

School elections and other elections for young people in the Nordic countries

A practical guide to organising elections
for young people

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1. A brief overview of the Ungas val project

The Ungas val project, funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers, aimed to strengthen the civic competence of young people in the Nordic countries through elections for young people and other democracy education. The concept of civic competence refers to a young person's perceived ability to understand societal and political processes. The project was based on the idea that the functioning of a democratic society requires active, aware and participating citizens. Young people do not only represent the present. Instead, their participation guarantees that the voice of future generations will be heard in decision-making and ensures the continuity and development of democracy in the long term.

The Ungas val project strengthened cooperation between the Nordic countries in democracy education and the organisation of elections for young people. Previously, there had been little cooperation in terms of elections for young people. Almost every Nordic country has its own model for conducting school elections. In the framework of the project, the aim was to create a basis for Nordic cooperation around school elections and democracy education so that it could continue even after the project had ended. In addition to Finland, Denmark and Norway participated in the project as official partners. Representatives of other Nordic countries were also interviewed and practices were reviewed for the materials in this guide.

The project was implemented in 2025 and its key activities were:

- Organising Youth Elections in Finland in connection with the municipal and county elections in 2025 and the Week of Politics, which is a national societal influencing theme week for young people and a democracy education concept for professionals from the teaching, guidance and pedagogy sectors.
- A communications campaign organised in connection with the municipal and county elections in Finland, aimed especially at increasing the voting turnout of young people.
- Compiling this written guide, which includes the Nordic countries' best practices for organising school elections and supporting the civic competence of young people.

The target group of this guide on the organisation of elections for young people is Nordic operators who organise elections and democracy education for young people. These operators may include government agencies or ministries, civil society operators and professionals from the guidance, teaching and pedagogy sectors for young people. The guide also benefits the Nordic Council of Ministers, which can use the guide to support the organisation of elections for young people and high-quality democracy education in all Nordic countries.

For the sake of clarity, the term "school elections" has primarily been used in the Ungas val project and in this guide for elections for young people, but it is important to be aware that elections for young people can also be organised outside of schools. Different countries use different terms for elections for young people, such as "Youth elections", "Shadow elections" or "Mock elections".

2. School elections in the Nordic countries

2.1. History of school elections

School elections for minors and other elections for young people that simulate national elections and give young people the opportunity to try voting before they reach the official voting age have long been organised in the Nordic countries. The purpose of these elections for young people is to lower the threshold for exercising their right to vote in official elections. Through functional learning, young people gain experience of how elections and democracy work. This increases their ability and willingness to participate in societal processes later in life.

As far as it is known, school elections have been organised in Sweden (*Skolval*) the longest, for more than 60 years. They were initially organised locally and later with the support of the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society MUCF since 1998 and with the support of the Ministry of Education and Research since 2002. Since 2014, the school elections have been organised in connection with all national elections in Sweden.

In Norway (*Skolevalg*), the elections have been organised locally since the 1980s, systematically by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training UDIR in all local and national elections since 1989, and also in the EU referendum since 1994.

In Finland (*Youth Elections*), the elections have been organised since the 1990s by the Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector.

In Denmark (*Skolevalg*) the elections have been organised at the initiative of the Danish Youth Council DUF and with the support of the Danish Parliament since 2015. The Danish model differs from other countries in that the school elections are not linked to the country's other elections – the school elections are organised as independent elections every two years.

In Iceland (*#ÉgKýs*), school elections have been organised since 2016 by the National Youth Council of Iceland LUF and its partners.

2.2. What is the purpose of school elections?

According to research, young people are often highly interested in politics and the society, but this interest is not always channelled into voting or other traditional forms of participation. Democratic values, attitudes and skills must also be learned in practice in order to strengthen the perception of the importance of one's own voice. Democracy education should be an essential part of schools' operations, as theoretical knowledge alone is not enough. Research also shows that democracy education can be used to reduce differences in participation and internal civic competence due to background. (Rautiainen & Vetter 2024; Kestilä-Kekkonen et al., 2022; Kestilä-Kekkonen et al., 2024).

Young people have reported reasons for not voting in official elections, such as a lack of information about national politics or voting practices and a feeling that their own vote does not matter. Some young people also find it difficult to find a suitable candidate or party. (Hormio et al., 2023).

