Why did they vote?

Voter turnout and the mobilization of 16-years-olds in the Norwegian local election of 2011

Guro Ødegård, Johannes Bergh and Jo Saglie

Institute for Social Research, Oslo

Paper prepared for presentation at the ECPR General Conference in Glasgow, September 2014

Abstract:

In the Norwegian local elections of 2011, a trial was held in which the voting age was lowered from 18 to 16 in 20 selected municipalities (and in the self-governed area of Longyearbyen). 58 percent of 16- and 17-year-olds turned out to vote. The participation rate among ordinary first-time voters (aged 18–21) was 46 percent, an increase of 11 percentage points from the previous election in 2007.

In this paper we discuss why the turnout rate among the young voters in general – and the trial voters in particular – was so high. The results are discussed in light of potential life-cycle, generation and period effects. First, we argue that the high turnout among the cohorts that are high school students can be partly explained by life-cycle effects. Second, we discuss how the terror attacks in Oslo and at Utøya in the summer of 2011 had an effect on young voters’ political participation and mobilization in general. Third, we also find a “Hawthorne-effect”: the novelty of being able to vote at 16, and the efforts made to mobilize young people in the trial municipalities, led to an especially high turnout.
Introduction

In recent years, voting age has again become an issue for public debate in European countries. The standard voting age in Europe, and most of the democratic world, remains at 18. However, support of a lowering of the voting age to 16 seems to have grown. Austria is so far the only European country to lower the voting age for all political elections, and this has spurred on a debate about the appropriate voting age in other countries. The voting age debate revolves around a number of issues of the possible effect of a lowering of the voting age, such as political maturity (Bergh, 2013a; Chan and Clayton, 2006), political representation and on political discourse. A number of legal, constitutional and normative arguments can also be frequently heard (Electoral Commission, 2004; Milner, 2010; Ødegård & Aars, 2011). A key question is the issue of election turnout. Are 16-years-olds willing to exercise their franchise in spite of the fact that they belong to a group that exhibit low interest in political issues (Bergh, 2013a)?

In this article we focus on the turnout among first-time voters in general and trial voters in particular in the Norwegian local elections of 2011. In this election a trial was held in which the voting age was lowered from 18 to 16 in 20 selected municipalities (and in the self-governed area of Longyearbyen). There was a significant increase in turnout among the ordinary first-time voters compared to previous local elections, and the trial voters demonstrate an even higher turnout than the first-time voters. The turnout among adults (above the age of 21) did not go up from previous elections. Based on this, we will discuss the following questions:

1) What explains the increase in turnout among young voters in 2011?
2) Why is the turnout among trial voters higher than among the ordinary first-time voters?

Our starting point is that age differences in turnout may be explained by three different mechanisms: life-cycle, generation and period effects. These questions are discussed in light of political socialization theory and Mark Franklin’s findings regarding changes in electoral participation (Franklin, 2004).

The analyses in this paper are based on three types of empirical data. 1) Random samples of eligible voters from the electoral rolls that enable us to measure voter turnout in different age groups. 2) Web-surveys of political party officials and bureaucrats in the trial municipalities. 3) In-depth interviews with youths, school-teachers, majors and other local officials in six of the trial municipalities.

The article is structured as follows. We review research on the relationship between age and turnout in the next section. Then, we present the voting trial in Norway and describe turnout-levels in different age groups in local elections from 1995 to 2011. Based on these results, we discuss why voters aged
16 to 21 had such high levels of turnout. First, we argue that the high turnout among the cohorts that are high school students can be partly explained by life-cycle effects. Second, we discuss how the terror attacks in Oslo and at Utøya in the summer of 2011 had an effect on young voters’ political participation and mobilization in general. Third, we also find a “Hawthorne-effect”: the young voters were mobilized by means of an experiment which got much attention both in local and national media, and in which municipalities made a considerable effort to mobilize the youngest newly enfranchised.

