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Bachelor's Thesis

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**Young and democracy: their participation and impact on
election results (Scotland case study)**

Bachelor's Thesis

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Year of the defence: 2023

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on May 2nd, 2023

Emma Fábryová

References

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Abstract

Young generations of people are an integral and significant part of societies and are often referred to as the future of nations and the running of the world, but despite this, their voices are often repressed and unheard. In any democratic society, all votes should have equal weight, and all people have the same rights and opportunities. In Scotland, the law to lower the voting age to 16 was passed by the Scottish Parliament in 2013 and was first used in practice a year later in the referendum on Scottish independence. As a result, many young people who would not have been entitled to vote until then were able to express their position in a referendum. Formally, the act was adopted unanimously by the Scottish Parliament in 2015 and first used in 2016 in the Scottish Parliamentary Elections. However, the law is only valid for elections inside Scotland and not across the UK, which for many young people has meant frustration at the inability to vote even in the all-British elections. Therefore, based on comparative analyses of voter turnouts of young people in each election and the referendum from 2011 to 2022, this thesis presents arguments on whether the youth have an impact on participation and election results in Scotland or not.

Abstrakt

Mladé generace lidí jsou nedílnou a významnou součástí společnosti a často se o nich mluví jako o budoucnosti národů a chodu světa, ale přesto jsou jejich hlasy často potlačovány a nevyslyšeny. V každé demokratické společnosti by všechny hlasy měly mít stejnou váhu a všichni lidé by měli mít stejná práva a příležitosti. Ve Skotsku byl zákon o snížení věku pro účast ve volbách na 16 let schválen skotským parlamentem v roce 2013 a poprvé byl použit v praxi o rok později v referendu o skotské nezávislosti. V důsledku toho mnoho mladých lidí, kteří by do té doby neměli volební právo, mohlo vyjádřit svůj postoj v referendu. Formálně byl zákon přijat jednomyslně parlamentem v roce 2015 a poprvé použit v roce 2016 ve skotských parlamentních volbách. Zákon však platí pouze pro volby ve Skotsku, a nikoli v celém Spojeném království, což pro mnoho mladých lidí znamená frustraci z nemožnosti volit dokonce i v celobritských volbách. Na základě komparativní analýzy volební účasti mladých lidí v jednotlivých volbách a referendu v letech 2011 až 2022 proto tato práce předkládá argumenty o tom, zda mládež má vliv na účast a výsledky voleb ve Skotsku či nikoliv.

Keywords

Young people, reduction of voting age reform, Scotland, democracy, participation, elections

Klíčová slova

Mladí lidé, reforma snížení volebního věku, Skotsko, demokracie, participace, volby

Název práce

Mladí a demokracie: jejich účast a vliv na výsledky voleb (případová studie Skotska)

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1. Introduction

With young people expressing their opinions on how the state they live in works, on the state of democracy in the world, and basic human rights more than ever before, a new phenomenon has arisen in Western Europe, the matter of the influence of the young on transforming societies. This crucial issue can be seen around the world in many countries where young people demonstrate against climate change, and non-democratic systems, and advocate for the rights of minorities as well as many other vital topics. However, these voices are often taken for granted or go completely unnoticed by the public, even though they matter as much as any other voice, especially when it comes to unprecedented decisions that directly affect young people (Afflick 2020).

One of the biggest and most discussed issues about the young population though is the minimum voting age limit. In any democratic society, all votes should have equal weight, and all people should hold the same rights and opportunities, no matter the age of the individual. However, many political elites in the United Kingdom believed that the public did not outwardly show interest in the topic of lowering the electoral age limit and was sceptical to open the topic publicly for discussion (Kenealy et al. 2017 : 61). The question of whether the minimum voting age should remain at its current level, that is at the age of 18, or be lowered to 16, as happened in Scotland ten years ago, is still subject to discussions of many western political elites without reaching a consensus.

Young generations of people are an integral and significant part of societies and are often referred to as the future of nations, but despite this, they often meet with ignorance and discrimination from society. Therefore, being a young person myself and seeing this topic as crucial for the further development of the world, the main focus of this thesis will be the influence of young people on democracy, namely their participation and influence on election results. It will demonstrate the importance of youth political participation for society and their impact on the running of politics and highlight the changes in society that have taken place since the passing of the law on lowering the voting age limit, including the impact of this change on elections and politics itself. Furthermore, this thesis will bring together and summarise all relevant knowledge available on this topic and enrich the social sciences with new insight gathered while finding answers to the research question “**Does the electoral age limit affect the participation of young people in elections and their results?**”.

To try to find an answer to my research question, I will mostly try incorporating empirical research. This part of my thesis will focus on comparing youth participation in elections over the years since 2014 and comparing youth participation in elections in the period before 2014 and after 2014. Thus, I will compare the number of young people participating in these elections and determine, whether the enrichment with a higher number of eligible young voters in the electorate can hypothetically have an impact on election results.

Consequently, this thesis will aim to contribute to the academic debate by making use of all relevant knowledge available on this topic. To fill the gap in the academic area, the three-dimensionality of my thesis will be the key feature of the division of its content. To achieve the desired result, the thesis will combine these three levels of research: conceptual, empirical, and normative, respectively. The conceptual level of my work will consist of the descriptiveness of the law itself on lowering the electoral threshold, the descriptiveness of the results of elections and a referendum, and the participation of young people in these events. The empirical level of my work will focus on comparing youth participation in elections over the years since 2014, comparing youth participation in elections in the period before 2014 and after 2014. The normative level of my work will be seen in the influence of young people on the results of the elections and the impact of the actual adoption of the law on the political engagement, education, and participation in the elections of young people. The results of this thesis may later contribute to further research and academic debate about this subject.

If a positive result was achieved by my analysis, I believe further empirical research by scientists is required over the next years to deepen our knowledge of this phenomenon by finding out the exact effects of the electoral change and earlier enfranchisement of the young on themselves, their political behaviour, the society, the education system, the politics, and the state as a whole by using both quantitative and qualitative methods of research, e.g. carrying out interviews, surveys and other analyses of the election results by age groups in the electorate.

2. Review of literature on youth voting

Since the first time 16- and 17-year-olds were allowed to vote in the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum and the passing of the Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill 2015 lowering the voting age happened a year after, authors focusing on this phenomenon in Scotland were mainly studying the electoral turnout of the young, the impact of lowering the voting age on the young and the society and changes in politics of the state. Using both quantitative and qualitative research methods, they are aware of the current limitations of their research, such as not yet having enough empirical evidence in such a short time after passing the law or not having enough respondents willing to provide valuable information through face-to-face interviews, which they admit by encouraging further research needed to achieve more accurate results in the future.

A lack of valid substantiated normative results of previous research conducted by various scientists is also present and limiting. Even though several authors focusing on this topic, like Eichhorn, Kenealy, Bergh, Huebner, Zeglovits, and others talk about the positive effects of this reform on both the young people and the school system, we still lack scientific evidence that would confirm these claims and that would prove positive effects on the politics, the society, and the decision-making elites. Therefore, as said above, extensive further research is required to confirm or oppose today's claimed positive effects of earlier enfranchisement.

Despite these limitations mentioned above, we are still able to access numerous research articles concerning this topic from the last 20 years. In the past decade, more of a negative approach toward lowering the voting age to 16 among scientists was present, such as in the article by Chan and Clayton from 2006. However, a year after Austria legally lowered the voting age to 16 and therefore provided a great opportunity for further empirical research in this matter. Since then, even before the Reduction of Voting Age Bill was passed in Scotland, more and more political scientists began to advocate for lowering the voting age to 16 in various countries and started providing the academic sphere with positive empirical data on more levels.

In this thesis, I will mainly focus on the work of scientists who study the case of Scotland. However, empirical evidence from scientists studying the case of other countries in the world will also be taken into consideration, such as Argentina, Austria, Ecuador, Estonia, Greece, Malta, Nicaragua, and others. Authors that have done great and extensive work in this field so far and whose results serve as essential resources for my thesis are Jan Eichhorn, Johannes

Bergh, Christine Huebner, Andrew Mycock, Jonathan Tonge, Thomas Loughran, and Daniel Kenealy.

The author that has been focusing on the topic of young people in various spheres in the UK, but specifically Scotland for a decade, is Jan Eichhorn. In his articles, he mainly uses quantitative research methods to come up with outcomes for his research questions. His work is extremely significant for my thesis because he is one of the few scientists that has extensively focused on young people's early enfranchisement and voting habits in Scotland. Therefore, I will briefly introduce and analyse a few of his articles I use for theoretical knowledge in my thesis to determine the methods, results, and limits of his research. After that, I will compare his work to the work of other scientists mentioned above to see the differences between research methods but also between results in time.

His article from 2014 *Newly Enfranchised Voters: Political Attitudes of Under 18-Year Olds in the Context of the Referendum on Scotland's Constitutional Future* is the first of its kind. Since it was published slightly after the independence referendum where the 16- and 17-year-olds had the first chance to legally vote and its research was conducted a year before the referendum, it gave Eichhorn an excellent opportunity to study the political attitudes and opinions of young people before the referendum.

