Generations and turnout
The generational effect in electoral participation in Finland

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ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

To be presented, with the permission of the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Helsinki, for public examination in the lecture room XII, University main building, on 17 June 2008, at 12 noon.

Acta Politica 35
Department of Political Science
University of Helsinki
Abstract

The relationship between age and turnout has been curve-linear as electoral participation first increases with age, remains relatively stable throughout middle-age and then gradually declines as certain physical infirmities set in (see e.g. Milbrath 1965). Alongside this life-cycle effect in voting, recent pooled cross-sectional analyses (see e.g. Blais et al. 2004; Lyons and Alexander 2000) have shown that there is also a generational effect, referring to lasting differences in turnout between various age groups. This study firstly examines the extent to which the generational effect applies in the Finnish context. Secondly, it investigates the factors accounting for that effect.

The first article, based on individual-level register data from the parliamentary elections of 1999, shows that turnout differences between the different age groups would be even larger if there were no differences in social class and education. The second article examines simultaneously the effects of age, generation and period in the Finnish parliamentary elections of 1975–2003 based on pooled data from Finnish voter barometers (N=8,634). The results show that there is a clear life cycle, generational and period effect.

The third article examines the role of political socialisation in accounting for generational differences in electoral participation. Political socialisation is defined as the learning process in which an individual adopts various values, political attitudes, and patterns of actions from his or her environment. The multivariate analysis, based on the Finnish national election study 2003 (N=1,270), indicated that if there were no differences in socialisation between the youngest and the older generations, the difference in turnout would be much larger than if only sex and socioeconomic factors are controlled for.

The fourth article examines other possible factors related to generational effect in voting. The results mainly apply to the Finnish parliamentary elections of 2003 in which we have data available. The results show that the sense of duty by far accounts for the generational effect in voting. Political interest, political knowledge and non-parliamentary participation also narrowed the differences in electoral participation between the youngest and the second youngest generations.

The implication of the findings is that the lower turnout among the current youth is not a passing phenomenon that will diminish with age. Considering voting a civic duty and understanding the meaning of collective action are both associated with the process of political socialisation which therefore has an important role concerning the generational effect in turnout.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost I thank God for giving me life and for giving me His blessing each day of my life.

Throughout my academic career I have been blessed with wonderful people. I am hugely indebted to Tuomo Martikainen, who first took me on as a research assistant in spring 2000, and has given such solid support and friendship ever since. As part of my job during that first summer he asked me to familiarise myself with studies on electoral participation, and I obviously did so. Over the years we have co-authored several studies on turnout, and one of them, written with Tuomo’s son Pekka Martikainen, is included in this study. I warmly thank both Tuomo and Pekka for extremely educative and enjoyable co-operation.

This study is part of the research project ‘Elections and representative democracy in Finland’, funded by the Academy of Finland (project 8104411). Both of my supervisors, Mikko Mattila from the University of Helsinki and Heikki Palohimo from the University of Tampere, were associated with the project, Mikko as a member and Heikki as director. I was involved as a doctoral candidate in 2004–2007. It was a privilege to be part of a group with so much expertise on electoral behaviour and I learned a lot during our meetings. Many thanks to Mikko and Heikki, who have both been excellent supervisors. Mikko has also given me plenty of advice with my empirical analyses and I have benefitted much from his outstanding knowledge of statistics. I would like to thank all those involved in the project for their co-operation, which continues, and especially Sami Borg who so generously shared his knowledge of political participation. I am indebted to Kyösti Pekonen who as the teacher of the postgraduate seminar gave many valuable comments and suggestions. I am also grateful to the Finnish Cultural Foundation for financial support and Ministry of Justice and Statistics Finland for providing the exceptional register-level data used in the first and second article of this study.

I am thankful to Henrik Oscarsson from the University of Gothenburg and Timo Toivonen from Turku School of Economics who gave valuable comments during the preliminary examination. I also thank Janne Jalava who commented on the introduction.

I have been working at the Department of Political Science throughout my years as a doctoral candidate. I remember how proud I was when I first became a member of staff, and I can honestly say that I still have that feeling. I warmly thank Teija Tiilikainen, who gave me the job of EU studies coordinator for the years 2002–2003. I am also very much indebted to the former head of the department Turo Virtanen. On two occasions, and I was not even aware of it first time, he took me on when I was between jobs. That kind of responsible personnel management I will never forget. I would also like to thank administrative staff on the department.

During the early stages my career, I had the chance to make friends with two
remarkable ladies who have acted as my mentors ever since. Anne Maria Holli and Maija Setälä are fine examples of the true academian: brave, gutsy, hard-working, fun and forever righteous. I thank them both for their irreplaceable friendship.

I am very grateful to Minna Tiili, with whom I shared an office for over four-wonderful years. Despite on being on maternity leave, Minna finished her dissertation five months before I did which shows how hard-working she is. I would like also thank the wonderful colleagues who have become my personal friends: Krista Berglund, Elina Kestilä, Tuija Lattunen and Tuula Teräväinen. We have had many insightful conversations and have shared many fun moments.

I warmly thank my mother and my stepfather, Pirjo and Kurt Nyman, for their endless encouragement and mental and financial support throughout the years. Finally, I give my heartfelt thanks to all my friends for their friendship.

Hanna Wass

Helsinki 12 May, 2008
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Introduction

Voting as a form of political participation

Voting is unquestionably the most widely studied form of political participation. In fact, as van Deth (2001) remarks, starting with the seminal studies on voting conducted by Lazarsfeld and his colleagues in the 1950s, political participation has mainly been considered in terms of casting votes and engaging in campaign activities. Even though the forms of political participation have expanded considerably, voting continues to be an important field of study. This is hardly surprising given that there have been several interesting questions surrounding electoral participation since the introduction of suffrage.

Firstly, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, political analysts assumed that more highly educated and wealthier people would make a rational decision not to vote as the possibility that one vote would make a difference is extremely small (Lijphart 1997, 1). The first empirical studies, however, soon showed that the situation was quite the opposite: socioeconomic status and turnout were positively correlated (ibid.). Even today it is somewhat unclear why the groups that could gain most from voting, i.e. the poor and the unemployed, are the ones that vote the least (for possible reasons, see Rosenstone 1982). In addition, there is still some controversy concerning whether voters and non-voters differ in their policy preferences, and whether it would affect election outcomes if non-voters had voted (see e.g. Bennett & Resnick 1990; Hajnal & Trounstine 2005; Griffin & Newman 2005; Leighley & Nagler 2007; Lijphart 1997, 4–5; Studlar & Welch 1986; Teixeira 1992, 97–101; Wattenberg 2002; Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980, 111–113). If non-voting causes an unrepresentative political agenda (see Teixeira 1992, 102), the underrepresentation of certain groups may, in the long run, lead to a circle in which unrepresented groups continue not voting for exactly the same reason, i.e. distance from the political system and the political agenda.

Secondly, there is the unresolved question of declining turnout. We know that younger generations tend to be much better educated than their predecessors, which has generated what is known as the puzzle of participation: why has overall turnout declined despite the dramatic rise in the general educational level (see Abramson & Aldrich 1982, referring to Brody 1978; Gray & Caul 2000)? On the other hand, it has been argued that the increase in the educational level has moderated the downward trend in turnout (Schaffer 1981).

Finally, it appears that alongside the life cycle effect, which means that turnout first rises with age, remains relatively stable throughout middle-age and then gradually declines as physical infirmity sets in (see e.g. Milbrath 1965, 134–135; Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980, 37–38), there are nowadays clear signs of a generational effect in turnout (see e.g. Blais et al. 2004; Franklin 2004; Lyons and Alexander 2000). The generational effect suggests that the differences between
age groups in electoral participation are not related to age alone but could be attributed to different socialising experiences during the formative years of various cohorts. Such dissimilarities between cohorts are more permanent than those related to the life cycle effect.

Consequently, far from being a worn-out subject, turnout still has many interesting aspects. This study deals with one of them, i.e. the generational effect in electoral participation. There are two research questions. Firstly, to what extent does the generational effect found in studies conducted in the U.S. and Canada apply in Finland? Secondly, what factors account for the generational effect?

Before turning to the scope of the study in more depth, I will briefly examine the history of franchise in general, give a short overview of studies on voter turnout, discuss the suggested factors behind the turnout decline, and describe the main features of each of the elections analysed. Next, I will explain the concepts of the study, i.e. the life cycle, generational and period effects in turnout, and introduce the categorisation of generations used in most parts of the study. Finally, I will present the aims of the study and the research design, and discuss the main results and their implications for further study on voter turnout.

The history of franchise

Even though direct democracy, practised in the ancient city-states, is often seen as the opposite of modern representative democracy, they share some common features, i.e. the use of representatives (Manin 1997, 8). In Athenian democracy, the functions that were not carried out by the Popular Assembly were performed by elected magistrates, who mainly focused on administrative and executive tasks. The feature that sets it apart from representative democracy, however, is the method of selection of these officials. Even though the most important magisterial posts were subject to election, most of the officials were selected by lot. In principle, any citizen aged thirty years or more and not under deprivation of civil rights could be chosen as a magistrate (ibid., 8–15). In practice, however, the selection was made only from those who had offered themselves as candidates (ibid., 13, referring to Hansen 1991, 97, 230–231, 239). According to Manin, it is not the fact that a few govern on the behalf of the people that makes a system representative, but the exclusive use of elections in nominating these representatives that distinguishes it from ‘direct systems’ (ibid., 10–11, 41).

As the modern era approached, it became evident that some sort of representative system was required. The aim of classical utilitarianism, represented by Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and James Mill (1773–1835), was the maximum well-being of the maximum number of people (Setälä 2003, 132–133). They both supported representative democracy on the grounds that it best promoted the overall well-being in society. According to Bentham, this well-being was related to elections, which gave citizens the opportunity to supervise the decision makers (ibid). Interestingly, the son of James Mill, John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), while
also supporting representative democracy, put much more emphasis on the developmental function of political participation (ibid., 113). He argued that the moral and intellectual levels of citizens affected the selection of decision makers as well as citizens’ control over their leaders. Moral and cognitive levels are partly dependent on the opportunities for participation a society offers. The value of representative democracy thus lies in its developing side-effects (ibid., 114), which are not the primary justification, however. According to John Stuart Mill, the well-being of citizens should be the most important goal for governments. It can be achieved via representative democracy in situations in which citizens have reached the required moral and intellectual level (ibid., 118).

The question of suffrage has divided various philosophers. Locke (1632–1704) remarked that God has given every human being the inalienable right to life, freedom and ownership. This also means that citizens should be entitled to approve the government and the legislation directed at them in order to protect those rights (Setälä 2004, 24, 67). It took several centuries, however, before this undeniable principle was fully understood. According to Dalton (1988, 38), voting rights in most nations were restricted to property owners and long residency. The U.S. was one of the first countries to expand the franchise, and by 1850 almost the entire white male population was entitled to vote. The extension of suffrage proceeded more slowly in Europe given a lack of populist thought. As the social cleavages were more polarised, many European conservatives thought that if enfranchised, working-class voters would vote them out of office. Even though the working-class movement claimed equal rights in most cases, it took some sort of crisis to change the political order. It was not until the twentieth century that voting rights were extended to the whole population (ibid.).

