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TOO OLD TO VOTE?

On reasons for non-voting at old age

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ABSTRACT It is well-known that voting participation declines with old age, but the reasons are largely unknown. Uninterest in the oldest and routine assumptions that the participatory decline among seniors is something natural deriving from deteriorating health, have likely contributed to the scarce amount of explanations to their non-voting. The few available studies that explore the phenomenon use quantitative measures, which neglects individual reasoning. The process of demographic aging in most Western societies highlights the urgency of information on the reasons for non-voting among the oldest citizens, if the unequal participation of the oldest is not to become a democratic issue in the future. This thesis undertakes an initial step of exploration, in defining and categorizing individual-level reasons for non-voting at old age among Swedish seniors who are 80+, using a qualitative approach. It finds reasons that range from the internal to the external; from not being able to out of poor health or a lack of engagement, assistance or information; to not wanting to out of a lack of engagement or efficacy. Altogether, the existing literature offers a basic understanding of the reasons for non-voting presented in this thesis, but it is far from sufficient for capturing the whole picture. The contributions of this thesis can be utilized both as a starting point for future research and for diversifying the societal and scientific conversation about the status of the oldest citizens in our democracies.

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Introduction

Voting participation declines with old age. The decline is a well-known matter that has been perpetually established in election data and through research from different countries and times (e.g. Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980: 38; Bhatti & Hansen 2012; Bhatti, Hansen & Wass 2012; Fieldhouse, Tranmer & Russell 2007; Rattinger 1992). Somewhat simplified, turnout over life first increases and then decreases in a curve-linear fashion with the oldest old being the group who generally votes the least. Sweden is no exception; in the Swedish 2018 parliamentary election, from peaking at around 90 percent among 65-74-year-olds, turnout plunged over 15 percentage points to around 75 percent among those who were 80+ (Statistics Sweden 2019). The pattern is recurrent in all recent parliamentary- county- and municipal elections (e.g., Statistics Sweden 2011, 2015 & 2019).

The substantial decline in turnout as voters get older is accompanied by demographic aging in the Western world. As for the EU28 perspective, people aged 80+ are expected to increase from comprising 5,6 percent of the population in 2018, to 12,6 percent of the entire population by 2070 (Eurostat 2019). As for the Swedish perspective and the closer future, the 80+ group is expected to increase by 50 percent until 2028 (Statistics Sweden 2018). In light of these demographic changes, it is important to highlight the *democratic* challenges that we are facing as our senior members of society are becoming more numerous while at the same time being less inclined to vote compared to other age groups. It is well known that unequal participation erodes democracy (see discussions by, e.g., Lijphart 1997 and Verba 2003). In the public debate however, this is a greatly neglected aspect of the demographical changes.

With regards to the pressing matter of lower turnout rates among the oldest old compared to the rest of the population, accompanied by demographic aging, we know surprisingly little from previous research about why senior members of society abstain from voting.

Three major problems with previous research impair the understanding of why turnout declines with old age. First, a general interest in the young and a disinterest in the oldest neglects how steep the turnout decline really is, makes data less exact and results in a great lack of studies on non-voting among the oldest seniors (see e.g., Nygård & Jakobsson 2013; Martikainen, Martikainen & Wass 2005; Glenn & Grimes 1968). It is also exemplified by the habit of grouping seniors, such as 65+ or 80+ in studies on political participation and age (see Bhatti & Hansen 2012: 480 for discussion, and Statistics Sweden 2019; Quintelier 2007; Glenn & Grimes 1968; Goerres 2007; Martikainen, Martikainen & Wass 2005 for examples). Grouping seniors, in turn, derives from the use of insufficient research methods for reaching the very old, such as surveys (see Bhatti & Hansen 2012: 480 for discussion).

Secondly, routine and somewhat ageist assumptions that the participatory decline is something natural deriving from deteriorating health, have likely contributed to the dismissal of further studies on why turnout declines with old age (as discussed by Burden, Fletcher, Herd, Moynihan & Jones 2016 and Goerres 2009; exemplified by, e.g., Strate, Parrish, Elder & Ford 1989: 454). Health is undoubtedly part of the explanation, but it is not the entirety of it (Bhatti & Hansen 2012).

Thirdly, the few who have made attempts at explaining the decline in turnout with old age, have done so by quantitative measures, thus ignoring individual-level reasoning for non-voting. In short, no one has asked older people what reasons for non-voting are relevant at an old age.

So, let's ask them. Assuming the explanation do not stop at 'poor health', listening to how seniors from the age of 80 reason about why one would abstain from voting at old age could unveil valuable, and I argue, crucial, information for equal and representative democracies in the future. This information is likewise a piece to the puzzle of political behavior research that has clearly been missing for long. Seeking to bring attention to a neglected group of constituents in times of demographic aging, this thesis is an attempt at answering the research question "*what conceptions of reasons for non-voting at old age exists among Swedish seniors?*".

Literature review and theoretical framework

Why is non-voting a problem?

Political participation is the different ways in which citizens express their political voice; voting, contacting government officials, protesting, campaigning, getting involved in local issues, to name a few (Brady, Verba & Scholzman 1995). Among these, voting is the central form of participation: it is a fundamental citizen right, it is the most common political act and it determines government (Verba 2003: 664).

The literature concludes that equal citizen participation and representation is pivotal for democracy (e.g., Dahl 1996; Lijphart 1997; Verba 2003; Davidson 2014). Participation enables citizens to express their needs and preferences to policymakers and enables policymakers to listen and act on these expressions. As democracy relies on the dynamics of citizens' input and policymakers' output – if the input is unequal, the output turns out unequal and commonly biased against disadvantaged citizens (Lijphart 1997; Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980).

Knowing this, we ought to recognize that the lower turnout and overall lower participation among the oldest citizens is problematic for democracy; when older peoples' voices are expressed to a lesser extent, policies and societies are perpetually shaped with less consideration of their needs and preferences¹.

Why does someone abstain from voting?

Voter turnout is typically explained using three overarching groups of determinants: individual, institutional and contextual factors. Institutional and contextual level factors, such as the characteristics of institutions, electoral and party systems and national economy, are

¹ The effects and response to the Covid-19 pandemic in Sweden is a possible example of skewed policy output that works to the disadvantage of older people with little democratic power.

used to explain differences in turnout among and between populations (Blais 2006). The scope of this study, and the focus of the following sections, are individual-level factors.

While voting is the most central form of participation, it is a subcategory of political participation. Voting participation is thus academically dealt with both as a separate topic and as a part of the broader discourse of political participation. An inclusive approach to the literature is therefore arguably the best way of forming a deeper understanding of voting as a mode of political participation. Accordingly, my review of the literature will include both the wider discussion on participation, and the slightly narrowed discussion on voting.

The Civic Voluntarism Model

Famously inverting the usual question of participation, and instead asking why people do *not* take part in politics, Verba, Schlozman and Brady suggested three answers in their Civic Voluntarism Model: because they can't, because they don't want to, or because nobody asked (1995: 15). I will address the central components within the model, supplemented by factors that are interesting with regards to the focus on older people; *resources* supplemented by *health*; *engagement* and *recruiting networks* supplemented by age-related *disengagement*.

