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Lowering the Voting Age to 16

Learning from Real Experiences Worldwide

Edited by Jan Eichhorn · Johannes Bergh

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Palgrave Studies in Young People and Politics

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Over the past few decades, many democracies have experienced low or falling voter turnout and a sharp decline in the members of mainstream political parties. These trends are most striking amongst young people, who have become alienated from mainstream electoral politics in many countries across the world. Young people are today faced by a particularly tough environment. From worsening levels of child poverty, to large increases in youth unemployment, to cuts in youth services and education budgets, public policy responses to the financial crisis have placed a disproportionate burden on the young.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Johannes Bergh and Jan Eichhorn

Discussions about who should vote are intrinsic to a democratic system, as they determine who gets to make the choice about elected representatives or outcomes in referenda. Questions about the age at which people should be allowed to begin voting are one important dimension of these debates and have been for a long time. The 1960s and 1970s saw extensive discussions in many Western democracies about the reduction of the voting age from 21 or 20 to 18—and some countries have engaged with changes on precisely those dynamics more recently (such as Japan). However, more recently, countries in which there had been a decades-long consensus on the voting age at 18 began to contemplate whether an earlier enfranchisement at 16 might be more appropriate. While there are also other ideas being discussed, such as minimum tests for literacy and independent voting instead of a set voting age (see for example Cook, 2013), major policy and campaign discourses

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have been focusing on the question whether 16 may be a better age for enfranchisement.

Proponents and opponents of a lower voting age often present passionate arguments. This applies both to academia as well as parliamentary debates (see for example the discussions in the UK's House of Commons, November 2017). Contentions often arise as the question addresses deep concerns related to issues such as citizenship (Tonge & Mycock, 2010) and therefore the foundations of how we understand the engagement of citizens with the state and its institutions. Indeed, many analyses, particularly those critical of early enfranchisement, initially engage with normative questions (e.g. Chan & Clayton, 2006; Electoral Commission, 2003; Hart & Atkins, 2011) before considering empirical observations to substantiate particular claims. Therefore, different investigations may not always be contradicting each other, even if they appear to do but they often start from different normative viewpoints, which makes it difficult to develop comprehensive evaluations. Furthermore, even when critiques are primarily based on empirical accounts (Cowley & Denver, 2004), comparisons between studies can be difficult because the foundations and underlying assumptions of different analyses often vary substantially.

This book therefore aims to bring together the research on the topic, both conceptually and, in particular, also empirically. We are now able to make use of an emerging body of data on case studies of countries where we do not have to speculate about what would happen if 16-year olds were allowed to vote but where we can actually observe what takes place. Voting at age 16 has been implemented at multiple levels, which allows us for further differentiation as well. While some countries permit newly enfranchised, younger voters to take part even in national elections (such as Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Malta and Nicaragua), others have limited it to local or regional level elections (such as Estonia) or have only implemented it for local or regional elections in some parts of the country (such as Scotland in the UK or several states in Germany). Additionally, in some countries experimental trials have been conducted with a lowered age in some municipalities (for example in Norway) or been exacted locally through direct action (such as in some places in the USA), which provides us with further empirical insights. For the first time, we are now able to examine how newly enfranchised young people behave and view elections in a wide range of different contexts.

After reviewing some general arguments in the debate, the book proceeds in two sections. First, we present three chapters that engage with the conceptual debates related to the voting age in depth. In the second part of the book, we then engage with the new opportunity to utilize data on empirical studies from a range of different countries in eight case studies before concluding. By bringing together the currently rather disparate knowledge we have about observations of lowering the voting age in a variety of different contexts and at multiple levels, we aim to provide deeper insights into what the consequences of earlier enfranchisement may be. In doing so we are looking for shared patterns but also divergences between the different case studies to identify what other structures and processes enfranchisement may interact with. Any such endeavor, while providing very meaningful insights, will inevitably also raise new questions and we will suggest avenues for future, coordinated research to deepen our understanding further.

1.1 Key Contentions in the Debate on Lowering the Voting Age

The voting age debate tends to revolve around four general topics. There is, first, a debate about legal issues, and the relationship between the voting age and other age-limits that are defined by national legislation or international conventions. The second topic is whether a lower voting age may affect the political engagement of young people. Third is the issue of political maturity. Are 16-year-olds ready and able to get voting rights? The answer to that question may depend on the quality of civic education in each individual country. Fourth, what are the political consequences of a lower voting age? If the voting age is lowered, the electorate will be substantially expanded, and this may affect election outcomes, and in the long term it may affect policy.

From a legal perspective, a commonly argued point by proponents of a reduction of the voting age to 16 is that, depending on the country, there are also other citizenship rights or duties that apply at this age. However, critics argue that indeed there are many citizenship rights reserved for older ages (Chan & Clayton, 2006, p. 534; Cowley & Denver, 2004). Most countries define people below the age of 18 as children, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children are both de jure and de facto to some extent dependent on their parents or guardians. Opponents of a voting

age below 18 therefore sometimes argue that children are not sufficiently free or independent to be able to exercise their voting rights. Reducing the age for something as important as voting may be problematic and ultimately inconsistent with broader understandings of democratic citizenship (Tonge & Mycock, 2010, p. 190).

With respect to the second topic, many critics present empirical evidence that suggests a lowering of the voting age may be harmful at worst and ineffective at best, in increasing political engagement. Many of these studies focus on observations of the existing youngest voter groups (commonly 18- to 24- or 30-year olds). These investigations indeed suggest that often younger people engage less with representative forms of politics than older people. Different studies have shown that younger people's participation rates in elections had declined (Electoral Commission, 2003; Franklin, 2004).

However, there are substantial issues in relying on studies focused on slightly older young adults, when trying to deduce insights into the behavior of 16- and 17-year olds if they were enfranchised. In the early years of the transition into adulthood, there are many changes in the political attitude and behavior that we can observe in young people (Hart & Atkins, 2011; Prior, 2010) and those may not follow simplistic linear patters but reflect a complex set of contextualizing factors. Indeed, even among young adults aged 18–21 we can find substantial differences. 18- and 19-year olds have been shown to participate more in voting than their slightly older counterparts aged 20 and 21, which Bhatti and Hansen (2012) use to illustrate that we should understand voting as a social act, which young people are more likely to engage with, if they still live with their parents and which is more common the younger they are. This particular insight seems to extend to 16- and 17-year olds further. Several studies have shown that they tend to present a greater eagerness to engage politically than their slightly older counterparts (Wagner, Johann, & Kritzinger, 2012, p. 378) undermining the commonly held idea that interest and engagement with politics decreases continuously with age.

This raises an important question about the causality assumed in these processes. While critics tend to suggest that earlier enfranchisement will lead to a reduction in engagement (in a linear extension from the observation of young adults), proponents of lowering the voting age suggest that actually the degree of engagement in young adults should be understood as lower than it could be *because* of enfranchisement occurring too late. This is because early voting experiences

themselves are habit forming (Dinas, 2012) and potentially distinct for 16- to 17-year olds. Empirically, Zeglovits and Aichholzer (2014, p. 356) indeed observe this after the change in the franchise in Austria where 16- to 17-year olds turned out in higher proportions than 18- to 20-year olds. A similar result could be observed in Scotland during the 2014 independence referendum, where 16-year olds were permitted to vote and turned out at a much higher rate than 18- to 24-year olds (Electoral Commission, 2014, p. 64). In addition to electoral practice, positive changes could also be noted in relation to political attitudes. In Austria, attitudes contributing to political interest were positively affected (Zeglovits & Zandonella, 2013) and in Scotland pro-civic attitudes increased among the newly enfranchised voters, as well (Eichhorn, 2018).

In order to properly understand young people's political engagement, we need to widen our perspective beyond traditional representative forms of democracy and incorporate other forms of participation as well. While young people tend to engage less with traditional institutions of Western democracies (Fieldhouse, Trammer, & Russel, 2007; Syversten, Wray-Lake, Flanagan, Osgood, & Briddell, 2011), at the same time they show greater levels of participation in other forms of non-representative and more direct political participation (Quintelier, 2007). While there has been a distinct reduction in partisanship for young people specifically (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002) and publics more generally (Dalton, 2014), we should not mistake that for a disengagement from political issues. Indeed, young people often find that engagement through alternative means than classic institutions can expand their repertoire meaningfully (Pickard, 2019; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2011).

The third topic, or claim, that is often part of the voting age debate is the idea that young people's political knowledge tends to be lower than that of adults (Johnson & Marshall, 2004) and that the young are less sophisticated in their vote choices and party allegiance (Chan & Clayton, 2006, p. 544). In short, young people are presented as having a lower level of "political maturity" than older voters. However, we need to be careful to distinguish between general processes related to young people's political engagement and the specific aspect of lowering the voting age to 16, as empirical experiences are not uniform. In an experiment in Norway, where some municipalities allowed 16-year olds to vote in local elections while others did not, there was not a comprehensive treatment effect on any of the measured dimensions

of political maturity: political interest, efficacy, attitudinal constraint and correlations between attitudes and voting (Bergh, 2013). Youth at the age of 16 or 17 generally had a lower score on all of these dimensions, and there was no positive effect of the voting age experiment. Understanding why and how voting could be different for 16-year olds requires us to engage with contextualizing influences. Indeed, many complex interactions between enfranchisement and socializing agents may exist. The two main areas usually discussed are parents and schools.

Parents indeed influence young people's political attitudes and behavior and act as a crucial socializing influence into the habit formation of voting and civic engagement more broadly (Zaff, Hart, Flanagan, Youniss, & Levine, 2010, p. 607). However, we need to be careful not to assume that therefore young people merely represent their parents' views. Often their behavior actually diverges substantially in terms of electoral choice. In the Scottish independence referendum 2014, for example, over 40% of under-18-year olds held a different position prior to the vote than a parent of theirs (Eichhorn, Paterson, MacInnes, & Rosie, 2014). Additionally, it has been shown that young people also influence their parents' political attitudes and engagement (Zaff et al., 2010). We therefore need to be careful not to assume a simplistic, one-directional effect of socializing agents on young people but have to understand young people as active agents within their respective contexts.

McDevitt and Chaffee (2000) have shown that young people act as stronger agents vis-à-vis others, in particular when they had received civic education in schools. Indeed, schools are strong influencing factor in shaping young people's civic attitudes—not in opposition to parental socialization but in a complementary role (Dassonneville, Quintelier, Hooghe, & Claes, 2012). How experiences in school interact with enfranchisement and political engagement varies depending on the mode. While positive effects of civic education in conjunction with the lowering of the voting age could be identified both in Scotland (Kenealy, Eichhorn, Parry, Paterson, & Remond, 2017, p. 55), effects vary depending on whether we are looking at formal civics education or discursive engagement with political issues in the classroom (Dassonneville et al., 2012; Torney-Purta & Lopez, 2006, p. 20)—and are strongest when jointly present (Torney-Purta, 2002).

A final topic that is sometimes discussed in relation to a potential lowering of the voting age to 16 is the political impact of such a move.

Voters at the ages of 16 and 17 may have different political preferences from the rest of the electorate. Their votes may therefore affect the composition of parliaments and locally elected assemblies, which may in the long run affect policy outputs. Two contradictory claims that are often heard in public debates about this issue are, first, that youth tend to support radical political alternatives, and, second, that the young tend to vote like their parents. An additional effect that a lower voting age may have is increased representation of young politicians in elected assemblies. These issues are addressed in the empirical chapters in this book, where data is available.

Looking for an effect on policy is more challenging. However, the voting age trial in Norway did provide us with an opportunity to study long term effects on policy. Folkestad (2015) conducted a longitudinal study of the budget-priorities of Norwegian municipalities, comparing those that had the trial with others but he did not uncover any effects. That null-finding could be explained by a number of unique circumstances pertaining to the Norwegian trial, reminding us again that context matters.

1.2 The Structure of This Book

Considering the range of important conceptual issues identified above, it is crucial that we begin our analysis with a section that provides much more depth to those discussions. We start in Chapter 2 by engaging with the fundamental question of the interplay between the voting age and voter **turnout**, a question which is part of all debates on the topic. In the chapter Mark Franklin reviews the core argument about a potentially positive impact of early enfranchisement on political participation and in particular turnout which he laid out in his 2004 book. The chapter addresses the argument about early voter socialization and presents a review of the literature surrounding it, before conducting an empirical analysis of turnout changes in the countries that have lowered their voting age at the national level.

As outlined earlier, debates regarding the voting age are not occurring in isolation of broader political discussions and in particular relate to questions of citizenship. In Chapter 3 Andy Mycock, Thomas Loughran and Jonathan Tonge critically review what it means to change the law to allow 16-year olds to vote from a broader societal and civic perspective. Reviewing the process of lowering the voting age to 18, they suggest

that we can learn much from looking at the past, highlighting that a change in enfranchisement has implications for our understanding and definition of **citizenship**. The chapter will look at the potential pitfalls of lowering the voting age without embedding it in a discussion of how it should connect with other domains of political and societal structures.

Chapter 4 then provides deeper insights into the importance of **knowledge and civic education** and the role of schools in this process. Henry Milner reviews the role of knowledge for political decision-making in young people and in particular engages with the question of how 16-year olds can be enabled to be informed voters. Furthermore, the chapter engages with the question of how civic education affects political behavior and attitudes in young people and what empirical challenges proponents of lowering the voting age have to substantiate their arguments.

After reviewing the conceptual debates, we engage subsequently with the eight case studies. We start with the countries in which young people at age 16 have been permitted to take part in all elections, all the way up to the national level. In Chapter 5 Sylvia Kritzinger and Julian Aichholzer discuss the experience from **Austria**. Austria lowered its voting age for all elections in 2007, so it allows us to gain an insight into a country that had a decade of experience with this situation. The chapter will review the empirical studies that have not only looked at the impact of earlier enfranchisements per se but also whether any changes have been lasting. Subsequently, in Chapter 6 Constanza Sanhueza Perarca moves our attention to Latin America, where several countries allow 16-year olds to participate in national elections. Using data from the Latinobarometer she reviews how earlier enfranchisement came about differently across the countries studied and reviews the experience for young people across **Latin American** countries where young people can Vote at 16.

After this, the next two chapters review the experience from countries in which 16-year olds are allowed to participate in elections at a substate, regional level above the municipality but not at the country-level. First, in Chapter 7 Christine Hübner and Jan Eichhorn, using both quantitative and qualitative data discuss the case of **Scotland**, where 16-year olds can vote in Scottish Parliament and local elections but not at the UK-level. Contrasts between young people in Scotland and the rest of the UK permit a special opportunity for observations in this case that approximates a natural quasi-experiment. Similar to the UK, **Germany** has some substates in which 16-year olds are allowed to take part in

elections at that level. Thorsten Faas and Arndt Leininger will discuss the German case in Chapter 8 and engage with the additional complexities arising, as some other substate entities in Germany allow 16-year olds to vote at municipal elections, and others do not allow them to take part at any level (thus dividing the German substates into 3 groups).

The following three chapters all focus on countries in which some young people have experienced voting at the municipal level only. In Chapter 9 Anu Toots and Tõnu Idnurm review the experiences of enfranchisement in **Estonia**. The country lowered the voting age for municipal elections, while also placing a strong emphasis on modernizing the voting process in the country. The chapter looks at the impact this had on the political behavior of young people in Estonia and particularly discusses what role civic education and teachers play in this context. Chapter 10 focusses on **Norway**, where no comprehensive reduction of the voting age took place but a reduction in the voting age for some municipalities, while keeping others as control groups, allows us to gain a unique insight through experimentation that Guro Ødegård, Johannes Bergh and Jo Saglie are going to discuss. Finally, Chapter 11 examines the experience of some particular municipalities in the **USA** deciding to reduce the voting age at that level to 16. Josh Douglas will discuss the insights from these processes and in particular what forms of engagement are most fruitful in changing public opinion about earlier enfranchisement.

In the final Chapter 12 we will outline the similarities as well as the differences from the case studies and relate them to the theoretical discussions and reviews presented in the first section of the book. In doing so, we will look both at the outcomes of earlier enfranchisement but also questions about the processes and debates surrounding it. Drawing on the findings throughout the book, we will suggest what opportunities may exist when enfranchising 16- and 17-year olds but also what challenges need to be considered. Furthermore, we discuss how future research might help to develop even more comprehensive insights, so that ultimately they can help us to enhance youth political engagement positively.

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CHAPTER 2

Consequences of Lowering the Voting Age to 16: Lessons from Comparative Research

Mark N. Franklin

2.1 Introduction

The most frequent argument given in support of lowering the age at which young adults can vote is that this would increase their political engagement, improve their satisfaction with the political process and perhaps even increase their lifelong turnout rate. The most frequent reason given in opposition to the same reform is that by the age of 16 young adults have not yet acquired the knowledge and maturity required for electoral decision-making. In this chapter, we address these two opposing views on the basis of survey data along with the public record of election outcomes for countries that reduced the voting age to 16 for all otherwise qualified citizens at national legislative elections. Four of these countries are in South America (Argentina starting in 2013, Brazil 1990, Ecuador 2009, and Nicaragua 1981) and one is in Europe (Austria starting in 2008).

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The reason for optimism regarding positive effects on turnout of a lower voting age is not immediately clear. The last time the voting age was lowered in most countries (from 21 to 18), during the last third of the twentieth century, there is general agreement that the results were unfortunate. 18–20-year olds voted at a lower rate at their first election than those who had been 21 at their first election. Moreover, Franklin (2004) found that those given the opportunity to vote at 18 voted at a lower rate throughout their ensuing lifetimes (cf. Bruter & Harrison, 2013) and, as this cohort grew to encompass the entire electorate, so overall turnout fell to that group's level.

In order to understand why we might have better luck with lowering the voting age to 16 than we did with lowering the age to 18 it is important to understand the forces at work. How could a lower voting age influence not only the incoming cohort at its first election but throughout their ensuing lives? The reasoning was set out in the book already referred to, my *Voter Turnout: Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies Since 1945* (Franklin, 2004). There I established that effects on voter turnout can be divided into those that are transitory, affecting turnout primarily at the specific election at which those effects are felt (I called these "short-term" effects), and those that are quasi-permanent, affecting turnout not just at one election but indefinitely (I called these "long-term" effects). The basis for a distinction between short-term and long-term forces is the role of habit-formation in human behavior (Bargh, 1989; Ouellette & Wood, 1998). Though occasionally referenced in the political science literature (e.g. Franklin & Mackie, 1983), the role of habit in electoral behavior first came to widespread attention due to the work of Plutzer (2002). Plutzer focused on how people, during a critical period in early adulthood, either undergo a transition to habitual voting or they do not. If they fail to become habitual voters then they instead acquire a habit of non-voting. This is because any decision that is repeatedly taken very quickly becomes habitual. This applies not only to voting and non-voting but also to other repeated decisions such as where to vacation or which mode of travel to adopt when going to work (Aarts, Verplanken, & van Knippenbe, 1998). Once they become habitual, such decisions can readily be changed but people with a habit of this kind normally return to the behavior concerned after brief defections. Only if different choices are made on each occasion does habituation not kick in.[1]

With regard to the age of vote-eligibility, Bruter and Harrison (2013) have reported their own finding that persons who first voted at 18 did so in smaller numbers than those who had, earlier in history, first voted at 21. So a smaller proportion of this cohort acquired a habit of voting and a larger proportion acquired a habit of non-voting. Those proportions continued to characterize the Votes-at-18 cohort as it aged, when compared to cohorts for whom the voting age had been higher (though see Franklin, 2014, Fig. 2, for cognate findings implicitly suggesting that some of those who fail to vote at their first opportunity nevertheless do learn the habit later in life).

So why did those who first had the opportunity to vote at 18 fail to do so in greater numbers? As set out by Franklin (2004) and confirmed by Bruter and Harrison (2013), by 18 years of age many young adults have left the parental home and are engaged in the arduous process of establishing their separate existence as self-sufficient individuals, leaving little time or motivation for learning the skills needed for voting. Whether at work or in higher education they are more likely to live with other individuals the same age as themselves, thus less likely to be subject to mobilizing household influences.

Realizing that lowering the voting age to 18, while done for the best of intentions, had actually produced life-long deleterious consequences for its intended beneficiaries (and realizing that this was a genie that could not be put back into its bottle) Franklin (2004) raised the question of whether the deleterious consequences could be mitigated by further lowering the voting age, perhaps to 16. At that age potential voters would be more likely to still be living in the parental home, subject to influences from other members of a mixed-generation household in which older members had benefitted from multiple opportunities to learn the habit of voting. Bruter and Harrison (2013) add that the main reason why young people stay away from politics is that political parties do not address their concerns. By growing the size of the pool of young voters we increase the incentives for parties to change their ways.

But what about the quality of the choices made by 16-year olds in comparison with older voters? Are 16-year olds perhaps less likely to "vote correctly" in line with their underlying values and predispositions (Lau & Redlawsk, 1997)? This would be the political science version of the concern that 16-year olds are not mature enough to vote responsibly. Research in Austria, following the reduction of the voting age there, suggested that the quality of decision-making among youngest voters

was not lower than among slightly older cohorts (Wagner, Johann, & Kritzinger, 2012) and that, while the youngest voters were more likely to support the more extreme right-wing choice in the 2008 election there, this was in line with age effects displayed by pre-reform cohorts as well (Wagner et al., 2012). Even if lowering the voting age only grows the existing pool of those more subject to extraneous influences, pushing these voters first one way and then another at successive elections (creating variation in voting choices known to political science as "volatility"), this might still be a matter for concern. Bruter and Harrison also report a worrying tendency for the youngest voters to be more subject to mode effects, with those who voted by mail in Britain in 2010 being notably more right wing than those who voted in person.

So expectations for political consequences from lowering the voting age to 16 are mixed: positive in terms of effects on turnout, (tentatively) negative in terms of effects on volatility. But the extent of these potential costs and benefits have never been estimated, and consequently they have never been set against each other in such a way as to facilitate a balanced assessment of their net effects. Doing so is the purpose of the remainder of this chapter.

2.2 Theorizing Dynamic Equilibria for Turnout and Volatility

Voter turnout is an archetypical example of a quantity that is in dynamic equilibrium. For any given country at any given point in time, turnout sits at a level whose magnitude is the result of a balance of forces. Most of those forces are slow to change and are largely captured in the level of turnout at the previous election ("turnout_{t-1}" in statistical parlance). One can think of these forces as manifesting the power of inertia in human affairs, creating barriers to turnout change.

But things do change. An influence on turnout that had been stable for decades can alter as a result of legislation or other factors. More importantly, some forces are by their nature quite ephemeral. The marginality of the race (which can motivate people to vote in a tight race who might not have voted had the outcome been a foregone conclusion) is a quintessential short-term force.[2] Whether a particular force is short-term or long-term at any given point in time is effectively a matter for empirical assessment. The critical thing is that, at any such point in time, a short-term force will cause the level of turnout to deviate from the

equilibrium established by long-term forces—an equilibrium to which the level of turnout will tend to return, once the short-term deviation is over.

Since equilibria of various kinds are central to much of economic theory, economists have developed statistical tools for investigating these equilibria. Recently one of these tools has made its way into political science research (Jennings, 2013) because it serves the needs of our discipline so well. This so-called "Error Correction Model" (ECM), treats all departures from an equilibrium as due to "shocks to the system" which are then diagnosed in terms of their nature (long-term or short-term). In the main text of this chapter our modeling will be more straightforward, since we are mainly interested in long-term effects of lowering the voting age and, if the effects are indeed long-term in nature, their magnitudes can be established by traditional methods. But an Appendix will present ECM results needed to validate our assumptions regarding long-term versus short-term effects.

When examining volatility, we need to bear in mind some complications. First, volatility is a variable that measures change: the difference in support for one or more parties between one election and the next. So change in volatility requires a three-election sequence. We already lose one time-point in the calculation of volatility so differenced volatility costs two time-points for each country under study. This is not a trivial loss, given that (as will be explained) we only have seven time-points for some countries that democratized quite recently. Things are even worse when it comes to survey data. At the individual level, volatility is conceived in terms of party switching. At that level it is only at the second election after a reform that we get our first opportunity to compare the volatility of voters affected by the reform with that of other voters.

2.3 Data and Methods

A major problem in assessing the consequences of electoral reform is data availability and reliability. Official statistics enable us to determine change in turnout rate and change in party strengths from one election to the next but they do not readily reveal which individuals within each electorate are responsible for such changes as are seen at the aggregate level. Correspondence between changes in age-eligibility and turnout could be the result of something else entirely than the lowering of the voting age. By contrast, survey data lets us look within electorates at the behaviors

of different groups of voters, to see whether respondents who become eligible to Vote at 16 report different behavior than older voters—a critical requirement if we are to ascribe any change in turnout to the age-eligibility reform. But survey data (in regard to turnout and especially in regard to previous party choice) is subject to large amounts of error: over-reporting the turnout of those whose behavior we seek to understand along with the consistency of their party choices over time. Vote over-reporting has generally been blamed on respondents not wishing to reveal their failure to vote—what is termed "social desirability bias"; but there is also evidence that non-voters are under-represented in the normal run of surveys (Jackman & Spahn, 2019) and, moreover, that recall of past party support is biased by a tendency to bring remembered past support into line with current support (Van Elsas, Miltenburg, & van der Meer, 2016). These sources of bias are potentially very damaging to our ability to discern the consequences of electoral reforms for electoral behavior of all types. Survey data can be weighted (giving more weight to non-voters and less weight to voters) so as to reflect aggregate outcomes but this may not fix our problems.[3] In this study I attempt to overcome these problems by triangulation: establishing quantities of change from aggregate data and sources of change from (weighted) survey data.

The unreliability of survey data is greater as more time elapses between the fielding of the survey and the behavior being reported (Van Elsas et al., 2016). Even more problematic is that most of the surveys we employ in this study did not ask for party preference at other than the time of the survey. Survey data is scarce in South America and I employ the LatinoBarometer—the only source of relevant individual-level survey data I could find that is comparable across countries over an extended period of time (1995 to the present day). But these surveys asked respondents about vote choice in a hypothetical election held "next Sunday" (the same data are used by Constanza Sanhueza elsewhere in this volume). For both these reasons I restrict the survey data employed in this chapter to data from surveys that were fielded in an election year.[4]

Aggregate data regarding turnout and volatility is available for all countries that lowered the age of eligibility to vote in nation-wide elections from 18 to 16. Four of these are situated in South America, which is a continent where free and fair elections only recently became the norm. My aggregate data thus starts with the first election following the last period of autocratic rule in each of the countries of South America

included in the dataset (I include more countries than just those that lowered their voting age, in order to be able to compare countries that instituted the reform with countries that did not). This yields a starting date of 1973. Because some countries hold elections more frequently than others, and because some countries did not emerge from their final period of autocracy until the 1980s, the full dataset includes more cases for some countries than for others. This could give more weight to patterns found for the effects of age-16-eligibility in countries that were early adopters of the reform. To check for composition effects I created a second dataset in which elections held early in the period were omitted to the extent necessary to provide a uniform *N* of 7 elections for each country, including Austria.[5] To enhance comparability between aggregate level and individual-level findings, the countries selected for inclusion in the aggregate-level dataset are the same countries as those for which survey data were available.

Survey data for many South-American countries are available for most years from 1995 to 2017 but, as already mentioned, in order to limit recall bias I include only years in which an election was held.[6] This also ensures comparability with the Austrian data which is available only for election years (see this chapter's Appendix for details). My pooled survey dataset of eleven South-American countries includes the 4 countries listed earlier that adopted Votes at 16 in this period. Since I cannot use a lagged dependent variable with these data (see Note 5) I analyze individual-level data for Austria (derived from the Austrian National Election Studies) separately from the data for South America before pooling the two data sources.

Regarding the aggregate data, this is arranged in time-series cross-section (TSCS) format, with successive elections being given adjacent sequence IDs for each country. This enables me to employ fixed-effects models that focus only on differences occurring over time (see Note 5). Supportive findings are based on ECM (presented in this chapter's Appendix) that were mentioned earlier.

Since we know from past research (Franklin, 2004) that short-term effects are due to the malleability of new cohorts of voters while long-term effects result from habitual behavior by older voters, an ECM can confirm the long-term nature of effects suggested by TSCS models that are themselves unable to distinguish short-term from long-term effects. The implications that flow from both sets of aggregate-level findings regarding the behavior of individual citizens will then be confirmed using

survey data, which can distinguish specifically between individuals who were permitted to Vote at 16 and those who were not.

These procedures provide the triangulation mentioned earlier. From the aggregate data we get the magnitudes of short- and long-term effects, uncontaminated by recall bias, and from the survey data we get confirmation of the mechanism by which the effects take place.

Our analyses need to evaluate possible controls for effects on turnout (at the aggregate level) and on the decision to vote (or not) made by individuals. From Franklin (2004) we derive a long list of variables found to affect the level of turnout in time-serial perspective but few of these variables have any variance at all in the universe of countries over the time period investigated here; and only compulsory voting, margin of victory (closeness of the race) and electoral clarity prove relevant in any of these models. Compulsory voting is relevant because some of our countries enforce voting as a legal duty and two of them abolished compulsory voting over the course of the period under study. Margin of victory is potentially relevant as a measure of the closeness of the contest, with more voters being stimulated to vote when the outcome is not a foregone conclusion. Majority status is derived from the theorizing of Powell and Whitten (1993), who identified an important difference between countries with majoritarian electoral systems and all others. Citizens living in majoritarian countries appeared more readily able to correctly ascribe responsibility for economic and other conditions and, with this enhanced "electoral clarity", were more readily able to hold governments accountable where appropriate. My measure of electoral clarity focuses on what I take to be the "active ingredient" in Powell and Whitten's measure: the gap between the seat share controlled by the largest party and 50%. A party that controls half the seats in a legislature can rule alone. A party that controls close to that proportion of seats dominates any coalition of which it might form part and so provides a focus point for electoral competition, clarifying the choices confronting voters at election times (Franklin, 2004; Franklin & Hobolt, 2011; Johnston, Matthews, & Bittner, 2007; Vowles, Katz, & Stevens, 2017). As the size of that party falls further so choices become more difficult and turnout declines in consequence.

2.4 Findings (1): Turnout

We start with aggregate turnout data from South America. Figure 2.1 clearly suggests an important difference between the evolution of turnout for countries that lowered the voting age as compared with countries that did not. Countries that retained an 18-year-old threshold for vote-eligibility see falling turnout until the present day. But countries that lowered the age for vote-eligibility to 16 see turnout decline ending at the point at which the voting age is lowered. However, though striking, the graph is not definitive. The voting age was lowered at different times in different countries, and countries that lowered the voting age later in time may have been countries with generally higher turnout both before and after the reform. To reach a firmer judgment we need to evaluate the processes that gave rise to these turnout differences, seeing whether turnout remains high in countries with Votes at 16 for other reasons than the lowering of the voting age. For this purpose, we resort to multivariate analysis, employing the sorts of fixed-effects Cross

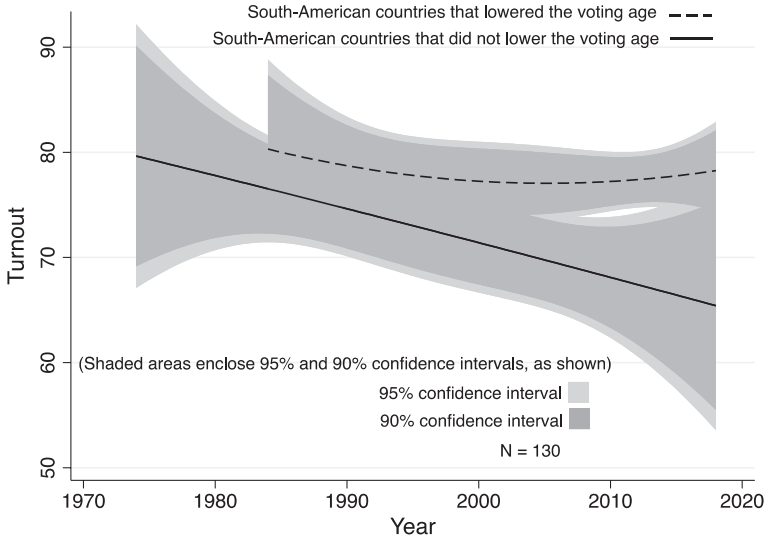

Fig. 2.1 Turnout evolution over time for countries divided according to whether they lowered the voting age to 16 (aggregate data for eleven South-American countries)

Table 2.1 Effects of vote-eligibility on aggregate-level turnout in South-American countries and Austria from fixed-effects models, controlling for other predictors of turnout

Outcome: turnout	*Model A Fixed effects, full dataset*		*Model B Same, omitting non-significant effects*		*Model C Fixed effects with balanced data (equal* N *per country)*	
Inputs	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*
(1) Intercept	49.16	(6.41)**	57.14	(3.83)**	55.31	(3.82)**
(2) Turnout$_{t-1}$	0.12	(0.09)*				
(3) Electoral clarity+ (0–1)	0.49	(0.12)**	0.54	(0.11)**	0.25	(0.13)**
(4) Closeness of election outcome++ (0–1)	0.08	(0.07)				
(5) Compulsory voting	26.85	(6.14)**	30.82	(5.00)**	27.90	(4.76)**
(6) Eligibility to Vote at 16	3.91	(3.67)	4.99	(3.35)*	6.08	(3.55)**
R-squared	0.37		0.38		0.38	
Observations	119		131		84	
Number of countries	12		12		12	

+1—Proportion gap between largest party size and 50% of seats
++1—Proportion gap in seats between the top 2 parties
Note Coefficients significant at **$p<0.05$, *$p<0.10$, one-tailed. Country fixed effects not shown

Section Time Serie (TSCS) models that were described earlier (confirming error correction models are in the Appendix).

Table 2.1 presents a TSCS fixed-effects model that focuses on variance in turnout at successive elections held within specific countries. Model A shows effects for the dataset as a whole while Model B shows effects for a "reduced form" of the same model that omits inputs whose effects prove not statistically significant at the conventional 0.05 level. In model C this model is applied to the balanced dataset that contains only 7 election years per country. Eligibility to Vote at 16 does not prove statistically significant in Model A but does do so in Model C, suggesting more than a 6% positive impact in countries that adopted the reform (Row 6), with only a 1 in 20 (0.05) chance of no effect. (In Model B the effect reaches

borderline significance at the 0.1 level.) These results are confirmed by a ECM presented in the Appendix but only at somewhat lower level of statistical significance ($p < 0.1$). That ECM also confirms that the effect of lowering the voting age is long-term in nature, not ephemeral.

We can pursue the matter further by using survey data for South-American countries (data that covers approximately the same time-span as was covered by the balanced aggregate-level dataset) and separately for Austria. In the earlier Fig. 2.1 the two traces showed aggregate turnout for countries that had or had not adopted a lower voting age. In Fig. 2.2, by contrast, survey data gives us the ability to look within those countries at cohorts of voters that did or did not have the opportunity to first Vote at 16. This graph assesses survey data from all our South-American countries taken together—the same countries that provided aggregate data for Fig. 2.1. Because the data are pooled across 11 countries, the graph is able to focus on age as a generic concept—assuming that effects of age in early surveys will not be different from effects of age in later surveys. This goes some way toward overcoming the problem built into Fig. 2.1

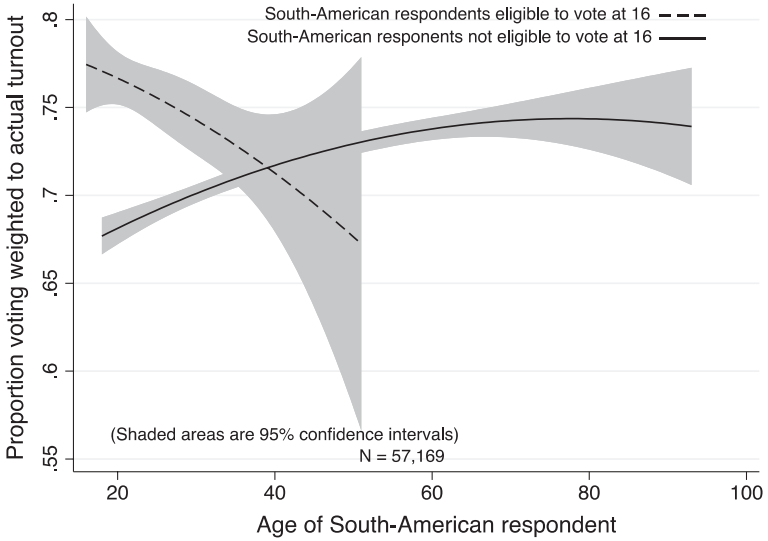

Fig. 2.2 Turnout evolution over the age course for respondents divided according to whether they experienced Votes at 16 or not (survey data for eleven South-American countries)

that Votes at 16 generally occur later in time. We do still have a problem of small sample numbers among those who first voted at 16, who in most countries have not had the opportunity to reach an advanced age. Those aged over 40 in our data are all from Brazil or Nicaragua, both of them relatively low turnout countries. The small number of respondents available in just two countries is responsible for the very wide confidence intervals for older age-16-eligibles (intervals so wide as to make it clear that in reality it is quite possible that the turnout of age-16-eligibles does not drop below the turnout of earlier electoral cohorts). A similar graph for Austria shows no reduction in turnout for age-16-eligibles as they grow older (see Appendix Fig. 2.4).

Still, whatever might be true of respondents aged over 30, the earliest elections for cohorts that were vote-eligible at age 16 are representative of all years and countries that lowered the voting age and, from age 18 upwards, these cohorts contain members that are matched by respondents of the same age who did not experience vote-eligibility at age 16. For members of the age-16-eligible cohorts it is clear that Votes at 16 made a large difference to turnout, providing a shortcut to turnout at a level otherwise not found among respondents aged less than 60. Though this difference appears to dissipate with increasing age, the 17-year period in which the difference is statistically significant constitutes about a quarter of the span of years that the average citizen remains an active member of the electorate of his or her country. Note that the confidence interval for respondents eligible to Vote at 16 includes the possibility of a totally flat (or even slightly rising) trajectory for that trace.

A more precise estimate of the same effects can be obtained by multivariate analysis of the individual-level data.[7] In such analyses, I can control for confounding effects of additional variables that cannot be taken into account in a graph such as is shown in Fig. 2.2. In Table 2.2 we see the effects of having been eligible to vote at age 16 on respondents' likelihood of casting such a vote, using fixed-effects analyses of data weighted to actual turnout for each election in each country.[8] Fixed country effects account for differences between countries (remaining aggregate-level effects account for differences between successive elections in those countries) but not for different effects that may be found for individual-level covariates. Additional individual-level variables account for some of the variance in the individual-level data that was not present at the aggregate level, allowing a more precise estimate of eligibility effects on individual-level voting. The South-American

Table 2.2 Effects on individual-level voting of changes in vote-eligibility in eleven South-American countries and Austria, controlling for other predictors of the act of voting

Outcome: respondent voted	*Model D South-American fixed effects*		*Model E Austrian regression model*		*Model F Fixed effects for all countries*	
Inputs	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*
(1) Age in years rescaled (0–1)	0.04	(0.01)**	0.15	(0.03)**	0.04	(0.01)**
(2) Gender female (0,1 = yes)	−0.00	(0.00)	−0.03	(0.01)**	−0.01	(0.00)*
(3) Education+ rescaled (0–1)	−0.02	(0.01)*	0.27	(0.05)**	−0.01	(0.01)*
(4) Electoral clarity++ (0–1)	0.11	(0.01)**	0.74	(0.12)**	0.12	(0.01)**
(5) Electoral marginality (0,1 = yes)	−0.01	(0.01)	0.66	(0.15)**	−0.01	(0.01)
(6) Compulsory voting (0,1 = yes)	0.37	(0.01)**			0.37	(0.01)**
(7) Eligible to Vote at 16 (0,1 = yes)	0.04	(0.01)**	0.05	(0.03)*	0.03	(0.01)**
(8) Age * Eligible	−0.14	(0.07)*	−0.57	(0.40)	−0.10	(0.07)
Observations	56,602		7854		64,546	
Number of countries	11		1		12	

+Initially measured in years of education

++1—Proportion gap between the largest party's size in seats and 50% of seats

Note First differences from logit models. Fixed country effects in Models D and F not shown

Coefficients significant at $**p<0.01$, $*p<0.05$, one-tailed

findings are very robust to the omission of particular variables and countries. However, despite the use of fixed effects, findings from the LatinoBarometer data are not robust to the inclusion of Austrian data. In particular, the negative effect of the age*eligible interaction (Row 8) loses significance when South American and Austrian data are pooled in model F. This calls into question earlier suggestions in this chapter of

declining benefits of Votes at 16 over the life-course of those who were first eligible to vote at that age.

The idea of declining effect of age-16-eligibility also contradicts the implications of Fig. 2.4 in this chapter's Appendix, which shows turnout rising (though not significantly) among Austrian age-16-eligibles as they grow older.

These findings take advantage of both preelection and postelection surveys for Austria in 2013 and 2017 in order to maximize the N available for verifying that effects of eligibility at 16 apply only to the voters concerned (however, the weight given to Austria in Model F is reduced by two-thirds in order not to give Austria more weight than any other country in that analysis).

The critical coefficients are for the eligible to Vote at 16 variable (Row 7), with an effect of 0.04 in the South-American data and 0.05 in the Austrian data.[9] Despite the hugely greater number of cases provided by survey data, these coefficients are little more significant than the aggregate-level coefficients we looked at earlier, due to the small number of individuals who have as yet experienced eligibility to Vote at 16; and the effects on turnout of age-16 voter eligibility in South-America seems at first glance very similar to those we saw in Table 2.1 (Models B and C, Row 6) despite our expectation that survey data would understate true effects of the eligibility reform.

First impressions can be misleading, however. The effects of eligibility at 16 in Table 2.2 have to be taken in conjunction with any decline estimated for these effects with advancing age (even if that estimate proves mistaken): 14% over the course of their lifetimes for South-American respondents, as shown in Row 8 of Model D in Table 2.2. Over a twenty-year span this would subtract 4% from the initial boost, which would be completely eliminated after 30 years. The 6.08% boost in turnout suggested by our aggregate data (Row 6 of Model F in Table 2.1) is an average that takes account of any attenuation seen in practice, so the individual-level data appears to be picking up less than half of the long-term effect of the voter eligibility reform suggested by the aggregate-level findings.[10]

The importance of these survey findings is not to provide an alternative estimate of the extent to which turnout rises when the voting age is lowered to 16 but to validate the mechanism responsible for that rise. By demonstrating that the mechanism is indeed rooted in the behavior of

those who become vote-eligible at 16 years of age we validate the findings of TSCS models in Table 2.1 that presume precisely such a mechanism.

2.5 Findings (2): Volatility

Again we start with aggregate-level data, employing the same modeling setup as for turnout, though omitting the aggregate-level control variables since there is no theoretical reason why these should have any effects on volatility.

Table 2.3 follows the layout of Table 2.1, showing first the full model for all cases, then a reduced form model that omits nonsignificant effects and, finally, a reduced form model for the balanced dataset. None of these models show effects of age-16-eligibility that are significant at conventional levels (Model G shows an effect significant at 0.2). This is unexpected since we will see that survey data, which should under-estimate any such effects, does show effects that are significant at conventional levels, as does an ECM in this chapter's Appendix. But it should be born in mind that, just as measures of statistical significance can overstate the importance of an effect, so they can also understate its

Table 2.3 Effects on aggregate-level volatility of age-16 vote-eligibility (fixed-effects models for eleven South-American countries and Austria)

Outcome: volatility	*Model G Fixed effects, full dataset*		*Model H Same, omitting non-significant effects*		*Model I Fixed effects with balanced data (equal* N *per country)*	
Inputs	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*
(1) Intercept	7.46	(1.09)**	8.65	(0.67)**	9.05	(1.03)**
(2) Volatility$_{t-1}$	0.11	(0.10)				
(3) Eligibility to Vote at 16 (0,1 = yes)	2.07	(2.08)$^{+}$	1.97	(2.05)	1.23	(2.78)
Observations	114		127		84	
Number of countries	12		12		12	

Note Coefficients significant at $^{**}p = 0.01$, $^{*}p = 0.05$, one-tailed, $^{+}p < 0.20$, one-tailed. Country fixed effects not shown

importance (in statistical parlance, a "Type-II error of inference"). This could be because TSCS models, such as those in Table 2.3, assume all effects to be long-term effects (as already mentioned) whereas in practice the effect is a short-term effect. The highly significant coefficient we see for this effect in the Appendix ECM is precisely that: a short-term effect.

As mentioned, individual-level data also contradicts the aggregate-level findings, though suitable data is only available for one country: Austria. We use the 2013 and 2017 pre-post-election studies for that country, which contained booster samples of 16- and 17-year olds and in which we can code respondents as having switched if they voted for a different party in the election concerned than the party they report having supported previously.

Figure 2.3 shows that the effect on volatility of granting Votes at 16 is not significant at a level conventional for survey data. At $p<0.05$ the confidence intervals represented by light shading overlap over the whole range of ages that the two traces have in common. The required level

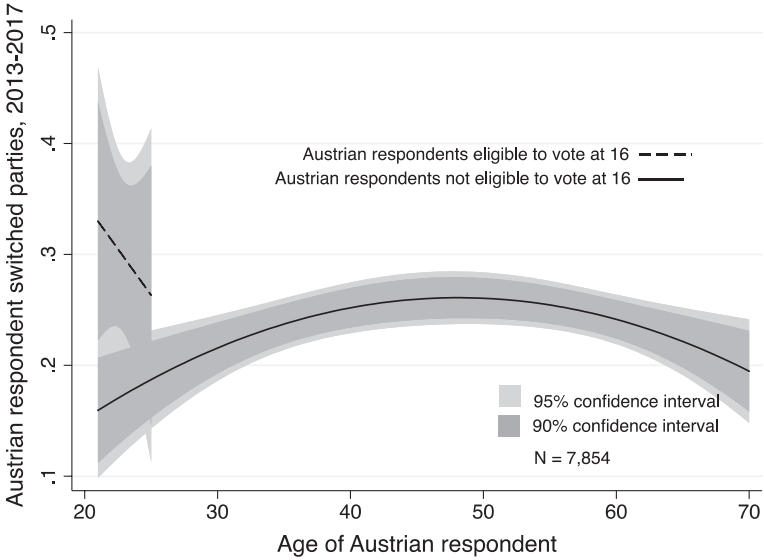

Fig. 2.3 Evolution in volatility over the age course for Austrian respondents divided according to whether they were eligible to Vote at 16 or not (pooled data for 2013 and 2017)

of confidence has to be lowered to $p<0.1$ in order to get intervals that are distinct for even a short span of ages (about 21–23, as shown by the dark-shaded intervals). But at that level of significance there is apparently an effect on volatility of granting votes to 16-year olds (perhaps doubling the rate of party switching among age-16-eligibles at their second election) but this increase is not statistically significant at conventional levels.[11] The apparent drop-off in volatility for those aged over 20 does seem to match the ECM finding of an initially higher level of volatility that then dissipates within little more than a single inter-election period (see Appendix). But we must address the fact that the aggregate-level finding failed what can be seen as a straightforward robustness check (in Table 2.3) while the individual-level finding is only borderline significant, statistically.

The question of whether volatility increased (even if not the extent of its increase) can be answered with greater certainty using multivariate analysis of survey data that controls for confounding effects.

Table 2.4 distinguishes an analysis of data restricted to the 2017 Austrian election study (Model J) from analyses of pooled data from the 2013 and 2017 studies taken together (Models K–L). For these analyses we again use both the pre and postelection studies for that country, which also contain booster samples of 16- and 17-year olds and in which we can code respondents as having switched if they voted (or planned to vote) for a different party in the election concerned than the party they report having supported previously.

