STUDY

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European Parliament

Young people's participation in European democratic processes

How to improve and facilitate youth involvement

Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs
Directorate-General for Internal Policies
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Abstract

This study, commissioned by the Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the AFCO Committee, examines young people's participation in democratic processes, with a special focus on the European elections. The study inspects the meaning of political participation for contemporary democracies and the dilemmas behind young people's participation and representation. It also assesses, from a youth perspective, the ongoing legislative proposals on European elections and the electoral participation of EU mobile citizens as well as the Citizens' Proposals adopted in the plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe in May 2022.

This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Voter turnout – one of the most important forms of political participation – has been declining since the 1950s, posing a major challenge to democracies around the world. Various studies consistently show alarmingly low voter turnout among young people at different levels and in different regions and countries (Martin 2012; Garcia Albacete 2014; Bouza 2014; Deželan 2015; Deželan and Moxon 2021). European Election Studies (see Schmitt et al. 2014; Schmitt et al. 2019) reveal a shocking landscape of voter abstention in EU Member States, especially among the youngest cohorts of eligible voters, where abstention in European elections is particularly high (over 70 per cent). Moreover, the gap between young and older voters has widened significantly across the democratic world, pointing to a problem with low political participation among young people not only in elections but also in institutional politics. Studies show that young people today participate less in institutional politics than other age groups and also less than cohorts of young people decades ago, which indeed calls for immediate action.

The Citizens' proposals 36–38 adopted in the plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe include several recommendations on how to engage youth in democratic processes. For example, Proposal 36 on "Citizens information, participation and youth" aims to "increase citizens' participation and youth involvement in order to develop a 'full civic experience' for Europeans, ensure that their voice is heard also in between elections, and that the participation is effective". It also calls for more structural support for youth civil society and local youth councils, and for introducing a 'Youth-check' of such legislation that can have an impact on young people.[1]

In its resolution on the follow-up to the conclusions of the Conference[2], the European Parliament (EP, Parliament) has stressed the importance of "continuous involvement of citizen participation and consultation in the EU decision-making process". In addition, Parliament adopted in May 2022 a legislative resolution proposing a new Council Regulation on the elections of Members of the European Parliament[3] aiming at a single harmonised age for voting and standing as a candidate throughout the Union. Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) is also working on two Commission proposals for Council Directives on the electoral participation of EU citizens[4].

This study examines the current situation of young people's political participation with a special focus on the European elections. It inspects the meaning of political participation for contemporary democracies and the dilemmas behind young people's participation and representation. It looks at the theories of non-participation and the available empirical data showing the reasons for the absence of young people in institutional politics. The study also assesses, from the youth perspective, the above-mentioned ongoing legislative proposals concerning European and municipal elections as well as the

1 See Report of the final outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

2 European Parliament resolution of 4 May 2022 on the follow-up to the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe (2022/2648(RSP)).

3 European Parliament legislative resolution of 3 May 2022 on the proposal for a Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, repealing Council Decision (76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom) and the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage annexed to that Decision (2020/2220(INL) – 2022/0902(APP)).

4 Proposals for a Council directive laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and stand as a candidate in elections to the European Parliament for Union citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals (recast), COM/2021/732 final (AFCO/9/07840) and a Council directive laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in municipal elections by Union citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals (recast), COM(2021)0733 final (AFCO/9/07839).

Citizens' proposals adopted in the plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe. Taking into account relevant legislative developments and policy documents, the study also proposes a set of recommendations.

Political participation is essential for any functioning democracy. Government action should be controlled to prevent arbitrariness, and voting and other forms of participation are one form of this external control. The question of who participates in political decision-making is one of the defining features of democracy. A situation in which only a few participate in the political process or in which certain groups are excluded from decision-making therefore imposes clear limits on democratic rule. Political participation is also the best mechanism for the articulation of interests, it fulfils an educational function for citizens, affects life satisfaction, provides a form of checks and balances on decision-makers and is directly related to the responsiveness of government. The absence of youth in institutional politics also affects youth representation, as low youth participation in politics means that they have relatively little to expect from government, as there is little incentive for politicians to focus on policies that benefit youth. Studies show that the percentage of MPs younger than 30 in parliaments rarely exceeds 2 per cent and is particularly unfavourable to young women (see Deželan 2015; Tremmel 2006).

There are many reasons for the current situation in young people's political participation. Young people are indeed underrepresented in numbers. However, also the arenas of expression need to be reassessed in terms of their relevance to young people's citizenship. The factors contributing to low participation include the changing relationship between young people and the political sphere, political socialisation and key events during socialisation, and the changing citizenship norms of young people, which are also related to the way we define political participation. There is also a wealth of empirical evidence on different factors that influence individuals' political participation, and studies show that certain causes have different effects on different groups in different contexts. However, there is a list of robust variables that have been shown to be significant for political participation across groups and contexts. It includes, in particular, income, education, marital status, mobility, group inequalities, political knowledge, political efficacy, interest and trust, party identification and civic education at the individual level, and, for example, population size, heterogeneity, proximity of campaigning, polarisation, media environment, electoral system and political mobilisation at the group/system level.

The ongoing proposals on European elections generally address the problem of youth political participation and offer steps forward. However, these steps are often subject to serious limitations (e.g. Union-wide unit, national legislation), are not very ambitious (e.g. introduction of a quota system for young people/age groups, very soft introduction of the right to vote for young people under 18) and in some cases could also work against youth participation (e.g. different age thresholds for voting age and candidacy, 9 May as election day). The Citizens' proposals 36–38 of the Conference on the Future of Europe, on the other hand, offer a very wide range of ideas for improving European democracies. They relate to the provision of information, the ability to process information and the access to and strength of democratic institutions and processes.

Acknowledging the ongoing processes of addressing the problem of youth participation in electoral politics, the recommended actions target the areas of information provision, information processing capacity and increased access to and strength of democratically elected institutions and political processes. Among others, the following recommendations are proposed: Support for voter information and education campaigns; Creation of and support for tools for youth-friendly information-sharing and feedback; Promotion of community media; Promotion of youth juries, mock trials and other deliberative models of youth participation; Support for media education and digital literacy; Lowering

the voting age and age of eligibility for office; Automatic voter registration and up-to-date electoral rolls; Promotion of youth participation in election management; Creation of e-voting and other alternative forms of voting at home and abroad; Introduction of youth quotas and the presence of youth in important political bodies; and Improvement of consultation and co-management of youth-related issues and introduction of mechanisms of direct and participatory democracy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Engaging youth in decision-making and democratic processes belongs to the key priorities of the EU. Also the Citizens' proposals 36–38 adopted in the plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFE, Conference) contain several recommendations on the involvement of youth in democratic processes and call for stronger structural support for youth civil society and local youth councils.[5] In its 2022 resolution on the follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe([6], European Parliament (EP, Parliament) has stressed the importance of "continuous involvement of citizen participation and consultation in the EU decision-making process" and, in its 2021 resolution on citizens' dialogues and citizens' participation in EU decision-making[7] Parliament has called for greater involvement of young people and youth organisations and for concrete measures to be taken on the basis of the results of the EU Youth Dialogue.

Against this backdrop, Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO Committee) has requested additional information on how to improve and facilitate young people's participation in participatory democracy and electoral processes at the European level. Despite a significant increase in turnout in the last European elections, young people's participation in EU electoral processes remains low and well below the average for other age groups (see Standard Eurobarometer 91 2019).

This study therefore examines the current situation regarding young people's participation in national and European elections in EU Member States and looks for ways to increase their participation in EU democratic processes. It looks, inter alia, at the benefits and challenges of lowering the voting age and draws on concrete quantitative and qualitative evidence (e.g. surveys on representative samples of young people, country mappings and benchmarking based on expert coding or official statistics, etc.) as well as a desk review of academic literature published in high-quality peer-reviewed academic journals and monographs.

The study also assesses, from a youth perspective, the ongoing legislative proposals concerning electoral law, namely the Parliament's legislative resolution of 3 May 2022 on a proposal for a Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage[8] and the two Commission proposals for Council directives on the participation of the EU mobile citizens in the European and municipal elections[9]. and the above-mentioned Citizens' proposals 36–38 of the Conference The study also offers some insights into the effectiveness of certain ongoing actions, instruments and platforms in engaging young people in democratic participation in Europe. Taking

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5 See Report of the final outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

6 European Parliament resolution of 4 May 2022 on the follow-up to the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe (2022/2648(RSP)).

7 European Parliament resolution of 7 July 2021 on Citizens' dialogues and Citizens' participation in the EU decision-making (2020/2201(INI)).

8 European Parliament legislative resolution of 3 May 2022 on the proposal for a Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, repealing Council Decision (76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom) and the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage annexed to that Decision (2020/2220(INL) – 2022/0902(APP)).

9 Proposal for a Council directive laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and stand as a candidate in elections to the European Parliament for Union citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals (recast), COM/2021/732 final (AFCO/9/07840) and Proposal for Council directive laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in municipal elections by Union citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals (recast), COM(2021)0733 final (AFCO/9/07839).

into account relevant legislative developments and policy documents, the study concludes with a set of recommendations addressed to key stakeholders.

2. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR DEMOCRACY

2.1. The relevance of political participation

Political participation is essential for any functioning democracy. It involves **individuals actively participating in the formulation, adoption and implementation of public policy** (Moyser 2003, 174). The actions of government should be controlled to prevent arbitrariness, and voting and other forms of participation are one form of this external control. The nature of control also depends on who participates, because individuals and groups do not share all concerns about government action. **The question of who participates in political decision-making** is therefore **one of the defining features of democracy** (Verba and Nie 1972, 1). A situation in which only a few participate in the political process or in which certain groups are excluded from decision-making therefore imposes clear limits on democratic rule.

Democratic life is not fulfilled by the fact that government by the people alone results in the best form of governance. In cases where important groups of citizens are much less active and influential than others, the conditions for collective self-government are not met and the political order suffers from problems of legitimacy. There is ample evidence that **political institutions are most responsive to those they mobilise** (Macedo et al. 2005, 6). The idea of *government for all* thus disappears when only narrow and particular interests are mobilised or when important parts of the political community are excluded. Greater participation is therefore closely linked to **the principle of equity** (Levine 2007, 22-27), since the most politically active citizens also tend to come from wealthier backgrounds. **The best way to increase equity, therefore, is to increase the number of people and groups who participate**.

Contemporary arguments for the importance of strong citizen engagement in democratic polities (see Macedo et al. 2005, 4-6) include the view that broad civic engagement enhances the quality of democratic governance. Knowledge of citizens' interests is essential for decision-makers, and citizens' preferences are usually expressed through various forms of participation. Expertise has its place in politics and public administration, but **citizen input can improve the quality of public policy by organising knowledge and capturing the preferences of the political community**. The formulation and implementation of public policies thus leads to better, more insightful and legitimate policies when the public has sufficient information, resources, time and deliberative opportunities to participate in the process (ibid.). Widespread political participation is therefore seen in the most successful communities, e.g. those with the highest standards of living and the best functioning institutions, even when we control for economic causes (Levine 2007, 30).

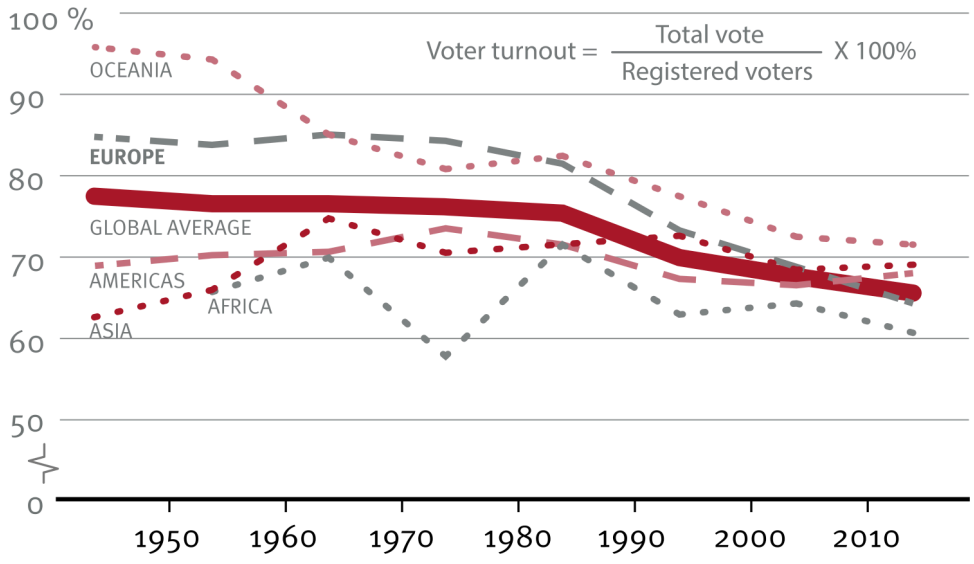
Participation also has a value in itself, for the self-government of the people is said to involve the exercise of special human capacities and is inherently noble. Participation is often seen as an end in itself, an inherent good, because political participation is essentially the interaction of people who differ on a common issue (see Arendt 1958, 57). It is essentially dignified and valuable (Levine 2007, 37) and has **the potential to educate and enliven citizens to increase their understanding and capacities** (Macedo et al. 2005, 5). While recognising that people often lead good lives without engaging politically, participation is seen as part of the good life that complements rather than undermines other valued activities. It is a form of shared learning because making binding public

decisions strengthens citizens' active faculties, their judgement and gives them a familiar knowledge of the issues they have to deal with (Levine 2007, 41). **Higher levels of participation**, especially membership in groups and involvement in social networks associated with service to community, are related to **higher levels of individual satisfaction with the quality of individual and community life**. When citizens are engaged and work with others, their lives and the community in which they live are better (Levine 2007, 34).

2.2. Declining participation rates as a threat to democracy

As a necessary condition for the existence of a democratic polity (Held 2006), citizen participation thus provides the best mechanism for the articulation of interests, fulfils an educational function for citizens, affects life satisfaction, provides a form of checks and balances on decision-makers, and is directly related to the responsiveness of government (O'Neill 2009, 7). Continued high turnout suggests that democracy is doing well, but concerns that this is changing are shared across the democratic world. **Voter turnout – one of the most important forms of political participation – has been declining since the 1950s** (Dalton 1996), and the gradual decline of a few percentage points has accelerated dramatically since the mid-1980s, a trend described by many as one of the greatest challenges facing democracies worldwide (e.g. López Pintor et al. 2002). As Figure 1 shows, this continuous downward trend is universal and no region of the world is immune to it. It has since posed a major challenge to democracies around the world (ibid.), and the official statistics on voter turnout available for most of the world's democracies confirm these observations. Regardless of the communist or non-communist past, the official statistics show that **the decline has mainly marked the period after the 1990s**.

Figure 1: Global voter turnout by region, 1945-2015



Source: Voter Turnout Database, www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voter-turnout

Despite the general trend of declining voter turnout, there are significant differences between democratic countries and regions. **New democracies and democracies with shorter democratic traditions have significantly lower turnout compared to established democracies**, and the trend of falling turnout has been particularly detrimental to them, both in terms of the absolute low turnout and the greater decline in turnout they are experiencing. For example, the countries of the former communist bloc still fare significantly worse compared to Western European countries, with an average turnout of less than 60 per cent and with factors influencing turnout that differ from those of more established democracies (see Kostadinova and Power 2007; Deželan 2015). To be precise, **the established European democracies experienced a significant decline in voter turnout since the mid-1980s**. However, the post-communist European democracies started with lower turnout after their transition to democracy and also experienced a larger decline in relative and absolute terms (see Figure 1 in the Annex).

The downward trend and especially the gap between the new (post-2004 accession) and the old Member States is also clearly reflected in the European elections. It should be noted, however, that European elections are idiosyncratic.[10] Western European countries manage to keep turnout of the European elections around 60 per cent, despite a much lower turnout than in national elections, while post-communist member states mostly have turnout between 20 and 40 per cent. Although there is a general pattern of waves in registered turnout and a slight overall decline in turnout in the case of the old Member States, there is a large gap between them and the new Member States (see Table 1 in the Annex). In these states, citizens seem to have gradually withdrawn from the electoral process after the introduction of democracy (see Kostadinova 2003).

The 2019 European elections were a positive sign of **increased voter turnout** (see EP 2019a, 22), but we are still far from a renaissance in voter turnout. The results suggest that an important role in this equation has been played by **the adjustment of the electoral calendar**, in particular taking advantage of the opportunity that the voting days for European elections coincide with those of national elections and that elections are held on weekends rather than weekdays and on more than one day (see Kelbel et al. 2020).

[10] Although exact cross-national comparisons are limited due to differences in institutional context and survey instruments (Parry et al. 1992, 44), they generally show that national elections are the most attended expression of democracy (Dalton 1996) and that the figures for national elections are consistently higher than those for sub-national (local, regional, state) or supranational elections (i.e. European Parliament elections) (Moyser 2003, 178). In line with Reif and Schmitt's (1980) study and a number of later studies (e.g. Reif 1984; Marsh 1998; Binzer Hobolt and Wittrock 2011), European elections are merely additional second-order national elections, as they are determined more by national than by EU-level political divisions.

3. YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION: THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA

3.1. Youth turnout and youth participation in institutional politics

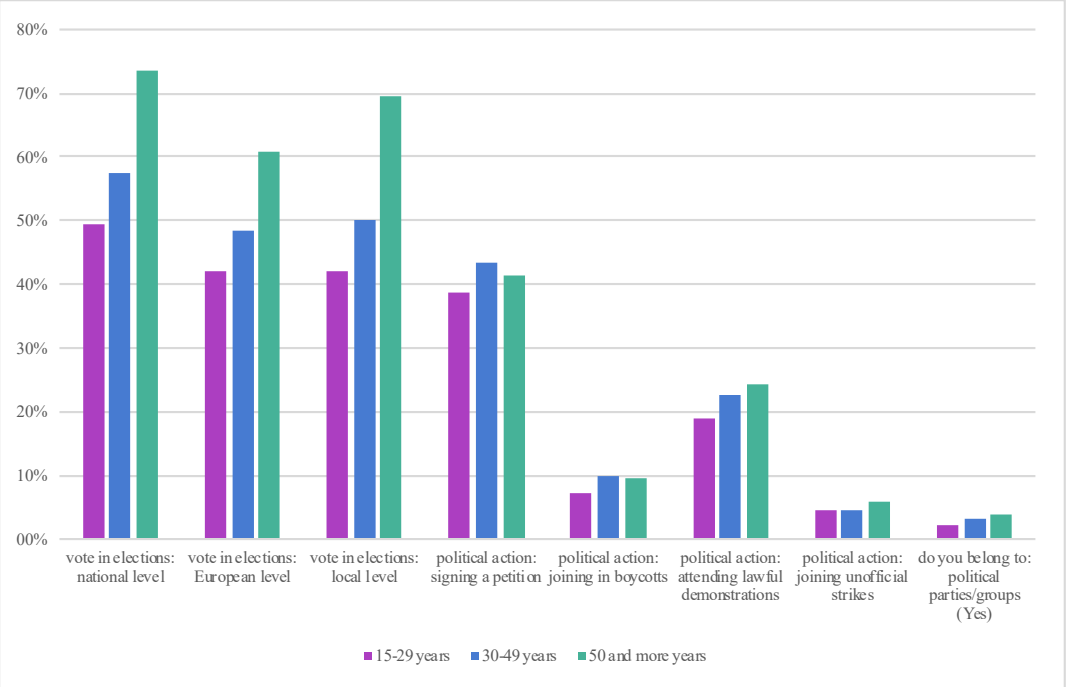
There is no consensus in the academic literature on the effects of turnout. Indeed, a fairly large part of the American empirical literature suggests that voter turnout does not create new winners or losers and has little effect on electoral outcomes (e.g. Teixeira 1992, 104; Bennett and Resnick 1990, Gant and Lyons 1993), and only recent studies are beginning to show a break with these conclusions (see Hajnal 2010). However, studies outside the American context consistently show that turnout matters. Cross-national comparisons suggest that higher voter turnout tends to favour left-leaning progressive actors who are generally more committed to social justice and reducing inequalities (see Mueller and Stratmann 2003, Wattenberg 2002, Hajnal 2010). Thus, the figures on **voter turnout for the population as a whole shows only part of the problem**, as **abstention** from voting **does not affect all countries equally, nor does it affect all population groups within a society equally.**

Age emerges as one of the strongest predictors of voter turnout and, along with income and education, is **one of the most robust explanations for differences in voter turnout** (see Zukin et al. 2006; Stolle and Hooghe 2009). Various studies consistently show alarmingly low turnout among young people at different levels and in different regions and countries (e.g. López Pintor et al. 2002; Wattenberg 2012; Martin 2012; Garcia Albacete 2014; Schmitt et al. 2015; Deželan 2015, Pickard 2019). European Election Studies (see Schmitt et al. 2015; Carteny et al. 2022) suggest that youth absenteeism in the primary (national) political arena is surprisingly high, and the gap between youth and other age groups is significant. Youth are proving to be alarmingly absent from national elections, with an average of almost 60 per cent of eligible voters aged 16/18 to 24 choosing not to vote. Those aged 25-29 do better, although they still do not reach the level of other age groups (see Table 3 in the Annex). In line with this logic, the European Parliament arena is no exception and only reinforces this pattern (see Table 2 in the Annex). Indeed, European Election Studies (see Schmitt et al. 2015; Carteny et al. 2022) reveal a **shocking landscape of voter absenteeism in EU Member States, especially among the youngest cohorts of eligible voters** (see Table 3 in the Annex). In the 16-18-24 age group, abstention from voting at the EU level was over 70 per cent and only slightly below 70 per cent among 25-29-year-old young adults. **This has changed for the 2019 European elections**, but for the reasons mentioned above, namely the adjustment of the electoral calendar, which allowed the European elections to coincide with national elections. Apart from this, the widespread absence of youth from EU institutional politics is undeniable.

European Values Study (2020; see Figure 2) and numerous other studies (e.g. Verba and Nie 1972; Dalton 1996; 2009; Deželan 2015; Garcia Albacete 2014) confirm the findings obtained and corroborate the widely accepted argument that the gap between young and older voters has widened considerably throughout the democratic world (Wattenberg, 2012). Indeed, there is a general consensus that we have a problem with low political participation among young people in Europe and throughout the democratic world, not only when it comes to elections, but also in terms of institutional politics. Studies show that **young people today participate less in institutional politics than other age groups and also less than cohorts of young people decades ago**. The problem of young people's political participation is clearly reflected in their turnout in the different political arenas (national, sub-national and, in the case of the EU, European). The fact that young people are increasingly turning away from

traditional politics and structures is also reflected in their **lack of intention to stand in future elections** (see Deželan 2015; Flash Eurobarometer 375 2014; European Parliament's Youth Survey 2021).

Figure 2: Political participation in Europe by age groups



Source: European Values Study, Wave 7 (2020)

The declining participation of young people in institutional politics is also reflected in the decline in party membership observed in all European democracies (Van Biezen et al. 2012, 38). Several studies have clearly found **a decline in party membership among young people** (e.g. Cross and Young 2008; Hooghe et al. 2004; Seyd and Whiteley 2004, Deželan 2015), which severely affects the recruitment and mobilisation function of political parties and has a very negative impact on young people's political representation. Another indication of this is the participation of young people in the activities of political parties and organisations, which is not very common among young people today. Only about five per cent of 15-29 year olds participate in the activities of political parties and political organisations (see Deželan 2015). A similar decline can be observed in other conventional forms of participation, such as participation in election campaign activities, contacting public officials, active participation in political groups, etc. (Moyser 2003 179; Deželan 2014; Deželan 2015; Deželan and Moxon 2021).

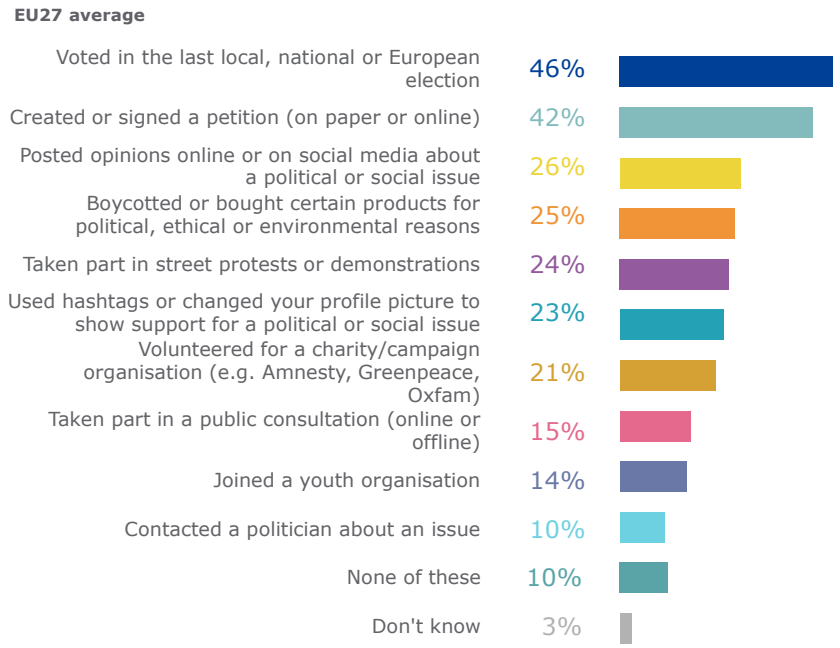
There is also little evidence for the general pattern assumed by Barnes et al. (1979) that young people are consistently more active in other, less conventional forms of political participation than other age groups. The results of Wave 7 of the European Values Study (2020) suggest that **the problem of youth participation in today's democracies goes beyond mere differences in electoral participation and party membership to include other forms of political action**. Signing a petition, participating in a legal demonstration and taking part in unofficial strikes – although often assumed otherwise – are less practised by young people today and are more indicative of non-institutional generational youth activism (see Figure 2).

