



EVOLUTION OF THE MINIMUM VOTING AGE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AFTER THE WORLD WAR II¹

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Abstract. *The minimum voting age has become an increasingly debated topic in European public policy and electoral law, particularly in the context of initiatives aimed at strengthening youth participation in democratic processes. While most European Union Member States maintain the voting age at 18, several countries have introduced reforms allowing citizens aged 16 or 17 to participate in elections. This article examines the evolution of the minimum voting age in the European Union after the Second World War through a comparative analysis of national electoral reforms. The research combines the analysis of legal and academic sources with a comparative approach and a questionnaire-based empirical component addressing public perceptions in Romania. Particular attention is paid to the Austrian case, the first EU Member State to lower the voting age to 16 for all elections. The findings indicate that lowering the voting age cannot, by itself, increase democratic participation. Its effectiveness depends on complementary factors such as civic education, political literacy and institutional trust. The article concludes that, in the Romanian context, any future reform should be preceded by sustained public policies designed to strengthen civic competences among young citizens.*

Keywords: *Voting age, Electoral reform, Youth political participation, European Union, Civic education, Romania, Democracy.*

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1. Introduction

Lowering the minimum voting age is one of the most-discussed topics in recent literature on how young people can participate in politics and how representative democracy evolves. Over the past twenty years, several countries in Europe have studied or implemented changes whereby the right to vote has been extended to 16-year-olds. These countries believe that if young people get involved in elections earlier, it can help strengthen democratic culture and increase civic participation in the long run. However, these initiatives have sparked discussions about how politically mature teenagers are, how well informed they are, and whether they can make responsible choices.

At the moment, most countries in the European Union have the minimum voting age set at 18, but the different types of rules show that there is no agreement across Europe on the best time to have the right to vote. The experiences of countries such as Austria, Malta, Belgium or Germany show that there are various approaches, influenced by political, legal and social factors. In Romania, although the minimum voting age remained the same after the adoption of the Constitution in 1991, the discussion about its possible reduction continues to appear both in academia and in public conversations.

With this in mind, this article examines changes in the minimum voting age across European Union countries and assesses whether it would be appropriate to lower the minimum voting age to 16. The study aims to find the most important written arguments on this subject, to compare experiences in Europe, and to examine how this reform is perceived in Romania.

The methodology used combines the study of documents from the specialized literature and European and national legislation with a comparative analysis of the changes in elections in the countries that are part of the European Union. This study also uses survey results from a group of respondents to highlight their opinions on lowering the minimum voting age and the factors that affect young people's political involvement.

The article is divided into five main parts. The first part discusses the basic ideas of the right to vote and how universal suffrage has evolved. The second part compares how the minimum voting age has changed in different European countries, including Romania. The third part analyzes the pros and cons of lowering the electoral limit. The fourth part focuses on youth political participation and the importance of civic education, and the last part presents a case study on electoral reform in Austria, followed by the conclusions of the research.

Research question

What are the main European trends regarding the reduction of the minimum voting age and how is this reform perceived in the Romanian context?

2. Theoretical foundations regarding the right to vote

2.1. History of voting

The right to vote is an essential pillar of representative democracy, giving citizens the opportunity to be involved in decision-making and to elect their representatives. The changes in this right show how democratic regimes have evolved, from the limited forms of participation in ancient times and the Middle Ages to the establishment of universal suffrage in the twentieth century until recent polarization studies (Raiu & Negoită, 2024). The gradual expansion of the right to vote for women and other groups that were left out was one of the most significant changes in modern democratic systems. (Society of Legal Sciences, 2024).

2.2. The evolution of the electoral system in Romania in the context of the Second World War

The transformations of the Romanian political system before the outbreak of the Second World War. In the period between the two world wars, the voting system in Romania operated under the rules established by the Constitution of 1923, which guaranteed a universal, equal, and secret right to vote for the election of members of Parliament. (Scurtu, 2004, pp. 112-115).

Against the backdrop of political uncertainty and economic problems in the 1930s, Romanian democracy began to face significant challenges (Raiu, 2012). The rise of authoritarian regimes in Europe and internal political tensions led to a decline in democratic functioning and a diminishing importance of parliamentary institutions.

