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Youth Voter Trends and Digital Influence: 20 Years of Change in European Parliament Elections²

Abstract

This article analyzes the dynamics of youth participation in the European Parliament elections from 2004 to 2024. It highlights the diversification of political preferences among young voters, noting that their support in the 2024 elections is shaped by broader global issues such as climate change, social inequality, migration, and traditional political concerns. Over the years, youth turnout has fluctuated, influenced by social, economic, and technological factors. The younger generation is increasingly turning to non-traditional forms of participation, particularly through digital platforms. These platforms play a significant role in shaping the political engagement of young people.

The 2024 elections saw a rise in support for far-right political forces among youth in many advanced countries, although left-wing movements retain popularity in certain regions. The influence of digital platforms is evident, as political campaigns leveraging social media have gained traction among younger voters. This paper emphasizes the importance of understanding the reasons behind youth engagement with European political forces, particularly as they address pressing global challenges and utilize modern communication channels to reach this demographic. The evolving landscape of youth electoral behavior reflects a changing relationship between young people, politics, and digital technology.

Keywords: European Parliament elections, youth preferences, electoral activity, digital platforms.

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Introduction

Elections to the European Parliament, often referred to as European elections, take place every five years. As the Parliament plays an important role in drafting EU laws, it also determines the political direction of the Union. At the same time, the Parliament is the only institution in the EU that is directly elected by the voters. The other two important institutions are elected indirectly: The composition of the European Commission requires the approval of MEPs, and the Council is made up of national ministers appointed by the respective governments (Liboreiro, 2024). The importance and accountability of the European Parliament to the public is correspondingly high. Elections to the European Parliament have a tangible impact on the daily lives of people in Europe. The policies and decisions taken by elected representatives have a direct impact on areas of society such as access to education, employment opportunities, healthcare, environmental sustainability, and much more. In the last five elections to the European Parliament (2004-2024), the turnout and preferences of young people have varied considerably due to various socio-economic, political, and cultural factors (results.elections.europa.eu, 2024).

This article analyses the elections to the European Parliament and the dynamics of variable youth participation in these elections, while also examining the reasons for this. After all, the 2024 European elections were characterised by a trend towards increasing youth participation compared to other elections in the past. The aim of the paper is therefore to explain young people's preferences in parallel to the increase in voter turnout using the example of recent elections in Europe and, accordingly, to determine the extent of young people's participation in future elections and their likely thematic interests. Based on the objectives of the study to analyze the dynamics of the variability of youth participation in European elections, the first task of the paper was to determine the variability of the quantitative indicator of youth participation in the history of elections to the European Parliament. In addition to analyzing the reasons for the change in their numbers, I set another task to identify the factors that have influenced this variability, including the role of the development of digital platforms. In order to identify the preferences of young people in the 2024 European Parliament elections, another task of this article was to determine the specific thematic interests and, accordingly, the party preferences of the young generation.

Based on the research objectives, the paper poses relevant research questions. The paper explains 1. how youth engagement has changed over the course of several elections to the European Parliament. It is also interesting to see what has led to the trend of youth participation in European Parliament elections. To determine the voting priorities of young people, the paper also answers the question of 2. Which issues are prioritized by young voters in the 2024 European Parliament elections? Accordingly, the hypotheses of the paper were formulated as follows: 1. the growth trend of the young electorate in the last five European Parliament elections is mainly determined by the increasing role of digital platforms, more specifically social networks, among the younger generation; 2. among the important issues for the young generation in the 2024 European Parliament elections, those social issues that directly affect them are worth mentioning.

In order to analyze the election processes for the European Parliament in detail, the research part of the thesis is based on the method of qualitative research. In this context, the method of analyzing secondary sources and documents was applied. The application of this method is valuable in that it involves analyzing secondary data from government reports, census data, and institutional records, which is necessary to understand broader patterns of political participation, particularly in terms of demographic participation. Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris used large-scale secondary datasets (such as surveys or official election data) to analyze long-term trends in voter turnout and political engagement. The researchers argued that document and survey data can reveal important changes in political culture over time, such as generational or gender differences in political participation (Norris & Inglehart, 2009). In addition to the qualitative research method, the article analyses studies with specific statistical indicators that allow important conclusions to be drawn. Accordingly, the study relies on the triangulation method, which involves the use of quantitative aspects to analyze the topic in depth.

