Voter turnout in Dutch elections

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Introduction

Free, secret and competitive elections are the hallmark of representative democracy, and the level of participation in these elections is often considered as an indication for the health of a democratic system. Political scientists, like many doctors, however, disagree on the interpretation of symptoms.

Some scholars feel that a low level of electoral participation is cause for concern. For one thing, a low level of turnout is thought to be harmful, because elections are seen as a crucial link between popular wishes and the behaviour of the political elites. If a large proportion of the electorate fails to exercise the franchise, there is a real danger that the electoral 'messages' of the voters are not representative for the wishes of the electorate at large (for example: Verba et al., 1993).

Other political scientists hold diametrically opposed views. Low levels of turnout reflect satisfaction with the political system and its outputs. High levels of electoral participation, on the other hand, are considered as evidence for popular dissatisfaction with the system and its performance (for a review of some of these arguments, refer to: Jackman, 1987: 418-419).

One way or the other, the level of turnout is likely to be an interesting object for investigation by political scientists all over the world. In this paper I shall discuss research on turnout in Dutch elections. A case-study of the origins of voting and nonvoting in one country will, almost necessarily, focus on within-system explanatory variables (micro or meso-level explanations). Case-studies, however, are inappropriate for establishing the relevance of macro-level explanatory variables (for instance: institutional differences between electoral and party systems). Therefore, section 2.1 puts the Dutch case in a comparative perspective and provides some information on institutional characteristics of the Dutch electoral and party system. In section 2.2 I shall discuss trends in turnout for four types of elections for the period 1970-1991. Many democracies have seen decreasing turnout rates in this period. In this section I shall first discuss whether there is a similar decline of electoral participation in the Netherlands. Then, I shall introduce the distinction between first-order and second-order elections, to interpret variations in the level of electoral participation in different types of elections (Van der Eijk and Oppenhuis, 1990) and, finally I shall discuss the 'nationalization' of the Dutch electorate.

In section 3, I shall focus on the explanation of individual electoral participation in the current Dutch political science literature. This section
deals with the theoretical approaches, results and methodologies. In the concluding section I shall dwell on some normative issues regarding electoral participation.

**Turnout in Dutch elections**

**The Dutch electoral system in perspective**

Up to 1970 the Netherlands had a system of ‘compulsory’ voting. Although there was no actual legal obligation to cast one’s vote, all members of the electorate were required to present themselves at the polling station on election day. This resulted in an average turnout of 94.7 percent for the elections of the lower house of the Dutch national parliament (Tweede Kamer) in the period 1945-1967 (Crewe, 1981: 234). In a list of 28 democracies, presented by Crewe (1981: 234-237), the Netherlands ranked second, after Australia. In 1970 the Netherlands abandoned ‘compulsory’ voting. Since then, the average turnout rate for parliamentary elections has dropped considerably. The average for the parliamentary elections between 1970 and 1989 was 83.5 percent. The Dutch example clearly illustrates the importance of ‘compulsory’ voting. If one compares turnout rates before and after 1970 it becomes clear that the abolition of ‘compulsory’ voting has resulted in a decline of turnout rates of about ten percent on average. That ‘compulsory voting’ is important, can also be seen in Figure 1.

This figure presents the ranking of 24 democracies in terms of their average turnout at the three most recent general elections (as reported in Mackie and Rose, 1991). The Netherlands are no longer among the front runners, but find themselves in the middle of the pack. The four nations leading the pack, all have a system of ‘compulsory’ voting. Penalties for not-voting are by no means the only institutional factors determining crossnational variations in turnout (Powell, 1980; Crewe, 1981; Jackman, 1987). Many other institutional variables affect both parties and voters. On the one hand, institutional differences affect the incentives for parties and candidates to mobilize voters. On the other hand, institutional arrangements influence the voter’s belief that his vote will affect the outcome of the election (Jackman, 1987: 407).

Powell (1980) has argued that the institutional mobilization of the vote is of crucial importance in the explanation of crossnational variations in turnout. Party systems differ in the strength of the linkages between political parties and socio-demographic groups. Strong linkages are likely to produce high levels of electoral participation:
"[W]here the national parties represent different, meaningful, cleavage groups, the electoral outcomes take on an easily identifiable significance. Where these linkages are relatively stable, they provide cues to even poorly informed and less interested voters as to the interpretation of issue and candidate choices in given elections. [...] Moreover, the presence of strong, continuing expectations about parties and cleavage alignments not only creates easily identifiable choices for citizens, but also makes it easier for parties to seek out supporters and mobilize them at election time. [...] Therefore we expect that voting participation will increase to the extent that political parties are linked with nationally identifiable cleavage groups" (Powell, 1980: 13-14).

Building on the work of Powell, Jackman concentrates on four additional institutional factors:

Nationally competitive districts: in an electoral system with national elections by proportional representation in which all members of parliament are chosen from one district (the national electorate) the turnout is higher than in single-member ("winner takes all") districts. With many single-member districts, parties will concentrate their mobilization on the 'marginal' districts. Many areas are bulwarks of one party or another. Other parties will write off these districts as hopeless. Moreover, in these 'safe' districts many supporters for the minority parties will regard their votes as wasted. Both effects will lower turnout rates.

Electoral disproportionality: No electoral system achieves complete equality between the distribution of votes in the electorate and the distribution of seats in the representative assembly. However, electoral systems differ in the extent of their disproportionality. These differences, moreover, are consequential: "highly disproportional systems require minor parties to accumulate many more votes to achieve a given degree of legislative representation" (Jackman, 1987: 408). In these highly disproportional systems the high thresholds for representation of minor parties will discourage their campaign efforts, and their supporters are more likely to feel that their vote might be wasted.

Multipartyism: In multipartisan systems, elections determine the distribution of parliamentary seats. Elections are, however, not decisive in the formation of government. Bipartisan elections are decisive in both respects, and are therefore more likely to induce voters to cast their ballots.