The check for conformity in findings between the pooled data and data for just 2017 is needed because the definition of switching differs between the two studies, as explained earlier (Note 4). Switching parties between a European Parliament (EP) election and a national parliamentary (NP) election (the switching measure for 2013) might not involve quite the same considerations as switching parties between one NP election and the next (the measure for 2017). As can be seen, the additional cases available in the pooled dataset (Model K) produce a more reliable coefficient in Row 4 but the magnitude of that coefficient remains the same within the margin of error.[12]

What these models tell us is that we can be quite confident (with less than a 1 in a hundred chance of being wrong) that a lower voting age in Austria increased the extent to which voters change their party choices from one election to the next. The estimated magnitude of this effect (some 8–11%) is likely to be an underestimate, as already explained.

Table 2.4 Effects on individual-level party switching, among those aged 18 and over, of changes in vote-eligibility, controlling for other predictors of party switching

Outcome: respondent switched parties	*Model J (2017 only)*		*Model K (2013 and 2017)*		*Model L (2013 and 2017)*	
Inputs	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*
(1) Non-religious (0–1 = yes)					0.12	(0.04)**
(2) Gender female (0,1 = yes)					0.03	(0.02)$^{+}$
(3) Age in years (rescaled 0–1)					−0.07	(0.05)$^{+}$
(4) Eligible to Vote at 16 (0,1 = yes)	0.08	(0.04)**	0.10	(0.03)**	0.07	(0.04)*
Observations	1189		2308		2075	

Note First differences from fixed effects logit models (see Note 8). *N* restricted to party supporters at each relevant election
Coefficients significant at **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$, $^{+}p < 0.1$, one-tailed

These are among the most significant effects found in this chapter, reaching virtually the 0.001 level of confidence. Model L tells us that these effects are stronger for women and for those reporting no religious affiliation; and they appear to decline with increasing age, though the attenuation is barely significant and applies to all voters, rather than just those who first voted at 16 (the relevant interaction of age and eligibility, not shown, proves nowhere close to statistical significance). This failure to confirm an attenuation of volatility for vote-16 eligibles with increasing age contradicts the implications of Fig. 2.3 that seemed to show a falloff in the effect on volatility of age-16 vote-eligibility for respondents aged over 20—a fall-off confirmed in an Appendix ECM (Table 2.6). The lack of significance for the same effect in individual-level data may be due to the small number of individuals with the necessary characteristics (aged under 27 and having voted in two consecutive elections).

These findings must be regarded as tentative. But, taken together, they do not relieve concerns regarding the ability of 16–17-year olds to vote correctly (as indicated by their tendency to change their minds at the very next election). Because survey data should *underestimate* any actual effects, the statistical significance of effects shown in Row 4 of Table 2.4 are telling.

2.6 Discussion

This chapter has evaluated the effects of lowering the age of eligibility to vote from 18 to 16, focusing on countries that instituted this reform, along with a control set of additional countries where there was no change in the age-eligibility of voters. This research design has permitted an evaluation of the extent of the reform's effects on both turnout and volatility (using aggregate data) and also the mechanism underlying those effects (using survey data). Regarding turnout, this research design has produced conclusions in which we can have a fair degree of confidence. We know that turnout was boosted overall in countries that instituted the reform: a boost in turnout that amounts to some 5–6 percentage points (averaged across 5 electorates taken as a whole) over the first 20 years of any such reform, though with a considerable margin of error.[13]

The individual-level analyses find an effect of the reform on the cohort of voters whose age of vote-eligibility was changed to 16 and not on other cohorts. This provides confirmation that the mechanism by which turnout rose was the mechanism theoretically expected. The individual-level findings cannot be used to confirm the magnitude of this effect because those findings are subject to considerable recall error. Note, however, that this bias makes it harder (not easier) to confirm the mechanism that gives rise to the aggregate findings. Yet the required confirmation was found nonetheless. Moreover, benefits to citizens who were permitted to vote at a younger age are virtually certain (with confidence of better than 100:1), at least up to the age of 30, and with strong suggestions of continued benefits over their remaining life-course.

There is doubt concerning the durability of the reform's effect on turnout with increasing age of those who benefitted from the reform. The survey data suggest a drop-off in the effect with increasing age, although this drop-off is not confirmed by the aggregate-level findings. However, we should bear in mind that the survey data includes few respondents over the age of 40 who enjoyed the possibility of voting at age 16. Thus, uncertainty about age effects is inevitable. Things will of course become clearer as more time elapses since the reforms took place.[14]

Regarding volatility, conclusions are more tenuous. Effects on aggregate volatility of changing the age of vote-eligibility are only of borderline statistical significance and apply only to the full aggregate-level dataset, which gives more weight to some countries than to others. However, the aggregate-level effects on overall volatility correspond to

individual-level effects on the volatility of the Austrian cohort of voters that became eligible to Vote at 16. So the mechanism that would produce aggregate-level volatility is apparently in place, yielding among the highest levels of confidence found in any of the analyses conducted in this chapter (only slightly more than one chance in a thousand of the effect being absent). Still, this effect also appears to be transitory and its transitory nature is seen in both aggregate and survey data.

Lowering the voting age to 16, in countries that have adopted this electoral reform, has increased turnout in these countries above what it would have been in the absence of the reform. The extent of future growth in the difference between turnout in reformed and unreformed countries depends on the durability of the boost given to citizens enabled to Vote at 16 as these "treated" citizens grow older. In regard to volatility, effects appear to be real and quite large (involving around a fifth of the newly enfranchised) but transitory. However, even small and transitory increases in volatility can alter election outcomes, adding to the uncertainty that has beset these outcomes in recent years—uncertainty that we must learn to deal with in any case.

This is an important concern but there is more at stake than simply the behavior of newly voting 16-year olds. Bruter and Harrison (2013) make the argument that youthful voting behavior has implications for life-long turnout rates. We face a situation in contemporary democracies where turnout of those impacted by the Votes-at-18 reform has been reduced. By enacting Votes at 16 we have the opportunity to take a step back from the deeply unfortunate consequences of the earlier reform. The Votes-at-16 reform would seem, from the evidence amassed in this chapter, likely to undo those consequences and perhaps make additional gains. These gains have to be put in the balance against the costs of greater volatility that are even more certain to occur but far more difficult to evaluate.

Notes

1. The number of times the same choice needs to be repeated in order for it to become habitual is not definitively established. Franklin (2004) followed Butler and Stokes (1975) in supposing the effective number to be 3 while Johnston et al. (2007), along with Bruter and Harrison (2013) settled on 2. In practice, the prevalence of defections from habitual behavior declines with each time the behavior is repeated, so the cut point is somewhat arbitrary.

2. In some cases such a force can seemingly "get stuck" at a certain level or be seen to trend reliably in a certain direction, and in such cases will behave like a long-term force (Vowles et al., 2017).
3. Mis-reporting of turnout is greater with lower turnout, so the effects of any reform that leads to higher turnout will be under-estimated. Unreformed turnout will be more greatly exaggerated than reformed turnout.
4. Austrian data is collected in pre and postelection surveys that ask about behavior in an election to be held in the immediate future or in an election just past. There is, however, a potentially damaging difference between Austrian questions about recall of past vote asked in the 2013 and 2017 election studies. In 2017 respondents were asked about their party choice in the 2013 national elections. However, in 2013 the only question about votes in an earlier election targeted the 2009 election to the European Parliament (EP). Much literature suggests that such elections are different in a variety of ways from national elections, and Franklin and Hobolt (2015, p. 403) find that about a quarter of voters, on average, vote differently at EP elections, raising the possibility that most of them would return in 2013 to their previous party choice. For such voters we would have a false measure of high volatility. But we are interested in first-time voters and these have no previous partisanship to return to. Still, we will need to be cautious when comparing 2013 switching by young Austrian voters with switching at the next national election (in 2017).
5. Including Austria in a pooled dataset otherwise comprised entirely of South-American countries might raise concerns, but in this study I use fixed effects regression for analyzing my aggregate data. Such analyses focus entirely on over-time change from one election to the next, anchored by inclusion of a lagged term for turnout at the previous election. With this modeling strategy, differences between countries have no effect on findings. With survey data, however, I cannot lag the dependent variable because different respondents are interviewed in each election study. Without the anchoring provided by a lagged outcome, it is risky to pool datasets (such as the Austrian along with the South American) because unmeasured covariates could result in very different relationships even among what appear to be the same variables.
6. Recall bias occurs because voters view their memory of past behavior in light of how they would currently behave, continuously updating their recall as their current preferences change (Van Elsas et al., 2016). This means that faulty recall of past behavior will increasingly match prospective behavior as the next election approaches. So "recall" of past vote is a good indication of party choice at any temporally adjacent election—even one that has not yet occurred. This is unfortunate when studying volatility but helpful in regard to measuring turnout. Dropping studies

that occurred in election years but in which interviewing was conducted before that year's election did not noticeably change the findings other than in reducing statistical significance due to the smaller remaining *N* of cases.

7. Bear in mind, however, that I do not expect confirmation of the magnitudes of effects from these survey data, which will understate any real changes in turnout that may have occurred.
8. I show first differences from fixed-effects logit models. However, there is a problem interpreting the first difference of the coefficient for a multiplicative term in a nonlinear model as though it were an interaction effect (Ai and Norton, 2003; Buis, 2010). Consequently, I compared my findings with those from linear probability models (OLS models with dummy dependent variables, as described in Kennedy, 2008, pp. 254–255). With my data, these models produce coefficients that are virtually identical to those presented here.
9. The much smaller effect seen in Model F must be ascribed to the consequence of pooling data for countries where different causal processes underlie the decision to vote.
10. The error correction models in this chapter's Appendix show no significant attenuation over time in the effect of age-16 vote eligibility.
11. The age scale has been truncated to end at 70 so as to expand the area of interest at the other end of the scale, up to age 25.
12. Again I show first differences from fixed effects logit models and the same caveats apply (see Note 8).
13. The chances of being wrong in asserting an effect of lowering the voting age are about 1 in 10 for the aggregate-level finding. We can have more confident in our individual-level findings, where there is only about a 1 in 100 chance of being wrong. Moreover, these tests are completely independent of each other, so the chances of error can be multiplied, yielding only a 1 in 1000 chance of being wrong in asserting rising turnout consequential on Votes at 16, comparing countries that instituted this reform with countries that did not. Whether these findings will travel to countries outside the set of those studied is a matter of judgement. The fact that Austrian findings mirror those from South America suggests that the findings can indeed be generalized, at least to similar political systems in Europe and North America.
14. Note that any drop-off will affect only the magnitude of the eventual boost to turnout that would have occurred had the gap in turnout between treated and untreated individuals remained unchanged. It should be mentioned that past experience with changes in electoral laws (particularly the enfranchisement of women and the lowering of the voting age to 18) that Franklin (2004) found to lie at the foundations

of long-term turnout evolution suggests that there is very little if any attenuation over time in the resulting effect. If we can establish the real (uncontaminated by survey recall error) extent of the turnout increase for those who became eligible to Vote at 16 this will likely be the eventual overall turnout increase once the entire electorate has been replaced by "treated" individuals (cf. Franklin, 2004, pp. 116–142). We have no means to confirm these expectations for the Votes-at-16 reform since survey data is biased and both survey and aggregate data, as employed in this chapter, only inform us about changes that have already taken place.

Appendix

Aggregate data for this chapter are taken from the IDEA voter turnout database, augmented by information from Wikipedia regarding the seat shares of the top two parties following each election. Election coverage was as follows: Argentina 1983–2017 (19 elections); Austria 1975–2017 (13); Bolivia 1979–2014 (10); Brazil 1978–2018 (11); Chile 1989–2017 (8); Colombia 1974–2018 (13); Ecuador 1984–2017 (13); Nicaragua 1984–2016 (7); Paraguay 1973–2018 (11); Uruguay 1984–2014 (7); and Venezuela 1973–2015 (10).

Survey data for South-American countries are provided by the LatinoBarometer (LB) database for the same countries as listed above; the only countries in the database with seven or more elections since their 1970–1980 emergence from authoritarian rule and for which LB surveys were conducted in any election years. Surveys for Brazil in 2002 and for Ecuador in 2009 are dropped because of anomalous numbers of respondents with ages that placed them as having been eligible to vote at 16 (86% and 1%, respectively). The remaining numbers of surveys conducted in election years were as follows for each country: Argentina 10; Bolivia 4; Brazil 3; Chile 5; Colombia 4; Ecuador 5; Nicaragua 5; Paraguay 4; Peru 5; Uruguay 2; and Venezuela 5.

Survey data for Austrian elections in 2008. 2013 and 2017 is taken from the Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES) website. For 2008 only a postelection survey is available (conducted in 2009). In 2013 and 2017 there were additional preelection surveys. Because of the small *N* available in only one country and our special interest in the elections of 2013 and 2017 (the only elections for which we have individual-level data relevant to the study of volatility) I pool the pre and postelection data where available.

Table 2.5 Error correction effects on aggregate-level turnout in South-American countries and Austria of changes in vote-eligibility, controlling for other predictors of turnout

Outcome: differenced turnout	*Model M Fixed effects, full dataset*		*Model N Fixed effects with equal* N *(balanced)*	
Inputs	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*
(1) Intercept	43.87	(7.31)**	48.33	(9.32)**
(2) Turnout$_{t-1}$	–0.77	(0.10)**	–0.85	(0.15)**
(3) ΔElectoral clarity^{+} (0–1)	0.57	(0.11)**	0.28	(0.15)*
(4) Electoral clarity$_{t-1}$	0.29	(0.16)*	0.20	(0.21)
(5) ΔCompulsory voting (0,1 = yes)	28.23	(8.06)**	27.76	(7.39)**
(6) Compulsory voting$_{t-1}$	21.33	(6.95)**	21.43	(7.85)*
(7) ΔEligibility to Vote at 16 (0,1 = yes)	4.83	(5.44)	5.11	(5.61)
(8) Eligibility to Vote at 16$_{t-1}$	2.61	(4.13)	6.59	(4.53)*
R-squared	0.56		0.51	
Observations	119		72	
Number of countries	12		12	

$^{+}$1—Proportion gap between largest party size and 50% of seats
$^{++}$1—Proportion gap in seats between the top 2 parties
Note Fixed-effects regression. Coefficients significant at $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$, one-tailed

The main text refers to error correction models (ECMs) which are presented here. Table 2.5 contains two models: Model M for the full dataset and Model N for the same data truncated to contain only the final 7 electoral contests held in each country. The outcome (dependent variable) is the difference in turnout ("ΔTurnout", using the Greek letter Delta for "difference") found by comparing each election with the previous one in temporal sequence. The first input (independent variable), shown in Row 2, is a version of the same outcome lagged by one time-point. In the context of an ECM, its coefficient is known as the "error correction parameter".

Because it is negative, the error correction parameter suggests what is sometimes known as "regression towards the mean"—the tendency of any deviation from long-run equilibrium to be "corrected" (or "decay") over the passage of time. An error correction parameter of –0.85 in Model N suggests that 85% of any short-term effect decays within a

single time period (approximately four years in our data, the average period between elections). The remaining inputs all come in pairs, each differenced coefficient being paired with a lagged coefficient for the same input. Differenced coefficients show the short-term effect of the variable concerned (the effect that will decay at the rate established by the error correction parameter) while the corresponding lagged coefficient shows the long-term effect—an effect that contributes to changes in the equilibrium level from which future short-term deviations will occur.

Model M shows no significant effect of eligibility to Vote at 16, neither short-term (Row 7) nor long-term (Row 8). These same failures were seen Model A of Table 2.1 in the main text, which used the same unbalanced data as are used in Model M. But Model N does show a long-term effect of 6.59 (Row 8), though this is only barely significant at conventional levels. That long-term effect is not significantly greater than the value found in Table 2.1, Model B, of 6.08% for the effect on turnout resulting from a switch from eligibility at 18 to eligibility at 16; but, more importantly, tells us that the effect in question is of a long-term nature. Evidently, the truncated dataset removes a composition artifact that masked this finding when time-series of different lengths were analyzed together.[1]

Figure 2.4 replicates Fig. 2.2 in the main text but using only data for Austria. In that country we have only three elections with age-16-eligible voters, thus the maximum age that any of these voters have had the chance to reach in 2017 is 26. So the distinction between the traces for age-16-eligibles and older voters extends only over 9 years. But during this period there is no sign of the diminution in this distinction that we saw in the main text's Fig. 2.2 for South-American countries. Indeed, the trace for respondents eligible to Vote at 16 appears to rise with increasing age. Confidence intervals are quite wide, however, and comparing the high margin of this interval for the youngest members of the cohort with the low margin for its oldest members we see that the upward slope is in fact not statistically significant and might even be downward. Statistically speaking, there is no difference between this graph and the one shown in Fig. 2.2 for South-American countries.

In Table 2.6 we replicate the volatility analysis using error correction models. In the unbalanced dataset (Model O) we find an effect (5.84 in Row 3), rather larger than was found in Table 2.3 of the main text (2.07 at most). This is as it should be since Table 2.3 averaged over all future

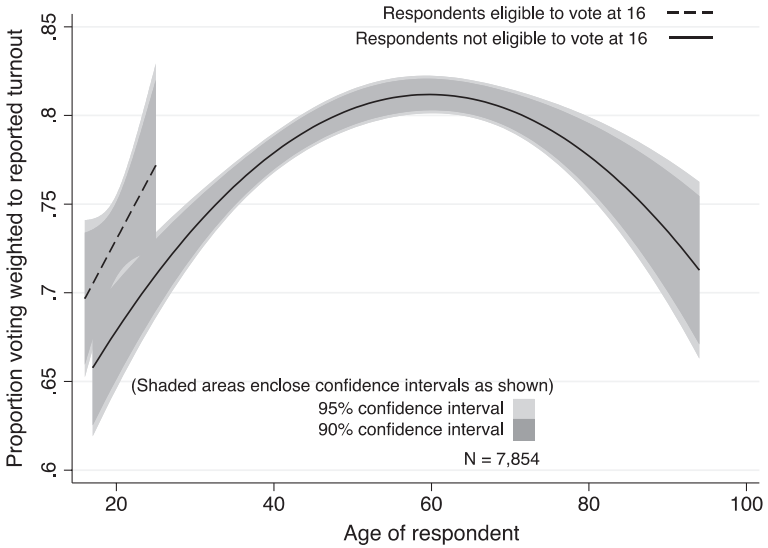

Fig. 2.4 Turnout distinctions for Austria between citizens eligible to Vote at 16 and others, with increasing age

Table 2.6 Error correction effects on aggregate-level volatility in South-American countries and Austria of changes in vote-eligibility

Outcome: differenced volatility	*Model O Fixed effects, full dataset*		*Model P Fixed effects with equal* N *(balanced)*	
Inputs:	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*	*Coef.*	*(s.e.)*
(1) Intercept	7.59	(1.08)***	9.20	(1.72)***
(2) Volatility$_{t-1}$	–0.89	(0.10)***	–1.03	(0.14)***
(3) ΔEligibility to Vote at 16	5.84	(3.22)**	0.60	(4.26)
(4) Eligibility$_{t-1}$	0.50	(2.31)	0.99	(3.37)
R-squared	0.47		0.48	
Observations	114		72	
Number of countries	12		12	

Note Fixed-effects regression. Coefficients significant at **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$, one-tailed

elections an effect of which 89% would have dissipated by the time of the next election following the one at which 16-year olds first voted (according to the error correction parameter in Row 2 of Table 2.6). (See the text associated with Table 2.5 for an explanation of the effects shown in an error correction model) This effect is far smaller and not remotely significant in Model P, which employs the balanced dataset, seemingly due to estimation problems.[2]

Notes

1. Statisticians express concerns regarding possibly spurious effects in ECMs for variables that trend over time (Kennedy, 2008, pp. 307–313)—certainly the case for turnout. But turnout shows a lot of variability, and its overall trend is not statistically significant in our data except for Colombia (in the full dataset) and Paraguay (in the balanced dataset). No other country displays what is known in the econometric jargon as a "unit root" for turnout and our measure of Votes at 16 shows no such unit root for any country. Electoral clarity does show a unit root for five other countries (three in the balanced data), but the effects of the lower voting age in the full dataset rise to match those in the balanced data if the countries with unit roots on either variable are all omitted. For the balanced data, if Paraguay alone is omitted and electoral clarity is dropped from the model then the long-term effect of lowering the voting age rises to 7.1%, still significant at 0.10.
2. Again we need to be concerned with the possibility of unit roots in our data. In addition to those mentioned in Note 1, four countries show a unit root for volatility in both datasets: Chile, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Venezuela. But if the countries with unit roots for any relevant variable are all omitted from the volatility analysis the results are actually strengthened, with short-term effects of age-16-eligibility rising to 8.1 in the unbalanced data and to 6.9 in the balanced data. Both coefficients prove significant at $p<0.05$. Since none of the problematic countries are ones in which the voting age was lowered to 16, but were simply included as controls, one could take the finding of unit roots in four of those control countries as disqualifying them for this role due to non-comparability with countries in which the voting age was lowered. Dropping the data for these four countries would still leave four South American control countries to match the four South American test countries, reifying the findings described in this note.

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CHAPTER 3

Understanding the Policy Drivers and Effects of Voting Age Reform

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3.1 Introduction

Momentum has grown over the past two decades in many countries supporting the lowering of the age of electoral enfranchisement to 16. Over the same period, a significant literature of academic, government-sponsored, and nongovernmental research emerged which has sought to examine the case for and against voting age reform. Advocates and opponents of 'Votes at 16' have drawn on a range of arguments which seek to frame the perceived rationality or otherwise of increasing the number of entrants into the political system at an earlier age. Analyses have been proven illuminating in expanding our understanding of age-related electoral reform in terms of youth democratic socialization,

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political participation, and transitions to adulthood. They have also often been determinately partisan nature, thus reflecting the somewhat binary nature of debates about voting age reform.

There has though been an absence of analytical research which might explain the policy drivers for voting age reform or to historically substantiate its potential effects. The following chapter provides the first such attempt to fill this gap in the literature, establishing and then applying a thematic analytical framework to explain the drivers of voting age reform. It argues that there are at least four thematic models that we can apply to enhance our understanding of the policy origins, justifications, and impacts associated with reforming the age of enfranchisement. The chapter will apply these models to understand policy drivers informing voting age reform in the UK over the past 50 years or so. The chapter concludes that voting age reform in the late 1960s and early 21st century draws on the same policy drivers but they differ in their context and importance.

3.2 Outlining the Policy Drivers for Voting Age Reform

Birch, Clarke, and Whiteley (2015, pp. 298–300) note that a lack of empirical evidence in the UK and internationally with regards to effects of lowering the voting age to 16 has meant that debates about voting age reform have largely coalesced around two meta-themes. First, the normative implications of 'Votes at 16' have been discussed in relation to the age at which it is appropriate for different rights to be granted and how they impact in shaping transitions from youthhood to adulthood. Second, the impact of permitting 16-year olds to vote has been debated, particularly whether 16–17-year olds are likely to exercise their franchise and if they are mature enough to make informed political choices. They note that public opinion is an important but often overlooked dynamic in terms of understanding what motivates people to vote and how this shapes attitudes to reforming the franchise. Political participation, they argue, is strongly influenced by social status, self-interest, and access to sufficient resources (such as time, money, and civic skills and knowledge) to encourage civic voluntarism and increase stocks of social capital. It also impacts on public attitudes to lowering the voting age to 16, with older, highly engaged and resourced citizens opposed to reform when compared to younger citizens. Political preference

also appears influential in shaping popular attitudes to 'Votes at 16', with party affiliation strongly correlated with support or opposition to voting age reform.

There has though been a lack of analysis of the origins and drivers of contemporary voting age reform. As with many policy interventions, the case for 'Votes at 16' has been outlined in election manifestos, policy papers, and media statements to both herald its importance and also organize the case for its introduction. In outlining the case for voting age reform, advocates have highlighted that its policy drivers are a complex and contentious interplay between intentional and instrumentally rational *and* inherently interest-driven, ideological and potentially irrational concerns, which reflect diverse political cultures, processes, and norms of policy actors and organizations. As such, the policy drivers appear both complimentary *and* contradictory when considered independently and in conjunction with other policies. Voting age reform has been driven by a desire to reform contemporary and future aspects of public but not governmental behavior, highlighting the extent to which 'Votes at 16' is driven by demand rather than supply-side deficiencies of democratic systems. This noted the policy drivers have developed over time as new policy challenges have emerged. While the initial driver for reform is typically located in concerns about youth democratic disengagement, issues of intergenerational political fairness and youth transitions to adulthood have increasingly resonated.

Voting age reform is not a new policy area, meaning debates have often occurred within the confines of established governance norms and policy logic concerning electoral reform. Proponents of 'Votes at 16' have sought to build on existing policy interventions which evolved over time rather than abandoning or replacing them in their entirety. Howlett (2011, p. 145) argues past experiences and memories are instrumental in shaping new policies, as failing to learn from prior policy interventions can affect the quality and impact of contemporary policy-making. There has though been a near universal absence of comparative analysis of the drivers and effects of previous and current reform of the age of enfranchisement, particularly the decision of many countries to lower the voting age to 18 in the 1960s and 1970s. Contemporary approaches to voting age reform have thus accommodated incoherence and flaws in terms of the policy design and objectives of 'Votes at 18', a policy which may well have proven partially or wholly unsuccessful in terms of realizing its own aims and objectives.

In an attempt to encourage a more structured approach to understanding the origins and objectives of proponents of 'Votes at 16'—and opposition to the proposition—we argue that there are at least four ways of modeling the drivers of voting age reform. The first model focuses on 'political socialization', and is located in a shared belief that the earlier realization of full rights of political citizenship will increase the potential for life-long political engagement and the participation of young citizens. This is based on an understanding that the determinants of life-long electoral behavior and political attitudes are a product of habits formed early in life, particularly voting (Healy & Malhotra, 2013). Citizens are thought to develop a voting habit during their first experiences with elections if, as a first-time voter, they are socialized in a political culture that emphasizes the importance of civic engagement (Franklin, 2004). It is argued that earlier enfranchisement of young people might enhance this socialization.

The second model focuses on the voting age question via the lens of 'social capital'. It is posited that voting age reform is necessary to rebind the electorate and enhance its cohesion and inclusivity. Proponents argue that the periodic lowering of voting age is justified as a response to the substantial recalibration in the rights and responsibilities associated with youth and adult citizenship. It also reflects the perception that young people are understood to be sufficiently mature, politically literate, and socially engaged to enact their right to vote. A third model is located in 'valence politics' and acknowledges the politicized drivers of voting age reform. Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, and Whiteley (2004) argue that citizens vote based upon their judgments of the overall competence of the rival political parties. The decision by some parties to support lowering the voting age should therefore be seen in instrumental terms, founded on the belief this will encourage young voters to see them as competent and thus more likely to vote for them. It also recognizes that young people might have differing policy priorities when compared to older voters which incentivizes them to support parties promoting youth-orientated polices.

This links to a fourth model which focuses on 'political incentivization', arguing that young people will be more inclined to participate in politics if the voting age is lowered as a result of their increased individual and collective power. This thesis is founded on the proposition that as people are living longer, asymmetries in the generational composition of the electorate means that older voters are increasingly exercising a

disproportionate influence on the democratic process, both in terms of voter turnout and defining the policy priorities of political parties (Berry, 2014). Young people, acutely aware of such imbalances, become increasingly disenfranchised and disengaged. Lowering the voting age provides some redress to this intergenerational democratic deficit, increasing the collective power of young people within the electorate and sending a powerful message to them that their contribution to the political system is valued and welcome. The remainder of this chapter will apply this framework in exploring the historical and contemporary drivers for reforming the age of enfranchisement. It will first consider the decision to lower the voting age to 18 in 1969 in the UK and its impacts before going to assess contemporary drivers for the introduction of 'Votes at 16'.

3.3 Policy Drivers and 'Votes at 18'

Age has proven an influential but often overlooked dimension of the story of expansion of the British electoral franchise. This reflects the fact that from the 1832 Great Reform Act until 1969, the lower age of enfranchisement was 21. The expansion of the franchise in the UK during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries should be seen as largely defensive and reactive moves to addressing concerns about political radicalization and disorder. Successive reforms were principally concerned with the reluctant redress of restrictive voting conventions linked to class, property ownership, and voting rights. The expansion of the vote in 1918 saw women aged 30 and all men aged 21 given the vote. This gender-based age inconsistency was subsequently addressed in 1928. Valence politics proved influential as the main political parties, concerned about the threat of popular discontent and even revolution in the wake of the First World War, was motivated to expand the franchise and appeal to a greater number of potential voters (Ball, 2018). Although there was a lack of explicit concern about the political socialization or incentivization of the vast majority of the population or the social cohesion of the electorate, each reform proved powerful in altering how political parties engaged with and represented voters.

It is noteworthy that, prior to 1969, age itself was not a driver for policy reform. The Representation of the People Act (1969) is the first example of specifically age-driven reform of the UK electoral franchise. This pioneering decision was pivotal in initiating a global wave of voting

age reform as the UK became the first democratic state to universally lower the voting age to 18. Within a decade, most states had followed the UK's example and introduced 'Votes at 18'. The foremost driver in voting age reform in 1969 was a desire to align the ages of civic and political rights with the new age of majority. 'Votes at 18' was thus part of a much wider series of reforms which sought to reflect changes in the parameters of youth and adult citizenship.

Although calls for reform of the age of enfranchisement first emerged in the late 1950s, Labour's victory in the 1966 general election was pivotal. In government, Labour first established a committee, chaired by Justice John Latey, to consider reducing the ages of marriage, welfare, property ownership, and contract purchasing to align adulthood with various ages of responsibility where possible. The so-called Latey Committee published its final report in 1967, drawing attention to changing social attitudes during the immediate post-war period toward young people and acknowledging a wider transformation in how British society understood the citizenship rights, roles, and responsibilities of young adults (Latey Committee, 1967). Only after the Latey Committee had recommended the reduction of the age to 18 was a House of Commons Speaker's Commission convened by the Labour government in 1968 to independently consider the voting age. The Commission's recommendation of a reduction of the voting age to 20 was however rejected by Labour and the voting age for all elections in the UK was universally lowered to 18 in April 1969.

The 'social capital' model thus proved the primary factor to the introduction of 'Votes at 18'. As there was little contention about whether 18-year olds were adults, the case in the 1960s for or against lowering the age of enfranchisement rested upon their perceived maturity, competence and capacity, particularly the extent to which they were seen as sentient humans capable of voting. Those in favor of voting age reform argued that 18-year olds were informed decision-makers and that previous extensions of the franchise had been opposed by those using spurious incapacity arguments. One advocate of change noted how during the passage of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, 'speaker after speaker talked about how women were hysterical and emotional and were given to running off at tangents' (Anthony Gardner, HC Deb, 18 November 1968, c.994). Opponents, such as the Labour MP, Charles Pannell, responded that 'there is nothing sacred about the age

of 18', suggesting instead that 20 was a more appropriate age of maturity (HoC Deb, 10 April 1968, 1405). Presciently, one Labour politician noted in the debate on reform in 1969, 'it is impossible to produce logical proof that the correct minimum voting age should be 25, or 21, or 20, 18, or 16' (Lord Brooke, HL Deb, 6 February 1969, 299, c.249).

Valence politics also proved influential, as Labour clearly believed that voting age reform might deliver electoral benefits (Fielding, 2003, p. 184). As such, Labour's support for 'Votes at 18' did stimulate some political discord, and many Conservatives opposed the reform of the voting age. However, the strength of this opposition was limited with little concerted action by opposition parties to stymy or reject 'Votes at 18' outright. Moreover, media reportage and public opinion at the time suggested widespread—if tepid—support for lowering the voting age. The road to 'Votes at 18' was largely uncontentious and elicited little interest outside of Westminster with scant public interest in the issue. For example, the issue did not witness a sustained campaign from young people within the Labour Party, the trade union movement, or the National Union of Students. But any hopes that Labour's support for the enfranchisement of more young people would bring electoral returns appears to be misguided as the first general election where 18-year olds could vote in 1970 saw the party voted out of office. There is scant evidence that 'political incentivization' influenced voting age policy change in the 1960s. Although intergenerational tensions had become more marked during the decade, expressions of discontent with representativeness or otherwise of Westminster was not a marked feature of youth political activism.

Growing concerns were apparent however regarding the political socialization of young people during the 1960s among the political parties which drove voting age reform, particularly fears that widespread youth social alienation could lead to the antidemocratic embrace of either far-left or nationalist causes. By encouraging youth political participation from an earlier age, it was hoped that young people would affiliate with and legitimate representative forms of democracy. The potential that 'Votes at 18' would affect the quantity of youth political engagement and participation appeared peripheral. Voting in elections was the overwhelming norm in the 1960s for young people; as such a crisis of their participation was not a driver of reform.

3.4 The Policy Origins of 'Votes at 16'

Mainstream British party political interest in 'Votes at 16' emerged in the late 1990s in response to concerns regarding growing youth political disengagement from electoral politics. 'Votes at 16' has grown in resonance from a niche concern of youth advocacy groups, politically engaged young people, and some smaller political parties to become an important and contentious issue. In response, policy-makers across the UK have undertaken the piecemeal and partial lowering of the voting age which has created asymmetries in the electoral rights of young people depending on where they live. 16- and 17-year olds in Scotland can vote in all national elections but not in Westminster elections nor in UK-wide referenda or European Parliament elections should such occasions arise again. Their counterparts in Wales will likely be afforded the same variable voting rights in 2021. The devolved legislature in Northern Ireland does not have the power to lower the voting age, although the Northern Ireland Assembly formally supports reform.

In England, young people under the age of 18 are also unable to vote in elections. Campaigning by the influential 'Votes at 16' Coalition—formed in 2003 and led by the British Youth Council (BYC) with support from a range of political parties, youth democracy organizations, and other democratic reform groups—has proven successful in raising awareness and encouraging political and public support. 'Votes at 16' has regularly featured in the top five issues voted for by young people in the BYC's annual 'Make Your Mark' survey which attracts over one million young voters. The lack of an English national legislature has however meant that efforts to lower the voting age have largely focused on reforming electoral conventions in Westminster.

Given that there are significant policy parallels to be drawn between the debates of the 1960s and those of the contemporary period, it is striking that both supporters and opponents of 'Votes at 16', and policy-makers, have displayed a common disinterest in reviewing the drivers or outcomes of the decision to lower the voting age in 1969. This oversight is surprising as contemporary advocates of voting age reform often laud the progressive and ground-breaking nature of the UK's franchise history. Furthermore, many of the drivers for 'Votes at 16' originate from the effects of lowering the voting age to 18 and subsequent policy interventions. This lack of engagement is in part because Westminster has never formally scrutinized the impacts of 'Votes at 18'

via a departmental select committee or commission. Moreover, the political and institutional memory of the Representation of the People Act (1969) has diminished markedly as nearly all the policy actors directly involved have retired and many have passed away.

A number of evidence-gathering initiatives have considered the case for and against 'Votes at 16'. Two independent commissions—the Electoral Commission (2002–2004) and the Youth Citizenship Commission (YCC) (2008–2009)—were established by the UK government to analyze youth democratic disengagement and also the potential for voting age reform. Both came to the conclusion that the case for lowering the voting age was not sufficiently evidentially coherent or sustained to recommend 'Votes at 16'. Two nongovernment commissioned reviews—the Power Inquiry (2006) and the BYC (2014)—came to the opposite conclusion, both arguing they had received insufficient evidence for them to *not* recommend lowering the voting age. The Scottish Government undertook no evidential analysis of the voting age question prior to the reduction of the voting age to 16 for the 2014 independence referendum. Moreover, post-referendum analysis was limited to a rather brief and positive review which largely drew on evidence provided by Dr. Jan Eichhorn and his research team at the University of Edinburgh, and the Electoral Commission (see Scottish Parliament, 2015). The extent to which the Scottish Government might adopt a more critical, substantial review was undermined by the then First Minister, Alex Salmond, who declared a few days after the referendum proved here was an 'overwhelming, unanswerable' case for 'Votes at 16' to be introduced for all elections in the UK. He concluded 'there is not a shred of evidence for arguing now that 16 and 17-year-olds should not be allowed to vote' (Barford, 2014).

Unlike in Scotland, the Welsh Assembly has established separate consultations to assess evidence regarding 'Votes at 16' for local and national elections. However, these consultations have been undertaken *after* the political decision to lower the voting age. Both consultations therefore appear keen to support the case for voting age reform. For example, although only 53% of more than 10,000 young people who responded to a survey supported 'Votes at 16', the Presiding Officer of the National Assembly for Wales, Dame Rosemary Butler AM, concluded there was 'a clear mandate' for reform (National Assembly for Wales, 2015, p. 7). An *Expert Panel on Assembly Electoral Reform* established in 2017 considered voting age reform as well as a range of other electoral reforms in Wales. It concluded a reduction in the minimum voting age to 16

'would be a powerful way to raise political awareness and participation among young people' (National Assembly for Wales, 2017, p. 6).

The various analyses of the voting age question have looked at the issue in distinctive but overlapping ways, drawing on common methodologies which involve—to differing extents—the review of existing analytical evidence, elite interviews with leading political, academic, and youth democracy individuals, organizations, and focus groups with young people. Some also undertook public opinion surveys. This noted, while the Electoral Commission, the BYC, and Scottish Government analyses focused primarily on voting age reform, the issue was only one element of the wider remits of the YCC, the Power Inquiry, and Welsh Assembly commissions to explore (youth) democratic disengagement or electoral reform. It is noteworthy that although each of these initiatives acknowledged the importance of lowering the voting age to 18, none chose to evaluate its impacts and effects.

The impact of 'Votes at 18' was first and most significantly realized in terms of the political socialization of young people. Growing concerns about declining youth electoral turnout and wider disengagement of democratic activism proved the primary driver for calls for 'Votes at 16' (see, for example, Votes at 16 Coalition, 2008). Although expansion of the franchise meant 1.1 million more people voted in the 1970 general election than in 1966, early warning signs were apparent regarding youth electoral participation as overall turnout fell by 3%. Although 65% of 18–24-year olds voted in the 1970 contest, a rise of 4.5% on the number of 21–24-year olds who had voted in 1966, this was 7% lower than the overall turnout. While the February 1974 election saw an impressive 70.2% of 18–24-year olds vote, overall turnout was nearly 9% higher (Dar, 2013). Although general election turnout of 18–24-year-olds continued to exceed 60% between October 1974 and 1992, it was consistently lower to older age groups. It dramatically fell in the 2001 general election, when only 39% of 18–24-year olds voted, and by 2005, youth turnout was 23% lower than the overall figure. While there has been some improvement in turnout of this age group, nonparticipation of 18–24-year olds in UK general elections has proven higher than all other age cohorts in every general election since the lowering of the age of franchise. This correlated with reductions in overall turnout for elections experienced by other states who lowered their age of enfranchisement from 21 to 18 in the 1970s (Franklin, 2004).

During the passage of the 1969 act, very few politicians had identified the need for civic or political education to instill young people with the requisite political knowledge and skills to vote. However, during the 1970s calls for youth political education by the Politics Association and the Hansard Society sought to challenge conventional attitudes that schoolchildren were too young to respond to political instruction (Crick & Heater, 1977). Under the auspices of the *Programme for Political Education*, advocates encouraged the development of critical skills and deliberation, rather than the rote-taught civic knowledge (Crick & Porter, 1978). Calls for political education lacked significant political party support though, largely due to concerns that young people should not be exposed to the confrontational style of British politics or potential political indoctrination (Andrews & Mycock, 2008). It was not until 2002 that citizenship education was introduced by a Labour government as a statutory subject in the English National Curriculum, and across the rest of the increasingly devolved UK state in differing formats (Andrews & Mycock, 2008). But while strong evidence emerged regarding its positive effect on youth political knowledge, interest, and activism—particularly the potential to vote (Tonge, Mycock, & Jeffery, 2012; Whiteley, 2014), citizenship education across the UK retains low status and is largely apolitical in content, often being poorly taught due to insufficiently trained teachers, and limited curriculum time (Keating et al., 2010; Kisby & Sloam, 2012). The majority of young people across the UK receive little or no political education before they are enfranchised to vote.

Governmental and non-governmental reviews of the voting age question have consistently raised concerns about the poor availability and content of political education for young people prior to voting. But although there is a shared recognition of these issues, responses have proven diverse. While the Electoral Commission and YCC recommended that citizenship education should be improved *before* any further reform of the voting age, the Power Inquiry, and BYC commissions proposed that voting age reform should be undertaken without any surety of how or when political education would be improved. This is an approach which has been adopted by advocates of voting age reform in Westminster and the wider 'Votes at 16' coalition. Concerns about the lack of universal political education in Scottish schools have been raised by a host of youth democracy organizations and academics but are yet—so far—to be addressed by the Scottish Government. In Wales, there is

evidence of adaptive policy-learning, with calls for the introduction of a dedicated program of political education in schools and local communities for young people at the same time as voting age reform.

The attempt of lowering the voting age in 1969 to facilitate the synchronization of 18 as the age of adulthood was largely successful as the threshold for ages of majority established in the late 1960s remained remarkably static. However, the 'social capital' model, which proved the primary driver of reform in the 1960s, has proven to be the most contented and contentious area of dispute in terms of debates about 'Votes at 16'. Since 1969, sociocultural change has seen maturity framed and understood in contradictory and confusing ways which have altered public perceptions of youthhood and adulthood. In 1985, the House of Lords ruled that young people in England and Wales under the age of 16 were able to consent to their own medical treatment without parental consent or knowledge if deemed to have sufficient capacity to make this decision. Successive acts then facilitated the lowering and equalization of the age of consent at 16 for homosexual and heterosexual activity throughout the UK. Advocates of 'Votes at 16' have identified a range of economic and social rights and responsibilities which are realized at 16 years of age, such as paying tax, consensual sex, and marriage, as well as military service, which they argue are sufficiently significant markers of adulthood to be complemented with the right to vote (Adonis & Tyndall, 2013).

Those supporting the maintenance of the current voting age have responded by noting 18 remains the age where most rights coalesce and are realized. Furthermore, there is a general upward trajectory in ages of responsibility to 18 or beyond, particularly in areas of public health and welfare rights (Russell, 2014). Attention has been drawn to the conditionality of many of the rights identified by 'Votes at 16' advocates, such as joining the Armed Forces or getting married (in England and Wales) requiring parental consent. Furthermore, frontline service is avoided until 18, not least because the UK has signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which defines childhood as lasting until 18. Indeed, the introduction of the Children Act 1989 appeared to confirm that policy-makers considered 18 the age of adulthood as it compelled local authorities, courts, parents, and other agencies in the United Kingdom to promote the safeguarding and welfare of all young people under 18. In England and Wales, legislation came into force between 2008 and 2015 which determined that the young people must remain in some form of statutory education or volunteering until 18.

Devolution in Scotland and Wales also encouraged differentiation in the rights of young people, and stratification of how youth and adult citizenship are understood and realized. For example, the Scottish Government has undertaken a number of reforms of ages of responsibility which appear to confirm their view that 18 is the age when adulthood begins. Similarly, the day after the Welsh Government announced its intention to lower the voting age to 16 in 2018, it raised the age that young people are allowed to have intimate body piercings to 18. This variable geometry of adulthood has allowed both advocates *and* opponents of 'Votes at 16' to deploy age symmetry arguments which were influential in debates in the late 1960s. Interestingly, many of the established markers that informed how youth transitions to adulthood were understood in the 1960s, including leaving home, buying a house, getting married, or having children, are increasingly realized later in life by young people.

It is evident that contemporary transitions to adulthood are increasingly complex; there is no single age at which a young person takes on all the responsibilities and rights of an adult citizen. Various analyses of the voting age question have rightly noted the importance of the vote within a wider context of their transitions to adulthood—and not a definitive marker of adulthood itself. There has though been dissonance as to whether the relationship between electoral rights and other ages of the majority should determine whether the voting age should be lowered or not. The Electoral Commission (2004) and the YCC (2009) both noted significant disconnects in the framing of and relationships between political and other ages of majority, recommending that a review of the ages of majority should be undertaken *before* reform of the voting age. The equalizing of the age of candidature and enfranchisement in 2006 appeared to confirm that 18 was the definitional coming of age for young citizens.

Although the Power Inquiry (2006) and the BYC (2014) also acknowledged substantial differentiation in the ages of majority, this was not viewed as a barrier to lowering the voting age. Both concluded that the rights coalesced at 16 were significant and sufficient to legitimate 'Votes at 16', a position supported by the Welsh Assembly Expert Panel too. The Scottish Government has—thus far—chosen not to review the voting age question in terms of transitions to adulthood. It is noteworthy, however, that advocates of 'Votes at 16' have sought to stress the legitimacy of younger voters within the electorate by citing the

accumulation of adult citizenship rights and responsibilities while also not acknowledging these as a definitive marker of adulthood itself. Moreover, there has been little consideration of the potential to lower other significant civic rights, such as the age of candidacy or jury service, to 16.

The political incentivization for young people to vote also diminished after 1969, encouraging a slow but marked decline in individual and collective youth political capital and agency. As youth political disengagement increased, political parties sought to attract older, more reliable voters by designing policies and election manifestoes to appeal to them. This further disincentivized their younger counterparts (Birch et al., 2015). Young people have become increasingly critical of democracy, particularly the behavior and performance of those elected to office, and political parties whose policies fail to offer alternatives to austerity and worsening prospects for the future (Sloam & Henn, 2019, p. 104). Moreover, the language of politics and established mediums of political campaigning are seen as archaic by many young people, as are the older electoral representatives they are expected to engage with and vote for (Mycock & Tonge, 2012). As a result, fewer young people now join political parties (Bale, Webb, & Poletti, 2018), and their youth wings are typically seen as ineffectual and peripheral to mainstream politics (Rainsford, 2018).

Empirical evidence is limited in terms of the extent to which lowering the voting age to 16 would politically incentivize young people to vote. In Scotland, the 2014 independence referendum saw an exceptional turnout of 75% of under-18s, who voted in significantly larger numbers when compared with the 54% of 18–24-year olds (Electoral Commission, 2015). Research has highlighted that 16- and 17-year-old voters were as politically engaged, literate, and autonomous in their participation as older voters during the referendum (Eichhorn, 2015; Hill, Lockyer, Head, & McDonald 2017). Voting age reform in Scotland has had a marked positive effect on youth political interest and activism when compared with young people in the rest of the UK (Eichhorn, 2018; McLaverty, Baxter, Tait, Göker, & Heron, 2015). Some have however questioned the lack of political or academic interest as to why turnout of under-18s in the Scottish independence referendum was 10% lower than the average of 85% (Mycock, 2015). Moreover, although subsequent local and national elections in Scotland have encouraged a slight increase in overall turnout, this is linked more to the ongoing resonance of the independence question among older voters rather than the

impact of voting age reform (Electoral Commission, 2017). In 2019, the average age of the Scottish Parliament's elected representatives has risen to 51. It is early days but as yet voting age reform has not encouraged a change in political culture in Scotland to incentivize younger voters, with policy-making still disproportionately focused on older voters.

