. In the October elections of 1974, where the gap was 5 percent, the likelihood for such a voter to participate would, on the basis of this model, rise slightly to 87 percent. In the 1992 elections, which were predicted to be a dead heat at 0.5 percent - even though the pollsters were forced to eat their words later - such a voter would have a chance of 91 percent to turn out. Clearly, the model indicates that a close race makes a difference to voters.

Were this a 'traditional' individual level analysis, this would be all to report. Closeness indeed has a positive, statistically significant influence on electoral participation. The next two columns of Table 5-5 show, however, that there is more to closeness than just an across-the-board effect.

The last two columns of Table 5-5 show the 'Individual Context' model, i.e., the traditional model with indicators for Convinced, Confounded and Condemned voters added. This model acknowledges the fact that voters will be affected by their context in different ways. The dummy variables for the voter categories identify the influence of whether or not a respondent's preference (or lack thereof) for the leading parties, while the interaction-terms indicate how this effect is increased or decreased as the race becomes closer or less close. The non-interacted closeness indicator is left to identify the influence of closeness on the Base category voters, to which the other categories of voters are set against.

The top pane of the table shows virtually no change from the 'traditional' model. The stability of the estimates for the individual characteristics is striking: differences are minimal. The dummy indicator for a missing income answer is now no longer statistically

16 For random effects, as variation at level 2 and level 3 is commonly referred to in multi-level modeling, an approximate Wald hypothesis test of the significance of this variation is more appropriate than looking at the parameter estimate/standard error ratio alone. This test is used when reporting statistical significance of the level 2 and level 3 variances.

17 The predicted value y_i is defined as $(\text{EXP}(a_i + b^*x_i) / (1 + \text{EXP}(a_i + b^*x_i)))$. For the example presented, the sum of coefficients ($a_i + b^*x_i$) equals $-.56$ (constant) $+ 45^*.014$ (age) $+ 1^*.206$ (female) $+ 5^*.071$ (average education) $+ 5^*.245$ (average political interest) $+ 0^*.255$ (average income) $+ 0^*-.121$ (income not missing) $+ 1^*.231$ (closeness = 1/10% gap between parties) = 1.8791. $\text{EXP}(1.8791)/(\text{EXP}(1+1.8791)) = .8675$ (86.8%).

significant, however, indicating that, other variables taken into account, the propensity to vote of these respondents does not deviate from average income voters. The small decrease in the estimate for political interest can be explained by the relation between the indicators for Convinced, Confounded and Condemned voters and political interest. To qualify for one of the three voter categories, an opinion on the parties in the political system and thus some political interest is required. The very small change in the estimate suggests that this makes only a very small difference.

In the middle pane of the table, the estimate for the across-the-board effect of closeness is slightly smaller than in the traditional model. This should come as no surprise since the interaction terms that have been added reflect closeness at the individual level. Since a substantial part of the expected influence of closeness is mediated through these interaction terms, the aggregate effect is expected to decrease somewhat¹⁸.

The estimates for Convinced voters show a very clear pattern. Convinced voters show a greater propensity to vote than the Base category, indicated by the positive and statistically significant estimate for Convinced voters. This high propensity to vote increases in close elections, as indicated by the positive and significant effect for the Convinced*Closeness Interaction. So not only do Convinced voters vote more often in close elections, they evidently vote more often in any election, even in those elections that are not close.

The pattern for Confounded voters is less straightforward. Here, neither the dummy estimate nor the interaction effect is statistically significant. Three alternative explanations can be considered for this. The relationship may genuinely not exist in the population, which means that Confounded voters show behavior that is not significantly different from Base category voters. Alternatively, some relationship may exist or more precisely, several relationships may exist: some of the Confounded voters may show an increased chance to turn out, while others may not be able to make a choice and stay home. These two contradicting patterns will produce an effect that cannot be distinguished, and will therefore not show statistical significance. Lastly, there may be a problem of sample distribution. As very few Confounded voters are included in the samples (see Table 5-3), the number of respondents may be too small to render the difference of their behavior with that of the Base category significant. On the basis of the data available, it is not possible to distinguish between these options.

The Condemned voters do behave according to expectation, in that Condemned*Closeness Interaction does not show a statistically significant effect. These respondents are thus not affected by the closeness of the election, at least not more so than Base category voters. This is in line with expectations, as the race is between parties that these respondents do not care about. In addition, these respondents show an overall lower propensity to vote, as indicated by the negative estimate for the Condemned dummy, which is statistically significant. Two things may cause this. Firstly, these voters realize that they do not stand a chance to see their favored party win the elections, and therefore they decide to stay home. Including information from the constituency level may shed light on this, as in some constituencies Condemned voters at the national level may still

18 The difference is small because the large majority of respondents belong to the Base category.

see their favored party win locally. Secondly, it may also indicate that within the group of Condemned voters, a substantial segment consists of people who do not care for any political party on offer. Without any party they appreciate, these respondents may show a high rate of abstention.

5.2.3 *Outcomes - Constituency Level*

Although the national level is what ultimately counts in British parliamentary elections to determine government, individual voters elect a representative for their local constituency, and in that sense the constituency is the limit and scope of their influence. As the local race may well see other parties in the lead than the national race, it is worthwhile examining whether British voters focus more on the local or on the national level when deciding whether to vote.

As mentioned, there are some handicaps for the constituency level to exert its influence. The predominance of the national level in the media has already been mentioned. This predominance is reflected in part by opinion polling: a dominant feature of national level news reports, but which are invariably rare at the constituency level. Information on the closeness of the local race will thus be scarcer and harder to come by for voters. It is not assumed here that such information will be completely unavailable to voters, as campaign efforts by local candidates and local news reports are likely to contain clues about the closeness of the election. Technically this means that such pre-election closeness information is also not available for this analysis. As a proxy, actual election outcome data is therefore used.

The estimates for the models including the constituency level are presented in Table 5-6, below. First the model for the constituency level is presented, next the constituency and national level combined. The constituency model with only closeness, and without dummy indicators or interaction terms is not presented, as virtually all parameter estimates remain unchanged compared to the first model presented in Table 5-6. Again, standard errors are given next to the parameter estimates in italics, while bold figures indicate statistical significance.

Table 5-6

Great Britain - Constituency and National Level Analysis

	<i>Constituency</i>		<i>National & Constituency</i>	
	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>
	0.014	0.001	0.014	0.001
<i>Female</i>	0.199	0.040	0.195	0.040
<i>Education</i>	0.073	0.007	0.075	0.008
<i>Political interest</i>	0.242	0.008	0.232	0.008
<i>Income</i>	0.263	0.030	0.265	0.030
<i>Income missing – dummy</i>	-0.110	0.061	-0.110	0.061
<i>Constituency level:</i>				
<i>Closeness</i>	0.003	0.005	0.002	0.005
<i>Convinced voters</i>	0.369	0.063	0.142	0.071
<i>Convinced*Closeness Interaction</i>	0.228	0.186	0.233	0.186
<i>Confounded voters</i>	0.269	0.148	0.148	0.155
<i>Confounded*Closeness Interaction</i>	-0.203	0.477	-0.119	0.483
<i>Condemned voters</i>	-0.167	0.074	-0.130	0.082
<i>Condemned*Closeness Interaction</i>	0.025	0.072	0.027	0.077
<i>National level:</i>				
<i>Closeness</i>			0.195	0.039
<i>Convinced voters</i>			0.317	0.067
<i>Convinced*Closeness Interaction</i>			0.233	0.104
<i>Confounded voters</i>			-0.092	0.183
<i>Confounded*Closeness Interaction</i>			0.519	0.880
<i>Condemned voters</i>			-0.435	0.119
<i>Condemned*Closeness Interaction</i>			0.157	0.161
<i>Constant</i>	-0.496	0.069	-0.549	0.071
<i>Variation constituency level</i>	0.058	0.020	0.053	0.020
<i>Variation election level</i>	0.083	0.028	0.067	0.028
<i>Likelihood, R2dicho</i>	11707	.175	11204	.190

Standard errors in italics. Bold figures indicate statistical significance at $p < .05$.

Actual election outcomes used for constituency level closeness, opinion poll data used for national level closeness.

The top pane of the table once more shows the stability of the estimates for the individual characteristics in the model. None of the parameters show a substantial change in size or direction, when compared to the previous models. The estimate for closeness at the constituency level is extremely small, and not statistically significant. This indicates that, at the local level, no across-the-board effect of closeness exists, while such an effect does exist at the national level¹⁹.

The indicators for Convinced, Confounded or Condemned voters and the interaction terms now reflect the situation in the constituency of each respondent. A Convinced voter on the national level need not be a Convinced voter at the local level, and a close race at the national level need not be close at the constituency level, and vice versa.

There is one striking pattern when regarding the local voter categories and their interactions with closeness. The closeness of the race does not come out as a statistically

19 Excluding the dummy indicators from the model, as in the first model presented in Table 5 5, does not alter the parameter estimates for closeness.ut to cast a vote. Where specifically 'voters' or 'non-voters' is meant, this will be made clear in the text.

significant influence, neither as an across-the-board effect nor as interaction with any of the three indicators. Closeness does not appear to influence voters at the local level. This is reflected by the interaction terms that fail to come up statistically significant for any of the three categories. However, two of the three dummy indicators do prove statistically significant, with Convinced voters showing a greater chance of participation and Condemned voters showing a lower chance to participate, regardless of the closeness of the election. The estimates for Convinced and Condemned voters are thus comparable to the pattern at the national level, although Condemned voters tend to fall less 'behind' on the local level.

The pattern that emerges from this analysis is that at the local level, it is not closeness but location that matters. Location in this case indicating being in a constituency where a respondent's favored party stands a chance of winning. The margin of that victory does not appear to matter. Possible explanations for this may be that the margin, i.e., the closeness of the race, is - contrary to what was assumed - not actually known to the electorate. Second, it may be that the margin is known, and is actually rather too well known, for instance, because it hardly fluctuated over the last number of elections held in the constituency. This may give voters the impression that no matter what, the outcome is certain, meaning that the effect of closeness on turnout will be negligible. Thirdly, it may be that it is not the constituency level, but the national level that dominates the minds of the voters.

The latter two columns of Table 5-6 certainly endorse the explanation that the national level dominates the local level. As indicators for the national level are added to the constituency level model, only the local Convinced voters estimate remains statistically significant. In addition, the estimates for the national level parameters are very close to the estimates for the model without constituency level data presented in Table 5-5. This clearly suggests that it is the national level that influences voters. One possible pitfall remains, however: cross-level interactions.

5.2.4 Cross-level Interactions

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the categories of voters at national and constituency level need not coincide. A Convinced voter at the national level may well be a Confounded or Condemned voter in his or her constituency. If cues from both these levels are used in determining participation in the election, the effect of being a Convinced voter at the national level may be dependent on the category of voters the respondent belongs to at the constituency level. This means that the interaction between the national and constituency categories should be taken in to account in the evaluation of which of these levels is most influential. As there are three categories at both levels, and all of the combinations can occur, nine possible interaction-terms exist²⁰. Table 5-7 gives an overview of the possible interactions terms, and reports percentages of respondents of the total sample that belong to each of the categories.

²⁰ The possible nine interactions excludes the 'Base' or fourth category.

Table 5-7 Great Britain - Possible National/Constituency-level Interactions, Percentages of Respondents in Total Sample

<i>Constituency</i>	<i>National</i>	<i>Convinced</i>	<i>Confounded</i>	<i>Condemned</i>
Convinced	I	12.7	III 0.5	IV 0.3
Confounded		0.5	0.6	0.0
Condemned	II	3.2	0.0	1.6

Roman numerals refer to interactions discussed in text.

On theoretical grounds, the combinations of voter categories presented in Table 5-7 can be divided into two categories. The combinations on the diagonal are not necessarily ‘true’ interactions, but may actually be simple additive effects. Convinced national level voters living in constituencies where they are also Convinced voters (denoted as interaction I in Table 5-7) find an incentive to vote at both the national level and the local level. These two incentives add up, but there is no direct theoretical argument as to why these two incentives would interact. The same holds true for the other diagonal combinations.

The off-diagonal combinations are expected to be ‘true’ interactions, in which the combination of the two categories at national and constituency level influences the actual behavior. Three examples will be discussed here. Convinced national level voters living in constituencies where they are Condemned voters (denoted as interaction II in Table 5-7) have no hope of electing a favored candidate in their constituency. As a consequence, they cannot help their favored party to national victory. For these voters, their participation can be no more than a token entry - they might as well stay home. This combination can therefore be regarded as a true interaction: Convinced national level voters should be positively influenced by the closeness of the election, but Condemned local voters should not. Whether one level dominates the other should become clear from the interaction effect.

The interactions III and IV present two other examples of theoretically interesting interaction effects. Interaction III concerns national level Confounded voters. For these voters, their constituency may function as a tiebreaker for the difficult choice between the two nationally leading parties. The combination should therefore function as a positive incentive to participate, when compared to other national level Confounded voters. Comparing to constituency level Confounded voters, the interaction III voters may be less likely to vote, because of the national level effect.

Interaction IV concerns national level Condemned voters, who are not expected to be affected by closeness, and constituency level Convinced voters, who are expected to be affected by closeness. Again, the interaction effect can inform us as to whether the national or the constituency level takes precedence, and how the behavior of the interaction IV voters compares to that of voters who share their national or constituency level category, but not the combination of the two.

The interactions may therefore offer us a number of benefits. Interactions may show how a group of voters in theoretically interesting circumstances responds. We may establish whether the national level or the constituency level takes precedence in conflicting situations. Moreover, by modeling interactions we may get a clearer view of the behavior of voters in more ‘straightforward’ circumstances, since the (hypothetically) distinctive behavior of interactions group voters is isolated.

Although theoretically the model should become more accurate with the introduction of interaction terms, Table 5-7 shows that in practice we can expect difficulties testing the model since most combinations only concern a small number of respondents²¹Six of the nine possible combinations involve less than one percent of all respondents. We are therefore unlikely to find any statistically significant results for these combinations, as empirical analyses (not presented here for the sake of brevity) confirm. Consequently, only two of the possible combinations are analyzed further and discussed here, namely those denoted by combinations I and II in Table 5-7.

Table 5-8 Great Britain - National Level Convinced/Constituency Level Convinced Interaction (condensed table)

	<i>No interactions</i>		<i>Interactions</i>	
	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>
Constituency level:				
Closeness	0.002	<i>0.005</i>	0.002	<i>0.004</i>
Convinced voter	0.142	0.071	0.358	0.104
Convinced*Closeness Interaction	0.233	<i>0.186</i>	0.371	<i>0.320</i>
National level:				
Closeness	0.195	0.039	0.179	0.038
Convinced voter	0.317	0.067	0.459	0.080
Convinced*Closeness Interaction	0.233	0.104	0.153	<i>0.128</i>
Interaction: National Convinced * Constituency Convinced voters				
Interaction effect			-0.490	0.151
Interaction * Constituency closeness			0.230	<i>0.201</i>
Interaction * National closeness			-0.274	<i>0.395</i>

Condensed table. Complete table presented in Table 5 of the Appendix
Standard errors in italics. Bold figures indicate statistical significance at $p < .05$.
Actual election outcomes used for constituency level closeness, opinion poll data used for national level closeness.

