

Too Immature to Have a Sense of Duty?

Civic Duty in Youths Aged 16 and 17

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Abstract:

An increasing number of studies investigated whether citizens under 18 are mature enough to vote. While this research addresses the level of political interest and knowledge in young citizens, and the quality of their voting decision, it does not explore their sense of civic duty to vote and its role for their participation in elections. This is surprising, as the sense of civic duty to vote is one of the main drivers of electoral turnout. Looking at the Austrian case, where voting is possible from the age of 16, we contribute to closing this gap. In particular, we investigate (1) the role of civic duty for the participation of young citizens in elections and (2) what constitutes differences in the sense of civic duty between 16- and 17-year-old citizens and those aged 18 and older. We show that the young citizens' sense of duty to vote affects their decision to turn out, but that they display a lower sense of duty than those aged 21 and above. These differences seem to be connected to the young citizens' level of political interest and knowledge, and their involvement in discussion networks. The results have important implications for academics, educators, and policymakers.

Keywords:

Civic duty to vote; voting at 16; electoral turnout; Austria

INTRODUCTION

An ongoing, yet vital, discussion among academics, policymakers, the media, and the general public focuses on lowering the voting age in elections to the age of 16 (e.g., Chan and Clayton 2006; Hart and Atkins 2011; Wagner, Johann, and Kritzinger 2012; Zeglovits 2013; Stewart et al. 2014; Kritzinger and Zeglovits 2016; Hill et al. 2017; Johann and Mayer 2017). To date, few established democracies have implemented electoral laws that allow citizens under the age of 18 to participate in elections (see Table 1 for an overview of countries that allow these citizens to participate in elections). While some European countries make it possible to vote at the age of sixteen in lower-level elections (for example, Germany, the United Kingdom, or Norway), Austria is the only country in Europe to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to participate in *all* elections.

[TABLE 1 HERE]

Debates on youth turnout often circle around the question whether young citizens are actually mature enough to participate in elections and to make informed and meaningful choices. Previous findings are inconclusive: Some authors report gaps between 16- and 17-year-olds and older citizens regarding their political maturity (e.g., Chan and Clayton 2006; Bergh 2013; Plutzer 2002; Wass 2007). Others find that the youngest citizens are as mature as older citizens regarding their levels of political knowledge or the quality of their voting decisions. For example, they argue that young citizens learn from the voting experience at a younger age (e.g., Wagner, Johann, and Kritzinger 2012; Johann and Mayer 2017; Eichhorn 2018b). However, none of these studies explicitly focus on the sense of civic duty to vote as an indicator of political maturity. In particular, it has not yet been analysed whether civic duty matters at all for young (aged 16 and 17) peoples'

decisions to vote, and which factors constitute differences in civic duty between 16- and 17-year-old citizens and those aged 18 and older.

In this article, we contribute to closing this gap in the literature. In order to study the sense of civic duty to vote in the context of the young citizens' electoral turnout effectively, we first investigate whether civic duty to vote is a crucial factor for the decision to vote, especially for citizens under the age of 18. We also determine whether age differences in the propensity to vote can be explained by civic duty. Second, given that civic duty to vote indeed plays a role for the youth and older age groups, we further investigate what explains potential differences in civic duty to vote between citizens under the age of 18 and their older counterparts. This would then allow educators, policymakers – including political parties – and the media to develop strategies to help the youth to socialise as democratic and dutiful citizens.

By studying the role and the drivers of sense of civic duty to vote in young people aged 16 and 17, as compared to older age cohorts, we distinguish between two dimensions of the sense of civic duty to vote (for similar multidimensional operationalisations, see Blais 2000; Blais and Galais 2016; Mayer 2017). Prior research has conceptualised civic duty predominantly as an internalised norm of citizen responsibility to participate in elections, which arguably is one of the main drivers for people to decide to turn out (e.g., Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Blais 2000; Goerres 2007; Blais and St. Vincent 2011; Bowler and Donovan 2013; Smets and van Ham 2013; Blais and Galais 2016; Blais and Achen 2018). In survey research, this *sociotropic* dimension is traditionally measured by enquiries whether respondents believe that *every citizen* has the *duty* to vote. Rather than reflecting on their own level of duty, respondents reflect on societal norms and report what they think is desirable for a society. However, civic duty also has an *individual* component

capturing the extent to which individuals feel guilty if they do not turn out (Blais 2000; Blais and Galais 2016).

It is useful to take this individual dimension into account because it focuses on an emotion – the emotion of dutiful citizens if they do not vote – that is not captured by the sociotropic dimension but is nevertheless an important factor explaining electoral turnout (Blais and Galais 2016). While both dimensions of civic duty are to some extent related, empirical evidence has shown that they do not capture the very same concept (Blais and Galais 2016; Mayer 2017).

The focus of this study is Austria, a country in which 16- and 17-year-olds have been granted the right to participate in national elections since 2007 (e.g., Wagner, Johann, and Kitzinger 2012; Kitzinger and Zeglovits 2016; see also Table 1). This is an advantage because our analysis of civic duty includes citizens under the age of 18 who actually have the right to vote (Wagner, Johann, and Kitzinger 2012; Johann and Mayer 2017).

We proceed as follows: We begin with a discussion of the literature on electoral participation of citizens under 18 and review previous research studying what constitutes the sense of civic duty. Next, we introduce our data and methods before presenting our results. We close with a discussion of our findings and their implications for future research.

CITIZENS UNDER 18, ELECTORAL TURNOUT, AND THE SENSE OF CIVIC DUTY

Turnout and Political Maturity

In past few decades, turnout rates have decreased in many countries (e.g., Franklin 2004; Fieldhouse et al. 2007; Blais 2010; Blais and Rubenson 2013). In order to stop this trend and to help increase turnout rates again, democracies around the globe are pushing to

allow young people aged 16 and 17 to participate in elections. It is believed that involving these young citizens in the participatory process will help them to obtain democratic experience, to tackle potential political immaturity, and to develop a habit to vote (e.g., Plutzer 2002; Franklin 2004; Johnston, Matthews, and Bittner 2007; Johann and Mayer 2017, Zeglovits and Aichholzer 2014). However, some scholars question whether lowering the voting age to 16 is actually a good idea, arguing that young citizens, especially those under the age of 18, have not yet developed a sufficient interest in politics, do not know enough about politics, have little sense of civic duty, lack the motivation to engage (effectively) in politics, and may not be able to make meaningful choices (e.g., Chan and Clayton 2006; Wagner, Johann, and Kritzinger 2012; Johann and Mayer 2017; Leininger and Faas 2020; see also Pattie et al. 2004; Blais and Rubenson 2013).