The 1938 Constitution reshaped the political framework and diminished the importance of political parties, replacing them with a state-run political system. In this context, elections to Parliament took on a largely formal characteristic, and political representation was subject to royal authority.

The elections for Parliament held in 1946 marked an essential point in the development of the electoral system in Romania. Even though they were officially declared democratic elections, many historical research studies indicate that the electoral conduct was strongly affected by political and administrative interventions. (Constantiniu, 2008, p. 396).

2.3. Concept of universal suffrage

Universal suffrage is one of the most important principles of democracy today. This means that all citizens of legal age have the right to choose those who represent them in politics, without being discriminated against on the basis of money, social position, race or gender. Today, universal suffrage means that all citizens can participate equally in elections and is the result of a long history, full of political reforms, social movements, economic change and good governance (Raiu, 2015).

In the earliest times of modern states, the right to vote was reserved only for certain social groups, especially those who owned property or for economic and political elites (Sabie et. al. 2025). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, electoral systems were based on the census vote, which allowed people to participate in political decisions only if they paid taxes or had enough money. This approach reflects the idea that only those people who contributed significantly to the state budget should have the right to decide on leadership. As ideas about enlightenment and equality began to spread in Europe and America, these restrictions were challenged. The political revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as the French Revolution and the liberal revolutions in Europe, laid the groundwork for more inclusive political systems and enabled the gradual expansion of the right to vote. (Wellman, 2004, p. 56).

3. Evolution of the voting age in Europe. Benchmarking

3.1. Evolution of the minimum voting age in the European States

The analysis of changes in voting age in Europe, as presented in the table, shows a significant shift. This shift was from a strict idea of political maturity to a model of participation for all. The information gathered provides an overview of how democratic countries have changed in recent years the age at which a person can influence the community to which he belongs. Thus, reducing from 21 years to 16 years in some countries.

Change from 21 to 18 years old:

After the war, most European countries, such as Germany, France, Belgium, and Greece, kept the voting limit at 21. This rule reflects a traditional mindset about civic responsibility. The first important changes occurred in the 70s. Germany (in 1970) and France (in 1974) were among the first countries to amend electoral law, lowering the age to 18, taking a significant step towards modernization.

In France, the change was linked to the modernization of political and social life, recognizing the new demographic realities. In Greece, this transition had a specific path, and the reduction of the age from 21 to 18 years was made in 1972, showing that it was aligning with the European trends of that time.

The most important part of the table shows the countries that have decided to allow voting at the age of 16, a change that is transforming democracy in Europe. Austria (2007) is considered the first and most advanced country in the European Union, being the first to set this minimum age for all types of elections. This law was a good example for the other European countries. Malta (2018) is another example of gradual change. Through changes to its law, Malta first tested youth voting at the local level in 2015, then extended this option to all elections, becoming the second country to fully recognize the ability of 16-year-olds to vote.

Table 1. Evolution of the minimum voting age in selected European Union member states

Country	Initial voting age (after WWII)	Current age	Year of amendment	Normative act	Reform type	Remarks
Germany	21	18/16 (EU Parliament elections and some regional elections)	1970/2024	Federal Law Electoral / Amendment	Amendment to the Federal Electoral Act/ amendment	The general trend of expanding the political rights of young people
France	21	18	1974	Normative act adopted by the Parliament (L 74-631/ 1974)	Electoral reform	Decrease in the context of political modernization
Austria	19	16	2007	Electoral Law Amendment	Legislative reform	The first EU country to lower the minimum voting age to 16
Malta	18	16	2018	Electoral law	Constitutional and legislative reform	In 2015, the age of 16 for local elections. And in 2018 for all elections. The second state to lower the voting age

Belgium	21	18/16 (for the European Parliament)	2022	Law on elections to the European Parliament)	Legislative reform	Belgium has only allowed 16-year-olds to vote in European Parliament elections, but has kept the 18-year-old age limit for nationwide elections.
Greece	21	17	2016	Law 4406/2016) Legislative reform	Legislative reform	In 1972 the vote went from 21 to 18 years old

Source: Author's processing based on Epthinktank (2023), European Commission (2024), Oesterreich.gv.at (2023), Agerpres (2018) and European Youth Forum (2016).