'Votes at 16' has increasingly become enmeshed with wider debates about impacts of the political, social, cultural, and economic discord of the past decade on young people. A number of studies have observed that young people are participating in politics in diverse, fluid, and new ways (Pickard, 2019; Sloam & Henn, 2019). These are understood to have encouraged a 'Youthquake' in the 2017 UK general election whereby political parties, particularly Labour under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, increasingly designed policies to attract the youth vote. Evidence indicates that the appeal of 'Votes at 16' is strongly aligned with political interest. While young, mainly university-educated and cosmopolitan voters support reform, those from disadvantaged and disengaged backgrounds have little interest in the issue (Loughran, Mycock, & Tonge, 2019). There is a potential danger that lowering the voting age to 16 in isolation may actually increase 'the engagement gap' by empowering already empowered young people while doing little to address these underlying inequalities.

The influence of valence politics has been a feature of growing demands for voting age reform. As previously noted, any hopes of short-term electoral benefits for Labour after lowering the voting age to 18 were quickly dashed. Initial proposals to lower the voting age to 16 emerged in the mid-1980s when the then Liberal Party argued voting age reform was necessary to enhance opportunities for young people to 'participate more fully in the affairs of their community and the decisions that affect or shape their lives' (Franklin, 1989, p. 56). However, 'Votes at 16' only began to resonate more widely in the late 1990s when the Liberal Democrats began to push for further reform on the grounds that young people were disengaging from formal politics, in part due to their lack of recognition as adults. Attempts to lower the voting age to 16 were however rejected by the New Labour government, who argued that, like in the 1960s, the issue needed to be considered within a wider review of the age of majority.

Political support for 'Votes at 16' has taken time to build policy momentum when compared to voting age reform in the 1960s, and has proven more party politically divisive than 'Votes at 18'. The role

of political ideology has proven influential, dividing left wing, and centrist parties, who support voting age reform to underline and enhance their progressive, youth-focused credentials, with those on the political right, who are often typified as archaic in terms of their appeal to young people. Furthermore, it has divided some union-wide political parties. 'Votes at 16' is now accepted by all political parties represented in the Scottish parliament, including the Conservative party who formally oppose the proposition in Westminster.

Voting age reform was introduced by the SNP-led government who framed it in progressive terms that sought to politically differentiate and disconnect Scotland from Westminster in the hope that it would encourage significant numbers of young people to vote for independence (Mycock, 2015). Such hopes were dashed when a slight majority of 16–19-year olds voted for Scotland remains in the UK (Hill et al., 2017). However, the valence effects might be more significant and favorable in the long-term. Reform of the voting age in Wales appears to have been driven by a shared desire to 'modernize' their respective national institutions and politics when compared to Westminster. While Welsh Conservatives have not directly advocated for 'Votes at 16', they have been muted in their opposition.

Successive Coalition and Conservative UK governments have rejected a change to the voting age, and frequent attempts to introduce 'Votes at 16' via Private Members' Bills in the House of Commons have failed. The failure of the Liberal Democrats to pursue 'Votes at 16' when in Coalition government (2010–2015) was instructive as the party did not pursue one of its long-term youth-orientated policies when the opportunity arose. There has though been a marked shift in party political opinion, with all parties in Westminster, except the governing Conservatives and Democratic Unionist Party, now formally supporting lowering the voting age. Conservative opponents view 'Votes at 16' as potentially enfranchising over 1.5 million young people who are most likely to vote for political opponents (Mycock & Tonge, 2017). Such concerns may have a foundation; in the 2017 UK general election, the National Audit Office reported that the outcome in up to 88 constituency results could have changed if 16- and 17-year olds had been franchised, mostly in favor of Labour (National Audit Office, 2017).

It is noteworthy that no one political party has sought to exclusively claim 'Votes at 16' as their own policy or explicitly seek to benefit from lowering the voting age. Moreover, calls for a reduction of the age of

enfranchisement have increasingly come from across the political spectrum both at Westminster and in the devolved national constituencies of the UK. A small but influential group of Conservatives MPs, including Nicky Morgan and Sir Peter Bottomley, have proven increasingly vocal in their support (Electoral Reform Society, 2018) and the establishment of an All-Party Parliamentary Group on Votes at 16 indicates that there is growing non-partisan support for voting age reform in both Houses. Furthermore, a growing number of English local authorities and city-region mayors support lowering the voting age for elections within England. It has also had a marked effect on public opinion, where surveys over the past two decades have consistently seen a majority of adults across the UK reject 'Votes at 16' (Greenwood, 2019). UK-wide survey fieldwork undertaken in 2019 indicates a majority of both under-18s and over-18s voters now support 'Votes at 16', which is possibly a result of political uncertainty caused by the EU referendum and the partial introduction of voting age reform in Scotland and Wales (Loughran et al., 2019).

3.5 Conclusions

This chapter has sought to develop understanding of voting age reform by introducing an analytical framework which seeks to frame and explain its policy drivers and outcomes. This framework was applied to the case study of the UK, comparing iterations of voting age reform in the late 1960s and the present day. By applying the analytical framework, we have identified two distinctive policy-making approaches informing contemporary voting age reform. Advocates of 'Votes at 16' argue that questions regarding the political socialization of young people and how it might transform transitions to adulthood are important but should not stymy voting age reform. They have adopted pragmatic and opportunistic approaches to reform, prioritizing the principle of introducing 'Votes at 16' above concerns about its potential effects. Those who oppose lowering the voting age to 16, or who urge caution in how it is introduced, place greater emphasis on the need to address these issues first.

The chapter provides insights into voting age reform policy-making in the UK and enhances the potential for the comparative study of debates about reducing the age of enfranchisement elsewhere. Policy-learning related to the introduction and effects of lowering the voting age to 18 have been largely eschewed by both advocates and opponents in terms of

developing our understanding of the policy drivers and potential impacts of 'Votes at 16'. Moreover, the current debates regarding the expansion of youth enfranchisement have overlooked the potential contribution of considering the policy drivers for contemporary voting age reform in a coherent, longitudinal, and holistic manner.

The decision to lower the voting age to 18 in many countries in the late 1960s and 1970s was principally driven by concerns regarding the social cohesion of the electorate, particularly the inclusive correlation between political, social, and economic rights of those deemed to be adults. Consideration of the need for youth political socialization prior to enfranchisement was largely overlooked, and only emerged in the 1990s as younger, newly enfranchised voters disengaged from formal modes of democratic participation in increasingly significant numbers. By comparison, campaigning for 'Votes at 16' in most countries has been principally driven by concerns regarding political socialization, with questions regarding social capital and the cohesion of the electorate proving influential but inconclusive.

Valence politics has proven an observable but secondary feature of the decision to lower the voting age in the late 1960s and currently. This noted, there appears to be a growing correlation between younger voters—if they vote at all—and parties that support 'Votes at 16'. Issues regarding the political incentivization of younger voters have proven peripheral in debates about reducing the voting age both to 18 and then 16. There appears to be a shared lack of concern about why 18–24-year olds continue to vote at lower levels than all other age cohorts. There is though scant consideration given to 'supply-side' issues concerning the potential reform of the political system beyond the extension of the franchise and how political parties engage with and represent both franchised and non-franchised younger voters.

It is likely that 'Votes at 16' will be universally introduced in many countries over the next decade or so. Policy momentum is building—although at a considerably slower pace than that which saw the introduction of 'Votes at 18'. Only time will tell whether the current approaches to voting age reform are appropriate. If we do see the widespread introduction of 'Votes at 16'—as appears likely—a more holistic evidence-led approach should be adopted to ensure the policy lessons of previous iterations of voting age reform are embraced.

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CHAPTER 4

Political Knowledge, Civic Education and Voting at 16

Henry Milner

4.1 Introduction

Proponents and opponents of voting at 16 often talk past each other: empirical data, if used at all, is brought in to bolster a subjective position, such as, if 16-year olds are old enough to drive, work without restrictions on their hours, and pay taxes, they should be able to vote. The issue here is rather different, simply put: do we have good reason to believe that allowing 16 and 17-year olds to vote enhances democracy.

Reducing the voting age to 16 is one of the several measures that proponents of enhancing democracy through institutional reforms advocate.[1] And indeed, enhancing democracy is anything but inconsequential. In this and other chapters of this book, as in comparative electoral studies generally, the resilience of electoral democracy is taken for granted. But, in fact, a glance at the political world around us tells a different story. For example, the January 2018 Democracy Index from the Economist Intelligence Unit shows that the "unwelcome trend of disturbing

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democratic … retreat remains firmly in place." This conclusion was reinforced by IDEA's 2018 Report on the Global State of Democracy (GSoD), which concluded that "Regions with a concentration of so-called established or high-performing democracies … have experienced 'modern democratic backsliding'—when democratically elected political parties or leaders use legal means to weaken democracy from within."

To justify reducing eligibility to vote from 18 to 16 is thus to show how it serves not as an end in itself but rather a means to an end, an end that can be provisionally termed enhanced democratic political engagement. This is the starting point here. Moreover, it is not a simple matter: As we shall see, the question that emerges is under what, if any, circumstances does reducing the voting age enhance political engagement.

Identifying institutional choices that reinforce informed democratic participation among upcoming generations indeed constitutes part of a much-needed response to the resurgence of authoritarian populism. Civic education, discussed below, is clearly one area of such choices. And, as we shall see, voting age and civic education policies are closely linked. One study comparing Poland and Hungary, argues that the widely different choices, including on civic education and voting age that were made in the early 1990s as these two countries entered their post-communist period impacted the politics of the two countries, with Polish youth then voting for less authoritarian alternatives than older Poles, unlike in Hungary, where the pattern was reversed (Fesnic, 2016).

This chapter, then, focuses on these appropriate circumstances. Political engagement is shorthand for the second, qualitative dimension of electoral participation. The first dimension is that of turnout, a purely quantitative expression. If our concern is limited to this dimension—one we admittedly cannot ignore when democracy itself is under fire from authoritarian populists[2]—then we should be concerned less with changing the age of eligibility and address the participation rate directly: to augment turnout of all age groups, especially young people,[3] who are least likely to vote out of civic duty (see, e.g., Pammett & Leduc, 2003), we would need first and foremost to make voting compulsory. But, in doing so, we risk bringing to the polls an additional number of less sophisticated voters.[4]

In any case, we are a long way from any general openness toward, let alone acceptance of, compulsory voting among long-standing democracies. Thus, in discussing reducing the voting age to 16, we assume that there is no penalty for not voting or reward for voting beyond the satisfaction that comes from choosing to participate in the democratic

process. This raises the question of whether, based on what we know, much of which is brought together in this book, we are able to identify a clear relationship between reducing the voting age and electoral participation. At this, it would seem, given that there are few existing cases, the existing data does not point clearly in one direction.

The more important issue concerning turnout is whether, as suggested by Franklin in this volume that for a meaningful number of people, early voting can be habit forming. Franklin's explanation that it is because 16- and 17-year olds are more often still living with their parents and thus more likely to vote than their 18- and 19-year olds siblings, is persuasive but the case that they are more likely to vote not only initially but also to form a habit of voting remains to be made (see Bhatti, Hansen, & Wass, 2012).

4.2 Electoral Participation and Civic Literacy

We thus arrive at the second, qualitative, dimension of political participation, which we can characterize as "political engagement." A few quantitative studies get at this second dimension. In Chapter 5 on Austria, Aichholzer and Kritzinger conclude that there is no evidence that the quality of vote choices among citizens under 18 is any worse than that of older voters and that for young people there is a net gain from voting at 16, since the level of political knowledge of Austrian 16–17-year olds is not lower than that of their slightly older counterparts, while their political interest increased after being granted the right to vote.

However, a different result emerges in the case of the Norwegian voting age experiment (discussed in more detail in Chapter 10), where four indicators were used to measure what the authors termed "political maturity": interest in politics, political efficacy, attitudinal constraint and consistency between attitudes and (hypothetical) vote choice. Youth at the age of 16 and 17 generally had a lower score on all of these indicators than 18- and 19-year olds (Bergh, 2013), even though they voted at a higher rate. To the disappointment of advocates of reducing the voting age, the researchers could find no positive effect from voting for these 16-year olds (compared to those of the same age group who did not participate) on each of these indicators.

An interesting recent Swedish study (Rosenqvist, 2016) using the nationwide Swedish register data arrives at similar conclusions. Swedes are eligible to vote if they turn 18 at the latest on the day of the

election. The Swedish register data provides the exact date of birth of all individuals born in Sweden since 1969. Given fixed election dates in Sweden, the paper thus was able to estimate the causal effect of having one's first voting opportunity at 18, compared to having it three years later, on measures of political knowledge, as well as political and civic interest around age 18.[5] Individuals that had their first voting opportunity shortly after turning 18 do not in any way exhibit higher levels of knowledge and interest than comparable individuals whose first voting opportunity took place, on average, three years later. In other words, those reaching 18 with an election coming up do not apparently make any special effort to become politically knowledgeable just because they will soon be eligible to vote. The author concludes that, other things being equal, the same would apply to 15- and 16-year olds having the right to vote in the election following their 16th birthday. However, in Chapter 8, Leininger and Faas suggest, in their analysis of voting at the threshold of 16, that there are indeed differential results for those just before or after that point in an electoral context.

Furthermore, while fitting expectations derived from the results of the Norwegian experiment, the Swedish experience contrasts sharply with developments in Scotland following the high levels of 16- and 17-year-old participation and interest in the referendum on independence reported on in Chapter 7. Overall, with the Scottish and Austrian election data on one side, and the Scandinavian data on the other, we cannot make any claims as to a direct causal relationship between voting age and political knowledge. At this point, the burden of proof remains with those looking to justify a reduction in the voting age.

To possibly meet such a burden, we need to turn to the wider context of lowering the voting age. I stress political knowledge rather than civic attitudes on which there is a wide literature. I have argued elsewhere (see Milner, 2007) that subjective measures such as political interest or political efficacy are too much prone to be affected by social desirability to serve as comparative indicators of this second, political engagement, dimension. Instead, by stressing the knowledge aspect of political engagement, we can make use of aggregate measures of individual political knowledge, which allow us to compare the level of what I term "civic literacy." A brief digression on civic literacy is in order at this point.

Civic literacy reflects the proportion of citizens having the knowledge necessary to cast an informed vote. One side of civic literacy is the individual's political knowledge, which draws our attention to civic and adult

education, and the role of the media, discussed below. There is another, institutional, dimension to civic literacy, though it is less relevant to the discussion of young people eligible to vote for the first time here. It concerns the effect of electoral institutions on the development of stable party identification, an effect that is cumulative over time. Proportional electoral systems (PR) foster civic literacy in the incentive structure faced by parties[6]: Overall, PR systems are more conducive to the formation and durability of programmatically coherent parties that contest elections throughout the country and at more than one level, hence they make it easier for potential voters to locate themselves politically, i.e., to identify with a party and to use that identification as a guide through the complexities of issues and actors over time and at various levels of political activity.

This relationship can explain a finding by Fisher, Laurence, and Curtice (2008) which found that the turnout advantage of countries with proportional systems was due almost entirely to the significantly higher rates among those with lower levels of political knowledge. In this way PR fosters political knowledge and thus, potentially, electoral participation, especially at the lower end of the education ladders. Young people are clearly at the lower end of the education ladders. Initially, the fact that they are voting in a proportional system should not make a difference given that they have yet to form any stable party identification. Still, it could be that once able and sufficiently informed to vote at 16, the fact that they would be in a position to form stable party identification earlier could have a long-term effect on their likelihood to participate electorally later in life.

The crucial term in the above is "sufficiently informed." In the case of young people eligible to vote for the first time, the relevant institutional factor is civic education. If civic education can compensate for the lack of political maturity, combining such a program with reducing the voting age to 16 should satisfy this concern. But civic education, unlike electoral institutions, is a fluid concept, applied quite differently in different countries and even subunits of some countries.

There is an extensive literature on civic education and its effects. We can generalize, as noted in the editors' introduction: Effects vary depending on whether we are looking at formal civics education or discursive engagement with political issues in the classroom, and are strongest when jointly present (Torney-Purta & Lopez, 2006; See also Dassonneville, Quintelier, Hooghe, & Claes, 2012). Moreover, such

curricular decisions reflect wider societal choices in the timing, content and form of civic education for those at school: these include how many hours a student is obliged to take such a course and at what age but also how it is taught, and by whom. Given that to be most effective in enhancing political participation and engagement, civic education should be offered in the years just before the young person is eligible to vote, there is a structural advantage to voting at 16 since a significantly smaller proportion of young people are (required to be) still in school at 17 and 18 than at 14 and 15 in most countries.

Underlying these objective factors is a subjective one: to what extent is civic education seen as important by educational and political authorities. A key indicator of the latter is whether the goal is to convey a given amount of information or whether the priority is to develop the means and habit of attentiveness to the relevant ongoing political discussion. The problem is that the literature does not allow us to meaningfully link inputs and outcomes. For example, Manning and Edwards (2014) directly pose the question "Does civic education for young people increase political participation?" They surveyed a heterogeneous group of studies that explored the effects of civic education in an educational context on political participation. Six studies explored specific civic education programs and three studies looked for links between routine civic education and political participation. Different study designs, follow-up periods and methods for data collection were used and studies reported on a range of outcomes, from voting and voter registration to composite measures of political expression. Little discernible effect of civic education on voting or voter enrolment was found, though there was some increase in increasing of political expression, such as petitions.[7]

4.3 Civic Education and Voting at 16

Returning to the age of eligibility to vote, we begin from the assumption based on the Norwegian experience that, other things being equal, compared to those first eligible to vote at 18, those first eligible to Vote at 16 can be expected to vote more but know less when casting their first vote. Hence the question we pose becomes: Is a young person who has taken civic education courses at the age of 14–16 and eligible to Vote at 16 as likely to cast an informed first or subsequent vote as someone who has taken the same course but cannot vote until 18? Based on what we know of the effects of civic education, this entails identifying the circumstances

under which civic education at age 15 and 16 can compensate for a lack of political sophistication so that those first voting at 16 are in an equivalent position to those first voting at 18 to cast an informed first or subsequent vote. The literature is suggestive but is it sufficient?

Owen and Soule (2015) show that US high school students gain political knowledge as a result of taking a civics class, and that those who have a base of political knowledge are more inclined to engage in political and civic activities, including voting, than those who do not.[8] A study based on Belgian data on political attitudes and behaviors, as well as the curriculum, of adolescents and young adults, and the attitudes and actions of their parents, asked whether and how civic education can compensate for missing parental political socialization. It found that civic education in the school compensates for inequalities in family socialization with respect to political engagement (political interest and media use) but not significantly for political participation (Neundorf, Niemi, & Smets, 2015). Similarly, Campbell and Niemi (2016), using data from the 2006 and 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) civics test administered to American high school students, as well as a large national survey of 18–24-year olds, conclude that civic education has the largest effect on young Americans with less exposure to political information, specifically students with Latin-American backgrounds and immigrants.

Along similar lines, a Finnish study investigated the kinds of factors related to home and school environment that affect political knowledge among the young, using data from the IEA Civic Education Study on Finnish 15-year-old pupils in their last year of comprehensive school. "The pupils' experience of civic education proved to be the strongest predictor for political knowledge followed by political participation and having reading material at home. It is important to acknowledge the role of school environment as a leveler of the playing field. In other words, the role of civic education can become very important for those pupils whose families are politically passive."[9]

Since not all civics courses are the same, nor are the political cultures in which they are offered, we cannot presume that there will be comparable results everywhere. A useful indirect test would identify the difference in political knowledge levels of 16- and 18-year olds who underwent civic education and then do the same for a comparable group that did not undergo formal civic education in the years before the first election in which they are eligible to vote. Moreover, this should be

done in more than one setting so that the effects of differences in the form, content and timing of civic education could also be tested.

We do not have anything like such data at this point. It would need to be based on tests of political knowledge with questions that can be used in the different jurisdictions, such as those that were included in the CSES 4th wave.[10] It could also test political attentiveness indirectly through awareness of media and other relevant sources of information. But unless carefully prepared, answers to questions of this nature risk reflecting social desirability, if posed simply as ones of attentiveness to public affairs, especially with the arrival of the digital world of the Internet, given that there is anything but a consensus among observers as to the informational effects of the new media. Moreover, we cannot go by indicators of political interest, since they are subject to the distortions caused by social desirability.[11]

In the end, at this point the burden still remains upon those who advocate lowering the voting age. In Scandinavia, especially Denmark and Sweden (with 81 and 85% turnout, respectively, in 2015 and 2014[12]), young citizens, like voters overall, turnout at high levels without compulsory voting. The exception has been Norway, which explains the special efforts by Norwegian authorities to augment participation, including the experiment of voting at 16 at the local level discussed above. Norway also went furthest in revising its civic education program to incorporate highly sophisticated electoral simulations. A brief digression on these simulations is in order.

4.4 Election Simulations and Youth Political Knowledge

Sweden, Denmark and Norway have well-developed mock parliament programs. As a rule, however, parliamentary simulations typically address the already politically interested. The same can be true of the electoral simulations that are carried out to coincide with national elections in schools of a number of countries. As I have written elsewhere (see Milner, 2010), the crucial question is whether, as with The *Skolval*, or school vote, in Sweden,[13] they can reach potential political dropouts, which requires secure funding and appropriate resources, and, especially, their being integrated into the civic education program. As part of the effort to address low youth turnout, the Norwegian *Skolevalg* has been running mock elections since 1989 for parliamentary and local elections.

Both the mock and real elections are well integrated into Norwegian civic education. Students study political parties and their programs, visit them, make projects where they present party platforms in class and role play as representatives of political parties. They analyze overall results and compare the choices with those of their peers. The courses are structured so the section on elections and parties can coincide with the campaigns (facilitated by a system of immovable fixed election dates). In addition, a survey of students is carried out, with a similar survey among a representative population sample, before the election.

Also integrated into the Norwegian civic education process is the *Minitinget* (There is a similar, slightly less sophisticated, simulation for the Swedish Parliament called the Democracy Workshop). The *Minitinget*, opened in 2005, next to the *Storting* (Parliament) in Oslo. With three civics classes visiting daily during the school year, close to a majority of 15–16-year-old Norwegians are able to participate in the Minitinget once during their two years of civic education at the upper secondary level.

As I was able to observe on a recent visit, the simulation of a parliamentary committee is both timely, in terms of current issues being discussed in the Storting, as well as set up in a way to appeal to young people. The three-hour Minitinget session is typically combined with a visit to the Storting. A good part of the three hours is in small quasi-partisan groups in which even the shyest of students naturally take part.[14]

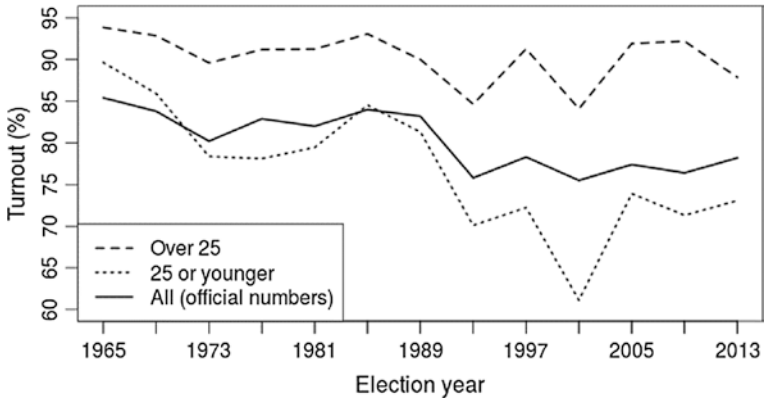

Fig. 4.1 Voter turnout in Norway 1965–2013 (young voters)

The various elements of civic education are integrated, from the training of civics teachers, to the curriculum and the textbooks, right up to the *Skolevalg*, which was revamped by the education department in cooperation with the highly respected Norwegian Social Science Data Center (NSD) in 2005 as part of an effort to improve civic education and encourage youth political participation. There has been some indication that in Norway the educational reform may have had a positive effect in stopping if not yet reversing declining youth turnout, we can see in Fig. 4.1 compiled from NSD data.[15]

4.5 Conclusion

It remains is hard to argue based on the available data only that the improvements in civic education in Norway which would raise the "political maturity" of the 16- and 17-year olds. Still, it is quite possible that Norway is exceptional that an enhancement of civic education along Norwegian lines in a comparable country would combined with the possibility of voting when still in school, in fact raise civic engagement. This could be tested if, as country or province would combine improving civic education with replicating the Norwegian experiment.

In the meantime, given the real concern with declining youth turnout per se, a further test of the expectation that simply because they are more likely to be living with voting relatives, those eligible to first Vote at 16 and 17 vote in greater numbers than those having to wait until 18 is in order. Hopefully, publication of this book will encourage initiatives that will test whether reducing eligibility to vote to age 16, taking into consideration the relevant context, enhances democratic political engagement. The findings in some of the case studies already provide indicative insights into those questions.

The crucial contextual aspect identified here is civic education. As noted, we are lacking sufficient systematic data allowing for the comparative assessment of civic education. Some progress can be expected from the ongoing round of the latest International Civic and Citizenship Education (ICCS) study. In 2016 the ICCS introduced its new Assessment Framework for the study (see Schulz, Carstens, Losito, & Fraillon, 2016), which, among other things, focuses on the way civic education is organized and implemented in schools, including data on the place of civic education in the formal curriculum, whether the courses are compulsory or optional, the extent of assessment in the area

of civic education at the grade eight level, the extent to which civic education is part of civic-education teachers' training. ICCS 2016 gathered data from more than 94,000 students in their eighth year of schooling in about 3800 schools in 24 countries, augmented by data from more than 37,000 teachers in those schools.

The authors caution, however that comparisons of assessment and quality assurance for civic and citizenship education are difficult and complex due to the diversity of approaches and monitoring and quality assurance are often unconnected and carried out on a small scale. Still, some countries have started to implement nationwide assessments of civic education. If these can be incorporated with the data on the effects of voting at 16, we will finally be in a position to offer policymakers advice on whether and under what circumstances to lower the voting age.

At this point, thus, we cannot say that allowing 16- and 17-year olds to vote enhances democracy, though we certainly cannot state the contrary either. Given the stakes of the current challenge, we should not leave it as such. Hopefully, we will see more natural experiments like that in Norway. Indeed, just possibly the publication of this book will help bring this about.

Notes

1. The venerable British Electoral Reform Society sees "building a better democracy" to go beyond adopting a proportional electoral system to extending the vote to "disenfranchised" 16- and 17-year olds.
2. In the US, the 2014 midterm election saw the lowest turnout rate ever recorded: a mere 19.9% of 18- to 29-year olds voted. Even worse, only 46.7% of these voters registered—the lowest figure since the 26th Amendment was passed in 1971, lowering the voting age from 21 to 18.
3. In Canada, for example, the key determinants are interest in politics and information about politics. Blais and Loewen's cohort analysis suggests that most of the decline in voter turnout is attributable to decline among younger generations, those least interested and informed about politics. Blais André and Peter Loewen, 2011. "Youth Electoral Engagement in Canada." Working Paper Series. Elections Canada.
4. Hooghe and Stiers (2017) test whether compulsory voting leads to a trade-off with the quality of the vote as measured by the ideological congruence between voters and the party they vote for. Using data from the 2007, 2010 and 2013 elections in Australia, as well as data from Belgium, they find that reluctant voters are indeed less ideologically congruent in their vote.

5. Political knowledge and interest is mainly measured using the high school grade in Social Studies but the score on the General Knowledge section in the *SweSAT* is also used as an alternative measure which captures a combination of political and civic interest and knowledge.
6. Since elections take place at different levels, under PR, parties seeking to maximize scarce resources gain from operating at more than one level. In contrast, under plurality systems, parties face a disincentive from operating at levels other than the one at which they are best organized, or at which the stakes are highest, while they are reluctant to compete in elections to assemblies and councils in regions and municipalities where they are weak.
7. Off and on in the first decade of the twenty-first century I was based at IDEA in Stockholm coordinating an effort to create a cross-national database on civic education. The project proved far more complicated and thus expensive for our limited funding, and was ultimately dropped before any presentable such base could be created. The only real generalization our initial research revealed was that there were wide variations in all aspects of civic education among—and even within—countries and over time. Instead, I focused on the Nordic countries which share a great deal, yet among which turnout varied widely.
8. Owen and Soule (2015) found differences in the strength of the correspondence between knowledge and engagement based on the knowledge domain, with knowledge of the US Constitution having the strongest relationship to political engagement followed by knowledge of government institutions. Moreover, those students in states where civics was taught in an open environment and included active learning approaches were the most inclined to engage in politics.
9. "Preparing young people for citizenship: Modelling the interrelations of home environment, school environment and political knowledge", Jonna Paavilainen. Paper presented at the ECPR General Conference—Université de Montréal, 26–29 August 2015.
10. Q20a: Which of these persons was the Finance Minister before the recent election—[CABINET MINISTER NAME—FIRST CHOICE], [CABINET MINISTER NAME—SECOND CHOICE], [CABINET MINISTER NAME—THIRD CHOICE], or [CABINET MINISTER NAME—FOURTH CHOICE]?

    Q20b: What was the current unemployment rate in [COUNTRY] as of [DATE]—[UNEMPLOYMENT RATE—FIRST CHOICE], [UNEMPLOYMENT RATE—SECOND CHOICE], [UNEMPLOYMENT RATE—THIRD CHOICE], or [UNEMPLOYMENT RATE—FOURTH CHOICE]?

Q20c: Which [PARTY, ALLIANCE, OR COALITION] came in second in seats in the [NAME OF THE LOWER HOUSE IN BICAMERAL SYSTEMS; OR ASSEMBLY, PARLIAMENT, OR CONGRESS IN UNICAMERAL SYSTEMS]—[PARTY, ALLIANCE, OR COALITION—FIRST CHOICE], [PARTY, ALLIANCE, OR COALITION—SECOND CHOICE], [PARTY, ALLIANCE, OR COALITION—THIRD CHOICE], or [PARTY, ALLIANCE, OR COALITION—FOURTH CHOICE]?

Q20d: Who is the current Secretary-General of the United Nations—Kofi Annan, Kurt Waldheim, Ban Ki-moon, or Boutros Boutros-Ghali?

11. An American experiment illustrates this point all too clearly. It consisted simply of changing the order of political interest and political knowledge questions. When first asked about their interest, 75.9% reported following politics most or some of the time; however, when first asked political knowledge questions, the percentage expressing interest dropped to 57.4%. Schwarz, Norbert and Howard Schuman. 1997. "Political Knowledge, Attribution, and Inferred Interest in Politics: The Operation of Buffer Items." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 9: 191–195.
12. Note that the Danish number is for 18–21-year olds, which for Sweden is 18–25. *Youth, Democracy, and Democratic Exclusion in the Nordic Countries*, Nordic Council of Ministers, 2017.
13. In Sweden during elections, students form election committees that represent various parties and even invite candidates to the schools to debate on the issues. During the week of the election, students vote on ballots that are identical to official ones, which are counted in the same manner as the nation vote. The reports of the Swedish *Skolval* are reported in the newspapers and on television as part of the live coverage of the actual elections. A study for the National board of Youth Affairs *(Sverigesungdomstyrelsen*) of *Skolval* 2006, Sweden's nationally coordinated school elections, found that 70% of high school students in the academic stream and 60% of the vocational programs took part in that election simulation.
14. Each of about 25 students in a typical civic education class is assigned the role of an individual legislator and party, and placed on a mock parliamentary committee which is assigned one of two issues. The students then go to their parties' caucus room to work out a position on the issue. They are guided in their deliberations by instructions on a computer screen, with access to relevant newspaper articles and excerpts from TV and radio coverage. Deliberations are interrupted by taped telephone calls and computer screen messages from lobbyists, constituents and party

leaders. They are even called upon to answer questions posed by real journalists in a mock press conference. They then go back to the committee room where they carve out compromises in an effort to win majority support. The two bills then come to the plenary in a mock session of Parliament, with speeches for and against each measure, and a vote is taken. Finally, the students vote again, this time based on their own views, and discuss how these evolved during the simulation.

15. "The Norwegian election survey: Voter turnout across generations and age groups." http://opisthokonta.net/?p=1348, May 18, 2018.

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CHAPTER 5

Voting at 16 in Practice: A Review of the Austrian Case

Julian Aichholzer and Sylvia Kritzinger

5.1 Introduction: Setting the Context

The idea of lowering the voting age has, among other ideas, been put forward to counter low or decreasing levels of political participation, specifically electoral turnout, and therefore as a way to encourage involvement in politics at an early stage of social and political socialization (see, e.g., Franklin, 2004). The present chapter empirically assesses this policy proposal that was implemented in Austria more than a decade ago when a general voting age of 16 was introduced in 2007.

In this study, we aim to further our knowledge about characteristics that might distinguish 16- and 17-year olds from other voters and the medium-term impact of lowering the voting age to 16, taking Austria as a unique case study. This chapter is structured as follows. First, we review the Austrian case and how the decision to enfranchise voters aged 16+ came about, including some of the accompanying measures.

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We then provide an overview of existing research on the Austrian case in Sect. 5.3, looking at indicators of participation, political involvement, and political sophistication or maturity. In Sect. 5.4, we provide, on the one hand, novel empirical evidence on the level of turnout among 16- and 17-year olds using official records from electoral lists. On the other hand, in Sect. 5.5, we gathered large-sample survey data to compare 16- and 17-year olds to older voter cohorts. We close this chapter with Sect. 5.6 by discussing potential implications for policymakers in other countries as well as avenues for further research.

5.2 Lowering the Voting Age to 16: The Austrian Case

In 2007, the voting age for active participation in all nationwide elections and referenda was lowered from 18 to 16 years in Austria. With this measure, the Austrian electorate was extended by adding approximately 150,000 new voters (Source: Austrian citizens aged 16 to 17, as of January 1, 2018) among a total of 6.4 million eligible voters (in 2017).[1] At the same time, the minimum age for passive suffrage was lowered from 19 to 18 years.[2] With this reform, Austria was taking on a pioneering role throughout Europe: it is now one of two EU countries (next to Malta which lowered the voting age to 16 in 2018) which allows electoral participation of 16-year olds in all elections.[3]

The idea of lowering the voting age to 16 was initially promoted by the governing Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) as well as the opposition party The Greens, whereas it was opposed by the SPÖ's coalition partner, the center-right People's Party (ÖVP), and the right-wing parties FPÖ and BZÖ (see, e.g., Karlhofer, 2007).[4] This might explain why in some regions where the SPÖ was in power (Carinthia and Burgenland) the voting age was lowered to 16 already in 2000. Also in Vienna, the capital of Austria, 16- and 17-year olds were already allowed to vote in 2005 (Demokratiezentrum Wien, 2015).

Eventually, a bigger electoral reform in 2007 was implemented as part of a bundle of other measures, including a bill concerning absentee voting (*Briefwahl*) and the extension of the legislative period for the National Council from four to five years, which was proposed together by the SPÖ and the ÖVP. In the end, introducing a lower voting age was considered the result of an exchange deal between the ÖVP and SPÖ, in which the SPÖ agreed to introduce absentee voting, which was proposed by the ÖVP (e.g., Karlhofer, 2007, p. 37). Changing the electoral law required an amendment to the Austrian Federal Constitution,

a two-thirds majority in the National Council and the corresponding approval by the Federal Council. In the National Council only one party, the Freedom Party (FPÖ), voted against the electoral reform measures.[5] The electoral reform, which led to the lowering of voting age in Austria, was clearly a top-down process initiated by the governing parties, especially the SPÖ, and did not feature bottom-up characteristics, for instance, by the Austrian citizenry or NGOs.

Yet, the electoral reform in Austria did not go without accompanying measures for the youngest voters, such as awareness-raising campaigns in 2008 and an enhancement of civic and citizenship education in schools (e.g., Schwarzer & Zeglovits, 2013). For this reason, first-time voters were more likely to be encouraged to participate in the first national election in 2008. Furthermore, Austria implemented changes to school curricula. In 2015, civic and citizenship education was implemented as a mandatory cross-curricular educational principle (*Unterrichtsprinzip*) starting in 6th grade (for students between 12 and 13 years).[6] In particular, civic education in Austria was designed to follow a competence-based system. Competence-oriented citizenship education intends to provide expert knowledge, methodological competence, competence in judgment, and competence in agency/participation (see Krammer, Kühberger, & Windischbauer, 2008).[7]

Today a central service facility for political education in schools is the *Zentrum Polis*, which is financed by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF). The institution specifically aims to support teachers, schools and other educational institutions in the implementation of political education, including education and training of teachers and the production of materials for teaching. Apart from that, The Democracy Centre Vienna (*Demokratiezentrum*), an academic nonprofit organization, provides educational material (learning modules) for teachers on the subject of civic/political education. In addition, the democracy lab (*Demokratiewerkstatt*) of the Austrian Parliament provides workshops for 8- to 14-year olds on the issue of electoral participation, how democracy works as well as working with the media, which is regularly visited by school classes.

In the following section, we review the extant research and evidence on the impact of the electoral reform in 2007. In doing so, we look at differences between the newly enfranchised voters, i.e., adolescents aged 16- to 17-years, and older first-time voters (18+ years) since 2007, including three national elections and also some elections at the regional level.

5.3 Austria: The Empirical Evidence so Far

Existing empirical evidence on the Austrian case has looked on either political involvement (foremost electoral turnout) or indicators of political maturity of young people.

So far, the most compelling evidence on differences in turnout is based on a sample of official electoral lists (as opposed to survey data). It suggests that turnout among 16- to 17-year olds in two regional elections was actually somewhat higher than among the 18- to 20-year-old first-time voters, and most importantly, turnout seems to be similar to the average turnout rate (Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014). This is largely congruent with earlier evidence on 16- to 18-year olds' turnout in the regional election of 2005 in Vienna (Kozeluh, Kromer, Nitsch, Reichmann, & Zuba 2005) and in the national election of 2008 (Schwarzer, Zandonella, Zeglovits, Perlot, & Kozeluh, 2009). Further evidence coming from survey data in 2009, just before the European Parliament election, however, suggests levels of *voting intention* among all first-time voters were similar but lower compared to older voters (Wagner, Johann, & Kritzinger, 2012).

With regards to political interest, an important finding is an increase in political interest among adolescents after the time when the voting age was lowered in Austria (Zeglovits & Zandonella, 2013). Using data from the 2013 national elections, Glantschnigg, Johann, and Zeglovits (2013) also investigated potential differences in political interest between adolescents (aged 16 and 17) and older first-time voters (aged 18–21). Even though political interest is usually inversely related to age, they did not find any age differences in political interest among all first-time voters. Another study conducted in 2013 showed that the more "political" activities were taken in school, the higher the political interest of young people (Kritzinger, Zeglovits, & Oberluggauer, 2013). This indicates that accompanying measures with the aim of preparing first-time voters for their role as citizens are of great importance.

Initial results on the so-called "quality" of vote choice primarily looked at the idea of "correct voting" or vote choice based on rational proximity considerations to parties (see Lau & Redlawsk, 1997). The general idea of "correct voting" is that voters should vote for parties that reflect their views best, ideally holding the same policy positions (e.g., on the general left-right-scale). In a study preceding the 2009 European Parliament Elections, Wagner and colleagues (2012) reported that the

quality of the vote choice for 16- and 17-year olds was comparable to older first-time voters. Further analyses based on the 2013 national elections also suggest that the youngest voting age cohort showed similar levels of correct voting, i.e., they were able to identify the party that best reflects their opinions and views (Glantschnigg et al., 2013).

With regard to political knowledge, studies conducted thus far find that first-time voters showed somewhat lower political knowledge than the older electoral cohorts, whereas the difference between 16- and 17-year olds and older first-time voters seems to be negligible (Kritzinger et al., 2013; Wagner et al., 2012). That said, a detailed analysis of different political knowledge dimensions using 2013 data Johann and Mayer (2017) show that 16- and 17-year olds seem to know less about Austrian parties' left-right positions when compared to older first-time voters as well as to older voters. Yet, they are similar in their knowledge about political actors, with all first-time voters scoring lower on that measure.

However, an important factor that should not go unnoticed is the heterogeneity within the group of younger voters. There are sometimes considerable differences between those adolescents still attending school and those already being active employees in the labor force (e.g., apprentices). Pupils seem to exhibit greater interest in politics, a higher level of political sophistication, and greater turnout compared to those already working (e.g., Kozeluh et al., 2005; Kritzinger et al., 2013; Perlot & Zandonella, 2009). This pattern goes hand in hand with the finding that pupils in vocational schools, who leave school earlier, are less often reached by measures of civic education (see, e.g., Schwarzer & Zeglovits, 2013). Taken together, these findings lend strong support to the notion that scholarly education in the form of civic and political education plays an important role in preparing young people for their role as active citizens.

In summary, the most general finding from the Austrian case is that electoral turnout of 16- and 17-year olds is encouraging to supporters of youth suffrage, i.e., turnout does not seem to be lower compared to older first-time voters. Instead, 16- to 17-year olds tend to be more likely to go to the polls than 18- to 20-year olds. In turn, results on indicators of political maturity are mixed, so far (see also Zeglovits, 2013). Younger voters show somewhat lower political interest and knowledge than the average population but among the youngest age group hardly any differences between 16- and 17-year-old voters and 18- to 20-year olds can be noticed.

Thus far, research findings on voting at 16 mainly are based on cross-sectional data collected at one election only. In the following section, we turn to the analysis of novel data that provide an over-time perspective, using both official register data from several elections and survey data from the two most recent national elections in 2013 and 2017.

5.4 Over-Time Analysis of Turnout Based on Electoral Lists

In what follows, we aim to provide further evidence on electoral turnout of first-time voters, with an emphasis on voting ages 16 and 17 using cross-sectional data over time. We rely on samples taken from official electoral lists of all eligible voters in Austria, which were manually coded from paper lists. The sampling scheme for selecting polling stations uses a stratified clustered random sampling design, since polling stations (clusters) were stratified by their size (for details on the sampling strategy and weighting procedure, see Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014). The advantage of using electoral lists, i.e., official registers, is that these data provide higher validity and precision on small population subgroups (e.g., by age in years) than self-reports in survey sample data (e.g., Jackman & Spahn, 2019).

We were able to retrieve data from five elections in total: (1) the Viennese Regional Elections in 2005 (data collected by Kozeluh et al., 2005), (2) the 2010 Viennese Regional Elections, and (3) the 2012 local election in Krems, a small sized town in Lower Austria (data collected by Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014). We then supplemented the existing data with two more recent elections: (4) the Austrian Parliamentary Elections held in 2013 (data from Vienna) and (5) the Viennese Regional Elections held in 2015.[8] To sum up, in our analysis we were able to include data on turnout according to official electoral lists from five elections held in 2005, 2010, 2012, 2013, and 2015 (for the sampling scheme and sample sizes see Table 5.1).[9]

In Table 5.2 we, first, summarize the evidence on differences in the levels of turnout by age groups, namely 16- to 17-year olds versus 18- to 20-year olds. The results from 2005, 2013, and 2015 corroborate previous evidence reported by Zeglovits and Aichholzer (2014), suggesting a considerable gap in turnout with adolescents showing significantly higher turnout rates, on average. We can also confirm that the higher turnout

Table 5.1 Sampling scheme for electoral lists and sample sizes by election

Year	*Election*	*City*	*Total polling stations*	*Sampled polling stations*	*Age range*	*Sampled voters* (n)
2005	Regional	Vienna	1818	138	16–18	2841
2010	Regional	Vienna	1765	32	16–21	2989
2012	Local	Krems	41	census	16–21	1741
2013	Parliamentary	Vienna	1660	48	16–21	2429
2015	Regional	Vienna	1545	49	16–21	2926

Note 2005 data from Kozeluh et al. (2005), 2010/2012 data from Zeglovits and Aichholzer (2014), own calculations for 2013/2015

Table 5.2 Sample sizes and differences in turnout by age groups and election

Year	*16–17 y.*	*18–20 y.*	*Diff. (%)*	*(adj.)* χ^2*-test*
2005	59.70%	57.4%[a]	2.30	$p = .233$
n	1985	871		
2010	64.20%	56.30%	7.90	$p = .004$
n	810	1562		
2012	56.30%	46.30%	10.00	$p = .001$
n	432	912		
2013	68.00%	63.00%	5.00	$p = .020$
n	640	1284		
2015	70.20%	66.00%	4.20	$p = .050$
n	805	1551		

Note Data sampled from electoral lists; 2005 data from Kozeluh et al. (2005), 2010/2012 data from Zeglovits and Aichholzer (2014), own calculations for 2013/2015. [a]Only18-year olds

is independent of the level of election, i.e., whether people voted in a national, regional, or local election.

As Fig. 5.1 shows, turnout levels are distributed quite unevenly across the youngest age groups, since turnout initially decreases with age (see also Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014). Our evidence supports the notion that turnout drops from age 18 onwards when young people "leave the nest", reaching a level below the electorate's average turnout (Bhatti & Hansen, 2012). Taking statistical uncertainty into account (i.e., 95% confidence intervals) turnout among the adolescent group approaches the level of the total electorate. Yet, a specific pattern emerges for the 2013 and 2015 elections when compared to earlier elections:

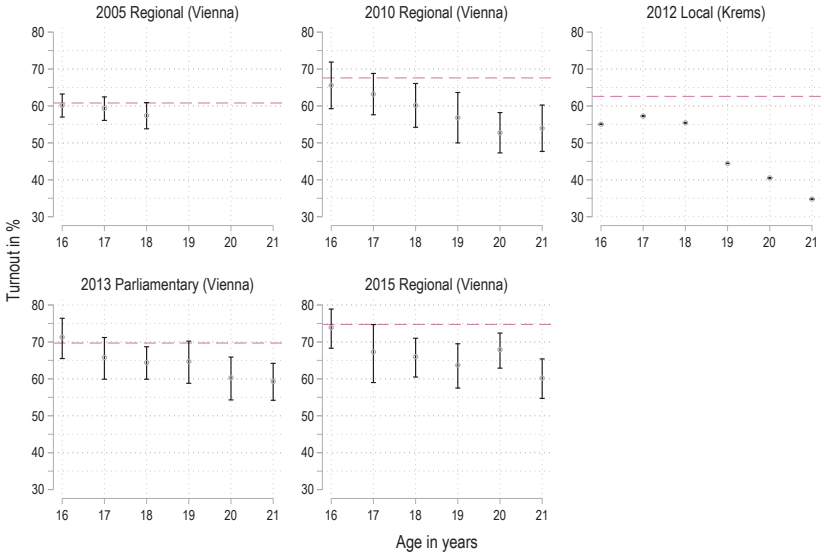

Fig. 5.1 Estimated turnout of 16- to 21-year olds by election (*Note* Turnout estimate [maximum estimator = voting booth + absentee voting] plus 95% confidence interval. *Source* Data sampled from electoral lists; 2005 data from Kozeluh et al. [2005], 2010/2012 data from Zeglovits and Aichholzer [2014], own calculations for 2013/2015, and official turnout [dashed line])

16-year olds stand out as having a much higher turnout, whereas the other age groups level out in terms of their participation.

