

# Stock-taking of the 2024 European Parliament Elections

## Political Representation: Turnout and Vote Choice

### KEY FINDINGS

In the 2024 European Parliament elections turnout varied significantly across EU Member States, influenced by institutional factors such as compulsory voting and concurrent elections. Socioeconomic disparities persisted; older, higher-educated, and wealthier citizens were more likely to vote, while economically disadvantaged and unemployed individuals participated less. Gender and age gaps in turnout reaffirmed the importance of role models and political efficacy in mobilization.

Vote choice reflected both ideological convictions and protest voting, with established pro-EU parties retaining support while Euroskeptic and far-right parties made gains. The elections confirmed the enduring importance of economic redistribution, European integration, and climate policy as key axes of political contestation. While high-quality representation fosters legitimacy and political engagement, turnout and ideological representation disparities highlight ongoing challenges for democratic inclusivity in the EU.

Key recommendations for higher quality of representation include: (1) strengthening political efficacy among women; (2) encouraging youth political engagement; (3) balancing age representation in politics; (4) simplifying electoral processes; (5) strengthening social safety nets to sustain political engagement; (6) addressing political disengagement stemming from economic dissatisfaction; (7) enhancing representation for disadvantaged groups; (8) considering candidate age in party strategies; (9) bridging climate policy divides; and (10) leveraging EU defense cooperation for political consensus.

The elections for the European Parliament (EP) took place between June 6th and 9th, 2024, across all 27 Member States of the European Union. These elections are a cornerstone of European democracy, providing more than 450 million EU citizens with the opportunity to shape the political direction of the Union. A total of 720 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) were elected, reflecting the electorate's diverse political preferences and priorities.

This **Stock-taking Report** examines the extent to which the European Parliament election of 2024 has achieved its representative function. Specifically, it focuses on two key dimensions of representation:



**turnout** – which determines whose voices are heard in the democratic process – and **ideological positions** – which shed light on the political landscape of the newly elected Parliament. These aspects are crucial for assessing representation quality and understanding how different segments of the population engage with and are reflected in European politics.

The analysis presented in this report is based on data from the [European Election Study 2024 \(EES 2024\)](#), a comprehensive survey that captures voter behavior, attitudes, and preferences across all EU Member States. By drawing on these data, the report aims to provide insights into patterns of participation and ideological alignment, contributing to a broader understanding of electoral dynamics in the European Union.

## Representation

Representation in democratic institutions can be understood in two key dimensions: descriptive and substantive. Descriptive representation refers to the extent to which elected officials reflect the social characteristics of the population they represent, including factors such as age, gender, level of education, race, occupation, and ethnicity. Substantive representation, on the other hand, relates to whether representatives act in the interest of their constituents, ensuring that relevant issues are prioritized and policies align with public demands. Empirical research in political science suggests a strong connection between these two forms of representation, particularly in the case of gender, where female representatives are more likely to address issues affecting women and advocate for related policies (Kläy et. al 2025). More broadly, descriptive representation has been shown to enhance trust in government, increase political participation and thus turnout, and empower historically underrepresented groups, such as ethnic minorities and women. Additionally, voters tend to prefer candidates who share their social characteristics, with younger voters more likely to support candidates of a similar age.

### Why is the high quality of representation important?

A high quality of representation strengthens democracy by ensuring legitimacy, responsiveness, and inclusivity. When citizens perceive their voices as reflected in political institutions, they are more likely to trust governance structures, accept policy decisions, and remain engaged in the democratic process. Conversely, inadequate representation can fuel disillusionment and disengagement, creating space for anti-system sentiment. Effective representation also enhances political participation, as individuals who see their identities and concerns acknowledged are more likely to vote and engage in civic life. Beyond participation, there are better chances that good representation leads to more responsive policymaking, addressing the needs of diverse social groups and fostering social cohesion by integrating marginalized communities (Taylor-Robinson and Heath, 2003). This inclusivity not only strengthens democratic stability but also reduces polarization by ensuring that different perspectives contribute to decision-making. What is more, when representatives are accountable to their constituents, electoral processes remain meaningful, reinforcing the core democratic principle of government responsiveness (Banducci et al., 2004). By reflecting societal diversity in identity and experience but also ideology, high-quality representation may contribute to enriching political debate and policymaking, ultimately leading to more effective and balanced governance (May, 1978; Pitkin, 1967: 209).

