

Timing Turnout: The Competing Electoral Schedules of European Elections

Jeffrey S. Nonnemacher
Program in International Affairs
University of Colorado Boulder

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Honors Thesis Defense Committee

Dr. Joe Jupille, *Thesis Advisor*
Program in International Affairs & Department of Political Science

Dr. Douglas Snyder, *Honors Council Representative*
Program in International Affairs

Dr. Sarah Wilson Sokhey, *Thesis Committee Member*
Department of Political Science

Abstract: Since direct elections to the European Parliament began in 1979, variations in voting behavior in European Parliament (EP) elections from national elections raise interesting questions about political behavior. Previous studies into European elections conclude that turnout is lower because EP elections are second order contests, meaning that they are seen as extensions of national politics and of low importance. However, as the EU has grown, some studies have found that European considerations do influence electoral outcomes in EP elections. In this study, I add to this growing literature on how Europe matters and I argue that EP elections are more complicated than second order contests. Through a cross-national study of national and European elections, I find that European turnout drops when an EP election follows a national election but rises when an EP election precedes a national election. I also find that the European cycle matters as voters compare EP elections to prior EP elections as the timelines interact with one another. Overall, I conclude that time matters in political behavior and that the interactions between national timelines and European timelines impacts electoral outcomes by decreasing turnout during frequent elections or periods where there are a high number of elections. I conclude that the multi-level democracy of the European Union challenges voters and complicates simple acts such as voting, discouraging participation.

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Introduction

The European Union (EU) has become an increasingly salient political issue across Europe. The 2017 French presidential run-off election pitted Emmanuel Macron, who ran his campaign pushing for further European integration, against Marine le Pen, who argued for further French independence from the EU. Le Pen's National Rally represents growing support for nationalist radical right parties throughout the continent that have been increasingly successful in recent years by stoking anti-EU sentiments. In 2016, the United Kingdom narrowly voted to leave the European Union that set-in motion the divorce procedures that will separate the UK from the EU, creating turmoil in British politics as Prime Minister Theresa May has struggled to negotiate a deal. In 2015, German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that Germany would have an open-door policy towards the influx of Syrian refugees, contributing to a migration crisis overwhelming several European countries and a rise of hardline anti-immigrant and anti-EU rhetoric from politicians challenging the EU's enforcement of immigration policy on member states.

Throughout these crises that have impacted national politics in the member states, the EU's economic situation has barely recovered from the financial crisis in 2010 that decimated the European economy. Unemployment skyrocketed in the Southern European countries of Spain, Portugal, Greece, and Italy. Greece in particular was rocked by the financial crisis. The economic downturn exposed deep macroeconomic problems and led to long negotiations among member states about austerity measures to preserve the Greek economy. The negotiations created intense Euroskepticism, exemplified by the success of populist left and right parties in recent Greek elections that Greeks saw as breaches of Greek sovereignty by elites in Brussels. The

negotiations also stoked concerns among member states that they would continue to have to bailout member states by being tied to poorer EU countries.

Amid the turbulence of European Union politics, a common theme among critics of the union emerged regarding its perceived lack of accountability to the people. This “democratic deficit” means that the institutions of the European Union are separated from the people and are not responsive to their needs, which critics argue allows Brussels to act in the interests of the elites instead of the common European (Hooghe & Marks 2001). While the European Union does have problems with accountability and transparency that contribute to its democratic deficit, it has taken steps to include Europeans in the process through elections to the European Parliament (EP). Overtime, the European Parliament has evolved and become a much more powerful legislative body in EU politics. Along with those changes, the electoral politics of EP elections have become more important for EU policy making. However, EU elections still rely heavily on domestic politics. Every five years starting in 1979, Europeans head to the polls and vote for the party that they want to represent them at the European level, but they are not voting for European parties, but rather voting for the national party they want to represent them in the EP. These parties then form party groups based on ideological similarities, acting as single political parties. In recent elections, attempts have been made to Europeanize the campaigns by unifying the national political parties of each group around one group leader who would become the president of the commission, but voters are still voting under national political rules and party systems.

Despite the importance of the EU in domestic political debates and attempts to Europeanize campaigns, turnout rates across Europe have steadily declined since the first elections in 1979. As Figure 1 depicts, turnout in 1979 was slightly above 60 percent and has

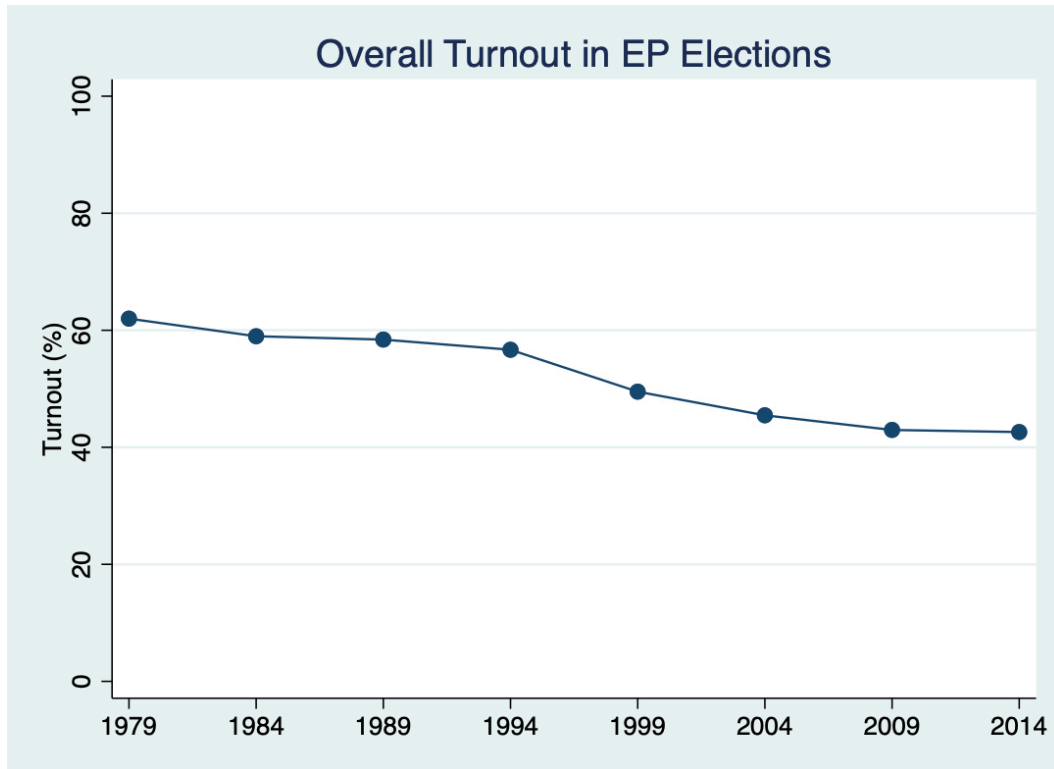


Figure 1: Turnout in European Parliament Elections from 1979 to 2014

decreased to around 42 percent in the most recent election in 2014. The growing inactivity of Europeans in European elections despite heightening challenges for the EU raises questions about how voters vote in EP elections.

Despite continental trends, variation in turnout rates exist among the member states as depicted by Figure 2 (See Appendix). Older member states with historical ties to the European Union appear to vote more than East European countries which have joined the European Union recently since 2004. However, attributing cross-national variation in turnout on the duration of membership does not capture all the cross-national variation among the member states. In some cases, turnout has been low throughout time even if they participated in elections since the first EP election. Additionally, not every country has the same decreasing trendline in turnout despite aggregate EU trends. Belgium and Luxembourg have stable turnout around 90 percent, while some countries have steady declines in turnout or volatile turnout levels. These cross-national

variations in turnout and the trends of turnout suggest that there are important factors contributing to turnout in EP elections among the member states despite when they joined the European Union. Why, then, is turnout in EP elections decreasing steadily despite growing challenges? What variation exists across Europe can explain different turnout levels among the member states?

This thesis seeks to explain the variation of turnout among member states beyond the length of membership and understand the specific conditions of the countries which could explain the cross-national variation in turnout. I then analyze existing debates surrounding turnout levels in European elections, in which I argue that the literature does not do a satisfying job of discussing how temporal variations in elections and how the interactions of multi-level democratic institutions impacts voting behavior. As a result, I argue that there is more to voter fatigue than electoral frequency. Not only do voters consider national calendars when behaving in EP elections, but that the European electoral schedule matters as well. Through a cross-national study of national and European elections, I find that European turnout drops when an EP election follows a national election but rises when an EP election precedes a national election. I also find that the European cycle matters as voters compare EP elections to previous EP elections as the timelines interact with one another. I then discuss how these findings contribute to academic understandings of voting behavior in multi-level politics and how multi-level democracy impacts voters.