Taking a closer look at research dealing with electoral participation and political maturity of citizens under the age of 18 suggests that critics tend to be wrong. Indeed, studies have repeatedly shown that turnout is low among young citizens, arguing, for example, that the cost of voting in the first election is relatively high (e.g., Levine and Lopez 2002a, 2002b; Plutzer 2002). However, empirical evidence from Denmark indicates that turnout fluctuates: Once the initial threshold of the first election has passed, turnout drops among the 18- to 20-year-olds but tends to increase again as the young citizens become older (e.g., Bhatti and Hansen 2012). A similar account is given by Zeglovits and Aichholzer (2014), who focus on two regional elections in Austria. They show that turnout is actually higher among the youngest citizens aged 16 and 17, compared to their 18- to 20-year-old peers, and that it is not substantially lower either than the average turnout rate in these regions. Some scholars have speculated that age differences in turnout may be the consequence of a universal life-cycle effect (Aarts and Wessels 2005; Bhatti and Hansen

2012; Wagner et al. 2012): Young citizens may lack experience and the necessary civic skills to turn out, naturally detaching themselves from parental influence when they turn 18 by physically removing themselves from the family and starting lives of their own. At the same time, studies demonstrated that 16- and 17-year-olds do not substantively differ from their slightly older peers (18 to 20) with regard to their levels of political interest and knowledge, which challenges the argument of a lack of skills among the younger group (Wagner, Johann, and Kritzinger 2012; Johann and Mayer 2017). It is also shown that the quality of voting decisions is similar to that of older citizens (Wagner, Johann, and Kritzinger 2012; Johann and Mayer 2019). Finally, prior evidence suggests that young citizens aged 16 and 17 tend to engage in informal rather than formal ways of political participation, i.e., they do not necessarily lack the motivation to engage in politics but may instead engage in different ways (Wagner, Johann, and Kritzinger 2012; Dalton 2015).

However, previous research suffers from neglecting one important factor in its models: The sense of civic duty in younger citizens (aged 16 to 17). This is problematic because civic duty can be viewed as one empirically measurable indicator of democratic maturity. Civic duty is often conceived as an internalised norm of citizen responsibility to participate in elections (e.g., Riker and Ordeshook 1968; Blais 2000; Goerres 2007; Blais and St. Vincent 2011; Bowler and Donovan 2013; Smets and van Ham 2013; Dalton 2015; Blais and Galais 2016; Blais and Achen 2018). As such, scholars have shown that citizens with a high sense of duty are more likely to turn out and engage politically (e.g., Goerres 2010; Blais and St. Vincent 2011; Bowler and Donovan 2013; Galais and Blais 2016a; 2016b; Blais and Achen 2018). Age differences in electoral turnout may be related to a potential lack of civic duty, as younger citizens may not have had a chance to develop such a sense sufficiently (Wagner, Johann, and Kritzinger 2012). Democracy can only be

maintained in the long term when most, if not all, parts of the population take part in elections and articulate their interests, so that policymakers hear and act on behalf of all citizens' concerns (e.g., Verba et al. 1995; Steinbrecher 2009; Blais 2010). It is thus desirable that young citizens (16 to 17) also internalize that voting is important for maintaining democracy, especially if they have already been given the right to vote.

Factors Constituting Civic Duty

Should age differences in electoral turnout indeed be affected by a potential lack of civic duty among younger citizens, we need to raise the question what can be done to promote measures that help them to develop or strengthen their sense of civic duty. Research focusing on factors constituting civic duty in citizens more generally has emphasised the role of socialisation, as well as that of social networks: Parents, peers, or other close persons may act as role models for political education and political involvement, but can also help with civic education and mobilization (e.g., Putnam 2000; Plutzer 2002; Campbell 2006; Goerres 2010; Bowler and Donovan 2013). Furthermore, the broader social environment and any individual's involvement in social networks and events appear to be relevant constituents of duty (e.g., Goodman 2018). Bowler and Donovan (2013) demonstrated that civic duty is mostly driven by factors such as an interest in politics and the sense of external political efficacy on the part of individuals. Goerres (2010) stressed the importance of attitudes towards the political system along with the observation of, and mobilization through, others, but indicating that social trust is less important.

Little research studies the determinants of civic duty particularly among young people. One assumption is that young citizens lack experience with the political system and its institutions and, as a consequence, have been unable to develop a strong sense of duty compared to more experienced, older age groups (Wagner, Johann, and Kritzinger 2012).

However, the youths may have been able to develop at least some sense of duty, even if they have not previously taken part in democratic processes. One necessary condition to achieve maturity in voting could be role models of good democratic citizenship, exemplified by parents and peers (Dalton, 2015). Young people may benefit from learning effects through observation and conversation with others (e.g., Verba et al. 2005; Gidengil, Wass and Valaste 2016). Parents in particular may serve as role models for democratic behaviour and as conversation partners on political topics, which in turn helps the young citizens to become politically involved and to develop a sense of duty. Studies on political participation suggest that the behaviour and decisions of young citizens are predominantly shaped by their parents and peers at a young age (e.g., Plutzer 2002; Verba et al. 2005; Bergh 2013; Zeglovits and Aichholzer 2014; Gidengil et al. 2016; Eichhorn 2018a, 2018b): Young adults develop a habit of interest and political participation if they talk to their parents and friends and experience ways of participating by observing them.¹ However, only one study focused explicitly on the constitutes of duty in younger citizens: Galais (2018) suggests that a family's socioeconomic status as well as parental engagement with children's education both help young citizens to develop a sense of duty. In line with the discussion above, we hypothesise that civic duty is an important driver of turnout among the youngest citizens aged 16 and 17. Looking at the constitutes of duty, we further presume that both civic attitudes and socialisation are relevant drivers of differences in civic duty between younger citizens (16 to 17) and their older counterparts (18-20).