New Zealand was the first country to give women the right to vote, which it did in 1893. Finland, however, was the first country in which women were simultaneously given the right to vote and to stand for election, in 1906 (IPU 2008, women’s suffrage). This happened in the context of parliamentary reform, which granted universal and equal suffrage to all men and women. Despite the name, universal and equal suffrage had its restrictions. For instance, people in regular military service, people not registered in the country during the previous three years, people who had not paid tax to the government during the previous two years, and people regularly receiving poor relief were denied suffrage (Rahikainen 2006). Whereas most Western democracies had given women the right to vote by 1945, there were some exceptions such as Switzerland, which enfranchised women as late as 1971 (IPU 2008, women’s suffrage). The Voting Rights Act of 1965 removed most of the formal restrictions for African Americans (Dalton 1988, 38).

Voting age is another interesting issue. During the 1970s, it was generally lowered from 21 to 18 in Britain, France, Germany and the U.S (ibid.), as well as in some other countries (Franklin 2004). According to Franklin (2004, 25–26, 63–64), the voting-age reform, together with the fact that in most countries the electorate had substantially increased in numbers due to the entry of so-called baby boomers, and also in some countries because of the enfranchisement of women, were
the main reasons for the large drops in turnout during the 1970s. This decline was related to the nature of the newly enfranchised citizens. The under-developed character of the young as voters, compared to older people, was emphasised as they gained suffrage at a younger age while lacking the educational and membership characteristics of their predecessors. Along with these temporary, although long-term effects, lowering the voting age has had a more permanent influence related to the socialising effect of a less rewarding voting experience.

Franklin argues that the costs of learning to vote are particularly high in the case of those who have their first opportunity to vote during the four-year period after leaving high school. The profits from voting are also substantially lower in this period as these individuals have not yet completed their education or become established in an occupation, and have not had the opportunity to establish social links (ibid., 61). In other words, there is less at stake in the elections. As it would be politically impossible to re-establish an older voting age, Franklin suggests that it should be lowered further to fifteen. At this age people are still at high school and the habit of voting could be acquired in the context of a civic class project (ibid., 213).

There has been quite a lot of discussion in Finland in the recent years on whether the voting age should be lowered to sixteen for municipal elections. The General Synod of the Church took this step for congregational elections in 2007. The new voting age will be applied in the congregational elections of 2010. In the parliamentary elections, the original voting age of 24, which was established during the parliamentary reform of 1906, has been lowered three times: in 1944 to 21 years, in 1968 to 20 years, and in 1972 to 18 (Nousiainen 1998, 156). The last-mentioned amendment came into force on May 15, 1972. Consequently, the parliamentary elections of 1975 were the first ones in which 18 year-olds were entitled to vote. Before the election-legislation reform of 1995 suffrage was determined by the age on the last day of the year before the elections (Tarasti 1998), which meant that all those born in 1954 (18 year-olds in 1972) or later belonged to, in Franklin’s terms, to post-reform cohorts.

A general overview of studies on voter turnout

As already mentioned, factors related to turnout have been extensively investigated. Interestingly, Geys (2006, 638–639) points out that there are still disagreements even when it comes to measuring the dependent variable. In his meta-analysis1 of 83 aggregate-level studies, Geys found five different definitions of turnout: 1) the absolute number of votes cast, 2) the number of voters divided by the voting-age population, 3) the number of voters divided by the number of eligible voters, 4) the number of voters divided by the number of registered voters, and 5) the number of voters divided by the size of the electorate. While studies using the voting-age population as the divisor were the most common, according to Geys, this is not necessarily the best way to calculate turnout as it includes individuals who
are not entitled to vote. On the other hand, it is difficult to determine whether it is preferable to use registered voters rather than eligible voters as the registration procedures vary between countries and non-registration could also be a political action. In practice, however, the use of measures is often connected to the availability of data (ibid.). In Finland, since the elections of 1975 turnout has usually been assessed dividing the number of voters by the number of enfranchised Finnish citizens living in Finland, thus omitting enfranchised citizens living abroad.

In order to form a clearer picture of the numerous approaches in studies on turnout, there has to be some categorisation (see e.g. Blais 2006; Borg 1996, 27–30; Powell 1980). There is a basic division between macro- and micro-level analyses. On the macro level studies are usually comparative because the interest is in the differences between countries, and especially in factors related to higher turnout in some and lower turnout in others. These factors could also be referred to as properties of the political system (Lane & Ersson 1990, 462). On the micro level, on the other hand, the interest lies in differences between individuals, i.e. variables that either increase or decrease the propensity to vote. Furthermore, macro-level factors are mostly related to the supply side of voting whereas micro-level factors reflect the demand side.

The distinction between the macro and the micro level could, however, be regarded as problematic. According to Lane and Ersson (ibid.), if we follow the Weberian philosophy of the social sciences, we should be able to find a relationship between macro- and micro-level conditions given that the former is only an aggregation of the latter. It is thus worth asking some factors could be related to individual-level behaviour and others to national participation rates. One way to deal with this problem is to combine both approaches. Perea (2002) found that the impact on institutional-level factors depends on voters’ individual resources and motivations. It is also worth mentioning Powell’s analysis (1986), which according to Gray and Caul (2000, 1104), is the best example thus far of combining both levels. Neither of these studies is based on the technique of multi-level analysis, however. According to Perea (2002, 668), multi-level analysis was not possible given the limited number of observations on the upper level, i.e. elections and the small variance in the dependent variable, i.e. turnout. Consequently, there is certainly a need for analysis that genuinely takes account of both levels at the same time (for a recent development, see Fieldhouse et al. 2007).

On the macro level, it is possible to separate the institutional setting, the party system and the socio-economic environment in terms of affecting turnout (see e.g. Blais 2000; Blais & Dobrzynska 1998; Geys 2006; Powell 1980). While on the micro level various sociodemographic, socioeconomic and sociopsychological characteristics of individuals (Borg 1996, 20), as well as resources (see Brady et al. 1995) have an impact on the tendency to vote. In the following I will briefly discuss the factors that are most often mentioned in the literature. The list is by no means exhaustive, but rather an illustration of other variables affecting turnout besides time-related factors, i.e. age, generation and period, which are analysed in more depth later in this study.
There are several institutional-level variables that have been found to have an effect on turnout. In his exploration of 83 aggregate-level studies, Geys (2006) includes the electoral system, compulsory voting, concurrent elections and registration requirements among the factors found to have an impact on electoral participation. It is usually assumed that the electoral system, i.e. whether there is majority, plurality or proportional (PR) representation, has an effect on turnout (ibid., 650). It is not, however, perfectly clear which is the most favourable system as far as turnout is concerned. Drawing on previous discussions, Blais and Carty (1990, 167) mention several reasons why proportional representation fosters turnout. Firstly, the correspondence between the votes won by a party and the seats obtained in parliament makes voters feel that their votes count. This is especially the case with supporters of small parties. Secondly, as the PR system means that several representatives are chosen from one district, parties have more of an incentive to campaign around the country. Finally, PR increases the number of parties, meaning that voters have more options. Referring to Powell (1980) and their own previous study (Blais & Carty 1987), the authors acknowledge that there are also counter-arguments such as the simplicity of the single-member plurality system and the possibility of one-party major-government. Their study, nevertheless, reveals that turnout is clearly higher in PR systems even though it is not clear why. According to Blais and Dobrzynska (1998), who considered a much larger set of countries, what mostly counts is the disproportionality related to any given electoral system.2

Most scholars agree that compulsory voting, currently practised in Australia, Belgium, Greece and Luxembourg, for example, (see IDEA 2008a), increases turnout (for systematic analysis see Geys 2006, for individual studies, see e.g. Blais & Dobrzynska 1998; Jackman 1987; Jackman & Miller 1995). As a matter of fact, according to Lijphart (1997, 9–10), compulsory voting has such a strong equalising effect that its wider adoption should be considered. As far as concurrent elections are concerned, Geys (2006) found, based on a meta-analysis, that holding different types of elections simultaneously increased turnout. The same applies to automatic registration which has been adopted in Europe.3 Registration requirements, used in the United States, have been considered one of the main factors related to its lower turnout compared to Europe (see e.g. Powell 1986; Squire et al. 1987; Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980, 61–88). In addition, voting age, the decisiveness of the elections, and the degree of democracy can be included in institutional variables (Blais & Dobrzynska 1998). Whereas an older age and more decisiveness of elections, measured by the position of the lower house, both increase turnout, the degree of democracy does not appear to have a statistically significant impact. Lijphart (1997, 8) also mentions the frequency of elections, referring to studies conducted by Boyd (1981; 1986; 1989). This is especially the case in the U.S., and in Switzerland where the frequent use of elections and referenda cause voter fatigue (ibid., referring Jackman & Miller 1995, 482–483).

It is also possible to distinguish factors related to the party system, even though it could be considered partly subordinate to the electoral system (Borg 1996, 29).
The most significant way in which the party system enhances turnout is through the linkages between parties and various religious, occupational and other kinds of social groups. According to Powell (1980, 13–14; Powell 1986, 22), these linkages make the interpretation of issues and the choice of candidates easier for those less involved in the politics. They should also make the cues from the individual’s personal environment, such as family, friends and co-workers, more consistent, and they make it less costly for parties to identify their supporters and mobilise them during the elections (Powell 1980, 14; Powell 1986, 22).

There are also several other factors that are related to the party system. In his meta-analysis of turnout studies, Geys (2006) mentions the closeness of elections, by standard measured in terms of percentage vote gap between the first and the second candidates, campaign expenditure and political fragmentation, i.e. the number of parties. According to Powell (1986, 21), it is plausible to expect that citizens would have more reason to participate in elections in which the outcome could be close, and in such a cases the parties also have more incentives to campaign actively. The meta-analysis conducted by Geys (2006) reveals that the closeness of elections indeed fosters turnout (see also Blais & Dobrzynska 1998), as does campaign spending. The latter result also seems quite logical, as according to Rosenstone and Hansen (2003, 10), people engage in politics not only because of their personal characteristics, but also because they are mobilised by politicians. In terms of the number of parties, several studies have shown that multipartyism decreases turnout (see Jackman 1987; Jackman & Miller 1995; for similar result based on a meta-analysis, see Geys 2006). Elections have a less decisive role in government formation in multi-party systems because the governments are usually coalitions. Blais & Dobrzynska (1998) found the relationship between the number of parties and electoral participation to be logarithmic: the decreasing effect on turnout is stronger when the number of parties increases from two to many, but milder when it reaches 10 and 15. Finally, Jackman (1987) and Jackman and Miller (1995) showed that unicameralism enhances turnout, because in countries with only one legislative chamber the lower house has a more decisive role in the legislation, and therefore its elections have more at stake to the electors.