School elections are a concrete way to turn young people's political and societal interest into action. They lower the threshold for later participation in official elections when the voting practices are known in advance. Through school elections, young people also learn to understand how their voice can have an impact in society, which increases their experience of opportunities to influence and motivation to participate in democratic processes in the future.

School elections and the democracy and participation related teaching in connection to them are tools of democracy education that strengthen young people's internal civic competence. They offer young people the opportunity to learn about the election process, the functioning of parties and the selection of candidates in a practical manner even before voting in the official elections. In this way, school elections support young people's commitment to the democratic system through knowledge and experience. The aim is that the lessons learned and experiences gained during school elections will also bear fruit later as the young people reach the voting age and can participate in official elections.

2.3 Who participates in the school elections?

School elections in Finland, Sweden and Norway are aimed at lower and upper secondary school students. In Denmark, school elections are aimed at lower secondary school students, and in Iceland, they are aimed at upper secondary school students. The invitation to participate is always directed at all schools, but participation is voluntary for both schools and students in all countries.

Finland differs from other countries in that youth elections can also be organised outside schools – the participants can be, for example, libraries, youth facilities,

hobby groups or other groups of young people. This is why the term "Youth Elections" is used to describe school elections in Finland. In Finland, the presidential elections for young people in spring 2024 reached 95,000 young people, which is approximately 22 per cent of the young people in the target group. As the elections were organised, it was observed that vocational school students are significantly more difficult to reach than upper secondary school students.

In Finland, youth elections were also organised in connection with municipal and county elections for the first time in 2025. County elections interested both young people and the organisers significantly less: municipal elections were organised in 450 places, while county elections were organised in only 215. The proportion of votes rejected in the county elections also indicates that they were clearly more difficult to understand than the municipal elections. Of the votes cast in the municipal elections, 9.7 per cent were rejected, while 18.4 per cent of the votes were rejected in the county elections.

In Sweden, 89 per cent of all municipalities participated in the school elections organised in connection with the parliamentary elections in 2022. The elections reached more than 390,000 young people, with a voting percentage of 77.9. In Finland, fewer people participated in the county elections than in the municipal elections, while in Sweden, the number of participants in connection with the EU elections was lower compared to the parliamentary elections: Only 50 per cent of all municipalities in the country participated in the EU elections, with a voting percentage of 55.3.

In Sweden, it has been observed that socio-economic background affects the voting turnout of individuals. There are also differences between the participating schools: public schools are more likely to participate than private schools, and if the school is a special education school, it is less likely to participate. Large schools are more likely to participate than smaller schools.

In Denmark, approximately half of the country's lower secondary schools participated in the school elections that were organised separately from the official elections. The school elections reached approximately 71,000 young people. Differences between the voters were examined in 2021, and no clear results emerged at the time.

In Norway school elections reach the most young people. 379 schools participated in the school elections organised in connection with the parliamentary elections in 2025. Votes were cast in 367 of the schools. Voter turnout was 81.4%.

In Iceland, 10,896 votes were counted in the school elections organised in connection with the parliamentary elections in 2024, and the voting percentage among all eligible voters was 34.9. No differences have been observed between the different participating groups in the country.

2.4. How are the impacts of school elections examined?

Examining the impact of school elections and related research varies greatly between the Nordic countries. In Finland, the impacts are examined on a school election-specific basis, and the Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector compiles statistics on the subject. Among other things, the impacts have been assessed through feedback surveys, according to which 60 per cent of the respondents would vote in the national elections. Although the participation of young people and democracy education is a subject of academic research in Finland, no specific research has been carried out on school elections.

In Sweden, a comprehensive report is published after each school election, including an assessment of the impact of the election. The reports have been published since 2002, when the Ministry of Education and Research started to participate in the organisation of the elections. Swedish school elections have also been studied academically. The results show that approximately 70 per cent of the participating students have felt that their knowledge of democratic decision-making and politics has increased. Understanding of the views of different parties increased, and 82 per cent said they would vote in the national elections after reaching adulthood. (OECD, 2023).

The results of the assessment highlighted significant differences between students born in Sweden and students born outside Sweden. The latter group showed greater confidence in political influencing and were more politically active. The assessment also emphasised that disinformation can be countered through school elections. (OECD, 2023).