¹ While it cannot be ruled out that duty – just like turnout – is higher until the youths begin their independent lives, and then temporarily stagnates or even drops to increase again with experiences, civic duty should be more stable than actual voting behaviour, especially turnout (e.g., Jankowski 2002; Blais and Labbé St-Vincent 2011; Loewen and Dawes 2012).

STUDYING CIVIC DUTY EMPIRICALLY

Data

To investigate the role of civic duty for the participation of young citizens in elections and the constitutes of differences in duty among 16- and 17-year-old citizens and those 18 and older, we rely on data collected by the Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES). In 2013, the AUTNES conducted a pre- and post-electoral panel survey (ZA5859; Kritzinger et al. 2017a; Kritzinger 2017b) representative of Austrian citizens aged 16 and above who were eligible to vote in the parliamentary election held in September 2013 (total $N = 3,265$). To allow for a thorough analysis of young citizens, a top-up sample of 200 citizens aged 16 to 21 was added. Our analyses are based on the pre-election component implemented using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). All cases with missing data on the core variables were excluded from the analyses. We apply post-stratification weights to account for oversampling and different selection probabilities based on household size.

Measures and Analysis Strategy

We begin by analysing the role of civic duty when turnout is concerned. To do so, we estimate five OLS regression models, using the respondents' propensity to vote (PTV) as our dependent variable. PTV is measured using an 11-point scale on which respondents indicated how likely they were to turn out in the 2013 parliamentary election; higher values indicate a higher probability of voting. We distinguish two dimensions of civic duty to vote as our core independent variables: The *sociotropic* dimension is measured on a 5-point agreement scale enquiring whether respondents believe that it is every citizen duty to vote. *Individual* duty to vote is measured on a 5-point agreement scale enquiring whether or not respondents feel guilty if they do *not* vote. For both dimensions, higher values on the scale indicate stronger agreement with the respective statement. Both

measures correlate moderately (Spearman = 0.55, p-value < 0.001), indicating that they indeed measure different dimensions of civic duty.

The first two models explore the impact of the sense of civic duty in youth (Model 1a) and in older respondents (Model 1b) on their PTV. We do this by splitting the sample into two groups: citizens under the age of 18 and citizens aged 18 and above. We then run two separate models with both dimensions of the sense of civic duty as independent variables. Next, we test age differences in the probability to vote (Model 2a). We employ a fine-grained measure of age, clustering respondents into eight age groups (16 to 17, 18 to 20, 21 to 30, 31 to 40, 41 to 50, 51 to 60, 61 to 70, and 71 and above; see Appendix, Table A1, for an overview of the distribution of age in the sample).

Next, we examine whether age differences in the probability to vote can be attributed to civic duty to vote by adding both indicators of duty (Model 2b), as well as other common explanatory factors of turnout, including self-reported political interest as well as perceived political interest of parents and friends, political knowledge, and external and internal political efficacy, to the model (Model 2c; see Appendix, Table A2, for details on coding of all explanatory factors of turnout). We follow this strategy to demonstrate that (a) civic duty to vote plays an important role for electoral participation even for the youngest age group and that (b) age differences in electoral participation can be explained in particular by differences in the level of civic duty between younger and older citizens. We then turn to exploring differences in the extent of the sense of civic duty between the age groups. In order to illustrate the bivariate relationship between age and civic duty, we plot the means of the two civic duty indicators against the age groups. Finally, we analyse which factors explain the differences in the level of civic duty between 16- and 17-year-olds and older citizens. To do so, we estimate a series of OLS regression models predicting the sense of civic duty in a stepwise modelling process. The first model only

includes the categorical age group variable. The youths (16 to 17) serve as the reference category. We add variables/variable groups focusing on factors that may constitute differences in civic duty to vote between young citizens under the age of 18 and older age groups, such as self-reported political interest as well as the perceived political interest of parents and friends, political knowledge, external and internal political efficacy, and different discussion networks (see Appendix, Table A2, for details on coding). If these variables/variable groups explain lower levels of civic duty in the youths aged 16 and 17, the level of significance of the age group coefficients (dummy variables) would diminish or even vanish (see Wagner, Johann, and Kritzinger [2012] for a similar procedure). Thus, we should be able to identify which of the explanations is crucial for the differences in civic duty to vote between the age groups. This allows us to provide recommendations to strengthen young citizens' sense of duty and, ultimately, youth turnout. As an additional check, and to explore whether the explanatory variables may also lead to divergent effect sizes and/or effects pointing in different directions for different age groups, we lastly add interaction terms to our models.

RESULTS

The Role of Civic Duty for Electoral Participation

The results presented in Models 1a and 1b in Table 2 suggest that both components of the sense of civic duty to vote explain a large proportion of the overall variance for citizens aged 18 and above, but also for young citizens under the age of 18. In fact, when comparing the explained variance (R^2), we observe that the explanatory power of duty amongst young citizens is much higher (Model 1a: 44.1 per cent) than for older citizens aged 18 and above (Model 1b: 22.7 per cent). The effects of both dimensions of civic duty are positive and statistically significant, indicating that higher levels of civic duty

lead to a higher propensity to vote. The effects of the sociotropic dimension are much larger than the impact of the individual dimension, however, independently of the age group.

Model 2a in Table 2 suggests differences, across age groups, in the intention to vote. It is noteworthy that the 16- and 17-year-olds (our reference category) are significantly less likely to have an intention to vote, compared to all other age groups. This finding corresponds with previous studies (e.g., Wagner, Johann, and Kritzinger 2012). We observe a large difference between 16- and 17-year-olds and citizens aged 41 and above. The gap between 16- and 17-year-olds and their somewhat older peers aged between 18 and 20 is smaller, yet it reaches conventional levels of statistical significance.

Turning to Models 2b and 2c, in which we included the sense of civic duty to vote (Model 2b) as well as some control variables (Model 2c), the effect of age on the propensity to vote appears to be substantively smaller. For some coefficients, it fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. The results suggest that divergences in the propensity to vote can be explained by civic duty, in particular.

As civic duty to vote explains a large proportion of the overall variance of turnout for all citizens, also for those under the age of 18, and because age differences in turnout seem to be explained predominantly by the citizens' sense of civic duty, it is important to learn more about age differences in the level of civic duty and the factors explaining these differences.

