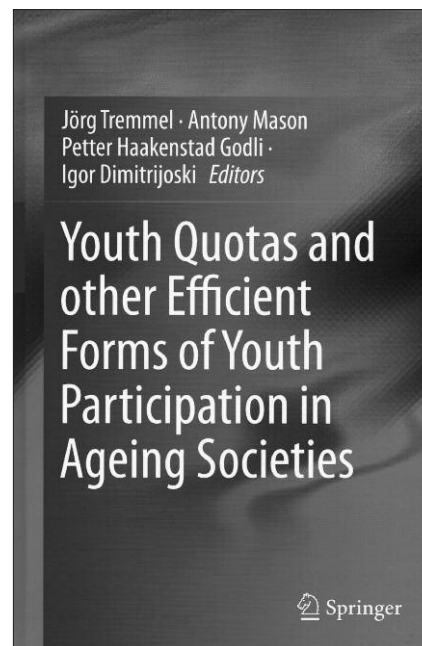


# Jörg Tremmel/Antony Mason/Petter Haakenstad Godli/Igor Dimitrijoski (eds.): Youth Quotas and other Efficient Forms of Youth Participation in Ageing Societies

*Reviewed by Lena Sommerfeld*

The anthology *Youth Quotas and other Efficient Forms of Youth Participation in Ageing Societies* deals, as the title suggests, with the challenge of demographic change in Western countries and its implications for the youth. One of the main questions is how the participation of young people may be supported and secured. Eleven articles, including introduction and afterword, discuss possible ways to increase young people's presence in elections, as well as in public offices, and the problems that come with this. The main topic, youth quotas, has not been discussed much before – neither in politics nor in scholarly debates. In this work, the authors approach forms of participation from the point of view of different disciplines including political science, philosophy and sociology.

The introduction to the book lays out the general problems that are created by an ageing society. In addition, some definitions – for example for different types of quotas – are given. These clarifications ease the reader into the topic of youth quotas and provide a useful background when reading the other contributions. The anthology then presents some of the issues concerning youth participation. While quotas are the main topic of the first few articles, some other forms of



youth participation receive a discussion as well. In this brief summary, three articles, by Juliana Bidadanure, Ivo Wallimann-Helmer, and Marcel Wissenburg, will be omitted, since they are reprinted in this journal (albeit in shortened versions).

In the first article, *What Do Quotas Do? Reflections on the Ubiquity and Justice of Quotas*, Radostin Kaloianov explains the purpose of quotas in general and only touches on the

topic of youth quotas lightly. Kaloianov lists arguments for and against quotas, while saying that they have become a vital part of our society. Whenever a choice between people has to be made, quotas are applied. This is described as meritocratic allocation (8), Kaloianov's first dimension of quotas. The second is a formal quota which can be implemented for normative reasons. He argues that such quotas for the disadvantaged can improve justice in their treatment. By means of such a quota, equal opportunities for different groups of people can be created (10). Many opponents of a normative quota, according to Kaloianov, argue that candidates for certain positions are not as qualified as others because of their age or race. This way, the merit principle prevalent in our society, i.e., the already existing quota, impedes minorities from being successful because of their discriminated-against attributes. This so-called "meritocracy" implies the marginalisation of certain groups of people in our society and preserves the asymmetrical power relations and oppression. A formal quota would neutralise these tendencies and prejudices and make positions available to people irrespective of their background. Kaloianov then briefly examines the implementation of a youth quota. He concludes

that not having to be involved in politics is a privilege that young people have. In times of the acceleration of the life-cycle, the protection from being an adult is threatened enough. A youth quota would only worsen this development and cause the young to grow up even faster. Youth quotas, if implemented at all, could only be imaginable if they addressed talented young people who explicitly wish to participate in politics instead of all young people (18).

Like many other authors of the anthology, Tobias Hainz calls to mind many of the problems that come with the democratic change, such as the marginalisation of young people. In his contribution, he seeks to explore whether youth quotas can be seen as discrimination against other ages and thus as a form of ageism, and whether a quota can be justified.

In the author's opinion, demographic change could diminish the interest that decision makers take in the concerns of young people. This way, young people would become marginalised morally and numerically. Although one might think this is the reason why the representation of young people should be secured by a quota, the author lays this out differently. Under these circumstances, he thinks that other minorities, such as atheists and homosexuals, would deserve a quota, too. He also questions the importance of young people's opinions over others and argues that young people are not, in themselves, an interest group like other minorities. Because of this, there is no need for special representation of young people. Furthermore, young people are no formerly discriminated-against group and therefore are in need of compensation. The author recalls, however, that young people do have the right to participate in politics, even before they graduate. This militates against a quota. Also, he argues that demographic change is unintentional (31) and therefore does not need to be compensated.

His conclusion is that youth quotas come up to ageism and are therefore morally not acceptable. Through a quota, the elderly would be disadvantaged and thus unduly discriminated against (34).