5.5 Political Characteristics of Young Voters: Evidence from Survey Data (AUTNES)

Next, we analyze several standard measures of political involvement, political efficacy, and party proximity, comparing 16- to-17-year olds and 18- to 20-year-old voters with each other as well as with the general electorate. For the following analyses, we use a pooled dataset of survey data collected by the *Austrian National Election Study* (AUTNES) in 2013 and 2017 (see, for details, Aichholzer et al., 2018; Kritzinger et al., 2013a, 2013b, 2013c, 2013d, 2018; Wagner et al., 2018). Pooling the survey data of, in total, seven large-*n* surveys and further oversampling first-time voters in the AUTNES data allows us to delve

Table 5.3 Overview of AUTNES surveys and sample sizes (by age group)

Year	*Name*	*Oversample*	*Mode*	*16–17 y.*	*18–20 y.*	*21+y.*	*Total*
2013	Pre-/Post Survey	yes	CAPI + CATI	208	174	2884	3266
2013	RCS Panel Study	no	CATI	40	79	3892	4011
2013	TV Debate Panel	no	CAWI	57	152	2820	3029
2013	CSES Survey	no	CATI	12	22	966	1000
2017	Online Panel Study	no	CAWI	70	255	3837	4162
2017	CSES Survey	no	CATI	18	38	1147	1203
2017	Multi-Mode Survey	yes	CATI + CAWI	111	331	3571	4013
	Total			516	1051	19,117	20,684

Note Cumulative file of AUTNES 2013/2017 data; Oversample = first-time voters were deliberately sampled more often to increase sample size; CAWI = online survey, CAPI = face-to-face survey, CATI = telephone survey

deeper into sub-group differences among this specific voter segment. In total, our dataset includes survey data from 516 adolescent voters aged 16–17 years, 1051 first-time voters aged between 18 and 20 years, and 19,117 voters aged 21 and older (see Table 5.3).

Analyzing in greater detail the national elections of 2013 and 2017 not only allows us to capture differences among first-time voters over time but also to capture contextual factors that changed in between. A year before the national election 2017, the highly contested 2016 presidential elections took place. For the first time since 1945 no candidate of the two mainstream parties SPÖ and ÖVP made it into the second round.[10] Instead, the two candidates of the more "extreme" or niche parties, FPÖ (Hofer) and The Greens (Van der Bellen) won the first round of the election. Moreover, the constitutional court declared the runoff of the presidential election invalid, so that the second-round election had to be repeated in December 2016. The electoral campaign became highly politicized and the electorate was polarized, resulting in a high turnout and intense media reporting (e.g., Zeglovits, Sickinger, & Eberl, 2016). Whether this politicization also affected young voters, we examine below.

We use multivariate logistic regression to take into account potential differences in the target variable due to using different survey modes. Afterwards, we estimate the impact of age and provide confidence intervals and statistical significance tests for each age group (i.e., within first-time voters).

Political Interest and Involvement

Starting with political interest, our findings, by and large, support previous evidence: the level of political interest expressed in surveys is in general lower among younger voters (see Fig. 5.2, upper panel). In 2017 there is also a tendency toward lower interest among the 16- to 17-year olds when compared to older first-time voters (18- to 20-year olds), which is however not significant at conventional levels ($p = .096$). Furthermore, political interest has increased overall between the two elections—a trend that especially holds true for the youngest age cohort. In summary, a quite consistent pattern indicates that political interest in politics per se seems to be somewhat lower among the youngest group, which has however become more similar to the population average in 2017.

We also examine attention to the electoral campaign or political events in the preelection phase (see Fig. 5.2, lower panel). As can be seen, attention to the campaign is also somewhat lower among all first-time voters (aged 16–20) in 2013. Yet, we do not find statistically significant differences within this age group, i.e., adolescents do not differ from other young voters. Again, in 2017, all first-time voters have become more similar to the population average and no differences within this age group can be observed.

Taking both findings together it seems that the highly politicized presidential campaign in 2016 has increased both the interest and involvement of the entire youngest age group. While the young voters aged 18 to 20 were already allowed to vote back then, the 2016 election also seemed to have caught the attention of the soon-to-be enfranchised voters resulting in high levels of interest and involvement.

Political Efficacy and Satisfaction with Democracy

A common indicator to examine identification with or support of the political system and feeling competent in the realm of politics is political

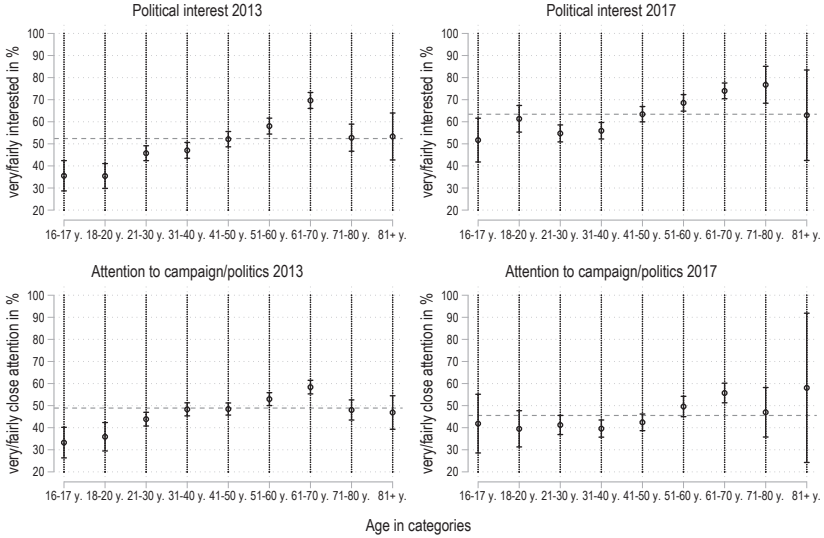

Fig. 5.2 Degree of political involvement (pre-election) by age group and election year (*Note* Estimated percentages plus 95% confidence interval, data weighted. *Source* AUTNES 2013/2017, own calculations. Dashed vertical lines show sample average)

efficacy (Almond & Verba, 1965). Usually, we differentiate between two types of efficacy, *internal efficacy*, i.e., a feeling of being able to take an active role in politics and being aware of what is "going on" in politics, and *external efficacy*, i.e., a feeling of citizens' faith and trust in government to be responsive (Balch, 1974). We use two indicators for each concept that are available in almost all surveys conducted by AUTNES.

Looking at internal efficacy (i.e., agree/rather agree with the statement "In general I know quite a lot about politics"), we identify a marginally significant ($p = .041$) age gap in 2013 with the adolescent voters reporting lower levels of internal efficacy (see Fig. 5.3, upper panel). There is also a considerable gap between first-time and older voters. However, in 2017 we do not find such a difference, since first-time voters feature similar values as older voters.

We also examine external efficacy. Since the item used is semantically reversed (i.e., "Politicians don't care about what people like me think", CSES Survey 2017: "Most politicians do not care about the people"),

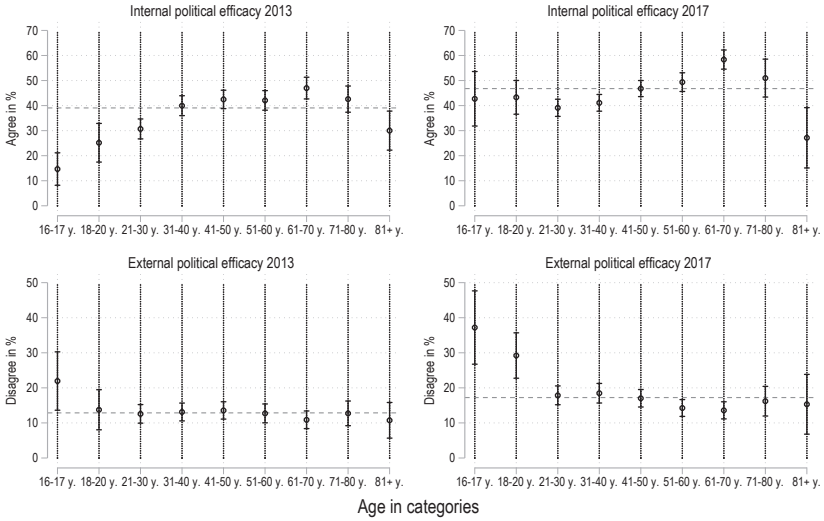

Fig. 5.3 Internal/external political efficacy by age group and election year (*Note* Estimated percentages plus 95% confidence interval, data weighted. *Source* AUTNES 2013/2017, own calculations. Dashed vertical lines show sample average)

higher disagreement (disagree/rather disagree) with this statement indicates greater external efficacy (see Fig. 5.3, lower panel). Overall, we find that the level of external efficacy has slightly increased over time. An interesting finding is that the adolescent voters exhibited the highest level of external efficacy throughout. As a trend we would thus see decreasing levels of external efficacy or growing political cynicism, for that matter, with higher age. As a result, we confirm a significant difference in external efficacy in 2017, distinguishing 16- to 17-year olds from all other voters, with similar levels to older first-time voters. In other words, young people start their political careers with a more optimistic picture of how politics works.

Another important indicator for the functioning and support for the political system is the level of satisfaction with democracy in a country. More recent studies suggest that, contrary to expectations, the level of satisfaction would be relatively high among younger citizens, especially among those aged 16- to 18-years (e.g., Zilinsky, 2019). Our data

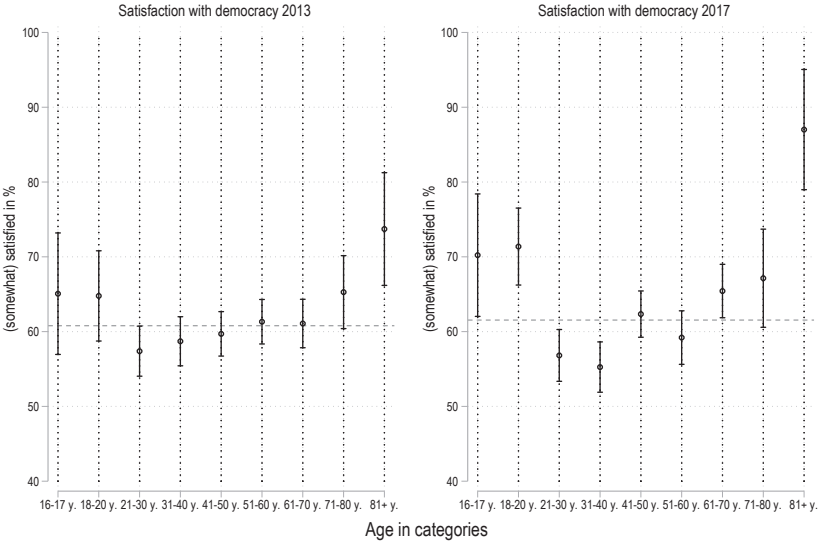

Fig. 5.4 Satisfaction with democracy by age group and election year (*Note* Estimated percentages plus 95% confidence interval, data weighted. *Source* AUTNES 2013/2017, own calculations. Dashed vertical lines show sample average)

suggest that this holds true for the youngest voter segment in Austria as well (see Fig. 5.4). First-time voters (aged 16–20) seem to be quite satisfied with the way democracy works, showing similar levels to the oldest cohorts (71+ years). Moreover, there is no statistically significant difference between adolescents and 18- to 20-year olds in that respect.

Party ID and Party Proximity Voting

Do younger voters already identify with a certain party (i.e., do they hold a so-called party ID)? For this purpose, we explore a standard measure in electoral behavior, namely whether the voter openly feels close to a party. In this calculation, we only select the percentage of voters immediately reporting a party ID and disregard if she only has a certain tendency (i.e., somewhat closer to some party). Looking at 2013 data, we observe that younger voters less often feel clearly attached to a specific party. Moreover, the youngest first-time voters lack party attachment even

(significantly) more often (see Fig. 5.5, upper panel). Interestingly in 2017, we cannot establish such a difference with regard to age. Younger voter cohorts therefore seem to resemble each other with regard to party ID. It is likely that the politicized context of the national election 2017 has fostered the development of stronger party ties, even among very young voters.

We also measure ideological congruence with the party elected, using a simplified measure that represents a way to approximate the concept of "correct voting" (Lau & Redlawsk, 1997; see also Wagner et al., 2012). More precisely, we consider a vote as "correct", if a voter voted for one of the parties she was closest to on the standard left-right-ideological scale, and coded it as "non-proximity voting" otherwise.[11] Our results suggest that 16- to 17-year olds did not differ significantly from all other voters in 2013, whereas "non-proximity voting" was somewhat more prevalent in 2017 (see Fig. 5.5, lower panel). Yet, we cannot find a consistent pattern that distinguishes adolescents from the older first-time

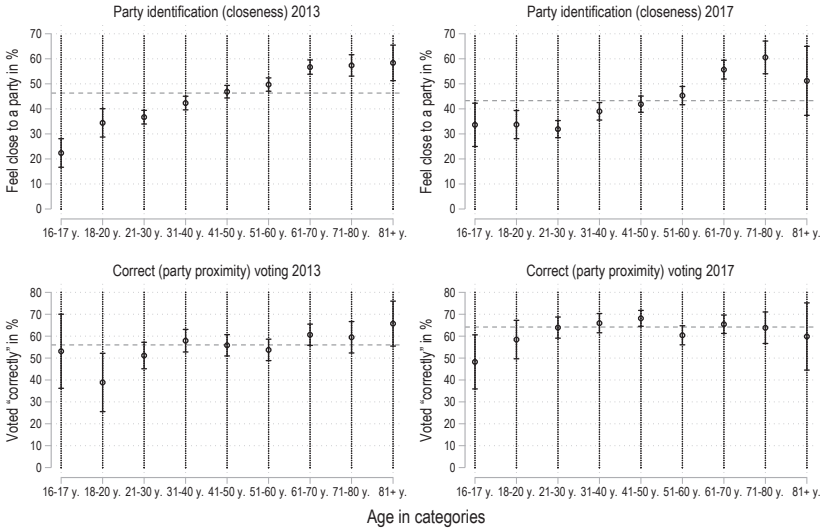

Fig. 5.5 Degree of party ID and party proximity voting by age group and election year (*Note* Estimated percentages plus 95% confidence interval, data weighted. *Source* AUTNES 2013/2017, own calculations. Dashed vertical lines show sample average)

voters in terms of the quality of vote. Note, however, that due to the way the dependent variable has to be operationalized, the sample sizes for this analysis are very low.

Polarization Among Young Voters?

In order to examine whether young voters are ideologically different or more polarized, i.e., that they hold more extreme attitudes as they still reflect on politics in a "relatively pure" way (Rekker, Keijsers, Branje, & Meeus, 2015, p. 137), we look at their left-right self-placement over time. Taking the standard 11-point ideological left-right scale (0 = *left*, 10 = *right*; see Fig. 5.6) in 2013, we see a minor ideological left-wing tendency among younger voters, when compared to older voters. In 2017, particularly younger voters more often deviate from the neutral mid-point (5) and rather seem to choose one of the other scale points,

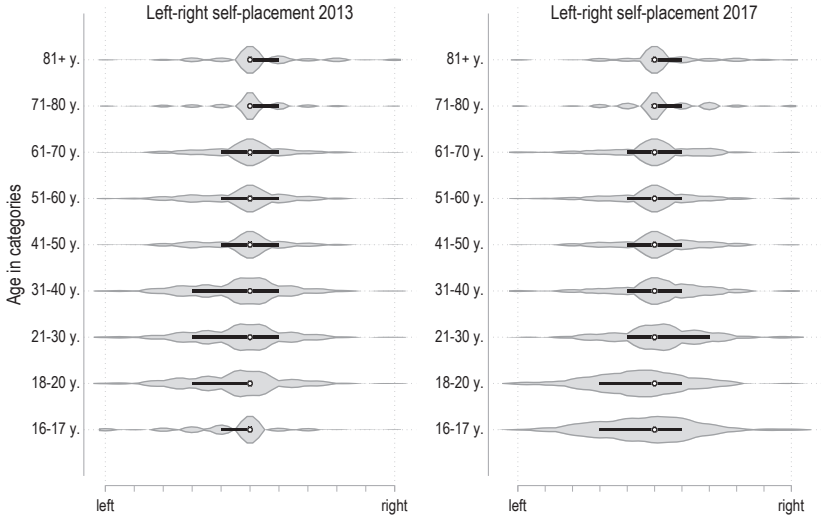

Fig. 5.6 Left-right self-placement by election year and age group (*Note* Estimated distribution using a violin plot, data weighted. *Source* AUTNES 2013/2017, own calculations. White dot indicates the median value and black bars indicate the interquartile range including 50% of all voters within each age group. Sample sizes for 16–17 y./18–20 y. are: $n = 254/366$ [in 2013] and $n = 147/501$ [in 2017])

equally on the left or the right. It seems that young voters have ideologically drifted apart over time and express more pronounced ideological positions. In other words, they show greater variation in their ideological leanings. Again, this might be due to the ideologically highly politicized context induced by the contested presidential election in 2016 and the national election in 2017. These results corroborate previous findings by Rekker et al. (2015) who show that young voters tend to be ideologically "more extreme" but with age voters "stabilize" in the center. However, we do not find any differences between adolescents and other young voters, suggesting that there is little evidence for polarization being a defining feature of the youngest voters.

5.6 Conclusion and Implications

Previous literature has been concerned with the way young voters engage in politics and potential ways to foster greater political engagement and participation. In this paper, we aimed to assess the impact of lowering the voting age to 16 from a medium-term perspective, taking Austria, a country that has witnessed a voting age of 16 for over a decade, as an example. Overall, the evidence from the Austrian case is generally encouraging to supporters of lowering the voting age to 16.

First, in terms of electoral turnout, we confirm earlier expectations anticipated by Franklin (2004), who argues that because 16- to 17-year olds are quite differently embedded in social surroundings, such as family and school, this may result in greater turnout among that group. We show that the level of turnout is generally higher among 16- to 17-year olds (compared to 18- to 20-year olds) and similar to the electorate's average (and here in particular among the 16-year-olds), as evidenced by official records from electoral lists. Second, even though 16- to 17-year olds exhibit somewhat lower general interest in politics and lower internal efficacy, they follow the political campaign to the same extent as other young voters. They even exhibit consistently higher levels of external efficacy (or lower cynicism) and satisfaction with democracy, which in general has a positive impact on turnout. Third, it seems that some differences between adolescent voters (aged 16–17) and older first-time voters (aged 18–20) have decreased between 2013 and 2017. In other words, we no longer find some of the differences that distinguished the two groups in 2013. One explanation could be that we can already observe effects of early political socialization: some of the younger voters

might have already voted in another election when being 16 and 17 (for instance in the highly politicized presidential election of 2016) and this event continues to affect political attitudes and behavior of voters then aged 18–20. Another interpretation could be that first-timers are more similar, because Austria is actually approaching a state in which the voting age 16 genuinely is the new normal.

Overall, according to the AUTNES survey data, between the 2013 and 2017 national elections the overall levels of political interest, internal efficacy, external efficacy, and correct voting in the voting population seem to have increased. This pattern, together with an increase of turnout at the national level from 74.9% in 2013 to 80.0% in 2017, highlights a greater level of politicization in 2017. So, it could also be that elections characterized by high saliency mobilize all voters, and thus cancel out differences between first-time voters and other voters.

The big question, however, is, does it really make a (long-lasting) difference if one starts her voting biography at the age of 16 instead of 18? Plutzer's famous study (2002), for example, failed to investigate the impact of participation in one's first election and its long-term effects. The question whether a "downstream effect" exists, i.e., whether voting in one election increases the probability of voting in a subsequent election, is still open. A body of more recent studies suggests that past eligibility generally fosters participation in later elections (Denny & Doyle, 2009; Dinas, 2012; Franklin & Hobolt, 2011; Gerber, Green, & Shachar, 2003). Yet, we do not know how these effects play out differently depending on age at first election, since we still lack long-term data on the impact that turnout or abstention has for 16- vs. 18-year olds in the long run.

Notes

1. Statistics Austria—Population with Austrian citizenship: https://www.statistik.at/web_de/statistiken/menschen_und_gesellschaft/bevoelkerung/bevoelkerungsstruktur/bevoelkerung_nach_alter_geschlecht/105080.html [accessed 8 April 2019].
2. The minimum age for the Federal President is 35 years however.
3. Other countries that also established voting of 16 in nation-wide elections are: Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Malta, Nicaragua as well as Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey, and Scotland (only local).

4. The first official proposal by the SPÖ was made in 2003. See: https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20031113_OTS0178/spoe-praesentiert-ueberparteiliche-plattform-waehlen-mit-16 [accessed 8 April 2019].
5. See, for further details on the electoral reform process: https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/PR/JAHR_2007/PK0439/index.shtml [accessed 8 April 2019].
6. See, for further details on school curricula: https://www.politik-lernen.at/dl/qsmmJKJKoMlKnJqx4KJK/Politische_Bildung_in_den_Schulen_tab__bersicht_Stand_Oktober_2018.pdf [accessed 8 April 2019].
7. See, for further details on "Citizenship Education as a Cross-curricular Educational Principle": https://bildung.bmbwf.gv.at/ministerium/rs/2015_12_en.pdf?6cczm2 [accessed 8 April 2019].
8. We are deeply indebted to Eva Zeglovits for her contribution to this and earlier studies as well as to Jana Bernhard, Veronika Heider, Josef Glavanovits, and Lena Raffetseder for collecting the data from electoral lists during summer 2016. Their work was invaluable for the success of this project. Was also thank SORA for providing the 2005 data (cf. Kozeluh et al., 2005).
9. Note that because borders of polling stations in Vienna have been altered between the elections, we had to draw independent samples and cannot compare the same polling stations over time.
10. The candidate of the SPÖ obtained 11.3% of the votes, the candidate of the ÖVP 11.1%.
11. We define correct voting as follows: We measure congruence with all parties on the left-right dimension using the absolute distance as a proxy. As an approximation, we count a vote as "correct" if a voter chose one of the parties she was closest to. However, we omit all voters for whom no information on left-right placement was available or if she voted for other (smaller) parties for which no left-right position was asked. So, only the larger parties expected to pass the vote threshold—which is 4% of the total national vote—are included in the calculation of correct voting.

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CHAPTER 6

Does Voting at a Younger Age Have an Effect on Satisfaction with Democracy and Political Trust? Evidence from Latin America

Constanza Sanhueza Petrarca

6.1 Introduction

Over the past quarter of a century, an unprecedented number of countries and subnational regions have enfranchised voters under the age of eighteen. Latin America is the world region counting the largest number of countries where the voting age at the national level is sixteen. As of 2018, the total number of countries granting voting rights to voters at the age of sixteen is five: Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador and Nicaragua. While, during the twentieth century, Latin American polities experienced the gradual enfranchisement of different social groups, including women and ethnic minorities, the political incorporation of young voters followed more recent democratic trends.

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The main goal of this chapter is to use comparative evidence and survey data to examine whether lowering the voting age to sixteen affects satisfaction with democracy and political trust across a wide range of political contexts. While the general set-up of the analysis is primarily descriptive, two major themes emerge from this study. First, while the design and adoption of the electoral laws enfranchising 16- and 17-year-old voters took place in very different political and social contexts across Latin American countries, the political left played a major role in the inclusion of the younger segments of the electorate. Second, signs that the enfranchisement of younger voters results in greater democratic satisfaction and political trust in comparison to voters that participated for the first time in elections later in their lives are observed.

6.2 Enfranchisement of Young Voters in Latin America in Context

Among the Latin American countries with early enfranchisement, Cuba, Nicaragua and Brazil were also world pioneers as they granted voting rights to 16–17-year-old voters in the 1970s and 1980s. Ecuador and Argentina, by contrast, adopted such laws in 2008 and 2012, after the debate over the political inclusion of the youth had been established in the legislative agenda of numerous countries worldwide. For instance, in Latin America only, similar debates have taken place in Bolivia, Chile, Venezuela and Uruguay.

In this section, I examine the political and social contexts of the enfranchisement of young voters in the five countries. In particular, I have a closer look at the democratic and partisan contexts, the role of civil society, the characteristics of the electoral laws and the socio-demographics of the new electorate.

Cuba (1976)

The first country to lower the voting age in Latin America was Cuba by means of a new constitution that was drafted and adopted with a popular referendum in 1976 after the 1959 Cuban revolution. There are at least three interesting features about the process of design and implementation of the new electoral law in Cuba, which contrasts with the experiences in other countries. The change in the minimum voting age was part of the project of a new constitution that modified the electoral

administrative units and enfranchised several social groups. The new constitution and new electoral laws were adopted by means of the Cuban constitutional referendum which was conducted in 1976 and was the first national vote since the Cuban revolution in 1959. The new constitution was discussed by Cuban citizens which resulted in the revision of over a third of the proposed articles (Nohlen, 2005) and the constitution was approved by 99% of the voters. As such, drafting the new electoral laws required a planning period that lasted several years. Furthermore, the Cuban case represented one of the most drastic changes in the minimum voting age in the region as it was lowered from 21 to 16 years. Another interesting feature of the Cuban case was the government's decision to test the new electoral laws in the Cuban province of Matanzas before implementing it nationwide. Starting in 1973—and for a period of almost two years—the regime administration worked on the political education of the citizens of Matanzas to prepare the elections. This process culminated with the establishment of the Provincial Assembly of the People's power in 1974 and served to inform the new electoral laws that were included in the new 1976 constitution of the republic.[1]

Nicaragua (1984)

Over a decade after Cuba's pioneering political incorporation of the youth, Nicaragua expanded the rights to voters under eighteen years in 1984 immediately after the country celebrated the first democratic election which followed several years of autocratic regimes. The change in the minimum voting age was part of the political program adopted by the elected president Daniel Ortega and his party, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (SNLF). Ensuing the elections, the SNLF started implementing its revolutionary program which put great importance on social inclusion, and placed particular emphasis on the political inclusion and participation of the youth. This inclusive agenda was already in place years before the party was elected with the so-called National Literacy Crusade.[2] In 1980, over 60,000 young adults were trained and sent to the country to teach basic literacy skills to thousands of illiterate citizens. As these marginalized populations felt empowered, a new way of nationalism emerged as a result (Beaufait, 2006, p. 14) in which youth organizations played a major role as both, supporters and opponents of the causes of the SNLF. These youth organizations also

played a major role in the democratic transition years in the country. The SNLF lowered the minimum voting age to 16 years of age in 1984 in an attempt to electorally acknowledge the political leverage of the youth movements in the country.

Brazil (1988)

In the same decade as Nicaragua but four years later, Brazil followed the enfranchisement of young voters in Latin America, in a process that went also hand in hand with the democratic transition years. In fact, three years after the democratic transition that overturned eleven years of a dictatorial regime in the country, the law extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-old voters was included in the Brazilian constitution of 1988. The new constitution advanced the democratization of the public sphere significantly as it also implemented several mechanisms of direct democracy that contributed to better control and accountability of political institutions (Da Costa and Zamot, 2010). The new constitution was proposed as a result of the uprising of civil society in the country. Millions of Brazilian citizens mobilized across the country with the aim to democratize the national territory and expand social justice to all social groups (Lemos, 1988). Thus, the demand of the political inclusion of younger voters formed part of this popular movements' agenda, which also demanded a greater social inclusion of children and the youth.

In the subsequent years, the debate over the political inclusion of voters under eighteen spread across the continent and in 2008 and 2012 Ecuador and Argentina joined the group of countries allowing 16-year-old voters to participate in elections.

Ecuador (2008)

Rafael Correa was elected president of Ecuador in 2007. After taking office in 2008, Correa called a popular referendum to establish a constituent assembly that would draft a new constitution for the country. The 2008 Ecuadorian constitution reflects an encompassing political agenda. It is also cutting edge in many dimensions, as it recognizes the right of food, rights of nature, rights to sexual orientation and gender identity, which very few national constitutions do. At the same time, it marks the beginning of a more participatory democratic era for the country. The new constitution extended the voting rights to young citizens aged 16

and 17, as well as other social groups including senior citizens, convicts, Ecuadorian citizens residing abroad, members of the armed forces and the police, as well as people with disabilities. The new Ecuadorian electoral laws were effective for the first time in the presidential election of 2009 and the general election of 2011. Prior to the elections, several programs organized by the government focused on promoting the rights, obligations and guarantees that were established in the new constitution. In particular, a considerable emphasis was put into the suffrage rights of under eighteen-year-old voters. The Directorate of Education (Dirección de Educación), along with the Electoral Council, the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion, the Institute for Children and the Family and the Council for Childhood and Adolescence, coordinated the program "If you are 16 years of age you can vote!" (*Si tienes 16 años puedes votar*) which implemented a series of training sessions with teachers and students in preparation for the upcoming elections.

Argentina (2012)

After Ecuador, in Argentina the center-left government of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner promoted and adopted the law allowing voters aged 16 and 17 to participate in the elections of 2012. For over a decade the center-left Kirchner administrations, which included president Nestor Kirchner (2003–2007) and his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007–2015) of the Front of Victory party, implemented a series of programs that aimed to increase the political inclusion of the youth, for instance by creating the Federal Council for the Youth in 2007. Over a hundred legislative bills dealing with the youth were drafted during the Kirchner administrations from 2003 to 2015 (Cozachcow, 2016). And around 60% of the legislative bills were drafted following the enactment of the 2012 bill granting voting rights to under eighteen-year-old voters. Many of these legislative bills aimed at fostering the participation of the youth in politics and decision making such as the enactment of a law that promoted the recognition of student councils as democratic and representative institutions within schools and universities in 2013. The new electoral law was first implemented in the 2013 primary and legislative elections with a participation of around 50% of the newly enfranchised young voters (Observatorio Político Electoral, 2018).

Contexts in Comparison

As I have presented above, the political inclusion of young voters came about in very different political contexts across the five Latin American countries. In this section, I further examine these processes from a comparative perspective. Table 6.1 summarizes the evidence.

Table 6.1 Adoption of the laws in context

	Cuba	*Nicaragua*	*Brazil*	*Ecuador*	*Argentina*
Year	*1978*	*1984*	*1988*	*2008*	*2012*
Political context					
Liberal democracy index	0.04	0.09	0.43	0.41	0.62
Law induced by civil society	No: Top-down. It included civil society consultation	Yes: Bottom-up	Yes: Bottom-up	No: Top-down	No: Top-down
Party in government	Communist	Sandinista national liberation front (Left)	Brazilian democratic movement party (Center)	PAIS alliance (Center left)	Front for victory (Center left)
Electoral law characteristics					
Year	1978	1984	1988	2008	2012
New constitution	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Compulsory voting all population	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Compulsory voting16–18	No	No	No	No	No
Socio-demographic characteristics					
Years of education (population +15)	05-Jan	04-June	08-July	08-Apr	08-July
Population	9.5 millions	3.6 millions	144 millions	14.4 millions	42.1 millions
New young voters	0.8 million	0.15 million	8.8 millions	0.5 million	1.3 millions

Sources United Nations Population Division (2019), V-Dem (Coppedge et al., 2019; Pemstein et al., 2019)

The inclusion of young voters took place at different stages of the democratic processes in the five countries. In order to examine this more closely, I look at the countries' scores on the V-Dem's liberal democracy score (LDI) (Coppedge et al., 2019) in the years in which the electoral laws were adopted. The LDI reflects both the liberal and electoral principles of democracy, and the clean election index which measures the extent to which elections are free and fair. Both indices range from zero to one that is from less to more democratic.

At the time of the inclusion of younger voters, Cuba and Nicaragua had very low liberal democracy levels scoring 0.04 and 0.09, respectively, indicating that they lacked the basic democratic qualities when the new electoral laws were enacted. Ever since the political situation has remained problematic in both countries. By 2018 the countries' democracy scores were still very low (Cuba: 0.08; Nicaragua: 0.06). However, while Cuba never transitioned to democracy, Nicaragua experienced a mild democratization for most of the 1990s and a sudden decline since 2005, giving the cohorts of young voters of that period a different democratic experience than the rest of the electorate had. In Brazil and Ecuador, the electoral laws were adopted years after the democratic transitions. In 1988, Brazil scored 0.43 on the liberal democracy score, very close to Ecuador in 2008 (LDI: 0.41). The two countries were more democratic than Cuba and Nicaragua when they adopted the new electoral laws but still exhibited a lack of some basic democratic qualities as well. Among the five countries granting voting rights to under eighteen-year-olds, Argentina had the highest level of democracy when the new electoral law was passed. The country had experienced a larger number of electoral cycles after the democratic transition in 1983, and by 2012 scored 0.61 in the liberal democracy index providing a better basis for the democratic experience of these cohort of young voters. Despite the formal advancements in the incorporation of young voters in Latin America, illiberal regimes and the absence of free and clean elections limit the political leverage of young voters. Malfunctioning democracies affect citizens' possibilities to achieve political representation and a sense of political efficacy, which has potentially deeper and more lasting effects for young cohorts of voters that get to participate for the first time in elections in contexts where basic democratic attributes are absent.

Another interesting feature when examining the enfranchisement of young voters in Latin America is whether the adoption of the laws was led by social movements or the government. In Nicaragua and in Brazil

the enfranchisement of young voters, and of other marginalized social groups as well, originated in bottom-up processes in which social groups mobilized to demand the national governments for political inclusion and participation. In the case of Nicaragua, youth movements had been very active in advocating for more participation in the decision-making process and the democratic transition. In Brazil, social movements demanded more political inclusion and participation, which is reflected in the 1989 constitution which does not only grant voting rights to young voters but also implements direct democracy and other participatory mechanisms designed to foster the participation of Brazilian citizens. By contrast, the political inclusion of young voters was part of the agenda of ruling parties in Argentina, Cuba and Ecuador being proposed and enacted through top-down political processes.

A third dimension to account for is the ideological leaning of the governing party adopting the electoral laws enfranchising young voters. Examining the five cases, it is noticeable that in all countries, the earlier enfranchisement laws were enacted by center-left and left parties. In Cuba, the legislative bill was drafted by the Communist party, in Nicaragua by the Sandinista National Liberation Front, in Ecuador by the center-left Alliance PAIS and in Argentina by the Front for Victory, a Peronist center-left party. While Brazil may appear as the exception, as the new electoral law was adopted during the government of the Brazilian Democratic Party formed as an umbrella party including political groups opposing dictatorship ranging from conservatives and Christian democrats to socialists and communists, the party included a relevant center-left faction that played a pivotal role in the draft of the new constitution. Overall, the role of center-left and left parties in the enfranchisement of the youth in Latin America is in line with evidence from Western Democracies in which parties on the left more commonly advocate for the inclusion of marginalized groups including women, the poor and ethnic minorities than right-wing parties (Lovenduski & Norris, 2003).

Examining the features of the electoral laws allowing voters under the age of eighteen to vote, it is observed that the new provisions were included in existing constitutions in Nicaragua and Argentina but formed part of new constitutions in Cuba, Brazil and Ecuador. Also, in all five countries voting is not compulsory for voters under eighteen, while it is compulsory for the rest of the electorate in Argentina, Brazil and Ecuador, and voluntary in Cuba and Nicaragua.

Turning now to the young electorate, combining all countries together the young vote in the five countries represented the inclusion of 7.9 new million new first-time voters at the point the laws were enacted. In order to take stock of the impact of these provisions, I have a closer look at the composition of the electorate in each country inspecting two components of human development: the population demographics and education indicators.

In terms of the net gains, lowering the minimum voting age in Cuba represented a gain of approximately 0.8 million new voters, in Nicaragua 0.15 million voters and in Ecuador of 0.5 million voters, in Argentina it represented around 1.5 million new voters while in Brazil almost 6 million new voters. In relative terms, as these countries are characterized by expansive population pyramids with higher fertility rate and low life expectancy the impact of these laws on the composition of the electorate and their political leverage is even greater. As younger citizens outnumber senior citizens, lowering the minimum voting age means that de jure younger voters have greater electoral weight than senior voters.

Finally, another key feature of the young electorate is the cross-country disparities in terms of levels of education. The average years of education for citizens aged 15 or older was only 4.6, 5.1 and 6.2 years in Nicaragua, Cuba and Brazil, respectively, and 8.47 and 8.7 years in Ecuador and Argentina. Education, as well as the personal economic circumstances that may result from it, are likely to pose additional challenges to the mobilization and representation of young voters as these factors are directly related to turnout (Tenn, 2007). Yet some of these inequalities are expected to be moderated in countries with compulsory voting systems (Gallego, 2010) and the so-called "paradox of participation", which points to the fact that while in some Western democracies education has risen substantially, turnout has declined (Burden, 2009; Jackson, 1995).

6.3 Information and Preferences of Young Voters

Are young voters different from older voters? In this section I examine the political knowledge and preferences of young voters in Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador and Nicaragua using the 2017 *Latinobarometro* survey. I divide the voters into three age groups (when possible): 16–17, 18–25 and older than 25 and assess whether age plays an important role in voters' participation, attitudes and preferences across countries.[3] The empirical evidence reported in this section is summarized in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Young voters, political information, ideology and most important problems

	Argentina		*Brazil*			*Ecuador*		*Nicaragua*		
	18–25	*25+*	*16–17*	*18–25*	*25+*	*18–25*	*25+*	*16–17*	*18–25*	*25+*
Political information (Source)										
Newspaper	21.2%	25%	42%	31%	34%	24.3%	28.1%	10.2%	9.5%	7.30%
Television	66%	74.06%	64.1%	30.89%	74%	85.9%	88.7%	56.4%	65%	70.5%
Radio	24%	6.7%	18%	20.56%	21%	32.84%	44.6%	25.6%	23%	32.3%
Internet	36%	27.3%	33.9%	38%	22%	30.6%	22.5%	17.9%	10.5%	6.46%
Social networks	51%	35.5%	24.9%	39%	22%	47.9%	29.7%	15.3%	14.6%	5.95%
Ideology (Left:0; Right:10)	*4.85*	5.3	4.75	4.48	4.24	5.5	5.24	6.7	5.58	6.05
Most important problem	Economy, Crime, Unemployment	Economy, Crime, Unemployment	Corruption, Political Situation, Unemployment	Corruption, Political Situation, Unemployment	Corruption, Political Situation, Unemployment	Economy, Unemployment, Crime	Economy, Unemployment, Crime	Unemployment, Economy, Poverty	Unemployment, Economy, Poverty	Unemployment, Economy, Poverty

Political Information

Existing studies show that young voters are more likely to obtain political information on the internet and on social media (see, e.g., Wells & Dudash, 2007) and the Latin American youth does not seem to be the exception. The 2017 *Latinobarometro* survey includes the question "*How do you inform yourself about politics?*" and asks respondents to mention the sources. I examine the extent to which respondents mentioned traditional media such as newspapers television, radio or new media, including the Internet and social networks. Across all age groups, the evidence shows that television is the principal source of information for almost all voters in the four countries examined, except for the group of 18–25-year-old voters in Brazil. Yet, some generational differences can be observed when looking at the most mentioned sources of political information besides television. Younger voters widely mention the internet and social networks as a source of information, whereas older voters cite traditional media including the radio and newspapers.

Ideology and Most Important Issue

What are the ideological stances and political views of young voters? I examine the political leanings of voters by looking at the average placements of respondents on the left-right scale by age group and country. Respondents are asked to place themselves on a ten-point scale, where zero represents the left and a ten represents the right.

On average, young voters are more to the left than older voters in Argentina. In all the other three cases, younger voters placed themselves on average more to the right than older voters. These differences in political leanings do not affect, however, the perceptions that the three age groups have about the most important problems facing their respective countries. According to the survey data, young and older voters consider that unemployment, the economy and poverty were the most important issues in Nicaragua; corruption, the political situation and unemployment were the main concern for respondents in Brazil; the economy, unemployment and crime were the main issues for Ecuadorian citizens; and the economy, crime and unemployment for Argentinian respondents.

In summary, the evidence shows that across countries age seems to be an important social differentiator. Young voters rely on traditional media to a great extent, as do older voters, yet they also obtain information

about political affairs and candidates from social media and the internet to a greater extent than older voters. In three out of the four countries examined, voters are more likely to place themselves on the right of the political spectrum than older voters, nevertheless they reach similar conclusions about the most important issues challenging their respective countries. After having examined some of the general characteristics of the young electorate, in the next section I will explore whether early enfranchisement is associated with greater political satisfaction with democracy and political trust.

6.4 Does Voting at a Younger Age Has an Effect on Satisfaction with Democracy and Political Trust?

Political trust is a multidimensional phenomenon. In his seminal book, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*, Easton (1965) distinguished three dimensions of political support: support for the community, the regime and the authorities. Evaluations of the overall performance of the regime include the general assessment of the workings of democratic processes and practices and the national government (Norris, 2011, p. 25) and are a reliable indicator of democratic disaffection and alienation (Wagner, Johann, & Kritzinger, 2012). Trust in national parliaments and in parties, refer to the public's support for political institutions (Norris, 2011). In this chapter, I examine four dimensions of democratic attitudes: satisfaction with democracy, trust in government, trust in national parliament and trust in parties. Do we observe substantive differences in satisfaction with democracy and political trust between voters that voted at 16 or 17 and voters that did so at 18?

Using the 2017 *Latinobarometro* survey I examine satisfaction with the democracy and political trust in Latin American countries included in the survey that have lowered the minimum age to 16 ($N=4$) and those that have not ($N=14$). The first dependent variable measures satisfaction with democracy. The survey asks respondents: *In general, would you say you are very satisfied, quite satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the working of the democracy in (country)?* The possible answers are "very satisfied", "quite satisfied", "not satisfied" and "not at all satisfied". Respondents can also say "Don't know". In order to examine the proposed question, I created a binary dependent variable where a value of one is given to respondents that are very satisfied and quite satisfied, and a zero to those who are not satisfied or not at all satisfied.

The variable excludes "Don't Know" and missing responses. I use a similar approach to code the remaining three dependent variables which measure respondents' trust in the government, national parliament and political parties.[4]

The main independent variable is the dummy variable *Allowed to Vote at 16* in which I coded one for all those cohorts of respondents that could vote at sixteen ages of age and zero for those that could vote at eighteen. It is also possible that satisfaction with democracy and political trust are affected by other individual characteristics and circumstances. Therefore, I control for the respondents' *age*, *gender*, *education* (ranging from illiterate to university education and personal economic situation) and *personal socio-economic situation*. Moreover, I also include two variables to control for a respondent's political preferences. The variable *left-right placement* measures a respondents' self-placement on the left-right scale (0 = Left, 10 = Right) and the dummy variable *winner* indicates if a respondent voted for the winning party or not. Last, I included country dummies to test for country-specific effects.

Table 6.3 portrays the results of four logit regression models with clustered standard errors for 18 Latin American countries included in the *Latinobarómetro* in which the four dependent variables are examined. In model 1 I examine satisfaction with democracy and in models 2–4 political trust. Country-dummies are included in the models to account for average differences between the countries but are excluded from the table.

Model 1 presents the results of the regression model for satisfaction with democracy. The results show that lowering the minimum voting age to 16 is associated with an increase in the level of satisfaction with democracy, however the result is only marginally significant ($p < 0.1$). This model shows that males as well as respondents who voted for the winning party and of higher socioeconomic status show greater levels of satisfaction with democracy. In model 2, I examine trust in the national government. As the results show, early enfranchisement does not have a significant effect on trust in government, instead older, more educated people and respondents who voted for the governing party have greater trust in the government. As it can be observed in model 3, voting at sixteen does have a positive and significant effect on trust in parliament ($p < 0.01$). The model also shows that voters that place themselves on the right of the political spectrum and supporters of the governing party are also more likely to trust the national parliament. I find similar results when I examine trust in parties, presented in model 4. Early enfranchisement has

Table 6.3 The estimated relationship between voting at 16 and satisfaction with democracy and political trust

	Model 1 satisfaction with democracy	*Model 2*	*Model 3*	*Model 4*
		Trust in government	*Trust national parliament*	*Trust in parties*
Allowed to Vote at 16	**0.204**$^{+}$ **(1.89)**	**0.055 (0.88)**	**0.320**** **(2.69)**	**0.304**** **(2.83)**
Age	0.003 (1.54)	0.011*** (6.14)	0.0018 (0.59)	0.002 (0.67)
Female	−0.244** (−3.17)	−0.076 (−1.26)	0.075 (1.30)	−0.001 (−0.15)
Education	−0.030 (−0.94)	0.057** (2.61)	−0.000 (−0.02)	0.012 (0.38)
Left-right self-placement	−0.001 (−0.02)	−0.006 (−0.17)	0.059** (2.87)	0.012 (0.66)
Voted for winning party	1.275*** (6.66)	1.967*** (7.32)	0.714*** (4.50)	0.805*** (4.61)
Personal socio-economic situation	0.102* (2.17)	0.074 (1.61)	0.051 (1.41)	0.042 (1.11)
N	7350	7466	7346	7404

t statistics in parentheses, $^{+}p<0.10$, $^{*}p<0.05$, $^{**}p<0.01$, $^{***}p<0.001$, country dummies excluded
Source Latinobarómetro (2017)

a positive and significant effect on respondents' trust in political parties ($p<0.01$), as well as having voted for the winning party.

Overall, in this section I investigated the question of whether early enfranchisement was related to political attitudes across Latin American countries. The evidence shows that voting at sixteen affects satisfaction with democracy marginally and it is not associated with trust in government but it is strongly and positively associated with trust in national parliaments and parties. As numerous studies show that political satisfaction with democracy and trust and has declined across Latin American democracies (Latinobarómetro, 2018), these findings are of substantive relevance for scholars and practitioners alike. Considering that satisfied citizens provide legitimacy to the political system and that democracy is at risk when citizens believe that they are subordinated to deficient institutions, finding that early political participation might contribute to reduce citizens' feeling of dissatisfaction—at least to some extent—is a potentially significant finding.

6.5 Conclusion

Many commentators assume that lowering the minimum voting age to sixteen could have important implications for political participation, representation and democracy at large. These assumptions have generated a widespread scholarly concern and debates among practitioners about the democratic effects of granting voting rights to under-eighteen-year-old voters. While around the world there is only a very small number of democratic experiences of Votes at 16 to inform this debate, further understanding how these electoral laws came to exist and their implications for elections and democracy are a serious matter.

In this chapter I have sought to retrace the political inclusion of younger voters in Latin America, a region that today has the highest number of countries that have granted young voters electoral rights at the national level. Examining evidence from Argentina, Cuba, Brazil, Ecuador and Nicaragua, I shed light on similarities and differences in the processes of enfranchising young voters. Based on this analysis, this chapter arrives at the conclusion that the enfranchisement of young voters has resulted from different political and historical contexts and was triggered by both governments and social movements. Moreover, I find that in these countries, the political left has played a crucial role in extending the political community to include young voters, in line with similar findings on its historical role in the political inclusion of the working class, women and ethnic minorities.

I also examine some of the basic characteristics of the young electorate, including their electoral leverage, their sources of political information, ideology and issue concerns. The evidence reinforces the conclusion of the existence of a generational gap in these countries. While young and older voters reach similar conclusions in terms of what are the main challenges in their respective countries, intergenerational differences are observed in terms of the sources of political information that different age groups use as well as their ideological stances. The acknowledgment of these generational differences supports the arguments of advocates of lowering the minimum voting age, as otherwise some of these perspectives would not be represented and accounted for.

Yet, the central concern regarding the debate over the minimum voting age is whether it fundamentally influences orientations toward democracy, exemplified by satisfaction with democracy and trust in core democratic institutions. Early political socialization and vote might be

expected to contribute to democratic attitudes, generating greater satisfaction with democracy and political trust. The evidence I examine in the last section of this chapter shows contrasts between voters who could vote at sixteen to those that could only vote at an older age. The evidence shows that across Latin American countries there are important differences in satisfaction with democracy and significant differences in political trust in parliaments and parties between the two groups. Overall, voters who could vote at sixteen show more positive democratic attitudes.

Although this chapter provides a detailed examination of the contexts and effects of earlier enfranchisement in Latin America, multiple puzzles remain. Future research should further examine the mediation of other contextual, party-system and individual variables not included in the models and also adopt a cross-sectional time-series approach to account for cross-national diffusion and temporal variations.

