

## Voter participation of young Europeans. The case of the 2004 European Parliament elections

In this article we carry out a comparative analysis of the voter participation of young Spanish people in comparison to other young Europeans in the context of a common electoral process for them all: the European Parliament elections. Therefore we have used data provided by the *European Electoral Studies 2004*, and as independent explicative variables for different behaviours we use attitudes of young Europeans towards the European Union. The analysis allows us to highlight the relevance of the feeling of belonging and the pride of being a European citizen as the most important variables that explain participation in European elections.

### Analysis of youth's political behaviour

Political participation constitutes one of the priorities of this analysis, as it is one of the central elements of democracy. Therefore, changes in the patterns of participation are very interesting, and sometimes can become a concern for researchers and political decision-makers due to the repercussions for the legitimacy of the democratic political system. Transformations in the practice of rights and obligations in general, or among a certain group in particular, awakens the curiosity of researchers for knowing and explaining the reasons behind it. Some of the reasons are related to the change of attitudes towards politics, and some to social and cultural changes derived from the modernization processes of societies.

Among the different analyses about political participation many are focused on voter participation exclusively. Some have proven the decrease of voter participation (Blais et al., 2004; Dalton, 2007) mainly among young people, in comparison to previous generations and in comparison to the rest of the population. In many occasions, young people are described as apathetic, indifferent, uninterested or disconnected with regard to politics. On the contrary, other analyses have come to the conclusion that young people are in fact interested in politics, but they use different forms of political participation (O'Toole et al., 2003; Cunningham and Lavallette, 2004; Weinstein, 2004; Stolle y Hooghe 2005). What seems to be changing is the type of participation, which changes from conventional forms to non-conventional forms. Some authors have called these new forms of participation "cause-oriented styles" (Norris, 2003), "one-off issue politics" (Hoskins, 2003), or "extra-representative expression instruments" (Torcal, Montero & Teorell, 2003), trying to highlight that the characteristics of this

type of activities or instruments through which this group of the population tries to influence on politics. (1)

The decline of the interest in (and the use of) traditional instruments of participation does not mean that young people are not linked to politics, but just that we need to widen the definition of participation to include new forms of political engagement. Hoskins (2003:3) insists on pointing out that the private and personal sphere of the young people provide indicators to measure their own political engagement. For example, the expression of said engagement could happen through the clothes they wear, the music they listen to or the food they buy. So, if they change their forms of political participation and engagement, we will need to find new indicators in order for us to be able to measure the changes.

The appearance of new technologies of information and communication, and the new demands of young people, added to the decrease of the use of traditional or conventional political participation divides analyses of this group of the population into three big groups. The first group includes researches that, following the most classical analyses about political participation (such as Milbrath and Goel, 1977), mainly try to explain differences regarding the patterns of behaviour of young people by referring to a specific age group in front of the rest of the population (Quintelier, 2007, Goerres, 2007). A second group includes those studies that focus on the interior of the group of young people and try to find differences between age cohorts and between adolescence and youth (Krampen, 2000; Smith, 1999), and lastly there are studies that try to find explanations of the differences and similarities in the patterns of political behaviour of young people by studying and identifying differentiated contexts, that is, comparative studies (Anduiza, 2001, Cainzos, 2006, Westphal, 2006).

These analyses made use of different factors to explain the differences in behaviour, such as the appearance and development of post-materialistic values derived from the process of modernization following Inglehart's theories, the increase of individualism (Bennet, 1998), the loss of importance of traditional cleavages of the social class, religion or rural-urban areas to determine the levels of political and voter participation, and the importance of mass media regarding the increase of the level of cynicism and apathy (Pinkleton & Weintraub, 2001). Among them, two types of effect were also taken into account to explain the change of the patterns of behaviour: the generational effect (or cohort effect) and the life-cycle effect (2). The generational effect has two connotations. The first one refers to the fact that people of the same age and faced with the same event can react differently depending on the situation and context they live in. In this sense, the objective is to look for those variables that make young people of the same age act differently in different periods of time. The life-cycle effect is related to the process of growth and, therefore, it explains that young people, as they gradually become adults, also acquire more experience in terms of the political and electoral processes, and at the same time, they access higher levels of education and a more stable economic and labour situation.

