

Chapter 9

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CITIZENS TO PARTICIPATE IN ORGANISING ELECTIONS IN EUROPE

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1. PURPOSE

The REDEM project aimed to foster research into the ethics of electoral participation. Part of the aim was to identify and develop new ways of engaging citizens in elections, whether they are currently willing or entitled to vote. This report contributes to that objective by presenting and discussing one particular idea for expanding citizens' electoral participation. The proposal is to employ those currently disengaged with electoral democracy as electoral support staff (i.e., polling station staff) on election day. While various groups in contemporary societies are presently not participating in elections as voters, this report focuses primarily on those who are too young to vote, and on adults who are not allowed or are not willing to vote. The report explores a particular proposal for increasing opportunities for participation in the different administrative aspects of elections.

2. APPROACH

We start by identifying a gap in the existing approach to voter-engagement in a democracy. The chapter situates the current proposal as a halfway-house between approaches that engage citizens as voters and those who engage citizens in non-electoral measures. Engaging disenchanting citizens as electoral support staff is different from engaging them as voters, but it is a kind of engagement with a distinctive focus on elections. To enhance our understanding of what the proposal entails the chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the tasks currently performed by electoral support staff. It then examines the barriers to introducing the proposal by looking at current limits to who is allowed to fill the roles of polling station staff across a wide range of European countries. Doing so provides a picture of current limits and opportunities for engaging the politically uninterested or disengaged in electoral democracies. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the broader merits of the proposal.

3. INTRODUCTION

Many Western democracies experience declining voter turnout at elections (Blais, 2007; Cassel and Hill, 1981; Flickinger and Studlar, 1992; Gray and Caul, 2000; Hooghe and Kern, 2017; Schlozman et al., 2018). As political participation is widely considered an essential part of a functioning democracy, declining participation, especially if stratified by socially salient factors, is troubling. (Dahl, 2007; Dworkin, 1987; Fishkin, 2011; Lijphart, 1997). It raises the concern that some groups' needs, experiences, and preferences are inadequately considered in political decision-making in ways that risk becoming part of a vicious cycle, (Rosset and Kurella, 2020; Schlozman et al., 2018), leading some to question the point and legitimacy of electoral outcomes. Here we will focus primarily on under-participation among younger voting-aged citizens as a group, compared to their elders and on socially disadvantaged citizens compared to those who are better off.

Young people participate less in elections than their elders (Blais et al., 2004; Konzelmann et al., 2012). Sloam observes that around 'three-quarters of (eligible) 18 to 24-year-old voted in national elections in Sweden and Denmark compared to just over one-third in the UK and Ireland (Sloam, 2016b). In the EU15 well over 80% of citizens over 30 vote, whereas the corresponding number for those aged 18-24 is less than 60 percent (Sloam, 2016b). Of course, such numbers differ based on factors such as educational level (Schäfer et al., 2020; Sloam, 2016b) and, interestingly, whether one lives at home and has parents who vote (Bhatti and Hansen, 2012). The lack of electoral participation among the young should not be confused with lack of participation as such¹. Young people are often active in other ways (Dalton, 2015; Gaby, 2017; Norris, 2002; Sloam, 2007, 2016a). Nonetheless, their lack of electoral participation is likely to have adverse effects on public policy, skewing it towards the interests of the elderly rather than the needs of the young and the longer term interests of the population as a whole, especially because there is a relationship between abstaining as a first-time voter and abstaining later in life (Schäfer et al., 2020).

Voting patterns among adults also differ significantly. Not all adults are allowed to vote in every election –non-citizens, but also citizen-felons in some European countries, for example. (Poama and Theuns, 2019) But even those eligible to vote can face stark participatory inequalities. The research points to an educational cleavage in electoral participation and a socioeconomic one. Those with lower levels of formal education and lower socioeconomic status are less inclined to vote than those with University degrees (Dalton, 2017; Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2017; Gallego, 2010, 2015; Schäfer et al., 2020) and, as Lijphart noticed long ago, social inequalities in voting rates increase as abstention increases. (Lijphart, 1997)

