

Nina Krivokapić, Mehmed Đečević
Faculty of Political Sciences, Podgorica, Montenegro

POSSIBILITIES AND PERSPECTIVES OF PARTICIPATION OF OLDER MINORS IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN MONTENEGRO

Abstract

The youth population in Montenegro constitutes a demographic of strong significance for study. The theme that stands out is their involvement in conventional forms of political participation. Decreasing the voting age from 18 to 16 would enable the youth population to participate in the voting process, directly impacting policies that would affect their societal status. EU member states such as Malta, Austria, and Germany serve as strong examples of good practice with regard to the voting rights of youth. The objective of this study was to assess the political awareness and will of the youth in Montenegro to take on more societal and political responsibility, and to compare the political knowledge between newly eligible voters and older minors, in line with trends in the EU. In order to examine the attitudes of youth and obtain research findings, a combination of quantitative research through a survey and qualitative research through a semi-structured interview conducted with relevant actors such as psychologists, teachers, young people, and representatives of the non-governmental sector was conducted. The research survey was conducted on a sample of 186 participants who completed the survey online. The respondents were youth attending high school or university in the Podgorica area. The results indicate that older minors reject the idea of decreasing the voting age from 18 to 16, and that older minors have the same or comparable degree of political knowledge as young adults who are already eligible to vote. Another finding points to the fact that older minors have confidence in electoral processes but do not want to participate in them. They have a higher level of trust in the non-governmental sector and believe that it is through these organizations that they become active participants in society.

Keywords: youth suffrage, older minors, political knowledge, political will, political participation

Introduction

The campaign “Votes at 16” of the United Kingdom, implemented by the British Youth Council, highlights the need to lower the voting age from 18 to 16. Members of the Council believe in the political maturity of sixteen and seventeen-year-olds. Since May 2019, all major political parties in the UK, except for the Conservatives, have supported the idea of reducing the voting age to 16. Young people have shown a greater affiliation with left-wing parties and support for remaining in the European Union, and less with right-wing parties and leaving the EU, which benefits a particular faction of the British Parliament (The British Youth Council Campaign 2020).

It is important to note that in May 2009, Danish MP Mogens Jensen submitted an initiative (2020) to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg to lower the voting age in Europe to 16. Supporting this idea, he spoke about the concern that demographic developments in many European countries will exacerbate the problem.

According to EUROSTAT statistics (EUROSTAT, 2009), there is an increase of 44.5% among people aged 65 to 79 and a decrease of 24.3% among those aged 15 to 24 in Europe by 2050. There is a real risk that young people will be marginalized in the political process because they will be outnumbered numerically, but also because political risk agendas are dominated by issues primarily of interest to older people. This is particularly problematic at a time when societies will more than ever need the dedication and work of young people to sustain economic growth, social security systems, and social cohesion.

Delving deeper into the mentioned topic, there are international examples of this practice, including countries such as Austria, Malta, Estonia, Wales, Scotland, Nicaragua, and North Korea, which in their legislative frameworks verify the idea of reducing the voting age to 16 and/or 17, granting them the right to vote at both local and national levels (votingage.com, 2020).

There are also those who believe that young people, if they have rights such as entering into employment where they are obligated to pay taxes to the state (considering the option of leaving school and entering into employment in the UK), expressing their opinions during their parents’ divorce proceedings, consenting to sexual relations, marriage rights, giving full consent for medical treatment, changing their names, joining the armed forces, establishing non-profit organizations, etc., should also be granted the right to vote (The British Youth Council, 2020).

The research *Situation of young people in the European Union*, conducted by the European Union and data from the working documents of the European Commission (European Commission, 2020) on the state of political participation among young people indicate that in 2014, only 1/4 of young Europeans with the right to vote contributed to the European Parliament elections. There has been a general decline in Europe from 2011 to 2017, with voter turnout dropping from 79% in 2011

to 68% in 2017. Many previous studies highlight the low turnout of young voters in elections at various levels (National, European), indicating the need to reassess such poor political participation.

According to projections by MONSTAT *Population Projection of Montenegro until 2060*. (MONSTAT, 2014), the proportion of the older population group will increase compared to the younger group. In the age group of 0-39, the projected percentage is 43.6%, compared to 56.4% for the age group of 40-80+, with an average age of 44.9. It is astonishing to believe that such a significant increase in the average age is predicted compared to the last census in 2011, where the average age was 37.7. Considering this broader issue and giving it a connotation of the future and innovativeness of the Montenegrin legislative system concerning the right to vote, the ability and willingness (desire) of Montenegrin youth (older minors) to respond to future challenges have been examined.

Daniel Hart and Robert Atkins, in their study “American Sixteen and Seventeen-year-olds are Ready to Vote” (2011), point out that American adolescents at the age of 16, but not before, possess roughly the same level of developed citizen status characteristics in every aspect as voting-eligible Americans. Full citizenship requires participation in society’s life. Less is known about children’s sense of themselves as citizens. However, children do volunteer, which is a precursor to earlier forms of civic participation that adults were inclined towards. Children identify with their countries and see themselves as members of their societies; they care about citizens’ rights and responsibilities; and to some extent, children participate in and contribute to civic well-being, as emphasized by Hart and Atkins.

Authors Marc Hooghe and Britt Wilkenfeld, in their study “The Stability of Political Attitudes and Behaviours across Adolescence and Early Adulthood: A Comparison of Survey Data on Adolescents and Young Adults in Eight Countries” (2007), analysed the stability of political attitudes among adolescents and found that political attitudes regarding immigrants and the development of political trust are well-established and formed by the age of 14, which represents an even more radical discovery in terms of the political capacity of adolescents.