In the paper, the pre-and post-election Eurobarometer surveys and their results were specifically selected and analyzed in relation to young people's participation in the last five elections to the European Parliament (2004, 2009, 2014, 2019, 2024). The period analyzed covers the years 2004-2024. The first period was deliberately chosen because it was during this period that the increase in young people's turnout was observed compared to previous elections. In addition, 2004 is a significant period in terms of the enlargement of the European Union, as ten new Member States joined the Union during this period, so it makes sense to start the calculation of the study period precisely in 2004 due to the number of countries. The endpoint of the period under review - 2024 - is the last elections to the European Parliament that have taken place so far. Using secondary sources, the article analyses the Eurobarometer surveys on public opinion conducted by the European Union during the period under review for the European Parliament elections. At the same time, the study analyses analytical and scientific reports and documents related to the European Parliament elections. The study focuses on the European Parliament elections, the European youth electorate, secondary sources and studies on the elections, digital platforms, and young people's preferences.

The theoretical framework of the paper is the theory of interaction between political participation and digital media channels in order to identify the dynamics of the increase in youth participation in the European elections and the reasons for this process. Among the theorists working on this topic, it is worth mentioning the theory of Andrew Chadwick and James Dennis, which highlights the role of digital media in shaping political behavior. According to the authors, social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok are new spaces for political engagement, activism, and the dissemination of political information, especially for young people. Based on analytical observations, the authors analyze that the use of digital tools can improve young people's political participation through methods such as providing information, organizing campaigns participating in debates, etc. (Chadwick & Dennis, 2016).

With the growth of digital media, political participation has become more accessible to young people. Digital platforms allow them to share different opinions, mobilize others, and raise

awareness of various political issues, including electoral processes. This is especially true for the European Parliament election period, where global issues such as climate change and social justice were directly influenced by youth movements (such as Fridays for Future) that shaped political discourse across the EU.

Literature Review

Among the most widespread forms of political participation, electoral participation is considered one of the most effective in the academic literature, as it is the most widespread and highly regulated political activity with the greatest influence on citizens in most democracies (Deželan & Moxon, 2021). Elections are particularly important for the political system of the European Union as they are the only mechanism that allows citizens to exercise direct control over their representatives in the European Union. Empirical studies on voter turnout have their roots in theories of voting behavior. Of the numerous surveys on voter turnout conducted by various researchers in the past, most of the academic literature is based on the Downs model (Downs, 1957), in which the benefits and costs of voting are weighed against each other and the decision to vote is accordingly based on a cost-benefit analysis (Fiorino, Pontarollo, & Ricciuti, 2017). At the same time, the academic literature also analyses the role of party systems in explaining the variability of voter turnout. Most studies consider the effect of the number of parties. On the one hand, the more parties, the higher the voter turnout. On the other hand, according to Robert Jackman, multi-party systems usually lead to coalition governments, making elections less decisive because governments are the result of backroom deals between parties, which in turn reduces turnout (Jackman, 1987).

In the past, various studies have confirmed that fewer people vote in European elections than in national elections. Voter turnout in elections to the European Parliament is often lower than in other second-level national elections (Reif, 1985). According to some researchers, the low turnout in European elections is mainly explained by the fact that Europe is of little interest to the public and that the results of elections are difficult to recognize in the development of Union policies (Franklin & Eijk, 1996). Despite the downward trend in voter turnout since the first European Parliament elections (1979), voter turnout in the 2019 European Parliament elections increased by 8 percentage points compared to 2014, reaching 50.6%, which is the highest turnout since 1994. Based on analytical research, political scientist Tarja Laaninen states that this increase is due to the growing turnout of young people and is linked to both growing pro-European attitudes and a sense of European inclusion and empowerment (Laaninen, 2024).