Explaining Turnout in EP Elections

When understanding European Parliament turnout, scholars have focused on various levels of analysis due to the multi-level nature of European politics. The individual level focuses on the behavior of voters and how they make decisions, ultimately arguing that the best way to

understand turnout is by understanding individuals' psychologies, cognition and political attitudes. At the national level, scholars focus on the domestic politics that influence European politics and the national currents underpinning European elections, arguing that European turnout is largely a result of national politics. Lastly, the European level focuses on the role of European Union politics that transcend the national domain, asserting that European elections are not just extensions of national politics, but also encompass European considerations. By understanding these levels of analysis, scholars have constructed a multi-level model of EU politics by understanding how these various levels behave within the system, but also interact with one another (Hooghe & Marks 2001).

Impact of the Voters

Turnout, and voting behavior more broadly, is an individual behavior, and scholars argue that in order to properly understand voting behavior, it is necessary to understand individual voters and what impacts their decision to vote or not. One debate among scholars is whether or not voters are making rational decisions when deciding when to vote and how to vote. Rationalists argue that voting follows the basic rational choice model in which the benefits must outweigh the costs (Riker & Ordeshook 1968). Scholars have amended the model to better capture voting behavior beyond the traditional calculus of voting. Aldrich defines the updated calculus of voting as $R = PB + C + D$ (Aldrich 1993). By this equation, the benefits of the voter's preferred candidate winning (B) must outweigh the costs of voting (C). A voter's benefit is based on the perception that their vote will be the decisive vote (P) and that even if the benefits are zero, voters still will vote based on a feeling of civic duty (D) (Aldrich 1993). Further studies applying this model of voting behavior have found that avenues of reform that impact the cost of voting, like Automatic Voter Registration or compulsory voting, have the expected results of

increasing turnout (Fitzgerald 2005, Franklin 2001). However, there are limitations to the rational choice framework that cannot fully account for variation in individual behavior. The introduction of the sense of civic duty into the model even concedes that part of the decision to vote is psychological and varies by person. Simply viewing voting behavior through a rational prism does not do justice to the variation at the individual level.

Due to the significant limitations of the rational model of voting behavior, it is important to understand the psychological contributors to voting behavior, especially the decision to vote or not, which has been studied extensively. Political psychologists have produced two seminal psychological arguments for the decision to vote at the individual level. On one hand, scholars argue that voting is habitual and that voters who vote are more likely to continue to vote. Once people vote, they form a habit of voting which perpetuates the behavior throughout time (Plutzer, 2002, Fowler 2006, Aldrich et al 2011). The more elections that happen throughout time, turnout should increase or at least stagnate since voters who voted in the last election will vote in the next election. However, at the European level, turnout has steadily decreased throughout time since the first European election in 1979. Studies have even found that the habitual model does not hold in European elections as young voters who vote in EP elections for the first time have negative experiences with voting, and will not vote in subsequent EP elections, suggesting that voting is more complicated than developing a habit (Franklin & Hobolt 2011).

On the other hand, scholars view turnout as a signal of the enthusiasm to participate in the political arena, and that frequent elections and frequent political decisions depresses turnout through voter fatigue. Essentially, voter fatigue as defined by Lijphart (1997) is a phenomenon in which voters begin to feel overwhelmed by the prospect of constantly being asked to vote and make informed political decisions. Within the rational choice framework, scholars argue that

voter fatigue increases the costs of voting, decreases the benefits of voting and the sense of civic duty. Voter fatigue primarily results from extended political campaigns and election calendars which demand the constant attention of voters (Boyd 1986, Rallings et al 2003, Schakel and Dandoy 2014, Lijphart 1997). Voter fatigue deteriorates the incentives of voting. Studies of Europe have found that frequent elections in Germany and the European Union decreases turnout in subsequent elections, through the development of voter fatigue (Garmann 2016, 2017). Voter fatigue is a powerful argument to explain the depreciating turnout through the history of European elections, however studies into the phenomenon single out EP elections immediately before or after national contests instead of focusing on the whole electoral cycle. In sum, the voter fatigue framework of political behavior examines how often politics demands the attention of voters and argues that frequent campaigns push people out of the process and depress turnout in elections.

Other studies at the individual level of analysis have found significant relationships between the demographics and the decision to vote in European elections. Some scholars argue that it is generational. Older voters participate more in European elections than younger generations. The decreasing turnout is a result of the aging population since young voters are not being socialized to vote or refusing to vote due to negative experiences (Bhatti & Hansen 2012, Franklin & Hobolt 2011). Other studies point to the information available to voters, and their perceptions of the election as a whole. Scholars find that more information about the election increases a voter's perception of impact and raises awareness of the importance of the election, which increases turnout in European elections (Rallings & Thrasher 2005, Kentmen-Cin 2017, Hogh & Larsen 2016). The opinion of the EU also matters, with studies finding that positive feelings towards the European Union and its institutions increases turnout in European elections

(Stockemer 2012, Fauvelle-Aymar & Stagmaier 2008, Hogh & Larsen 2016, Flickinger & Studlar 2007).

Understanding the voters is important to capture voting behavior, but voters largely operate under the rules that they have been given and that their decisions are shaped by the institutions around them (Eijk & Franklin, 1996). Among the findings on the decision to vote in European elections, a common tension has emerged between whether voters think about national politics or European politics, further suggesting that voters operate under the conditions in which they are given and how they interact with those rules and institutions. As a result, while these individual explanations of European turnout are important, they suggest that something more influential is going on above the individual level of analysis and that national and European factors may play a role in shaping turnout in European contests.

The Impact of Member States

The classic model of understanding turnout, especially in European elections, is through Reif and Schmitt's influential work on the second order model of elections. According to Reif & Schmitt (1980), second order elections are elections that have much lower stakes for voters and are therefore ignored or treated as extensions of national politics rather than voters making decisions about European issues and their preferred European outcomes. This entails decreased turnout, vote gains for anti-government parties, and an increased vote share for small parties as opposed to larger parties (Reif 1984, Mzes 2005). Typically, in second order elections, the issues voters use to make decisions are national in nature, either based on feelings and attitudes toward their national government or based on their stance on national issues as opposed to the issues at the level of the second order election (Reif & Schmitt 1980, Reif 1984). This is especially the case for European elections, where voters perceive these elections as the most distant and low

stakes, resulting in decreased turnout and the results reflecting tests of national politics (Reif 1984, Lefevere & Van Aelst 2014).

Numerous studies have since found substantial support for the second order model of elections when studying European elections. When analyzing individual voting behavior, Hobolt and Wittrock (2011) find that European Parliament elections fit into the second order model of elections since voters were more responsive to national issues and national politics when making decisions, and that national issues were more important to voters than the EU integration dimension. Other studies have found that voters vote in European elections because they are motivated to do so, and that that motivation more significantly comes from national issues, national considerations, and national parties (Hobolt & Wittrock 2011, Schmitt & Mannheimer 1991, Stockemer 2012, Flickinger & Studlar 2007). As a result, not only have European elections been considered second order, but they have also been determined to be signals of currents in national politics. Studies have found that since national politics is the most significant motivator, voters usually interact with European elections in order to protest their national government or signal their support (Hix & Marsh 2005, Marsh 1998). Overall, national politics is central to the voting behavior of European voters and how they make decisions, supporting the second order model of elections.

Additionally, scholars argue that national institutions and rules, such as compulsory voting, play an important role in the level of turnout in European elections (Franklin 2001). One potential explanation for aggregate variation in turnout at the European level is based on the timing of EP elections in the national electoral calendar. Studies have found that European elections closer in time to other national contests, or even regional contests, have higher turnout than those that are further apart (Fauvelle-Aymar 2008, Mattila 2003, Rallings & Thrasher 2005,

Garmann 2016 & 2017). Similarly, European elections contribute to the electoral frequency which develops voter fatigue, and since they are perceived as less important than national elections, voters abstain. (Garmann 2017). National campaigns also impact European elections, according to Weber (2007), who argues that first order campaigns activate voters at all levels and have impacts at the European level even if that is not the goal of the national campaign. The national timeline is important and lends credence to the argument that European elections are just extensions of politics within the member states, since when further away from national elections, EP elections experience lower turnout.

