



Nordregio

Youth participation in policymaking in the Nordic Region

Myriam Chilvers, Line Andreassen, Rebecca Eriksson

Table of Contents

Executive summary	3
Introduction	4
Youth participation beyond urban centres: Why it matters now more than ever	6
Key Concepts	14
Youth participation in policymaking in the Nordics	20
Strengthening youth participation at the local and regional levels	28
A final, playful reflection on youth participation	31
Concluding remarks and next steps	33
References	34
About this publication	41

This publication is also available online in a web-accessible version at:
<https://pub.nordregio.org/wp-2026-4-youth-participation-in-policymaking-in-nordics>

Executive summary

This working paper provides a conceptual foundation for the Nordregio-led project “Young and Rooted – Strengthening Youth Participation in Nordic Regions” (2026–2027), funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers. It builds on the outcomes of the [2023 Nordic Rural Youth Panel](#), which identified gaps in impactful participation for young people living outside major urban centres across the Nordic Region (Wøien Meijer et al., 2023).

The report pursues three objectives:

- To define what constitutes *impactful youth participation* in policymaking
- To identify how *youth participation is institutionalised* across the Nordic countries
- To provide an *analytical framework for understanding the barriers to and opportunities for* strengthening rural youth participation.

This overview serves both as a conceptual contribution to and a foundation for the next stages of the “Young and Rooted” project, in which these insights will be translated into practical approaches to expanding impactful youth participation across the Nordic Region.



Image: Andreas Omvik / norden.org



Image: Patrik Svedberg/imagebank.sweden.se

Introduction

In 2023, the Nordic Rural Youth Panel called for stronger youth involvement in policymaking regarding issues that shape everyday life in rural areas, including transport, housing, education, local jobs, public spaces and wellbeing (Wøien Meijer et al., 2023). These priorities point to a broader concern: how young people's perspectives are included in democratic decision-making beyond urban centres and formal electoral channels.

Across the Nordic Region, democratic systems remain strong in aggregate terms, with stable electoral participation and no uniform rise in populist support. However, these national averages conceal uneven patterns of political engagement and trust, with more pronounced political discontent in intermediate and some rural areas compared to urban municipalities (Sánchez Gassen et al., 2025). At the same time, young people across Europe consistently appear as a structurally vulnerable group in democratic participation, with lower turnout than older cohorts and signs of growing political disengagement, particularly in local elections (Bressanelli & Bernardi, 2025; Nordic Council of Ministers, 2017). It is vital to address these uneven patterns, not only to ensure inclusive democratic representation across territories and generations, but also to strengthen democratic resilience by reducing participation gaps. Otherwise, these gaps threaten to deepen distrust and undermine the legitimacy of democratic institutions.

Against this backdrop, this paper develops a conceptual foundation for understanding impactful youth participation in sub-national policymaking in the Nordic countries. It defines what impactful participation entails, examines how participation is institutionalised across different national contexts, and develops an analytical framework for identifying barriers to and opportunities for strengthening rural youth participation. The paper treats youth participation as a governance challenge within local and regional

systems. Drawing on Archon Fung's (2006) Democracy Cube, it analyses participation through three dimensions (who is involved, how participation is organised and the influence it has) and considers how these are shaped in practice by leadership, consensus-building and the extent to which these three dimensions influence youth participation in municipalities and regions (Fung, 2015).

About this paper

Methods

This working paper is based on a review of relevant open-access literature on participatory democracy, youth participation and democratic resilience, covering both academic publications and grey literature from intergovernmental bodies, national youth councils and organisations involved in youth policy and practice. The purpose of the review was to map the field and identify frameworks and debates relevant to the theoretical framing of this paper. It was complemented by scoping interviews with staff and leadership at the national youth councils of Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland, conducted online in 2026. The interviews explored how youth organisations are currently structured and how young people's participation is supported in practice across the Nordic countries.

About the project

This working paper has been produced as part of the research project *"Young and Rooted: Strengthening youth representation in Nordic regions"*, led by Nordregio (Nordregio, n.d.). The project forms part of the Nordic thematic group for local and regional resilience and attractiveness and contributes to the Nordic Co-operation Programme for Regional Development and Planning 2025–2030, under the Nordic Council of Ministers' Committee of Senior Officials for Regional Policy (EK-R). Running from January 2026 to December 2027, the project examines youth participation in Nordic policymaking through the lens of democratic resilience, based on the principle that young people's inclusion in political processes is a prerequisite for robust democracies.



Image: Evelina Ytterbom / imagebank.sweden.se

Youth participation beyond urban centres: Why it matters now more than ever

Political discontent in the Nordics

In recent decades, Western democracies have been characterised by political and anti-government protests, declining voter turnout, and the rise of non-traditional or anti-establishment parties (Berman, 2021; Florida, 2021; Rodríguez-Pose, 2020; Solijonov, 2016). This trend is exemplified by the 2010s, described as the "age of discontent", which saw growing political dissatisfaction among segments of the population, linked to long-term structural changes such as globalisation and marketisation (Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2023). Elements of these dynamics were also evident in the Nordic countries, where all five states saw changes in voting patterns and rising support for anti-establishment parties (Bjerkem, 2016; Meinander, 2021; Önnudóttir et al., 2021; Palonen & Sunnercrantz, 2021; Salo, 2022; Sørensen & Svendsen, 2023).