In an academic paper entitled "The Networked Young Citizen: Social Media, political participation and Civic Engagement" a group of English researchers analyzes the role of digital media in young people's political participation. According to their observations, digital platforms offer young people more flexible opportunities for political engagement, including political activism, participation in digital protests, and the use of social media as a tool for mobilization and awareness-raising (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014). Therefore, the discussion of the presented

paper is valuable in the context of my article, which emphasizes the important role of social platforms in increasing youth participation in the European elections. In this study, the authors argue that the consumption of news media alone does not automatically lead to political participation. Instead, individuals can reaffirm or challenge their political views by discussing news topics, and these discussions can lead to greater interest in political activities, such as voting, attending rallies, or participating in political protests. Considering that many young Europeans increasingly receive political news digitally, the results of the study suggest that the more young people engage in political discussions online (in forums, social media groups, and platforms such as Twitter (X) or Instagram), the more likely they are to participate in political processes, including the EU elections. Platforms such as Twitter (X) and TikTok enable young people to advocate for environmental policies, engage with EU politicians, and form new political alliances, even across borders (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014).

Participation of young people in the 2004-2024 European Parliament elections

In 1999, young people's participation in European elections was lower than that of other age groups. Researchers have found that this trend of abstention is probably due to young people's distance from European institutions and their lack of influence on citizens' lives. At the same time, those who did vote tended to support traditional and moderate parties and were less inclined towards extremist or radical movements (Palomar, 2024). In the 2004 elections to the European Parliament, voter turnout among young people increased slightly, partly due to the enlargement of the European Union and the resulting interest in European integration. However, the general advantage of the traditional parties remained. Mateos Díaz analyses the political participation of young people in Spain and other European countries in a comparative context. The analysis focuses on the 2004 elections to the European Parliament and the reasons for the absence of young people and also highlights new forms of political participation. The author explains the reasons for the low participation of young people in the elections. According to his observations, the process of electing representatives to the European Parliament is of as little interest to young Europeans as it is to the adult population. However, their situational interest in topics related to the European elections is remarkable. At the same time, forms of political participation such as watching the media and political discussions with family or friends were found to have a significant and positive influence on voters' political participation. On this basis, the researcher points to the need for better coverage of the election campaign through digital platforms (Díaz, 2004, p. 181).

As in subsequent years, the 2009 European Parliament elections saw a marked change in voter turnout among young people. According to some observations, the reason for this is seen in the global financial crisis and its impact on young Europeans, which triggered a sense of dissatisfaction and disillusionment among them, even though abstention remains a major challenge (EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, 2009). Accordingly, this attitude of young people was reflected in the growing support for relatively small and emerging parties, including green parties and populist movements,

which offered them an alternative to austere politics and promised more radical reforms in various directions. The increase in voter turnout among young people and the trend towards supporting alternative parties continued in the 2014 European Parliament elections (EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, 2014). According to some researchers, a key reason for the increase in young voter turnout during this period may be the increasing role of social media in the election campaign. It is noteworthy that in the 27 countries of the European Union, young people aged 16-24 are more active users of social media than other age groups, and in terms of activity, creating blogs, publishing their opinions, and sending messages via social networks is notable (Davies, 2014).

In the 2019 elections, voter turnout among young people in many EU Member States reached a record high in the history of elections to the European Parliament compared to previous years. Young people voted primarily in favour of parties campaigning for climate change, social justice and democratic reform. In many countries, green and progressive parties achieved historic results, indicating a clear shift in the priorities of young voters. This shift was driven by the growing environmental crisis, active campaigning by youth organisations and awareness-raising activities by the EU institutions (DEŽELAN, 2023). The 2019 post-election survey of the Eurobarometer, the European Parliament's opinion poll, has analyzed new dimensions of the European elections. The report examines voter turnout and analyses the differences between socio-demographic and socio-professional groups in EU countries. The analysis shows the increasing participation of young voters in elections to the European Parliament. It also shows their party preferences. According to the report, young Europeans find it difficult to make their voting decision until the last moment before the elections. This is evidenced by the fact that, compared to the older generation, young people were less certain about who they would vote for in the 2019 European Parliament elections and for the most part only made up their minds in the run-up to the elections (ZALC, BECUWE, & BURUIAN, 2019, p. 8). According to the same report, between 2014 and 2019, voter turnout increased more among the under-25s (42%, +14) and 25-39-year-olds (47%, +12) than among the over-55s (54%, +3), although older people are more likely to vote. The report highlights the differences in young people's turnout by their level of education and confirms that those leaving higher education institutions and dropping out of school at a relatively older age are more likely to vote than those leaving school at a relatively younger age (see, p. 21). Analyzing this report helps us to get a picture of the dynamics of changes in young people's participation in several elections to the European Parliament. It showed that in the history of elections to the European Parliament, the number of voters, including young voters, has increased since 2019. This trend will continue in the 2024 European Parliament elections.

