



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



## REINVENTING DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE: YOUTH DOING POLITICS IN TIMES OF INCREASING INEQUALITIES

### Youth Political Engagement and Experiences

FEBRUARY 2020

#### INTRODUCTION

The following policy brief is based on the Euryka project's WP4, WP5 and WP6.

**WP4** collected data on political engagement, online political participation and media use, attitudes and values, policy satisfaction and issue priorities, and finally, economic outlooks and conditions, life engagement and mobility through a panel survey (repeated measures within individuals over time) on national representative samples of the general population in each of the countries included in the project and also include booster samples for young people in order to have large enough samples to analyse also differences between different sub-categories of young people by gender, class, age, educational level including levels of digital literacy, etc.

**WP5** has investigated the presence of a causal effect of different dimensions of the youth experience of inequalities and their support and potential for social and political change for strengthening democratic life in Europe that may include avenues for creatively reimagining democracy. This was done by conducting seven survey experiments: six vignette experiments and one conjoint experiment. We tested the effects of a number of treatments on young people's attitudes and behaviors relating to social and political engagement, including protest behavior.

Through the in-depth interview method, **WP6** collected a large variety of data concerning the lives, daily routine, and major events and experiences faced by the young people who do politics nowadays. The target population was young individuals who define themselves as members of different organizations/groups involved in socio-political activities. The time period of the fieldwork varied in the different countries, but overall it ran from February 2018 to January 2019. The 252 interviews lasted between one and two hours and were digitally recorded, by prior agreement from the respondents.

### **WP4 – Panel survey analysis**

- We tend to see a higher proportions of younger relative to older citizens tend to be involved in more unconventional forms of participation such as strikes and occupations; these forms also tend to attract smaller proportions of individuals participating. On the other hand, more conventional activities such as contacting or visiting a politician or government official generally show higher proportions for older citizens.
- In terms of associational involvement, labour/trade unions, political parties, environmental, church or religious and youth organisations (amongst youth) tend to attract slightly larger proportions relative to other organisations in defence of civil and human rights, etc. Higher proportions of younger citizens tend to be involved in these than older citizens.
- Younger citizens tend to be about as involved as older citizens in community forms of participation such as raising money for a charitable cause or working or cooperating with others to solve problems in their community or neighbourhood. Overall, higher proportions of young people tend to be involved through online forms of political participation such as discussing or sharing opinion on politics on a social network site e.g. Facebook or Twitter or joining or starting a political group on Facebook / following a politician or political group on Twitter etc though older citizens tend to show higher proportions of searching for information about politics online at least once a month.
- In terms of media use for political news, higher proportions of older citizens appear to follow the news everyday be it on the newspaper, TV, radio and even on the internet though results are more mixed for social media. For most types, it appears to generally by the case that higher proportions of younger citizens post political content through social media though the pattern is reversed or more mixed in some cases.
- When it comes to political efficacy, it seems that lower proportions of young people feel internal political efficacy: i.e. that they feel well-qualified to participate in politics or that they have a good understanding of political issues facing the country. More young people feel externally politically efficacious however, lower proportions say that public officials do not care about what people like them think or that people like them do not have a say about what the government does relative to older people.

### **WP5 – Experimental analysis**

- The survey experiments suggest the presence of a causal effect on youth's political attitudes and behaviors of contextual aspects such as elites discourse about young people and of state as well as police repression.
- Perceptions of inequalities influence young people's levels of social trust and political engagement. Moreover, taking into account perceptions of who is to blame affects the form of political engagement of young people.
- There is an effect of peer pressure on youth political action. However, young people tend to react to peer pressure indirectly, that is, mediated by their personal convictions.
- The expected violence of a demonstration is something that is strongly related to the probability of allowing such demonstration to take place. It also showed the causal effects of mobilizing groups on the perceived legitimacy of demonstrations as well as analyze the political tolerance towards specific political groups.