Notes

1. Ecured: Sistema Electoral Cubano, Retrieved April 30, 2019.
2. Cruzada Nacional de Alfabetización (CNA).
3. Data for 16–17 year-old voters is only available for Brazil and Nicaragua.
4. Question Wording: Por favor, mire esta tarjeta y dígame, para cada uno de los grupos, instituciones o personas de la lista ¿cuánta confianza tiene usted en ellas: mucha (1), algo (2), poca (3) o ninguna (4) confianza en…

   - El gobierno
   - El congreso
   - Los partidos políticos

   Possible Answers: (1) Mucha, (2) Algo, (3) Poca, (4) Ninguna, No Sabe, No Responde.

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CHAPTER 7

Votes at 16 in Scotland: Political Experiences Beyond the Vote Itself

Christine Huebner and Jan Eichhorn

7.1 Introduction

Scotland offers a unique case study of young people's engagement in elections. The lowering of the voting age to include 16- and 17-year olds in the franchise coincided with the referendum on Scottish independence in September 2014. This provided an environment that mobilized young people and allowed them to connect to a political issue as never before. In the first instance, the lowering of the voting age in Scotland was a one-off decision that did not apply to other elections. Only after evaluating the experience of young people actually voting in the referendum, the general franchise was reformed to include 16- and 17-year olds in all Scottish elections. This two-step change provides us with interesting insights into the dynamics that led to the lowering of the voting age and with an opportunity to research why the inclusion of 16- and 17-year

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olds was considered a success in Scotland. It came with broader changes in public and political opinion regarding the inclusion of young people and, with these changes, young Scots themselves started to look differently at their role in politics. Because young people elsewhere in the UK are not enfranchised at 16, we can compare the experiences of young people in Scotland to those of their peers in the rest of the UK to gauge their attitudes to politics and engagement with UK-wide elections and political issues.

This chapter presents and discusses what happened in Scotland in the period from the initial lowering of the voting age for the Scottish independence referendum until today. It describes the process of constitutional changes that were necessary to allow 16- and 17-year olds to vote and looks at the impact this had on young people and the Scottish society as a whole. We use quantitative and qualitative evidence to evaluate the outcomes of the lowering of the voting age in Scotland and discuss the experiences of those young Scots who are newly enfranchised. There is a lot that can be learnt from the Scottish case about the impact of Votes at 16 on young people, the circumstances in which young people can benefit from a lower voting age, and what early enfranchisement may mean for their future political engagement. At the same time, the experiences from Scotland highlight a number of issues that remain unresolved to date and warrant further research.

7.2 The Road to the Lowering of the Voting Age in Scotland

The Scottish National Party has been in government in Scotland since 2007. However, they did not hold a parliamentary majority initially and so were not able to legislate for a Scottish independence referendum when they first came into power. This changed in 2011 when they won the majority of seats. With that, the party was able to fulfill its manifesto pledge of holding a vote on the constitutional future of Scotland. An agreement with the UK government, the Edinburgh Agreement, was signed in October 2012. It outlined the parameters of how the vote on Scottish independence would take place and stated that both sides would accept the outcome as binding.

Already before the crucial Edinburgh Agreement, there were signs that the Scottish Government intended to allow 16- and 17-year olds to vote in a referendum on Scottish independence. As early as October 2011,

a year before the Edinburgh agreement, Scottish politicians in support of independence raised the idea of the lowering of the voting age. They argued that a lower voting age would be more inclusive of the next generation. Critics, however, suggested this was merely an opportunistic step, one that was based on the assumption that young people would be more likely to back Scotland's independence from the United Kingdom (Mycock & Tonge, 2012).

When the rules of the franchise for the referendum on independence were finally outlined, they included a voting age of 16 instead of the usual 18 years. The Scottish Parliament had voted to lower the voting age for the referendum in June 2013. While in other aspects the franchise for the referendum was very similar to that of elections for the Scottish Parliament, the lowering of the voting age represented a significant deviation. In Parliament, the positions on the proposed change were not divided along pro- and anti-independence lines. Both nationalist and several unionist parties (such as the Scottish Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats) voted in favor of the voting age reduction. The Scottish Conservatives were the exception and continued their UK-wide position of opposing earlier enfranchisement. In accordance with the Edinburgh Agreement, this change in the franchise only applied to the referendum as a one-off event. Because the voting franchise generally is a reserved power of the UK Parliament at Westminster, the Scottish Parliament was only allowed to make this change in relation to the referendum vote.

The ballot on whether or not the Scottish wanted Scotland to become an independent country was held on Thursday, September 18, 2014 and it included more than 100,000 registered 16- and 17-year old voters (McInnes, Ayres, & Hawkins, 2014). It saw Scotland remain a part of the United Kingdom, but the debate about the voting age continued. A commission was set up to discuss the devolution of further powers to Scotland, the Smith Commission. This was a promise made by the leading unionist politicians in Westminster during the referendum campaign. The Smith Commission recommended that the power over the right to enfranchise 16- and 17-year olds should be transferred from the UK's parliament at Westminster to the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood in November 2014 (Smith Commission, 2014). Things moved quickly afterwards. A draft order for the necessary modifications to the Scotland Act was proposed in the UK Parliament in January 2015 (McGrath, 2015, p. 8) and approved and accepted by March 2015. The Scottish

Parliament then held hearings for evidence on the issue of lowering the voting age in its Devolution (Further Powers) Committee, which suggested that the voting age should be lowered for all future elections in Scotland in May (Scottish Parliament, 2015). One month later, in June 2015, the Parliament in Edinburgh adopted the changes allowing Scottish 16- and 17-year olds to take part in both local and Scotland-wide elections. However, the Scottish politicians could not legislate to let them take part in UK-wide elections. Those powers remained reserved for Westminster.

What made for this rather quick procession toward an extension of the franchise after the referendum? A major difference to the 2013 decision was that even the members of the Conservative Party in the Scottish Parliament now voted in favor of a lower voting age. The vote was unanimous, a sign that a significant change had occurred with regard to perceptions about young people's engagement. Ruth Davidson, the leader of the Scottish Conservatives, said that she changed her mind after experiencing how 16- and 17-year olds participated in the referendum. She saw the change as very positive and the lowering of the voting age as an opportunity to increase political engagement (Davidson, 2015). Not only had the Scottish Conservatives changed their attitude toward young people but other institutions also started to think differently about 16- and 17-year olds. The BBC, for example, created a panel of 16- and 17-year olds from across Scotland to increase the presence of young people in their programming on general political (and not only so-called youth) issues (BBC, 2014). In addition to the creation of this "Generation 2014" panel, the BBC showed their determination to include young people when they set up the final television debate, one week before the referendum, with an audience comprised only of young Scots.

It was not only politicians and media institutions that changed their perception of and engagement with young people. There was also a major shift in public opinion from before to after the referendum. In 2011, over two-thirds of Scots opposed the lowering of the voting age to 16—in line with attitudes in the rest of the UK (Electoral Commission, 2003; Nelson, 2012). After the referendum over 50% supported earlier enfranchisement (Electoral Commission, 2014, p. 65; Kenealy, Eichhorn, Parry, Paterson, & Remond, 2017, p. 52), while attitudes on this issue did not shift elsewhere in the UK. Since then this figure has risen further. Now around 60% of Scots agree with allowing 16- and 17-year olds to vote (Scottish Parliament, 2015, p. 65). What is

more, the experience of Votes at 16 in Scotland has inspired debates elsewhere. Politicians advocating for UK-wide changes to the age of enfranchisement have repeatedly referred to what has taken place in Scotland and an All-Party Parliamentary Group on Votes at 16 has been formed in the UK Parliament (2018), including several Conservative members. What then were the experiences with 16- and 17-year olds voting in Scotland that had such an impact on the opinions of politicians and the public?

7.3 How 16- and 17-Year Olds in Scotland Make Use of Their Right to Vote

More than 100,000 16- and 17-year olds were on the electoral roll for the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence—about 2.6% of the electorate (McInnes et al., 2014). Some of them campaigned passionately for either independence or for Scotland to remain a part of the UK. The Electoral Commission (2014) estimates that on referendum day 75% of registered 16- and 17-year olds turned out to vote. That is a higher estimated turnout than among those aged 18–24 years (estimated at 54%), but lower than the overall turnout (just under 85%). It is somewhat difficult to make exact statements about the election turnout of particular groups of the population, such as 16- and 17- year olds, as they are based on extrapolations of post-election surveys. This means there is always a margin of error remaining. However, the Electoral Commission's assessment matches with estimates from a survey of 16- and 17-year olds from just a few months before the referendum, where 72% of the same age group said to be rather or very likely to vote in the referendum (Eichhorn, 2018). Taken together, these estimates refute the argument commonly presented by critics of the earlier enfranchisement that 16- and 17-year olds would show an equally low or even lower turnout than 18- to 24-year olds. On the contrary, in the case of the Scottish referendum, newly enfranchised young people turned out in quite substantial numbers.

However, the figures on turnout alone were probably not what convinced Ruth Davidson and others to change their minds on the extension of the franchise to 16- and 17-year olds. In addition to young people's higher-than-expected turnout, there was a remarkable amount of youth engagement in the long campaign leading up to the referendum. Over the course of the two years from when the vote was called,

Scotland witnessed a substantial increase in political discussions among young people, within families, with friends, and in school. Young people could be seen out campaigning in the street and engagement with the referendum in schools increased especially in this period.

We can evaluate the engagement of young people with the referendum on the basis of qualitative as well as quantitative evidence: firstly, drawing on two surveys, which were conducted just before the referendum in April–May 2013 and May 2014 among those who would be aged 16 or 17 and eligible to vote in the referendum (Eichhorn, 2014); and secondly, drawing on qualitative interviews among young yes-voters, aged 16–20, conducted in early 2015, just after the referendum (Breeze, Gorringe, Jamieson, & Rosie, 2015, 2017). While in early 2013 less than half of those under-18s eligible to vote said they had discussed the referendum in class, this figure rose to just under 70% by May 2014. Overall, a remarkable 93% of young people said they had discussed the referendum issue with others, whether with friends and family or in class (Eichhorn, 2018). Russell (16), a participant in Breeze et al.'s study (2017, p. 756), said about the referendum: "*Everyone was talking about politics for the first time that I can really remember… it was good to be able to speak about politics, completely freely.*"

The research also proves those critics wrong who argued that young people would not be mature enough for a decision as far-reaching as that on Scottish independence. The under-18s who were eligible to vote revealed similar levels of interest in the referendum to adults and, in contrast to commonly held beliefs, they did not only rely on social media or what their parents said to make up their mind about the vote. Instead, young people used a variety of information sources (Eichhorn, 2014). Breeze and colleagues (2015, 2017) find that 16- and 17-year old voters held nuanced and well-founded views on Scottish independence. Even though they acknowledge the influence of family or friends, many had carefully considered different arguments throughout the campaign, ranging from questions of democratic legitimacy to the economy (Breeze et al., 2015). Instead of just being influenced by their parents, more than 40% of young people held a view that was different from that of a parent's (Eichhorn, 2014). Mike (18), who joined the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) against his parents' recommendation, says: "*When I first started campaigning I went my own way, made my own mind up, found out my own things, and done it for myself*" (in Breeze et al., 2017, p. 767). What is more, a fair amount of young people seemed to influence

their parents on the referendum question instead of only the other way around (Breeze et al., 2017; Eichhorn, 2014).

After the referendum many of these young Scots remained interested and engaged in politics. It seemed that, through the referendum experience, they had grown to like politics. While before young people in Scotland were not any more or less involved in politics than young people elsewhere in the UK, after the referendum they were more likely to turn out to vote, to engage in elite-challenging forms of political participation and to seek out information about politics. A survey conducted ahead of the 2015 General Election—about five months after the referendum—allows us to compare young people from Scotland to those in other parts of the UK (Eichhorn, 2017). It shows stark differences in actual and intended engagement with politics between young Scots and their peers in the rest of the UK. Had they been allowed to vote in the 2015 General Election, 67% of young people in Scotland said they would have been very likely to vote (9 or 10 on a 10-point scale), while in the rest of the UK less than 40% were prepared to say the same.

And young people's political engagement did not only involve voting: 57% of Scottish 16- and 17-year olds said they had taken part in some form of political expression other than voting in the referendum. For example, they participated in demonstrations, boycotts, or wrote to a member of parliament. And more than half of Scottish respondents said they had signed a petition in the past compared to only just under a third of young people elsewhere in the UK. Breeze et al. report on young people who, through their experience of the referendum, joined political parties and became involved "in a range of issues, including anti-Trident activism, homelessness, anti-austerity and support for local businesses" (2017, p. 763). In the months after the referendum young people in Scotland also engaged with more sources of political information than their peers. To find information on political issues they were more likely to have read newspapers, searched online news websites, watched TV, listened to the radio, or used information available on social media. 60% of Scottish young people said they had consulted at least three different news sources regarding political issues compared to only 43% of their peers in the rest of the UK, who said the same (Table 7.1).

What is more, we found that especially young Scots hailing from less advantaged backgrounds were more likely to be involved in politics than their peers in the rest of the UK. Already during the referendum campaign, we noticed that the classic relationship of political engagement

Table 7.1 Comparison of 16- and 17-year olds in Scotland and the rest of the UK (RUK), February 2015, ahead of the 2015 General Election

	% Scotland	*% RUK*
Hypothetical voting likelihood in a General Election, if allowed to take part (9 or 10 on a 10-point scale)	67	39
Taken part in non-electoral political engagement	57	40
Engagement with at least 3 news sources on politics	60	43
16-year olds should be allowed to vote in all elections (agree)	66	52

Source Eichhorn (2017), from a survey of 810 16- and 17-year olds conducted in February 2015, representative for Scotland ($N=403$) and the rest of the UK ($N=407$)

and social class—that people of higher social status are more likely to be involved in politics—did not hold true for young people in Scotland (Eichhorn, Paterson, MacInnes, & Rosie, 2014). Five months after the referendum, we observed this again. While in most of the UK young people of higher social status were more likely to be engaged, social class differences in political engagement were less pronounced among 16- and 17-year olds in Scotland. Rather young Scots of all social classes were equally likely to turn out to vote, to become engaged in elite-challenging action, and to use a variety of information sources (Eichhorn, 2017).

Figure 7.1 illustrates these findings. It breaks down voting likelihood, non-electoral political participation, and information source usage by the socio-occupational class of the household the 16- and 17-year olds were living in at the time of the survey (February 2015). It thus allows us to compare how young people's political attitudes and behavior in Scotland and the rest of the UK, respectively may or may not have been correlated to their social class. In all three instances, the confidence intervals overlap for the different social classes among the Scottish respondents, suggesting that we could not observe any significant differences between classes. However, for respondents from the rest of the UK, there were significant differences, at least between the highest and lowest social class groupings, suggesting that social background was related to political engagement for young people there—in a way that it was not in Scotland.

How much of this more engaged cohort of young Scots can be attributed to the lowering of the voting age and how much has to be credited to the unique experience of the referendum is difficult to disentangle. In Scotland, the referendum and the lowering of the voting age coincided.

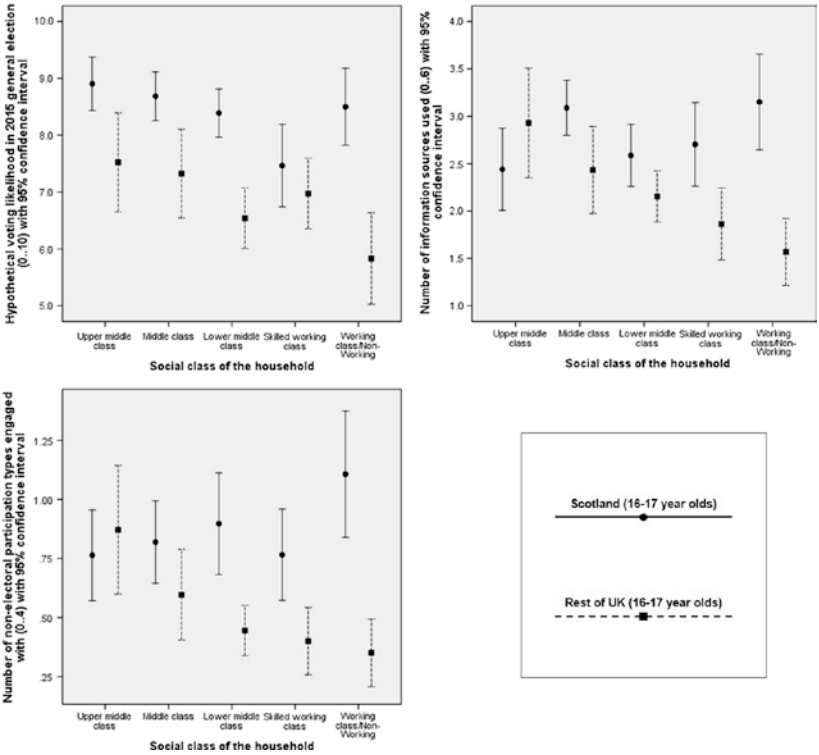

Fig. 7.1 Hypothetical voting likelihood, non-electoral political participation and political information source use by social class in Scotland and the Rest of the UK (RUK). Estimates shown are mean estimates with 95%-confidence intervals by social class of the household for 16- and 17-year-old respondents in Scotland and RUK, respectively (Data from February 2015, $N=704$)

Their individual effects on young people cannot be isolated from one another. From comparisons of young people in Scotland to their peers in the rest of the UK we can conclude that there was at least some distinctive effect of the inclusion of 16- and 17-year olds on their hypothetical likelihood to vote in the 2015 General Election, if they had been allowed to, and their engagement with information about politics in the media. However, much of the difference in young people's participation in demonstrations, boycotts, petitions, and their engagement with

members of parliament probably has to be credited to the unique referendum experience (Eichhorn, 2017).

We already tried to give an impression of how much the referendum mobilized people of all age groups, including young people. A closer look at how young people in Scotland experience the opportunity to vote can help us assess how much of this change is attributable to the lowering of the voting age and whether any changes are likely to have a lasting impact on youth participation in the future. Based on survey data collected among young people aged 16 and 17 years in Scotland ahead of the 2015 General Election (Eichhorn, 2017) and qualitative interviews with twenty Scottish young people aged 15–18 years recruited in schools after the referendum (Huebner, 2019) we can start to better understand how young people in Scotland experienced the referendum campaign and the lowering of the voting age.

7.4 How Young Scots Experience Voting at 16

Young people can be their own worst critics. They often think that politics is too complicated for them to understand, that it is "*over my head*" (Katie, 17).[1] Youth in Scotland find politics just about as hard to understand as their peers elsewhere in the UK: around 55% say they find it difficult (Eichhorn, 2017). But what seems to have changed since the voting age was lowered is that young Scots appear more confident in dealing with political issues.

There are several indicators that suggest greater levels of confidence—or internal political efficacy—among young people in Scotland, both in themselves and their peers. Young Scots are more likely to talk to friends or family about politics. Around 60% of Scottish 16- and 17-year olds say they talk to their friends and family about political issues compared to just about a third of young people in the rest of the UK (Eichhorn, 2017). Not only are young people in Scotland more likely to vote or to engage with politics than young people elsewhere in the UK. They are also more likely to think that it makes a difference who gets elected and that how the UK is governed matters for their own lives (Eichhorn, 2017). In our interviews, Ross (18) articulated how powerful being able to vote makes him feel and how he thinks his vote is making a difference:

> I definitely… I feel like I definitely got more power. I have sort of a say on like who's gonna go and be in power. So I definitely feel good about

> being able to vote. Definitely. (…) I think like my votes will like change things. Like the local elections that I took part in, like my vote helped to like lower the majority that a party held, which was like, I felt quite proud about.

And young Scots are also much more likely to be in favor of the voting age being lowered for all UK elections—a sign of their confidence in themselves and their peers. Two-thirds of 16- to 17-year olds in Scotland feel that young people should be given the right to vote in all elections compared to only half among their peers in the rest of the UK (Eichhorn, 2017). They believe that the act of voting itself gives young people more confidence, Emma (17), for example:

> And I think there this sort of strength that's come with the voting age being lowered in the Scottish referendum. 'Cause like before it was kind of like constant "Young people don't care about anything." Like "You're just like all off in your own little, frivolous worlds" and "You just don't have enough brains or intelligence or selflessness to care about these issues", when actually they were teaching us to be selfless and they were teaching us to care. And then they lowered the voting age and then suddenly there was this feeling of "Our voices do matter. And we can be engaged."

Undoubtedly, the referendum experience and the lowering of the voting age played a key role in this increase in political efficacy among young people in Scotland. Taken together, they provided an environment that mobilized young people, which allowed them to connect to formal political institutions such as political parties and, ultimately, to see themselves as independent citizens. Young people describe the experience of the independence referendum as their "*political awakening*" (Ben, 16), a time where they first came to think about politics. Hamish (15), for example, says that he became interested in politics with the referendum "… *'cause that was the first time that I really properly considered politics, I think*." Because they were allowed to vote, even some previously disinterested and unengaged young people started to actively follow and engage with politics during and immediately after the referendum (Breeze et al., 2017). Breeze et al. (2017) also illustrate how closely bound up young people's political engagement was with their growing independence and transition to adulthood.

We identified a number of factors that make young people in Scotland more confident to take political decisions and most of these were

particularly potent during the time of the referendum. Discussing politics with parents or friends, or taking a civics-style class positively impacts young people's likelihood to vote or to be involved in politics, because they give young people an opportunity to engage with politics and witness how others form their opinions. Reminiscing the referendum campaign, Ben (16) says:

> I mean, like no one could avoid it. So, I mean, debate was pretty much inevitable certainly. Eh, it was certainly interesting to be able to see other people's opinions and that kind of stuff.

While talking to parents or friends mainly impacted how interested in politics and likely to vote young people said they were, it was particularly class discussion that contributed to young people's increased confidence to make political decisions. This is also what differentiates the youngest voters' experiences in the referendum most clearly from the rest of the population during this special referendum period. The vast majority of young Scots said that there was at least a little or even much discussion in class during the referendum campaign (86%) and that they enjoyed learning about the referendum (85%). More than a third of young people even wished there had been more discussion in school. And also those who felt ill-informed wanted more discussion or more teaching in school (Hill, Lockyer, Head, & MacDonald, 2017). While talking to parents and friends seems important for general interest and to instill the necessity to vote, we found that those who had discussed the referendum in class were much more likely to say that politics was not too difficult to understand and that they were confident to make a decision regarding the referendum issue (Eichhorn, 2014, 2018). Even well after the referendum, young people in Scotland are more likely to discuss political issues in class. Almost two-thirds of young Scots say they have recently discussed politics in a classroom setting compared to a little more than half among young people elsewhere in the UK (Eichhorn, 2017). There are also more young people in Scotland, who choose a civics-style class in school, although formal civic education subjects are not mandatory in Scotland. 41% of Scottish young people say they had chosen such a class, most likely Modern Studies, a subject which seeks to develop young people's knowledge and understanding of contemporary political and social issues (Andrews & Mycock, 2007). In contrast, in the rest of the UK only 20% of young people say they took a civics-style class (Eichhorn, 2017).

It is difficult to disentangle cause and effect based on the cross-sectional data that is available on young people, their interest in and engagement with politics. However, regression analyses allow us to show that, keeping all other things equal, it is discussion in class that contributes most to young people's confidence to engage with political issues. Young people who had discussed political issues in a classroom setting were more confident in their understanding of political issues (Eichhorn, 2018). While it seems that young Scots turn to friends and family for political opinions, they seem to rely on schools to provide factual or educational information that, ultimately, gives them confidence in their own judgment. Hence, it is also the difference in uptake of political education and in-class discussion that explains some of the differences in young people's confidence with politics between Scotland and the rest of the UK. In other words, participation in civics-style classes and more frequent discussions of political issues in a classroom setting give young people in Scotland that extra bit of confidence in dealing with political issues.

7.5 What We Can Learn from Experiences in Scotland

The experience of lowering of the voting age in Scotland shows that, under certain circumstances, 16- and 17-year olds can benefit from being enfranchised at an early age. Compared to their peers in the rest of the UK, where the legal voting age remains at 18, young people in Scotland were more engaged in politics and showed greater levels of confidence in their own ability to understand politics and make political decisions in our detailed analyses from 2015. The Scottish experience dispels a number of myths about young people and politics: that young people are not interested in political issues, that they are not mature enough to take political decisions, that they do not care about voting, and that they blindly follow their parents or social media to form political opinions. In contrast, we found Scottish young people to be as interested in political issues as adults, to use a variety of information sources and to hold different opinions from their parents. In the question of Scottish independence, some young people even influenced their parents with their opinions. And most importantly, Scottish 16- and 17-year olds did turn out to vote in Scottish elections, first and foremost the 2014 referendum on independence (estimate around 75%).

The Scottish case also shows how 16- and 17-year olds are different from 18- to 24-year olds. Experiences with first-time voters in the latter

age group cannot simply be transferred to those a few years younger. More 16- and 17-year olds turned out to vote in the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence than their peers aged 18–24 years. There are a number of possible reasons for this. We have highlighted the particular importance of civics education and discussions in a classroom setting for young people to develop confidence in their own political judgment and as space to learn about and debate political issues. 16- and 17-year olds are much more likely to be in secondary education than their older peers, and thus much more likely to benefit from civics education and discussions in a formal educational setting. Younger people are also more likely to still live at home, talk about politics with their parents, and be motivated to vote by parents and friends.

Experiences from Scotland also provide us with important insights on what kinds of circumstances make Votes at 16 successful. We found that, in particular, classroom discussion and civics-style education were key for the success of the extension of the franchise to 16- and 17-year olds in Scotland. Above all, young people seek out formal politics education and discussions of political issues in a classroom setting. Both help them to get an idea of the different points of view on political issues and to form their own opinions. In Scotland, participation in civics-style subjects and discussions of political issues in class were associated with greater confidence in understanding politics and in making political decisions. For many young people discussions with parents and friends were important, too, especially because discussions were inevitable in and around the 2014 referendum. But instead of just adopting the political opinions of friends or family members, young people seek to critically assess them. They rely on schools to provide them with balanced information that enables them to discuss with others. In that sense, the school acts as a facilitator for young people's engagement with politics, while discussions with family and friends are important to get young people interested in political issues in the first place.

Lastly, the Scottish example is a remarkable case of a change of heart on the matter of the voting age among the publics and politicians. In a period of less than four years the tide turned for Votes at 16 in Scotland. While in 2011 much of the public was opposed to early enfranchisement, by 2015 most Scots were in favor of changing the franchise, including a broad coalition of political parties. This was largely due to the overwhelmingly positive experience of 16- and 17-year olds voting in the Scottish independence referendum. And it has resulted in young people

being included in other parts of Scottish society as well, for example the media.

Before we treat the Scottish case as a wholly positive example of the implementation of Votes at 16, however, some cautionary aspects need to be raised. The experience of the lowering of the voting age in Scotland has brought a number of issues to the fore—some of which are still unresolved to date. One particular problem in Scotland was the inclusion of 16- and 17-year olds in the electoral roll (Stewart, Wilson, Donnelly, & Greer, 2014). In Scotland, voters must register to be included in the electoral roll and be allowed to vote. Anyone aged 16 or older can register but this formerly excluded young people who turned 16 after the cut-off date. For the referendum on Scottish independence, administrators went to great lengths to enfranchise 16- and 17-year olds, including the creation of a separate electoral register. At the time this raised questions about potential tensions between electoral registration and child protection (Curtice, 2014). The creation of a separate electoral register for 16- and 17-year olds also allowed for specific targeting of young first-time voters, which makes it somewhat tricky to compare their engagement with the referendum with that of 18- to 24-year olds (who were not specifically targeted).

We have highlighted the special role of formal civic education and in-class discussion for young people's confidence to engage with politics. This finding raises the question of how schools and teachers, in particular, accept and fulfill this role in the Scottish context. In a survey conducted by Hill and colleagues (2017) Scottish teachers expressed difficulties with the concept of political literacy. Few saw it as a core part of civic education. Instead, for a majority of teachers moral and social responsibility as well as community involvement took precedence over political literacy. Half of the teachers surveyed also expressed concerns regarding their students' political maturity and knowledge. While Hill and colleagues find that Scottish pupils and teachers agreed on the importance of balance and the necessity to avoid partiality and bias when discussing political issues in the classroom, few teachers felt confident to achieve this. Political education is considered a minefield of potential "indoctrination" and teacher bias and has traditionally been anti-political in the UK, including in Scotland (Frazer, 2000). In the context of the referendum on Scottish independence local councils issued guidance on how school teachers should engage with the issue. Not only did this lead to somewhat different approaches in different constituencies, it also split

teachers. While some teachers wanted more materials and clearer guidance on how to organize class discussions on controversial issues, others—including many students—thought that the guidance that was issued was "unnecessarily constraining" (Hill et al., 2017, p. 65). Given the particular role of civic education in young people's political development, it seems imperative that teachers are adequately supported in achieving balance when discussing political issues in the classroom.

Difficulties with the electoral register and the teaching of political literacy can certainly be overcome with time. However, this is less so for the conceptual issues the Scottish case raises. The lowering of the voting age brought about a contradictory situation, in which young people in Scotland are allowed to vote in some but not all elections. 16- and 17-year olds can now vote in all Scottish elections but they are not allowed to vote in UK-wide elections. This means that while 16- and 17-year olds voted in the 2016 elections for the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood, most of these young people were not entitled to vote in the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, which took place less than two months later. The same situation applied to 2017, when young Scots were asked to the ballot in the local council elections in May but were not enfranchised in the UK's general election for the parliament at Westminster in June. Many young people are dismayed by this contradiction—a finding that is also reported by Breeze et al. (2017) and Hill et al. (2017). Russell (16), a participant in Breeze et al.'s study (2017, p. 771), complains: "*I've been disenfranchised, that's horrible, I got to vote in the Referendum, the most important thing ever, and now I don't get a vote in the General Election, that's pretty crap.*" In Huebner's study (2019), Lauren (16) says that not being allowed to vote in all elections makes her feel like a partial citizen: "*I mean, I feel like a citizen, but I feel like a partial citizen in a way that I don't have the same rights as everybody else.*" And when comparing the situation of young people in Scotland to those in Wales or England, Hamish (15) finds the playing field is not level:

> Eh, I think, eh, pff, I think I'd support a move to either lower it to 16 for the general elections or put the council and Scottish elections back up to eighteen. Just so that that's a level playing field. (…) The English 16 year olds certainly, they don't get to vote in their council elections. But then the Scottish ones do. And that's not fair. It's not part of a balanced democracy in that case.

The differential treatment does not only pertain to the Scottish versus the UK level. Also within Scotland 16- and 17-year olds still face barriers to their full inclusion into the citizenry—despite being able to vote. The formal markers of adulthood are incongruous in Scotland and the lowering of the voting age has certainly not lessened the differential treatment of young people. If 16- and 17-year olds are deemed responsible and mature enough to vote, why then are they not allowed to run as candidates in elections (the legal age continues to be 18) and why can they not be cited to appear in a jury (also from age 18)? These discussions are still to be had in Scotland as well as the rest of the UK. It remains to be seen how the enfranchisement of 16- and 17-year olds will be aligned with other entitlements and responsibilities of young people in Scotland, for example, that of candidacy or jury service.

7.6 Questions That the Scottish Case Leaves to Answer

It has been a turbulent couple of years in Scotland. In the five years following the Scottish parliament's decision to lower the voting age, people in Scotland were called to the ballot box no less than six times. However, the newly enfranchised 16- and 17-year olds were only allowed to vote in three out of these six elections: the 2014 referendum, the 2016 Scottish Parliament elections, and the 2017 local council elections. They were not enfranchised for the 2015 and 2017 UK General Elections and for the 2016 referendum on UK's membership in the EU. This leaves us with a lot of questions on how these newly enfranchised young people would have participated in other elections. Out of those elections that 16- and 17-year olds were allowed to vote in, we only have data on their turnout in the Scottish independence referendum. Reliable data on turnout by age is lacking for other elections.

It is unclear how much of the positive experience with Votes at 16 in Scotland pertains to the particular cohort that was enfranchised during the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence and how it will affect younger cohorts. Throughout this chapter, we have illustrated what a unique experience the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence has been and how mobilizing it was for many Scots, not the least for young people. Some findings—for example those on Scottish young people's increased non-electoral participation—may well be an effect of the aftermath of this unique experience, when thousands joined political parties and debated about further

constitutional change. It remains to be seen if ensuing cohorts—those who have been less or not at all involved in the referendum—will show similar levels of engagement. Similarly, considering the unusual circumstances of the referendum vote (and arguably other recent elections and political events that have drawn a lot of interest in the UK, e.g. the EU membership referendum or the 2015 and 2017 General Elections), we have to reflect on the question what kind of political engagement young people are getting used to on the basis of this experience. Mycock argued that the particular nature of the referendum vote might very well teach young people how important it is to get involved in politics, but also to look at politics in a binary and adversarial way: "It is unclear whether young Scots are continuing to fight the independence campaign or have established a deeper commitment to traditional democratic politics – be it Scottish or British" (Eichhorn & Mycock, 2015, p. 23).

It remains to be seen whether more "ordinary" kinds of elections, such as parliament or local elections, would generate a similar amount of interest and engagement among the youngest cohorts. There is reason to doubt this. While some young people are happy that they are able to engage at ages 16 or 17, regardless of the level of election, others are more skeptical about their partial involvement. Ross (18), for example, is proud of his participation in the 2017 local council elections and believes his vote made a difference:

> Like the local elections that I took part in, like my vote helped to like lower the majority that a party held, which was like, I felt quite proud about. Like "I've helped changing this".

Emma (17, and usually very involved in politics) is more skeptical. Reflecting on the different levels of interest that national and local politics draw, she says:

> The council election I was just kind of like don't really know what's, I feel like there's kind of a divide between like local politics and…like national politics. Whereas like national politics is quite easy to get involved in. With your council you're just like, 'I don't know who any of these people are personally. I'll just like vote randomly'.

We need more and reliable data on young people's turnout in elections, their interests and vote choice quality as well as qualitative insights into

young people's evaluation of different kinds of elections before we can answer questions on how the story about Scotland and young Scottish voters continues.

A finding that made many particularly hopeful was that of increased levels of non-electoral forms of participation among the youngest Scottish voters, such as participating in demonstrations, boycotts, signing petitions, or corresponding with an elected representative. This kind of connection between the lowering of the voting age and broader experiences of political engagement would be quite remarkable and very encouraging for proponents of a lower voting age. However, as Eichhorn (2017) reports, much of that increase probably has to be credited to the unique referendum experience. The more robust effects are reported for voting and general political interest. While it would certainly be a good outcome if, by means of a lower voting age, young people learnt about the importance of participating in elections, voting is not the only form of political participation. Campaigns in favor of the lowering of the voting age like the one we have witnessed in Scotland run the danger of purporting an image of political engagement that revolves solely around voting. Or as Ross (18) says "*…voting's really…the main thing we can do*." Young people need opportunities to engage with politics in other ways, too, in order to develop broader feelings of political efficacy—either because they simply want to "do" politics differently or in order to develop a comprehensive image of the role of the citizen.

Finally, our findings on the particular role of schools and classroom discussion in the development of young people's political literacy and confidence raise questions around the role of knowledge and education for young people's political engagement. What does good civic education look like and what are the mechanisms through which it impacts young people's political efficacy? We need to understand how education and the classroom experience impact young people's willingness and confidence to engage with political issues, what the effects are on different kinds of young people, and what good civic education can and should look like. Qualitative and applied research that is embedded in the day-to-day context of schools is required to answer these questions. We need to learn what exactly happens in the classroom when teachers and students discuss political issues and how in this context young people's political development can be guided and facilitated. We also need to ask questions about who exactly benefits from this kind of virtuous circle of political interest, civic education, and political engagement. We

have seen that shortly after the independence referendum young Scots of different social classes showed very little difference in their levels of engagement, while in the rest of the UK young people of lower social status were much less likely to be involved. Based on this finding alone it could be argued that the lowering of the voting age is a way to alleviate social class differences in political participation, possibly because it removes factors that contribute to inequalities later in life, for example going to university. However, it seems just as plausible that in a world where classroom discussion and the confidence of teachers to address controversial political topics is key for young people's engagement with politics pupils at better schools or with well-trained teachers grow more confident in their own political decisions. Research needs to explicitly address questions on inequalities of participation in this context, in order to avoid that recommendations for more civic education disproportionately benefit those young people who have better access to it. In order to evaluate these hypotheses, we do not only need more data on young people's engagement with political issues but we particularly need substantive data that allows us to evaluate smaller groups of young people, for example when broken down by their social status, and long-term studies that follow young people's development over time.

Note

1. All names are pseudonyms. Qualitative data from Huebner (2019).

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CHAPTER 8

Votes at 16 in Germany: Examining Subnational Variation

Arndt Leininger and Thorsten Faas

8.1 Introduction

A decline of and increasing social imbalances in voter turnout have sparked a debate over electoral reform in many countries. One of the most prominent ideas in Germany, as in other countries, is the proposal to lower the voting age from 18 to 16 years. Here, the voting age has already been lowered in some states as Germany's 16 federal states have the jurisdiction to set the voting age for state and municipal elections, respectively. Currently, four states have lowered the voting age to 16 for both state and municipal elections, and seven states have lowered the voting age to 16 for municipal elections only. In this chapter, we describe the German case and summarize what we can learn from it that can inform the academic as well as public debate in Germany and beyond.

To provide some context, we begin by sketching the brief history and the politics of voting age reductions in Germany as they have occurred

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so far. The arguments made for or against a reduction of the voting age are not specific to Germany; they broadly represent arguments in academic and public debates in other countries. Some believe that lowering the voting age in an aging society would imply more justice between generations and ultimately increased turnout (not only in the short but also in the long run).[1]

Others are afraid that 16- and 17-year olds are not mature enough to make meaningful choices at the ballot box and that they do not possess the required feelings of civic duty to take part in the electoral process. This question is discussed and highly disputed in the political as well as the academic realm. Of particular concern to us is the question of what the consequences of a lowering of the voting age to 16 would be. Chapters 1–4 in this volume discuss these arguments in detail.

In this chapter, we focus on the politics of voting age reductions as they have occurred thus far in Germany. Our primary focus, however, is on the consequences of extending the franchise to underage citizens. Here, we rely on official electoral statistics and polling data, but we also contribute evidence from a survey that we have conducted among young voters in the state of Schleswig-Holstein. We end with an important question that the German case raises but that is also pertinent to other (federal) countries. Lowering the voting age for some but not all elections will automatically create situations in which young voters will be eligible to vote at one election (with a lower voting age), but will not be eligible to vote at a subsequent election (with a higher voting age). In other words, young voters might feel that they are temporarily disenfranchised—with possibly detrimental consequences for the long-term political involvement of affected citizens.

Using so-called representative electoral statistics, we show that turnout among 16- to 20-year olds is higher than among citizens up to ten years older. Comparisons of age groups below 21 years remained inconclusive. Even though turnout among 16- and 17-year olds might well be lower than among 18- and 19-year olds we take our results to support a reduction of the voting age, because it would imply that more citizens experience their first election when 20 years or younger. As vote choices are concerned, there seems to be a slight but not strong tendency of young people to vote for left parties, in particular the *Greens*, as well as smaller parties more generally, while the *CDU* tends to do worse. Germany's political parties seem to be aware of this: The *Greens* are the most prominent supporters of voting age reductions and have initiated

many of the reforms, which we detail in this chapter. Almost all reforms have been passed by center-left governing coalitions in states where the voting age was regulated by state law. States in which the state constitution stipulates the voting age saw significantly fewer reforms because changing the state constitution requires a super-majority in the state legislature.

Our analysis of original survey data collected in the wake of a state election with voting age 16 shows no significant differences between 15-, 16-, 17-, 18-year olds with regard to their interest in politics or the campaign more specifically. Yet, our results confirm that comparing ineligible 16-year olds to eligible 18-year olds is problematic because young citizens would behave differently if they were eligible. In our case, young citizens who are ineligible but almost 16 are less likely to use a voting advice application (VAA) and engage less in political conversations than eligible young citizens who are barely 16. While these results only provide some limited support for lowering the voting age, they do not provide any support for arguments against the lowering of the voting age.

8.2 The History and Politics of Voting Age Reductions in Germany

The Federal Republic of Germany has seen several changes in the voting age in its history. The first reform occurred in 1972 when the national parliament, the *Bundestag*, lowered the voting age for national elections from 21 to 18. Germany in the late 1960s and early 1970s saw extensive discussions as in many Western democracies, not just about the reduction of the voting age but democratic reform more generally. Germany's then Chancellor Willy Brandt famously declared to want to "dare more democracy." In contrast to the controversial public debate that preceded it, members of the *Bundestag* unanimously, with only one abstention, passed the reform to lower the voting age to 18. Only three years later parliament also lowered the age of maturity to 18 years so that from 1976 onwards 18-year olds were also able to run as candidates in national elections. Since then, the voting age at the national level has been constant for over four decades. Although all parties of the left committed to reducing the voting age for national elections in their 2017 election manifestos, the voting age for national elections is not politicized and remains essentially

unchallenged to this day. Therefore, we focus on the history and politics of voting age reductions at the state level.

Germany's 16 federal states have the jurisdiction to set the voting age for federal and municipal elections. The voting age for state elections has always been 18 until the first reforms took place in the 1990s. We should note here, that all reforms that we will describe concerned the age of active suffrage, the right to vote, but not the passive suffrage, the right to stand for elections. The latter is, on both national and state level, usually tied to the age of maturity. Figure 8.1 illustrates the current status quo on a map of Germany and Table 8.1 provides a time line of reforms thus far, also providing information on the political context of the reforms.[2]

Lower Saxony was the first state to lower the voting age to 16. In 1996, a governing coalition of the *SPD* and *Greens* lowered the voting for municipal elections to 16. Hesse, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, North Rhine-Westphalia, Saxony-Anhalt, and Schleswig-Holstein followed suit in the following two years. The four other states mentioned above lowered the voting age for municipal elections only. Berlin and Bremen, again only for municipal elections, lowered the voting age in 2005 and 2006, respectively.

Another more significant wave of reforms occurred between 2011 and 2015 when Baden-Württemberg, Brandenburg, Bremen, Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein, and Thuringia reformed the voting age. Brandenburg and Hamburg lowered the voting age for both municipal and state elections. Bremen and Schleswig-Holstein, which had already reformed the voting age for municipal elections in the 1990s, now reduced the voting age for state elections. The other states, Baden-Württemberg and Thuringia, lowered the voting age for municipal elections.

The state of Hesse appears in Table 8.1 but is not highlighted in Fig. 8.1 because the state legislature reversed its 1998 decision to lower the voting age only one year later. This reform and its reversal are explained by the then partisan composition of Hesse's state legislature. As can be seen in Fig. 8.1 all northern states have lowered the voting age at least for municipal elections, while with Baden-Württemberg only one southern German state has done the same. Constitutional requirements and the partisan composition of state legislatures serve to explain this pattern.

Fig. 8.1 Map of Germany indicating which states have set the voting age to 16 in both state and municipal elections (dark gray) or in municipal elections only (light gray). All other states have set the voting age to 18 for both types of elections

Table 8.1 Reforms to lower the voting age in municipal elections or state and municipal elections in 12 states for the Federal Republic of Germany

Year	*State*	*Election type*	*Voting age regulated in*	*Reform process*
1996	Lower Saxony	Municipal	State law	Initiated by the *Greens*. Voted for by *SPD* and *Greens*. *CDU* voted against
1997	North Rhine-Westphalia	Municipal	State law	Initiated and voted for by *SPD* and *Greens*. *CDU* voted against
1997	Saxony-Anhalt	Municipal	State law	Initiated and voted for by *SPD* and *Greens*
1997	Schleswig-Holstein	Municipal	State law	Initiated and voted for by *SPD* and *Greens*
1998	Hesse	State and municipal	State law	Initiated and voted for by *SPD* and *Greens*. Voted against by *CDU* and *FDP*
1998	Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania	Municipal	State law	*SPD* and *PDS* (today *Die Linke*) initiated the reform
1999	Hesse	State and municipal	State law	New government of *CDU* and *FDP* raised the voting age back to 18
2005	Berlin	Municipal	State law	Joint initiative of *SPD*, *PDS*, *Greens*, and *FDP*. *CDU* voted against
2006	Bremen	Municipal	State law	Initiated and voted for by *SPD* and *CDU*
2011	Bremen	State	State law	Initiated by *SPD* and *Greens*. Voted for *SPD*, *Greens*, *Die Linke* and *FDP*. *CDU* voted against
2012	Brandenburg	State and municipal	State constitution	*FDP* initially proposed to lower the voting age for municipal elections. *SPD*, *Die Linke* and *Greens* voted for lowering it for both elections. *CDU* and *FDP* voted against
2013	Baden-Württemberg	Municipal	State law	Initiated and voted for by the governing coalition of *SPD* and *Greens*

(continued)

Table 8.1 (continued)

Year	*State*	*Election type*	*Voting age regulated in*	*Reform process*
2013	Hamburg	State and municipal	State law	Initiated by the *Greens*. Voted for by *SPD*, *Greens*, *Die Linke* and a part of the *FDP*. *CDU* and a part of the *FDP* voted against
2013	Schleswig-Holstein	State	State law	Initiated and voted for by *Pirate Party*, *SPD*, *Greens* and *SSW*. *CDU* voted against
2015	Thuringia	Municipal	State constitution	Initiated and voted for by *Die Linke*, *Greens* and *SPD*. *CDU* and *AfD* voted against

Currently, eleven states have set the voting age to 16 in state elections, municipal elections, or both. Four states—Brandenburg, Bremen, Hamburg, and Schleswig-Holstein—have lowered the voting age for both state and municipal elections to 16. Seven states—Baden-Württemberg, Berlin, Lower Saxony, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, North Rhine-Westphalia, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia—have lowered the voting age to 16 for municipal elections only. Thus, when it comes to the voting age, we have three groups of states in Germany: those with voting age 16 for both state and municipal elections, those with voting age 16 for municipal elections, and those with voting age 18 for both types of elections.

No state has lowered the voting age for state elections before lowering the voting age for municipal elections. Only two states—Brandenburg and Hamburg—have lowered the voting age for both types of elections at the same time and kept them. Besides, these states did so only almost a decade after the first reform took place in Lower Saxony. This pattern reflects, on the one hand, the idea that it is safest to test reforms on the lowest level of elected government first and, on the other hand, a powerful and enduring skepticism toward extending the franchise to underage citizens.

Usually, a governing coalition of *SPD* and *Greens* voted for the lowering of the voting age while the *CDU*, if in opposition, always and the *FDP* often voted against it. The only time the *CDU* supported a

reduction of the voting was when it proposed and voted for lowering the voting age in municipal elections in Bremen in a coalition with the *SPD*. However, in the same state, it rejected the lowering of the voting age for state elections, which the *FDP*, in contrast, supported. In another rare case, parts of the *FDP*'s parliamentary group in the state legislature of Hamburg supported the lowering of the voting age for both state and municipal elections. The Left Party (*Die Linke*), if it was represented in parliament, always voted for the lowering of the voting age.

In a sense, Germany's political parties' stances on voting at 16 resemble the way they are arranged on the left–right dimension in the German party system. The Christian Democrats (*CDU*) have almost always opposed reforms. The market liberal party *FDP* has sometimes voted against and sometimes in favor of lowering the voting age while the Social Democrats (*SPD*), the left party (*Die Linke*) and the *Greens* (*Bündnis 90/Die Grünen*) were usually in favor. The general ideological outlook of parties provides one possible explanation for the parties' divergent positions on underage voting. Christian-democratic parties like the *CDU*, on the one hand, tend to be more conservative and therefore reluctant to change the status quo, which includes the voting age. Left parties, on the other hand, are more likely to side with underrepresented minority groups. This applies in particular to the *Greens*, which besides their concerns for minority rights also put a strong emphasis on democratic reform more generally.

