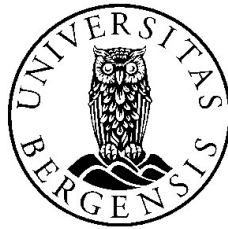


Why countries do (not) lower
the voting age:
A mixed-methods study of conditions and
processes

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Abstract

Many countries around the world have successfully lowered their voting ages to 16 at either the local, regional, and/or national level. These countries have applied differing methods for their implementation process. Some have experienced a top-down process while others have experienced a bottom-up process. In this thesis, I investigate why countries lower their voting age – and why they don't. I start with a literature review into enfranchisement reforms in general, and youth enfranchisement in particular. Based on this, I formulate expectations about the structural conditions for lower voting ages and outline possible actors and processes accompanying the adoption of voting age reforms. In the empirical part of the thesis, I first analyse the conditions most often associated with a lower minimum voting age through a time-series cross-national analysis of 141 countries between 1960 and 2022. Here, I find that majoritarian electoral systems, more elderly people in a country, a high degree of political polarisation, liberal democracy, and high degrees of regional authority correlate with lower minimum voting ages. I use these findings as a foundation to further explore the processes involved in the adaption of a voting age reform drawing on the case of Norway, where lowering the minimum voting age has been attempted, but rejected several times. Using six in-depth interviews and process tracing, I investigate the actors and negotiations in the Norwegian adaption process. I find that the Norwegian case exhibits both top-down and bottom-up tendencies throughout the process. The discourse in the Norwegian case is academic in nature, and primarily focuses on democratic participation and health on the pro-side, and normative legal arguments on the side against lowering. Critical actors in the top position of the responsible ministry were crucial for the trial elections held in Norway, by first pushing for them and later allowing the project to continue. Youth parties and organisations were crucial for both accelerating the trial election process, but also turning parties on the issue. I also find that political actors sometimes acted outside of party lines. I conclude that the Norwegian process failed implementation because of a lack of political will from political actors, and subsequently the Norwegian public.

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Abbreviations

AUF – *Arbeidernes Ungdomsfylking* (Youth Wing of *Arbeiderpartiet*)

BFD - Ministry of Children and Families (*Barne- og familiedepartementet*)

CRC - The Convention on the Rights of the Child

ISF - The Norwegian Institute for Social Research (*Institutt for samfunnsforskning*)

KDD – The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (*Kommunal- og distriktsdepartementet*, aka *Kommunal- og moderniseringsdepartementet* in 2014-2021)

LNU – The Norwegian Children and Youth Council (*Landsrådet for Norges barne- og ungdomsorganisasjoner*)

PR – Proportional Representation

RAI – Regional Authority Index

RoW – Regime of the World indicator

UH – *Unge Høyre* (Youth Wing of *Høyre*)

1. Introduction

Fukuyama once described liberal democracy as “the best possible solution to the human problem” (1992, 338). “The end of history” as he called it, proposed liberal democracy as humanity’s final form of government. However, in the timespan where liberal democracy has been one of the reigning forms of government, it has significantly altered its makeup. One of the most notable of these alterations is the continued expansion of voter suffrage to previously disenfranchised groups of voters.

Some modern liberal democracies have extended suffrage to groups such as resident foreigners, overseas nationals, women, and 16- and 17-year-olds (Piccoli 2022, 331; Turcu and Urbatsch 2015, 407; Koukal and Eichenberger 2020, 1; Eichhorn and Bergh 2021, 507). In particular, the minimum voting age has continuously been lowered at several stages during the history of liberal democracy. In fact, liberal democracy did not even begin its process of international standardisation towards a minimum voting age of 18, which is the contemporary democratic norm, until Britain became the first country to do so in 1969 (Loughran, Mycock, and Tonge 2021, 284). And many countries therefore did not lower theirs until the following decades. Aspects such as this, which we take for granted in liberal democracy today, has a foundation in relatively modern electoral reform. The composition of the electorate has consequently experienced a relatively constant evolution, while at the same time being a fundamental part of the distribution of power in liberal democracies. The voting age in turn is likely the most revised aspect of this evolution.

Depending on the country, the initial voting age lay somewhere in the mid-20s and has been lowered in increments over time. The debate over where to finally place the minimum voting age, if such a finality exists, has therefore been held at several points in time. Currently, we see an ongoing debate about lowering the minimum voting age to 16 at various levels of government. While some countries in North America, Latin America, and Europe have lowered their voting age in national, regional, and/or local elections, others have yet to initiate the process, or are still in the middle of the process (Sanhueza Petrarca 2020, 104-107; Aichholzer and Kritzinger 2020, 82; Leininger and Faas 2020, 145-147; Huebner and Eichhorn 2020, 122-124; Toots and Idnurm 2020, 169-172; Douglas 2020, 211-212). There are, however, a small minority of countries which have initiated the process but subsequently failed to implement a reform. Some of these countries include the United Kingdom, Luxembourg, and Norway

(Mycock, Loughran, and Tonge 2020, 58; Peto 2020, 60; Stortinget 2022, 4220; Bergh 2016, 11-12). This thesis will have a particular focus on Norway as a counterfactual case.

The Norwegian debate for implementation of a 16-year-old voting age started somewhere around the turn of the millennium. The proposal was suggested or considered by various state established committees and bodies in the late 1990s and 2000s, such as *Ungdommens demokratiforum*, *Valglovutvalget 2001*, *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen*, and *Gruppen for Ungdomsdemokrati* (St.meld. nr. 39 (2001-2002), 56; NOU 2001: 3, 137-138; NOU 2006: 7, 11; Kommunal- og distriktsdepartementet 2010, 2-3). The last group, composing of youth parties and organisations, suggested trial elections to be held at the municipality level. KDD evaluated the proposal, and eventually trial elections where 16- and 17-year-olds were allowed to vote in municipalities were held in 2011 and 2015 (St.meld. nr. 33 (2007-2008), 55; Bergh 2016, 12). Despite initially positive evaluations of the trial project, the ministry eventually voiced its opposition to the reform (NOU 2011: 20, 14; NOU 2020: 6, 176; M.S. Winsvold and Ødegård 2016, 20; Prop. 128 S (2016-2017), 37). The proposal was ultimately rejected by Parliament in 2022, by a vote of 87-79 (Stortinget 2022, 4220). The Norwegian process is therefore peculiar in the sense that it had multiple outcomes in the form of trial elections and evaluations which indicated steps towards implementation of reform, but in the end these steps were not enough to push the reform across the finishing line.

This thesis will first investigate the conditions under which countries have a lower voting age. In particular, the structural, compositional, and political environmental factors of countries with lower voting ages. This will be an analysis of these conditions and their relation with the voting age. I will run a time-series cross-national analysis of 141 countries from the time period 1960-2022. I will then conduct an in-depth study of the Norwegian case to understand why the process of implementation failed in Norway and may fail in other countries. The Norwegian process is particularly interesting, because it included years of debate, many committees and investigations led by the Ministry of Local and Regional Government (KDD), two trial elections held at the municipality level, and several propositions in Parliament.

In my thesis, I aim to investigate the conditions under which initiatives to lower the minimum voting age are (not) successful. The central research question is thus as follows: *Under what conditions do states lower the minimum voting age, and why does adoption fail?*

Concerning the research on voting rights for 16-year-olds, the central piece of academic literature comes from Mark Franklin. Franklin's theory states that habitual voting is formed

early in life during the first few elections one participates in, and that it therefore matters when people vote for the first time in their lives (Franklin 2004, 12). This theory thus establishes the condition that the minimum voting age needs to be set in the right place for the maximisation of voter turnout and democratic participation to be possible. Franklin argues that given the nature of the current situation we have ended up with, where we have an unideal voting age placed in the university age group, the optimal path is to lower the minimum voting age to 16 in order to reestablish it in a stable period of young adults (Franklin 2020, 14). The university age group is according to Franklin the most difficult age group to establish a voting habit in. This theory of voter turnout maximisation by lowering the minimum voting age proves especially prevalent in the debate concerning 16-year-old voting, both academic and political, and is therefore the core of many of the arguments constructed. Franklin also attempted to measure the effect of the expansion of voting rights for 16-year-olds and found that turnout would increase by some 5-6 percentage points over a twenty-year time span (Franklin 2020, 31). According to Franklin's work then, if you wish to increase voter turnout among young adults over the course of their lifetime, you need to lower the minimum voting age to 16.

Other state-of-the-art research on this topic is often concerned with political participation, and maturity of 16-year-olds, and consequently there have been many studies conducted attempting to measure the effect on voter turnout. Studies in Austria and Norway, for example, have provided empirical evidence for 16- and 17-year-olds having a higher voter turnout than young adults (Zeglovits and Aichholzer 2014, 358-359; Bergh 2016, 21-22). Studies regarding political maturity of 16-year-olds have been mixed, however, with both positive and negative finds depending on the criteria used to measure maturity (Chan and Clayton 2006, 552-553; Wagner, Johann, and Kritzing 2012, 373; Bergh 2013, 99). Since a minimum voting age of 16 is not very common, some of these studies have lacked extensive data for studying the effects this would have on political maturity. The lack of extensive empirical data is one of the primary issues pertaining to analysing the implications of a 16-year-old voting age.

An aspect studied in the literature is the way in which countries go about, or arrive at, their enfranchisement. Several models and theories purport that beneficial, threatening, and/or opportunities presented by the enfranchisement could cause the elite of a country to be encouraged to include new groups in the franchise (Acemoglu and Robinson 2000, 1168-1169; Lizzeri and Persico 2004, 755; Jack and Lagunoff 2006, 570). When the elites are primary actors such as this, it is known as a top-down approach to voter suffrage extension. The distinction of top-down and bottom-up approaches has been made in previous literature in order

to explain the difference in cases where the government and/or constitutional reform is the key player and driver of the implementation, and of cases where civil society, organisations, and lobbying is the key player and driver of implementation (Eichhorn and Bergh 2021, 509-511). This grouping is usefully adopted in the literature to separate very differing cases from one another. However, this paradigm struggles with cases that are less obvious.

For the Norwegian case, the central research places the two trial projects in the centre, as they were each followed by extensive evaluations done primarily by the Norwegian Institute for Social Research (ISF) (Bergh 2014d, 11-12; 2016). These evaluations were funded and ordered by KDD to analyse the trial elections for the benefit of documenting potential upsides and downsides of such a reform. These evaluations include research into, among other things, the background for the projects, the empirical results provided by the projects, and deeper studies into what these empirical results potentially mean, such as analysing political mobilisation, habit formation among young voters, coverage in the media, representation and performance of young people elected to the municipality councils.

Based on the state-of-the-art research results, in this thesis I theorise that some of the conditions affecting the level of states' voting age are the following: a) the electoral system, b) the percentage of elderly people in the country, c) the degree of political polarisation, d) the degree of liberal democracy, and finally e) the degree of regional authority for regions in the country.

A country with a proportional representation (PR) system is expected to be more likely to have a lower minimum voting age due to the expected impact of democratic institutional factors on the enfranchisement process combined with a higher expected turnout in PR systems. This could especially affect participation rates of young people, which are the most likely to support lowering the voting age (Koukal and Eichenberger 2020, 20-21; Milner 2020, 69; Bergh 2016, 22). Essentially, if more young people vote then more of the electorate supports the reform, potentially decreasing the voting age.

My argument for why a large elderly population might coincide with a lower minimum voting age rests on the assumption that the demographic makeup of a country will affect the output of its democratic institutions (Engerman and Sokoloff 2005, 917; Leininger and Faas 2020, 144; Toots and Idnurm 2020, 169). Essentially, lowering the minimum voting age is turned into a strategy to counter the increasing and disproportionate political power of the elderly voting bloc, and therefore is likelier to occur in societies where this disproportionality is happening. Politically polarised countries tend to produce less significant legislation than less polarised

countries, but the track record of polarisation effect on legislation lowering the minimum voting age is mixed, with regions like Scotland having large consensus and little polarisation, while German regions experience more polarisation on the issue and still have managed to lower the minimum voting age (Barber and McCarty 2015, 68-69; Huebner and Eichhorn 2020, 124; Leininger and Faas 2020, 148).

The argument pertaining to liberal democratic countries being more likely to have a lower voting age is based on research suggesting that voter enfranchisement is more likely to happen when the political elite is incentivised or benefit in some shape from it (Lizzeri and Persico 2004, 755). High degrees of regional authority being an indicator of an expected lower voting age is hypothesised based on several observations of this being the case, such as Austria and potentially Germany in the future (Leininger and Faas 2020, 146; Aichholzer and Kritzinger 2020, 82).

Norway, as a counterfactual case, does fit several of these hypotheses, as the country has a PR electoral system, a somewhat high degree of elderly people, low political polarisation, and a high degree of liberal democracy. However, it only has average amounts of regional authority.

The research design used in this thesis is a mixed-methods research design. The goal of a mixed-methods research design is to combine the methods and data of both a quantitative and qualitative analyses in order to gain a better understanding of the topic being researched (Leavy 2017, 135). This thesis draws, first, on a quantitative analysis to analyse when countries have lower minimum voting ages in a cross-national time-series perspective. Here, I use data from the V-Dem dataset, the World Bank Gender Statistics dataset, and the Regional Authority Index (Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, Lindberg, Teorell, Altman, Bernhard, Cornell, Fish, Gastaldi, Gjerløw, Glynn, God, et al. 2023; World Bank 2023; Shair-Rosenfield et al. 2021). To get a better understanding of the process for voting age reform implementation, I trace the process of the failed attempt to lower the minimum voting age in Norway. Norway thus serves as a counterfactual case. These two analyses are built upon one another, and they seek to create a holistic picture of voting age reform. This topic is also dominated by quantitative studies, which creates a lot of breathing room for qualitative analysis. Usually, these quantitative studies are focused on studying public opinion of policy, voter turnout, or political maturity in relation to the minimum voting age or of the proposed or newly introduced voter age group (Bergh 2014b, 52; M.S. Winsvold and Ødegård 2016, 20; Wagner, Johann, and Kritzinger 2012, 376-377). A qualitative analysis therefore helps inform the debate from another angle.

Subsequently, this thesis includes both quantitative and qualitative findings, and the qualitative analysis is built upon the quantitative findings. The quantitative findings test the five hypotheses summarised earlier. First, I find that countries with majoritarian electoral systems tend to have a lower minimum voting age when compared to countries with PR electoral systems. Second, I find that states with a higher proportion of elderly people use a slightly lower minimum voting age. Third, I find that countries with a higher degree of political polarisation tend to have lower minimum voting ages. Next, I find that more liberal democratic countries tend to use a lower minimum voting age. And finally, I find that a high degree of regional authority makes it more likely for a country to have a lower minimum voting age. In summary then, the predictors of a low minimum voting age country would be a majoritarian electoral system, a high proportion of elderly people, high degree of political polarisation, high degree of liberal democracy, and a high degree of regional authority. These are therefore the ideal conditions according to my analysis.

While Norway is an aging society, does score high on liberal democracy, and has an average amount of regional authority, it isn't very polarised, and employs a PR electoral system. In the qualitative analysis there are many findings of note. Interestingly, the Norwegian case is almost solely focused on democratic participation on the pro-reform side, and normative legal arguments on the other side. This means that in the ministerial work, there is a tendency for voter turnout and affiliation to be prioritised, while things like the ageing population and rights of 16-year-olds, in the natural law sense, is sidelined.

Some of my findings are related to the importance of critical actors in the process, most notable several of the occupants of the position of Minister of Local Government as head of KDD. Here, I find that the first trial election would not have happened without the direction and determination of the minister, and following this, the second trial election would not have happened without the passive permission of the minister. Intertwined with the importance of this position is also the influence of youth parties and youth organisations. I find that the decision of the minister to initiate the first trial election was contingent on *Landsrådet for Norges barne- og ungdomsorganisasjoner* (LNU), the youth parties, and their deliberation outlined in *Gruppen for ungdomsdemokrati*. Some municipalities were also influential by advocating for the project.

I also find that youth parties, although limited in scope of influence, can be very influential in convincing their mother parties to adopt a position in support of lowering the minimum voting

age. When youth parties are in such a position, youth organisations such as LNU can have an accelerating influence on the process because of their influence and access to resources. My findings indicate that this is what happened with *Arbeiderpartiet* (The Labour Party) before they turned on the issue. Youth organisations that adopt the reform as their stance can also operate independently and influencing through state apparatuses and civil society. Youth organisations, in particular LNU, also lobbied their influence at several stages of the process in order to convince different committees and bodies set up by the government to be in favour of the reform, and also played a critiquing role when the results of these bodies did not favour the reform.

An interesting observation is also how the debate evolved, and to what extent the academic work influenced the Norwegian process and debate. Habit formation theory and the work of Franklin proved to be exceptionally influential in the Norwegian debate, where it was regularly cited as empirical evidence for increased voter turnout if Norway were to lower the minimum voting age. Political parties and individual actors also played their part. Partisanship is relatively observable throughout the process, such as which parties in Parliament supported holding the first trial elections where this was mostly done among the left-right divide. Some parties tend to break with the traditional Norwegian left-right coalitional understanding, most notably *Venstre* (The Liberal Party) and *Senterpartiet* (The Centre Party), which each respectively often went against what their typical coalition partners did on this issue. There are also instances of individual actors not following their political party, with a particular focus on individual actors from *Senterpartiet* whom frequently broke party lines. This thesis contributes to the ongoing study of youth enfranchisement and voting rights for 16-year-olds. It sheds light on conditions observed in the quantitative analysis. It also expands the rather lacking qualitative field on this topic, and subsequently provides insight into the causal mechanisms of a failed reform case.

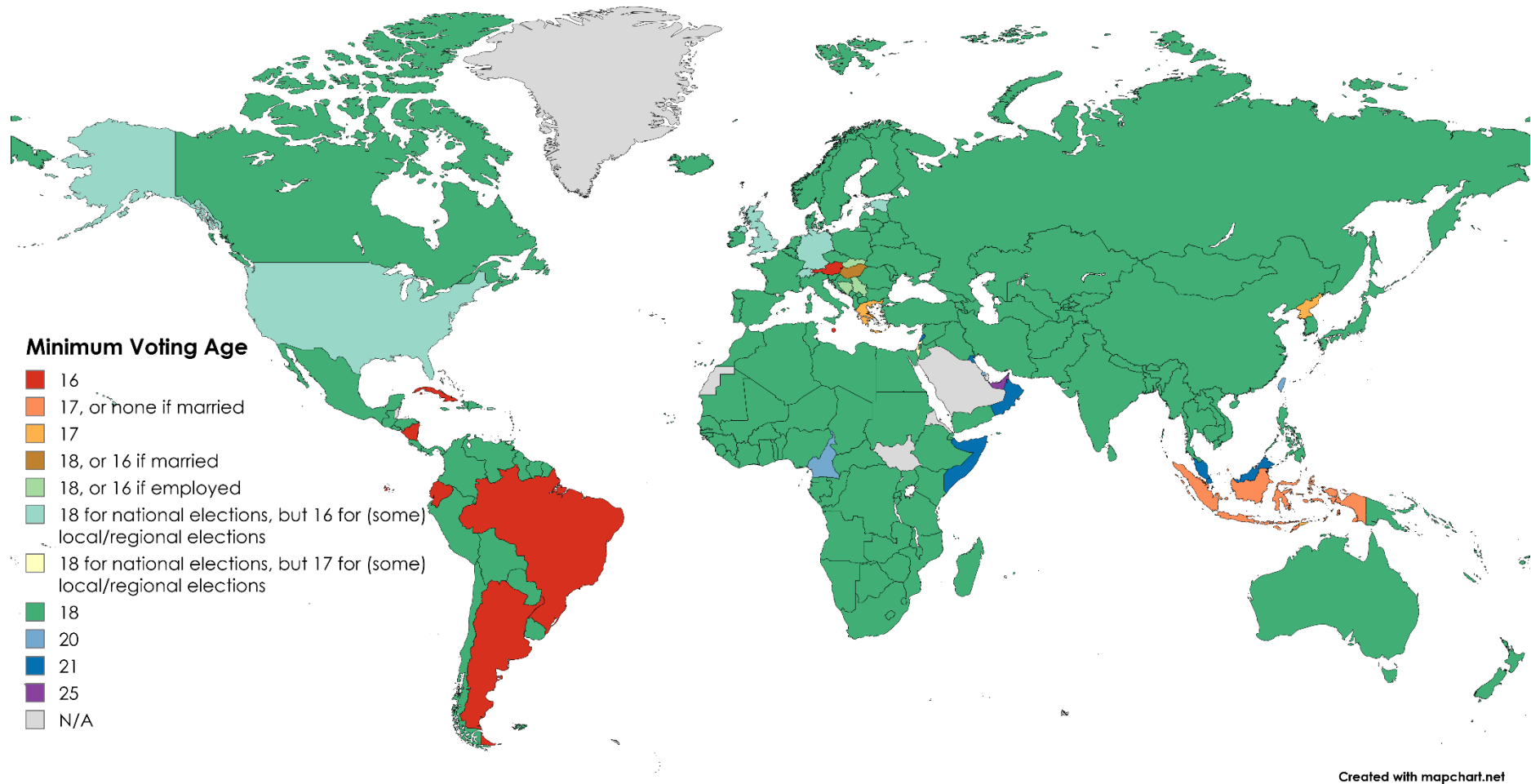
2. Background: Voting Age Worldwide

In this chapter, I will briefly visit the international voting age through the years, before presenting some examples of countries where the minimum voting age has been lowered to 16. This chapter will therefore touch upon European, North American, South American, and some Asian countries. Figure 2.1 on the next page presents the current status of the voting age internationally.

The story of youth enfranchisement has its start in the 20th century. In 1969 Britain became the first liberal democracy to lower their minimum voting age to 18 in all elections (Loughran, Mycock, and Tonge 2021, 284). At the time, the worlds democracies usually had a minimum voting age of 21, or in some rarer cases 20. This was the beginning of a reorientation from 21 as the international standard minimum voting age for democracies towards 18 being the new international standard. The British initiative was brought about in a unique landscape of motivated political actors, a majority of whom belonged to the Labour Party, as a reaction to the changing perception of adulthood during the social and cultural upheaval of the 1960s (Loughran, Mycock, and Tonge 2021, 285). Other democracies soon caught on and adopted similar reforms.

The American story is somewhat different, yet similar. Before the constitutional amendment and federal enforcement of a minimum voting age of 18, several states had adopted the policy on a state level (Douglas 2020, 215). Georgia became the first state in 1943 and was also likely the birthplace of many of the arguments and slogans of the future national debate, including the famous “old enough to fight, old enough to vote” slogan which would later be applied to the Vietnam draft too. The 26th amendment, which guarantees 18-year-olds the right to vote in state and federal elections, came about because of both state- and civil actors (Cheng 2016, 6-7). The inclusion of a passage guaranteeing 18-year-olds the right to vote when the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was up for renewal in the Senate was the catalyst which brought about the change on the national stage. However, the Supreme Court maintained that Congress only had authority to dictate federal elections, which shook the establishment into quickly ratifying a Constitutional amendment to avoid dealing with a two-tiered voting age system. Secondly, civil society in the form of protests and youth organising also played a major part. The draft for the Vietnam war and the effective arguments and slogans born out of it applied pressure to politicians, but also worked as a double-edged sword by alienating voters and weakening support in state legislatures.

Figure 2.1: The minimum voting age worldwide.



NOTE: Own graphics based on data on Minimum Voting Age by country. Sources: (NOU 2020: 6, 171; Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, Lindberg, Teorell, Altman, Bernhard, Cornell, Fish, Gastaldi, Gjerløw, Glynn, Grahn, et al. 2023, 60).

Some countries, however, have yet to – or have only recently – lowered their voting age to the “international standard” of 18. In particular, there is a group of countries in East- and Southeast Asia which has traditionally held onto voting ages of 20 or 21 well into the 21st century. This group includes Taiwan, Singapore, Japan, and South Korea. The two latter countries have only just, within the past decade, lowered their minimum voting ages to 18. Japan was the first country to do so in 2015, lowering their minimum voting age to 18 from 20 (Steele and Kano 2018, 103, 109). This reform was carried out for the purposes of boosting the country’s low voter turnout, to address the increasing political power of the growing elderly population, and to standardise Japan’s voting age with the international democratic norm. The latter being one of the cited reasons speaks to the internationalised effects of standardised enfranchisement on democracy. Likewise, in 2019 South Korea lowered the minimum voting age to 18 from 19, which was previously lowered to 19 from 20 in the early 2000s (Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, Lindberg, Teorell, Altman, Bernhard, Cornell, Fish, Gastaldi, Gjerløw, Glynn, God, et al. 2023).

It is entirely possible that Japan lowering their minimum voting age broke the dam in the East Asian democracies, as political processes are often interconnected and affect each other’s neighbouring societies (Gleditsch and Ward 2006, 930). If this is the case, one would potentially expect Taiwan and Singapore to be the next democracies in this region to consider lowering their minimum voting ages. Indeed, Taiwan held a referendum on lowering the minimum voting age to 18 in 2022, but the referendum did not pass due to a failure of reaching the thresholds outlined before the referendum, despite achieving a simple majority for (Copper 2023, 65). There is therefore a clear trend in the East Asia region, ever since the lowering of the minimum voting age to 18 for Japan, both South Korea and Taiwan have made successful and unsuccessful attempts at lowering their respective voting ages.

In the modern context, youth enfranchisement more often refers to the lowering of the minimum voting age to 16, as this is understood as the potential next suffrage reorientation of liberal democracy in the domain of age limits. A wave of such reform has struck different regions of the world in distinct ways. The Latin American wave came first, where countries like Cuba, Nicaragua, and Brazil lowered their minimum voting age at both the national and regional levels as early as the 1970s and 1980s (Sanhueza Petrarca 2020, 104-106). Interestingly, this coincided with the first international reorientation towards a voting age of 18. And while these reforms happened during the span of less than 15 years, they were very different in nature. Cuba implemented theirs through a state-led top-down effort, while Nicaragua and Brazil were more related to democratic transitions and organised youth

movements. It would take some 20 years before the next two Latin American countries, Ecuador and Argentina, would lower the minimum voting age in 2008 and 2011 respectively (Sanhueza Petrarca 2020, 106-107). These two exhibited more in common with the Cuban case, with state-led efforts being key drivers for the implementation of the reform. Latin America therefore displays two different categories for cases of lowering the minimum voting age to 16, the first relating to civil society and the second relating to state-led efforts. These will be a defining characteristics I will come back to in chapter 3.

