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Votes at 16
Making it a success

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Executive Summary

More and more countries around the world are discussing a lowering of the voting age, often with the aim of addressing young people's electoral participation, their representation in politics and society, and intergenerational justice. Although empirical evidence from countries with Votes at 16 shows that the inclusion of younger voters in the electorate can, under certain circumstances, bring about positive outcomes, it is also clear that changing young people's voting rights alone does not lead to more participation and better representation of young people.

Whether or not, and to what extent, voting age reform can bring about positive results for young people's representation largely depends on its implementation: how a lowering of the voting age is campaigned for and how it is introduced in elections. To advise campaigners and policymakers how to best use the opportunities that Votes at 16 can offer, this report identifies recommendations on (1) how campaigns for Votes at 16 can succeed in putting the issue on the political agenda, and (2) good and bad practices for mobilizing young first-time voters when introducing Votes at 16.

Campaigning for a lowering of the voting age

- **Context matters**: Campaigns that are initiated top-down face different challenges from those that work from the bottom up. Strategies need to consider whether campaigns are initiated *top-down* or *bottom-up*.

- **Young people to take center-stage**: Young people need to be visible in campaigns, e.g., as spokespeople, and can be empowered through rhetoric or media training to help them succeed in their role as campaign advocates.

- **Plan time and resources to build networks**: Campaigns on voting at 16 that involve existing organizations and that are network-oriented have more potential than those working through a single organization. Building effective networks requires time and resources.

- **Connect Votes at 16 to other issues**: To build broader support and win necessary majorities, campaigns should consider linking voting age reform to other political or societal issues, especially related to participation and inclusion.

- **Develop cross-partisan approaches**: Initiatives to lower the voting should be non-partisan, and work across party lines. Bringing in voices from political parties that are otherwise skeptical is a particularly promising strategy.

- **Draw on evidence and seek support from researchers**: Researchers should make evidence available to campaigns, in plain language and open access.

- **Pool resources**: Networks of initiatives can share and pool core resources for decentralized use, e.g., as summaries, templates or websites, to make it easier for them to engage and avoid replication of existing efforts.

- **Be proactive to generate media attention**: To increase issue salience, campaigns can actively use social and traditional media to mobilize supporters or to shape the broader discourse, e.g., opinion pieces or attention-grabbing measures.

Implementing the lowering of the voting age

- **Enhance nationwide standards on civic education in schools**: The lowering of the voting age needs to be understood as an opportunity to build consensus on and enhance standards for civic education in schools, focusing on deliberation and discussion of political issues. This should be developed with young people.

- **Support political education outside of schools**: Youth work and youth organizations, especially those already frequented by young people, should be strengthened, so that they can deliver civic education with and by young people outside of schools.

- **Enhance young people's self-efficacy beyond elections**: Municipal and school initiatives, such as youth citizens' budgets, can offer young people opportunities to be involved in concrete decision-making processes and experience valuable political efficacy outside elections.

- **Support political parties to enhance their engagement with young voters**: Once young people are allowed to vote, political parties across the spectrum must scale up their engagement with them, e.g., by developing campaign materials targeting young people and investing in the recruitment of younger members.

- **Cooperate with election officials early**: Active cooperation with implementing bodies (such as electoral commissions) can help institutionalize non-partisan initiatives and allow for mobilization and celebration of young first-time voters.

- **Use established and social media to mobilize young voters**: Social media are particularly useful for peer-to-peer campaigns; traditional and established media can be effective to integrate young people's voices into the mainstream.

- **Consider the potential impact of reverse socialization**: Young people who vote can impact the political attitudes of the household or family. This reverse socialization should be studied further and considered carefully for its potential impact on policy preferences, political representation, and intergenerational justice.

Further research

The recommendations and best practice examples presented in this report provide a starting point for work on future campaigns and implementation of voting age reform. However, the experiences and case studies presented also reveal that there are gaps in what we know about the introduction of Votes at 16.

These questions deserve further research, particularly through qualitative and quantitative longitudinal, experimental, and internationally comparative research: how sustainable first-time voter effects are in the long run; which groups of young people tend to participate more, and who tends to participate less; what is the absolute and relative effectiveness of formats of formal and informal civic education; and whether political decision-makers correctly assess young people's attitudes.

Content

1   Introduction

More and more countries are debating and experimenting with electoral reforms that allow people as young as 16 to vote in elections. Often the aim is to counteract declining voter turnout in the population and to motivate more young people to participate in democratic processes. The latter is particularly important because due to demographic change the overall impact of young voters on democracy continues to decline, and among young people inequalities in electoral participation increase as participation declines (Vehrkamp et al., 2015).

However, experience from multiple countries shows that Votes at 16 is not a sure-fire success. Although empirical research from various countries does not indicate strong negative effects, it is also clear that changing young people's voting rights alone does not lead to a higher participation of young people in political discourse. To use the opportunities that Votes at 16 presents, it is thus necessary to focus on the *how*: How can lowering the voting age to 16 be implemented well and successfully, so that it leads to positive outcomes for young people?

This report addresses the question of how Votes at 16 can best be implemented Votes at 16 by reviewing current evidence from academia and practice in countries that have lowered the voting age or that have seen campaigns to introduce a voting age of 16. The objective is to analyze outcomes of Votes at 16 and campaigns to introduce Votes at 16, taking into account effects at the individual level, society, and the political system. The interest in voting age reform relates to questions on how a lowering of the voting age and supporting first-time voters can bring about societal benefits more widely, especially in light of problems related to political inequality and in the political representation of young people. To this end, the report addresses both how campaigns for Votes at 16 can succeed in putting the issue on the political agenda and what good (and bad) practice for introducing Votes at 16 and to mobilize young voters can be identified. In particular, we seek examples of good (in contrast to bad) practice that can be adapted or scaled (or, otherwise, avoided) in countries seeking to introduce Votes at 16.

In addition to reviewing existing literature, interviews with experts form a central basis for this report. The authors interviewed thirteen academics and activists who shared insights into different countries from a research or practice perspective. The interviews were semi-structured using an interview guide. The focus of the interviews was to gather insights into the campaign or implementation processes in the individual countries and, in particular, to discuss concrete measures and give practical examples. All participants gave their consent to be named.

Table 1. Overview of the contributing experts

Focus	Expert	Affiliation
USA	Josh Douglas	University of Kentucky
USA	Brandon Klugman	Vote16USA, Generation Citizen (formerly)
New Zeeland	Ralph Hall	„Make it 16" campaign
South America	Constanza Sanhueza Petrarca	Australian National University (formerly WZB)
Great Britain	Thomas Loughran	Lancaster University
Scotland	Gareth Brown	Scottish Youth Parliament (formerly)
Wales	Jessica Blair	Electoral Reform Society Cymru
Norway	Guro Ødegard	Norwegian Social Research, Oslo Metropolitan University
Estonia	Anu Toots	Tallinn University
Austria	Eva Zeglovits	Institute for Empirical Social Studies (IFES) Vienna
Belgium	Dieter Stiers	Centre for Citizenship & Democracy, KU Leuven
Netherlands	Sarah de Lange & Linet Durmuşoğlu	Universiteit van Amsterdam

Table 1. Overview of the contributing experts

2 Current state of research

Although lowering the voting age to 16 is not a new idea, it has been studied empirically mostly in recent years. In Central and South American countries, such as Nicaragua (1984) and Brazil (1988), Votes at 16 was introduced in the 1980s. Nevertheless, until the early 2000s, there was little research that could provide a clear answer to the question of how 16- and 17-year-olds would turn out if they were allowed to vote. Even earlier instances of lowering the voting age, for example from 21 to 18, have not been comprehensively evaluated with research (Mycock et al., 2022).

Due to a lack of empirical studies and very limited data, research on the possible outcomes of Votes at 16 were initially based on theoretical analyses, in which conclusions on the voting behavior of to-be-enfranchised young people were derived from the behavior of somewhat older 18- to 24-year-olds. Such studies come to pessimistic conclusions and emphasize the traditionally lower voter turnout in this age group compared to older cohorts of adults (The Electoral Commission, 2004). In addition, these studies emphasize that younger voters tend to have less political knowledge (Johnson & Marshall, 2004) and that their voting decisions are less coherent (Chan & Clayton, 2006), which may make them more susceptible to political influence.

In addition to these derived assessments, normative arguments are often cited in debates of Votes at 16 (Hart & Atkins, 2011; Tonge & Mycock, 2010). These question the extent to which lowering the voting age is compatible with other rights and duties conferred on young people between the ages of 16 and 25 (Cowley & Denver, 2004). Such purely normative questions cannot be answered empirically and thus remain controversial; both arguments in favor of and against the lowering of the voting age can be formulated from normative debates.

However, it is undisputed that numerous changes regarding the legal status of young people take place during the transition to adulthood, and that these interact with possible electoral reform and how young people perceive themselves as full citizens (Gifford et al., 2014). Such arguments tend to reflect broader debates about the organization of democratic processes at a given point in time (Mycock et al., 2020). Thus, it is often not just about the voting age *per se*, but about who should be involved in political decision-making. Understanding the lowering of the voting age in a broader context is therefore important and directly includes, for example, the question of political education (Milner, 2020).

Table 2. Countries with (partial) electoral reform and voting age under 18

Country	Voting age	Election level	Since (year)
Argentina	16	All levels	2012
Austria	16	All levels	2007
Belgium	16	European elections only	2022
Brazil	16	All levels	1988
Germany*	16	State/local & European elections	1996-2022
Ecuador	16	All levels	2008
Estonia	16	Local elections only	2015
Greece	17	All levels	2016
Israel	17	Local elections only	2003
Malta	16	All levels	2014/2018
Nicaragua	16	All levels	1984
Scotland	16	State/local elections only	2014/15
Wales	16	State/local elections only	2020

* Only passive suffrage and in some Länder, at state and municipal level only in Baden-Württemberg, Brandenburg, Bremen, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Schleswig-Holstein; at municipal level only in Berlin, North Rhine-Westphalia, Saxony-Anhalt, Schleswig-Holstein and Thuringia. Governments in some further Länder have indicated a desire to change legislation.

2.1. Data on Votes at 16

Arguments in favor of and against lowering the voting age from 18 to 16 can now be empirically examined, at least in part. Although many studies initially expected negative outcomes from a reform of the voting age, there were also researchers who postulated positive outcomes. Mark Franklin (2004) saw a lowering of the voting age as a possible instrument to increase voter turnout among young people and thus achieve higher participation in the population in the long run. While at the beginning of the 2000s Franklin could not examine this argument based on empirical evidence, this is different today. Especially in the last 15 years, several countries, federal states or regions in certain countries have lowered the voting age (see Table 2) and some have

monitored and gathered data on these reforms. Thus, it is now possible to make empirical statements about how 16- and 17-year-olds act if they are allowed to vote.

There are differences in the extent and nature of the reforms that led to a lowering of the voting age across countries. In some countries, the voting age was lowered for all elections (e.g., Austria, Argentina, Ecuador, Malta). In other countries, the voting age was lowered for all 16- and 17-year-olds, but only for elections below the national level, such as local elections (e.g., Estonia). In addition, there are many countries where the voting age is not uniform. In the UK, for example, 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland and Wales are allowed to vote in local elections and elections for Scottish and Welsh parliaments respectively. In England and Northern Ireland, however, young people can only vote in elections at the age of 18. A similar situation exists in Germany: in some Länder, 16- and 17-year-olds may vote in elections for federal state parliaments, while their peers in other Länder may only vote in local elections. And in yet others they may only vote in all elections at the age of 18. The German Parliament has also legislated to lower the voting age to 16 for the next European Parliament elections (as did Belgium). In addition, there are countries where the voting age has either been lowered to 16 in some municipalities on an experimental basis (e.g., Norway and Belgium), and states (e.g., the USA) where individual municipalities have lowered the voting age to 16.