Furthermore, there might also be some calculating rationality at play concerning likely electoral effects of voting age reductions. Specifically, parties might have been taking their cues from the so-called "U-18" elections, mock elections organized in schools to simulate the electoral experience for underage citizens. In these, the parties of the left—*SPD*, *Greens*, and *Die Linke*—usually fared relatively better than parties of the right—*CDU/CSU* and *FDP*—compared to the actual election.[3] For instance, in the "U-18" elections mirroring the federal election 2017 the *SPD* received 19.8% (almost the same as the 20.5% in the actual election), the *Greens* 16.6% (8.9%), and *Die Linke* 8.1 (9.2%), while the *CDU/CSU* and the *FDP* only received 28.5% (32.9%) and 5.7% (10.7%), respectively. This is, to a certain degree, mirrored in our results based on an analysis of representative electoral statistics of elections with voting age 16.

These partisan differences in combination with legal constraints explain the variation in voting ages between states. The state constitution defines the voting age for state elections in eleven states. Only Bremen,

Hamburg, Hesse, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, and Schleswig-Holstein define the voting age in their electoral law. Four of these states have permanently reduced the voting age to 16. In contrast, among those eleven states where the state constitution defines the voting age for state elections, only Brandenburg has reduced the voting age to 16, for both state and municipal elections. While a simple majority in parliament can amend state laws, changing the constitution requires a two-thirds majority in the state parliament and, in Bavaria and Hesse, approval in a following statewide referendum. This significantly curtails the possibility of a governing coalition to reform the voting age because it usually requires the support of the opposition to pass constitutional reforms. Consequently, almost all reforms occurred in states where the voting age was not enshrined in the state constitution.

In four out of the seven states, which lowered the voting age to 16 for municipal elections, the state constitution defines the voting age for state elections but the voting age for municipal elections is regulated in a state law only. Only Berlin and Thuringia changed the state constitution to lower the voting age for municipal elections. Finally, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, which regulates the voting age for both types of elections in state laws only—has lowered the voting age for municipal but not state elections. Only one state—Hesse—remains that could lower the voting age by changing the state law. Hence, these two states are the most likely cases for future reforms because in all other states reforms would require a two-thirds majority in parliament to change the state constitution. Unless the *CDU* and other opponents of reduction fall below one-third of seats in state parliament or changes its mind, further reforms in states with a constitutionally mandated voting age remain unlikely.

From a legal perspective, an argument commonly made by opponents of a reduction of the voting age to 16 is that the age of suffrage should match the age of maturity (cf. Lorenz, 2015). However, this argument had not kept parliament from reducing the national voting age from 21 to 18 years in 1972, three years before the age of maturity was lowered from 21 to 18 years. Also, the voting age for state elections has been set at 18 even before these reforms. Nevertheless, legal arguments do play an important role in public debates. The voting age has also occupied the courts from time to time. For instance, in early 2018 Germany's Federal Administrative Court rejected a lawsuit against the voting age reduction in Baden-Württemberg. A group of citizens

had unsuccessfully argued that the national voting age forbids a lowering of state voting ages for municipal elections in that state. Most recently, Germany's new populist radical right party, the *AfD*, unsuccessfully challenged Thuringia's voting age reduction. A detailed discussion of the legal and political issues surrounding voting age reductions and minors' rights more generally in Germany, including case studies of reforms in four states, can be found in Lorenz (2015).

Given that some of the reforms took place over two decades ago, it is hard to obtain detailed information on some of them. While we were able to obtain parliamentary protocols on all votes, not all of them provided a breakdown of the vote by parliamentary groups. In Table 8.1 we assemble key information on all reforms of the voting age that have taken place in the German states so far. However, it does not list failed attempts at reform.[4]

Within civil society, it is mainly youth and child welfare organizations backing calls for voting at 16. One exception is the *Bertelsmann Stiftung*, an influential think tank, which in 2015 published a report on voting at 16 in which it advocated a reduction of the voting age as a means to counter declining turnout (Vehrkamp, Im Winkel, & Konzelmann, 2015). That report included results from a population survey that the think tank commissioned and that showed that younger respondents were more favorable toward a lowering of the voting age. However, even among 16- to 17-year olds, support only reached 42%. Public opinion on voting at 16 is, by and large, rather skeptical. None of the other polling results we found indicated a majority in favor of a reduction of the voting age. Most recently, in 2017 in a national poll commissioned by *Cicero*, a monthly magazine, only one-third of respondents said to be in favor of lowering the voting age to 16.

Furthermore, even those who stand to profit from the reform are quite skeptical. The *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*, a think tank affiliated with the *CDU*, has collected over half a dozen different polls of young citizens, none of them indicating a majority for lowering the voting age (Eisel, 2016). Those opposed or not expressing an opinion always outnumbered those in favor of lowering the voting age. Thus, proponents of a lowering of the voting age seem to be facing an uphill battle.

At the national level, in the past there has not been and currently there also is no serious debate about reducing the voting age, although the *SPD*, the *Greens*, and *Die Linke* proclaimed in their manifestos for the 2017 national election that they would like to lower the voting age.

Further reforms on the state level are more likely. At the time of writing, the governing coalition of *SPD* and *CDU* in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, where the age of eligibility for municipal elections is 16, rejected a legislative proposal by *Die Linke* to also lower the voting age for state elections but are considering to hold a plebiscite on the issue. Although principally in favor, the *SPD*, as in other cases when it was in a coalition with the *CDU*, rejected the proposals due to coalition discipline.

The variation in voting ages as well as types of elections across states that we just described makes Germany an interesting case for research on the effects of enfranchising adolescents. In the following section, we describe some first empirical findings obtained from the German case.

8.3 Consequences of Voting Age Reductions

What will be the consequences of lowering the age, a politician pondering reform might ask. This is a controversial question not just in politics but also in political science because given the relative scarcity of reforms we still know little about the ramifications of enfranchising adolescents. The German case can provide important insights into the effects of early enfranchisement on youths' voting behavior and political attitudes.

While some studies show that the youngest voters, commonly 18- to 24-year olds, vote in lower numbers than older voters do, it is problematic to look at the behavior of 18- to 24-year olds to infer the likely behavior of 16- and 17-year olds. For one, studies such as Bhatti and Hansen (2012) find that such comparisons are problematic because within this small age bracket 18-year olds and 19-year olds turn out more than young citizens aged 20–21. Furthermore, it is also problematic to compare the political knowledge or interest of 16- and 17-year olds to 18-and 19-year olds if only the latter are enfranchised. After all, enfranchisement itself may have a positive effect on the affected young citizens' political interest and knowledge. Finally, we have seen in the preceding section that left-of-center parties were the driving force behind reforms to lower the voting age while right-of-center parties were opposed. The supposition that younger voters are more likely to vote for left-of-center parties than older voters seems to be shared by parties on the left and the right: the *SPD*, *Die Linke*, and *Greens* are favorable while the *FDP* is more skeptical and the *CDU* opposes voting age reductions outright.

To scrutinize these questions empirically, we rely on several sources of data. For one, we rely on so-called representative electoral statistics that are produced by a state's returning officer and provide a breakdown of turnout and the vote by gender, age groups, and region. They provide a precise picture of turnout and vote choice within age groups based on actual ballots. To also capture young citizens' political attitudes, we use survey data. Most importantly, we rely on data from a survey of over three-thousand adolescents and young adults between 15 and 18 years of age, which we contacted in the wake of a state election in Schleswig-Holstein, where the voting age was 16. We present evidence from these sources of data in the remainder of this chapter, beginning with the insights we gleaned from representative electoral statistics.

Evidence from Representative Electoral Statistics

As of June 3, 2019, forty-one municipal elections and seven state elections with voting age 16 have taken place. For ten of these elections, representative electoral statistics are available that include a breakdown of turnout and vote choice by age groups. Representative electoral statistics are calculated by the state returning officer based on the returns from a stratified random sample of voting precincts. In these polling stations, voters were given ballot papers that indicated a voter's gender and the age group they belonged to. These so-called representative electoral statistics allow us to compare turnout among adolescents, young adults, and older voters. Unfortunately, the age groups printed on the ballot papers—brackets of multiple years rather than a single year of birth are used to safeguard anonymity in small polling stations—differ from state to state and even from election to election within states because there are no fixed standards for collecting these data. This means that while Bremen in 2015 differentiates between 16- to 17-year olds and 18- to 20-year olds, Bremen in 2011 or North Rhine-Westphalia only use the category 16- to 20-years old.

Figures 8.2 and 8.3 plot turnout levels observed for various age groups. We plot age-specific turnout as the deviation from the overall turnout in a given election because we combine data from multiple elections. Negative values indicate that turnout within an age group was below overall turnout and positive values mean that turnout was above it. Figure 8.2 shows all age groups between 16 and 21 years. Here, we

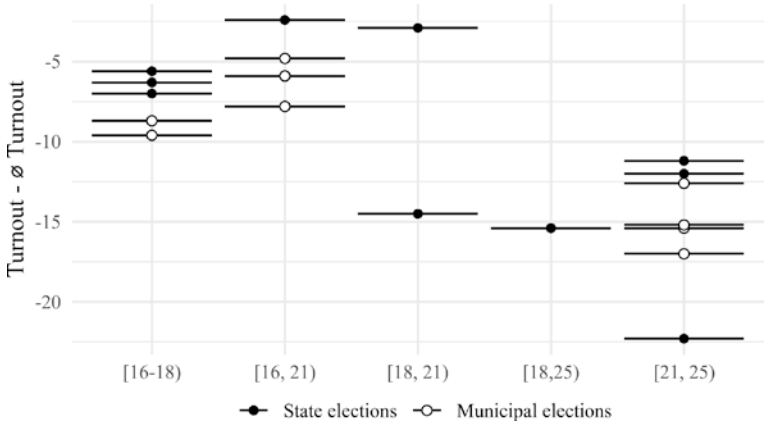

Fig. 8.2 Turnout among age groups below 25 relative to overall (Ø) turnout in an election—based on the representative electoral statistics for ten elections: the 1999, 2004, 2009, and 2014 municipal elections in North Rhine-Westphalia, the 1999 and 2009 municipal elections in Saxony-Anhalt, the 2011 and 2015 state elections in Bremen, the 2014 state election in Brandenburg and the 2015 state election in Hamburg

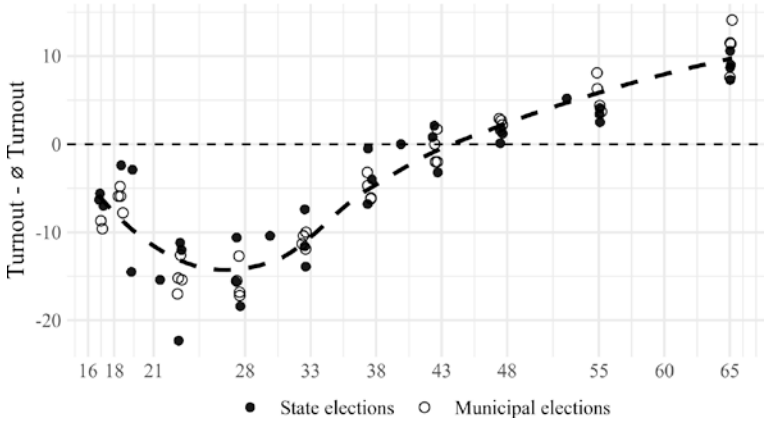

Fig. 8.3 Turnout among all age groups. Dots are centered on the midpoint of an age group. Based on representative electoral statistics from ten elections: see Fig. 8.2 for the list of elections

plot all age groups below the age of 25 and sort them by the lower bound of the age interval that defines the group.

Unfortunately, based on these data, we cannot say much about how turnout among 16- and 17-year olds compares to turnout among 18- to 20-year olds because the 16-to-below-18-category is only available for five elections and the 18-to-below-21-category for only two elections. Turnout among the age group of 16-to-below-18 is lower than in the 16-to-below-21 age group but we cannot say whether this difference is driven by higher turnout among 18- to-20-year olds. However, what we can say with confidence is that turnout among citizens younger than 21 is higher than among citizens 21 years of age or older.

Figure 8.3 plots turnout in all age groups but the oldest. In this scatter plot, we use the mid-point of the interval defining an age group to locate the dots on the x-axes. We exclude the oldest category because it has no natural upper bound and therefore no natural mid-point. We see that turnout among citizens younger than 21 is markedly higher than among citizens aged 21 or a few years older, in our case by about ten percentage points on average. Note also that turnout among citizens aged 16 or 17 is slightly higher or about the same as turnout among citizens in their mid to late 30s.

Our results mirror findings from other studies (Bhatti, Hansen, & Wass, 2012; Wagner, Johann, & Kritzinger, 2012) and add to the literature by including underage voters. These comparisons seem to support an argument made by proponents of lowering the voting age that adolescents and young adults vote in higher numbers because they still live with their parents, attend school or both. While our results provide support for the implications of that argument, they do not speak to whether the posited mechanism holds. Turnout among citizens younger than 21 is generally higher than turnout among citizens in their twenties. However, due to a limited number of elections in which the respective age groups were covered by representative electoral statistics, comparisons of 16- and 17-year olds with 18-year olds remain inconclusive. Nevertheless, our results do speak in favor of lowering the voting age to 16 because a lower voting age makes it more likely that a young citizen, given legislative periods of four to five years in German states, will experience their first election while being 20-years old or younger.

Having discussed turnout, we now turn to an analysis of the vote choices of young voters. The key question here is: Are the parties right in their apparent suspicion that youth are more left-leaning than the general

Table 8.2 Vote choices among 16- to below-25-year olds in comparison to the official election returns for eight elections based on representative electoral statistics: the 1999, 2004, and 2009 municipal elections in North Rhine Westphalia, the 2011 and 2015 state elections in Bremen, the 2014 state election in Brandenburg and the 2015 state election in Hamburg

	North Rhine-Westphalia 1999 municipal elections		*North Rhine-Westphalia 2004 municipal elections*	
	[16, 25)	*Overall*	*[16, 25)*	*Overall*
Greens	10.2	7.2	15.7	10.0
SPD	29.8	34.9	28.0	31.8
Others	5.1	4.0	8.6	7.5
CDU	49.4	49.8	37.8	42.8
FDP	5.5	4.1	8.6	6.5

	North Rhine-Westphalia 2009 municipal elections		*Bremen 2011 state election*	
	[16, 25)	*Overall*	*[16, 25)*	*Overall*
Die Linke	4.6	4.4	5.9	5.7
Greens	17.2	11.0	30.2	23.2
SPD	29.0	29.6	34.4	40.4
Others	7.5	6.2	15.9	9.0
CDU	30.3	38.5	11.3	19.5
FDP	10.2	8.8	2.3	2.1

	Brandenburg 2014 state election		*North Rhine-Westphalia 2014 municipal elections*	
	[16, 25)	*Overall*	*[16, 25)*	*Overall*
Die Linke	15.3	18.6	5.1	4.6
Greens	16.2	6.2	17.4	11.6
SPD	19.0	31.9	29.2	31.1
Others	14.9	6.8	13.6	10.0
CDU	20.6	23.0	29.3	37.0
FDP	2.1	1.5	3.9	4.5
AfD	11.8	12.2	-	-

(continued)

Table 8.2 (continued)

	Bremen 2015 state election		*Hamburg 2015 state election*	
	[16, 25)	*Overall*	*[16, 18)*	*Overall*
Die Linke	14.0	9.9	11.6	8.5
Greens	24.6	15.8	19.1	12.4
SPD	23.3	32.6	39.8	46.9
Others	14.6	7.1	7.6	4.0
CDU	15.8	22.2	12.3	15.3
FDP	3.9	6.7	5.4	6.7
AfD	3.8	5.6	4.1	6.1

The representative election statistics for the 2014 local elections in North Rhine-Westphalia include the AfD in the category *Others*.

electorate? In Table 8.2 we tabulate vote choices among citizens aged 16–24 and compare their vote choices against the official election result. Unfortunately, the representative electoral statistics are not as fine-grained for vote choices as they are for turnout. Vote choices are only reported for the age group 16 to below 25 years and older age groups.

Table 8.2 shows that in eight[5] elections for which we have data on vote choices the left-of-center parties combined—*Die Linke*, *SPD*, and *Greens*—perform better among young voters than among the complete electorate—the two exceptions to this pattern are the municipal elections in North Rhine-Westphalia 1999 and the state election in Brandenburg 2004. However, not all left parties performed better than average among young voters. Only the *Greens* performed better among young voters in all elections that we observed. It seems that young voters are generally more likely to vote for smaller parties, particularly on the left. In all of the elections that we have representative electoral statistics for, the vote share for the residual category *Others* is larger among the younger voters. Among parties of the center-right, the Christian-democratic *CDU* almost always performed worse among younger voters, while the market liberal *FDP* sometimes did better and sometimes did worse among young voters.

To summarize, using the so-called representative electoral statistics we have shown that 16- to 20-year olds vote in higher numbers than slightly older citizens. The difference between voters below 20 and voters between 20 and 30 is about ten percentage points. Turnout among eligible citizens below 20 is on par with that of citizens in their mid-30s.

Comparison of age groups below 21 years remains inconclusive. A lower voting age would imply that more citizens experience their first election when 20 years or younger, that is when they are more likely to still be in school, live at home or both (Franklin, 2004). As vote choices are concerned, there seems to be a slight but not strong tendency of youth to vote for left parties, in particular the *Greens*, as well as smaller parties more generally. While informative about behavioral outcomes, representative electoral statistics are uninformative when it comes to attitudes and the implications of voting age reductions for the development of long-term electoral habits. It is for this reason that we now turn toward an analysis of original survey data to address these topics.

8.4 Evidence from a Post-election Survey of Adolescents in a State with Voting Age 16

In the preceding subsection, we have speculated that relatively high turnout rates among adolescents and young adults might be explained by the fact that most of them still live at home, go to school, or both. There they are exposed to the influence of socializing agents such as parents and teachers (cf. Neundorf and Smets, 2017). In this subsection, we use survey data to investigate this and other issues. A common charge against lowering the voting age is that adolescents do not possess sufficient political competence and interest to be made eligible (cf. Bergh, 2013). Therefore, in this section, we look at adolescents' political interest and knowledge but also the internalization of norms as the latter might be indicative of whether respondents develop a habit of voting.

Survey data that we could use to address these questions are scarce because most scientific surveys of voters only interview precisely this set of people, ignoring under-18-year olds as well as foreigners who are not eligible to vote. The German Longitudinal Election Survey (GLES) does cover underage citizens, 16 or 17 years of age, but even in a relatively large sample such as that of the GLES's post-election cross-section only about 70 respondents fall into the relevant age bracket. Our survey, in contrast, comprises of over three-thousand adolescents and young adults between 15 and 18 years of age.

We carried out an off-line-recruited, three-wave online panel study of young people from Schleswig-Holstein, Germany's northernmost state, in the wake of the 2017 state election. We recruited our subjects

Table 8.3 Mean political interest, interest in the state election campaign, and subjective informedness about the parties and their programs (all on a five-point scale from 1—not at all to 5—very interested) among respondents aged 15, 16, 17, or 18. Political knowledge gives the share of respondents who were able to identify correctly the more important ballot in the state election's two-ballot system

Age	*Political Interest*	*Interest in the campaign*	*Subjective informedness*	*Political knowledge*
15	3.2	3.1	3.1	58.2
16	3.3	3.4	3.4	65.9
17	3.3	3.3	3.3	68.1
18	3.2	3.1	3.1	62.0

in the seven largest municipalities in Schleswig-Holstein, as the registration records are managed at this level. In these municipalities, we asked the registration offices for the names, addresses, and birth dates of all German citizens aged between 15 and 18. We sent a postal invitation to participate in our survey containing the URL to our survey and a personalized access code. We deliberately chose Schleswig-Holstein for this survey, because there we were able to cover a state election in May 2017 with voting age 16. In addition, we also covered the national election (with voting age 18) which took place in September of the same year. That election was followed, again only a few months later, by local elections in that state on May 8, 2018 (with voting age 16).

As we can see in Table 8.3, 15- to 18-year olds do not differ in their interest in politics in general or the campaign more specifically. They also feel similarly well informed about the political parties and their programs. Overall, political interest among our sample is considerably higher—half a point on a five-point scale—than in the sample of the *GLES*'s post-election cross-section in 2017, which uses the same item. Hence, we should treat these results with some caution because ceiling effects might play a role in our sample of youngsters who followed our invitation to participate in the survey.

However, we do see a sizable difference of up to 10 percentage points when it comes to political knowledge. Our youngest respondents, who are not eligible to vote, are less likely to correctly identify which vote determines the overall seat share in Schleswig-Holstein's mixed-member proportional system, which mirrors that at the national level. 15-year olds' lack of

knowledge may be caused by their ineligibility. Such knowledge is simply not as relevant to them as it is to their older and eligible peers. Therefore, we focus on comparisons of eligible and non-eligible citizens next.

A young person's eligibility to vote depends exclusively on their date of birth. Whether respondents were born shortly before or after the cut-off date defining eligibility—that is whether they are 15 or 16 on the election day—can be regarded as a random event. Thus, by comparing respondents born shortly before or after the eligibility date we can approximate the causal effect of eligibility on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes in a quasi-experimental setting.

We look into the reactions of young citizens to being eligible. Figure 8.4 displays the results of our comparison of eligible and ineligible citizens who have been born within a period of 12 weeks before and after the cut-off date defining eligibility: May 7, 2001. Respondents born within this 6-month period should be roughly similar to each other—for instance, both eligible and ineligible citizens should attend the same classes in school—except for the fact that some are almost but not yet 16 while others turned 16 before the election. In our survey, we asked

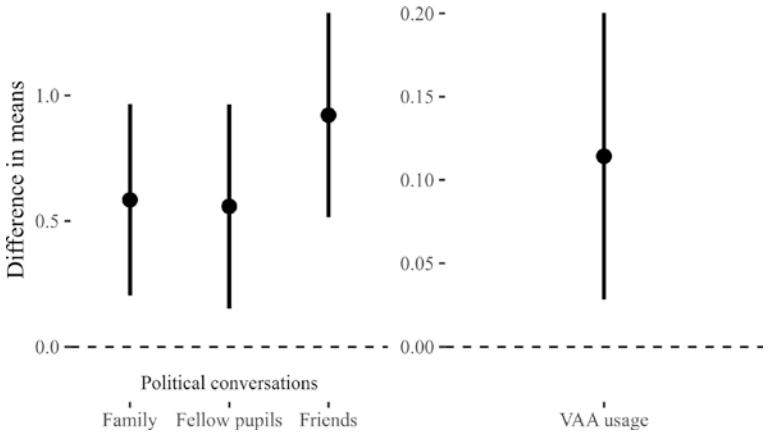

Fig. 8.4 Differences between eligible and ineligible respondents who have been born 12 weeks before or after the cut-off date for eligibility (May 7, 2001): number of days per week they engaged in political conversations and whether they used a voting advice application (VAA)

respondents how many days per week they talk about politics with different groups of people. Eligible respondents tend to engage more in political conversation by up to a full day more. They are also eleven percentage points more likely than ineligible respondents to use a VAA.

What does this imply for eligible adolescents' opinions about the voting age? We asked our respondents what they thought the optimal age of eligibility would be for the state election that they had just participated in. Interestingly, eligible adolescents favored a slightly higher voting age than non-eligible adolescents did. Their average response was 16.4 years while non-eligible adolescents saw the ideal voting age on average at 16.1 years. Still, both groups preferred the current voting age of 16 to 18 years.

The reduced voting age seems to be positively received by young voters. 70% of eligible respondents said that they were happy that they were eligible to vote, among voters that share increases to 80%. Every third 16- or 17-year-old voter in the state election said that they would certainly or almost certainly vote in the upcoming national elections—even though they would not be eligible to vote in this election.

This is an important aspect, which has so far been overlooked in the debate on lowering the voting age. As a result of reforms to lower the voting age at the subnational level, young people can temporarily lose their right to vote again—with unclear consequences for future elections. In our case, most of the 16- and 17-year olds who were able to vote in the state election were barred from doing so in the national election five months later because there the voting age was 18. Among those who were eligible for the state but not the national election, 70% said that they are not happy that they could not vote. In comparison, only a third of non-eligible respondents in the state election said that they were unhappy about their inability to vote.

Prior research has shown that a citizen's first-ever election is crucial for developing a habit to vote because participating in that election has a positive causal effect on future participation (Dinas, 2012). Temporary disenfranchisement, which young voters between the ages of 16 and 17 experienced in our case, might counteract this effect. In our survey, we do observe high levels of frustration among temporarily disenfranchised voters. Further research will need to look at whether this frustration demobilizes affected young citizens. We touch upon this point again in the following section as we summarize and discuss our results.

8.5 Discussion and Conclusion

The decline and increasing social imbalances of voter turnout have sparked a reform debate over the electoral law. One of the most prominent ideas is the proposal to lower the voting age to 16 years. In the Federal Republic of Germany, where the states have the jurisdiction to set the voting age for state and municipal elections, this has already happened for some state and local elections. More precisely, four states have set the voting age for both municipal and state elections at 16, seven have done so for municipal elections only, and five states still have the voting age set at 18 for both elections.

Using the so-called representative electoral statistics, we have shown that turnout among 16- to 20-year olds is higher than among citizens up to ten years older. Comparisons of age groups below 21 years remain inconclusive. Even though turnout among 16- and 17-year olds might well be lower than among 18- and 19-year olds we take our results to speak for rather than against a reduction of the voting age. A lower voting age would imply that more citizens experience their first election when 20 years or younger. If turnout is indeed habit forming as the extant research strongly suggests, that higher turnout of young first-time voters will result in a higher number of habitual voters.

As vote choices are concerned, there seems to be a slight but not strong tendency of youth to vote for left parties, in particular the *Greens*, as well as smaller parties more generally, while the conservative *CDU* generally does worse. Germany's political parties seem to be aware of this: The *Greens* are the most prominent supporters of voting age reductions and have initiated many of the reforms, which we detailed in this chapter. The *CDU* has almost always opposed lowering the voting age.

Our analysis of original survey data collected in the wake of a state election with voting age 16 shows no significant differences between 15-, 16-, 17- and 18-year olds with regard to their interest in politics or the campaign more specifically. Yet, our results confirm that comparing ineligible 16-year olds to eligible 18-year olds is problematic because young citizens would behave differently if they were made eligible. In our case, young citizens who are ineligible but almost 16 are less likely to use a VAA and engage less in political conversation than eligible young citizens who are barely 16. These results while providing only weak support for lowering the voting age also provide no support for arguments against the lowering of the voting age.

In the current debate about lowering the voting age, one important aspect has so far been overlooked. As a result of such reforms, young people can after having voted for the first time temporarily lose their right to vote again—with unclear consequences for further elections. In the case of the 2017 state election in Schleswig-Holstein that we analyzed, many first-time voters in the state election were ineligible for the national election a few months later. Such a situation occurred again in the following year when 16-year olds who voted for the first time in municipal elections in May 2018 experienced a temporary disenfranchisement in the European elections in May 2019. Another problematic case is Germany's capital Berlin, which is also a federal state, where municipal elections (voting age 16) are always held concurrently with state elections (voting age 18). This leads to the curious experience that 16- and 17-year olds who might accompany their parents will be handed a ballot for the municipal election and, if one is held concurrently with the elections, a referendum but will be refused a ballot for the more important state election.

In our sample of youth in Schleswig-Holstein, a third of first-time voters in the state election who would not be eligible for the national election indicated that they would also vote in the national election to come a few months later, apparently unaware of their ineligibility for that election. Such a temporary loss of the franchise, if perceived in such a way, can be a frustrating experience, which can potentially counteract the positive effects of participation in one's first election on habitual voting. Inconsistencies in rules, not so much between states, but within states, are an underexplored aspect of voting age reforms, even though this problem naturally arises everywhere where the voting age is lowered for some but not all elections. When the voting age is lowered, a homogeneous application of the new voting age across elections such as in Austria—see Chapter 5—may be preferable.

Due to a lack of data, more research is needed on all aspects of voting age reductions to arrive at a fuller picture of its consequences at the individual as well as system level. However, future research should focus in particular on the aspects we just highlighted. What are the (long-term) consequences of temporary disenfranchisement? Moreover, what effect does the participation in a concurrent election have on young citizens, when they are only eligible for one of those elections?

Notes

1. Of course, turnout rates decrease when 16- and 17-year olds become eligible, because turnout within these age groups is lower than average but the absolute number of voters, and therefore also the share of the population voting, increases—a point we will return to later.
2. Information on the reform processes was obtained from media reporting, press releases, and parliamentary protocols. These sources do not always report the voting behavior of all parliamentary groups. Table 8.1 provides information on the vote of all parliamentary groups that we were able to acquire information on.
3. The website of the project "U18" provides results of mock elections it conducted in schools: https://www.u18.org/, last accessed 12 May 2019.
4. For a discussion of some failed attempts at reform, see Lorenz (2015).
5. Saxony-Anhalt does not provide vote choices for the municipal elections 1999 and 2009 in the representative electoral statistics.

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CHAPTER 9

Modernizing Voting in a Post-transition Country: The Estonian Experience of Lowering the Voting Age

Anu Toots and Tõnu Idnurm

9.1 Political Context of Elections in Estonia

Estonia held its first free and democratic elections in 1992 after the country restored independence in 1991. Since then, the political party landscape and electoral system have stabilized regarding the level of electoral turnout. Generally, Estonia belongs to the countries with relatively low turnout levels (OECD, 2016). At parliamentary elections, typically 60–65% of voters cast their vote, at local elections the participation is even lower at about 53–55%. While the overall turnout has remained about the same level throughout the years, the share of internet votes has been gradually increasing, starting from 2% in 2005 local elections when I-voting was allowed for the first time and reaching 32% in 2017 (National Electoral Committee, 2018). Neither international events

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(such as the alleged interference of Russia into US Presidential elections 2016) nor the domestic failure with national ID-card security certificates on the eve of 2017 local elections seemed to have a significant impact on Estonians' trust on internet voting.

The idea to extend voting rights to young people below the conventional voting age of 18 can be seen as a piece of a broader picture to make Estonia internationally known as a progressive and rapidly modernizing country. Differently from some postcommunist Central and Eastern European countries (such as Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary) that relied on the support of the older generations, Estonia turned to younger cohorts both regarding policies and the formation of new political elite. As a consequence of a firm political step to quit with staff formerly employed by the Soviet regime, civil servants below 40 make up almost half of the government employees in Estonia (Ministry of Finance, 2018). During the debate on lowering the voting age, Prime Minister T. Rõivas was just 34 years old and famous for his ambitious advocacy of various innovations. When Rõivas stepped into office in spring 2014, Estonian National Youth Council (ENYC) sent him a public message. 'Dear Prime minister, please do so that […] future generations can read the following in the annals: Estonia, after restoring its independence has been a great innovator in many fields […]. It is typical that big reforms have been made under young Prime ministers as Mart Laar (32) who turned the country to the West in 1992 and Taavi Rõivas (34) who lowered the voting age to 16' (ENYC, 2014).

Thus, in general the political climate in Estonia for lowering the voting age was rather favorable. In the next sections, we will study the process more closely and look at the preliminary effects of the lowered voting age. First, we provide an overview of parliamentary proceedings and highlight major criticism and expectations toward the extension of voting rights. We proceed by analyzing political attitudes and engagement with future voters based on survey data. Then we look at schools as key institutional players in the process of preparing young people to undertake their role as voters. Finally, we address the question whether there was an effect on the political landscape. The chapter concludes by discussing lessons learned and further perspectives for research and practice.

9.2 Public Discourse and Parliamentary Debates on the Constitutional Amendment

The initial idea to lower the voting age from 18 to 16 came from the youth umbrella organization—ENYC which submitted an open letter to the political parties represented in the national parliament (Riigikogu) (Explanatory Memorandum, 2014a). The first step to move the idea on a formal political agenda was made in spring 2011, when the coalition government of the Reform Party and Pro Patria Union declared in the coalition government program that young people should be given more possibilities to have a say in society. For that reason, the government started a debate on lowering the voting age to 16. The measure was seen as an option 'to maintain the stable balance in the society' which had been aging rapidly (Coalition Agreement, 2011, p. 52).

The issue was debated between 2012 and 2014 with varying intensity. In the public media, both *pro et contra* opinions were voiced, whereas the formal process of preparing legal amendments was much less heated. The public debate preceding the parliamentary elections focused on two main topics. First, several people questioned the willingness and ability of young people to make an informed choice by voting. It was feared that the turnout would have been even lower if 16–17-year olds were formally part of the electorate but did not show up onthe voting day. The second topic linked the lowering of voting age to the population aging problem (Explanatory Memorandum, 2014a). As in many developed Western countries, in Estonia, too, the share of voters above 65 increases faster than the share of younger cohorts. By 2020 the former constituted 23% of the population whereas the latter (16–28 years) were only 15% (Statistics Estonia, 2014). Conservatively minded political parties and NGOs voiced the idea that not the young people but their parents should be granted an extra vote according to the number of children (Hvostov, 2013). Through this, they hoped to promote childbirth, which eventually would solve the problem of population decrease. Liberals and Social Democrats opposed this proposal, arguing that it was against the basic principles of free and fair elections (Loonet, 2012a, 2012b; Meikar, 2010). Moreover—young people had demonstrated socially responsible behavior elsewhere and giving them the right to vote could further advance their social inclusion (Toots, Idnurm, & Saarts, 2014).

The support for lowering the voting age was carried first of all by the neoliberal Reform Party that held the posts of Prime Minister (PM) and Minister of Justice at that time. The Ministry of Justice acted proactively by commencing analyses on practices of foreign countries on lowering the voting age and an *ex ante* impact assessment of possible change in Estonia. First results of the impact assessment study were heard at an open session of the constitutional committee of the Riigikogu. The open session in June 2014 was a trigger of parliamentary activities—four weeks later the bill to amend the constitution was initiated. As Reform Party and Social Democrats were in the government during the crucial period of legal amendments and controlled the parliamentary majority, the process was expected to go smoothly. However, the reality turned out to be somewhat more complicated.

The voting franchise is clearly dealt with in the Constitution of the Estonian Republic. Therefore, the process of legally amending the voting age had to pass two stages—first, an amendment of the relevant article of the constitution and second, an amendment of the Municipal Council Election Act. To amend the constitution two successive memberships of the Riigikogu have to vote for it. The bill to amend the constitution regarding the voting age was initiated by 41 MPs of the liberal Reform Party and the Social Democratic Party in 2014 and passed three readings by the effective membership of the Riigikogu, and one more reading by the next membership of the Riigikogu in 2015.

Although all readings were passed successfully, there was a clear division in the Riigikogu along the coalition-opposition lines. The conservative Pro Patria Union agreed to start the debate on lowering the voting age when they were in government in 2011, when the party left the government in 2014 they opposed the idea, and changed their position again as they became a coalition government partner in 2015. The largest opposition party, the social-liberal Centre Party has been the main opponent of lowering the voting age throughout the entire process although the party position was sometimes contradictory. They opposed the whole idea by relying on the 'immaturity' argument on the one hand, and on the other hand, they proposed to lower the age for standing as a candidate. MPs of the Centre Party abstained in the final voting on the constitutional amendments and voted against the Municipal Council Election Act. Because some smaller conservative parliamentary parties also voted against it, the bill failed in its final reading. As a result, the legal situation became abnormal since the effective Municipal

Council Election Act contradicted the amended constitution. To solve the problem, the Constitutional Committee of the Riigikogu initiated at once a new bill with content identical to that previously failed. The bill was processed fast and the amended law entered into force in January 2016.

Looking 'behind the scene' of parliamentary debates one can highlight two aspects of the process. First, overall it was not a heated debate with massive mobilization of advocacy groups and long-lasting parliamentary hearings. Most of the criticism concerned technical details such as updating the population register (which in Estonia is the bases for the voters' register) and discussing the incapacity to vote due to medical reasons in case of non-adult persons. For the second reading of the bill on the Municipal Council Election Act only two amendments were proposed—one by the Center Party and another, similar one, by a minor NGO 'Radical Democrats', both proposing to also lower the of passive voting right age to 16 (Explanatory Memorandum, 2015). The umbrella organizations of local governments—the Estonian Association of Cities and the Association of Municipalities, generally supported lowering the voting age if the technical nuances (mentioned above) were properly addressed by legal regulations. The second feature that illustrated the entire process of lowering the voting age was a sharp confrontation between two major political parties—the Reform Party and the Center Party. The former held the PM position in an extraordinarily long period for a transitional democracy (2002–2016), whereas the latter sat permanently in opposition despite the high(est) share of votes. There are many reasons for this, but one of those was the widespread perception of the Center Party as an actor that represents interests of senior citizens, including the Russian-speaking minority. This viewpoint is supported by various opinion polls that continuously reveal higher support for the Reform Party among younger cohorts and for the Center Party among older cohorts (see for example, Lauri, 2017). As a by-product of this age-based split of voters, the Center Party was resisting the development of internet voting whereas the Reform Party has been the main advocate. Although no surveys had confirmed that young people were more inclined to use I-voting, these assumptions heated the confrontation between the two largest political parties. One of the MPs of Center Party publicly accused the Reform Party of the intention to claim credit for this to detract from several unpopular decisions in tax policy and thus use young people for their partisan ambitions (Ivanova, 2015). Because

the Center Party has stood in political isolation for years due to their arguably pro-Russian platform, it was unable to mobilize smaller nationalistic opposition parties against this particular legal amendment. The Municipal Council Election Act was passed and judicially everything was in place to allow 16–17-year-old permanent residents to vote in the local elections taking place in the fall of 2017.

9.3 Youth Political Engagement Practices—Have Elections Become More Prominent?

Contemporary political science literature has extensively discussed the interest of young people toward elections and voting. Overall declining turnout and lower participation of younger voter groups (OECD, 2016) have given ground to claims that voting as a conventional mechanism of political engagement does not attract young people anymore (Franklin, 2002; Wattenberg, 2012). Yet, these studies commonly rely on data of the population aged 18 and above, which can have different attitudes toward and practices of voting compared to younger cohorts. Studies that include cohorts below the conventional voting age reveal that 16–17-year olds are more active to participate at elections compared to 18–30-year olds (Council of Europe, 2011; Wagner, Johann, & Kritzinger, 2012). In the elections to the European Parliament, it was found that the largest share of abstentions was among university students who may have had a weaker feeling of belonging to a polity and community compared to the youth of compulsory schooling age (Bouza, 2014). The IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study[1] surveying 14-year-old students revealed that voting for them was actually the most popular mode of expected political participation. On average, 85% of adolescents across 24 countries think that as adults they are going to vote at local and national elections. Similarly, 81% see voting as one of the key characteristics of a good citizen (Schulz et al., 2017). Contrary to the claims of critics, these figures have increased throughout the 17 years of IEA ICCS cycles (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr, & Losito, 2010; Schulz et al., 2017; Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001). Adolescents in Estonia are less enthusiastic compared to their foreign peers in IEA ICCS—77% of them intend to vote at parliamentary elections and 80% at municipal elections. 68% of Estonian students believe that a good citizen always votes at elections (Toots, 2017). All these figures remained unchanged in two survey cycles, 2009 and

2016. By the time of the last survey, Estonia had already lowered the voting age at municipal elections to 16, which suggests that the legal amendment itself did not automatically affect attitudes of 14-year olds toward electoral behavior.

To what extent are voting intentions and practices of 16–17-year olds different from 14-year olds? A national survey[2] carried out shortly after the first municipal elections in 2017 in which young people had the right to vote can shed light on this. In total, 59% of 16–17-year olds went to the polling station, which exceeds the overall turnout by 6% (Kantar Emor, 2018; National Electoral Committee, 2018). Although these numbers should be compared with caution, since the data sources are different, one can still argue that one of the main worries related to the lowering of voting age, distinctively lower turnout levels among those newly enfranchised, did not materialize. In addition, as surveys predicted, most first-time voters voted at polling stations (Table 9.1).

In broader terms, a larger proportion of 17-year olds could define personal ideological preferences. At the same time, 17-year olds reported less interest in politics compared to the 16-year olds. The relatively small sample size does not allow us to make profound generalization on age differences in voting behavior, therefore we attempt to find voting predictors for the entire group of newly enfranchised first-time voters. As the linear regression model (Table 9.2) revealed, moral qualities of politics such as non-corruption and keeping the promises tend to be important for young peoples' political activism. Whereas having an ideological preference turned out to be non-significant, following news about some particular party was a systemic predictor of voting. Most of the 16-year olds believed that in electoral manifestos political parties should pay special attention to youth problems, whereas 17-year olds started to doubt this. Yet, this factor was statistically not significant either. Generally, the analysis revealed

Table 9.1 Voting modes used in municipal elections 2017, %

Voting mode	*16-year olds*	*17-year olds*	*National average*
Polling station	87	77	68
Internet	13	23	32

Source Kantar Emor (2018), National Electoral Committee (2018)

Table 9.2 Predictors of voting for 16–17-year-old first-time voters ($N = 534$)

	Standardized coefficients beta
Local politics is corrupt and dirty	**0.196**
Do you follow news about a particular political party?	**0.144**
When making a governing coalition one must not back off from campaign promises	**0.086**
Politicians are selfish and indifferent to reality	0.072
The age for standing as a candidate must be the same as the voting age	0.048
Lowering the voting age to 16 must be considered also for other elections (European Parliament and Riigikogu)	0.048
For me, it is important what my candidate does after becoming a councilor	0.034
Young people must be given special attention in electoral programs	0.030
Advertisements in social media must be classified as political advertising as well	0.019
How would you identify yourself ideologically?	0.019
There must be restrictions in schools during the electoral campaign on visits of politicians and distribution of promotional materials	0.018
Gender	0.013

Dependent Variable: "*Did you vote at local government elections 2017?*"; predictors significant at level $p \leq .05$ are in bold
Source Kantar Emor (2018)

that contrary to the adult politicians and school staff, young people were not specifically concerned about campaign regulations inside and outside the school, including the social media.

In summary, the lowering of voting age had a quite marginal effect on overall turnout and adolescents' intention to vote. There was no change in the level of voting intention among 14-year olds before the 2015 legal amendment and after, which suggests that they did not see the lowering of voting age as something relevant for them. Among 16–17-year olds, who got the chance to use their voting right, a slight majority (59%) decided to do so (Kantar Emor, 2018). Although the survey data are not directly comparable to the population turnout, one can argue that 16–17-year olds appear slightly more enthusiastic to vote compared to the Estonian population in general or at least are not voting less. This is in contrast to the pattern of 18–24-year olds, whose turnout is typically much lower than the national average (OECD, 2016). In 2015, only 41% of 18–24-year olds voted compared to 64% of 25–50-year olds (ESS, 2016).

9.4 Schools as Institutional Players in the Electoral Process

Educational institutions are seen as bearing the main responsibility in preparing young people to perform their citizen rights and duties. In the Estonian case, the question of civic competence of 16–17-year-old students has regularly entered the public debate. In the first years of debate, the dominant opinion was that young people are 'not ready' and do not understand politics. In an online Gallup poll conducted for the national daily 'Postimees', 92% out of 4600 respondents were against lowering the voting age (Postimees, 2012). Even the Association of History and Civic Education Teachers voiced skepticism by saying that young people are easily manipulated (Filippov, 2012). Some of the MPs shared this view, but positive findings of the IEA ICCS 2009 where Estonian 14-year olds ranked as sixth among 21 countries in civic knowledge (Schulz et al., 2017) and the *ex ante* impact assessment report (Toots et al., 2014) contributed significantly to cooling down the arguments against the lower voting age. In consequence, parliamentary debates were transformed into discussions on the quality of civic and citizenship education, which in Estonian general education is a compulsory subject framed by the national curriculum. During the period of parliamentary proceedings (2012–2015) problems and challenges of civic and citizenship education have been debated three times in open sessions of the Constitutional Committee and the Committee of Cultural Affairs (that deals also with education). Various stakeholders, including organizations such as the Association of History and Civic Education Teachers, the Association of Student Unions, the Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations, the Estonian Scout Association and the Youth Parliament of Narva City participated. However, the discussions ended without any real impact on education policy, such as an amendment to the national curriculum or a revision of teacher training (Explanatory Memorandum, 2014b). The further debate focused mainly on extracurricular activities and electoral campaign regulations in schools, which brings us to a topic scarcely studied so far.

Lowering the voting age to 16 means having cohorts of voters, which are institutionally embedded because the compulsory schooling age in most European countries ends as a rule at 16 (European Commission, 2017). This is quite different from adult voters who are scattered across increasingly diverse workplaces. This novel situation raises the question,

what role will school play as an educational institution in shaping young voters' political preferences and attitudes toward electoral participation? Schwarzer and Zeglovits (2013) argue that it is important to understand how the role of schools is seen in broader national educational traditions. According to them, in one type of countries (like Austria) schools' main mission is to equip young people with knowledge, in others (like the USA)—to develop social and behavioral skills. In the former case the public expectation is that schools should teach future voters to retrieve and comprehend political information and based on this, make wise choices; out-of-school activities and mock elections are not regarded here as having paramount importance. Teachers' pedagogical approaches tend largely to follow societal expectations toward the role of schools. In addition, teachers' practices are affected by the country's political history. Reichert and Torney-Purta (2018) have found that although teachers in all countries rarely prioritize teaching political participation, this tends to be even more so in countries where democracy is not fully developed. Political participation may be thought to be inevitably partisan, causing teachers to be cautious about promoting participation. Instead, focusing on knowledge transfer and civic involvement in the local community seems to be a safer approach.

Estonia belongs to the group of knowledge-oriented countries in these typologies. This is reflected by the division of students between the vocational and general education institutions and by civic education as a compulsory subject. 73% of the 16- to 17-year-old students are enrolled in general education and by that age have typically already taken civic education classes. The majority of Estonian teachers see promoting knowledge of political institutions and citizenship rights and responsibilities as the top three aims of civic education (Schulz et al., 2017). Thus, the lowering the voting age agenda that called for teaching practical skills of political participation did not fit easily into the conventional Estonian educational approach. This concern has been voiced also by the Minister of Education at the time at the parliamentary committee meeting. 'Estonian schools are much focused on academic knowledge and less on citizenship education. It is important to make Estonian schools more open to society and engage people from outside in the classes', the Minister said (Explanatory Memorandum, 2014b, p. 1).

The following sections will analyze how the novel situation was perceived by the school staff and to what extent a readiness to change manifests itself among teachers and school headmasters. Firstly, we look

at the change of the intended and implemented curriculum, then move on to the attitudes of school staff toward teaching and practicing elections within educational institutions. To analyze attitudes, a national module added to the ICCS 2016 teacher and school questionnaire provides the empirical data.[3]

The amendment of the National curriculum in 2011 coincided with the start of public debates about lowering the voting age. Although the curriculum reform had much broader aims and was not explicitly related to the voting age agenda, topics on electoral campaign, media communication and voting behavior were included in the CCE curriculum for lower secondary schools together with relevant learning outcomes for the first time. Formally defined learning outcomes marked a turn from 'pure' knowledge toward social skills, which should enable young people to 'formulate a reasoned position as a voter' (National Curriculum, 2011). The national curriculum is a highly authoritative document for school staff in Estonia and therefore it comes as no surprise that it had an effect on teachers' declared priorities. In 2009, 66% of teachers saw promoting students' critical and independent thinking among the top three aims of the CCE, with the figure increasing to 73% in 2016 (Schulz et al., 2010, p. 182; 2017, p. 36). Critical thinking has thus become the top priority for teachers in Estonia and close to the level of prioritization found in Nordic countries (ibid.). At the same time, the lowering of the voting age had no direct effect on the prioritization of political participation. In 2009 the share of teachers who declared preparing students for future political participation as a priority was 7%, in 2016—8% (Schulz et al., 2010, 2017). All these empirical findings demonstrate how firmly Estonian school tradition holds on to developing cognitive competences instead of promoting effective engagement in social and political life.

