

Abstract Momentum 2022: Transformation

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My essay for the conference is a (political) summary of my bachelor's thesis. In my thesis I conduct an analysis of the European election turnout from 2019 with a focus on young voters, what influenced them to cast their votes, and how voter turnout varies across generations. For the conference, I want to deepen the interpretation on a more abstract level as well as formulate political implications and provide statements of societal requirements.

For the first time since 1979, when the first democratic European election for the European Parliament was held, voter turnout in the last European election increased. Until 2019 turnout has continuously decreased, which among other things is one of the reasons European elections are so-called second-order elections. Now, not only politicians, journalists, or activists, but scholars, too, have raised the question whether European elections have moved up towards first-order elections. Furthermore, albeit the literature and empirical research show a significant influence by the so-called 'Spitzenkandidaten process' in the European election in 2014, the process was weakened in 2019. Due to the EU politicians' inability to agree on a Spitzenkandidat, a compromised vote was reached for the current president of the Commission, who addressed both the Spitzenkandidaten process and transnational electoral lists in her acceptance speech. The latter have informally been in place for the first time in 2019 and are supposedly to be institutionalized by the next European election in 2024.

The latest European election of 2019 puts these prevailing classifications into question and offers the opportunity to re-assess the current state of democracy and its electability in the European Union. I do this on an abstract level by scratching beneath surface of existing assessments and theories, and on a more practical level by posing the following research question: How does voter turnout vary across generations in the European election 2019?

To answer my research question, I conduct a literature and data review, research data banks and models, and finally analyse a multivariate regression. I use aggregate-level data and employ various control variables. The literature on young voters is scarce which is why I design an experimental research design, where conventional models operate to analyse voter turnout, while I put a focus on the (trans-) national voters' age groups and specifically the ages from 16 and 18 to 29.

First inspections of the data show that there is not significant difference between younger and older voters, but indeed a national difference which indicates different voting attitudes among young voters within the EU member states. What is of interest is to find out which generations influenced the turnout both 'negatively' and 'positively', and whether there is the need for tailored processes and transnational lists in order to reach voters across different generations.

With regard to this conference's topic 'Transformation' my contribution is a statistical and political analysis of young voters, who, too, have undergone various transformations in terms of politicization, voting behaviour, and (un)conventional political participation.