(1)  
For a comprehensive and comparative analysis about participation of young Spanish people in demonstrations, see the article by Miguel Cainzos, number 75 of the *Revista de Estudios de Juventud*

(2)  
These two effects were analyzed for the Spanish case in a work by Moral and Mateos (2002) regarding electoral participation and the change of young people's attitudes.

In this article we will carry out a comparative analysis of voter participation of young Spanish people and young Europeans in a common electoral process such as the elections for the European parliament. Therefore, this is a partial analysis of political participation focusing on the forms of voter participation with regard to a certain event where the increase of abstention

is remarkable in comparison to other elections. Although this approach is partial, it complements the group of comparative analyses previously presented. In this case, the main interest is not identifying new forms of political participation, but understanding and explaining why there is such low conventional political participation. Due to the quantity of considered countries, we limited our comparative analysis to young people only, that is, the comparison between young people from different EU-member countries, and not between young people and adults in each country. As will be explained later in the section about objectives and data, explicative variables for voter participation in this kind of elections are: political attitudes of young people towards what it means to be a European citizen and towards European institutions, as well as other introduced socio-demographic control variables.

This article is structured in four sections. The first section highlights the characteristics that make elections for the European Parliament different in comparison to the rest of elections, and we will present some of the factors that can explain different levels of participation between countries. The second section focuses on the characteristics and the justification of the data and the cases used to carry out the analyses in sections three and four. The section entitled “Youth and European Union” aims to descriptively present differences between young people regarding affective orientations of young people as European citizens and their assessment of European institutions. The last section uses these political orientations towards the European Union and other specific factors of the elections as possible explicative variables for participation in this type of events.

## European elections: are they second or third-rate elections?

The European Parliament is the only supranational assembly directly elected by the citizens of the member states. Therefore, elections for the European Parliament constitute the main instrument of participation and direct influence of citizens on issues of the European Union. However, low levels of participation characterize these elections. They have been identified as second-rate elections, as citizens give little political importance to what is to be decided through them and voters feel their votes are not important (Font, 1995: 15).

This type election also presents a different type of characteristics, which highlight its peculiarities in front of other electoral processes. In the first place, it is a process that leads to a single organ of representation, but the selection of representatives does not take place through a common electoral system. There is no electoral regulation applicable for all states; each country chooses its own representatives through different norms (3). The type and size of the circumscription, the obligation to vote or not, the compatibility or not with national mandates, the day of the elections, the electoral formula to distribute the seats, the electoral threshold, closed or open lists; these are some of the main variables that vary from country to country. So, for example, Spain has one single circumscription and a proportional electoral system, while in countries such as Belgium vote is preferential and circumscriptions regional (4).

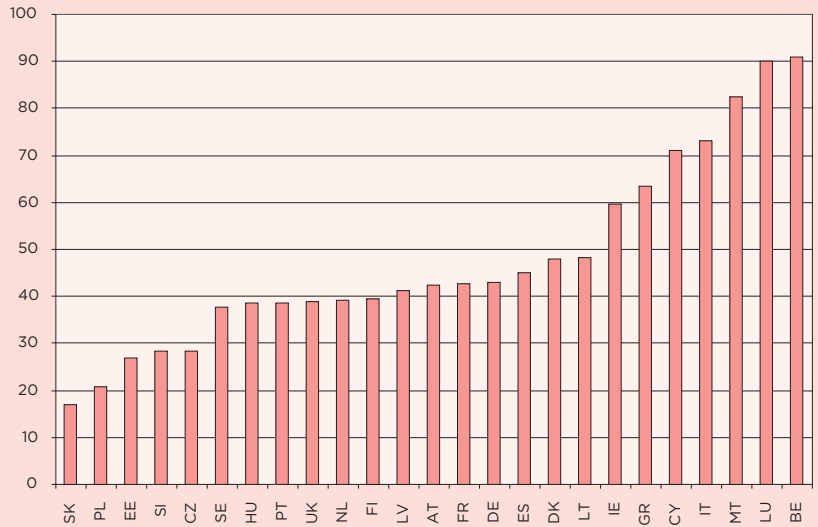
A second relevant characteristic for the different importance of these elections is that although the election of representatives is carried out

(3)  
Besides, these norms can at the same time differ from the norms used for national electoral processes.

(4)  
For a detailed description of institutional peculiarities in each country see:  
<http://www.europarl.es/>

through different processes, elected members of the parliament are not distributed depending on nationality, but on political groups. In this case, their political affinity determines their capacity and power in the Chamber (5).

