Breaking the Cycle of Alienation: The Impact of Youth Representation on Democratic Engagement

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Abstract

The underrepresentation of youth in politics fuels a vicious cycle of political alienation. Due to the low presence of youth in political institutions, their specific interests are not adequately represented and therefore policies important to youth are not implemented which leaves youth with feelings of apathy and disconnect to the formal political systems. This research aims to test whether the cycle of political alienation can be broken by increasing youth representation in political institutions. I hypothesize that increased youth representation in parliaments and governments can trigger higher electoral participation and higher satisfaction with democracy from young people. To test my hypotheses, I constructed an original dataset using survey results from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), Worldwide Age Representation in Parliaments (WARP) dataset and I hand-collected data on the age of the country leader. The finished dataset includes information on 59 countries, for over 200 elections and over 200 leader ages from 1996 to 2021. My results derived through bivariate and multivariant statistics reveal that higher youth representation in parliaments slightly increases youth voter turnout and increases youth satisfaction with democracy (for the 35 or under age category). Additionally, the age of elected leaders plays a role in shaping young people's satisfaction with democracy. Although the effect of youth representation on the cycle of alienation is not particularly strong, it is statistically significant. This suggests that increasing youth representation in politics could have broader positive impacts on mitigating the cycle of alienation.

Keywords: Youth in politics, underrepresented groups, cycle of political alienation, civic engagement, satisfaction with democracy

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Introduction

Adequate representation of all demographic groups in democratic political institutions is necessary for effective governance, sustainability of democracy, and to give political institutions a sense of legitimacy in the eyes of these groups. Young people, despite being a significant portion of the population, are often an overlooked outgroup in the representation literature. While past literature has explored the impacts of descriptive and substantive representation for outgroups such as minorities (Broockman, 2013; Jeong, 2013), women (Campbell et al., 2009; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006) and socio-economic status (Carnes, 2012; Hahn, 2022), the effects of descriptive and substantive youth representation remain underexplored.

Like other outgroups, young people have specific policy interests that are often forgotten by the majority. For example, older people are in favour of higher pension and military spending whereas younger people are in favour of higher social spending such as healthcare, education and unemployment (Busemeyer et al., 2009; Wattenberg, 2015). This is because many issues such as education, unemployment and childcare or family-oriented policies impact young people more than older people by default. The distinct perspectives of younger individuals ultimately have an impact on policy preferences (Busemeyer et al., 2009; McEnvoy, 2016; Sloam, 2016).

Young people are currently underrepresented in politics in almost all democratic countries (Joshi, 2013; Krook & Nugent, 2018; Stockemer & Sundström, 2018). The underrepresentation of youth not only undermines the principles of representative democracy but also perpetuates a vicious cycle of political alienation. The low political presence of youth in democratic institutions means their specific interests are not adequately represented and therefore policies important to youth are not implemented. This leaves youth with feelings of apathy and disconnect to the formal

political systems (Stockemer & Sundström, 2023). The sense of disillusionment is reinforced by the perception that the voices of young people are not valued or heard within the political arena (Cammaerts et al.,2014; Dahl et al., 2018; Henn & Foard, 2012; Marzecki & Stach, 2016). When young people's unique needs and perspectives are ignored, it might erode their trust in the democratic process and fosters a belief that formal political participation is futile (Cvetanova & Naumovska, 2015; Essomba et al., 2023; Maree, 2022; Stoker et al., 2017; Wong et al., 2017). Younger people today might not only be more dissatisfied with democracy compared to middle age and older people, but also are dissatisfied compared to youth in the past (Foa et al., 2020). The growing discontent among youth is alarming as the feelings of apathy and cynicism towards political institutions could reinforce disengagement and further discourage young people from engaging in formal political participation such as voting (Fieldhouse et al., 2007; Leighley & Nagler, 2014; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2011). This process of alienation could influence a self-perpetuating barrier to youth involvement in politics. As fewer young people participate, political institutions become even less responsive to their needs, further fuelling disengagement and non-participation.

The central question guiding this thesis is: Does having higher youth representation in parliaments and governments trigger higher electoral participation and higher satisfaction with democracy among young people? This research aims to test the theory that the vicious cycle of political alienation can be broken by increasing youth representation in parliaments and government. Understanding the elements of the cycle of political alienation of youth and the impact of increasing youth representation in institutions is crucial for understanding if inclusive political processes can enhance youth engagement and attitudes towards democratic institutions.

For this research I utilize survey data from 59 countries featured in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) dataset along with data from Worldwide Age Representation in parliaments (WARP) dataset and hand collected data of age of leaders. I use bivariate statistics and a multivariant regression analysis to examine whether higher youth representation has an impact on youth behaviour and attitudes.

My research contributes to the budding literature looking at the impact of youth's descriptive representation on their substantive representation. Some research looks at the effects of youth substantive representation on the implementation of youth policy preferences (Bailer et al., 2022; Baskaran et al., 2021; Jung, 2023; McClean, 2021), but there is no research on the effects of youth representation on how young people act within the political system (their political participation) and how they feel about the political systems (their satisfaction with democracy); I aim to fill that gap in the literature. Addressing this gap is crucial to better understand how descriptive representation influences youth political engagement (or lack thereof). While there is abundant literature on how descriptive representation of minority groups increases voter turnout of represented minority groups, there is a lack of research exploring whether similar patterns hold for youth. If descriptive representation can indeed enhance political participation among young people, it could have implications for their overall engagement in the political process. Furthermore, literature finds that satisfaction with democracy increases when people feel represented by their political parties and their government. However, the impact of descriptive representation of minority groups on satisfaction with democracy remains unexplored. Understanding how adequate representation affects young people's feelings towards political systems is crucial to understand how satisfaction with democracy can be improved. By exploring these dynamics, this study will provide empirical evidence on the impact of youth representation

on democratic processes and could render democratic systems more inclusive and effective for young people.

My thesis proceeds as follows. First, I present a literature review. I start with youth participation literature, followed by youth satisfaction with democracy literature and finish with youth representation literature. Then, I introduce the adapted theory of the vicious cycle of political alienation and present my hypotheses. Next, I describe my methodological approach including dataset construction and variable selection. I then proceed with the results of my multivariant analysis followed by a discussion section.

Literature Review

Youth Participation Literature

A substantial body of research has examined youth political participation. Over the years, political participation has received many definitions but generally "refers to voluntary activities undertaken by the mass public to influence public policy, either directly or by affecting the selection of persons who make policies" (Uhkaner, 2015, 504). These activities can include signing a petition, voting in elections, protesting, helping with a political campaign or contacting public officials (Uhkaner, 2015). Political participation is necessary in democracies as it allows citizens to hold their governments accountable. Through active participation individuals can influence political outcomes by expressing their opinions, advocating for policies that align with their interests.

The youth participation literature is largely interested in participation trends and the socialization of young people into politics. Many studies find that young people are less likely to

vote than adults (Fieldhouse et al., 2007; Hooghe & Stolle, 2003; Kimberlee, 2002; Leighley & Nagler, 2014; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2011) and studies also find there has been a steady decrease in membership of young members in youth sectors of political parties and official party membership around the world. Regional studies in Europe (Gauja, 2015; Kitanova, 2019; van Biezen et al., 2012) and single country case studies in Germany (Offe & Fuchs, 2002), Sweden (Roth-stein, 2002), Belgium (Hooghe et al., 2004), Great Britain (Pattie et al., 2004) observe these trends.

There is an ongoing debate regarding the engagement of young people in politics, on one hand some argue that young people are disengaged and uninterested, as evidenced by declining voting trends among youth in elections and decreasing rates of participation in political parties. On the other hand, other researchers argue that young people are engaged in politics but just not in conventional ways such as voting or volunteering with a political party. Norris (2004) argues traditional indicators of voting and party activism offer only a limited perspective to youth political engagement. Research finds that young people prefer to protest, boycott products, sign petitions (Cammaerts et al.,2014; Norris, 2004 ; Sloam, 2014; Quintelier, 2007;) and get involved with politics using online platforms (Calenda & Meijer, 2009; Ekström & Shehata, 2016; Ekström & Sveningsson, 2019; Kim et al., 2017) compared to traditional means of political participation. In addition, other studies find that young prefer to be involved in advocacy organization compared to traditional political parties (Cammaerts et al., 2014; Cross & Young, 2008; Kitanova, 2019) as it makes youth feel they have more of a meaningful impact on policy outcomes. This suggests that while traditional political involvement may be decreasing, young people are finding new avenues to express their political views and impact social change. Understanding these different modes of

engagement is crucial for comprehensively assessing youth participation in politics and addressing the factors that may discourage them from traditional political involvement.

While youth are involved in other non-conventional forms of political participation, it continues to be important to understand why youths tend to abstain from formal political participation. Formal political participation, such as voting, remains a central way individuals can directly affect policies and decision-making. Through voting, citizens can select representatives that align with their values and priorities which then shape the government's agenda and influence future actions. When youth choose not to engage in formal political participation, this limits their influence over the election of representatives that represent their interests.

In an effort to understand the declining rates of participation, a lot of research also examines what factors influence the political socialization of young people such as family, school, peer and media influences (Weiss, 2015). Home socialization is a key area of study that aims to understand youth political participation with numerous studies highlighting the significant influence of family on youth voter turnout. When one or both parents in a household vote, youth are more likely to also vote compared to those from households where parents do not vote (Bhatti & Hansen, 2012; Kudrnac & Lyons, 2017). Another important predictor for youth voter turnout is socio-economic status. Young people with higher socio-economic status, particularly those with highly educated parents are more likely to vote. This is likely due to greater access to political resources, more frequent political discussions within their families and higher likelihood to access post-secondary education (Pacheco, 2008; Verba et al., 2005). Both education and social class are significant predictors of electoral participation, with higher levels of both associated with greater voter turnout (Henn & Foard, 2014; Kitanova, 2019; Tenn, 2007). Additionally, studies on voter registration reveal significant impacts on youth voter turnout. Barriers in voter registration in

college towns have been shown to reduce youth turnout (Richman & Pate, 2010), while facilitating voter registration among young people (Lickiss et al., 2020) and that same-day registration increases enhance their electoral participation (Grumbach & Hill, 2022).

Political contexts also have an impact on youth voter turnout. Pacheco (2008) finds that young people living in competitive political districts turnout to vote more than young people living in less competitive districts. Whereas Nový and Katrnak (2015) and Kitanova (2019) find that democratic maturity of a country also impact youth voter turnout. Young people living in newer democracies are less likely to vote compared to young people that live in established democracies.

The literature highlights various factors that influence youth voter turnout, yet research on the impact of youth descriptive representation remains limited. A few studies on youth candidate voter choice suggest that the presence of young representatives could significantly affect conventional political participation among young people. In a controlled experiment Sigelman and Sigelman (1982) highlight that university students prefer candidates closer to them in age over other characteristics such as gender and race, showing that younger people prefer younger candidates. Another experiment done by Pomante and Schraufnagel (2015) shows that younger people in the United States have higher intentions to vote in elections when there are younger politicians in the candidate pool. Using observational data from Senate elections, the authors also find that younger people are more likely to vote when there is a clear age difference between candidates and they are more likely to cast a ballot for the younger candidate (Pomante & Schraufnagel, 2015). Finally, Sevi (2021) finds that voters prefer and vote for leaders that are closer to them in age; the bigger the difference between the age of candidate and the age of voter, the less likely the voter is to support the candidate. These studies provide evidence that younger

voter prefers younger candidates but overall, there needs to be further research how adequate representation impacts political behaviours of young people.

Youth Satisfaction with Democracy Literature

Satisfaction with democracy (SWD) is a widely studied indicator in political behaviour and public opinion research to gauge political support, system legitimacy and attitudes towards democracy (Anderson et al., 2005; Claassen & Magalhaes, 2022; Singh & Mayne, 2023; Valgarðsson & Devine, 2022). It is a key variable featured in more than 400 publications (Singh & Mayne, 2023) and commonly used as a subjective measure of a country's democratic quality, how well citizens think politics and governance is working in their country and whether "democracies are facing a crisis of legitimacy" (Singh & Mayne, 2023, 194). High levels of satisfaction can indicate that citizens feel their needs and preferences are met through democratic processes, whereas low levels can indicate potential issues such as distrust in institutions, perceived inefficacy, or corruption. Studying SWD helps us better understand the association between citizen satisfaction and system-challenging political behaviour and political attitudes.

While there is an extensive body of literature on SWD, research specifically focused on youth satisfaction with democracy is more limited. Existing studies primarily focus on trying to understand young people's attitudes towards democracy and making sense of what influences these attitudes. Notably, some scholars argue that youths are less enthusiastic about democracy compared to other generations and find that young people have less support for democratic values (Foa & Mounk, 2017; Norris, 2017).

Several single-country case studies provide further insights into youth attitudes towards democracy. In Poland (Marzecki & Stach, 2016), Macedonia (Cvetanova & Naumovska, 2015),

Hong Kong (Wong et al., 2017), South Africa (Maree, 2022), Australia (Stoker et al., 2017) and Spain (Essomba et al., 2023), research reveals that while young people identify with democratic values and they believe that democracy is a good form of governance, across all studies younger people exhibit a lack of trust in politicians, political parties and other government institutions. In addition, studies in Spain, South Africa and Poland specifically highlight that youths are very concerned with the democratic system and dissatisfied with democracy. In Spain 64.3% of participants are concerned with the crisis of democratic system (Essomba et al., 2023), in South Africa only 45% of young respondents are satisfied with the way democracy works in South Africa (Maree, 2022) and in Poland only 53% of youth are satisfied with democracy (Marzecki & Stach, 2016).

