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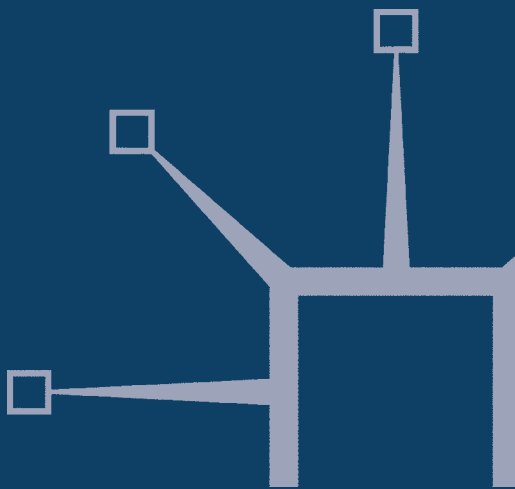
The Political Participation of Older People in Europe

The Greying of Our Democracies

Achim Goerres



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Für meine Eltern, Biggi und Andrea

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About the Author

Achim Goerres has been assistant professor at the Faculty of Management, Economics and Social Sciences of the University of Cologne since 2008. He studied European Studies and Comparative Politics in Osnabrück (Germany), Leiden (Netherlands) and at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE, UK). After completing his Ph.D. at the LSE in 2006, he was a postdoctoral research fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne for two years before moving to the University of Cologne. His research interests include the comparative politics of ageing societies, comparative political behaviour and applied research methods.

Preface

This book took five years to write, from its first conceptualisation to the final version, and came into being over three stages of my professional career. It started out as a Ph.D. thesis that I defended at the Government Department of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in October 2006. My first expressions of gratitude therefore go to my supervisors, Michael Bruter and Simon Hix. Their advice, encouragement and criticism allowed me to progress steadily throughout my Ph.D. years. Among the many things I learned from them, I will always remember two in particular: Michael showed me how to approach empirical measurement with great care, and Simon taught me to be passionate about social science research.

My Ph.D. studies were supported by a number of organisations on both sides of the Channel, and I would like to thank the German Academic Exchange Service, the Economic and Social Research Council, the Sir Richard Stapley Educational Trust, the Government Department of the LSE and the Ralph Miliband programme.

Second, large parts of the manuscript were written while I was a postdoctoral research fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne (November 2006 to March 2008). I would like to thank its friendly staff for providing a fantastic working environment, in particular Astrid Dünkelmann, Cynthia Lehmann and Christel Schommertz, who were of great help during the publishing process. My special thanks go to Wolfgang Streeck whose support was vital during this fruitful stay.

Third, I finished the book as *Akademischer Rat auf Zeit* (assistant professor) at the Faculty of Management, Economics and Social Sciences of the University of Cologne, where I started in April 2008. Here, my gratitude goes to Alexander Schmidt and Caroline Wehner for their research assistance during the final stages of the book.

While the book was still a thesis, I received feedback from many people. My thanks go to Miriam Allam, Jan van Deth, Patrick Dunleavy, Rune Fitjar, Simon Glendinning, Pierre Hausemer, Abby Innes, Simona Milio, David Sanders, Gwen Sasse, John Sidel, Marco Simoni, David Soskice, Andreas Warntjen, Joachim Wehner and Paul Whiteley.

When the manuscript began to look like a monograph, I received comments from several colleagues who read parts or all of it. I would like to

thank Hans-Jürgen Andreß, Andrea L. Campbell, Andrea M. Herrmann, Martin Höpner, Marta Kahancová, Laura Morales de Ulzurum, James Tilley, Mark I. Vail, Pieter Vanhuysse, Simon Weschle and Paul Whiteley. I owe a lot to Marius R. Busemeyer who helped me through the whole process, from finding a publisher to formulating the conclusions, by commenting patiently on all parts of the manuscript. Because of him, the book is much clearer and accessible.

This book is mainly an exercise in secondary survey analysis and would not have been possible 20 years ago because surveys would not have been so easily available. Therefore, I would like to thank the numerous army of principal investigators who devised, carried out and made accessible the large number of mass surveys that this book is based upon, such as the European Social Survey (ESS), the World Values Surveys (WVS), the German and British Election Studies and the Politbarometer.

I gratefully acknowledge the generosity of Blackwell and Elsevier in granting me the right to draw on two journal articles:

- Chapter 3 was partially published as Goerres, A. 2007. 'Why Are Older People More Likely to Vote? The Impact of Ageing on Electoral Turnout in Europe'. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 9 (1): 90–121.
- Chapter 4 appeared in part as Goerres, A. 2008. 'The Grey Vote: Determinants of Older Voters' Party Choice in Britain and West Germany'. *Electoral Studies* 27 (2): 285–304.

Also, I would like to thank Mark Goldstein (http://www.markgoldstein.co.uk) for allowing me to use his fantastic photograph 'Council Tax Protest #65' for the book cover.

I dedicate this book to four people: to my parents Marita Goerres (1944–92) and Dietmar Goerres (1942–2001), who were not allowed to become older people; to my sister Birgit Goerres, who has always been there for me since my ageing process began on day one; and finally to my best companion and wife, Andrea Diepen, with whom I want to become very old. Andrea is the only person working outside academia who can give an ad hoc lecture about cohort and age effects at any time of the day.

Cologne, August 2008 Achim Goerres

Abbreviations

AIC	Akaike's Information Criterion
AOV	Algemeen Ouderen Verband (Dutch Pensioners' Party)
AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BES	British Election Studies
CDU/CSU	Christian-Democratic Union/Christian-Social Union
CH	Switzerland
CZ	Czech Republic
DE (E)	East Germany
DE (W)	West Germany
DK	Denmark
ES	Spain
ESS	European Social Survey
EU	European Union
FAZ	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
FDP	Free Democratic Party
FI	Finland
FR	France
GB	Great Britain
GP	General Proposition
GR	Greece
HU	Hungary
IDEA	Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IE	Ireland
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetory Fund
IT	Italy
LibDems	Liberal-Democrats

LU	Luxembourg
NL	Netherlands
NO	Norway
NSDAP	National-Socialist German Workers' Party
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAYGO	Pay As You Go
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SPD	Social-Democratic Party of Germany
U55+	Unie 55+
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
VdK	Association of Organised Social Interests Germany (Sozialverband VdK Deutschland e.V.)
WVS	Wold Values Survey

1

Introduction: The Political Participation of Older People in an Era of Demographic Ageing

> I am afraid to say that we are currently witnessing the early signs of a pensioners' democracy. Older people are becoming more and more numerous, and all political parties pay extraordinary attention to them. This development could end in a situation in which older people plunder the young.
>
> Roman Herzog, former judge at the Federal Constitutional Court (1983–94) and former President of Germany (1994–99) on the German government's announcement in April 2008 that it would raise public pensions by 1.1 per cent and so deviate from the pension formula (Blome et al. 2008)

This book is about the political participation of older people in Europe; how and why it differs from the participation of younger people; and why it matters for ageing democracies. At the moment, the public debate about the political impact of population ageing is rather superficial, with sensationalist undertones. Politicians and public commentators expect growing political pressures from a group of older people who will dominate all political processes and influence outcomes in their favour. According to this view, electoral politics in particular will be determined by people aged 50 and older who will soon be in the voting majority due to sheer numbers and their high voting propensity. In democratic systems that are based on majority decisions, this group of older voters will influence all policy outputs. This opinion is not only held by prominent elder statesmen, such as Roman Herzog, but also resonates in the writings of economists, international

organisations and scientific journalists (International Monetary Fund 2004: Chapter 3; Kotlikoff and Burns 2004; Wallace 1999; Peterson 1999; Sinn and Uebelmesser 2002; see Lynch and Myrskylä forthcoming in 2009; Tepe and Vanhuysse 2008).

This book opposes the idea that a political 'war of the generations' will be waged in ageing societies. Its objective is to put the debate about the political behaviour of older people on a sound empirical basis and to generate a more balanced view. Older people do not behave in a different manner from younger people across European societies; some generational and age effects vary between countries. For one thing, different national milieus influence the early political and social experiences of individuals during impressionable early adulthood. Where and when an individual grows up matters for political participation in later life. In addition, countries are also the context for the social experience of the life cycle. Societies facilitate a particular type of social construction of old age and of other stages in the life cycle. Reaching 'old age' in one country can be a different experience from those encountered in other countries and have varying consequences for political behaviour.

Since the differences between older and younger people are determined by national characteristics, the continuous increase of the old age group relative to other age groups has varying consequences for political participation. A simple message such as 'demographic ageing will affect participatory politics in manner X' is false and untenable in light of the evidence reviewed for this book. Rather the message must be: given the societal context, we can expect the participatory process in a given country to develop in a specific direction. Most importantly, the extent to which a society is structured in favour of older people shapes participation differences across age groups. In countries in which many older people depend on relatively few working people and public opinion on the subject of older people is very positive, older people are less likely to participate in politics relative to younger people. Put differently, this means that younger people are more active relative to older people in those countries in which the welfare state and the public sphere are more favourable to older people. Thus, in contrast to the simplistic notions referred to above, older people are less likely to dominate the political process in countries in which political reforms are most needed in order to cope with ageing populations.

Even within a given country, the differences in political participation between older and younger people are not stable across time. Some of them are due to particular political and social cohort experiences whose impact on the political process is limited to each cohort's presence in

the populace. In contrast, other differences stem from age effects that are grounded in social and psychological experiences along the life cycle that affect all generations. Their influence will be long-lasting and will shape the differences between older and younger people for some time to come.

Besides containing an analysis of older people's party choice in chapter 4, this book is not about the political interests of older people and how they may differ from those of younger people. Inter-age differences in political interests are important issues, and I and others have tried to shed some light on them elsewhere (Busemeyer et al. 2008; Goerres 2007a). Nor is the book about the new strategies of political parties, trade unions and single-issue organisations, whose 'customers' are ageing by the day, although I do offer a number of expectations concerning what these organisations may want to do.

1.1 Exploring the political participation of older people in Europe

Defining 'older people' in advanced industrial societies

One of the greatest imbalances in public discussions about older people and old age is the discrepancy between the homogeneous image that 'older people' have in society and their own, much more varied view of old age, as well as their general unwillingness to identify themselves as older people. 'The elderly', 'seniors', 'senior citizens', 'older people', 'the aged' – there is a multiplicity of terms for older citizens in everyday English. However, older people rarely identify themselves as being old and do not agree on the labels given to them by others (see Walker and Maltby 1997: 17–18).

Technically speaking, the elderly are the most advanced in terms of *chronological age*, which is the number of years they have lived. Chronological age is only a proxy variable for many other characteristics and does not have a simple social meaning (Jennings and Markus 1988: 308). Chronological age is not culture-free in its social and political implications because it depends on the developmental circumstances of the society in which the person lives. One year in a pre-industrial society, such as the Amazonian Yanomami culture, is not the same as one in post-industrial Europe (Albert and Cattell 1994: 19–26). Among the Yanomami, a 70-year-old man will cause wide interest because his still being alive is a rare occurrence. In Europe at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a 70-year-old scarcely raises an eyebrow and can be expected to be largely free from morbidity. Because of the cultural

embeddedness of chronological age, this study looks only at societies that are similar in their stage of socio-economic development, so that chronological age is comparable in social and cultural terms. If we take only post-industrial societies in Europe, chronological age as a mere number assures us that one year of age is roughly the same for everybody in terms of expected life span.

While the maximum life span of about 110 years has been stable for the last 100,000 years, average life expectancy at birth has steadily risen with the socio-economic development of societies (Albert and Cattell 1994: 26–7). Life expectancy is in fact a direct indicator of socio-economic development or modernisation, as the cause of death in more advanced societies has largely shifted away from external causes (such as infectious diseases) to internal causes (physical and mental deterioration) (Avramov and Maskova 2003). The average life expectancy in the 21 European countries mainly under investigation here (Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland) is quite similar in comparison to the rest of the world. The estimated average for children at birth in 2000–5 was 80.8 years for women and 74.7 for men (United Nations 2004). The group means in these countries were above the world means of 67.9 (women) and 63.4 (men). Along similar lines, the proportion of older people in these European societies is above the world mean, ranging from 15.2 per cent in Ireland to 24.1 per cent in Italy (60 and older as a proportion of the whole population). Most countries in the world are well below the minimum in Ireland. The world minimum lies at 3.0 per cent in Kuwait, the maximum at 25.5 per cent in Japan and the mean at 9.9 per cent (United Nations Common Database 2004).

As a working definition, I use 60 years of age as a cut-off point to separate seniors from non-seniors. The age of 60 approximates the mean retirement age in Europe, making it an important social division point.[1] As I define older people as those aged 60 and older, I identify the comparison category of 'non-older people' as those who are 59 and younger and will term them 'younger people'. Sometimes, when it is conceptually appropriate, I will make specific comparisons between older (60+), middle-aged (30–59) and young people (<30). In those instances, I clearly state which chronological age I am referring to.

The socio-economic situation of individuals who are 60 and older is changing. Thus, resources and interests as regards political participation are changing, too. First of all, senior citizens today are on average much better off in socio-economic terms than they used to be.

The present senior cohort in Europe is better educated, has a higher income and has occupied higher-prestige jobs than earlier generations. This is mainly due to overall economic progress and development after the Second World War. In particular, the post-war baby-boomer generation, those born between 1945 and 1955 and who are currently crossing the 60-year threshold, is much better off than earlier generations in many advanced industrial democracies (see, for example, for Finland, Germany and the United Kingdom, Huber and Skidmore 2003; Geschäftsstelle Seniorenwirtschaft 2004; Kunz 2005; Walker 1999). Second, today's older people in Europe find themselves in a social environment that has changed greatly with regard to relations between seniors and their families. Whereas the tradition in European societies was to take care of parents in a three-generation household, the trend has been towards older people living separately from their family members, either on their own or in retirement homes (Tomassini et al. 2004). A third point is the reconstruction of European welfare states. European democracies began to experience increasing strains on their state budgets after the two oil crises in the 1970s because of negative economic growth, growing mass unemployment and high inflation. Social welfare systems that were based on particular assumptions about societies – such as lifelong permanent employment, short life spans after retirement and the care-giving social net of the family – are being reviewed. The elderly have become a major target of reform efforts and a change in political discourse. Older people receive expensive welfare benefits, such as public pensions, long-term care and medical treatment. If individuals perceive imminent cuts to policy regimes that they benefit from, they are likely to become mobilised on the issue. This is because individuals are more likely to become mobilised against losses of existing benefits than by the potential gain from benefits with the same value (Campbell 2003b; Weaver 1986; Kahnemann and Tversky 1979; see also Vanhuysse 2006).

The scope of political participation in the analysis

This book contributes to the discussion on the potential influence of demographic ageing on politics and public policy through the *individual* participation of older people. The analysis is limited to liberal democracies that give room for *voluntary* participation. We shall not be concerned with political actions that are forced upon the individual, such as in totalitarian systems. Nor shall we occupy ourselves with paid political activities, such as those of public affairs professionals or paid party employees, because their motivational structures can also be assumed

to be different. Bearing in mind Max Weber's differentiation between politics as *Beruf* (profession) and as *Berufung* (vocation) (see Verba et al. 1995: 39), I disregard the *Beruf* sphere of political participation. There may be influences of demographic ageing on the world of professional political participants, such as the activities of old-age interest groups, but they are outside the scope of this book. Moreover, we are interested in individual voluntary political participation that is intended to influence political outcomes, to change existing institutional arrangements of the political process or to influence the selection of political personnel (see Verba et al. 1995: Chapter 2 for a similar definition). Thus, I shall restrict the analysis to the impact of participation on public policies and public institutions.[2] Finally, I concentrate on *mass* political participation. These are political actions that are reasonably easy to carry out and do not require intense commitment. For example, party activists tend to commit themselves to regular activities for their party. The transition between mass and high-intensity participation is fluid. The main reason for this limitation is practical and derives from the type of evidence used here. Conventional mass surveys capture only a very small number of activists. This kind of evidence does not give enough statistical leverage to properly investigate high-intensity forms of participation, as over-samples of activists would (Whiteley and Seyd 2002; Seyd and Whiteley 1992; Whiteley et al. 1994; Verba et al. 1995).

This book focuses on various modes of mass political participation that can be classified as institutionalised (voting and membership in political organisations) and non-institutionalised participation outside organisations, such as signing a petition. This division, suggested, for example, by Max Kaase (1999), is important because the political participation process in advanced industrial democracies is in flux. The universe of participation is becoming more diverse, with non-institutionalised forms of participation supplementing and to some extent replacing institutionalised forms. It is therefore vital to know how the growing group of older people falls into these categories. Institutionalised participation requires some form of organisational effort on a regular basis. Non-institutionalised participation can be done more spontaneously and does not require long-term preparations by an organisation.

Table 1.1 reports the patterns of significant differences between the group of older people (60+) and that of younger people (<59) in 20–22 European countries in 2002. Each row summarises the proportions of countries that fall into one of three categories: older people are more active/not different/less active than/from younger people. The first striking finding is that each political action shows only one significant

Table 1.1 Patterns of difference between older (60+) and younger (<59) people with regard to single political actions, 20–22 European countries in 2002 (%)

	Proportion of countries with the relevant pattern (sums to 100%)		
	Older people more active	**Older people not different**	**Older people less active**
Been a party member	**72**	28	0
Voted in parliamentary elections	**68**	32	0
Signed a petition	0	5	**95**
Bought a product for political, ethical or environmental reasons	0	9	**91**
Been a trade union member	0	16	**84**
Boycotted a product for political, ethical or environmental reasons	0	18	**82**
Taken part in a legal demonstration	0	28	**72**
Worn a badge	0	45	**55**
Contacted a public official or politician	0	45	**55**
Taken part in an illegal demonstration	0	**86**	14
Been a member of a humanitarian or human rights group	0	**80**	20
Donated to a political party	25	**75**	0
Been a member of environmental/peace/animal rights groups	0	**70**	30
Donated to humanitarian or human rights groups	0	**60**	40
Donated to environmental/peace/animal rights groups	0	55	45

Note: Percentages indicate the proportion of countries in which the dominant, statistically significant pattern of the respective column may be found, observations weighted by design weight. Respondents were asked: 'In the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?'

Source: European Social Survey (ESS). Some items were not available in all countries.

type of difference. In general, older people tend to be significantly more *or* less active in a given political activity, but not both, in different countries. In each row of the table, we find only countries in which

there is no statistically significant difference and countries with a statistically significant difference in just one direction. In the first section, there are two forms of participation, voting and party membership, in which older people are more likely to engage than younger people in most countries. In the case of party membership, 72 per cent of all countries show a significantly higher occurrence of party membership among older people than among younger people. In the case of voting, 68 per cent of the countries have significantly more active older people. In the second section, there are six forms of participation for which older people are predominantly less active in the majority of countries: signing a petition, buying a product, boycotting a product, trade union membership, demonstrating legally and contacting a public official or politician. The share of countries with this dominant pattern ranges from 95 per cent in the case of signing a petition to 55 per cent in the case of contacting a public official or politician. In the third section, there are six political actions that do not show any inter-age differences in a majority of countries. The patterns range from 86 per cent of countries not showing any age differences as regards taking part in illegal demonstrations to 55 per cent of countries as regards donating to an environmental/peace/animal rights group.

1.2 The 'state of the art' in the literature on the political participation of older people

The existing body of knowledge about the political behaviour of older people in Europe is disparate. Few political science studies deal with the politics of older people (Campbell 2003a; Lynch 2006; Schulz and Binstock 2006). Instead, we find one part of the relevant literature scattered across social gerontology, the discipline studying all social aspects of older people, and the other in political science studies, in which age-related effects on political behaviour are analysed. Age-related effects are generally divided into cohort effects or generational effects on the one hand, and age effects or life-cycle effects on the other. A cohort effect is shared by a group of people born during a certain period. It is typical of all members of that generation and remains the same as the cohort members become older. An age effect is shared by people in the same age group, regardless of the cohort to which the individual belongs.

Generational accounts

The only available long-term panel study (spanning 50 years) predicts that political–ideological attitudes (important antecedents of behaviour)

are very stable throughout the ageing process. Attitudes acquired at a young age are usually maintained, although specific later personal experiences can change them (Alwin et al. 1991). In social gerontology, continuity theory claims that seniors continue doing what they learnt when they were younger (Tirrito 2003: 123–4; Atchley 1989). Middle-aged and older individuals make 'adaptive choices' to maintain and preserve their personal, psychological and social structures. They do so in order to support and reinforce their self-image.

Whereas the process of attitude formation seems to be the same for all cohorts, the content of early socialisation is not. One prominent body of writing emphasises long-term generational value change from materialism to postmaterialism: older people show a more materialist predisposition because they were socialised during times when their basic material needs had not been satisfied (Inglehart 1971, 1990; Abramson 1989; Abramson and Inglehart 1987). This value change can also have subsequent effects, such as preferences for new political issues and political parties (Klein and Arzheimer 1997; Kohler 1998). Related to the discussion concerning postmaterialism is the idea of societal modernisation that leads to both a change of political values towards postmaterialism, and new participatory demands. New generations favour non-institutionalised over institutionalised participation (Topf 1995a, 1995b; Fuchs and Klingemann 1995a; Delli Carpini 1986). Some authors (Norris 1999; Dalton 2004, 2008) also put forward generational explanations for declining political trust in the institutions of representative government, which could then lead to more participation outside these institutions.

There are also specific cohort explanations for voting participation. Cohorts that were affected by the lowering of the voting age when they were young show a relatively lower turnout probability than precedent or subsequent cohorts. The newly enfranchised group of 18–20 year olds at the time, as with women in the first elections in which they exercised universal franchise, did not vote with the same probability as the already enfranchised 21+ group. This lower likelihood of voting was maintained in relative terms throughout the life course (Franklin 2004; see for a comprehensive review of voting behaviour and age groups Goerres (2009)).

Accounts of party structures and organisations suggest that the fact that older people are more likely to be party members than younger people is a sign of the decline of political parties. West German parties were good at attracting young cohorts in the 1970s, but deteriorated in later decades. As a consequence, party members are more likely to be older in Germany today. Britain's biggest parties have been unsuccessful in attracting young cohorts since the Thatcher era (see Scarrow

1996; Seyd and Whiteley 1992: 32; Whiteley et al. 1994: 43; Whiteley and Seyd 2002). Party membership in most European countries (with the exception of, for example, Spain) has declined in recent decades (see Mair and van Biezen 2001; Scarrow 2000) and has led to a higher likelihood of party members being older people today. However, the fortunes of parties can also go the other way. For example, in Germany, the Netherlands and France, Green parties emerged at the beginning of the 1980s and attracted young party members, meaning that older people are less likely to be Green party members today (Kitschelt 1990).

With regard to party preferences, young people are susceptible to political forces during their impressionable years, that is, when they first go to vote (Butler and Stokes 1983 (1974); Green et al. 2002; Rose and McAllister 1990). The dominance of a party leaves its mark on the youngest cohort of new voters. Over a lifetime, this impression is strengthened through a growing identification with that party. These voters perceive all emerging political events through the lens of their party identification. Thus, at old age, the cohort as a whole can potentially differ from younger cohorts that do not share the same socialisation experience.[3]

To sum up, the piecemeal evidence suggests two things. Generations differ in their preferences for types of political participation, with newer generations increasingly favouring non-institutionalised forms. They also vary in their political preferences in general. Value changes in the area of postmaterialism and libertarianism, as well as party-political experiences, affect generations differently.

Life-cycle explanations

The most prominent sociological theory about senior social participation proposes the 'disengagement thesis'. Seniors disengage themselves from society once they leave the workforce as much as society retreats from its older members (Cumming and Henry 1961; Glenn 1969; Rollenhagen 1982). Norval Glenn and Michael Grimes (1968) refined the disengagement theory: becoming a senior, they argue, might be accompanied by selective withdrawal, that is, senior citizens withdraw from some parts of social life (such as employment) and remain active in others, including politics.

The second major explanation of differences between age groups is life experience. John Crittenden (1963) undertook a cohort analysis of party identification and turnout (following up on Campbell et al. 1960). Raymond Wolfinger and Stephen Rosenstone (1980) established the higher likelihood of older voters voting, once demographic variables

have been controlled for. They also found an interaction effect between age and education, which they explained with the function of life experience. Thus, not only does formal education affect voting participation, but also the accumulation of life experience as people age. Other authors have suggested that the accumulation of various resources, such as political knowledge, over a lifetime increases the likelihood of voting (Jankowski 2000; Strate et al. 1989; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Eric Plutzer (2002) and Mark Franklin (2004) also proposed the importance of habituation. The more often people vote, the higher the likelihood that they will do so the next time. Older people go to the polls more often because they have more experience than younger voters. M. Kent Jennings and Gregory Markus (1988) analysed individual-level change of political participation with a three-wave panel study. Ageing individuals showed an overall decline in all participation other than in voting. They also attributed this rigidity of voting to early habituation.

'If you're not a liberal when you're 25, you have no heart. If you're not a conservative by the time you're 35, you have no brain.' This quote, attributed variously to Winston Churchill, Otto von Bismarck and Bernard Shaw, illustrates the common belief that people get more conservative as they age. This prominent hypothesis (first put forward by Glenn 1974; Crittenden 1962) exists in three different variations: (i) voters become economically more conservative as they age because they accumulate more material goods that they want to preserve, that is, older people want lower taxes (Binstock and Quadagno 2001); (ii) older people favour the status quo, to which they have adapted, because they want to minimise insecurity (Williamson et al. 1982: Chapter 5); (iii) older people become more authoritarian in their political attitudes because they increasingly value social and political order (see Tilley 2005; Danigelis and Cutler 1991).

Another life-cycle hypothesis for voting choice is growing adherence to parties that are large and/or regularly part of government (Barnes 1989). These parties can leave a recurring impression on ageing voters over their lifetimes by being members of government or the leading opposition (and the greater media coverage that goes along with it). As we age, we develop a stronger established-party bias. Smaller parties are consequently at a disadvantage among older voters because their sustainable legacy in ageing voters' minds is less well established.

Finally, Andrea Campbell (2003a, 2003b) analysed the political behaviour of recipients of Social Security in the US (state pension and old age health benefits), who are normally 65 and older. She found that they could be mobilised into participation even though they would

normally not be active when they perceive potential changes to a policy programme as a threat to the level of their entitlements.

In sum, the existing life-cycle explanations concern the participation as well as the political interests that are pursued. Variations across the life cycle can occur due to growing experience or social situations that change along the life cycle. The literature on both generational and life-cycle explanations suffers from the lack of a comparative framework that can incorporate several country contexts and fails to see the implications of contexts for differences between age groups.

1.3 A model for studying the political participation of older people

In order to talk about the impact of the growing number of older people on the political process, we must carry out a robust empirical analysis at the individual level, endogenising the macrolevel context into the explanation. Being older involves many different things that might also affect political behaviour: for example, relative to younger people, seniors have more life experience, other generational experiences, such as the memory of the Second World War, or are at a different position in the life cycle, such as retirement. Once the mechanisms for differences at the individual level are worked out, we can relate them back to the macrolevel and discuss their wider implications.

Why should older people show different patterns of political participation from younger people? The recent political science literature (Verba et al. 1995) suggests a model that includes intrinsic as well as extrinsic contextual factors. When we assume such a resource-based model of political participation, we can find two answers to the question: (i) older people are different 'from within': they might have other levels of motivation and resources that they can use to participate in politics; (ii) older people face a different environment from younger people. They might be exposed to a different kind of mobilisation to participate in politics or to a different set of opportunities for participation.

In this book, we trace age differences in political behaviour back to four different types of age-related effects: political generation, socio-economic cohort, life cycle and individual ageing (see Chapter 2 for a full discussion). This conceptualisation extends the conventional discussion of age-related effects in order to get a better understanding of underlying causal mechanisms. Traditionally, differences between age groups are explained by the classification of age, period and cohort effects and their interactions. A period effect is the impact of the

context in which a survey was conducted that affects all respondents (and which – on its own – is thus not helpful for explaining differences between age groups at a certain point in time, but its impact on a particular age group creates a cohort effect). A cohort effect is shared by a group of people born during a certain period and comes up in surveys at different points in time (either in panel surveys or in repeated cross-sectional surveys). An age effect is shared by people in the same age group. It can also be measured at different points in time. My definitions of the 'political generation' and 'socio-economic cohort' effects fall into the category of 'cohort effects'. My 'life cycle' and 'individual ageing' effects must be placed in the category of 'age effects'.

A 'political generation' effect stems from the shared experience of a group that was born during a certain period. Cohort membership is important because the early period of our adulthood is so decisive in terms of political socialisation. We are much more open to political influences between about 15 and 30 (the 'impressionable years') than between 50 and 65. This early political socialisation leaves an imprint in citizens' heads as it shapes their early political preferences. Since socialisation influences stem from political circumstances at the time of young adulthood – such as differences between parties in attracting first-time voters – political preferences differ between cohorts. This cohort effect is based on the shared historical, *political* experience of a cohort, not the *socio-economic* experience that is captured by the socio-economic cohort effect to be explained next. Political experiences in young adulthood can influence political preferences. It can also determine attitudes towards political participation as such, most importantly the scope of political participation considered to be open for engagement. Individuals who grew up in times of limited political participation perceive less scope for political participation in later life.

The 'socio-economic cohort' effect derives from the varying probabilities between cohorts of acquiring certain socio-economic characteristics. Changes in the class structure and educational composition of the population affect generations differently and so must be taken into account. Education is the most important case of a socio-economic cohort effect. The probability of a younger person today having finished secondary school is much higher than that of an older person because they grew up in different times – the latter before the mass expansion of secondary and higher education. A higher degree of formal education stimulates higher levels of political participation. According to this perspective, educated individuals also tend to have a better understanding of the political process and live in social contexts in which political

participation is valued more strongly. These generational changes are correlates of long-term social changes such as economic development. This unidirectional development separates this effect from the political generation effect, whose influence can differ even between two decades. Political generation effects capture the effects of political history in youth rather than those of macrosocial changes.

'Life-cycle' effects on political behaviour derive from changes in our social situation over the life course. Each life-cycle stage – such as youth, adolescence, middle and old age – puts the individual into social contexts with rather different demands. For example, young adults often struggle to succeed in their professional lives and are occupied with starting a family and securing their family's income. Older people can suffer from deteriorating health, tend to have settled down in a certain area and do not usually need to support children anymore. These different social stages are contexts that create differences in political interests as much as in available resources for participating in politics. Health, for instance, deteriorates with age due to the combined effects of the accumulation of unhealthy lifestyles (a social phenomenon) and the physical effects of ageing. Physical ability can be important for various forms of political participation. This age effect is rooted in the social experience associated with (and often constructed around) a certain age. It is thus dependent on social and cultural circumstances.

As a final age effect on political behaviour, 'individual ageing' entails two universal human mechanisms that affect the likelihood of political participation: accumulation of experience and growing adherence to social norms. First, past participation experiences influence the future probability of participation. If we learn that something brings some kind of gratification to us that outweighs our costs, we will do it again. If something does not give us enough gratification, we will not do it again. Over a lifetime, the repertoire of situations that we know (and also believe we know) grows steadily. The older we are, the more likely we are to 'know the show'. Drawing on our own experience is one type of cognitive short cut. An older person can fall back, for instance, on many more elections than a younger one and can use that experience to cast his or her vote again. Issues, candidates and the procedure of voting are more familiar to the former than to the latter, entailing lower costs in performing that political action. Second, increasing adherence to social norms as we age is the result of a complex transmission process between social norms and our individual behaviour. At the level of the individual, we are motivated to behave in a certain way by our own subjective norm. The subjective norm is our perception of the social

norm in our personal environment. This subjective norm is the sum of social pressure and gratification that we expect to receive from people we know. Thus, it plays an integral part in any cost–benefit calculation of political action. The social gratification that we receive increases the benefit of our action. As we age, the perception of the social norm changes because we are more and more likely to have followed societal rules in the past and to identify with the society that produces the social norm. The older person has held many social roles in his or her life – such as parent, employee, grandparent, retiree – and has been subjected to many social expectations. The social norms of that society have increasingly become part of the older person's personal, subjective norm because of the growing expectations to behave according to social norms. For example, as voting represents a social norm in liberal democracies, the older person feels more obliged to comply with that norm than the younger person. This age-related effect is psychological in nature and exists independently of social contexts, whereas the content of social norms is, of course, contingent on it.

1.4 The country-level implications of age-related effects

The four age-related effects not only help us to systematise the differences between younger and older individuals in a given context, but also inherently include expectations of differences in the context, that is, how we can endogenise differences between countries into the model. Furthermore, the nature of age-related effects has varying implications for the impact of demographic ageing on the participatory process.

Expectations concerning differences between countries

Political generation effects are due to varying period effects when a cohort is impressionable in early adulthood. These effects are strongly shaped by a cohort's political history. There are a few historical events and processes that can potentially determine generational experiences at a young age across national borders, and which have an effect on the decision to participate and create similar lasting influences at a later age. Examples might be experience of the World Wars or the fall of totalitarian regimes. For instance, the experience of a totalitarian system with its lack of participatory opportunities in young adulthood may influence attitudes towards participation in later life. To that extent, the participatory predisposition of a Polish older person should be similar to that of a Slovenian older person. By and large, however, political generation effects should vary between countries and should be due to national

circumstances. This is especially true with regard to electoral preferences, as the experience of parties is national in character.

If cohorts differ in the probability of attaining a certain socio-economic characteristic, this difference is largely due to broad societal processes that tend to go only in one direction (in the periods under study). For example, many sociologists, such as Bryan Wilson (1966), claim that socio-economic development and declining religiosity are correlates of modernisation. Older cohorts are more likely to have lower degrees of formal education and be more religious. Differences between cohorts vary across countries, but are likely to be qualitatively similar because European societies follow comparable socio-economic trajectories. For example, the difference in religiosity between older and younger age groups is greater in Spain than in Germany. This is because in Spain the older generations are strongly religious and younger generations less so, whereas in Germany there is only a modest generational difference because older generations are already less religious than their fellow generational members in Spain.

Life-cycle effects depend on the cultural perception of the life course. This perception is very similar across Europe. Thus, social demands and expectations, resources and identities vary similarly across the life cycle. So if life-cycle factors play a role in political participation, they should do so in a similar way across Europe. This is not to say that there are no differences between European countries as to the social position of older people. Indeed, one of our findings is that there are differences in terms of public opinion towards older people that determine the activity levels of older people relative to those of younger people.

Individual ageing is the sum of accumulating life experience as well as the habituation of certain patterns of political behaviour. These are genuinely human processes that should be the same in all countries, regardless of cultural context.

Implications for the long-term impact of demographic ageing on the participatory process

Discussions regarding the political impact of demographic ageing are always about the future. The elderly of the coming decades are already being born. Research on their political preferences today can be carried out today. But what will the participatory process look like in, for example, two decades? We can make projections concerning how many older people there will be and calculate their numerical power vis-à-vis younger age groups with reasonable precision. But to what extent will there be differences in political participation? The empirical research

carried out on data that do not go further than 2005 can provide some limited answers.

The argument for these projections draws on the assumption that the four age-related effects differ in their implications for ageing societies. We can make a distinction, on the one hand, between political generation and socio-economic cohort effects, whose impact depends on specific cohorts, and, on the other hand, life cycle and individual ageing effects, whose impact is relatively stable across time. Generational effects, be they political generation or socio-economic cohort effects, are specific to generations that constitute certain age groups at a given point of time. Therefore, differences between age groups are unstable across time. For example, the baby boomers in Germany belong to the Brandt Generation that is more pro-SPD (Social-Democratic Party of Germany) and pro-Green than the preceding generations. The impact of these generational preferences is visible in the political process as long as members of the Brandt Generation vote, but will be gone once its members die. In contrast, those findings that are mainly rooted in life cycle or individual ageing effects will be long-term characteristics of ageing democracies. Life cycle and individual ageing effects make the differences between age groups independent of generations and thus stable across time. For example, as I will demonstrate, retirement has a positive impact on political protest because retirees have the time to engage in protest and are no longer concerned about any repercussions their protests might have on employment. This effect is independent in its nature from specific generations. The effect on political behaviour today, all other things being equal, should be similar to the effect of retirement on political behaviour in ten years' time.

The process of demographic ageing, witnessed all over Europe, is a significant social change. If differences between age groups are stable across time, as are life cycle and individual ageing effects, ageing democracies will have enduringly changed. If the differences between age groups are unstable across time, ageing democracies will experience changes only insofar as a generation, when it is old, will have a strong influence due to its demographic weight. The importance of that generation will not linger. This is because a new generation will soon be old and assume the demographic power.

For the near future, the voting process appears to be tilted in favour of older voters. Life cycle and individual ageing dominate as causes that make older people more likely to vote. This argument is further strengthened by the fact that life cycle and individual ageing are sociological and psychological factors that stand outside the political process. They are

embedded in the way we live our lives and in the way we think, and are not easily amenable to the influence of policymakers. Other important life-cycle factors can be found at the macrolevel: in societies that favour older people more (more positive public opinion of old age and relatively many older people dependent on few working people), older people are less likely to be active, compared to younger people, across various modes of political participation. Thus, ageing societies of that kind are less likely to see a disproportional participatory impact of older people.

Other differences are due to cohort effects, such as education, which has a depressing effect on older people's participation in many areas. The varying levels of education shape the differences between older and younger people today, but are likely to vanish in the future. Another example concerns non-institutionalised participation. There is evidence of cohorts of older people catching up with younger people. This difference is cohort-specific and therefore dynamic across time.

1.5 Organisation of the book

The book is divided into four parts: theoretical framework, institutionalised participation, non-institutionalised participation and conclusions. In order to keep the book accessible and the number of figures and tables manageable, many regression results are shown and discussed only with the help of a graphical presentation. All regressions, additional tests and other materials can be found in the web appendix that is available from http://www.achimgoerres.de or directly from the author. The book itself also contains a small appendix with the coding details of the variables.

In Chapter 2, I put forward a theoretical model of resources and incentives as conditions of political participation that can be empirically tested. The framework explicitly incorporates the contextual implications and expectations of the individual-level differences.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 constitute the first empirical part about institutionalised forms of mass participation. As Chapter 3 shows,[4] older people in Europe are more likely to vote because of a combination of psychological and sociological factors experienced through individual ageing. As we age, we habituate voting and become more deeply entangled in the social fabric of a liberal democracy. Thus, we are increasingly exposed to the social norm of voting and feel a growing gratification from it. Furthermore, social factors such as the duration of residence or not living with a mobilising partner are the most important determinants of the difference between younger and older citizens. Political

factors (such as politicisation) or generational factors (such as educational differences) do not play a major role. The country context also shapes the difference between younger and older voters. In countries with low turnouts, low dependency ratios – in essence a low number of pensioners relative to the working population – and a less positive public opinion of old age and a shorter democratic tradition, older people are – relative to younger people – more likely to vote. Our findings suggest that in societies favouring older people (high dependency ratio and more positive public opinion towards old age), the levels of younger and older people's voting participation are more balanced, making the gap between the age groups smaller. So, in contexts in which public resources are more likely to be targeted at older people, their overall impact on the voting process is smaller.

In Chapter 4,[5] the focus lies on the content of the voting decision by looking at longitudinal data for party choice in Britain and West Germany. The findings suggest that older people choose differently from younger people when they vote. This difference depends on a complex interplay of the characteristics of the party system and a combination of generational and life-cycle factors. In more aligned systems in which voting volatility is low, older people vote differently because of their generational membership: on average, their party choice mirrors the party fortunes of their young adulthood. Furthermore, in more proportional electoral systems, older people tend to vote more for established, large or governmental parties. Finally, there is no evidence for any form of growing conservatism.

Chapter 5 analyses age differences in terms of political membership (parties, trade unions, single-issue organisations). For each type of membership, there is one outstanding life-cycle effect at work at the individual level: the duration of residence (parties, positive impact from the perspective of older people), employment (trade unions, negative impact for older people) and living with children (single-issue organisations, positive impact for older people). The country contexts shape the variance between individuals of different ages, too, especially the country-specific popularity of the organisation and dependency ratio. Finally, there is some moderate evidence for parties and single-issue organisations, which support the cohort notion that the decline in political parties indicates an ageing membership and the rise in single-issue organisations entails a rejuvenating membership. The lack of findings for trade unions and the weak evidence for parties and single-issue organisations suggest that these organisations might be reacting to the changes and therefore avoiding membership losses in certain age groups.

Chapters 6 and 7 make up the third part of the book, concerning non-institutionalised political participation. The quantitative findings in Chapter 6 are as follows: older generations are less likely to use non-institutionalised forms of participation, but are steadily catching up with younger generations of similar social backgrounds; older people have a different level of endowment with predictors of participation, of which three are socio-economic cohort phenomena (education, post-materialism, religiosity) and three are based on the life cycle (duration of residence, the number of children in the household and health). Also, compared to younger people of the same country (*ceteris paribus*), older people are more active in countries with low participation rates, long democratic traditions, low dependency ratios and a less favourable public opinion of older people.

In Chapter 7, interview material is analysed from a case study of English council tax protesters to trace the personal experience behind correlational associations of the quantitative study with a large number of observations in Chapter 6. For example, health does not matter because less healthy individuals can substitute physically more demanding actions (e.g. street demonstrations) with less demanding ones (e.g. letter-writing). Most importantly, the interviews mirror the generational change that is affecting the current cohort of older people and the societal embeddedness of their experience as protesters.

In Chapter 8, I conclude by comparing my findings, discussing the limits of the investigation, suggesting avenues for future research and relating the findings to the broader debate about the implications of population ageing.

With regard to data sources, I use the European Social Survey (version 5, round 1) in Chapters 3, 5 and 6. It is a broad survey that has been coordinated between European countries. The sampling period covered spring 2002. There are 21 European countries in the survey: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Slovenia, Sweden and Switzerland. If necessary from a theoretical point of view (e.g. to control differences in totalitarian socialisation), I split Germany into East and West, in which case the sample consists of 22 countries. The survey is cross-sectional only, that is, we have data only from one point in time, albeit in a multitude of countries. The countries cover a whole range of cultural regions, welfare systems and democratic experiences. All countries are functioning liberal democracies that have had regular elections and changes in government by democratic means.[6] In addition, I draw on

the World Values Survey series (WVS, 1981, 1990, 2000) with different sets of countries (see chapters for details). In Chapter 4, I use national election studies (the British Election Studies, BES 1964–2001; the German Election Studies 1961–98) and monthly surveys (Gallup 1958, 1959 and Politbarometer 1977–2002). All surveys are available at the British and German Central Data Archives in Colchester and Cologne, respectively. Finally, the analysis in Chapter 7 draws on interviews that I conducted with older British protesters in autumn 2005.

2
An Age-Centred Model of Political Participation

Why should older people behave differently in politics than younger people? Why does it matter for politics? This chapter presents a testable model to explain differences in political participation between age groups. It also discusses the implications of patterns of difference at the individual level for the democratic participation process.

First, I present some necessary assumptions about human nature and about how it affects the origins of political preferences and decision making. Second, I present a general, resource-based model of political participation in the tradition of Verba and his colleagues (1995). Third, I discuss in detail the four main age-related effects that are expected to have an impact on political participation: political generation, socio-economic cohort, life cycle and individual ageing. Section 4 summarises the model's general propositions and their implications for ageing societies.

2.1 Assumptions about human nature

This book is concerned mainly with the social context of individuals and the way in which it impacts on preferences, resources, motivation and actions. But in order to be able to deal with the social context, we need to start with three assumptions about individuals that cannot be tested in the analysis: (i) individuals in post-industrial democracies have relative freedom to decide because their basic needs are satisfied; (ii) individuals are motivated by personal material and expressive benefits; (iii) individuals make a cost–benefit calculation when deciding to perform a political action and when actually performing one; they are constrained therein by limited rationality. In other words, the individual assessment of a situation depends on cognitive short cuts to simplify complex reality.

This book has limited scope because it concentrates on individuals in a post-industrial (high level of socio-economic development) and liberal-democratic context. First, living in a post-industrial liberal democracy – generally speaking – enables us to take many decisions relatively freely compared to individuals in other regions of the world, or compared to individuals in other historical periods. The room for individual political manoeuvring in such a context is relatively large. This is due not only to the fact that political liberties are available, but also that more basic human needs,[1] such as hunger and safety, are by and large satisfied in post-industrial societies, meaning that political actions can pursue needs other than survival. Thus, individuals can – on average – be assumed to have a reasonable chance of free decision making not limited by the exigencies of everyday survival.

