

# **YOUNG PEOPLE AND DEMOCRATIC LIFE IN EUROPE**

**WHAT NEXT AFTER THE 2014  
EUROPEAN ELECTIONS?**

**#YOUTHUP**



**YOUNG PEOPLE AND DEMOCRATIC LIFE IN EUROPE:  
WHAT NEXT AFTER THE 2014 EUROPEAN ELECTIONS?**

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# YOUNG PEOPLE AND DEMOCRATIC LIFE IN EUROPE



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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This study provides an overview of the themes and trends around the topic of young people's relationship with democratic life in Europe. It follows up a first study published by the League of Young Voters in 2014, which looked into the reasons why young people abstained from voting in large numbers in elections to the European Parliament. This second study looks at youth political participation in a broader sense than just voting, while also including the perspectives of academics, policy makers, and practitioners.

The study looks in particular at the situation in six broadly representative countries, opting for “the most different” model of case selection in order to grasp the entire scope of barriers and triggers of youth political participation across Europe. Based on this principle, Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom were selected. The in-depth analysis of what influences youth participation in these selected countries comes from a systemic as well as individual's point of view. There is an additional examination of what stakeholders perceive as relevant to youth political participation, for instance in terms of education, socio-economic conditions, media environment, and institutional barriers.

The research first looks into common misconceptions in terms of young people's so-called “disengaged” relationship with politics, highlighting the need to look beyond elections and electoral turnout when referring to levels of youth participation. It confirms what political scientists have acknowledged for more than a decade: yes, the problem of youth political participation exists, but this is strictly related to institutional politics.

The study makes clear that there is a strong interest among young people in the politics of organising, mobilising and contesting power from the outside. The emergence of individualised, immediate, and non-representative styles of politics, associated with protests, petitions and social movements present challenges to traditional politics — but also many opportunities. The 15M protests in Madrid, movements for marriage equality in Ireland, the student protests in Croatia, the tuition fee protests in the UK, and many others,

suggest that we are in fact not living in an age of political apathy, and that young citizens are not withdrawing into the private sphere. The study examines the emergence of new forms of political activism, and the diversification in agencies, repertoires and targets of this new political action.

Internet and social media and the opportunities they provide in terms of bridging the gap between youth and politics are key aspects of the study. As the political identity and attitudes of young people becomes less shaped by social ties to family, neighbourhood, school and work, and more by the manner in which they participate in social networks that they co-create, the study observes a phenomenon of “networked individualism”, in which the internet, particularly social media, takes a central role. These young networked citizens are more likely to participate in non-hierarchical networks, be project-oriented, and conduct their social relations through social media.

However, the study reiterates that the Internet and social media are not necessarily a ‘game changer’ in terms of improving youth political participation. The Internet and technological innovations have very quickly become ‘politics as usual’, despite their initial potential to strengthen democracy. Online tools that were seen as liberating have quickly become the instruments of for-profit corporations, and as such fail to contribute to the empowerment of excluded social groups. The Internet therefore should not be seen as a ‘magic bullet’. In fact, it also presents challenges to the safety of online activists across the globe. Improving participation through the Internet and social media, therefore, might only be successful when coupled with the strengthening of existing democratic structures, such as youth civil society organisations. With more support, these organisations could use digital tools to reach out to more and to more marginalised groups of young people. With adequate training, youth organisations can be an instrument to effectively combat the political inequality and marginalisation that young people face.

The fundamental question of why we should be concerned about political participation of young people is also asked. The study outlines why youth participation is vital for the future of democracy and the risks and long-term consequences of failing to address the growing alienation of young people from institutions of representative politics. If the interpretation of democracy is rule by the people, then the question of who participates in political decisions becomes the nature of democracy itself. In a situation where few take part or certain groups, such as young people, are excluded from decisions, there is little democracy, and levels of frustration and distrust increase. Regardless of debates on the most appropriate model of democracy, political participation is a necessary precondition for the existence of a democratic polity. It is also a guiding principle of the Universal

Declaration on Human Rights, and is promoted by numerous international agreements. As the most compelling principle of legitimacy and the basis of political order, political participation offers the consent of the governed. From this perspective, by not suitably addressing the underrepresentation of youth and their issues in politics, and by failing to adapt to the changing political imaginary of young people, political institutions risk becoming increasingly anachronistic and illegitimate, and put at risk the safety, the future, and the health of our democracies.

## **TOWARDS SOLUTIONS ON HOW TO YOUTH UP POLITICS**

The increasing socio-economic alienation of young people caused by the economic crisis, changing economic models, and accompanying austerity measures that hit services essential to young people, leaving them with a heavy burden. Young people are trapped in a vicious circle in which it is more and more difficult for them to participate, as they face more social and economic barriers and are more and more disengaged from the political system. When 72% of 16/18-24 year-olds do not vote but more than 50% of 65+ year olds do<sup>1</sup>, young people's interests are less and less a priority for political institutions. Young people are consequently less represented in the political arena, both from a descriptive and a substantial perspective, leading to lower levels of trust in the system and institutions of representative democracy, and high levels of political inequality. This is a reality captured by a growing number of academics and practitioners.

The study takes a different approach however, in that it is solutions-focused. In his research, the author collected all recommendations on how to address youth participation that were found in the literature, as well ideas from interviews with policy makers and other stakeholders. The full list of these recommendations can be found in the last pages of the report.

The European Youth Forum and League of Young Voters have identified a number of key recommendations that they see as requiring urgent political action given their potential impact.

It is important to first highlight the direct link between high levels of youth participation and wider discussions about democracy and good governance. Secondly, as the research points out, political participation is a multi-dimensional concept. Addressing issues in relation to the political participation of young people therefore requires not only strong

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<sup>1</sup> See European Parliament Election Study 2014, as referenced in full study

political commitment, but also a comprehensive and multi-faceted strategy that creates consensus among stakeholders. At the same time, solutions must not be tokenistic and paternalistic, but take on a deep and broad understanding of the barriers that young people face and the attitudes and means of political expression they use. Horizontal, co-creation and bottom-up — these are terms that need to be part of any approach. Instead of being *à la carte*, the recommendations below should hence be treated as key priority areas that all need attention. They are interconnected, and thus can bring significant change only when used meticulously and inclusively in a plan carefully designed to tackle different problematic areas together, both at the individual and structural level. This plan should also provide clear guidelines about the role of each stakeholder in addressing this problem.

## **1. POLITICAL LITERACY TAUGHT IN CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION CURRICULA IN SCHOOLS**

According to numerous polls conducted on young people, as well as experts, policy makers and politicians, most perceive the lack of political knowledge, competence and literacy as the most important barrier to the full and informed political participation of youth. Also, in the research, many interviewed stakeholders expressed concern that, when implemented, citizenship education curricula was ill-designed and taught in educational environments that neither promoted a democratic culture, nor the willingness to connect youth with political issues in a suitable environment. The research therefore identifies the need to extend citizenship education beyond school curricula to provide students with practical opportunities to apply citizenship education in their school and community activities. In other words, a problem-based learning approach should be adopted.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Foster an on-going and Europe-wide dialogue on a common definition of citizenship education** amongst all actors, including political institutions from the local to the European level, both formal and non-formal education providers, and youth organisations, aimed at finding and defining a holistic approach to citizenship education that provides young people with the skills and competences they need to be confident and efficacious in democratic processes. These would include political skills, embracing new and different forms of political activism, and financial, digital, and media literacy. Such discussions should also lead to concrete implementation measures.

- **Encourage partnerships between formal and non-formal education providers**, for instance by providing financial incentives or creating windows in curricula for schools to partner with youth organisations and youth workers to run joint citizenship education programmes. Such programme should focus on topical issues, such as human rights, immigration, the environment, or intergenerational solidarity, and should aim at developing young people's critical thinking and confidence to express ideas on these topics.
- **Provide resources for training programmes for teachers, school heads 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 educational environments is the lack of appropriate professional development of citizenship educators. The establishment of stable financing of such programmes should become a priority for policy-makers, as should the development of specific training programmes or other support measures to help school heads foster and contribute to democratic school cultures, thus establishing an effective environment for the teaching and learning of citizenship studies.
- The **European institutions, particularly the European Commission**, should provide the space for a pan-European discussion on defining citizenship education, and should encourage member states, education providers, and other stakeholders, to implement the measures put forward above. At European Union level in particular, Article 165 (2) of the Lisbon Treaty stipulates that EU Action should be aimed at encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe. Yet very little has been done so far to implement this article beyond what already exists within the Erasmus+ programme. The **European Commission** could address these by, for instance, **creating an expert group to further develop the knowledge on citizenship education, or enhance exchanges of best practices through an online observatory.** Furthermore, at European level, particular attention should be paid to how participation in European and global democratic processes are reflected in the citizenship education as a whole.

## **2. A CROSS-SECTORAL APPROACH TO PARTICIPATORY POLICY MAKING**

As the research confirms, an important trigger of young people's distrust of politics is related to low level of substantive youth representation, where young people do not feel their interests are represented in decision-making processes. There are a number of examples of political institutions that provide a space for dialogue with young people and youth organisations on youth policies, ranging from the EU's Structured Dialogue on youth, the co-management system of the Council of Europe, to participatory budgeting schemes, youth juries and youth parliaments. Equal opportunity to participate in public deliberation and decision-making improves institutions' understanding of young people, the legitimacy of political decisions, and addresses problems endogenous to the vote-centred democratic process. They offer the opportunity of greater accountability, as well as providing a youth perspective. Such participatory policy making mechanisms should therefore be improved, promoted as well as extended to other political areas, discussions and decisions that are high on the agenda and have an important impact on young people's lives.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Support more research on youth political participation**, in order to raise awareness about the risks and opportunities afforded by young people's changing political imaginary as well as evolving citizenship norms, as described in the research. Public authorities and regulatory bodies at various levels should support continuous and systematic data collection and research on youth political involvement. Data collection should track youth participation, representation and inclusion, youth transition from school to the world of work, the impact of policies on various youth groups, and youth involvement in the political process.
- **Promote mechanisms of participatory policy-making and co-decision by young people in key decisions and across policy fields.** Existing mechanisms, such as the Council of Europe's co-management system and the EU's Structured Dialogue on youth, should be analysed in order to be implemented elsewhere and at different levels, as well as to be both promoted and improved. Such mechanisms should be designed not as parallel policy making processes, but feed into actual decision-making, where a feedback loop is established so that young people that participate to the processes can see what is the follow-up to their contribution. Participatory Budgeting mechanisms have proven to be particularly successful in engaging young people in

policy making. They allow ordinary citizens to exercise decision-making power as part of a public consultation around the allocation of public funds. Participatory budgeting is essentially a local-level concept of political deliberation and allows targeting specific groups (e.g. youth).

- **Support the reform of youth councils to ensure adequate funding and formal input in municipal policy making.** There is a critical need for local and national authorities, where appropriate, to establish functioning local youth councils. Public authorities must provide support, and refrain from excessively politicising them (in a partisan manner where young people are seen as instruments of political parties). In some cases (e.g. Spain), severe budget cuts or even funding termination are threatening such youth councils. To ensure clarity, clear agreements and a solid normative framework of cooperation (consultation and co-management), including timelines and attendance and budget requirements, should be established to prevent practices of non- or mal-functioning local youth councils. Also, the influence of local politics on the composition of local youth councils should be regulated.

In order to create ownership of political decisions and ensure that young people feel their participation in policy making has a direct impact on their lives, it is important that such measures are established at local level. **Local and regional authorities** should therefore consider the recommendations above.

They should envisage **the creation of participatory policy making mechanisms and structures for important decisions made in their regions**. It should be noted that these mechanisms, which may be conceived as a combination of online and offline methods, should include grassroots organisations and marginalised youth, and that the content of the dialogues should be co-determined by youth and include clear follow-ups and consequences. They should not be simple consultations, but offer genuine co-decision power to young people.

### **3. ACCESS TO AND ADEQUATE INFORMATION ABOUT ELECTORAL PROCESSES**

Even though levels of voter participation have continued to reach their lowest points, voting is still one of the most extensively exercised modes of political participation, particularly in terms of institutional politics. It is the most widespread and regularised political activity that exists and has the most important overall influence on governmental

performance, especially as it seen as giving legitimacy to political representatives. In this regard, improving young people's access to elections should remain a priority. The research identifies a number of measures that, if implemented, could have a positive, direct and quick impact on levels of youth participation and would facilitate their engagement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Targeted voter information and education campaigns.** Voter educational programmes are critical in boosting political participation. Voters should be informed of electoral processes explaining why, when and how to participate through a single campaign that combines online and offline information and uses a variety of communication channels (e.g. Voting Advice Applications, posters, leaflets, newspapers, TV, institutional and media websites and social media). Electoral Management Bodies (EMB) or appropriate public authorities should prepare impartial literature that targets young or first-time voters, ethnic minorities and other typically marginalised groups. Youth civil society representatives and experts for youth should be included in all phases of the voter information and education campaign in order to guarantee the presence of different youth perspectives in the design, evaluation, and validation of such activities.
- **Lower the voting at 16 in all elections.** The right to vote is a fundamental democratic right, and a key element to participating in modern democracy. Denying this right to citizens requires exceptional justification. 16-year-olds, more than ever before, possess the maturity and knowledge to make important decisions, as they already do regarding their education, living situation and career. After Austria lowered the voting age to 16 in 2007, research has consistently shown that under-18s are as willing and able to participate as their older peers. They follow the same voting patterns and are not excessively influenced by extremist parties or politicians. Paired with effective citizenship education in schools, a lower voting age makes it much easier to instil a habit of voting in young people while they still live at home, boosting lifelong participation rates. The recent Scottish independence referendum, for example, serves as evidence that 16 year-olds are interested in politics and engaged in political conversations, especially if they see the impact of their vote.
- **Improve transparency and consider limitations in the financing of political parties and campaigns.** Imposing limitations on party and candidate spending has the potential of allowing younger candidates easier entry into the electoral arena and can lessen the obstacles facing new political actors that enter the world of institutional

politics. Enforcing transparency in donations or provisions that limit and ban donations from private interests and public actors can also reduce the gap between youth and established political actors by limiting the influence of private vested interests on decision-making.

Demographic changes in Europe have seen the number of 15-24 year olds falling rapidly while the 65-90 demographic quickly expands. The interests of younger citizens remain underrepresented in our political systems. **National Governments** that have the competence of setting voting ages in elections at all levels should consider **lowering their voting age to 16 as well as the above measures** in order to support a readjustment of the political imbalance young people face. Young people have shown to remain engaged in voting processes where a clear choice was presented to them — one that would have a clear impact on their lives. It is therefore not the act of voting that prevents their participation, but rather their lack of trust, representation and inclusion in structures of representative democracy.

## **4. REPRESENTATION AND INCLUSION IN DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES**

Several studies have identified a decrease in party membership among youth. Particularly in established Western democracies, party membership among youth has been in a continuous decline, which severely hinders political parties' recruitment and mobilisation functions, and has a seriously negative effect on the potential of youth in political representation. It is vital to ensure the representation of young people and their interests in democratic structures, especially political parties.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Ensure the presence of youth in key political bodies.** Quotas are a 'fast-track' mechanism to improving the positions of disadvantaged groups in the political process, and have a visible track record in promoting representation of women, ethnic minorities and other minority groups. There are three general types of quotas in politics that tackle different aspects of political exclusion and are described in the study. Voluntary party quotas are a non-legislated mechanism promoting participation and representation of underrepresented groups within political organisations. When taking the form of reserved seat quotas, this mechanism facilitates youth participation in the key

executive organs of political organisations (e.g. a reserved seat on the board of a political party for a representative of the youth wing, or the presence of youth in candidate selection panels). Whichever the method used, it is important to analyse, evaluate and raise awareness within the party of the situation with regard to the representation of specific groups, including youth, in political bodies and in electoral campaigns' lists.

- **Prepare action plans on how to integrate youth in party life.** Successful campaigning is but a single step towards sustained youth participation in political proceedings. Issue campaigns also generate significant expectations. The Scottish National Party is an example of successful attraction of the youth vote. The unprecedented level of youth engagement and membership caught the party by surprise, and without a clear plan of how to integrate this increased youth influence into its party's structures. The preparation of action plans for how to facilitate higher levels of youth political participation (and maintain them) would make political parties, which are generally very rigid organisations, more equipped to handle such situations. Action plans may also serve as a clear signal to their youth wing members and younger members — as well as external supporters and sympathisers — that the organisation takes youth seriously. Such plans could address the needs of intersectional demographic groups within youth party membership (e.g. young women or young members of excluded ethnic or religious communities).
- **Political parties should improve young people's inclusion and representation in their own structures and prepare action plans in this regard.** According to the research, at least part of the blame for recorded lower levels of youth participation in institutional politics — if not all of it — should be placed on political structures and mass membership organisations that stopped investing in mobilisation and grass-roots activities. As the building blocks of democracy, a large effort is needed by the political parties to bring marginalised youth back into the mainstream political process.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The study provides an in-depth understanding of the barriers that young people face, as well as the triggers of participation. What it highlights is the need for a comprehensive and consensual approach to addressing young people's changing relationship with democratic life in Europe — one that considers not just the individual as the main cause of non-participation, but also the influence of the system, the culture and the dominant ideas in a society. The measures outlined above aim at addressing these misperceptions of reasons for young people's growing exclusion from institutional politics. This will require consensus and partnerships between public bodies and civil society, especially youth organisations, at all levels.

What is certain is that this is needed in order to ensure that we safeguard the future and improve the quality of democracy in Europe. We should all be concerned, and all stakeholders who care about democracy need to engage with the issue and consider their role in this process. **Politics needs to change. It needs to youth up!**



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## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EP</b>	European Parliament
<b>EVS</b>	European Values Study
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>International IDEA</b>	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>OSCE</b>	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
<b>OSCE ODIHR</b>	OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
<b>US</b>	United States of America
<b>WVS</b>	World Values Survey
<b>ACE project</b>	Administration and Cost of Elections Project
<b>EMB</b>	Electoral Management Body
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>IEA</b>	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
<b>ICCS</b>	International Civic and Citizenship Education Study
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom

# IS THERE A PROBLEM WITH THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN EUROPE?

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*There never was a golden age of political participation.*

- Andrew Mycock, University of Huddersfield, 24 February 2015.

To determine first whether there is a problem with the political participation of youth in Europe, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of political participation. Many previous studies have addressed this question,<sup>1</sup> but the generally undisputed definition of political participation concerns the participation of individuals in the processes of formulation, enactment, and implementation of public policies.<sup>2</sup> While elections are the main formal means by which people are given the opportunity to influence the political process, there is a wide repertoire of other actions at the disposal of politically engaged individuals. The concept of political participation has broadened over time from activities that focus purely on elections and election campaigns<sup>3</sup> to activities that take place beyond the ballot box.<sup>4</sup> These include the following: citizen-initiated contact with politicians outside the election process and participation through interest groups,<sup>5</sup> unconventional types of participation, such as petitions, demonstrations, boycotts, street blockades and so forth;<sup>6</sup> activities ranging from volunteering in local governmental bodies to jury duty.<sup>7</sup> Some even consider participation in non-governmental decision-making processes as a form of political participation,<sup>8</sup> as such activities might affect participation in the political sphere.<sup>9</sup> The broader repertoire of political actions, as well as decades of research, have also revised the classical one-dimensional view of political participation,<sup>10</sup> which included categories ranging from *apathetic* to *gladiators*,<sup>2</sup> to a multi-dimensional concept, as it has become clear that certain individuals were very active in some modes of political participation, but were passive in others.<sup>11</sup> This was particularly evident in comparing individuals who were active in conventional (for some also *traditional* or *institutional*) and unconventional (also *untraditional* or *non-institutional*) modes of political participation.<sup>12</sup>

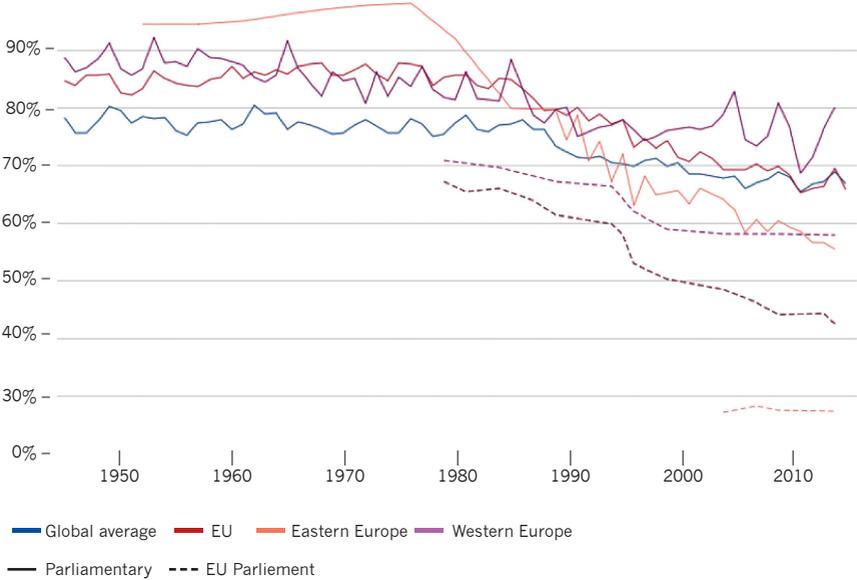
Now that we have provided a definition of political participation, which we will return to later in this paper, we assert that political participation is at the heart of every

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<sup>2</sup> In his seminal work on political participation, Milbrath (1965) framed a linear concept of politically active individuals from non-active *apathetics* to *gladiators* who engaged in politics to the highest possible degree. The problem with this typology of political participants is that it does not allow the same individual to be a gladiator in one form of political participation and an apathetic in another.

working democracy. Political participation involves citizens who are actively engaged in the formulation, passage and implementation of public policies.<sup>13</sup> Thus, high participation rates are vital for the health of democracies regardless of ideological viewpoints.<sup>14</sup> This is also a reason that many are concerned about the downward trend in voter turnout across the democratic world, which has been evident since the Second World War.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the gradual decrease in the levels of conventional political participation is undeniable<sup>16</sup>. However, since the mid mid-1980s, the gradual drop in a few percentage points per decade has accelerated dramatically, which has presented a major challenge to democracies across the world.<sup>17</sup> Official statistics that are available for most of the world's democracies support these observations, and they are particularly valid in the case of European countries (see Figure 1). Regardless of the communist or non-communist legacies, official statistics have indicated that the decline has been particularly evident in the post-1990s period. Compared with Western European countries, the countries of the former communist block still clearly perform worse, with an average turnout in national elections of less than 60 per cent, and with factors affecting turnout that are different to more established democracies.<sup>18</sup>

Figure 1. Voter turnout in parliamentary and EU parliamentary elections for the EU, Eastern European and Western European countries compared to the global average.



Source: IDEA (2015)

Even though exact cross-national comparisons tend to be limited due to differences in institutional contexts and survey instruments,<sup>19</sup> they generally reveal that national elections are the most frequent expression of democracy and they rarely engage less than a majority of the adult citizen population.<sup>20</sup> The turnout statistics for the case studies selected for this paper<sup>3</sup> confirm this observation: all countries except Poland consistently report turnout rates between 55 and 75 per cent; the EU average is 65 to 70 per cent (see Appendix 1). Despite significant differences in the voter turnout between states, where in some cases more than a half of adult citizens have abstained from the most important political decision in the country, these figures are continuously higher than those recorded for subnational (local, regional, state) or supranational elections (i.e., elections to the European parliament).<sup>21</sup>

The European parliament (EP) elections are a clear indication of this trend: the average turnout in this race usually fails to match that of the national level elections in virtually all member states. As Reif and Schmitt<sup>22</sup> argue in their seminal study, which a number of subsequent studies confirm,<sup>23</sup> elections to the EP are mere additional national second-order elections, as they are determined by domestic cleavages rather than by EU political differences. This draws attention to the comparison between EP elections and subnational ones: both are secondary to the main national election. Figure 1 illustrates the poor voter turnout levels in Eastern European member states, which lag behind their Western counterparts by more than 30 percentage points and, in effect, make a mockery of the democratic process in the EU, which nevertheless is the only mechanism that directly enables citizens to exercise control over their representatives in the European Community. Despite displaying considerably lower levels of turnout than in their national elections, Western European countries manage to maintain a voter turnout of around 60 per cent at EP elections. The countries we selected for a detailed analysis (see Appendix 2) reveal a much more complex picture that this EU-15/EU-28 divide: the United Kingdom (UK) proves to be a Western democracy with a notoriously low turnout in EP elections (approx. 35 per cent); it is on par with Estonia and performs significantly worse than Spain, which has a turnout of approximately 45 per cent. The worst performing countries that we selected are undoubtedly Poland and Croatia, which are showcase examples of the miserable turnout rates in more or less the entire post-communist part of the EU. In these states, citizens seemingly have gradually withdrawn from the electoral process after the instauration of democracy;<sup>24</sup> they continue to struggle to find their way back to the ballot box.

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<sup>3</sup> In this study we opted for „the most different“ model of case selection in order to grasp the entire scope of barriers and triggers of youth political participation across Europe. Based on this criterion, Croatia, Poland, Georgia, Spain, Estonia and United Kingdom were selected.

## **Youth and declining turnout**

However, the official turnout statistics for the voting population<sup>4</sup> fail to tell the entire story. As the previous statistics indicate, absenteeism does not uniformly affect all societies. It also does not equally affect all sub-groups of the population. In addition to the usual explanations of education and gender, age has proven to be one of the strongest predictors of participation.<sup>25</sup> Hence, age can be used to indicate whether a person will vote or not. Indeed, the turnout data on voters in both the EP and national elections reveal huge differences according to age group.

The data found by the European Parliament Election Study 2014<sup>26</sup> portray a shocking landscape of voter absenteeism across Europe, particularly among the youngest cohorts of eligible voters (see Table 1). The EU28 level of absenteeism was higher than 70 per cent for the 16/18-24 age group, and only fractionally below 70 per cent for the 25-29 age group. This is a staggering disparity compared with the 47.9 per cent turnout of voters aged 65 and older, and it indicates the widespread absence of youth from EU institutional politics.

The post-communist member states are again frontrunners in these statistics. Approximately 85 per cent of 18-24 year olds and 80 per cent of 25-29 year olds opted to abstain in 2014. Selected Western European democracies reflected a similar negative trend: in addition to Estonia, Great Britain<sup>5</sup> revealed a gap of more than 40 per cent between the most (65 years and older) and the least (18-24 year olds) participatory group of citizens. Just above 12 per cent of Estonian and 19 per cent of British 18-24 year olds went to the polls. Considerably more than half of their grandparents and their peers exercised this political right. With the exceptions of Croatia and Poland, which have smaller gaps in voter turnout between different age groups, in the EU, the gap in turnout between youth and other age groups has been rapidly increasing.

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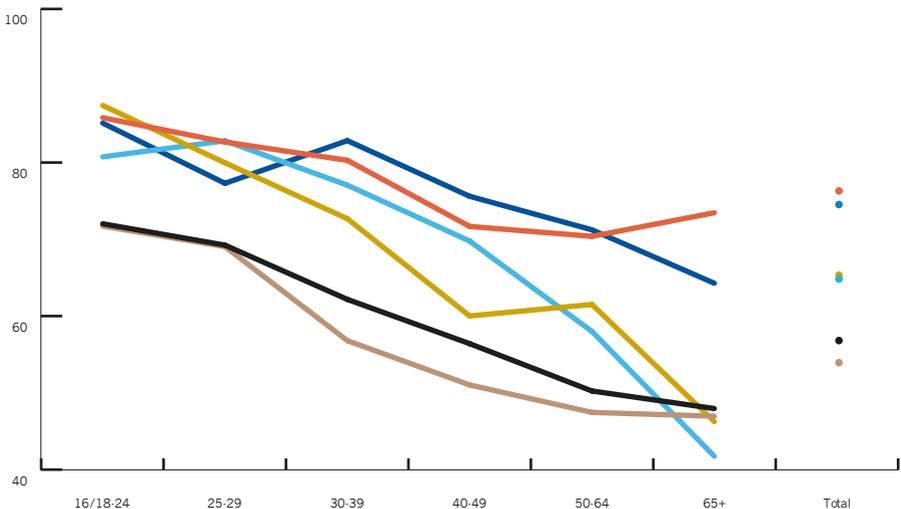
<sup>4</sup> Total vote divided by the number of registered voters.

<sup>5</sup> In the case of the European Parliament Election Study 2014, we provide calculations for Great Britain and not the United Kingdom.

Table 1. Voter absenteeism in EU parliamentary elections for Spain, Croatia, Estonia, United Kingdom, Poland and EU average across different age groups. (Did you yourself vote in the recent European Parliament elections? 'Did not vote'.)

