



Cast your vote!: In recent years, elections all over Europe have faced significant challenges relating to their transparency and accessibility. In view of the upcoming European Parliament elections in 2024, what measures can the EU and the Member States take to ensure higher participation of European citizens, and to increase their accessibility and their perceived legitimacy?

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The European Youth Parliament aims to prevent misinformation, to enable people with mental and physical disabilities to participate more easily in the elections as well as to guarantee one's vote secrecy, also considering the progressive and steady decline in the voters' turnout in the past European elections. The European Youth Parliament aims at a tighter control of propaganda and false information, it proposes to closely monitor online platforms and to facilitate and encourage every EU citizen to express their opinion, raising awareness of the enormous value of the latter to ensure a greater turnout in the 2024 elections,

because

- The reduced turnout of voters in the previous EU election sessions¹ may be perceived as a threat to democracy, since voting and taking part in politics is a right provided by law²,
- The lack of transparency before elections, due to the phenomenon of micro-targeting³, can lead to the unfairness and unequal opportunities before and during elections,

¹ Turnout in European elections 1979-2019 | Statista

²Art. 39 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights; Article 2 TEU, "The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail"

³ "When people use social media platforms and other digital service providers, these can collect personal data. The harvested data can be used to define users' preferences, lifestyles and interests, and enable **micro-targeting**", <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20230202STO71504/why-new-eu-rules-for-political-advertising-are-important>, Society, 09/02/2023

- The practice of using fraudulently political advertisements and spreading misinformation to manipulate people's political decisions,⁴ like in the recent case of influencing citizens about their preferences on Brexit⁵, may distort voters' opinion,
- Social media, which can generally have a positive effect on politics, may undermine democracy by disseminating mistrust towards democratic organizations⁶,
- Political advertising through social media is not always considered a trusted source of information, due to the "massive spread of false information online and, particularly, disinformation on social media"⁷,
- The shortfall in the sense of legitimacy of European Parliament (EP) may be one of the reasons of the turnout dropping at every election and of the reduced enthusiasm⁸ of the voters, who do not feel the urge to express their political decisions,
- The outcome of the last EP elections has shown that Euroscepticism is rising and anger and fear due to the Covid pandemic, the war and the refugees' sharp rise have fostered populism, which is spreading progressively across Europe⁹,
- Abstention consolidates the preferences of minority groups, and it is often the expression of the lower income classes to disengage from politics¹⁰,
- The disengagement towards EP is especially experienced by young people, mainly because they no longer reside in their own country or they do not feel involved in the European political model¹¹,

⁴ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/headlines/society/20230202STO71504/why-new-eu-rules-for-political-advertising-are-important>

⁵ A UK company, Cambridge Analytica, was allegedly involved in the Leave.EU campaign and instructed the campaigners on "how to build profiles, target people and gain data from Facebook profiles", in The Guardian, *What Brexit should have taught us about voter manipulation*, by P. Flynn, 2017
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/17/brexit-voter-manipulation-eu-referendum-social-media>

⁶ <https://www.populismstudies.org/what-surrounds-the-2024-european-elections/>

⁷ <https://www.medialaws.eu/political-advertising-and-disinformation-the-european-approach/>

⁸ J.Rankin, *What is the European parliament and do the elections matter?*, in The Guardian, 6 May 2019
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/06/what-is-the-european-parliament-and-do-the-elections-matter>

⁹ In the 2019 elections it was revealed that more than 28% of the MEPs belonged to populist/Eurosceptic parties
<https://www.populismstudies.org/what-surrounds-the-2024-european-elections/>

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/apr/29/voters-abstain-france-uk-emmanuel-macron>

¹¹ Fewer than half of the young who had the requirements to cast their ballot in the 2014 European elections took part in the vote

https://youth.europa.eu/nfe/what-would-encourage-more-people-vote-or-participate-public-life_en