The relationship between age and turnout: life-cycle, generation and period effects
Voter turnout, the extent to which those who are legally enfranchised exercise the most basic of democratic rights, is increasingly an area of interest among electoral administrators, academics and policymakers. Scholars have been particularly attentive to the influence of life-cycle, generations and period on the development in aggregate turnout across time (Blais, Gidengil, & Nevitte, 2004; Franklin, 2004; Gallego, 2009; Konzelmann et al., 2012; Wass, 2007). Election turnout has declined in Western democracies during the past 30-40 years. Most of the decline happened after the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 years. How can this development be explained?

Generational effects
First, there may be a generational effect (see, e.g., Franklin 2004, Highton and Wolfinger 2001). Different generations may have different turnout rates. Following the sociology of generations, individuals born in the same period of time may share exposure to certain socio-historical events that shape their political socialization (Franklin, 2004; Inglehart, 1989; Mannheim, 1952; Putnam, 2000). An argument is that individuals are more open to external stimuli during their “impressionable years” in late adolescence and early adulthood (Dawson & Prewitt, 1969; Easton, 1953; Hyman, 1959). Such socializing experiences might in some cases be common across several countries. Bhatti and Hansen (2012c) use the 1960s movement as an example of how political currents affecting the cohort born just after the end of WWII. Zukin and colleagues (2006) identify four age cohorts that constitute the U.S. population at the start of the twenty-first century. These cohorts are offered as potential generation, Dutiful (born before 1946) the Baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) Generation X (born between 1964 and 1974) and the DotNets – young adults born after 1976. These generation grew up with different socialization experiences, which led to differences in political outlook and participation (Zukin, Keeter, Andolina, Jenkins, & Delli Carpini, 2006).

If a generation is mobilized during its “impressionable years”, the early socializing experiences can have a lasting impact on that generation (Plutzer, 2002; Franklin, 2004). Therefore a generation or cohort effect is often seen as something that is constant over the life course (Franklin, 2004). Low turnout among today’s young voters will cause a drop in overall participation when young generations
replace the older electorate. Losing the young voters today, we risk losing the future generations of voters.

**Life-cycle effects**

Generational replacement is not the only factor that explains age differences in turnout; there is also a life-cycle effect. The curvilinear impact of age on turnout is one of the most robust findings in the study of turnout. A relatively low level of participation during early adult life, a gradually growing mobilization among middle-aged voters and a soft decline with old age have been reported since the seminal analyzes conducted in the 1930s (for reviews, Milbrath, 1965, Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980). People at the age of 18 are moving into a transitional phase in life; they finish secondary education, they move away from home, leaving old social networks and local communities behind. These shifts reduce young voters’ probability of voting, but turnout increases when they get older and enter into a more stable phase in their life. Many studies find a cross-sectional curvilinear relationship between age and turnout where the young vote less than the middle-aged, which have established families and careers (Highton & Wolfinger, 2001; Abramson et al., 1998).

In recent years, however, scholars have questioned the simple curvilinear relationship between age and turnout. Bhatti and Hansen (Bhatti & Hansen, 2010) have studied the relationship between age and turnout among first-time voters in Denmark at the local elections in 2009. They find that first-time voters who have turned 18 few weeks before Election Day are more likely to vote than older first-time voters. While voters at age 18 had a turnout of 65 percent, the turnout for voter who passed the age 19 in the weeks leading up to the election, decreased to 50 percent. Bhatti and Hansen (2012a) also find a positive effect on turnout of approximately 10 percentage points among young voters that still live with both parents. When young adults leave home, the influence of their parents is presumably replaced by the influence of their peers – who generally are less likely to vote. Bhatti and colleagues also find a similar pattern in Finland and Texas (Bhatti et al., 2012). Voters in their early twenties are characterized by low turnout, while voters at age 18 participate to a greater extent than older youth.