Interestingly, while some studies suggest that youths are less enthusiastic about democracy (see Foa & Mounk, 2017; Norris, 2017), others report that young people still consider democracy important and one of the most effective forms of government. However, trust with political institutions and politicians is declining, raising concerns about the implications of this trend. While certain studies highlight that young people engage in civic participation by volunteering in NGOs and engaging online (Cammaerts et al., 2014; Cvetanova & Naumovska, 2015; Essomba et al., 2023; Stoker et al., 2017), the low levels of trust, declining satisfaction, and low levels of conventional political participation among young people is concerning.

One of the most extensive studies on youth SWD is by Foa et al. (2020). They analyze a global dataset of 4.8 million respondents, 43 sources and 160 countries between 1973 and 2020. They find that youths are not only more dissatisfied with democracy compared to middle age and older people, but also more dissatisfied compared to youth in previous decades. Using globally aggregated satisfaction with democracy data by age and generation cohort for 74 countries, they

find each generational cohort is less satisfied with democracy than the previous cohort was at the same age in life and highlight that younger cohorts become more dissatisfied as they age.[1]

The literature cites many reasons for growing discontent among youth. Foa et al. (2020) highlights that rising economic inequality and youth unemployment has a big impact in dissatisfaction. For example, they found that during the eurozone crisis, youth unemployment skyrocketed and corresponded with a significant decline in the level of satisfaction in the affected regions. Additionally, transition fatigue also increases dissatisfaction. Where democratic transition usually increases democratic satisfaction, Foa et al. (2020) explain that "as memory of the struggle for democracy fades, a new generation of voters … is less concerned with the value of democracy as an ideal, and more concerned with its functioning in practice—including the ability to address problems of youth unemployment, corruption, inequality and crime" (19–20). The performance of States becomes important to youth and when States are unable to address problems they are facing, satisfaction declines. Other single country studies cite similar reasons for growing youth dissatisfaction. Health and economic crises have decreased youth's trust towards institutions satisfaction with democracy in Spain (Martinez-Cousinou et al., 2022). In Hong Kong, the rising cost of housing is a significant impact on this satisfaction (Wong et al., 2017). While in Poland, the economy, unemployment, passivity on corruption and "marginalization of the society by the political elites" and all reasons brought up for dissatisfaction (Marzecki & Stach, 2016, 53).

Notably, the literature does not address the potential impact of descriptive representation on youth satisfaction with democracy.

[1] Consult Figure 10 in Appendix A for a graph of the intergenerational satisfaction with democracy level (Foa et al., 2020)

Political Representation Literature

Political representation is a fundamental aspect of democratic governance and ensures that political institutions represent a variety of interests. There are multiple definitions of political representation in the literature, with the most cited and straightforward by Pitkin (1967). According to Pitkin, to represent means to "make present again," referring to the activity of making citizens' voices, opinions and perspectives "present" in the public policy-making processes. Political representation is a form of political assistance where "political actors speak, advocate, symbolize, and act on behalf of others in the political arena" (Kurebwa, 2015, 50).

There are many different types of representation highlighted in the literature but the two main concepts that resurface are: substantive representation and descriptive representation. Pitkin (1967) defines substantive representation as a representative that "act [s] in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them" (209). This could mean by creating laws and implementing policy that reflect the needs of the community, regardless of shared physical or other characteristics. Descriptive representation occurs when representatives share the same physical characteristics and lived experiences as the group that they represent. Sharing characteristics as their respected groups helps representatives "stand for" these groups.

There is a rich debate on whether descriptive representation is enough. Some argue that descriptive representation does not lead to substantive representation since there is too much focus on the shared characterizes and qualities rather than "deliberative capabilities" of representatives (Kurebwa, 2015, 52). While others argue that the emphasis on group differences make the main role of legislators obsolete since it is their job to produce policies for every citizen—not just a certain group in their constituency (Phillips, 1995).

Those that advocate for descriptive representation argue that representatives who share the demographics and lived experiences of their constituents increase their ability to evaluate and construct representative policies. They believe that descriptive representation is essential as it "furthers the substantive representation of interests by improving the quality of deliberation" (Mansbridge, 1999, 654). The strongest argument that supports the idea that descriptive representation can lead to substantive representation is the research on whether demographics of representatives have an impact on policy outcomes for disadvantages groups (Mansbridge, 2004).

In fact, studies show that descriptive representation of certain underrepresented groups does have measurable impacts. When there are more women descriptively represented within political parties and in the legislature, the elected women have a positive impact on pushing for candidate gender rules and changing policies within these institutions such as gender quota rules to increase representation (Caul, 1999). Increased women's representation also changes spending allocation patterns in education, healthcare and defence (Clots-Figueras, 2011; Funk et al. 2022) and influences change in parliamentary deliberations on bill initiation and specific policy choices such as healthcare, women's issues and child issues (Baskaran et al., 2019; Hessami & de Fonseca, 2020; Lippmann, 2022 ; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006).

Other scholars also find support that minority legislators substantively represent minority interests (Juenke & Preuhs, 2012; Minta, 2009). Black legislators are more likely to represent the policy interests of Black people (Broockman, 2013; Kopkin, 2017; Owens, 2005) and Black citizens perceive greater substantive representation from Black politicians (Jones, 2016). Similar findings are true for Latinos, as Latino legislators are more likely to work on legislation and enact legislation considered salient for Latinos (Hero & Tolbert, 1995; Wallace, 2014) and are more likely to enact pro-minority policies (Jeong, 2013).

There is also some research that finds a link between the descriptive and substantive representation of social classes. Legislators from working-class occupations have more liberal economic preference compared to legislators from profit-oriented professions and these preferences then translate to voting on economic policies (Carnes & Lupu, 2015; Carnes, 2012). In addition, citizens perceive better representation and better legislative performance when working-class politicians are present in legislators (Barnes & Saxton, 2019).

The literature on youth representation remains very limited. Young people are also a political outgroup, but the literature continually overlooks them. Being a young person is different than belonging to another underrepresented group because age is a temporary state, and eventually young people grow up and will no longer feel underrepresented. Whereas other identities such as women and religious minorities are stable, they don't evolve over time and these groups will potentially face underrepresentation throughout their whole life (Stockemer & Sundström, 2018). According to life-cycle arguments, the exclusion of young people in politics is less unfair than the exclusion of other minorities such as women and people of colour, because young people will not face unequal treatment for their entire lives (Phillips,1998). Despite this argument, young people should have an active voice in politics.

The adequate representation of young people is crucial because it ensures that policy-making considers diverse perspectives and experiences. When young people contribute their insights, it enriches the decision-making process, making policies more responsive to the needs of younger people in the population. This inclusivity helps to address the specific challenges younger people face, which older legislators in the political body might overlook or misunderstand. The lack of younger people in legislatures is problematic because the "significant descriptive underrepresentation of certain groups in the national legislature undermines the legitimacy of the

regime in the eyes of those less well represented" (Mansbridge, 2015, 265). By increasing representation of marginalized groups, such as young people, and showing these groups that their concerns are taken seriously, it fosters trust and legitimacy in political institutions, which is essential for a healthy democracy.

Magnitude of Youth Underrepresentation

The current literature finds that young people are underrepresented in parliaments worldwide (Joshi, 2013; Krook & Nugent, 2018; Stockemer & Sundström, 2018). Research using a worldwide sample shows while the global population of people aged 18–35 represents around 30% the world's population, individuals aged 35 years or under represent only 10% of deputies in parliament and individuals aged 40 years or under represent about 20% of deputies (Stockemer & Sundström, 2018). In other words, young people are underrepresented by a factor of three in legislatures compared to their share in the voting-age population. Another study confirms these findings, showing that deputies aged 40 or under represent less than 15% of parliamentarians worldwide, while "more than one third of parliamentarians worldwide are in their fifties, and more than one-half are aged 51 and above" (Krook & Nugent, 2018, 62). Other research that looks at specific regions such as Asia (Joshi, 2013) and southern Europe (Freire et al., 2021) or single country studies including Sweden (Burness, 2000), Switzerland (Kissau et al., 2012), Indonesia (Prihatini, 2019), France (Murray, 2008) or Ghana (Van Gyampo, 2013) all confirm, either implicitly or explicitly, that there is an underrepresentation of young legislators and an over-representation of people in the 50 to 60 age group. These findings across various contexts highlight that the underrepresentation of youth in legislative bodies is a global trend.

The underrepresentation of youth is even more pronounced in cabinets. Stockemer & Sundström (2022a) find that that cabinet members aged 35 or under represent 3.12% of ministers

while cabinet members aged 40 or under represent 8.64% of ministers. This leads youth to be underrepresented in cabinets by a factor of 10. In cabinets, young people do not reach half the percentage that do in parliaments which "render [s] youths' underrepresentation in cabinet endemic" (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a, 90). In addition, 72.79% of cabinets have no one aged 35 or under in their cabinet, while 45.59% of cabinets in the sample have no one aged 40 or under (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a). Cabinets represent the highest level of political office and these statistics emphasize the significant gap in youth representation in high-level decision-making positions. Cabinet members have the most decision-making power and have the most influence over the head of government/head of state. If outgroups such as younger people are absent from these decision-making spaces, there is no one to represent the interests of the young.

In addition to low representation of young people at the legislative and executive branches of government, there is also limited representation of young leaders. While the average voter is 44 years old (Stockemer & Sunström, 2018), a dataset containing 51 countries from 1996–2016 found that the average age of leaders of government is 54 years old and only 3% of leaders are 35 years and under (Sevi, 2021). The Archigos dataset from 2015 that contains a sample of 188 countries finds that in 2015 the average political leader is over 60 years old (Goemans et al., 2009). My own data collection containing a sample of 188 leaders from 2021 to 2023 confirms the Archigos dataset results that the average political leader is over 60 years old. Party leaders and leaders of government play an important role in nominating people into the cabinet and in serving as a symbol/figurehead of a party or a country. Their choices for cabinet nominations directly impact the direction and priorities of government policies. If a younger leader is in power, they are more likely to nominate younger individuals who then have the opportunity to represent the younger generation within political institutions (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a). Overall, the studies

confirm that there is an underrepresentation of youth in the legislative and executive branches of democratic governments.

Factors That Influence Descriptive Youth Representation in Politics

There are several factors that impact the representation of younger people in democratic political institutions.

To begin, in line with Norris and Lovenduski's (1995) supply and demand model, the representation in political institutions starts with the supply of younger candidates at the party level. The supply side of the framework focuses on what factors influence the decision to run for office and the factors that limit who can run for office. Whereas the demand side focuses on the actors that gate keep certain candidates from running for office and the voters who decide on the representatives. Political parties play a key role in candidate supply and voter demand. They need to supply enough younger candidates to allow them to get elected and increase youth representation. However, often there are not enough young candidates in most jurisdictions. For example, a study in Canada, finds that the number of young candidates in the candidate pool does not resemble the voting-age population, indicating that youth underrepresentation starts with the supply of candidates (Stockemer et al., 2024).

Certain party-level factors significantly influence youth representation within political parties. The age of a political party plays a crucial role, a few studies find that new parties tend to have a high share of young members of parliament compared to older parties (Kurz & Ettensperger, 2023 ; Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a). This could be due to older parties having "long-established networks of commands, consisting mainly of middle-aged and senior men" (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a, 80), making it harder to come into these closed groups as a younger person.

Additionally, Stockemer and Sundström, (2022a) find that party ideology and the age of the party leader also impacts youth representation. They find that left-leaning parties usually having a higher share of young legislators compared to right-leaning parties and younger leaders are associated with younger party memberships, likely due to their influence in the candidate nomination process. Lastly, the presence of strong and well-integrated youth wings within parties could positively impact youth representation by providing young people with opportunity to develop political experience and skills. However, the actual effect of youth wings on increasing the descriptive representation of youth remains unclear, with some research suggesting that their influence may vary depending on the specific party context (Kurz & Ettensperger, 2023).

Next, there is a growing literature that aims to identify barriers that impact youth representation within parliaments. One significant factor is candidate age requirements; while the voting age is typically 18, the age to run for office can be as late as 35 in some countries, which negatively impacts youth representation. For each year beyond 18 that individuals are prohibited from running for office, youth representation in parliament decreases by 1% (Stockemer & Sundström, 2018). Congruently, another study finds that lowering the candidacy age from 25 to 18 could increase the representation of deputies under 45 by 5% (Krook & Nugent, 2018). The type of electoral system also plays a role—a few studies finds that Proportional Representation (PR) systems generally promote higher youth representation than majoritarian systems (Kurz & Ettensperger, 2023; Joshi, 2013; Stockemer & Sundström, 2018). PR systems are party-centred and create an incentive to appeal to different voters and present a more diverse list of candidates, while majoritarian systems are candidate-centred and tend to just appeal to the average voter, so candidates are typically educated middle-aged men of the dominant race (Kurz & Ettensperger, 2023). Studies show that PR systems have 5 percentage points more young deputies aged under

35 and 7 percentage points more deputies aged under 40 years under compared to plurality systems (Stockemer & Sundström, 2018, 482). Education is another key factor; educated youth are more likely to be politically active and qualify for office, with a 1% increase in education levels correlating to a nearly 6% increase in young parliamentarians under 30 (Bekenova, 2022, 84). Youth quotas could also impact youth representation, although research on their effectiveness finds that their impact has been mixed due to poor implementation or low quota levels. Countries with well-implemented youth quotas might see better youth representation, but current efforts are often inadequate (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a).