Within the context of relative personal freedom in political decision making, I assume, second, that citizens try to maximise their personal outcome according to their personal preferences. The interests or motivations that are easiest to measure are material, such as financial resources, that are unequivocally grounded in egoistic selfishness. However, individual political participation is one area of political science in which the 'hard' economic approach does not suffice. Pure material interests can, for example, explain neither the motivation to vote nor the motivation to protest (see Opp 1996; Dowding 2005; Blais 2000; Sanders et al. 2004; Green and Shapiro 1994: Chapter 4). Thus, I settle for a wider definition: individuals can be motivated by personal material interest as well as expressive benefits to take part in political action. Expressive benefits include all those benefits that the individual gains from the process of participation. This includes the pleasure of participation, the feeling of doing the right thing or the personal satisfaction attained by doing something in line with felt grievances, regardless of the outcome (Chong 1991: 74–80). Expressive benefits are particularly important with regard to social norms that give individuals gratification from complying with a social standard in their social situation. Compliance with a social norm gives immediate expressive benefit, merely by taking part in a socially desirable action.[2]

The third assumption is that individuals make cost–benefit calculations in order to maximise their outcome according to their preferences. The individual perceives a certain scope for possible actions and chooses among them. In this way 'limited rationality' (March 1986) restricts human beings. Individuals tend to simplify decision-making problems because of the difficulties of anticipating or considering all

alternatives and information. We do so via various cognitive short cuts. We start by looking for something familiar. Thus, we look into our own past for experiences. If we consider the new situation to be like one that we have already experienced and in which we have taken a decision that we still perceive to have been successful, we will take the same decision again. Cognitive psychologists successfully employ the concept of heuristics to explain how individuals take decisions in complex environments. One of the most important is the availability heuristic (Tversky and Kahnemann 1974). It postulates that a judgement on, for example, unknown proportions or frequencies is guided by the ease with which individuals can recall similar instances from their personal experience. Thus, experience plays an important role in dealing with uncertainty. The more easily the individual can retrieve instances from personal experience, the more easily a decision can be taken under uncertainty. It is a robust empirical finding that prior knowledge facilitates the encoding of the new information of the present situation, and thus makes a decision easier (Fischer and Johnson 1986: 63). If the search in our own experience of a political context does not give us any cues, we simplify the situation by further cognitive short cuts: we get recommendations from sources we trust, or try to apply partisan and ideological schemata, that is, reference systems that help us to process the new piece of information on the basis of organised prior knowledge (Lau 2003).

In sum, I assume that individuals in an advanced post-industrial democracy can act politically with a certain degree of freedom because their basic needs are satisfied. When doing so, individuals maximise their personal outcomes according to their preferences. The benefits of political action that can be accumulated for personal outcomes can be both material and expressive. When taking the decision to act in the political sphere, individuals carry out a cost–benefit analysis under the restriction of limited rationality, meaning that they look for cognitive short cuts, such as their own past experience, to deal with complex social reality.

2.2 A modified resource-based perspective on political participation

This section lays out the model and its theoretical underpinning before Section 2.3 explains the theoretical foundation of the various age effects. I shall first briefly sketch the model to provide the reader with an immediate intuition.

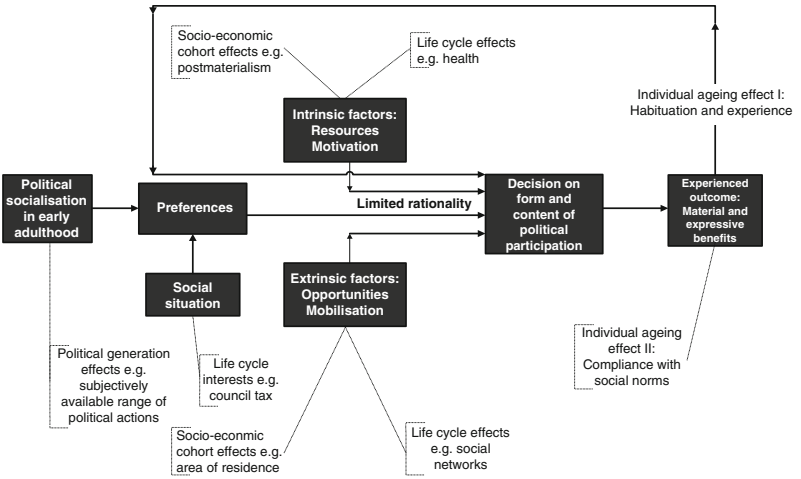

Figure 2.1 Age-centred model of political participation

The model in brief

The annotations with intermittent lines in Figure 2.1 demonstrate where the four different age-related effects come into the model that I introduced in Chapter 1 and that I will describe in detail in Section 2.3. Individuals have political preferences at any given point in time. These preferences are a result of their early political socialisation and the social situation they find themselves in. When considering an act of political participation, individuals maximise their personal outcome, which can comprise material and expressive benefits. During this maximisation process, they are restricted by their limited rationality, which prevents them from comparing all possible outcomes. The experienced outcome of a decision to participate feeds back into the next decision-making process, in which it can serve as a heuristic short cut for the individual. The decision on the form and content of political participation is contingent on a set of intrinsic factors (resources and motivation) and extrinsic factors (opportunities and mobilisation).

Political generation: Older people belong to a different political generation from that of younger people. This has an effect on their preferences for the range of participatory activities that they perceive to be subjectively available. Although older people are free to protest in the street, they are less inclined to do so as it was not common during their impressionable years. As political generations share a certain pool of political experiences,

they are likely to share some political preferences. These political preferences could make their participation content different from that of younger people. For example, in West Germany the generation that was young during the Social Democratic era of Willi Brandt (1969–74) and Helmut Schmidt (1974–82) should be distinctly more pro-SPD than its preceding generation. This is because the party managed to catch the young electors of the time after decades of CDU/CSU dominance.

Socio-economic cohort: A cohort shares an average probability of acquiring a certain social characteristic that is higher or lower for other generations. For instance, more recent cohorts have a higher likelihood of being postmaterialist as they grew up during times of economic prosperity. This has an effect on their motivation to participate as self-fulfilment ranks higher in their personal value system. Also, the content of participation is affected. For example, caring for the environment is more widespread among postmaterialists. Extrinsic factors also vary between cohorts. For instance, in some countries older cohorts are more likely to live in the countryside, a correlate that decreases the likelihood of being exposed to opportunities to take part in street demonstrations.

Life cycle: Older people are at a different stage of their social life cycle, which influences their resources/motivation and their mobilisation/opportunities. For example, decreasing physical fitness lowers the available resources of individuals for participating in politics. A decline in social networks due to dying friends and the failure to replace them with new acquaintances (Wagner et al. 1999) leads to individuals experiencing less mobilisation from friends in various networks. The life cycle also shapes our preferences due to specific interests associated with a certain life-cycle stage. An example of an issue of relevance to pensioners would be the council tax in Britain. It is a local property tax that weighs heavily on those pensioners with a small fixed income living in expensive properties.

Individual ageing: This complex learning process affects future decisions to participate as more experience means less costs when doing something. It also influences the decision as to which mode of participation to adopt, as the experience can teach us to do or not to do something again (effect I). In addition, it also makes older people more likely to adhere to social norms. This is because the expressive benefit they gain is higher due to the fact that they are more strongly connected to that society through networks, social roles and experience (effect II).

Existing theories of political participation

In contrast to empirical tests of general models of political participation, I want to assess the relative differences between two groups – older people versus younger people – with regard to political participation. As I have shown in Chapter 1, this has not previously been attempted in a comprehensive manner, so that a relative assessment of rival models is not a straightforward exercise. Rather, this book puts the most successful model of participation to the test from an age-centred perspective.

There are only a limited number of general models of political participation. Most scholars reduce their interest to one political mode, most frequently voting participation (e.g. Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980; Franklin 2004, 1996; Franklin et al. 1996) or protest activities (e.g. Opp 1989, 2004, 1996; Opp and Finkel 2001; Opp 1992; Sanders et al. 2004; Eisinger 1973; Marsh 1977; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001). Historically, there are two schools of general models of political participation. The first school is based on the traditions of rational choice and collective action. Its scholars are preoccupied with the collective action problem that political participants face. This problem was outlined by Mancur Olson (1971 (1965)) who argued that there is a major incentive for individuals to freeride on the efforts of others to secure public goods. These researchers tried to model the various types of incentives directly, rather than the social location or other personal characteristics of the participants (Lüdemann 2001; Finkel and Muller 1998; Finkel et al. 1989; see also Whiteley 1995).[3]

The second school, the resource-based approach, is founded in studies by Verba and colleagues. Each new model is built upon earlier models in that tradition, incorporating most of their variables and adding new ones. The basic socio-economic status model (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1978) started from the postulate that someone's social position was a major determinant of their political attitudes and resources, and ultimately of their political behaviour. The Political Action Study (Barnes et al. 1979), which was the first explicit comparative model to include unconventional participation, added values, satisfaction and trust to the social location. The next step was to pay attention to group membership and its effect on resources and mobilisation. Also, scholars introduced explicit measures of the current context – current opportunity structures – and the mobilising efforts of elites (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Parry et al. 1992; Conway 1991). The importance of social networks, groups and trust is also stressed by social capital scholars (Putnam 2000; La Due Lake and Huckfeldt 1999; Teorell 2003), who hold that a high level of trust and involvement in social networks raises

the levels of political participation. In contrast to the other resource-based models, however, the social capital approach has its primary focus on the broader society rather than on the individual.

All these models in the second tradition share the assumption that political behaviour is defined not only by narrow instrumental and material interests, but also by other kinds of non-selfish benefits. Generally speaking, the latest findings on political participation suggest that an integrated approach combining the two traditions can be a fruitful way forward (Whiteley and Seyd 2002; Whiteley 1995; Sanders et al. 2004; Pattie et al. 2004). This is also the general perspective of this book. Even though we do not test decision-making mechanisms at the individual level, their testable implications are visible and hint at the utility of a 'soft' rational choice approach to political participation.

The model in the tradition of Civic Voluntarism

The Civic Voluntarism Model starts with the simple question of why citizens do *not* participate in politics. Verba et al. give three different answers: (i) they cannot because they lack the necessary resources; (ii) they do not want to because they lack the psychological engagement in politics; and (iii) nobody asks them, meaning that people are not in the networks that recruit people to participate in politics (Brady et al. 1995: 271). Resources are reduced to only time, skills and money, which the authors perceive to be most accessible to measurement.

My theoretical model contains three modifications of the Civic Voluntarism Model. In this book, Verba et al.'s model would not suffice to explain the differences between age groups with regard to political participation. It is in the low-intensity forms of participation – that is, those characterised by low levels of necessary resources – that there are perceptible and systematic differences between age groups. Verba and colleagues started from the assumption that the broad universe of political action can be structured according to the necessary levels of resources. For example, party activism is much more demanding in terms of time and civic skills than voting is. However, the political activities that will be the main focus of this book (voting, membership and non-institutionalised participation) are low-intensity forms of participation. They do not differ much in the amount of necessary resources. Thus, it seems advisable – as a first modification – not to omit motivations from the model.

A second modification of the Civic Voluntarism Model is to give up the differentiation between motivation and resources because it cannot be measured well. Take, for example, political interest. Political interest

is – as intuition suggests – a strong predictor of political behaviour.[4] Is political interest a resource or a motivation? It is certainly a motivation because the greater one's political interest, the more one appreciates the importance of political participation for a sustainable democratic political system. But also, the greater somebody's political interest, the greater that person's (subjective) understanding of political dynamics. Therefore, individuals find it easier to vote or engage in non-institutionalised forms of participation to the extent that they can judge the consequences. This makes political interest also part of someone's resources.

As a third modification, I suggest maintaining the category of mobilisation, to which I add opportunities. The fact that 'nobody asked' a person to participate can be quite an important explanation for a lack of participation. Politics (and even more so participatory politics) has a low priority in most people's lives. This is more important for non-institutionalised forms of participation because – in contrast to voting – the particular context can provide or not provide opportunities for protesting, signing a petition and making a badge to wear. In sum, it is meaningful to differentiate between factors of participation that are resources and motivations on the one hand (intrinsic to the individual), and opportunities and mobilisation on the other (extrinsic to the individual).

2.3 Age-related effects on political behaviour and their implications for ageing societies

We can see how the model relates to the existing theories of individual political participation. We shall now demonstrate how the various age-related effects fit into this picture. Why should an older person behave differently in politics from a younger person? In order to find an answer, it is helpful to see age differences in political behaviour as the sum of four different types of effects, already outlined in the Introduction.

Political generation effects

A 'political generation' effect stems from the shared experience of a group that was born during a certain period (Mannheim 1997 (1928)). Cohort membership is important because the early period of our adulthood is so decisive in terms of political socialisation. We are much more open to political influences between 15 and 30 (the 'impressionable years') than between 50 and 65 (see Dawson and Prewitt 1968; Hyman 1959; Sears and Levy 2003). This early political socialisation leaves an imprint on citizens as it shapes our early political preferences. Since socialisation influences stem from political circumstances at the time of

young adulthood, such as differences between parties in catching first-time voters, political preferences differ between cohorts.

For example, with regard to street demonstrations, a West German growing up in the 1930s would not have seen many of them during his or her early socialisation period. In contrast, a West German growing up in the 1980s and 1990s would have heard about many street demonstrations in the media or maybe participated in some, such as the anti-nuclear, peace and other demonstrations in the late 1980s. These differences in early experience are engrained in early preferences for political participation and likely to shape later behaviour.

Although political attitudes acquired in early political life are not monolithic, they are very stable over a lifespan (Alwin, Cohen, and Newcomb 1991). These preferences can affect the content of political participation as much as the participatory mode. For example, citizens who experience a strong occurrence of protests at a young age, like the 1968 generation in countries such as West Germany, should be more participatory than other generations in later life. In Britain, citizens that came of age politically during the Thatcher and Blair eras tend to be disenchanted with formal conventional politics and to some extent will carry this disenchantment throughout their lives (Russell et al. 1992; Clarke et al. 2004; Henn et al. 2002; see also for a discussion of the American G. I. Bill generation Mettler 2005; Mettler and Welch 2005).

Socio-economic cohort effects

The 'socio-economic cohort' effect stems from the varying probabilities that cohorts have of acquiring a certain socio-economic characteristic. While I introduce a new label for this age-related effect to separate it clearly from the others, the underlying notion is not new. For instance, in research into long-term partisan dealignment (see for e.g. Mueller 1999; Pappi and Mnich 1992), long-term social changes that affect generations differently are taken into account, such as changes in the class or educational composition of the population. These generational changes tend to go in only one direction when the period under investigation is a few decades. For example, after the Second World War there was – broadly speaking – a decline in religious practice in Western Europe. These effects are correlates of long-term social changes, such as economic development. The unidirectional development separates these effects from political generation effects, whose influence can differ even between two decades. Political generation effects capture the effects of political history in youth rather than social changes at the macrolevel.

Education is the most important example of a socio-economic cohort effect. The probability of a younger person having finished secondary school is much higher than an older person's because they grew up in different times: the elderly might have grown up before the mass expansion of secondary and higher education. Higher formal education stimulates higher levels of political participation. Individuals tend to have a better understanding of the political process and live in social contexts in which participation is valued more strongly (Leighley 1995; Nie et al. 1996).[5]

Life-cycle effects

'Life-cycle' effects on political behaviour derive from changes in our social situation over the life course. Each life-cycle stage, such as youth, adolescence, middle and old age, puts individuals into social contexts that make rather different demands on them as individuals. The life-cycle stages stand for certain societal roles the individual assumes, such as spouse, parent, employee or retiree (Steckenrider and Cutler 1989). The notion of a social life cycle finds wide application in political science (Stoker and Jennings 1995; Plutzer 2002) and other social sciences: in economics with regard to spending and saving patterns (Börsch-Supan and Stahl 1991) and in sociology with regard to well-being, the welfare state, gender experiences and other questions (Moen 1996; O'Rand 1996; Kohli 1985; Mayer and Müller 1989).

Social roles associated with the life cycle are not the same for all individuals. Instead, social experience carries a certain likelihood of being shaped by particular experiences. Therefore, these effects can have only a probabilistic character. For example, young adults struggle to succeed in their professional lives and are occupied with founding a family and securing their family's income. Older people suffer from deteriorating health, have settled down in a certain area and do not need to support children anymore. These different social stages are contexts that create differences in political interests as much as in available resources for political participation. Health, for instance, deteriorates with age due to the combined effects of the accumulation of unhealthy lifestyles (a social phenomenon) and the physical effects of ageing. Physical ability can be important for various forms of political participation. Political interests that vary across the life cycle could, for instance, lie in preferences for certain policy programmes. Parents with young children might have a stronger interest in schools and nurseries than parents with older children.

Life cycle and cohort effects can also be confounded. In the empirical analyses, therefore, I carefully balance the evidence for the roots of an effect as life cycle or cohort. For example, income is on average lower for all the elderly of different generations compared to younger age groups. This is due to the fact that pensions are always below average earnings – a clear life-cycle aspect. But at the same time, the income of the elderly goes up relative to earlier elderly cohorts because recent retirees have accumulated more wealth and higher pension entitlements during their lives. This allows them to benefit from a higher income in old age – a cohort aspect.

In the group of life-cycle effects, it is important to consider that the stage of the life cycle can influence the individual's social identity. Psychological studies of middle-aged to very old participants have shown that there are systematic differences in what defines the self across the life course. For example, very old people – that is, 85 years and older – tend to describe themselves more homogenously in terms of their external physical constraints. The young–old – that is, 70–85 year olds with better health status – presented a more multifaced description of themselves (Dittmann-Kohli 2005: 287). Those individuals who describe themselves as old do so in combination with a sense of loss in comparison to their reference groups, due to widowhood or ill health. Generally speaking, a person's age identity is strongly linked to the social roles he or she fulfils at a given moment (Logan et al. 1992).

Out of that *social* age identity, it is imaginable that a *political* age identity could develop. Senior age could be the foundation of a political group consciousness (Miller et al. 1981). A political age identity would be a special form of life-cycle effect because of its self-conscious nature. A senior person can perceive himself or herself as belonging to the group of the elderly and see shared senior interests as a common goal and motivating factor (e.g. senior education, pensions, social care). Senior interest groups are likely to play a role in stimulating this kind of political identity and consecutive political action. For example, older people who identify with the Gray Panthers in the USA, an intergenerational action network, are more likely to take group-related political action than those who do not (Simon et al. quoted in Huddy 2003: 526). A political identity based on old age or some sub-group of it would thus become a type of cognitive short cut for assessing politics. The cost–benefit calculation of whether and how to participate in politics would take into account the interest of other group members.

The present in particular might be a time in which the elderly are more likely to identify with their fellow seniors. Old age might be more

important to political identities in times of pension reforms, for example, for this is when the group of the elderly as recipients of pensions has its greatest salience. During times of economic difficulty, attacks on economic benefits are likely to strengthen the group consciousness, which could be shown with regard to Social Security, the state pension after 65 and Medicare, free public health provisions after 65, in the USA (Day 1990: 39). Retirees could identify themselves as the target population of a policy programme that is under threat of being rescaled (Campbell 2003b). In contrast, there are also reasons to expect that senior age identity is not strong enough to develop into a political identity. Old age identity is inherently transitional in juxtaposition to, for instance, ethnic identities, which are by and large stable. After all, the most senior members of the old age category are naturally most likely to die soon. Furthermore, the group identification of old age is prone to cross-pressures from other identities, such as class, religion, ethnicity or gender. Since these other identities are much 'older' in terms of an individual life course, old age identity has to fight its way through the long-held identities (see Goerres 2007a).

In sum, we can expect the position in the life cycle to play a role in the resources and motivation of individuals to act in politics. The position in the life cycle can lead the individual to have certain political interests linked to it, and can even create a political identity based on age that can be another motivating factor for political participation.

Individual ageing effect

As a final age-related effect of political behaviour, 'individual ageing' entails two universal human mechanisms that can affect the likelihood of political participation: accumulation of past experience and growing adherence to social norms. First, past participation experiences influence the future probability of participation. It is widely acknowledged that the repetition of the same behaviour leads to an increasing probability of performing that behaviour again (see for a review Ajzen 2002). If we learn that something brings some kind of gratification to us that outweighs our costs, we will do it again. If something does not give us enough gratification, we will not do it again. Over a lifetime, our repertoire of situations that we know (and also believe we know) grows steadily. The older we are, the more likely we are to 'know the show'. Drawing on our own experience is one type of cognitive short cut for dealing with the constraints of limited rationality (see Lau 2003). This kind of reasoning has been applied to voting participation through the notion of habituation (Franklin 2004; Gerber et al. 2003; Plutzer 2002).

Second, growing adherence to social norms as we age is the result of a complex transmission process between social norms and our individual behaviour. A social norm, which is a social manual on what to do in a given social context, affects us differently depending on our social context. At the level of the individual, we are motivated to behave in a certain way by our own subjective norm. The subjective norm is our perception of the social norm in our personal environment. This subjective norm is the sum of social pressure and gratification that we expect to receive from people we know (Ajzen 1991; Ajzen and Fishbein 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). Thus, it plays an integral part in any individual's cost–benefit calculation regarding political action. The social gratification that a person receives for doing something increases the benefit of action. An example may be tax compliance where a positive association with age can be shown: that is, the older an individual is, the more likely he or she is to pay taxes regularly (Tittle 1980; Wenzel 2002; Mason and Calvin 1978). Tax compliance is often seen as an example of individual behaviour being driven by social norms rather than self-interest because the risk of being detected is minimal and the personal gain from cheating is immense.

Since voting is a widespread social norm in a liberal democracy, many people are likely to subscribe to the view that we ought to vote. As we age, the more we become part of a society through widening social networks, interactions and social role-taking, and the higher the number of people in our environment whom we believe hold that view. As we get older, we can count more people who we think might want us to vote.

In summary, I differentiate between four different types of age-related effects that influence political behaviour and that I will subject to empirical testing. The political generation effect makes older people different from younger people as their political preferences were shaped in a historical context different from what younger people experienced. The socio-economic cohort effect credits the fact that cohorts attain social characteristics that are important for political participation with varying probabilities. These probabilities differ due to macro social changes, such as the expansion of mass education. The life-cycle effect stems from differences in interests, identities, motivations and resources over the social life cycle. The individual ageing effect is grounded on two psychological processes: the older the individuals, the more they habituate social behaviour and the more they are likely to adhere to social norms.

Expectations of between-country variations

So far, we have looked at differences between seniors and younger age groups only at the individual level, without taking the macrocontext

into account. However, since we are using international surveys that encompass up to 22 European societies, we can also ask whether this difference between older and younger people depends on the macro-context of a society. For example, the model posits that early political socialisation is important for shaping policy preferences and preferences for political actions. A given generation of individuals in one country accumulates political experiences in early adulthood different from those of a later generation. At the same time, a given generation in one country is subjected to other impressions than the same generation in another country. For instance, those West Germans born between 1930 and 1940 experienced a young liberal democracy between the ages of 15 and 30 (1945–70) in which political liberties were available and the democratic process was fully functioning. They differ sharply in their experience as adolescents and young adults from earlier German cohorts that grew up under a totalitarian system without political freedom. In Czechoslovakia, in contrast, the generation born between 1930 and 1940 grew up under a new totalitarian system under Socialism. Their preceding generations had experienced liberal democracy for a limited number of years between 1919 and 1938.

In a simultaneous analysis of all countries, the variation of generational differences between countries can be modelled in the statistical analysis by including conceptual macrolevel variables and their interactions with age. For example, the longer established a democracy is, the more a socialisation effect should become visible for older cohorts. In more established democracies, a participatory culture should be more embedded in society and older people should thus have internalised that culture more, which would be an expectation following the logic of *Civic Culture* (Almond and Verba 1989 (1963); see also Norris 2002; Martín and Van Deth 2007). Living one additional year in a democracy that has been established for a longer time socialises an individual more strongly into participation ideals than living one additional year in a relatively new democracy.

Another example of how country differences could matter is the social environment for old age, that is, the structures that a society provides for older people. The model puts forward the idea that individuals find themselves in certain social situations that shape their preferences and their resources/motivation and mobilisation/opportunities. There are two aspects of particular concern here: the social image of old age and the structural position of older people as a group in the welfare state. On the one hand, societies construct a certain image of old age (McConatha et al. 2003; Miller and Acuff 1982;

Minichiello et al. 2000; Kruse and Schmitt 2006; Tuckman and Lorge 1953; Wilson 2000; Cuddy and Fiske 2002; Cuddy et al. 2005). This image could be internalised by older people and then be reflected in their social and political behaviours. In order to capture such a social image, I suggest a measure of public opinion concerning older people derived from the World Values Survey (see Chapter 3). It measures the extent to which the public is willing to help older people. Some societies, such as Sweden, show a high proportion of people who are willing to help older people, whereas others, such as Britain, show a low proportion. Could these societal differences impact on the participation levels of older people? We can hypothesise first that higher helpfulness leads to more participation on the part of older people because they feel more valued by society. Therefore, they have higher self-esteem and should be more participatory. In contrast, the greater the helpfulness in a society, the less older people need to become politically active because this helpfulness may be an expression of a society or a welfare state that provides for older people (support in the family and through welfare state services). In such a context, the political participation of older people may be less necessary.

Moreover, the most important institutional structures affected by demographic ageing are the welfare state and its programmes. More specifically, it matters how many older people are pensioners in a society and how many people are of working age. European welfare states have been constructed on the assumption that a small number of dependant older people would be supported by a large number of people of working age. The rising number of pensioners and decreasing labour market participation rates undermine this. This change is captured by the dependency ratio, that is, the number of pensioners relative to working people;[6] the higher the dependency ratio, the higher the structural need for the welfare state to make adaptive changes. Younger people would therefore have a higher incentive to be active in politics in countries in which the dependency ratio is high in order to have their interests heard.

Empirically, all these expectations can again be presented as macrolevel variables, and their interactions with age – namely the residual variance between age groups not yet captured by individual level variables – is made dependent on the levels of these macro variables. Modelling between-country variations also allows us to make explicit statements on the impact of ageing in a given society. We can include societal properties in our predictions about the participatory process in the future. For example, if we find a differential effect of the democratic age of a society (how long it has been a democracy) on age groups, we

can deduce that that society's participation process will be affected differently by societal ageing than that of another society.

2.4 Summary of propositions

We shall now summarise the main expectations of the theoretical considerations in a compact manner as general propositions.

GP1: Generations differ in their early political experiences. Therefore, older people as members of a certain generation differ in their political interests (the policies that they want to be pursued) and their preferences for political participation (channels of political action that they prefer).

Early political socialisation matters: The political public that an individual experiences in young adulthood and early contact with politics leaves a strong mark on individuals as to their policy preferences and their preferences for certain types of political action. These impressions are not monolithic and can be changed in later life, but still these early imprints are very important for shaping an individual's participatory personality. Early political experience depends on the political context, which varies in democracies from decade to decade and sometimes even between two years. As older people belong to a particular generation, their political imprint differs on average from younger people who belong to another generation.

GP2: Large-scale social change endows cohorts with different levels of resources and motivation, as well as opportunities and mobilisation exposure to engage in politics. Because of their cohort membership, older individuals' average endowment with certain predictors of political participation differs from that of younger people.

Older people's different generational membership matters not only with reference to early political experiences, but also because of varying social experience that can shape an individual and subsequently his or her political behaviour. Education, for instance, is an important positive predictor of mass participation; due to educational expansion, more generations have a higher likelihood of having gained higher educational degrees than older generations. As a consequence, members of older generations have on average a lower probability of participating in politics because they are more likely to lack this resource and the motivation to engage in politics. Differences can thereby arise on the resource/motivation side of the equation as much as on the opportunities/mobilisation side.

GP3: Along the life cycle, political preferences, resources and motivation, as well as opportunities and mobilisation exposure vary. Due to their age position, older individuals' average endowment with certain predictors of political participation differs from that of younger people.

Societies and welfare states structure the life cycle of an individual. A given life-cycle position can shape the political preferences of an individual, such as parents' interest in children's nurseries; but it can also determine the amount of resources/motivation and opportunities/mobilisation exposure that an individual has to participate in politics. For example, working people have less free time to engage in politics than retirees. Older people are in a different social position in the life cycle than younger people, and will accordingly differ in their political participation patterns.

GP4: Older people have more political experience and a higher level of satisfaction from compliance with participatory norms.

An individual's political experience shapes the way he or she thinks about and behaves in politics. More experience represents an additional resource to draw upon when deciding for or against a political action. Older individuals have more experience and can therefore go about politics in a different way from younger people. Older people also tend to comply more with social norms. If a certain political action is constructed as a social norm then older people are more likely to perform it than younger people.

If there was evidence only for GP1 and GP2, ageing societies would experience a participatory process that is unstable as to the differences in participatory behaviour between younger and older people. If, in contrast, there was empirical support only for GP3 and GP4, we would see that the participatory process in ageing societies will be permanently changed. In essence, we find all GPs to have explanatory power in enabling us to understand the differences in political participation between age groups. Thus, the impact of demographic ageing on the participatory process is, at the same time, dynamic due to the importance of cohort experiences and also stabilised by the presence of life cycle and ageing effects.

3
Voting Participation

> Those who want to further burden 20 million pensioners with pension cuts must be brave enough to say this before the national election. Then, pensioners will know what to do when they go to cast their vote.
>
> Walter Hirrlinger, president of the German pensioners' organisation VdK, in June 2005 in the run-up to the national election (VdK 2006).

> This election may very well be the first determined by the votes of the over 50s. There are 20 million people in the UK over the age of 50. Also, older people are more likely to vote.
>
> From the 2005 General Election manifesto of Age Concern England, the largest British old age interest group (Age Concern England 2006b).

In 2005, major old age charities in Germany and the United Kingdom ran election campaigns in which they used the high voting participation and the high number of their constituents to put political pressure on candidates and parties. In Britain, for example, they organised public events in which they confronted the old age spokespersons of the major parties with the problems of British older people, such as poverty, and asked them to sign statements acknowledging these problems.

The high voting power of older voters is always brought up in superficial discussions of ageing democracies to show that certain types of reform are not applicable once the majority of voters turning out is 50 and more. This very mechanistic view is generally offered by economists trying to put pressure on policymakers to follow their policy proposals.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), for instance, titled part of its analysis on pension reforms 'the last train for pension reform leaves in … ' and indicated the year in question (IMF 2004: 164; Lynch and Myrskylä forthcoming (2009)). Germany is doomed from 2010 on, Sweden from 2020 and the United Kingdom from 2040 (see also Sinn and Uebelmesser 2002).

Older people are generally believed to be more likely to vote. Recall from Chapter 2 that older people's voting participation depends on their levels of resources/motivation and opportunities/mobilisation. These can be different from younger people because (i) they belong to a different political generation that shares a certain general attitude towards voting participation; (ii) their generation shares a certain probability of having a social characteristic that can either be conducive or obstructive to political participation; (iii) the elderly are at a different stage in their social life cycle; and (iv) the ageing process gives them more time to habituate and learn. Thus, the total impact of intrinsic and extrinsic factors explains the higher voting participation among older people.

In principle, all types of effects have an impact on voting participation. British political generations are shown to differ in their voting participation; education is the most important socio-economic cohort effect, although it loses its importance with rising age; the duration of residence, living with a partner and health are the strongest life-cycle effects; and a strong pattern of habituation and norm compliance exists. In addition, I find interaction effects between age and the average turnout, the dependency ratio, length of democratic epoch and public opinion towards old age. This means that there remain consistent differences between age groups in their voting participation that can be explained by societal features.

In the first section, I review the cohort explanation of turnout decline for Britain as a political generation effect. Section 2 describes the methodological approach for the multivariate regression analysis. In Sections 3 and 4, I use the European Social Survey for a cross-sectional analysis, moving from bivariate to multivariate analyses, and then to macro–micro interactions.

3.1 The cohort explanation of voting participation

Figure 3.1 plots the mean voting probability of two age groups across all British elections between 1964 and 2001 (see also Clarke et al. 2004). The intermittent line reflects the likelihood of all those citizens aged 60

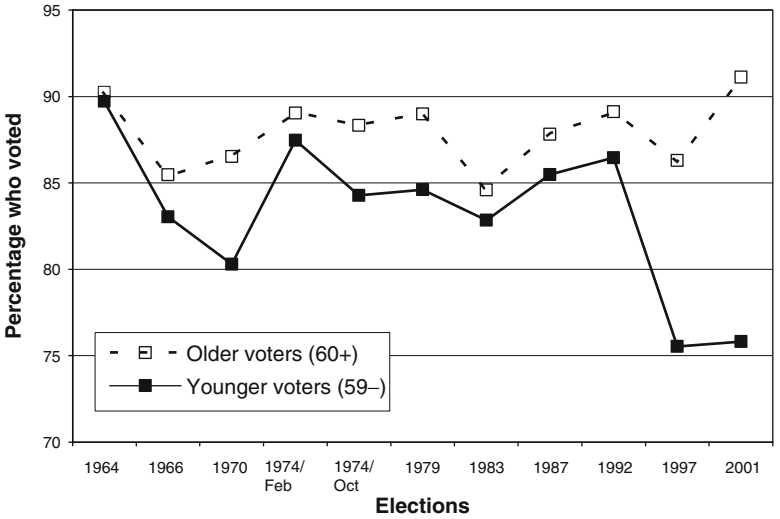

Figure 3.1 Average turnout of two age groups in British General Elections, 1964–2001.
Source: (BES) 1964–2001.

and more going to the polls; the other line stands for all others, aged 59 and younger. In all 11 elections, older people were more likely to vote. However, the difference between the two changed substantially over time. In some years (1964, 1966, Feb 1974, 1983, 1987, 1992) the difference between the two was smaller than 3 per cent. It was larger, at about 4 to 5 per cent, in 1970, October 1974 and 1979. In 1997 and 2001 the difference increased dramatically to 10 and 15 per cent, respectively.

That older people are more likely to vote in all British elections is a fascinating finding. Older people in the 1960s had been born under Queen Victoria (reigned 1837–1901) or King Edward VII (1901–10) and had experienced the era of Liberal–Conservative cooperation and limited franchise when they had been young adults. Those older people were more likely to vote in the 1960s than the younger generations who had grown up with full mass franchise and different political experiences in young adulthood, such as the rise of the Conservatives. The younger generation in the 1960s became the older generation in the 1990s. Again, they differ a lot in terms of their political experiences from younger people. Still, older people in the 1990s were more likely to vote.

Figure 3.2 shows the voting probabilities of four cohorts across time. These cohorts are defined by the historical periods during which they were first entitled to vote (see Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion). The four political generations are the only ones for which we have data for the time at which they first went to the polls. Two aspects of the figures are particularly worth mentioning. The four generations are distinctively different from each other in their average voting participation. The more recent the socialisation of each political generation, the lower its average voting participation. In 1997, for example, the difference between Blair's Children, born in 1975 or more recently, and the 1966–79 Cohort, born between 1946 and 1956, was about 25 per cent. At the same time, the difference in voting probabilities at the first eligible election between the two generations (1970 for the 1966–79 Cohort and 1997 for Blair's Children) was approximately 15 per cent. In other words, political generations differ in their initial voting participation at the first election and remains distinctive from each other in all subsequent elections. In addition, the two 'long' political generations about which we have data for most elections seem to have an increasing

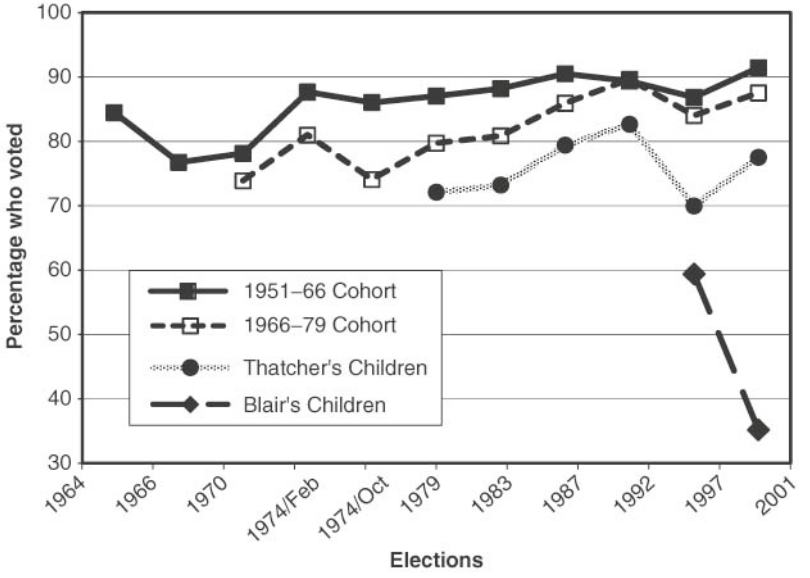

Figure 3.2 Average turnout of four political generations in Britain, 1964–2001.
Source: BES 1964–2001.

likelihood of voting over the years. The 1951–66 Cohort grows from a low of 77 per cent in 1966 to a high of 92 per cent in 2001. The 1966–79 Cohort increases in likelihood from 73 per cent in 1970 to 88 per cent in 2001. This growth is all the more remarkable given that the overall turnout declined from 77.1 per cent in 1964 to 59.4 per cent in 2001 (Yonwin 2004: 17). At the same time, the spread of education among younger cohorts should have facilitated a higher voting participation on the part of younger generations, which makes the finding of cohort decline even more remarkable.[1]

If cohort effects, such as the political generation effect that stipulates a lasting influence of early political socialisation, could alone explain the differences in turnout between older and younger people, we would not be able to see the growth in voting participation of the same cohort across time. This growth cannot be due to period effects as the overall tendency was a *decline* in turnout. If, on the other hand, only life-cycle or ageing hypotheses were true, we would not be able to see the fluctuations in the difference between younger and older voters over time. This is because it is reasonable to assume that life cycle or ageing forces are relatively stable over four decades. In sum, there seems to be a combination of life cycle and generational factors that explains differences between age groups across time (for a more detailed causal analysis see Franklin 2004).

In what follows we shall not concentrate on political generation explanations, for which it would be necessary to look at each country separately. Instead, I use an innovative technique to undertake an analysis that does not allow for an estimation of all generational effects, but instead for an estimation of the relative impact of many life-cycle effects, as well as the causal mechanism behind ageing.

3.2 Methodological excursion: An international cross-sectional approach

Before the analysis, we must discuss the innovative empirical approach pursued in this chapter (and in Chapters 5 and 6). This empirical approach consists of four steps: (i) a list of conceptual variables is put forward that can be measured in the ESS and should be age-related according to the model; (ii) we analyse the ESS, an international cross-sectional survey, and include these age-related variables as predictors of voting participation; after this analysis, we know which variables, that should theoretically be age-related, have a systematic impact on political participation; (iii) we review evidence for the causes of the

most important predictors to see whether they have their age-related roots in cohort or life-cycle dynamics; (iv) we assess the importance of the macrolevel country context for the residual variation between age groups by including interaction effects between macro variables and the age variable.

Analysis of age-related effects in a cross-sectional survey

Quantitative survey analysis of age-related effects on political behaviour is confronted with three different confounded effects: cohort, age and period effects. Cohort effects are shared by those citizens who were born around the same time and thus form a cohort. Age effects affect those who have the same age. Period effects subsume all those effects that stem from the point of time of data collection. Period, age and cohort effects are always perfectly multicollinear in a cross-sectional survey (see for a review Glenn 1976). If you take, for example, German elections in 1998 and 2002 and compare the behaviour of 70-year-olds in each election, one cannot say whether their behaviours stem from the fact that they are 70-year-olds, or a combination of cohort effects of those born in 1928 or 1932 and period effects of 1998 and 2002 affecting only this cohort. One of the three effects can always be exchanged by a linear combination of the two other confounding effects.

A little-used technique is the analysis of international cross-sectional data to study age-related effects (see for e.g. Rubenson et al. 2004; De Graaf 1999; Norris 2003). The first reasoning in this direction was put forward in an article by Nie, Verba and Kim with regard to age and political participation:

> The nature and timing of major political events vary from country to country. If we find uniformity in the relationship between political activities and age across these nations [Austria, Britain, India, Nigeria, United States], it is unlikely that such uniformity was produced by uniform generational experiences. It is far more likely that such uniformity reflects the uniform impact of aging.
>
> (Nie et al. 1974: 322)

Social scientists usually agree that chronological age as such does not have any causal implications for social behaviour. However, chronological age can serve as a proxy for many other things that are hidden in age (i.e. someone's position in the life cycle, ageing experience or cohort experience). Our approach tries to strip chronological age of its

underlying importance as a proxy and then to interpret the coefficient of the residual age variable, namely the age variable that still captures the residual variance between age groups.

In statistical terms, a multivariate regression model is built in which the dependent variable (e.g. a yes/no – dichotomy of political action) represents the object of study and the independent variables stand for various cohort (e.g. religiosity or education), life cycle (e.g. retirement or free time) and individual ageing effects that we can expect from our underlying model.

The idea (see Figure 3.3) is to control for as many age-related effects as possible at the individual level, that is, through individual level independent variables. Guided by hypotheses about potential effects, the researcher is able to include cohort and life-cycle effects with diverse proxies in the comprehensive data set. Thereby the coefficient of the age variable still captures the meaning of individual ageing and political generation effects. Then we need a procedure to disentangle the universal individual ageing effect from national political generation effects.

The 21 countries in the European Social Survey are very different as to their democratic experience. They range from recently democratised post-communist countries to established democracies, such as Britain. If diverse countries are pooled together, political generation effects should no longer distort the residual effect of age because they cancel each other out. This means that we can – with confidence – interpret the coefficient of residual age as the individual ageing effect. Imagine

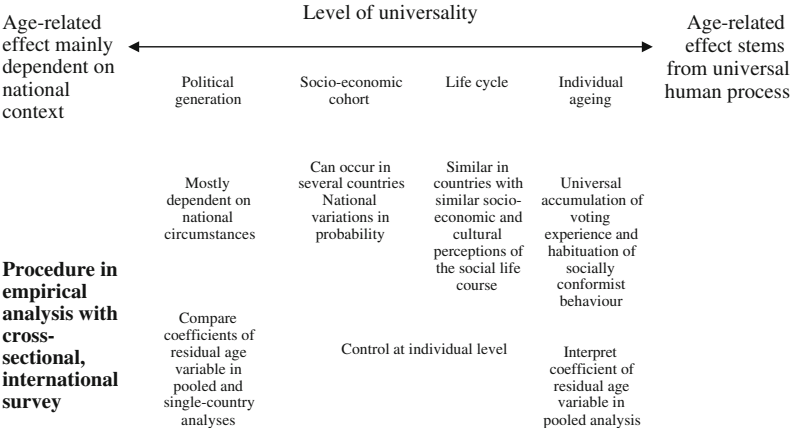

Figure 3.3 Conceptual diagram of the methodological approach.

the group of 50 to 60 year olds in 2002. If we look at the group from West Germany, they experienced the 1968 student revolution when they were about 15–25. Their Spanish counterparts of the same age in 2002 experienced the last decade of the totalitarian Franco regime. Czechs experienced a regime going hard line after the Prague Spring. Similarly, there are 19 other cohort experiences that we cannot capture separately in other variables. However, all cohorts across the diversity of these countries should show the individual ageing effect because it is a universal human feature. If the individual ageing effect has an impact on the phenomenon in question, it will thus become visible in the pooled analysis because national political generation distortions add up to a kind of random noise.

The major merit of this approach is that different kinds of age-related effects can be analysed in a conceptually meaningful manner. Instead of stating the presence of life cycle or generational effects, we can, for instance, talk about the relative effects of retirement or raising children (life cycle) vis-à-vis education and political ideology (cohort differences), all of which are causes of variation across age groups.

Analysing interaction effects between country-level variables and the age variable

In addition to controlling age-related differences at the individual level, we can also analyse the relationship between the residual age variation and characteristics of the country. This is one of the major advantages of using an international comparative survey; the country-level is a second layer of variance. The researcher can therefore check whether conceptual differences between countries have an impact at the individual level.