The question of why adolescents should be given the right to vote is partially answered in the study “Why Children and Youth Should Have the Right to Vote: An Argument for Proxy Claim Suffrage” by John Wall (2014), who advocates for reducing the voting age, refuting opponents’ arguments. The rationality/irrationality of minors, especially in a political sense, is often debated. Many scholars, including Rousseau (1947), who suggests that minors are prone to political manipulation and lack basic rational judgment to resist it, and Kant (1974), who argues that minors do not possess enough self-control or autonomy to overcome mere irrational desire, contribute to this debate. Wall responds that the presence or absence of rationality

does not justify excluding children from political rights because it would mean excluding any irrational adult from voting as well.

The issue of competence, frequently raised by opponents, is also discussed in the work of Michael S. Merry and Andres Schinkel titled “Voting rights for Older Children and Civic Education” (2016), where competence is defined in terms of knowledge of the political system or specific functions of elected officials. Both arguments require the average voter to possess the qualities of an ideal citizen. However, if the ideal is demanded, only a small percentage of citizens would meet the criteria for being adequate voters. Another argument against granting voting rights to older minors is their dependency on parents, teachers, media, etc. Wall argues that this portrays adults as the only group in society with complete independence, which is not true since, as the author points out, no one thinks and behaves entirely independently. Merry and Schinkel (2016) discuss how literature on impulsivity and self-control does not support the current voting age of 18 for young people. In fact, it could equally be used to argue for raising it. However, that would involve excluding a significant number of voters and would be more controversial than lowering the current voting age. As with most research domains, there is no absolute consensus on the capacities of young people. Another criticism is that lowering the voting age will shorten childhood by imposing “adult” responsibilities. However, this argument is fraught with difficulties. Firstly, it greatly exaggerates the “burden” of voting. While ideally voters may be strongly impressed with the sense of importance and seriousness of the task at hand, it is unlikely that the average adult experiences it in this way. Voting is not an exceptionally burdensome matter for most people, and it is fair to assume that for young people, the new right is even a pleasant and interesting thing to have and exercise. Secondly, many older children already have significant responsibilities, including pursuing education, work, taking care of siblings, and so on. They are not inherently less “burdensome” than those associated with the right to vote. In fact, allowing older children to vote could contribute to their development; it could help children explore and reflect on their responsibilities and consider alternative viewpoints.

According to Wall (2014), the right to vote should be expanded as widely as possible, and the main arguments against extending it to minors are not unquestionable. The disadvantages lie less on the side of children and young people and more on the side of entrenched historical assumptions about them.

The impact of civic education on the political knowledge of minors has been a subject of interest for many scholars. Galston, in his work “Political Knowledge, Political Engagement and Civic Education” (2001), discusses the importance of civic education for children and young people. Firstly, civic knowledge helps citizens understand their interests as individuals and as members of groups. The more knowledge we have, the better we can understand the impact of public policies

on our interests and effectively advocate for our interests in the political process. Secondly, civic knowledge increases the consistency of attitudes across issues and over time. Thirdly, if citizens lack a basic level of civic knowledge, especially about political institutions, and processes, it becomes difficult for them to comprehend political events or integrate new information into their existing framework. (By analogy, imagine trying to grasp the impact of a sports competition event for which someone doesn't know the rules of the game.) Ignorance is the father of fear, and knowledge is the mother of trust (Galston, 2001).

The general objective of the research was to deepen the understanding of the political capacity and political willingness of older minors in Montenegro regarding the possibility of reducing the voting age to sixteen. In addition to the general objective, there were specific goals related to defining the level of interest of older minors in informal forms of education that would contribute to their more active involvement in political processes, determining the level of political knowledge, and obtaining results on priority areas that would indicate future investments in youth policy. The importance of introducing civic education as an integral part of regular educational processes to improve political knowledge among older minors was also considered.

Reducing the voting age requires a comprehensive examination of the political system of a specific country (in this case, Montenegro) as well as an assessment of young people's capacity to responsibly and democratically respond to the challenge of gaining the right to vote.

Methods and Data

The survey was conducted using an online questionnaire, with a sample of one hundred and eighty-six respondents. It included two age groups of young people - one group consisting of sixteen (16) and seventeen (17) year-olds, and another group consisting of eighteen (18) to twenty (20) year-olds who attend high school or college in the Podgorica area. Out of the total number of participants, 76.3% were women, while 23.7% were men, indicating greater activity and solidarity among women when it comes to involvement in the research process (Table 1).

The sample of young people from both age groups was selected randomly. Both groups of participants were from Podgorica, specifically from high schools and college units in the Podgorica area (Table 2).