Unicameralism: The importance of parliamentary elections is also affected by the constitutional constraints on the powers of the popular assembly. Strong unicameral systems, are likely to produce strong, decisive governments. Strong bicameralism invites compromises between both houses of parliament and reduces the decisiveness of parliamentary elections for policies pursued by the government.
Table 1 summarizes the institutional characteristics of the Dutch electoral and party system. Throughout its postwar electoral history the Netherlands had a weak bicameral parliamentary system, nationwide proportional representation, high levels of proportionality and (as a result) a highly fragmented party system. Initially Dutch politics was also characterized by very strong linkages between social groups and political parties and had 'compulsory' voting. Given this institutional structure it is hardly surprising that the Netherlands (1945-1970) initially took the second position in Crewe's turnout ranking. In two respects, however, Dutch politics has undergone major changes: realignment and the abandonment of 'compulsory' voting (see Irwin, 1974 for the latter). The combination of these changes is responsible for at least part of the ten percent drop in turnout after 1970. The effects on turnout of the other institutional characteristics more or less offset each other. Nationally competitive elections and high proportionality both enhance turnout, whereas multipartyism dampens electoral participation (Jackman, 1987: 415).

In addition to the institutional factors mentioned by Powell and Jackman, Crewe (1981: 240-250) has argued the importance of the legal and administrative facilitation of voting. These institutional provisions affect the costs of voting. Procedures for registration, absentee voting and so on, are therefore likely to affect levels of turnout.

Table 2 provides information on the current legal and administrative provisions regarding parliamentary, provincial, municipal and European elections in the Netherlands. For all these elections, voting registration is done automatically, on the basis of municipal population registers. Some days before the election each eligible voter receives a polling card, listing the nearest polling station, where the voter is supposed to cast his ballot. The table indicates that the Netherlands has employed additional possibilities to facilitate voting only sparingly. Polling stations are open for just one day: a Wednesday for national, provincial and municipal elections and a Thursday for European elections. Postal voting, on advance application, is only possible for national and European elections. And proxy voting and constituency transfers are strictly regulated. Many other democratic states have made considerably more substantial efforts to lower the 'thresholds' for electoral participation (Crewe, 1981: 240-250).

**Dutch election results 1970-1990**

Dalton and Wattenberg in their review of the international literature on voting behaviour conclude: "if there is any predominant pattern in voting participation in recent decades, it is one of declining turnout" (1993:211).
If we inspect Figure 2 carefully their generalization seems unwarranted for the Dutch parliamentary and municipal elections. Of course, as we have seen before, after the obligation for voters to present themselves at the polling station on election day was skipped from the Dutch electoral law, turnout rates dropped by approximately ten percent. But apart from this (rather moderate) institutionally induced decline in electoral participation, the figures for the period between 1970 and 1990 do not exhibit a clear-cut downward trend. If one compares the Dutch turnout rates with, for instance, those for the USA, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Finland or Italy the failure of a downward trend to occur after 'compulsory' voting was abandoned might be considered remarkable. One might be tempted to attribute this phenomenon to a socialization effect: generations of Dutch voters have been brought up with the idea that voting was both a statutory and moral obligation. These lessons from early life, still induce the older electoral generations to consider voting as self-evident even though the law no longer requires the voters to go to the polling station (Daudt and De Lange, 1971: 444). Some observers have interpreted the sharp drop in turnout at all four elections held in the period 1989-1991, as evidence for the decline of the sense that voting is self-evident and a moral obligation (for example Van der Eijk and Van Praag, 1993: 215-216). This conclusion is, however, premature. For one thing, it is simply too early to say whether the 1989-1991 ‘haisse’ is really the beginning of a systematic decline in electoral participation or merely an incident (like the one in 1970-1971). Moreover, even if the prediction of the ‘disappearance of the Dutch voter’ (cf. Burnham, 1980) should proof correct, the ‘decline of citizen duty’ explanation is not completely satisfactory. Processes of generational replacement and the ‘erosion’ of citizen duty among the elder electoral generations would lead to a more or less gradual decline in turnout, not to the recent sharp drops. Finally, Irwin (1974: 308-312) has cast doubt on the hypothesis of an effect of compulsory voting on the development of voting habits in the Netherlands.

Figure 2 also shows that the level of turnout for different types of elections diverges. The turnout rate for national parliamentary elections is consistently and substantially higher than participation in municipal, provincial and European elections. Van der Eijk and Oppenhuis (1990) have interpreted these differences in turnout in terms of first-order and second-order elections:

"A simple and plausible explanation of individual turnout in any kind of elections may focus on the degree to which voters are convinced that the institution which they will elect is relevant to their own interests and concerns. Why bother to vote if one is convinced that the elected body in question would in no way be of any consequence to whatever one
personally deems important?" (Van der Eijk and Oppenhuis, 1990: 71).

According to survey data reported by these authors, the Dutch electorate considers the subnational elected institutions and the European Parliament (second-order) elections less important than the lower house of the national parliament (first-order). In 1989, 88 percent of a representative sample of the Dutch electorate (N=948) indicated that "what is discussed and decided upon" in national parliament is very important or important for their "personal life". For the municipal councils the corresponding figure was 78 percent, for the provincial assembly 61 percent, and for the European parliament merely 53 percent (Van der Eijk en Oppenhuis, 1990: 86). This ranking in terms of the perceived institutional importance of these four elections is exactly the same as the rank-order in terms of the turnout rates for these elections in the period between 1989-1991. Moreover, the individual scores of respondents on an index for institutional importance constructed by these authors were also clearly related to the individual’s turnout in European elections (Van der Eijk and Oppenhuis, 1990: 73-75). Nevertheless, some problems remain with the 'second-order-election' approach. For one thing, in a recent study on municipal elections in seven Dutch cities, no relation was found between the citizen's perception of the institutional importance of the municipality and the citizen's inclination to vote (Tops et. al.: chapter 3). And, for another thing, it is not obvious how changes in institutional importance could explain why provincial and municipal elections, after 1982 have traded places in the turnout ranking. No major objective changes in the institutional structure have taken place in the previous period.