From 6 to 9 June 2024, the citizens of the 27 EU Member States elected more than 700 MEPs in the European Parliament elections. Through these elections, they chose both the European Parliament and its composition and determined the political direction and agenda of the European Union for the next five years. It is worth noting that in the 2024 European Parliament elections, for the first time, all citizens over the age of 16 in countries such as Austria, Belgium, Germany, and Malta and all citizens over the age of 17 in Greece were eligible to vote (Laaninen, 2024). The results

of the Eurobarometer survey on youth and democracy, published on 13 May 2024, show that 64% of young people (aged 15 to 30) intend to vote in the 2024 European Parliament elections (European Commission, 2024, p. 14). This figure is the highest in the history of elections to the European Parliament. This fact shows that nowadays the interest and participation of young Europeans in political processes, in this case elections, is increasing, which is also clearly reflected in the democratization process in the EU Member States. Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President for the Promotion of the European Way of Life, emphasizes the importance of the Eurobarometer results for the development of European democracy:

"This Eurobarometer survey on youth and democracy gives hope that the engagement of young Europeans in the European elections is crucial for the future of our Union. By voting, they can help shape the policies that shape their lives. In the 2019 elections, voter turnout among young people has risen sharply. In these turbulent times, I am optimistic that we can build on this positive trend in 2024 so that our European democracy can thrive (Schinas, 2024)."

However, according to a 2024 survey, 19% of young people say they are not interested in politics, while 13% are not interested in voting in the next elections (European Commission, 2024, p. 2). The young people who were hesitant or unsure about voting in the next European elections gave ten different reasons that could explain their hesitation. Each reason was mentioned by less than 20% of respondents. Among the reasons, the most frequently cited (19%) were a lower interest in politics and a lower expectation of change as a result of voting (ibid., p. 15). In 14 of the countries analysed, less interest in politics was cited most frequently in Austria (31%) and Estonia (30%) (p. 16). Nihilism and a lack of interest in European elections can therefore still be observed among young Europeans. The reasons for this attitude are complex and linked to other additional factors, which should be the subject of further in-depth research.

In the history of elections to the European Parliament, young people's interest in various social and political issues has grown in importance with the increasing technological development, including in the virtual world. Accordingly, it is worth noting the various forms of interest and expression of opinion in politics by European youth, which include expressing opinions on political processes on social networks. The European Parliament's 2023 study emphasises that "young people have never distanced themselves from politics and have not become inactive, but are engaged in different ways" (DEŽELAN, 2023). Among these forms, the same study emphasises the role of social media. Social media is one of the most desirable channels for young people's online political engagement, as it enables the mobilisation of a large number of young people in a very short time. It is on social media that young people express their opinions on current political issues and other topics that they consider relevant.

Young people and their preferences in the 2024 European Parliament elections

Political interest is a crucial component of political participation (Ham & Smets, 2013, p. 355). Certain issues are of particular interest to young people. According to the European Parliament's youth survey in 2024, the three most important issues for young people were the fight against poverty and inequality (43%), the fight against climate change and the protection of the environment (39%) (European Parliament, 2021, p. 16). At the same time, traditional issues such as youth unemployment (37%), education (28%) and health and social affairs (34%) remain on the list of priorities. Corruption is also important as an indicator of integrity (27%) (p. 16-19).

According to Professor Jesús Palomar, support for far-right forces has increased among younger generations in recent years, but this growing and influential trend remains on the fringes of European politics for the time being. According to the author, the increasing popularity of far-right forces among young Europeans is due to their active campaigning on social media, which is widely used by young people. It is also interesting to note that young people in the European Union are increasingly interested in political and social issues that directly affect their future (Palomar, 2024).

These key issues include climate change and environmental sustainability, which is reflected in young people's strong support for green policies and political parties that promise strong action to combat global warming. At the same time, social justice and equality are also priorities for young Europeans. In this respect, the focus is on overcoming economic inequality and discrimination. In recent years, young Europeans have placed increasing emphasis on affordable, quality education and adequate employment opportunities in a rapidly evolving labour market. In addition, the issues of migration and human rights are crucial to them, and advocating for the rights of refugees and migrants is important to young people. Furthermore, democratic reforms and government transparency are among the main concerns of a generation that values more citizen participation and accountability in political decision-making (JEF Europe and Make.org, 2024).