Age group	EU 28	Spain	Poland	Estonia	Great Britain	Croatia
16/18-24	72,1%	71,8%	85,9%	87,5%	80,8%	85,2%
25-29	69,3%	69,1%	82,7%	80,0%	82,9%	77,3%
30-39	62,2%	56,8%	80,3%	72,7%	77,1%	82,9%
40-49	56,4%	51,0%	71,6%	60,0%	69,8%	75,6%
50-64	50,2%	47,4%	70,3%	61,5%	58,0%	71,2%
65+	47,9%	46,9%	73,4%	46,2%	41,7%	64,2%
Total	56,9%	54,0%	76,1%	65,0%	64,7%	74,5%

Source: Schmitt et al. (2015)



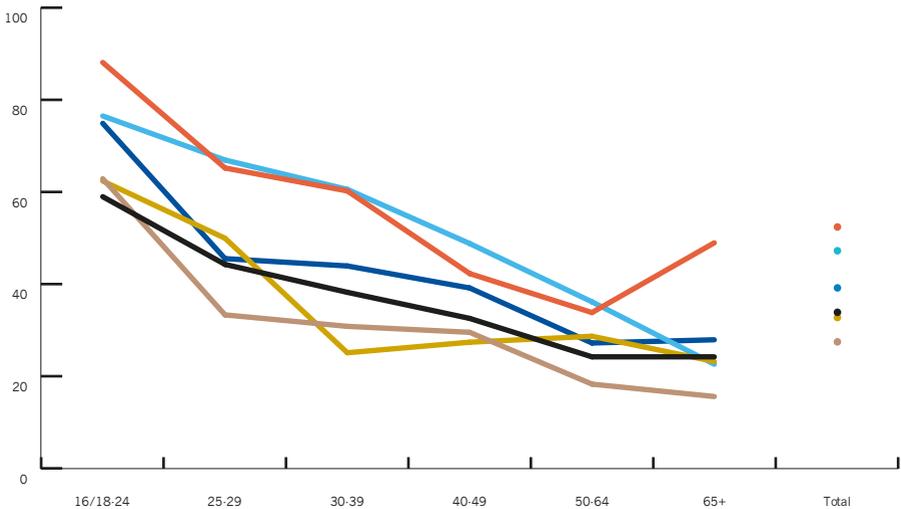
The problem is worsened in the voter turnout in elections to the primary political arena in a country — national elections. The level of youth absenteeism remains surprisingly high, and the gap between youth and other age groups changes marginally. Youth prove to be worryingly absent from national elections: in the EU 28 area, almost 60 per cent of eligible voters between 16/18 and 24 opted not to vote in the last election, and Poland topped the ranks at 88 per cent (see Table 2). The performances of Great Britain and Croatia were similarly alarming, and although Spain and Estonia ranked the best, they still demonstrated youth absenteeism well above the 60 per cent mark. 25-29 year olds performed better; although this age group still failed to reach the levels of other age groups. The

selected cases revealed an interesting variety of considerable gaps in participation across different age groups both within youth age groups as well as between youth and other age groups. Regardless of these peculiarities, which may be caused by different effects (e.g., period effect, cohort effect, or age group effect), youth generally behave differently when it comes to voting.

Table 2. Voter absenteeism in national parliamentary elections in Spain, Croatia, Estonia, the United Kingdom, Poland and EU average across different age groups. (Did you yourself vote in the [NATIONAL ELECTIONS]? 'Did not vote'.)

Age group	EU 28	Spain	Poland	Estonia	Great Britain	Croatia
16/18-24	59,1%	63,0%	88,2%	62,5%	76,6%	75,0%
25-29	44,3%	33,3%	65,2%	50,0%	67,0%	45,5%
30-39	38,2%	30,8%	60,2%	25,0%	60,6%	43,9%
40-49	32,5%	29,5%	42,2%	27,3%	48,8%	39,1%
50-64	24,1%	18,2%	33,7%	28,6%	36,1%	27,1%
65+	24,1%	15,5%	48,9%	23,1%	22,5%	27,8%
Total	33,6%	27,5%	52,4%	32,8%	47,0%	39,2%

Source: Schmitt et al. (2015)



Several studies<sup>27</sup> show corroborative results that validate the widely accepted argument that the gap between young and older voters has widened considerably across the democratic world.<sup>28</sup> The fact that youth are increasingly detached from traditional politics and structures was emphasised when individuals aged between 15 and 30 were asked whether they saw themselves standing as a candidate in a political election in the future. The results, which revealed intentions to make use of the passive voting right, replicated the intention-to-vote scenario. Less than 20 per cent of young people from the EU 28 area believed that it was probable (14.5 per cent) or certain (5.1 per cent) that they would stand as a candidate in an election sometime in the future (see Table 3). The share of youth that responded positively was more or less the same across different countries at between 15 and 20 per cent. The other side of the coin is even more alarming, as the share of individuals that were certain they would never stand as a candidate ranged between 40 and 60 per cent (the EU28 average was 50 per cent), which effectively *a priori* reduced the pool of potential future political representatives by half.

Table 3. Would you consider standing as a candidate in a political election at some point in your life?

Country/Area	Yes, certainly	Yes, probably	No, probably not	No, certainly not
<b>EU 28</b>	5,1%	14,5%	30,4%	50,0%
<b>United Kingdom</b>	5,9%	16,7%	38,1%	39,3%
<b>Spain</b>	4,3%	12,9%	27,4%	55,4%
<b>Estonia</b>	3,8%	11,2%	40,2%	44,8%
<b>Poland</b>	5,9%	15,9%	35,4%	42,8%
<b>Croatia</b>	4,5%	11,6%	24,7%	59,2%

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 375 (2014)

Even though levels of voter participation have continued to reach their lowest points, voting is still one of the most extensively exercised modes of political participation, particularly in terms of conventional modes. It is the most widespread and regularised political activity that exists and has the most important overall influence on governmental performance.<sup>29</sup> Other modes of conventional political participation have revealed the same patterns and significantly lower overall levels of participation, such as in campaign activities, contacting officials, politically active groups and so forth.<sup>30</sup>

## *The tribal loyalty of older people has broken down.*

- Philippa Broom, The Conservative Party, 9 April 2015

Diminishing conventional political participation, hand in hand with declining voter participation,<sup>31</sup> resonates further in the decline in party membership that is clear across European democracies<sup>32</sup> and has resulted in the consequent dismantling of ‘tribal loyalty’ referred to by the Conservative Party Executive cited above, Philippa Broom. Several studies have identified a decrease in party membership among youth,<sup>33</sup> which was also shown in the results of the European Values Study (EVS). Particularly in established Western democracies, youth party membership has been in a continuous decline (see Appendix 3), which severely hinders political parties’ recruitment and mobilisation functions, and has a seriously negative effect on the potential of youth in political representation.

With the exception of a small number of examples in Western Balkan countries, the level of party membership of individuals below the age of 30 is significantly lower than the population average. Flash Eurobarometer 375 (2014) confirmed these results and suggested that participation in the activities of political parties and organisations is not the most frequent activity of European youth nowadays. Only around five per cent of 15 to 30 year olds in the EU28 area participated in the activities of political parties and political organisations in the past year (see Appendix 4). Poland and Estonia are particularly extreme cases, where only 2.6 per cent of youth included in this study participated in such activities in the past year.

## **Are we witnessing general erosion in political participation?**

*We are not witnessing a crisis of political participation; we are experiencing a crisis of participation in formal institutional politics.*

- Therese O’Toole, University of Bristol, 27 February 2015.

Political participation is a dynamic social phenomenon in which youth are becoming increasingly detached from traditional politics and structures.<sup>34</sup> We are currently witnessing a rapid transformation in the political landscape.<sup>35</sup> However, this change does not imply that the decline in voter turnout and other conventional modes is part of a general erosion of political participation.<sup>36</sup> The large numbers of people participating in strikes

or demonstrations, signing petitions, expressing collective solidarity, practicing political consumerism and engaging in other modes of unconventional political participation suggest that we are in fact not living in an age of political apathy and that citizens are not withdrawing into the private sphere.<sup>37</sup> The 15M protests in Madrid, the Gezi and Tahrir protests in Istanbul, the student protests in Croatia, the tuition fee protests in the UK, and many others have signalled this broad trend. Indeed, in the past decades, a growing wave of political protest—or protest politics—has emerged.<sup>38</sup>

This wave of protest politics is displayed when citizens sign petitions, join boycotts and attend lawful demonstrations; however, other modes of participation that tend to challenge the boundaries of legality are less frequent. The EVS data (see Appendix 5) show high frequencies of petition-signing and moderate frequencies of boycotting and lawful demonstrations by citizens but very rare occurrences of participation in unofficial strikes or the occupation of buildings and factories. The mode of protest politics that is exercised by youth differs from country to country, corresponding to its democratic tradition, cultural idiosyncrasies and other contextual effects. In the case of Croatia, young people are much more active in petitioning than other parts of the population are, while Georgian youth are more likely to attend lawful demonstrations. For the first time, our results show that participation by youth in unconventional modes is equal or even higher than by other age groups and in population averages.

Nevertheless, there is little proof of the assumed general pattern of youth being consistently more active than other age groups in unconventional participation modes, as raised by Barnes et al.<sup>39</sup> It is seemingly widely accepted across the academic community. British youth, for instance, lag behind the population average even in the examined unconventional modes of political participation. This could be interpreted in two ways: in line with Putnam,<sup>40</sup> who argues that the depleting social capital of youth has led to a decline in political participation and associational activity (for the involvement of youth in activities of various organisations, see Appendix 4); or it could be seen as an indication that political participation is evolving.<sup>41</sup> While acknowledging that the associational activity of European youth is at an undesirable level — membership in sports clubs is by far the most frequent type of associational activity — it may in fact reveal the dynamic and evolving nature of political participation as a social phenomenon,<sup>42</sup> which is a continuously shifting topic for researchers and academics. The repertoire of the actions available for participating in the political process has changed dramatically in the last two decades, and it differs from one political community to another. Consequently, we are witnessing a diversification of the range, forms and targets of political expression.<sup>43</sup>

## **Is there a need to revise the concept of political participation?**

The diversification of the range, forms and targets of political expression alongside the rise of protest politics calls into question the definition of political participation provided at the beginning of this paper although it is still predominantly used in professional and academic documents. Norris<sup>44</sup> argues that political activism has been reinvented by the diversification in *agencies*, *repertoires* and *targets* of political action:

- New *agencies*—collective organisations that structure political activity—started to emerge in the form of (new) social movements that differed from traditional forms of political organisations (e.g., political parties, unions and pressure groups) in terms of more fluid membership and contentious politics making use of a plethora of forms of collective action.<sup>45</sup>
- Diversification of the *repertoires*—actions used for political expression—was caused by either a reinvention of older forms of action (e.g., economic boycotts) or a consequence of technological innovation championed by the development of the information and communication technology (ICT) (e.g., internet activism, social media and blogging).<sup>46</sup>
- The changing *targets* of political action—which the political actors or participants try to influence—denote the change in political power and authority in contemporary societies where the nation-state, as the primary target of action, is losing its primacy to a variety of transnational and supranational public and private agents.<sup>47</sup>

At the same time, several studies show that a new breed of citizens is emerging.<sup>48</sup> These citizens are less collectivist and more individualists, cause-oriented and engaged. It is clear that the new generations of young people are less knowledgeable, interested or efficacious, and they are less likely to participate in traditional modes of politics. However, they are more likely to be members of informal groups, involved in protest politics as a result of growing political disaffection and alienation, and focused on specific issues or policy concerns.<sup>49</sup>

Marsh et al.<sup>50</sup> argue that the narrow definition of political participation put forward in the mainstream literature is the consequence of a narrow and imposed conception of the political, which fails to investigate youth's political imaginaries. The reliance on quantitative survey methods as the central approach to investigating political participation thus fails to engage how youth themselves think about politics, incorrectly links non-participation in a prescribed range of activities with apathy and perpetuates the separation between the public and the private. Thus, these methods fail to take into account the politics of the personal, and they pay insufficient attention to the structural features (e.g., political systems) that shape participation.<sup>51</sup>

Broad conceptualisations of the political and political participation reveal that youth are frequently misinterpreted as apathetic. A growing amount of data indicates that young people in fact never withdrawn from politics or become inactive, but instead have taken up different forms of engagement. The introduction of micro-political action and the elements of *consumer citizenship*<sup>52</sup> and *identity politics*<sup>53</sup> have led to revelations about the complexity of the political engagement of contemporary youth. These revelations have been further widened by the concept of politics as a lived experience, which focuses on the process rather than on formal political arenas.<sup>54</sup>

Regardless of how much we broaden the definition of political participation and the political, it is clear that non-participation does not simply equate to apathy as mainstream studies and politicians have tended to imply. Snell<sup>55</sup> analyses the category of politically disengaged 'apolitical' youth and draws enlightening conclusions. In addition to categorising *political* and *semipolitical* groups of youth who express some or much interest in politics and were either sporadically or frequently participating in political events, she identifies four distinct groups of politically uninvolved youth: apathetic, uninformed, distrustful and disempowered.<sup>56</sup> Individuals in the *apathetic* group did not care and were completely uninterested in politics, and they had no motivation to be active in civic life. The *uninformed* group consisted of young people who also did not care about and were not interested in politics, but who considered that they did not know enough about politics to be engaged. Contrary to the *uninformed*, the *distrustful* group knew about and were interested in politics, but they remained unengaged due to their lack of trust in politicians and the political system. The final disengaged group of individuals, the *disempowered* group, also seemed to be well informed about political issues and frequently expressed political views but felt they could not change anything by participating in the political system—hence, the feeling of disempowerment.

Regardless of the definition of the political, the typology of political engagement outlined above is a stark reminder of how reckless it is to label politically inactive youth as apathetic. The disaggregation of this category of individuals, who are usually attributed with a lack of political interest, indicates that youth 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.<sup>57</sup> Each group therefore reflects a different set of characteristics and should be addressed accordingly. This also brings forward the need to focus on the structural aspect of the non-participation of youth in traditional politics.<sup>58</sup> The scepticism of Russell Brand<sup>59</sup> and others who have never voted but are passionate and interested about the political issues that influence their everyday lived experiences and their normative concerns<sup>60</sup> therefore should not be equated with a lack of interest, but rather as a characteristic of an emerging group of networked young citizens who are sceptical of politicians and mainstream political institutions.

## **Is the Internet a game-changer?**

***Don't treat the Internet as a magic bullet of problems related to political participation.***

- Therese O'Toole, University of Bristol, 27 February 2015.

As Norris<sup>61</sup> points out, the technological innovation championed by the development of ICT has diversified the repertoires of political expression and has led to the overhaul of existing forms; it also has introduced online politics and activism. The development of ICT, with the current expansion and popularity of social networking in political campaigning as well as recreational life, could prove to be a game-changer for the political participation of youth.

The political participation of youth on the Internet appears to break certain rules. Smith et al.<sup>62</sup> claim that youth are equally or more politically active in online political activities and that blogs and social media outlets are the preferred outlets for the online political engagement of young people.<sup>63</sup>

It must be emphasised, however, that there are both positive and the negative sides of the Internet. Generally, two prevailing sets of views can be identified regarding the role of the Internet in politics:

- The first view is *utopian*: it argues that the Internet levels the political playing field thanks to its relative low cost, lack of editorial intervention, and interactive and transmissive properties. Proponents of this view assert that disadvantaged actors and groups, who lack resource capacity and have limited exposure to traditional media outlets, use the Internet not only as a mere technological utility but also as a ‘game-changer’. In this view, the Internet is both saviour and executioner of the current political system and its organisational infrastructure.<sup>64</sup> This approach symbolises the utopian expectations of the Internet’s influence on the political process, particularly in terms of aspirations to direct democracy,<sup>65</sup> new opportunities for empowerment,<sup>66</sup> virtual communities that revitalise democracy,<sup>67</sup> an elevated participatory style of politics with the activation of an increasingly disaffected electorate,<sup>68</sup> and a new platform for political competition on an equal basis. The utopian claim is that the move to the Internet challenges existing power structures<sup>69</sup> and introduces a new type of political engagement that sharply differs from traditional activities.<sup>70</sup>
- The sceptical view is *normalisation*, which stresses that we are witnessing ‘politics as usual’ and argues that the Internet tends to reflect and reinforce the patterns of behaviour in the offline world. This view portrays online politics as an extension of offline politics and contends that the anticipated revitalisation of citizenship and democracy has been shattered by ordinary politics and commercial activity, which have taken over cyberspace.<sup>71</sup> A sophisticated political economy that is designed and guided by web professionals has crowded out the amateurs and hobbyists, and it has begun to dominate political, economic, social and recreational life on the Internet.<sup>72</sup> In the same vein, Norris<sup>73</sup> emphasises the problem of the digital divide and that the Internet will disproportionately favour the elite.

With the rise of web 2.0 and social media outlets in particular, the jury is still out on the prevalence of these claims. There is no doubt, however, that new forms of mass communication have proven more appealing to youth, who are also willing to experiment with them.<sup>74</sup> In the next section, we examine the evidence that supports the claims that youth are more likely to participate in politics on the Internet and that the Internet might facilitate youth civic engagement.

### **The Internet as a tool for political information and political communication**

The ways that youth are informed about political issues and communicate with others differs from other generations. Young people are much more likely to gain political information on the Internet as well as edit and collate different sources of news.<sup>75</sup> Originally derived from research on Anglo-American youth, Eurostat data confirm this observation in

the EU28 area as well as in the countries in our sample (see Table 4). Reading and posting about civic or political issues on websites is clearly a form of engagement that youth participate in, compared with other parts of the population. Younger generations clearly use websites to read and post about politics, which is particularly evident in the cases of Croatia and Spain. In this regard, only Estonia reflects a picture of engagement, which is usually typical of voting and participation in traditional politics. However, this should be connected to the Estonian e-agenda that has produced tech-savvy cohorts of individuals in their mid-thirties and early forties.

tTable 4. Reading and posting opinions on civic or political issues via websites (percentage of individuals).

	16-19	20-24	25-29	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74
EU 28	24	23	23	21	15	11	8	5
Estonia	19	21	28	27	25	14	11	4
Spain	22	28	23	21	15	10	6	3
Croatia	21	22	13	13	9	5	1	1
Poland	9	13	13	12	7	4	3	1
United Kingdom	14	16	19	18	15	8	11	5

Source: Eurostat (2015)

The examination of the postings of opinions about civic and political issues in blogs and social networks shows a high tendency among youth to use the Internet, particularly social media. The age group of 20-24 year olds clearly voice political opinions the most frequently, particularly in Spain and Estonia (see Table 5). The tendency of young people to be the probable distributors of political information and views online is in line with existing scholarly evidence.<sup>76</sup> However, this evidence also confirms the downside of these results. A precise analysis of the data reveals that the share of individuals who actually read about politics is low, and the share of those who express their opinions about politics online is even lower. Hence, the acquired evidence does not support the view that the Internet is a game-changer. The number of individuals who use it for such purposes is too limited. There also seems to be a gulf between those who are active in discussions and share political information online and those who deal with politics through traditional means.<sup>77</sup>

Table 5. Posting opinions on civic or political issues via websites (e.g. blogs, social networks, etc.) (Percentage of individuals).

	16-19	20-24	25-29	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74
EU 28	16	19	18	17	12	9	6	4
Estonia	17	24	22	20	16	14	11	4
Spain	19	30	24	23	16	10	7	3
Croatia	15	19	18	15	10	6	3	1
Poland	8	12	9	9	5	3	2	0
United Kingdom	10	16	16	16	12	8	8	6

Source: Eurostat (2015)

### The Internet as a tool of political participation

The point that Internet use increases political knowledge<sup>78</sup> certainly reinforces the importance of young people's greater use of online tools. The effect of the Internet on youth is additionally marked by youth's higher tendency to consult the websites of political parties and other political organisations compared to other age groups.<sup>79</sup> Martin<sup>80</sup> demonstrates that young people in Anglo-American settings are more engaged in political activity than older people are; however, the problem is that the Internet reinforces the activism of the already active. Therefore, perceived as a tool that facilitates 'preaching to the converted', the Internet might prove to increase divisions between active and non-active users in the future. It should be stressed, however, that digital politics still contribute to the quality of representative democracy, as they introduce additional channels of information for those already interested in politics as well as a means to voice concerns.

Eurostat<sup>81</sup> data on the frequency of taking part in online consultations or voting to define civic or political issues, such as urban planning, signing online petitions or engaging in political deliberation on a certain issue, show that youth participate politically over the Internet. This is true primarily for 20-24 year-olds, who proved to be the most participatory in these activities across all age groups. The case of Croatia stands out: more than one fifth of individuals in this age group (20-24) participated in such activities, whereas other age groups proved to be significantly less engaged.

Table 6. Taking part in online consultations or voting to define civic or political issues (e.g. urban planning, signing a petition) (percentage of individuals).

	16-19	20-24	25-29	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74
EU 28	7	11	11	10	9	8	6	4
Estonia	8	12	8	8	8	5	6	1
Spain	9	16	15	14	12	9	7	3
Croatia	7	21	14	13	7	5	4	1
Poland	2	4	4	4	3	1	1	0
United Kingdom	3	9	10	8	10	8	8	7

Source: Eurostat (2015)

The data also clearly justify reservations regarding the role of the Internet. Even though young people clearly engage in online consultations or voting to define civic or political issues, the overall figures are too inadequate to indicate a lasting and ground-breaking change in the overall patterns of political participation. The distribution of young people engaging in these activities, despite some methodological reservations regarding the data, primarily shows that individuals with low levels of formal education participate less than those with high levels of education (see Appendix 6).

The Estonian example of the elections over the Internet (I-voting)<sup>82</sup> is a clear indication of the excessive expectations of the benefits of technological innovation. Regardless of whether we think of them as a failure or a success, the participation rates indicate that they do not solve the problem of the low participation of youth. Although they still do not show the highest participation rates, young people use the system more often than older age groups do, but the overall trend towards high youth absenteeism has not altered (see Appendix 7). The very small share of individuals who believe they would not have voted had the I-voting system not been placed<sup>83</sup> suggests that, in fact, those who are already active use the system. It appears that the system of elections over the Internet has not contributed noticeably to improving democratic participation in Estonia. However, the system has reduced the transaction costs of going to the polls, and it has made voting more convenient for some segments of society.<sup>84</sup>

## **The Internet as a tool of mobilisation**

Non-traditional forms of political participation, such as protest politics, are particularly attractive to youth.<sup>85</sup> Cause-oriented participation in certain issues of interest, frequently of a post-materialist nature, also corresponds to the values and citizenship of contemporary youth.<sup>86</sup> The Internet offers a significant potential to mobilise youth in issue-oriented campaigns, as it allows disparate groups of individuals with diverse and fragmented political identities to connect.<sup>87</sup>

The Internet facilitates the formation of issue-based organisations of young people, as it facilitates the reduction of communication costs and provides easier access to official sources. In addition, technological innovations have led to the emergence of crowdfunding, crowdsourcing and networking practices.<sup>88</sup> The Internet allows various actors in civil society, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and think tanks, to carry out a variety of activities aimed at influencing policy-makers and other actors through public campaigning, activism and lobbying.<sup>89</sup> Hence, the Internet has allowed these new agencies of political action, which have innovative repertoires of political expression at their disposal, to disrupt 'politics as usual'. The emergence of the Occupy movement, 15M movement, Avaaz.org, Global Exchange, The Dolphin Project, Save Darfur coalition and so on are examples of the opportunities for new and reinvented networks of individuals to mobilise supporters, lobby representatives, network with like-minded organisations and communicate with traditional media fortresses over the Internet in order to influence public and private actors on all levels.

As the political identity and attitudes of young people become increasingly shaped by their social ties to family, neighbourhood, school and work and more by the manner in which they participate in social networks that they co-create, we observe the phenomenon of networked individualism in which the Internet, particularly social media, take a central role in the political engagement of individuals.<sup>90</sup> The demise of the dutiful young citizen is, therefore, a long-term process that is shaped by wider economic and social forces that may be characterised by self-actualising and critical individuals, which Loader et al.<sup>91</sup> call *networked citizens*. These citizens are more likely to participate in non-hierarchical networks, be project oriented and conduct their social relations through social media. Their historical reference points are less connected to modern welfare capitalism than to global information networked capitalism.<sup>92</sup> It needs to be stressed that these networked young citizens do not represent a total discontinuity with the notion of citizenship based on duty. Networked citizens might perform some acts that are reminiscent of traditional politics, realise their identity through lived experience (also by disrupting dominant discourses of dutiful citizenship) and

not live in a power vacuum, but networks exhibit new regulatory norms of inclusion and exclusion.<sup>93</sup>

Hence, the *networked young citizen* reflects a positive relationship between social media use and political engagement and has the potential to influence longstanding patterns of political inequality.<sup>94</sup> This relationship implies a change in the process of political socialisation,<sup>95</sup> which is mobilised through mass demonstrations against growing social inequalities, such as *Indignados* and *Occupy*, and rejects political class by participating in the formation of political parties, such as Italian *Movimento 5 Stelle*, Spanish *Podemos* or the German *Piratenpartei*.<sup>96</sup> It is clear that the emerging generations of networked citizens are becoming more and more sceptical of the political class and existing political institutions, it is necessary to address the following questions in order to reduce the gap between (traditional) political institutions and actors and the emerging forms of (networked) young citizens: Is the current gap between political institutions and the emerging notion of citizenship among young citizens obvious to the relevant stakeholders? Do they perceive this gap as a problem of youth? How are they trying to address this problem? In the following sections of this research study, we aim to answer these questions. Before we take on this challenging endeavour, it is worthwhile considering the reasons that youth should participate in the political process at all.

# WHY IS THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH VITAL FOR THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY?

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*If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. (Madison, 1788)*

As noted in the famous Federalist Paper No. 51, controls over the actions of the government should be enabled, as we should not expect the rulers or the ruled to be civically virtuous (or angels). Voting and other forms of participation in politics may be considered as one such (external) control. However, why does the participation of youth matter, if the government can be controlled by the participation of the population in general?

Apart from the obvious normative concerns related to the social contract and the consent of the governed, this question is relevant from various points of view. If the interpretation of democracy is rule by the people, then the question of who participates in political decisions becomes the nature of democracy itself.<sup>97</sup> In a situation where few take part or certain groups are excluded from decisions, there is little democracy. From this perspective, higher levels of participation directly relate to higher levels of democracy. Citizen participation provides the best mechanism for the articulation of interests, and it performs an educative role among citizens. To some scholars,<sup>98</sup> it is an essential mechanism by citizens influence decision-makers, which links it directly to the responsiveness of governments.

Regardless of debates on the most appropriate model<sup>6</sup> of democracy,<sup>99</sup> political participation is a necessary precondition for the existence of a democratic polity. It is also a guiding principle of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and it is promoted by numerous international agreements.<sup>100</sup> However, regardless of the fact that political participation is and always has been a prerequisite for every democratic system, it is not a panacea for all human problems.<sup>101</sup> As the most compelling principle of legitimacy and the basis of political order, political participation offers the consent of the governed.

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<sup>6</sup> Even in the most elitist conceptions of democracy (see e.g., Schumpeter), the political participation of citizens is necessary even though it is usually restricted to voting in general elections for the selection of political representatives and ensuring government accountability (O'Neill 2009, 7). In contrast, pluralist models and their derivatives (see Held 2000) rely on high levels of citizen participation and encourage the participation of a knowledgeable citizenry with a sustained interest in the governing process.

Macedo and others<sup>102</sup> provide contemporary arguments for the importance of robust citizen engagement<sup>7</sup> in democratic countries:

- *Firstly*, wide civic engagement enhances the quality of democratic governance. Knowledge of the interests of the people is a vital requirement for democratic decision-making, and the preferences of citizens are generally presented by making use of various modes of participation: voting, attending a rally, writing to a politician, volunteering or some other form of engagement. Expertise has its place in politics and public administration, but the input of citizens may improve the quality of public policies by organising knowledge and recording the preferences of the political community. It is argued that devising and implementing public policies will result in better, more insightful and legitimate policies if the public possesses sufficient information, resources, time and deliberative opportunities to be part of this process.<sup>103</sup> Levine<sup>104</sup> stresses that broad political participation is present in the most successful communities, such as those with the highest standards of living and best functioning institutions, even when we control for economic causes.
- *Secondly*, participation can enhance the quality of citizens' lives. Participation holds value in itself, as the self-government of the people is supposed to involve the exercise of distinctive human capacities, and is an inherently noble enterprise. In the eyes of civic republicans, participation is seen as the end in itself, an intrinsic good, as political participation is in essence the interaction of people who are different regarding a common subject.<sup>105</sup> Participation (or the good life) in politics is seen as essentially dignified and valuable — much more than other human activities, including producing and consuming.<sup>106</sup> According to many,<sup>107</sup> participation has the potential to educate and invigorate citizens to expand their understanding and capacities. While acknowledging the existence of important trade-offs and allowing that people frequently lead good and fulfilling lives without engaging in political activity, participation is still supposed to be a part of the good life, and it should complement rather than undermine other valuable activities. Mill also argues that participation is a form of learning together, as making binding public decisions strengthens citizens' active faculties, exercises their judgment, and gives them a familiar knowledge of the subjects they have to deal with.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> We need to clarify that the concepts of civic engagement and political participation are popular catchphrases (Levine 2007, 1). Because of broad views of the reasons and motives for political action, a sharp distinction between the "civic" and the "political" is rarely drawn because the comprehension of politics and civil society are interdependent concepts (Macedo et al. 2005, 6). Nevertheless, we may conceive of political participation as behaviour that involves the state and civic engagement as behaviour that involves the state as well as behaviour that occurs in civil society (see Levine 2007, 48).