Studies have identified multiple, interacting drivers of discontent, including economic insecurity, spatial inequalities, socio-cultural tensions, demographic shifts, declining public services and immigration (De Ruyter et al., 2021; Dijkstra et al., 2020; Florida, 2021; Inglehart & Norris, 2016; O'Brien & Leichenko, 2003; Rodríguez-Pose & Bartalucci, 2023). Discontent often emerges among groups or regions that are experiencing relative economic decline or perceived neglect, rather than among the poorest (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018), and some evidence suggests that support for populist parties is driven more by attitudes, ideological distrust in institutions and a desire for strong leadership (Brunkert et al., 2025). Such trends of discontent have profound implications for democracy and contribute to what is often described as a "crisis of democracy", characterised by declining citizen participation, polarisation, disinformation and unequal political influence (Bressanelli & Bernardi, 2025; Ercan & Gagnon, 2014).

Rural youth: Vulnerable groups in vulnerable places



Image: Mads Schmidt Rasmussen / norden.org

Vulnerable places

At the national level, the Nordic countries continue to display relatively high levels of electoral participation, with no clear overall decline in voter turnout in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, while turnout in Finland has stabilised following earlier decreases. Similarly, while support for populist parties has increased in some cases, particularly in Sweden and more recently in Finland, there is no consistent or uniform rise across the Region, with support declining in Norway and Denmark after earlier peaks (Sánchez Gassen et al., 2025).

However, these stable national patterns mask significant territorial variations. To understand territorial differences in political participation and discontent, it is first necessary to distinguish between the types of municipalities. Drawing on the Nordic municipal typology developed by Stjernberg et al. (2024) (Figure 1), Nordregio categorises municipalities into three groups:

1. **Urban municipalities:** Inner and outer urban areas
2. **Intermediate municipalities:** Peri-urban areas, rural areas close to urban centres, and some local centres in rural areas
3. **Rural municipalities:** Rural heartlands, sparsely populated areas and some local centres in rural areas.

Across the Nordic Region, political engagement and dissatisfaction vary markedly between urban, intermediate and rural areas and is often most pronounced in intermediate municipalities, which are neither fully urban nor fully remote (Sánchez Gassen et al., 2025).

Support for populist parties is generally highest in peri-urban areas, rural local centres and rural municipalities close to cities, while metropolitan cores and the most remote areas typically show lower levels of support (Figure 2). In certain intermediate and rural regions, support for these parties can reach as high as 50%. Furthermore, urban areas and municipalities near major cities tend to have higher turnout, while rural and sparsely populated areas, particularly in northern Norway, Sweden and Finland, show lower levels of participation (Figure 3). Although election results are an imperfect measure, they offer a useful indication of areas in which political discontent is most pronounced (Sánchez Gassen et al., 2025).