Compared to Latin America, the European effort came delayed and coincided somewhat with the second Latin American wave. Austria as the pioneering European case, did not lower the voting age to 16 for all elections until 2007 (Aichholzer and Kritzinger 2020, 82). It also remains one of only two European countries, the other being Malta, which has implemented the reform on all levels of government including the national. The more common contemporary arrangement in Europe is the voting age being lowered at only the local, regional, and/or federal level. The prime example of this would be Germany, which has lowered the voting age at various municipal and state levels since the 1990s (Leininger and Faas 2020, 145-147). Essentially, the German approach has been that of the bottom-up process taking root at the local levels, and since Germany is a federal state, this has led to the implementation being primarily at the federal state or regional level.

In the United Kingdom too, the process seems to have been similar yet slightly differing in nature, at least in the case of Scotland where the process was tied up in the independence referendum process (Huebner and Eichhorn 2020, 122-124). The latest European country to successfully lower the voting age is Estonia, where the minimum voting age was lowered to 16 before the regional elections in 2017 (Toots and Idnurm 2020, 169-172). In both instances the state as well as civil society played major roles in the catalyst of, and during the implementation process. For example, the initiator of the Estonian process was a youth umbrella organisation sending an open letter to the political parties in Parliament, while the Scottish process saw politicians bringing the issue forth to the public debate prior to the independence referendum.

The United States being one of the catalysts for lowering voting ages to 18 historically, it has also been a country which has experimented with a voting age of 16 temporarily and is therefore an important case to note. The first city in the United States to lower the voting age to 16, Takoma Park in Maryland, did so in 2013 (Douglas 2020, 211-212). This sentiment

subsequently spread to other cities in Maryland, and beyond to other states like California. Since the United States is a federal country, there are many different regional variations which makes it hard to generalise the how and why of voting ages in the US. In some states, the prerogative of the voting age lies with the state legislature, effectively making it illegal to lower it at the local level, while in other states the state government does not intervene. Essentially, local laws are more easily passed than state-, and especially federal-, laws (Douglas 2017, 1074). Therefore, the local jurisdictions can act as trials for new policy proposals, and if the new policy is deemed to be working well, they spread through the other local jurisdictions. This draws many parallels to the German process, which is unsurprising given the federal nature of both these countries.

3. Literature Review

The literature review will cover some general tendencies of group enfranchisement using empirical findings from enfranchisement processes. It will also present the normative arguments used for and against lowering the minimum voting age, empirical impacts of enfranchisement reform relating to voting ages seen in countries which have lowered theirs, and finally a descriptive overview of the Norwegian case.

In the literature, many of the authors make a distinction between top-down and bottom-up processes (Eichhorn and Bergh 2021, 509-511). Top-down refers to processes where the initiation is coming from the top, or in other words processes in which the state, government, and/or political elite are the initiators. Bottom-up on the other hand, refers to processes initiated through means of civic society, such as youth or interest organisations, grassroots political party activity, and/or other forms of lobbying the government. When referring to these concepts, it is these definitions that I reference. Table 3.1 lists some cases of countries concluded to be either top-down, bottom-up, or mixed in its implementation process.

Table 3.1: Some countries as described in the literature.

Country	Type
Argentina	Top-down
Austria	Top-down, but applied in regions first
Brazil	Bottom-up
Cuba	Top-down
Ecuador	Top-down
Estonia*	Started as bottom-up, transitioned into top-down
Germany*	Top-down
Nicaragua	Bottom-up
Scotland*	Started as top-down, transitioned into bottom-up
The United States*	Largely bottom-up w/ some top-down elements

Notes: () indicates countries where reform has not yet happened on the national level.*

Sources: (Sanhueza Petrarca 2020, 108; Aichholzer and Kritzingler 2020, 83; Eichhorn and Bergh 2021, 509-511).

3.1. How Enfranchisement Happens

Theories encompassing group enfranchisement are plentiful in political science. The question often being asked could be boiled down to: what causes a state to extend suffrage rights? In order to answer this, different theories and models have been developed. One such model

maintains that initial enfranchisement can be understood through political reform involving the potential for revolution, and the economic inequalities present. Essentially, this model theorises that the political elite of a given country is forced to enfranchise when the threat of social unrest is present (Acemoglu and Robinson 2000, 1168-1169). Acemoglu and Robinson applied this to the European context of Britain, France, Germany, and Sweden, and found the threat of social unrest, or revolution, to be the major factor in the movement towards suffrage rights for the generally poorer segments of society. This is the historical start of many enfranchisement journeys.

It has also been argued that the elite will voluntarily enfranchise sections of the population given the right benefits (Lizzeri and Persico 2004, 755). This model builds on the proposition that varied benefits for different sections of the elite cause cleavages within the elite, where some sections will support an extension of suffrage rights. For example, a group within the elite itself might start advocating for enfranchisement as a means to benefit either the elite itself, or the political system (Lizzeri and Persico 2004, 746). Parts of the elite might desire enfranchisement then, for the efficiency of the system itself. It could also take the shape of investing in public good production, where if the returns are large enough for the majority of the elite they will favour enfranchisement, as it will increase public good provision (Lizzeri and Persico 2004, 729). Essentially, the value of public projects as a good dictate the support for reform, or increased enfranchisement. There is therefore an observable initiator for enfranchisement to be developed and expanded from within.

Jack and Lagunoff similarly accepted the premise that the elite could act as a major player in initiating enfranchisement, and in their model they attributed it to the elite's desire to alter the outcome of policy-responsive private decisions of citizens (2006, 570). In such a model, the median voter of the currently enfranchised could be incentivised to enfranchise further if predicted future private behaviour of the enfranchised is committed or aligned with the interest of the currently enfranchised. This means that if at the start of the enfranchisement process only the elite is enfranchised, they might be incentivised to enfranchise further if the policy responsiveness of the population in question is believed to align or guarantee their goals. This makes both the political elite and the disenfranchised key players in the enfranchisement process. Following the idea of enfranchisement being initiated from the top-down, a model including party competition might also be explanatory. In such a model, a country has several parties competing for political support using enfranchisement of certain parts of the population as boosts to their own support (Collier 1999, 54-55). Collier identified Norway in its early

democratisation, among several other countries, to fit this model. Essentially, enfranchisement under this model is a calculated tactical play by a political party or bloc to increase their own strength.

These differing theories often fit a specific type of enfranchisement more than the others, while there might be interplay between the theories, a given theory usually explains a main factor of a specific type of enfranchisement. If this is the case, then traditional theories of enfranchisement might, or might not, prove good fits for newer groups being enfranchised, such as 16- and 17-year-olds in the modern context. This latter model described somewhat maps onto the top-down and bottom-up approaches described earlier in the start of the chapter.

One commonality in some group enfranchisement is the constitutional and partisan context of the country, which matters for success of enfranchisement through the state apparatus. An observed factor in the rolling out of enfranchisement in Latin America related to this is that of inequalities of demographics. The composition of a country matters in that the more socioeconomically equal, and the more ethnically homogeneous a country is, the likelier it were to adopt broader suffrage and more politically equal institutions (Engerman and Sokoloff 2005, 917). Country composition therefore matters when discussing enfranchisement, as the structure of the population in terms of economic, ethnic, religious, or other groupings will have an impact on enfranchisement. Likewise, institutional factors that might lead to certain demographic outcomes will also have an impact.

Enfranchisement of foreign nationals for example, usually comes through either left-wing dominated legislatures (in the absence of partisan consensus), or as part of a broader package of reform (Piccoli 2022, 347). Likewise with the enfranchisement of youth, which also shares these essential factors during the implementation process of suffrage for 16- and 17-year-olds (Eichhorn and Bergh 2021, 517; Leininger and Faas 2020, 144-145). State actors might also extend suffrage because of international norms, or pressure. The enfranchisement of overseas nationals for example, was spread through the international community by being seen as a commitment to the democratic ideal (Turcu and Urbatsch 2015, 428-429). Essentially, the states extended enfranchisement to citizens overseas because it was seen as a tangible commitment to democracy. As mentioned in chapter 2, this might have partly been the case for the East Asia region. One might expect waves of enfranchisement to appear and spread as international norms and trends influence state actors, especially within frameworks of closely cooperating countries.

Civil society also plays its role in group enfranchisement. Well organised movements comprising of organisations, groups, or other actors can be powerful drivers of suffrage extension. Research of the enfranchisement of women in the United States has pointed towards exactly this, concluding that the enfranchisement movement, and the infrastructure for women which it established, in combination with highly competitive conditions was the catalyst for reform in the various states, and eventually on the federal level (Teele 2018, 458). The suffrage movement was therefore an essential part of the process resulting in women enfranchisement. The suffrage extension was subsequently a result of the movement, as opposed to a political process happening in parallel with the movement. Group enfranchisement can therefore happen because of a strong suffrage movement.

Nevertheless, a strong competitive political environment might be essential for suffrage movements to succeed through civil society like this, as partisan actors might not be incentivised otherwise. The electorate can therefore clearly influence state actors when it comes to group enfranchisement. However, sometimes state actors might play less pivotal roles in the implementation process. In direct democracies one would expect this to be a decision resting more in the hands of the electorate. Indeed, direct democracy has been found to hinder the enfranchisement of women in the early phases, due to individual resistance among the electorate (2020, 20-21). It seems the capability of the electorate through democratic channels might hinder enfranchisement if the electorate is reluctant to concede a degree of political power.

Extending the franchise will inevitably lead to differing outcomes too, and this might potentially influence actors during the enfranchisement process. For example, it has been found that introduction of universal male suffrage only showed significant increase in public goods provision in countries with proportional representational electoral systems (Abou-Chadi and Orłowski 2015, 66). Essentially, majoritarian systems incentivised politicians to direct towards targeted spending instead. Electoral systems are therefore relevant when it comes to enfranchisement, as they likely play a role in shaping the expectations and realities of different kinds of enfranchisement. A political party of a certain ideological or political persuasion, if they act as a strategic player, will likely place themselves differently on the topic of a specific group being enfranchised, depending on in which electoral or institutional system they are operating in given the available empirical outcome information available.

There are also countries which have repeatedly failed to implement specific group enfranchisement extensions. Norway is an example of this with youth enfranchisement, but another example would be that of Luxembourg which rejected extending suffrage to 16- and 17-year-olds in 2015 (Peto 2020, 60). Yet another example is that of Chile and its failure with emigrant enfranchisement. Finn and Ramacciotti identified stagnation and rejection, primarily based on normative, legal, and procedural arguments (2023, 12). In this example, the instigating point of the process turned out to be the left- and right-leaning parties' differing stances on who belonged to the enfranchisement proposal. Essentially, there was a difference in opinion about whether the emigrants included in the enfranchisement would need to require a territorial link to the country. In this case however, unlike in the Norwegian and Luxembourgish case, the enfranchisement extension was eventually passed. It is therefore possible for a process of group enfranchisement extension to fail repeatedly, but eventually succeed.

3.2. Normative Arguments for Lowering the Voting Age

Ødegård and Aars categorised the normative arguments used regarding proposals to lower the minimum voting age to 16 into four categories: a) democracy-building and promoting, b) psychological arguments related to maturity and capability, c) other age-related rights and obligations, and d) constitutional praxis (2011, 43). These categories were also described by *Ungdommens maktutredning* when evaluating the election trials of 2011 and the proposal of lowering minimum voting age itself (NOU 2011: 20, 68). I find the contemporary arguments to be largely divisible in the same fashion, although as mentioned in the investigation by *Ungdommens maktutredning*, these arguments often bleed into one another. For example, by relying on psychological maturity empirical evidence to ground the argument in democracy-building.

Arguments For

One of the most essential theories in youth enfranchisement was laid forth by Franklin in 2004, in which he theorised the importance of habit-formation and life circumstances in generational voter turnout trends, and how this relates to lowering the minimum voting age to 16. Franklin argues that the costs of learning how to vote at the age of 18 is higher than it was when the voting age was set at 21 (Franklin 2004, 63). Essentially, the life circumstances of a first-time voter will determine the degree to which their cohort will vote. Combined with a theory of habit-formation from early voting experiences, and we have an argument which maintains that increased voter turnout is observed when first time voters are in life circumstances which allow them to vote to a higher degree. Quite commonly then, this framework of thought is used to

justify a voting age of 16, as this age exhibit less destabilising life circumstances than life at 18 does. Franklin argues that since having the voting age at 18 has introduced this unintentional effect of a permanent lower voter turnout, we should consider lowering the voting age to 16 in order to circumvent this.

If one reads between the lines, one could perhaps construct a similar argument for raising the voting age back to 21 by the same justification in theory, and Franklin does refer to 21-year-olds having higher first time voter turnout than 18-year-olds in his work (Franklin 2020, 14). He also alludes to a general consensus of this empirical result of the lowering to 18 as being considered unfortunate, and therefore argues that having the voting age at 18 introduces the aspects of the worst of all worlds. Consequently then, it is argued 16-year-olds will vote to a higher degree as first-time voters compared to 18-year-olds. Meaning that giving 16-year-olds the right to vote will increase political engagement, satisfaction and trust in politics and institutions, and voter turnout in the short- and long-term (Franklin 2020, 13). This argument therefore belongs to the democracy-building and promoting family, as it is essentially prioritising voter turnout and political engagement.

A pro-argument belonging to the second group of arguments relating to maturity and capability takes its shape in the assumption that 16-year-olds today are more politically mature, and have undergone a more comprehensive political education than previous generations (Ødegård and Aars 2011, 47). The argument comparatively suggests that historic democracies were able to function with less educated electorates, and therefore a fright of lack of political education or maturity is misplaced. There is also the flipside of this argument, in which some argue that even though we might have portions of the population not being politically educated enough by some standards, it does not mean they lose their right to vote. Some also draw parallels to how mental impairments which might hinder political knowledge or maturity doesn't deprive someone of their right to vote, and that therefore the maturity argument is not a consistent argument. To a certain extent, this type of argument relies on comparing 16- and 17-year-old voters to preexisting voters in the electorate in order to legitimise their fundamental voting rights.

The voting age in relation to other rights, or ages at which one gets their rights, is an often-used argument. The pro-side for this type of argument will vary between countries, as the existing legal rights will vary. In the Norwegian context, it is argued that the voting age already has exceptions in its own right when it comes to who it applies to (NOU 2011: 20, 71-72). Here

the argument is that this is already a break between the age of majority and the voting age. This argument type would also point out that there are other rights that are granted independently of the voting age. In the Norwegian context this would be things such as the right to independently decide on health questions, and the obligations of taxation and possible prosecution. These are all rights or obligations that work independently of the age of majority, and that therefore the voting age should be no exception to this.

Arguments Against

On democracy-building and development, the arguments are often tied into maturity or the ability of youth to participate in democracy. The arguments framing the maintaining of contemporary voting ages as being pro-democracy do so by arguing the ability of 16-year-olds is not up to par with what is required for a functioning democracy (NOU 2011: 20, 71). The public opinion of 16- and 17-year-olds is also often cited as being in support of arguing in favour of the 18-year-old minimum voting age being the more democratic position. The ability of youth below the minimum voting age to participate in other channels of the democratic process is also an argument used to maintain that it is indeed democratic to maintain the contemporary voting age.

On the arguments against, relating to maturity and capabilities, it is argued that 16-year-olds do not possess the necessary political knowledge, interest, and stability that older voters exhibit (Ødegård and Aars 2011, 46-47). It is therefore understood by many that 16-year-olds are simply not mature enough to vote, and that a potential lowering of the voting age would hurt democratic prospects rather than help them. Although some studies have shown an increase in political maturity after implementation of the 16-year-old vote, others have shown that this is not the case (NOU 2020: 6, 174). This is sometimes cited as a reason to be cautious of the uncertainties, and therefore as an argument against the political maturity of 16-year-olds.

Perhaps the most frequent argument against lowering the minimum voting age, is the ones related to age barriers for other rights in relation to the voting age. Frequently, they maintain that lowering the voting age away from 18 would detach it from the age of majority, and therefore possibly bring other legalities currently set at 18 down to 16 as well (Silbaugh 2020, 1722). Some of the suggested legal questions would be those related to the military draft, foster care, jury duty, and parental status. Indeed, in the United States the lowering of the voting age to 18 was closely related to the draft of the Vietnam War (Silbaugh 2020, 1719). This argument is often referred to as the constitutional argument. It is concerned with the consistency between

the age of majority, and other legal age limits like the voting age, and the age of candidacy (Ødegård and Aars 2011, 48-49). Essentially, for proponents of the constitutional argument, it is important that these ages are set at the same age, and they see it as unreasonable to lower the other ages to 16 because of the implications it brings.

Indeed, the emphasis on protecting 16-year-olds with child welfare protections is consensus among child welfare advocacy groups (Silbaugh 2020, 1693). Consequentially, the fear is that the lowering of the voting age will eventually lead to the erosion of said protections, as 16-year-olds are increasingly exposed to adult consequences. It might be the case that a sort of international democratic norm has developed in the aftermath of the lowering of the voting age to 18 and the consolidation of a lot of age limits being placed at this age, and that lowering the voting age any further is seen in opposition to this democratic norm.

3.3. The Empirical Impact of Lowering the Voting Age

The empirical impact of introducing voting at sixteen has been studied previously. First, in the international context, in the countries which have lowered the minimum voting age to 16 and have data available, the change has had no negative impact on political engagement (Eichhorn and Bergh 2021, 517). Political engagement is often measured through voter turnout. Franklin found, by measuring all countries with available data and a 16-year-old minimum voting age, that voter turnout over the first twenty years after the expansion of voting rights would be increased by some 5-6 percentage points (2020, 31). While warning of a certain margin of error, Franklin maintains that this find is significant. Indeed, while there might be limitations in the data used concerning timespan covered and the extent of countries covered, there was found no negative consequence for voter turnout (Eichhorn and Bergh 2021, 514).

A closer study of the Austrian case found that the turnout of 16- and 17-year-olds was significantly higher than their 18- and 19-year-old counterparts (Zeglovits and Aichholzer 2014, 358-359). The international context then, provides the backdrop that extending voting rights to 16-year-olds not only increases voter turnout over time, but also at the beginning of first-time voters' voting careers. In the Norwegian context, this is reflected in the 2011 and 2015 trials, where it was found that although 16- and 17-year old voters have slightly lower turnout than the national average, they fare better than the other groups of young people (Bergh 2016, 21-22). This is especially the case for the 18- to 21-year-old bracket, which they beat by some 12 percentage points.

The maturity argument has also been studied. In a study of the Austrian case, Wagner, Johann, and Kritzinger found that although 16- and 17-year-olds had generally lower turnout, they showed similarities to their older peers in relation to ability and motivation to vote (2012, 373). Consequentially, if a group exhibits lower voter turnout, then it cannot necessarily be attributed to their lack of ability in making political choices that reflect their interests and represent them adequately. In a study of the Norwegian trial elections in 2011, Bergh found that 18-year-olds show a greater consistency in political maturity than 16- and 17-year-olds (2013, 99). This was achieved by measuring interest in politics, political efficacy, attitudinal constraint, and consistency between attitudes and voting between the 16- and 17-year-old age group and 18-year-old age group. In the three former categories, 18-year-olds clearly showed higher measurements, while the latter had some mixed results. The differences between the age groups are deemed to be consistent, but not substantially large. Nevertheless, Bergh concludes that lowering the voting age to 16, in the case of the Norwegian trial election of 2011, does not affect the political maturity of 16- and 17-year-olds.

A third finding studying the effects of the 16-year-old minimum voting age during the Scottish independence referendum on 16- and 17-year-olds found that the levels of interest in the referendum among 16- and 17-year-olds was on the same levels as that of adults, and that these 16- and 17-year-olds used a diverse set of information sources to feed this interest (Huebner and Eichhorn 2020, 126-127). In the aftermath of the referendum, they were also more likely to participate, engage, and be interested in politics than previously and compared with other youth from other parts of the United Kingdom.

And oft cited older study of youth in the United Kingdom found less political maturity in 16- and 17-year-olds by measuring interest in politics, non-partisanship, political knowledge, and consistency of attitudes (Chan and Clayton 2006, 552-553). It is worth noting, however, that this study was not conducted around a decrease in the minimum voting age taking place, meaning that it does not study the post-implementation picture at all. Given the different results between the Austrian, Norwegian and British case, it is still clearly too early to tell. One can point out that the Scottish and Austrian case were more comprehensive, as they were nationwide applications of the 16-year-old minimum voting age, compared to the limited trials in the Norwegian case. However, it has been noted that the results from the Austrian case might differ because of different metrics used to measure maturity, and it might suffer from a low population for the sampling (NOU 2020: 6, 174). Ideally, we would measure cases where the

minimum voting age has been 16 for some time in order to account for potential positive effects on political maturity of 16- and 17-year-olds under such a system.

An earlier content analysis of the media portrayal of the arguments around the time of the 2015 trials found some interesting results. Primarily, the arguments laid forth in the local medias were positive towards lowering the voting age (M. Winsvold 2016, 73-75). They were concerned with participation in the election as both a right and an educational process for the youth, as well as being concerned with voter turnout and local issues. Interestingly however, while the local debate was involved with the project, the national debate was found to be rather absent, largely not covering the trial at all (M. Winsvold 2016, 70). The implications of this could be intertwined with what we know about the top-down-, and bottom-up processes, and what the national debate does to the processes.

3.4. Overview of the Norwegian Case

Youth enfranchisement towards a voting age of 16 in the Norwegian case started somewhere around the end of the 20th century. KDD established *Valglovutvalget 2001* in 1997, as is regularly scheduled, in order to define the new electoral law of Norway. Alongside *Ungdommens demokratiforum*, this was the first instance of a body established by a ministry evaluating the lowering of the voting age to 16. *Valglovutvalget 2001* ended up rejecting the proposal by a considerable majority (NOU 2001: 3, 137-138). In 1998, the Ministry of Children and Families (BFD) established *Ungdommens demokratiforum*. This was a forum with an intended purpose of securing the youths increased participation and influence in the evolution of society (St.meld. nr. 39 (2001-2002), 56). The members of the forum had backgrounds from all over Norway, which included different child- and youth organisations and interest groups. The forum proposed many things, one of which was lowering the voting age as a response to the low voter turnout (St.meld. nr. 39 (2001-2002), 62). This is a theme that will persist in arguments for lowering the voting age.

In the years following, two different bodies were established by KDD to investigate a plethora of youth related issues, one of which was the lowering of the voting age. In 2006 *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen*, and in late 2007 *Gruppen for Ungdomsdemokrati*. After considering it, *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen* ended up rejecting the reform proposal, compared to *Valglovutvalget 2001* however, it was considerably closer (NOU 2006: 7, 11). *Gruppen for Ungdomsdemokrati* was composed of representatives from all the youth party wings in

Parliament, and proposed as one of its suggestions that there should be an evaluated trial for lowering the voting age (Kommunal- og distriktsdepartementet 2010, 2-3).

Before the proposals for targeting municipality elections for lowering the voting age were proposed in Parliament, a proposal for lowering the minimum voting age for the Norwegian parliamentary elections was brought up in 2004, and then debated and rejected by the Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs in 2007 (Innst. S. nr. 188 (2006-2007), 3).

In a white paper published by KDD in 2008, the evaluation of the proposals were under way (St.meld. nr. 33 (2007-2008), 55). Within the white paper evaluation was also a proposal to hold trial elections in a select few municipalities for the municipality elections in 2011, where 16- and 17-year-olds would be allowed to vote. Parliament later approved this, and the 2011 trial elections went ahead. All in all, twenty municipalities plus Longyearbyen, Svalbard was selected and held trial elections (Bergh 2014d, 11). Following the local elections in 2011, an investigative body established by BFD named *Ungdommens maktutredning* became the first such public body to have a majority for implementing the proposal at the local level (NOU 2011: 20, 14). Interestingly, a sizeable minority maintained this proposal should be valid for parliamentary elections as well as local elections. Following the 2011 trial elections, KDD decided to repeat the trials for the 2015 local elections, where 10 of the previous municipalities and 10 new municipalities would take part (Bergh 2016, 12).

Following the second trial elections in 2015, the government laid out its propositions for politics on the municipality level in *Kommunalproposisjonen 2018*. Among these propositions were the evaluations of the trial elections and the future of the minimum voting age, in which KDD voiced its opposition to the proposal on the grounds of correspondence between the minimum voting age and the age of majority (Prop. 128 S (2016-2017), 37). They also make a reference to the lack of support from the general public. In relation to proposals for amendments to the current Norwegian voting laws, *Valglovutvalget 2020* recommended lowering the minimum voting age for municipal- and county elections to 16 (NOU 2020: 6, 176). They did so on the grounds of political participation, and increased voter turnout.

The proposal has been considered by parliamentary committees several times during this period. First, in 2019 a proposal to lower the minimum voting age to 16 at both the local and national level was rejected by the Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs (Innst. 133 S (2018-2019), 4-5). Following this, in 2022 a slightly different proposal only targeting the local elections was recommended to Parliament by a majority of the Standing Committee

on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs (Innst. 412 L (2021-2022), 3-4). This was the first time the committee had approved of a proposal for lowering any of the minimum voting ages to 16. Following the ruling of the committee, the proposal was brought forward in Parliament where a majority of 87 against 79 rejected the proposed constitutional change (Stortinget 2022, 4220). This therefore means that proposals for lowering the voting age have been rejected under the Solberg Cabinet, but also the Støre Cabinet, making it cross-coalition consensus. Following this, the proposal has been examined again by both the standing committee and KDD, but both of these have halted this

Roughly a year after the vote in Parliament, the Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs evaluated the proposal again, and concluded that Parliament and the committee had already taken a stance the year previously, and that therefore there would be no point in repeating the same exercise without changes in Parliament or in the political situation of the issue (Innst. 431 L (2022-2023), 54). Subsequently, the reform was also evaluated again by the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. They too, rejected the proposal on the grounds of the recency of the attempted implementation of the reform the year before, and the fact that the current sitting Parliament is identical to what it was at that time, and therefore it is likely that little would change in the outcome (Prop. 45 L (2022-2023), 96).