Geys’ meta-analysis (2006) reveals that of the factors related to the socio-economic environment, the association between turnout and population size, population concentration, population stability, population homogeneity and previous turnout are most frequently studied. Of these, all except population homogeneity are connected to electoral participation. Blais & Dobrzynska (1998) tested the impact of GNP per capita, GNP growth per capita, average life expectancy, degree of illiteracy, and population size and density. The results showed that economic development increases turnout in a logarithmic manner meaning that the impact was highest at the lowest level of income. This could be related to the fact that in an economically developed environment people have more information and are more engaged in the political process (ibid., 242, referring to Powell 1982). The authors emphasise, however, that the impact stems from the structure of the economy and not from economic, conjuncture as economic growth does not facilitate
electoral participation. In addition to GNP per capita, also degree of literacy and population size affect turnout. The relationship between turnout and literacy is curvilinear: the impact is strongest when the rate of illiteracy moves from the highest to the average level, but very small when it moves from the average to the lowest level. The relationship between turnout and the size of the population is, in turn, logarithmic, suggesting that the difference is between smaller countries and all others (ibid., 244). This might be accounted for the higher level of communal activity in smaller settings in which the social and political ties are more personal and closer (ibid., 242, referring to Verba & Nie 1972).

It should also be mentioned that Radcliff (1992; 1996) found that the state of the economy affects turnout, although the relationship was mediated by the degree of welfare-state development in a non-linear fashion. His results suggest that the impact of economic adversity on turnout is positive in countries with the highest and lowest levels of welfare spending, i.e. economic hardship fosters turnout, and negative in countries with an average level of spending. As Blais and Dobrzynska (1998, 252) remark, however, Jackman and Miller (1995) were not able to replicate these findings.

Blais and Dobrzynska (1998, 251) state that even though most of the factors affecting turnout on the macro level have only marginal impact individually, combined they make a large difference. As a summary, they argue that turnout is highest in a small, industrialised, densely populated country in which the national lower-house elections have a decisive status, voting is compulsory and the voting age is 21, there is a PR system with relatively few parties, and the electoral outcome is close. Whereas turnout can exceed 90 per cent when most of these conditions are met, it could easily be 30 percentage points lower when most of them are not fulfilled. It should be noted, however, that compulsory voting has by far the most substantial effect. When the socio-economic environment and the institutional setting were held constant, compulsory voting increased turnout by 11 percentage points whereas the impact of lowering the voting age, for instance, was substantially smaller (turnout is decreased by almost two percentage points when the voting age was lowered by one year) (ibid., 246).

Evans (2004, 152–156) mentions age, gender, ethnicity, education, income, membership of organisations and trade unions and marital status as sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors related to turnout on the micro level. A seminal study conducted by Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980), based on huge survey data on the presidential elections of 1972 in the U.S., showed that social class, employment status, occupational sector, home ownership and residential stability were strongly connected to turnout. Of the sociodemographic variables, age has by far the strongest impact on an individual’s propensity to vote (ibid., Blais 2000, 52–53). The relationship between age and turnout is curvilinear as participation first increases with age and then gradually declines after middle age (see e.g. Milbrath 1965, 134–135). I will examine this relationship in more depth in the section in which the life cycle, generational and period effects are discussed. In terms of gender, men used to be more active voters than women, but nowadays the dif-
ferences are extremely small (see e.g. Blais 2000; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, 37–44). In Finland, the turnout among women first exceeded that of men in the 1978 presidential elections (the elections to choose the electoral body). Women have been more active in parliamentary elections since 1987.

Ethnic background has also been found to be connected with turnout. The subject has been most prevalent in the U.S. where turnout among black voters was low until the 1960s due to discriminatory registration laws (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, 90–91). As Evans (ibid.) remarks, referring to Leighley and Nagler (1992), since then many studies have shown, that *ceteris paribus*, the propensity to vote among black people is as high or higher as among white people. There is further evidence that Hispanics (of Latin American or other Spanish origin) vote at the same rate in presidential elections as Anglo Americans and African Americans with the same socioeconomic status and political contexts, but to a clearly less extent in the midterm elections (see Cassel 2002). In Finland, the turnout among non–citizens, who are allowed to vote in municipal elections, was under 20 per cent in the elections of 1996 and 2000 in certain voting districts in Helsinki (Hellsten & Martikainen 2001, 52–53). Another interesting feature is the particularly high turnout among Swedish-speaking Finns (see Martikainen & Wass 2002, 85–87), which could be at least partly accounted for their strong party identification with the Swedish People’s Party and their tighter social networks.

The connection between socioeconomic status (SES) and turnout is discussed in more detail in the first article of this study. At this point it is sufficient to note that turnout is strongly connected to the individual’s socioeconomic status in a very straightforward manner: the higher the SES, the higher the turnout. There are, however, a few other factors that need to be mentioned, i.e. membership of social organisations, marital status and residential stability. Evans (2004, 155) mentions the Catholic Action organisation in Italy, which could be regarded as a political intermediary organisation between the Vatican and Christian Democratic voters, as the best example of the mobilising effect of being a member of a politically active organisation. Trade-union membership usually increases turnout, especially if the union has close linkages with a political party (ibid., 154–155). It is also a well-known fact that electoral participation clearly varies by marital status: married people have higher propensity to vote than widows and singles (Blais 2000, 52–53; Martikainen & Wass 2002, 84; Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980, 44). Moreover, couples tend to vote or not to vote jointly (see Glaser 1959, 564). Evans (2004, 155) argues that the increased tendency among married citizens to vote is related to the fact that they are more settled and rooted in society. As a consequence, they have more at stake and are more affected by the governmental policy, and therefore have more of an incentive to vote for the party that is most supportive of their life situation. According to Evans, it could be argued, however, that the effect is mainly dependent on parental status, the impact of which on turnout has not yet been comparatively analysed (ibid.).

Several studies have shown that residential mobility decreases turnout (see e.g. Filer et al. 1993; Martikainen & Wass 2002, 72–77; Squire et al. 1987; Wolf-
This effect stems from several sources: those living longer in the same neighbourhood have more social ties (Teixeira 1987, 23) and are more aware of local issues and candidates (Filer et al. 1993, 79). On the other hand, moving and settling down take a lot of time and effort, which may cause a temporarily decreased interest in politics. If moving is constant, it could cause some sort of rootlessness and a loosening of social contacts (Martikainen & Wass 2002, 73). Finally, in the U.S. moving has been found to be closely related to efforts to re-register. Squire et al. (1987) found that movers did not differ from stayers on motivational variables such as interest in politics, attention to the campaign, concern about the outcome, and political efficacy.

Alongside sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors, there are also sociopsychological variables, such as values and attitudes, that affect turnout on the micro level. Numerous studies have shown that religiosity, party identification, political interest and sense of political efficacy are all related to turnout. People who are very religious and regularly attend church are considerably more likely to vote. Churches may also encourage parishioners to exercise their right to vote even though not speaking out on the choice of a party (Blais 2000, 52, 92). Franklin (2004, 156–157) found in his analysis of the German electorate that Christian identification has strong effect on the propensity to vote. Moreover, religiosity increases the feeling that voting is a civic duty (Blais 2000, 97–98).

The concept of party identification was developed by the so-called Michigan school (Campbell et al. 1960). It refers to a lasting tie between an individual and the party he or she feels closest to. Partisanship has many functions concerning citizens’ political engagement, such as providing decisional short-cuts by enabling them to use their partisan identities in order to form their opinions on different policy options (Dalton 2000, 21). With regards to electoral participation, partisans are more easily mobilised to vote by political parties and they have bigger incentives to support their preferred parties and candidates (ibid.). I discuss the role of party identification and political interest in the fourth article in the context of accounting for the generational differences in turnout.

There is also a connection between political efficacy and turnout. As Clarke and Acock (1989, 522) remark, referring to Lane (1959), since the 1950s political efficacy has been classified as either internal or external. While the former means that an individual feels that he or she possesses the required skills and resources to influence the political system, the latter refers to the perception that government institutions are responsive to citizens’ attempts to influence it (ibid.). There is recent evidence from the Finnish parliamentary elections of 2003 that a sense of internal efficacy increases turnout (see Paloheimo ed. 2005).

The link between attitudes and electoral participation is, however, somewhat problematic. As Evans (2004, 152) notes, referring to the aforementioned study conducted by Perea (2002, 647), we will not get very far by arguing that an individual is not voting because he or she is not interested in politics or does not feel politically effective. The primary questions should be why some people have more interest than others, and why some feel more effective than others. Moreover, there
is the question of causality. According to Brady et al. (1995, 271), political interest and efficacy, for instance, enhance political participation. At the same time, participation presumably increases interest and effectiveness. While such variables and turnout certainly have statistically significant interdependence, using them as independent variables in explaining turnout might cause a spurious relationship, meaning that they only mediate the impact of some other, unknown factor.

Brady et al. (1995) thus argue that we should consider resources, i.e. civic skills, time and money, along with SES and engagement in politics, in any investigation of political participation. The point is that the availability of such resources differs on the basis of SES and different resources are required for different types of activities. As far as resources are concerned, civic skills such as the communication and organisational abilities that are necessary in political activity, are developed in churches, at work and in various organisations throughout an individual’s life. Acquiring such skills depends heavily on the educational level. Churches, however, are most egalitarian in terms of fostering civic skills as those with the least education are as prone as those with most education to attend church regularly, and among those who attend church there is relatively less stratification by education in relation to making a speech or organising a meeting (ibid., 275). Income is obviously also very much connected to SES, whereas free time is related to life circumstances such as having a full-time job and having children at home. While civic skills, measured by adult skill-acts (frequency of religious attendance and number of hours devoted to church activities, employment status and attachment to organisations), language abilities and formal educational experiences have a considerably bigger impact on activities requiring time, such as, engaging in informal community activity or working on a campaign, they are related to voting to a lesser extent (ibid.).

Political knowledge or ‘civic literacy’, which could be regarded as a certain kind of political resource, is also related to turnout (see e.g. Howe 2003; Milner 2002; Paloheimo ed. 2005). Political knowledge is particularly important in terms of accounting for the generational effect in turnout as shown in the fourth article of this study.

In this section I have briefly explored most of the macro- and micro-level variables that affect turnout. Before turning to the factors that possibly account for its decline, I should mention one more approach. According to Aldrich (1993, 246), turnout is the most commonly used example of a theoretical puzzle in rational choice theory, and is often referred to a major indication of its failure. At first glance, a mismatch between rationality and turnout is not hard to see. As Downs stated as long ago as in 1957, the benefits a voter gains from having his or her preferred candidate win (B) multiplied by the estimated probability of his or her to casting the decisive vote (P) are smaller than the costs related to voting (C), such as gathering information, making a decision on whom to vote for and going to the polls (see Blais 2000, 2). Consequently, if (P)B-C<0 it is rational to abstain. The fact that most people still vote poses a serious challenge to the assumptions of rational choice theory.
According to Blais (ibid., 3–9), various rational choice theorists have put forward seven different reasons for voting to resolve the dilemma: the desire to maintain democracy (Downs 1957), a sense of duty (Riker & Ordershook 1968), risk-aversion and the avoidance of regret for not voting and seeing the preferred candidate lose by one vote (Ferejohn & Fiorina 1974), a reasoning that others will not vote and one vote could thus be decisive (Mueller 1989), mobilisation and thus cost reduction by group leaders and politicians (Aldrich 1993, Uslaner 1986, 1989a, 1989b, 1993), the fact that the costs of voting is practically nil (Niemi 1976), and the fact that the calculation of benefits and cost is not rational as they are both very small (Barry 1978, Aldrich 1993 in altered fashion). Of this list of potential reasons, the two first-mentioned could be considered expressive motivations, focusing on what a citizen can express by voting, such as support for the prevailing political system. The latter five are clearly instrumental motivations as the main concern lies in the outcome of elections, i.e. what a citizen can gain by voting.

