

**SUMMARY**

Since its inception, while the EU has grown in legislative power, voter turnout in European Parliament elections has fallen continuously. Based on our experiences of running the You&EU campaign that encouraged young people to vote in the 2019 elections, we recommend: (A) Greater accessibility and availability of voting information; (B) The introduction of policies regulating disinformation online that do not impede a digital single market; (C) A new style of marketing by the EU that highlights their role and impact on citizens; (D) The hosting of a summit for campaign groups to establish a sustainable network.

CONTEXT ASSESSMENT

1. Since its inception, the European Union has significantly grown in power and legislative oversight. In particular, the European Parliament – initially formed as a consultative body – is now an international decision-maker and law-setter with considerable impact on Member States and their citizens.
2. Despite this, prior to 2019, voter turnout for the European Parliament elections had decreased continuously since voting began in 1979. In 2014, average voter turnout was just 42.6% and only 8 Member States had a turnout greater than 50%¹.
3. Voter turnout is particularly low amongst young people: in 2014, only 27.8% of voters under 24 years of age voted. At the same time, young people tend to have significantly different political views and priorities compared to older generations².
4. The result of this evident paradox is a European Parliament that has greater power and influence on people's lives but decreased legitimacy and democratic authority with which to make key decisions.

YOU&EU CAMPAIGN

5. Given this context, we launched the campaign 'You&EU'. Our mission was to encourage young people to participate in the 2019 European Parliamentary elections, by illustrating the impact of specific EU policies on their lives in an accessible and engaging way.
6. Across the website and social media channels that we designed and created, we shared blog posts, clear voting information, videos and images all highlighting the importance of European institutions on and for individuals. Through these platforms, we reached over 389,000 people across the EU.
7. Based on the experiences of running this campaign, we make the following policy recommendations.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**(A) Voting Information: Improving Access and Awareness**

8. **Problem:** Voting information was not readily available on the European Parliament website; some vital information, including election dates and whether or not people had to register, was missing for some countries and voter groups. Meanwhile, information that was provided was unclear and ill-organised.
9. Information was more readily available on the European Elections website, but this was not sufficiently promoted or updated until too near the elections. In some areas, this information was also limited to an online format, alienating those citizens reliant on other information sources.
10. **Action Recommended:** We suggest a cross-EU survey, including consultation with local municipalities and the Committee of the Regions, to identify best practice, exploring what is done in different areas to inform citizens about voting practice and regulations, and what communication channels work best.
11. These insights can be used to develop a common approach for all Member States and municipalities to ensure that every eligible voter is aware of their right to vote, how they can vote, and whether and how they need to register to vote.
12. **Change implementer:** Marie-Hélène Boulanger, Co-Head of Union Citizenship Rights and Free Movement (Unit D.3) in European Commission & Chair of Expert Group on Electoral Matters.

¹ European Parliament: Results of the 2014 European elections <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/turnout.html> (accessed 07.07.2019)

² EU Observer: Voter turnout will decide Europe's fate <https://euobserver.com/opinion/144947> (accessed 24.07.2019)

(B) Regulating Disinformation: Maintaining a Digital Single Market

13. **Problem:** To date, efforts to combat ‘fake news’ and hate speech online have relied upon self-regulation by large media companies, in line with vague and limited guidelines from the EU.
14. Resulting company practices have impeded other channels of communication, including civil society actions that seek to increase voter turnout. For instance, You&EU were hindered by new Facebook policies that prevent individuals from running political advertisements outside their country of residence and national ID.
15. Whilst such policies aim to prevent disinformation, they inhibit the EU’s current objective of creating a digital single market and significantly impede transnational campaigns. They further undermine the concept of EU citizenship by prioritising national citizenship.
16. **Action Recommended:** In seeking to challenge the rise of misinformation, ‘fake news’ and voter manipulation, the Commission must take every step to ensure that the democratisation of information is not undermined.
17. We therefore recommend less sweeping and more targeted regulations of social media. As a minimum, we suggest consultation with media companies regarding their current initiatives, opening a positive dialogue, and the subsequent development of clearer guidelines in line with the objectives of the digital single market. Going further, we propose the introduction of mandatory requirements and regulations to replace voluntary action, such as permitting political advertising between all Member States.
18. **Change implementer:** Paolo Cesarini, Head of Media Convergence and Social Media (Unit I.4) in European Commission.

(C) Social Media Content: Marketing the EU

19. **Problem:** During the 2019 campaign period, the EU’s official social media activity successfully reached a large audience. Content, however, was focused on abstract values rather than the concrete impact of EU policies, practices and institutions on the everyday lives of its citizens.
20. The EU therefore often remains a distant and general collection of institutions ill-understood by many European citizens.
21. **Action Recommended:** We advise the EU social media team to focus on demystifying the EU for the average citizen, clearly articulating the specific impacts of the EU on people’s daily lives.
22. As social media is widely used by young people, we recommend the tailoring of content to a young audience, including citizens below voting age, and greater use of Instagram – the dominant platform used by young people.
23. **Change implementer:** Dana Manescu, Head of Social media & Visual Communication Team (Unit COMM.1.A) in European Commission.

(D) Campaigners’ Summit: Creating a Sustainable Network

24. **Problem:** During and after our campaign it was evident there were multiple overlapping but separate campaigns all addressing a similar mission³. Whilst it would be more efficient and impactful to co-ordinate these different endeavours and to work collaboratively, this is currently difficult as there is no network of like-minded campaign groups and organisations in existence.
25. **Action Recommended:** We strongly recommend the Commission supports and facilitates the establishing of such a network through a ‘Campaigner’s Summit’.
26. This event would bring together campaigners from across the EU, to promote co-learning, knowledge sharing and the forming of a sustainable network that would promote and support future election campaigns. It would further provide practical insights for the Commission, such as the identification of other obstacles experienced by campaigners.
27. **Change implementer:** Irena Moozova, Director for Equality and Union Citizenship & Chair of European Cooperation Network on Elections.

CONCLUSION

28. Collectively, these recommendations seek to further democratise and legitimise the EU by clarifying and emphasising its impact and importance for European citizens, improving knowledge and accessibility of voting information, and supporting political campaigns that pursue similar ambitions.

³ Examples include: [Klimadelegation](#); [YouthVote2019](#); [EUvote2019](#); [eu.for.you](#)