



University  
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## How does volunteering succeed & fail in promoting solidarity in Europe?

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# Political Participation, Solidarity & Citizenship

**Deterioration, decline or bias in political participation = serious challenge to European solidarity & citizenship**

Man  
del

Agents of solidarity

ship  
right &  
responsibility to participate  
in democratic government

# Young Generation's Electoral Participation

Today's young Europeans use a wide variety of methods to participate in politics, and most are interested in politics & politically active in some way

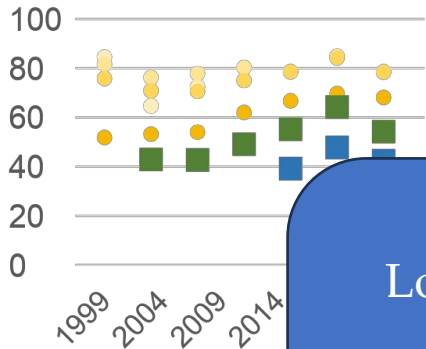
**BUT young generations – Millennials & Gen Z – are less likely to vote than their parents' & grandparents' generations were at the same age**

Voting is **habitual**: those who vote in their **first elections** have a high likelihood of **voting throughout adulthood**; those who don't are likely to be **lifelong abstainers**

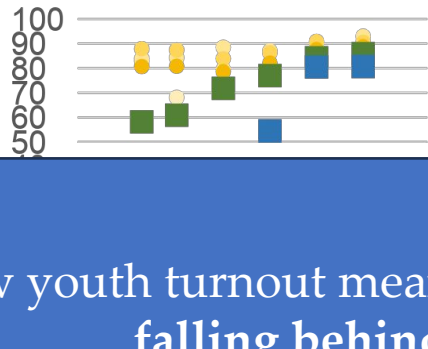
Low youth turnout today = large numbers developing non-voting habits

The result is **persistent generational divides** in voter turnout...

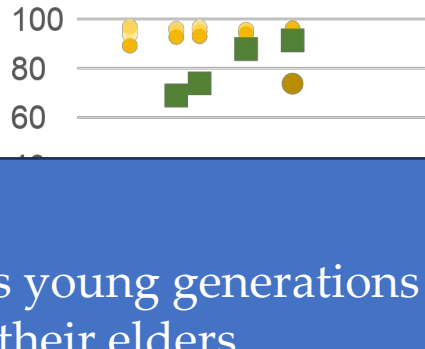
## Switzerland



## Germany



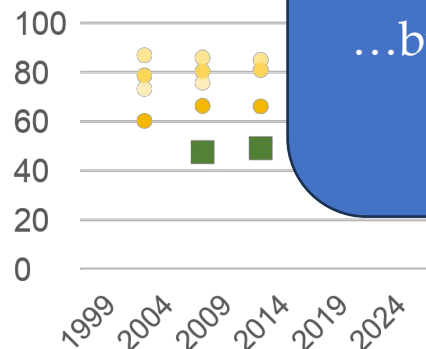
## Denmark



## Portugal



## France



## Ireland



Low youth turnout means young generations are **falling behind** their elders...  
...but low youth turnout is also concentrated among those from the **poorest backgrounds**...

Pre-war (pre-1926)

Silent Generation (1926-1945)

Baby boomers (1946-1964)

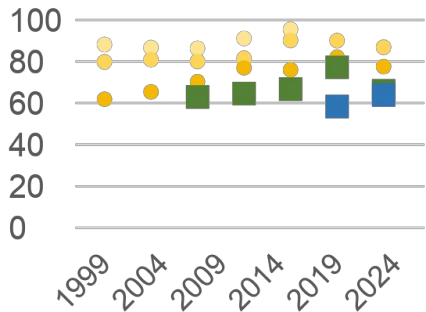
Gen X (1965-1980)

Millennials (1981-1994)