As part of this knowledge-oriented approach, Estonian schools have been rather closed to the outer world until recent decades when the New Public Management (NPM) established itself as a dominant paradigm in national public policies. As evidenced by international research, NPM has brought about substantial revisions to school-community interactions (Furlong, Cochran-Smith, & Brennan, 2009; Le Grand, 2007). On the one hand, school staff has become sensitive to the opinion of community and political leaders, on the other hand, external experts tend to enjoy higher legitimacy than teachers and other school staff members (Woessmann, Leudemann, Schuetz, & West, 2009). The need to adapt to this new functional environment has brought about the extension of

school heads' autonomy. Today they are not solely managers who take care of finances, buildings and performance, but also 'agents of change' and 'cultural heroes' (Ball & Junemann, 2016, p. 77). School headmasters' authority to decide many aspects of teaching and extracurricular activities in schools makes them important actors also in implementing the lowering of the voting age agenda. In Estonia, the discretionary power of school headmasters manifested itself in the process of mock elections. Mock elections are organized by the ENYC since 2009 each time when real elections (local or national) are held. These elections simulate a real electoral campaign and 14- to 17-year olds can vote for the same political parties and candidates who stand as candidates in this particular district. About 7% of the age group (approx. 3000 pupils) participate each time at mock elections. The electoral campaign and the voting procedure of mock elections are all held within the school, thus, the positive attitude of the school head is of paramount importance to make elections happen.

When the lowering of the voting age to 16 was enacted, there was a remarkable fear that school heads will resist the change and in worst cases, misuse their power to interfere with elections. As the survey data (Table 9.3) suggests, the reluctant attitude is rather dominating and only a minor portion of school heads and teachers accept direct interference into electoral campaign and students' voting. Considering

Table 9.3 'In 2017, 16–17-year olds can vote at local elections. How do you see the role of the school in preparing young people to this?' % of headmasters and teachers who 'agreed' + 'completely agreed' with following statements

	Headmasters	*Teachers*
	n = *111*	n = *931*
It should be explained to students which candidate they should vote for	5	11
As a school head/as a teacher I will decide myself, which candidates are allowed to speak in the school	25	12
Independent experts should be invited in the school to explain the electoral campaign	83	83
Candidates of different political parties and electoral unions should be invited to speak in the school	38	41
Electoral campaign should be kept out of the school	69	62

Source ICCS 2016 National Module

their respective occupational position and duties, attitudes vary slightly between teachers and headmasters. However, both groups show strikingly similar and strong support to inviting independent experts to the school to explain the electoral campaign. In line with this, there is universally low support toward the enhancement of traditional pedagogical tools such as more classes and more teachers training. This can be interpreted as an effect of NPM, advocacy of 'expert democracy' and of the understanding of schools as apolitical, or as low self-confidence of teachers in election-related topics. About a third of Estonian teachers reported that they do not feel confident in election-related issues (Schulz et al., 2010).

Which factors explain, whether educational practitioners stand for or against electoral campaign in school? A regression analysis (Toots & Idnurm, 2016) revealed that among several factors (such as location and language of instruction of the school, the headmaster's membership in the political party, participation of the school in mock elections and years in the headmaster position) only one was statistically significant. If a school had participated in mock elections, then the headmasters' attitude toward taking an active position in preparing students to become voters had a positive effect. However, one must be careful in deciding, what the cause and what the consequence is, because school heads interested in politics may be friendlier toward having mock elections in the school in the first place. For teachers, the only statistically significant predictor of positive attitudes was the teaching of citizenship-related subjects; personal characteristics such as age and gender did not play a role (Toots & Idnurm, 2016). Similar to headmasters, one can expect CCE teachers to be more enthusiastic about elections regardless of the actual voting age.

Although survey data did not reveal substantial risks of partisan misconduct by the school staff during the electoral campaign, public debates continuingly emphasized it. In order to address these concerns the Ministry of Education and Research (MER) together with the Chancellor of Justice (who performs the functions of the ombudsman for children in Estonia) and the ENYC composed guidelines for schools entitled 'Elections and the school: principles to ensure neutrality of educational institutions during municipal elections' (MER, 2017). This nonbinding document was to define principles that facilitate equal treatment of all parties in the campaign period, but the central concept of the document was 'neutrality'. It means that teaching must remain normatively balanced and all election-related activities were only allowed if

they support the implementation of curriculum goals and do not disturb classes; campaign activities of political parties or candidates within school building were not allowed (MER, 2017). In line with the strong authority position of the school head, they were made responsible for deciding, 'what is right, and what is wrong' in the campaign period. At the same time, the principles warn that the headmaster must keep their professional and political positions separate and cannot misuse their authority. Thus, the principles follow the tradition of an apolitical school, which focuses on implementing the national curriculum and where the school headmaster is the key actor. To balance the headmaster's power to some extent, the movement of Young Election Watchers has been initiated by the ENYC, Chancellor of Justice and Network of Estonian Nonprofit Organizations. A major task of young people who agreed to volunteer as Election Watchers was to monitor whether schools follow the principles of neutrality and to report any cases of misconduct. Additionally, 16–19-year-old Election Watchers had the possibility to become official observers or members of the voting district committee at municipal elections.

9.5 Effect of Lowered Voting Age on the Political Composition of Municipality Councils

Opponents of lowering the voting age claim that young people have no stabile political party affiliation and may vote for extreme parties. Broader cross-country comparisons suggest that preferences and behavioral patterns of youngest voters mirror general national trends. In countries, where a higher share of adult citizens are members of a political party (Denmark, Austria, Sweden, Finland), adolescents also tend to be more likely to join a party. Moreover, in these countries, larger proportions of adolescents feel affiliated to some political party compared to those countries where party membership is typically modest (Schulz et al., 2010). Estonia belongs to European countries, where both political party membership and party identification are rather low—41% of the adult population has some party affiliation (Ehin, 2014). Among 14-year olds in Estonia, 50% declare liking a certain political party (Schulz et al., 2010) and among 16–17-year olds, 54% can name their favorite political ideology. The most popular ideologies in the latter age group are social democracy (17%) and liberalism (13%), followed by equal support for conservatism and greens (9%) (Kantar Emor, 2018).

When associating young voters' preferences with the share of votes given to the larger political parties, one can see a slight increase for the liberal Reform Party in 2017, but not for Social Democrats (Table 9.4). The Centre Party, known for the relatively older electorate has performed slightly worse than at previous local elections, as did Pro Patria—the party that several times changed its position on lowering the voting age during parliamentary proceedings. However, it would be inappropriate to interpret this association as a direct effect of voting by 16–17-year olds. First, voters' ideological preferences not necessarily match with a platform of a political party the vote has been given (Lau, Andersen, & Redlawsk, 2008; Mölder, 2013; Wagner et al., 2012). Second, there are multiple factors that affect the division of votes between political parties, the age of voters being one factor among many. To shed more light on the possible effects of young voters, we compare their ideological self-identification with the actual voting behavior at local elections 2017.

One could assume that those political parties, which were the main advocates of lowering the voting age (the liberal Reform Party and the Social Democrats) made special efforts to mobilize their newly enfranchised supporters. Thus, one could expect those 16–17-year olds who see themselves as liberals or social democrats to show up more actively compared to those young people, who affiliate themselves with conservatives. Conservatives, as explained above held a rather ambiguous position on the issue of lowering the voting age. As Table 9.5 demonstrates, liberals and Social Democrats really succeeded to build a feeling of ownership among first-time voters and bring majority of their affiliates to the polling boxes.

Table 9.4 Share of votes given to main political parties at local elections nationwide, 2009–2013, % of all votes (votes given to electoral unions are not shown)

	2009	*2013*	*2017*
Centre Party	31.5	31.9	27.3
Reform Party	16.7	13.7	19.5
Pro Patria and Res Publica Union	13.9	17.2	8.0
Social Democrats	7.5	12.5	10.4
Conservative People's Party	1.9	1.3	6.7
Greens	1.1	n.a.	0.8

Source National Electoral Committee (2018). https://www.valimised.ee/et

Table 9.5 Participation of 16–17-year olds at local elections 2017 according to ideological preferences, %

How would you identify yourself ideologically?	*Voted*	*Did not vote*
As a liberal	71.0	29.0
As a conservative	53.1	46.9
As a social democrat	63.7	36.3
As a green	60.0	40.0
Something else	47.1	52.9
Hard to say	55.9	44.1

Source Kantar Emor (2018)

9.6 Lessons Learned: Positive Aspects and Possible Risks

The strategic aim of lowering the voting age in Estonia was to engage young people more actively in debating and deciding on local public affairs (Explanatory Memorandum, 2014a). By the time of writing this chapter, it is too early to judge, to what extent this declared aim has been achieved. However, several conclusions can be made on the basis of the first voting exercise of 16–17-year olds at the local elections in 2017.

First, there was no major effect on population-level turnout. In general terms, the turnout in 2017 was lower than in two former elections but remained at the average level in a longer time perspective. The participation of 16–17-year olds was slightly higher than the average turnout but because of the relatively small share of young voters in the electorate (about 2%), it did not have an overall effect. However, this also means that concerns about 16–17-year olds participation resulting in a reduced turnout were not confirmed.

Second, there seems to be an association between the position of political parties on lowering the voting age and voting behavior of young people. Those parties that actively advocated for lowering the voting age, succeeded in increasing the share of votes and mobilize young people to show up at the polling station.

Third, the expectation that young people will prefer internet voting did not materialize. Most first-time voters preferred to cast their votes in polling stations. In contrast to the act of voting itself, the electoral campaign reached young people mainly via the Internet. 33% of 16–17-year olds got information on local elections from social media, the figure

outperforming substantially all other modes of communication (Kantar Emor, 2018). This fact suggests that regulations on electoral campaign in schools set up by the government institutions missed the target to some extent. Face-to-face agitation and printed political propaganda within the school buildings were seen as the major threats by politicians, parents and policy makers, whereas the 'real game' happened in the social media freely available within the schools and elsewhere. Although Estonia is globally known as pioneering in e-government and e-voting, no regulations on online political campaign exists.

Fourth, enfranchising 16-year olds with voting right did not break the traditions of formal civic and citizenship education, which focuses on developing cognitive competences instead of promoting effective engagement in social and political life. Political 'neutrality' and keeping electoral debates out of the school were key principles for both, school staff and the National Youth Council.

Fifth, the legal process of lowering the voting age and its first test in practice is a positive example of mobilizing various stakeholders and policy entrepreneurs. Moreover, several novel engagement arenas and tools for young people were established (Mock elections, Open sessions of the parliamentary committees, Youth Election Watchers), which facilitated familiarization with electoral processes.

Sixth, the sustainability of the lower voting age in terms of young people's engagement depends crucially on the future behavior of elected representatives. 88% of first-time voters said that it is important for them what the candidate they voted for will do as the municipality council member (Kantar Emor, 2018). This finding is in line with previous research (Bouza, 2014; Schwarzer & Zeglovits, 2013; Wattenberg, 2012) that argues 16–17-year olds having hopes for a better future of politics, rather than being as disaffected as the general population overall.

Notes

1. IEA International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) is a regular large scale assessment of adolescents' cognitive civic competences/civic knowledge, their attitudes, anticipated and effective civic engagement. The target population is 8th Grade (14-year-old) students, their teachers and school heads. Representative national samples include about 3500 students, 150 schools and about 15 teachers per school. 38 countries participated in ICCS 2009 and 24 countries in ICCS 2016; the next data collection will be in 2022. https://www.iea.nl/iccs.

2. A survey 'Youth electoral behavior in the context of municipal elections' called by the ENYC and performed by Kantar Emor after local elections 2017. The field works were carried out from 23 Jan. to 20 Feb. 2018 online (CAWI) with a representative sample of 16–17-year-old permanent residents of Estonia ($N=534$).
3. National module of ICCS 2016 teacher questionnaire and school questionnaire, $N=111$ schools, 931 teachers. The module included 10 Likert-type items identical for teacher and school head questionnaires.

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CHAPTER 10

Why Did Young Norwegians Mobilize: External Events or Early Enfranchisement?

Guro Ødegård, Johannes Bergh and Jo Saglie

10.1 Introduction

Scholars have for decades focused on how to mobilize young people politically. One reason for this academic attention is the fact that both recruitment to political parties and voter turnout has declined in Western democracies over the last 30–40 years. There is reason to believe that low turnout among young voters is partly to blame for this trend. Notably, the greatest decline occurred in most modern democracies after the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 in the 1960s and 1970s (Franklin, 2004; Gallego, 2009).

Since the current political and academic debate surrounding declining voter turnout tends to focus on the low turnout among the young, the

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increased level of participation among young voters in Norway since the local elections of 2011 comes as a surprise. While turnout numbers in general were more or less stable in the years leading up to these elections, turnout among first-time voters (aged 18–21) increased by 11 percentage points from the previous local elections held in 2007 (jumping from 35 to 46%). Membership in Norwegian youth parties also increased in 2011.

In the Norwegian context of 2011 two different types of situational shocks—or circumstances—might have increased young Norwegian's willingness to vote in local elections and to support political youth parties. The first shock was a terrorist attack that struck the Norwegian political and societal life less than two months before the election day in 2011. Secondly, the Norwegian local elections of 2011 were the testing ground for a trial where the voting age was lowered from 18 to 16 in 20 selected municipalities. Turnout was surprisingly high in this pilot, with 58% of the (9400) eligible 16- and 17-year olds taking part in the election. The trial was repeated in the next local elections in 2015, again with 20 municipalities: 10 of the same municipalities and 10 new ones. Voter turnout among trial voters remained high in 2015 when 57% voted. In 2017, the government decided that the voting age should remain 18, and the trials were discontinued. The purpose of this article is to analyze and discuss the political mobilization of young people in Norway in the last decade in light of these two events.

Scholars have considered three different mechanisms for explaining age differences in political participation: generation, period and life cycle effects (Blais, Gidengil, Nevitte, & Nadeau, 2004; Franklin, 2004; Gallego, 2009; Konzelmann, Wagner, & Rattinger, 2012; Wass, 2007). Based on a mixed-method approach using quantitative data on turnout by age, membership in political youth parties and qualitative interviews with first-time and trial voters in 2011, we discuss how these three mechanisms might explain how exogenous shocks like terror attacks and changes in political circumstances—as lowering the voting age to 16—influence adolescent political participation and mobilization both in the short and somewhat longer run in a society like Norway.

We pose two research questions, regarding the increase and level of participation, respectively. First, is the *increased* party membership and turnout among young people in 2011 a short-term period effect or can we identify a comprehensive generational effect? Second, how can we explain the exceptionally *high* turnout among 16- and 17-year olds

when compared to ordinary first-time voters? Was this a period effect of being voting pioneers in 2011 or can we identify a life cycle effect that is restricted to new, young voters?

The study highlights two core findings. First, since 2011 and the subsequent elections in 2013, 2015 and 2017 there has been a dynamic generational mobilization observed among the young people who were in their formative years when terror struck Norwegian political and social life. Although six years is a limited period in which to identify a resilient generational imprint, we argue that this time span will give some indication of this specific cohort's likely future participation habits. Secondly, the high turnout among voters between the ages of 16 and 18 in the local elections in 2011, followed up with a similarly high turnout in the local elections four years later (2015), indicate a life cycle effect that will in all likelihood persist in the next generation of high-school students. However, the two explanatory mechanisms (life cycle and generational effects) are not mutually exclusive. 16- and 17-year olds were probably also affected by the terror attacks. Given the limited time-frame, it is impossible to completely separate these effects.

The rest of the chapter is structured as follows: First, we review the literature on the relationship between age and turnout. Then, we present the extraordinary contextual conditions of the 2011 Norwegian local elections. Based on the results, we finally discuss whether the increased political mobilization among young people might be interpreted as a period effect, a life cycle effect or a generational effect.

10.2 Age Differences in Political Participation

A generational or cohort effect is often seen as something that is constant over a person's life span, and refers to the long-lasting impact on significant events on the generation that came of age at that time (see, for example, Franklin, 2004; Highton & Wolfinger, 2001). This is closely related to Mannheim's (1952) understanding of *generational imprint*: that experiences in formative years might powerfully shape subsequent political attitudes and behavior. Scholars have argued that individuals are more open to external stimuli during their "impressionable years" in late adolescence and early adulthood (Dawson & Prewitt, 1969; Easton, 1953; Hyman, 1959). Accordingly, if a generation is mobilized during its "impressionable years," this early socializing experience can have a *lasting impact* (Bartels & Jackman, 2014; Franklin, 2004;

Howe & Strauss, 2000; Plutzer, 2002). Therefore, a generational or cohort effect is often seen as something that is constant over a person's life span (Franklin, 2004; Mannheim, 1952). With regard to turnout, this means that low turnout among today's young voters will cause a drop in overall participation when these young generations replace the older electorate. In other words, by losing young voters today, we risk losing future generations of voters.

Following the sociology of generations, individuals born in the same period may share an exposure to certain socio-historical events that shape their political socialization (Edmunds & Turner, 2002; Franklin, 2004; Inglehart, 1990; Mannheim, 1952; Putnam, 2000). As Edmunds and Turner (2002, p. 12) put it:

> A generation can be defined in terms of a collective response to a traumatic event or catastrophe that unites a particular cohort of individuals into a self-conscious age stratum. The traumatic event uniquely cuts off a generation from its past and separates it from the future. The event becomes the basis of a collective ideology and set of integration rituals.

Within such a framework of understanding, we may deem acts of terror as traumatic events or catastrophes that elicit a collective response, especially among young people. Overall, there is limited research on how terrorism influences turnout in general and age-specific effects in particular. However, two studies are relevant in this regard. Age-specific effects were identified after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the United States in 2001. The first national election was held more than a year after the attacks and researchers have shown that both political confidence and engagement increased in the period immediately following September 11, 2001. Six months later, the numbers had returned to normal (Traugott et al., 2002), with the exception of one group: those who were young and in their most formative years when the attack occurred (Sander & Putnam, 2010). Unlike the older cohorts, young Americans born in the 1980s maintained a stable and high level of political interest and high turnout in the years following the terrorist attacks. This study exhibits a generational effect. In a study of Spanish voters, Bali (2007) found that the terrorist attack that took place in Spain, three days before the parliamentary election of 2004, mobilized groups with previously low turnout, such as young voters and voters without higher education. However, Bali's study did not show a long-lasting effect on

turnout in the young generation, indicating that not all traumatic events and important social, cultural and political events necessarily carry long-term effects.

A limited *period effect* is the second explanation of (changes in) age differences in participation. Period effects occur when the variation, for example in youth participation, is caused by a particular event and this influence is short term and diminishes over time. For example, Bhatti and Hansen (2012b) point to the 2009 European Parliament (EP) elections in Denmark and Latvia, where highly salient referendums were held simultaneously with the EP elections and boosted the turnout. An example from Norway is the parliamentary election in 1989 when environmental issues were high on the political agenda. This mobilized young voters in particular (Aardal & Valen, 1995). However, this effect seemed to be brief, as it could not be identified in the following parliamentary election of 1993.

The third explanation of age differences is a *life cycle effect*, which is a more or less permanent and static dimension tied to the characteristics of specific life stages. People at the age of 18 are entering a transitional phase in life; they finish secondary education and move away from home, thus leaving their old social networks and local communities behind. These shifts reduce young voters' probability of voting, but turnout increases when they get older, establish families and careers, and thus enter a more stable phase (Abramson, Aldrich, & Rohde, 1998; Highton & Wolfinger, 2001). The higher turnout among middle-aged voters is followed by a soft decline in old age. This results in a curvilinear impact of age on turnout, which has been reported since the seminal analyses were conducted in the 1930s (for reviews, see Milbrath, 1965; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980). In recent years, however, scholars have questioned the simple curvilinear relationship between age and turnout. Bhatti, Hansen and Wass (2012), using data from Denmark, Finland and Texas, have shown that whereas voters in their early twenties are characterized by low turnout, voters at the age of 18 participate to a *greater* extent than older youths. Bhatti and Hansen (2010) also found that Danish 18-year olds were more likely to vote than 19-year olds. Furthermore, they found a positive effect on the turnout of approximately 10 percentage points among young voters who still lived with both parents (Bhatti & Hansen, 2012a). When young adults have left home, the influence of their parents is presumably replaced by the influence of their peers, who are generally less likely to vote.

Since life cycle effects are supposed to remain stable, they cannot explain *declining* turnout (unless there is a substantial change in the age composition of the electorate). However, Franklin (2004) argues that voting is a habit and that a *combination* of generational replacement and life cycle effects—directly related to reduced voting age—can explain the decline. His starting point is the low turnout rate among young voters. People learn the habit of voting (or not) based on their experiences in their first few elections. It is therefore crucial that the newly enfranchised exercise their right to vote: "Turnout appears to be stable because, for most people, the habit of voting is established relatively early in their adult lives" (Franklin, 2004, p. 12). When the voting age was reduced to 18 in the late 1970s, the newly enfranchised got the right to vote during the "wrong" stage of their life cycle since they were in a transitional phase, as described above. If they did not vote in their first election—at the age of 18—then a habit of non-voting was formed. According to Franklin (2004, p. 213) the age of 18 is probably the worst possible age to enter the electorate (see also Chapter 2). In another work, Franklin (2005) has shown that there is a close relationship between length of residence in a neighborhood (and thus integration into a local community) and turnout—especially among young voters. This might be an argument for giving the franchise to younger teenagers, as they are more often already part of an established local community network. Franklin (2004, p. 213) suggests that the appropriate voting age could be 15 (see also the discussion in Milner, 2010).

10.3 Terror Attacks and Voting Age Trial as Contextual Conditions of the 2011 Local Elections

The 2011 local elections in Norway were held on September 12, less than two months after Norway was struck by a terror attack of unprecedented magnitude on July 22. A car bomb was detonated outside the offices housing the central government, killing eight people. Another 69, mostly teenagers from all around Norway, were brutally massacred at a national Labor Party youth camp on the island of Utøya, 37 kilometers outside Oslo. The perpetrator, a 32-year-old right-wing extremist, had specifically targeted political activists in a scheme designed to thwart the future of the governing party in Norway. The terror plot was publicly portrayed as an attack on the nation's democratic values and a representation of an epochal watershed (Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen,

& Ødegård, 2011). Following the call made by the prime minister on the eve of the attacks to respond to terror with "more openness, more democracy," peaceful mass mobilizations were organized throughout the country to show sympathy for the victims and to stand up for the core values of Norwegian society. Thus, what came to be termed the "Rose Marches" were characterized more by serenity and containment than by anger and fear (Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Ødegård, 2012a).

In the public debate that took place after the attacks, a consensus emerged that people's response to terrorism should be to embrace openness and democracy. Studies carried out a short time after the attacks indicate that this dramatic collective social experience made its deepest impression on young people. The feeling of unity and togetherness after July 22 was strongest among youth (Wollebæk et al., 2011, 2012a; Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Ødegård, 2012b), and the awareness of fundamental democratic values seemed to be particularly strengthened in this group. These studies indicate that one of the consequences of the attacks—at least in the short term—was increased trust in institutions of government, politicians and police.

In advance of the 2011 elections, a high turnout was expected. The general increase of three percentage points from the previous local elections was not enough to meet these expectations, but the particularly great expectations for young voters were fulfilled (turnout rose 11 percentage points from the last local election, among first-time voters, aged 18–21). Based on previous research on terrorism in general, there is no reason to expect a general increase in voter turnout after a terrorist attack. However, the fact that the perpetrator targeted Norwegian teenagers at a political summer camp might have affected the entire generation of teenagers. The Utøya victims, including the 69 dead and 495 survivors who were trapped on the island, were inhabitants of local communities that spanned the whole country. This might have shaped the feeling of collective experience for this age group, which also affected young voters in the next elections in 2013 and 2015.

The voting age in Norway has generally aligned with that of other European democracies. The last lowering of the voting age occurred when 18-year olds were given the right to vote in 1978. During the 2011 election, the very first trials were held in which 16-year olds from 20 selected municipalities were allowed to vote. As in many European countries, voting age had become a hotly debated issue in Norway. The voting age debate—in Norway as in other countries—centers on a few

key themes, including the political knowledge and "political maturity" of 16- and 17-year olds (Bergh, 2013a; Chan & Clayton, 2006; Wagner, Johann, & Kritzinger, 2012), and the potential legal or constitutional hurdles that have to be overcome (Electoral Commission, 2004; Milner, 2010; Ødegård & Aars, 2011). The center-left government that held office in Norway from 2005 until 2013 had people within its ranks that favored a lower voting age. However, the government as a whole was not ready to propose a general lowering of the voting age to 16, so it decided to lead a trial in a limited number of municipalities instead.

The government's stated reason for trialing a lower voting age was to find out if voting rights would increase political consciousness and engagement among adolescents. All of Norway's 430 municipalities could apply to participate in the trial, and 143 did so. There were various criteria for selecting municipalities for the trial. The government aimed for the greatest possible variation in terms of size, geography, location in the country, political composition of the municipal councils and the age composition of the population. With respect to these characteristics, the selected municipalities are representative of the country as a whole. The ministry in charge of the trial also looked for municipalities that had actively tried to get their youths involved in the community in various ways. This criterion did not aim for representativeness, and there is some evidence of slightly more political interest and involvement among youth in the trial municipalities than in the rest of the country (Bergh, 2013a). In the local elections that took place four years later, in 2015, a new trial was held in 20 municipalities—including 10 participants from the 2011 trial and 10 newcomers.[1]

10.4 Analysis: Youth Political Mobilization in Norway Since 2011

By analyzing statistics on local election turnout from 2007 to 2015, parliamentary election turnout from 2009 to 2017, and membership in political youth parties over time, we reveal an increased political mobilization among young people starting in 2011. First, however, we look into some of the mechanisms behind this increase by giving a qualitative description of how young people perceived the importance of taking part in the local elections in 2011, which took place only a few weeks after the terrorist attack at Utøya and in Oslo.

Qualitative Approach

In the aftermath of the 2011 election, case studies were carried out in 5 of the 20 municipalities participating in the voting age trial. This fieldwork included interviews with young people who had been involved in the municipalities' planning of the trial. All of the informants were students at local high schools and were selected to take part in the planning of the trial because of their involvement in local youth councils. In the youth councils, they represented local political youth parties, voluntary organizations, youth centers, student councils, etc. In total, 20 young people took part in the interviews. Eighteen of the informants were divided into four focus groups. Two of the informants were interviewed individually. The interviews were semi-structured; we followed an interview guide where the questions and topics we wanted to cover were noted. The interviews were digitally recorded.

In the interviews, we asked if the informants had any thoughts on how the terror on July 22 affected young people's political engagement in their municipalities. The talks between the informants centered on how the acts of terror influenced young people to vote and made young politicians and political youth parties more visible to the general public. There was a consensus that knowledge of politics and political parties had increased among youth in general in response to the attacks. Thus, the informants were deeply affected by the targets of the attacks since they were their peers. Lise was not politically active, but she felt that July 22 affected young people's political engagement and turnout. She put it this way:

> On July 22, young people died because they believed in something. I think this point in particular has been an important motivation for many young people to vote. (…) For many young people it became important that those (who died at Utøya) did not die in vain.

Several of the informants were involved in political parties. Some of them talked about how it had become "easier" to be young politicians after the terror attacks. The attention it elicited from their peers became more positive, something which Adam, a member of the Norwegian Young Conservatives, expressed in this way:

> We (young politicians) are no longer identified as nerds. Youth in general had an eye-opener. They understand that young politicians are humans and that youth parties exist.

This experience of increased respect is in line with Carl's feelings. He was a member of the Socialist Youth, the youth league of the Socialist Left Party in Norway:

> We are no longer seen as "precocious". Now it has become something that gives you status to express your political opinion.

To have opinions, to argue for political solutions, to have standpoints and to represent something are values that gained an appreciation after July 22. Julie was a member of the youth division of the Norwegian Labor Party (AUF) that was attacked on July 22. Similar to Adam, she thought that political knowledge among young people had increased after the terror attacks. When wearing her AUF button, "at least youth know what AUF is committed to," she said.

The informants also talked about the intense media focus on young politicians in the weeks after the terror. Lise felt that this extensive focus from the media has been a "wake-up call" for people in general. The focus on young people also led to an unusually large number of candidates below the age of 26 becoming councilors after the local election of 2011. Previous research shows that many of these young councilors were elected because voters gave preference votes to young candidates (Saglie, Ødegård, & Aars, 2015).

Quantitative Evidence

Can this general sense of a generational shift among the current generation of young voters in Norway be borne out in quantitative data on political mobilization since 2011? Though it is too soon to determine if a generational shift has taken place, we do have a few data points since 2011 that are worth exploring.

Voter turnout in political elections in Norway, as in most other democracies, is strongly influenced by life cycle effects. Figure 10.1 displays the turnout levels in individual age cohorts in the Norwegian parliamentary election of 2017 and in the local elections of 2015. The results are taken from municipalities that have implemented a system of electronic registration of turnout. This includes the vast majority of municipalities and voters in 2017 but somewhat fewer in 2015.[2] This makes the data ideal for a detailed study of the relationship between age and turnout.

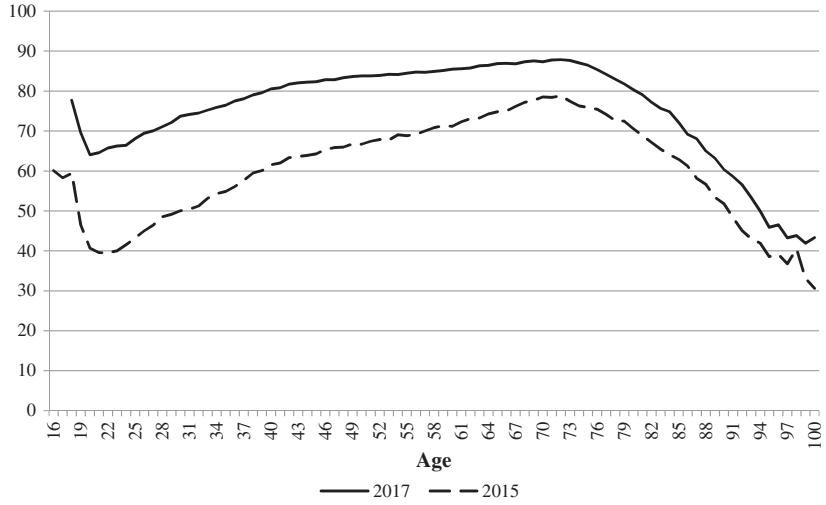

Fig. 10.1 Voter turnout by age in the 2017 Norwegian parliamentary election and in the 2015 local elections (in %)

The youngest eligible voters in the 2017 parliamentary election demonstrate a turnout rate that is close to the average for the entire population (the overall participation rate was 78.2%). Turnout then drops sharply once voters are beyond the age at which they attend high school. Those in their early twenties are less likely to vote than most other age groups; 20-year olds seem to be the most passive, with a turnout rate of 64%. Turnout rises as people get older and enter middle age. Toward the end of their lives, people again become less frequent voters, probably because of health issues.

The data from the 2015 local elections reveal a similar pattern. We also include 16- and 17-year olds in this figure. Turnout in Norway's local elections is generally lower than it is in parliamentary elections. Life cycle effects are evident in 2015, perhaps even more so than in 2017. For instance, comparing low-turnout 20-year olds to high-turnout 70-year olds, we find a difference of 38 percentage points in 2015. The corresponding figure for the 2017 election is 24 percentage points. High-school students, including the age cohorts from 16 through 18, have about an average level of voter turnout in 2015 (the total turnout rate in this election was 60.2%). This is in line with the above-mentioned

findings of Bhatti and Hansen: 18-year olds are characterized by higher turnout than their slightly older peers. Moreover, just as Zeglovits and Aichholzer (2014) found in Austria, this pattern becomes even more evident when we include voters between the ages of 16 and 17. The vast majority in these age cohorts are high school students; they live with their parents or guardians and are part of established social networks. These young voters have a stable living situation, and they attend schools where they learn about democracy and elections.

The middle-aged are clearly at an advantage when it comes to voter turnout, but again, in 2015, the frequency of voting drops off as one enters old age. These patterns are stable over time, from one election to the next, and are highly suggestive of life cycle effects.

There is little reason to doubt that a voter's period of life influences his or her likelihood of voting. However, it does not preclude the possibility that there are generational differences in voting and that period effects may also occur.

In order to explore this, we need to use time-series data. Using the Norwegian National Election Studies for parliamentary and local elections, respectively, we look at changes over time in the age differences in voting. Figure 10.2 displays the differences between the turnout levels in individual age groups, on the one hand, and turnout in the entire electorate, on the other. This holds life cycle effects stable. Any changes over time for specific age groups are suggestive of generational change; definitive proof of a generational shift would of course require longer time-series.

Starting with parliamentary elections from 2009 through 2017, average deviations in turnout with respect to most age groups are stable. Middle-aged voters are above average with respect to voter turnout, while the age groups below the age of 30 have a voting frequency that is clearly lower than the rest of the population. The two youngest age groups, "first time voters" (aged 18–21) and "second time voters" (aged 22–25), start out with the lowest level of turnout in 2009, but then witnesses a distinct increase over time, especially between 2009 and 2013.

The same development seems to occur in local elections, where there is an increase in turnout from 2007 to 2011. In the local elections of 2011, 65% of the eligible voters turned out to vote; thus representing an increase of three percentage points since the previous election in 2007. First-time voters turned out to vote at a rate of 46%, which is 11 percentage points higher than in the previous election. We do not find the same increased turnout among voters older than 21. In the 2015 election, the

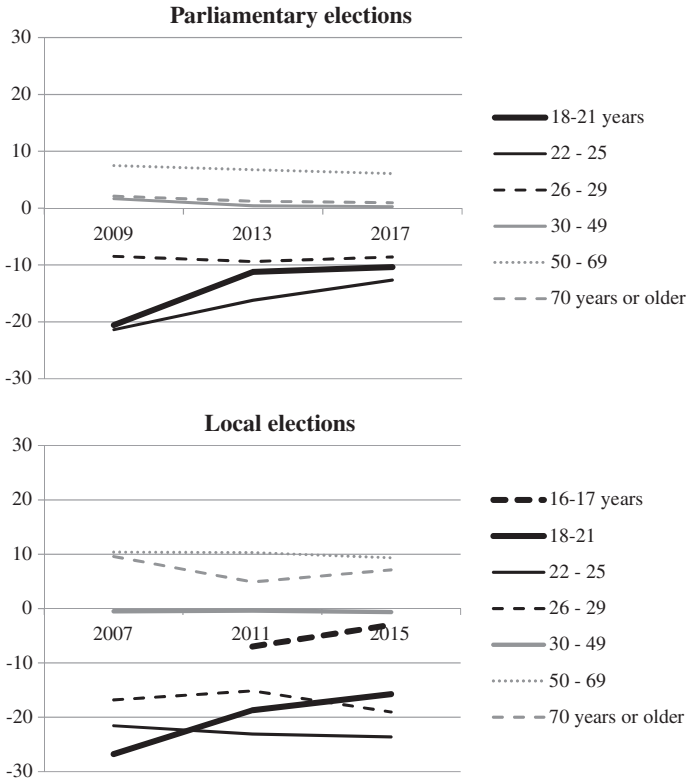

Fig. 10.2 Differences in voter turnout between voters in general and various age groups in Norwegian elections from 2007 to 2017 (in percentage points)

general turnout declined by 5 percentage points when compared to the previous local election (from 65 to 60%). The turnout among first-time voters was more or less on the same level as it was in the 2011 election. Hence, the relative increase in Fig. 10.2.

Turnout among the newly enfranchised adolescents, aged 16 and 17, in the trial municipalities was 58% in the 2011 election and approximately the same level four years later (57%). This is somewhat lower than the overall turnout level. However, compared to the turnout rate for other young voters, this is remarkably high. There is a small and close to insignificant difference between this age group and voters in general in 2015.

For all other age groups in Fig. 10.2, there is a pattern of stability from one election to the next. This stability probably reflects the consistent life cycle effects that were evidenced in Fig. 10.1. The main question that emanates from Fig. 10.2 is, therefore: What explains the relative (and absolute) increase in turnout in the 18–21 age cohort over time? Whatever explains that change may also contribute to explaining the extraordinarily high turnout levels among those aged 16 and 17. In order to explore that further, we need to look for generational or period effects. If there is a generational effect in turnout, then we also expect to find an increased mobilization in other political institutions, such as political parties.

Until 2012, eight youth wings of Norway's regular political parties received funding from the Norwegian government through the grant scheme "Frifond."[3] After 2012, Young Greens of Norway was established and received funding for the first time in 2013.[4] The amount of financial support given depends on the number of paying members under the age of 26 and the number of local branches. Based on this self-reported data, we analyze membership changes in youth parties from 2005 to 2017.

As shown in Fig. 10.3, the political youth parties in Norway increased their membership by 6000 between 2010 and 2011 (11,060–17,066). This is not merely an effect of increased sympathy for the Worker's Youth

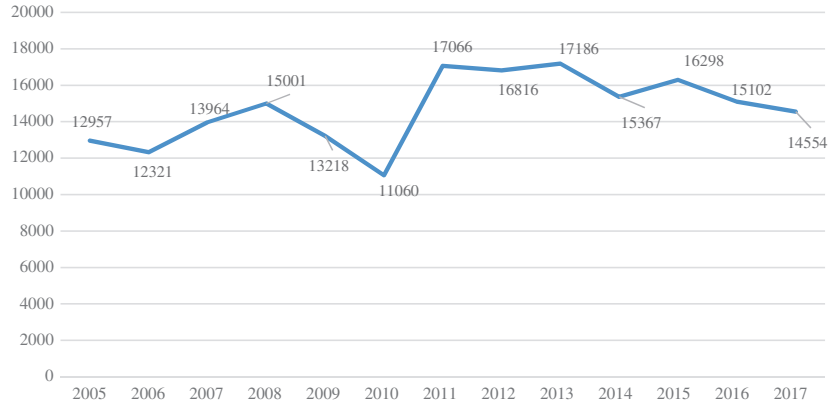

Fig. 10.3 Number of paying members under the age of 26 in Norwegian political youth parties, 2005–2017

League (AUF), which was attacked on July 22. On the contrary, all of the eight youth parties reported an increased membership by the end of 2011 (Ødegård, 2014). Two years later, in 2013, the membership numbers for these organizations were approximately the same as they were in 2011. Starting in 2011, youth involvement in political parties appears to have gone up and remained high until 2013.

However, we can identify a decrease in numbers from 2013 to 2017. It is primarily the largest youth parties that lost members, and in particular, the youth wing of the Conservatives, which became the governing party after the 2013 parliamentary election.[5] Nevertheless, despite some fluctuations during this period, the total youth party membership in 2017 is still at a higher level than it was before 2011. Party membership in general also increased in 2011, but this was a much more short-lived increase: the total number of paid-up party members in Norway had almost reverted to the 2010 level in 2012 (Allern, Heidar, & Karlsen, 2016, p. 52).

In conclusion, the findings concerning electoral turnout and membership in political parties, supplemented by the qualitative data, indicate that the terror attacks increased young people's awareness, knowledge and interest in the conventional and established element of our political system.

10.5 Discussion: An Utøya Generation?

In both the local elections of 2011 and 2015 and the parliamentary election of 2013 and 2017, we can identify a remarkable increase in turnout among young voters. At the same time, the general turnout either remained stable or decreased in the older age groups. In 2011 membership in political youth parties also increased. To understand this changed pattern of participation, we have to distinguish between life cycle, generation and period effects.

The findings indicate that our data tell two different stories. First, since 2011, there has been a dynamic generational mobilization observed among the young people who were in their formative years when terror struck Norwegian political and social life. The other story is the story of stability in maintaining a high voter turnout among youth between the ages of 16 and 18. Within this group, we can identify a life cycle effect that will, in all likelihood, persist in the next generation of high-school students. Hence, our explanatory factors are linked to both generational and life cycle effects.

A Generational Effect After the July 22 Terror Attacks

In the aftermath of July 22, it seems that young people's awareness of fundamental democratic values and the democratic role of political parties increased—directly contradicting the terrorist's aims. Following the sociology of generations, such traumatic events might influence young people's political outlooks and participation throughout their lifetimes (Edmunds & Turner, 2002). Based on a total appraisal of the situation, the findings indicate that this is a more politically oriented generation—one that has been referred to as "the Utøya generation" (Bergh, 2015). The current generation of young voters in Norway is more politically active and engaged than prior generations. We have identified a notable increase in political mobilization among first-time voters since the Norwegian local elections of 2011. Furthermore, the number of members in political youth parties has increased since the terror attacks in 2011. This high level has remained more or less stable in the following six years. Additionally, in a more extensive analysis, Bergh (2015) finds evidence of political mobilization on a broad range of indicators (such as political interest, participation in various political activities and political trust). Hence, today's young Norwegians are more politically active than the previous generations.

But why did the terror not mobilize older age groups to the same extent? According to the theory of generational effect, an epochal watershed, such as the July 22 terror attacks, makes a lasting impression and influences the values of younger adults in their formative years to a greater extent than it does older generations (Edmunds & Turner, 2002; Sander & Putnam, 2010; Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Carpini, 2006).

The development over time makes it likely that the increased turnout did not represent a limited period effect. Rather, the high turnout among second-time voters both in the 2013 parliamentary election and in the 2015 local elections, combined with a decreased turnout in the electorate in general, strongly indicates a generational effect.

A Life Cycle Effect Among High-School Students

Why did the 16-, 17-, and 18-year olds turn out to vote in higher numbers than other young voters under the age of 30? Their high turnout may not necessarily be a reflection of true engagement and increased

political interest in the aftermath of the terror attack in Norway (see also Bergh, 2013b). An alternative explanation would be that the extraordinary mobilization was an effect of being "voting pioneers" as a result of taking part in the trial. Hence, this would indicate a limited period effect. A previous study has shown that the voting age trial in 2011 attracted significant attention in local, regional and national media and it was a prestige project for the participating municipalities (Ødegård & Saglie, 2013). High turnout among 16- and 17-year olds was—in their eyes (and the eyes of the media)—necessary if the trial should be considered a success. This means that high turnout, to some extent, could be the result of a "Hawthorne effect" caused by the trial itself, and would not necessarily reoccur in future elections if 16 were to become the regular voting age (Ødegård & Saglie, 2013). However, the second voting age trial in 2015 weakened this hypothesis. The fact that the turnout remained more or less stable among trial voters in the local election of 2015—and also in the municipalities that took part in both trials (2011 and 2015)—strengthens the assumption that the high turnout among this limited group of voters cannot be explained as a limited period effect caused by being "voting pioneers."

However, based on two similar trials held in two subsequent local elections in Norway, our empirical data clearly indicates a life cycle effect among 16-, 17- and 18-year olds. The vast majority in these age cohorts have stable living situations, live with their parents or guardians, are high school students learning about democracy and elections and are part of established social networks. These findings seem to be robust, as they are in line with research from other countries where the voting age has been reduced (e.g., Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014). In addition, previous research has shown that leaving home has a negative impact on turnout in the short run (Bhatti & Hansen, 2012a; Smets, 2012). It is thus reasonable to believe that this life cycle effect is a general phenomenon that also applies to other democracies.

10.6 Concluding Remarks

A discussion of turnout among young Norwegian voters since 2011 must necessarily be complex: There was both a terrorist attack aimed at young people and a voting age trial. It is not possible to completely separate the effects of these events but the extraordinarily high turnout among

the 16- and 17-year-old trial voters—together with similar findings from other countries—points to a life cycle effect. This is not only of interest for research on youth and political participation but it has also implications for the voting age debate. If the voting age is lowered to 16, there is reason to believe that turnout will be reasonably high.

Whereas a life cycle effect can explain the *level* of turnout among the young, our conclusions on the *increase* in turnout remain somewhat tentative. The question is whether the terror attacks triggered a generational effect where young voters in the future will be more willing to exercise their right to vote, or just a short-lived period effect. As Converse (1976, p. 80) pointed out, the distinction between generational and period effects may be hazy. We have argued that there are good reasons to believe that this is a generational effect. However, the time span of our study is limited. It must be left to future research to analyze future developments—and thus confirm or reject our conclusions.

The future trajectory of youth involvement in Norwegian politics will in part depend on whether the voting age is permanently lowered to 16 or not. Even though the trials were discontinued in 2017, recent developments suggest that a lower voting age is within the realm of possibility. In a series of local referenda on municipal amalgamations held in Norway from 2015 through 2017, 165 of 213 municipalities (77.5%) used a voting age of 16 (Klausen, 2017, p. 48). Currently, voting at 16 in general elections is only officially supported by smaller center-left parties. However, the largest party in Norway, the Labor Party, is moving on the issue. At the time of writing (in 2019), they favor "a further development" of the previous voting age trials.[6] The youth wing of the Labor party (AUF) favor a full-scale lowering of the voting age. If the party as a whole embraces voting at 16, a parliamentary majority for a voting age reform is within reach.

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Notes

1. Local elections in Norway include elections for both county and municipal councils but 16- and 17-year olds were only allowed to vote in the municipal elections.
2. This computerized system was implemented in 27 municipalities in 2015 (including the largest cities), which covered 42% of the electorate.
3. See www.frifond.no. The eight are: Workers' Youth League (AUF), The Norwegian Young Conservatives (UH), The Progress Party's Youth (FpU), Young Liberals of Norway (UV), Socialist Youth Norway (SU), Red Youth (Rød Ungdom), The Centre Youth (Senterungdommen), The Young Christian Democrats (KrfU).
4. Young Greens reported 468 members in 2013.
5. The Young Conservatives lost 1824 members from 2013 to 2017 (from 4917 to 3093 members). In the same period, membership in the Labor Party's youth wing—The Workers' Youth League (AUF)—dropped from 6223 to 4738 (a loss of 1485 members). During the same period, smaller youth parties like the Centre Youth, the Red Youth and the Socialist Youth, experienced a slight increase in membership.
6. Labor's party programme for 2017–2021, page 75. Downloaded from https://www.arbeiderpartiet.no/om/partiprogram/.

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CHAPTER 11

Lowering the Voting Age from the Ground Up: The United States' Experience in Allowing 16-Year Olds to Vote

Joshua A. Douglas

11.1 Introduction

When first presented with the idea to lower the voting age to sixteen, many people in the United States seemed to have a visceral negative reaction. Voting at eighteen has become the accepted norm. Yet a discussion over lowering the voting age in the United States has gained steam in the recent years, with several municipalities passing the reform and others debating it.

The Twenty-Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1971, lowered the voting age in all U.S. elections from twenty-one to eighteen. Until recent action began in 2013 to lower it to sixteen, hardly anyone was considering another change to the voting age and all jurisdictions used age eighteen as the starting point for voting for virtually all elections.[1] Then, in 2013, Takoma Park, Maryland lowered the

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voting age to sixteen for local elections. A few other places in Maryland subsequently adopted the practice as well. Next, places in California considered the reform for their own elections. Now larger jurisdictions are having the debate.