Contemporary democratic theory pays a lot of attention to citizen participation, electoral and non-electoral. A wide range of proposals has been put forward to give citizens a more active role in legislation, decision-making, and government. Deliberative mini-publics, referendums, and citizen's assemblies selected through sortition all reflect the broad sentiment that there is something valuable to be gained from involving citizens in legislation or providing them with new ways of selecting legislators (Abizadeh, 2020; Caserta et al.,

¹ For a REDEM-IPPR workshop on youth participation, conducted in November 2021, see the Events section of the REDEM project page (<https://www.redem-h2020.eu/>)

2021; el-Wakil, 2020; Jacquet and van der Does, 2021; Khan, 2005; Paulis et al., 2020; Smith, 2005)². Nonetheless, voting remains the dominant way in which people select their governments in contemporary democracies, and the most common form of political participation by citizens³. In the case of elections, citizens generally participate as voters, rather than as candidates for election. Hence the importance of electoral turnout, even if non-electoral forms of participation are generally now considered essential to the quality of democracy. participate as voters electing their representatives⁴.

However, creating alternative forms of political participation, and increasing electoral turnout leaves untouched alternative ways to engage citizens in elections. This chapter examines one such possibility, particularly suited to those who may not want, or yet be eligible, to vote. While voting is critical to democratic elections, people do not need to be voters, candidates for electoral office or engaged partisans, to participate in the collective event that is a democratic election. Hence, this chapter examines whether it is possible and desirable to treat the administrative aspects of elections as an opportunity to engage those who currently do not engage in elections as voters, whether by choice or not. The chapter will focus on both young people and adults. While alternate versions of the proposals are also considered, the main idea is that these positions are paid positions, to which people voluntarily apply - as opposed, for example, to unpaid positions into which they are drafted, or for which they volunteer. In terms of terminology, the chapter employs the term electoral support staff (ESS) to cover any person who has a non-executive role at the polling station and is thus responsible for carrying out tasks in the administration of an election.

The administrative aspects of elections are important. After all, it is true for all of us that we can only exercise our right to vote if there is a ballot box (or its equivalent) to put our ballot in, and someone to tally the votes once we have left the polling station, perhaps to follow the electoral count on television. These tasks are important, even if they can seem trivial. The point of the proposal, in part, is to consider whether we can design and use these positions in ways that benefit democracy beyond their primary and essential purpose. Broadening involvement in the administration of elections could enable people to feel that the elections belong to them and are something in which they can play a part, even if they are too young to vote or uncomfortable with their political knowledge or discouraged by the political choices they face. For the latter it is especially important that being able to help out on

² For an overview over recent electoral innovations, see: (Smith, 2005) (OECD, 2020). For an overview of recent research, see (Albertsen, 2021).

³ As Fourniau and Jacquet note, participation in large randomly selected assemblies averages 4% of those selected; and participation in all minipublics averages around 15%. Even were these figures to double, they would still be dramatically lower than voting rates in national elections, or even than citizen participation on criminal juries. (Fourniau, 2019; Jacquet, 2017)

⁴ These proposals include various nudges (Green and Gerber, 2019); compulsory voting compulsory (Chapman, 2019; Hill, 2016; Lever, 2010a; Lever and Volacu, 2018; Saunders, 2010; Singh, 2016, 2021; Thaysen et al., 2020; Thaysen and Albertsen, 2020; Volacu, 2020); electronic voting (Abu-Shanab et al., 2010; De Cock and Preneel, 2007; Vassil and Weber, 2011); paying voters (Saunders, 2009); lowering the voting age (Bergh, 2013; Chan and Clayton, 2016; Douglas, 2016); adopting proportional representation (Lijphart, 1997) and technological remedies such as voting advice applications (Albertsen, 2020; Anderson and Fossen, 2014; Enyedi, 2016; Gemenis and Rosema, 2014; Germann and Gemenis, 2019). There is also a discussion about whether voting is a duty (Häggrot, 2023; Saunders, 2016, 2018). (Lever, 2009, 2010a, 2010b)

election day does not commit them to voting, to mentioning their political preferences or to discussing them with others.