**Life-cycle and generation combined**

Life-cycle effects are of course supposed to remain stable, and they cannot explain declining turnout (unless there is a substantial change in the age composition of the electorate). However, in his book *Voter Turnout and the Dynamics of Electoral Competition in Established Democracies* Mark N. Franklin (2004) argue that a combination of generational replacement and life-cycle effects – directly related to reduced voting age – can explain the decline. His starting point is the low turnout rate among young voters. Franklin argues that voting is a habit. People learn the habit of voting, or not, based on experience in their first few elections. It is therefore of crucial importance that newly enfranchised use their right to vote: “Turnout appears to be stable because, for most people, the habit of voting is established relatively early in their adult lives” (Franklin 2004: 12). When the voting age
was reduced, the newly enfranchised got the right to vote at the “wrong” stage of the life cycle – in a transitional phase in their lives. If they did not vote in their first election – at the age of 18 – a habit of non-voting would be formed. Thus, a life-cycle explanation does not exclude the generation explanation, but there seems to be an interaction: a high turnout among young voters increase the probability to vote in subsequent elections. In a Nordic context Gallego (2009) found that lower turnout among the post-baby boomer generations are the main reason behind the turnout decline.

This might be seen as an argument for raising the voting age from 18 to 21, since 21-year-olds have passed a key transitional phase in their lives (Franklin 2004). However, Franklin realizes that depriving large groups of a democratic right is an impossible political project (see the discussion in Milner 2010). Later, Franklin (2005) has shown that there is a close relationship between residence time and thus integration into the home network and the turnout – especially among young voters. This is an argument for giving the franchise to younger teenagers, as they are in a more established local community network than young people by age 18. He suggests that an appropriate voting age would be 15. The findings of Bhatti and colleagues (Bhatti and Hansen 2012a, Bhatti et. al 2012b) may support Franklin's argument, as they show that turnout is higher among the youngest voters than among their slightly older peers.

**Period effects**
There is a third effect that may explain decline or increase in turnout, namely a period effect: particular events may have short-term consequences for turnout – or the relationship between age and turnout. Bhatti and Hansen (2012c) use the examples of the 2009 EP election in Denmark and Latvia, where highly salient referendums were held simultaneous with EP election, which boosted the turnout. Franklin (2001) uses the “first-time-boost” of the first EP election in new member states as examples. Period effects may also be of an even more general nature – if the public perceives EP election as less important than previously or if it generally become more political disinterested, this is likely to result in a negative period effect (see Bhatti and Hansen, 2012). An example from the Norwegian context is the parliamentary election in 1989 where environmental issues were high on the political agenda. This mobilized young voters in particular (Aardal and Valen, 1995). However, this effect seems to be brief, and could not be identified among the young voters in the following parliamentary election of 1993.

In the context of the 2011 Norwegian local elections, there are two potential causes of such period effects: the terrorist attacks of July 22\textsuperscript{nd} 2011, and the voting age trial. Therefore, we briefly discuss the potential effects of such incidents.

There is limited research of how terror influence turnout. In contrast, there are several studies of how terrorist attacks affect voters’ political preferences (see Abramson et al 2007; Merolla and
Zechmeister, 2009; Montalvo 2011). A consistent finding is that terrorist attacks and other forms of intimidation contribute to a "rally around the flag" effect where the power holders, and to some extent political parties on the right, get increased support. This is what Berrebi and Klor (2008) finds, using extensive data on terrorist attacks in Israel to study effect of terror on the electorate's political preferences. They find that terror attacks within an election district lead to increased support for parties on the political right in the same area. However, they do not find any effect of terror on voter turnout.

The parliamentary election of 2004 in Spain was held three days after a terrorist attack in Madrid. The election was remarkable, partly because of the short time between the attack on Election Day and partly because the sitting conservative government was voted out. The election result was contrary the expectation that the sitting governments, particularly those on the right, have greater support following the terrorist attacks. In a study of Spanish voters, Bali (2007) finds that the terrorist attack mobilized groups that previously had low turnout, such as young voters and voters without higher education. It was among these voters the attacks influence both the turnout and the result.

