Rain falls on all of us (but some manage to get more wet than others) : political context and electoral participation

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The previous chapter presented an analysis of the influence of closeness in a two dominant-party system. In such a system closeness is expected to have a clear and significant influence. The current chapter presents analyses for Sweden, a country where not two but several parties determine the political landscape. Sweden is a multi-party system where the political spectrum has traditionally comprised of five, and in recent times seven to eight political parties. The notion of ‘closeness’ is not directly associated with elections in multiparty systems. In this chapter we assess the possibilities of generalizing this concept beyond the two-party context in which it is usually applied. This effort is not only of relevance for Sweden, but potentially also for other multi-party systems. Before focusing on this, we first give a brief overview of the Swedish party-system

The Swedish political landscape is not composed of two large parties, but only one. The Social-Democratic Party (SAP) is the largest one and its primacy has been unassailable. Apart from the dominating SAP party, a number of smaller parties fill the political spectrum from left to right. As was already discussed in Chapter 4, the Swedish party spectrum is well structured. The consequence of this is not that party competition in Sweden is a game of all against all, or of all parties against the dominating party. Instead, a clear divide has for a long time determined Swedish politics that distinguishes the political parties in Sweden into two groupings: the left versus the right. On the left one finds the social democratic and left wing parties, and on the right the parties that are commonly referred to as "bourgeois" parties. Since the introduction of general suffrage, the SAP successfully maintained its unrivaled position of as largest party, typically wining around 45 percent of the vote. As a consequence, the social democrats managed to maintain government power for nearly all of the twentieth century (cf. Hancock, 1993).

The two-bloc structure of the Swedish party landscape has proven extremely rigid up until the end of the twentieth century. The left party bloc is made up of the SAP and what originally was the communist party Vänsterpartiet, to the left of the SAP, and the green Miljöpartiet, which appeared on the political stage in the early 1980s.

The right, or bourgeois, side is composed of the Center (agrarian) party, the conservative Moderaterna and the liberal Folkpartiet. The 1990s saw the rise of the Christian-democratic Kristdemokraterna into what now appears a firmly settled addition to the bourgeois camp. A quick shot at electoral success by the right-wing populist Ny Demokrati party in the early 1990s proved to be short-lived.

The image of a two-bloc structure is reinforced by the fact that the SAP, although invariably the largest party and frequently polling over 45 percent of the vote, has since 1921 managed only twice to win an absolute majority. Much like the Fianna Fail party in Ireland, it refused for decades to enter into a coalition government, preferring instead to form a minority government with the almost assured support (or at least not opposition) of the left-
wing Vänsterpartiet. When particular political issues would so require this single-party government would rely on temporary brokered coalitions with the bourgeois parties. Although Vänsterpartiet supporters may not always warmly support the SAP, it is clear that they are on the same side of a generally recognized political divide, and that they share sentiments of animosity, even adversity regarding the ‘other’, bourgeois side. The same holds for the green Miljöpartiet, although its allegiance to the left has been somewhat less outright, perhaps because ‘green’ issues at times cut across the traditional left-right divide. It has taken until the very end of the 1990s before negotiated, cross-bloc agreements emerged in Sweden, such as the 1994-1998 SAP government’s legislative agreement with the Center party.

To all intents and purposes, therefore, the Swedish political landscape can be viewed not so much as a system made up of five, seven or even eight parties, but rather, as was already argued in Chapter 4, a two-bloc structure, in which the left wing hopes for an SAP government - be it minority government or not - while the bourgeois side aspires to form a right wing government. In essence, the race between parties then becomes a race between blocs, determining which side will take up government responsibility. Chapter 4 already showed that, under such circumstances, closeness is related to turnout at the aggregate level. But how will closeness affect individual voters?

Table 6-1 Sweden - Turnout Figures for Parliamentary Elections, 1979-1998 (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turnout</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>81.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 6-1 shows, turnout figures in Sweden are high, around the 90 percent mark for the period of the early 1980s. Since then, turnout rates have declined somewhat, although 80 percent may still be considered high for present day western democracies. The high turnout figures mean that there is little room for the additional influence of closeness, and we may not see very strong effects. However, the gradual decline in turnout rates leaves more room for a possible influence of closeness.

