

# Youth engagement and democratic participation

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## YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

Opinion of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council

on a proposal from the **Temporary Commission  
on Democratic Participation** with the contribution  
of the Delegation for Overseas Territories

**Rapporteurs:** Manon Pisani and Kenza Occansey

Question referred to the Economic, Social and Environmental Council by letter from the Prime Minister dated 27 September 2021. The Bureau asked the Temporary Commission on Democratic Participation to draw up an opinion entitled: "Youth engagement and democratic participation". The Temporary Commission on Democratic Participation, chaired by Ms Claire Thoury, appointed Ms Manon Pisani as rapporteur and Mr Kenza Occansey as rapporteur.

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# Youth engagement and democratic participation <sup>1</sup>

## OPINION

### Introduction

Major elections will be held in 2022. In this context, the present referral from the Prime Minister is in line with the observed lack of interest of the younger generation in the electoral process. After a record low turnout rate in the regional and departmental elections held in June 2021, especially among 18-24 year olds, the link between young people, institutions and representatives seems to have significantly weakened. However, from the first hearings and the first data collected, one thing quickly became clear: the younger generations are neither less committed nor less interested in politics than the older generations. This commitment takes various forms, but going to the polling stations is something that fewer and fewer young people do, which questions the health of our democratic system and its ability to adapt to generational changes.

In order to conduct a relevant analysis of young people's turnout in France, and to assess the nature of the phenomenon, the commission wished to collect elements to help compare worldwide turnout figures and, even more importantly, understand the underlying causes. In this respect, and as defined by the Prime Minister in his letter of referral, particular attention was paid to public policies pertaining to young people, to the degree of mutual trust between young people and public authorities and how this affects adherence to the democratic system. It should be remembered that France is a democracy, a form of society with common rules and collectively deliberated laws, with continuous civic activity (voting, freedom of the press, association, of trade unions, of speech, etc.). Our democratic system is also a Republic, and endows all its citizens with rights and defines the collective framework.

In order to understand the causes of young people's low turnout figures, it is necessary to look at the extent to which they are integrated into society, the place they are given in the democratic system and the way in which they are viewed by public authorities and political stakeholders. It also implies looking at how far the institutions of the Fifth Republic, inherited from previous republics, have been able to embrace societal changes. The expectations of the younger generations seem to be out of step with the politics on offer and the way the democratic system works, thus affecting the relationship they have with politics.

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<sup>1</sup> The opinion as a whole was adopted by 136 votes cast for and 22 cast against (See Vote page).

These expectations are many and varied, just like the young people themselves. Although they all share the common feature of having reached a particular age, in a time of progressive construction of their autonomy, there is no such thing as a uniform youth. Young people enrolled in education, dropouts, NEET<sup>2</sup>, students, integrating the world of work, employed or unemployed, previously in the child welfare system, vulnerable, with or without any family support, etc. There are as many young people as there are life paths, financial, social, professional and educational situations. There is not one youth, but many youths who have needs public policies should be able to meet in order to best support them in the emancipation process. This point is crucial and should be kept in mind at all times in this opinion.

The decreasing turnout is not only obvious when political elections are held, it also affects elections in all democratic spaces. It was with this in mind that the Temporary Commission on Democratic Participation was set up to analyse the causes of low turnout both inside and outside the political sphere, and the relationship between citizens and engagement in all its forms and spaces. Although some of the causes may be sector-specific, others are cross-cutting, and the first opinion on "Renforcement de la participation aux élections des instances à gouvernance démocratique" [Strengthening participation in the elections of democratically governed bodies] has in many ways shed light on the thinking that led to this opinion.

Although they are part of the current election campaign, the reflections in this opinion have a long-term vocation. The decrease in turnout is not a recent phenomenon, and the solutions that will be proposed in this opinion will not have an immediate effect. Many levers need to be used together to have any hope of stemming this growing disaffection among voters. Without a more comprehensive reflection on the very structure of the current democratic system, however, it seems difficult to have any hope of reversing the trend.

Each proposal, even when considered 'technical', underpins deeply political choices. Indeed, the turnout among young people, like that of other generations, also raises questions about how our democracy and our institutions work. For this reason, the ESEC has chosen to go beyond recommendations and to suggest avenues for reflection, to introduce prospective and key elements that could lead to reforms of our democratic system.

There is no "miracle cure" to increase turnout, whether it is among young people or the general population. It is multifactorial, and the responses to it should be as well. Rather than a factual rise in turnout figures, the main goal should be to work on the methods of participation in democratic life in order to recreate links between citizens and institutions.

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2 For *Not in Education, Employment or Training*, a category of unemployed people, neither in education nor in training.

# Chapter 1: Statement

## I - YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER-REPRESENTED IN A FAILING SYSTEM

A. A democratic system to which fewer and fewer young people adhere

### 1. A system of representation that does not include the whole society and is slow to change

Today's French democracy derives from our country's political history and suffers from indeterminacy. People's sovereignty is marked by equivocation and tension, alternating between direct and representative democracy. While the second choice has prevailed over time, the construction process has been slow and made of failures but also of major advances.

Sovereignty, i.e. The exercise of supreme power in a democracy was the subject of a major theoretical debate, particularly in Europe, well before the French Revolution. Very roughly speaking, there were two conflicting systems.

In the first, each citizen making up the "People" was considered a member of society with the same power as all the others. The people, in its composition, may exclude more or less important parts of the population. If there are too many partners, power must be delegated, but these delegations can be challenged. Delegates are performers, who must report very often.

In this first system, the term of office was imperative. This gave rise to forms of direct or semi-direct democracy, which meant that people had to be gathered on a regular basis or consulted in referendums. In France, the referendum process has been questioned for two reasons: it has been used on several occasions by authoritarian regimes to achieve some legitimacy and its results have sometimes been questioned by governments.

Reference has been made to direct democracy "to voice a point of criticism of the elites and political staff", "based on the principle that the people spontaneously know what is good for them without having to take into consideration the knowledge of experts", as the political scientist Luc Rouban reminds us<sup>3</sup>.

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3 Luc Rouban, "La démocratie directe peut-elle être une réponse à la crise de la démocratie représentative" [Can direct democracy be an answer to the crisis of representative democracy?] , <https://www.vie-publique.fr/parole-dexpert/268547-democratie-directe-reponse-la-crise-de-la-democratie-representative> 14 March 2018.



In the second system, an abstract entity, "the Nation", stands between voters and their representatives. In this politically and economically liberal conception of sovereignty, developed by and for the elites, it is the nation that gives the mandate to the Assembly, not the voter. Article 3 of the 1789 Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen (Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen) proclaims that "the principle of all Sovereignty resides essentially in the Nation. No body, no individual can exercise any authority that does not expressly emanate from it." The drafters of the first French constitutions feared the arbitrary power of the monarch as much as they feared that of the people. Our current system is still linked to this system.

In France, around 1790, it is estimated that 47% of men and only 27% of women could read, in a country of 28 million inhabitants. The purpose was to take the supreme power away from the King, prevent the nobility from using it as being part of its own heritage, and associate with power those who did not benefit from it - the Third Estate - while preventing power from placing it entirely in the hands of the people.

To limit that risk, the suffrage set up was a male census suffrage: only male citizens who paid a certain amount of tax could take part in the vote. Female citizens were excluded. In 1791, the representatives of the nation were appointed by indirect suffrage by 4.3 million voters. Paying tax was a guarantee of responsibility, a guarantee that one would not be tempted to waste public money. This seemed quite legitimate at the time.

However, on 25 April 1789, Louis-Pierre Dufourny de Villiers expressed his indignation in "les cahiers du quatrième ordre"<sup>4</sup>. These cahiers were a plea for the recognition of the voice and knowledge of the less fortunate. Indeed, a whole fringe of citizens was kept out of the assemblies and places of the nascent democracy: the poorest. In Paris in particular, they were not given the opportunity to take part in the drafting of the famous "cahiers de doléances" and the election of their representatives.

Access to representation, to the right to vote, was therefore a long struggle.

The criteria of wealth or capacity (diploma, position, property, etc.) were still commonly used until the end of the 19th century. In France, the legitimacy of census suffrage was challenged at the end of the Restoration and under Louis-Philippe. The refusal to lower the census is one of the causes that led to its fall. With the revolution of 1848, 9 million voters were called to elect the first President of the Republic by universal male suffrage.

While the electorate had just undergone an enormous growth, the turnout was the highest since the French Revolution. Indeed, 84% of the electorate participated in this election, whereas since the Estates General of 1789, voter turnout had never exceeded 60%.

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4 Michèle Grenot, "*Le souci des plus pauvres. Dufourny, la Révolution française et la démocratie*" [Concerns of the poorest. The French Revolution and Democracy], Éditions Quart-Monde, Presses Universitaires de Rennes (PUR), 2014.

This high turnout is partly due to democratic learning process of the state and citizens. On the one hand, the election was a political act which was no longer new and, on the other, the institutionalisation and organisation of elections as well as the acculturation to them were now implemented<sup>5</sup>.

In 1867 in England, a lowering of the census led to an increase in the electorate from 7 to 16% of the population...

Suffrage, when it became 'universal', was exclusively male suffrage. Women's suffrage - until then women had not been full citizens - did not actually take hold in Europe until after 1918. In France, in 1919, a bill on women's suffrage was passed by the Assembly but rejected in the Senate. It was not granted until 1944. The Order of 21 April 1944, stipulating that "women are voters and eligible under the same conditions as men", enabled French women to vote for the first time on 29 April 1945 in municipal elections. Olympe de Gouges's struggle in 1791 and later the struggle of women activists and suffragettes made it possible to acknowledge women's citizenship.

Also in France, the military got the right to vote in 1945, the voting arrangements for homeless people were organised by a 1998 law and the right to vote became the norm for people under guardianship in 2019.

The voting age was lowered from 30 to 25 in 1830, to 21 in 1848, and to 18 in 1974 as a result of the lowering of the legal age of majority.

In the colonies, it was not until 1956 that the law gave concrete expression to the equal citizenship promised in 1945 between "indigenous people" and "Europeans" by abolishing the "double electoral college" system and extending the electorate to all inhabitants of French nationality, without any limitation in terms of capacity (linked to employment, diplomas, property, etc.).

Finally, since the Maastricht Treaty (1992), France, like other EU states, has allowed foreigners from EU countries to take part in municipal and European elections - in practice for the first time in 2001. The issue of other foreigners voting in local elections is the subject of a lot of discussions.

Developments have been slow and frustrated, with the increasing of the number of people eligible to vote necessarily calling into question principles, political, economic and social balances and existing rights. Other questions arise once the issue of voting is resolved: that of the eligibility of the populations eligible to vote, and even more so, that of their effective representation. Representative political systems are often accused of not tackling the widening divide between representatives, who have become highly professionalised and do not reflect the diversity of French society, and those they are supposed to represent. It can be observed that the very legitimacy of the members of Parliament or the President of the Republic starts to be called into question soon after the election (the 100 days of the so-called 'state of grace'), notably because of an election perceived as not legitimate in relation to the percentage of the population that actually voted.

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5 Melvin Edelstein, "Citoyenneté, élections, démocratie et Révolution : les fondements de la France contemporaine" [Citizenship, elections, democracy and Revolution: the foundations of contemporary France], Cahiers de l'Institut d'histoire de la Révolution française, November 2015. Citoyenneté, république, démocratie dans la France de la Révolution (openedition.org)

## 2. Accountability of elected officials: strengthening of ethical rules, accountability at the end of the term of office.

The Nation is an abstract entity that pre-exists today's citizens and will survive them. Referring to the Nation allows and justifies acting in the collective interest in order to preserve a present good or to build a future good. Elected representatives therefore have duties towards the Nation they represent: duties to take into account what it has bequeathed to current generations, to act for the benefit of the nation as a whole in its present state, and to ensure the well-being of future generations. Regarding this last point, we see that citizens are strongly reacting to what is perceived as 'inaction' on the part of governments on issues such as the environment and climate change.

In theory, elected officials must therefore be accountable to the nation for their actions, if not their promises. Indeed, many circumstances may require a change of plans and act differently: economic crisis, "natural" disasters, pandemics, etc. or a simple breach of promises and commitments given. However, as political accountability is not clearly organised at national and local levels, many French people, especially young people, lose confidence in public action. Traditional forums for debate, such as the chambers of the Assemblies, struggle to fulfil this role. At the end of the day, it is at each election, when they decide to run for re-election that the elected representatives account for their actions in concrete manner .

This concept of accountability has been debated since the advent of French democracy. Since the French Revolution, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (DDHC) of 1789 has been repeatedly rewritten or supplemented during the revolutionary period in order to incorporate a dose of accountability, even revocability.

Rather than fighting the feeling of 'all unfit' and of having no control over the term once the election is over, the Republic organised to fight the feeling of 'all rotten', by leading the fight on the legal level, especially the criminal law<sup>6</sup> by taking the fight from a legal point of view, particularly that of criminal law.

The Constitutional Council relied on two articles of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (DDHC) of 1789 that deal with the issue of citizen control of public action: Article 14, relating to what is known as consent to taxation, and Article 15, which proclaims that "Society has the right to hold any public official accountable for their administration", and is of more general scope. It is on the basis of this Article 15 that it established the right of access to administrative documents. It also ruled that the notion of public official includes elected officials and members of the executive power<sup>7</sup>.

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6 Hearing of Stewart Chau, co-author, with Frédéric Dabi, of *La Fracture* on 20 January 2022.

7 Constitutional Council, Decision No. 2016-599, priority preliminary ruling on the constitutionality, (QPC, Question prioritaire de constitutionnalité) of 2 December 2016. <https://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/decision/2016/2016599QPC.htm>.

In addition, since the end of the 1980s, a number of legislative texts have strengthened the control of the action of elected representatives and public officials and the means allocated to it:

- measures on the financing of political life in 1988;
- law of January 1993 on the prevention of corruption and the transparency of economic life and public procedures, known as "Sapin 1", which strengthens transparency in the financing of election campaigns and political parties;
- laws of October 2013 on the transparency of public life instituting the High Authority for Transparency in Public Life (HATVP, Haute autorité pour la transparence de la vie publique): today, 15,000 elected officials and senior civil servants fall within its scope of control;
- Sapin II law of December 2016 on transparency, the fight against corruption and the modernisation of economic life, which introduced controls on interactions between public officials and "lobbies";
- The same law creates a French anti-corruption agency (AFA, Agence française anti-corruption) and a global framework for the protection of whistleblowers, with the European Union (EU) also adopting a directive on the subject in 2020;
- the laws for confidence in political life of September 2017 abolished the parliamentary reserve, and created a mandatory complementary penalty of ineligibility in case of crime or breach of probity.

These measures are complemented by a strengthening of ethics at all levels, in particular through the establishment of ethics officers. These concerns are increasingly shared by elected officials themselves: in June 2020, the NGO *Transparency International* welcomed the fact that "9 of the 10 largest cities in France are now led by mayors who have placed transparency and ethics in local public life at the heart of their project".

### 3. Loss of trust and misunderstanding between representatives and represented young people

The loss of confidence among young people (and part of society, all age groups combined), addressed in this paragraph, seems to testify to the gap between their feelings and the measures introduced over the last twenty years to raise moral standards in politics.

According to Tristan Haute, it is this relationship between the representative and the represented that is at stake in young people's relationship with politics. The younger generation of voters is showing a real loss of confidence in our representatives. This loss of confidence is exacerbated by the fact that the current political climate leaves little room for "non-professionals", which makes identification with a candidate complex.

Indeed, at national level, an analysis of the distribution of MPs by age group highlights a gap with the French population. In 2017, only 4% of the members of the National Assembly were aged 20-29, compared to 17.5% of the overall French population. In the Senate this gap is even more obvious, since only 1.8% of senators

are under 41 years of age<sup>8</sup>. This political under-representation of young people in the spheres of power can create a sense of exclusion and a confidence crisis<sup>9</sup>.

In addition to this, leaders are criticised for their lack of exemplarity and accountability in relation to electoral promises. These widespread dissatisfactions can affect in the electoral process, either with people not going to the polls or by casting blank and/or spoiled ballots. These findings were supported by the young people we met during the "ESEC beyond its own walls", young people who do not identify with the current politics on offer and question a system from which they feel increasingly remote. However, it should be noted that young men usually have more confidence in politicians than young women.

Furthermore, it is important to remember that the loss of confidence in representatives is not limited to young people (although it is exacerbated among them), it is a feeling shared by a large portion of the French population. Thus, the 13<sup>th</sup> wave of the January 2022 study by the Centre de recherches politiques de Sciences Po (CEVIPOF) "En qu(o)i les Français ont-ils confiance aujourd'hui ?" [Who/what do French people trust today?]. The survey "revealed that 77% of respondents think that politicians do not care about them and 75% think that politicians are out of touch with reality and only serve their own interests<sup>10</sup>.

Apart from people who are not abreast of current affairs and/or historically away from the electoral process, the large number of people who shun elections, as experienced during the latest elections, can decide to do so for political reasons, since 34% of non-voters were led by their desire to express their dissatisfaction with political parties<sup>11</sup>.

Stewart Chau's work shows that young people's interest in politics is still there, but the politics on offer do not meet their expectations, or don't do so anymore. 81%<sup>12</sup> of young people surveyed do not agree with Diderot's words: "The more reason you find in a man, the more probity you will find in him", and thus judge politicians as dishonest and reproach them for their lack of exemplarity, which is systematically called into question (setbacks with the law, embezzlement, conflict of interest, etc.), phenomena that Stewart Chau popularised as "all rotten" and "all powerless".

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8 Dominique Andolfatto, "La nouvelle sociologie de l'Assemblée nationale : renouvellement ou 'cercle fermé' ?" [The new sociology of the National Assembly: renewal or 'closed circle'?), Political and Parliamentary Review, Headlines, No. 1083-1084, 11 December 2017. <https://www.revuepolitique.fr/la-nouvelle-sociologie-de-lassemblee-nationale-renouvellement-ou-cercle-ferme>.

9 Olivier Galland, "La crise de confiance de la jeunesse française" [The crisis of confidence among young French people], in the journal Études volume 412, no. 2021-1, pp. 31-42. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-etudes-2010-1-page-31.htm>.

10 CEVIPOF, "En qu(o)i les Français ont-ils confiance aujourd'hui ?" [What/Who do French people trust nowadays?], The Political Confidence Barometer Wave 13, January 2022. <https://www.sciencespo.fr/cevipof/sites/sciencespo.fr/cevipof/files/BONNE%20VERSION%20FINALE-1.pdf>

11 Ifop-Fiducial, "Les Régionales 2021 – Sondage jour du vote : Profil des électeurs et clés du scrutin (1er tour)" [2021 Regional elections – Poll on voting day: Voter profile and key aspects of voting (1st round)], 20 June 2021 <https://www.ifop.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/117992-Rapport-JDV-REG21-T1-DET-20h30.pdf>

12 Frédéric Dabi and Stewart Chau, *La fracture Éditions Arènes*, September 2021.

In his studies, he highlighted the fact that 82% of young people did not believe in political action. As will be developed in the next section, many policies aimed at young people are more addressed to the general public to signify concern for young people, without actually taking into account their actual expectations and needs. The introduction of the Universal National Service (SNU), for example, did not originate from expectations expressed by young people, and was organised against the opinion of a large majority of them and popular education associations. The lack of listening and recognition reported by a majority of young people, observed in many recent studies, reached a peak during the latest regional and departmental elections: the increasing precarity of young people generated by the health crisis combined with the difficulties of conducting an electoral debate during a pandemic led to a record low turnout among young people.

Moreover, in today's society eager for immediacy and hyper-reactivity, the long time frame of collective decision-making and implementation of public policies is difficult to understand and accept.

Younger generations have experienced more crises than victories and therefore want quick answers and concrete actions to deal with their consequences.

The ESEC's Delegation for Overseas Territories confirmed there was indeed a lack of confidence, or even some distrust, in the system of political representation and elected representatives. This aspect was brought to her attention: many young people are losing interest in politics and choose other means than the ballot box to express their choices or even their anger (social networks, demonstrations, etc.). The multifaceted social crises in autumn 2021 in the West Indies have revealed the deep malaise of some of the young people leaving in these territories. If we go back in time, young people were already one of the elements of the popular protest movement in the West Indies in 2009, as it was in French Guiana in 2017<sup>13</sup>.

Furthermore, according to Stewart Chau, the model of society that has been existing for several years is a model built on the valorisation of self-fulfilment, on the exaltation of the individual, on the over-personalisation of paths. There is an individualisation (not to be confused with individualism) of political commitment and mobilisation observed among the youngest generations.

#### 4. A feeling of exclusion from democratic life in an ageing society

Ageing demographics have an effect on democracy and the question arises as to the impact of the reduced participation of young people in political life on the very future of that democracy. As will be developed in the following section, current public policies are aimed at an ageing population and, as a result, young people are little or poorly taken into account. This lack of recognition leads to some young people feeling unheard and often sacrificed. One of the immediate effects of the unprecedented health crisis we are currently experiencing is the increasing precarity in which young

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<sup>13</sup> Contribution from the ESEC's Delegation for Overseas Territories, reported by Inès Bouchaut-Choisy and Yannick Cambay, appended to this opinion.

people live for the sake of the precautionary approach. This double sentence has accentuated the feeling of illegitimacy young people have in an election time and which was reflected in record-low turnout in the last regional and departmental elections.

In her work, Cécile Van de Velde used the example of Japan, described as a "Silver Democracy", and noted that political debates that focus on the interests of older population cohorts (e.g. The subject of pensions) to the detriment of education and employment policies, have very little resonance with the younger generation.

Some young people feel excluded from the public sphere and from the system because they feel that their voices and concerns are not heard, not listened to and not taken into account in policies. Other young people, like the rest of the population, may also feel a lack of interest in public policies that they feel have no impact on their daily lives and individual aspirations.

Some young people may even feel exploited by leaders who appropriate some of their struggles without carrying them through to the end, or who are too often used as a support for a discourse that is not intended for them, and they therefore reject this demagogic posture.

Within the "Silver Democracy", young people have little or no representation and this lack of representation keeps them away from the ballot box. Indeed, identifying with a "similar" figure, a man or woman, who embodies the dynamism of young people and commits himself or herself through his or her programme to meet their expectations, would be likely to reassure and encourage young people to get involved in the political life. The lack of renewed politics on offer is an issue that needs to be addressed.

## B. Voting in France, a central act of democracy

### 1. Voting, an act that is now codified

During the first presidential election in 1848, Alexis de Tocqueville took the male population of the village, about 170 people, to vote. He described the scene in his memoirs: *"When we arrived at the top of the hill overlooking Tocqueville [...] I reminded these brave people of the seriousness and importance of the act they were about to perform; I advised them not to allow themselves to be accosted or diverted by people who, on our arrival in the village, might try to deceive them; but to march without disunity and to remain together, each in his own rank, until we had voted... They shouted that they would do so and so they did. All the votes were given at the same time, and I have reason to believe that they were almost all given to the same candidate."*

Laurent Le Gall, author of "A voté - Une histoire de l'élection" [A history of the election], wrote in the newspaper *L'Opinion* (21 April 2021) that *"voting is always a practice undergoing rehabilitation and reflection. During the French Revolution, it was the first steps of the transfer of power to the people. From 1848 onwards, it became the backbone of the democratic order. At the time, practices were not codified: people voted as they could. It was not until the end of the Second Empire,*

for example, that the Ministry of the Interior issued circulars requiring similar ballot boxes. The polling booth, which crowns the voting space, appeared in 1913, after much debate took place. Its opponents argued that citizens should be able to assert their opinions and that polling booths, by obscuring democratic transparency, could fuel the politics of suspicion. Its proponents argued that it allowed people to make conscious decisions regarding their votes in a kind of republican interiority." The former belonged more to the monarchist parties in the Assembly, the latter to the republican parties.

Voting taking place on one day, in a polling station with a chairperson, assessors, a polling booth and a ballot box, is therefore a rather recent practice. The polling booth keeps the voter's choice secret and gives time to think: until 1913, voters handed their folded ballots to the chairman, who placed it in the ballot box.

We must not consider, added Mr Le Gall, *"that entering the polling booth transforms an individual inscribed in his time into an individual freed from his social ties, capable, in his heart of hearts, of delegating a piece of his sovereignty to constitute a general will. In reality, voting is more of a social habit that has become a tradition."*

He also points out that this "electoral 'transhumance', at the same time, on Sundays, throughout the country, refers to forms of recurrent parentheses that punctuate democratic life", to which the figure of the citizen-voter owes much. In this sense, the effort to go to the polling stations shows the voter's attachment to, and even love of, democracy. This can be interpreted as the fact that in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, 41.6% of the electorate participated in the second round of municipal elections.

The material conditions for voting have not fundamentally changed since 1913, the voting machines introduced in the 1980s have not been as successful as expected and remain anecdotal.

Regarding voting by post, Laurent Le Gall stressed that *"voting at home means voting in one's own universe; it becomes a domestic act"*, whereas democratic practice has always endeavoured to separate the two universes, the domestic sphere, on the one hand, and the political, on the other, in order to ensure secrecy.

Finally, two elements should be highlighted which tend to underline that voting is also a little more than a simple ritual. It is a decree of the Prime Minister or of the President of the Republic that call the voters - because it is a *"convocation"* - of the electoral body or electoral colleges. And the Article L. 9 of the French Electoral Code currently in force states that *"registration on the electoral roll is compulsory"* - without the current legal framework providing for any sanctions, which encourages parliamentarians to propose such sanctions (see e.g. National Assembly, bill no. 4582 of 19 October 2021). However, this has a direct consequence: non-registration deprives the citizen of a right, since it prevents him or her from voting.



## 2. Non-registration and improper registration on the electoral roll

The issue of non-registration on the electoral roll is not a new one. In 1987, in response to a question from a senator (written question No. 07919 from Mr Henri Belcour), the Minister of the Interior replied that his services had made an estimate by comparing the sum of registered voters and the population of voting age (after deduction of foreigners and French men and women deprived of their right to vote), and that they had estimated "*that the proportion of 'non-registered' voters varied, depending on the year, from 3 to 8.5% of the theoretical electorate*".

Voting is a right and people who are not registered or not properly registered could be considered as not using the system. To combat non-enrolment, the preferred approach has been automatic enrolment. Thus, every French citizen who comes of age is automatically registered on the electoral roll, provided that he or she has taken part of the compulsory census at the age of 16. As specified on the [service-public.fr](http://service-public.fr) website, if the automatic registration could not take place because the census was too late or because you moved after the census, you must then ask to be registered on the electoral roll at your town hall, respecting certain deadlines: the procedure must be completed at the latest on the sixth Friday before the first round of the election. For a young person reaching the age of 18, in the event of a change of house, acquiring French nationality or recovering the right to vote, the deadline for registration is extended until the tenth day before the first round.

The ESEC's Delegation for Overseas Territories , in its contribution, pointed out, however, that this system was not always effective. The automatic registration procedure at 18 does not include all young people. In 2012, only two thirds of Guadeloupeans aged 18 to 30 were registered to vote, despite the automatic registration of new voters when reaching the age of majority<sup>14</sup>. On islands such as Saint Barthélemy, which does not have a local secondary school, many young people leave home very early, at the age of 13 or 14. Although every young person is automatically registered on the electoral roll when they come of age, the fact that many of them leave before this age means that, when it comes to citizen census formalities at 16, they are not automatically registered. The contribution suggests strengthening the automatic registration procedure at 18 years of age by systematic information (by e-mail or SMS) at 16 years of age, in conjunction with the school and the local community network, so as not to forget young people who have dropped out of school.

For young French men and women who reside abroad and come of age, registration on the consular electoral roll of the country of residence is automatic, provided they are already registered in the register of French citizens abroad.

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<sup>14</sup> Cynthia Duchel, "En Guadeloupe, une large majorité d'inscrits mais peu de votants" [In Guadeloupe, a large majority of registered voters but few actual voters], INSEE AntianÉchos, no. 34, May 2013.

The Fondation Jean Jaurès stated in a recent report<sup>15</sup> that *"in electoral sociology, those who do not reside in the same municipality as that of the previous electoral registration are poorly registered"*, which particularly concerns students who leave their family home, for example, to study in another city or find a job, but also all those who move during the year of an election. France *"has between 6.5 and 7 million citizens who are not properly registered, and we are one of the last countries in Europe not to ensure the automatic registration when a change of address is declared. In addition, there are between 3 and 4 million non-registered voters who did not complete the procedures due to bureaucratic red tape or ignorance of the dates to be respected."* In total, depending on the sources, *"between 10 and 11 million citizens cannot vote, which may significantly affect the sociology of the electorate and mechanically affect the rate of participation"*.

During his hearing at the ESEC, Jean-Yves Dormagen pointed out in the same vein that incorrect registration is a massive phenomenon - around 15% of voters. In the 25-29 age group, the non-registration rate is even 55%, which is considerable. For the poorly registered, having to travel to the commune of registration from their place of residence to vote directly, or to establish a proxy, is a hindrance, a financial cost and/or in terms of time spent, constraints which it is not always possible to overcome. Dormagen said that his work showed that in "populations that are not very politically minded, the fact of being properly registered, close to home, increased turnout".

The 2016 law extending the deadline for registration to the sixth Friday before the election was a step forward, but it is not the same as automatic registration. Obviously less effective, it assumes some awareness of the issues at stake in the election long before it actually takes place, as well as some knowledge of the place of registration and its procedures, which may come as a surprise, especially since the first one did not require any particular step. However, since declaring a move of house is not compulsory, it seems difficult in France to achieve an automatic solution.