An important observation that emerges from the data provided is that the right to vote is applied differently, something that is seen in Germany (2024) and Belgium (2022). These countries have set the age of 16 for European Parliament elections, but have kept different ages for national elections. This method suggests a step-by-step approach to young people's involvement in politics, first allowing them to express themselves in an international framework.

In Greece (2016), the threshold was set at 17 years, bringing a different note in the European context. This choice can be seen as a middle ground between the desire to offer more political rights and a more cautious behavior regarding lowering the voting age.

The conclusion that can be drawn from the table is that there is a clear tendency to give more political rights to young people. If in the first phase of modernization it was established that all young people have the right to vote from the age of 18, now we see that we are moving towards 16 years old. This change is not just a simple adjustment of the law on voting, but shows a transformation in the way we think about politics and subsequent fields such as religion, morality, or the environment in Europe (Raiu, 2024), giving young people the opportunity to be active in building the future of the society in which they live.

3.2. The case of Romania

The analysis of the electoral threshold in Romania shows how the right to vote has been influenced by the various types of government from the post-war period to the present day. Unlike other European countries that have discussed a threshold of 16 years (for example Austria), Romania set an earlier voting age of 18, although there have also been many significant changes in terms of ideologies, according to “*Youth Participation in Representative Democracy*”.

The year 1946 is a moment of great importance, marked by the decree of July 15. Although the minimum voting age remained at 21, the reforms brought a truly universal vote to Romania for the first time, allowing women and military personnel to vote. This stage was made in a rather turbulent political period and led to the end of the restrictive vote, thus increasing the basis of democracy.

A major change occurred in 1948, when the first Constitution of the communist regime was adopted. The table shows how the minimum voting age has been lowered from 21 to 18 years. This change was not just an administrative adjustment, but was part of a political strategy that wanted to involve youth in supporting the new regime. It is important to note that after this moment, the age of 18 remained constant in the Romanian electoral system, even after the regime changes at the end of the last century.

After Romania transitioned to democracy, it was confirmed that the 18-year threshold is maintained, but now it has a new basis of legitimacy:

Constitution of 1991: This is the main law that establishes that everyone must have the right to vote, equally, directly, in secret and freely, in a state where the law is respected. The table shows that the new fundamental law kept the age of 18 as the age limit for voting, providing real democratic value, unlike how it was used in the past.

2003 Revision: The study shows that the 2003 Constitution Amendment Act retained the same idea of the age of 18 as the age limit, considering young people to be quite mature.

4. Arguments regarding the reduction of the minimum voting age

4.1. Arguments in favour of lowering the voting age

A first argument found in the scientific article is that, with the lowering of the minimum voting age, the interests of young people for political life would also expand, and if 16-17-year-olds had been involved in the 2024 Romanian elections, the number of eligible people would have

doubled, adding approx. 410000 citizens. The accelerated aging of the population is another factor for the decrease in the minimum voting age. According to the (National Institute of Statistics, 2022) (Tempo Pop107A), on January 1, 2022, the 40-54 age group was 56.71 years older than the 0-14 age group.

Another pro-argument is that the international report (Be Seen. Be Heard., 2021), shows that countries that have lowered the minimum age have much higher civic engagement from young people. This is confirmed in the federal elections in Germany. Following these elections in 2021, compared to those in 2017, the turnout of young people in the 18-20 category increased by 4.6% in states where they can vote from 16 years old and by only 0.5% in those where the minimum age is 18 years old.

Extending the right to vote for everyone and lowering the voting age are two of the most important changes in democracy. In Romania, the right to vote was granted to all men in 1918, but women did not have this right. Although women asked to vote and contributed a lot to important events in previous history, they were left out in politics. The 1938 constitution gave women the right to vote, but only to those who could read and write.

The age at which one can vote does not coincide with the age at which one becomes of age, that is, to make legal decisions on their own. Although the law says that a person becomes an adult at the age of 18 and can sign official documents on their own, in Romania, young people between the ages of 14 and 17 gradually receive various rights that allow them to actively participate in society, politics or culture.