In Norway, data on school elections is collected very systematically. The national research operator Sikt has collected and published data on school elections since 1989. The participating schools are also offered the opportunity to participate in the school election survey. 87 per cent of the students who responded to the school election survey in 2025 said they had voted in the school elections. The annually recurring questions enable longitudinal research, and the results of school elections are also compared between the adult population and young people.

In Denmark, the parliament collects information in connection with the elections. The schools and students are asked the same questions in connection with each election so that they can be compared. The results are published by region and school. Academic research has also been carried out on school elections in 2015 and 2017, according to which school elections had a positive impact on the internal civic competence of students. Internal civic competence refers to perceived ability to influence society and to understand the functioning of society. The school elections increased students' trust in the political system and politicians and increased students' understanding of the views of political parties. (Hansen, Hansen & Levinsen 2015; Hansen, 2017).

In Iceland, information about the school election campaign is compiled on the campaign's website. After the school elections, it has been observed that the voting turnout of the youngest voters increased in both county elections and parliamentary elections, where the voting percentage of the youngest voters increased by 9.5 per cent. Academic research has shown that in schools with mock elections, students were more politically engaged in terms of how interested they were in politics and the frequency with which they discussed politics (Finnbogadóttir & Önnudóttir, 2022).

2.5. School elections in the Nordic autonomous regions

There are three autonomous regions in the Nordic countries: Åland (Finland), the Faroe Islands (Denmark) and Greenland (Denmark). In addition to the national elections, the autonomous regions also organise their own county elections.

At least in Åland, school elections have been organised in connection with the national elections. School elections have not been organised in the region's own elections, but the local operators have shown interest in doing this in the future.

According to the information gathered for this publication, no school elections that cover the entire region have been organised in the Faroe Islands. However, election debates have been organised in connection with the official elections at higher education institutions where the students are already adults and of voting age. However, no separate elections have been organised for young people, with the exception of student council elections, in which young people themselves stand as candidates.

No school elections that cover the entire region have been organised in Greenland. Democracy education is part of the schools' curriculum, and the themes are also discussed in more detail in connection with the official elections. However, topics related to the participation of young people and democracy education are increasingly relevant in Greenland. The topics are increasingly being discussed, and local schools, municipalities and youth organisations occasionally organise activities related to the participation of young people and democracy education. More detailed information about these activities was not available at the time of writing this publication.

2.6. School elections in connection with indigenous peoples' elections

The Sámi, i.e. the indigenous people living mainly in the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, have their own representative self-government body, the Sámi Parliament, which represents the Sámi people in domestic and international affairs. As far as it is known, elections for young people are only organised in connection with the Sámi Parliament in Norway. Participation in these school elections is clearly lower: when 379 schools registered for the parliamentary elections in Norway, only 35 schools registered for the elections organised in connection with the Sámi Parliament. The elections were organised at the same time (Sikt). No information on whether school elections or other democracy education measures for young people are organised in other countries in connection with the Sámi Parliament could be found for this publication.

3. Who organises the school elections?

Cooperation between civil society and the central government is a unique feature of Nordic school elections, although the forms and intensity of the cooperation vary from country to country. In some countries, government agencies have the main responsibility for organising school elections, while in others, the organisation sector bears the main responsibility. Resources also differ considerably: the responsibility for organising and the financing model have a direct impact on the opportunities of different countries to develop their school elections and measure their impacts.

3.1. Models by different operators

3.1.1. The central government has the main responsibility

In the central government-led model, the central government operators have the main responsibility for organising school elections. The clearest Nordic example of this is Norway, where UDIR (*Utdanningsdirektoratet*, or *the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training*), an agency under the Ministry of Education and Research, has been responsible for coordinating school elections since 1989. The national research operator Sikt plays a key role in the implementation and publishing the results. The schools are responsible for the practical arrangements, such as the voting process and organising election debates. The state funds the organisation of school elections.

In Sweden, MUCF (*Myndigheten för ungdoms- och civilsamhällesfrågor*, or *the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society*), a government agency under the Ministry of Education and Research, has been responsible for coordinating school elections since 2002. The task of organising school elections comes from the central government. School elections have previously been organised together with youth organisations, but they have only played a communicative role since 2022. The European Parliament and the European Commission have also been involved in the organisation of the EU elections. The state funds the organisation of school elections, but the assignment is given on an election-specific basis.

