

New vs. Consolidated Democracies: Are the Young More ‘Undemocratic’ Than the Old?
A comparative analysis of South Africa and Finland

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ABSTRACT

Are young people more undemocratic than the old? The hypothesis this thesis examines is whether young people born into consolidated democracies vote less because they take democracy for granted, compared to young people born into recently democratised countries, assuming that they ought to participate more in voting because they have experienced the aftermath of non-democratic governance. Academic articles and data by national data collection organisations report that young people are increasingly not exercising their right to vote and are therefore considered less democratic than older generations. But what does that mean, and is it true? This thesis aims to compare democratic support amongst young people in a longstanding democracy, namely Finland, and in a young democracy, namely South Africa. Finland has recorded the lowest voter turnout in presidential elections in people aged 19-21 (Statistics Finland 2024). The South African Institute of Race Relations reports that the lowest voting turnover is amongst people aged 18-20 years (Institute of Race Relations 2023). Despite Finland having an older and South Africa a younger democracy and different historical makeups, they face the same challenge of voter apathy in the youth. To examine the hypothesis, existing literature, data from the Afrobarometer, the Democracy Index reports, findings from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Statistics South Africa, Statistics Finland, academic studies, government, and news reports will be studied. The role of democratic socialisation on voter turnout will be studied. Traditional democratic engagement of young people is low, regardless of whether the democracy is new or consolidated but young people are participating differently through protests and online debates. Findings indicate that young people in Finland support democracy and seek improvement of existing representative democracy (Huttunen 2021, 1). South Africa's youth is plagued with inequality and social alienation, but the 2024 African Youth Survey Special Report on South Africa shows that young South Africans support democracy (Ichikowitz Family Foundation 2024, 8). Suggestions on how to increase voter turnout will be shared.

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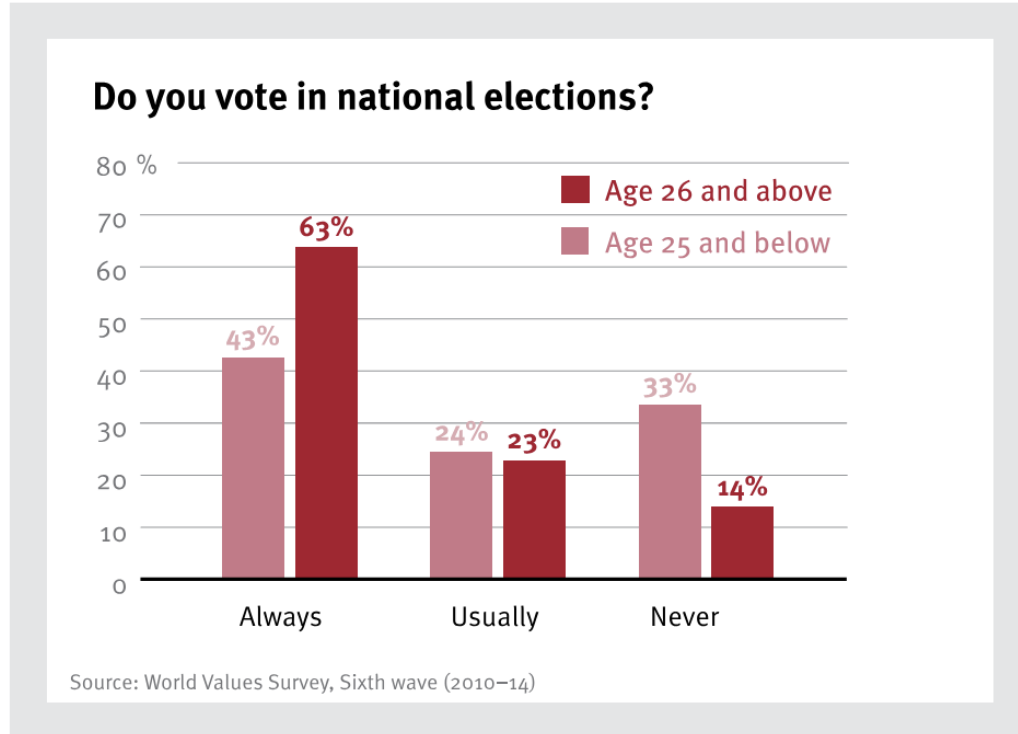
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INTRODUCTION

The future of democracies is in jeopardy, according to academic reports and polling information. Polls indicate that young people are not utilising their democratic right and responsibility to vote and that voter apathy among young people (25 years or younger) is therefore increasing (Solijonov 2016, 39). But are young people really becoming disinterested in democracy? If yes, why? This thesis investigates the support for democracy amongst young people in a longstanding and a recently democratised country. Young people, for the purpose of this thesis are people aged between 18-27 years. The countries being analysed are Finland and South Africa. In light of democratic backsliding and erosion of democratic values, it is important to understand young peoples' attitudes and interaction with democracy, as young people comprise the future of democratic society.

Voter turnout is defined as “the percentage of votes cast in an election, including invalid votes” (International IDEA 2024, 17). As can be observed in **Picture 1** below, people aged 25 and under are least likely to vote in national elections compared to those above 25 years (International IDEA 2024, 39). Further, those under 25 also represent the smallest group of people that vote in national elections (International IDEA 2024, 39). Voter turnout among young people is therefore considerably lower across the globe.

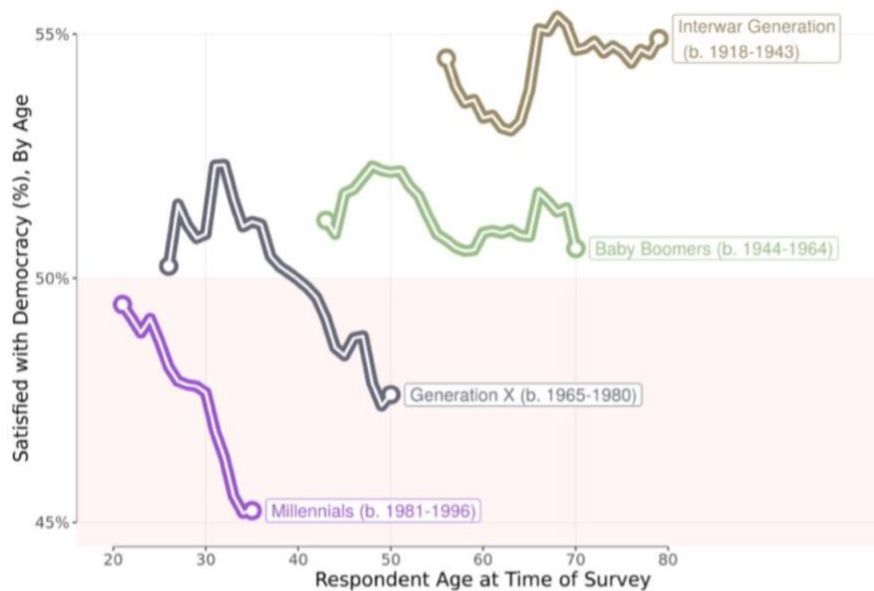
Figure 13. Differences in voter turnout by age



Picture 1: International IDEA “Figure 13: Differences in voter turnout by age” 2024, 39.