There are four variables whose interactions are tried out with the age variable in all chapters in which this approach is taken (Chapters 3, 5 and 6):

Average level of participation (here: parliamentary turnout)

The average turnout in a country is the result of party systems, socio-economic environment and institutions (Blais and Dobrzynska 1998). Therefore, we need to assess whether these differences could somehow impact on the differences in voting between older and younger voters. Turnout can also be seen as a signal to voters of the extent to which the voting norm is being followed. The higher the average turnout in a country, the more compliance with the social norm of voting should be perceived (see Tyran and Feld 2006). Younger people in high-turnout

countries already have a high social incentive to comply with the norm. The growing likelihood of norm-compliance that we expect with age is weaker in such contexts than in low-turnout countries. This effect is thus a contextual factor for the individual ageing effect. The variable capturing this notion ranges from 51.4 per cent (Switzerland) to 92 per cent (Italy), with a mean of 76.4 per cent, which is the average parliamentary turnout in the post-war era (IDEA 2002). In the other chapters, we will employ similar measures for the kind of participation under investigation.

The dependency ratio[2]

The dependency ratio measures the weight of the 65 and older population relative to the number of people in the labour force. It is thus an indicator combining the demographic aspect and labour market specificities. Some countries have very low participation rates in the labour market and thus a small labour force. In such instances, the group of 65 and older citizens, who tend to be retired, must be supported by relatively fewer individuals in the labour force – for example, in PAYGO pension systems – than retirees in a country with a large labour force. In terms of competition for resources, politics in an ageing democracy with high labour force participation is a different matter from politics in an ageing society with low participation rates (see Castles 2004; Myles and Pierson 2001).

We should expect that younger people are relatively more likely to vote in countries with high dependency ratios than young voters in countries with low dependency ratios. The causal chain is simple: in countries with high dependency ratios, relatively many older people are supported by relatively fewer people of working age who are in the labour force. In such a context, the necessary changes in the welfare state system are urgent. Younger people, who are likely to lose out if political reforms are deferred, have a high motivation to vote (and to participate in other channels of politics) in order to have their voices heard. This effect thus falls into the category of life-cycle effects and is salient during periods of potential competition among age groups for public resources. The variable enshrining this idea (OECD 2008) ranges from 14.7 (Switzerland) to 45.1 (Greece), with a mean of 31.7.

Length of democratic epoch

The longer established a democracy is, the more a socialisation effect should become visible for older cohorts. The variable measures, the number of years that have passed between 2002 (the year of the survey)

and the first free general election with universal franchise followed by an uninterrupted free democratic period. In more established democracies, a participatory culture should be more embedded in society and older people should thus have internalised that culture more, which would be an expectation following the logic of *Civic Culture* (Almond and Verba 1989 (1963); see also Norris 2002; Martín and Van Deth 2007). Living one additional year in a democracy that has been established for a longer time socialises an individual more strongly into participation ideals than living one additional year in a relatively new democracy. However, some studies predict a curvilinear relationship between length of democratic epoch and participation. At very high levels of establishment, participation ideals may fall again (see for a discussion of turnout rates in established democracies (IDEA 2002: 14, 85)). If that was the case, older people in more established democracies would not be relatively more likely to vote compared to younger voters or even be less likely to vote.

Public opinion concerning older people

There is a growing body of social psychological and gerontological literature that compares societies with respect to their images and stereotypes of old age that suggests that there may be an impact of the social image of old age on the active behaviour of older people. One hypothesis could be drawn in analogy with the political participation of women. Women tended to make less use of some forms of political participation. One explanation for this gender gap was that women were socialised into social roles at a young age that prescribed political passivity (and reliance on their husbands to take care of their political interests) (Welch 1977; Greenstein 1961; Jennings 1983; Orum et al. 1974; McGlone et al. 2006; Mayer and Schmidt 2004). According to this first notion, politics is a male domain.

This literature on gender and politics hinges on the mechanism that societies construct social categories (women) and attribute certain political roles to individuals who are members of that category. Since the life course is also socially constructed, we can expect a similar mechanism to be at work for old age (Wilson 2000; Kohli 1985; Cuddy and Fiske 2002; Cuddy et al. 2005). If a society has a more negative image of old age, that construction could be reflected in a more negative self-understanding of older people and subsequent lower voting levels than comparable older people in more old age-friendly societies. Therefore, the levels of older people should vary across countries in absolute, not relative terms. The second, to some extent contending, notion can be linked to the literature on the interest representation of

older people. There has been work on the reform of Social Security and Medicare in the United States that shows how older people as recipients of these welfare programmes were mobilised to become politically active (Campbell 2003a, 2003b, 2002). If a society holds a positive view of older people, this might also mean that the interests of older people are being taken care of (in the family and through the existing institutions of the welfare state). Thus, older people might feel less need to go to the polls, relative to younger people, because younger people would by implication also have more of an incentive to be politically active in such a senior-friendly society. This second notion can also be linked to the idea behind the dependency ratio. Both the dependency ratio and public opinion towards older people are expressions of the extent to which a society's public sphere is favourable towards older people. However, they do not measure the same dimension as the correlations between them (see the next few paragraphs) are low.

In order to capture public opinion concerning old age, I calculated the variable 'helpfulness towards older people' from the World Values Survey 1999/2000. The variable indicates the proportion of individuals who said 'yes' or 'absolutely yes' to the following statement: 'Would you be prepared to actually do something to improve the conditions of elderly people in your country?'. Figure 3.4 presents the variation for 31 European countries, 19 of which are included in the regression analysis with the European Social Survey. This is a new measure that has not been used in this context. I therefore carried out auxiliary analyses (see Web Appendix, part 2) to externally validate the measure. This exercise showed that public opinion concerning old age seems to be rooted in structural characteristics of a society that are historical in nature. The measure is therefore definitely causally prior to any measured impact at the individual level.[3]

The four variables – turnout, dependency ratio, length of democratic epoch and public opinion concerning older people – are only weakly correlated. Measured at the individual level, the largest correlation is 0.24 (see Table 3.1). We can thus say that the impacts of each variable that we find on the differences in participation between older and younger people are unlikely to come from the same macrolevel features. Unfortunately, we are unable to check for the simultaneous impact of each variable due to statistical problems.[4]

As a rule, to save space I shall not show the regression tables for the macro–micro interactions in detail. Rather, I will present the results in graphical format by plotting predicted probabilities for 'average' individuals of all age groups across a range of values of the macrolevel variables.

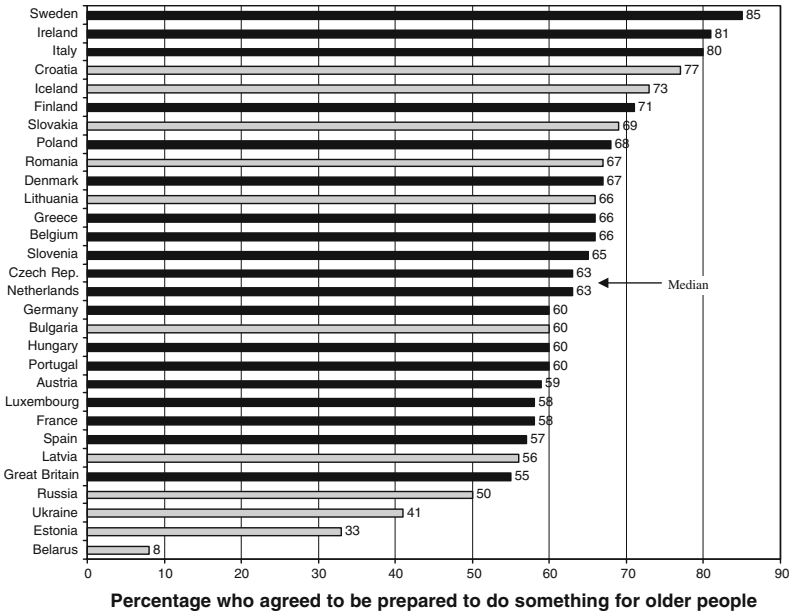

Figure 3.4 Variations of helpfulness towards older people in 30 European countries, 1999/2000.
Note: Countries labelled in black are in the ESS.
Source: WVS 1999/2000.

Table 3.1 Bivariate correlations between macrolevel variables, 2002

		1	2	3	4
1	Average parliamentary turnout since 1945	1.00			
2	Dependency ratio 65+/labour force	0.20	1.00		
3	Length of democratic epoch	0.24	–0.21	1.00	
4	Helpfulness towards older people	0.18	–0.07	0.23	1.00

Note: Individual-level correlations.
Sources: See text, pp. 47–9.

In general, interaction effects pose the problem that the uncertainty that is associated with each point estimate cannot be directly read from the regression table. For logistic regression models, this problem is even more severe because of the non-linearity of the probability function. There are some solutions for getting the correct standard error mostly by simulation, some of which can be found applied in the Web Appendix

(part 3) (Brambor et al. 2006; Braumoeller 2004; Norton et al. 2004). But for our problem – understanding the differences between age groups across countries – the question is not whether the slope at a particular value of age is different from zero, but how it differs from the slope at another value of age. The necessary statistical tests would be possible but, given the high number of regressions in this book, are not presented.

In sum, this excursion discussed how research on age-related effects can be conducted with an international cross-sectional data set. The empirical procedure consists of (i) checking whether predictors of political participation that are theoretically derived from the model are age-related; (ii) building multiple regression models with all predictors and assessing the roots of the most important predictors; and (iii) interacting macrolevel features of societies with age.

3.3 Independent individual-level variables

I shall now discuss groups of independent variables in detail, starting with those that have a suppressing effect on turnout for older people. A variable has a suppressing effect either because it is negatively related with age and positively with turnout (such as education), or the other way round (such as health). The bivariate correlation coefficients with age can be found in Table 3.2; details on the original survey questions and coding are in the Appendix (p. 176).

Suppressing turnout

Education, income: The so-called standard model of political participation postulates that higher socio-economic status has a positive impact on participation. Higher education enables citizens to have a better understanding of politics (for an overview see Leighley 1995). At the same time, they are more likely – because of occupation and income – to be in a social context in which norms of participation prevail. Higher income citizens also have a higher material stake in the system. The spread of mass education, however, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Thus, there is a clear generational increase in aggregate levels of education. Income declines with age, mirroring cohort and life-cycle differences. Older generations earn less, but all the elderly have less income as they retire because pension levels are below working life wages.

Gender: Entrenched understandings of traditional gender roles could interact with age since newer cohorts are less likely to hold them.

Women in older generations might still have been socialised into social roles that prescribe political activity only in the shadow of their husbands (Welch 1977). Also, it is necessary to include gender because older age groups comprise more women due to their longer life expectancy.

Living with a partner, number of minor children in household, subjective evaluation of health: These are likely to be life-cycle effects. Living together with a partner increases the likelihood of voting because the partner is another potential mobilising source (Pattie et al. 2003). On the grounds of widowhood and divorce, this variable is negatively correlated with age for people who are 40 and more. Children enhance one's personal interest in public provision. A certain amount of physical fitness is needed to undertake even the minimal requirements of voting. Frailty increases with age (Gehring and Wagner 1999: 696–7) due to the accumulative effects of unhealthy lifestyles (essentially a social effect) and the physical effects of ageing.[5]

Friends in non-political networks: According to the disengagement thesis (Cumming and Henry 1961) the elderly are thought to show a decline in inter-personal activity as they disengage themselves from their social environment. This includes disengagement from the political sphere, meaning that levels of participation should drop. The retreat should be reflected in a decline in the number of social networks that are reported to include close friends. The social retreat would then not only affect the political sphere directly, but also decrease the possibility of individuals being mobilised in a non-political context, such as by friends. Social networks are considered to be important in making people participate in politics in general (Knoke 1990; Putnam 2000). Individuals gain expressive benefit from voting as they can talk, for example, with their friends about the experience.

Internal and external political efficacy: These individual-level measures are intended to capture the idea that the social image of old age could impact on the self-image that older people have of themselves in the political sphere (see discussion on public opinion concerning older people). Also, newer generations seem to have higher levels of political efficacy.

Trade union and party membership: Membership of a political organisation is a strong mobilising factor in voting because members are exposed to activists' efforts to make them cast their vote in favour of the organisation. Some countries have experienced a decline in party and trade union membership, which would be reflected in ageing

membership profiles. Retirement leads to exit from trade unions in most countries (see Chapter 5).

Boosting turnout

Sense of duty to vote: In the survey, respondents were asked to answer the following question on an 11-point scale: 'To be a good citizen, how important would you say it is for a person to vote in elections?' This variable is helpful in catching some of the variation in the individually felt subjective norm to vote. According to our theoretical expectations of norm-compliance over a lifetime, we can expect this item to show the features of a life-cycle effect. Unfortunately, we must expect over-reporting of such a socially desirable trait, so the proxy loses its power. In addition, the decline of the sense of duty to vote as a cohort effect has been established in several country studies (Blais et al. 2004; Clarke et al. 2004).

Religiosity: Secularisation makes newer cohorts less religious (see Wilson 1966). Religiosity seems to increase our felt obligation to comply with social norms and thus makes the more religious citizens more likely to vote (see Secret et al. 1990).

Duration of residence: This is considered to be one aspect of social connectedness. The longer someone has been living in a certain area, the more likely that person is to be socially settled. This means that he or she can pay attention to the increasingly familiar problems of that area, which might need political solutions (Miller and Shanks 1996: 100–6).[6] A person's level of resources/motivation to vote is thereby increased.

Party identification: Research into the decline of institutional forms of political participation holds that younger generations identify less with parties than with other political groupings with a smaller scope of activity. On the other hand, the older a person is, the higher that individual's potential attachment to his or her party, as they have more time to grow attached. This could explain the higher level of party identification among older people (Converse 1976; Tilley 2003; Fuchs and Klingemann 1995b; Butler and Stokes 1983 (1974): 59–61). Voters with lower levels of party identification feel less motivation to engage in a form of electoral politics where they lack the identification with an actor they might deem worth voting for.

Pension as main source of income: Dependence on a public pension could be a mobilising factor because politics can be important in determining

the amount of income. Any reform efforts could be perceived as a 'policy threat' (see Campbell 2003a).

Political interest: The disengagement thesis hypothesises a decrease in political interest. But a competing hypothesis of 'selective withdrawal' suggests that politics might be one of the few areas in which the elderly might decide to remain active. This view predicts a general social retreat among the elderly accompanied by a concentration on fewer subjects, including politics (Glenn and Grimes 1968). Political interest is thereby a strong predictor of political participation because it decreases information costs. Citizens who are politically interested do not view getting information about politics as a costly necessity, but draw some enjoyment from it. Younger cohorts – for example, in Britain – show less interest in formal politics than older cohorts (Henn et al. 2002).

The following empirical investigation shows that not all of these variables are equally important when considered in a multivariate regression analysis. The strongest age-related predictors are life-cycle effects: having lived in an area for longer (positive impact from an old age perspective), living without a partner and deteriorating health (negative impacts).

3.4 International cross-sectional regression analysis

This cross-sectional analysis can be divided into three steps: (i) I establish the relative impact of the independent variables in multivariate regression models; (ii) I demonstrate the universal presence of individual ageing by comparing the results of the pooled analysis with results from separate country regressions; and (iii) I check for the interaction effects of the age variable and four macrolevel contexts: the average turnout of a country, the dependency ratio, length of democratic epoch and public opinion concerning older people.

Relative importance of independent microlevel variables

We make use of binary logistic regression models with random intercepts for each country (multilevel models). We know from the analysis of electoral institutions that they affect the average probability of the eligible voter going to the polls. By modelling random intercepts as part of these models, I allow this average probability to vary between countries. The dependent variable is a dichotomy of whether or not the respondent voted in the last national parliamentary election before spring 2002.[7]

Table 3.2 shows a series of three regressions. As goodness of fit indices, we find the Log-likelihood and the Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC). For both measures, we can interpret values closer to zero as a better fit. So, both measures point towards model 3 as having the best overall fit out of these three models. As explanatory variables, model 1 has age dummies (18–29, 30–9, 40–9, 50–9, 60–9, 70–9, 80+) and the full list of independent variables. There are some age-related effects that lose significance in the multiple regression models: religiosity, gender, external political efficacy, pension as the main source of income and children. These variables do not capture large enough effects to enrich our understanding of the differences in voting participation between older and younger voters. Noticeable in particular is the lack of any effect for a pension. With regard to voting participation, being a pensioner, almost the only experience that almost all older people share, does not make any difference.

The coefficients of the age dummies show a curvilinear relationship. The probability of voting increases from the very young to voters in their 50s and remains similar until individuals are in their 70s. For the 80 and older group, voting participation drops. This latter drop could be due to a real drop in voting participation, but it could also be an artefact of the low numbers of observations that we have for voters who are 80 and more (see King et al. 2000: 351). For example, the standard error of the 80 and older category is much larger, capturing the uncertainty associated with that effect.

Taking the significant predictors together, which are the most important in explaining the differences between older and younger voters? One way to think about this problem is to plot the bivariate correlation coefficients (first column, Table 3.2) against the impact of each variable (see Figure 3.5). The impact of each variable is measured as the absolute difference in predicted probabilities between the respective variable at its maximum minus the predicted probability of the variable at its minimum. The more the variables are to the right and to the top, the more age-related impact they have on voting participation.

From this age-centred perspective, three variables stand out as having a relatively high impact, as well as a strong correlation with age: duration of residence, if someone is living with a partner and subjective evaluation of health. Their distance from the other variables, more to the left, is relatively large. Sense of duty is also quite high and apart from the others, but not as strongly correlated with age. I discuss this variable, together with education (which is not plotted), separately in the interpretation of the models we shall consider next.

Table 3.2 Random-intercept binary logistic regression models of voting participation for 21 European countries, 2002 (models 1–3)

	Correlation with age	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
		Coef.	Std. err.	Coef.	Std. err.	Coef.	Std. err.
Constant		–1.22***	0.20	–1.28***	0.20	–1.27***	0.20
Age and interactions							
30–9 (baseline 18–29)		0.27***	0.05	0.31***	0.05	0.29***	0.06
40–9		0.57***	0.06	0.61***	0.06	0.62***	0.06
50–9		0.72***	0.06	0.73***	0.06	0.84***	0.07
60–9		0.67***	0.08	0.66***	0.08	0.82***	0.08
70–9		0.72***	0.09	0.82***	0.11	0.86***	0.10
80+		0.10	0.11	0.51***	0.14	0.21	0.11
Education	–0.27	0.09***	0.01	0.20***	0.03	0.10***	0.01
Sense of duty	0.13	0.30***	0.01	0.30***	0.01	0.24***	0.01
30–9 × education				–0.13***	0.04		
40–9 × education				–0.15***	0.04		
50–9 × education				–0.18***	0.04		
60–9 × education				–0.20***	0.04		
70–9 × education				–0.07	0.05		
80+ × education				0.15	0.07		
30–9 × sense of duty						0.03	0.02
40–9 × sense of duty						0.06**	0.02
50–9 × sense of duty						0.11***	0.02
60–9 × sense of duty						0.14***	0.02
70–9 × sense of duty						0.13***	0.02
80+ × sense of duty						0.11***	0.03
Cohort effects							
Religiosity	0.19	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01
Cohort/life-cycle effects							
Female	a	–0.03	0.04	–0.03	0.04	–0.04	0.04

Pol. interest	0.05	0.25***	0.02	0.25***	0.02	0.25***	0.02
Income	–0.16	0.03***	0.01	0.04***	0.01	0.03***	0.01
Party ID	0.14	0.24***	0.01	0.24***	0.01	0.24***	0.01
Pol. membership	–0.02	0.18**	0.05	0.18***	0.05	0.17**	0.05
Life-cycle effects							
Duration of residence (logged)	0.46	0.29***	0.02	0.29***	0.02	0.29***	0.02
External pol. efficacy (logged)	–0.03	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.01
Internal pol. efficacy (logged)	–0.11	0.06***	0.02	0.05***	0.02	0.06***	0.02
Pension as main source of income	0.67	0.11	0.06	0.10	0.06	0.10	0.06
Living with partner	–0.26	0.33***	0.04	0.32***	0.04	0.34***	0.04
Health	–0.36	0.14***	0.02	0.14***	0.02	0.14***	0.02
Social networks (logged)	–0.03	0.27***	0.04	0.27***	0.04	0.26***	0.04
Number of minor children in HH	–0.48	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02
σ_u		0.76		0.77		0.76	
Intra-class correlation coefficient		0.15		0.15		0.15	
Valid N		33,713		33,713		33,713	
Log-likelihood		–11,797		–11,773		–11,761	
AIC		23,641		23,606		23,584	

Note: ***/**/* significant at 0.001/0.01/0.05 respectively. Observations weighted by population weight. (a) Demographers use the masculinity ratio to describe how many men there are per 100 women in a particular age group. In 2000, the ratio was around 90 in European countries in the 60–64 age group and around 50 in the 80 and older age group (Avramov and Maskova 2003: 51). Correlations for living with partner and number of children for those aged 40 and more. All continuous variables are centred around 0.
Source: ESS.

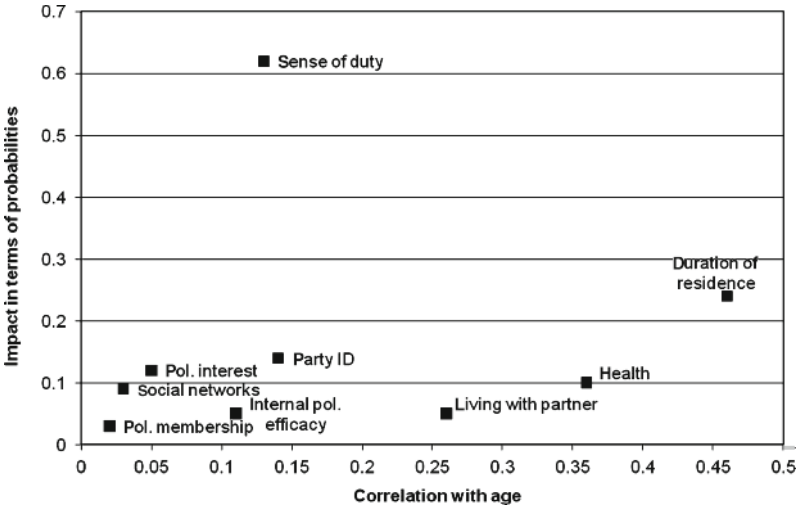

Figure 3.5 The impact of age-related independent variables on voting participation and their correlation with age (based on model 1).
Note: Correlations of living with partner and number of minor children for respondents aged 40 and more. Impact = difference between fitted probabilities with respective independent variable at its maximum and minimum.

The three most important predictors of the difference between younger and older people (duration of residence, living with partner, health) are *prima facie* life-cycle effects. However, long-term social changes affect even a number of seemingly uncontroversial life-cycle effects that we shall discuss briefly. Duration of residence in one area is on the decrease due to growing professional mobility. In earlier days, individuals were still likely to stay with one company for a long time and so remain in the area. We can therefore expect older people, relative to younger, to have lived in an area for longer because they belong to generations that were more likely to move little and because of their age. Numerous other studies show the strong life-cycle component of residential mobility (Davies and Pickels 1985; Speare Jr. 1970; Clark and Huang 2003).

In Europe, living with a partner is strongly related to the position in the life cycle due to the prevalence of monogamous relationships: younger adults are more likely to be living alone, middle-aged individuals have a high likelihood of sharing their accommodation with a partner and at an advanced age, separation/divorce or the death of the

partner decreases this probability again. Across cohorts, the prevalence of living with a partner goes down because of numerous developments (e.g. professional mobility, growing female emancipation, decreased significance of marriage) (Avramov 2006: 13; Eurostat 2007b: 56).

With increasing life expectancy, health problems are shifting further and further towards older age. That means that 40-year-olds today are healthier than 40-year-olds 30 years ago; and the same is true for older people. As an expression of improving health conditions, life expectancy at birth and life expectancy in later life rise. For example, life expectancy at 65 for Norwegian women rose from 19.2 in 1995 to 20.9 in 2006, and for Hungarian women, it increased from 16.0 to 17.7 (Eurostat 2007a). Overall, life expectancy has increased dramatically over the last two hundred years (Riley 2001). However, due to the accumulation of the effects of unhealthy lifestyles and the physical effects of ageing, older people are likely to become less fit than younger people.

The three factors – duration of residence, living with partner and health – are purely physical, sociological and stand outside the political process. It is the social context of the life cycle that matters rather than the political context in explaining variation between age groups in voting participation. The impact of these factors on voting participation is arguably quite stable since they are embedded in a cultural conception of a social life course that is subject only to slow societal change. Finally, two of the three most important age-related effects make elderly people *less* likely to vote. This hints at the magnitude of the other boosting effects, namely individual ageing and duration of residence.

In Table 3.2, model 2 introduces an interaction term between education and age (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980). The relationship shows the impact of education, depending on the age group. For the youngest age group, educational background matters strongly, whereas it matters less and less for the next age groups until people are in their sixties. Then, the coefficients rise again, which means that the educational impact for the 60 and older groups does not differ significantly from that of the young. However, we do find a systematic variance in terms of the fact that the older voters are, the smaller the gap is between different educational groups. Highly educated citizens generally show a higher likelihood of voting because they are more likely to understand the political process and live in a social context in which norms of participation prevail. Over a lifetime, however, less educated people catch up with their more educated fellow citizens of the same age. This can be explained by the substituting

effect of life experience for education. The learning effect through past experience is stronger for people of lower educational backgrounds over a lifetime.

Model 3 tests another interaction effect with the age dummies. This time, it is the interaction between age and the expressed sense of duty to vote that we are interested in. We see in the bivariate correlation (first column, Table 3.2) that the sense of duty correlated positively with age: the older an individual is, the higher his or her expressed sense of duty to vote. Now we seek to understand whether sense of duty, which highly predicts whether an individual indicates having gone to the polls, matters more or less for older people. Recall from GP 4 that we expect older people to be more likely to be motivated by social norms. Thus, we would expect the sense of duty to have a stronger impact for older people. This is exactly what we do find. The coefficients for the interaction terms between sense of duty and the age dummies rise with increasing age. For voters in their seventies, the impact of sense of duty is highest. This means that older individuals are more likely to be motivated by a high sense of duty to vote than younger people. Since we have found two-way interaction effects between education × age and sense of duty × age, we shall try a three-way interaction effect, which we will also interpret graphically. But before we do that, we shall assess the idea of habituation. Let us turn to the interpretation of the general curvilinear increase of voting participation in all educational groups when plotted against age.

Habituation and compliance with the norm of voting

Figure 3.6 shows the results of 21 regressions, one per country (based on model 1, see Web Appendix, part 3). The horizontal axis shows the fitted probability for all other variables held constant except for age. As we can see, there is a lot of variation between countries. Most countries show an increasing tendency to vote with age, but not all. The reason for the difference between countries lies in the cross-sectional nature of the data. If we look at, for example, British 50–59-year-olds and their likelihood of voting, this average probability is determined not only by individual ageing but also by the cohort experience of those born between 1942 and 1952. We can control part of this cohort experience, namely the shared cohort probability of acquiring a social characteristic such as education or religiosity at the individual level. What we cannot control is the shared experience as a political generation that might make this age group different from others in Britain. However, these political generation effects are determined by national political history.

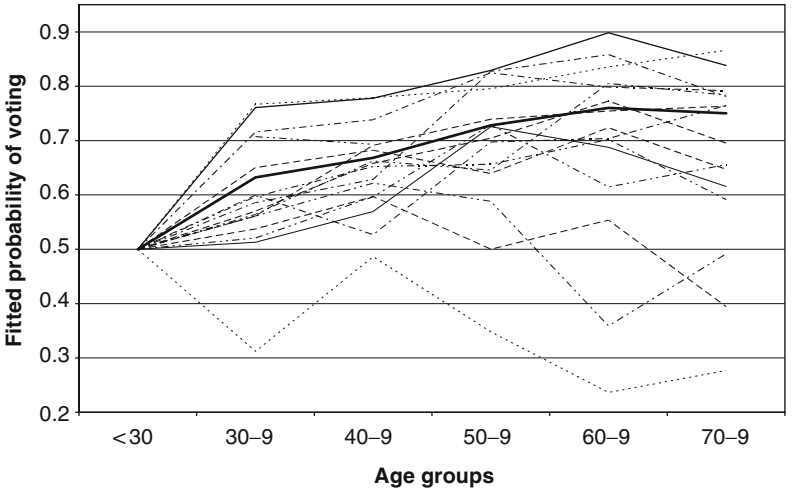

Figure 3.6 Variation between age groups as to fitted voting probability (pooled versus single-country analyses, based on model 1).

Therefore, the graphs of each country look very different. If we pool all respondents into one analysis, these political generation experiences cancel each other out. They become a kind of white noise that does not affect the universal experience that all countries share: individual ageing.

The thick concave line in Figure 3.6 represents the result from the pooled analysis. We see a clearly increasing trend, though at decreasing rates. This is the typical form of a learning curve. I hypothesise that the causal mechanism behind this individual ageing effect is the habituation of socially conformist behaviour. To provide evidence for this, let us return to the interaction effects between age, education and sense of duty.

Habituation of socially conformist behaviour

Figure 3.7 graphically demonstrates the findings for high/low educational background and high/low sense of duty to vote (based on two separate regressions like model 2, once for individuals who indicated a low sense of duty and once for those who indicated a high sense, see Web Appendix, part 3). Those who feel a high sense of duty have a higher probability of voting in general (left), in comparison to their counterparts of the same age and educational background (right). If we now look at Figure 3.7 (left) for those with a high sense of duty and high formal education, there is almost no variation left between age groups.

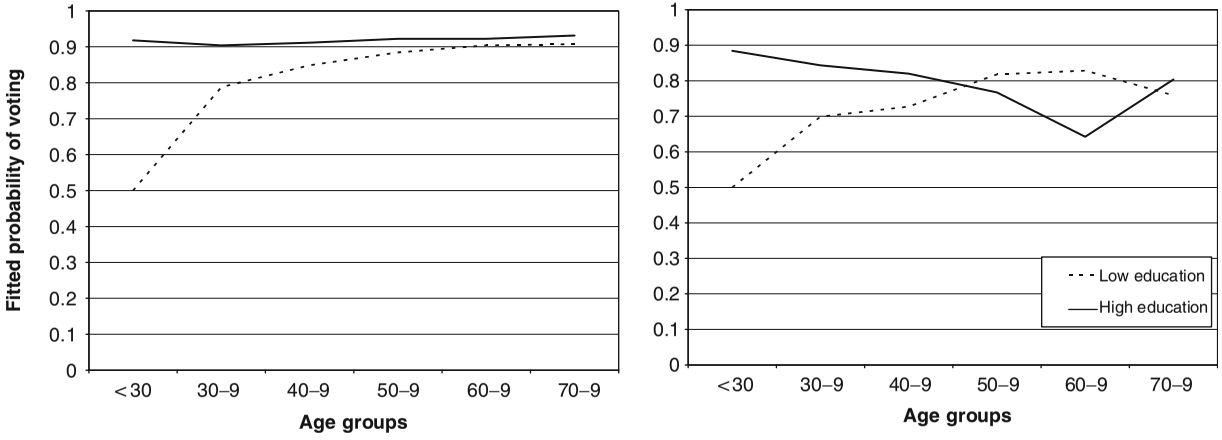

Figure 3.7 Variation between age groups as to fitted voting probability, high (left) and low (right) sense of duty to vote and two educational groups.

This curve is almost flat. It is the graphic embodiment of the ceiling of habituation. Those who feel a high sense of duty at a young age have a high incentive to vote when they are also more highly educated. This is because they have an understanding of the political process and are cognitively engaged (Dalton 1984). Thus, life experience cannot lead to more habituation in this group of voters because these individuals are likely to vote in every election. For those with low educational backgrounds and a high sense of duty, life experience substitutes for understanding the political process by education. Figure 3.7 (right), in contrast, paints a different picture for those with a low sense of duty. Here, high educational background does not equate with high participation. The relationship across age groups is not positive and does not look similar to the individual ageing effect. This stems from the fact that those people who are highly educated, and are thus prone to have a greater understanding of the political process, do not habituate voting across their lifetime because they do not perceive it as a civic duty. Thus, it would be inconsistent for them to conform to a kind of behaviour that they do not deem desirable. For those with low educational backgrounds, there is still some residual effect – although not a clean learning curve – of life experience teaching them the norm. It might be that the less educated are more open to social pressure because they are not cognitively mobilised to resist the habituation of a norm they do not agree with. All in all, however, this habituation pattern is much less pronounced in comparison to the other patterns we have seen.

Macro-micro interactions

So far, we have concentrated only on the individual level without any attempt to include conceptual macro variables. Now we test the interaction between four macrolevel characteristics and age (turnout, dependency ratio, length of democratic epoch and public opinion concerning older people). The direct effect of age is now approximated with a combination of age and age^2 according to the results for dummies in model 1 (turnout increases with age in a concave curve and drops for those 80 and more). All estimations also include the interaction between education and age and the mean turnout level (estimation results and additional tests of the standard errors around the marginal effects can be found in the Web Appendix, part 3).

Figure 3.8 summarises the predicted probabilities of voting once we consider the interaction between macrolevel characteristics of their political system and their society and age. The probabilities are for voters who have mean values on all other independent variables; that

is, the differences we see here are not due, for example, to differences in education or intensity of party identification. All differences in resources/motivation and mobilisation exposure/opportunities that we can measure at the individual level are constant.

The graphs demonstrate that the strength of habituation, essentially the increase of voting probability with age, is dependent on the macrolevel context of that society. The first graph on the left shows the predictions from the interaction between the average turnout in a country and the age differential. The higher the average turnout in a country, the higher the general predicted probability, a trivial finding, and the smaller the difference between age groups. Indeed, for the maximum value of turnout, the leftover variance between age groups is essentially flat. There is thus no difference left between older and younger voters in such a context. The explanation of this lack of difference lies in the importance of voting as a social norm. In countries in which turnout is high, the social norm of voting is perceived to be widely held. Thus, voters at a young age already have a high motivation to comply with that social norm. For them, ageing and the accompanying growing number of opportunities to vote will also lead to more familiarity with the voting process, but given the high starting probability at a young age, this habituation no longer increases voting probability. In contrast,

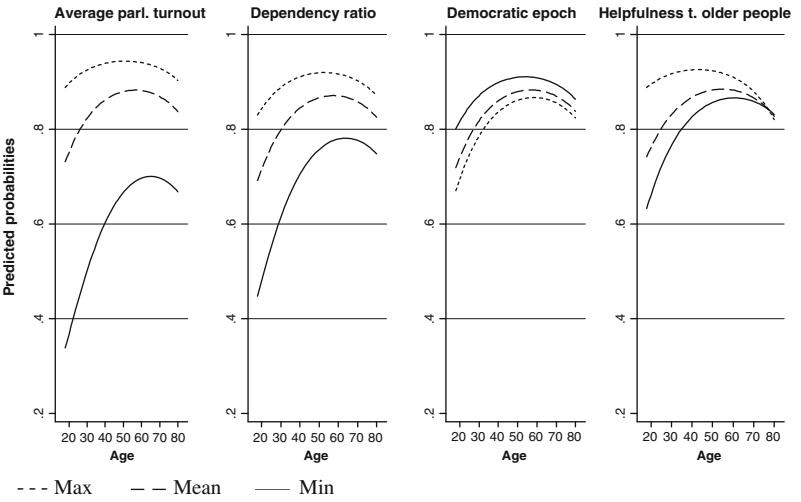

Figure 3.8 Fitted probabilities of voting participation, interaction models – macrolevel characteristics × age.

in a country with low turnout there is less social pressure to conform for all age groups. Thus, a young person in these countries feels less incentive to conform to the voting norm. Over a lifetime, however, a person learns to conform more and more as he or she becomes part of a social context that values that norm. Starting from a lower level at a younger age, there is more room for the habituating process towards the top. Thus, the increase by age is much more pronounced in low-turnout countries.

In the second graph of Figure 3.8 we see the fitted probabilities stemming from the interaction effect between the dependency ratio and age. The evidence supports the notion that younger voters are more likely to vote relative to older people in countries with high dependency ratios, where their say in politics is probably more vital to them if we think in terms of an age competition for resources. This means that the European democracies that have the most urgent necessity to restructure their welfare systems so as to deal with changes in age and labour force composition also have the lowest imbalance between age groups. Very similar findings will be shown in Chapter 5 (membership of political organisations) and Chapter 6 (non-institutionalised participation).

The third graph shows the influence of length of democratic epoch. There are some slight differences in overall levels of voting that are not statistically significant. What is significantly different is the marginal effect of age across different values of democratic epoch length. The more established a liberal democracy is, the more older people exceed younger people in terms of voting participation. This can be explained by a Civic Culture argument. In those countries in which democratic practice is more established, having lived longer in that society has noticeable, albeit small consequences for voting behaviour.

In the final graph, the interaction between public opinion and age (helpfulness towards older people) is shown. The macrolevel variable is intended to capture the social image of old age in a society. The more people express a willingness to help older people in a country, the more older voters participate in voting, compared to older people in other countries, although the differences shrink to nil in the highest age groups. The direction of impact is what the hypothesis about social image would predict: more positive image, more participation of older people compared to older people in other countries. What varies much more is the relative participation rate of younger voters. Relative to older voters with the same level of resources, motivation, mobilisation exposure and opportunities, younger voters are more likely to vote in countries characterised by a more positive public opinion towards older

people. This pattern is consistent with findings that we shall present in later chapters. In all areas of participation, it is the relative participation levels of younger and older people that are affected by public opinion towards older people. Direct effects on the participation level of older people are hardly noticeable.

3.5 Summary and discussion

If we now combine the findings from the British case and the analysis of the ESS, we can see that there is strong evidence for the presence of all four types of age-related effects to explain the difference in voting participation between older and younger people.

First, political generation effects are present to explain the difference between older and younger voters, as the British data analysis has shown. Today's younger people – Blair's Children – show a smaller likelihood of voting in their early life-cycle elections than the other three generations at the same age. Also, the learning process is more pronounced in more established democracies. One additional year of experience in a democracy that has been established longer increases the probability of voting more strongly than one additional year in a less established democracy.

Second, socio-economic cohort effects play a subordinate role. Education, the strongest socio-economic cohort effect, loses its importance the older the voter is because the function of formal education is substituted by life experience.

Third, sociological life-cycle factors are stronger than socio-economic cohort variables in explaining differences between age groups. The social and cultural construction of our life course sets the scene for a higher likelihood among older people to vote. Most importantly, the tendency to move house less in later life makes older people more likely to have lived in a certain area for longer and therefore enhances their consciousness of its problems. The suppressing factors of being likely to live alone or being less able-bodied reduce the voting probability of older people.

Also, macrolevel properties related to the life cycle impact on the voting participation of older people. The results suggest that the age-relevant structures of the welfare state, measured by the dependency ratio, matter for the differences between younger and older voters. The higher the dependency ratio in a country, the less difference there is between younger and older voters, meaning that political pressure by age groups is more equally balanced in those societies in which welfare

state reforms are most urgent. Along similar lines, the relative levels of older people's voting participation – that is, relative to younger people – are lower in countries with a more positive public opinion of old age, and therefore younger people's voting participation is comparatively higher. This suggests that in societies favouring older people more (high dependency ratio and more positive public opinion concerning old age) the levels of younger and older people's voting participation are more balanced, shrinking the gap between the age groups. So, in contexts in which public resources are more likely to be targeted at older people, their overall impact on the voting process is smaller.

Fourth, there is a case to be made for the presence of habituation as a consequence of individual ageing. The learning curve that arose in the pooled analysis in comparison to single-country regressions provides evidence of this causal process. The causal narrative is that the cognitive short cuts of past experience are important for ageing voters as they reduce their costs of voting. Their past experience allows easier decision making in light of limited rationality. This past experience is so important that it can replace the function of formal education over a lifetime. Familiarity with the voting situation and similar political constellations in previous elections make it easier for older voters to take the decision to vote. In addition, the increasing tendency to vote is higher, the less widespread the social norm of voting; that is, the higher the average voting turnout in a country. The expressed sense of duty matters more strongly for predicting voting participation for older people than for younger people. The increase with age manifests itself only if voters are still open to an increase in their personally felt obligation to vote; among those with a high sense of duty, habituation with age hardly takes place anymore because the subjective norm to vote is already very high at a young age. In the group of voters with a low sense of duty and high cognitive mobilisation (high education), no increase in voting participation across age groups is visible as voters understand the process and do not accept the social norm.

If we remember the omnipresence of older people being more likely to vote – across time for Britain and across space for the 21 European countries (see Table 1.1, Chapter 1) – it seems that the effects that are stable across time between generations (life cycle and individual ageing) are stronger, although we should not extrapolate too much into the future due to the complexity of the mechanisms at work. If we accept short-term stability for the moment, it seems as if the campaigns of old age interest groups, as I reported them at the beginning of the chapter, are well grounded in the underlying causal mechanisms of older people's

higher likelihood of voting. The nature of human decision making as much as the sociological foundations of the life cycle stand outside the political process. They cannot be changed, or at least not very easily. Older people are thus likely to maintain their relatively higher voting probability, compared to younger citizens, in the near future. But even this difference varies across countries, as the findings on the interaction effects demonstrate.

4
Party Choice in Britain and West Germany

> Campaigners [in the 2005 British General Election] recognise that the search for the grey vote is more complex than simply handing out money. Both the age and experience of older voters do not make them mere 'what's in it for me?' consumer voters.
>
> Michael White (2005), political editor of *The Guardian*, March 2005

In the run-up to the 2005 British General Election, there was a bidding war between the major political parties. Each promised to allocate material handouts to pensioners, through either a discount or change in the council tax system (see Chapter 7), more money for heating or higher pensions. Spurred on by the campaigns of old age interest groups, all parties wooed the grey vote. As the political editor of *The Guardian* observed (see above), this competition for the grey vote turned out to be very difficult because pure material self-interest seemed not to be the only concern for older voters, with other factors remaining in the dark. The level of attention directed towards older voters has increased significantly in the last few years. In the 1997 campaign, Peter Mandelson, head of the New Labour campaign, told an old age interest group lobbyist that the Labour Party would not present New Labour in such a way as to appeal to older people because they would not change their vote (Vincent et al. 2001: 74).

This chapter sheds light on the matter from a more general angle. To what extent do older voters cast their vote differently from younger people? What are the implications of these differences for an ageing democracy? In order to answer these questions, I look at two countries,

Britain and West Germany, across several decades. Each of the four General Propositions (GRs) is testable with regard to party choice. GP 1 predicts that older people's behaviour is shaped by political circumstances during their young adulthood. Voters in early adulthood are more susceptible to the impressions that parties leave on them. They are likely to retain their preferences for the party that has impressed them most. Thus, we should be able to predict a party's fortunes among a certain cohort through our knowledge of the historical electoral circumstances of the period during which the cohort was in young adulthood. We should detect stable preferences in party choice with identifiable cohorts – political generations – across time and predict the popularity of a certain party within a political generation relative to the preceding political generation. We can thus infer how older people who are members of a particular cohort differ from younger generations.

GP 2 entails that a cohort shares a certain probability of possessing a social characteristic. This can then influence the decision to participate politically in later life because, for example, motivations are different from other cohorts. The generational changes in social background, such as education, religiosity or postmaterialism, can shape party fortunes among various cohorts. We should expect the German Greens, a typical New Politics party, to enjoy an advantage among more recent cohorts. Their members are more likely to be postmaterialist due to rising economic fortunes (see Inglehart 1971, 1990) and thus be more likely to favour a party that pursues such goals.

There are three testable life-cycle hypotheses derived from GP 3. Two are competing notions of growing conservatism with age. The accumulation of material resources over life cycle could make older voters more likely to vote conservatively from an economic standpoint as they have more material resources they want to preserve. The popularity of the most extreme parties in economic policy terms should therefore show life-cycle variations in the expected direction; in other words, older people should be more likely to vote for the most economically conservative party (Free Democratic Party (FDP), Tories) and less likely to vote for the most economically progressive party (Social-Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) (the Left did not matter in West Germany before 2005), Labour). Another notion of conservatism proposes that older people could become more conservative in the sense that they are reluctant to change and want to preserve the status quo and should thus be more likely to vote for the incumbent party. A final testable life-cycle notion in this chapter is that older citizens vote according to 'grey interests', that is, for parties that set out to protect the material interests of older

people. The social situation of retirement can shape the preferences of voters at that age, especially with regard to material provisions, such as pensions, social care and certain taxes. This notion can be tested at the aggregate level through a review of the success of senior interest parties because ageing democracies should witness an increasing popularity on the part of senior parties.