### 3. What voting means and the place it holds

The involvement of young people, beyond the electoral process, takes many forms. However, there has been a shift in commitment, particularly political commitment, which is becoming more personal. Young people are breaking free from the principles imposed by the main political ideologies or parties in order to build their own opinions outside traditional frameworks. In short, young people are as politicised as their elders, but fewer take part in electoral rituals because they no longer consider voting as a republican duty - unlike in other European countries, it has never been an obligation in France - but as a right. *"When the younger generations do not perceive what is at stake in an election, when they do not find good reasons to go and vote, they choose to stay away from the polls rather than cast votes without conviction (which is still the case for a fairly large number of older people)"* (*"L'abstention, de puissants*

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<sup>15</sup> "L'abstention, Analyses et propositions" [Abstention, analyses and proposals], September 2021, note by Dorian Dreuil.

*effets de générations ?" [Abstention, powerful generation effects?], Pierre Bréchon, in "La politique au fil de l'âge" [Politics through the ages], Anne Muxel, pp. 11-111).*

They are, in fact, more intermittent voters. While they remain highly mobilised for the presidential elections, the turnout drops as soon as the general elections are held. In 2017, this amounts to a 40-point drop in turnout between these two elections (see the hearing of Céline Braconnier and Jean-Yves Dormagen by the ESEC Temporary Commission in 2021). It is also worth noting the meagre turnout (87% of 18-24-year olds did not vote) in the first round of the regional and departmental elections in 2021.

However, there are disparities in the meaning given to the vote, which are intrinsically linked to the stabilisation of the young person's situation. a 25-year-old who is studying does not face the same issues as a 25-year-old who has been working since he was 16. a 27-year-old entering the labour market does not face the same challenges as a 27-year-old who has just started a family. The stabilisation of the socio-economic situation of young people can usually be seen as a turning point in their political participation (see the hearing of Camille Dupuy by the ESEC Temporary Commission on Democracy, 2021). Faced with new responsibilities (first child, buying a property, etc.), voter turnout increases steadily to reach a peak around the age of 50 before decreasing again.

The relationship of young people to politics cannot only be reviewed from the perspective of an age group, because the life paths and social capital of individuals differ greatly and these two aspects themselves have a strong influence on the feeling of legitimacy and the assertion of their opinion.

Various attitudes to (political) engagement were observed depending on socio-economic status and social background (hearing of Camille Dupuy) - and various activism profiles.

Furthermore, voting and, more generally, the relationship with politics is not perceived in the same way by women and men. As the ESEC's Delegation for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunity (DDFE) points out, little account is taken of gender in studies on engagement of young people, which favour a gender-neutral approach. However, the concept of citizenship is based on an abstract universality, often referring to the masculine, as women have been belatedly considered as full citizens.<sup>16</sup>

Not all the existing obstacles, particularly sociocultural ones, have been removed and slow down the politic involvement of young women. Indeed, the stereotype of the French politician is still that of the "good paterfamilias" (a concept that only disappeared from our Civil Code in 2014), with whom women and young women do not identify. As the DDFE's monitoring note reminds us, another stereotype that still impacts women's political engagement is the image of the "unfit mother"<sup>17</sup>. Gender bias contributes to the assignment of women to the domestic sphere and many female politicians have been accused of being "bad mothers".

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<sup>16</sup> Contribution DDFE Observation Note ESEC, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> "Vache folle", "Incontrôlable", "Mais qui va garder les enfants ?" : Ségolène Royal raconte 30 ans d'attaques sexistes" ["Mad cow", "Uncontrollable", "Who's going to look after the children?": Ségolène Royal recounts 30 years of sexist attacks] | LCI

At a time of whistleblowers and revelations of sex scandals involving politicians, many young women are reluctant to endorsing such acts by legitimising their perpetrators through a vote, and rather make their voices heard through new modes of expression and mobilisation.<sup>18</sup>

Although they account for 51.5% of the French population and 52.3% of the electorate, women and young women are under-represented in our institutions. Although the proportion of women in power is increasing, it does not exceed one third in Parliament: 38.7% of female MPs in the National Assembly and 31.6% of female senators in office in 2017.

The latest municipal elections increased the share of women in municipal councils (mayors, deputy mayors, councillors) to 42.4% compared to 39.9% at the end of the previous term of office. Almost 20% of the municipalities are now headed by a woman. Nevertheless, disparities across territories persist, although the proportion of women mayors has increased to 19.8%, with 1,000 additional municipal councils being managed by women compared to the situation at the end of the previous term, thus reaching 6,858 municipalities. However, as was the case before the last elections, women are more often in charge of small municipalities. More than 20% of the mayors of rural municipalities are women, compared to 18% in urban municipalities.

Some tools have proven to be effective in promoting the feminisation of political life<sup>19</sup>. For example, the laws on equal representation (2002 and 2003) in politics have raised great expectations of renewal of the political class by the population, especially from the younger generation<sup>20</sup>. Behind parity lies the issue of renewal of political elites, seen as a remedy to the crisis of political representativeness.

This wave of feminisation of the various political assemblies has indeed led to a renewal and rejuvenation of political figures. In the 2017 general elections, the average age of male and female MPs decreased from 54.6 years in 2012 to 49.2 years in 2017. This rejuvenation is primarily due to women MPs, since their average age is 48 compared to 50 for men MPs<sup>21</sup>. For the past twenty years, more and more women have run for President of the Republic. Furthermore, in several countries,

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18 Study "Une jeunesse plurielle" Institut Montaigne, Olivier Galland and Marc Lazar, 2022, pp.111 and 112: *"The particularity of young women can be seen in their greater interest in societal issues, especially those involving gender (a strong gap with men on this item) but also ecology, their greater taste for protest while respecting the democratic framework and repudiating political violence (as well as private violence) more than men. On the other hand, women have more difficulty than men in translating this societal involvement into effective commitment: they are less present in associations and are much more often politically disaffiliated. 40% of them state neither partisan proximity nor political positioning on the left-right scale (compared to 28% of men). Basically, men are less involved but more committed, whereas women have the opposite characteristics. Men are also more likely to be extremists (20% against 15%) and, as we have seen, more willing to justify violence."*

19 Contribution DDFE Observation Note, ESEC, 2022.

20 According to the "Panel électoral français" [French Electoral Panel] survey conducted by Cevipof in 2002, 64% of men and 72% of women believed that "people's interests would be better served if there were more women in parliament" (Sineau, 2004: 214).

21 "La féminisation élitiste de l'Assemblée nationale | Sciences Po" [The elitist feminisation of the National Assembly].

the introduction of quotas on young people in electoral laws has helped improve the political representation of women<sup>22</sup>.

Thus feminisation and generational renewal seem to be correlated.

#### 4. Types of elections and institutions

The management of public affairs is entrusted to the elected representatives of the nation. Their decisions are the expression of the general will. Indeed (DDHC, art. 6) *"the law is the expression of the general will. All citizens have the right to contribute either personally or through their representatives to its construction."* Referendum laws, in the words of the Constitutional Council, *"are the direct expression of national sovereignty"*. For this reason, it refuses to review the constitutionality of the case, its role being limited to reviewing the constitutionality of the question asked.

Elections in France take place every five years for the President of the Republic (the only term of office with a maximum number of terms) and for members of Parliament, every six years for mayors, municipal councillors, departmental and regional councillors, and for senators.

Since 1852, the votes taken into account are the votes cast (Article L.66 of the French Electoral Code), i.e. cast = ballots, leaving out "blank and spoiled ballots".

Since 1962, the President of the Republic has been elected by direct universal suffrage, in a two-round majority vote system. If no candidate gets an absolute majority of the votes cast in the first round, a second round shall be held, in which only the two leading candidates may stand. The term of office was reduced from 7 to 5 years in 2000. Candidates should collect the signatures of 500 elected officials from at least 30 different overseas departments or regions, without more than one tenth of them being elected officials from the same overseas department or collectivity.

Members of Parliament (577 at the most since 2007) are elected by direct universal suffrage in a two-round first-past-the-post system. There has been only one exception since 1958; in 1986, the elections were held under the departmental one-round proportional representation system - it being specified that the voting methods for the assemblies are laid down by an ordinary law. Following the adoption of the five-year term and the decision to reverse the electoral calendar in 2002, general elections are organised after the presidential election. To be elected in the first round, a candidate must get more than 50% of the votes cast and a number of votes equal to at least 25% of the number of registered voters. Only those candidates who have obtained at least 12.5% of the registered voters may stand in the second round. Triangular" or even "quadrangular" second-rounds are possible under this condition.

A summary of the various types of ballots for elections by direct universal suffrage, including local elections, is given in the table below.

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<sup>22</sup> Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle, United Nations Development Programme, 2014, p. 22.

## Table of voting methods for elections by direct universal suffrage in France

Municipal elections in municipalities with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants	Majority vote, two rounds
Municipal elections in the municipalities with at least 1,000 inhabitants	Proportional representation system with a majority bonus
Departmental elections	Binominal majority vote, two rounds
Regional Elections	Proportional representation system with a majority bonus
General elections	Two-round first-past-the-post system
Presidential election	Two-round first-past-the-post system

Table: Vie-publique.fr / DILA • [Retrieve the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

The obligation of an equal presentation of male and female candidates for the two ballots for municipal elections in municipalities of at least 1,000 inhabitants and for departmental elections is noteworthy. In the first case, the lists must comply with equal representation, i.e. be composed of as many women as men, with a compulsory alternation of one woman/one man or vice versa. For the second vote, each canton elects a pair of men and women.

The 348 senators are elected for six years by indirect universal suffrage by an electorate college of senatorial electors, commonly known as the "grands électeurs". This electoral college is composed of members of Parliament and senators, regional councillors elected in the department, councillors of the Corsican Assembly, councillors of the French Guiana Assembly and councillors of the Martinique Assembly, departmental councillors and delegates of municipal councils. The latter account for 95% of the approximately 162,000 electors in total. The partial renewal of the Senate takes place every three years and involves half of the seats. Each renewal allows for the election of half of the senators broken down into two series.

Depending on the number of seats to be filled, senators are elected by a two-round majority system (constituencies with 1 or 2 senators) or by a proportional representation list system (constituencies with 3 or more senators). In municipalities with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, the electors of senators are elected by a two-round majority vote. In municipalities with more than 1,000 inhabitants, they are elected by proportional representation on the basis of the highest average.

As the DDFE note states, these various types of elections can play a role in the feminisation and rejuvenation of candidates. The weight of stereotypes means that older and more experienced men are perceived as better leaders, which will give them an advantage in a first-past-the-post election. Women, and according to our findings the correlation between the two, and young people would stand a better chance when placed on lists in proportional representation elections.

## C. Is low turnout a European evil?

### 1. Higher participation in Germany and the Netherlands

Vincent Tiberj, during his hearing at the ESEC, underlined the difference between France and Germany in terms of voter turnout, which he said was due to the fact that the two political systems and political cultures are very different. In Germany, government majorities are formed on the basis of political compromises that are sometimes negotiated after the elections.

Despite a slight decline compared to the 2000s, voter turnout in the Bundestag elections remains high: 71.5% in 2013, 76.2% in 2017, 76.6% in 2021. It should be remembered that the stakes of these coupled elections (federal elections, elections in the Länder) are extremely high in Germany, where the Länder are states in their own right, with their own policies on health, security and education.

General elections are held every four years and the date is set by the Federal President. All Germans who have reached the age of eighteen, who have resided in Germany for at least three months and who have not been deprived of their right to vote, may express themselves by universal suffrage.

A recent article points out the technical specific features of the German electoral system with a proportional representation system with no majority bonus and an electoral threshold of 5%<sup>23</sup>. *"The German electoral system is complex, so a brief explanation is probably necessary. Voters have two votes: first, they vote for Bundestag candidates within a constituency, then, for a party list within a Land. It is this 'second vote' (Zweitstimme) that determines the number of seats each party will have in parliament. Half the seats are allocated to candidates elected directly by the "first vote" (Erststimme) and the other half to list candidates. In simple terms, it is a proportional system, with an electoral threshold of 5%."*

Women and men voters who are unable to go to their polling station on the election day, for example because of illness or age, can vote by post. German people rely heavily on this tradition of voting by post, which was introduced in 1957 and was even practised by 28.6% of voters in the 2017 federal elections. To do so, all they need to do is download a simple form from the Internet. This solution had even led to an increase in turnout for elections in Bavaria in March 2020 (58.5% compared to 55% in 2014), at the very beginning of the health crisis. The postal voting rate increased again in 2021, to 47.3%.

In addition, every adult who has been a German citizen for at least one year has the passive electoral right to stand for election.

According to Mr Kimmel, young voters were particularly motivated by the ecological issues. In Germany, the under-thirties represent only 9% of the electorate.

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<sup>23</sup> Kimmel Adolf, "26 septembre 2021 : les élections de l'après-Merkel" [26 September 2021: the post-Merkel elections], *Pouvoirs*, 2022/1 (No. 180).

Other European countries seem to be able to do as well as Germany. This is what happened in the March 2021 elections in the Netherlands, where everyone expected a drop in turnout in the midst of a pandemic. Against all odds, this scenario did not happen and a large number of Dutch voters turned out to vote (turnout reached 82.6%) to re-elect their Prime Minister<sup>24</sup>.

The ballot was designed in a pragmatic way, by consensus between the authorities and all political parties, and was supported by the population. In addition to remote voting for the over 70s, the choice was also made to spread the elections over three days, so as to prevent overcrowding in the polling stations. This early voting, initially intended primarily for at-risk groups, was in practice used by a large number of voters. The curfew in force at the time had also been adapted to allow people to vote at times of their choosing and possibly to take part in the counting process.

*"In the Netherlands," noted H el ene Degryse, "elections are held during the week, usually on Wednesdays. Voting is real life, just another day. There is no such thing as an electoral list as we understand it in France. Population registers are the basis for determining who is a voter and these registers, which include moves, are very up-to-date." Voters receive all the information with their invitation two weeks before the election. There are no assigned polling stations, unlike in France. Voters go to one of the polling stations opened in the municipality. They are numerous and sometimes located in train stations, car parks, concert halls, monuments, places of worship, etc. "Thus, no one is ever far from a voting place".*

## 2. The surprises of the 2019 European elections

Turnout in European elections is low and decreased continuously until 2009 in France and in Europe, reaching 59.9% in the EU and 59.4% in France. It first slightly fell in the 2014 election, by 3% in the EU and by 1.8% in France, and then much more significantly in the 2019 election, to such an extent that the Fondation pour l'innovation politique spoke of a counter-example: *"The 2019 European elections are a counter-example in that turnout has increased significantly compared to previous elections... voter turnout levels have returned to 1994 levels at 50.1% for France and 50.6% for the European average"*<sup>25</sup>. The rise in turnout in France was therefore 7.7% compared to the previous elections - that is 4 million more voters - 9.5% cumulatively compared to the turnout low in 2009.

The Young Europeans website analysed those results in an article on 4 June 2019<sup>26</sup> linking them to themes that punctuated the campaign (Brexit, migration crisis, global warming), to the voters' desire to prevent a surge of nationalism from overwhelming Europe, and finally to the mobilisation of young people.

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<sup>24</sup> Articles "Apprendre de la participation  lectorale record aux Pays-Bas" [Learning from the record voter turnout in the Netherlands], article by H el ene Degryse, Councillor of the French in the Netherlands, Member of the Assembly of French citizens living abroad, *Eurojournalist* and Jean-Baptiste Fran ois, *La Croix* 21 June 2021, "Abstention, comment s'en sortent les autres pays europ ens ?" [Low turnout: how are other European countries faring?].

<sup>25</sup> Fondapol, report for the National Assembly, November 2021.

<sup>26</sup> European elections: young people have chosen Europe!



The forum points out that *"among 18- to 24-year-olds, turnout is 39%, an unexpected 14-point increase on the 2014 vote. The same applies to the 25-34 age group, with 40% turnout (27% in 2014)."*

In that spirit, the European Parliament stated that, according to the results of the post-election Eurobarometer survey, a quantitative survey commissioned by the Parliament, the high turnout in the 2019 European elections was due to a strong increase in the turnout of the younger generations of Europeans: the under -25s (+14 points), as well as the 25- to 39-year olds (+12 points)<sup>27</sup>.

The European Parliament points out that *"nineteen Member States recorded an increase in voter turnout compared to 2014"* including Poland, Romania, Spain, Austria, Hungary, Germany and France, as well as Slovakia and the Czech Republic, where turnout is traditionally very low. At the same time, turnout fell in only eight countries, but by less than 3 points, given that voting is compulsory in five countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Cyprus and Greece).

*"The results show that 2019 voters were also driven by an increased sense of civic duty, a growing sense that voting can make a difference, as well as their increased support for the EU."* According to the survey, *"the economy and growth (44%) as well as climate change (37%) are the main drivers of the vote, a trend observed on average at EU level. Human rights and democracy (37%), how the EU should work in the future (36%) and immigration (34%) were also important motivating factors."* It remains to be seen whether this momentum will generate new interest in the European elections in the long term.

### 3. The right to vote at 16, still an exceptional right

The voting age in most democracies is 18. Voting at 16 or 17 is not *"a democratic anomaly or a utopian project"*<sup>28</sup>. More than 15 states or self-governing entities (federated states, self-governing territories, etc.) in the world have introduced the right to vote at 16.

In Europe, those countries are Austria, Greece, Malta, Slovenia, Scotland, some German Länder, a Swiss canton and several Channel Islands.

In Slovenia, this right is conditional on employment. In Scotland, the right is only open for Scottish elections. It was also granted to 16-year-olds in the vote on the independence. In the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, 75% of the 16-and-17-year-olds in Scotland voted, compared to 54% of 18- to 24-year-olds and 72% of 25- to 34-year-olds<sup>29</sup>. We can see that in a vote with a concrete and direct impact, young people under the age of 18 massively took part in the election, even more than their elders.

Austria and Malta lowered their voting age to 16 for all elections in 2007 and 2018 respectively. Greece chose 17 years in 2016, in force for the 2019 general elections - voting

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<sup>27</sup> European Parliament, press release of 24 September 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Fondapol, November 2021, report quoted.

<sup>29</sup> Source website UNICEF France, "L'Unicef dit oui pour le vote à 16 ans" [Unicef says yes to voting at 16]

is compulsory in Greece for people aged 17 to 70. Participation was very slightly higher than in 2015 (57.9%, up 1.3 points). More than a mere possibility of voting or a measure to increase turnout, it is a far-reaching vision of how to empowering and increase the trust of young people with a view to include them and help them become full citizens.

Other countries, such as Germany and Estonia, granted their citizens over the age of 16 to vote in some local elections. The federal form of the state facilitates such decisions at local level: in Germany *"in most Länder, 16-year-olds take part in municipal elections - since 1996 in Lower Saxony, the pioneer in this respect"*<sup>30</sup>. In several Länder they also participate in regional parliamentary elections. One Swiss canton has also set the age of voting at 16.

The lowering of the voting age gave rise to intense discussions at sittings of the commission.

The Fondapol report highlights *"that the effects of this measure on low turnout are not obvious. The example of Austria shows that lowering the voting age was very successful in the first election (75% turnout of 16-18-year olds before a sharp drop in turnout of young people in subsequent elections)."* This is reminiscent of the evolution of women's participation in France at the time when they were granted that right, with first a high turnout, then a fall for about twenty years before being on a par with male participation. Thus, voting does require learning when this right is given to a new category of the population.

#### 4. A living tradition of direct democracy: the case of Switzerland

In Europe, direct assembly democracy can be found in Switzerland today, although the parliament, with an upper house (the Council of States, a kind of American-style Senate) and a lower house (the National Council, elected by proportional representation), is characteristic of a representative democracy in a federal state.

The federal state is made up of 26 cantons, two of which maintain popular assemblies called *Landsgemeinde* (which translates as "land assembly"). In Appenzell Innerrhoden, for example (canton website), every year on the last Sunday in April, women and men voters (Swiss citizens aged 18 and resident in the canton) meet on the *Landsgemeindeplatz* to appoint the canton's authorities, who are elected for two years, pass resolutions, approve the accounts for the past year and appoint (every four years) their representatives at the federal level, the Council of States. People vote by raising the right hand. If the majority cannot be estimated, voters are counted individually.

In Glarus<sup>31</sup> the voting age is set at 16, the right to stand for election at 18 years of age. At the *Landsgemeinde*, citizens can submit motions directly.

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30 Bourgeois Isabelle, "Elections au Bundestag : droit de vote à 16 ans ?" [Bundestag elections: voting rights at 16?], *Regards sur l'économie allemande*, 2015/3-4 (no. 118-119).

31 Le Grand continent, *"Glaris, l'Athénienne : essai d'anthropologie politique"* [Glarus, the Athenian: an essay in political anthropology], François Hublet, October 2021.

Glarus has 40,000 inhabitants, Appenzell Innerrhoden over 15,000. Given the powers of cantons, for example in taxation, and their representation at federal level, this system is neither anecdotal nor folkloric.

The same author recalls that *"the strengths and weaknesses of assembly democracy are obvious. The vote is not secret, the counting of votes is not very precise, the role of the head of government is more important than in other cantons. The need to spend a whole day on the Zaunplatz, regardless of the weather outside and the nature of the agenda, severely limits participation. In return, the citizens of Glarus have a unique platform for direct deliberation and can intervene directly in the legislative process. But features that, by the standards of large representative democracies, appear to be flaws - the open vote, the arbitration role of the presidency, the imprecise count, the lengthy deliberations - are in fact intentional, even desirable, in the logic of the Glarus system. [...] The Landsgemeinde indeed favours consensus over compromise, participation over effectiveness, and open and public discussions over the protection of private opinions."*

The assumed conservatism of this democratic form is also often put forward. The reality is often more complex. It is true that the Landsgemeinde were slow to accept women's suffrage - the last one to give in did so in 1990, at the request of the Federal Court. But it was a popular initiative that led to the introduction of the right to vote at 16 in Glarus in 2007. Also in Glarus, the adoption of an energy law, more ambitious in the fight against climate change than the one proposed by the local government, was recently the result of motions tabled in the assembly. It is not uncommon for the cantonal government and parliament to be outvoted.

Another hallmark of direct democracy, the referendum has a special place in Switzerland. According to the ACE (Electoral Knowledge Network) project website, of all the national referendums held in Western democracies since World War II, more than two thirds have been held in Switzerland. Voters have the right to ask for a popular referendum on every bill adopted by Parliament. The only condition is that it is signed by 50,000 people. In addition, all constitutional changes decided by parliament must be submitted to a vote of the electorate. 100,000 or more voters can submit a constitutional amendment on their own initiative. The ACE Network states that *"when the referendum was first introduced in the 19th century, it was expected to have an innovative effect. The founders of modern Switzerland believed that voters would be open to change, but the opposite has happened and the referendum has often had a delaying effect. The best example is the implementation of women's right to vote, which was only granted in 1971. Parliament was willing to give women the vote much earlier than male voters."*

The Swiss Federal Statistical Office underlines that *"turnout in federal referendums has been declining since the beginning of the 20th century, but the decline has been marked by sharp swings. Thus, as early as 1990, the extreme values garnered from 28% to 79%. However, the downward trend did not continue at the beginning of the 21st century. Average voter turnout has even increased slightly (from 42% in the 1980s/1990s to 46%)."* The ACE project comments on these figures by pointing out that while turnout reached approximately 45%, the number of voters who take

part in direct democracy each year is actually higher, as different referendums do not necessarily attract the same voters.

The attached table shows the highest turnout in Swiss elections since 1971, with the understanding that there are several referendums each year. On reading this table, it can be seen that the referendums that attracted the most voters obviously involve subjects that are meaningful either because they deal with issues that can be described as existential for a landlocked, neutral and federal country (defence, security, membership of international organisations, etc.), or because they involve social issues, or finally problems of society.

This finding supports the idea that understanding the purpose of the election and the value placed on it are particularly important criteria for motivating citizens to vote. For voting to be used on a massive scale, especially by young people, it must be considered as useful and interesting.

## 5. Voting is not the only political act

The perception of political participation is a very narrow one because it is very institutional, and tends to only take into account the political election, as is often suggested by the discourse of elected officials and most of the media. Yet, according to Philippe Braud, "*participation is the set of individual or collective activities that can give the governed an influence on the functioning of the political system.*"<sup>32</sup>

Collective actions, but also the organisations that result from them (associations, forums, trade unions, etc.) are very rarely included in what is known as 'political participation'. The end of the twentieth century, with the end of the great utopias, led to a negative vision of certain strong terms: ideology, popular, radical, etc. The constant loss of credibility of social movements thus destroys the "bridge" dear to Jack Goldstone, who suggested to "rebuild a bridge between *institutional* and *non-institutional* politics". Indeed, social movements shape the work of public authorities<sup>33</sup>.

The political scientist Herbert Kitschelt, on the other hand, has shown that political system distinctions can be made in terms of openness or closure. An open political system is for him a system in which social movements can express themselves upstream of the political decision, can have access to the administration, to the rulers and which allows for co-constructed public policies and accountability to intermediary bodies and social movements... In contrast, in closed political systems, the legislative power is subject to the executive power and there are no channels where alternative solutions can be suggested. The executive power is strong and administrations are reluctant to share their power, especially if these demands for participation take the form of collective actions.

According to this definition, France is a rather closed political system.

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<sup>32</sup> Philippe Braud, "Sociologie politique" [Political Sociology], 14th edition, 2020

<sup>33</sup> Jack A. Goldstone, "States, Parties and Social Movements", 2003.

## II - YOUNG CITIZENS WITH FRAGILE FAITH IN THE SYSTEM

Tom Chevalier, at the hearing on 11 January 2022, explained that *"when the State has confidence in young people, young people have confidence in the State"* a phrase which echoed a statement made by the mayor of the 15th and 16th *arrondissements* of Marseilles<sup>34</sup> during the Temporary Commission's visit on 5 January 2022 *"If public affairs take an interest in young people, then young people taken an interest in public affairs"*. This relationship therefore has a particular impact on trust, willingness and opportunity to participate in democratic life.

### A. Social and family background influences trust in institutions as well as the feeling of legitimacy in participating in them

1. Participating in democratic life implies feeling sufficiently confident and legitimate to take part, regardless of socio-professional category, gender, region or level of education

Céline Braconnier and Jean-Marie Dormagen highlight that the low turnout rate functions as an *"amplifier of social inequalities in participation"*. Since 2002, people without a degree – the category with the highest rate of abstention – have seen the greatest increase in abstention, while those with an educational level higher than the French baccalaureate are less likely to abstain and represent the category with the smallest increase in abstention rates. The gap between graduates and non-graduates widened between 2002 and 2017. This self-exclusion of individuals with the least cultural capital and political skills is partly determined by social origin and educational background. However, this unequal access to political instruments can be compensated for by the work of different public education organisations.

*"Although age is clearly the most predictive factor for voter turnout"*, differences in turnout by social category increased in 2017. Thus *"the gap between managers on the one hand, and people in middle-level occupations, employees and workers on the other, also widened in 2017"*. Between 2012 and 2017, the share of managers and professionals fell by 8 points compared to 14 points for workers and 15 points for employees and professionals in middle-level occupations<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.lecese.fr/actualites/retour-sur-le-deplacement-marseille-participation-democratique-des-jeunes>.

<sup>35</sup> Céline Braconnier, Baptiste Coulmont, Jean-Yves Dormagen, "Toujours pas de chrysanthèmes pour les variables lourdes de la participation électorale. Chute de la participation et augmentation des inégalités électorales au printemps 2017" [The heavy variables of electoral participation are alive and well. Drop in participation and increase in electoral inequalities in spring 2017], *Revue française de science politique*, 2017/6, volume 67, pp. 1023 to 1040.

Stereotypes and gender norms still hinder young women's political engagement. Women can be very involved in certain forms of engagement, such as ecological and feminist engagement, and unconventional public actions – such as boycotts, petitions, etc. However, 72% of women abstained in the June 2021 regional and departmental elections, compared to 59% of men, while there was no significant difference for the presidential elections<sup>36</sup>.

One explanation is that *"female voters are more likely to say they are unqualified to make a judgement, and more so in these less important elections than in high-profile elections that receive extensive media coverage. On the other hand, they make up for it by investing in unconventional political actions, such as boycotts or petitions, which fall outside the framework of traditional partisan activity, argues Nonna Mayer, citing the work of researcher Anja Durovic, a specialist in gender inequality in politics and electoral behaviour"*<sup>37</sup>.

The feeling of legitimacy or illegitimacy is built up as early as secondary school, with participation in first elections – the elections of class representatives. Already in middle school, students with better academic results are more likely to run for class representatives or other positions. By the age of 13 or 14, a quarter of middle school students have been elected as class representatives, but 34% of these representatives are students with the strongest achievements compared to 18% of those with the weakest achievements. Middle school students from more privileged backgrounds are more frequently involved: 30% of the class representatives were children with parents who are managers, compared to just 21% whose parents are unskilled workers.

On the other hand, variables such as gender or origin, which could be sources of discrimination, do not prevent students from becoming involved, from being elected class representatives and from taking part in the community. For example, at middle school, girls are more involved than boys: 27% of girls are elected as class representatives, compared to only 24% of boys. In fact, girls will go on to make up more than 60% of Civic Service volunteers. At middle school, pupils of immigrant descent from the Maghreb or Sub-Saharan Africa become class representatives more often than other pupils: 28% and 33% respectively become class representatives compared with only 25% of children without immigrant parents. This situation, also observed in secondary schools (CNESCO, 2018), occurs with other similar characteristics.

However, the feeling of illegitimacy can also come from a feeling of incompetence in relation to the level of language used by committed young people. During a discussion with young people from the Saint-Joseph Fontainieu social centre in Marseilles in January 2021, a teenager explained his refusal to take the floor during a visit to the National Assembly with other young people involved in associations in these words: *"I don't speak French as well as they do"*. He expressed himself clearly during this exchange but did not feel legitimate to speak in the National Assembly, in the presence of young people who were more experienced in this type of exercise.

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<sup>36</sup> Sources: DDFE contribution, ESEC, 2022.

<sup>37</sup> "Régionales 2021 : Pourquoi les femmes se sont davantage abstenues que les hommes" [2021 regional elections: why women abstained more than men] (lemonde.fr).