3.1.2. Organisations have the main responsibility

In the organisation-led model, organisations have the main responsibility for school elections, and the central government is not involved in the organisation. In the Nordic countries, this model is only implemented in Finland, where the Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector has been responsible for organising school elections since the 1990s. Various youth organisations and political parties are involved in the organisation in communications. The funding depends on the project funding available annually.

3.1.3. Shared responsibility between organisations and the central government

In the central government and organisation sector model, school elections are organised in cooperation with different operators. In Denmark, the Danish Parliament (*Folketinget*) has the main responsibility for the organisation, but the Danish Youth Council DUF (*Dansk Ungdoms Fællesråd*) is responsible for coordinating the elections. The prime minister always declares the start of the three-week election period. Political youth organisations are also actively involved in the organisation. Employees of the municipalities and schools carry out the elections in practice at schools.

In Iceland, school elections are organised by the National Youth Council of Iceland LUF (*Landssamband ungmennafélaga*), with the Icelandic Upper Secondary Student Union SÍF (*Samband Íslenskra Framhaldsskólanema*) as its main partner. Many operators are involved in the practical organisation of school elections, such as the member organisations of LUF and SÍF, political parties and their youth movements and cities. The Ministry of Education and Children is responsible for the funding.

3.2. Resources

Country	Budget	Organisers' human resources	Financing model
Finland	Overhead costs EUR 15,000–20,000 and personnel costs approx. EUR 40,000	0.2–2 people, depending on funding (Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector).	Annual project funding, no ongoing government funding.
Sweden	5–7 million SEK (approx. EUR 435,000–610,000) per school election.	approx. 5 people full-time (MUCF).	Central government assignment on an election-specific basis, no ongoing funding.
Denmark	No exact amount.	2–3 people in the Parliament 0.5–1 person in DUF.	Primarily funded by the Danish Parliament.
Iceland	No information available.	3 people (LUF).	The Ministry of Education and Children as the main funder.
Norway	No information available.	No information available.	UDIR is responsible for the funding.

Source: Interviews carried out in connection with the project

In addition to the organisers' human resources, a coordination team consisting of a few adults and young people, depending on the participants' resources, is involved in the implementation of school elections at each election location.

4. Practical arrangements for school elections

4.1. Time

In most Nordic countries, school elections are organised in connection with, and usually a few weeks before, the official elections. Some countries have the resources to organise the elections in conjunction with the official elections, but not all countries have the funding to do so. An exception to this is Denmark, where school elections are always organised at the same time, i.e. every two years in January –February for three weeks, separate from the country's official elections.

In Finland, school elections have been organised in connection with the parliamentary elections, the presidential elections and the county and municipal elections, depending on project funding. In Sweden, school elections have been organised in connection with the parliamentary and EU elections; in Norway, they have been organised in connection with the parliamentary and county elections, the Sámi Parliament and referendums; and in Iceland, they have been organised in connection with the parliamentary and county elections.

4.2. Democracy education

In all Nordic countries, democracy education is the primary purpose of school elections. The aim of the school elections is to offer experiences of active citizenship and opportunities to learn about practical civic participation and democratic principles. Political research has found that voting behaviour is inherited – the aim of democracy education in schools and other youth facilities is to offer the opportunity to practice voting (Erola et al., 2017).

In the school elections, it is important to proactively prevent the reasons young people of voting age report for not voting in the official elections, such as: a lack of information about national politics and voting practices, a feeling that their own vote does no matter and difficulty in finding a suitable candidate or party (Hormio et al., 2023). School elections provide practical means for voting, political decision-making and getting to know parties. The carefully organised school elections simulate official voting situations as accurately as possible and make politics a part

of everyday life in the form of election debates and panels organised at youth facilities, for example.

It would also be important to involve young people in organising democracy education events, such as political visits. This would lower the threshold for young people to have discussions, ask questions and learn about politics. It is also important that politicians understand which questions or topics arise from young people themselves.

In order for young people to be able to reflect on what societal topics are important to them, adults, such as teachers and youth workers, must also be provided with support and learning materials for discussing topics related to democratic education.