4. Theory

There are mainly two questions, or themes, that this thesis will focus on. First, which country characteristics correlates with lower voting ages? And secondly, why would a country succeed or fail an implementation? More easily framed, the focus will be the conditions which are commonplace for lower voting ages, and how actors and processes affect this implementation either positively or negatively. This chapter will lay out the hypotheses of the conditions for the quantitative analysis, and then go through the theory related to the qualitative analysis of the process and actors.

4.1. Hypotheses of Conditions

The way in which the will of the people is carried out has been found to affect the way in which enfranchisement is carried out. For example, direct democracy as a democratic institutional pathway to legislation has been shown to slow down the enfranchisement process in Switzerland (Koukal and Eichenberger 2020, 20-21). The way in which policy is formed through the voting, and eventual law-making processes seem to matter for the success of enfranchisement. A practical example of an outcome related to this is how the electoral system in use will affect what effect a particular suffrage extension has on distribution of public goods (Abou-Chadi and Orłowski 2015, 58). It is expected that the policy outcomes, at least in regard to public goods, will differ between majoritarian to proportional representation (PR) systems when a new group is enfranchised.

If this is extrapolatable to any outcome and given the potential effects that enfranchised groups present in these systems, one would expect electoral systems to affect the outcome of enfranchisement in such a way, since it shapes the composition and electoral process of a legislature. One of the empirical outcomes that PR has been observed to produce is a higher turnout in elections (Milner 2020, 69). This turnout increase is concentrated in the voters with lower levels of political knowledge and generally lower levels of education, unsurprisingly young people generally find themselves in both categories. In theory then, if younger people with access to voting are generally more in favour of lowering the voting age, they would be a more important voting bloc to cater for in PR systems, as they would vote to a higher degree than in majoritarian systems.

We know from the Norwegian experiments, that although a majority of younger people below the age of 30 do not support lowering the voting age, they do have considerably higher support for lowering it (Bergh 2016, 22). However, this youth voter bloc turnout argument might be

weakened by a minimisation of their political weight. Especially, when most of the developed countries in the world face increasingly aging populations (Seo 2017, 44; Huang 2023, 30). One of the deciding factors is also to what degree the voters who would've abstained from voting in majoritarian electoral systems, support lowering the minimum voting age. Considering these potential effects on enfranchisement, my first hypothesis is:

H1: Countries using proportional representation as their electoral system have a lower minimum voting age.

The makeup of a country is essential when analysing the output of its institutions. As discussed, the findings from Latin America puts weight on the demographics of a country (Engerman and Sokoloff 2005, 917). A balanced socioeconomic structure is therefore important for the functioning of democratic institutions. A population heavily skewed towards older people, who likely hold more capital than younger people, would pose an issue. Some countries that have either attempted to, or successfully lowered the voting age, have therefore used their ageing populations as an argument for lowering the voting age. Essentially, the argument goes that as the population keeps ageing, more and more of the political power will be skewed towards the older generations as the elderly voting bloc increases in size, and that therefore lowering the voting age becomes a counter-measure in order to stabilise the effects of an ageing society on democracy (Leininger and Faas 2020, 144; Toots and Idnurm 2020, 169). The fear is that as the proportion of the younger electorate continues to decrease, the less their political goals and material needs will be a component in policy, and that therefore the distribution of resources will skew towards the elderly along with the ageing of the population. However, the proportionalities of the electorate might also affect the success rates of lowering the minimum voting age.

If the elderly voting bloc is staunchly opposed to reform, and they disproportionately control a majority of the political power through numbers, then it will be difficult to pass any such legislation. Indeed, in Norwegian opinion polls this seems to be the case, where people above the age of 50 that supported the lowering only covered roughly 10 percent of the surveyed population (Bergh 2016, 22). There are also some examples of this playing out in other policy, such as findings from a study of the advocacy for increased federal spending by age group in the United States, which found that the interests for older and younger voters increased social security spending had largely been similar up until a point of divergence in 2008 where older voters became disinterested (Hart and Atkins 2011, 214-215). While differences in social

security might lack historical foundation, the findings in other areas of federal spending told another story, as there were substantial differences between younger and older people when it came to support for increased spending in public education and college funding. Essentially then, unless the incentives change, many would view lowering the voting age as a necessity for maintaining publicly funded institutions for young people.

The question is therefore whether an increased elderly population will lead the elite to recognise this democratic malfunction and lower the voting age as a result, or that the increased elderly population will act as a democratic barrier for the reform to pass through democratic institutions. A study of the educational spending policy preferences of 16- and 17-year-olds before and after the 2011 election trials, found that compulsory school spending was not impacted positively by the increase of the younger electorate (Nyhus and Strøm 2023, 12). Albeit a timespan limited study, as the consolidation of 16- and 17-year-old voters had not yet taken place, it does demonstrate that the 16- and 17-year-old group of voters will not necessarily hold the same preferences as the slightly older group as other studies assume, which might make the elderly voting bloc more lenient towards lowering the voting age. Considering these two factors, my second hypothesis is:

H2: Countries with a higher elderly percentage and lower youth percentage have a lower minimum voting age.

What is observed in the literature about enfranchisement in general, is that in the case of many types of enfranchisement, the presence of left-wing governments are more likely to correlate with the expansion of suffrage to include disenfranchised blocs of voters (Piccoli 2022, 345; Teele 2018, 446; Kayran and Erdilmen 2021, 2873). In the cases of enfranchisement of women, foreign nationals, and non-citizens this has been found to be the case. For newer forms of enfranchisement in general, it therefore seems to be the case that they more often than not are implemented when left-wing governments are in power. As mentioned previously in chapter 2, this seemed to be true for the first case of lowering the minimum voting age to 18 in the United Kingdom where the Labour party played a disproportionate role in driving the implementation (Loughran, Mycock, and Tonge 2021, 285). Unfortunately, however, data surrounding left-right ideological positionings of governments and coalitions are sparse in their coverage, at least for covering the number of observations used in this quantitative analysis.

There is, however, other tangentially related variables which might measure some of this effect. As mentioned previously, party competition in general is thought to play a major part in

enfranchisement, as the parties compete to enfranchise parts of the population thought to strengthen the parties grip on power (Collier 1999, 54-55). In this case, it might be reasonable to assume that polarisation of political parties would lead to a higher likelihood of reform implementation, since one could expect this party competition to be based on policy cleavages around voter groups which would be assumed to be more or less likely to vote for certain parties. A polarised party environment like this might hypothetically lead to such legislation, either from the fact that competition drives implementation or the fact that more left-wing parties are more likely to implement the reform. However, a study conducted on the US Congress, which is perhaps an extreme example of political polarisation over the past half of a century, found that the least polarised congressional terms produced 16 significant enactments per term while the most polarised produced slightly more than 10 (Barber and McCarty 2015, 68-69). The study also notes that this includes the post-9/11 terms, which are notable outliers because they are polarised but produced a lot of legislation due to the circumstances.

For the American case then, polarisation seems to halt significant legislation in Congress, therefore in some instances polarisation must make landmark legislation less likely. Indeed, it could be said that in the Scottish case there was minimal polarisation on this issue, since during a lot of the enfranchisement process, the lowering of the voting age was supported by parties from both sides of the political spectrum (Huebner and Eichhorn 2020, 124). In Germany, however, most of the local reforms were passed by coalitions involving typically left-wing parties such as the SPD and the Greens (Leininger and Faas 2020, 148). In fact, one such reform in an anomalous event was reversed by a coalition of the CDU and FDP, typically centre-right parties. It is therefore difficult to tell whether differing degrees of party polarisation would stimulate or halt the reform process. More polarisation might lead to a higher likelihood of reform when left-wing parties are in power, but a higher likelihood of reversal when right-wing parties are in power. Therefore, it might be more likely for a permanent reform to be the result of a larger consensus over the middle of the isle. Based on the legislation output and cases of consensus then, my third hypothesis will be:

H3: Politically polarised countries have a lower minimum voting age.

The reasons for wanting to lower the minimum voting age, whether to 16 or to 18, has been studied to some degree. Mycock, Loughran, and Tonge found some overlapping and some unique reasons for each of these cases (2020, 59-60). The first push towards an 18-year-old minimum voting age was driven by concerns about social cohesion in the electorate. The

second push towards a 16-year-old minimum voting age is different in that the primary concern lies with political socialisation, and with some concern of the cohesion of the electorate as well. As discussed in chapter 3, some studies of historical voter enfranchisement have concluded that elites in a regime which might benefit from enfranchisement are likely to do so (Lizzeri and Persico 2004, 755). The hypothesis concerning liberal democracy is therefore centred on this.

When the political elite is opened to the incentives of electoral politics, they are obviously more swayed by public opinion. We also see countries being concerned with this issue due to democratic arguments. In the Norwegian case for example, a great deal of the arguments are related to democratic participation, turnout, and rights (St.meld. nr. 33 (2007-2008), 54-55). More liberal democratic countries might be more prone to reevaluate enfranchisement extension on the ground of arguments related to democratic health and democratic rights.

In contrast, some instances of reform towards a lower minimum voting age have happened due to constitutional upheavals or similar situations, such as in Cuba (Sanhueza Petrarca 2020, 104-105). However, even in the Cuban case the change was put to a referendum, and the government did sufficiently trial the reform. Nevertheless, especially in Latin America and when the process is remarkably top-down in approach, the country doesn't necessarily have to be very democratic. Although in the Cuban case, one could perhaps argue that the idea of this being a reform pushing towards more democracy, even if it was carried out by an undemocratic actor, is still there. In the European context, we have mostly seen the lowering of the voting age to 16 in highly democratic societies such as Austria, Estonia, Germany, Scotland, and Malta (Bergh and Eichhorn 2020, 2; Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, Lindberg, Teorell, Altman, Bernhard, Cornell, Fish, Gastaldi, Gjerløw, Glynn, God, et al. 2023). Given these current and historical examples, my fourth hypothesis will be:

H4: Liberal democracies are more likely to have a lower minimum voting age.

Some federal or devolved countries have full jurisdiction for their regions to adapt a 16-year-old minimum voting age for their regional or local elections. One such example is that of Germany, which started implementing a 16-year-old minimum voting age in some of its federal states and municipalities by the end of the 1990s (Leininger and Faas 2020, 146). An argument surrounding this is that in municipalities and regions, which are unbound from constitutional constraints, it is much easier to implement such a reform due to the lack of a need for supermajorities and other constitutional hurdles. While this minimum voting age has not been

implemented for national elections yet in Germany, it has in the neighbouring country of Austria. In the Austrian case, there were implementations of a 16-year-old minimum voting age in the federal state levels by the year 2000, and this eventually led to a national implementation by 2007 (Aichholzer and Kritzingner 2020, 82). Austria is perhaps the prime example of this happening through the means of the regions first, before being implemented at the national level.

Historically, this has been the case for some federal countries when they lowered their voting ages to 18. As mentioned in chapter 2, the United States followed such a path of implementation in states before implementation at the federal level occurred (Douglas 2020, 215). There is therefore historical precedent for federal countries to lower their voting ages like this. Of course, it is not uncommon either for countries to implement reform nationwide through constitutional amendment or replacement, which is the more common story in the Latin American countries (Sanhueza Petrarca 2020, 110). The argument is therefore not that such a pathway is uncommon or not achievable, but rather that the regional approach might be an easier path for a regionalised, devolved, or federal country wishing to lower their voting age. Because of this extra avenue in federal and devolved countries then, I argue this gives reform actors more options and therefore a higher likelihood of success. My fifth hypothesis is therefore:

H5: Countries with strong regional governments are more likely to have a lower minimum voting age.

4.2. Exploration of Processes and Actors

The exploration of processes and actors involved in the Norwegian process will effectively build on the analysis of the conditions expected to have tendencies for a lower minimum voting age. Some countries have the conditions in place but have yet to lower their voting ages. Norway is potentially one of these countries, but it has yet to lower its voting age to 16. Instead, it has repeatedly tried and failed to lower the minimum voting age to 16 over the course of over two decades.

Some of the literature makes a distinction between the countries which have so far implemented the sixteen-year-old vote using two subcategories based on the process used by a given country to lower the voting age, the two processes are referred to as top-down and bottom-up processes (Eichhorn and Bergh 2021, 509-511). Essentially, in a country with a top-down process the government is likely a key player and driver of the implementation, and in some cases the voter extension is part of a broader constitutional change. In a bottom-up process, civil society

through the use of youth organisations or other forms of organisation or lobbying plays a leading role in inducing the change.

However, there are examples of countries which have undergone similar top-down or bottom-up youth enfranchisement processes, where the reform did not take place. The presence of either an active state player or an active civil society is therefore clearly not enough to lower the minimum voting age in at least some cases. The question also arises as to what to do about cases which have undergone a process of both active state players and an active civil society. Are these cases both bottom-up and top-down? Or perhaps, we should consider the catalyst of the process as the decider for how one should categorise such a case, making the first action matter in determination.

According to the model of dynamic enfranchisement developed by Jack and Lagunoff, which is meant to explain how the extension of suffrage rights in the most general sense happens, any future voter franchise is effectively a result of the explicit decisions of the contemporary franchise (2006, 570). Effectively, any enfranchisement extension is shown to be the result of the contemporary franchise's median voter preference, and these voters are driven by hoping to change how the current electorate forms its policy wishes. The electorate, and perhaps more generally civil society, is therefore essential for suffrage extension according to the dynamic enfranchisement model. Organisation of civil society in support of suffrage extension must subsequently be essential for passing reform. The enfranchisement of women in the United States is an example of exactly this, where places in which the national suffrage organisations effectively mobilised constituencies and managed resources mattered significantly to where organising for women suffrage caught on (McCammon 2001, 470-471). Actors operating within civil society before, or during, the enfranchisement process are clearly important to the outcome of the process then.

Identifying which process, and what actors were essential in the Norwegian case might be key in understanding why the initiative was not successful. A report on the 2011 election trial concludes that the case of Norway should be categorised as having experienced a bottom-up process, albeit with state-led efforts later in the process being essential (Ødegård and Saglie 2014b, 144-145). If Norway is in fact a bottom-up case, then that makes the study of non-state actors, such as interest groups, youth parties, and the media, even more important and relevant in understanding why the implementation inevitably failed. Indeed, the youth organisations of *Landsrådet for Norges barne- og ungdomsorganisasjoner* (LNU) and the youth parties were

heavily involved in initiating the 2011 trials in the first place, as they were part of a group set up by the Minister of Local Government with the purpose of increasing voter turnout (Kommunal- og distriktsdepartementet 2010, 1-3; Ødegård and Saglie 2014b, 132-133). This seems to be the story in the Norwegian case, where bottom-up initiatives are present but accepted and welcomed by state actors, and therefore further incorporated into a top-down process later on in the process.

A key variable in any democratic change is the public opinion on the issue, at least if one intends for it to be a lasting change. After the trial elections of 2011 and 2015 in Norway, during the trial elections, *Skolevalgundersøleksen* conducted a survey of public opinion among 16- and 17-year-olds on the issue. Combined with the data from NSD, the Norwegian Centre for Research Data, for the general population above 18, the survey data results showed a supermajority of over 80 percent against implementing the change after both trials (Bergh 2016, 21-22). Indeed, even the younger groups which hadn't been included in the trials failed to reach a majority, but nevertheless there was a clear negative relationship between support for lowering the voting age and age. Only the 16-year-olds in the municipalities where the trials were held managed to achieve a slim majority, at 51 percent support.

Public opinion, or the lack of, might play an inducing role in the implementation process, and since this wasn't present in Norway after the trial elections it might be the case that democratic will for implementation was lacking. This is also a strange find considering the classification of Norway as a bottom-up case, one would perhaps expect a firm base of support among the electorate if the trial election process, and subsequent reform attempts, were driven by civil society. Given that the support from the general adult population stands at 19 percent, even after both the trial election experiments, investigation into how this portion of the population which was likely even smaller before the trial elections managed to convince Parliament to have a majority in favour of the first trial election could be paramount for understanding the outcome. In doing so the expectation is likely that youth organisations such as LNU and the youth parties were involved in the process and played active roles, as some sort of strategic consolidation of the reform supporters must have been necessary. With a rather small base of support, we can expect a concentrated effort through these organisations to have played larger roles in bottom-up processes, meaning that civil society did not play an entirely passive role in the attempted implementation process.

5. Methodology

For the methodology of the thesis, I will first explain the research design used, which is a mixed-methods design. Thereafter the chapter is split into two parts, the first part covering the quantitative analysis of the conditions surrounding lower minimum voting ages, and the second part covering the qualitative analysis of the processes and actors in the Norwegian case. Both parts are meant to present and explain the data and methods of their respective analyses, and how these two analyses are weaved into one research design.

5.1. Research Design: Mixed Methods

This thesis will employ a research design often referred to as a mixed-methods research design. This method is based on the pragmatic paradigm, which states that different research contexts will require different tools (Leavy 2017, 31). Measuring conditions at the generalised cross-national level, and processes at the single-case level is a good example of two of these differing conditions. Essentially, this means that some research contexts or questions will require specific analytical tools to study. Mixed-methods research designs are therefore both quantitative and qualitative in nature, and thus employ both methods (Leavy 2017, 135). This study will subsequently include both a quantitative and a qualitative part.

In this thesis, a quantitative approach is more suited to answer hypotheses about conditions surrounding the country level in order to understand what conditions tend to be present in countries with a lower minimum voting age. A qualitative approach on the other hand, is more suited to analysing causal mechanisms and case-particular events at the single country, or case-study, level. Mixed-methods research usually involves some form of deductive- and inductive design combination for producing both quantitative and qualitative data, and to further integrate the data produced. Essentially, in this study the quantitative data produced will be used to further inform the qualitative analysis, and therefore data produced.

Many of the studies focusing on youth enfranchisement, and in particular the lowering of the minimum voting age to 16, are quantitative in nature. These studies focus on the arguments, or opinions, and the empirical reality of the affected voter bloc. Examples of this includes public opinion of policy, voter turnout-based studies, and the political maturity of youth (Bergh 2014b, 52; M.S. Winsvold and Ødegård 2016, 20; Wagner, Johann, and Kritzing 2012, 376-377). And while qualitative methods have been applied to other studies of enfranchisement, such as emigrant enfranchisement, enfranchisement of women, and historically the movement towards

universal suffrage rights, it has not been applied to a rejected case of lowering the minimum voting age as far as I am aware. There is therefore a gap in the literature.

5.2. The Conditions: Multivariate Regression

First, I will conduct a cross-national regression using the V-Dem and V-Party datasets, as well as World Bank data, in order to test the hypotheses concerning macro-level factors associated with voting age. This analysis will be focused on all forms of lowering the minimum voting age, regardless of which age is the current minimum voting age and which is being changed to. The variables used in this regression are the dependent variable of minimum voting age, and the independent variables of electoral system, percent of elderly population, percent of young population, political polarisation measurements, the liberal democracy index, and aggregated regional authority of countries. The results of the analysis can thereafter be used to tell something about the conditions which countries with a lower minimum voting age tend to have, or the conditions which one with a higher one tend to have. One weakness with this approach is the inability to draw causal inferences from the results. Nevertheless, I believe it to be an appropriate methodological tool for identifying key differences through the comparative perspective, while still making room for the case study.

Data

My analysis covers 141 countries over the span of roughly fifty years. The dataset covers countries as far back as the late 1960s and early 1970s, but depending on the country they may enter the dataset at later points in time, the latest not entering until the 2010s. Most countries, however, are covered for 3-5 decades in the 1965-2022 period. This is due to a plethora of things, but in general some of these countries either did not gain independence until, were not considered democratic by, or did not exist before the time at which they enter the dataset.

While extending the analysis to include as many countries as possible might be good for a more complete macro-analysis, there is a limit to the usefulness of extension. In this case, I am looking at suffrage extension of the electorate and including various electoral or democracy related variables like measures of liberal democracy, electoral systems, and government positions. Thus, it makes little sense to include countries which do not hold elections, are not democracies in the broadest sense, and/or do not have multiple parties competing for power. However, limiting the countries involved too much could skew the results by either making them insignificant, or making the only applicable to highly democratic countries.

In order to determine which countries I would include, I used the *Regimes of the World* (RoW) indicator, which is built using V-Dem data (Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, Lindberg, Teorell, Altman, Bernhard, Cornell, Fish, Gastaldi, Gjerløw, Glynn, Grahn, et al. 2023, 287-288). The RoW indicator uses V-Dem data to sort countries into four different categories of regime types: “closed autocracy”, “electoral autocracy”, “electoral democracy”, and “liberal democracy”. Here, I have decided to exclude countries in the “closed autocracy” category, as this category is the only category in which the legislature and executive are not subject to direct or indirect multiparty elections (Lührmann, Tanenberg, and Lindberg 2018, 63-64). The minimum requirement for being included in this analysis is therefore being categorised as at least an “electoral autocracy” by RoW, which effectively means that the minimum requirement is multiparty elections being held for the legislature and the executive.

The V-Dem dataset has various variables which will be used in this analysis, of which is the dependent variable (Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, Lindberg, Teorell, Altman, Bernhard, Cornell, Fish, Gastaldi, Gjerløw, Glynn, God, et al. 2023). The V-Dem variable *v2elage* measures the minimum voting age citizens have to be of a given country, on a national level (Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, Lindberg, Teorell, Altman, Bernhard, Cornell, Fish, Gastaldi, Gjerløw, Glynn, Grahn, et al. 2023, 60). Essentially, the variable will be numeric, and will be equivalent to the minimum voting age. As we’re operating with time-series data, this variable is also recorded over time, meaning that it captures potential changes in the voting age for all countries recorded.

As can be seen in Table 5.1, the distribution of the datapoints for minimum voting age is very clustered around 18, as both the twenty-fifth and seventy-fifth percentiles are both 18. The lowest recorded age is 16, the highest is 23, and the mean is 18.47. In order to deal with the lopsided distribution of the dependent variable, I use heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors, which is discussed further in the following method part of this chapter. The dependent variable, along with the following independent variables described are all found in the summaries of Table 5.1 and Table 5.2, with the exception of two variables which are exclusive to their datasets.

Table 5.1: Summary of variables for Dataset 1

Interval Variables						
Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	25%	75%	Max
Minimum Voting Age	18.47	1.172951	16	18	18	23
Percentage of Youth	9.121	2.012999	4.071	7.531	10.703	14.028
Percentage of Elderly	7.8193	5.410812	0.8456	3.3813	12.1749	29.9246
Political Polarisation	-0.299	1.353331	-3.874	-1.322	0.697	3.640
Liberal Democracy	0.461	0.2604119	0.0180	0.228	0.731	0.898
Categorical Variables (percent and number of obs.)						
Electoral System	Majoritarian		Proportional		Mixed	Other
Percent	37.6%		46%		14.7%	1.8%
N	2250		2756		878	106
Regime Type	Electoral Autocracy		Electoral Democracy		Liberal Democracy	
Percent	39%		32.3%		28.8%	
N	2335		1932		1723	

N = 5990. Note: Dataset 1 uses data from V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date], and World Bank Gender Statistics

In order to answer the first hypothesis, I included the *v2elpar1el* variable from the V-Dem dataset. This variable sorts the electoral system used by the lower chamber (or in the case of unicameral systems, their legislature) into four categories: “majoritarian”, “proportional”, “mixed”, or “other” (Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, Lindberg, Teorell, Altman, Bernhard, Cornell, Fish, Gastaldi, Gjerløw, Glynn, Grahn, et al. 2023, 84). Of note here is that the latter category includes electoral systems like STV, and limited voting. Mixed-majoritarian systems were also coded as majoritarian. There are many reasons as to which I chose to solely focus on the lower chambers’ electoral system, but primarily it is because in the international context the power symmetry favours the lower chambers as opposed to the upper chambers (Bradbury and Crain 2001, 322-323). The constitutional layout of countries therefore generally favours the lower chambers, but there is an observable difference still between bicameral and unicameral legislatures across countries. Nevertheless, the fact that not all countries have upper chambers, and that lower chambers are empirically the dominant chamber, I have chosen to focus on the electoral system of the lower chambers.

For answering the second hypothesis, I originally wanted age group data at the national electoral level, that is the number of voters belonging to each age group on each election.

Unfortunately, to my knowledge no such data exists. There is, however, age group data with wide availability in the World Bank Gender Statistics dataset (World Bank 2023). Here, I decided to include one variable for the elderly and one variable for the group seeking enfranchisement, the people between 15-19 years of age. Notably, this group includes both the first batch of youth enfranchisement, the ones who earned their voting rights when the voting age was lowered to 18, but also the newest enfranchisement seekers of 16- and 17-year-olds. This variable is created by combining the data for male and female groups and using the total population data to calculate a corresponding percentage. This variable therefore mirrors the already existing percentage variable measuring the elderly population, which includes all above the age of 65.

The third hypothesis theorises that political polarisation in a democracy will lead to a lessened likelihood of youth enfranchisement. In the V-Dem dataset, the variable *v2cacamps* measures the political polarisation among the civic space, by quantifying the degree of hostility in interaction between political camps (Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, Lindberg, Teorell, Altman, Bernhard, Cornell, Fish, Gastaldi, Gjerløw, Glynn, Grahn, et al. 2023, 226). It is based on five options, which are formulated in relation to political interaction. The first option is “Not at all” and states the manner of political interacting is generally friendly. The second option is “Mainly not” which states interaction is more likely to be friendly. The third option is “Somewhat” which states interactions are equally hostile as they are friendly. The fourth option is “Yes, to noticeable extent” which states interaction is more likely to be hostile. And finally, the last option is “Yes, to a large extent” which states that interaction is generally hostile. After this the ordinal data is converted to an interval scale by the measurement model, which results in countries having a value ranging from negative to positive values on an interval scale. This is done by first going from indicators to sub-components using relevant theoretical distinctions, and then is aggregated using Bayesian factor analyses (Coppedge, Gerring, Knutsen, Lindberg, Teorell, Marquardt, et al. 2023, 7). The indicators are outputs from a Bayesian measurement model that has aggregated expert coding. Since it is part of the V-Dem dataset, the coverage is virtually as wide as the other variables from this dataset.