A third remarkable observation with regard to Figure 2 is due. The time-series for each of the four types of elections show a similar pattern. The levels of electoral participation differ, probably at least partly reflecting the perception of the importance of the various institutions involved. But the trends in turnout for these elections are essentially the same. Most political scientists agree that these similarities reflect the nationalization of the Dutch electorate. This nationalization takes two shapes. First, it is reflected in the parallelism of trends in turnout for different types of elections. Irrespective of the nature of the election (municipal, provincial, European or national) the electorate's voting decisions are apparently affected by changes in the nation's general public opinion. Few citizens base their voting decision on arguments related to one specific level of government. In a survey study in seven local democracies, Tops et al. (1991: chapter 2), for instance, found that voters motivated their decision to abstain in municipal elections almost exclusively in general terms: personal circumstances, no time, protest against policies or politicians, powerlessness and cynicism. If specific
references to one level of government are made, these almost exclusively relate to national politicians and institutions. Nationalization is also reflected in the parallellism of electoral trends in different parts of the country. Irrespective of geographical location trends in turnout and election results are strikingly similar. Van der Eijk and Visser (1992: 90) report that the variations in electoral participation in the twelve Dutch provinces for European, provincial and national elections in the period 1977-1991, almost exclusively (for 99 percent to be exact) reflect national factors. Even in municipal elections, where there is the largest potential for idiosyncratic variations, specifically local factors appear to be unrelated to trends in electoral participation. Figure 3 shows the similarity in electoral trends for municipal elections in seven large Dutch cities (among which Amsterdam, The Hague and Utrecht).

Figure 4, demonstrates two things. First, levels of turnout differ substantially between (large) cities and rural municipalities. These differences probably reflect both differences in the social composition of the populations as differences in community spirit in urban and rural areas (cf. Dahl and Tufte, 1973: 61-65; Verba, Nie and Kim, 1978: chapter 13; Denters, De Jong and Thomassen, 1990:75-80). Second, however, there is once more a surprising parallellism in the trends for these four types of municipalities. Here too, it is hard not to think of these trends as induced by general, nationwide changes in public opinion.

Nonvoting: the analysis of individual electoral behaviour

Introduction

The abolition of compulsory voting in 1970 provided a strong impetus for Dutch political scientists to investigate into the origins of nonvoting. Before 1970 nonvoting was a very rare phenomenon of marginal interest. In the early 1970s, however, many political scientists and other observers were curious/concerned about the effect of the withdrawal of negative sanctions for not voting on the level of electoral participation. These years, moreover, offered various opportunities to study electoral behaviour. In 1970 provincial and municipal elections were held, and in 1971 there were national parliamentary elections. On each of these occasions Dutch political scientists organized election studies. The results from these studies soon found their way to the sociological and political science journals (Stouthard, 1971; Janssens, 1971; Dauddt and De Lange, 1971; Bijnen and Hagenaars, 1971; Dauddt, 1972; Jennings, 1972; Heunks, 1973; Irwin, 1974). After this short bloom the attention for
nonvoting faded. National elections were held in 1972, 1977, 1981, 1982, 1986 and 1989, and in each of these election years Dutch National Election Studies (DNES) were held. But reports on electoral participation are published only occasionally. The beginning of the 1990s witnessed a renewed interest in electoral participation, especially in second-order contests. Van der Eijk and Oppenhuis (1990) analyzed the participation of Dutch voters in the European elections. Denters, De Jong and Thomassen (1990) published the results of a study on electoral and other forms of local political participation in small Dutch municipalities based on data for 1983. Tops et al. (1991), and Denters and Geurts (1993) report on municipal elections, whereas Van der Eijk et al. (1992) focus on provincial elections.

In section 3.2, I shall first discuss some of the major bivariate results of recent Dutch results into the act of voting. Then, I shall turn to some recent multivariate models. Section 3.3 deals with some methodological points.

**Theory and results**

In their recent review article on electoral behaviour Dalton and Wattenberg (1993) categorize current research in this field in three theoretical approaches. The first approach, the sociological, focuses on demographic variables. Variables like age, gender, class, education, income, religion and employment are conceived as determinants of electoral behaviour. A good example of this approach is provided by Wolfinger and Rosenstone’s ‘Who votes?’14. The second approach is labelled, the social psychological model15. This approach focuses on long-term psychological predispositions (like: party-identification, political efficacy, political interest). Empirical research guided by this perspective was conducted by for instance Shaffer (1981) and by Abramson and Aldrich (1982). Finally, there is the so-called economic approach. This perspective is associated with Anthony Downs’ classic book ‘An economic theory of democracy’ (1957). In this approach the decision to vote or to abstain is determined by a calculus of the costs and benefits associated with these two behavioural alternatives. Initial attempts to apply this ‘economic theory’ to electoral participation (for example: Riker and Ordeshook, 1968) were generally considered as unsatisfactory. Recently, Aldrich (1993) has made a new case for casting the voting decision in terms of a rational actor model. He emphasizes the importance of incorporating the strategic campaign behaviour of political leaders and parties trying to persuade voters to cast their vote for them, as contextual elements in models of individual electoral participation. Empirical
research focusing on these contextual variables is conducted by for instance Patterson and Caldeira (1983) and Cox and Munger (1989). One of the most striking features of the current Dutch literature is the dominance of empiricism. More often than not, after a short introduction the author(s) turn immediately to the analysis of whatever data are at hand. Serious efforts at developing and testing a (partial) theory of electoral participation are rare. In as far as empirical work is guided theoretically, the choice of the explanatory variables to be analyzed, are largely demographic and social-psychological. Moreover, many of the studies, especially the earlier ones, are only describing bivariate relations. Multivariate models were estimated by Elsinga (1985) and Jaarsma/Schrum (most comprehensively reported in Schram, 1989) for the Dutch national elections. Denters, De Jong and Thomassen (1990) and Denters and Geurts (1993) tested multivariate models for electoral participation in municipal elections. In this section I shall first discuss some of the bivariate results, then I shall turn to some of the multivariate models.

Table 3 summarizes the main results from the bivariate analyses. Before I turn to a discussion of these results, a word of caution is due. For constructing this table we had to rely on material from different surveys, and in part on published research reports. Therefore, one should be cautious in drawing conclusions in comparing the results in the rows of the table: at times procedures and indicators employed are not equivalent. This is the case with the dependent variable and with independent variables (e.g. some studies use a simple dichotomy on reported electoral participation, another researcher has constructed a voting index based on both voting reports and voting intentions). Nevertheless, some general observations about these results are in order.

With regard to the demographic variables gender is consistently unrelated to electoral participation. In the Netherlands there is no 'gender gap' in electoral participation. On the other hand, all studies indicate that the young are somewhat less likely to vote than older people. Moreover, virtually all studies show that the relatively well-to-do and the highly educated are slightly more inclined to vote than those with low incomes and little formal education. Finally, several studies show that regular churchgoers are somewhat more likely to vote than others. Establishing these relationships is hardly surprising. Most of these findings are simply reaffirmations of the political science 'canons of wisdom' (cf. Lipset, 1983: 189-190).