## Turnout

Participation in the electoral process and voter turnout are key indicators of high-quality representation, reflecting the extent to which citizens engage with and influence democratic decision-making. A combination of institutional, political, and political party-related factors shapes election turnout. Institutional

characteristics such as compulsory voting, the coincidence of multiple elections, and the perceived importance of an election tend to boost participation. At the same time, mandatory voter registration requirements act as a deterrent. Unsurprisingly, EP elections are considered second-order elections as no national government is produced as a result, leading to lower voter turnout than national elections. Socio-economic factors also play a role, with evidence suggesting that smaller countries generally experience higher turnout rates. Although proportional representation (PR) systems are often associated with greater participation, findings on their actual impact remain inconclusive (Cancela and Geys, 2016).

Political dynamics further shape turnout, particularly the competitiveness of elections and the structure of party competition. Higher campaign expenditures, closely contested races, and a greater number of parties—expanding voters’ choices—can enhance participation. A crucial determinant is the perceived significance of elections; when voters believe that party competition has real stakes and outcomes are meaningful, they are more motivated to cast their ballots (Stockemer, 2017).

### Who turned out to vote in the EP2024 elections?

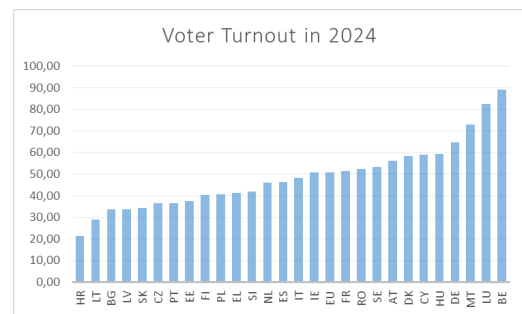
The voter turnout in the EP2024 elections varied a lot depending on the country. Considering the institutional factors increasing voter turnout, one must remember the compulsory voting in Belgium, Luxembourg, Bulgaria, and Greece. Another important piece of information is that in Belgium and Bulgaria there were simultaneously the parliamentary elections taking place, while in various other countries there were local elections (Cyprus, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, and Romania) and some referenda (Slovenia, Sweden).

The highest turnout was in Belgium (compulsory and combined with national election) and Luxembourg (compulsory). Despite compulsory voting in place, Greece and Bulgaria show lower compliance.

When examining the increase in voter turnout compared to the previous EP election, we observe a significant rise in almost all countries with parallel electoral events, except for Italy and Sweden. In particular, the higher turnout in Germany has sparked academic debate on whether EP elections should still be considered second-order elections, as the growing powers of the EU and the EP’s increasing role in decision-making suggest that much more is at stake.

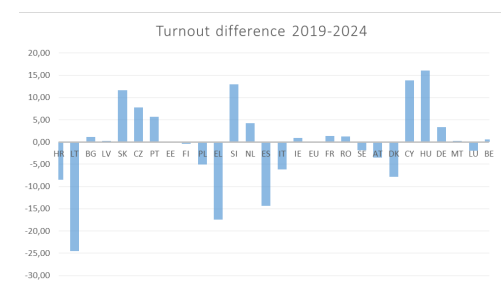
Going deeper on the individual level, this report uses survey data collected in all 27 Member States in June 11-29 ([European Election Study 2024](#)). The findings show that men are slightly more likely to vote than women. This aligns with previous research that connects low electoral participation of women to the importance of role models and low political efficacy. Visible female politicians serve as role models to women and young girls, who become more interested and active in politics and report more political efficacy. A recommendation if we want parity in turnout is to increase political efficacy among women by increasing the number of female politicians and their visibility in the decision-making process.