Finally, GP 4 about individual ageing postulates that older voters learn from their experience and use it as a cognitive short cut to make decisions. This leads to the testable hypothesis that larger parties – or smaller parties that are regularly part of the government – have more of an edge over the older voters. This is because these parties are more likely to leave an impression on them over their lifetimes – through the media and through their policies.

Overall, generational differences dominate over life-cycle differences in party choice. Generational differences lead to different generations facing each other as members of old and young age groups at each election. The difference between the grey voters, the group of older people, and younger voters is thus not stable in the two ageing democracies, Britain and Germany. All four groups of hypotheses find some evidence, but not without further refinement. Growing economic conservatism and growing status quo conservatism with higher age can be refuted. The poor showing of grey parties also suggests that only a small minority – at most – of older people votes for them. Moreover, some parties can leave a more prominent impression on electors through repeated government participation or their relatively constant electoral size. They seem to be more successful with older voters in electoral systems with proportional representation as they can repeatedly impress ageing voters. Finally, political generations matter if the party system is characterised by stronger alignment. Political impressions in political youth leave an impression that is carried through our lifetimes, but even more so if overall voting volatility is low. This is because the strength of generational socialisation is an observable implication of the state of alignment, that is, the degree to which voting choice is determined by stable social background factors.

The empirical procedure consists of the following steps. First, I look at the electoral fortunes of grey parties that are specifically set up to address older voters' interests. Second, I describe the overtime variations of differences between older and younger voters and political generations in Britain and West Germany. Third, I run various regressions to test the hypotheses together.

4.1 Voting for old age interests: The failure of grey parties

One life-cycle hypothesis holds that senior parties become successful in countries with a sizeable and growing proportion of older voters. Older people might cast their vote for a party that represents special material interests associated with their greater age, most importantly health, social care and pensions. These are expensive policies that need a high degree of redistribution.

It is remarkable that grey parties are active in many European countries. A grey party signals that its main target group is older people through its name, such as the Grey Panthers, the Greys, or 55+. Indeed, few countries are without such a party. However, most such parties are electorally unsuccessful. Even in the Netherlands, the country with the lowest electoral threshold in the world, pensioners' parties have not been able to obtain more than six seats in a single election (see Table 4.1). The two successful exceptions are the Slovenian party that has been a member of the ruling coalition with one ministry (defence) since 1996, and the Luxembourgian party. The party in Luxembourg started out as a single-issue party that campaigned for equal pension treatment of public and private workers, but has significantly broadened its appeal and is now a right-wing party and senior interests are no longer the main campaigning issue (Wort.lu 2005). In spring 2007, the party also dropped the add-on 'pension justice' from its party label. Thus, the hypothesis does not find evidence that senior parties become more successful in ageing democracies because there is no visible trend of growing popularity.

It is interesting to note that grey parties started to emerge in Europe in the 1980s. Two explanations might account for this. In the aftermath of oil crises and recessions, welfare state programmes were being reconsidered across Europe. Older people, as the beneficiaries of some of these programmes, became the target of cutbacks as the whole political discourse concerning old age changed (Walker and Naegele 1999). Also, the onset of dealignment in some European countries had opened up opportunities for new parties (Franklin et al. 1992). Furthermore, the new and volatile party systems of Central and Eastern Europe seem to have provided fertile grounds for the rise of grey interest parties (see Hanley 2008).

The generally bad fortunes of grey parties might be a problem of supply rather than demand. In a Eurobarometer Survey in 1992, 10 to 20 per cent of older respondents in the European Union (EU) member states indicated that they thought that a party for older people would

Table 4.1 The electoral fortunes of grey parties in selected European countries since 1980

Party name	Country	Best electoral result
Action Committee for Democracy and Pension Justice	Luxembourg	9.9% (national election 2004)
Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia	Slovenia	5.2% (national election 2000), member of the ruling coalition since 1996
Pensioners' Party	Finland	4.2% (national election 1987)
Croatian Pensioners' Party	Croatia	4.1% (national election 2007)
Party of United Pensioners of Serbia	Serbia	3.9% (national election 2007, coalition with Social Democratic Party)
Estonian Pensioners' Union	Estonia	3.7% (national election 1992)
Older People's Party, Union 55+, General Older People's Union	Netherlands	3.6% (Algemeen Ouderen Verband (AOV) in 1994 national election), 0.9% (Unie 55+ (U55+) in 1994 national election)
Pensioners for a Secure Life	Czech Republic	3.1% (national election 1996)
Pensioner's Party	Bosnia-Herzegovina (Republic Srpska)	2.5% (national election 2006)
National Party of Pensioners and Retired Persons	Poland	2.2% (national election 1997)
Dignified Ageing	Belgium (Flanders)	2.1% (national election 1994)
Pensioners' Party	Russia	2.0% (national election 1999)
The Pensioners' Party	United Kingdom (Scotland, England/Wales)	1.9% (Scottish parliamentary election) No success in England
Pensioners' Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina	Bosnia-Herzegovina	1.5% (national election 2006)
Pensioners' Party	Italy	1.1% (European election 2004)
Pensioners' Party	Norway	1.0% (national election 1993), 1.5% (municipal elections 2005)
Swedish Senior Citizens' Interest Party	Sweden	1.0% (national election 1998)
Party of Pensioners of Romania	Romania	0.7% (national election 2000)
Grey Panthers/the Greys, 50+	Germany	0.5% (national election 1994), 3.8% (Berlin election 2006)
Bloc of the Party of Pensioners of Ukraine	Ukraine	0.1% (national election 2007)
Pensioners' Party	Hungary	0.02% (national election 1994)
Party of Pensioners in Action	Spain	0.01% (national election 2008)

Sources: www.electionworld.org, Mackie and Rose (1990), various party websites, Hanley (2008).

be good idea (Walker and Maltby 1997). In the accompanying senior boost survey in which older people (60+) were questioned, 22 per cent said that they would join a political party for older people (EB2242, own calculations).

We cannot refute the notion that older people vote according to their senior material interests if senior interests are best captured by mainstream parties. In many countries, there is no senior party of significant size that can even enter parliament. Senior parties might not only face the challenges that all small parties in general have to tackle, such as electoral thresholds. They might also be unsuccessful because major parties take up policies for senior citizens in order to garner support from this large pool of voters. Thereby, older voters might want to vote according to senior interests, but there would not be one 'best senior party'. Established parties might converge on the 'best senior' positions. One could compare this notion with the middle class vote. In post-industrial societies, the middle class tends to comprise of the majority of voters. Thus, no party interested in acquiring a majority can afford *not* to propose policies that benefit the middle class. In democracies with many older people, no party can afford *not* to be senior-friendly. We would expect an even stronger party interest in older people's policies as all voters aspire to become old. Unlike a social class, the frontiers of old age as a policy group are open to everyone.

4.2 Descriptive analysis of age groups and political generations

Variations between age groups

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show the ratio of the proportion of voters aged 60 and older divided by the proportion of voters aged 59 and younger that vote for a certain party from a longitudinal perspective. If the ratio is one, it signifies that senior voters do not show a different voting pattern. If the ratio is higher than one, older people are more likely to vote for that party than younger people, and vice versa for ratios below one.[1]

In Figure 4.1, the party ratio of the Conservatives is significantly above one in 11 out of 13 election years and below one in the other two instances (further graphs for the smaller parties can be found in the Web Appendix, part 4). That means that the Conservatives had an advantage in the group of 60 and older voters in most elections. But the party ratio varies considerably, between less than 0.9 and up to 1.4. The party ratio for Labour seems to mirror the Conservative age ratio in the opposite direction. It is below one in almost all instances where

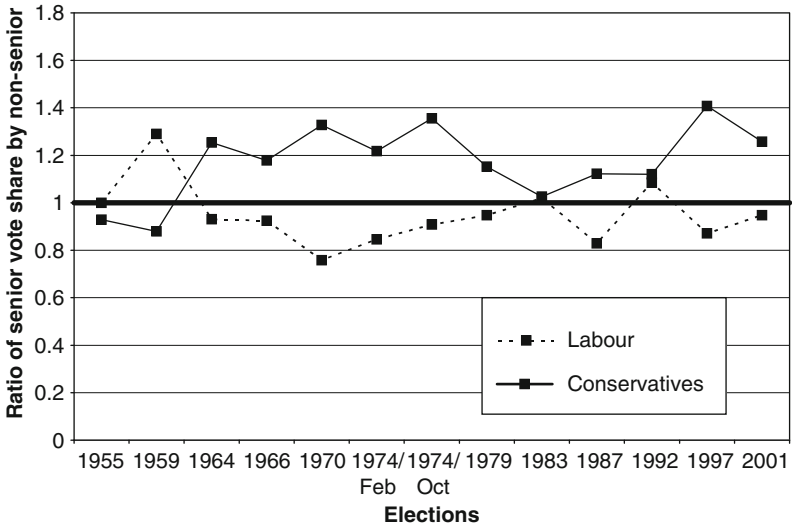

Figure 4.1 British party ratios (vote share of voters aged 60 and more by vote share of those younger than 60) – Conservatives and Labour, 1955–2001.
Sources: BES 1964–2001 and Gallup polls 1958, 1960.

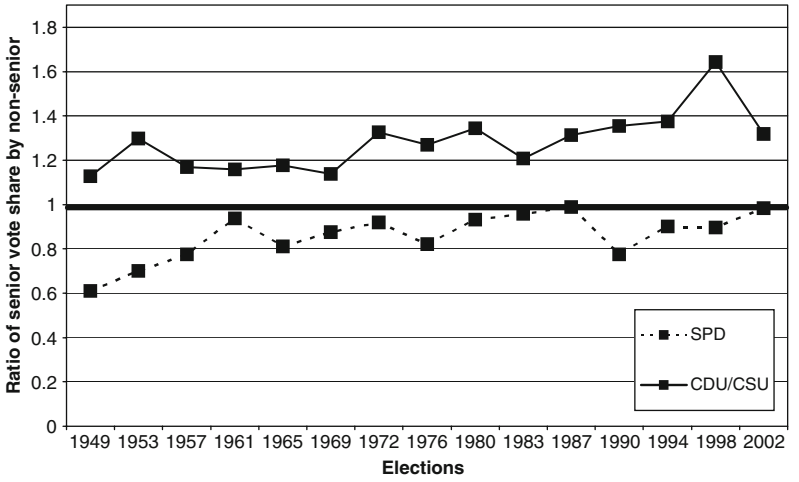

Figure 4.2 West German party ratios (vote share of voters aged 60 and more by vote share of those younger than 60) – CDU/CSU and SPD, 1949–2002.
Sources: German Election Studies 1961–98 and Politbarometer 2002.

the Conservatives had the edge among older voters. Nonetheless, in three out of 13 years (1959, 1983, 1992) an older voter was more likely to vote Labour than a younger voter.

In West Germany (Figure 4.2), the Christian Democrats were more likely to be voted for by older voters in all election years. However, the difference between older and younger voters varied between 10 per cent in 1949 and more than 60 per cent in 1998. The Social Democratic party ratio lay below one in most, but not all elections. However, for them the differences between age groups are much smaller compared to the CDU/CSU. The highest advantage for younger voters was in 1949, with 40 per cent, and the smallest zero in 1987.

At first sight, these two figures seem to support the growing economic conservatism idea. The more Conservative party (Tories, CDU/CSU) is generally more favoured among older voters than the more progressive party (Labour, SPD). However, the strong variation seems to indicate that there are other forces at work. Election-specific factors could explain this variation only if they affected the two age groups differently. For instance, a universal swing away from one party would affect both age groups equally and the age ratio would stay the same.

Variations between political generations

There is some evidence that enables us to discern distinct political generations in terms of political behaviour in West Germany and Britain. We need to look at historical electoral developments to hypothesise about the existence of political generations. The critical stage is the electoral context of the time during which voters first went to the polls. This has already been noted by James Tilley (2002) and Martin Kohli and Harald Künemund (2001) with regard to party identification.[2]

Table 4.2 shows the expected political generations for Britain. Butler and Stokes (1983 (1974)) established the existence of the first four generations, and Russell et al. (1992) demonstrated the distinct political preferences of the young generation under Thatcher, which they called 'Thatcher's Children'. The other generations fill the gaps in between, and I have given historical explanations of why each generation should be different. For instance, the generation that first went to the polls in 1945 and 1950 experienced the Labour landslide of 1945, the first Labour-led government and the establishment of the post-war welfare state. This historical experience should make this cohort as a whole more pro-Labour than the previous cohort that first voted in an era of Conservative dominance.[3]

Table 4.2 Political generations in post-war Britain

Name of political generation	Years of birth	Dates of first election	Distinct historical context in youth
Victorian Generation	1896 and earlier (men), 1887 and earlier (women)	Before 1918	Limited franchise, two party system Liberals and Conservatives, First World War
Inter-War Cohort	1897–1914 (men) 1888–1914 (women)	1918–35	Conservative dominance, Labour party on the rise, Liberals on the decline
1945 Cohort	1915–29	1945–50	Great Depression, Second World War, first majority Labour government after election landslide, establishment of modern welfare state
1951–66 Cohort	1930–45	1955–66	Conservative dominance, second Labour government under Wilson with landslide, Liberals close to oblivion
1966–79 Cohort	1946–56	1970–4	Alternating governments, strikes, revival of conservative values in society (Norris 1997), Liberal revival, more parties
Thatcher's Children	1957–74	1979–92	Conservative era, Thatcher, reform of the welfare state
Blair's Children	1975 and younger	1997–2001	New Labour shifted towards the centre, Conservatives in disarray, Lib Dems gaining ground, devolution

Table 4.3 summarises the expected political generations for West Germany.[4] For instance, the largest political generation is the Adenauer Generation. Its members first went to free polls in early post-war Germany. It was the era of the *Wirtschaftswunder* and a strong Christian Democratic party that brought stability after the politically unsteady course of the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. Thus, this generation should be more pro-CDU/CSU than its predecessor, the Weimar Generation. The latter knew only the smaller *Zentrum*, some of whose personnel made up the post-war CDU. By contrast, the following Brandt

Table 4.3 Political generations in post-war West Germany

Name of political generation	Years of birth	Dates of first election	Distinct historical context in youth
Empire	1891 and earlier (men only)	Before 1918	Semi-authoritarian regime, only men allowed to vote, census franchise in state parliamentary elections
Weimar	1892–1914 (men) 1914 and younger (women)	1919–33	Increasing polarisation of the party system, hyper inflation, world recession, SPD strongest party before the National-Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) came to power
Adenauer	1915–45	1949–66	Economic *Wirtschaftswunder*, consolidation of Christian Democrats as dominant party, FDP in government
Brandt	1946–62	1969–80	Grand coalition, Social Democrats in power for the first time since Weimar, new foreign policy towards East, student revolts, emergence of Green Party
Kohl	1963–76	1982–94	Second era of CDU/CSU dominance anti-nuclear protests, unification, growing mass unemployment
Schröder	1977 and later	1998–2002	Green Party in power

Generation, who first voted between 1969 and 1980, experienced the first post-war SPD-led governments and a radical change in foreign and domestic policies. This generation should be more pro-SPD, compared to the Adenauer Generation.[5]

Now I shall give a descriptive overview of the patterns of party support of political generations for the social democratic and conservative parties (see for graphs of other parties Web Appendix, part 4). The picture of political generations and the Labour Party is mixed (Figure 4.3). Until the mid-1970s, there appears to be a distinct relative position for each generation: while members of the Victorian Generation were least likely to vote Labour, the 1966–79 Cohort was most likely to vote Labour. The 1945 Cohort and the 1951–66 Cohort were in between, but did not

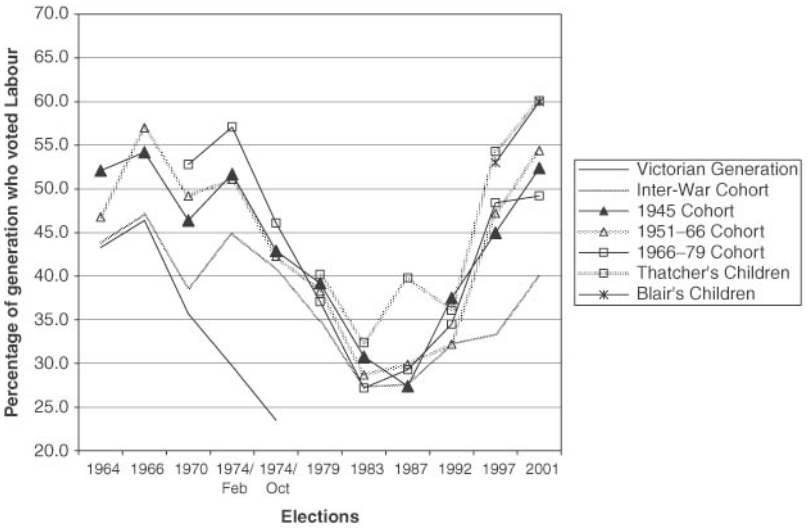

Figure 4.3 Proportion of political generations who voted Labour in British elections, 1964–2001.
Source: BES 1964–2001.

differ a lot from each other. From 1979 onwards, however, generational differences seem to disappear. Thatcher's Children were most likely to vote Labour after 1979. The separation in those two periods might reflect the consequences of dealignment through which long-term allegiances (and the two-party system of Labour and Conservatives) ceased to exist. I shall return to this notion later on.

For the Conservatives (Figure 4.4), the pre-1979 period shows clear generational patterns. The Victorian Generation and Inter-War Cohort were most likely to vote Conservative, followed by the 1945 Cohort and 1951–66 Cohort, which were again too close to each other to represent distinct variations. The 1966–79 Cohort was least likely to vote Conservative. From 1979 onwards, the generational differences became relatively small, with the exception of the (then oldest) Inter-War Cohort, which remained the strongest pro-Conservative generation.

These generational variations together have implications for older voters: in the 1950s, older voters were largely pro-Conservative (and unlikely to vote Labour) because they were members of the Victorian Generation who first went to the polls during the Liberal–Conservative two-party system. In the 1970s, the majority of older voters were more pro-Conservative (and less likely to vote Labour) than younger voters

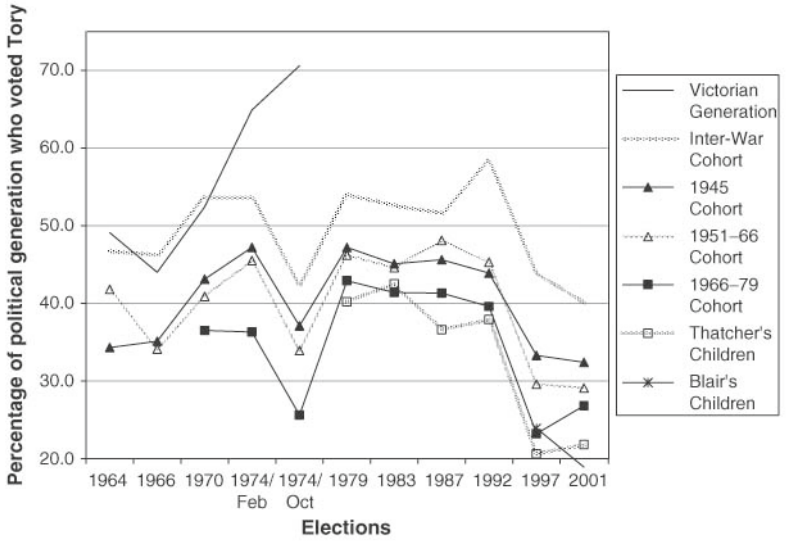

Figure 4.4 Proportion of political generations who voted Conservative in British elections, 1964–2001.
Source: BES 1964–2001.

because they were members of the Inter-War Cohort who had first gone to the polls under Conservative dominance. In the last elections of the series, however, older voters no longer showed a distinct generational difference.

The German graphs for the Social Democrats (Figure 4.5) and Christian Democrats (Figure 4.6) do not show a potential dealignment pattern such as the British ones did for the Tories and Labour (see for graphs of other parties Web Appendix, part 4). With the exceptions of 1983, 1987 and 2002 we can detect some generational differences for the SPD. The earliest Empire Generation was more likely to vote SPD than its follower, the Weimar Generation, which had the lowest likelihood of all. The Adenauer Generation was again more pro-SPD than the Weimar Generation that it followed. Overall, the Brandt Generation was most pro-SPD, whereas the Kohl Generation was somewhat in between.

As in Britain, the Conservative party CDU/CSU shows clearer generational patterns. The Weimar Generation, most adversarial to the SPD, was most pro-CDU, followed by the Adenauer Generation. The preceding Empire Generation, with the exception of 1961, was up to 30 per cent less likely to vote CDU/CSU than the Weimar Generation. The difference between the Weimar Generation and the Brandt Generation was

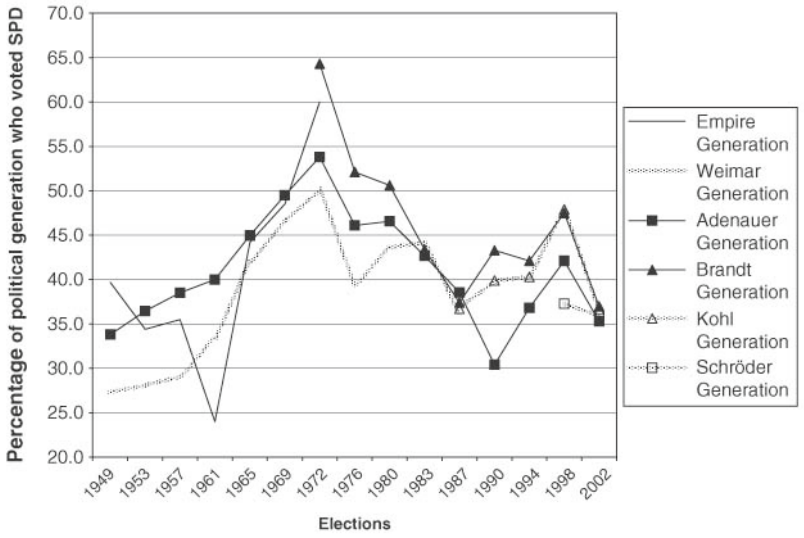

Figure 4.5 Proportion of political generations who voted SPD in German elections, 1949–2002.
Sources: German Election Studies 1961–98 and Politbarometer 2002.

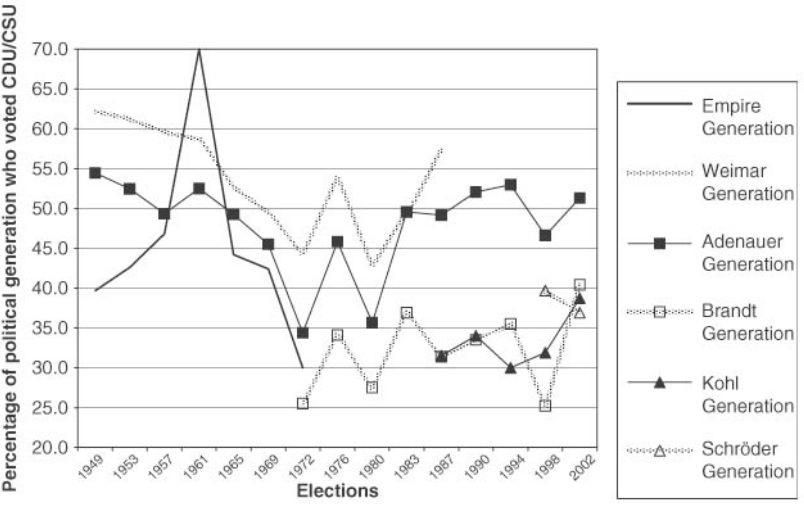

Figure 4.6 Proportion of political generations who voted CDU/CSU in German elections, 1949–2002.
Sources: German Election Studies 1961–98 and Politbarometer 2002.

up to 20 per cent. Differences between the Brandt, Kohl and Schröder generations were not apparent. For older people, we can deduce an interesting picture. Right after the Second World War, older voters were – as members of the Empire Generation – less likely to vote CDU/CSU and more likely to vote SPD than middle-aged or younger voters. The reason for this higher relative popularity of the Social Democrats among male voters who first voted in the Wilhelmine era might lie in the good fortunes of the party before 1918, and the lack of continuance of all other parties between the German Empire and the Federal Republic. The Social Democrats were the only party that continued to exist for almost one hundred years (apart from the totalitarian period 1933–45 when it was banned and had to be organised underground). All other parties after 1949 represented new parties that had some predecessors, but did not have the organisational continuity of the SPD. In the 1970s, older voters from the Weimar Generation, who had experienced the deterioration of the SPD as a ruling party in the Weimar Republic as young voters, were much more likely to vote CDU/CSU than the young Brandt Generation. In 2002, older people, as members of the Adenauer Generation who first voted in an era of Christian Democratic dominance, were still more likely to vote for the Christian Democrats and less likely to vote for the SPD.

This first descriptive tour has shown that life cycle and generational effects seem to tell part of the story. We have found evidence for the existence of some of the hypothesised political generations and have also seen that some hypothesised generations seem not to be different from adjacent ones. Thus, the differences between younger and older voters seem not to be stable, but the result of the relative contrast of different political generations. I will now test different kinds of age-related effects together in the multivariate regression analysis.

4.3 Combined hypothesis testing in multivariate regressions

First of all, I check the existence of the hypothesised generational effects by separating them from *any* kind of age effect. To that end, I run a series of logistic regression models where the dependent variable is voting for one specific party versus voting for all others.[6] I also establish the independence of variations from socio-economic factors by including more socio-economic control variables: gender, education, trade union membership, religiosity and, for Britain, council housing (see for coding details Appendix, p. 183). Then, I test the status quo conservatism and

larger parties' advantage hypotheses with a different set of dependent variables, namely incumbent versus opposition, and larger or governmental parties versus smaller parties.

Separating political generation effects from other age-related effects in a party-by-party analysis

In attempting to estimate the effects of age and generation while controlling for period effects, we easily run into the problem of multicollinearity, that is, the situation in which independent variables can be predicted to a large degree by other independent variables. If year of birth, age and survey year are used as predictors, there will be perfect multicollinearity because the survey year can be deduced from knowing the respondent's age and year of birth and vice versa, meaning that a strategy against severe collinearity is necessary. The suggested way around this problem is to use dummies for political generations. These generations comprise a decade or more and are of unequal size. The underlying assumption is that the differences in the year of birth within a political generation do not matter.[7]

There are three regressions for each dependent variable in Table 4.4. The British data are divided into an early period (1964–79) and a late period (1979–2001). In addition, there is a regression for the full sample from 1964 to 2001. This threefold division is to test whether dealignment makes a difference for the results. In the first British period (1964–79), there are no significant residual variations between age groups that could be captured by the age variable. This lack of significant variation is an important finding. It refutes our conservatism hypothesis for the period 1964–79. If it had been correct, we would have seen that advanced age meant an increase in the tendency to vote for the Tories, economically the most Conservative party, and a decrease in the tendency to vote for Labour, economically the most progressive party.

In contrast, there are significant generational variations. For the two large parties, there are variations between each generation that are always significant relative to the preceding cohort (tests not shown). Across all parties, the 1945 Cohort and the 1966–79 Cohort stand out as being relatively different from preceding cohorts, marking the changes to the political system that occurred right after the Second World War and in the late 1960s. For this early British period, the political generation hypothesis seems to hold true. The 1945 Cohort and the 1966–79 Cohort stand out most clearly as having different party preferences from the respective preceding generations. With regard to the three major parties, these two generations are significantly different from their immediate predecessors.

Table 4.4 Binary logistic regression models of party choice in Britain, 1964–79, 1979–2001 and 1964–2001

	Dependent Variable: Voted in last parliamentary election for one party versus voted for another											
	Labour			**Cons**			**Liberals**			**Others**		
Survey period	1964–79	1979–2001	1964–2001	1964–79	1979–2001	1964–2001	1964–79	1979–2001	1964–2001	1964–79	1979–2001	1964–2001
Political generations												
Victorian	–0.64***		–0.47***	0.95***		0.78***	–0.55		–0.46	–0.05		0.23
	(0.16)		(0.15)	(0.16)		(0.14)	(0.28)		(0.26)	(1.23)		(0.81)
Inter-War Cohort	–0.53***		–0.36***	0.81***		0.65***	–0.49***		–0.41***	0.01		0.14
	(0.09)		(0.06)	(0.09)		(0.06)	(0.13)		(0.09)	(0.80)		(0.41)
1945 Cohort	–0.40***	0.05	–0.19***	0.55***	0.08	0.37***	–0.15	–0.01	–0.11	–0.28	–0.27	–0.12
	(0.09)***	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.12)	(0.05)	(0.12)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.53)	(0.18)	(0.26)
1951–66 Cohort	–0.22**	0.02	–0.10***	0.37***	0.08	0.27***	–0.25*	–0.11	–0.20	0.07	–0.03	0.04
	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.12)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.31)	(0.12)	(0.15)

1966–79 Cohort (baseline)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Thatcher's Children		0.11	0.19***		0.00	0.05		–0.23***	–0.30***		–0.28*	–0.41**
		(0.07)	(0.06)		(0.16)	(0.05)		(0.07)	(0.06)		(0.14)	(0.15)
Blair's Children		–0.03	0.15		0.10	0.08		0.01	–0.08		–0.88*	–1.09**
		(0.17)	(0.16)		(0.28)	(0.16)		(0.20)	(0.20)		(0.35)	(0.38)
Age	0.00	–0.005***	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	–0.02	–0.02**	–0.02**
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.02)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Constant	0.03	–0.49***	–0.41***	–0.59***	0.11	–0.19*	–1.97***	–2.10***	–1.94***	–3.40	–3.46***	–3.24***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.08)	(0.12)	(0.33)	(0.08)	(0.17)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.62)	(0.30)	(0.34)
Valid N	8,877	15,952	23,276	8,877	15,952	23,276	7,211	15,952	21,610	8,877	15,952	23,276
McFadden's R^2	0.115	0.082	0.101	0.098	0.073	0.083	0.039	0.032	0.044	0.075	0.079	0.095

Note: ***/**/* significant at 0.001/0.01/0.05 respectively. Standard errors in brackets. Observations weighted according to sample size per election. Further controls (coefficients not shown): education, religiosity, gender, union membership, council housing, election years.
Source: BES 1964–2001.

In the second British period, there is less variation with regard to adjacent generations, and very few generation dummies show significant coefficients. Only Thatcher's Children are significantly less likely to vote for the Liberal Democrats and other parties relative to the preceding cohort. This means that there is much more variation *within* political generations in the second British period than in the first. Also revealing are the coefficients of the three generations that overlap in both periods (1945 Cohort, 1951–66 Cohort and 1966–79 Cohort). Relative to the baseline of the 1966–79 Cohort, the two other generations look different for the two time periods with respect to the Tory or Labour vote. Where there were strong differences to the baseline generation in the first period, these generations are no longer any different from it in the second period. Knowing which election was the first in which a voter was eligible to vote tells us much less in the later British period. With regard to age, there are some significant age coefficients in the second period. The Labour Party and 'other parties' are voted for less by older voters, regardless of their generational membership. The finding for the Labour Party could be seen as evidence of a voting pattern among older people in which they favour economically more conservative parties. However, we do not see the opposite result for the Conservatives since there is no positive coefficient of age in the regression of the Conservative Party.

In the full sample regressions, which cover the entire period from 1964 to 2001, we see generational coefficients, whose magnitude is between the results for the early period and the later period. Whereas the early British period shows strong, significant differences and the later period exhibits little to no generational variation, the results of the third model lie somewhere in the middle. The results for the whole period are exactly what we would expect in the case of differences between early and late periods. The creation of two shorter time periods in the longitudinal analysis did not produce artificial results that might have been caused by the collinearity structure of our independent variables. The results of the full sample thus justify the strategy of splitting the data into two time periods in order to capture the impact of dealignment.

How large are the predicted differences between older and younger voters in Britain? Let us look at some predicted probabilities for two exemplary election years, 1964 (early period) and 2001 (late period), and for 70-year-old and 30-year-old voters. The predicted probability that a young voter votes for Labour in 1964 is 55 per cent, compared with a 39 per cent probability for an older voter. This represents a difference of 16 per cent. In 2001, however, the difference between a

younger and an older voter was predicted to be only 6 per cent. The change from 16 to 6 per cent results from the weakening importance of generational differences. A 70-year-old in 1964 belonged to the Victorian Generation, which showed a much lower likelihood of voting for Labour. This finding conforms to the fact that Labour was still very weak during the time of the voter's early political socialisation. A 30-year-old in 1964 belonged to the 1951–66 Cohort, which exhibited a much greater likelihood of voting Labour because that party had by then become part of the government on a regular basis. In 2001, the generational difference between a 70-year-old (1945 Cohort) and a 30-year-old (Thatcher's Children) hardly mattered anymore. Also for the other parties, due to the vanishing importance of generational differences, the predictions in 2001 differ much less for the two exemplary voters than in 1964. The only exception is the category of 'other parties', as a result of the growing importance of regionalist parties in Wales and Scotland. In sum, the grey vote became less distinguishable from the vote of younger age groups.

Taken together, these findings seem to suggest that, after dealignment had started, generational differences caused by varying socialisation experienced at a young age mattered less than they had before. From a perspective that focuses on differences between age groups, it looks as if the increased volatility of voters, defined as members of certain generations, has made the grey vote more similar to others. If the degree of dealignment really played a role, we should now see results for West Germany that are somewhere in the middle of the results between the early and the late British periods. Dealignment in West Germany should be stronger than in the early British period and weaker than in the later British period (Franklin 1992).

The German data (Table 4.5) set contains about ten times as many observations as the British data. Therefore, I will use a confidence level of 99 per cent as a minimum instead of 95 per cent. The political generation dummies have coefficients that are significantly (here at the .01 level, tests not shown) different from the respective preceding cohort in 14 out of 16 instances, that is, the formative process can be seen in the members of each political generation. Overall, the magnitude of differences between political generations is between the levels we have seen in both British periods, so that the importance of the dealignment context gains further credibility. Also, the political generation expectation that new politics is more important to newer cohorts is supported by the finding that the Greens found little backing in the earliest Weimar and Adenauer Generations. The Green Party found most of its supporters

Table 4.5 Binary logistic regression models of party choice in West Germany, 1977/ 1980–2002

	Dependent Variable: Would vote for one party versus would vote for another			
	SPD	**CDU/CSU**	**FDP**	**Greens**
Political generations				
Weimar (baseline)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Adenauer	–0.09***	0.22***	0.24***	0.11
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.05)	(0.11)
Brandt	0.07*	–0.08*	0.06	0.57***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.12)
Kohl	0.01	–0.01	–0.15	0.11
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.14)
Schröder	–0.21***	0.28***	0.01	–0.37*
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.13)	(0.16)
Age	0.00	0.01***	–0.003*	–0.04***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.001)	(0.00)
Constant	0.56***	–1.05***	–2.83***	–3.44***
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.11)	(0.16)
Valid N	242,409	242,409	242,409	216,181
Mc Fadden's R^2	0.058	0.081	0.036	0.144

Note: ***/**/* significant at 0.001/0.01/0.05 respectively. Standard errors in brackets. Observations weighted according to sample size per election. Further controls (coefficients not shown): education, religiosity, gender, union membership, election years.
Source: Politbarometer 1977–2002.

in the Brandt Generation. Then their electoral fortunes declined in the Kohl and Schröder Generations. This is in tune with Inglehart's hypothesis. Economic downturns occurred just before the Kohl and Schröder eras when those generation members were still teenagers and ineligible to vote (in 1973 and the early 1990s). The experiences of these downturns just before these people came of political age explain why this generation exhibits postmaterialist values less often and therefore was less likely to vote for the Greens, relative to the Brandt Generation, who grew up during the German *Wirtschaftswunder*.

On the whole, the coefficients of the age variable in the German models are significant in more instances than in the British model. If the economic conservatism hypothesis was correct, we would need to see an increase in the age variation for the FDP, economically the most Conservative party, and the opposite pattern for the SPD, the most progressive one. These variations do not exist. In contrast, the FDP even shows significant variation in the opposite direction. Thus, there is

again no evidence for growing economic conservatism in party choice among ageing voters.

How large are the predicted differences between older and younger voters in West Germany? Let us look again at some predicted probabilities for an average 70-year-old and a 30-year-old voter in the 1980 and 2002 elections. The Christian Democrats show the strongest differences, with 10 per cent in 1980 and 14 per cent in 2002. However, the most remarkable differences can be seen for the Green Party in respect of which generational differences meant that even in 2002 the probability that an older voter would vote for that party was one-fifth (2 per cent) of the probability that a younger voter would (10 per cent).

Overall, the party-by-party analysis of Britain and West Germany enabled us to test the generational hypotheses. It gave us some evidence on the nature of the life-cycle hypotheses. Economic conservatism can be ruled out as an explanatory factor because the parties that are most extreme in terms of their economic stance do not show the variation between age groups that we would expect. For instance, neither the German FDP nor the Tories show a general advantage among older voters. That still leaves us to run decisive tests on the larger parties' advantage hypothesis (that ageing voters develop a preference for larger parties), and the status quo conservatism hypothesis (that older people tend to prefer the incumbent more than younger voters).

Testing the larger parties and status-quo conservatism hypotheses

Table 4.6 shows four regressions. For Britain, the dependent variable is coded one if respondents voted for the Liberals or any other small party, and 0 if they voted for Labour or the Tories. For West Germany, the dependent variable is coded one if respondents voted for the Greens or any of the small parties, and 0 if they voted for the SPD, CDU/CSU or the FDP, each of which have had long tenures of post-war governmental participation in Germany. There are again controls for education, religious practice, gender, trade union membership and, for Britain, council housing.

The British models show no significant age effects in the predicted direction for any of the periods. The West German one, in contrast, shows a decreasing likelihood of voting for the Greens or other parties among older people in accordance with the hypothesis of larger-party advantage. The predicted probability of voting for a smaller party is only 2 per cent for someone who was 70-years-old in 1980 and 6 per cent for someone who was 30-years-old with only year and age varying. In 2002, the predicted probabilities were 6 and 19 per cent,

Table 4.6 Binary logistic regression models for Britain and West Germany, small party vote

	Great Britain			West Germany
	1964–79	1979–2001	1964–2001	1977–2002
	Dependent variables: party choice			
	Liberals and others versus Labour, Tories			Green and others versus SPD, CDU/CSU, FDP
Political generations				
Victorian	–0.68***		–0.61*	
	(0.26)		(0.25)	
Inter-War Cohort	–0.57***		–0.53***	
	(0.12)		(0.08)	
1945 Cohort	–0.29**	–0.13*	–0.26***	
	(0.11)	(0.07)	(0.06)	
1951–66 Cohort	–0.26*	–0.12*	–0.24***	
	(0.10)	(0.06)	(0.05)	
1966–79 Cohort	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Thatcher's Children		–0.19**	–0.28***	
		(0.07)	(0.06)	
Blair's Children		–0.16	–0.27	
		(0.18)	(0.18)	
Weimar				0.00
Adenauer				–0.03
				(0.07)
Brandt				0.27***
				(0.08)
Kohl				–0.01
				(0.10)
Schröder				–0.34***
				(0.12)
Age	–0.00	–0.00	–0.00	–0.03***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	–1.79	–1.88	–1.72	–3.86
	(0.16)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.15)
Valid N	8,877	15,952	23,276	242,409
McFadden's R^2	0.062	0.018	0.059	0.126

Note: ***/**/* significant at 0.001/0.01/0.05 respectively. Standard errors in brackets. Observations weighted according to sample size per election. Further controls (coefficients not shown): education, religiosity, gender, union membership, (council housing), election years.

Sources: BES 1964–2001, Politbarometer 1977–2002.

respectively. Those numbers represent sizable differences between the grey vote and the vote of other age groups. However, since we failed to find evidence for the two British periods, we find no general support for the hypothesis of larger-party advantage. It could be that the evidence for West Germany measures something that is unique to the German case, perhaps a frequent occurrence in respect of anti-establishment parties in the category of 'smaller parties'. The difference between the two countries cannot lie in dealignment. For one thing, the generation dummies capture the growth in vote share among new, smaller parties; for another, if we were to order the three contexts of period/country/constellations according to the strength of dealignment, West Germany would fall in the middle. So neither the most aligned system – Britain from 1964 to 1979 – nor the most dealigned system (Britain from 1979 to 2001) shows an age advantage for bigger parties.

Instead, the reason might lie in differences between the electoral systems. In Britain's first-past-the-post system, voting for a smaller party does not make any sense in most constituencies because the candidate is not likely to win. Therefore, even if larger parties leave a stronger impression on older voters than on younger ones, the younger ones might be just as likely to vote for the latter because there is no instrumental sense in voting for smaller parties. Thus, we would not expect to see a measurable difference. In Germany, in contrast, there is a stronger incentive to vote for smaller parties because the electoral system based on proportional representation guarantees that no vote is 'wasted'. If this finding holds true, generally, in party systems with low electoral thresholds younger people would be more likely to vote for smaller parties that do not have a history of governmental participation.

In Table 4.7 we see the last series of regressions. The dependent variable is coded one if the respondent indicated having voted for the incumbent party, and 0 if he or she voted for one of the opposition parties. The regressions include the same political generation dummies and socio-economic control variables as before and give little evidence of a systematic preference for the incumbent in the two countries. In the British analysis, the age coefficient is not significant. The German data shows a significant life-cycle variation that is captured in the age coefficient.

Is there a plausible explanation for the lack of a finding for Britain and, at the same time, the predicted finding for West Germany? The electoral system cannot be the reason. If anything, the incumbent government party (Labour or Conservatives) tends to be strongly presented in all constituencies and is more often than not a likely winner in the

Table 4.7 Binary logistic regressions for Britain and West Germany, incumbent vote

	Great Britain			**West Germany**
	1964–79	**1979–2001**	**1964–2001**	**1977–2002**
	Dependent variables: party choice			
	Incumbent party versus opposition party			
Political generations				
Victorian	0.01		0.17	
	(0.15)		(0.14)	
Inter-War Cohort	–0.05		0.18**	
	(0.08)		(0.06)	
1945 Cohort	–0.10	0.18***	0.16**	
	(0.08)	(0.05)	(0.05)	
1951–66 Cohort	0.01	0.12*	0.16**	
	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.05)	
1966–79 Cohort	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Thatcher's Children		–0.26***	–0.23	
		(0.05)	(0.05)	
Blair's Children		–0.40*	–0.34	
		(0.18)	(0.18)	
Weimar				0.00
Adenauer				0.20***
				(0.02)
Brandt				0.05
				(0.03)
Kohl				–0.01
				(0.04)
Schröder				0.18***
				(0.06)
Age	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	–0.32**	–0.40***	–0.56***	–0.48***
	(0.11)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.05)
Valid N	8,877	15,952	23,276	242,409
McFadden's R^2	0.014	0.034	0.021	0.016

Note: ***/**/* significant at 0.001/0.01/0.05 respectively. Standard errors in brackets. Observations weighted according to sample size per election. Further controls (coefficients not shown): education, religiosity, gender, union membership, (council housing), election years.

Sources: BES 1964–2001, Politbarometer 1977–2002.

next electoral race in that constituency. Thus, if older voters in Britain do have a stronger bias for the governmental party, there is instrumental sense in voting for it in a given constituency. Neither can it be an effect due to measuring a conservative party bias. In the second British period, the Tories predominantly held power, as did the Christian Democrats in Germany. But we see one systematic and one insignificant life-cycle pattern. All in all, the hypothesis is provided with ambiguous evidence and we should reject it in its present form on those grounds.

4.4 Summary and discussion

A mixture of macro factors and a combination of individual ageing and generational effects explain the differences between younger and older voters. Economic conservatism can be rejected as an explanation of older voters' choices. Status quo conservatism that plays out in a growing preference for the incumbent party does not find unambiguous evidence, either.