3.2. Patterns of youth participation in the European political arena

Despite the narrow definitions of political participation that lead to narrow political imaginaries imposed on young people (Marsh et al. 2007, 4), and the reliance on tools to study political participation that consistently underscore young people's political participation, voting is still one of the most widely exercised forms of political participation and is also seen as one of the most effective (see Deželan and Moxon 2021). As the most widespread and regularised political activity with the greatest overall citizen influence in most democracies, elections are particularly important to the Eu political system, as they are the only mechanism that allows citizens to exercise direct control over their representatives in the EU.

As mentioned earlier, voter turnout in supranational elections is lower than in national elections (see Moyser 2003, 178) because of their second-order character (Reif and Schmitt 1980). Regardless, the Youth Survey 2021 (EP, 2021) and other similar studies confirm that **elections remain the main formal means by which people have the opportunity to influence the political process**. The results show that 46 per cent of young Europeans voted in the last local, national or European elections (see Figure 3), with a wide repertoire of other actions available to them. At the same time, we have to note that survey data often do not fully substantiate political participation, especially when it comes to questions about voting, as socially desirable behaviour combined with important civic norms lead respondents to overstate turnout by 10 to 20 per cent on average (see, for example, McAllister and Quinlan 2021). This is also true for European elections, where reported results for 16–29 year olds – the group with the lowest turnout – are 15 per cent higher than the official result (Deželan and Moxon 2021).

Figure 3: Have you ever done any of the following? (in percentages - EU27)



Source: European Parliament Youth Survey (2021)

The most common forms of engagement included signing petitions, whether online or offline (42 per cent), which also suggests that traditional forms of engagement are far from a thing of the past. However, the popularity of less traditional and non-institutional forms of political engagement can also be observed. More than a quarter (26 per cent) of young people in the EU publish their opinion on a political or social issue online. One in four young Europeans (25 per cent) also practise politically motivated consumption through consumer boycotting or buycotting, i.e. deliberately buying or avoiding certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of young people have participated in street protests and demonstrations, and 23 per cent of young Europeans have used hashtags or changed their profile pictures to show their support for a political or social issue. More than a fifth of young people (21 per cent) have also volunteered for a charity or campaign organisation (e.g. Oxfam, Amnesty International) and 15 per cent have actively participated in online or offline public consultations. When looking at these results, it is important to note that only 10 per cent of respondents did not indicate any of the available forms of activities from the rather limited list of political action repertoire, suggesting that young people are more politically active than is generally perceived.

A closer look at the above results using binary regression models revealed several statistically significant patterns (see Table 6 in the Annex). Young women (aged 15–29) are more likely than young men to vote and sign a petition, while they are less likely to contact politicians. Older cohorts of young people (aged 24–29) are more likely to vote and sign a petition than younger cohorts. Looking at financial situation, it appears that those living in wealthier circumstances are more likely to vote and sign a petition, and that the most privileged are also more likely to contact politicians than those who only have enough to pay for basic necessities. Members of ethnic, religious and other minorities, as expected, have lower voter turnout than members of the dominant population. Overall, young men from less affluent backgrounds participate the least, followed by young women from poor backgrounds. On the other side of the turnout scale, the older cohorts of young women (24–29) from more affluent backgrounds are the most active, followed by men of the same age and background.

The fact that voting is the most popular form of political action, with 46 per cent of young people having done so, and that there are only 10 per cent of those who are absent from all the actions listed, indicates that we should not speak of a one-dimensional view of participation (from apolitical individuals to "gladiators" of political participation; see Milbrath and Goel 1977), but of a multidimensional view, suggesting that certain individuals are very active in some forms of political action but passive in others, and vice versa (see also Moyser 2003, 177; Verba et al. 1995). These findings are further confirmed when perceptions of the effectiveness of forms of participation are examined (see Deželan and Moxon 2021). Young Europeans believe that voting is still the most effective strategy. 41 per cent of respondents choose this type of action, especially women (see Figure 1 in the Annex). Participating in street protests and demonstrations seems to be an alternative to voting and the second most effective political action. This is a clear sign that protest politics is popular among European youth and thus also a sign of a different, more engaged citizenry. The third most popular form of political action is signing petitions, as 30 per cent of respondents believe this is the most effective way to make their voices heard. Interestingly, women are again more likely to be convinced of the effectiveness of these forms than men.

3.3. Youth participation as a problem of representation

The absence of youth from institutional politics also affects youth representation. The simple fact that "**if you do not vote, you do not count**" (Martin 2012, 107) indicates that low youth participation in politics means that they have relatively little to expect from government, as there is little incentive for politicians to focus on policies that benefit youth. Various studies point to the empirical fact that **the outcomes of the political process are in favour of those who participate the most** (see Macedo et al. 2005; Martin 2012), although such findings should not be demonised. They simply show that widespread political participation leads directly to the articulation of interests, which improves the quality of democratic governance. Although other age groups might represent the interests of youth, the accumulated evidence shows that empirically this is not the case (see Macedo et al. 2005; Martin 2012).

The reference to the importance of political participation and its direct link to political representation has yet another dimension. We can look at representation through different lenses and descriptive representation is one of them (see Pitkin 1967). Descriptive representation indicates the degree of similarity between the representative and the represented. Mansbridge (1999) emphasises the importance of descriptive representation in cases of marginalised and/or disaffected groups who distrust other, relatively more privileged citizens. In such cases, these groups feel that their policy preferences need to be represented by someone who belongs to them in order to establish appropriate communication in contexts of mistrust. This enables innovative thinking in contexts of ambiguous interests, the creation of a social meaning of 'governability' for members of this group, and the enhancement of the de facto legitimacy of the polity (ibid.). Given youth's immense mistrust of institutional politics (see EVS 2020) – i.e. the political institutions of representative democracy and politicians – representatives from the group would make it easier for them to identify with and engage in the political process. However, we are far from this goal if we look at the number of young MPs in national parliaments.

Research has shown that the percentage of MPs younger than 30 in the national parliaments of OECD countries is higher than 2 per cent only in exceptional cases (see Tremmel 2006, 211). The author further pointed out in his study of selected European parliaments (Deželan 2015) that only 0.5 per cent of MPs

are younger than 30, with 0.1 per cent of them being younger than 25. There are more MPs in the 35–39 age group. The same findings also point to the persistence of patriarchal elements in selected representative bodies, as the proportion of young female MPs rarely reaches a ratio better than one to three compared to their young male counterparts. The coincidence of young age and gender thus leads to an even higher degree of exclusion and alienation for women. This is also illustrated by the fact that there are still Western European parliaments – with a long democratic tradition and a high number of MPs – that fail to have a single MP, male or female, who is younger than 30 years (ibid.).

If we consider that **today's young people represent the largest generation in history, with 1.8 billion people** (ICPD 2014, 1), **the exclusion of youth becomes a crucial problem for the health of democracy around the world**. Keeping youth out of the main spaces of institutional politics therefore reads like a script for the decline of liberal democracies.

3.4. The role of the internet and social media

Technological innovation, driven by the development of information and communication technology (ICT), has diversified the repertoire of political expressions and led to a revision of existing forms (see Norris 2002). This change has given rise to different forms of online politics and activism. The internet, and social media in particular, have introduced some entirely new forms of action and interaction that can only take place in a digitally networked space, such as online petitions or commenting on posts by politicians (Sloam 2016). Cumulative research shows that **the internet has a positive impact on offline political engagement** (Bakker and de Vreese 2011) **and broader civic engagement** (Stern and Dillman 2006; Davis 2010). Vitak et al. (2011) have shown – contrary to the famous slacktivism thesis (see Lutz et al. 2014) – that low-threshold forms of political participation are associated with more resource-intensive forms of participation, and research on social media largely confirms the rather positive effect of new media use on political participation (de Zúñiga et al. 2010). The use of the internet for information purposes has also been shown to be positively associated with online and offline participation (Bakker and de Vreese 2011; Lutz et al. 2014).

The development of ICT, with the current expansion and popularity of social networks in both political campaigning and leisure have broken certain rules regarding youth political participation. Young people are equally or even more politically involved in online political activities, and **social media is the preferred channel for young people's online political engagement** (Smith et al. 2009, 52). The way young people inform themselves about political issues and communicate with others differs from that of other generations. Young people are much more likely to find out about political issues online and to process and collect a variety of news sources (Martin 2012, 105). Originally derived from research on Anglo-American youth, European data confirms this observation. Reading and posting about civic or political issues on websites is clearly a form of engagement in which young people participate more than other parts of the population (Deželan 2015). **Posting opinions on civic and political issues on blogs and social networks is more favoured by young people, and young people are more inclined to disseminate political information and views online** (see Martin 2012, 106). Young people's use of digital media is therefore often seen as a partial remedy (Boulianne and Theocharis 2020, 112) and it is argued that digital media is an important source of information for those who are not primarily interested in institutional politics (Matthes 2022).

Social media has become a central part of young adults' lives, and while young adults aged 16–25 rely on digital platforms or messenger services to get news, the older generations are much more likely to

rely on traditional news sources such as television or newspapers (Matthes 2022, 7). Scholars have expressed high hopes for young adults' democratic engagement (see Binder et al. 2021) – as a tool that will build new relationships between political actors and young people – and the positive correlation between political use of social media and political participation is overwhelming (Boulianne and Theocharis 2020). **Social media is widely believed to promote political engagement among young adults** because **the networking function** of social media **helps young citizens develop skills and psychological dispositions that promote offline participation** (Kahne and Boyer 2018), and it has been argued that **social media promote incidental exposure to political information, leading to learning effects** and an increase in traditional forms of political participation (Matthes et al. 2020), as well as increased political efficacy (e.g. Eckstein et al. 2012).

Moreover, cause-oriented participation in specific issues of interest, often post-materialist in nature, is also consistent with the values and citizenship of today's youth (see Dalton 2009; Inglehart and Welzel 2005), and **the internet and social media offer significant potential for mobilising youth for issue-oriented campaigns, as they allow disparate groups of individuals with different and fragmented political identities to connect** (Chadwick 2006, 29; Martin 2012, 108). They facilitate the formation of issue-based organisations of young people because they **reduce communication costs and facilitate access to official sources**. Technological innovations have also led to **the emergence of crowdfunding, crowdsourcing and networking practises** (Martin 2012, 110), which enable different actors to carry out activities aimed at influencing policy-makers and other actors through public campaigning, activism and lobbying (see Ostling 2014)

However, scholars often underestimate that social media are primarily used by young people for entertainment and relationship purposes (Dimitrova and Matthes 2018) and can distract rather than mobilise (Heiss and Matthes 2021). **While the use of the internet and social media for information purposes is beneficial for political participation, media consumption for entertainment purposes proved to have negative effects** (Bakker and de Vreese 2011; Holt, et al. 2013; Lutz et al. 2014). Moreover, the internet and social media increase the activism of those who are already active (Martin 2012, 107). A closer look at the data also shows that **the proportion of those who actually read about politics is low, and the proportion of those who express their opinions about politics online is even lower** (see Table 4 in the Annex). There is also evidence that while young people clearly engage in online consultations or voting to define civic or political issues, the numbers are too modest to indicate a lasting and groundbreaking change in the overall patterns of political participation (see Deželan 2015).

4. EXPLANATIONS FOR THE PHENOMENON OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION

There are many reasons for the current situation regarding young people's political participation. While it is true that young people are numerically underrepresented in some conventional areas of political expression, it is also true that these areas of expression need to be examined for their relevance to young people's citizenship today. There is no evidence that the political institutions and processes that were largely shaped in the 19th and 20th centuries best fit the political imaginary of today's generations of young people – indeed, we know that they do not (see Norris 2002; Loader et al. 2014; Pickard 2019; Dalton 2009). Thus, an examination of the characteristics of young people that 'cause' the problem must be combined with an examination of the political institutions and processes that contribute to it, an examination of the relationship between young people and institutional politics, and a reflection on the methodological tools used to identify them.

4.1. The problem of defining political participation

The question of youth participation is not as simple as one might think. If we look at political participation from a traditional, narrower perspective and understand it as the participation of individuals in the processes of formulating, adopting and implementing public policies (Parry et al. 1992, 16), then young people, especially if we measure them using the methodological designs of most relevant international comparative studies (e.g. European Values Study, World Values Survey, European Social Survey, International Social Survey Programme), have lower scores in almost all areas of political participation studied. However, despite existing and relevant differences in youth political participation in different countries and regions (see Kostadinova 2003; Kostadinova and Power 2007), this universal trend is also seen as a by-product of the diversity and outdatedness of the definitions underlying the measurements of this phenomenon.

The definition of what is political and what is not is not shared by academics and the general population and can mean different things. Many studies have looked at the meaning of political participation (see Axford and Rosamond 1997; Moyser 2003, Pickard 2019). For example, Parry et al. (1992) found that there are surprising differences between survey respondents and researchers in their understanding of what is political. While voting is the main formal means by which people have the opportunity to influence the political process, there is a wide repertoire of other actions available to politically engaged people. The concept of political participation has also expanded over time, from activities that focus exclusively on elections and campaigning (e.g., Lazarsfeld et al. 1944), to activities that take place beyond the ballot box, such as citizen-initiated contacts with politicians outside the electoral process and participation through interest groups (Verba and Nie 1972), petitions, demonstrations, boycotts, street blockades, activities ranging from volunteering in local government offices to serving on juries, some even consider participation in non-governmental decision-making processes because such activities might influence participation in the political sphere (see Verba and Nie 1972; Parry et al. 1992; Dalton 2009; Moyser 2003, 176).

Political participation is thus a dynamic and evolving social phenomenon (Lamprianou 2013) and continues to evolve (see Norris 2002; Dalton 2009). This poses a challenge for the academic community trying to capture it, as the repertoire of actions available to participate in the political process has

changed dramatically in recent decades and differs from one political community to another. We are witnessing an **immense diversification in the range, forms and targets of political expression** (Rosanvallon 2008). Norris (2002, 215) argues that political activism has been reinvented through the diversification of agencies, repertoires and targets of political action, while new agencies – collective organisations that structure political activity - have emerged in the form of (new) social movements that differ from traditional forms of political organisations (e.g. parties, trade unions and pressure groups) through more fluid membership and contentious politics using a variety of forms of collective action (Marsh et al. 2007, 9). The diversification of the repertoire –the actions used for political expression – has been caused either by a reinvention of older forms of action (e.g. economic boycotts) or by technological innovations fostered by the development of information and communication technology (e.g. internet activism, social media and blogging) (Marsh et al. 2007, 9-10). And the changing targets of political action – which political actors or participants seek to influence – point to **the changing nature of political power and authority in contemporary societies**, where the nation state as the primary target of action is losing its primacy in favour of a multiplicity of transnational and supranational public and private actors (ibid., 10).

A narrow definition of political participation is therefore the result of a narrow and imposed conception of the political that does not take into account the political imaginations of youth (Marsh et al. 2007, 4). Relying on quantitative survey methods as a central approach to the study of political participation ignores how young people themselves think about politics, wrongly associates non-participation in a particular set of activities with apathy, and perpetuates the division between the public and the private. These methods also fail to take into account the politics of the personal and do not pay sufficient attention to the structural features (e.g. political systems) that shape participation (ibid., 4-5).

Given that young people have a greater propensity to engage in non-institutional forms of political participation (see Norris 2002; Dalton 2009; Martin 2012; Deželan 2015; Pickard 2019), broadening the definition transforms the problem of youth participation from whether they participate to where they participate (Weiss 2020). This has led to calls to broaden the definition of political participation (O'Toole 2003; Marsh et al. 2007; Pickard 2019) and to recognise the problem as such. This discussion is not limited to mainstream political science or political sociology. For example, scholars from the field of childhood studies have also argued for a broader understanding of participation and politics (e.g. Larkins 2014; Moosa-Meetha 2005), stating that children are not blank slates learning to become political, but are immersed in the politics of the everyday world from birth. Broader conceptualisations of political participation thus show that youth are often misinterpreted as apathetic. A growing body of data suggests that young people have never withdrawn from politics or become inactive, but engage in various forms. Observations of micropolitical action and the elements of consumer citizenship (Pattie et al. 2004) and identity politics (Norris 2002) have led to new insights into the complexity of political engagement among today's youth. These observations have been further extended by viewing politics as a lived experience, that is, a view that takes into account knowledge overlooked by traditional quantitative methods that focus on the process of political experience of different social groups rather than their participation in formal political arenas (see Marsh et al. 2007, 24-29). Their citizenship is thus shaped by lived, relational experiences with the institutions and people with whom they interact on a daily basis. Through these interactions, the voice of those who have not yet reached voting age is pushed back overall. This means that a person often begins their political career with the experience that their voice counts less than the voice of their elders.

The broader repertoire of political actions, as well as decades of research, have also revised the classic one-dimensional view of political participation (see Milbrath and Goel 1977), which included categories ranging from apathetic to gladiatorial, to a multidimensional concept, as it became clear that certain

individuals were very active in some forms of political participation but passive in others (Moyser 2003, 177; Verba et al. 1978; Verba et al. 1995). This became particularly clear when comparing individuals who were active in institutional and non-institutional forms of political participation (see Barnes et al. 1979). Political participation must therefore be recognised as a dynamic social phenomenon, showing that young people are increasingly disengaging from traditional politics and structures (Riley et al. 2010). This is not synonymous with the age of political apathy and the retreat of young people into the private sphere, but rather with a diversification of the range, forms and targets of political expression (Rosanvallon 2008; Norris 2002).

4.2. The role of age and political socialisation or the theories of non-participation

Young people's political participation is often interpreted in relation to their age, life stage and broader political socialisation processes (Pickard 2019, 89), particularly in the sense that these factors influence different dimensions of the relationship between young people and the political sphere. Indeed, this means that young age and political environment, as well as notable events that take place during a young person's political socialisation, have short- and long-term effects on the way he or she is politically active (ibid.). There are competing views in the academic literature on the ways in which age and political socialisation affect political participation across almost all domains of political participation. These views can be divided into life-cycle and generational explanations, with the "period effect" as a third (stand-alone) explanation put forward by some authors.

The reasons why young people are less engaged with politics, less politically educated, less likely to participate in political activities and show less political interest (see Quintelier 2007, 165) are seen by some to be related to **the life cycle of the individual** (i.e. the fact that a person's political concerns and behaviour evolve over a lifetime). **The theory of life cycle effects states that participation increases in a curvilinear fashion from youth to middle age and then slowly decreases towards old age**. This puts forward the idea that differences for higher or lower levels of political participation result from the different stages of life that people are in. The basic idea behind this theory is that young people have fewer opportunities than other adults to engage in politics because they are more burdened with other personal concerns and therefore participate less (Weiss 2020, 4). As people get older, they gain more experience with the electoral and political process, and some steps on the path to adulthood, such as settling down, getting married, finishing school or starting work, have been shown to have an impact on political participation behaviour. The relevance of this theory has also been shown for participation outside institutional politics (ibid.). This age deterministic explanation, which also contributes to the negative stereotyping of young people, highlights that young people are less interested in politics, more politically apathetic, less likely to identify with political ideologies, have weaker political party affiliation, are less likely to be members of political parties, are less active in electoral forms of participation, are more progressive, and are more active in non-electoral forms (Pickard 2019, 91). Although **life cycle effects theory is relevant to both institutional and non-institutional participation, it has been seriously challenged** in recent decades due to its generalist nature and its reliance on the notion of a linear transition to adulthood.

Another explanation for young people's political behaviour is **the period effect**, which states that there are some political, social and economic episodes or ideologies that strongly shape individuals' participation behaviour. According to this view, events such as 9/11, **economic and financial crises,**

the emergence of social media, etc. have a major impact on political attitudes, political engagement, party affiliation, voter turnout and the propensity to participate in non-institutional forms of political action (ibid.). Proponents of this explanation argue that **these extraordinary events in history dramatically influence the political socialisation of young people** living through this period because of their formative years (i.e. they are at a stage in their lives when they are politically socialised) and have less fixed political ideas than older sections of the population (see Pickard 2019, 100).

Closely related to the period effect, especially when taking a long-term perspective and the generational change of ageing cohorts, is **the generational effect** that can develop from the period effect (Pickard 2019, 101). This view highlights **the importance of individuals' pre-adolescent socialisation for their political behaviour as adults**, as individuals' adolescence is seen as the crucial time for the development of political thinking. Studies supporting this view assume that young people retain characteristics that distinguish them from previous generations, which in effect means that they will never reach the level of participation of today's older people. The delay in reaching some of the milestones of adulthood therefore leads to an irreversible delay in political participation, which could result in today's electorate being replaced by a more passive one. The generational effect is in fact the consequence of the period effect, which runs through the entire life course (ibid.). This means that people's engagement and political behaviour remain shaped by this event as they grow older, and therefore show different patterns than those of earlier generations. In other words, **the generational effect is the period effect that continues throughout the life course** and has a persistent influence on rates of political engagement, political identification and political behaviour.

4.3. The changing relationship between young people and the political sphere

Young people have a complex relationship with the political sphere, partly because they understand it differently when young (Soler-i-Martí 2015, 399). The relationship between young people and the political process is largely determined by the following aspects (see Soler-i-Martí 2015, 399-401). First, young people are increasingly distancing themselves from institutional politics, as evidenced by the small number of young MPs, ministers in governments, candidates for important elected and non-elected positions and, more recently, for example, very influential Covid 19 task forces.

Another important aspect is the increasing complexity of youth transitions, characterised by longer and reversible transition periods (Serracant 2012; Soler-i-Martí 2015). As these diversified youth trajectories are accompanied by higher levels of uncertainty and vulnerability, these changing youth transitions affect young people's political engagement, particularly in terms of their political socialisation and repertoire of political engagement (ibid. 399). The main patterns of transmission of prevailing political values have consequently changed: less importance is attached to the main traditional factors shaping political socialisation, while greater importance is attached to peers and social media (Vraga et al. 2014; Gordon and Taft 2012). Young people's political engagement is thus becoming more diverse, non-exclusionary and incompatible with traditional forms of engagement (Loader et al. 2014).

This also leads to a changing relationship between youth and the political sphere, challenging the liberal distinction between public and private spheres. Since **young people's understanding of politics does not provide for a clear separation between traditional political institutions and everyday life**, the expansion of the political sphere serves to break down the boundaries between

politics and society, so that political orientation and forms of expression manifest themselves in young people's everyday lives (Soler-i-Martí 2015, 400). Based on ethical principles, this engagement extends to everyday **actions and decisions regarding food, clothing, the use of public spaces**, etc., which means that political issues and concerns diversify and do not conform to traditional political dividing lines (ibid., 400-401).

Non-participation in institutional politics, then, does not necessarily mean apathy, as many assume. People who show little or no interest in politics and consequently do not participate in institutional politics do so for a variety of reasons (see, for example, Snell 2010, 268-279). It may indeed be that people are apathetic, not interested in politics at all and have no motivation to actively participate in civic life. But it may also be that they are **uninformed** and therefore, because they feel they do not know enough about politics, they are not interested in politics and do not care. Young people who do not participate in politics are also people who are **very interested in politics but** do not get involved because they **do not trust politicians and the political system**. These are the distrustful, and it is notoriously difficult to get them to participate because they know what politics is about, and **only radical changes in the way the political process works could make them reconsider their actions**. Finally, individuals may also **feel disempowered**, i.e. they are well informed about the political issues and also frequently express their political views, but at the same time they are bitterly convinced – also because of their own experiences – that their vote does not count and that they cannot change anything. Such a breakdown of the politically inactive allows you to look beyond traditional binary categories and observe the influence of information, interest, trust, efficacy and other factors on an individual's decision to act (Snell 2010, 282).

A breakdown of young people, who are usually said to lack political interest, suggests that young people approach politics with more or less information, more or less trust in political institutions and politicians, more or less a sense of efficacy and more or less a sense of civic duty (Snell 2010, 282). The scepticism of people who have never voted but are passionate and interested in the political issues that affect their everyday lived experiences and normative concerns should therefore not be seen as apathy, but rather as an emerging pattern of youth citizenship (see Loader et al. 2014, 143).

4.4. Changing patterns of youth citizenship

In addition to changes in political participation, several studies also show that a new kind of citizen is emerging (e.g. Dalton 2009; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Norris 2002). They are less collectivist and more individualist, cause-oriented and engaged. Although younger generations tend to be less knowledgeable, less interested, less effective and less engaged in current institutional politics, they are more likely to be members of informal groups and to engage in protest politics because of growing political dissatisfaction and alienation (for a detailed overview, see Marsh et al. 2007, 10-17).

