

Abstract

A common interpretation of the age gap in electoral turnout is that younger cohorts are apathetic and part of a generation that is absent from political life. Still, youth political participation differs across European countries, and cross-national variation in the age gap has been rarely examined in the literature. This paper, therefore, argues that unequal voting in Europe is due not to a lack of interest in the public good but rather to a combination of contextual and individual factors. This study examines young and older individuals' engagement with electoral politics in 26 European countries using the European Social Survey data between 2008 and 2018. Specifically, this study addresses the questions of (1) what context-related factors determine the age gap in voting between old and young citizens and (2) why the age gap in voting is smaller in some countries than in others. The results show that the age gap varies considerably across countries. The OLS and FE regressions results suggest that government expenditure, the share of migrants, and the age of democracy influence the level of age gap in voting. The findings on macroeconomic and immigration factors raise methodological concerns.