Finally, the incomplete accessibility of electoral campaigns for people with disabilities is a real obstacle to their participation as soon as they come of age. It is clear that today's electoral programmes are almost entirely inaccessible for people with disabilities. This is the stark observation made by the National Consultative Council for Persons with Disabilities (CNCPH) at the launch of the 2022 election campaign accessibility observatory on 27 January, in partnership with the ESEC.

Above and beyond the campaigns, it is also necessary to give everyone access to public life, in particular through texts written in French that are easy to read and understand (FALC) and which are useful to all audiences.

## 2. The influence of young people's direct entourage and the social fabric to which they belong also plays a role in taking part in the collective

According to Jean-Yves Dormagen, the influence of the entourage is what he calls the "driving factor". This can be the family (father, mother, brothers and sisters, spouse, etc.) but also friends, work colleagues, individuals met through involvement with non-profit organisations, etc. This environment generates "micro-pressures" that encourage people to vote<sup>38</sup>.

The family, by its function, is a place where values are transmitted between parents and children. Stewart Chau reminds us that the family is the most important value for young people today, and that it is "*perceived as a protective shield against uncertainty*". He highlights that the definition of the term has been broadened and that it is no longer a place of confrontation, as it might have been perceived in the past, but a place of union.

There are similarities between the views of parents and their children, even once these children become adults. Annick Percheron states in this respect that in France, a political legacy is passed on from one generation to the next<sup>39</sup>. However, this partisan transmission does not make it possible to predict the opinions of children who have become adults on major social issues. This can be explained, as Vincent Tournier does, by the fact that as children and as adults – and without regard for the birth cohort – political opinions fluctuate, as does the perception of values. Moreover, from adolescence onwards, young people are able to put into perspective the ideas expressed by their parents<sup>40</sup>.

Geographical location may also have an impact on the propensity of young people to go to the polls on election day. Some researchers have been able to

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38 Hearing of Jean-Yves Dormagen and Céline Braconnier by the ESEC Temporary Commission on Democracy, 2021.

39 In 1975, 34% of 16-18 year olds reproduced their parents' political positions on the left-right axis. This percentage was 49% in 1989.

See: Vincent Tournier. "Le rôle de la famille dans la transmission politique entre les générations. Histoire et bilan des études de socialisation politique. Politiques sociales et familiales", [The role of the family in passing down politics between generations. History and review of political socialisation research], Politiques sociales et familiales, Caisse nationale des allocations familiales (CNAF) (Family branch of social security agency), 2009, pp. 59-72.

40 Ibid

demonstrate that the micro-pressures referred to by Jean-Yves Dormagen are played out, for example, in sparsely populated municipalities. This environment generates greater proximity between individuals who, without necessarily belonging to the same social circles, "know" each other. In these municipalities, a form of social pressure may be exerted, pushing individuals to go to the polls in order to avoid the judgement of their fellow citizens. Correspondingly, in these same municipalities, the percentage of blank votes is higher.<sup>41</sup>

Studies have shown that there is a correlation between the level of politicisation and turnout at elections, both of which are related to the level of education and socio-professional status<sup>42</sup>. Differences are seen in election turnout according to social category, which in turn are related to the question of social capital, which leads to a person's feeling of legitimacy or illegitimacy vis-à-vis their political opinion<sup>43</sup>. This was the case, for example, in the last regional and departmental elections, where turnout amongst voters with an income of less than 900 euros was 22%, compared to 39% for those with an income of more than 2,500 euros.<sup>44</sup> In the same elections, turnout amongst young people was only 16% for 18-24 year olds and 19% for 25-34 year olds.

However, the younger voter's situation is marked by a more or less complicated emancipation process, with the ability to create autonomy sometimes coming later on. It should be remembered here that young people do not form a homogeneous group. Social reproduction leads to inequalities within this age group that are just as marked as in the older generations. These inequalities have a strong influence on the extent of the difficulties encountered on the road to socio-economic citizenship, and whether or not these difficulties persist once autonomy is acquired<sup>45</sup>.

Social inequalities also influence the type and status of the job that young people can access, making it more difficult for those from low-income families to reach a higher socio-professional category (SPC) than their parents. As highlighted in the ESEC opinion "*New generations, building tomorrow's solidarity*" in 2020, the social ladder for new generations is broken.

The precariousness and instability surrounding job retention primarily affects a proportion of young people with few or no qualifications, who are more often in a vulnerable position when faced with a succession of short-term employment contracts interspersed with periods of unemployment, and who are also more exposed

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41 "L'acte de vote" [The act of voting], Yves Deloye and Olivier Ihl, Presse de Science Po, 2008.

42 "Voter ensemble. Dispositifs informels de mobilisation et compensation des inégalités de politisation" [Voting together. Informal measures for mobilisation and offsetting inequalities in politicisation], Céline Braconnier, in: "*La politique sans en avoir l'air, aspects de politique informelle XIXe-XXIe siècle*" [Politics but not as we know it, aspects of informal politics, 19th-20th century], François Ploux, Michel Offerlé, Laurent le Gall, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, p. 355-384.

43 Hearing of Tristan Haute by the ESEC Temporary Commission on Democracy, 2021.

44 "Abstention : au-delà de la crise sanitaire, les vraies raisons de la démobilitation" [Abstention: beyond the health crisis, the real reason for lack of mobilisation], Tristan Haute, The Conversation.

45 We would like to highlight that one in five young people live below the poverty line: <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/3565548>.



to jobs with low autonomy. These employment conditions have visible consequences on election turnout, with lower mobilisation for these profiles<sup>46</sup>.

This generates the feeling of being in transit, which also manifests itself during studies and can be projected onto this transition to adulthood, comprising a series of statuses. These successive upheavals can make it more difficult for someone to project themselves in terms of representation, which occurs as part of the community.

According to Tristan Haute, *"Voting is always based on social ties. Increasing turnout also means working on solidarity and on social ties"*.<sup>47</sup> While social ties are an element that promotes political participation, an individual's socio-economic situation tends to influence their propensity to be socially isolated: to be outside the community. Social isolation can affect all social classes but people in precarious situations are particularly vulnerable. A study in Strasbourg found that only 8.6% of people living in wealthy neighbourhoods suffered from isolation, compared to 21% of people living in poor neighbourhoods.<sup>48</sup>

The same study also showed that people with few or no qualifications are more likely to be socially isolated, with 23% of people without qualifications experiencing isolation compared to 13% of people with a higher education.

Other factors that increase the risk of social isolation include unemployment, job insecurity and/or low pay disability and single parenthood. This means that a section of young people, who are particularly exposed to the risk of unemployment (20% of 15-24 year olds are unemployed in Q3 2021) and job insecurity are also over-exposed to the risk of social isolation, due to these factors. Despite a higher "graduation" rate among the new generations, it should also be remembered that in 2018, 8.9% of 18-24 year olds had few or no qualifications and were not in education<sup>49</sup>.

Since the end of the 1970s, there has been a trend towards job insecurity, particularly among young employees, a decline in autonomy at work – with repetitive or assembly-line work far from having disappeared – and a decline in the commitment of employees to collective bodies, particularly in terms of trade unions.

Camille Peugny states that *"the type of employment contract appears to be a structuring variable in terms of voter turnout"*. *"Employees in precarious situations vote significantly less than their colleagues with stable employment contracts. Job insecurity, combined with a non-permanent employment contract, distances*

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46 Vincent Tiberj, Tristan Haute, "Extinction de vote" [Is voting dying out?], PUF, 2022, p.74-76.

47 Hearing of Tristan Haute by the ESEC Temporary Commission on Democracy, 2021.

48 ESEC opinion *"Combattre l'isolement social pour plus de cohésion et de fraternité"* [Combating social isolation for greater cohesion and fraternity], by Jean-François Serres, 2017.

49 (8.9% of 18-24 year olds with no or few qualifications and not in education): INSEE, "Indicateurs de richesse nationale, sorties précoces du système scolaire" [National wealth indicators, early school leavers], 7 December 2021 <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/3281681?sommaire=3281778#tableau-figure1>.

people from politics and especially from the ballot box. It limits integration into a collective body in the workplace and the resulting sociability<sup>50</sup>."

Moreover, social inequalities are at play from an early age, including the replication of situations causing isolation. A 2013 UNICEF study showed that 17% of children were in a "situation of concern" for social exclusion and 7% were in a situation of "extreme exclusion".<sup>51</sup>

As we have seen in this section, beyond the low turnout amongst young people, the sociological distribution of the vote is extremely pronounced and particularly worrying. The working classes vote less and, as a result, their representation is less than their weight in the electorate.

This also leads to questioning the feeling of belonging to one or more social groups, often linked to commitments made within civil society (sporting, social, political commitment, etc.) and which constitute a complementary social fabric structuring the lives of individuals. These social groups can, in the run-up to key political moments, act as a forum for debate, exchanges of ideas and dissemination of information, without the association or organisation itself being active in the political field. This has been highlighted by Céline Braconnier in the United States, where the associative fabric plays an important role in mobilising citizens around electoral issues<sup>52</sup>. Whilst this is not a hard and fast rule, Tristan Haute notes that a person involved in organised civil society is more likely to vote in political elections than a person with no particular involvement.<sup>53</sup>

However, there is rising anger, which runs through youth and transcends the variety of youth profiles. Many people now refuse to accept the rules of an imposed social game, which includes the French exception of denied citizenship<sup>54</sup>. If left unaddressed, this anger has consequences for the ways in which people participate in democratic life.

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50 Camille Peugny, "Pour une prise en compte des clivages au sein des classes populaires. La participation politiques des ouvriers et employés" [For consideration of divisions within classes. Political participation of manual workers and non-manual workers]. *Revue française de science politique*, 2015, page 745.

51 ESEC opinion "*Combattre l'isolement social pour plus de cohésion et de fraternité*", by Jean-François Serres, 2017.

52 "Voter ensemble. Dispositifs informels de mobilisation et compensation des inégalités de politisation" [Voting together. Informal measures for mobilisation and offsetting inequalities in politicisation], Céline Braconnier in: "*La politique sans en avoir l'air*" [Politics but not as we know it], François Ploux, Michel Offerlé, Laurent Le Gall, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012, p. 355-384.

53 Hearing of Tristan Haute before the Temporary Commission on Democratic Participation 2021.

54 Tom Chevalier, "*La jeunesse dans tous ses États*" [Young people and the Government], 2018, Éditions PUF, p. 251 et seq.

## B. Growing frustration among young people fuelled by short- and long-term expectations that clash with political rationales and time frames

### 1. Unheard voices and concerns ignored: rising anger

It has been established that policies for young people, especially social and economic policies, are not sufficiently adapted to the younger generation. On the contrary, the measures intended for them are often used as adjustment variables in times of crisis, so that the improvement of their living conditions and socio-professional integration depends on the economic health of the country. Similarly, although young people are regularly at the centre of debates and statements by politicians, it is interesting to compare this with the electoral weight they represent, and to add to this the fact that a speech about young people<sup>55</sup> is all too often not addressed to young people themselves, but can also be used to convince a whole other part of the population. Young people represented 17.4% of the population in 2019.<sup>56</sup>

As Jean-Yves Dormagen and Céline Braconnier explain, politicians are elected more by middle class and upper middle class retirees than by young people. Those who are elected or take up responsible positions are more often representative of this part of the electorate. Thus, although young people are often mentioned, they are not heard by public authorities and political players. They are not the target audience of the speeches but rather the main actors of speeches addressed to others.<sup>57</sup>

This has consequences on the political behaviour of these younger generations.

Cécile Van de Velde has explained the reasons for the lack of participation amongst young people and the long-term issues at stake. These are generations that are subjected to demands for adjustment to the system which they found unbearable and these generations then express various types of anger and revolt, demanding radical change.

The protest is reflected in a growing criticism by some young people of *"the rules of the social game to which we are obliged to conform"* and which is expressed in the word "system". Policy measures are not inclusive enough to generate support for the system. It should be noted that this "system" goes much further than the question of political players or institutions. It is a whole, often badly identified, which will jeopardise the overall democratic participation of young people. Central government is seen as powerless, but even worse, sometimes as an actor in this feeling of rejection. This is reflected in the 'closed doors' rhetoric, of which the refusal by employers to allow young middle school students to do a week's unpaid work experience in the

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55 TOPO magazine, "Pourquoi décide-t-on de ne pas voter" [Why do we decide not to vote?], Julien Duriez and Lisa Blumen, issue 33, January-February 2022.

56 Source: INJEP <https://injep.fr/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Chiffres-cles-Jeunesse-2019.pdf>

57 TOPO magazine, "Pourquoi décide-t-on de ne pas voter" [Why do we decide not to vote?], Julien Duriez and Lisa Blumen, issue 33, January-February 2022.

third year of secondary school or, later, having to go through five interviews to get a fixed-term employment contract, can be symptomatic examples of various forms of discrimination.

All this generates less belief in the power of the ballot box, and even in its legitimacy. Among this generation, which is still highly political, the political terrain is not necessarily, or at least not primarily, focused on elections<sup>58</sup>. Cécile Van de Velde will identify different types of anger narratives among French youth:

- **an anger amongst young graduates** fuelled by the following idea: "Society promised me things but I can't actually access them. It takes them away from me." Despite hopes of integration, the feeling of loss of an individual or collective future prevails. This type of anger becomes collective more easily and gains more access to the public space. For example, through the young people heard in the pro-climate demonstrations or the student movements.
- **An anger linked to a feeling of being worn down, less visible but just as present for young people on the margins**, who are less qualified and less privileged and who feel they are losing out, with the idea of efforts being made in vain and efforts that do not work. But this anger is difficult to make collective: how do you collectivise an anger associated with a sense of failure? The work will be done by the individual, who will absorb this anger or social frustration and which translates into loss of self-esteem and mental health problems, in a very solitary way without collective expression of social criticism. In terms of voting, this anger is mainly transformed into low turnout: "I'm not concerned by this system that excludes me; I don't even have the strength to go and vote", but this can also turn into radical votes, with many votes being given to the far right thanks to the image of the insignificant people fighting the bigger players.
- **Anger linked to discrimination**: in France we hear less about this anger than elsewhere, even though there is more and more talk about certain forms of discrimination. This occurs more on social networks, unlike in the United States, where there is a very visible expression of anger with the "Black Lives Matter" movement. In France, this remains a very silent form of anger that is part of people's life paths. The image that we could compare this to is of a person running the same marathon as everyone else but in fact they are starting with a gap that will never be made up. In terms of participation, this anger may translate into a collective commitment to act against discrimination, but there may be a burnout of commitment linked to a feeling of powerlessness.

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58 It should be remembered that the electoral mobilisation of young people, similar to a growing share of the population under 65, is intermittent. It can be high for certain elections where high stakes will be identified (e.g. presidential elections) and low for elections where the stakes are low or poorly identified (e.g. departmental or European elections). Source: Céline Braconnier and Jean-Yves Dormagen, "La démocratie de l'abstention" [The democracy of abstention], Folio Actuel, 2007, p.70 et seq.

## 2. A need for political effectiveness for today and tomorrow

In connection with this growing anger, it would also be interesting to analyse the possible relationship between the period linked to long-term issues (such as the climate and the fight for equality) and the period linked to the way that democracy works and which does not necessarily allow for a response. There is a mismatch between our traditional political system and new, more immediate, more urgent forms of engagement.

However, this questioning is not limited to long-term issues, as illustrated by the discussions with a young person from Marseilles at the Saint-Joseph social centre, which the Temporary Commission visited during its visit to the northern districts of Marseilles on 5 January 2022. For example, in response to the question "Have you ever spoken to your local mayor?", 15-year-old students said that they had already met the mayor and asked for a football stadium and a fountain, but that since it was two years later, they felt that the mayor had lied and therefore could not be trusted. Even on very concrete and 'quick' actions in the political sense, we see a constant mistrust due to insufficient links that do not foster understanding on either side.

Albert Hirschman, a German-American socio-economist, has observed the reactions and resistance of users to the sudden decline in quality of a public service<sup>59</sup>. He notes that reactions vary according to the environment, context and degree of competition for the service. His conclusions, below, are adapted to electoral turnout:

- the "loyalist" attitude: despite discontent, the citizen maintains their attachment to the act of voting and their trust in political organisations. This loyalty may, in some countries where voting is compulsory, be constrained by the existence of fines and/or linked to trends acquired over time (family, individual, linked to the personal history of the individual);
- "expression", which expresses frustration or anger and which can take a variety of forms: signing petitions, sending letters expressing opinions, signing forums, participating in social movements, etc. It can be observed that digital tools greatly facilitate sharing of opinions;
- "Defection", when users boycott a service and/or switch to another provider. In the political field, this would mean renouncing party membership, not going to activists' meetings, abstaining for the first time or returning a blank/spoiled vote, etc.

When the "exit", or "defection" is renewed too often – because there is no answer to the disappointment experienced – this could create a real, deep and lasting "break". If the diversity of the politics on offer ("competition", for Hirschman) does not match requirements either, if investing oneself does not provide any influence and if boycotting becomes permanent, the failure of collective action leads to increased individualism.

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<sup>59</sup> Hirschman, Albert O., *"Exit, Voice and Loyalty: responses to decline in firms, organizations and states"*, Harvard University Press, 1970.

Social behaviour is not a fixed absolute and even in the case of a break there may be episodic participation.

It is difficult for public authorities to hear the various anger and frustration. However, the integration of citizens and the recognition of their commitment to a cause could help make this a turning point, transforming this anger into something positive. A new political process that allows them to be involved and included in decision-making would provide solutions.

## C. Young people: a special type of citizen?

### 1. Some young people in the blind spot of public policies/some public policies in the blind spot of young people

Reducing social and territorial inequalities and enabling young people to fulfil their potential as individuals and citizens requires public policies that support young people's pathways to autonomy, in particular through education, training, social and professional integration, housing, health, safety, educational, sporting and cultural leisure, mobility and engagement.<sup>60</sup>

As Antoine Dulin and Célia Vérot explain in their 2017 report to the Prime Minister entitled "Arrêtez de les mettre dans des cases, pour un choc de la simplification en faveur de la jeunesse" [Stop putting them in boxes, for a simplification process aimed at young people], young people are now thought of in terms of age and status. These statuses are not flexible enough, at a stage life that is particularly conducive to regular changes: secondary school pupil, student, job seeker, worker, unemployed, or neither in employment, education nor training (NEET), etc. This occurs without linear pathways, despite what the previous sentence might suggest.

Each status has new rules which must also be analysed in the light of a multitude of age barriers which are not consistent with the latter. These strict, complex and overlapping criteria will have the effect of alienating young people from public policies, in both directions: public policies will leave out a part of this public and young people themselves will find it increasingly difficult to know that they are beneficiaries (when their status or age allows it) of an existing scheme.

This exclusion of young people from certain public policies is part of a specific and very French perception. Tom Chevalier will explain that this social and economic citizenship is "denied" for young people (Tom Chevalier, 'La citoyenneté refusée de la France' in "*La jeunesse dans tous ses États*" [Young people and the Government], 2018). Thus, young people – although citizens in the eyes of the law – do not enjoy the same rights as all other citizens: whether through the familialisation of aid or through the refusal to open up basic social welfare benefits to the under-25s. Family-based social policies will have an impact on young people's perception of what the state

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60 2022 cross-disciplinary policy document Cross-disciplinary youth policy.

does for them. Therefore, by not directly considering young people, the public action intended for them will be less perceptible.

Moreover, the failure to make civil and social majority coincide produces a double bind. Young people have to become adults and have the same responsibilities without having access to the tools that other adults have.

This game of trust and direct support could therefore have an impact on "political" citizenship. In countries such as Sweden – which is developing an "enabling" social and economic citizenship – trust in institutions and the state by young people is much higher than in France, and in parallel we see much higher turnout rates. Thus, in political models where young people are direct beneficiaries of social policies, they will better perceive the action of the state in their favour and this will be reflected in their willingness to participate in political life, with a better understanding of the issues that may concern them.

However, it is important to show that even within a perfectly identified age group, existing divisions within a generation will cause certain young people to disappear off the radar of public policies, distancing them even more from our democratic system.

One of the main divisions occurs between young graduates and the "*losers of the educational competition*"<sup>61</sup>.

The French school system is particularly good at reproducing social inequalities, which will encourage the failure of young people who experience both social and economic difficulties. Thus, the overemphasis on qualifications and over-qualification will further distance the most disadvantaged from sustainable integration into the labour market. Among 15-29 year olds, one particular category will emerge and grow over the years: NEETs (neither in education, employment nor training). These young people, who are off the radar, number about 1 million in France and are characterised by a low level of qualifications, which has an impact on their integration into the labour market.

## 2. The emancipation of young people, a transition perceived as an obstacle course: what impact does this have on confidence in public authorities?

As Tristan Haute explained during his hearing for the opinion on "Renforcement de la participation aux élections des instances à gouvernance démocratique" [Strengthening participation in the elections of democratically governed bodies], voting and participation are profoundly social actions. Thus, the better integrated a person is, they will have a fuller social life and therefore more confidence in the political system in which they live, and will be more likely to participate.

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61 Camille Peugny, "Jeunesses et classes sociales, apports et angles morts de la lecture générationnelle des inégalités" [Young people and social classes, helps and hindrances to a generation understanding of inequalities] in "*Une jeunesse sacrifiée?*" (Young people: a sacrificed generation?) edited by Tom Chevalier and Patricia Loncle, 2021.

The perception of young people is therefore far from what could be linked today to a global pathway towards autonomy, with difficulties in overcoming inequalities and social integration, and brutal gaps in public policies aimed at them between different statuses and ages. However, a general idea that emerges from many speeches about young people is that it is a period of life that is initiatory and formative, and should lead to the much-vaunted "adult" age. It is a stage that everyone goes through, but with more or less organised pitfalls. Non-take-up of social assistance is a major part of this.

Non-take-up refers to the fact that an individual does not make use of their rights. In France, according to the INJEP<sup>62</sup>, 28% of NEETs and young people with few qualifications, 27% of young jobseekers, 14% of young people in stable employment and 21% of women do not make use of their rights, compared to 16% of men, and 26% of young people earning less than 700 euros per month.

Non-take-up of rights is included in the calculation of budgetary allocations for individual aid, which could be seen as a renunciation on the part of the public authorities of the need to combat non-take-up and to enable young people to become emancipated.

While measures are put in place to support young people in their emancipation process, a form of guilt-tripping is creeping into the process. Some young people are easily portrayed as being unable to manage a budget, with a propensity for laziness – an argument used notably by the political world to justify a family-based policy until the age of 25.<sup>63</sup>

As Léa Lima and Benjamin Vial explain in their article "La jeunesse, l'âge du non-recours ?" ["Youth, the age of non-take-up?], young people have a particular perception of non-take-up. This would be a period of latency between leaving the school system and enrolling in an institution promoting integration. It would also be a life experience, as if it were a rite of passage, all of which would be accentuated by a form of guilt that could set in because you would be living "off the state", without having been able to manage on your own.

All of this can be likened to a kind of "social hazing"<sup>64</sup>, a rite of passage to adulthood which would involve experiencing a "precariousness airlock" for a certain period of time. Ad hoc support may exist for a limited period (e.g. the 18-month Youth Guarantee), with varying conditions depending on the territory (different support from local authorities) and always linked to a status (scholarships for students, allowances for a young person in Civic Service), but young NEETs (neither in employment, nor in education, nor in training) under 25 years of age do not benefit from any safety net, i.e. almost one young person in five<sup>65</sup>.

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62 DJEPVA Barometer 2016.

63 Source: Benjamin Vial and Léa Lima, "La jeunesse: l'âge du non-recours" in "Une jeunesse sacrifiée?" (Young people: a sacrificed generation?), Tom Chevalier and Patricia Loncle, 2021, PUF, pp. 51-52.

64 Michel Fize, "Jeunes à l'abandon, la construction universelle d'une exclusion sociale" [Abandoned youth, the universal construction of social exclusion], 2016.

65 <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/5346969>



This period of life is unfortunately too often romanticised by the media and political players, but it has a strong impact on young people, who have no safety net during this period.

For the young people concerned, this period of precariousness can have wide-ranging consequences: a lengthening of studies leading to stiff competition when entering the labour market, or, on the contrary, a drop-out in order to work, social isolation, or even a loss of confidence in institutions and a strong feeling that society does not trust young citizens. Such precariousness can lead to extreme situations.

#### **Inset 1: The Covid-19 crisis as a typical example**

*For almost two years, young people have been at the centre of many speeches related to the health crisis. The government has asked young people to make "efforts" to protect older people. Young people have often been portrayed as irresponsible in view of certain behaviour, with a presumption of irresponsibility on the part of young people that has never compared to the behaviour of other generations. This is coupled with weak responses to the financial and psychological difficulties of the younger generation, especially during lockdowns and curfews, which have led to an increase in psychiatric admissions, suicide attempts, the use of crisis lines and a massive increase in the number of young people attending food banks and food distributions.*

*The image of young citizens suffers from the weight of stereotypes made about them (an "apathetic", "disengaged" generation), stereotypes that justify the infantilisation of young people. These stereotypes must be overcome because, in addition to the age or generation effect, it is above all "the fact of evolving in a historical time encouraging other uses and other mentalities [that] has more of an impact than that of growing old"<sup>66</sup>*

*The current participation of young people in public life expresses the need to create or recreate mutual trust between political actors and young citizens.*

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66 *Ibid.*

### III - YOUNG CITIZENS PARTICIPATING DIFFERENTLY IN DEMOCRATIC LIFE

#### A. Decreasing turnout among people under 30, but increasing commitment in other forms outside institutions

##### 1. Voter turnout that's been systematically declining in all rounds for all age groups since 2012, particularly for 25- to 29-year-olds

Since 2002, the French people have been called upon to participate in two national elections, each taking place every five years: the presidential election and the general elections. Turnout in at least one round of these national elections has remained stable: among registered voters living in mainland France, about nine out of ten participate in at least one round of these elections. However, turnout in all four election rounds declined in 2017: only four out of ten registered voters participated in every election round compared to five out of ten in the 2002, 2007 and 2012 elections. Also, more and more French people on the electoral roll are only voting in the two rounds of the presidential election: in mainland France, this is the case for 21% of voters.

Systematic turnout in all rounds of elections began declining for almost all age groups from 2012 onwards, and then dropped sharply in 2017. This decline compared to 2012 is generally in excess of ten points, as can be seen in the table below. *"The 2017 national elections thus greatly stand out compared to past elections: for all ages, voter turnout was less in all rounds."*

Turnout rates are not the same across French territory. The ESEC's Delegation for Overseas Territories has indicated that it is the overseas territories where a "systematic low turnout" is most prevalent. In 2017, while nine out of ten registered voters voted in at least one round at the national level, one third of voters in Martinique and Guadeloupe did not vote in any of the elections during the year. In La Réunion, the number of voters who voted systematically (26%) was only slightly higher than the number who systematically did not turnout (23%). In this general context of declining voter turnout in Overseas France, the turnout rate among young people is low regardless of the election. Detailed electoral data are not widely available in overseas territories, since few electoral sociology surveys are conducted. Nevertheless, the published data show a very strong decrease in turnout among young people. Thus, one out of two voters between the age of 18 and 29 years old does not vote in any elections in Overseas France. In Guadeloupe, two out of five voters in the same age bracket did not participate in any of the four votes in 2017.

Table 1 - Voter turnout by age

in %

Age bracket (in years)	Systematically vote				Intermittently vote				Systematically don't turnout			
	2017	2012	2007	2002	2017	2012	2007	2002	2017	2012	2007	2002
18-24	18.00	25.90	31.30	32.40	62.70	57.50	57.90	53.80	19.40	16.60	10.80	13.90
25-29	16.70	27.90	30.10	30.00	59.40	55.30	58.90	51.00	23.90	16.80	11.00	18.90
30-34	23.2	34.3	37.7	35.3	59.0	52.9	53.3	48.7	17.8	12.9	9.0	16.1
35-39	26.9	43.9	46.6	42.8	60.6	48.7	45.5	44.1	12.6	7.4	7.9	13.1
40-44	35.8	45.6	52.1	46.5	55.9	46.7	40.7	42.9	8.3	7.7	7.2	10.7
45-49	35.6	49.9	53.4	51.9	56.2	43.4	40.6	39.3	8.2	6.6	6.0	8.8
50-54	38.8	54.8	57.9	54.3	54.2	39.0	37.2	36.8	7.0	6.2	4.9	8.9
55-59	42.8	57.9	61.5	57.2	50.2	37.4	34.0	36.1	7.0	4.8	4.5	6.6
60-64	44.6	60.4	64.5	59.5	47.9	33.5	31.3	33.8	7.5	6.1	4.2	6.8
65-69	49.7	63.1	66.2	60.4	42.9	32.0	29.4	31.8	7.4	4.9	4.4	7.8
70-74	51.9	65.1	65.1	60.0	39.7	27.5	28.8	31.4	8.4	7.4	6.2	8.6
75-79	50.4	62.7	61.5	56.9	38.5	25.8	28.6	30.6	11.1	11.5	9.9	12.5
80 or over	38.0	44.7	51.0	45.5	32.2	27.4	26.5	25.8	29.9	27.9	22.5	28.7

Interpretation: in 2012, 55% of registered voters aged 50 to 54 years old participated in all rounds of the national elections (systematically vote), 39% participated in one of the rounds (intermittently vote), and 6% did not turnout for any round (systematically don't turnout).

Scope: Registered voters residing in mainland France

Source: Insee, surveys on voter turnout from 2012 to 2017

*"Depending on the age bracket, the atypical character of 2017's elections does not always reflect the same changes in voting behaviour. For the youngest age group (18-24) and the 30-34 age group, the decline in systematic participation rates in 2017 compared to previous years is accompanied by a decrease in systematic turnout and an increase in intermittent voting. Among 25- to 29-year-olds, this decline is mainly due to a decrease in systematic turnout, with little change in intermittent voting."*<sup>67</sup>

However, the age profile of systematic turnout remains the same as in the past. Systematic turnout is low before the age of 30, increases between the ages of 30 and 75, and declines thereafter, particularly from the age of 80.