6.1 Who is Affected?

Although the two-bloc structure includes all political parties in Sweden - or at least all those represented in parliament - this does not necessarily mean that all of the electorate should be affected by the closeness of an election race as well.

In line with the argument of Chapter 3 and in a similar approach as the previous chapter, three categories of voters have been constructed, on the basis of how voters evaluate the parties of the two blocs. Again, voters will be described as Convinced, Confounded, Condemned or Base category voters¹.

Convinced voters strongly support one of the parties in one bloc, while rejecting at least one of the parties in the other bloc. These voters are expected to be most strongly affected by the closeness of the election race, and to show a greater chance of participating in close elections.

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¹ A discussion of the codings used to define the different voter categories is presented in the Appendix.
Confounded voters care for one side as well as the other. They strongly appreciate at least one party from the bourgeois bloc, as well as at least one from the social democratic bloc. This might place such voters in a dilemma when elections become close, as the potential consequences may make the choice harder to make.

Condemned voters do not favor either of the blocs. They do not express a great evaluation for one of the parties of either bloc. As the Swedish two-bloc structure comprises all parties, this implies that Condemned voters in Sweden by definition do not have strong positive feelings for any of the political parties - in contrast for instance to their counterparts in Great Britain. This will of course be of consequence for the impact that closeness may have on these voters. Condemned voters are expected to show a lower propensity to participate in the election, and are not very susceptible to the degree of closeness of the election.

The remainder of the electorate is made up of voters who positively evaluate at least one of the political parties, yet do not combine this positive evaluation with a strong dislike of the parties on the ‘other’ side.

6.2 Data

Swedish electoral research is rooted in a strong tradition of empirical survey studies, founded in the mid 1950s by Westerståhl and Särväk, with the first parliamentary election study being held in 1956\(^2\). Since then, studies have been held at every election, creating a substantial base for electoral research. Helpful in this is a quality of the Swedish political system enviable to researchers of contextual effects, namely frequent elections - held every three years since the 1970 election. Unfortunately - from a purely scientific standpoint, that is - Sweden moved back to a four-year parliamentary term in 1994.

The number of election studies available for analysis was restricted by the availability of a good party evaluation indicator. This requirement narrowed down the number of available election studies to a total of seven, covering the parliamentary elections from 1979 to 1998. After corrections for missing data, a total of 16,812 cases within 7 elections remained for analysis.

As in the analyses of the preceding chapter, the aim of the model presented is to determine how the closeness of the election affects different voters, not to explain individual level electoral participation completely. Therefore, the range of individual level characteristics included is not exhaustive, but a selection of the ‘usual suspects’ was made. These variables include age, gender (being female), education, income, political interest and political cynicism. All except the last are expected to have a positive influence on turnout. Education was coded into three categories (low, middle, high), while for income the same standardization was used as in the previous chapter, i.e., a natural log transformation centered around the mean. Political interest and political cynicism were each measured by a scale ranging from zero to six, constructed from two four-point items\(^3\).

2 See Holmberg (1994) for an overview on the history of Swedish election studies.

3 The items used for political interest concerned reading political news in the papers, and self-declared political interest. For political cynicism, the items tapped whether the respondent believed parties are only concerned about people’s votes, not what they think, and whether members of parliament pay attention to the views of ordinary people. A Mokken scale procedure showed that, for each year, the items formed strong scales (H values between .58 and .73) (Mokken, 1971). Missing values were subsequently recoded to the lowest score per item for political interest, and the middle score for political cynicism.
The respondents were subsequently classified as Convinced, Confounded, Condemned or base category voters, in line with the categorization scheme introduced in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5. Dummy variables were constructed to identify Convinced, Confounded and Condemned respondents. This was based on a party rating score, running from -5 for a negative evaluation, to +5 for a positive evaluation of the party. Respondents who gave one of the parties at least a 4 or 5, while evaluating at least one of the parties from the other bloc with minus 3, 4 or 5 were grouped in the Convinced category. Respondents who evaluated at least one of the parties from either bloc with a 4 or 5 were scored as Confounded. Respondents who evaluated none of the left wing parties nor any of the bourgeois parties with 4 or 5 were scored as Condemned voters.

The remainder - that is those who do not fall in one of the above categories - consist of respondents who did evaluate at least one of the parties with a score of 4 or 5, but did not score -3, -4 or -5 for at least one of the parties from the other bloc, and are coded as Base category. To use a liberal interpretation, these voters may vote for a party, but do not necessarily vote against the other side. These voters may well be affected by closeness, though not as strongly as Convinced voters.