Age specific effects were also found after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 2001 in the United States. The first national election was held more than a year after the attacks. Researchers have shown that both political confidence and engagement increased in the period immediately after September 11 increase. Six months later the numbers had returned to normal (Putnam, 2002; Traugott et al., 2002) - except in one group: those who were young and in their most formative years when the terror struck (Sander & Putnam, 2010). Unlike the older cohorts young Americans born in the 1980s remained a stable high level of political interest and high turnout in the years following the terrorist attacks. This finding thus raises an important question: to what extent does a terrorist attack leave a lasting mark on a generation – creating a generational effect – rather than cause a short-term effect, i.e. a period effect?

Finally, how may a lowered voting age affect turnout? Of course, there is no turnout without the right to vote. Research from Austria suggests, however, that although young people in general are less interested in politics, the right to vote may in itself affect political interest. Accordingly, this may contribute to a high turnout rate among the newly enfranchised. Research on young voters after Austria lowered the voting age suggest for example that interest in politics have increased since 2004; that the impact of schools on political interest has also increased (Zeglovits, 2013), and that the quality of voting choice also is high (Wagner et al. 2012). However, in the case of Norway Bergh (2013a) finds that those who got the right to vote as 16- and 17-year-olds were not more politically mature than youth in the same age group elsewhere in Norway. He also finds that 18-year-olds are more interested in politics than younger high school students, both in the trial municipalities and elsewhere. Evidence
from the Norwegian trial, therefore, does not support the assertion that voting rights have an effect on political interest specifically or, more broadly, political maturity.

The 2011 Norwegian Voting Age Trial

In 2008, the Norwegian government decided that a trial would be held in some municipalities in the election of 2011, in which the voting age would be lowered to 16. This decision came after some years of debate regarding the quality, and possible decline, of Norwegian local democracy. The main reason for concern seems to have been the decline in turnout in Norwegian local elections, but this prompted a broader debate about the role of local government and citizen participation (Bjørklund 2005). The government’s stated reason for holding the trial was to find out if voting rights would increase political consciousness and engagement among adolescents.

All of Norway’s 430 municipalities could apply for participation in the trial, and 143 did so. Out of these, 20 municipalities¹ and the local council of Longyearbyen in arctic Svalbard were selected as participants. There were various criteria for selecting municipalities for the trial. The government aimed for the greatest possible variation in terms of size, geography, location in the country, political composition of the municipal councils, as well as age-composition of the population. The ministry in charge of the trial also looked for municipalities that had actively tried to get its youth involved in local society in various ways.

Local elections in Norway include both county council elections and elections for municipal councils. 16- and 17-year-olds were only allowed to vote in the municipal elections, i.e. the most local of the two elections.

In our research-evaluation of the trial, we have collected three types of empirical data. First, we have a sample from the electoral roll of 26,607 eligible voters in the trial municipalities. People at the age of 16 and 17 are oversampled; they constitute 7,184 voters of the total sample. This data-file includes information about age, gender, municipality of residence, and actual voter turnout. Similar data-files that are representative of the country as a whole, albeit with smaller samples, are routinely collected in connection with every Norwegian election. We use these national-level data as well, below.

Our second data-source is a set of two web-surveys directed at party officials and bureaucrats in the trial municipalities. The surveys are a source of factual information about the trial in each municipality, and of the officials’ evaluation of the trial and of their own efforts.

---

¹ The 20 municipalities were: Ålesund, Austevoll, Gjesdal, Grimstad, Hamar, Hammerfest, Kautokeino, Kåfjord, Luster, Lærenskog, Mandal, Marker, Namdalseid, Øsen, Porsgrunn, Re, Sigdal, Stavanger, Tysfjord, and Vågå.
Finally, we employ data from case-studies of six trial municipalities. In-depth interviews were conducted with youths, school-teachers, majors and other local officials. The case-studies give a more detailed sense of what went on during the trial, and how the local community tried to mobilize young people to the polls.