Political participation can be classified into “conventional and unconventional” forms of participation (Kaim 2021, 50). Institutional or conventional political participation is regarded as electoral participation such as voting (Kaase 2007, 15). Non-institutional or unconventional political participation is understood as “boycotts, citizen initiatives and demonstrations” (Kaase 2007, 15). Kaase points out that “non-institutional, non-electoral” political participation has increased (Kaase 2007, 14). Russel Dalton points out that protest has increased tremendously and is therefore “the extension of conventional participation” (Dalton 2008, 91). Nevertheless, the low voter turnout, therefore the institutional/conventional form of political participation of the youth preoccupies scholars.

Existing literature has debated whether young people punish undemocratic behaviour less than old people (Frederiksen & Skaaning 2023), and whether the younger generation is less democratic than the old (Huttunen & Saikkonen 2023). Non-institutional forms of participation are often disregarded in this debate. On one side Roberto Foa and Yascha Mounk argue that democratic support is declining amongst the youth (Foa & Mounk 2017, 2). Compared to older generations, as can be observed in **Picture 2**, young people are less satisfied with democracy (Foa et al. 2020, 9). Foa terms this as “democratic disconnect” (Foa et al. 2020, 9). In consolidated democracies, the reason for the youth being less satisfied with democracy is primarily because of “rising wealth inequality and youth unemployment” (Foa et al. 2020, 10). In new democracies, it is because the younger generation “lack formative memories of...the democracy struggle” (Foa et al. 2020, 11).



Picture 2: Bennet Institute for Public Policy “Satisfaction with democracy by age and generational cohort, for 75 countries across the world in all regions” 2020, 9.

On the other side, scholars argue that, although voter turnout is low, this is a momentarily concern and should not endanger democracy (Welzel 2021). Young people support democracy through activism rather than voting because they are “alienated from political processes” (Sloam 2007, 550). Instead, young people engage in protests, such as the Fridays for Future protests, as they believe this will be more effective than voting (Colling & McCormack 2020). To increase voter turnout, young people need to be educated on how to become democratic citizens (De Groot 2011, 80). People are not born democratic (De Groot 2011, 80). Rather, they are socialised into democratic citizens

The reason for conducting a comparative analysis between a consolidated democracy, Finland, and a young democracy, South Africa, is to examine whether the age of a democracy plays a role in democratic support. The hypothesis is that young people born in longstanding, established democracies are likely to take democratic freedoms for granted and are therefore less inclined to participate in democratic practices, such as casting a vote in elections. In recently democratised countries, however, this paper’s hypothesis is that young people, who experienced the aftermath of non-democratic regimes, are more likely to be strong advocates of democracy and therefore more inclined to uphold democratic practices, such as voting.

This thesis argues that, despite low voter turnout among young people, it is faulty to assume that young people are less committed to democracy as a regime, compared to older generations. Rather, young people are prioritising other ways of engaging with democracy. To examine this, academic journals, government reports and national databases, briefing papers, public opinion polls, findings from the European Union and the Afrobarometer will be analysed. Findings indicate that voter turnout is low in South Africa and in Finland. Although this thesis acknowledges that democracies are facing fundamental challenges, it emphasises that democracies are not immobile constructs.

CHAPTER 1: MYTH VS REALITY: EXAMINING THE GLOBAL STATE OF DEMOCRACY AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEMOCRACY

Democratic Backsliding, Voter Turnout, and Democratic Engagement

Worldwide, countries are experiencing democratic backsliding, which is becoming an increasing concern for democracies (Castaldo & Memoli 2024). Democratic backsliding is defined as:

“the decline in democratic qualities of a democratic regime that may result in the weakening or the breakdown of democracy and the recession of democratic characteristics in authoritarian regimes” (Castaldo & Memoli 2024, 2).

The regression or weakening of democracies has raised alarms amongst politicians, policy makers, scholars, who have tried to understand why this trend is increasing globally. While scholars agree that democracies are backsliding, a lack of unanimity can be observed when deciding against which measures the decline of democracy should be evaluated. For instance, the Freedom House published its 2024 annual report on political rights and civil liberties, which holds “flawed elections and armed conflict” accountable for a decrease in global democracy (Freedom House 2024). The Freedom House’s report explains how attacks on democratic fundamental rights, such as freedom and safety will ultimately lead to voter apathy (Freedom House 2024).

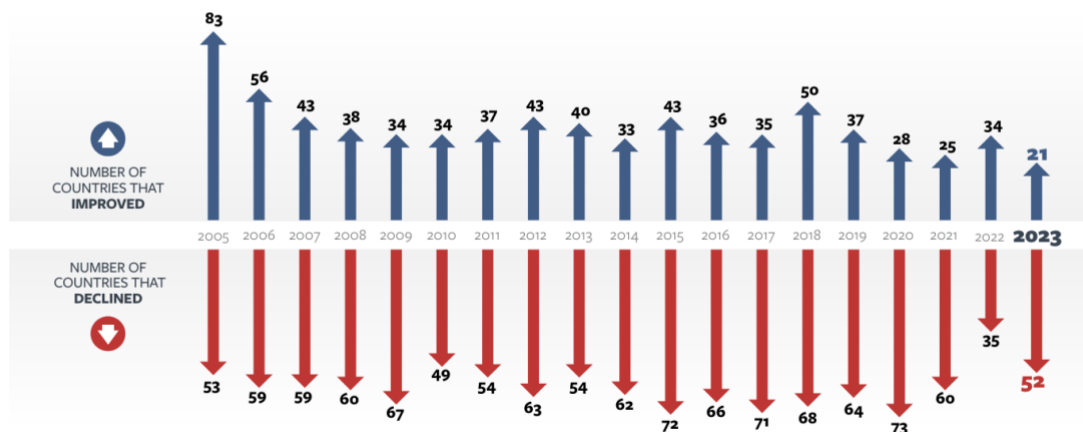
The 2024 Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem) report concluded that in 2023 individuals are enjoying the level of democratic rights that a person in the 1998s had access to (V-Dem 2024, 9). Hence, the enjoyment and access to democratic rights has declined considerably. The theory that can be developed is as follows: If a citizen’s democratic rights, to freedom and safety, for instance, are continuously attacked, the same individual will subsequently become less committed and interested in

upholding their democratic responsibilities, such as participating in elections via voting, as their view of democracy turns negative.