To answer the fourth hypothesis, I have included the *v2x_libdem* variable from the V-Dem dataset. The Liberal Democracy index attempts to measure the ideal of liberal democracy. In order to do this, it uses a plethora of measurements, including individual and minority rights against tyranny of the state, and of the majority, the degree to which civil liberties, an independent judiciary, the rule of law, and effective checks and balances limit the executive

power of the government, and lastly the level of electoral democracy present (Bradbury and Crain 2001, 45). All of this combined creates an index value which places a given country, at a given point in time, on a scale of 0-1. This is therefore, in my opinion, an apt measurement of the degree to which a country is both democratic and liberal democratic. It also has virtually every observation I need it for covered, which makes it a very adaptable and an unconstricting variable to use. This variable is only found in Dataset 1, as seen in Table 5.1, because of its overlap with the regional authority variable.

In the Regional Authority Index the variable n_RAI estimates authority in ten dimensions, of which five are self-rule related, meaning authority exercised in its own territory, and the other five are shared-rule related, meaning authority exercised as a cooperative between regional and national institutions (Shair-Rosenfield et al. 2021, 82-83). This will be the variable for answering my final hypothesis. The dimensions used include institutional depth, policy scope, fiscal autonomy, borrowing autonomy, representation, law making, executive control, fiscal control, borrowing control, and constitutional reform. The final score of RAI is the sum of these ten-dimensional variables.

The index includes values for region by region, but also an aggregated value for countries as units of analysis. It is the latter that I will be using in this analysis, because the units of analysis are countries and applying regional values to this would not work. The Regional Authority Index is particularly suited for the need of this analysis because it clearly distinguishes between federal countries where regions have a very high degree of authority or autonomy, and countries with regions which are existent and have elected governments or councils, but which fail to have the required authority for exercising independent policy. This variable is only included in Dataset 2, as seen in Table 5.2, because of a lack of coverage.

Table 5.2: Summary of variables for Dataset 2

Interval Variables						
Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	25%	75%	Max
Minimum Voting Age	18.53	1.247344	16	18	18	23
Percentage of Youth	8.638	1.988356	4.282	7.026	10.367	13.098
Percentage of Elderly	9.494	5.306577	0.850	4.288	13.930	28.902
Political Polarisation	-0.5902	1.384264	-3.8740	-1.7160	0.5380	3.213
Regional Authority	9.682	9.645982	0	1	14.712	37.722
Categorical Variables (percent and number of obs.)						
Electoral System	Majoritarian		Proportional		Mixed	Other
Percent	27.5%		59.5%		12%	1.1%
N	930		2012		406	36
Regime Type	Electoral Autocracy		Electoral Democracy		Liberal Democracy	
Percent	23.2%		33.8%		43%	
N	785		1145		1454	

N = 3384. Note: Dataset 2 uses data from *V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date]*, *World Bank Gender Statistics*, and *Regional Authority Index (RAI-Country)*

Method

Given that the dependent variable in this analysis is a continuous variable, and therefore has a zero point and an equal difference between measurements, it is well suited for many models. Many of the independent variables too, with the exception of the ordinal variable for electoral systems, are either at the interval or ratio level. The assumption of linearity is therefore not out of the ordinary. However, the variables do have an uneven distribution towards the 18-year-old voting age, as during the period in which the dataset covers, this is unequivocally the international standard for voting ages. This means that a majority of the observed instances have this value, which might lead to problems of heteroscedasticity. Cases of heteroscedasticity for regression model fits are models in which some cases are better fit for the model than others (Kellstedt and Whitten 2018, 208-209). Essentially, if the minimum voting age variable is not normally distributed, there will be an unequal fit between points of data, and therefore some points will be more in line with the model than others. This would likely be the case for my model with an uneven distribution, which means many points of data could fall in between the more perfectly fitted points of data for each value of the dependent variable. It is therefore

viable to go for a model with heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors, since these will help correct the variance.

The essential macro difference between fixed-effects and random-effects models boils down to the differences between the groups in the analysis (Bell and Jones 2015, 149). In fixed-effects models the differences between the groups are accounted for by essentially making comparisons within the individuals, and then cutting out the average effect of this, leaving only the universal effect of the variables being measured (Allison 2005, 3). With this, the model is essentially measuring the differences in independent variables among the population by not including them. In my case, this is ideal as the dependent variable is possibly highly dependent on the group in which the unit is placed in. More specifically, the differences between different countries, and different years are potentially explained by varying systematic, institutional, or otherwise counter- or year-related stable factors. Therefore, when measuring the effects on the minimum voting age, these stable factors should be accounted for.

Random-effects on the other hand, models this difference, leading to a more comprehensive model but potentially a misleading one. Random-effects are potentially more preferable in the instance of a combination of longitudinal data and the goal of studying effects that are not related to the higher-level units (Bell and Jones 2015, 139). Indeed, random-effects better represents the time-invariant variables of a model, or in other words variables that rarely change over time, because these are not excluded from the model. This might lead to such effects being entirely unnoticeable in a fixed-effects model, but it also means that the focus of a fixed-effects model will be more oriented towards when a variable does indeed change, which is the purpose of this analysis. Fixed-effects are therefore preferable when we seek to eliminate the effects of outside noise, in order to only look at the effects of the included variables at the macro level.

Given the points related to heteroscedasticity and cross-unit variation, I will run a fixed-effects linear regression with heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors. This is done to reduce problems related to non-standard distribution of the dependent variable, as well as to deal with the static country-effects and year-effects likely present in such an analysis. There will be two separate analyses because of dataset limitations, where both will include both country- and year fixed-effects, but will have different compositions for their datasets meaning slight differences in independent variables included and number of observations.

Software used

The fixed-effects linear regression with robust standard errors is executed using R Studio version 4.2.1, using the “lm_robust” function from the *estimatr* package. This is used for Table 6.1. This function provides the fitting for linear models with heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors required. For Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3, I used the “lm” function because of incompatibility between “lm_robust” and “ggpredict” from the *ggeffects* package. However, I still include both robust standard errors and fixed-effects in this model.

5.3. The Processes and Actors: Process Tracing

The purpose of a mixed-methods research designs is to bring quantitative and qualitative analyses and results together in some way, in order to gain a better understanding of a research topic (Leavy 2017, 141). In what way this is achieved however, is up to the individual study, the goals of the researcher, and the contextual factors at play for the topic. The design used in this thesis is an explanatory sequential design, which begins with the quantitative method and is followed up by the qualitative method which is used to explain the quantitative findings. It is also used to cover ground, which is perhaps not explained by the quantitative results, indeed the quantitative results explain much of the conditions expected for increasing likelihood in lowering the minimum voting age, but little of the conditions necessary for the maintenance of a minimum voting age. In some respects, the qualitative results shed light on this and therefore help paint a fuller picture of voting age reform.

The Case Study

When developing a case study the primary aspects of consideration are usually the study of multiple perspectives inherent in the case itself, given that we’re only exploring a single case (Lewis and Nicholls 2014, 66-67). The study of these perspectives can build up a detailed, complex understanding of the subject of study. This part will be a case study of Norway, as it is an example of a country that has rejected extension of voter suffrage, on a continent with a trend tending towards the opposite. In this sense, it is a counterfactual case in terms of successful youth enfranchisement. A case study will therefore help understand the motives, discourses, and critical junctures in the process of (not) adopting a lowered voting age. The actors, their motives, and surrounding contextual factors will be the units of analysis, as they are part of the process which lead to the original trial of the extended voter suffrage, the following public debates and public scrutiny, and the eventual failure of the bill. I will construct a timeline of the Norwegian case.

The case of Norway seemingly exhibits the characteristics reminiscent of many other European cases that have successfully lowered their minimum voting age to 16 at some level of government. It is therefore a case which, at the surface, one would expect to have succeeded in the process once it was started. Because Norway has been unsuccessful in this attempt, it makes Norway eligible as a counter-factual case. Counter-factual cases are cases in which a hypothetical of the absence of something in a case is used to study whether an outcome would have occurred with said absence, or it is a case chosen specifically because it is similar to an actual case with an outcome but where the absence of something has potentially made the outcome not happen (Fearon 1990, 171). The latter is the bounds by which Norway is chosen as the case for this analysis.

Process Tracing & Causal Mechanisms

The quantitative analysis will be part of a larger overarching process tracing methodology. Process tracing is a methodological tool used to analyse evidence taken from processes, sequences, and the state of events identified in a case (Bennett and Checkel 2014, 7-8). It is primarily used for testing and developing hypotheses based on probable causal mechanisms of within the case. There are both deductive and inductive reasonings within process tracing, where deductive theory testing studies the real outcomes of hypothesised causal mechanisms, while inductive theory development uses outcomes and evidence from within the case to build theory about the hypothesised causal mechanisms. I plan to use process tracing as the theoretical framework for the case study of Norway which I will be conducting. Essentially, the timeline created from the Norwegian case will be used to extrapolate theoretical implications by using process tracing.

In constructing a timeline, I must identify the starting and ending points. The starting point will be the first deliberation of implementation in a report from an interest group, commission, or otherwise state-related body. The end point will be the most recent step towards implementation as of 2024. Within this period the two trials of 2011 and 2015, along with several reports, the recommendations of the Control- and Constitutional committee, and the several parliamentary attempts at passing reform will be major highlights.

Data

For the qualitative analysis, I have chosen to use interviews as a form of gathering and generating data. Considering the intent of the qualitative study, that is tracing the processes in order to answer questions about the failure of the Norwegian reform process, both the usage of

archival, official, or legal documents as well as in-depth interview as a method for data generation is suitable. Indeed, process tracing generally includes both archival documents and interview transcripts as data for analysing the causal process (Bennett and Checkel 2014, 6). Since this analysis is concerned with analysing the actors and processes which led to the reform not taking place, it is important to gain an understanding which covers both the official documentation, but also the informal aspects of the social world. In this way, the datatypes complement each other by covering each other's blind spots.

The archival, legal, and official documents produced by the process will be used as one of the data types in the qualitative analysis. The documents will include white papers (*Storgingsmeldinger*), draft resolutions and bills (*Stortingsproposisjoner*), parliamentary recommendations (*Stortingsinnstillinger*), parliamentary Hansards (*Stortingsreferat*), Official Norwegian Reports (*Norges offentlige utredninger*, often referred to as an NOU), parliamentary consultations (*Stortingshøring*), and differing governmental or ministerial reports. These last three forms of documents in particular are usually the result of the work of a committee.

Content analysis investigates and analyses documents in text format, for the purpose of understanding the purpose, or meaning, that circulate in documents (Leavy 2017, 121). In this, the text itself as well as the context of the text and the document are considered in the analysis. Further, the documents are broken down into chunks of data, and these are used to construct themes in the documents that give insights and develop concepts (Leavy 2017, 122). The point behind using content analysis in this analysis is the focus on process. Given that the research question is concerned with a process taking place in part within the Norwegian state, documents as a form of documentation of the process has been used by the state actors throughout the entire process, and therefore contain much vital information about what processes were taking place, were finished, or were being planned at the time, as well as what different actors at different points in the process were considering and acting upon.

The documents will therefore be related to the actors identified as having been pivotal in the introductory stage, various trial stages, continued public debate, and eventual failure of the reform. As this is a public process, and the Norwegian government keeps records of the democratic processes, the availability of said documents is not a problem. Newspaper articles could also have been used, but the quantity of articles about the national debate in the media for the election trials have been observed to be rather lacking (M. Winsvold 2016, 70). However, local counterparts did cover it to some extent.

In this analysis, generative data from the social world fills in the holes that government documents leave behind, in that explaining and understanding actors' actions and perceptions are not things documented in white papers and parliamentary transcripts. In-depth interviews are ideal for exploring the social world in the sense of gathering knowledge about, and understanding the opinions or points of view of the interviewee in relation to, a subject or situation that is relevant (Yeo et al. 2014, 178-179). While conversation-like in appearance, in-depth interviews follow a topic guide constructed by the researcher, and the conversation is therefore directed by both the guide, interviewer, and interviewee. In-depth interviews are by nature generative, meaning that they generate new knowledge, thoughts, or ideas (Yeo et al. 2014, 184-185). While dependent on the researcher's capabilities, ideally the interviews will generate substantive data from the collaboration of the guide, interviewer, and interviewees efforts. These interviews will be conducted with relevant actors or "parts" of actors (for example, a single member of a larger committee or organisation). These actors will be interest groups, committee members, or party representatives. As this form of data is extrapolated and generated from people, their availability is dependent on scheduling interviews and identifying potential actors of interest.

The interviews will be semi-structured in approach. Semi-structured interviews are interviews which follow a topic guide that asks open-ended questions, encouraging the participant to answer the questions using their own framing rather than framings predetermined by the questions being asked (Leavy 2017, 117). In a study where relatively little is known about the causal mechanisms, such open-ended questions will help minimise biases introduced by the researcher and encourage the generated data to be as free-flowing as possible. For the purposes of my interviews, the topic guide is prepared but adapted to both complement the flow of the interview, but also in a personalised way where some topics are dependent on which involvement in the process the participant had.

Many of the interviews were conducted digitally, rather than in person. There are both positive and negative aspects of conducting interviews digitally over conducting them in person. The primary criticism of digital interviews in the social studies, is the impact on the ability of the researcher to be able to determine visual cues from the informant (Thunberg and Arnell 2022, 765). On the other side, there are also those who argue that digital interviews are preferable to in-person interviews, because they create less of a formal setting and therefore prompting informants to disclose their experiences more easily. As for the difference in qualitative data

produced, there seems to be no little to no difference between digital and in-person interviews. The only caveat being the quality, stability, and reliability of the technology being used.

Ethical Considerations

As the only data type being directly derived from human beings, the in-depth interviews will be the research conducted that requires the most ethical considerations. These ethical considerations, often arising as an answer to an ethical problem, are dynamic and situational depending on the research being conducted (Webster, Lewis, and Brown 2014, 82-83). Before conducting any of the interviews, I applied for permission from SIKT. This is a part of the transparency process, and SIKT ensures that any sensitive data is handled in the correct way. Before I performed an interview, I ensured informed consent from the informant in order to ensure that they are willingly and freely participating in the research.

During this process I was also careful in never having assumptions or being ignorant to social situations that might hinder the consensual aspect. The informants are identifiable in my research and have been informed about this in the consent form presented before the interview took place. The necessity of having informants being identifiable is because of their place in the process being relevant to the questions asked. It is also relevant for their answers, as in the analysis I can relate their answers to the position they occupied and therefore generate more substantive findings. It would be very difficult to make them anonymous, and doing so might also make it a lot more difficult to include them in the research framework. I also document the decisions made during the process as accurately as possible, to ensure transparency.

6. Results

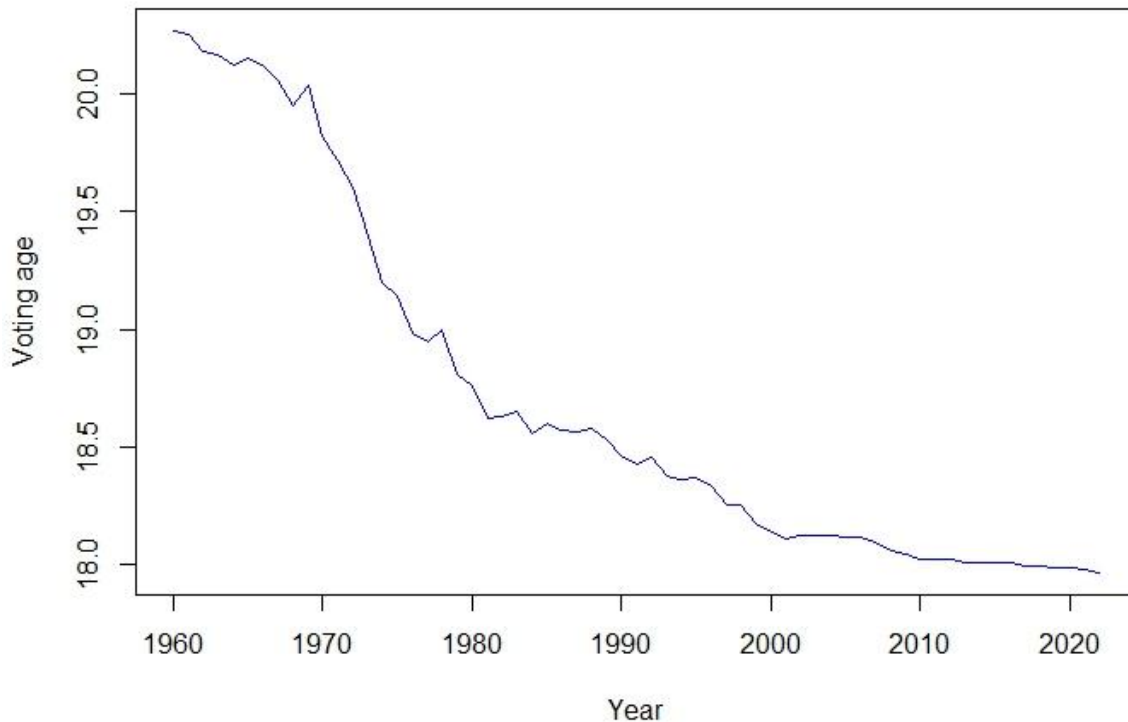
This chapter will present the results from both the analyses. First, it starts with the quantitative results of the conditions, compares Norway to the results. Next, the qualitative results of the processes and actors are presented through the use of a timeline of the process.

6.1. The Conditions: Quantitative Results

Figure 6.1 displays the average minimum voting age across all countries include in Dataset 1 by year. Here we can see the downwards trend in the voting age across time. Interestingly, the largest and most rapid decline happened from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, and the average has been on a slow decline ever since then. One of the reasons the sharpness of the decline is steeper during this period is the fact that it marks the shift from a minimum voting age of 21 being the international standard, to 18 being so instead. Compared to the latter period which marks a shift from 18 to 16, which has yet to be widely adopted as the international standard and thus has not experienced a large shift.

There are arguably four identifiable periods shown. First, the pre-1970 period shows some minor decline and is probably characterised by decolonisation. The second period marks the main transition in the international standard, kickstarted in 1969-1970 by the United Kingdom and the United States as mentioned in chapter 2 and then followed by most countries during the span of the 1970s and early 1980s. The third period marks the leftover minority of countries, which did not lower their voting age during this decade, slowly following suit from the mid-1980s to the 2000s. The fourth period, starting in the late 2000s, is characterised by countries starting to lower their voting ages in Europe and Latin America as well as some outliers mentioned in chapter 2, such as Japan and South Korea, which held onto their voting ages above 18 until this period. Interestingly, this means that the average did not go below 18 until 2017, when it passed the threshold for the first time, and this is therefore an indicator of the latter period, and potentially the start of a reorientation similar to the earlier reorientation towards a voting age of 18, albeit in its very early stages.

Figure 6.1: Mean minimum voting age 1960-2022.



N = 5990. Note: Country-year observations

The models in Table 6.1 use the largest dataset I created, with an N of 5990. This dataset only relies on the V-Dem, and World Bank datasets, meaning essentially little constraints by variables lacking in observations. The World Bank data is more extensive than the V-Dem observations post-1945, so including the two population related variables in this dataset did not affect the number of observations notably. The models run both country- and year-fixed effects, as both country- and timespan effects were a concern in measuring the effect of the independent variables of interest. For example, both the minimum voting age, and the World Bank age group percentages have a clear trend over time at the aggregate level. The voting age and percentage of younger people have both lowered over time, while the elderly group has increased over time.

Table 6.1: Testing effect of independent variables on minimum voting age.

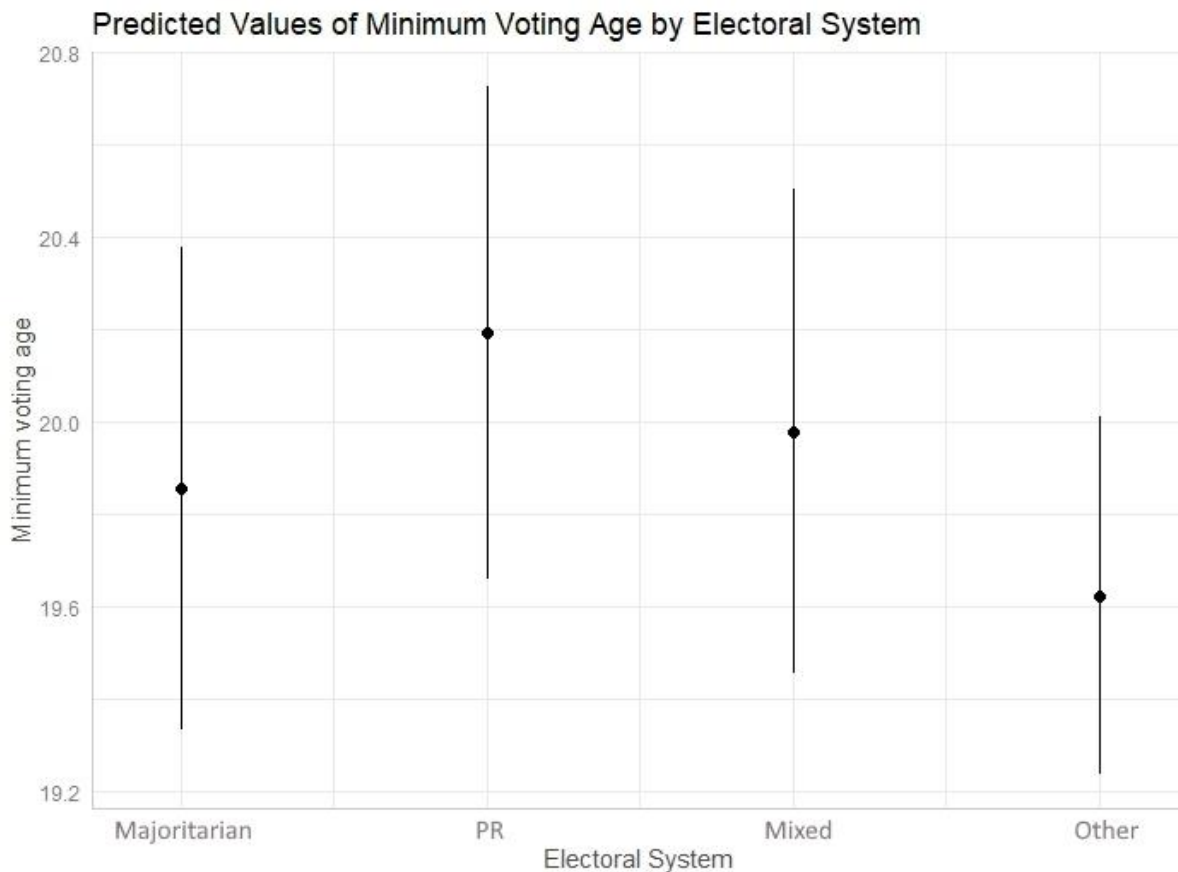
Independent var.	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
PR el. sys.	0.359*** (0.057)			0.336*** (0.057)		0.522*** (0.081)
Mixed el. sys.	0.155** (0.047)			0.123* (0.047)		0.031 (0.073)
Other el. sys.	-0.037 (0.191)			-0.232 (0.219)		-0.827*** (0.212)
Percent of Youth		-0.003 (0.012)		0.001 (0.012)		-0.027 (0.018)
Percent of Elderly		-0.024** (0.008)		-0.031*** (0.009)		0.011 (0.012)
Political Polarisation			-0.102*** (0.018)	-0.097*** (0.018)		-0.150*** (0.023)
Liberal Democracy			-0.699*** (0.131)	-0.779*** (0.131)		
Regional Authority					-0.043*** (0.006)	-0.044*** (0.006)
R ²	0.675	0.673	0.675	0.679	0.709	0.724
Adj. R ²	0.664	0.662	0.664	0.668	0.696	0.711
N	5990	5990	5990	5990	3384	3384

*Significance Codes: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Note: Cross-national OLS models with robust standard errors in parentheses. All models are run with country fixed effects and year fixed effects. Dependent variable: Minimum Voting Age.*

The first hypothesis questions the impact of electoral systems on minimum voting age. Model 1 includes the categorical variable of electoral system used. For this variable, the majoritarian group was used as the reference point for the other values of the categorical variable. The variable for proportional representation (PR) and mixed systems were statistically significant, but the third category categorising other electoral systems was not. The PR systems group had a coefficient of 0.359 in the model, while the mixed systems group had 0.155. Model 4, which includes all the other independent variables, shows similar coefficients with 0.336 and 0.123 respectively. This tells us that both electoral system groups are more positively correlated with the minimum voting age on average than Majoritarian electoral systems. PR electoral systems being even more so than mixed electoral systems. This would mean that countries with a PR electoral system have a higher minimum voting age compared to those with majoritarian

electoral systems. In effect then, countries with majoritarian electoral systems tend to have lower minimum voting ages. Figure 6.2 shows the predicted values of the minimum voting age by electoral system. Here, we can see the predicted value of a majoritarian electoral system is something like 0.4 lower than its PR counterpart.

Figure 6.2: Predicted values of minimum voting age by electoral system.



