

The choice of the new generation

About the political participation of young people and their most important issues in Poland, Hungary and Italy

ANALYSIS OF THE REPUBLIKON INSTITUTE



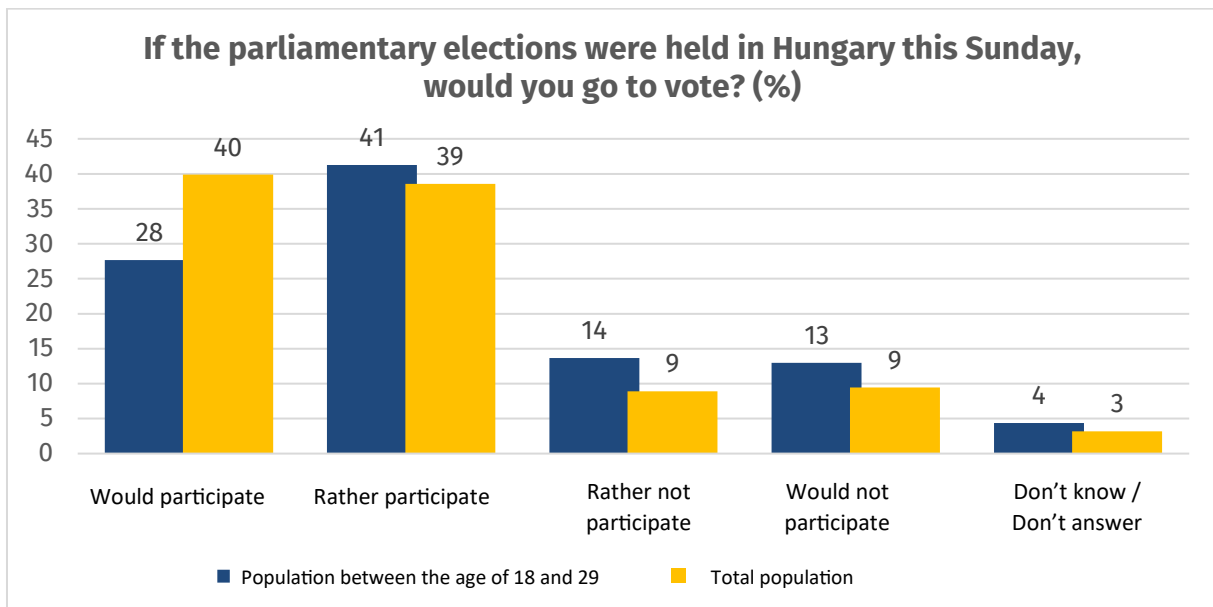
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SUMMARY

- Our analysis is based on a three-country youth research, in the framework of which the Republikon Institute, in cooperation with its Polish and Italian partners, investigated - among other things - the participation of young people in the 2024 European Parliament elections and in the election campaign, as well as in the the problems considered most significant by the young generations of three countries from the point of view of their own countries.
- The Eurobarometer survey conducted after the 2024 European Parliament elections confirms that young people participate in the elections in a smaller proportion compared to the entire population; the youngest voters produced the lowest turnout in all three countries examined.
- A comparison of the results of Polish, Hungarian and Italian research shows that there are very significant differences between the young people of each country in terms of the extent to which they participated in the election campaign. Only 12% of young Hungarians claimed to have taken an active role, while in the case of Polish young people it was 58%. Although getting to know the reasons behind this phenomenon requires more thorough investigations, a partial explanation could be that while the youngest voters in Hungary no longer have personal experiences of what it's like when an election results in a political change at the national level, Polish young people may have very recent experiences from last year. about this, and this can increase the desire for political/public participation.
 - Although there are differences in how exactly the young people of each country rank the problems they consider the most important for their country, there is a significant overlap between the issues ranked in the top five. Overall, in the first five places, problems related to democracy and the rule of law arose most often, which, on the one hand, is worrying for the future of liberal democracies, but on the other hand, it can give cause for optimism that for young voters, democracy and the rule of law are values that should be highly valued and protected.

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, we have considered it an almost unquestionable truth that young people are less interested in politics and public life, and that they participate in elections in a smaller proportion compared to the entire voting age population. This assumption was confirmed by the research carried out by the Republikon Institute in 2021, in which we asked, among other things, whether the respondents would participate in the parliamentary elections if they were held on Sunday that week. The results clearly showed that the willingness of younger people to vote is significantly lower than that of the entire population: the difference among those who, according to their own statement, would definitely have gone to vote, was 12 percentage points between the 18-29 age group and the entire population, naturally in favor of the latter. About the same number of people in the two groups said that they would rather cast their vote, that they would rather not or definitely not go to vote, but in the categories young people had a clear advantage (5 and 4 percentage points respectively).