- *Thirdly*, Macedo et al.<sup>109</sup> stress the importance of participation in voluntary and non-profit organisations as a form of the provision of a wide variety of goods and services that cannot be provided by the state or the market. They claim that higher levels of participation — especially membership in groups and involvement in social networks — are connected with higher individual satisfaction with the quality of individual and community life. When citizens are involved and engaged with others, their lives and the communities they live in should be better off for it. In the case of middle-class American families, Levine<sup>110</sup> made this evident by identifying community organising—not money—as the vital component that influences the quality of people’s lives.
- *Lastly*, the condition of democratic life is not fulfilled by the fact that government by the people alone returns the best form of governance; it also implies that a government is legitimate when the people as a whole participate in their own self-rule. In cases when important groups of citizens are substantially less active and influential than others are, the conditions of collective self-rule are eradicated, and the political order suffers from problems of legitimacy. The notion of democracy as the forum where the interests of the people as a whole are represented has been continuously questioned by an abundance of evidence that indicates that political institutions are the most responsive to those who mobilise.<sup>111</sup> The notion of government for all disappears when only narrow and particularistic interests are mobilised or when important sectors of the political community are excluded.

Levine<sup>112</sup> links the need for greater levels of participation with the principle of equity. He observes that the most politically active members of American society are more commonly from affluent backgrounds than poor backgrounds. He concludes that in this context, the best method for increasing political equity is **to increase the total number of people who participate in order to ensure that the least active are better represented.**

## **Political participation and its link to representation**

*I’m in favour of 100 per cent participation!*

- Eiki Nestor, Speaker of the Estonian Parliament, 13 March 2015

When Martin<sup>113</sup> explains Burnham’s remark, ‘if you do not vote, you do not count’, he makes it clear that as long as the participation of young people in politics remains low, they should expect to get relatively little from the government. There will be very little

incentive for politicians to focus on policies that benefit youth. Being in favour of 100 per cent participation, as the Speaker of the Estonian Parliament asserted, therefore only accentuates the importance of widespread participation for policy making. Although other age groups can also represent youth's interests — a process that is known as substantive representation — the accumulated empirical evidence shows that this is not the case.<sup>114</sup>

The above-mentioned arguments are a sign of the importance of political participation and its direct link to political representation. We can examine representation through various lenses: the *symbolic* (the meaning a representative has for the represented), the *descriptive* (degree of resemblance of the representative and the represented) and the *substantive* (the actions taken in the interest of the represented).<sup>115</sup> Even though the bulk of attention is usually paid to substantive representation, there are instances in which the other forms are of particular importance. Mansbridge<sup>116</sup> stresses the importance of descriptive representation for marginalised and disaffected groups that distrust other, relatively more privileged citizens. In such cases, these groups feel that their political preferences have to be represented by someone who belongs to the same group in order to establish adequate communication in the context of mistrust.

The huge distrust of youth in institutional politics has exacerbated the growing alienation of this segment of the population from electoral politics and the institutions of representative democracy. The economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures, placing a disproportionate burden on youth, have made this situation even worse. It is clear that having political representation, youth would find it easier to relate to and engage in the political process. In today's world, however, this is far from being realised. The low number of young national parliamentarians demonstrates that young people feel detached from traditional politics. Research has shown that the percentage of parliamentarians younger than 30 in national parliaments across OECD states is higher than 2 per cent only in exceptional cases.<sup>117</sup> We verified these results by screening<sup>8</sup> the national parliaments of the selected countries, and we came to staggering conclusions: overall, only 0.5 per cent of parliamentarians are younger than 30 in the examined parliaments, and only 0.1 per cent are below the age of 25 (see Table 7). Even more disturbing is the fact that although there is a larger number of parliamentarians in the age group of 35 to 39, only 3.4 per cent of deputies are below the age of 35. These results also show the persistence of patriarchy in these representative bodies. The proportion of young female parliamentarians is rarely higher than one in four compared to their male colleagues. The absence of young females in representative politics creates even higher levels of exclusion and alienation in the serious under participation of youth in politics.

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<sup>8</sup> The screening was performed in March 2015.

Table 7. Number and percentage of young members of national parliaments in selected countries.

Selected countries		24 or less	29 or less	34 or less	39 or less
<b>Male</b>	<b>(Count)</b>	2	8	46	153
	<b>(Percentage)</b>	0,1%	0,4%	2,5%	8,2%
<b>Female</b>	<b>(Count)</b>	0	1	17	62
	<b>(Percentage)</b>	0,0%	0,1%	0,9%	3,3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>(Count)</b>	2	9	63	215
	<b>(Percentage)</b>	0,1%	0,5%	3,4%	11,6%
<b>Grand Total</b>		1861	1861	1861	1861

Source: own calculations

The figures for each of the lower houses of the national parliament of the selected countries and the European parliament showed that the picture remains more or less the same. Only the Estonian parliament (Riigikogu) stood out from the pattern of the virtual absence of any descriptive representation of youth in national parliaments. However, in the Riigikogu, only five per cent of parliamentarians are younger than 30 (see Table 8). In other parliaments, youth are massively underrepresented in the descriptive sense even though this age group forms approximately 10 to 15 per cent of the voting age population. At the time of our analysis, the lower houses in the parliaments of Croatia, Spain and the United Kingdom failed to have a single parliamentarian below the age of 30 occupying 151, 350 and 650 deputy seats, respectively.

Table 8. Percentage of young members of national parliaments in six selected countries.

	24 or less	29 or less	34 or less	39 or less
<b>Croatia</b>	0,0%	0,0%	2,0%	12,6%
<b>Estonia</b>	1,0%	5,0%	13,9%	17,8%
<b>Georgia</b>	0,7%	1,3%	6,0%	13,3%
<b>Poland</b>	0,0%	0,4%	3,7%	12,2%
<b>Spain</b>	0,0%	0,0%	2,0%	8,9%
<b>UK</b>	0,0%	0,0%	1,7%	7,8%
<b>EP</b>	.	1,6%	.	.

Source: own calculations; EC (2015)

Today, young people aged between 10 and 24 represent the largest generation in history, comprising 1.8 billion individuals.<sup>118</sup> The exclusion of youth is a vital issue for the health of democracy across the globe. **Leaving youth out of the mainstream political process— participation as well as representation—creates the conditions for making the largest cohort of population in the history of humankind more or less politically non-existent.** In the next section, we examine the effects of this exclusion on the political participation of youth and the consequent levels of representation, both substantive and descriptive.

# WHAT INFLUENCES THE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH?

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*We can confidently say that turnout is lower in poor countries and higher in small ones, that compulsory voting fosters turnout, and that turnout increases in closely contested elections. But I am more impressed by the gaps in our knowledge. (Blais 2006, 122)*

Even though the above statement concerns voter turnout, it indicates the theoretical and empirical lack of coherence regarding the causal mechanisms of political participation. A plethora of empirical studies on the diverse factors that influence political participation reveal the additional problem of speculating in relation to the political behaviour of individuals.<sup>119</sup> However, a variety of valid and relevant empirical results reveal that certain causes have diverse effects on different groups in different contexts.<sup>120</sup> With that in mind, certain robust variables (or the 'usual suspects') continuously prove to be significant for political participation (primarily within traditional institutional politics) across different groups of individuals and in diverse contexts.

Participatory acts concern not only the individual but also the structure. The prevailing scholarly evidence of youth participation focuses on the individual and not the structure.<sup>121</sup> This focus leads to perceiving that (young) individuals as the main causes of non-participation and ignoring the influence of the system, the culture and the dominant ideas in a society. Agent-centred explanations of political participation focus on the agent and its consequent level of political efficacy as either individuals or groups.<sup>122</sup> In contrast, structure-centred explanations of political participation reiterate the interplay between structure and the individual.<sup>123</sup> Structure-centred views explain the levels of political participation and try to determine the reasons for its decline from the perspective of formal rules (legal framework and organisational rules), social structure (class, religion, gender and ethnicity) and dominant ideas (belief systems, e.g., patriarchy).<sup>124</sup> It is sometimes difficult to distinguish these explanations, as they may concern both levels, but for the sake of a structured and analytical discourse, the divide between the individual level and the structural level proves appropriate.<sup>125</sup>

## **Features of youth political participation**

Age is one of the most robust predictors of conventional political participation from which young adults continuously prove to be notorious abstainers.<sup>126</sup> Despite this definite conclusion, there is no simple answer to the question of why that is the case. This has much to do with the complex relationship between young people and the political sphere, primarily in terms of youth's understanding of it.<sup>127</sup> Several specific aspects define young people's relationship with the political process, four of which are particularly salient:<sup>128</sup>

- The *first* aspect is extensively explained in the previous sections. It points to the distancing of young people from institutional politics. This process is undisputed in the academic and professional literature — although the reasons given for it vary greatly.<sup>129</sup>
- The *second* aspect, which is also discussed in previous sections, is the broadening definition of politics. As the political imaginary of youth has changed and evolved, so have the agents, repertoires and targets of political action. It is therefore necessary to resist the narrow definition of political participation used in conventional survey methodology, as this definition particularly neglects the engagement of younger generations.
- The *third* aspect is related to the changing political imaginary of youth. The relationship between youth and the political sphere calls into question the classical liberal distinction between the public and private spheres. As young people's understanding of politics does not entail the clear separation of traditional political institutions and everyday life, the expansion of the political sphere serves to break down the boundaries between politics and society such that political orientation and expressions are manifested through the daily lives of young people.<sup>130</sup> Based on ethical principles, this involvement extends to daily actions and choices regarding food, clothing, the use of public spaces and so forth, which means that political issues and causes are diversifying, and do not correspond to traditional political cleavages.<sup>131</sup>
- The *fourth* important aspect of how youth face politics is the growing complexity of youth transitions. Contemporary youth's transitions to adulthood are marked by longer and reversible transition periods.<sup>132</sup> As these diversified youth trajectories are infused by higher levels of uncertainty and vulnerability, these changing youth transitions have an important effect on young people's political involvement, particularly in terms of their political socialisation and their repertoires of political engagement.<sup>133</sup>

The main patterns of the transmission of dominant political values have consequently been altered: lesser importance is placed on the key traditional factors that shape political socialisation, and greater importance is placed on peers and social media outlets.<sup>134</sup> Young people's political engagement is thus becoming increasingly diverse, non-exclusive and incompatible with traditional modes of engagement.<sup>135</sup>

In addition to these aspects of the political participation of contemporary youth, several key universal factors determine political engagement in democratic communities. We explain them in the following section.

## **Note on the Methodology**

The empirical part of this report is based on a selection from the relevant primary and secondary research data. The main intention of this study is to investigate perceptions of the gap between institutional politics and emerging forms of citizenship, to determine whether youth political participation is conceived as a problem, and how it could be addressed. We focus on the main stakeholders in the field. We thus conducted 86 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with representatives of the youth wings of political parties, representatives of mother parties, representatives of public authorities at the national and sub-national levels, representatives of key youth organisations, representatives of civil society organisations and experts (the list of interviewees is provided in the Bibliography). The interviews were conducted between 19 February and 13 May 2015 in six countries. In addition, we acquired four written responses to a questionnaire in cases of non-availability, language limitations or requests for further explanations. The QDA Miner 4 QDA Miner qualitative data analysis tool was used to examine the data collected in the interviews.

The data about the activities of national electoral management bodies (EMB) related to youth political participation were obtained in the responses to a structured questionnaire that was sent to the national EMBs. We received seven official written responses to the questionnaire, and we conducted one semi-structured interview with an EMB official in Estonia (see the list of responses to the questionnaire sent to the EMBs in the bibliography). In addition to conducting interviews with the representatives of parliamentary political parties and their youth wings, we collected a set of the normative documents (party statutes, party platforms, party manifestos, key party strategies and rules of procedures) adopted by all current<sup>9</sup> parliamentary political parties in the six countries. Based on the

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<sup>9</sup> The reference point was 1 March 2015.

collected normative documents, which complemented the interview data, a desk research on the inclusion of youth in the life of political parties was performed. To identify the presence of youth in national legislatures, a biographical database of the deputies of the lower chambers (in the case of a dual-chamber parliament) was created and later analysed according to age and gender.

These data were complemented by a review of the existing international comparative research in the field: EVS and WVS data, International IDEA's databases of the Global database on elections and democracy and voter turnout, EUDO Citizenship's database of electoral rights, ACE project's comparative data on elections, OSCE ODIHR's election observation reports, Eurostat's statistics on youth political participation, the European Commission's Youth monitor and Flash Eurobarometer 375, the European Parliament Election Study 2014, and the database compiled by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's (IEA) International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) 2009.

## **The system and the political parties are to blame**

### **What do we know about the influence of the systemic organisations on political participation?**

The so-called structure-centred explanations of political participation tend to be ignored in examinations of the decline of the participation of youth in politics.<sup>136</sup> However, structure could prove to be as equally important as the individual, as every act of participation inherently involves the interplay among individuals, resources, and the mobilising structure. Since mobilisation efforts have proved crucial in explaining the participation levels of individuals,<sup>137</sup> the examination of structure offers the possibility of showing important aspects of the mobilisation channels available to youth in particular contexts. Therefore, in this study, we used a set of variables that proved to be relevant.<sup>138</sup>

#### *Socio-economic conditions*

We examined several socio-economic variables on the individual level; however, there are also structural characteristics that make a certain environment more or less participatory. *Population size*, for instance, can influence the prediction of rational choice, as the probability of being decisive is an important incentive to participate. In effect, the larger the community, the smaller the probability of making a difference.<sup>139</sup> The empirical evidence of turnouts supports this hypothesis, which shows that population size has a negative effect on participation.<sup>140</sup>

In terms of *population heterogeneity*, particularly in the presence of minority groups (according to ethnicity and race), the empirical evidence confirms that electoral participation is also lower when the share of minorities in the population is higher.<sup>141</sup>

#### *Political influences*

*Political competition* is extremely important for political participation, as competitive environments are much more engaging. In cases when political competition is low or virtually non-existent, the hopes of high participation rates are futile. Macedo et al.<sup>142</sup> present an example of an electoral race the results of which were more or less known, mainly decided in favour of the incumbents and had big margins. Poor institutional design can cause a disengaging environment, which revives when the electoral race close. This alters the behaviour of candidates, the media and the voters. Mobilisation efforts become more intense, and issue positions become more developed.<sup>143</sup> The decline of political competition also decreases the quality of political life and increases ideological polarisation, which are particular disincentives for moderate young adults.<sup>144</sup> Localised political competition, regardless of the level, healthy partisan competition and an institutional design that allows for real debates among competing parties over important policy positions<sup>145</sup> are also incentives for political engagement.

*Political campaigns* have a positive effect on political participation. The professionalization of political communication (and media market fragmentation) and the move towards permanent campaigning<sup>146</sup> have made it difficult to follow long political campaigns. If political campaigns were educational exercises—helping citizens to learn about candidates, their positions and the relevant issues—they would have a positive effect on participation.<sup>147</sup> Geys<sup>148</sup> stresses that campaign expenditures have positive effects on turnout rates, as the information and awareness levels within the electorate are increased, and the costs of acquiring information are decreased. In addition, ‘get-out-the-vote’ campaigns that try to amplify the feelings of civic duty in voters also play an important part in increasing turnout.<sup>149</sup>

*Political mobilisation structures* are another extremely important political variable, as they have a huge impact on various modes of political participation.<sup>150</sup> It is a matter of asking citizens to mobilise,<sup>151</sup> and in western democracies, the mobilising institutions have deteriorated. Not only have the virtues of citizens changed (Putnam 2000), but there has also been a radical transformation of mass membership organisations in favour of advocacy groups, which no longer need a wide membership base and therefore no longer invest in mobilisation.<sup>152</sup> In addition to the transformation (professionalisation) of political parties, voluntary organisations and labour unions have diminished grassroots activities

and face-to-face politics.<sup>153</sup> Parties therefore try to mobilise their own supporters (e.g., through get-out-the-vote campaigns) and rarely target other groups. They thus invest in those who are already most likely to be engaged, leaving out the young, the poor and immigrants.<sup>154</sup> Hooghe and Stolle<sup>155</sup> 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.

### *Media environment*

The media environment has proven to be an essential component of political participation, particularly in the electoral process. There is a symbiotic relationship between individuals' knowledge of and interest in politics and the media coverage of politics, particularly political campaigns.<sup>156</sup> The proliferation of media outlets has affected political participation, with a slow decline of the TV coverage of politics, which seemingly has had a negative effect on engagement and consequently on the electoral process.<sup>157</sup> Network news and newspapers are general interest intermediaries and have an important integrative function in large, modern and heterogeneous democracies by providing a shared focus of attention.<sup>158</sup> With the decline of newspaper readership, network news coverage and the audience, the primacy of the Internet and new media has emerged. However, this means that the accidental exposure to political information is less likely to occur. Moreover, the general interest intermediaries are gone, the audience, exposed to partisan media, has become ideologically polarised and the knowledge gap has widened.<sup>159</sup> The customisation of news, enabled by the technological advancement in media production and consumption, has made political news and information optional rather than inevitable.

### *Institutional barriers*

In discussing the institutional barriers to political participation, we focus on the barriers to the electoral process, as it is one of the most important and manifest forms of participation. The first important institutional variable is the *electoral system*, which allows the translation of votes into seats. It is generally believed that proportional representation (PR) systems induce higher turnouts, due to the disproportionate numbers of votes and seats in majority-based systems.<sup>160</sup> In PR systems, voters are less likely to feel that their vote is not important, and the districts in these systems are less likely to be non-competitive, which creates more incentives to campaign extensively. Despite counterarguments that majority-based systems are easier to understand and do not lead to complicated processes of coalition formation, the empirical evidence indicates that PR systems are associated with higher turnout.<sup>161</sup>

*Concurrent elections*, such as combined multiple electoral races, are expected to increase electoral participation thanks to increased party mobilisation, more intensive campaigning and heightened media attention.<sup>162</sup> Concurrent elections create conditions for individual voters to feel concerned about one issue, at the very least. This should be further facilitated by the fact that more intense campaign activity also leads to higher general awareness and information levels in the electorate.<sup>163</sup> The empirical evidence supports the assumption that turnout is positively affected by the presence of multiple elections on the ballot although the affect does not seem to be overwhelming.<sup>164</sup>

*Voter registration* is an institutional variable that has a negative effect on turnout. Voter registration requirements induce immediate monetary costs for potential voters, as well as additional information costs related to the time and process of registering.<sup>165</sup> As voter registration becomes more difficult, it is likely that fewer people will actually vote. This line of reasoning is supported by empirical evidence that automatic registration, Election Day registration, the absence of literacy tests and poll taxes significantly increase turnout rates.<sup>166</sup> Voter registration procedures have been shown to impede the electoral presence of certain groups. For reasons of mobility, students, for example, are among the groups that carry the highest burden of registration. This is also because registration procedures, where they are in place, usually place new administrative burdens (residency procedures, taxes etc.) on already notorious abstainers, and frequently on first-time voters.<sup>167</sup>

*Compulsory voting* is an institutional variable that is portrayed as the fastest solution to the problem of low turnout. As it perceivably increases the expected costs of not voting by imposing fines and diminishing social prestige for disobeying the law, the value of not voting decreases significantly.<sup>168</sup> The effect of compulsory voting on turnout is one of the most robust findings that in virtually all cases, support the assumption that turnout is significantly higher when compulsory voting exists.<sup>169</sup>

Lastly, certain *vote-facilitating* rules that are designed to motivate and mobilise potential voters also tend to improve turnout. These include postal voting, proxy voting, voting in advance, voting over the Internet (e-voting), placing voting booths in the most convenient places (e.g. churches and shopping malls), extending the time to cast a vote and so forth.<sup>170</sup>

## **Institutional facilitation of electoral participation of youth**

Institutional arrangements are both a barrier and a facilitator of political participation of youth. The conventional approach to examining these arrangements is to focus on the electoral process. In view of the empirical evidence of the effects of electoral institutions (see structure-centred institutional variables in the previous section), even a brief overview of the electoral systems in the selected countries showed room for improvement in terms of conventional youth political participation:

The *electoral systems* of the national parliaments of the examined countries (lower houses in the cases of bi-cameral legislatures) have important differences. With regard to the general type of electoral system, Georgia and the UK do not use a proportional representation (PR) system to translate votes to seats (see Table 9). PR systems are statistically associated with higher voter turnout. Georgia, which has a mixed, parallel PR, majoritarian electoral system<sup>10</sup> and the UK, which has a simple, *first-past-the-post* majority system, have been criticised, as their electoral systems do not favour the participation of minority and disaffected social groups.<sup>171</sup> Certain variations of PR systems also reflect majoritarian aspects that actually prevent certain social groups from electing their representatives due to the closed nature of the lists, the design of electoral constituencies or the absence of potential quotas. Hence, the PR systems of the countries examined in this study could also be improved. In Spain, for example, there have been calls to make the electoral system more proportional and introduce open lists where possible in order to allow voters to choose their preferred candidates.<sup>172</sup> Revising the electoral systems along these lines could also tighten electoral races, which has been proven to have a huge effect on political participation.<sup>173</sup>

*A strict cap on election campaign financing* may allow easier entry into the electoral arena for younger candidates and lists of candidates and reduce the gap between youth and established political actors.<sup>174</sup> A detailed scrutiny of the normative framework of financing of political parties and candidates reveals that certain countries do acknowledge the traps linked to donations to political parties and candidates. This is primarily the case in countries with shorter democratic traditions (e.g., Croatia), which have tried to address the potential corruption and excessive influence of certain interests in the political process (see Appendix 8). In contrast, in certain robust systems with longstanding democratic traditions (e.g., UK) provisions that favour the access of new actors to the political arena through lower entry costs are virtually absent. The UK therefore is the most difficult system for young candidates to enter the electoral arena. Spain and Estonia have some limitations, and Croatia and Georgia impose almost all the limitations examined in this

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<sup>10</sup> The Georgian parliament is composed of 77 MPs who are elected through a proportional election system and 73 MPs through a majoritarian election system (IDEA 2015a).

study. It needs to be stressed however, that even those two countries leave loopholes that enable existing power structures to dominate the process (e.g., no ban on corporate donations and no spending limits for parties, candidates etc.).

It is frequently argued that *aligning the minimum voting age with the minimum age of eligibility to run for office* would facilitate greater participation as well as the potential representation of youth in legislative bodies.<sup>175</sup> Such context-specific legal barriers are also difficult to justify morally, as there is no reason that an individual should be excluded from the right to stand as a candidate and serve as a representative of the people as long as he or she is subject to the same range of duties as a citizen. Only two of the six examined countries (Croatia and Spain) specify the voting age of eligibility to stand as a candidate, which is 18 years (see Table 9). The four remaining countries adopt two different age thresholds. The most severe barriers to youth participation and representation in the national parliamentary arena appear in Georgia and Poland: the latter sets the threshold for membership in the Senate at the age of 30; both states have the threshold of 35 years for individuals standing as a candidate for the position of president.

It is contended that by *lowering the voting age*, which defines citizenship, the turnout would rise. Turnout appears to be higher among 18 year olds than among 19 to 21 year olds.<sup>176</sup> Emerging evidence is in favour of lowering the voting age to 16. Although some remain sceptical about whether extending voting rights to 16 year olds would promote higher turnout for first-time voters and over time,<sup>177</sup> the number of advocates of this measure, who also demand comprehensive complementary citizenship education, is increasing.<sup>178</sup> Evidence from the recent Scottish Referendum on independence, in which 16 and 17 year olds had the right to vote, shed new light on the topic; some key arguments of the opponents of this measure were proved to be invalid. The data showed that youth aged 16 and 17 were (a) as interested in politics as adults, (b) demonstrated engagement with politics in conversations and through voting when actual issues were concerned, (c) not strongly influenced by parents, and (d) their political perceptions were not substantially related to parents' educational backgrounds.<sup>179</sup> In addition, discussing political issues in schools greatly increased students' political confidence, and the young people surveyed felt closer to political parties after the referendum.<sup>180</sup>

As previously explained, *voter registration procedures* impose additional requirements on the voter, and they make the cost of voting higher for the individual. Voter registration processes have been proved to have a negative effect on electoral participation and to have particularly negative consequences in certain groups of individuals, including students.<sup>181</sup> Among the examined countries, only the UK does not automatically register

voters and requires that the voters themselves register (see Table 9). Instead of simply dropping the active registration process, the UK decided to move from a system of household electoral registration, in which one member of a household completes the registration for all its members, to individual electoral registration, in which each eligible voter registers to vote individually. Even though the new system introduced the possibility of registering online, it also created new barriers to the population that is already the least likely to register.<sup>182</sup> Both private tenants and students suffered a disproportional negative impact of the new registration process.<sup>183</sup>

Measures that *reduce the costs of visiting the ballot box* and *improve access* for persons with disabilities or other personal limitations are important steps towards making the electoral process more inclusive. Furthermore, alternative modes of voting, such as from abroad, include voters who would otherwise be excluded due to personal obligations, arrangements or life-choices. All the examined countries are accustomed to at least one alternative mode of voting, such as voting in a district where the individual is not registered, postal voting, voting by proxy and even electronic voting over the Internet. Poland and Estonia have the friendliest systems among the alternative modes, including voting when abroad. Since its adoptions of E-voting, Estonia has the most advanced alternative voting system.

*E-voting*, which is the ability to vote over the Internet from any location within and outside the country, has frequently been portrayed as the panacea for modest voter turnout, particularly in the young, tech-savvy generation. As E-voting solutions mainly respond to the need to reduce the costs incurred by the visit to the ballot box, it is clear that this system does not resolve the issues associated with the non-participation of young people in institutional politics. Nevertheless, it has proven to be a convenient option for those who are already active, and it has certainly improved the opportunity to vote for those who face limitations that prevent their presence at the polling station (see the section on the role of the Internet in youth political participation). Some argue that the full potential of E-voting's relies on its inclusion in a wider e-democracy agenda, which would allow voters to gather additional information for the Internet and even debate online.<sup>184</sup>

Table 9. Electoral process data for Spain, Croatia, Georgia, Estonia, the United Kingdom and Poland.

Country	Political Finance		Electoral System Design				Voting from Abroad			Registration, e-voting		
	Spending threshold (party)	Spending threshold (cand.)	Family	Nation. legislat.	No tiers <sup>1</sup>	Presi-dent.	Election type	Voting method	Age threshold* (act/pas)	Altern. mode*	Voter registr.*	E-voting
Croatia	No	Yes	PR	List PR	1	TRS	Legislative	Personal	18/18 all	Other district	Autom.	No
Estonia	No	No	PR	List PR	2	nr	Legislative Referendums EP elections	Personal Postal E-voting	18/21 (leg) 18/21 (EP)	Other district, Electronic, Postal	Autom.	Yes
Georgia	No	No	Mixed	Parallel	2	TRS	Presidential Legislative	Personal	*** 18/21 (leg) 18/35 (pre)	na	Autom.**	No
Poland	Yes	Yes	PR	List PR	1	TRS	Presidential Legislative Referendums EP elections	Personal Postal Proxy Fax	18/21 (lh) 18/30 (sen) 18/35 (pre) 18/21 (EP)	Other district, Proxy, Postal	Autom.	No
Spain	Yes	No	PR	List PR	H	nr	Legislative Referendums	Postal	18/18 all	Postal	Autom.	Yes (some sub-mat.)
United Kingdom	Yes	Yes	Plurality/ Majority	FPTP	1	nr	Legislative Referendums	Postal Proxy	18/18 (leg) 18/21 (EP)	Where registered, Proxy, Postal	Active	No

Source: IDEA (2015a); \* EUDO Citizenship (2015); \*\* OSCE (2010); \*\*\* EAG (2015)  
 Legend: nr - not relevant; H - hybrid system; PR - proportional representation; FPTP - first past the post; TRS - two-round system; lh - lower house; sen - Senate; pre - presidential; leg - national legislature

## Media and election campaign

There is a symbiotic relationship between the knowledge of and interest in politics and media coverage;<sup>186</sup> hence, the importance of media in election campaigning is unquestionable. As main television (TV) channels and newspapers play the role of general interest intermediaries and have an important connecting function in providing a shared focus of attention in modern societies,<sup>187</sup> it is important to examine whether institutional systems concerning mass media actually facilitate voter turnout.

The provision of **free airtime in the national media** would improve citizens' knowledge of and interest in politics, particularly during elections. As TV is still the most influential tool of political communication,<sup>188</sup> and new media frequently operate as proxies for TV in the election campaign strategies of political actors,<sup>189</sup> the allocation of free time provided by national broadcast media is an important factor in getting the message to the voter. Table 10 reveals that very different legislative frameworks for the coverage of election campaigns were found in the observed countries. At one end of the range, Croatia provides free airtime in the national broadcast media, both public and private,<sup>11</sup> on an equal basis, regardless of the size of the party and its previous performance. Similar frameworks are in force in Poland, where free airtime is limited to public radio and television broadcasters, and in Spain, where the airtime is allocated based on previous results. Georgia offers a combination of equally distributed airtime and previous performance-based allocation, but extends this framework to community broadcasters.<sup>190</sup> At the other end of the range, Estonia offers no free airtime to political contestants during the election campaign, and political advertising is limited to private media. The UK has placed this decision in the hands of a special body that is responsible for the allocation of party political broadcasts.<sup>191</sup>

However, we have to put this into perspective, as the accompanying legislation might completely overrun the provisions explained previously. If unlimited political advertising is allowed, the allocation of free airtime might be just a drop in the ocean, as the political powerhouses can easily afford primetime ads and thus overshadow the allocated free slots. This is precisely the case in Croatia, Georgia and Poland, which are most beneficial for political newcomers (see Table 10). Estonia bans political advertising by the public broadcaster, but allows it in the private media, whereas both Spain and the UK ban paid political advertising by broadcasters.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Private media may abstain from covering an election campaign.