There is no systematic study that evaluates these processes comparatively and across different countries. Nevertheless, a number of important conclusions can be drawn from the findings of various investigations on the effects of Votes at 16 in terms of promoting political interest, a sustainable increase in voter turnout, and the willingness to assume social and political responsibility (Eichhorn & Bergh, 2020, 2021).

2.2. Empirical findings on the effects of Votes at 16

Indeed, there is evidence of positive effects that Votes at 16 can have on young people's turnout. By using new data, Franklin (2020) was able to test his old hypothesis and show that after the lowering of the voting age in South American countries as well as in Austria, young people's turnout actually increased. While differentiating the exact rate of increase within specific cohorts is difficult with existing individual-level data, an aggregate effect of a 5 to 6 percent increase in overall turnout can be attributed to the lowering of the voting age, according to Franklin. One reason for this is that 16- and 17-year-olds tend to experience voting for the first time differently than older young people. Even among over-18s, we know that a younger age at the first election (i.e., at 18 or 19 rather than at 20 or 21) is associated with increased average turnout. Bhatti & Hansen (2012) show, for example, how in the 2009 Danish local elections, turnout among 18- and 19-year-olds decreases by one percentage point with each additional month of age. Similar results have been demonstrated in other contexts, such as

elections in Finland and Texas (Bhatti et al., 2012). In the transition to adulthood, attitudes towards and participation in politics change for many people due to rapidly changing life circumstances (Hart & Atkins, 2011; Prior, 2010). As younger people under the age of 18 are more likely to live in an environment with strong socialization influences, especially the parental home and school, an earlier first-time voting experience can be perceived more communally (Franklin, 2004) and positive effects may be fully developed through the formative influence of the family or school. Bhatti and Hansen (2012) demonstrate some of these socialization processes empirically.

This shows the limitations and problems of the older studies mentioned above. Basically, those studies did not look at the question of causality clearly enough. Instead of asking how young people behave currently and how these patterns would play out after lowering the voting age, the focus should be on the extent to which lowering the voting age could causally change existing patterns of voter behavior among young people. For example, research shows that 16- and 17-year-olds – if allowed to vote – show a higher political interest than slightly older young people. Wagner et al. (2012) show that while 16- to 17-year-olds have slightly less factual knowledge than 18- to 21-year-olds, they articulate significantly more political interest (at the same level as 22- to 25-year-olds). Since early voting experiences can be habit-forming (Dinas, 2012), the opportunity to vote at the age of 16 has the potential to bring about lasting change.

In practice, we find evidence of positive effects of Votes at 16 in some of the countries now researched. In Scotland, for example, 16- and 17-year-olds showed a similar level of political interest as the rest of the population before the 2014 vote (Eichhorn, 2018a) and they were significantly more politically involved than 18-24-year-olds: While around 75 percent of the youngest new voters in a post-election survey said they had voted, only 54 percent of 18-24-year-olds did (Electoral Commission, 2014, p. 64). Moreover, their willingness to participate was also higher than among their peers in other parts of the UK in the following year: in 2015, 67 percent of 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland said that they would almost certainly vote in a House of Commons election if allowed to, but only 39 percent of their peers in the rest of the UK said the same about themselves (Eichhorn, 2018b). A similar picture emerged in the same survey for political participation through non-representative channels (e.g., participation in demonstrations or petitions): while 57 percent of young Scots said they had taken part in at least one such activity, the figure was only 40 percent in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. A positive effect on political interest was also observed in Austria (Zeglovits & Zandonella, 2013) and increased participation seems to be at least partially established in the longer term. Aichholzer & Kritzinger (2020) show that in Austria cohorts who were allowed to vote at 16 no longer show lower turnout compared to adults. Positive trends have also been observed in some parts of Germany where the voting age had been lowered (Faas & Leininger, 2020).

In fact, many of the pessimistic expectations have not materialized in practice. In addition to voter turnout, concerns about young people's lack of ability to make political decisions have been partly countered by positive experiences in countries with Votes at 16. Further, it was shown that many young people do not follow their parents in political decision-making. In the run-up to the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum, for example, over 40 percent of voters younger than 18 years had a different view of the referendum question compared to their parents (Eichhorn, 2018a). In the same context, it has also been observed that younger first-time voters are not influenced one way or the other by greater exposure to political issues: young people who had discussed the vote on possible Scottish independence in a class at school were no more in favor or against than young people who had not discussed the issue in class (Eichhorn et al., 2014).

Instead, in the Scottish context, we have seen that in the year following the introduction of Votes at 16 the traditional pattern of inequality in political participation by social class was significantly less pronounced among young people in Scotland than among their peers in the rest of the UK (Huebner & Eichhorn, 2020). As things stand, this finding represents the first insight into whether lowering the voting age to 16 might also have effects on the distribution of young people's political participation. Most analyses have looked at average levels of political attitudes or participation. However, in the research in Scotland, an additional effect of the distribution among young people was observed: while there were no differences in political participation by social class among 16- and 17-year-olds in Scotland, such differences were very much observed among peers in the rest of the UK and in the adult population of Scotland. In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, voter turnout, non-electoral political participation, and accessing political information were each more pronounced among young people from higher social classes. In Scotland, this was not the case for 16- and 17-year-olds – while it was observed for older generations there as well.

This result is rather surprising, as traditionally young people's political participation has been highly socially stratified, similar to that of the rest of the population. In the UK, for example, it has been shown repeatedly that socially disadvantaged young people show overall lower rates of political participation (Hoskins et al., 2012; Hoskins & Janmaat, 2016) and that this effect is related to social class (Henn et al., 2007). Young people are also aware of this themselves and say that they would participate more if only they had a higher social status (Levy, 2013). Similar findings have been reported in other countries. With respect to Germany, Abendschön and Roßteutscher (2016) argue that social inequality in voter turnout, especially related to educational background, has rather increased among young people in recent decades. Inequalities are often passed on through the family and the gap in electoral participation is becoming increasingly similar to the level of inequality in non-electoral

political participation. In addition to the generational transmission of social class characteristics in the form of economic, cultural, or social capital (Quintelier, 2015; Verba et al., 2005), family backgrounds also impact young people's civic attitudes and behavior, some of which are in turn associated with social class and which all impact young people's political attitudes and behaviors (Jennings, 2007; Quintelier, 2015). The Scottish results are therefore indeed surprising. At the same time, it is not possible to state which exact causal mechanisms are at play based on one study, and how exactly the potential of the lowering of the voting age could be used to establish greater distributional justice in young people's political participation. Further monitoring of political participation by social class and educational background is thus extremely important, especially among young people and in the context of measures on Votes at 16.

2.3. From "if" to "how" – state of research on success factors for Votes at 16

The empirical findings summarized above show that lowering the voting age to 16 can be accompanied by positive changes. However, this does not mean that positive outcomes come about automatically. The effect on how young people decide whether or not to vote and seek information, for example, is not clear across all contexts (Toots & Idnurm, 2020). Especially when Votes at 16 is limited to secondary elections (such as state or local elections) or when 16- and 17-year-olds only participate in elections as part of an experiment (Bergh, 2013; Stiers et al., 2020), effects have not always been measured as extensive and lasting. The crucial question is therefore not so much *whether* lowering the voting age is empirically justifiable in principle, because few negative effects have been observed in practice. However, since we see substantial differences in the *way* the lowering of the voting age plays out in different contexts, the focus of further research must be on the success factors of implementing Votes at 16. In summary, an earlier voting age *is likely to be* associated with positive changes in young people's political participation, but this does not necessarily have to be the case.

Much existing research has placed particular attention on the role of civic education in schools, showing that the interplay between enhancements in civic education and giving young people opportunities to debate political issues can increase the potential benefits of Votes at 16 (Zeglovits & Zandonella, 2013). However, the type of civic education plays an important role. While basic acquisition of knowledge about the political system is important, the strongest factor for increased political self-efficacy and participation among young people is deliberative civic education: when political issues are actively discussed in the classroom (Eichhorn, 2018b). This means that students are enabled to actively learn about and exchange different political positions, rather than just talking about electoral processes in theory, for example. The teaching of skills to critically discuss political issues is just as important as learning to articulate

one's own point of view. The importance of such discursive engagement in political education has been confirmed repeatedly in research in many countries (Dassonneville et al., 2012; Torney-Purta, 2002; Torney-Purta & Lopez, 2006). At the same time, teachers are often very cautious in their implementation of this learning in schools. Due to insecurities and often the fear of being accused of political bias, many teachers do not feel sufficiently trained to offer such lessons (Toots & Idnurm, 2020; Head et al., 2014; Weinberg, 2021).

However, civic education in schools is not the only success factor for Votes at 16. How the change in voting rights comes about and subsequently implemented is of great importance, too (Eichhorn & Bergh, 2021). Even in campaigns for Votes at 16, there are major differences, and this may impact the reform's implementation. Some initiatives are organized top-down, for example by parties or governments (as in Estonia or Scotland), whereas other campaigns are built more *bottom-up* by young people and youth organizations (e.g., in the US and New Zealand). In the latter case, it has been shown to be crucial for a positive outcome that young people themselves become visible in campaigns (Douglas, 2020). High visibility of young people's participation in society is especially helpful when it comes to pushing for broader policy change, such as a reform of civic education in conjunction with Votes at 16. Similarly, a high visibility of young people in campaigns that call for Votes at 16 is beneficial in that this makes young people feel recognized as full and equal citizens, which in turn can have a positive impact on young people's perceived self-efficacy and self-image as voters (Huebner, 2021; Sanghera et al., 2018). The latter is not only important when it comes to the direct and short-term effects of electoral reform, but also particularly for the long-term development of young people (Breeze et al., 2017), intergenerational justice, as well as for the quality of democratic debate in society as a whole.

Thus, regarding Votes at 16, it is necessary to focus on the *how*-question: How can lowering the voting age to 16 be implemented for the reform to become a success? And furthermore, in relation to the question of success factors, there is a lack of answers as to which measures and processes matter most when implementing electoral reform. While much of the empirical research has focused on the question of *whether* the voting age should be lowered or not, activists and researchers are gathering evidence from their ongoing work on which aspects deserve special attention in the implementation of Votes at 16. In the following parts of this report, we go into detail on these aspects deserving more attention and the evidence gathered from experts and practitioners.

3   Campaigning and agenda-setting on Votes at 16

The evidence presented in the following sections combines experiences and practice shared by campaigners and practitioners with insights from ongoing research on Votes at 16. Building on the existing research on Votes at 16, the interviews with experts conducted as part of this study offer reflections on success factors and best practice for the successful introduction of a lowered voting age. The aim is to better understand which concrete measures were introduced in different countries, and crucially, which ones worked. The focus is both on campaigns to introduce Votes at 16 and on measures supporting the implementation of the electoral reforms.

The findings go beyond the question of the pros and cons of the lowering of the voting age. Instead, they demonstrate how positive individual and societal outcomes can be achieved through the participation of younger people in elections in the context of Votes at 16. On the one hand, existing findings are consolidated, and, on the other hand, we show which gaps exist in our current understanding of Votes at 16 and which measures are potentially worth testing in future implementations of the reform.