Ultimately, understanding the role of national politics in European elections is important to understand electoral outcomes in EP elections. Widespread among the literature are findings that national issues, politics, and institutions matter for European elections and play the most significant role in determining turnout and the results of EP elections. These findings support the second order model, which states that European Parliament elections are less important and therefore treated as extensions of national politics, resulting in lower turnout (Reif, 1984). Despite these consistent findings, scholars have begun to see inconsistencies with the model. Even when finding that national issues matter, Flickinger & Studlar (2007) found this most dominantly in Eastern Europe and the new member states while the old member states had a higher degree of significance surrounding European issues and identities. Other studies which have directly tested the second order model have found that the model does not hold up in Eastern Europe, which does not protest their government in the same way as the West and therefore view European elections differently (Koepke & Ringe 2006). While the national level is incredibly important, the line between Europe and national interests has continued to blur in recent elections.

The Impact of Europe

As the EU has evolved over time, scholars have found significant European trends in voting behavior in their elections and have adapted the second order model to account for recent deviation from its conditions. For scholars, the “Europe Matters” model argues that European elections may still be second order elections, but they do not fit the conventional understanding of second order elections in the enlarged and stronger EU (Koepke & Ringe 2006, Studlar et al. 2003, Hobolt & Spoon 2012, Hobolt et al. 2009, Clark & Rohrschneider 2009). For Hobolt and Spoon (2012), characteristics of the 2009 EP elections do not conform to the conventional understanding of the second order model. They find that the degree of politicization of the European Union in the national arena affects the amount of sincere voting, protest voting, and abstention that occurs in EP elections (Hobolt & Spoon, 2012). Essentially, in order to understand European elections, it is a mistake to dismiss Europe.

Throughout the literature, studies have found through recent EP elections significant relationships between Europe and electoral outcomes of EP elections. European issues matter (Hobolt & de Vries 2016, Flickinger & Studlar 2007, Rallings & Thrasher 2005, Mattila 2003, Studlar et al. 2003). Information about the European Union increases turnout and the Europeanization of voting behavior (Hobolt & Wittrock 2011, Hogh & Larsen 2016, Weber 2007, Lefevere & Van Aelst 2014). Perceptions of the EU, trust in its institutions and leaders, and the perceptions of importance also have been found to increase participation and the Europeanization of the elections (Kentmin-Cin 2017, Stockemer 2012, Fauvelle-Aymar & Stagmaier 2008, Hogh & Larsen 2016). Overall, European ideas, issues, and perceptions do play their own role in motivating voters to participate in European elections, and that even if minor, voters are thinking about Europe when voting in EP elections.

Other studies into the role of European electoral institutions, like campaigns and parties, have found that European elections which are removed from national politics, either through time or political characteristics of the member state have much more focus on the European dimension of the election. Additionally, an emphasis on European candidates and a focus on EU issues increases turnout and the Europeanization of future elections (van der Eijk & Franklin 1996). The adoption of the *Spitzenkandidaten* system in 2014, which meant the European parties coalesced around a single leader who would be the face of the campaign and the party's candidate to be chief executive of the European Commission, played a role in increasing turnout in parts of Europe (Schmitt *et al.* 2015). Similarly, Spoon (2012) finds an interplay between national politics and European politics among the “Euromanifestos” of political parties since these parties respond to the degree of Europeanization in the domestic polity. Ultimately, Europe matters to voters, and as a result, European elections have begun to mimic or intersect national politics through the adoption of campaign design, electoral timing, and party platforms. That growing interplay can explain the variation in turnout in EP elections.

Ultimately, European elections are a unique form of second order election since Europe matters in the elections, while the second order model argues that only national politics should matter. Since the role of Europe has increased in recent elections, this suggests that European elections are evolving and increasingly standing on their own, and the second order model needs to be adapted to fit the new Europe. However, national politics still matter with recent studies finding that national politics continue to play an important role in the results of European elections (Stockemer 2012, Hobolt & Wittrock 2011). As a result, even more studies of the nature of the multi-layered polity of European politics are needed to determine how the two levels interact with one another.

Theoretical Framework for Predicting EP Turnout

Given the academic understandings of European elections as an intersection between individuals, national politics and European politics, further study into the multi-level polity is required to understand how these levels interact with one another. Specifically related to European elections, scholars have observed that the timing of elections matters and that elections that are too close together experience depressed turnout due to voter fatigue (Garmann 2016 & 2017, Ljiphart 1997). Frequent elections close together should demonstrate this phenomenon with decreased turnout at the aggregate level, and I expect European elections closer in time after national elections to have depressed turnout due to voter fatigue after the national contests.

Hypothesis 1: The closer in time after national elections, the lower the turnout will be in European elections

However, voter fatigue arises when individuals are exposed to politics for a extended periods of time. Garmann (2017) notes that voter fatigue only suppresses turnout in the subsequent elections, suggesting that voter fatigue develops throughout the electoral period. When voters are fresh to the process, having recharged from the last round of elections, they vote. However, as institutionalists argue, EP elections are second order elections which depresses turnout since they are not as important to voters and are treated as proxies to national contests (Reid & Schmidt 1980). Combining these models presents a framework of turnout in second order elections in which voters are recharged and prepared to engage in the process. Instead of ignoring second order elections held before national elections, they use the opportunity to influence national politics through signaling, protest voting, and sincere voting (Hobolt & Spoon 2012, Koepke & Ringe 2006). Second order elections can be used as a signal of what is to come in national politics and to influence domestic parties who are up for election by giving them insight into the issues important to voters prior to their own election (Hummel 2011, Hix &

Marsh 2007, Hobolt & Spoon 2012). As a result, I expect European elections that are closer in time prior to national elections to have higher turnout due to the incentives presented by signaling.

Hypothesis 2: The closer in time before national elections, the higher turnout will be in European elections

However, the EU “timescape” (Goetz 2009) comprises more than the position of European elections in national political timelines (Goetz, 2009). Studies into the EU timescape have found that time in the European Union works differently than at national levels, and that there is tension between the national timeline and the European timeline for processes like decision-making, legislation, and integration (Kovats 2009, Goetz 2009, Goetz & Meyer-Sahling 2009). For turnout, the primary focus of the literature has been on elections immediately before and after European elections, zooming in on a couple moments in the European timescape. By focusing on national elections immediately before and after EP elections, scholars are discounting that voter fatigue develops throughout time and throughout subsequent elections (Garmann 2017, Ljiphart 1997). The temporal density, or the raw number of national elections between European elections, should contribute to the level of voter fatigue that develops among voters. As a result, I expect a high number of elections between European contests to result in lower turnout at the European level in the subsequent European elections.

Hypothesis 3: If the number of non-European elections increases between European contests, turnout in the latter EU election will decrease.

Ultimately, scholars have observed that variations in turnout in European elections can be explained by understanding the relationship between national elections and European elections (Garmann 2016 & 2017, Reif 1984, Reif & Schmitt 1980). The relationship through time between national and European elections is an interesting line of inquiry. The goal of this

thesis is to contribute to the emerging literature on the European timescape and the relationship between national time and European time as it relates to political behavior. As a result, I hypothesize that elections held in close proximity before national contests will have higher turnout while elections held in close proximity after national contests will have lower turnout. I also expect electoral environments in which there are more elections to lead to less turnout in subsequent EP elections. Through these hypotheses, I seek to understand the role of temporality on voting behavior in the multi-level polity of the EU and whether the second order model of elections still applies to EP elections.

Data & Methods

In order to test these hypotheses and understand the effect of the temporality of elections on turnout, I conduct a cross-national time-series study of European Parliament elections. Each of the 28 member states has participated in at least one EP election, which date back to 1979, resulting in 147 observations from which to construct a model of European turnout. The main dependent variable is the turnout in the European Parliament election by country for each European contest, including off-cycle elections for new members retrieved from publicly available data from the European Union. In order to support the conventional wisdoms captured in hypotheses one and two, I compare European turnout at the aggregate level to the number of days that separate European Parliament elections from national elections held before and after the European contest. For every European election,¹ there is a value that captures the number of days that a national election is held before the EP election and a variable that captures the number of days that a national election is held after the EP election. These values are calculated

¹ The only exceptions include Luxembourg where every national election is held concurrently with European elections and Belgium for 2014, where the next round of national elections is set to be concurrent with the 2019 European elections in May so no elections have been held yet after the 2014 elections

Table 1	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Min Value	Max Value
Days After National Election	735.848	724	406.924	3	1702
Days Before National Election	736.018	730.5	428.19	24	1603

by finding the number of days from the last national election, retrieved from government websites and Ministries of the Interior, and the closest EP election. These variables are designed to capture the breadth of variation in the electoral frequency for each EP election within the national timeline. Table 1 captures the variation among electoral schedules. Additionally, elections that are held on the same day is coded as either a 1 or 0 representing if an EP election has a concurrent national election. Concurrent elections are not considered as either before or after a national contest and excluded from the days before or days after variables because of the different effects concurrency and ballot size have on behavior (Augenblick & Nicholson 2016). I then compile additional controls such as the number of European elections in which the member state has participated up to that point to capture the duration of membership, a measure of the proportionality of the EP and how seats are allocated at the European level, a dummy variable for states that have compulsory voting and lastly another dummy variable for if the country was a member state of the European Union prior to the Eastern Enlargement in order to capture potential variation between Eastern and Western Europe (Koepke & Ringe 2006).