All national media frameworks in the examined countries recognise the importance of TV in election campaigns, and they provide for televised debates as a core event in the electoral race. Reports on media monitoring show that these debates do not reach their full potential to galvanise voters and inform them about the main policy positions of political contestants.<sup>193</sup> In addition to the lack of coverage of election campaigns due to the stated lack of technical and human resource capacity of public and private broadcasters,<sup>194</sup> the fact that these debates fall short of expectations is much more problematic. Although these televised debates are held among the top candidates, media monitors have reported the absence of proper debate among the top contestants, the lack of policy discussion,<sup>195</sup> intense polarisation<sup>196</sup> and complaints about inappropriate formats of debates that exclude certain political actors and favour the power holders.<sup>197</sup> The fact that the media monitors perceived public national broadcasters, in some cases, to be visibly biased<sup>198</sup> has also decreased the importance of the media in the promotion of a democratic and participatory political discussion.

Based on this overview of media frameworks and media monitoring reports, there is still much room for improvement in both public and private broadcasters to reach their full potential as general interest intermediaries that provide citizens with a shared focus of attention about the political race. This is exemplified by the coverage of the debate among the *Spitzenkandidaten* for the president of the European Commission during the 2014 EP elections. Some national broadcasters chose not to broadcast the debate live, or they decided to provide streaming of the debate over the Internet even though the debate and the introduction of the *Spitzenkandidat* were aimed at boosting voter turnout and reducing the EU democratic deficit. In Spain, the mainstream mass media are perceived as being passive and not active enough in promoting voter education and the dissemination of relevant political information,<sup>199</sup> which would increase the number of informed voters. However, some perceive that the power of television is still pivotal<sup>200</sup> and rests in the hands of a few,<sup>201</sup> thus preventing an open and fair electoral battle. The mass media agenda, frequently influenced by the ownership structure, is seen as an important barrier to political newcomers—including youth.<sup>202</sup>

The mass media are also relevant in terms of informing voters about the electoral process. Voter education campaigns are usually coordinated by national electoral bodies (EMB) and carried out through various communication tools. Public (and private) media outlets, TV in particular, play a dominant role due to their reach and popularity. An example of a televised voter education campaign was detected in Croatia, where the EMB informed citizens about electoral rights and the voting process by providing specific information about candidates, first-time voters and the general electorate through leaflets,

TV and radio.<sup>203</sup> Similarly, the Estonian EMB implemented voter education campaigns through newspaper advertisements, audio and video clips in public and private broadcasts, posters, an institutional website and social media outlets. The Polish example is somewhat less extensive. The Polish EMB provides an information bulletin and publishes announcements in the official gazette. Consequently, civil society organisations tend to take a more active role in voter information and mobilisation campaigns.<sup>204</sup> In less extensive information campaigns, national, regional and local governments assist EMBs through their established communication channels. These campaigns also tend to cover issues beyond the provision of basic information about the approaching elections. EMBs also tend to coordinate and conduct broader voter education campaigns by sending or uploading material to various online information outlets. A more active approach is undertaken by some EMBs that foresee the active role of civil society organisations in the implementation of such campaigns (e.g. Croatia).

Table 10. Election campaign data for Spain, Croatia, Georgia, Estonia, United Kingdom and Poland.

Country	Who conducts information campaigns	Civic (voter) education	Criteria for allocating free media time	Advertising in media	Televised debates?	OSCE ODIHR election observation reports
Croatia	National Electoral Management Body; Media	conducted by the National Electoral Management Body; NGOs/ Civic Organisations	Equal regardless of size of party and previous performance	Paid political media advertising is allowed during the official campaign period, but was not used widely by contestants.	Yes, in presidential elections; in legislative elections	absence of debated among main contestants hampered the informed decision
Estonia	National Electoral Management Body; Media	conducted by the National Electoral Management Body	Not applicable	The public service broadcaster does not carry any advertising, including political advertising. Allowed advertising in private media.	Yes, in legislative elections	lack of public debates between the leaders
Georgia	Local/County Electoral Management Bodies	No	Based on result of previous election	There are no specific legal provisions in this regard.	Yes, in presidential elections; in legislative elections	lack of proper policy debate; polarization
Poland	National Electoral Management Body; Local Governments; NGOs/ Civic Organisations; Media	Yes	Equal regardless of size of party and previous performance	The political parties are entitled to paid election advertisements.	Yes, in presidential elections; in legislative elections	major policy topics were rarely covered or discussed during the campaign, avoidance of confrontation among frontrunners
Spain	National Electoral Management Body; National Government	no info	Based on result of previous election	Public and private broadcasters cannot accept paid campaign advertising.	Yes, in legislative elections	criticism and complaints from parties was raised because of coverage of the main two, five smaller and other parties
United Kingdom	National Electoral Management Body; National Government; Local Governments	conducted by the National Electoral Management Body; the Government	As agreed by special committee	Paid political advertising on television and radio is prohibited by law.	Yes, in legislative elections	The arrangements for the 'prime-ministerial' debates have been criticised by some political parties

Source: ACE project (2015); OSCE (2010a; 2011; 2011a; 2011b; 2012; 2015)

Many believe<sup>205</sup> that cynical and tabloid press outlets also present a serious challenge to citizens' perception of and trust in politics due to their lack of fact checking, and tendency toward sensationalism. The coverage of youth issues by mainstream broadcasters is frequently seen as patronising and prejudicial<sup>206</sup> and frequently takes a very cynical approach to youth.<sup>207</sup> However, some positive examples (e.g. BBC's Generation 2015 young voter panel and Sky News' Stand Up Be Counted initiative) have contributed to changing the public's perception of youth and bringing them closer to the political process.<sup>208</sup>

### **The role of electoral management bodies (EMBs)**

As discussed in the previous section, electoral management bodies play an important role throughout the electoral process from the aspect of information campaigns and voter education to increasing the ownership of elections through various instruments. The examined practices of EMBs in the selected countries revealed that electoral authorities rarely undertake a proactive role in involving youth in the electoral process. According to our results (see the list of responses of EMBs), there were no instances of the regulated participation of young people, representatives of youth organisations or experts on youth issues within the advisory boards of EMBs. Furthermore, although young people do participate in various roles at polling stations,<sup>12</sup> the countries we examined, in fact, do not provide any guarantees that this would be the case. The Spanish lottery system of selecting electoral board members (i.e., polling station workers) from literate electors for mandatory service<sup>209</sup> came the closest to the systematic inclusion of youth in the electoral process.

While some EMBs strictly defend the position that the right not to vote is as important as the right to vote (e.g. Spain), others conduct activities that explicitly address the problem of youth electoral participation even if such activities are not explicitly foreseen in the regulatory framework (see Table 11). Hence, we identified several attempts to facilitate the electoral participation of youth through electoral material that was specially designed for youth (e.g. Croatia). The UK's EMB conducted the most active approach to addressing the problem of electoral participation but primarily in terms of boosting the voter registration process among young people and students.<sup>210</sup> Subnational (devoluted) levels also proved to promote youth voter turnout actively, particularly in the case of the Scottish Referendum on Independence, in which 16 and 17 year olds were given the right to vote.

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<sup>12</sup> The Croatian EMB reported that 55 per cent of polling station workers in Croatia are below the age of 30 and 25.8 per cent are below the age of 25 (State Electoral Commission of the Republic of Croatia, 2015).

Appropriate data need to be collected to design effective measures that promote youth electoral participation. Surprisingly, none of the examined EMBs systematically collected data on youth political participation, representation and registration when an active registration process was foreseen (see Table 11). Measures to counter the declining turnout and political participation of youth by EMBs and other authorities, therefore, seem to have gradually disappeared into oblivion.

Table 11. Data on youth-related activities of the electoral management bodies for Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Poland, Spain and United Kingdom.

Country	Collection data on youth turnout	Addressed the problem of youth participation	Regulated participation of youth in advisory boards of electoral management bodies	Regulated participation of youth as poll station workers	Age-segregated (active) voter registration
Croatia	No	No, some initiative	No	No	not relevant
Estonia	No	No, not explicitly	No	No	not relevant
Georgia	..	..	..	..	not relevant
Poland	No	No	No	No	not relevant
Spain	No	No not allowed	No	Electoral Board members are selected by lottery among all literate electors (age limit: 70 years old). Service is mandatory.	not relevant
United Kingdom	No	Yes; also at the level of devoluted units	No data	No data	No, except for 16 and 17 year-olds in the Scottish referendum

Source: personal communication with electoral management bodies

## Youth and political parties

***Youth is the muscle, and not the intellectual body, of our organisation.***

· Interview with a political party executive, March 2015

This honest, blunt definition of the position of youth in a given political party, which a top party executive stated only days after an important and unanticipated electoral success, clearly indicates the instrumental role that young people play in internal party politics. The rhetoric that appears in political texts and politicians' statements tends to be much

more politically correct, as it is deemed inadvisable to neglect or underappreciate a tech-savvy sleeping lion in the electorate. Political parties tend to mask their true positions (or lack of them) regarding this important but disproportionately affected social group in order to stay in the horse race with competing parties as well as to appeal to potential voters that might visit the polling station. The decline in youth party membership and its effect on the recruitment function of parties—whether it is a matter of the changing understanding of citizenship among the young generation or the radical transformation of mass membership organisations (for this debate, see the previous section)—are therefore commonly seen as one of the core problems in contemporary institutional politics. However, the evidence of what political parties do to curb this problem rarely goes beyond the anecdotal.

### ***Political parties are the architects of their own demise.***

- Andrew Mycock, University of Huddersfield, 24 February 2015.

In order to scrutinise Mycock's catchy assertion and answer Hooghe and Stolle's<sup>211</sup> question of whether political parties are still interested in young people, we investigated the statutory and programmatic positions of key political parties in the selected countries. We defined key parties as those that act in national parliaments and their most publicly exposed extra parliamentary contestants (*Podemos*, *Ciudadanos*, and *Živi zid*). The main objective was to identify the degree to which these parties concentrated on youth in terms of including them in their internal processes or elaborated on the most contentious topics. As political parties are frequently considered undemocratic structures, and young people within parties are considered non-democrats,<sup>212</sup> it is vital to institutionalise the processes that lay the foundations for intra-party democracy and inclusion. The institutionalisation of these processes—or the lack of it—could prove to be pivotal in the democratic functioning of political parties and the entire political system.<sup>213</sup>

Party statutes (e.g., constitutions, rulebooks and charters) tend to define the function and the role of youth within the party. As these documents act as the foundation of the party's actions, the commitments that are written in the statutes reveal the level of integration of youth in the party's life. An overview of the party statutes in the six countries showed that youth are either a social group addressed by the party or an interest that needs organisational recognition within the party. Statutes address youth to various degrees in different countries. In general, three of the four examined parties mentioned youth; in most cases, they referred to how the youth interest is organised within the party. Georgia and the UK stood out having the fewest references to youth. In the UK, this lack of attention to youth could be justified by its longstanding (conservative) tradition. However, a

more valid explanation was found in the case Georgia, where parties tend to be less institutionalised;<sup>214</sup> indeed, some even regressed and abandoned the idea of institutionalised youth branches in order to retain informal networks. This finding was corroborated by the number of effective (active) youth branches within or associated with selected parties. This image is somewhat altered when we consider the actual functioning of normatively anticipated youth wings. The percentages changed drastically when we examined Croatia, where the gap between normative provisions and the actual situation is huge, and the UK, where party constitutions do not lay normative grounds for youth branches although they exist and are active (see Table 12).

The presence of youth as an age group or youth branch in key party executive bodies (usually the board) is another important aspect of their inclusion, as it offers them the opportunity to participate in key party decisions (e.g., on programmes and manifestos, party leadership, candidate selection, policy questions etc.). Their participation in these decisions not only provides voice and influence but also includes them in core-governance party structures, thus increasing the degree of ownership of the party by younger members. Across the examined countries, Georgia clearly had failed to institutionalise the presence of youth in these bodies; no examined party foresaw this in its normative framework. About a third of Croatian, Estonian and Polish political parties included youth in top party executive decision-making. Only in the UK and in Spain do more than half of the key political parties reflect this normative arrangement (see Table 12). We should note that opposition and extra parliamentary parties foresaw this more often (47 per cent) than governmental parties (29 per cent), which suggests the unwillingness of key powerhouses to involve youth in key party decisions. The finding might also reveal a strategic tendency toward gain electoral advantage. That said, a majority of the new players in the field (e.g., *Podemos*, *Ciudadanos*, *ORaH*, and *Živi zid*) did not foresee this option; they believed that youth are de facto integrated in the life of these new parties to the extent that mechanisms of institutionalised presence are more or less redundant.

Young people's presence and influence in the key executive bodies of political parties is normally assured by the provision of a 'reserved seat' for the leadership or delegates of youth branches. In addition, some Spanish and Croatian parties have introduced age quotas for either youth branch members or regular members. For example, the Spanish *Izquierda Unida* (United Left) provides that 20 per cent of nominations and representation of individuals under 31 be ensured in its internal party organs.<sup>215</sup> The introduction of conventional candidate quotas for electoral races outside the party is very rare. *Izquierda Unida* is also one of only two among the political parties examined that foresaw this as a solution, similar to that in gender politics, to guarantee the greater presence of youth in

the electoral process; the other was *Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske* (Social Democratic Party of Croatia). Having set their thresholds at one fifth of the candidate lists, they clearly showed the importance of youth within the party, as well as in society in general, and they were committed to recruiting and educating a sizeable number of young people to enter electoral battles.

*Table 12.* Statutory and programmatic provisions of parliamentary political parties on youth in Croatia, Estonia, Georgia, Poland, Spain and United Kingdom.

	Croatia	Estonia	Georgia	Poland	Spain	UK	Total
<b>Party statutory provisions on youth</b>	75%	83%	40%	83%	81%	63%	74%
<b>Existence of an active youth branch</b>	56%	83%	50%	83%	81%	100%	75%
<b>Presence and voting rights in executive organs of the party</b>	38%	33%	0%	33%	63%	50%	42%
<b>Reserved seats for youth branch in party's executive organs</b>	38%	33%	0%	33%	63%	50%	42%
<b>Youth quotas for executive organs on any level</b>	6%	0%	0%	0%	25%	0%	9%
<b>Candidate quotas</b>	6%	0%	0%	0%	6%	0%	3%
<b>Youth addressed in a party programme</b>	53%	100%	60%	67%	100%	100%	81%
<b>Special chapter devoted to youth in party programme</b>	7%	33%	0%	17%	13%	10%	12%
<b>Other special measures concerning youth</b>	25%	33%	0%	17%	13%	22%	19%
<b>Prioritization of youth political participation</b>	19%	50%	0%	0%	69%	44%	36%

Source: own data (see sources consulted)

## ***Political parties often see youth engaged in initiatives as a problem, as competition. They don't see them as programmatic drivers.***

Jan Eichhorn, University of Edinburgh, 6 March 2015

On the other side of the coin are the policies and topics with which parties try to address youth. The presentation of these policy packages and contentious issues may take various forms (e.g. Youth Manifesto of the Scottish Nationalist Party). However, party programmes are the most robust statement of general principles that presumably bind the party together. These programmes state the policies that party members are expected to follow and the priorities that the party will attempt to legislate if elected.<sup>216</sup> There are already significant differences between countries in terms of whether youth are actually addressed in a party programme or not. Estonia, Spain and the UK address the political participation of youth, whereas Croatia, Poland and Georgia do not. Although they have the same issues, such as high youth unemployment (e.g., Croatia) and decreasing numbers of youth who participate in politics (e.g., Poland), many parties fail to mention youth explicitly. This appeared across the spectrum among main governmental powerhouses as well as fringe opposition parties. This situation was further revealed in cases of potential separate programme chapters devoted to youth. Despite the importance of the cross-sectoral policy approach to youth and fears of youth being compartmentalised, a standalone chapter or section devoted to youth still demonstrates serious party commitment, especially if it entails a coherent set of policy solutions and addresses relevant topics. Estonian political parties frequently include special chapters on youth in their programmes (one in three), while in other countries, one or two parties perceive youth as a prominent topic (see Table 12).

## ***Political parties overlook issues important to youth.***

Kaat Smets, University of London, 26 February 2015.

The topics that political parties focus on are probably even more revealing of their seriousness in terms of addressing youth. The shared fate of contemporary youth is evident in the common topics put forward by the majority of parties. These typically include the problem of high (sometimes long-term) youth unemployment, which affects the aspirations of young people across the continent.<sup>217</sup> In relation, problems concerning education and training and qualifications tend to emerge, and the question of transition from education to the labour market is consistently on the agenda. Questions of mobility, primarily the problem of evictions and housing, also emerged as topics that have rocketed some new actors into the political stratosphere. In addition to traditional youth topics (sports

and recreational activities), we observed several concerns that barely addressed the key issues that youth currently face. These included the necessity of a defence doctrine centred on youth, youth mountaineering and mandatory school attendance. We should stress that a number of parties, particularly in Spain (69 per cent), prioritised youth participation in politics and society as a key issue concerning youth. Estonian and UK parties also demonstrated comparatively high levels of the prioritisation of this topic. In contrast, the Georgian and Polish parties failed to address this topic although both countries are going through severe challenges in promoting youth participation. The Croatian parties also did not seem to perceive this as an issue (see Table 12).

These topics mostly relate to calls for co-decision making with youth on youth-related matters (*Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske*) and a greater role of public media in the development of the ethics of participation (*Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya*). The topics include calls to strengthen the mechanisms of collaboration between youth councils and public institutions (*Coalició Compromís*) and participatory budgeting (*Geroa Bai*). Further topics include numerous calls to strengthen the channels of youth participation, introduce a wider set of opportunities to engage directly in politics, lower the voting age, set youth candidate quotas, introduce compulsory civic education into school curricula, and ease the process of voter registration. Some parties also saw the need to address the problem by removing subsidies to youth associations, restructuring youth councils (*Ciudadanos*) or making school attendance mandatory, which would spur dutiful citizenship norms (*Eesti Reformierakonna Noortekogu*).

Any special measures adopted to promote the political participation and the presence of youth in political parties indicated acknowledgement of young people's role in politics. Several interesting examples of the internal promotion of youth were found in the statutory provisions in the six countries, but no country excelled in this regard. The examples include the prioritisation of a younger person in cases of tied votes or candidacies for certain party positions (*Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske*; *Hrvatska narodna stranka – liberalni demokrati*), support for the work of a youth branch by party executives (*Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe*), parties' outreach work with schools and youth associations (*Noored Sotsiaaldemokraadid*), the participation of youth in candidate nomination boards (*Partido Popular*) and the creation of a special youth manifesto (Scottish National Party). Young people contributed significantly to a party's positions on youth either by being pivotal in delivering youth manifestos that were adopted by the mother parties<sup>218</sup> or by contributing to the youth sections of party platforms and providing a youth perspective in policy making by being full members of programme committees. These contributes also serve to facilitate the change from the omnipresent practice of 'policies done for youth and not by youth'.<sup>219</sup>

Although the youth branches of political parties are perceived as tending to overplay institutional politics and forget about the policies and issues,<sup>220</sup> there are examples of youth branches that have succeeded in introducing issues on the mother parties' agendas due to their organisational capacity (e.g., having established forums on various levels and back-channelling feedback to the central level) and their focus on specific issues (e.g., 'Collaboration for Palestine' initiative in case of *PSOE*). Another plan for bridging the gap between party politics and youth is a sophisticated online and offline campaign strategy that takes into account the habits of young people and their spaces, thus adapting to youth's behaviour in social media, offline recreational activity and so forth.<sup>221</sup>

It has to be acknowledged that the promotion of the political participation of youth also serves as a terrain for ideological battles. The Spanish example clearly demonstrates that the mechanisms that promote the political participation of youth and democratic politics might soon become part of an ideological confrontation of contentious issues, such as the rights of sexual minorities, the correct interpretation of historical events, the role of the Church in (promotion of) political and societal life and so forth. These ideological clashes have left visible scars on the countries' (citizenship) educational systems, the promotion of youth councils at the sub-national level, and the financing of national youth councils.<sup>222</sup>

In the light of the changed citizenship norms of youth and the increased attention given to single-issue campaigning, which arguably makes conventional organisational membership redundant, the following question, which was expressed by a government official, becomes even more pertinent:

***Is there really still a need for youth  
to be active through political parties?***

- Interview with a Scottish government official, February 2015.

## **Citizenship education within and outside school walls**

***Don't let it [citizenship education] be a Cinderella subject.***

- John Tonge, University of Liverpool, 23 February 2015.

As citizenship education in formal educational environments usually lacks academic value and appropriate assessment,<sup>223</sup> it is deemed a 'Cinderella' subject. Using the ICCS model of citizenship education, we examined the content, the affective-behavioural and the cognitive dimensions of citizenship education in the six selected countries. The

content dimension includes civil society and systems, civic principles, civic participation and civic identities. The affective-behavioural dimension covers values, attitudes, behavioural intentions and behaviours. The cognitive dimension encompasses the processes of knowing, reasoning and analysing.<sup>224</sup> As citizenship education is also determined by the context, we took into account the national contexts related to citizenship education policies, citizenship education in school curricula, current reforms in citizenship education and approaches to assuring the quality of citizenship education.<sup>225</sup>

The ICCS 2009<sup>13</sup> study revealed that countries across Europe gave high priority to this area of education. As policy commitment was proven to set the tone for citizenship education (in terms of status and approach) in the past, the high priority given to policies regarding citizenship education in Spain and England and the medium priority given to this area in Estonia and Poland<sup>226</sup> seemed to be positive signs for the future of citizenship education in formal school curricula. This commitment is often fragile, however, and it is sensitive to the ideological composition of the parties in government. Spain is a clear example of such fragility, which resulted in the removal of Citizenship and Human Rights education from primary and secondary school curricula<sup>227</sup> following the enactment of a controversial law.<sup>228</sup> The issue escalated when a report by the Commissioner for the Human Rights of the Council of Europe report suggested that political opposition, rather than austerity measures, was the real reason for the removal.<sup>229</sup> The centre-left Zapatero government introduced this subject, which the Council of Europe promoted. The centre-right, which was the opposition party, fiercely opposed it, as did the Catholic Church, who declared it a tool of the indoctrination and promotion of gay rights.<sup>230</sup>

Certain stakeholders that push for less intrusion into politics and a more stable and transversal mode of citizenship education also perceive politicisation as an important barrier to youth political participation.<sup>231</sup> The politicization of citizenship education, which is an omnipresent feature of many political discussions (e.g., in Slovenia, Croatia, Poland, and the UK), might therefore have a detrimental effect on its implementation and impact. The unwillingness of the political elite to clarify the function and the substance of citizenship education also allows for the introduction of ideological agendas into the school. An example is the Conservative party's tendency to promote a civil, rather than civic, engagement model in the UK, which is fully based on a model of civic duty (communitarian) and treats political participation as a side-product.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> ICCS's 2009 study included only certain countries selected in our analysis. Spain, Poland and Estonia participated in this study. In the UK only England was a part of it, while Croatia and Georgia were not included.

Nevertheless, excessive precaution with regard to leaving day-to-day party politics outside the school walls might cause negative effects on political knowledge, interest and overall political engagement. Eichhorn<sup>233</sup> and McNeill<sup>234</sup> therefore see the strict ‘depoliticisation’ of school education, as the result of either the decision of (national or local) authorities or as the over-cautiousness of school leaders and teachers, which also damages the participation of youth in politics. Commentators on the Scottish citizenship education system also expressed the need for a more coherent approach to citizenship education, particularly one that would limit the influence of local politics on citizenship curriculum and push school leaders to open schools to political debates and collaboration with third sector organisations.<sup>235</sup>

The ICCS study also shows that countries have diverse approaches to citizenship education and that they have already mapped this area of education in relation to curricula as well as school and wider community. Citizenship education can also be achieved through assemblies and special events, extracurricular activities, classroom ethics, student participation, school culture and values, parental and community involvement, student and teacher involvement in the community and school governance.<sup>236</sup> The available data revealed a diverse approach to what is considered citizenship education from a (formal) curricular conception in Estonia to an all-inclusive conception in Spain and England (see Appendix 9). Nevertheless, we need to stress that the anticipated results depend on the way in which policies are implemented and that policies on citizenship education seem to be among the most challenging to implement.<sup>237</sup>

***The mere existence of this course [citizenship education],  
if it is in place, doesn't mean anything if the students  
are not actively engaged.***

· Jan Eichhorn, University of Edinburgh, 6 March 2015.

The participation of students in school governance is an important aspect of citizenship education, as students become familiar with the values and principles of the democratic process. Class representatives present students’ interests by participating on a class council, or through informal interactions with the school’s management. The existence of a system of class representatives differs from country to country. It frequently includes levels 2 and 3 in the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED).<sup>238</sup> Croatia, Poland and Spain include class representatives on all three levels, whereas Estonia and the UK leave this decision to the individual school. Similar provisions exist for student councils, which are one of the most common forms of participation and serve as a forum for school-related matters. Student councils are created in Estonia, Poland, Croatia and

Scotland on all three levels stated in the ISCED, whereas Spain's regulation creates them for ISCED levels 2 and 3. England leaves this decision to the individual school. In Spain, Croatia and the UK, student participation in school governing bodies takes place on all three ISCED levels while Estonia and Poland provide this solution only at ISCED levels 2 and 3. The procedures for appointing representatives on the student councils and school governing bodies vary hugely from direct elections by the students to the appointment by class representatives (for the former) or by the school itself (for the latter), which undermines the democratic value of these institutions. An important issue is also the actual input of student representatives on school governing bodies.

The opportunities of students to participate in the civic activities of schools in their local communities in cooperation with external groups and organisations differ significantly among the studied countries. Students generally participate the most in sports events and cultural activities and the least in activities related to improving the facilities of the local community, human rights projects, and activities related to underprivileged groups. This pattern is common all countries for which data were available. Estonia is the extreme case, as its schools almost exclusively provide opportunities for sports and cultural activities, and very little activities are aimed at the involvement of the community. The fact that students have more opportunities to participate in a range of civic-related community activities in some countries indicates the need for nationwide programmes and projects as well as the provision of greater support for local initiatives.<sup>239</sup>

A study conducted by the Eurydice network on citizenship education across Europe<sup>240</sup> also found that improving teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching citizenship was challenging. Initial teacher education and the continuing professional development of teachers remain a grey zone, and the lack of suitably qualified teachers is a common feature.<sup>241</sup> The heads of schools also have a huge effect on the citizenship education, as they can be key players in terms of encouraging a democratic school culture, the promotion of active participation in the school community, and the creation opportunities for citizenship-related activities.<sup>242</sup> The results showed that some education authorities provide specific training programmes, whereas others support measures for school heads to establish democratic and inclusive school community. Others offer no support whatsoever.

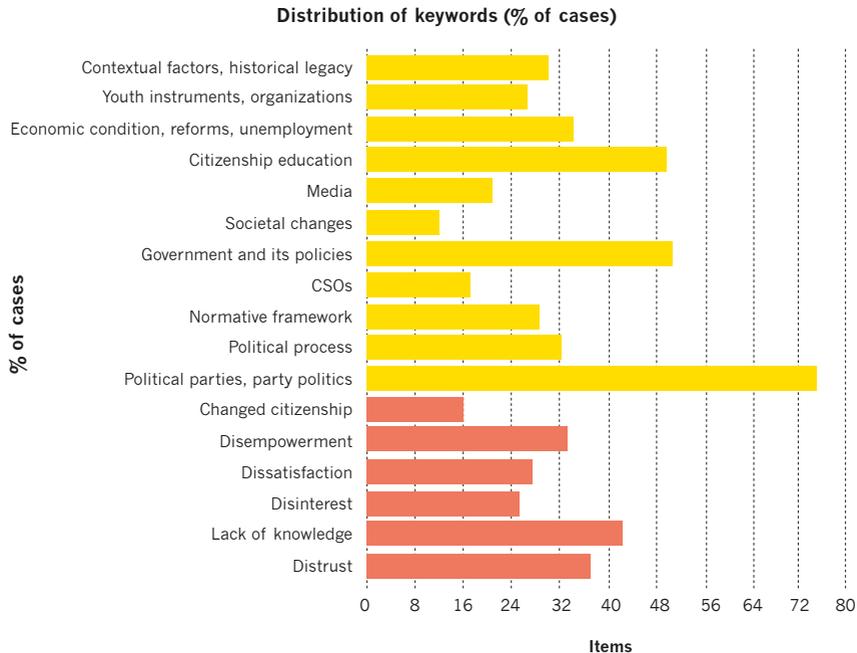
### **How do stakeholders reflect on the influence of the system and political organisations?**

As argued by Hooghe and Stolle,<sup>243</sup> the reasons for the problems related to political participation, regardless of its definition, cannot be ascribed only to the young individual. The reasons must include the structure by which he or she is framed. The interviewed

stakeholders shared this reasoning and identified both structural and individual causes of the limited participation of youth in politics. Virtually all interviewees identified at least one structural explanation and 9 in 10 individuals offered explanations. The same interviewees often identified multiple structural explanations (see Appendix 11).