Chart 1. Total real participation in the European Parliament elections, 2004



Source: European Parliament.

As shown in Chart 1, total real participation in the European Parliament elections in 2004 was very different depending on the country, and the total average participation was 47.8%. This could lead us to even refer of third-rate elections. Participation in Belgium and Luxembourg was very high (90%, obligation to vote), in front of Sweden and Hungary, with a participation rate of 40%, and much more than in other countries that only recently entered the European Union such as Poland and Slovakia, where the participation rate was under 20%. However, these striking differences seem to only be the consequence of the European electoral context, as there are not as many notable differences between countries when we compare other types of election. Rico and Font (2000: 215) show how average participation in national elections does not differ as much between countries as in European elections. Therefore, the mentioned institutional factors could explain the variation of the percentages of participation, but they are not the only factors that contribute to these differences.

In 2004, and for the Spanish case, national and European elections coincided, only separated by two months (in March the national general elections and in May the European elections). This short time between elections and the results regarding participation justify Rico's and Font's theory to explain low participation in European elections in comparison to national elections: "*if not much time has passed since the general elections, that what might happen in European elections is not interesting and participation suffers*". However, the political situation around the general elections did not transfer to the European context; there were much lower

(5)

Currently, there are seven political groups: European People's Party (EPP), the European Democrats, the Party of European Socialists, The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), the Green / European Free Alliance, the Independence and Democracy Group, and the Union for Europe of the Nations.

levels of voter mobilization for the European elections. All of this makes us think that it is a necessity to take other individual variables into account in order to explain said behaviour. The individual variables considered in this paper are related to the attitudes of citizens towards the European Union and its institutions. As you will see later on, differences between countries and specifically between young people are notable.

Orientations towards the European Union have been used as variables to explain low participation rates in elections for the European Parliament. The lack of favourable attitudes (or feelings of belonging) towards the European Union and its institutions could justify abstention in this kind of elections. But regarding the issue of the importance of euro-sceptic attitudes for participation rates, there are different approaches (Van Ewijk & Van Egmond, 2007: 563). With regard to the total population, there are studies that state that there are not enough evidences to reach conclusive conclusions. According to other author like Blondel, Sinnott and Svensson, attitudes towards European integration, the European Parliament, political parties and candidates presented in the elections of the year 1994 in fact do show a positive relation to participation in this type of elections.

The following sections try to contribute to this debate by proving the relevance of these attitudinal variables among young Europeans for the case of the elections in the year 2004. We expect that young people with pro-European attitudes, with high levels of identification as European citizens, and more trust in European institutions will be the ones who will show higher levels of participation than others that do not present these attitudes.

## **Objectives and data**

Specific objectives of this article are to initially describe the conflict between participation versus abstention among young Spanish people in comparison to young Europeans in the elections for the European Parliament, and then analyze the differences of these patterns of behaviour. Independent variables through which we to explain the behaviour are individual and related to the political attitudes of youth towards the European Union.

The attitudinal indicators considered for this article take into account situational elements, such as interest in the electoral campaign for the 2004 elections, as well as attitudes that are related to specific support, and feelings of belonging, towards the European Union. Combining more situational aspects with other aspects referred to the European Union itself could establish some differences in terms of the level of voter participation.

The difficulty of surveys with large and representative samples on a European level and focused on young people constitutes a major problem to reach reliable conclusions about the attitudes and behaviours. Being aware of this limitation, but also knowing of the interest of such an approach to comparative studies, we used the data of the European Electoral Studies corresponding to the year 2004. This is a study carried out in all EU-member states before May 2004 with equivalent questions for all countries, therefore allowing comparisons. Lithuania and Luxembourg were removed from the matrix, as the samples for these countries did not include the population under 30. Therefore, the total number of cases in this study is 22, and the analyzed group of the population are people between 18 and 30 years of age. Specific information regarding each country can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. **Characteristics of the study**