In his article, he uses an unconventional way of collecting data for political scientists – a survey via telephone using random digit dialling. He has also mentioned that the response might have been only 37%, but he considers it a good result since he had to speak with the parents first and ask for their permission and then ask for the permission of the young voter. The purpose of this article is therefore to summarise the results of the only representative and comprehensive survey of young Scottish people under 18 who were enfranchised to vote in the referendum conducted in 2013.

Since Eichhorn used a quantitative method of research, it is important to note how many participants he had in his study. Even after the “double safety” measure he used during the telephone calls, he managed to get a sample of 1018 young Scots aged 14-17. To achieve a true representation of this age group in Scotland, he also managed to distribute his respondents almost evenly across Scotland. In the end, he had about 125 young people in each of the eight Scottish Parliament electoral regions, so this survey should be representative of the age group 14-17 in the whole of Scotland.

After analysing all these interviews, he came to very interesting results. Firstly, he discovered that this age group of young people has similar levels of interest in all political things as adults over 18. Similarly, according to him, young people also express a desire for

more information about politics to contribute to their decision-making process than adults do. Moreover, 14-17-year-olds also distinguish between sources of information (Eichhorn 2014 : 47).

When it comes to their political views, the results are also quite surprising. Many would think young people would be heavily influenced by their parents, friends, or teachers, but the opposite is true. Eichhorn found out that young people are not easily biased to vote one way or another and they often hold a different view than one of their relatives (Eichhorn 2014 : 47). Concerning the referendum, the respondents did not seem to be particularly likely to favour particular national identities or follow others' leads without questioning them first and they also did not adopt simple narratives around particular forms of identity nor disengaged from political debate (Eichhorn 2014 : 47).

Even though these results are fascinating and give us a push to explore this phenomenon more, the author is aware of some limitations of his research. The biggest limitation might be that his survey was the first of its kind and that another survey like this is required to see polarisations on issues or influences among young people. Since 2014, there have been more surveys and studies like this one, many of these conducted by Eichhorn specifically, that gave us new results but also confirmed what Eichhorn first found out in his first study about this issue.

Eichhorn's next significant article from 2018 *Votes At 16: New Insights from Scotland on Enfranchisement* is enriching our knowledge of the subject once more. An updated version of this article with more conclusions drawn was published in a 2017 book by Daniel Kenealy et al. *Publics, Elites and Constitutional Change in the UK* under the name *Voting at 16: Lessons from Scotland for the rest of the UK?* where Eichhorn has, of course, been credited as a co-author of the book. However, since this thesis contains citations from both versions of this article and therefore cited both Eichhorn and Kenealy et al., I will mention both in this chapter.

In the original article, Eichhorn, again, uses a quantitative survey method with stratified random sampling for his research. This time, the survey took place on the territory of the whole UK in 2015, slightly before the General Election. In this case, he was asking 16-17-year-olds about their political attitudes and behaviour to find out the differences between young Scottish and young British by comparing the results from both groups. In this survey, he had a sample of 810 respondents evenly split between Scotland and the rest of the UK which caused equal representation of both enfranchised young people in Scotland and disenfranchised young people in the rest of the UK in 2015.

By analysing the results, Eichhorn found out that there are higher levels present in terms of issues related to electoral and non-electoral participation and views in Scotland than in the rest of the United Kingdom (Eichhorn 2018 : 387). In the updated article, Kenealy et al. also mention parents and friends play an important role in socialising young people into politics in both groups. They also acknowledge the distinctive role of schools in this matter. They think schools should influence young people in a few areas to some extent, e.g., by giving them formal instruction in civic matters. A need for active and moderated classroom discussions about politics is also present in the results of this survey (Kenealy et al. 2017 : 58-59).

Of course, as with any other research, even this one has its limits acknowledged by the author. Firstly, there is a possibility that the results of this survey were affected by the aftermath of the independence referendum in 2014, and young people who were able to vote in this referendum, might have been influenced by this event in their political attitudes and behaviour. Secondly, further studies are required to examine whether the effects presented by the results of the survey can be sustained over longer periods and replicated without the presence of an extraordinary event like an independence referendum. Another limitation might be the fact, that a sample of 405 young people on each side may not be representative enough to draw objective conclusions. Higher representativeness could be achieved by having a much bigger sample of young people in this age group and dividing the overall sample into four equal parts, one for each state in the UK.

A comparative study conducted by the scientific duo Jan Eichhorn and Johannes Bergh *Lowering the Voting Age to 16 in Practice: Processes and Outcomes Compared* from 2021 provides us with important knowledge about the different experiences of young people and the countries after lowering the voting age to 16 or 17 in different countries around the world. For this study, they only compared previous empirical studies from the countries in Latin America and Europe that lowered the voting age to 16 or 17 for all elections, specifically from Argentina, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Cuba, East Timor, Ecuador, Estonia, Greece, Indonesia, Israel, Malta, and Nicaragua. Examining knowledge from these countries, they looked at young people's political behaviour resulting in a discussion about their political and civic attitudes and what potential impacts on the debate about this matter these findings might have.

By comparing these previous empirical studies, they found that generally no negative effects of lowering the voting age were found in any of the studied countries. Even though the potential negative effects it might have caused were not specified, it might serve as a

solid confirming argument for lowering the voting age in other countries. Moreover, as Eichhorn found out in his earlier studies for Scotland, this comparative study confirms that enfranchised young people were often more interested in politics and more likely to vote in elections than slightly older young people. This group also demonstrated other pro-civic attitudes and was more engaged when it was enfranchised earlier. These findings suggest that this phenomenon could result in turnout increases over the next years (Eichhorn & Bergh 2021 : 517).

However, as of now, we have no empirical scientific evidence available for the question of whether earlier enfranchisement increases turnout. The authors also acknowledge that a study designed to apply the same methodology as they used across multiple country contexts is missing. In the future, a study like this could provide us with important systematic insights currently impossible to gain. They also admit that without a study like this, it was difficult for them to study the interplay between different processes intersecting with enfranchisement experiences. This was mostly caused by the great differences in methods of operationalising the measures between selected countries (Eichhorn & Bergh 2021 : 518).

Another author with a scientific focus on young people, their earlier enfranchisement, and the effects of this change significant for my thesis is Christine Huebner. Opposite to Eichhorn, she mostly uses qualitative methods of research in her studies which provides us with another interesting insight on the topic of lowering the voting age from real experiences from interviews with young people. I have, therefore, chosen two articles cited in my thesis that I will briefly introduce and analyse.

Her article from 2021 *How young people in Scotland experience the right to vote at 16: Evidence on 'votes-at-16' in Scotland from qualitative work with young people* provides us with significant and fascinating results of a qualitative study of 20 young Scots aged 15-18. To gain valuable data from her study, she used the method of in-depth interviews with those 20 people in 2017 and 2018. All of these young people were selected from secondary schools in and around a city in the east of Scotland.

The participants were interviewed either in small groups or one-to-one for a period ranging from 35 minutes to 1 hour and 45 minutes. To have more diverse data, some of the interviews were repeated after a few weeks or months which is why only the collection of data took a long time. Once these interviews started, participants were asked to recount memories of the 2014 referendum and the initial lowering of the voting age. Their purpose was to share valuable experiences with “Votes-at-16” and the electoral process since the

referendum and the reform, experiences of recent elections, and civic education in this context.

Findings from this study give us an idea about the effects of lowering the voting age in Scotland but not in the rest of the UK. Participants reported a sense of confidence in the youth voice and in young people's power to affect politics connected with a feeling of empowerment (Huebner 2021 : 569). However, negative findings, such as frustrations about being temporarily disenfranchised in UK-wide elections were also reported by some participants (Huebner 2021 : 576). This partial enfranchisement in only Scottish elections is also connected with an increased allegiance to Scottish political institutions for some participants (Huebner 2021 : 574). Some of the interviewed young people reported having enfranchisement bound up with the experience of the referendum that for them they became virtually inseparable. When asked whether they turned out to vote in the referendum in the end, some of them said they did not because it was more difficult to get informed on local and Scottish politics than nationwide politics where people see the politicians' faces and names more often (Huebner 2021 : 576).

Even though the course and results of this study were very enriching for the scientific sphere, we can also see some limits present here. Possibly the most limiting factor is the fact that reliable quantitative data on youth turnout as well as further evidence on young people's early voting experiences is missing from research. The author also mentions the need for longitudinal research into the potential impact of frustrations on young people's relationships with electoral politics in the future. Further research on whether voting age reform teaches young people that, as of yet, it is the only available way to impact political institutions is also required in the upcoming years. The last minor limit seen in this study is that all of the participants were coming from only one small area of Scotland and therefore cannot speak for the whole of Scotland (Huebner 2021 : 576-577).

An article by the scientific duo Huebner and Eichhorn *Votes at 16: Political Experiences Beyond the Vote Itself* from 2019 combines both qualitative and quantitative research methods in one study. This way, the authors tried to compare the experiences of young Scots to their peers in the rest of the UK and to gauge their attitudes to politics and engagement with UK-wide elections and political issues. Combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods, they were studying two sets of data – qualitative data collected by Huebner from her previously mentioned article and quantitative data collected by Eichhorn. Eichhorn's dataset consisted of data from a survey among young people aged 16-17 from the whole UK conducted ahead of the 2015 General Election.