In the structural explanations, political parties and the way they did politics were the most frequently pointed to as one of the causes of the problematic participation of youth. Three quarters of all the stakeholders interviewed perceived the parties as a key part of the problem (see Figure 2). They pointed to their public image as being corrupt and lacking transparency; their unwillingness or inability to address the problems of youth in a non-tokenistic way; their concentration on the accumulation of votes with total disregard of the opinion of youth and other segments of the citizenry; their lack of intra-party democracy, which prevented young candidates or youth wings to come to the front with support to act autonomously; or their lack of potential to interest and engage youth about issues that are relevant to them.

Figure 2. Horizontal bar chart displaying percentages of interviewees depicting at least one dimension of a cause identified as an important barrier to youth political participation.



Yellow – structure-centred causes; Red – individual-centred causes  
Source: the present data analysis

Another reason that was identified is the position of governments and their policies towards youth. As shown in Figure 2, half of the interviewees gave this explanation, emphasising the unwillingness of governments to change in this regard. They also mentioned the following: the lack of a systemic approach and the absence of a clear and coherent strategy; the patronizing attitude towards youth and the efforts of the youth sector; the over-bureaucratisation of funding opportunities for youth organisations and initiatives or the complete abandonment of funding them; the lack of consultation or co-management when devising, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies; the disregard of processes such as the EU's Structured Dialogue with young people; and the introduction of policies that harm youth and diminish their welfare and career opportunities (e.g., non-paid internships, reduction of welfare programmes, ban on new public sector employments, flexibilisation of labour market legislation causing the precarisation of the most vulnerable groups in the labour force—youth, women and minorities).

Closely related to these reasons for the negative effect on youth political participation, which are mainly a sub-category of governmental approaches to the problem, are citizenship education and its regulation. Half of the interviewees were convinced that the current regulation of and attitudes towards citizenship education present a major barrier to the political participation of youth from several angles. First, some of them believed that there is a lack of citizenship education within and outside the school walls and that the political and bureaucratic elites do nothing about it. They also perceived a lack of willingness to re-introduce (Spain and Croatia), substantiate (e.g., Croatia, Estonia and Poland), clarify (e.g., Poland) and standardise citizenship education across the entire country. While being aware of the problems of politicisation of citizenship education and the warnings against it, they also identified the issue of the varying quality of citizenship education depending on the local politics on one hand and on the other hand the unwillingness of school leaders to open the school field to contemporary politics as they feared being labelled political or partisan (e.g., Scotland and Estonia). Consequently, the much-needed facilitation of unbiased discussion about contemporary politics, which is frequently promoted in cooperation with CSOs introducing non-formal pedagogical approaches to citizenship education, is missing. The lack of appropriate teacher training programmes was also perceived to be an important barrier to proper citizenship education.

More than one third of the interviewees said that youth unemployment was one of the most straightforward barriers to youth political participation. Youth unemployment is particularly soaring in recent times, with the emergence and perpetuation of economic downturn, which negatively affects the general mood of youth already very sceptical about politics. Although Tonge<sup>244</sup> claims that youth unemployment was not much higher

in previous decades, when participation levels were enviable by today's standards, the interviewees agreed that the interplay of measures originating from the crisis or the narrative connected to it have exacerbated the non-participation of youth and alienated them from the political process. In addition to the bad economic situation and rising youth unemployment, the interviewees also expressed the following: damaging austerity measures were often linked to the general neoliberal agenda; the reduction of welfare benefits; excessive brain drain and the search for new career opportunities; rising social inequality and tough living conditions had a huge effect on the psyche of young citizens. However, it needs to be said that the same causes, as commentators have observed, drove masses of young people over the edge and mobilised them in to take part in a large counter-democracy<sup>245</sup> initiatives, which occurred in Spain.

This crisis narrative included the removal of large amounts of financial resources designated for programmes related to youth participation, either as budget cuts to youth programmes and services (e.g., Scotland and particularly the rest of the UK, Poland and Spain), termination, the absence of funding or the serious decrease in funding for youth organisations as well as youth political organisations (e.g., Spain, Poland and the EU). The lack of public funds for youth programmes was also seen as negatively affecting the reliance of organisations active in the field of youth on private funds and companies, which have their own agendas and partisan orientations (e.g., Poland, Georgia, Spain and the UK). An important step toward curbing this problem was the funding from EU programmes (e.g., Youth in Action and Erasmus +), which gave momentum to projects related to the political participation of youth<sup>246</sup> and helped organisations active in the field to stay in operation (e.g., Poland, Spain, Georgia and Croatia). Although the rationale for this funding was sometimes incoherent to organisations working in the field and the needs of local communities,<sup>247</sup> they still presented a lifeline to many organisations active in the field of promoting the civic engagement of youth. One quarter of the interviewees thus identified problems that were related to the functioning of CSOs as influencing political participation. These problems were mostly related to the origins of funding a subsequent agenda or the partisanship induced by the funder. In addition to concerns about inefficiency, incompetence and lack of commitment, the most consistently expressed concern related to CSOs was their proximity to politics in certain countries (e.g., Georgia), where their positions functioned as stepping stones to politics, and their potential was limited because of bias and political interest.

Somewhat linked to concerns about the CSOs were problems related to youth organisations and mechanisms of consultation with youth. The interviewees mainly expressed concerns about the malfunctioning of local youth councils as being too influenced by

local politics. In addition, some concerns were expressed about the exclusive positions of the national youth councils, the lack of continuity and quality of the individuals active in these structures (youth councils) and their absence in certain regions and localities.

One third of the interviewees also believed that the general attributes of the political process create conditions that inhibit the participation of youth. They offered the following causes of the non-participation of youth in institutional politics: trivial political discussion that was frequently without proper argumentation or focus on issues; the PR-induced personalization of politics that focus on political brands more than content and frequently hijack political debate,<sup>248</sup> the absence of leadership and role-models; the links of politics to other informal networks; the elitist character of the political process; and the general way that politics is conducted. The normative framework in which the political game is played was perceived as equally important. The interviewees stressed the outdated system of institutional (representative) politics; disengaged electoral systems and a variety of electoral barriers (e.g., voter registration, residency regulation and mode of voting); high age thresholds for standing as candidates (Georgia); limited systems of accountability; limited spaces and repertoires of institutional participation in politics and communication with politicians.

With the exception of certain initiatives related to boosting the political participation of youth (e.g., BBC and Sky News), public and private broadcasters tended to be perceived as part of the problem. One fifth of the interviewees expressed concerns about tabloidization as well as the cynical and prejudicial attitudes to youth. The commercial rationale for the functioning of the main broadcasters was also perceived as fostering a passive and ignorant approach to the topic. In addition, this mode of operation is altered only in contexts of close races when the broadcasters start to perform their role of information providers and interest intermediaries.

The remaining responses regarding structure were country specific and characteristic of the countries from which the interviewees originated. The nature and success of democratisation processes, different authoritarian legacies, the presence of ethnic minorities and influential neighbouring states, the role of Church in society and the state, and general cultural attributes were also identified as relevant barriers to political participation by almost a third of the interviewees. In contrast, societal changes related to globalisation, materialism and post-materialism were not perceived as having a major effect on the political participation of youth.

## **The problem is the individual**

### **Accumulated evidence on personal and group-level causes of (non-)participation**

Macedo et al.<sup>249</sup> stress that political participation and the improvement of democratic processes entail questions about not only the *quantity* and *quality* of political participation but also *equality*. This draws attention to the question of *who* participates, as some personal characteristics make individuals more prone to participating in the political process. Verba et al.<sup>250</sup> propose very useful questions about why people do not participate. They observe that it is because they cannot (lack of resources); do not want to (lack of psychological engagement); or they were not asked them to participate (lack of recruitment networks). We explain the following (non-exhaustive) set of variables, which were used to investigate the socio-economic, psychological and socialisation conditions of the participation of youth in politics.

#### *Socio-economic conditions*

The most common idea of socio-economic status and the variables that measure it is that the socio-economically deprived participate less. *Income* levels are one of the most common indicators of how socio-economic status impacts participation on different levels. Regarding turnout, Smets and Van Ham<sup>251</sup> report that income appears to have a positive impact on participation, as those from higher social classes systematically turn out at higher rates. Scholz et al.<sup>252</sup> suggest that this is the case not only in electoral politics but also in protest politics and civic engagement, where those with higher incomes are the most active. This tendency also extends to political activity online.<sup>253</sup> Although there is an increasing amount of evidence that links declining participation rates with economic inequality, its validity has not been sufficiently tested.<sup>254</sup>

The second core socio-economic variable that has been proven relevant over time is the level of *education*. Although higher education levels generally do not lead to higher levels of traditional participation (see the section on youth and declining turnout), it is still clear that education is positively related to turnout.<sup>255</sup> Hence, we have to stress that an overall increase in education is not expected to lead to a rise in political participation, as the amount of education is not likely to solve the problems of political attentiveness and knowledge.<sup>256</sup>

In addition to income and education, various other socio-economic variables are relevant in different contexts and for different groups. One variable is *marital status*. It is thought that married people are more attuned to traditional values, including the sense of civic

duty, than those with other domestic arrangements.<sup>257</sup> The variable of *residential mobility* is particularly relevant to younger people, as their ties with the community of residence are weaker than those of *homeowners*, for example.<sup>258</sup> *Group-based inequalities* also prove to be very important in various environments.<sup>259</sup> This could be the case with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, citizenship status, religious minorities and so forth. The uneven participation across different groups is fairly well known, and it could result from a range of efficacy, political knowledge, language proficiency or social deprivation.<sup>260</sup>

#### *Psychological roots of engagement*

*Political knowledge* is inherently linked to the quality of participation; it also affects quantity. Those who are more knowledgeable about politics also participate more, whether in electoral politics or other types of political activity.<sup>261</sup> Political knowledge increases the consistency of political views, allows for better acquisition and processing of information and improves linkages between individuals' interests and proposed policy solutions.<sup>262</sup> Politically knowledgeable citizens are also less likely to rely on simple cues when they make a decision.<sup>263</sup> Political knowledge is unequally spread across the population. The socio-economic disparities among adults become visible in their children quite early. These knowledge gaps signal potential inequalities in political participation.<sup>264</sup>

*Political interest* is one of the most important indicators of political participation. Verba et al.<sup>265</sup> list political interest as one of the main causes that drive individuals to become politically engaged. Macedo et al.<sup>266</sup> claim that in terms of electoral participation, political interest in the campaign is second only to the habit of voting.<sup>267</sup> The degree to which citizens are interested in politics is a legacy of their experiences in the periods preceding adulthood, including both political discussions at home and participation in school activities, where parents have relatively low influence. However, it needs to be said that political interest is triggered by the stimulation provided by the political environment.<sup>268</sup>

Political parties provide information and incite political interest. *Partisans* or those who *identify with a political party* are also most likely to be politically active in other modes of political participation. The current period could be characterised as in a process of electoral de-alignment. It could also be characterised as having widespread disaffection with party politics (see the section on declining youth turnout).<sup>269</sup> Although *party identification* is a reliable predictor of political participation,<sup>270</sup> the rise of partisanship has an important negative dimension, as ideological polarisation among elites produces extremes and divisions among youth. Macedo et al.<sup>271</sup> claim that partisan conflict is an essential part of politics, but there is a line between healthy partisanship (i.e., clear competing visions of political ends and policy means) that is based on genuine disagreement and excessive polarisation (discounting the views of centrists

and amplifying the voices of ideological extremes) that is based on divisive conflict.

Another important aspect of individuals' psychological engagement is *political efficacy*, which is the extent to which an individual feels that his or her participation in politics is effective.<sup>272</sup> Political efficacy encompasses a variety of sentiments, feelings and aspects of human psychology, which indicate the extent of the individual's belief that he or she can make a difference.<sup>273</sup> In fact, political efficacy is a two-fold concept: *internal* political efficacy relates to the belief that one can influence politics; *external* efficacy relates to the belief that politicians actually care about one's opinions.<sup>274</sup> Smets and Van Ham<sup>275</sup> find that political efficacy, both internal and external, are positively correlated with turnout.

*Political trust* (also called institutional trust or political support) corresponds with psychological engagement. This concept includes the level of trust that an individual has in the political system, politicians or political institutions.<sup>276</sup> Although political trust has long been deemed not to have a direct effect on political participation, Hetherington<sup>277</sup> demonstrates that declining political trust affects voting choices by making politically distrustful voters support non-incumbent candidates. Bélanger and Nadeau<sup>278</sup> further prove that decreasing trust acts as a motivation to support third-party alternatives, while distrust significantly affects electoral participation. In addition, *political cynicism*, which is frequently portrayed as the general mistrust of particular leaders, political groups or the political process, has been found to have a negative effect on certain modes of political participation<sup>279</sup> although the available empirical evidence has not convinced some scholars.<sup>280</sup>

*Previous political participation* (particularly turnout) is also important in making decisions about future participation. Political participation can be self-reinforcing, increase positive attitudes towards participation and lower information barriers.<sup>281</sup> As younger citizens have less experience in participation (particularly electoral), they also tend to participate less, which becomes a habit.<sup>282</sup> Positive experience in previous participation is an even stronger motivator, which builds on the psychological concept of reinforcement learning.<sup>283</sup> The more opportunities that young people have to learn and act politically, the more likely they are to be active adults.

### *Political socialisation*

The process of political socialisation includes the formative years or the learning process through which the individual learns political attitudes and behaviours from generation to generation, which is influenced by political socialisation agents.<sup>284</sup> The first and possibly the most important agent of political socialisation is *family*.<sup>285</sup> Families are the main context in which early socialisation occurs, but the process of transmission can be either

direct (e.g. adoption of the same party identification) or indirect (e.g. specific patterns of decision making within families). Parental impact has been identified as relevant to several attitudinal and behavioural outcomes from party identification to social participation. Direct influence can happen through the provision of information, political discussions and specific media use.<sup>286</sup> Children will also be more likely to participate in political life if their parents tend to participate.<sup>287</sup>

Parental influence diminishes as a child grows older.<sup>288</sup> *Schools* are non-political institutions that have the potential to equip individuals with the resources required for political participation.<sup>289</sup> Schools foster political participation directly through the curriculum and indirectly through the school's climate, peers and teachers. An important source of the resources needed to participate in the political process is *citizenship education*,<sup>14</sup> in which institutionalised norms of political knowledge are taught within formal, non-formal and informal educational frameworks. Formal curricular provisions provide separate subjects, integrated approaches or cross-curricular themes, whereas non-formal curricular provisions include extra-, co- or out-of-school activities that are connected to the formal curriculum. Informal curricular provisions encompass the entire set of daily, natural and spontaneous situations that occur in school life.<sup>290</sup> In their ground-breaking study, Niemi and Junn<sup>291</sup> found that citizenship education affects political participation. Citizenship education has since been portrayed as an activity that increases students' political knowledge, critical thinking, personal and cognitive development, and consequently their political participation.<sup>292</sup>

*Active learning strategies* are another form of citizenship education in schools that encourage participation in politics. These strategies create a participatory school culture and provide learning opportunities for students to engage in real life activities. These experience-based strategies orient individuals towards the norms of civic commitment and the development of citizenship.<sup>293</sup> The strategies include visiting state institutions, inviting government officials to schools and creating opportunities for students to have a voice through student councils. In addition, schools can foster political participation through an open classroom climate that allows space for discussions about controversial issues. A participatory, interactive and less authoritarian school climate with open classrooms where students have a say in school decisions, leads to positive political attitudes and increases the participation of young people.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In line with Schulz et al. (2010), we use the term *citizenship education* rather than the narrower term of *civic education*. Civic education focuses on the knowledge and understanding of formal institutions and the processes of civic life (such as voting in elections), while citizenship education focuses on the knowledge, understanding and opportunities for participation and engagement in both civic and civil society (ibid., 22).

Peers are political socialisation agents. They are key players in the political socialisation of adolescents, and they help shape attitudes towards politics.<sup>295</sup> Peers provide weak ties (casual acquaintances) by introducing individuals to information and resources beyond those available

through their immediate circle of friends and family. These resources and information serve as a bridge (bridging interaction; see Putnam 2000) to ideas that would otherwise be beyond the reach of individuals with tightly knit networks. Without such information, they are less likely to participate.<sup>296</sup> Political discussions with people who hold different viewpoints also forces individuals to rethink and reflect on their own positions, which also fosters their participation.

### **The individual-level capacity of youth in examined states**

Studies on the civic knowledge of young people around the age of 14 have found that it varies considerably. The best-performing countries were Finland and Denmark (576 points), while Cyprus (453 points) performed the worst among European countries.<sup>297</sup> Interestingly, in the context of the data on participation, Polish young people demonstrated high levels of civic knowledge (536 points), while the Spanish score was comparatively low (505 points). English and Estonian youth ranked somewhere in between. An array of experts, policy makers and politician have perceived that the lack of political knowledge, competence and literacy are important barriers to the full and informed political participation of youth.<sup>298</sup>

With regard to perceptions of democracy and citizenship, the countries examined in the present study showed high levels of democratic values; Poland performed the best among the examined countries.<sup>299</sup> However, ICCS (2009) clearly revealed the changing nature of citizenship norms among youth. In this survey, the perceptions of the importance of a conventional model of citizenship (voting, joining a party, showing respect for government representatives etc.) barely reached beyond the categories of 'not very important', or not important at all. Among the examined countries, all almost reached the 'quite important' category; Estonia had the lowest score, and Poland had the highest score although it was comparatively low.<sup>300</sup> Moreover, perceptions of the importance of social-movement models of citizenship (e.g., participating in protests, promoting human rights, protection of the environment etc.) were not high. The results showed that only the Spanish respondents expressed perceptions that differed from the conventional model.<sup>301</sup>

Civic institutions, particularly national and local governments, courts, the police, political parties and the national parliament, are largely distrusted. In general, the least trustful of civic institutions were Polish youth, followed by Estonian, Spanish and English youth, which had slightly higher average scores.<sup>302</sup> The least trusted civic institutions

were political parties, the English respondents showed low levels of trust, which were extremely low in the Estonian and Spanish respondents.<sup>303</sup> The comparison of the available data on the other three examined countries showed that Polish youth also expressed extremely low levels of trust in the national government at approximately half the average levels found in the study. It should be mentioned that the media in Poland, Estonia and England in particular also showed comparatively low levels of trust.

In terms of political interest, the ICCS 2009 revealed mixed results. Young people are interested in the politics of other countries and international politics but not as interested in domestic political and social issues. On average, the youth in the examined countries were also not particularly interested in political and social issues.<sup>304</sup> It should be reiterated that the lack of interest in domestic social issues supports the relevance of arguments related to youth's changing political imaginary and the anachronistic traditional measures of politics and the political.

Similarly, the scores for internal political efficacy (i.e., individuals' confidence in their ability to understand politics and act politically) showed relatively low scores among youth in terms of their belief in their capacity to engage in politics. All the examined countries scored close to the study's average, indicating that no particular difference existed in internal political efficacy. The data also validates the hypothesis of higher perceived efficacy for males, which is also understood to be a factor in the gap between the rates of the political participation of women and men.<sup>305</sup>

### **Do stakeholders believe youth is to be blamed too?**

Contrary to expectations and to Hooghe and Stolle's<sup>306</sup> observation of the dominance of individual-centred explanations of problems of youth political participation, the interviewees perceived individual-level causes less frequently. It is worthy to note that because these levels are interconnected, this artificial divide is used for presentation purposes only.

Linked to the extensively perceived problem of the lack of policies on citizenship education, whether implemented by authorities on various levels or not, the lack of political knowledge and competence were the main causes that were perceived to have a negative effect on the political participation of youth. This is related to the lack of political information and the tools to acquire and process it. Consequently, the interviewees perceived youth as having unrealistic expectations of political participation, which eventually made them feel disappointed and disenfranchised. Moreover, low levels of political knowledge and competence were thought to increase the vulnerability to extremism. The

interviewees from Croatia and Poland particularly perceived that lack of political knowledge and competence as major reasons for the popularity of the radicalised politics of extreme parties and movements, which eventually drives moderate (young) citizens away from the political process.

The interviewees' reasons for the problems related to youth political participation included the general lack of trust; more than one third of the interviewees offered that explanation. The distrust was perceived as the general distrust towards institutions of the state, the lack of trust in politicians and political parties, the lack of trust in leadership figures and the political process. The lack of trust in various institutions and actors is based on the concept of a broken promise towards youth that was never implemented.<sup>307</sup> In line with theoretical assumptions, many interviewees also perceived that informed and distrustful youth were the main protagonists of counter-democratic parties in the 15M movement, Grillo's M5S and Tsipras' Syriza. Closely related to trust is the issue of dissatisfaction with political parties, politicians and political systems in general. Dissatisfaction was expressed by almost one third of the interviewees, and the lack of interest in politics and political institutions was perceived as a major problem by one fourth of the interviewees.

One third of the interviewees perceived that disempowerment was important reason for the disengagement of youth. They believed that the feeling of the inability to make a difference in the political system and the general feeling of exclusion from the political process were reasons for the detachment of youth from the political arena. The remaining set of perceived causes affecting youth political participation followed Dalton's rationale of changed citizenship norms, Putnam's argument of declining social capital, changing transitions to adulthood or the politics of youthful anti-political arguments.<sup>308</sup>

The frequency with which structural and individual causes were referred to as major obstacles to youth political participation indicates that political parties were by far the most frequently perceived causes of youth's alienation from the political process (see Appendix 12). The other causes that were the most frequently cited, but far less than political parties were, included regulation by the state and the lack of citizenship education, with the consequent lack of political knowledge and competence. Other causes included the general actions of governments and their policies related to youth and the general distrust of the political class.

# IS THERE ANYTHING NEW FROM THE STAKEHOLDERS? DO THEY ALL THINK THE SAME?

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In order to explore the perceptions of key stakeholders in the field (i.e., political parties, CSOs active in the youth field, national and sub-national authorities, youth councils and experts), we had to start by scrutinizing of the original trigger for this study—the problem of the participation of youth in the political process. This initial step revealed important issues that had been found at the theoretical level of our research, which is discussed in the previous sections.

## **In search of a common definition**

The first point is the problematic definition of political participation. This concept is understood in several ways from a very thin definition of electoral participation to a very broad notion of civic engagement. This ambiguity is revealing, particularly regarding party officials (primarily from the main political parties) who define political participation as the electoral process. It also opens up the issue of the need for a policy definition in order to address related problems properly. Lauristin<sup>309</sup> argues that this is a challenge that is problematic in itself, as it can influence the success of subsequent measures aimed at remedying the problem. In general, the interviewed stakeholders perceived youth participation in institutional politics as much more problematic than other forms of political engagement. A general crisis of participation in institutional politics was acknowledged but mostly in the case of youth councils, which also implement numerous projects aimed at curbing this issue (see Appendix 10). The difference in perceptions across countries provides varied findings, primarily in relation to domestic events concerning politics and the political participation of youth. Following the 15M protests, the consequent rise of counter-democratic political actors in Spain,<sup>310</sup> and the relative success of the Scottish referendum on independence from the viewpoint of participation of young people, particularly the 16 to 18 years old cohort,<sup>311</sup> youth political participation appears to be less problematic in these countries. However, according to bleak statistics on country participation, Polish commentators were much less optimistic although they stressed some positive changes at the local level.<sup>312</sup>

Another variation is revealed when grouping political party representatives according to their party family or affiliation. Social democrats and liberals perceive youth political participation as much more problematic compared to conservatives and others (e.g., green parties and regionalists). The latter two, however, differ severely, as conservative parties rest on the notion that political participation should be a matter of quality over quantity,<sup>313</sup> whereas the fringe green and regionalist parties usually tap into the segment of the electorate that is concerned with post-modern issues and contentious politics.<sup>314</sup> The elitist vs. pluralist perception of democracy may therefore already be detected at the level of the mainstream parties. In particular, conservatives and social democrats reveal opposing views on the priorities in political participation.<sup>315</sup>

### **Inclusive process of and coherent approach to addressing the problem of youth political participation**

Based on a common definition of political participation and particularly the agreed definition of a problem, appropriate solutions may be sought and instruments devised. One of the general concerns regarding addressing youth political participation, while disregarding definitional issues, is the problem of a coherent, holistic and systemic approach to addressing the identified problem. This problem is widely perceived among the stakeholders,<sup>316</sup> as disjointed temporary measures and ad-hoc (re-)actions and initiatives dominate the field. The shift of governmental agendas from the promotion of one type of engagement to another one according to the ideological orientation of the office holders (e.g. from civic to civil engagement, with political participation becoming a by-product) or even the commitment of a person in charge<sup>317</sup> might have detrimental effects on the participation level of the young generation and serve to confirm perceptions of patronising attitudes towards youth.<sup>318</sup>

Equally omnipresent among stakeholders is the simple lack of attention to the problems of youth political participation and youth itself. The lack of governments' willingness to act is a widespread perception among stakeholders, primarily the representatives of CSOs and youth wings of political parties.<sup>319</sup> This is clearly exhibited in the case of citizenship education, which received significant attention when the interviews focused on the causes of the problem of youth political participation. Precisely, the state and its position holders are frequently seen as impeding the process of clarifying the citizenship education curriculum and its adaptation.<sup>320</sup>

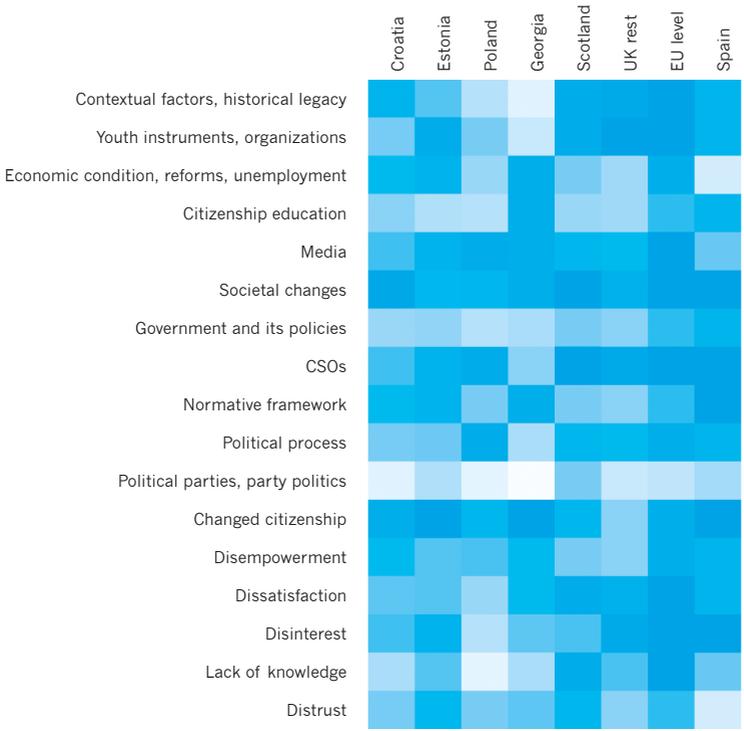
The interviewees nevertheless put forward some positive examples. They pointed to the processes of drafting youth strategies or equivalent strategic documents. These processes, although suffering from the lack of consultation with youth outside youth organisations<sup>321</sup> and privileging positions on the national youth councils,<sup>322</sup> indicate an inclusive approach to policy-making<sup>323</sup> and resemble the co-management processes promoted by the Council of Europe.<sup>324</sup> This process, however, does not ensure that any of these strategies will be implemented<sup>325</sup> or that this process will affect other bureaucratic structures dealing with policies relevant to youth.<sup>326</sup>

## **Perception of barriers to youth political participation by country/political entity**

Grouping the interviewees according to their countries of origin or the political entities to which belong or are knowledgeable about allowed us to map certain country- or polity-specific patterns that otherwise would be unnoticed.

As previously observed, political parties and party politics in general are perceived as a major obstacle in the majority of the examined entities but especially so in Georgia, where all the interviewees expressed at least one concern about this aspect of political life, particularly the lack of institutionalisation and intra-party democracy (see Figure 3). In Croatia and Poland, political parties seemed similarly discouraging of participating in politics. In these three states, the problem of polarisation (as well as radicalisation) of the political space and the hollowing-out of the moderate middle were also expressed the most frequently. In contrast, although they are perceived as structures that frequently discourage youth from participating, political parties perform better in Estonia, Spain, and particularly Scotland, where they were not the most frequently cited barriers to political participation. The latter can be explained by the active role of parties in promoting the Vote at 16 campaign, as well as the attention devoted to youth, particularly during the Scottish referendum on independence campaign. As in the Scottish case, where the Westminster-focused parties are still perceived as a major problem, the Spanish case reflects the divide between resented political dinosaurs and new counter-democracy parties<sup>327</sup> coming out of the 15M movement.