Country	Abbreviation	Sample	% Sample Young people	% Sample Rest of the population
Austria	AT	1,010	15.2	84.8
Belgium	BE	889	16.6	83.4
United Kingdom	UK	1,500	14.8	85.2
Cyprus	CY	500	25.2	74.8
Czech Republic	CZ	889	16.8	83.2
Denmark	DK	1,317	16.6	83.4
Estonia	EE	1,606	17.9	82.1
Finland	FI	900	15.9	84.1
France	FR	1,406	19.1	80.9
Germany	DE	596	17.4	82.6
Greece	GR	500	19.4	80.6
Hungary	HU	1,200	13.5	86.5
Ireland	IE	1,154	15.5	84.5
Italia	IT	1,553	10.3	89.7
Latvia	LV	1,000	23.8	76.2
Netherlands	NL	1,586	7.4	92.6
Poland	PL	960	22.5	77.5
Portugal	PT	1,000	21.3	78.7
Slovakia	SK	1,063	25.9	74.1
Slovenia	SI	1,002	19.2	80.8
Spain	ES	1,208	22.8	77.2
Sweden	SE	2,100	18.5	81.5
<b>Total</b>		24,939	15.9	84.1

Malta, Rumania and Bulgaria are not included in the study, as it was carried out in 2004. The samples of Lithuania and Luxembourg did not include people over 30 years of age.

## Youth and the European Union

This section aims to describe the similarities or differences regarding attitudes of young people towards the European Union. Therefore, we have selected four indicators, two of them referring to the European citizenship: considering oneself a European citizen and, at the same time, a citizen of his/her country, and the level of pro-European feelings measured through the personal pride of being a European citizen. The other two indicators reflect affective orientations and assessment of the European Union: trust in European institutions and level of satisfaction with how democracy works in the European Union.

### European citizenship

The Maastricht Treaty in 1992 institutionalized European citizenship for all those persons with the nationality of a member state. This citizenship complements the national citizenship. However, not all Europeans feel as European citizens. Sharing both citizenships, obtaining a series of rights and obligations is not always a guarantee that people will feel or see themselves as such.

In the case of young Europeans, and in general terms, it is not very frequent among European people to see themselves as both European citizens and citizens of their own country. In fact, there is a high percentage of people who never think of themselves as having two citizenships: 57% of the young people in Great Britain, 43% of the young interviewees in Germany, 53% in the Netherlands, or 68% in Hungary. In this sense,

young Spanish people follow the general trend and 57% of them only sometimes think of themselves as having two citizenships. On the contrary, young people from Greece (39%), France (30%), followed by Cyprus, Ireland, Austria, Italy and Portugal (around 20%) see themselves more often as citizens of both their country and the European Union (See Table 2).

Table 2. **European Citizenship (in %)**

	Feel both a European citizen and a citizen of the own country			Feeling proud of being a European citizen	
	Often	Sometimes	Never	Very much Pretty much	Little Nothing
<b>Austria</b>	24.7	36.4	38.3	46.7	50.6
<b>Belgium</b>	19.6	50.7	29.7	72.6	27.4
<b>United Kingdom</b>	14.5	28.6	56.8	51.4	41
<b>Cyprus</b>	27.8	57.9	14.3	69.8	27.7
<b>Czech Republic</b>	8.1	36.9	38.3	34.9	43.6
<b>Denmark</b>	15.1	43.1	38.5	58.3	22.9
<b>Estonia</b>	9.4	48.3	40.6	35.8	57.3
<b>Finland</b>	18.9	50.3	30.8	46.2	51.8
<b>France</b>	29.7	37.9	32.3	81.4	17.4
<b>Germany</b>	21.8	34.7	43.6	54	40.2
<b>Greece</b>	39.2	34.0	25.8	62.9	34
<b>Hungary</b>	6.8	24.7	68.5	59.9	31.5
<b>Ireland</b>	22.9	42.5	34.6	78.2	20.6
<b>Italia</b>	23.7	49.4	24.4	66.6	17.9
<b>Latvia</b>	10.1	47.5	39.9	32.8	57.6
<b>Netherlands</b>	5.9	33.9	53.4	31.3	49.1
<b>Poland</b>	17.6	47.2	32.4	58.3	25.9
<b>Portugal</b>	23.0	64.8	12.2	88.3	11.7
<b>Slovakia</b>	14.2	43.3	39.6	45.4	37.1
<b>Slovenia</b>	18.8	43.2	34.4	38.5	55.2
<b>Spain</b>	6.2	<b>57.1</b>	<b>33.7</b>	<b>74.3</b>	<b>19.8</b>
<b>Sweden</b>	*	*	*	24.9	32.1
<b>Total</b>	17.1	44.2	36.5	53.9	34.6

Question: Do you think of yourself not only as a Spanish citizen, but also as a citizen of the European Union sometimes?