By comparing results from the two different approaches to gaining valuable data about young people and their political attitudes in Scotland and the rest of the country, the duo was able to give us new information about this phenomenon. After the analysis, young people in Scotland showed a greater level of confidence in themselves and their peers than the same age group did in the rest of the United Kingdom. Furthermore, this study found out that 60% of young Scots talk to their family and friends about political issues versus only 1/3 of their peers in the rest of the UK. This goes hand in hand with the fact that young Scottish are more likely to engage with politics, to vote, and to think it makes a difference who gets elected (Huebner & Eichhorn 2019 : 130). Lastly, 2/3 of young people in Scotland are more likely to be in favour of the lowered voting age to 16 for all UK elections in comparison to 50% of young people in the rest of the country (Huebner & Eichhorn 2019 : 131).

Of course, in the data collected by Eichhorn, the referendum and lowering of the voting age for the first time could have played a key role in the increase in political efficacy among young people in Scotland. Therefore, it remains to be seen whether more “ordinary” kinds of elections would generate a similar amount of interest and engagement among the youngest cohorts (Huebner & Eichhorn 2019 : 138). Just like in Huebner’s previous article, there is also a need for more reliable data on young people’s turnout in elections, their interests and vote choice quality present as well as qualitative insights into young people’s evaluation of different kinds of elections (Huebner & Eichhorn 2019 : 138-139).

The last research filled with valuable knowledge for my thesis is *Voting age reform, political partisanship and multi-level governance in the UK: The party politics of ‘votes-at-16’* by the author trio Andrew Mycock, Jonathan Tonge, and Thomas Loughran from 2021. In their article, these three scientists use a qualitative research method to reach results. They ran elite interviews with 17 politicians in 2018 and 2019 on their attitudes to voting age reform and to the debate whether 16-17-year-olds should be allowed to run in elections too. These politicians were from across the political spectrum and from both Westminster and devolved institutions.

By analysing each interview with elite politicians, the trio reached the result that the current advocacy of positions on the UK voting age has become increasingly partisan and linked to party politics (Mycock, Tonge & Loughran 2021 : 537). That means, from all parties in the UK, only the Green Party and Liberal Democrats seem to support lowering the voting age of candidature to 16 as of the time of the interviews. This ensured that debates on expanding youth enfranchisement in this direction as well have often been normative and

based upon assertions than objective considerations of political participation, democratic socialisation, and transitions to adulthood (Mycock, Tonge & Loughran 2021 : 537).

This qualitative research has also been affected by some limiting factors. The authors realise a more substantive consideration of the potential impact of voting age reform is required with a more holistic analysis of ages of responsibility, assessment of the capabilities of 16-17-year-olds, clearer definitions of what constitutes adulthood, and whether it should be a criterion for voting (Mycock, Tonge & Loughran 2021 : 538). An option that the parties are not united in their opinions might also occur, i.e., interviewed politicians do not necessarily have to possess the same opinion on this matter as their fellow party members.

To conclude, each of these authors and each of their works provide us with new insights and findings important for studying the phenomenon of lowering the voting age to 16 or at least for confirming results from previous studies by conducting improved research with newly available data needed for finding out more about the effects of this change in young people's lives as well as in different public areas. However, further research in the future is deeply encouraged by scientists to find out more about what this phenomenon causes in societies.

3. Historical evolution of enfranchisement in Scotland

To understand the topic of lowering the voting age to 16, it is essential to briefly outline the history of Britain's and Scotland's political franchise. Therefore, in this part of my thesis, I will dive into the depths of voting rights in Scotland even before the Scottish devolution in 1999 until today. Historically, different groups of people were advocating for the further enfranchisement of some groups. At first, in the 19th century, it was men who did not own much land or who did not have a proper educational background. Years later in the 20th century, women began their campaign for suffrage and started fighting to earn the right to vote for all women without property or marriage restrictions. The newest campaign for further enfranchisement began in the 21st century under the name Votes at 16 when young people started advocating their right to vote even though they were not 18 years old. In Scotland, the biggest supporters of this campaign were the Scottish National Party and the Scottish Greens from larger political bodies and the British Youth Council and the Scottish Youth Parliament from other organisations.

Voting rights in the United Kingdom have overcome various changes since the first half of the 19th century. Before 1832, the only group of people who could vote was men who owned property or paid certain taxes to qualify. At that time, this was extremely discriminating since these rules excluded most of the working class (The National Archives¹) and the conditions for eligibility to vote were very difficult to fulfil. Some rich and educated men even had the right to have more than one vote in elections. The Representation of the People Act 1832, also known as the First Reform Act, changed the game slightly when allowing more men to vote. This act "broadened the franchise's property qualification in the counties, to include small landowners, tenant farmers, and shopkeepers" and "created a uniform franchise in the boroughs, giving the vote to all householders who paid a yearly rental of £10 or more and some lodgers" (UK Parliament²). However, it also explicitly excluded all women from voting when specifically defining the voter as a male person (UK Parliament³). That is also the time when the women's suffrage movement in the UK started to advocate for equal enfranchisement.

As years passed, more and more people were calling for "one man, one vote" or universal male suffrage and pressuring the Parliament to broaden voting rights once again. The

¹ date of release not available, accessed on 20th April 2023

² see footnote 1

³ see footnote 1

Representation of the People Act 1867, also known as the Second Reform Act, may have granted more voting rights to the male population, but they were still based on property qualifications, and it also kept on excluding women from voting in elections. This act enfranchised agricultural landowners and tenants with very small amounts of land in the counties and householders and lodgers who paid rent of £10 or more a year in the boroughs (UK Parliament⁴). After this act was passed, the electorate roughly doubled and reached two million men.

In Scotland, the women's suffrage movement was persuading politicians and the results slowly came into sight. In 1872, some women in Scotland were given the right to vote and stand for school boards (National Records of Scotland 2021). Although this may not seem like a significant win, it started a massive overtime wave of the enfranchisement of different groups of people for different types of elections in Scotland and the UK.

The Representation of the People Act 1884, also known as the Third Reform Act, brought more voting rights to certain men again. This act “established a uniform franchise throughout the country” and brought the franchise in the counties into line with the 1867 householder and lodger franchise for boroughs” (UK Parliament⁵). However, still only a very small part of the population had the right to vote since even after this act was passed, there were still about 40% of men who could not vote and all women (UK Parliament⁶). However, 10 years later, the Local Government Act allowed all women to vote and stand for election at a local level. This further enfranchisement of the female population led to smaller discrimination in voting rights.

Women did not have to wait long for further enfranchisement. In 1907, the Qualification of Women (Country and Borough Councils) Act 1907 was passed and allowed certain women ratepayers to run for and be elected to boroughs and county councils (National Records of Scotland 2021).

The biggest win for women and all other disenfranchised men came in February 1918 with the Representation of the People Act. This act made the biggest changes in enfranchisement in the history of the country: it removed property qualifications for men and replaced them with a residence qualification instead, which granted universal male suffrage (UK Parliament⁷) for men over 21 years of age (National Records of Scotland

⁴ see footnote 1

⁵ see footnote 1

⁶ see footnote 1

⁷ see footnote 1

2021). This act also introduced voting for some women but under a few conditions. “To qualify for the Parliamentary franchise a woman, as well as being at least 30, had to own or rent property of a yearly value of £5 or more, or be married to a man who qualified for the local government franchise. The Act also introduced a system of absent ballots to allow soldiers still stationed across the Channel to vote. Service voters had to be 19 years or older” (UK Parliament⁸).

Moreover, in November 1918, the British Parliament passed the Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act. This particular act is very important in the field of British passive suffrage because, for the first time in history, it allowed women to become Members of Parliament (MPs). Interestingly, this act might have been only one page long, but in the matter of running for MPs, there were no restrictions about women being elected to the Parliament, like age or property qualifications, so they could be elected from the age of 21 just like men (UK Parliament⁹).

Finally, equal enfranchisement of all adults happened after the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act of 1928 was passed. This allowed every adult in the UK aged 21 or more to vote and run in all elections. As a result, “approximately 5.2 million extra women could now register and join the 9.5 million already registered” which meant that for the first time in history, women formed the majority of the British electorate (UK Parliament¹⁰). The General Election of 1929 was the first time where this complete adult suffrage was implemented in practice.

However, this did not mean that all eligible voters would be equal. True equality was established in 1948 after the passing of the Representation of the People Act 1948 that finally abolished plural voting which ensured that each voter had only one vote (UK Parliament¹¹). Another huge change in voting rights came through the Representation of the People Act 1969, which universally lowered the voting age for both men and women from 21 to 18 years.

Since 1999, Scotland has been granted the powers to have its parliament and pass bills and amendments in certain areas of law on the territory thanks to devolution. Since this event, Scotland has made a few significant changes in the enfranchisement laws for different groups of people living there.

⁸ see footnote 1

⁹ see footnote 1

¹⁰ see footnote 1

¹¹ see footnote 1

Possibly the most significant and the most media-covered legislative act is the voting age reform from 2015 after the Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill 2015 was passed by the Scottish Parliament. This bill reduced the voting age in Scotland for all local elections from 18 to 16 years (The Scottish Parliament¹²). Since then, debates on whether to lower the voting age to 16 in the whole UK have risen within both the political elites and the public. So far, only Wales has joined forces with Scotland on this front and lowered the voting age to 16 for all local elections in Wales as well. It is possible, Northern Ireland will soon follow this trend and put even more pressure on the British Parliament in this matter.