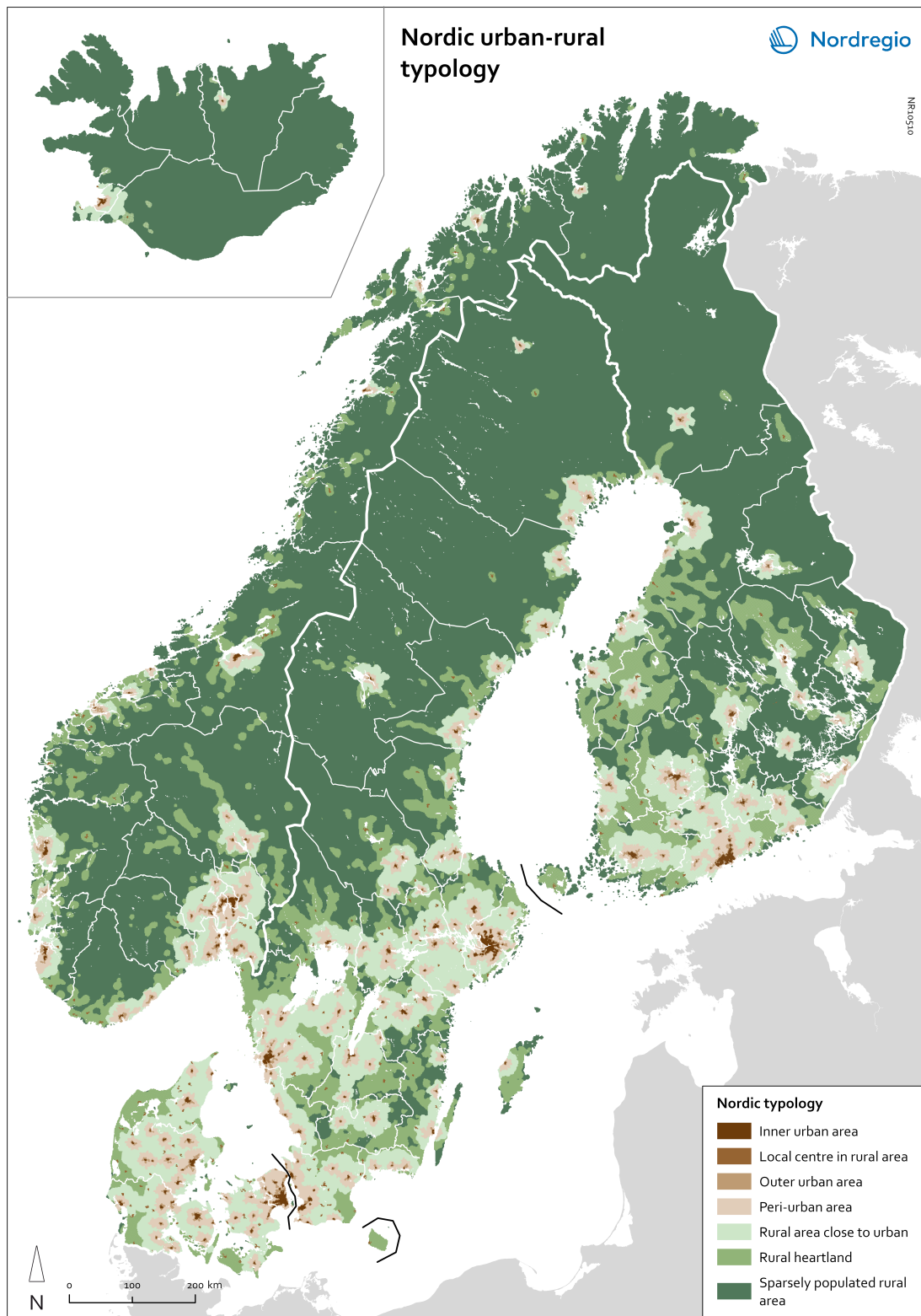


Figure 1: [Nordic urban-rural typology](#)

Note: This grid-based classification was developed by the Nordic thematic groups 2021–2024 to enable more accurate cross-Nordic statistical comparisons. The seven types are defined based on population density, proximity measures and land-cover parameters.