### **WP6 – Biographical analysis**

- Similarities overshadow the differences in particular if we look at the respondents' primary socialization. They generally seem not to have experienced any major challenging situation at the domestic and public levels. Because of this, the generational conflict hardly emerges as something relevant across our respondents during their first socialization. Most of our

respondents say they share their families' political standing. Only a few respondents mentioned that their parents opposed somehow their political involvement.

- Respondents in our sample, during the adolescent phase of their lives, shift from being generally interested in political issues or not showing interest at all to gradually starting very similar processes of political socialisation at home and at high school, during some important turning points.
- The respondents' narratives suggest continuity between the previous politicization phase and their first mobilization in an organisation/group. For the large majority of our respondents, the motivation driving their mobilization was to find a vehicle that would allow them in a practical way to be able to produce a better society.
- For members of youth branches of right-wing and left-wing political parties, ideology still plays an important role. For the rest of our respondents, instead, ideology is no longer considered an important means of tying people within an organisation/group. On the contrary, being a non-ideological organisation/group appears to be an advantage for our respondents.
- Our respondents, from all the different cities as well as from different types of organisations/groups, seem to recognise the profound personal impact, most of the time narrated in a positive way, that doing politics has had on their own life. Respondents say they have acquired through participation different skills, to have become more sociable and self-confident, to have matured, to have become more pragmatic in relationship with their political standing in order to achieve major outcomes, to have changed their priorities, and to have brought them knowledge.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Invest in political education** to stimulate internal political efficacy amongst youth in particular and also media/news consumption for information and evidence-base which should help guard against empty rhetoric, prejudice, scapegoating vs addressing complex structural problems, etc.
- **Offer political choice**, e.g. proportional rather than first-past-the-post electoral system.
- **Invest in research and education**, particularly ensuring history is a subject studied for the duration of compulsory education including modern and contemporary history to this day to give young citizens a sense of time and social change.
- **Ensure that the education system is rigorous** and provides students with the tools to engage in the world and consume information be it the news or data which will be increasingly important for evidence-base.
- **Prioritise better data collection and analysis** on understanding the multifaceted connections between youth empowerment, inequalities and social trust and political participation which will enable evidence-based policies for ensuring right conditions for young people to become active citizens and exercise leadership in society and politics.
- **Provide incentives for businesses** to develop green technologies and use stimulus packages for great redevelopment works in order to reshape cities in the service of citizens.
- **Encourage large investments** to stimulate the economy particularly in poorer regions to stop emigration and restart growth with new projects linked also to reclaiming territories and welcoming migrants.
- **Strengthen representation in educational institutions**, which is seen as a stage leading young people to acquire skills that are important for taking political action later on.
- **Work with youth and civil society organisations to develop an enabling environment for young people to participate meaningfully** by putting forward programs and initiatives that are not replicating pre-existing inequalities that affect youth participation and mobilization.
- **Encourage the political participation of young people as early as possible**, so that they get in touch earlier with the adult world and in a subordinate way, therefore avoiding to see politics as part of a generational conflict.

EURYKA is a cross-national research project which aims to provide systematic and practice-related knowledge about how inequalities mediate youth political participation in nine European countries: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. EURYKA has three objectives:

- ▶ To provide systematic evidence on how inequalities are experienced and mediated by young people, exploring the coping mechanisms which are embedded in how they do politics. These coping mechanisms are manifested in multiple forms, i.e. as either political (dis)engagement and contestation online and offline or as (trans-) national democratic innovation and experimentation.
- ▶ To provide evidence on the conditions and causes underpinning youth political participation. This involves an examination of their values, expectations, and behaviors regarding democracy, power, politics, policymaking, social and political participation (online and offline).
- ▶ To make various, novel suggestions to strengthen democratic life in Europe, with particular emphasis on those that are more inclusive for young people – and especially those with fewer opportunities.