We first look at evidence on the impact of campaigning that takes place before the introduction of Votes at 16 and how lowering the voting age can influence the political agenda. Taking stock, eight core areas of activity emerge where practice shows that certain approaches work particularly well. These include, firstly, alignment with previously researched top-down or bottom-up processes on which the respective campaigns are based (Eichhorn & Bergh, 2021), and the visibility of young people as a core building block of these campaigns (Douglas, 2020). Also important are networks and planning that allows sufficient time to build them, linking Votes at 16 with other politically relevant issues, and working with political parties across party lines. For this work, campaign teams need, above all, empirical and well-researched findings, centrally provided materials that local branches of campaign initiatives can easily use, and targeted media outreach.

3.1.   From Adaptation to top-down or bottom-up processes

While in some countries campaigns to lower the voting age were initiated by existing institutions such as governments or political parties (*top-down, e.g.,* in Scotland, Wales, Estonia), initiatives in other countries were started from "below" and built up successively (*bottom-up, e.g.,* New Zealand, USA). Both approaches can work well and in practice there are often overlaps. *Top-down* processes are particularly successful if civil society groups get involved at an early stage to help shape implementation (as in Scotland, an example further below in this section). It is crucial

that campaigns are adapted to the realities and challenges of the respective circumstances (Eichhorn & Bergh, 2021).

Bottom-up campaigns face the challenge of creating visibility and being taken seriously. Campaign manager Brandon Klugman ("Vote16USA" in the USA) and activist Ralph Hall ("Make it 16" in New Zealand) emphasized how important it was for them to position themselves as a professional campaign in order for political actors to deem them relevant interlocutors. The involvement of academics (see 3.6) and the cooperation with established media outlets (see 3.8) were of particular importance to them. In addition, empowering decentralized, locally anchored initiatives is helpful (see 3.7).

Top-down processes face the challenge of how the actors behind them are perceived. Particularly if the considerations are politically motivated to further a particular political party or program (as initially in Scotland), non-partisan groups need to be involved as quickly as possible so that the objective is explicitly linked to the democratic representation of young people and thus more likely to find broad acceptance. Working across party lines plays an important role in this (see 3.5). Specifically, Gareth Brown, among others, who had helped coordinate the campaign on lowering the voting age for the Scottish Youth Parliament named cooperation with organizations that have a broad thematic range as an important step (see 3.3 and 3.4).

Analytically, it is very important to look at the context of a country's campaign for Votes at 16 as a first step, as this makes it easier to see which experiences are transferable to other contexts and which ones may be more specific to a particular country. In all cases, however, it is highly important to involve young people in the campaign.

> **Transferable best practice:**
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> - Strategies for campaigns need to be strongly adapted to national contexts and in particular take into account the question of whether campaigns are initiated *top-down* or *bottom-up*.
>
> - Even if the initiative comes from either established institutions or civil society organizations, other actors can be involved after initiation. Good interaction in implementation is particularly promising.

3.2.   Visibility of young people as a core building block of campaigns

All interviewees with active campaigning experience stressed how crucial it is that young people are not only involved in campaigning, but that they are also clearly visible and perceived as having a say. This can be illustrated by looking at different processes in the US. Josh Douglas has examined the experiences in several US municipalities (Douglas 2019). In the state of Maryland, municipalities have lowered the voting age to 16 and implementation was seen as successful. The campaign in Takoma Park, in particular, has since also been used by the national Votes at 16 campaign as a positive case study to show how young people should be visibly involved. In the interview, Josh Douglas emphasized how important it was that young people advocated in the communities instead of letting adults speak for them.

The opposite was the case in Golden, Colorado, where some city council representatives, following the positive experience in Maryland, had spoken out in favor of lowering the voting age and called for a referendum. However, the proposal was rejected by about 65 percent of the population, as it was perceived as abstract and imposed from above. Young people were hardly perceived as advocates for their own concerns.

Constanza Sanhueza Petrarca, speaking on the case of Argentina, also stressed how crucial it is that young people themselves want and promote the lowering of the voting age. In Argentina, campaign work was organized by student representatives. The representatives of the country's elite schools usually enjoy high media attention and receive relevant training (e.g., in rhetoric), and they joined forces with representatives of a greater range of schools in the country to communicate a wider message. In the public debate, arguments for the voting right amendment were therefore presented by young people themselves. The New Zealand campaign offers another example of the successful involvement of young people as visible advocates in campaigning, which they have summarized in extensive documentation.[1]

Thus, measures that empower young people in campaigns are of great importance. However, the best way to do this depends on the context. In Argentina, for example, rhetoric and media training took place within the elite schools whose representatives were able to establish access to the public debate. In the more decentralized USA, such empowerment measures were provided by a national organization (Generation Citizen, with Brandon Klugman leading its "Votes16USA" campaign). These included consultations and formats that provided, for example, training on how to use media

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[1] This documentation can be viewed here: https://www.makeit16.org.nz/our-story

and helped with strategy development. Such empowerment activities help young people take up more active roles and increase their visibility in campaigns.

> **Transferable best practice:**
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> - It is essential that campaigns for votes at 16 do not only involve young people in the organization and debate, but that they also clearly establish them as spokespersons.
> - Specific measures that empower young people in campaigns, such as rhetoric or media training or help with strategy planning, can help young people succeed in their role as campaign advocates.

3.3. Building networks with sufficient time

Successful campaigns, particularly those that go beyond the municipal level, are usually not just linked to one organization. Instead, they often link several youth organizations, working together for the goal of lowering the voting age, rather than competing for attention. The specific national context also plays an important role in building networks.

In Brazil, for example, the lowering of the voting age was strongly linked to the transition to democracy. Many youth organizations supported the transition and saw electoral reform as part of ensuring that young people continued to play a role in the debate on the country's development (Sanhueza Petrarca, 2020). Elsewhere, such as in Scotland, there was already a wide range of active and established youth organizations working collaboratively in the campaign, for example presenting joint statements at hearings in the Scottish Parliament on the issue.[2] This enabled them to create a more unified image of established civil society organizations.

Crucially, building and coordinating such networks takes time. The case of Wales illustrates what happens when the lowering of the voting age is implemented too quickly and when there is not enough time to build sufficient networks. In a top-down and relatively quick process of electoral reform – with less than 24 months between the first bill and the first election in which 16- and 17-year-olds were allowed to vote in Wales – experts and civil servants from the Welsh administration dominated the hearings and when drafting the bill. Youth organizations played hardly any role in the

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[2] For the hearing in the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Youth Parliament, Young Scot and Youthlink Scotland as leading organizations made a joint submission. Available at: https://archive2021.parliament.scot/S4_Bills/Scottish%20Elections%20(Reduction%20of%20Voting%20Age)%20Bill/SPPB216.pdf (p. 187).

planning and hearings. In the ten months that remained for the implementation of the reform until the first election in May 2021, youth organizations initially did not connect to each other, and often started working on individual initiatives. According to Jessica Blair, this was partly due to many Welsh initiatives having temporary and project-based rather than structural funding.

Transferable best practice:

- Campaigns on votes at 16 should be strongly network-oriented and, depending on the national context, involve existing organizations and structures.

- Establishing networks requires time and coordination. Therefore, structural funding is more important than isolated project funding.

- Bringing together already established organizations (if available) is more promising than establishing new ones. It is important to create capacities and roles that can coordinate campaigns within existing structures.

3.4. Establishing thematic links

To generate greater reach, Votes at 16 campaigns can actively collaborate with organizations whose focus is on specific issues – rather than on electoral or political aims –, e.g., addressing children's and young people's rights, or the rights of minorities represented by young people, such as LGBTQ+ youth or young people from ethnic minorities. Linking issues in this way can increase the reach of campaigns and can engage young people who are advocates for a range of issues. This can make an important contribution to diversifying the kinds of young people who are involved in Votes at 16 campaigns.

With the aim of giving young people as a whole a voice, according to Gareth Brown the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) had very good experiences with cooperation on various issues. Specifically, they sought mutually beneficial ways of working together with youth organizations on other issues, such as LGBTQI+ rights or ethnic diversity. While initiatives on other issues supported the Votes at 16 campaign to raise the overall profile of young people, SYP's campaign gave those initiatives more of a political voice. As an established organization, SYP had access to political actors and was able to open new avenues for these initiatives. As a result, a broader coalition of supporters emerged as well as the narrative that it was not just about voter participation *per se*, but about involving young people more in political discussions. Votes at 16 was thus established as a starting point for further campaigns and activities

(and resulted in existing networks that can be used in the implementation to increase participation: see section 3.b.).

Moreover, in constitutional settings such as Germany, where a two-thirds majority is required for electoral reform, such issue linkage may not only be beneficial, but even necessary to make Votes at 16 possible. Due to the two-thirds majority required for electoral reform in Germany, a more comprehensive reform proposal, which for example refers to children's rights in a broader sense or includes a reform of the voting rights of other minorities, can provide the necessary arguments to convince actors that are critical of Votes at 16 of the necessity of a reform. In addition, issue linkage offers the opportunity to set the course for successful implementation by building on broad support from across the political spectrum.

According to expert Sarah de Lange, electoral reform in the Netherlands, for example, is only promising if campaigns for Votes at 16 are combined with other issues specific to the reform of electoral law, since, as in Germany, Votes at 16 at the national level can only be achieved through a constitutional amendment. In Wales, linking issues also played an important role on the way to Votes at 16: here, lowering the voting age was combined with a broader focus on children's rights and a reform of voting rights for migrants and, as such, successful.

Transferable best practice:

- Votes at 16 can be connected to discussions on broader societal and democratic issues, especially in relation to participation and inclusion, incl. changes to the country's constitution (e.g., as in Argentina, Brazil, Austria, Norway).

- In countries like Germany, where a constitutional amendment is required to introduce votes at 16, issue linkage can help establish necessary majorities.

3.5. Working with parties and across party lines

Where the initiation of the lowering of the voting age is not explicitly linked to a political party and their program (as in Estonia), it is very important for campaigns to be non-partisan on the one hand and to cooperate actively with political parties on the other. Ralph Hall, for example, said it was an essential condition for the campaign in New Zealand to be independent of political parties and to be perceived as such. It is particularly important to actively address those political parties that have traditionally

been skeptical or opposed to lowering the voting age. This can be achieved by emphasizing a possible benefit for these parties. The following arguments worked for interviewees in different contexts:

▪ When young people are involved in elections, they do not necessarily vote along existing patterns of political partisanship (i.e., often with a bias to the left). In the Austrian presidential election 2016, for example, the FPÖ candidate Strache did disproportionately well among the youngest voters. In the Scottish context, the Conservative Party gained support among new voters after they were admitted to the polls (albeit from overall low levels).

▪ For political parties, actively reaching out to young people can offer opportunities to recruit new members. For example, Guro Ødegard described how Norwegian political parties have been able to attract new members by actively engaging younger people in associated campaigns. In Argentina, several of the young people from Votes at 16 campaigns have become active politicians supporting political parties.

▪ Political parties that oppose lowering the voting age can be perceived as not progressive. For example, although in Scotland the lowering of the voting age was initiated by the pro-independence Scottish National Party in government, opposition parties such as Labour and the Liberal Democrats also agreed to the reform – presumably to be associated with the narrative of giving young people in Scotland a voice (Huebner & Eichhorn, 2020).

▪ Political parties should be aware of the potential of reverse socialization and position themselves on arguments that place Votes at 16 in the context of intergenerational justice. Particularly young people who still live at home can influence their parents and even grandparents politically, especially if they are politically interested and feel empowered by civic education (McDevitt & Chaffee, 2002). Thus, young people may be able to act as multipliers for their parents and families (Zaff et al., 2010). McDevitt & Kiousis (2006), for example, demonstrated in a large experimental study involving students and their parents that deliberative civic education can produce such effects. They observed an increased willingness to engage in political discussions among pupils who had participated in the "Kids Voting USA" program and similar effects among parents[3] .