Table 1: Demographic and gender structure of the survey respondents

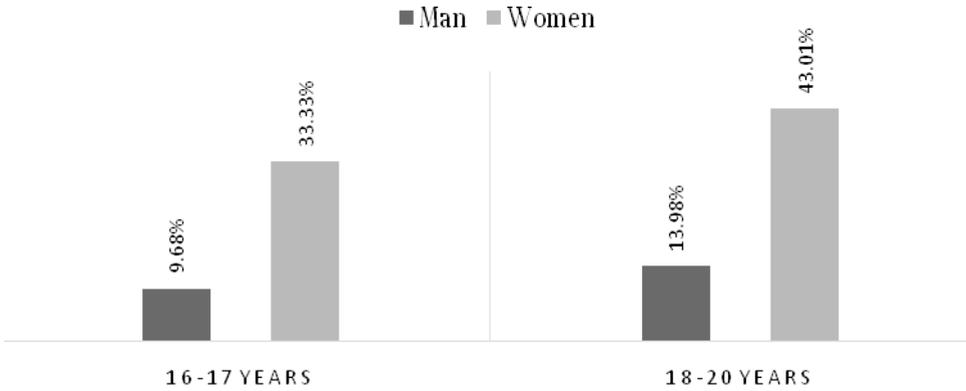
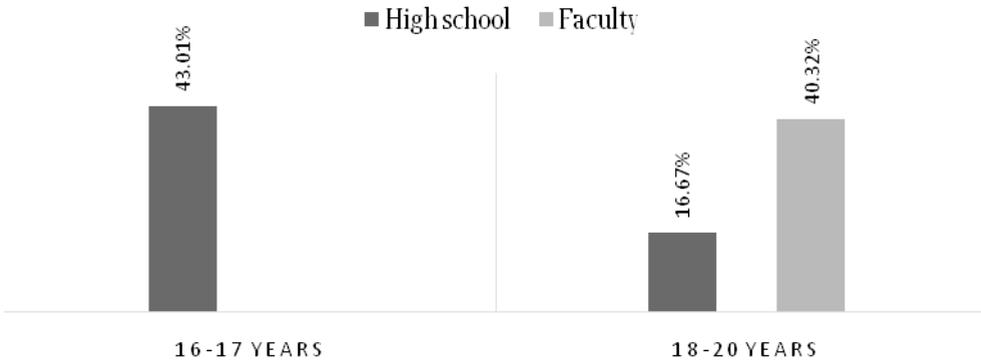


Table 2: Educational status of the survey respondents



The research was conducted as an independent study that aimed to provide insights into the political ability and knowledge of older minors compared to young adults. The findings included results related to political interest, political attitudes, political participation, trust, and general political perception among youth. Another part of the study focused on the political willingness of older minors and young adults to support/not support the idea of reducing the voting age, which further implies the possibility of future research in this field.

Hypothesis:

1. Older minors are equally politically capable as young adults aged 18-20.
2. Older minors are politically willing to participate in the political process through voting if it is made possible for them at the national or local level.

3. *The political willingness of older minors represents their readiness, determination, and openness to engage in the decision-making process through voting, thereby supporting the idea of reducing the voting age to 16. This definition has been established in line with the concept and essence of the research work by the authors.*

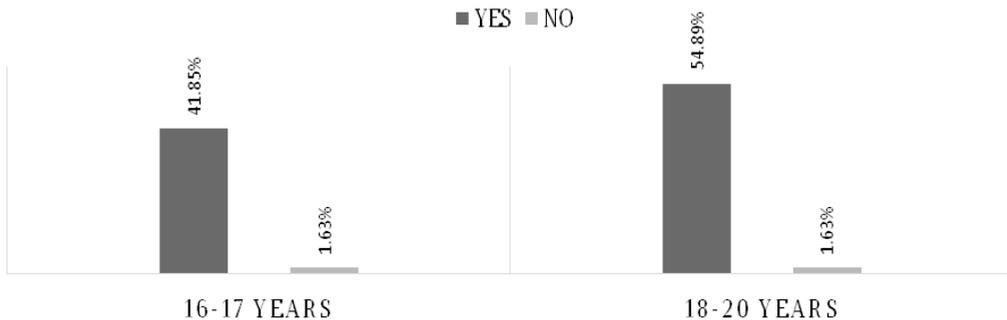
Results

The results are presented in the separate sections. Each section corresponds to a hypothesis and either confirms or refutes it. To facilitate a better understanding of the similarities and differences in the results, we have graphically represented them. It was important to compare the political ability, knowledge, and willingness of both groups of participants in order to determine if there is indeed a demarcation line between those who do not have the right to vote and those who have just attained it at the age of eighteen.

Political knowledge

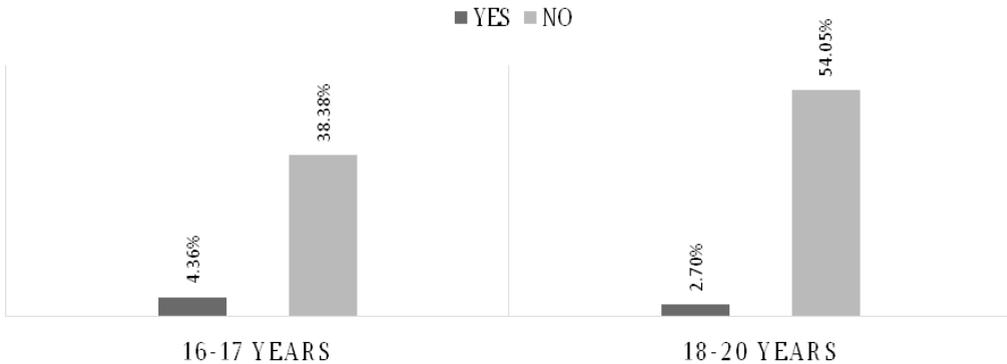
What is important for this research is the comparison of knowledge between young individuals aged 16-17 and older individuals aged 18-20. When looking at the percentages in the graphical representations, it can be observed that there is a slightly small difference in the responses between the two groups. When it comes to their basic knowledge of the political system in Montenegro, it can be said that young individuals from both groups have a similar level of knowledge about politics in Montenegro, implying that older minors (16-17 years old) have the same/similar level of political knowledge about Montenegro as young adults (18-20 years old). Tables 3, 4, and 5 present the findings of political knowledge among older minors in comparison to young adults with voting rights.