The project's methodology has three main components:

- A multidimensional theoretical framework that combines macro-level (institutional), meso-level (organizational), and micro-level (individual) factors for explaining youth experience of inequalities and the differential aspects of how young people do politics in Europe.
- A cross-national comparative design that includes nine European countries with different degrees of exposure to inequalities and different policy regimes.
- An integrated methodological approach based on multiple methods of analysis, such as:

*Policy analysis:* Tracking public policies and practices which promote youth participation and inclusion in the nine countries as well as at the EU level.

*Political claims analysis:* Studying how young people and their particular ways of doing politics are dealt with in the media, as well as the presence of organized youth in the public domain.

*Organizational analysis:* Investigating youth political participation by examining the networks and (youth-led) organizations that are active in the fields of youth inclusion, participation, national and transnational democratic innovation and experimentation.

*Panel survey analysis:* Conducting a panel survey in all the nine countries to collect information on young people's values, expectations, and behaviors regarding democracy, power, politics, policy-making.

*Experimental analysis:* Conducting survey experiments to capture young people's experience of inequalities and their support for social and political change to strengthen democratic life in Europe.

*Biographical analysis:* Conducting biographical interviews with young people to collect information on the individual trajectories of young people since their childhood and how inequalities impact young people's ways of doing politics.

*Social media analysis:* Investigating youth political participation online and the impact of inequalities on this by examining the use young people make of social media and how digital participation and representation may (or may not) provide the seeds for reinvigorating democracy in Europe.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

<b>PROJECT NAME</b>	Reinventing Democracy in Europe: Youth Doing Politics in Times of Increasing Inequalities (EURYKA)
<b>COORDINATOR</b>	Prof. Marco Giugni, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland, <a href="mailto:marco.giugni@unige.ch">marco.giugni@unige.ch</a>
<b>CONSORTIUM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• European Alternatives, London, United Kingdom</li><li>• SciencesPo, Paris, France</li><li>• Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence, Italy</li><li>• Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain</li><li>• University of Crete, Rethymnon, Greece</li><li>• University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland</li><li>• University of Sheffield, Sheffield, United Kingdom</li><li>• University of Siegen, Siegen, Germany</li><li>• University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland</li><li>• Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden</li></ul>
<b>FUNDING SCHEME</b>	Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020), Societal Challenge 6 – Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies", call REV-INEQUAL-05-2016, topic: "Inequalities in the EU and their consequences for democracy, social cohesion and inclusion"
<b>DURATION</b>	February 2017 – January 2020 (36 months).
<b>BUDGET</b>	EU contribution: 2,595,720.00 €.
<b>WEBSITE</b>	<a href="http://www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/euryka/home">www.unige.ch/sciences-societe/euryka/home</a>
<b>FOR MORE INFORMATION</b>	Mathilde Brunet (University of Geneva), <a href="mailto:mathilde.brunet@unige.ch">mathilde.brunet@unige.ch</a> Maria Grasso (University of Sheffield), <a href="mailto:m.grasso@sheffield.ac.uk">m.grasso@sheffield.ac.uk</a> (WP4) Marco Giugni (University of Geneva), <a href="mailto:marco.giugni@unige.ch">marco.giugni@unige.ch</a> (WP5) Lorenzo Bosi (Scuola Normale Superiore), <a href="mailto:lorenzo.bosi@sns.it">lorenzo.bosi@sns.it</a> (WP6)
<b>FURTHER READING</b>	<p>EURYKA Integrated Report on Panel Survey Analysis (Deliverable 4.2) prepared by the University of Sheffield project team (led by Maria Grasso)</p> <p>EURYKA Integrated Report on Experimental Analysis (Deliverable 5.2) prepared by the University of Geneva project team (led by Marco Giugni)</p> <p>EURYKA Integrated Report on Biographical Analysis (Deliverable 6.2) prepared by the Scuola Normale Superiore project team (led by Lorenzo Bosi)</p> <p>The full reports can be found on the project website: <a href="https://unige.ch/sciences-societe/euryka/outputs/deliverables/">https://unige.ch/sciences-societe/euryka/outputs/deliverables/</a></p> <p><b>Disclaimer</b></p> <p>The content of this policy brief does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed therein lies entirely with the author.</p>