Finally, a systematic lack out turnout is also on the rise in all age groups, most markedly in the 18-39 age group: more than 5 points higher than in 2012 in each group. In this 18-39 age bracket, it can be noted that 18- to 24-year-olds are less inclined to systematically abstain (only a 2.8% increase compared to 2012), unlike 25- to 29-year-olds, for whom the increase is the highest of all age groups combined (7.1%).

Voters seem to have progressively understood that general elections are always held after the presidential election (since 2002) and simply complete it. As the general elections have so far reinforced the presidential elections, their responsibility is lessened.

<sup>67</sup> Insee Première no. 1671, "Presidential and general elections from 2002 to 2017: Atypical participation in 2017", by Guillemette Buisson and Sandrine Penant, October 2017.

## 2. Voting is therefore less and less of a reflex for young people under 30, who are tending towards "intermittent voting".

Sociologist Anne Muxel notes that *"for the 18-24 age group, whatever the type of election, the rate [of abstention] in recent years has been ten points higher on average than for the population as a whole. In the first round of the 2017 presidential election, as in the 2019 European elections, only a small third of 18- to 24-year-olds turned out to vote."*<sup>68</sup>. Céline Braconnier notes that the evolution in participation rates over a decade (2007-2017) reveals a widening gap between the age group that participates the least, 25- to 29-year-olds, and the one that participates the most, 65- to 69-year-olds. In the first round of the 2017 presidential election, the gap between these two age groups was 18 points, compared to eight points in 2007.

When asked if they had voted in recent years, young people under 30 were fewer in responding positively. While, on average, 74% of all French people say they always or fairly often vote, only 50% of 18- to 30-year-olds say they participate. The age of 30 seems to represent an important threshold, as 82% of the over-30s report that they always or fairly often vote. Moreover, 20% of young people under 30 say they never vote, compared to only 8% of the over-30s and 10% of the general population<sup>69</sup>. This decrease in turnout peaked in the 2021 regional and departmental elections, where 87% of 18- to 24-year-olds did not vote in the first round. There are many possible reasons for this low turnout.

**"Intermittent voting", which is not systematic, is becoming more common among younger generations.** Many young people, including the most highly educated, are distancing themselves from political participation: this political alienation has been referred to as "distant citizenship" in France. The *"duty to vote"* is steadily declining. Voting has thus become just one of several modes of action. "Intermittent voting", the practice of voting in one round and abstaining in the other, is increasing.

As shown by the differences between generations in the 9th edition of the "Fractures françaises" survey conducted in October 2021<sup>70</sup>, the act of voting out of duty is no longer as common. For almost three out of four French people, voting is a duty, but young people are much more divided. Generally speaking, 72% of French people believe that "voting is a civic duty that you should always or almost always carry out", while the remaining 28% believe that "voting is a simple right that you are free to exercise or not". But there is a 30-point gap between the over-60s and the under-35s, 42% of whom think that "voting is a simple right that you are free to exercise or not", compared with only 12% of those aged 60 and over. Indeed, voting remains a civic duty for 88% of those aged 60 and over, but for only 58% of those under 35.

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68 [https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2020/07/02/anne-muxel-le-surcroit-d-abstention-des-jeunes-accentue-le-probleme-pose-a-la-democratie\\_6044899\\_3232.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2020/07/02/anne-muxel-le-surcroit-d-abstention-des-jeunes-accentue-le-probleme-pose-a-la-democratie_6044899_3232.html)

69 Source: CREDOC, Living Conditions and Aspirations survey, Flash Covid-19, April 2020.

70 "Fractures françaises" [Divisions in France] 2017 survey, Wave 5, Ipsos/Sopra Steria for Le Monde, the Jean Jaurès Foundation and Sciences Po ("Programme Viepol") by Brice Teinturier and Vincent Dusseaux.

	Voting is a civic duty that you should always or almost always carry out	Voting is a simple right that you are free to exercise or not
Under 35y/o:	58	42
35-59 y/o	69	31
60 y/o and over	88	12

Source: *"FRACTURES FRANÇAISES" [Divisions in France] 2017 survey, Wave 5, Ipsos/Sopra Steria for Le Monde, the Jean Jaurès Foundation and Sciences Po ("Programme Viepol") by Brice Teinturier and Vincent Dusseaux, p.106*

For Stewart Chau, this structural phenomenon must also be linked to a "contextual abstention" due to the extraordinary health crisis, which complicates the interpretation of the results and may call into question the very legitimacy of the vote.

**Perception of the purpose of voting and its impact on everyday life are important determining factors.** Voting is still seen as useful for changing things for two thirds of French people, but yet again there are differences between generations, although these are smaller than in the previous question. The belief that the outcome of the vote will not have an impact on their daily life is one of the main reasons for abstaining<sup>71</sup>.

**Debates are emerging about whether voting should be seen as a duty or simply as a right.** The conviction that **voting is a duty** was very strongly felt among the pre-war cohorts and is still present among some baby boomers, but this "duty to vote" is no longer the culture of generation X or millennial voters. For these generations, voting is increasingly becoming one of several means of action and not necessarily the most interesting one<sup>72</sup>.

**Still interested in voting, some people are resorting to the blank vote, which consists of placing an empty envelope or one containing a ballot paper without any candidate's name (or any indication in the case of a referendum) in the ballot box<sup>73</sup>.** For the Director of BVA Opinion<sup>74</sup> the blank vote is more an option used by voters with a very acute sense of civic responsibility, who cannot imagine not voting<sup>75</sup>. It is a way of showing their disappointment with the politics on offer.

The law of 21 February 2014 allowed blank ballots to be counted separately and annexed to the minutes. They receive special mention in the ballot results and are

<sup>71</sup> Harris interactive/M6 poll "Les Régionales 2021 : Sondage jour du vote" [2021 Regional elections: Poll on voting day], 20 June 2021.

<sup>72</sup> Hearing of Vincent Tiberj, 10 November 2021.

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.vie-publique.fr/fiches/23931-abstention-vote-blanc-et-vote-nul-quelles-differences>.

<sup>74</sup> "Rapport d'information visant à identifier les ressorts de l'abstention et les mesures permettant de renforcer la participation électorale" [Informational report on the causes of abstention and measures to increase voter turnout], French National Assembly, December 2021.

<sup>75</sup> Adélaïde Zulfikarpasic, "Le vote blanc: abstention civique ou expression politique ?" [The blank vote: civil abstention or political expression?] *Revue française de science politique*, Presses de Sciences Po, 2001/1.

thus no longer assimilated, as was previously the case, to spoiled ballot papers, i.e., ballot papers without an envelope, not in accordance with the regulations, annotated, or torn. However, blank ballots are not taken into account in determining the number of votes cast but various bills have called for them to be included. Similarly, some people, still interested in voting, express their disagreement in the envelope itself (through annotations and various comments, destruction, etc.), which leads to the vote being categorised as "spoiled" and thus invalid.

**In both cases, blank and spoiled votes are always counted as votes not cast.**

According to Jérémie Moualek, the blank and spoiled vote indicates a sort of exclusion of part of the population and the exclusion of several forms of expression that do not have a place in the public arena. For him, the blank and spoiled vote has different uses with three ideal types: refusal to choose out of loyalty to the Elections Act or to a candidate; wanting to vote but disinterested because excluded from the electoral system; a desire to reappropriate one's vote to pass on a message (usually found among rather politically aware and highly educated people but with opinions against institutional politics)<sup>76</sup>.

One of the first reasons given was the lack of trust in the political candidates. The CEVIPOF research centre shows that although the French, like the Italians but more so than the Germans and the British, continue to perceive them negatively, they nevertheless make a clear distinction between public institutions, political institutions and holders of political mandates. This perception among French people still corresponds to a negative view of politics<sup>77</sup>.

### 3. On the other hand, the involvement of young citizens in non-profit organisations is constantly increasing and the modes of participation are diversifying

In its opinion *"Jeunes et politiques publiques : osons ensemble !"* [Young people and public policy: daring together!] of June 2019, the Regional Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESER) of Bourgogne-Franche-Comté stressed that *"the recurrent discourse in our society which suggests that young people no longer wish to be active, to commit themselves, to take responsibility, to vote, is contradicted by numerous studies which show that the reality is more complex"*.

**Youth participation in non-profit organisations and voluntary work is steadily increasing.** In 2020, 38% of young people aged 18 to 30 said they belonged to or participated in the activities of a non-profit organisation, compared with 37% in 2019, 36% in 2018 and 32% in 2017. Within the European Union, young French people are characterised by a high level of participation in non-profit organisations: their participation is 4 points higher than that observed among all young Europeans aged 15 to 30<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> Private interview with Jérémie Moualek, 11 January 2022.

<sup>77</sup> Cevipof Policy brief #1 (sciencespo.fr).

<sup>78</sup> Source: Eurobarometer, "European Youth", EB Flash, no. 455, September 2017. Scope: All young people aged 15-30 living in the European Union (28 countries).

This commitment to non-profit organisations can, moreover, take multiple forms: 29% of young people questioned in the special April 2020 edition of the CREDOC Living Conditions and Aspirations survey even said they belonged to two or more organisations (compared with 22% of older French people).

Enthusiasm for voluntary work is not waning, despite the health crisis that is increasing isolation and worsening living conditions for a large part of the population. While there was marked solidarity among the general population during the lockdown of 2020<sup>79</sup>, young people under the age of 30 were particularly active. 31% of 18- to 30-year-olds report having taken part in at least one civic action during the 2020 lockdown, ranging from donations (13%) to sewing masks or surgical gowns (3%) and even telephoning isolated people (10%)<sup>80</sup>.

The creation of non-profit organisations can come from young people themselves, from the age of 16, or even 14 with parental authorisation, as was indicated during a round table discussion<sup>81</sup> by the General Delegate of the Réseau National Des Juniors Associations (RNJA), a popular education association created in 1998 to enable 11- to 18-year-olds to set up their own project in the form of a non-profit.

As Vincent Tiberj explained during his hearing, *"rather than voting, some individuals prefer to take part in direct actions where they feel like citizens who contribute to changing life; by doing a soup run, handing out food in a soup kitchen, planting trees, going to an AMAP (agricultural organisation), taking part in neighbourhood meetings, participating in non-profits, etc., they are fulfilling a civic duty and feeling like they are doing something useful. However, over time, the way in which political parties operate, which have become professionalised, is 'less and less connected with these non-profit networks': parties that have refocused on elected officials, employees of elected officials, experts in communication, in legal matters... by becoming more professional have lost their connection with society"*<sup>82</sup>.

This discrepancy between voting and engagement was found yet again during the meeting with young people from Marseilles at the Saint Joseph Fontainieu social centre in January 2022: the question "Are you looking forward to voting?" was met with little enthusiasm at the outset and subsequently led to many practical questions about how democracy works. The question "Are you involved in a non-profit organisation?", however, had many positive responses, with several young teenagers doing outreach work, assisting people with disabilities, and helping with CVs and job searches.

**Finally, the ways in which young citizens under the age of 30 participate in political life are diversifying.**

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79 Brice Mansencal L., Coulange M., Maes C., Müller J. (CREDOC), 2020, 2020 Youth Barometer by DJEPVA (Department for Youth, Non-formal Education and Voluntary Organisation), with the collaboration of Baillet J., Guisse N., Hoibian S., Jauneau-Cottet P., Millot C., INJEP, Notes & reports/study report, 2020

80 Opinionway for Heyme, 20 Minutes, "#MoiJeune, confiné et demain ?" [Young and locked down, what about tomorrow?] Barometer Wave 3, April 2020.

81 Round-table talks with non-profit organisations "table-ronde associations", 16 December 2021.

82 Hearing of Vincent Tiberj, 10 November 2021.

On the basis of a hearing with Patricia Loncle, commenting on data from a European study to which she contributed, the CESER of Bourgogne-Franche-Comté identified three ways in which young people participate in politics:

- Formal participation initiated by the public authorities, which can be found in youth and student councils. Forms of participation organised by institutions;
- Non-formal participation carried out through the non-profit sector and popular education movements, in which case participation is organised within a voluntary framework;
- Informal participation structured by young people themselves who meet through collectives, demonstrations, social media. This form of participation is not based on an organised structure.

According to Patricia Loncle, young people are not losing interest in politics, they are simply choosing other means and forms of participation: signing a petition, starting a boycott, organising a protest movement, participating in direct democracy operations, protests, etc.

The use of digital technology is central to these forms of participation: almost one in two young people (47%) signed a petition or defended a cause on the Internet, a blog or social media in 2020. These participation patterns are increasing: + 11 points in five years. Digital technology doesn't need to replace other more traditional forms of involvement, but can increase their impact: the hashtag #DoublePeine, which collected testimonies and was massively relayed on social media, contributed greatly to pushing the government to act on helping female victims of abuse.

The feeling of powerlessness of institutions as well as society's contempt for young people, pushes them to act differently in order to regain a certain degree of control over their lives, as pointed out by Cécile Van de Velde.

In their book "Une jeunesse sacrifiée?" [Young people: a sacrificed generation?], authors Tom Chevalier and Patricia Loncle argue that young people have developed a specific way of getting involved: *"with a strong political scope, while being 'non-formal', i.e. outside institutions yet maintaining institutional links to change public action"*.

Based on the experiences of democratically engaged young people in Rennes, compared with other youth initiatives, they identified a certain number of points common to many forms of participation: the objective of reducing social inequalities affecting young people, *"disenchantment with public authorities perceived as producing inadequate, even unfair, responses in the field of youth policy"*, and horizontal methods inspired by popular education, which are more respectful of the public.

The conclusion of their chapter is rather optimistic: *"In many areas, we are witnessing the emergence of movements led by young people, often highly educated and from the middle classes, who intend to change public action for their generation. The mobilisation capacities of these young people, who are inventing their own channels for political action rather than joining political parties or movements led by*



*public authorities, represent a definite potential for renewal, far from the image of passive young people that doubters of this population might have."*

For Vincent Tiberj and Laurent Lardeux, this investment among young citizens in other types of participation than partisan commitment is the sign of "*a democratic re-enchantment outside traditional political institutions*".

#### 4. Insufficient engagement policies

The involvement of young people outside the electoral framework is difficult to quantify, due to the lack of sufficient tools. As Céline Braconnier pointed out during her hearing before the Temporary Commission, "*we do not have the equivalent of an electoral roll for youth involvement when it takes other forms*".

The observation is that there are few tools for measuring the forms of expression of young people apart from statistics relating to electoral participation or membership of non-profit organisations.

Beyond the forms of voluntary commitment and time given on a one-off or regular basis, young people use a variety of channels: online petitions, participating in demonstrations or boycotts, displaying messages in public places, disseminating online content, adopting a certain lifestyle (a less polluting lifestyle, distancing themselves from consumer society, alternative lifestyles that demonstrate their commitments on a daily basis)<sup>83</sup>.

As Patricia Loncle and Tom Chevalier summarised in their interview, the commitment of young people is increasingly taking place outside institutional frameworks and therefore outside the forms of commitment organised and/or recognised by public authorities in the creation of public policies.

Moreover, stereotypes persist about the supposedly "apathetic" attitude of a disengaged, individualistic youth who are not interested in civic life<sup>84</sup>.

This alarmist argument contributes to the fact that young people are not seen by public authorities and politicians as active citizens to be recognised and in whom they should take an interest, which sometimes leads to a rejection of their cultural expression<sup>85</sup>. As Vincent Tiberj mentioned during his hearing before the Temporary Commission, young people are very often seen as a problem, or as a source of concern.

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83 As described by Cécile Van de Velde in her chapter "Trois types de colères" [Three types of anger] in "*Une jeunesse sacrifiée?*" [*Young people: a sacrificed generation?*], Tom Chevalier, Patricia Loncle, PUF, 2021.

84 This is similar to the way young people were portrayed in the media during the early days of the health crisis. Reporter interview with Patricia Loncle and Tom Chevalier, 2022.

85 Reporter interview with Patricia Loncle and Tom Chevalier, 2022.

## **How should public authorities promote engagement?**

### **Recognition of engagement in education**

With the 2017 Equality and Citizenship Act, involvement in non-profit organisations must be recognised within the initial training curriculum provided by higher education institutions. This provision brought consistency to a previously optional scheme.

However, the law does not establish a strict framework for showing engagement during a student's career. Thus, the actual method of recognition varies from one university to another: ECTS credits, bonus, a diploma supplement, etc.<sup>86</sup>. Furthermore, some institutions provide dedicated time for engagement within their courses, but this is not the case for all. For example, the University of Strasbourg has created an institutional diploma on democratic engagement in order to make it an official qualification, and to recognise the skills acquired through such action. It is still the only university to have taken this initiative.

Thus, in view of these disparities, engagement will not be the same between a student who can include it in their curriculum, and one who will not receive any support from their institution.

A parallel can be drawn with the schemes in place in secondary schools to encourage student engagement. The implementation and work of class delegates, eco-delegates or representatives in school councils are very uneven depending on the school, and no school time is set aside for performing such a role<sup>87</sup>. As a result, these positions are usually filled by "good" students<sup>88</sup>, who can miss school time without it impacting their education.

Engagement during secondary to higher education is generally promoted as a "bonus", rather than as a learning tool that complements national education and training.

A parallel can be drawn with the validation of voluntary experience, a system that makes it possible to value the skills acquired through voluntary work in the professional sphere. However, the ESEC noted in 2019 *"that a certain number of obstacles (cultural barriers, lack of promotion, lack of knowledge on the part of organisation leaders, cost, absence of a reference diploma, etc.) severely limit the use of this system."*<sup>89</sup>

Beyond the situation of young students, young non-students also need their commitment outside the school and university context recognised.

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86 French Ministry of Higher Education and Research: <https://www.enseignementsup-recherche.gouv.fr/fr/reconnaissance-de-l-engagement-des-etudiantes-dans-la-vie-associative-sociale-et-professionnelle-49097>.

87 Opinion *"Comment renforcer la participation aux élections des instances à gouvernance démocratiques ?"* [How can participation in the elections of democratic governance bodies be strengthened?] by Thierry Cadart, 2021.

88 INJEP (French National Institute for Youth and Non-formal Education), "l'engagement dans le cadre du collège, une affaire de bons élèves?" [Involvement in school councils: for good students only?]: [https://injep.fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/IAS53\\_engagement-college.pdf](https://injep.fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/IAS53_engagement-college.pdf)

89 Opinion *"Education populaire, une exigence du 21ème siècle"* [popular education, a requirement of the 21st century], by Jean-Karl Deschamps and Christian Chevalier, 2019.



- **Civic Engagement Account (CEC)**

The Civic Engagement Account is open to everyone from the age of 16, or 15 if they have signed an apprenticeship contract (employees, jobseekers, public servants, the self-employed, students, stay-at-home parents, pensioners). The CEC records activities undertaken as a volunteer or a tutor that can be used to acquire training rights, which are registered in the personal training account (CPF). This is an example of valuing civic engagement.

- **Civic service**

Civic service is one of the forms of engagement recognised and supported by public authorities. Managed by a government agency, civic service allows young people aged 16 to 25 to get involved in a mission within a non-profit organisation or a public administration for a period of 6 to 12 months, for 24 to 35 hours a week. The young person receives an allowance of approximately €580 per month for this mission, of which €473.04 are paid by the State and €107.58 by the host structure. Launched in 2010, more than 400,000 young people took part in the scheme in 2020<sup>90</sup>.

The choice of the mission is up to the young person, who can decide to work in one of the 10 areas proposed in relation to social cohesion, international solidarity, culture, etc. The young person is mentored by the host organisation.

Civic service in its current form manages to interest a number of young people, even if some remain more removed from the scheme. This is particularly the case for NEETs<sup>91</sup> as Béatrice Angrand, Director of Civic Service, pointed out during her hearing before the Temporary Commission. Furthermore, due to the geographical coverage of civic service missions, young people in rural areas have more difficulty in accessing a mission as there are fewer on offer<sup>92</sup>.

61% of the volunteers are women, 17% are school dropouts and 12% come from disadvantaged "priority" urban areas. The average age of the volunteers is around 21<sup>93</sup>. It seems necessary to note that young people with a general education background are over-represented.

The generalisation of civic service has enabled many young people to take a break on their path to adulthood and independence, in the form of a period of civic engagement that allows them to fulfil a personal need or aspiration, but also to develop social and material skills.

As such, the proposed remuneration is important since it is supposed to provide a degree of security to the young person by enabling them to acquire relative financial independence during the period of the mission. This helps to promote engagement as an essential learning tool, but also to encourage all young people, including the most precarious who do not have a safety net, to sign up for this scheme. However, the low

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90 INJEP (French National Institute for Youth and Non-formal Education), "Les volontaires en service civique, des parcours de formation et d'insertion variés" [Civic service volunteers, varied training and integration paths], 2020: [https://injep.fr/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/lAS32\\_-volontaires-en-Service-Civique.pdf](https://injep.fr/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/lAS32_-volontaires-en-Service-Civique.pdf)

91 Not in education, employment or training. Term used on a European scale.

92 Béatrice Angrand hearing before the ESEC Temporary Commission on Democracy, 2022.

93 Ibid.

monthly remuneration remains a barrier for the most precarious young populations. The current amount (€580) is less than half the amount of the poverty line (€1,11394), which does not provide financial security for a young person in full-time civic service.

However, remuneration should not take focus off the initial objective of civic service: to commit time to a mission of public interest. The assignment carried out by the young person should not be used by the structure to compensate for an excessive workload and/or a lack of personnel.

The risk of job substitution and misuse of civic service missions remains a reality for host structures faced with the decrease in public funding. The increase in the number of civic service contracts must not give way to the excesses encountered in previous decades with initiatives such as the "community service" (TUC) and "subsidised contracts" schemes: favouring a short-term quantitative objective of increasing the number of contracts to the detriment of the quality of the support and training and therefore to the detriment of long-term integration for the person concerned. In its 2017 opinion "Service Civique, quel bilan ? Quelles perspectives ?" [Civic Service, what assessment? What prospects?], the ESEC pointed out this risk of substitution, while affirming the relevance of the scheme and its generalisation (although in 2016 there were four times more requests than offers of missions), provided that it offers "quality missions" and, in this respect, makes suggestions to *"better match civic service missions to the projects of host structures and volunteers"*<sup>95</sup>.

It should be noted that the Civic Service Agency conducts regular surveys to ensure the quality of the missions offered by approved organisations and their compliance with conditions<sup>96</sup>. This seems all the more important since, the civic service mission being a civic engagement scheme, the provisions of the labour code are not applicable and young people are therefore in a vulnerable situation if the mission does not take place under adequate conditions<sup>97</sup>. Moreover, as Sarah Bilot, General Delegate of Animafac, pointed out during a round table organised by the Temporary Commission, civic service must not become a "waiting period" for entering the labour market.

The increase in civic service mentioned above must not lead to an uncontrolled surge and a reduction in obligations for host structures. The inclusion of the scheme in the "1 jeune, 1 solution" [1 young person, 1 solution] initiative in the summer of 2020 is indeed a worrying sign in this respect.

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94 Poverty, purchasing power, employment: statistics tested in everyday life | French Treasury (economie.gouv.fr).

95 Study "Service Civique, quel bilan ? Quelles perspectives ? [Civic service, what assessment? What prospects?], Jean-François Serres, Julien Blanchet, ESEC, 2017 <https://www.lecese.fr/travaux-publies/service-civique-quel-bilan-queelles-perspectives>.

96 Béatrice Angrand hearing before the ESEC Temporary Commission on Democracy, 2022.

97 Source: website of the civic service agency.

Despite this, 96% of young people who have completed a civic service mission were satisfied with the experience. For 44% of them, it incited a desire to continue their commitment, a desire that materialised for 39%, which shows that although it is a temporary mission, it makes young people want to persevere with their commitment.

- **National Service (SNU)**

The National Service (SNU) is a scheme currently being tested. A distant legacy of the compulsory military service suspended in 1997, it is aimed at young people aged 15 to 17, who take part in a two-week social cohesion programme. It was introduced in 2019 and is currently voluntary, although the government has stated its ambition to make it mandatory in the coming years. For the year 2021, the SNU received 15,000 young people.

The SNU is divided into two parts: the first takes place in a centre. During this so-called "social cohesion" phase, the young people attend various workshops and are partly supervised by the military.

In the second phase, each young person must carry out a mission of general interest (MIG) for a total of 84 hours spread over the whole year.

A survey conducted by the INJEP (French National Institute for Youth and Non-formal Education) on the uptake of this scheme has highlighted two trends that are emerging from the trial.

On the one hand there are the young people who voluntarily applied and are mostly satisfied with their experience. On the other hand are the "non-volunteers". This concerns 1 in 10 young people who participated in the scheme and report that they were forced into it, usually by their families. Among these "non-volunteers", the satisfaction rate is more nuanced, with less interest in the scheme. From this point of view, the overall feeling of satisfaction is difficult to *"extrapolate to the perspective of a compulsory national service"*<sup>98</sup>.

Moreover, a key factor that must also be taken into account when interpreting satisfaction is the family context of the young people who have experienced the SNU since its introduction. The INJEP notes that 10% of the young people who took part in the scheme had at least one parent working in the police, army or fire brigade, and 37% had at least one parent who had previously worked in these professions. Yet, the police and military represent only 1% of the working population. This context, combined with the choice of these volunteers to choose a mission in a uniformed service, suggests a path that is intrinsically linked to a career objective. Indeed, 53% of the participants choose the army to carry out their general interest mission, 43% choose the police, and 34% choose the fire brigade<sup>99</sup>. Among non-volunteers, however, this is less of a trend.

Since the launch of the scheme, many concerns have been raised within youth, student and popular education organisations to warn against a compulsory scheme,

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98 INJEP, "Déploiement du service national universel en 2021, satisfaction des jeunes volontaires" [Deployment of national service in 2021, satisfaction of young volunteers], 2021: [https://injep.fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/IASS1\\_SNU.pdf](https://injep.fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/IASS1_SNU.pdf)

99 Ibid.

which goes against the very definition of civic engagement, which implies a voluntary approach. The Mouvement Associatif organisation reiterated its conviction that successful engagement is a voluntary commitment, allowing each person to develop their citizenship through a mission that is all the more empowering as it is chosen and co-constructed<sup>100</sup>. The Student Associations Federation (FAGE), the French Youth Forum (FFJ) and the National Union of Students of France (UNEF) expressed their position at a round table organised by the Temporary Commission<sup>101</sup>. The FFJ called for vigilance with regard to this type of short-term civic engagement discovery scheme without sufficient, long-term support.

Furthermore, as the scheme takes off, the issue of the increase in the number of "non-volunteers" (19% of whom are currently dissatisfied with their SNU experience) needs to be broached. This also raises material questions, as 61% of non-volunteers "are not enthusiastic about the idea of carrying out the general interest mission<sup>102</sup>". In a process where 84 hours spread over a year already requires a great deal of logistics for the host organisations, these structures will certainly have to welcome an increasing number of young people who will never have shown the desire to commit themselves through volunteering, thus raising the question of "should we force them?".

- **Defence and Citizenship Day (JDC)**

Carried out before the age of 18 (or 25 depending on certain criteria), based on the national census, this day is an opportunity to provide information on French institutions, but also on the rights and duties of citizens. In addition, the Defence and Citizenship Day acts as a forum to discuss the issues and objectives of national defence, the various forms of engagement, equality between men and women, the fight against gender prejudice, and the fight against physical, psychological and sexual violence. Lastly, this day allows young citizens to be assessed on the fundamental learning of the French language. However, the one-day time frame seems insufficient given the number of topics that need to be addressed.

- **Youth councils**

With regional youth councils, departmental youth councils, municipal youth councils etc., bodies dedicated to young people are developing all across the country at the initiative of local authorities. Stemming from the Equality and Citizenship Act, these councils aim to make the voice of young people heard, to participate in politics and to work on the place of young people in local life. However, the voice of young people is too often confined to youth issues, which suggests that they only have an opinion on policies that directly concern them. Yet, as citizens of today and tomorrow, they have an opinion on all public policies, as demonstrated by the major environmental, equality and anti-discrimination issues that are often at the centre of the younger generations' civic actions.

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<sup>100</sup> [https://lemouvementAssociatif.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/LMA\\_CP\\_27062018\\_SNU\\_OK.pdf](https://lemouvementAssociatif.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/LMA_CP_27062018_SNU_OK.pdf)

<sup>101</sup> Round table organised by the Temporary Commission on 15 December 2021 with the presence of Animafac, FFJ, UNEF, Jeunes Agriculteurs and FAGE.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

Moreover, these councils, while they allow young people to discuss political issues and projects to be implemented, have no decision-making powers. As a result, their power to act is very limited and depends on the goodwill of the local authorities to which they are attached. The same criticism was made in the ESEC opinion "Renforcement de la participation aux élections des instances à gouvernance démocratique" [Strengthening participation in the elections of democratically governed bodies] with regard to citizens' councils.

Lastly, it should be noted that the methods of appointing young people to these councils vary from one council to another, due to the lack of a predefined framework. Therefore, they can be composed of young elected representatives from secondary schools, or from associations designated by local authorities, or from those elected at the local level. This necessarily raises the question of the representativeness of young people within these bodies, which in reality are only open to a small number of young people.

- **Structured dialogue**

In addition, the 2017 Equality and Citizenship Act also made it compulsory to use the structured dialogue method at national level. Structured dialogue is a method of civic participation that allows citizens to be involved in the construction, implementation and monitoring of public policies. First used at European level, where it has produced interesting results, it is now applicable to regions at national level. Structured dialogue is part of long cycles, generally lasting 18 months, during which young people become acclimatised, exchange with elected officials, and gain competence on the political subject in question with the aim of bringing their vision, experience and expectations to the table. At the end of the 18 months, there is a political conclusion, the form of which is predefined but the substance depends on the outcome of the collaboration. Working methods are left open and popular education organisations usually play an important role in this process. It is the CNAJEP (Committee for National and International Relations between Youth and Non-formal Education Associations) that coordinates the implementation of structured dialogue in France. However, as the organisation points out, in the absence of an implementing decree for Article 54 of the Equality and Citizenship Act, the regions have the choice of whether or not to set up the system<sup>103</sup>.