An overview of the percentage of respondents per category of voters is presented in Table 6-2. From this table, it is clear that Confounded voters are especially hard to find: on average, about five percent of the electorate fall in this category. This will of course make it hard to find statistically significant estimates for this category. Compared to the distribution of voters in Great Britain presented in the previous chapter, Base category voters are also relatively scarce in Sweden. The majority of the electorate is made up by the Convinced and Condemned voters.

Table 6-2  Sweden - Frequencies of Convinced, Confounded and Condemned Voters versus Base Category (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Convinced</th>
<th>Confounded</th>
<th>Condemned</th>
<th>Base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>34.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>39.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The indicator for closeness of the election is based on opinion poll data from SIFO's election barometers (Oscarsson, 1995). These polls are typically reported by the media in the run up to the election. The combined vote-share for the left-wing parties SAP and Vänsterpartiet was pitted against the joint share for the bourgeois parties Center, Folkpartiet and Moderaterna, with the gap between the two blocs in absolute percentage points taken as an initial measure. Because a number of newcomers appeared on the political stage, the definition of the two blocs had to be adapted accordingly. This means that as of the 1991 elections, Kristdemokraterna was added to the bourgeois bloc, while from the 1998 election onwards the Miljöpartiet was regarded as part of the left-wing bloc (Oscarsson, personal correspondence). Table 6-3 presents an overview of the closeness of
the election based on poll data compared to actual election outcomes, together with election turnout.

Table 6-3  
Sweden - Degree of Closeness (in polls and actual) and Turnout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election Year</th>
<th>Gap in Polls</th>
<th>Actual Gap</th>
<th>Turnout (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>90.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>91.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>89.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>86.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>86.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>86.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>80.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The same transformation as in Chapter 5 was applied to the indicator for closeness to reflect the expected non-linear effect of closeness. By taking the inverse of the gap between the blocs (1 divided by the gap between the two blocs in percentage points), a measure of closeness was created with higher scores indicating a closer election.

6.3 Analysis
The results of the analyses for Sweden are presented in Table 6-4. As in the previous chapter, a logistic multi-level regression was applied. The first column presents the variable names, followed by pairs of columns presenting the parameter estimates and the standard errors (in italics). Bold type indicates statistically significant estimates at an alpha level of .05. Finally, at the bottom of this table there is the likelihood estimate and the dichotomous pseudo-R² (Snijders & Bosker, 1999).
The first model contains estimates for individual level characteristics as well as for Closeness, at the contextual level. It is the 'traditional' model in which the contextual effect is assumed to have an equal influence on all of the respondents. No surprises are encountered here. Women tend to vote more often than men, when controlling for the other individual level characteristics. Education is contrast-coded so that each educational level is compared to the level preceding it. The first education indicator shows that respondents with a middle level education have a higher propensity to vote than those with a low level of education only. However, the second education indicator shows that the difference between the higher and middle education level is of more importance still, since its estimate is larger. Age, income and political interest all show a positive influence on the chances of participation, as was expected. The negative influence of political cynicism is also in line with expectations.

The Closeness of the election has a substantial and statistically significant positive influence on electoral participation. Additional analysis (not shown here) proves that this effect is not greatly dependent on the individual characteristics included in the model; only minimal changes in parameter estimates occur if closeness is left out. The variation at the second level is very small and not statistically significant, indicating that little between-election variation is left in the model. Based on these analyses, we would conclude that the closeness of the election does indeed have an effect on Swedish voters. Something we could also conclude from the analysis presented in Chapter 4. But from these analyses we cannot determine whether the closeness of the election is of influence for all Swedish voters.
The ‘Individual Context’ model presents the analysis with additional indicators added for the different categories of voters. Convinced, Confounded and Condemned voters are denoted by dummy variables. The Interaction variables denote an interaction between each of the categories and the degree of closeness of the election. In this model, closeness may have an across-the-board effect on all of the electorate, denoted by the Closeness indicator, but allowance is also made for additional influence on individual segments of the electorate, denoted by the Interaction terms. The dummy variables indicate whether a respondent is classified as Convinced, Confounded or Condemned, they do not indicate how close the election actually is. These are in effect individual characteristics. The Interaction terms indicate whether the closeness of the election has an additional influence for voters in any of the categories, over and above the effect denoted by the Closeness indicator.