\* No data available

Being aware of this double citizenship more often seems to be related in some countries to feel proud of being a citizen of the European Union. In Greece (32%), France (28%), Ireland (23%), Italy (24%) and Portugal (23%) young people are prouder of being European citizens. The Spanish case surprises, as nearly three out of four young people feel very proud of being European citizens, however, only 6% of them think of themselves as Spanish and European citizens. All in all, young people who think of themselves as European citizens and citizens of their country are also the ones who feel very proud of being Europeans.

The time those countries have already been members of the European Union establishes a difference with regard to the internalization of the condition of citizen and the pride of this situation. In this sense, six out of ten young people in Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia are little or not at all proud of being European citizens.

## Trust in European institutions and satisfaction with democracy in the EU

A characteristic element of many democratic countries is the increase of political attitudes of distancing and disconnection regarding politics. This decrease of engagement is usually a consequence of the loss of trust of citizens in political institutions, political parties and politicians. Previously, we have mentioned that some of the descriptions of young people's behaviour are related to the presence of this type of attitudes, such as apathy, cynicism or disaffection. Torcal (2005) identifies two dimensions in the concept of political disaffection: political disconnection and institutional disaffection. The first dimension is formed by the perception of a lack of responsibility of political authorities and institutions, and the second one is related to the absence of trust of citizens in institutions and politicians. Institutional disaffection is independent from the support of the political regime by individuals and therefore does not imply a crisis of democratic legitimacy. If that would be so, young Europeans would distrust institutions very much and would be more or less satisfied with the political system.

In this case, there are several indicators regarding institutional trust: specifically, trust in the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council. The best way to describe levels of trust in these institutions (Table 3) is: limited differences of trust in these three institutions and a general medium level of trust. Only in some cases distrust is higher than trust, for example, among British and Swedish people.

Table 3. **Average trust in European institutions (typical deviation) (from 1 to 10)**

	European Parliament	European Commission	Council of Europe	Average institutional trust
<b>Austria</b>	4.84 (2.23)	5.00 (2.07)	4.57 (1.95)	4.8
<b>Belgium</b>	5.19 (1.99)	5.07 (2.03)	4.88 (2.02)	5.8
<b>United Kingdom</b>	4.65 (2.17)	4.44 (2.02)	4.27 (1.89)	4.4
<b>Cyprus</b>	5.95 (1.83)	5.78 (1.68)	5.78 (1.84)	5.8
<b>Czech Republic</b>	5.18 (2.55)	5.05 (1.51)	4.69 (2.49)	4.9
<b>Denmark</b>	5.78 (2.11)	5.49 (2.04)	5.79 (2.05)	5.7
<b>Estonia</b>	5.40 (2.26)	5.40 (2.38)	5.32 (2.39)	5.4
<b>Finland</b>	5.22 (1.82)	5.28 (1.94)	5.04 (2.08)	5.1
<b>France</b>	5.19 (2.19)	5.27 (2.05)	4.65 (2.22)	5.0
<b>Germany</b>	5.40 (2.05)	4.85 (1.98)	4.75 (1.88)	5.0
<b>Greece</b>	5.83 (2.57)	5.89 (2.44)	5.75 (2.28)	5.7
<b>Hungary</b>	5.90 (2.12)	5.82 (2.26)	5.35 (2.18)	5.7
<b>Ireland</b>	5.09 (2.34)	4.89 (2.24)	4.14 (2.32)	4.6
<b>Italia</b>	5.49 (1.85)	5.43 (1.89)	*	5.4
<b>Latvia</b>	5.17 (2.34)	5.12 (2.40)	4.93 (2.32)	4.9
<b>Netherlands</b>	4.97 (1.75)	4.92 (1.77)	5.05 (1.67)	5.0
<b>Poland</b>	5.11 (2.38)	4.94 (2.23)	4.76 (2.30)	4.9
<b>Portugal</b>	6.49 (2.05)	6.23 (2.07)	6.16 (2.02)	6.2
<b>Slovakia</b>	3.57 (2.21)	5.24 (2.73)	5.07 (2.44)	4.6
<b>Slovenia</b>	5.61 (2.39)	5.78 (2.33)	5.59 (2.37)	5.7
<b>Spain</b>	5.34 (1.73)	5.35 (1.71)	5.31 (1.66)	5.3
<b>Sweden</b>	3.64 (2.21)	3.62 (2.15)	3.57 (2.18)	3.6
<b>Total</b>	5.15 (2.27)	5.21 (2.20)	5.00 (2.23)	5.1

Question: Regarding the following institutions, can you tell me if you know them and if yes could you express your opinion about them where 1 is the worst and 10 the best assessment.