There is very limited research on youth representation in cabinets. Several key factors influence youth representation in cabinets, although much like the research on parliaments, research on this topic is limited. One factor is the level of youth representation in parliaments. When there is higher youth representation in parliament, it indicates a political culture that values younger politicians is present and increases the likelihood of younger ministers being nominated to the cabinet. In fact, higher youth representation in parliament correlates with an increase of young cabinet members of 0.57 and 0.42 percentage points in the under 35 age category and the under 40 age category (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a). The age of the head of government is also significant to youth representation. Heads of government seem to have a natural tendency to nominate people closer to their own age as collaboration tends to improve when people work with others similar in age (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a). Whatever the reason for nominating younger ministers, research shows the older the head of government is, there are fewer younger ministers in cabinet. In fact, for every year older the head of government is, the proportion of young legislators in the cabinet decreases by nearly 0.4 percentage points (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a).

The existing literature highlights the magnitude of youth underrepresentation and puts forward a few institutional factors that impact young people underrepresentation in political parties, parliaments, and in cabinets. However there is still much to discover on the topic. Most factors mentioned in the literature have a small influence on youth representation at different levels of government and there is no model of youth representation that explains the variation consistently.

The Effects of Youth Representation

Having youth present in political institutions is necessary because there are significant differences between age cohorts when it comes to policy preferences and values. Older people are in favour of higher pension spending whereas younger people are in favour of higher spending on education and unemployment (Busemeyer et al., 2009). In the United States, older people have more conservative values and favour higher military spending. Whereas young people have more progressive values and favour higher social spending such as healthcare, education and other social services (Wattenberg, 2015). Younger people are more open to same sex marriage compared to older people (McEnvoy, 2016) and there are differences between the age cohorts when it comes to referendum votes such as Brexit—young people were more likely to vote to remain as a part of the European Union (Sloam, 2014). Other research finds that younger people tend to identify with more post-materialist values such as increased individual freedoms compared to older individuals and tend to have more pluralistic, multicultural, and egalitarian beliefs (Abramson & Inglehart, 2009). To ensure that the interests of young people are considered, policy preferences and values need to be mirrored on the political level.

Some research reports that age has an impact on substantive representation. McClean (2021) finds that the age of mayors in Japan influences child welfare spending. Compared to older

mayors, younger mayors are more likely to increase social spending towards benefits for young families. Baskaran et al. (2021) illustrate that younger municipal politicians in Bavaria increase social spending such as on schools and childcare—which are areas considered to be high priority for younger people. Bailer et al. (2022) finds that during the first term in office younger deputies are more interested in youth-related issues such as education compared to their older counterparts. Jung (2023) finds that in South Korean municipalities when there is an elected young mayor there is budget increases in areas related to job creation, economic development and cultural activities, which are of interest to the younger generation. Curry and Haydon (2018) examine the U.S. Congress and the impact of older politicians on legislation important to seniors. In their study, their results show that a politician's age influences the introduction of lower salience senior issue bills. Although these case studies are limited to individual countries and over half focus only the municipal level of government, they collectively show that, much like other characteristics such as gender, socio-economic class and minority status, a politician's age can influence government priorities and affect the allocation of government funding. Young people have specific interests and these studies suggest that younger politicians are more attuned to the needs and preferences of younger constituents, leading to policy decisions that reflect the interests of a younger demographic.

Despite the importance of youth engagement, the connection between their descriptive representation and substantive outcomes remains largely unexplored in the literature. In particular, the link between youth's presence in decision-making bodies on conventional political behaviour and democratic attitudes remains largely unexplored. To my knowledge only Angelucci et al. (2024), looks at a direct link between youth representation political behaviour. They find that when the representation of young people in parliaments increases, the age-gap difference in voter turnout

decreases, meaning that when there is more youth representation there is higher youth voter turnout. In addition, when a party system emphasizes post-materialist values, which younger people prioritize compared to older generations, the age-gap difference in voter turnout also decreases. In other words, when parties emphasize values important to younger people, there is higher youth voter turnout.

Additionally, political representation appears as an important factor in political trust and satisfaction with democracy literature. Several studies find that representation positively correlates with SWD. Research on political party representation finds that, when a voter's preferred party is elected to parliament the voter becomes more satisfied with democracy post-election (Canalejo-Molero, 2024; Cameron, 2020). Homogeneity in political party choice also influences SWD. When citizens perceive that all political parties to be similar, they are less satisfied with democracy indicating that political differences between parties is crucial within a democratic system (Donovan & Karp, 2017; Ridge, 2022).

Other studies show that citizens that have similar ideological alignments with their representatives tend to be more satisfied with democracy (Brandenburg & Johns, 2014; Curini et al., 2012; Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2011; Kim, 2009; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017) and when politicians share the same policy priorities as citizens satisfaction also increases (Reher, 2015; Reher, 2016). The same is true for perception of representation, when individuals believe that representation and political accountability is strong, they tend to be more satisfied with democracy (Aarts & Thomassen, 2008; Erlingsson et al., 2014; Lundmark et al., 2020).

While there is some research that links political representation and satisfaction levels, only one article examines the descriptive representation and satisfaction with democracy. Forman-Rabinovici and Beeri (2024) find that citizens' gender and majority/minority status, along with the

descriptive representation of councillors on city councils in Israel, correlate with satisfaction. Their results indicate that when a group is represented proportionally to the actual population, levels of satisfaction among citizens increase. In their sample, men are more satisfied than women, and majority citizens are more satisfied than minority citizens, as men and majority citizens comprised the majority of the council (Forman-Rabinovici & Beeri, 2024, 10). Apart from Forman-Rabinovici and Beeri (2024) looking at the municipal level, there is no descriptive representation literature (that I have been able to find) that links descriptive representation at the national level of different groups such as race, gender or age with increased satisfaction with democracy (Singh & Mayne, 2023). This is an overlooked area of study that requires further attention.

While there are three big areas of youth in politics literature: youth political participation, youth satisfaction with democracy and youth political representation—these three literatures are not well connected. One way to combine these elements together is through the vicious cycle of political alienation but as of yet, this cycle has not been comprehensively tested. My contribution will be to combine these three literatures together and test the (adapted) cycle of political alienation.

Theoretical Expectations

Vicious Cycle of Political Alienation

The low representation of youth in politics feeds into a vicious cycle of political alienation. Political alienation refers to "a person's sense of estrangement from the politics and government of his society" (Lane, 1962, 161). The main dimension by which we can characterize political alienation is powerlessness which Finifter (1970, 390) defines as "an individual's feeling that he

cannot affect the actions of the government … [and that] the heart of the political process is not subject to his influence."

The vicious cycle of political alienation of young adults coined by Stockemer & Sundström (2022a) refers to a reinforcing pattern where young people become increasingly disconnected and disinterested from the formal democratic political process. The original cycle outlines three interconnected elements: lack of political interest and knowledge, lack of conventional political participation, and lack of political representation. In my research, I modify this cycle by combining the elements of lack of interest/knowledge and lack of conventional political participation into a single category. These elements are intertwined and have been frequently linked and researched in the existing literature. Additionally, I incorporate increased political apathy and political dissatisfaction as a new element in the cycle. This adjustment aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the cycle and account for how political disconnect reinforces the other elements of the cycle. The lack of political interest and knowledge among youth coupled with a lack of participation in formal politics from youth, leads to low representation of youth in political institutions, which increases youth political apathy and dissatisfaction and the cycle continues (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a).

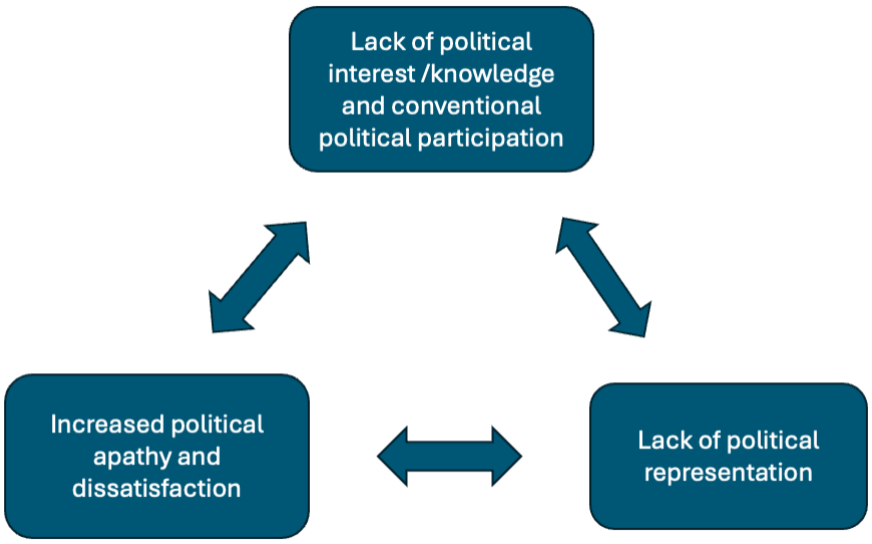

Figure 1 The modified vicious cycle of political alienation of young adults inspired by Stockemer & Sundström (2022a)

Researchers have assumed and tested the link between political interest/political knowledge and conventional political participation. Numerous studies show that younger people have less political knowledge compared to the older generations (Pattie et al., 2004, Stockemer & Rocher, 2017) and have low levels of interest in formal politics (Lupia & Philpot, 2005; Norris, 2004; Quintelier, 2007). The lack of political knowledge among young people accounts for about half of the gap in turnout between young voters and older voters (Stockemer & Rocher, 2017). If younger people had the same level of political knowledge as older generations, youth turnout would be 10–15 percentage points higher (Stockemer & Rocher, 2017).

Research has long identified political education and interest as a determinant to actual and expected electoral participation. Lower political interest and knowledge have a detrimental influence on youth's political participation. Milner (2010) finds that factors such as lack of civic education in schools and changes to political socialization influence that young voters are less

interested in politics and as a result participate less. A focus group study in Canada finds non-voting youth, feel powerless and have a lack of confidence in their political knowledge to influence change in politics—so they don't engage in conventional political behaviour (Bastedo, 2014). Other studies find there is a strong correlation between youth's knowledge of democracy and expected voting habits; students with a lot of knowledge on democracy are more likely to vote in future elections compared to students with less political knowledge (Barrett & Pachi, 2019; Schulz et al., 2018; Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

Furthermore, the trend of declining political participation of youth because of low political interest and political knowledge hinders youth issues to make it to the political agenda (Buchmeier & Vogt, 2024; Marsh et al., 2007). As mentioned in the literature review, young people vote less (Fieldhouse et al., 2007; Leighley & Nagler, 2014; Quintelier & Hooghe, 2011) and they are less likely to get involved with political parties (Gauja, 2015; Kitanova, 2019; van Biezen et al., 2012). Since young people are involved in formal politics at lower rates than older generations, this leads the voice of the young to be less important to parties and political candidates as these political actors gain little from catering to a group of people that are disinterested in formal politics (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a). There is no benefit for political parties to focus on policies that could benefit or interest youth (such as education spending, the environment, social spending, etc.). Since older generations are the ones that vote and are engaged in formal politics, it is the strategic decision for political parties and candidates to concern themselves with policies catered to older voters (such as policies related to pensions and healthcare) (Vlandas, 2023).

This reasoning also translates to candidate nominations at the party level—since younger people vote at lower levels than older generations, political parties do not gain anything from nominating a younger candidate that could appeal to younger voters (Norris & Lovenduski,1995).

Therefore, parties do not supply enough younger candidates that could allow or adequate youth representation in politics which ultimately leads to a lack of young legislators (Stockemer & Sundström, 2018).

Due to low political presence of youth in institutions, specific interests are inadequately represented and therefore policies important to youth are not implemented which leaves youth with feelings of apathy and disconnect to the formal political systems (Dahl et al., 2018; Henn & Foard, 2012; Cammaerts et al.,2014). Cammaerts et al. (2014) highlights that youth perceive the "highly formalized model of political engagement inherent to policy processes is alien and intimidating" (656), they believe that policy makers do not listen to their concerns and prefer not to engage in formal political behaviours such as voting (Cammaerts et al.,2014).

Countless single country studies mirror the sentiments that young people don't feel represented by politicians which increases feelings of cynicism and apathy. In Great Britain, 71% of young people believe that parliamentarians lose touch with people once elected, and 59% believe that political parties are not interested in the same issues as young people (Henn & Weinstein, 2006). Young people find that "there are few channels open for them to engage with politicians" and parties fail "connect actively and meaningfully with youth" (Henn & Weinstein, 2006, 527). Only 5% of Polish young adults believe that politicians take their citizens' interests into account during decision-making processes. They indicate that their interests and problems are not sufficiently represented by politicians or political and they feel excluded from the political sphere (Marzecki & Stach, 2016).

Results from focus group studies and interviews with young people in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and South Africa confirm that young people are apathetic about politics and dissatisfied with the political systems (Bastedo, 2014; Kiesa et al., 2007 ; Maree, 2022;

Oyedemi & Mahlatji, 2016; O'Toole et al., 2003a; O'Toole et al., 2003b). The Canadian study highlights that "youth had little confidence that as individuals they would be heard or included in political affairs" and even the young people that voted in focus group shared the same sentiments (Bastedo, 2014, 656). They highlight that the disconnect between Canadian politicians and youth which then influences many youths to abstain for conventional political participation such as voting. O'Toole et al. mirrors this finding as they cite one of the key reasons youth do no participation in formal politics is because they feel left out of the decision-making process and believe "they don't feel that anyone in authority, and especially in central government, is listening to them" (O'Toole et al., 2003b, 359). In South Africa, young people also believe that politicians do not engage with them in a meaningful way and the "distrust of government and the political system creates cynicism among the youth" which leads to apathy towards voting and low participation (Oyedemi & Mahlatji, 2016, 321; Maree, 2022).