For example, from the age of 14, young people have a limited exercise capacity, which allows them to do things like money management or signing up for small expenses. So, starting at the age of 14, there is no longer a need for parents to represent them, but only to accept what they want to do. If the parents do not give their consent, the young people can ask the judges for permission directly.

Also, from the age of 16, according to labor laws, young people can find a job without asking their parents. In addition, criminal law provides that from the age of 16, young people are responsible for their actions. This means that, from the perspective of the law, at the age of 16 there is no longer the presumption that young people do not understand what they are doing, so they can be held accountable for their actions without the need for special evidence. In conclusion, Romanian law provides young people with rights and responsibilities that make them considered more mature before they reach the age of 18. (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2022).

Another argument in support of lowering the voting age is that young people who have reached the age of 16 can start a family, acquiring through marriage the full capacity to exercise. Concluding this argument, we can ask the following question: if a 16-year-old is allowed to start a family at this age, why should he not be allowed to vote? (Niță, 2021).

Political scientist Gabriel Bădescu believes that 16-year-olds have the same opinions and convictions as 18-year-olds who have the right to vote, as they are equally informed about politics and society. He also claims that following the possibility of young people to vote from the age of 16 will develop their civic skills more quickly, which will help them throughout their lives and contribute to a more politically developed country. “Last but not least, 16-year-olds should have a voice of their own when political decisions are made that concern them.” He adds that, on the one hand, there are neuroscience studies that show how the brain is constantly changing at 16-17 years old, and the fact that 25 is the new 18.

Donald Runciman believes that people should be able to vote from the age of 6. This is a rather unusual opinion that he also mentioned in *The Guardian*. He says that this point of view has a logic. In ancient Athens and until the 70s, there were more young people under 40 who voted than seniors over 60. Now, however, things have changed. He argues that once older people are in control of the economy and politics, with the largest number of voters, their interests prevail.

Then, Runciman says that the idea that children are easy to influence is no longer valid. He recalls that those who opposed the vote for women used the same argument: why give them the right to vote if it is known that they will vote as their men tell them.

Teacher Ivona Mihaela Grigorescu, school counselor at the “Cuza Voda” National College, claims that young people who want to vote from the age of 16 know their rights well. He also claims that there is still a category of young people who need a deeper education in the field of active citizenship and an important role is played by the environment they come from. She observes that cognitively, children are ready to vote and bring about a change for the better. On the other hand, it also has students who do not get involved at all and for them, material values are more important.

4.2. Arguments against lowering the voting age

A reason against this idea, discussed in the places where the extension of the right to vote to 16–17-year-olds is being analyzed, including in Romania, is that they are not ready to vote responsibly and consciously. They do not understand well how democracy works, what

doctrines and programs the parties that participate in the elections have and how voters express themselves. Paradoxically, from the perspective of formal education offered by the state for the development of civic skills, at the age of 16 a young person already has the necessary skills to vote. Although Romania has recognized since 2011 that one of the essential skills that graduates should have is civic and social, a 2021 report by the Romanian Academic Society and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation shows that, more than 10 years after it was included in the National Education Law no. 1/2011, in the national high school curriculum there is no real attention to the development of students' civic and social skills, but only superficial attention.

To help children realize how important voting is, countries such as the Netherlands and Germany have started projects in which students in the school participate in mock elections. Here, middle and high school students, who do not have the right to vote, can get involved in votes that imitate real elections, but without having a decisive voice. Studies in Germany show that these sham elections have positive results that could help expand the right to vote for 16–17-year-olds.

One of the reasons why some are against giving 16–17-year-olds the right to vote is that they fear that they could vote without sufficient information and that they would prefer extreme parties. However, research conducted during Germany's 2021 federal election shows that things are different. In the official elections, the far-right party Alternative für Deutschland won 10.3% of the vote. On the other hand, in the mock elections where more than a million students who cannot vote in the real elections participated, the AFD had only 5.1%, much less than in the real elections. DIE WELT (2021).