Wider citizen involvement in elections might be valuable for several reasons. It may increase the perceived and actual legitimacy of the democratic process amongst non-voting participants, and it may subsequently motivate them to vote. The parallel here is with the benefits that jury service was found to have on electoral participation in a US study although, sadly, no one seems to have tried to replicate or extend its findings (Gastil and Weiser, 2010). At least, we may hypothesize that it would increase the experience of taking part in a collective enterprise, where each of us has roles to play and tasks to complete. This kind of value is apparent if we understand elections as something which is of collective importance (Thompson, 2004) or think of voting as a form of mutual service (Kapelner, 2022) such that facilitating participation in the electoral process becomes a visible form of engagement with something of collective, not merely personal, importance. The proposal may also help to increase understanding and acceptance of the electoral process, and increase assurances of its integrity and transparency, especially when the results are close or the process is called into question.

4. ADMINISTERING AN ELECTION: A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE TASKS

This chapter examines the experiences and theoretical merits of a proposal that seeks to present a different way of engaging citizens in democratic participation. Specifically, the proposal facilitates citizen participation in tasks associated with administering the election. Across countries, we see that there are different levels of positions. While different tasks are allocated differently in various countries, there is, clearly, a hierarchy of tasks, based on the skills and responsibilities involved at any polling station. The most senior electoral administrator/office is referred to by various terms (i.e., *valgstyrelser* in Denmark, *President* in Spain, and the *Presiding Officer* in the UK). Still, in every country, there are also polling station staff, ESS, without overall responsibility for the conduct of the poll in their station⁵. They are tasked with more mundane but still significant, tasks on election day. Those kinds of positions could potentially be utilized as tools of democratic inclusion. Again various terms are applied across countries (*vocales* in Spain, *valgmedarbejdere* in Norway, *Wahlhelfer* in Germany, and *Polling station assistants* in the UK), but the important thing to stress here is that the focus in this chapter is on what these subordinate roles involve, who holds them and whether they could be distributed in ways that include the young and adults from the social groups that are least likely to vote.

Which tasks are we concerned with? Many different ones - and the picture we are about to draw of them is based on a wide range of descriptions of the tasks of ESS from across Europe⁶. For readability, references are not provided for each task, as citing each place where

⁵ Various terms are used in different countries. Electoral Support Staff (ESS) will be employed throughout here.

⁶ Such as: (arbetsgivarverket.se, 2022; bristol.gov.uk, 2020; bundeswahlleiter.de, 2021; Council, 2022; Electoral Office for Northern Ireland, 2022; highland.gov.uk, 2021; legislatie.just.ro, 2015; Law Governing Elections to the Assembly of the Republic, 2015; News, 2020; Økonomi og Indenrigsministeriet, 2017;

these tasks are mentioned would be impractical and unnecessary. It should be understood as a broad picture of the available tasks, while also recognizing variation between countries. A clear example of this would be Belgium, where the associated tasks are somewhat different because electronic voting is widespread (De Cock and Preneel, 2007).

But let us consider the different tasks solved by ESS: Voting booths need to be assembled the day before the election, and the polling station needs to be set up with tables etc. before Election Day. During Election Day there are a lot of small and large tasks to complete. Some welcome voters to the election. Throughout the day, there may be a need to ensure the orderly conduct of the ballot and ensuring peace and order in the voting area. One very visible task is to sit at the polling station. Here ESS verifies the voter's identity using an identity document or asking specific questions to ascertain that the voter is indeed who he or she says he is. If such a register is in place, it can also be a task to check whether the polling card number is included in the register of invalid polling cards. ESS also receives the polling card, checks its authenticity, hand out ballots, and notes which voters have turned up. During the COVID-19 pandemic, additional tasks have been in place, such as keeping the polling station and touchpoints clean, ensuring that people in queues observe social distancing, etc.

Another task is to answer specific clarificatory questions about the election. These can be practical, and many statutes are clear that ESS are not allowed to provide voting advice in terms of which party and candidate to vote for - but are expected to clarify technical questions regarding where to tick the ballot etc.