**Turnout by age over time in Norway: a descriptive analysis**

The life-cycle effect discussed above is also found in the Norwegian case. Table 1 demonstrates that the turnout patterns in the past five local elections are quite stable, with a massive age gap in voting in all elections. In all elections from 1995 to 2011 we can identify a stable level of turnout among the group of voters over 50 years of age, whereas young adults below the age of 30 exhibit much lower levels of turnout than older citizens.

Table 1 Turnout by age in the Norwegian local elections from 1995 to 2011. Percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trial voters (age 16-17)</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-time voters (age 18-21)</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 - 29 years</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 - 39 years</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 - 49 years</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 59 years</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 - 69 years</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 - 80 years</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>First-time voters</th>
<th>206</th>
<th>280</th>
<th>275</th>
<th>279</th>
<th>672</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22 - 29 years</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>474</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>1275</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 - 39 years</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>771</td>
<td>743</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>1664</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 - 49 years</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>748</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 - 59 years</td>
<td>494</td>
<td>791</td>
<td>736</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>1624</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 - 69 years</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>589</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>1433</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 - 80 years</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>880</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In the Norwegian local elections of 2011, 65 percent of the eligible voters turned out to vote; an increase of 3 percentage points since the previous election in 2007. There were two notable changes in voter turnout in the 2011 election. First, we see that first-time voters (aged 18-21) turned out to vote at

---

2 They are the municipalities of Ålesund, Kautokeino, Lørenskog, Mandal, Marker and Stavanger.
a rate of 46 percent, which is 11 percentage points higher than the previous election. We do not find the same increase turnout among voters older than 21. Second, turnout among the newly enfranchised adolescents in the trial municipalities, aged 16 and 17, was 58 percent. This is somewhat lower than the overall turnout level of 65 percent. However, compared to the turnout rate for first-time voters and voters in general below the age of 30, 58 percent is remarkably high.

**How to explain the high turnout among early adults?**
How can we explain the increased turnout rate among the young voters compared to older voters and why is the turnout among trial voters higher than among the ordinary first-time voters? In this part we will highlight three possible explanations related to life-cycle, generation and period effects.

**The life-cycle explanation**

Empirical analyses from the 2011 local election in Norway are in line with the above-mentioned findings of Bhatti and Hansen: 18-year-olds are characterized by higher turnout than their slightly older peers. Moreover, this pattern becomes even stronger when we include voters at the age of 16 and 17. Figure 1 reports turnout by age in the trial municipalities, and shows clearly that turnout drops at the age of 19.

Figure 1 Turnout by age in the trial municipalities of the 2011 Norwegian local election, among voters aged 16 to 30. Percent.
Voters aged 16 to 18 have the highest rate of turnout among voters below age 30. The vast majority in these age cohorts are high school students; they live with their parents or guardians, and are part of established social networks. These young voters have a stable living situation, and they are in school where they learn about democracy and elections. Leaving home does in the short run have a negative impact on turnout (Bhatti and Hansen, 2012, Smets 2012).

This general life-cycle effect can therefore partly explain the high turnout among the youngest voters in the Norwegian 2011 election. However, it cannot explain why turnout in this age group was so much higher in 2011 than in previous elections, as shown in Table 1. To explain this, we have to look into the context of this election.

**Terrorist attacks and political mobilization**

On July 22, 2011 Norway was struck by a terror attack of unprecedented magnitude. A car bomb was detonated outside the offices housing the central government killing eight, with another 69, mostly teenagers, were brutally massacred at a Labor Party youth camp at the island of Utøya outside Oslo.
The perpetrator, a 32-year-old right-wing extremist, had specifically targeted political talents in a deranged scheme designed to thwart the future of the governing party in Norway in Oslo and Utøya.