There is a clear diversification in the political preferences of young Europeans. Many tend to favour progressive, left-wing and anti-establishment alternatives as well as parties that are committed to ecological, social and democratic renewal issues. Left-wing parties still have a significant base among young voters, even if their share has declined with the rise of right-wing populism. This situation is supported by specific electoral data from leading European countries. In Italy, for example, despite the victory of Giorgia Meloni's right-wing populist force, there has been a certain shift of the youth vote to the left. In Germany, polls show that the far-right party "AfD" has gained a lead of up to 17% among 12% of young voters and especially among young people aged between 16 and 24 (Marsh & Escritt, 2024). Furthermore, in France, Marine Le Pen's nationalist policies are the most popular choice in the 18-34 age group (Robles, 2024). A different situation was observed in Spain, where 22% of voters aged 18 to 24 stated in a recent survey that they would vote for the far-right parties Vox (12.2%) and Se acabó la fiesta (9.8%). In comparison, Spain's left-wing parties - the Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), Suarez and Podemos - together received 24.2% of voters in this age group (Palomar, 2024).

The Eurobarometer survey on public opinion 2024 conducted by the European Parliament shows that certain issues have become a priority for young people in the European election campaign. It found that for the majority of young Europeans aged between 15 and 24 (33%), 'tackling climate change' is one of the most important issues in the 2024 EU election campaign. Remarkably, while 33% of respondents in this age group believe that this issue should be widely discussed, 27% of respondents overall share this view. This makes it the topic with the highest priority among young respondents, although it ranks fifth in the overall survey (European Parliament - EB 101.1, 2024, p. 76-77). The topic of "combating poverty and social exclusion" is also important to young Europeans, with 31% of them citing it as a key issue. The youngest respondents are also interested in the topic of the future of Europe: around three in ten (29%) stated that they would like this topic to be actively discussed during the campaign. A quarter of all respondents (26%) would also like this to happen. At the same time, the data shows that among social issues, the topic of universal healthcare is important to young people (28%).

In the context of the current global crises, migration and refugee accommodation (22%) are the most important issues for young people. This is particularly true in connection with the ongoing crises in Ukraine and Palestine (European Union - Standard Eurobarometer 98, 2023). The Eurobarometer survey also identified other topics that young Europeans are most interested in. These include humanitarian aid (18%), gender equality, inclusion and diversity (15%), the digitalization of the European economy and society (14%), etc.

Analysing the Eurobarometer surveys on young people's participation in the European Parliament elections 2004-2024

This section analyses the Eurobarometer surveys of public opinion following the last five European Union elections. The analysis of these polls is valuable as they represent a survey of European voters in the Member States of the Union conducted by the official research centers of the European Parliament in view of the forthcoming elections. Accordingly, the survey data is valuable in terms of its reliability and validity. In analyzing the Eurobarometer results, I focus on the socio-demographic aspects of the electorate surveyed and their preferences in specific areas. In view of my research objective, the analysis also includes the opinions of the young electorate (18-24) participating in the European Parliament elections.

The pre-election Eurobarometer surveys are interested in voters' attitudes towards the upcoming European elections by age group. This sub-section presents the attitudes of the younger generation towards certain issues in the 2004-2024 elections in the form of a table. In particular, it reflects their interest in the European elections, the likelihood of their voting in the upcoming elections and their trust in the European Union. At the same time, the last component of the table analyses young people's participation in the European elections and the reasons for it, based on Eurobarometer surveys (see Table №1). In addition, this sub-section analyses the post-election

Eurobarometer surveys, in particular the total number of voters in the European elections during the study period, their turnout and the percentage of young voters (see Table №2).