If there is anything to be surprised about, it is the weakness of these relations. None of these coefficients exceeds 0.20.

Social psychological variables appear to be slightly stronger related to turnout. In their 1960 study 'The American voter', Campbell and his
associates found that the likelihood of having voted, was associated with, among other things, the intensity of party preferences, the level of subjective political involvement (interest in the campaign) and political efficacy. The Dutch case for the 1980s and early 1990s confirm these earlier findings. It is clear from Table 3 that whenever the strength of party-identification is cross-tabulated with electoral participation, their correlation is statistically significant. Moreover, respondents who are interested in politics, or who feel that political decisions are important for their everyday life, or who agree that party political differences matter, are more likely than others, to participate in an election. Moreover, several indicators for the citizen’s political knowledge and a measure of political efficacy have also been shown to be related to individual turnout.

Table 3 only reports bivariate relations. As stated before, there are few examples of efforts at developing and testing a (partial) theory of electoral participation in the Netherlands. An essentially sociological approach is chosen by Schram (1989). Inspired by Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980) he employs a logit model to assess the impact of demographic variables on electoral participation in all national elections between 1970 and 1986. His findings are mixed. If, as Schram thinks is the case, the pooling of the data for all six elections is legitimate, most of the ‘bivariate’ effects of demographic variables reported in Table 3 are corroborated by his multivariate analyses. However, if he analyses the election years separately, the results strongly depend on the particular election year chosen (Schram, 1989: 51).

A recent example of a social psychological approach is provided by Denters and Geurts’ paper (1993) on the effects of aspects of political alienation on electoral participation. Building on previous work by Henkens (1973) these authors conclude that the demographic variables, age, gender and education affect voting intentions in municipal elections through various aspects of political alienation. On the one hand the voting decision is directly affected by the citizens’ sense of cognitive meaningfulness (i.e. his perception of differences between the political parties contesting the election and his perception of stakes of the election). On the other hand, electoral participation is affected by the citizen’s feeling that the political system is responsive (one aspect of political efficacy). Another example of an essentially social psychological approach is provided by Denters, De Jong and Thomassen’s study of thirty small Dutch local democracies (1990).

These authors also test an economic model of turnout. Earlier Elsinga (1985) tested a variety of ‘economic models’ for national electoral behaviour. These models interpret the effects of traditional demographic and social psychological variables, like education, political knowledge, political efficacy (see Table 3) in terms of costs and benefits for a rational
voter. In terms of the individual characteristics entered in the regression equations as independent and intervening variables, the ‘economic’ models are very similar to the traditional ‘sociological’ and ‘social psychological’ approaches.

A major difference between the ‘economic’ approach and traditional models is the relevance of the political context in which the individual decides whether or not to vote. Aldrich has argued that the low-cost, low-benefit nature of the act of voting “provides an opportunity for political leaders and groups to affect turnout through their strategic actions” (Aldrich 1993: 274). Rational vote maximizing politicians will “invest more heavily in the closest contests, and these investments will be reflected in increasing levels of turnout, even if voters do not consider the closeness of the contest” (Aldrich, 1993: 268). These higher investments will provide voters with more free or low-cost information, and the resulting reduction of information costs will induce many to vote. Aldrich argues that his argument implies the necessity of introducing variables like campaign efforts, canvassing and closeness of the election as contextual elements in models of individual electoral participation. Empirical research in other countries (for instance Patterson and Caldeira, 1983; Cox and Munger, 1989; Denver and Hands, 1985) has shown these variables to be influential. In Dutch research I am familiar with only one study in which contextual variables of this type are introduced in individual level models. Denters, De Jong and Thomassen (1990) have included electoral competition and the ideological diversity of the parties competing the election in their aforementioned ‘economic’ model of electoral participation in 30 small municipalities. The direct and indirect effects of these contextual variables, however, were very small.

All of the multivariate models discussed have one thing in common. The performance of these models, even of the most encompassing ones, in terms of variance explained is very modest indeed (between about 15-30 percent). Moreover, explanations of voting turnout are less successful (in terms of variance explained) than explanations of other forms of political participation (see for instance Elsinga, 1985: 207-241). There are several reasons for these rather poor results.

First, the dependent variable is subject to considerable measurement error due to effects of ‘social desirability’ (see section 5). The exact nature of this error is unknown. In the most benign case of random error, $R^2$-values will be attenuated (Berry, 1993: 51).

Second, a large portion of nonvoting, as is evident from Table 4, is due to ‘circumstantial factors’: illness, work and other obligations, being away on polling day (holiday). Table 4 indicates that virtually half of those reporting to have abstained, said they did so for occasional, more or less accidental reasons. If these motivations reflect the true reasons for not
going to the polls, we would expect the nonvoters to be a shifting population. The group of regular nonvoters is expected to be relatively small. In order to check this, I computed an index of voting regularity based on respondents' voting reports for the 1986 and 1989 national elections and for the European elections in 1989. The results are presented in Table 5.

This table shows that only 10 percent of the respondents reported to have abstained on two or three occasions. These results confirm that in many instances nonvoting is essentially a random occurrence. This partly random nature of nonvoting is of course a second factor to be taken into consideration in our assessment of low values of the $R^2$ for models of electoral participation.

Third, Aldrich (1993) in a recent article makes an interesting point regarding the impossibility of having a complete answer to the question 'Who votes?'. From a rational choice perspective he argues that voting is a low-cost and low-benefit phenomenon. Both the costs of voting and the benefits to be expected from this behaviour are trifling. The low-cost, low-benefit nature of voting, according to Aldrich, is consistent with the empirical findings reported here, and elsewhere:

"there is weaker performance of turnout models than comparable models of other forms of participation or of candidate choice. There are more 'errors' made by decision makers in low versus high cost-benefit contexts; measurement error will be consequential; and a large range of variables that contribute small amounts of costs or of benefits and that are largely impossible to measure completely will have a greater impact on decisions" (Aldrich, 1993:265).