BECAUSE THEY CAN'T: A LACK OF RESOURCES A basic set of resources are necessary for being *able* to participate. This section will focus on the resources *health* and *civic skills*. Civic skills are the organizational and communications skills developed and performed in settings *outside* of politics, that in turn facilitate an individual's ability to participate *in* politics. Being able to speak, write, organize and lead increases an individual's political confidence, which makes it easier to get involved and increases the likelihood of being successful when doing so (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995: 305). The politically skilled have a higher *ability* to participate and are therefore more likely to do so than those who lack skills (Verba et al. 1995: 342).

The distribution logic of civic skills relies on some contexts being more intense of opportunities for learning civic skills than others. The likelihood of finding oneself in such a context relies heavily on socioeconomic factors, most prominently on education. Education directly provides skills that are key for participating, such as verbal and writing skills and increases the knowledge of how to do well in an organizational setting (Verba et al. 1995: 305). Education also indirectly increases an individual's chances of later in life appearing in contexts that are intense of opportunities for continuing to learn and exercise civic skills: having a job at all, having a higher status job, being trusted with organizational tasks or with leadership roles (Verba et al. 1995). Education is however unevenly distributed along the usual lines of social stratification: ethnicity, gender, social class and parental social class (Verba et al. 1995).

Health is a factor that is missing in the Civic Voluntarism Model, but that is arguably also a resource. Health is undoubtedly a factor of interest in the interplay between old age and participation, as the likelihood of having poor health increases with age (The Public Health Agency of Sweden 2017). Burden et al. (2016) provides groundwork evidence that health, measured in multi-dimensional ways including physical and cognitive functioning, strongly influence voting participation. This effect is especially evident for older persons, which is supported also by Bhatti & Hansen (2012: 487). In fact, health matters comparably

as much as education, which is one of the strongest predictors of all kinds of participation (Burden et al. 2016: 172). Other studies provide additional support to the notion that poor health depresses voting participation in all age groups (Mattila, Söderlund, Wass & Rapeli 2013; Söderlund & Rapeli 2015).

Moreover, in the Civic Voluntarism Model, voting is emphasized as a particularly low-demanding form of participation, in that political interest and information, and little more, is what is needed for voting (Brady, Verba & Schlozman 1995: 282; Verba et al. 1995: 360). Contradicting this claim, Burden et al. (2016) and Söderlund & Rapeli (2015) show how voting may be particularly difficult for those with poor health. Low mobility, for instance, can comprise a substantial barrier to voting, whereas it might not limit forms of participation that do not require mobility, such as contacting a politician. These findings emphasize the need for taking health into account when studying constituents where poor health is highly prevalent, while also stressing the need for less simplistic assumptions about how poor health affects political participation.

BECAUSE THEY WON'T: A LACK OF ENGAGEMENT Although resources matter for being able to participate, they merely constitute a set of abilities that lowers the threshold for participating, *if one wants to*. This highlights the importance of *engagement* for turning resources into actual political activity (Verba et al. 1995: 334). Being engaged in politics above all requires having a political interest, but also having feelings of political efficacy, knowing about politics, and having a strong party affiliation (Verba et al. 1995). Being interested and informed, are the primary denominators for voting in the Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba et al. 1995: 360).

Political engagement works as both a supplement and an enhancer for resources. Those who put resources to work in political settings are those who know and care about politics and who believe their participation is meaningful (Verba et al. 1995: 343-344). Reciprocally, those who participate are likely to be more engaged over time since participation increases interest, information and efficacy (Verba et al. 1995: 344). Goerres (2009) and Gerber, Green & Shachar (2003) furthermore emphasize the meaning of past experiences of voting, for voting participation.

BECAUSE NOBODY ASKED: A LACK OF RECRUITING NETWORKS If nobody ever asked for an individual's opinion or participation, it lies close at hand thinking that she, whether she has resources and engagement or not, would be less inclined to voice her opinion or participate. The importance of recruitment into political activity constitutes the third part of the CVM (Verba et al. 1995: 389).

In non-political settings, may it be the workplace, the choir practice or at a family dinner, people are brought into politics by chatting with one another about political issues during a break, being asked to sign a petition, or being informed about political issues that are relevant to the operations of the group (Verba et al. 1995). Moreover, the politically interested and informed, are more likely to interact in these types of ways, and the educated are more likely to have the resources and the engagement that make them attractive activists (Verba et al. 1995).

This dimension of the CVM can be broadened into a more general social dimension of political participation; that the socially integrated participate more (Bevelander & Pendakur 2009; Teorell 2003). That is, the workplace, the family or the choir practice not only constitutes a platform for actual recruitment – they are also places where people become socially integrated and acquire social capital. The importance of social ties for voting among all age groups is emphasized by Bhatti, Fieldhouse & Hansen (2018) who show how voting is an act that is commonly performed together. Gaining a potential voting partner increases the likelihood of voting, whereas losing one decreases the probability of voting (Bhatti, Fieldhouse & Hansen 2018: 15-18). Losing one’s social network as a result of aging, in retiring or being widowed, thus affects voting participation negatively, even when factors such as health and demographics are controlled for (Bhatti & Hansen 2012: 491). Mattila et al. (2013) moreover find how poor health limits one’s social life, highlighting how health factors can affect both ability aspects and social aspects of participation.

Touching upon both the social- and engagement dimensions in the CVM, Johnson & Barer (1992) contributes to the theory of social disengagement in old age by listening to narratives about the social world of the very old. Half of the individuals in the study tell stories about withdrawal from social life as a result of disability and of losing close ones. These individuals cope with the new reality by redefining and readjusting to a narrower social world, either *voluntarily* because they feel content, or *involuntarily* as a way to endure. They describe becoming less susceptible to expectations that are conflicting with their capacities and shifting awareness from the long perspective and from the external, towards the present and towards introspection. In this canon, Katz (2000) directs criticism towards societal norms of activity that insist on the extrovert activeness of older people, which oftentimes conflict with older people’s own priorities, that are more inward-oriented matters.

The theory of social disengagement suggests something different than theories focusing on a decline in abilities or social encouragement of the oldest; it suggests that becoming old might to some mean being likely to no longer feel that politics matter, or in a broader sense, that what is going on in the outside world is of lesser importance now than before. As such, the theory is valuable for understanding the very different circumstances that being old entails. Becoming very old might mean coping with something that few others do, and with something that is beyond political as well as social life, that is, the end of life.

Summary

Although an empirical consensus regarding what explains non-voting among senior citizens is absent, theoretical frameworks on political participation and life at an old age altogether suggests that “because they can’t, because they won’t or because nobody asked” (Verba et al. 1995) might in a broader sense be plausible as answers to why some senior citizens abstain from voting. They might not be able to as a consequence of lost abilities or poor health; they might not want to because they are no longer concerned with politics, or because they do not have information; they might not be encouraged anymore as a result of retirement, the own or others’ disability, or as a consequence of family and friends passing away. Learnings from theories of social disengagement moreover suggest that old age for some might entail a

withdrawal from social and political life as a way of coping with the new reality of becoming old.