Table 3: *Does the constitution of Montenegro describe the state as a civic?*



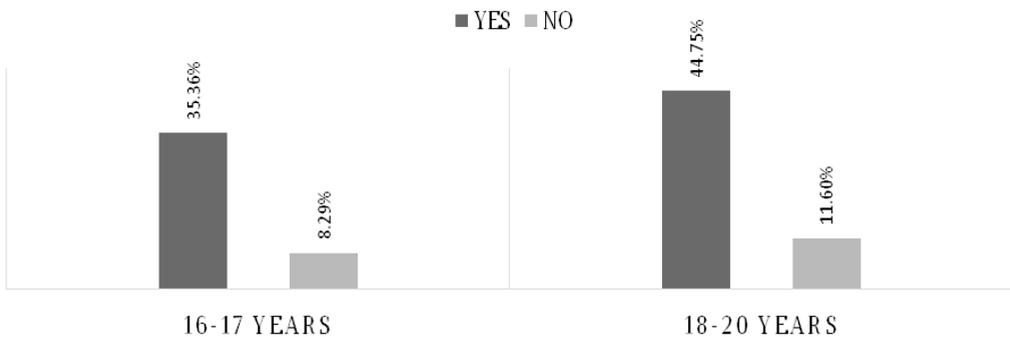
Regarding the Table 3 young minors answered *confirming (Yes)* at 41.85%, representing the majority response of this group, while young adults 54.89%, indicating the accuracy of the response and alignment between these two age groups.

Table 4: *Is Montenegro a member of the European Union?*



In Table 4, older minors responded with *No* at 38.38%, and young adults at 54.05%, indicating majority correct responses. These results suggest a basic level of awareness among young people about the relationship between Montenegro and the EU.

Table 5: *Is Montenegro a state of social justice?*



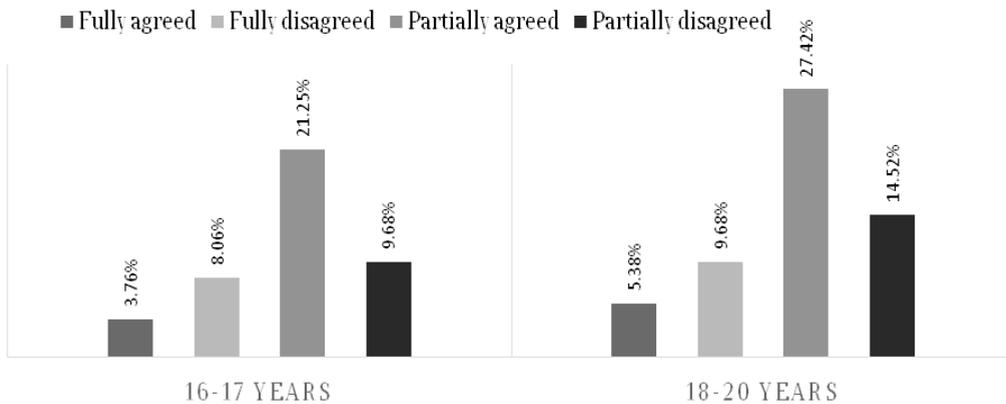
In Table 5, which reflects the understanding of the foundations on which Montenegro builds its political system, young people have demonstrated a high level of comprehension. For the statement that Montenegro, according to the Constitution, is a state of social justice, 34.97% of them (16-17 years old) and 44.26% (18-20 years old) provided the accurate response.

Political ability (attitudes of young people on important political topics)

There are divided opinions when it comes to the views of young individuals on political parties. A higher percentage of older minors believe that political parties are either not interested or only slightly interested in youth issues, and they do not tell people the truth about the real problems of the state and society. Regarding political skills in terms of addressing public officials and expressing political views in public, older minors consider themselves competent in these skills.

When it comes to political efficacy, older minors have a clear stance that political officials do not care much about their opinions, but they believe in the electoral process and see it as the best indicator of the direction state policy should take. All of this indicates that older minors have a clear understanding of what is happening in the political system, even though they may be confused by the contradictory actions of government representatives. As for tolerance, a high level of understanding for differences and diversity is observed, but there is also a certain degree of conservatism, which may be attributed to the long-standing political culture in Montenegro, where submissiveness plays a role. All of this indicates that older minors have a clear stance on politics and political events in the country.

Table 6: Political parties are effective organizations that change people’s lives for the better?



In Table 6, which reflects the political perception of young people, for the first question in this group, older minors responded to the statement that political parties are effective organizations that change people’s lives for the better, with 25.27% agreeing and 17.74% disagreeing.

Table 7: Political parties divide people more than they unit them?