Overall, in all the qualitative and quantitative studies, young people believe politicians are not interested in finding out the needs of young people. They feel that politician's don't consider their views, they don't engage in meaningful ways and therefore they don't participate in conventional political behaviours. All these factors fuel the vicious cycle of youth's political alienation.

Breaking the Cycle of Political Alienation

Stockemer and Sundström (2018) (2022a) theorize that increasing youth representation can break the cycle of political alienation. By providing adequate representation of youth, it could allow younger generations to raise issues important to them within the formal political sphere and make younger people feel seen as a generation. This in turn would incentivize young adults to

engage more actively in the political process (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022a) and could combat the increasing feelings of apathy and discontent.

The link between youth underrepresentation and political alienation is important to test empirically because there is limited evidence that increased representation will influence younger people to be more involved with formal politics (such as voting in elections) or whether it will influence how they feel about the political systems (their satisfaction with democracy). As such, without testing this link, breaking the cycle of political alienation through increased youth representation remains a theoretical proposition.

Hypotheses

To put the theory of the vicious cycle of political alienation to the test, I put forward several hypotheses. The first set of hypotheses tests how increased youth representation can impact youth political behaviours. Descriptive representation has an important role in reinforcing the link between citizens and their political representatives (Mansbridge, 1999). I base these hypotheses on the theoretical expectation that increased representation of a certain group should increase voter turnout with that group (Pitkin, 1967). The sense of identification and representation can influence younger voters may feel more empowered and motivated to vote if they see young parliamentarians who share their characteristics.

H1a: When there is higher youth representation in parliaments, there should be higher voting turnout among youth.

H1b: When the elected leader for the highest office is young, there should be higher voting turnout among youth.

H1c: When there is higher youth representation in parliaments, the age gap in turnout should decrease compared to middle-age and older people.

Hypothesis H1a aims to explore the role of descriptive representation and its effect on political behaviours. Previous research finds that voter turnout of ethnic minorities (Barreto, 2007; Hayes et al., 2024; Rocha et al., 2010; Whitby, 2007) and women (Barnes & Buchard, 2013; Reingold & Harrell, 2010; Wolbrecht & Campbell, 2007) increases when there are candidates that descriptively represent these groups. Furthermore, Angelucci et al. (2024) is the only study that looks at the direct link between youth descriptive representation and youth voter turnout and finds that age representation matters for youth voter turnout. While their research explores the link between youth underrepresentation and political alienation, the sample size is restricted to 57 elections in 19 West European countries—in my research I increase data coverage and look at a wider sample. By looking at a wider sample that covers various demographics, geographic, and socio-political contexts with more indicators I broaden the scope of analysis. This helps enhance the generalizability of my results, provides a greater statistical power and offers a more comprehensive understanding of youth engagement in the political process.

Along the same line, hypothesis H1b aims to explore the impact of youth representation of younger leaders on youth voter turnout. The literature finds that representation has an impact on the voter choices of citizens. Minority voters tend to vote for minority candidates that share the same identity (Böhm et al., 2010; Grant & Tolley, 2017; Junn & Masuoka, 2008) and people tend to vote for candidates that share the same social background as them (Heath, 2015). There is evidence that age influences voter preference (Sigelman & Sigelman, 1982; Pomante & Schraufnagel, 2015; Sevi, 2021). While research finds that younger people prefer younger candidates and young people vote for the younger candidates at a higher rate, no studies have looked at whether the voter turnout among youth increases due to the presence younger candidates.

If H1b is confirmed, this hypothesis could not only highlight the importance of age representation in politics, but it also highlights the important role of younger leaders in enhancing youth political engagement.

Angelucci et al. (2024) directly inspire hypothesis H1c. In their research the age gap in voter turnout decreased when there was higher youth descriptive representation in parliaments. This hypothesis allows to directly look at the differences in voter turnout among groups and allows me to build on Angelucci et al.'s work and compare results. As mentioned above, I broaden the scope of analysis. Despite working with a larger dataset, I expect the same results to be true in my research.

The second set of hypotheses tests the emotional effects of increased youth representation and whether it can combat the feelings of apathy and discontent with democracy that young people often experience. I base these hypotheses on the theoretical expectation that descriptive representation can enhance political legitimacy and satisfaction with democratic processes among underrepresented groups.

> **H2a: When there is higher youth representation in parliaments, young people should have higher satisfaction with democracy.**
>
> **H2b: When the elected leader for the highest office is young, the more young people have higher satisfaction with democracy.**
>
> **H2c: When there is higher youth representation in parliaments, the age gap in satisfaction with democracy should decrease compared to middle-age and older people.**

With the exception of Forman-Rabinovici and Beeri (2024) who find that, citizens' gender and majority/minority status and the descriptive representation of characteristics of the councillors

on the city council correlate with citizens satisfaction, there is no descriptive representation literature that links increased descriptive representation of different groups such as race, gender or age with increased satisfaction with democracy. Despite the lack of literature on the descriptive representation and satisfaction with democracy, the existing representation literature that looks at ideology preferences (Brandenburg & Johns, 2014; Curini et al., 2012; Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2011; Kim, 2009; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017) and policy congruence (Reher, 2015; Reher, 2016). Therefore it is reasonable to believe that youth representation could have a positive impact on youth satisfaction with democracy as youths have specific policy preferences compared to older people (Busemeyer et al., 2009; McEvoy, 2016; Vlandas, 2023). Higher youth descriptive representation, could implicitly trigger substantive representation and more awareness for policy issues that are important for younger people. This could lead to younger people becoming more satisfied with democracy.

In addition, the literature cites many reasons for growing discontent among youth such as rising inequality, youth unemployment and transition fatigue (Foa et al., 2020). However a lack of representation is unmentioned as a potential cause for this dissatisfaction. Many studies find that young people are increasingly apathetic about politics and dissatisfied with the political systems due to lack of representation (Bastedo, 2014; Dahl et al., 2018 ; Cammaerts et al.,2014; Kiesa et al., 2007 ; O'Toole et al., 2003ab). It is reasonable to believe if youth representation increases, young people would no longer feel as apathetic and their attitudes to democracy could change.

Finally, Hypothesis H2c aims to measure how the age gap in SWD changes when youth representation increases. This hypothesis allows to directly look at the differences in SWD among groups and by adding the SWD age gap indicator it again allows me to build on Angelucci et al.'s work and for a more inclusive discussion how age representation could influence age cohort

differences. Foa et al. (2020) finds an intergenerational gap in SWD in which youths are not only more dissatisfied than middle age and older people but also young people in the past. By measuring the SWD age gap I can examine whether the same type of gap is present in my dataset and if there are any factors that could close the gap.

I expect that when young people see individuals who reflect their age and experiences in parliamentary positions or as a head of government, it can lead to a greater sense of political inclusion. This increased sense of representation can boost satisfaction with democracy, as young people feel their voices are heard and their concerns are taken seriously. By testing these hypotheses, my study aims to provide empirical evidence on the relationship between youth representation and youth satisfaction with democracy. This research will contribute to a deeper understanding of how descriptive representation impacts political attitudes.

While my H2 hypotheses follow a similar logic to my first set of hypotheses, they focus on the potential emotional effect of increased youth representation. Having both sets of hypotheses is crucial to first, understand if increased representation can break different parts of the cycle of political alienation. And second, to understand if representation can have an impact on an action-based level (changing practices and habits by participating in voting) and on a nuanced, emotional level (enhancing feelings of political inclusion and satisfaction with democracy). Both sets are important to explore as they mutually benefit each other.

Methodology

Dataset Construction

To answer my research question and test my hypotheses, I build my own dataset using multiple sources and use descriptive and inferential statistics. First, I use the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) datasets to measure voter turnout and satisfaction with democracy. The CSES data provides comprehensive cross-national post-election survey results. The dataset includes voting data, political perceptions, political behaviour and demographic information as well as demographic information such as date of birth of voters—which is crucial for my research since I am looking at age-related trends. CSES is a popular dataset used by many researchers to study electoral participation and behaviours (A few recent examples include: Ankudinov, 2024; Burlacu, 2020; Carreras & Castañeda-Angarita, 2019; Kruella et al., 2024; Sevi, 2021; Stiers, 2021; Sulmont, 2021; Tuttnauer & Wegmann, 2022; Živković, 2021). The CSES dataset spans from 1996 to 2021 and contains results from 59 countries worldwide2. The dataset offers a good variation in the countries included and offers a rich and diverse sample. It includes nations from various regions, including the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Europe, providing a comprehensive global perspective. In addition, the countries represented in the dataset have a wide range of GDP per capita, from lower income to higher-income nations, ensuring economic diversity, includes a variety of political systems, such as parliamentary, presidential, and semi-presidential systems, along with different regime types. This diversity allows for a more thorough analysis. Rather than

[2] Complete list of countries is in Appendix B.

using multiple datasets for multiple measures, I choose to use only this dataset because it includes relevant information for all my measures and allows me stay consistent with one dataset.

CSES does not include information about the age of parliamentarians and age of leaders, therefore I use the Worldwide Age Representation in parliaments (WARP) dataset (Stockemer & Sundstorm, 2022b). This dataset provides information about the numerical proportion of age groups in parliaments across the world. It reports measures the presences of members of parliament aged 30 years or under, aged 35 years or under, aged 40 years or under, aged 41 to 60 years, as aged 61 years or over as well as the mean and median age of parliamentarians—I include all these measures in my dataset. The WARP dataset has information on over 700 elections, in 149 countries from the 1990s to 2021, which allows me to obtain youth representation data and match it to the CSES dataset. The only other dataset with information on the age of Members of Parliaments on a large scale is the IPU Parline Database (2022). However, since I need data spanning before 2014, the WARP dataset is the best choice, as it includes information prior to that year.

Finally, I hand collect the date of births of every elected country leader for each election. I retrieve the leader's age from government websites, news articles and the personal biographies of the elected leaders. To find out the age of each leader at the time of an election, I subtract the election year by the year or birth of each leader.

Once I collect all my data, I match the individual CSES dataset from modules 1 to 5 with the WARP dataset and the data of age of leaders to construct an original dataset. In total, I have data for 59 countries (worldwide) for over 200 elections and over 200 leader ages from 1996 to 2021.

Independent Variable: Age

In line with the current literature, for empirical analysis I use the term "youth" to refer to a person belonging to a certain objective age category, instead of relying in self-identification (such as used by Barrett & Pachi, 2019). The number of years a person has lived is the approach most researchers use (IPU 2014, 2016, 2018; Joshi, 2013; Sevi, 2021; Stockemer & Sundstorm 2018, 2022a). There remains a lot of debate of the age range to define "youth." There is less debate about the lower limit of 18 years old as this is the age most countries determine the lower bar of age of majority as well as recognizes adulthood with the right to vote. The upper limit is subject to more debate where the upper limit ranges from 30 years old (Angelucci et al., 2024), 35 years (Norris & Franklin, 1997; Sevi, 2021) to 40 years (Curry & Haydon, 2018; Joshi, 2013; Joshi & Och, 2021; IPU 2014, 2016, 2018). There is no standard benchmark in youth representation literature for what the upper limit should be therefore a few studies (such as Kissau et al., 2012; Stockemer & Sundström 2018, 2022a) use the two benchmarks to capture variation in age: 18 to 35 years and 18 to 40 years. In line with this practice, I choose to also define "youth" with two upper limits of 35 years and 40 years. As a result, I classify "middle-aged" people as someone between 41 years and 60 years and "older" people as someone 61 years and over.

Dependent variables

I have three dependent variables: voter turnout, satisfaction with democracy and age gap (for voter turnout and satisfaction with democracy) between young people and middle age and older people.

Voter Turnout

First, to measure voter turnout the CSES survey asks respondents: "Did you cast a ballot in the last election?" The respondent answers are coded as a dummy variable, with 1 = 'Respondent voted' and 0 = 'Respondent did not vote.' Non-responses, 'Respondent not registered on electoral list' and 'Don't know' are coded as missing values. For my dataset, I collect the aggregate voter turnout for each age group and for each election. Self-reported voter turnout using survey data is a standard measure in research (Briggs, 2017; Dahl et al., 2018; Denny & Doyle, 2008; Fraga & Holbein, 2020; Fieldhouse et al., 2007; Henn & Foard, 2012).[3] In fact, only 11% of research articles in the top 10 political science journals, use validated turnout data (Smets & van Ham, 2013, 346). For the use of my study, the use of validated turnout data is not possible, because too few countries report validated turnout across age cohorts.

Satisfaction With Democracy

Second, to measure satisfaction with democracy, the CSES survey asks respondents: "On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in [COUNTRY]?" The respondent answers are coded on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (very satisfied) to 5 (not at all satisfied). For my dataset, I collect the aggregate voter turnout for each age group and for each election. I combine the "very satisfied" and "fairly satisfied" results to simplify the analysis and focus on the broader trends.

[3] Initially, I intended to hand collect voter turnout data using country websites and sources to have the most accurate results as possible. The proportion of people self-reporting in the survey that they cast a ballot during an election is consistently larger than the actual turnout rate. Researchers speculate it is due to a social desirability bias where respondents respond to questions in line with the desired behaviour (Holbrook & Krosnick, 2010). However, most countries do not provide age voter data—so I would not be able to compare turnout by age group for the large sample. For this reason, I use the self-reported answers from the CSES survey data.