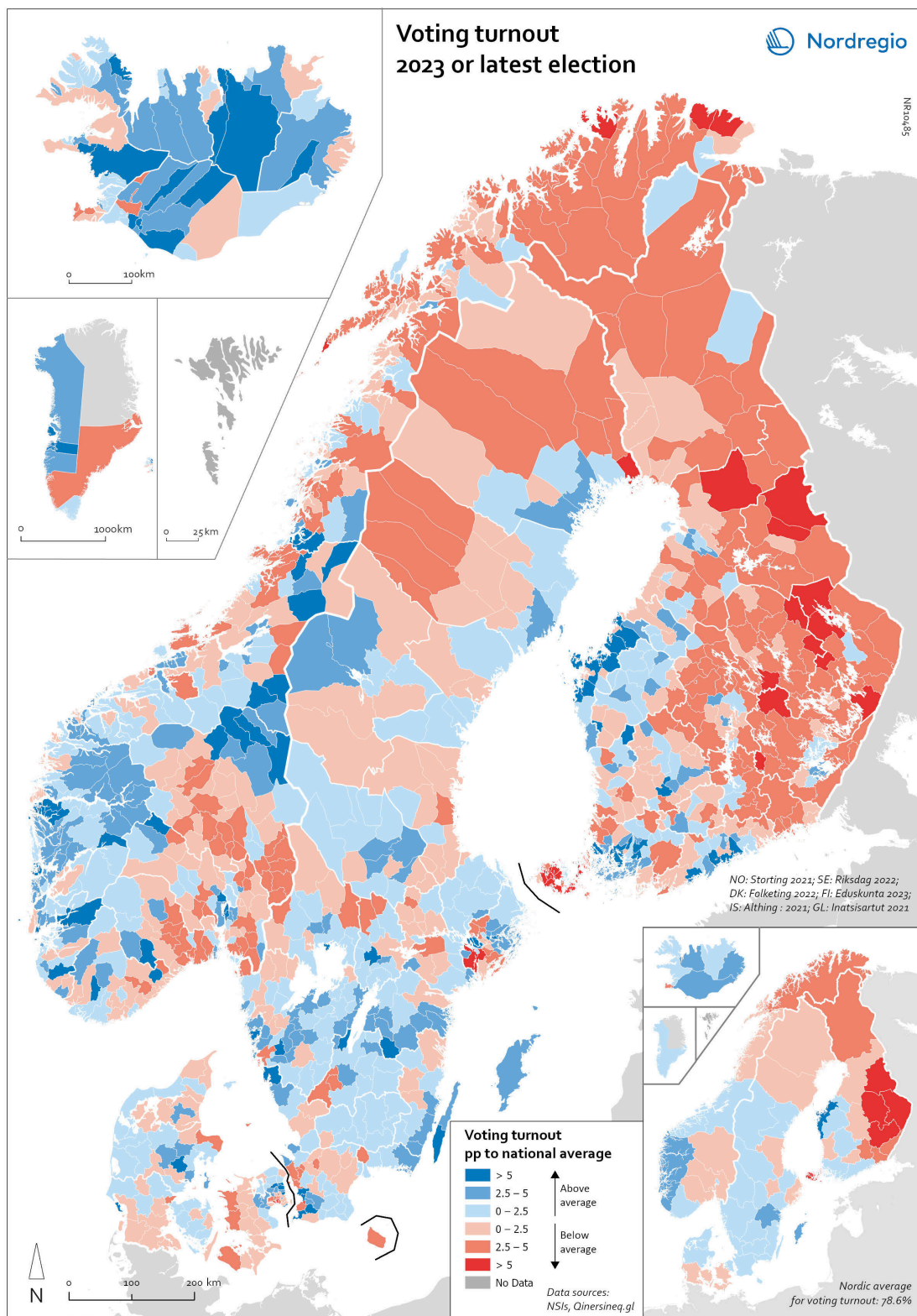


Figure 2: Votes for populist parties in national elections (2023 or latest election before this year)

Note: The map compares the share of votes cast for populist parties in national elections in each municipality compared to the national average. Municipalities highlighted in blue are those who have below-average votes for populist parties; municipalities in red are above average. Based on the PopuList project, the following parties are classified as populist: The Danish People's Party and the New Right (Denmark), Movement Now and the Finns Party (Finland), Progress Party, Red Party and Coastal Party (Norway), and the Sweden Democrats (Sweden). In the map legend, "pp" stands for percentage points.

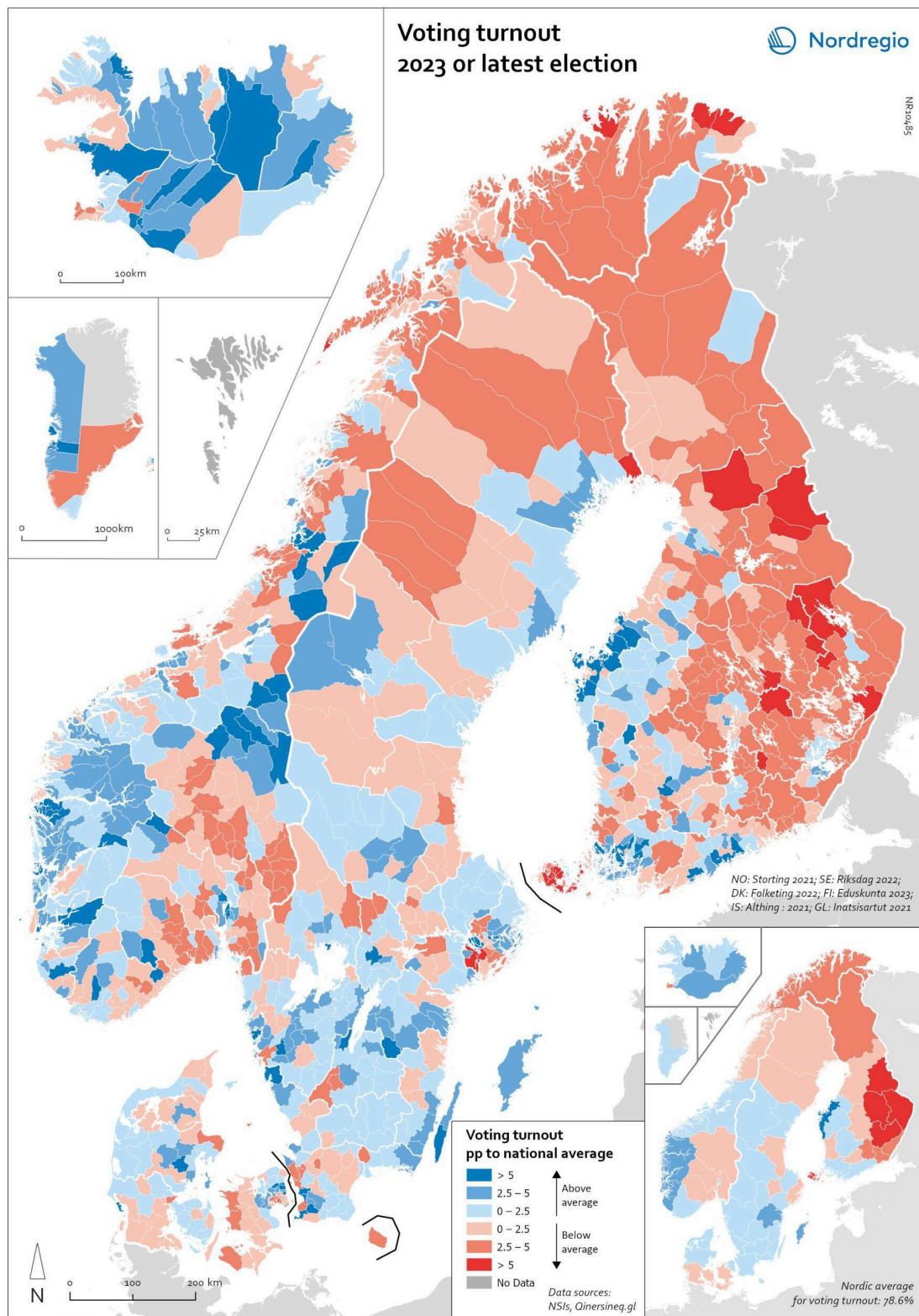


Figure 3: Turnout in national elections (2023 or latest election prior to this year)