Voter Turnout in 2024



Source: elections.europa.eu

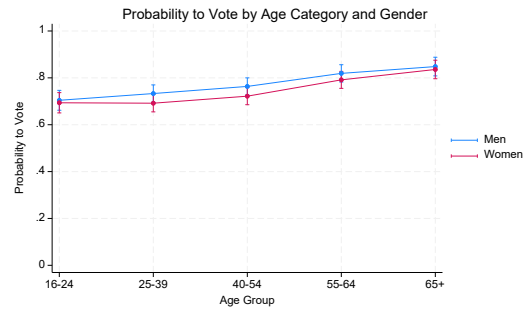
Turnout Difference 2019-2024



Source: elections.europa.eu

Older age cohorts have a much higher probability of voting in the EP elections than younger cohorts. This probability increases for every age category, both for men and for women. In this case, two elements need to be taken into consideration. The first is the political engagement of younger people. The under-representation of young people in politics contributes to their lower political efficacy, affecting their voter turnout. Recent research shows that young voters are more likely to vote if their party is led by a younger candidate, with a notable difference in turnout (over 4%) for those whose party is led by a 39-year-old versus a 70-year-old. This effect is particularly important during party system fragmentation and narrow electoral margins. Interestingly, older voters do not penalize younger candidates. This factor should be considered when evaluating the pros and cons of different candidate profiles (Castanho Silva, 2025).

### Probability to vote (Age and Gender)



Source: European Election Study 2024

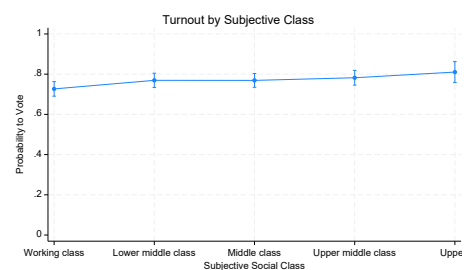
The second element has to do with demographics. Older people form the majority of the electorate, with the category of 65+ being 15% (Luxembourg) and 25% (Italy). While it is crucial to keep older voters mobilized, it is equally important to engage young voters. Demographic changes worldwide indicate that societies are aging, with younger citizens becoming an increasingly smaller minority. This shift may elevate age as a significant social identity, potentially reinforcing the political bias toward the preferences of older cohorts as they become numerically more important. As younger voters decrease in number and, in the absence of adequate representation, may turn out even less, the gap between age groups in terms of political engagement and influence could widen. In this context, ageing societies may witness the strengthening of cleavages along age lines, highlighting the need for balanced age-based representation in politics (Castanho Silva, 2025).

### How does educational and economic attainment influence voter turnout?

Educational and economic attainment plays a significant role in voter turnout, with socially-privileged citizens voting more frequently than disadvantaged ones. When disadvantaged citizens vote less frequently, it leads to a lack of representation for their interests in policy-making. This uneven participation has significant consequences for public policy, as it often results in policies that do not fully address the needs of lower-income groups. This can fuel a vicious cycle of non-representation and political marginalization. When lower-class/lower-educated citizens are engaged in the electoral process, welfare policies tend to be more generous, and the state's redistributive efforts are stronger, catering more to their needs (Heath, 2015).

In the EP2024 elections, individuals from upper-middle and upper-class backgrounds had a significantly higher likelihood of voting compared to those who self-identified as working-class. Likewise, further analyses (omitted here for brevity) show that individuals with lower levels of education were considerably less likely to participate in the election. This pattern is consistent across both men and women in the electorate.

### Probability to vote by class



Source: European Election Study 2024

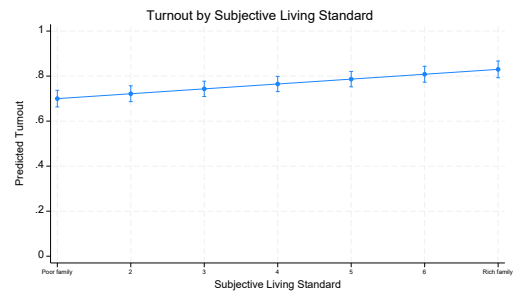
In terms of potential voter mobilization, lower-educated and working-class citizens represent the largest pool of non-voters. In previous elections, but also in the EP2024, far-right and radical left parties have actively targeted and mobilized these groups, highlighting their electoral significance.