I choose this variable because it is a key indicator used to measure how well citizens think politics and governance is working in their country (Singh & Mayne, 2023) and the wording of this question has stayed consistent over the years, so it makes it comparable to other research. In recent years, scholars such as Canache et al. (2001) and Ferrín (2016) have critiqued the SWD indicator for its validity, noting its ambiguity and the potential for different interpretations by respondents. Despite the critiques, researchers have continued to use this indicator as a standard item in surveys to measure political support and citizens' attitudes toward democracy (Anderson et al. 2005; Claassen & Magalhaes, 2022; Singh & Mayne, 2023).

Age Gap

Fourth, to replicate the Angelucci et al. (2024) study, I calculate the age gap in voter turnout and satisfaction with democracy. Angelucci et al. (2024) calculates age gap in voter turnout by comparing the turnout of the younger age category (those under 30) against the older age category (those over 60). This measure lets us see the difference in voter turnout between the under 30 categories of voters and the over 60 category of voters.

To calculate the age gap, I operationalize the age category into 4 categories: 35 years or under, 40 years or under, 41 to 60 years and 61 years plus to be in line with the age categories I choose to use for my research. I compare both the younger age benchmarks (35 or under and 40 or under categories) against both the 41–60 years category (middle-aged people) and the 61 years and over category (older aged people). I calculate the age gap by simply measuring the difference between the aggregate results of the different age groups for example, for a given election I take younger age category voter turnout result and subtract it against the middle age category to create the age gap. I then do that for every combination of age categories. I calculate the age gap between younger age people and both middle-aged people and older aged people, because it is interesting

to see how the two youth age groups compared to both middle-aged and older people. I want to see the variation between the age groups and see if there are any similar trends across the results.

The closer the age gap is to 0, the smaller the difference in voter turnout or satisfaction with democracy between younger and middle/older age categories. A near-zero age gap indicates a relatively equal level of electoral participation or satisfaction between age group. For instance, if the age gap for satisfaction with democracy between the under-35 youth and older age groups is a positive number, such as 10, it implies that, on average, the younger demographic is much more satisfied with democracy. Conversely, if the age gap is a negative number, like -10, it signifies that the older population is more satisfied with democracy compared to the youth. Understanding these gaps can help identify the disparities in democratic engagement and satisfaction across different age groups.

Control Variables

I also have a set of control variables to ensure that my tests account for additional factors that could impact the dependent variables (voter turnout, satisfaction with democracy and age gap between younger people and middle age/older people for all indicators) results. They also minimize the potential for alternative explanations of the relationship between the independent (age of members of parliament, age of country leaders) and dependent variables (voter turnout, satisfaction with democracy and age gap). I have multiple control variables: ideology of elected leader, regime type, system type, gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and mandatory voting.

Political Ideology of Leader

First, political ideology measures the left/right position of the elected leader. Political ideology significantly influences a politician’s policy positions, decision-making, and behaviour

which then influences how potential voters align themselves with candidates. A few studies (Lees & Praino, 2024; O'Grady, 2023; Tilley & Evans, 2014) find that younger people tend to vote for left-leaning candidates compared to right-leaning candidates even if the left-leaning candidate is older (Beauchamp, 2017; Curtice, 2017). It's important to control for this variable to ensure that the results are not confounded by the leader's political stance. I code ideology using the Global Leader Ideology dataset (Herre, 2023). This dataset classifies chief executives and heads of government as leftist, centrist or rightist. This dataset contains information for 182 countries annually, from years 1945 to 2020. Herre (2023) base the ideology coding on the politician's party affiliation, the ideology that party adopted and also by analyzing the actions of the political leader related to policies and agendas. They use multiple sources to stay consistent and accurate. I use three value operationalizations: leftist = 0, centrist = 1, rightist = 2 and in rare cases where a politician is classified as "non-ideological," I code it as a missing value.

Regime Type

Second, regime type shapes a country's political processes, institutions, and outcomes. This measure can serve as a proxy for the quality of governance in a country and can help assess democratic performance in a country. Regime type influences political systems within in a country, political participation of citizens and can influence satisfaction with democracy which could have an impact of results (Joshi, 2013; Krook & Nugent, 2018, Owens et al., 2008). I choose to use regime type as a control variable instead of the level of democracy because, it provides distinct categories and offers a clear classification of political systems, making it easier to compare and analyze data across different contexts. It also tends to be more stable over the years, whereas the level of democracy indicator tend to fluctuate due to short term political events. The stability helps in maintaining consistency in the analysis. I code regime type using the Varieties of Democracy

(V-Dem) dataset which has data available for 200 countries from 1789 to 2021 (V-Dem, 2023). The V-dem classifies regime using four distinctions: Closed autocracies (score 0), where citizens do not have the right to choose political representatives through multiparty elections; electoral autocracies (score 1), where citizens have the right to choose politicians through elections but they lack some freedoms and the elections are not free and fair; electoral democracies (score 2), where citizens have the right to participate in free and fair elections and liberal democracies (score 3), where in addition to participating in free and fair elections citizens also enjoy an array rights such as being equal in front of the law.

System Type

Third, similar to regime type, the political system type of a country influences distinct political dynamics that can affect political processes, institutions, and outcomes. By controlling for this variable, I can isolate the potential effects of the difference between the systems. It ensures that outcomes are not simply true because of the structure of certain systems. There is a vast voter turnout literature that analyzes whether voter turnout is higher in parliamentary or presidential systems with concurrent legislative elections (Geys, 2006; Stockemer & Calca, 2012). In addition, the literature finds there is a lot of nuances between system type and institutions and citizens' satisfaction with democracy (Aarts & Thomassen, 2008; Culter et al., 2023). I also use the V-dem classification for this measure and distinguish three types of systems presidential system (score 0), parliamentary system (score 1), and semi-presidential (score 2).

GDP per Capita

Fourth, GDP measures the economic output of a country which can help researchers account for the economic context in which political processes occur. Researchers use it to assess

how economic factors shape political dynamics. Higher GDP indicates greater industrialization, urbanization, education and even satisfaction with democracy (Armingeon & Guthmann, 2014; Christmann, 2018; Claassen & Magalhaes, 2022; Nadeau et al., 2019; Quaranta & Martini, 2016)—factors which can influence political attitudes, behaviour, and institutions which then influence political outcomes. To measure each country's GDP in a specific year, I use data from the World Bank in American dollars. The World Bank has data available for over 180 countries from 1961 to 2022.

Mandatory Voting

Fifth, I use a mandatory voting as a control variable for all the voter turnout related models. Enforced, mandatory voting significantly increases voter turnout compared to voluntary voting systems (Fowler, 2013; Gaebler et al., 2017; Hoffman et al., 2017; Jaitman, 2013). Controlling for this variable ensures that the difference in voter turnout in my dataset is not solely due to the presence or absence of mandatory and enforced voting. I verify whether each country in my dataset has mandatory voting laws and whether those laws are enforced by consulting government websites. I code mandatory voting as a dummy variable with 1 = 'enforced mandatory voting laws' and 0 = 'no enforced mandatory voting laws.'

Statistical Analysis

First, I use Stata to run bivariant regressions to test the strength of the relationship between age the independent variables (age of members of parliament and age of leaders) on the dependent variables (voter turnout, satisfaction with democracy and age gap). This initial analysis helps to identify the direct impact of age on youth voter turnout and satisfaction with democracy and assesses the bivariate effects. Second, I run multivariant regressions to further examine the

relationship between multiple independent variables simultaneously on the dependent variable. This allows me to control for potential confounding factors such as socio-economic status, political system type and mandatory voting laws. This provides a more robust understanding of the dynamics that influence youth voter turnout and satisfaction with democracy.

Results Section

Univariate Statistics

In my dataset, the average voter turnout among survey respondents was 80.16%. The average voter turnout for respondents 35 or under and respondents 40 or under was 75% and 76% respectively, compared to an average voter turnout of 85% for respondents in the middle and older age category. The lowest voter turnout for survey respondents 35 or under was in Tunisia (2019) with a voter turnout of 25.45% and the United States (2004) with a turnout of 28.71%. The countries with the highest levels of voter turnout were unsurprisingly countries with mandatory voting such as Australia, Belgium, Peru and Uruguay. All these countries had a voter turnout of over 92% according to self-reported survey data. My dataset finds that the three largest voter age gaps between the 35 or under category and the older age category is in South Korea (2016) with a gap of -35.42, United Kingdom (2005) with a gap of -40.42 and the United States a gap of -54.44. In these three elections, older people voted much more than young people. There are a few instances of younger people voting more. For example, Argentina (2015) has an age gap of 12.14 and Brazil (2002) had a gap of 11.95, meaning in these elections younger people on average voted more than older people. In my dataset, only 11.5% of elections witnessed a higher voter turnout among youth compared to the older generations.

52% of survey respondents said they were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with democracy. On an aggregate level, satisfaction with democracy was the same across age cohorts. However, there was a lot of variation in the results across countries. For example, the lowest satisfaction with democracy levels were present in Bulgaria (2001), Greece (2012, 2019), Latvia (2014), Russia (2000) and Ukraine (1998)—less than 15% of respondents reported they were very satisfied or somewhat satisfied. While the highest levels of satisfaction were observed in Australia (2007), Denmark (1997–2019), Norway (2005–2017), Spain (2000) and Switzerland (2019)—85% or more respondents in these countries reported being very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with democracy.

Representation and Voter Turnout

First, I find that higher youth representation in parliaments does increase youth voter turnout for both people 35 or under and people 40 or under. Figure 2 shows when there is a higher share of members of parliament 40 or under, voter turnout for those 40 or under increases moderately; for every 10 points increase in members of parliament 40 or under, the youth voter turnout increases by 2.06 points.[4]

[4] For all the under 35 and under graphs, please consult the Appendix C

Figure 2 The effect of youth representation in parliaments on voter turnout for people 40 or under

The multivariant analysis (Table 1, Models 1 and 2) confirms that higher youth representation in parliaments does increase youth voter turnout for both youth age categories. Holding all control variables constant, the model predicts that for every 10 points increase in members of parliament 40 or under, the under 40 youth voter turnout should increase by 1.99 points. The effect of youth representation appears even more pronounced for the 35 or under voter turnout; Model 1 predicts that for every 10 points increase in members of parliament aged 35 or under, youth voter turnout for those under 35 should increase by 3.49 points. There is a moderate increase in youth voter turnout, which confirms that there should be some effect of descriptive representation on youth voter turnout. Among the control variables, higher GDP per capita and mandatory voting have a statistically significant impact on youth voter turnout. In countries with a lower GDP per capita, such as the Philippines, where the GDP per capita is approximately $1,000, the youth voter turnout (for those aged 40 or under) increases by only 0.227 points, indicating a

minimal impact. In contrast, in countries with a higher GDP per capita, like the United States, where the GDP per capita is approximately $60,000, the youth voter turnout increases by 13.62 points, demonstrating a significant impact.

Table 1: Regression models measuring the effect of youth representation in parliaments on youth voter turnout

	Model 1	**Model 2**
Variable	**Voter turnout 35 or under**	**Voter turnout 40 or under**
MPs 35 and under	.349** (.171)	-
MPs 40 and under	-	.199** (0.193)
Regime type (reference category closed autocracy)		
Electoral autocracy	9.692 (6.408)	10.57 (5.857)
Electoral democracy	-.621 (5.680)	.984 (5.227)
Liberal democracy	-3.079 (5.298)	-1.343 (4.854)
GDP per capita	.000*** (.000)	.000*** (.000)
System of government (reference category presidential system)		
Parliamentary system	3.043 (2.617)	1.471 (2.415)
Semi-presidential system	-3.370 (3.508)	-4.163 (3.236)
Mandatory Voting	16.96*** (3.322)	14.98*** (3.026)
Constant	63.640	64.578
Rsquared	.230	.234
N (observations)	193	193

Two tailed test of significance * p <= 0.1 ** p <= 0.05 *** p <=0.01

Second, I did not find evidence that the age of leaders influences higher voter turnout among youth. In the bivariate regressions for both youth age categories, the results were not

statistically significant. Figure 3 illustrates that as the age of leader increases, the voter turnout remains constant with a nearly horizontal line. The multivariant regression (Table 2) also failed to show any statistically significant results, reinforcing that in this dataset the age of leaders does not have a measurable impact on youth voter turnout.