In order to capture the relationship between the temporal density of elections and turnout in European Parliament elections, I also code the number of non-European elections that have been held in each member state between European contests. For this study, only country-wide elections count towards the temporal density of elections. Each non-European election, whether it be a statewide referendum, parliamentary election, or presidential election, is counted as one

Table 2	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Min Value	Max Value
Temporal Density of Elections	2.168	2	1.503	0	7

additional election. Elections prior to the 1979 European Parliament elections are not counted in the dataset since the focus of this study is on the effect of elections between European contests. Since there was no European contest prior to 1979, or the off-cycle elections as members joined, there is no basis for which to start the European cycle. Additionally, since the focus of this study is on the number of elections between EP contests, for EP elections that follow off cycle elections for new member states, the number of elections is recorded despite electoral cycles that are less than five years. Table 2 displays the variation of the number of elections across the continent.

With this dataset, I estimate standard OLS regressions in order to test my hypotheses and predict turnout levels. I include fixed effects and a control for prior turnout to effectively account for the cross-national time series data that I compile. I first estimate OLS models in order to determine the statistical significance between the turnout at the European level and the timing of the EP election in national timelines, and then estimate the effect of the temporal density of national elections. For each model, I maintain the standard battery of controls for concurrency, length of EU membership, the district magnitude, compulsory voting, and the geography of the member state. I also apply fixed effects for the EP election and country to control for other unobserved heterogeneity between elections and countries. Fixed effects for the EP elections captures variation among elections such as the salient issues, candidates, political climate at the time and other variation between elections that are theoretically unimportant to the model. The country fixed effects controls for variation between countries, including political culture, that exists between the member states.

Table 3: Predicting Turnout in European Parliament Elections from 1979-2014

	(1) EU After National	(2) EU Before National
Days After National Election	.005*** (.002)	-----
Days Before National Election	-----	-.004** (.002)
Turnout in Last EP Election	.044 (.098)	.044 (.098)
Concurrency	1.954 (4.379)	5.774 (4.318)
Western European Member	28.138*** (7.877)	29.474*** (8.04)
Number of Past EP Elections	-5.319*** (1.559)	-4.965*** (1.557)
District Magnitude	.031 (.064)	.031 (.065)
Compulsory Voting	57.489*** (9.391)	56.041*** (8.676)
Observations	113	113
R-Squared	.926	.925
Prob < F	.000	.000

Standard errors in parentheses, *p<.1, **p<.05, ***p<.001

Europe in the National Timescape

In regard to the conventional wisdom that timing matters for European Parliament elections, I find support that the timing of European elections in the national political timeline matters for turnout in EP elections. Table 3 presents the results from an OLS regression for hypotheses one and two. Model 1 (Table 3) tests the number of days that a national election came prior to a European Parliament election. Model 2 (Table 3) tests the number of days that a national election was held after the European Parliament election. In both models, there are controls for the standard battery of turnout controls, including the turnout in the last election to control for variation over time. This model also has election and country fixed effects, which are included in the full model in Table 5 (see Appendix). As the European Parliament elections move further away after national elections, turnout increases in the EP election. Additionally, as

the number of days that separate European elections before national elections increases, turnout decreases in the EP election. Figures 4 and 5 best represent the observed relationships between the number of days separating European Parliament elections and national elections (see Appendix). These findings confirm the conventional wisdom surrounding electoral timing and support hypotheses one and two (Garman 2016 & 2017).

As Garman (2016) observes in his German quasi-experiment, voter fatigue develops as elections move closer together, and turnout in the European Parliament election decreases. These results support this conclusion throughout the rest of Europe. As the European election moved closer in time following the national contests, voter fatigue grew, and turnout decreased in EP elections. The further away from the national contest, turnout was higher in the EP elections. While voter fatigue can explain the positive relationship between the number of days a national election precedes an EP election and turnout, it cannot be the causal mechanism for the similarly significant relationship between the number of days a national election was held after the EP contest.

As the results indicate, the more days that separate an EP election and a national election after the EP election, turnout decreases in the EP election. Voter fatigue cannot explain this relationship because it is impossible to be fatigued after voting in a national election if the national election has not happened yet, although it is possible to be fatigued of campaigns. However, the significance of the relationship supports the theory that turnout in EP elections increases as national elections are closer in proximity after them because of signaling and protest voting. The second order model asserts that European elections are not as important as national elections, but that voters view them as extensions of national politics (Reif & Schmidt 1980, Reif 1984). In European elections that are close before national elections, voters view those elections

as an extension of the upcoming national election and use the opportunity to sway domestic politics (Hummel 2011, Hix & Marsh 2007, Hobolt & Spoon 2012). While this pattern of voting behavior is true across time, turnout increases close before national elections because campaigns start increasing awareness about domestic politics and encouraging voters to vote (Weber 2007). The evidence is consistent with the argument that voters respond to the cues from domestic parties and take the opportunity in the EP elections to signal their support for certain parties, policies, and candidates or protest incumbent governments.

The signaling hypothesis also can explain the depressed turnout that occurs when EP elections are close in proximity after national contests. Voters use the EP election to signal their intentions in the upcoming national elections or protest the incumbent party running for re-election. However, voters are unable to signal their intentions about upcoming domestic elections when the national election has already occurred. The value of the protest vote and signal disappears once the national election has already occurred. While voter fatigue can only explain the depressed turnout that exists in EP elections following national contests, the signaling hypothesis can explain both the depressed turnout from following national contests and the increased turnout from preceding national contests. Overall, timing within the national timeline matters for EP elections, and has statistically significant effects on the degree of turnout in EP elections.

This analysis indicates that the distance from national elections matters for EP election turnout, further supporting the second order model of elections. Whether it be because of voter fatigue as is the case for the decreasing turnout as EP elections are held closer in time after national elections, or the result of voter engagement and the desire to signal, these results suggest that national politics are the driving force of political behavior. For the voter fatigue hypothesis,

voters are fatigued from voting in national elections and do not perceive the stakes of the EP elections as worthy of their energy and time, buttressing the second order model of EP elections. For the signaling hypothesis, the voters are not voting because they are motivated by the European elections, but because they are engaged about domestic politics and want to influence their domestic parties and the upcoming national election. These results firmly reinforce the second order model of elections since the model argues that national politics are on the top of voters' minds and what influences the voters the most when participating in EP elections. Despite the recent expansion of the role of the EU in voters' lives and the growing politicization of the body, voters are still predominantly reacting to national politics when they interact with EP elections.

Additionally, these results find statistically significant evidence that Western European countries vote more in EP elections than the new member states in East and Central Europe. This is an interesting finding in that it reveals inherent differences among the various countries of the European Union. While it could be argued that this a product of the Eastern European member states being newer members, the control for the number of past EU elections is also statistically significant with a negative relationship. As the number of EU elections increases by one, turnout decreases by 5.3 percentage points in model one and 5 percentage points in model two. Western European countries are not voting more because they have been members longer as these results indicate that they should be voting less than the newer member states due to the length of their membership. Something other than membership is going on in the Eastern bloc of the European Union that accounts for the variation in turnout in EP elections. While beyond the scope of this study to draw definitive conclusions, some scholars posit that Eastern Europeans interact with EP elections differently than Western Europeans because they do not view the elections as a pure

extension of domestic politics. According to scholars, East Europeans view EP elections as opportunities to vote their sincere preferences despite not being allowed to vote for them in national elections (Koepke & Ringe 2006). This finding in particular is worth further study because it suggests that the second order model as it stands may not be entirely ubiquitous across the European Union.