Democratic decline is not a phenomenon that occurred over a short time or was triggered by a specific event. The Freedom House’s report, and statistical analysis, as can be seen in **Picture 3** below, shows that democratic backsliding has been happening for the past 18 years (Freedom House 2024, 2). While observing the chart, one can deduct that, comparatively, democracy as a regime is declining and not improving. A decline in democracy is not only being recorded in democracies in the West, which are considered more stable and consolidated, compared to, for instance, democracies in Africa. Democratic backsliding is also happening in the Global South.

18 YEARS OF DECLINE IN GLOBAL FREEDOM

Countries with aggregate score declines in *Freedom in the World* have outnumbered those with gains every year for the past 18 years. The scope and scale of deterioration affected a fifth of the world’s population in 2023.



Note: Countries whose scores were unchanged are not included in this comparison.

Picture 3: Freedom House, “18 Years of Decline in Global Freedom” 2024, 2.

A Fundamental corner stone of democracy includes the organization of fair, transparent, and free election. The function of elections is to offer citizens the possibility to be involved in how their country is governed. Citizens elect heads of state and representatives on local levels, who share similar political views in matters of immigration policies, social security, healthcare measures, to name a few. As such, voting is a fundamental right and responsibility of democratic citizens. By casting a vote, citizens demonstrate not only their engagement for their country's future but also their commitment to maintaining democratic practices and democracy.

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) conducted a study which demonstrated that voting turnout, and as such, democratic participation, has been steadily declining since the late 1990s (International IDEA 2016, 13). International IDEA states in their report that “voter turnout is often a sign of the vitality of democracy, while lower turnout is usually associated with voter apathy and mistrust of the political process” (International IDEA 2016). Hence, according to International IDEA's report, democratic participation and citizen's trust in the government can be measured by how many individuals in a country cast a vote in elections. According to International IDEA's report, this would imply that citizens are increasingly mistrustful of their governments and that democratic participation is declining at the same time. This thesis suggests that the ways in which individuals, specifically people aged 27 or younger, engage with democratic processes has changed and can therefore not be measured against voter turnout, and is therefore not declining, but rather, has taken on a different form of expression.

While considering the causes and consequences of democratic backsliding, it is important to study the young population, people aged 27 years or younger, as they represent the future of democratic societies. Understanding the youth's engagement and support of democracy is necessary in order to address challenges democratic countries are facing. By understanding the youth's approach to political participation and their support for democracy, the perceived and studied erosion of democratic values can be tackled. Changes in education systems, campaigns calling on the engagement of the youth can be created to increase the youth's engagement and, essentially, sustain democracies.

Whether young people are becoming less democratic compared to the generation of their parents or grandparents has been widely debated by scholars. Two main arguments are being made. One argument being that the youth is indeed becoming less democratic. This argument is widely supported by scholars such as Roberto Foa and Yascha Mounk who point out that support for democracy is declining amongst younger generations (Foa & Mounk 2017, 2). The European Parliament reports similar trends on youth disengagement, reporting that young people in Europe are less likely to join political parties and to vote in elections (Lupi & Crosier 2023).

Other scholars such Rumena Filipova, the Chairperson for the Institute for Global Analytics (IGA) and public opinion polls found that more than half of the Generation Z in Bulgaria, a country in the East of Europe, agrees that "having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections is good for Bulgaria" (Filipova 2023, 13). According to Filipova, similar trends can be observed amongst the youth in neighbouring eastern and central European countries, such as Hungary and Serbia (Filipova 2024).

While these scholars point out that the future of longstanding democracies are unstable because young people are growing less supportive of democracy (Foa & Mounk 2017, 2), similar trends are recorded by the Afrobarometer in relatively new and young democracies. A study by the Afrobarometer suggests that young people in Africa do not engage with traditional forms of politics and democracy as they do not vote or become members of political parties (Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny et. al 2023).

The other argument being made is that the youth is not less democratic. This argument is supported by scholars such as Janette Huttunen and Inga Saikkonen, whose study has not found evidence that young people are less democratic (Huttunen & Saikkonen 2023). Other scholars, such as Christian Welzel, while acknowledging that democracies are facing challenges, disagree with the idea that democracies are backsliding or deconsolidating (Welzel 2021).

Welzel introduces the relationship between culture and democracy, explaining that “emancipative values” – values that prioritise freedom and egalitarianism – are increasing globally (Welzel 2021). This, in turn, is supposed to promote stronger commitment and support for democracy among young people (Welzel 2021). If these values are taught from an early age, Welzel argues that these values will persist in people’s lives (Welzel 2021). Hence, according to Welzel, democracy will persist, too (Welzel 2021). It can be deduced, along Welzel’s line of argumentation, that democracies will survive because young people grew up with cultural values that promote democratic lifestyle.

Country-specific focus: Introducing case studies

Selection of case studies occurred based on diverse case selection method and explorative investigation (Gerring & Seawright 2008, 300). The diverse case selection aims to “achieve maximum variance along relevant dimensions” (Gerring & Seawright 2008, 300). The two countries were selected based on how

long they have been democratic. South Africa constitutes a recent democracy. Finland constitutes a consolidated democracy. This aims to give insight into whether the age of a democratic country influences support for democracy among young people. The case studies have been selected to further identify whether voter apathy (variable X) positively correlates to a decline in support for democracy among young people (variable Y). Hence, this thesis involves an exploratory investigation of the case studies. The reason for this being to contribute to the understanding of youth engagement with democracy in consolidated and recently democratized democratic countries. While Finland and South Africa have historical differences, they face the same issue: voter apathy.