Another task allocated to ESS is to assist those, who, perhaps due to a disability, need special aid in voting. This can include helping people who have trouble walking from their car to the polling station. It is also part of the job to guide voters in the direction of the ballot box - and to ensure that the secrecy of the vote is kept intact in the voting process (i.e. ensure that voting is done in secrecy. if a voter starts writing on the ballot outside of the ballot box, he or she must be told to wait until inside it) - or if two persons enter the ballot box at the same time. For the latter instance, there are often exemptions for small children and for people who need assistance. However, it is sometimes required, for example, in Denmark, that if a voter is assisted by a family member or similar in the voting booth, then an ESS must also be present to ascertain the vote intention of the voter and the voluntariness of the vote.

Other tasks during Election Day are more practical. People may need guidance regarding which table they should queue at, the supply of ballot papers may need to be topped up, and new pencils might be required in the polling. Still, other election tasks do not take place at the polling station. Some countries allow for remote voting through mobile ballot booths. Such tasks are also done by ESS.

Polls close at the end of the day, and the votes are tallied. In some countries, such as the Netherlands and Ireland, counting is handled by a different group of ESS - but in others, this is just another task to conduct for those who have served as ESS during the day.

The above shows how running an election requires that many tasks are solved before, during and after Election Day. That these tasks are solved satisfyingly is in a very real sense the

rijksoverheid.nl/, 2020; Riksdagsförvaltningen, 2005; swissinfo.ch, 2003; The Electoral Commission, 2019; valg.no, 2022; vasteras.se, 2022; villard-de-lans.fr, 2022; warrington.gov.uk, 2021)

backbone of electoral democracy. While each task viewed in isolation may seem minor or insignificant, taken together, they help to constitute a democratic election.

5. CURRENT LIMITS TO BECOMING ESS

There is considerable variation among European countries regarding who can help in these lower level but essential electoral tasks. Each country surveyed in this chapter has its own set of requirements. These are listed in Table 1. It is worth saying something about the parameters employed to distinguish them. The term main requirement is, of course, an artificial creation for the purpose of the chapter. In electoral law or in official descriptions of the requirement for taking on the position of ESS, there is no hierarchical ordering of the requirements. As it were, the applicants (or those selected to fulfill the role) must fulfill every mentioned criteria. But the requirement is singled out here because it provides an important initial filtering of who can attain the position, one that provides us with an overview of who the initial group of people is who can become ESS. Another point to note is that when staff must be selected from those eligible to vote, we have a *de facto* age criterion for serving. While the list of surveyed countries is incomplete, in the sense of not including all European countries, the aim has been to select a varied subsection of European countries. Another weakness of the comparison is that it sometimes draws on electoral laws but elsewhere draws on advertisements for ESS jobs. And as the Swedish case reveals, the latter might have requirements not stipulated by law. Additionally, there are linguistic barriers to examining adverts more widely, and they are often not available online when there is not an election coming up. Hence, there are advantages and disadvantages to reviewing the requirements for selection beyond those laid out in electoral laws.

Table 1: Requirements for being allowed to help in electoral tasks

Country	Main requirement	Language	Training	Other	Not a candidate ⁷
Netherlands ⁸	Age 18		(x) ⁹		
Germany ¹⁰	Voter			Lived > 3 months in Germany ¹¹	
Spain ¹²	Voters below 70	Can read and write			
Sweden ¹³	(none) ¹⁴		x		
Romania ¹⁵	Citizens with right to vote				x + relatives of candidates
England ¹⁶	18 and working permit				x + relatives + those working for candidate
Scotland ¹⁷	18 and working permit				x + relatives + those working for candidate
Northern Ireland ¹⁸	18 and working permit			Must not have been convicted of an offence under electoral law	x + relatives + those working for candidate. Must declare other conflicts of interests.
Denmark	Voters			Must live in municipality	Candidates cannot count votes of own party or assist voters in the voting booth
Switzerland ¹⁹	Citizens 18+				

⁷ Here 'x' means that it is a requirement that you are not a candidate

⁸ (rijksoverheid.nl/, 2020)

⁹ Must go through online training

¹⁰ (bundeswahlleiter.de, 2021)

¹¹ and not longer than 25 years ago

¹² (legislatie.just.ro, 2015)

¹³ (Riksdagsförvaltningen, 2005)

¹⁴ Not by law, but adds asks for people over 18 and speak Swedish (arbetsgivarverket.se, 2022; vasteras.se, 2022)