For the cases of Spain and Sweden the minimum value was 0 and not 1.

No data available for Italy regarding the Council



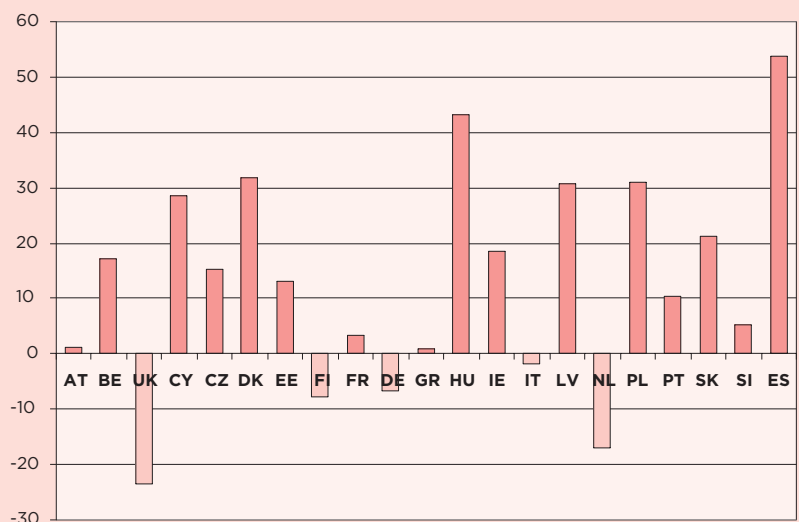
On the opposite side, trust is very high among young people from Cyprus, Hungary, Denmark, Portugal and Greece. Within these countries, there are no big differences of trust between these institutions, which means their reputation is very similar.

Another indicator that allows us to measure the level of legitimacy and acceptance of the political system is the level of satisfaction with how democracy works. Satisfaction of each individual is usually the result of combining perceived quality and awaited quality. In this sense, and regarding the context of the European Union, satisfaction is higher than dissatisfaction. We could say that perceived quality is higher than awaited regarding the political democratic system in the European Union, although there is a group of countries where young people are clearly dissatisfied: Great Britain and the Netherlands, followed by Finland and Germany. But the most important thing is that these attitudinal characteristics are constant throughout time. The data coincides with information provided by Anduiza (2001) with regard to previous years.

Young people from France, Italy and Austria are completely divided when it comes to assess how democracy works in the European Union. Spanish people are characterized by being the most satisfied; more than seven out of ten young Spanish people are very or pretty satisfied.

These two indicators: institutional trust and level of satisfaction with how democracy works present high levels of correlation between them, which allows us to define a profile of young people with high levels of institutional trust who positively assess how democracy works in the European Union; but this should not lead us to think that there is institutional disaffection among young Europeans, as levels of trust in European institutions are not strikingly low.

Chart 2. **Satisfaction with how democracy Works in the EU**



Difference between those that are very or pretty satisfied and those that are little or not satisfied at all. Question: In general, would you say you are very satisfied, pretty satisfied, little satisfied or not satisfied at all with how democracy works in the European Union?

## Youth and the European Parliament elections

The elections for the European Parliament, as already said, could be identified as second (or even third) rate elections, due to the participation rate and the importance given to them by the population. In this section we will try to analyze the interest in and the specific monitoring of the 2004 elections and provide a model to explain different levels of participation among young Europeans.

### Interest in and monitoring of the electoral campaign

The 2004 elections for the European Parliament did not wake notable interest among young people in Spain or in Europe, rather the opposite. More than seven out of ten young Europeans were not interested in this electoral process. Those who were more interested were young people from Ireland and Portugal, with similar levels of interest and lack of interest. This lack of interest reflects one of the characteristics that identify second-rate elections. And add to that the limited monitoring of political information regarding this electoral process by young people. In this sense, young Spanish people stand out, as they barely used the most common resources to stay informed about politics and about this electoral process, such as television or newspapers. Furthermore, this is one of the groups that talk less about this issue with family and friends.