The first claim that this essay tackles is the question of whether people aged 27 and below are less democratic compared to older generations. After introducing the analysis and findings, this essay will address the second question, namely: Are young people in recently democratised countries more engaged in democratic processes, compared to the youth in consolidated democracies? The hypothesis being that, on one side, young people who were born around the mark of democratic transition, and therefore have parents who experienced pre-democratic lifestyle, should be more inclined to participate and defend their democracy. On the other side, the hypothesis is that young people who were born in a stable, longstanding democracy, whose parents also experienced democracy for their whole life, take democratic liberties for granted and therefore are less inclined and interested to participate in democratic processes. To do so, this paper has identified two countries, with one being a long-standing, established democracy, namely Finland, and the other country being South Africa, where democratic transition occurred only 30 years ago, and is therefore considered relatively “young”.

Finland, a country in the north of Europe, is considered a “high performing” and consolidated democracy after electing the first President by Parliament in 1919 (International IDEA 2024, Ministry

of Justice Department for Democracy and Public Law 2024). South Africa, on the other side, a country in the south of Africa, only transitioned to democracy in 1994, only 20 years ago, and is considered a “mid-performing democracy” (International IDEA 2023). However, with South African politicians facing accusations and charges of corruption and state capture, the claim can be made that it is experiencing a decline in democracy (Democratic Erosion Consortium 2022, Arriola et al. 2023, 1).

Finland has recorded the lowest voter turnout in presidential elections in for people aged 19-21 (Statistics Finland 2024). The South African Institute of Race Relations reports that the lowest voting turnover is amongst people aged 18-20 years (Institute of Race Relations 2023). Despite the countries being different in terms of the age and consolidation of their democracy and history, they both face a core issue – young people are abstaining from voting. Does this imply that young people are not committed to democracy? The question that arises is, why is democratic backsliding being recorded across democracies, regardless of whether they are consolidated or new?

CHAPTER 2: GENERATION ‘BORN FREE’: UNDERSTANDING YOUNG DEMOCRACIES AND DEMOCRATIC SUPPORT

South Africa: Becoming a Democracy and development since 1994

South Africa is considered a relatively young democracy compared to countries, such as the United States and Switzerland, which have been continuously democratic since 1789 and 1848 respectively (World Economic Forum 2019). April 27 1994 marks “the day that Apartheid died”, when all South Africans were able to vote in the first free, democratic elections, and Nelson Mandela was elected president of the nation (Nelsson 2024). This was only thirty years ago.

In 1795, the British occupy the Cape (Beck 2014, xxii). In 1910, the Union of South Africa was formed with exclusively white people in power (South African Government N/A). In 1912, the African National Congress (ANC) was created “to protest against the exclusion of black people from power” (South African Government N/A). The National Party (NP) was founded in 1914 by J.B.M Hertzog (BBC 2022; South African History Online n.d). In 1948, Apartheid policies were implemented when the National Party came to power (Beck 2014, xxvii).

Apartheid was a set of racist policies, implemented by the white-minority National Party. Some of the policies included the banning of mixed marriages, segregation in terms of housing and access to public facilities such as schools, toilets, beaches, benches, with signs being put up which stated, “Europeans only” or “Natives only” (African Union n.d). The interaction between whites and non-whites was limited (African Union n.d). Curfews for black people, banning of interracial, not allowing black people the right to vote or participate in politics, restricting and regulating black people’s opportunities and access to jobs, forced relocations from neighborhoods, lack of access to education were the norm during Apartheid (African Union n.d; CJPME Foundation n.d).

In the early 1980s, reforms to the Apartheid rule were observed, allowing Coloureds and Indians limited participating in politics (South African Government n.d). The internal resistance grew, with a few Afrikaaner people and the international community denouncing Apartheid (South African Government n.d). The South African Students' Association (SASO), founded by Steve Biko, gave rise to Black Consciousness ideology and increased university-based activism and protest (Ho 2022). Globally, university-based and student-led protests were mounting pressure on international governments to take public action and denounce Apartheid rule, who then imposed sanctions and trading relations with South Africa (The Anti-Apartheid Movement in North Texas n.d).

Because of growing international pressure, which resulted in South Africa becoming isolated from the international community, and increasing protests within the country, South African Apartheid ended (CJPME Foundation n.d; African Union n.d). In 1994, Nelson Mandela became the first democratically elected president of South Africa and the country committed itself to a non-racialized democracy (African Union n.d). Although South Africa is now considered a democracy and has been considered a democracy for the past thirty years, the consequences and aftermath of apartheid are still prevalent in South Africa's 2024 society.

Today, South Africa is considered one of the most resilient democracies in Southern Africa and even one of the strongest in Africa, according to data collected by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) (EIU 2023; Oluwole 2023). South Africa scored 7.05 out of a scale of 10, with 10 being considered "full democracy" and 0 being considered "authoritarian regime" (Oluwole 2023; EIU 2023, 21). However, South Africa's rating on the democracy index has declined since 2006 when it scored 7.91 out of 10 (EIU 2023, 21). The Economist Intelligence Unit analyses the state of democracy by assessing

factors such as “electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties” (EIU 2023, 3).

South Africans are becoming increasingly frustrated with their government, the African National Congress (ANC). Corruption is widespread throughout the country with South Africa’s Corruption Perception Index (CPI) declining (Banoba et al. 2024). In 2018, the Zondo Commission of Enquiry was established to investigate accusations of state capture (Momoniati 2023). In the South African context, the State Capture Commission – the Zondo Commission - did not clearly define ‘state capture’ (State of the Nation 2024). However, it is referenced as follows:

‘State capture in the South African context evolved as a project by which a relatively small group of actors, together with their network of collaborators inside and outside of the state, conspired systematically (criminally and in defiance of the Constitution) to redirect resources from the state for their own gain.’ (Public Affairs Research Institute 2022, 3).

The report investigated the relationship between the Gupta family, politicians, including Duduzane Zuma, Jacob Zuma’s son, and Jacob Zuma himself, the former President of the nation and head of the African National Congress (Public Affairs Research Institute 2022, 1) The findings show that the South African state had been captured on “an extensive scale” (Report by the Public Protector South Africa 2016). The Zondo Commission found that approximately R57 billion of public funds was lost to state capture (Public Affairs Research Institute 2022, 6). Given the extent of state capture, it is not surprising that social trust and trust in government and institutions has declined among South African citizens (Department Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Republic of South Africa 2021, 4).