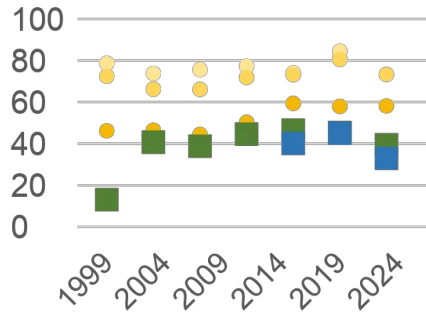
Gen Z (1995+)

## Switzerland

### Graduates

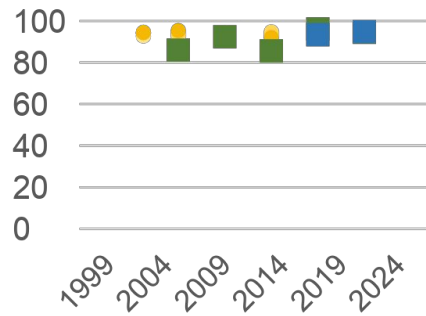


### Non-Graduates

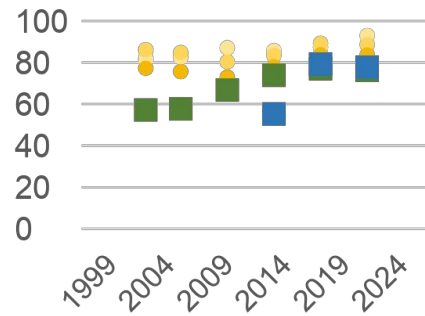


## Germany

### Graduates

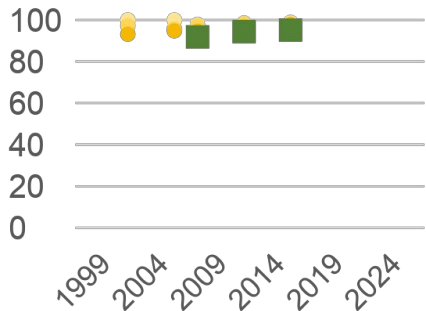


### Non-Graduates

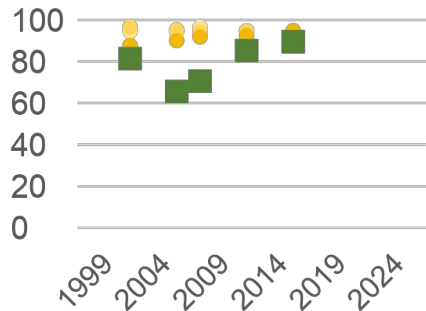


## Denmark

### Graduates

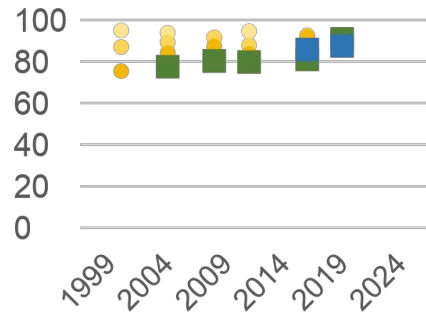


### Non-Graduates

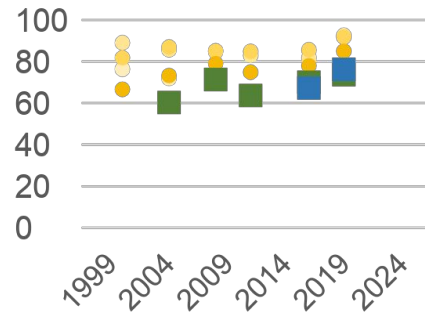


## Spain

### Graduates



### Non-Graduates



Pre-war (pre-1926)

Gen X (1965-1980)

Silent Generation (1926-1945)

Millennials (1981-1994)