The likelihood value indicates that the model has improved significantly, which is confirmed by the improved $R^2$ value. Inspection of the top pane containing individual characteristics reveals that the estimates here have largely remained stable. The difference between men and women is reduced somewhat, while education proves to be somewhat more influential. The estimates for political interest and political cynicism are reduced slightly. However, none of these changes are substantial.

The across-the-board influence of Closeness is reduced somewhat, but a statistically significant effect remains. This is important to recognize, when we look at the estimates for the different categories of voters. The effect on Convinced voters is positive, as was expected, and statistically significant. Likewise, the estimate for Condemned voters is also statistically significant, and in the direction that was hypothesized, in this case negative. Both estimates are of substantial size, indicating that it does make a difference whether one is a Convinced or Condemned voter in Sweden.

The other estimates for the voter categories do not prove to be statistically significant. For the Confounded voters, this is hardly surprising as Table 6-2 already showed that this category contains very few voters. Since expectations as to the size and direction of the estimates for this category were rather tentative, there is very little that may justifiably be concluded from the findings for this category of voters.

The expectations for the Interactions between Closeness and Convinced and Confounded voters were more specific. The Convinced Interaction term was expected to be positive and statistically significant. An additional effect of closeness on Condemned voters was expected to be absent. In view of the substantial and positive across-the-board effect for Closeness, a significant, negative Condemned Interaction term might be expected in the analytical model. Neither of these two expectations appears to be supported by the findings. The absence of statistically significant interaction terms could mean that the closeness of the election affects every Swedish voter to virtually the same degree. People tend to show a higher propensity to vote in close elections, regardless of whether they are Convinced, Confounded, Condemned voters or none of the three. The absence of significant interactions could also be caused by the characteristics of the data. The distribution of respondents over the different categories has already been referred to. An additional feature of the Swedish political system is worth mentioning here, too, and will become more apparent in Figure 6-1 and Figure 6-2, below. Electoral participation in Sweden is typically very high. Variations in this participation rate, especially within groups with very high rates of participation, will therefore be very difficult to detect and explain in an analytical model.

109
The model of Table 6-4 as it stands now seems to suggest that what matters is closeness, and that it matters equally for all voters, irrespective of whether a voter actually cares for a particular party and rejects the other party, or whether these party preferences are less intense. Although the interpretation that only an across-the-board effect of closeness exists may be correct, there is also the risk that the operationalization of the variables is causing problems here.

The indicators for the three categories of voters may in fact work as a proxy for another individual characteristic, hinted at already in the previous paragraph, namely party attachment. Since the two-bloc division in Swedish politics comprises all political parties, Condemned voters may be differently described as "respondents who have not expressed a high evaluation for any of the political parties on offer" while Convinced voters are "respondents who clearly favor at least one party and reject one from the other bloc". This may have an unwanted effect on the analysis. To control for this, an analysis including information on party attachment was carried out. Whether the respondents considered themselves close to a political party or not was included in the model through a dichotomized variable. The results are presented in Table 6-5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sweden - Closeness and Electoral Participation 1979-1998, including Party Attachment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>'Traditional' (B, s.e.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.007 (0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.389 (0.064)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle vs. Lower</td>
<td>0.265 (0.080)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High vs. Middle</td>
<td>0.341 (0.091)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>0.218 (0.029)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Interest</td>
<td>0.308 (0.025)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Cynicism</td>
<td>-0.094 (0.023)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Attachment</td>
<td>0.900 (0.071)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Closeness 0.633 (0.194) 0.601 (0.252)

Convinced voters 0.287 (0.119)
Convinced interaction 0.130 (0.273)
Confounded voters -0.151 (0.226)
Confounded interaction 0.455 (0.558)
Condemned voters -0.623 (0.109)
Condemned interaction 0.130 (0.250)

Constant 0.862 (0.178) 1.127 (0.193)
Variation level 2 (election) 0.019 (0.014) 0.023 (0.016)

Likelihood -3322 .190 -4134 .208

Standard errors in italics. Bold figures indicate statistical significance at p < .05.