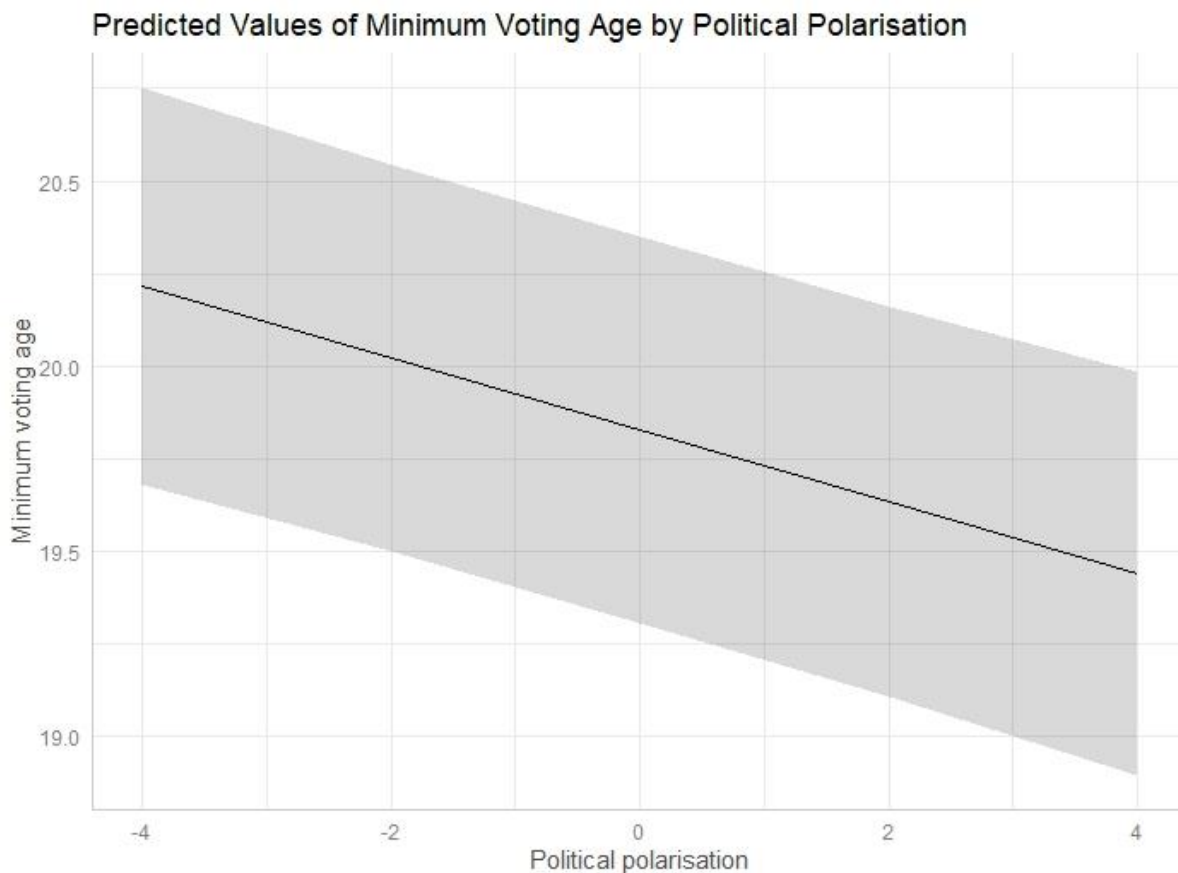
Note: Figure made using Cross-national OLS model based on Model 4 from Table 6.1. Model includes robust standard errors, country fixed effects, and year fixed effects.

The second hypothesis considers the composition of elderly and young populations and their impact on the minimum voting age. Model 2 includes the variables measuring the proportion of young and elderly people in the population. The percentage of youth variable was not statistically significant. However, the percentage of elderly variable was statistically significant at the one percent level in this model, where it is ever so slightly negatively correlated with minimum voting age, with a coefficient of -0.024. In model 4, this becomes significant at the 0.1 percent level, and outputs a coefficient of -0.031. Considering the variable counts the percentage of elderly people in numbers equalling the percentage points, it would mean an expected decrease in minimum voting age of 0.031 for every percentage point of elderly people.

In more realistic terms this would mean that we would expect a swing of roughly 33 percent in the elderly population for every single year the minimum voting age decreases. This is roughly the difference in the smallest and biggest observation in the dataset. It is therefore a measurable effect, and gives support to the hypothesis, considering the disparity in proportion of elderly people among countries.

The third hypothesis suggested that politically unpolarised countries will have more success in lowering the minimum voting age. Model 3 includes the democracy related variables, those being the liberal democracy index and the variable measuring degree of political polarisation. Political polarisation has a coefficient of -0.102, meaning that a higher minimum voting age is more common in less polarised countries. Model 4 again is in line with the previous model, with a coefficient of -0.097. This would mean that more politically polarised countries would be expected to have a lower minimum voting age than their less polarised counterparts. For each year the minimum voting age decreases, the political polarisation would be expected to increase by something like 0.73. Given that the range of political polarisation in the dataset is 7.514 from the least to the most polarised country, this is a substantial amount. These findings were also statistically significant at the 0.1 percent level. The expectation formulated in the third hypothesis is therefore not supported. Figure 6.3 displays the predicted value of minimum voting age by political polarisation. The predicted value goes down from roughly 20.2 to 19.4 over the course of the polarisation scale.

Figure 6.3: Predicted values of minimum voting age by political polarisation.



Note: Figure made using Cross-national OLS model based on Model 4 from Table 6.1. Model includes robust standard errors, country fixed effects, and year fixed effects.

The fourth hypothesis predicts that liberal democracies, or countries scoring highly on the liberal democracy index, have a higher likelihood of having a lower minimum voting age. In model 3 the liberal democracy variable is significantly negatively correlated with minimum voting age, with a coefficient of -0.699. Model 4 has a slightly different coefficient of -0.779, but tells a very similar story. Essentially, this means that the higher a country scores on this index, the lower their minimum voting age is expected to be. Meaning that the more liberal democratic a country is, the lower their minimum voting age will be. It is therefore expected that a country's minimum voting age decreases by the coefficient value when the liberal democracy index goes from 0 to 1, which is the entire range of the index scale. In other words, the perfect liberal democracy, according to the index, would be expected to have a minimum voting age 0.779 lower than the least liberal democratic country on average. Clearly, more liberal democratic countries can be expected to have a lower minimum voting age thus supporting the fourth hypothesis.

The fifth and final hypothesis considers whether the degree of regional authority and autonomy has an impact on minimum voting ages. Models 5 and 6 are both based on a modified version of the original dataset, where the Regional Authority Index has been incorporated. This was done by including the country aggregate RAI variable that the index provides into the dataset, and then removing all the observations in the dataset in which the Regional Authority Index lacks an observation for. This means a significant decrease in the number of observations, with an N of 3384. The models still display similar levels of fitness for the dataset as the previous models. Model 5 includes only the variable measuring regional authority on the country level. The coefficient for the RAI variable is -0.042 in this model, meaning a slight negative correlation. This means that countries with higher regional authority in their regions can be expected to have a slightly lower minimum voting age. Countries with high regional authority are therefore expected to have a lower minimum voting age.

Model 6 runs the same analysis, but this time with all the variables included in Model 4 as well, with the exception of the liberal democracy variable. The RAI coefficient in this model is -0.043, which is nearly identical to the coefficient in model 5. Most of the other coefficients are similarly almost identical when compared to Models 4 or 5. The most significant outlier is the “others” electoral system variable, which becomes significant on the 0.1 percent level, and surprisingly has a negative coefficient of -0.851, which means compared to majoritarian electoral systems it is expected has a lower minimum voting age. Other changes include the loss of statistical significance for the mixed electoral system variable, and the percent of elderly people variable. The liberal democracy variable is not included in this model due to the skewed nature of Dataset 2, which includes mostly democratic countries which score very highly on the liberal democracy index, meaning the indicator experiences a loss in its estimation and therefore loses its usefulness.

In conclusion of the quantitative analysis, I find support for some of the hypotheses. Firstly, the results of the analysis which is related to the first hypothesis about electoral systems finds reverse results as to what the hypothesis was claiming. The hypothesis theorised that PR electoral systems would likely exhibit lower minimum voting ages, but this is not what the quantitative evidence shows. It shows that majoritarian electoral systems are expected to have a lower minimum voting age than both PR and mixed electoral systems, and mixed systems fall in between PR and majoritarian systems. The second hypothesis expects the percentage of elderly people to affect minimum voting age. The models ran in this analysis does support this

notion, finding that a larger elderly population is expected to mean a lower minimum voting age. This hypothesis is therefore confirmed.

The third hypothesis hypothesised that countries with a low degree of political polarisation are expected to have a lower minimum voting age. The empirical results here, much like the first hypothesis, shows the opposite relationship between the dependent and independent variable as to what was expected. The conclusion for this hypothesis is therefore that a country with lower political polarisation is expected to have a higher minimum voting age than one with high political polarisation. The fourth hypothesis concerns the liberal democracy index. It hypothesises that liberal democracies are more open, free, and competitive, and that therefore the prospect of lowering the minimum voting age is more likely. This hypothesis finds strong evidence in the empirical data, and therefore I find support for this hypothesis.

The final hypothesis includes the Regional Authority Index, and here we find a slight negative relationship between the dependent and independent variable. The difference in the expected mean of the minimum voting age between a country with the lowest score in the dataset and a country with the highest is roughly 1.6 then, which is quite a significant amount. It can therefore be concluded that based on this, one would expect high regional authority to equate a low minimum voting age, and the hypothesis is therefore confirmed.

Comparisons of Norway as a Case

According to my hypotheses and the empirical results then, the typical case for a country with a lower minimum voting age would be this: a country with a majoritarian electoral system, high portion of elderly people, high degree of political polarisation, a high degree of liberal democracy, and a high degree of regional authority. This would be the typical representative case, which focuses on these stable relationships between the dependant and independent variables (Seawright and Gerring 2008, 299). The opposite of this, known as a deviant case, would be cases which exhibit the opposite of the values of the typical case (Gerring 2008, 655). The deviant case in this case would have a PR electoral system, low portion of elderly people, a low degree of political polarisation, of liberal democracy, and of regional authority. Given the quantitative results and the support for my hypotheses in this subchapter, the case of Norway shares both typical and deviant independent variables, therefore making it ineligible for being classified as either a typical or a deviant case. As mentioned in chapter 5, Norway could be described as a counter-factual case because of its similarity with other successful cases and subsequent failure at implementation of a 16-year-old minimum voting age.

Norway as a case, compared to the optimal conditions presented by the quantitative analysis, has a PR electoral system, somewhat high portion of elderly people, low political polarisation, a very high degree of liberal democracy, and an average amount of regional authority. In Table 6.2, we can see the mean and recent Norwegian values for the independent variables compared with the dataset means and low/high observations. For the percent of elderly people, the mean of all countries in the dataset is 7.82 percent, while the lowest and highest observations are 0.85 percent and 29.9 percent respectively. Norway comes in with a mean of 14.83 percent across the entire period, and a most recent value of 18.44 percent. This is obviously in the upper end of the spectrum, but not extremely so, especially when considering the average. Norway also has a low degree of political polarisation compared to the mean and lowest observed value, which is something that would predict an expected higher minimum voting age. This polarisation is also currently less than the mean according to the most recently measured value, which would only strengthen an expected higher minimum voting age currently.

Table 6.2: Norwegian measurements compared with values from Dataset 1 and 2.

Variable	Norway mean	Norway recent	Mean (All)	Low. obs.	High. obs.
Percent of Elderly	14.83%	18.44%	7.82%	0.85%	29.9%
Political Polarisation	-2.2	-2.76	-0.30	-3.87	3.64
Liberal Democracy	0.84	0.86	0.46	0.02	0.90
Regional Authority	10.13	12.1*	9.68	0	37.72

Note: Values are rounded to two decimal places for convenience. The data for Norway covers 1960-2022, except Regional Authority which only covers until 2018.

A PR electoral system and less political polarisation therefore seems to be the deviant factors in Norway when compared with the typical case. Exploring these factors could therefore be essential in understanding how the Norwegian case has failed to lower the minimum voting age. The theory of voter turnout increase affecting youth disproportionately by increasing their turnout mentioned in chapter 4 might have turned out to have limited effects on political results, given both the lacking amount of support among even young people for a voting age of 16, and increasingly elderly population of Norway as seen in Table 6.2 (Bergh 2016, 22). The adult population below 30, which would be the main contributors of such a turnout increase, only has 26 percent of their voter bloc supporting the proposed reform.

More political polarisation being a predictor of a lower minimum voting age is quite a strange notion in the context of arguments mentioned in chapter 4 relating to legislation output and historical cases (Barber and McCarty 2015, 68-69; Huebner and Eichhorn 2020, 124). However,

there are several historical examples of voting age reform being pushed by one party or coalition, such as the United Kingdom in the 1960s and Germany more recently (Loughran, Mycock, and Tonge 2021, 285; Leininger and Faas 2020, 148). The question then remains why these cases are expected to have lower minimum voting ages than their less polarised counterparts.

In a study of the Norwegian case, Sørensen found that political polarisation only negatively affects democratic efficiency if the degree of electoral dominance is high (2014, 445). Electoral dominance being the degree to which one party or coalition has dominated the previous elections. It is possible that this is the deciding factor for most of the cases of high polarisation and lower expected minimum voting age. It also might very well be the case that this increased polarisation without electoral dominance increases the likelihood of such a reform to be passed. Such empirical results have been found in English local governments, where governments that do not have parties with a supermajority of their legislatures would perform better, suggesting party competition being central (Boyne et al. 2012, 657-658). The combining factor of lack of electoral support, and therefore little need for parties to compete over a polarised electorate, might work as discouraging factors towards lowering of the minimum voting age, both in Norway and other countries with PR electoral systems and low political polarisation.

Where Norway does fall in line with the hypothetical typical case is its score on the liberal democracy index. Here it outperforms both the mean and almost reaches the highest observed value for the variable in the dataset. Clearly, according to this variable Norway would be expected to have a lower minimum voting age due to its robust liberal democracy. The regional authority in Norway is roughly on par with the mean of the entire dataset. The perspective here, however, should be that most countries do not have very high regional authority and therefore score very lowly on this index. This can be seen by the highest observed value, which is nearly four times as large as Norway's. Norway subsequently does not have a particularly high score of regional authority, but doesn't necessarily stand out as a low regional authority country either.

Liberal democracies being more inclined to have a lower minimum voting age is perhaps not unsurprising. As mentioned in chapter 4, given the tendencies of liberal democracies to reevaluate their democratic health and rights combined with the electorate playing a more responsive role for elites in the regime to respond to, a liberal democracy will likely have a lower minimum voting age (Lizzeri and Persico 2004, 755; St.meld. nr. 33 (2007-2008), 54-55). The Norwegian process, as explored in the overview in chapter 3 and the next subchapter

in this chapter, contains many such examples of a critical approach to improve democracy wherever possible. This approach is likely to accelerate processes taking place within the state apparatus.

6.2. The Processes and Actors: Qualitative Results

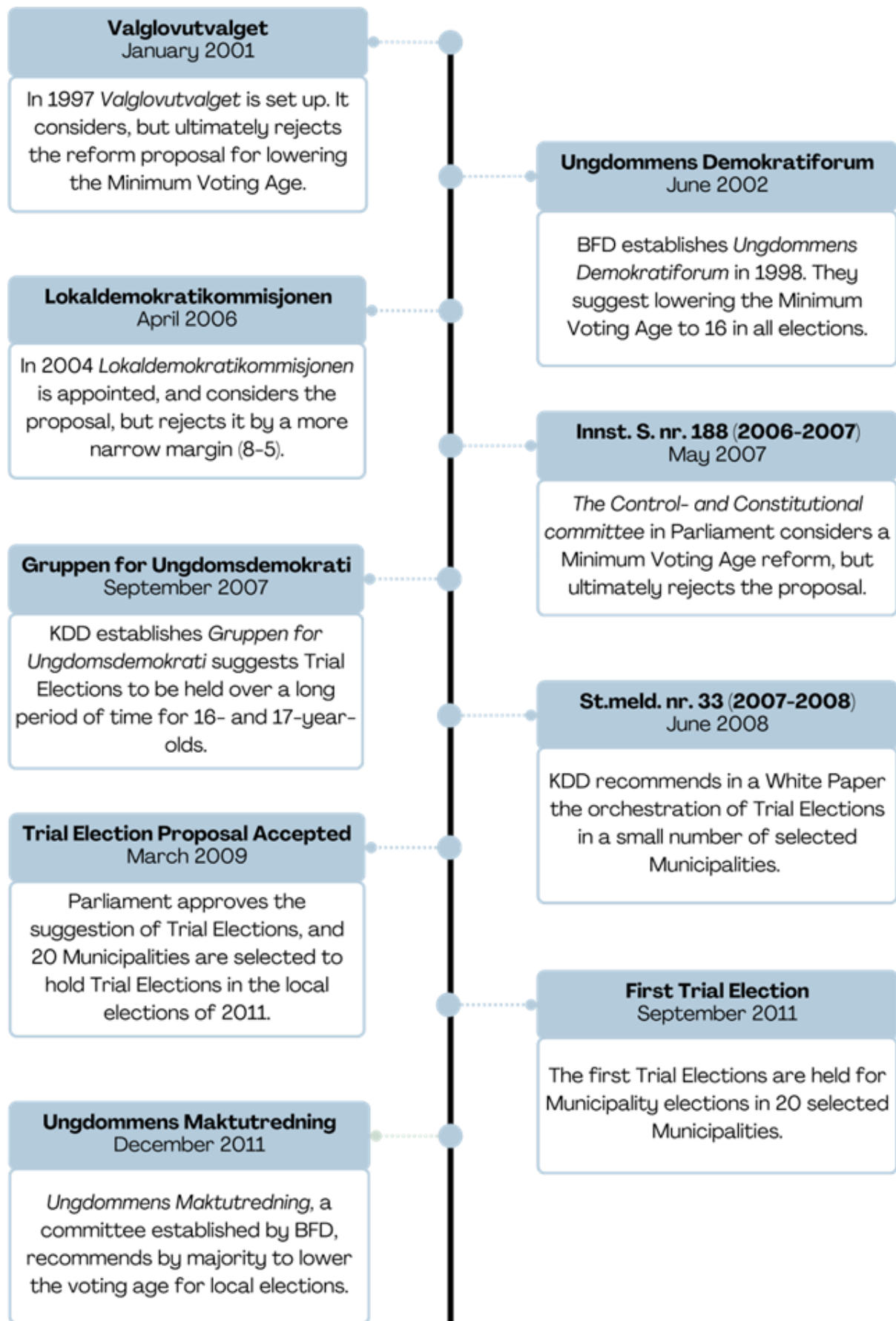
In this last part of the chapter, I will analyse the case of Norway. In order to do this, I have conducted six interviews overviewed in Table 6.3, gathered relevant documentation for the case, and out of this constructed a timeline of the Norwegian process displayed in Figure 6.4. With this, I conduct process tracing of the Norwegian case. This subchapter is written mostly in accordance with the timeline, meaning the events are analysed in chronological sequence, except for a few instances where deviation is necessary to investigate a wider concept pertaining to larger parts of the process.

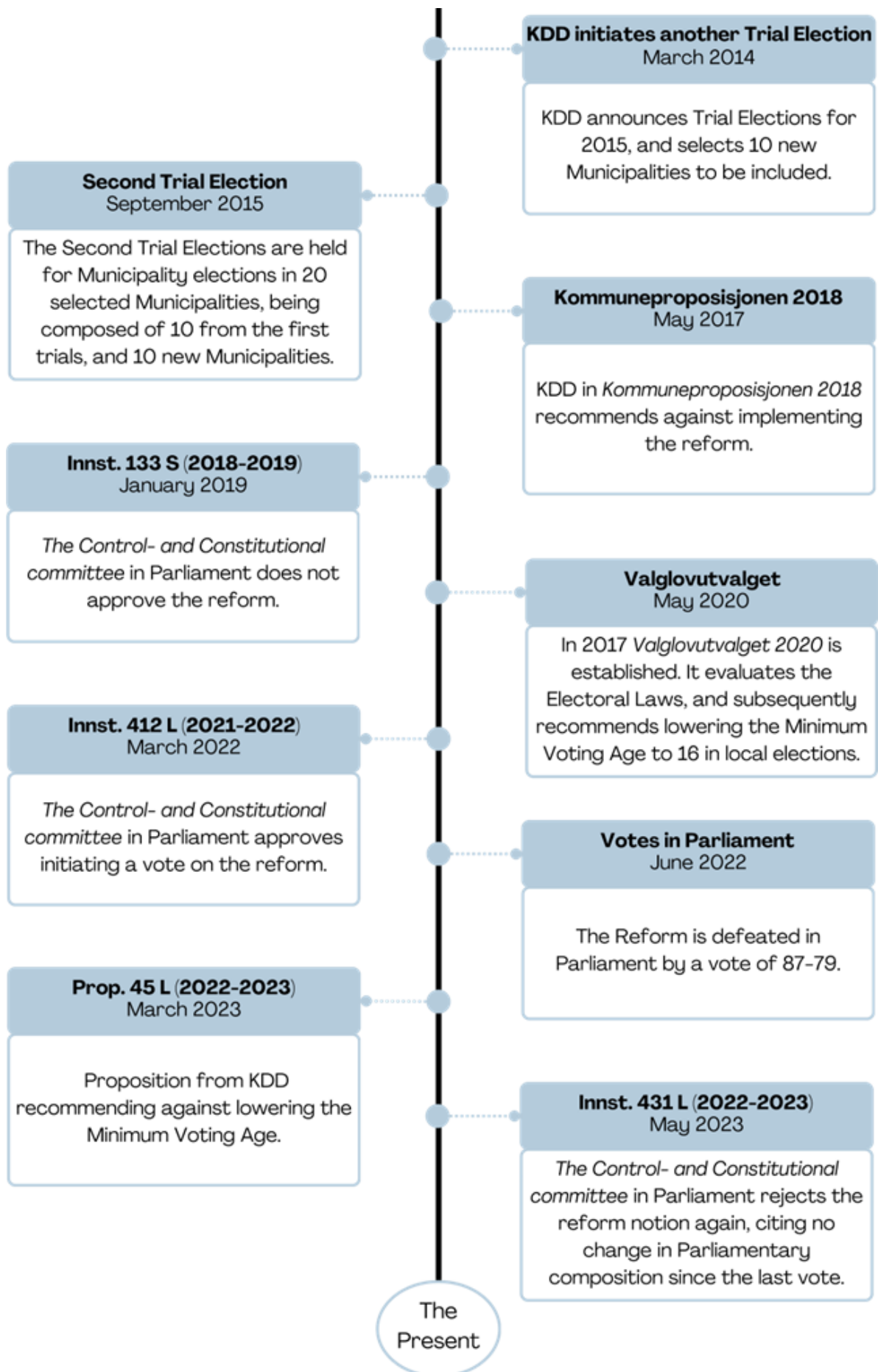
Table 6.3: Information about the interviews and informants.

Informant	Related Occupation	Date of Interview	Length
Dag Vestrheim	Project Leader for Trial Elections at KDD, part of Secretariate of <i>Lokaldemokratikommisjonen</i>	17.01.24	56:24
Margrete Bjørge Katanasho	Chairman of the Board at LNU, also previous member of Press - <i>Redd Barna Ungdom</i>	24.01.24	53:24
Emma Erlandsen	Deputy Leader of <i>Unge Høyre</i> (Youth Wing of <i>Høyre</i>)	26.01.24	47:47
Synnøve Kronen Snyen	Leader of <i>Sosialistisk Ungdom</i> (Youth Wing of <i>Sosialistisk Venstreparti</i>), stood as candidate under trial elections of 2011	30.01.24	50:05
Trond-Viggo Torgersen*	Leader of <i>Ungdommens Maktutredning 2011</i>	08.02.24	59:43
Sigrid Stokstad	Member of <i>Valglovutvalget 2020</i> , contributed to evaluations done by ISF	12.02.24	57:14

All interviews done digitally, except where () marked.*

Figure 6.4: Timeline of the Norwegian process.





6.2.1. Genesis of the Process

The Norwegian process for lowering the voting age to 16 can be said to have already started by the early 2000s. *Valglovutvalget 2001* was established in 1997 by the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development (KDD) and came with its recommendations in early 2001, while *Ungdommens demokratiforum* was established in 1998 by the Ministry of Children and Families (BFD) and came with its recommendations from 1999-2001. These two recommending bodies therefore represent the first instance coequally, as they were roughly established at the same time and came with their recommendations to the ministries almost simultaneously (NOU 2001: 3, 1). Their recommendations however, differed. *Ungdommens demokratiforum* proposed lowering the minimum voting age as a response to low turnout among young people (St.meld. nr. 39 (2001-2002), 62). *Valglovutvalget 2001*, on the other hand, rejected the proposal by 17 against 3 votes (NOU 2001: 3, 137-138).

This is therefore the starting point of my timeline of the Norwegian process. In fact, I put more weight on *Valglovutvalget 2001* as the start of the process rather than *Ungdommens demokratiforum*. First, the work done by state actors in the process is mostly confined within the same ministry that set up *Valglovutvalget 2001*, while a different ministry was responsible for *Ungdommens demokratiforum*. Second, this was also the findings that resulted from my interview with Dag, who was involved in *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen*, and later on was project leader of the trial elections that were held. When asked about when the ‘process’ started, Dag gave these answers:

Dag, Project Leader for the trial elections at KDD:

“I don’t know exactly, [...] this was something that was already discussed by the start of the 2000s as far as I can remember. That is, Valglovutvalget in I don’t remember exactly when the previous electoral law was passed, so the commission or that committee had come with their recommendations in I don’t know if it was 2000 or 2001 or so...”

It seems relatively clear that he is referring to *Valglovutvalget 2001*. To make sure, I asked directly if *Valglovutvalget 2001* was the first step:

“Yes something like that, yes I would say so. That it was then... there was a pretty large majority against as far as I can remember...”

Valglovutvalget 2001 summarised the arguments used by supporters of lowering the voting age as being related to increasing political interest of the youth, and therefore increasing the legitimacy of local democracy (NOU 2001: 3, 137-138). They also comment on the government's goal of increasing political participation of the youth in local democracy, and that therefore this is an overarching framework. The justifications for the rejection of the proposal are arguably strictly legal in nature. The arguments were that a) the voting age should always follow the age of majority, and that it would not be natural to give people below the age of majority voting rights, b) that out of principle we should have the same voting age for every election, changing the national voting age is not viable and that therefore other voting ages are locked to the national voting age, and c) our rules and traditions dictate that we have a single voting age (NOU 2001: 3, 137). Beyond this, they point to preferred methods for achieving increased youth participation, such as participation in municipality or county councils.

The minority of *Valglovutvalget 2001* were for the proposal on the grounds of political participation, the changing landscape of student life lasting longer, the increasing elderly proportion of the electorate, and local democracy as an introduction to democracy (NOU 2001: 3, 138). They also challenged the belief that the separation of the voting age from the age of majority was something new or original, and point to Germany as an existing example where the proposal had been implemented at the time. It seems the case that already at this time, the arguments for and against the implementation were already relatively well developed and had begun to take on their contemporary forms.

The next major step in the process was *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen*, another body appointed by KDD for the purposes of evaluating the terms of local democracy at the time (NOU 2006: 7, 7). When asked if *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen* used *Valglovutvalget 2001* as a source of input, Dag replied:

“Yes that has... there it maybe has a little to do with the secretariat that was... overlapped a little with each other. And Dag Arne Christensen especially, that sat in the secretariat of both.”