Note: The map compares turnout in national elections in each municipality to the national average. Municipalities highlighted in blue are those with higher-than-average turnout; municipalities in red have lower-than-average turnout rates. The map shows turnout in the following elections: Stortinget 2021 (Norway), Riksdagen 2022 (Sweden), Folketinget 2022 (Denmark), Eduskunta 2023 (Finland), Althingi 2021 (Iceland) and Inatsisartut 2021 (Greenland).

Vulnerable groups

Across Europe, one in five 16–26-year-olds report that they would accept authoritarian rule under certain circumstances, while an additional 10% express indifference toward democratic governance (Bressanelli & Bernardi, 2025). Furthermore, youth turnout in the Nordic countries is consistently lower than among older cohorts, especially among those in their early twenties. This gap is most pronounced in local elections, which may indicate political discontent, although turnout alone is not a sufficient measure (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2017).

Finally, according to the 2024 Eurobarometer Youth Survey, social media is the main source of socio-political information for young people in the EU. Exposure to disinformation is widespread, and although many young people feel confident in their ability to identify false information, research suggests this confidence is often overstated. As disinformation can weaken civic engagement and erode institutional trust, this reinforces the need for targeted and impactful youth participation, particularly in peri-urban areas, rural local centres, and rural municipalities close to cities, which are more likely to support anti-establishment parties (European Commission, n.d.; European Parliament, 2025).

Youth participation as a driver of democratic resilience



Image: Martin Zachrisson / norden.org

The concentration of political dissatisfaction in specific regions, combined with the particular vulnerability of youth, makes participation beyond urban centres particularly important. Engaging young people in these areas is not only a matter of ensuring democratic rights; it is also essential for reinforcing democratic resilience at the

intersection of generational and territorial vulnerabilities. Without targeted efforts to encourage engagement, communities run the risk that democratic practices and trust in governance will wane.

The EU increasingly recognises youth participation – understood here as young people's formal and informal involvement in civic and political life – as a core element of democratic resilience, i.e. a political system's capacity to maintain democratic principles under pressure, adapt institutional practices and restore stability after disruption. Democratic resilience depends not only on formal institutions, but also on the quality of interactions between political actors, civil society and citizens. European Parliament initiatives reflect this understanding by emphasising early and sustained citizen engagement through measures that strengthen electoral participation, support deliberative processes, and fund civic education and participatory democracy (Bressanelli & Bernardi, 2025). Further, the OECD (2025) identifies trust as a foundation of democratic resilience. Indeed, citizens who feel heard are more likely to trust their government. Yet young people remain among the most disaffected groups. Across 30 OECD countries, the OECD Trust Survey 2024 found that only 36% of 18–29-year-olds trust their government (OECD, 2025). Investing in youth participation is therefore one way of strengthening the democratic resilience of communities where young people feel least heard.



Image: Robert Noreiko / Unsplash.com

Key Concepts

Youth

For the purpose of this paper, it is important to clarify what is meant by “youth”. While there is no universal definition of this term, it is broadly understood as the transitional period between childhood and adulthood – a phase of life marked by increasing independence, self-sufficiency and gradual entry into adult roles and responsibilities (European Commission: Eurostat, 2009; Perovic, 2016).

Age is the most common way to define this period. The United Nations typically defines youth as those aged 15–24, though some frameworks extend this to 35 (Perovic, 2016; United Nations, n.d.). In a Nordic context, age categories largely follow these international standards, yet youth-policy frameworks sometime extend into the late twenties or early thirties. This reflects a broader trend across Western societies, whereby the transition to adulthood in terms of stable employment, housing and financial independence has become more gradual over time (European Commission, n.d.; Skirbekk et al., 2025).

However, age alone provides only a partial understanding of what it is to be young. Young people also share a common structural position, navigating the same age-based rules around voting, work, education and public service and as a result face similar opportunities and barriers (Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, 2010).

For the purpose of this paper, youth is defined as individuals aged 15–29, in line with the European Commission’s usage (European Commission, n.d.). While this age range is used as a practical boundary, this paper also recognises that what young people have in common is not only their age, but a common position within institutions, policies and society.



Image: Mette Mjöberg Tegnander / norden.org

Participatory democracy

The Nordic Rural Youth Panel highlighted that young people seek meaningful involvement in policymaking (Wøien Meijer et al., 2023). This reflects a desire for engagement that goes beyond voting or indirect representation and falls within the scope of participatory democracy.