In Finland, the needs of the staff of vocational schools related to democracy and human rights education have been investigated. The interviewees and survey respondents expressed a large need for support in developing democracy and human rights education. The most important issues mentioned were the need for internal discussions at educational institutions and the lack of learning materials related to the theme. Based on the survey, the needs for support were so diverse that they can be summarised in the sentence "almost all types of support are needed and, on the other hand, it seems that we are also ready to receive them." (Gretschel & Särkiluoto, 2025).

4.2.1. Materials supporting democracy education

In all Nordic countries, practical learning material is produced to support democracy education and delivered to participants in connection with school elections. Depending on the country, the themes of the materials may vary from election to election.

In Finland, for example, the Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector coordinates the Week of Politics, which culminates in the Youth Elections and is a national theme week for democracy education aimed at all groups of young people. During the week, young people learn about societal decision-making and influencing as well as the current political topics. For example, the overarching theme of the Week of Politics organised in connection with the municipal and county elections in 2025 was "politics as part of the everyday life of young people". The week focused on the themes of the municipal and county elections, the differences between and decision-making of municipalities and wellbeing services counties, political communications and deciding who to vote for.

The learning materials for the Week of Politics consisted of five modules:

1. Young people as influencers and political values
2. Municipal decision-making
3. Wellbeing services counties and decision-making
4. Political communications
5. Deciding who to vote for and Youth Elections (school elections)

Each module included both independent and group exercises, videos and text materials to support learning. Practical and expert materials help young people understand political themes and reduce the workload of individual teachers. Tailoring materials for different elections (e.g. EU elections and parliamentary elections) is a good practice. For example, the EU elections may seem more distant – which is reflected, for example, in the fact that in several countries, fewer people participate in school elections organised in connection with the EU elections than in school elections organised in connection with the parliamentary elections.

4.2.2. Election compasses for young people

At least in Finland and Iceland, election compasses for young people have also been developed to support young people's voting decisions. The same election compasses can also be used as a tool for democracy education with minors. Another advantage of the election compasses for young people is that they bring issues that are essential to young people's well-being to the candidates' attention.

The Election Compass for Young People used in Finland is an election compass especially for young voters, the purpose of which is to help the user find a suitable candidate and provide information on the issues discussed in the elections to help the user decide who to vote for. The Election Compass for Young People has been developed and designed with young people's help. The aim of the Election Compass for Young People in video form used for the EU elections in spring 2024 was to develop the user interface of the election compasses to be suitable for young people in order to make societal influencing and voting interesting and accessible.

In connection with the EU elections in Finland, the Election Compass for Young People included issues related to EU decision-making that young people consider particularly important and interesting. In the design of the election compass, special attention was paid to the explanations of the statements, which can be used to provide additional information to support decision-making. With the help of explanations, election compasses are also well suited for teaching. It was essential that the young people themselves appeared in the explanatory videos of the election compass in video form. Based on the feedback collected on the Election Compass for Young People, the election compass in video form was considered useful and it also inspired the users to vote.

4.3. Societal significance of school elections and their outcome

In all countries, the results of the school elections are public and often also attract the interest of the media. In Denmark, the publication of the results reflects the publication of the official election results the most; the parliament is responsible for publishing the results, and people can follow the publication process via a live election night broadcast. The results are published area by area, and the data is followed by school. Although the school elections in Denmark are always organised separately from the official elections, unlike in other countries, it has been noted that the outcome of the school elections is often similar to the outcome of the official elections, and they are widely discussed in the public.

In the rest of the Nordic countries, school elections are organised in connection with, and mostly before, the official elections. In Finland and Norway, the results of the school elections are published before the results of the official elections. In Finland, the results of the school elections have been published approximately two weeks before the official elections. The results of the elections are published by the Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector, and they attract a lot of interest in the media and the societal discussion. The results are particularly interesting to local channels. In Norway, too, the results of the school elections are published a few days before the official elections. The results receive a lot of attention in the media and often predict the outcome of the official elections.