The generational pattern for the Green Party – in line with national economic fortunes – also suggests the validity of the socio-economic cohort idea that recent generations are more likely to be postmaterialist and thus favour the Green Party. Older voters today are still less likely to vote for these parties, although that can change in the near future as the generation born right after the War turns 60. Furthermore, the 'pure' senior interests being served by senior parties seem not to be an important factor at the moment, as the poor showing of grey parties demonstrates.

The individual ageing hypothesis about growing larger-party bias finds only conditional confirmation. The conditions can only be suggested here and need more research to test them. Older people seem to build up a stronger preference for larger or governmental parties over their lifetimes, relative to younger voters, but only if the electoral system is conducive to smaller parties, so that younger voters have an instrumental incentive to vote for them and so set themselves apart from older voters. Thus, the British party system with its low degree of proportionality does not have these ageing effects: older people might be more likely to have a preference for the larger parties (Labour and Tories), but this effect does not show in their voting behaviour. Younger people, who in West Germany are more likely to cast a vote for smaller and opposition parties, might not do so in Britain as the vote is likely to be 'wasted'.

Political-generation effects are also present but seem to be a correlate of the state of dealignment in the party system. The more dealigned

a party system is, the smaller the differences between socialisation experiences in early adulthood because of growing electoral volatility. As a consequence, for instance, older voters have behaved much more like younger voters in recent British elections than in the past because generational differences have almost ceased to matter.

The findings cast a new light on apocalyptic visions of an ageing democracy. We found almost no evidence for a life-cycle effect in voting patterns. The only pattern is the growing established party bias played out in West Germany, meaning that this pattern is not even stable across the two macrocontexts that we have here. At most, we can postulate that ageing democracies with proportional electoral systems will face an increasing advantage for established parties. But the magnitude of the effects that we measured for West Germany was not great. Otherwise, generational differences (postmaterialism, political generations) are the dominant sources of differences between age groups. However, even these differences become less important because early socialisation plays less of a role in party systems characterised by dealignment and increasing voter volatility. Also, these kinds of differences are not stable across time as different cohorts face each other as younger and older voters at each election.

5
Membership of Political Organisations

> At the moment, we [the senior caucus of the CDU] have 58,000 members and are represented in 360 districts all over Germany … Parallel to the growing importance of older people as a target group, older people themselves have the experience and the motivation to make themselves heard and to make things happen. The senior caucus of the Union [Christian Democratic Union] … wants to make policies not only for older people, but with them as well.
>
> (Senioren-Union 2008)

Due to the fact that European parties have a growing number of older members, some parties have institutionalised organisational substructures to give special representation to older people. An example of such a sub-organisation is the German *Senioren-CDU* that was established in 1988. Other German parties followed suit and set up comparable structures: the SPD (AG 60 Plus, 1991), the Liberals (Liberale Senioren, 2001) and the Greens (Grüne Alte, 2004). The membership of these caucuses is on the rise, whereas the membership of most parties in Western Europe is declining. For example, in 2008 the senior caucus of the German Christian Democrats had more than 50,000 members (about 10 per cent of their overall membership) and was represented organisationally all over Germany. Overall, the proportion of CDU party members who were more than 60 rose from 29 per cent in 1990 to 48 per cent in 2007 (FAZ 2008).

Why is the membership of many political parties ageing? Is this ageing process merely an aspect of the ageing of the general population? In that case, the ageing process within parties should proceed at the same pace as the ageing process of the populace at large. On the other

hand, the process of membership ageing may be a result of a failure of parties to attract new members at a young age or of disproportionate success among older individuals. In that case, the ageing process within parties should be faster than the general ageing process.

Political parties are still the main but not the only mass organisational vehicles of representative democracy. In particular, trade unions have played an important role at the intersection between the economy and politics in many industrial democracies. Also, single-issue organisations – that is, organisations that target single policy areas, such as environmental groups or local action groups – are becoming increasingly important for policymaking. How are these other political organisations developing with respect to membership ageing?

Our theoretical model can answer these questions. The model projects four general expectations concerning the differences in political membership between younger and older people. We can expect three of the four effects to be at work here: political generation, socioeconomic cohort and social life cycle. According to GP 1, an individual's early political socialisation gives him or her political preferences for a particular type or types of organisation(s). If one type of organisation is generally on the decline, we would expect younger cohorts to be less likely to form preferences for that kind of organisation because the declining popularity would particularly impact on the youngest generation. Given the general trends in European democracies, political parties and trade unions may be the preferred institutionalised channels of political expression of older cohorts, and single-issue organisations the channel preferred by newer cohorts.

In addition, individuals decide on the type of political participation based on a set of intrinsic factors (resources and motivation) and extrinsic factors (opportunities and mobilisation exposure). On the one hand, these factors differ between cohorts (according to GP 2). For example, older cohorts are less postmaterialist, which we would expect to be a predictor of single-issue organisation membership. On the other hand, the factors vary across the social life cycle (as GP 3 suggests). For example, trade unions are likely to show a strong life-cycle effect tied to employment status. This link makes middle-aged individuals, who tend to be employed, more likely to be trade union members.

The idea of political generation and life-cycle effects will also be analysed with regard to interaction effects between country-level characteristics and the variation between age groups. We have seen in Chapter 3 that when societies are shaped in favour of older people (where public opinion towards older people is positive and the dependency ratio is

high), older people are less likely to vote relative to younger people, which seem to suggest that younger people are motivated to defend their own interests. Also, the length of democratic epoch increases the relative participation rates of older people because socialisation in longer established democracies leads to the internalisation of more participatory norms. Can we find the same patterns for membership of political organisations? If the hypothesised causal mechanisms are at work, they should be measurable in this area, too.

The main findings are as follows. For each type of membership there is one outstanding life-cycle effect at work at the individual level: duration of residence (parties, positive impact from the perspective of older people), employment (trade unions, negative impact for older people) and living with children (single-issue organisations, positive impact for older people). Also, the country context shapes the variance between individuals of different ages, especially the country-specific popularity of the organisation and dependency ratio. Finally, there is some moderate evidence for parties and single-issue organisations, supporting the cohort notion that parties on the decline indicate an ageing membership and single-issue organisations on the rise indicate a younger membership.

The empirical analysis proceeds in three steps. First, I discuss the long-term trends and democratic meaning of political parties, trade unions and single-issue organisations. Second, I carry out a series of regressions at the individual level explaining the probabilities of party, trade union and single-issue organisation membership. Third, I describe the general aggregate changes in membership numbers of the three main types of organisation, and analyse the changes in age composition and its relationship to general membership change. I then discuss the meaning of these dynamics for ageing Europe.

5.1 The dynamics of changing membership structures

The comparability of membership types

A central question in this chapter concerns the extent to which membership of a political party, a trade union and a single-issue organisation can be compared. To some extent all organisations are the same: they are formally organised and aim to affect political outcomes, that is, the provision of public goods (see Morales Diez de Ulzurum 2004: 36), which makes membership of them fit into our definition of political participation. However, the three types target different structures of economic–political systems in their efforts to influence public policies and therefore attract different kinds of people. Political parties are

characterised by a full set of ideological preferences that guide their policy preferences. In contrast to this broad ideological approach, single-issue organisations are concerned about only one policy area, such as human rights. Trade unions, in turn, cater to the interests of employees in a specific sector of the economy, sometimes only to those of a very small guild-type sector. In corporatist countries, trade unions are also partners of the government and other interest organisations in making policies; in Ghent system countries, they take the additional role of administering unemployment benefits.

Another way of characterising the differences between political organisations is suggested by Laura Morales (2004: 40). She characterises different kinds of political organisation in terms of the 'nature of the representative link'. Trade unions and political parties are 'traditional' organisations that link specific constituencies or sectors of the population with the political system. 'New' organisations, by which she means single-issue organisations, do not provide this explicit link. They do not have an established mandate that allows them to represent any part of the population in the political distribution process.

In addition to differences between the three types of organisation, there is organisational heterogeneity within each type, which can make analysis more complicated. For parties, it can be argued that the membership of an extremist fringe party, such as a separatist party, is likely to follow a different logic from membership of established mass member parties. The former is probably characterised by a high level of commitment on the part of its members, who are also motivated by the elite challenging character of their party. In contrast, membership of parties that are regularly part of the government is likely to be motivated by identification with the current political system and perhaps career interests. For trade unions, membership of traditional craft unions requires a higher level of commitment in terms of time and effort than membership of a modern trade union (Calmfors et al. 2001: 11). Finally, single-issue organisations are by definition very diverse, sometimes targeting local political issues, sometimes big political issues, such as environmental protection. Thus, the differences in objectives within the group of single-issue organisations lead to differences in membership structures in terms of the degree of organisation and general organisational patterns.

Causes of membership changes

The political participation process is in flux in many advanced industrial democracies (Dalton 2002, 2004; della Porta and Diani 1999; Norris 2002).

How citizens express themselves politically and which channels they use have changed in the last few decades. For example, we saw in Chapter 3 that voting is considered less of a citizen's duty by younger cohorts in Britain. As a consequence, overall voting participation is on the decline because younger, less civically minded cohorts are replacing older ones in the electorate. Other industrial democracies are showing a similar decline in younger cohorts' sense of duty to vote (Blais et al. 2004).

Some easily measurable facets of this change, such as declining turnout, are unambiguously stated in the growing body of literature. In contrast, there is less agreement on how to interpret the observed changes. One thing that seems clear is the rise of the 'critical citizen' (Norris 1999). Citizens in advanced industrial democracies simultaneously embrace democratic values and distrust of the institutions of representative government, such as parliament, government and political parties (see also Dalton 2004). In organisational terms, waning trust seems to have led to the rise of social movements and political single-issue organisations and the decline of political parties and trade unions, although, as we shall see, these trends are not universal.

With regard to party membership, Dalton and Wattenberg (2000) identified three levels of potential factors that could further this demise of political parties in established Western democracies: the micro, meso and macrolevels. At the microlevel, the socio-economic process of modernisation makes higher levels of formal education available to an unprecedented number of people. Higher education leads to cognitive mobilisation and more critical perspectives. The habitual bonds with parties that used to exist are lessening in strength. Furthermore, a widespread value change from materialism to postmaterialism makes individuals eschew hierarchical structures, such as those typical of established political parties. Also, increasing residential mobility – also a correlate of better education and the changing economy – weakens group membership ties. Citizens are less likely to identify strongly with a particular social group. The political mobilisation exposure that comes from these social group memberships therefore loses its importance for individuals.

At the mesolevel, the authors put forward the increasing significance of the media, on the one hand in informing citizens about politics, a function long fulfilled by political parties, and on the other hand in their tendency to downplay the role of political parties. In addition, the growing professionalisation of political parties makes party elites less dependent on members for conducting election campaigns, instead relying on professional campaigning organisations and public opinion polls.

At the macrolevel, there is most importantly the advance of communication technology. Public opinion polls assist political parties in getting to know what the electorate wants, which was previously achieved through the party organisation. Moreover, the style of electoral campaigns has changed from a labour-intensive style – with party members, for example, delivering flyers – to a more capital-intensive style that involves professional marketing firms.

An analysis of trade unions in Western Europe also found some fundamental factors of social change that have furthered the membership decline (see also Checchi and Visser 2005; Ebbinghaus and Visser 1999): changes in the economy, labour force composition and individual values. Most importantly, the economy is changing from an industrial structure in which there is a high density of unions and a relatively homogenous workforce to a services-led structure with a growing number of white-collar job categories and rising female employment. The economy overall has expanded in sectors that are less unionised. In addition, small-sized firms are on the increase and tend to have fewer unionised employees. The authors also cautiously point towards the change in values and lifestyles, a less collectivist working class orientation and more individualised lifestyles with postmaterialist values.

The rise of single-issue organisations is probably the development with the least clear research findings. One problem is that these organisations, many of which are also known as 'new social movements', are not necessarily either mass organisations or strictly organised. Indeed, membership of these organisations requires much less ideological commitment on the part of the participants than membership of a party, their main rival in terms of membership recruitment. In general, membership of single-issue organisations is most difficult to measure. By its very nature, the transition between supporters and members of these organisations is fluid. Some organisations have almost no hierarchies and no membership strategies. Therefore, some of these organisations are closely intertwined with non-institutionalised participation, which will be the focus of Chapters 6 and 7.

It seems that the long-term trend for single-issue organisations is upward. The Handbook of the Union of International Organizations has collected data on international non-governmental organisations, many of which have political goals. Their count of organisations in Europe as a whole went up from about 24,000 in 1977 to over 54,000 in 1993 and to 130,000 in 2006 (Union of International Organizations 1993: 1707; 2008). Of course, this can be only a fraction of all political single-issue organisations, but it is the best indicator apart from the survey material.

Analyses of accumulated surveys also point towards an upward trend of environmental, human rights and consumer organisations in European countries (Morales Diez de Ulzurum 2004: 115).

The reasons given for the increase in these social movements are manifold (Pichardo 1997; Tarrow 1994; Touraine 1981). One is the decline of conventional political organisations that I have just described. Another links the rise of these new organisations to the change from an industrial to a post-industrial society. The latter has created a new middle class that is less dependent on old sectors that are stratified by social class in the conventional sense. Also, in the post-industrial society the state is not able to correct its own flaws and needs corrections from outside (Offe 1985).

The bulk of studies on the fortunes of political parties, trade unions and single-issue organisations deal with established democracies in Western and Northern Europe. The new democracies, such as the post-communist ones, partly follow different logics; political organisations played an important role in the transition to democracy – for example, Solidarity in Poland and the Civic Platform in Czechoslovakia. Parties and trade unions that were part of the Socialist system often lost members after the transition, whereas new organisations gained members. Overall, however, there was an 'overall reluctance of the newly empowered citizens to join parties and engage in the variety of activities they are traditionally associated with' (Lewis 2001: 556).

Summing up, we can detect major changes that affect the decline and rise of different kinds of political organisations: the economy, technology, values and other things are put forward in the empirical literature, mostly on established democracies. Age groups are likely to be affected differently by these macro changes. Most importantly, new developments are likely to impact more strongly on younger cohorts. The faster the pace of any change, the more dramatic the differences between cohorts should be as to their receptiveness to membership of various organisations. We now turn to the empirical evidence for the traces that these changes are leaving on age groups in European democracies.

5.2 Analysing differences at the individual level

In the European Social Survey, respondents were asked whether they had been a member of any organisation in the last 12 months, and were then given a list of organisations. As single-issue organisations, respondents could tick humanitarian/human rights organisations or environmental/peace/animal rights organisations.

Before we start the analysis, a glance at the simple distribution of membership across age groups will be informative. As a first result, we are reminded that political involvement is a minority phenomenon. Most people are not members of any organisation, with middle-aged people between 30 and 59 most likely to be members (27 per cent are members of some political organisation), followed by older people (18 per cent members) and young people below 30 (16 per cent). Second, trade union membership is still relatively widespread among the oldest age group (8 per cent) compared to 19 per cent among the middle-aged and 9 per cent among the young, a finding mirrored in the membership data of individual trade unions, such as the German *IG Metall* (Hassel 2007). Third, a significant number of older people (8 per cent) are members of the 'new' types of organisation, the single-issue organisations, with a likelihood that exceeds that of young people (7 per cent). Finally, the likelihood of older people being party members (5 per cent) is two and a half times higher than that of young people (2 per cent) and slightly higher than that of middle-aged people (4 per cent).

Individual-level patterns in the multivariate regression analyses

Table 5.1 shows the results from multilevel logistic regression models in which exactly the same approach was followed as in Chapter 3. We have a cross-sectional, but international data set and include a full array of age-related independent variables. Some of the independent variables have already been used in Chapter 3: education, religiosity, gender, political interest, income, duration of residence, internal and external political efficacy, pension as main source of income, living with a partner, health, social networks and a number of minor children in household. Why these variables are age-related and predictors of political participation was explained in Chapter 3.

There are some new variables that are age-related and need to be included as predictors of political membership:

Cohort effects

Postmaterialism, Left–Right self-placement: Trade unions and some single-issue organisations have been associated with Left politics and the latter more importantly with New Left politics. Younger cohorts in post-industrial societies are thought to have been socialised into a new set of values that include people's desire to express themselves and caring about non-material public goods, such as the environment (Inglehart 1971, 1990).

Table 5.1 Random-intercept binary logistic regression models of membership of parties, trade unions and single-issue organisations for 19 European countries, 2002

		Parties		**Trade unions**		**Single-issue organisations**	
		Model 1		**Model 2**		**Model 3**	
	Correlations with age	**Coef.**	**Std. Err.**	**Coef.**	**Std. Err.**	**Coef.**	**Std. Err.**
30–9 (baseline 18–29)		0.03	0.15	0.50***	0.07	0.32***	0.08
40–9		0.09	0.15	0.71***	0.07	0.46***	0.09
50–9		0.21	0.15	0.87***	0.07	0.40***	0.09
60–9		0.31	0.16	0.84***	0.10	0.14	0.11
70–9		**0.58****	**0.18**	**0.40****	**0.13**	**-0.08**	**0.13**
80+		1.10***	0.21	0.20	0.18	–0.04	0.18
Trade union member	–0.07	0.70***	0.08			0.37***	0.06
Single-issue org. member	0.01	0.30***	0.09	0.37***	0.06		
Party member	0.10			0.75***	0.08	0.26**	0.09
Cohort effects							
Education	–0.27	–0.49**	0.15	0.04	0.09	0.76***	0.11
Left–Right	0.07	0.06	0.15	–1.11***	0.09	–0.69***	0.11
Town size	–0.04	–0.47***	0.12	0.04	0.07	0.25**	0.08
Postmaterialism	–0.15	–0.35	0.26	–0.23	0.15	0.61***	0.17
Religiosity	0.19	–0.23	0.12	–0.30***	0.07	0.17*	0.08
Cohort/life-cycle effects							
Political interest	0.07	2.25***	0.15	0.13	0.08	0.49***	0.10
Political information	0.23	0.73*	0.33	0.16	0.19	0.68**	0.23
Income	–0.14	–0.20	0.19	0.29*	0.11	0.66***	0.13
Social networks (logged)	–0.02	1.24***	0.14	0.90***	0.09	3.41***	0.10
Internal political efficacy	–0.09	2.59***	0.19	0.21	0.11	0.28*	0.13

(*Continued*)

Table 5.1 (*Continued*)

		Parties		Trade unions		Single-issue organisations	
		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Correlations with age	Coef.	Std. Err.	Coef.	Std. Err.	Coef.	Std. Err.
External political efficacy	–0.08	1.15***	0.15	0.30**	0.09	0.39***	0.11
Female	a	0.06	0.07	0.26***	0.04	–0.50***	0.05
Life-cycle effects							
Employed	–0.53	0.03	0.10	1.46***	0.06	–0.11	0.07
Self-employed	–0.03	0.37**	0.12	–0.35***	0.10	0.01	0.09
Duration of residence	0.46	1.27***	0.20	0.18	0.10	–0.49***	0.12
Living with partner	0.10	0.13	0.08	0.13**	0.05	–0.10	0.05
Number of minor children in HH	–0.47	–0.08	0.40	–0.47*	0.22	–1.07***	0.28
Health	–0.33	–0.23	0.16	–0.29**	0.10	–0.21	0.11
Pension as main source of income	0.67	0.27*	0.12	–0.17*	0.08	0.25**	0.09
Constant		–4.55***	0.17	–3.68***	0.17	–2.92***	0.12
σ_u		0.47		0.66		0.42	
Intra-class correlation coefficient		0.06		0.12		0.05	
Valid N		28196		28196		28196	
Log-likelihood		–3858		–9495		–7009	
AIC		7774		19047		14076	

Note: ***/**/* significant at 0.001/0.01/0.05 respectively. Observations weighted by population weight. Without Czech Republic or Switzerland because of missing data. (a) Demographers use the masculinity ratio to describe how many men there are per 100 women in a particular age group. In 2000, the ratio was around 90 in European countries in the 60–64 age group and around 50 in the 80 and older age group (Avramov and Maskova 2003: 51). Correlations for living with partner and number of children for those aged 40 and more. All continuous variables transformed to range from zero to one and then centred around zero.
Source: ESS.

The attachment of certain cohorts to specific parties leads to a moderate correlation of age with Left–Right ideological positions. Elderly people are not becoming more conservative in terms of shifting to the Right on a socio-economic conflict dimension. Rather, they stay where they were when they were socialised at a young age (see Chapter 4 for the cohort effects on party choice). However, society and party politics change. Thus, elderly people in post-communist countries position themselves more to the Left as they grew up in an era of socialism, and the party system has now moved relatively to the Right. In other countries, the elderly stand more to the Right because the postmaterialist, New Left dimension of politics that has become part of politics in many European countries is new to them.[1]

Size of town: The size of the town a person lives in is a proxy for the quantity of opportunities for joining a political organisation. In some countries, such as the Netherlands, older cohorts are more likely to live in more rural areas, while newer cohorts tend to move to the towns due to employment opportunities.

Life-cycle/cohort effects

Political information: It is measured here via politically relevant media usage. Like political interest more generally, this is another side of the elderly's concentration on politics, which might diminish for later cohorts as a correlate of growing political disenchantment. Access to political information is important in decision making because more information decreases uncertainty.

Life-cycle effects

Employment status: In addition to pension as main source of income, the estimations in this chapter will also include whether the individual is employed or self-employed. Especially with regard to trade union membership, we can expect employment to matter because it puts the individual into a context in which there is instrumental benefit from joining a trade union. Middle-aged people are more likely to be employed than young adults or older people.

In order to save space, all independent variables have a range of one, so that readers can directly compare the overall impact of each independent variable on the likelihood of being a member of the respective political organisation (see Appendix, p. 176, for coding details). In addition, the first column indicates the bivariate associations of these independent variables and age. These pieces of information enable us

to directly read the strongest age-related predictors of membership from the table. These are variables whose regression coefficients are high and have a strong overall correlation with age.

The variations of the coefficients of the age dummies are informative. These coefficients still capture the variance not explained by the range of independent variables. For party membership, there is a clear increasing propensity to be a party member even with all the other age-related effects being equal. For trade union membership, the residual age dummies have a perfect inverse u-shape, with those between 50 and 59 having the highest likelihood of being trade union members. For single-issue membership, the probability rises from the very young to those in their forties, then gently declines for those in their fifties, after which it suddenly drops.

There are only a few age-related predictors of membership that have a large coefficient and a large bivariate association with age itself. From such an age-centred perspective, party membership is strongly determined by duration of residence. Older people tend to have lived in an area for longer and are therefore more likely to be party members. Individuals who are more embedded in an area because of the length of time that they have lived there are more likely to be party members. In terms of our theoretical model, this finding suggests the importance of motivation in becoming politically active because long-term residents are more familiar with the problems of the area and more likely to be asked to join.

Trade union membership shows different age-related dynamics. Here, not surprisingly, employment status is highly age-related and leads to a much higher likelihood of being a trade union member. This piece of evidence reminds us of the different benefits of trade unions in comparison with parties and single-issue organisations. They cater primarily to the needs of their members, who have much to gain from membership when they are still working. Also, this suggests that trade unions, even though they try to retain retirees, are still mainly employment sphere organisations in Europe.

Finally, single-issue membership shows dynamics that are again different from the other two kinds of membership. Residual age does not matter very much in explaining why someone is a single-issue organisation member or not. The most outstanding age-related predictor is the number of children that live in an individual's household. It is a negative determinant of such membership and also negatively related with age (seen for those aged 40 and more). Older people are more likely to be members of single-issue organisations because they are less likely to

have children living in their household. This direction of impact can also be found for the collective mode of non-institutionalised participation (and trade union membership at the 0.05 significance level). It might be best explained by the interests of individuals who have children in a household. Children are likely to require so much time and concentration that those concerned are less interested in supporting single-issue organisations, such as human rights groups, environmental groups and others.[2] Even though the number of children that parents have is going down across cohorts (Statistisches Bundesamt 2006; Frejka and Calot 2001; Kohler et al. 2002), having minor children in the household still carries a strong life-cycle aspect.

Macro–micro interactions

In a second series of regressions, we interact the residual variance captured in the coefficients of the age dummies – that is, the remaining difference between age groups that has not yet been accounted for – with macro characteristics of the country (see Web Appendix, part 5, for the regression results): the average level of participation in each country (mean on the dependent variable per country), the dependency ratio, the length of democratic epoch and public opinion concerning older people.

Figure 5.1 summarises the results of 12 regression analyses in the form of predicted probabilities for average individuals who have exactly the same values on all age-related individual-level predictors. Each partial diagram shows three graphs, one for the macrolevel variable at its minimum, one at its mean and one at its maximum. Starting with party membership, we see, first of all, that the average country level of party membership shapes the differences between age groups. For mean to minimal participation countries, there is no substantial variation left between age groups. In high participation countries, there remains an increasing trend with age of being a party member. In other words, the more popular party membership is in a country, the higher the age-related increase of the likelihood of being a party member. Second, the dependency ratio and helpfulness towards older people mildly affect the slope associated with age. In countries with low dependency ratios and low levels of helpfulness towards older people, the increase with age is more substantial. In countries with high dependency ratios or high levels of willingness to help older people, the likelihood of being a party member is the same across age groups (the increase has gone done to zero). Finally, the length of democratic epoch makes a difference for the older age groups, but leaves younger age groups virtually unaffected.

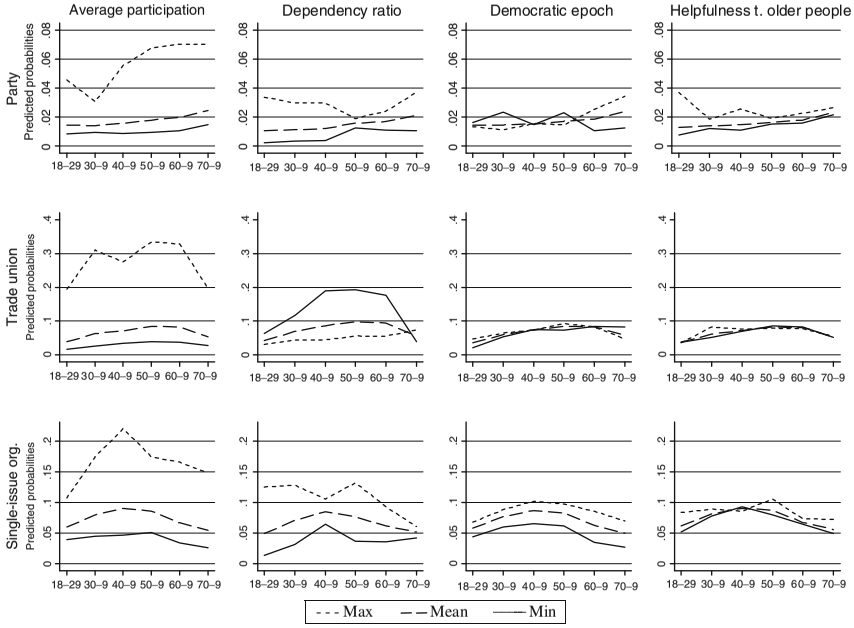

Figure 5.1 Fitted probabilities of membership of parties, trade unions and single-issue organisations, interaction models – macrolevel characteristics × age.
Note: The scaling of the vertical axis is the same in each row, but differs between rows, so that the absolute probability levels can be more easily compared within one type of membership.

For older people, the likelihood of being a party member is higher, the longer established the democracy.

For trade union membership, the first two graphs and the last two graphs are similar. High popularity of trade union membership and low dependency ratios create an inverse u-shaped variation between age groups. Trade union membership is still much more common at middle age even if we statistically control for things such as employment, in contexts in which many people are members of trade unions and relatively few older people depend on relatively many working people. In countries in which trade union membership is low to average or where dependency ratios are mean-level to high, the variance across age groups is practically zero. That means, first of all and trivially, that union membership is still very much linked to middle age in those countries where it is popular and, second and more interestingly, that trade union membership is as common among older people as among younger people in countries characterised by a high weight of older people relative to the working population. Whether trade unions in such a context – for example, Italy – are eager to open their organisations to retirees seems likely and is congruent with the aggregate analysis in Section 5.3 (see, for a related argument and evidence from Germany and Italy, Anderson and Lynch 2007). The last two graphs for trade union membership show no effects of length of democratic epoch and public opinion. Once we know the differences between younger and older people at the individual level, more knowledge about the length of democracy or public opinion concerning old age does not further our understanding of trade union membership.

With regard to single-issue organisations, high participation rates and high dependency ratios lead to lower levels of membership among older people relative to middle-aged people around the age of 40. In other words, in countries in which single-issue organisation membership is widespread or in which many older people depend on fewer working people, older people are less likely to be members compared to middle-aged people. Length of democratic epoch and public opinion concerning older people do not have any substantial impact on the differences between age groups.

Let us now discuss the conceptual–theoretical meaning of these macro–micro results across three types of membership. First, the popularity of membership matters. The more widespread a certain type of membership is in a country, the more pronounced the differences between age groups. In societies in which membership is very popular, party members are more likely to be older people, trade union members

are more likely to be of working age (even once we have controlled for employment effects) and single-issue organisation members are more likely to be between 30 and 50. The evidence for parties and single-issue organisations can be linked to the next section where we will analyse aggregate longitudinal data. Taking everything together, the explanation seems to be a political generation one. Younger cohorts prefer single-issue organisations and older cohorts prefer political parties. In countries in which these organisations are popular, are particularly among the age groups representing earlier (parties) or later birth cohorts (single-issue organisations). The evidence for trade unions only trivially mirrors the fact that high popularity of membership occurs primarily among people of working age (not necessarily employment), that is, trade unions are still primarily organisations of working age members.

Second, the evidence for the dependency ratio for parties and single-issue organisations suggests that in countries in which many older people are supported by few working people, younger people have – relatively speaking – a high likelihood of being members of parties and single-issue organisations. In other words, in contexts in which their activity levels may be more necessary because of a potential distortion of welfare state resources to their detriment, younger people are more active. For trade unions in societies with high dependency ratios, the lessening importance of working age members in their membership profile can also mean that trade unions open their ranks more aggressively to retirees.

Finally, the evidence for length of democratic epoch and public opinion concerning older people suggests little or no impact. The small systematic differences that we see for party membership, however, is in accordance with what we saw in Chapter 3 and what we are going to see in Chapter 6. Older people are more active in politics in more established democracies, and differences between age groups grow to nil in contexts in which public opinion is most favourable towards older people. Considering that we are talking about residual differences that already account for many age-related differences, the effect of old age opinion must be seen in differential terms. In less senior-friendly contexts, older people are more active relative to younger people, which can be interpreted in terms of senior interests being taken care of already in more senior-friendly contexts so that seniors do not need to pursue their interests through party membership anymore. Younger people, in contrast, have a stronger incentive to use their membership efforts to defend their interests.

5.3 Longitudinal analysis of age structures of membership in 25 European countries

We now turn to longitudinal data from the WVS (25 European countries, 1990–2000) in order to get a sense of the cohort implications of macro membership changes. The WVS includes 25 European countries: nine that have been democratic since before the Second World War (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Great Britain, Iceland, Ireland, Netherlands, Sweden), four that have been independent democracies since 1945 (Austria, Germany, Italy, Malta (1964)), two post-1970 democracies (Portugal, Spain) and ten post-communist ones (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia). This survey is the only available source that allows an equivalent comparison of membership of parties, trade unions and single-issue organisations across countries, as well as across time.

The main indicators for aggregate membership are proportions calculated from the survey sample.[3] First of all, I estimated the proportions of the population who were members in 1990 and 2000. Then, I calculated the proportion of members who were older people for each organisational form for each country in 1990 and 2000 (further data on these calculations can be found in the Web Appendix, part 5). Finally, I divided the proportion of older party members by the proportion of older people in the population, that is, I created a relative measure of representation of membership for older people in that country. For example, out of the British population in 1990, 4.9 per cent identified themselves as party members. Of these party members, 29 per cent were more than 60, in respect of which we need to remember that there is considerable uncertainty involved in this measure due to the low number of observations. Given the demographic proportion of older people in Britain in 1990 (20.1 per cent, UN estimate (2004)), the representation ratio was 1.40. In 2000, when party membership had declined to 2.9 per cent of the populace, the ratio stood at 1.89, yielding a difference in ratio of 0.49. That means that older people were over-represented in British parties in both 1990 and 2000 relative to their demographic weight, but that over-representation had increased while parties overall had lost members.

Parties

Figure 5.2 shows the change in representation ratios for membership of parties. If the column goes above zero, it means that older people have gained representation in parties. If it goes below zero, it means that older

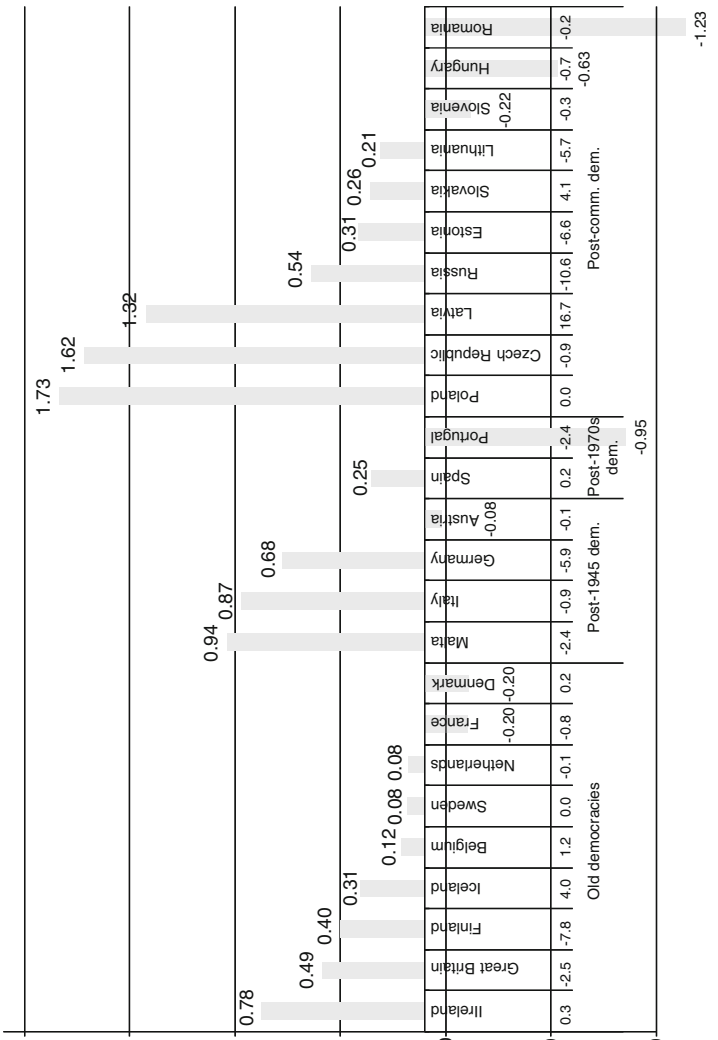

Figure 5.2 Changes in representation ratios, four types of democracies, membership of parties, 1990–2000.
Source: WVS 1990–2000.

people have lost representation – irrespective of the demographic change that occurred during the same period. Underneath each country name, a change in percentages is given circumscribing the change in overall party membership popularity between 1990 and 2000. Positive numbers capture an increase and negative numbers a decrease in popularity.

We see that each country group has positive and negative changes in the representation ratio; that is, in all groups there are countries in which party membership aged disproportionally over and under the pace of the demographic ageing process. Although both these patterns are visible for all groups of countries, the variance of changes is biggest for post-communist countries as the most extreme values in both the positive and the negative can be found in that country group. The transition phase of 1990–2000 in the post-communist countries seemingly represented a volatile party system in which generations might be caught up differently in the build-up of new parties and the demise of old ones. The evidence from post-communist countries leads us to conclude that the fate of parties in the circumstances of recent transitions may be systematically different from that in established democracies. Overall, however, a positive change in ratio is more dominant, with a mean of +0.30 for all countries and 18 countries out of 25 having this pattern.

The mean changes in overall popularity are negative for all four groups of countries, meaning that on average parties lost members in all types of democracies. Some countries show a deviant pattern, namely an increase in popularity (Ireland, Iceland, Denmark, Belgium, Slovakia, Spain) or constancy (Sweden, Poland). However, we must bear in mind that these survey measures are subject to sampling error. According to non-survey data for roughly the same time period and against our measures, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark and Belgium had declining membership, while Hungary and Slovakia showed increases in party membership (Mair and van Biezen 2001: 12).

Our hypothesis at the beginning of the chapter was that political organisations that are on the rise have increasingly younger members because they are likely to attract young people more. Vice versa, political organisations that are becoming less successful are likely to age as they fail to attract new members. Overall, the bivariate correlation between the changes in party membership popularity and the change in the representation ratio is –0.28; that is, the more the parties become unpopular in a country, the stronger the representation ratio becomes biased in favour of older people. Also, the mean directions of change are as expected. On average, parties lost members in these 25 countries between 1990 and 2000 (decline of 2.2 per cent in the proportion of the

population who are members) and on average the old age proportion of their membership increased by 7.3 per cent. These pieces of evidence moderately, but not unequivocally favour the political generation explanation. In countries in which parties are on the decline, the membership base ages more than the general demographic ageing process would suggest. In countries in which parties gain in popularity, their membership base rejuvenates. In the first instance, this regularity could be explained by parties losing their ability to recruit new members among the younger populace and/or their ability to retain older members for longer than younger members, a judgement we cannot make from this kind of data. Other studies of voluntary involvement using individual-level panel data seem to suggest that people tend to choose early in their life where to get involved and then stick to that organisation (Erlinghagen 2007). For example, the German CDU gained about 10,000 new members in the first half of 2008. 56 percent of them were younger than 40 and only 16.2 per cent were more than 60 (FAZ 2008).

However, there are significant deviations from this trend. Some may be explained by the uncertainty revolving around survey measures, but others are too large to be just a matter of uncertainty. For example, some countries have – at a substantial level and according to this measure – declining parties and a rejuvenating membership base (Portugal, Hungary); that is, parties are losing members, but have a younger and younger membership base. Other countries show parties gaining in overall popularity and still having an ageing membership base (Iceland, Belgium, Spain and Slovakia). What can explain the deviant country patterns? Besides the difficult data quality, we should remember that political organisations are not ships without captains in a sea of rising or declining popularity. Instead, organisations arguably notice demographic changes in their membership bases and adapt their strategies accordingly. One strategy is to attract the growing number of older people in the populace by targeting messages and programmes at them. The Senior CDU that I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter is an example of such an adaptation strategy. Other strategies could be to make parties more successful by trying to acquire more members among younger age groups. Depending on how successful party organisations are with their strategies, they will counterbalance the cohort changes in party popularity.

Trade unions

Figure 5.3, first of all, tells us that the ageing process of trade unions that evolved in addition to demographic changes is not as widespread

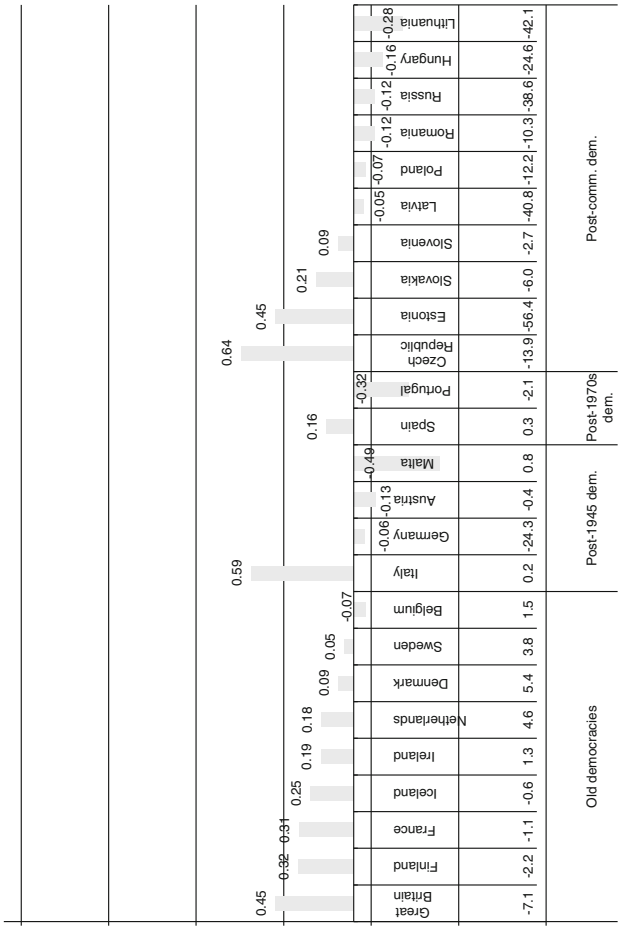

Figure 5.3 Changes in representation ratios, four types of democracies, membership of trade unions, 1990–2000.
Source: WVS 1990–2000.

as for political parties. Fourteen countries had ageing membership profiles in their trade unions (in contrast to 18 countries in respect of parties). At the same time, 17 countries had decreasing trade union membership rates between 1990 and 2000. Furthermore, the mean change in age profiles within trade unions was only 0.08, whereas it was 0.30 for political parties. This difference in relation to political parties may be partially due to the fact that trade unions mainly target working citizens. Thus, the group of retirees is only of subordinate importance to trade unions. However, many trade unions also maintain membership for retiring members (see Hassel 2007).

How does the evidence hold up in light of our expectations? We hypothesised that trade unions losing members primarily did so in younger age groups. This would then lead to an ageing membership profile. Also, we expected trade unions that did well in terms of membership to gain more younger individuals. Overall, the expected relationship is non-existent. The correlation between the change in total membership and the relative change in old age members is 0.09 and not in the expected direction. Some countries demonstrated the expected patterns, either as declining and ageing membership (Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Great Britain, Iceland, Slovakia, Slovenia) or as increasing and rejuvenating membership (Belgium, Malta). However, almost as many countries showed patterns other than the expected one.

The reasons for this lack of finding might lie in the flux that trade unions are in (Boeri et al. 2001). It might be that these numbers are too aggregated to show the structural membership changes that trade unions are going through. For example, industrial trade unions might be on the decline in terms of membership as services trade unions are on the rise, which is what the evidence of the macro–micro interactions suggested (see also Hassel 2007). We could then expect the declining industrial trade unions to show the ageing characteristics and the services trade unions, the rejuvenating process, both of which together would not come up well in the aggregate analysis. Another reason could be changes of strategies towards trade union members on the part of organisational leaders. But from the evidence presented here we do not find support for this political generation explanation.

Single-issue organisations

Turning to the final type of organisation (local political actions, environmental, human rights/humanitarian organisations and peace organisations), we see in Figure 5.4 that, overall, 13 countries show a growing popularity with regard to membership of such organisations. Among

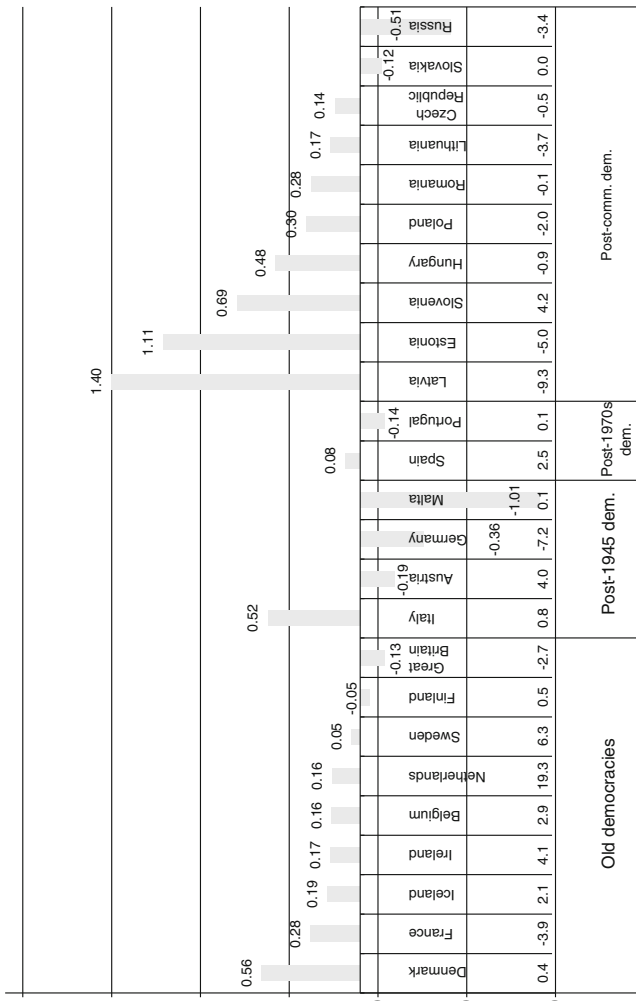

Figure 5.4 Changes in representation ratios, four types of democracies, membership of single-issue organisations, 1990–2000.
Source: WVS 1990–2000.

the 12 countries with stagnating or declining popularity, we find nine post-communist countries, as well as Britain, France and Germany. The decline in the post-communist countries could again be interpreted as a sign of declining 'transitional' organisations, such as the Czechoslovak Civic Platform.

