

**Adolescent first time voters:  
The relationship between educational background, perception of politics, socio-  
political attitudes and voting behaviour**

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**ABSTRACT**

Since the Austrian Parliament decided to reduce voting age from 18 to 16 years in June 2007, the election in September 2008 was the first national election where 16 and 17 year olds were allowed to vote. To examine the voting behaviour of this particularly interesting group of young voters, we collected quantitative data in a post election survey (n=1.000 first time voters aged 16 to 18) and qualitative information through focus groups and in-depth interviews. Our research interest focused on voting motives and party preferences depending on the perception of politics and on attitudes toward democracy, authorities, gender policies, immigration and minorities. The overall results showed great satisfaction with democracy, positive attitudes toward politics as such and a careful interest in the election campaign among the adolescent first time voters. On the other side we found quite pessimistic expectations for the future concerning employment, income and retirement and a great amount of discontent with the actual performance of the political system. Furthermore and particularly interesting our analysis revealed critical differences in socio-political attitudes and party preferences between students and employed young voters.