[TABLE 2 HERE]

Age Differences in the Level of Civic Duty

We now turn to investigating age differences in the level of civic duty. Therefore, we look at the two core dimensions of civic duty to vote, sociotropic and individual, separately (see Figure 1). The coefficient plot on the left-hand side presents the mean levels of the sociotropic dimension by age. It is noteworthy that 16- and 17-year-olds, and also their slightly older peers, display much lower levels of the sense of civic duty than all other age groups. Even though the level of 18- to 20-year-olds is somewhat higher than that of 16- and 17-year-olds, the divergence between these two age groups does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. The largest differences can be observed between 16- and 17-year-olds and citizens aged 71 and above. The coefficient plot on the right presents the levels of the individual dimension. The observed pattern is very similar to the pattern of the sociotropic dimension.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

Differences in Civic Duty of Youth and Older Age Groups

To recap, the first model we estimate to analyse which factors explain the differences in the level of civic duty of 16- and 17-year-olds and older citizens only includes the categorical age group variable. 16- and 17-year-olds serve as the reference category. Next, we add various variables/variable groups step by step, in order to explore, which factors constitute differences in civic duty to vote between young citizens under the age of 18 and older age groups. If these variables/variable groups explain lower levels of civic duty in the youth aged 16 and 17, the level of significance of the age-group coefficients would diminish or even vanish.

Looking at the results for the sociotropic dimension from the stepwise modelling procedure presented in Table 3, we observe that lower levels of self-reported political

interest, political knowledge, and internal political efficacy account for the differences in the levels of civic duty between citizens under the age of 18 and some other age groups (31 to 40, 41 to 50, and 61 to 70). In addition, it appears that differences in civic duty of citizens under the age of 18 compared to older citizens diminish when exchanges in political discussions with their parents and peers are taken into account.² However, other variables, such as the political interest of parents and friends, the perceived political efficacy, or democracy satisfaction seem to have no impact on the age differences in sociotropic civic duty.

[TABLE 3 AND TABLE 4 HERE]

Next, we turn to the individual dimension, i.e., the guilt as a result of non-voting. The results presented in Table 4 indicate that lower levels of self-reported political interest, political knowledge – especially knowledge concerning political actors – internal efficacy, as well as discussions and exchanges with parents and peers, seem to drive differences in individual duty between 16- and 17-year-olds and older citizens. As opposed to the sociotropic dimension, where we did *not* observe an impact of the political interest of others, it appears that the political interest of parents and peers does explain differences in individual civic duty. However, external efficacy and general satisfaction with democracy do not seem to explain the differences in the feelings of guilt on the part of non-voters across all ages.

Previously, we looked at factors explaining the differences in the level of civic duty between age groups. As an additional check, we now add interaction terms between the different explanatory variables and all age groups. We do this in order to test whether

² As we rely on cross-sectional data, we cannot say whether high levels of civic duty are caused by more frequent discussions, or whether frequent discussions are caused by higher levels of civic duty.

different mechanisms are at play especially between the youngest citizens (16- and 17-year-olds) and their older peers (18- to 20-year-olds) (see Appendix A, Tables A3 and A4). The analysis reveals that the effects on both measures of civic duty only vary for one out of thirteen explanatory variables: For the sociotropic dimension, compared to the 18- to 20-year-olds, among 16- and 17-year-olds the parents' political interest displays a statistically significantly stronger effect on civic duty ($p < 0.05$). For the individual dimension, knowledge about the political system seems to matter less among the youngest group when compared with their slightly older peers ($p < 0.05$). In sum, the explanatory variables in our models appear to have a similar impact on both dimensions of civic duty for the two youngest age groups, providing further evidence that similar mechanisms are at play for the 16- and 17-year-olds and their older peers aged 18 to 20.

DISCUSSION

We have argued that leaving the civic duty to vote out of studies investigating the political maturity of citizens under 18 might be problematic, as this is one of the main predictors of turnout. In line with this argument, our article examined (1) the role of civic duty to vote for young citizens' participation in elections and (2) what factors explain differences in the level of civic duty to vote between citizens under 18 and older citizens.

While our results display differences in levels of turnout across ages, as expected, they also indicate that the differences in electoral turnout between 16- and 17-year-olds and older age groups can be explained to a large extent by differences in the sense of civic duty to vote across age groups. This corresponds with Blais and Rubenson (2013: 112), who emphasize that "young voters are less inclined to vote because their generation is less prone to construe voting as a moral duty." Our results further indicate that younger citizens (aged 16 to 17) display lower levels of both dimensions of civic duty to vote (*sociotropic* and *individual*) than their older counterparts. However, these differences are

not statistically significant with regard to the 18- to 20-year-olds. Our findings may not be surprising, given that 16- and 17-year-olds have little experience of democratic politics.

However, the important question is: What can be done to close the gap in the levels of civic duty to vote between younger and older citizens? Identifying potential factors driving these differences may help educators, policymakers – including political parties – and the media to develop strategies that should support 16- and 17-year-olds to become dutiful citizens and to push them to the polls. We have explored this by testing the impact of political involvement, political efficacy, satisfaction with democracy, and democratic discussions and exchange on civic duty. The results suggest that differences in civic duty across age groups could potentially be tackled by civic education, which helps young people to become more interested in politics, to learn more about politics, and to enhance their general political knowledge. Moreover, the findings indicate that the lower internal efficacy of young citizens may explain the differences in civic duty between young citizens (16 to 17) and older citizens. Finally, the findings also convey the notion that political discussions and exchange on political topics, especially with parents and peers, help close the gap of civic duty between 16- and 17-year-olds and older citizens, thus socialising young people as dutiful, democratic citizens. This is potentially a more difficult task for politics to achieve, as discussions are more likely to occur in the private sphere and only infrequently take place in the public sphere. They also require parents to be dutiful, democratic citizens, which may not necessarily be the case anymore in times of political disenchantment, decreasing party alignment, and increasing dissatisfaction with politics. Peer discussions might be easier to achieve, given that educators, political parties, and certain media outlets try gently to initiate discussions among peers by providing important context debates and background, or by initiating educational

projects. However, if young adults discuss among themselves without any guidance and input, this may result in misperceptions of politics and, in the worst case, it could demotivate the youth. It is up to educators, policymakers, and the media to take very special care when developing programmes to enhance youth engagement in politics.