This conversation has occurred alongside a nationwide debate over youth engagement and gun rights stemming from a February 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The surviving Parkland students became the face of a movement for gun control and greater youth civic engagement. Given that young people were driving this national conversation, numerous academics, journalists, and advocates wrote that the time was ripe to give these inspiring young people political power at the ballot box (Bouie, 2018; Douglas [CNN], 2018; *Washington Post*, 2018). That is, the discussions over gun rights and lowering the voting age became intertwined thanks in part to the examples that the Parkland students set in the aftermath of the tragedy.

Given this greater exposure to the idea, larger cities, such as Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles, have considered whether to lower the voting age for elections in their jurisdictions. Thus, it appears that there could be further developments in the next few years regarding who can vote in local elections.

The story of lowering the voting age in the United States, however, lacks uniformity across the country, with significant regional differences in whether the reform is even legally possible. Many state laws prevent their municipalities from expanding local voting rights (Douglas [*George Washington Law Review*], 2017a). In addition, this movement has been isolated to cities dominated by the Democratic Party.

The experiences of the localities that *have* enacted the change suggest that the policy has the potential to increase voter turnout among youths and bring younger voices into policy discussions in these cities. Yet not all localities that have lowered the voting age have experienced a significant increase in voter turnout. One lesson in implementation is that advocates have had greater success when they couple lowering the voting age with an overall push for sustained democratic participation and improved civics education for the entire electorate. Moreover, at least one jurisdiction's voters, in Golden, Colorado, overwhelmingly rejected the idea of lowering the voting age, and the short campaign there can provide insights into why certain campaigns have been successful while others have fallen short. Further, political maneuvering held up the

measure in the Washington, D.C. city council, offering insights into the political issues inherent in the idea even in a Democratic-leaning city.

This chapter first discusses the legal structure of election administration in the United States, explaining why localities in some states can expand suffrage to sixteen- and seventeen-year olds while municipalities in other states do not have that same authority. The chapter then provides a brief history of the voting age in U.S. elections, which borrowed from the British common law practice of setting the age at twenty-one and shifted to eighteen nationwide through a constitutional amendment in 1971. Importantly, nothing in federal law forbids a state or locality from lowering the voting age below eighteen, although state laws can prevent their localities from enacting this reform. Next, the chapter tells the stories of the initial Maryland and California cities that lowered the voting age. These stories show how young people themselves have been at the forefront of the movement, advocating for their own suffrage. The chapter then highlights the ongoing debates in other U.S. cities and states that are considering the reform, with lessons from both the successes and setbacks. Finally, the chapter concludes with some key takeaways about the local focus of the movement, the importance of a sustained, youth-driven campaign, and the partisanship that necessarily accompanies this debate.

11.2 Structure of Election Administration in the United States

The U.S. government does not run any elections, whether for president, Congress, or state or local offices. Instead, states and localities regulate election administration.

The U.S. Constitution says that the states shall direct the "times, places and manner" of holding federal elections unless Congress intervenes (Article I, Section 4). In addition, various constitutional amendments set a floor on certain voter eligibility criteria, providing that states cannot deprive people of the right to vote based on race (15th Amendment), sex (19th Amendment), inability to pay a poll tax (24th Amendment), or age of eighteen or older (26th Amendment). To be sure, given the U.S. Constitution's Supremacy Clause—which says that federal law is the supreme law of the land—any state or local laws would still have to comply with federal mandates on the voting process

(such as the federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 or the Help America Vote Act of 2002), but those laws leave ample room for state regulation. That is, state and local laws can be more expansive than federal requirements.

Because of this structure, states may run their elections in vastly different ways, even for the presidential election. Voting hours, polling machines, and even eligibility rules can vary across states. In fact, the actual administration of an election is most often left up to municipalities under the province of county clerks. The voting rules, therefore, can vary even within a state, with voters in one area using different rules or procedures as compared to voters in another part of the same state.

With respect to the voting age, the Twenty-Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution forbids states from denying the right to vote to those aged eighteen or older, but it says nothing about whether a state (or a locality within a state) may grant voting rights to those younger than eighteen.

For their part, state laws mandate a uniform statewide voting age (of eighteen), but some also allow localities to lower it for local elections under the doctrine of "home rule." Thus, to determine whether a municipality in a given state can enact local-specific rules for their elections, one needs to examine the state's home rule law. Some states, such as Maryland and California, grant broad home rule powers to most of their localities, while many other states give no authority whatsoever to their counties, cities, or towns. In other states, the determination of whether localities have home rule authority is open to interpretation or is otherwise sufficiently complex. For instance, in Massachusetts, the legislature must approve each local-specific rule that a municipality adopts (Douglas, 2017a).

The ability to lower the voting age to sixteen in a U.S. municipality requires several levels of analysis. The first question, as noted above, is whether state law even allows localities to craft their own voting rules. A municipality simply cannot act if state law does not grant it that power. The second question asks how a local reform can come about. In some places, only the city council can make the change. In others, the voters have the ability to put a local measure on the ballot. And some jurisdictions, such as San Francisco, require both methods: The city council must authorize a ballot initiative to go to the voters. Finally, one must examine the local politics. Do the people embrace the benefits of lowering the voting age, at least for local elections, as compared to the common arguments against the practice? Or do people mostly adhere to the

status quo? The places that have lowered the voting age in the United States have cleared all three hurdles: state law allows the practice; the city council, the voters, or both have approved the measure; and the politics were ripe—especially after sustained advocacy from youths themselves, as discussed below.

11.3 Brief History of the Voting Age in U.S. Elections

At its Founding, the voting age in American elections was twenty-one. This practice was largely due to a historical accident. The states borrowed from British common law, which had set the voting age at that level. That tradition came from medieval times, as twenty-one "was the age at which a medieval adolescent was thought capable of wearing a suit of heavy armor and was therefore eligible for knighthood" (Cheng, 2016, p. 9). For almost 200 years, then, the remnants of British practice dictated the common rule in the United States to set the voting age at twenty-one.

Lowering the voting age to eighteen had its genesis in World War II, when Congress lowered the draft age from twenty-one to eighteen and various advocates argued in favor of lowering the voting age as well. Although a proposal to lower the voting age stalled in Congress, in 1943 Georgia was the first state to lower its voting age to eighteen. As Professor Jenny Diamond Cheng recounts, "the slogan 'old enough to fight, old enough to vote,' likely dates to this campaign" (Cheng, 2016, p. 10). There was continued activity in the 1950s and 1960s, with Kentucky voters approving a constitutional amendment in 1955 to lower the voting age to eighteen for state elections. But voters in other states rejected similar proposals (Cheng, 2016). Alaska's voting age was nineteen and Hawaii's was twenty when they each entered the Union in 1959 (Neale, 1983).

The real action on nationwide change stemmed from the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Eighteen-year olds were sent off to fight in a war of which many of them disapproved. Further, protests and demonstrations on college campuses across the country created a need for a peaceful outlet for young people's political expression (Cheng, 2016). Congress stepped in with a federal law to lower the voting age to eighteen, but the Supreme Court invalidated the portion of the law that regulated state and local elections as beyond Congress's purview

(Oregon v. Mitchell, 1970). Ultimately, the Twenty-Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in 1971, lowered the voting age to eighteen for all elections in the United States. Under the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, a state may not deny the right to vote to anyone aged eighteen or older. Importantly, however, this language does not prohibit a state or locality from lowering the voting age even further. It just says that a state cannot raise the voting age above eighteen.

Some states already let younger people vote in certain elections: seventeen states and Washington, D.C. allow seventeen-year olds to vote in a primary election if they will be eighteen by the general election that year (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2018b). The theory seems to be that, since these individuals will be eligible to vote in the general election, they should be allowed to select the nominees as well. A handful of states also allow sixteen- or seventeen-year olds to preregister to vote so that these individuals are already on the voter registration list when they turn eighteen (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2018a). These reforms, however, are meaningfully different from actually lowering the voting age itself to sixteen, which a handful of cities in the United States have done in recent years.

11.4 The Recent History of Lowering the Voting Age in American Cities

Initial Adoption in Maryland Towns

In 2013, Takoma Park, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C. with a population of about 18,000, became the first American city to lower the voting age to sixteen for municipal elections. The measure was the brainchild of Council Member Tim Male, who had learnt that Scotland was debating whether to lower the voting age for its 2014 Independence Referendum. He liked the idea, so he began to explore whether the change was possible for Takoma Park elections. Maryland grants its localities (with the exception of Baltimore) broad home rule power, so there were no legal impediments to this change (Douglas, 2019).

Council Member Male partnered with fellow Council Member Seth Grimes to promote a Right to Vote resolution and adopt numerous changes to Takoma Park elections, which included lowering the voting age to sixteen. Several other stakeholders became involved or gave

advice, such as Rob Richie, the executive director of a democracy reform group called FairVote, and Bill Bystricky, who was the head of the National Youth Rights Association. These individuals shared studies they had read from other countries showing that younger first-time voters exhibited higher turnout than even slightly older teenagers. For instance, one study from Austria demonstrated that "electoral turnout of 16- and 17-year-olds was significantly higher than turnout of older first-time voters (18 to 20)" (Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014). Yet the most meaningful advocacy came from young people themselves. Several teenagers testified before the town council on the importance of civic engagement and their desire to participate in their local democracy (Douglas, 2019). As Male noted when he testified before the Washington, D.C. city council in support of a lower voting age for that city,

> the most important thing that we heard by far, was a plea by well-informed articulate and diverse residents of our city that they wanted to participate in our democracy as voters. They just happened to be sixteen- and seventeen-years-old at the time. And as a believer in democracy, I just don't know how you say 'no' to a resident who asks for that most fundamental privilege and right. (Male, 2018)

The debate on the proposal lasted about eight months and included two public hearings. Eventually, the city council passed a measure by a 6–1 vote to reform the city's elections and lower the voting age. Although the reasons behind the one "no" vote on the city council are not abundantly clear, some residents who opposed the measure expressed concern that teenagers would simply copy their parents' vote or, conversely, would purposefully vote contrary to their parents' wishes (Governing, 2013).

Takoma Park implemented the change for its 2013 mayoral and city council election. The voting rate of newly enfranchised sixteen- and seventeen-year olds exceeded turnout among the rest of the electorate by a significant margin. The turnout rate for this age cohort was about 44%, while citywide the turnout rate among registered voters was around 10%—and the election had few contested seats (including for mayor, which had only one candidate on the ballot). However, these percentages obscure the underlying data: there were only about 370 eligible sixteen- and seventeen-year olds in the small city, and of those, only 134 registered to vote (which included the possibility of same-day registration during the early voting period). Thus, although

turnout among registered sixteen- and seventeen-year olds was higher than the participation rate for other age groups, the raw numbers were still somewhat low (Vote16USA, 2016).

Turnout among sixteen- and seventeen-year olds in Takoma Park has continued to outpace older adults. In the 2014 special election for one district, registered sixteen- and seventeen-year olds turned out at a rate of 34%, compared to an overall turnout rate of 28% in that district. In 2015, turnout among these younger voters citywide was 45%, compared to an overall turnout rate of 21% (Vote16USA, 2016). In 2017, 48% of registered sixteen- and seventeen-year olds voted, as compared to an overall turnout rate of 22% (Male, 2018). Of course, in each two-year election cycle, there are new voters who have turned sixteen and are now eligible to vote in city elections (Table 11.1).

Council Member Male also points to less quantifiable—yet vitally important—positive effects of lowering the voting age in his city. As he told the D.C. city council,

> Since we made this change, teens have come to candidate debates. They testify at public meetings. They reach out to their elected officials to ask for services or assistance, often quite a bit more politely than older voters. We've also had teens organize Rock-the-Vote events. Teens have hosted and moderated candidate debates and participated in other ways that are inspiring. Our city now has a thriving Youth Council, offering expert opinion on the kinds of services and initiatives that would matter most to young people (Male, 2018).

Male also touted economic benefits for the city: "I continue to hear from residents who picked our city to move to from somewhere distant,

Table 11.1 Turnout in Takoma Park, MD local elections

	Turnout among registered sixteen and seventeen-year olds (%)	*Overall turnout among all registered voters (%)*
2013 election	44	10
2014 special election (only one district)	34	28
2015 election	45	21
2017 election	48	22

because they have heard it's such 'a great place to raise kids … we even let them vote'" (Male, 2018). Civics education in the local high school has included a discussion of the reform and the ways in which local politics affect young people (Vote16USA, 2016). As one student said, "In a place where you already felt so connected to the city, it made you feel that much more connected to political candidates. Lowering the voting age and showing young people that their vote counts is the first step in showing young people that they have to be involved" (Vote16USA, 2016). Takoma Park's Mayor recognized the need for outreach to these younger voters. For her successful 2015 campaign, Kate Stewart employed a seventeen-year-old campaign manager, and Stewart actively connected with younger voters, running ads in the high school's newspaper and organizing an event specifically for high school students (Vote16USA, 2016). If there have been negative reactions to the change in Takoma Park, they have not entered the literature or media accounts.

After watching Takoma Park's reform, Council Member Patrick Paschall of Hyattsville, Maryland introduced a charter amendment to lower the voting age to sixteen in his city. Once again, young people were instrumental in convincing the majority of the city council to adopt this change, which passed in 2015 by a 7–4 vote. As Bill Bystricky of the National Youth Rights Association said, teenagers attended the crucial city council meeting on the idea and, based on their testimony, "one by one they flipped the opposing city council members" (Douglas, 2019, p. 17). Bystricky noted that "Hyattsville is a working-class town whose leadership was known for sticking to the tried and true" (Douglas, 2019, p. 17). One resident who was opposed to the measure said, "I just felt like 18 was considered to be adult.… To me, it's just highlighting a lot of contradictions in our society" (Bennett, 2015). Yet most of the opposition on the city council was over who should make the decision to lower the voting age: the voters in a referendum or the council itself. One council member who voted "no" explained, "What [my constituents] could agree on was that it go to referendum, and so therefore, I support the referendum. And that's it" (Bennett, 2015).

In 2015, the first Hyattsville election when sixteen- and seventeen-year olds could vote, only eleven individuals registered and four of them voted (Vote16USA, 2016). By 2017, there were 105 registered sixteen- and seventeen-year olds, but only eight of them voted, a measly 7.5% turnout rate (Reams, 2018). That is lower than the 15% overall turnout in the city (City of Hyattsville, 2017).

Determining why lowering the voting age in Hyattsville did not have a significant impact on electoral participation requires some speculation. The youth advocacy group Vote16USA notes that teachers at the local high school did not meaningfully engage their classes on civic participation, perhaps because Hyattsville students comprised only a small part of the total student population and students from surrounding towns who attended the school could not yet vote. Some teachers apparently "were reluctant to discuss the change as it only applied to students from Hyattsville" (Vote16USA, 2016, p. 7). Although students in Takoma Park also comprised only a portion of their high school, teachers there "discuss[ed] Takoma Park's recently lowered voting age when teaching about enfranchisement and the role of citizens in democracy" (Vote16USA, 2016, p. 5). Further, Vote16USA noted that Takoma Park undertook the reform "in the context of a broader effort to increase voter turnout and citizen engagement on the local level" (Vote16USA, 2016, p. 8). It is less apparent whether Hyattsville's change came amidst a more general push for civic engagement throughout the electorate.

Yet just like in Takoma Park, the effects of lowering the voting age in Hyattsville may go beyond voter turnout. Soon after adopting the measure, the city created a Teen Advisory Committee to offer recommendations to the city council about issues that impact young residents (Vote16USA, 2016).

One significant takeaway from both Takoma Park and Hyattsville, the first two American cities to lower the voting age to sixteen, is that young people were crucial to the effort. As Vote16USA explained, "In both cities, public testimony from young people themselves is what clinched the votes needed to pass the charter amendments. Furthermore, when young people lead the way to make this change, they are likely to stay engaged with crucial voter education and registration efforts" (Vote16USA, 2016, p. 8). Yet merely lowering the voting age is not enough by itself and may lead to low turnout among this population. Meaningfully engaging young people in the political process even after changing the law is also crucial to sustain high voter participation.

Greenbelt, Maryland was the next locality to join in, agreeing in 2018 to lower the voting age for its local elections. To demonstrate support for the idea among the city's young residents, the Greenbelt Youth Advisory Committee conducted a survey of 159 local high school students; 92.45% said that, if allowed, they would vote in local elections. That contrasts with a survey of all Greenbelt residents, 77%

who indicated that they would oppose lowering the voting age to sixteen (Douglas, 2019, p. 17). People seemed to have a knee-jerk reaction to the idea given that voting at eighteen has become so entrenched in American elections. In fact, the city council first rejected the proposal in August 2017. Young people then led a campaign to convince the city's voters to direct its city council to adopt the reform (Smith, 2017). The nonbinding referendum passed in November 2017, with 53% of the vote. The city council then unanimously endorsed the idea in January 2018, which will go into effect for the November 2019 election (Douglas, 2019).

Glenarden, Maryland lowered its voting age to sixteen in 2016, but then repealed that law and raised it back to eighteen a year later. It is not clear whether there was vigorous local youth engagement on the issue or why the city reversed course. In 2018, Riverdale, Maryland lowered its own voting age to sixteen. Thus, as of this writing, Maryland has seen the most action on this reform (National Youth Rights Association, 2018). Other Maryland cities have also embraced expanded voting rights—for instance, some municipalities have enfranchised noncitizen residents—so further activity to lower the voting age in more places in Maryland is likely.

The Idea Spreads to Other U.S. Cities

The movement to lower the voting age in the United States is not limited to small cities in Maryland. In 2016, Berkeley, California voters embraced a lower voting age for school board elections. The effort began in September 2015, when a group of students at Berkeley High School met to consider social justice issues at their school, such as racism and sexual assault. They discussed how to make an impact on school policy, which in turn led the students to seek voting rights for school board elections. Around that same time, Berkeley school board member Josh Daniels sat down with some students to hear their views on youth civic engagement. He backed the students' idea to convince the city council and the city's voters to lower the voting age for school board elections. As Daniels noted, "We supported them, but we would not have done this if they had not done all of the hard work" (Douglas, 2019, p. 18). The young activists then went to the city council, which unanimously agreed to put a measure on the ballot to lower the voting age to sixteen for school board elections. The students ran the campaign, canvassing at

public transportation stops and grocery stores and going door-to-door. They also sought buy-in from school board members and educators. In November 2016, Berkeley voters approved the measure with over 70% of the vote.

Daniels said that the measure passed largely because youths themselves were the catalyst behind the change. In addition, they focused on gaining support among key local stakeholders, such as council members, school board members, and election officials. The Berkeley experience shows that a holistic approach that involves young people and elected officials can create the proper mechanism for passage. The students had to counter the idea that they were not old enough or mature enough to vote, in part by modeling civic participation through their advocacy for this measure. The city is now in the process of implementing the change for the 2020 election. The local election officials must wade through the logistical issues of allowing sixteen- and seventeen-year olds to vote in school board elections but no other races being held that day (Douglas, 2019).

San Francisco voters also considered whether to lower the voting age in 2016 for all city elections, though the measure ultimately failed, with about 48% in favor and 52% against. The San Francisco Youth Commission, an advisory policy group, was behind the push for this reform. Young residents of the city took the lead to advocate for the measure. They held a press conference on the steps of city hall to show their support. They filled the hearing room for a Board of Education meeting, ultimately convincing the Board to support the proposal and couple it with improved civics education in the city's schools. Most significantly, these young advocates changed the minds of several members of the Board of Supervisors. Initially, only four of the eleven Supervisors said that they would support a lower voting age, but five changed their minds after they heard testimony from young individuals who sought the ability to have a say in their local democracy. The Board of Supervisors voted 9–2 to send a ballot proposition to the voters (Douglas, 2019).

Proponents conducted polling in early 2016 and found that the measure would have about 36% support in the city (Douglas, 2019). Many voters initially had a visceral reaction to the idea, thinking that sixteen-year olds are not mature enough to enjoy the responsibility of voting. The advocates pointed to psychological studies showing that, in fact, brains are developed for "cold" cognition, which encompasses reasoned decision-making and slower thinking processes, by age sixteen

(Steinberg, 2018). After the campaign, driven by youths, the measure garnered about 48% of the vote—still shy of a victory, but a significant gain over the initial 36% support they saw in the early poll. That increase provided one major lesson for the advocates in San Francisco: they said that the more people learn about the merits of lowering the voting age for local elections, the more likely they are to support the reform (Douglas, 2019). Education and advocacy driven by young people themselves seemed to be the key to change many voters' minds. Coupling a lower voting age with improved civics education can also persuade people to back the idea (Douglas [SSRN], 2017b; Douglas, 2019). Advocates plan to put another measure on the ballot in 2020.

In 2018, voters in Golden, Colorado—a suburb of Denver—considered a ballot proposition to lower the voting age to sixteen for city elections. Two city council members sponsored a measure that, after it passed the council unanimously, placed the issue before the voters. These council members said they wanted to improve turnout and create lifelong voters, pointing to the successes in the Maryland cities that have adopted the reform (Rodriguez & Eastman, 2018). The measure had the full support of the principal of Golden High School (Aguilar, 2018).

The Golden proposition, however, failed by a large margin, with about 65% voting "no" (Todd & Steadman, 2018). There were meaningful differences between the campaigns in the Maryland jurisdictions such as Takoma Park and the campaign in Golden, and perhaps these differences can account for the divergent outcomes. Advocates in Golden did not have much time to wage a vigorous campaign: there were only two months between when the city council agreed to place the proposition on the ballot and when the voters considered it. The Takoma Park timeline was much longer. Similarly, San Francisco advocates said that they were able to change people's minds after explaining the merits and countering traditional viewpoints about the cognitive ability of youths to engage meaningfully in the political process. Yet there simply was not much time to engage Golden voters in the same way. Stemming from that crunched timeline, proponents may not have been able to organize young voices sufficiently to advocate for the measure. The Golden Votes 16 Steering Committee formed in September, less than two months before Election Day. By contrast, in all of the places that have passed ballot propositions to lower the voting age or convinced local governmental bodies to support the reform, young voices were at the center of months-long campaigns. Opponents of the Golden measure highlighted

cost and implementation concerns, their beliefs on the maturity of young people, and the hurdles in educating youth on local issues as reasons to vote "no." Supporters believe the proposition lost because of the seeming novelty of the idea, the fact that the measure was far down a lengthy ballot, and voters' initial reaction coupled with a lack of time to change people's minds (Todd & Steadman, 2018).

In late 2018, Washington, D.C.'s city council debated whether to lower the voting age to sixteen for all elections in the city, which would include the presidential election. The sponsor of the measure, Council Member Charles Allen, said that the civic engagement of young people from Parkland, Florida sparked his own proposal to engage younger voters in his city. Working with the youth advocacy group Vote16USA, Allen approached his fellow council members to gain their support. A majority of council members indicated that they would co-sponsor the ordinance. Numerous young people attended a public hearing and several young individuals testified about their desire to participate in democracy through voting, arguing that lowering the voting age was a matter of social justice. As Allen noted, "There are multiple future council members and a future mayor in this room" (Thebault, 2018).

Yet the measure in D.C. stalled, at least for now. Two council members who had initially co-sponsored the bill reversed their positions and voted to table the measure indefinitely. One council member said that even though his constituents urged him to vote for the bill after he asked for their views on Facebook, "he seemed skeptical that lowering the voting age would improve voting habits" (Nirappil, 2018). The other council member said that "parents were confused about the bill and that she needed to educate constituents" (Nirappil, 2018). Another council member who voted against the measure explained that "the reason why it's always been for adults is because of the correlation between adulthood, experience, perspective and maturity" (Nirappil, 2018). Advocates who were in the room suggested that there was some behind-the-scenes maneuvering by opponents, who successfully convinced the two council members to change their votes for political reasons unrelated to the measure. The Washington, D.C. experience shows how the voting age issue can become entwined in politics. Proponents had expected the measure to pass when they went to the hearing room and left surprised and disappointed at the outcome. This example suggests that, when an elected body has the authority to make the change, political maneuvering can stand in the way.

Prospects for Future Local, Statewide, and National Reform

The preceding discussion shows that the movement to lower the voting age to sixteen for local or school board elections has gained traction in recent years, with several notable successes among a few setbacks for advocates of the reform. Campaigns to lower the voting age are also underway in other places throughout the United States, though actual adoption and implementation may be several years off. All of these jurisdictions—much like the places that have lowered the voting age already—are considered Democratic Party strongholds, which might suggest a partisan valence for the idea. As of the end of 2018, Vote16USA listed active campaigns in Culver City, CA; Sacramento, CA; Boulder, CO; Knoxville, TN; Memphis, TN; Brattleboro, VT; and several towns in Western Massachusetts. There is also an active Vote16 chapter in Illinois to explore statewide adoption (Vote16USA, 2018). In early 2019, the Los Angeles Unified School District board voted unanimously for a resolution that directs the superintendent to study the feasibility of lowering the voting age to sixteen for school board elections in the city. The board's non-voting student representative, a seventeen-year-old, authored the resolution. Although some board members expressed reservations about whether teenagers have the proper life experiences to make informed decisions or whether teachers would unduly influence their students, all board members approved the measure. Ultimate passage will require a vote from the city's electorate (Kohli, 2019).

The idea also has reached certain states as well as Congress. Lawmakers in California, New York, and Oregon have introduced legislation to lower the voting age in those states (Douglas, 2019; Lou & Griggs, 2019; New York State Assembly, 2017; Richardson, 2017). A proposal in Congress to lower the voting age for all federal elections failed 126–305, but a majority of Democrats—125 out of 233—and one Republican voted yes (Hasson, 2019). In addition, major newspapers, such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, ran editorials supporting a lower voting age at least for certain elections (Steinberg, 2018; *Washington Post*, 2018).

There also have been proposals to amend the U.S. Constitution to lower the voting age to sixteen in all elections throughout the country, though discussion of this more widespread reform is still at a murmur. In 2018, a Democratic member of Congress introduced a congressional

resolution to repeal the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, which had lowered the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen, and replace it with a new amendment that says a state may not deny the right to vote to anyone aged sixteen or older (Folley, 2018). Amending the Constitution requires the agreement of two-thirds of each house of Congress and three-quarters of the states. A successful constitutional amendment to lower the voting age to sixteen seems unlikely at this point unless many additional localities and states adopt the reform first. But the seriousness of the conversation itself suggests that the idea no longer seems far-flung to many people.

All of these actions demonstrate that the debate on the voting age in the United States has become a lot more robust in recent years. What started with a small town in Maryland in 2013 has now spread to conversations in larger cities and a serious discussion in Congress.

11.5 Takeaways from This Case Study

There are three main takeaways from the stories of recent successes in lowering the voting age in some places in the United States, as well as some lessons from where the measures were not successful.

First, given the structure of U.S. election administration, the reform effort so far has focused on local elections in states that allow their municipalities to enact their own local-specific voting rules. Although the Twenty-Sixth Amendment does not place a barrier to a lower voting age, state laws might. Determining which states grant their localities home rule authority to lower the voting age is itself not straightforward, as the issue implicates the state constitution, state legislation, and case law. That said, there are at least fourteen states (plus Washington, D.C.) where there appear to be no legal impediments to lowering the voting age in local elections (Douglas, 2017a). In the other states, the issue is not as clear, meaning that advocates may have to convince state legislatures to broaden the home rule authority of localities within the state. There is also a difference among local laws regarding whether a city council can enact the reform itself or whether the electorate must consider it in a ballot proposition. The path of changing the law will dictate the strategy that advocates must pursue.

Second, young people themselves have driven the movement in the places that have lowered the voting age. Voting at age eighteen has become the accepted norm, such that many people have an initial

negative reaction to altering the status quo. Young people have been able to change some minds by advocating for their own enfranchisement. Yet when young voices did not have the opportunity for a longer campaign, such as in Golden, Colorado, the measure did not earn as much support among the electorate. The experiences suggest that these campaigns take time to change voters' minds from their initial opposition. In addition, proponents have found the most success when the reform is coupled with an overall push for improved civics engagement among the entire electorate.

Finally, politics underlies the debate and is a barrier to change in many places. Conventional wisdom is that young voters skew Democratic, and it is no surprise that the localities that have lowered the voting age are in liberal cities in mostly-liberal states. Progressives have generally embraced the idea while some opposition has come from conservatives who suggest that lowering the voting age is simply a way for liberals to improve their electoral success (Richardson, 2017). Yet the measure still stalled even in Washington, D.C., a Democratic stronghold, perhaps due to politically driven behind-the-scenes maneuvering by council members who opposed the idea. This result suggests that the specific local politics are extremely important for the future of the reform in particular cities. Moreover, as recounted above, lowering the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen stemmed from wartime debates and the requirement of young people to serve in the military, yet there is no obvious analog today. Sixteen-year olds are not required to fight in a war, so the slogan "old enough to fight, old enough to vote" is unhelpful in the current debate. This fact suggests that there may be less emotional appeal to lower the voting age even further.

11.6 Conclusion

As of just a few years ago, hardly anyone was discussing a lower voting age for American elections. Some innovative thinkers saw how other countries had enfranchised young people and brought the idea to their own local communities. Young people themselves have stood at the forefront of the debate. The movement has grown apace and spread across the country in recent years, albeit mostly to liberal cities, and it is still ongoing. But political opposition and the failure to engage young people meaningfully have tempered the movement in other places. Given that the conversations on the idea are spreading, it is quite possible that this

chapter will be outdated, or at least in need of significant revision, in a just a few years as more localities and advocates push the reform. The United States is therefore a place to watch as the debate over lowering the voting age progresses.

Note

1. A few cities allow younger individuals to vote in specific Participatory Budgeting elections, in which the community decides how to spend a certain portion of the city's discretionary budget. For instance, Cambridge, Massachusetts allows all residents aged twelve and older to vote on which community projects to fund. New York City permits residents aged eleven and older to vote in its Participatory Budgeting elections (Douglas, 2017a; New York City Council, 2018).

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CHAPTER 12

Conclusion

Jan Eichhorn and Johannes Bergh

For the first time, this volume has brought together empirical research from a large number of countries that have introduced or experimented with lowering the voting age to 16 in one place. While as recently as about a decade ago, discussions of this topic were largely based on extrapolations of empirical analyses of slightly older young people and theoretical assumptions; we now have a fairly rich basis of data to learn from. Rather than speculating about the likely attitudes and behavior of young people when enfranchised at 16, we are now able to study the actual experiences of them in a variety of different contexts. Crucially, those different contexts matter. At the end of reviewing the case studies presented in this book, we are not able to provide one clear formulaic response to the question what impact lowering the voting age has on all aspects of young people's political attitudes and engagement in all possible places. Indeed, findings in some countries suggest different conclusions than findings in others.

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Having said this, it is clear to us that bringing together all these different studies enhances our insights beyond the knowledge we could gain from looking at them only individually. There are certain patterns and influential factors that we can identify across many cases. Often, that does not mean that we necessarily get a definitive answer to each question but it helps us to note which questions are the most important ones to ask in further studies of this topic. It seems that some particular concerns about young people voting at 16 can genuinely be considered as unproblematic, while others require deeper engagement. Certain observations seem to suggest strong support for researchers optimistic about earlier enfranchisement, while others call for the particular investigation of the impact of certain changes.

In summarizing what we consider to be the main insights from engaging with all these studies, using conceptual and theoretical ideas about how to think about the topic is tremendously helpful. We therefore begin by reflecting on the insights from Chapters 1 to 4 highlighting the complexities we must engage with when researching the lowering of the voting age. Using these analytical frameworks, we consider how changes to electoral franchises have come about differently in the various contexts studied, before reflecting on the key themes and findings from the case studies across the range of countries considered. Finally, engaging with the limitations of the work presented in this volume, we discuss the implications of these insights for future research on the topic.

12.1 How to Look at Lowering the Voting Age to 16

The most common and classic approach to looking at questions of enfranchisement is its relation to voting and in particular the likely turnout that changes in the franchise may result in. While this volume demonstrates that many other aspects are equally relevant to the discussion of Votes at 16, analyzing the impact on turnout is crucial. Where data is available, it forms an important part of the analyses in the chapter presented in this book. In Chapter 2, Mark Franklin engages in great depth with the issue.

In his 2004 book "Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies since 1945", Franklin shows that earlier reductions to 18 had adverse effects on turnout in the proceeding decades. He argues that the ages of 18 and 19 are the worst possible times to be given the chance to vote, because young people are

in a transitional phase in their lives, usually after finishing high school. People are more likely to vote when they have a stable and socially integrated life. Rather than learning the habit of voting at the age of 18 or 19 (when first given the chance to vote), young people may get a habit of abstaining. Franklin (2004) argues that a higher voting age may be preferable but also that a lower voting age could be useful for getting young people to the polls and instilling a habit of voting. In other words, whereas the lowering of the voting age from 20 or 21 to 18 in the 1960s and 1970s in Western democracies led to a decline in turnout over time, a further lowering to 16 may have the opposite effect. There are now a number of democracies that have practiced voting at 16 for some time, thus enabling Franklin to test that proposition empirically. He finds that the voting age reforms in these countries have in fact had a positive effect on turnout (see Chapter 2).

Crucially, the findings reflect an important insight alluded to in the introduction and reconfirmed in many of the case study investigations: We cannot extrapolate from the behavior of slightly older young people (aged 18 upwards) directly to those aged 16 and 17. The age difference may appear small, but there are significant differences in the attitudes and behavior of those slightly younger people. Discussions about actual political behavior, such as turning out in elections, have to be grounded in the analysis of real empirical observations of what enfranchised people in this age group actually think and do.

One of the key reasons why 16- and 17-year olds may experience first-time voting differently to slightly older young people is their social environment. Apart from being more likely to still live at home, most young people in this age range are still in some form of education across the countries studied. And the link between education, civic knowledge and political attitudes and behavior is a crucial dimension of research into young people's political socialization, as Henry Milner discusses in Chapter 4. Research on this theme links to another often addressed point in discussions about the voting age: the political knowledge and maturity of young people. While the case studies look at this empirically in many instances, the chapter points out that analyses of these questions are not easy and straightforward. Indeed, while a positive effect of civic education at the interplay of political engagement at 16 or 17 appears to be observable in many instances, its durability and impact on the quality of political engagement are not always confirmed outright. In their analysis of the Austrian case, Aichholzer and Kritzinger find that the youngest

voters at the ages of 16 and 17 are less interested in politics than other voters (although the young have a better score on almost all other indicators of democratic engagement in their analysis). Franklin (Chapter 2) finds an increase in volatility (party switching) when 16-year olds are given the right to vote. These findings, though far from being damning evidence against voting at 16, are suggestive of deficiencies in civic education. Further questions on this front remain and future work on earlier enfranchisement has to discuss its intersections with education and knowledge.

Appreciating that we cannot understand the processes shaping young people's attitudes and behavior in relation to Votes at 16 in isolation is at the core of the arguments Andy Mycock, Thomas Loughran and Jonathan Tonge develop in Chapter 3. They argue persuasively that, while distinct in many ways, we can learn from history by studying the debates on lowering the voting age to 18 and its implementation and subsequent impacts. Related to the discussions from Chapter 4, we learn how decisions on the voting age intersect with other fundamental debates about the construction of society, citizenship and civic space. How young people learn about the state and the political system matters fundamentally for their political socialization and who gets to vote is not just a question of its impact on political outcomes but an issue at the heart of determining young people's status within society. Both proponents and opponents of Votes at 16 use selective illustrations of other rights and responsibilities that apply at 16 or 18. Because of the apparent contradictions at this period of transition, discussions about what characterizes youth and adulthood are difficult and complex. Chapter 3 outlines why this is not trivial and why we need to consider the social and political context within which debates about lowering the voting age take place.

12.2 Does It Matter How Enfranchisement Framework Changes Come About?

The motivations for supporting earlier enfranchisement can vary greatly as Chapter 3 points out. Ranging from a more instrumental rationale regarding expected party political orientations to reasons focused on political socialization or the structures of social capital in a society, understanding why certain organizations or persons support Votes at 16 helps understand its emergence in different contexts. The distinction

is important, because cynical views that enfranchisement age changes are only enacted in the direct interest of parties supporting it are not always confirmed. In the Scottish independence referendum context (Chapter 7), for example, both many independence supporting and opposing parties within the Scottish Parliament were in favor of lowering the voting age to 16.

Indeed, how changes come about can vary greatly between countries. Even among many the pioneering Latin American countries there were substantial differences, as we learned in Chapter 6. While Cuba's enactment of the change in 1978 was organized very much top-down, the lowering of the voting age in Nicaragua (1984) and Brazil (1988) was initiated much more through civil society action in a bottom-up manner. More contemporarily, in Ecuador and Argentina we also saw more top-down orientation in the decision to make these changes, as was the case in many other case studies. However, it is possible for dynamics to shift. While the intention to lower the voting age for the Scottish independence referendum was announced very early in the process by the Scottish Government, many civil society organizations, such as the Scottish Youth Parliament, actively engaged and proactively shaped the debates, thus creating and maintaining a momentum in the discussions toward the 2015 decision to ultimately lower the voting age in all Scottish elections.

Chapter 11 shows that it matters how these processes emerge and are led. In the discussion about municipalities in the USA that have lowered the voting age or areas where attempts have been made to do so that failed, the character of the efforts to enact Votes at 16 mattered. While especially campaigns led in smaller communities that were youth-led, visible and engaged broadly within the community tended to achieve change, areas in which the change was proposed by officials and put to a vote without much external engagement usually saw the status quo maintained. Resistance to Votes at 16 tends to be prominent, unless people have different experiences with young people that make them reevaluate their presumptions about their political engagement. However, at higher levels, opposition to earlier enfranchisement faces additional obstacles as well, as the failure to achieve change in the District of Columbia, for example, shows. The precise nature of reasons for groups to support or oppose the change politically matters to appraise the likelihood of campaigns to succeed and, if implemented, how Votes at 16 may be experienced by those newly enfranchised.

12.3 Key Areas of Enquiry Across the Case Studies

In addition to the social and political contexts, also the nature of the research methods differed between the different enquiries that informed the respective case studies in this volume. Nevertheless, there are certain issues that most or all studies were able to shed light on and that deepen our insights into the study of how voting at 16 or 17 may be a distinguishable experience or not.

In many of the cases looked at, we find that young people who are enfranchised at a slightly earlier age, indeed behave in a discernible way. In several instances, newly enfranchised young people appeared to have participated to a greater extent than expected from older studies that tried to predict their behavior based on the observed turnout of slightly older young people. A positive effect could be observed in Austria (Chapter 5) and Scotland (Chapter 7), for example, especially in comparison to slightly older age groups, which also applied in Norway (Chapter 10). Research from Germany (Chapter 8) supports those findings as well, where turnout tended to be lower for young adults above 20 years of age than younger ones, while electoral participation increased again at later ages. However, at the same time, the findings from Germany are inconclusive regarding smaller differences between 16- and 17-year olds compared to 18- and 19-year-old ones, suggesting that they could have a slightly lower participation level. The opposite, however, was found in Scotland. So while the research across all these different countries suggest that some effect is observable, its precise patterns and potential strength of any effects may vary. In Estonia, for example (Chapter 9) newly enfranchised young voters participated in voting at slightly higher levels in the municipal elections than the national average. In Scotland, however, while much more engaged in the independence referendum vote than their slightly older 18- to 24-year-olds peers, 16- and 17-year olds still participated less than the general population overall.

Patterns may also shift over time. As the authors of the Germany chapter point out, it is inadequate to study 16- and 17-year olds regarding their political attitudes while not enfranchised and assume that we can make inferences about their likely behavior as if they were. Crucially, the findings across the chapters suggest that there are certain impacts associated with enfranchisement. Therefore, the experience of being allowed to vote at 16 or 17 may—albeit depending on context—significantly impact young people's attitudes and behavior. Indeed, the German case study

identifies a threshold effect around the age of 16 that sees differences in attitudes for those young people who are enfranchised already, compared to their slightly younger peers. As the authors of the Norway chapter point out, longitudinal analyses are important. In Austria the authors found that differences between 16- and 17-year olds and their slightly older peers have been diminishing, which may be a sign of more lasting change from those originally enfranchised at 16 or 17 for the first time. At the moment we do not have long enough time series or data in all of the countries studied so far, however, where we do, cross-sectional longitudinal comparisons provide us with important insights. Importantly, we need to distinguish between life-cycle and generational effects, especially when voter enfranchisement itself is seen as a big event (such as the independence referendum in Scotland or the terrorist attacks in Norway) or accompanied by extensive campaigns (such as in some of the cases in the USA discussed in Chapter 11). It reminds us that the type of process leading to the introduction, whether it is top-down or bottom-up and who the actors are that drive it, may have a significant impact. Also, the level of implementation may matter. Not only do we see cases where the voting age was lowered at the national or only subnational level, but cases where, at least initially, early enfranchisement was run as a trial or experiment (such as in Cuba or Norway).

Furthermore, the investigations presented here, show that there is a lot more to investigate than electoral participation, if we are interested in how enfranchisement at 16 may affect young people's political attitudes and behavior. In the Scottish context, for example, some of the strongest differences between enfranchised 16- and 17-year olds in Scotland compared to their counterparts elsewhere in the country were in relation to non-electoral political engagement and how they used information sources differently. In several countries, we also saw that enfranchised young people showed similar levels of interest in elections and politics as the wider public. However, once again, the findings are not identical across all contexts and require some qualification. As discussed extensively in Chapter 4, it matters what sort of outcomes we investigate. Looking at related, but different sets of political attitudes, for example, can lead us to observe different results.

Constanza Sanhueza Petrarca's chapter on Latin American countries (Chapter 6) looks at a crucial variable for those of us who are interested in the effect of voting at 16 on democracy. She finds that people who were able to vote at 16 were more supportive of

democracy in general and had a higher level of trust in parliament and political parties than other voters. Aichholzer and Kritzinger make similar discoveries in their chapter on Austria. These results, in combination with the apparent positive effect on turnout when 16-year olds are given the right to vote, do suggest some significant benefits to democracy of lowering the voting age to 16.

We also find across the case studies that socializing influences matter for young people. In addition to family and friends, in particular schools and civic education play an important role in shaping the experiences of political engagement in general and in the context of being able to Vote at 16 in particular. However, it is not just the presence or absence of civic education that matters, but also the type of education offered. Impacts of classic civic instruction matter in terms of generating knowledge. At the same time, and in line with decades of research on civic education, deliberative engagement in the classroom has the opportunity to unlock more civic potential. As noted in Chapter 3, however, political education in school can often be a contentious issue and as, for example, the insights from Estonia show, teachers do not necessarily feel convinced that their work involves that form of pro-actively oriented civic education. Even if they do, as research from Scotland suggests, they often do not feel adequately equipped to confidently teach students using political discussions in the classroom extensively.

Taken together, the findings across the cases in this book suggest that there are many country-specific elements to the experience of voting at 16 or 17. At the same time, the common issues explored above appear to suggest a range of commonalities. Taken together, the studies fundamentally suggest that the experience of being able to vote slightly earlier is associated with a range of political behaviors and attitudes of young people. Enfranchisement changes seem to intersect significantly with different dimensions of political socialization. While we cannot conclusively say whether the implementation of Votes at 16 resulted in positive changes in every instance, we have little evidence to suggest that it has been detrimental in the cases studied. Because of its complex interplay with other factors, there are several points of enquiry that are not conclusive, yet. However, having observed significant associations between the introduction of a lower voting age and the political engagement of young people, we have a strong rationale to conduct further research into this issue.

12.4 Future Research

The chapters written for this book provide us with a set of rich insights. At the same time, we must acknowledge that there are limitations to the extent of our enquiry at this stage, because of limitations with the existing data, as Chapters 2 to 4 already pointed out as well. One of the issues we face is that in many countries voting at 16 is still a rather new phenomenon. So while we might be able to study early experiences, it is difficult to examine longer-term trends and patterns. We have some insights from Latin American countries, where the longest lasting experiences with a lower voting age exist and Chapters 2 and 7 engage with the data. However, unfortunately, samples with political attitude and behavior data among 16- and 17-year olds are rare overall, so the extent to which we can undertake analyses is limited. Austria provides us with the longest period of study outside Latin America and indeed has shown us that being able to observe changes over time is crucial. But it is not just the presence or absence, but also the type of data that differentiates countries from each other. While good survey data with significantly large samples exists in some of the countries we looked at, this is not the case everywhere. Official administrative data on the age group can be obtained (with great effort) in some countries, like Austria, but not in others, because of differences in data protection laws or electoral administration rules.

Additionally, while quantitative data is crucial to study large-scale patterns and change over time, we need qualitative data to engage more deeply with the understanding different groups of young people have of their engagement or non-engagement. Findings from interviews in Norway and Scotland provided us with insights into the sense-making of young people that survey or administrative data could not. Furthermore, when investigating socializing influences, such as schools, engaging not just with young people, but in that case also their teachers, is crucial, if we want to explore reasons for barriers to better civic education. The findings on teachers' concerns about the issue found in Estonia and Scotland highlight how important it is to engage with the key actors involved, if policy proposals are meant to be developed for positive civic change.

Crucially, to overcome some of the current limitations preventing us from making more conclusive statements about particular effects, we require explicitly comparative research. To understand which findings

are generalizable, which are generalizable, but contingent on identifiable context characteristics and which ones cannot be generalized, we need to be able to study early enfranchisement in the same way in multiple countries at the same time. Ideally, an interplay of quantitative and qualitative data that is able to track changes over time to differentiate life-cycle and generational effects would enable us to arrive at robust insights on the issue.

In doing so, we should embrace the need for nuance. Not all young people are the same, of course. While we see that younger people tend to show more left-leaning tendencies in many of the cases studied, we see, for example, that in several (though not all) Latin American countries younger voters characterize themselves as slightly more right-wing. Most of the quantitative research referred to, so far has focused on averages—whether enfranchisement at 16 has been affected by certain factors or has been associated with a mean increase or decrease of certain outcomes (such as electoral participation). But as, for example, the chapter on Scotland illustrates, participation may not be affected uniformly for all young people. In contrast to their peers in the rest of the UK young Scots seemed to have seen a reduction in social class inequalities in their political engagement, at least in the aftermath of the initial enfranchisement. Widening our studies to explicitly engage not just with levels but also the distribution of factors associated with Votes at 16 would provide a potentially highly insightful avenue.

There are many pointers in this book to suggest that it is definitely worth conducting this further research. Many attitudes and forms of political behavior seem to be associated with enfranchisement. Turnout and political trust are positively related to a lower voting age across countries. Both of these variables are crucial to the future wellbeing of democracy. By establishing these empirical results, we believe this book could and should be an important contribution to the debate about the voting age in many countries across the globe. On the negative side of the scale there seems to be a cross-country deficiency in civic education. The youngest voters tend to be less interested in politics and seem to provide more volatility to election results than other voters do. That may not be good for democracy and could be used in an argument against lowering the voting age, in favor of better civic education or both.

Using those insights may provide us with better strategies that could have positive long-term impacts on the political engagement of the next generations. Working together across countries where we have the

chance to engage with such processes will remain a very worthwhile endeavor.

Finally, we would like to point to one area of research that we have not been able to include in this volume but that should be a focus of future research in this area. Granting voting rights to a new segment of the population is not just about turnout and engagement in democracy, it is also about *power*. When people are granted the right to vote, they are also given the ability to influence policy (through elected representatives). If voting rights for 16-year olds only affect the political process but not the policy output, one may reasonably ask what the point of lowering the voting age is. We believe future research should take up the challenge of studying the effects of granting voting at 16 on policy. Are the issues, concerns and attitudes of young people reflected in public policy? We suspect the answer to that question may vary quite a bit from one country to the next.

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