Voting Patterns and Democratic Engagement among young people in South Africa

This section compares the voting trend of young South Africans in three different elections to see if, and how, they have changed. The elections that are studied are the national elections in 1994, the local elections of 1995, and the most recent national elections in 2019. These elections have been selected to investigate how voting patterns of young people have shifted since the very first democratic election compared to the most recent one 30 years later.

Young South Africans' voting patterns in 1994 and 1995

A study conducted by the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE) examined election participation during the 1994 national election (Jennings et al. 1998). According to Jennings, it seems that there is contestation about the 1994 election process and results (Jennings et al. 1998). Concerningly, the authors point out that the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) reported that 19,745,738 individuals voted in the 1994 elections (Jennings et al. 1998, 10). A census was published which showed that, during the time of election, there were not 19 million people who were also eligible to vote (Jennings et al. 1998, 9). The assumption that the CASE presents is that, either the IEC's counting is false or that individuals below the minimum voting age of 18 years were allowed to cast a vote (Jennings et al. 1998, 10). Although this thesis does not address the accuracy of the 1994 elections, it is important to consider this context when observing the voting pattern of young people during this election.

Questioning focus groups and conducting a representative national survey study, Jennings found that 93% of young people voted in the 1994 national elections ((Jennings et al. 1998, 10). From this data set, the age of the focus group was initially 18-35 years (Jennings et al. 1998, 10). However, the researchers decided to exclude all 18-year-olds, as they might have been 17 years old in April when the

election was held, and the study was being conducted in the following November (Jennings et al. 1998, 10). This data shows a very high voter turnout. Hypothesizing, the voter turnout among young people, limitations aside, could have been high because this was the very first democratic election and young people felt hopeful and therefore committed to vote.

Local elections were held in 1995, which showed that 43% of young people did not vote, and hence only 50% of young people responded that they did vote (Jennings et al. 1998, 10). Jennings suggests that the increase in voter apathy could be explained by voters not being educated on the differences between national and local elections, with many not understanding the need for another election 19 months post the first one (Jennings et al. 1998, 11). “Lack of identification documentation and knowledge on election processes, illiteracy, of interest, and belief that their vote will not make a difference” were further explanations that were proposed (Jennings et al. 1998, 12). Already at this young stage of democratic South Africa, Jennings suggests that the youth are “less likely to vote than their older counterparts” (Jennings et al. 1998, 14). Jennings concludes his study, suggesting that one can already perceive the youth becoming disinterested in political democracy (Jennings et al. 1998, 14).

Young South Africans’ voting patterns in 2019

The most recent national elections took place in 2019, with national elections taking place every five years. The report by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) of voter turnout shows that, out of the 26.756.649 individuals that are registered to vote, 17.672.851 actually voted (Independent Electoral Commission 2019, 7 & 68). Out of the 17.672.851 people who voted, people aged 19 years and younger voted the least, comprising a total of 273.010 numbers of votes (IEC 2019, 68). People aged between 20-29 comprise 2.952.459 of the total votes (IEC 2019, 68). People aged 30-39 comprised the largest number of votes with 3.894.927 votes (IEC 2019, 68).

It is important to consider these numbers in national population context. In 2019, South Africa's population was estimated to be 58,78 million (Department of Statistics South Africa 2019, 3). The Youth, which the South African Department of Statistics considers people aged 15-34 years comprises 35,1% of the population, while children aged 0-14 years comprise 28.8%, adults aged 35-59 years comprising 27,1% and anyone above 60 years constitutes 9% of the total population (Department of Statistics South Africa 2019, 10). Hence, the youth, as defined by the South African Department of Statistics, constitutes the largest percentage of the population. Considering this contextual information, it is alarming that young people aged 18-19 years do not participate in elections by casting their votes. The people aged between 15-34 years constitute the largest voting bloc, but they only constitute 3.225.469 votes out of the total 17.672.851 casted votes, which is less than 1/5th of the votes.

Observing the statistics, one can draw one definitive argument, namely that young South Africans are not voting. Voter apathy declined dramatically from the first democratic election in 1994 and started declining as early as 1995 during the local elections. Viewing the statistics alone, one could reach the conclusion that young South Africans are not committed to democracy because they are not voting. But is voter turnout positively correlated with commitment to democracy? South Africans fought for their freedom and equality, so why would young South Africans not participate in elections which sustain democracy.

CHAPTER 3: EXAMINING SUPPORT FOR FINLAND'S OLD DEMOCRACY: DOES IT DIFFER FROM NEW DEMOCRACIES?

Finland: Democratic evolution and current socio-political state

Finland is known to be one of the most stable democratic countries. The country ranks as the 5th strongest democracy on the Democracy Index, with an overall score of 9.30 out of 10, where 10 is considered “full democracy” and 0 is considered an “authoritarian regime” (EIU 2023, 9). It can also be considered an “old” or a longstanding democracy, since the country has been democratic since 1919, which is 105 years ago (Ministry of Justice Department for Democracy and Public Law 2024).

In 1917, the Finns gained independence from Sweden (Singleton 1998, 1). In 1809, Finland was under Russia but maintained some level of autonomy (Singleton 1998, 1). Finland becomes independent of Russia in 1917 and Finland holds the first democratic elections for Prime Minister (Singleton 1998, 1). But shortly after, the civil war breaks out in which around 38.000 people were killed (BBC 2022; Finish Heritage Agency n.d). The civil war erupted predominantly between “Red socialists” and “conservative Whites”, with the White conservatives winning the war five months later (Chassé 2015; Andersson 2016, 2).

The civil war was triggered by the social division of the society (Andersson 2016, 2). The division was between socialist workers, conservative farmers, and the middle and upper class (Andersson 2016, 2). Swedish speakers formed the white group while finish speakers formed the red group (Andersson 2016, 2). In 1919, Finland becomes a democratic republic and elects its first president (BBC 2022, Andersson 2016, 2). Finland loses some of its territory during the second world war to the Soviet Union but maintains its democracy throughout the war (BBC 2022, Andersson 2016, 2). In 1995, Finland joins the European Union and four years later the social democrats take over (BBC 2022).

