

National
Volunteer
Management
Conference



Volunteer
Ireland
Obair Dheonach Éireann

How does volunteering succeed and fail in promoting solidarity?

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What do I mean by ‘Solidarity’?

First example of solidarity is (mis)attributed to anthropologist Margaret Mead: setting bones
At heart solidarity means **using something we possess to help someone/something else**



4Thought for Solidarity (Knock and Nicodemi 2020):

- Desire to **deliver positive change**
- Requires **active commitment** – must be ‘agents of solidarity’
- 4 cornerstones of solidarity: human rights, empathy, inclusion & **active citizenship**

Volunteers are agents of solidarity: give **time to deliver positive change**

European Solidarity in Trouble?

Active citizenship: **responsible participation** in **political**, economic, cultural & social life

Political participation is another (potential) example of European solidarity

- Activities to affect political events & decisions and/or express identities, values & interests
- Can be (it isn't always) a means of trying to deliver positive change
- Manifestation of **active citizenship** & **European democracy** cannot function without it!

Any deterioration, decline or bias in political participation is a serious challenge for European solidarity & democratic citizenship...

Young People's Democratic Participation

Today's young Europeans use a wide variety of methods to participate in politics, and most are interested in politics & politically active in some way

BUT young generations – Millennials & Gen Z – are less likely to vote than their parents & grandparents at the same age

Voting is **habitual**: those who vote in their **first elections** have a high likelihood of voting throughout adulthood; those who don't are likely to be **lifelong abstainers**

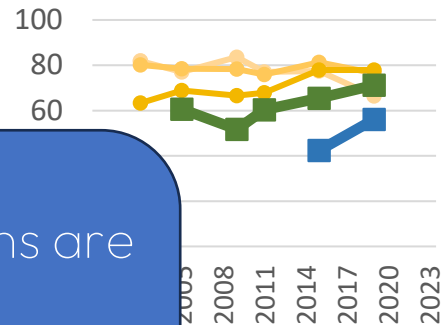
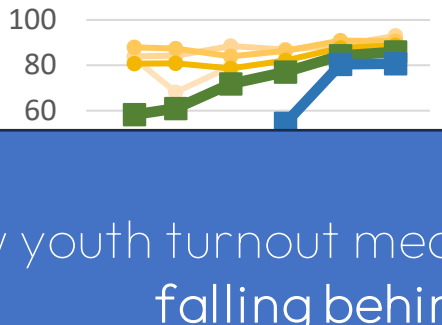
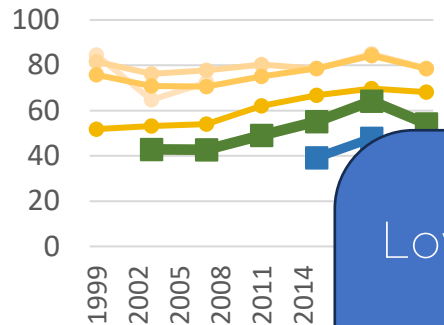
The result is **a persistent generational divide** in voter turnout...

Switzerland

Germany

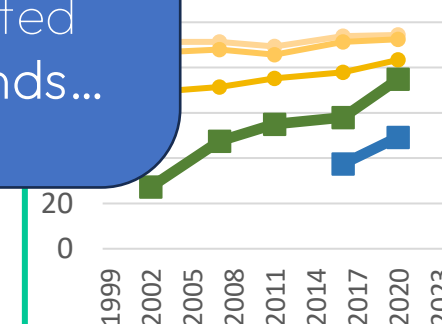
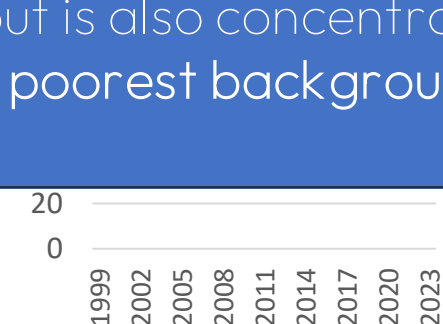
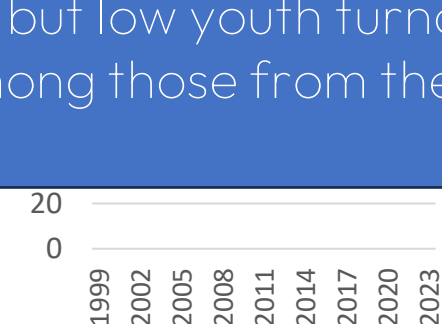
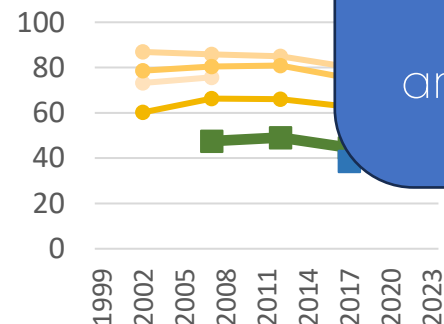
Denmark

Portugal



France

Ireland



Low youth turnout means young generations are falling behind their elders...