Lastly, it is worth noting that we did not identify relevant differences between the younger citizens' duty to vote (16 to 17) and their older counterparts (18 to 20). Hence, our findings imply that 16- and 17-year-olds are as prepared to turn out to vote as 18- to 20-year-olds, and that the age threshold of 18 for voting is as arbitrary as Hart and Atkins (2011) suggest. In addition, we find some differences in the effects of *sociotropic* and *individual* duty on the propensity to vote or the explanatory factors on the two dimensions of civic duty to vote, respectively. However, these differences are rather small. This indicates that it is indeed sensible to deploy more than one indicator of civic duty to vote in studies dealing with causes and consequences of civic duty, but that *sociotropic* and *individual* duty could be combined to an index measuring more comprehensively, and hence validly, the sense of civic duty to vote than a single indicator (Blais and Galais 2016).

While our analysis contributes to the increasing body of literature on young people's political engagement, it is limited to cross-sectional data at one particular point in time and in one particular context. Ideally, it would be useful to employ panel data to track how the youngest voters develop over time. Future work on electoral turnout at the age of 16 should regularly consider the civic duty to vote.

CONCLUSION

This article contributes to the discussion focusing on lowering the voting age in elections to the age of 16. In particular, the article researches whether young citizens under 18 are driven to the polls by their sense of civic duty to vote, and what constitutes differences in

civic duty to vote between 16- and 17-year-olds and older citizens. In sum, the civic duty to vote is not only an important mechanism for electoral participation among citizens aged 18 and above, but also for citizens under 18. However, the levels of civic duty to vote in young citizens differ from that of older citizens. Part of this is obviously a logical consequence of the life cycle, as older citizens have had more time to develop a sense of civic duty to vote and are more experienced with elections. However, based on our findings, we believe that there are ways to reduce these differences. The differences in the sense of civic duty to vote between 16- and 17-year-old citizens and those who are 21 and older seem to be connected to the young citizens' level of political interest and knowledge, as well as to their involvement in discussion networks. Hence, if educators, policy-makers, political parties, and the media offered programmes and encouraged 16- and 17-year-olds to learn about and engage in politics, they would be able to develop a stronger sense of duty to vote. This, in turn, may push them to the polls and enable them to make more meaningful choices.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

TABLE 1.

COUNTRIES IMPLEMENTING THE VOTING AGE AT 16

Country	Kind of Election	Year of Implementation
Argentina	Local elections	2012
Austria	All elections	2007
Brazil	Presidential election	1988
Ecuador	All elections	1998
Estonia	Local elections	2015
Germany	Local and regional elections	1996+
Malta	Local elections	2015
Norway	Local elections	2011
Nicaragua	All elections	1988
United Kingdom	Scotland local and parliamentary elections as well as referenda; self-governing British Crown Dependencies (Jersey, Guernsey, Isle of Man) local elections	2013
United States	Some local elections and referenda, e.g., City of Takoma Park, Maryland	2013
Switzerland	Local and cantonal elections Glarus	2007

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union PARLINE Data Base on national parliaments; online research of media archives and electoral laws

TABLE 2.
LINEAR REGRESSION PREDICTING PTV ACROSS AGE GROUPS AND CIVIC DUTY TO VOTE

	Model 1a 16 to 17	Model 1b 18+	Model 2a	Model 2b	Model 2c
Civic Duty 1: Sociotropic Dimension	1.383*** (0.26)	1.040 *** (0.09)		1.109*** (0.09)	0.965 *** (0.09)
Civic Duty 2: Individual Dimension	0.482* (0.22)	0.272*** (0.06)		0.277*** (0.05)	0.172*** (0.05)
Age groups (ref. cat: 16 and 17)					
18 to 20			1.004* (0.49)	0.534 (0.33)	0.584 (0.32)
21 to 30			1.397** (0.43)	0.607* (0.28)	0.608* (0.27)
31 to 40			0.943* (0.46)	0.362 (0.32)	0.415 (0.31)
41 to 50			1.649*** (0.43)	0.970*** (0.29)	0.978*** (0.28)
51 to 60			1.868*** (0.44)	0.884** (0.29)	0.947** (0.29)
61 to 70			1.625*** (0.46)	0.699* (0.33)	0.593 (0.32)
71 +			1.914*** (0.45)	0.741* (0.31)	0.879** (0.31)
Interest in Politics (Ego)					0.252* (0.11)
Interest in Politics (Parents)					0.327*** (0.09)
Interest in Politics (Friends)					0.088 (0.10)
Knowledge on Party Positions					-0.062 (0.05)
Knowledge on Political System					-0.009 (0.07)
Knowledge on Political Actors					-0.043 (0.07)
Internal Efficacy					0.194* (0.08)
External Efficacy					0.118* (0.06)
Satisfaction with Democracy					0.092 (0.10)
Gender: male					-0.105 (0.13)
Constant	0.569 (0.85)	3.082*** (0.34)	6.731*** (0.41)	2.078*** (0.43)	1.735*** (0.46)
Adj. R ²	0.441	0.227	0.035	0.278	0.314
n	160	2369	2529	2529	2529

Note: The dependent variable is probability to vote measured on an 11-point scale. Models 1a and 1b are calculated on split samples for youth and older respondents. Models 2a, 2b, and 2c are estimated on the full sample; cases with missing values on any of the variables are excluded.

Robust standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05.