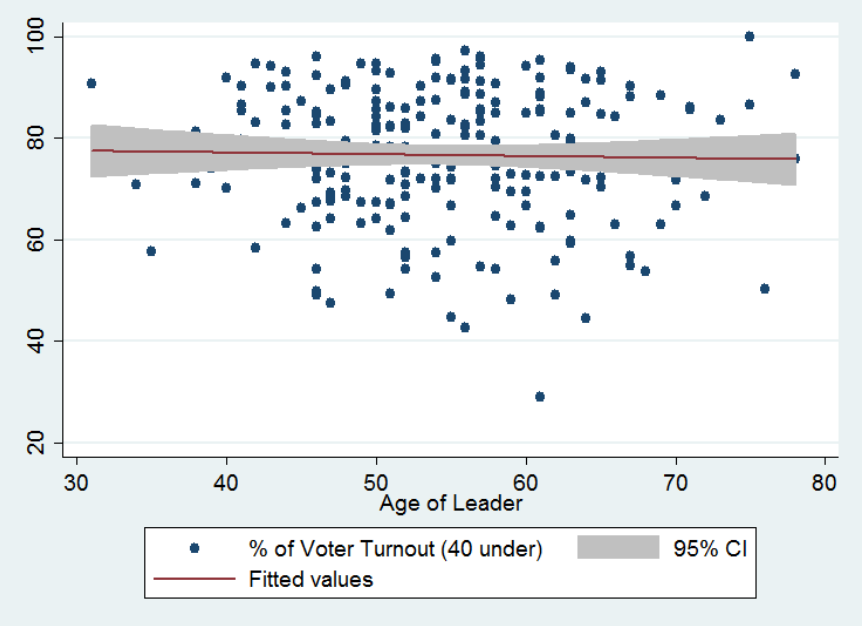

Figure 3 The effect of the age of leader on voter turnout for people 40 or under

Table 2: Regression models measuring the effect of the age of leader on youth voter turnout

	Model 3	**Model 4**
Variable	**Voter Turnout 35 and under**	**Voter Turnout 40 and under**
Age of Leader	-.040 (.106)	-.018 (.097)
Ideology of the leader (reference category left-wing head of government)		
Centrist head of the government	-5.248 (3.499)	-5.658* (3.196)
Right-wing head of the government	-.0249 (2.006)	.171 (1.83)
Regime type (reference category closed autocracy)		

Electoral autocracy	-13.12 (9.823)	-13.01 (8.995)
Electoral democracy	-22.73*** (9.486)	-21.97*** (8.665)
Liberal democracy	-24.46*** (9.322)	-23.62 *** (8.511)
GDP per capita	.000*** (.000)	.000*** (.000)
System of government (reference category presidential system)		
Parliamentary system	1.246 (2.66)	-.185 (2.433)
Semi-presidential system	-1.740 (3.241)	-2.809 (3.006)
Mandatory Voting	18.67*** (3.07)	16.35*** (2.919)
Constant	92.25	93.24
Rsquared	.249	.251
N (observations)	201	199

Two tailed test of significance * p <= 0.1 ** p <= 0.05 *** p <=0.01

Age Representation and Voter Turnout Age Gap

The voter turnout age gap models measure the effect of youth representation in parliaments on the difference in voter turnout between age groups. A large difference in voter turnout indicates that one age group has a significantly higher voter turnout compared to the other. I find that when there is higher youth representation in parliaments, the voter turnout age gap decreases between both younger categories compared to middle-age and older categories. For every 10 points increase in members of parliament 40 or under, the voter turnout gap decreases by 0.787 points in Figure 4 and 1.21 points in Figure 5. Both figures illustrate a positive trend towards a smaller voter turnout gap, indicating that the gap decreases slightly as the number of younger members of parliament increases.

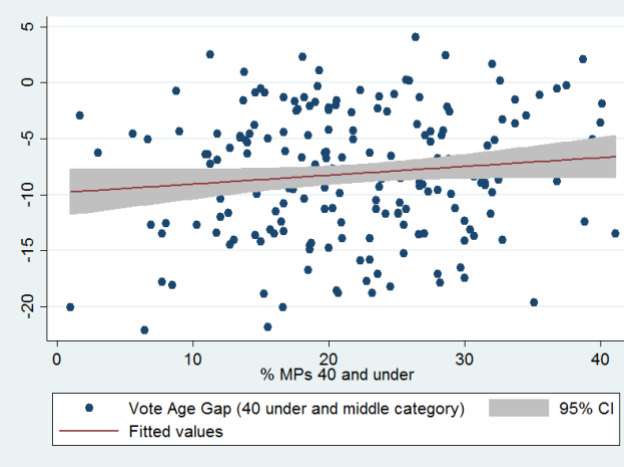

Figure 4 The effect of youth representation in parliaments on the voter turnout age gap for people 40 or under and middle category

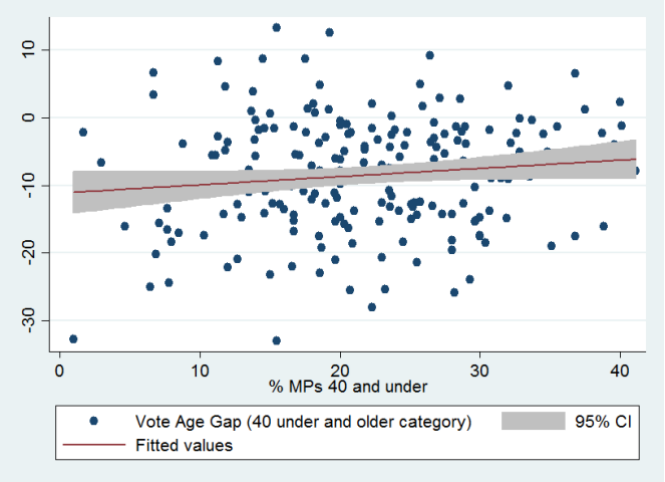

Figure 5 The effect of youth representation in parliaments on the voter turnout age gap for people 40 or under and older category

The multivariant regressions confirm these findings (Table 3, Models 5, 6, 7 and 8). When holding all the control variable constant, all four models predict that the voter turnout gap should decrease when there is higher youth representation in parliaments. The strongest effect is Model 6 in which predicts for every 10-point increase in youth representation the vote gap should decrease by 2.62 points. This is a substantial increase as the average voter turnout gap in the dataset for the 35 or under categories is -10. Another example is model 8 which predicts that for every 10-point increase in youth representation the voter turnout gap decrease by 1.43 points. This again is a substantial increase as the average voter turnout gap in the dataset for the 40 under category is -8. Out of the control variables, I find that mandatory voting and regime type have a statistically significant impact on the voter age gap across all four models. The models predict that the voter age turnout gap substantially shrinks in countries that enforce mandatory voting, whereas the model predicts that countries that are liberal democracies have wider voter age gaps compared to closed autocracies. In addition to these findings, in models 7 and 8 the type of political system also

has statistically significant effects. The voter age gap widens in semi-presidential systems compared to presidential systems.

Table 3: **Regression models measuring the effect of youth representation in parliaments on youth voter turnout age gap**

	Model 5	**Model 6**	**Model 7**	**Model 8**
Variable	**Vote Age Gap (35 and middle)**	**Vote Age Gap (35 and older)**	**Vote Age Gap (40 and middle)**	**Vote Age Gap (40 and older)**
MPs 35 and under	.201** (.087)	.262** (.115)	-	-
MPs 40 and under	-	-	.100** (.043)	.143** (0.642)
Regime type (reference category closed autocracy)				
Electoral autocracy	-1.245 (3.270)	-5.113 (4.315)	-.380 (2.483)	-4.259 (3.638)
Electoral democracy	-5.718** (2.898)	-8.587** (3.824)	-3.940* (2.215)	-6.914** (3.246)
Liberal democracy	-5.310 ** (2.703)	-10.92*** (3.567)	-3.497* (2.057)	9.160*** (3.015)
GDP per capita	000 (.000)	000 (.000)	.000** (.000)	000 (.000)
System of government (reference category presidential system)				
Parliamentary system	1.394 (1.335)	2.102 (1.762)	-.066 (1.024)	.580 (1.500)
Semi-presidential system	-2.708 (1.790)	-3.402 (2.362)	-3.354*** (1.371)	-4.129*** (2.010)
Mandatory Voting	9.393 *** (1.695)	14.83*** (2.237)	7.544*** (1.283)	12.94 *** (1.879)
Constant	-9.937	-6.331	-8.626	-5.205
Rsquared	.206	.267	.227	.283
N (observations)	193	193	193	193

Two tailed test of significance * p <= 0.1 ** p <= 0.05 *** p <=0.01

In short, the results confirm hypothesis H1a: higher youth representation in parliaments does increase youth voter turnout. Although the effect is only moderate, the results reveal that

descriptive representation in parliaments seems to have a positive impact on voter turnout. The results also confirm hypothesis H1c, as the turnout gap in voting decreases substantially between both of the younger categories and the middle and older categories. However, hypothesis H1b remains unconfirmed; the age of the leader did not yield statistically significant results.

Representation and Satisfaction with Democracy

I did find evidence that the number of young members of parliament has an impact on satisfaction with democracy on younger people but only for the 35 or under category. Figure 6 shows that when there is higher youth representation, the satisfaction with democracy level among young people increases[5]. The multivariant regression confirms these findings (Table 4, Model 9). Holding all control variables constant, the model predicts that for every 10-point increase in members of parliament aged 35 or under, satisfaction with democracy among people aged 35 or under should increase by 4.03 points.

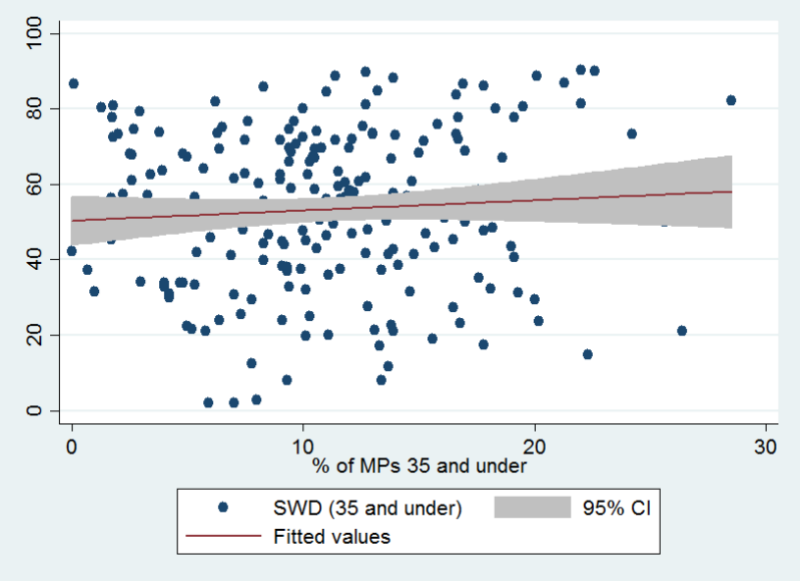

Figure 6 The effect of youth representation in parliaments on SWD (35 or under)

[5] For the 40 or under graph, please consult the Appendix D

Although this may not seem like a significant increase, it's important to consider that youth representation should be 30% in parliaments, if we believe in the tenor that youth representation in parliament should roughly reflect youth representation in society. In this case, the model predicts that for every 30 points increase satisfaction with democracy for people aged 35 or under should increase by 12.09 points. Considering that in my dataset on average only 52% of people 35 or under are satisfied with democracy this is a substantial effect. Among the control variables, higher GDP per capita, regime type and system type have a statistically significant impact on youth satisfaction with democracy.

Table 4: **Regression models measuring the effect of youth representation in parliaments on youth SWD**

	Model 9	**Model 10**
Variable	**SWD 35 or under**	**SWD 40 or under**
MPs 35 or under	.403* (.233)	-
MPs 40 or under	-	.150 (.152)
Regime type (reference category closed autocracy)		
Electoral autocracy	15.45* (8.776)	15.61* (8.662)
Electoral democracy	9.285 (7.726)	8.858 (7.681)
Liberal democracy	12.22* (7.303)	12.72* (7.225)
GDP per capita	.000*** (000)	.000*** (000)
System of government (reference category presidential system)		
Parliamentary system	-.850 (3.656)	-.154 (3.649)
Semi-presidential system	-7.731* (4.859)	-7.424* (4.846)
Constant	22.07	23.33
Rsquared	0.338	0.336

N (observations)	192	192

Two tailed test of significance * p <= 0.1 ** p <= 0.05 *** p <=0.01

To continue, I also find that the older the leader of government the less young people are satisfied with democracy. The results for both younger age categories are statistically significant. Figure 7 shows a clear decline in satisfaction with democracy, in the 40 or under category the older the elected leader is. For every 10 years older the leader of government is, satisfaction with democracy decreases by 2.55 points among respondents 40 or under and 2.85 points for the respondents 35 or under.

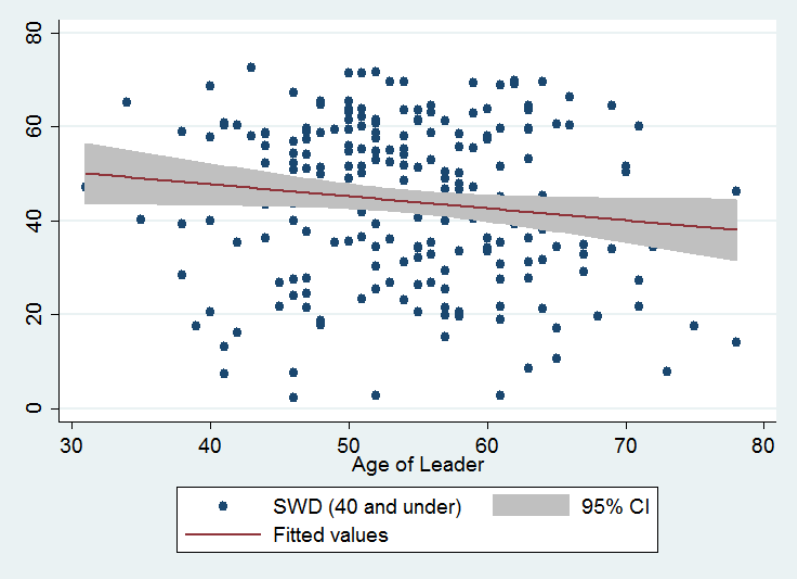

Figure 7 The effect of age of leader on SWD for people 40 or under

The multivariant analysis (Table 5, Models 11 and 12) confirms that the older the leader the less younger people are satisfied with democracy for both young age categories (i.e. youth aged 35 or younger, as well as youth aged 40 or younger). Holding all the control variable constant, the model predicts that for every 10 years older the leader of government is, satisfaction with democracy decreases by 3.43 points among respondents 40 or under and 3.78 points for the respondents 35 or under. Although this does not seem like a lot, if I take the average age of leader

in my dataset, which is 55 years old, the model predicts that satisfaction with democracy decreases by 18.86 points among young people aged 40 or under. Out of the control variables, the model predicts that youth are more satisfied in countries with higher GDP per capita. For example, in countries with a lower GDP per capita of $1,000, the satisfaction with democracy (for those aged 40 or under) increases by only 0.393 points, indicating a minimal impact. In contrast, in countries with a higher GDP per capita of $60,000, the youth voter turnout increases by 23.58 points, demonstrating a significant impact.