...but low youth turnout is also concentrated among those from the poorest backgrounds...

Pre-war (pre-1926)

Silent Generation (1926-1945)

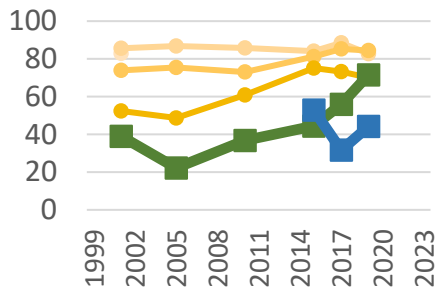
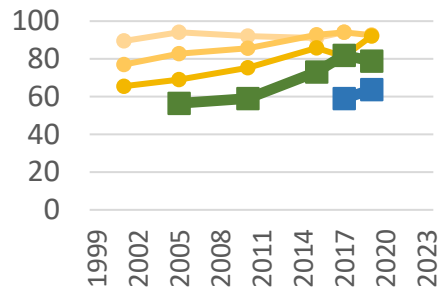
Baby boomers (1946-1964)

Gen X (1965-1980)

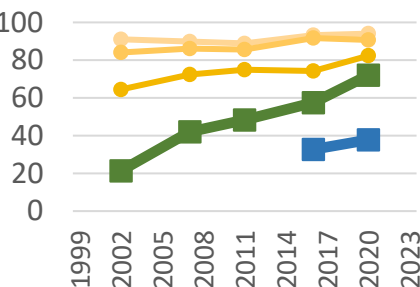
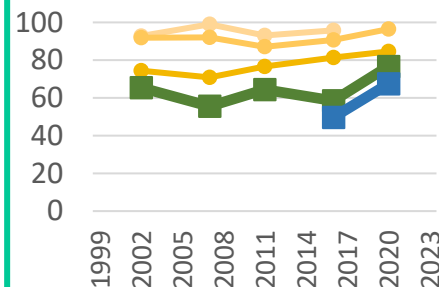
Millennials (1981-1994)

Gen Z (1995+)

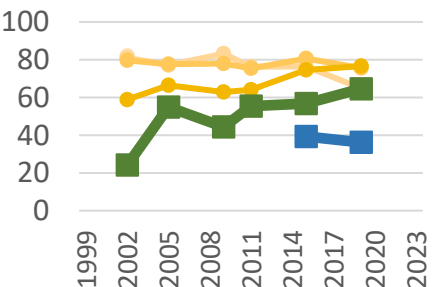
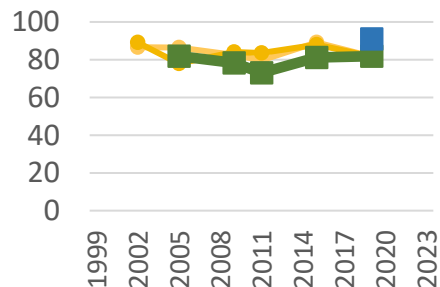
Great Britain



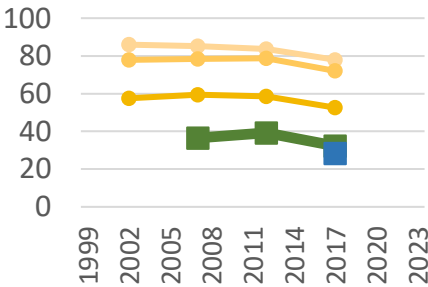
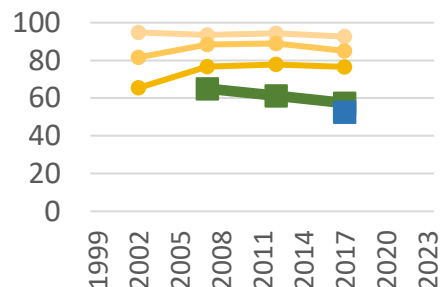
Ireland



Portugal



France



—●— Pre-war (pre-1926)

— Silent Generation (1926-1945) — Baby boomers (1946-1964)

● Gen X (1965-1980)

➡ Millennials (1981-1994)

Gen Z (1995+)

Source: European Social Survey

The Problems of Falling Youth Turnout

Low youth turnout has serious consequences for European **democracy & solidarity** and for **young people** – the poorest young people most of all...

- Young people **under-represented** in election results & public spending/policy decisions
- Governments are **less efficient & less representative** of public will
- Fewer **agents of solidarity** delivering positive change for their communities

How can volunteering help fight this challenge to European solidarity & democracy by **helping more young people – especially those from poorer backgrounds – to vote** in their first elections?