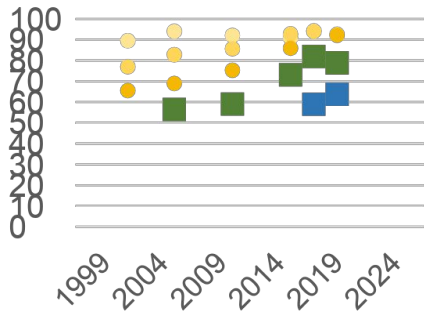
Baby boomers (1946-1964)

Gen Z (1995+)

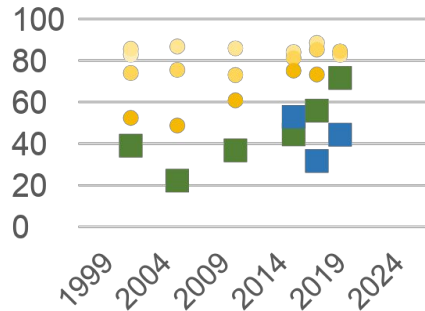
Source: European Social Survey

## UK

### Graduates

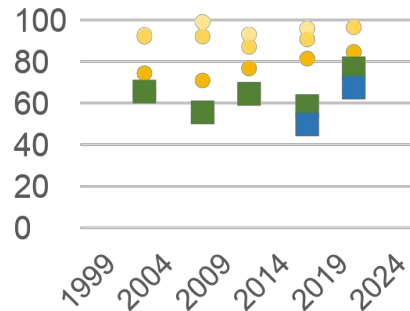


### Non-Graduates

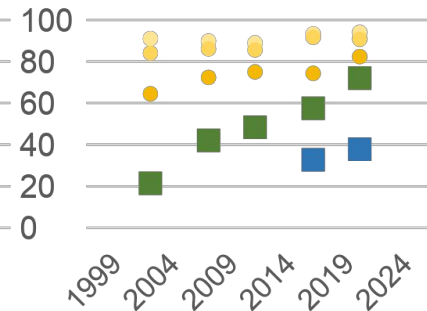


## Ireland

### Graduates



### Non-Graduates



## Portugal

### Graduates

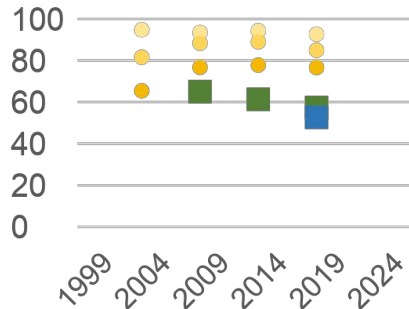


### Non-Graduates

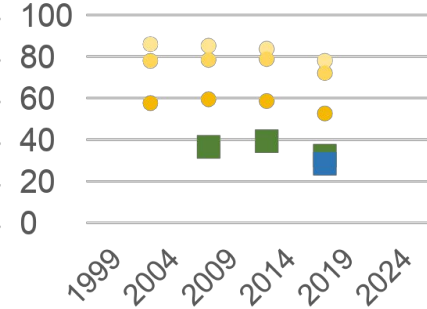


## France

### Graduates



### Non-Graduates



Pre-war (pre-1926)  
Gen X (1965-1980)

Silent Generation (1926-1945)  
Millennials (1981-1994)

Baby boomers (1946-1964)  
Gen Z (1995+)

Source: European Social Survey

# The Problems of Falling Youth Turnout

Low youth turnout has serious consequences for **young people**, European **democracy** & European **solidarity**

- Young people & especially poorer young people are **under-represented in election results & public spending/policy decisions**
- Governments are **less efficient & less representative** of public will
- Fewer **agents of solidarity** delivering positive change for their communities

How can volunteering help fight this challenge to European solidarity & democracy by **helping more young people – especially those from poorer backgrounds – to vote** in their first elections?