Ultimately, these results support the conventional wisdom and second order model of EP elections. As the national election that precedes the EP election gets closer in time, turnout in the EP elections decreases since voters are fatigued and do not see the need to vote another time. As the national election that follows the EP election gets closer in time, the national political environment increases engagement with politics, and voters use the EP elections to influence the domestic politics. Both of these hypotheses support the second order model of EP elections that has dominated the discussion of EP elections. In both cases, the national polity is the predominant consideration of European voters when they participate, or abstain, from European politics. However, within these models are findings that raise questions about the applicability of the second order model across the European Union since old member states in Western Europe turn out at higher rates than the new member states in the east. These findings raise questions regarding the applicability of the second order model in the European Union and reveal that time does matter for political behavior.

Temporal Density of Elections

For European Parliament elections, the data indicates that time matters. The timing of elections affects how voters perceive and interact with politics and the elections, and whether they are engaged or fatigued can impact whether or not they decide to vote in subsequent, second order elections. However, the conventional wisdom and prior analysis has focused

predominantly on the national electoral timeline, focusing on the temporal location of the EP election before or after national elections. As some scholars have observed though, the European Union has its own political timescape, and the EU timescape is often in tension with the timescapes of member states (Goetz, 2009). This suggests that timing could also matter at the European level, and the intersection between European time and national time is worth exploring as it relates to voter behavior, especially as newer models of European elections have found that voters do care about Europe (Koepke & Ringe 2006, Hobolt & Spoon 2012, Hobolt et al. 2009, Clark & Rohrschneider 2009). Table 4 presents the results of an OLS regression model merging national electoral schedules and European electoral schedules by estimating the significance of the number of non-European elections between two EP elections. Within this model are controls for the turnout in the last EP election, a dummy variable for concurrency, a dummy variable for being a West European country, the number of past EP elections, district magnitude, a dummy variable for compulsory voting, and fixed effects for EP election and country (see Appendix).

The results indicate that the number of non-European elections is statistically significant and an increase in the number of elections by one election between EP contests decreases turnout in the subsequent EP election by 1.6 percentage points. This finding reveals that voters consider the entirety of the European electoral cycle from EP election to EP election, revealing that the timing of EU elections and rules matters. At the national level, voters look beyond the elections that are closest in proximity to one another. The temporal density of elections is the number of elections throughout time in which a voter is asked to participate. As the temporal density increases, as Table 4 indicates, the level of turnout decreases in the elections at the end of the given time frame. Also apparent in this table is a statistically significant difference between Western Europe and Eastern Europe and how their voters behave in European Parliament

Table 4: Predicting Turnout in EP Elections

	(3) Electoral Stock
Number of Elections	-1.602** (.779)
Turnout in Last EP Election	.072 (.096)
Concurrency	3.45 (3.534)
Western European Member	19.565** (8.152))
Number of Past EP Elections	-4.676*** (1.541)
District Magnitude	.062 (.064)
Compulsory Voting	45.809*** (6.897)
Observations	119
R-Squared	.935
Prob < F	.000
Standard errors in parentheses, *p<.1, **p<.05, ***p.001	

elections. The model explains 93.5% of the variation of the levels of turnout in European Parliament elections, signifying that the statistical significance is an important addition for understanding European Parliament elections.

One powerful explanation for the decreased turnout from high temporal density is that a large number of elections generates voter fatigue. Electoral volatility or countries that hold frequent elections on a regular basis exhaust their voters, and voters respond to this constant politicization by opting not to vote. Ljiphart (1997) argues that the presence of more elections is a very important contributor to the development of voter fatigue because it constantly forces voters to be making political decisions that they do not want to be making. Ljipart (1997) focused mostly on the American case due to elections every two years and campaigns that last just as long, but these results indicate that this argument applies to the European Union as well (Ljiphart 1997). At the individual level, temporal density also challenges the assumptions of the

habitual voting model of voting behavior. Habitual voting relies on many elections to introduce people to voting and maintain the habit of voting, but that is not the case in European politics. When given multiple opportunities to vote, voters are actually voting less as the number of elections increases. Ultimately, European voters are responsive to the number of elections that they undergo, and when an election that is less important comes along, voters opt out and abstain in order to take a break from voting instead of maintaining the habit of voting.

One alternative explanation for the negative relationship between high temporal density and lower turnout in EP elections deals with the perception of impact of voting and the importance of the election. The second order model asserts that one of the problems EP elections face is that voters do not perceive these elections to be important to their daily lives. These findings cannot speak directly too how voters perceive EP elections, but they do provide some implications for further research. Some scholars have observed that first time voters who vote in EP elections have negative experiences with voting and are turned off to voting in future elections (Franklin & Hobolt 2011). The presence of high temporal density suggests that national politics is unstable, which studies have indicated decreases turnout in national elections (Robbins & Hunter 2011). In the EU multi-level polity, where European elections are perceived to be extensions of national politics, electoral instability that decreases national turnout and increases perceptions that national elections are unimportant impacts the appearance and perception of European elections as well. In countries where frequent elections are held, they begin to not only feel fatigued from voting, but also that their democracy is unstable, and their participation is not worth their time. Frequent elections in countries is usually a sign that their politics are unstable, with frequent votes of no confidence that results in new elections, the inability to form governments that results in new elections, or leaders that call snap elections to improve their

parties' position in the legislature. As these destabilizing events occur and result in new elections, turnout in subsequent elections is depressed because voters are fatigued and also view their system as dysfunctional, depressing their desire to turnout. (Robbins & Hunter 2011, Ljiphart 1997). Voters are not just responding to the frequent elections but also adjusting their opinions on the importance of voting accordingly and deciding not to vote because they do not feel that their vote matters or counts.

Whether it is voter fatigue or shifting perceptions of the importance of voting, this finding suggests that the role of time in the European Union multi-level polity is more complicated than the second order model suggests. According to the second order model of elections, voters perceive EP elections as extensions of national politics. Therefore, previous studies have focused on the timing of EP elections in comparison to the closest national election (Reif 1980, Garman 2016 & 2017). If voters see EP elections as a referendum on national politics, then in theory they should only be interacting with EP elections by comparing them to the previous national contest. This is the theoretical basis for understanding how turnout is impacted by the timing of the EP elections in national calendars from hypotheses one and two. However, the significance of the temporal density of elections suggests that the impact of time transcends the national and European levels, challenging some of the assumptions of the second order model that Europe is just another national election.

These results reveal that when voters are confronted with an EP election, they do operate within the European timescape. Instead of generating fatigue from the most proximate election, voters do examine the whole electoral time period that separates European elections. National politics still matter since national electoral volatility decreases turnout, but the statistical significance of the electoral volatility from the last EP election suggests that European time is

important as well. Voters are not just comparing the EP election and their feelings about politics to the closest national election but looking across the five years as a whole to the last EP election. These results find support for the Europe Matters model and support for studying the EP and its institutions not as an extension of national politics, but as a multi-level governmental body. The tension that Goetz (2009) observes in his discussion on timescapes in the European Union is that there are several avenues of competition and cooperation between national and European timescapes. This is a function of the multiple layers of governance in the European Union. The EU has its own legislative schedule separate from national legislatures, and its own electoral schedule that is often separate from national legislatures (Goetz 2009). These multiple layers are frequently in competition with one another, and these results indicate that electoral scheduling is no different. In multi-layered systems, time is an often-understudied aspect of governance, but the interaction between schedules across the levels of EU institutions does impact voting behavior and decrease turnout.

Ultimately, the above findings contribute to scholarly understandings of turnout in EP elections and how institutional factors impact electoral outcomes. As the number of national statewide elections increases, turnout in EP elections decreases. Possible explanations for this relationship include the development of voter fatigue as voters are asked to vote in more elections or the deterioration of trust in the system during periods of high electoral instability. Institutionally, these results suggest that the national timescape is not the only timescape in the EU that matters for how voters interact with EP elections and with European institutions. They compare the EP election to the most recent EP election, not only the closest national election. Voters generate their feelings about voting and democracy by comparing Europe to Europe, not Europe only to domestic politics. This finding contributes to the development of the Europe

Matters model and studies that have found that as the EU has evolved, it has begun to generate its own electoral polity that is still connected to domestic politics, but also separate. Ultimately, European electoral schedules matter for the results of European elections, and these findings suggest that European time matters for political behavior in the EU multi-level polity.