Figure 3. Heatmap displaying the percentages of interviewees grouped by political entities depicting at least one dimension of the identified reasons for important barriers to youth political participation.



The brightest square indicates 100 per cent of interviewees perceived this explanation as a major obstacle to youth political participation while the darkest square indicates the absence of this explanation from perceptions of interviewees.  
Source: the present data analysis

Similarly, communist heritage, unfinished or improper democratisation processes and authoritarian elements were perpetuated after the transition to democracy proved to be the most frequently perceived obstacles to youth political participation in the post-communist countries examined in the present study. The interviewees from Georgia and Poland expressed problems of non-democratic legacies, the culture of passiveness and important urban-rural divides that prevent young people from outside the developed urbanised centres from fully participating in politics. The interviewees from Croatia and Poland, but primarily Georgia, also expressed concerns about the influence of local politics on the functioning of local youth councils, which they frequently perceived as failed attempts to connect youth to local politics and policy-making. However, economic

conditions, particularly youth unemployment and budget cuts to youth programmes and services, were perceived as a major issue in the youth political participation in Spain, Poland and the UK. The interviewees from the other countries did not focus on that explanation. The media, particularly the main public and private broadcasters, were perceived to be the most unfriendly to the political participation of youth in Spain and Croatia, which is corroborated by reports of the OSCE election.

The Georgian interviewees emphasised the problem of CSOs' interest in political advancement and accepting biased funding, whereas the Croatian interviewees saw the work of CSOs as having no particular impact. In terms of the normative framework, the interviewees from the UK most frequently perceived Westminster-type political institutions as out of date and in need of revision either by modifying the electoral system and tweaking the system of representation (introduction of the recall) or by substantially revising the bi-cameral system and the monarchical hierarchy (e.g., abandonment of the House of Lords, progressive devolution etc.). The political process and the way politics are conducted were the most frequently perceived as problematic in Georgia, Croatia and Estonia.

Stakeholders from Poland, where there is a widespread perception that the government does not recognise the problem and is not willing to do anything about it, perceived the attitude of the government and its policies as the most problematic. The interviewees from Croatia, which was perceived as making positive efforts, made similar arguments, but these were mainly based on a particular project or department, rather than across sectors. The Georgian interviewees expressed the lack of meritocratic practices and the lack of funding for the youth sector. The bureaucratisation of state funding was seen as an omnipresent problem in Georgia. The excessive ideological revision of the model of citizenship was expressed as a major problem primarily in the UK.

The regulation, implementation and commitment to citizenship education were emphasised as important barriers to youth political participation in all countries. Specific references were made to problems such as the definition of the curriculum, teacher-training programmes, politicization and so forth. On the individual level, the lack of political knowledge and competence, which is closely related to the citizenship education policy, was perceived to be the most problematic in Poland, Georgia and Croatia. Poland and Croatia seem the most prone to radical polarisation and extremism. Distrust, the condition that led to the support of counter-democracy parties, was the most frequently perceived by the Spanish interviewees. However, distrust was frequently referred to as having a major influence on political participation. The Polish interviewees highlighted alienation

or the complete lack of interest in the political process, which was also indicated by the survey data and official turnout statistics. Low satisfaction with politics were similarly perceived to be a major problem in Poland, while disempowerment—the feeling of having no influence despite political interest—was mentioned the most frequently by the interviewees from UK, who also expressed the highest concern for the changed citizenship of young people (for a detailed overview see Appendix 13).

## **Perception of barriers to youth political participation by stakeholder type**

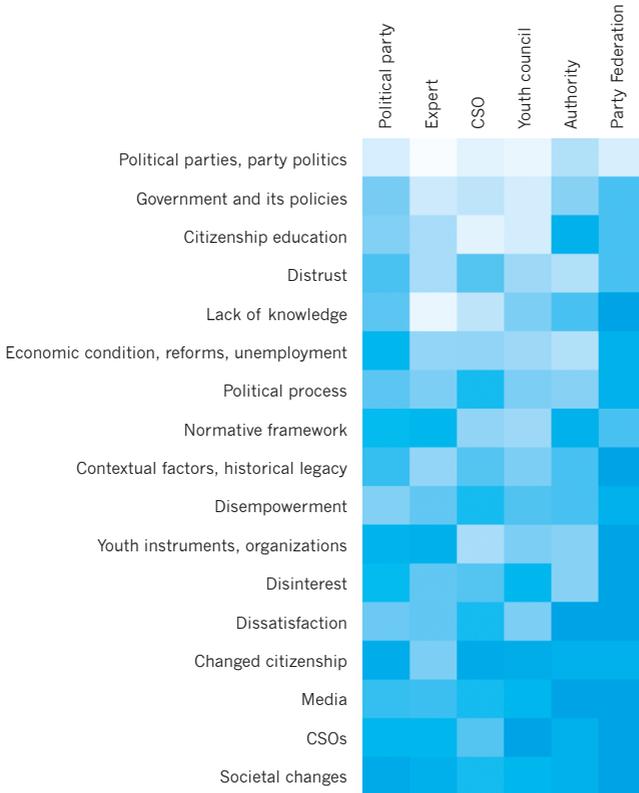
As there are different interests at stake in youth political participation, cross tabulating the perceptions of key barriers to participation by different stakeholders might provide additional insights into the topic. In our research, we interviewed political party executives, the representatives of national authorities, the representatives of youth councils, the representatives of CSOs active in the field, the representatives of European party federations and experts in this field of research.

The picture painted in the previous sections generally does not vary although it indicates specific aspects of the problem expressed by certain stakeholders. Hence, we could identify CSOs and youth councils as structures that are heavily involved in citizenship education programmes, as they almost universally tap the system of citizenship education as a main determinant of the problem (see Figure 4). These stakeholders expressed the problem of the politicization of citizenship education, the lack of commitment to it and an inconsistent or insufficient formal curriculum. In contrast, the representatives of state authorities did not perceive this as an issue and instead expressed a narrative that is common to state and local governments when discussing the problem of youth participation: the difficult economic situation prevents extensive government programmes, which indicates that this is a systemic cause of the distrust and disinterest of young people in the political process. They added the insufficient mechanisms of consultation and cooperation that were available to youth, particularly local youth councils (for a detailed overview see Appendix 14).

The commitment, actions and policies of authorities were the most frequently expressed by the experts, CSOs and youth councils as they either observed or experienced these actions directly. The experts generally questioned the governments' commitment and conflicting measures (either in policy fields or in governmental terms). The youth councils and CSOs, in addition to the lack of commitment, expressed their resentment of unnecessary bureaucratic practices and the lack of support needed for the sector to survive without major damage (e.g. Poland and the UK). Furthermore, CSOs and youth councils often perceived the normative framework as an important part of the problem. They perceived the framework as setting unnecessary barriers to participate in the electoral process as well as limiting the opportunities to participate outside it, particularly during other stages of the policy process (e.g., agenda setting, policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation).

Political parties, party politics and the general 'rules' of the political process were perceived to be major problem by different types of stakeholders. The experts stressed this issue the most frequently, particularly the lack of transparency, intra-party democracy and competition on issues relevant to youth. The representatives of political parties (and European party federations), nevertheless, also acknowledged the problem and expressed that it was related to the problems of transparency, intra-party democracy and external interests that pressured parties, which all discouraged youth to take part in institutional politics. The interviewees that represented authorities were the most reluctant specify this issue. However, one reason for their reticence could be that they were uncomfortable commenting on this issue rather than not perceiving that it was a problem.

Figure 4. Heatmap displaying percentages of interviewees grouped by type of stakeholders depicting at least one dimension of an explanation identified as an important barrier to youth political participation (sorted by frequency).



The brightest square indicates 87 per cent of interviewees perceived this explanation as a major obstacle to youth political participation while the darkest square indicates the absence of this explanation from perceptions of interviewees.  
 Source: the present data analysis

Individual explanations also reflected responses to the hostile political structure surrounding young people. These were well identified, primarily by the experts, CSOs and representatives of youth councils. Although most stakeholders referred to the conventional issues of lack of interest and apathy, an argument very common in the political discourse, the answers not related to the interest were also frequently put forward. It is interesting to note that the representatives of political parties most frequently stressed the

problem of disempowerment of youth, that is their alienation from the political process because of various excluding factors, although the political parties perpetuate this process. The most universally expressed problem, primarily by the experts, was the tendency of youth to lack political knowledge and competence, which increase their vulnerability to populist and extremist agendas. Distrust of politics, politicians and political institutional was widely perceived by all stakeholders, who were well aware that distrust had fuelled several counter-democracy movements and initiatives across Europe.

## **Perception of barriers to youth political participation of political party representatives by party family**

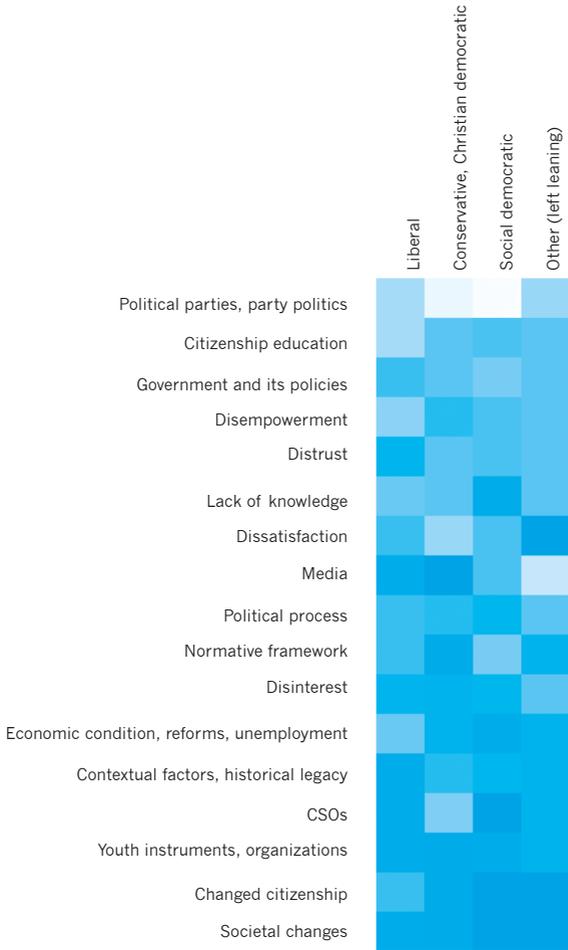
The segregation of data from the interviews with representatives of political parties according to party affiliation was an opportunity to revisit the assumption of different models of democracy pursued by different parties, such as elitist vs. pluralist.<sup>328</sup> Although our interview data did not allow us to make generalise, the findings may indicate differences between parties that are more than coincidental.

Hence, in line with our expectations, the representatives of liberal parties expressed that the economic downturn and youth unemployment were major factors in the problem of youth political participation (see Figure 5). This was particularly the case with issues related to the regulation and implementation of citizenship education. The liberals often pointed to problems related to this issue, primarily insufficient teacher training, deficiencies in the citizenship education curriculum (no topics related to finances and the economy) and insufficient time devoted to citizenship education in school. In contrast, the representatives of fringe parties (i.e., the 'Other' category) stressed the problems of private and elite-based agendas of media and their tendency towards cynicism and tabloidization. The social democrats also pointed to the problem that media were activated only in times of close electoral races. The social democrats frequently expressed the lack of and the extent of state and local authorities' commitment to the topic as well as the damaging effects of outdated political institutions on the participation of youth in the political process. In contrast, and in support of the theoretical assumptions, the conservatives and Christian democrats blamed CSOs, as they believed civil society was not fulfilling its mission.

While the political process was more or less equally stressed across party families, the perception of political parties as part of the main problem related to youth political participation—a recurrent finding across the interview data—was dominant in the main party

affiliations (for a detailed view see Appendix 15). While the social democrats stressed the issue of transparency and the negative image of parties related to it, the conservatives and Christian democrats, in addition to this issue, also referred to youth wings (e.g., autonomy, activities and the recruitment function) as important elements in preventing youth from participating in politics.

Figure 5. Heatmap displaying percentages of political party representatives grouped by party affiliation depicting at least one dimension of explanation identified as an important barrier to youth political participation (sorted by frequency).



The brightest square indicates 90 per cent of interviewees perceived this explanation as a major obstacle to youth political participation while the darkest square indicates the absence of this explanation from perceptions of interviewees.  
Source: the data analysis

The liberal interviewees frequently acknowledged the changing citizenship of the younger generation, primarily the lack of citizen-duty norms. They also acknowledged the greater problem of the internal disempowered of youth, which promoted their feeling that taking part in institutional politics was futile. With regard to the individual-level explanations it is noteworthy that that conservatives and Christian democrats recognised the problem of youth's dissatisfaction with politics to a greater extent, and the distrust and lack of political knowledge and competence were acknowledged comparatively frequently across party affiliations.

The structural explanations of political parties, governmental actions, and the regulation and implementation of citizenship education were the most frequently and most widely expressed barriers to youth political participation. However, in some instances social democrats and conservatives expressed opposing views regarding this problem, particularly in relation to the role of CSOs, the normative framework, the lack of knowledge and the relevance of economic conditions.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

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This extensive examination of youth political participation and the debate about problems related to it revealed both answers and challenges. However, before we provide our concluding thoughts, we will discuss the problems that face European youth, which may have significant disempowering effects on their participation in the political process. The increasing socio-economic alienation of European youth, which was caused by the economic crisis and accompanying austerity measures, have placed a heavy burden on both this segment of the population and other disadvantaged demographic groups. Compared to segments of the population that have influence on the decision-makers, young activists face violations of their basic civil and political rights and even threats to their personal safety. These infringements are incongruent with current perceptions of 21st-century Europe, which assume that basic democratic rights and liberties prevail. This incongruence was vividly illustrated in the response of an interviewee from a country that was initially selected for our analysis. The country's authorities declined to participate in this research.

*Interviewer:*

***Who are the most influential players in the promotion of youth political participation in your country? Are they doing a good job?***

*Respondent:*

***At the moment, no one.  
All who had been good organisers left the country or are political prisoners.***

- Interview with a young political rights and human rights activist on 12 March 2015

The extreme case put forward by the recently imprisoned human rights activist does not apply to most European democracies. However, it is still a blatant reminder of conditions that can confront youth activism in some parts of Europe, particularly in the post-Soviet Europe.<sup>329</sup> The response of the activist quoted at the beginning of this paragraph signals the risks that young dissidents face when they confront the authorities about wrongdoing or lack of action. The threat of being denied appropriate career opportunities has also become a means of control by certain political regimes of activists and supporters of the opposition.<sup>330</sup> In some countries, young people continuously face barriers to participation due to their ethnicity, religion, race, sexual orientation and so on, which is particularly damaging to certain social groups (e.g., young ethnic minority women). States should guarantee the safety of all citizens and all social groups in their public expressions of views; moreover, states should respect the fundamental civil and political rights of all citizens. Furthermore, the international community, particularly the big donors and elite clubs of states, should be alert to such instances and pressure countries that fail to abide by these fundamental democratic norms.

In answer to the original research question, we confirm what political scientists have acknowledged for more than a decade. Yes, the problem of youth political participation exists but only in terms of institutional politics. Conventional forms of political participation will be perceived as increasingly outdated by new generations, as they do not reflect contemporary citizenship norms but the norms accepted by their parents and grandparents. Consequently, contentious norms and identity politics are much closer to the experience of youth today. The rigid conception of membership and the repertoires of political action enclosed within the political representation framework will become increasingly anachronistic. Local MPs, mayors, MEPs or even responsible ministers will no longer be the only or the most powerful vehicles of political action. A plethora of non-governmental (as well as international and supranational governmental) actors have entered the political scene, and they have tremendous leverage with national and local governments. In the 21st century, multi-level governance in the broadest possible sense will reveal the outdated nature of political institutions in contemporary liberal democracies that are unable to sustain high levels of legitimacy in their 20th-century style of representative politics.

As Skocpol<sup>331</sup> and Hooghe and Stolle<sup>332</sup> have acknowledged, contrary to Putnam's<sup>333</sup> bold claim about the declining social capital of youth, at least part of the blame, if not all of it, should be placed on the political structure and mass membership organisations that stopped investing in mobilisation and grassroots activities due to their increasing professionalisation. Consequently, an equal amount of effort is needed by the political structure to bring marginalised youth back into the mainstream political process. Much political

tokenism and paternalism persists in the ways that authorities address the issue of their lack of political legitimacy. A recent attempt to address the problem of contemporary liberal democracies (and less contemporary youth) pointed to the declining participation of youth in (conventional) politics by acknowledging the importance of children and youth and recognizing how they could contribute to the social, political and economic situations of their countries. The problem is that they are already contributing a disproportionately big part,<sup>334</sup> but unfortunately, no one is willing to notice.

The issue of willingness is important in the issue of youth political participation. Much camouflaging accompanies attempts to create a political environment that enables the society's offspring. Governmental actions usually suffer from severe implementation problems and frequently end by shelving projects and proposals tackling these issues because of shrinking budgets and the unnecessary politicization of ideologically diverse political interests or even daily political bickering. There is a serious lack of ownership of this issue, as usually only lip service is paid to the commitment to youth in rounds of structured dialogue, especially in election campaigns. However, the findings of this study revealed that this problem has deeper roots. The data collected in the interviews with the representatives of political parties showed serious gaps in the perceptions of desired levels of participation as well as desirable participants. In an interview, an executive of the youth wing of the EU party federation expressed the following: 'The decline of youth political participation is not a decline in the quality of participation; thus this is not necessarily a bad thing' (Interview with an EU party federation youth wing executive, February 2015). Some do not perceive that there is a problem with the participation of youth in conventional politics. The most troublesome part of the narrative is that the proponents of this elitist model of democracy equate absence with quality, which is not the case. Many previous studies have found compelling evidence for the changing nature of youth's political imaginary. In fact, it seems that a large part of 'quality' is outside the mainstream political process and that the mantra of 'politics is a job for tough boys' (which implies the significantly patriarchal attitude detected during some interviews), as was framed by an interviewed youth wing president, could not be more wrong.

Many youth who do not participate in politics are not disinterested apathetics who could not care less about the public affairs happening around them. As Snell<sup>335</sup> observed, they could also be insufficiently informed and disempowered because of the barriers they face as well as their increasing scepticism, which are main factors in the contemporary problem of youth political participation.

## *They are giving us the flavour, but the whole dish is missing.*

· Teona Laurelashvili, Georgian Youth Parliament, 13 May 2015.

The metaphor in this statement brilliantly illustrates the disgust that youth increasingly feel about contemporary politics. The 'broken promise'<sup>336</sup> created a class of informed, critical and sickened young citizens who are therefore rather radically inactive and conceive absenteeism from institutional politics as a form of political activism than legitimize a process they have serious disregard to. A conventional response to the straightforward dismissal of any problem related to youth political participation is that 'Not voting is a choice as well'.<sup>337</sup> The response may be valid, but for all the wrong reasons.

Before we discuss the potential routes to making the political structure more enabling and inviting for youth as well as making youth more aware of institutional politics and more willing to participate in it, we warn against excessive enthusiasm related to the Internet and technological innovations that ICT has brought into the political field. As noted by Margolis and Resnick<sup>338</sup> after the initial surge of utopian ideas about the political revolution, the Internet and technological innovations very quickly became 'politics as usual' despite their initial potential to foster democracy. Liberating tools thus rapidly became the instruments of corporations to nurture economic rationality and not the democratization of contemporary societies or the empowerment of excluded social groups. The Internet therefore is not a 'magic bullet'. In fact, it also presents challenges to the safety of online activists across the globe. As the Internet has become a very important medium of political participation, threats to personal safety and limitations of political and civil rights online have had devastating effects on youth in particular. Specifically, the current regulation of the Internet and practices of states have limited the free flow of information and political expression online. Countries across the globe have invested huge resources in developing technologies that can be misused to violate human rights. Therefore, it is imperative that democratic countries refrain from the practices of mass surveillance and protect private communication, in order not to undermine human rights both online and offline. Nevertheless, despite these challenges and the digital divide that accompanies them, the Internet has many features that can make the political process more convenient for youth as well as bring them closer to participatory citizenship.

# SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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*Politicians are like doctors.  
We should identify and solve the problem.*

· Ketevan Mamulashvili, Conservative Party of Georgia, 29 April 2015.

In this section, we provide an overview of a vital but frequently forgotten part of the political participation literature: solutions. One reason for this omission is the fact that researchers rarely know which measures would make a difference, or in what settings. As this field of research does not include social experiments and the testing of potential measures, it generally relies on either unverified proposals or good practices that work in one environment, with no assurance that they would be effective in another. Consequently, consensus is vital for the effectiveness of certain measures. This was largely the case with the Scottish Vote at 16 campaigns, which spurred a plethora of other measures and activities that benefitted the political participation of young people.

We thus provide an extensive list of recommendations for measures that could improve both youth political participation and the democratic process. These may serve as points around which consensus among stakeholders could be reached. In addition to the recommendations provided in the relevant literature and empirical results, we include those made by the interviewees, who included experts and representatives of political parties, youth councils, public authorities and civil society organisations active in the field of youth. By providing relevant stakeholders with a voice in identifying solutions, we are able to detect prevailing ideas about potential solutions in the field, which may facilitate consensus and identify differences in the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the problem and ways to resolve it.

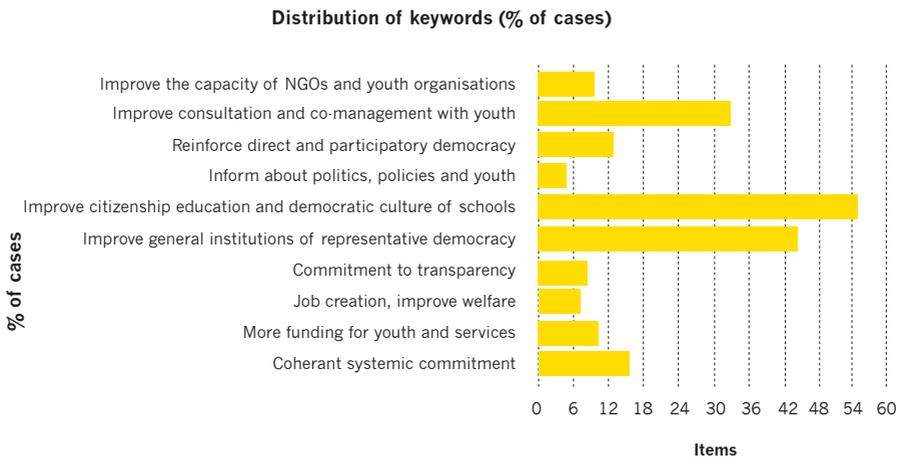
## **Stakeholders' views of possible solutions To remedy the problem of youth political participation**

The interviewed stakeholders expressed a coherent understanding of the problem of youth political participation, which was also in line with their views of its causes. With

the exception of a few unhelpful, if not disrespectful, solutions (e.g., drug prevention), the stakeholders expressed many ideas that have already been put forward in the relevant academic and professional literature.

The stakeholders proposed several solutions, which we grouped into theoretically sound proposals. The most commonly expressed solution to remedy the non-participation of youth in European politics was *the improvement of citizenship education* and democratic culture in schools and other educational environments. More than half of the interviewed stakeholders perceived this solution to be the most relevant. They expressed that political literacy, as it was taught in ill-designed citizenship education curricula and implemented in educational environments that neither promoted a democratic culture nor the willingness to connect youth with political issues in a suitable environment. The second most frequently expressed recommendations called for *improvement in institutions of representative democracy*. Slightly less than half of the stakeholders provided recommendations related to political parties, political representation and the process of selecting political representatives in the country (i.e., the electoral process).

Figure 6. Stakeholders’ solutions to the problem of youth political participation (percentages of all interviewed stakeholders).



Source: the data analysis

The third most frequently expressed set of recommendations concerned the *improvement of the consultation and co-management processes between youth and relevant political or bureaucratic institutions*. More than a third of the interviewees believed that the solution could be accomplished by the following: improved formulation and functioning of (local) youth councils; stronger coordination in the youth field; the establishment of co-management practices in the regulation of key issues related to youth; improved communication channels between politics and youth; and the establishment of places of dialogue and consultation that could serve as agenda setting mechanisms with respect to agreed common positions. Other less frequently expressed recommendations concerned the need for a coherent systemic commitment in the field of youth (15.7 per cent); the reinforcement of direct and participatory democracy (13.3 per cent); better and expanded funding of youth programmes and services (10.8 per cent); improving the capacity of NGOs in the field of youth and youth organisations (9.6 per cent), a genuine commitment to transparency and the prevention of corruption (8.4 per cent); new jobs and improved welfare for youth (7.2 per cent); and improving the process of informing youth about the political process and politics in general (4.8 per cent). To complement these suggestions, we provide a detailed list of all solutions that we collected in the following section.

## **Political literacy: Preparing young people for democratic life**

*I don't see how it [political literacy] makes a difference.*

- Interview with a governmental political party executive, April 2015.

### **A holistic approach to citizenship education that encompasses curricula, schools and the wider community**

This research identifies the need to extend citizenship education beyond school curricula to provide students with practical opportunities to apply citizenship education in their school and community activities. Community links must be created and strengthened so as to offer students citizenship experiences outside of school programmes. Current civic activities, primarily carried out by schools and local communities in cooperation with external groups and organisations, commonly include sports events and cultural activities, but rarely prioritise community involvement or contemporary citizenship activities based on topical issues (e.g. human rights, immigration, the environment, or intergenerational solidarity). A redefinition of how citizenship is learned and practiced should provide

students with opportunities to actively discuss political issues, as well as participate in school governance structures throughout their educational experience.

A modified definition of citizenship education should include financial and media literacy, and access to a wide range of diverse and unfiltered information. A participatory school culture should draw upon a range of formal and non-formal learning methodologies that enable young people to develop democratic attitudes and values so as to actively participate in society. Such practices would promote cooperation between systems of formal education and encourage non-formal education providers to afford students a holistic educational experience that develops the core competencies necessary for future engagement in society. Such a holistic approach would have to encompass political literacy and social, cultural and global perspectives.<sup>339</sup>

### **Providing support to programmes and measures aimed at strengthening the competencies of teachers, school heads 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 educational environments is the lack of appropriate professional development of civic educators. The establishment of stable financing of such programmes should become a priority for policy-makers, as should the development of specific training programmes or other support measures to help school heads foster and contribute to democratic school cultures, thus establishing an effective environment for the teaching and learning of citizenship studies.

### **Curbing political influence over citizenship education curricula**

Comprehensive citizenship education in schools is hindered by the ideological conflicts of political actors who misuse the topic in an attempt to secure votes, as the subject covers high-profile topics (e.g. migration, religion, rights and duties and historical reflection). To rectify the many structural deficiencies of the field, citizenship education should finally be conceived a prerequisite for participatory citizenry by the political elites, but at the same time also protected from politicisation so as to better encourage a functional democracy. In addition, citizenship education should be more coherent, as current programmes allow local political decision-makers to excessively influence school curricula, which can negatively affect the willingness of school leaders to participate in citizenship education activities.<sup>340</sup>

### **Media education and digital literacy**

Despite their strong online presence, young people are not very educated in creating media content or performing online routines, such as maintaining a blog or website or

contributing to wikis.<sup>341</sup> The first step towards meaningful and effective participation in a digital environment is the establishment of media education in formal and non-formal curricula. These programmes should concentrate on the technical fundamentals of the Internet, coding and critical content assessment. Schools and civil society organisations should explore opportunities to establish curricula that concentrate on coding, network administration and ICT, and also explore how to harness youth creativity to foster ongoing dialogues and participation in social action via new media platforms (e.g. training through video production and peer education).<sup>342</sup> Media education curricula should incorporate ethics of online behaviour (particularly related to hate speech) and effective usage of ICT and new media to communicate with political authorities. Media and ICT literacy training programmes for public officials engaged in outreach activities should also be established and supported.

## **Participatory policy making**

### **Comprehensive definition of political participation and youth participation-related data collection and research**

The definition of political participation, agreed upon by the relevant stakeholders, should serve as the starting point for any attempt to address issues of youth engagement in the political process. This definition should take into account the changing political imaginary of young people, as well as evolving citizenship norms and the new repertoires, agents and targets of political action. Public authorities and regulatory bodies at various levels should support continuous and systematic data collection and research on youth political involvement. Data collection should track youth participation, representation and inclusion; youth transition from school to the world of work; the impact of policies on various youth groups; and youth involvement in the political process.<sup>343</sup> This could be achieved by creating focal points within public institutions to collect, archive and periodically publish data on the position of youth in the field within their competence. Additionally, establishing a methodology to track youth participation, representation and influence (e.g. a youth index) would improve the transparency of the political process and provide grounds for various advocacy organisations to competently defend youth interests. To guarantee the validity of this information, multiple initiatives and institutions would have to be supported in order to collect the relevant information, thus also acting as “watchdogs”.

## **Improvement of the consultation and co-management of youth-related issues and the introduction of direct and participatory democracy mechanisms**

### ***Young people are shouting down the well.***

- James Edlestone, British Youth Council, 9 April 2015.