Another further enfranchisement of people living in Scotland happened in 2020 with the passing of the Scottish Elections (Franchise and Representation) Bill 2020. This important bill allows anyone who possesses a legal right to live in Scotland to vote as well. In addition, it also includes that people with refugee status or the right to asylum are also eligible to vote in Scottish elections along with Scottish nationals. It also enables prisoners serving sentences of 12 months or less to vote and all foreign nationals with permanent residency (indefinite leave to remain) to stand for election (The Scottish Parliament¹³).

The latest enfranchising bill passed by the Scottish Parliament was the Scottish Local Government Elections (Candidacy Rights of Foreign Nationals) Bill 2022. This bill gives “certain foreign nationals the right to stand as candidates at local government elections in Scotland in accordance with international treaty agreements entered into by the United Kingdom” (The Scottish Parliament¹⁴). This means that all nationals of Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, and Spain can be candidates in Scottish local government elections (The Scottish Parliament¹⁵).

As can be seen, the history of the franchise in Scotland is quite extensive, but also important to understand the context of the motive to write this thesis because the issue of lowering the voting age is part of a longer trend in British and Scottish societies. In the following chapter, I will also introduce another very important thing about the voting age reduction in Scotland and an integral part of the campaign for lower voting age – the UK national campaign Votes at 16, as well as the Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill 2015 itself.

¹² see footnote 1

¹³ see footnote 1

¹⁴ see footnote 1

¹⁵ see footnote 1

4. Theoretical framework

Due to the lack of information about the UK national campaign Votes at 16 and about the Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill 2015 itself and the lack of media coverage within the Czech media, it is important to firstly highlight what exactly this campaign is and what it has achieved so far for the young people in the UK, especially Scotland, and what the Scottish Elections Bill brought and meant for the Scottish society.

Votes at 16 is a national campaign in the United Kingdom that fights for the reduction of the voting age to 16 for all public elections in the country. Currently, this campaign is led and promoted by the British Youth Council (BYC), a group of people “made up of more than 200 member organisations who support our common vision for young people”, working across the UK and the world to “empower young people through our programmes, training, and awards... like the UK Youth Parliament” (British Youth Council). The BYC is mostly lobbying all regional governing bodies in the UK, that being the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Parliament, and the Northern Ireland Assembly, to act and listen to young people and the support they get around the country and lower the voting age to 16 for all elections.

The *Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill 2015* is an official legal document that lowers the voting age to 16 in all Scottish regional elections. This bill amended the latest passed Representation of the People Act 1983 valid on the territory of the whole United Kingdom and was passed by the Scottish Parliament unanimously by the Members of the Scottish Parliament on 18th June 2015 and received Royal Assent, i.e., went into effect, on 24th July 2015 (Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Act 2015). The act was first used in practice in the 2016 Scottish Parliamentary Elections, changing the history of youth enfranchisement in Scotland.

However, the idea of making and issuing such a law came in 2013 already when the Scottish National Party (SNP) expressed their interest in lowering the voting age to 16. The first attempt at this new idea was put into action for the 2014 Scottish independence referendum where 16- and 17-year-olds could officially vote for the first time. Even though the Conservative Party in Scotland firstly took an opposing stance to lower the voting age for the referendum, they subsequently embraced the Reduction of Voting Age Bill in 2015 after seeing the success of the reform in the referendum. In an interview for Douglas, a Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Conservative Party Jeremy Balfour said he “did not believe a lower voting age would change electoral outcomes” but later he believed that

“youth in general have become more knowledgeable and engaged in the political issues of the day” (Douglas 2020 : 1458).

As a result, many young people who would not have been entitled to vote until then were able to express their position in a referendum or elections. However, the law is only valid for elections inside Scotland and not across the UK, which has meant frustration at the inability to vote even in the Westminster Elections for many young people. Nevertheless, young people in Scotland became more interested in political affairs and politics itself from an earlier age, both in private life and in schools (Huebner 2021 : 576-577; Hill et al. 2017 : 64). In an article by Eichhorn and Bergh from 2021, they point out that public opinion about votes at 16 can be altered by using a mechanism including the interaction between young people, their families, and friends. This mechanism can be further enhanced through civic education in schools (Eichhorn & Bergh 2021 : 516).

Traditionally in the past, the support of the public for lowering the voting age has been low. In an article from 2012, Nelson speaks about only around a third of the Scottish public supporting this idea and almost half of the Scots being against it completely (Nelson 2012). On the other hand, soon after 16- and 17-year-olds had been allowed to vote for the first time in Scotland, 60% of all the referendum respondents said “they would support a measure that allowed everyone to vote from the age of 16, with 43% strongly supporting the idea and out of 16- and 17-year-olds voting for the first time, 75% would further support the measure” (The Electoral Commission 2014).

The public’s support for this issue can be influenced by other factors as well, in this case, framing amongst the elites and the media. Greenwood-Hau and Gutting carried out a survey experiment in their study to find out whether the issue would get more support if it was framed in terms of extending rights or as a change from the policy status quo, like reducing the voting age. They found out that the support for votes at 16 is higher when the issue is framed in terms of extending rights than in terms of policy change. Moreover, the support for this issue is higher among the left-wingers than among the right-wingers, however, the “left-wingers were not particularly persuaded to support the initiative by the rights frame and right-wingers were not particularly dissuaded to support the initiative by the policy change frame” (Greenwood-Hau & Gutting 2021 : 558).

However, there are also many opponents of the Votes at 16 campaign. One of the main arguments against the reform is that young people are not politically engaged enough to vote or that they do not understand politics. This argument has been proven incorrect in a study by Huebner and Eichhorn where they found out that young people in Scotland after

enfranchisement are “more likely to engage with politics, to vote, and to think it makes a difference who gets elected and how the UK is governed matters for their own lives” than their peers in the rest of the UK (Huebner & Eichhorn 2019 : 130).

Furthermore, a survey conducted by a British think tank Demos proved that young people often view a certain situation in the same way as adults aged over 18 even though they may not be as experienced as adults. When asked “Do you think the general economic condition of the country will improve, stay the same or get worse of the next twelve months”, 36% of young people believed it would improve, 29% believed it would stay the same and 35% believed it would get worse. Interestingly, these trends were almost identical for the group of adults aged over 18 (Reeves & Nadesan 2010).

Another argument against this reform is stated in an article by Chan and Clayton from 2006. They believe that “the available data indicate that the sixteen and seventeen-year-old age group lacks sufficient political maturity to be enfranchised” and that younger people are less interested, informed, engaged, and knowledgeable in politics and have less stable attitudes toward political topics than older people, therefore it makes them less competent a mature to be able to vote in elections (Chan & Clayton 2006 : 555).

This opinion has been proven wrong by various scientists. Tommy Peto in his article from 2018 researched three measures of political maturity and found out that 16- and 17-year-olds are “either already mature, or, to the extent they are immature, this immaturity is a product of a system which excludes them, and the immaturity will fade if the voting age is lowered”. Even if he agrees that some young people of this age are immature and will remain so, he still proposes that “the negligible harm of letting immature teenagers vote fails to outweigh the serious wrong of denying that right to mature teenagers”. Therefore, maturity is the only premise on which 16- and 17-year-olds might be denied the right to vote, however, he advocates that these people are and can be politically mature and thus, the voting age should be lowered to 16 in the rest of the UK (Peto 2018 : 293).

In an article by Zeglovits from 2013, she assumes that voting is habit-forming. She further supports her argument by stating that “if someone starts as a voter, she or he will most likely vote again. If someone starts as a non-voter, she or he will probably develop the habit of non-voting. The first elections leave a footprint on one’s voting biography. High turn-out rates among 16- and 17-year-olds thus might raise hopes for future turn-out rates”. According to her, this is valid even if political interest and knowledge are not higher for 16- and 17-year-olds than people aged 18-24, because still living at home and attending school

may increase election turnout rather than when young people move away to study or work (Zeglovits 2013 : 252).

Similar findings were found in Scotland where Votes at 16 is seen as “having had a positive impact on youth political interest and impacted upon the decision of the Welsh Government to follow” while retaining faith in good habit-forming impacts of this reform which might lead to continuing electoral participation of these young people in the upcoming years. Tonge et al. also believe that the Scottish and Welsh examples could influence the decision of “whether to proceed with similar reform for Westminster contests”, because they also generate “‘pressure from below’ as progressive advocates can highlight voting age reform in the devolved nations as an example of a more consensual and responsive approach to constitutional change” (Tonge et al. 2021 : 538).

To be able to reach my findings and answer my research question, I will need to work with two variables. The first variable for my research will be the number of young people voting in each election. My focus will be mostly on young people aged 16 and 17 for this issue, but for the part of comparing the engagement within the youth in elections before 2014 and after 2014, I will also need to work with people aged 18-24 for the 2011 Scottish Parliament election and the 2012 Scottish local elections. To measure my first variable, the indicator for this variable will be the total voter turnout for the particular election.

My second variable will be the percentual share of young people in the whole electorate. Again, I will mostly consider young people aged 16 and 17 for this matter, but for the comparison of engagement of the young in elections before 2014 and after 2014, I will also need to work with the age group 18-24 for the 2011 Scottish Parliament election and the 2012 Scottish local elections. To measure my second variable, the indicator for this variable will be the number of young people in the electorate for the particular year. Using these in the comparative analysis, I hope to find out sufficient results to formulate an answer to my research question.