In Sweden and Iceland, the results of the school elections are published after the official elections. In Iceland, the results of the school elections are announced after the official voting locations close. The results of the elections are published in the national public radio broadcaster RÚV's election broadcast and, at the same time, on the school elections' own website. In Sweden, the results are published the day after the official election day. The results receive attention in the media, but the number of participants is often the most interesting factor. In different countries, the public discussion often focuses more on the outcome of the school elections and the number of participants, rather than on the effects of democracy education, which is the most important task of school elections.

4.3.1. An example of the focus of public discussion changing in Norway

In Norway, school elections have been organised and statistics have been compiled on them since 1989 in connection with all national and local elections. Over the years, a key challenge has been identified: public discussion and media visibility focused strongly on the election results and their predictive value, which threatened to overshadow the real purpose of the school elections – democracy education.

A doctoral study (2016) by the Norwegian researcher Julie Ane Ødegaard Borge revealed that students voted in school elections mainly because they were told to do so, and not because they wanted to express their political identity. The school elections simulated voting, but young people's own voices in the present moment were ignored. At the same time, the media actively reported on the election results in an analytical manner – "which party won" and "what does this predict about the upcoming elections" – which reinforced the perception that the results were the most important part of the school elections.

The focus of public discussion in Norway has later been successfully shifted away from the election results and towards democracy education. These factors have been highlighted as the key factors in shifting the focus:

- **Research and long-term monitoring:** Sikt has collected data since 1989. In addition to asking about the voted party, the school surveys also ask young people about their general views on democracy and the society.
- **Communication about school elections:** In addition to communicating the results, the parties working in the school elections also consciously communicate the views and experiences of young people. These are also brought up in the media.
 - **School surveys ask questions such as** *"What are the most important political questions when young people choose a party?"* and *"How satisfied are young people with democracy in Norway?"*
- **Integration into the curriculum:** School elections have been defined as part of the democracy and civic education in schools and are therefore organised to achieve the competence requirements of the curriculum.

In addition to these, it is essential that as the society in general is more interested in young people's societal views, politicians should also be interested in them. That is why it is important to bring young people and politicians together through, for example, political visits organised in connection with school elections. In order for a young person to feel that voting and societal influencing are significant, people in decision-making positions must show an interest in young people's matters.

4.3.2. Are school elections connected to the voting percentage of official elections?

The table below shows voter turnout for the entire country and the youngest age group in the most recent parliamentary elections, as well as voter turnout in the youth elections held in connection with the same elections (except Denmark, where youth elections are held separately from official elections).

The clearest difference is between Finland and the other Nordic countries. Based on the table, direct assumptions cannot be made about how different organizer models are reflected in voting behavior in official elections. However, the differences in organizer models raise the question of whether youth elections that reach more participants could also be a means of increasing voter turnout?

The table below shows that in countries where the central government is involved in organizing the elections (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland), overall voter turnout in official elections is also higher. However, as has also become evident in this guide, the resources used for youth elections in Finland differ significantly from other countries. Finland is also the only country where the state central government does not participate in organizing youth elections.

Country	Voting turnout of the total population	Voting turnout of the youngest voters	Voting turnout in youth elections
Finland (2023)	71.9%	51.2% (18-year-olds)	ca. 20-25%
Sweden (2022)	84.2%	82% (18–29-year-olds)	77.9%
Norway (2025)	80%	77.4% (18–19-year-olds)	81.4%
Denmark (2022)	84.2%	85% (18-year-olds)	ca. 50% (2024)
Iceland (2024)	80.7%	72.2% (18–19-year-olds)	ca. 34.9%

Sources: Tilastokeskus, Nuorisola ry, Statistikmyndigheten SCB, MUCF, Statistics Norway, Sikt, Statistics Denmark, the Danish Parliament, Statistics Iceland, RÚV.

4.4. Good practices and challenges

Based on the Ungas val project's interview material, many good practices for organising school elections have developed in the Nordic countries. At the same time, however, significant challenges that affect the quality and coverage of implementing the elections have been identified.

Good practices when organising school elections:

- **Enough time to organise:** Successful school elections require at least six months of preparation before the elections. It is also a good idea to reserve plenty of time for post-election activities, such as compiling statistics and possible reporting.