The process that began in the 1980s due to the global restructuring of economies and production led to fundamental changes in the way people formulate their view of the world and their relationship to it (e.g. Giddens 1991). As individuals increasingly take responsibility for managing their personal identities and disengage from modern organisations and institutions that used to convey a shared status, younger citizens feel less obliged to participate in institutional politics and are more inclined to display their lifestyle values through more personally expressive or self-actualising affiliations that can be fluid and changing (Bennet et al. 2009, 106-107). While the debate about young people's political apathy and lower social capital (see Wattenberg, 2012; Putnam, 2000) still rages in the political and

academic community, it is clear that we are observing citizens whose behaviour, participation and channels of action and communication have changed (e.g. Norris, 2002; Rosanvallon, 2008)

Young people have turned away from traditional politics and structures for many reasons (Riley et al., 2010) **and increased their participation in protest politics** (see Norris, 2002; Dalton, 2009). Some point to changing values (Inglehart, 1995), others to the changing role of the state, trust in political institutions and technological innovations (Goerres, 2010, 210; Dalton, 2004; Loader et al. 2014) and many other reasons. These changes have led to an altered transition into adulthood, characterised by higher levels of insecurity and vulnerability, which also has a strong impact on their political engagement (Soler-i-Martí, 2014), with greater importance attached to peers and social media (Vraga et al., 2014). These new citizens are less collectivist and more individualist, cause-oriented, engage in single-issue organisations and other forms of engagement that do not require long-term commitment (Norris, 2002), and are more likely to be members of informal groups, participate in protest politics and focus on specific issues or political causes (Marsh et al. 2007, 10-17). Young people today are **more attracted to and willing to experiment with new forms of mass communication** (Martin, 2012, 102). These processes have therefore initiated the discussion on two models of citizenship, namely the dutiful citizen and the actualising citizen (see Dalton 2009).

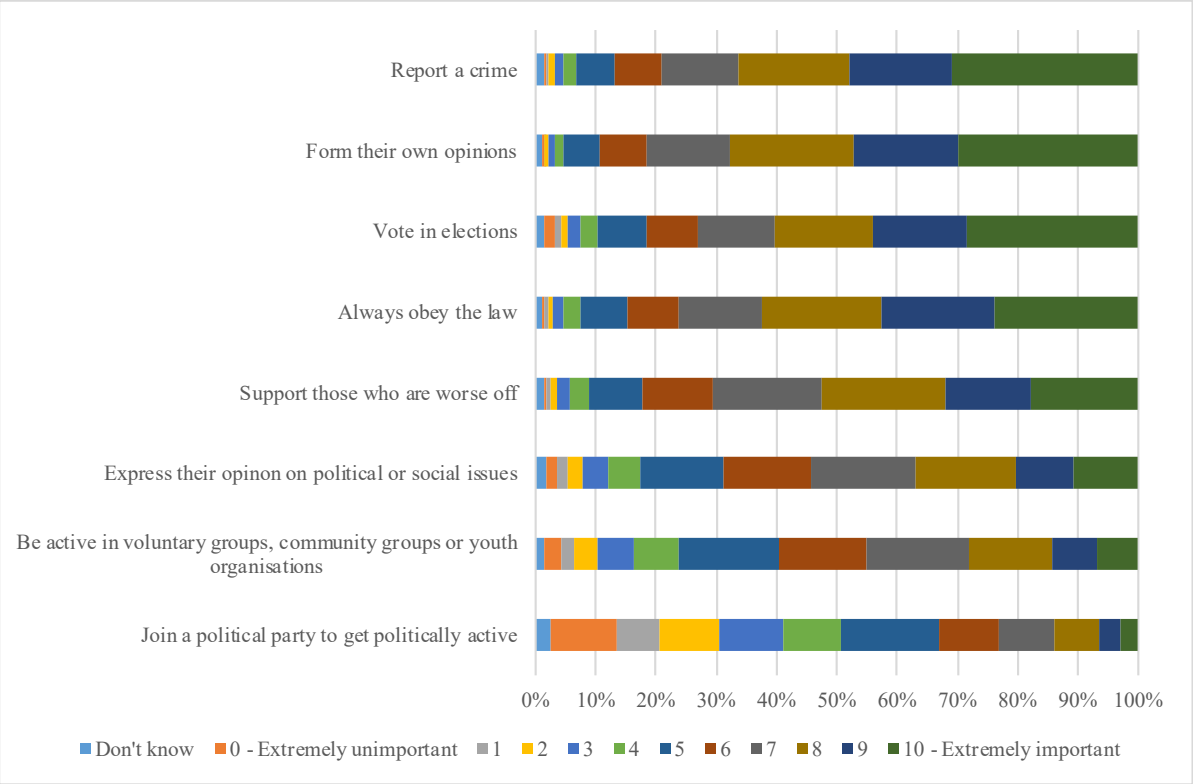
The decline of the dutiful young citizen is thus a long-term process driven by broader economic and social forces characterised by self-actualising and critically networked citizens (Loader et al. 2014, 145). As young people's political identities and attitudes are increasingly shaped less by their social ties to family, neighbourhood, school and work, and more by the ways in which they participate in social networks that they help to shape, we are witnessing the phenomenon of **networked individualism**, in which the internet, particularly social media, plays a central role in individuals' political engagement (Rainie and Wellman 2012). Such networked citizens are usually members of **non-hierarchical networks**, are **project-oriented** and maintain their relationships via social media.

Networked citizens may perform some acts reminiscent of traditional politics, realise their identity through lived experience (including by disrupting dominant discourses of dutiful citizenship), and do not live in a power vacuum; rather, networks exhibit new regulatory norms of inclusion and exclusion (ibid.). Networked young citizens reflect a positive relationship between social media use and political engagement and have the potential to influence long-standing patterns of political inequality (Xenos et al. 2014). This relationship implies a shift in the process of political socialisation (Vraga et al. 2014), mobilised by mass demonstrations against growing social inequalities and the rejection of the political class created through participation in activities of political parties. However, we must note that networked citizens do not represent a complete break with the notion of citizenship based on duties, because they can do things that are normal in institutional politics and they also develop new regulatory norms of inclusion and exclusion (ibid.).

The European Parliament's Youth Survey (EP 2021) shows a picture that fits the above debate, as we can see that young Europeans today show a mix of citizenship norms to which they give priority. To be precise, **young Europeans attach great importance** to the elements that both models of citizenship display, namely commitment **to the social order and acceptance of state authority**. They also give priority to public participation in politics and support the relevance of a strong sense of responsibility and duty, defence of the established institutional framework and commitment to government or formal institutions, and the duty to participate in key government institutions, **indicating a strong presence of the notion of dutiful citizenship** (see Figure 4). At the same time, the importance of forming one's own opinion and supporting those who are worse off was still high on the list of priorities, suggesting that **critical and deliberative aspects of citizenship**, as well as **ethical responsibility**

towards others, are also an important part of young people's citizenship. However, joining political parties to engage in politics was considered the lowest ranked citizenship norm by young Europeans.

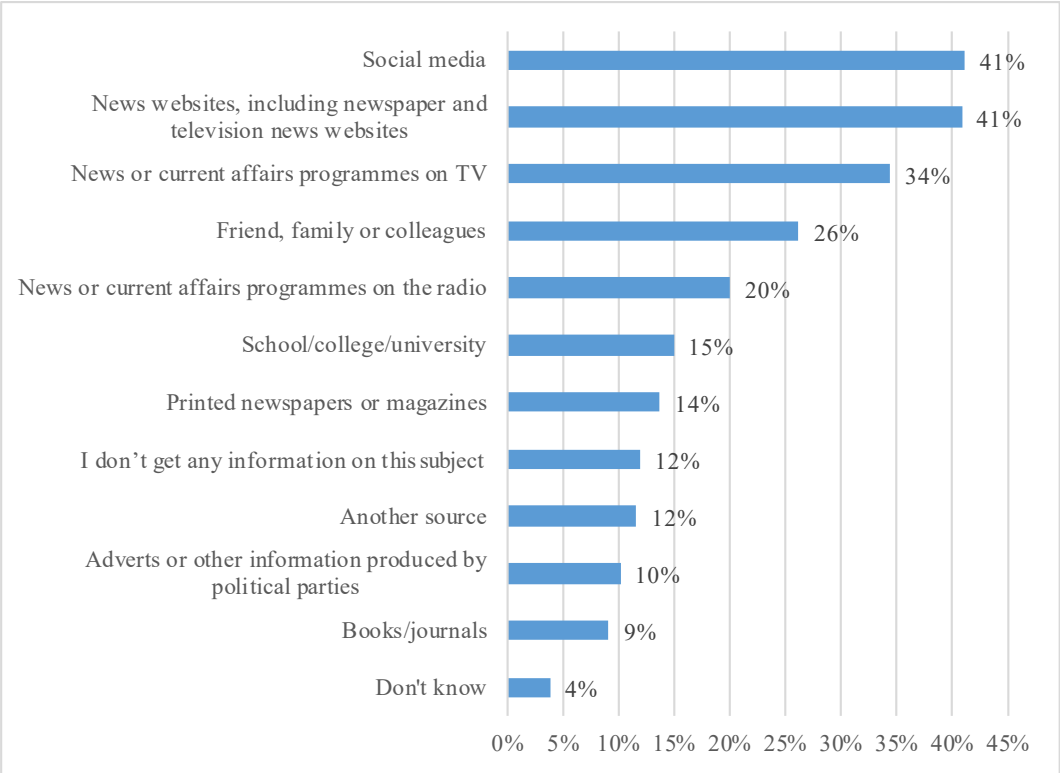
Figure 4: In order to be a good citizen, how important do you think it is for a person to ... ? (in percentages - EU27)



Source: European Parliament Youth Survey (2021)

If we add that young people join together in loose networks to act socially and politically, and that they conduct their communication and political action to a large extent through social media and other online tools, then it is clear that we are dealing with a fusion of actualising and dutiful citizenship norms that define this generational cohort. The relevance of social media as sources of information was clearly demonstrated by the European Parliament's Youth Survey (EP 2021), which found that social media, together with news websites, top the list of sources of information on political and social issues for young Europeans. To be precise, 41 per cent of respondents said for both sources that they were one of up to three important sources of information (see Figure 2 in the Annex). A detailed overview of the results shows that the preferred source of information is social media with 45 per cent among 16–19 year olds and 43 per cent among 20–25 year olds, while news websites are the main source for young people aged 26–30. The list of priorities is then followed by the sources that were most popular before the advent of the internet and social media, i.e. TV (34 per cent), friends, colleagues and family (26 per cent) and the radio (20 per cent).

Figure 5: From which of these sources do you get most information about political and social issues? Please select up to three answers. (in percentages - EU27)



Source: European Parliament Youth Survey (2021)

A detailed examination of the results also shows that social media is clearly the preferred source of information among 16–19yearolds (45 per cent) and 20–25year-olds (43 per cent), while news websites are the source for young people aged 26-30. Looking more closely at what type of social media is preferred by many young people to get information on political and social issues, there are no surprises. The preferred tool is Facebook, which 54 percent of respondents cite as the most important source, followed by Instagram (48 percent), YouTube (35 percent) and Twitter (29 percent). At the same time, there are significant differences within the group of young people. For example, 10 percent more women than men use Instagram as their most important source of information, while 17 percent more men use Youtube as their most important source of information. The age differences are also huge: 32 percent more 26–30-year-olds use Facebook as their most important source of information compared to 16–19-year-olds. On the other hand, 30 percent more 16–19-year-olds use Instagram compared to young people aged 26–30.

5. FACTORS OF YOUTH TURNOUT FROM A THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVE

5.1. Theories on (voter) participation

Although young people's political participation is reaching its limits in institutional politics and other, non-institutional forms are proving immensely relevant to their participatory repertoire, voting is still perceived as important and carried out by many young people. Effective measures to bring young people closer to the institutions of representative democracy are therefore urgently needed and make sense despite the changing citizenship norms of younger generations

There are many theories that attempt to explain citizens' political participation, including the decision to vote. Among the most influential are **the social psychological models of political behaviour**, which focus on psychological factors attributed to individuals' willingness to vote, shaped by family socialisation, schooling and organisational experiences in adulthood (Aytaç and Stokes 2019, 13). These models emphasise and provide empirical evidence that **certain psychological characteristics and life experiences** increase feelings of efficacy and attention to politics, and thus increase the likelihood of voting. Also **the level of education** promotes participation, as well as the importance of the **perceived outcome of the election** and the relevance of the proximity of the race, but only if they care about the outcome. This has also been confirmed when considering institutional factors and not just individual factors. Social psychological models have recently focused on the effects of cognitive biases, emotions and preference formation.

Economic models of choice and democracy build on economic foundations and leave the voter's choice of candidate to the decision rule based on selecting the option that offers the greatest utility benefits (see Downs 1980). Since these models, due to their focus on candidate choice, initially downplayed the paradox of voting (ie, that voting is costly and individual votes virtually never change the outcome, as well as the goods that governments produce are public and not limited to the one who casts the vote), rational choice models focused on ways to compensate for the low probability that an individual's vote is decisive and thus introduced revisions such as compulsory voting (or voting satisfaction) (e.g. Riker and Ordershook 1968) and game-theoretic features (Ledyard 1984). Nonetheless, economic models of turnout are still not sufficient to explain voting behaviour, especially when it comes to reconciling the importance of the election outcome with the probability of a decisive vote (Aytaç and Stokes 2019, 20). To be precise, rather than securing a private advantage, citizens may go to the polls because of the psychological dissonance associated with worrying about an outcome and inaction, social pressure, the strategic context of the election, etc. (ibid.).

Building on the insights and weaknesses of the earlier models, contemporary models include factors that allow them to better explain the differences between elections in the same country. The **minimax-regret model**, for example, builds on the foundations of the economic models but revises the decision rule to focus on avoiding the potential outcome that might cause voters to regret their decision to abstain (see Ferejohn and Fiorina 1974). **Expressive voting models**, on the other hand, emphasise the importance of voting not for the sake of the outcome, but to express who they are by connecting with the outcome (see Schuessler 2000). In this case, people are likely to vote if they care about signalling to others that they are the kind of people who vote and if they expect many others to do the same (Aytaç and Stokes 2019, 21). In addition, group, party and network models argue that leaders will make more

of an effort to get their supporters to vote if they believe there is more at stake in the outcome. Consistent with these models, people go to the polls because they are embedded in social networks that urge them to participate (out of civic duty or the risk of being shamed for not conforming to the norm) (Rolfe 2021). When elections are more important, groups work harder to expand these networks because larger social networks increase the likelihood of higher turnout (ibid.).

There are many other models that attempt to capture some of the complex features of voter turnout and decision-making processes. However, they focus primarily on the costs of abstention (subjective tensions due to non-participation), the benefits of voting (the value of the victory of the preferred candidate), the closeness of the final outcome, the costs of participation (resources and time to go to the polls and cognitive effort to find out what candidates think and whom to support), and social norms and pressures (social costs of voters not going to the polls). What more and more studies, mostly from political psychology, take into account are the emotions that make voters approach the ballot box (approach emotions; i.e. anger, enthusiasm) or withdraw from it (withdrawal emotions; i.e. guilt, sadness) (Aytaç and Stokes 2019, 35).

5.2. Factors influencing participation

There is a wealth of empirical research on various factors that influence individuals' political participation (Macedo et al. 2005), and studies show that certain causes have different effects on different groups in different contexts (see Smets and Van Ham 2013). That being said, there is a list of robust variables that have been shown to be significant for political participation across groups and contexts. At the same time, we need to note that participatory action is not only about the individual, even though the prevailing academic evidence on youth participation might lead to this conclusion (see Hooghe and Stolle 2005, 43). In fact, participation also depends on broader structural variables, and the causes of non-participation could also be found in culture, legal framework and organisational rules, class, religion, gender, ethnicity, etc., and prevailing ideas (i.e. belief systems such as patriarchy) (see Axford and Rosamond 1997). We therefore speak of actor-centred and structure-centred explanations of political participation, the former focusing on individuals or groups (Axford and Rosamond 1997, 102), while the latter usually describe the interplay between the structure and the individual (Hooghe and Stolle 2005, 43).

Macedo et al. (2005, 32) emphasise that political participation and the improvement of democratic processes are not only about issues of quantity and quality of political participation, but also about equality. This draws attention to the question of who participates, as some personal characteristics increase an individual's propensity to participate in the political process. If young people have the means and skills to participate, if they are interested and if they are mobilised appropriately, then the likelihood that they will participate is quite high. This model of participation based on resources, interest and recruitment (see Verba, et al., 1995), which is also seen as motivation, ability and trigger (e.g. behavioural model of persuasive design; see Fogg 2009), states that the reasons for not being able to participate (lack of resources), not wanting to participate (lack of psychological commitment) or not being asked to participate (lack of recruitment networks) generally revolve around a number of variables grouped around socio-economic, psychological and socialisation reasons. Hilderman and Anderson (2017) operationalise the above three groups of variables that affect youth political participation in the following checklist. They believe that young people will participate if they feel an obligation to participate, if they feel social pressure from family, peers or others, if they believe something is at stake, if they have participated in the past, if barriers to participation have been

removed and if they have been contacted. We explain the operationalised elements using two (non-exhaustive) groups of variables: individual- or group-centred and structure-centred.

5.2.1. Individual- and group-centred factors

The most common idea behind socio-economic status and the variables that measure it is that socio-economically weaker people participate less. **Income** level is one of the most common indicators of how socio-economic status impacts participation on different levels. In the case of voter turnout, Smets and Van Ham (2013, 350) report that income appears to have a positive effect on participation as people from higher social classes systematically have higher turnout rates. Schlozman et al. (2005) point out that this is not only the case in electoral politics, but also affects the areas of protest politics and civic engagement, as low-income people are less active than high-income people. This also applies to political activity on the Internet (see Margolis and Resnick 2000; Norris 2002)

The second important socio-economic variable that consistently proves relevant is **educational level**. Although educational level does not generally lead to higher participation in traditional forms of electoral participation, it is nevertheless clear that education is positively related to voter turnout (Smets and Van Ham 2013, 348). Against this background, we need to emphasise that a general increase in education levels is unlikely to lead to an increase in political participation, as higher education levels are not likely to address problems of political awareness and knowledge (Wattenberg 2002).

In addition to income and education, several other socio-economic variables have been shown to be relevant in different contexts and for different groups. One of these is **marital status**, as married people are thought to be more likely to adhere to traditional values, including a sense of civic duty, than people in other domestic circumstances (Denver 2008). Another factor that is particularly important for younger people is **residential mobility**, which leads to lower turnout because attachment to the community of residence is weaker than, for example, among homeowners (see Smets and Van Ham 2013, 350). In several areas, **group-based inequalities** also prove to be very important (Schlozman et al. 2005). This can be the case with race, ethnicity, gender, citizenship, religious minorities, etc. Unequal participation of different groups is a well-known phenomenon that can be a consequence of feelings of efficacy, political knowledge, language skills or social disadvantage (Macedo 2005, 39-40).

Political knowledge is inherently linked to the quality of participation, but it also affects the quantity. Those who know more about politics participate more, whether in elections or in other types of political activities (Smets and Van Ham, 2013, 355; Macedo et al., 2005, 32). Political knowledge increases the consistency of political views, enables better information absorption and processing, and improves the link between individuals' interests and proposed policy solutions (Popkin et al., 2007). Politically knowledgeable citizens are also less likely to rely on simple cues when making decisions (Macedo et al., 2005, 35). Political knowledge is extremely unevenly distributed across the population, with socio-economic differences between adults and children becoming apparent quite early on. These knowledge gaps consequently signal inequalities in political participation (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1997).

Another important aspect of individuals' psychological engagement is **political efficacy**, that is, the extent to which individuals believe that their participation in politics will be effective (Axford and Rosamond, 1997, 102). Political efficacy encompasses a variety of sensations, feelings and aspects of human psychology that indicate the extent to which the individual believes he or she can make a difference (ibid.). Political efficacy is in fact a dichotomous concept, where internal political efficacy

refers to the belief that one can influence policy, while external efficacy refers to the belief that politicians care about one's opinion (Nygård and Jakobsson 2013, 70). Smets and Van Ham (2013, 355) find that political efficacy, both internal and external, is positively correlated with voter turnout.

Political interest is one of the most important indicators of political participation. Verba et al. (1995) cite political interest as one of the most important factors that lead people to become politically involved. Macedo et al. (2005, 34) claim that political interest is second only to the habit of voting earlier in terms of voter turnout (see also Smets and Van Ham 2013, 354). Citizens' political interest is a legacy of their pre-adult experiences. This includes political discussions at home and participation in activities at school, with relatively little influence from parents. At the same time, it must be said that political interest depends on stimulation from the political environment (ibid.).

Political parties provide information and stimulate political interest. Party supporters or those who identify with a political party are also most likely to be politically active in various forms of political participation. The current period can be characterised as a process of electoral dealignment that is characterized by widespread dissatisfaction with party politics (Skocpol, 2003; Van Biezen et al., 2012). **Party identification** has proved to be a reliable predictor of political participation (Bartels, 2000). However, the rise in party affiliation also has an important negative dimension, as the ideological polarisation of elites leads to more extreme and divided youth. Macedo et al. (2005, 37) argue that partisan conflict is an essential part of politics, but there is a line between healthy partisanship (clear competing visions of political goals and political means) based on genuine disagreement, and excessive polarisation (devaluing the views of centrists and amplifying the voices of ideological extremes) based on divisive conflict that can also lead to the emptying of the moderate centre.

Political trust (also called institutional trust or political support) also corresponds to psychological engagement. This concept indicates the degree of trust a person has in the political system, politicians or political institutions (Nygård and Jakobsson, 2013, 70). Although it has long been assumed that political trust has no direct effect on political participation, Hetherington (1999) shows that declining political trust affects voting decisions by leading politically distrustful voters to support candidates who are not in office. Bélanger and Nadeau (2005) also show that declining trust promotes support for alternative parties, while distrust has been shown to significantly affect voter turnout. In addition, political cynicism – often portrayed as mistrust generalised from particular leaders or political groups to the political process as a whole - has been found to have negative effects on certain forms of political participation (see Smets and Van Ham 2013, 355), although the available empirical evidence for some of these is not yet convincing (de Vreese, 2005).

Earlier political participation (especially when discussing voter turnout) is also important in deciding future participation, as political participation can be self-reinforcing by increasing positive attitudes towards participation and breaking down information barriers (Smets and Van Ham 2013, 352). As younger citizens have less experience with participation (especially in elections), they also tend to participate less, as it is a habit-forming activity (Geys 2006, 646). A positive experience of previous participation is an even more powerful experience, which actually builds on the psychological concept of reinforcement learning (ibid.). The more opportunities young people have to learn and act politically, the more likely they are to become active in adulthood.

The process of **political socialisation** refers to the formative years or the learning process through which the individual learns political attitudes and behaviours from generation to generation, influenced by political socialisation agents (Quintelier 2013). The first and for many the most important agent of political socialisation is the family (Jennings et al. 2009). The family is the most important context in which early socialisation takes place, but the process of transmission can be direct (e.g. adoption of the same party identification) or indirect (e.g. specific patterns of decision-making within

the family). Parental influence has been shown to be relevant to various attitudinal and behavioural outcomes, from party identification to social participation, and direct influence can occur through the provision of information, discussion of politics and specific media use (Quintelier 2013, 141). Children are also more likely to participate in political life if their parents tend to be involved (Plutzer 2002).

Parental influence decreases as a child gets older (Plutzer 2002). **Schools** prove to be non-political institutions that can equip individuals with important resources necessary for political participation (Verba et al. 1995). Schools promote political participation both through the curriculum and indirectly through the school climate, peers and teachers. An important source of resources for acquiring participation in the political process is **civic education** – institutionalised forms of acquiring political knowledge that take place within formal, non-formal and informal education. Formal curricular provisions provide for separate subjects, integrated approaches or cross-curricular topics, non-formal curricular provisions include extracurricular, co-curricular or out-of-school activities linked to the formal curriculum, while informal curricular provisions encompass the full range of everyday, natural and spontaneous situations that occur in school life (Pavlin et al. 2013). Niemi and Junne (2005) show in their seminal study that civic education has some impact on political participation. It has since been portrayed as an activity that enhances students' political knowledge, critical thinking, personal and cognitive development and thus improves political participation (Quintelier 2013, 143).

Active learning strategies are another form of civic education in school that promotes participation in politics by creating a participatory school culture and providing active learning opportunities for students to engage in real-world activities. These experiential strategies orient individuals to norms of civic engagement and citizenship development (Quintelier 2013, 144) and include visiting government institutions, inviting government representatives to schools and creating opportunities for students to make their voices heard through student councils. In addition, schools can encourage political participation by creating an **open classroom climate** that provides space for discussion on controversial issues. A more participatory, interactive and less authoritarian school climate and an open classroom where students have a say in school decisions leads to more positive political attitudes and increases youth participation (Torney-Purta et al. 2007; Quintelier 2013, 144).

Another political socialisation factor with great influence is **peers**. They are the most important actors in the political socialisation of young people, helping to shape their attitudes towards politics (Torney-Purta 1995). Peers provide a type of weak ties (casual acquaintances) that put individuals in contact with information and resources outside their immediate circle of friends and family. These resources and information serve as a bridge (bridging interaction; see Putnam 2000) to ideas that would be inaccessible to individuals with a close-knit network; and without such information, they are less likely to participate (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Quintelier 2013). Moreover, **political discussion** with people who hold different viewpoints forces individuals to constantly rethink and reflect on their own positions, which ultimately leads to greater participation.