Political authorities should establish a system of cooperation with youth regarding youth-related issues beyond the conventional consultation procedures and with co-management features. One way to do so would be to improve the functionality of cooperation structures between youth bodies and public authorities on all levels (e.g. governmental councils responsible for youth), particularly when developing and implementing youth strategies. To guarantee transparent policy processes and accountability in the delivered actions, web-based tools that oversee the different policy stages (e.g. policy agenda setting, policy formulation, policy enactment, policy monitoring and policy evaluation) should be developed.

#### **Functioning local youth councils**

There is a critical need for local and national authorities, where appropriate, to establish functioning local youth councils. Due to existing links with party politics, public authorities often either refrain from establishing such structures, fail to provide support or excessively politicise them. In some cases (e.g. Spain), severe budget cuts or even funding termination threaten national youth councils. The influence of local politics on the composition of local youth should be regulated by democratic instruments of representative selection (e.g. direct election). In addition, clear agreements and a solid, normative framework of cooperation (consultation and co-management), including timelines and attendance and budget requirements, should be established to prevent practices of non- or mal-functioning local youth councils.

#### **Mainstream national youth and children's parliaments**

To some, youth and children's parliaments appear ineffective and may have a discouraging effect on youth political participation. When it is not made clear whether the relevant political institutions seriously consider the opinions and actions of youth structures, these initiatives fail to generate participation in social and decision-making processes outside the established frames of political representation. Solutions to this problem could include identifying the appropriate political or bureaucratic structure responsible for addressing expressed concerns; providing appropriate support and training to young representatives (e.g. policy-making processes, lobbying, negotiating skills and proportional representation); engaging youth structures to oversee the actions of political institutions

to promote greater accountability; and amending representative selection processes to resemble national electoral practices.

Youth-friendly information sharing mechanisms should be devised to establish youth as governance partners at all levels. Social media and other online tools should be exploited to allow youth to participate in national and local decision-making. This could include sharing policy information in a youth-friendly fashion, providing direct youth feedback to government on certain policies (e.g. through feedback forums), holding consultations between youth and politicians through social media or other online platforms (e.g. Tweet Congress), making use of structured citizen surveys, opinion polls, online petitions, policy consultations and dialogues and involving youth in development planning.<sup>344</sup> It should be noted that these structured dialogues, which may be conceived as a combination of online and offline methods, should include grassroots organisations and unaligned youth, and that the content of the dialogues should be co-determined by youth and include clear follow-ups and consequences.<sup>345</sup>

### **Youth juries and mock trials**

Equal opportunity to participate in public deliberation prior to decision-making improves the legitimacy of political decisions and addresses problems endogenous to the vote-centred democratic process. Youth participation with deliberative elements, if inclusive and performed in genuine collaboration with decision makers, can influence policy outcomes and curb political tokenism.<sup>346</sup> Either as part of a wider framework of mock legislature<sup>347</sup> or as standalone exercises, youth juries and mock trials can serve as important examples of the deliberative mechanisms available to youth to help them learn about and influence democratic processes. Like traditional citizen juries, youth juries can provide a safe public space for youth to discuss the issues that concern them in open setting among a diverse set of peers, with adults acting only as facilitators and expert witnesses.<sup>348</sup> Youth juries can facilitate collaborative 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 malfunctioning conventional political process. Youth mock trials, in which there are no adult experts and the information base is built by the youth themselves, serve a similar function. The final verdict (i.e. declaration) of a youth mock trial often represents the supported and structured opinion of the youth body on issues of policy most relevant to them. Through collaborative learning, facilitated deliberation and advocacy of trial verdicts to policy makers, mock trials provide an attractive opportunity for youth to engage in the political process and for policy makers to acquire the youth perspective on relevant issues.

## **Participatory budgeting for youth**

Participatory budgeting allows ordinary citizens to exercise decision-making authority as part of the democratic deliberation process around the allocation of public funds. Participatory budgeting is essentially a local-level concept of political deliberation and allows targeting specific groups (e.g. youth). The provisions of municipal budgets that affect youth, for example, present an excellent opportunity for randomly-selected or interested individuals of the affected demographic group to decide on the programme or service they deem most appropriate and consult political leadership and administrative authorities about solutions and strategic issues. If it involves participants up to the final stages (e.g. final services, projects and measures), this process will inject the youth's voice into policy decisions, thus improving policy-making legitimacy.<sup>349</sup>

## **Youth resident surveys**

Resident surveys improve the democratic process by collecting information about people's attitudes towards different issues. Though they may appear trivial at first, resident surveys actually demand more effort than voting, but have the advantage of allowing every member of the population to have an equal voice (one resident one opinion<sup>15</sup>).<sup>350</sup> Youth populations can face little to no opportunity to discuss and form opinions on important political issues, thus transforming political decisions into mere administrative concerns. Youth resident surveys are useful, therefore, as they provide an opportunity to gather the opinions of young individuals who might otherwise remain unreached by youth organisations and conventional electoral processes. These surveys access youth opinions regarding important political decisions in a way that is convenient to most population groups.

## **Introducing youth impact assessment mechanisms in policy making**

As exemplified by environmental impact assessments, public authorities should introduce youth impact assessments to predict and evaluate the potential impact of all governmental measures on youth populations. Austerity measures, for example, which were designed to curb problems related to the economic and financial crises, revealed that youth and other under-prioritised social groups (e.g. women) bear the brunt of such governmental actions. The active use of youth impact assessments might prevent such imbalances and allow for the design of parallel supplementary measures to remedy any negative consequences.

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<sup>15</sup> This principle can easily be skewed in public meetings, for example.

## **Information about and access to the Electoral Process**

### **Voting age, age of eligibility to run for office, accompanied with curriculum changes and extensive information campaigns**

Emerging evidence suggests that youth turnout would improve if the voting age were lowered to 16. Currently, there is evidence of turnout being higher among 18-year-olds than 19- to 21-year-olds.<sup>351</sup> The recent Scottish referendum, for example, serves as evidence that young people are interested in politics and engaged in political conversations. Open classroom discussions have been shown to elevate students' political confidence,<sup>352</sup> further improving youth turnout. Eichhorn<sup>353</sup> states that the measure of a lowered voting age should be coupled with changes to school curricula and the promotion of political discussions in school. In the Scottish referendum vote, youth were recognised not only as a valuable part of the electorate, but also as one of its most informed bodies.<sup>354</sup>

Aligning the minimum voting age with the minimum age of eligibility to run for office should facilitate greater participation by youth in representative political bodies. Unaligned age thresholds create an aura of distrust among young politicians and the electorate, creating a caste of semi-citizens and "citizen apprentices". As discussed in the previous section on youth representation, this contributes to alarmingly low descriptive representation of youth in the main representative bodies.

### **Voter information and education campaigns**

Voters should be informed of electoral processes through a variety of communication channels (e.g. posters, leaflets, newspapers, TV, institutional and media websites and social media). EMBs or appropriate public authorities should prepare impartial literature that targets young or first-time voters, ethnic minorities and other typically marginalised groups. Youth representatives and experts for youth should be included in all phases of the voter information and education campaigns, in order to guarantee the presence of a youth perspective in the design, evaluation, and validation of such activities.

Voter educational programmes are critical in boosting political participation. It is important that these programmes include relevant youth groups and youth-related content. Of special importance are projects and programmes that focus on the functioning of the political system; these should be broadcasted through specially designed media productions targeting young voters. Public broadcasters and community media should lead the way in supporting these efforts by targeting the special needs and interests of disadvantaged youth groups. In addition, the active inclusion of civil society organisations, particularly youth-led ones, should be encouraged to better reach underrepresented youth groups.

### **Youth involvement in electoral management**

Involving youth in all phases of an election campaign (e.g. as electoral management bodies' advisory board members, poll station workers or election observers) improves general knowledge about the needs of young voters and ownership of the political process by the involved youth.<sup>355</sup> Implementing a lottery selection for poll station workers is one way to even out imbalances when youth participation on advisory boards and as poll station officers is not achievable; this action also improves general awareness of electoral processes as a part of civic duty.

### **Introducing elements of proportional representation to electoral systems coupled with mechanisms facilitating youth representation**

Proportional representation electoral systems encourage higher turnout votes are translated into seats in a more balanced way. With fewer votes lost, voters feel their input is appreciated more than in majoritarian systems. For underrepresented groups such as youth, this translation of votes can facilitate the nomination of young individuals on voter lists, improve turnout and better the chances of electoral success. To combat the entrenched advantages of older candidates and incumbents, proportional representation systems that welcome youth should either introduce open electoral lists that allow voters to choose their candidates, or closed lists that incorporate mandatory youth quotas—including provisions that place young individuals higher on the candidate list (i.e. zipper or irregular zipper systems) or in electable districts. The latter option is arguably the most effective solution, but is disadvantageous in that it limits voter choice.

One potentially favourable option for youth is the single transferable vote (STV) system—a proportional representation system that allows a more balanced representation in terms of gender, age and ethnicity; fewer wasted votes; and more power in the hands of voters instead of parties. Conventionally designed with multi-member constituencies and preferential voting expressed in the ranking of candidates, STV gives voters more choice on who to support (e.g. youth supporting young candidates); elects more politicians to whom citizens may voice concerns in the post-electoral period; and demands that parties campaign in all districts, promote a balanced list of candidates and address the issues, concerns and preferences important to all key demographic groups.

### **Limitations to financing political parties, candidates and lists of candidates**

Provisions that limit or ban donations from private interests and public actors have the potential of allowing younger candidates easier entry into the electoral arena, thus reducing the gap between youth and established political actors. Imposing limitations on party

and candidate spending and enforcing transparency can also lessen the severity of obstacles facing new political actors that enter the world of institutional politics.

### **Automatic voter registration and up-to-date voter registries**

Automatic voter registration can improve voter turnout by eliminating barriers and costs incurred by traditional voter registration requirements that cause less-involved citizens to disengage from the democratic process. While some oppose the introduction of automatic registration due to cultural, financial and privacy concerns, the cost of losing a large percentage of the voting population due to inconvenient traditional registration processes is a cost too great for an otherwise healthy democracy to bear. If an active registration process is in place, it is advised that voters should be able to register as easily as possible, even on the Election Day itself.<sup>356</sup> Also, although not a problem in the countries examined in this study, but very much so in post-conflict and transitional societies, voter registries are not always regularly updated. Failure to do so impacts those who reached voting age after the registry was last updated; though these citizens have the right to vote, they will not appear on the registry of eligible voters. This lack of bureaucratic capacity or political willingness can seriously threaten young people's political voice.<sup>357</sup>

### **E-voting and other alternative modes of voting at home or abroad**

While E-voting does not exhibit the clear evidence of improved voter turnout that its enthusiasts had hoped for, it is clearly a more convenient method of voting, and lowers the cost of voting for people familiar with ICT. Estonia, a frontrunner in the adoption of e-voting systems, has seen positive results in both convenience and facilitation of the voting process; years of success in these areas have established E-voting as an important component of the country's electoral participation.<sup>358</sup> Estonia has further assisted the youth vote by extending the number of voting days (e.g. early/advance voting), distributing voting hours over more than just one day, and including both working days and weekends in the voting period.

### **Web-based applications that support the electoral process**

One way to revitalise the political process is to develop interactive web-based applications that bring elections closer to youth. Voting advice applications (VAA) that inform young citizens about programme stances of political parties and candidates, and 'vote watches' that inform them about the actions of deputies, have the capacity to improve political knowledge and activate the youth vote. These online applications can also serve as an integral part of the broader civic and voter education campaigns conducted by responsible public authorities.

### **Media coverage of the electoral process**

To promote impartial media coverage of the electoral process and improve political process awareness and general knowledge, public and private national broadcasters should allocate free airtime to political actors equally, regardless of their size and previous performance. To prevent the dominance of political powerhouses on primary political communication channels, a ban on paid political advertising on public and private broadcasters, or at the very least, a cap on campaign spending, should be enforced. Televised election debates should facilitate discussions among political actors on relevant policy issues so that voters may make informed political decisions.

## **Representation and inclusion in Democratic Structures**

### **Youth quotas and the presence of youth in key political bodies**

Quotas provide an interesting opportunity for youth to enter representative institutions. Quotas influence representation in executive organs within political organisations and representative organs as well as political participation in the political process, primarily in terms of the right to stand for different posts. Quotas are a ‘fast-track’ mechanism to improving the positions of disadvantaged groups in the political process, and have a visible track record in promoting representation of women, ethnic minorities and other minority groups.

There are three general types of quotas in politics that tackle different aspects of political exclusion.<sup>359</sup> Reserved seats, which guarantee fixed levels of representation, are the safest solution for disadvantaged groups seeking a certain level of representation. Reserved seats are an efficient mechanism of representation for national and ethnic minorities, but do not solve the problem of intersectionality (e.g. multiple exclusion due to gender, ethnicity, age or skin colour). Candidate quotas are the most widespread and commonly recognised mechanism. These legislated mechanisms prescribe a certain share of members of an underrepresented group within a list of candidates. Since they do not inherently guarantee any representation, this type of quota is prone to manipulation, as power holders can design systems to not affect representation (e.g. no or ‘symbolic’ penalties for breaching the quota rule, no provisions on positions on the list or no parallel mechanisms to facilitate entry to politics); as such, candidate quotas can have a counter effect on participation. Voluntary party quotas are a non-legislated mechanism promoting participation and representation of underrepresented groups within political organisations. As a mechanism that reflects the progressive nature of many political organisations, these quotas can exhibit the characteristics of candidate quotas (to nominate candidates

within the party for future electoral races and internal party organs) or of reserved seat quotas. When resembling reserved seat quotas, this mechanism facilitates youth participation in the key executive organs of political organisations (e.g. a reserved seat on the board of a political party for a representative of the youth wing, or the presence of youth in candidate selection panels).

The United Nations Development Programme<sup>360</sup> pressed for the introduction of legislated youth quotas; however, political parties are the major actors in the political arena regarding this issue. Despite rare examples of voluntary party quotas formalised in party statutes (e.g. Nicaragua's Liberal and Constitutionalist parties), informal party quotas are more common when it comes to youth (see the section on youth and political parties). The most important areas in which these quotas boost youth participation (apart from electoral lists) are party executive organs, programme committees and candidate selection panels.

### **Promotion of issues of interest to youth by political parties, public authorities and mass media**

To facilitate a higher level of participation among young people in the political process, political parties, public authorities and mass media outlets (primarily public broadcasters) should promote and devote extensive attention to the issues that impact youth the most, and those that young people are likely to be more knowledgeable about (e.g. student fees, housing, transport, or welfare provisions). Youth are more likely to express their opinions, voice concerns, and actively seek common solutions about these directly relatable issues.

### **Preparation of action plans by political parties on how to integrate youth in party life**

Successful campaigning is but a single step towards sustained youth participation in political proceedings. Issue campaigns also generate significant expectations. The Scottish National Party is an example of successful attraction of the youth vote. The unprecedented level of youth engagement and membership caught the party by surprise, and without a clear plan of how to integrate this increased youth influence into its party's structure.<sup>361</sup> The preparation of action plans for how to facilitate higher levels of youth political participation (and maintain them) would make political parties, which are generally very rigid organisations, more equipped to handle such situations. Action plans may also serve as a clear signal to youth wing members or younger members, as well as external supporters and sympathisers, that the organisation takes youth seriously.

The participation of youth party members in designing action plans that cater to youth priorities is vital for the success of such endeavours, and would likely increase trust and sense of ownership. Parallel training programmes for young members should address potential knowledge and skills gaps related to specific policy fields and policy-making and political processes. Such plans could address the needs of intersectional demographic groups within youth party membership (e.g. young women or young members of excluded ethnic or religious communities).

### **Reform of legislatures**

Legislatures have the potential to indirectly improve the political participation of youth and young politicians by implementing a series of minor changes to the manner in which they operate. Firstly, supranational, national and regional parliaments that are open for youth visits present a great opportunity for young people to learn about the political system and get in touch with high-level politicians, and are an indispensable pillar of citizenship education curricula. Secondly, continuous, stable and appropriately remunerated internship programmes in state parliaments would significantly increase the number of individuals with first-hand experience in political proceedings. Thirdly, periodic and open-committee or intergroup sessions focused on youth should be convened in order to allow wider consultation and deliberation on issues impacting youth with relevant stakeholders and interested members of the public.

Parliaments should also consider organising special training and support programmes for young deputies, with special attention paid to women, ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups, to facilitate their seamless transition into the parliamentary arena.<sup>362</sup> Furthermore, representative institutions should provide young parents with appropriate childcare services and sensible working hours—for example, avoidance of late-night parliamentary sessions.

## **Other supporting measures**

### **Providing impartial information throughout the political process**

The complexity of the political process is a huge challenge for even the most knowledgeable of citizens. The complexity of different policy fields and the depth of the policies regulating them—combined with biased information promoted by political competitors, the think-tanks that favour them, private companies and even public authorities—make the formation of an informed opinion and consequent political action very difficult for individual citizens. Mechanisms that provide impartial and fact-checked information about

policies and topics discussed in the political arena would improve feelings of political efficacy, and provide the information necessary for citizens to reach a decision and deliver an opinion. The Scottish referendum of 2015 demonstrated the positive role of academic institutions, especially the University of Edinburgh, in delivering impartial information about central topics, checking the facts introduced in debates, validating arguments and filling in any information missing from critical discussions.<sup>363</sup> Similar—but far less extensive—fact-checking mechanisms focused on the monitoring of political debates are free online platforms such as demagog.sk and factcheckEU.org. Regardless of their funding model (e.g. public funds, private funds or crowdsourcing) and transparency of it, the most crucial part of these mechanisms is the credibility of the institutions and/or individuals delivering judgements and information.

### **Multi-partisan youth settings**

A very important feature in the overall effort to achieve a political dialogue between youth representatives is the provision of a forum, network, or organisation that facilitates networking across party lines and promotes both a democratic dialogue and the ways to achieve it. This multi-partisan setting has the potential to transcend national boundaries through international networks, thus facilitating cross-ideological and intercultural dialogue. Such a dialogue would include various youth social groups; especially those focused on women, ethnic minorities, groups with disabilities and other typically under-represented groups. These networks could be excellent venues for providing training and fostering cross-party cooperation on youth-related issues, particularly in countries suffering from party polarisation.

### **Single-issue campaigning relevant to youth**

***We need to make a connection between issues and parties.***

· Ryan Mercer, Liberal Youth, 8 April 2015.

Youth-targeted single-issue campaigns that expose the problems that affect young people and address relevant policy issues or upcoming political decisions can galvanise youth populations otherwise alienated from institutional politics. These campaigns should focus on issues that affect youth directly (e.g. scholarships and transport) and speak to their postmodern citizenship norms (e.g. environmentalism, peace and human rights). Grassroots single-issue campaigns use young people's tendencies to engage in contentious politics, and in doing so, have the potential to yield many positive examples of youth political activism (e.g. language campaigns by youth [party] activists in Wales).<sup>364</sup> These campaigns are of particular importance to public authorities and political parties

concerned with the absence of youth from institutional politics, but are also the recommended mode of campaigning among private companies and civil society organisations that target youth.

### **Representative public administration**

Another way to make governments more democratic and legitimate from the youth perspective is to encourage a move towards a more representative bureaucracy. Specifically, decision-making processes must be democratic at both the political superstructure level and the level of policy/programme specialisation to which majority of the decision making of the administrative state is committed. It has been suggested that improving the demographic representation (e.g. including more youth within bureaucratic organisations) of administrations could produce a more responsive bureaucracy. The rationale is: if the attitudes of policy-making bureaucrats resemble those of the population, their policies will be more responsive to the public's needs.<sup>365</sup> This idea has been heavily disputed; studies have shown support however for this approach in terms of the better representation of gender, ethnicity and race, and in producing specific policies that directly benefit individual groups.<sup>366</sup> Decisions made by a representative bureaucracy can enhance the political efficacy of agents, thus encouraging youth political participation. This approach is particularly relevant during times of economic crisis, when employment opportunities become scarce and authorities must assume greater commitment to the needs of youth.

The Slovenian initiative '– 3 + 2' is an example of a campaign that pressed for a more representative public administration, particularly concerning the youth population, by employing young people for 2 per cent of the entire mass of employees within public administration on meritocratic standards when austerity measures demanded the reduction of public administration by 1 per cent every year. With established mechanisms for transparent and merit-based competition among young people for educational and labour market opportunities, such campaigns could curb the disproportional burdening of youth imposed by austerity measures. In addition, paid apprenticeships, internships and traineeship schemes that counteract free youth labour, and the consequent precariousness of an already disenfranchised youth, improve the general conditions for youth political participation and minimise the formation of distrust.

### **Community media**

As an instrument of public agenda framing that benefits young people and engages them in public affairs, community media is an important element of many non-formal educational activities. Programmes that train youth to self-produce media content help them acquire media skills, including digital skills, and build social capital through collaborative

experience in environments staffed by other young people. As technological advancements continue to connect different platforms (e.g. radio, Internet and TV), community media offers inexhaustible opportunities to connect youth with organisations and policy-makers and raise awareness of youth issues. Support to community media and initiatives that establish such platforms, including accompanying training programmes, should be supported. Simultaneously, an enabling regulatory framework, including in relation to copyright licenses, should be in place for their full functioning.

### **Stable support for organisations that assist youth and support youth civic spaces**

Extensive budget cuts to youth-related programmes due to austerity measures have made it critical that funds be provided 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 cooperation, networking, and exchange of best practices supported.

Youth-led organisations that engage youth in civic life should be especially supported, as these organisations tend to target youth-specific issues, put these issues on political agendas, and produce innovative solutions the most. Acquiring sufficient funding due to barriers related to accounting proficiency and other professional capacity is a major obstacle to many youth-led organisations and initiatives. Flexible support (e.g. technical or financial) with low access barriers for small-scale youth projects should therefore be provided.

In an era of commercialisation and gentrification of urban areas, the creation and maintenance of safe, open civic spaces available to all youth should be a priority. These spaces, such as youth clubs and centres and community media centres, provide young people from diverse backgrounds the opportunity to participate in various realms of public life and successful private engagement. Such spaces could also serve as venues for organised community activities that link to decision-makers. Structural public funding for open civic spaces in which youth and adults can come together and discuss public issues, as well as participate in various community projects (e.g. educational, training and volunteering), would better include otherwise excluded youth populations in their communities.

## Parallel funding opportunities to implement projects addressing youth political participation

*Funding from Europe really gave us the momentum to address this issue.*

- James Cathcart, British Youth Council, 9 April 2015.

In addition to stable, long-term support of organisations that target youth (usually provided by national or subnational governments), the introduction of parallel or supplementary funding opportunities could be a turning point against the severe austerity measures and budget cuts affecting above-standard political activities. Funding for youth-related activities from the EU programmes, the Council of Europe and from private foundations (e.g. Open Society Foundations) could not only be instrumental in addressing the issues abandoned by domestic policy but also act as a trigger to reintroduce them.

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## **List of interviewees in alphabetical order**

1. Allan Faulds (SYG Co-Convenor) in discussion with the author, March 25, 2015.
2. Andrew Mycock (University of Huddersfield) in discussion with the author, February 24, 2015.
3. Ángel Gudiña Canicoba (El Consejo de la Juventud de España) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.
4. Anne Kivimäe (Head of Youth Affairs Department, Estonian Ministry of Education and Research) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.
5. Ben Kelso (Ulster Unionist Party) in discussion with the author, March 30, 2015.
6. Cathy McCulloch (The Children's Parliament) in discussion with the author, April 21, 2015.
7. Darko Čop (Info zona) in discussion with the author, February 26, 2015.
8. David Linden (Scottish National Party) in discussion with the author, March 31, 2015.
9. David McNeill (Young Scot) in discussion with the author, March 11, 2015.
10. Dragan Vulin (President of HDSSB) in discussion with the author, March 30, 2015.
11. Eeva Metssalu (MTÜ SpeakNow) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015.
12. Eiki Nestor (President of the Riigikogu) in discussion with the author, March 13, 2015.
13. Emyr Gruffydd (Young Scots for Independence) in discussion with the author, March 31, 2015.
14. Federico V. Potočnik (Deputy Secretary General of The Youth of the European People's Party) in discussion with the author, February 26, 2015.
15. Filip Jakovac (Mladi Autonomisti, youth branch of Lista za Rijeku) in discussion with the author, March 31, 2015.
16. Gareth Brown (Public Affairs Coordinator, Scottish Youth Parliament) in discussion with the author, May 5, 2015.
17. Givi Chikovani (United National Movement (Georgia)) in discussion with the author, May 5, 2015.
18. Hillary Solway (Youth Service Manager at Milton Keynes Council) in discussion with the author, February 20, 2015.
19. Hrvoje Kovač (Independent Youth Association Croatia) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.
20. Igor Caldeira (Secretary-General of LYMEC) in discussion with the author, February 24, 2015.
21. Ivan Jakšić (Mladež Hrvatske demokratske zajednice) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015.
22. Ivan Nekić (Hrvatska narodna stranka) in discussion with the author, April 9, 2015.

23. James Cathcart (Chief Executive Officer of the British Youth Council) in discussion with the author, April 10, 2015.
24. James Edleston (Head of International, British Youth Council ) in discussion with the author, April 9, 2015.
25. Jan Eichhorn (University of Edinburgh) in discussion with the author, March 9, 2015.
26. Jędrzej Witkowski (Head of Youth Programmes Department, Centre for Citizenship Education) in discussion with the author, April 8, 2015.
27. John Mason (Scottish National Party) in discussion with the author, April 8, 2015.
28. John Rowe (Kernow X, youth branch of Mebyon Kernow) in discussion with the author, March 25, 2015.
29. Jon Tonge (University of Liverpool) in discussion with the author, February 23, 2015.
30. Kaat Smets (Royal Holloway, University of London) in discussion with the author, February 26, 2015.
31. Kaido Kukk (IRL spokesman) in discussion with the author, March 11, 2015.
32. Karl Jõgi (youth participation project manager at Youth Council of Estonia) in discussion with the author, March 20, 2015.
33. Karolina Ó Beacháin Stefańczak (School of Law and Government, Dublin City University) in discussion with the author, May 4, 2015.
34. Katarina Pavić (president of the board of the CYN) in discussion with the author, February 19, 2015.
35. Ketevan Mamulashvili (Youth Affairs Secretary of Conservative Party of Georgia; Chairman of Young Conservatives) in discussion with the author, April 29, 2015.
36. Khatuna Samnidze (Chairperson, Republican Party of Georgia) in discussion with the author, April 28, 2015.
37. Kristi Kirsberg (Estonian National Electoral Committee) in discussion with the author, March 12, 2015.
38. Lasha Darsalia (Department of Security and Analytics at the Office of the National Security Council of Georgia) in discussion with the author, March 25, 2015.
39. Lasha Shakulashvili (Youth Representative of Georgia at the UN) in discussion with the author, April 28, 2015.
40. Linda Eichler (IRL Youth, Estonia) in discussion with the author, March 12, 2015.
41. Lucie Susova (Political officer at Young European Socialists) in discussion with the author, February 23, 2015.
42. Magdalena Macinska (Polish Council of Youth Organizations (PROM)) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.
43. Małgorzata Gondko (Social Democratic Youth Federation in Poland) in discussion with the author, March 12, 2015.
44. Małgorzata Ludwiczek (Europe Direct Szczecin) in discussion with the author, March 9, 2015.

45. Manana Kavtaradze (The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs of Georgia) in discussion with the author, April 22, 2015.
46. Marco Trimboli (Youth Development and Integration Association STRIM) in discussion with the author, March 20, 2015.
47. Maria Keris (IRL Youth, Estonia) in discussion with the author, March 16, 2015.
48. Maris Sild (Secretary General of Social Democratic Youth of Estonia) in discussion with the author, March 9, 2015.
49. Marju Lauristin (Member of the European Parliament, Estonian Social Democratic Party) in discussion with the author, April 1, 2015.
50. Marko Boko (Croatian Youth Network) in discussion with the author, February 19, 2015.
51. Marko Kovačić (Associate expert at Institute for Social Research in Zagreb) in discussion with the author, February 23, 2015.
52. Martin Ford (Scottish Greens) in discussion with the author, March 20, 2015.
53. Martin Helme (President of the Conservative People's Party of Estonia) in discussion with the author, March 12, 2015.
54. Mateusz Parys (Młodzi dla Polski) in discussion with the author, February 26, 2015.
55. Mateusz Zalewski (Polish Council of Youth Organizations (PROM)) in discussion with the author, April 3, 2015.
56. Michael Bloss (Co-Spokesperson, Federation of Young European Greens) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.
57. Michał Braun (Polish Council of Youth Organizations (PROM)) in discussion with the author, April 1, 2015.
58. Mirela Holy (President of the ORaH) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.
59. Monika Kwiecinska (Instytut Socjologii UMK w Toruniu) in discussion with the author, April 8, 2015.
60. Monika Maljukov (Social Democratic Youth Estonia) in discussion with the author, March 30, 2015.
61. Morana Makovec (Croatian Ministry of Social Policy and Youth) in discussion with the author, February 26, 2015.
62. Natalia Diaz Santin (Spanish Institute for Youth – INJUVE) in discussion with the author, February 20, 2015.
63. Nenad Livun (President of SDP Youth Forum) in discussion with the author, February 24, 2015.
64. Nicholas Morgan (Department for Education Scotland) in discussion with the author, February 26, 2015.
65. Olga Bogdanova (University of Tartu) in discussion with the author, February 25, 2015.