When advocates in favor of the lowering of the voting age can be identified in political parties that are more skeptical, this opens up completely new avenues for the broader public to accept Votes at 16. This is illustrated in the UK context, where the then leader of the Scottish Conservative Party, Ruth Davidson, changed her opinion on the issue

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[3] See also 4.1. for a more detailed account of the initiative.

and voted in favor of lowering the voting age in 2015. This motivated other Conservative politicians – also those in Westminster – to openly support the reform. The shift was further encouraged by a publication of the Electoral Reform Society, in which only Conservative politicians (who are otherwise less likely to work with this organization) presented arguments in favor of the lowering of the voting age.[4] Such measures can help take the discussion beyond those parts of society that agree with voting age reform anyway. In Germany, for example, we are currently observing how campaigns focus on convincing actors within the conservative Christian Democrats (CDU). For example, the Berlin initiative to lower the voting age has explicitly focused its website and presentation of arguments to convince members of the CDU.[5]

In addition, it can be helpful to work with official, non-partisan organizations. For example, in some municipalities in the US, working with election authorities and election officials ensured that votes on lowering the voting age were perceived as fair and organized in a non-partisan way, as Josh Douglas reported.

Transferable best practice:

- Initiatives to lower the voting age should ideally have a non-partisan role (unless the process is strongly initiated and organized by a political party). This can be achieved, among other things, through early cooperation with official institutions.

- Campaigns should work with political parties across party lines to develop broad acceptance. It is particularly helpful if there is a focus on more conservative parties or those political parties who are opposed to electoral reform.

3.6. Making use of empirical research

Especially for *bottom-up* campaigns, it is very important to be perceived as professional. According to activists, empirical findings play a particularly important role in this. In the interview, Ralph Hall emphasized the role of robust surveys to complement normative perspectives in the work of "Make it 16" in New Zealand. In his view, arguments that rely solely based on normative or rights-based perspectives are less successful than those that additionally show how positive outcomes can be related to the lowering of the voting age. Gareth Brown pointed out that he even

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[4] The publication "Civic Duty: The Conservative Case for Votes at 16 and 17" can be viewed here: https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/publications/civic-duty-the-conservative-case-for-votes-at-16-and-17/
[5] The campaign website can be accessed here: https://www.wahlaltersenken.berlin/.

managed to reverse the narrative using evidence from research. Instead of asking why 16- and 17-year-olds should vote, the question can be posed the other way around as "Why shouldn't 16- and 17-year-olds vote if there are no negative consequences of their enfranchisement, but potentially positive ones?"

In particular, robust data on the potential changes in the political landscape can play a crucial role in campaigning for Votes at 16. According to Linet Durmuşoğlu, young voters in the Netherlands would have only a small effect on the election results of various parties. However, simulations of the impact of these changes, albeit small, could have a noticeable effect on the distribution of political power in the fragmented multi-party system in the Netherlands (also shown by Bronner & Ifkovits, 2019, for Austria). Such calculations are rarely published, but they can stimulate overall political debate and sometimes connect Votes at 16 with questions of intergenerational justice in the political system.

However, advocacy based on empirical research can be very difficult to do for organizations, because, for example, academic articles are not freely accessible, it is difficult to develop a full overview, or it is sometimes difficult to understand the academic language, especially in quantitative surveys. It is important that researchers make the results of surveys and analyses accessible, for example through short summaries of academic texts in blog posts[6] or the funding of open access publication of academic articles.[7] A fantastic resource has been developed by Michael Shull at the University of Maryland. He compiled an extensive literature review summarizing key findings from studies so far in an accessible manner.[8] Campaigns can also share overviews of existing articles and summaries, as well as contacts to researchers, so that organizations that may not be able to do their own research can access them.[9]

In addition to providing research reviews, researchers themselves can play an important role in supporting campaigns. For example, in addition to his research, Josh Douglas has worked closely with Votes16USA activists to translate findings into practice.

According to the interviewees, particularly useful arguments are:

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[6] See, for example, Jan Eichhorn's blog post as a supplement to the article on lowering the voting age in Scotland (Eichhorn 2018b). Available here: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/votes-at-16-new-evidence-from-scotland/.

[7] The current articles by the two authors of this report, for example, have been published in the public domain. S. Eichhorn & Bergh (2021) and Huebner (2021).

[8] Shull, M. (2022). Vote16 Literature Review. School of Public Policy. Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement. University of Maryland. Available at https://spp.umd.edu/research-impact/publications/vote16-literature-review.

[9] The Vote16USA campaign, for example, has a collection of "Academic Studies" on its website: https://vote16usa.org/resources/.

- 16- and 17-year-olds tend to participate more than slightly older young people in first-time voting;
- Lowering the voting age does not necessarily only benefit left-wing parties; it potentially allows all parties to better communicate with young people;
- Young people do not simply follow the opinion of their parents – especially if they feel politically well informed;
- Lowering the voting age makes it possible to make greater use of positive socialization influences to increase participation;
- Civic education can have a positive impact and should be strengthened;
- Lowering the voting age alone is not enough but can be understood as a drive or impetus to promote further political education and youth work.

Transferable best practice:

- Research findings should be made available to campaigns for their work. Overviews of existing articles help organizations that might not be able to do their own research.

- Researchers can actively contribute to campaigns and advise them in their work.

- In addition, academics should make their findings available in simpler language and freely accessible formats so that activists can use them, for example through short summaries of academic texts, blog posts, or the publication of academic articles as open access.

3.7. Pooling and providing materials for local initiatives

Many local initiatives do not have the capacity to review existing research and campaign experiences and draw conclusions for their own work. Therefore, in addition to the empowerment measures (mentioned in 3.2), which can be provided centrally for initiatives, it is also helpful if existing materials are prepared for wider utilization. This refers to two types of materials: on the one hand, overviews and ideally easy-to-understand summaries of existing research and, on the other hand, materials for use in campaign work (e.g., samples for flyers, presentation templates).[10] Also, visibility of various initiatives can be increased by having an online platform that connects local initiatives to national efforts, as for example in Canada.[11]

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[10] A good example of such a collection of material is provided by the Vote16USA campaign on its website: https://vote16usa.org/resources/.
[11] See the campaign website https://vote16.ca/ for a good example of this.

> **Transferable best practice:**
>
> - Websites should pool research materials and make them easily accessible, ideally with summaries in simple language.
>
> - Campaign materials can also be provided for decentralized use (e.g., via presentation templates). Ideally, such materials should be easily editable, so that initiatives can adapt them to their respective contexts.

3.8. Generating media attention

For the experts interviewed for this report, social and traditional mass media played a very different role in their respective campaigns. In most countries, interviewees stressed that social media was useful, but less to influence public opinion and more to organize activities and mobilize volunteers for specific events, for example.

For broader discourses, mass media usually played a more important role. On the one hand, they were perceived as more valuable in shaping political discourse, and on the other hand, coverage in established media could underline the campaigns' professionalism (see 3.6). Since before the start of campaign efforts, the lowering of the voting age was not a major topic of public debate in many countries, the presence of campaigns and debates about the issue in the media helped bring the issue into a broader discourse. In part, this was achieved through opinion pieces by campaign members or supporting academics.[12] But there were also other approaches: in New Zealand, for example, a court case was brought forward. According to Ralph Hall, the chances of lowering the voting age through legal action were considered limited in the first instance and the initial case was not won. It was nevertheless very helpful because it generated a lot of media coverage. Ultimately, at the highest level, the case itself ended up being successful, too, paving the way for a parliamentary vote on the lowering of the voting age in New Zealand.

In those South American countries that saw a lowering of the voting age in the last decade, the situation was somewhat different. According to Constanza Sanhueza Petrarca, in Argentina, for example, social media played a greater role in impacting discourse as well. This was mainly because access to established media is more difficult there overall.

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[12] Josh Douglas, for example, writes for CNN about why votes at 16 should be introduced: https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/19/opinions/parkland-shooting-voting-age-opinion-douglas/index.html

Transferable best practice:

- Depending on the media landscape, strategies should be developed for social and traditional media. While social media are mostly useful to mobilize supporters, traditional mass media can be better used to shape the broader discourse.

- Moreover, attention-grabbing measures can be helpful, such as the court case on lowering the voting age in New Zealand.

- Access to mainstream media can be achieved through opinion pieces by activists or supportive academics.

4 Successfully monitoring and implementing Votes at 16

In this section, the report draws on experiences of the impact and successful implementation of Votes at 16. The main focus is on how the participation of younger people in the context of Votes at 16 can have positive effects, both for young people individually and for society and the quality of democratic debate as a whole.

For the lowering of the voting age to have positive effects at the individual level, it is crucial to consider and implement measures promoting both formal and informal civic education when introducing electoral reform. The goal of both educational work and monitoring measures is to strengthen the perceived self-efficacy of young people.

In addition, a successful introduction of Votes at 16 may offer the opportunity to bring about impact on society, including above all the strengthening of young people's visibility in society and political representation. With the lowering of the voting age, young people's political voices as well as debates on issues of intergenerational justice can gain importance in the public, e.g., in the media, in party political discourses, or in the family.

4.1. Expanding formal civic education (especially in schools)

Since good civic education in schools can have a strong effect on young people's civic attitudes and political participation, as outlined in the review of research above (section 2), it is one of the most important tools for mobilizing young people. Most young people are reached in educational settings. This is true for young people in general, but even more so in the context of the lowering of the voting age from 18 to 16: if the opportunity to participate in an election is imminent, civic education in school can motivate young people to participate in an immediate activity, in contrast to voting in elections being covered in the abstract, thus increasing its importance.

The lowering of the voting age may offer new impulses into debates about civic education. Eva Zeglovits, for example, emphasizes how important the changing of the electoral law was for educational debates in Austria, which is also outlined in academic texts from this period (Filzmaier & Klepp, 2009). Partly due to the expectation that the reform of the voting age should have positive outcomes for young people, the nationwide curriculum was revised to ensure that civic education had a higher priority, and young people felt prepared for the election. As in some other countries, in their approach to civic education Austria has placed a stronger emphasis on the development of competences. Instead of focusing on transferring factual knowledge on electoral processes, greater emphasis was placed on students' abilities to analyze

and present (Sander, 2009). In doing so, Austria stood out by differentiating between factual competence on the one hand and practical skills on the other. As a result, civic education in Austria was developed in a more skills-based way. Although certain thematic focal points (such as human rights education, European policy, and gender equality)[13] are core part of the curriculum, the core claim is to instill "a reflective and (self-)reflexive political awareness, which is built up in a school environment via exemplary approaches to political case studies, taking into account the pupils' realities and experiences".[14] The ability to develop own opinions is acquired through three areas: 1. "acquiring knowledge, reflecting it, passing it on"; 2. "developing positions"; 3. "evaluating, deciding, implementing". Details on implementation are presented in curricula for the whole of Austria and provided in a transparent way via a special web platform of the Ministry of Education.[15] In addition, the platform serves to provide teaching materials and to pool various initiatives and projects. Curricula are differentiated for all types of schools – starting with primary school (as a component of general education). At vocational schools, politics is taught as a separate subject; in other types of schools, it is offered in combination with other social science subjects.

Similar processes could be observed in South America, where, according to Constanza Sanhueza Petrarca, the goal was to engage young people with politics within the framework of the constitutional amendment and through corresponding educational measures. In Wales, electoral reform was also introduced alongside an educational reform aimed at strengthening the understanding of democratic citizenship. However, the short timeframe for implementation meant that the education reform only took effect after introducing Votes at 16 and thus will at the earliest apply to the second or third cohort of 16- and 17-year-old voters.