Some of the factors brought up in the literature are less dynamic than others with respect to aging. For instance, upbringing, education and to some extent family, certainly lies further away in time at an old age but are nevertheless fixed. Health-and social factors on the other hand, are subject to more change with old age than other factors: retirement, health issues and widowhood take a toll on abilities, skills, mobility, and on the social life that spurs engagement. Currently being the only study that has been dedicated specifically to the non-voting among older citizens, Bhatti & Hansen (2012) points decisively towards the disruption of social ties, but also towards declining health, as causes for older people's non-voting.

Studies that use quantitative measures fail to give insights on individual-level reasoning about non-voting at an old age. Although such distinctions are acknowledged in the literature, current contributions cannot distinguish a person who is, for instance, able to vote but chooses not to, from a person who wants to vote but is not able to. Further empirical insights into reasons for non-voting at old age, as well as insights into how older people themselves perceive their circumstances, would evidently be valuable to this field of research.

Purpose and research questions

Previous research has failed to identify individual motives for non-voting among the oldest. The purpose of this thesis is therefore to identify and describe reasons for non-voting at old age as conceptualized by Swedish seniors.

The overarching research question to be answered is:

What conceptions of reasons for non-voting at old age exists among Swedish seniors?

Drawing on the literature review, one specified research question is added:

Can the reasons for non-voting at old age be connected with the concepts of abilities, engagement and/or social life?

Methodology

Long interviews by telephone

The essence of studying something qualitatively is the interpretation and description rather than quantification of a phenomenon: qualitative research studies the meanings of phenomena as expressed by subjects (Kvale 2007; Flick 2007). As such, it is suitable for answering questions of “why” and “how” rather than “how much”.

Long interviews is the most suitable qualitative research design for exploring individual reasoning among seniors about non-voting at old age. First, we are overlooking a largely unexplored field of research (Esaïasson, Giljam, Oscarsson, Towns & Wängnerud 2017: 262).

Since the significant reasons for non-voting among seniors are currently unknown, identifying conceptions about these is an initial step of exploration.

The aim of this thesis is hence to study the subjects' own realms of thoughts, which is the second reason that long interviews make up the most suitable framework (Esaiaasson et al. 2017: 262; McCracken 1988: 49).

Third, as a result of the scattered theoretical foundation, elements of theory development and induction will inherently be present in conceptualizing observations. Long interviews are especially well-suited for inductive approaches (Esaiaasson et al. 2017: 263).

Fourth, by enabling follow-up questions, long interviews allow for registering unexpected answers, which is key for observing realms of thoughts and thus to contributing with new knowledge (Esaiaasson et al. 2017).

The Covid-19 pandemic meant that adjustments had to be made to the methodological approach of this study. This as people aged 70 or older were strongly advised by authorities to limit their physical contacts with others, coupled with a national prohibition on visiting retirement homes (The Public Health Agency of Sweden 2020). In-person interviews were thus ruled out with respect to the infection risk and instead, telephone interviews were opted for. By not conducting in-person interviews, the empirical inquiry of this study omits opportunities of non-verbal communication that facilitates naturalness, comfort and trust (Shuy 2001). In interviewing older people, hearing-impaired individuals can also benefit from in-person interviews (Shuy 2001).

Telephone interviews on the other hand, can generate less interviewer effects and facilitates less biased questions (Shuy 2001). For the purpose of an open conversation where neither interviewer questions nor answers are adjusted to suit, less interviewer effects and less biased questions are desirable. When interviewing older people, one is well to be aware that interviews can be tiring for the respondents (Wenger 2001). Hence, an advantage of telephone interviews is that they usually take less time than in-person interviews and reduces demanding preparations that the respondent would undertake before an in-person interview (Shuy 2001).

Nevertheless, telephone interviews is a second option that does not create the same dynamic as in-person interviews would have.

The Swedish case

The institutional and contextual characteristics of Sweden means that the respondents in this study are fostered in a society where most people vote. The universalist nature of the Swedish welfare state also enhances norms of participation and solidarity which produces participating citizens and mitigates the participation gaps between the advantaged and disadvantaged, for instance in respect to health (Lister 2007; Söderlund & Rapeli 2015). This is reflected in turnout rates that are among the highest in the world (International IDEA 2016).

The respondents, having lived a long life, likely have a good understanding and positive experiences of voting, making the question of why one would abstain from voting at an old age even more intriguing. Sweden is therefore suitable as context for initial explorations of reasons for non-voting among seniors.

Population and sample

Population

The population this thesis aims to study are Swedish citizens born in Sweden, who are 80 years old or older and who have good cognitive abilities and adequate hearing.

The fact that no interview studies have previously been conducted with particularly old people about non-voting informs us that it is likely especially demanding to reach this type of population. The limitations caused by the Covid-19 pandemic meant further access limitations. A large population was therefore chosen and few restrictions was posed on the sample. Therefore, both voters and non-voters 80 years and older were included in the population, based on whether they had voted in the Swedish 2018 election².

The decision to only include Swedish-born citizens was motivated by the fact that only citizens can vote and abstain from voting³, and because it is well known that being an immigrant affects one's voting behavior (Adman & Strömblad 2018). Factors connected to processes of political integration were thus avoided and focus on age was maintained. The respondents could furthermore not suffer from a dementia disease as it would have been impossible to receive informed consent from a person with dementia. In order to be able to conduct interviews over the phone, respondents needed to have adequate hearing to ensure consent and the validity of the results. That people 80+ is the age group that have gotten least attention in research and that votes the least motivates the choice with respect to age (Statistics Sweden 2011, 2015 & 2019).

Sampling

Using the selection principle of maximum variation is a common method used in interview studies for ensuring that samples, to reasonable degrees, correspond to the composition of the population. The researcher considers which attributes of interest might vary among the selected population and seeks to reflect this variety in their sample (Esaiasson et al. 2017: 270). The most important aspect in this thesis is which factors would generate diversity in the respondents' answers, i.e., which factors would – if varied – increase the amount of different views on causes for non-voting. This means that the factors chosen here will differ slightly from the factors highlighted in previous research, as they are used to *predict* voting participation – not to purposefully *reflect* on voting participation.

With respect to the hardships of reaching representative samples of respondents of high age, and with regards to further access limitations posed by infection control measures, it was not a viable option to select factors that would have been too demanding to vary (Wenger 2001). Therefore, the selected factors were limited to the following ones: *age*, *gender*, *voting incidence in the 2018 election*, *living circumstances* (e.g. lives in their own home or in a care home) and *political interest*.

² Intentionally, no difference is made between the three national elections held on election day 2018 in order to maintain focus on the general concept of non-voting.

³ Residents who are not citizens can vote in county- and municipal elections.

The respondents were reached out to using a combination of snowball sampling and convenience sampling. Methods of random selection were considered but deemed too demanding in terms of time and outcome. By beginning at finding a small number of respondents or contacts and allowing those to recommend further respondents, a sample can gradually be assembled (Esaiasson et al. 2017). Surprisingly, the ethics of snowball sampling did soon appear questionable. To ask a person, who just had described how most of their friends have passed away, for contacts to their friends, appeared insensible. For this reason, convenience sampling was introduced as a supplement (Esaiasson et al. 2017).