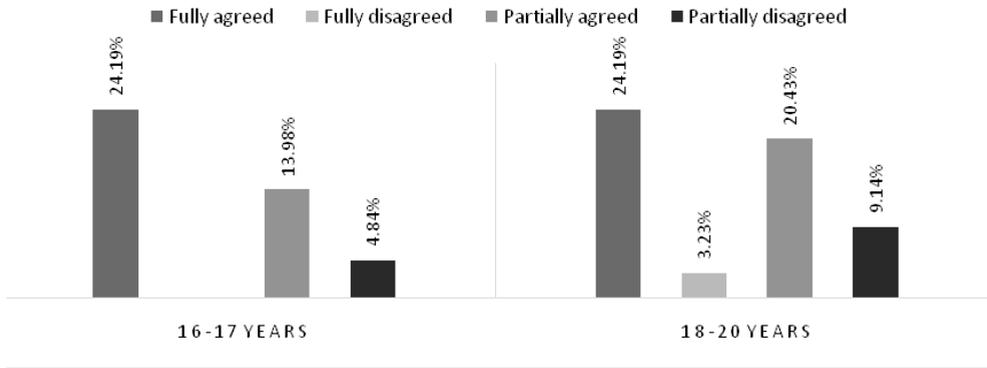
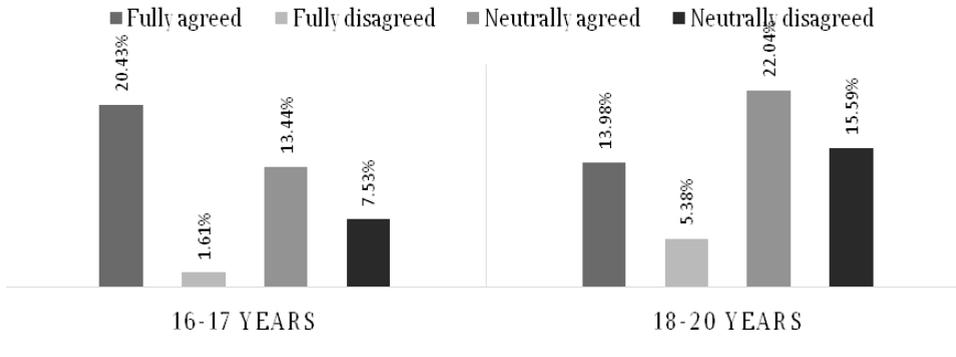


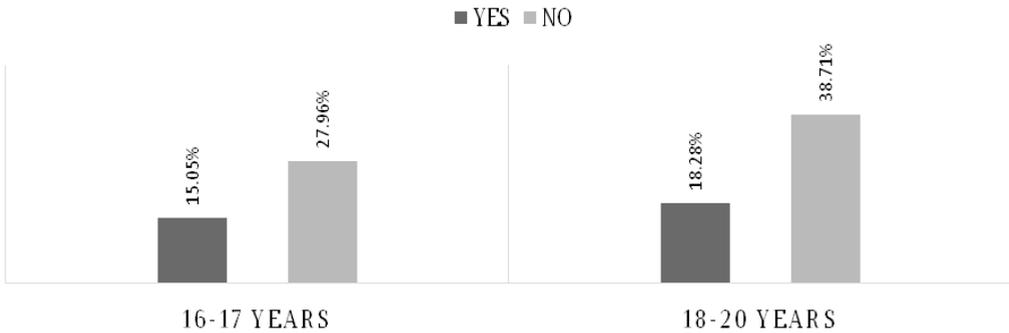
Table 7 continues to illustrate results indicating that young people generally have a negative view of political parties. For the statement that political parties work more to divide citizens than to unite them, older minors affirmatively responded at 38.17%, compared to opposing views at 4.84%. Young adults do not differ significantly from older minors, with an affirmative response of 44.68% compared to 12.37% for the opposing view.

Table 8: Political parties are not interested in youth problems?



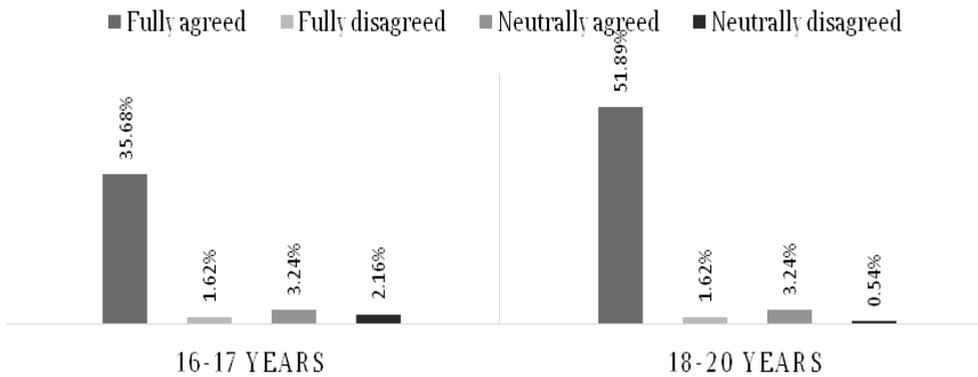
Regarding the statement that political parties are not interested in young people, in Table 8, the results show that older minors are in agreement, with 33.87% compared to those who deny it at 9.14%. Young adults also agree, with 36.02% compared to 20.97% who do not. This again leads to the conclusion that young people hold negative views regarding political parties when it comes to their representation of youth in Montenegro.

Table 9: Do you refrain from publicly expressing your opinions?



In Table 9, regarding the question of whether they refrain from expressing their opinions in public, older minors respond with *No* at 27.96%, compared to those who refrain from public appearances at 15.05%. Young adults respond with *No* at 38.71%, compared to 18.28% who are restrained.

Table 10: I would not mind living in a neighbourhood with a person of a different religious affiliation?