In another chapter, Anja Karnein and Dominic Roser discuss youth participation from an environmental perspective by asking *Saving the Planet by Empowering the Young?* This article puts an emphasis on the possible negative aspects of the demographic change and how to counteract them. It is presumed that the high number of elderly

people participating in politics might result in short-term policies. The idea, presented by the authors at the beginning, is that empowering the young would lead to more idealistic policies.

Karnein and Roser stress that a quota should not be an end in itself. Lowering the voting age should be justified by the right reasons, such as enhancing democratic legitimacy, but not in order to meet the goals of a particular agenda (80). An argument against youth quotas is that, unlike gender quotas, they do not empower a formerly discriminated-against group. What is more, a youth quota would not automatically guarantee a better representation of young interests. It is not only young people who can address topics relevant to the youth, such as the environment. Seeing that all currently living people are similarly affected by environmental changes, it is not a topic that can be limited to one age group (86).

Consequently, the authors state that age does not allow a conclusion to be drawn about the kind of policies that would be addressed by certain people. Only if there were a proven connection between the ages of the members of parliament and voter turnout might a youth quota be considered. Also, to favour one group of people because of special interests, or in this case their age, does not square with democratic ideals (89/90). Rafael Ziegler's article *Toward All Voices, from all Levels and in Their Own Ways? Discussion of the Youth Quota Proposal as an Incremental Policy Innovation for Sustainability* also makes youth quotas the subject of discussion and focuses on the quota as a means of making politics more sustainable. As was asked in the preceding chapter, he discusses whether young people are an important key to a sustainable politics. The second question is whether a youth quota might be a useful instrument in order to achieve this goal.

The responsibility of the youth for sustainability is split into three dimensions. The first is the responsibility of current generations for future generations. Ziegler argues that current generations could be useful for the sake of future generations. Youth quotas and their tendency towards sustainable policies, he expects, would 'automatically' lead to intergenerational justice. As an institutional addition, a 'future chamber' could secure sustainability. The second aspect is about distant generations, where he takes the focus off from quotas. For him, youth participation beyond a quota becomes im-

portant when the responsibility for distant generations is in dispute. Simply having a quota doesn't suffice for giving the young a voice. When talking about justice between overlapping generations, the quota becomes important again. Young people, through their participation in parliaments and elections, are expected to increase the chance for social change, thus leading to different policies. Nevertheless, the possibilities for the young would remain limited without institutional changes (100).

In the context of a project about participation, Ziegler then discusses possible ideas about the consequences of youth quotas. In his opinion, youth quotas would create young party backbenchers. The hierarchical structures of political parties would deter them from contributing experiences in a traditional way and lead to new ways of participation in parliaments and parties. Furthermore, he argues that the quotas would have to be extended to lower levels to be more effective, because only equal opportunities everywhere would deliver basic justice for all age groups (106).

*Encouraging and Supporting Children's Voices* by Sarah-Jane Conrad, Claire Cassidy, and Christian Mathis, deals with one of the arguments that is often used against youth participation. Maturity, and the degree of knowledge that goes with it, is often presented as a condition for participating in elections. Conrad, Cassidy, and Mathis describe philosophical projects that have taken place and enabled children to learn how to think critically, as well as how to discuss philosophical and political issues. The main question the authors ask is why children are not seen as full members of society and whether this does not contradict social justice and theories of the good life (111), thereby creating a power imbalance between children and adults. In order to recognise children as "beings in their becoming" (113), the power imbalance between them and others would have to change. Projects like Philosophy with Children, and especially the Community of Philosophical Inquiry prove that children can form ideas on what the ideal society would look like to them. They also showed that justice and equality are key components for a good life to the children. Philosophical and political thinking is, according to the authors, not reserved for adults, but can be used by children as well so as to create solutions for existing problems. Especially projects like the ones above would help the process along.

Therefore, children should be able to participate in politics and adults should enable children to speak up for themselves and, furthermore, try to profit from their opinions. The article *Democracy or Epistocracy? Age as a Criterion of Voter Eligibility* by Jörg Tremmel and James Wilhelm supports the argument that not letting young people vote is irreconcilable with the normative self-understanding of modern democracies.

During all periods of history, the right to vote has only been open to exclusive groups of the population. The concept of 'epistocracy' (rule by those in possession of political judgement) was established during classical antiquity and includes the rule of philosophers over the common people. The term 'epistocracy', however, can also be used for other systems in which voting is limited. The reasons for the exclusion of certain groups throughout history included income, education, gender, and age. The main questions asked by the authors are how people are kept from their right to vote and who, if anyone, has the qualification to make such a decision. The danger of excluding people from the right to vote is that they are not politically represented and are easily left out when it comes to important decisions.