Discussion

In sum, this study has contributed to the growing literature on EP elections and political behavior in the EU by examining how variations in electoral schedules, and the temporal density of elections impact turnout. I argued that voter fatigue depresses turnout in EP elections when the EP elections follow national contests and that national campaigns increase turnout in EP elections when the EP elections precedes the national election. I then argued that national elections exist within the European timescape, and that voters respond to the whole timeline, not just the immediate before and after. The findings presented in this paper confirm these hypotheses and contribute to how scholars understand the effects of institutions on electoral outcomes and political behavior. Goetz (2009) identifies a tension in the EU between national and European timescapes, and this study has found more evidence to support this conclusion. National electoral calendars have significant influence on the level of turnout in EP elections. Holding national elections too close previous to EP elections, and voters do not vote in the European contest. Hold national elections too long after EP elections and voters are not engaged enough to vote. Even when the timeline is expanded to encompass the entire electoral cycle between European contests, national electoral calendars play an important role in the turnout rate of European voters. The national timescape matters, but I find that the European timeline also matters. While national electoral volatility is the mechanism that decreases turnout, voters are comparing the EP election to the prior EP election and not just the most recent national contest.

This finding contributes to how scholars understand time in the EU and how the timescapes of the multiple levels of Europe interact with one another and impact voters.

It is important to understand how timing works in the multi-level politics of the EU because it is continuously evolving, presenting new challenges for its own institutions and for domestic politics in the member states. The next round of EP elections is scheduled for May 26, 2019 and comes at a time of great transition for the European Union. For the first time in the history of the European Union, a member is leaving the EU. Seats will be reallocated, the distribution of parties and members will be shifted, and the EU will continue to determine how to operate without the United Kingdom. Despite the example Brexit has set for why leaving the European Union is not an ideal option, radical right parties throughout Europe campaign on withdrawing their respective countries from the European Union and ending the Brussels bureaucracy while also hoping to expand their influence in the EP. The upcoming elections will be very informative about the future of the European Union, and what the EU looks like post Brexit.

The best-case study for how these relationships will impact the upcoming elections is Spain, which will have held three legislative elections between the 2014 and 2019 EP elections. The first round of general elections came in 2015 and resulted in a split government as the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE), the People's Party (PP), and Podemos did not receive a majority of the seats in the parliament. When coalition talks stalled, new elections were held in 2016 and the PP gained enough seats to form a government. Following the controversial Catalanian Referendum in 2017 and charges of corruption, the PP government was replaced by the PSOE government under Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez who called for snap elections to be held on April 28, 2019, just 28 days prior to the upcoming EP contests. According to the models

presented in this paper, turnout in the EP contest should only be a little over 40 percentage points (see Figure 4) based on the number of days that separate the new elections from the EP elections, and around 50 percentage points based off of the number of elections in Spain since the 2014 EP contests (see Figure 5). Spain presents a compelling case study for understanding how electoral timing and temporal density of elections matter for electoral outcomes in EP elections.

Although Spain is a current case study in which to better understand the relationships between the competing timescapes of the European Union, there are other ways that future research can capture these relationships and build on the findings of this thesis. This study focused just on general elections, presidential elections and statewide referendum, leaving regional elections out of the analysis. However, subnational elections do exist, are an important party of multi-level governance, and, in some countries, have their own electoral calendars separate from national calendars (Hooghe & Marks 2001). Looking ahead, future studies into the temporal density of elections must take into account the presence of local and subnational elections (Lefevere & Van Aelst 2014). Not only do these elections matter and represent a natural progression of this research, but studying regional elections presents theoretical implications to further develop the academic understanding of multi-level governance in the European Union. Scholars have found that voters care about local politics, sometimes more than they do national politics, and that local ties can influence a voter's decision in national politics (Fitzgerald 2018). By studying the impact of regional temporal density, future research can better address the missing level of multi-level governance in this study and contribute to the growing literature on the importance of multi-level governance between the European Union, national governments, and subnational institutions.

Another next step in this research is to test the assumptions of this thesis regarding the impact of institutions on voting behavior. The data collected in this study was unable to directly test how individuals actually interpreted the changing temporal distance between elections and the temporal density of elections between two contests. Voter fatigue, shifting perceptions about electoral importance, signaling, and protest voting are individual explanations for the decreased turnout stemming from observable relationships at the institutional level. However, the best way to determine how voters perceive these institutional changes is to survey voters themselves and ask them how they feel about upcoming elections, how they feel about the number of elections they have had to vote in, and how they perceive elections. Testing the individual explanations through a survey contributes to the scholarly understanding of how electoral timing impacts voting behavior by capturing exactly how voters perceive frequent elections and shift their electoral behavior accordingly.

This study contributes to how scholars understand time in the multi-level institutions that make up the European Union and better understand how turnout in EP elections has steadily decreased despite heightened challenges. The EU challenges the conventional wisdom surrounding political behavior that states are the largest unit of analysis. As it has evolved, it has challenged the member states and the status quo. The heightening challenges of the EU have created electoral volatility in the member states as Eurosceptic fringe parties upend existing party systems throughout Europe. By upending stable systems, these parties contribute to the electoral volatility that decreases a voter's engagement with democratic acts such as voting.

The heightened importance of the EU also complicates the democratic norms of the member states. Not only is multi-level politics worth studying to understand how governing occurs across the levels of the EU, but this study reveals that multi-level democracy requires

further study. As the EU continues to grow and become more salient, as national politics continue to evolve and change, and as regional politics through devolution become more important to voters, democratic acts such as voting become more complex. Multi-level democracy means more politics, more elections, and more complicated separations of power between levels. This study has found that the increasing political interactions between democratic institutions decreases turnout and engagement in the EU, suggesting that increasing complexity among the various levels of government negatively impacts democratic acts such as voting. Turnout in the European Union has steadily decreased despite the increasing salience of the EU in domestic politics because that heightened salience complicates democratic decision making. Ultimately, the complexity of simple acts such as voting in the EU multi-level polity has disengaged voters from participating in the process.

Appendix

Turnout in European Parliament Elections by Country

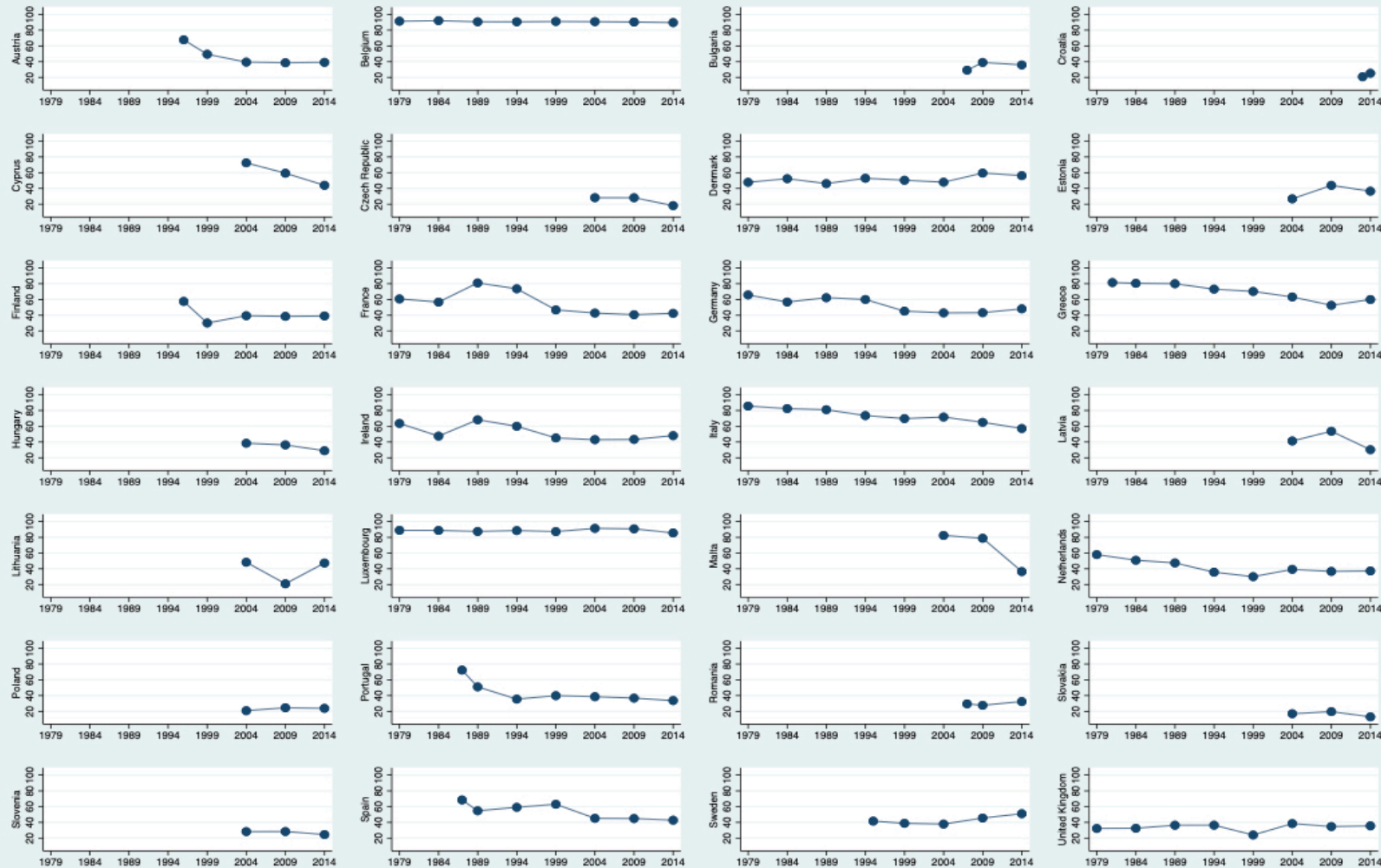


Figure 2: Turnout in European Parliament Elections from 1979 to 2014 by Member State