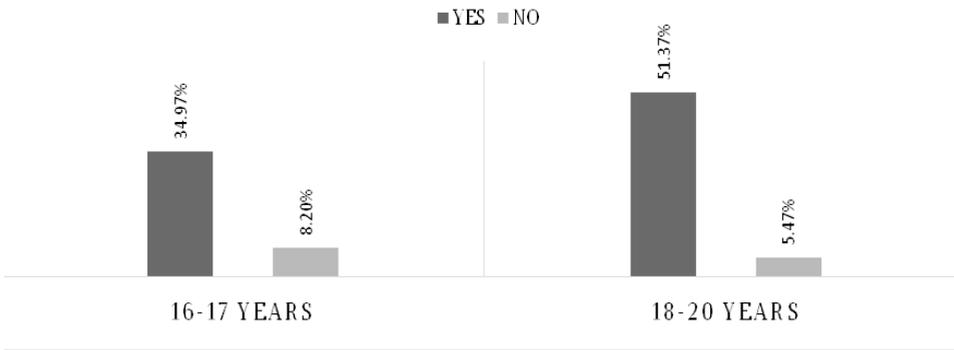


Tolerance among young people is expressed in Table 10, with the statement that they would not have a problem living in the same neighbourhood with people of different religious beliefs. Older minors responded that they agree, with 35.48%, while young adults, with 51.61%, are in agreement with this statement. Therefore, over 80% of young people express a high degree of tolerance for people of different religious beliefs.

Political will

Older minors have a positive view of the electoral process. Having fair elections is a prerequisite for the development of democracy in society. Despite the finding that they positively characterize the electoral processes, paradoxically, it is discovered that they do not want to have the opportunity to participate in them. Older minors do not support the idea of reducing the voting age from eighteen to sixteen. Please refer to tables 11, 12, and 13 for more information.

Table 11: Having fair and serious elections forces politicians to consider public opinions?



In Table 11, regarding the statement that having free and fair elections makes politicians listen carefully to public opinions, older minors respond in agreement at 34.41%, while young adults also positively evaluate it with 50.54%.

Table 12: I would really help changes in the country by voting?

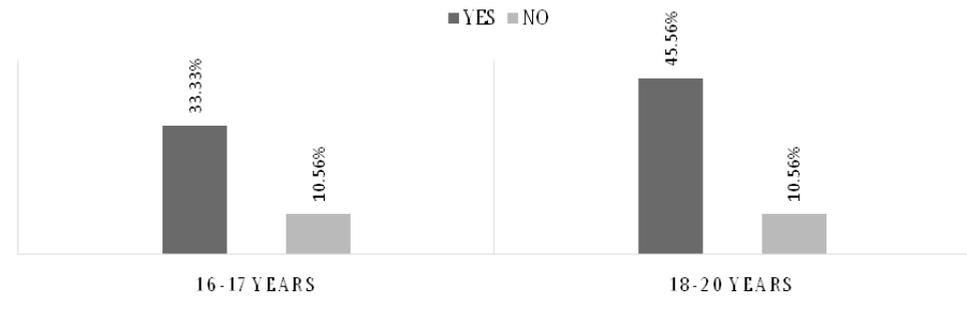
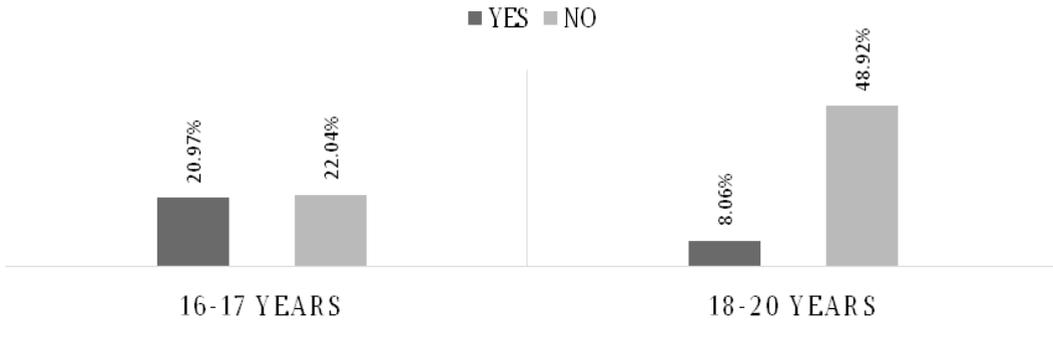


Table 12 shows the results regarding the statement that by the act of voting, young people would feel like real, participatory actors in processes that bring about change in society. Therefore, older minors affirmatively respond at 32.26%, while young adults respond positively with 44.09%.

Table 13: I would like the voting age in Montenegro to be lowered from 18 to 16 years?

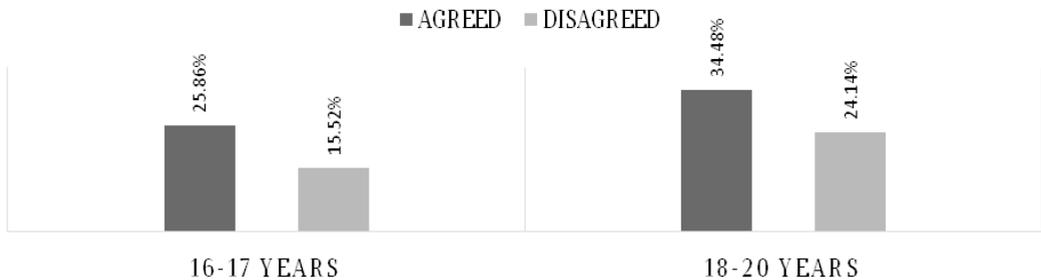


The political will of older minors to obtain the right to vote is crucial for this research. If it is lacking, there is no need to initiate the complicated process of changing Montenegro’s electoral legislation. Although all aspects that make a young person competent to vote are positive, based on the above results, older minors, as well as young adults, have not expressed a positive attitude toward this idea. 22.04% of older minors did not support the idea of lowering the voting age, compared to 20.97% who did. Similarly, with young adults indicating that they disagree with this idea at 48.92%, compared to those who do at 8.06%. In total, young people, 70.96%, reject the idea of lowering the voting age. (Table 13)

Youth and non-governmental organizations

Young people have a higher level of trust in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) than in the government sector, believing that NGOs provide more opportunities for young voices to be heard and seen in society. They believe that NGOs contribute more to knowledge and competencies for active, democratic citizenship than the state through its systems. They strongly reject the notion that NGOs only superficially listen to young people, considering the opposite to be true. The majority of young people believe that introducing Civic Education as a core subject would contribute to a better understanding of the socio-political system.