- **A long-term financing model:** Regular and predictable financing enables high-quality implementation and the continuous development of school elections.
- **Basis on research:** Long-term and comparable academic research measures the practical impacts of school elections. The research also increases public discussion on democracy education for young people.
- **Strong support from the central government:** In Denmark, the prime minister declares the start of the school elections. This gives the elections visibility and legitimacy.
- **Integration into the curriculum:** Integrating the school elections into the country's official curriculum strengthens the implementation of democracy education and the equality of young people.
- **A predictable schedule:** The predictability of when the school elections are organised, such as always organising them at a specific time, helps the organisers, participants and all stakeholders to prepare for the school elections.
- **Cooperation between different operators:** Cooperation between the local government, political organisations and voting locations strengthens the impact of the school elections.
- **Providing election-specific learning materials:** Election-specific democracy education materials provide context on the purpose of the different elections (cf. e.g. the EU elections and parliamentary elections). The practical materials help young people understand and reduce the workload of individual teachers when organising school elections.
- **Diversity of voting locations:** Expanding the school elections to libraries, youth centres and other meeting places for young people increases opportunities for participation and makes the elections more accessible to young people.
- **Authenticity:** Election arrangements that correspond to those of the official elections give young people a realistic experience of voting. Familiarity with the processes lowers the threshold for voting in the official elections, and the election panels and enabling political encounters make politics concrete and easier to understand for young people.
- **Involving young people in the organisation of school elections:** Peers, such as the young people in the school's student council, are more likely to successfully encourage other young people to participate in school elections. Young people can also be asked to help as election officials, for example.
- **Election Compass for Young People:** Election compasses for young people help the young people understand topics that are relevant to them and find parties and/or politicians that represent their opinions. In addition, the election compasses for young people bring issues that are essential to young people's well-being to the candidates' attention.

Practices that have posed challenges:

- **Rushing:** A late commission or funding decision naturally makes it difficult to organise school elections in many areas. Schools or other participants have less time to react and join in.
- **Financial uncertainty:** If it is not possible to predict the organisation of school elections or their schedule, it is naturally more challenging to organise them.
- **Reaching the participants:** Depending on the organisers, information about the school elections and the offered materials may not reach everyone equally. School elections supported by the central government reach more participants than organisation-led school elections.
- **Dependence on individual adults at the participating places:** The commitment of the participating places is often the responsibility of a few motivated adults, such as social studies teachers. A loss of votes is usually caused by an individual teacher changing or falling ill.
- **Disregarding special needs:** Young people in need of special support, such as young people with an immigrant background, are easily excluded from school elections without additional support.
- **Democracy education is often overshadowed by the results in the news:** The election results often dominate public discussion, even though the ultimate purpose of school elections is to educate young people about democracy. This can be prevented by finding out young people's views on societal issues in the form of a school election survey, for example, in addition to the voting results.
- **Political impartiality:** The participation of political operators in the school elections creates a sense of authenticity. However, it also creates a risk of emphasising a specific election theme if, for example, not all parties participate equally.

5. The ABC of organising school elections

When organising school elections, it is a good idea to clarify the answers to the following questions:

Organisers, funding and resources

- Why do we want to organise the school elections? What is their goal?
- Where and to what extent do we want to organise the school elections; locally or nationally?
- Who is in charge of the organisation (the central government and/or an organisation)?
- Is separate funding needed, and if so, where is the funding obtained? Is there a central government budget available, or will the school elections be organised as part of a project?
- How many human resources are available for the organisation?

Schedule

- How much time has been reserved for organising the school elections?
- When will the school elections be organised? Will they be organised in connection with official elections or as separate elections?

Partnerships with different parties

- Will academic research be carried out in connection with the organisation or will information be collected systematically from the beginning?
- Where will the elections for young people be organised? At schools, libraries, youth facilities or other communities for young people?
- How will the parties organising the school elections be reached and recruited?
- Will political parties or their youth organisations participate in the organisation of the school elections by e.g. visiting election locations, participating in election panels or providing material related to the election themes?
- How will awareness of the school elections be spread and how will participants be engaged in the elections?

- What is the role of the media in relation to the school elections? What is the desired media approach to the topic (democracy education vs. election results or the number of participants)?