These arguments suggest, that as long as we can legitimately assume that measurement errors in the dependent variable are essentially random, we need not worry too much about the low level of variance explained by our models of electoral participation. This is even more so, since for the evaluation of theoretical predictions the squared multiple correlation coefficient is not very useful (Achen, 1977: 807). The values of the unstandardized regression coefficients and the standard errors of these estimates provide a better insight in the correctness of our theoretical hypotheses. In this respect it is indicative for their apparent lack of theoretical interest that many of the researchers do not even bother to report the coefficients for the explanatory variables, but only publish their $R^2$ or pseudo $R^2$; see for instance: Van der Eijk and Oppenhuis (1990); Van der Eijk and Schild with Visser (1992) and Elsinga (1985).

Considering the Dutch work done so far, I feel that we should first and foremost engage in the development of a more solid theoretical foundation for our research into electoral behaviour. Recent research by Denters and Geurts (1993) suggests, for instance, that traditional theories of
political alienation are too undifferentiated to account for the differential effects of various aspects of alienation on turnout. Moreover, for the more 'economically' inclined, Aldrich's recent article presents a major challenge for politico-economic research into the act of voting. His approach opens up promising new ways to develop contextual models of electoral participation (see also Huckfeldt and Sprague, 1993: 296-297).

Some methodological concerns

In this section I shall make some observations on the methodology employed in Dutch research into electoral participation. The quality of (quantitative) empirical scientific research is largely determined by three variables: the theoretical importance of the hypotheses under research; the validity and the reliability of the measurements and the appropriateness of the statistical methods employed. In the previous section I have made some critical remarks with regard to the theoretical relevance of current Dutch research into electoral participation. In this section I shall address myself to the two other topics.

The first topic to be discussed is the quality of our measurements. Probably the most worrisome aspect of survey-based research on electoral participation is its reliance on voters' reports. On the one hand, survey methods provide the only feasible way to collect a combination of individual information on voting intentions and reported voting behaviour with data on the individual voter's social background, cognitions, perceptions and attitudes. It is exactly this combination of data we need in order to test micro-theories of political behaviour. On the other hand, it is also widely recognized that survey methodology poses major problems for the validity of research in electoral participation.

If we compare reported voting in our surveys with actual turnout in the corresponding elections substantial differences are found. Campbell and his associates report a twelve percent gap between reported and actual turnout (Campbell et al. 1980: 94). Similar differences are reported for many other countries (Swaddle and Heath, 1989; Granberg and Holmberg, 1991). Figure 5 presents the data for the Netherlands (see Aarts, 1993). This figure portrays reported abstaining in the unweighted DNES and the actual percentage of nonvoters from official election statistics after 1970. As in other countries, in the Netherlands there has been a gap between actual and reported nonvoting throughout the period 1970-1991.

There are three major factors determining this gap (Swaddle and Heath, 1989). The first source, is deliberate misreporting by the respondent. Some respondents might feel embarrassed to admit that they failed in their
civil obligations, in front of a stranger (the interviewer). The second bias is introduced through response bias. People who do not agree to be interviewed might be different from those that are more cooperative. It is not unlikely that those that refuse to be interviewed are less politically interested, and therefore less likely to vote, than the respondents in our surveys, since the DINES surveys are dominated by political questions. The third source of biased results are inaccuracies in the popular registers (on which our samples are based; movers, who are more likely than others to abstain, are underrepresented in these registers).

Dutch voting registers are reputedly among the most accurate in the world (cf. Crewe, 1981: 233). Therefore, the third source of biases is probably of little importance in the Netherlands. On the basis of the international evidence it appears that the first source, deliberate misreporting, is always present and seems to be inherent to survey research in the social sciences. But the presence of deliberate misreporting does not seem to provide an explanation for the widening of the gap in the 1980s. Such an explanation should take into account the peculiarities of the Dutch research.

There is some circumstantial evidence that response bias, is responsible for the widening gap between reported and actual nonvoting. Aarts (1993) shows that response rates have declined almost continuously since the early 1970s. These dropping response rates are probably not due to changes in the research design. Moreover, these response rates seem to be worse than in comparable research projects in other countries. The 46 percent in the first wave of the 1989 study marks a dramatic low. It is difficult not to think of these response-rate problems as a major source of distortion in research into electoral participation.

It can be easily seen that both misreporting and response bias pose serious threats to the validity of research into the act of voting. Response bias negatively affects the external validity of the survey results. When surveys are biased, the response group is unrepresentative for the population and generalizations to the Dutch electorate are illegitimate. Misreporting endangers the internal validity in that it will produce (systematic?) inaccuracies in the dependent variable of studies into electoral participation. The results of empirical research are affected by misreporting and response bias in two ways. First, as is clearly the case, the combination of these two types of errors in our sample results lead to an overestimation of the level of electoral participation. Second, these biases could result in unjustified inferences about the causation of electoral participation. The relations (or non-relations) we find in our sample do not adequately reflect the ‘true’ patterns of causes and effects in the population. It can be argued that the first problem is not of great importance, since the actual level of electoral participation is known
through the aggregate electoral statistics. The latter problem, however, is more worrying. It is precisely because we do not know from other easily accessible sources what the true population relationships between electoral participation and supposedly explanatory variables are, that political scientists all over the world resorted to the survey-design. But what is the worth of these survey-data if misreporting and response bias undermine the validity of its results? These problems merit thorough methodological research.

The second topic I want to discuss in this section relates to the appropriateness of the statistical methods employed in current research on voter turnout. Recently Dutch political scientists have employed increasingly sophisticated statistical techniques to investigate electoral participation. Jaarsma et al. (1986) and Schram (1989) were the first to employ multivariate logit analysis in this area. Their example has been followed by Van der Eijk and his associates. This kind of multivariate analysis is gratifying for two reasons. For one thing, it marks a departure from the essentially descriptive bivariate analyses that dominated the field for so many years. Moreover, for dichotomous dependent variables (like reported voting or nonvoting) these logit models are technically clearly superior to other multivariate statistical techniques (like path-analysis and multiple regression).

Nevertheless, even the most advanced statistical techniques are merely means of testing theoretically interesting hypotheses on data that are valid and reliable measurements of the theoretical concepts in these hypotheses. So far, the potential for testing interesting propositions on the determinants of electoral participation with these new models has been exploited insufficiently (see previous section). Furthermore, there are serious problems associated with the validity and reliability of the dichotomous measures of electoral participation currently employed.