5. Conceptual framework

This particular level of my thesis will consist of the descriptiveness of the Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill 2015 itself, the descriptiveness of the results of elections and referendum since 2014, and the participation of young people in these events. For these purposes, I will work with the official British website for all laws passed on the territory of the UK legislation.gov.uk where the wording of the whole bill as passed can be found and from the official election and referendum reports of the Electoral Commission from all elections and referendums happening since 2014 where not only overall results of the elections can be found, but also statistics from the voting about participating age groups. The help of secondary sources will also be needed.

As it was said in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill 2015 is an official legal document that lowers the voting age to 16 in all Scottish regional elections and is not valid for the UK national elections. It was passed by the Scottish Parliament on 18th June 2015 and received Royal Assent on 24th July 2015. The act was passed by the Scottish Parliament unanimously by the Members of the Scottish Parliament and was first used in practice in the 2016 Scottish Parliamentary Elections.

In the first section of the Scottish Elections Bill from 2015 named Scottish elections: reduction of voting age to 16, amendments made by subsection (1) change the wording of section 2 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 valid on the territory of the whole United Kingdom, so it is not inconsistent to the passing of the Scottish Elections Bill. The wording of the crucial and basic part of the law can be found in subsection (2). “The amendments made by subsection (1) have effect for the purposes of— (a) an election for membership of the Scottish Parliament (by virtue of section 11 of the Scotland Act 1998) at which the poll is to be held on or after 5 April 2016, (b) a local government election at which the poll is to be held on or after 5 May 2016, (c) any other relevant election at which the poll is to be held on or after 5 May 2016.”¹⁶ Subsection (2) is then complemented by subsection (3) which defines “other relevant election” as an election not mentioned in subsection (2) but other election to which section 2 of the 1983 Act applies for voting.

A significant part of the bill is section 14A Voting age for proxies at local government elections. In this sense, a proxy takes the meaning of an authority given to a person to vote for someone else in an election or the person who was given this authority. This time, the

¹⁶ wording of the Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Act 2015 after receiving Royal Assent

bill amends the wording of paragraph 6 of the Schedule of the Representation of the People Act 2000 and inserts a subsection (5A) of subparagraph (5), “(5A) A person is not capable of voting as proxy at a local government election in Scotland unless on the date of the election the person has attained the age of 16.”. That means that not only the voting age for regional elections in Scotland has changed, but also the age of being given the authority to vote for someone else in an election.

For the descriptiveness of the elections and referendum in Scotland since 2014, I will describe these events in chronological order as they happened in time. That means, the first event will be the Scottish Independence Referendum in 2014, the following event will be the 2016 Scottish Parliamentary Elections, the next event will be the 2017 Scottish Council Elections, subsequently followed by the Scottish Parliamentary Elections in 2021, and finally 2022 Scottish Council Elections.

Conceptually, I will primarily work with three defined groups of young people: youth aged 16 and 17, 18-24-year-olds, and a joint group of 16-24-year-olds to draw data from reports and electoral statistics. I have chosen these three groups particularly because some reports and statistics do not divide the youth specifically into 16- and 17-year-olds and the age group of 18-24 but consider it one group of young people under 25.

However, it is important to notice the range of available data for each election. The biggest range of data is available for the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum. The reason for this may be that it was a voting “try-out” for the age group 16 to 17 years old. It is crucial to point out that the law that enfranchised this age group to vote was legally passed a year after this referendum. Unfortunately, we do not possess as wide a range of data for this age group in the next few elections as for the referendum in 2014. Thus, I will be forced to work with secondary data (proxy) created with the help of total voter turnout for each election and the number of young people in the age group 16 and 17 registered to vote listed in the Electoral Statistics for Scotland for each year.

The 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum was special not only for the young people aged 16 and 17 who were included in voting for the first time but also for Scottish political history. The official report on the Scottish Independence Referendum by The Electoral Commission published in 2017 states that “the number of registered electors eligible to vote on 18 September 2014 at the referendum can be said with certainty to be the largest ever electorate for a Scotland-wide poll” with over 4,2 million registered electors (The Electoral Commission 2017). Since this was the first time young people in Scotland could vote, we also have the exact number of this age group available in the report. Out of the total number

of registered electors, almost 110 thousand were young people aged 16 and 17 years old which makes it around 2,5% of the registered electorate. The total turnout in this referendum was 84,6%. The referendum was asking one question: Should Scotland be an independent country? The number of people who votes “Yes” reached 44,65%, whereas 55,25% of the voters voted “No” and 0,1% of votes were rejected paper ballots (The Electoral Commission 2017).

In a survey conducted by the Electoral Commission, 10% of respondents answered they had voted for the first time in this referendum. However, this number includes not only 16- and 17-year-olds but other age groups as well. In their survey, “45% of 18-24-year-olds claimed to have voted for the first time, 17% of 25-34-year-olds and 4% of the 35-44 and 44-55 age groups”. This may be empirical proof that voting is, indeed, habit-forming, and that claiming young people under 18 years old are politically immature and incompetent in making their own political decisions is false (The Electoral Commission 2014).

This referendum served as a trial for deciding whether 16- and 17-year-olds should be allowed to vote or not. A survey by the Electoral Commission administered after the referendum showed that 60% of all their respondents said they would support a measure that would allow young people aged 16 and 17 to vote, with 75% of people aged 16-17 also supporting the measure. Interestingly, support for this measure was higher among voters who voted “Yes” in the referendum reaching 85% than among “No” voters where support reached only 40% (The Electoral Commission 2014).

Unfortunately, this is the only report that gives us so much additional significant information about 16- and 17-year-old voters. Nevertheless, for election analyses, I will take the group of people under 25 years old into consideration.

The 2016 Scottish Parliament election was held in May 2016. This was the second time young people aged 16 and 17 were legally allowed to vote in Scotland and the first time this group was allowed to vote in Scottish Parliament elections. The turnout for the election was 55,6% on the constituency vote and 55,8% on the regional vote out of approximately 4 million people in the electorate. Even though the turnout was considerably lower than turnouts during the 2015 UK General Election and the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum, it is still the highest seen turnout at a Scottish Parliament election since the devolution in 1999. This could be caused by the fact that almost 290 thousand more people voted in 2016 than in the 2011 election, including 16- and 17-year-olds who might have formed a habit of voting after they voted in the 2014 Independence referendum (Aiton et al. 2016).

Overall, the Parliament after this election was made up of 5 parties in Scotland: Scottish Conservative & Unionist Party, Scottish Labour Party, Scottish Liberal Democrats, Scottish Green Party, and Scottish National Party (SNP). The Scottish National Party won the election by far and won 63 out of 129 seats in the Parliament. The next biggest number of seats was won by the Conservatives who won 31 seats. After that, there was the Labour Party with 24 seats, the Greens with 6 seats, and the Liberal Democrats with 5 seats (Denver 2016). Therefore, the SNP was leading a minority government. In his report to the Electoral Commission, David Denver points out that across 58 constituencies, for which the information is available, 16- and 17-year-olds constituted 2% of the overall electorate (Denver 2016). Electoral Statistics for Scotland for the year 2016 note that the number of 16- and 17-year-olds in the electorate for 2016, and possibly for the parliamentary elections too, was more than 79,5 thousand people (National Records of Scotland 2017). Unfortunately, no other information, e.g., how age groups voted in this election, is available.

The Scottish Council Elections 2017 were, again, a historical moment for 16- and 17-year-olds, because this was the first time this age group could vote in this type of election. Even though the turnout was significantly higher than in 2012 when it was only 39,7%, with the total turnout across Scotland being only 46,9%, it is difficult to say whether a significant amount of young people turned out to vote and whether they had any impact on election results (Bochel & Denver 2017). According to the National Records of Scotland, as of December 2017, there were more than 83 thousand young people aged 16 and 17 in the electorate (National Records of Scotland 2018). However, it is hard to tell how many young people voted in the elections.

The elections resulted in a win for the SNP with 32,3% of votes and 431 seats in 32 local authorities. Second place went to the Conservatives who got 25,3% of votes and 276 seats, followed by the Labour Party with 20,2% of votes and 262 seats. Other big parties, such as Liberal Democrats and Greens, gained 6,9% of votes and 67 seats and 4% of votes and 19 seats, respectively. Interestingly, independent candidates were quite successful as well, getting 10,4% of votes and 168 seats. This could be caused by a large amount of support for these candidates in the Orkney and Shetland Islands and some other parts of Scotland (Bochel & Denver 2017).

The second time young people aged 16 and 17 could vote in Scottish parliamentary elections was during the 2021 Scottish Parliament election. This election had the biggest voter turnout since the devolution in 1999 which reached 63,5%. Out of more than 4 million

eligible voters, almost 78 thousand of them were people aged 16 and 17, which makes up 1,8% of the electorate (National Records of Scotland 2022).

When it comes to results, the Scottish parliament is made of 5 parties again. The constituency vote was dominated by the SNP, whereas the regional vote was successful for the Conservatives and the Labour Party. The SNP consolidated their electoral dominance in the election once more and managed to win 64 seats in the parliament via both constituency and regional votes. Despite their strong continued electoral dominance in Scottish Politics, this was only enough for a minority government since they were one seat short of the majority. The second and third biggest parties in the Scottish parliament are the Conservatives and the Labour Party with 31 and 22 seats, respectively. The last two parties making the parliament are the Greens with 8 seats and the Liberal Democrats with 4 seats (Aiton et al. 2021).