Volunteering & Voting: The Causality Conundrum

Most research **exaggerates** the positive effect of volunteering

Most research ... but Kim and Morgul (2018): youth volunteering has **no effect** on voting in adulthood once **family background** is taken into account.

But what if we look at the effect of volunteering specifically for those from the poorest backgrounds?

Volunteering

Voting

Politically active
parents

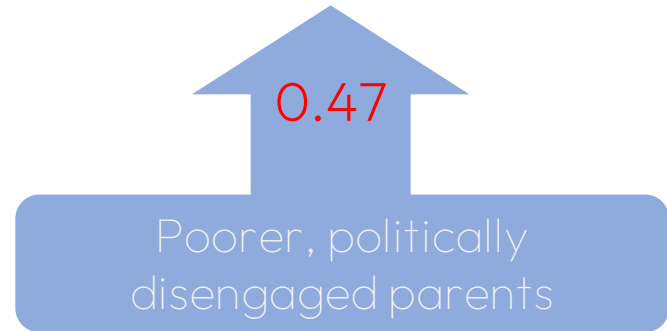
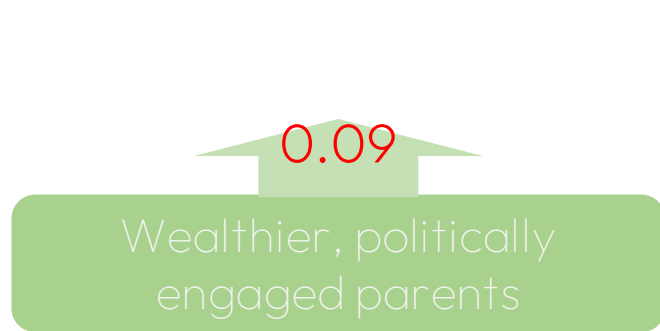


The Compensation Effect of Volunteering

UK annual household survey → does childhood volunteering affect first-time voter turnout, after accounting for childhood & parents' political engagement?

How likely children were to vote in their first general election from 0 (min) to 10 (max)

If they volunteered in the year before, their average score increased by...



Youth volunteering (slightly) increases likelihood of voting, especially for young people from poorer, politically disengaged households

Volunteering Promotes Active Citizenship

Volunteering helps young people from the poorest, most politically disengaged households become **more likely to vote** in their first election & promotes **some non-electoral** political activity

Volunteering can help reduce generational turnout decline & promote solidarity through political participation & active citizenship

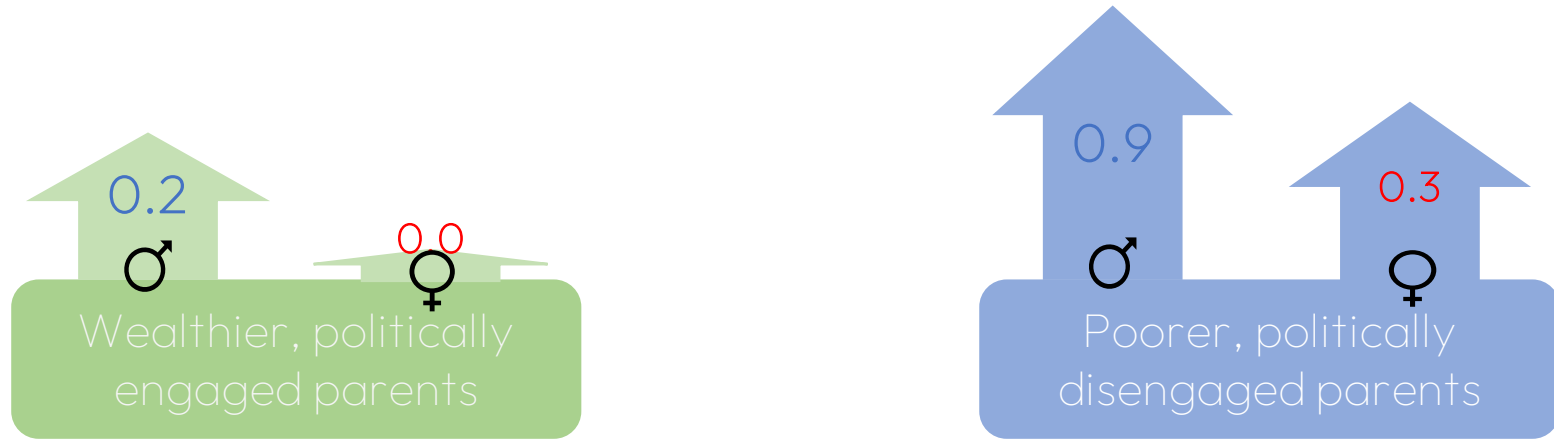
BUT there are some problems:

- 1) Benefits of volunteering are much greater for young men than young women
- 2) Overall levels of youth volunteering **have fallen**
- 3) Youth volunteering remains **dominated** by those from wealthier backgrounds

Volunteering benefits young men the most

How likely children were to vote in their first general election from 0 to 10

If they volunteered in the year before, their average score increased by...