Republikon Institute 2021

In 2024, our Institute had the opportunity to examine, among other things, the willingness of young people to participate in politics in a European and international comparison within the framework of a youth research project jointly implemented with Italian and Polish partners, and to reveal which public affairs they consider the most important in their own countries. We reported on the results and lessons of the research at our conference held on October 18, 2024, and the studies based on Hungarian, Italian and Polish research will be published in the form of a volume in an online edition in the near future.¹

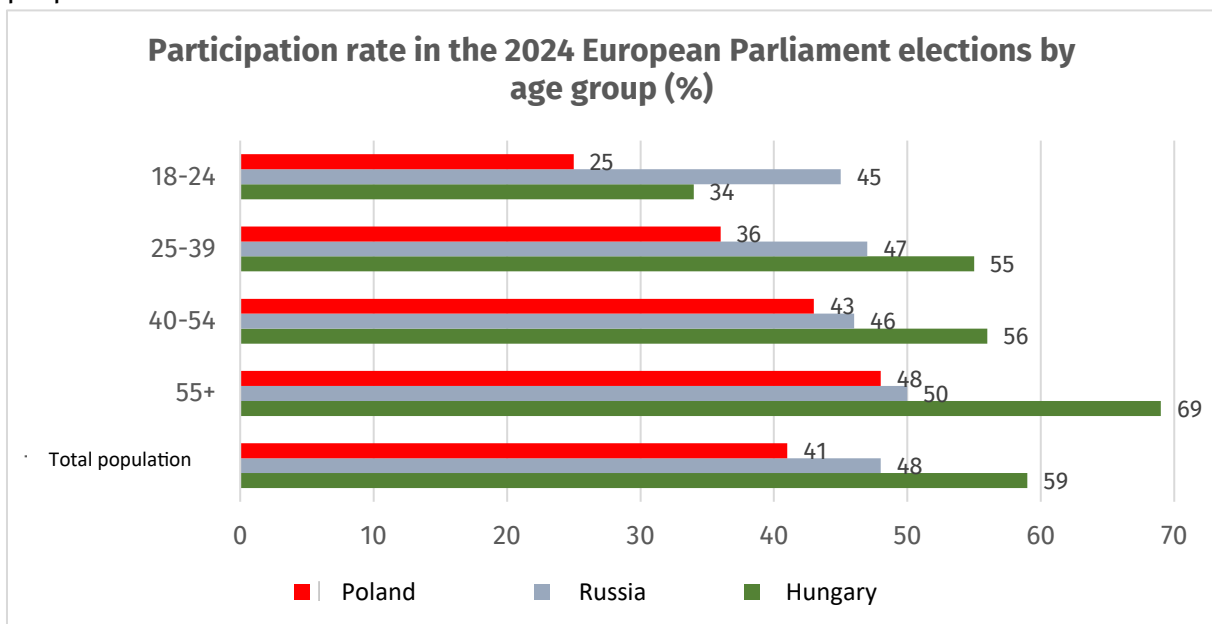
¹ The recordings of the October conference are available on the Republikon Institute's YouTube channel, and the transcript of the talks can be found on our Institute's website under the Events menu.

RESULTS

The 2021 data showing the willingness to participate in the elections cited above are theoretical, as they are not based on real participation data, but on the respondents' subjective, momentary assessment of whether they would participate in an upcoming parliamentary election. However, we already have specific data on the 2024 European Parliament elections, which were the most recent nationwide voting in Poland, Hungary, and Italy, thanks to Eurobarometer research. Parliamentary and European Parliament elections naturally move voters to different degrees: national-level voting typically results in significantly higher participation than European-level voting.

Participation rates in the most recent parliamentary and European parliamentary elections			
	POLAND	HUNGARY	ITALY
Parliamentary election ²	74,4%	69,6%	63,9%
2024 European Parliament elections	40,7%	59,5%	48,3%

However, the data from the European Parliament elections also support previous experiences with the lower willingness of young people to participate. Although to different extents, members of the 18-24 age group participated in the voting in the smallest proportion in all three examined countries.