The local elections were held on September 12, 2011, less than two months after the terrorist attacks. The atrocities shocked the whole world and in the Norwegian public debate the terror plot was seen as an attack on the nation's democratic values. In the public debate after the attacks, a consensus emerged that people’s response to terrorism should be to embrace openness and democracy. A clear manifestation of this would be a historically high turnout in the local elections. The expectations were especially great towards young voters. When the overall turnout totaled 64.5 percent was met with disappointment. The increase of almost 3 percentage points from the previous local elections was not enough to meet expectations.

According to previous research there is no reason to expect a general increase in turnout after a terrorist attack. A common assumption has been that watershed events influence the values of younger adult to a greater extent than older generation. Hence, we might expect the July 22 terror to mobilize young voters in particular. At the same time we must be cautious when comparing the effect of terrorism on turnout in different countries. There are many factors that will affect citizens’ political participation, as the character of the terror, the ideological motives of the terrorists, how long after the attack elections are held, and the domestic political situation and climate. How political authorities react in the aftermath of the attack might influence how citizens handle the situation – at least in the short term (Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Ødegård, 2012a).

In Norway the effect of 22 July on political and civic engagement and participation has been studied (Wollebæk et al., 2012a; Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Ødegård, 2012b; Wollebæk, Enjolras, Ødegård & Steen-Johnsen, 2011). Empirical studies indicated that one of the consequences – at least in the short term – was an increased trust in institutions of government, politicians and police. The researchers also saw an increase in social trust, of people in general. This increase was statistically significant in all age groups, but among those aged 16-24 trust went up more than in other age groups. It was also among the youth the feeling of unity and togetherness after July 22 was strongest. Accordingly, the effects of such a dramatic collective social experience seem to make deepest impression among young people in their most impressionable years (Wollebæk et al. 2011).

The terror-attacks did seem to have an effect on the political mobilization of young people. As is evident in table 1, voter turnout went up substantially in the local elections of September of 2011. One may reasonably expect this to be a short-term response to the tragic events seven weeks prior to the election. However, in the Parliamentary election in 2013, more than two years after the attacks, there was a similar increase in turnout among young people under the age of 26 (Bergh 2013b).
Furthermore, party membership among young people has also shot up in the aftermath of July 22 2011 (Ødegård 2014). Indications are therefore that the current generation of young voters in Norway are more politically active and engaged than prior generations. The change is especially evident when comparing the young today with those that were first-time-voters during the 1990s and 2000s.

**Being pioneers: a period effect?**
The trial involved 20 municipalities and gave 9400 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote. The high turnout was generally seen as an indication that the trial was successful at getting young people engaged in politics (Ødegård & Saglie, 2013). As we have seen, a stable life cycle seems to have a positive effect on turnout among voters age 16, 17 and 18. Furthermore, the terrorist attack seems to have mobilized a generation of voters.

However, it is not so obvious that the high turnout was a reflection of true engagement and increased political interest. The mobilization might also be an effect of the attention the trial got in local, regional and national media which gave a short-term effect by being “voting pioneers”. Furthermore, the voting age trial was a prestigious project for the participating municipalities. They had applied to participate, and the selected municipalities made a considerable effort to mobilize their newly enfranchised. High turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds was – in their eyes (and the eyes of the media) – necessary if the trial should be considered a success. This means that high turnout to some extent might be the result of a “Hawthorne effect”, caused by the trial itself, and not necessarily occurring in future elections if 16 years were to be the regular voting age.

Such an effect will, to some extent, appear in all trial municipalities. It is therefore not easy to separate it from the effects of the terrorist attacks. However, variation in turnout between the municipalities may indicate whether special efforts in some municipalities affected turnout. This variation clearly suggests that the trial municipalities put varying efforts into getting their youth to the polls on Election Day. The turnout varied substantially – from 43 percent to 82 percent – between the municipalities (see Bergh and Ødegård, 2013). Moreover, the variation in turnout was larger among 16- and 17-year-olds than among the rest of the electorate. Ødegård and Saglie (2013) find several explanations for the wide variation in turnout.