One of the arguments against lowering the voting age concerns the way teenagers obtain their political information. Recent studies show that digital platforms (Zamora-Medina et. al., 2023), such as TikTok, are one of the main sources of information for young people under 30, which can amplify exposure to disinformation and influence electoral decisions. According to a Pew Research Center study, young people under 30 use this platform for political information. McClain, C. (2024). About half of TikTok users under 30 keep up with politics and news there (Rekker, 2023).

The analysis of the presented points of view shows that we cannot view the reduction of the minimum voting age solely in terms of biological age. Both the arguments for and against this idea indicate that the success of such a change depends on civic education, political knowledge, and the institutional environment in which it is implemented. Examples from European

countries studied suggest that granting the right to vote yields positive effects when accompanied by policies that help young people develop their civic skills.

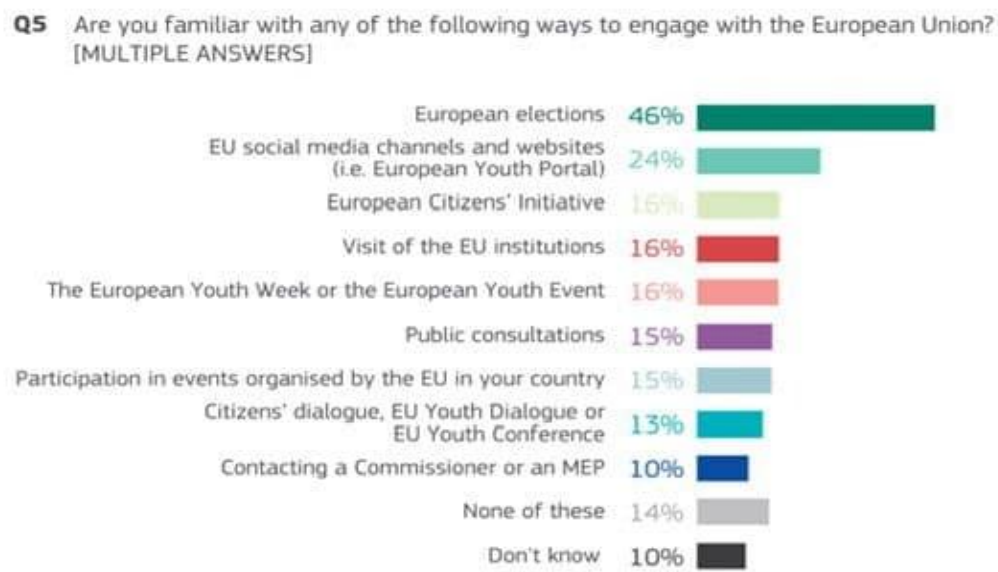
5. Youth participation in voting and influencing factors

5.1. Young people’s participation in voting

Participation in elections refers to people who can actually vote. Usually, young people vote less often than older adults. The participation of young people (15-30) in voting was analyzed separately because they have a different mentality than those who have more experience, and their beliefs are more different. They represent a distinct demographic group (Mina-Raiu et. al., 2024), and traditional ways (political parties) can influence them positively or negatively.