5.2.2. Structure-centred factors

As mentioned above, structure-centred explanations for political participation are often ignored when it comes to the decline in political participation among youth (Hooghe and Stolle 2005, 43). However, a consideration of structural causes may prove equally important, as any participatory act inherently involves an interplay between an engaged individual and a mobilising structure. Since mobilisation efforts have been shown to be crucial in explaining individuals' levels of participation (see Verba et al. 1995), examining structure reveals important aspects of the mobilisation channels available to young people in particular contexts.

In addition to socio-economic variables at the individual level, there are also some structural features that make a given environment more or less participatory. First and foremost is **population size**. It is based on the rational choice prediction that the probability of being decisive for participation is an important incentive for participation. The larger the community, the less likely it is to make a difference (Geys 2006, 642). Empirical evidence from voter turnout supports this hypothesis, as population size has a negative effect on participation (ibid., 643). With regard to **population heterogeneity**, especially when examining the presence of minority groups (by ethnicity, race), empirical evidence confirms that voter turnout is lower when the proportion of minorities in the population is higher (ibid., 645).

Political competition is also important for political participation, and a competitive environment is much more attractive. In cases where political competition is low or virtually non-existent, hopes of high participation are in vain. Macedo et al. (2005, 45) give an example of electoral contests with more or less known outcomes that are usually decided in favour of the established parties and by large margins. Poor institutional design can thus be a cause of an unattractive environment that revives with the **closeness of electoral races**. As a result, candidate, media and voter behaviour changes, and mobilisation efforts become more intense as well as positions on particular issues more pronounced (Kahn and Kenney 1999). The decline in political competition also lowers the quality of political life and increases **ideological polarisation**, which is particularly unattractive to moderate young adults (Macedo et al. 2005, 46). **Localised political competition** also promotes political engagement, regardless of level, as well as healthy party political competition and institutional design that allows for genuine debates between competing parties on key policy positions (ibid., 47).

Political campaigns can have a positive effect on political participation. The professionalisation of political communication (and the fragmentation of the media market) and the shift to permanent campaigns (see Blumenthal 1982) have made political campaigns long and difficult to follow. If political campaigns have an educational function – helping citizens to learn about candidates, their positions and the relevant issues – they should have a positive impact on voter turnout (Macedo et al. 2005, 45). Geys (2006, 648) emphasises that campaign spending has a positive impact on voter turnout because it increases the electorate's level of information and awareness and reduces the cost of obtaining information. In addition, get-out-the-vote campaigns, which aim to increase voters' sense of civic duty, also play an important role in increasing voter turnout (Cox and Munger 1989; Gerber and Green 2000). A strict **cap on election campaign financing** may allow easier entry into the electoral arena for younger candidates and lists of candidates and narrow the gap between young and established political actors (UNDP 2013). A close examination of the normative framework for political party and candidate financing shows that some countries do recognise the pitfalls associated with donations to political parties and candidates (Deželan 2015).

Political mobilisation structures emerge as another extremely important political variable with immense implications for different forms of political participation (Macedo et al. 2005, 45). It is about citizen mobilisation (see Verba et al. 1995) and in Western democracies mobilisation institutions have deteriorated. This is not only because the virtues of citizens have changed (Putnam 2000), but also because of the radical transformation of mass membership organisations in favour of advocacy organisations that no longer need mass membership and therefore no longer invest in mobilisation (Skocpol 2003). Voluntary organisations, trade unions, but especially the transformation (professionalisation) of political parties have reduced grassroots activities and face-to-face politics (Macedo et al. 2005, 45). Parties therefore primarily try to mobilise their own supporters (e.g. through get-out-the-vote campaigns) and rarely reach out to other groups. Thus, they invest in those who are most likely to get involved anyway, leaving out young, poor people and immigrants (ibid.). Hooghe

and Stolle (2005, 45) stress that the relevant question here is not whether young people are still interested in politics, but whether parties are still interested in young people.

The **media environment** proves to be one of the essential components of political participation, especially in the electoral process. There is a symbiotic relationship between individuals' knowledge and interest in politics and media coverage of politics, especially political campaigns (Macedo et al. 2005, 41). The proliferation of media outlets has affected political participation and led to a slow decline in TV and TV coverage of politics, which appears to have a negative impact on engagement and the resulting electoral process (Patterson 2009). Network news and newspapers are brokers of general interest that serve an important integrative function in large, modern and heterogeneous democracies by providing a common focus of attention (see Sunstein 2009). As newspaper readership, coverage and ratings decline, the internet and new media are taking their place. However, this means that incidental contact with political information is becoming less likely, that there are no longer intermediaries of common interests, that audiences are more ideologically polarised as they are exposed to more partisan media, and that the knowledge gap has widened (Macedo et al. 2005). Technological advances in media production and consumption have made political news and information optional rather than inevitable. Providing **free airtime** in the national media improves citizens' knowledge of and interest in politics, especially during elections. As TV still proves to be the most influential tool of political communication (Norris 2004) and new media often act as a proxy for TV in the campaign strategies of political actors (see Deželan et al. 2014), free airtime provided by national broadcast media is an important feature to get the message to the voter.

In discussing institutional barriers to political participation, we focus primarily on barriers to the electoral process as one of the most important and obvious forms of participation. The first important institutional variable is the **electoral system** – a system that allows votes to be converted into seats. It is generally assumed that **proportional representation systems (PR)** lead to higher turnout, as there is a large disparity between votes and seats in majoritarian systems (Geys 2006, 650). Voters in PR systems are less likely to feel that their vote is unimportant because constituencies in these systems are less likely not to compete with each other, creating more incentives to campaign everywhere. Despite the obvious counter-arguments that majoritarian electoral systems are easier to understand and do not lead to complicated coalition-building processes, empirical evidence shows that PR systems are associated with higher turnout (ibid.).

Measures that reduce the cost of voting and improve access for people with disabilities or other personal limitations are important steps towards making the electoral process more inclusive. Alternative forms of voting, including from abroad, are an important way to include people who would otherwise be excluded because of their personal commitments, life circumstances or life choices, and disabilities. **E-voting**, the ability to vote from anywhere inside or outside the country via the internet, has often been portrayed as a panacea for modest voter turnout, especially for tech-savvy (younger) generations. Since e-voting solutions respond primarily to the need to reduce the costs incurred by going to the ballot box, it is clear that this system cannot solve the problems associated with young people's non-participation in institutional politics. Nevertheless, it has proven to be a convenient option for those who are already active, and it has certainly improved voting opportunities for those who cannot be present in person at the polling station due to various constraints. Studies have also shown that e-voting increases turnout among abstainers and occasional voters (Petitpas et al. 2021).

Some argue that the full potential of e-voting can only be realised if it is part of a broader **e-democracy agenda** that allows voters to gather additional information and get informed online (see Trechsel 2007). **Simultaneous elections** that combine multiple electoral campaigns are expected to increase voter turnout due to greater party mobilisation, more intense campaigning and increased media

attention (Smets and Van Ham 2013, 355). Simultaneous elections create conditions under which each individual voter should engage at least somewhat with one of the election campaigns, which should be facilitated by the fact that more intensive campaigning also leads to higher general awareness and information levels among the electorate (Geys 2006, 652). Empirical evidence supports the assumption that voter turnout is positively influenced by the presence of multiple choices on the ballot paper, even if the apparent effects do not seem to be overwhelming (see Geys 2006; Smets and Van Ham 2013). The results of the 2019 European elections also demonstrate the importance of this factor.

Voter registration also emerges as a relevant institutional variable that can have a negative impact on turnout. Voter registration requirements impose direct monetary costs on potential voters, as well as additional information costs related to the time and process of registration (Geys 2006, 652). Since registration makes voting more difficult, it is likely that fewer people will vote. This argument is also supported by empirical evidence, as automatic registration, registration on election day, the absence of literacy tests and poll taxes significantly increase voter turnout (ibid., 653). Voter registration procedures have been found to be particularly inhibiting to the presence of certain groups at the ballot box. For mobility reasons, students are an example of one such group that has to bear the greatest burden of registration, as registration procedures, where they exist, usually impose further administrative burdens (residency procedures, taxation, etc.) on already notorious abstainers and often first-time voters (Macedo et al. 2005, 49).

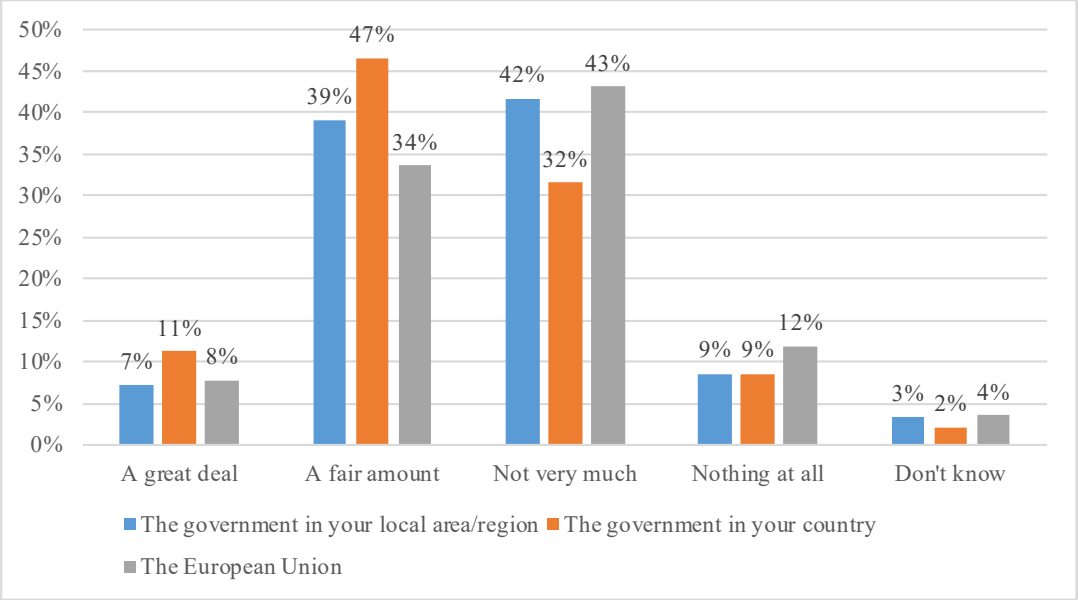
Compulsory voting is an institutional variable presented as the quickest solution to low voter turnout. Since the expected costs of not voting are assumed to increase for individuals, as they face a fine or loss of social standing if they disobey the law, the benefits of not voting decrease significantly (Geys 2006, 652). The effect of compulsory voting on turnout is one of the most solid findings, supporting in virtually all cases the assumption that turnout is significantly higher when voting is compulsory (ibid.; Blais 2000). Moreover, certain other rules to facilitate voting tend to have a positive effect on turnout, as they aim to motivate and mobilise potential voters. These include **postal voting**, **proxy voting**, **voting in advance**, distributing **voting booths** in the most convenient places (e.g. churches, shopping malls), extending the time for **voting to several days**, **voting on weekends**, etc. (Smets and Van Ham 2013, 355).

It is often argued that **aligning the minimum voting age with the minimum age for candidacy** would facilitate greater participation as well as potential youth representation in legislative bodies (see IPU 2010; UNDP 2013). Such context-specific legal hurdles are also difficult to justify morally, as there is no reason why a person should be excluded from the right to run for office and serve as a representative of the people when they are subject to the same obligations as a citizen eligible to vote. It is claimed that by **lowering the voting age**, voter turnout would increase. Voter turnout appears to be higher among 18-year-olds than among 19- to 21-year-olds (Bhatti et al. 2012). There is also growing evidence that lowering the voting age to 16 makes sense. Although some remain sceptical about whether extending the right to vote to people who turn 16 will lead to higher turnout among first-time voters and over time (Gretschel et al. 2014, 16-17), there is an increasing number of advocates of this measure who also call for comprehensive complementary citizenship education (see LSE 2013; Bouza 2014). Giving young people the chance to participate in democracy when they are still in school and living in a community, rather than at a transitional stage in their lives, increases voter turnout among first-time voters. As a result, young people become accustomed to voting rather than abstaining, leading to higher overall turnout over time. This has been confirmed among 16- and 17-year-olds as first-time voters compared to 18- and 19-year-olds (Aichholzer and Kritzinger 2020; Huebner and Eichhorn 2020), as well as higher overall turnout due to generational change (Franklin 2020).

5.3. The factors of voter turnout from the perspective of European youth

In addition to patterns of change in young Europeans' citizenship norms around good citizenship and social media consumption, the European Parliament's Youth Survey (EP 2021) has revealed **a wide gap between young people and governments at different levels**. The gap is widest when it comes to **understanding how the EU works**, while respondents understand national governments more easily (see Figure 6). When it comes to national governments, 41 per cent of respondents feel they either do not know much or nothing about them. 51 per cent of respondents say they understand local governments about as well, while understanding of the EU is the worst, with 55 per cent of respondents feeling they do not understand much or anything. Interestingly, although this measure was empirically demonstrated decades ago (see Campbell et al. 1960), it clearly points to **a gender gap in understanding institutional politics**: 8-10 per cent more women than men reporting not knowing much or anything about the three levels of government. This is **not a knowledge gap, but a gendered perception of the knowledge gap** that has been highlighted in other studies and has a negative impact on young women's political participation, both passive and active (Mendez and Osborn 2010).

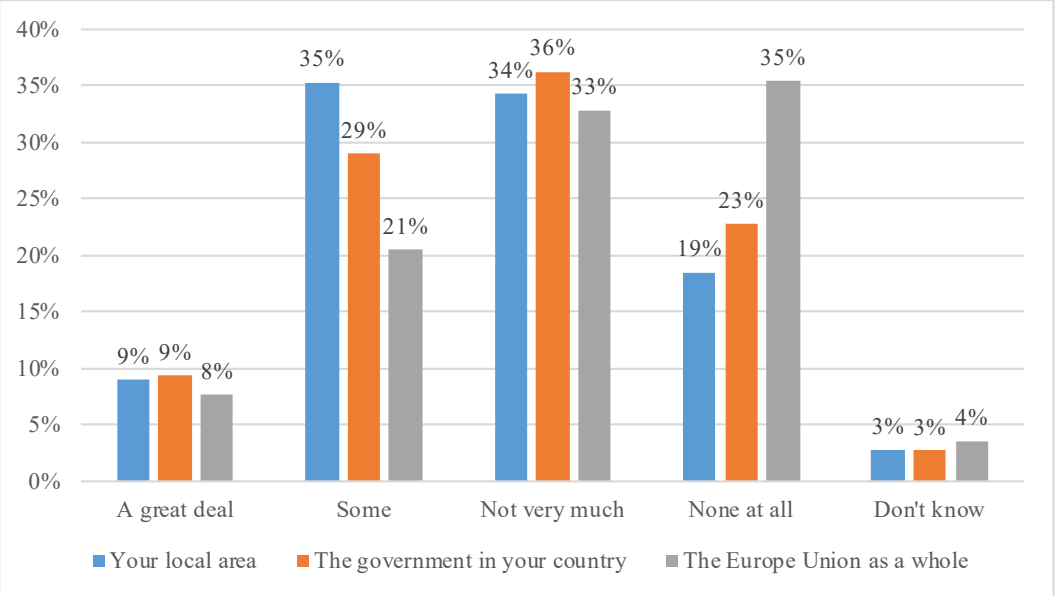
Figure 6: How much, if anything, do you feel you understand about…? (in percentages - EU27)



Source: European Parliament Youth Survey (2021)

In terms of **external political efficacy**, **i.e. perceived resources about individual's ability to influence the political process**, at least half of the respondents feel they have little or no say in important decisions, laws and policies (see Figure 7). From a psychological perspective, political efficacy has a major impact on attitudes towards voting, as it indicates the extent to which someone feels they are effective or that their vote counts (Axford and Rosamond 1997, 102). The situation is worst at the EU level, where 68 per cent of respondents feel they have very little or no say in decisions, legislation and policy. With such low levels of perceived external political efficacy, which indicates the perceived value of citizens' voices and votes, it is hardly surprising that the level of participation in the Union's institutions is even lower than the already low level of participation in sub-national political processes.

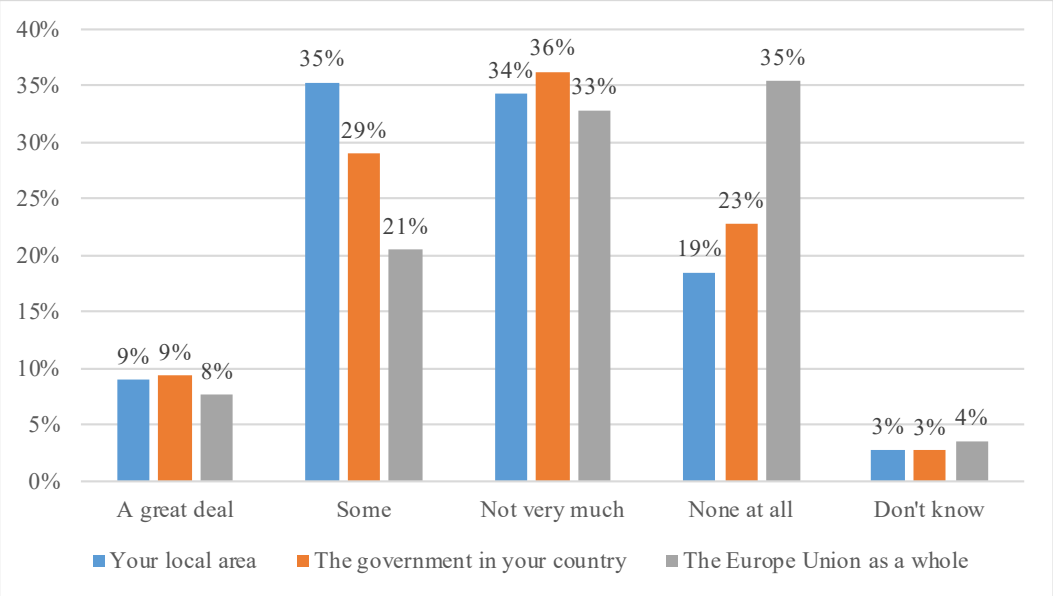
Figure 7: How much of a say do you feel you can have over important decisions, laws and policies affecting…? (in percentages - EU27)



Source: European Parliament Youth Survey (2021)

Political interest is another extremely important indicator of political participation (Smets and Van Ham 2013, 355). As shown in the research on young people's citizenship norms and changing citizenship, there are certain issues that young people are particularly interested in. The European Parliament's Youth Survey (EP 2021) found that when young people listed up to three priority issues, fighting poverty and inequality (43 per cent), combating climate change and protecting the environment (39 per cent) were the most important issues for young people (see Figure 8). The focus on social justice and environmental justice policies clearly shows the relevance of the engaged citizenship model (Dalton 2009). At the same time, traditional youth issues such as youth unemployment (37 per cent), education and training (28 per cent) and health and well-being (34 per cent) remain high on the list of priorities. Corruption as an indicator of integrity, which has an immense impact on trust, also proves relevant (27 per cent). Looking at differences in prioritisation by age and gender, younger people (16-19 years) and especially women show significantly stronger support for issues closer to the principles of social activism and distributive justice than other groups.

Figure 8: In your opinion, which three of the following issues should be given priority? (in percentages - EU27)

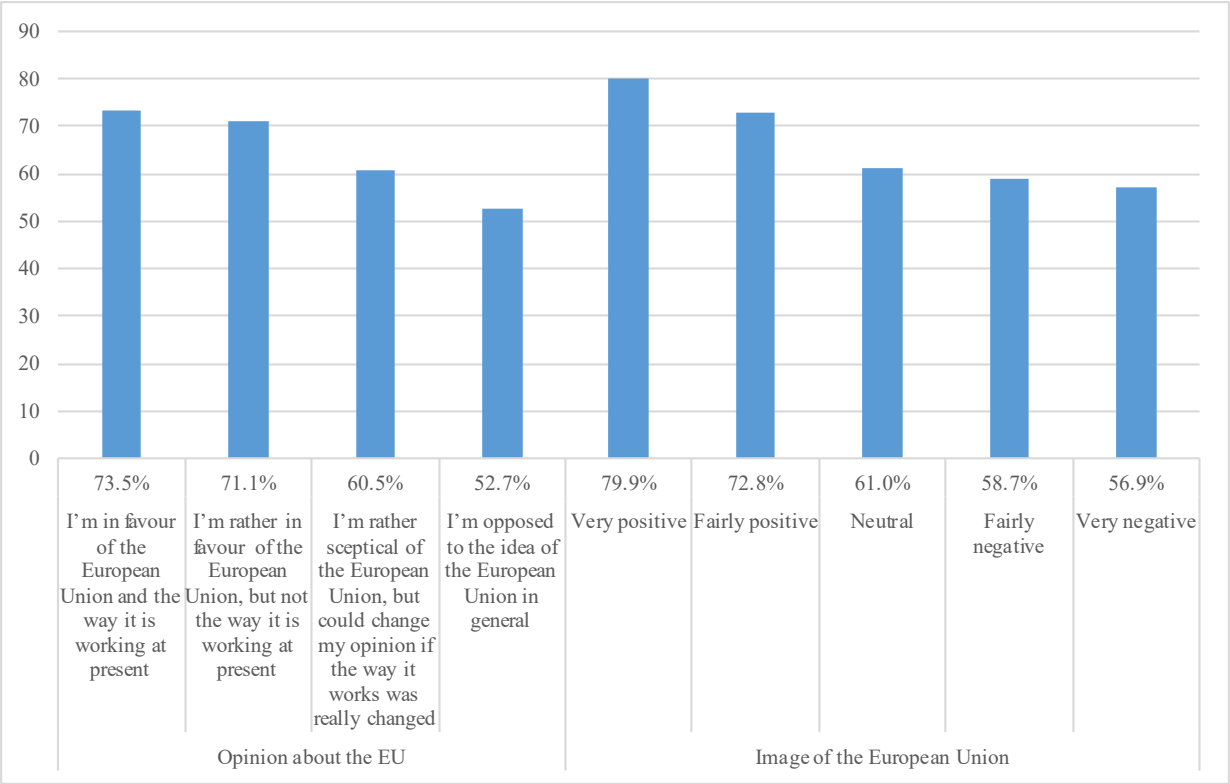


Source: European Parliament Youth Survey (2021)

In terms of **priority values**, the results (EP 2021) show how important ethical and critical and deliberative aspects of citizenship are for young people. The most important value for young people is the protection of human rights and democracy, chosen by 56 per cent of respondents, followed by freedom of speech (48 per cent), gender equality (38 per cent) and interpersonal solidarity (36 per cent) (see Table 6 in the Annex). So when it comes to values, young people show a much more up-to-date and far less dutiful image of themselves than the one that emerges from their representation of the norms expected of a good citizen. Again, women show higher levels of support for the protection of human rights, democracy and gender equality, while the youngest group of respondents (16-19 years old) show higher levels of support for gender equality and 25-30 year olds for solidarity between people and countries.

Political trust, also called institutional trust or political support, corresponds to psychological commitment and encompasses the level of trust a person has in the political system, politicians or political institutions (Nygård and Jakobsson 2013, 70). Declining political trust influences voting decisions by leading politically distrustful voters to support candidates who are not in office (Hetherington 1999). Declining trust motivates support for alternatives, while distrust significantly reduces voter turnout (Bélanger and Nadeau 2005). Political cynicism, often portrayed as a general distrust of particular leaders, political groups or the political process, has a negative impact on certain forms of political participation (see Smets and Van Ham 2013, 355). Diminishing trust in established political institutions and actors also opens up space for anti-establishment candidates and rhetoric. This leads to new populist initiatives, more polarisation and a less attractive polity for young engaged citizens. When we look at willingness to vote, it is clear that a positive image of the EU has an important influence on the decision to vote or not to vote. A positive image is closely linked to trust in the EU and its institutions and therefore indicates a positive psychological engagement, which is also linked to a positive experience of participating in the European project. Thus, almost 80 per cent of those who participate in the European elections also report a very positive image of the EU and, conversely, only 57 per cent of those who have a very negative image of the EU say they vote (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Image of the European Union and opinion about it from the perspective of voters at the last European elections? (in percentages - EU27)



Source: European Parliament Youth Survey (2021)

A similar result, albeit more complex, emerges from a breakdown of opinion on the EU and the reported vote. Those with a **negative attitude towards the** EU are also the most likely to abstain from voting in the European elections. Similarly, moderate sceptics report a slightly higher turnout (60 per cent), while the most surprising result is found among the moderate and unequivocal pro-EU groups, as there is not much difference in reported turnout between these two groups. In essence, this suggests that resource-related and, in particular, factors that trigger participation in European elections need to be explored and possibly strengthened, as there is a large pool of potential voters who are positively disposed towards the European project but somehow do not go to the polls. Young people who have a positive opinion or image of the EU should be given special attention. Those who have a more positive opinion are young men, while women tend to be neutral and share a more neutral opinion with people from low-income households.