4 The difference with the British polity for example is that in Britain a Condemned respondent may still adamantly support a third party, while in Sweden there is no third 'bloc' on offer.

5 Introducing the party evaluation scores as a variable into the model would not be useful here, since by definition Convinced respondents will have a higher party evaluation score than Condemned respondents (see section 6.2, above).
The strong influence of Party Attachment on electoral participation has an impact on the other individual characteristics of the ‘traditional’ model: most the estimates show some change compared to the model presented in Table 6-4. The estimate for Age is reduced considerably, indicating that there is a substantial relationship between age and party attachment. The influence of education is increased, while the influence of political interest is reduced. The latter is hardly surprising as party attachment and political interest tend to be related. The estimate for Party Attachment is statistically significant, positive and of substantial size, as might be expected. The likelihood and pseudo-$R^2$ figures show a considerable improvement over the first model shown in Table 6-4. The aggregate influence of Closeness has decreased somewhat, although not by a great deal. It remains statistically significant.

The ‘Individual Context’ model presented in the next two columns of Table 6-5 shows comparable changes in estimates to the model presented in Table 6-4. Including the indicators for the different categories of voters decreases the estimate for Party Attachment, suggesting that there is indeed a relationship there. The changes in the other estimates is comparable to what we saw in the previous analyses.

The estimates for Convinced and Condemned voters do show some notable changes. Both estimates are substantially reduced. They remain statistically significant, however. This indicates that part of the influence of Party Attachment is indeed mediated through the Convinced and Condemned indicators. The model as it is presented now should therefore be a better representation of the actual process of electoral participation. The overall picture, however, remains unchanged. In Sweden, Closeness appears to affect the electorate uniformly, while Convinced voters show a distinctly higher propensity to vote and Condemned voters show a consistently lower likelihood of turning out. From the analyses presented here, we can conclude that the degree of closeness of the election does not influence these differences between categories of voters.

**6.4 Predicting Electoral Participation**

What do the above findings imply for the propensity to vote of the Swedish electorate? To what degree are voters more likely to turn out in close elections? In this section, the predicted chance of voting for a few stereotypical voters will be compared. Comparisons will be made for different categories of voters, as well as for different levels of closeness of the elections. We will see that the closeness of the election does affect voters of the different categories to different degrees, even though no significant interaction effects could be established in the analyses reported above.

Before the predictions can be made, a model must be established from which to derive the predictions. The point of concern in establishing this model is whether to include the parameter estimates that were not found to be statistically significant in the analyses of Table 6-5. Including statistically non-significant parameters is acceptable if we argue that sample size and distribution are the main cause that these parameters are not statistically significant. However, we cannot be sure of this. Therefore, we adopt a cautious approach, and base our predictions on a model containing statistically significant results only. The predictions are therefore based on a re-estimated model, analogous to that of Table 6-5 but with the non-significant estimates removed. The estimates are largely comparable to those presented in Table 6-5, and are presented in Table 7, in the Appendix.

The degree of closeness is derived from actual opinion poll predictions for the elections.
The values of 9.3, 7, 5.4 and 1 percent correspond with the elections of 1998, 1988, 1991, 1985, respectively. A hypothetical close election with a gap of 0.5 percent is added for illustrative purposes.

Figure 6-1 shows the predicted chance to vote for a female respondent of 45 years of age with an average income (score of 0), middle levels of education, political interest and political cynicism (scores of 3), and who also feels close to a political party. The plotted lines represent such a respondent as a Base category, Convinced or Condemned voter. As no statistically significant estimates for Confounded voters were found, the predictions for Base and Confounded voters are identical.

Figure 6-1 Sweden - Predicted Chance to Vote for Different Categories of Voters (left), and Deviation from Chance Predicted for Base Category Voters (right).

The most striking feature of Figure 6-1 is of course the extremely high predicted probability of voting for each of the voter categories. Regardless of the closeness of the election, and regardless of whether our female voter is a Convinced or a Condemned voter, her predicted probability of voting is near 95 percent or over. At such levels of predicted participation, the impact of political context will be minimal. The left hand pane of Figure 6-1 shows a small increase in the chance to participate as the election becomes closer. The right hand panel shows that the differences between categories of voters diminish as the election becomes closer: extremely close elections ensure that this female voter stands an almost equally high chance of participation, regardless of what voter category she is part of. In elections that are less close, we see that Condemned voters fall behind the Base category and especially the Convinced voters. The following section will show a comparable pattern for some voters, but a decidedly different one for other voters.
6.4.1 High versus Low Involvement

Based on individual characteristics alone, some voters show a high propensity to vote, while others show a lower likelihood to participate. It is in the difference between these groups that the influence of the political context is best perceived. High political involvement leaves little room for outside influences. On the other hand, low political involvement means that the political context can play a crucial role in determining actual electoral participation.