The introduction of cross-level interaction terms brings changes to some parts of the model, but not to the full model. Table 5-8 therefore presents only a condensed overview of the first interaction model. In this table, only the parameters affected are presented, so as to give a better insight into the impact of the interaction terms. For a complete presentation of the model, the reader is referred to Table 5 in the Appendix. To aid comparison, the estimates for the model without cross-level interactions, presented in Table 5-6, have been added to the table.

The results must be interpreted with caution, since only a few of the estimates show statistical significance. Bearing this in mind, the picture Table 5-8 seems to convey is that of an increased influence of the constituency level. Although the overall effect of closeness at the constituency level does not change, the estimates for Convinced voters and Convinced*Closeness Interaction at the local level do increase substantially. At the national

21 This does not necessarily imply that the interactions will only affect a small percentage of British voters, since the survey sample may not be representative of all British constituencies. A nationally representative sample need not be representative at the constituency level.

level, the estimates for closeness and the interaction with Convinced voters decrease in size, while the direct effect for Convinced voters at the national level increases. This suggests a shift of impact from the national to the constituency level, especially regarding the closeness of the race at the constituency level. This is underlined by the estimates for the cross-level interaction, at the bottom of the table. There too closeness at the constituency level shows a positive effect, while closeness at the national level shows a negative influence, as does the direct interaction effect. These last two findings may appear puzzling at first sight, as they run counter to expectations. It is necessary to understand, however, that to these parameters the estimates at constituency level as well as national level need to be added to come to the complete effect for this national level cross-level interaction term. The estimates and standard errors for the additional (interaction) effect of national closeness, 0.153 (0.128) and -0.274 (0.395) respectively, suggest however that an extra effect of closeness on top of the overall effect is absent for the cross-level interaction. This first cross-level interaction thus suggests that the model of Table 5-6 underestimates the importance of the constituency.

Table 5-9 Great Britain - National Level Convinced/Constituency Level Condemned Interaction (condensed table)

	<i>No interactions</i>		<i>Interactions</i>	
	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>
Constituency level:				
Closeness	0.002	<i>0.005</i>	0.002	<i>0.004</i>
Convinced voter	0.142	0.071	0.162	0.071
Convinced*Closeness Interaction	0.233	<i>0.186</i>	0.231	<i>0.180</i>
Condemned voter	-0.130	<i>0.082</i>	-0.216	0.094
Condemned*Closeness Interaction	0.027	<i>0.077</i>	0.020	<i>0.059</i>
National level:				
Closeness	0.195	0.039	0.191	0.038
Convinced voter	0.317	0.067	0.262	0.070
Convinced*Closeness Interaction	0.233	0.104	0.282	0.107
Condemned voter	-0.435	0.119	-0.385	0.122
Condemned*Closeness Interaction	0.157	<i>0.161</i>	0.152	<i>0.160</i>
Interaction: National Convinced * Constituency Condemned voters				
Interaction effect			0.152	0.160
Interaction * Constituency closeness			0.389	0.234
Interaction * National closeness			1.301	1.278

Condensed table. Complete table presented in Table 5 of the Appendix
Standard errors in italics. Bold figures indicate statistical significance at $p < .05$.
Actual election outcomes used for constituency level closeness, opinion poll data used for national level closeness.

Table 5-9 presents the estimates for the second cross-level interaction model. This interaction term denotes voters who stand a chance of winning at the national level but find themselves without any chance in their constituency. Again the table only presents the parameter estimates that are affected, and a complete overview is presented in the second part of Table 5-in the Appendix. The first two columns of Table 5-9 again present estimates from the non-interaction model of Table 5-6 for ease of comparison.

As in the previous interaction model, the results are not readily interpreted. Again, the

estimate for closeness at the constituency level remains stable. However, the estimates for Convinced and Condemned voters do change. The estimate for Condemned voters becomes even more negative. As the group of Condemned voters at constituency level now no longer includes national level Convinced voters - isolated by the interaction term - this is not surprising: the remaining Condemned voters have less to expect from the election and are less inclined to vote. Thus the slight increase in the estimate for Convinced voters cannot be explained.

At the national level, we see that Convinced voters now have a lower tendency to turn out at consistently higher rates. Instead they exhibit stronger responses to the degree of closeness. This is reflected in the table by a decrease in size of the Convinced voter estimate, while the accompanying interaction term increases in size. Apparently, the remaining Convinced voters at the national level are less stable voters that react more to the added incentive of a close race. Condemned voters at the national level do not change in their response to the closeness of the race, although they do fall less far behind the Base category voters in this cross-level interaction model - this is indicated by the decreased negative estimate.

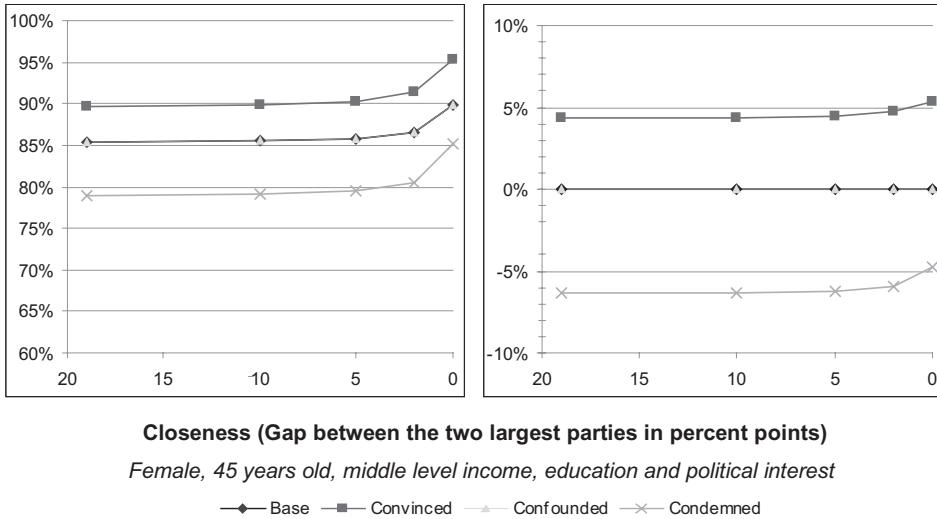
In conclusion, the cross-level interaction models present a somewhat mixed outcome. On the one hand, the sample distribution suggested beforehand that any model findings would be problematic. Data analysis confirms this suspicion. At the same time however, the cross-level interactions do suggest that the influence of the constituency level may be underestimated if such interactions are excluded from the model.

5.3 Predicting Electoral Participation

What then does it matter whether one is a Convinced, Confounded or Condemned voter, or whether one can be classified as a Base category voter? To emphasize the impact of closeness on the different categories of voters, this section will depict the influence of closeness on the different categories graphically, for different degrees of closeness. First, the female mainstream voter presented earlier in Section 5.2.2 of 45 years of age, about average education, political interest and income (scores of 5, 5 and 0 respectively) is presented as a Base category voter, and also as a Convinced, Confounded and Condemned voter. The predicted chance to vote for such respondents is presented for different degrees of closeness of the election. These closeness figures are based on actual opinion poll predictions, published before the elections of 1983, 1979, October 1974, February 1974 and 1992, and with gaps between the two largest national parties of 19, 10, 5, 2 and 0.5 percent, respectively. Calculation of the predicted chance to vote is analogous to the calculations presented in Section 5.2.2 and note 17 above)

Figure 5-1 shows the propensity to vote for our respondent under different contextual circumstances. To aid transparency, the predictions are based on the national level model only, which is comparable to the model presented in Table 5-5 (last columns). However, the model used for the actual predictions had all estimates removed that were not statistically significant, since it cannot be claimed that these effects will exist in reality. Unfortunately, this may also mean that effects are removed from the model that show no statistical significance because of sample distribution and size reasons only, and not because these effects are in actuality absent. The amended prediction model is presented in Table 6-in the Appendix

Figure 5-1 Great Britain - Predicted Chance to Vote for Different Categories of Voters (left), and Deviation from Chance Predicted for Base Category Voters (right).



The three lines in Figure 5-1 represent, from top to bottom, Convinced voters, Base category voters and Condemned voters. Confounded voters follow the same pattern as Base voters, since the estimates for Confounded voters proved not to be statistically significant. The left hand panel presents the likelihood of voting for our 45-year-old respondent under different degrees of closeness. Two things are clear right away: a Convinced voter has a consistently greater probability of voting than a comparable Base or Confounded voter, who in turn is more likely to vote than Condemned voters. In the model, this was reflected by the direct effects of the category indicators. Additionally, it is clear that the closeness of the election does affect the probability to vote, for *all* categories of voters. All three lines show an upward curve to the right, i.e., as the election becomes closer. In the estimation model, this is reflected by the significant and positive direct effect of Closeness, as well as the interaction of Closeness with the Convinced voters. But is this increased probability to vote uniform for the three categories?

The right hand panel of Figure 5-1 depicts this more clearly - although the picture requires some explanation. The right hand panel of Figure 5-1 shows the predicted probability of voting for the various categories, contrasted against the predicted chance to vote for Base category voters. The zero-line represents the predicted chance to vote for Base (and Confounded) category voters, while the top and bottom lines show the predicted deviation from that line for Convinced and Condemned voters, respectively. The upper line shows that Convinced voters have a probability to participate that is almost consistently 4 percent points higher than Base category voters, while this increases to a little over 5 percent points in extremely close elections. This is in line with expectations.

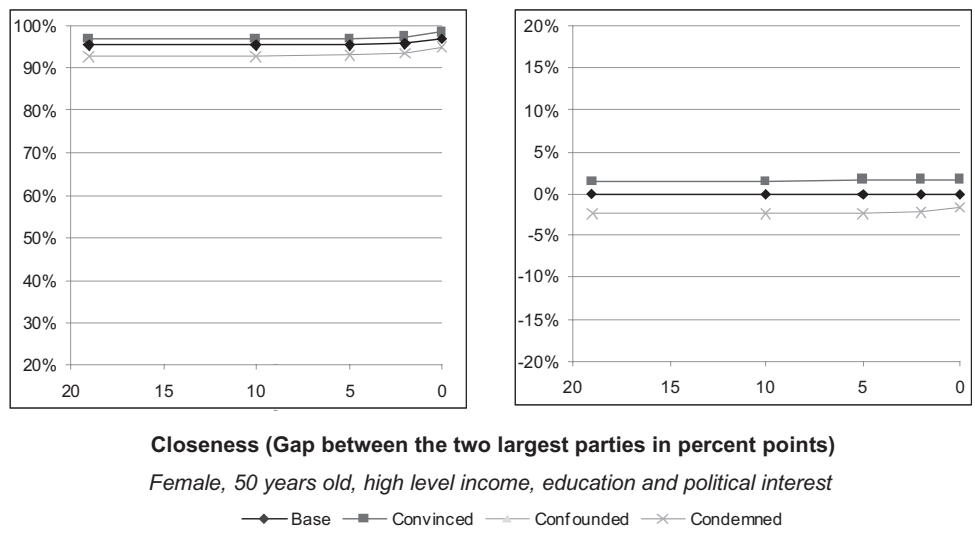
The lower line of the right hand panel of Figure 5-1 shows the probability to vote for Condemned voters. This probability is consistently lower than that of Base category voters, as was expected from the estimated model. However, the line also shows a curve upward at the extreme right hand side, indicating that as the election becomes extremely close, Condemned voters are more affected by this than Base category voters. This seems odd, even

counter-intuitive, as Condemned voter were expected to be least affected by the closeness of the election. However, this can be explained as a ceiling effect. As the election becomes extremely close, the chance to vote increases for all voters - but already high probabilities of voting have less scope to increase than lower probabilities. This explains the pattern of Figure 5-1, and it is a reflection of the s-curve which is typical for a logistic regression model. This effect will be shown to be even more pronounced in section 5.3.1. The reason that Convinced voters show an increase in the predicted probability to vote in close elections in Figure 5-1 as well is of course due to the additional, statistically significant interaction with closeness for Convinced voters.

5.3.1 High versus Low Involvement

Figure 5-2 depicts the effect of being a Convinced or Condemned voter vis-à-vis Base or Confounded category voters - now for high turnout potentials. Ceiling effects play an even greater role in these analyses. The predictions are once again based on the national level model presented in Table 6-of the Appendix. However, the simulated voter now has a higher probability to turn out and vote on the basis of her individual characteristics: predictions are made for a 50 year old female, of high education, high political interest and high income (scores of 8, 8 and 1, respectively)²². As Figure 5-2 clearly shows, for such a voter the contextual influence of closeness are minimal. The lines in the left hand panel of Figure 5-2 show only a minimal incline, while in the right hand panel the pattern of Figure 5-1 is repeated: Convinced voters are more likely to vote than Base category voters, and even more so as the election draws closer. Condemned voters catch up somewhat in close elections.

Figure 5-2 Great Britain - Predicted Chance to Vote for Different Categories of Voters with High Involvement (left), and Deviation from Chance Predicted for Base Category Voters with High Involvement (right).



22 Education score of 8, political interest score of 8, income score of 1.

A different pattern can be detected at the other end of the scale, where voters are decidedly less inclined to participate. Figure 5-3 presents turnout predictions for a 20 year old male, of low education, low political interest and low income²³.

Figure 5-3 Great Britain - Predicted Chance to Vote for Different Categories of Voters with Low Involvement (left), and Deviation from Chance Predicted for Base Category Voters with Low Involvement (right).

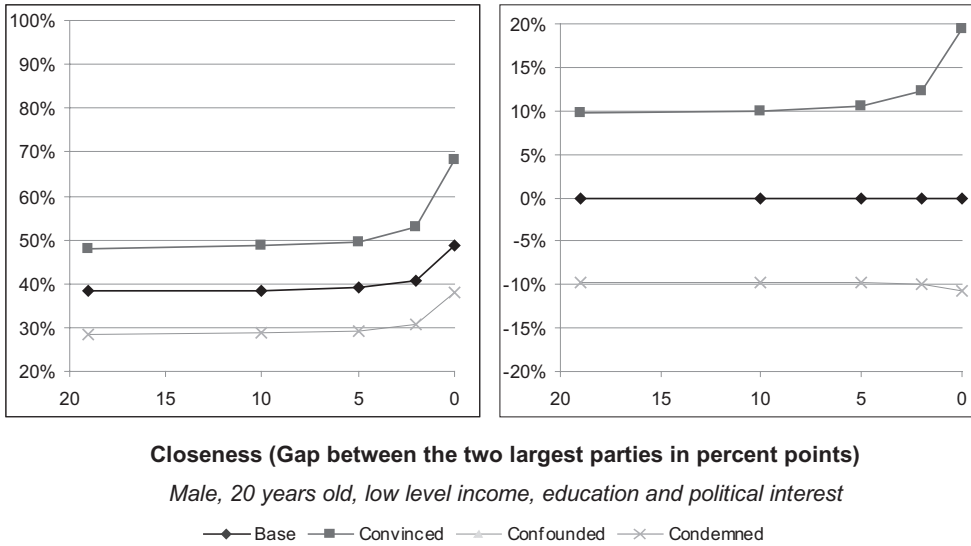


Figure 5-3 not only shows that it matters a great deal whether one is a Convinced, Condemned or Confounded or Base category voter at the low end of the scale. The plots also show that for these voters the political context - the closeness of the race - matters a great deal. For Convinced voters the probability to vote rises from under 50 percent to almost 70 percent in a dead heat election race. In other words, the chance to participate for Convinced voters is 10 percent in excess of the turnout likelihood for Base category voters and this increases to 20 percent. In contrast, Condemned voters are 20 to over 30 percent behind. The right hand panel also shows that these less involved Condemned voters fall even further behind as the election becomes very close.