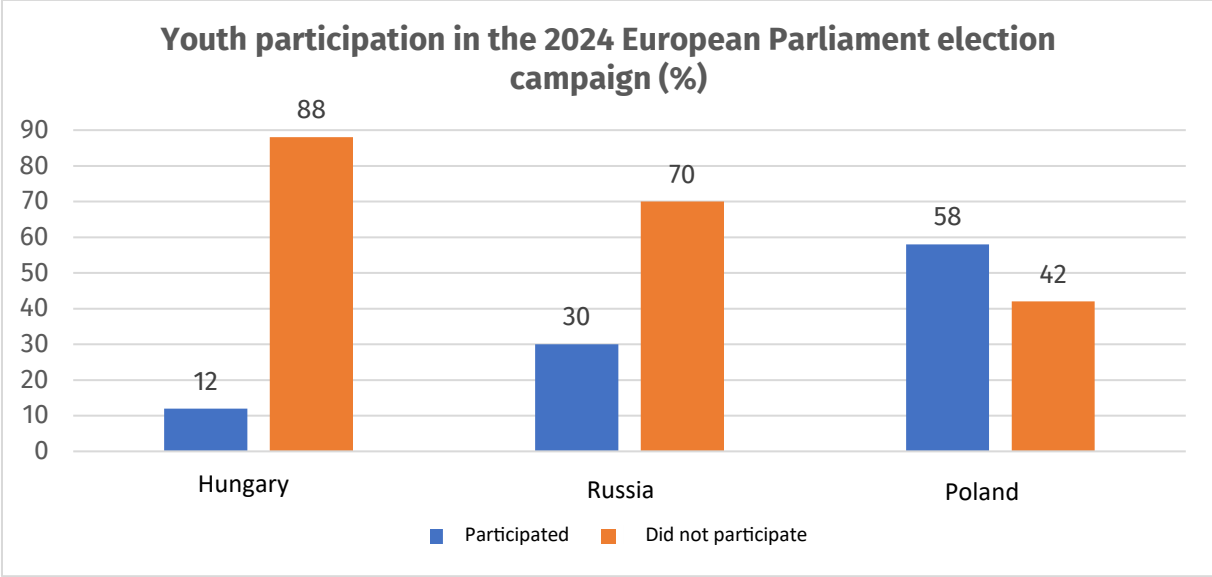


Eurobarometer 2024

Since involvement in politics and public life far from ends with participation in elections, in this year's international research we considered it important to compare the extent of the

² Examining the semi-annual data of the parliamentary elections of October 15, 2023 in the case of Poland, April 3, 2022 in the case of Hungary, and September 25, 2022 in the case of Italy

differences between the activity of young people in the three examined countries in the election campaign. Of course, a retrospective assessment of the extent to which young people were involved in the EP election campaign cannot be based on strictly objective facts, since participation in the campaign can mean different things to those interviewed, and memory can also distort reality. At the same time, the research gives a real picture of how much the respondents felt like they were part of the election campaign, and the results show very significant differences between the countries examined. In order to be able to compare the Polish, Hungarian and Italian data, we excluded from the comparison the respondents who could not or did not want to answer, and divided the answers into two categories: "participated" or "did not participate" in the campaign.



Republikon Intézet 2024

Huge differences can be observed between the campaign activity of young people from country to country, and even if the differences between the questions asked in each country during the research may lead to some inaccuracy, they can hardly explain the 18 percentage point difference between the campaign activity of Hungarian and Italian young people, but especially the Hungarian and to a difference of 46 percentage points between the participation of Polish youth in the campaign. Answering the question of what could have been behind such differences in willingness to participate requires considerable further research, since the behavior of young people is influenced by countless historical, political and cultural factors. Nevertheless, it seems to be a viable – at least partial – explanation that the different political present and recent past of the countries may have contributed to the differences.

If we only look at the two extremes: Hungary has been governed by Fidesz-KDNP governments for more than 14 years under the prime ministership of Viktor Orbán, so the young Hungarians interviewed in the research have virtually no personal memories or experiences of political leadership different from the current one. Those who are interested in politics have been able to get to know a highly fragmented domestic opposition in the last decade and a half, which has suffered defeat after defeat at the hands of the governing parties in parliamentary, local government and European Parliament elections. This can

erode trust in the democratic institutional system, parliamentary democracy, and reduce the desire for political participation. On the other hand, the youth in Poland have a very recent experience in 2023 of the successful unification of the opposition and the replacement of the Law and Justice (PiS) party after eight years. Regardless of political preference, the experience of political change and the fact that in liberal democracies different political groups have the opportunity to gain power or even lose it, can greatly shape young people's desire to shape politics.

In our research, we also looked for answers to which problems young people consider to be the most significant in their own countries. The respondents had to choose from a specific list which issues they attribute the most importance to for Poland, Hungary and Italy. The relevant results of the three researches are summarized in the table below, showing the top five problems per country, divided into five categories.

Problems considered most significant by young people from the point of view of their own countries			
	HUNGARY	ITALY	POLAND
1.	The state of democracy and the rule of law	State of the national health system	Inflation and cost of living
2.	Low quality of healthcare	Lack of job opportunities	The security of the country
3.	Living expenses (housing, food)	Reducing the human impact on the natural environment	The state of democracy and the rule of law
4.	Massive corruption	Gender equality	The status of women and the rights of minorities
5.	The bad situation of the Hungarian economy	The strength of democracy	The health care situation

Democracy/rule of law Economic matters Healthcare Security Environment

By comparing the data, we can see that although there are differences in how exactly the young people of each country rank the problems they consider to be the most important for their country, there is a significant overlap between the countries in the top five ranked issues. Problems related to democracy and the rule of law were not only among the most important in all three countries, but also the most frequent (6 out of 3x5, i.e. 15 cases can be classified in this category), followed by concerns related to the economic situation (5/15), health issues of its situation (2/15), as well as environmental protection (1/15) and security (1/15).

The fact that the young people of the examined countries are so worried about the state of democracy and the rule of law is, on the one hand, of course, a clear indication of the dangers lurking for liberal democracies (if only the rise of populist, autocratic political forces, or the ever-increasingly challenging artificial intelligence and because of its development, it is increasingly difficult to think about the spread of disinformation), but on the other hand, it can also be evaluated as a positive, as it proves that: democracy and the rule of law are values to be highly valued and protected for future generations as well.