Table 14: I have more trust in non-governmental organizations than in the government?



In Table 14, youth have more trust in NGOs than in the state system. Older minors respond positively and in agreement with 24.86%, compared to those who do not at 14.92%. Young adults respond with agreement at 33.15%, compared to others who do not at 23.20%.

Table 15: Non-governmental organizations provide greater chances for youth to be heard and be more active citizens.

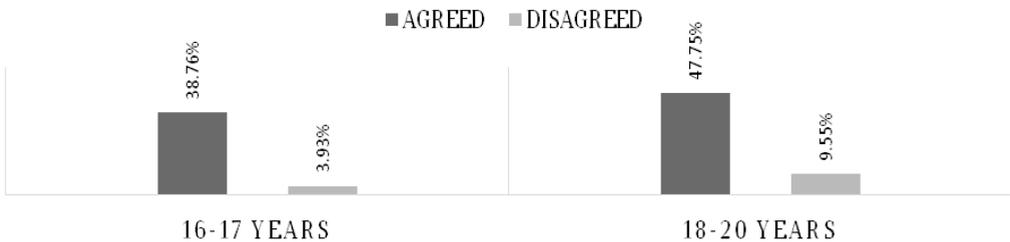
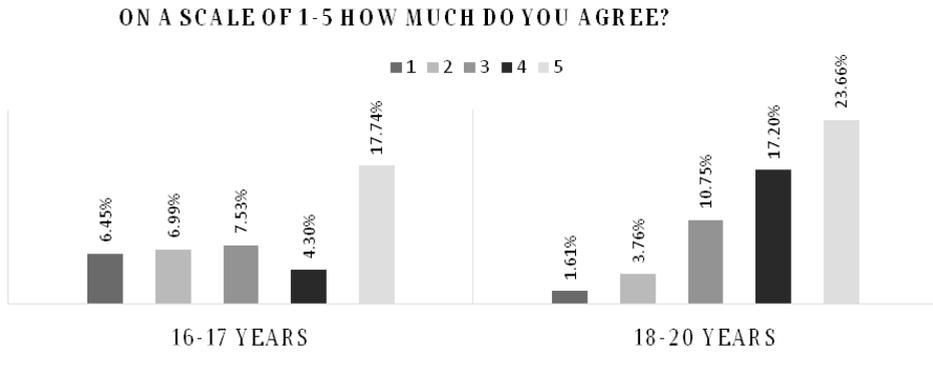


Table 15 shows attitudes regarding the statement that NGOs provide young people with more opportunities to be heard and active than the state. Older minors are in agreement on this with a percentage of 38.33%, while those who are not in agreement are at 3.89%. Young adults in agreement with the statement are at 47.22%, while those who are not in agreement are at 9.44%. These results suggest that young people, through activities conducted by NGOs, indeed participate and feel included in society.

Table 16: I believe that the introduction of the subject of civic education among the basic subjects would contribute to enhancing the socio-political engagement of youth.



To wrap up the story regarding NGOs and young people, as well as the state’s role in providing adequate knowledge and competencies for active, democratic citizens, young people were asked to what extent they agree with the statement that introducing the subject of Civic Education among the core subjects would contribute to better competencies and knowledge in this regard (where 1 is strongly negative, and 5 is strongly positive). Older minors responded positively with 29.57% (including a rating of 3), while those who believe it would have a negative impact are at 13.44%. Young adults believe it has a positive impact with 51.61% (including a rating of 3), compared to 5.37% who think otherwise. Therefore, the majority of responses from both age groups are positive.

Discussion

The KAP survey conducted in 2013 highlighted the challenges faced by Montenegrin society regarding the active participation of young people. It pointed out the lack of information among young people about their active political participation, limited opportunities available to them, and the lack of resources at their disposal, leading to practical passivity. The KAP survey revealed concerning findings about the position of young people in decision-making processes, especially when it comes to important decisions where they have limited influence (2013). Despite these findings, there was a need for more concrete and specific research, which was carried out and focused on the idea of lowering the voting age. All of this contributes to aligning with European legal systems, where Montenegro envisions itself in the future. By studying the political ability and willingness of older adolescents, necessary data has been obtained to guide further policies, if we strive for active citizenship and strengthening democracy. What does it mean to define any youth policy without granting decision-making rights to those directly targeted? Democ-

racy cannot be discussed if a significant group of citizens is excluded. Why reject them as politically immature or unfit individuals when we know that young people reason well on political issues and relationships, as evidenced by the results of this research? While it may be ambitious to grant them voting rights at the national level, it is entirely legitimate to discuss decision-making at the local level, especially for decisions concerning youth policy. The results indicate that young people are not engaging in more serious political and social actions and are unwilling to take on greater levels of responsibility, highlighting the need for further research to explore why this is the case and what society can do to enhance the self-confidence and belief in the political capacities of young people. The findings of the KAP survey indicate that older adolescents have a lack of information about political events, leading to youth passivity. However, this research provides results that demonstrate that young people do possess adequate political knowledge and can discern what is happening in the political world. This is consistent with the argument put forward by John Wall, who pointed out that even older individuals do not possess an ideal understanding of the political system, thus making it irrelevant to highlight such shortcomings among young people.