5.4 Predicting Turnout Levels

The previous sections showed that closeness affects different voters differently, and that we should allow for individual variation in the influence of closeness on voters. In this section we will examine whether our ability to predict turnout at the aggregate level improves if we allow the influence of closeness to vary at the individual level. Does the Individual Context model provide more accurate turnout estimates that the ‘traditional’ model does?

The predictions are analogous to the predictions presented in Table 2-4 and Figure 2-1

23 Education score of 1, political interest score of 1, income score of -2.

in Section 2.5 of Chapter 2. We estimate the predicted turnout based on our analytical models, and for each election compare the turnout estimates with the actual turnout²⁴. The basis for the predictions is the ‘traditional’ model presented in Table 5-5, and the prediction model (including statistically significant results only) already employed in the previous section and presented in Table 6-of the Appendix. The predictions will therefore be based on the national level model²⁵.

Table 5-10 presents the turnout level as predicted by the ‘traditional’ model and the Individual Context model, followed by actual election turnout. The last column presents that average absolute deviation in predicted and actual turnout per model.

Table 5-10 Great Britain - Turnout (percentages), Actual and Predicted by Traditional and Individual Context Model and Average Absolute Deviance from Actual Turnout (percentage points)

<i>Year</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1974Feb</i>	<i>1974Oct</i>	<i>1979</i>	<i>1983</i>	<i>1987</i>	<i>1992</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>Deviance</i>
<i>Traditional model</i>	73.9	78.1	74.5	75.6	74.4	75.9	79.1	72.9	1.19
<i>Individual Context</i>	74.0	78.1	74.5	75.9	74.4	75.9	79.1	73.0	1.17
<i>Turnout</i>	72.0	78.1	72.8	76.0	72.7	75.3	77.7	71.2	-

An inspection of Table 5-10 shows that the differences in predicted turnout between the two models are small, in most cases only appearing in the second decimal. This should not surprise us - the amendments to the model are limited. No clear ‘winner’ can be determined, although the average deviation score shows a slightly more accurate prediction for the Individual Context model than for the ‘traditional’ model.

24 The prediction procedure requires the sample to be weighted, since voters are typically over-represented in election surveys (cf. Note 7, Chapter 2). Weighting ensures that sample turnout (as reported by the respondents) reflects the actual election turnout, enabling aggregate level predictions. Since sample weighting is problematic in the MLwiN software, the individual level predictions were produced in MLwiN, after which sample weighting and aggregate level predictions were performed in SPSS.

25 Additional analyses showed findings to be comparable for the national and constituency level models, and were therefore not presented here. For consistency the same model used in section 5.3 was presented.

Figure 5-4 Great Britain - Predicted Turnout Levels, Deviation from Actual Turnout

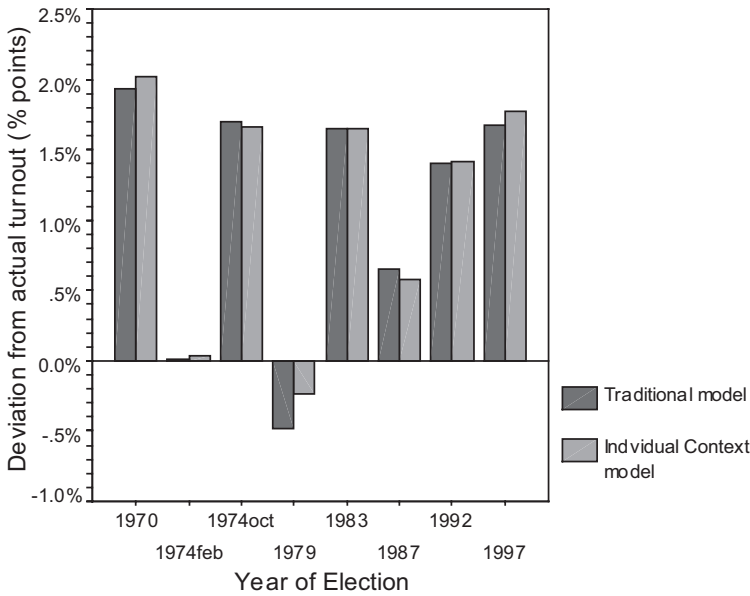


Figure 5-4 presents the deviation of the predicted turnout rates from the actual election outcome. We see that the model tends to over-estimate the actual turnout. Figure 5-4 confirms the pattern of Table 5-10: differences in prediction accuracy are small between the two models. Only for the 1979 and 1987 elections does the Individual Context model provide markedly more accurate estimates.

5.5 Conclusions

Does closeness matter in Great Britain? Yes it does. The previous chapter already suggested this at the aggregate level, and the analyses in the current chapter show that indeed closeness affects turnout at the individual level as well. The figures in Section 5.3 illustrate this for the national level. But the aim of this chapter went further: to show that the impact of closeness is dependent on individual level characteristics. This too was confirmed by the analyses presented in this chapter. Graphically, this differentiation in the impact of closeness was depicted in the right hand pane of the figures of Section 5.3. The graphs showed that it matters whether one is a Convinced, Confounded or Condemned voter, and moreover, that this matters even more if one's individual characteristics make electoral participation less certain.

Although these findings do support the theoretical expectations set out in Chapter 3 and this chapter, there is still need for caution. The aggregate level turnout predictions of Section 5.4 showed only small differences, albeit in favor of the Individual Context model. In addition, a number of parameter estimates at the national and constituency levels, as well as for the cross-level interactions, were not to be statistically significant in contrast to prior expectations. Of course, this could mean that our expectations were wrong. However, as was already mentioned, the characteristics of the sample available for analysis meant that the

quality some of the variables used in this chapter was less than that desired. In addition, the number of respondents qualifying as Confounded or Condemned voters was extremely low: an unavoidable feature of standard survey sampling when segments of specific research interest in the population are small. Attaining enough respondents from these categories would require oversampling - or extremely large sample sizes. As a consequence, it is difficult to determine whether it is indeed these sample limitations that caused the estimates to remain statistically not significant, or whether the theory outlined is wrong. This proved to be especially problematic in the interpretation of the constituency level estimates, and the cross-level interactions.

Limitations of the sample distribution hamper conclusions which might be drawn regarding the constituency level as well. Whether the influence of the constituency level is fully overshadowed by the national level, as Table 5-6 suggests, is a question that for the moment must remain unanswered. However, some clues for an answer to this question were offered by the cross-level interaction analyses. Although only two of the possible nine cross-level interaction terms could be explored, indications were that the constituency level is of consequence. Or, to put it more accurately, voters are likely to focus on the arena that gives them the most favorable outlook - be it at the constituency or the national level.



Sweden

The previous chapter presented an analysis of the influence of closeness in a two dominant-party system. In such a system closeness is expected to have a clear and significant influence. The current chapter presents analyses for Sweden, a country where not two but several parties determine the political landscape. Sweden is a multi-party system where the political spectrum has traditionally comprised of five, and in recent times seven to eight political parties. The notion of 'closeness' is not directly associated with elections in multiparty systems. In this chapter we assess the possibilities of generalizing this concept beyond the two-party context in which it is usually applied. This effort is not only of relevance for Sweden, but potentially also for other multi-party systems. Before focusing on this, we first give a brief overview of the Swedish party-system

The Swedish political landscape is not composed of two large parties, but only one. The Social-Democratic Party (SAP) is the largest one and its primacy has been unassailable. Apart from the dominating SAP party, a number of smaller parties fill the political spectrum from left to right. As was already discussed in Chapter 4, the Swedish party spectrum is well structured. The consequence of this is not that party competition in Sweden is a game of all against all, or of all parties against the dominating party. Instead, a clear divide has for a long time determined Swedish politics that distinguishes the political parties in Sweden into two groupings: the left versus the right. On the left one finds the social democratic and left wing parties, and on the right the parties that are commonly referred to as "bourgeois" parties. Since the introduction of general suffrage, the SAP successfully maintained its unrivaled position of as largest party, typically winning around 45 percent of the vote. As a consequence, the social democrats managed to maintain government power for nearly all of the twentieth century (cf. Hancock, 1993).

The two-bloc structure of the Swedish party landscape has proven extremely rigid up until the end of the twentieth century. The left party bloc is made up of the SAP and what originally was the communist party *Vänsterpartiet*, to the left of the SAP, and the green *Miljöpartiet*, which appeared on the political stage in the early 1980s.

The right, or bourgeois, side is composed of the *Center* (agrarian) party, the conservative *Moderaterna* and the liberal *Folkpartiet*. The 1990s saw the rise of the Christian-democratic *Kristdemokraterna* into what now appears a firmly settled addition to the bourgeois camp. A quick shot at electoral success by the right-wing populist *Ny Demokrati* party in the early 1990s proved to be short-lived.

The image of a two-bloc structure is reinforced by the fact that the SAP, although invariably the largest party and frequently polling over 45 percent of the vote, has since 1921 managed only twice to win an absolute majority. Much like the Fianna Fail party in Ireland, it refused for decades to enter into a coalition government, preferring instead to form a minority government with the almost assured support (or at least not opposition) of the left-

wing *Vänsterpartiet*. When particular political issues would so require this single-party government would rely on temporary brokered coalitions with the bourgeois parties. Although *Vänsterpartiet* supporters may not always warmly support the SAP, it is clear that they are on the same side of a generally recognized political divide, and that they share sentiments of animosity, even adversity regarding the ‘other’, bourgeois side. The same holds for the green *Miljöpartiet*, although its allegiance to the left has been somewhat less outright, perhaps because ‘green’ issues at times cut across the traditional left-right divide. It has taken until the very end of the 1990s before negotiated, cross-bloc agreements emerged in Sweden, such as the 1994-1998 SAP government’s legislative agreement with the *Center* party.

To all intents and purposes, therefore, the Swedish political landscape can be viewed not so much as a system made up of five, seven or even eight parties, but rather, as was already argued in Chapter 4, a two-bloc structure, in which the left wing hopes for an SAP government - be it minority government or not - while the bourgeois side aspires to form a right wing government. In essence, the race between parties then becomes a race between blocs, determining which side will take up government responsibility. Chapter 4 already showed that, under such circumstances, closeness is related to turnout at the aggregate level. But how will closeness affect individual voters?

Table 6-1 Sweden - Turnout Figures for Parliamentary Elections, 1979-1998 (percentages)

Year	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998
Turnout	90.7	91.4	89.9	86.0	86.7	86.8	81.4

As Table 6-1 shows, turnout figures in Sweden are high, around the 90 percent mark for the period of the early 1980s. Since then, turnout rates have declined somewhat, although 80 percent may still be considered high for present day western democracies. The high turnout figures mean that there is little room for the additional influence of closeness, and we may not see very strong effects. However, the gradual decline in turnout rates leaves more room for a possible influence of closeness.

6.1 Who is Affected?

Although the two-bloc structure includes all political parties in Sweden - or at least all those represented in parliament - this does not necessarily mean that all of the electorate should be affected by the closeness of an election race as well.

In line with the argument of Chapter 3 and in a similar approach as the previous chapter, three categories of voters have been constructed, on the basis of how voters evaluate the parties of the two blocs. Again, voters will be described as Convinced, Confounded, Condemned or Base category voters¹.

Convinced voters strongly support one of the parties in one bloc, while rejecting at least one of the parties in the other bloc. These voters are expected to be most strongly affected by the closeness of the election race, and to show a greater chance of participating in close elections.

¹ A discussion of the codings used to define the different voter categories is presented in the Appendix.

Confounded voters care for one side as well as the other. They strongly appreciate at least one party from the bourgeois bloc, as well as at least one from the social democratic bloc. This might place such voters in a dilemma when elections become close, as the potential consequences may make the choice harder to make.

Condemned voters do not favor either of the blocs. They do not express a great evaluation for one of the parties of either bloc. As the Swedish two-bloc structure comprises all parties, this implies that Condemned voters in Sweden by definition do not have strong positive feelings for any of the political parties - in contrast for instance to their counterparts in Great Britain. This will of course be of consequence for the impact that closeness may have on these voters. Condemned voters are expected to show a lower propensity to participate in the election, and are not very susceptible to the degree of closeness of the election.

The remainder of the electorate is made up of voters who positively evaluate at least one of the political parties, yet do not combine this positive evaluation with a strong dislike of the parties on the 'other' side.

6.2 Data

Swedish electoral research is rooted in a strong tradition of empirical survey studies, founded in the mid 1950s by Westerståhl and Särilvik, with the first parliamentary election study being held in 1956². Since then, studies have been held at every election, creating a substantial base for electoral research. Helpful in this is a quality of the Swedish political system enviable to researchers of contextual effects, namely frequent elections - held every three years since the 1970 election. Unfortunately - from a purely scientific standpoint, that is - Sweden moved back to a four-year parliamentary term in 1994.

The number of election studies available for analysis was restricted by the availability of a good party evaluation indicator. This requirement narrowed down the number of available election studies to a total of seven, covering the parliamentary elections from 1979 to 1998. After corrections for missing data, a total of 16,812 cases within 7 elections remained for analysis.

As in the analyses of the preceding chapter, the aim of the model presented is to determine how the closeness of the election affects different voters, not to explain individual level electoral participation completely. Therefore, the range of individual level characteristics included is not exhaustive, but a selection of the 'usual suspects' was made. These variables include age, gender (being female), education, income, political interest and political cynicism. All except the last are expected to have a positive influence on turnout. Education was coded into three categories (low, middle, high), while for income the same standardization was used as in the previous chapter, i.e., a natural log transformation centered around the mean. Political interest and political cynicism were each measured by a scale ranging from zero to six, constructed from two four-point items³.

2 See Holmberg (1994) for an overview on the history of Swedish election studies.

3 The items used for political interest concerned reading political news in the papers, and self-declared political interest. For political cynicism, the items tapped whether the respondent believed parties are only concerned about people's votes, not what they think, and whether members of parliament pay attention to the views of ordinary people. A Mokken scale procedure showed that, for each year, the items formed strong scales (H values between .58 and .73) (Mokken, 1971). Missing values were subsequently recoded to the lowest score per item for political interest, and the middle score for political cynicism.