Despite the Varieties of Democracy Institute's report (V-Dem) stating that Finland is one of the strongest democracies, it notices that political engagement has been declining (Andersson 2016, 11).

While Finland does not face the same, deep-rooted racial and socio-economic challenged that South Africa, the country experiences different social challenged. For instance, Finland is experiencing growing popularity for the right wing "Finns Party", known as Perussuomalaiset (IPS Journal 2023). In the most recent 2023 parliamentary, the Finns Party gathered the second largest number of votes, accounting 20.1% of the votes (Statistics Finland 2023). The National Coalition Party won with the majority of votes, counting 20.8% of all votes (Statistics Finland 2023).

According to Kristina Birke Daniels, director of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung regional Office for the Nordic Countries, the campaign strategy of the Finns Party expanded on social media platforms such as TikTok where it was able to target young voters, specifically "first-time voters" (IPS Journal 2023). The Finns Party pushed a comparative narrative of Sweden, issuing statements such as "we don't want to live with criminal gangs and overburdened public services like our neighbouring country Sweden" (IPS 2023). The Finns Party has been reported to express anti-immigration and xenophobic policies (Jantti 2015).

The social democratic party, with previous prime minister Sanna Marin, did not perform as well as expected in the most recent 2023 parliamentary elections, in which the National Coalition Part secured the win (IPS Journal 2023). According to Daniels, the National Coalition Party performed well because of its focus on lowering Finland's national debt, which is a topic of concern amongst Fins (IPS Journal 2023). Despite the social democratic party not comprising the majority of the votes, the overall voter turnout remains stable at 72% (Statistics Finland 2023). The voting turnout was reported at 72.1% in 2019 and 70.1% in 2015, hence remaining stable (Statistics Finland 2019).

Finland has been experiencing an increase in migration influx since the 1990s (Alho 2021). The first surge in refugee influx was noticed in 2015, when 32.000 asylum seekers were reported in Finland (Alho 2021). This was a dramatic increase compared to previous years where a maximum of 4.000 asylum applications would be received per annum (Alho 2021). More recently, Finland has been confronting a refugee influx from its eastern border with Russia (Kauranen & Lehto 2024). Finland has accused Russia of attempting to destabilise Finland by deliberately sending migrants across to the Finish border (Kauranen & Lehto 2024). In 2023, Finland recorded the influx of 684 asylum seekers with nationality from African countries or the Middle East (Strelnikov 2023). After the beginning of the Russian War in Ukraine, Finland joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for security purposes. The President of Finland, Niinisto, alleges that Russia is purposefully sending asylum-seekers to cross into Finland from Russia because of that decision (Strelnikov 2023).

In addition to that, Finland is experiencing challenged with sustaining the welfare state (Strelnikov 2023). Finland's growing ageing population, coupled with a decrease in birth rates, has raised concerns about how young people will continue to finance the welfare system and support the large ageing population during their pension (Väänänen 2023, 79). With birth rates declining in Finland and the mortality rate declining too, there will be fewer young people proportionally to finance and sustain the welfare system. The growing fear regarding the sustainability of the welfare state could serve as an explanation for the increasing popularity of the right-wing Finns Party and their anti-immigrant policies.

Voting Patterns and Democratic Engagement among young people in Finland

This section compares the voting trend of young finish people in two different elections to see if, and how, they have changed. The voter turnout of young people in the 2023 parliamentary and in the 2019 parliamentary elections is examined. This specific mark is examined because the Social Democratic Party of Finland performed poorer than expected and because this period witnessed key influential events such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian war in Ukraine.

Voting patterns of finish youth in 2019 Parliamentary elections

In 2019, 4.255.466 people living in Finland were eligible to vote in the parliamentary election (Statistics Finland n.d). Out of the 4.255.466 people eligible to vote, 72.1% of people living in Finland actually voted (Statistics Finland n.d). Voting analysis shows that 55.2% of people aged between 18-24 years voted in the 2019 Parliamentary election, constituting the age group amongst whom the fewest members voted (The Social Science Research Institute (SSRI) 2019, 5). The age cohort of people aged between 25-34 years comprised the second lowest group of voters as 62.9% of this age group participated in the election by voting (SSRI 2019, 5). People aged 45-54 years comprised the largest age group of voters with 74.9% people of that age group voted (The SSRI 2019, 5). The Social Science Research Institute therefore characterizes people aged 18-24 years as “passive” (SSRI 2019, 5).

It remains important to evaluate this data in context. People aged 18-24 years only constituted 9.9% of the entire population in 2019 (The SSRI 2019, 7). People aged 25-34 years constituted 15.8% and those aged between 35-54 years made up 30.9% of the entire finish population, the later constituting the largest percentage (The SSRI 2019, 7). Despite young people comprising the smallest percentage of the entire population, it still seems that only half of the people aged 18-24 years voted in the 2019

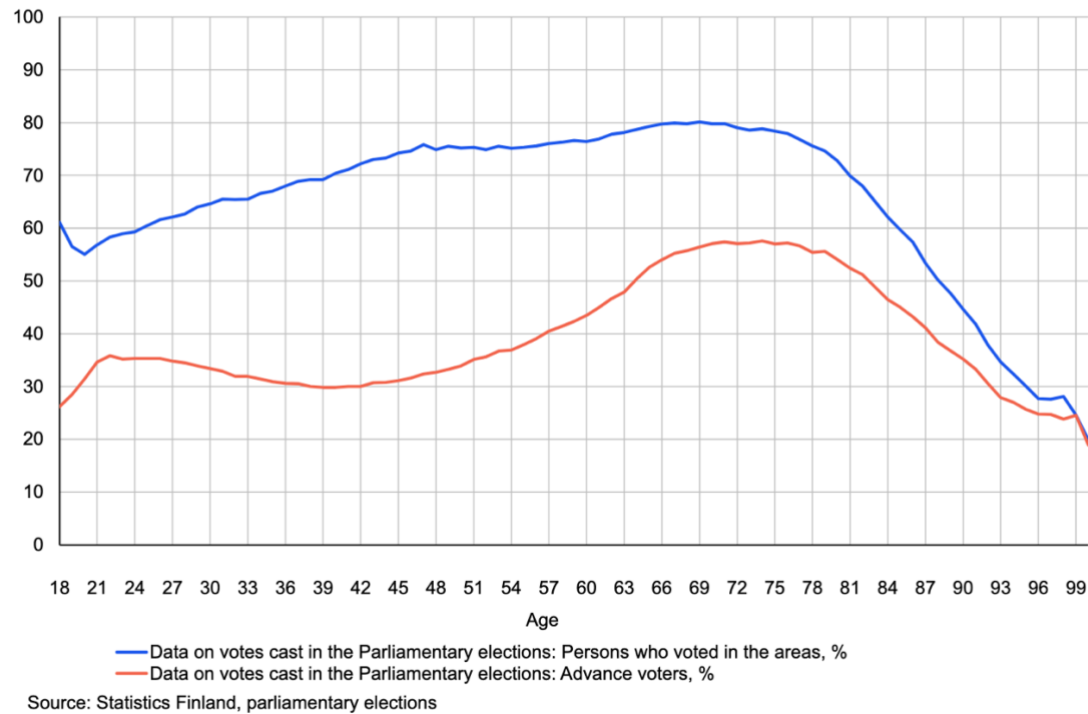
Parliamentary election. Compared to the other age group, this indicates that young people generally vote less than their older counterparts.