**Normative concerns**

The sharp decline in electoral participation in Dutch elections at the outset of this decade, have been cause for widespread concern. Both in the media and among politicians the relatively low level of electoral participation has been interpreted as an indication for a 'legitimacy crisis'. This concern resulted in the establishment of a prestigious parliamentary committee (with all the floor leaders of the Dutch parties) on constitutional and political reform31. This committee formulated several questions with regard to proposals for reform (for example: the election of Dutch mayors, or the introduction of referenda) that needed further consideration and analysis. For this purpose a number of independent committees was
established. These have recently reported to the "Tweede Kamer". Not only national politicians reacted. Many municipalities initiated political and administrative reforms, as well.

Dutch political scientists reacted in a more cautious and detached way, as it should be. Of course, many scholars point out that it remains to be seen whether the 1990s mark the beginning of a systematic decline in turnout. And, it is pointed out rightly that the relation between electoral abstention and (il)legitimacy is not as simple as some politicians and journalist would have it (Van Deth, 1993). Van der Eijk and Van Praag (1993: 214-216), moreover, question the arguments provided by those who are concerned about low levels of electoral participation. Their argument offers a convenient starting point to discuss some of the normative implications of the level of electoral participation.

First, according to Van der Eijk and Van Praag, some people are concerned because low levels of participation would undermine the legitimation of government, electoral controls on politicians and the process of political representation. Van der Eijk and Van Praag question this argument, because it allegedly starts from the incorrect assumption that electoral participation is the only form of democratic political participation. Even if there is a decline in electoral participation, Van der Eijk and Van Praag argue, this tendency is compensated for by increasing levels of nonelectoral participation.

A second point is closely related. This argument regards the possibility of selective electoral representation. If large sections of the electorate abstain, their interests are not represented in the political process. Van der Eijk and Van Praag, however, argue that empirical research indicates that nonvoters are very heterogenous. Voters and nonvoters are not clearly identifiable groups. In as far as there are differences these do not relate to political preferences and attitudes.

Finally, people are concerned over low levels of turnout, because this would indicate a decline in the political system's legitimacy and maybe even decreasing support for democratic values. Van der Eijk and Van Praag, however, argue that all surveys indicate that political distrust, cynicism et cetera cannot explain abstentions. There are no indications that there is a growing distrust in politics and government among the electorate.

Van der Eijk and Van Praag's arguments merit some discussion. Their first point, though based on the correct observation of increasing nonelectoral participation, ignores the special character of electoral participation in a representative democracy. Popular elections provide the basis of legitimacy for those in government to stand up against all kinds of demands by special interests, and follow what they believe to be in the public interest. Low levels of turnout tend to erode this base of legitimization.
power. Moreover, if their second argument is correct, this undermines their first point. As Elsinga (1984) and Castenmiller (1988) have shown for the Dutch case, electoral participants do not differ substantially in their political attitudes from nonparticipants. But, they also demonstrate that for other forms of participation the participants are definitely not representative for the entire adult population. This is another argument not to consider electoral participation and nonelectoral forms of participation as full equivalents in a representative democracy.

I need, however, to qualify this point immediately. Verba et al. (1993) have recently made some interesting points, that are relevant for our discussion. They argue that even for electoral participation, it matters for the quality of representation who participates. First, they argue:

"When a group [...] is active, it becomes visible to an elected representative and is incorporated in his or her salient constituency. [...] Even in the absence of explicit directives (and constituents often do not send detailed messages), elected officials anticipate the needs and make inferences about the preferences of potentially active constituents. Thus, it matters not only how participants differ from nonparticipants in their opinions [...] but who they are" (Verba et al., 1993: 304).

In other words politicians are likely to be more responsive towards the politically active. This poses no problem, as long as the active are representative for the electorate as a whole. Some studies both in the Netherlands (Elsinga, 1984 and Castenmiller, 1988) and abroad (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980) indicate that voters and nonvoters are essentially similar in their political attitudes.

But, and this is their second point, Verba et al. argue that these comforting conclusions are based on a standard list of issues included in the election survey, because political scientists think they are relevant. These issues, however, need not be representative for the most urgent concerns of our respondents. Verba and his associates show that, even though participants and nonparticipants were similar in their preferences as measured by such standard attitude questions:

"citizens who are active and those who are not are quite different in their demographic attributes, their economic needs, and the government benefits they receive. These disparities are exacerbated when we move from the most common political act, voting, to acts that are more difficult, convey more information, and exert greater pressure" (Verba et al., 1993: 314).

Of course, it remains to be seen whether, these conclusions are also relevant in the Dutch context, where the association between demographic variables and reported voting is probably less strong than in the USA. But these findings do legitimize some caution, even with regard to conclusions on the consequences of widespread nonvoting for the quality of political representation.
A note of caution is also appropriate with regard to the third argument provided by Van der Eijk and Van Praag. There is undoubtedly ample evidence that our DNES-surveys do not show a decrease in political interest, political distrust, and similar attitudes. Van der Eijk and his associates have made this point convincingly elsewhere (Van der Eijk, Pennings and Wille, 1992). Nevertheless, on the basis of the arguments provided in section 3.3, I am not completely confident that these positive results are not affected by a possible response bias in the DNES.

If we look at Van der Eijk and Van Praag's arguments, I think they are not wholly sensitive to the special nature of voting in a representative democracy. Moreover I think they are premature in their sympathetic attempt to comfort those who are worried about low levels of electoral participation. In this latter respect, Van der Eijk and Van Praag's article, clearly demonstrates the importance of good empirical research for the normative theoretical debate on the meaning of nonvoting for the quality of representative democracy. Many arguments in normative debates on electoral participation are based on propositions that lend themselves to empirical testing. Van der Eijk and Van Praag in their argument, not to worry too much about low levels of turnout, are essentially doing this. My comments do not question the legitimacy of applying empirical research in this way. On the contrary. My doubts regard the conclusiveness of their empirical evidence.