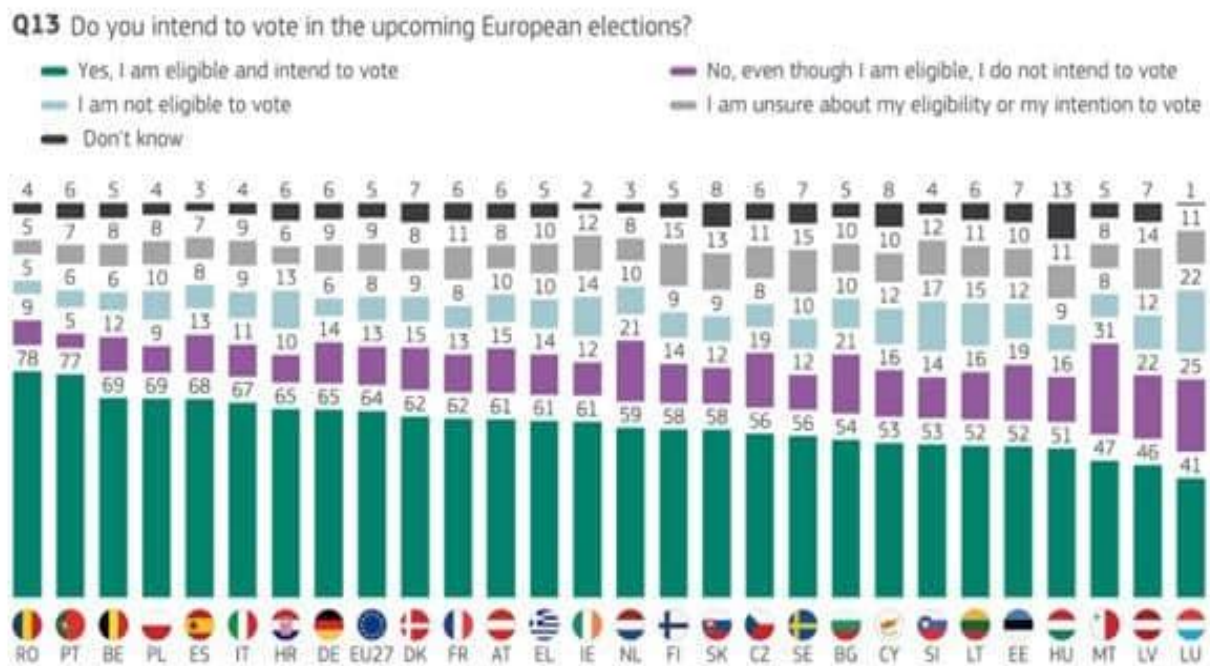
A small proportion of young people in the European Union were asked how well they know the ways to interact with the Union (Geantă et. al. 2025). 46% of them say they know about the European elections. Almost a quarter (24%) of them are aware of Union social media platforms and websites, such as the European Youth Portal. These findings suggest that, while electoral participation is relatively well recognized, awareness of other opportunities for engagement with EU institutions remains limited. Increasing the visibility of official communication channels and youth-oriented platforms could encourage greater civic participation and strengthen young people’s involvement in European democratic processes. European Commission (2024).

Figure 1. *Young people’s familiarity with ways of engaging with the European Union*



Source: European Commission (2024), Youth and Democracy - May 2024 – Eurobarometer Survey.

Figure 2. Young people's intention to vote in the upcoming European elections



Source: European Commission (2024). Youth and Democracy - May 2024 - Eurobarometer Survey.

An extremely exciting result is represented by the high percentage of willingness to vote observed in Romania (78%), the highest among all the member countries evaluated. This figure suggests an increased interest among young people to get involved in elections, even at a declarative level. However, the desire mentioned in a questionnaire does not always translate into effective participation in the vote, as this can be influenced by aspects such as the credibility of the institutions, electoral campaigns or the internal political situation. In contrast, countries such as Luxembourg, Latvia and Malta have considerably lower voting intention rates, which shows significant differences between Member States in terms of young people's political engagement.

5.2. Youth participation as an indicator of democracy

The participation of young people is seen as a very important thing for the health of a democracy because they represent the future of the community (Ribeiro et. al. 2023). Young people constitute a large group in many countries. If they don't care about politics, it could mean that public power is not perceived as legitimate. Furthermore, youth participation shows how much they believe in institutions and whether they feel the political system gives them the opportunity to express themselves and that their vote can bring about real change. For example, Eurobarometer surveys show that many young people believe that voting is the most important

way to get involved in democracy (38%), while there are also young people who are not interested in politics or voting. European Commission. (2024).

According to the International Study on Civic and Citizenship Education (ICCS 2022), it shows that “2 out of 10 students (eighth grade) have difficulty understanding democracy and the functioning of the state”. The study demonstrates that students have average civic knowledge. On a scale from A (advanced level) to D (minimum level), most Romanian students are placed at level B (30.6% compared to 31.1% ICCS average) and C (26.8% compared to 23.8% ICCS average) of competence; they demonstrated that they can use general civic principles and concepts (level C), respectively that they understand public institutions (level B).