Table 5: Predicting Turnout in European Parliament Elections from 1979-2014

	(1) EP After National	(2) EP Before National	(3) Temporal Density
Days After National Election	.005*** (.002)	-----	-----
Days Before National Election	-----	-.004** (.002)	-----
Number of Elections	-----	-----	-1.602** (.779)
Turnout in Last EP Election	.044 (.098)	.044 (.098)	.072 (.096)
Concurrency	1.954 (4.379)	5.774 (4.318)	3.45 (3.534)
Western European Member	28.138*** (7.877)	29.474*** (8.04)	19.565** (8.152)
Number of Past EP Elections	-5.319*** (1.559)	-4.965*** (1.557)	-4.676*** (1.541)
District Magnitude	.031 (.064)	.031 (.065)	.062 (.064)
Compulsory Voting	57.489*** (9.391)	56.041*** (8.676)	45.809*** (6.897)
<i>Election Fixed Effects</i>			
1989	5.838* (3.17)	5.259 (3.193)	4.763 (3.039)
1994	8.422** (4.101)	7.378* (4.096)	7.371* (3.991)
1999	6.978 (5.011)	6.58 (5.059)	6.581 (4.989)
2004	13.023** (6.069)	11.668* (6.057)	12.424* (6.085)
2009	17.986** (7.325)	16.772** (7.347)	17.03** (7.353)
2014	21.407** (8.769)	19.972** (8.783)	20.789** (8.883)
<i>Country Fixed Effects</i>			
Belgium	-3.914 (6.970)	-3.348 (5.712)	5.324 (3.936)
Bulgaria	10.175 (6.191)	8.764 (6.276)	2.746 (7.104)
Croatia	-4.972 (7.809)	-4.86 (7.878)	-13.919 (9.246)
Cyprus	-36.326*** (9.849)	-31.442*** (8.842)	-30.421*** (8.383)
Czech Republic	-4.029 (6.202)	-2.286 (6.293)	-11.313 (7.173)
Denmark	18.403*** (3.81)	16.468*** (3.791)	18.357*** (3.922)
Estonia	11.527 (6.214)	13.399** (6.231)	4.525 (7.456)

Finland	-8.573*	-8.783*	-8.769**
	(4.458)	(4.505)	(4.486)
France	12.225**	12.59**	11.39**
	(4.817)	(4.918)	(4.844)
Germany	14.727**	13.524*	10.7
	(6.937)	(6.967)	(6.81)
Greece	-24.464***	-25.644***	-14.816***
	(7.352)	(6.361)	(4.656)
Hungary	5.247	6.952	-1.744
	(6.263)	(6.375)	(6.971)
Ireland	17.11***	16.984***	22.012***
	(3.832)	(3.874)	(5.161)
Italy	36.915***	36.476***	37.417***
	(5.381)	(5.433)	(5.704)
Latvia	11.98*	13.933**	10.088*
	(6.473)	(6.475)	(6.617)
Lithuania	8.089	9.641	2.196
	(6.182)	(6.319)	(6.582)
Luxembourg	0	0	0
	(.)	(.)	(.)
Malta	48.714***	51.21***	38.669***
	(7.994)	(8.245)	(8.456)
Netherlands	6.122	4.886	4.445
	(3.782)	(3.752)	(3.719)
Poland	-2.832	-1.068	-8.858
	(6.178)	(6.228)	(7.134)
Portugal	-1.373	-1.547	1.362
	(3.35)	(3.404)	(3.405)
Romania	3.837	5.40	-3.567
	(6.362)	(6.519)	(6.968)
Slovakia	-11.557*	-9.71	-15.333*
	(6.262)	(6.28)	(6.88)
Slovenia	0	0	0
	(.)	(.)	(.)
Spain	11.97**	10.814**	9.18**
	(4.693)	(4.709)	(4.624)
Sweden	-3.119	-3.258	-3.4
	(4.481)	(4.537)	(4.559)
United Kingdom	0	0	0
	(.)	(.)	(.)
Constants	10.537	16.023**	22.462***
	(7.311)	(7.227)	(8.256)
Observations	113	113	119
R-Squared	.926	.925	.935
Prob < F	.000	.000	.000

Standard errors in parentheses, *p<.1, **p<.05, ***p<.001

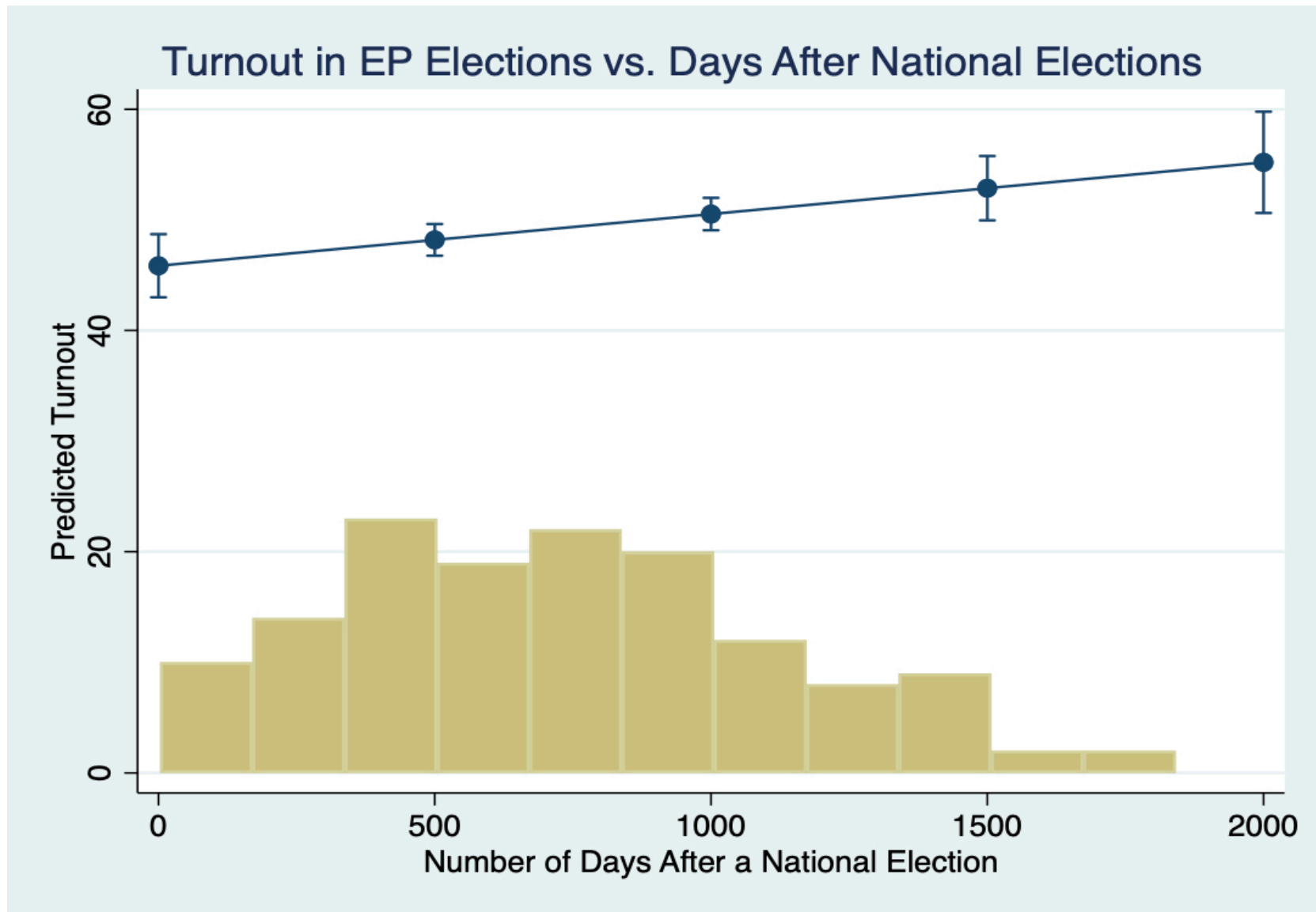


Figure 3: Estimated Turnout in EP Elections by the Number of Days that a European Election Follows a National Contest