In this paper I have reviewed the Dutch political science literature on election turnout. I think it is obvious that a lot of work still needs to be done. In a rather small political science research community, like the Dutch one, one should not expect all of the gaps in our current knowledge to be filled in a few years time. Nevertheless, I am confident that current projects and proposals for new studies will alleviate at least some of the shortcomings in the present literature.
Table 1
Institutional characteristics of the Dutch electoral and party system

| Institutional mobilization: | Dealignment: percentage of voters in a social group supporting the associated party dropped from 72 percent in 1956 to 44 percent in 1989 (Andeweg and Irwin, 1993: 99). |
| Compulsory voting: | Repealed in 1970. |
| National competitive districts: | Election of all the representatives from one electoral district by proportional representation. |
| Disproportionality: | High disproportionality: among 22 democracies only Denmark has a lower value for Lijphart’s index of disproportionality (Lijphart, 1984: 160). |
| Multipartyism: | Strong multipartyism: among 22 democracies only Denmark and Switzerland have a higher number of ‘effective’ parties (Lijphart, 1984: 160). |
| Unicameralism: | Weak bicameralism: one house of parliament is generally more powerful than the other (moderately asymmetrical) and both chambers are elected by a system of proportional representation (congruence; Lijphart, 1984: 99). |

Table 2
Legal and administrative facilitation of voting in the Netherlands$^a$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Provincial/Municipal</th>
<th>European</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of days polling booths are open</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work day or rest day?</td>
<td>work day</td>
<td>work day</td>
<td>work day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal voting</td>
<td>on advance application; for voters abroad</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>on advance application; for voters abroad not voting in other EEC-country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proxy voting</td>
<td>within strict limits</td>
<td>within strict limits</td>
<td>within strict limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituency transfer</td>
<td>on advance application</td>
<td>on advance application</td>
<td>on advance application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polling booths in special institutions</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance voting</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ The table is analogous to Crewe’s Table 10-4 (1981: 242-247).
Table 3
Bivariate relationships (Kendall’s τ) between electoral participation in Dutch national, local, provincial and European elections and demographic and psychological characteristics of voters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>National ‘70-’86</th>
<th>National ‘89</th>
<th>Local ‘90</th>
<th>Provinicial ‘91</th>
<th>Europe ‘89</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>cs (.06)</td>
<td>s (.06)</td>
<td>s (.14)</td>
<td>s (.09)</td>
<td>s (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>income</td>
<td>os (.04)</td>
<td>s (.05)</td>
<td>s (.08)</td>
<td>s (.15)</td>
<td>s (.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education</td>
<td>os (.04)</td>
<td>s (.05)</td>
<td>s (.15)</td>
<td>s (.09)</td>
<td>s (.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>church attendance</td>
<td>os (.04)</td>
<td>s (.05)</td>
<td>s (.10)</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>church membership</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political interest</td>
<td>nr (.17)</td>
<td>s (.08)</td>
<td>s (.32)</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>s (.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political knowledge</td>
<td>nr (.18)</td>
<td>s (.11)</td>
<td>s (.17)</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>knowledge party position</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>s (.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>political efficacy</td>
<td>nr (.15)</td>
<td>s (.06)</td>
<td>s (.22)</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strength party-ident.</td>
<td>nr (.26)</td>
<td>s (.15)</td>
<td>s (.17)</td>
<td>s (.39)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closeness to party</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>s (.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importance of politics</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>s (.08)</td>
<td>s (.22)</td>
<td>s (.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relevance party politics</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>s (.13)</td>
<td>s (.27)</td>
<td>na</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Entries in column ‘national 70-86’ relate to the average value of τ over 5 or 6 elections. Abbreviations stand for: na = not available; nr = not reported; ns = not significant; at α is 5 percent; one-tailed test; unless stated otherwise; os = occasionally significant; cs = consistently significant; The results for the demographic variables are based on Schram (1989). His dependent variable is a simple dichotomy (reported turnout or abstention); his analysis covers all elections in this period. The results for the psychological variables are based on Schmidt (1983). His dependent variable is a voting index based on DNES-panel data. Respondents in the panel were asked repeatedly whether they actually voted or intended to vote in an election. The number of affirmative answers determines the score on the voting index. Schmidt’s results do not cover the 1986 election. The sample sizes on which these results are based are all well above 700; and normally exceed 1000 cases.

2. Entries in the column ‘National 89’ are based on my analysis of DNES’89 data. The dependent variable relates to reported voting or abstention. The sample size was 1506.

3. Entries in the column ‘Local 90’ are based on my analysis of data for seven large Dutch municipalities (Amsterdam, The Hague, Utrecht, Eindhoven, Tilburg, Nijmegen and Zwolle; refer to Tops et al., 1991). The dependent variable is a four-category item measuring the respondent’s reported likelihood to vote if there would be elections the other day (will vote certainly, will probably vote, will probably not vote, will certainly not vote). The sample size on which these results are based is 3400.

4. Entries in the column ‘Provincial 91’ are based on Van der Eijk and Schild with Visser (1992). Their dependent variable relates to the respondents intention to vote and is a simple dichotomy (reported turnout or abstention). The sample size for the survey on which these results are based is not reported in their contribution. Significance is determined for a two-tailed test.

5. Entries in the column ‘European 89’ are based on Van der Eijk and Oppenhuizen (1990). Here too the dependent variable is dichotomous (reported turnout or abstention). The τ indicates that it is not clear from this source what the variable ‘religiosity’ (significant; τ = .19) stands for. The sample size for this survey was 948. The authors do not indicate the criteria employed in the significance tests performed.
### Table 4
Respondents' motivation for (reported) abstention (Source: DNES 1989; Anker and Oppenhuis, 1993: 247-248)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation for abstention</th>
<th>% of reported nonvoters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>physical and personal circumstances</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absence (not in town, abroad)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no summons</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problems with proxy</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no interest</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>does not vote on principle</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>could not make a choice</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protest</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cynicism</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feelings of incompetence</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uncodable, no answer, don't know</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (percentage)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (absolute)</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of times voted</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 times</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 times</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 times</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>never</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (percentage)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (absolute)</td>
<td>1439</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1
Average turnout in the three most recent parliamentary elections in 24 democracies.

Figure 2
Figure 3
Turnout in municipal elections in seven large Dutch cities, 1974-1990.

Cities
× Zwolle
□ Nijmegen
■ Utrecht
○ Amsterdam
■ Den Haag
● Eindhoven
▼ Tilburg

Source: Mackie and Rose, 1991
Figure 4

- ▼ Rural area
- ⬤ Regional centres
- ○ Medium-sized cities
- ■ Large cities
Figure 5.
Notes

Thanks are due to Kees Aarts, Henk van der Kolk and Ingrid Smeets (all Department of Public Policy and Public Administration at the University of Twente) for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

1. The normative implications of electoral participation are discussed at some length in later section of this paper.

2. The higher house of Dutch parliament (Eerste Kamer) is elected indirectly, by the members of the popularly elected provincial councils (Provinciale Staten).