Crucially, all this is not just about offering civic education *per se*, but about what kind of civic education is provided. In Scotland, for example, the expansion of the subject *Modern Studies* (a mixture of political science and sociology) gave more young people direct access to civic education. In the context of the lowering of the voting age, it was then also discussed what this teaching should look like and how more political deliberation could be included in *Modern Studies*. However, these discussions were not centrally coordinated. Rather, they were initiated on an *ad hoc* basis within various interest groups. For example, the Modern Studies Teacher Association organized workshops during their annual conference and shared materials with colleagues. Public institutions, such as the Electoral Commission, developed their own materials – with limited exchange with teachers in schools. Academics, among others, developed materials with the aim of making research projects useful for teaching. One such project in Scotland collected the findings from research projects in a publication

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[13] S. https://www.politik-lernen.at/allgemeines
[14] S. https://www.bmbwf.gv.at/Themen/schule/schulpraxis/uek/politbildung.html
[15] Available at: https://www.politik-lernen.at

that was used in over 200 schools. It was important that the materials were easily adaptable for teaching and also useful for exam preparation, for example – two aspects that were developed through cooperation with teachers.[16]

Best Practice | Deliberative Civic Education: Kids Voting USA

"Kids Voting USA" is a program for use in the classroom, specifically designed for the last months of an election campaign. Young people are encouraged to participate in current political debates in a qualified manner. Founded in 1988, the organization has developed materials for use in schools. Through cooperation with regionally based civil society organizations ("affiliates"), teachers are provided with a regional contact who can help with implementation and knows the specific context (e.g., states or regional school authorities). In addition to providing materials that can be used in the classroom, the organization has long supported the implementation of youth elections in schools, providing monitoring and expert input. All activities are thus strongly oriented towards discussing real political issues. Compared to similar initiatives in other countries, a special feature is the explicit involvement of parents in "Kids Voting USA". For each election campaign, materials are provided for use at home and, ideally, school-based programs are combined with activities at home.

McDevitt and Kiousis (2006) emphasize this special feature of the program in their evaluation. Positive developments in understanding and discussing politics, and participation were measured among the students – although partly to a decreasing extent in follow-up surveys in subsequent years. In addition, however, some positive effects could also be demonstrated among parents, indicating that such deliberative civic education can be considered effective even beyond just its effect on young people. The authors identify the following criteria for programs to be successful: involving parents; using real media content in the classroom (e.g. political campaign ads); timing the lessons so they correspond to major political events; including out-of-school activities – i.e. translating debates into civic engagement; discussing issues that are actually relevant to students; allowing debates on issues; including socio-economically vulnerable students; establishing an understanding of political participation that goes beyond voting.

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[16] The project was led by the co-author of this report, Jan Eichhorn. The materials can be requested free of charge via the following link and are also available directly from the author: https://www.research.aqmen.ac.uk/2017/07/14/scottish-independence-referendum-2014-teaching-materials/

However, in Scotland it was problematic that the responsible local authorities gave guidelines to the schools they ran leading to great differences between local areas in the way civic education was provided. Thus, while in some Scottish schools there was active political discussion, in others, teachers were only allowed to explain basic legal structures. This resulted in nervousness among some teachers (Head et al., 2014) and meant that the full potential of civic education and its outcomes for young people's political participation was not realized. These regional differences also prevented greater coordination, for example by Scottish government bodies. For Austria, Eva Zeglovits highlighted how important it was that education policy was primarily a federal matter (although there were also Länder differences) and that decisions could be implemented on a nationwide scale. The evaluation of the model project "Kids Voting USA"[17] (see case study below) showcases how successful deliberative approaches to political education can be.

In many countries, the question of what political education should look like is contested. In Germany, the famous Beutelsbach Consensus fundamentally regulates ideological neutrality – but this lowest common denominator does not sufficiently clarify what civic education can look like in practice. In Estonia, where civic education has a special role because of tensions between Russian-language and non-Russian schools (Toots & Idnurm, 2020), a more comprehensive process was therefore initiated. Inspired by national youth organizations, a guideline for political discussions in schools was jointly developed. This is intended to be binding and non-partisan and involves young people's representatives through the National Youth Council. Generally, decisions on this issue were previously rather the responsibility of school principals. The guide gives teachers in Estonia more confidence in what they can and cannot do. It is important to note that this is a dynamic process. After the first version (2017) in the wake of lowering the voting age, the document was revised for the next elections (2021), because it was not seen as sufficiently effective in practice.[18] According to Anu Toots, the new version helps teachers to be less cautious. By involving the young people and establishing a consensus among all involved parties, the Estonian guideline is thus continuously adapted to the changing realities.

In addition to focusing on content within civic education subjects, there are also a number of comprehensive approaches that look at the whole curriculum. In Norway, for example, the education authority is developing a new curriculum that establishes values and principles for primary school and beyond.[19] This includes three core themes: Health and life skills, sustainable development, and democracy and citizenship. According to Guro Ødegard, this even includes subjects such as

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[17] Available at: https://www.kidsvotingusa.org/.

[18] The current version of the guide can be found here: https://enl.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/10.05.21_valimised_koolis_HTM_OK-1.docx.pdf.

[19] An overview of this initiative can be found here: https://www.udir.no/lk20/overordnet-del/prinsipper-for-laring-utvikling-og-danning/tverrfaglige-temaer/demokrati-og-medborgerskap/?lang=eng.

mathematics, with more examples from political debates, rather than classical examples (e.g., elections and polls in statistics lessons). Discussions on politics and society should thus be a continuous part of education for all students. The initiative only started recently, and its implementation is still in process. It is currently being evaluated within the framework of pilot projects and first experiences in practice. However, precise assessments will only be possible later.[20]

Best Practice | Guide to Civic Education in Estonia

Approach: The initiative to produce a guide to political discussions in schools came from the Estonian National Youth Council ("Eesti Noorte – Ühenduste Liit" – the link between the different national youth organizations). Two official partners are further co-editors of the guide and involved in the process and publication: the Minister of Justice of the Government, who is also the Ombudsperson for Children and Young People in Estonia, and the Ministry of Education and Research. Jointly, the three parties create the document in a concerted effort. After the first version in 2017, the guide has now been revised in the run-up to the 2021 local elections to be able to give stronger guidance.

Core contents of the 2021 Guidelines:

- Schools must be impartial in the election campaign;

- Students have the right to cast their vote freely and autonomously;

- Politics <u>can</u> and <u>should be</u> discussed in school;

- Politicians may be invited to class if this serves to achieve the learning objectives in the curriculum;

- Campaign-oriented events in schools must be balanced and neutral: member recruitment, for example, is prohibited;

- Parents must be informed about events in advance;

- Headmasters, teachers, and students who organize events are not allowed to use them to promote their favored party.

Many initiatives also aim to think about civic education beyond the school curriculum. For example, approaches such as mock elections in schools are often an established concept (e.g., in Austria or Wales), but not always necessarily successful (e.g., in Belgium). It is important that such initiatives are linked to other educational

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[20] The main research project monitoring this initiative is DEMOCIT at Oslo Met University: https://www.oslomet.no/en/research/research-projects/democit.

experiences and not implemented in isolation. For example, Dieter Stiers, who evaluated the outcomes of mock elections in the Belgian city Ghent (Stiers et al., 2020) explains that the experiment there only led to minor effects for the young people who took part, because the elections were not systematically accompanied by reflection and discussion in-class across all schools.

The same applies to election debates with politicians. These are often popular with young people (e.g., in parts of Norway, Wales or Scotland), but need to be linked to reflection and discussion in class. The lowering of the voting age offers opportunities to involve external stakeholders in measures of education. For example, in the course of electoral reforms, the education programs of the Scottish and Welsh parliaments offered a greater range of activities in civic education, linking education to the democratic institutions. In Wales, in addition to events informing about voting, the Welsh Parliament also offered high-profile debate events, where school and youth groups created and then debated fictional political programs with others, just like political parties.[21] Similarly, the Scottish Parliament massively expanded its program when the voting age was lowered. In addition to organizing school groups to visit Parliament ("Schools visit programme"), new formats were also established. Staff from the Parliament's education program, often in cooperation with MPs, visited schools ("Let Parliament come to you") – in order to break down barriers, especially for schools that are far away from the capital.[22]

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[21] Further information on the "Power of your Vote" program here: https://senedd.wales/visit/education-and-youth-engagement/vote-16/power-of-your-vote-a-mock-election-event/
[22] Details of all programs can be found here: https://archive2021.parliament.scot/visitandlearn/education.aspx.

Transferable best practice:

- The lowering of the voting age offers opportunities for debates on the further development of civic education and can enable enhancements. This potential should be utilized immediately.

- In this context, civic education must be understood not only as learning about the electoral system, but also as enabling students to form opinions and engage in political debates. It is important to agree on standards that apply nationwide – which can be a challenge especially in disaggregated structures - like Germany's federally devolved education system.

- Following the example of Estonia, conventions, like Germany's Beutelsbach Consensus, can be reconfigured into a dynamic process. When they involve young people, such processes can ensure regular evaluations of what political education in schools should look like, which principles must be adhered to, and how implementation can be ensured in a non-partisan way.

- Researchers can make important contributions by producing materials based on their findings that can be used in schools. Such materials should be developed and tested in cooperation with teachers.

- Besides the implementation in classic political education subjects, civic education can also be integrated into and mainstreamed through many other areas of the curriculum. Not only subjects in the social sciences or humanities, such as history, are relevant here, but political debates can also be integrated in mathematics and natural science.

- Learning opportunities in schools that go beyond the classroom, such as mock elections or political debates, can be helpful tools. However, it is very important to integrate these formats well with the rest of civic education.

4.2. Expanding informal education (outside schools)

Civic education does not only take place in schools. Particularly young people who are not in any form of education or training beyond the age of 16 do not benefit to the same extent from measures of civic education as outlined in section 4.1. Since participation in education is socially stratified, inequalities in political participation could thus increase further (Weinberg, 2021). Therefore, it is also important to offer activities outside of school environments. They are particularly successful if they are designed

and implemented by youth organizations and take place in locations where young people already spend time.

For example, Gareth Brown spoke about initiatives by the Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) following the decision to lower the voting age. Building on connections to youth organizations from the campaign phase (see 3.4), the SYP team developed workshops that youth organizations could deliver locally and to targeted groups of young people, who usually do not focus on political participation. He emphasized that the decision to focus on the out-of-school sector was deliberate and strategic. Within SYP, it was perceived that official institutions and teachers' associations focused heavily on the school environment, but this led to concerns that young people who did not benefit from civic education in school (see 4.1.) would be left out.

In Wales, too, the initial focus was on informal education in youth groups and youth clubs, especially aiming to reach young people from less academic backgrounds. In contrast to the example of Scotland, however, the implementation of these measures was less successful because actors operated in a short-term and largely isolated manner and were limited to project-funding. The Welsh Youth Parliament – the counterpart to the Scottish example – played no role in connecting youth organizations. Jessica Blair explained how her organization, the Electoral Reform Society, pushed to build a network of youth organizations and youth workers shortly before the election. As a result, to mobilize young people to vote in the first election with Votes at 16 in youth organizations offered similar and often competing interventions, while some groups of young people were not engaged much at all.