The respondents were subsequently classified as Convinced, Confounded, Condemned or base category voters, in line with the categorization scheme introduced in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5. Dummy variables were constructed to identify Convinced, Confounded and Condemned respondents. This was based on a party rating score, running from -5 for a negative evaluation, to + 5 for a positive evaluation of the party. Respondents who gave one of the parties at least a 4 or 5, while evaluating at least one of the parties from the other bloc with minus 3, 4 or 5 were grouped in the Convinced category. Respondents who evaluated at least one of the parties from either bloc with a 4 or 5 were scored as Confounded. Respondents who evaluated none of the left wing parties nor any of the bourgeois parties with 4 or 5 were scored as Condemned voters.

The remainder - that is those who do not fall in one of the above categories - consist of respondents who did evaluate at least one of the parties with a score of 4 or 5, but did not score -3, -4 or -5 for at least one of the parties from the other bloc, and are coded as Base category. To use a liberal interpretation, these voters may vote *for* a party, but do not necessarily vote against the other side. These voters may well be affected by closeness, though not as strongly as Convinced voters.

An overview of the percentage of respondents per category of voters is presented in Table 6-2. From this table, it is clear that Confounded voters are especially hard to find: on average, about five percent of the electorate fall in this category. This will of course make it hard to find statistically significant estimates for this category. Compared to the distribution of voters in Great Britain presented in the previous chapter, Base category voters are also relatively scarce in Sweden. The majority of the electorate is made up by the Convinced and Condemned voters.

Table 6-2 Sweden - Frequencies of Convinced, Confounded and Condemned Voters versus Base Category (percentages)

Election Year	Convinced	Confounded	Condemned	Base
1979	48.2	2.5	17.4	32.0
1982	47.1	3.4	18.1	31.4
1985	46.1	5.8	13.8	34.2
1988	38.8	4.8	17.3	39.1
1991	41.1	6.0	14.3	38.9
1994	44.5	4.7	13.9	36.9
1998	32.4	3.0	21.4	43.2

The indicator for closeness of the election is based on opinion poll data from SIFO's election barometers (Oscarsson, 1995). These polls are typically reported by the media in the run up to the election. The combined vote-share for the left-wing parties SAP and *Vänsterpartiet* was pitted against the joint share for the bourgeois parties *Center*, *Folkpartiet* and *Moderaterna*, with the gap between the two blocs in absolute percentage points taken as an initial measure. Because a number of newcomers appeared on the political stage, the definition of the two blocs had to be adapted accordingly. This means that as of the 1991 elections, *Kristdemokraterna* was added to the bourgeois bloc, while from the 1998 election onwards the *Miljöpartiet* was regarded as part of the left-wing bloc (Oscarsson, personal correspondence). Table 6-3 presents an overview of the closeness of

the election based on poll data compared to actual election outcomes, together with election turnout.

Table 6-3 Sweden - Degree of Closeness (in polls and actual) and Turnout

Election Year	Gap in Polls	Actual Gap	Turnout (%)
1979	1.5	0.2	90.7
1982	5.5	6.2	91.4
1985	1.0	4.5	89.9
1988	7.0	7.3	86.0
1991	5.4	4.5	86.7
1994	5.8	10.1	86.8
1998	9.3	8.4	80.3

The same transformation as in Chapter 5 was applied to the indicator for closeness to reflect the expected non-linear effect of closeness. By taking the inverse of the gap between the blocs (1 divided by the gap between the two blocs in percentage points), a measure of closeness was created with higher scores indicating a closer election.

6.3 Analysis

The results of the analyses for Sweden are presented in Table 6-4. As in the previous chapter, a logistic multi-level regression was applied. The first column presents the variable names, followed by pairs of columns presenting the parameter estimates and the standard errors (in italics). Bold type indicates statistically significant estimates at an alpha level of .05. Finally, at the bottom of this table there is the likelihood estimate and the dichotomous pseudo-R² (Snijders & Bosker, 1999).

Table 6-4

Sweden - Closeness and Electoral Participation, 1979-1998

	'Traditional'		'Individual context'	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
Age	0.012	0.002	0.011	0.002
Female	0.382	0.064	0.307	0.065
Education:				
<i>Middle compared to Lower</i>	0.204	<i>0.079</i>	0.256	<i>0.080</i>
<i>High compared to Middle</i>	0.286	<i>0.090</i>	0.292	<i>0.091</i>
Income	0.215	<i>0.029</i>	0.235	<i>0.029</i>
Political Interest	0.358	<i>0.025</i>	0.277	<i>0.025</i>
Political Cynicism	-0.128	<i>0.023</i>	-0.101	<i>0.023</i>
Closeness	0.685	<i>0.229</i>	0.637	<i>0.272</i>
Convinced voters			0.439	<i>0.118</i>
Convinced*Closeness Interaction			0.116	<i>0.272</i>
Confounded voters			-0.116	<i>0.226</i>
Confounded*Closeness Interaction			0.458	<i>0.557</i>
Condemned voters			-0.724	<i>0.108</i>
Condemned*Closeness Interaction			0.153	<i>0.250</i>
Constant	1.056	<i>0.187</i>	1.279	<i>0.199</i>
Variation election (2nd) level	0.030	<i>0.020</i>	0.031	<i>0.020</i>
Likelihood,	-1669		-3310	
R²_{dicho}		.150		.187

Standard errors in italics. Bold figures indicate statistical significance at $p < .05$.

The first model contains estimates for individual level characteristics as well as for Closeness, at the contextual level. It is the 'traditional' model in which the contextual effect is assumed to have an equal influence on all of the respondents. No surprises are encountered here. Women tend to vote more often than men, when controlling for the other individual level characteristics. Education is contrast-coded so that each educational level is compared to the level preceding it. The first education indicator shows that respondents with a middle level education have a higher propensity to vote than those with a low level of education only. However, the second education indicator shows that the difference between the higher and middle education level is of more importance still, since its estimate is larger. Age, income and political interest all show a positive influence on the chances of participation, as was expected. The negative influence of political cynicism is also in line with expectations.

The Closeness of the election has a substantial and statistically significant positive influence on electoral participation. Additional analysis (not shown here) proves that this effect is not greatly dependent on the individual characteristics included in the model; only minimal changes in parameter estimates occur if closeness is left out. The variation at the second level is very small and not statistically significant, indicating that little between-election variation is left in the model. Based on these analyses, we would conclude that the closeness of the election does indeed have an effect on Swedish voters. Something we could also conclude from the analysis presented in Chapter 4. But from these analyses we cannot determine whether the closeness of the election is of influence for *all* Swedish voters.

The 'Individual Context' model presents the analysis with additional indicators added for the different categories of voters. Convinced, Confounded and Condemned voters are denoted by dummy variables. The Interaction variables denote an interaction between each of the categories and the degree of closeness of the election. In this model, closeness may have an across-the-board effect on all of the electorate, denoted by the Closeness indicator, but allowance is also made for additional influence on individual segments of the electorate, denoted by the Interaction terms. The dummy variables indicate whether a respondent is classified as Convinced, Confounded or Condemned, they do not indicate how close the election actually is. These are in effect individual characteristics. The Interaction terms indicate whether the closeness of the election has an additional influence for voters in any of the categories, over and above the effect denoted by the Closeness indicator.

The likelihood value indicates that the model has improved significantly, which is confirmed by the improved R^2 value. Inspection of the top pane containing individual characteristics reveals that the estimates here have largely remained stable. The difference between men and women is reduced somewhat, while education proves to be somewhat more influential. The estimates for political interest and political cynicism are reduced slightly. However, none of these changes are substantial.

The across-the-board influence of Closeness is reduced somewhat, but a statistically significant effect remains. This is important to recognize, when we look at the estimates for the different categories of voters. The effect on Convinced voters is positive, as was expected, and statistically significant. Likewise, the estimate for Condemned voters is also statistically significant, and in the direction that was hypothesized, in this case negative. Both estimates are of substantial size, indicating that it does make a difference whether one is a Convinced or Condemned voter in Sweden.

The other estimates for the voter categories do not prove to be statistically significant. For the Confounded voters, this is hardly surprising as Table 6-2 already showed that this category contains very few voters. Since expectations as to the size and direction of the estimates for this category were rather tentative, there is very little that may justifiably be concluded from the findings for this category of voters.

The expectations for the Interactions between Closeness and Convinced and Confounded voters were more specific. The Convinced Interaction term was expected to be positive and statistically significant. An additional effect of closeness on Condemned voters was expected to be absent. In view of the substantial and positive across-the-board effect for Closeness, a significant, negative Condemned Interaction term might be expected in the analytical model. Neither of these two expectations appears to be supported by the findings. The absence of statistically significant interaction terms could mean that the closeness of the election affects every Swedish voter to virtually the same degree. People tend to show a higher propensity to vote in close elections, regardless of whether they are Convinced, Confounded, Condemned voters or none of the three. The absence of significant interactions could also be caused by the characteristics of the data. The distribution of respondents over the different categories has already been referred to. An additional feature of the Swedish political system is worth mentioning here, too, and will become more apparent in Figure 6-1 and Figure 6-2, below. Electoral participation in Sweden is typically very high. Variations in this participation rate, especially within groups with very high rates of participation, will therefore be very difficult to detect and explain in an analytical model.

The model of Table 6-4 as it stands now seems to suggest that what matters is closeness, and that it matters equally for all voters, irrespective of whether a voter actually cares for a particular party and rejects the other party, or whether these party preferences are less intense. Although the interpretation that only an across-the-board effect of closeness exists may be correct, there is also the risk that the operationalization of the variables is causing problems here.

The indicators for the three categories of voters may in fact work as a proxy for another individual characteristic, hinted at already in the previous paragraph, namely party attachment. Since the two-bloc division in Swedish politics comprises all political parties, Condemned voters may be differently described as "respondents who have not expressed a high evaluation for any of the political parties on offer" while Convinced voters are "respondents who clearly favor at least one party and reject one from the other bloc"⁴. This may have an unwanted effect on the analysis. To control for this, an analysis including information on party attachment was carried out. Whether the respondents considered themselves close to a political party or not was included in the model through a dichotomized variable⁵. The results are presented in Table 6-5.

Table 6-5 Sweden - Closeness and Electoral Participation 1979-1998, including Party Attachment

	'Traditional'		'Individual context'	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
<i>Age</i>	0.007	0.002	0.008	0.002
<i>Female</i>	0.389	0.064	0.327	0.065
<i>Education</i>				
<i>Middle vs. Lower</i>	0.265	0.080	0.286	0.081
<i>High vs. Middle</i>	0.341	0.091	0.334	0.091
<i>Income</i>	0.218	0.029	0.233	0.029
<i>Political Interest</i>	0.308	0.025	0.256	0.025
<i>Political Cynicism</i>	-0.094	0.023	-0.082	0.023
<i>Party Attachment</i>	0.900	0.071	0.665	0.074
<i>Closeness</i>	0.633	0.194	0.601	0.252
<i>Convinced voters</i>			0.287	0.119
<i>Convinced Interaction</i>			0.130	0.273
<i>Confounded voters</i>			-0.151	0.226
<i>Confounded Interaction</i>			0.455	0.558
<i>Condemned voters</i>			-0.623	0.109
<i>Condemned Interaction</i>			0.130	0.250
<i>Constant</i>	0.862	0.178	1.127	0.193
<i>Variation level 2 (election)</i>	0.019	0.014	0.023	0.016
<i>Likelihood</i>	-3322		-4134	
<i>R²_{dicho}</i>		.190		.208

Standard errors in italics. Bold figures indicate statistical significance at $p < .05$.

4 The difference with the British polity for example is that in Britain a Condemned respondent may still adamantly support a third party, while in Sweden there is no third 'bloc' on offer.

5 Introducing the party evaluation scores as a variable into the model would not be useful here, since by definition Convinced respondents will have a higher party evaluation score than Condemned respondents (see section 6.2, above).

The strong influence of Party Attachment on electoral participation has an impact on the other individual characteristics of the ‘traditional’ model: most the estimates show some change compared to the model presented in Table 6-4. The estimate for Age is reduced considerably, indicating that there is a substantial relationship between age and party attachment. The influence of education is increased, while the influence of political interest is reduced. The latter is hardly surprising as party attachment and political interest tend to be related. The estimate for Party Attachment is statistically significant, positive and of substantial size, as might be expected. The likelihood and pseudo-R² figures show a considerable improvement over the first model shown in Table 6-4. The aggregate influence of Closeness has decreased somewhat, although not by a great deal. It remains statistically significant.

The ‘Individual Context’ model presented in the next two columns of Table 6-5 shows comparable changes in estimates to the model presented in Table 6-4. Including the indicators for the different categories of voters decreases the estimate for Party Attachment, suggesting that there is indeed a relationship there. The changes in the other estimates is comparable to what we saw in the previous analyses.

The estimates for Convinced and Condemned voters do show some notable changes. Both estimates are substantially reduced. They remain statistically significant, however. This indicates that part of the influence of Party Attachment is indeed mediated through the Convinced and Condemned indicators. The model as it is presented now should therefore be a better representation of the actual process of electoral participation. The overall picture, however, remains unchanged. In Sweden, Closeness appears to affect the electorate uniformly, while Convinced voters show a distinctly higher propensity to vote and Condemned voters show a consistently lower likelihood of turning out. From the analyses presented here, we can conclude that the degree of closeness of the election does not influence these differences between categories of voters.

6.4 Predicting Electoral Participation

What do the above findings imply for the propensity to vote of the Swedish electorate? To what degree are voters more likely to turn out in close elections? In this section, the predicted chance of voting for a few stereotypical voters will be compared. Comparisons will be made for different categories of voters, as well as for different levels of closeness of the elections. We will see that the closeness of the election does affect voters of the different categories to different degrees, even though no significant interaction effects could be established in the analyses reported above.

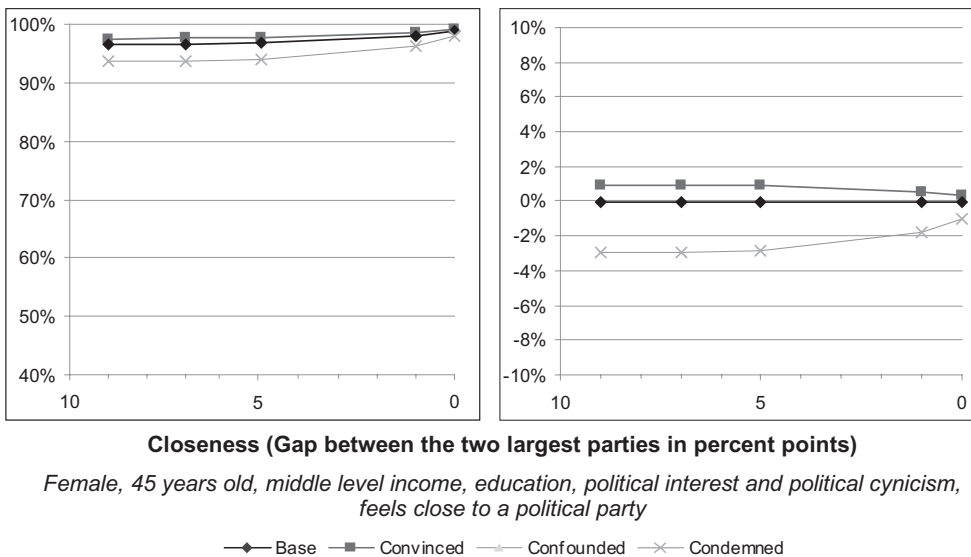
Before the predictions can be made, a model must be established from which to derive the predictions. The point of concern in establishing this model is whether to include the parameter estimates that were not found to be statistically significant in the analyses of Table 6-5. Including statistically non-significant parameters is acceptable if we argue that sample size and distribution are the main cause that these parameters are not statistically significant. However, we cannot be sure of this. Therefore, we adopt a cautious approach, and base our predictions on a model containing statistically significant results only. The predictions are therefore based on a re-estimated model, analogous to that of Table 6-5 but with the non-significant estimates removed. The estimates are largely comparable to those presented in Table 6-5, and are presented in Table 7, in the Appendix.