As it was not an option to contact older people in-person, the efforts of convenience sampling were directed towards advertising through social media and through contacting retirement homes. The intention was to reach both the seniors living at home and those residing in care homes. The common denominator of the sampling methods is that the sample ran the risk of being biased towards a more active and communicative type of individual. To mitigate this risk, persons that were contacted (e.g. relatives, friends or caretakers of respondents) were perpetually reminded that all types of individuals within the population were of interest, with emphasis on the factors chosen for variation.

Respondents

When contacts with potential respondents were made, a pre-interview conversation took place where individuals were informed about the study. A small number of questions were used to discern whether the individuals were relevant to the population (Esaiasson et al. 2017: 270) (see Appendix).

Table 1. Respondents

Respondent nr.	Age (Born year)	Gender	Voted 2018	Living circumstances	Political interest
1	85 (1935)	Male	No	Own home	No interest
2	81 (1939)	Female	No	Care home	Some interest
3	82 (1938)	Female	Yes	Own home	Large interest
4	82 (1938)	Female	Yes	Own home	Large interest
5	89 (1931)	Male	Yes	Own home	Large interest
6	84 (1936)	Male	Yes	Own home	Large interest
7	86 (1934)	Female	Yes	Own home	Some interest
8	95 (1925)	Female	Yes	Care home	No interest

Note: Respondents out of a population consisting of Swedish citizens born in Sweden, from the age of 80 (born year 1940 or earlier) and with sufficient hearing and no dementia disease.

Hearing and cognitive ability was assessed in this initial conversation. Telephone interviews were then conducted with eight respondents as presented in table 1.

The diversity between respondents is adequate with regards to the demanding task, but not entirely satisfactory. The sample would ideally have reflected a greater variety with respect to age (more older respondents), living circumstances (more respondents residing in care homes), political interest (more respondents with lower levels of interest). Additional non-voters would have meant that more self-experienced reasons for non-voting could have been captured and would have been closer to the ideal of maximum variation. The challenges with accessing non-voters reflects the current number of non-voters. Several individuals declined participation, either because they worried they would give faulty answers or because they perceived the interview-procedure as too demanding. This likely biases the sample towards a more healthy and active type of individual.

All interviews were conducted in Swedish between April and July 2020. Each interview took between 20 and 60 minutes to complete. Interviews were continuously conducted until theoretical saturation was obtained on a general level, meaning that the last interviews contained few surprises and answers were similar to earlier interviews (Esaiaasson et al. 2017). McCracken furthermore suggests that eight respondents is generally a sufficient number of respondents (1988: 17).

Interview guide

The guide is opened with a briefing where the subject and setting of the interview is introduced for creating trust and comfort (Kvale 2007: 55). The respondent is informed about the recording and asked for their consent. The respondent is then offered anonymity, since questions about voting and politics can be perceived as sensitive subjects (Esaiaasson et al. 2017). The respondent is informed that no questions concern their specific political affiliations. Reminders and repetitions are frequently used during the interview to ensure the consent and comfort of the respondent. If needed, respondents are reminded about events and political issues that signified specific elections and events that are discussed during the interview.

The interview guide then consists of three themes. The first theme is biographical questions, partly used as a “warm-up” and partly for understanding the situation of the respondent (McCracken 1988: 34). The theme provides a context for interpretation and for asking meaningful follow-up questions.

The second theme is non-voting and is tightly connected to the main research question. Here, the respondents’ conceptions of non-voting are explored. Non-voters are asked about their own non-voting and voters are asked about their conceptions of others’ non-voting at an old age (see Appendix). Follow-up questions are key to this theme; based on the respondents’ reflections, scripted and non-scripted follow-up questions are used to explore conceptions and meanings until the topic is exhausted.

As the first themes do not invite a deeper conversation on the social world of the respondent, the third and last theme is hence used to explore the respondent’s social circumstances; to explore their social ties and to give the respondent an opportunity to reflect and relate their social life to their political life.

The interview ends with a debriefing where the respondent is invited to ask questions and share their experience of being interviewed (Kvale 2007: 55). Formalities such as contact- and publishing information is covered.

The interview guide was used as a starting point for an in-depth conversation on reasons for non-voting and was not followed slavishly, although all topics were covered (Esaiasson et al. 2017: 276). The motto was to let the respondents reflect as freely as possible and to endorse their input by adjusting topics to the conversation (Charmaz 2001). The approach is also intended to reduce the risk of interviewer effects (Esaiasson et al. 2017). The interview guide is designed to allow for the exploration of topics related to the existing theoretical frameworks on political participation, but also for accommodating exploration outside of the conventional understanding of the phenomenon (Esaiasson et al. 2017; McCracken 1988). Hence, questions are structured as little as possible to encourage different types of answers and to fit different types of individuals (Esaiasson et al. 2017: 237).

Follow-up questions are in some instances scripted in the interview guide, and some are non-scripted (see Appendix) (Esaiasson et al. 2017). Interpretative questions were used to ensure valid and correct interpretation (Esaiasson et al. 2017: 275).

Method of analysis

The recordings were carefully listened through and transcribed. Keeping in mind that transcripts should be produced in a style that matches the purposes of the study, pauses, laugh, stutters and such, were not included in the transcripts (Kvale 2007: 98). All changes to the material were carefully executed and will not affect validity.

The transcripts were analyzed using the Grounded Theory-method, as it is particularly suitable for categorizing aspects of phenomena (Eneroht 2005). The method prescribes the use of *categories*, *dimensions* and *qualities* for summarizing the collected material; broad categories of the empirical material are identified, dimensions of the categories are determined, and the dimensions are given specific qualities (Eneroht 2005). The analysis should result in a four-level category-schedule with the phenomenon as its starting point. The overall aim is to present the material in a transparent and comprehensible manner, where all the significant aspects of the phenomenon are covered (Eneroht 2005).

The analysis was made through several close readings of the interview transcripts where all statements containing conceptions of reasons for non-voting were identified and concentrated (Kvale 2007: 107). They were then thematized in several rounds.

The method allowed for the categorization of several different statements into one quality, such as *hope in the future is lost when there is no change* (R4, condensed statement), and *does not matter who one votes for, there is no change anyway* (R4, condensed statement) being categorized into the quality distrust in politicians' ability to achieve change. Statements that were similar but had qualitative differences, such as *politicians promise more than they can deliver* (R2, condensed statement), were instead categorized into the quality distrust in politicians' abilities to keep their promises (see Grahn Strömbom 2000, for a similar approach).

All statements that constituted some type of explanation to non-voting on a manifest level, were considered reasons for non-voting (Grahn Strömbom 2000: 41). Some statements

were less apparently a reason than others. For example, R3 shared how her husband would not have been able to vote if she would not have helped him with several practical matters. Her statement was interpreted as lacking practical help with transportation or finding the right ballot although the respondent herself might not define the statement as a reason for non-voting (Grahn Strömbom 2000: 41). *The political elite governs regardless of election results* (R4, condensed statement), was however not defined as a reason for non-voting, since it is was a response to the question “*do you feel like you have something to say regarding political issues?*”, and not to a question about non-voting specifically. R4:s statement could however be used to interpret her other statements.

Each quality is illustrated by one or more quotes. The presented quotes are the most informative. All interviews gave results, and the only respondent who is not represented by a quote is R7, since other quotes were more informative in that case⁴. Based on the transcripts of the respondents’ exact formulations, all quotes were carefully translated from Swedish to English, which does not affect their validity. Colloquial speech and grammar were, when needed, corrected to facilitate comprehensiveness (Kvale 2007: 132).