Following a thorough discussion of the P, B, C and D (duty) terms, Blais (2000, 137) concludes that rational choice gives a certain but limited contribution for study on electoral participation. He also strongly emphasises the role of a citizen’s duty as a most important impetus. It is easy to agree with Blais based on this study given that the generational differences in the sense of duty to vote seem to be the main factor in accounting for the generational effect in turnout, as shown in the fourth article.

**Accounting for turnout decline**

Table 1 shows that electoral participation has declined in most Western democracies since the 1950s: turnout is now at a lower level in 16 of the 23 countries. On the aggregate level, however, the downward trend has been quite modest as the average turnout in the early 2000s is only 8.3 percentage points lower than in the 1950s, and 9.2 percentage points lower than in the 1960s which was about the most active period. The aggregate-level trends nevertheless conceal strong cross-national fluctuations. Whereas some countries, such as Switzerland (-22.1%-points), the United Kingdom (-19.9%-points) and France (-19.8%-points) have witnessed substantial declines in turnout since the 1950s, others, such as Malta and Denmark have seen increases (17.6 and 4.3%-points, respectively).

The mean figures in the two right-hand columns are calculated in a similar fashion as in Franklin’s study (2004, 69) on the British elections of 1964–1997. The mean turnout change is the sum of the changes between the decades divided by the number of decades. The mean absolute change shows the average turnout change when declines are treated positive. The most dramatic decline in mean turnout on the aggregate level took place between the 1980s and 1990s (-4.2%-points), although the change was relatively small over five decades (-1.3%-points). It was positive in five, zero in three, and negative in 15 countries. The overall drop in
turnout was largest in Portugal (-8.0%-points), Switzerland (-4.4%-points) and France (-4.0). Portugal and Switzerland are also the countries in which the decline between the 1950s and 2000s was most apparent. The same applies to the countries in which there was a positive change, i.e. Malta and Denmark, and to a lesser extent, Australia and Sweden.

In terms of mean absolute changes on the aggregate level, turnout has remained relatively stable at only 2.0 percentage points change: it was below average in Iceland (1.2%-points), Australia (1.3%-points), Belgium (1.9%-points) and Luxemburg (1.8%-points). This finding is hardly surprising for Australia, Belgium and Luxembourg where voting is compulsory. A sustained stability in Iceland is quite interesting, however, considering the bigger fluctuations in the other Scandinavian countries. The fluctuations have been biggest in the U.S. (8.3%-points) which saw quite substantial increases from the 1950s to the 1960s and again from the 1990s to the 2000s, but also strong declines, especially from the 1980s to the 1990s. The changes in Finland (5.5%-points) and New Zealand (5.4%-points) stem from both increases and decreases in participation, whereas in Portugal it has only declined.

How can we account for the changes in turnout? There are number of country-specific factors involved. For instance, Switzerland, in which it has declined substantially, has often been treated as a deviant case because of the low level of party competition due to the customary shared participation by the four major parties in collective executive, which makes the electoral outcome rather meaningless, and the extensive use of referendums (Blais & Dobrzynska 1998, 252–253). The high level of mobilisation in Malta, in turn, is assumed to be related to the intense competition between two major parties, and strong and pervasive partisanship among the electorate (Hirczy 1994). The increases in turnout from the 1950s in Denmark and Sweden, and the relatively small declines in Norway and Iceland, are connected to the strong positions of parties that mobilise the working classes (Wattenberg 2000, 72).

In order to form a more comprehensive picture of the various factors behind the declining turnout we need to look beyond the individual countries. As mentioned earlier, the decline in turnout has obviously been one reason why electoral participation has continued to interest scholars. Various macro- and micro-level factors were discussed in the previous section. The question is how these factors are related to turnout decline. Referring to studies conducted by Jackman (1987), Jackman and Miller (1995) and Powell (1986), Gray and Caul (2000, 1092) argue that even though institutional characteristics have been found to have the strongest impact on turnout in cross-national comparisons, they probably do not account for much of the decline given that institutions have remained rather constant within advanced industrial democracies during the post-war era. In fact, the authors’ multivariate analysis of 18 industrial democracies reveals that a decline in union density and labour-party success have both contributed to turnout decline. Trade unions have historically been an independent mobilising factor, but have also functioned as a linkage between voters and labour parties. Together these two
have acted as facilitating organisations for reform and social justice through their potential working-class electorate (ibid., 1103).

In addition, the increase in the voting-age population and the lower proportion of eligible voters aged between 30 and 69 years have contributed to the decline in the voting age has brought younger, less interested and less socially connected voters into the electorate (ibid. 1100, referring to Teixeira 1992, 38). Franklin (2004, 133, 135, 139–140), on the other hand, found in his analysis of 22 countries that enlarging the electorate had no statistically significant impact on turnout decline. He did identify a specific effect of lowering the voting age however: this, together with the indirect effect of an enlarged electorate, accounted for the almost three-per-cent fall in turnout. There will be a further one-per-cent drop in participation when each post-reform cohorts joins the electorate.

The increase in the number of parties achieving the five per cent vote share declined turnout as fractionalising the political system and diminishing the impact of votes in respect of future government policy (ibid., 1098, referring Jackman 1987). On the other hand, societal investment in higher education has had a positive effect on participation. Gray and Caul conclude that in the future the ageing of the electorate in the countries studied will reverse the effect of lowering the voting age.
Table 1 Turnout in the parliamentary elections in 23 Western democracies in 1950–2007 (%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1950s</th>
<th>1960s</th>
<th>1970s</th>
<th>1980s</th>
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<th>2000s</th>
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<th>mean absolute change</th>
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<td>94.3</td>
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<td>81.4</td>
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<td>62.3</td>
<td>-2.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
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<td>0.9</td>
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<td>85.0</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>73.9</td>
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<td>4.0</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>78.0</td>
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<td>United Statesª</td>
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<tr>
<td>total</td>
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<td>mean absolute change</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sources: The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) and its sources, The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (if data not available in IDEA), the Australian Electoral Commission (for the elections of 2007). Turnout figures are based on registered voters except for the U.S., in which the voting-age population is used.

The means are calculated in a similar fashion to that used in Franklin (2004, 69). The mean turnout change is the sum of turnout changes between the decades divided by the number of decades. The mean absolute change shows the average of turnout changes when declines are treated positive.

ª Until the elections of 1990, the figures refer to the Federal Republic of Germany.
[b] Information on the 1950 elections is not available.
[c] Information on the 2007 elections is not yet available.
[d] Information is available from the elections of 1975 onwards. The comparison shown in the last column is based on the difference between the 1970s and the 2000s.
[e] Information is available from the elections of 1977 onwards. The comparison shown in the last column is based on the difference between the 1970s and the 2000s.
[f] Turnout in the 2001 and 2005 elections is based only on valid votes.
[g] Turnout is based only on valid votes from 1950 to 2000. The information on the 2002 and 2004 elections was provided by the U.S. Census Bureau. Information on the 2006 elections is not yet available.
It seems plausible that the weakening of party mobilisation (see e.g. Wattenberg 2000) and the decline in memberships of various work-related and social organisations have contributed to turnout decline. The same does not apply to all institutions, however. In Finland, 82.4 per cent of the population belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in 2006. Also the number of those joining has grown since 2004 compared to previous year (Church Council Communication Centre 2007; Church Council Communication Centre 2008). It is also worth noting that the unionisation rate among employees and entrepreneurs in Finland is very high, even though it also has declined since the mid-1990s (Ahtiainen 2003; Ahtiainen 2006).

The weakening of partisanship and the rise in education levels, generating the so-called puzzle of participation mentioned earlier, could also be a contributory factor. According to Dalton (2000, 29, referring to his earlier study of 1984), the increased educational level together with the growing availability of political information have improved the skills and resources of the contemporary electorate. This cognitive mobilisation has enabled citizens to deal with politics without political cues having to be provided by political parties (ibid.). Another possible explanation is connected to citizens’ growing dissatisfaction with the performance of parties and the democratic process (ibid.). Even though they still strongly support the political system and democratic principles, they are becoming increasingly critical of political actors, and even of institutions of representative democracy (Dalton 1999, 72). According to the World Value Survey of 2005, Finns have considerably more trust in the church, the army, the police and the legal system than in political parties and parliament: only 29 per cent trusted very or fairly much in parties, while the corresponding figure for parliament was 56 per cent (World Values Survey 2005: Finnish data). Abramson and Aldrich (1982) also mention the weakening of party identification and the diminishing trust in government responsiveness as the main reasons for turnout decline.

Given the improved skills and resources of citizens, it seems only natural that demands for participation beyond current forms of representative democracy have arisen (Dalton 1999, 76), and there is at least indirect evidence of citizens’ increased willingness to challenge political authorities (ibid. 69). According to Dalton, Inglehart’s (1990, 1997) research on post-material value, change reinforces this point in that participatory values are emphasised as a measure. At the same time, parties have failed to some extent in responding new challenges. As a reaction to the decline in class-based politics and the weakening of social cleavages they have adopted so-called catch-all tactics and in most industrialised democracies the ideological differences between the major ones have substantially narrowed (Wattenberg 2000, 66, referring to Kirchheimer 1966 for the term ‘catch-all party’). This, in turn, has weakened the significance of voting. On the other hand, the old social cleavages have given way to the development of new post-industrial cleavages (ibid., 67, referring to Inglehart 1997). Even though the emergence of new issues on the political agenda might have been expected to increase turnout, post-materialism emphasises participation outside the arena of representative democracy (ibid.).
As indicated in this brief overview, numerous factors could have contributed to the decline in turnout. Assessing their significance is even more difficult given the essence of electoral participation: whereas voting is an act by an individual, turnout is an aggregate-level phenomenon (see Franklin 2004, 16–18). Even though the electorate comprises individual electors, we cannot simply sum up all the features of each individual. Consequently, the electorate is not merely a voter on a larger scale. This is evident given the fact that even large changes in its structure do not necessarily have a major effect on turnout. For instance, it is difficult to show the impact of the rising expenditure on education on aggregate-level turnout. We know that on the micro level individuals with more education have a larger propensity to vote. On the aggregate level, however, the interest is in how big a proportion of the increase in educational level is due to increased spending. For example, we can think of situation in which the proportion of the college-aged people in higher education in some country doubled from 10 per cent to 20 per cent over 20 years. On the evidence of the previous studies, it could be estimated that the propensity to vote is 15 per cent higher among college-educated individuals than among those with no college education. On the aggregate level this means a 1.5 per cent increase in turnout, but it takes 20 years to accomplish.

It is important to note, however, that the full effect of increased investment in education will be felt only after the new levels of college education are reflected throughout the population and when the last of those educated before the reform has left the electorate, which will take 50 years more. A 1.5 per cent increase in turnout over 70 years will be swamped with other changes, and thus probably impossible to detect.

It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss various theories of turnout decline in more detail. In fact, the focus is not on decline as such, even though the generational effect has presumably played a role in it. Putnam (2000, 33–34) argues that almost all long-term turnout decline is due to generational replacement: the overall turnout has fallen as the proportion of so-called baby boomers and their children, who are less active voters than their predecessors, has increased. This theme is covered in more detail in the second article of this study.