First, the size of the municipality seems to be of importance. In the smallest municipality (Osen) there were 29 newly enfranchised 16 and 17 year-olds. In the largest, the cities of Stavanger, there were 3144 16- and 17-year-olds. Normally it is easier to mobilize few than many thousands of voters. Figure 2 describes the variation in turnout among the trial voters, and how turnout is related to the number of trial electors. The figure confirms that the highest turnout is found in some small
municipalities with few trial voters. However, this cannot be the only explanation. Figure 2 also shows that there were municipalities with few trial votes and low turnout, whereas the city of Stavanger achieved a reasonably high turnout (62.5 %).

Figure 2 Turnout (percent) among 16- and 17-year olds in the trial municipalities of the 2011 Norwegian local election, by number of 16-and 17-year-old electors.

Second, in municipalities where the turnout in general is low, turnout seems to be low also among young voters (Bergh and Ødegård 2013). This is in line with Bhatti and Hansen (2012a) who found that first-time voters are more likely to vote if their parents – and especially their mother – vote. Third, it is also reason to believe that the local authorities efforts of information directed toward young voters in varying degrees have been successful. Ødegård and Saglie (2013) found that municipalities that involved local youth council, local youth groups, teachers at local high schools, various local services and national actors – as youth organizations and the Ombudsman for children – were more likely to mobilize young voters. A unifying of local networks resources increased the project management’s capability to solve problems and create new solutions in the spaces between existing parts of the municipal organization. Such an organization filled in a gap of competence between those working with the more technical part of the local election and those who worked to mobilize youth at school, such in voluntary organizations, at the leisure-time club etc.
We may therefore conclude that those municipalities that achieved the highest turnout among their 16- and 17-year-olds, most likely made a special effort to reach out to the young voters – an effect that might not be repeated if a lower voting age becomes permanent. When voting at sixteen is no longer new and when the publicity and novelty value will be reduced both from media, local and national authorities – and among young people themselves – when they no longer becomes franchise pioneers – we might expect a lower turnout. In any case, this points to the importance of a continuous work to get out the vote among the youngest parts of the electorate.

We should also note that the trial municipalities’ efforts did not have any effect on the general increase in turnout among ordinary first-time voters (the age group 18-21), which was described in Table 1. Turnout in this age group was exactly the same in the trial municipalities as elsewhere (46 percent) (Bergh and Ødegård 2013). This increase is presumably a result of mobilization after the terrorist attack, and not related to the trial.

Finally, an analysis in Bergh (2014) indicates that the trial did not have a long-term effect on voter turnout among the 16- and 17-year-olds that were given the right to vote in 2011. These voters, whom had turned 18 or 19-years of age by the 2013 parliamentary election, did not have an especially high level of turnout in the 2013-election. In fact, 18- and 19-year-olds who were first time voters in 2013, and had not been a part of the 2011-trial, had a higher level of turnout than those at the same age who had been part of the 2011-trial. So far, there is no evidence to suggest that the voting age trial had the effect of instilling a habit of voting in the young people that were given voting rights.

**Conclusion**

The Norwegian local elections of 2011 were extraordinary in many ways. The very first trial in which the voting age was lowered to 16 was held in 20 selected municipalities. A few weeks before Election Day, the country was struck by an atrocious terror attack. Even though turnout among voters in general was more or less at the same level as in the local election in 2007, the turnout among first time voters (age 18 to 21) increased 11 percentage points from the previous election (from 35 to 46 percent). Among the 9400 trial-voters (age 16 and 17) the turnout was even higher: 58 percent.