# Volunteering & Voting: The Causality Conundrum

Most r

**Most**

...but

**volu**

Kim and Morgul (2018): youth volunteering has **no effect** on voting in adulthood once **family background** is taken into account

**both**

**But what if we look at the effect of volunteering specifically for those from the poorest backgrounds?**

Vol

Politically active  
parents



# The Compensation Effect of Volunteering

UK annual household survey □ does childhood volunteering affect first-time voter turnout, after accounting for childhood & parents' political engagement?

*How likely children were to vote in their first general election from 0 (min) to 10 (max)*

**If they volunteered in the year before, their average score increased by...**



**Youth volunteering (slightly) increases likelihood of voting, especially for young people from poorer, politically disengaged households**

*There is evidence of similar effect from Switzerland – see my Europe Talks paper...*

# The Compensation Effect of Volunteering

Volunteering helps **young people from the poorest, most politically disengaged** households become more likely to vote in their first election

- Fox (2024): it increases **political interest** and **belief in civic responsibility of voting**

**Volunteering can help reduce generational turnout decline & promote solidarity through political participation & active citizenship**

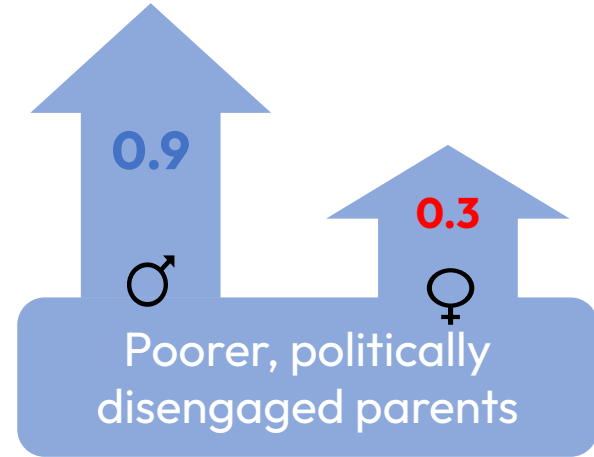
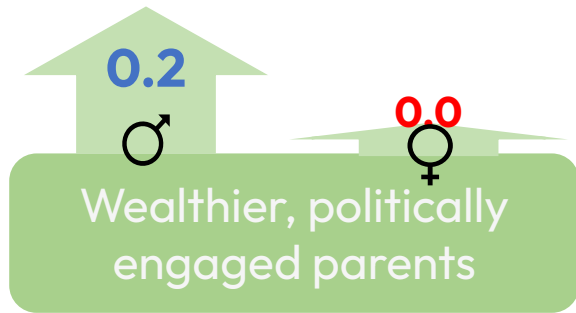
**BUT** there are some problems:

- 2) Benefits of volunteering are much greater for **young men than young women**
- 3) Participation in volunteering remains **dominated by young people from wealthier backgrounds**