Results

Table 2 shows reasons for non-voting categorized in four levels; starting with the phenomenon – non-voting – it divides into two categories; internal and external. The categories divide into six dimensions; engagement, health, efficacy, practical assistance, social assistance and information. The bottom level lists qualities comprising reasons for non-voting as expressed by respondents.

Internal reasons

Together, the dimensions *engagement*, *health* and *efficacy* form the category *internal* reasons for non-voting. The reasons categorized hereunder derive from sources internal to the subject, as opposed to circumstances that lie outside the “self”.

Engagement

The engagement dimension comprises of reasons for non-voting that derive from a lack of engagement, ranging from not being able to be engaged to simply not caring enough.

R1 is an 85-year old man who did not vote in the 2018 election and has no intention of doing so in the future. He is “*too old*” and too frail, he says. When asked if it is a physical issue, he says:

”No, it’s not the body, it’s... One doesn’t have the strength to get familiarized with the stuff. I have the strength to go out [for walks] but I don’t have the strength to take in all the political decisions that are in the newspapers. I can’t say ‘Oh Lord, what’s that? I have to call someone!’ – that’s over [...] You see, it only has to do with age. It’s very simple: age takes its toll. I don’t

⁴ R7’s statements were categorized into the quality distrust in politicians’ abilities to achieve change.

have the strength to go to meetings, I don't have the strength to get into details. I could 10-15 years ago, but..." (R1)

R1 describes how it is not health issues that keep him from being engaged, which is supported by the fact that he has previously said that he is satisfied with his physical health. It's rather the effects of aging on how much he is able to mentally engage in, that hinder him from being engaged enough to vote. His statements are therefore categorized as does not have the mental strength to be engaged.

He seems to be holding voting to a high standard in terms of the level of engagement required; getting acquainted with the details of politics, being a member of a political party, going to political meetings and contacting others with the purpose of making his political voice heard. The weight of political engagement seems heavy to carry when it is held to such standards, especially if one, as him, is 85 years old. When he is asked to explain what makes him too old to vote, he expresses a wish to be relieved of the responsibility he considers voting to be: "[...] *Considering my age⁵ I think others should take over. I think that's the whole explanation. Since I am not a member of a political party, I think others should take the responsibility.*" (R1). The statement was categorized as the younger generation should take over the responsibility. Not being a member of a political party was first interpreted as a reason for his non-voting. After careful analysis, it was instead interpreted as the respondent giving an example of what makes him less engaged to vote, and consequently why others should take over.

Being politically uninterested seemed to be a conception close at hand for many of the respondents, as it was oftentimes the first of several reasons for non-voting that was given. Again, R1 is talking out of own experience: "[...] *No, I told you before that the interest in politics in detail doesn't exist anymore*" (R1). R6 reflects on other's non-voting: "[...] *I guess it's due to poor interest in politics [...]*" (R6).

Having qualitative differences from being politically uninterested, being generally uninterested in the outside world, is another reason for non-voting put forward by R1, whose priorities are limited to his family and to taking daily walks. Politics lie "*further away*" (R1) he says, and explains his disinterest:

"For God's sake, you see, it declines with age little girl! One has other interests when one is [85]... No, one has no interests at all when one is as damn old as I am. One has interest in taking walks, that's my interest. Yes." (R1)

R8, who is a 95-year old woman, puts forward similar thoughts when she is reflecting on other people's non-voting at old age: "[...] *when one gets older, one doesn't invest as much interest any more, as one would have when one, for example, was young. That's what I think. It just passes. 'What will be will be', they think.*" (R8)

R5 is an 89-year old man. His statement could have been categorized as a lack of interest, but it differs qualitatively inasmuch as he emphasizes that the small *effort* of voting makes those who cannot muster enough interest to vote lazy. Put another way, they are not

⁵ Swedish expression, "*med ålderns rät*".

interested in being interested. His statement was therefore interpreted as laziness: “[...] *I guess it's the idlers. They aren't interested enough to make the small effort of bringing themselves to the voting station. [...] They don't bother to take an interest.*” (R5)

Abstaining from voting out of contentedness is a reason different from laziness as it refers to a person's conception of their current circumstances. R6, an 84-year old man, exemplifies: “[...] *They might be satisfied as it is and don't consider that they have to keep voting in order to maintain it [...]*” (R6)

Health

Lacking physical or cognitive abilities: to be able to choose between different candidates, to bring the right documents and to go through the procedures of voting, is a reason ranging from dementia to physical disabilities. Respondent 3 is an 82-year old woman whose husband lived in a care home during the 2018 election, where she spent much time with him. She puts it well when she is asked about whether she thinks the other residents in the care home were able to vote:

“No, not at all. They were too deeply immersed into their illness and their situation to make the excess movement – both mentally and bodily – that voting is; to go out and collect ballots, making sure that it is the right ballot, present their ID-papers – it was too demanding.” (R3)

R5 reflects on his wife's disabilities: “*She had such difficulties with mobility and with getting to the voting station, so I think her difficulties outweighed her interest.*” (R5)