Figure 6-2 Sweden - Predicted Chance to Vote for Different Categories of Voters with High Involvement (left), and Deviation from Chance Predicted for Base Category Voters with High Involvement (right).

![Graph showing predicted chance to vote and deviation from chance for different categories of voters.](image)

Closeness (Gap between the two largest parties in percent points)

*Female, 50 years old, above average income, education and political interest, low political cynicism, feels close to a political party*

- Base
- Convinced
- Confounded
- Condemned

Figure 6-2 shows the predicted chance of voting for a 50 year old female with high education, above average income (score of 1), high political interest (score 5) and low political cynicism (score of 0) who feels close to a political party. This respondent is virtually guaranteed to vote, regardless of the closeness of the election, and regardless whether this is a Convinced, Confounded, Condemned or a Base category voter. The virtually straight lines in the left hand panel suggest only one thing: this person will vote, come what may. The right hand panel shows that the chance of participation for Condemned voters is nearly equal to that of Convinced and Base category voters. The story is completely different on the other end of the involvement spectrum, as is illustrated in the next figure.

Figure 6-3 shows the predicted probability to participate under different degrees of closeness for a 20 year old male, with low education, low income (-2) with low political interest (0) and a high political cynicism score (6) who does not feel close to a political party. This is a group of voters whose propensity of participation based on individual characteristics is low. Here, the closeness of the election is of great importance, and does increase the chance to participate by over 20 percent points.
Figure 6-3 Sweden - Predicted Chance to Vote for Different Categories of Voters with Low Involvement (left), and Deviation from Chance Predicted for Base Category Voters with Low Involvement (right).

Closeness (Gap between the two largest parties in percent points)
Male, 20 years old, low income, education and political interest, high political cynicism, not feeling close to a political party

As the right hand pane of Figure 6-3 shows, for voters with low political involvement it matters a great deal whether they are Convinced, Condemned or Base category voters - the differences between the categories call for an extended range on the X-axis. Although the differences decrease as the election becomes closer (as in Figure 6-1, above), substantial differences do remain, even in the closest election. The left hand panel of Figure 6-3 shows clearly how the political context (i.e., closeness) stimulates these voters to participate. From a high likelihood of abstention in elections that appear a foregone conclusion, a close election can boost the chance of voting beyond 70 or 80 percent, making participation much more likely.

Figures 6-2 and 6-3 imply that variation in turnout levels across elections is not likely to be explained by the very politically involved. They are likely to vote in every election, regardless of the closeness of the race or other political context factors. Variation in context does not generate variation in participation, for these voters. The key to the ebb and flow of turnout levels can be found with the politically less involved. That is the section of the electorate that will be likely to participate in some, but not in all elections. Contextual characteristics, such as the closeness of the election, will help determine whether these voters will participate or not. It is here that we should turn our attention if we want to explain why some elections show a record turnout, while others show a lackluster participation.

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6 Establishing the size of this part of the electorate can give us an insight into the degree of turnout variation we can expect in elections. If a large part of the electorate is susceptible to contextual influences, we can expect large variations in turnout between elections. Establishing the size of this segment of the electorate falls beyond the scope of the current research, however.
6.5 Predicting Turnout Levels

Section 6.3 showed that closeness affects electoral participation in Sweden. In fact, Section 6.3 showed that all voters are affected by closeness in Sweden. Does this mean that the Individual Context model, in which the influence of closeness can vary between voters, is no improvement over the ‘traditional’ model? In this section, we will examine whether the Individual Context model improves our ability to predict turnout at the aggregate level, compared to the ‘traditional’ model.

The procedure is comparable to the predictions presented in Section 5.4 of Chapter 5. The predicted turnout is estimated, based on the Individual Context and the ‘traditional’ model, and for each election the turnout estimates are compared with the actual turnout. The basis for the predictions is the ‘traditional’ model presented in Table 6-5 (including party attachment information), and the Individual Context prediction model used for the predictions of the previous section (including statistically significant results only, see Table 7 of the Appendix).