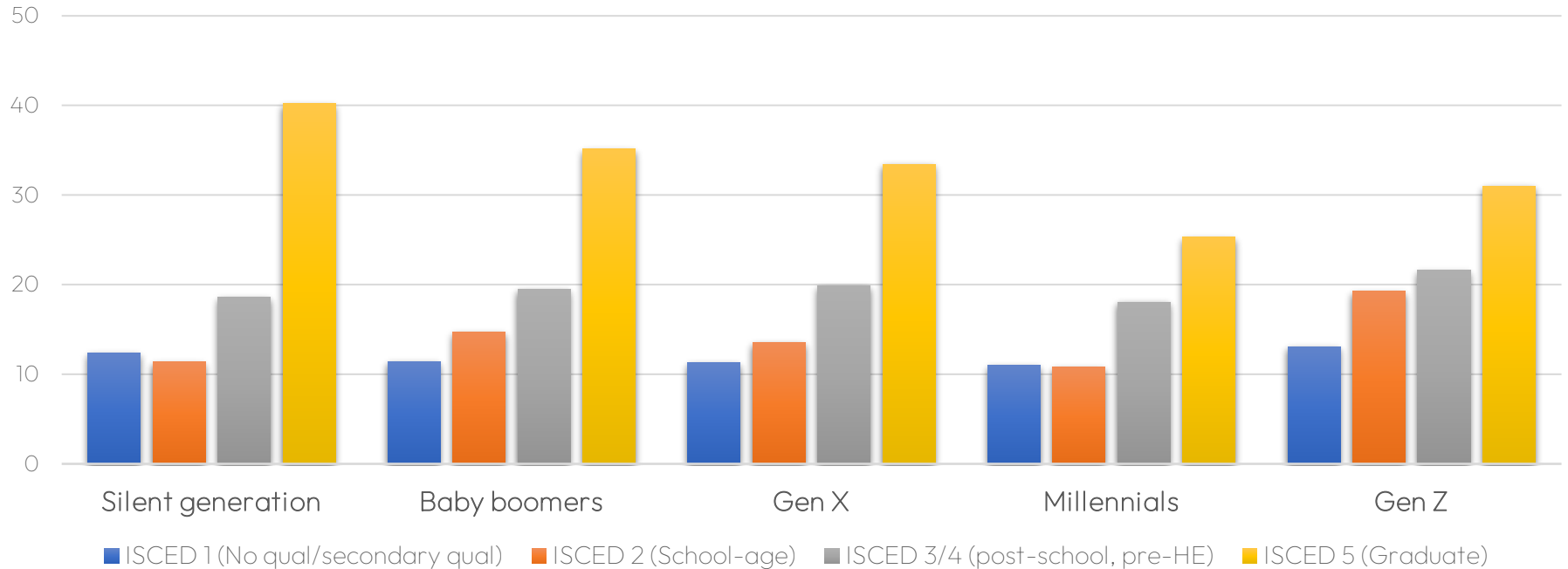


Young men, regardless of background, gain more (politically) from volunteering

Why? We aren't sure – but it is likely to reflect **differences** in the types of **volunteering** young men and young women typically participate in

Youth volunteering is falling & dominated by graduates...

Volunteered for non-profit or charitable organisation (%)



Source: European Social Survey 2020

The Successes...

Volunteering helps young people from the poorest backgrounds become more likely to vote in their first elections

Those who are least likely to vote in early adulthood & at the leading edge of generational turnout decline have the most to gain from volunteering

Volunteering has a critical role to play in reducing generational & socio-economic inequalities in political participation, and promoting European Solidarity

The Failures – and where we need to work harder

The benefits of volunteering (at least for voting) are much stronger for young men than young women

➤ *Why? We can't fix it if we don't explain it!*

➤ *How can we recruit more **young women from poorer backgrounds** to (politically) productive forms of volunteering?*

Volunteering is less common among younger generations & remains dominated by those from wealthier backgrounds

➤ *How can we increase participation of young people from poor households? **What can we learn from existing policies & schemes** to achieve that?*

How does volunteering succeed & fail in promoting solidarity in Europe?

To find out more:

Email me: S.Fox2@exeter.ac.uk

Sign up to my newsletter by dropping me an email

Look out for my [Europe Talks Solidarity article](#)

Find my paper '[Social Action as a Route to the Ballot Box](#)'

Thank you
for listening!