Efficacy

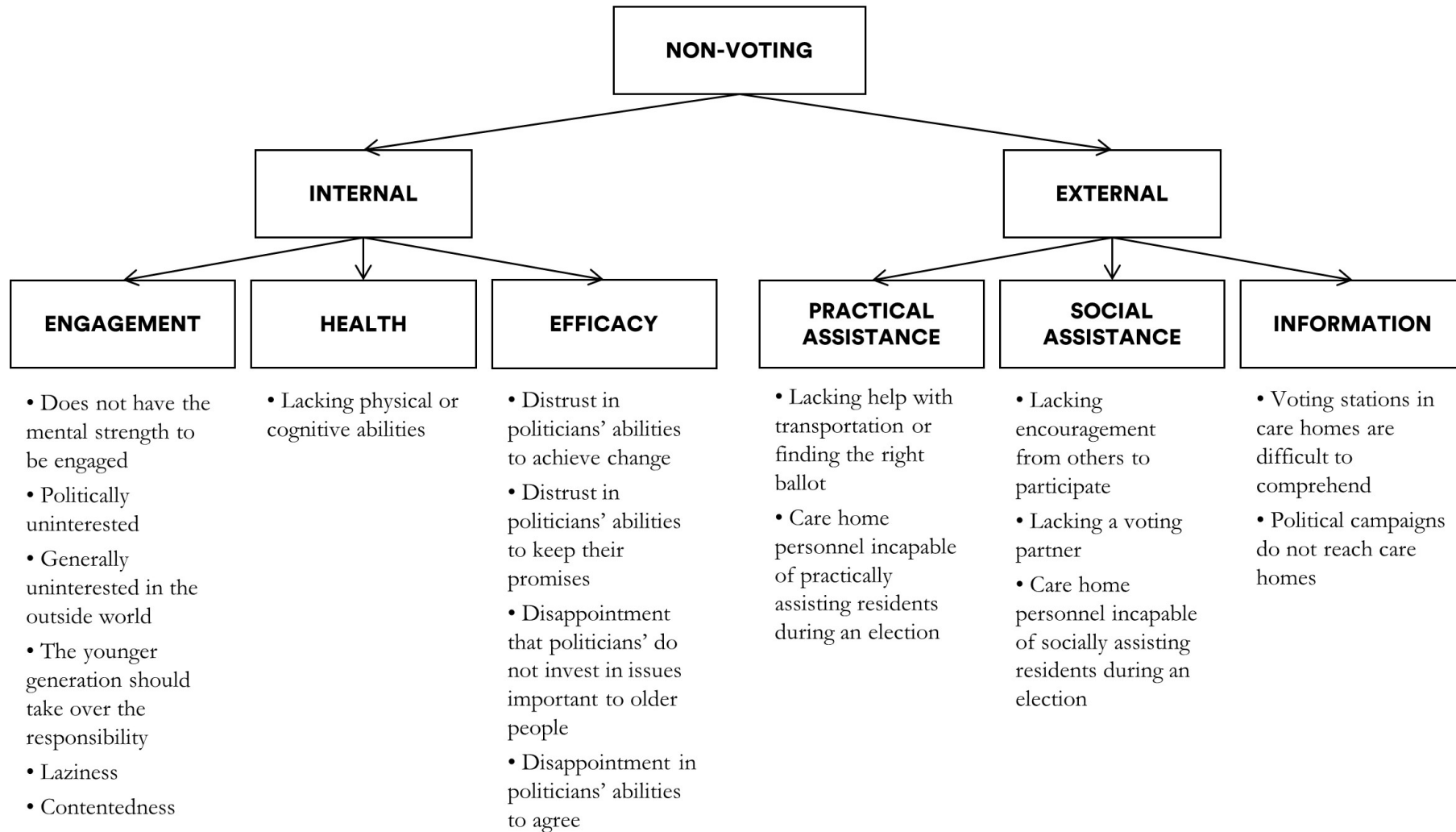
Another internal dimension is efficacy - and the lack thereof - which in several forms was given as a reason for non-voting. The dimension was initially interpreted as something external, that the issue was the wrongful actions of politicians. At a closer look, it is really the subject's *own experience* of being unheard in various ways, that is the common denominator among the qualities within this dimension. Therefore, it belongs within the internal category.

One quite diverse quality is distrust in politicians' abilities to achieve change. R2 is an 81-year old woman who is a non-voter out of religious reasons, who does not believe politicians can ever achieve change – only God can. R4 is an 82-year old woman who does not believe it is possible to vote for change and believes that non-voters feel the same: “[...] *people don't believe that there will be any change and therefore it doesn't matter. Unfortunately, they might have lost their hope in the future [...]*” (R4)

R2 describes how a distrust in politicians' abilities to keep their promises can give cause for non-voting:

“[...] They promised [higher pensions]. But when the election was over, they said 'it's not possible now, we have to wait three years'. And I mean, the ones who voted must be very disappointed [...] Maybe they think 'there's no point in voting next time because they don't deliver on their promises anyway'.” (R2)

Table 2. Category schedule for reasons for non-voting among seniors



Note: Reasons based on conceptions of non-voting among voters and non-voters 80 years and older.

R2 refers to both herself, her husband who out of lack of efficacy stopped voting at old age, and her neighbors in the care home where she lives, when she illustrates how disappointment that politicians' do not invest in issues important to older people can give reason for non-voting: “[...] *they don't feel like it's getting better. They're pensioners and their pensions get lower and lower and the quality of the healthcare for the elderly get worse and worse. I think that's the reason.*” (R2).

R8, a 95-year old woman, has been thinking that she will abstain from voting in the 2022 election. She is disappointed in politicians' abilities to agree and feels like there is no point in voting if they cannot agree: “*It's when they can't agree on a good solution just because they have their own opinion. They don't accept anything else and they won't change their minds. There can be many good proposals, but they disagree only to oppose.*” (R8)

External reasons

Together, the dimensions *practical assistance*, *social assistance* and *information* form the category *external* reasons for non-voting. The reasons categorized hereunder derive from sources external to the subject, as opposed to circumstances that lie within the “self”.

Practical Assistance

The assistance-dimension is divided into two parts: one practical and one social dimension. The practical assistance-dimension is connected to the internal health-dimension, inasmuch as it is its external counterpart; while poor health is the internal issue, which could make cause for non-voting alone, practical assistance can remedy the effects of poor health, and the lack thereof is therefore considered a reason for non-voting that is qualitatively different from that of poor health.

Both R3, the 82-year old woman, and R5, the 89-year old man, drove their spouses to the voting station on election day 2018. R3 also helped her husband to find the ballot for the party he wanted to vote for. Both spouses had health issues that would have hindered them from being able to participate, *if they had been lacking help with transportation or finding the right ballot*. The assistance in this aspect seems to be something that is typically assigned to family members. When R5 is asked to imagine what would have happened if neither him nor his children had been able to help his wife with practical matters, he says: “[...] *Then she wouldn't have participated.*” (R5)

Not only family members are a source of practical assistance for those who need it, also professionals working close to them are. R3 is displeased with the assistance that was offered her husband in his care home. She felt like the care home personnel were incapable of practically assisting residents during the election; partly due to disinterest and partly due to low proficiency in Swedish and little civic engagement, as they were all immigrants. She says:

“[...] *a person who has had several strokes has difficulties with comprehending. They even have difficulties with their eyesight. They need glasses, they need assistance. And in order to read things like election material, one needs better assistance [...] than what was offered at [husband's care home]*” (R3)

R3's way of attributing her husband's hardships with voting to a lack of assistance rather than to his internal health issues is a good example of the difference between the health-dimension and the practical assistance-dimension.

Social assistance

The social assistance-dimension is connected to the internal engagement-dimension, inasmuch as it is its external counterpart; while a lack of engagement is the internal issue, which can make cause for non-voting alone, social assistance can remedy the effects of scarce engagement, and the lack thereof is therefore considered a reason for non-voting that is qualitatively different from that of scarce engagement.

R5 cared for his wife during her last years and was not only essential for her voting in terms of practical assistance, but also in terms of social assistance, or encouragement. Lacking encouragement from others to participate is thus interpreted as a reason for non-voting. The following exchange takes place when he is asked if his wife would have been able to vote in 2018 if he had not helped her:

“No, she wouldn't have.

How come?

Well, to begin with, I don't think she was interested enough. I was probably the one who spurred her interest quite much [...].” (R5)

The verbal encouragement from others is not the only aspect of social assistance; also the company of others can comprise a form of social assistance. R1 lost his wife, whom he voted together with, several years ago. Lacking a voting partner impacted his desire to vote negatively, which is illustrated by his answer to how voting felt after she passed away: *“Well... Then the interest in voting declined too, I guess. It's not very fun to go out alone to the voting station. I guess I did it for a year or so, but then it died out.” (R1)*

As previously described, R3 is displeased with the assistance that was offered her husband in his care home, which goes also for the social dimension. She would have wanted the personnel to engage in conversation with the residents about the election, but the care home personnel were incapable of socially assisting residents during an election. She describes how:

“[...] they had no social behavior towards the residents. They made sure they were fed and clean [...] and then they disappeared into their break room where they sat, chatting with each other [...] But they had relatively recently arrived to the country, 2-4 years maybe. Spoke poor Swedish and weren't at all engaged in talking to the elderly.” (R3)

She does not really blame the personnel for their inability to assist. She, holding dual citizenship herself, understands how difficult it can be to get familiarized with the politics of another country than one's home country. Having had a professional key role within a trade union, she rather blames the system; underfinanced elder care and a preference for cheap labor.