The degree of closeness is derived from actual opinion poll predictions for the elections.

The values of 9.3, 7, 5.4 and 1 percent correspond with the elections of 1998, 1988, 1991, 1985, respectively. A hypothetical close election with a gap of 0.5 percent is added for illustrative purposes.

Figure 6-1 shows the predicted chance to vote for a female respondent of 45 years of age with an average income (score of 0), middle levels of education, political interest and political cynicism (scores of 3), and who also feels close to a political party. The plotted lines represent such a respondent as a Base category, Convinced or Condemned voter. As no statistically significant estimates for Confounded voters were found, the predictions for Base and Confounded voters are identical.

Figure 6-1 Sweden - Predicted Chance to Vote for Different Categories of Voters (left), and Deviation from Chance Predicted for Base Category Voters (right).



The most striking feature of Figure 6-1 is of course the extremely high predicted probability of voting for each of the voter categories. Regardless of the closeness of the election, and regardless of whether our female voter is a Convinced or a Condemned voter, her predicted probability of voting is near 95 percent or over. At such levels of predicted participation, the impact of political context will be minimal. The left hand pane of Figure 6-1 shows a small increase in the chance to participate as the election becomes closer. The right hand panel shows that the differences between categories of voters diminish as the election becomes closer: extremely close elections ensure that this female voter stands an almost equally high chance of participation, regardless of what voter category she is part of. In elections that are less close, we see that Condemned voters fall behind the Base category and especially the Convinced voters. The following section will show a comparable pattern for some voters, but a decidedly different one for other voters.

6.4.1 High versus Low Involvement

Based on individual characteristics alone, some voters show a high propensity to vote, while others show a lower likelihood to participate. It is in the difference between these groups that the influence of the political context is best perceived. High political involvement leaves little room for outside influences. On the other hand, low political involvement means that the political context can play a crucial role in determining actual electoral participation.

Figure 6-2 Sweden - Predicted Chance to Vote for Different Categories of Voters with High Involvement (left), and Deviation from Chance Predicted for Base Category Voters with High Involvement (right).

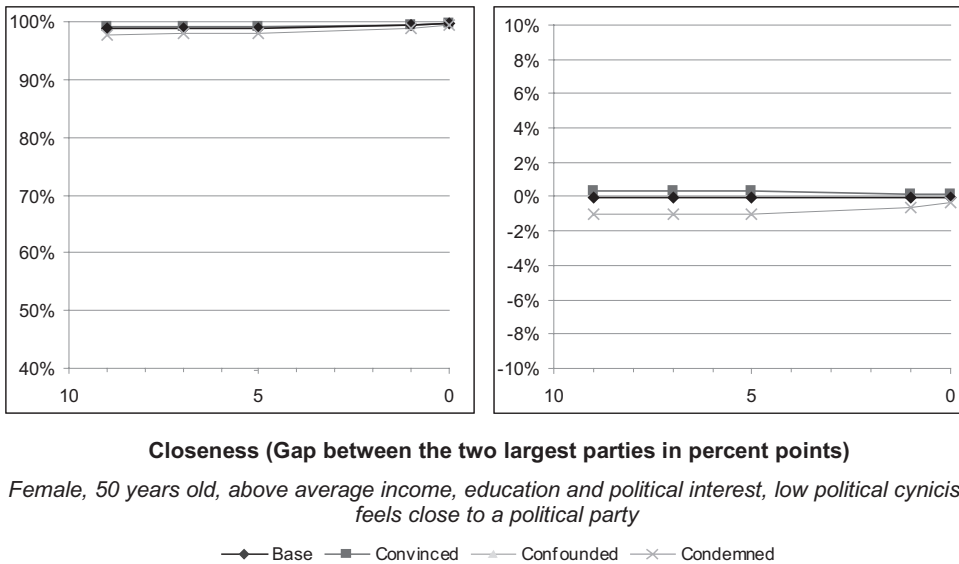
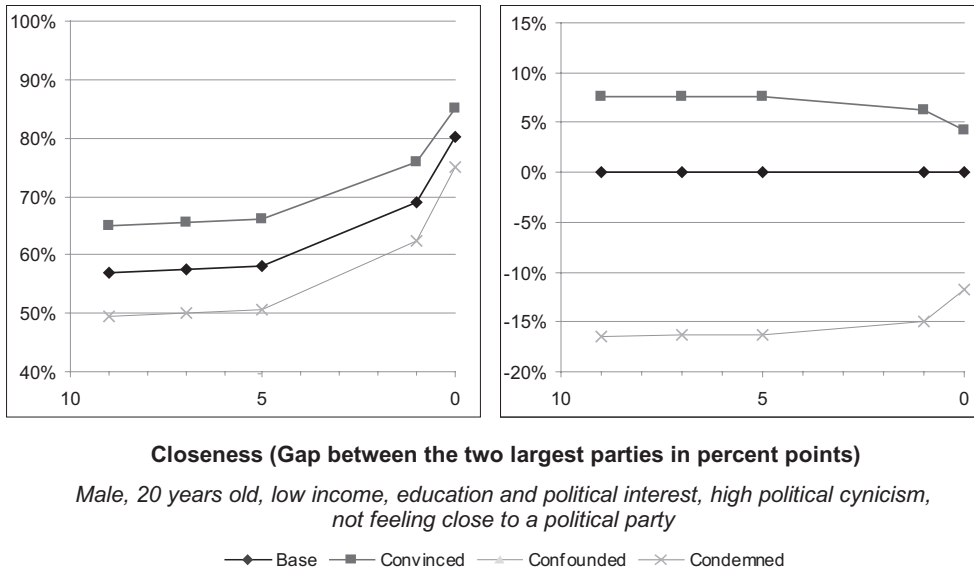


Figure 6-2 shows the predicted chance of voting for a 50 year old female with high education, above average income (score of 1), high political interest (score 5) and low political cynicism (score of 0) who feels close to a political party. This respondent is virtually guaranteed to vote, regardless of the closeness of the election, and regardless whether this is a Convinced, Confounded, Condemned or a Base category voter. The virtually straight lines in the left hand panel suggest only one thing: this person will vote, come what may. The right hand panel shows that the chance of participation for Condemned voters is nearly equal to that of Convinced and Base category voters. The story is completely different on the other end of the involvement spectrum, as is illustrated in the next figure.

Figure 6-3 shows the predicted probability to participate under different degrees of closeness for a 20 year old male, with low education, low income (-2) with low political interest (0) and a high political cynicism score (6) who does not feel close to a political party. This is a group of voters whose propensity of participation based on individual characteristics is low. Here, the closeness of the election is of great importance, and does increase the chance to participate by over 20 percent points.

Figure 6-3 Sweden - Predicted Chance to Vote for Different Categories of Voters with Low Involvement (left), and Deviation from Chance Predicted for Base Category Voters with Low Involvement (right).



As the right hand pane of Figure 6-3 shows, for voters with low political involvement it matters a great deal whether they are Convinced, Condemned or Base category voters - the differences between the categories call for an extended range on the X-axis. Although the differences decrease as the election becomes closer (as in Figure 6-1, above), substantial differences do remain, even in the closest election. The left hand panel of Figure 6-3 shows clearly how the political context (i.e., closeness) stimulates these voters to participate. From a high likelihood of abstention in elections that appear a foregone conclusion, a close election can boost the chance of voting beyond 70 or 80 percent, making participation much more likely.

Figures 6-2 and 6-3 imply that variation in turnout levels across elections is not likely to be explained by the very politically involved. They are likely to vote in every election, regardless of the closeness of the race or other political context factors. Variation in context does not generate variation in participation, for these voters. The key to the ebb and flow of turnout levels can be found with the politically less involved. That is the section of the electorate that will be likely to participate in some, but not in all elections⁶. Contextual characteristics, such as the closeness of the election, will help determine whether these voters will participate or not. It is here that we should turn our attention if we want to explain why some elections show a record turnout, while others show a lackluster participation.

6 Establishing the size of this part of the electorate can give us an insight into the degree of turnout variation we can expect in elections. If a large part of the electorate is susceptible to contextual influences, we can expect large variations in turnout between elections. Establishing the size of this segment of the electorate falls beyond the scope of the current research, however.

6.5 Predicting Turnout Levels

Section 6.3 showed that closeness affects electoral participation in Sweden. In fact, Section 6.3 showed that all voters are affected by closeness in Sweden. Does this mean that the Individual Context model, in which the influence of closeness can vary between voters, is no improvement over the ‘traditional’ model? In this section, we will examine whether the Individual Context model improves our ability to predict turnout at the aggregate level, compared to the ‘traditional’ model.

The procedure is comparable to the predictions presented in Section 5.4 of Chapter 5. The predicted turnout is estimated, based on the Individual Context and the ‘traditional’ model, and for each election the turnout estimates are compared with the actual turnout⁷. The basis for the predictions is the ‘traditional’ model presented in Table 6-5 (including party attachment information), and the Individual Context prediction model used for the predictions of the previous section (including statistically significant results only, see Table 7 of the Appendix).

Table 6-6 presents the turnout level as predicted by the ‘traditional’ model and the Individual Context model, followed by actual election turnout. The last column presents that average absolute deviation in predicted and actual turnout per model.

Table 6-6 Sweden - Turnout (percentages), Actual and Predicted by Traditional and Individual-context Model and Average Absolute Deviance to Actual Turnout (percentage points)

Year	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	Deviance
<i>Traditional model</i>	89.6	89.2	88.9	84.9	85.5	85.9	81.8	1.13
<i>Individual-Context model</i>	89.6	89.3	89.0	85.0	85.6	86.0	81.9	1.08
<i>Actual turnout</i>	90.7	91.4	89.9	86.0	86.7	86.8	81.4	-

As for Great Britain (see Table 5-10), Table 6-6 shows that the differences in predicted turnout between the two models are small. Comparing with Table 5-10, we see that the Swedish model predicts more accurately than the British models. In Table 6-6 a clear pattern can be detected. The Individual Context model is most accurate overall, as the smaller average deviance score indicates. In addition, the Individual Context model is more accurate in predicting turnout than the ‘traditional’ model in all elections except 1998 election, as Figure 6-4 emphasizes.

⁷ As was the case for Great Britain, the predictions were weighted (to allow for aggregate level predictions) in SPSS, while the individual level predictions were produced in MLwiN (cf. Note 24, Chapter 5).

Figure 6-4: Sweden - Predicted Turnout Levels, Deviation from Actual Turnout

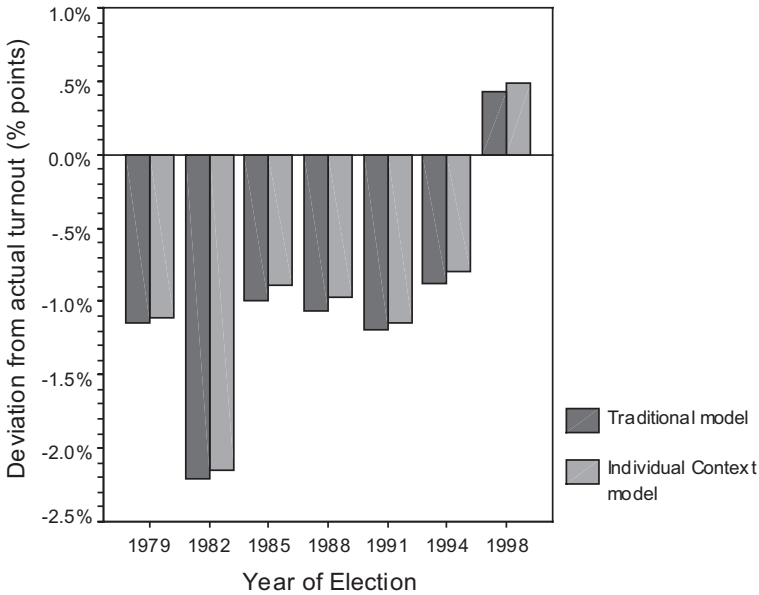


Figure 6-4 presents the predicted turnout rates as deviations from the actual election outcome. We see that the Swedish model has a tendency to under-estimate actual turnout. Figure 6-4 shows clearly that, with the exception of the 1998 elections, the Individual Context model provides more accurate turnout predictions than the ‘traditional’ model does.

6.6 Conclusions

Chapter 4 showed that closeness is an extremely good predictor of electoral participation in Sweden at the aggregate level. This chapter aimed to examine whether variation in that influence could be established at the individual level, or whether that influence is uniform for the whole electorate. The previous chapter showed that individual level variation in the influence of closeness could be established in Great Britain.

The analysis of the current chapter showed a clear across-the-board effect of closeness, influencing Convinced, Confounded, and Condemned as well as Base category voters. Individual variation in the impact of electoral closeness could not be established. All interaction terms between the degree of closeness and the three categories of voters proved not to be statistically significant. This may be caused by the limitations in the data available. The small numbers of Confounded respondents available for analysis make it unlikely that we will find significant estimates. Whether the same holds true for the interaction terms for Convinced and Condemned voters cannot so easily be argued. Both categories of voters represent sizable numbers of respondents. Data limitations may therefore appear a gratuitous excuse too easily made. Unfortunately, however, this excuse cannot be summarily discarded.

Although the number of respondents in the Convinced and Confounded category is sizable, it is possible that this number is still not sufficient to detect variation in turnout when ‘smeared out’ over the seven different elections by the interaction effect. Especially since

only a small percentage of respondents are non-voters. The typically high rates of participation in Sweden make the detection of turnout variation more difficult. This situation is exacerbated by a typical trait of election studies in general: reported electoral participation tends to exceed actual turnout figures. For Sweden, the result is extremely high reported turnout, ranging from 90 to as high as 95 percent. As a consequence, the number of non-voters in the sample is small, smaller than in the actual population. The percentage of non-voters that exist in each of the voter categories will thus also be smaller in the sample than in the actual population. In any case, the distribution is heavily skewed. Together, these data limitations hinder the detection of statistically significant results. The superior aggregate level turnout predictions of the Individual Context model presented in Section 6.5 also show that it is perhaps too rash to dismiss individual level variation in the influence of closeness for Sweden.