The authors then go on to specify the reasons that are used as excuses not to change the voting age, and invalidate them. Maturity and political judgement seem to be the main arguments and become void when considering that there are no tests to verify other voter's qualifications. Their suggestion on how to implement the right to vote for people of all ages is by means of a registration (138). This way, they argue, there would be no general limit to the voting age and, if minors have an interest in voting, they can officially register and participate in the elections simply by opting in. Other solutions that are mentioned include the representation of children by their parents. This idea might be an alternative, too, but would have to be regulated in order to ensure the right to vote in secret and to avoid abuse. The conclusion to draw from this article is that any age limit would be a form of epistocracy and therefore needs to be removed from our democracy.

Petter Haakenstad Godli, in his article *Giving 16-Year-Olds the Vote: Experiences from Norway*, presents the results of a Norwegian trial which was conducted in order to examine whether the voting age should be lowered or not, and how this empirical evidence could influence further reforms. Ac-

cording to Godli, the discussion about lowering the voting age has been mostly normative in the past because there were few practical experiences that could be used (149). Because of this situation, Norway decided to conduct a trial in which 16- and 17-year olds were able to vote. The results from this election, it was thought, should allow for more informed discussions about the implementation of a lower voting age.

All of the arguments against suffrage reform are also part of the discussion in the European Voting Age Debate, which offers the framework for Godli's piece, and which include legal and constitutional practice arguments, as well as democracy and political maturity arguments. Godli also presents the problems that would come with lowering the voting age, such as jeopardising the harmonisation of voting age, the age of eligibility and the age of majority. Furthermore, he argues that a majority of people in Norway was and remains opposed to lowering the voting age. Arguments in favour of suffrage reform are that the democratic legitimacy could be increased and the political marginalisation of youth avoided (158). Godli presents more issues and facts describing the turnout for the trial and the studies that have been conducted. Finally, he concludes that these trial elections had a positive effect on youth participation in Norway (171) and that the decision of the government on whether the voting age should be lowered or not should be based on evidence that can be deduced by this or an additional trial.

All in all, this anthology can be described as well-written and fairly balanced. Especially given the absence of research in this area, the reader gets a good idea on how youth quotas might be implemented and what sets them apart from other forms of quotas. However, not all of the articles fit the title. The phrase "efficient forms of youth participation" gives rise to the suspicion that further ideas and strategies to enhance the participation of young people might be presented. Instead, the discussions are limited to the arguments for and against quotas and justifications for the participation of youth. A concern for efficiency can only be ascribed to two contributions which evaluate whether a youth quota could make politics more sustainable – so efficiency is limited to the achievement of a certain goal here.

Those articles in particular seem very one-dimensional because youth quotas were looked at with certain preconceptions. It

seems rather harsh to designate young people to a specific field of politics and to not leave it open, at least in principle, where they themselves might decide to get involved. Whenever regulation for a quota is implemented, young people deserve to be given a voice, and not to be restricted in their participation because of a limited agenda.

Since the topic of youth quotas has not been researched very widely, there is probably not too much data out there on which to base one's arguments. Many arguments – for example why sustainable politics might be promoted by the young – are not backed up by facts, but mostly work on assumptions. Depending on the author, the same arguments are used for and against quotas and contradict each other. For example, Ziegler maintains that young people are interested in sustainable issues. Karnein and Roser, on the other hand, cannot detect a connection between interests and age. The problem here is not that there are different opinions, but that these opinions are based on assumptions and can be bent into the shape the authors need. By working with mostly empty assumptions, the results might turn out not to be transferable.

Following these general comments on the anthology, some articles will now be picked out and subjected to further critical scrutiny. The articles summarised above were of varying quality. While all were informative and generally well-written, there were parts that lacked clarity.

Ziegler starts out nicely by dividing the influence on the participation of young people in the three categories mentioned above. This illustrates well on how many levels different generations can be considered. While the beginning was comprehensible, the article then continues to become less so. Towards the end, as described before, Ziegler seems to build arguments on many assumptions and does not back them up empirically, which makes it hard to retrace his steps one-by-one. He says himself that the project he conducted, a "River Parliament", is not comparable to youth quotas. Notwithstanding, he draws an analogy to them and bases his arguments on the comparison, which seems not very convincing.

Later in the anthology, Godli gives a good example of how a trial on voting ages can be organised and that it might be necessary for some states to have empirical evidence in order to implement suffrage reform. This aspect could be very interesting for further discussions. Unfortunately though, his article

lacks structure. He opens up questions in one paragraph of the article that are not addressed directly. This way, one ends up having to go back and forth to search for the paragraph where he discusses those ideas, and one easily loses the thread of what he wants to convey.

Youth quotas are a very controversial issue. This is all the more reason to try to grasp the main ideas and form an informed position based on them. The anthology at hand lays the groundwork for further discussions and enables the reader to get to know the subject, as well as to engage with different ideas about youth participation in general.

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