¹⁵ (legislatie.just.ro, 2015)

¹⁶ (bristol.gov.uk, 2020; warrington.gov.uk, 2021)

¹⁷ (highland.gov.uk, 2021)

¹⁸ (Electoral Office for Northern Ireland, 2022)

¹⁹ (swissinfo.ch, 2003)

Portugal ²⁰	Voters	Must read and write Portuguese			
Italy	Voters				
Norway ²¹					x
Belgium ²²	Voters				
Wales ²³	18				x + relatives + those working for candidate
Iceland ²⁴	(none)				x + their spouses and closest relatives
Poland ²⁵	Citizen with the right to vote				x + persons connected with them
Hungary ²⁶	Voters residing in the district				x + relatives + members of organisations nominating candidates ²⁷
Croatia	(none)				Chairperson and deputy cannot be party members

Looking at the table provides us with several interesting insights into who can serve as ESS in Europe. We see that there is a *tremendous variation* between the surveyed European countries. Let us take a closer look at this variation. The purpose is not necessarily to rank every country in terms of how permissible or impermissible they are when employing ESS. Some countries such as Norway, Ireland, Croatia, and the Netherlands, have relatively few requirements. In contrast, others, such as Romania and Poland, have several requirements, which, at least to some extent, make it difficult to use the employment of ESS as proposed in this chapter. Looking in more detail at the requirements, it is worth briefly pointing out how they affect this possibility.

Being a voter is a requirement in several countries. However, within this category of requirements, there is a distinction regarding whether everybody above a certain age is considered a voter or you have to register to become a voter. If the latter is the case, it

²⁰ (Law Governing Elections to the Assembly of the Republic, 2015)

²¹ (valg.no, 2022)

²² (<https://elections.fgov.be/>, 2022)

²³ (*Polling Station Staff and Count Assistant Positions (Closing Date, 2022)*)

²⁴ (government.is, 2020)

²⁵ (aplikuj.pl, 2020)

²⁶ (Act C of 1997 on Electoral Procedure, 2013)

²⁷ In addition, it is also stated that a number of public officials and public employees working with elections can't hold these positions.

constitutes a further obstacle and a different kind of obstacle than age to employment as ESS. In other countries, it is a requirement that you are a citizen. Such a requirement stops immigrants who are not yet (or never will be) citizens from becoming ESS. However, the weaker requirement of being eligible to vote is consistent with voting in local elections by non-national EU citizens. In any EU member country, a person is allowed to cast a vote in the country they currently reside for elections to the European Parliament and in local elections. For the latter also, non-EU citizens are often voters.

But the converse can also be true, that people can be citizens but not voters. This is the case when a person has not reached the voting age, but also when a person has been disenfranchised. In some instances, the reasons people are disenfranchised (i.e., lack of cognitive abilities or, in some countries, that they are in prison) make them unable to serve as ESS. For this reason, the situation where people are voters, but not citizens is the most relevant for current purposes. It is worth pointing out here that several countries do not have a nationality requirement (or, as in Northern Ireland, allow many nationalities to become ESS). But the differences between a voter requirement and a citizenship requirement should be clear at this point.

Looking at the other requirements, we may say that the extent to which they filter out certain groups varies a lot. Competence in the local language may make some immigrants ineligible for particular tasks. Party affiliation, or requirements that you cannot have campaigned for a candidate, will also bar some from becoming ESS. Still, this requirement is less likely to affect the young and politically marginalized.

Whether explicit or implicit, age requirements make it impossible to involve those below the voting age in the conduct of elections. In contrast, Norwegian job descriptions emphasize that school pupils can be hired as ESS even if they are not yet eligible to vote (valg.no, 2022). Sweden also has very inclusive rules, even if their job advertisements seem to include an age requirement (vasteras.se, 2022). So, looking at the formal limits, we can conclude that there is a great deal of variation, and it is quite clear which rules need to be relaxed for the proposal discussed here to work.