The Finnish parliamentary elections of 1975–2003

The unicameral Finnish parliament comprises 200 representatives. Elections are held every fourth year. The President has the right to dissolve parliament by ordering new elections, however. Dissolution requires a reasoned initiative from the Prime Minister, and consultation with the various parliamentary factions. Parliaments have been in session for whole four-year period in recent decades. Since the independence, dissolution has occurred eight times, the latest being in 1975.

The electoral system used in Finland could be called open-list preferential voting (see Marsh 1985, 365). Whereas in many list PR systems in Western Europe voters may also indicate their favoured candidate within their favourite party, it
is compulsory to vote for a candidate in Finland (Reynolds et al. 2005, 84). The number of seats won by each party is based on the total number of votes gained by its candidates. The candidates representing each party are elected based on the number of individual votes they have received (ibid.). The elections are proportional in the sense that each party, party alliance, constituency association or joined list win seats in relation to the votes cast compared with the votes for other groups. The votes are counted by according to D’Hondt method, which appears to have a tendency to favour large parties (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 357).

According to Reynolds et al. (2005, 84, 90), the Finnish system offers voters more freedom in the choice of candidates than closed-list systems. There are, however, also some negative side effects in that as this kind of open-list system may lead to internal party conflicts and fragmentation given that candidates within the same party are competing with each other. Moreover, parties are motivated to field a large variety of candidates in order to attract the highest possible number of voters. The substantial variation within the parties may, in turn, make it more difficult for voters to perceive the differences between them.

For the parliamentary elections, Finland is divided into 15 electoral districts.10 The number of representatives elected in each district is based on the number of citizens residing there six months prior to the elections. There is substantial variation between the districts in the numbers of representatives elected, ranging from one (Åland) to 34 (Uusimaa) (Statistics Finland 2007). Consequently, the possibilities of parties to gain seats in parliament corresponding to number of votes received vary from one district to another, the difference between the proportional number of seats seats in parliament and the votes gained in the elections being larger in smaller districts. The statistically significant relationship between this so-called deviation from proportionality and the size of the district has only strengthened as the differences in size between the districts have grown (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 359–360).

Every Finnish citizen not under guardianship or holding military office is eligible to vote. Candidates may be nominated either by registered political parties or constituency associations established by a minimum of 100 persons who are entitled to vote. Each party is entitled to nominate a maximum of 14 candidates in each district, or the number of representatives for the districts if it exceeds 14. The same holds for constituency associations. Parties may also form electoral alliances, which used to be quite popular. During the 1970s, the Christian League (SKL) and the Rural Party (SMP) actively forged alliances with other parties (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 287).

In the following, the context of each of the elections included in the study is briefly described in order to interpret the impact of the third time-related factor, i.e. the period effect. While the period effect is not confined to the electoral context, it is certainly closely connected to it. Indeed, Franklin (130, 207–208) argues that turnout has much more to do with the character of elections, measured by the majority status and the margin of victory of the largest party, than with the characteristics of the electorate. In their study of 22 countries, Franklin et al.
(2004) noted that elections have become less competitive in the sense of being followed by policy change. For young people especially, who are less habitual voters, it means that there are fewer reasons to vote.

The parliamentary elections of 1975 could be called the ‘oil crisis elections’ (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 254). The oil crisis, erupted in 1973, and was followed by a decline in economic growth and increased unemployment. These problems fragmented the government that was appointed in 1972 and a caretaker government was installed. The President dissolved it and ordered new elections to be held in September 1975. The Christian League (SKL) was one of the winners of this election. It had forged many successful electoral alliances and gained nine seats instead of the previous four (ibid., 254–255). The Rural Party (SMP) weakened considerably, while the positions of the traditional parties strengthened. It is also worth mentioning that the 1975 elections were the first ones in which 18 year-olds were entitled to vote.

The ‘consensual elections’ of 1979 were characterised by a meeting held between politicians and representatives of economic institutions and interest groups in 1977 (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 256). All the parties involved agreed on a future economic policy that aimed to enforce the prerequisites in entrepreneurship. This policy also became a central theme for the elections. All of the governmental parties lost seats, while the Christian League (SKL), the right-wing National Coalition (KOK), and the Rural Party (SMP) all increased their support (ibid., 256–258).

The elections of 1983 were held a year after the 1982 presidential elections in which a new president was chosen after 26 years term of Urho Kekkonen. The parties involved in the electoral debate took different on whether or not to continue the policy line adopted by President Kekkonen. These were also the last elections in which the turnout rose above 80 per cent. The Social Democratic Party (SDP), which had nominated the new President Mauno Koivisto, substantially increased its share of the votes (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 259).

The co-operation between the Centre Party (KESK) and the SDP, which had lasted for decades, began to crack in the elections of 1987. The Finnish welfare state had reached the phase in which neither party could any longer attract to benefit from co-operation by distributing new benefits to their supporters, and both parties started to search for a new coalition partner (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 261). The National Coalition (KOK), which had not been part of any government since the government formed in 1964, started to seem alluring. In the context of favourable economic development, parties made several promises concerning various benefits (ibid., 261–262). Ollila & Paloheimo (2007, 262) argue that the similarity between the various promises could have decreased citizens’ willingness to participate in the elections. In fact, the turnout was almost five percentage points lower than in previous elections, and sank to the same level as in the 1950s. For the fourth time in a row, the National Coalition increased its support. The SDP lost some of its vote share, but was able to maintain its position as the largest party. Even though the KOK and the KESK had planned to form a right-wing government, they failed to announce the attempt early enough in
the presidential round, which immediately followed the elections. Consequently, President Koivisto used heavily his rights to be involved in the government formation, and a month after the elections the new SDP-KOK government was appointed (ibid., 262–263). There were also two special features related to the 1987 elections: it was the first time that women’s electoral participation exceeded men’s turnout, and the Green League (VIHR) was founded even though it was not registered as a party (ibid., 262).

It was distinctive of the 1991 elections that the KESK was for the first time in opposition in the majority government. It campaigned very actively, aiming at ‘breathtaking’ electoral victory. Indeed, the party managed to win almost 170,000 more votes than in previous elections, and became the largest party. The Christian League (SKL) and the VIHR also came out as the winners, the latter campaigning for the first time as a registered party. The new government comprised four right-wing parties: KESK, KOK, SKL and RKP (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 267–268). According to Sundberg (1992, 394–395), the 1991 electoral campaign differed from previous ones in that it was heavily influenced by an international conflict, the Gulf War, which had no obvious connections to the Finnish political debate. However, because international events received a lot of media exposure, the party contest remained somewhat in the background until the end of elections.

Finland joined the European Union before the 1995 election at the beginning of 1994. Regardless of the changes in the country’s international role, the elections were characterised by the economic depression that had set in at the beginning of the 1990s (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 269). The growing unemployment figures and cuts in welfare spending increased citizens’ dissatisfaction with the government. Consequently, all governmental parties lost support, the worst affected being the party of the Prime Minister, the KESK. The SDP, on the other hand, increased its share of the votes. The new government was called ‘the rainbow cabinet’ because it constituted five parties covering widely the political spectrum. Given its wide range, only a few parties were in opposition (ibid., 270–272). Moreover the legitimacy of its policies was strengthened when many parties were involved in its formation. It should also be noted that even though turnout remained at almost the same level as in the previous elections (71.9%), it was already 10 percentage points lower than during the elections of the 1960s and 1970 (ibid., 270).

The 1999 electoral campaign did not reach the same level of intensity as the previous one due to the cabinet’s composition: the parties involved were rather cautious in challenging each other (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 272, Sundberg 2000, 378). The country was recovering from the recession and citizens were expecting actions aimed at maintaining public services. The parties tried to meet these voter expectations. The main opposition party, the KESK, introduced a labour-market reform according which employers should be entitled to offer employees fixed-term contracts. The SDP and the Left Alliance, and the trade unions considered the reform as detrimental to employees (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 272). It did not raise that much debate, however, and even the Centre Party wanted to keep a low profile and retain the option of joining the next government. The cabinet parties,
for their part, were interested maintaining the same coalition because the Finnish EU presidency was looming (Sundberg 2000, 378–379). The race was extremely tight as all the largest parties (KESK, KOK and SDP) were almost even in the opinion polls. In the end, all the bourgeois parties, the KESK, the KOK and the Christian League, were the biggest winners while the leftist parties lost votes (Nurmi & Nurmi 2001, 149). Regardless of its electoral success, however, the KESK was left out of the cabinet.

Notwithstanding the labour reform, the campaigning in general was rather lame, and turnout reached an all-time low since the war, 68.3 per cent (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 272). Another related factor to this could have been ‘electoral jam’: following the parliamentary election in March, the EP election was held in June, the presidential election in January 2000 and the municipal election in October 2000. This exceptional rush strained party finances and contributed to the low-profile campaigns (Nurmi & Nurmi 2001, 148).

The elections of 2003 could be called the ‘prime-minister elections’. Since the 1991 elections the leader of the largest party had formed the government (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 273). Party leaders become more visible during campaigns and they were introduced as potential prime ministers. This tendency strengthened after the new constitution was adopted in 2000, which among other things weakened the role of the President in the government formation. This suited for both the KOK and the KESK which had appointed new leaders. The Christian League changed its name to the Christian Democrats (the KD) at the party conference at summer 2001 (ibid.). The elections were particularly important for the KESK as it had spent the two previous terms in opposition (Sundberg 2004, 1000). Its new female leader, Anneli Jäätteenmäki, campaigned very actively and brought into the debate the dialogue between President George W. Bush and the previous Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen about Finland’s possible involvement in the Iraq War (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 274; Sundberg 2004, 1000). Again, the elections were very close as the KESK beat the second largest party, the SDP by only 0.2 percentage points. The Christian Democrats (KD), in particular, but also the VIHR increased their support. On the other hand, the KOK received 2.4 percentage points fewer votes (Nurmi & Nurmi 2004, 562; Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 274–275). It should also be noted that turnout rose for the first time since the 1987 elections, even though rather mildly (1.4.‰-points). Nevertheless, the increase shows that the electoral context does have an impact: the kind of composition in which the party leader’s role is emphasised seems to mobilise voters, arguably reflecting the general tendency towards the personification of politics.

The new government was formed and Anneli Jäätteenmäki was appointed Prime Minister. Soon after the elections, however, a debate arose over her sources of information concerning the conversations between Bush and the previous Prime Minister. After a while, it turned out that the documents had been leaked to her by a long-term presidential advisor. In June she had to explain to Parliament how she obtained the secret information. Even though she stated that she had not asked for it, the SDP insisted that she resign so that they could maintain
the same cabinet composition. Following her resignation from both the premiership and the party leadership, the KESK vice-president of, Matti Vanhanen, was appointed the new Prime Minister (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 276–277, Nurmi & Nurmi 2004, 565; Sundberg 2004, 1004–1005).

The life cycle, generational and period effects in turnout

This section introduces the concepts of the life cycle, the generational and the period effects. While in reality these effects usually occur simultaneously, each of them refers to conceptually different time-related phenomena. The empirical difficulty of separating the impacts of age, generation and period has often been referred to as the identification problem in the literature on cohort analysis (see e.g. Glenn 1976; Glenn 2005; Markus 1983; Mason et al. 1973). This problem and attempts to solve it are discussed in more depth in the second article. In the following, each effect is considered separately.