Participatory democracy refers to democratic arrangements that allow citizens to engage actively and continuously in public decision-making beyond periodic elections. Rather than limiting participation to selecting representatives, participatory approaches create opportunities for dialogue, deliberation, consultation and co-decision-making in policy processes, acting as a bridge between institutions and the public (Palumbo, 2017). This includes mechanisms through which citizens influence the direction of public policies, either directly, by interacting with policymakers to co-create policies; or indirectly, by making informed choices in direct democracy processes.

Participatory democracy does not replace representative democracy but operates alongside it, addressing one of its limitations. Namely, that periodic elections alone are insufficient to capture the full range of citizen perspectives, particularly groups who are less likely to be heard through formal political channels (Baillie, 2025). A number of scholars have documented this limitation, and describe political participation as inherently unequal, leaving some groups more politically influential than others (Dalton, 2017; Lijphart, 1997). This limitation has sparked a growing interest in participatory governance

as a way of "opening the door" to decision-making for the broader public (Baillie, 2025), resulting in what is often referred to as a global deliberative wave (OECD, 2020). Accordingly, governments across varying political contexts are trying out "new or alternative ways" to engage citizens in political decision-making, including citizen assemblies and juries, participatory budgeting, and other "democratic innovations" aimed at broadening participation (Elstub & Escobar, 2019; Smith, 2009).

Some scholars also highlight the benefits of regularly employing participatory democratic approaches. For example, participatory processes can improve the reflexivity and efficiency of decision-making by pooling diverse perspectives and expertise. They can increase the responsiveness and legitimacy of institutions, grounded in the belief that citizens have a fundamental right to be involved in decisions that shape their lives. Scholars have also argued that social justice is advanced and more equitable outcomes are achieved when all those affected by a policy are involved in its design (Baillie, 2025). Finally, participatory democratic approaches have been used since the 1990s as a way to reverse trends towards declining voter turnout (Edwards, 2012).

The Nordic countries provide a particularly rich context for examining participatory democracy. Based on its strong democratic traditions and robust civil society networks, the Nordic Region has developed extensive frameworks for involving citizens in public decision-making (Haveri, 2015). A defining feature of Nordic governance is decentralisation, whereby significant decision-making authority rests with municipalities and regions, rather than central governments. This means that participatory democracy often unfolds at a sub-national level. Local and regional governments have wide-ranging responsibilities in terms of their citizens' welfare and operate under extensive regulatory frameworks that both enable and constrain opportunities for citizen involvement. This results in a system in which participation can take diverse forms, shaped by high levels of institutional trust, a consensual approach to policymaking, and the specific capacities and practices of municipal or regional authorities, all of which result in considerable variation in how participation manifests in practice (Sinervo et al., 2025).

Varieties of participation and impact

To understand the diversity of opportunities for participation available to youth, this report draws on Archon Fung's framework, the Democracy Cube (Fung, 2006). This framework sits within a broader scholarly debate on what participation means and what it aims to achieve, which has been ongoing for decades (Abas et al., 2023; Cornwall, 2008). One of the most influential contributions to this debate is Sherry Arnstein's "Ladder of citizen participation" (Arnstein, 1969), which organises participation into eight levels, with non-participation at the bottom and full citizen control at the top. While the framework has been broadly adapted elsewhere, its specific typology is less suitable for this paper's purposes. For instance, by focusing on power redistribution, the ladder treats participation as a form of advocacy, which limits its usefulness in contexts where engagement serves a broader range of purposes (Collins & Ison, 2009). It also does not fully account for the question of whose interests are served by participation, which cannot

be determined by the form of engagement alone (White, 1996). More broadly, scholarship has questioned whether any single scale can capture the variety of conditions under which different modes of engagement occur (Cornwall, 2008). One concern is that hierarchical models insinuate that public empowerment and full citizen control are seen as the most desirable outcomes, which does not account for the fact that different contexts call for different modes of engagement. Participation, as we see it, is therefore not a question of how to engage everyone all the time, but rather about choosing the most appropriate mode in a given context. By mapping the diverse forms of participation without ranking them, Fung's Democracy Cube offers a more nuanced framework for choosing between them. As such, it is well-suited for capturing the ways in which young people can impact decision-making.

Who participates?

The Democracy Cube typically categorises citizen engagement along three dimensions. The first asks who participates. At the most open end, processes are accessible to anyone who wishes to engage through self-selection, such as public hearings or protests. From here, the mechanisms become more structured in terms of how participants are recruited, whether through targeted outreach, random selection or the involvement of lay stakeholders with a particular interest in the issue at hand. At the most closed end are professional stakeholders, expert administrators and elected representatives who participate within the bounds of their formal role or expertise (Fung, 2006). Yet across all these categories, it should be kept in mind that citizens, including young people, often "wear multiple hats". In other words, they bring a diverse range of identities, values, lived experiences and cultural backgrounds to participatory processes. It is therefore important to note that "people" and "youth" are not homogenous groups, and that individuals may play different roles depending on the context in which they are asked to participate (Hofer & Kaufmann, 2022).

How do they participate?