In addition to work with youth organizations and youth groups, another effective source of information and knowledge can be materials produced *by* young people *for* young people that target individual young people. For example, the SYP team produced a series of videos in which experts spoke about voting rights and current political issues.[23] These were produced in cooperation with researchers from the campaigns (see 3.6). Through existing networks, the SYP was thus able to provide many young people with access to the information about political debates – in a way that was easy to understand.[24]

Similarly, in Estonia, the National Youth Council set up a podcast in which the positions of political parties presented by and for young people. Based on experiences from the

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[23] Some examples of the videos can be found here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NM9qeV4Vq0;
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQ1AaNs8ieY.
[24] In the run-up to the Brexit referendum, for example, the Scottish Youth Parliament produced videos to mobilize featuring the voices of young people and Scottish comedians, which were used extensively on social media. The videos can be accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdQkk3gQTLU; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TiVbGkMKPng.

US, Brandon Klugman also emphasized that such information campaigns made by young people for young people can have wider effects beyond mere knowledge acquisition. Since it is young people who produce the materials on political issues, they are in general perceived to be playing a stronger role in debates across society, and other young people are exposed to a more relevant discursive environment.

Best Practice | Workshop Programs offered by National Youth Organizations: The Scottish Youth Parliament

SYP's political education work in the out-of-school sector was primarily aimed at two target groups: issue-oriented initiatives (such as LGBTQI+ groups) and groups representing the regional interests of young people, especially in more rural regions (such as Youth Voice Highlands). The most important content of the workshops was the explanation of different tools for asserting the groups' interests. Thus, it was easy to highlight the benefits of increased political participation, as the aim was to empower youth groups, so that these could represent their own interests. The cooperation with LGBTQI+ groups, for example, focused on their specific issues to consider together how positive change could be generated at the political level. Possible approaches to democratic change were discussed, such as petitions, which the group had not considered before. After deciding on the most helpful instruments, it was then possible to offer in-depth training on these (e.g., in petition writing and the organization of a campaign). The learning was thus directly linked to the issues and goals of the respective group. In addition, SYP offered opportunities to establish contact with official institutions and decision-makers. Learning and political participation were thus pursued as parallel goals. Gareth Brown stressed the importance of a partnership approach: empowerment through workshops complemented by providing channels to policy makers – which in turn strengthened SYP itself, because their work had a clear link to stakeholders. A systematic evaluation of the program's reach has not been carried out, but according to Gareth Brown it was considered a very successful program, because it reached young people outside the urban centers of Edinburgh and Glasgow, and content from participating groups subsequently fed into SYP's national campaigning work (e.g., their Equal Marriage campaign).

> **Transferable practice insights:**
>
> - Civic education must also take place outside schools, ideally through youth groups and organizations where young people are already involved and active, but not necessarily thinking primarily about politics.
>
> - Informal political education should be designed and delivered primarily by young people for other young people to make it most relevant and lower the threshold for engagement.
>
> - Strengthening existing organizations with good networks is more promising than creating completely new structures, especially if there is only limited time available. This also applies to materials for use by youth organizations.
>
> - Academics can make important contributions to support activities, e.g., by creating materials, ensuring that these are based on factual insights.

4.3. Increasing self-efficacy

Cooperation with local and nation-wide organizations is not only important for civic education. It also gives young people new ways to express political goals and become involved, as already indicated in section 4.2. This way of increasing self-efficacy is an important step towards convincing young people that political and civic engagement is worthwhile in the long run, and it does not always have to happen on the national level.

On the contrary, it is often easier for young people to achieve impact at the local level. One example illustrating initiatives that can give young people experiences of self-efficacy at the local level is Vienna's "Word Up! Jugendparlament" (Youth Parliament).[25] It invites young people to engage in deliberative processes in their district to propose infrastructure improvements, which can then also be implemented. The initiative, initially applied in individual city districts only, has now been offered for the whole city for the first time. Young people submit project proposals and participate in a city-wide committee to decide on the use of funds of up to €1 million.[26]

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[25] Details of the program can be found here: https://www.jugendzentren.at/themen-projekte/word-up/
[26] To the announcement: https://www.wien.gv.at/menschen-gesellschaft/wien-for-future.html

Best Practice | Political Involvement of Young People on the Ground: Word Up! Youth Parliaments in Vienna

The "Word Up! Youth Parliaments" are delivered by the youth centers of the City of Vienna in several districts. The concept consists of a core setup and minimum requirements, with a youth parliament in the district at their heart, as well as the possibility for more in-depth measures that can increase impact. The exact design and depth of the program application is organized in cooperation between district administrations, schools, and youth centers. The aim is to enable young people to actively shape their district through democratic processes and to have an impact on their environment. Students of grades 7 and 8 in the district are involved. As a minimum requirement, two delegates per class are sent to workshops, which form the basis for plenary sessions of all delegates. Ideally, the central deliberations in the youth parliament are complemented by program activities in schools and workshop formats in all classrooms. This increases the involvement of students across the board and feeds back the work of delegates to the classes. To identify possible measures for improving the neighborhood, district visits are organized. The students then develop proposals and discuss them in depth with experts from the municipal administration to determine feasibility and develop formats for implementation. Measures can relate to improvements in four areas: infrastructure, environment, social issues, and youth culture. Administrative experts help to budget the costs of projects. Subsequently, the delegates to the youth parliament discuss which priorities should be set and which measures should be implemented accordingly. Funds are available for this purpose and can be used directly when the program is fully implemented. In the district of Leopoldstadt, for example, the youth parliament was ultimately able to decide on the use of €70,000 – through the deliberative development of a citizens' budget.

In such programs, it is important to not to only involve young people who are already politically active. Therefore, the same approach as outlined in section 4.2 should be implemented, i.e., one that seeks to involve young people in settings where they ideally already spend time, even if these are structures not primarily concerned with political participation (e.g., sports clubs, youth groups, etc.). School can also act as such a setting. Democratic deliberation in schools can provide important opportunities for young people to experience democracy, but only if the students' opinions can actually shape school life in a way that goes beyond decisions such as on the organization of school festivities. Based on her experience in Norway, Guro Ødegard emphasized that there can be positive effects on self-efficacy, if young people feel that they can actually shape the school as a place. An example of can be found in the

Swedish municipality of Södertälje, where student representatives form the majority in the governing bodies of secondary schools and thus have a decisive say in everything relevant to the local schools – such as parts of the budget, new hires, holiday dates, and policies (Bäckermann & Trafford, 2007).

National youth organizations that go beyond student representation can have a similarly supportive impact on experiences of self-efficacy both inside and outside the school environment. Like empowerment in the campaign phase (see 3.2), youth organizations can offer support and workshops to establish new practices. Again, the likelihood of a positive impact is higher, if initiatives are developed with young people themselves. For example, the Youth Council in Estonia offers consultations and seminars in many areas, as well as affordable hire of e.g., technical equipment for events.[27]

For this reason, experiments on the lowering of the voting age, as in Norway or Belgium, are interesting from a research perspective, but not necessarily helpful in terms of increasing young people's self-efficacy. Young people are very well aware that they can only participate as part of an experiment and that their votes have no prospect of being decisive in real-life politics. For example, expert Dieter Stiers explains why mock elections in the Belgian city of Ghent only had a marginally measurable effect on the political interest and voting behavior of the participating young people. Experiments cannot be expected to have the same effect on self-efficacy as a real election. While they allow young people to practice the process of voting, they do not contribute to young people experiencing political impact in practice.

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[27] A brief overview in English can be found here: https://enl.ee/en/services/.

> **Transferable practice insights:**
>
> ▪ Young people need to be involved in real decision-making processes to experience self-efficacy. Lowering the voting age achieves this at the macro level, but further opportunities that provide experiences of political efficacy, e.g., in the local living environment, are desirable.
>
> ▪ Schools can be places where young people experience self-efficacy. For this to happen, young people must be able to directly shape their school as a living environment, with freedom to make decisions and tangible results.
>
> ▪ Municipal initiatives, such as a youth citizens' budgets, can also offer an experience of self-efficacy. It is important to involve young people across the board and to achieve tangible outcomes.
>
> ▪ Working with local and national youth organizations offers opportunities to engage young people in spaces where they are already active and is promising if activities and concepts are developed and implemented by other young people.

4.4. Working with political parties and across party lines

Beyond campaigning (see 3.5), active cooperation with political parties across the political spectrum is also desirable in the implementation of Votes at 16. One aim is to convince political parties – governing and opposition parties alike – that targeted interaction with young people is in their own interest. The lowering of the voting age affords political parties an opportunity to mobilize an additional group of new voters, who may further have multiplier effects on older voters (see 3.5).

In particular non-party youth organizations can put pressure on political parties to become more accessible for young people. In the Scottish independence referendum, for example, the Scottish Youth Parliament lobbied the campaign teams to make their position papers more accessible to young people – which, according to Gareth Brown, led to the organization of a mass event with hundreds of young people, where the Scottish government presented and discussed its referendum white paper. The good thing about such initiatives is that the actions youth organizations take put pressure on all political parties, increasing the likelihood that offers across the party spectrum will be communicated to young people. This work makes sense for all parties, not only in order to communicate positions to the general public, but also because – through increased interaction – such activities increase the likelihood of attracting young people as members (as Guro Ødegard observed in Norway, for example).

In addition to highlighting differences between political parties, such initiatives can also establish consensus on some issues, such as on the benefits of promoting youth participation as a whole. According to Thomas Loughran, this happened in Wales, where several political parties supported electoral reform in an effort to support children's rights (Loughran et al., 2021). This brought about a broad consensus across party lines, which made it easier for the government and administration to implement the reform to enfranchise 16- and 17-year-olds (see also 4.5), e.g., by providing funds for outreach and the registration of young voters. Establishing broad support for Votes at 16 can help bring about process enhancements, especially if local administrators and the civil service are involved in the implementation of cross-party consensus decisions.

> **Transferable practice insights:**
>
> - Non-partisan cooperation with political parties should be established through national youth organizations in order to make political parties understand that greater youth engagement can be in their interest.
>
> - It can be very helpful for political parties to develop campaign materials specifically tailored to young people.
>
> - Greater investment in work for and with young voters can be very helpful for political parties in recruiting new and younger members.

4.5. Working with implementing bodies and "celebrating" change

In addition to the role played by political parties and civil society organizations, cooperation with official institutions such as electoral commissions or election officials is often overlooked in the implementation of Votes at 16. Yet, these are often crucial actors that can make important contributions to making it easier for young people access to elections. Involving official institutions such as e.g., electoral commissions can help increase the legitimacy of voting age reform and guarantee an orderly implementation at elections (e.g., aiding registration, such as in the USA or Wales).

The first election after lowering the voting age is likely to draw a large amount of public attention. Shortcomings, such as in the registration of young voters (as in e.g., Wales), should therefore be avoided. A good implementation increases the legitimacy of young people's participation, especially if the ease of their participation is publicly emphasized. This is particularly important if lowering the voting age in general was

controversial or the political debate around it highly polarized – such as in the US. Josh Douglas emphasized that the involvement of official bodies is crucial in building legitimacy and bridging political differences. Brandon Klugman also supported this approach. In addition, he pointed out how that the first-time participation of 16- and 17-year-olds should be publicly celebrated as a special experience. For example, in some of the municipalities in Maryland where the voting age was lowered, the mayors organized activities to do this.[28]

Best Practice | Celebrating the lowering of the voting age (and subsequently the first election for 16- and 17-year-olds) as a special occasion: Takoma Park

In Takoma Park, the first city in the US to lower the voting age to 16 in 2013, the local government organized initiatives highlighting young people's participation in the election. To highlight young first-time voters, the city organized campaigns on local networks and social media as well as special mentions during election day events. This initially took place for the first election that included 16- and 17-year-old voters, and was later repeated in 2015, thereby consolidating the approach to highlighting the first-time voting experience. This strategy was also intended to lower barriers to engaging with politics for young people. For example, the then mayor of Takoma Park, Kate Stewart, organized an event with the local high school bands playing and local politicians talking to young people. In addition, she arranged for the dissemination of information through channels that targeted young people, for example through campaign ads in school newspapers. The mayor's focus on 16- and 17-year-old voters also showed in the appointment of a 17-year-old campaign manager for the 2015 elections. The various activities aiming to highlight young people's participation was reflected in the election turnout: while overall voter turnout was 21 percent, it reached 45 percent among 16- and 17-year-olds.