Table 6-6 presents the turnout level as predicted by the ‘traditional’ model and the Individual Context model, followed by actual election turnout. The last column presents the average absolute deviation in predicted and actual turnout per model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional model</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td>88.9</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>85.9</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual-Context model</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>89.0</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual turnout</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>89.9</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>86.7</td>
<td>86.8</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for Great Britain (see Table 5-10), Table 6-6 shows that the differences in predicted turnout between the two models are small. Comparing with Table 5-10, we see that the Swedish model predicts more accurately than the British models. In Table 6-6 a clear pattern can be detected. The Individual Context model is most accurate overall, as the smaller average deviance score indicates. In addition, the Individual Context model is more accurate in predicting turnout than the ‘traditional’ model in all elections except 1998 election, as Figure 6-4 emphasizes.

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7 As was the case for Great Britain, the predictions were weighted (to allow for aggregate level predictions) in SPSS, while the individual level predictions were produced in MLwiN (cf. Note 24, Chapter 5).
Figure 6-4 presents the predicted turnout rates as deviations from the actual election outcome. We see that the Swedish model has a tendency to under-estimate actual turnout. Figure 6-4 shows clearly that, with the exception of the 1998 elections, the Individual Context model provides more accurate turnout predictions than the 'traditional' model does.

6.6 Conclusions
Chapter 4 showed that closeness is an extremely good predictor of electoral participation in Sweden at the aggregate level. This chapter aimed to examine whether variation in that influence could be established at the individual level, or whether that influence is uniform for the whole electorate. The previous chapter showed that individual level variation in the influence of closeness could be established in Great Britain.

The analysis of the current chapter showed a clear across-the-board effect of closeness, influencing Convinced, Confounded, and Condemned as well as Base category voters. Individual variation in the impact of electoral closeness could not be established. All interaction terms between the degree of closeness and the three categories of voters proved not to be statistically significant. This may be caused by the limitations in the data available. The small numbers of Confounded respondents available for analysis make it unlikely that we will find significant estimates. Whether the same holds true for the interaction terms for Convinced and Condemned voters cannot so easily be argued. Both categories of voters represent sizable numbers of respondents. Data limitations may therefore appear a gratuitous excuse too easily made. Unfortunately, however, this excuse cannot be summarily discarded.

Although the number of respondents in the Convinced and Confounded category is sizable, it is possible that this number is still not sufficient to detect variation in turnout when 'smeared out' over the seven different elections by the interaction effect. Especially since
only a small percentage of respondents are non-voters. The typically high rates of participation in Sweden make the detection of turnout variation more difficult. This situation is exacerbated by a typical trait of election studies in general: reported electoral participation tends to exceed actual turnout figures. For Sweden, the result is extremely high reported turnout, ranging from 90 to as high as 95 percent. As a consequence, the number of non-voters in the sample is small, smaller than in the actual population. The percentage of non-voters that exist in each of the voter categories will thus also be smaller in the sample than in the actual population. In any case, the distribution is heavily skewed. Together, these data limitations hinder the detection of statistically significant results. The superior aggregate level turnout predictions of the Individual Context model presented in Section 6.5 also show that it is perhaps too rash to dismiss individual level variation in the influence of closeness for Sweden.

We must not rule out another explanation, which is that in Sweden all categories voters are affected by closeness. Because the race affects the whole of the party spectrum, the whole of the electorate may be affected as well - with the exception only of the small part of the electorate that turns their back to any and all of the political parties. Because the two-bloc structure comprises all political parties from the moment they become established players at the political stage, supporters of all of these parties are therefore likely to be affected by the closeness of the election. Voters in Sweden are thus left with two choices. Either take the anti-system emergency exit, and withdraw completely from the electoral system. As the high rates of turnout show, this option is not taken up by many. The other option is to support one of the parties in either of the two blocs. A choice that is widely made by voters in Sweden, and is likely to make them responsive to the degree of closeness of the election. Figures 6-2 and 6-3 show us that the degree of this influence is heavily dependent on individual characteristics, but the uniform direction of the influence of closeness suggests that whenever it rains in Sweden, everyone gets wet.