Table 5. **Regression models measuring the effect of age of leader on youth SWD and SWD age gap**

	Model 11	**Model 12**
Variable	**SWD 35 or under**	**SWD 40 or under**
Age of Leader	-.378*** (.139)	-.343*** (.138)
Ideology of the leader (reference category left-wing head of government)		
Centrist head of the government	5.352 (4.567)	4.480 (4.540)
Right-wing head of the government	.444 (2.633)	.145 (2.621)
Regime type (reference category closed autocracy)		
Electoral autocracy	-13.56 (12.89)	-15.11 (12.82)
Electoral democracy	-16.49 (12.34)	-17.47 (12.27)
Liberal democracy	-14.69 (12.19)	-14.61 (12.12)
GDP per capita	.000*** (.000)	.000*** (.000)
System of government (reference category presidential system)		
Parliamentary system	-2.301 (3.602)	-1.730 (3.581)
Semi-presidential system	-8.891 (4.362)	-8.767** (4.368)
Constant	74.91	73.90

Rsquared	.374	.372
N (observations)	199	198

Two tailed test of significance * p <= 0.1 ** p <= 0.05 *** p <=0.01

Representation and the Satisfaction with Democracy Age Gap

For the satisfaction with democracy age gaps between both younger categories and middle and older categories, I find that a higher level of younger members of parliament does have an impact across the two age gap categories. The average difference in SWD between age groups in my dataset is 1, meaning that on average people in middle and older age group tend to be more a little more satisfied with democracy. It is important to note that the SWD age gap is not as pronounced as the average voter turnout age gap (which as mentioned above, is about -10 for the 35 or under category and -8 for the 40 or under category).

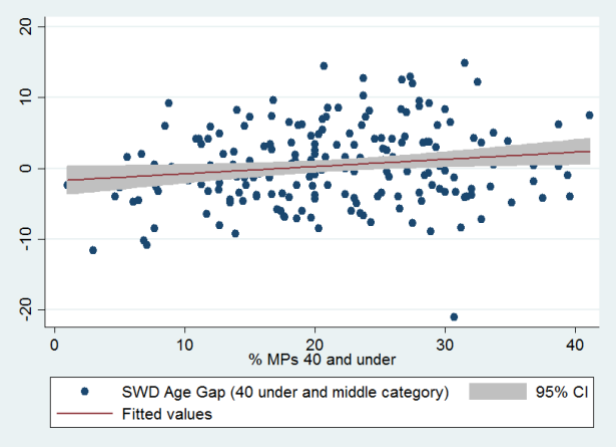

Figure 8 The effect of youth representation in parliaments on the SWD age gap for people 40 or under and middle category

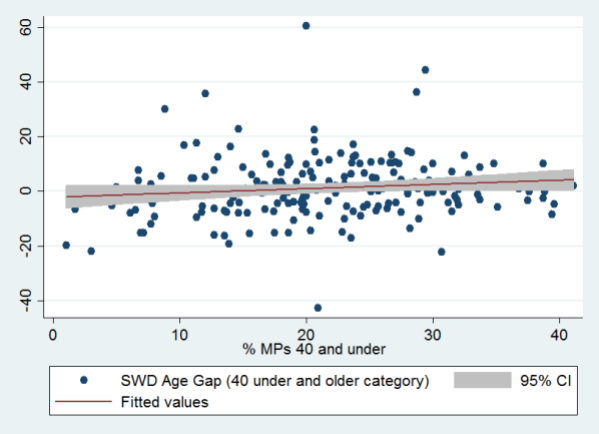

Figure 9 The effect of youth representation in parliaments on the SWD age gap for people 40 or under and older category

So while there is a SWD gap and the results are statistically significant, the difference in satisfaction with democracy is not as wide as the voter turnout gap. Figure 8 and 9 show that the more youth representation in parliament, the smaller the gap in satisfaction with democracy

between the age groups. For figure 8 for every 10 points increase in members of parliament aged 40 or under, the SWD age gap shrinks by .78 points and for figure 9 it shrinks by 1.21 points. These results substantial considering that the average SWD age gap is 1.

The multivariant analysis (Table 6, Model 13, 14, 15 and 16) confirms these results. The SWD age gap results are strongest for Model 14 and Model 16. The model predicts for every 10-point increase in representations of young members of parliament, the age gap should decrease by 3.6 points and by 2.2 points, respectively. Youth representation in parliaments has a substantial impact on shrinking the SWD age gap.

Across the models, GDP per capita and system type has varied statistically significant impacts on the satisfaction with democracy gap. For example, in Models 13 and 15 GDP per capita widens the SWD gap and the semi presidential compared to the presidential system substantially shrinks the SWD age gaps. While in Model 16, the parliamentary system compared to the presidential system substantially shrinks the SWD age gap.

Table 6. Regression models measuring the effect of youth representation on the SWD age gap

	Model 13	**Model 14**	**Model 15**	**Model 16**
Variable	**SWD Age Gap (35 and middle)**	**SWD Age Gap (35 and older)**	**SWD Age Gap (40 and middle)**	**SWD Age Gap (40 and older)**
MPs 35 or under	.133 * (.081)	.360*** (.146)	-	-
MPs 40 or under	-	-	.087** (.044)	.220*** (.091)
Regime type (reference category closed autocracy)				
Electoral autocracy	2.495 (3.080)	-.103 (5.510)	1.939 (2.527)	-.510 (5.20)
Electoral democracy	4.206	.716	2.881	-.686

	(2.711)	(4.850)	(2.241)	(4.612)
Liberal democracy	3.603 (2.563)	-.478 (4.585)	3.447 (2.108)	-.610 (4.338)
GDP per capita	-.000** (000)	-.000 (000)	-.000*** (000)	-.000 (000)
System of government (reference category presidential system)				
Parliamentary system	2.267* (1.283)	4.12* (2.295)	2.597*** (1.065)	4.243** (2.191)
Semi-presidential system	3.475 **	3.656 (3.050)	3.314** (1.414)	3.358 (2.910)
Constant	-5.682	-6.603	-4.983	-6.274
Rsquared	.105	.065	.162	.0727
N (observations)	192	192	192	192

In short, the results partially confirm hypothesis H2a, as I find that the number of young members of parliament impacts satisfaction with democracy among younger people, but only for the 35 or under category. The results for the 40 or under the category were not statistically significant. The results confirm hypothesis H2b, as both younger categories experienced a significant decrease in satisfaction with democracy as the age of leaders increased. Finally, the results confirm hypothesis H2c as well—higher levels of youth representation in parliament reduce the satisfaction with democracy gap across the different models. The strongest effect was between the younger categories and the older age group.

Discussion/Conclusion

My thesis is one of the first studies to test the link between youth representation and youth voter turnout as well as satisfaction with democracy. This research fills a significant gap in the literature by exploring how the presence of young people in political institutions impact the political behaviours and attitudes of young people. My results show that higher youth representation in parliaments increases youth voter turnout and decreases the age gap in voter turnout, meaning that when there is higher representation it narrows the turnout disparity between age cohorts. I build on Angelucci et al. (2024) by including more cases and I look at the absolute voter turnout—the percentage of young people who vote in elections—and the relative youth turnout—which compares youth voting rates to those of other age groups.

Furthermore, youth representation in parliaments and age of leader has an impact on the satisfaction with democracy of youth. Younger representatives increase satisfaction with democracy and reduce the satisfaction with democracy age gap between the different age cohorts. This is one of the first studies that look at how descriptive representation specifically has an impact on satisfaction with democracy. Previously, only Forman-Rabinovici and Beeri (2024) have looked at how gender and majority/minority status correlate with satisfaction, but this study was limited to municipal governments in Israel and they did not look at age. By having a larger sample size and looking at national government, I increased the scope of analysis and provide more generalizable insights as how descriptive representation when it comes to how age impacts satisfaction across different political contexts. Additionally, my study is the first one at looking at youth satisfaction with democracy, both in the absolute and relative measures.

My study is important for theory because my results show that higher youth representation can have an impact on two key elements of the cycle of political alienation: lack of conventional

political participation/lack of political interest and increased apathy and dissatisfaction. Higher youth descriptive representation correlates with increased electoral participation and higher satisfaction with democracy among youth. Therefore, this research offers some proof that underrepresentation of youth in politics hurts the democratic engagement of young people. Theoretically, these results contribute to our understanding of political representation and participation, emphasizing the importance of having young representatives in legislative bodies. While there is not a strong effect, the results indicate that even a small number of younger members or parliament and having young leaders can influence the cycle nonetheless and indicate the potential for breaking the cycle of alienation by increasing the presence of youth in political institutions. These findings show there is the potential for a positive feedback loop, whereas theorized by Stockemer and Sundström (2018) (2022a) increased youth representation leads to higher political engagement and satisfaction, which in turn could encourage even more youth participation and interest in politics.

In addition to the theoretical contribution of the cycle of political alienation, my findings align with previous research indicating that descriptive representation can enhance political engagement among underrepresented groups (Barreto, 2007; Barnes & Buchard, 2013; Hayes et al., 2024; Reingold & Harrell, 2010). Descriptive representation of youth representation in parliaments has an effect on the youth voter turnout. The descriptive representation of young people in parliaments should continue to be used as a measure in participation research and voter turnout research.

My findings also align with the satisfaction of democracy literature that finds that representation increases satisfaction with democracy (Aarts & Thomassen, 2008; Erlingsson et al., 2014; Forman-Rabinovici & Beeri, 2024; Lundmark et al., 2020).-Previous literature considers a

variety of factors that increase/decrease SWD among youth such as transition fatigue, poor economy, unemployment (Foa et al., 2020; Martinez-Cousinou et al., 2022; Marzecki & Stach; Wong et al., 2017). However, my research shows that descriptive representation also has an impact on satisfaction and therefore should be included as a measure when studying SWD in the future.

Youth representation is an untapped area of study and there are many possibilities for future research. While there is some literature on the magnitude of youth underrepresentation in politics and the factors that increases youth representation in parliaments, the literature on the effect of increased youth representation remains limited. My research is just one study that looks at breaking the cycle of alienation and I only looked at two indicators that increased youth descriptive representation could impact. Increased youth representation can have so many other potential impacts. Does increased representation influence the political knowledge of young people? Does it influence more youth participation in other forms of political engagement such as getting involved in campaigns or political parties? Does it inspire more young people to present themselves as candidates for public office? Does it lead to an increased focus on youth hot-topic issues such as the environment, education, unemployment or childcare? Overall, there needs to be more research, with other indicators and more diverse samples to further test if the cycle of alienation can be broken.

Another possible avenue for future research is collecting data for all the candidates for country leader. In my research I was limited to just the age of the elected leader for the age of leaders variable. It would have been better to collect data for all the candidates for country leader. It is not certain that the younger candidate would win, so having multiple candidates would be

ideal to see if even a young candidate having would have an impact on youth voter turnout or satisfaction with democracy.

Furthermore, the general representation looks a lot at intersectionality between different identities such as race, gender and socio-economic status. It would be a valuable next step for future youth representation research to also look at intersectionality. This approach could explore whether young politicians who belong to multiple marginalized groups, such as young women or young people of colour, face additional barriers to being elected or making meaningful changes in political spheres. Alternatively, it could investigate whether their multiple identities enable them to appeal to multiple outgroups, thereby enhancing their electoral capital.

In current times, there is a growing democratic dissatisfaction among young people. The increased feelings of apathy among youth hinder their democratic engagement and consequently lead to low representation of young people in politics. If we care about maintaining a democracy that truly represents all voices and is perceived as legitimate by younger generations, we must address these feelings of apathy. Increasing youth representation in politics is a critical step in breaking the cycle of alienation and fostering a political environment where young people feel their voices are heard and valued.

There seems to be a reluctance within political parties to nominate younger candidates for political office as these networks are often established by, and for, older individuals, perpetuating a cycle where older generations dominate representation in political spheres. However, this research highlights that young people are both willing to engage in politics and more satisfied when they see themselves represented. Therefore, political parties should not be afraid to encourage younger people to get involved in politics, foster a more inclusive environment for

young people and most importantly prioritize the nomination of younger candidates for political office. Increasing the supply of young candidates is the first step towards more inclusive political spaces and strengthening youth representation. Increased youth representation is not just desirable for boosting political engagement among youth and addressing growing democratic dissatisfaction; it is essential for improving the overall health of our democracy.