The second dimension of the Democracy Cube asks how participants engage. The least intensive mode involves simply listening and receiving information, with little expectation of contributing. From there, participants may express their preferences, develop and transform their views through deliberation and exchange with others, or engage in bargaining and negotiation to reach collective decisions. At the most intensive end, participation involves deploying technical expertise to make binding decisions (Fung, 2006). These modes connect to a broader deliberative democracy literature that has long examined how different forms of exchange between citizens and institutions can produce more impactful outcomes (Bächtiger et al., 2018; Mansbridge et al., 2012).

In addition, across these different modes, considerable attention has been paid to the design and selection of tools and methods to structure participation. This entails, for example, local governments and research projects experimenting with formats ranging from citizen assemblies and participatory mapping to online consultations and collaborative workshops (Schafer, 2019). However, this focus on procedure has been

critiqued for diverting attention away from outcomes and what participation actually produces (Ramos et al., 2026). This is particularly relevant in practice, where municipalities and regions often face constraints in terms of time, skills and resources. As such, questions about participation's influence and impact are at least as important as how it is designed (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004).

What influence do they have?

The third dimension of the Democracy Cube asks what difference participation makes, sometimes referred to as impact. At one end, participants may personally benefit from their involvement, without influencing outcomes. Moving along this dimension, participation can exert communicative influence by shaping public opinion or signalling to decision-makers; it can provide advice and consultation; or take the form of co-governance, where citizens and decision-makers make joint decisions. At the furthest end, participants have direct authority over decisions and resources (Fung, 2006).

While the Democracy Cube presents three equally important dimensions, in practice the question of impact often assumes particular significance. Participation is frequently evaluated not only in terms of who engages and how, but also in terms of the difference their involvement makes. This shifts attention from participation as a procedural exercise to understanding what it accomplishes. This is particularly relevant for youth participation, where tokenism has been widely recognised as a recurring pitfall, as young people are frequently consulted without regard to the quality or consequences of their involvement (Ramos et al., 2026). Furthermore, participation is rarely considered impactful unless it exerts influence beyond the process itself. However, direct and linear effects on policy are often difficult to achieve and hard to prove. The impacts are widely understood as multidimensional, occurring across multiple areas, such as policymaking, political debate and civil society (Baillie, 2025; Goodin & Dryzek, 2006; Russell, 2017). Specifically, participation can shape agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation and organisational learning; influence media coverage, public debate and stakeholder positions; contribute to theory, research and practice; and affect the participants themselves, by fostering shifts in perspective, deliberative capacity and political engagement (Russell, 2017).

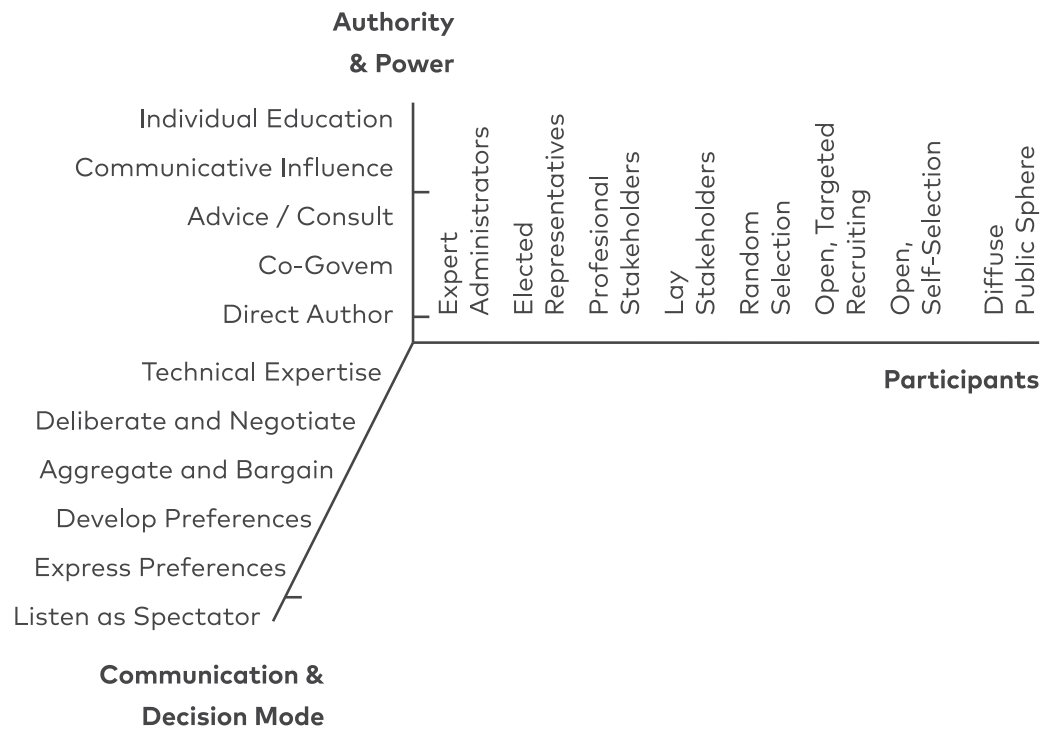


Figure 1. The democracy cube (Fung, 2006).