Only 18.3% of Romanian students achieve level A or above. They are able to evaluate certain policies/laws based on the principles on which they are based. This proportion is significantly lower than the 2022 ICCS average (30.6%), Sweden (52.8%), Poland (47.6%), and Estonia (43.4%).

The study also contains recommendations for the Ministry of Education as follows:

Ensuring the conditions to improve the status of the Social Education discipline: specialized teachers who have a stable job in this discipline itself, inspectors and special meetings, specific projects and teaching materials, a network of experts and trainers who are qualified.

Collaborating with state institutions at the central and local levels to involve them in informing, consulting, and including children and young people in the decision-making process; City halls, the government, parliament, and other public organizations should be obliged by law to develop programs for children and young people.

The 2024 European elections saw a decrease in voting, especially among young people, so only 36% of eligible people under 25 years of age voted; in 2019 it was 42%. Giusto, H. (2024).

5.3. Civic education

Civic education is an essential element that affects the way young people interact with politics. In most European countries, education includes courses that help to understand how democratic institutions operate, citizens' rights and responsibilities, and electoral processes. The aim of these programs is to develop civic skills and encourage the political involvement of the younger generations (Raiu, 2021). Research from Europe suggests that young people who use digital tools and attend civics classes are more inclined to vote, follow political activities, and participate in various civic actions. Civics education helps cultivate democratic skills, such as

critical thinking, understanding of political dynamics, and the ability to participate in public discussions.

Education programs in Europe, such as Erasmus+, also help to raise political awareness among young people and strengthen the sense of European identity. Around 67% of young people in Europe believe that the European Union influences their daily lives, and almost half of them are aware of European programs dedicated to education and civic participation. (European Commission, 2024). In this light, civic education is seen as a fundamental resource for strengthening political engagement and creating a sustainable democratic culture in European communities. The data in this chapter shows that young people show their interest in society through other methods, such as internet activism, protests or helping as volunteers. Also, civic education and knowledge levels are very important for understanding how to vote. Modern technology has a big impact on how young people obtain information and participate in politics, giving them quick access to news, but also risks of being misinformed or manipulated.

6. Case study: Austria – voting at 16

6.1. Context of electoral reform

Austria is an important example in Europe of lowering the minimum voting age. In 2007, this country was the first in the European Union to allow 16-year-olds to vote in all elections, whether parliamentary, presidential, local or European Parliament elections. (EPRS, 2023). The electoral reform did not appear out of nowhere, but was preceded by changes in the regions. In the years prior to the national reform, several areas in Austria had already lowered the voting age to 16 for local and regional elections, which made reform at the federal level possible. (Council of Europe, 2013).

The decrease in the legal voting age in Austria has been explained by several political and social reasons. The first reason was that the authorities believed that young people were directly affected by political decisions and thus should have the right to get involved in the democratic process.

Another important reason was that early voting can help form stable voting behavior in the long term. Research shows that people who participate in the first elections they can vote in are more likely to vote in future elections as well.

The reform was also supported by the idea of providing a stronger voice for young people in democracy. Lowering the voting age has been seen as a way for young people to be more

influential in policies that affect their lives, such as education, environmental protection and jobs. (Zeglovits and Aichholzer, 2014).

6.2. Legislative process

The adoption of Austria's electoral reform in 2007 was the result of a long and complicated road in the federal parliament. The idea of lowering the minimum voting age was presented in the program of the coalition government formed after the 2006 parliamentary elections. During that time, discussions about youth participation in politics became increasingly important in Europe, and the Austrian authorities believed that this reform could help strengthen participatory democracy.

The draft law was created by the Ministry of the Interior and then sent to the federal parliament for discussion. The proposed law wanted to change the existing electoral rules and some aspects of the fundamental law related to the right to vote. Since the minimum voting age was set by the constitution, the reform had to be accompanied by a change in the constitution, which required the support of a qualified parliamentary majority.

During the debates in Parliament, the parties discussed whether 16 and 17-year-olds are able to participate in the elections. Supporters of the reform said that young people are already active in society and education, and that early voting could develop an active political culture for them. The reform was also supported by the need to adapt democratic systems to the changes in today's society.