Voter turnout is more equitable in contexts where voting is easier. This new theory suggests that the relationship between education and voter turnout weakens, making less and more educated citizens equally likely to vote, when electoral processes are simplified—such as when ballots are straightforward, voter registration is state-initiated, and the number of political parties is limited. Unequal turnout, therefore, is not solely a function of social inequality but is also shaped by institutional factors and the cognitive demands of the voting process (Gallego, 2010).

**How does voter turnout connect with economic perceptions?**

Voter turnout tends to decline when a country's economy is negatively evaluated by its citizens, reflecting a decline in citizens' confidence in the government. However, stronger-than-expected economic performance appears to have no significant effect on turnout, suggesting an asymmetry in how voters respond to economic conditions. This indicates a negativity bias in electoral turnout, where voters are more likely to disengage in response to economic downturns than to be mobilized by economic success (Park, 2023). Economic dissatisfaction has a significant role in shaping electoral participation. When examining the socioeconomic drivers of voter abstention, an individual's perception of their financial situation plays a more decisive role than objective economic indicators. Political behavior is shaped by psychological mechanisms and self-perception rather than purely rational calculations. Individuals who perceive themselves as struggling to make ends meet are significantly less likely to vote compared to those who are satisfied with their financial situation. This suggests that economic self-positioning influences electoral participation, with financial insecurity contributing to disengagement from the political process (Lahtinen et al. 2017). In the EP2024 election, those who positioned themselves as being in a poor family had significantly less probability to turnout to vote than those evaluating their living standards as being a member of a rich family.

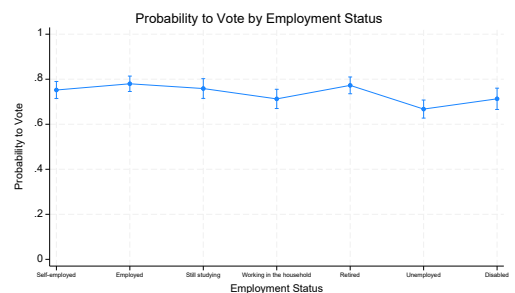
Probability to vote by subjective standard of living



Source: European Election Study 2024

The results of the EP2024 elections indicate that unemployed citizens and those with chronic illness or disabilities were the least likely to vote. Research suggests that several factors can moderate the impact of unemployment on voter turnout, offering insights for potential policy interventions to support political engagement among unemployed individuals.

Probability to vote by employment status



Source: European Election Study 2024

Gender plays a crucial role in shaping the effects of unemployment, as men tend to experience a greater loss of political efficacy due to the challenge of reconciling unemployment with traditional male identity (Jahoda, 1982). Additionally, middle-to-high-income earners who become unemployed often face significant status anxiety and stress, driven by concerns over maintaining their consumption levels (Brand, 2015). The broader socioeconomic context also influences the relationship between unemployment and political engagement. Unemployment has a particularly negative impact on political efficacy in societies with limited welfare provisions, low GDP per capita, high income inequality, and elevated unemployment rates (Marx and Nguyen, 2016).

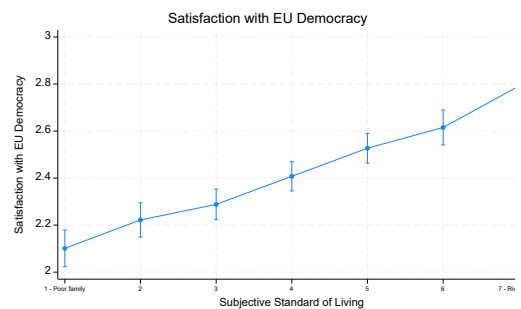
The generosity of the welfare state emerges as a key moderating factor. In countries with strong unemployment protection, unemployed individuals exhibit similar levels of political efficacy as their

employed counterparts. Likewise, in societies with low income inequality, unemployment does not lead to a significant decline in political engagement. These findings highlight the importance of social safety nets in mitigating the political disengagement of unemployed citizens (Marx and Nguyen, 2016).

