

The global trend towards greater longevity means that the number of older voters is constantly increasing, and the proportional number of younger voters is decreasing. In many of the world's democracies, older people vote more consistently and in greater numbers than their younger counterparts. The apparent reluctance of the young to exercise their right to vote only serves to reinforce this demographic trend. The result is that politicians tend to pander to the "Grey Vote", and young people run the risk of being under-represented in parliament while seeing their issues overlooked by governments. In such a scenario, young people may be easier targets for unpopular government measures, such as the belt-tightening associated with austerity.

The statistics make the case. In Germany's 2013 general election, the average voting turnout was 72.4%. All of the age-cohorts above the age of 45 fell above this average, whereas all of the age-cohorts below 45 fell exactly on or below it. Turnout was highest amongst 60-70 year olds (almost 80%), whereas turnout amongst 18-21 year olds was below 65%.

In the United Kingdom, turnout in 2015's general election among those aged 18 to 24 decreased to a mere 43%, far below the average turnout of 66.1%. The participatory gap has widened over the decades and its last year's figures were exceeded only in 2005, when youth turnout was a staggering 24 percentage points below that of the entire population. A recent article in *The Economist* (23 April 2016) suggests, however, that this is partly due to the fact that most British university students live in short-term accommodation and tend to move frequently, which makes it hard for them to register as voters in the first place.

In either of these cases, would lowering the voting age make a difference? In Germany, where 16 year olds are eligible to vote in the local elections of some *Länder* (federate states), there is some evidence to suggest that a cohort who obtain their voting right at 16 will have a higher poll turnout over the course of their whole lives than a cohort who are not allowed to cast their first vote until a later age. In other words, early

participation seems to set a trend for life.

One possible way of reducing the median voting age could be the introduction of compulsory suffrage, which already exists in countries such as Belgium, Greece, Luxembourg, Cyprus, and Australia. However, this kind of imposed political legitimacy is seen by some to offend the principles of liberal democracy – even though it need not imply the imposition of legal sanctions against non-voters, as the case of Belgium and others demonstrates. The question of whether the democratic act of voting should be recast from a civic duty to an obligation is multi-faceted and will remain open to discussion for years to come. Additionally, measures to increase the electoral turnout of the younger age groups could aim at making the very act of voting easier, that is, more "user-friendly" – for example through e-voting.

At any rate, it is hardly possible for the interests and preferences of a group, even with the very best intentions, to be better identified by a third-party than by the affected group itself. The paternalistic conception that men understand women's needs better than women themselves, for instance, was successfully rejected by women during their long battle for the suffrage. As John Stuart Mill put it in his *Considerations on Representative Government*, the rulers and ruling classes are "under a necessity of considering the interests and wishes of those who have the suffrage; but of those who are excluded, it is in their option whether they will do so or not." Therefore the very idea of democracy is called into question if any group within it become sidelined, while others are favoured. There will be repercussions for political legitimacy if young people perceive themselves as being left out of the political process; hence remedies are needed to ensure that this does not happen.

This issue of the *Intergenerational Justice Review* addresses the topic from two angles: it asks for the reasons why the electoral turnout of young voters is comparably low in the first place, and it discusses some possible solutions to the problem.

In the first of two research articles, Charlotte Snelling asks for the potential of education in raising youth turnout. Aggregate

increases in education do little to alter an individual's relative status within the education system, she argues. Using the 2011 UK Citizens in Transition Survey, she suggests that education affects turnout by determining young people's positioning within social networks. Some of these networks, however, are more politicised than others. Individuals with relatively lower educational status continue to be excluded from more politically engaged networks – irrespective of their educational attainment – and, as a result, they lack the mobilisation and greater sense of political efficacy required to vote. In short, the simple formula "more education leads to more political interest" turns out to be just that, a simplification.

In the second article, Thomas Tozer discusses how to increase electoral turnout among the young. He considers two methods for doing so: compulsory voting and a scheme of financial incentives. The incentive scheme that he prefers would pay young people £30 if they attend an hour-long information session on the election, an hour-long discussion session, and then vote. Tozer argues that this scheme is preferable to compulsory voting because it is more likely to lead young people to deliver reasoned and well-considered votes; and it does so, he holds, without violating individual liberty.

In the review section, our authors discuss some of the most recent publications on voting and intergenerational justice. The research articles of this issue are the winning entries to the 2014/2015 Demography Prize, bestowed jointly by the Foundation for the Rights of Future Generations (FRFG) and the Intergenerational Foundation (IF). Please also consider our Call for Papers on "Constitutions and Intergenerational Justice", printed at the end of this issue. Last but not least, we cordially invite you to visit our newly launched website at [www.igjr.org](http://www.igjr.org). Whether electronically or in print – we wish you a rewarding and insightful read.

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