It seems like these two bodies were linked in tandem with each other, meaning that the work done in *Valglovutvalget 2001* in some parts was used by, and directly resulted in *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen*. As Dag points to as well, the two bodies also shared some of its secretariat. Both were also works commissioned for KDD. These two points in the process are therefore likely the combined sequence start of a chain of events. Nevertheless, the proposed

reform in *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen* was rejected by a vote of 8 against 5, which was considerably closer than in *Valglovutvalget 2001*, but still a rejection. Interestingly, the commission leads with the problem of voter participation amongst both youth and the rest of the electorate (NOU 2006: 7, 43). Clearly, political participation had become more centre stage at this point, at least in academia where theories of voter turnout relating to voting age had developed for this issue during the timespan. Indeed, the laid-out argument for implementation relies on theory for increasing voter participation in relation to habit formation at an early, more participatory age.

Obviously, this is based on Franklin's research regarding this, which happened to take place in between *Valglovutvalget 2001* and *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen* (Franklin 2004, 2-3). There was also more empirical data to be referenced this time, as half a decade had passed, and the empirical data gathered from other experiences in Europe, in particular Germany was more extensive than during *Valglovutvalget 2001* (NOU 2006: 7, 44). The empirical data presented by the commission indicates that the 16- and 17-year-old group votes to a higher degree than traditional first-time voters belonging to the 18- and 19-year-old group. This empirical dimension, along with subsequent theoretical development in academia, might be reasons as to why the results of the commission were also much closer this time. In regard to the composition of *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen*, Dag commented:

"... in Lokaldemokratikommisjonen there was also a majority against, but there was also in a way a cross-political support, as far as I can remember, both right-leaning people and I wonder if not the leader was for as far as I can remember."

The leader of the committee, Leif Johan Sevland, was for lowering the minimum voting age to 16 for local elections, along with 4 others (NOU 2006: 7, 52). Among these were members of *Venstre*, *KrF* (The Christian Democratic Party), and *Høyre* (The Conservative Party). Two of these, *Høyre* and *KrF*, are not traditionally parties that have advocated for the reform. It is possible that as the trial elections had not yet been suggested or held, the debate had yet to enter the electorate and be actively debated and discussed, and that therefore the partisanship was less of a factor in this particular committee. The composition of the committee was largely made up of representatives from political parties, with a minority from *Kommunesektorens organisasjon* which is a composition of the Norwegian municipalities, and a couple of researchers (NOU 2006: 7, 22). Dag mentioned this as well, along with the extended wish of

Landsrådet for Norges barne- og ungdomsorganisasjoner (LNU) to participate which did not come into fruition:

“LNU I do not think had a spot, no. I think they might have asked to participate as far as I can remember, but it turned out that they didn’t have room. [...] Well, it was... so it had a party-political composition. Plus KS...”

LNU did not get input in *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen*, but they were asked to participate in another project a year later. In 2007, KDD decided to establish a group of representatives from youth parties, *Elevorganisasjonen*, LNU, and other youth organisations (Demokratigruppen 2007, 1). This resulted in the group known as *Gruppen for Ungdomsdemokrati*. The purpose of this group was to come with suggestions for increasing democratic participation among the youth. The group highlighted the importance of democratic education in school, and the ability and perception of youth in politics. One of the group’s specific suggestions was voting rights for 16-year-olds, along with a trial project over a long span of time where evaluations are done as the project progresses (Demokratigruppen 2007, 3). This is as far as I can tell, the first mention of such a project in relation to this reform from a body directly related to the ministry. This is also the first time LNU and the youth organisations are allowed to take part. Margrete, Chairman of the Board at LNU, also notes in relation to the most important things LNU had accomplished as a part of this process:

“...I think that we managed to get a breakthrough with the trial elections is also pretty good, and it is something we have managed to – it is what has made us end up where we have ended up today in a way, which opened the door for it.”

LNU and the youth organisations were evidently quite involved by suggesting and highlighting a trial project, and were therefore important in planting the seeds for such a project to be picked up by the ministry.

6.2.2. From Political Actors to Trial Election

Roughly a year later, in 2008 the white paper *St.meld. nr. 33 (2007-2008)* titled *Eit sterkt lokaldemokrati* was presented to Parliament. In this, the proposal of holding trials in a few individual municipalities was presented as the ministry’s stance (St.meld. nr. 33 (2007-2008), 54-55). However, the question about whether this should be left for only municipality elections, or alternatively include county elections as well was left open. The proposal is presented with a focus on voting as a learning process, with a reliance on the work of Franklin in regard to habit formation. The academic literature is evidently informing the debate at this stage,

especially in relation to the goal of increased democratic participation of youth. It also considers much of the empirical data from Germany brought up by *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen*, which both criticises the learning aspect and lasting effects of a high voter turnout for 16- and 17-years-olds. In context then, the reform is considered under the uncertain implication of increased democratic participation.

Gaining an understanding of the initial process within state apparatuses was an important part of achieving a wider understanding of the whole process. The Former Minister of Local Government Magnhild Meltveit Kleppa, belonging to *Senterpartiet*, seems to have played a pivotal role in the initial steps towards pushing for and initiating the trial project process, as explained by Dag who worked at KDD and led the trial projects:

“My work with this was under Magnhild Meltveit Kleppa, she was very much a supporter of voting rights for 16-year-olds. And she initiated this, as Minister of Local Government in 2008 [...] I understand that there was no such thing as a majority around it, but she stood her ground and achieved breakthrough with the proposal for this trial that was held in 2011 [...] but in the parties there was a lot of resistance, but as Minister of Local Government she got some things pushed through.”

And the role of Kleppa was perhaps best summarised by him as:

“Yes, with her in the lead she became a driving force for this, and we in the civil service did what she told us...”

Interestingly, Dag also mention this white paper as being a result of the work done in *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen*:

“...this was a bit of the background for the white paper that came right after in 2008. There they put forth this suggestion then. That was... the white paper was in a way a direct follow up of [Lokaldemokratikommisjonen].”

This is very much the way the investigation on 16-year-old voting rights in the white paper is structured as well, with a brief overview of *Valglovutvalget 2001*, and *Gruppen for Ungdomsdemokrati*, but with a heavy focus on *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen* and the empirical deliberations done by this commission. The particular decision for going in for a trial project uses the foundation of the arguments presented in these three bodies of work. Interestingly, it also leans into the wish for some thirteen municipalities to have this trial election (St.meld. nr. 33 (2007-2008), 18). Perhaps underlining this as an argument for the trials being democratically

legitimate. For Kleppa to be able to make her decision then, it was necessary for the groundwork of practical deliberations, and empirical work to be done beforehand, in order to present a convincing argument.

After the white paper was presented to Parliament, it fell to the Standing Committee on Local Government and Public Administration, where with the support of members of the committee from *Arbeiderpartiet*, *Sosialistisk Venstreparti* (The Socialist Left Party), *Senterpartiet*, and *Venstre* agreed with the trial election proposal (Innst. S. nr 163 (2008-2009), 14-15). Notably *Venstre* was adamant that this should be over a period of multiple elections, presumably to measure habit formation. The members from *Fremskrittspartiet* (The Progress Party), *Høyre*, and *Kristelig Folkeparti* went against the proposal, citing both correspondence between the voting age and age of majority, and lack of support amongst 16-year-olds. The partisan support here can almost entirely be divided between the *rødgrønne* and *borgerlige* coalitions, the two standard left-right coalitions in Norway, with the notable exception of *Venstre*. Following this deliberation by the committee, the white paper was deliberated in Parliament (Stortinget 2009, 2321). Parliament essentially passively accepted some of the proposals in the white paper, though no vote was held on the specific issue of trial elections for 16- and 17-year-olds.

KDD went on to select twenty municipalities, as well as Longyearbyen, Svalbard to participate in the trial elections (Bergh 2014d, 11-12). This was done from a pool of 143 municipalities that had asked to participate in the trial project. The selection was based on a few criteria in relation to size of the municipality, the composition of age demographics, degree of urbanisation, which party the mayor belonged to, geography of the municipality, and the presence of conscious policies directed at including youth in political work or processes. Some limitations were deemed as sensible and put in place, including the trial electorate not being allowed to vote in county elections, and the trial electorate not being allowed to stand for election. Meaning that effectively the minimum voting age for county elections and eligibility age for standing in both local elections remained at 18, while the minimum voting age for voting in municipality elections was the only one lowered to 16.

The trial elections went ahead in the chosen municipalities. Most municipalities set up a project group for aiding the execution of the trial (Ødegård and Saglie 2014a, 23-24). These groups would usually be operating with both internal and external actors, although this varied greatly especially in regard to the external actors. Internal actors being things like the different departments of the municipality administration, while external actors being schools, youth

organisations and councils, and politicians. In many municipalities, it has been reported that the leader of this project group was often the driving factor, and therefore essential in the turnout results of the trial elections in a particular municipality.

6.2.3. The Trial Elections

A report by the Norwegian Institute for Social Research (ISF) following the trial elections summarised the findings of the 2011 trial election as follows: a) political influence can increase through lowering the voting age, b) total voter turnout will likely decrease, even though 16- and 17-year-olds vote to a higher degree than voters in their early 20s they still fall slightly below the average voter, c) the municipalities that have been engaged in a focused campaign to inform and mobilise the youth to vote have higher turnouts, indicating that just having the right to vote is not the sole factor for increasing voter turnout, and d) that 16- and 17-year-olds have a lower political maturity and knowledge than 18- and 19-year-olds, but they still vote as conventionally as adult voters (Bergh 2014a, 67-68). The report explicitly states that the findings are difficult to predict over future elections, because this trial election was only held once and the long-term effects of this on voter behaviour and maturity cannot be extracted from a single trial election. This is something ISF couldn't study until further elections were held.

In relation to the candidates fielded in the trial election, the report also indicates that there were more young people as candidates elected for the municipality councils (Saglie and Aars 2014, 177-178). The cause of this is considered to be the mobilisation efforts of the voter, and in this the young voters played a larger role than older voters. Synnøve, the leader of *Sosialistisk Ungdom* (SU), the youth-wing of *Sosialistisk Venstreparti* (SV), explained how she observed similar phenomena in the second trial election:

“I became a member of SU in 2013, and I stood for election for SV in municipal council elections in Oppegård in 2015 when I had just turned 19 years old, so yeah. It was very exciting, and I learnt a lot from it, but I noticed, or it did something with the entire election campaign that there was voting rights for 16-year-olds in Oppegård. I noticed that multiple parties both around SV, but also all the other parties were more concerned with younger voters, it meant that people talked more about typical issues that were important to young people, that people prioritised running the election campaign in places where there were many young people, and that the youth parties also prioritised Roald Amundsen Videregående under the school elections since many of the ones going to school there also had voting rights under the municipality- and county election. [...]

So I thought that was positive, both that typical issues for young people were more relevant in the electoral campaign – in the media it also appeared more – and that I experienced more young people having an interest in familiarising themselves with it since they actually had voting rights.”

The parties through self-reported research are also said to have supported younger candidates more than usual, albeit not in prioritising them as list candidates (Saglie and Aars 2014, 178). The otherwise lukewarm results coming out of the evaluations might have contributed in some way, as Margrete, Chairman of the Board at LNU, put it:

“What we see is that yes like I said, the fact that 16-year-olds get to vote results in more young elected officials [...] And we kind of got... we have long used an argument that to get to vote in elections from one is young can lead to a democratic habit that makes one vote more when one gets to the middle of their 20s where we see a dip in how many people vote. And this we didn't really get confirmed, but in my opinion all the other findings speak very much in the direction of this having worked and that this has worked well.”

There was perhaps this expectation before the trial elections to prove the habit formation theory true, but at this time it was still too early to study the effects of this because more elections had to be held to measure any kind of habit effect. So given all the positive results presented, it did not give a definite answer to the main objective of KDD in the first place, which was to increase democratic participation overall, with a strong implied emphasis on this ‘middle of the 20s’ period where people vote the least. Because after all, Franklin’s habit voter theory promised exactly this, that allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote would eventually lead to a sustained higher turnout in this age bracket too.

Roughly a year before the first trial election, the Ministry of Children and Families (BFD) established a committee called *Ungdommens maktutredning* with the purpose of laying out the opportunities young people have for participation in society (NOU 2011: 20, 7). Mainly concerned with the status of these opportunities, but also in relation to a well-functioning democracy. It also takes on the peculiar legal aspect of young people, as to how there is no clear legal definition for teenagers. The report by the committee was submitted to the ministry a few months after the first trial election in 2011, meaning the committee worked before, during, and after the trial elections were held. Trond-Viggo, the leader of the committee, said:

“There was a lot of research and research gathering, so what exists of knowledge in this area. But we did not compare us with any other country or anything, I do not think we did that either.”

The members were split among three opinions, six members being for keeping the current minimum voting age, five members being for lowering the minimum voting age to 16 for all elections, and two being for only lowering it for local elections (NOU 2011: 20, 14). The minority, yet plurality, that were for keeping the minimum voting age at 18 argued their case by highlighting the potential communication issue with the proposal, where the difference in age would unintentionally communicate that local elections are less important than national elections (NOU 2011: 20, 71). Of course, this was targeted at the proposal for local elections, and not the proposal regarding lowering of the minimum voting age for all elections. Further, the proponents of the current voting age laws grounded their argument in the harmonisation of the voting age, the age of candidacy, and the age of majority, by arguing that one should not be able to decide over others before being able to decide over oneself. Meaning, that these ages should not be separated because it creates strange situations, such as being able to vote but not being able to stand for candidacy or vote for someone that is the same age.

Yet, they acknowledge that this has not always been the case in Norway. Trond-Viggo explained how they considered how the voting age fit together with the other collective eligibility ages already in existence, and how there was a particular focus on the eligibility age of standing for elections:

“...to get to the conclusion of for or against, or should we have an age limit of 16 or 18, or should we have something else? So, there was something with getting this to fit with other arrangements and possibly move the age limit.”

He elaborates on how the committee considered this:

“Yes, that was the big discussion towards the end, that when we had gathered and found a framework to discuss then there was different opinions in the committee, but there were very few that were of the opinion that we should have a 16-year-old minimum voting age in parliamentary elections. So, there was a really really small minority, and it had to do with the eligibility age for standing in elections.”

The second counterargument used mentioned the lack of support among youth themselves, pointing out that the proponents for lowering the minimum voting age among 16- and 17-year-

olds were disproportionately very politically engaged, and that the silent majority are against the idea and not politically engaged. Further, they point out other ways for increasing political engagement among teenagers as more viable. The members of the investigation arguing for implementation of a 16-year-old minimum voting age in all elections maintained that 16-year-olds are mature enough, and have gone through the necessary democratic education in school to be able to participate in elections (NOU 2011: 20, 71-72). They also point out that young people today have certain rights and obligations to the state, such as taxation, the ability to be prosecuted, health autonomy, the right to choose political opinion, religious affiliation, and organisation affiliation.

Further, the members also state that the issue of age of candidacy is not relevant either, because the contemporary laws already make exceptions for certain groups of people regardless of the age of majority. The legal standpoint is therefore that the age of candidacy, age of majority, and voting age are all separate legalities and are therefore separately applicable. On the benefits to democracy, the members concluded that youth enfranchisement would increase both voter turnout in total, in youth specifically, and representation among candidates. Political parties would also have to consider the interests of youth and incorporate their preferences on their agenda.

Lastly, the two members for only decreasing minimum voting age for local elections argued that municipalities and countries affect the youth to such a large degree that they should have a say in what happens. The committee did not, however, consider the changing demographic makeup of Norwegian society, or in other words the increasing disproportionality between the amount of old and young people and how this might potentially affect the health of democracy and the lives of young people. When asked about this Trond-Viggo said:

“No, I think we had to put that away because of our mandate. So, I do not think we talked much about it, but that is something I have thought about later on...”

The committee worked with incoming results of the first trial elections, as seen by the inclusion of voter turnout statistics for the trial municipalities included in the report (NOU 2011: 20, 69). According to Trond-Viggo, some of the resources given to the committee were spent gathering and evaluating the trial project:

“Yes, you get a senior role as leader of a committee like that, and since you have responsibility to the ones that have put you up to the task to both look after the economy and look after the time. So we used a lot of money I remember to both get all of the

background information gathered, and to get evaluated some projects in relation to use of 16-year-old minimum voting age locally or in local elections.”

The evaluations in reference are the ones done by ISF, which include judicial barriers and consequences, practical success, role of political parties, voter turnout, voter preferences, political maturity, public opinion, and general consequences of the trial (Bergh 2014c, 15) . While used by *Ungdommens maktutredning* and by extension BFD, these particular evaluations were ordered and financed by KDD. Dag, who both worked at KDD and was involved with this, said:

“Yes, it was we who ordered those reports. We had a pretty comprehensive evaluation. Maybe larger than many others – I very much went for that we should have a relatively thorough evaluation, so there was put aside – I don’t remember, three and a half million just on the first evaluation. [...] So that too was an important support for us, that we got a specialist environment at ISF.”

When asked whether the results of these evaluations had an impact on the process and events following the trial elections Dag said:

“Yes, it’s certainly possible, because I interpret this as a very positive find, because [...] there was great participation especially. There was a lot of activity around the fact that they participated, that is what I can say. Itself – both the voter turnout and what happened before the electoral campaign and advertising of the fact that they had 16-year-old voting rights in these 20 municipalities... it worked and was a pretty good evaluation at that time. So, yes.”

In discovering Kleppa’s importance in pushing for the project, we can perhaps conclude that in relation to the trial projects, and other work outputted by KDD, the Minister of Local Government’s opinion on the reform matters a lot. Kleppa was, however, replaced by Liv Signe Navarsete in 2009 in tandem with the parliamentary elections of 2009. Dag said this about the transition of ministers:

“Yes, she took over after the parliamentary elections. So we were going to have this conference in [2010]. And then she used this a bit, marking herself a little with this. I think she was actually against it but I’m afraid to say that with certainty, but she was... [...] I think she became a supporter eventually as far as I can remember, but I say this with some reservation.”

Dag continued later:

“But Liv Signe Navarsete that was council of state when elections were held in 2011, she was Minister of Local Government and Regional Development. She used this actively in the electoral campaign. Yes, visiting schools and such. “

So while Navarsete’s position on the reform might not be entirely clear, it is clear that she intended to push for the reform, and subsequently carry out the trial election. This is of course, what ended up happening, as she was the minister during the first trial election.

The next change of minister was in relation to the parliamentary elections of 2013, when the coalition government led by *Høyre* took over. According to Dag, there seems to have been a slight shift in demeanour in how the ministry related itself with the reform and trial election issues:

“...we got a new minister in 2013. Then came Jan Tore Sanner, and Høyre was against [a 16-year-old voting age] [...] A lot happened politically at this time, since there were municipalities that wanted to carry out [trial elections] once more as well. And it was this too – Høyre-controlled municipalities really wanted trials, so it can be that such things stood behind [another trial election being held]. But Høyre and I think Sanner were not supporters of this, but what he was I do not know, but at least another trial election was held. He could have stopped it.”

Sanner was likely concerned with other issues at the centre-stage of the political debate at the time, according to Dag:

“So that, while Sanner was more restrained when this was carried out in 2015. He was more concerned with the municipality reform, the mergers of the municipalities. That was his... what he was concerned with.”

It is entirely possible then that these municipality mergers took primary focus over the trial project, given their importance to the governments campaign and policy. However, it seems that the ministry was already on the path of executing these trial elections, and pressure from below from municipalities, especially those controlled by *Høyre*, helped keep the trial election path in check by perhaps convincing the minister to be neutral in action, and so evidently a second trial election was eventually on the table. The Minister of Local Government and Regional Development Jan Tore Sanner invited municipalities to apply for the project in 2014, and the ministry would pick 20 municipalities from the municipalities that submitted (Sanner

2014). The previous trial election was mentioned here, but they did not go into any depth other than that it gave interesting experiences for the ministry to consider.

The second trial election was eventually held in 2015, and evaluations were done by ISF for it as well. One of the key findings in the 2015 trial election, which makes it distinct from the 2011 findings, is the empirical results related to habit formation for young voters. In the evaluations, they compare the 2011 trial voters available for both the 2013 parliamentary elections and 2015 elections, and find that there are no indication of habit formation (Bergh 2016, 24). Meaning that the 2011 trial voters who also subsequently voted in the 2013 parliamentary election, as well as in the 2015 municipality elections, did not outperform the rest of the electorate in terms of voter turnout. Aside from this original find, the empirical results relating to voter turnout seems to have been relatively similar to the ones presented in the 2011 evaluation (Bergh 2016, 13).

6.2.4. Youth Organisations and Youth Parties

One of the underlying supporting factors of the push for implementation of a 16-year-old minimum voting age seems to be the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The argument for whether the CRC really supports this has been ongoing. Some argue that the CRC provides the child a right to be listened to and to participate in democracy, and that because of this an argument for lowering the minimum voting age could be built on it (Stokstad 2014, 118). The opposing argument points to the several political and other rights written in the CRC, and concludes that none of these mention a lower minimum voting age explicitly, and taking a particular issue with lowering the eligibility age (Stokstad 2014, 104). Nevertheless, using the CRC as a foundation for grounding the argument seems to be the case: Trond-Viggo and Margrete said the following about the CRC:

Trond-Viggo, Leader of *Ungdommens Maktutredning 2011*:

“The younger you are, the fewer rights you have in relation to your parents and society. Meanwhile, of course, you have human rights as a foundation, meaning the CRC moves some of those boundaries and gives children more rights than they had before. And in Norway then, we have also set new age limits both with the age of consent and with, for example, when you should have the right to know who your parents are, if there are possibilities, if there are places and nation and things like that. So it is – so there is probably a trend towards things getting a lower age limit, the question is whether it makes sense in all areas then.”

Margrete, Chairman of the Board at LNU:

“I can say a little bit about for my part, how I got to know this cause. It was that I participated in Press, the youth organisation for Redd Barna, when I was 16-17-years-old, and there we worked a lot with like children and youth rights to participate because this is something that is written in the CRC that we have the right to, and we did not have a point of view on 16-year-old voting rights, but there was a leader who was very concerned with it...”

The trial elections’ effect on the political debate, and the evolution of the process, is an interesting consideration when looking at the pre- and post-trial election periods. Margrete expressed similar sentiments:

“Yes I think so [...] And then in a way I think that the researchers at ISF also tell us that by and large this is positive in a way, the outcome.”

To a certain extent, LNU might have been involved with ISF:

“...this is a statement which I do not know if is completely true, but we have worked with ISF who also has done follower research here and the fact that ISF also wished for these trial elections. That is also a, I don’t know if we have influenced ISF, but there may have been an alliance that went through this process too.”

The trial elections saw involvement from youth organisations in various ways. LNU was perhaps one of the more prominent such cases, having worked through the different phases of the trial election projects, or such was the general consensus. Margrete explained LNU’s role like this:

“I know that LNU worked a lot to get... or in a way it was an instigator in getting the trial projects to happen and very much wished to have trial projects, and in a way in the aftermath of the trial projects they used that to say that we should implement this as a permanent arrangement.”

From the perspective of SU too, the sentiment was that LNU has been an important actor in working towards lowering the minimum voting age. Synnøve, the leader of SU had this to say:

“I worked with LNU the most [...] in relation to that project and had some contact with them both before and after the trial project. So I feel like they have maybe been the biggest driver.”

Dag, who was the project leader for the trial elections, pointed out that they were involved before and during the first trial election project in 2011. As an example, he explained their involvement with a conference held about the reform during that period:

“[To the conference] we invited all municipalities that were going to participate, plus political youth organisations. And I have to mention that [LNU] was very active then [...] We actually received a lot of help from them, which I should not understate, because when we were going to hold the conference for example so – so it was... they contributed among other things with shaping help for making group tasks and... things like that, and they provided speakers...”

LNU being an umbrella organisation for youth organisations, evidently played some sort of voluntary supportive role for organisations under them that were for lowering the minimum voting age or needed help with the subject matter. An example of this that Margrete mentioned:

“I think it was more that it was management in Press that wanted to work with [the 16-year-old voting age], and they knew that LNU worked with this, and then I think they used... they got LNU to hold courses for members, they got the same... retrieved information from LNU. But it was based on a wish from Press from the start in a way...”

But LNU did not directly influence or affect their member organisations according to Margrete:

“We are very concerned with that our member organisations [...] shall be allowed to think what they want, and be autonomous.”

Which lines up with something Dag said about the state of youth organisations under LNU around the time of the first trial election:

“...it was LNU as an organisation that fronted this from the side of their youth organisations [...] [The youth parties] did not agree between each other, I remember barely that for example Høyre, FrPU, and Senterungdommen [...] was against this, especially Ove Vanebo was his name, he was the leader of LNU.”

The role of LNU throughout this process can therefore be described as both an active driver for the reform when interacting with the ministry or other state actors, but also as an asset for willing organisations able to be used if or when they need help with resources, information, or other things. With the caveat of never influencing the opinion on the reform proposal for these organisations if they are members of LNU.

Following the second trial election, KDD laid forth the path chosen by the government in *Kommuneproposisjonen 2018*. Here, they cite increased youth representation among elected politicians as a positive find of the evaluations, but ultimately cite the failure to prove the habit formation theory, the lack of support among the rest of the population, and the issue of separation of the voting age and age of majority as the deciding factors in keeping the status quo (Prop. 128 S (2016-2017), 37). These are notably arguments that are usually used by the contra-side, in particular the argument of the age of majority. Emma, the deputy leader of *Unge Høyre* (UH), explained the position of both *Høyre* and UH like this:

“On this general foundation we are of the opinion that this is the main argument: that there should be one age of majority in Norway where you can vote, where you can drink, where you can drive a car, that it is the same age.”

Høyre has been using this argument since the start of the debate, according to Dag:

“[Høyre] had used this a lot, this about that there should be consistency between the age of majority and the voting age.”