## Vote Choice and Ideological Alignment

Elections typically boost satisfaction with democracy among voters. When examining the relationship between socioeconomic status and satisfaction with democracy, findings suggest that socioeconomic status influences overall levels of satisfaction rather than its fluctuations over time. While individuals with higher socioeconomic status tend to report greater satisfaction, changes in satisfaction levels are primarily driven by evaluations of political processes and government performance at specific moments. This indicates that long-term differences in satisfaction are shaped by structural factors, whereas short-term variations reflect perceptions of political events and governance outcomes (Kölln and Aarts, 2021). The overall level of satisfaction at the time of the EP2024 election was lower for individuals with low standard of living, while much higher for individuals with high living standard.

### Satisfaction with EU Democracy



Source: European Election Study 2024

Since EP elections are perceived as second-order elections, they provide voters with an opportunity to express themselves in a less strategic and more emotional or ideological manner. This often results in electoral losses for government and large parties compared to their performance in preceding national elections, while opposition and smaller parties tend to gain support. This dynamic can be understood as a balance between "voting with the boot" and "voting with the heart." "Voting with the boot" reflects protest voting, where citizens use their vote to signal dissatisfaction with national or EU-level governance, frequently benefiting Euroskeptic or opposition parties. Conversely, "voting with the heart" represents ideological or value-driven choices, where voters support parties that align closely with their political identity and vision for Europe. This interplay between protest and conviction-driven voting highlights the unique nature of electoral behavior in EU elections (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Hobolt and Wittrock, 2011).

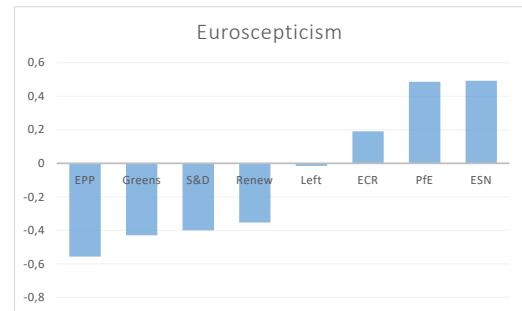
## How did citizens vote in the EP2024 Elections?

Ideological representation is a cornerstone of democratic quality, ensuring that diverse political perspectives are reflected in decision-making. The EP2024 elections resulted in the formation of eight parliamentary groups, capturing the political diversity of the Union's citizens. Two key dimensions of contestation structure competition in EU elections: the economic left-right spectrum and attitudes toward European integration.

For each of these dimensions, it is essential that parties exist to represent voters positioned on either side of the spectrum. A balanced ideological landscape strengthens democratic legitimacy by offering citizens

meaningful choices and ensuring that a broad range of interests are articulated and defended within the EP. The EU dimension captures the divide between those who view their country's EU membership as beneficial and those who prefer to leave the Union—a stance known as hard Euroskepticism. Based on citizens' ideological positions and voting choices, European Parliament party groups can be categorized accordingly. Groups such as the European People's Party (EPP), the Greens, the Socialists & Democrats (S&D), and Renew Europe primarily attract voters who see EU membership as a positive factor. In contrast, groups like the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), Patriots for Europe (PfE), and European Sovereignist Nations (ESN) appeal to those who are skeptical or opposed to EU membership. Notably, for supporters of The Left group in the EP, the question of EU membership did not play a decisive role in their vote choice.