TABLE 3.
LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS ESTIMATING SOCIOTROPIC DUTY

	Model 3a	Model 3b	Model 3c	Model 3d	Model 3e	Model 3f	Model 3g	Model 3h
Age groups (ref. cat. 16 and 17)								
18 to 20	0.305 (0.19)	0.255 (0.16)	0.241 (0.16)	0.236 (0.17)	0.248 (0.17)	0.318 (0.19)	0.315 (0.19)	0.200 (0.16)
21 to 30	0.517** (0.17)	0.335* (0.14)	0.410** (0.14)	0.319* (0.15)	0.347* (0.15)	0.560*** (0.17)	0.548** (0.17)	0.336* (0.14)
31 to 40	0.408* (0.17)	0.274 (0.15)	0.319* (0.15)	0.186 (0.15)	0.221 (0.15)	0.474** (0.17)	0.437** (0.17)	0.293* (0.14)
41 to 50	0.461** (0.17)	0.266 (0.14)	0.373* (0.15)	0.241 (0.15)	0.231 (0.15)	0.521** (0.16)	0.491** (0.17)	0.316* (0.14)
51 to 60	0.678*** (0.16)	0.407** (0.14)	0.606*** (0.14)	0.380** (0.15)	0.388** (0.14)	0.754*** (0.16)	0.699*** (0.16)	0.516*** (0.14)
61 to 70	0.657*** (0.17)	0.303* (0.15)	0.533*** (0.15)	0.310* (0.16)	0.287 (0.15)	0.714*** (0.17)	0.678*** (0.17)	0.467** (0.15)
71 +	0.778*** (0.17)	0.540*** (0.14)	0.783*** (0.15)	0.479** (0.15)	0.473** (0.15)	0.837*** (0.17)	0.793*** (0.17)	0.769*** (0.15)
Interest in Politics (Ego)		0.423*** (0.03)						
Interest in Politics (Parents)			0.211*** (0.04)					
Interest in Politics (Friends)				0.328*** (0.04)				
Knowledge on Party Positions					0.089*** (0.02)			
Knowledge on Pol. System						0.029 (0.03)		
Knowledge on Pol. Actors						0.228*** (0.03)		
Internal Efficacy						0.306*** (0.03)		
External Efficacy							0.156*** (0.03)	
Satisfaction with Democracy								0.127** (0.05)
Discussion Family								0.232*** (0.03)
Discussion Friends								0.106** (0.04)
Discussion Colleagues								0.145*** (0.03)
Discussion Neighbours								0.009 (0.03)
Constant	3.565*** (0.15)	3.138*** (0.15)	2.899*** (0.16)	2.956*** (0.17)	3.176*** (0.15)	3.315*** (0.15)	3.324*** (0.15)	3.015*** (0.15)
Adj. R ²	0.034	0.156	0.150	0.116	0.131	0.055	0.042	0.172
n	2613	2613	2613	2613	2613	2613	2613	2613

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05.

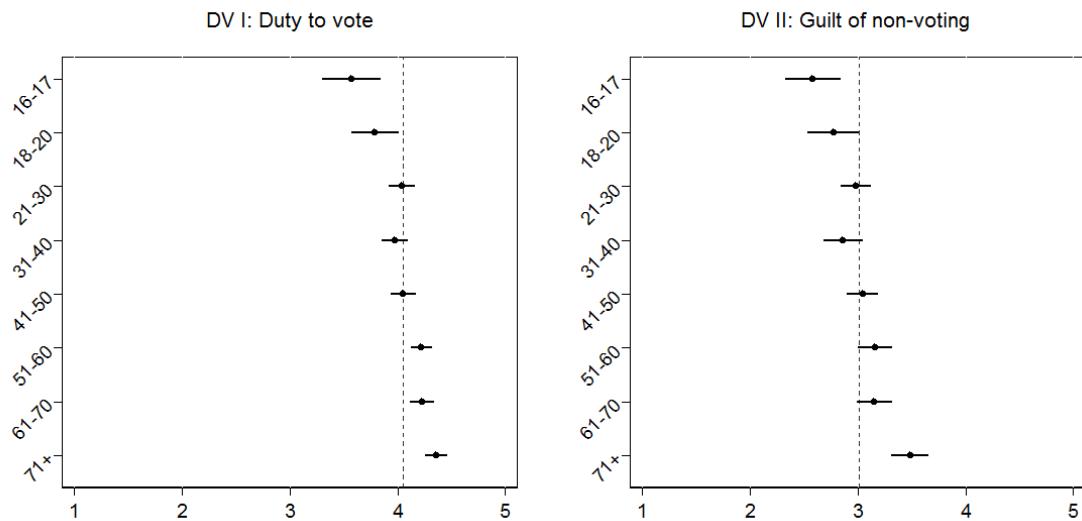
TABLE 4.
LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS ESTIMATING INDIVIDUAL DUTY

	Model 4a	Model 4b	Model 4c	Model 4d	Model 4e	Model 4f	Model 4g	Model 4h
Age groups (ref. cat. 16 and 17)								
18 to 20	0.171 (0.19)	0.105 (0.16)	0.075 (0.16)	0.086 (0.17)	0.088 (0.16)	0.190 (0.19)	0.190 (0.19)	0.034 (0.15)
21 to 30	0.405* (0.16)	0.165 (0.14)	0.255 (0.14)	0.172 (0.15)	0.159 (0.13)	0.469** (0.16)	0.468** (0.16)	0.142 (0.13)
31 to 40	0.251 (0.17)	0.076 (0.15)	0.112 (0.15)	0.002 (0.16)	-0.019 (0.14)	0.350* (0.17)	0.311 (0.18)	0.060 (0.14)
41 to 50	0.393* (0.16)	0.136 (0.14)	0.249 (0.14)	0.147 (0.15)	0.062 (0.14)	0.482** (0.16)	0.453** (0.16)	0.142 (0.13)
51 to 60	0.592*** (0.16)	0.237 (0.14)	0.456** (0.14)	0.270 (0.15)	0.175 (0.14)	0.707*** (0.16)	0.637*** (0.17)	0.317* (0.14)
61 to 70	0.516** (0.17)	0.051 (0.16)	0.324* (0.15)	0.140 (0.17)	-0.018 (0.16)	0.601*** (0.17)	0.560** (0.18)	0.167 (0.15)
71 +	0.883*** (0.18)	0.571*** (0.16)	0.841*** (0.15)	0.562*** (0.17)	0.444** (0.15)	0.972*** (0.18)	0.914*** (0.18)	0.784*** (0.15)
Interest in Politics (Ego)		0.555*** (0.04)						
Interest in Politics (Parents)			0.186*** (0.05)					
Interest in Politics (Friends)				0.447*** (0.05)				
Knowledge on Party Positions					0.117*** (0.02)			
Knowledge on Pol. System						0.080* (0.04)		
Knowledge on Pol. Actors						0.232*** (0.03)		
Internal Efficacy						0.441*** (0.03)		
External Efficacy							0.232*** (0.03)	
Satisfaction with Democracy								0.259*** (0.05)
Discussion Family								0.293*** (0.05)
Discussion Friends								0.202** (0.05)
Discussion Colleagues								0.115** (0.04)
Discussion Neighbours								0.094* (0.05)
Constant	2.677*** (0.14)	2.118*** (0.12)	1.928*** (0.13)	1.882*** (0.15)	2.117*** (0.12)	2.305*** (0.15)	2.186*** (0.16)	1.970*** (0.12)
Adj. R ²	0.021	0.143	0.117	0.084	0.138	0.048	0.040	0.167
n	2613	2613	2613	2613	2613	2613	2613	2613

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05.