On the aggregate level, turnout among various cohorts may exhibit similarities or differences, which may either persist or change over time. The term cohort refers to a group of individuals who have experienced a particular event during a specified period. In social science, the cohort most frequently studied is the birth cohort, i.e. a group of people who were born in the same year, decade, or other period of time. In fact, if the term is used without an adjective it is usually understood to refer to a birth cohort (Glenn 2005, 2).

The example of the similarities among various cohorts is the case in which perfect continuity between the different cohorts prevails. Given two time points, for instance, there is very little difference at either, meaning that cohorts do not vary in the first place and the similarities remain over time (Jennings & Niemi 1981, 118). This kind of continuity represents the perfect socialisation process in which the younger cohorts fully adopt their predecessors’ positions. It is also characteristic of societies in which few societal changes take place.

Figure 1 shows the ideal type of life cycle effect. According to Jennings and Niemi (ibid.), this concept is often interpreted as movement among the young cohort towards the older one when the position of the older one is somewhat stabilised. The changes are often related to the responsibilities, opportunities and needs that come with the aging process (ibid.). The curvilinear relationship between age and turnout is an excellent example of the life cycle effect. As discussed in the second article of this study and illustrated in figure 2, electoral participation first increases with age and then gradually declines after middle-age, when people face the ageing process and the physical infirmities that accompany it (see e.g. Milbrath 1965, 134–135).
In their study on low turnout among young people, Highton and Wolfinger (2001) considered the various life cycle transitions described in the theoretical discussion on adult roles: settling down, which means less residential mobility, marriage, community ties in terms of home ownership, getting a job, leaving school, and leaving home. All in all, adult-role theory does not seem to be very closely connected to turnout among the young. The impact of leaving school was the strongest, but contrary to expectations: turnout among full-time college students was over 17 percentage points higher than among non-students. Joining the labour force and leaving home increased turnout, even though to a lesser extent. Getting married had a negative effect (for a similar result among young people, see Stoker and Jennings 1995). Neither renting property nor residential mobility appeared to be characteristic of the youngest potential voters, and consequently not very useful factors in this sense, as many still live with their parents, who are homeowners and residentially more stable. Among those who did not live in their childhood home, the effects of home ownership and residential stability were positive.

Figure 1 The life cycle effect: the younger cohort converges with the older one as it ages. Source: Jennings & Niemi 1981, 119.
Figure 2 Turnout by age in the Finnish parliamentary elections of 1987 and 1999 (%). Source: Martikainen & Wäss 2002, 60.

Figure 3 illustrates the generational effect, according to which cohorts differ from each other from the beginning and sustain the dissimilarities over time (Jennings & Niemi 1981, 122). Here the difference between the terms ‘cohort’ and ‘generation’ becomes evident. As stated earlier, cohort usually refers to groups of people born in the same period of time, and who have hence experienced the same events at the same age. This is not sufficient to make them a societal generation in the Mannheimian sense, however. According to Mannheim, who could be described as a pioneer in studies on generations, the same experiences have different effects on various cohorts depending on their life situation and level of development (Delli Carpini 1986, 8–9). Even though there is some debate, the years between 17 and 25 have usually been considered formative (ibid.). If certain ‘key experiences’ during that period of time have a lasting impact on the whole cohort, one can talk about generations. I discuss the different key experiences of various cohorts in the next section. When related to turnout, the generational effect suggests that the low turnout among the younger generation is a reflection of the fact that this cohort did not have the political experiences that motivated their parents (Rosenstone & Hansen 2003, 139).
The period effect, in turn, has a similar impact on each cohort (see figure 4). It usually reflects major events and trends over time, such as was, economic depression and technological innovation (Jennings & Niemi 1981, 122).
As discussed, there has been a general decline in turnout, suggesting a period effect. The decline has been more evident among younger cohorts, however (see figure 2) which refers to the life cycle effect. Finally, the first and the second articles of this study show a clear generational effect in turnout.

In addition, there are various hybrid models in which two or three time-related factors have a simultaneous impact (see Jennings and Niemi 1981, 212, 123). These include the generation-period and the life cycle-period effects. In both cases cohorts begin apart, but whereas in the former they then move in the same direction over time at an equal pace, in the latter the younger cohorts move much more rapidly, reflecting the life cycle effect. As already mentioned, these interactions make analysis of time-related effects rather challenging. This question is covered in more detail in the second article. In addition to the aforementioned intercohort effects, there may be intracohort effects. In the case of the former, the change takes place through generational replacement as new cohorts arrive and old ones depart, while the intracohort effect refers to changes in the population characteristics between different time points that are not attributable to aging (Glenn 2005, 35). The role of both of these effects in turnout change is also discussed in the second article.

The categorisation of generations

The classification of generations used in this study (articles 2–4) is based on the categorisation originally developed by J.P. Roos (1987). He introduced it in his book entitled ‘Suomalainen elämä’ (Finnish life), which was based on autobiographies written by Finns of various ages. On the basis of these life stories and experiences, he defined the following four generations: 1) the generation of war and want (born between the late 19th century and 1919); 2) the generation of reconstruction (born between 1920 and 1939); 3) the generation of transformation (born between 1940 and 1959); 4) the generation of the suburban (born between 1960 and 1969). I have added one more, those born in 1970 and onwards, the generation of individual choice (for the term, see Purhonen 2002, referring to Hochschild 2000).

The classification used here is certainly open for discussion. First, one may argue that various cohorts are ‘forced’ to form generations. It could happen that even if some cohort shares the same key experiences, these experiences have not had a unifying effect. It is also problematic that the three oldest generations span the same number of years in that, depending on the societal situation, generations might be formed much more rapid. On the other hand, once the commercial value of generations was recognised, a special ‘generation production’ was launched (see Mikkola 2002, 34; Wilska 2004, 102). For example, those born at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s have been referred to as the ‘X-generation’, and even though a less popular term, those born at the end of 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s as the ‘Y-generation’. Regardless of the current rapid societal changes, such as globalisation and technological development,
it is difficult to see such large divisions between those born in the 1970s and those born in the 1980s that would require their classification as separate generations. It should be noted, however, that younger generations might still be ‘too close’ in order to take full account of their individual nature. Nevertheless, the youngest generation is undeniably rather wide, mostly for practical reasons, as explained in the following. Finally, the generation of transformation (1940–1959) is much wider than the one usually referred to as the ‘baby-boomers’, often including cohorts born between 1945 and 1954 (see e.g. Karisto 2005, 18).

Despite of its possible shortcomings, there are good reasons to apply Roos’ categorisation. As stated in the second, third and fourth articles, it is the most well-known description of Finnish society. As it is based on autobiographies, the key experiences are much easier to identify than would be the case if even-sized cohorts had been used, for instance. Finally, on a purely practical level, because the second, third and fourth articles are based on survey data with limited number of observations, the categories formed according to this classification are large enough to gain statistically significant results.

Table 2. The key experiences of Finnish generations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>generation</th>
<th>year of birth</th>
<th>key experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The generation of war and want</td>
<td>the late 19th century-1919</td>
<td>war, want, lack of or interrupted education, early entry into working life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The generation of reconstruction</td>
<td>1920–1939</td>
<td>scarcity, rationing, gradual increase of prosperity due to reconstruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The generation of transformation</td>
<td>1940–1959</td>
<td>industrialisation, urbanisation, broadening of education, rapid increases in the standard of living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The generation of the suburban</td>
<td>1960–1969</td>
<td>‘non-experiences’, the lack of experience of illness, disaster and want, smoothness of life, yet recession during early adulthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The generation of individual choice</td>
<td>1970–</td>
<td>recession, general individualisation, globalisation, the acceleration of technological development, competition, consumption, emphasised role of the media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Roos 1987; Purhonen 2002 (quoting Hochschild, the term ‘the generation of individual choice’).

Table 2 shows the key experiences of the various generations, and table 3, based on data produced by Statistics Finland, their socioeconomic status by the time of the parliamentary election of 1999. The oldest members of the generation of war and want grew up at the time of the First World War and had to face real want during their formative years. They also faced the Civil War of 1918 in their adolescence. It is also worth noting that 81.5 per cent of those belonging to this generation had no more than a lower-secondary education, and only two per cent were educated to the higher degree-level tertiary education (see table 3). This generation was combined with the second oldest in the third and fourth articles, given that very few of its representatives are still alive.
Table 3 The socioeconomic status of each generation in the parliamentary elections of 1999 (N= 3,907,222).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>The generation of individual choice</th>
<th>The generation of the suburban</th>
<th>The generation of transformation</th>
<th>The generation of reconstruction</th>
<th>The generation of war and want</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>abs.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>abs.</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>abs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lower secondary education</td>
<td>183,923</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>115,752</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>509,057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>upper secondary-level education</td>
<td>421,034</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>336,412</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>540,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lowest level tertiary education</td>
<td>85,331</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>154,972</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>217,767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lower degree-level tertiary education</td>
<td>24,580</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>37,452</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>88,589</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>higher degree-level tertiary education</td>
<td>23,895</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>74,659</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>100,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>736,763</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>719,247</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,455,783</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social class</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>manual labourers</td>
<td>128,872</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>178,735</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>335,464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lower middle class</td>
<td>92,076</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>184,032</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>374,586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>upper middle class</td>
<td>31,184</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>103,987</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>208,319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>entrepreneurs</td>
<td>13,077</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>37,942</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>106,807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>farmers</td>
<td>7,678</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>19,595</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>60,837</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| students\(/
| pensioners\b)                          | 310,439 | 42.1 | 43,993 | 6.1 | 110,299 | 7.6 | 663,762 | 80.2 | 167,802 | 99.9 |
| others                                    | 153,437 | 20.8 | 150,963 | 21.0 | 259,471 | 17.8 | 50,006 | 6.0 | 97 | 0.1 |
| total                                     | 736,763 | 100 | 719,247 | 100 | 1,455,783 | 100 | 827,530 | 100 | 167,899 | 100 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lowest + 2. decile</td>
<td>333,803</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>94,877</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>172,405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. + 4. decile</td>
<td>132,504</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>84,854</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>173,832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. + 6. decile</td>
<td>130,856</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>144,670</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>261,890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. + 8. decile</td>
<td>93,521</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>201,698</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>385,532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. + highest decile</td>
<td>46,079</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>193,148</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>462,124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>736,763</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>719,247</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,455,783</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing tenure</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>renting</td>
<td>334,879</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>238,024</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>288,115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owning a house</td>
<td>218,607</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>268,339</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>674,217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owning a flat</td>
<td>155,369</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>182,647</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>447,401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other housing tenure</td>
<td>27,708</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>30,237</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>46,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>736,763</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>719,247</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,455,783</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\a In the generation of individual choice and the generation of the suburban. In the three older generations students are included in the group entitled 'others'. \b In the generation of transformation, the generation of reconstruction and the generation of war and want. In the two younger generations pensioners are included in the group entitled 'others'.