Voting patterns of finish youth in 2023 Parliamentary elections

During the 2023 Parliamentary elections, there were a total of 4.277.487 people living in Finland who were eligible to vote (Statistics Finland n.d). Out of the 4.277.487 people eligible to vote, 72.% of people living in Finland actually voted (Statistics Finland n.d). Further, 58.085 people aged 18 years old and living in Finland were eligible to vote (Statistics Finland n.d). However, Statistics Finland show that only 51.2% of the 58.085 entitled 18-year-olds actually voted in this election (Statistics Finland n.d). Moreover, 285.552 people aged 20-24 years were eligible to vote, but only 51.0% actually did (Statistics Finland n.d). Similar trends are observable amongst the age group 24-29, where 308.482 people were entitled to vote, but only 48.9% ended up voting (Statistics Finland n.d). Hence, participation of the youth (<30 years) remains low. Compared to the 2019 parliamentary election, there has not been an improvement in young people's participation in elections.

As can be observed in **Picture 4** below, young people, aged 18-30 years old have the lowest percentage of cast votes in the 2023 Parliamentary elections (Statistics Finland 2023). The trend is particularly for 19-year-olds (Statistics Finland 2023). It can be observed that people aged 69-20 years had the highest voter turnout (Statistics Finland).

Persons who voted in the areas and advance voters by age in the Parliamentary elections 2023, %



Picture 4: Statistics Finland “Persons who voted in the areas and advance voters by age in the Parliamentary elections 2023, %”, 2023.

Despite the finish society not experiencing the same issues of corruption or high unemployment that South Africans face, the 2018 study conducted by the Youth Barometer indicated that young people between the age of 15-29 have lower voter turnover compared to other age groups (Antila 2019). This is verified through the data provided by Statistics Finland, which is Finland’s national statistical institute (Statistics Finland 2023). While youth participation in elections has not declined as dramatically as in South Africa, it is still concerning that only half of the eligible people under the age of thirty cast their votes in elections.

CHAPTER 4: SOUTH AFRICA VS FINLAND: THE IMPACT OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIZATION

From voting patterns, one can deduce that young people do not engage the core institutional political participation form, namely as voting. This seems a worrisome trend, as it might suggest that young people do not support democracy. Nevertheless, this thesis agrees partly with scholars such as Kaase, Colling & McCormack, and De Groot that young people have changed their engagement with democracy and political participation (Kaase 2007; Colling & McCormack 2020; De Groot 2011). Reasons for not voting include that young people feel like their vote will not have influence on matters of their importance (Finnish National Agency for Education 2023, 5). Sloam suggests that “the likelihood of any participation would greatly be increased if young people could feel a real impact from political decisions” (Sloam 2007, 559).

Other reasons might include lack of trust in institutions, alienation from society and political parties, and lack of national identity. Potential fear that vote would not be counted properly, as only 84% of South African voters said they were (completely) confident that their vote would be counted (IEC 2019, 96) could also contribute to low voter turnout. Importantly, Finland’s voting analysis indicated that people with higher education and employed were more likely to vote (Statistics Finland 2023). If those conditions were applied to South Africa, where unemployment among young people is at 45,5% as of 2024 (Department of Statistics South Africa 2024), this could constitute a core reason as to why voter turnout is low. The general conclusion that can be drawn is that democratic socialisation – the way people are introduced to democracy and how their political, social, economic environment shapes them – also shapes the way they engage with democracy. As De Groot stated, individuals “develop into democratic citizens” (De Groot 2011, 80)

Why are South Africa's and Finland's youth not voting?

With unemployment in South Africa reaching 32.9% of the population and being particularly high among the youth and black people, frustration is increasing in citizens (Gumbi 2024). Crimes, including murder, cash-in-transit heists, robberies, ass shooting, the construction mafia, kidnappings, and sexual violence, hijackings are still high with the crime index being 75.5/100 (South African Government 2024, Cowling 2024). The presence of xenophobic groups, such as Operation Dudula, indicate the levels of social tension in the country (Human Rights Watch 2023). With political, social, and economic conditions as such, one would expect the youth to participate in elections in efforts to change the course of the country.

International IDEA suggests that “voter turnout is often a sign of the vitality of democracy, while lower turnout is usually associated with voter apathy and mistrust of the political process” (International IDEA 2016). A 2021 survey conducted by the Afrobarometer reflect this statement, with survey results recording that only 38% trust the president and 43% have trust in courts of law (Moosa & Hofmeyr 2021, 2). After the corruption scandal involving the head of the ANC and the use of public funds for personal gains, mistrust of the government is logically high. Around 67% said “they would be willing to give up elections if a non-elected government could provide security, housing, and jobs”, with more support for this being reported among young and more educated South Africans (Moosa & Hofmeyr 2021, 2). This is a shocking, considering how hard the generation of their parents and grandparents had to fight for democracy.

Further, through interviews with young South Africans, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) found that young South Africans are:

- A) Disillusioned with democracy, particularly holding the belief that their vote will not have meaningful impact (Kambule 2024).
- B) Mistrusting of democracy, citing that “democracy is synonymous for selfishness...economic exploitation” (Kambule 2024).