## B. Elements for analysing changes in modes of participation of young citizens

### 1. The relationship of different generations with democracy has evolved over the last forty years

- **Relationship with democracy: rather than rejecting it, younger generations are more demanding**

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<sup>103</sup> Eva Baronnet's presentation at the round table organised on 16 December 2021 as part of the Temporary Commission's work on democratic participation.



A stronger distrust of democratic institutions by new generations compared to their elders is regularly evoked with pessimism. The uncertain effect on democracy in the long term is reflected in the term "democratic deconsolidation"<sup>104</sup>.

The European Values Study<sup>105</sup>, which compares the values of generations over forty years, shows that generations born after 1980 place less importance than their elders on living in a democratic system. On average, on a scale of 1 to 10, individuals born between 1940 and 1949 give a score of 9/10 to the importance of being governed democratically, while for those born after 1990 this score drops to 8.3, the lowest score of any generation.

**However, it appears that it is the content of democracy that is questioned by the younger generations.** Indeed, the survey sets out a series of propositions (e.g. "people choose their leaders in free and fair elections") and asks respondents whether they think this is an "essential feature of democracy". However, the younger generations are more demanding in their judgement of the democratic character of France, especially compared to the generations born before the 1950s. Thus, generations born after 1990, but also those born between 1970 and 1979, place more importance than older generations on free and fair elections.

- ***This demanding nature is not linked to age but to generation, which also applies to baby boomers***

More specifically, the relationship with politics differs according to age group, but the most atypical age group is not the 18- to 29-year-olds, who are very close to the other age groups in terms of the distrust expressed towards parties, the government or parliament, or the declared interest in politics and the fact of staying informed about politics. It is in fact the baby-boomer generation, which is characterised by a much higher level of electoral participation and allegiance to political organisations.

For Laurent Lardeux, the real difference lies with the generation of over-65s, who have a very different voting culture marked by civic duty and loyalty to partisan organisations.

Between the 18- to 29-year-olds and all the groups of a working age there are in fact strong convergences, even if young people are a greater reflection of what can be observed elsewhere in citizenship practices<sup>106</sup>.

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<sup>104</sup> Foa and Mounk, hearing of Vincent Tiberj, 10 November 2021.

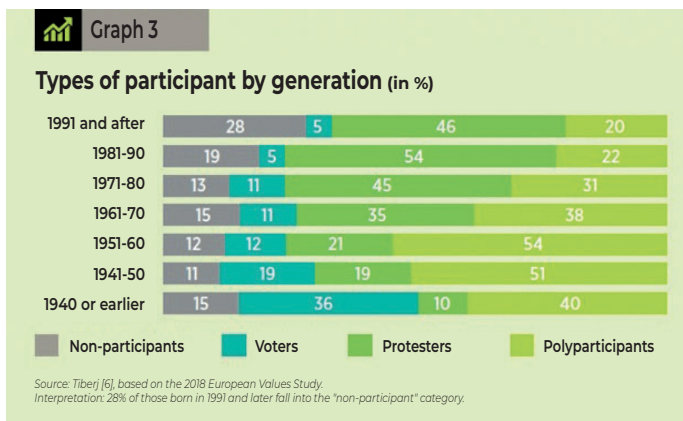
<sup>105</sup> The European Values Study conducted in France by the Association for Research on Value Systems (ARVAL) supported by INJEP and carried out for the first time in 1981 is renewed every nine to ten years. It allows comparisons over almost forty years in different fields: politics, institutions, family, religion, work, social norms, engagement and participation in organisations. The 2018 edition included a sample of 1,870 people aged 18 and over and an additional sample of 721 young people (18 to 29 years old) to gain a more detailed understanding of young people's value systems, their specificities and possible differences with other age groups (INJEP, "La démocratie à l'épreuve de la jeunesse : une (re)génération politique ?" [Democracy put to the test by young people: a political (re)generation?] March 2021).

<sup>106</sup> "Régionales 2021 : On observe une abstention des jeunes plus forte à chaque élection, mais une participation soutenue aux mouvements de protestation" [2021 Regionals: We can observe a lower turnout rate among young people at each election, but a sustained participation in protest movements] (lemonde.fr).

The current data do not therefore correspond to an "age effect", i.e. the fact of "falling in line with representative democracy" once one has grown up and accepted its principles and rules. For Vincent Tiberj, this hypothesis no longer holds true: it is rather a "generation effect" specific to the French baby boomers, who clearly stand out from the younger generations. The coming generational renewal therefore implies a significant political and democratic renewal in the coming years.

Indeed, in the democratic system, different types of participant (and non-participant) exist:

- "protesters", who vote only occasionally, but have already protested (petition, demonstration, boycott, illegal strike);
- "voters", citizens who systematically vote, but refrain from protesting;
- "polyparticipants", who vote systematically and have already protested;
- "non-participants", who systematically do not vote and have never protested.



Sources: "La démocratie à l'épreuve de la jeunesse : une (re)génération politique ?" [Democracy put to the test by young people: a political (re)generation?] Laurent Lardeux and Vincent Tiberj, INJEP Analyses et synthèses, 12 March 2021

The graph shows differences between the cohorts, especially at the two ends:

- the youngest, born in 1991 and after, for whom protest is the most common form of political participation and expression;
- and the older generations, who are more reticent about alternative forms of participation and remain very attached to voting and electoral participation.

Between these two extremes, the "baby boomers" stand out: these individuals used protest forms (petition, demonstration, boycott, illegal strike) when they were young, and more than half of them continue to protest and vote as they get older. 51% of those born between 1941 and 1950 and even 54% of those born between 1951 and 1960 continue to be polyparticipants, i.e., citizens who vote systematically and who have also protested.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>107</sup> "La démocratie à l'épreuve de la jeunesse : une (re)génération politique ?" [Democracy put to the test by young people: a political (re)generation?] Laurent Lardeux, study and research officer at INJEP, Vincent Tiberj, university professor, Sciences Po Bordeaux, researcher at the Centre Emile Durkheim, INJEP Analyses et recherches no. 46, March 2021.

## 2. Contrary to what was expected, when education was made more accessible to the masses it did not lead to an increase in voter turnout but to an increase in "distant citizens"

- **Increased accessibility to education has not produced the expected results in terms of participation**

In the 1970s, the American political scientist Ronald Inglehart postulated that the rising educational level of the new generations would lead to an increase in declared interest in politics, with young citizens being both more critical and more involved and mobilised in political parties. However, even though youth engagement has been increasing, this prediction of involvement in political parties has not come to fruition.

Young French people have benefited from the increase in the level of education over the generations. In 1985, the proportion of baccalaureate holders in a generation was 29%, and reached 87% in 2020. This proportion first increased by more than 30 points between 1985 and 1995, with the increase affecting all types of baccalaureate, but especially the general baccalaureate (+17 points). It then stabilised until 2010, before growing again.

But this general increase in educational achievement has in fact resulted in an increase in the number of "distant citizens". As Vincent Tiberj points out, because of their increased level of political knowledge, they are citizens who are not easily influenced. Knowledge no longer creates appetite, but "*disenchanted citizens who are no longer enthusiastic about the political sphere*". Gradually, individuals are emerging who turn out to be graduates, and therefore theoretically have the means to exercise their role as citizens: the means to obtain and process information, to use the Internet, etc., but who say they are not interested in politics. Because of the way politics is practised, these citizens are now distancing themselves from the political system.<sup>108</sup>

- **Moral and civic education that's too theoretical and marginalised in practice**

Moral and civic education, as currently practised in France, may also be an elucidatory variable, as it remains (when it is actually implemented) very theoretical, whereas pupils themselves are in favour of practical learning<sup>109</sup>. This could be based, for example, on voting simulations conducted through the organisation "Électeurs en herbe", or direct testimonies by professionals in schools and simulations of parliamentary debates by pupils set up by the organisation "Parlons démocratie".

Current moral and civic education is marginalised and not valued by young people, teachers or the Ministry of Education. In an evaluation report on citizenship education, the Cour des Comptes (court of audits) noted the lack of this subject in pupils' timetables (one hour per week in primary schools and half an hour in junior

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<sup>108</sup> Vincent Tiberj hearing.

<sup>109</sup> ESEC Opinion "*Renforcement de la participation aux élections des instances à gouvernance démocratique*" [*Strengthening participation in the elections of democratically governed bodies*], December 2021.

school and secondary school) and the pressure on teachers to finish the syllabus, which tends to make this subject an "adjustment variable". Between two thirds and half of the hours expected by the curriculum are not actually implemented, far below what is foreseen in the official syllabuses. During an inspection of History-Geography which includes moral and civic education, it is history and geography subjects that are inspected as a priority<sup>110</sup>.

Furthermore, teachers do not necessarily receive adequate initial and continued training in moral and civic education.

### 3. Young people do not show a real lack of interest in information, but they have a different relationship with it in a context where they have to deal with fake news and conspiracy theories

The widespread use of social media is characteristic of the younger generations, especially for getting information. 73% of 16- to 25-year-olds use these networks for informational purposes<sup>111</sup>. The possibility of finding information oneself is favoured over the simple vertical transmission of knowledge and corresponds to the quest for autonomy and horizontality of these generations.

Nevertheless, the Internet can facilitate the dissemination of false or misleading information to the detriment of an informed exchange of views. Techniques for spreading disinformation online are constantly evolving. The Bronner Commission's report entitled "Enlightenment in the Digital Age", published on 11 January 2022, takes stock of the misinformation on social media and the "democratic disruption" caused by the prevalence of automatic "programmable advertising", which leads to targeted content. The more shocking a piece of information is, the more clicks it gets and the more algorithms contribute to shaping behaviour, attitudes, representations of the surrounding world or beliefs without being directly responsible for them. However, it is worth noting that, according to a study on the 2016 US campaign, the over-65s spread seven times more "fake news" than the 18-29s<sup>112</sup>.

In its report "*Réseaux sociaux numériques : comment renforcer l'engagement citoyen ?*" [*Digital social media: how can civic commitment be reinforced?*], the ESEC recognised the power of social media as a tool for mobilisation and the risks associated with this technology. The ESEC recommended encouraging media initiatives aimed at deciphering fake news and ensuring transparency on how algorithms function<sup>113</sup>.

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<sup>110</sup> Round-table talks with non-profit organisations "table-ronde associations", 16 December 2021.

<sup>111</sup> Diplomeo's "Parole aux jeunes" [Voice of Youth] study, conducted among 1,454 young people aged 16 to 25 in December 2018: [https://diplomeo.com/actualite-sondage\\_reseaux\\_sociaux\\_jeunes](https://diplomeo.com/actualite-sondage_reseaux_sociaux_jeunes).

<sup>112</sup> Blog: "Génération Z : Comment les jeunes utilisent les réseaux sociaux en France (enfants, adolescents, jeunes adultes)" [Generation Z: How young people use social media in France (children, adolescents, young adults)] (digimind.com).

<sup>113</sup> "*Réseaux sociaux numériques : comment renforcer l'engagement citoyen ?*" [*Digital social media: how can civic commitment be reinforced?*] The Economic, Social and Environmental Council (lecese.fr).

There are actions that can counterbalance the negative influence of the media. Thus, in his hearing with a young audience, Hugo Travers, creator of the YouTube and Instagram channel "HugoD crypte", showed the success of condensed and decrypted information in the form of videos of varying length: 1 or 2 minutes on Instagram, shorter formats for a younger audience on TikTok, and 3, 20, 40 and 60 minutes on YouTube and Twitch, with a weekly show of 20 to 30 minutes.

By ensuring the accessibility of content, without denying its complexity, it is possible to successfully educate. This offer of content on major current affairs topics thus meets a real demand: Travers' YouTube channel has more than 1.8 million subscribers, 60% of whom are aged 18 to 24, while on Instagram and TikTok he has 1.4 million and 1 million followers respectively. Subscription is free to ensure accessibility of information, with revenue sources provided by advertising, partnerships and donations. Short content can also contain links to longer content to enable a deeper understanding of a topic. Topics that generate high interest may be a 20-minute interview with Franois Hollande or international issues such as the plight of the Uighurs rather than the "sound bites" and "clashes" that are highlighted on mainstream media.

# Chapter 2: Recommendations

## Introduction

In the wake of the findings of this opinion, the ESEC is sounding the alarm about what appears to be a generation that is too far removed from, and sometimes feels left out of, a democratic process that no longer resonates with them. We have observed that the topic of democratic participation in young people covers many different fields and effects encountered by young people in our country. We have noted that, in addition to a general erosion of participation and an age effect, there is now a generational effect which places us at a turning point for our democracy: if nothing is done, the low participation among young people today could very well continue beyond their youth, which would then call our whole system into question.

We cannot look for solutions to the current low level of involvement without questioning the organisation of our democratic system as a whole, because the former is the product of the latter. Low turnout (or abstention) at elections, other than that caused by practical obstacles to voting, often reflects a feeling of distrust of the system in place and the politics on offer. It is important to consider the extent of abstention, to analyse and understand its causes, propose solutions to reinvigorate our democratic system, and then to determine a threshold where an alarm will be raised to force us to examine the health of our democracy and react accordingly.

The recommendations we are making are therefore aimed at bringing young people closer to our democratic system, with the main driver being to fully recognise their engagement, to enable them to participate in community life and to ensure that their voice is recognised and has some effect. Although intended to have an effect on young people, these recommendations are of course general in scope. All our recommendations will require the necessary resources to implement these reforms and create the conditions for participation: financial resources, but also human, material and logistical resources. This effort must allow us to bring about well-considered changes to the democratic, political and institutional system in which we live, convinced as we are that this is the normal process of evolution in a society.

As the work progressed, the ESEC realised that each individual recommendation taken in isolation would not be sufficient. It is systemic change, a relationship to be re-established, a taking into account of new interests and new aspirations of young people that will allow for a wide-ranging evolution and that will enable this generation, a generation moving further and further away from traditional participation in our representative democracy, to re-engage.

In this sense, any recommendation that might appear to be technical or organisational is in fact always guided by in-depth political reflection. In addition to alterations to certain arrangements, they will have to be combined with a profound change in the democratic system to favour positive inclusion of young people in that system.

## I - FOR MORE DEMANDING AND RENEWED INVOLVEMENT IN DEMOCRACY

### A. Ensure active education about democracy from kindergarten onwards to encourage people to be actively engaged citizens from an early age

The findings showed that moral and citizenship education was inadequate, an observation shared by the Court of Accounts in its report on citizenship training submitted in November 2021. This report also extends this observation to media and information literacy which is the "poor relation". However, processing and deciphering information are necessary to exercise a role as a citizen against a backdrop of multiplying information sources. An introduction to sociology and political science is also a missing element in the younger generation's education. The very description of "moral and citizenship education" can also be questioned.

To become real skills and knowledge, the teaching of civic education and media & information literacy requires the use of interactive methods, such as simulated parliamentary debates, simulated elections or indeed the organisation of dialogues with institutions.

On the proposal of the Delegation for Overseas Territories, the ESEC also recommends ensuring that the powers and statuses specific to overseas local authorities are better known to the general public.

In its opinion on *"Renforcement de la participation aux élections des instances à gouvernance démocratique"* [Strengthening participation in the elections of democratically governed bodies], published on 15 December 2021, the ESEC advocates "continuous learning by doing" with teamwork and "cooperative education" to "boost social links and learning about citizenship at school". In its opinion *"Réseaux sociaux numériques : comment renforcer l'engagement citoyen ?"* [Digital social media: how can civic commitment be reinforced?] submitted in January 2017, the ESEC recommends developing educational practices that incorporate digital technology and in particular the use of social media to "enable students to have both a critical view of these tools and knowledge of responsible practice in this area".

Submitted to the French President on 11 January 2022, the Bronner report "Les Lumières à l'ère numérique" (Enlightenment in the digital age) also recommends improving media and information education, with developing the teaching of critical thinking as an addition. Improved learning about debates and elections from kindergarten on age-appropriate issues would prepare young people for actually exercising their right to vote from the age of 16, as is the practice in some other European countries.

In this regard, the provision of practical training for teachers about institutions, the issues at stake in elections and changes in the media, in addition to the current syllabus on *"embodying, living and transmitting the values of the Republic"*, would be needed<sup>114</sup>.

This training would benefit from being developed practically through regular meetings involving elected representatives and staff from French institutions (magistrates, prefects, administrators, engineers, etc.), journalists and editors-in-chief, in a similar way to the actions undertaken by the non-profit "Parlons démocratie", which meets the expectations of the students and teachers we met.

### Recommendation 1

The ESEC recommends reforming moral and citizenship education. This will produce enlightened citizens, via continuous learning from an early age through the practice of civic education, critical thinking, and media and information literacy. This learning will be grouped into a specific curriculum subject in connection with other lessons and the practice of school life in schools and institutions. To promote learning by doing, schools and institutions should involve popular (non-formal) education organisations, organised civil society and, in the form of partnerships, local and regional authorities.

Initial and continuous training will have to be adapted to provide this education.

### Recommendation 2

The ESEC recommends lowering the voting age to 16. This must be accompanied by education about elections from an early age following a democratic continuum.

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<sup>114</sup> Continuing education master plan, Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports: Continuing education | Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports.



## Dissensus

The Agriculture, Crafts and Professions, Cooperation, Enterprise and Families groups have reservations about this Recommendation 2, as allowing voting at age 16 is a matter of some debate, including and importantly among young people themselves.

The hearings showed (see pages 21 and 22 of this opinion) that there is a real controversy about the effects of voting at 16 on young people's abstention in elections. They believe that an in-depth assessment of the sociological and electoral impact of voting at 16 is needed. These groups are in favour of starting a public debate on the voting age and consider that this reform cannot take place without continuous learning about the democratic process from an early age. The education of informed citizens as recommended in Recommendation 1 is a prerequisite for the right to vote at 16.

It would also be a good time to consider consistency between the age of majority and voting age. Finally, an experiment in the context of municipal elections, in line with Recommendation 3, would be likely to shed light on the debate and test the appropriateness of such a reform.

## Recommendation 3

With a view to passing on knowledge and boosting the value of the electoral process, the ESEC recommends that, for each polling station, an educational invitation from the town hall be sent to newly-registered young people explaining the role of assessor (a person who helps with running a polling station) inviting them to become assessors themselves on election day, together with more experienced assessors. Those who act as assessors must be given an appropriate entry on their citizenship engagement account (their "CEC").

## Recommendation 4

As part of a citizenship education programme for the entire age group, the ESEC recommends reusing the funds initially earmarked for Universal National Service to transform Defence and Citizenship Day into a citizenship week introducing the forms of engagement and the issues at stake in elections. This week outside the confines of school, with the participation of non-profits or institutions, would supplement the "engagement week" and the "school democracy week" organised in schools, which must be implemented in an egalitarian manner for all young people across France.

## B. Develop and maintain reciprocal links between young people, French institutions and civil society organisations

### 1. Explain the role of French state institutions in the school curriculum and extracurricular activities of young people

During the Temporary Commission's visit to the northern neighbourhoods of Marseilles, a young person reported, "We went up to Paris with our association, we visited the National Assembly and other places, and there we saw the large halls, the Assembly chamber, and we did not even know that this existed in France, we thought that it only existed in the United States." For a whole section of young people, institutions, even when represented in ways that might seem obvious, are too remote, to the point of being unknown. Having more contacts through visits to State institutions for all students in France would create this link that is currently missing for a whole category of the young population. This observation prompts a proposal to extend the first recommendation of this opinion regarding more education, to add more effort to provide information.

Welcoming young people to institutions (local authorities, national institutions) would deepen their knowledge of these institutions and the democratic functioning of our society. This could be done during internships, or through agreements between institutions and organised civil society bodies, non-profit organisations or social centres for young people.

#### Recommendation 5

The ESEC recommends that compulsory visits to French State institutions be introduced into the education programme (school, extracurricular and out-of-school time) so that each young person has the opportunity to visit them at least once, and that partnerships between local authorities and institutions and the places young people visit be made compulsory, so that competent people, in particular elected representatives, can come and give educational workshops on this subject.

To set an example, the ESEC is committed to welcoming young citizens each year for a visit during the "Tour de France républicain", as well as interns (aged approximately 16) referred by partner organisations.

### 2. Strengthen the recognition of skills and qualifications to recognise new forms of engagement and their political value

In the section on findings, we highlighted the lack of uniformity in the recognition of engagement throughout education and school life. Indeed, there are major differences in implementation between higher education institutions, with predictable consequences for young people's training paths. In line therefore with

Recommendation 17 of its opinion "*Renforcement de la participation aux élections des instances à gouvernance démocratique*" [Strengthening participation in the elections of democratically governed bodies], the ESEC proposes the following.

### Recommendation 6

The ESEC calls for the provisions of the Equality and Citizenship Act to be implemented by establishing a framework for the recognition of engagement common to all higher education and vocational training courses. In this way, the engagement recognised would lead to the accreditation of the skills, qualifications and knowledge acquired, which could be transposed to the academic world as well as the world of work. For young NEETs (not in education, employment or training) and for young workers, the recognition of prior skills and qualifications must be designed in partnership with 'missions locales' and the Employment Office, based on the principle of accreditation of prior learning and experience (APEL).

In addition, the ESEC's Commission for Education, Culture and Communication has taken up the issue of voluntary engagement, in which the question of recognition of engagement, in particular through APEL, should be examined in greater depth.

Finally, it was noted in the section on findings that forms of engagement are not limited to the traditional forms of membership of an organisation. It therefore seems important to take an interest in the diversity of forms of engagement and to promote them to the institutional world, for example by conducting a major annual survey on engagement.

### 3. Increase the number of forums using publicly-funded premises to recreate links between generations and the political world

Engagement and voting are profoundly social matters, as Tristan Haute explained during his hearing before the Temporary Commission on Democratic Participation. Thus, to encourage democratic participation in the broadest sense, the presence of civil society organisations working on social links and popular (non-formal) education is essential in the whole country, especially those where young people appear to be most remote from the democratic system. To this end, the physical presence of premises and stakeholders that allow the generations to meet, discuss and collect information would ensure this democratic continuum. However, access to premises is often complex and costly for non-profit organisations, which prevents them from setting up in those places where they are particularly needed.

## Recommendation 7

The ESEC recommends improving and encouraging the presence of civil society organisations working on social links and popular education to recreate links between the generations and between young people and politics. This requires equal attention throughout the country and the provision of the necessary resources by public authorities, including funding and/or the provision of premises.

In this respect, the ESEC reiterates that in 2019 it recommended *"a plan to relaunch the PEDT (local education projects) by making them a tool for synergising the action of co-educators in their local areas with schools, through the exchange of practices, through the cross-cutting nature of educational fields, through the coordination of stakeholders and resources, through innovation, in the furtherance of the educational success of every child and young person"<sup>115</sup>*. This would be a first step in securing the space and acknowledged importance of popular education organisations as regards social cohesion and citizenship education across the country.

### 4. Recognise new forms of youth engagement by transforming them into concrete actions within our democratic system

It was seen during this opinion that petitions are increasingly part of the way young people participate and engage, with almost one in two having signed an online petition in 2020.

The National Assembly launched its platform for collecting citizens' petitions in early 2021. This remains limited in practice.

The ESEC has recently acquired new jurisdiction over handling citizens' petitions, which are open to petitioners from the age of 16 and are officially collected if they reach 150,000 signatures. We must now go further and the work undertaken by the ESEC must, in this context, find legislative outlets. While parliament sits, which is however a very limited period, every opposition or minority political group has an allotted time to put items on the agenda, their "parliamentary slot", and this includes new bills.

The same principle could therefore be considered for the matter of citizens' petitions. A number of slots could be reserved for public petitions throughout the parliamentary session, via the ESEC as the body responsible for citizens' participation<sup>116</sup>. This would guarantee a specific time for citizens' participation in the National Assembly, in so doing reinforcing the value of petitioner power. The views of petitioners' representatives should be heard without fail. This would also make it possible to give greater legitimacy and substance to a form of participation and

<sup>115</sup> *"Education populaire, une exigence du 21ème siècle"* [popular education, a requirement of the 21st century], The Economic, Social and Environmental Council (lecese.fr).

<sup>116</sup> Organic Law No. 2021-27 of 15 January 2021 on the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (I) - Légifrance (legifrance.gouv.fr).

engagement that is little recognised in society, and recreate a link between the institutional world and young people.

### Recommendation 8

The ESEC, the powers of which in relation to handling petitions were extended by Article 4 of the Organic Law of 15 January 2021, recommends that when petitions have led to the adoption of an opinion, a study or a resolution, the text adopted should then be examined by the competent parliamentary committee. This in turn might lead to transposition into legislative provisions to be discussed in a public session. To this end, the ESEC recommends the creation of a specific parliamentary day in the parliamentary calendar.

Article 11 of the constitution opens the possibility of a shared initiative referendum. This allows a bill to be put to a referendum if it is supported by one fifth of the members of parliament and one tenth of the registered voters. A website has been set up to list relevant current bills.

It came into force in 2015 but has never been used as no bills have thus far reached the required signature thresholds. To make it more accessible, it might be worthwhile lowering the minimum number needed to trigger the procedure to 1/50th of the registered voters.

### Recommendation 9

Lower the threshold of signatories required to trigger a shared initiative referendum to 1/10th of the members of parliament and 1/50th of the electorate.

## C. Include young people from the outset in the construction of public policies that directly or indirectly concern them

### 1. Jointly build, with young people, those public policies that concern them

One of the main causes of the widening gap between the traditional political world and young people is the feeling of not being heard or taken into account by public authorities.

Those issues that concern young people may seem less pressing and easier to handle, as older people, having been through it, tend to think of youth as a short-lived condition. However, changes in young people's practices across generations, their expectations and their vision of the future must be taken into account. Furthermore, variations in the country's economic health, including taking the hits from various crises, very often have an impact on the transition periods that characterise young lives. This impact is more or less ignored by the political establishment, who are often tempted to use young people as an adjustment variable in times of recession.

As a result, the inclusion of users and people targeted by public policies appears to be necessary, for all populations but especially for young people. This also requires the presence of public services, with the necessary human and financial resources, embedded in all regions and accessible to all young people.

In this respect, as explained in the findings, in 2011 the European Union launched the use of structured dialogue for some European policies affecting young people. Structured dialogue is a method of citizen participation that allows the general public to get involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of public policies. It is a space that allows citizens to be part of the process of making public policy and not just the lip service of consultation. This takes shape through 18-month work cycles, led in France by the CNAJEP youth organisation. Although structured dialogue is mandatory at national level when building all or part of policies concerning young people (article 54 of the Equality-Citizenship Act of 2017), its implementation is very disparate and relatively slow<sup>117</sup> at all levels.

Several mechanisms must consequently be put in place so that young people can jointly construct the public policies that affect them, including by acknowledging that new forms of engagement and involvement exist.

## Recommendation 10

To enable young people to participate effectively in the development of public policies aimed at them, the ESEC recommends that mechanisms be put in place for and with young people to enable these public policies to be jointly constructed, going beyond mere consultation:

- widespread use at European, national and local level of "structured dialogue" type mechanisms with non-profit youth organisations to collect feedback from young people; in this respect, the ESEC calls on the government to issue the statutory order necessary for the effective entry into force of Article 54 of the Equality-Citizenship Act on structured dialogue;
- make use of the new Citizenship Week mentioned in Recommendation 4 of this opinion to implement this scheme in practice: each year, a subject should be chosen concerning a public policy about which young people can be informed, and debates and/or votes held so that their contributions are included in the wider debate and policy-building phase. Approved popular education organisations could participate and help young people in this experiment.

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<sup>117</sup> Eva Baronnet's talk at a round table organised by the Temporary Commission on 16 December 2021.

## 2. Include the "youth impact clause" in all national and regional public policies

Taking young people into account in public policies would assist greatly in recreating the link between young people and the political system. Created in 2016, the "youth impact clause" was intended to anticipate the consequences of laws and decrees on young people, now and in the future. After evaluation, if it emerges that a law or decree penalises young people, corrective mechanisms should be applied.

Unfortunately, the youth impact clause is not used. As was pointed out in the *"Impact assessment: better evaluation for better lawmaking"* report adopted in September 2019<sup>118</sup> by the ESEC, while the youth impact clause was used for three draft decrees and four bills in 2016, that figure fell to zero in 2017.

### Recommendation 11

The ESEC recommends that the use of the youth impact clause be implemented at national level by requiring that the impact sheet using this clause be made public, and that it be extended to make it compulsory for all local and regional authorities.

All public policies, including regional policies, also have an impact on young people, especially in terms of urban planning, transport, economic development, education and training, guidance, workplace integration, etc. Local authorities, in the same way as the State, must pay particular attention to the younger generations.

## 3. Revise policies for young people so that they are the direct beneficiaries more often

To put an end to a system that does not give young people the same rights as other citizens, placing them at the heart of social policies aimed at them would be highly beneficial. For young persons, the knowledge that their own situations are being taken into direct account, and not their families' circumstances, especially financial, and that they are considered sufficiently "adult" to receive welfare support from the age of 18, will make them feel properly acknowledged by the government. This will produce much improvement in the existing (or often wrongly perceived non-existent) relationship between the state and young people.

The purpose of such a measure would be to connect the legal age of majority and the age of social welfare entitlement. As the ESEC has pointed out on numerous occasions, opening up social rights to the under-25s is an essential measure, not least to rebuild trust between young people and the political system. Thus, with a renewed confidence in young people and a direct consideration of their situation by public policies, we could hope that young people will increase their investment in the democratic process, thanks to a reduction in their feelings of abandonment by the public authorities and the anger that can result from this. Social support of young people by the State must be considered as a lever for emancipation, without

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<sup>118</sup> ESEC study presented by Jean-Louis Cabrespines, September 2019.

this change placing such emancipation and the need for more direct recognition of each young person's own circumstances in direct opposition to the importance of the family's role and aid directed at families.