We must not rule out another explanation, which is that in Sweden all categories voters are affected by closeness. Because the race affects the whole of the party spectrum, the whole of the electorate may be affected as well - with the exception only of the small part of the electorate that turns their back to any and all of the political parties. Because the two-bloc structure comprises all political parties from the moment they become established players at the political stage, supporters of all of these parties are therefore likely to be affected by the closeness of the election. Voters in Sweden are thus left with two choices. Either take the anti-system emergency exit, and withdraw completely from the electoral system. As the high rates of turnout show, this option is not taken up by many. The other option is to support one of the parties in either of the two blocs. A choice that is widely made by voters in Sweden, and is likely to make them responsive to the degree of closeness of the election. Figures 6-2 and 6-3 show us that the degree of this influence is heavily dependent on individual characteristics, but the uniform direction of the influence of closeness suggests that whenever it rains in Sweden, everyone gets wet.

seven

Conclusions and Discussion: What About the Rain?

In this chapter the implications of the research presented in this book will be discussed. As the concluding sections of the various chapters contain summaries of their findings, this chapter will not reiterate these again. Rather, a set of more general concerns will be addressed. The first section discusses whether it is always necessary to analyze contextual effects at the individual level. The second section discusses who may be affected by contextual characteristics, and the third and last section considers the conceptualization of political context.

7.1 Context and Individual - A Close Enough Look?

The main subject of this dissertation is the influence of political context on the individual voter. It is argued that the influence of contextual factors is not equal for all voters. Some voters will be more affected by contextual factors than others. The extent to which voters are affected by the political context is determined by their individual characteristics. These cause some voters to remain virtually immune to the context of the election. In terms of the specific dependent variable investigated here, electoral participation, such voters will either vote regardless of what the election is about, while others will not vote at all, no matter what electoral circumstances. These certain voters or certain non-voters are beyond the influence of contextual factors.

However, there is also a segment of the electorate that is affected by the context of the election. For this part of the electorate, the probability of participation in an election is influenced by the particular circumstances of the election. Chapters 5 and 6 showed that specific parts of the electorate in Great Britain and Sweden, termed "Convinced" voters, are more likely to participate in an election if their favored party might just about win the election. In close elections, where the leading parties are in a neck and neck race, supporters of each of these leading parties show a greater probability to vote than in elections where the race is not as close. These Convinced voters see their probability to vote affected by a contextual characteristic, i.e. the closeness of the election.

The analyses of Chapters 5 and 6 also showed that not all people are equally strongly affected by the closeness of the election. For people who do not support any of the parties in the lead, the so-called "Condemned" voters, it made little difference whether the election was close or not. Their willingness to participate was not affected a great deal. They were not completely unaffected: an overall tendency of increased electoral participation was established for close elections, affecting this group of Condemned voters as well. But the degree to which this segment of the electorate was influenced by the closeness of the election fell far behind the effects noted for Convinced voters.

We may therefore conclude that the central argument of this book is upheld. Voters are indeed influenced by contextual characteristics, by factors connected to the election as such. And the degree to which they are affected by these factors is determined by their individual characteristics. In the examples examined in this book, it was shown that an individual's party affiliation and party support influence whether or not they are affected by the closeness of the election, and if so, to what degree¹.

Having established that contextual characteristics do indeed affect individual voters, and to different degrees, this inevitably begs the question: does it make a difference? Do we improve our understanding of the processes that determine electoral participation if we take the electoral context into account? The answer to this depends on how we wish to determine what constitutes an improvement.

The 'standard' approach to determine whether an alternative analytical model is an improvement over the existing model is to look at the amount of variance explained by the new and improved model, usually summarized by some kind of model fit-statistics, such as, an R-square estimate. For this measure, bigger is better, so a new and more complex model should be justified by a substantial increase in variance explained. Rated by this standard, the Individual-Context model proposed in this book is something of a disappointment. The variance explained was certainly higher for this model than it was for the simpler and more 'traditional' models in the analyses presented in Chapters 5 and 6. The R-square estimate increased - but not by a substantial amount. However, we did see substantial improvement on another count.

Section 2.5 of Chapter 2 presented predictions of turnout levels based on the competing models. One model contained information on individual voters only, while the alternative model contained information on individual voters combined with contextual level information of the elections. The two models were tested by determining how well they could reproduce the actual turnout levels of the elections analyzed. The results were presented in Table 2-4 and Figure 2-1. These results showed that the Context & Individual model performed substantially better in predicting turnout rates than the 'traditional' model. In all but one election, the Context & Individual model outperformed the 'traditional' model by predicting turnout rates that were considerably closer to the actual election turnout rates. In other words, the new model appeared to add little to variance explained at the individual level, but for predicting aggregate levels of turnout the Context & Individual model is a definite improvement. It is therefore better able to shed light on turnout variations from one election to another, a notoriously weak point of more 'traditional' models that only consider information from individual voters.

The benefit of combining individual and contextual information in a single model is thus established. But is it always necessary to go into such a detailed analysis as presented in Chapters 5 and 6 to answer questions on political context? In these two chapters, not only was contextual information added to the model, but the *influence* of this contextual information was also expected to vary at the individual level in a model dubbed the Individual-Context model. The turnout predictions for Swedish elections in Section 6.5 of the previous chapter

¹ That is, for Great Britain and Sweden. For the Netherlands, the influence of closeness proved not to be statistically significant or even run counter to expectations (cf. Table 2-3). We must keep in mind, however, that the analyses presented in Chapter Two paid only limited attention to potential individual level variation in the effect of closeness.

showed that the Individual-Context model improved our accuracy in predicting turnout. Turnout predictions for the British elections presented in Section 5.4 of Chapter 5, however, did not show such an unequivocal improvement. Is the level of detail of the Individual-Context model always required to establish whether a contextual factor will influence electoral participation in country A or Country B, in Election X or Election Y? The answer depends on the specific aims of the analyst, as well as on the characteristics of the electorate.

Chapter 4 showed that the closeness of the election has an effect on turnout rates in several countries, among which Great Britain and Sweden. In principle, this suffices if all we desire is to answer the question whether closeness has an effect on turnout in Britain or Sweden: it does. If we ask the same question for the Dutch electorate, or for Germany with regards to supporters of the small FDP or Grünen party, the answer - based on the analysis of Chapter 4 - is negative. But, as Chapter 3 argued, the latter conclusion may be misleading. Composition effects of the electorate may hinder our perception here.

Chapter 3 offered a theoretical examination of the influence of closeness at the individual level. Four categories of voters were presented, three of which we dubbed Convinced, Confounded and Condemned voters, next to a remaining Base category of voters. These categories of voters react in different ways to the closeness of an election. The analyses of Chapters 5 and 6 showed two clear findings. Convinced voters have a greater propensity of voting in a close election, while Condemned voters do not react strongly to the closeness of the race. The composition of the electorate determines how easily these individual level effects can be detected at the aggregate level as well. If the segment of Convinced voters in the electorate is sufficiently large, turnout levels will reflect the responsiveness of this category of voters to the closeness of the election. If the segment of Convinced voters is not so large, and Condemned voters make up a large part of the electorate, the closeness of the election will only affect a small part of the electorate. Its small size may obstruct the detection of this individual-level effect in the aggregate. In Germany, the race of small parties against the five percent threshold that must be overcome to acquire parliamentary representation affects only a small part of the electorate - not large enough to be discernable at the aggregate level. In the multi-party system of the Netherlands, a substantial segment of the electorate supports parties that are not in the lead. For these Condemned voters, the closeness of the election is hardly relevant.

If all we want to know is whether the closeness of the election affects turnout in the Netherlands, the aggregate level analyses of Chapter 4 suffice. If we want to know whether the closeness of the election - or any other contextual factor - influences Dutch voters, we need to dig deeper. For contextual factors that affect only part of the electorate, or for which it is unclear how many voters are affected and in what way, an individual level analysis is required. That analysis will have to combine contextual and individual level information in a single model, and that model has to allow for individual level variation in the effect of the contextual factor of interest.

Aggregate level analyses proved sufficient in determining whether closeness of the election is of influence in Great Britain or Sweden. However, the individual level analyses of Chapters 5 and 6 show that the situation is somewhat more complex than the picture portrayed at the aggregate level. For Great Britain, Chapter 5 showed that some parts of the electorate, the Convinced voters, are indeed affected to a considerable degree by the closeness of the election. Other parts of the electorate, i.e., the Condemned voters, were at the same time

hardly affected by this closeness. Aggregate level analysis is unable to detect such individual level variation. For Sweden, the picture was comparable to that of Great Britain at the aggregate level, but not at the individual level. Chapter 6 showed that the influence of the closeness of the election varies little between different categories of voters in Sweden. Virtually the entire electorate turned out to be affected by closeness to the same degree, in contrast to British case. Again, only individual level analyses can determine this. The findings of this dissertation demonstrate that whether a contextual factor - such as the closeness of the election - has an influence that varies between voters is an empirical question that cannot be answered by aggregate level analyses.

Whether we care about individual level variation or only about aggregate level effects is not only contingent on our research question, but it also carries a normative component. The way in which context has different consequences for the electoral participation of various segments of a society has ramifications for the extent to which elections attain the democratic ideal of political equality. Consider the example of weekday versus Sunday voting, discussed in Section 3.2.2. There it was argued that some parts of the electorate may be more likely to vote in elections on Sunday, while others, such as for instance devout Christians, may object to Sunday voting and consequently participate in smaller numbers. If these two segments of the electorate are of equal size, the contextual effect will balance out at the aggregate level, and turnout, in quantitative terms, will be equal to weekday elections. In qualitative terms, there is likely to be a substantial difference, however. If devout Christians tend to support specific political parties, the outcome of an election held on Sundays is likely to differ from weekday elections.

The norm of political equality is clearly violated if large inequalities exist in electoral participation. Whether or not such equalities exist, and whether or not they are related to contextual factors, cannot be determined by aggregate level analyses, and therefore requires individual level analyses.

7.1.1 Explaining Between-country Differences

The argument of the previous section is also helpful in understanding the between-country variation in turnout levels shown in Figure 1-2 of Chapter 1. The consequence of country differences in contextual characteristics is that voters are confronted with different circumstances, and therefore show different behavior, leading to on average higher turnout in one country, and lower turnout in another.

Figure 1-2 shows that, even though substantial variation in turnout exists between elections within a single country, it may easily be surpassed in magnitude by between-country differences. In this figure, turnout is structurally lowest in Great Britain. These differences between countries should not be attributed to characteristics inherent to the people of each of them. There is no reason to assume that the British are by nature less interested in politics, or the Swedes are cognitively superior to the Dutch, and so forth. Rather, these differences are the consequences of political and systemic circumstances - the electoral context - that *are* different between Sweden, the Netherlands and Great Britain. For example, in Sweden we saw that large segments of the electorate are affected by the closeness of the election, since the two-bloc structure implies that all parties are part of the race. Large segments of the electorate are therefore more motivated to participate when the race between the two blocs is a close one. In the Netherlands, large segments of the electorate are *not* affected by the

closeness of the election, since their favored party is not in the lead. However, because of the proportional representation system in the Netherlands, these third parties still remain viable government parties and attractive options to voters. In Great Britain the majority system ensures that any voter who wants to vote for a potential government party sees his or her choice limited to two parties at the national level. The British constituency system also implies that such a voter might even be without a favored party option at the local level, since the party of their choice might not run, or stand no chance of winning in the local constituency. These are but a few examples of the differences in circumstances voters are confronted with in different countries.

The consequences of varying electoral contexts contribute to the explanation why in some countries large segments of the electorate refrain from voting, while in other countries virtually the whole of the electorate participates. British voters are not instinctively less inclined to vote, but they cast their vote under circumstances that more often provide disincentives to vote than is the case for Dutch or Swedish voters.

7.2 Who may be Affected?

In the opening section of this chapter, the argument from Chapters 5 and 6 was repeated (cf. Figure 5-2 and 5-3 of Chapter 5, and Figure 6-2 and 6-3 of Chapter 6) that contextual characteristics do not influence all voters, but only a particular segment of the electorate. This segment consists of those voters whose participation in the election is not a certainty - we may call it the *occasional electorate*. This occasional electorate participates in some elections, but not in others. Whether these occasional voters participate in the particular election at hand is determined by the characteristics of that election². In other words, the electoral participation of the occasional electorate is dependent upon the context of the election.

To explain variation in turnout over different elections in a single country, we have to look at the occasional electorate. By participating in greater numbers in one election while failing to do so in another, it is this segment of the electorate that is mainly responsible for changes in turnout³. These voters determine the ebb and flow of turnout rates. Habitual voters, who participate in every election, do not cause variation in turnout. Neither do abstainers, who never participate.

The size of the occasional segment of the electorate may of course vary over time. Such variation is likely to be the result of changing political circumstances that modify voters' certainties or preferences. Compositional changes may also be the result of cohort replacement, when the influx of young voters and the dying off of the old change the proportions of the various electoral segments.

The composition of the electorate with regard to habitual voters, habitual abstainers and occasional voters could offer us valuable insights into the turnout rates we may expect in a given political system. The composition of the electorate may tell us what maximum and

2 "Characteristics" here refer to the *values* of specific elections on *variables* that are used to describe elections.

3 In addition to contextual characteristics affecting the occasional voters and hence turnout, one can also think of chance as a process that determines whether or not *any* voter turns out to vote. This formulation leaves open the possibility to regard 'chance' as the set of omitted relevant variables (cf. King, Keohane & Verba, Chapter 2). However, chance is, by definition, not expected to influence turnout *systematically*.

minimum levels of turnout may be attained. The degree of variation to be expected is determined by the size of the occasional electorate compared to the size of the habitual voters segment. A small occasional segment of the electorate can only create minor turnout variations, while systems with a large occasional segment of the electorate may face far greater turnout fluctuations.

From the considerations above it follows that it would be attractive for further empirical research to have individual-level indicators for these segments. To a certain extent, an indication of the size of the occasional electorate may be derived from observed turnout rates and variation therein. But such derivations will most likely be very imprecise, and can at best only be proxies for what is essentially an individual level characteristic: the degree of certainty of a voters' electoral participation.

With such an instrument, the probability of electoral participation for all members of the electorate could be measured. Ideally, such an indicator would be comparable between systems and over time, so that it could contribute to comparative research on turnout and electoral participation.

Through the use of such a measure, aggregate measures could be constructed to describe political systems. The size of the occasional electorate might be calculated and used as an explanatory variable in between-country or over-time comparative research. But such a measure of the certainty of electoral participation would also be of interest at the individual level. As a dependent variable, to determine what are the most important factors determining electoral participation, or the intention to participate. But it could also be used as a mediating variable in the sort of research that has been carried out in this book, establishing the influence of contextual factors on individual behavior.

The development of indicators such as the certainty of electoral participation is a matter of further research. Franklin (2003) suggests that we look at psychological lock-in processes. According to his argument, choosing for a particular behavioral option, e.g., voting or non-voting, increases the chance of choosing that same option again at a future occasion. After having chosen for the same option uninterruptedly in a series of successive occasions, "lock-in" would occur, i.e., approaching certainty (chance=1) to choose that same option again at future occasions. Lock-in would remove a person from the occasional electorate to the ranks of the habitual voters, or the habitual non-voters. Obviously, new voters entering the electorate will necessarily form part of the occasional electorate. But older voters may be part of that segment as well.