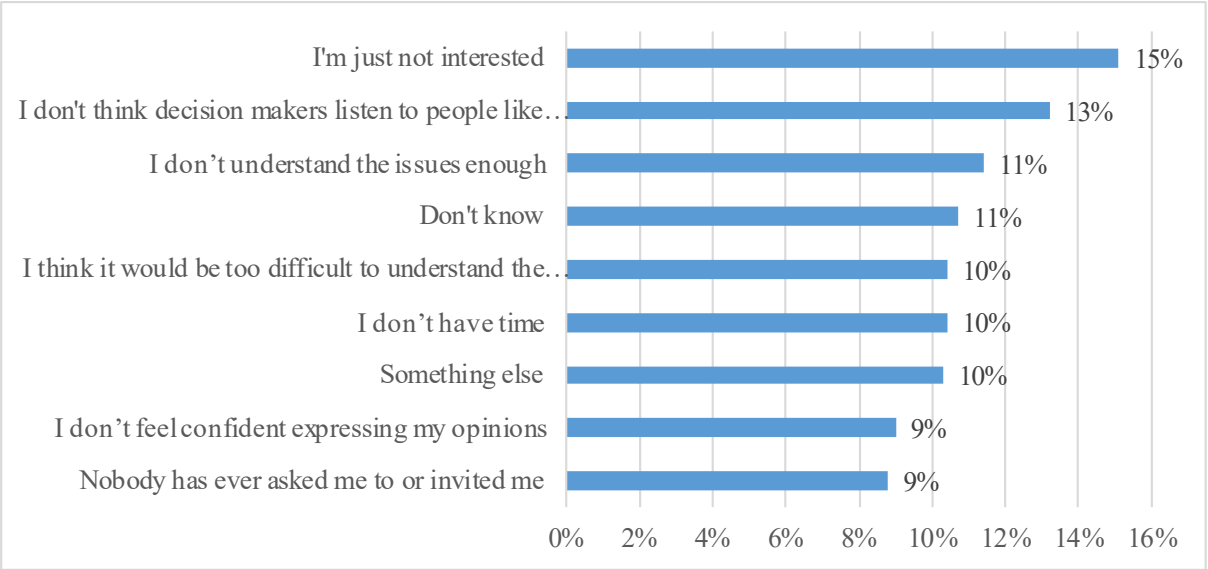
On the other hand, **ethnic, religious and sexual minorities** and especially persons with a migration/refugee background have a more positive image of the EU. Interestingly, enthusiasm for the EU decreases with age and turns into a more realistic view, and the most sceptical views of the EU are held by the least educated. People from high-income households also show much more enthusiastic views than people from less affluent households. Respondents with a migrant/refugee background and sexual minorities have more realistic but still positive views about the EU, while people with disabilities are again much more sceptical about the European project. If we look at the current trends of enthusiasm for the EU, the situation is not positive, as there are more of those who report that their image of the EU has worsened in the last year (31 per cent), while only 17 per cent report having a better image of the European Union than a year ago (see Deželan and Moxon 2021). Young Europeans aged 26-30 and those with the lowest levels of education are particularly disappointed, as are workers

and those who earn just enough money for basic needs, food and clothing. It is clear that persons sceptical of the EU and opposed to it just got even more negative about the EU, while young Europeans who have a positive or realistic attitude towards the Union are also more likely to be disappointed.

5.4. Reasons for European youth to vote or abstain from voting

If three conditions (ability, motivation and trigger) are not met, participation is unlikely. **Non-participation does not simply equate to apathy, because politically uninvolved young people may not only be uninterested in politics, but also uninformed, distrustful or disempowered.** The Youth Survey (EP 2021) shows that the reasons for not voting are many and varied when it comes to the most common and, in the eyes of respondents, most effective form of political action: voting. Of those who do not vote, 15 per cent have no interest in participating. In fact, there are many resource-related reasons that have been found to be important. For example, 10 per cent of respondents report a lack of time, 11 per cent report a lack of understanding of the most important issues, 13 per cent believe that politicians do not listen to ordinary people and 11 per cent do not dare to express their opinions. The survey also shows the importance of triggers, with as many as 9 per cent of respondents themselves citing the lack of an invitation to vote as the main reason for not voting.

Figure 10: You said you have not voted in the last local, national or European election. What, if anything, has prevented you from doing this? (in percentages - EU27)



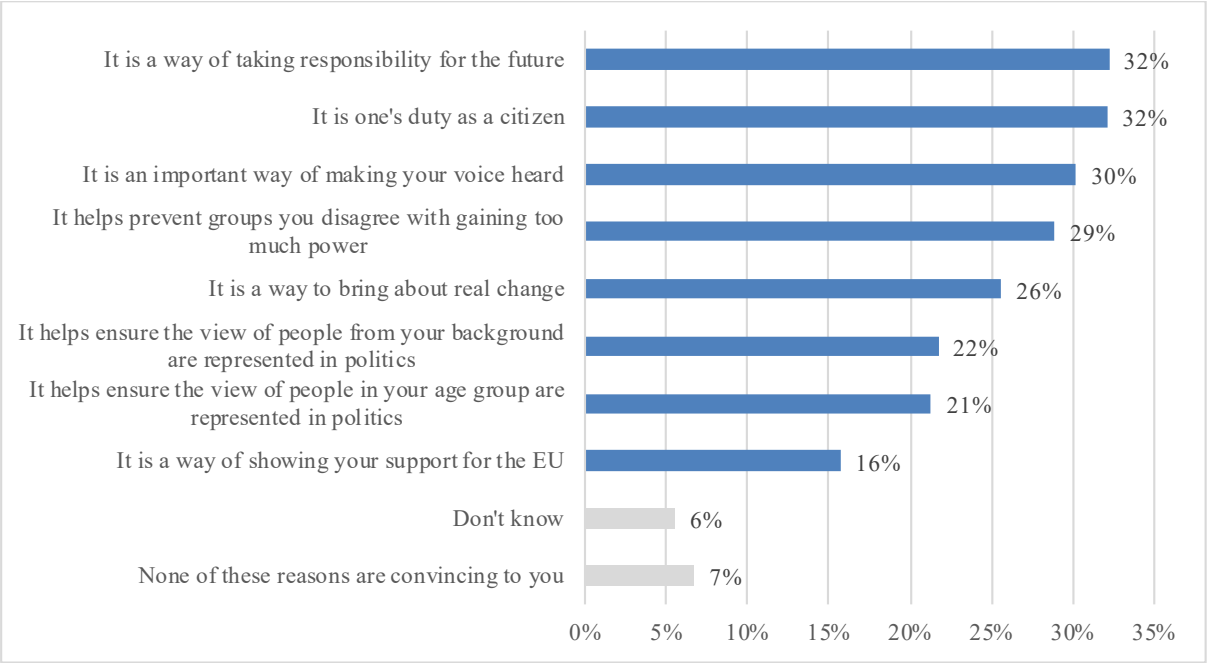
Source: European Parliament Youth Survey (2021)

When it comes to **having enough time to vote** – a traditional socio-economic reason for abstaining from voting – the only statistically significant effect in the binary logistic regression models (see Table 7 in the Annex) was for financial situation, suggesting that people from less affluent backgrounds are more likely not to vote due to lack of time. Lack of interest showed no statistically significant relationship with the observed independent variables, while the reason "I do not think decision-makers listen to people like me" – a clear indicator of external political efficacy – showed that older cohorts of young people increasingly believe this and therefore also stay away from the polls. Those aged 20-25 are more likely to abstain from voting because they feel they do not understand the issues sufficiently than those aged 16-19. In terms of confidence in expressing their opinion, members of ethnic, religious or other minorities are more likely to abstain from voting for this reason than the dominant population. Another indicator of internal political efficacy - "I think it would be too difficult to understand the jargon/political language" - shows that 20-25 year olds are more likely to think this way than 16-19 year olds, adding weight to the initiative to lower the voting age, as are people from less affluent backgrounds, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and disabled people. The external indicator of political efficacy, i.e. "I do not think decision-makers listen to people like me", also contributes to lowering the voting age, as it is much more common for 20-30 year olds (about 17 per cent) than 16-19 year olds with the right and ability to vote (7.4 per cent) not to vote for this reason. Again, lack of understanding of the issues as a reason for abstention is far more common among 20-to 25-year-olds (15.3 per cent) than among 16-to 19-year-olds or 26-to 30-year-olds. The reason for invitation ("No one has ever asked or invited me"), on the other hand, shows that people from less affluent backgrounds are more likely not to vote for this reason, as are people from ethnic, religious or other minorities, people with disabilities and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex have higher odds of missing out on mobilisation efforts.

But beyond the reasons for abstention in the European elections, it is also important to see what the motivations are for voting. The Youth Survey (EP 2021) shows that **young Europeans cite dutiful aspects of democratic citizenship (individual responsibility, citizen duty) as the main reason for voting in European elections** (see Figure 11). A more committed understanding of citizenship is

perceived among the other reasons for voting, especially in terms of making their voices heard and preventing alternative interests from gaining too much power (i.e. control mechanisms). The link that young people make between voting and different aspects of descriptive representation (i.e. age group, origin) is also interesting, as 22 per cent of respondents see voting in the European elections as a tool to give voice to different demographic groups. However, when it comes to the legitimacy of the EU, a very low proportion of young people understand the European elections as a way to express their support for the Union, suggesting that the idea that the European elections are a "legitimacy referendum" on the European Union is false.

Figure 11: Below are some reasons people have given for voting in European elections. Which three of these reasons, if any, do you think are most convincing? (in percentages - EU27)



Source: European Parliament Youth Survey (2021)

There are also two interesting within-group trends that we should note when it comes to reasons for voting. First, the 26–30 age group shows significantly higher levels of dutiful citizenship norms (i.e. voting out of a sense of duty) than other age groups. Second, older individuals among young people have a more pessimistic view of institutional politics, while younger people still display a degree of naivety about elections. To be precise, 26-30-year-olds are less likely to perceive elections as a tool to bring about real change than 20-25-year-olds, and the latter in turn much less than 16-19-year-olds. If we look at support for the above reasons from the point of view of turnout (voted or not voted in the European elections), we can again see the prevalence of the dutiful citizen, as more than 80 per cent of those who support the idea of voting out of a sense of duty actually voted, while the percentage for the options of making one's voice heard, preventing the opposition from becoming too strong, and taking responsibility for the future is around 70 per cent, and below 70 per cent for the representation reasons (age, origin). These results indicate that the ballot box is still seen as a manifestation of civic duty rather than a place where substantial change is initiated.

In general, we can observe **gender** as a statistically significant independent variable across different reasons for voting, suggesting that young women are more likely to vote because they see voting as a

duty, as a way to bring about real change, as a way to take responsibility for the future, as a way to make their voices heard, and as a way to prevent groups with which one disagrees from gaining too much power (see Table 8 in the Annex). **Age** is a statistically relevant variable in all three models. Older cohorts are more likely to view voting as a duty (dutiful citizenship), while younger cohorts are more likely to participate in elections because voting is an opportunity to bring about real change (engaged citizenship). Age at completion of full-time education is statistically significant in the case of the first model, as individuals who complete their full-time education after the age of 15 are more likely to vote.

Occupational status is also significant for many models and the results show that persons with no occupation - mostly persons still in full-time education - have a higher probability of voting out of service than workers. The same is true for the reason of making one's voice heard and the reason of preventing other groups from gaining too much power. For this reason, the rates are also higher for white-collar and self-employed workers than for blue-collar workers. Salaried and self-employed people are also more likely to vote because they feel that it is a way of showing their support for the EU.

Financial situation is also a very relevant independent variable and suggests that people from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to vote in elections because they see it as an act of civic duty or an important opportunity to bring about real change. Similarly, people from wealthier backgrounds are more likely to vote because they see it as a way to take responsibility for the future, to make their voices heard or to prevent opposing groups from gaining too much power. In addition, those who self-identify as an ethnic, religious or other minority are less likely than members of the dominant group to vote because they believe it is their civic duty and more likely because they believe it is a way to bring about real change. Those who identify as migrants, refugees, asylum seekers or displaced people are less likely than the dominant population to vote because they believe it is their civic duty to make their voices heard, and more likely to vote because voting is a way to ensure that the views of their origin are represented and a way to show their support for the EU.

Disabled people are less likely to vote out of a sense of duty to bring about real change, to take responsibility for the future and to make their voices heard. On the other hand, they are more likely to vote because they see elections as a way to represent the views of a group and to prevent opposing groups from gaining too much power. Finally, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex people are less likely to vote because they see elections as a way to bring about real change. However, they are more likely to vote in an election because they see elections as a way to ensure that the views of people of your age group are represented in politics, as a way to ensure that the views of people of your background are represented in politics, and as a way to prevent groups you disagree with from gaining too much power.

In terms of **voting out of a sense of duty**, older cohorts (26–30) of young women are most likely to vote out of a sense of duty (37 per cent), while men in the same age category vote less (33 per cent). On the other hand, the youngest cohorts of men vote least out of a sense of duty (28 per cent), followed by women in the same age category (30 per cent). In terms of taking responsibility for the future, the proportion of these voters is highest among women living in a wealthier financial situation (40 per cent), while it is lowest among men living in a very disadvantaged financial situation (23–26 per cent). Men living in more affluent circumstances share this reasoning in about 33–35 per cent of cases. The situation is similar when it comes to the question of whether people vote to make their voices heard: Women living in a wealthier financial situation share this reason most often (38 per cent), while wealthy men do so only about 32 per cent of the time. The group that shares this reason the least are poorer men. 22–25 per cent of men share this reason for voting.

6. YOUTH PERSPECTIVE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ONGOING REFORM OF THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

Participatory democracy – in particular strengthening citizens' role in the EU decision-making processes – is currently at the forefront of political conversation in Europe. The EU also has many existing tools and platforms in place in order to engage young people in democratic processes, including the EU Youth Strategy, the European Democracy Action Plan, the Digital Education Action Plan, the European Youth Portal, the European Youth Parliament and EP's European Youth Event (EYE), to name a few. In addition, EU programmes such as Europe for Citizens, Erasmus+, the European Solidarity Corps, CERV and others contribute to the active provision of citizenship education.

In its resolution on citizens' dialogues and citizens' participation in EU decision-making[11], Parliament has called for greater involvement of young people and youth organisations, as well as concrete actions based on the results of the EU Youth Dialogue. Also, in order to ensure more equality and accessibility as regards European elections, Parliament adopted in May 2022 a **legislative resolution on the proposal for a Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage**[12] proposing a single harmonised age for voting and standing as a candidate throughout the Union. According to Parliament, without prejudice to existing constitutional orders providing for a minimum voting age of 18 or 17, the minimum age for the right to vote should be set at 16 and the minimum age for the right to stand as a candidate at 18. In addition, in order to move towards **broader and more inclusive electoral processes in Europe**, the Commission has published two Commission proposals for Council directives on **electoral participation of EU mobile citizens in the European elections and municipal elections**, which are currently being scrutinised by Parliament and the Council. A third important initiative in the field has been **the Conference on the Future of Europe** that concluded its work in May 2022, putting forward 49 proposals to the three EU Institutions, several of which call for a greater citizens' participation. In particular, the adopted plenary proposals 36–38 contain several recommendations on the involvement of youth in democratic processes and also call for stronger structural support for youth civil society and local youth councils.

Below we will look more closely into the Parliament's proposal for a Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament, the two Commission proposals for Council Directives on electoral participation of mobile EU citizens, both in the European elections and municipal elections[13] and the Citizens' proposals 36–36 adopted by the Conference on the Future of Europe[14], in order to analyse their possible impact on youth participation in the European elections and democratic processes.

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[11] European Parliament resolution of 7 July 2021 on Citizens' dialogues and Citizens' participation in the EU decision-making (2020/2201(INI))

[12] European Parliament legislative resolution of 3 May 2022 on the proposal for a Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, repealing Council Decision (76/787/ECSC, EEC, Euratom) and the Act concerning the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage annexed to that Decision (2020/2220(INL) – 2022/0902(APP)).

[13] Proposals for a Council directive laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and stand as a candidate in elections to the European Parliament for Union citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals (recast), COM/2021/732 final (AFCO/9/07840) and a Council directive laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in municipal elections by Union citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals (recast), COM(2021)0733 final (AFCO/9/07839).

[14] See Report of the final outcome of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

6.1. Parliament's legislative resolution on the proposal for a Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage

The Parliament's proposal for a Council Regulation aims to increase the participation of young people in the European elections in many ways. Below we will look at a selection of the proposed articles and assess their impact on youth engagement and participation.

Article 3

National provisions

The electoral procedure for the election of the members of the European Parliament shall be governed by this Regulation. Matters not covered by this Regulation shall be governed in each Member State by its national provisions.

Those national provisions shall not affect the proportional nature of the voting system.

They shall in any event ensure respect for democratic standards, leading to democratic and proportionate requirements for registering a political party or an association of voters and for submitting a list of candidates for the national constituencies and the Union-wide constituency.

The second paragraph of Article 3 could have a positivie impact on youth turnout as it It provides that ***"national provisions shall not affect the proportional nature of the voting system"***, and in line with the evidence presented above, proportional representation systems encourage higher turnout, as votes are converted into seats in a more balanced way (see Geys 2006). In addition, the third paragraph, which states that there should be **"*proportionate requirements for registering a political party or an association of voters and for submitting a list of candidates*"**, is also likely to increase youth participation, as this could **facilitate the entry of younger candidates or less established political actors concerned with youth issues**.

Article 4

The right to vote

1. Every Union citizen from 16 years of age, including persons with disabilities regardless of their legal capacity, shall have the right to vote in elections to the European Parliament without prejudice to existing constitutional orders establishing a minimum voting age of 18 or 17 years of age.

[-- --]

The first paragraph of Article 4 should also have a positive impact on youth turnout, as there is evidence that youth turnout could increase if the voting age is lowered to 16. It has been confirmed that 16- and 17-year-olds as first-time voters get used to voting to a greater extent compared to 18- and 19-year-olds if they are already offered this opportunity at the age of 16, which leads to an overall increase in voter turnout over time (Aichholzer and Kritzinger 2020; Huebner and Eichhorn 2020; Franklin 2020). In line with this reasoning, respecting the existing constitutional provisions that provide for a minimum voting age of 18 or 17 will limit the impact of this measure.

Article 5

The right to stand as a candidate

1. Every Union citizen from 18 years of age shall have the right to stand as a candidate for the elections to the European Parliament in either a national constituency or in the Union-wide constituency, or in both.

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The first paragraph of Article 5 could have a negative impact on the reform, as aligning the minimum voting age with the minimum age for standing would facilitate greater participation for the reasons outlined above and provide the opportunity for greater youth representation in legislative bodies, which is an even greater problem (see IPU 2010; UNDP 2013). Such context-specific legal hurdles are also difficult to justify morally, as unaligned age thresholds create an aura of distrust towards young politicians, creating a semi-citizen caste, a class of citizen apprentices.

Article 6

Exercise of the right to vote

1. Member States shall ensure that all Union citizens, including those living or working in a third country, those without a permanent residence, those living in closed residential settings, those experiencing homelessness or those serving a prison sentence in the Union, are able to exercise their right to vote in elections to the European Parliament.

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Given that young people are among the most mobile groups of citizens for educational and career-related reasons, and that weaker ties to the community of residence have a negative impact on voter turnout (see Smets and Van Ham 2013), the provisions of **Article 6** requiring member states ***to ensure the exercise of the right to vote*** could prove particularly beneficial for young people across Europe. This is particularly relevant for countries where a large proportion of young people live abroad for learning or career opportunities. Important tools in the EU's arsenal to combat the low levels of electoral participation of mobile EU citizens could also prove to be the European Commission's proposals for Council directives on electoral participation of mobile EU citizens in European and municipal elections (see section 6.2. below).

Article 7

Accessibility

1. Member States shall ensure that all citizens, including persons with disabilities, have equal access to relevant materials, to voting facilities, and to polling stations.

2. Based on their national voting systems, Member States shall put in place appropriate arrangements with the aim of facilitating the exercise of the right to vote by persons with disabilities independently and in secret.

3. Member States shall ensure that persons with disabilities receive, at their request, assistance in voting by a person of their choice.

Article 8

Postal voting

1. Member States shall provide for postal voting in elections to the European Parliament, including for citizens living in a third country, and shall adopt measures that ensure that postal voting is accessible, in particular for persons with disabilities. Member States shall adopt all necessary measures to ensure the reliability and secrecy of the vote, and the protection of personal data in accordance with applicable Union law.

2. Member States may provide additional possibilities of voting by way of advance physical voting, proxy voting and voting by electronic and internet systems.

In the event of electronic, internet and proxy voting, Member States shall adopt all necessary measures to ensure the reliability, integrity, the secrecy of the vote, transparency in the design and deployment of electronic and internet systems, the possibility for manual or electronic recounts without compromising the secrecy of the vote and the protection of personal data in accordance with applicable Union law.

The provisions of **Article 7** dealing with accessibility issues (**"*equal access to relevant materials, to voting facilities and to polling stations*"** and **"*appropriate arrangements with the aim of facilitating the exercise of the right to vote*"**), including for persons with disabilities, as well as the measures on postal voting in **Article 8** (***provision of postal voting and the possibility of voting by means of prior physical voting, proxy voting and voting through electronic and internet systems***) are likely to have a positive impact on youth turnout, as arrangements to facilitate voting tend to have a positive impact on turnout because they aim to motivate and mobilise potential voters. These include postal voting, proxy voting, voting in advance, distributing voting booths in the most convenient locations (e.g. churches, shopping malls), extending the time for voting to several days, voting on weekends, etc. (Smets and Van Ham 2013, 355). Access to information also has a positive impact on voters and their participation in elections, as shown in the Scottish referendum vote (McNeill 2015). E-voting and internet voting have also been shown to reduce voting costs for young people and increase turnout among abstainers and occasional voters (Petitpas et al. 2021).

Article 19

Election day

1. Elections to the European Parliament shall be held on 9 May of the last year of a parliamentary term, as referred to in Article 20 (the "Election day").

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5. Member States may declare the Election day a national holiday.

In the same context, the Article 19(1) could have a negative impact on young people's turnout and on turnout in general, as ***elections on 9 May of the last year of a parliamentary term***, although a very symbolic and solemn measure, refer to an electoral calendar that is more difficult to adapt to other electoral processes. And turnout in the 2019 European elections was also higher because the electoral calendar was adapted and, in particular, the opportunity was taken to have European election days coincide with those of national elections (see Kelbel et al. 2020). On the other hand, ***making such an election day a national holiday*** (Article 19(5)) may have a positive impact, as elections on non-working days could improve the accessibility of the event (ibid.).

Article 10

Principles of selection of candidates

1. All political parties, associations of voters, electoral alliances and European electoral entities participating in elections to the European Parliament shall observe democratic procedures, transparency and gender equality, through measures that aim to ensure that all eligible persons have an equal opportunity to be elected, and a composition of the European Parliament that reflects the diversity of the European Union, when selecting their candidates for election to the European Parliament. Gender equality shall be reached depending on the Member States electoral systems and in any event in the Union-wide constituency by the use of zipped lists or quotas, without infringing on the rights of non-binary people.

2. A member of a political party, an association of voters or a European electoral entity may file a reasoned complaint of non-compliance with the democratic procedures, transparency and gender equality criteria laid down in this Article with the responsible national authority or the European Electoral Authority.

Article 12

Electoral system

1. Elections shall be by direct universal suffrage and shall be equal, free and secret. Each voter shall have two votes, one to elect the members of the European Parliament in the national constituencies and one to elect members of the European Parliament in the Union-wide constituency.

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4. In the Union-wide constituency, members of the European Parliament shall be elected using the closed list system.

The provisions of **Article 10**, which aim to achieve a ***composition that reflects the diversity of the Union***, could have a positive impact on turnout, as descriptive representation (reflecting the diversity of society in a parliament) increases participation, especially of non-dominant groups. However, to combat entrenched advantages of other groups, youth quotas, including provisions that place young people higher on the candidate list (i.e. zipper or irregular zipper systems), are a more effective option. In this sense, **Article 12(4)**, which states that **"[i]*n the Union-wide constituency, Members of the European Parliament shall be elected using the closed list system*",** could produce positive results in terms of youth representation (descriptive representation; Pitkin 1967) as well as youth participation, but the impact of this innovation is limited by the relatively small size of the Union-wide constituency and the absence of youth quota provisions. Moreover, the possibility provided for in **Article 10(2)** to file a ***reasoned complaint of non-compliance*** with democratic principles could prove beneficial and allow young people to be taken into account to a greater extent in order to reflect the diversity of Union citizens. However, the lack of a more stringent provisions to ensure adequate representation of youth, comparable to gender equality provisions in many national legislations, could completely undermine this solution.

Article 14

National constituencies

In accordance with its specific national situation and without prejudice to Article 15, each Member State may establish single constituencies for elections to the European Parliament or subdivide its electoral area in a different way, without affecting the proportional nature of the voting system in general.

Member States may form single-member constituencies representing linguistic or ethnic minorities, overseas nationals, outermost regions or overseas territories in accordance with national regulations, without affecting the proportional nature of the voting system.

Following on from what was mentioned in relation to Articles 10 and 12, the first paragraph of Article 14 on single constituencies in each Member State provides a greater opportunity for youth representation and participation, but the second paragraph of the same article (establishing single-member constituencies) hinders it by not providing for youth-oriented representation.

Article 13

Electoral threshold

1. Member States may set a minimum threshold for the allocation of seats. At national level, this threshold shall not exceed 5 % of the valid votes cast.