Table №1

Youth participation in the European Union elections (data from pre-election Eurobarometer surveys - general trends):

Year	Interest of young people (18-24) in the EU elections %	Probability of young people (18-24) voting %	Positive attitude/trust towards the EU among young people (18-24) %	Level and reasons for political participation of young people (18-24)
2004	30-35	25-30	53	Low (general non-participation)
2009	35	28-30	49	Low (lack of connection with the European Union)
2014	37	28	48	Slight increase (due to campaigns targeting young people)
2019	45-50	31	58	High (more targeted digital campaigns)
2024	51 (15-24)	63 (15-24)	58 (15-24)	Higher (role of social networks, interest in global issues)

Eurobarometer 2004

According to the data presented in Table 1, up to $\approx 35\%$ of young voters aged 18-24 were interested in the upcoming European elections in 2004. Despite this interest, the likelihood of voting is slightly lower ($\approx 30\%$). It is worth noting that trust in the European Union is at around half of the young electorate (53%). It should also be noted that there is a positive attitude towards the European Union in the various age groups. According to the same study, in 2004, 18-24 year olds were slightly more likely (81%) than the older category (76% - 40-54 year olds) to think that their country's membership of the European Union is a good thing (p. 32, 2004) (Flash Eurobarometer 161, 2004, p. 32).

If we look at the age categories of the 2004 Eurobarometer survey, we see that young people are much less inclined to vote than older people. According to the same survey, 35% of 18-24 year

olds said they would definitely vote in 2004, while this figure rose to 61% for the over 55s. Of those aged between 25 and 39, 41% intend to vote. The age categories also show that the older the respondents are, the better informed they are about the upcoming European elections: While only 30% of 18 to 24-year-olds think they are sufficiently informed, the figure is 54% for the over 55s. The 2004 Eurobarometer survey shows that the older the population, the higher the voter turnout in the upcoming elections and the more they believe that their vote will not make a difference. While 50% of 18 to 24-year-olds cite this attitude as a reason for not voting in the forthcoming elections, the figure is 62% for the over 55s (Flash Eurobarometer 161, 2004, p. 24). As can be seen from Table 1, the non-participation of young people in elections is low, which according to the Eurobarometer survey is mainly due to a general lack of participation and interest.

In 2004, the mass media, particularly television and radio, were the main sources of publicity for the European elections. According to the pre-election Eurobarometer survey results, 78% of European citizens in the 25 Member States of the Union stated that they had seen or heard information about the election campaign on television or radio. At the same time, however, 62% said that they had seen adverts for parties or candidates and 60% had read about the election campaign in newspapers (Flash Eurobarometer 161, 2004, p. 27).

Eurobarometer 2009

The Eurobarometer survey in the run-up to the 2009 elections shows, similar to the data from 2004, a lack of interest in the European elections among young voters, which is almost as high as in previous elections (35%). The likelihood of voting among the younger generation is also $\approx 30\%$, as shown in Table 1. Young people's trust in the institutions of the European Union is 49%, which is lower than in previous elections. Overall, voter turnout and interest among young people is low, as in previous elections, and the pre-election Eurobarometer survey suggests that the reason for this is a lack of connection to the European Union. In particular, there is a lack of knowledge about the elections and the importance of the European Parliament in their daily lives. Many young Europeans were skeptical about the effectiveness of the European Parliament in solving their problems. This was compounded by a sense of political disillusionment, with young people often feeling that their vote had no meaningful impact on EU policy or that European politics seemed distant and abstract to them.

In the 2009 European elections, social media and digital platforms played only a limited role in the participation of young people, in contrast to the elections in subsequent years. Although traditional mass media such as television and newspapers still dominated during this period, young voters began to use social media platforms for political information and discourse. However, their potential to mobilise young people and increase voter turnout remained largely untapped in the European elections during this period (Bouza, 2014, p. 19).

Eurobarometer 2014

The turnout of young people (aged 18-24) in the 2014 European Parliament elections was around 29%, slightly higher than in 2004 and 2009, but still well below the EU average. According to Eurobarometer data prior to the 2014 elections, 37% of young people aged 18-24 stated that they were not interested in the European elections. 29% of young people cited insufficient information about the elections or the candidates as the reason for this. In addition, around 21% of young people felt that voting in the European elections would have no real impact on their lives or those of their country. Table 1 shows that despite the slight increase in young people's interest in the European elections, the likelihood of participating in the elections has remained roughly the same as in previous years (28%). The Eurobarometer survey also measured the level of trust in European institutions and its correlation with young people's voter turnout. Similar to 2009, trust in the EU institutions among young people has remained more or less the same (48% - 18-24 year olds). Half of young Europeans feel disconnected from the EU and its processes (Eurobarometer - European Parliament, 2013).