Another option to establish an indicator for the certainty to vote is to look at past electoral participation. When taking into account participation in first- as well as second-order elections, a measure with sufficient predictive power may conceivably be achieved. A drawback of such a retrospective measure is of course that it is likely to be less accurate for younger voters, simply because their vote record is not as extensive as that of older generations. And first time voters would have no record of voting at all. Moreover, memory effects and social desirability could generate bias towards high certainty. Such deficiencies in the measuring instrument could in part be amended by adding information from additional individual characteristics such as education or political interest. But one can also think of a newly developed scale, measuring a voter's attitude towards electoral participation, or a probability to vote question - measuring just that.

7.3 Conceptualizing Political Context

This book has examined the influence of the political context on individual behavior, and the interplay between individual and contextual level effects on electoral participation. It was argued and demonstrated that an integration of contextual and individual level information improves our understanding of individual level behavior. Although the empirical analyses in this book focused on electoral participation, the argument is not restricted to this domain. Many of the fundamental research questions in the social sciences consider the behavior of individuals within their social context. To examine individual behavior, we need to examine the context as well.

To examine the context, we need to know what we are talking about. That is less trivial than it sounds. Often the outcome of an election is explained by referring to particular events connected with the election. The candidates may be particularly dull, the economy might be booming or a political party may have gone through an internal power struggle. *Ad hoc* explanations are offered to account for the outcome of a particular election. Such 'explanations' are popular in the media, when a quick interpretation of current affairs is needed. But even in electoral research such explanations are at times offered, when for instance outcomes from single election analyses need to be brought in agreement with existing knowledge. This is not the kind of contextual interpretation that will bring us forward in our understanding of electoral behavior. Unique, *ad hoc* explanations do not help us to arrive at an adequate characterization of elections. Only when we are able to establish what makes a particular election unique in terms that are also applicable to other elections, can we start to compare elections. By comparing elections in terms of a set of concepts applied to all of them, we can address the question how much of the variation in turnout may be attributed to what contextual characteristics of a particular election.

What comparative electoral research thus needs are concepts and associated measures that describe relevant aspects of the political context, in a way that allows us to compare between elections. When using these contextual characteristics in individualized ways, as illustrated in Chapters 5 and 6, we can determine why some elections see high turnout, while some see a lower turnout.

A substantial number of contextual indicators is already available for research. Most of these indicators describe system characteristics, such as type of electoral system, number of political parties, degree of proportionality, day of the week elections are held and so forth. These are characteristics that are typically very stable: they show little variation within a political system. As a consequence, such indicators work quite well in explaining between-system variations in turnout - e.g., why turnout is consistently higher in Sweden than in Great Britain - but they are of little use in explaining why the Dutch election of 1981 saw a substantially higher turnout than the 1982 election. Indicators for contextual characteristics that can explain these short-term turnout variations are in much shorter supply. Not because the data is more difficult to come by, but rather because the theory behind these indicators is largely non-existent. We often do not know very well what it is that makes turnout high in one election and low in the next, if we refrain from *ad hoc* explanations.

One of the characteristics that can help to explain short-term turnout fluctuations was examined in this book. It was shown that the closeness of the election can help us explain

why voters participate in some elections, and not in others, and hence why certain elections see higher turnout rates than others. To do so, the concept of the closeness of an election was extended beyond the typical two-party race. It was shown that the concept of closeness can be applied to two-party, but also to multi-party, systems and that the 'race' may be between two parties, two blocs of parties, a number of parties versus one party, or even a single party against an electoral or self-imposed threshold. This extension of the concept of closeness also showed that this characteristic is applicable to more than just a single country, and that it can in fact be used in comparative research. The comparability of the measure between countries required some attention, but did not prove to be impossible.

Comparative electoral research has provided a few other suggestions of contextual characteristics that may exert short-term influences on turnout. A number of these were referred to in Chapter 2. The time since a previous election, the premature collapse of a government coalition or pre-election coalition agreements were three contextual characteristics that were examined for the Netherlands, in addition to the closeness of the election. Other contextual explanations have been suggested in the literature. The concept of first and second order national elections has been used to describe elections that are of importance or of less importance to the general electorate. It was developed to explain the low turnout rates witnessed for European Parliament elections in countries that were accustomed to substantially higher turnout rates in national Parliamentary elections, but the concept is equally well applicable to other settings. Congressional elections in the USA see considerable variation in turnout between years when the elections are held in concurrence with Presidential elections, and 'off-years', when they are not.

The contextual characteristics mentioned here are examples of contextual characteristics that have proved informative in explaining between-election turnout variation. These constitute, however, a rather small set. In the metaphor of this research, all kinds of precipitation can be distinguished, according to temperature, volume, duration and physical appearance. What we refer to as hail, snow, sleet or rain can be distinguished in degrees of volume (from torrential rain to drizzle), duration, temperature and additional factors such as wind-velocity. Depending on all these characteristics, different individual reactions will vary in their efficiency to keep us dry. In much the same way, we need to be able to characterize the (short-term) political, social and economic contexts that characterize elections, and that affect us in varying degrees - depending on individual characteristics.

A first step may be formed by taking stock of all the *ad hoc* explanations of turnout offered by the media, politicians and political scientist after any election, and attempting to operationally define these into characteristics that can be applied to every election. These, then, may form the inspiration for further research into the influence of contextual characteristics on individual voters and electoral outcomes, such as turnout.

appendix

The appendix contains technical details on the variables and datasets used, as well as additional tables referred to in the text.

Variables and Data

The Netherlands

The analyses of Chapter 2 are based on data gathered for the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (DPES, referred to in Dutch as NKO). The DPES are an enterprise of the Dutch political science community united in Dutch Electoral research foundation SKON (before 1989: NKO). Data is archived at the NIWI/Steinmetz Archive in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. In the table below, Study ID numbers refer to the Steinmetz Archive. All election studies are titled Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (followed by year of election).

Table 1 The Netherlands - DPES Studies Overview

<i>Year</i>	<i>Principle Investigators</i>	<i>Steinmetz Archive ID</i>
1972	NKO: L.P.J. de Bruyn, J.W. Foppen	P0353
1977	NKO: G.A. Irwin, J. Verhoef, C.J. Wiebrens	P0354
1981	NKO: C. van der Eijk, B. Niemöller, A. Th. J. Eggen	P0350
1982	NKO: C. van der Eijk, M.J. Koopman, B. Niemöller	P0633A
1986	NKO: C. van der Eijk, G.A. Irwin, B. Niemöller	P0866
1989	SKON: H. Anker, E.V. Oppenhuis	P1000
1994	SKON: H. Anker, E.V. Oppenhuis	P1208
1998	SKON: K. Aarts, H. van der Kolk, M. Kamp	P1415

The variables employed in the analyses of Chapter 2 are defined as follows.

Age

Age in years

Female:

Coded zero for men, 1 for women

Class

Based on EGP-index (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992). If not available from original DPES dataset, based on Nieuwbeerta & Ganzenboom, (1996).

Education

Two dummy indicators distinguish primary, secondary and tertiary level education.

Base category is primary education. Dummy indicators are contrast coded:

- Secondary level dummy-indicator signifies education at least secondary level (scored positive for respondents with secondary and tertiary level education)
- Tertiary level dummy-indicator scored positive for tertiary level education

Parameter estimates for the dummy indicators indicate the influence of an additional level of education (e.g., secondary vs. primary, tertiary vs. secondary). To assess the influence of tertiary level education compared to primary level education, the parameters estimates for secondary and tertiary level education need to be added up. Respondents for which no information on educational level was ascertained were added to the base (primary) category, while an additional dummy variable was coded positive for this group (zero for respondents for which the educational level was ascertained).

Lowest Income Quartile

Coded positive for respondents with household income within lowest quartile (determined per sample), zero for all other respondents.

Respondents for which no income was ascertained were coded zero (base category), while an additional dummy variable was coded positive for this group (zero for respondents for which income was ascertained).

Religion

Four dummy-variables indicating Catholic, Dutch Reformed, Calvinist and 'other' religions. Scored positive where applicable, zero if not applicable. Base category is 'not religious'.

Church attendance:

Dummy-indicators signifying church attendance on weekly or monthly basis. Scored positive where applicable, zero if not applicable

Union member

Scored positive if labor union member, zero for all other respondents.

Party attachment

Coded positive if respondent expressed a preference for a political party.

Political interest

Five-point, additive index-score, based on Mokken-scales of four separate items. (Anker & Oppenhuis, 1995, pp. 323-330).

Political efficacy

Five-point, additive index-score, based on Mokken-scales of four separate items. (Anker & Oppenhuis, 1995, pp. 323-330).

Government collapse

Coded positive if election followed after the collapse of the government coalition, zero for all other elections.

Time since previous election

Time since previous parliamentary election in years, divided by 4. Four years is the normal Parliamentary term in the Netherlands.

Coalition seeks re-election

Coded positive if incumbent coalition made an expressed wish to continue after the election, zero for all other elections.

Closeness of the election

Defined as 1 divided by the gap between the two largest parties in last NIPO opinion poll before the election.

Great Britain

Data used for the analyses of Chapter 5 are from the British Election Studies (BES, also referred to as British General Election Studies BGES).

Table 2 Great Britain - BES Studies Overview

<i>Year</i>	<i>Principle Investigators</i>	<i>Data ID</i>
1970	D. Butler, D.E. Stokes	ICPSR 7250
1974 Feb	I. Crewe, B. Särilvik, J. Alt	ICPSR 7868
1974 Oct	I. Crewe, B. Särilvik, J. Alt	ICPSR 7870
1979	I. Crewe, B. Särilvik, D. Robertson	ICPSR 8196
1983	A. Heath, R. Jowell, J.K. Curtice, E. Field	ICPSR 8409
1987	A. Heath, R. Jowell, J.K. Curtice	ESRC 2568
1992	A. Heath, R. Jowell, J.K. Curtice, J. A. Brand, J.C. Mitchell	ESRC 2981
1997	A. Heath, R. Jowell, J.K. Curtice, P. Norris	ESRC 3887

ICPSR=Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, Ann Arbor (Mi) USA
ESRC= ESRC Data Archive, University of Essex, Colchester (UK)

The variables employed in the analyses of Chapter 5 are defined as follows.

Age

Age in years

Female:

Coded zero for men, 1 for women

Education

Predicted value (Y-hat) of electoral participation in OLS regression model with education indicators as predictive variables (cf. note 12, Chapter 5).

All available education indicators per BES survey were turned into dummy-variables and entered as independent variables in the OLS regression model.

Political interest

Predicted value (Y-hat) of electoral participation in OLS regression model with political indicators as predictive variables (cf. operationalization of Education, above). "Don't know" and "no answer" codes on political interest indicator questions were recoded to the lowest political interest score on the variable concerned, before introduction into the OLS regression model.

Income

Standardized respondents' household income. Transformed by taking the natural log of the respondents' income after dividing by the mean survey income. An exception is the 1983 survey for which only a subjective 'perceived distance to average income' is ascertained, (far below average income, below, average, above, far above average

income). The variable was recoded from 1 to 6, respectively, before transformation as noted above. Respondents for which no income information was ascertained were coded as having a mean income. A separate dummy-indicator was coded positive if no income was ascertained, zero for all respondents for which income was ascertained.

Voter categories.

These are based on party evaluation scores, with dummy variables being constructed to indicate the three categories of voters. For the national level, the two largest parties are invariably Labour and the Conservatives. For the constituency level, the actual election outcome in the constituency was used to determine the two largest parties.

The Base category is the complement of the other three categories defined. Operationalization for the different surveys are as follows.

1970

Party evaluation score, 0-100 scale.

Convinced voter

Coded positive if evaluation score is 80 or greater for one leading party, and equal or smaller than 50 for other leading party.

Confounded voter

Coded positive if evaluation score is 80 or greater for both leading parties.

Condemned voter

Coded positive if evaluation score is 50 or lower for both leading parties.

1974 February, 1974 October, 1979, 1997

Party evaluation score, 0-10 scale.

Convinced voter

Coded positive if evaluation score is 8 or greater for one leading party, and equals or smaller than 5 for other leading party.

Confounded voter

Coded positive if evaluation score is 8 or greater for both leading parties.

Condemned voter

Coded positive if evaluation score is 5 or lower for both leading parties.

1983

No party evaluation score for all parties was included. Therefore, indicators were constructed using strength and direction of (positive and negative) party identification.

Convinced voter

Coded positive if respondent expressed strength of party identification as 'fairly strong' or 'very strong' for one leading party, and 'very strongly against' the other leading party.

Confounded voter

Coded positive if respondent expressed strength of party identification 'fairly strong' or 'very strong' for one leading party, and 'not really against' other leading party.

Condemned voter

Coded positive if 'very strongly against' both leading parties.

1987, 1992

Party evaluation score, five-point scale (strongly in favor, in favor, neither in favor or against, against, strongly against).

Convinced voter

Coded positive if strongly in favor of one leading party, and against or strongly against other leading party.

Confounded voter

Coded positive if strongly in favor of both leading parties.

Condemned voter

Coded positive if against or strongly against both leading parties.

Closeness

Defined as 1 divided by the gap between the largest parties. Opinion poll data used for the national level, actual constituency outcomes at the constituency level.

Sweden

Data used for the analyses of Chapter 6 are from the Swedish election studies. All data identification refers to the Swedish Social Science Data Service (SSD) in Göteborg, Sweden

Table 3 Sweden - Swedish Election Studies Overview

Year	Principle Investigators	SSD Data ID
1979	S. Holmberg	0089
1982	S. Holmberg	0157
1985	S. Holmberg, M. Gilljam	0217
1988	S. Holmberg, M. Gilljam	0227
1991	S. Holmberg, M. Gilljam	0391
1994	S. Holmberg, M. Gilljam	0570
1998	S. Holmberg	0750

The variables employed in the analyses of Chapter 6 are defined as follows.

Age

Age in years

Female

Coded zero for men, 1 for women

Education

Comparable to analyses of Chapter 2. Two dummy indicators distinguish primary, secondary and tertiary level education. Base category is primary education. Dummy indicators are contrast coded:

- Secondary level dummy-indicator signifies education at least secondary level (scored positive for respondents with secondary and tertiary level education)
- Tertiary level dummy-indicator scored positive for tertiary level education

Parameter estimates for the dummy indicators indicate the influence of an additional

level of education (e.g., secondary vs. primary, tertiary vs. secondary). To assess the influence of tertiary level education compared to primary level education, the parameters estimates for secondary and tertiary level education need to be added up.

Income

Comparable to analyses of Chapter 5. Standardized respondents' household income. Transformed by taking the natural log of the respondents' income after dividing by the mean survey income.

Political interest

Six-point Mokken scale constructed using two four-point items: reading political news in the papers, and self-declared political interest. Missing values were recoded to the lowest score per item for political interest.

Political cynicism

Six-point Mokken scale constructed using two four-point items: whether the respondent believed parties are only concerned about people's votes, not what they think, and whether members of parliament pay attention to the views of ordinary people. Missing values were recoded to the middle score per item.

Party attachment

Coded positive if respondent considered themselves close to a political party, zero if not.