FIGURE 1.

MEAN LEVELS OF SOCIOCOPIC AND INDIVIDUAL CIVIC DUTY BY AGE GROUPS (95 PER CENT CONFIDENCE INTERVALS)



Note: Analysis based on the full sample ($n = 3,192$ for DV I and $n = 3,200$ for DV II). Cases with missing values on any of the variables are still included in this analysis. The bars indicate 95-percent confidence intervals.

ONLINE APPENDIX:

TABLE A1.
DISTRIBUTION OF AGE GROUPS (UNWEIGHTED)

Age group	N	Percent
16 to 17	208	6.37
18 to 20	174	5.33
21 to 30	549	16.81
31 to 40	456	13.97
41 to 50	541	16.57
51 to 60	503	15.41
61 to 70	417	12.77
71 +	417	12.77
Total	3265	100.00

TABLE A2.
CONCEPTS AND QUESTIONS WORDINGS OF THE MAIN INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Concept	Operationalisation	Additional comments
Interest in Politics (Self-reported); Scale range: 0-3	Q4: Generally speaking, are you very, fairly, a little or not at all interested in politics?	
Interest in Politics (Parents and Friends); 0-3	Q68: In your opinion, are or were the following people very, fairly, a little or not at all interested in politics? Your father? Your mother? Your friends?	Mean of both sub-questions for parents
Knowledge on Party Positions; 0-5	Q11: In politics people often talk of "left" and "right". Now, thinking of the political parties in Austria: Where would you place each of the political parties in Austria on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means "left" and 10 "right"? <i>Where would you place the SPÖ?</i> <i>The ÖVP?</i> <i>The FPÖ?</i> <i>[The BZÖ?]</i>	Respondents got one point for each correct answer if they placed (1) the SPÖ left of the ÖVP, (2) the SPÖ left of the FPÖ, (3) the GREENS left of the ÖVP, (4) the GREENS left of the FPÖ and (5) the ÖVP left of the FPÖ.

	<i>The GREENS? [Team Stronach?]</i>	
Knowledge on the Political System; 0-3	<p>Q50; Question 1 (open-ended): At what age do people have the right to vote in national parliamentary elections in Austria? (correct answer: 16 years)</p> <p>Q51_A: Question 2 (closed-ended): Split A: Do you know what percentage of votes a political party requires to enter the National Council? 3%, 4% or 5% Q51_A: Split B: Do you know what percentage of votes a political party requires to enter the National Council? 4%, 5% or 6%? (correct answer: 4%)</p> <p>Q52: Question 3 (closed-ended): Who appoints the Austrian Federal Chancellor? (correct answer: the Federal President)</p>	Respondents received three questions, correct answers received one point, incorrect answers or don't know answers zero points
Knowledge on Political Actors; 0-3	<p>Q81: Which party do the following politicians belong to? SPÖ, ÖVP, FPÖ, BZÖ or the Greens?</p> <p>What about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Maria Fekter (right answer: ÖVP) (2) Alois Stöger (right answer: SPÖ) (3) Rudolf Hundstorfer (right answer: SPÖ) 	Respondents received three questions, correct answers received one point, incorrect answers or don't know answers zero points
Internal Efficacy; 0-4	<p>Q23_1: I will now read out several statements. Please indicate whether you completely agree, somewhat agree, partly agree and partly disagree, somewhat disagree, or completely disagree with</p>	

	each of the statements: "In general, I know quite a lot about politics."	
External Efficacy; 0-4	Q23_2: I will now read out several statements. Please indicate whether you completely agree, somewhat agree, partly agree and partly disagree, somewhat disagree, or completely disagree with each of the statements: "Politicians do not care about what people like me think."	
Satisfaction with Democracy; 0-3	Q24: On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Austria? Very satisfied, fairly satisfied, fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied?	
Discussion (Family, Friends, Colleagues, Neighbours); 0-3	Q66: In general, how often do you discuss political matters with the following persons? Do you discuss political matters often, sometimes, rarely or never? (1) with your close family (2) with close friends (3) with colleagues from work, studying or school (4) with neighbours	

TABLE A3.
 LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS ESTIMATING SOCIOTROPIC DUTY WITH INTERACTIONS

	Model A3b	Model A3c	Model A3d	Model A3e	Model A3f	Model A3g	Model A3h
Age groups (ref. cat. 16 and 17)							
18 to 20	0.456 (0.30)	0.760 (0.39)	0.103 (0.53)	0.200 (0.31)	0.208 (0.27)	-0.223 (0.46)	0.402 (0.34)
21 to 30	0.697** (0.27)	1.003** (0.34)	0.006 (0.42)	0.470 (0.28)	0.304 (0.22)	0.167 (0.39)	0.716* (0.30)
31 to 40	0.837** (0.28)	1.130** (0.36)	0.635 (0.45)	0.570 (0.29)	0.180 (0.22)	-0.288 (0.40)	0.940** (0.31)
41 to 50	0.794** (0.29)	1.121** (0.35)	0.785 (0.45)	0.618* (0.29)	0.234 (0.22)	-0.408 (0.40)	0.920** (0.31)