Another couple of points should be made in addition to this list of requirements. One is that countries differ in how people are appointed/hired. In some countries, such as Belgium, ESS are drawn by lots and serving, if selected, is a civic duty, like jury service in other countries. By contrast, in other countries, like the UK, ESS are hired after applying in response to a job advertisement. Elsewhere, such as in Denmark, the parties seem to influence the composition of ESS. We know from inequalities in political participation that the latter might not be a good idea from the perspective of equality of opportunity. Using lotteries to select ESS might therefore seem preferable. However, unweighted lotteries are unlikely to facilitate the inclusion of the politically marginalised amongst ESS, even if they will likely distribute positions to a more diverse population than will be the case if parties do the selecting. However, while weighted lotteries, suitably constructed, might broaden participation still further, even when participation is voluntary, they inevitably violate formal equal of opportunity and, more seriously for our purposes, may be less good than more targeted forms of affirmative action in encouraging the electorally inactive to consider applying and serving as ESS.

It is important, then, that ESS jobs be advertised broadly and that people from different backgrounds should be encouraged to apply and be capable of being hired. It is interesting to note that in countries advertising for ESS, the advertisements for these jobs send very different messages. In Italy, it is stressed that students and the unemployed are particularly welcome to employ. In Ireland, the officers responsible are required to ensure a recruitment process that ‘encourages and welcomes applications’ from those who are unemployed (INO, 2020). In stark contrast, many UK postings advise potential applicants on benefits to first contact their local unemployment benefits office (bristol.gov.uk, 2020), which is likely to discourage people on unemployment benefits from applying, even if the effect is unintentional.

It is probably hard to say whether filling ESS positions via applications or through the drawing of lots (whether with or without compulsion to serve) is better morally or politically. These are complex issues balancing various values, but for now the proposal will be discussed in the form where it is something people sign up to on a voluntary basis.

Our discussion thus far has looked at restrictions in terms of how they impact the opportunities of marginalized groups. But, of course, there is also a further discussion about the justifiability of each requirement. Discussion of each of them in detail would be too much to cover in this chapter, but a few remarks can be made. It is likely that issues of competence and trustworthiness are behind several restrictions related to age (whether that is a minimum or a maximum age). To a certain extent, requirements pertaining to citizenship may have similar justifications. Whereas other restrictions, such as those barring candidates or their relatives from serving, are more likely to be justified by considerations of procedural fairness. Depending on who they exclude, restrictions based on whether people are voters may have a variety of justifications. Here again, matters of competence/ability (in relation to the not yet old enough or the disenfranchised) and trustworthiness (similar, but also non-nationals) may be the reasons for such limitations. It is, however, important to realise that the communicative, or expressive, dimension of such exclusions, however motivated, is relevant to their justification. While a 35-year-old party member can accept that the importance of impartiality might justify precluding them from being an ESS, the public implication that they cannot be trusted is likely to be offensive for 17-year-olds, given their legal responsibilities in other respects, and the same is likely to be true for resident non-citizens. Whether subjectively experienced as disrespectful or not, however, we may wonder whether democratic principles and considerations of solidarity, civic respect and inclusion are consistent with such limitations on the role of ESS nowadays.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter considers whether we could or should relax some of the limitations on who can currently help with elections in publicly recognized roles, as one way of enabling people who are currently unwilling or unable to vote to feel that electoral democracy is for them, not just about them. Instead of relying on public servants, party- members, and perhaps the most electorally enthusiastic among the general population, a more significant effort should be conducted to reach out to those on the fringes of electoral participation. Including some of those who are not willing or eligible to vote in the electoral process could be important for a number of reasons. It sends the message that society considers them valuable and trustworthy; it shows that they have a role to play in electoral democracy and that their

contribution is valuable and valued even if they do not want to vote or are not yet legally able to do so.