Voter categories

Based on an eleven-point party evaluation scores (-5 to +5), dummy variables indicating the three categories of voters were constructed.

Base category is complement of three categories distinguished.

Convinced voter

Coded positive if evaluation score is 4 or 5 for at least one of the parties of one bloc, and minus 3 to minus 5 for at least one of the parties from the other bloc.

Confounded voter

Coded positive if evaluation score is 4 or 5 for at least one of the parties of either bloc.

Condemned voter

Coded positive if evaluation score is no higher than zero for any of the parties in either bloc.

Closeness

Defined as 1 divided by the gap between the largest parties, opinion poll data used.

Tables

Table 4 Great Britain - Closeness at Constituency Level Per Election. Figures are Percentages of Respondents per Sample

<i>Election</i>	<i>Gap</i>	<i>% Respondents</i>	<i>Cumulative %</i>	<i>Election</i>	<i>Gap</i>	<i>% Respondents</i>	<i>Cumulative %</i>
1970	<1 %	4.5	4.5	1983	<1 %	1.9	1.9
	1 - 2 %	1.3	5.8		1 - 2 %	0.9	2.8
	2 - 3 %	2.5	8.3		2 - 3 %	2.5	5.3
	3 - 4 %	5.6	13.9		3 - 4 %	3.4	8.7
	4 - 5 %	5.0	18.9		4 - 5 %	3.6	12.3
	5 - 6 %	0.0	18.9		5 - 6 %	3.3	15.6
	6 - 7 %	3.0	21.9		6 - 7 %	2.9	18.4
	7 - 8 %	4.6	26.5		7 - 8 %	1.1	19.5
	8 - 9 %	3.8	30.3		8 - 9 %	2.0	21.5
	9 - 10 %	0.0	30.3		9 - 10 %	2.0	23.5
	>10 %	69.7	100.0		>10 %	76.5	100.0
Total	100.0		Total	100.0			
1974Feb	<1 %	3.3	3.3	1987	<1 %	1.6	1.6
	1 - 2 %	1.4	4.7		1 - 2 %	1.4	3.0
	2 - 3 %	3.3	8.0		2 - 3 %	3.2	6.2
	3 - 4 %	2.1	10.1		3 - 4 %	2.6	8.7
	4 - 5 %	3.8	13.9		4 - 5 %	1.6	10.3
	5 - 6 %	5.5	19.4		5 - 6 %	2.1	12.4
	6 - 7 %	3.5	22.9		6 - 7 %	1.6	13.9
	7 - 8 %	4.3	27.2		7 - 8 %	2.8	16.7
	8 - 9 %	3.1	30.3		8 - 9 %	3.5	20.2
	9 - 10 %	3.1	33.4		9 - 10 %	1.9	22.1
	>10 %	66.6	100.0		>10 %	77.9	100.0
Total	100.0		Total	100.0			
1974Oct	<1 %	1.7	1.7	1992	<1 %	4.4	4.4
	1 - 2 %	4.1	5.8		1 - 2 %	2.9	7.3
	2 - 3 %	2.4	8.2		2 - 3 %	1.9	9.2
	3 - 4 %	3.0	11.2		3 - 4 %	3.9	13.1
	4 - 5 %	1.5	12.7		4 - 5 %	1.3	14.4
	5 - 6 %	2.5	15.2		5 - 6 %	2.8	17.2
	6 - 7 %	2.4	17.6		6 - 7 %	2.9	20.2
	7 - 8 %	1.4	19.0		7 - 8 %	2.8	22.9
	8 - 9 %	.9	19.9		8 - 9 %	4.7	27.7
	9 - 10 %	.7	20.6		9 - 10 %	3.2	30.9
	>10 %	79.4	100.0		>10 %	69.1	100.0
Total	100.0		Total	100.0			
1979	<1 %	1.9	1.9	1997	<1 %	0.5	.5
	1 - 2 %	3.7	5.6		1 - 2 %	1.1	1.6
	2 - 3 %	2.5	8.1		2 - 3 %	2.7	4.2
	3 - 4 %	1.5	9.5		3 - 4 %	4.8	9.1
	4 - 5 %	2.1	11.6		4 - 5 %	1.5	10.6
	5 - 6 %	.2	11.7		5 - 6 %	3.0	13.6
	6 - 7 %	.6	12.3		6 - 7 %	5.8	19.4
	7 - 8 %	3.1	15.4		7 - 8 %	1.3	20.7
	8 - 9 %	1.6	17.1		8 - 9 %	0.8	21.6
	9 - 10 %	3.1	20.2		9 - 10 %	4.1	25.7
	>10 %	79.8	100.0		>10 %	74.3	100.0
Total	100.0		Total	100.0			

Table 5

Great Britain - National/Constituency Level Interactions

<i>National level:</i>	<i>Convinced</i>		<i>Convinced</i>	
	<i>Convinced</i>		<i>Condemned</i>	
	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>
<i>Constituency level:</i>				
<i>Age</i>	0.013	0.001	0.013	0.001
<i>Female</i>	0.193	0.040	0.193	0.040
<i>Education</i>	0.074	0.008	0.074	0.008
<i>Political interest</i>	0.230	0.008	0.231	0.008
<i>Income</i>	0.261	0.029	0.262	0.029
<i>Income missing–dummy</i>	-0.110	0.061	-0.111	0.061
<i>Constituency level:</i>				
<i>Closeness</i>	0.002	0.004	0.002	0.004
<i>Convinced voter</i>	0.358	0.104	0.162	0.071
<i>Convinced*Closeness Interaction</i>	0.371	0.320	0.231	0.180
<i>Confounded voter</i>	0.149	0.156	0.152	0.155
<i>Confounded*Closeness Interaction</i>	-0.108	0.484	-0.124	0.484
<i>Condemned voter</i>	-0.153	0.082	-0.216	0.094
<i>Condemned*Closeness Interaction</i>	0.029	0.085	0.020	0.059
<i>National level:</i>				
<i>Closeness</i>	0.179	0.038	0.191	0.038
<i>Convinced voter</i>	0.459	0.080	0.262	0.070
<i>Convinced*Closeness Interaction</i>	0.153	0.128	0.282	0.107
<i>Confounded voter</i>	-0.116	0.180	-0.099	0.181
<i>Confounded*Closeness Interaction</i>	0.392	0.856	0.506	0.873
<i>Condemned voter</i>	-0.422	0.119	-0.385	0.122
<i>Condemned*Closeness Interaction</i>	0.153	0.160	0.152	0.160
<i>Interaction: National Convinced * Constituency Convinced voters:</i>				
<i>Interaction effect</i>	-0.490	0.151		
<i>Interaction * Constituency closeness</i>	0.230	0.201		
<i>Interaction * National closeness</i>	-0.274	0.395		
<i>Interaction: National Convinced * Constituency Condemned voters:</i>				
<i>Interaction effect</i>			0.152	0.160
<i>Interaction * Constituency closeness</i>			0.389	0.234
<i>Interaction * National closeness</i>			1.301	1.278
<i>Constant</i>	-0.550	0.070	-0.544	0.070
<i>Variation level 3 (constituency)</i>	0.051	0.019	0.051	0.019
<i>Variation level 2 (election)</i>	0.059	0.028	0.059	0.028
<i>Likelihood</i>	11703		11717	
<i>R²_{dicho}</i>		.189		.189

Standard errors in italics. Bold figures indicate statistical significance at $p < .05$.

Actual election outcomes used for constituency level closeness, opinion poll data used for national level closeness.

Table 6

Great Britain - Prediction Model

	'Prediction model'		'Individual context'	
	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>
Age	0.013	0.001	0.013	0.001
Female	0.190	0.040	0.197	0.040
Education	0.075	0.008	0.074	0.008
Political interest	0.232	0.008	0.232	0.008
Income	0.249	0.029	0.260	0.030
Income missing – dummy	-	-	-0.112	0.061
National level:				
Closeness	0.219	0.037	0.212	0.038
Convinced voter	0.387	0.059	0.385	0.059
Convinced Interaction	0.211	0.103	0.220	0.104
Confounded voter	-	-	-0.054	0.183
Confounded Interaction	-	-	0.741	0.889
Condemned voter	-0.439	0.095	-0.495	0.112
Condemned Interaction	-	-	0.159	0.160
Constant	-0.558	0.070	-0.544	0.071
Variation constituency level	0.056	0.020	0.055	0.020
Variation election level	0.064	0.028	0.064	0.028
Likelihood	11236		11229	
R²_{dicho}		.188		.188

Standard errors in italics. Bold figures indicate statistical significance at $p < .05$. Prediction model is re-estimation of model containing statistically significant parameter estimates only.

Opinion poll data used for national level closeness.

Table 7

Sweden - Prediction Model

	'Prediction model'		'Individual context'	
	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>
Age	0.008	0.002	0.008	0.002
Female	0.324	0.065	0.346	0.065
Education				
Middle vs. Lower	0.287	0.080	0.284	0.080
High vs. Middle	0.332	0.091	0.345	0.091
Income	0.233	0.029	0.230	0.029
Political Interest	<i>0.256</i>	<i>0.025</i>	0.279	0.025
Political Cynicism	<i>-0.082</i>	<i>0.023</i>	-0.088	0.023
Party Attachment	<i>0.665</i>	<i>0.074</i>	0.720	0.074
Closeness	<i>0.610</i>	<i>0.207</i>	0.431	0.189
Convinced voters	<i>0.330</i>	<i>0.081</i>	0.279	0.119
Convinced Interaction			0.124	0.126
Confounded voters			-0.129	0.202
Confounded Interaction			0.481	0.418
Condemned voters	<i>-0.662</i>	<i>0.074</i>	-0.359	0.106
Condemned Interaction			0.160	0.102
Constant	<i>1.123</i>	<i>0.188</i>	1.091	0.197
Variation level 2 (election)	<i>0.022</i>	<i>0.016</i>	0.011	0.010
Likelihood	<i>-4120</i>		-3953	
R² dicho		<i>.205</i>		.209

Standard errors in italics. Bold figures indicate statistical significance at $p < .05$. Prediction model is re-estimation of model containing statistically significant parameter estimates only.

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samenvatting

Dit boek gaat over de invloed van de context op het individu. Meer specifiek handelt dit boek over de invloed van de electorale context op het wel of niet gaan stemmen bij verkiezingen. Hoofdstuk Een maakt duidelijk waarom dit onderwerp van belang is: individuele kenmerken bepalen weliswaar voor een groot gedeelte of iemand wel of niet regelmatig stemt, maar het merendeel van deze individuele kenmerken is zeer stabiel, en kan daarom niet verklaren waarom de opkomst bij de ene verkiezing hoger is dan de andere. Contextuele kenmerken, kenmerken die de verkiezing beschrijven, kunnen deze variaties in verkiezingsopkomst wel verklaren.

Hoofdstuk Twee onderzoekt de invloed van contextuele kenmerken op individuele kiezers bij Tweede Kamerverkiezingen in Nederland. Naast de gebruikelijke individuele kenmerken die helpen verklaren of iemand zal gaan stemmen bij Tweede Kamer verkiezingen, is ook een viertal contextuele factoren in het verklaringsmodel opgenomen. Deze kenmerken van verkiezingen zijn: of de verkiezingen volgen op een val van het kabinet; hoe snel twee verkiezingen elkaar opvolgen; of de bestaande coalitie na de verkiezingen wil doorregeren; en of de verkiezingen een nek-aan-nek race te zien geven. Deze factoren blijken inderdaad van invloed te zijn op de opkomstbereidheid van Nederlandse kiezers. Dit model met individuele en context kenmerken kan tevens beter voorspellen of verkiezingen een hoge of lage opkomst zullen kennen.

In Hoofdstuk Twee wordt tevens een eerste aanzet gegeven tot het 'individualiseren' van de context. Met behulp van interactie effecten wordt individuele variatie in de invloed van contextuele effecten gemodelleerd. Dit wordt verder uitgewerkt in Hoofdstuk Drie, en vormt de rode draad van deze dissertatie: het effect van verkiezingskenmerken is niet uniform, maar verschilt voor verschillende groepen kiezers.

Hoofdstuk Drie geeft allereerst een overzicht hoe electorale participatie op individueel en contextueel niveau geanalyseerd kan worden, en laat zien dat het niet voldoende is om het individuele en het contextuele niveau simpelweg samen te voegen in een verklarend model. Voor een juiste weergave van de invloed van contextuele kenmerken op individuele kiezers is een meer geavanceerde benadering nodig, waarin de invloed van de context varieert op individueel niveau. Deze benadering wordt vervolgens theoretisch uitgewerkt voor drie contextuele kenmerken: of verkiezingen op een zondag of een weekdag gehouden worden; of verschillende verkiezingen op dezelfde dag gehouden worden, en of de verkiezingen een nek-aan-nek race te zien geven. De invloed van een nek-aan-nek race op het wel of niet gaan stemmen biedt de beste mogelijkheid tot een empirische toetsing van het model, hetgeen in de hoofdstukken Vier, Vijf en Zes wordt uitgewerkt. Daarbij wordt gebruikt gemaakt van een typologie van kiezers die aangeeft welke kiezers wel, en welke zeer waarschijnlijk niet beïnvloed worden door een nek-aan-nek race.

Hoofdstuk Vier analyseert de invloed van een nek-aan-nek race op geaggregeerd niveau, voor verschillende politieke systemen. Tevens wordt het onderscheid tussen opiniepeilingen of verkiezingsuitslagen als indicator voor een nek-aan-nek race behandeld. Hoofdstuk Vier

laat zien dat een verkiezingsrace op verschillende manieren geoperationaliseerd kan worden, afhankelijk van de structuur van het partij-politieke landschap. De resultaten geven aan dat voor verschillende landen de invloed van een nek-aan-nek race op opkomst duidelijk waarneembaar is.

Nu vastgesteld is dat een nek-aan-nek race de verkiezingsopkomst beïnvloedt, is een volgende stap mogelijk. In Hoofdstuk Vijf en Hoofdstuk Zes wordt de invloed van een nek-aan-nek race op individuele kiezers in Groot-Brittannië en Zweden geanalyseerd. Hoofdstuk Vier liet zien dat in deze landen de invloed van een nek-aan-nek race op opkomst waarneembaar is. De vraag die beantwoord wordt in Hoofdstuk Vijf en Zes is: wordt iedere kiezer in gelijke mate beïnvloedt door de verkiezingsrace? Hoofdstuk Vijf laat zien dat in Groot-Brittannië aanzienlijke verschillen zijn waar te nemen tussen kiezers. De verschillende typen kiezers, geïntroduceerd in Hoofdstuk Drie, blijken inderdaad verschillend te reageren op de verkiezingsrace. Hoofdstuk Zes laat zien dat dit in Zweden niet het geval is: de invloed van een spannende verkiezingsrace is in Zweden nagenoeg gelijk voor alle kiezers.

Het concluderende Hoofdstuk Zeven beschouwt de bevindingen uit de voorgaande hoofdstukken. Er wordt een discussie gevoerd over de noodzakelijkheid van de analyse van contextuele invloeden op individueel niveau. Tevens worden aanzetten gegeven tot een verdere bestudering van de politieke context.

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