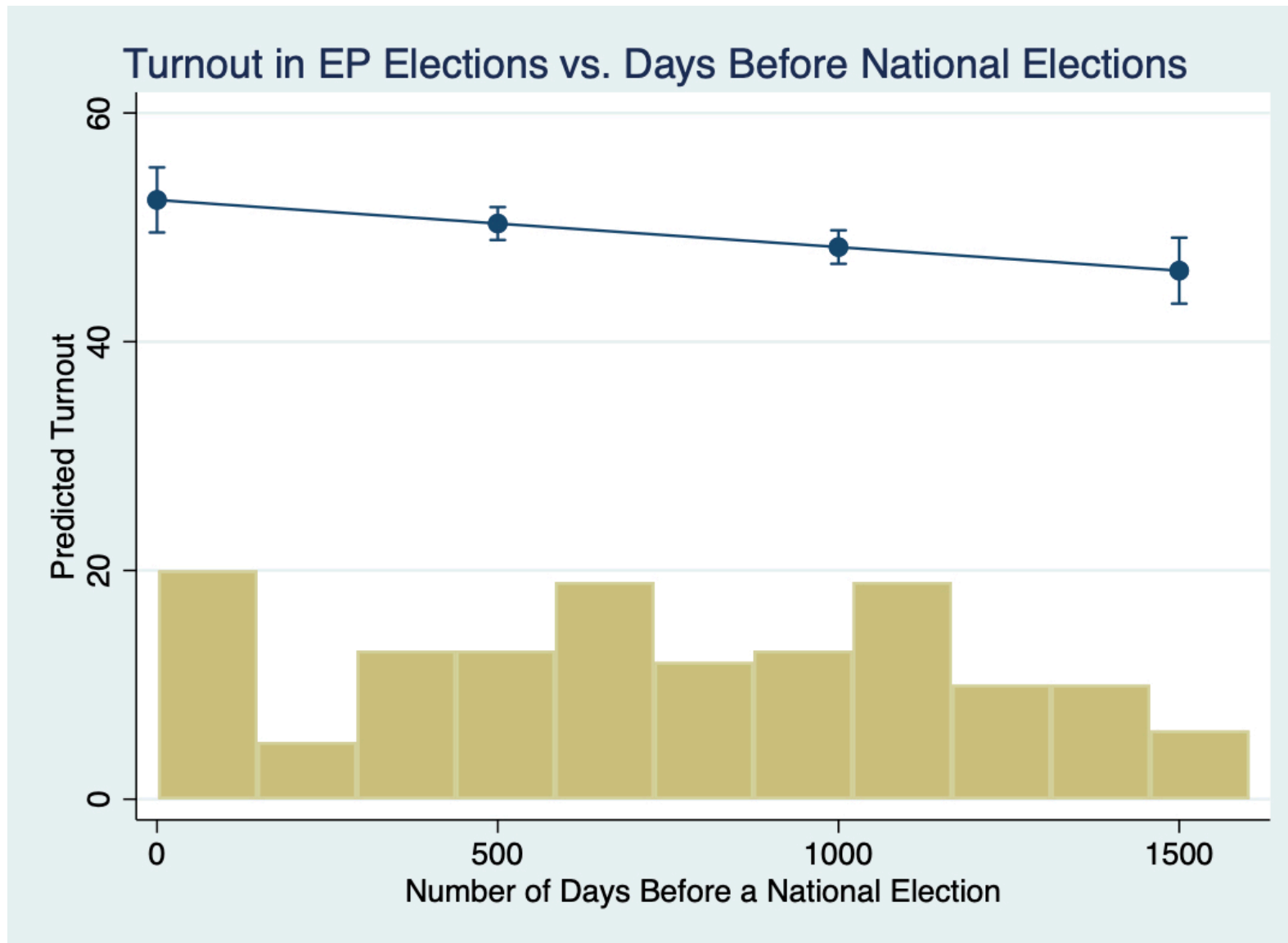


Figure 4: Estimated Turnout in EP Elections by the Number of Days that an EP Election precedes a National Election

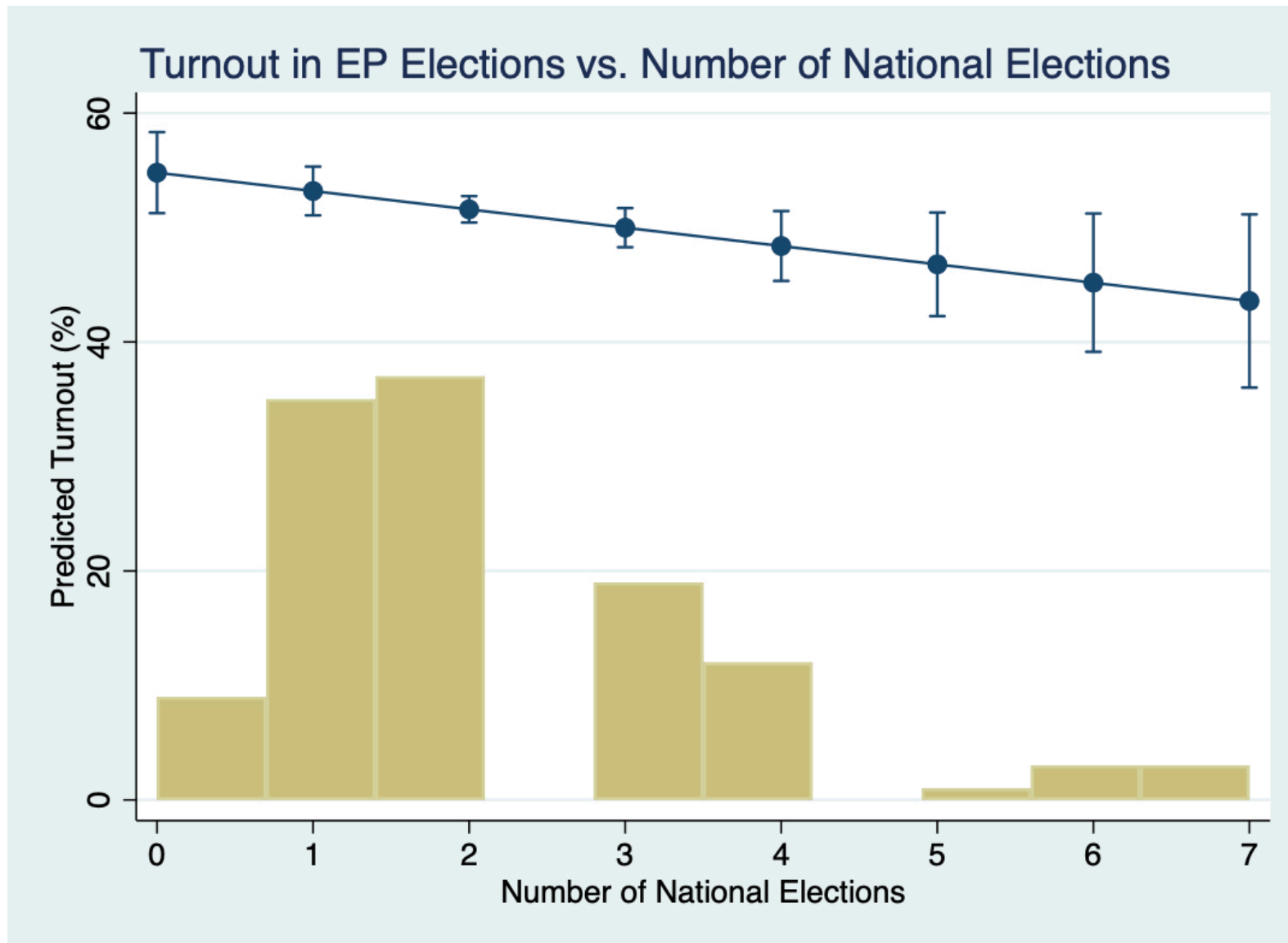


Figure 5: Estimated Turnout in EP Elections by the Number of Non-European Elections between EP Elections

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