As for the small increase in the number of young people, the role of political campaigns in increasing voter turnout is worth mentioning. The Eurobarometer survey points to the increasing importance of digital platforms for voter behavior. For this reason, the participating political organizations ran their campaigns on digital platforms, which proved to be very interesting for young people who are used to technology. On the eve of the 2014 European elections, the European Parliament conducted an opinion poll among young people aged between 16 and 30 in the 28 Member States of the European Union. The survey focussed on five main EYE 2014 themes: youth and employment, the digital revolution, the future of the EU, sustainable development, and European values. According to the report, 46% of young Europeans believe that social networks are a step forward for democracy, while 41% see them as a risk (Podimata, Karas, & Welle, 2014, p. 19).

Eurobarometer 2019

2019 is a significant period in the history of European elections in terms of the increase in young voters. According to the Eurobarometer survey, around half of young voters are interested in the European elections, which is a significant increase compared to previous years. Nevertheless, the likelihood of participating in the elections is still slightly increasing and stands at 31%. Compared to previous elections, the increase in young people's attitudes towards and trust in the European Union and its institutions (58%) is remarkable (see Table 1).

The 2019 Eurobarometer survey also emphasizes the role of digital platforms and targeted campaigns in the increase in voter turnout among young people in the 2014 European elections. Among these campaigns, the appeal "This time I'm going to vote" (Flash Eurobarometer, 2019) is noteworthy. The same study found that more than half of young people get their political information three or more times a week from digital news channels (p. 12). At the same time, 44% of respondents recall receiving messages encouraging them to vote. Young voters were also particularly attracted by issues such as climate change, human rights and democracy (European Parliament, 2019).

Eurobarometer 2024

Today's Eurobarometer survey in the run-up to the 2024 European Parliament elections showed a growing interest among young people in the upcoming elections. More than half of young people aged between 15 and 24 (51%) said they were interested in the European elections. However, compared to previous elections, the age of young people in this survey starts at a relatively low threshold (15 years). Compared to previous years, the likelihood of young people voting in the European elections has changed more significantly. 63% of young people aged between 15 and 24 plan to vote in the upcoming elections, which is around twice as many as in the last elections. At the same time, more than half of the young generation (58%) have a positive attitude towards and trust in the European Union.

In addition, the 2024 Eurobarometer report analyses the socio-demographic characteristics of voters by gender and age group in the 2024 European elections. The data shows that young women (66%) are slightly more likely to vote than young men (63%). In addition, voter turnout is slightly higher among 25 to 30-year-olds (70%) than among 19 to 24-year-olds (67%). A clearer difference can be observed among the education groups. For example, young people with secondary or higher education are significantly more likely to vote in European Parliament elections (72%) than young people with secondary or higher education (55%) (European Parliament - EB 101.1, 2024, p.14).

The Eurobarometer survey analyses the trend of increasing political participation of young people in 2024 and shows the highest level in the history of elections to the European Parliament. The reasons for this increase are complex and linked to various awareness-raising campaigns, including the activation of digital platforms and social networks. The 2024 Eurobarometer report on the upcoming European Parliament elections underlines the growing importance of digital platforms and technologies in engaging young voters. The 2024 election campaign emphasised young people's interest in global challenges, on which the campaigns focused more strongly (p. 77).

Table №2.

Youth turnout in the European Parliament elections (2004-2019), according to post-election Eurobarometer surveys:

Year	Total number of voters (million)	Total voter turnout %	Youth activity (18-24) %	Number of member states
2004	350	45.47	28	25
2009	375	42.97	28	27
2014	400	42.61	29	28
2019	427	50.66	31	28
2024	400	50.74	36	27

The table below shows the data from the European Parliament's post-election polls for the period 2004-2024. In addition, the table shows the total number of voters registered for the European elections in the period analysed, which is between 350 and 400 million, with an average of 390.4 million people. The data also shows the percentage of total voter turnout. In the period 2004-2024, the average voter turnout in elections to the European Parliament was 46.5%, and 30.4% among young people aged between 18 and 24.¹ At the same time, the table shows the number of EU member states during the study period, which generally increased from 25 to a maximum of 28 member states.