Source: Statistics Finland (for details, see Martikainen et al. 2005).
Alestalo (2007, 148) refers to a section of the second generation, i.e. those born between 1921 and 1925, as ‘the war generation’ because they faced the Second World War in the age of approximately 20. Furthermore, this was the first generation to profit from general compulsory education, which became law in 1921 (ibid. 149). Its impact was quite visible in that the number of people with only the lowest level of education was substantially lower (70.7%) than among the oldest generation (table 3). Alestalo (2007, 149) argues that the social background of those born between 1921 and 1925 was very homogenous as almost everybody was descended from smallholders or farm workers not owning land. The same applies to those belonging to the oldest generation. The post-war era, i.e. during the youth of the younger part of the second generation, was characterised by reconstruction and the need to house those evacuated from the former Karelia, which Finland lost in the war, and veterans (ibid.). Consequently, prosperity slowly started to grow.

Members of the generation of transformation were born in a totally different country than that of their predecessors. Following the home-coming from the front at the end of 1944, the birth-rate began to grow exponentially in August 1945, and over 100,000 children were born in each of the following four years (Kartovaara 2002, 8). As Karisto (2005, 22) remarks, however, there was a corresponding baby boom almost everywhere, even in countries that were not involved in war. Consequently, baby boomers became used to being part of a throng even during their early years, and the same thing applied in working life (Alestalo 2007, 150). During the formative years of the generation of transformation Finland went though a substantial structural change to industrialisation and urbanisation. According to the calculations made by Karisto et al. (2005, 97, see also Alestalo 2007, 151), 42 per cent of those born in 1945–1950 came from farmer families, while in 1999 only 4.2. per cent were themselves farmers (table 3). The broadening of the educational base is also clearly evident as the number of people with the lowest level of education fell to 35 per cent and of those with the highest level rose to 6.9 per cent (table 3). The baby-boomers were also the first generation to have more women in higher education than men (Karisto 2005, 43, see also Alestalo 2007, 150). Considering their higher educational attainment, it is not surprising that women have been more active voters in parliamentary elections since 1987. The generation of transformation also saw a huge increase in the standard of living: while some consumer goods, such as telephones, televisions and cars were not that common during the beginning of the period (Simpura 2002, 1), they became almost universal in the western world as the generation grew up.

Certain ‘non-experiences’, such as the lack of illness, disasters and want, could be mentioned as characteristic of the generation of the suburban. It should be noted, however, that Roos (1987) used the same description for the generation of transformation. One could nevertheless argue that this ‘smoothness’ become more general during its adolescence and has thus been reflected in the formative years of its children. Again, the rise in the educational level is worth noting: under
20 per cent of the generation of those belonging to the suburban fall into to the lowest educational category. Despite the easy life to some extent, the generation faced the worst post-war recession during its early adulthood, although its older members did not suffer as much as the following generation from the economic downturn because they had already entered into working life.

The oldest members of the generation of individual choice grew up in an era of recession. The data, based on a writing competition entitled ‘Sukupolveni unta’, shows that the majority of those born after 1967 most frequently mentioned an upturn in the economy at the end of the 1980s and at the beginning of 1990s, and the consequent recession, as societal events that had the biggest impact on their generation (Mikkola 2002, 36). Alestalo (2007) also refers to cohorts born between 1971 and 1975 as ‘the generation of recession’, which he claims to differ radically from its predecessors as far as social background is concerned: the majority come from working- or middle-class families (ibid., 151, referring Alestalo 1986, 64). In 1975, farmers’ comprised only 13 per cent of the population. This generation was also the first to benefit from the services provided by the welfare state, such as day-care and health care, since childhood (ibid). Moreover, it became has become the mostly highly educated generation so far. This high level of education is not evident in table 3, however, in which the age range of the youngest generation is considerably wider, and includes cohorts who have not yet finished their studies.

The recession experienced during adolescence made entering into working life very difficult for those born in the early 1970s. This is related to the prolongation of adolescence (see Alestalo 2007, 152). According to the ‘Life as learning’ -research programme funded by the Academy of Finland, regardless of the fact that cohorts born at the beginning of the 1970s are better educated than those born in the 1960s, their position in the labour market is still weaker. This unfavourable position, in turn, is related to the postponing of certain acts related to adulthood such as getting married, having children and purchasing a home (Academy of Finland 2005). It also appears that the recession has had a permanent impact on the structure of working life as fixed-term employment contracts of definite duration have become more and more common (Alestalo 2007, 152).

The youngest members of the generation of individual choice were only in elementary school at the time of the recession and probably have very faint memories of it. However, they have had to face various challenges such as increased competition even in schools, which are characterised by classlessness, optionality and specialisation, and also emphasise individuality (see Hoikkala & Paju 2002, 26). While education has expanded, it has also inflated (Silvennoinen et al. 2000, 80). At the same time, the gap between the well-educated and the poorly educated young has only widened (ibid., 77). Competition in general has only intensified with globalisation.

In addition, technological development and consumption could be picked out as the key experiences of the youngest generation. In fact, according to Youth Indicator 2004, approximately 25 per cent of those born between 1974 and 1988 chose ‘the IT-generation’ as the best description of their own generation, while
almost 20 per cent chose the name ‘mobile-phone generation’ and almost ten per cent a name related to consumption (Wilska 2004, 103).

The aims of the study and research design

As shown in the previous chapters, both the level of and the decline in electoral participation is related to a vast number of independent factors, generation being only one of them. The association between generation and turnout is worth studying for several reasons however. First, while several studies have shown a strong curve-linear relationship between age and turnout, the role of generation has received much less research attention. Recent pooled cross-sectional analyses conducted in the U.S. and Canada (see e.g. Blais et al. 2004; Lyons and Alexander 2000) have suggested that alongside the life cycle effect in voting, there is also a generational effect at work, referring to lasting differences in turnout between various age groups. It is particularly interesting to examine the extent to which the generational effect applies in Finland, where the substantial differences between age groups in electoral participation have only widened as the overall turnout has declined (see Martikainen & Wass 2002). Moreover, Finland is an interesting case in the sense that, compared with the other Nordic countries, there has been a clear declining trend in electoral participation since the 1970s and nowadays turnout is at a much lower level (see table 1). In this sense, Finland has much more in common with Canada, France and Ireland than with its Nordic counterparts.

By the time I started this study there were already clear signs of the generational effect in Finland on the evidence of a report based on data from three time points (see Martikainen & Wass 2002, 67, and table 1 in the second article). Due to the lack of cohort analysis, however, the relationship with other time-related variables, i.e. the life cycle and period effects had not yet been established. In addition, the results of the first article included in this study showed that lower turnout among the young was not related to generational differences in socioeconomic status, which is partly connected to the individual’s life cycle. Consequently, a study based on longitudinal data with all the time-related variables was required in order to give a comprehensive picture of the extent of the generational component.

Secondly, the public discussion on turnout decline is usually concentrated solely on the impact of age on turnout. There are a lot of reasons why the current youth votes at lower rates than their predecessors, but until recently decline in turnout has not been seen as part of the wider generational replacement. Thus, there is a need for empirical investigation in order to establish whether it is a question of ‘normal’ variation between different age groups or whether it is a genuine generational effect.

Finally, there are more long-term effects on the level of electoral participation if the current low turnout is associated with generation rather than young age. Whereas in the latter case non-voting would be considered a passing phenome-
non that will fade away as a person ages (see Martikainen & Wass 2002, 93), in the former the implication is that the overall turnout will continue to decline through generational replacement.

The first aim of this study is thus to find out whether there is also a generational effect at work in Finland, and whether the turnout decline is related to generational replacement. The second aim is connected to first in that there is a need to further examine which factors account for this effect. According to Mair (2005, 423), we cannot account for declining levels of turnout simply by observing that fewer young people are voting: the task is to find out the factors connected to young citizens’ lesser propensity to vote compared to the youth of earlier decades. Hence, I had to explore the factors that are related to the generational effect.

The first article analyses the association between socioeconomic status and turnout in Finland among three age groups (25–34, 35–54 and 55–69). We also considered whether the variations in turnout between the age groups remained following adjustment for socioeconomic status, i.e. whether the differences in electoral participation were attributable to the different positions of various age groups concerning socioeconomic status, stemming from different stages in their life cycles, or whether there were more permanent distinctions. The article is based on individual-level register data from electoral wards in the parliamentary elections of 1999 compiled by Statistics Finland, comprising 2,941,834 electors (1,470,462 men and 1,471,372 women). Register-based data has many advantages compared with survey data. The information on voting is more reliable as self-reported turnout figures in surveys are usually higher than the official turnout (see e.g. Martikainen & Yrjönen 1984, 82; Pesonen et al. 1993, 531 for Finland; Teixeira 1992, 60). Moreover, as the data covers almost the whole Finnish electorate with the exception of Åland, the number of observations is large enough to enable analysis with a very specific categorisation of variables. This article was not originally written to be included in this study, and we used age groups instead of generations, which I have used in the other three articles. However, I have replicated the models using the same classification of generations. The results were into same direction.18

The second article is the most relevant of those articles included in this study. It examines simultaneously the effects of age, generation and period in the Finnish parliamentary elections of 1975–2003. The analysis is based on cross-sectional data with the same relevant variables. The data from Finnish voter barometers of 1975–2003 were pooled to cover a total of 8,634 respondents. The pooled data consists of information on voting in eight Finnish parliamentary elections (1975, 1979, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995, 1999, 2003). In addition, I used the same individual-level register data on the Finnish parliamentary elections of 1987 and 1999 as in the first article in order to investigate the impact of generational replacement on overall turnout decline.

The third article examines the extent to which political socialisation is related to generational differences in electoral participation. Political socialisation is defined as the learning process in which an individual adopts various values, politi-
cal attitudes, and patterns of actions from his or her environment. The analysis is based on the Finnish national election study 2003 (N=1,270). The role of politics during childhood and adolescence, the knowledge of one’s parental partisanship, the amount of parental encouragement for voting and attitudinal change towards voting over the individual’s life span were used as indicators of the socialisation process.

The fourth article concerns the impact of five models on turnout differences between four generations: 1) socioeconomic, 2) party identification and mobilisation, 3) political interest and political knowledge, 4) civic duty, and 5) non-parliamentary political participation. This study is also based on the Finnish national election study 2003 (N=1,270). However, the data in this case could be considered problematic. Unlike in the models reported in the third article, in which the independent variables were based on retrospective evaluations of various generations, the variables used here measured only the status quo. Thus, one could argue that they cannot take into account the different developments among in various generations. Obviously, longitudinal data would have been ideal for examining which factors are connected to the life cycle effect and which are related to the generational effect. As there are no such data available with all the relevant variables, a different solution was applied. In fact, I limited the hypotheses concerning the positive relationship between turnout and the independent variables to the turnout-related variables that show some intergenerational change (see e.g. Putnam 2000, 35–37) rather than ‘normal’ variation between age groups. My reasoning was that age-related differences are connected to the life cycle effect, whereas differences related to intergenerational change are connected to the generational effect in turnout (for a similar line of reasoning, see Elklit et al. 2005; Goerres 2007). Elklit et al. (2005, 16) state, however, that they hesitate to interpret age differences as an expression of generational differences because they may as well be interpreted as life cycle effects. Consequently it should be noticed that the results mainly apply to the Finnish parliamentary elections of 2003, in which we have data available.