### Eurosceptic attitudes

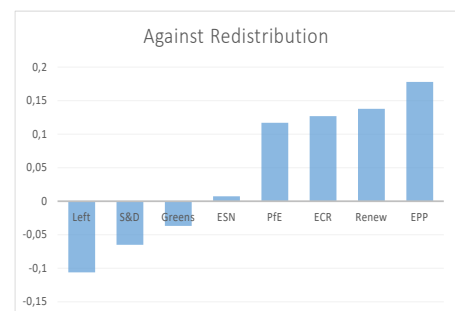


Source: European Election Study 2024

What is important to know about the impact of Euroskepticism on vote? Euroskepticism is shaped by both individual socio-economic status and broader regional economic conditions. The "winners and losers of globalization" theory suggests that higher-educated individuals, who tend to benefit from globalization, are more likely to support EU membership, while those with lower education levels are more skeptical. However, economic conditions at the regional level also play a direct role in shaping EU attitudes. Support for the EU declines in areas with higher unemployment, with some evidence suggesting that this effect has strengthened over time, particularly among lower-educated individuals. While regional economic disparities contribute to a geography of Euroskepticism, they do not appear to alter the fundamental divide between globalization's winners and losers. Instead, economic hardship at the regional level reinforces existing patterns of skepticism, particularly in economically struggling areas (Katsanidou and Mayne, 2024).

A significant dimension of political contestation remains economic policy, particularly the issue of income redistribution through taxation. This issue, however, remains in the jurisdiction of Member States, not the EU. While positioning on the redistribution dimension plays a significant role in vote choice, it appears to be less influential than attitudes toward the European Union. Nevertheless, voters who support wealth redistribution predominantly align with the Left, S&D, and the Greens, whereas those opposing redistribution tend to support the EPP, Renew Europe, ECR, and PfE. In contrast, ESN supporters are generally less influenced by positions on redistribution when determining their vote choice. Among European party groups, the most pronounced divide on this issue exists between the EPP and the Left.

### Redistribution attitudes

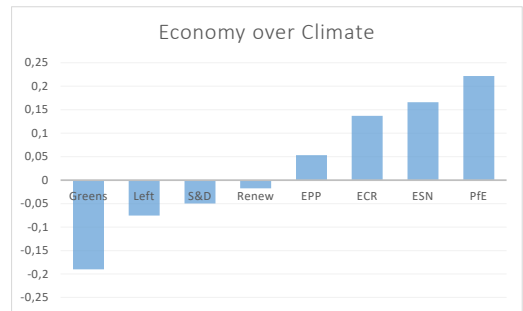


Source: European Election Study 2024

In addition to economic policy, climate change and the war in Ukraine have been key issues in the political debate, shaping voter preferences. Climate policy is often framed in opposition to economic growth, though there is also ongoing discussion about the need for a new economic model that integrates climate change mitigation without undermining economic development. Despite these alternative perspectives, the narrative of climate action versus economic growth remains dominant, even though increasingly irrelevant. The war in Ukraine has also influenced vote choice, with divisions emerging over military support, sanctions, and the EU's role in the conflict.

On the climate change versus economy divide, the Greens attract voters most concerned with climate change mitigation. Similarly, the Left, S&D, and Renew Europe also lean toward prioritizing climate action, though Renew Europe's association with this issue is more marginal. In contrast, voters primarily focused on economic concerns and less supportive of climate mitigation are largely represented by far-right parties such as PfE and ESN, as well as the center-right ECR and EPP. On this dimension, the main opposing poles are the Greens and PfE. Climate change mitigation is an issue that increasingly polarizes citizens and becomes more relevant for vote choice. However, this issue is much wider than climate and captures several aspects of political conflict. Recent research (eg. Colantone et. al. 2024) finds that opposition to climate change mitigation policies increases as their personal cost rises, but not in a straightforward way. Linking policies to environmental goals or personal responsibility deepens divisions between the low-educated working class and urban elites. In contrast, redistributing benefits to low-income households and emphasizing international commitments help reduce these divides. The suggestion here is that rather than focusing only on overall support, policymakers should pay closer attention to how specific policy features economically burden low-income households (Tatham and Peters, 2023).