The last election I will briefly introduce is the 2022 Scottish Council Elections. The turnout in these elections was a slight decrease compared to the ones in 2017, reaching only 44,8%. This was the second time young people could legally vote in this type of election in Scotland. The Electoral Commission continued its work in supporting young people to engage in the elections. For example, they ran “Welcome to Your Vote” in January 2022 to encourage schools to run political education sessions and raise awareness among young people. They also launched new education resources, like lesson plans, a template assembly on the council elections, and short interactive activities, and promised to keep searching for new opportunities to reach under-registered groups of people (The Electoral Commission 2022).

The results of these elections were quite similar to the last ones. The SNP was the overall winner of the elections again, winning 453 seats (67,9%). This time, the Labour Party placed above the Conservatives and gained 282 seats (42,3%), whereas the Conservatives gained only 214 seats (32,1%). Independent candidates placed fourth with 152 seats (22,8%), followed by Liberal Democrats with 87 seats (13%) and the Greens with 35 seats (5,2%) (BBC 2022).

Unfortunately, there is little to no information about young people in most of the electoral reports, so we can only infer how young people voted and if they had any impact on the results of the elections.

To be able to formulate the empirical results of my research, it will be necessary to work further and more extensively with the data provided and available. Hence, more information and results will be seen in the next chapters of my thesis where the actual analysis of the

results and the comparison of them to reach a result and, possibly, an answer to my research question will be executed.

As of today, various scientists have been able to define hypothetical normative effects of the enfranchisement of the 16- and 17-year-olds. Eichhorn and Bergh provide us with invaluable knowledge about the effects of lowering the voting age to 16. Collecting empirical data from more countries that have lowered the voting age to 16 and analysing it, they concluded that “in none of the countries, for which data are now available, researchers could find negative effects of the lowering of the voting age on young people’s engagement or civic attitudes”. They also point out the effects are quite the opposite, stating that “enfranchised 16- and 17-year-olds were often more interested in politics, more likely to vote and demonstrated other pro-civic attitudes”. They also declare the support for votes at 16 has a significant increase rate (Eichhorn & Bergh 2021 : 517).

Zeglovits also points out that young people aged 16 and 17 may be more likely to vote in elections since they are, in a majority of cases, still living with their parents and going to school nearby their home instead of moving away for their studies or work like the majority of the 18-24-year-olds do. She also thinks that this factor may cause earlier enfranchisement to be habit-forming and cause higher turnout rates over a few years (Zeglovits 2013 : 252). Even though these results are from a study conducted in Austria, their relevance is highly applicable to the Scotland case as well, although there is not any evidence of this in Scotland’s case available yet.

This reform has been seen to affect the education system. From an article by Eichhorn published in 2018, we already know that the young Scottish have taken classes on civic education at schools more than their peers in the rest of the UK (Eichhorn 2018 : 377). Therefore, in the same article, he also suggests that a good relationship between civic education, parental socialisation, and early enfranchisement can have a positive impact on the practical political participation of young people in Scotland (Eichhorn 2018 : 389). In this matter, in a study by Hill et al., students revealed that they wanted more balance to be present in arguments in civic education at schools when discussing politics and controversial topics with teachers and their classmates. (Hill et al. 2017 : 65).

The question of whether lowering the voting age will have an impact on society has been discussed among scientists as well. Hill et al. point out that by lowering the voting age to 16, young people aged 16 and 17 will become fully entitled political citizens. They think that “this could require adjustments be made not only to other formal age barriers but more widely to shifting our conception of the threshold of adulthood and our thereby our attitudes

to older teenagers“, including „revisiting the ability to influence how schools are run, as well as in other areas of participation in public life“ (Hill et al. 2017 : 65). However, the exact effects on society, education, politics and the young themselves are still not substantiated to this day as scientists need more time and data to conduct more research to formulate effects earlier enfranchisement causes.

6. Data and methods

The case of Scotland serves as a good example to answer my research question for multiple reasons. Firstly, it is one of the very few states in the world that legally enfranchised people under the age of 18 to vote in elections. Secondly, the enfranchisement of the young occurred recently, so its effects are still being manifested in various areas of politics and research. Thirdly, Scotland's case is unique in the fact that young people are only able to vote in regional elections and not "bigger" elections for the whole United Kingdom, which creates a fruitful debate among the elites on whether to lower the voting age to 16 for all elections in the state or not.

The use of relevant scientific data will be central to all three levels of my thesis. Therefore, I will draw data primarily from scientific articles, research, and election commission reports from all Scottish regional elections and referendums that have taken place since 2014. Work with secondary literature will also be necessary, mainly because the topic itself is not as widely covered yet. For this, I will draw some of my data from scientific websites and articles such as the British Youth Council and their Votes at 16 campaign and the British think tank Demos. For deeper analyses of the election results, I will also use various statistical data from the various available official, verifiable, and trustworthy statistical portals, reports, and other sources on the Internet.

Taking the form of a comparative case study, the main focus of this thesis will be on comparing and describing the results of several elections and referendums in Scotland that have taken place since 2014, the year the lowered electoral age threshold was approved for the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. I will also carry out analyses for that election to find out their impact on Scottish society from 2014 to the present day and each analysis will focus on one specific election or referendum that has taken place within the Scottish region.

For my work, the group of underage eligible voters, i.e., people aged 16 and 17, will be particularly significant and will be the main concept of operationalisation. However, for working with some graphs and statistics and to compare the participation of young people in elections, I will take into account people in the age range of 16-24 years and 18-24 years, respectively. These two different age groups will be considered in my analysis because data from various sources use different age divisions when determining election turnouts.

To answer my research question, my perspective will be on what proportion of eligible voters were 16- and 17-year-olds, how many of them went to the polls and voted, and

whether this group of people had any significant impact on the results of that election and whether they could have influenced them in any way. At the same time, I will focus on the magnitude of the gap in the participation of young people under the age of 25 before 2014 and after 2014, when the electoral age limit was lowered, thereby showing how much interest young people have in politics and political events in the state.

Several conceptual limitations will be present in my research. Firstly, there is the problem of age groups. Some reports specifically divide the young electorate into 16-17-year-olds and 18-24-year-olds, but some reports do not recognise these two groups as different, so instead of two groups, they offer us to work with just one group, i.e., 16-24-year-olds. Moreover, some reports do not divide the electorate into age groups at all, so to determine the number of eligible voters under the age of 18 it will be necessary to draw data about the electorate age groups from Electoral Statistics for Scotland published annually by the National Records of Scotland. I am aware of the fact that the number of young people being able to vote at the time of elections will not be exact nor will I be able to find out the exact number of 16- and 17-year-olds voting in each election and therefore the use of proxy (secondary) data will be required. This secondary data may differ from the unresearched and unavailable actual values, but unfortunately, there is currently no present statistical evidence about this matter.

In this case, unfortunately, I will be forced to work with proxy data created by myself. To do so, I am planning to take the number of young people under 18 registered to vote in each year before the elections from Electoral Statistics for Scotland and the total voter turnout for each local election in Scotland from 2014 to this day. For this purpose, I will be using this simple mathematical formula

$$Y * (T/100) = V$$

where Y represents the number of young people in the electorate, T represents the total voter turnout in the election and V represents the number of young people that voted in the election.

Since the elections in Scotland usually happen in May (except for the Scottish Independence Referendum that took place in September), I will be only able to take young people registered to vote in the year before the elections into consideration. Unfortunately, there are no monthly data about the registered number of under-18-year-olds available yet. To get the approximate turnout of young voters under 18, I will divide the registered voters under 18 from the year before by the overall turnout in the election.

To find out whether this group of voters can affect the results of elections, I will also need to find out the approximate percentage of the electorate made of 16- and 17-year-olds. This can be achieved by a simple method of cross-multiplication using the total value of the electorate for a certain year and the electorate aged 16 and 17 for the same year. For this matter, the use of a simple mathematical formula

$$(Y/E) * 100 = P$$

will be required where Y represents the number of young people present in the electorate, E represents the value of the overall electorate and P represents the percentual share of the young people in the electorate. After that, I will need to see how close the results of the election were to determine whether the percentage of the electorate in this group is high enough to hypothetically affect the results of the elections.

My last analysis will be based on comparing the voter turnout of young people before lowering the voting age and after lowering it. To achieve a result, I will need to compare youth participation in elections over the years since 2014, and between the period before and after 2014. Thus, I will compare the number of young people participating in these elections and determine, whether young voters in the electorate can hypothetically have an impact on election results.

Even though my resources are limited by the limits described above, I believe I am still able to draw some conclusions from the available data and results of previous research from the past few years and use scientists' experiences and findings on all levels of my work and contribute to the academic debate with my findings. It is also possible that my thesis will motivate scientists to dive more into researching this topic and to find out the exact data about whether the young can alter the results of elections or not and incite the responsible government organs to collect appropriate statistical data about how many young people went to cast the vote for further research purposes. This could also arouse interest in discussing this topic even outside the academic sphere and outside of Scotland.