The main results and implications of the study on voter turnout

Firstly, the study shows that there is a clear generational effect alongside the life cycle and period effects on turnout in Finland. As demonstrated in the first article, the differences between the various age groups remain even after accounting for socioeconomic variables. Adjustment for sex, social class and education increased the difference between the 25 to 34 year-olds and the older age groups, reflecting the better class position and education of the former. This suggests that turnout differences between the different age groups would be even larger if there were no differences in social class and education. Accounting for income attenuated the difference due to the lower income of the youngest generation, as did accounting for housing tenure.
The second article reveals how the propensity to vote rose with age among the three youngest generations eligible to vote both during a period of increasing and stable turnout (1975–1983), and a period of declining turnout (1987–2003). The largest average inter-generational difference was 11.2 percentage points, and the voting propensity was 8.4. points lower during the latter period. Finally, turnout would have been 2.1 points higher in the 1999 elections than in the 1987 elections, if there had been no generational replacement.

According to the findings reported in the third article, politics had had the least influence during the formative years of members of the youngest generation, who were also aware of their parents’ partisanship. On the other hand, this is the generation that has been given the most encouragement to vote, and that has experienced the most positive change attitudinal change towards voting. The multivariate analysis indicated that if there were no differences in socialisation between the youngest and the older generations, the difference in turnout would be much larger than, if only sex and socioeconomic factors were taken into account. Thus, it is suggested that the factors related the low turnout among the young generation lie elsewhere than in political socialisation. As I state at the end of the article, the study could be criticised for the operationalisation of the concept of political socialisation. I suggest that in future studies, parental partisanship and political knowledge should be included as indicators of political socialisation. It could also be argued that the effect of agents other than the primary political socialisation agents i.e. family, should be considered.

The fourth article explored other possible factors related to the generational effect. It seems that sense of duty to vote is one of the most important factors in accounting for the generational effect in voting: only the difference between the youngest generation and the generation of transformation remained following adjustment for a sense of duty. In addition, political interest, political knowledge and non-parliamentary participation narrowed the difference in turnout between the youngest and the second youngest generations.

The implication of the findings for research on electoral participation is basically that the lower turnout among the current youth is a much more deeply rooted than is sometimes thought. It is not by any means a passing phenomenon that will diminish with age. The factors related to it are much more profound than age-related issues, such as ‘having less at stake’ or lack of experience. The sense of duty to vote is something that is very difficult to acquire in later years if it does not develop during adolescence.

While this study is focused on the demand side of elections, i.e. the characteristics of the voters, it should be noted that this is only half of the story. Discussion on generational differences in turnout should take into account at least two supply-side changes: the character of the elections and the role of the institution being elected. It could be argued that, the 2003 elections notwithstanding, parliamentary elections became less exciting during the 1990s. Even though this period effect probably partly accounts for the general decline in turnout, it may also be strongly related to the generational effect effect among cohorts that faced their first elections.
in that less competitive era (cf. Franklin 2004). In addition, the general declining trend in participation may also have had a stronger impact on younger cohorts. According to Franklin, cohorts who first had the opportunity to vote in low-turnout elections will continue to vote at lower levels even when newer cohorts vote at a higher rate (ibid., 43).

Furthermore, the role of national parliaments has declined, at least to a certain extent, due to European integration and globalisation. Consequently, younger generations have socialised into voting in an era in which national parliamentary elections may seem less relevant than a few decades ago. It should be noted, however, that while the closeness and decisiveness of an election certainly have an impact on voter’s motivation (Franklin 2004, 29), the association between the level of turnout and the importance of the institution being elected seems rather unclear. Turnout in European elections has been very low in Finland, following the logic of second order elections (see Reif & Schmitt 1980), but has remained very high in the presidential elections despite the new constitution of 2000 that weakened the role of the President. Moreover, turnout in local elections has fallen even though the municipalities have assumed more and more responsibilities. While this development may seem quite confusing, it is probably related to general personification of politics on the one hand, and intra-country migration on the other (see Paloheimo, ed, 2005).

One could, of course, ask whether the lower turnout really matters. There is an ongoing debate on whether or not turnout has an impact on electoral results (for an overview, see Lutz and Marsh 2007). In my view, however, this question is not relevant as far as generational differences in turnout are concerned. Voting has many valuable spillover effects in that it may increase other political participation, and there is a considerable amount of evidence that involvement in church, the workplace, and voluntary organisations increases political participation (for references, see Lijphart 1997, 10). Voting is also important per se in system of representative democracy. It is therefore very hard to understand why large number of people among the youngest generations voluntarily excludes themselves from the decision-making process.

The most serious aspects of the generational effect in turnout has to do with its impact on the political agenda. If young generations vote in much lower numbers, their interests and needs are not represented (see Teixeira 1992, 102), and parties are more motivated to direct their campaigns towards older generations whose propensity to vote is much higher. According to Bennett and Resnick (1990), it could be argued that people are well aware of their own interests and have the right to participate in order to protect them against the interests of the elites. Non-voting, however, may skew public policy as it is easier for politicians to ignore the interests of non-voters. In situations in which the interests of non-voters substantially differ from those of voters this could be rather problematic (ibid., referring to Key, 1949; 1961, see also Kestilä & Wass 2008).

Young generations often feel that they are not represented in the parliamentary arena, but miss the point that this is related to their own voting behaviour.
Under-representation is certainly the case in Finland: the average politician is 47.9 years and the proportion of representatives under 30 year-olds is only 2.6. per cent (Statistics Finland 2007). While people are capable of representing interests other than those of their own social group, according to the resemblance model of representation, parliament should be a miniature model of the population (Pitkin, 1967, 11). In practice, however, the majority of older people vote for candidates of their own age, while the young either vote for older candidates or do not vote at all (Paloheimo, ed, 2005).

It is often suggested that even though there is a low level of voting among young generations they are politically active in other ways. As argued in the fourth article, however, this is not the case. According to the Canadian election study 2000 (Gidengil et al.), non-parliamentary participation is, in fact, positively associated with conventional forms of participation such as belonging to a political party or an interest group and voting, and *vice versa*. Contrary to what might be expected, middle-aged citizens are most likely to take part in non-parliamentary activities (ibid.). The same holds according to the data from the Finnish national election study 2003, which was used in the third and fourth articles of this study. It was also shown that voting and other kinds of political participation are positively associated.

In a sense, it is understandable that voting, which is primarily a collective action, seems rather odd to the younger generation, which is characterised by general individualisation. Electoral participation can be supplemented but not replaced by other, more individual forms of participation, such as political consumerism. Considering voting a civic duty and understanding the meaning of collective action are both associated with the process of political socialisation. Political socialisation therefore has an important role in the context of voting, and especially concerning the generational effect in turnout.
References


Endnotes

1 According to Geys (2006, 640, referring to Glass 1976, 3), meta-analysis means analysis of the analyses. Consequently, a statistical analysis on the test results from previous studies involves procedures such as ‘vote-counting’ and ‘combined tests’. It is beyond the scope of this section to discuss the techniques more thoroughly, however.

2 According to Blais and Dobrzynska (1998, 245), both Powell (1986) and Jackman (1987) use ‘nationally competitive districts’ as a measurement of proportionality, a combined effect of electoral formula and of district magnitude. The result is, however, that it is not clear what exactly it measures (ibid., referring to Blais & Carty 1991).

3 In France, however, registration requires an active request by an individual to be included in the voter register. The voter remains on the municipal register as long as he or she lives at the same address. A change of residence requires re-registration (France – Presidential Election).

4 In the context of campaign expenditures Geys (2006, 648) also discusses the opposing views on the impact of negative campaigns.

5 Blais and Dobrzynska (1998) use multiple measures of number of parties: the number of parties running in the election, the effective number of electoral parties and the effective number of legislative parties (referring to Laakso & Taagepera 1979 for the definition of the last two). They obtained slightly better results with the first measure, however, and argue that it corresponds more closely to the information that is most easily obtainable for most electors (Blais & Dobrzynska 1998, 253).

6 Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980, 37–40) point out that the decline in turnout with age is much sharper among women than men. This could be accounted for several factors. The oldest women might be socialised into thinking that voting is mainly for men. It might also be the case that many older women have tended to rely on their husbands for political cues, and because women live longer than men more older women are widowed compared to men of the same age. Indeed, in the parliamentary elections of 1999 in Finland, the turnout among 80 year-old widows (48%) was almost 20 percentage points lower than among married women (Martikainen & Wass 2002, 84). Finally, in their multivariate analysis Wolfinger and Rosenstone (1980, 42–43) found that nearly all sex differences in turnout disappeared following adjustment for education, income and marital status along with age.

7 Stoker and Jennings (1995), however, found that marriage among younger people had a negative effect on turnout.

8 In Finland, for instance, the percentage of population entitled to vote was 53 in the elections of 1939, which were the last ones before the voting age was lowered. The corresponding figure was 79 percent in the elections of 2003 (Ollila & Paloheimo 2007, 183).

9 The following section, describing the electoral system in Finland, is mainly based on information provided by the Ministry of Justice Finland (see http://www.vaalit.fi/15491.htm).

10 The whole country forms a single district in the presidential and European elections

11 The aggregate-level positions between cohorts should not be confused with the individual-level positions. A perfect level of continuity on the aggregate level indicates nothing about continuity or change on the individual level (Jennings & Niemi 1981).
All of the examples concerning the different positions of the cohorts are based on the well-known panel study carried out by Jennings and Niemi (1981) in the U.S. high-school seniors and one or both of their parents were interviewed in 1965, 1973, and 1982 (for a description, see Plutzer 2002, 45).

I do not refer to Mannheim’s original study (1928/1952), but instead use secondary sources. Moreover, I do not discuss his theory in more depth. Even though this solution may be open to debate, there was a relevant reason for it. Mannheim’s essay, entitled ‘The problem of generations,’ is very complicated and difficult to interpret. In recent years, there have been several interpretations published in Finnish, such as Alestalo 2007, Mikkola 2002, Purhonen 2002, Roos 2005, Virtanen 1999, 2001 (see also Purhonen 2007 for the general conceptual and research history of the term generation). As this study is not about generations as such, it seemed reasonable to limit it to the generational effect.

According to Roos (2005, 209), Mannheim does not use the term ‘key experiences,’ and refers only to experience or first experience. The term key experiences has become common in the Finnish literature since Virtanen’s (1999) first article on the subject. Virtanen, for his part, recalls to having adopted the term from a review of Marja Tuominen’s seminal dissertation related to generations. According to Roos, this information is relevant in the sense that it appears that Mannheim was thinking about some sort of structuring experience, whereas there may be other kinds of key experiences as well.

The data used in the table is the same as that used in the first article of this study (Martikainen et al. 2005), which is based on a different classification of age groups.

As already mentioned, the classification used here is somewhat broader in terms of the usual categorisation of baby-boomers. Nevertheless, the adolescence of those born before 1945, which is commonly used as bottom line for baby-boomers, did not differ substantially from the formative years of those born after it.

It should, however, be noted that according to the Finland 1999 data, 15 per cent of women and nine per cent of men among those born in 1970–1981 felt that they did not belong to any generation (Wilska 2004, 102). As already suggested, this may reflect the temporal closeness as the young may not be able to fully identify with their own generation.

The study is available on request.

One should note that there is an unfortunate error in page 653: the mean turnout among the generation of reconstruction in the Finnish parliamentary elections of 1975–2003 was 88.0 per cent instead of 85.5 per cent (for correct figure, see table 2).
Generations and turnout
The generational effect in electoral participation in Finland

Hanna Wass