Moreover, as the ESEC emphasised in its "Métiers en tension" [Occupations under pressure] opinion<sup>119</sup>, the obstacles to autonomy are many and varied, and concern social policy as much as policies on regional planning, employment, housing, etc. Consequently the levers to be activated are many and varied, and aligning the ages of legal majority and social welfare entitlement must allow better overall support for young people according to their situation and needs, whether they are students, young workers, job seekers, school dropouts, etc. One young person in five lives below the poverty line in France. Over-represented in insecure jobs, 1.5 million are also neither in employment nor in training. Yet, while they can vote, get paid, pay social security contributions and income tax, these young people are denied access to a part of our social welfare system. Young people are criminally responsible at 16 and legally of age at 18, but they must wait until they are 25 for entitlement to all welfare benefits. France is thus one of the few European countries where young people are not eligible as of right for the main basic welfare benefits. Receiving a benefit does not discourage job hunting. It provides a necessary safety net for social inclusion and planning, providing the conditions for better participation in the democratic system.

The Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, on 15 October 2021 on France Info, has herself moved in this direction, saying she was ready "to take up this issue of student autonomy and the system for awarding grants, which are no longer necessarily awarded on the basis of what parents earn." This social measure will also benefit the democratic participation of young people.

## Recommendation 12

The ESEC recommends that young people be brought within the scope of ordinary law from the age of 18 and that they be granted the same rights and access to support schemes as other citizens. It also recommends developing measures to support and secure pathways, while making these young people more often the direct recipients of social welfare intended for them.

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119 "Métiers en tension" [Occupations under pressure], January 2022, rapporteur Pierre-Olivier Ruchenstain.



## Dissensus

For the Agriculture, Crafts and Professions, Cooperation, Enterprise and Families groups, the proposal to open up basic welfare benefits to young people from the age of 18 by recommending the application of ordinary law to ensure that the age of majority and the age of welfare entitlement coincide is not appropriate, for several reasons:

- the effect, even indirect, on the electoral participation of young people is not demonstrated;
- such a change would first require an assessment of all impacts on several public policies, the most important of which are, for example, the potential disincentive for young people to start an apprenticeship or the familialisation of social rights.

These groups are in favour of developing measures to support and secure pathways for young people aged 18-25 who are not in employment, education or training, while making such young people the direct recipients of the welfare benefits available to them more often.

The ESEC considers it necessary to launch a large-scale study to propose a comprehensive reform of policies affecting young people.

## II - POLITICS TO BE ORGANISED IN THE FURTHERANCE OF MORE ACCESSIBLE ELECTIONS

### A. Access to information that clearly presents the issues and stakeholders in each election

The impact of any given election on everyday life, the issues at stake and the distribution of roles between stakeholders are not always clearly identified. Engagement is not certain if voters are not provided with the necessary information. In Germany, there is a federal agency for civic education, the "Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung" or "bpb", which reports to the Ministry of the Interior and enjoys "a high degree of independence and trust from the citizens"<sup>120</sup>. This agency publishes a "voting assistant", which enables citizens to "form their own opinion on the positions of the parties contesting an election" for each election. The assistant is built around an "awareness and educational approach, including questions and answers". This educational approach is also used in Switzerland during referenda with booklets explaining the issues of the elections and the different positions.

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<sup>120</sup> Benjamin Kurc, President of the non-profit Vote & vous, National Assembly hearing, electoral participation programme.

In France, the audiovisual election campaign and the election campaign online are regulated to ensure a "fair treatment" of candidates' speaking time and their freedom of expression, subject to certain limits. The Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA), the regulatory authority for broadcasting, is the guarantor of the exercising of freedom of audiovisual communication and political pluralism; the Commission Nationale de l'Informatique et des Libertés (CNIL), the data protection authority, is responsible through the election observatory for identifying practices that would be contrary to the data protection law of 6 January 1978; the Commission Nationale de Contrôle de la Campagne Électorale (CNCCEP), a temporary commission set up two months before the election, is responsible for ensuring the equality of the electoral campaign.

The importance of social media as a tool for engagement and for disseminating information must also be taken into account.

The hearing of Hugo Travers, creator of "HugoDécrypte", showed the strong demand for educational work, without denying the complexity of the information. Following this model, the work of increasing involvement, explaining the issues and using appropriate tools, such as mobile apps, could be carried out by the public authorities for political elections.

The accessibility of electoral campaigns to people with disabilities is a real obstacle to their participation once they come of age.

The organic law of 29 March 2021 on the election of the President of the Republic is a step forward but falls short of expectations. Indeed, it essentially limits itself to asking candidates to ensure *"their election campaign materials are accessible to persons with disabilities"*. This provision should be more stringent. The reimbursement of campaign expenses could thus be conditional on compliance with accessibility rules.

The Conseil National Consultatif des Personnes Handicapées (CNCPH) has recently seen its role reinforced and the disability advisory body will now publish recommendations or observations for candidates to improve the accessibility of their campaign.

## Recommendation 13

The ESEC recommends that the public authorities centralise and disseminate information and programmes concerning each candidate and the issues at stake in various elections to facilitate the process of informing citizens ahead of the election. As a corollary, public authorities are responsible for ensuring that all information and campaign materials are equally accessible to the whole population, including people with disabilities. It also recommends that before each election, information and awareness campaigns on the jurisdictions of the institutions and stakeholders involved in the election should be broadcast in the audiovisual media and on social media, adapted to the target audience.

## B. Make registration and voting easier to access

### 1. Combat non-registration and misregistration

As has been pointed out, non-registration and misregistration affect millions of French people, especially young people. Many countries make it easy to register to vote right up to the last moment. As highlighted in the report of the National Assembly's information mission "aimed at identifying the causes of abstention and measures to strengthen voter participation" (December 2021), in the United States, the *National Voter Registration Act* of 1993 obliges states to offer voter registration when issuing a driving licence and whenever someone applies for social assistance. In Great Britain, a comprehensive electoral roll update campaign is held.

In France, since 2019, it has been possible to apply for registration on the electoral roll up to the sixth Friday before the election.

This means a person who moves to a new district in metropolitan France at the beginning of 2022 must, in order to vote in that district in the presidential elections on 10 and 24 April 2022, have registered on that district's electoral roll no later than 4 March 2022. This can be done online until 2 March and requires the uploading of a scanned version of an identity document and a proof of address less than 3 months old. The procedure can also be carried out by post, at the town hall or by a third party.

If a person moved after 4 March 2022, it was no longer possible to change the registration district [in time for the presidential election], with some exceptions: thus, if the move was for professional reasons (private and public sectors), or retirement for public-sector agents, after 4 March in either case, it was possible to register until 31 March, i.e. until the tenth day before the first round of the election.

This measure, effective in giving time to all those who simply do not have the time to complete a registration process that they may not consider a priority, given the difficulties that any move raises particularly for families, only partly solves the problem of misregistration.

Registration, even when made easier, entails a process and effort, and therefore an investment that becomes another reason to abstain. It is possible to get around this

difficulty, for example, by using the support offered by the network of France Service centres throughout the country, whether for registration or proxy procedures.

The difficulty generally cited in France with regard to automatic voter registration after a move is that there is no obligation to report a change of residence to a different district - such a report is only compulsory in Alsace-Moselle and even there now only in theory, not practice. The family allowance funds, health insurance organisations or tax authorities could be tasked with informing INSEE, which would then carry out the registration procedures directly with the district councils. INSEE is in fact responsible under France's Electoral Code for maintaining the general electoral register. This register is the basis for updating and checking the electoral rolls kept by the local councils. INSEE would propose, as it does for young people who have completed their census, that the new district of residence be registered on the electoral roll, with the district council responsible for verifying the accuracy of the data transmitted.

The French postal service also offers an online change of address service, including sending a letter to a whole range of utilities and service suppliers, etc. The council for the new residence could be automatically included in the list.

Furthermore, the ESEC points out that this residency criterion can discriminate against certain groups: people who are homeless or living rough, or certain young people leaving the "ASE" child welfare system, who have split from their families and who cannot produce proof of address, cannot register to vote. In this respect, the ESEC reiterates its Recommendation 9 in its opinion on "*Les personnes vivant à la rue, l'urgence d'agir*" [People living rough: the urgent need for action] on the duty of the State to make the right to free accommodation effective, both through its role as organiser of the service and through adequate financial and material support for the associations that implement it<sup>121</sup>.

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121 Opinion "*Les personnes vivant à la rue, l'urgence d'agir*" [People living rough: the urgent need for action], [https://www.lecese.fr/sites/default/files/pdf/Avis/2018/2018\\_32\\_situation\\_sdf.pdf](https://www.lecese.fr/sites/default/files/pdf/Avis/2018/2018_32_situation_sdf.pdf)

## Recommendation 14

The ESEC recommends that each time a change of address is reported on one of the services available via "France Connect", an automatic message should be displayed asking users whether they want the new address to be registered on the electoral roll of the new district council. A favourable response would trigger the procedure for removal from the old electoral roll and inclusion on the new one.

The ESEC recommends that the automatic registration procedure at age 18 be reinforced by systematically sending a reminder (by e-mail or text) at age 16, in conjunction with the school, local non-profits or social support structures, so as not to overlook young people who have dropped out of school. Registration and verification could also be carried out during any official procedure (census, registration for an examination or competition, first job, procedures involving the tax authorities, Pôle Emploi employment office, social security, etc.). A reminder using a method yet to be determined (text message, email, post, etc.) could be considered three or six months before an election.

The ESEC recommends increasing the number of staff in France Service centres to help citizens register to vote.

Such a procedure will obviously have to comply with the GDPR and offer those citizens who so wish the right to be forgotten. In particular, special attention should be paid to situations where it is necessary to keep a new address secret (e.g. moving away from violent people). Furthermore, removal from one electoral roll should only take place following verification that the citizen has been registered on the electoral roll of another district. This is to combat non-registration.

### 2. Simplify voting by proxy

The process of establishing a proxy has already been made easier, in particular when it became possible to establish one for a range of reasons. As the Ministry of the Interior states on its website (Elections, how to vote), voting by proxy is a voting method open to all voters unconditionally since June 2020. Voters therefore no longer have to justify why they cannot vote in person.

A voter can receive two proxies, one in France and one abroad. In the elections held in 2020 and 2021, however, the pandemic meant it was possible to receive two proxies issued in France (675,000 proxies in the June 2021 elections). The National Assembly report quoted previously points out that this has not caused any particular issues. For votes abroad, it is even possible to receive up to three proxies.

Since April 2021, it has been possible to fill in a proxy application online on the "maprocuration.gouv" website, thus avoiding the "paper" procedure. The Ministry of the Interior states that "this new service is a first step towards the digital proxy voting". The service is not in fact entirely paperless. Voters appointing a proxy must always go to a police station or gendarmerie to have their identity checked, as the data entered on the "Maprocuration" website is automatically communicated digitally to a verifier. Voters receive a digital acknowledgement of receipt at each stage of the process and are informed in real time of the progress of their application. This in-person verification step may discourage many voters.

The Ministry of the Interior therefore rightly observes that the process is imperfect. It is reiterated that FranceConnect, in partnership with the French post office, is already developing a digital identification service, called "L'identité numérique". It should be noted that although online measures need to be developed, they should always be built in addition to the option of carrying out these procedures physically, in person.

### Recommendation 15

The ESEC recommends allowing a voter to receive a maximum of two proxies issued in France as a permanent measure.

The ESEC also recommends that the public authorities - via the Interministerial Directorate for Digital Affairs (DINUM) - develop a secure digital identification system for proxy voting as soon as possible.

## 3. Make voting at the ballot box easier

Genuine efforts by the French authorities to smoothen voting arrangements and organisation are often hampered by technical difficulties, long-standing customs, or the provisions of the Electoral Code.

The French Electoral Code for instance stipulates that a number of elections are held on a specific Sunday.

Voters are divided, by order of the prefect, into as many polling stations as local circumstances and the number of voters require. The premises where polling stations are located must be accessible on polling day to people with disabilities, regardless of the form of their disability.

As the circular from the Minister of the Interior sent to mayors explains, decisions on polling station locations are taken by the prefect, who in turn relies on proposals by elected representatives. It is recommended that the polling station location is a public building. Failing that, it may be a private location to which access at the time of voting is unrestricted. The holding of any other event unrelated to the election in the same building as a polling station or in the immediate vicinity is not prohibited by the Electoral Code, provided that it respects the principle of neutrality and does not impede the freedom or secrecy of the vote.

It is recommended that the number of registered voters per polling station should not exceed 800 to 1,000, but this rule is not always followed. In addition, it may be difficult in some local settings to find a public building that can serve as a polling station close to where people live. Hence moving polling stations closer to the most densely populated areas or places where Sunday activities are held (community centres, social centres, leisure centres, university premises, etc.) by creating additional polling stations to resolve problems surrounding distance or isolation could improve voter turnout, including in younger people.

This increase in the number of polling stations could only be achieved by encouraging councils to actively seek out assessors (individuals who help with running a polling station), as they often already do, as recommended in Recommendation 3 of this opinion, but also tellers. For appropriate implementation, the following recommendation should be linked to Recommendation 3 on assessors.

In addition, consideration could be given to extending the time that polling stations are open (over the day or even beyond a single day). Similarly, the location of polling stations could be reconsidered, to think about "moving towards" voters (university campuses, mobile polling stations, etc.). Logistical and human resources should be substantially reviewed.

### Recommendation 16

The ESEC recommends facilitating physical voting by altering the arrangements and the number of polling stations to match the country's needs.

## C. Reinvigorate representative democracy through greater accountability from elected representatives, an overhaul of political bodies, and continuous democracy

### 1. Include young people in the governance of projects that concern them

*"If public affairs do not come to young people, young people will not go to public affairs."* This statement by the mayor of the 15th and 16th districts of Marseilles, Nadia Boulainseur, during the commission's visit, sums up and reflects the fact that young people (and youth policies) are often caught in a policy blind spot, and have difficulty in getting to grips with how policy works. To deal with the various timing problems between a law being passed and the implementation of public policy, between the public decision to start a project and its delivery, between the timeframe of a teenager and the timeframe of public action, young people have to be involved in the mechanics of public decision-making. This means knowledge not only of decision-making processes, but also of the different stakeholders involved in project governance (decision-makers, investors, companies, non-profit organisations, etc.) is necessary to better understand the actions of local government officials in particular.

For example, during the Temporary Commission's visit to the northern districts of Marseilles, it was noted that the young people present that day were angry with their Mayor and blamed her for the fact that the construction of a city stadium that had been promised to them was taking too long (2 years). It should be noted here that sports and leisure infrastructure projects, as this example shows, remain highly unequal in their use, which demonstrates that women's needs and demands are taken into less account in local development policies including the financing of public infrastructure. As public-sector investments are not subject to gender impact assessments, they are financing infrastructure that is used mainly by men and boys<sup>122</sup>. The voices and needs of young women are still underrepresented compared to those of young men.

Many young people feel that they are too often misunderstood, unheard and neglected, and that the system is not and/or is no longer in keeping with modern society, and so they do not vote. Thus, (re)introducing democracy into the daily lives of young people, giving them a certain right of scrutiny and some power to act, should enable them to regain some trust and limit the influence of widespread doubt and misinformation.

Moreover, at a time when most young people<sup>123</sup> express distrust in institutions and in elected representatives' commitment to the common good, it would be appropriate to increase their accountability. The idea would be to extend Recommendation 2 of the opinion *"Renforcement de la participation aux élections des instances à gouvernance démocratique"* [Strengthening participation in the elections of democratically governed bodies] to elected politicians<sup>124</sup>: *"The ESEC recommends that organisations (mutuals, cooperatives, non-profits, trade unions, etc.) increase the participatory processes offered to their members both on the major issues that concern them and on social issues when they fall within their remit, using digital tools if necessary in order to encourage ever wider changes and to make such processes meaningful. They undertake to be accountable to their members for what happens after such processes. They could develop regular participatory approaches to evaluation and programming to share the meaning of the action."*

In line with what the ESEC advocates in terms of the involvement of the public, users and those concerned in public policy implementation and evaluation<sup>125</sup>, it would seemingly be beneficial to focus on young people, being amongst that part of the population that has the least trust in public programmes.

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122 ESEC Resolution "Agir pour un espace public égalitaire" [Acting for an equal public space"], 2020.

123 See in particular the annual Cevipof survey on "Confiance dans la vie politique" [Trust in political life] and the 2021 OpinionWay survey on "Jeunesse et confiance" [Youth and trust].

124 *"Renforcement de la participation aux élections des instances à gouvernance démocratique"* [Strengthening participation in the elections of democratically governed bodies] | The Economic, Social and Environmental Council (lecese.fr).

125 *"Quelle conception des politiques publiques pour accompagner les transitions en cours et à venir ?"* [How should public policies be designed to support current and future transitions], The Economic, Social and Environmental Council (lecese.fr).



## Recommendation 17

In line with its customary position on the need for any public policy or decision to be jointly constructed (consultation, participation, integration into governance, etc.) with the populations concerned, the ESEC recommends that governance of domestic development and infrastructure projects or projects surrounding the implementation and evaluation of public policies concerning them are created by specifically including young people under 30 on a panel of citizens.

For panel membership of this kind to be successful, it will be necessary to envisage a support organisation in both technical and human terms and, if necessary, arrangements for paying some kind of allowance.

In the same vein, the ESEC recommends that young people are involved in impact assessments, which could be done via the CESERs, and that the public affected are better informed about project development.

## 2. The real and effective consideration of blank votes

Law No. 2014-172 of 21 February 2014 aims to recognise blank votes (vote is cast but no candidate selected) in elections by counting the ballots separately and appending them to the official count report. However, this law is unsatisfactory as it does not allow them to be counted as votes cast. Moreover, votes that could be considered blank votes are often counted as spoiled ballots owing to the lack of clarity, information and means given to voters and tellers during the counting of votes. Some people express their disagreements in the envelope itself (various annotations and comments, destruction, etc.), which results in the vote being categorised as 'spoiled'. The fact that these votes are not counted as votes discourages voters because they feel that their voices are not being heard. Such votes (blank vote and very often votes recorded as spoiled ballots) reflect a number of voter behaviours, such as but not limited to:

- the voter votes, but not for any candidate and the blank vote reflects a lack of political choice;
- the voter votes but is not necessarily uninterested in the outcome, the blank vote reflects a refusal to choose between several candidates;
- the voter votes and expresses dissatisfaction with the system by voting blank;
- the voter votes out of habit but feels alienated from public affairs, etc.

A blank vote is not only a sanction vote, and in any event is still a real militant choice, expressing a refusal to choose or to want something else. Being able to vote blank and including blank ("no candidate") votes in election results would mean each voter feels heard, a feeling that is particularly lacking among the younger generations.

To do this and to ensure that each blank vote is counted as such, an amendment to the Electoral Code is necessary.

Moreover, in traditional polling stations, there is currently no option to vote blank with an official blank ballot. This raises several concerns: not marking anything on the ballot paper is visible and could therefore reveal peoples' votes to those around them, there is no "safe" way to allow people to vote blank, as not voting for a candidate could

make the ballot paper invalid (if no official blank sheet is available, crossing out or two votes in the same envelope may be the easiest solution), and it creates inequality compared to electronic polling stations, where blank voting is an option. To address some of the arguments against this, it should be noted that there is no significant difference between traditional and electronic polling stations in terms of the number of blank votes.

Blank votes must be able to be expressed, and thus are expressed by a blank ballot paper placed on the same table as the other ballot papers. This blank ballot should be counted as a vote cast.

### Recommendation 18

The ESEC recommends that blank votes can be expressed by making it compulsory to have blank ballot papers in the polling stations.

The ESEC recommends that blank votes be counted within the votes cast.

With this recommendation, the ESEC would like to see a debate in wider society on the effective consequences of taking blank votes into account in election results.

## 3. Introduce a proportional component in elections

The proportional representation (PR) system, which is a list system, is designed to ensure fairer representation of different political views and better representation of the diversity of society. It promotes more diverse candidates and candidate profiles, including the representation of women, young people and minorities.

It is simple to implement in principle: an electoral quotient is calculated by dividing the number of votes cast by the number of seats to be filled, and all the lists that obtain this quotient win a seat, as many times as they reach the quotient. This is full proportional representation. Different methods are then used to distribute the remaining seats among the different lists. In Europe, many political systems introduce eligibility thresholds that avoid excessive fragmentation and set a minimum threshold for representativeness. It should be noted that such eligibility thresholds would also allow blank votes to be counted in election results.

Elements of PR and majority voting rules are often combined to create, depending on the country, and the national and local context, mixed systems where the disadvantages of both systems are supposed to cancel out, while best use is made of their advantages. In France, for example, PR with a majority premium is used for municipal elections, as we saw in the section of the report on types of election.

It should be recalled that in 2019 and 2021, bills and proposals have been tabled in the National Assembly to introduce a measure of proportional representation in the 2022 general election. They were not examined or could not be completed in time. However, on 4 February 2022, the National Assembly passed a resolution inviting the government to consider a reform to general elections that would allow for the introduction of PR.

## Recommendation 19

The ESEC recommends introducing a degree of proportional representation in general elections, without undermining the predominant nature of election by majority vote and ensure that this mechanism enables better representation of the richness and diversity of French society.

### 4. Facilitate young people's engagement by overhauling political bodies

In line with Recommendation 5 of the opinion *"Renforcement de la participation aux élections des instances à gouvernance démocratique"* [Strengthening participation in the elections of democratically governed bodies]: *"The ESEC encourages non-profit organisations to limit their leaders' terms of office to three consecutive terms or nine years, to promote access for young people and to guarantee parity in their statutory bodies.<sup>126</sup>"* The ESEC believes that strict rules should be applied in the political sphere. Indeed, seeing the same faces on the political scene again and again does not inspire the necessary confidence, is not conducive to participation, and can lead to a view of politicians as clinging to power. Moreover, refreshing and rejuvenating the politics on offer would enable young people to identify more closely with elected representatives ("if she can do it, so can I"), to accelerate equal opportunities and take an interest in political life. This is standard practice in the governance of many civil society organisations where renewing terms of office and holding more than position is limited.

The renewal imposed by restricting the number of consecutive terms would also make it possible to slow down the professionalization of elected representatives, a phenomenon affecting the perceived accessibility of positions: this makes it possible to fight against the image of a Silver Democracy<sup>127</sup>, and/or democracy in the hands of professionals, and lastly, it would limit the existence of "dynasties" locking up the politics on offer.

However, in recent years a shortage in applications, particularly for the position of mayor, has been seen, for a variety of reasons. There has been an increase in attacks on elected representatives<sup>128</sup> which could increase this effect.

Furthermore, as the Delegation for Overseas Territories pointed out, *"candidates in local elections must be encouraged to go out and approach young people and give them a place on the lists. Candidates need to take better account of young people's demands and aspirations in their programmes. Deputy mayor or vice-chair positions should be offered more often in local administration in order to ensure decent representation of young people on councils. We must also think about the future*

<sup>126</sup> *"Renforcement de la participation aux élections des instances à gouvernance démocratique"* [Strengthening participation in the elections of democratically governed bodies] | The Economic, Social and Environmental Council (lecese.fr).

<sup>127</sup> See Cécile Van de Velde's hearing.

<sup>128</sup> Source: French mayors' association at [https://www.amf.asso.fr/m/observatoire\\_agressions/accueil.php](https://www.amf.asso.fr/m/observatoire_agressions/accueil.php)

*and the on-the-job training of our future public officials. Elected representatives have a duty to be accountable for their mandate, including for young people in the overseas territories."*

Finally, as the Delegation for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunity pointed out in its contribution, more women on election lists generally makes them younger. In connection with this much needed reduction in the age of political leaders, the status of elected representatives must be reconsidered to ensure accessibility and security of pathways, allowing anyone, including the most precarious, students or young people from an area of work where their political experience is not well recognised, to increase their engagement.

### Recommendation 20

The ESEC recommends the introduction of a formal status of "elected representative", which would set out a number of guarantees, rights and obligations. It would encourage commitment to terms of office, deliver better representation of society's diversity by boosting the involvement of women and men from categories currently largely excluded from public life (the working class, the young, people from diverse backgrounds, etc.). It would make it possible to secure, recognise and value the career paths and experiences of elected representatives, and ensure their mandates can be both exercised and terminated, while maintaining a strong link with citizens.

### Recommendation 21

Limit the number of terms of office to three consecutive terms within a local council or as a parliamentarian, with the exception of terms of office in districts with fewer than 3,500 inhabitants.

# *Chapter 3: To move forward yet further*

## **Introduction**

To combat low voter turnout and enable our democratic system to take the aspirations of younger generations into account, it should be reformed; otherwise we run the risk of seeing these younger generations live their lives away from the system, questioning the very legitimacy of our representative democracy.

This goes beyond the question of young people's relationship with engagement and democratic participation and reflects a structural and global problem in the relationship that part of the population has with its democratic system, dating from well before the regional and departmental elections of 2021.

The ESEC therefore wished to experiment with a new form of opinion in order to include its thinking on matters beyond the issues addressed in the recommendations and focus on observations about mechanisms that could recreate the link between citizens, particularly young people, and our democratic system.

The idea is not to propose solutions that can be put in place immediately, but to introduce elements of foresight aimed at providing more depth in considering the vigour of our institutions. This thinking touches on various dimensions showing the scale of the work on "renovating" our democracy. In this section, the ESEC does not comment on the merits of the proposed avenues for reform, but wishes to draw the Prime Minister's attention to possibilities that should be examined in future work, as they are already being extensively debated in society.

This is a list of just some of the levers that could be pulled to adapt our democratic system to changes in society. It is a question of opening up the field of possibilities for public expression for a more lively, more inclusive, more participatory and more demanding democracy.

# I - AVENUES FOR REFLECTION ON NEW VOTING ARRANGEMENTS: OPENING UP THE FIELD OF POSSIBILITIES

In the following cases studied, it is stressed that they should not be seen as gimmicks or as a single solution that will bring citizens closer to our institutions. It is a question of addressing different areas that potentially facilitate voting, but which must be part of a coherent package of resources. The technical thus becomes political, and serves the political.

The addition of these new voting procedures to those already in place would above all make it possible to act on low voter turnout resulting not only from practical difficulties but also from political disengagement.

## A. Electronic voting using secure digital identification<sup>129</sup>

The introduction of e-voting as a voting method should only be considered as a complement to traditional polling stations and not as a replacement for them.

The type of electronic voting described here is that of online voting, which must be adaptable to all available digital media and accessible to all in terms of content so as not to discriminate against any sections of the public who use it.

The implementation of electronic voting will require the development of a digital civil status system, to be managed under the responsibility of central government.

Generally speaking, the first studies on the implementation of e-voting seem to show that the populations using e-voting are not only the higher social classes, although they are online more, sociologically speaking<sup>130</sup>, but also those most inclined to use existing alternative methods to face-to-face voting, namely postal voting and proxy voting. Unsurprisingly, the 25-39 age group seems to take up electronic voting quite strongly<sup>131</sup>. However, it should not be forgotten that the digital divide and computer illiteracy also affect young people: 29.2% of 15- to 29-year-olds say they have little or no knowledge of digital government services. Attention must also be paid to gender, as women are less likely to vote electronically than men<sup>132</sup>. Similarly, technical aspects must be taken into account: large areas of France are designated as

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<sup>129</sup> The source of this section on e-voting is essentially the article "Le vote électronique, une réponse à l'abstention" ("E-voting, an answer to abstention?") by Marie Neihouse, in Tristan Haute, Vincent Tiberj, "Extinction de vote ?" [Is voting dying out?], PUF, 2022.

<sup>130</sup> Tristan Haute, Vincent Tiberj, "Extinction de vote ?" [Is voting dying out?], PUF, 2022.

<sup>131</sup> A survey by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE) shows that almost one in five young people have at least one digital disability among the four main skills identified by INSEE: information, communication, software and problem solving: <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/4241397#titre-bloc-14>.

<sup>132</sup> Marie Neihouse, "Le vote électronique, une réponse à l'abstention ?" ("Electronic voting, an answer to abstention?") in "Extinction de vote ?" [Is voting dying out?] Tristan Haute, Vincent Tiberj, PUF, 2022.

a "dead zone" with the population unable to access the internet; this situation may be exacerbated by difficulties in affording computing equipment or devices.

According to Marie Neihouser, e-voting seems to act as a "return to the ballot box" for some intermittent voters and abstainers, especially those who are usually less interested in politics and on whom a campaign to boost electronic voting would have an influence.

It is clear that there is a lack of studies on e-voting that could answer the questions related to its implementation.

Among the positive effects, we can highlight the de facto reduction in voter registration irregularities, and also easier access to voting, which seems to have a positive effect on the younger generations and which seems to be sustainable for those who take it up. The risks include limited feedback on the impact of e-voting on social inequalities, the significant human and financial resources required in addition to those already needed for in-person voting at the ballot box, and the particular attention to be paid to cyber security. It also raises a question around voting freedom, as the voter does not benefit from the protection of the voting booth against external pressure. Furthermore, care must be taken to ensure that implementation of e-voting does not undermine trust, which is currently strong in France, in election results<sup>133</sup>.

If electronic voting is implemented, a transitional phase could be envisaged, before any more widespread roll-out, using it for the European elections (the fact other European states already use this voting method for this election, such as Estonia, would potentially increase trust in this method).

## B. Postal voting

Postal voting for political elections is not very widespread in France. It used to be available only to French citizens living abroad who wished to vote in general elections. Since the 2021 departmental and regional elections and for the next presidential election in 2022 (organic law of 29 March 2021), it is also used by detainees in pre-trial detention or prisoners serving a sentence that removes their right to vote. For the rest of the population, it was abolished in 1975, because it was believed to encourage fraud. In other countries, however, postal voting can be used instead of voting by proxy. However, in some countries certain conditions must be met to use postal voting, while in others postal voting may be used unconditionally.