3. For a review of the consequences of the abandonment of 'compulsory voting', see Irwin (1974).

4. In some countries there is an outright legal obligation to vote. In other countries such as Italy there is no real obligation, but 'sanctions' are applied to nonvoters. In Austria voting is compulsory in some parts of the country.

5. This tendency might be balanced by a positive effect on turnout of more intense contact between electorate and representatives in single-member districts (Crews, 1980: 256).

6. In this respect Jackman follows Downs (1957) argument regarding multiparty systems.

7. There is probably an interaction between these variables. The negative effects of dealignment on turnout only became apparent after the abandonment of 'compulsory' voting. This is especially relevant since most of the dealignment seems to have taken place before 1970 (see Andeweg and Irwin, 1993: Table 4.2).

8. On the other hand one might also argue that the decline in electoral turnout is the surprising phenomenon: "The decline in electoral participation presents a paradox. Education, access to political information, and sophistication have generally been rising in recent decades, and it has long been established that such indicators are related to turnout. Why then is participation declining if the public's general level of political involvement is increasing?" (Dalton and Wattenberg, 1993: 211). Moreover the Netherlands is by no means the only democracy with more or less stable turnout rates; some countries even have witnessed substantial increases in turnout.

9. The municipal elections held in March 1994 and the parliamentary elections held in May 1998 witnessed a stabilization of turnout at the rather low levels of 1989-1990. The turnout in the municipal elections was 3 percent higher than the all-time low in 1990. The turnout in the parliamentary elections reached an all-time low (78,3%), slightly below the relatively low turnout in 1989 and the previous rock bottom in 1971. No detailed results of these recent elections are currently available. Therefore this paper will not discuss the results of these 1994 contests.

10. Recently Dutch municipalities have conducted local referenda. This paper does not discuss the electoral participation in these referenda. These referenda are discussed in Hillebrand and Van Holsteyn (1991); Van Holsteyn and Hillebrand (1991); Van Praag (1993); Saris, Neijens and Slot (1993).

11. Van der Eijk and Visser employed Stokes' Variance Components Model of Political Effects (Stokes, 1967 and 1969). For European elections the variations were explained for 100 percent by the national variance component; for provincial elections the national component explained 98 percent of the variance, and for the national elections this component explained 99 percent (Van der Eijk and Visser, 1992: 90).

12. In April 1970 a survey was conducted by Heunks and Stouthard shortly after the provincial elections; Following the municipal elections in June 1970, Daedt and his associates conducted a survey of citizens from Amsterdam. On the occasion of the parliamentary elections in 1971, the second large scale Dutch National Election
Study was held. Moreover, on this occasion Dutch television commissioned six monthly surveys (partly forming a panel). This survey was conducted by a research group including among others Van Putten and Staelhard.


14. The distinction between these approaches are not very thight. For instance, Wolfinger and Rosenstone cast their section 'explaining who votes' (1980: 6-10) in terms of the benefits and costs of voting. They explicitly acknowledge that this text was inspired by Anthony Downs. The classification of Wolfinger and Rosenstone under this heading is based on the selection of their explanatory variables.

15. Dalton and Wattenberg associate the sociological approach with Berelson and Lazarsfeld (Columbia school) and the social psychological model with the investigators at the University of Michigan (Campbell, Miller, Converse, Stokes). But here too one should be well aware that the boundaries are not very clearly. Such a categorization, does no justice to the substantial similarities in theoretical approach between 'Columbia' and 'Michigan'. Moreover many of the social-psychological variables, also turn up in rational choice models where their effects are interpreted in terms of costs and benefits.

16. This is not to say that these authors are necessarily supportive of the rational choice perspective.

17. Early exceptions are provided by the studies by Janssens (1971) and Heunks (1973).

18. Van de Eijk and Oppenhuizen (1990) and Van der Eijk, Scheldt with Visser (1992) also have performed a multivariate analyses, but they do not present detailed results.

19. With regard to conventional political participation men are more active than women, whereas both sexes participate about equally in non-conventional forms of participation (Castenmillner, 1988: 56).

20. Although according to many studies this trend is reversed for the aged.

21. The same is true for a closely related variable 'closeness to party': the length of the shortest distance between the voter's left-right placement and the positions on the left-right scale where the respondent locates the competing parties.

22. The title of his dissertation ('Voting behavior in economic perspective') suggests otherwise. Schram's empirical research on electoral participation however exclusively relates to demographic variables.

23. These authors concentrate on four aspects of alienation: cognitive and evaluative meaninglessness, sense of political competence and sense of the political systems' responsiveness to citizen demands.

24. These authors call their approach 'sociological', following Brian Barry's discussion of 'sociological' and 'economic' explanations (Barry, 1970).
25. Aldrich's arguments implies that the effect of closeness on voting is through lower information costs. The effect of the factual closeness does not run via the subjects estimate of the likelihood that his vote will make a difference for the outcome of the election.


27. Of course this theoretical reflection could result in a need for new measurement instruments as well.

28. This section draws heavily on the discussions with Kees Aarts and Ingrid Smeets (both Faculty of Public Policy and Public Administration at the University of Twente) and our joint proposal for a research project on the validity of survey-based data on voting behavior and voting intentions.

29. In this paper I shall not discuss the results of aggregate voting research. In the Netherlands geographers have taken up this essentially descriptive type of analysis. Examples of Dutch research in this vein are Passchier (1989) and Van Tilburg (1993).

30. Although the case of the airplane crash in the Bijdmermeer (Amsterdam) might suggest that recently the municipal population registers being the basis for electoral registration are not as accurate as previously supposed. The inaccuracies in the Amsterdam case, however, were mainly due to illegal foreigners. These illegal foreigners, of course, are not eligible to vote.

31. The floorleader of a ultra-right wing, racist party was excluded by the other parties.

32. In my discussion I disregard the role of voting in normative theories of citizenship in a representative democracy.

33. Wolfsinger and Rosenstone (1980) draw similar conclusions for the USA. It is curious that Van der Eijk and Van Praag do not bother to cite any evidence for their (correct) claim, on the representativeness of voters.

34. I emphasize that Elsinga and Verha et al. agree in their conclusion that the representativeness of the participants is less problematic for electoral participation than for other forms of political action.
References


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S. A. H. Denier