The communicative aspect of the proposal is important. We do not assume that participating as ESS will make people who are currently marginalized, vote. Rather, the main purpose of the proposal is to highlight the different roles through which non-voters might participate in democratic elections, understood as a democratically important collective event, whether or not they are willing or able to participate in the process of collective decision-making and legitimation that characterizes the role of voter. Although some non-voters might thereby be turned into voters, that is not its sole, or even the primary aim. What is at issue, rather, is the possibility of making elections more accessible, understandable, and transparent to those whose families, friends and colleagues may know little about them, may dismiss them as irrelevant for people like them, or who may not be ready or able to take up the morally burdensome role of voter. As the REDEM project has emphasized, a voter-centred perspective on electoral democracy is important because contributing to the selection of political leaders and programmes can be morally burdensome in ways that are inadequately acknowledged in the literatures on abstention or the ethics of voting. (Lever, 2017; Lever and Volacu, 2018) Moreover, those burdens are unlikely to be distributed equally amongst the population, in so far as the electoral choices that some people face are often very much less appealing than those of others, despite being fully as democratic. (Mráz and Lever, 2023a; and Mráz and Lever, 2023b; Beckman and Volacu, 2023). In these circumstances the inclusive communicative aspects of the proposal are particularly important, conveying the message that you do not have to be a voter or a candidate to play a valuable part in an election and to contribute to its democratic character and success.

However, being part of the electoral process may, in fact, encourage and facilitate subsequent participation as a voter. Consider the idea of electoral ergonomics. The theme is explored in several publications by Bruter and Harrison (Bruter, 2019; Bruter and Harrison, 2017, 2020), who see ergonomics as a key term in design, architecture, and marketing. It is defined as 'the interface between electoral arrangements and voters' psychology' (Bruter, 2019, p. 2). Elsewhere Bruter and Harrison define it as a 'way in which electoral arrangements interact with citizens' psychology and optimize their experience given the possible functions of elections' (Bruter and Harrison, 2017). The idea is that once we take account of electoral ergonomics, we can see that there can be essential interactions between design and psychology. Even supposedly neutral designs may matter because they affect 'the atmosphere of the vote, the experience of the voter, his/her interactions with the system and with others and trigger different memories, emotions or broadly defined psychological reactions' (Bruter, 2019, p. 2). While electoral ergonomics has been developed in relation to voters, it seems reasonable to extend it to non-voting participants in elections as well. Thus, we could reasonably consider the ESS to experience this kind of interaction. So it could be, that this kind of effect means that non-voters may be more likely to vote in the future if they experience Election Day and are, as it were, exposed to it. Furthermore, we may say that ESS are also part of the ergonomic themselves, and thereby affect the experience of voters. Therefore, a more diverse group of ESS (in terms of age and background) might make polling stations feel less intimidating and more welcoming for those who are unsure if voting is really for people like them.

But for this proposal to matter, we must take a critical look at the rules defining eligibility to take up an ESS, especially when those rules render people who close the opportunity to those who are not yet eligible or willing to vote. Relevant groups that come to mind here are, of course, immigrants may be allowed to vote in local elections, and who if they obtain citizenship, would be eligible to vote in national elections; but also young people who have not yet reached the voting age. The proposal is, it should be admitted, least applicable to those who have been disenfranchised for reasons related to their cognitive abilities as this may, though need not, render them unable to fulfil the requisite tasks, without unduly burdening the rest of the ESS, or calling the integrity of the count into question.

One important question, of course, would be whether this would work. Is it reasonable to think that people who are eligible to vote, but do not take up that opportunity, might be open to taking up a non-voting role in elections? Here it can be helpful to bear several points in mind. Firstly, people who abstain from elections are not necessarily hostile or, even, indifferent to democracy. If they consider the current electoral options unattractive, or do not feel confident in their political knowledge and judgements, they may be interested in serving as ESS, though unwilling to take part in an election as a voter. Secondly, paying people to undertake this task can motivate them (if it is adequately ensured that they will not lose benefits). This is in line with the practice in most countries, even if the payment size varies. Finally, many of the people for whom this proposal is relevant are not non-voters by choice, but because they are not yet legally eligible to vote or fear losing the citizenship of their birth country by adopting that of another. The ability to take part in an event of national significance, and to display their interest and commitment to it, may therefore be particularly appealing. Hence, more attention to current electoral laws on the hiring and training of ESS appears justified. As we have seen, these rules can be quite diverse, and the implicit picture that they draw of who is a trusted and valued member of society is not always appealing or justified. Thus, there are non-instrumental and communicative reasons, as well as more directly instrumental ones to consider widening the range of roles through which people might take part in democratic elections.

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