2. For national constituencies, which comprise more than 60 seats a threshold shall be set and shall not be lower than of 3,5 % of the valid votes cast in the constituency concerned.

3. The thresholds referred in paragraph 1 and 2 shall be without prejudice to exemptions made in national law for political parties or associations of voters that represent recognized national or linguistic minorities.

4. An exemption from national thresholds set in paragraph 2 shall be made for political parties or associations of voters, registered in a quarter of Member States and obtaining at least one million votes across the Union, which include in their national ballot paper the single name and logo of the European electoral entity to which they are affiliated, and where appropriate, adapted to the languages of the Member States concerned.

5. There shall be no minimum threshold for the allocation of seats in the Union-wide constituency referred to in Article 15.

The higher the electoral hurdle, the less chance there is for less established political actors and candidate groups to enter the parliamentary arena, and the greater the risk of lost votes for niche/minority lists of candidates. In line with the rational choice view, this essentially results in the cost of voting becoming higher and the chances of an individual's vote counting becoming lower, thereby reducing the chance of voting. **Article 13(1)** therefore limits the impact of the threshold on youth participation and representation. However, **Article 13(2)** is an obstacle to youth representation and consequent participation as 3.5 per cent of votes in a national constituency comprising more than 60 seats is a large number of votes to lose. Therefore, **the decision of *not to set a threshold for the Union-wide constituency*** (**Article 13(5)**) is beneficial for youth participation, but will have more of a symbolic effect.

Article 15

Union-wide constituency

1. There shall be one constituency formed of the entire territory of the European Union from which 28 members of the European Parliament shall be elected at the first election of members of the European Parliament following the entry into force of this regulation.

For elections of members of the European Parliament thereafter, the size of the Union-wide constituency shall be determined by the European Council Decision establishing the composition of the European Parliament.

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13. European and national public broadcasters shall provide broadcasting time in proportion to the results of the preceding election to the Union-wide constituency, ensuring minimum broadcasting time for every Union-wide list.

In order to promote impartial media coverage of the electoral process and to improve awareness of the political process and general knowledge, **Article 15(13)**, which guarantees a ***minimum broadcast time for each Union-wide list***, is positive for youth participation. However, in order to increase relevance to youth - the target group addressed by niche and infrastructurally weaker political actors – public service broadcasters should equally allocate free airtime to political actors regardless of their size and ability to produce a Union-wide list. Moreover, the provision of **"*broadcasting time in proportion to the results of the preceding election*"**, as stipulated in the same paragraph, reinforces the dominance of the major political powers on one of the most important channels of political communication and harms the performance of niche political actors competing on niche issues, which essentially has a negative impact on youth participation.

Article 27

Vacancies

1. A seat shall fall vacant when the mandate of a member of the European Parliament ends as a result of that member's resignation or death, or due to the withdrawal of his or her mandate.

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7. The Parliament may, at the request of the member concerned, and with the agreement of the Member State concerned or the European Electoral Authority, propose a temporary replacement of the concerned member in case of maternity, paternity or parental leave or in the case of leave due to a severe illness.

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Legislatures also have the potential to indirectly improve the political participation of youth and young politicians by making a number of changes to the way they operate. One such small change is also the proposed possibility to **"*propose a temporary replacement of the Member (of the Parliament) concerned in case of maternity, paternity or parental leave*"**, as provided for in **Article 27**, as this measure lowers the hurdle for the representation of young parents, especially young women, who are among the least represented demographic groups in parliaments across Europe.

6.2. European Commission's proposals for Council directives on electoral participation of mobile EU citizens in European and municipal elections

The issue of **mobile EU citizens and their political participation is of particular importance to young people** and their advocates, as young people are a demographic group that **is among the most mobile** due to the stage in their life cycle they are in. Mobility proved to be a particularly important factor for youth participation, as **mobile citizens have lower levels of participation due to their weaker ties to the municipality of residence** (see Smets and Van Ham 2013, 350). **The period of youth is also traditionally a time of major transitions** to adulthood, characterised by moving from the education system to the world of work, from dependency to independence, changing residence, living single or with a partner, starting a family, and so on. In particular, due to the increasing trend of fractured, precarious and prolonged transitions of young people into the world of work caused by changes in the structure of labour market opportunities, policies to promote labour flexibility, rapidly rising housing costs and other relevant factors (see Bradley and van Hoof 2005, 246), young people are forced to move to another country in search of a better life and better career opportunities, which is already linked to the search for better education and the resulting learning mobility. The need to seek better life opportunities abroad is also becoming an acceptable response among young people (see Deželan and Lavrič 2021), making the attempt to address the needs of mobile EU citizens even more important and clearly positive from the perspective of participation of young people's political participation.

The Commission's proposals for two Council directives on electoral participation of mobile EU citizens in the European elections (proposal on the European elections) and municipal elections (proposal on municipal elections)[15] revolve around several important dimensions of political participation in general and youth in particular. The first is the desire to **improve access to information**, which has an impact on individuals' capacity to act, as it has been clearly demonstrated that **feeling uninformed is one of the main reasons for non-participation** (see Snell 2010). Although in this case information is mainly linked to the process of acquiring the right to vote or stand for election, it also affects the general perception of political knowledge, which allows for a greater convergence of political views, allows for better information absorption and processing, and improves the link between individuals' interests and proposed policy solutions (Popkin et al. 2007). In the case of the two proposed Council directives, the information dimension is primarily aimed at **providing electoral information to mobile EU citizens in order to raise their awareness and understanding of the procedures and practises for registering and participating in elections**. This is further facilitated by the flexible **use of different communication tools targeting different audiences** – a potentially very youth-friendly approach due to the communication patterns of younger generations – and **the use of an additional Union language** (**Articles 12 and 11** of both proposals).

The second important dimension, also related to access to information, is **the removal of institutional barriers to participation**. Measures to remove institutional barriers reduce the cost of voting and thus have a direct and indirect positive impact on participation. Registration requirements impose direct

[15] Proposals for a Council directive laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and stand as a candidate in elections to the European Parliament for Union citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals (recast), COM/2021/732 final (AFCO/9/07840) and a Council directive laying down detailed arrangements for the exercise of the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in municipal elections by Union citizens residing in a Member State of which they are not nationals (recast), COM(2021)0733 final (AFCO/9/07839).

financial costs on potential voters as well as additional information costs related to the time and process of registration (Geys 2006, 652). As registration makes voting more difficult, it is likely that fewer people will vote. **Voter registration procedures have been shown to particularly limit the presence of young people** at the ballot box. For reasons of mobility, students are an example of such a group that has to bear the greatest burden of registration, as registration procedures usually impose further administrative burdens (residency procedures, taxation, etc.) on already notorious abstainers and often first-time voters (Macedo et al. 2005, 49). The Commission proposals (**Articles 9 and 10** of both proposals) address the **administrative barriers of entering the electoral roll and the need for mobile EU citizens to benefit equally from measures to facilitate participation in elections** (advance voting, postal voting, e-voting and internet voting available to their own nationals; **Article 14** of the proposal on the European elections and **Article 12** of the proposal on municipal elections).

The third dimension, also related to access to information and reducing barriers to participation, is the need for **continuous monitoring and evaluation** of the actions proposed by two Directives. This is **particularly important for youth**, **as most of the barriers to youth participation are not monitored and key data on the problem of participation and representation are not even collected**. The first step in addressing the participation problem is therefore systematic data collection and reporting on the problem and the effectiveness of the proposed measures. **Article 17** of the proposal on the European elections and **Article 14** of the proposal on municipal elections therefore introduce **regular monitoring and reporting on implementation, including relevant statistical data on the participation of mobile EU citizens in elections, either as voters or as candidates**. This requires data collection processes that go beyond the traditional participation categories of participation and representation (although they are much needed) and include broader variables relevant to giving youth a proper voice in society. **This could be supported by the creation of appropriate infrastructure** (e.g. focal points) **that collect, archive and regularly publish data, as well as guarantee** (for a broader category of young people) much-needed **information for advocacy and government oversight**. Overall, monitoring policies increases ownership of the policies, builds trust through transparency and informs policy to achieve the expected results, thus making the proposed policies youth-friendly.

6.3. The Conference on the Future of Europe Plenary plenary proposals (Citizen information, participation and youth; Democracy and elections)

The report on the final outcome of the Conference, including 49 proposals, was presented to the Presidents of the three institutions on 9 May 2022. These outcome includes, in particular, the following three proposals, all accompanied with a list of actions to be taken[16]:

- Proposal 36 – : Citizens information, participation and youth
    - *Objective:* Increase citizens' participation and youth involvement in the democracy at the European Union level to develop a 'full civic experience' for Europeans, ensure that their voice is heard also in between elections, and that the participation is effective.
- Proposal 37 – Citizens information, participation and youth (bis)

[16] Please see for more details Conference on the Future of Europe – Report on the final outcome.

  - *Objective*: Make the European Union more understandable and accessible and strengthen a common European identity.
- Proposal 38 – Democracy and elections
  - *Objective:* Strengthen European democracy by bolstering its foundations, boosting participation in European Parliament elections, fostering transnational debate on European issues and ensuring a strong link between citizens and their elected representatives.

Due to their nature, the adopted proposals are are much more abstract, comprehensive and ambitious than the legislative proposals discussed above. At the same time, they are less systematic, coherent and include a wide range of more or less realistic ideas that could improve youth engagement, some also based on measured empirical evidence. In general, these ideas focus on **strengthening democracy through improved access to information, quality of information, better targeting of voters, higher levels of participation and greater representation with greater impact**.

In order to analyse the adopted proposals, their substance has first been grouped together in three broad categories concerning, in particular, the reliability and accessibility of information, the role of the media and truth/facts in today's democratic society, political literacy and the role of civic education, and the accessibility of democratically elected institutions and their strength:

- Information Provision,
- Information Processing Capacity,
- Access to and Strength of Democratically Elected Institutions and Political Processes.

6.3.1. Information provision

a. Creation of and support for web-based applications to support the electoral process

One way to revitalise the political process is to develop **interactive web-based applications that bring elections closer to the youth**. Voting Advice Applications, which inform young citizens about the programmatic positions of political parties and candidates, and 'Vote Watches', which inform them about the actions of MPs, can improve political knowledge and activate youth voter participation. These online applications can also serve as an **integral part of the broader civic and voter education campaigns** conducted by the relevant authorities.

b. Support for voter information and education campaigns

Voters should be informed about the electoral process through a **variety of communication channels** (e.g. posters, leaflets, newspapers, TV, institutional and media websites and social media). Electoral management bodies or relevant authorities should produce **non-partisan information material targeting young or first-time voters**, ethnic minorities and other typically neglected groups. **Youth representatives or youth experts should be involved in all** stages of voter information and education campaigns to ensure that the **youth perspective is taken into account in the design, evaluation and validation of such activities**. Voter education programmes are crucial in promoting political participation. It is important that these programmes include relevant youth groups and youth-related content. Of particular importance are **projects and programmes that focus on the**

functioning of the political system; these should be broadcast through specially designed media productions that target young voters. **Public service broadcasters and community media** should lead the way in supporting these efforts by **addressing the specific needs and interests of disadvantaged youth groups**. In addition, the active involvement of civil society organisations, especially youth organisations, should be encouraged to **better reach underrepresented youth groups**.

c. Increased and evidence-based media coverage of the electoral process

To promote impartial media coverage of the electoral process and improve awareness of the political process and general knowledge, public and private national broadcasters should **equally allocate free airtime to political actors regardless of their size and past performance**. To prevent the dominance of political conglomerates on the main political communication channels, **a ban on paid political advertising on public and private broadcasters**, or at least a limit on campaign spending, should be enforced. Televised election debates should facilitate discussions between political actors on relevant policy issues so that voters can make informed political choices.

d. Provision of impartial information throughout the political process

The complexity of the political process is an immense challenge even for the most knowledgeable citizens. The complexity of the various policy fields and the depth of the policies that govern them – combined with biased information disseminated by political rivals, the think tanks that favour them, private companies and even public authorities – make the formation of informed opinion and consequent political action very difficult for individual citizens. **Mechanisms that provide impartial and valid information about the policies and issues** being debated in the political arena can **improve the sense of political efficacy and provide citizens with the information they need to make a decision and express an opinion**. The 2015 Scottish referendum demonstrated the positive role academic institutions play in providing impartial information on key issues, verifying the facts put forward in debates, validating arguments and supplementing information missing from critical discussions (Brown 2015). Similar –but far less extensive – fact-checking mechanisms that focus on monitoring political debates include free online platforms[17] . Regardless of their funding model (e.g. public funding, private funding or crowdsourcing) and transparency, the most important part of these mechanisms is the **credibility of the institutions and/or individuals providing judgements and information**.

e. Promotion of single-issue campaigns relevant to youth

Single-issue youth-focused campaigns that highlight youth problems and address relevant policy issues or upcoming policy decisions can mobilise young people who are otherwise alienated from institutional politics. These campaigns should focus on **issues that directly affect youth** (e.g. scholarships and transport) **and address their postmodern citizenship norms** (e.g. environmental protection, peace and human rights). Single-issue grassroots campaigns capitalise on young people's propensity to engage politically and have the potential to generate many positive examples of youth

[17] See, for example, https://www.factcheck.org, www.demagog.sk and https://factcheck.afp.com.

political activism. These campaigns are of particular importance for public authorities and political parties concerned about the absence of youth in institutional politics, but they are also the recommended form of campaigning for private companies and civil society organisations targeting young people. **The internet has great potential for mobilising groups in issue-based campaigns** as it helps to connect geographically and ideologically separated groups (Chadwick 2006, 29; Martin 2012, 108). It **helps young people form groups** around single issues because it is cheap and easily accessible, and it **brings them close to crowdfunding, crowdsourcing and other networking practises** (Martin 2012, 110). **Smart use of online tools can enable political actors to join online forums for young people.**

f. Creation of and support for tools for youth-friendly information-sharing and feedback

As most young people use social media as their main or even only source of information (e.g. Aillerie and McNicol 2016), **political actors need to** adapt the way they communicate with both party members and ordinary citizens. They should therefore **develop information-sharing tools that young people understand and that put young people's participation on an equal footing**. Social media and other online tools should be used, but **with language that is both understood by young people** and appropriate for the chosen medium (e.g. character limit, video, image). These tools are suitable for both dissemination of **information and consultation**, as they offer two-way interaction with features such as polls, voting, dialogue, etc. offer interaction in both directions (see LSE 2013, 14; Gretschel et al. 2014, 25-27). As peer interaction seems to be very successful, especially when it comes to young people who are less interested in politics (see Howe 2010), these information sharing and consultation activities should be **developed together with young people and have clear follow-up and consequences** (see LSE 2013, 9). **These forms of consultation could be mandatory and binding for decisions that young people consider particularly important**.

g. Utilisation of the potential of schools

Educational institutions have proven to be excellent tools to facilitate contact with young people. However, political organisations have struggled to harness the potential of such educational institutions. Due to excessive caution in their desire to leave day-to-day party politics outside the school walls, educational leaders often create an environment where political knowledge, interest and general engagement among young people declines (Eichhorn 2015; McNeill 2015). If there is a strong need and responsibility for school leaders to open schools to political debate (e.g. Brown, 2015) – as there is evidence that young people are interested in politics and engage in political conversations, and that open classroom discussions on such issues increase political confidence and improve voter turnout (see Eichhorn 2014) – then it is up to **political parties to engage in these discussions by participating in various events organised by schools**. Their aim here should be to **disseminate information about political positions or to hold general political exercises, such as simulated elections**. There are other similar campaigns by political parties, such as mock debates, where some political actors also return to schools to report on the work done and the changes made based on the debate, or outreach work by political organisations with schools that focus on engaging youth associations.

6.3.2. Information Processing Capacity

a. Introduction of comprehensive definition of political participation and increased youth participation-related data collection and research

The definition of political participation agreed upon by relevant stakeholders should serve as a starting point for any attempt to address issues of youth engagement in the political process. This definition should take into account the **changing political imagination of young people** as well as **evolving citizenship norms and new repertoires, agents and targets of political action**. Ongoing and systematic data collection and research on young people's political engagement should be supported by public authorities and regulators at different levels**. Data collection** should **track youth participation, representation and inclusion**, **youth transition from school to work**, **the impact of policies on different youth groups and youth participation in the political process** (see Chisholm and Kovacheva 2002; Gretschel et al. 2014). This could be achieved by **establishing focal points in public institutions that collect, archive and regularly publish data** on the position of youth in the area that falls under their jurisdiction. In addition, **the introduction of a methodology to track youth participation, representation and influence** (e.g. a youth index) would improve the transparency of the policy process and provide a basis for the various advocacy organisations to competently represent youth interests. **To ensure the validity of this information, several initiatives and institutions would need to be supported to collect the relevant information and thus also act as "watchdogs"**.

b. Promotion of community media

Community media is an important element of many non-formal education activities because it is a tool for shaping the public agenda that benefits young people and engages them in public affairs. **Programmes in which young people learn to produce media content themselves help them acquire media skills and build social capital by collaborating in environments with other young people**. As technological advances continue to connect different platforms (e.g. radio, internet and TV), civic media offer inexhaustible opportunities to connect young people with organisations and policymakers and raise awareness about youth issues. **Support for citizen media and initiatives** that build such platforms (including numerous accompanying training programmes) should be encouraged. At the same time, **an appropriate legal framework (including copyright licencing) should be put in place for their full functioning**.

c. Establishment and mainstreaming national youth and children's parliaments

To some, youth and children's parliaments appear ineffective and can have a discouraging effect on youth political participation. If it is not clear whether the opinions and actions of youth structures are seriously considered by the relevant political institutions, these initiatives fail to achieve participation in social and decision-making processes outside the established framework of political representation. Solutions to this problem could include identifying the appropriate political or bureaucratic structure responsible for addressing expressed concerns, providing adequate support and training to young representatives (e.g. policy-making processes, lobbying, negotiation skills and proportional representation), mandating youth structures to monitor the actions of political institutions to promote greater accountability, and changing selection procedures for representatives to resemble national electoral procedures. **Youth-friendly information-sharing mechanisms** should be developed to establish youth as partners with government at all levels. **Social media and other online tools** should

be used to enable youth to participate in national and local decision-making processes. This could include **youth-friendly sharing of policy information, direct feedback from youth to government on specific policies** (e.g. through feedback forums), holding consultations between youth and politicians through social media or other online platforms (e.g. Tweet Congress), using structured citizen surveys, opinion polls, online petitions, policy consultations and dialogues, and involving youth in development planning (see Gretschel et al. 2014, 25-27). It should be noted that these structured dialogues, which can be designed as a combination of online and offline methods, should **involve grassroots organisations and disengaged youth**, and that the content of the **dialogues should be co-determined by youth and include clear follow-up and consequences** (see LSE 2013, 9).

d. Promotion of youth juries, mock trials and other deliberative models of youth participation

Providing equal opportunity to participate in public deliberation before decision-making improves the legitimacy of political decisions and addresses problems associated with the vote-centred democratic process. Youth participation with deliberative elements, when inclusive and conducted in genuine collaboration with decision-makers, can influence policy outcomes and curb political tokenism (Gretschel et al. 2014). Either as part of a broader framework of mock legislatures or as stand-alone exercises, **youth juries and mock trials can serve as important examples of the deliberative mechanisms available to help young people learn about and influence democratic processes**. Like traditional citizen juries, youth juries can provide a safe public space for young people to discuss the issues that concern them in an open setting among their peers, with adults acting only as facilitators and experts (see Gretschel et al. 2014, 33). Youth juries can facilitate joint work and sometimes lead to written correspondence with policy makers. If taken seriously by policy-makers, youth juries are a positive deliberative addition to an otherwise poorly functioning conventional political process. Youth mock trials, where there are no adult experts and the information base is built by the young people themselves, have a similar function. The final verdict (i.e. declaration) of a youth mock process often represents the supported and structured opinion of young people on the policy issues that are most important to them. Through shared learning, facilitated deliberation and advocacy of judgements to policy makers, mock processes provide an attractive opportunity for young people to engage in the policy process and for policy makers to hear young people's views on relevant issues.

e. A redefinition of civic education to include curricula, schools and the wider community

This research highlights the need to extend citizenship education beyond the curriculum to provide practical opportunities for students to apply citizenship education in their school and community activities. **Community links need to be created and strengthened to provide students with civic experiences outside of school**. Current civic activities, primarily carried out by schools and local communities in collaboration with external groups and organisations, usually include sporting events and cultural activities, but rarely emphasise community engagement or contemporary citizenship activities based on current issues (e.g. environment, human rights, immigration or intergenerational solidarity). **A redefinition of citizenship education in schools** should give students the opportunity to actively discuss political issues and participate in school decision-making structures throughout their school years. A modified definition of citizenship education should include **media literacy** and access to a wide range of diverse and unfiltered information. **A participatory school cul**ture should be based on a range of formal and non-formal learning methodologies that enable young people to develop democratic attitudes and values in order to actively participate in society. Such practises would

promote cooperation between formal education systems and encourage non-formal education providers to offer students a holistic educational experience that develops the core competencies necessary for future engagement in society. Such a holistic approach would need to include civic education as well as social, cultural and global perspectives (see EYF 2015).

f. Support for programmes and measures of strengthening the competences of teachers, school leaders and other educators in the field of citizenship education

A serious obstacle to the creation of successful citizenship education programmes in both formal and non-formal education is the **lack of adequate professional development for civic educators**. Establishing **stable funding for such programmes** should become a priority for policy makers, as should the development of specific training programmes or other supports to help school leaders promote and contribute to a democratic school culture and thus create an effective environment for civic education teaching and learning.

g. Containment of the politicisation of citizenship education

Comprehensive citizenship education in schools is hampered by the ideological conflicts of political actors who misuse the subject to secure votes because the subject covers high-profile topics (e.g. migration, religion, rights and duties, and historical reflection). To address the many structural shortcomings of the subject, **citizenship education** should finally be understood by political elites as a **prerequisite for participatory citizenship**, while at the same time being **protected from politicisation in order to better promote a functioning democracy**. Furthermore, citizenship education should be more coherent, as current programmes allow local policy makers to overly influence school curricula, which can negatively impact the willingness of school leaders to engage in civic education (Brown 2015; McCullock 2015; McNeill 2015).

h. Support for media education and digital literacy

Despite their strong online presence, young people are not very well trained in creating media content or performing online routines such as maintaining a blog or website or contributing to wikis (Macnamara 2014). The first step towards meaningful and effective participation in a digital environment is to **introduce media education in the formal and non-formal curricula**. These programmes should focus on the technical basics of the internet, coding and critical evaluation of content. Schools and civil society organisations should look for opportunities to establish curricula that focus on **coding, network administration and ICT**. They should also explore how to harness young people's creativity to encourage ongoing dialogue and participation in social action through new media platforms (e.g. training through video production and peer education) (see Ostling 2014). Media education curricula should include **ethical aspects of online behaviour** (especially in relation to hate speech) and the effective use of ICT and new media to communicate with political authorities. Media and ICT skills training programmes for civil servants working in public relations should also be established and supported.

i. Creation of cross-party settings to disseminate information, promote discussion and receive feedback

Activating non-partisans who interact with young people on a daily basis effectively creates opportunities for the formation of non-partisan youth environments where politics can be safely and meaningfully discussed. Such environments create opportunities to become familiar with politics and political representatives across the ideological spectrum, while learning about important political issues, the differences between prevailing political views, and the needs and problems that need to be addressed. Such events therefore promote dialogue between political actors, between young people and political actors, and between young people themselves on issues that matter most to youth. Such political discussions – with or without political party representatives – in a safe and youth-friendly environment **strengthen young people's political confidence and bring them closer to political parties** (Eichhorn 2014).

j. Stable support for organisations that help youth and support civic youth spaces

Due to extensive budget cuts in youth-related programmes as a result of austerity measures, **it is crucial that funds are made available to create a stable environment for organisations targeting youth to operate and implement programmes successfully**. Capacity building activities for individuals and organisations should be promoted and platforms for their collaboration, networking and sharing of good practises should be supported. Youth-led organisations that engage youth in civic life should be particularly supported as these organisations are most likely to target youth-specific issues, establish these issues on the policy agenda and generate innovative solutions. Raising sufficient funds due to barriers related to accounting skills and other professional skills is a major obstacle for many youth-led organisations and initiatives. Therefore, **flexible support** (e.g. technical or financial) **with low barriers to entry should be provided to small youth projects**. In this era of commercialisation and gentrification of urban areas, the creation and maintenance of safe, open public spaces available to all young people should be a priority. These spaces, such as youth clubs and centres and community media centres, provide opportunities for young people from diverse backgrounds to participate in different areas of public life and to engage successfully in private activities. Such spaces could also serve as venues for organised community activities that connect with decision-makers. **Structural public funding for open civic spaces** where young people and adults can come together and discuss public issues and participate in various community projects (e.g. education, training and volunteering) would better engage otherwise excluded young people in their communities.

k. Creation of and support for academies and training programmes for young politicians

Promoting training programmes for young members and candidates is a good way to equip them with the civic knowledge and experience needed to participate meaningfully in institutional politics and to familiarise them with the party's values and positions. These programmes are even more effective if they are designed as 'incubators' for future politicians (see UNDP 2013, 25-26). They should also be designed to ensure that young people, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, have the necessary knowledge and skills about democratic institutions and processes, as well as the practical skills needed to succeed in institutional politics (simulations, debates, negotiations, etc.). Different actors should therefore establish and support **permanent youth academies and training programmes for young members and candidates from different backgrounds** to equip them with

the **necessary knowledge of democratic institutions and the skills** required to be competent in institutional politics.

l. Provision of parallel funding opportunities for the implementation of youth political participation projects

In addition to stable, long-term support for organisations targeting youth (usually from national or sub-national governments), the introduction of parallel or additional funding opportunities could be a turning point against the severe austerity measures and budget cuts affecting higher-level policy activities. Funding youth-related activities from EU programmes, other public and private foundations (e.g. Open Society Foundations) could not only help address the issues abandoned by domestic policy, but also serve as a trigger for their reintroduction.