In terms of representation, over the decade from 1990 to 2000, 17 countries had ageing single-issue membership at a rate that was above that of demographic ageing. In 2000, at the end of the period, 18 countries had single-issue organisations with membership structures that represented older people at a ratio of 0.9 or better, compared to their demographic size in the population (see Web Appendix, part 5, for these numbers). Of those seven with a value below 0.9, four showed increasing trends between 1990 and 2000. This means that older people are catching up in their use of single-issue organisations as vehicles of political expression. This finding is similar to the results on non-institutionalised participation that shall present in Chapter 6. In terms of the spread across age groups, find a pattern of 'normalisation' in the membership of single-issue organisations with regard to older people.

The bivariate relationship between the growth/decline of organisational membership on the one hand and the relative number of older people as a percentage of all members is modest on the other hand, but in the expected direction ($r = -0.17$). The more the single-issue organisations grow in popularity in a country, the 'younger' the age structure of their memberships becomes. The modest magnitude of this correlation points to the weakness of the evidence for this hypothesis. There were a few countries with increasing overall membership and – against expectations – ageing age profiles (Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden), and also against expectations, countries with declining membership and rejuvenating membership (Britain, Germany, Russia). For the post-communist countries it could again be argued that the transition process has led to a volatile landscape of emerging, merging and vanishing single-issue organisations. For the other countries, we could hypothesise that the aggregate numbers on single-issue organisations do not do justice to changing trends within this group in a given country. For example, Germany experienced a boom of the peace movement in the 1980s that was followed by its decline in the 1990s. During the same period, a different kind of organisation – for example, human rights organisations – could have increased in popularity. Even if the declining peace groups had ageing memberships and the increasing human rights groups had rejuvenating memberships, the aggregate number could show a seemingly

deviant pattern on the country level. Another explanation of the deviant countries could be the behaviour of single-issue organisations. As we expected for trade unions, single-issue organisations could make an extra effort to counterbalance unequal distributions of their members across age groups.

All in all, political parties and trade unions are on the decline in a majority of countries; exceptions are often post-communist countries. Single-issue organisations are on the rise, but not in a majority of countries. Also, membership is ageing in all three kinds of organisation beyond the pace of demographic change. There are exceptions, but overall this pattern holds. Surprisingly, the single-issue organisations are ageing, too, albeit at the slowest pace. Finally, we expected a relationship between changing organisational popularity overall and changing age profiles. The more an organisation lost popularity overall, the more its membership would age. This pattern could be found at some level with regard to parties and single-issue organisations; there was no evidence for this from trade unions. In other words, a simple model – increasing organisational popularity equals rejuvenating membership – does not universally hold. One reason could be the behaviour of the collective actors themselves. In an ageing society, parties and other political organisations should develop strategies on how to deal with ageing population to attract members.

5.4 Summary and discussion

At the individual level, the evidence showed life-cycle effects to be the most important predictors of membership preferences between age groups: (i) higher duration of residence increases older people's likelihood of being a party member; (ii) a lower likelihood of being employed decreases their probability of being a trade union member; and (iii) a lower likelihood of living in households with smaller children increases their likelihood of being single-issue organisation members. All of these effects are arguably rooted in the life cycle and are only changing slowly across time.

With regard to the interaction patterns between macrolevel characteristics of a country and age, age-related party membership was shown to vary across all four country characteristics. Older people are – relative to younger people – more likely to be party members (i) where party membership is generally more popular, (ii) where relatively few older people compete with relatively many working people for welfare state resources, (iii) in more established democracies and (iv) in countries

with a less senior-friendly public opinion. These findings suggest that older people's party membership depends not only on individual-level characteristics, but also on country-level traits. Party membership of older people is affected by the general constellation of young and old and the public image of older people. In contexts in which older people are already benefiting from a favourable public sphere (high dependency ratio and positive public opinion concerning old age), their probability of being a party member is not that much different from that of younger people. The effects of the length of democratic epoch reiterate the findings from voting that socialisation in more democratic contexts have a stronger impact on participation than in other contexts.

The mean level of participation also has an effect on trade union and single-issue membership, with union members primarily being working age people in those contexts in which trade union membership is very common and single-issue organisation members primarily being in the first half of their lives. This shows merely that the high levels of participation stem from the popularity of these organisations in certain age groups of the time.

The dependency ratio impacts on trade union and single-issue organisation memberships, too. In countries in which many older people are supported by a smaller labour force, younger people have – relative to older people – a higher likelihood of being members of trade unions and single-issue organisations. In other words, in contexts in which their activity levels may be more necessary because of a potential distortion of welfare state resources to their detriment, younger people are more active relative to older people, compared to other countries. For trade unions in societies with high dependency ratios, the lessening importance of working age members can also mean that trade unions open up their ranks more aggressively to pensioners.

In addition to the individual-level evidence, the aggregate results suggest that political socialisation processes are at work for parties and single-issue organisations, but the evidence is ambiguous. However, at least in some countries, cohorts develop preferences for political organisations that make them more likely to join one kind over another, compared to later cohorts. The plenitude of deviations could be due to measurement problems and, more interestingly, to the strategic behaviour of organisations, such as the development of old age caucuses in political parties.

What do these findings mean for ageing democracies in Europe? First of all, all three kinds of organisation are affected by the ageing of their membership beyond the pace of demographic ageing. In terms

of representing older people, political parties are at the highest level, followed by single-issue organisations and then trade unions. In terms of membership numbers, political parties almost everywhere represent older people at the level or more than the level that would be expected from their demographic size. Single-issue organisations are split between countries in which they over-represent and countries in which they under-represent older people. Trade unions are still mostly dominated by people younger than 60, which is a characteristic of their instrumental importance for working life. However, all kinds of organisations aged in the decade between 1990 and 2000, towards more representation of older people.

The modest evidence for the nexus between the popularity of an organisational form and its age profile suggests cohort differences in preferences for channels of political participation. This means that these differences between age groups are not stable across time. Insofar as the organisational participation process is in a process of change, so are the differences between older and younger people in their organisational preferences.

These age dynamics in membership patterns have important consequences for the democratic participation process. An organisation's democratic function within the wider political process is seriously affected by the numbers and structures of its members. A few decades ago, political parties provided inter-electoral linkage in a West European political system; that is, a connection between public opinion or what citizens want and public decisions. Parties served to aggregate the preferences of their constituencies through their members to the public decision-making level. They 'linked' preferences to political structures. Declining and ageing membership impacts on that linkage function of political parties. The fewer members a party has, the less it seems legitimised to provide that kind of linkage. Also, the preferences that it can still link to the political system are increasingly skewed to represent the interests of older people. The rise of single-issue organisations as alternative vehicles of membership in the political process outside of the economy can be interpreted as having two distinct meanings from this perspective of linkage: on the one hand, the linkage traditionally provided by parties has declined and opened up 'linkage space' to new organisations; on the other hand, the new organisations may provide a new kind of linkage that has hitherto not been provided by parties (see Lawson 1988). The still higher representation of younger people in single-issue organisations may thus be interpreted as complementing their underrepresentation in political parties.

6
Non-institutionalised Participation outside Organisations

> Young people enjoy the physical vigor, the freedom from day-to-day responsibilities of career and family, and have the *time* to participate in the pursuit of the energetic kinds of political activity implied by high protest potential. Protest potential is therefore held to be primarily an outcome of the joie de vivre of youth itself.
>
> (Emphasis in the original Barnes et al. 1979: 101)

The 1974 Political Action Study, from which the above quotation is taken, was the first detailed examination of what was then called 'unconventional' political participation. Protests were considered to be a domain of the young and associated with the energy and 'wildness' of younger people. In other words, the authors implicitly concluded that protest was something that older people were less likely to engage in because they had fewer such characteristics.

Chapters 3 and 5 demonstrated that older people are more likely to involve themselves in most institutionalised forms of participation, such as voting and party membership. This chapter and the next deal with non-institutionalised participation outside organisations, in which older people in Europe tend to be less active than younger people. The nature of non-institutionalised political participation – such as taking part in a street demonstration or signing a petition – is different from institutionalised participation, such as voting or involvement in organisations. Non-institutionalised participation is non-committal in the long run, spontaneous and individualised. Participants carry out political actions without subscribing to the overall goals of an organisation. The target of any particular action of non-institutionalised participation

is limited and tends to be a single policy issue or broad political objective, which makes the borderline between these forms of activity and involvement in loosely organised single-issue organisations clear.

The lower activity levels of older people in this area seem to be particularly worth researching because recent findings suggest that these forms of participation are becoming more popular, and may even become more characteristic of the democratic process than voting or engagement through parties. Non-institutionalised political actions symbolise the rise of 'critical citizens'; that is, citizens who are more critical of hierarchical institutions, but are also supportive of democratic practices. The increasing popularity of non-institutionalised political participation may be linked to a societal trend characteristic of postmodernisation that affects common values held by individuals (Dalton 2004; Norris 1999, 2002; Inglehart 1990, 1999). The two observations – on the one hand, increasing overall popularity and on the other hand, a still-existing lower likelihood of older people engaging in these kinds of activities – can be a cause for concern from a normative point of view because such imbalances could matter for political outcomes.

Our model predicts that older people's levels of non-institutionalised participation are lower due to either lower endowment levels of intrinsic factors (motivation and resources), lower levels of extrinsic factors (mobilisation exposure and opportunities) or a combination of the two. These differences could be either due to political, generational, socioeconomic cohort, life cycle or individual ageing effects. The model also has testable implications in respect to the macrolevel effects on the variation of participation between age groups. From a political, generational perspective, older people in more established democracies should be more active than older people in other democracies and also more active than younger people in the same country. Socialisation and experience in longer established democracies should mean that older cohorts have more internalised participatory norms. In life-cycle terms, public opinion concerning old age and the dependency ratio should also have an impact. Where a society favours older people more, their participation rates might be lower, relative to younger people's, because their interests are being taken care of, or higher because the milieu gives them more self-esteem as regards to being active in politics.

In brief, the findings are as follows. For Western Europe, we find a normalisation process that equalises the likelihood of participating across all age groups over time. In addition, only a few factors matter substantially in explaining differences at the individual level: education, postmaterialism, religiosity, duration of residence, number of children

in the household and health. Of these, education, postmaterialism and religiosity are cohort phenomena, whereas duration of residence, number of children and health are life-cycle aspects. At the macrolevel, all four macrovariables (average participation levels, dependency ratio, length of democratic epoch and public opinion concerning old age) matter, though not necessarily for all modes of non-institutionalised participation. Most interestingly, in societies that are more shaped in favour of older people, *younger* people are more active relative to older people in politics, reflecting for non-institutionalised what we have seen for institutionalised participation – where competition for public resources may be structured to favour older people more, younger people show higher participation rates.

Section 1 gives an overview of patterns of participation as to age and countries. Section 2 presents a longitudinal analysis of non-institutionalised participation in Western Europe between 1981 and 2000. Section 3 describes the results of multivariate regressions. Section 4 summarises the findings and discusses the implications for politics in ageing societies.

6.1 Average levels of participation and the age ratio by country

Non-institutionalised participation consists of several modes that are theoretically distinct and empirically separable. The ESS includes six items that capture this universe of political participation: signing a petition, wearing a badge, boycotting a product for political reasons, buying a product for political reasons, contacting a public official or politician and taking part in a legal demonstration. From these six items, we can create three dichotomies, the individual (the first four items, reduced to a dichotomy that scores one if at least one activity has been engaged in), the contacting (the fifth item) and the collective modes (the last item). This can be done with reference to the recent literature (Pattie et al. 2004; Martín and Van Deth 2007) and to some reliability tests.[1] The correlations (Cramer's V) between the three dependent variables are between 0.13 and 0.24, meaning that individuals active in one mode are also moderately more likely to be active in other modes.

Figure 6.1 demonstrates the variations of the three modes across age groups. Clearly, the individual mode is the most common. The curve ranges from 42 per cent for those younger than 30 up to 49 per cent for those between 30 and 50, and then slopes down to 25 per cent for those older than 70. The contacting mode has a symmetric u-shape with a maximum of 19 per cent for the 40–49 age group and a minimum of 11 per cent in the youngest and oldest age groups. The collective mode

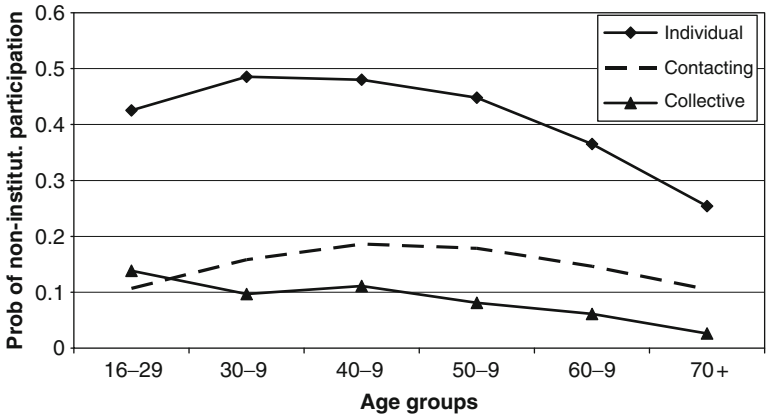

Figure 6.1 Variations of three modes of non-institutionalised participation across age groups in Europe, 2002.
Note: Weighted observations.
Source: ESS.

is the least common and shows an almost perfectly linear curve from 14 per cent for the youngest to 3 per cent in the oldest age group.

Not only do levels of non-institutionalised participation vary between younger and older people across all countries, but also the differences between age groups vary between countries. Figure 6.2 plots the average level of non-institutionalised participation outside organisations by country on the horizontal axis (with all six items in one additive scale) versus the ratio of participation of older people divided by that of younger people. The figure reveals a linear trend: the higher the participation level in a given country, the more active older people are vis-à-vis younger fellow citizens. Since the age ratio is below one in all instances, this linear relationship also means that the more common participation is outside organisations in a country, the smaller the gap between older and younger people.

In Figure 6.2, countries are also marked according to their time of democratisation. The oldest democracies (such as Britain or France) and post-1945 democracies (such as West Germany) tend to be to the right and top (more general activity and more active older people). Younger democracies (post-communist democracies or post-1975 ones, such as Spain) tend to be on the left and down. East Germany is a clear outlier from the post-communist countries and hardly differs from West Germany. Italy and the Netherlands are further to the left than their democratic age would predict. In tendency, we find at the descriptive

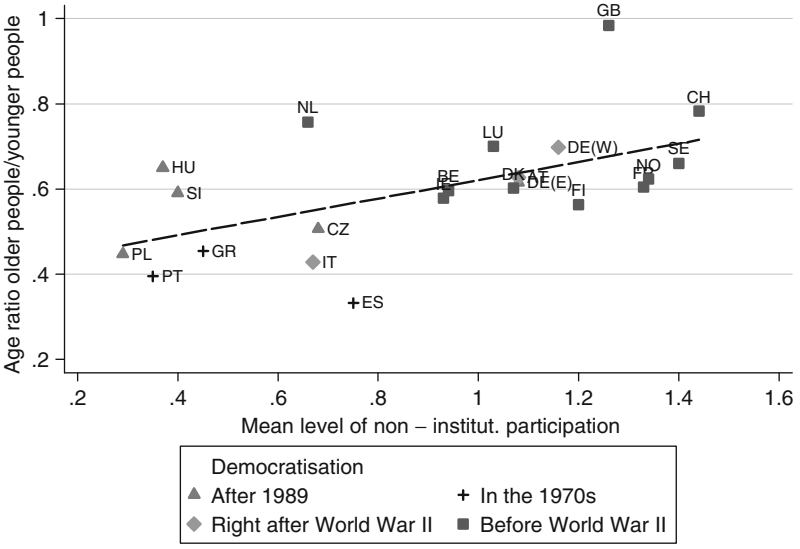

Figure 6.2 Bivariate relationship between average participation levels and age ratio per country.
Note: AT (Austria), BE (Belgium), CH (Switzerland), CZ (Czech Republic), DK (Denmark), DE (E) (East Germany), DE (W) (West Germany), ES (Spain), FI (Finland), FR (France), GB (Great Britain), GR (Greece), HU (Hungary), IE (Ireland), IT (Italy), LU (Luxembourg), NL (Netherlands), NO (Norway), PL (Poland), PT (Portugal), SE (Sweden) and SI (Slovenia).
Source: ESS.

level that older people are more active in non-institutionalised participation in longer established democracies.

6.2 Longitudinal analysis of Western Europe 1981–2000

In Figure 6.3, we see the likelihood of older people having performed one of two political actions. The respondents were asked: 'I'm going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it.' We find two political actions of the non-institutionalised kind that were suggested to the respondents at all three points in time, namely taking part in legal demonstrations and signing a petition. The survey question biases the answer in favour of older people because it asks individuals whether they have 'ever' done any of the

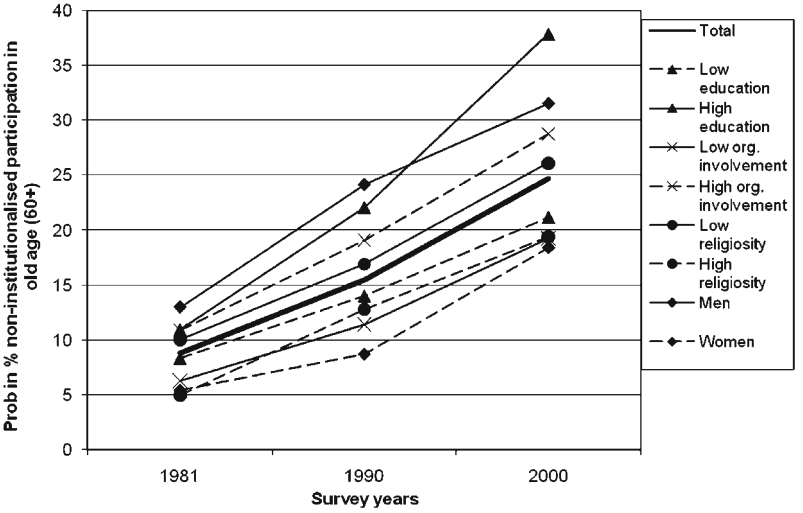

Figure 6.3 Overtime trend of non-institutionalised participation in Western Europe, 1981–2000, 60 and older age group.
Note: Observations weighted by population size, ten West European countries: Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, (West) Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden. Proportion of respondents who have 'ever done' one of the two political actions (see text).
Source: WVS 1981–2000.

political actions. This question means something different to a 20-year-old compared to a 70-year-old. The older person has a much longer time period in which he or she may have performed such a political action.

According to GP 1, we would expect that the older generations are less likely to engage in non-institutionalised forms of participation because they were less exposed to these forms of participation when they were young. Since the repository of political participation has widened, newer generations are increasingly exposed to a wider range of political behaviour and should therefore show growing probabilities of engaging in these forms of participation. However, four other long-term social changes could also account for generational differences and must be taken into account: the spread of mass education, changing gender roles, the decline in religiosity and the decline in social capital: (i) access to higher education became much more easily available after the Second World War in Western Europe – as higher education increases the likelihood of engaging in all kinds of political participation, newer cohorts of older people should be more participatory than

previous ones; (ii) women's socialisation into political passivity and into the belief that politics is a male domain is on the decline – older cohorts of women could still be more politically passive than younger women (Welch 1977); (iii) Christian religiosity and religious practice has declined – as religiosity implies a certain degree of rule-abidance and deference, non-institutionalised forms of political participation should now become more likely (see references in Secret et al. 1990); (iv) finally, the social capital argument might work in favour of the participation level of older people (Putnam 2000; Van Deth et al. 1999) – social capital as measured in terms of organisational membership might be on the decline, and its benefits for a participatory political culture might thus decrease. Thus, older generations might still be more involved in organisations that increase their likelihood of participating politically.

The thick black line in Figure 6.3 designates the whole group of older people. The other graphs show eight groups of older people defined by the eight values of the four different dichotomies (low/high education, low/high organisational involvement, low/high religiosity, men/women). All graphs show an upward trend across time. No matter which sub-group we look at, the likelihood of older people in that social sub-group engaging in non-institutionalised political participation increased across time. Even for older women, represented by the lowest line, the probability increased from 5 per cent in 1981 to 18 per cent in 2000. We can interpret this result as supporting the notion that the growing popularity of non-institutionalised political participation also affected the behaviour patterns of older people across time.

Figure 6.4 shows a comparative measure of older people's participation levels relative to those of young people (16–29). I have graphed ratios of the proportions of the older and younger age groups who have ever performed one of the two political actions. A data point that goes above the parity line at one signifies that the older age group has a higher likelihood of having performed one political action; a data point below one means the opposite. The first striking finding – again – is that all lines go upwards. That means that the gap between the two age groups shrank for all of the social groups, no matter what their defining feature was. Not only did the absolute participation of older people increase (Figure 6.3), but also the levels relative to younger people of the same background (Figure 6.4).

These general catching-up patterns are exactly what we should find if the idea of the 'normalisation' of protest activities was true (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001). If we imagine continuing the lines, they point towards a soon-to-be-reached parity between younger and older

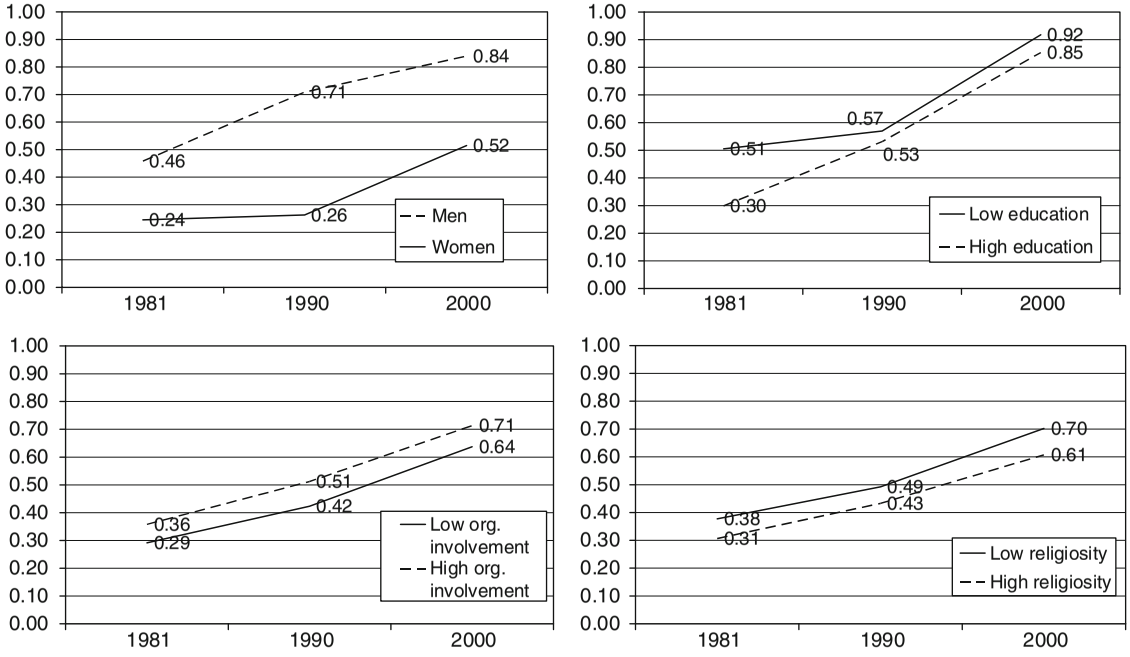

Figure 6.4 Overtime trend of non-institutionalised participation in Western Europe, 1981–2000, 60 and older age group divided by 16–29-year-olds for four social categories (dichotomised): gender, education, organisational involvement, religiosity.
Note: Observations weighted by population size.
Source: WVS 1981–2000.

people in Western Europe. However, we must step back at this point and remember that these are simple descriptive differences between younger and older people. One compositional explanation could be that older people are simply becoming more healthy, which would increase their participation rates. What other differences might, for example, lie hidden between a highly educated older person and a highly educated younger person? It could be that the gap would decrease even more if we had more fine-grained comparisons between social sub-groups of older and younger people. Thus, we now turn to a multivariate analysis with a different data set that allows us to capture these differences.

6.3 Multivariate regression analysis

Differences at the individual level

On the individual level, we employ the same range of variables as in Chapter 5, with similar expectations. We add three more variables: (i) the experience of democracy before the age of 30 – according to the political generation notion, we should expect individuals who have grown up in a liberal democracy to have been socialised into more voluntary political participation norms than those who have not. Technically, this variable can be used in a cross-sectional way in addition to age because it correlates with age only in those countries that are not long-established democracies, which make up only part of the sample. (ii) Political and general satisfaction – are believed to be predictors of non-institutionalised participation, especially those with elite-challenging character, such as protesting (Gurr 1970; Tilly 1978). Older people tend to be more satisfied with affairs in general, probably due to the human tendency to lower aspirations as individuals age (Herzog and Rodgers 1986). (iii) Political membership – since non-institutionalised participation does not take place separately from the institutionalised forms and since mobilisation by organisations is an important factor in these fluid forms of participation, we include party, trade union and single-issue membership.

In the multiple regression analysis, we now include this multitude of age-related factors in order to see which ones are most important in explaining differences between younger and older people on three dependent variables. Table 6.1 shows the results by including a series of age dummies to capture the residual variance in age. All variables have been recoded to span from a minimum of zero to a maximum of one and then centred. The first column gives the bivariate correlation coefficients between the respective variables and age. From the estimated

Table 6.1 Random-intercept binary logistic regression models of three modes of non-institutionalised participation for 21 European countries, 2002

	Correlations with age	Contacting		Individual		Collective	
		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
		Coef.	Std. err.	Coef.	Std. err.	Coef.	Std. err.
Av. level of participation		1.22***	0.15	0.22*	0.12	2.31***	0.1
20–9 (baseline 16–19)		0.53***	0.14	–0.24*	0.12	–0.70***	0.1
30–9		0.56***	0.14	–0.27*	0.13	–1.13***	0.1
40–9		0.74***	0.15	–0.01	0.13	–0.96***	0.11
50–9		0.60***	0.15	–0.32*	0.14	–1.20***	0.11
60–9		0.39*	0.16	–0.96***	0.16	–1.47***	0.13
70–9		0.28*	0.17	–0.76***	0.17	–2.22***	0.17
80+		0.09	0.21	–1.51***	0.25	–2.49***	0.25
Party member	0.10	1.17***	0.08	0.80***	0.11	1.07***	0.08
Union member	–0.04	0.15*	0.07	0.37***	0.08	0.52***	0.06
Single-issue org. member	0.02	0.09*	0.07	0.42***	0.10	0.25***	0.07
Cohort effects							
Education	–0.21	0.49***	0.10	1.19***	0.12	0.52***	0.11
Left–Right scale	0.07	–0.13*	0.10	–0.26*	0.11	–1.66***	0.11
Size of town	–0.04	–0.32***	0.08	0.37***	0.09	0.88***	0.08
Postmaterialism	–0.15	0.55**	0.17	0.03	0.24	1.24***	0.17
Religiosity	0.18	0.23**	0.08	–0.46***	0.09	–0.30***	0.08
Experience of democracy before 30	–0.37	–0.02	0.08	0.18*	0.08	0.06*	0.08
Cohort/life-cycle effects							
Political interest	0.09	0.67***	0.10	1.36***	0.10	1.39***	0.1
Political information (logged)	0.24	0.05	0.22	–0.06	0.23	–0.14	0.22
Income	–0.13	0.19*	0.13	–0.20*	0.14	–0.20*	0.12

(*Continued*)

Table 6.1 (*Continued*)

Social networks (logged)	–0.02	1.92***	0.10	1.88***	0.12	1.41***	0.1
Intern. pol. efficacy	–0.07	1.79***	0.12	0.91***	0.14	0.74***	0.13
Extern. pol. efficacy	–0.08	0.62***	0.11	0.25*	0.12	0.34**	0.11
Political satisfaction	0.02	–0.55***	0.13	–1.25***	0.15	–1.04***	0.14
General satisfaction	–0.02	–0.15*	0.15	0.41*	0.17	0.10	0.15
Life-cycle effects							
Female	a	0.17***	0.05	–0.32***	0.05	0.01	0.05
Employed	–0.35	–0.15*	0.06	–0.02	0.06	–0.14*	0.06
Self-employed	–0.02	0.33***	0.08	–0.21*	0.09	–0.30***	0.09
Duration of residence (logged)	0.45	0.71***	0.13	0.00	0.14	–0.10*	0.12
Living with partner	–0.26	0.01	0.05	–0.11*	0.06	–0.10*	0.05
Number of minor children in HH	–0.47	0.74**	0.24	0.52*	0.29	–0.30*	0.27
Subj. evaluation of health	–0.33	0.01	0.11	–0.25*	0.13	0.37**	0.12
Pension main source of income	0.66	–0.04	0.08	0.10*	0.09	–0.07*	0.09
Constant		–2.31***	0.16	–1.16***	0.13	–2.08***	0.12
σ_u		0.25		0.59		0.50	
Intra-class correlation coefficient		0.02		0.10		0.07	
Valid N		30,352		30,260		30,415	
Log-likelihood		–10,700		–13,300		–7,385	
AIC		21,470		26,671		14,840	

Note: ***/**/* significant at 0.001/0.01/0.05 respectively. Observations weighted by population weight. (a): Demographers use the masculinity ratio to describe how many men there are per 100 women in a particular age group. In 2000, the ratio was around 90 in European countries in the 60–64 age group and around 50 in the 80 and older age group (Avramov and Maskova 2003: 51). Correlations for living with partner and number of children for those aged 40 and more. All continuous variables transformed to range from zero to one and then centred around zero.
Source: ESS.

coefficients and the magnitude of the correlations, we can now read the age-related importance of each variable. Variables that score relatively high in the first column, as well as for a coefficient, are strong age-related predictors of that mode of participation.

The coefficients can be compared directly since all variables vary by a maximum of one. The large coefficients of the residual age dummies demonstrate once again that there is a lot of variance between age groups that we cannot capture directly at the individual level. For the contacting and individual modes, we find a somewhat curvilinear residual variance; for the collective mode, there is a linear decline with age.

Alongside the residual variance between age groups, a few individual-level variables capture most of the difference in participation between age groups: education, postmaterialism, religiosity, duration of residence, number of children and health. These variables have a large correlation with age, as well as a large coefficient in the regressions. The first three are more likely to be cohort effects; the last three are more likely to be life-cycle effects. Education, religiosity and number of children have sizeable age-related impacts on all three modes. Education has – again – a positive impact on all three counts. This can be interpreted as education capturing knowledge about the workings of the political system and being a resource for political participation. Older cohorts are less likely to have high levels of education, so older people are disadvantaged in this respect.

In contrast to education, religiosity has a positive impact for the contacting mode, and a negative influence on the other two modes. This points towards the more elite-challenging character of the individual and collective modes, compared to the contacting one. Older cohorts in some countries are more religious, and therefore older people are less likely to use the individual and collective modes, but more likely to use the contacting mode.

The number of children in the household also has an ambivalent influence. It is a positive predictor of the contacting and individual modes, but a negative one of the collective mode. The impact for the collective mode is similar to the one that we measured in Chapter 5 for single-issue organisation membership. For membership of single-issue organisations, living with children leads to a lower likelihood of being a member. The importance of children hints at the additional interests that can arise due to concern for children and that can be sought through the contacting and individual modes. For the collective mode, children could be a hindrance as they take away time. Looking after children is a clear life-cycle phenomenon, with middle-aged individuals having the highest likelihood of sharing a household with them.

Postmaterialism, which is identified as a cohort phenomenon (Abramson and Inglehart 1987; Inglehart 1971, 1990, 1997), is a very strong positive predictor of the collective mode and still moderately strong for the contacting mode. Older cohorts are less likely to be postmaterialist. Therefore, they lack these socio-economic resources for engaging in politics. Finally, health and duration of residence (both life-cycle phenomena) have effects on the collective mode (positive and substantial for health, negative and small for residence); residence also impacts positively on the contacting mode. Older people are more likely to suffer from ill health due to the accumulation of the effects of unhealthy life styles and the physical effects of ageing. This poses a hindrance for the collective mode where physical fitness is needed. As the results of the interviews presented in Chapter 7 show, older individuals tend to substitute their collective mode actions with actions from other modes of non-institutionalised participation, such as contacting through letter-writing. Their longer duration of residence increases older people's likelihood of using the contacting mode – a similar effect to the one we saw for party membership and which probably stems from their higher levels of familiarity with issues and higher likelihood of being asked to engage in this kind of activity.

All in all, the individual-level analysis suggests that older people are different in their use of non-institutionalised forms of participation because they are less educated, less postmaterialist, more religious, less likely to live with children, have lived in an area for longer and suffer more from ill health.

Macro–micro interactions

The difference in non-institutionalised behaviour between older and younger people depends not only on the individual level, but also on the macrocontext of the society. Along the same lines as in Chapters 3 and 5, we interact age with macrolevel characteristics.

There are four interactions: the mean level of participation in a given mode, the dependency ratio, the length of democratic epoch and public opinion concerning older people (see Figure 6.5; estimates are in the Web Appendix, part 6; the model set-up is the same as in Table 6.1). For the contacting mode, we find substantial effects for all interactions. Even though we have included a multitude of age-related independent variables at the individual level, there remain substantial probability differences between age groups that vary systematically between countries. Older people are more likely to be active than older people elsewhere in countries in which contacting is a popular form of participation, where

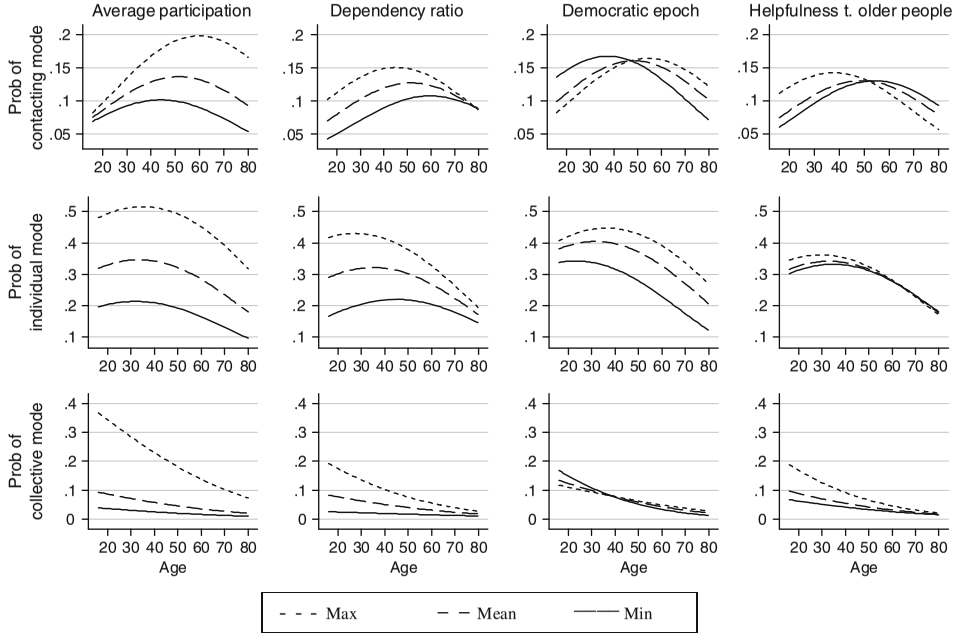

Figure 6.5 Fitted probabilities of non-institutionalised participation, models with interactions – macrolevel characteristics × age.
Note: The scaling of the vertical axis is the same in each row, but differs between rows, so that the absolute probability levels can be more easily compared within one type of membership.

the democratic tradition is longer and where helpfulness towards older people is low. In term of relative differences from middle-aged and young people, older people are less active in countries that are characterised by low participation, high dependency ratios, a short democratic tradition and a more positive public opinion of old age.

For the individual mode, the differences between age groups do not depend much on the macrolevel characteristics of the country. With regard to the overall popularity of the individual mode and the length of the democratic epoch, the differences across age groups are almost the same and only the average levels differ across all age groups. With respect to public opinion concerning older people, the differences between countries are negligible. Only for the dependency ratio do we witness the same pattern as for the contacting mode: the higher the dependency ratio in a country, the more active younger people are relative to older people. Also, participation levels of older people do not vary a lot in absolute terms across different levels of the dependency ratio.

The final, collective mode shows the same pattern for the average level of participation, the dependency ratio and helpfulness towards older people. The higher the popularity of the collective mode, the higher the dependency ratio and the higher the helpfulness towards older people, the higher is the participation among younger people in absolute terms and also relative to older people's activity levels. The length of the democratic epoch, however, does not impact on differences between age groups.

Let us now discuss the conceptual-theoretical meaning of these macro–micro results across the three modes of non-institutionalised participation. First, the popularity of the mode matters, most importantly for the contacting and collective modes. Older people's non-institutionalised participation is relatively higher compared to younger people, the more popular the contacting mode and the less popular the collective mode are in a given country. This is an interesting finding when we link it back to Figure 6.2. There we plotted the average level of participation against the age ratio of participation measured in one index, showing a linear relationship such that older people are more likely to use non-institutionalised participation relative to younger people, the more popular non-institutionalised participation in a country is. Once we strip away all the individual-level differences and look at each mode separately, the relationship is in essence still visible for the contacting mode.

Second, the evidence for the dependency ratio mirrors what we have seen in Chapters 3 and 5. In Chapter 3, we saw patterns indicating that younger people are – relative to older people – more likely to vote in

countries with high dependency ratios. In Chapter 5, we observed that younger people are more likely to be members of parties and single-issue organisations in countries with high dependency ratios, that is, where their activism may be more necessary in competition with older people. Here, we find this pattern for all three modes. This means once again that young and middle-aged people, who are already more likely to use non-institutionalised forms of participation, show even higher levels of participation relative to older people in societies in which the relationship pensioners/labour force is skewed in favour of older people. These are societies in which pressures for welfare state reforms and an inter-age competition for public resources are most likely – and political participation by younger people is instrumentally most needed to defend their interests.

Third, the length of democratic epoch does increase older people's participation rate, relative to younger people's, but only for the contacting mode. So, the effect is in the hypothesised direction (more established democracies make for more active older people), but it is not very substantial.

Finally, more positive public opinion towards old age makes older people less active, compared to younger people, than they are in less senior-friendly contexts (substantially for the contacting and collective modes). In other words, since younger people are generally more active in these forms of participation than older people, the gap shrinks more, the less senior-friendly a society is. This means that older people are, relatively speaking, more active in those societal contexts that are less in their favour. Thus, this evidence, together with the patterns that we have seen for the dependency ratio, suggests a reaction of inter-age participation differences to the degree to which a society is shaped in favour of older people. The most plausible explanation would be that senior interests are already being taken care of in societies with a senior-friendly public opinion and a high dependency ratio. Thus, younger people have more of an incentive to be active in order to counterbalance a potential shift of public resources away from them.

6.4 Summary and discussion

The longitudinal evidence for Western Europe demonstrated that older cohorts are catching-up with younger cohorts in terms of non-institutionalised participation. The growing popularity of non-institutionalised participation is increasingly socialising older cohorts at a pace that is above the growing popularity of these kinds of participation among

younger people. In short, political socialisation makes more recent generations of older people use these channels of participation more, which means that there is a normalisation process at work that is equalising the likelihood of participating across all age groups. This effect is taking place irrespective of other socio-economic cohort changes. In future, we might therefore expect the gap between younger and older people to fully close in ageing Western Europe. For other parts of Europe, we do not have long series of data, but it may be expected that there too the growing popularity of non-institutionalised participation will spread through all generations.

The multiple regression analysis of three modes of non-institutionalised participation (contacting, individual and collective) showed that some differences at the individual level are more important in explaining differences between age groups: education, postmaterialism, religiosity, duration of residence, number of children in the household and health. Of these, education, postmaterialism and religiosity are cohort phenomena, whereas duration of residence, number of children and health are life-cycle aspects. We do not know, therefore, whether participation levels will differ in the future due to differences in educational attainment, postmaterialism or religiosity because there is uncertainty about the characteristics of future young cohorts. In contrast, life-cycle effects create some level of stability in terms of non-institutionalised participation between age groups.

The analysis also found that country characteristics matter for the understanding of inter-group participation differences. Compared to younger people of the same country (*ceteris paribus*), older people are more active in countries with higher (contacting mode) or lower (collective mode) participation rates, low dependency ratios, a less favourable public opinion concerning older people and a longer democratic tradition. This evidence corroborates the findings from earlier chapters that macrocontexts matter in complex ways. Most interesting are the results for the dependency ratio and public opinion concerning old age. Younger people are, relative to older people, more active in societies that are more shaped in favour of older people. That means that in ageing societies in which the competition for public resources may be most pressing, younger people show relatively higher participation rates. This is the pattern that we witnessed with regard to voting participation and political membership. It gives further credence to the notion that in societies more shaped in favour of older people younger people are politically more active in pursuit of their own interests to counterbalance any further shift of public resources in favour of older people.

7

The Experience of Older Participants in the English Council Tax Protests in 2004/5

> We [older people, AG] are becoming more protesting.
> Interviewee J, a 68-year-old woman from the Southwest of England, in an interview with the author in November 2005.

In 2003, a British protest movement started to build up against rises in the local property tax, known as council tax. The movement's street demonstrations received wide media coverage because most protesters were pensioners, older than 65. The media stressed the age of the protesters; for example, the Daily Telegraph described them as 'the grey army that marches against Blair' (Sylvester 2003).

A protest movement led primarily by older people seems a worthwhile object of study for understanding how older people experience protest-related activities. Non-institutionalised political participation outside organisations is less common among older than among younger people. In the English council tax protests in 2004/2005, however, older people engaged in various forms of protest behaviour regularly and for a sustained period. Therefore, these protesters represent an unusual case in terms of overall probabilities. Interviewing them promises to tell us more about older people's experience of political protest and why they chose a particular form of political participation that is uncommon for their age group, but becoming more popular when we look across time. These cases are not deviant; they can be explained by our theory. Indeed, we gather from the interviews that these individuals protested because they were rich in resources and motivation, as well as highly mobilised.

Can the interviews teach us something to help us understand protest activities in later life? These qualitative data enable us to more

thoroughly investigate the causal chains that seem to exist according to the large-N analyses of the last few chapters and to improve the model by looking at aspects that are not easy to measure in a quantitative survey. The interviews were conducted with a particular interest in whether these protesters experienced any of the youth bias of protest and the generational trend that we detected in the analysis of the surveys.[1]

In the first section, I explain the background to the council tax protests and why this case study has been selected, and describe the interviewees' social characteristics. Section 2 looks at resources and motivations in old age (history of political engagement, retirement and health). Sections 3 and 4 present experiential evidence on social expectations from older people and on senior identity. Section 5 spells out the experience of mobilisation and opportunities to protest at old age, and Section 6 describes the experience of generational change from the point of view of older people. Section 7 summarises the results.