It is important however that celebrations of 16- and 17-year-old voters do not take the focus away from good practice in implementing voting age reform. While increased awareness among young people and a pioneer effect around the first election that includes 16- and 17-year-olds can indeed lead to an increase in turnout (Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014), in the first instance it is important that elections are accessible to young people without barriers. The perception of self-efficacy and impact as voters (see 4.3) plays a particularly important role here.

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[28] A brief case study of the processes accompanying the lowering of the voting age in Maryland can be found here: https://vote16usa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Final-MD-Case-Study.pdf.

While accessible elections are important, this does not necessarily mean that polling stations are provided in certain locations or that elections only take place on certain days. There is not sufficient evidence on how much the place and timing of elections determines to what extent 16- or 17-year-olds participate. Evidence from the US suggests that voter registration at schools and colleges is likely to contribute to higher turnout by increasing young people's political interest and access to elections.[29] In Wales, a pilot project in the 2022 local elections allowed young people to vote in schools and colleges.[30] However, for the population as a whole, studies have so far not shown any substantial impact of the exact voting modalities, such as specific polling places or polling days, on citizens' willingness to vote.

A study of the lowering of the voting age in Wales showed that for the majority of young people a number of barriers to voting existed well before election day, regardless of the exact days on or locations in which voting was possible (Huebner et al., 2021). This showed that problems in the mobilization of young first-time voter were less often related to the act of voting itself. More often barriers to participation were related to young people's lack of awareness of the reform of the voting age or even the election, as neither had been discussed at school or at home. Similarly, the study found that young people often lacked the necessary information about the political parties and their programs to make a confident choice. In terms of social inequality in voter turnout, however, polling stations in schools – if accompanied by appropriate educational measures – can make a slight difference: by possibly encouraging those young people to vote who, without a politicized family environment, lack the motivation and incentive to participate in elections. This hypothesis is being investigated in a pilot in Wales.

Transferable practice insights:

- It is important to actively cooperate with implementing bodies (such as electoral commissions). This cooperation can help to institutionalize non-partisan initiatives such as voter turnout campaigns, especially in politically polarized debates.

- The first election after lowering the voting age can be celebrated as a special occasion to highlight youth participation but must not be seen as a substitute for actual work on participation.

- According to current research, perceived self-efficacy and related factors are more likely to determine young people's voter turnout than specific voting modalities. However, research on this is incomplete.

[29] As discussed here, for example: https://www.genprogress.org/college-campus-voting-booths-and-their-impact-on-millennials/. See also Ulbig & Waggener, 2011.
[30] The Minister responsible for the Constitution, Mick Antoniw MS, announced this on 9 November 2021: https://gov.wales/written-statement-update-flexible-voting-pilots

4.6. Mobilizing young voters through established and social media

Both traditional and social media can be used in political work with young people, but they should be used in different ways. Social media are best used for direct mobilization, through information campaigns (e.g., with materials developed by youth organizations as mentioned above, see 4.2), or to call for participation in specific initiatives. Cooperation with specific social media platforms can be useful to increase reach. In the days leading up to the referendum, for example, the Scottish Youth Parliament cooperated with Twitter. This gave their campaign hashtag a free-of-charge trending-guarantee and thus significantly strengthened their campaign's reach. In Wales, some successful mobilization campaigns used Instagram and TikTok to reach young people.[31] It turns out that it is important to use platforms young people already use or which have been proven to be relevant in the context of elections (in Germany, for example, the Wahl-O-Mat, a popular vote advice application). Trying to establish entirely new apps or platforms during a mobilization campaign is less promising, as new applications often fail to achieve the necessary reach.

In a similar way, cooperation with traditional media can also play an important role: firstly, because making young people visible in the mainstream media can have an impact on their own self-efficacy, and secondly, because it also contributes to young people being more visible in and impactful on public debates. Thirdly, mainstream media content also often appears and is consumed by young people on social media (for example, content from Germany's public broadcaster ARD's news program "Tagesschau" is prepared for different platforms, such as Instagram or TikTok). Cooperation with media representatives is thus important, among other things, because they can provide targeted support to youth organizations in implementing campaigns via existing platforms. Trends, especially on social media, are developing faster than many campaigners can keep up with. Youth workers or civil servants alone often do not have the capacity to keep up with these new trends in order to create successful and relevant campaigns.

Another action that can be useful is the involvement of young people in media work, for example via peer-to-peer campaigns.[32] In Wales, for instance, the lowering of the voting age was accompanied by a number of social media campaigns, two of which were organized as peer-to-peer campaigns and ended up being most successful. Both the #MakeYourMark21 campaign, targeting young people from ethnic minorities, and #OurMoment, a campaign by the Youth Advisory Group of umbrella organization

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[31] For example, the #MakeYourMark21 campaign, which called on mainly Welsh ethnic minority youth to vote: https://www.instagram.com/makeyourmark21/

[32] For example, in Wales through the Democracy Box project in collaboration with BBC Bitesize: https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/z4pr3j6/articles/z78ntrd

Youth Cymru, used posts by young people, e.g., about the election process and political issues on Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter in order to target peers. Young people reflected that the campaigns not only communicated in a way that was highly relevant to them, for example by breaking down the difficult topic of voting into steps and using appropriate language, but that they also made young people and their issues more visible in public.

The youth organizations that supported and coordinated the peer-to-peer campaigns reported that it is essential to ensure sufficient time and support for planning and implementing such strategies and to keep young people's other commitments (school, exams, lack of time) in mind. A cooperation of peer-to-peer campaigns with media professionals, which did not exist in Wales, would therefore be particularly promising.

For media professionals, it is particularly important that young people are not only interviewed about alleged "youth issues", but that their opinions are considered as contributions to the general political debate, as young people prioritize similar issues as the rest of the population. For this reason, the Norwegian daily newspaper Aftenposten introduced a daily column in which young people can comment on a current issue.[33] With a similar aim, BBC Scotland established the Generation 2014 Panel,[34] a group of young people from all over Scotland who were regularly asked to contribute to the main program. The success of the Scottish project then led to the introduction of similar approaches across the other parts of the BBC for the 2015 House of Commons election.[35] Academics[36] and activists[37] advised on the plans to increase impact. The initiative was considered a great success and as a result, the final televised debate before the referendum on Scottish independence in 2014 was hosted with an audience consisting of and questions from only 16- and 17-year-olds ("The Big, Big Debate").

On the other hand, the Welsh case provides an example of what can happen when traditional media are not strategically involved in the implementation of voting age reform. The Welsh media landscape – mainly based in London and with little specifically Welsh news – failed to report on the introduction of Votes at 16. Recognizing the lack of coverage, expert Jessica Blair felt the urge to contribute to the coverage a month before the election by means of an open letter.[38] Due to the lack of media coverage of Votes at 16, many young people in Wales said that they or their friends did not hear about or were reminded that they could vote in the election. This

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[33] The current contributions to the column can be accessed here: https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/sid.
[34] An overview of the initiative can be found here: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01gf7rb.
[35] An overview of the contributions can be found here: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-31854312.
[36] In particular Jan Eichhorn, co-author of this report.
[37] In particular, the Scottish Youth Parliament.
[38] Accessible here: https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-56148364

was seen as a missed the opportunity to mobilize particularly those young people, who tend to be less interested in politics, but were eligible to vote in the first election including 16- and 17-year-olds in Wales.

Best Practice | Making young people visible in mainstream media: The BBC Scotland Generation 2014 Panel

In 2012, ahead of the lowering of the voting age in Scotland, BBC Scotland explored how to highlight the independence referendum coverage in its programs. There were two producers, David Stenhouse and Dave Howard, who had experience with reporting on youth issues. In the planning stage, they discovered that there were hardly any young people in the lists of possible interviewees for television and radio programs. They recognized that it would be difficult for them to create programs that would reflect young people's perspectives and there was a concern that ad hoc recruitment of young people to deliver youth perspectives would not lead to featuring only easy-to-reach young people and young people's perspectives not being integrated into the wider programming. To address these concerns, they decided to select 50 16- and 17-year-olds, through a public recruitment process, to form the "Generation 2014" panel. The panel was evenly split by gender, consisted of young people from all regions of Scotland, including remote parts of the country, and deliberately included young people from minority groups (for example, young people with disabilities or whose families migrated to Scotland). The panel was used in two ways: firstly, the young people were brought together in the BBC Scotland studio in Glasgow to provide input to the producers and their program ideas. On such occasions, the panel also served as an audience for special productions, such as a TV debate between politicians, in which the young people asked the questions. Secondly, young people from the Generation 2014 panel regularly participated as panelists in BBC programs in order to make young people's perspectives visible in the standard program. A key focus was to not only ask them about alleged "youth issues", but to include the young panelists in all debates of all policy areas. Academic experts (in particular Dr Jan Eichhorn) and representatives of youth organizations (such as Scottish Youth Parliament) were involved in the concept phase of events and programs with the young people and thus ensured quality and acceptance of the panel within the BBC and externally.

Transferable practice insights:

- There should be an active use of social and traditional media, but the different platforms should be used and targeted according to their respective strengths.

- Social media are primarily useful for information and mobilization campaigns, in particular peer-to-peer campaigns. Cooperating with established media can have additional impact.

- Cooperation with traditional media should be sought proactively. Instead of passively expecting coverage, media outlets should be approached to help integrate young people's voices into the mainstream.

- Academics and activists can provide support in creating sustainable models for print and broadcast media, building on the positive experiences in, for example, Norway and the UK.

4.7. Generational justice and reverse socialization

Young people who vote have the potential to shape political discussions within the family/household and thus bring a different dynamic to these debates. Results of research by Linet Durmuşoğlu, Sarah de Lange, and their colleagues (2022) in the Netherlands show that the effect of reverse socialization is smaller compared to the influence parents are likely to have on children. Furthermore, the effect is noticeable only for certain issues, especially those on which young and older people tend to disagree: for example, the issue of migration and attitudes towards European integration.

Through young voters' impact on parents and grandparents regarding certain political issues, debates on Votes at 16 can interact with debates of intergenerational justice. If young people aged 16 and 17 are allowed to participate in elections while still living at home with their parents, conversations about political issues and this process of reverse socialization is somewhat more likely to take place. Both processes are likely to mutually impact each other, so that Votes at 16 as well as issues of intergenerational justice and the political voices of young people gain in importance in the general public discourse. This is more likely to occur when interventions explicitly promote dialogue between young people and parents as well as grandparents and discussions about politics at home. However, there is still a lack of robust evidence or examples of good practice.

In contrast to possible positive effects related to debates on intergenerational justice, the preliminary findings of Sarah de Lange and Linet Durmuşoğlu in the Netherlands also show that young people's impact on parents' opinions occurs mostly among young people who are more likely to already be politically interested and engaged. Reverse socialization could thus reinforce existing inequalities in society, as the process may be limited to families that tend to be more politically engaged. According to Durmuşoğlu, the effect is not the focus of her study and aspects of reverse socialization need further research.