However, it is important to identify the line between disillusionment with democracy and disillusionment with the government. The IJR reports that the youth feel powerless and unable to have any impact on the way their country is run (Kambule 2024). A 2021 study showed that only 9% of the National Assembly was comprised of people aged 25-35 years (Parliamentary Monitoring Group 2021). This number reflects that young people are not involved in decision-making and could explain, in part, the feeling of powerlessness of the youth. Concluding, young South Africans are deeply mistrustful of their government and feel that voting will not make a difference. Since young South Africans have disengaged from traditional political participation in terms of voting, have they taken their democratic engagement to a different platform?

The Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAR) explains that voter turnout among the youth is less compared to older people because there is a lack of young people in political parties (FNAE 2023, 5). Because young people don't feel that they are represented in political parties, they do not vote (FNAE 2023, 5). The FNAE blames the political parties themselves for the lack of voter turnout among young people, noting that political parties do not try to engage the youth because historically, they will receive the largest number of votes from older groups (Finnish National Agency for Education 2023, 5). Similarly to South Africa, young people in Finland feel like they cannot influence decision-making (Finnish National Agency for Education 2023, 5).

Another important factor to consider is that young people spend a lot of time on social media. Political parties have tried to gain voter attention through internet sites, trolls make young people susceptible to fake news (Finnish National Agency for Education 2023, 5). One of the most known disinformation and fake news spreading group is called “The Truth Seeker” (Moilanen et al. 2023, 1). Deep fakes of politicians and other fake twitter accounts that were created prior to the 2023 Parliamentary election try to disrupt social cohesion and promote confusion by tweeting about Finland joining NATO and discouraging that (Moilanen et al. 2023, 1). These accounts also promote the idea that elections are rigged, especially on platforms such as TikTok where they can target very young, new voters (Moilanen et al. 2023, 1).

Sloam reports that young people “expect less from the state and consequently have a weaker sense of solidarity along the traditional industrial cleavages of British politics” (Sloam 2007, 550). While this is the case for Britain, it could also be considered in Finland and South Africa and explain low voter turnout. Another potential reason that Sloan points out is that “younger generations have always had different political concerns to their elders (Sloam 2007, 553). Observing Picture 4, one can see that the highest voter turnout was among 69-70-year-olds while the lowest was among 19-year-olds (Statistics Finland 2023). According to Sloan’s argument, this trend could be explained if the policies and issues tackled by parliamentary elections in 2023 concerned older age groups, such as pension reforms, for instance, which do not preoccupy the young.

While there are multiple reports on voter apathy among the young in South Africa, not as equally many reports exist in Finland’s case. Although, this might also be a linguistic limitation as the writer of this thesis does not read Finnish and therefore has limited access to all databases. Nevertheless, it would be compelling to study this further.

Democratic socialisation: Non-voting youth but supportive of democracy?

Similarly to Welzel’s argument that young people born into democracies are instilled with “lifelong” cultural values which enhance their commitment to democratic principles (Welzel 2021), this thesis proposes the concept of democratic socialization for the cause of voter apathy in the case of South Africa. Namely, the social, political, racial environment in which young people grow up, with all its challenges, shapes their perspective and attitude towards democracy. In the case of South Africa, where racial division is still prevalent in society, corruptions charges of politicians, high unemployment rates, young people are not offered the opportunity to understand different democratic contexts except the South African version. This makes their experience of democracy – their democratic socialisation – negative, which explains the lack of participation in democratic practices such as voting.

An important statement made by Veera Heinonen, the Director of Democracy and Participation is describing the tradition that follows after voting (Finnish National Agency for Education 2023, 6). “On election day, the Finnish flag is raised, and it is tradition to go for a cup of coffee after voting” (Finnish National Agency for Education 2023, 6). In longstanding democracies where the habit of voting is widespread through society, cultural patterns can be established which normalise the act of voting, such as going for coffee after voting. Voting becomes a normalised behaviour in society and the outlier is the person who does not vote. In essence, one could observe it as a form of “peer-pressure” or that voting becomes so ingrained in society that it becomes a cultural, social activity.

South Africa and Finland are countries with different democratic histories, yet they experience a similar issue of voter apathy. In both countries, the youth, defined as individuals below the age of thirty, are voting less compared to those aged above thirty years. Interpreting the voting data, the starting hypothesis that young South Africans should be more democratic because they are more likely to have

experienced the aftermath of non-democratic regimes is disproven. In Finland's case, the hypothesis that young people are not as democratic as their parents or older generation could prove correct by looking at the data because of low voter turnover compared to older generations.

International IDEA states that “voter turnout is often a sign of the vitality of democracy, while lower turnout is usually associated with voter apathy and mistrust of the political process” (International IDEA 2016). Therefore, because voter turnout among the youth is low in both countries, one could argue that the youth is not as committed to democracy compared to those aged thirty and above whose voter turnout is greater. However, does low voter turnout in the youth imply that they are less democratic than the older generations or has democratic engagement changed among the youth?

A study conducted by the University of Johannesburg and Rhodes' University showed that young South Africans engage with democracy in non-traditional ways and are interested in politics (Campbell 2017; Graham 2017). They exchange views, protest, voice their opinions on social media (Graham 2017). Further, young South Africans interest in current affairs can be witnessed through the 2015 #FeesMustFall movement, where student-led protest against unaffordable university fees, gained international attention (Mlaba 2021). Shortly before, students had organised a protest that became famous the #RhodesMustFall movement, where students protested to remove the statute of Cecil John Rhodes (Mlaba 2021). From the engagement on social media and organised protests, one can see that young South Africans are not disinterested in the history or the challenges that their country faces. Merely, their form of engagement with democracy has changed because they do not see how voting will make a difference.

CONCLUSION

Democratic support among young people is not related to the maturity of a democracy. Young South Africans and Finns do not cast votes, sometimes for similar reasons, such as feeling that one's vote will not carry much weight. Overall, findings indicate that voter turnout cannot be directly linked to less support for democracy among the youth, and that the young are not less democratic than the old. Instead, young people are largely engaging in unconventional ways of political participations, such as protests, as they deem these more effective. Importantly, this thesis suggests that democratic socialisation is key to understanding why voter turnout among the youth is low. Potential to increase voter turnout could lie in digital elections, political and voting education, and increasing political representation in government for young people. Further research suggestions include assessing the transmission of democratic values through culture, the effectiveness of non-institutional forms of political participation, as well as investigating the main proposed reforms during Parliamentary elections in Finland which could indicate whether these concern the older generation rather than the young.

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