Postal voting seems to have increased significantly as a result of the health situation during the latest elections in countries where it is used<sup>134</sup>.

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<sup>133</sup> Warning issued by the representative from the "Parlons Démocratie" non-profit organisation during the round table organised by the Temporary Commission on 16 December 2021.

<sup>134</sup> Fondation Jean Jaurès, "Le vote par correspondance en Allemagne" [Postal voting in Germany], Ernst Stetter: <https://www.jean-jaures.org/publication/le-vote-par-correspondance-en-allemande>

It should be noted that research results regarding the impact of postal voting on reducing abstention (or increasing turnout) are mixed. In both Europe and the United States<sup>135</sup>, elections that use it see little or no increase in voting.

The positive effects include facilitating voting for people who are unavailable on the day of the election, away from home, unable to travel to the polling station, etc. From the risk point of view, as with electronic voting, these include protection of voters against external pressure, the extra human and financial resources needed in addition to those already allotted to in-person voting, in particular to track and store ballot papers. Moreover, the addition of this voting method must not undermine trust, which is currently strong in France, in election results<sup>136</sup>.

If postal voting is implemented, transitional phases could be envisaged in order to assess the impact of such a measure and in particular the participation of certain sections of the public who tend not to vote, before it is opened up to the entire electorate.

## C. Counting blank votes

Further to Recommendation 18, we develop here the issues around taking blank votes (and spoiled ballots, the two categories being intertwined in their use) into real consideration, as well as the potential effects on the course of our elections. When turnout is particularly low, or even under 50%, the legitimacy of an election and the elected representatives can be questioned. Recognising the blank (no candidate) vote as a fully-fledged vote with real electoral consequences could help to reduce abstention among those who shun the ballot box because they do not agree with any of the candidates standing for election, by giving such voters a clear and recognised means of expressing that view.

To consider the different methods of taking blank votes into account to affect the election result, we can look at various models existing in the world. In Colombia, for example, if blank votes exceed 50% of the votes cast, the election is null and must be held again (only once, as a majority blank vote cannot annul the same election twice in a row).

In some German Länder, in proportional elections, more than 5% of the total vote (which includes blank votes and spoiled ballots) is required to be elected. In Switzerland, blank votes are counted in local elections in the first round to determine the absolute majority.

It is in the light of these experiences that a system must be devised which would aim to give real weight to blank votes, with voters given power to act to bring about fresh political choices on offer during an election. This could also be adapted to the French system, by including blank votes when counting the votes cast in the first

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<sup>135</sup> "Voting by mail and absentee voting", MIT Election Lab, *via* <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/services-aux-french/voter-a-l-etranger/modalites-de-vote/vote-by-mail>

<sup>136</sup> Warning issued by the representative from the "Parlons Démocratie" non-profit organisation during the round table organised by the Temporary Commission on 16 December 2021.



round of an election (municipal or general elections) and allowing candidates to be elected or to qualify for the second round according to the share represented by blank or spoiled votes.

The consequences of a blank vote (no candidate) majority will have to be considered. A pure and simple ban on standing for re-election after a majority blank vote should be studied; in any event it would have to be adapted to the various elections by analysing the consequences, particularly legal, that this would have on the notion of ineligibility to stand.

## D. Come together for better representation

To renew the links between citizens and their elected representatives and thus encourage voting, it seems necessary for elected representatives to be more representative of the population living in France, in terms of age, gender and socio-professional categories.

In addition to the recommendations made in this opinion, a range of tools should therefore be studied and debated in society to achieve this better representation, particularly of young people<sup>137</sup>, to encourage diversity of opinion, changes in sensibilities and social, sociological and regional origin. Some of the most numerous social classes and categories are poorly represented or even absent from any governmental body. This can lead to a feeling of exclusion from public affairs.

Consideration should be given to the methods and scope of proportional representation, particularly with regard to the significance given to PR in the various elections, ranging from partial PR to full proportional representation.

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<sup>137</sup> In a report on the evaluation of the law of 6 June 2000 to promote equal access for women and men to elected positions and functions, the Ministry of Gender Equality, Diversity and Equal Opportunities concluded as follows: *"The strengthening of social cohesion also involves improving how France's cultural and social diversity is represented. Political parties must open up to France, which is rich in diversity, and parliament must reflect the population in order if we are to be the modern European democracy we see ourselves to be."* (<https://www.vie-publique.fr/rapport/27167-rapport-devaluation-de-la-loi-du-6-juin-2000-tendant-favoriser-legal>).

## II - PUT DEMOCRACY AT THE HEART OF THE DEBATE

Having reached the end of our work, and noting that we are far from having exhausted all the issues that such a subject raises, we have identified some subjects that appear to go beyond the scope of our Temporary Commission. As we have said on many occasions, the issue of young people's involvement in elections one element of a wider democratic crisis.

This crisis, which affects democracies to a greater or lesser extent and in various forms, stems from deep-rooted economic, social and environmental causes that could not be dealt with in a single opinion document.

Furthermore, we have identified difficulties inherent in the functioning of our French democracy, linked to the system of institutions on which it is currently based.

The arrangements for nominating candidates emerged in our discussions as a key component in the potential overhaul of our democratic system. How can we allow the public to express themselves as well as possible, without binary opposition, by offering a judgement on the politics on offer rather than encouraging the practice of voting for a candidate in whom the voter has little faith? One avenue to consider could be what is known as a "value vote", such as majority judgment<sup>138</sup> or approval voting, which allows, in particular for majority judgement, all the candidates and proposals to be scored or ranked in order to have better representation and more nuance in the choice that voters are asked to make. Although it does not address all the problems that might exist around nomination procedures, thinking about this area arose in our debates as a possible route for changing how our democracy operates.

**Moreover, the balance of legislative and executive powers, which is very particular in the operation of our Fifth Republic**, also has an impact on the way in which citizens can feel represented. Consideration, potentially involving constitutional reform, around the real weight of citizen decision-making and participation, through different ways of appointing our Prime Minister, or through a profound reform of how referenda are held, could have an impact on the relationship between our citizens and our democratic system. A referendum that is misused, poorly formulated and above all not followed up would have more negative than positive impact. Referenda unequivocally need explanations, as well as clarity on whether to call a binding or consultative referendum (which could therefore have a different name). Moreover, giving more possibilities to citizens than a binary choice appeared in our discussions as an interesting possible route.

It would have to be place deliberation, debate and thought at the centre, rather than a simple yes or no that is too binary for subjects that can be more complex. This kind of reflection can also be carried out at a local level, with local referenda

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<sup>138</sup> Majority judgement is a voting system invented in the early 2000's. It is based on transforming ballot papers into a single ballot paper where all candidates or positions are listed and the voter has to "rate" or score them by marking the ballot paper. The candidate or proposal with the highest score after the median has been calculated is elected or selected.

being one of the ways in which citizens can get involved. This will further develop participatory democracy alongside representative democracy.

Finally, the very status of the elected representative, already discussed in the recommendations, warrants further development. It is particularly important in terms of the image projected and the relationship between the representative and the represented: the immunity of elected representatives and the practice of holding more than one elected post, for example, raise questions in society today.

It no longer seems possible to leave these issues unaddressed in view of the harmful effects on our democracy caused by contradictions between the aspirations of some parts of society, in particular the younger generations, and how the democracy governing our political functioning actually operates.

In this opinion, the ESEC proposes strong, sustainable solutions and it is convinced that the issue of democracy as a whole must finally be addressed in a tangible manner in society and by public decision-makers.

**The 21 recommendations described here are needed to enable our system to meet the aspirations of the younger generations, and are envisaged as paths to explore when undertaking the thinking essential to the debates within the Temporary Commission designed to respond to the issue of young people's involvement and engagement. These questions must be debated within an exemplary democratic framework, so that France can adopt operating rules that bring citizens together around the common good that is our Republic.**

# Appendices

## NO. 1: COMPOSITION OF THE TEMPORARY COMMISSION ON DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION AT THE DATE OF THE VOTE

### Chair

- ✓ Claire THOURY

### Acting otherwise for social and environmental innovation

- ✓ Majid EL JARROUDI
- ✓ Samira DJOUADI (alternate)

### Agriculture

- ✓ Pascal FEREY
- ✓ Catherine LION
- ✓ Manon PISANI

### Social and ecological alternatives

- ✓ Bernadette GROISON
- ✓ Cécile GONDARD-LALANNE (alternate)

### Small businesses

- ✓ Michel CHASSANG

### Associations

- ✓ Isabelle DORESSE
- ✓ Viviane MONNIER
- ✓ Claire THOURY
- ✓ Souâd BELHADDAd (alternate)
- ✓ Martin BOBEL (alternate)
- ✓ Marie-Claire MARTEL (alternate)

### CFDT

- ✓ Thierry CADART
- ✓ Pascal GUIHENEUF
- ✓ Franck TIVIERGE

### CFE-CGC

- ✓ Véronique BIARNAIX-ROCHE
- ✓ Valérie GAYTE (alternate)

### CGT

- ✓ Pascale COTON
- ✓ Anne CHATAIN (alternate)

### **CGT**

- ✓ Michèle CHAY
- ✓ Gilles FOURNEL
- ✓ Jean-François NATON
- ✓ Angeline BARTH (alternate)
- ✓ Dominique GALLET (alternate)
- ✓ Benoît GARCIA (alternate)

### **CGT-FO**

- ✓ Béatrice CLICQ
- ✓ Jean-Yves SABOT
- ✓ Sébastien BUSIRIS (alternate)
- ✓ Gilles GOULM ( substitute)

### **Cooperation**

- ✓ Olivier MUGNIER
- ✓ Jacques LANDRIOT (alternate)

### **Businesses**

- ✓ François-Xavier BRUNET
- ✓ Philippe GUILLAUME

### **Environment and nature**

- ✓ Jean-David ABEL
- ✓ Cécile OSTRIA
- ✓ Pauline RATTEZ (alternate)

### **Families**

- ✓ Pierre ERBS
- ✓ Dominique MARMIER

### **People not registered to vote**

- ✓ Daniel-Julien Noël
- ✓ Alain BAZOT (alternate)

### **Student Organisations and Youth Movements**

- ✓ Kenza OCCANSEY
- ✓ Evanne JEANNE-ROSE

### **Overseas**

- ✓ Inès BOUCHAUT-CHOISY
- ✓ Yannick CAMBRAY (alternate)

### **Health & Citizenship**

- ✓ Dominique JOSEPH
- ✓ Jérémie BOROY (alternate)

### **UNSA**

- ✓ **Martine VIGNAU**
- ✓ **Saïd DARWANE (alternate)**

## Citizens

- ✓ Soraya B.
- ✓ Gérard B.
- ✓ Minata C.
- ✓ Sandrine C.
- ✓ Muriel D.
- ✓ Emmanuel J.
- ✓ Djamel K.
- ✓ Jonathan L.
- ✓ Léa L.
- ✓ Clément R.
- ✓ Odile R.
- ✓ Laure-Anne R.

## NO. 2: LIST OF PEOPLE HEARD

### Hearings

✓ **Ms Béatrice ANGRAND**

*President of the Agence du service civique (Civic Service Agency) (ASC)*

✓ **Ms Éva BARONNET**

*Structured Dialogue Project Officer on the Comité pour les relations nationales et internationales des associations de jeunesse et d'éducation populaire (Committee for National and International Relations of Youth and Non-formal Education Associations) (CNAJEP)*

✓ **Ms Marine BOIN**

*General Delegate of the Réseau national des juniors associations (National Network of Junior Associations) (RNJA)*

✓ **Mr Éric BUGÉ**

*President of Parlons démocratie (Let's Talk Democracy)*

✓ **Mr Grégoire CAZCARRA**

*Member of the Board of Directors and spokesperson of the association "A voté"*

✓ **Mr Stewart CHAU**

*Consultant at the ViaVoice research consultancy*

✓ **Ms Sarah El HAÏRY**

*Junior Minister to the Minister of National Education, Youth and Sport, with responsibility for Youth and Engagement*

✓ **Mr Cédric MAZIÈRE**

*Vice-President of Électeurs en herbe (Voters in the Making)*

✓ **Mr Vincent TIBERJ**

*Research Associate at Sciences Po Bordeaux, Associate University Professor*

✓ **Mr Hugo TRAVERS**

*Creator of the HugoDécrypte media channel*

✓ **Ms Cécile VAN DE VELDE**

*Professor of Sociology at the University of Montreal*

### Private interviews

✓ **Ms Anaïs ANSELME**

*General Delegate of the Forum français de la jeunesse (French Youth Forum) (FFJ)*

✓ **Ms Sarah BILOT**

*General Delegate of Animafac*

✓ **Mr Tom CHEVALIER**

*Research fellow at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS)  
at the Arènes laboratory, Sciences Po Rennes*

✓ **Mr Arnaud GAILLOT**

*General Secretary of Jeunes Agriculteurs (JA)*

✓ **Ms Patricia LONCLE-MORICEAU**

*University Professor of Sociology*

*University of Rennes, École des hautes études en santé publique (EHESP),  
Arènes Joint Research Unit (UMR) 6051*

*Co-leader of the Master's Degree in Analysis of Public Issues*

✓ **Mr Marowan MOHAD**

*Member of the UNEF national bureau*

✓ **Mr Jérémie MOUALEK**

*Senior Lecturer in Sociology*

*Member of the Pierre Naville Centre, associate at the Centre for  
Administrative, Political and Social Studies and Research (CERAPS) in Lille*

✓ **Mr Hugo PIERSON**

*Treasurer of the UNEF*

✓ **Mr Quentin THIROT**

*Vice-President of the FAGE, with responsibility for youth policies*

**People met during the visit by a temporary commission delegation to Marseilles**

✓ **Ms Sophie BEC**

*Head of the Les Bourrely youth sector*

*Les Bourrely Social Centre*

*Bouches-du-Rhône Federation of the Ligue de l'enseignement*

✓ **Ms Tina BIARD**

*Director of the Saint-Joseph Fontainieu social centre*

✓ **Ms Nadia BOULAINSEUR**

*Mayor of the 15th and 16th districts of Marseilles*

✓ **Mr Grégory BRANDIZZI**

*Head of Engagement and Community Life and the Social and Socially  
Responsible Economy (ESS)*

*Bouches-du-Rhône Federation of the Ligue de l'enseignement*

✓ **Mr Théo CHALLANDE-NIVORET**

*Deputy Mayor of Marseilles with responsibility for local democracy*



✓ **Ms Anne-Marie COLLIN**

*Special adviser on local democracy on the town council for the 15th and 16th districts*

✓ **Mr Régis CORRÉARD**

*Principal Private Secretary to the Mayor of the 15th and 16th districts*

Paris, 27 SEPT 2021

✓ **Ms Élise DUPEYROUX**

*Adviser at the Marseilles Social Centre*

✓ **Mr Hedi RAMDANE**

*Deputy Mayor of Marseilles with responsibility for youth*

Dear Sir,

The latest regional and departmental elections have again highlighted the low participation of young people in democratic life: 87% of 18- to 24-year-olds did not go to the polls for the first round. This observation, which was particularly striking during the last election, is unfortunately not new. This disaffection of young people for political elections might cause concern that political life will gradually be organised without them, with the risk of a democratic and generational divide in the long term.

The situation is all the more paradoxical since young people are not far removed from the big issues in our society or from the search for the common good, as demonstrated by their involvement in the fight for equality between women and men or in the fight against climate change. Although the forms of their engagement may differ from previous generations, with sometimes more occasional involvement, the success of the "jeveuxaider" platform launched by the government during the health crisis, or the momentum seen in civic service or national service, demonstrate a continuing desire to engage.

As I was able to announce before your assembly on 14 September and following on from the discussions of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council on the place of young people in society, I would like your assembly to enlighten the Government on the ways and means of revitalising the close link that should exist between the desire to engage in society and democratic participation. I would be grateful if you could study the nature of and the reasons for this renewal of the forms of young people's engagement and, more broadly, of its place in the democratic life of our country, and make proposals to improve the consistency of our public policies in this area.

This work on the involvement of young people in our society will be a useful and relevant complement to the work you are already doing, in response to the request made to you by the President of the National Assembly last July, concerning exercise of the vote by our fellow citizens, in the political field of course, but also in the economic, social and community sectors.

Mr Thierry BEAUDET  
President of the ESEC  
9, place d'Iéna  
75016 - Paris

### NO. 3: LETTER FROM THE PRIME MINISTER

I would like you to send me the conclusions of your work by the end of June 2022. In order to do this work, you may rely on all the administrations and departments that you feel it would be useful to consult, and in particular, those of the Ministry of the Interior and the Office of the Junior Minister with responsibility for Young People and Engagement.

Yours faithfully,



Jean CASTEX

Pravica vs



Pravica

## NO. 4: REPORT ON THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR INVOLVING CITIZENS IN THE WORK OF THE TEMPORARY COMMISSION ON DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION ATTACHED TO THE OPINION IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLE 26 OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE

- **Objective**

The ESEC has been asked by the Prime Minister to make proposals for adapting public policies to revitalise the link between young people's engagement in society and their democratic participation.

On this issue of integrating young people into the traditional democratic life of the country, direct public participation in the commission's work helps to draw up an opinion with proposals adapted to the specific nature of the subject, both in terms of the way it is drawn up and in terms of its recommendations.

A panel of citizens, involved from the outset of work on this subject, offers different viewpoints: the direct experience of young people and co-constructed work between organised civil society and citizens who are more removed from the democratic mechanisms. By directly involving these citizens in the commission, the ESEC's work benefits from direct and innovative experience in its consideration of the voice of the people.

- **Number of citizens involved**

Constitutional Council Decision 2020-812 DC states that *"without infringing Articles 69 and 70 of the Constitution relating to the powers of the Council, the number of such individuals may only constitute a limited proportion of the number of members of a commission"*. Rule 25 of the Rules of Procedure "Public participation in the work of commissions" provides that the number *"may not exceed half the number of permanent members of the commission or delegation concerned."*

To ensure their proper integration and effective participation in the commission, a maximum of 12 full citizens were recruited, without aiming to be representative of a small sample, but respecting "parity between women and men and a balanced representation of the territory of the Republic, particularly Overseas France"<sup>139</sup> with a panel adapted to enriching the work of this referral.

To this end, the provider, IRS, recruited a higher proportion of under-30s to participate in the work carried out between 4 November and 9 March.

After the plenary session, citizens are also invited to events promoting the opinion and to the review of the follow-up to the recommendations, held by the commission six months after adoption of the opinion.

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<sup>139</sup> Article 26 (former Article 25) of the ESEC's Rules of Procedure.

In addition to respecting gender parity, a limited number of representativeness criteria were submitted to the service provider: people no qualifications, people with a level of education lower than the baccalaureate (Bac), people with a level of education between Bac and Bac +3, people with a level of education higher than Bac +5, inhabitants of a city with a population of more than 200,000, inhabitants of a city with a population of between 10,000 and 50,000 and inhabitants outside urban units.

- **Integration procedures**

Sandrine Rui, a lecturer in sociology at the Centre Émile Durkheim of the University of Bordeaux, accepted the task of guaranteeing a process that meets the requirements of honesty, equality, transparency and impartiality, in particular by listening to citizens in the event of any difficulties.

To welcome them, an induction session was organised by the commission's governance body in conjunction with the company Missions Publiques on the afternoon of Wednesday, 3 November: after a welcome lunch, the citizens took part in a presentation of the ESEC, the Temporary Commission, the commission's work and the mechanisms for participating in its work, in order to make it easier for them to speak out and answer their initial questions.

A tour of the premises and a presentation of the services were also given on Thursday, 4 November.

The citizens were then welcomed by all commission members to the meeting on 4 November to start the work on youth engagement and democratic participation.

The organisation of two training sessions with the co-rapporteurs on Wednesday, 24 November and Thursday, 25 November provided an opportunity for citizens to attend the ESEC's first plenary session dedicated to gender equality and to give initial feedback on their experience. The shared time on 25 November gave citizens the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the co-rapporteurs and to begin to express their opinion on their experience of the ESEC.

In the end, despite personal or work-related constraints, the participation rate was 85% on completion of the work, with a particularly high level of face-to-face follow-up.

Throughout the work, citizens were provided with the same working documents as those sent to the ESEC members appointed to the commission.

- **Tasks entrusted to the citizens**

Rule 25 of the Rules of Procedure provides that the Bureau may decide to include the public "in the work of the commissions in an advisory capacity, for a specific purpose and for a specific period of time".

Citizens were involved in the work of the commission from the outset and were integrated so that they could participate fully in the meetings:

- participate in the development of the joint assessment, through their testimony and thoughts;
- propose new ideas (reasons for abstention, levers and channels of mobilisation, obstacles to and reasons for engagement, etc.);

- give an opinion on the reception by society and the feasibility of the proposals (social acceptability);
- formulate a limited number of proposals to be discussed in a commission meeting.

Having been put at ease, the citizens quickly took the floor to ask questions during hearings, give their point of view and react during debates and discussions. To facilitate integration of these citizens, direct coordination was handled by the commission. For the reading phase, ad hoc support for the drafting of amendments was offered by a *Task Force* administrator, after approval by the General Secretary.

As a result, the citizens participated in the co-construction of the opinion through their thoughts at a first reading and at a second reading.

They also took part in all the meetings organised by the commission, both face-to-face and by video conference (hearings, private interviews, readings of the text), and in the commission's trip to Marseilles.

When the councillors adopted the text in a commission meeting, the citizens expressed their opinion on the draft opinion by means of a nominal vote attached to the minutes.

- **Evaluation**

The added value of these innovative working methods in the construction of an opinion requested from the ESEC by the government to adapt public policies will be measured. A qualitative evaluation will be commissioned from a research team in order to draw lessons from the conditions of implementation and from the context in which the opinion was drawn up.

## NO. 5: CONTRIBUTION FROM THE ESEC DELEGATION FOR OVERSEAS TERRITORIES REPORTED BY MS INÈS BOUCHAUT-CHOISY AND MR YANNICK CAMBRAY<sup>140</sup>

The Temporary Commission on Democratic Participation wished to shed particular light on Overseas France in the context of the referral on "*Youth engagement and democratic participation*". The situation of young people in Overseas France with regard to participation and engagement is, in many respects, very specific. Although the decline in voter turnout is nationwide, it is particularly significant in Overseas France for national and European elections. However, voters in Overseas France are still more mobilised for local elections than in France. It can be seen that, structurally, the participation of young people remains low.

So how can we mobilise young people in Overseas France to return to the ballot box? How can we restore their confidence in the future and a will to engage in collectively taking their destiny in hand? For the delegation, it is first of all a question of analysing the causes of this disaffection, finding ways of educating, informing and supporting, but above all of better considering and valuing the engagement of these young people who, when they are offered a hand, are able to take it. This is the approach of the contribution made by the ESEC's Delegation for Overseas Territories<sup>141</sup>.

### I - BETTER SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

**The phenomenon of abstention affects Overseas France, regardless of the age of the voters.** As the referral brief reminds us, the phenomenon of voter abstention largely affects national territory, and not only Overseas France. Depending on the elections, abstention is sometimes even lower in Overseas France than in France. For example, in the last regional elections, abstention was sometimes lower than the national average, with Mayotte standing out with a 68.14% turnout<sup>142</sup>. Moreover, in view of the stakes between the first and second rounds, in some regions the abstention rate varied significantly, between 18 and 8 points between the two rounds<sup>143</sup>. The last election in June 2021 was marked by a high abstention rate<sup>144</sup>: Guadeloupe 63.12%;

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<sup>140</sup> Contribution adopted by the Delegation for Overseas Territories on 25 January 2022.

<sup>141</sup> As part of its work, the delegation's rapporteurs heard from: Mr Clément René-Gabriel, member of the citizens' group associated with the referral on "*Engagement and democratic participation amongst young people, a native of Guadeloupe and a student in France; Ms Eulalie Tisserant and Ms Sarahda Latchimy, members of the Sciences Ô student association, from La Réunion and New Caledonia, students at Sciences Po Paris*". This association promotes the culture of Overseas France at Sciences Po, offering proposals and action for young people and Overseas France. It works to improve the preparation of secondary school students from Overseas France for the various entrance exams to Sciences Po. The association also runs the Overseas Week at Sciences Po.

<sup>142</sup> The final turnout for the second round of the 2021 regional elections (France) was 34.69%.

<sup>143</sup> An analysis of the vote will be available: Martial Foucault, "Évolution du vote régional Outre-mer 2015-2021" [Changes in the regional vote in Overseas France, 2015-2021], FOROM, July 2021.

<sup>144</sup> Abstention rate in the second round of regional and departmental elections, source: Ministry of the Interior.

French Polynesia 56.02%; Martinique 55.17%; French Guiana 53.22%; Reunion 53.50%. Already in the 2017 presidential elections, while abstention is traditionally low at the national level (22%), it was 53% in Overseas France, 31 points above the national average<sup>145</sup>. **Withdrawal from the ballot box is therefore a structural phenomenon in Overseas France, and not only among young people.**

**Overseas France covers those territories where "systematic abstention"<sup>146</sup> is the highest.** In 2017, while nine in ten registered voters voted in at least one round of voting at the national level, one third of voters in Martinique and Guadeloupe did not vote in any of the elections during the year<sup>147</sup>. In La Réunion, the number of voters who voted systematically (26%) was only slightly higher than the number who systematically abstained (23%). The socio-economic characteristics of voters (age, proportion of single-parent families, level of education, income, etc.) are not enough to explain this low voter turnout in France's overseas departments and regions, which remains much higher than it should be 'all things being equal'<sup>148</sup>. **Therefore, in view of the general decline in voter turnout, the delegation is calling for no stigmatisation of 'young people' as a social group, who may be more likely to abstain from voting, but who are part of a broader context of crisis in democratic engagement in Overseas France.**

**Turnout among young people in Overseas France is low regardless of the election.** Detailed electoral data are not widely available in overseas territories, since few electoral sociology surveys are conducted. Nevertheless, the published data show a very strong decrease in turnout among young people. **Thus, one out of two voters between the age of 18 and 29 years old does not vote in any elections in Overseas France.** In Guadeloupe, two in five voters aged 18 to 29 did not participate in any of the four elections in 2017<sup>149</sup>. **The delegation believes that more statistical data and electoral sociology surveys are needed to examine the causes of low turnout**

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<sup>145</sup> The trend of abstention in presidential elections is steadily increasing in Overseas France. In Guadeloupe, for example, it was 47.5% in 2012, rising to 60% in 2017; in French Guiana, it was 49% in 2012, rising by almost 17 points to 65.7%. In Martinique: 47.6% in 2012 and 60% in 2017. In French Polynesia, the abstention rate was 50.65% in 2012, and in 2017, it rose to 61.1%.

<sup>146</sup> Systematic participation refers to the electoral behaviour of a person who has voted in all elections. Conversely, systematic abstention refers to the behaviour of a voter who did not participate in any round of voting during the year.

<sup>147</sup> According to INSEE, for 13.4% at national level, systematic abstention represents 35% of registered voters living in Martinique and 32% of those living in Guadeloupe. Floraline Cratère, "Un tiers des électeurs n'ont pas voté en 2017, Participation électorale en Martinique" [One third of voters did not vote in 2017, voter turnout in Martinique], *INSEE, Flash Martinique*, no. 74, October 2017. *As can be seen in most territories, the youngest and oldest people participate less often in elections. Systematic abstention is high among young people and decreases between the ages of 30 and 59, then stabilises between 60 and 79 at around 28%. From the age of 80, systematic abstention becomes the position of a large majority and concerns three in five voters. In Martinique, men vote less than women (eight points difference), while at the national level, participation is almost identical.*

<sup>148</sup> Guillemette Buisson, Sandrine Penant, 2017 presidential and general elections: nine in ten registered voters voted in at least one round, *INSEE Première*, No. 1670, October 2017.

<sup>149</sup> Floraline Cratère, voter turnout in Guadeloupe. One third of voters did not vote in 2017, *INSEE, Flash Guadeloupe*, no. 73, October 2017.



**among young people in Overseas France. It welcomes the creation of an Overseas Chair at Sciences Po to carry out more in-depth studies<sup>150</sup>.**

**Social circumstances, level of education and job insecurity have a bearing on participation in elections<sup>151</sup>.** Studies show that family circumstances, especially single parenthood<sup>152</sup>, are important factors in abstention from voting. Young Guadeloupeans of voting age who live with their parents are more often disinterested in politics: 40% of young voters living with their parents did not vote in any of the 2017 elections. Social and professional integration is also a factor in voter participation. It should be remembered that with a very high level of unemployment, often long-term, among young people, many are unable to find their place in society. While some young people in Overseas France are successful at school and have a desire to become entrepreneurs, others suffer from academic failure, unemployment and a feeling of social exclusion which lead to a profound rejection of political life<sup>153</sup>. This phenomenon of social and political disaffiliation was pointed out by the young people interviewed by the delegation. **The Delegation for Overseas Territories is calling for public policies that promote social cohesion and the inclusion of young people in employment, training, housing and access to public services, which are the key to social integration and participation in democratic life.**

**The education system should encourage discovery of the world of community and encourage more citizen participation.** During the interviews, several young people pointed out the gap between moral and civic education in primary and secondary schools and the civic life they would encounter a few years later. The very theoretical courses on "the making of the law" are not sufficiently in tune with the expectations of young people, the need to explain the issues at stake in the elections, and in line with the local statutes. Occasional interventions by associations or elected representatives would help open up this teaching to their environment. These teaching programmes should set out the remit of the overseas communities,

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<sup>150</sup> The CEVIPOF has carried out an analysis of changes in voting, taking into account the last two regional elections (in 2015 and 2021) in Overseas France. A study will be conducted on the regional elections to be held on 20 and 27 March 2022 for the Communities of Saint-Martin, Saint-Barthélemy, Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelon and Wallis and Futuna.