7.1 The background of the council tax protests and protesters

Council tax protests as a reaction to a policy threat

It is particularly important to understand the actions of older people outside established organisations and institutions in times of societal ageing. On the one hand, there are a growing number of older people in such contexts whose political activities can determine the political participation process and its political outcomes. On the other hand, ageing industrial democracies are characterised by a high level of state activity and scope, especially in terms of the welfare state. Thus, societal ageing does not take place in a context of social stagnancy, but in parallel with other social processes that are not all directly linked to it. Many advanced welfare states are experiencing massive state deficits and need to adapt their welfare state systems to changing economic and demographic needs. Therefore, welfare state programmes that primarily target older people need to be reformed. If individuals notice that the state is changing a policy to their personal detriment they are more likely to mobilise against the change politically. This has been shown, for example, for the reform of Social Security in the United States (Campbell 2003b). The underlying microlink of this mobilisation trigger is that individuals are more likely to be mobilised by a potential loss of entitlement than by a potential gain over the status quo (see, for the political implications, Weaver 1986; Kumlin 2004; see, for the psychological foundation, Kahnemann and Tversky 1979). In other words, individuals

are more likely to mobilise in case of a policy threat concerning the status quo than in that of a policy opportunity (see, for a general discussion of old age issues fitting into this category, Goerres 2007a).

The council tax in 2005 was a unique system of local finance in Britain (England, Wales and Scotland). It was the only tax that a local council could raise, but made up only about 25 per cent of local budgets. Local authorities were not entirely free to set the tax, but sometimes faced a cap imposed by national government. Council tax had to be paid by the residents of a property unit (which could be a whole house or just one flat in a house) to the local government authority. If the occupants of the unit received Council Tax Benefit or were full-time students, they were totally or partially exempt from the tax. A person aged 65 or more and living on his or her own received a discount of 25 per cent. The tax did not affect the poorest because they were exempt as recipients of welfare benefits. The tax burden per person was fixed regardless of income for those who did not receive Council Tax Benefit. Thus, for those who had to pay, council tax was a de facto regressive tax that places a heavier burden on those with a small fixed income, such as pension recipients, and those who cohabited with a small number of people, such as couples or widowers.

This tax was unusual because its value base was property and not income. The value of the property was based on a valuation carried out in 1991 and was due to be adjusted to the rises in value resulting from the property boom in the 1990s and early 2000s after the next General Election, in 2009/2010 (in England and Scotland). In Wales, revaluation took place in 2003 and led to a broad upgrade of properties moving up one band, which increased the tax burden for residents. Between 1993 and 2003, the average council tax in England rose 95 per cent, while public pensions and prices (across Britain) rose only 30 per cent and earnings 50 per cent. The 2003 council tax increase in England of 13 per cent was the biggest ever (Help the Aged 2005: 4). On an average, council tax in England in 2004/2005 was £1167 per property (Department for Communities and Local Government 2008).

The analysis of the council tax protests between 2003 and 2005 is a representative case study of a policy threat that triggered participatory reactions on the part of older people. The status quo had been a moderate tax level that was based on old valuations of properties. Older people were particularly affected by this tax because they often owned properties and had few assets of any other kind. The policy change led to steep annual rises in council tax levels, and the intention to fully reassess the tax bands would lead to massive rises in the tax burden due to the

property boom that took place between 1991 and the next evaluation exercise in England likely to be in 2010.

The council tax protests under study here include all those activities undertaken in England from January 2004 to October 2005 to express discontent either with the rises in council tax or with the system as such. The activities consisted of signing a petition, collecting signatures for a petition, writing letters to councillors and MPs, legal and illegal demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience, such as withholding part of one's council tax payments. National occurrences of these council tax protests were two street marches in London, one in Trafalgar Square on 17 January 2004 and one in Whitehall on 2 October 2004. The January march attracted approximately 2000–3000 protesters, and its leaders handed in a petition of about 40,000 signatures at No. 10 Downing Street (Tapper 2004; Wills 2004). At the October rally, a few hundred protesters handed over another petition with 60,000 signatures (*Independent on Sunday* 2004; Danks 2004). Locally, a plethora of demonstrations took place, typically protests in front of county halls. There were also protests in Wales and Scotland, but they were not as widespread as in England and are excluded from further analysis here.

Protests by older people are not a new phenomenon. Historically, England has seen several periods of senior protests. Pension reforms were part of the public debate in the late 1930s, and the National Association of Old Age Pension Associations was formed in 1938. It mobilised its members to demonstrate, to write petitions to ministers and to lobby Members of Parliament (Blaikie in Thane 2000: 331–2). Pensioner organisations since the Second World War have used their members as political leverage to make themselves heard in Westminster. The large national organisations declined in the 1980s, however, due to the increasing availability of local funding for pensioners' groups (Pratt 1993: 143).

In sum, the expected policy changes regarding council tax can be interpreted as a policy threat to the status quo of English pensioners. Given the property-dependent calculation of council tax, property-rich individuals with low levels of other assets and income – which fits the description of many pensioners – were most threatened by the changes. The pensioners' protests took place in 2004–5 in England, but historically they were not new.

The profile of the interviewees

The council tax protests were concerted by a group called 'Isitfair'. It was a campaigning organisation that claimed to be non-partisan. It had numerous fully and partially affiliated local pensioners' groups across

England. Anecdotal evidence from the interviews suggests that there might have been about 120 of them in 2005, varying significantly in size and activity levels. Isitfair was a loose organisation that did not have a membership system and financed itself purely from donations. Local groups often started independently and joined the Isitfair campaign in late 2003.[2]

All respondents were at least 60 years old. The minimum age was 60, the maximum 82 and the mean 72. Two respondents were between 60 and 65 years old, six between 66 and 70, eight between 71 and 75 and six between 76 and 82. Five respondents were women, 17 were men. Eight respondents had left school at the age of 16 or less, 12 at a higher age (two unknown). Two interviewees had graduated from university. Most respondents' last jobs were white-collar. Two respondents worked in skilled, manual professions, one in a non-skilled manual position. Apart from one respondent who still engaged in freelance work, all respondents older than 64 were retired.

The respondents' places of residence can be divided into three regions: the Southeast, with four respondents (Surrey, West Sussex); the Southwest, with 15 respondents (Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Somerset); and 'Other', with three respondents (Essex, London, Yorkshire). Of the retired interviewees, all but one received an occupational pension alongside their state pension (unknown in two cases). The large number of interviewees from the South-west and South-east mirrored the high level of activities of local pensioners' groups in those regions. Very likely, this was due to the high rises in council tax in these areas and the high population of older residents.

7.2 Resources and motivation to protest in old age

Recall from the theoretical model that individuals engage in political actions based on the sum of intrinsic (resources and motivation) and extrinsic factors (opportunities and mobilisation exposure). Chapter 6 has shown a number of statistically significant age-related predictors of non-institutionalised political participation. Most importantly, older people are less likely to engage in the collective mode because they are (i) on average less educated, (ii) more to the right of the political spectrum, (iii) less postmaterialist, (iv) more religious and (v) less physically fit. Older people's likelihood of engaging in protest-related activities is increased by the fact that they are (vi) rarely employed or self-employed.

The interviews brought to light three groups of intrinsic factors that we shall thoroughly discuss in the following sections: prior political engagement, retirement and health.

Political engagement prior to council tax protests

One pool of resources that older people might be able to draw upon is experience of the political actions in question, an expectation that we found strong evidence for in the case of voting participation.[3] For example, prior knowledge of street demonstrations makes it easier to decide for or against them; this is because the person knows what it will be like, including the practicalities, such as taking something to eat and drink.

The onset of political activity varied among the interviewees, but was found predominantly from the age of 40 onwards. Four respondents (C, P, T, V) became active for the first time in the council tax protests. Another three (B, D, G) became active shortly before or after their retirement. Ten (A, E, F, K, L, N, O, Q, R, S) began their political engagement in their forties or fifties. Only four (I, J, M, U) reported a first political activity other than voting in their twenties or thirties. Some respondents showed uncertainty about actual dates, but were able to identify the decade of their lives by aligning the political events to their personal circumstances of the time. It could be, however, that these recollections are not equally correct and that events further back in the past, for instance, were systematically discounted. Nevertheless, the answers of most respondents mirrored the image of an apolitical first half of life.

In terms of modes of political participation, most respondents (14) had never demonstrated before the council tax street marches. Another five had demonstrated once before, some a few years, others a few decades before the council tax protests. These previous demonstrations included: the poll tax protests in 1990 (E), a demonstration for gay rights in the 1980s (K, N), a demonstration against a development scheme in a nature reserve in the 1980s (L) and a trade union strike in the 1960s (U). The other four had been more regularly involved in demonstrations. Interviewee I had been a professional union official for a few years and had been active in protest politics during that time. Respondent S had first demonstrated against British accession to the European Community at the beginning of the 1970s and had been active in the Referendum and United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) parties since, also going to their street rallies. Respondent Q had started regular protests ten years ago, campaigning for the installation of a local council.

However, apart from two respondents, all had been involved in some kind of political participation other than street demonstrations or voting, before the council tax issue. Seven (B, E, H, L, Q, S, U) had been party members at some point in their lives. Not surprisingly, only the member of the UKIP, a typical protest party, was still a party member at the time of the protests. The protests – as portrayed in the press – were a reaction to disenchantment with the main political parties, which were seen as responsible for the council tax system and its double-digit rises. The most common form of participation, other than voting, had been contacting a public official or MP prior to the council tax protests; 18 respondents had engaged in some kind of political letter-writing prior to 2004. Three of those had written on the issue of council tax (D, F, S) before they joined in the activities of the local group.

In sum, the reported experience of previous political engagement showed that the interviewees predominantly belonged to the pool of politically interested citizens, who at a younger age had not been very active, but who demonstrated the occasional motivation and willingness to engage in political activity. These older people could draw on a history of political interest and participation apart from voting when they became active on the issue of council tax. Even if most of them had been unfamiliar with street demonstrations, their personal experience of other political activities provided a potential resource for them. The lack of experience of street demonstrations can probably be explained with regard to the fact that protesting grew in popularity as the interviewees got older. It would have been unusual for them to have engaged in protest at a young age, as protests had been uncommon in the 1950s and early 1960s.

Retirement

Retirement makes it easier for older people to engage in protest-related acts of political participation. Retirement provides more time to think about political issues, more time to become active on political issues, no (or less) responsibility to raise a family or earn money, and the freedom to express one's opinion without having to worry about one's status as an employee. Also, the discrepancy between what respondents expected from retirement and their experienced reality in terms of material well-being seems to be an important motivational factor.

We have seen in Chapters 5 and 6 that the lower likelihood of looking after children increases older people's probability of becoming members of single-issue organisations or of being active in the collective mode of non-institutionalised participation. Also, it decreases their likelihood of

using the individual or contacting modes. We also found varying effects of employment status and retirement. Overall, the quantitative evidence suggests that older people's status as pensioners increases their likelihood of being single-issue members and of using the collective mode of non-institutionalised participation, and decreases their probability of using the contacting mode of non-institutionalised participation.

Retired respondents were asked to what extent retirement had made a difference to their ability to be politically active. Most respondents said that retirement had given them more time. Some respondents noted a difference between having more time to think about issues that they had not been concerned about when still working, and having time to actually engage in activities that they were interested in, such as political actions. One interviewee (H) mentioned the stressful nature of his previous job and his personal inability to 'sit still'. He saw his high level of engagement in the council tax protests as a means of keeping himself busy. Another respondent (M) described the vacuum that retirement had left and explained that he sought to fill it with his activity in the pensioners' group.

Some respondents (C, U) stressed the nuisance that they felt in having to become active on the issue of council tax; they would have preferred not to have had to get politically involved. One respondent (U) explained that his involvement on the issue of council tax prevented him from working on his woodwork in his garage, a typical example of the opportunity costs of political participation. Many respondents emphasised that retirement had freed them from responsibility in financial terms and, at a higher age, from the responsibility of raising a family. Respondent S summed this notion up by saying that younger people 'have ties that we [pensioners, AG] don't have'. Respondent J also told me she felt she had not been in a position to be politically active while still in employment because it would have caused problems in her job. By contrast, in retirement she felt she had nothing to lose. Some of the interviewees had withheld parts of their council tax and only paid the outstanding sum in pennies once ordered by the court. Typically, they delivered the pile of pennies to the local authority and tilted the bag over in the presence of press photographers. Interviewee S described the embarrassment that this spectacle caused to his spouse and children and at the same time emphasised that he was no longer afraid of social repercussions. The widespread willingness to commit civil disobedience, which was also the policy of Isitfair, suggests that many of these pensioners take a position of 'nothing to lose', a position that suggests a low estimate of personal risk. The reason could be that older mobilised

people are simply less fearful of potential repercussions because they are no longer dependent, for example, on employers to make a living.

Respondent D described his motivation to protest in terms of his disappointment with his financial situation. He had thought he would be comfortable in retirement and know his income for the rest of his life. But instead he felt that 'we [pensioners] are being wronged every day'. He took the view that pensioners just wanted their pensions and to live a quiet life. Respondent N said that in post-war Britain you had been expected to 'take your silver clock' at the age of 65 and 'sit down'.

Respondent G thought that people who had worked hard to accumulate their pension credits were treated unfairly because part of their pensions was taken away by council tax. According to interviewee Q, his generation was punished for being 'thrifty', as people on benefits were not affected by council tax. Respondent C described that since his retirement ten years ago his whole outlook on personal finances had changed. His income was now fixed but costs could still vary: 'When you are retired, it is a different ball game.' Respondent G felt that the impingement of council tax on pensioner income was aggravated by the fact that older people find it difficult to take up a job to earn more money. Respondent L expressed the view, along similar lines, that ageism in employment made it more difficult for older people to raise extra cash, something that younger people could easily do.

Respondent E said that he found it 'disgusting' that pensioners had to protest to secure their income. Respondent O held that he should not have to protest and should not have to worry about where the money was coming from. Respondent M raised the issue that retirement should allow people to stand back from the struggles of life, especially if they had been through the Second World War and experienced the post-war period of hardship. This political generational experience is typical of that cohort (see Vincent 2005). Along similar lines, on one of the protest marches in Whitehall in London, one female protester held a banner reading '1939–1945 somehow we survived … and by the grace of God, in spite of politicians, we will survive' (Goldstein 2005, see also the cover of this book). Overall, the reluctance with which these respondents engaged in protest activities further strengthens the idea that policy threat is the main motivating factor for these protesters. Political activity as such is not something they enjoyed or seem to have valued as such.

In sum, retirement played an important role for these protesters. It not only gives them time to think and act, but also frees them from job responsibility. The mismatch between their anticipated financial

retirement situation and the social situation they were actually experiencing caused widespread anger. They were expecting a time free from material worries, an expectation that was threatened by the rises in council tax. It is not merely the direct experience of a social situation that creates political preferences, but the comparison of it with expectations.

This kind of discrepancy between what retirement feels like and what had been expected of it is likely to occur on various dimensions in the near future for the current older generation. The British as well as other European welfare states are partially being recast at the moment. Many welfare programmes have the pensioners' group as their main beneficiaries; the most widespread programmes are probably public pensions, social care and health care. If changes to these programmes affect pensioners in a way that they had not anticipated, this is likely to be as much a motivating factor to become active in politics as was the council tax. This mechanism is especially relevant with regard to pension-related policies. Over time, citizens develop long-term diffuse psychological expectations of a certain level of old age income. If policies seem to reduce their expected disposable income at old age in an unpredictable manner (such as short-term tinkering with pension levels), prospective as well as actual pensioners are likely to become insecure and develop a political awareness of these changes, and grow willing to become politically active to defend their interests. This is why Social Security in the US has been called the 'Third Rail' of American politics that kills those who touch it (see Lynch and Myrskylä forthcoming (2009)).

Ill health and the choice of political action

In the quantitative analyses of Chapter 6, health proved to be a positive predictor of collective and a negative predictor of individual non-institutionalised participation. In contrast to younger age groups, ill health is much more of a problem for older people due to the physical effects of ageing and the accumulative effects of unhealthy lifestyles. I was interested to see in what respects these older protesters or other people in their group were hampered by their health in engaging in political participation. The group of interviewees was probably relatively fit in comparison to an average group of British older people because one of the sampling requirements was engagement in street protests.

The interviewees were asked to compare their situation now with the situation their parents had been in when they had been older and whether the interviewees thought it was easier, more difficult or not different for them today to engage in political protest. Respondent T noted that his generation today was living much longer and that his

parents had already been old in their fifties. Other respondents judged along similar lines, confirming the individual experiences of the impact of increased life expectancy and quality of health. However, although today's older people live longer and are healthy for longer, ill health mattered. Several respondents indicated that they had had to give up going to street marches or group meetings because they were less mobile due to new artificial hips or other health problems. However, they substituted their going out by concentrating on writing letters. This activity with low physical requirements was also expected from other older people who were not able to protest in the streets by respondents K, L and R. Some respondents also reported protesters in wheel chairs and crutches at street demonstrations who were being helped by others, so that physical disabilities were dealt with as much as possible. One group leader (Q) provided a monthly newsletter to cater for the needs of the housebound members of his group. Respondents U and M, who were very active in organising local groups, told me how ill health can be a problem in recruiting enough older protesters, who do not want to stand outside for long periods of time.

In sum, older interviewees reported past experience of political participation, which suggests that this policy threat had activated people who were at least politically interested beforehand. Retirement proved an important context for them as it gave them time to think and act, as well as freedom from the exigencies of working life. Ill health proved to be important only insofar as the physically more demanding forms of non-institutionalised participation were substituted by less demanding ones.

7.3 The experience of social images of old age and protest

Chapters 3, 5 and 6 showed that public opinion concerning old age played a limited role in motivating older people to political participation, but had a strong impact on the relative participation levels of younger age groups. The more positive public opinion was towards older people, the less active older people were relative to younger people in that society. In countries with a low general willingness to help older people, such as Britain, older people were more likely to engage in collective and contacting modes than younger people, with all other differences held constant. The explanation that I offer for this correlation is that more senior-friendly societies cater to the interests of older people due to cultural reasons and traditions of the welfare state. They do so via the institutions of the state and private institutions of the family.

In such a high-valuing context, older people have less of a need to get politically engaged outside the institutionalised channels because the status quo is already relatively favourable to them. In less senior-friendly contexts, older people have a greater interest in becoming active outside organisations.

In this chapter, we can delve deeper into the meaning of this correlational association. We have already seen some images of old age in some of the perceptions of what retirement should look like, namely a role model of a politically passive older person who should live off his or her pension and keep quiet. I wanted to venture further into that territory and asked a series of four questions to capture any stereotypes that the respondents might feel or have been confronted with:

1 In the press coverage of the street demonstrations in London, journalists highlighted the higher age of protesters, with an undertone of surprise; for example, they wrote about the 'grey army that is marching'. Can you understand why they should be surprised?
2 Do you think it is unusual to protest at your age?
3 How did your friends, family and neighbours react when they heard about your protest involvement? Did younger people react differently?
4 Were there people who let you understand that you should not have marched in the streets because you are too old?

The last question, which is certainly the most direct one, received only negative answers. Respondent C, however, added that he still looked young, which might have been the reason why he had not received comments of this kind. In other words, he expected these comments could come if someone looks 'old', which probably means frail, sick or wrinkled. However, it could be that stereotypes are more subtle and seen as socially inappropriate to utter.

The answers to question 3 concerned a whole variety of reactions from people in the respondents' immediate environment. Most respondents reported a supportive environment and no differences in reaction between younger and older people. A few respondents (O, S) had encountered less interest among younger people. Respondent R, however, who was a 77-year-old woman and primarily engaged in letter-writing without regular group involvement, reported that some of the other older people in her milieu had asked her: 'Why do you bother at your age?' They let her know that these activities were a waste of time. Whereas this is a point of criticism directed towards the impact of letter-writing to politicians and

public officials, the addition of 'at your age' is very interesting. It suggests that – in some of her peers' opinions – she should even be less willing to use this form of participation because (i) she should know better at her age, (ii) she should be aware of the limited lifespan that she still has or (iii) she should not be so active at her age. Respondent J reported that some younger people still in work were thankful because the pensioners were putting in the time that younger people did not have for a cause that they supported.

In answer to question 1 about press coverage, some respondents (F, H, M, P) identified the way the press covered the marches as sensationalist journalism. Respondents H, F and P were even annoyed because of the way that the media represented their marches and objectives because council tax affected everybody and the marches also attracted some younger people. Others perceived the fact that it was older people who were of most interest to the public because this group had not been known to protest before (D, I, J, K, L, N, S). Protester K described how journalists thought that older people 'have lost it, but they actually haven't'. Respondent L emphasised that he thought pictures of older protesters sold well. In sum for question 1, some respondents were aware of the fact that older protesters are more interesting to newspapers than younger protesters because (i) they are unlikely to protest and have been known not to protest so far or (ii) older people are perceived as not being in a position to protest.

Question 2 asked directly whether it was unusual to protest at the respondent's age. The majority of respondents said that it was unusual, but gave rather different shades to their answers. Many described the overall change in the direction of protest becoming more common. Two respondents (M, O) said it was unusual because retirees should not be in a position whereby they have to protest. Interviewee K stressed that people at their age often cannot be bothered to get involved. Respondent A reported having seen a 92-year-old female protester, which he described as inspiring. The first two respondents emphasised a clash between their image of retirement and old age on the one hand, and the protesting situation they were in on the other. In an ideal world, they as pensioners *ought not* to be protesting. Their underlying logic was founded on the perception that retirees had earned the right *not* to have to protest through their hard efforts in working life. As a consequence, protest was perceived as something like a last resort and not as a 'regular' political activity.

All in all, the interviews present a number of images of old age and politics. Some respondents seemed to have internalised these

themselves; other respondents encountered them in their environment. Negative images of old age and protest imply that you should not engage in protest activities because: (i) you should know better about the unlikelihood of your engagement having an impact; (ii) you should not waste the last part of your life on these activities; (iii) you should generally not be as active politically; and (iv) you should not be in a position where you have to protest. One protester described the inspiration that he drew from seeing a 90+ year-old-protester. This can be interpreted as a personal experience that defies internalised preconceptions about old age and passivity.

7.4 The lack of a common senior identity

A common identity is a powerful motivating force in group politics (Abrams and Hogg 2001; Miller et al. 1981). Did the protesters have any feelings about a common senior or pensioner identity, or did they have any feeling of solidarity with their peers? The findings confirm the results of earlier studies (Day 1990; Binstock 1972): senior identity and solidarity are detectable with some individuals, but are uncommon among the group of interviewees as a whole.

At different points in the interview, I asked questions about the experience of marching together with a group of older people and whether the respondents felt motivated to engage in protest while knowing that there are other older people who are unable to participate because they are ill or do not have the minimal monetary resources to be active. Experiencing the group event with many other older people created the feeling of a common bond for some, albeit in different variations. For four respondents (B, C, D, Q), the age of the other protesters did not matter at all. For some, it was important to see that they were not alone in their protest and that there were other people who cared about the same issues (I, O, R), rather than that there were other people of the same age group. Thus, they noticed the common policy threat to people who lived in highly valued homes on a low income. Interviewee A emphasised the common experience of the *first* street demonstration that many protesters shared, like the experience of political initiation. This experience is directly linked to that generation of older people because their cohort as a whole is less likely to have protested at a younger age. Some respondents (F, M, P, V) complained that there were so few young people at the demonstrations in London. In contrast, respondent S saw it as a driving factor to be active on behalf of younger people who had to work. One respondent (I) highlighted the

satisfaction of having marched with younger people, which again highlights the trans-age motivation to be active in politics.

Two respondents (L, V) mentioned feelings of solidarity with other pensioners on the march. One respondent (K) said that it was important for them as older people to protest because 'they [mainstream party politicians, AG] think, because we are old, we are not able to do these things and protest'. She would have liked to see even more older people on the marches. Respondent J argued along similar lines that it was important for older people to come together, not only on the issue of council tax, but also other issues that Isitfair was looking into (e.g. pensions).

The majority of interviewees were not conscious of their own age or the age of the other pensioners. Only two hinted at the idea that their protest should concentrate on engaging a broad group of older people. An interest in gaining support among *younger* people for their cause prevailed. One respondent described the support that older people, who are rich with time, could give to younger people. After all, younger people are similarly affected by the council tax, but do not have the time to protest. This is an interesting notion of inter-generational solidarity and stands in contrast to a political group identity that is based on the construction of an 'us' versus 'them' dichotomy (Klandermans 1997).

Besides the potential solidarity with fellow older protesters, the interviewees could also experience feelings for the vulnerable sub-group of older people who are unable to engage in protest activities. The experiences of the interviewees can be classified into three groups. Eight respondents (F, H, K, O, L, N, R) said that knowing about this vulnerable group did not have any impact on their own behaviour. They expressed feelings of sympathy and pity, but no feelings of responsibility, which again highlights the low levels of solidarity. Four alluded to the substitution of protest in the streets by letter-writing, which is open to anyone, even if immobile and poor in resources. Respondent A described that some people used their age as an excuse not to become active. Respondent N also highlighted that some people in wheelchairs and on crutches made it to the protests none the less. Interviewee H expressed his admiration for disabled older people who joined them despite their disability. The second group (B, C, T) drew motivation from the fact that they were themselves still physically active enough to engage in all kinds of protest activities, while knowing about other, vulnerable seniors. The last group (E, G, I, J, M, P, Q, S, U) felt that the current system of council tax was especially unjust to this vulnerable group and felt a responsibility to be active on their behalf. These protesters described their feelings

towards vulnerable pensioners with reference to justice and responsibility. Furthermore, interviewee U thought that it was a good feeling to have this group of people behind them when protesting.

In sum, it would be hard to speak of a common identity of older people or pensioners among the group of respondents. Some of them draw some motivation from the knowledge of other vulnerable people in their situation. These others are defined by illness and inability rather than by age or by the fact that they receive pensions. At most, the interviewees expressed a common bond with people who suffer from the exigencies of the council tax and are threatened by the same policy change. Thus, the evidence from these interviews aligns better with the logic of a policy threat than with that of an old age identity.

7.5 Mobilisation and opportunities for older protesters

So far, we have dealt with resources and motivation for participation. But what does the mobilisation or opportunities side of the equation look like for these older protesters? The evidence of the interviews seems to suggest that local organisations run by retirees can mobilise other retirees into protest activities by older volunteers providing them with information, setting up transport facilities and functioning as role models. In other words, older people can create further participation opportunities for other older people who might otherwise have found it difficult to engage in any kind of protest activity. The mobilising potential of political groups run by retirees to get older people to engage in protest mirrors the quantitative findings in Chapter 6. There we found the positive impact of membership of single-issue organisations on non-institutionalised forms of participation.

The respondents predominantly lived in rural areas with patchy public transport. Most of them benefited from buses that had been organised by local groups of the Isitfair family. Others reported having used their own car to attend local or London demonstrations. The organisation plays an important role in overcoming the transport problem for these rural dwellers. Younger protesters would face similar problems, although access to a motor vehicle is more widespread among younger people (Age Concern England 2006a).

Many respondents had individually been active on the issue of council tax before they joined their local pensioners' group. As individuals, they had not had much of an impact. Once the Isitfair campaign got under way – most importantly through press coverage of the involvement of Christine Melsom, their national leader – the isolated

individuals were able to get into contact with each other locally. They could then set up local support networks for those who lived far away from where the demonstrations took place, and for those who could not leave their homes, but could write letters. The pool of homebound older people can be used by local senior groups because they can provide them with the information they need in order to write effective letters to newspapers, MPs and councils. Local groups can also coordinate the work of these 'isolated' individuals, so that a meta-community of older protesters arises.

Further mobilisation potential comes from the role models of local and national leaders who are older themselves. If we assume that images of older people being less active in politics can decrease the likelihood of some people participating, the threshold will probably become lower if they see other older people being active. Respondent M, for example, spoke very fondly of Albert Venison, the then 80-year-old group leader of the Devon Pensioners' Action Forum, and the achievements at his age that had brought him two awards and an invitation to a reception at No. 10 Downing Street. Another example is the admiration of respondent A for the 92-year-old protester.

It is interesting to note that these examples are from the area of protest politics. No respondent mentioned older career politicians as a motivating source. For example, some of the then leading British party figures were 60 or more, such as Michael Howard or Sir Menzies Campbell (both born in 1941). One reason could be that these politicians aged while they were engaged in politics, whereas the older protesters were old when they started protest activity.

7.6 A new generation of protesting older people

We saw in the last chapter that the gap between older and younger protesters is shrinking with regard to participation outside organisations. I asked protesters: (i) whether they thought it was unusual to protest at their age; (ii) how they felt that their own situation had changed over their lifetime as to protest opportunities; (iii) to compare their situation now with the situation their parents had been in at the same age; and (iv) to assess whether they thought that protesting had gotten easier, more difficult or had remained similar.

Most interviewees thought that today they were in a better position as older protesters than their parents had been at the same age.[4] Four reasons were given concerning why their parents had been unlikely to protest in old age. First, respondents O and U thought that there had

been no need to protest back then. Respondent E maintained that it was Margaret Thatcher who was responsible for bringing into being many things to protest about. Second, their parents' generation had different attitudes. Their parents had been more deferential (A) or had respect for authority (Q). Third, their parents' generation had been preoccupied with rebuilding the country (M). Fourth, demonstrations were very rare (P), or people beyond 40 were unlikely to take part in them (N).

Most interviewees judged their own situation today to be more conducive to protest. Interviewee J summed this up by stating about her age group: 'We are becoming more protesting.' She explained that older people are no longer afraid and mentioned the involvement of pensioners in the poll tax demonstrations in 1990. Protest had become 'part of political life today' (P). Interviewee K also thought that protesting was much more acceptable now. In contrast, respondent H held that the facilities for protest had remained the same, but that pensioners today are faced – for the first time – with the need to engage in protest. Interviewee C also thought that protest was easier, but that the impact of individual protest activities had diminished because there were so many of them. The availability of groups for all kinds of political interests can ensure that there are channels of political participation for everybody's interests (L).

Some respondents (B, I, L) thought that protest was facilitated by the more widespread availability of free information and means of mass communication. These could ensure that older people can make each other aware of issues (I). Respondent M highlighted the fact that the availability of more and freer TV channels, as well as the citizen-friendly Freedom of Information Act in the United Kingdom, 'raised the political temperature', making it more conducive to political protest.

Moreover, older people now have a richer variety of resources at their disposal, compared to their parents. They include: better health because of better medical treatment (K, L), longer lives (T, U) and more material resources, such as money or a car (S, U). Respondent T observed that his parents were already 'old' in their fifties, by which he probably meant frail.

Finally, three respondents thought that protesting had to some extent become more difficult. They felt they lived in a more 'dirigiste' police state and were concerned about the freedom of political expression after the passage of anti-terror legislation and expanded police powers (D, F, T). Despite the changes that had made protest easier for older people, some respondents still held the belief that protesting remained unusual for older people.

Overall, the respondents reiterate the widely confirmed notion that protesting is becoming more common in contemporary liberal democracies. It is important to stress the impact of better means of mass communication for older people who live in isolated circumstances and might be homebound. The group of interviewees certainly confirms the generational trend towards more non-institutionalised participation. They indicated better means of transport and communication, and a change in the political process (protest activities generally more common) as reasons for this development.

7.7 Summary and discussion

The qualitative interviews illuminate the findings of the last quantitative chapter and cast light on additional resources/motivation and opportunities/mobilisation factors that are difficult to capture in large-N surveys. The experiences of the 22 interviewees bore out the generational change that is taking place through which older people are becoming more likely to engage in protest activities. They also reported the still existing gap between themselves and younger people.

Previously unmeasured resources enabling older people to participate include prior political interest, as well as prior engagement inside and outside the electoral process. The scope of these resources is much richer for older than for younger people. All respondents were politically interested (and active at least at low levels) before they became active on the issue of council tax.

Health – as we found in the quantitative chapter – does not play a role in older people's activities. Some might engage in letter-writing to support their cause instead of street demonstrations, but ill health – in general – is not a factor for those who want to become involved.

Additionally, some of the respondents reported stereotypes or images of retirement/old age and political passivity. The images, which they held themselves or had heard, revolved around the notion that older people have 'earned' a phase in their lives in which they should not need to become active or they should have learned that such activities are not effective. The social situation of old age imposes certain expectations and images on those individuals.

In contrast to social expectations, a common identity as a motivational source can hardly be detected. Answers diverged massively on these questions. Most interviewees did not feel solidarity with other older people per se, but put forward – if at all – a common cause (reform of council tax) or situation (receipt of low pension income) as a feature

of common identity. This finding mirrors the fact that older people are a very heterogeneous group that finds it hard to organise around old age as such. This is because other personal characteristics, such as income, class and place of residence, divide the group of older people. The social situation of 'being old' is not enough to create an identity across older individuals – that is, internally from the group perspective – and is insufficient to shape their political group consciousness. Rather, it is the common bond of a policy threat that unites individuals of different ages in their common objective. It is self-interest shared by many rather than group interests that triggers participation.

There are two new factors of mobilisation that we have not yet found in the large survey. During a time of generational transition, when protest activities are still described as unusual, older people draw mobilisation potential from other older people who are already active. Furthermore, emerging protest groups that are run by older people and focused on recruiting older people can also provide isolated older people, who might not have access to a motor vehicle, with the information and meta-community they need to engage as members of a group. This can occur even though they might not physically meet. This is a new phenomenon facilitated by the ready and cheap availability of means of communication.

The evidence seems to suggest the advent of a new generation of older people who feel motivated to engage in protest and have the resources and opportunities to do so. The nature of their resources suggests that there is potentially a whole new reservoir of older retirees who are ready to protest if necessary and have the time to think about and engage in politics. From a normative perspective, this development ought to be welcomed because it means that more older people are using non-electoral means of participation to make their voices heard. In this case study, overall, the interests of older people were not seen as unique to themselves, but as characteristic of people with small disposable incomes, which also includes young families. Inter-age competition for public resources may be a problem if older people can take part in politics disproportionately, but only if they define their interests to the detriment of other age groups.

8
Summary and Conclusions

Differences of political participation between younger and older citizens cannot be pinned down in a simple statement valid across European democracies or across time. Instead, the interplay of, on the one hand, generational socialisation in politics and society and, on the other hand, sociological changes across the life cycle and psychological experiences of ageing shape an individual's pattern of political participation at any age.

Older people are not uniformly different from younger people across societies because some generational and age effects vary between countries. For one thing, countries influence the early political and social experiences of an individual in early adulthood, when he or she is impressionable. The political and social developments of a society impact most strongly on the younger cohorts. Where and when an individual grows up matter for political participation in later life. In addition, countries are also the context for the social experience of the life cycle. Societies facilitate a certain type of social construction of old age and of other stages in the life cycle. Entering 'old age' in one country can be a different experience from that in another country.

Since the differences between older and younger people are determined by a country's characteristics, the continuous increase of the old age group relative to other age groups has varying consequences for the political participation process. A simple message of the kind 'demographic ageing will affect participatory politics in manner X' is false and untenable in light of the evidence reviewed in this book. Rather the message must be: given the societal context, we can expect the participatory process in that country to develop in a specific direction.

8.1 Older people's political participation – a summary

The population of many advanced industrial democracies is ageing. This demographic change fundamentally alters the pool of citizens who can participate in politics. Most importantly, the group of older people is growing massively in absolute and relative terms, no matter whether we choose a definition of older people as those aged 50+, 60+ or 65+. How can this ageing process alter the democratic participation process? To what extent and why do older people participate differently in politics?

Political participation is conceptualised as an individual action based on a prior decision concerning the mode and content of that action. Individuals consider the motivation and resources they have, and the mobilisation attempts and opportunities they are exposed to. They have the choice between a whole variety of political actions that can lead to changes in policy, institutions or political personnel. Among the less intense and more common forms of participation, citizens can distinguish fundamentally between institutionalised and non-institutionalised forms of participation. Institutionalised forms are organised on a permanent basis either by the state or by another organisation. Among these forms of participation, we analysed voting and membership of political organisations. Non-institutionalised forms are more transitory in nature; these political actions do not require a long-term commitment on the part of the participant nor permanent organisation. Here, we analysed three modes of non-institutionalised participation: the individual mode consisting of acts such as signing a petition or wearing a badge; the contacting mode describing acts of contacting public officials or politicians; and the collective mode summarising group activities, such as protesting in the streets.

The differences in political participation between age groups can be traced back to four different kinds of age-related effects – older people can behave differently in politics from younger people for the following reasons:

1 They belong to a different political generation that has differently shaped political preferences. These preferences can affect the choice and content of political participation. The early experience of politics varies from one cohort to the next (*political generation effect*).
2 Older people belong to a generation whose socio-economic experience differs from that of more recent cohorts. Social experiences, such as the exposure to education and postmaterialist values, have

an immediate impact on political participation because they affect preferences for ways of participation and the predisposition to participate (*socio-economic cohort effect*).

3 Older people are at a different stage in their life cycle. The social and sometimes physical experiences of their position in the life cycle affect their political interests as much as their predisposition to participate in any given channel of participation (*life-cycle effect*).
4 Older people have more participatory experience to draw from and are more likely to adhere to social norms that prescribe a certain type of behaviour in a given situation (*individual ageing effect*).

Political generation and socio-economic effects belong to the category of cohort effects. If all differences between older and younger citizens' political behaviour in a society were due to these effects, that society would experience an unstable difference in participation between these two age groups across time. At one point in time, a particular cohort of older people would demonstrate a certain participatory behaviour vis-à-vis the behaviour of a specific cohort of younger individuals. Ten years later, for example, the groups of older and younger people would consist of different cohorts that again carry different sets of relevant experiences. In contrast to cohort effects, life cycle and individual ageing effects belong to the larger category of age effects. If all differences between older and younger individuals were due to this type of effect, ageing societies would experience long-lasting changes in the participatory process. Older people would represent a growing group of individuals exposed to a specific set of age effects that makes their participatory behaviour different from the shrinking group of younger people. In essence, both cohort and age effects can be found to be at work across all types of participation, making the impact of demographic ageing on the participatory process not only complex, but also unstable across time.

Political generation effects

In the realm of voting, the evidence brought to light clear political–generational differences. For one thing, older cohorts in many West European democracies are socialised more strongly into the belief that voting is a citizen's duty. In these countries, such as Britain, older people are therefore more likely to turn out to vote. Their early socialisation made them on average more politically active in the electoral sphere. Younger cohorts, in contrast, did not learn to view voting as such an important act when they were young.

Voting is affected not only with regard to participation, but also voting choice. The analysis of British and West German data showed generational differences in party preferences that can be explained by knowing the political context of the early elections of each cohort. Older voters today are different from younger voters because the former were influenced by a different system of popular parties in youth than the latter. However, the socialisation impact of early elections on party preferences depends on the context. The more volatile voting and the electorate are, the less these early impressions have a lasting influence. Hence, with increasing overall voting volatility, the effects of socialisation diminish.

Another political effect of generations can be measured with regard to the degree of establishment of a democracy. In countries that have been functioning as liberal democracies for a longer time, older generations behave differently in politics than more recent cohorts. This effect is striking with regard to voting, party membership and the contacting mode of non-institutionalised participation. The longer a country has been a democratic, the more likely older people are to vote, to be party members and to use the contacting mode relative to younger people of the same country. This can be explained by the stronger generational experience of participatory norms and values in more established democracies. If a cohort goes through life in a context in which participation and participatory values are more prevalent, its members develop a stronger difference from younger cohorts in that country than do cohorts in a less participatory context. For non-institutionalised participation, we also find some evidence of the experience of a free liberal democracy in young adulthood increasing a generation's participation levels.

Older people's membership of political organisations is also characterised to some degree by the changing fortunes of each kind of organisation. We find moderately strong evidence that older people are more likely to be party members in those countries in which parties have lost members in general. Hence, if parties have maintained or increased their membership, they seem to have done so by recruiting young people, reducing the relative share of older people in party membership. A similar relationship can be seen with regard to single-issue organisations, but it is even weaker. For trade union membership, no such correlation is visible. The reason for the weakness (in the case of parties and single-issue organisations) or for the non-existence (trade unions) of this pattern probably lies in the strategies of the respective organisations. Organisations are likely to notice that they are losing members in

particular age groups and may pursue strategies to counterbalance these losses. For example, trade unions have to rethink their role in ageing societies in which the number of people in the labour force is shrinking and have to strike a balance between representing employees and trying to have a large number of members, so increasing their political power. Parties in Germany have reacted to their ageing membership not only by trying to attract more younger people, but also by building up organisational structures for older members, similar to the longer-existing party youth branches.

The evidence also showed us a general political generational change. Newer forms of non-institutionalised participation previously used much less by older than by younger people are increasingly being used by older people. The gap between younger and older people is closing with regard to these forms of participation. This change is taking place regardless of other social changes. The popularity of this kind of participation is growing and is spreading disproportionately among older cohorts. The interviews brought vivid examples of how generations are experiencing this general change in politics. The older protesters reported that they felt they belonged to a different generation from their parents with regard to involvement in politics. This change is being propelled at the microlevel by the increasing visibility of older active individuals who serve as role models for others. This finding for non-institutionalised participation is remarkable insofar as the general change towards greater popularity of these forms of participation is affecting older cohorts more strongly than younger cohorts.

Socio-economic cohort effects

Despite the numerous social changes that have happened in Europe in the last 50 years, the evidence showed only education to be of consistent age-related importance across all areas of participation. Other changes, such as postmaterialism and religiosity, have had only a minor impact. Higher education has spread dramatically in European societies, with many governments now striving for a target of 50 per cent of school leavers going to university. The availability of educational opportunities has increased for younger cohorts, and so the likelihood of participation in education at a higher level tends to be higher for younger than for older cohorts.

Education is an important predictor of political participation because higher educated individuals have more resources to participate (because they are more likely to understand the workings of the political process) and more motivation to do so (because they are cognitively mobilised

to understand the participatory norms of society). Thus, education has a consistently positive impact on all the political actions that we surveyed in this book. It proved to have a particularly strong impact, relative to others, on voting participation, party and single-issue organisation membership. Only for voting participation did we also find a strong interaction effect between education and age that mirrors the substitute effect of life experience for formal education, making education-level differences in old age less relevant for participation than at a young age.

All in all, we see that political and socio-economic generational changes occur in all modes of mass participation. The dynamics of political change affect generations differently, but younger cohorts most strongly. This creates a consequential dynamic for the differences between younger and older people. The impact of these generational changes on the difference between the behaviours of older and younger people varies from one point in time to the next because different generations face each other as older and younger people at each point.

Life-cycle effects

First of all, the general image of old age in a society and the numerical relationship between older people and the working population matter, but primarily for the participation rates of *younger* people relative to those of older people. We measured the image of old age through public opinion with regard to helping older people (the proportion of citizens who are prepared to help older people) and the balance between dependent older people and the labour force through the dependency ratio. In all analyses, the absolute levels of older people's participation were hardly affected by these societal characteristics.

In societies more shaped in favour of older people (positive public opinion, high dependency ratio), younger people are more active relative to older people than in other contexts. The underlying causal chain seems to be that if a society is shaped by a positive public opinion towards old age and by a high number of dependent older people (measured by the dependency ratio), the institutions of that society are likely to produce a political output favouring older people. Thus, younger people have more of an instrumental incentive to be active in politics in order to have their voices heard. If further evidence for this causal chain was found in new research, it would shed new light on the discussions of generational conflict. Ageing democracies would not just be determined by the growing influence of older people; younger people in certain contexts would balance out a public sphere shaped in favour of older people by means of higher participation rates.

The robust correlations between societal characteristics and the relative participation rates of younger people are noteworthy to the extent that the measurable effect of a socially constructed image of older people stands in sharp contrast to the lack of a common senior identity among older people, as the interviews showed. Older people do not define themselves as 'older people' and are not more likely to do so when they become active in politics. If anything, being the target of a policy threat motivates older people to be politically active for themselves and others in the same situation.

Moreover, how we lead our lives affects political participation through the duration of residence, the likelihood of living with a partner and the likelihood of living with children. Older people tend to have lived in an area for longer than younger people because residential mobility decreases with age. This longer residence leads to a greater extension of networks and a higher level of familiarity with problems in the area. It therefore increases an individual's probability of being asked to join a political action and being motivated to become active with respect to politics in the area. Older people are more likely to go to the polls, to be party members and to contact officials because of their longer residence period. Moreover, living with a partner means living with another adult who can mobilise a person to become active in politics. The probability of living with a partner increases from young to middle age and decreases thereafter due to widowhood and divorce. For voting participation, this effect is very important and disadvantages older people relative to middle-aged individuals in terms of their likelihood of voting. Also, living with children can alter someone's interest in political participation, in two ways: on the one hand, caring for children reduces free time; on the other hand, it produces an interest in more policy areas, for example, schools, kindergartens and so on. The ambiguity of childcare is also mirrored in the findings. For membership of trade unions and single-issue organisations as well as having the collective mode of non-institutionalised participation, having children is a negative predictor; for the contacting and individual modes of non-institutionalised participation, it is a positive predictor. The likelihood of living with children increases from young to middle age and decreases thereafter. This means – from the perspective of older people – that they are sometimes more and sometimes less likely to participate due to their lower likelihood of being directly concerned with children.