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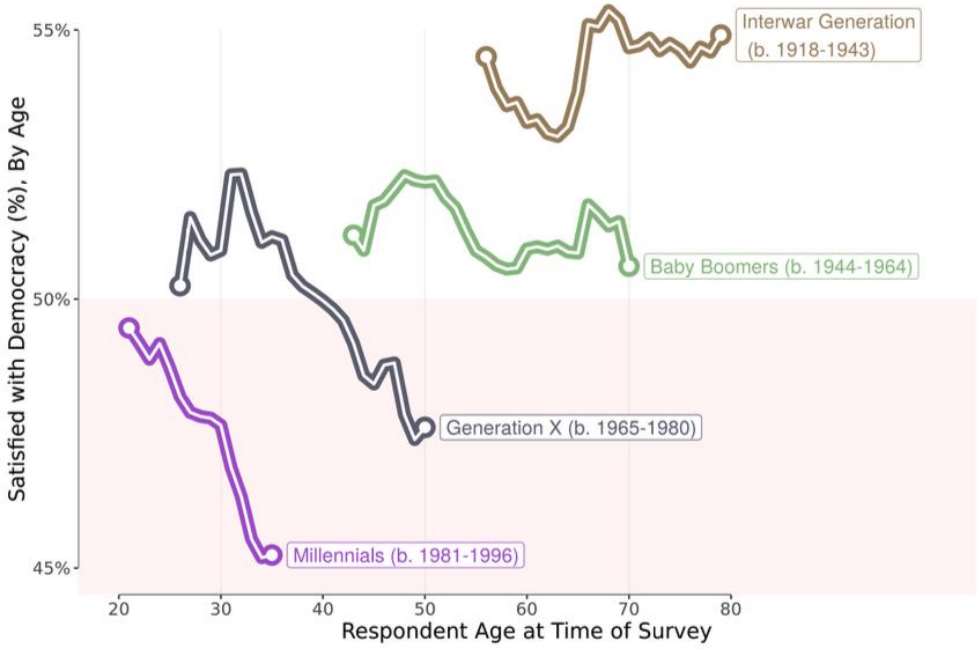
Appendices

Appendix A - The intergenerational satisfaction with democracy level graph

Figure 10. The intergenerational satisfaction with democracy level graph (Foa et al., 2020)



Appendix B – List of Countries

List of Countries Available in the Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems Dataset

Albania
Argentina
Australia
Austria
Belarus
Belgium
Brazil
Bulgaria
Canada
Chile
Costa Rica
Croatia
Czechia
Denmark
El Salvador
Estonia
Finland
France
Germany
Great Britain
Greece
Hong Kong
Hungary
Iceland
India
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Japan
Kenya
Kyrgyzstan
Latvia
Lithuania
Mexico
Montenegro
Netherlands
New Zealand
Norway
Peru
Philippines
Poland
Portugal
Romania
Russia
Serbia
Slovakia
Slovenia
South Africa
South Korea
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland
Taiwan
Thailand
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
United States
Uruguay

Appendix C – Graphs for the 35 or under age category

Figure 11. The effect of youth representation on youth voter turnout (35 or under)

Figure 12. The effect of the age of leader on voter turnout for people 35 or under

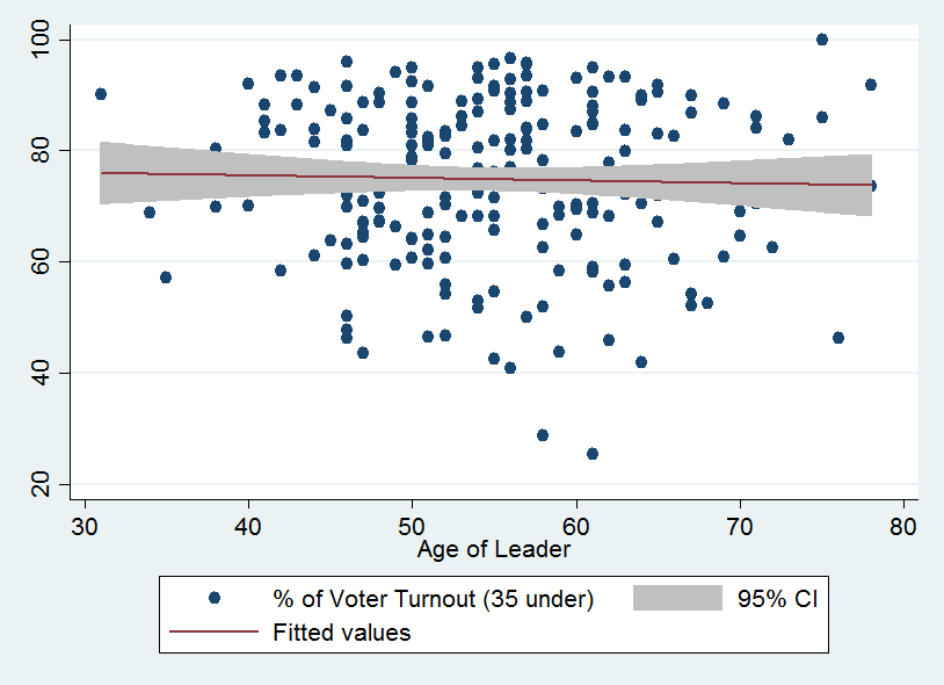


Figure 13. The effect of youth representation in parliaments on the voter turnout age gap for people 35 or under and middle category

Figure 14. The effect of youth representation in parliaments on the voter turnout age gap for people 35 or under and older category

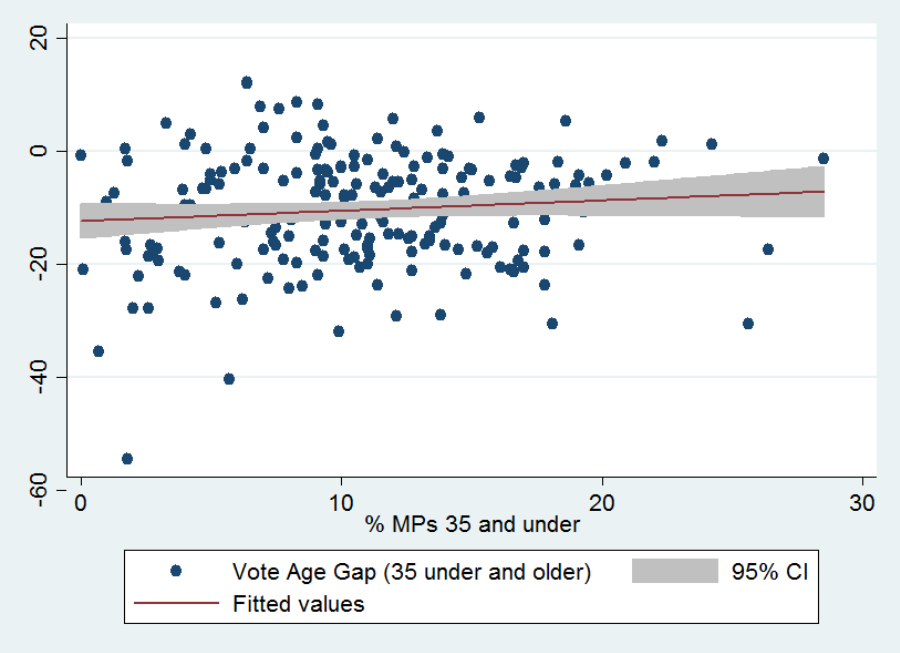


Figure 15. The effect of age of leader on SWD for people 35 or under

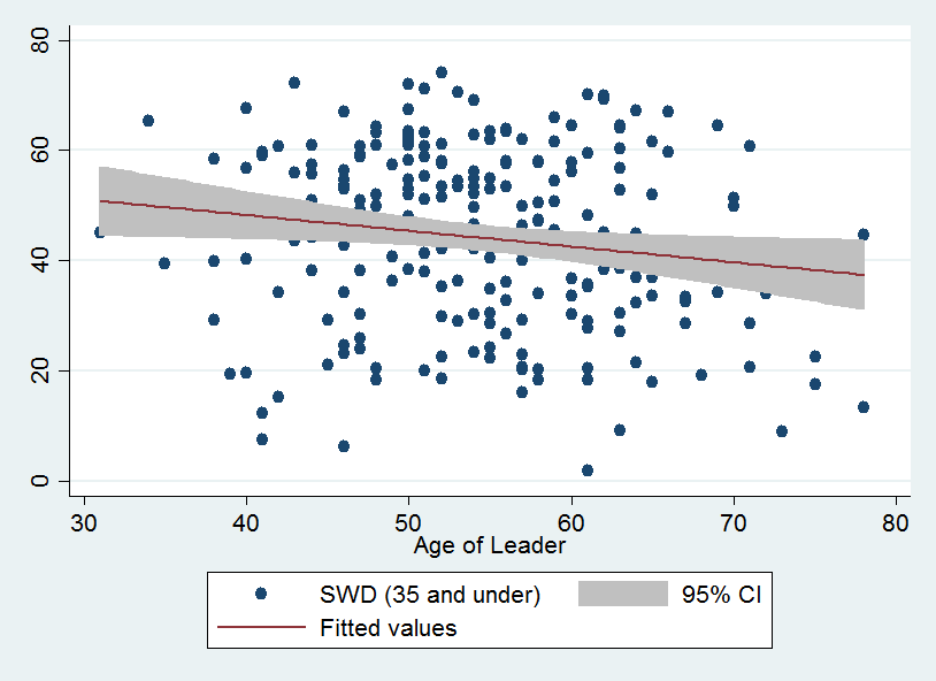


Figure 16. The effect youth representation in parliaments on the SWD age gap for people 40 or under and middle category

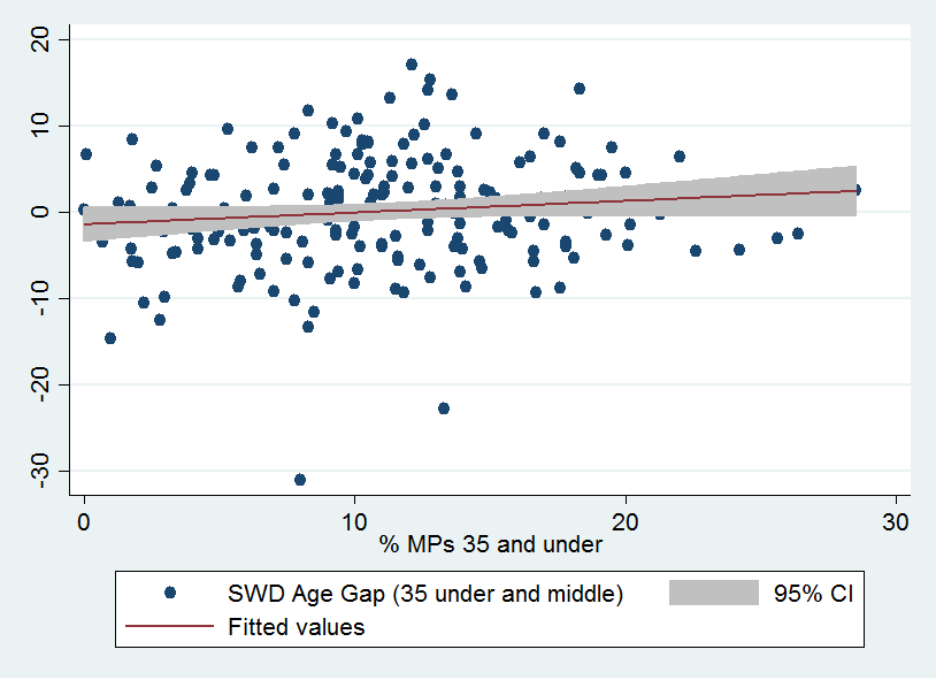
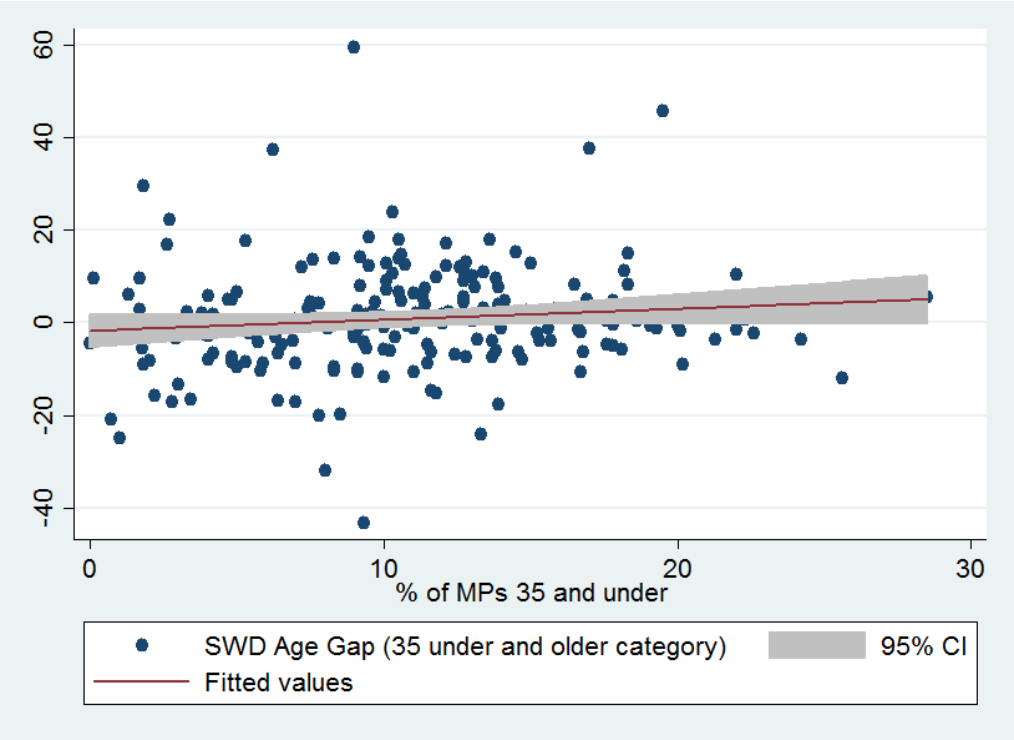


Figure 17. The effect of youth representation in parliaments on the SWD age gap for people 35 or under and older category



Appendix D – Graph for the 40 or under age category

Figure 18. The effect of youth representation on SWD (40 or under)