Summarised, *Høyre* and UH is of the opinion that there should be one age for adulthood, and that all these other age limits stems from this age, which is currently 18. The grounds used for this seems to be rooted in tradition, legality, and simplicity. The inconsistency between the voting age and the eligibility age for getting elected is therefore obviously also an issue for Emma and UH:

“Because it is a bit strange that we should be able to, if we have a representative democracy, that one can get the right to vote but that one isn’t able to vote for anyone that represents... or, if we say age is the most important marker for who represents you. Then you can’t vote for a 16-year-old. [...] That if you don’t think that 16- and 17-year-olds can sit in the council then it makes little sense that they should be able to vote too.”

Synnøve, the leader of SU, on her perception of the same argument:

“And especially the argument that there should be a consistency between the age of majority and the voting age I think is weak, because there were more years where there was not a consistency between the age of majority and voting age than not, it is entirely new that it is the same. And there are no judicial problems with having a lower minimum voting age than age of majority, so I think the argument is a bit thin.”

Having a different age of majority and voting age is both common abroad, and has also as Synnøve pointed out been historically common in Norway before the second world war and for a brief period in the 1970s (Ødegård 2014, 186). Nevertheless, the Norwegian debate, and perhaps Norwegian society has developed a principle surrounding this, which is likely the most common argument against lowering the minimum voting age, that goes something like what Emma explained. Norway has, after all, had a matching age of majority, minimum voting age, and age of electability since 1979, or in other words for forty-five years. There therefore seems to have developed a democratic principle of this being the case over these decades in Norway, and people seem inclined to perceive it as the democratic norm. There is perhaps, a certain fear that decoupling the minimum voting age from these other two age limits will, as has historically been the case in Norway, eventually lead to the lowering of the other two age limits as well.

During the work on *Ungdommens maktutredning*, this argument was something that that committee touched upon as well according to Trond-Viggo, as mentioned earlier when discussing the works of *Ungdommens maktutredning*. The eligibility age for electability is something which seems to have come up at several points during the process. Sigrid, a member of *Valglovutvalget 2020* on her ISF contributions relating to this:

“... we wrote a book in the end where I had a little material – yes, I had a little chapter there. I think it was Johannes Bergh and Guro Ødegård that were editors of that book. And there I investigated legal sides of lowering the minimum voting age [...] And then I must say that I was made a little bit extra aware of this to do with the consistency between eligibility and voting rights, [...] because in a way that hadn't been a part of the discussion earlier, when one discussed lowering the minimum voting age, and I simply saw that as a shortcoming. But we got that brought forward in Valglovutvalget [2020]”

As she notes during *Valglovutvalget 2020* they also touched on this, and she comments:

“But to me it was important that we managed to separate that with ombudsplikt... and eligibility and ombudsplikt. Yes, because I didn't think that was reasonable to have for 16-year-olds.”

Ombudsplikt is the law related to the duty of acting as a representative after being elected or nominated. It therefore seems like this is an argument that was especially strengthened during the intermission period between the first trial election, and the vote on the reform in Parliament. This could be as a consequence of the empirical results of the trial elections weakening some

of the other arguments used by the opposition, and that therefore this legal argument was made more centre-stage after the empirical results and analyses were published. I find that the argument related to the age of majority is very politicised, and perhaps the clearest signifier that a staunchly opposing party will use. It is not surprising then that the ministry seems to have changed its tune towards this under the Solberg government.

Alongside this conclusion to the trial project saga, the parties pushing for this tried to propose a constitutional amendment to Parliament in order to lower the minimum voting age to 16 for all elections. This reform was eventually brought in front of the Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs, where it was not approved (Innst. 133 S (2018-2019), 5). Following this, Parliament rejected the proposal with a substantial supermajority.

6.2.5. Valglovutvalget and the Turn of Arbeiderpartiet

In 2017, KDD established *Valglovutvalget 2020* for the purpose of routinely reform of the Norwegian electoral law (NOU 2020: 6, 19-20). The committee was composed of a mixture of professionals, politicians, and researchers. Interestingly, while some of the focus of the committee lay on electoral laws related to counties and municipalities because of the new merge reform, the mandate did not mention the voting age reform proposal. Sigrid said the following:

“I do not think there was written anything about lowering the minimum voting age [in the mandate] [...] in a way it is the general that was clear in the mandate. We were to investigate how the new county structure affected the electoral system – this with electoral districts. [...] I think we felt we were quite free, but that the lowering of the minimum voting age had quite a big impact on the matter of democratic participation, so that question and that it was natural to bring this up too because there was a clear enthusiasm in the committee around this question.”

Interestingly then, it seems to be the case that the evaluation of a 16-year-old minimum voting age for the electoral law reform was initiated not from the ministry through the mandate, but from the committee members themselves. Although, as Sigrid states, it might have been slightly implicit to cover the proposal when the mandate included democratic participation. Nevertheless, the initiative seems to stem more from the committee members according to Sigrid:

“...and there were some of us others who were concerned with the issue. So you can say we who were in the majority, that went for lowering the minimum voting age in

municipality and county elections, it was... Christensen he was a researcher, Hoff Kristin – Kristin Taraldsrud Hoff came from the Agricultural Cooperative, has a director position there, but has also been a researcher for multiple years in FAFO I think, and ISF maybe – social scientist. So you also had that background, and there was me and Bern Aardal – all of us had a background as researchers, and was concerned with this issue. In addition came Anne Grimsrud from Senterpartiet, and Heikki Holmås SV was very active for this, Sofie Høgestød from Venstre was also actively for lowering the minimum voting age, and Thomas Nygreen from Rødt was for this, and Knut Storberget which I did not consider to be a driver for this initially, but was clearly a supporter of lowering the minimum voting age. [...] and also Strømmen from MDG was active in this question, actively engaged I would say. Yes, and Tho Aatlo was there as someone who had worked with election management – election implementation both in Oslo municipality and in the Ministry for many years, so he had – he had a background as a lawyer, and he was also in favour of lowering the minimum voting age in municipality and county elections. So there was a fair amount of enthusiasm in the committee to bring up the question, and yes we considered it natural to bring up when we were to consider democratic participation and the electoral system.”

The initiative seems to have come from all the different backgrounds, from researchers, professionals, and politicians. This is a potential academic and political elite slant on this being a top-down effect, where academia and political elites brought the mandate into the committee and therefore likely affected the degree to which the committee considered the issue. One interesting thing of note here is that while seemingly the issue plays out among party lines, one outlier of this is Anne Grimsrud from *Senterpartiet*, a party traditionally against the proposal. There seems to be a tendency for members of this party to go against the party platform, seeing as Kleppa was also a member but was a staunch supporter of the reform. My impression from talking to the informants was also that *Senterpartiet* was considered fertile ground for the advancing the reform in the future, or at least in the sense that it would be the most likely party to turn in favour of the issue.

Dag, project leader for the trial elections and former KDD employee, thinks that more parties will turn in favour eventually:

“And Senterpartiet is against, but Arbeiderpartiet has turned. And that is a little interesting. And there will probably be more parties for eventually.”

Margrete, Chairman of the Board at LNU, acknowledges *Senterpartiet's* position but thinks there seems to be some flexibility within *Senterpartiet*, and perhaps this is an indication of a future turn:

“I can also say that we were involved in the process of a new electoral law and tried to push for it. But Senterpartiet is against, and that’s how it is in a way.”

“But I think that in the aftermath of that case there was among other things a Senterparti mayor who had a Senterparti member of Parliament that had an opinion piece in an online newspaper where she was like ‘It is important to include the vote of 16-year-olds’. And that is a new tune from Senterpartiet, that shows that there is perhaps a little more flexibility that we might think.”

Synnøve, the leader of SU, thinks this is something *Senterpartiet* should be in favour of, given their focus on local democracy and the districts:

“And I think it’s a bit strange that Senterpartiet isn’t more positive towards 16-17 year olds voting, it is usually them who know their local communities well, and when they’re 18-19 it is – or 19-20 – then there is a lot of people who have moved away from home and that do not live in their home municipality anymore, and in a way you also lose a lot of expertise and experience with the municipality one has lived in when we aren’t able to reach out to that voter group, and it is perhaps them one needs to reach out to in order to get policy on how they can move back home after they are done studying. So I think it is actually a paradox that Senterpartiet isn’t more interested in listening to that group of voters, especially in many district municipalities where we lack young people or people in work, and we have many older people, so I think it would be very positive for democracy to have a greater weight of young people.”

In 2020 the committee published their work. The majority went for a recommendation of lowering the minimum voting age to 16 at municipality and country elections (NOU 2020: 6, 176-177). They did, however, reject both a minimum voting age of 16 at parliamentary elections, as well as an eligibility age of 16. This, of course, breaks with the principle of keeping the age of majority consistent with the voting age. Sigrid on the arguments against this in the committee:

“But it was, so the ones who did not go for lowering the minimum voting age were very concerned with that it should follow the age of majority. And I kind of didn’t get much

else out of that argument, that it was like, necessary, natural... yes, without it being possible to explain in much more detail. [...] Yes, in a way a tradition that they meant was a good one.”

Again, in the instance of *Valglovutvalget 2020* too, the major cleavage between the arguments is between democratic participation and legal consistency with the age of majority. This is an argument that seems to have prevailed during the entire process, regardless of the empirical outcomes reported by the evaluators of the trial elections, but seemingly become the main argument by the time of this committee.

According to Margrete, LNU worked with trying to influence both *Valglovutvalget 2020* and KDD on their stances towards the reform:

“... Valglovutvalget [2020] recommended voting rights for 16-year-olds yes, in local elections. And it was a process LNU worked a lot with. And after [KDD] worked further on this, they put their foot down. And that was the process we tried to influence, yes. Also then, we wrote chronicles, and in a way it was something we worked with both in the backrooms and externally, loudly...”

She also spoke on LNU's reaction to KDD's decision:

“...And that was something LNU criticised KDD for then and worked up against KDD – I participated among other things in a subject seminar for new electoral law in cooperation with Redd Barna, and I got to present for 3 minutes or so where we criticised the minister for their decision.”

This is perhaps an example of how the different involved organisations, in particular LNU working up towards state related actors in order to influence the outcome in the ministerial sphere. It seems that aside from LNU, and the youth parties, the involvement of other youth organisations is rather limited in nature. However, one exception to this seems to be *Press – Redd Barna Ungdom*, which has a pro-stance on the issue. As mentioned by Margrete they were involved with trying to influence the ministry's decision in the aftermath of *Valgloutvalget 2020*. Margrete also worked for *Press – Redd Barna Ungdom*, and was therefore somewhat involved with their work on this issue:

“...I participated in Press, the youth organisation for Redd Barna, when I was 16-17-years-old, and there we worked a lot with children and youths right to participate [...] and we did not have a point of view on 16-year-old voting rights, but like there was a

leader who was very concerned with it and I think was influenced by LNU's work on this, and saw it as an important point for youth to be heard..."

Synnøve also mentioned interacting with *Press – Redd Barna Ungdom* during her time in *Sosialistisk Ungdom*:

"I have also had some cooperation with Press Redd Barna Ungdom about voting rights for 16-year-olds, they have also been very engaged in the matter."

Tying the outcome of *Valglovutvalget 2020* to earlier deliberations outputted KDD was something which I brought up during my interview with Sigrid, a member of *Valglovutvalget 2020*. That is, the effect of earlier state created commissions or committees on later outcomes. She had this to say about her experience related to this:

"No, I did not perceive the assessment done [in Valglovutvalget 2001] gave much guidance for us, no. But it was [...] There was some shared knowledge that was transferred in a way, we knew a bit of the issues raised earlier too, but I don't think - at least not me and not the ones I spoke to either - had when we were finally going to decide this that we – that it was that NOU we went to in a way, I don't really think so."

These two bodies then, did not seem to influence the assessments made in *Valglovutvalget 2020* to a significant degree, at least not as primary inspirations. However, there were other bodies of work with more sway:

"The trial with lowered minimum voting age and the evaluations after it – that was known substance, and something we had with us. For my part it was the work I had done earlier that I like remembered really well, even if it... there is a difference between investigating something as a researcher and to have an opinion in a committee like this because in the committee you actually have to decide what it is you are going in for, I perceive it as quite a different role. So... and there were more people that had been part of different – both research projects and political processes and investigations tied to this in different ways."

By the time of *Valglovutvalget 2020* it seems like *Valglovutvalget 2001* and *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen* were no longer essential deliberations considered, rather they had been replaced by the trial elections and their subsequent evaluations for more empirical understanding about how the proposed reform would play out. The trial elections can therefore

be said to have transformed the debate, at the very least the academic debate, in the aftermath, as they were the substance of most importance when these deliberations were being made.

The effects of *Valglovutalget 2020* on the process for implementing voting rights for 16- and 17-year-olds seems to have furthered the discussion in a period where not much was happening around the cause. Synnøve, the leader SU, said this:

“Yes, I think the experiences were brought up when Valglovutalget came, and we got a new debate about voting rights for 16-year-olds”

However, this might not have been reflected in the youth parties opposing the reform. Emma, deputy leader of UH, contributed this:

“I think maybe that the engagement around the cause could have been a bit affected by Corona, we had some slightly larger – or from my perspective – some slightly larger crises to handle following the consequences of the pandemic, especially for young people. So it might be that it is there the focus lies. [...] But I have not been a witness to any sort of active lobbying or that there have been any big debates in the public discourse.”

In fact, I think this was a major thematic difference between my interviews with both the youth parties. Synnøve from SU seemed to perceive the debate as a lot more active than Emma from UH, perhaps as a consequence of their respective parties' point of view. This might be an indication that the youth parties at least are working more in tandem with their mother parties and trying to influence upwards, rather than actively engaging in the debate on their own level. In fact, this was something brought up in relation to AUF, the youth wing of *Arbeiderpartiet*, in several of the interviews as well:

Margrete mentioned how *Arbeidernes ungdomsfylking* (AUF) worked up against *Arbeiderpartiet* prior to their shift in opinion:

“... and the same applies to AUF, they have worked – lobbied a lot up against Arbeiderpartiet and gotten a breakthrough for this.”

Emma describing AUF and SU's degree of advocacy, as well as the general state of the debate:

“I wonder if [changing the opinion of Arbeiderpartiet] wasn't one of AUFs breakthroughs. [...] AUF has been especially busy with it, and maybe... AUF and SU are the ones that I have seen has been on social medias and written posts about 16-year-old

voting rights. But I do not feel it is something they have put forth in discussion with us necessarily, unless it has been a predetermined theme or question from the leader of the debate. We have not been confronted on it, they have not tried to create any lines of conflict there really.”

Clearly, not much interaction between the youth parties on this issue. Synnøve explains the difficulty for youth parties to affect one another:

“[The youth parties] could probably have done more, but it is hard for a youth party to affect other youth parties than their own. So that all the time the youth parties... the parties that are against or are not for, then there is not much that I feel that they can do other than speaking about it publicly and in the newspapers and make sure LNU is still for...”

The consensus seems to be that youth parties typically have more success influencing their mother parties on this issue, compared to influencing other opposing youth parties. The youth parties therefore likely find themselves in a difficult position, where they can't really debate the youth party opposition because of a lack of interest, so the issue rarely gets brought up, and the only meaningful change they can achieve is by affecting their mother parties. Nevertheless, we can see the major impact of exactly this with how AUF influenced *Arbeiderpartiet*.

6.2.6. Later Developments

Next in the timeline of the process, the proposal went to the Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs again. This time, however, it only proposed lowering the minimum voting age for municipality and county elections, and not for parliamentary elections (Innst. 412 L (2021-2022), 1). Meaning, of course, that only a regular majority is required of Parliament as opposed to a supermajority. The committee approved of this proposal, citing the majority in *Valglovet 2020* and the arguments brought up by that committee, the illegitimacy of refusing someone the right to vote without good reason, political participation, impact of local politics on youth, habit formation theory, increased youth representation in municipality councils, political maturity, other age limits, and the health of Norwegian democracy itself (Innst. 412 L (2021-2022), 2-4). In other words, they virtually cite every common argument for the implementation. Interestingly, they choose to cite habit formation theory despite the evaluations of the trial elections failing to prove this to be the case. Synnøve raised an interesting point about this:

“I also think that is a bit sad that it is the Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs that has this case because yes, it is an entirely different committee than the other committees, and I understand that it is important when we change the Constitution to give more people the right to vote in parliamentary elections, but otherwise I think this committee – or this case belongs in the Local Government committee or maybe also in the Family and Cultural Affairs committee in Parliament. So I think maybe we would have got better youth influence if it was located in another place in Parliament.”

It is perhaps slightly controversial that this case is delegated to the Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs, when a Constitutional amendment is not necessary for the law, and it affects the municipalities and counties to such a large degree as it does. Following the recommendation by the committee it was brought to Parliament, and Parliament subsequently held a vote on the proposed reform. Parliament rejected the proposal by 87 to 79 votes (Stortinget 2022, 4220). *Arbeiderpartiet, Sosialistisk Venstreparti, Rødt* (The Red Party), *Venstre*, and *Miljøpartiet De Grønne* (The Green Party) voted in favour, while *Høyre, Senterpartiet, Fremskrittspartiet, Kristelig Folkeparti, and Pasientfokus* voted against the motion. The parties in favour had therefore grown some by this point, with the most notable party to turn being *Arbeiderpartiet*. Dag, the project leader of the trial elections, agreed on the importance of such political actors as parties for the breakthrough in this reform initiative:

“This is to a very large extent politically driven. There aren’t really any structural conditions [in the way], to any large extent. It is more that it is the political that decides a lot here. That parties have their national convention adoptions that they then follow when voting in Parliament. And then you have some that are a little bit... position themselves freely in these parties. But when it comes to voting in Parliament then they are loyal as far as I understand it, but some parties can free their representatives, that can also be the case. So there is probably a bit of a difference in praxis.”

He also elaborates on the evolution of the political parties as actors, and how these decisive political decisions have changed:

“I would say so. And the political parties, and what they adopt at their national conventions, is of great importance. But what we observe then is that there is an evolution happening, where there was great resistance previously, there is now less resistance. Arbeiderpartiet has for example turned on the issue, and that is important.”

The process of turning *Arbeiderpartiet* was something both AUF and LNU had worked towards for some time. Margrete, Chairman of the Board at LNU, attributed the work as such:

“... and there we actually had a visit from Jonas Gahr Støre at barne- og ungdomsting which is our national meeting or general assembly. And in that speech [...] he says ‘thank you to LNU for moving us on this matter’ or that you have played a big part for us in this opinion that we have now. And that I think in a way... LNU and AUF worked up against Arbeiderpartiet there to... yeah, get them to move.”

When prompted on the most important influences LNU has had on the reform process, she answered:

“...that we have managed to turn Arbeiderpartiet which I think is in a way the most important.”

Clearly the impact of LNU must have been observed within *Arbeiderpartiet* too if Støre, the leader of the party over the course of much of the process, seems to acknowledge this too. Turning one of the two largest political parties in Norway is also bound to create more discussion and advance the reform cause, meaning the emphasis put on the importance of LNU's work here is not understated. However, Margrete notes that although LNU helped AUF and *Arbeiderpartiet*, the initiative must first come from the parties before an umbrella organisation such as LNU can influence:

“...the youth parties are members of [LNU] and again, we are very careful with pushing them on their opinions. So that I would never think that LNU should convince Senterungdommen that they should be for voting rights for 16-year-olds. But if Senterungdommen had come to us and said ‘Hi, we are a little for voting rights for 16-year-olds and we would like help to push Senterpartiet in the right direction’ then we could have done it in a way.”

Therefore, the critical actor here can be said to be AUF, and their decision to turn on the issue. And with the help from LNU, they successfully managed to influence their mother party. If *Senterpartiet* were to follow a similar path then, it would first have to take root in *Senterungdommen*, then through LNU they would have to channel their resources up against the mother party. In any case, this is how it appears that *Arbeiderpartiet* turned on the issue.

Roughly a year after the vote in Parliament, the Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs evaluated the proposal again, and concluded that Parliament and the

committee had already taken a stance the year previously, and that therefore there would be no point in repeating the same exercise without changes in Parliament or in the political situation of the issue (Innst. 431 L (2022-2023), 54). Subsequently, the reform was also evaluated again by KDD. They too, rejected the proposal on the grounds of the recency of the attempted implementation of the reform the year before, and the fact that the current sitting Parliament is identical to what it was at that time, and therefore it is likely that little would change in the outcome (Prop. 45 L (2022-2023), 96).

Both the Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs and KDD therefore seem to reject the proposal on the notion of the parliamentary composition and political landscape being unchanged, and not necessarily on any other grounds. These two instances can therefore be interpreted as not really being advancements or milestones against the reform cause necessarily, but rather the institutional framework determining what is worth allocating time and resources to. It is likely that if this is brought up to either the committee or the Ministry under a new parliamentary term after elections, they would have to use other arguments for rejecting the proposal, if they were to reject it at all.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

In this thesis, I analysed the causes of lowering the voting age. The research question was: *Under what conditions do states lower the minimum voting age, and why does adoption fail?* To answer this, I used a mixed-methods research design. On the macro-level, I used a quantitative analysis of countries worldwide in order to determine expected conditions for lower voting ages. On the micro-level, I used a qualitative analysis consisting of interviews, documents, and state actor records to construct a timeline of what actors and processes involved in preventing this from occurring in Norway. This mixed-methods research approach has shown the importance of both top-down and bottom-up actors in the adaption process of a lower minimum voting age as well as the conditions expected for such a process to take place.

Within this concluding chapter, I discuss the main findings from the analyses done in this thesis, touch upon the limitations of these analyses, and suggest what can be done in future research. The discussion and conclusion of the main findings are done in the structure of the previous chapters, which is starting with a short overview of the background and previous literature, followed by the quantitative analysis and its hypotheses, and ending with the qualitative analysis. The qualitative analysis, or case study of Norway, is meant to illuminate the conditions found in the quantitative analysis. This does not mean, however, that the qualitative analysis is explanatory of the quantitative results.

Main Findings

The evolution of voting rights and the voting age have developed at a different pace around the world but has arguably achieved international consensus ever since the suffrage was extended to all people above a certain age. In the post-war period, the first large scale change in the voting age was an international wave of lowering the minimum voting age from 21 to 18. As mentioned in chapter 2, this was kickstarted by Britain and the United States in the late 1960s and went on to spread throughout the democratic world over the next few decades, in particular in the 1970s, leading to the current situation where the vast majority of countries have lowered their minimum voting age to 18 or below (Loughran, Mycock, and Tonge 2021, 284; Cheng 2016, 6-7). This is therefore the overview and status of the current climate.

As described in chapter 3, the normative arguments used in relation to the potential lowering of the minimum voting age are primarily concerned with democratic participation, democratic health, levels of maturity, and normative legality. The arguments in the Norwegian case based on my research were also primarily of these types, with a slight absence of democratic health,

especially when considering the question of the ageing population. The arguments in principle are relatively consistent between the academic literature and the Norwegian case, and the former does seem to inform the latter. The previous literature has been concerned with the empirical impacts of lowering the voting age to 16. In this, the impact on voter turnout, political participation in other forms, political maturity, and political affiliation of the newly enfranchised were often the main topics of study. As discussed in previous chapters, the research done by the Norwegian Institute for Social Research (ISF) for the Norwegian trial elections follows this trend, with a major focus on voter turnout in particular.

In chapter 3 and chapter 4 I discussed how, based on previous research, one of the ways in which research has attempted to explain cases of lowering the minimum voting age is with the top-down/bottom-up model. Framing cases, such as the Norwegian case, within the top-down/bottom-up paradigm proves somewhat difficult when the case exhibits characteristics and elements of both the types. Some historical cases are shown to have done the implementation in a top-down fashion by constitutional adoption, however when it comes to bottom-up paradigms, or top-down cases where the centralisation of power is more ambiguous, it becomes more difficult to distinguish between state actors making decisions because of the belief of an elite actor or collective and because of upwards pressure from civil society such as through youth organisations.

Norway in conclusion, turns out to be one of these cases. Despite being categorised as a bottom-up case by the research done post-trial elections, this analysis confirms the presence and importance of bottom-up actors, but also highlights the essential actions of top-down actors in order for the trial elections to have been held. Although there are many bottom-up actors throughout the process affecting the outcomes, such as youth organisations and youth parties, many decisions seem to have taken place on the state-level by political actors under influence of either individual conviction or party/coalition affiliation. This challenges the view that Norway can be described as strictly having a bottom-up or top-down process.

The Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis resulted in both unexpected and expected results according to the hypotheses in chapter 4. Countries with majoritarian electoral systems were the most likely to have lower minimum voting ages, despite expectations of stronger youth voting blocs, voter turnout, and efficiency of the electoral systems presented in the first hypothesis. In combination

with this was the unexpected find of more political polarisation being expected in countries with lower minimum voting ages relating to the third hypothesis.

It might be the case that in many of the instances of a lower minimum voting age, we have a majoritarian electoral system in combination with a high degree of polarisation. Perhaps this makes sense when considering effects of this over a longer period of time. If it is a given that these majoritarian electoral systems most often lead to two-party systems and one-party governments in the long run, then when the parties are more polarised, assuming they are polarised on the voting age issue, one of the two main parties will take a stronger stance on lowering the minimum voting age compared to a political system where parties form a coalition in a more unpolarised proportional representation (PR) environment. Compare this with a system where there are multiple parties, and only some of these parties take strong stances on this issue, it might be the case that two-party systems simply create a likelier artificial consensus and thus implements voting age reform more rapidly due to single-party majorities.

It might also be the case that under a majoritarian system, less electoral consensus is needed for this to be the case. Political polarisation might also help within a proportional representation system by this logic, where more polarised coalitions might result in more parties, and therefore the coalitions, taking stronger stances. But this will always suffer from the moderate and indifferent political parties.

In combination with this, the fourth hypothesis concerning liberal democracy was confirmed by the quantitative analysis. Here, I found that liberal democracies are more likely to have lower minimum voting ages. This is likely the most self-evident of my hypotheses, as one would expect liberal democracies to be inclusive of their electorates and responsive to public opinion. The electorate as a battleground for the political elite is also something inherently democratic in nature. This maps onto the elite competition model presented in chapter 3. A polarised democracy might be expected to be more combative when it comes to this, as the two poles compete for small parts of the electorate. This is indeed the likely way in which a lowering of the minimum voting age would occur in a majoritarian polarised liberal democracy, at least in a bottom-up scenario.