In addition to our ways of life that are structured by the life cycle, health is an important physical difference between younger and older people, with older people being less fit due to the physical effects of ageing and

the accumulation of the effects of unhealthy lifestyles. Lower physical fitness and – equally important – the individual's perception of it hamper participation in politics and therefore disadvantages older people relative to younger people. The evidence shows the persistence of this effect for voting participation, membership of parties, trade unions and single-issue organisations, and the collective mode of non-institutionalised participation. Older people are structurally disadvantaged with regard to some forms of participation because of their physical background. However, the interviews demonstrated the possibility of substituting a physically demanding activity with a less demanding one. Thus, older people, especially when in a group, can organise themselves to limit this constraint on their political participation.

A final group of determinants stem from the economic sphere. In public discussions, older people are often reduced to their economic status, namely as retirees. Interestingly, there is very little evidence that this status alone affects political participation. For the collective mode of non-institutionalised participation, being economically inactive increases participation rates. But here the causal chain seems to lie in the elite-challenging character of demonstrations that makes working individuals less willing to expose themselves in public. Receiving a pension as the main source of income somewhat increases the likelihood of being a party or single-issue organisation member. The only example of a strong effect from the economic sphere is that of being employed for trade union membership. This not very surprising effect reminds us of the instrumental use of trade union membership for employees and the mobilisation potential of trade unions in the workplace.

All in all, we find plenty of evidence that the social life cycle matters in explaining differences in political behaviour between older and younger people. The way in which a society constructs an image of the life course and old age is a manual that many of us follow and which in consequence structures our political participation patterns.

Individual ageing effects

So far, we have summarised the evidence showing how social and political changes influence political participation by shaping cohorts differently and how the social construction of the life course impacts on individuals and shapes their participation patterns. The final group of effects has nothing to do with history, economic and social developments or social expectations along the life cycle. Instead, they are founded on very basic human behaviours: our tendency to choose actions that we are familiar with, our growing repertoire of thoughts

and actions that we acquire by learning and complying with the expectations of our fellows.

We have found strong evidence for the positive effect of habituation and learning for voting participation. Older people are more likely to vote because they habituate the act of voting. Their past experience with voting increases their likelihood of voting next time. This is a classic example of a habitual kind of behaviour deriving from the fact that humans tend to repeat behaviour they are familiar with. A longer period of learning how to perform a certain type of behaviour advantages older people over younger people with regard to voting. The experience aspect was also found in the interviews, in which respondents reported their past experience with politics in rich detail, showing the greater pool of resources they had to draw upon.

Closely intertwined with this learning mechanism is the growing compliance with social norms that accompanies the ageing process. The older we are, the more likely we are to identify with our environment and to feel gratification from compliance with social norms. Voting participation is a social norm in liberal democracies, even though its strength may be declining. Therefore, older people are also more likely to vote because they seem to benefit more from norm-compliant behaviour.

The evidence for the presence of life cycle and individual ageing effects gives some overtime stability to the participatory differences between older and younger people. These effects, which are rooted in the way we lead our lives and stand outside the political process, are likely to be stable into the near future. Differences in participation caused by them are therefore likely to persist, too.

8.2 Why the findings matter for political behaviourists and social gerontologists

The analysis made use of a modified resource-based model (Verba et al. 1995). This model proved to be very useful for explaining differences in participation patterns between younger and older people. In a nutshell, the differences between age groups can be traced back to varying levels of intrinsic (motivation and resources) and extrinsic (opportunities and mobilisation exposure) factors. This mainstream model of political participation therefore found another set of supportive evidence in this study.

The strong evidence for learning and habituation points towards the usefulness of the concept of limited rationality (March 1986); that is, among other aspects, the notion that individuals have to use cognitive

short cuts to deal with complex reality. Only with such a conception, which assumes that individuals try to use all kinds of short cuts to understand their social experience, can we explain the importance of learning and habituation. The evidence that experience becomes more important with age is complemented by recent experimental studies demonstrating that with increasing age individuals start to prefer cognitively less demanding mechanisms in making political choices (Redlawsk 2004).

Older people have more experience with social and political matters. More experience allows individuals to use experiences more easily as short cuts in order to come to a decision. In a society with more older people, in sum, this kind of decision making is more likely to matter. What consequences this might have can only be suggested here. It seems that party signals directed towards a growing number of voters who can draw on long experience for decision making need to be framed in a different way in order to affect older voters' choices. Given the general trend towards voter volatility, this development could have important consequences for political strategists.

The findings also demonstrated the importance of social context in explaining individual behaviour, such as the repeated impact of the duration of residence. Citizens are not atomised individuals who listen only to their internal interests and motivation to engage in politics. Rather they depend on their social environment to be mobilised into participation, to have opportunities to become active and to be motivated. These findings resonate with results from other recent studies that again highlight the importance of social context to political participation (Zuckerman 2005; Zuckerman et al. 2007; Campbell 2006).

Another strand of literature that we drew upon when establishing the theoretical framework for this book was social gerontology, that is, the social science study of older people, old age and ageing. Our findings also provide interesting insights for social gerontologists. The first insight is old news for social gerontologists, however, and merely corroborates decades and dozens of earlier studies: there is not one type of older person as far as political behaviour is concerned. Even the 'average' older person behaves in a different manner in one area of political participation, relative to a younger person, than in another area. What makes older people different in their political activities are a conglomerate of political generation and socio-economic cohort effects on the one hand, and life cycle and individual ageing effects on the other hand.

The second insight concerns the novel finding that the social construction of old age matters for differences in political participation

between age groups. An increasing number of studies deal with the social image that a society constructs around the status of 'old age' and 'pensioner' and ageing in general. Different from our expectations, however, mainly it is not the participation rates of older people that are affected, but those of younger people. In those countries in which a high proportion of the populace expresses a willingness to help the elderly, younger people are more active relative to older people in voting, party membership and some modes of non-institutionalised participation. Given the same dynamic for levels of the dependency ratio, the most plausible explanation seems to be that in societies that are more shaped in favour of older people, seniors have less of a need to be active in politics because their interests are satisfied, and younger people are, in contrast, more active in politics on their own behalf. This finding should encourage social gerontologists to continue their efforts to disentangle the dynamics that surround the construction of the elderly, old age and ageing, and political scientists to measure whether the social construction of old age is related to political outcomes.

Given the potential contribution of the evidence presented in this book to discussions on political behaviour and social gerontology, what might be suggested for further research? My ideas in this domain are simple. Scholars of political science and social gerontology (often psychologists and sociologists by training) should read each other's work and try to merge the insights of the two lines of inquiry into a new discipline of the social sciences that we might call 'political gerontology', that is, research that deals with the political aspects of older people, old age and ageing at the individual and societal levels. This call to establish a more structured approach in the study of these issues dates back at least as far as the 1970s (Cutler 1977). The current demographic changes in industrial societies, however, may make it easier for researchers to approach this new field, and their efforts can only be welcomed.

This new field of 'political gerontology' could concentrate on many questions. The most important are probably the following. Do politics in ageing societies work differently from politics in other demographic contexts? Will the quality and outcomes of the political process be different? How are institutions of the state and civil society affected by demographic changes? Is our conception of democracy independent of the demographic composition of a society? These questions, which represent just a small sample, go to the core of what makes political science and touch upon various of its sub-disciplines. They show the fundamental need for research in this area.

8.3 Why the findings matter for ageing democracies

Currently, political discussions about politics and policies in ageing societies are dominated by a simplistic notion: older democracies have more older voters, and these voters are very likely to vote. Thus, the 'older' a democracy gets – that is, the more older voters there are – the more difficult it becomes to reform any policy system in a way that might be detrimental to older people. The simple assumption behind this thesis is that all 'older voters' want the same things and behave in a self-interested manner to vote against any policy changes that do not benefit them – self-interest being defined in the material sense.

At its core, this notion embodies an assumption about the behaviour of older people and an assumption about old age political interests. Others and I have challenged the assumptions about the political interests of older people in general elsewhere (Goerres 2007a; Busemeyer et al. 2008), noting that to perceive them as one homogenous group with a clear preference structure in what they want is to discount the fact that there is a bigger difference within the group of older people (or pensioners) than between older and younger people. This book presents a number of results concerning interest differences with respect to party choice and tells a very comprehensive story about the behavioural differences between older and younger people. These results can be summarised in the following statements:

1 There is no simple difference between younger and older people's political participation.

This is the supreme message to be sent to public discussions concerning 'pensioner's democracy' and 'the political power of the old' and the assumptions of economistic social scientists portraying the 'ageing median voter'. As with many social issues, there is no simple story to tell about the political participation of older people. The participation differences between younger and older people are the result of a complex interplay of cohort and age factors, as well as of the social and political context of a democratic society. Panic in the face of the fact that there are more and more older people who can influence political outcomes through their political participation is wrong and might even be dangerous insofar as politicians seem to act under the same veil of insecurity concerning what older people do and want.

2 The differences between older and younger people's political participation patterns are unstable across time.

We carried out a thorough analysis of two types of mass participation, institutionalised and non-institutionalised. For both the modes, we found the simultaneous presence of cohort effects (political generation and socio-economic cohort) and age effects (life cycle and individual ageing). If we had found that only age effects mattered in explaining differences between younger and older people, we could have concluded that the participation process in ageing democracies will change permanently. We could have done so because the participatory differences rooted in life cycle and individual ageing are stable into the near future. Older and younger people would behave differently in politics today for the same reasons as older and younger people in ten years or so.

However, since we found that cohort effects matter everywhere, the differences in participatory patterns are unstable across time because at each point in time different cohorts endowed with varying cohort effects face each other as younger and older people. This instability would be very volatile if we had found that only cohort effects matter, but the evidence also points to some stable life cycle and individual ageing differences. Most importantly, the habituation and social compliance effect that we detected in correlation with age is sizeable and likely to yield a higher probability of older people having some stability into the future. So, strictly speaking, we cannot predict the future development of political participation because we do not know how future cohorts will be socialised.

3 The participatory impact of a growing number of older people depends on the social context.

The participatory process in ageing societies is not only unstable with regard to differences between younger and older people in one country across time, but also differs across societal contexts. This implies that there is not one single impact of demographic ageing on the participation process, rather this impact is mitigated by the characteristics of each society. Table 8.1 summarises the distribution of the three most important macrolevel variables across 21 European countries in the ESS. To ease interpretation, these variables have been truncated into four groups, numbered variously 1 to 4: length of democratic epoch according to the wave of democratisation that the country belongs to (1 being the earliest and 4 the latest); the dependency ratio (in quartiles, 1 being the lowest and 4 the highest); and helpfulness towards older people (in quartiles, 1 meaning the lowest level and 4 the highest). Each cell has a shade of grey that becomes darker the higher the number: thus,

countries with darker cells have higher values on these variables. Based on the results in Chapters 3, 5 and 6, darker shades also mean lower participation levels of older people relative to younger people (*ceteris paribus*).

Looking at the bottom of Table 8.1, we see countries such as Britain or the Netherlands (with very light colours) that are likely to show more active older people relative to younger people. Britain and the Netherlands are likely to experience higher activism on the part of older people because (i) the elderly are more socialised into the participatory norms of a long-established democracy; (ii) their interests are less likely to be taken care of politically as public opinion towards old age is less favourable; and (iii) younger people have less of an incentive to become active given the moderate dependency ratio, capturing a low degree of

Table 8.1 Distribution of macrolevel variables in four groups in 21 European democracies

	Macrolevel variables			
	Dependency ratio	Helpfulness towards older people	Democratic epoch	Mean
Italy				3.33
Greece				3.33
Hungary				3.33
Poland				3.00
Belgium				2.67
Sweden				2.67
Slovenia				2.67
Austria				2.33
Germany				2.33
Spain				2.33
Portugal				2.33
Czech Republic				2.33
Luxembourg				2.00
Denmark				2.00
Finland				2.00
Ireland				2.00
France				1.67
Norway		---------		1.50
Britain				1.33
Netherlands				1.33
Switzerland		---------		1.00

Note: Missing values for Norway and Switzerland. Shades of grey signify a group number between 1 (bright) and 4 (dark) (see text). The darker the cells of a country are, the more characteristics it has that lead to lower political participation rates of older relative to younger people.

inter-age competition for public resources. At the top end of the table, three countries score relatively high on all three variables: Italy, Greece and Hungary. These countries are likely to witness older people who are – relative to younger people in these countries – less active in politics because the elderly have not been socialised into participatory norms as much as in longer established democracies (although Italy is here in the 2nd quartile) and because they experience a public sphere that is shaped in their favour, with high dependency ratios and a positive public opinion towards old age, meaning that younger people have a higher incentive to become active in politics in order to have their voices heard. Other countries sometimes score high, sometimes low on one of the three variables. Luxembourg, for example, has the highest dependency ratios (which increases younger people's relative participation), but scores rather low on the public opinion measure and length of democratic epoch (which increases older people's relative participation rates).

All in all, demographic ageing in the near future will have differential impacts on the participation rates of older people relative to those of younger people depending on these three macro factors. We might speculate that the participatory impact on current political outcomes of older people in Britain and the Netherlands could be much higher than that of older people in Italy, Greece or Hungary. Political actors, such as parties, would be likely to pay disproportionately more attention to older people in Britain and the Netherlands than in Italy, Greece and Hungary. Although there is little evidence that old age political interests shape older people's political preferences (see next section), political actors, such as parties or candidates, in Britain and the Netherlands might think that older people behave in a self-interested manner and – noting their high participation rates – make policies accordingly. This would in the long run potentially depress older people's participation rates again and make political outcomes comparable to the countries at the other end of the table. In Italy, Greece and Hungary, in contrast, political actors would have less of an incentive to produce new political outcomes satisfying what they might perceive to be older people's interests because older people's participation rates are low relative to those of younger people. Thus, newly produced political outcomes should become more biased in favour of younger people, which could then lead to the participation levels of older people rising again. If these speculations are correct, it would also mean that a convergence process could develop that produced political outcomes in an equilibrium of satisfied older and younger people's interests and participation levels. Thus, countries at both ends of the table would move closer to each other.

4 Greying democracies per se are neither better nor worse democracies.

The political participation of individuals is important in liberal democracies because a high level of mass participation keeps political elites on their toes, socialises individuals into their role as citizens and helps political elites to govern. From this participatory perspective (see Pateman 1970; Barber 1983), political participation by more citizens and more political participation by already active citizens are to be welcomed.

From a different perspective of democratic theory, more participation is not necessarily better. Thinkers are concerned with the ways in which activists may be different from non-activists (see as a much-quoted example Schattschneider 1975 (1960); see also Verba et al. 1995). If an increase in participation comes only from a group of people whose interests vary from those of the inactive, this may be seen as a problem. In an open political system, such as a democracy, activists are more likely to influence political outcomes than non-activists. This more cautious view of more participation is of great importance in the debate about the impact of demographic change on politics. Some argue that 'older people' will skew outcomes in their favour, permanently excluding the interests of younger people, especially children (van Parijs 1998; Hinrichs 2002).

The evidence in this book tells us that non-institutionalised participation, which has gained increasing popularity in the last few years, is used more and more by older people who are currently still less active than younger people. It can be expected that the gap between older and younger people will close fully in the future. In a participatory view of democracy, this catch up is a positive sign and means that age groups are becoming more equal as far as their participation rates are concerned. However, in other areas, such as party membership in some countries, older people are increasingly likely to be members because younger cohorts are less attracted to these 'old school' vehicles of representative democracy. This is to be interpreted as a negative development from the participatory standpoint. From the perspective 'the more, the better' the developments and dynamics that we observed have positive as well as negative implications.

From the point of view of equality and minority protection, these dynamics should also be interpreted with ambiguity. In those areas in which older people are catching up with younger people, the question arises whether older people, given their rising numbers, will use their increased usage of these channels of participation to the detriment

of the minority. The same logic applies even more strongly to those areas in which older people are already more likely to participate and are increasing their advantage because younger people are ceasing to use these channels, such as party membership. If only older people are party members, party organisation may be shaped by older people, so that policy programmes could be rewritten to represent older party members' interests.

For example, children are a group that would plausibly suffer if older people participated only in pursuit of their own age-related material self-interest. Some empirical studies show negative correlations between age (or the proportion of older people at the aggregate level) and preferences for spending on education or employment (or patterns of spending) (Iversen 2005: 100–4; Iversen and Stephens 2008); however, the story behind these correlations remains unclear. The evidence that life-cycle interests are pensioners' primary concern is not very strong, considering our findings for party choice in this book and further evidence elsewhere (Busemeyer et al. 2008; Goerres 2007a; Tepe and Vanhuysse 2008). Even if older people completely dominated some areas of participation, their pursuit of age-related material self-interest would still have to be shown. All in all, therefore, we must conclude that 'greying' democracies are neither necessarily better nor worse democracies. The higher participation rates of older people sometimes indicate that they are catching up with younger people and sometimes mean that they are increasing their edge over them; both observations are normatively ambiguous as the interests of older people may not be so different from those of younger people after all.

We have now come full circle. Demographic ageing is the most fundamental social change in Europe since the expansion of mass education at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. The latter ultimately led to increasing demands on reigning elites for more mass political participation and more elite responsiveness, and finally changed the world of politics. For demographic ageing, we must accept that its impact on the participation process depends on other societal characteristics and happens in interaction with other changes in the political process. Only a balanced view from a cross-national perspective can shed light on the political dynamics of ageing societies and their normative implications in the decades to come.

Appendix

Table A.1 Variables derived from the European Social Survey 2002/3

		Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Dependent variables					
Collective mode	B20: Coded 1 if respondent indicated having taken part in a lawful public demonstration in the last 12 months.	0.07	0.26	0.00	1.00
Contacting mode	Coded 1 if respondent indicated having contacted a public official or politician in the last 12 months.	0.17	0.37	0.00	1.00
Individual mode	B18, 19, 21, 22: Coded 1 if respondent indicated having signed a petition, worn a badge, bought or boycotted a product for political or ethical reasons in the last 12 months.	0.34	0.47	0.00	1.00
Party membership	B12: Are you a member of any political party? When used as control variable, missing values replaced by mean.	0.06	0.23	0.00	1.00
Single-issue organisation membership	E1-12a: For each of the voluntary organisations I will now mention, please use this card to tell me whether any of these things apply to you now or in the last 12 months, and if so, which. Coded 1 if indicated membership of an organisation for humanitarian aid, human rights, minorities, or immigrants or an organisation for environmental protection, peace or animal rights. When used as control variable, missing values replaced by mean.	0.11	0.31	0.00	1.00

Trade union membership	E1-12a: For each of the voluntary organisations I will now mention, please use this card to tell me whether any of these things apply to you now or in the last 12 months, and if so, which. Coded 1 if indicated membership of trade union. When used as control variable, missing values replaced by mean.	0.23	0.42	0.00	1.00
Voting participation	B13: Some people don't vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last (country) national (this refers to the last election of a country's primary legislative assembly) election in (month/year)?	0.81	0.39	0.00	1.00
Independent variables (continuous variables centred)					
Age dummies	F3: In what year were you born? 2002–answer 0 = 16/18–29 (baseline), 1 =30–9, 2 = 40–9, … ,6 = 80+				
Age		0.00	17.51	–29.00	62.00
Age^2		66.84	1771.41	–2186.00	9371.00
Duration of residence, logged	E28: How long have you lived in this area? Natural logarithm of original value.	0.00	1.00	–2.85	1.72
		0.00	0.22	–0.62	0.38
Education	F6: What is the highest level of education you have achieved? 0 = not completed primary education, 1 = Primary or first stage of basic education, 2 = Lower secondary or second stage of basic, 3 = Upper secondary, 4 = Post secondary, non-tertiary, 5 = First stage of tertiary, 6 = Second stage of tertiary.	0.02	1.49	–2.88	3.12
		0.00	0.25	–0.48	0.52
Employed	E29: Can I just check? Are you currently: Employed, self-employed, not in paid work, don't know. Coded 1 if employed.	0.45	0.50	0.00	1.00

(*Continued*)

Table A.1 (*Continued*)

		Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Experience of democracy before 30	Coded 1 if the respondent experienced liberal democracy before the age of 30.	0.83	0.38	0.00	1.00
External political efficacy (logged)	B5: Do you think that politicians in general care what people like you think? Hardly any politicians care what people like me think, very few care, some care, many care, most politicians care what people like me think, B6: Would you say that politicians are just interested in getting people's votes rather than people's opinions? Nearly all/most politicians are just interested in votes, some politicians are just interested in votes some aren't, most politicians are interested in people's opinions, nearly all politicians are interested in people's opinions. One factor Principal Component Solution: 80% of variance explained. Pairwise deletion of missing data. Missing values replaced by mean. Natural logarithm after minimum was set to 1 for Chapter 3.	0.00	1.44	–1.86	6.33
External political efficacy		0.00	0.23	–0.33	0.67
Female	F2: Coded by interviewer, 0 = male, 1 = female.	0.47	0.50	0.00	1.00
General satisfaction	B29: All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays? Please answer using this card, where 0 means extremely dissatisfied and 10 means extremely satisfied. B30: On the whole how satisfied are you with the present state of the economy in (country)? Still use this card. Added up the two coded answers.	0.00	0.19	–0.58	0.42
Health	How is your health (physical and mental health) in general? 0 = very bad, 1= bad, 2= fair, 3 = good, 4 = very good.	0.00	0.92	–2.80	1.20
		0.00	0.23	–0.70	0.30

Income	F30: If you add up income from all sources, which letter (show card) describes your household's total net income? If you don't know the exact figure, please give an estimate. Use the part of the card that you know best: weekly, monthly or annual income: scale 1–12.	0.00	2.52	–5.01	5.99
		0.00	0.23	–0.46	0.54
Internal political efficacy (logged)	B2: How often does politics seem so complicated that you can't really understand what is going on? Never, seldom, occasionally, regularly, frequently, B3: Do you think that you could take an active role in a group involved with political issues? Definitely not, probably not, not sure either way, probably, definitely, B4: How difficult or easy do you find it to make your mind up about political issues? Very difficult, difficult, neither difficult nor easy, easy, very easy. One factor Principal Component Solution: 57% of variance explained. Pairwise deletion of missing data. Missing values replaced by mean. Natural logarithm of original values with minimum set to 1.	0.00	1.16	–3.53	1.30
Internal political efficacy		0.00	0.22	–0.44	0.56
Left–right self-placement	B28: In politics people sometimes talk of 'left' and 'right' on this scale. Using this card, where would you place yourself, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right.	0.00	0.21	–0.51	0.49
Living with partner	Original variable: partner.	0.64	0.48	0.00	1.00
Number of minor children in household	F3: In what year was she/he born (all current members of household)? Sum of people under the age of 18 living in household.	0.00	1.04	–0.73	9.27
		0.00	0.10	–0.07	0.93

(*Continued*)

Table A.1 (*Continued*)

		Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Party identification	B25a: Is there a particular party you feel closer to than any other party?, B25c: How close do you feel to this party? 0 = not closer to any party, 1 = closer to one party, but not close at all, ... ,4 = very close.	0.00	1.49	–1.36	2.64
Pension as main source of income	F29: Please consider the income of all household members and any income which may be received by the household as a whole. What is the main source of income in your household? Please use this card. Wages and salaries, income from self-employment or farming, pensions, unemployment/redundancy benefit/any other social benefits or grants, income from investments, savings, insurance or property, income from other sources. Coded 1 if pensions mentioned, 0 otherwise.	0.26	0.44	0.00	1.00
Political information (logged)	A2, A4, A6: And again on an average weekday, how much of your time watching television/listening to the radio/reading is spent watching/listening to/reading the news or programmes about politics and current affairs? Still use this card. 0 = no time at all, 1 = less than ½ hour, 2 = ½ hour to 1 hour, 3 = more than 1 hour, up to 1 ½ hours, 4 = more than 2 hours, 5 = up to 2 ½ hours, 6 = more than 2 ½ hours, up to 3 hours, 7 = more than 3 hours, don't know. Sum of scores, natural logarithm of (original value minus 1).	0.00	0.11	–0.57	0.43
Political interest	B3: How interested would you say you are in politics? Are you very interested, quite i., hardly i., not at all i.?	0.00	0.90	–1.43	1.57
		0.00	0.30	–0.47	0.53
Political membership	Coded 1 if respondent indicated membership of trade union or party, missing values replaced by mean.	0.26	0.42	0.00	1.00

Political satisfaction	B31: Now thinking about the (country) government, how satisfied are you with the way it is doing its job? Still use this card. B32: And on the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works (country)? Still use this card. Added up the two coded answers.	0.00	0.21	–0.50	0.50
Postmaterialism	Male and female respondents received separate self-completion sheets (GS1/GS2): Here we briefly describe some people. Please read each description, tick the box on each line that shows how much each person is or is not like you. E: It is important for her/him to live in safe surroundings. F: He/she likes surprises and is always looking for new things to do. He/she thinks it is important to do lots of different things in life. N: It is important to him/her that the government ensures his/her safety against all threats. He/she wants the state to be strong so it can defend its citizens. S: He/she strongly believes that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to him/her. Very much like me, like me, somewhat like me, a little like me, not like me, not like me at all. If respondents answered E or N (F or S) with not like me or not like me at all, they got a 0, otherwise –1 (+1). Then the scores were added up to span from –2 to + 2. N/A for Hungary or Italy. Missing values replaced by mean.	0.00	0.13	–0.49	0.51
Religiosity	C13: Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are? Please use this card. 0 = not religious at all, … ,10 = very religious.	0.00	2.94	–4.99	5.01
		0.00	0.29	–0.50	0.50
Self-employed	E29: Can I just check? Are you currently: Employed, self-employed, not in paid work, don't know. Coded 1 if self-employed.	0.09	0.29	0.00	1.00

(*Continued*)

Table A.1 (*Continued*)

		Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Sense of duty to vote	E23: To be a good citizen, how important do you think it is to vote in elections?	0.00	2.56	–7.64	2.36
Social networks (logged)	E1-12b: Do you have personal friends within this organisation? Sports club/club for outdoor activities, an organisation for cultural or hobby activities, a business, professional or farmers' organisation, a consumer or automobile organisation, an organisation for environmental protection, peace or animal rights, a religious or church organisation, an organisation for science, education, or teachers and parents, a social club for the young/the retired/elderly, women or friendly societies, any other voluntary organisation such as the ones I've just mentioned. Each organisation that was not a trade union, humanitarian aid, an organisation for human rights, minorities or immigrants party was counted as 1 and added up. Natural logarithm of (number +1).	0.00	0.56	–0.53	1.87
		0.00	0.23	–0.22	0.78
Town size	F5: Which phrase on this card best describes the area where you live? 1 = a farm or home in the countryside, 2 = a country village, 3 = a town or small village, 4 = the suburbs or outskirts of a big city, 5 = a big city.	0.00	0.30	–0.51	0.49
Macrolevel variables not in the text					
Mean level contacting	The mean level of participation in the contacting mode per country	0.00	0.27	–0.47	0.53
Mean level individual	The mean level of participation in the individual mode per country	0.00	0.32	–0.49	0.51
Mean level collective	The mean level of participation in the collective mode per country	0.00	0.27	–0.35	0.65

Table A.2 Variables from the British Election Studies and the Politbarometer (Chapter 4)

Variable name	Survey question	Answer categories	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Politbarometer						
Age (age categories)	Derived from V55 and V56	From 1988 on respondents indicated age in five year categories	46.08	16.77	17	97
Education	Derived variable from V59 and V60	No school diploma or still at school, one at least basic diploma (Hauptschule), at least advanced diploma (Realschule), A levels, university degree	2.63	0.83	1	5
Incumbent	Respondent voted for the party in power		0.47	0.50	0	1
Religiosity (if respondent expressed denominational membership)	How often do you generally go to church?	Never, rarely, once a year, every now and then, almost every Sunday, every Sunday	2.31	1.49	0	5
Sex	Coded by the interviewer	Male, female	1.52	0.50	1	2
Small party vote	Respondent voted for the Greens or another small party (not FDP)		0.11	0.31	0	1
Vote (if respondent expressed intention to vote)	(If there was a national election on Sunday) which party would you vote for?	SPD, CDU/CSU, FDP, Greens, Other			1	5
Year of birth	Derived from age and survey year		1943.81	18.44	1881	1983
British Election Studies						

(*Continued*)

Table A.2 (*Continued*)

Variable name	Survey question	Answer categories	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Politbarometer						
Incumbent	Respondent voted for the party in power		0.40	0.49	0	1
Sex	Coded by the interviewer		1.53	0.50	1	2
Small party vote	Respondent voted for the Liberals or a small party		0.19	0.39	0	1
Vote (if respondent voted)	Which party did you vote for?	Labour, Conservatives, Liberals/ Liberal Democrats, Other			1	4

Notes

1 Introduction: The Political Participation of Older People in an Era of Demographic Ageing

1. Alternative cut-off points of chronological age used in the social sciences are 50, 55 or 65 (see Walker and Maltby 1997; Walker and Naegele 1999). Not all people who are 60 and older are retirees, but the vast majority are. The rate of economically active people between 60 and 64 tends to be much lower than the rates for younger age groups. On average, it stood at 29.4 per cent in the 21 European countries in 2002. The rate of economically active individuals aged 65 and older lay at an average of 5.1 per cent (ILO 2006). Instead of a chronological age cut-off point, one could use the category of retired versus non-retired. But this poses the problem that being retired can mean many things that vary across countries due to policy regimes and traditions: for example, being voluntarily retired, being unable to work and at the same time above a certain age threshold, or having been forced to retire early. Also, some women who belong to older generations have not necessarily been members of the employed workforce, making the category of retirement misleading for them. Cut-off points of chronological age have the advantage that in countries with similar socio-economic development status, members of the relevant categories are socially comparable. All fixed cut-off points carry a potential risk as they tend to blind the researcher to transitional changes related to a certain life stage that are not linked to a specific date. Also, I will use the terms 'elderly', 'older people', 'seniors' and 'senior citizens' interchangeably, meaning people who turned 60 or older on their last birthday.
2. There is a whole debate about where the 'political' starts and the 'social' ends. In sum, political and social participation seem to reinforce each other under certain circumstances (Van Deth 2001).
3. For example, Warren Miller and Merril Shanks (1996) demonstrated the pro-Democratic tendency among the American New Deal generation that was young in the early 1930s.
4. Parts of this chapter were published as a journal article (Goerres 2007b).
5. Parts of this chapter were published as a journal article (Goerres 2008).
6. Overall, the European Social Survey has superb sampling properties. They differ by country depending on the availability of population frames. For instance, the Danish sample uses simple random sampling, the Austrian three-stage stratified probability sampling and the Czech Republic two-stage stratified probability sampling. The research team adopted a flexible approach where they wanted to get the best probability sampling design that is available in each country. This depends on the experience of the sampling experts in each country. The target response rate was a minimum of 70 per cent, which was attained in most countries. Interviews were carried out face to face, and at no point were substitution or quota sampling allowed.

2 An Age-Centred Model of Political Participation

1. See for the theory of hierarchical needs (Maslow 1987).
2. There might also be some long-term material benefits from compliance with social norms. For example, a local shopkeeper who visibly goes to the voting booth will have an interest in maintaining a good reputation as a political citizen because people who see him vote might be customers the next day. Dennis Chong (1991) calls this kind of political behaviour 'socially instrumental'. For this book, it is of primary relevance to allow for interests that are not selfish. The distinction between selfish and altruistic behaviour is an unresolved one (Mansbridge 1990b) and poses serious problems because very often selfish reasons and altruistic reasons are intermingled. If one disentangles the roots of the motivation in many social actions, both kinds of motivation are often at hand at the same time. Also, altruistic behaviour tends not to be proven as such. Instead, researchers show empirically that an action is non-selfish by demonstrating that individuals act against their own material interest, so that the altruistic category is in danger of being the leftover category of narrowly defined self-interest (Mansbridge 1990a).
3. Steven Finkel and colleagues (1998) mainly test their models on protest activities, but they should apply to any collective political action. They differentiate between selective benefits and collective interests. The former are benefits that are accessible only to those who participate, such as entertainment derived from political action. The latter are a combination of one's individual interest in the goal of the action and one's perception of individual and collective efficacy.
4. Political interest and participation probably reinforce each other rather than the one causing the other. But this does not matter for my argument here.
5. One study differentiates between the absolute and the relative levels of education and their impacts on political engagement. The relative level of education is defined as the status an individual has within those groups in which he or she competes for influence. Thus, a higher education degree in older cohorts has a stronger impact on participation than the formal equivalent in more recent cohorts because highly educated individuals in older cohorts have to compete with fewer individuals with the same degree, for example, for occupational prominence (Nie et al. 1996).
6. I would like to thank Paul Whiteley for pointing this measure out to me.

3 Voting Participation

Parts of this chapter have been published elsewhere (Goerres 2007b).

1. There are two possible explanations for this decreasing inclination to vote for the United States: either this is a symbol of a generational trend towards other forms of political participation (Dalton 2008), or it is a general decline in interest in and awareness of politics (Wattenberg 2008).

   Admittedly, the growth in average participation in the British data (Figure 3.2) could be due to compositional changes resulting from varying mortality rates. Richer and more educated individuals are more likely to vote and also more likely to live longer. Women, too, tend to live longer, but at least in older

generations are less likely to vote. Therefore, older cohorts consist of more people whose social background facilitates higher participation rates and are more likely to be female, which can decrease overall participation.

2. I would like to thank Paul Whiteley for suggesting this mechanism and variable to me.
3. In temporal sequence, there seems to be two stages of causal impact (see Web Appendix, part 2). The historical traditions of religion, which are still reflected in the distribution of religious adherents, play an important role. Countries that are still dominated by higher proportions of Christian population show a stronger helpfulness towards older people. This effect is even stronger – especially with regard to practising Catholics – if religious practice is linked with these religious traditions. Causally more recent, we can detect the importance of the current economic situation of the society as a whole and of older people in particular as having an influence. Woven into this narrative are the differences between welfare traditions. For example, the presence of Catholic traditions in conservative welfare states manifests itself in welfare policies being derived from the Catholic teachings on social policy. Also, reformed Protestantism might play a role in explaining parts of welfare state development (Manow 2002). In sum, therefore, this public opinion measure seems to be the expression of underlying structural factors, which is what we would expect if it was a cultural rather than a volatile policy opinion. It also means that if we measure an impact of this variable at the individual level, this factor is temporally and causally prior to the observed participation levels.

   There are various reasons why someone should declare a willingness to help. It is interesting to note, but too lengthy to report on here in full, that the underlying reasons seem to correlate. In the WVS, respondents who indicated that they would be willing to do something for older people were given a series of statements concerning why someone should do something for older people. The reasons included: to do something in return; it is in the interest of society; it is in my interest; it is one's moral duty to help. Respondents were given the chance to rate each item on a 5-point agree–disagree scale. Correlation and principal component analyses show that respondents seem either to tend to agree with many reasons or with few reasons. The evidence does not point to several, but to one underlying dimension concerning why older people should be helped. Thus, it seems that there is only one qualitative dimension of 'helpfulness' towards older people.
4. Technically, we interact age with macrolevel variables. Given that we also interact age with education and include age^2 to model a curvilinear relationship, it is impossible to include another interaction effect with age, as severe collinearity would reduce the precision of the estimators to an intolerable level.
5. One might question the validity of subjective self-evaluation of one's health, but this evaluation is, first of all, highly correlated with objective health measures and second, this self-image is a powerful force by itself (see Bazargan et al. 1991: 183–4).
6. There is also evidence at the ecological level that districts with high levels of residential mobility have lower turnouts (Gimpel et al. 2004).
7. Technically, these models also allow for the inclusion of random coefficients in order to model differences in the strength of impact across countries.

However, the most important variation across countries, that of age, we model explicitly once we introduce the interaction effects between the macrolevel variables and age.

4 Party Choice in Britain and West Germany

Parts of this chapter were published as a journal article (Goerres 2008).

1. We can use observations only where respondents have indicated whom they voted for. Non-responses or characteristics of non-voters are not included. I decided to look at the expressed voting choice rather than party identification. Voting choice is more comparable across time than party identification, which, according to the literature on dealignment, is weakening. Also, I am interested in the potential repercussions of voting behaviour rather than just the attitude towards a party, as I am mainly concerned with political outcomes.
2. The social science literature on political generations is confronted with a lack of findings about the factors that determine the emergence of political generations. We somehow know that generational differences exist. We are unclear, however, how to recognise when a new political generation evolves, why it evolves and when the next generation starts (Braungart and Braungart 1986). In addition, generations can be different on various dimensions; thus, there can be political, economic or social generations that do not necessarily coincide (see for a critical review Spitzer 1973). Also, the lack of multiple sources of surveys across time brings up the question as to whether new generational explanations can still be fitted to data sources that have been used many times for similar explanations.
3. With respect to party identification, Tilley (2002) has shown the existence of political generations according to party dominance at the time of socialisation. Clarke et al. (2004) showed the differences between the 'Thatcher generation' and the 'Blair generation' and previous cohorts in terms of the civic duty to vote. They also identify the 1945 cohort as the 'Post-war' generation, the 1951–66 cohort as the 'Macmillan' generation and the 1966–79 cohort as the 'Wilson/Callaghan' generation.
4. See Ulrich Herbert (2003) for the *Kriegsjugendgeneration* (born 1900 until 1910), which corresponds to my Weimar Generation, the *skeptische Generation* (born 1925 and 1935), which represents the second half of my Adenauer Generation and the *68er Generation* (born 1940–9), which corresponds roughly to my Brandt Generation. Peter Merkl (1989) also suggests a typology of the political generations of German leaders, depending on historical–political experience in youth.
5. The Nazi period (1933–45) is unlikely to play a role in party preference formation because there were no free elections. Also, any NSDAP preference could not be translated into a vote in the post-war period because all extreme right-wing parties were forbidden.
6. I use logistic rather than multinomial regressions because the predictions that I made for each political generation follow the logic of binary logistic regression and cannot be tested otherwise.
7. Overall, multicollinearity does not pose a major problem. In the British regressions, the highest variance inflation factor is 2.8. In the German regressions, the highest variance inflation factor is 6.8 for the age variable. This latter

level of multicollinearity reduces the precision of the estimator. However, due to the large sample size (more than 200,000 observations), this reduction in precision can be tolerated.

5 Membership of Political Organisations

1. The elderly are not more moderate, that is, they do not position themselves more to the middle of the Left–Right scale. I have checked this empirically with bivariate correlations between age and a transformed Left–Right scale. The Left–Right scale was transformed to span –5 to + 5 and was then squared.
2. A similar effect, albeit with a smaller magnitude, is found with regard to trade union, but not to party membership.
3. These percentages have advantages and disadvantages that can be discussed with reference to validity, objectivity and reliability. Since respondents are asked questions about the three types of membership in the same manner, the validity of the measurements is very high, that is, we can be confident to a comparable degree of measuring what we want to measure. However, there are problems with objectivity and reliability. What respondents say is not necessarily the truth. Social desirability makes respondents answer questions in a way that they perceive to be socially expected. Others argue that the bias does not vary across social groups (Verba et al. 1995: Appendix B). If this bias was the same across all countries, it would distort the answers equally in all contexts and would not matter for the comparative analysis. But there are good reasons to believe that social desirability impacts differently on political membership. It might be expected that established democracies with a high level of political participation show a stronger pro-membership bias (for e.g. Sweden) in answers than countries with low participation rates (for e.g. Poland). This bias reduces the objectivity of our data. However, other data sources that, for example, measure the membership rates of parties in other ways are not comparable for all three types of membership because they are only available separately for different time points and through different measures – for example, party accounts and trade union accounts – that are not easily comparable. Reliability is the final problematic aspect because surveys are just samples of underlying population. There is always a margin of error in estimates based on samples. Typical of a sample size of about 1,500 a proportion of 5 per cent is a margin of error (95 per cent confidence) of +/–1.5 per cent. In practice, this means for small changes in membership (characteristic of many established democracies) that we cannot be sure about the direction in terms of statistical significance. Nevertheless, the change in the point estimates the best sense of change that we can get. See Morales de Ulzurum (2002) for an excellent discussion of issues involving the measurement of political membership.

6 Non-institutionalised Participation outside Organisations

1. There is currently an agreement in the literature that political participation is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. There are debates about the number and definitions of various modes. In order to solve this issue, researchers can

conduct a number of scale-tests, such as principal component analysis. In principle, the empirical results are sensitive to the number of items included in the analysis and the question wording. Some authors who also used the ESS differentiated between 'conventional political participation', which is very similar to my definition of institutionalised participation, and 'protest politics', which includes my non-institutionalised participation (Newton and Montero 2007). However, across countries there is not one dimension of non-institutionalised participation, but three, as my analysis shows. Given the focus on cross-country analysis, I decided on the less parsimonious operationalisation. This seemed then to be warranted with regard to the varying regression results in this chapter.

The four items of the individual mode were subjected to a series of reliability tests. I checked by means of principal component analysis whether they measured one or more latent dimensions. I repeated the analysis for the whole sample (with individuals weighted by population and design weight), for each country separately and for three age groups (<30, 30–60, 60+). The results show that the four items are stable across all specifications. The only exceptions were East and West Germany, where a second dimension had an eigenvalue of barely more than one. Since the loadings of all items on that latent dimension were similar (between 0.3 and 0.5), each item is an equally good indicator of that latent dimension. Therefore, I reduced the dependent variable to a dichotomy that is scored one if the respondent has committed at least one of the four individual actions and zero otherwise. This allows an easy comparison of the results for the other two dichotomies.

7 The Experience of Older Participants in the English Council Tax Protests in 2004/5

1. The interviews cannot show us how the older protesters compare to younger ones because only older people were interviewed. Neither do they tell us anything about the differences between older protesters and non-protesters because the group of interviewees included only older people who had been active in protesting. However, I asked them several questions to illicit how their age mattered in their political involvement.
2. I contacted the main Isitfair organisation, and all local groups that were connected to Isitfair according to the Isitfair website, explaining my research and its non-commercial purpose. I also posted my project on the Isitfair internet news forum, asking for volunteers. The sample that I interviewed consisted of people who had been recommended by the main organisers as potentially willing to be interviewed and further recommendations by this first group. In total, I interviewed 22 older people between 15 November and 7 December 2005. Each interviewee is identified by a letter.

   As Isitfair did not have a full list of all individual members who were active in protest activities, there was no population frame from which to sample. Therefore, I decided for convenient sampling to try to reach a minimum number of 20 interviewees, who were as diverse as possible (as to residence and involvement in local groups), by way of recommendation (snowball principle). Interviewees were granted anonymity and were shown the quotations

and research output based on their statements. There are three potential major sources of bias in the sample compared to a representative one. Many interviewees were heavily involved in organising local groups, that is, they showed high levels of participation; they were known to be willing to talk about their experiences by those who recommended them; and were personally known to local or even national group leaders. Finally, it is plausible to assume that the recommended individuals shared opinions with those who recommended them. However, actual opinions about council tax are only secondary in this chapter because the experience of political protest as such stands in the foreground.

3. All 22 interviewees had voted in the 2005 election. None of them voted for Labour, nine voted for the Lib Dems, eight for the Conservatives, one candidate for himself as he stood as an independent and one for UKIP (three other interviewees voted, but declined to disclose whom they had voted for). Very few interviewees had a strong sense of party identification: only three indicated a long-term preference for the Lib Dems, one for Conservative, one for Labour and one for UKIP. Some expressed their general dissatisfaction with all major political parties. For example, interviewee F would like to have seen 'none of the above' as an option on the ballot and told me that he had deliberately spoilt his ballot paper a few times in the past. Respondent N voted for what he called 'protest' parties, the Greens and UKIP, in local elections.
4. Some respondents seemingly had problems with differentiating between the time their parents had been old (in the 1970s) and their own youth at home with their parents (in the 1950s).

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