In this context of limited interest in the electoral campaign, young people from Germany, Ireland and Austria do stand out, as they show a slightly more encouraging pattern in terms of the monitoring.

Table 4. Interest and monitoring of European Parliament elections (in %)

Country	Interest		Frequently		
	Very/ Pretty	Little/ Not at all	Television	Newspaper	Discuss with family
Austria	40.3	59.7	10.4	31.2	26.6
Belgium	25.7	74.3	15.5	11.9	15.5
United Kingdom	29.7	69.8	17.6	23.1	20.3
Cyprus	15.1	84.9	11.1	9.5	11.1
Czech Republic	12.8	86.6	6.9	11.6	4.1
Denmark	33.5	66.5	6.1	10.6	21.2
Estonia	25.3	74.0	4.9	7.7	9.6
Finland	31.5	68.5	0.7	9.1	16.1
France	26.0	74.0	11.2	13.4	23.0
Germany	26.0	74.0	32.7	27.8	17.3
Greece	15.5	84.5	17.5	11.3	20.6
Hungary	25.9	74.1	11.3	10.6	17.4
Ireland	50.8	49.2	20.1	24.7	35.4
Italia	25.8	60.4	11.0	9.3	29.2
Latvia	22.7	76.5	7.3	6.0	19.6
Netherlands	15.3	83.1	6.0	13.6	11.0
Poland	38.4	61.6	7.9	7.5	14.0
Portugal	48.4	51.6	11.3	13.6	25.8
Slovakia	7.6	90.9	1.5	3.3	5.5
Slovenia	34.4	65.6	2.1	9.4	10.4
Spain	<b>23.4</b>	<b>75.8</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>9.1</b>	<b>6.5</b>
Sweden	40.3	59.7	*	*	*
Total	25.7	74.3	9.5	12.2	16.8

\* No data available

Questions:

a) To what extent were you interested in the campaign for European Parliament elections? Were you very interested, pretty interested, little interested or not interested at all?

b) How frequently did you carry out one of these activities during the four or three weeks before the election:

- Watch a TV programme about the European election
- Read an article in the newspaper about the European elections
- Speak with friends of family about the European elections?

## Participation and abstention in European elections

Average electoral participation in the elections for the European Parliament was 47.8% for all countries. In the case of Spain, participation was 45.1%, lower than any previous elections since democracy. According to the data of the survey used for this article, 50.6% of young Spanish people say to have voted. This does not mean that participation was higher among young people than adults, especially when we know that participation of young people was lower than adults' participation in all previous elections. This shows that the survey has a sample with overrepresentation of young Spanish people that voted. However, it is a known fact that in electoral surveys in Spain the proportion of interviewees that say they will vote or say they have voted is significantly higher than the real participation rate finally registered.

Data about participation and abstention shows young Europeans with much differentiated patterns of electoral behaviour in front of the same electoral

process. In Slovenia, Slovakia and Poland participation exceeded 75%, while in Italy, Ireland and the Netherlands abstention was around 75% in the 2004 elections.

In order to try to explain these different patterns of participation among young Europeans as whole, we carried out a logistic regression where the dependent variable is participation, with the following values: abstention (value 0) and participation (value 1). As independent variables we include attitudinal characteristics and some socio-demographic variables, specifically labour situation (with three values: occupied, unemployed, student), age (codified in three interval: 18-21, 22-25 and 16-29) and a dummy variable that reflects if young people are able to place themselves ideologically or not, independently of the fact if they tend to the right or the left (6). Including these socio-demographic variables allows us to control and widen the analysis of other individual characteristics of the young people. Age has been re-codified in three intervals in order to check differences as age increases. In the case of the labour situation, we try to identify up to which point young people with different labour situations can show more or less participation or abstention in second-rate elections.

Table 5 shows the results of the regression analysis. Of all variables included in the model, five of them allow us to explain why some young Europeans decide to vote and some decide not to. Thus, we can say that those young Europeans that are interested in issues related to the elections, feel proud to be European citizens, place themselves ideologically, are interested in political information and talk about politics with family and friends have more probabilities of voting than those without that profile. Age groups have not been in the centre of the analysis, as that would lead us to a different type of analysis, although we can say that age is important in order to explain their electoral behaviour. This variable was relevant when it came to understand participation of the population in general terms, as well as to understand young people's participation in particular.