6.3.3. Access to and Strength of Democratically Elected Institutions and Political Processes

a. Lowering the voting age and age of eligibility for office

There is evidence that youth turnout would increase if the voting age were lowered to 16. Currently, there is evidence that turnout is higher among 18 year olds than among 19 to 21 year olds (Bhatti et al. 2012). The recent Scottish referendum, for example, is evidence that young people are interested in politics and engage in political conversations. Open classroom discussions have been shown to increase students' political confidence (see Eichhorn 2014), which further increases youth turnout. Eichhorn (2015) states that the measure of a **lowered voting age should be accompanied by curricular changes and the promotion of political discussions in school**. In the Scottish referendum vote, young people were recognised not only as a valuable part of the electorate, but also as one of the most informed groups (McNeill 2015). **Aligning the minimum voting age with the minimum age for eligibility should facilitate greater youth participation in representative political bodies**. As mentioned above, this contributes to an alarmingly low descriptive representation of youth in key representative bodies.

b. Automatic voter registration and up-to-date electoral rolls

Automatic voter registration can increase voter turnout by removing obstacles such as the costs imposed by traditional voter registration requirements that cause less engaged citizens not to participate in the democratic process. Some oppose the introduction of automatic registration because of cultural, financial and privacy concerns, but the costs of losing a large percentage of the voting population to inconvenient traditional registration procedures are too high for an otherwise healthy democracy to bear. **If there is an active registration process, it is advisable that voters can be registered to vote as easily as possible, even on election day itself**.

c. Introduction of elements of proportional representation into electoral systems in conjunction with mechanisms to facilitate youth representation

Proportional representation electoral systems encourage higher turnout because votes are converted into seats in a more balanced way. Because fewer votes are lost, voters feel that their contribution is

more valued than in first-past-the-post systems. For underrepresented groups such as youth, this **conversion of votes can facilitate the nomination of young people on electoral rolls, increase voter turnout and improve the chances of electoral success**. To combat the stubborn advantages of older candidates and incumbents, proportional representation systems that welcome youth should adopt either **open electoral lists that allow voters to choose their candidates**, or **closed lists that include mandatory youth quotas – including provisions that place young people higher on the candidate list** (i.e. zip or irregular zip systems) or in electable districts. The latter option is arguably the most effective, but has the disadvantage of limiting voters' choices.

d. Promotion of youth participation in election management

Involving young people in all phases of an election campaign (e.g. as advisory board members of electoral bodies, election workers or election observers) improves the general knowledge of young voters' needs and the ownership of the political process by the young people involved (see UNDP 2008). Conducting **a lottery to select election workers** is one way to redress imbalances when youth participation in advisory councils and as election workers cannot be achieved.

e. Restrictions on the funding of political parties, candidates and lists of candidates

Provisions that limit or prohibit donations from private interests and public actors have the potential to facilitate access to the electoral arena for younger candidates, thus narrowing the gap between young and established political actors. Limiting party and candidate spending and **enforcing transparency** can also **reduce barriers for new political actors to enter institutional politics**.

f. Creation of e-voting and other alternative forms of voting at home and abroad

While e-voting does not provide the clear evidence of higher voter turnout that its proponents had hoped for, it is demonstrably **a more convenient method** of voting and **lowers the cost** of voting for people who are ICT literate. Pioneers in the introduction of e-voting systems have achieved positive results in both convenience and ease of voting. Years of success in these areas have made e-voting an important component of voter participation. Countries have further **promoted youth turnout by increasing the number of voting days** (e.g. early voting), spreading voting hours over more than one day, and **including both working days and weekends in the voting period**.

g. Introduction of youth quotas and the presence of youth in important political bodies

Quotas provide an interesting opportunity for young people to enter representative institutions. Quotas influence representation in the executive bodies of political organisations and representative bodies, as well as political participation in the political process, especially in terms of the right to stand for election to various offices. Quotas are a 'quick fix' to improve the positions of disadvantaged groups in the political process and a visible track record in promoting the representation of women, ethnic minorities and other minority groups. There are three general types of quotas in politics that address different aspects of political exclusion (see Krook 2009). **Reserved seats**, which guarantee a fixed level of representation, are the safest solution for disadvantaged groups seeking a certain level of representation. Reserved seats are an efficient mechanism for representing national and ethnic

minorities, but do not solve the **problem of intersectionality** (e.g. multiple exclusion based on gender, ethnicity, age or skin colour). **Candidate quotas** are the most widespread and widely accepted mechanism. These legally enshrined mechanisms mandate a certain proportion of members of an underrepresented group on a list of candidates. Because they do not inherently guarantee representation, these types of quotas are **vulnerable to manipulation**, as those in power can design the systems to have no effect on representation (e.g. no or 'token' penalties for violating the quota rule, no provisions for positions on the list, or no parallel facilitation mechanisms to encourage access to politics); thus, candidate quotas can have an opposite effect on participation. **Voluntary party quotas are a non-legislative mechanism to promote participation and representation of underrepresented groups in political organisations**. As a mechanism reflecting the progressive nature of many political organisations, these quotas may have the characteristics of candidate quotas (for nominating candidates within the party for future election campaigns and internal party bodies) or reserved seat quotas. **If similar to reserved seat quotas, this mechanism facilitates youth participation in key executive bodies of political organisations** (e.g. a reserved seat on the executive committee of a political party for a youth wing representative or youth presence on candidate selection panels).

h. Introduction of compulsory voting

Compulsory voting is often seen as an undemocratic quick fix to the problem of low voter turnout. Although it does not eliminate most of the reasons for abstention, it proves to be one of the most robust solutions to improve voter turnout (Blais 2000), as the benefits of not voting are diminished by the new costs incurred and the loss of social prestige (Geys 2006, 652). It should also be noted that the changing citizenship norms of younger generations suggest that dutiful citizens (see Dalton 2009) are a reminiscence of the past; therefore, **clear commitment combined with sanctions may improve youth presence in institutional politics** (see Wattenberg 2012).

i. Creation of and support for strong youth organisations/youth party wings

Most political parties have some form of youth organisations that serve many purposes, but primarily serve to engage young people in political activities, provide 'foot soldiers" for the main party during election campaigns, and provide a pool of potential candidates (Hooghe et al. 2004; Rainsford 2014; Pickard 2015). Youth organisations within political parties (youth wings) thus have the common task of serving the needs of the party by reaching out to the young electorate and the role of socialisation agents, familiarising young members with the party's traditions, important networks and culture (Hooghe and Stolle 2005). This role is becoming increasingly important and prevalent, especially as parties' distance from young people has grown and their appeal has declined (Stock in Weber 2017). In these circumstances, youth organisations are likely to be best placed to provide good candidates from groups distant from the main party (e.g. young members of ethnic, sexual or religious minorities) (Pitkänen 2018). Moreover, because of their proximity to young people, youth organisations can help identify the most important youth issues and formulate very concrete solutions on how to address them. As youth associations often tend to form an internal opposition to the parent party, many youth associations have been disbanded, significantly limiting young people's influence on party politics and political debate (Mycock and Tonge 2012).

j. Reform of parliaments

Parliaments have the potential to indirectly improve the political participation of youth and young politicians by making a number of minor changes to the way they operate. First, supranational, national and regional parliaments that can be attended by young people are a great opportunity for young people to learn about the political system and interact with high-level politicians. They are an **indispensable pillar of civic education curricula**. Second, **continuous, stable and adequately remunerated internship programmes in state parliaments** can significantly increase the number of people gaining first-hand experience of political processes. Third, **regular and open committee or intergroup sessions focused on youth** should be convened to enable broader consultation and deliberation on issues affecting youth with relevant stakeholders and interested members of the public. Parliaments should also consider organising **special training and support programmes for young parliamentarians**, with a particular focus on women, ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups, to facilitate their seamless transition into the parliamentary arena (see UNDP 2011, 36). In addition, representative institutions should provide young parents with **adequate childcare facilities and reasonable working hours** – for example, avoiding parliamentary sessions until late at night.

k. Improvement of consultation and co-management of youth-related issues and introduction of mechanisms of direct and participatory democracy

Political authorities should establish a system of cooperation with youth on youth-related issues that goes beyond traditional consultation procedures and has features of co-management. One way to do this would be to improve the functioning of cooperation structures between youth bodies and public authorities at all levels (e.g. councils of government responsible for youth), especially in the development and implementation of youth strategies. To ensure transparent policy processes and accountability for policies implemented, **web-based tools** should be developed to monitor the different stages of policy (e.g. policy agenda setting, policy formulation, policy implementation, policy monitoring and policy evaluation) and **more structured consultation processes** should be introduced (e.g. structured dialogues, citizens' panels, citizens' councils, deliberative polls, etc.).

l. Creation of conditions for functioning local youth councils

There is an **urgent need for local and national authorities to establish functioning local youth councils** where appropriate. Due to existing party political entanglements, authorities often either refrain from setting up such structures, do not provide support or over-politicise them. In some cases, national youth councils are threatened with severe budget cuts or even termination of funding. **The influence of local politics on the composition of local youth councils should be regulated through democratic instruments of representative selection** (e.g. direct election). Furthermore, **clear agreements and a solid normative framework for cooperation** (consultation and co-management), including timetables, attendance and budget requirements, should be established to prevent practises of non-functioning or poorly functioning local youth councils.

m. Introduction of participatory budgeting for youth

Participatory budgeting allows citizens to exercise decision-making power in **the democratic deliberative process on the allocation of public funds**. Participatory budgeting is **essentially a concept of political deliberation at the local level** and enables specific groups (e.g. youth) to be targeted. For example, allocating municipal budgets that affect youth provides an excellent opportunity for randomly selected or interested individuals from the affected population group to decide on the programme or service they think is most appropriate and to consult political leadership and administrative authorities on solutions and strategic issues. If participants are involved up to the final stages (e.g. final services, projects and interventions), this process will bring the youth voice into policy decisions and thus enhance the legitimacy of the policy (see Gretschel et al. 2014, 35).

n. Introduction of surveys among young residents (citizen survey)

Resident surveys improve the democratic process by gathering information about people's attitudes on various issues. Although they may seem trivial at first glance, resident surveys actually require more effort than voting, but have the advantage that each member of a population has an equal voice (one resident - one opinion) (Aars 2007, 213). Young populations often have little to no opportunity to discuss and form opinions on important political issues, so political decisions become purely administrative matters. Surveys of young residents are therefore useful as they provide an **opportunity to capture the opinions of young people who might otherwise not be reached** by youth organisations and conventional electoral processes. These surveys provide access to young people's opinions on important policy decisions in a way that is convenient for most segments of the population.

o. Promotion of representative administration

Another way to make governments more democratic and legitimate from a youth perspective is to make them a more representative bureaucracy. Specifically, **decision-making processes need to be democratic both at the policy superstructure level and at the policy/programme specialisation level**, where the majority of administrative state decisions are made. It has been suggested that **improving demographic representation** (e.g. more young people in bureaucratic organisations) **in administrations could lead to a more responsive bureaucracy**. The basic idea is this: if the attitudes of policy-making bureaucrats are similar to those of the public, their policies will be more responsive to the needs of the public (see Meier 2007, 177). Studies have shown that this approach allows for better representation of gender, ethnicity and race and produces specific policies that directly benefit individual groups (Saltzstein 1979; Meier 2007). **Decisions made by a representative bureaucracy can increase the political efficacy of actors and thus promote political participation among youth**. This approach is particularly relevant in times of economic crisis, when employment opportunities are scarce and authorities need to be more responsive to the needs of youth.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The overview on the current state of youth political participation has revealed important challenges but also common misconceptions about citizenship among young people. The lack of youth political participation exists in institutional politics mainly due to **young people's changing citizenship norms**, their **changing political imaginary**, and the fact that **rigid liberal democratic notions of membership** and their repertoires of political action **are outdated** with the constant development of new agents, repertoires and targets of political action.

In addition to the focus traditionally placed on the agency of young people, more attention should be paid to the **political structure** and **mass membership organisations that no longer invest in grassroots mobilisation and activities** (Skocpol 2003; Hooghe and Stolle 2005). The willingness of decision-makers to take a few extra steps in the right direction is crucial, as initiatives to bring young people closer to politics have traditionally been accompanied by much deception. Government policies usually suffer from severe implementation problems and the frequent shelving of such initiatives due to shrinking budgets and unnecessary politicisation.

There is also a serious **lack of ownership** of policies that curb young people's political participation. This is due to the lip service that is often paid to strengthening the voice of youth in institutional politics through dialogue sessions with young people, election campaigns and general tokenism. Of course, there is the issue of youth political participation and it should not be weighed against protest politics or confused with quality (rather than quantity); it is about **inclusion, informed decision-making** and **legitimacy**. Many previous studies have found compelling evidence that **young people** are not disinterested apathetic outside institutional politics, but rather **insufficiently informed and disempowered** because of the obstacles they face, or **increasingly sceptical because of mistrust** of the political class. The 'broken promise' (Cathcart 2015) has also produced a class of informed, critical and sickened young citizens.

The relationship between young people and the political sphere is complex and subject to many important changes in the lives of today's generations of young people. The increasing complexity of youth transitions, characterised by prolonged and reversible transition periods accompanied by higher levels of uncertainty and vulnerability, is leading young people to move further and further away from institutional politics. As **social media and peers gain importance** as factors of political socialisation, **the repertoire of young people's political engagement becomes more diverse and incompatible with traditional forms of engagement**. Non-participation in institutional politics thus does not necessarily equate to apathy, as many who do not go to the ballot box may actually be uninformed, distrustful or disempowered. This demonstrates the **need to look beyond traditional binary categories and observe the influence of information, interest, trust, efficacy and other factors on individuals' decision to act**. Young people approach politics with more or less information, more or less trust, more or less efficacy and a sense of civic duty. These are the factors that need to be considered when designing an agenda to promote young people's political participation.

But the process of addressing the problem of young people's political participation is as important as identifying political participation itself. For this process to be successful, supported by the young generations and tailored to their needs, the following conditions must be met. First, **the process must be transparent and inclusive**, with important elements of deliberation to arrive at a common vocabulary and frame of reference for determining the current state and future direction of youth participation. Secondly, **the definition of youth (political) participation needs to be broad**, as the

definitions, aspirations and acceptable expressions of democratic activity are determined by cultural and social processes, and the conventional tools for measuring them prematurely shrink young people's perceptions of participation by undermining their initial formation in each successive generation. To secure and expand the democratic project, it must take into account the everyday experiences and normative concerns of young people. Third, **equitable assessment and promotion of youth participation must include analytical lenses and data** that surface the stratification of access and agency **across identities, cultures and communities**. This will – fourthly – also facilitate a much-needed **more nuanced approach to youth participation**, as prevailing policy discourses prioritise the identification of pragmatic and technical intervention strategies, the way policy issues are framed, including semantics and underlying assumptions. If we are to protect young people's participation, then the conceptual and theoretical lenses that guide analysis and policy craft must be **accompanied by considerations of the particular psychosocial, physical, economic, cultural and educational needs of young people**. Fifth and finally, reductionist notions embedded in reflections and debates about young people, viewing them as monolithic, valuable and vulnerable objects, undermine the prospect of harnessing and building their intellectual and creative capacities. Rhetorical framing plays a role in amplifying or alleviating the problem of youth participation. Therefore, **frameworks and engagement should be critically examined** when explaining and addressing the problem.

The processes of delivering the Parliament's legislative resolution on the proposal for a Council Regulation on the election of the members of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage, the Commission's proposals for Council directives on electoral participation of mobile EU citizens in European and municipal elections and, in particular, the proposals of the Conference on the Future of Europe, demonstrate the above considerations, which serve as prerequisites for successful efforts to bring young people and the political sphere closer together. In view of the fact that the above considerations are further recognised, **the three clusters of recommendations** could be identified:

1. Information Provision

- Creation of and support for web-based applications to support the electoral process;
- Support for voter information and education campaigns;
- Increased and evidence-based media coverage of the electoral process;
- Provision of impartial information throughout the political process;
- Promotion of single-issue campaigns relevant to youth;
- Creation of and support for tools for youth-friendly information-sharing and feedback;
- Utilisation of the potential of schools,

2. Information Processing Capacity

- Introduction of comprehensive definition of political participation and increased youth participation-related data collection and research;
- Promotion of community media;
- Establishment and mainstreaming national youth and children's parliaments;
- Promotion of youth juries, mock trials and other deliberative models of youth participation;
- A redefinition of civic education to include curricula, schools and the wider community;
- Support for programmes and measures of strengthening the competences of teachers, school leaders and other educators in the field of citizenship education;

- Containment of the politicisation of citizenship education;
- Support for media education and digital literacy;
- Creation of cross-party settings to disseminate information, promote discussion and receive feedback;
- Stable support for organisations that help youth and support civic youth spaces;
- Creation of and support for academies and training programmes for young politicians;
- Provision of parallel funding opportunities for the implementation of youth political participation projects.

3. Access to and Strength of Democratically Elected Institutions and Political Processes

- Lowering the voting age and age of eligibility for office;
- Automatic voter registration and up-to-date electoral rolls;
- Introduction of elements of proportional representation into electoral systems in conjunction with mechanisms to facilitate youth representation;
- Promotion of youth participation in election management;
- Restrictions on the funding of political parties, candidates and lists of candidates;
- Creation of e-voting and other alternative forms of voting at home and abroad;
- Introduction of youth quotas and the presence of youth in important political bodies;
- Creation of and support for strong youth organisations/youth party wings
- Reform of parliaments;
- Improvement of consultation and co-management of youth-related issues and introduction of mechanisms of direct and participatory democracy;
- Creation of conditions for functioning local youth councils;
- Introduction of participatory budgeting for youth;
- Introduction of surveys among young residents (citizen survey);
- Promotion of representative administration.

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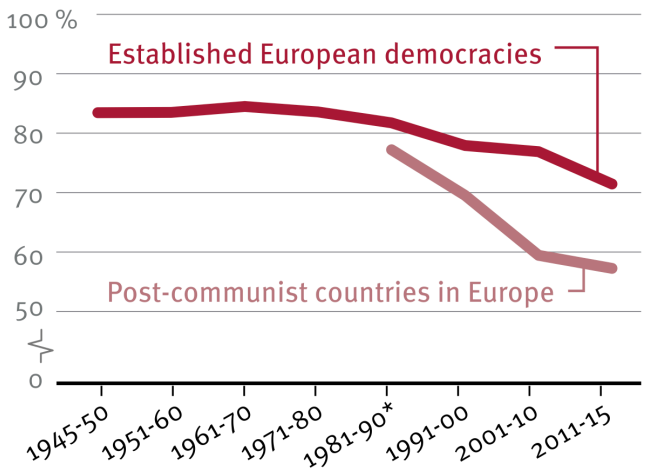
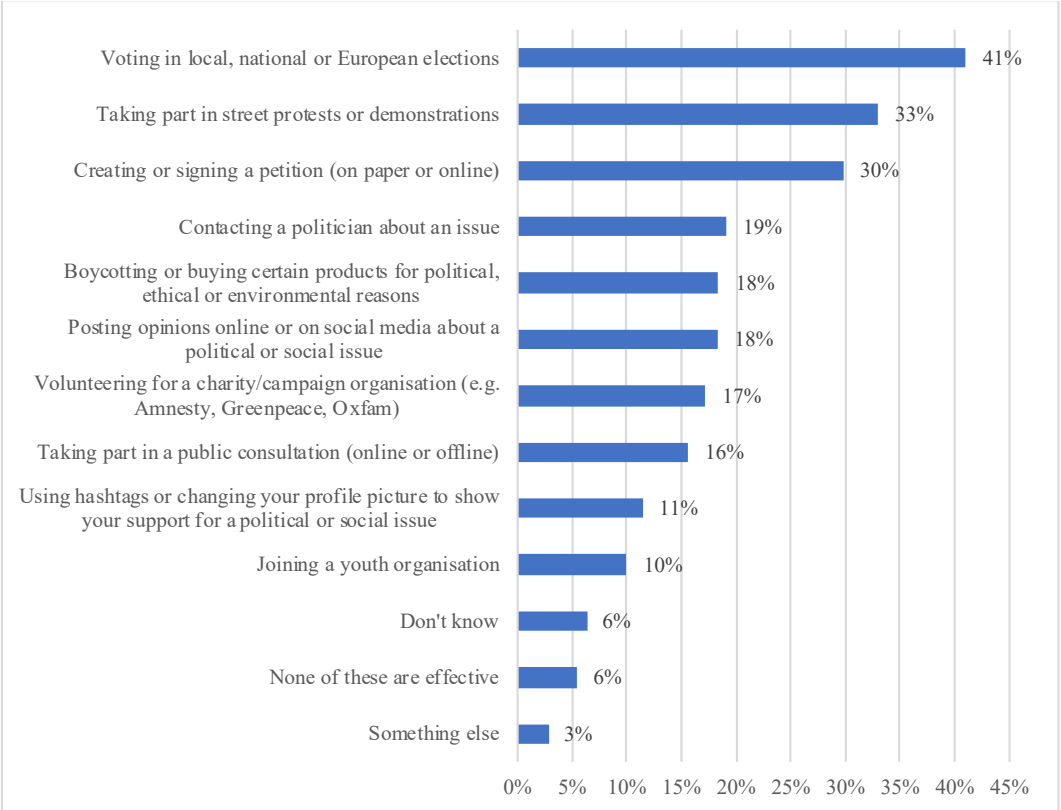
ANNEX (LIST OF ADDITIONAL FIGURES AND TABLES)

Figure 1: Voter turnout in Europe, 1945–2015



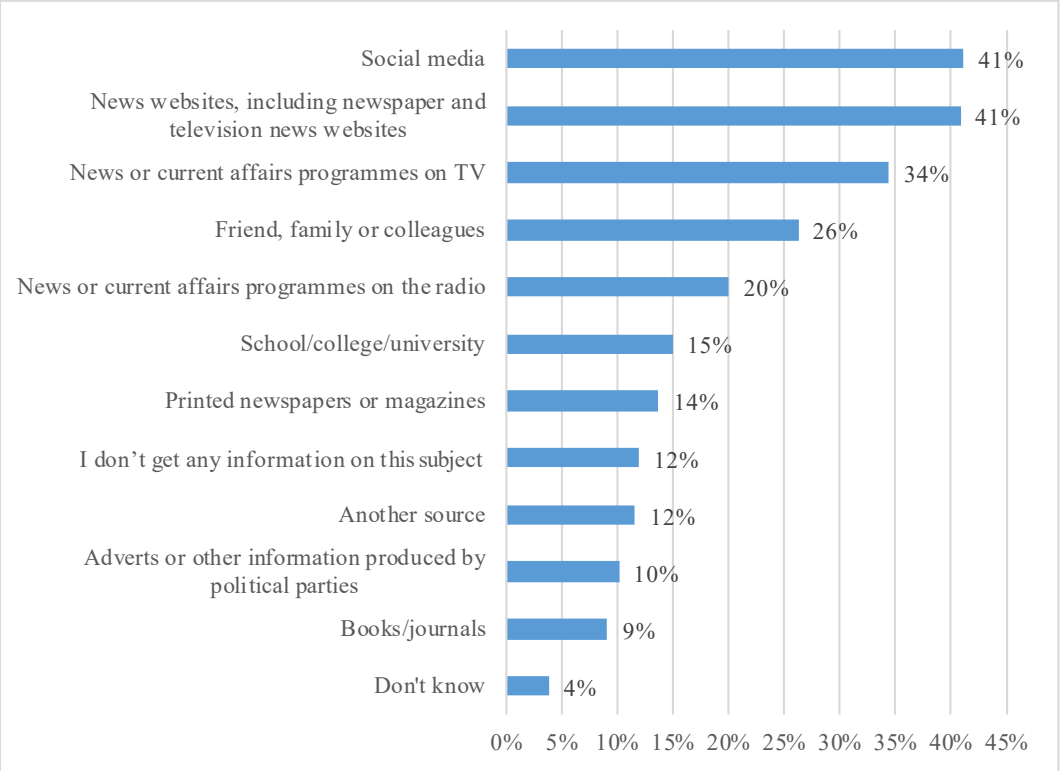
Source: Voter Turnout Database, www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voter-turnout

Figure 2: In your opinion what are the three most effective actions for making one's voice heard by decision-makers? (in percentages - EU27)



Source: European Parliament Youth Survey (2021)

Figure 3: From which of these sources do you get most of your information on political and social issues? Please select up to three responses. (in percentages - EU27)



Source: European Parliament Youth Survey (2021)

Table 1: Turnout at elections to the European Parliament

Country	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019
Belgium	91,36	92,09	90,73	90,66	91,05	90,81	90,39	89,64	88,47
Denmark	47,82	52,38	46,17	52,92	50,46	47,89	59,54	56,32	66,08
Germany	65,73	56,76	62,28	60,02	45,19	43	43,27	48,1	61,38
Ireland	63,61	47,56	68,28	43,98	50,21	58,58	58,64	52,44	49,7
France	60,71	56,72	48,8	52,71	46,76	42,76	40,63	42,43	50,12
Italy	85,65	82,47	81,07	73,6	69,76	71,72	66,47	57,22	54,5
Luxembourg	88,91	88,79	87,39	88,55	87,27	91,35	90,76	85,55	84,24
Netherlands	58,12	50,88	47,48	35,69	30,02	39,26	36,75	37,32	41,93
United Kingdom	32,35	32,57	36,37	36,43	24	38,52	34,7	35,6	37,18
Greece*	81,48	80,59	80,03	73,18	70,25	63,22	52,54	59,97	58,69
Spain**		68,52	54,71	59,14	63,05	45,14	44,87	43,81	60,73
Portugal**		72,42	51,1	35,54	39,93	38,6	36,77	33,67	30,75
Sweden***				41,63	38,84	37,85	45,53	51,07	55,27
Austria****					49,4	42,43	45,97	45,39	59,8
Finland****					30,14	39,43	38,6	39,1	40,8
Czechia						28,3	28,22	18,2	28,72
Estonia						26,83	43,9	36,52	37,6
Cyprus						72,5	59,4	43,97	44,99
Lithuania						48,38	20,98	47,35	53,48
Latvia						41,34	53,7	30,24	33,53
Hungary						38,5	36,31	28,97	43,36
Malta						82,39	78,79	74,8	72,7
Poland						20,87	24,53	23,83	45,68
Slovenia						28,35	28,37	24,55	28,89
Slovakia						16,97	19,64	13,05	22,74
Bulgaria*****						29,22	38,99	35,84	32,64
Romania*****						29,47	27,67	32,44	51,2
Croatia******							20,84	25,24	29,85
Total EU	**61,99**	**58,98**	**58,41**	**56,67**	**49,51**	**45,47**	**42,97**	**42,61**	**50,66**

Source: EP (2019)

Year of first EP vote

* 1981
** 1987
*** 1995
**** 1996
***** 2007
****** 2009

Table 2: Did you yourself vote in the recent EP elections?