- Electronic voting may become potentially dangerous, thus causing voters' vulnerability, since their vote could be manipulated by unauthorized individuals¹², which may lead to voter secrecy being compromised,
- Accessibility to the vote is often denied to people with mental disabilities and to those in wheelchairs¹³, as limited size voting booths prevent them from voting, thus increasing the percentage of the steady decline in casting the ballot,
- Notwithstanding the recent EP resolution¹⁴, there are still many discrepancies regarding the treatment of certain categories of voters, such as the homeless, prisoners, the blind, the deaf, the bedridden, EU citizens living outside their country of origin¹⁵, whereby their right to vote is being hindered¹⁶;

by

1. Demands Member States to increase awareness especially in younger voters by disseminating information, so that they can form an opinion and a desire to have an impact in Europolitics, by:

- a) educating high school students with lessons on the importance of the EP and European elections,
- b) promoting information about European elections on TV, including sign language for the deaf and deaf mutes,
- c) sending leaflets with information on the elections to the old and the bedridden to encourage voting,
- d) encouraging people to cast their ballot, because a single vote can make the difference;

¹² <https://www.verizon.com/business/resources/articles/s/protecting-against-election-cyber-attacks/>

¹³A report by European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) shows that “National rules in 16 Member States mean that about 800,000 citizens will be deprived of their right to participate in the European Parliament elections as a result of their disability or mental health problems”, in *A fundamental right to vote: Removing barriers for people with disabilities*, by K. Pater <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/news/article/a-fundamental-right-to-vote-removing-barriers-for-people-with-disabilities>

and in *Breaking down the barriers Persons with disabilities and their right to vote in European Parliament elections* (https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/breaking_down_the_barriers_0.pdf)

¹⁴ EP resolution of 26 November 2020

¹⁵ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/21/the-european-parliament-electoral-procedures>

¹⁶ https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/breaking_down_the_barriers_0.pdf

2. Further urges Member States agencies to promote initiatives, such as Erasmus, for students and school/University staff to have a European study and working experience and to raise an interest in European public institutions,

3. Recommends Member States authorities to cooperate with local organizations for the active involvement of the lower classes to develop attention towards European political parties and elections,

4. Calls upon the EP and the European Council to design new rules and regulations for preventing political micro-targeting, by:

a) increasing the monitoring of election campaigns pursued online,

b) harmonizing the Member States' legislation in the matter, thus overcoming the cross-border nature of the micro- targeting process;

5. Trusts the European Commission to make proposals of financial sanctions towards European political parties and foundations that influence the results of European elections by manipulating voters' decisions and by breaching data protection rules,

6. Strongly recommends Member States to apply tougher rules on political advertisement and the use of sanctions in case of breaking these laws,

7. Encourages the EP and the European Council to create a reliable online platform for political parties, where harmful practices such as data collection and micro targeting are banned, to advocate the role of European elections, by:

a) reading and understanding different political views, to promote unbiased and valuable information for EU voters,

b) sharing and publicizing political campaigns for politicians,

c) partaking in short debates on specific electoral topics, open to all,

d) fostering the feeling of being part of European history and of experiencing a common goal;

8. Invites EU candidates and political party leaders to come closer to the electorate, through online videos, conferences and online question time open to the public,

9. Urges Member States to ease access to vote by arranging polling stations in buildings which are reachable by all EU nationals, especially by those with physical disabilities,

10. Considers it necessary for the EU to develop legislation that makes the right of vote a concrete reality, by:

- a) improving the online, postal and by proxy voting system for those voters with physical and mental disabilities,
- b) promoting early voting to organize transport for the physically impaired,
- c) allowing the use of a sign language interpreter for the deaf and the deaf mute,
- d) eliminating compulsory voting in all MS, thus reducing disabled voters' anxiety;

11. Endorses Member States to equip polling stations to welcome people with disabilities, such as at a height for voters in wheelchairs and with tailored ballot papers (e.g. in Braille) for the blind and, in case, placing a ballot-box outside the polling station,

12. Calls on the European Commission to introduce standardized measures in all Member States to improve voting conditions for those EU nationals living abroad, for the homeless and for prisoners,

13. Further calls upon Member States to facilitate online voting by the constant monitoring of online voting platforms to avoid technical problems or legal identity theft.