Information

Within the information-dimension, the issue is the information itself; the amounts or quality of the information is inadequate.

The dimension revolves around the statements of R3. She describes how neither her husband, herself or her friend were able to understand how the voting station in her husband's care home worked; it was unclear where and how they were supposed to turn in their ballots. Instead, they drove to an ordinary voting station nearby. As three individuals were not able to understand how the voting station worked, it is likely that other individuals who does not have the option to vote someplace else, would find it difficult to comprehend and thus not vote. Therefore, voting stations in care homes are difficult to comprehend is considered a reason for non-voting, meaning that the information on how to use the voting station was inadequate enough to cause non-voting.

R3 is furthermore very concerned with the low quantity and quality of the information provided by the political parties to the residents in her husband's care home. She compares it to how candy brands, by their unambiguous marketing, make it impossible to misinterpret their message. But the political parties do not; their information at the voting station is intricate and generic.

“They don’t know how to imitate these candy stores and display [their parties] on the tables with all the ballots [...] There’s not a single picture! Have you ever seen a picture of [a party leader] or someone in a voting station?” (R3)

She expresses a wish for more campaign messages inside the voting station, although she knows that the voting station is supposed to be an environment free of influence. This was first interpreted as a lack of accessible information by the political parties, but when the conversation was re-analyzed, it seemed to have more to do with the fact that political campaigns do not reach care homes. Her wish for more campaign messages inside the voting station is interpreted as merely a consequence of the political campaign not reaching *into* her husband's care home, which makes the voting station the only context where he actually got in contact with the ongoing election;

“[If she would not have assisted] he wouldn’t have known it was election day. With as scarce election influence and campaigning as there were in the care home, I don’t believe they would even notice.” (R3)

Discussion

The CVM suggests how a lack of key resources can affect an individual's ability to vote (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995). Health and engagement are internal resources of interest to the understanding of the political world of the oldest. Internally, physical and mental disabilities, as emphasized by, e.g., Burden et al. (2016) and Söderlund & Rapeli (2015), can explain why individuals with low mobility, dementia and other health issues, are not fit enough to vote. It is a rather unsurprising finding that has previously been established in

literature on political participation at old age (e.g. Bhatti & Hansen 2012). However, the results interestingly indicate that what is likely commonly assumed to be health related issues, might rather have to do with aspects more closely related to social disengagement as described by Johnson & Barer (1992) and Katz (2000), than with health.

R1 describes how his lack of mental strength makes him unable to participate because it makes him unable to be engaged. R1 thus demonstrates how not being engaged enough to vote at old age does not have to be connected to poor mental or physical health. Contradictory to assumptions oftentimes made in research (e.g., Strate, Parrish, Elder & Ford 1989: 454), the issue is rather how much he is mentally able to *accommodate* at old age. He is describing a form of political disengagement with old age, where the political life is narrowed down as a way of coping with the new reality of becoming old. R1 holds voting to a high standard in terms of engagement and expresses a wish to be relieved of the burden of voting by the younger generation. Becoming less susceptible to what he might feel are high expectations, is another way of describing how political disengagement among older people has similarities with social disengagement theory.

The notion put forward by Katz (2000) that the social priorities of older people are oftentimes directed inward, is also exemplified by R1. Both he and R8 describe how becoming very old can implicate being generally uninterested in the outside world, resulting in an awareness narrowed down to the basics, like family or taking daily walks. It is understandable how expressions of disengagement can be (mis-)interpreted as physical or mental disabilities, and it emphasizes the importance of qualitative approaches to the subject, as they have the advantage of capturing complete narratives.

Reasons for non-voting at old age also include contentedness, laziness and political uninterest. Within these concepts, we find statements containing discrepancies that are worth briefly dwelling on. R5's initial response to the causes of non-voting among others, is that they are lazy – an internal reason. However, he assumes a more lenient attitude when he talks about his wife; her hardships to vote called for his assistance. The statements highlight the difference between conceptions of strangers' reasons for non-voting and conceptions of loved ones' hardships to vote. Laziness, uninterest and contentedness, that can be found within the internal category, seems to be reasons typically attributed to strangers or to oneself, while reasons found within the external category seems to be typically attributed to close ones: R3's husband is not lazy, uninterested or content – from her perspective, he is simply lacking assistance.

The efficacy dimension shows how older people are much like everyone else – they also carry distrust and disappointment towards politicians (Verba et al. 1995; Wolfinger & Rosenstone 1980). Having lived a long life, experiences of not feeling heard might build into their voting habits and might ultimately contribute to their non-voting, as exemplified by R2's husband who stopped voting at old age out of a lack of efficacy (Goerres 2009; Gerber, Green & Shachar 2003).

As previously discussed, poor health comprises a reason for non-voting. What is more interesting are the many ways in which assistance can alter the course towards non-voting that health issues can initiate. Previous literature on voting participation does not emphasize enough the crucial role of assistance in mitigating the barrier to voting comprised of, for

instance, low mobility (Burden et al. 2016). As such, the results diversify the implications of poor health for voting participation and suggests that poor health and a lack of assistance work in tandem in depressing an individual's voting participation.

A further interesting finding is how practical assistance is typically a task assigned to family members, while social assistance is a task ideally shared between care home personnel and family members. That the social network of an individual holds a critical role to an individual's propensity to vote is thoroughly established (e.g., Verba et al. 1995; Bhatti & Hansen 2012; Bhatti, Fieldhouse & Hansen 2018). The role of care home personnel in socially assisting residents during an election is however sparsely contemplated within political science research, although some attention is brought to the subject by legal and health care research within the U.S context (O'Sullivan 2001; Kohn 2007).

The care home as a context for understanding the political life of the residents is also interesting with regards to the information dimension. With having a political interest and being informed acting as the primary denominators for voting in the CVM, the findings that political campaigns do not reach care homes and that voting stations in care home are difficult to comprehend, are striking (Verba et al. 1995). If residents in care homes barely know that there is an ongoing election - and might not be able to comprehend the arrangements of the voting station if they do know it - it obviously contributes to depressing their voting participation.

The findings relate O'Sullivan's description of the importance of "keeping nursing home residents connected to the outside world" (2001: 345). Remembering that what are commonly interpreted as health-related disabilities can also be an expression for social or political disengagement, it is arguably important that political parties and officials do not neglect constituents residing in care homes, in order for these institutions to become the contexts intense of opportunities to acquire and nurture the resources, engagement and to experience the social interactions that the literature emphasizes the importance of (Verba et al. 1995).

Concludingly, the assistance dimensions exemplify how the choice of including both voters and non-voters in the study was a meaningful approach to identifying a diversity of reasons. We hear R3, the 82-year old woman concerned with the assistance given to her husband at the care home where he lived. We hear R5, the 89-year old man who cared for his wife during her final years. They both tell stories about spouses on the verge of becoming non-voters, had it not been for their practical and social assistance by means of transportation, finding the right ballot and encouragement. Had this study not included voters, like R3 and R5, it is unlikely that it would have captured such detailed descriptions of how assistance impacts voting incidence, meaning it might would have been difficult for non-voters to recognize a lack of assistance that they never had.