<sup>151</sup> In Martinique, the systematic abstention rate among those aged 25 or over with at least a baccalaureate is 26.1%, compared with 38.1% for those with a lower level of education. Retired people, blue-collar workers and people not in active employment are more likely to abstain from voting than intermediate professions or managers, as is the case at national level. In Martinique, the unemployed participate less often in elections than the employed: 42.6% of them abstained from voting in each election, while one in four employed people did not vote in 2017.

<sup>152</sup> In 2011, according to INED, single-parent families with children under 25 years of age represented 25% of families in France, compared with 54% in Martinique, 51% in Guadeloupe, 46% in French Guiana and 38% in La Réunion. According to INSEE, 32% of Guadeloupean and Martiniquan women aged 25-54 headed a single-parent family in 2011, and this figure was 27% of women in French Guiana in the same age group, compared with 12% in France.

<sup>153</sup> On this point, see the comments of the Martiniquan writer André Lucrèce, member of the Citizen's Committee for Transparency on the Management of Covid-19 in Martinique, in *Outre-mer Première*: "L'écrivain André Lucrèce appelle à ne pas décevoir l'appel des jeunes sur les ronds-points de Martinique" [*The writer André Lucrèce calls for not disappointing the call of the young people protesting on the roundabouts of Martinique*], 7 December 2021.

as well as the political history of these territories, which have a strong identity. **For the delegation, the Republic should formally call on young people in Overseas France to not fail in their duty to participate in elections. The right to vote is a moral duty for all citizens, as the wording on voter registration cards reminds us: "Voting is a right, it is also a civic duty".**

## Recommendation 1

For the delegation, moral and civic education should be improved, by presenting the remit and role of institutions and by incorporating the specific status of overseas communities and the historical dimension.

**The geographical remoteness of many young voters increases the level of abstention.** Several of the young people interviewed confirmed this: ways of voting are not adapted to the very specific situations of young people in Overseas France. Abstention by young people can be broadly explained by the large number of voters who do not or no longer reside in the municipality where they are registered. Young people born in the West Indies, French Guiana and Mayotte, and to a lesser extent in La Réunion, are leaving their birth region in large numbers<sup>154</sup>. The main reasons for leaving after the baccalaureate are to continue their studies and to find work. Reaching the age of 18 marks a strong wave of departures to France and abroad or to the county capital. It is at this age when young people become citizens that the risk of a break in voter turnout appears<sup>155</sup>. **As a result, it is not always the lack of registration that poses a problem, but "incorrect registration", i.e., being registered on the electoral roll in a municipality that does not or no longer corresponds to the place of residence. The delegation also questions the inclusion of the blank vote and of those who did not vote.**

**The procedure of automatic registration at the age of 18 does not include all young people.** In 2012, only two thirds of Guadeloupeans aged 18 to 30 were registered to vote, despite automatic registration for new voters reaching the age of majority<sup>156</sup>. On islands such as Saint-Barthélemy, which does not have a local secondary school,

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<sup>154</sup> Lise Demougeot, Ludovic Besson, "Pierre Thibault, Les natifs des Antilles, de Guyane et de Mayotte quittent souvent leur région natale, contrairement aux Réunionnais" [Natives of the West Indies, French Guiana and Mayotte often leave their birth region, unlike people from La Réunion], *INSEE Première*, no. 1853, April 2021. In 2017, 55% of young people aged 21 to 29 who were born in Mayotte left their region of birth, mainly to pursue their studies. In the West Indies and French Guiana, many young natives also leave for France (44% and 37% respectively between the ages of 21 and 29) to continue their studies or to work. In La Réunion, only a quarter of the young people born there leave their region of birth between the ages of 21 and 29. Between the ages of 15 and 34, 21% of native Martinique residents have already spent more than six months outside their region of birth; this figure is 16% of Guadeloupeans and 18% of Mayotte nationals. The numbers are lower in La Réunion (13%) and French Guiana (10%).

<sup>155</sup> While registration on the electoral roll can be done at any time of the year and there is no longer a deadline of 31 December of the year preceding the election, many young people are not aware that it is now possible to register on the electoral roll up until the 6th Friday before the election.

<sup>156</sup> Cynthia Duchel, "En Guadeloupe, une large majorité d'inscrits mais peu de votants" [In Guadeloupe, a large majority of registered voters but few actual voters], *INSEE AntianÉchos*, no. 34, May 2013.

many young people leave home very early at the age of 13 or 14. Although every young person is automatically registered on the electoral roll when they come of age, the fact that many of them leave before this age means that, when it comes to citizen census formalities at 16, they are not automatically registered. **The delegation proposes that the procedure of automatic registration at 18 be reinforced by systematic information (by e-mail or text message) at 16, in conjunction with schools and local associations, so as not to overlook young people who have dropped out of school. Registration and checks could also be carried out when taking a census, registering for an exam or completing any official formality (tax return, first salary, Employment Centre, Carte Vitale (health insurance card), etc.).**

**Access to proxy voting poses real practical difficulties.** Many young non-residents use proxy voting. In Guadeloupe, one in four young people registered to vote do not live in the country<sup>157</sup>. For the 2012 elections, one third of non-resident voters voted at least once by proxy, and half of them were under 35 years of age (45% were in employment, 31% were students). However, drawing up a proxy voting form is an administrative process that many people do not undertake due to lack of interest. The online "Maprocuration" service, with login through France Connect, allows voters to pre-fill a proxy voting form online, but they still have to go in person to a gendarmerie or police station to have this approved, which can be time-consuming for those who live far away. For overseas students studying abroad, a proxy voting form can be drawn up at the consulate. It should also be remembered that in Overseas France, these formalities represent a barrier for those who have difficulty using digital tools or who do not have access to the Internet. And lastly, the young people interviewed pointed out that using a proxy can lead to self-censorship in the choice of vote (this was particularly true during New Caledonia's independence referendum), and can mean that the choice of parents - often the proxy voters - prevails. The procedure for drawing up a proxy voting form should be simplified in the same way as the procedure for registering to vote. **For the delegation, young citizens need to be better informed about registration, proxy and voting procedures, through targeted campaigns on the various media (social networks, Internet, local press).**

**Innovative schemes could make it easier for young people to vote, especially those who live far from their home town.** Canada and the United States allow early postal voting, but so do Germany, Switzerland, Spain, the United Kingdom and others. We should remember that this existed in France between 1946 and 1975. This is a simple democratic tool that allows citizens of all ages to vote regardless of their circumstances (distance, disability, etc.). A recent bill (no. 4469) proposing the introduction of postal voting was rejected by the Senate.

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<sup>157</sup> Cynthia Duchel, "En Guadeloupe, une large majorité d'inscrits mais peu de votants" [In Guadeloupe, a large majority of registered voters but few actual voters], *INSEE AntianÉchos*, no. 34, May 2013.

## Recommendation 2

The Delegation for Overseas Territories is proposing to trial early postal voting for young people in Overseas France who are studying outside their home territory.

## II - MAXIMISING THE ENGAGEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN OVERSEAS FRANCE

**Abstention can also be explained by a lack of confidence, or even a form of mistrust, in the political representation system and elected officials.** The young people interviewed alerted the delegation to this point: many young people are disinterested in politics and choose methods other than the ballot box to express their choices or even their anger (social networks, demonstrations, etc.). The multi-faceted social crises in the West Indies in autumn 2021 have revealed the deep malaise among some of the young people in these territories<sup>158</sup>. If we look back, young people were already one of the focuses of the popular protest movement in the West Indies in 2009, as they were in French Guiana in 2017. The Minister for Overseas France recently announced the development of inter-ministerial action plans for young people in Guadeloupe and Martinique. Prefects have been given a mandate to expand the dialogue with stakeholders on the ground in order to gather their proposals on integration and training but also "engagement and citizenship", "access to and information about rights", etc<sup>159</sup>. **For the delegation, discussions are required at the level of each territory, bringing together the various youth actors and civil society, to better incorporate youth policies into the various plans (Convergence and Transformation Plans, Recovery and Environmental Transition Contract, etc.).**

**The civic involvement of young people should be encouraged.** Awareness of neighbourhood councils or citizen involvement among young people is low. In Guadeloupe, the Regional Youth Council is a consultative body. Young people can take up issues themselves, submit them and even give their opinion on the Region's budget. In Cayenne, a municipal youth council (for primary schools) is chaired by the Mayor, who has elected deputies with responsibility for this policy. This is coordinated by the City's policy department and makes proposals on the various municipal policies: sport, culture, citizenship, etc. **The Delegation for Overseas Territories encourages the development of youth councils at all levels of representation of territorial authorities, municipalities and departmental and regional councils.**

**Young people in Overseas France do not feel that electoral issues concern them, especially when these issues are national or European.** Several young people confirmed this: "information isn't getting through". New generations get

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<sup>158</sup> Jean-Marc Party, "Crise sociale en Martinique : la jeunesse sera-t-elle la grande oubliée des négociations ?" [Social crisis in Martinique: will young people be the most overlooked group in negotiations?], *Outre-mer Première*, 10 December 2021.

<sup>159</sup> The Government has mandated the Prefects of Martinique and Guadeloupe, in conjunction with the Chief Education Officer, to conduct negotiations with trade unions, youth representatives and local authorities.

their information from social networks and no longer follow television news or the written press. Local or specialised media for young people could play a role in better informing and engaging young voters. It is important for national media to give more visibility and a more positive image of Overseas France. "France doesn't just mean the mainland!" and young people need to identify with their territory.

**Candidates in national elections rarely talk about their policies for Overseas France or travel to meet young people.** The caricatured and sometimes disastrous image of political leaders, the lack of proximity of elected representatives to people "on the ground", their presumed powerlessness reflected by the media and social networks, all serve to discredit the function and generate disinterest among young people. Many people are not aware of the issues at stake in national or European elections, which they consider too far removed from their concerns. On the other hand, they feel more involved in local politics, which is reflected in higher voter turnout at the municipal and regional level. Similarly, as students living far from their place of origin stated during the interviews, their connection with their region remains strong and they feel more concerned by what is happening "back home" than in France. **Programmes incorporating the overseas dimension of national policies would be likely to be of greater interest to and further mobilise young voters. Similarly, young people would like to see programmes that make specific proposals for young people, even if they are experiencing glaring difficulties in Overseas France.**

**Young people must be considered and valued as citizens, fully-fledged actors in social and democratic life<sup>160</sup>.** Young people note that there is little representation of under-30s among elected politicians or those in positions of responsibility. Many young people do not feel listened to, or feel underestimated by the older generations. They regret the sometimes negative representations made of their age group or their lack of experience, and cite a lack of trust in them<sup>161</sup>. **As the interviewees said, a young person who feels listened to is more likely to vote!**

**Access to civic life requires socialisation through engagement in political and civil society organisations.** Many young people would like to get involved in the defence of "big issues" (the environment, the fight against climate change, social responsibility, etc.). However, it is clear that they do not take steps to approach an organisation, whether this be an association or a political organisation, which would enable them to put this engagement into practice. Raising awareness, from an early age, of democratic engagement, in all its aspects - relating to voting, trade unions, volunteering, civic participation, etc. -, is a fundamental lever for learning about citizenship. Therefore, the delegation is calling on civil society organisations to reach

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<sup>160</sup> See: CDJ, CEMEA, DJSCS, "Bilan des premières rencontres territoriales de la jeunesse martiniquaise, Fort-de-France, Conseil départemental de la jeunesse" [Review of preliminary regional meetings of young people in Martinique, Fort-de-France, Departmental Council for Young People], 2015.

<sup>161</sup> Remarks from the final report of the Assises des Outre-mer, Martinique - Youth workshop - drawn up by Michel Tondellier, Dominique Savon, Dominique Halbwachs, Murielle Alexandrine, Line-Rose Nonone, "*Placer la jeunesse au cœur de l'évolution de la société martiniquaise*" [Putting young people at the heart of changes in Martinique society], Fort-de-France, March 2018.

out to young people in order to fully play their role of integration, in order to embed young people in civic engagement and democratic participation.

**This approach also applies to political parties.** For example, a dozen young students close to the Tavini<sup>162</sup> party, but claiming the political pluralism of their members, decided to launch the association "We're not sheep" to encourage young people to mobilise for the elections and motivate them to go and vote, whatever the political party of their choice<sup>163</sup>. The association aims to raise the political awareness of young people and to reduce the number of abstainers on the island. A concert-debate with a member of parliament was organised on this occasion.

### Recommendation 3

For the Delegation for Overseas Territories, candidates in local elections should be encouraged to approach young people and give them a place on the lists of candidates. Candidates need to take better account of the demands and aspirations of young people in their programmes. Positions as deputy mayor or vice-chair should be offered more often within each local executive in order to ensure good representation of young people on councils. We also need to think about the future and the training, through practice, of our future public officials. Elected representatives have a duty to be accountable for their mandate, including for young people in Overseas France.

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<sup>162</sup> Tavini is a Polynesian political party led by Mr Oscar Temaru.

<sup>163</sup> Vaite Urarii Pambrun, "Une association pour inciter les jeunes à aller voter" [An association to encourage young people to go and vote], Radio], May 2018.

## NO. 6: UPDATE ON GENDER ISSUES AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ISSUES, PREPARED BY LOUISE LANDAIS-FEDERICI FOR THE ESEC DELEGATION FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY (DDFE)

Gender is rarely taken into account in studies on the engagement of young people, which favour a gender-neutral approach to young people. However, the concept of citizenship is based on an abstract universality, often referring to the male<sup>164</sup>, women having been considered as fully-fledged citizens in the history of Western democracy only at a later stage. The political world shows continuity with the social world, where gender inequalities are reproduced and may even be exacerbated. French political culture is still marked by sexism and *"women politicians are seen as intruders, subject to disqualification and incivilities, paternalistic behaviour and confronted with sexist and sexual abuse"*<sup>165</sup>. In order to better integrate young women into the democratic process, participatory democracy needs to be rethought, and the gender stereotypes and abuse that may hinder young women's democratic engagement need to be addressed.

### 1. A lack of visibility of women in politics

#### 1.1 History of women's suffrage

France was among the last European nations to recognise women's political rights by granting them the right to vote. Yet it was the first country to establish universal suffrage in 1848. The Order of 21 April 1944, stipulating that "women are voters and eligible under the same conditions as men", enabled French women to vote for the first time on 29 April 1945 in municipal elections. The recognition of women's citizenship was made possible by the struggles of women activists, from Olympe de Gouge in 1791 through to the suffragettes, and also the French Union for the Right to Vote in the early 20th century.

The Fourth Republic ushered in an era more favourable to women, with several elected politicians, newcomers to democracy, coming from the French Resistance. This momentum was slowed by the establishment of the Fifth Republic. This was to be a "unisex republic" and ensure the legitimate monopoly of politics for men, notably by strengthening the role of a President referring to the figure of the "right man for the job"<sup>166</sup>.

#### 1.2 A slightly different voting practice

The electoral behaviour of French women has changed a lot in 80 years. They first emancipated themselves from the political influence of husbands and fathers,

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<sup>164</sup> Carole Pateman, *"Le contrat sexuel" [The sexual contract]*, La Découverte, "textes à l'appui" series, 2010.

<sup>165</sup> High Council for Gender Equality, *"Rapport annuel sur l'état du sexisme en France en 2019" [Annual report on the state of sexism in France in 2019]*, p. 9.

<sup>166</sup> Mariette Sineau, *"Femmes et pouvoir sous la Ve république" [Women and Power in the Fifth Republic]*, 2015.

because before they had the right to vote, they were totally excluded from democratic learning. Women have long been more abstaining and conservative in voting than their male counterparts<sup>167</sup>. The trend was reversed in the 1980s and 2000s, when the women's vote positioned itself more to the left. However, there has been an increase in abstention among women in local elections. In the regional and departmental elections of June 2021, 72% of women abstained from voting compared to 59% of men<sup>168</sup>, while there was no significant difference between men and women in the presidential elections.

The vote of French women has become similar in these characteristics to that of men, so that few differences remain. However, they tend to vote for more moderate candidates and are less likely to vote for "extremes"<sup>169</sup>.

### 1.3 Abuse in spaces of engagement

Spaces of engagement reproduce the dynamics of oppression that run through society. A survey #EntenduALaMairie300 carried out by the organisations #NousToutes and EluesLocales.fr, among 354 elected representatives, shows that sexism and sexual harassment are very present in these circles. 43% of the women surveyed said they had experienced sexism, the vast majority of which (83.4% of cases) came from elected colleagues<sup>170</sup>. In an article in *Le Monde*, 285 women involved in politics call for the removal of perpetrators of sexist and sexual abuse from political life<sup>171</sup>.

This abuse is also found on the Internet, where women who speak out are much more likely to be victims of cyberbullying 79% of women expressed fear of being the subject of cyberbullying, compared to 66% of men<sup>172</sup>. And when factors of discrimination combine, bullying increases, with black women being 84% more likely than white women to be mentioned in offensive tweets<sup>173</sup>. This abuse discourages young people from engaging and participating in the democratic exercise in different forms. 40% of under-50s say they have experienced repeated attacks on online social platforms. Of these, 22% are between 18 and 24 years old<sup>174</sup>.

This abuse, which is expressed in different ways and in different places, always has the same objective: The report states: *"To silence women who dare to speak out and to exclude them from the media and digital sphere."*<sup>175</sup>

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167 Armelle Le Bras-Chopard Janine Mossuz-Lavau, *"Les femmes et la politique" [Women and Politics]*, 1997.

168 "Régionales 2021 : Pourquoi les femmes se sont davantage abstenues que les hommes" [2021 regional elections: why women abstained more than men] (*lemonde.fr*).

169 "Qu'en est-il du droit de vote des femmes ?" [Where are we with women's right to vote?] | *Vie publique.fr* (*vie-publique.fr*).

170 High Council for Gender Equality, *"Rapport annuel sur l'état du sexisme en France en 2019" [Annual report on the state of sexism in France in 2019]*, p. 127.

171 Gender-based abuse: 285 women involved in politics call for a "political #MeToo" (*franceinter.fr*).

172 "Cyberharcèlement : les solutions numériques pour s'en protéger" [Cyberbullying: digital solutions to protect yourself] (*adatechschool.com*).

173 Twitter study reveals shocking scale of online abuse against women (*amnesty.org*).

174 Social networks: "Français ayant été la cible d'harcèlement par âge 2019" [French people who have been the target of harassment by age, 2019] | *Statista*.

175 High Council for Gender Equality, *"Rapport annuel sur l'état du sexisme en France en 2019" [Annual report on the state of sexism in France in 2019]*, p. 33.



## 2. However, young women are actors of political change and there are ways for them to achieve this

### 2.1 Engaged young women involved in social change

Young women play a key role in political mobilisation for issues such as climate change, anti-discrimination and the #MeToo movement. They often invest in unconventional public actions such as boycotts, petitions, changing consumer behaviour. For example, 72% of vegetarians are women and more than half of vegetarians are between 26 and 35 years old<sup>176</sup>. The new generation is more sensitive to and more mobilised against sexism, with 78% of 18- to 30-year-olds saying they fight sexism<sup>177</sup>.

In recent years several young women have become politically vocal. These include Greta Thunberg and in France: Camille Etienne, Salomé Saqué and Assa Traoré.

But these voices have difficulty in finding their place in the public space and their legitimacy is all the more contested because they are women's voices. In the media, on the street or in meetings, women have less speaking time than men. On television, while they represent 42% of those present, their speaking rate is 32.7%. This rate falls when we look at just female experts and guests<sup>178</sup>. In 2017, the media outlet BRUT counted women's speaking time in the National Assembly at less than 4%, even though they make up 38.8% of MPs<sup>179</sup>.

### 2.2 Revitalising representative democracy and new rules to strengthen the place of young women in politics

Some tools have proven to be effective in promoting the feminisation of political life. For example, the laws on parity in politics (2002 and 2003) raised great expectations of renewal of the political class by the population, especially by the younger generation<sup>180</sup>. Behind parity lies the issue of renewal of political elites, seen as a remedy to the crisis of political representativeness. This wave of feminisation of the various political assemblies has led to a renewal and rejuvenation of political figures. In the 2017 general elections, the average age of MPs fell from 54.6 in 2012 to 49.2 in 2017. This rejuvenation is primarily due to women MPs, since their average age is 48 compared to 50 for male MPs<sup>181</sup>.

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176 "Végétariens : qui sont-ils ?" [Vegetarians: who are they?] | Santé Magazine (santemagazine.fr).

177 #MoiJeune, Study conducted by OpinionWay for 20 Minutes, 8 March 2019: <https://www.20minutes.fr/societe/2467367-20190308-sondage-moijeune-opinionway-92-18-30-ans>

178 High Council for Gender Equality, "Rapport annuel sur l'état du sexisme en France en 2019" [Annual report on the state of sexism in France in 2019], p. 94.

179 Video. "À l'Assemblée nationale, les femmes ont moins de 4 % du temps de parole (pour l'instant)" [Women get less than 4% of speaking time in the National Assembly (for now)] (francetvinfo.fr).

180 According to the "Panel électoral français" [French Electoral Panel] survey conducted by Cevipof in 2002, 64% of men and 72% of women believed that "people's interests would be better served if there were more women in parliament" (Sineau, 2004: 214).

181 The elitist feminisation of the National Assembly | Sciences Po.

The opposite is also true, as in several countries the introduction of youth quotas in electoral laws has helped improve the political representation of women<sup>182</sup>.

As a result, feminisation and generational renewal seem to be correlated. On the other hand, the high number of women going into politics has not significantly changed the social conditions of access to the political profession. The share of working class categories remains low and under-represented, unlike the category of teachers and civil servants, which has increased further as a result of feminisation<sup>183</sup>. Feminisation is therefore not necessarily accompanied by a renewal in socio-professional terms.

There are other measures to improve the political representation of women, such as the voting system. Women have a better chance of being placed on a party list in a proportional system than in a majority system. A proportional voting system can also be conducive to the political participation of young people. The impact of stereotypes means that older and more experienced men are perceived as better political leaders than younger people or women.

### 2.3 Combating gender stereotypes and norms in politics

The gender-differentiated process of socialisation and identity construction as well as "gender role obligations"<sup>184</sup> inhibit young women's participation in political engagement. Several studies have shown that from an early age, women may have difficulties in speaking up spontaneously, due to self-censorship and a feeling of illegitimacy.

Several actions can be implemented or are already in place to overcome this phenomenon: the creation of a system of shared turns taken to speak, for example, or the introduction of a listening unit and also the creation of a gender quota mechanism within the party<sup>185</sup>.

Another stereotype that still impacts women's political engagement is the image of the "unfit mother". Gender biases contribute to women being assigned to the domestic sphere; many female politicians have been accused of being "bad mothers"<sup>186</sup>. Women also suffer from being assigned to political issues related to the private sphere. For example, women represent 100% of the members of the Social Affairs and Health Delegation and more than 80% in the Culture Delegation in regional executives in 2016, compared to 11% in the Budget Finance Delegation and

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<sup>182</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle", 2014, p. 22.

<sup>183</sup> Mariette Sineau; *"Femmes et pouvoir sous la Ve république" [Women and Power in the Fifth Republic]*, 2015.

<sup>184</sup> Manon Tremblay and Réjean Pelletier-Sainte Foy, *"Que font-elles en politique ?" [What are women doing in politics?]*, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1995.

<sup>185</sup> "Les jeunes et la place des femmes en politique" [Young people and the place of women in politics] | Equal'ID (tbs-education.fr).

<sup>186</sup> "'Vache folle', 'Incontrôlable', 'Mais qui va garder les enfants ?' : Ségolène Royal raconte 30 ans d'attaques sexistes" ["Mad cow", "Uncontrollable", "Who's going to look after the children?": Ségolène Royal recounts 30 years of sexist attacks] | LCI.

8% in Transport<sup>187</sup>. Although the gap is less pronounced in the ESEC, the same kind of problem exists, with women councillors making up more than half of the members of the Commission for Social Affairs and Health (55%) compared to less than a third on the Commission for European and International Affairs (31%).

- **Recommendations:**

- creation of a system of shared turns taken to speak in assemblies;
- develop mentoring among women in politics;
- encourage affirmative measures such as quotas of young people and women in political parties and even combine both with the introduction of a gender clause in young people quotas;
- incorporate gender equality into the organisation of political parties, for example, by setting up an equality action plan for each political party;
- fund political parties on the basis of equal conditions by adding, in calculation of the first fraction, the obligation of parity within party leadership bodies and on nomination committees<sup>188</sup>;
- publish a specific count, during election periods, of the speaking time allocated to women and men per week<sup>189</sup>;
- introduce a penalty of non-eligibility for an elected official convicted for gender-based and sexual abuse.

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<sup>187</sup> Report of the High Council for Equality, 2019, p. 122. The study was carried out in the 12 mainland regions.

<sup>188</sup> Recommendation 27 of the *Report of the High Council for Equality*, 2019, p. 9.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*

**NO. 7: THE REFERENDUM IN SWITZERLAND: THE HIGHEST  
TURNOUT SINCE THE INTRODUCTION OF WOMEN'S  
SUFFRAGE IN 1971**

Date	No.	Subject	Participation as %
06/12/1992	3880	Joining the EEA	78.7
20/10/1974	2420	Against foreign infiltration	70.3
26/11/1989	3570	A Switzerland without an army	69.2
	3580	Introducing speed limits of 130/100 kph	69.2
28/11/2021	6480	"For strong nursing care" initiative	65.3
	6490	Justice initiative	64.7
	6500	Amendment of the Covid-19 Act	65.7
28/02/2016	5970	Initiative for the effective expulsion of foreign criminals	63.7
	5990	Reconstruction of the Gotthard road tunnel	63.5
	5960	Initiative on the reform of taxation of couples and families	63.2
	5980	No speculation on food initiative	62.9
13/06/2021	6410	"For clean drinking water and healthy food" initiative	59.8
	6420	"For a Switzerland without artificial pesticides" initiative	59.8
	6430	Covid-19 Act	59.7
	6440	CO2 Act	59.7
	6450	Federal Act on Police Measures to Combat Terrorism	59.6
27/09/2020	6310	"For moderate immigration" initiative	59.5
	6350	Purchase of new fighter aircraft	59.4
	6340	Loss of earnings allowance (paternity leave)	59.4
	6320	Federal Hunting Act	59.3
	6330	Direct federal tax (tax allowances for children)	59.2

03/03/2002	4850	Switzerland's membership of the UN	58.4
	4860	Reduced working hours	58.3
05/06/2005	5170	Schengen/Dublin Agreements	56.6
	5180	Registered Partnership Act	56.5
09/02/2014	5780	Financing and development of railway infrastructure	56.2
	5800	"Against mass immigration" initiative	56.6
	5790	"Funding abortion is a private matter" initiative	56.4
18/05/2014	5830	Minimum wage initiative	56.4
	5840	Purchase of the Gripen fighter aircraft	56.3
	5820	"Ban on convicted paedophiles working with children" initiative	56.2
	5810	Primary healthcare	55.8
04/03/2001	4760	Safe streets for everyone	55.8
	4740	Yes to Europe!	55.8
	4750	"Affordable medicines" initiative	55.7
06/06/1993	3930	Initiative against new fighter aircraft	55.6
	3920	40 military training areas are enough	55.6

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## NO. 9: TABLE OF ACRONYMS

ACE	Administration and Cost of Elections (project)
AFA	French Anti-Corruption Agency
CSA	Civic Service Agency
ASE	Child welfare
CEC	Citizen Engagement Account
CERAPS	Centre for Administrative, Political and Social Studies and Research
ESEC	Economic, Social and Environmental Council
CESER	Regional Economic, Social and Environmental Council
CEVIPOF	Centre for Political Research at Sciences Po
CNAF	Family branch of the social security agency
CNAJEP	Committee for National and International Relations of Youth and Non-formal Education Associations
CNCPH	National Advisory Council of Disabled Persons
CNESCO	National Council for School System Evaluation
CNRS	French National Centre for Scientific Research
CREDOC	Research centre for assessment and observation of standards of living
CSP	Socio-professional category
CV	<i>Curriculum vitae</i>
CVC	Student Life Committee (junior school)
CVL	Student Life Committee (senior school)
DDFE	Delegation for Women's Rights and Equal Opportunity
DDHC	Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen
DJEPVA	Youth, Non-formal Education and Voluntary Organisation
ECTS	<i>European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System</i>
EHESP	French School of Public Health
EMC	Moral and civic education
ESS	Social and socially responsible economy
FAGE	Student associations federation
FALC	Easy to read and understand
FFJ	French youth forum
FONDAPOL	French think tank for political innovation
HATVP	High Authority for Transparency in Public Life
INJEP	National Institute for Youth and Non-formal Education
JDC	Defence and Citizenship Day
MIG	General interest activities
NEET	<i>Not in Education, Employment or Training</i>
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PEDT	Territorial educational project
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
PUF	Presses Universitaires de France
PUR	Presses Universitaires de Rennes
QPC	Application for a priority preliminary ruling on the issue of constitutionality
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation

RNJA	National network of junior associations
SNU	National Service
TUC	Paid community service (for the young unemployed)
EU	European Union
UMR	Joint Research Unit
UNEF	National Union of Students of France
UNICEF	<i>United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund</i>

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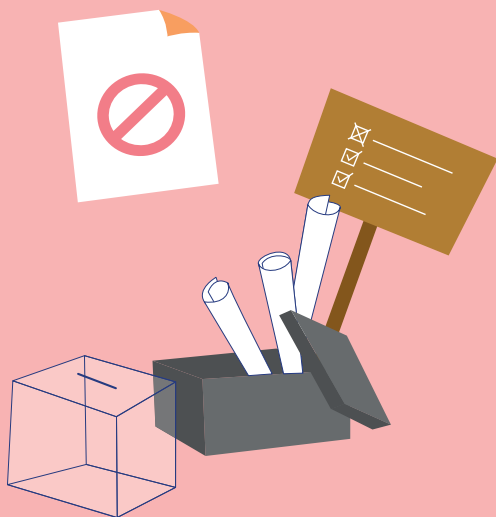
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