66. Oudekki Loone (European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation) in discussion with the author, March 11, 2015.
67. Pablo Peñuela Romero (Juventudes Andalucistas, youth branch of Partido Andalucista) in discussion with the author, April 8, 2015.
68. Paula Raužan (Local Democracy Agency Sisak) in discussion with the author, March 9, 2015.
69. Philippa Broom (Director International Office & WFD Programme, The Conservative Party) in discussion with the author, April 9, 2015.
70. Ramon Tremosa i Balcells (Member of European Parliament, ALDE Group) in discussion with the author, March 11, 2015.
71. Reet Sillavee (Estonian National Youth Council) in discussion with the author, February 26, 2015.
72. Roccu Garoby (President of the European Free Alliance Youth) in discussion with the author, March 3, 2015.
73. Ružica Jurčević (Association "Play") in discussion with the author, February 26, 2015.
74. Ryan Mercer (Policy Officer at the Liberal Democrats) in discussion with the author, April 8, 2015.
75. Sirle Rosenfeldt (IRL Youth Chairman) in discussion with the author, March 11, 2015.
76. Tanja Dibou (Tallinn University) in discussion with the author, February 24, 2015.
77. Teona Lavrelashvili (Youth Delegate (Georgia)) in discussion with the author, May 13, 2015.
78. Therese O'Toole (University of Bristol) in discussion with the author, February 27, 2015.
79. Thomas Maes (Secretary General of the Young European Socialists (YES)) in discussion with the author, February 27, 2015.
80. Tomasz Klemt (PROM, Polska Rada Organizacji Młodzieżowych) in discussion with the author, March 13, 2015.
81. Tomislav Mamić (Akcija mladih) in discussion with the author, April 23, 2015.
82. Toni Garac (President of Mladi hrvatski liberali) in discussion with the author, April 3, 2015.
83. Vedrana Gujić (President of European Liberal Youth (LYMEC)) in discussion with the author, February 24, 2015.
84. Víctor Moratinos (JS, Spain) in discussion with the author, March 6, 2015.
85. Vlasta Ilišin (Senior scientist at Institute for Social Research in Zagreb) in discussion with the author, March 9, 2015.

## **Written responses and additional information received**

1. Act Global Team, Response to the questionnaire, received March 2, 2015, sent by Sebastian Graça Da Silva.
2. Children's Parliament (Scotland), Response to the questionnaire, received April 21, 2015, sent by Cathy McCulloch.
3. Jorge Benedicto, Response to the questionnaire, received March 24, 2015.
4. Secretario General del Congreso de los Diputados (Spain), Response to the questionnaire, received May 18, 2015, sent by Rosa María Grau Guadix.

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1. Directorate General of Internal Policy (Ministry of the Interior, Spain), Response to the questionnaire, received 17 March 2015, sent by Ana Cristina López.
2. Elections Department of the Riigikogu, Response to the questionnaire, received 1 April 2015, sent by Arne Koitmäe.
3. Ministry of public administration of the Republic of Croatia, Response to the questionnaire, received 16 April 2015, sent by Boris Milošević.
4. National Electoral Office (Poland), Response to the questionnaire, received 25 March 2015, sent by Jacek Zieliński.
5. State Electoral Commission of the Republic of Croatia, Response to the questionnaire, received 20 March 2015, sent by Irena Kravos.
6. The Electoral Commission (UK), Response to the questionnaire, received 30 March 2015 and 9 April 2015, sent by John Doyle.
7. The Scottish Government (Children's Rights and Wellbeing (CRW) Division), Response to the questionnaire, received 16 April 2015, sent by Ann-Marie O'Neill.

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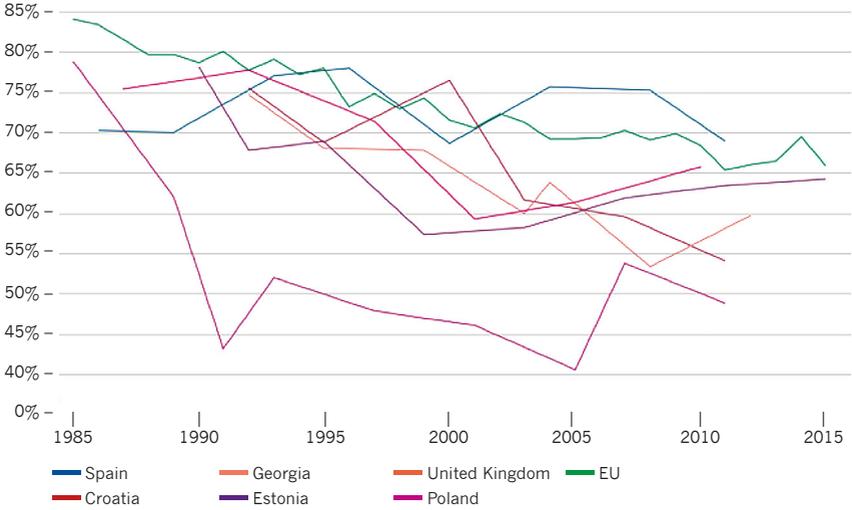
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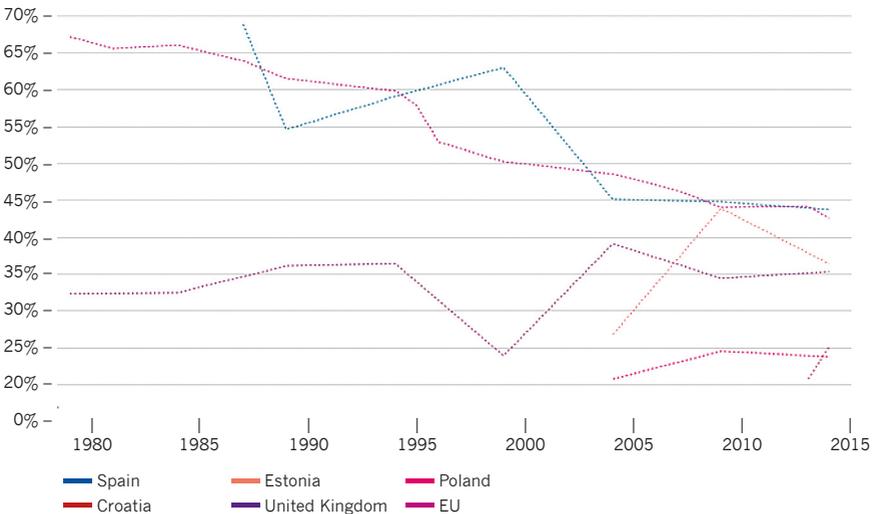
# Appendices

Appendix 1. Voter turnout in parliamentary elections for EU, Spain, Croatia, Georgia, Estonia, United Kingdom and Poland.



Source: IDEA (2015)

Appendix 2. Voter turnout in EU parliamentary elections for EU, Spain, Croatia, Georgia, Estonia, United Kingdom and Poland.



Source: IDEA (2015)

Appendix 3. Please look carefully at the following list of voluntary organisations and activities and indicate which, if any, you belong to? (political party—1 mentioned)

Country	EVS-wave							
	1981-1984		1990-1993		1999-2001		2008-2010	
	Total	15-29	Total	15-29	Total	15-29	Total	15-29
Albania							10.5%	9.3%
Azerbaijan							4.7%	2.6%
Austria			11.6%	5.7%	11.5%	6.6%	6.6%	2.8%
Armenia							4.1%	3.5%
Belgium	2.8%	1.6%	5.8%	4.6%	7.0%	4.6%	4.1%	1.2%
Bosnia Herzegovina							4.2%	3.6%
Bulgaria			11.4%	6.3%	3.7%	3.4%	4.1%	2.0%
Belarus					0.6%	0.4%	0.7%	1.3%
Canada	5.5%	3.6%	7.2%	5.5%				
Croatia					3.8%	2.5%	7.1%	10.5%
Cyprus							6.8%	5.1%
Czech Republic			5.0%	2.3%	3.6%	1.9%	3.2%	2.4%
Denmark	7.3%	2.7%	6.5%	2.2%	6.6%	4.8%	6.6%	7.1%
Estonia			7.9%	4.4%	1.6%	1.3%	3.9%	4.2%
Finland			13.8%	7.8%	6.6%	2.8%	9.9%	4.4%
France	2.5%	2.1%	2.7%	0.4%	2.0%	1.3%	2.8%	3.7%
Georgia							1.6%	1.4%
Germany	8.2%	8.4%	8.1%	5.4%	2.8%	1.1%	3.5%	0.3%
Greece					7.9%	5.6%	5.1%	5.1%
Hungary			2.4%	1.8%	1.6%	0.9%	0.6%	0.3%
Iceland	12.6%	5.4%	15.1%	11.9%	19.0%	13.9%	23.9%	18.0%
Ireland	4.4%	3.6%	3.8%	2.0%	4.2%	3.9%	5.9%	5.8%
Italy	6.3%	4.6%	5.3%	5.7%	4.1%	2.0%	3.7%	3.0%
Latvia			18.4%	13.7%	1.9%	1.1%	2.0%	1.9%
Lithuania			7.4%	4.3%	1.3%	1.1%	4.1%	1.8%
Luxembourg					6.0%	2.4%	5.5%	3.2%
Malta	8.6%	9.2%	8.4%	7.7%	5.9%	2.7%	1.8%	2.0%
Moldova							1.8%	1.8%
Montenegro							4.7%	2.8%
Netherlands	8.6%	3.7%	9.8%	4.1%	9.3%	2.9%	10.7%	5.4%
Norway	14.3%	6.5%	13.9%	8.1%			7.1%	4.3%
Poland			1.6%	2.6%	0.7%	0.0%	0.8%	0.3%
Portugal			4.6%	6.2%	0.9%	1.2%	3.4%	2.6%
Romania			2.5%	1.1%	2.3%	2.5%	3.7%	3.2%
Russian Federation					0.7%	1.4%	2.1%	2.2%
Serbia							6.9%	8.2%
Slovak Republic			2.7%	1.6%	6.6%	3.2%	1.2%	0.6%
Slovenia			3.3%	1.6%	3.0%	2.3%	3.9%	1.8%
Spain	2.7%	3.3%	1.4%	0.7%	2.0%	1.0%	2.3%	2.4%
Sweden	13.5%	6.3%	10.1%	3.6%	10.6%	5.5%	5.3%	7.9%
Switzerland							4.7%	2.6%
Turkey					3.5%	3.3%	2.9%	2.5%
Ukraine					2.2%	0.7%	2.7%	2.9%
Macedonia							10.9%	10.4%
Great Britain	4.5%	2.4%	5.7%	3.1%	2.5%	2.3%	1.9%	0.4%
USA	11.7%	8.1%	13.9%	9.0%				

Source: EVS (2011)

Appendix 4. Have you in the past year participated in any activities of the following organisations? ('Yes')

Country/Area	Sports club	Youth club, org.	Cultural org.	Political party, org.	Local comm.-oriented org.	Environ. org.	Human rights-oriented org.	Other NGO
<b>EU 28</b>	34,9%	21,9%	13,8%	5,1%	15,2%	6,6%	7,8%	12,1%
<b>United Kingdom</b>	41,4%	30,2%	14,0%	4,4%	26,8%	8,8%	9,8%	14,8%
<b>Spain</b>	38,0%	23,4%	19,0%	5,0%	15,4%	10,8%	13,0%	14,6%
<b>Estonia</b>	25,0%	12,6%	7,0%	2,6%	7,4%	3,0%	1,8%	4,4%
<b>Poland</b>	18,8%	12,0%	10,6%	2,6%	12,2%	1,6%	5,0%	7,8%
<b>Croatia</b>	19,4%	12,8%	9,2%	6,2%	7,6%	3,0%	4,4%	5,0%

Source: Flash Eurobarometer 375 (2014)

Appendix 5. Exercised forms of political actions in the past for youth and the population average.

Country	Signing a petition		Joining in boycotts		Attending lawful demonstrations		Joining unofficial strikes		Occupying buildings/factories	
	Total	15-29	Total	15-29	Total	15-29	Total	15-29	Total	15-29
<b>Croatia</b>	37,4%	51,1%	10,1%	6,8%	9,2%	7,9%	4,8%	4,0%	1,1%	1,7%
<b>Estonia</b>	21,2%	18,9%	3,4%	3,2%	5,7%	3,4%	0,6%	0,9%	0,1%	0,0%
<b>Georgia</b>	15,9%	10,2%	5,9%	4,8%	26,3%	29,6%	7,5%	5,0%	0,6%	0,0%
<b>Poland</b>	21,9%	20,5%	3,5%	3,7%	8,3%	6,2%	2,9%	2,8%	1,9%	0,9%
<b>Spain</b>	33,3%	34,2%	7,5%	5,0%	38,6%	36,6%	9,3%	7,7%	2,7%	1,9%
<b>Great Britain</b>	68,7%	48,4%	13,9%	5,6%	14,6%	6,3%	6,9%	3,8%	1,9%	1,1%

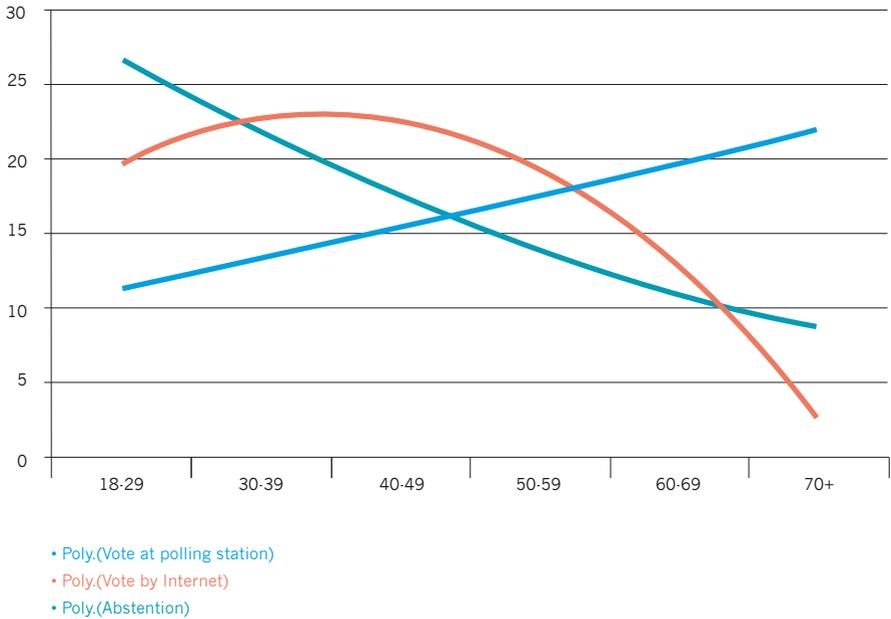
(Original question: I'm going to read out some different forms of political action that people can take, and I'd like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you would/might do it or would not/never, under any circumstances do it.; 'Have done')  
Source: EVS (2011)

Appendix 6. Posting opinions on civic or political issues via websites (e.g. blogs, social networks, etc.) according to low, medium and high formal education (percentage of individuals).

	Low formal education	Medium formal education	High formal education
<b>EU 28</b>	15	19	24
<b>Estonia</b>	14	26	38
<b>Spain</b>	18	31	36
<b>Croatia</b>	15	18	14
<b>Poland</b>	7	12	12
<b>United Kingdom</b>	.	12	14

Source: Eurostat (2015)

Appendix 7. Fitted trend lines of voters based on the means of all elections (percentage of individuals).



Source: Trechsel et al. (2010)

Appendix 8. Data on political finance for Spain, Croatia, Georgia, Estonia, United Kingdom and Poland.

Country	Is there a ban on donations from foreign interests to political parties?	Is there a ban on donations from foreign interests to candidates?	Is there a ban on corporate donations to political parties?	Is there a ban on corporate donations to candidates?	Is there a ban on donations from corporations with government contracts or partial government ownership to political parties?	Is there a ban on donations from corporations with government contracts or partial government ownership to candidates?	Is there a ban on donations from Trade Unions to political parties?	Is there a ban on donations from Trade Unions to candidates?	Is there a ban on anonymous donations to political parties?
Croatia	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Estonia	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Georgia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Poland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Spain	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
United Kingdom	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No, but specific limit

	Is there a ban on anonymous donations to candidates?	Is there a ban on state resources being given to or received by political parties or candidates?	Is there a ban on any other form of donation?	Is there a limit on the amount a donor can contribute to a political party over a time period?	Is there a limit on the amount a donor can contribute to a political party in relation to an election?	Is there a limit on the amount a donor can contribute to a candidate?	Are there limits on the amount a political party can spend?	Are there limits on the amount a candidate can spend?
Croatia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Regular limit applies	Yes	No	Yes
Estonia	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Georgia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Poland	No, but specific limit	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Spain	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
United Kingdom	No, but specific limit	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes

Source: IDEA (2015a)

Appendix 9. Conception of citizenship education definition by country.

Country	Civic and citizenship education priority in education policy	Inclusion of Civics and Citizenship Contexts in Policy Definition											School or curriculum or approaches for target grade revised at time of data collection (y/n)		
		Curriculum subject (either specific or integrated)	Cross-curricular	Assemblies and special events	Extracurricular activities	Classroom experience/ethos	Student participation	School ethos, culture, and values	Parental/community involvement	School governance	School/community links	Student and teacher involvement in community			
Austria	Medium	●	●	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	No
Belgium (Flemish)	Medium	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Yes
Bulgaria	High	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	No
Cyprus	High	○	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	Yes
Czech Republic	Medium	○	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	No
Denmark	Medium	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	No
England	High	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	No
Estonia	Medium	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	No
Finland	Medium	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Yes
Greece	High	●	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Yes
Ireland	Medium	●	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	Yes
Italy	High	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Yes
Latvia	Medium	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Yes
Liechtenstein	Medium	●	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	No
Lithuania	High	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Yes
Luxembourg	High	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Yes
Malta	Medium	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Yes
Netherlands	High	●	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	No
Poland	Medium	●	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	No
Slovak Republic	No priority	○	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	Yes
Slovenia	High	●	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	Yes
Spain	High	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	Yes
Sweden	Medium	●	●	○	○	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	No
Switzerland	Low	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Yes

**Inclusion of contexts**  
 ● Yes ○ No

Appendix 10. Perception of political participation of youth as a problem by country, background of interviewees and party family (for representatives of political parties).

	Croatia	Estonia	Georgia	Poland	Spain	Scotland	UK rest	EU level
No	6,3%	17,6%	14,3%	0,0%	40,0%	28,6%	16,7%	14,3%
Yes	93,8%	82,4%	85,7%	100,0%	60,0%	71,4%	83,3%	85,7%

	Political Party	Expert	Authority	CSO	Youth Council	Party Federation
No	18,8%	15,4%	16,7%	18,2%	0,0%	14,3%
Yes	81,3%	84,6%	83,3%	81,8%	100,0%	85,7%

	Liberal	Conservative	Social democratic	Other (greens, regionalists)
No	0,0%	33,3%	18,2%	33,3%
Yes	100,0%	66,7%	81,8%	66,7%

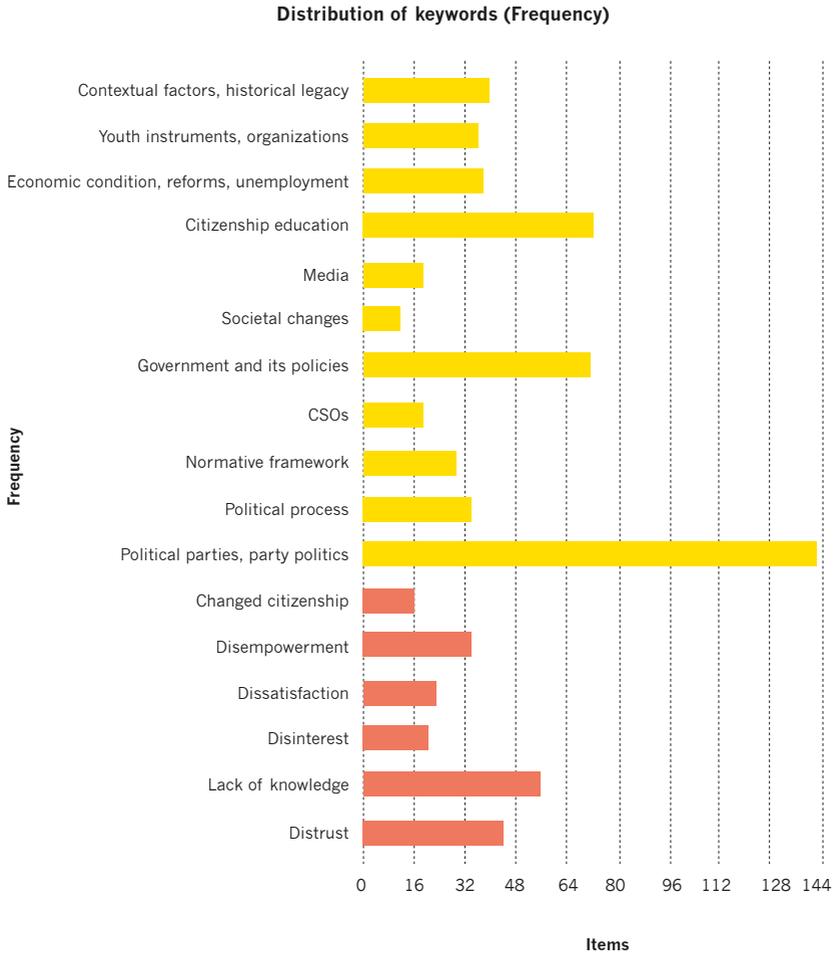
Source: own data

Appendix 11. Perception of structure and individual centred causes of the problem youth political participation.

Category	Code	Count	Cases	% Cases
PROBLEM	Structural factors	520	82	98,8%
PROBLEM	Individual factors	198	73	88,0%
PROBLEM\Structural factors	Contextual factors, historical legacy	40	25	30,1%
PROBLEM\Structural factors	Youth instruments, organisations	37	22	26,5%
PROBLEM\Structural factors	Economic condition, reforms, unemployment	38	29	34,9%
PROBLEM\Structural factors	Citizenship education	73	41	49,4%
PROBLEM\Structural factors	Media	20	17	20,5%
PROBLEM\Structural factors	Societal changes	12	10	12,0%
PROBLEM\Structural factors	Government and its policies	72	42	50,6%
PROBLEM\Structural factors	CSOs	20	14	16,9%
PROBLEM\Structural factors	Normative framework	30	24	28,9%
PROBLEM\Structural factors	Political process	35	27	32,5%
PROBLEM\Structural factors	Political parties, party politics	143	62	74,7%
PROBLEM\Individual factors	Changed citizenship	17	13	15,7%
PROBLEM\Individual factors	Disempowerment	35	28	33,7%
PROBLEM\Individual factors	Dissatisfaction	24	23	27,7%
PROBLEM\Individual factors	Disinterest	22	21	25,3%
PROBLEM\Individual factors	Lack of knowledge	56	36	43,4%
PROBLEM\Individual factors	Distrust	44	31	37,3%

Source: own data

Appendix 12. Horizontal barchart displaying percentage of interviewees depicting at least one dimension of identified explanations as an important barrier to youth political participation.



Yellow – structure-centred explanations; Red – individual-centred explanations

Source: own data

Appendix 13. Perception of structure and individual centred causes of the problem of youth political participation by political entity.

	<b>Croatia</b>	<b>Estonia</b>	<b>Georgia</b>	<b>Poland</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>Scotland</b>	<b>UK rest</b>	<b>EU level</b>
Contextual factors, historical legacy	18,8%	35,3%	87,5%	66,7%	20,0%	11,1%	8,3%	0,0%
Youth instruments, organisations	43,8%	11,8%	75,0%	44,4%	20,0%	11,1%	0,0%	0,0%
Economic condition, reforms, unemployment	25,0%	17,6%	12,5%	55,6%	80,0%	44,4%	58,3%	14,3%
Citizenship education	50,0%	64,7%	12,5%	66,7%	20,0%	55,6%	58,3%	28,6%
Media	31,3%	17,6%	12,5%	11,1%	40,0%	22,2%	25,0%	0,0%
Societal changes	6,3%	23,5%	12,5%	22,2%	0,0%	0,0%	16,7%	0,0%
Government and its policies	56,3%	52,9%	62,5%	66,7%	20,0%	44,4%	50,0%	28,6%
CSOs	31,3%	17,6%	50,0%	11,1%	0,0%	0,0%	8,3%	0,0%
Normative framework	25,0%	17,6%	12,5%	44,4%	0,0%	44,4%	50,0%	28,6%
Political process	43,8%	41,2%	62,5%	11,1%	20,0%	22,2%	25,0%	14,3%
Political parties, party politics	87,5%	64,7%	100,0%	88,9%	60,0%	44,4%	75,0%	71,4%
Changed citizenship	12,5%	0,0%	0,0%	22,2%	0,0%	22,2%	50,0%	14,3%
Disempowerment	25,0%	35,3%	25,0%	33,3%	20,0%	44,4%	50,0%	14,3%
Dissatisfaction	37,5%	35,3%	25,0%	55,6%	20,0%	11,1%	16,7%	0,0%
Disinterest	31,3%	17,6%	37,5%	66,7%	0,0%	33,3%	8,3%	0,0%
Lack of knowledge	62,5%	35,3%	62,5%	88,9%	40,0%	11,1%	33,3%	0,0%
Distrust	43,8%	23,5%	37,5%	44,4%	80,0%	22,2%	50,0%	28,6%

Source: own data

*Appendix 14. Perception of structure and individual centred causes of the problem of youth political participation by type of stakeholder.*

	<b>Political Party</b>	<b>Expert</b>	<b>Authority</b>	<b>CSO</b>	<b>Youth Council</b>	<b>Party Federation</b>
Contextual factors, historical legacy	25,8%	46,7%	28,6%	30,8%	40,0%	0,0%
Youth instruments, organisations	16,1%	13,3%	42,9%	53,8%	40,0%	0,0%
Economic condition, reforms, unemployment	19,4%	46,7%	57,1%	46,2%	50,0%	14,3%
Citizenship education	41,9%	53,3%	14,3%	76,9%	70,0%	28,6%
Media	25,8%	26,7%	0,0%	23,1%	20,0%	0,0%
Societal changes	6,5%	13,3%	14,3%	23,1%	20,0%	0,0%
Government and its policies	38,7%	66,7%	42,9%	61,5%	70,0%	28,6%
CSOs	19,4%	20,0%	14,3%	30,8%	0,0%	0,0%
Normative framework	22,6%	20,0%	14,3%	46,2%	50,0%	28,6%
Political process	32,3%	40,0%	42,9%	23,1%	40,0%	14,3%
Political parties, party politics	71,0%	86,7%	57,1%	76,9%	80,0%	71,4%
<i>Changed citizenship</i>	9,7%	40,0%	14,3%	7,7%	10,0%	14,3%
<i>Disempowerment</i>	41,9%	33,3%	28,6%	23,1%	30,0%	14,3%
<i>Dissatisfaction</i>	35,5%	33,3%	0,0%	23,1%	40,0%	0,0%
<i>Disinterest</i>	22,6%	33,3%	42,9%	30,8%	20,0%	0,0%
<i>Lack of knowledge</i>	32,3%	80,0%	28,6%	61,5%	40,0%	0,0%
<i>Distrust</i>	29,0%	53,3%	57,1%	30,8%	50,0%	28,6%

Source: own data

Appendix 15. Perception of structure and individual centred causes of the problem of youth political participation of political party representatives by party family.

	<b>Liberal</b>	<b>Conservative, Christian democratic</b>	<b>Social democratic</b>	<b>Other (left leaning)</b>
Contextual factors, historical legacy	9,1%	25,0%	20,0%	16,7%
Youth instruments, organisations	9,1%	8,3%	10,0%	16,7%
Economic condition, reforms, unemployment	36,4%	16,7%	10,0%	16,7%
Citizenship education	54,5%	33,3%	30,0%	33,3%
Media	9,1%	0,0%	30,0%	66,7%
Societal changes	9,1%	8,3%	0,0%	0,0%
Government and its policies	27,3%	33,3%	40,0%	33,3%
CSOs	9,1%	41,7%	0,0%	16,7%
Normative framework	27,3%	8,3%	40,0%	16,7%
Political process	27,3%	25,0%	20,0%	33,3%
Political parties, party politics	54,5%	83,3%	90,0%	50,0%
Changed citizenship	27,3%	8,3%	0,0%	0,0%
Disempowerment	45,5%	25,0%	30,0%	33,3%
Dissatisfaction	27,3%	50,0%	30,0%	0,0%
Disinterest	18,2%	16,7%	20,0%	33,3%
Lack of knowledge	36,4%	33,3%	10,0%	33,3%
Distrust	18,2%	33,3%	30,0%	33,3%

Source: own data

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- 17 Rafael López Pintor, Maria Gratschew and Jamāl al-Dīn Adīmī. *Voter turnout since 1945: a global report* (Stockholm, Sweden: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2002).
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