This information helps us to understand the importance of attitudinal variables related to the European Union for electoral behaviour. Young Europeans show attitudinal differences regarding the European Union and its institutions, and some of those orientations are the ones that will affect participation in the elections for the European Parliament. The feelings of belonging and European citizenship are two of the most relevant elements to answer the question behind this text. As pro-European feelings of young people increase (measured as pride of being European), participation in elections for the European Parliament also increases. This feeling is linked to the interest in issues related to the European Union and, specifically, to the monitoring of political news and information regarding this electoral process. There is a combination between more situational attitudes, such as interest in issues related to the electoral campaign, and internalized attitudes such as being proud of being a European citizen.

Not all attitudes towards the European Union included in this model had positive effects on electoral participation. Specifically the level of institutional trust, or even trust in the European Parliament, an institution that is the result of the electoral process, is a variable that hardly differs from country to country and is not useful to explain voter participation in European elections. And neither is the assessment of how democracy works by young people.

(6)  
We decided to include this variable because in divariant analyses this variable did not discriminate in terms of more or less participation.

Table 5. **Explicative variables for participation in European election (logistic regression)**

	Participation (1) vs Abstention (0)		
	$\beta$	E.T.	Sig
<b>Interest in the campaign</b>	<b>.637</b>	<b>.067</b>	<b>.000</b>
<b>Pride of being a EU citizen</b>	<b>.267</b>	<b>.066</b>	<b>.000</b>
Satisfaction with democracy	-.008	.074	.912
<b>Place ideologically</b>	<b>.520</b>	<b>.189</b>	<b>.006</b>
Occupation			.478
(1)	-.059	.114	.606
(2)	.158	.194	.417
<b>Age</b>			<b>.008</b>
(1)	.059	.121	.625
<b>(2)</b>	<b>.360</b>	<b>.127</b>	<b>.005</b>
<b>Monitoring of the campaign</b>	<b>.792</b>	<b>.111</b>	<b>.000</b>
Institutional trust	.009	.027	.731
Double citizenship	.048	.076	.527
Constant	-3.798	.303	.000
Cases included in the analysis	2,224		
% cases correctly predicted	66.9		
R <sup>2</sup> /Cox y Snell	.16		
R <sup>2</sup> /Nagelkerke	.22		

\* Interest in campaign: Not at all (1), little (2), pretty much (3), very much (4). Proud to be an EU-citizen: Not at all (1), little (2), pretty much (3), very much (4). Satisfaction with democracy: Not at all (1), little (2), pretty much (3), very much (4). Place ideologically: No (0), Yes (1). Occupation: Occupied (1), unemployed (2), student (3). Age: 18-21 years of age (1), 22-25 years (2) and 16-29 years of age (3). Monitoring of the campaign: from 1 to 3. Institutional trust index: from 0 to 10. Feeling as both European and from the own country: 1 (never), 2 (sometimes) 3 (often).

<sup>1</sup> Se ha decidido dejar en el modelo dos indicadores sobre ciudadanía para comprobar cuál de los dos tiene un efecto mayor sobre la participación pese a que entre ellos hay una importante correlación.

## Conclusions

The comparative analysis of the attitudes towards elements related to the European Union and the elections for the European Parliament, and the electoral behaviour of young people in said process, allows us to reach some interesting conclusions.

In the first place, young people do not show a homogeneous profile in terms of attitudes and behaviours when it comes to elections. The electoral process to choose representatives for the European Parliament wakes no special interest among the European youth, as it neither does among the adult population. However, the situational interest in issues related to the European elections, the monitoring through the media and political discussions within the family or with friends have significant and positive effects for voter participation. This highlights the need of better coverage of the campaign and more information regarding the function of the elected representatives by the media.

Also, young Europeans do not show a pattern of institutional disaffection. The levels of trust in the main European institutions and the level of satisfaction with how democracy works in the European Union do not allow concluding that this is a characteristic trait of their political orientations.

Lastly, young Europeans often do not think of themselves as citizens of the European Union and citizens of their own country. The identification as European citizens takes a second level. This aspect constitutes one of the main reasons for low participation of young Europeans in the elections for the European Parliament. The analysis shows that the variable of feeling proud of being a European citizen is the one that best explains participation in European elections. Identification, feeling of belonging and pride of being a European citizen increase the probability of participation in European elections. Therefore, one of the challenges when faced with the decrease of conventional participation of young people is the promotion of European citizenship among them.

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