In the 2004, 2009 and 2014 elections to the European Parliament, voter turnout among young people was relatively low at around 28%. Voter turnout in the EU as a whole also fell slightly during this period, but the gap between young people and older age groups remained significantly smaller. In 2019, voter turnout among young people increased slightly (to 31%), which is a slight improvement compared to previous elections. In the 2019 European Parliament elections, overall voter turnout was 50.6%, a significant increase compared to previous years. However, voter turnout among young people remains below average overall. The highest voter turnout among young people was recorded in the last European Parliament elections in 2024, when it was 36%. In the same elections, there was a slight increase in general voter turnout compared to previous elections, which at 50.74% is the highest in the history of the 2004-2024 European Parliament elections (see Table №2).

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to analyse the dynamics of voter turnout among young people in the history of the five elections to the European Parliament in the period 2004-2024. The analysis of the Eurobarometer surveys before and after the elections showed that the turnout of young people in the first three elections to the European Parliament in the period analysed (2004, 2009, 2014) did not increase or increased only slightly. The reasons for this are complex and are primarily related to young people's abstinence from voting and nihilism towards the European elections. This trend was more pronounced in the period before the elections (2004-2014). Furthermore, in the same years and in the subsequent election years, around half of the young generation was sceptical and distrustful of the European Union.

A relative increase in young voters in the elections to the European Parliament has been observed since 2019 and will reach its peak in the elections for the end of the European Parliament in 2024. Parallel to this growth trend, an increase in voter turnout among the electorate as a whole can also be observed in these two elections. The increase in youth interest in the European elections since 2019 is largely due to targeted information campaigns aimed at young people. In this direction, Eurobarometer and other electoral public opinion surveys point to the role of the technological revolution. The first hypothesis of my research is that the growth trend of the young electorate in the last five European Parliament elections is mainly due to the increasing importance of digital

platforms, more precisely social networks, among the younger generation. Indeed, the research results have shown that digital platforms and social networks play an important role in increasing the interest of the younger generation in the European elections. This is also evidenced by the fact that, since the same period, political parties participating in the elections have conducted a large part of their election campaigns precisely through digital channels, which aroused greater interest among young people. This trend was even more pronounced at the time of the 2024 European Parliament elections, as the main channels for young people to inform themselves about political processes were information websites and social networks. However, in addition to the increasing importance of digital platforms and social networks, it is also worth noting that in the 2024 European elections, the voting age was raised to 16-17 years in several countries, which was reflected to some extent in the increase in the young electorate. However, this change was not implemented in 2019, but a certain increase in the young electorate can still be observed, with the role of digital platforms already even more pronounced. Accordingly, the first hypothesis of my research was indeed justified, although it is advisable to conduct future, more in-depth research in this direction.

In the 2024 European Parliament election period, the younger generation was characterised by a diversification of areas of interest and preferences. Based on the Eurobarometer survey and the study of various analytical reports, it was found that social justice and environmental justice policies have been a topical issue for young people in recent years. In addition to social and economic issues, current global challenges and the parties' positions on the ongoing wars were also important for young Europeans in the 2024 election period, especially the crises in Ukraine and Palestine and thus also immigration policy and refugee management. As the article shows, in the last European elections, the majority of young people in most EU member states supported far-right political forces that focussed on migration policy and climate change issues.

Modern European youth is open to the world. They are not only interested in the challenges that affect them directly, but also in the global, universal problems that are currently taking place in the world. This speaks to the growing awareness and education of the young generation in relation to various challenges. Raising awareness is a fundamental process and the result of the efforts of many institutions that surround young people, including educational institutions and the family. It is worth mentioning that the latter are actively involved in informing and sensitising young people about various issues during the European Parliament's pre-election campaigns, which in the modern world is a significant event in the process of bringing young people closer to the electoral processes.

Based on this analysis, we can also discuss the expected future results. The elections to the European Parliament are characterised by the tendency of increasing interest and participation of young people. Therefore, it is expected that even more young people will participate in the next European elections in 2029. This fact is also supported by the fact that technologies and digital platforms are developing in the modern world and their role is evident in almost all areas of public activity, including electoral processes. Accordingly, in the upcoming elections, European political parties will increasingly focus their pre-election campaigns on digital platforms, which in turn will help to inform and sensitize the young electorate for the European Parliament elections. With various

global crises still on the agenda in the modern world, young people's preferences in the upcoming European elections are likely to centre on these issues. Support and benefits will be given to those political actors who actively campaign in this direction in the run-up to the elections.

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