

Executive Summary

The Challenges of European Citizenship: The Political Participation of Mobile Citizens in the EU

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The Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 introduced the concept of “European Union citizenship”, allowing for free movement of EU citizens within its borders, and granting them the same electoral rights as nationals of the Member states where they reside. However, while cross-border mobility has since increased and is now a pillar of Europeanism, the same cannot be said for the political participation of mobile citizens.

This thesis analysed the electoral participation of mobile EU citizens (European citizens living in another Member state as non-citizen residents) in the most recent European Parliament elections (held in May 2019) examining the possible reasons behind the voting behaviour of this heterogenous population. Mobile EU citizens could arguably be considered more engaged and interested in EU policies and politics than citizens residing in their own country. And yet, in most cases their participation in EU elections seems to be even lower than the average turnout in each country. What are the factors behind the political (dis)engagement of mobile EU citizens in their host country?

Participation in European Election is a salient topic in the contemporary literature, as the less-than-average turnout rates often incite discussions on the political legitimacy of the European Union (Kyriazi, 2021). In the more specific issue of mobile citizens’ participation, scholars theorise on why voters with arguably more positive attitudes towards the EU still do not seem to participate in elections (Recchi, 2015). Leaving aside the vastly documented problems that voter registration poses to non-citizen residents, the existing literature focuses on the time spent in the country of residence as a key factor, hypothesising that *the likelihood of mobile EU citizens voting in EP elections in their country of residence is positively correlated to the length of time they have spent there (H₁)*, as individuals may have familiarized themselves with the registration procedures, weakened their ties to their country of origin or have more information on voting in their host country (Chaudhary, 2017; Hutcheson and Ostling, 2021). Another argument for this issue argues that, similarly to the general population, mobile voter might be more likely to vote *when they have more positive attitudes about the European institutions (H₂)*, even though scholars theorise that due to their transnational experiences, mobile citizens might lead to less Eurosceptic views (Kyriazi, 2021). The last main hypothesis regarding non-citizen electoral participation examines the voting patterns of each Member state, arguing that the democratic quality and the

levels of electoral participation in the home country could be a determinant factor in individual political participation (Ciornei and Østergaard-Nielsen, 2020). Furthermore, studies on European Elections specifically show different patterns for turnout rates in “old” and “new” Member states¹ (Mattila, 2003), estimating that *mobile citizens from new Member states are less likely to vote in European parliament elections* (H₃).

The operationalisation of these variables was made using the data obtained by the 2019 European Electoral Survey, which asked respondents not only if they voted in the recent elections (dependent variable), but also about their opinions on several subjects, as well as enquiring about their demographic background. From that survey two control variables were also devised, testing the differences in responses based on gender and level of education.

Predictor	Estimate	SE	Z	p	Odds ratio	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower	Upper
Constant	0.1448	0.52467	0.276	0.783	1.156	0.413	3.232
trust EP	-0.2936	0.07594	3.867	<.001	0.746	0.642	0.865
years in country	0.0364	0.00503	7.225	<.001	1.037	1.027	1.047
EU membership:							
Old – New	0.1838	0.18104	1.015	0.310	1.202	0.843	1.714
level education:							
medium – low	-0.0478	0.43172	0.111	0.912	0.953	0.409	2.222
high – low	0.2830	0.42462	0.667	0.505	1.327	0.577	3.050
gender:							
female – male	-0.2768	0.17003	1.628	0.104	0.758	0.543	1.058

Note. The estimates represent log odds of "voted EPE = yes" vs. "voted EPE = no"

A descriptive exploration data shows that, compared to the general sample, mobile citizens voted less frequently in the 2019 European Parliament elections (71% and 50.66% turnout rates respectively). The results of the regression analysis provide further information. The table includes five regression analyses, using the binary logistic regression method. The findings confirm that the length of time spent in the country of residence proves significant to the probability of voting in European elections (H₁), with every unit increment in the variable (every year spent in the country), the odds of voting increase by a factor of 1.037. Similarly, the results corroborate the hypothesis that electoral participation is linked to attitude towards the European Union (*trust_EP*) and its institutions (H₂), indicating an increased probability of voting if trust in the EU is higher (the variable measures trust from 1 to 5, one being most trustful). However, the regression model does not confirm the relation between electoral participation and country of

¹ The point of distinction between “new” and “old” Member states is commonly determined by the 2004 enlargement of the European Union.

origin's EU membership, and neither with gender or level of education. A closer examination of the data suggests a possible spurious relation between the country of origin and trust in the European Union, as individuals from "old" Member States are shown to trust more the EU than citizens from newer Member States.

In conclusion, this thesis has found that electoral participation of mobile citizens in the 2019 European Parliament elections largely depended on the amount of time individuals had spent in their country of residence, as well as their attitudes towards the European Union. Other hypotheses were not found to be significant. To obtain a better picture of the situation on mobile citizens' political participation, the effect of administrative regulations should also be considered as a factor, though more data is needed to fully understand the scope of the issue.

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