

Lowering voting age in Austria – evaluation of accompanying campaigns for 16-18year olds

Abstract

Since 2008 16-year olds have been part of the Austrian electorate in all elections. Following up on first experiences with 16-year olds as voters in regional election, the parliamentary election in September 2008 has been the first election covering the whole group of young voters. Lowering voting age was accompanied by a broad variety of initiatives and projects by the Ministry for Education and regional school authorities in order to prepare 16-18 year olds for the elections.

The objective of this paper is to empirically examine indicators on attitudes such as political interest as well as behavioural indicators such as information seeking. One of the main findings is that lowering voting age makes political interest rise in the relevant age group. One can observe big differences between the attitudes before and after lowering voting age. Furthermore, we analyze the impact of accompanying initiatives on these indicators. On the one hand, initiatives can raise political interest or even have a direct effect on turnout, on the other hand, they can contribute to reducing the differences according to educational background.

We conclude that lowering voting age in Austria has proved to be a chance for democracy because newly enfranchised voters were prepared for their first election in time.

Zitation:

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Paper presented at the 5th ECPR General Conference, Potsdam, Sept 12th-15th 2009