Transferable practice insights:

- Processes of reverse socialization should be researched further, especially the link between family discussions and existing inequalities in political participation at the household level.

- Best practice examples should be developed that test how political discussions between young people and parents/grandparents can be explicitly promoted, for example in the school context.

- In order to test the effect on society as a whole, arguments for votes at 16 can be linked to discussions on intergenerational justice in political discourse, e.g., via opinion pieces in daily newspapers.

5 Gaps in knowledge and research

The best practice examples and discussions with experts summarized in this collection yield a number of insights into how campaigns for Votes at 16 can be led successfully and what is important in the implementation of voting age reform. However, the experiences and discussions also reveal that there are gaps in what we know about the introduction of Votes at 16 and which questions need further research. At this point, we want to point to further research experts consider promising and necessary in order to derive success factors for young people's participation in elections.

5.1. Knowledge gaps

The lowering of the voting age in more and more countries around the world has provided insights into the outcomes of voting age reform that were not available ten years ago. Many of the fundamental questions about lowering the voting age no longer need to be answered based on speculation or on data derived from somewhat older young people, who do vote. At the same time, there are still gaps in knowledge that are not covered by existing research. According to interviewees and in reviewing the existing literature, this mainly concerns the following areas:

Individual level

- **Systematic international comparisons:** Existing research so far have always been conducted within individual countries. While there has been knowledge transfer between researchers for several years, research projects have often been organized and financed in an ad hoc manner. As a result, the comparability of results is limited because research methods are not identical, and studies focus on different outcomes. This makes it difficult to say, for example, which structural country-level factors precisely favor the successful implementation of the lowering of the voting age. While certain conditional factors have been identified in several countries, there have not yet been any studies that would make outcomes of the lowering of the voting age at different levels (local, national, etc.) directly comparable to each other.

- **Sustainability of first-time voter effects:** Many surveys are cross-sectional studies, often conducted right before the introduction of the lowering of the voting age. While they offer valuable insights into the initial experience and how well the introduction was implemented, they cannot answer questions about habitualization, that is if voting at a younger age leads to habit formation and higher turnout in future years. So far, there are only few robust studies that can examine such longer-term effects empirically. These are usually based on cohort comparisons, as in Austria (Aichholzer & Kritzinger, 2020) or across a

number of countries(Franklin, 2020). However, both quantitative and qualitative longitudinal panel studies are lacking. These could provide insights on changes over relatively short periods of time from the age 16 to 20.

- **Distribution effects and inequality:** The majority of existing research so far has focused on comparing averages. Questions were mainly related to the level of political interest and participation, the range of sources of information, and political interaction with other groups of people. Questions of distributions, i.e., which groups of young people tend to participate more, which tend to participate less, are asked less often. This is partly due to limited sample sizes or missing information (such as on parents' income or social strata). However, in some cases such data are available, and we see that there might be significant distribution effects that can be affected by the lowering of the voting age (Huebner & Eichhorn, 2020). Further research with a focus on inequality by socioeconomic status, social class, and experiences of migration would make for a helpful contribution. Barriers in relation to experiences of migration, for example, have been examined in detail in a recent report (Dege et al., 2021).[39]

Educational effects

- **Relative effectiveness of school-based measures:** Existing research has shown that school-based education, especially when including discursive elements, can have positive effects on civic attitudes and political participation. The effect may be enhanced in the context of the lowering of the voting age – at least there are indications of this in several countries (although a systematic, comparative study would be helpful to substantiate this). Rarely, however, has research clearly differentiated which school measures (inside and outside the classroom) have the strongest effects. A systematic investigation is missing (especially in the context of the lowering of the voting age).

- **Absolute and relative effectiveness of formats of informal education:** Most of the research on civic education so far relates to schools. However, the interviewees in this project clearly supported the research that attributes a strong additional effect of education to measures that take place outside the classroom, for example in a context of youth work. Few projects have systematically assessed the actual effect on levels of participation. In addition, as with school-based measures, there is a lack of studies that systematically examine the relative effectiveness of different formats.

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[39] The research is part of the project "Who can participate", in which d|part investigates what barriers people with migration biographies experience in political participation. All details about the project can be found here: https://dpart.org/wer-kann-mitmachen/.

Organizational and institutional perspectives

- **Responses from parties and state institutions:** Existing research has clearly shown that the role of political parties and other political institutions is important in determining how young people become politically involved and what status they receive in the political debate. Yet, little research has systematically looked at the responses of parties and politicians. We hardly know whether political decision-makers correctly assess young people's attitudes and, accordingly, whether measures targeting such institutions to raise their awareness might be useful.

- **Impact of youth organizations (inside and outside political parties):** The importance of youth organizations in the interaction between young people and political parties has been demonstrated clearly in some countries. So far, however, there has been no systematic study of how exactly external youth organizations influence or even cooperate with party youth organizations and how party youth organizations influence political parties as a whole – especially in the context of the potential of a lower voting age.

5.2. Approaches to generating further knowledge

To be able to investigate these open questions, the following research projects and approaches would be helpful. They could be executed in combination or as parallel lines of enquiry:

- **Quantitative longitudinal research:** In order to find out how the habitualization of 16- and 17-year-old first-time voters develops, it would make sense to research voting habits explicitly through a panel study over a period of five years (in order to map a complete electoral cycle). The introduction of Votes at 16 in a particular country (such as for the European Parliament elections in Germany and Belgium) would also open up the possibility of an explicit pre-post study, the implementation of which could provide very important insights.

- **Natural experiment approaches:** The current situation in countries with different voting ages like the UK or Germany could be used for a study that makes use of this near natural experiment setup. Similar to comparisons of Scottish 16- and 17-year-olds after the lowering of the voting age with non-voting age groups of the same age in the rest of the UK (Eichhorn, 2018a), research could compare voting at three levels of governance in Germany. Grouping young people who were allowed to vote at 16 at the state and local level, only at the local level or not at all, depending on the state they reside in, would provide a unique insight into possible effects of lowering the voting age.

Data collection outside of immediate election periods would allow for comparability across federal states, both in terms of experiences and intentions of political participation as well as civic attitudes. For this purpose, new data would have to be collected that would allow for a corresponding sample breakdown.

- **Qualitative longitudinal research:** In order to explore how perceptions of political participation change and how measures are perceived and understood by young people in different contexts, qualitative research should be conducted with a first-time voter cohort over as long a period as possible (up to 5 years, i.e., a full electoral cycle).

- **Impact evaluations through intervention experiments:** Both in school and out-of-school contexts, a number of promising interventions should be evaluated systematically and comparatively while they are being put into practice. Applying different interventions within an overall setting (for example, in different classes of a school) or in comparable locations (for example, in similar youth clubs or schools) would offer new insights that have been missing so far.

- **Studying organizations and elites:** To better understand the response of decision-makers (such as politicians), especially in political parties, but also the cooperation between youth organizations, it is advisable to conduct qualitative research with these groups. Interviews with elites and experts can provide new insights into the approach of the respective organizations. Furthermore, analyses of the social networks between different organizations can provide insights into how they interact.

- **Internationally comparable studies:** Research with an identical methodological approach conducted in different countries would complement each of the above-mentioned activities by delivering comparative international evidence. Especially in countries with similar setups (e.g., Germany and the UK), natural experimental approaches could be considered, too.

6   Link collection

Campaigning

New Zealand: 'Make it 16' campaign establishing young people as spokespeople: https://makeit16.org.nz/blog-feed/

Germany: Lowering the voting age campaign at federal state level in Berlin: https://www.wahlaltersenken.berlin/

Scotland: Joint submission by Scottish Youth Parliament, Young Scot and Youthlink Scotland to the Scottish Parliament hearing: https://archive2021.parliament.scot/S4_Bills/Scottish%20Elections%20(Reduction%20of%20Voting%20Age)%20Bill/SPPB216.pdf (p. 187).

Great Britain: Publication "Civic Duty: The Conservative Case for Votes at 16 and 17", which is explicitly aimed at representatives of conservative parties: https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-news-and-research/publications/civic-duty-the-conservative-case-for-votes-at-16-and-17/

Collections of material

USA: Campaign material provided by "Vote16USA": https://vote16usa.org/resources/

Scotland: Teaching materials for secondary school students based on research on youth participation in the Scottish independence referendum: https://www.research.aqmen.ac.uk/2017/07/14/scottish-independence-referendum-2014-teaching-materials/

Making research accessible

Literature review of existing studies compiled by Michael Shull at the University of Maryland (2022): https://spp.umd.edu/research-impact/publications/vote16-literature-review

Blog post as a supplement to the technical article on lowering the voting age in Scotland (Eichhorn 2018b): https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/votes-at-16-new-evidence-from-scotland/

Open access articles that make current research freely available: Eichhorn & Bergh (2021): https://academic.oup.com/pa/article/74/3/507/6321304?login=true and Huebner (2021): https://academic.oup.com/pa/article/74/3/563/6320902

"Academic Studies" collection of the Vote16USA campaign: https://vote16usa.org/resources/

Collection of some academic studies and policy papers from the UK:

https://www.ukvotingage.co.uk/publications/

Educational measures

Estonia: Youth Council Estonia consultations and seminars:
https://enl.ee/en/services/

Estonia: Guide to political discussions in schools: https://enl.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/10.05.21_valimised_koolis_HTM_OK-1.docx.pdf.

Scotland: Educational videos on voting rights and political debates from the Scottish Youth Parliament: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NM9qeV4Vq0;
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQ1AaNs8ieY

Scotland: Scottish Parliament education programs:
https://archive2021.parliament.scot/visitandlearn/education.aspx.

Norway: Information on curriculum reform in Norway:
https://www.udir.no/lk20/overordnet-del/prinsipper-for-laring-utvikling-og-danning/tverrfaglige-temaer/demokrati-og-medborgerskap/?lang=eng

Wales: Senedd – Power of your Vote Mock Election Debate:
https://senedd.wales/visit/education-and-youth-engagement/vote-16/power-of-your-vote-a-mock-election-event/

Mobilization measures

USA: Mobilization campaigns in schools and colleges:
https://www.genprogress.org/college-campus-voting-booths-and-their-impact-on-millennials/

Scotland: mobilization videos featuring young people's voices and Scottish comedians, produced by Scottish Youth Parliament and used extensively on social media: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdQkk3gQTLU;
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TiVbGkMKPng

Austria: Word Up! Youth parliaments: https://www.jugendzentren.at/themen-projekte/word-up/

Media measures and peer-to-peer campaigns

Norway: Daily column in the daily newspaper Aftenposten, in which young people can always comment on a current topic: https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/sid

Scotland: BBC Scotland "Generation 2014" panel of 16- and 17-year-olds only: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01gf7rb and likewise "Generation 2015": https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-31854312

Wales: #MakeYourMark21 campaign calling on mainly Welsh ethnic minority youth to vote: https://www.instagram.com/makeyourmark21/

Wales: Democracy Box project in cooperation with BBC Bitesize: https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/z4pr3j6/articles/z78ntrd

Wales: Open letter on the introduction of voting at 16 by a number of youth organizations led by the Electoral Reform Society: https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-56148364

USA: Opinion piece by Josh Douglas for CNN: https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/19/opinions/parkland-shooting-voting-age-opinion-douglas/index.html

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d|part is a non-profit, independent and non-partisan think tank. Our work focuses on researching and promoting different forms of political participation. We provide guidance in grasping and understanding citizens' opinions and civil society and help to implement citizens' wishes and demands for forms of political participation. We conduct research projects, teach at schools and universities and advise public institutions, citizens' initiatives and political organizations in workshops and seminars.

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