Parliament approved electoral reform in 2007, ruling that young Austrians can vote from age 16. After this change, Austria became the first country in the European Union to allow voting from the age of 16 for all types of elections. The implementation of this reform has also brought changes in the electoral law, as well as information programs for young voters. The change has also made Austrian officials focus more on civic education and political information for young people to help them participate more easily in democracy. So, when it was decided that people could vote from the age of 16, other measures were taken to help young people get involved in politics and become more interested in elections. (Zeglovits and Aichholzer, 2014).

6.3. The impact of the reform on youth participation

Allowing 16-year-olds to vote has garnered significant interest among researchers and European institutions, as Austria serves as a unique case study within Europe.

Research indicates that 16- and 17-year-olds participate in elections at rates nearly comparable to those of 18- to 21-year-olds, and in certain contexts, even higher. This is largely due to the fact that adolescents at this age remain within a stable school environment, which provides them with greater access to civic education resources (Zeglovits and Aichholzer, 2014).

Furthermore, the Austrian experience demonstrates that lowering the voting age to 16 did not result in a decline in voting quality, despite the apprehensions raised by critics of the reform (Zeglovits and Aichholzer, 2014).

6.4. Austria's significance in Europe

Based on the gathered evidence, it can be concluded that Austria's experience has exerted a major influence on debates surrounding the lowering of the voting age in other European countries. Consequently, various nations have begun implementing similar reforms for different types of elections. For instance, several countries now permit 16-year-olds to vote in local or European elections.

From this perspective, the Austrian case is frequently utilized as a benchmark to analyze how lowering the voting age affects youth engagement and the overall functioning of democratic systems.

The analysis of the Austrian case demonstrates that lowering the voting age to 16 can be successfully implemented, provided that specific social and institutional conditions are met. The reform in Austria was designed to enhance youth participation and foster active engagement in democratic processes.

The reviewed literature shows that young voters in Austria participated at levels comparable to other age cohorts and exhibited no lower level of political competence. However, the success of this reform remains heavily reliant on an educational system that emphasizes civic education and the development of essential democratic skills.

Thus, Austria's experience proves that lowering the voting age can yield positive outcomes; nevertheless, the implementation of such a reform depends on the specific circumstances of each country and the presence of supportive policy frameworks.

7. Final conclusions

The debate on lowering the minimum voting age shows one of the current problems of modern democracies, namely how to strike a balance between encouraging people to vote and ensuring

the responsible use of the right to vote. The research in this study shows that age is not the only important aspect of participating in politics; It also depends on civic education, how well-informed young people are, trust in democratic institutions and the social environment in which they form their political opinions.

The analysis of the development of the right to vote, the experiences of European states that allowed voting from the age of 16 and the pros and cons of this reform show that there is no single solution that suits all countries. The results vary depending on the features of each political system, the existing civic culture and the measures taken to prepare young people to vote.

The specific case of Austria shows that lowering the minimum voting age was part of a larger reform, which also included legal changes, civic education programs and public policies aimed at increasing young people's involvement in democracy. The experience in Austria suggests that for such a measure to be successful, it is not enough just to change the law, but also to have a system capable of supporting the civic involvement of new voters.

Analysis of statistical data from Europe shows that young people are very interested in democratic participation, but there are also big differences between EU countries in terms of how well informed they are and whether they actually go to vote. The results of the ICCS study and the Eurobarometer also show how important civic education is to develop the skills needed to vote in an informed manner. In relation to Romania, studies show that lowering the minimum voting age should not be seen as a simple change in electoral laws. Such a change would require improvements in civic education, the creation of ways to inform young people about politics, and the implementation of public strategies to encourage democratic participation during adolescence. Without these actions, extending the right to vote would not significantly impact young people's actual involvement in elections.

Thus, the research clearly confirms neither the acceptance nor the refusal to lower the voting age. The main message is that the success of such a reform depends on the institutional framework in which it is implemented and on the fact that there are policies in place to help young people develop their civic and political skills. From this point of view, lowering the minimum voting age can strengthen participatory democracy, but only if accompanied by measures that translate the formal right to vote into active and responsible participation.

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