	Voted **2014**	Voted **2019**
EU28	43	51
Gender		
Man	45	52
Woman	41	49
Age		
16/18-24	28	42
25-39	35	47
40-54	45	52
55 +	51	54
Education (End of)		
15-	43	46
16-19	38	47
20+	51	59
Still studying	37	51
Socio-professional category		
Self-employed	52	55
Managers	53	61
Other white collars	44	53
Manual workers	35	42
House persons	36	47
Unemployed	31	37
Retired	50	55
Students	37	51
Difficulties paying bills		
Most of the time	32	38
From time to time	40	47
Almost never/Never	47	54
Left-right political scale		
Left	53	64
Centre	44	51
Right	54	66
My voice counts in the EU		
Agree	60	61
Disagree	33	39
Opinion about country's membership of the EU		
A good thing	53	58
A bad thing	35	45
Neither a good thing, nor a bad thing	32	41

Source: EP (2019a)

Table 3: Voter absenteeism in national parliamentary elections and European elections; EU average across different age groups

(Did you yourself vote in the (NATIONAL ELECTIONS)? "Did not vote").

Age group	*National elections*	***EP elections***
16/18-24	59,1 per cent	72,1 per cent
25-29	44,3 per cent	69,3 per cent
30-39	38,2 per cent	62,2 per cent
40-49	32,5 per cent	56,4 per cent
50-64	24,1 per cent	50,2 per cent
65+	24,1 per cent	47,9 per cent
Total	33,6 per cent	56,9 per cent

Source: Schmitt et al. (2015)

Table 4: Online activities on civic and political issues (EU average)

	16-19	**20-24**	**25-29**	**25-34**	**35-44**	**45-54**	**55-64**	**65-74**
Reading and posting opinions on civic or political issues via websites	24	23	23	21	15	11	8	5
Posting opinions on civic or political issues via websites	16	19	18	17	12	9	6	4
Taking part in online consultations or voting to define civic or political issues (e.g. urban planning, signing a petition)	7	11	11	10	9	8	6	4

Source: Eurostat (2015)

Table 5: Binary logistic regression models for selected models *(Have you done any of the following?)*

	Voted in the last local, national or European election (1 yes, 0 no)		Contacted a politician about an issue (1 yes, 0 no)		Volunteered for a charity/campaign organisation (1 yes, 0 no)		Boycotted or bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons (1 yes, 0 no)		Taken part in street protests or demonstrations (1 yes, 0 no)	
	b	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)
Gender (Male)	,244***	1,276***	-,333***	,717***	,235***	1,265***	,217***	1,243***	,173***	1,189***
Age (16-19 years)										
20 – 25 years	1,484***	4,409***	,066	1,068	-,011	,989	,200***	1,222***	,010	1,010
26 – 30 years	1,763***	5,828***	,085	1,089	-,228**	,796**	,445***	1,560***	-,006	,994
Age when ending full-time education (Up to 15 years)										
16-19 years	,406**	1,501**	,025	1,026	,043	1,044	-,108	,898	,163	1,177
20 years and older	,630***	1,877***	,211	1,235	,253	1,288	,086	1,090	,395*	1,484*
Still in full-time education	,555***	1,742***	,089	1,093	,248	1,282	,119	1,126	,319*	1,376*
Never been in full-time education	-,344*	,709*	-,106	,899	-,170	,844	-,077	,926	,152	1,164
Occupation status (Manual worker)										
Employee	,037	1,038	,193	1,213	,082	1,086	,093	1,098	,189*	1,208*
Self-employed	,316***	1,371***	,076	1,079	-,020	,980	,258**	1,294**	,130	1,138
Without a professional activity	,574***	1,775***	-,162	,851	-,283**	,753**	,283**	1,327**	,342***	1,407***
Occupation status RECODED (Student)										
Employed	-,263**	,769**	-,109	,896	-,040	,961	-,127	,880	-,202*	,817*
Non active	-,311	,733	,025	1,026	-,166	,847	-,340*	,712*	-,502**	,605**
Living area (A rural area of village)										
Small or medium-sized town	,101***	1,106***	,012	1,012	,086**	1,090**	,090***	1,095***	,243***	1,275***
Large town/city										
Financial situation (We have enough money for basic bills but not for food and)										
We don't have enough money for basic bills (electricity, heating etc	,189	1,208	-,228	,796	-,001	,999	,001	1,001	,230*	1,258*
We have enough money for food, clothes and shoes but not enough for more ve things (fridge, TV etc)	,437***	1,547***	-,109	,896	-,057	,945	,059	1,060	,122	1,130
We can afford to buy some more expensive things but not as expensive as a car house for example	,996***	2,708***	-,228*	,796*	-,135	,874	,229**	1,257**	,344***	1,411***
We can afford to buy whatever we need for a good standard of living	1,057***	2,879***	-,287**	,750**	-,077	,926	,422***	1,525***	,246**	1,278**
Identify as ethnic, religious or other minority (not selected)	-,266***	,767***	,425***	1,529***	,360***	1,434***	,359***	1,432***	,150*	1,162*
Identify as migrant, refugee, asylum seeker or displaced person (not selected)	-,603***	,547***	,264*	1,302*	,290**	1,336**	,146	1,157	,212*	1,236*
Identify as person with a disability/disabilities (not selected)	-,260**	,771**	,273**	1,314**	,211**	1,235**	,212**	1,236**	-,166	,847
Identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (not selected)	,003	1,003	,186*	1,205*	,270***	1,311***	,656***	1,928***	,599***	1,821***
Constant	-3,102***	,045***	-2,110***	,121***	-1,624***	,197***	-2,239***	,107***	-2,623***	,073***
Nagelkerke R^2	0,196		0,022		0,021		0,037		0,034	

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. Reference categories in (). N = 18156.

Table 5. Continued

	Created or signed a petition (on paper or online) (1 yes, 0 no)		Joined a youth organisation (1 yes, 0 no)		Taken part in a public nsultation (online or offline) (1 yes, 0 no)		Posted opinions online or on social edia about a political or social issue (1 yes, 0 no)		Used hashtags or changed your profile picture to show support for a political or social issue (1 yes, 0 no)	
	b	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)
Gender (Male)	,536***	1,709***	-,033	,967	-,191***	,826***	,070	1,072	,388***	1,475***
Age (16-19 years)										
20 – 25 years	,263***	1,301***	-,131*	,877*	-,031	,969	,051	1,053	-,120*	,887*
26 – 30 years	,434***	1,543***	-,262***	,770***	,056	1,058	,084	1,088	-,289***	,749***
Age when ending full-time education (Up to 15 years)										
16-19 years	,241	1,273	,011	1,011	-,068	,934	,056	1,058	-,060	,942
20 years and older	,367**	1,444**	,035	1,035	,150	1,161	,172	1,188	,037	1,038
Still in full-time education	,369**	1,446**	,188	1,206	,114	1,121	,280*	1,323*	,137	1,147
Never been in full-time education	-,347*	,707*	-,015	,986	-,092	,912	-,080	,924	-,055	,947
Occupation status (Manual worker)										
Employee	,191*	1,210*	,168	1,183	,197	1,217	,222**	1,249**	,107	1,113
Self-employed	,408***	1,504***	,041	1,042	,172*	1,187*	,051	1,052	,000	1,000
Without a professional activity	,674***	1,962***	-,182	,833	,029	1,030	,092	1,096	-,130	,878
Occupation status RECODED (Student)										
Employed	-,173*	,841*	,047	1,048	,066	1,068	,123	1,131	,043	1,044
Non active	-,108	,898	-,103	,902	,109	1,115	,112	1,119	-,039	,962
Living area (A rural area of village)										
Small or medium-sized town	,055*	1,056*	-,008	,992	,029	1,029	,128***	1,136***	,077**	1,080**
Large town/city										
Financial situation (We have enough money for basic bills for food and clothes)										
We don't have enough money for basic bills (electricity, etc	-,002	,998	-,097	,908	,080	1,083	-,067	,935	,033	1,034
We have enough money for food, clothes and shoes but ugh for more expensive things (fridge, TV etc)	,408***	1,504***	-,002	,998	-,138	,871	,135	1,145	,102	1,107
We can afford to buy some more expensive things but xpensive as a car or new house for example	,794***	2,213***	-,013	,987	-,021	,979	,306***	1,358***	,094	1,098
We can afford to buy whatever we need for a good d of living	,760***	2,137***	,147	1,159	,123	1,131	,172*	1,188*	-,020	,980
Identify as ethnic, religious or other minority (not selected)	,052	1,053	,294***	1,341***	,034	1,034	,253***	1,288***	,336***	1,400***
Identify as migrant, refugee, asylum seeker or displaced person (not selected)	-,279**	,756**	,118	1,126	,236*	1,267*	-,041	,960	,317***	1,373***
Identify as person with a disability/disabilities (not selected)	-,240**	,786**	,039	1,040	-,071	,932	,029	1,030	,171*	1,187*
Identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (not selected)	,331***	1,393***	,260***	1,297***	,344***	1,410***	,645***	1,905***	,682***	1,979***
Constant	-2,200***	,111***	-1,660***	,190***	-1,896***	,150***	-1,886***	,152***	-1,702***	,182***
Nagelkerke R^2	0,089		0,011		0,011		0,025		0,036	

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. Reference categories in (). N = 1815.

Source: European Parliament Youth Survey (2021)

Table 6: And in your opinion, which three of the following values are most important?

	EU27	male	female	In another way / prefer not to say	16 - 19 years	20 - 25 years	26 - 30 years
The protection of human rights and democracy	56 %	52 %	60 %	61 %	53 %	55 %	58 %
Freedom of speech	48 %	49 %	47 %	25 %	51 %	47 %	48 %
Gender equality	38 %	29 %	48 %	55 %	43 %	38 %	34 %
Solidarity with weaker members of society	19 %	21 %	18 %	16 %	16 %	19 %	22 %
Solidarity between people	36 %	34 %	38 %	31 %	34 %	35 %	39 %
Solidarity between European union member states	15 %	19 %	11 %	20 %	14 %	15 %	16 %
Solidarity between the european union and poor countries around the world	16 %	18 %	14 %	14 %	16 %	17 %	15 %
The protection of minority groups	18 %	17 %	19 %	34 %	20 %	19 %	16 %
Gettting rid of the death penalty throughout the world	13 %	13 %	13 %	12 %	14 %	13 %	11 %
None of these	2 %	2 %	1 %	0 %	1 %	2 %	2 %
Don't know	2 %	2 %	2 %	1 %	2 %	2 %	2 %

Source: European Parliament Youth Survey (2021)

Table 7: Binary logistic regression models for selected models

(Q8 You said you have not voted in the last local, national or European election. What, if anything, has prevented you from doing this?)

	I don't have time (1 yes, 0 no)		I'm just not interested (1 yes, 0 no)		I don't think decision makers listen to people like me (1 yes, 0 no)		I don't understand the issues enough (1 yes, 0 no)	
	b	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)
Gender (Male)	-0,186	0,830	-,124	,884	-,119	,888	,074	1,077
Age (16-19 years)								
20 – 25 years	0,229	1,258	-,073	,930	,802***	2,230***	,569**	1,766**
26 – 30 years	0,064	1,066	,072	1,075	,847**	2,333**	,179	1,196
Age when ending full-time education (Up to 15 years)								
16-19 years	-0,437	0,646	,357	1,428	,326	1,386	-,218	,804
20 years and older	-0,259	0,771	,355	1,426	,270	1,310	-,283	,753
Still in full-time education	-0,503	0,605	-,376	,686	,336	1,400	-,359	,698
Never been in full-time education	-0,213	0,808	,365	1,441	,045	1,046	-,028	,972
Occupation status (Manual worker)								
Employee	0,359	1,432	-,039	,962	,062	1,063	-,050	,951
Self-employed	0,389	1,476	,134	1,143	,060	1,062	-,034	,966
Without a professional activity	0,000	1,000	,262	1,299	-,502	,605	-,029	,972
Occupation status RECODED (Student)								
Employed	0,136	1,146	-,037	,964	,550	1,733	,037	1,037
Non active	0,158	1,171	-,078	,925	,371	1,449	-,355	,701
Living area (A rural area of village)								
Small or medium-sized town	-0,024	0,977	-,032	,968	-,063	,939	,061	1,063
Large town/city	-0,044	0,957	-0,068	0,934	-0,120	0,887	0,121	1,129
Financial situation (We have enough money for basic bills but not for food and clothes)								
We don't have enough money for basic bills (electricity, heating etc	-0,391	0,677	,680	1,973	-,152	,859	,141	1,151
We have enough money for food, clothes and shoes but not enough for more expensive things (fridge, TV etc)	-0,398	0,671	,448	1,565	-,007	,993	,284	1,328
We can afford to buy some more expensive things but not as expensive as a car or new house for example	-0,631*	0,532*	,419	1,521	-,070	,933	,173	1,189
We can afford to buy whatever we need for a good standard of living	-0,777	0,460	,410	1,507	-,257	,774	-,228	,796
Identify as ethnic, religious or other minority (not selected)	-,089	,915	,057	1,059	-,416	,659	,010	1,010
Identify as migrant, refugee, asylum seeker or displaced person (not selected)	-,454	,376	-,423	,655	,179	1,196	-,153	,858
Identify as person with a disability/disabilities (not selected)	-,539	,370	-,196	,822	,111	1,117	,127	1,136
Identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (not selected)	,316	,251	,116	1,123	-,041	,960	-,159	,853
Constant	-1,489*	0,225*	-2,175***	,114***	-2,320***	,098***	-2,161***	,115***
Nagelkerke R^2	0,034		0,033		0,055		0,024	

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. Reference categories in (). N = 18156.

Table 7: Continued

	I don't feel confident expressing my opinions (1 yes, 0 no)		I think it would be too difficult to understand the jargon/'political speak' (1 yes, 0 no)		Nobody has ever asked me to or invited me (1 yes, 0 no)	
	b	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)
Gender (Male)	,101	1,106	-,199	,820	-,131	,877
Age (16-19 years)						
20 – 25 years	,385	1,469	,543*	1,722*	-,004	,996
26 – 30 years	-,032	,969	-,141	,868	,300	1,349
Age when ending full-time education (Up to 15 years)						
16-19 years	-,958*	,384*	-,588	,555	,022	1,022
20 years and older	-,639	,528	-,155	,856	,159	1,172
Still in full-time education	-,541	,582	-,255	,775	,183	1,201
Never been in full-time education	-,325	,722	-,478	,620	-,484	,616
Occupation status (Manual worker)						
Employee	,401	1,493	,640	1,896	,638	1,893
Self-employed	-,065	,937	,456	1,578	,510	1,666
Without a professional activity	-,350	,705	-,512	,599	,336	1,400
Occupation status RECODED (Student)						
Employed	,289	1,335	,148	1,159	-,245	,783
Non active	,294	1,342	-,755	,470	,050	1,051
Living area (A rural area of village)						
Small or medium-sized town	,070	1,073	-,021	,979	,098	1,103
Large town/city	0,141	1,151	-0,034	0,966	0,200	1,221
Financial situation (We have enough money for basic bills but not for food and clothes)						
We don't have enough money for basic bills (electricity, heating etc	-,097	,908	-,676	,509	-,346	,707
We have enough money for food, clothes and shoes but not enough for more expensive things (fridge, TV etc)	,298	1,348	-,401	,669	-,656**	,519**
We can afford to buy some more expensive things but not as expensive as a car or new house for example	-,440	,644	-1,210***	,298***	-,999***	,368***
We can afford to buy whatever we need for a good standard of living	-,841*	,431*	-1,301***	,272***	-,980**	,375**
Identify as ethnic, religious or other minority (not selected)	,726**	2,066**	,251	1,285	,726**	2,068**
Identify as migrant, refugee, asylum seeker or displaced person (not selected)	,506	1,659	,750**	2,118**	,524	1,689
Identify as person with a disability/disabilities (not selected)	-,264	,768	,569*	1,766*	,638*	1,893*
Identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (not selected)	,242	1,274	-,020	,980	,712**	2,038**
Constant	-1,795**	,166**	-1,506*	,222*	-2,597***	,075***
Nagelkerke R^2	0,082		0,146		0,085	

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. Reference categories in (). N = 18156.

Source: European Parliament Youth Survey (2021)

Table 8: Binary logistic regression models for selected models

(Q11 Below are some reasons people have given for voting in European elections. Which three of these reasons, if any, do you think are most convincing?)

	It is one's duty as a citizen (1 yes, 0 no)		It is a way to bring about real change (1 yes, 0 no)		It helps ensure the view of people in your age group are represented in politics (1 yes, 0 no)		It helps ensure the view of people from your background are represented in politics (1 yes, 0 no)	
	b	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)
Gender (Male)	,095**	1,099**	,208***	1,232***	,077	1,080	-,003	,997
Age (16-19 years)								
20 – 25 years	,140**	1,151**	-,196***	,822***	-,036	,965	-,092	,912
26 – 30 years	,316***	1,372***	-,363***	,696***	-,318***	,727***	-,126	,881
Age when ending full-time education (Up to 15 years)								
16-19 years	,376**	1,456**	-,043	,958	,062	1,064	-,081	,922
20 years and older	,557***	1,746***	-,050	,951	,124	1,132	,041	1,042
Still in full-time education	,529***	1,697**	-,016	,984	,105	1,111	,083	1,087
Never been in full-time education	,084	1,088	-,188	,828	,066	1,069	-,099	,906
Occupation status (Manual worker)								
Employee	,047	1,048	-,063	,939	,100	1,106	-,113	,893
Self-employed	,128	1,136	-,072	,930	-,010	,990	-,043	,958
Without a professional activity	,266**	1,304**	-,044	,957	-,033	,968	-,020	,980
Occupation status RECODED (Student)								
Employed	-,136	,873	-,054	,947	-,065	,937	-,178	,837
Non active	-,174	,840	,084	1,087	,115	1,122	-,178	,837
Living area (A rural area or village)								
Small or medium-sized town	,050*	1,051*	-,002	,998	,010	1,010	,032	1,032
Large town/city	0,104	1,109	-0,005	0,995	0,016	1,016	0,062	1,064
Financial situation (We have enough money for basic bills but not for food and clothes)								
We don't have enough money for basic bills (electricity, heating etc	,045	1,046	,024	1,024	,038	1,038	-,033	,968
We have enough money for food, clothes and shoes but not enough for more expensive things (fridge, TV etc)	,302***	1,353***	,197**	1,218**	,009	1,009	-,029	,972
We can afford to buy some more expensive things but not as expensive as a car or new house for example	,550***	1,734***	,255***	1,291***	-,022	,978	,031	1,032
We can afford to buy whatever we need for a good standard of living	,572***	1,771***	,178*	1,195*	-,019	,981	-,010	,990
Identify as ethnic, religious or other minority (not selected)	-,226***	,797***	,029	1,029	,108	1,114	,227***	1,255***
Identify as migrant, refugee, asylum seeker or displaced person (not selected)	-,396***	,673***	,086	1,090	,162	1,176	,352***	1,422***
Identify as person with a disability/disabilities (not selected)	-,195*	,822*	-,171*	,843*	,254**	1,290**	,095	1,099
Identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (not selected)	-,269***	,764***	,015	1,015	,281***	1,324***	,228***	1,256***
Constant	-1,989***	,137***	-1,024***	,359***	-1,332***	,264***	-1,216***	,297***
Nagelkerke R^2	0,039		0,013		0,011		0,008	

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. Reference categories in (). N = 18156.

Table 8: Continued

	It is a way of taking responsibility for the future (1 yes, 0 no)		It is an important way of making your voice heard (1 yes, 0 no)		It is a way of showing your support for the EU (1 yes, 0 no)		It helps prevent groups you disagree with gaining too much power (1 yes, 0 no)	
	b	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)	*b*	exp(*b*)
Gender (Male)	,239***	1,269***	,257***	1,293***	-,331***	,718***	,140***	1,150***
Age (16-19 years)								
20 – 25 years	,040	1,041	,039	1,040	-,039	,961	,075	1,078
26 – 30 years	-,059	,943	,104	1,110	-,127	,881	,051	1,052
Age when ending full-time education (Up to 15 years)								
16-19 years	,085	1,088	,180	1,197	,031	1,031	,195	1,216
20 years and older	,121	1,129	,330*	1,390*	,064	1,067	,262	1,300
Still in full-time education	,179	1,196	,260	1,296	,194	1,214	,354*	1,425*
Never been in full-time education	-,075	,928	-,110	,896	,150	1,162	,191	1,210
Occupation status (Manual worker)								
Employee	-,042	,959	,008	1,008	,248*	1,282*	,222**	1,249**
Self-employed	,108	1,114	,020	1,020	,212*	1,237*	,206**	1,229**
Without a professional activity	,059	1,061	,308***	1,361***	,055	1,057	,292***	1,339***
Occupation status RECODED (Student)								
Employed	,032	1,033	-,235**	,790**	-,028	,973	-,026	,975
Non active	,004	1,004	-,158	,854	-,026	,974	-,337*	,714*
Living area (A rural area or village)								
Small or medium-sized town	,049	1,051	,057*	1,058*	,035	1,035	-,037	,964
Large town/city	0,098	1,103	0,118	1,125	0,061	1,063	-0,081	0,923
Financial situation (We have enough money for basic bills but not for food and clothes)								
We don't have enough money for basic bills (electricity, heating etc	,012	1,012	,165	1,179	-,016	,984	-,062	,939
We have enough money for food, clothes and shoes but not enough for more expensive things (fridge, TV etc)	,154*	1,167*	,134	1,144	-,007	,993	,096	1,100
We can afford to buy some more expensive things but not as expensive as a car or new house for example	,393***	1,481***	,344***	1,411***	-,077	,925	,169*	1,185*
We can afford to buy whatever we need for a good standard of living	,442***	1,555***	,407***	1,502***	,087	1,091	,287***	1,333***
Identify as ethnic, religious or other minority (not selected)	,048	1,049	,009	1,009	,151*	1,163*	,117	1,124
Identify as migrant, refugee, asylum seeker or displaced person (not selected)	,008	1,008	-,347***	,707***	,333**	1,395**	-,005	,995
Identify as person with a disability/disabilities (not selected)	-,275***	,760***	-,193*	,825*	-,056	,945	,159*	1,172*
Identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (not selected)	-,020	,980	,065	1,067	,071	1,074	,131*	1,140*
Constant	-1,355***	,258***	-1,629***	,196***	-1,750***	,174***	-1,620***	,198***
Nagelkerke R^2	0,019		0,026		0,014		0,010	

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. Reference categories in (). N = 18156.

Source: European Parliament Youth Survey (2021)

This study, commissioned by the Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the AFCO Committee, examines young people's participation in democratic processes, with a special focus on the European elections. The study inspects the meaning of political participation for contemporary democracies and the dilemmas behind young people's participation and representation. It also assesses, from a youth perspective, the ongoing legislative proposals on European elections and the electoral participation of EU mobile citizens as well as the Citizens' Proposals adopted in the plenary of the Conference on the Future of Europe in May 2022.

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