7. Analysis

7.1. Working with available and proxy data

As mentioned in the chapter Data and methods, working with proxy data in this thesis will be necessary for my research and for finding answers to my research question, since the lack of data for my thesis is quite significant in the scientific area. However, I was still able to find data about the number of young people in the electorate for a certain year, the overall electorate, and the overall voter turnout. Therefore, summarising the data we have available, I divided them into two tables attached below for higher clarity. The first table depicts data for the Parliament elections from 2011 to 2021 and the independence referendum and the second table shows data for the Local elections from 2012 to 2022.

Table 1 Summarising available data for Parliament elections from 2011 to 2021 and the Independence referendum

Election type	Parliament elections	Independence referendum	Parliament elections	Parliament elections
Year	2011	2014	2016	2021
Overall electorate	3 985 161	3 623 344	4 098 462	4 277 996
Young people in electorate	506 222	109 593	65 995	77 809
Age of young people	18-24	16-17	16-17	16-17
Overall turnout	50,6%	84,59%	55,8%	63,5%

Sources: National Records of Scotland, The Electoral Commission

Table 2 Summarising available data for Local elections from 2012 to 2022

Election type	Local elections	Local elections	Local elections
Year	2012	2017	2022
Overall electorate	4 008 411	4 110 790	4 222 332
Young people in electorate	509 000	79 621	77 591
Age of young people	18-24	16-17	16-17
Overall turnout	39,6%	46,9%	44,8%

Sources: National Records of Scotland, The Electoral Commission

As mentioned above, these two tables summarise the available data for each election happening in Scotland from 2011 to 2022. Each table is divided by 6 known factors: election type, year of the election, the number of people in the overall electorate, the number of young people in the electorate, the age of young people, and the overall voter turnout. The number of young voters aged 16-17 for each year since 2014 can be found either in a few of the electoral reports or in the National Records of Scotland. When considering the data from the National Records of Scotland, it is important to realise that the data available is the number of people in this age group for a certain year, i.e., the year before elections in this instance.

There were also no official reports stating how many people aged 18-24 were in the electorate. Fortunately, for the year 2011, data from the 2011 Scotland Census that happened just a month and a half before the election have been collected and are available in the dataset, so the statistical error occurring in this calculation is only minor. Unfortunately, we have no exact data available for this age group in 2012. Therefore, with the slight growth of

the size of the whole electorate in these elections, it is likely that the number of people aged 18-24 in the electorate has also risen. For that reason, I have decided to work with approximately 509 thousand young people aged 18-24. I reached this approximate number by dividing the difference between the electorate in 2011 and 2012 by the approximate percentage of young people in the electorate and then adding this value to the electorate aged 18-24 from the previous year. I am aware this may cause a bigger statistical error than in the previous case, however, it is the only possible way to obtain the proxy data I need.

There are two different age groups of young people available in the tables – the group of 18-24-year-olds and the group aged 16-17. This is because voting at 16 and 17 was first allowed at the Scottish Independence referendum in 2014. To compare the approximate voter turnout shown in the number of young people before and after the passing of the law reducing the voting age to 16, I will need to work with data and proxy data from both age groups. That is also why we can see such big differences in numbers when comparing the group aged 18-24 and the group aged 16-17.

To be able to execute the comparison, we need to work with proxy data. To get these, the use of formulas mentioned in the chapter Data and methods will be required. To find out the approximate percentage of young people in the electorate, the formula $(Y/E) * 100 = P$ will be needed. To determine the approximate number of people turning out to vote, the formula $Y * (T/100) = V$ will be used. The results after the formulas can be seen in the tables below.

The big noticeable differences in *Table 3* in the percentage of young people in the electorate between the years 2011 and 2012 and the rest are caused by the fact that in the years 2011 and 2012, the group of young people examined by me in these years for comparison is aged 18-24. The representation of this group in the electorate is significantly bigger in numbers than the group aged 16-17 and the number may be the result of the number of years of age taken into consideration, i.e., in the first two cases, we are considering 7 years of age whereas in the other cases, it is only 2 years of age.

Table 3 Percentage of young people in the electorate (after using the first formula)

Age of young people	Percentage of young people	Young people in electorate	Overall electorate	Year	Election type
18-24	12,7%	506 222	3 985 161	2011	Parliament elections
18-24	12,67%	508 000	4 008 411	2012	Local elections
16-17	3,02%	109 593	3 623 344	2014	Independence referendum
16-17	1,61%	65 995	4 098 462	2016	Parliament elections
16-17	1,94%	79 621	4 110 790	2017	Local elections
16-17	1,82%	77 809	4 277 996	2021	Parliament elections
16-17	1,84%	77 591	4 222 332	2022	Local elections

Sources: National Records of Scotland, The Electoral Commission, own calculations

Table 4 Number of young people turning out to vote in each election (after using the second formula)

Age of young people	Turnout of young people	Overall turnout	Young people in electorate	Year	Election type
18-24	151 867	50,6%	506 222	2011	Parliament elections
18-24	201 564	39,6%	509 000	2012	Local elections
16-17	82 195	84,59%	109 593	2014	Independence referendum
16-17	36 825	55,8%	65 995	2016	Parliament elections
16-17	37 342	46,9%	79 621	2017	Local elections
16-17	49 409	63,5%	77 809	2021	Parliament elections
16-17	34 761	44,8%	77 591	2022	Local elections

Sources: National Records of Scotland, The Electoral Commission, available literature, own calculations

For calculating the number of young people turning out to vote, I used the overall voter turnout except for two cases. The voter turnout of young people is not known anywhere in the literature for all elections, except for the Parliament elections in 2011 and the Independence referendum in 2014. Therefore, I used the values of voter turnouts for young people for these two cases from the available literature.

According to Eichhorn, the voter turnout of young people aged 18-24 in the 2011 Parliament elections was as low as under 30% (Eichhorn 2018 : 374). Thus, for the year 2011, I have used the approximate turnout of 30% to calculate the number of young people turning out to vote. The other exception, the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, actually has turnouts for both groups of young people, 16-17 and 18-24 respectively, available. The report on a survey conducted by the Electoral Commission after the referendum compared claimed turnout among 16-17-year-olds, the newly enfranchised group of voters, and 18-24-year-olds. Whereas only 54% of 18-24-year-olds declared they voted in the referendum, the percentage was significantly higher among the 16-17 age group reaching 75% turnout (The Electoral Commission 2017). Therefore, for the group aged 16-17 in my table, I have used the approximate turnout of 75%, which is almost 10% lower than the overall turnout. Unfortunately, I am not able to find out the number of people aged 18-24 for 2014, so I am unable to compare the numbers of young people turning out to vote for both age groups in this referendum.

7.2. Comparison

In this part of the Analysis chapter, I will focus on comparing the number of young people turning out to vote before lowering the voting age and after. Using the proxy data from *Table 4* attached above, I will compare youth participation in elections over the years 2014-2022 and between the period before and the period after 2014. This way I will try to determine, whether young voters may hypothetically have an impact on election results. I will also compare youth participation in the referendum to the ones in other elections.

As can be seen, there is a significant difference between the number of young people aged 18-24 and 16-17. Young people aged 18-24 made up almost 13% of the electorate, while young people aged 16-17 only about 2% on average. When comparing the voter turnout of young people aged 16-17 from 2014 to 2022, it can be seen that the biggest share of both young people in the electorate and young people turning out to vote was in 2014 during the referendum. These may be the effect of lowering the voting age to 16 for the first time in

history as a “try-out” for this referendum which allowed all people aged 16 and 17 to vote at once, of the referendum being an unusual once-in-a-lifetime event, and also of young people have felt the need to prove to the public they were as worthy of being able to vote in Scottish elections as adults aged 18 and above.

Even though the 16- and 17-year-old newly enfranchised young people made up only around 3% of the electorate in Scotland (Eichhorn 2014 : 347), it does not necessarily mean they could not help participation reach higher numbers. Interestingly, the participation in the referendum among the 16- to 17-year-old voters, who were newly enfranchised, was much higher with a 75% turnout than the participation of their slightly older counterparts aged 18 to 24 with only 54% turnout (The Electoral Commission 2014). This suggests that even though the number of young people turning out to vote may seem quite small, approximately the size of a medium-sized town in the UK, it can still boost participation to reach higher numbers.

However, some empirical evidence about young people’s political behaviour compared to other age groups brings us results that are not so positive. A survey conducted by the Electoral Commission after the referendum in 2014 found that young people under 35 years old were the least likely of any age group in society to report having voted. In the age group 16-34 years old, 69% of respondents said they voted in the referendum. In comparison, the percentages were much higher in the older age groups – 85% of 35-54-year-olds and 92% of the 55+ age group, respectively.

Nonetheless, the report on this survey also compared claimed turnout among 16-17-year-olds, the newly enfranchised group of voters was 75%, and among those aged 18-24 only 54%. Moreover, 97% of the 75% who voted claimed they would vote again in the future and the remaining 3% did not know. This, again, may be further empirical evidence that first-time voting at a young age is habit-forming (The Electoral Commission 2017) and that young people turning out to vote may have an impact on the election results.

Proof of this suggestion can be found in Douglas Fraser’s report on a Scottish Referendum Study conducted by researchers in 2015. This study asked their respondents how they voted in the referendum and divided the results into various groups, the age group being the most significant one for my thesis. The researchers behind this study of 5000 respondents found out that young people aged 16-19 opted to vote for “No” more than for “Yes” in the ratio of 54,3% to 45,7%, respectively. In comparison, the slightly older age group of younger people aged 20-24 voted very similarly – 54,1% voted for “Yes” and 45,9% voted for “No” (Fraser 2015). These results may suggest that considering the overall result of the referendum was

very close, young people under 25 had a great influence on the results of this particular voting event.