	(0.28)	(0.34)	(0.42)	(0.31)	(0.22)	(0.42)	(0.30)
51 to 60	0.925 ***	1.476 ***	0.953 *	0.848 **	0.643 **	-0.057	1.288 ***
	(0.28)	(0.34)	(0.40)	(0.30)	(0.21)	(0.39)	(0.29)
61 to 70	1.230 ***	1.764 ***	0.844	1.004 **	0.577 *	0.576	1.445 ***
	(0.31)	(0.37)	(0.46)	(0.31)	(0.22)	(0.42)	(0.31)
71 +	1.331 ***	1.774 ***	1.385 ***	0.998 ***	0.736 ***	0.396	1.542 ***
	(0.27)	(0.33)	(0.42)	(0.29)	(0.21)	(0.39)	(0.29)
Interest in Politics (Ego)	0.873 ***						
	(0.16)						
Interest in Politics (Parents)	0.560 ***						
	(0.13)						
Interest in Politics (Friends)	0.492 **						
	(0.16)						
Knowledge on Party Positions		0.210 **					
		(0.07)					
Knowledge on Pol. System		-0.102					
		(0.16)					
Knowledge on Pol. Actors		0.286					
		(0.15)					
Internal Efficacy		0.522 ***					
		(0.14)					
External Efficacy		0.038					
		(0.11)					
Satisfaction with Democracy			-0.156				
			(0.23)				
Discussion Family				0.429 **			
				(0.15)			
Discussion Friends				0.223			
				(0.13)			
Discussion Colleagues				0.310 *			
				(0.15)			
Discussion Neighbours				-0.051			
				(0.11)			
<i>Interaction terms</i>							
Age groups (ref. cat. 16 and 17)							
18 to 20 *							
Interest in Politics (Ego)	-0.225						
	(0.20)						
Interest in Politics (Parents)		-0.440 *					
		(0.22)					
Interest in Politics (Friends)		0.096					
		(0.20)					
Knowledge on Party Positions		-0.057					
		(0.10)					
Knowledge on Pol. System		-0.102					
		(0.16)					
Knowledge on Pol. Actors		0.011					
		(0.18)					
Internal Efficacy		0.005					
		(0.16)					
External Efficacy		0.066					
		(0.15)					
Satisfaction with Democracy			0.283				
			(0.27)				
Discussion Family				-0.196			
				(0.19)			
Discussion Friends				0.191			
				(0.18)			
Discussion Colleagues				-0.211			
				(0.21)			
Discussion Neighbours				-0.107			
				(0.15)			
				(0.05)			
Constant	2.685 ***	2.186 ***	2.708 ***	2.901 ***	3.504 ***	3.861 ***	2.492 ***

	(0.25)	(0.31)	(0.35)	(0.26)	(0.18)	(0.36)	(0.27)
Adj. R ²	0.177	0.173	0.129	0.144	0.058	0.054	0.195
n	2613	2613	2613	2613	2613	2613	2613

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05. Interaction terms estimated for all age groups. As our core research interest is the difference between the youths aged 16 and 17 (reference group) and those aged 18 to 20, we only display the coefficients for young citizens aged 18 to 20.

TABLE A4.
LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS ESTIMATING INDIVIDUAL DUTY WITH
INTERACTIONS

	Model A4b	Model A4c	Model A4d	Model A4e	Model A4f	Model A4g	Model A4h
Age groups (ref. cat. 16 and 17)							
18 to 20	0.167 (0.23)	0.086 (0.30)	-0.915* (0.46)	0.068 (0.20)	-0.107 (0.30)	-0.340 (0.49)	-0.028 (0.27)
21 to 30	0.666** (0.20)	0.887** (0.28)	0.186 (0.42)	0.609** (0.20)	0.278 (0.25)	0.328 (0.36)	0.659** (0.24)
31 to 40	0.303 (0.22)	0.257 (0.29)	-0.024 (0.46)	0.155 (0.21)	-0.082 (0.25)	-0.429 (0.38)	0.164 (0.25)
41 to 50	0.826*** (0.21)	0.825** (0.28)	0.813 (0.43)	0.765*** (0.22)	0.185 (0.24)	-0.592 (0.36)	0.719** (0.24)
51 to 60	0.808*** (0.22)	1.142*** (0.28)	0.663 (0.43)	0.737** (0.23)	0.602* (0.24)	-0.293 (0.37)	0.753** (0.24)
61 to 70	0.819** (0.28)	1.105*** (0.31)	0.933 (0.64)	1.015** (0.34)	0.272 (0.27)	0.146 (0.43)	0.738** (0.28)
71 +	1.242*** (0.25)	1.404*** (0.29)	1.210* (0.50)	0.980*** (0.27)	0.702* (0.28)	0.314 (0.46)	1.416*** (0.25)
Interest in Politics (Ego)	0.989*** (0.13)						
Interest in Politics (Parents)		0.359* (0.18)					
Interest in Politics (Friends)		0.624*** (0.17)					
Knowledge on Party Positions			0.247*** (0.05)				
Knowledge on Pol. System			-0.161 (0.15)				
Knowledge on Pol. Actors			0.340** (0.10)				
Internal Efficacy				0.755*** (0.09)			
External Efficacy					0.038 (0.11)		
Satisfaction with Democracy						-0.046 (0.18)	
Discussion Family							0.458** (0.17)
Discussion Friends							0.246 (0.18)
Discussion Colleagues							0.188 (0.14)
Discussion Neighbours							0.231 (0.13)
<i>Interaction terms</i>							
Age groups (ref. cat. 16 and 17)							
18 to 20 *							
Interest in Politics (Ego)	-0.100 (0.17)						
Interest in Politics (Parents)		-0.116 (0.23)					
Interest in Politics (Friends)		0.103 (0.21)					
Knowledge on Party Positions			0.039 (0.10)				
Knowledge on Pol. System				0.396* (0.20)			
Knowledge on Pol. Actors				0.068 (0.15)			
Internal Efficacy					-0.026 (0.13)		

External Efficacy		0.187					
		(0.17)					
Satisfaction with Democracy			0.278				
			(0.26)				
Discussion Family				-0.076			
				(0.23)			
Discussion Friends				0.122			
				(0.24)			
Discussion Colleagues				-0.006			
				(0.21)			
Discussion Neighbours				-0.226			
				(0.20)			
				(0.05)			
Constant	1.679***	1.477***	1.735***	1.718***	2.545***	2.765***	1.616***
	(0.15)	(0.21)	(0.32)	(0.15)	(0.21)	(0.31)	(0.18)
Adj. R ²	0.156	0.132	0.098	0.153	0.050	0.051	0.180
n	2613	2613	2613	2613	2613	2613	2613

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05. Interaction terms estimated for all age groups. As our core research interest is the difference between the youths aged 16 and 17 (reference group) and those aged 18 to 20, we only display the coefficients for young citizens aged 18 to 20.