Materials

- What kind of material must be delivered to the voting locations regarding the practical implementation and organisation of the elections (e.g. instructions for the organisation of the election locations)?
- What kind of material do we want to produce in connection with the school elections (e.g. related to democracy education and instructions for the voting day)?
- When will the material be available at the voting locations of e.g. schools?
- If a survey or feedback collection is carried out in connection with the school elections, what is their content?
- If the elections are organised in connection with official elections, will a separate election compass for young people be created?
- How will the materials be distributed to the widest possible audience?
- What materials will be needed on the voting day (e.g. voting slips and envelopes or a digital voting environment)?

Practices in schools/other voting locations

- What type of voting system will be used in the elections?
- How can the voting be made as similar to official elections as possible? What voting practices can be implemented from official elections?
- How many organiser resources will be needed at the voting locations? What kinds of responsibility roles? What instructions will they need?
- Where will the votes be collected and how will they be counted? Manually or digitally?

Counting the votes and publishing the results

- When will the results be published? Before or after the official elections?
- Where will the results be published? To whom and for how long are they available?
- How accurately will the results be published (e.g. school/area-specific)?
- Will a separate election night gathering be organised? What needs to be taken into account when organising such an event?
- How can we get the media and public discussion interested in school elections and democracy education?

Assessment and development after the school elections

- If feedback will be collected or research will be carried out on the school elections, what is the schedule for this? How will the collected information be used?
- What indicators will be used to assess the organisation of the school elections?
- How could school elections be organised regularly?

5.1. An example of a practical schedule

Below is the practical schedule of the school elections organised in Sweden in connection with the parliamentary elections in 2022.

Time	What?
September– December, 2021	• Preparation: contacting key partners, planning the communication strategy. • 16 December 2021, an assignment from the central government.
January– February, 2022	• Establishing the organiser team. • Setting up the website. • Pre-registration for the school elections opens on 14 February. • Kick-off at an open online event on 24 February
March, 2022	• Contacting schools; particularly the schools that did not participate in the previous elections. • Ordering voting slips from the Swedish Election Authority. • Sending start packages to schools by email.
April, 2022	• Pre-registration for the school elections closes on 30 April.
May, 2022	• The sending of the start packages ends on 31 May.
June– July, 2022	• Sending election packages to schools
August– September, 2022	• Post-registration for the school elections closes on 17 August • School elections 17 August–7 September • The preliminary results are published at the election night gathering on 12 September.
October– December, 2022	• Processing the election results of schools and compiling statistics • The final results are published on 18 November • Assessment and writing the school election report in November–December.
January– March, 2023	• Distribution of the school election report. • Submitting the school election report to the government by the end of March.

Source: MUCF, Skolval 2022 i samband med riksdagsvalet

6. Conclusion

This guide has compiled the Nordic countries' long and diverse experience of organising elections for young people. Although all Nordic countries have their own ways of operating, they all have the same core goal: to strengthen the civic competence of young people and lower the threshold for participating in democratic processes.

The good practices presented in the guide show that successful elections for young people require long-term work, sufficient resources and commitment from many different operators. The support of the central government, from direct responsibility for organising to cooperation with the organisation sector, has proven to be a significant factor in the coverage and continuity of elections for young people. At the same time, civil society operators provide flexibility and a strong connection to the everyday lives of young people. Both operator models have their own strengths and, at best, they complement each other.

The impact of elections for young people must be examined in the long term, and this is promoted by systematic data collection and evaluation. Research shows that elections for young people increase young people's understanding of political processes, strengthen their trust in democracy and increase their intention to vote in the future. It is particularly important that democracy education and elections for young people offer all young people the opportunity to practice voting and learn about politics, regardless of their socio-economic background. Democracy education and elections for young people must be equally accessible to all young people so that even the most vulnerable young people can strengthen their civic competence.

Elections for young people are not just a voting exercise; they are a concrete way of showing young people that their voice matters and that democracy is something they can and should participate in. Democracy education increases the understanding that politics is not something distant and unfamiliar; instead, it is part of the young people's everyday lives and future. This experience will bear fruit for years to come as young people reach the voting age and become active citizens.

High-quality elections for young people also show young people that others want to hear their voices and that their participation in the society matters. The development of civic competence does not happen on its own – the operators of society must create the structures and opportunities that enable every young person to practice their democratic skills and thus grow into a citizen who has strong civic competence and participates in the society.

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