The research “Youth perceptions and attitudes towards politics in Montenegro,” (2020) conducted by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy in Montenegro in 2020, with a sample of 900 young people aged 16-29, presented data that directly reflect the political knowledge, attitudes, and activism of young people. One part of the research encountered statistical data showing that 58.4% of young people aged 16-28 disagreed with the statement “I think I understand the most important political issues in society.”

The research (Study on Youth in Montenegro for 2018-2019), conducted with a population group aged 15-29, indicates that young people have the highest level of trust in the church, the military, and the police, as well as in the firm hand of a charismatic leader, which reflects a political culture characterized by submissiveness. “A submissive type of political culture is characterized by a passive, observational, and fatalistic attitude towards the political system. Authority is given, and as such, it is not questioned. Individuals do not have a clear perception or awareness of their role in shaping power; therefore, they are not participants in the political process. They expect a lot from the authorities, expecting them to take care of them, solve their problems, and provide necessary conditions for their lives and work. Thus, they only have an awareness of the system’s exit functions” (Komar, 2000). All of this provides a clear depiction of the state of democracy in Montenegro regarding the relationship between youth and politics, which is one of the indicators of the level of success in the democratization process in Montenegro. It seems inconsistent to deny voting rights to older adolescents who are legally responsible for their actions under, for example, the Law on Juvenile Justice of Montenegro (*Official*

Gazette of Montenegro, No. 1/2018), and consider them immature to participate in shaping the legal frameworks and social phenomena that directly affect them. The results and main conclusions reveal that the young people included in this research have faith in their political knowledge and skills, which do not differ significantly from those granted voting rights. However, they still expect others to handle tasks on their behalf and for their benefit. This is evidenced by their positive view of the electoral process, but without the will and desire to participate and contribute to democratic changes.

Lowering the voting age is a topic that is also present within the institutions and working bodies of the European Union. It is important to mention the initiative and Resolution on lowering the electoral age to the age of 16, adopted by the European Youth Forum (2006), which presented arguments for the introduction of this voting system. As a result, on November 11, 2015, the European Parliament, in its legislative procedure, adopted a Recommendation (European Parliament, 2015) on increasing support for lowering the voting age to 16 and called on EU member states to reconsider the possibility of introducing this voting system into their national legislation. Although the recommendation is not legally binding, progress is evident regarding this topic. The European Youth Forum, therefore, calls on EU countries to follow the lead of the European Parliament and grant young people their democratic right to have their voices heard and respected at an earlier age.

The number of countries that allow voting rights for older adolescents is not significant, leaving room for a dialogue about the foundation and legitimacy of the idea of lowering the voting age. It is important to mention those countries that have recognized the importance of including young people in conventional forms of political participation. These countries have acknowledged the significance of young people's voting rights and enabled them to become a significant group in the race called the electoral process, focusing on their needs in society. Today, we witness a greater influence of older generations in the general population, and it is important to discuss topics related to the future and sustainability, including the social security system that a large number of retirees depend on. In many solutions in favour of young people, these countries have cited facts about the representation of significant rights given to young people in other legislative acts. Therefore, if a young person can work and pay taxes to the state at the age of 16, they should also have the right to vote. First on the list to mention is Austria. In 2007, the voting age in Austria was lowered from 18 to 16 years as part of a broader electoral law reform. Since then, at the age of 16, young people have been allowed to vote in general, municipal, federal, and presidential elections, as well as elections for the European Parliament. In this regard, Austria is definitely a pioneer in the EU and an interesting case for study (Federal Ministry for Families and Youth, 2017). In early March 2018, Malta became the second EU member state to lower the voting age to

16 and thus made a change to its electoral legislation and in Germany, young people aged 16 are allowed to vote in municipal and federal elections in some federal states (Schmidt and Edthofer, 2020).

Montenegrin society seem ambitious considering the fact that our older minors are not ready to respond adequately and responsibly approach the act of voting. It is crucial to examine why they exhibit ambivalence when it comes to political engagement. Although the research results confirm that a fair electoral process and citizen turnout are important for strengthening democracy, they themselves are not willing to participate. It remains to be explored how to convey the importance of political participation to older minors and young voters in general, given the increasing proportion of older individuals in the general population. The lack of willingness to be active voters, as the final outcome, also highlights the finding that there is not a significant difference in political knowledge and understanding between young individuals without voting rights and those who possess voting rights. Volunteering is something that young people are familiar with through the non-governmental sector, as indicated by the research presented in the Youth Study (2018-2019). This research has shown that they have more trust in the non-governmental sector than in the state sector and that it is through the non-governmental sector that they can be best heard and seen.

Conclusion

The results of this study, considering the context in which the research was conducted, provide a valuable addition to the existing research on youth rights in Montenegro. The title of the study, *Research, Innovation, and Capacity Building in Social Policy*, showcases the need for new approaches in social policy regarding the conventional participation of older minors. The innovative idea of lowering the voting age to sixteen remains abstract, given the lack of political will among older minors. This research confirms that a significant portion of Montenegrin youth possesses political knowledge and skills to effectively utilize that knowledge. Furthermore, when comparing those who have just obtained voting rights and are considered mature enough to influence political decisions, there is not a significant difference between them and older minors. By strengthening the political capacities of young people, we invest in the future and the overall sustainability of the state's social system. It remains to be seen how things will unfold in the future, considering the increasing influence of older individuals in Montenegro's demographic structure and our aspirations for EU membership, which entail new agendas for youth policy.

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