When comparing the youth participation before and after 2014 using the percentage values of overall turnouts in elections, the turnouts of young people may mimic the overall ones. To be clear, this trend of mimicking is only plausible for the turnout reaching higher numbers each year than the year before, not being the same as the overall turnout. For example, as mentioned above, the approximate turnout of the 16-17-year-olds was almost 10% lower than the overall turnout in the referendum and the turnout of the 18-24-year-olds was 30% lower than the overall turnout. However, as we do not know the exact values of youth turnout in elections, the numbers from the referendum suggest that 16-17-year-olds may generally have a slightly higher voter turnout than their older counterparts, but also slightly lower than the overall turnout.

7.3. Effects of lowering the voting age in practice

Scientifically, we may not know the effects of the voting age reform substantiated by empirical research, however, there are results from studies that suggest the possible effects of lowering the voting age on various areas, such as education, accessing information, and political behaviour and activities. The first-ever effect of lowering the voting age to 16 for the referendum was seen close after. After the party members saw the significant voting turnout among the underage population, the Scottish Greens decided to put forward an amendment to the proposal of an official law that would allow those aged 16 and 17 to be able to vote in Scottish regional elections and another likely-to-happen Scottish independence referendum.

A lot of scientists (Kenealy et al. 2017 : 58-59; Hill et al. 2017 : 64-65; Huebner 2021 : 577) think that early enfranchisement may influence how politics is being presented in schools. Research in Scotland from 2015 showed that letting 16- and 17-year-olds vote in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum proved to have its advantages. There were major and significant percentual differences between the youth in Scotland and the youth in the rest of the UK in various areas. For example, Scottish underage young people were exposed to discussions about political issues in the classroom more (64%) than their peers in the rest of the country (56%). It is also important to note that only 33% of Scottish 16- and 17-year-olds had never taken any class related to civic education in comparison to the 50% of their counterparts from the rest of the UK. The difference is even more significant when we

compare the percentage of young people choosing a subject like this at school, that is 41% in Scotland and only 20% in the rest of the UK (Eichhorn 2018 : 377).

Possible positive effects are present in the political behaviour of the underage youth as well as in their ways of accessing information about politics. In the same survey, Eichhorn also found out that after the 16- and 17-year-olds were first allowed to express their views in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, “57% of Scottish respondents had taken part in at least one form of non-electoral political engagement”, compared to “only 40% of 16-to 17-year-olds from the rest of the UK”. What is more, this survey also proved that young people are becoming more informed about politics from various sources when they can vote than when they are not. “While 43% of respondents elsewhere named at least three different sources of information, 60% of Scottish respondents did” (Eichhorn 2018 : 374). Based on empirical results, another study supports Eichhorn’s survey by stating that “underage youth are not consistently less politically sophisticated than adult youth, and underage youth are sometimes more resourceful or as resourceful as adult youth”. This study also found that “underage youth are no less motivated to participate in various forms of political activity” (Mahéo & Bélanger 2020 : 612). Although the results from this study are from Canada, they apply to a similar case in Scotland, as could be seen in the previously mentioned survey.

Scientists’ claims about lowering the voting age are supported by further empirical evidence. The report on the 2021 Scottish Parliament election by the Electoral Commission points out that the 16-17 age group generally reported higher levels of confidence in accessing information about the election than the age group of 18-24. Results were similar when asked which group had enough information on candidates and parties to make an informed decision. Compared to only 62% of 18-24-year-olds, 75% of 16-17-year-olds stated this. Interestingly, 16-17-year-olds reported finding it easy to participate in the election than their older counterparts, in a ratio of 80% to 68%, respectively. This may be the result of a new voter registration campaign targeted at newly or more recently enfranchised voters aged under 35 called “Welcome to your vote”. During the campaign period from March to April 2021, there were a total of almost 128 thousand applicants registered to vote, including almost 7 thousand applicants aged 16 and 17 (The Electoral Commission 2021).

To prove if these suggestions of effects are correct over a longer period and to find out exactly what effects the voting age reform has, further extensive research is required. Scientists are doing their best to conduct more and more research and to find out empirical evidence for the claims mentioned above, but the lack of data continues to be a big limit.

Therefore, even my research in this thesis faces the same limitations, and the exact correct answer substantiated with empirical evidence and statistical data cannot be found. Nevertheless, just like other scientists, I can formulate suggestions based on my analysis results that should be researched more in the future.

8. Conclusion

This thesis focused on the voting behaviour of young people in Scotland. Using comparative analyses of young people's voter turnout in different elections across time, the thesis sought to answer the research question **“Does the electoral age limit affect the participation of young people in elections and their results?”**.

Just like researchers studying this phenomenon in Scotland before me, I was not able to reach a definitive answer. My findings suggest that even though the number of young people aged 16-17 in the electorate is not as significant as other age groups, these people can still make a difference by turning out to vote in elections where every single vote counts and can affect the results. From previous research (Electoral Commission in 2017; Eichhorn & Bergh 2021 : 517), we know that young people aged 16-17 are more likely to vote than the age group 18-24 and that their voting preferences, they might have influenced the results of the Scottish independence referendum in 2014.

Based on secondary literature (Zeglovits 2013 : 253; Hill et al. 2017 : 64; Kenealy et al. 2017 : 60-61; Eichhorn 2018 : 387; Huebner 2021 : 577), the electoral age limit can affect the participation of young people in elections, especially when young people meet with political debates at school and can discuss these sensitive topics with teachers and classmates. They also feel entitled to vote to make a difference and realise that election results affect their lives as citizens too. Moreover, researchers (Zeglovits 2013 : 252; Tonge et al. 2021 : 538) stipulate that early enfranchisement is habit-forming which means that young people aged 16-17 may consider voting for the first time as a significant moment in their lives and continue to vote when they are older and away from home as well.

In this case, my analysis results confirm the claims of other scientists (Zeglovits 2013 : 253; Eichhorn 2018 : 387-388) focusing on this topic and thus I can answer my research question as follows **“Yes, the electoral age limit affects the participation of young people in elections and their results, but it is yet unknown to what extent and significance.”**

Unfortunately, my research has been heavily influenced by a few limitations. There is a significant lack of data about how people in each age group voted in elections, how many people are there in the electorate from each age group, and how many people in each age group voted in each election. Thus, I was forced to work with proxy data which are not exact and statistically correct and contain statistical errors, however, they are probably rather close to what the actual would be like. It is possible that my research may push scientists and statistical authorities to start collecting exact statistical data for at least one limitation I

presented and also encourage further academic and scientific research and debate on my research question and the exact effects the electoral reform had on various areas of societies in the future not only in Scotland but also in other countries around the world where the voting age is lowered to 16 or 17.

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10. List of appendices

Table 5 Summarising available data for Parliament elections from 2011 to 2021 and the Independence referendum

Election type	Parliament elections	Independence referendum	Parliament elections	Parliament elections
Year	2011	2014	2016	2021
Overall electorate	3 985 161	3 623 344	4 098 462	4 277 996
Young people in electorate	506 222	109 593	65 995	77 809
Age of young people	18-24	16-17	16-17	16-17
Overall turnout	50,6%	84,59%	55,8%	63,5%

Sources: National Records of Scotland, The Electoral Commission

Table 6 Summarising available data for Local elections from 2012 to 2022

Election type	Local elections	Local elections	Local elections
Year	2012	2017	2022
Overall electorate	4 008 411	4 110 790	4 222 332
Young people in electorate	509 000	79 621	77 591
Age of young people	18-24	16-17	16-17
Overall turnout	39,6%	46,9%	44,8%

Sources: National Records of Scotland, The Electoral Commission

Table 7 Percentage of young people in the electorate (after using the first formula)

Age of young people	Percentage of young people	Young people in electorate	Overall electorate	Year	Election type
18-24	12,7%	506 222	3 985 161	2011	Parliament elections
18-24	12,67%	508 000	4 008 411	2012	Local elections
16-17	3,02%	109 593	3 623 344	2014	Independence referendum
16-17	1,61%	65 995	4 098 462	2016	Parliament elections
16-17	1,94%	79 621	4 110 790	2017	Local elections
16-17	1,82%	77 809	4 277 996	2021	Parliament elections
16-17	1,84%	77 591	4 222 332	2022	Local elections

Sources: National Records of Scotland, The Electoral Commission, own calculations

Table 8 Number of young people turning out to vote in each election (after using the second formula)

Age of young people	Turnout of young people	Overall turnout	Young people in electorate	Year	Election type
18-24	151 867	50,6%	506 222	2011	Parliament elections
18-24	201 564	39,6%	509 000	2012	Local elections
16-17	82 195	84,59%	109 593	2014	Independence referendum
16-17	36 825	55,8%	65 995	2016	Parliament elections
16-17	37 342	46,9%	79 621	2017	Local elections
16-17	49 409	63,5%	77 809	2021	Parliament elections
16-17	34 761	44,8%	77 591	2022	Local elections

Sources: National Records of Scotland, The Electoral Commission, available literature, own calculations