Due to the frequency of arguments relating to the ageing of populations in developed democracies, the second hypothesis expected a higher proportion of elderly people to be an indicator of a lower minimum voting age. The results of the analysis points to this being the case. Whether this is resulting from a concern for democratic health, in relation to composition

of the electorate, or some other factor is unclear. It is unlikely that the elderly electorate is the driving factor for this, considering the lack of support that can be seen for this in countries like Norway (Bergh 2016, 22). It is possibly the case that the political or bureaucratic elite becomes concerned with democratic health and is more likely to push for lowering the voting age under such conditions.

The fifth hypothesis concerned regional authority and its effect on the voting age. Here I also found support for the hypothesis. One might expect that in a federalised or devolved country, regions are freer to experiment with lower minimum wages, and that therefore this is something that the federal government can learn from within the context of their own country. Regional authority therefore might work as a kind of ladder for the bottom-up effects to flow through, and a legislature in which it is easier to experiment with new legislative proposals and showcase good policy. Regional authorities, especially in devolved systems, are also often not bound by the national or federal constitution, therefore making it remarkably easier to implement such a change due to the lack of constitutional hurdles.

All in all, the quantitative analysis had five hypotheses, three of which were confirmed in my analysis. The first hypothesis which theorised that PR systems would be expected to have a lower minimum voting age was not confirmed. Rather, the empirical evidence seemed to suggest the opposite being the case, that is that majoritarian electoral systems are expected to have a lower minimum voting age compared to PR electoral systems. The second hypothesis, hypothesising that countries with more elderly people and less young people are more likely to have a lower minimum voting age, was confirmed by the analysis. The third hypothesis, predicting that less political polarisation is ideal for a lower minimum voting age, is proven false by the analysis. Instead, according to the models we would expect countries with higher degrees of political polarisation to have a lower minimum voting age. The fourth hypothesis relating to degrees of liberal democracy is verified, and we see a high correlation between high degrees of liberal democracy and a low minimum voting age.

The last hypothesis runs on a smaller dataset and is concerned with regional authority and its effect on the voting age. This hypothesis is also supported, and the empirical data shows a correlation between a high regional authority, that is the aggregated regional authority between all regions within a country, and a lower minimum voting age. The conditions expected of a country with a lower minimum voting age is therefore a country with a majoritarian electoral system, a high portion of elderly people, a high degree of political polarisation, a high degree

of liberal democracy, and a high degree of regional authority. These are the conditional expectations of which I entered the case of Norway with.

The Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative analysis was meant to hopefully shine some lights on the causal mechanisms relevant for the failure to lower the minimum voting age in the counterfactual case of Norway. Essentially, analysing how the processes and actors performed within the confines of the case. It was also meant to add a qualitative dimension to an otherwise quantitatively dominated field.

The findings pertained to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) were slightly unexpected, but perhaps an obvious find. Trond-Viggo, having worked with the Ministry of Children and Families (BFD) by leading *Ungdommens maktutredning*, underlined the importance of the CRC. It might be the case that the CRC is more naturally brought up in a body receiving its mandate and authority from a ministry such as BFD, as this ministry might be more prone to keep the rights of children as a core principle when addressing voting rights for 16- and 17-year-olds, in contrast with the Ministry for Local Government and Regional Development (KDD) which is more concerned with the state of democracy through goals like democratic participation. The emphasis laid on the CRC therefore serves as an important distinction between the work done by BFD, and the work done by KDD. And, through the rest of the findings as well, I observe that the ministry and committees in Parliament that take on such trial projects greatly affect priorities. Margrete also mentioned the importance of the CRC for youth organisations like *Landsrådet for Norges barne- og ungdomsorganisasjoner* (LNU) and *Redd Barna Ungdom*. This is perhaps natural for youth organisations concerned with the rights of young people. This is therefore an underlying important foundational treaty for civil society, youth organisations, and other organisations to base their beliefs in, as seems to be the case for some Norwegian youth organisations.

One of the more significant finds was the importance of the convictions of the Minister of Local Government. Prior to, into, and after the trial elections the current minister clearly played a significant role. Magnhild Meltveit Kleppa was the first of said ministers and initiated the path towards the first trial election. Despite her party affiliation belonging to *Senterpartiet*, she clearly had a conviction for the issue. While she would not last in her ministerial position to see the first trial election take place, she got the process started by initiating within the ministry and cooperating with Parliament for the sake of gaining permission to carry out such a project.

The want of such a trial election by some municipalities, and the suggestion for such a project by *Gruppen for Ungdomsdemokrati* which included both LNU and the youth parties, played a pivotal role in advocating for the project. This was an argument for Kleppa to push for implementation, and likely accelerated the process. This entire sequence of decisions is difficult to put into a bottom-up/top-down paradigm, because virtually all the actors are ambiguous. Municipalities can be considered state-actors but could also be tools through which civil society operates. *Gruppen for Ungdomsdemokrati* was composed of important youth organisations and youth parties, and therefore in principle a bottom-up actor, but it was established by KDD, a state ministry. And of course, all of this relied upon a minister, and parliament, making the final decision to give the project a green light.

Liv Signe Navarsete followed Kleppa as minister, and despite reportedly being ambivalent on the issue she continued and carried out the trial election. This development likely happened because the government still consisted of the same coalition partners, and this was seen as one of their ongoing projects. Jan Tore Sanner was the next minister, and despite being from a new government consisting of opposition coalition parties, decided to allow the continuation of another trial election. This was apparently because many of the municipalities were in favour of this and pressured the ministry, and many of these were led by *Høyre* which Sanner was a member of, and they therefore carried extra weight. If the government had not been entangled with municipality reform at this time, it is possible that the minister would have exercised more restraint in allowing another trial election. The Solberg government was in a peculiar set of circumstances, where pushing for the reform policy probably entailed pleasing the municipalities in other areas. This can perhaps be showcased by comparing the neutral passive hand they played during the time of the second trial project, with their later years in government which were characterised by opposition from KDD towards lowering the voting age.

The importance of the ministerial role in the Norwegian case can be likened to characteristics of an actor in a top-down process, if not for the consistently bottom-up actors influencing these decisions. In the Norwegian case, actors wielding significant political power were needed for the trial elections to take place, and therefore presumptively for any hypothetical successful reform. However, these cases suggest that some bottom-up influence was needed as well, albeit still ambiguously within the confines of the state and its related projects. These actors, and the position of Minister of Local Government, are critical actors for the trial elections in the process. And therefore, arguably for the entire process because of the following effect the trial elections had on the Norwegian process.

The empirical debate evolved alongside the process due to the increasing empirical data being gathered from the two Norwegian trial elections as well as from other countries that have lowered the minimum voting age. However, this was mostly pertaining to the pro-side of the argument. Here, the proponents could cite the increasing amount of empirical evidence coming out of the evaluations done by ISF of the two trial elections. While this shaped pro-arguments, especially pertaining to voter turnout and expected political outcomes, it rarely shaped the arguments against the reform. Throughout the process, the actors against lowering the minimum voting age would rely on arguments relating to legal aspects like synchronisation of maturity age, voting age, and other ages, and maturity arguments. The maturity argument is somewhat unsettled, but the trial elections showed some results indicating lower levels of maturity in 16- and 17-year-olds (Bergh 2013, 98-99). On the other hand, the legal arguments virtually remain unchanged, because they are normative in nature and can hardly be contested by empirical evidence from the trial projects. It might also be the case that the actors against the reform have not needed to develop any other arguments because these two arguments are possibly widely accepted by the electorate. This might be an example of a bottom-up effect working against the reform.

The importance of Franklin's work in the Norwegian debate is also an interesting find from the analysis. This probably had something to do with the emphasis on youth participation in democracy that was present throughout the process, and therefore a result of the projects being conducted by KDD. Whether pro-reform actors pushed for reform because of theories of increased voter turnout, or they merely saw this increase as a positive byproduct difficult to tell, but it is clear that academic theory informed the opinions of the actors which were for lowering the voting age. It is nevertheless noteworthy that the theoretical developments in academia can be used to spearhead a political proposal to hold trial elections and lower the minimum voting age so prominently. It could also be the case that Franklin's work was something which was very well known to the secretariate or ministries in the differing committees and other bodies that evaluated the proposal, or perhaps that the introduction of this so early in the debate, being discussed as early as during *Lokaldemokratikommisjonen* in 2006, led to the prevalence of the arguments throughout the process.

Something peculiar lacking from the empirical results of my qualitative analysis was discussion surrounding the ageing population of Norway. Indeed, this was rarely a point of discussion in the ministerial documents nor in the committees. The demographic compositional element of the debate was therefore, as far as I can tell, not a primary focus in the process. Possible reasons

as to why this was the case might be that the focus on democratic participation was the central pro-argument, which also conveniently had some empirical evidence, compared to the more hypothetical theoretical nature of an elderly skewed populations effect on democracy. The quantitative results showed that older societies have lower minimum voting ages, so it might be the case that Norway has either yet to reach a point where the political elite becomes concerned with this, or that this is not the reason why older societies have lower minimum voting ages.

Another interesting aspect of the results were the nature of political parties as both actors and signifiers for individual actors. The presence of partisanship can be registered throughout the process, perhaps most notably in the stances taken by the political parties in Parliament when the decision for going through with the trial election was being taken. Here the vote was essentially among coalition lines, with the exception of *Venstre*. *Venstre* being a staunchly pro-reform party throughout the entire process breaks with their usual coalition partners. This is possibly because *Venstre* is the most left-leaning party within the *borgerlige* coalition of parties, or simply perhaps because they are a relatively small party and need to differentiate themselves in order to appear as a viable option. *Venstre* might also have affected the decision to hold a second trial project during the Solberg government.

Notably, *Arbeiderpartiet* and *Senterpartiet* voted for and continuously sided with the pro-reform parties during the process leading to trial elections, even though both parties were at this time not pro-reform. Therefore, the parties effectively operated as a single bloc when in government coalition, rather than by party stance terms as one might expect in a multi-party system. Notably, this was only for the trial elections, as the vote for implementation in Parliament was firmly along party lines rather than coalition lines.

When it comes to individual actors as members of a political party, the analysis gives some insight into how they operated. There are several instances of notable individual actors acting in opposition to the stance of their political party, most notably being Magnhild Meltveit Kleppa. Another example would include Anne Grimsrud from *Senterpartiet* in *Valglovutvalget 2020*. There seems to be somewhat of a tendency from members of *Senterpartiet* to be sympathetic to the issue, despite the party having a firm position against lowering the voting age. My informant from LNU also commented on a similar observation of a mayor belonging to *Senterpartiet* doing something similar as mentioned in the analysis. A diversity of opinion might exist within political parties that are officially against the lowering of the minimum

voting age then, with the most notable example being *Senterpartiet* and *Arbeiderpartiet* before they became in favour of reform. It could be the case for *Senterpartiet* that the nature of the proposed reform, being focused on municipality elections, might be persuasive for many members of the party given that the party is very concerned with district- and local politics. Party members, of course, likely share these values.

In the case of *Arbeiderpartiet* before they turned, some members would still be in favour of the reform. An example of this would be Liv Signe Navarsete as Minister of Local Government, although this was under the coalition government including both *Senterpartiet* and *Sosialistisk Venstreparti*. This is relevant because *Arbeiderpartiet* itself, despite being against the reform, would vote for the first trial election being implemented likely as a cause of being in government with *Sosialistisk Venstreparti*, which was, and still is, a party acting as a strong driver for the reform.

Youth parties and youth organisations were also found to be critical actors. The most notable find here is the influence of AUF, the youth wing of *Arbeiderpartiet*, on its mother party. Youth parties applying pressure seemingly can influence their mother party. LNU also played an important facilitating role in the turn of *Arbeiderpartiet*, by supporting AUF with resources and other necessities. However, youth parties rarely did engage in debate with each other according to my informants. This means the influence a pro- or anti-reform youth party could potentially bring would be entirely within the confines of the youth-mother party relationship.

Youth parties are therefore important actors for their own parties, but not for interactions happening in the arena of political debate across party lines. The primary reason for this is likely the apathetic nature of the youth parties that are against lowering the voting age. This could be due to a lack of interest for the topic from the members of the youth party, or potentially young people in general. As mentioned previously, the youth parties and youth organisations also influenced committees such as *Gruppen for Ungdomsdemokrati*, which first proposed the trial projects, and therefore likely helped pave the way for the first trial election. LNU played a major role in this committee, and this is therefore one of the major breakthroughs LNU achieved during the process.

The last stages of the process are all concerned with revaluations following the loss of the vote in Parliament. One can perhaps ask themselves why the proponents of the reform would push so hard for the proposition, given that these revaluations take place in the same parliamentary term, which is something noted by the committee as well. It might be the case that the

proponents did this in order to keep the issue alive, in the sense that the final vote might have been seen as the final stage of the process and therefore had a defeating influence on supporters of lowering the minimum voting age, but by bringing it up in Parliament again it sends a message that this is still an issue that is being fought for, and therefore undermines the finality of the parliamentary vote. This indicates that the failed vote in Parliament in 2022 is not the end of the process for the Norwegian case.

The consensus among the informants I spoke to regarding the primary reason as to why the proposal fell short in Parliament seems to be that the political will among the parties is lacking and therefore a majority is not achievable yet. Some alluded to or seemed to possess a cautious optimism about the prospect of turning *Senterpartiet* in favour of lowering the minimum voting age and could therefore be a favoured way in trying to push for the reform during the next parliamentary term.

In conclusion, the qualitative analysis revealed many things about the mechanisms, actors, and processes in play in for the counterfactual case of Norway. The first of which being the lack of political will, which would be required to implement the reform. Several key critical actors were observed to be catalysts for stages of the process. Of most import is the position of Minister of Local Government. The ministers, with particular emphasis on Kleppa, were important in initiating and maintaining the trial project and to eventually holding a second trial election. Individual actors were also known to sometimes break party lines, with particular emphasis on members from *Senterpartiet*, who Kleppa was also a part of. Youth parties and organisations could also act as critical actors, such as in the case of AUF and LNU convincing *Arbeiderpartiet* to change their position, or in the case of committee work where both LNU and the youth parties played important roles such as influencing the minister.

I also found that academia regularly informed the debate in the form of theoretical and empirical research, especially as mentioned earlier in relation to the work of Franklin. Franklin's theory of voter habit formation and the potential for increased voter turnout by lowering the minimum voting age was at the centre of argumentation for holding the trial elections in Norway. Analysing the Norwegian process through the bottom-up/top-down paradigm is difficult because of the nature of all these factors and actors combined. Some points in the process could be considered to be a top-down decision, such as Kleppa going in for trial elections, but bottom-up processes were at work in informing this decision. All in all, the Norwegian process is characterised by a series of critical actors within the state making top-

down decisions, being informed and accelerated by bottom-up actors such as youth parties and youth organisations, or notably ambiguous committees and bodies established by both KDD and BFD.

Limitations

As mentioned in chapter 5, one of the limitations of the quantitative analysis is that due to data limitations, hypothesis five must be run in a separate dataset with fewer observations. This is because of the lack of coverage of the independent variable involved in the hypothesis, and therefore results in a significantly smaller, and slightly skewed towards liberal democratic, number of observations. Some of the other limitations of this analysis, like the effect of year- and country-effects on the variables in the models, especially variables such as elderly population, are dealt with by introducing fixed-effects. Fixed-effects has, however, been criticised for sacrificing too much by controlling seemingly irrelevant variables out of the results in order to achieve a universal effect (Bell and Jones 2015, 149). It is therefore possible that it could control out an essential variable which I did not include in my independent variables.

Case studies are often noted to suffer from particular issues when generalisation attempts are made, which is the transferability and external validity of the findings (White et al. 2014, 364-365). Generalisations resulting from case studies often take the shape of analytical or conceptual generalisations, as opposed to numeric or quantifiable generalisations (Yin 2013, 327). This means that what might be generalised from my study of the Norwegian case will likely only be applicable as a form of theory, leading to greater cumulative knowledge about this field of study. Subsequently, what might be generalisable from the Norwegian case pertains to top-down/bottom-up theory, critical actors, organisational and party politics. This has importance for studying any country that has lowered, or has yet to lower, the minimum voting age.

The top-down/bottom-up classifications could be expanded more by using some of the general findings in this case study to define more clearly what actions and instances in the process of a country should be classified as top-down and bottom-up actions, actors, and processes, and how this pertains to the entire classification of the country case itself. Generalisations might also be made about the critical actors and ministerial actions in comparative ministries in other cases. The findings pertaining to youth parties, youth organisations, and their influence on political parties' stance on the voting age could potentially be generalised to other countries

with similar youth-mother party structures as Norway, for example the other Nordic countries. The party system findings, however, might be limited in its applicability to other countries due to differences in electoral systems, political compositions of legislatures, and strength of civil society and youth organisations.

Future Research

The opportunities for future research will only increase by the passage of time. Countries as seen in Figure 6.1 in chapter 6, are continuously lowering their voting ages. Rarely then, does a country raise their voting age, and the trend is one of international consolidation around a common voting age. Given that this is the case, in the future there will be more cases of successful and failed reform attempts for lowering the voting age, and this is therefore a field which will continue to flesh itself out, especially so for cases where the voting age is lowered to 16.

Future research should consider looking at political polarisation and partisanship, and why both of these concepts seem to be highly correlated with lowering the minimum voting age. On the macro-level, analysing left-right differences in preference and likelihood of lowering the minimum voting age could be essential for understanding why high polarisation drives expected lower minimum voting age. Another tangentially related aspect to this is parliamentary compositions and electoral systems, and why these institutional factors seemingly affect the voting age. Comparing cases where single-party- and multi-party coalition governments lower the minimum voting age could tell us something about how these institutional factors are influential.

Understanding why older societies are likely to have lower minimum voting ages could also potentially help explain why this condition in the Norwegian case did not appear to bear much fruit during the process. For the Norwegian case more specifically, future investigation should focus on the electorate and popularity of the reform, and how this plays out in the Norwegian political system. This, in combination with exploring what are established democratic norms, such as the correspondence between the voting age, age of eligibility, and age of majority in modern democracies. More work should also be done in developing defined characteristics for top-down and bottom-up processes, especially in regard to an ambiguous process such as Norway. A theoretical framework which explains these differences in nuance should therefore be developed.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Information Letter & Consent Form Example

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet

"Den Norske Stemmerettsalder: Påvirkende Aktører, Omstendigheter, og Prosesser"?

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor formålet er å *studere den politiske prosessen til forslag om 16-årig stemmerettsalder i Norge*. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål

Dette prosjektet er en del av en masteroppgave. Prosjektet skal analysere både intervjuer og dokumenter for å få en bedre forståelse av hvordan prosessen dannet og utviklet seg i Norge, og hvorfor de politiske forslagene til senking av stemmerett i Norge ikke var vellykket.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Universitetet i Bergen, institutt for sammenliknende politikk er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Utvalget er basert på å identifisere de viktigste aktørene i prosessen, og finne personer så nært disse aktørene som mulig. Utvalget vil bestå av ca. 5-7 personer.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet, innebærer det at du tar del i et dybdeintervju som vil ta ca. 1 time. Intervjuet vil inneholde spørsmål om din aktørs involvering i prosessen. Gitt at din involvering og bakgrunn da er relevant for prosjektet, vil navn og institusjon bli oppgitt. Intervjuet vil bli tatt opp på lydopptak.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

- Studenten (*Benjamin Haug Gjermundsen*) og veileder (*Jana Birke Belschner*) vil ha tilgang til den personlige dataen
- Transkripsjoner av intervjuet vil bli oppbevart på min UiB OneDrive konto
- Hvis du samtykker, vil navnet og okkupasjonen (eventuelt tidligere okkupasjon) din bli publisert med oppgaven

Hva skjer med personopplysningene dine når forskningsprosjektet avsluttes?

Prosjektet vil etter planen avsluttes når oppgaven er sendt inn, noe som etter planen er 1. juni 2024. De digitale opptakene og transkripsjonene vil bli tatt vare på til oppgaven er godkjent, og kan forventes å slettes innen 1. august 2024.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra *Universitetet i Bergen, institutt for sammenliknende politikk* har Sikt – Kunnskapssektorens tjenesteleverandør vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke opplysninger vi behandler om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene
- å få rettet opplysninger om deg som er feil eller misvisende
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å vite mer om eller benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- *Universitetet i Bergen ved Jana Birke Belschner*, som er veileder.
 - jana.belschner@uib.no
- *Benjamin Haug Gjermundsen*, som er studenten som utfører denne masteroppgaven
 - benjamin.gjermundsen@student.uib.no, Tlf: +47 944 98 306
- Vårt personvernombud: *Janecke Helene Veim* ○ Janecke.Veim@uib.no, Tlf: +47 555 82 029

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til vurderingen som er gjort av personverntjenestene fra Sikt, kan du ta kontakt via:

- Epost: personverntjenester@sikt.no eller telefon: 73 98 40 40.

Med vennlig hilsen

Jana Birke Belschner

Prosjektleder

(Forsker/veileder)

Benjamin Haug Gjermundsen

Student

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet *Den Norske Stemmerettsalder: Påvirkende Aktører, Omstendigheter, og Prosesser*, og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervju
- at opplysninger om meg publiseres slik at jeg kan gjenkjennes [navn, ev. stilling/tidligere stilling]
- at mine personopplysninger lagres etter prosjektslutt (1. august, 2024), for å sikre etterprøvbarhet

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Intervjuguide Eksempel

1. Introduksjon

- Introduksjon
- Tematikken, målene, og formålet bak studiet
- Forklar konfidensialitet og anonymitet
- Forklar lydopptaksmetode, den estimerte lengden på intervjuet
- Gå gjennom samtykke og forklar at de kan trekke seg når de vil uten å måtte oppklare hvorfor, samt at de ikke trenger svare på spørsmål de ikke vil svare på
- Spørre om de har spørsmål, og om de ønsker å fortsette med intervjuet

2. Bakgrunn

- Hvordan har din opplevelse av involveringen i prosessen vært?
 - Positiv eller negativ?
- Hvordan ståsted til lovforslaget?
 - Organisasjons- eller aktør ståsted
 - Personlig ståsted
- Hvordan tror du debatten oppsto i Norge?
 - Tror du internasjonale institusjoner/utviklinger påvirket?

3. Aktørene

- Hva vil du si din organisasjon/aktørs rolle var i fremmelsen av prøvevalgene og senere lovforslaget?
- Hva vil du si Regjeringens rolle, og statlige aktørers rolle, i prosessen har vært?
 - Syntes du Regjeringen har spilt en aktiv rolle i å fremme, eller å tilrettelegge for lovforslaget?
- Hva vil du si interesseorganisasjoners rolle i prosessen har vært?
 - Mener du deres organisasjon/aktør spilte en ledende eller følgende rolle i framvekstdelen av debatten?
 - Hvis ikke, hvem mener du spilte de ledende/følgende rollene i prosessen?
- Hvor engasjert i prosessen vil du si ungdomspartiene var?
 - Hva med ungdommen generelt, syntes du det var engasjement for saken?
- Hva tror du kunne vært gjort annerledes av din/deres organisasjon/aktør?

- Hva tror du generelt kunne blitt gjort annerledes (av andre aktører)?

4. Partiskhet

- Hvordan opplevde du Statlige aktører før og etter regjeringskifte?
 - Tror du regjeringskifter påvirket sakens utvikling?
- Opplevde du at partienes posisjoner var fleksible?
 - Mulig å overbevise med empiri/argumentasjon?
 - Var debatten konstruktiv eller partisk?
- Tror du 2022 avstemmingen/debatten i Stortinget var påvirket av kontekstuelle hendelser?
 - For eksempel, det oppkommende lokalvalgene?

5. Prøvevalgene

- Tanker om prøvevalgene før og etter de ble holdt?
 - Hvordan opplevde du engasjementet før og etter prøvevalgene?
- Hvordan tror du prøvevalgene påvirket utviklingen av saken?
- Hva var noen positive og/eller negative resultater/opplevelser fra prøvevalgene?
- Hvordan var kommunenes involvering/engasjement i henhold til prøvevalgene?
 - Hva var omstendigheter for vellykkede kommuner?
 - Hva var omstendigheter for ikke-vellykkede kommuner?
- Tror du to prøvevalg var en god mengde prøvevalg?

6. Empiriske utfall

- Tror du de empiriske resultatene av prøvevalgene påvirket utfallet?
 - Spesifikt ifølge Statens forventninger
 - Mener du det var noen negative empiriske resultater?
 - Hvis så, var det nok av disse?
 - Mener du det var noen positive empiriske resultater?
 - Hvis så, var det nok av disse?
 - Tror du manglende positive eller negative resultater var påvirkende på saken?
- Tror du Ungdommens maktutrednings konklusjoner påvirket framgangen?

7. Spesifikke

Hvis partisipant har tatt del i interesseorganisasjon/ungdomsparti:

- Tror du dere klarte påvirke synspunktet til:
 - Statlige aktører
 - Partiene
 - Velgere
 - Ungdom

Hvis partisipant har tatt del i utvalg/kommisjon:

- Parter representert?
- Argumenter?
- Tror du andre aktører påvirket 'målene' til kommisjonen/utvalget?
- Ble argumentene påvirket/formert til forventninger?
- Kunne du som representant legge fram din/institusjonen deres' argumenter uten sterk motstand?

Hvis partisipant har tatt del i Departementet eller Kontroll- og Konstitusjonskomiteens arbeid:

- Departementets rolle i prosessen?
 - Startfasen
 - Tilbakemeldinger/samspill med sivilsamfunnet
- Var det noen forskjeller mellom regjeringene?
 - Hvis ja, tror du disse forskjellene påvirket utfallet av arbeidet?
- Hva drev Departementets vilje til å sette opp utvalgene?
 - Var det prioriteringer blant argumentene?
- Hvorfor tror du Kontroll- og Konstitusjonskomiteen bifalte lovforslaget i 2022, og ikke i 2019?
 - Omstendigheter, forskjeller av oppbygning (komité og storting), etc.
- Hvordan opplevde du/dere regjeringen og statsrådets holdning til lovforslaget?
 - Var den konkret, usikker, paralyisert, etc?

8. Konklusjon

- Takke for deltakelse
- Informere kort en gang til om de viktigste tingene (lydopptak, transkribering, og mulighet til å trekke seg fra/trekke en spesifikk del av intervjuet)
- Til slutt, har du noe mer på hjerte som du vil si eller snakke om?