Conclusions

The literature on political participation have treated the subject of older people's non-voting with negligence; uninterest and the use of insufficient research methods have caused an absence of knowledge on individual-level reasons for non-voting. Routine assumptions that

the participatory decline among seniors is something natural deriving from deteriorating health, have likely further contributed to the scarce amount of explanations to their non-voting. The scarcity in answers is especially troubling in light of the well-established notion that unequal participation erodes democracy.

This thesis has been able to remedy the shortcomings of previous research by bringing attention to the oldest old, using qualitative interviews suitable for registering individual-level reasoning, and by applying a somewhat inductive approach in order to capture previously unidentified aspects of the phenomenon. In doing so, this thesis can present empirically observed reasons for non-voting as conceptualized by Swedish seniors.

The answer to this thesis' first research question, "*what conceptions of reasons for non-voting at old age exists among Swedish seniors?*" is found in table 2. The reasons range from the internal to the external; from not being able to out of poor health or a lack of engagement, assistance or information; to not wanting to out of a lack of engagement or efficacy. Some of the observed reasons comprise explanations to individual non-voting in combination with, or subsequent to other motives. Alike the CVM, the results emphasize that a single factor is seldomly alone responsible for non-voting.

The simple answer to the second research question, "*Can the reasons for non-voting at old age be connected with the concepts of abilities, engagement and/or social life?*" is "yes and no". Altogether, the existing literature offers a basic understanding of the reasons for non-voting presented in this thesis, but it is far from sufficient for getting the whole picture.

Lacking the abilities to vote is a finding that corresponds to the resources dimension in the Civic Voluntarism Model. It however differs greatly insofar as the abilities found are divided into an internal and an external axis working in tandem; practical assistance being the external ability corresponding to the internal ability of health; social assistance being the external ability corresponding to the internal ability of engagement. The results presented in table 2 furthermore replicates the conclusions of previous research; health is part of the explanation for non-voting, but it is far from the entirety of it.

Lacking the engagement to vote was found within the engagement-, efficacy- and information dimensions in table 2. But also engagement differs from the CVM:s description. Information, for instance, is something close to internal in the CVM; an individual *informs herself*. This thesis presents the information dimension as something external; the *lack* of key information makes an individual *unable* to inform herself. As such, the information dimension in table 2 is closer to the resources dimension in the CVM.

Lacking social ties needed for voting is in a broader sense highly present in several of the dimensions in table 2; the external axis shares striking similarities with what is described by previous literature, especially the social assistance dimension. Social disengagement theory seems to have some explanatory power also when it comes to political disengagement, especially evident in the general disinterest in the outside world that can comprise a reason for non-voting.

The results of this thesis suggest that the common assumption that senior's non-voting is something natural deriving from deteriorating health, is far from the whole truth. The

results rather show that health is one of many possible reasons for non-voting and highlights how the external counterpart of health, assistance, can be of equal blame when it is lacking. This thesis thus contributes to a more diverse societal and scientific discussions about the participatory decline among the oldest citizens and the implications it has for democracy.

The main weakness inherent to this study is the skewed distribution of non-voters and voters within the sample. Spouses of non-voters or individuals with difficulties to vote are prone to attributing these hardships to external circumstances, while non-voters themselves seems to be more prone to attributing their non-voting to internal circumstances. By including both voters and non-voters, this study omits opportunities of identifying more unmitigated reasons for non-voting as expressed by non-voters. A better distribution in this regard could have provided a better coverage of the interplay of internal and external reasons for non-voting. As the well-known challenges with accessing seniors for interview studies were confirmed, the results reflect the variety in answers that were possible to obtain, which is a sufficient contribution of this initial pursuit (Wenger 2001).

The main strength of this thesis is how it is able to contribute with new knowledge on non-voting among seniors that goes beyond the knowledge provided by existing literature. The results cannot claim to have captured all relevant reasons for non-voting, mostly for reasons associated with sampling, but the strength of the thesis lies in how it is able to sufficiently fulfill its purposes: even with a limited sample, the identified categories of reasons for non-voting among seniors exists in reality (Esaiasson et al. 2017: 167). Since no studies have previously identified and categorized reasons for non-voting among seniors, discovering some of the conceptions of non-voting that exist, and what type of individuals might have them, is an adequate contribution within the scope of this thesis.

The next step within research is to adapt and develop frameworks suitable for a deeper understanding of the political world of the oldest. Future research has likely much to gain by continuing to explore the internal and external aspects of voting participation at old age. Especially assistance – practical and social – are interesting dimensions that deserve a place within political science research. Answers to questions like “*how can society contribute in order to make voting participation more inclusive to senior citizens?*” should furthermore be of great interest to officials whose mission and responsibility is to improve democracy. Care homes is a context that comprises an intriguing intersection for two areas of interest to political science: the political integration of immigrants and the political disintegration of older citizens. An interdisciplinary approach – including e.g., gerontology, sociology, law and political science – is likely a fruitful way of bringing new knowledge into this field of research in the future.

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Appendix

Interview guide

The interview is preceded by a pre-interview where the respondent is informed about the study and has the possibility to raise questions. The age, citizenship and place of birth is registered. The respondent is asked whether he/she voted in the 2018 election. The hearing and cognition of the respondent is evaluated. The pre-interview is not recorded.

Follow-up questions, “a,b” are scripted. Non-scripted follow-up questions are also used.

Underlined questions are asked to non-voters only.

Briefing

As previously said, I am now recording our conversation. Is that still ok with you?

Thank you for participating. [Information about the study and about the nature of the questions, e.g., no questions about party identification etc.]

Reminder about the importance of the comfort of the respondent and the possibility to repeat, ask questions and take breaks. (If not discussed during pre-interview).

Anonymity.

I thought we would begin by talking about you and your relationship to politics. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Theme 1: Biographical questions

1. Please tell me a little about yourself! (Education, health, family, partner, living circumstances and political interest should be covered.)
2. Have you voted constantly or sporadically during your life?
3. What is the meaning of voting?

Theme 2: Non-voting

4. You did not vote in the 2018 election. Do you remember the last time you voted?
 - a. How come you did not vote in this/these elections?
5. Many older people about your age, in Sweden, choose not to vote – Why, do you think, do many *other* older people abstain from voting?

Theme 3: Social life and political life

6. Do you feel like you have something to say on political issues?
7. Do you feel like someone would be interested in hearing your views if you expressed them?
 - a. Have this changed since you have gotten older?
8. If you think about all types of social activity; to meet and talk to family and friends, engagements, activities – where would you place yourself on a scale from one to five, where 1 is no social activity and 5 is a lot of social activity?

- a. Have you experienced a change as you have gotten older?
- b. [Follow-up question designed to explore the connection between social life and political life, e.g., *did it feel different to go and vote after your spouse passed away? Was your political engagement affected by X?*]

Debriefing

That was my last question. Thank you. Do you have anything to add?

What did you think about being interviewed?

Information about the time and place for publication of the thesis.

Contact information is exchanged.

Ending.