In this paper, we have tried to answer the following questions: What explains the high turnout among young voters in general at the 2011-election, and why was the turnout among trial-voters higher than among ordinary first-time voters? Finally, we will discuss if this changed pattern of turnout have shaped a new generation that will remain politically engaged in the future. An alternative hypothesis is that the high turnout is a temporary period effect.
The high turnout among young voters have to be interpreted in the context of the terror attacks in Oslo and the island Utøya on July 22 2011. The atrocity mobilized young people to go to a polling station on Election Day. An obvious question is why the terror did not mobilize older age groups. According to the theory of generational effect, an epochal watershed such as the July 22-terror, make a lasting impression and influence the values of younger adult who are in their formative years to a greater extent than older generations. Additionally, the fact that the perpetrator’s target was teenagers at a political summer camp might have affected the generation of teenagers in general. The victims at Utøya, 69 deaths and 495 survivors who were trapped at the island, were inhabitants in local communities across the whole country. This might have shaped a dramatic collective experience for this age group. Furthermore, the terrorist aim was to damage political institutions. In the aftermath of July 22, it seems that young people’s awareness of fundamental democratic values and the political parties’ significant position became stronger. Other studies are in line with this interpretation. The terror attacks make a lasting impression on young generation and to a greater extent than previous generations they become more oriented towards traditional political institutions (such as election and political parties) (Wollebæk et. al, 2011, Ødegård 2014).

However, why was the turnout among trial voters at age 16 and 17 higher than among first-time voters? In line with Hansen and Bhatti (2012a), we indicate a life-cycle effect being in a stable phase in life: living at home, being a high school student and established in a well-known social network. We might also assume that the high level of turnout is due to novelty or a “Hawthorne” effect of the trial, which got much attention in local and national media, in political and local administration, and among policymakers. Hence, being “voting pioneers” might have a mobilizing effect on the trial-voters. We have to take into consideration that a permanent lowering of the voting age will probably not give such a high turnout among first-time voters since the novelty-effect will be reduced.

There is no evidence that lowering the voting age to 16, in the short run, will strengthen the habit to vote. Bergh (2014) found that the trial-voters in 2011 did not have a higher turnout than other first-time voters at the parliament election in 2013. However, in municipalities that give extensive information about the procedures and political parties in 2011, we found a higher turnout than in municipalities that did not make any efforts (Saglie and Ødegård, 2013). These findings indicate that information and dialog about the political system mobilize newly enfranchised voters. A lowering of the voting age may in the long run contribute to improved focus on political information towards young voters. This might lead to increased knowledge and interest in democracy and politics, which in turn could affect the turnout rate. However, unlike the result from Austria (Zeglovits and Zandonella, 2013), there is no empirical evidence that the political interest among trial-voters aged 16 and 17 in Norway went up in the short term (Bergh, 2013a).
Do we observe a generational effect where young voters in the future are more willing to use their right to vote? It is too early to conclude. However, several empirical studies indicate that young people’s affiliation to traditional political institution has been strengthened aftermath of the attacks. One year after the terror, Wollebæk and colleagues (2012b) found that young people aged 16 - 18 were more engaged in political parties than before the terror. We also recognize that party membership among young people increased in the aftermath of July 22. The youth organizations of political parties in Norway increased their members with 6000 from 2010 to 2011 (11060 to 17066) (Ødegård, 2014). One year later (in 2012) the number of members was approximately at the 2011-level (Ødegård, forthcoming). Also Bergh (2013b) sees evidence of a generational effect in their study of the turnout in the Norwegian parliament election 2013. In this election first-time voters (age 18-21) and second-time voters (age 21-23) had a remarkable high turnout compare to previous PE. Based on a total appraisement, these finding indicates an outline of a more political oriented generation – what have been called “the Utøya generation”. It will be an important research assignment to follow this generation in the coming years for understanding how young people in their formative years respond to tragic events as terror in the long term.

**Literature:**