### Economy over Climate



Source: European Election Study 2024

The issue of Ukraine has gained even greater significance since the EP2024 election. Support for Ukraine is a key factor in voting for the EPP, Renew Europe, the Greens, and, to a lesser extent, S&D and ECR. In contrast, opposition to continued support for Ukraine is primarily found among ESN and PfE voters. The Left has also gained support, though mainly due to its pacifist stance rather than a specific preference between Russia and Ukraine. While this issue remains relatively underexplored due to its recent emergence, it has evolved into a broader debate on citizens' preferred vision for a European Defense Union. Research indicates that the most widely supported approach includes high ambition, EU-wide governance, joint purchasing and procurement, and progressive taxation as a funding mechanism. Most Europeans, particularly in Western Europe, support a cross-border European defense framework, with public preferences largely converging on policy design. European citizens are generally open to creating joint defense institutions, with support peaking during periods of heightened collective risk—highlighting how major crises create key opportunities for advancing EU-level defense initiatives. Political parties representing wider parts of the population can gain from such a position, which also offers itself for intra-European party and between-party cooperation (Nicoli et. al. 2023).

### Support Ukraine



Source: European Election Study 2024

## Recommendation for better representation

**1. Strengthening Political Efficacy Among Women:** Gender disparities in voter turnout persist, partly due to differences in political efficacy. Increasing the visibility of female politicians, ensuring equal representation in decision-making processes, and supporting women's political leadership can foster higher engagement and reduce gender gaps in electoral participation.



**2. Encouraging Youth Political Engagement:** Young voters are significantly less likely to participate in elections. Targeted policies should focus on civic education, support for young candidates, and digital outreach strategies that resonate with younger demographics to increase their political engagement and representation.

**3. Balancing Age Representation in Politics:** As societies age, political representation risks becoming skewed toward older voters, potentially marginalizing younger generations. Policies promoting intergenerational dialogue and ensuring political platforms address the concerns of all age groups can help maintain a balanced representation in electoral processes.

**4. Simplifying Electoral Processes:** Institutional barriers disproportionately impact lower-educated and working-class citizens, leading to lower voter turnout. Simplifying voter registration procedures, ensuring clear and accessible ballot designs, and streamlining party systems can enhance participation and equity in elections.

**5. Strengthening Social Safety Nets to Sustain Political Engagement:** Economic insecurity, particularly unemployment, is strongly linked to political disengagement. Expanding welfare provisions and labor market policies that provide economic stability can encourage sustained voter participation among economically vulnerable groups.

**6. Addressing Political Disengagement Stemming from Economic Dissatisfaction:** Economic dissatisfaction correlates with declining voter turnout, particularly among lower-income groups. Policies aimed at enhancing economic stability, reducing income inequality, and addressing financial precarity can mitigate political disengagement and reinforce democratic participation.

**7. Enhancing Representation for Disadvantaged Groups:** Lower-income and less-educated citizens are systematically underrepresented in elections. Implementing targeted outreach initiatives, fostering inclusive political participation programs, and addressing structural inequalities in political access can improve representation and engagement among marginalized populations.

**8. Considering Candidate Age in Party Strategies:** Young voters are more likely to support political parties that field younger candidates. Strategic candidate selection that reflects generational diversity can enhance electoral competitiveness and foster greater youth engagement in the political process.

**9. Bridging Climate Policy Divides:** Climate policy debates often reflect socioeconomic divisions, with lower-income voters more skeptical of costly mitigation measures. Designing policies that proportionally distribute the costs of climate action can help build broader support for environmental initiatives and reduce political polarization.

**10. Leveraging EU Defense Cooperation for Political Consensus:** Support for a European Defense Union presents an opportunity for political parties to unite diverse voter segments. Strengthening EU defense cooperation can serve as a unifying policy platform, fostering political consensus and reinforcing European integration efforts.

## Conclusion

Addressing voter disparities requires a multifaceted approach that tackles economic, institutional, and demographic barriers to participation. Implementing these policy recommendations can contribute to a more inclusive and representative democratic process.

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