# Volunteering benefits young men the most

*How likely children were to vote in their first general election from 0 to 10*

**If they volunteered in the year before, their average score increased by...**

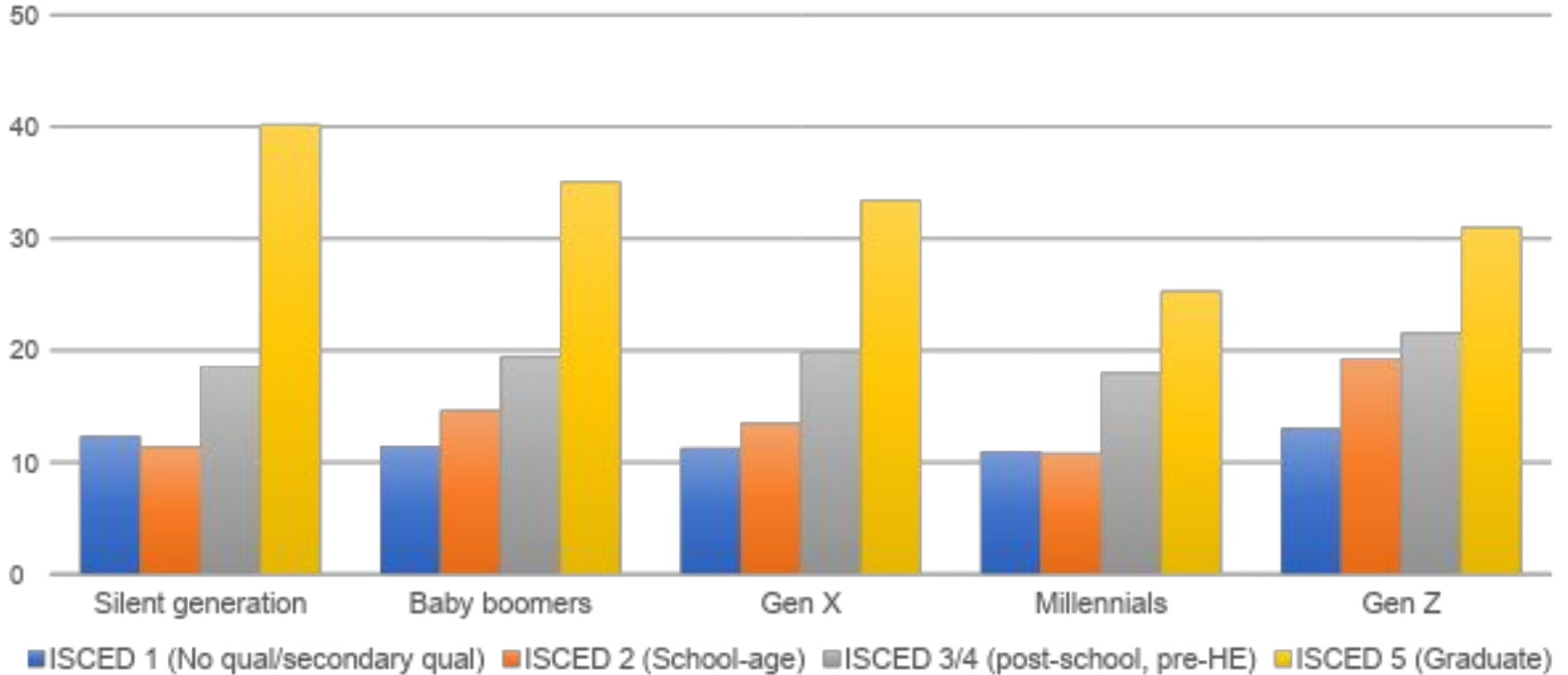


**Young men, regardless of background, gain more (politically) from volunteering**

Why? We aren't sure – but it is likely to reflect **differences in the types of volunteering** young men and young women typically participate in

# Socio-Economic Bias in Volunteering

Volunteered for non-profit or charitable organisation (%)



Source: European Social Survey 2020

# The Successes...

Volunteering helps **young people from the poorest backgrounds** become more likely to vote in their first elections

Those who are **least likely to vote in early adulthood & at the leading edge of generational turnout decline** have the most to gain from volunteering

Volunteering has a critical role to play in reducing **generational & wealth inequalities in political participation**, and **promoting European Solidarity**

# The Failures – & where we need to work harder

The benefits of volunteering (at least for political participation) are **much stronger for young men than young women**

*□ Why? We can't fix it if we don't explain it!*

*□ How can we recruit more **young women from poorer backgrounds** to (politically) productive forms of volunteering?*

Participation of young people from poorer households in volunteering **remains limited** – we still don't know how to overcome this socio-economic divide

*□ How can we increase participation of young people from poor households? **What can we learn from existing policies & schemes** to achieve that?*

# How does volunteering succeed & fail in promoting solidarity in Europe?

**To find out more:**

Email me: [S.Fox2@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:S.Fox2@exeter.ac.uk)

Sign up to my newsletter (drop me an email)

Look out for my Europe Talks Solidarity article

Find my paper ['Social Action as a Route to the Ballot Box'](#)

**Thank you  
for listening!**