Image: Linus Bergman/imagebank.sweden.se

Youth participation in policymaking in the Nordics

Across the Nordic countries, youth participation is embedded in long-standing democratic traditions, characterised by high levels of institutional trust and strong civil societies. Compared to other regions globally, Nordic youth display high levels of civic knowledge and a strong commitment to democratic norms, yet tend toward more reserved, indirect forms of political engagement, rather than direct activism. This shows a pattern of "reserved citizenship", which suggests that participation in the Nordic context is often mediated through structured and institutionalised channels, rather than confrontational or movement-based politics (Lieberkind & Bruun, 2021).

Often well-funded and autonomous, youth organisations are a core part of this democratic model. They are often described as "schools of democracy", as they help young people to develop civic skills through volunteer-driven and youth-led initiatives. The organisations in this sector are diverse, ranging from NGOs and political youth wings to municipal and religious youth work, but all of them have in common a commitment to reflecting young people's needs and perspectives (Gretschel et al., 2023).

The following country profiles examine how this shared democratic culture translates into formal mechanisms of consultation and representation across the Region. While the Nordic countries are unified by a "group" identity rooted in social inclusion and high trust in civil society, the institutional design of youth participation varies significantly in practice (European Commission, n.d.; Gretschel et al., 2023). These variations are primarily driven by different legal traditions, ranging from Norway's mandatory statutory councils to Denmark's voluntary, NGO-led model, as well as diverging approaches to national funding and the degree of decentralisation in local decision-making.

Consequently, the country profiles focus on:

- The legal and institutional basis for youth consultation
- The role of national and local youth councils, umbrella organisations and civil society actors.

Taken together, the country profiles illustrate that while youth participation is recognised across the Nordic Region, there is considerable variation in the degree to which it is legally mandated, institutionally embedded and supported by stable structures.

Denmark

Formal mechanisms of consultation

Youth involvement in the Danish policymaking process is primarily consultative, rather than legally binding (Vejledning Om Lovkvalitet, 2018). At the national level, the general procedure involves sending policy documents, such as bills and ministerial orders, to relevant partners and authorities for consultation before they are discussed in Parliament. The government also conducts ad hoc consultations on bills considered relevant to youth. Such consultations involve the use of youth panels, consisting of specific target groups, which provide perspectives to both practitioners and politicians (European Commission, 2026).

In addition, the National Council for Children in Denmark identifies societal conditions that impact children's rights and development and submits legislative responses to ensure the interests of children are safeguarded. The Council works, via the children and youth panels, to ensure that children's voices are heard in the public sphere. In this way, children and young people are consulted indirectly. At the local level, consultation occurs through municipal youth councils and joint pupil councils, although the regularity and methods of these interactions vary across regions (European Commission, 2026). While there is no specific legislation in Denmark requiring the establishment of youth councils at the municipal level, two acts frame local youth engagement. The Act on Non-Formal General Education (Folkeoplysningsloven) obliges municipal councils to establish permanent committees on non-formal education and to provide funding and facilities to voluntary youth associations, while the Youth Schools Act (Ungdomsskoleloven) requires each municipal youth school (ungdomsskole) to establish a board that includes pupil representation (Folkeoplysningsloven, 2018; Ungdomsskoleloven, 2019). Together, these acts create an enabling but non-mandatory environment for local youth participation, consistent with Denmark's broader voluntary, NGO-led model.

National youth council and key actors

The Danish Youth Council (DUF) functions as the central national umbrella organisation. It represents 80 member organisations across a wide spectrum, including political youth wings, scouts, and cultural associations, with a combined membership of approximately

600,000 individuals (Gretschel et al., 2023, p. 14). DUF is vital to the sector's financial sustainability, distributing roughly DKK 140 million annually from national lottery surplus funds to various organisations (Gretschel et al., 2023, p. 13).

Depending on the policy topic, youth are also represented through various interest organisations and national umbrella associations. At the municipal level, the relevant actors are the local youth councils and municipal joint pupil councils. The Danish Parliament also supports participation by hosting the Youth Parliament and other dialogue initiatives (European Commission, n.d.; Folketinget, 2024).

Faroe Islands

While the Faroe Islands have adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, youth participation is largely guided by government recommendations and decentralised municipal initiatives, rather than a single overarching youth law (Nordic Welfare Centre, 2021).

The Føroya Ungdómsráð (FUR) serves as the primary national umbrella organisation. It represents around 4,000 young people under 30, from 51 local communities, and advocates for youth rights (Faroe Islands, n.d.; FUR, n.d.; Nordic Welfare Centre, 2021).

Finland

Formal mechanisms of participation

Finland's approach to youth involvement has a solid legal basis, starting with the Constitution, which mandates that public authorities promote opportunities for individuals to participate in societal decision-making (731/1999, 2000). This is further solidified by the Youth Act, which requires that young people be heard and given active roles in both local and national youth policy (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, n.d.; 1285/2016, 2016).

Nationally, the "kuuleminen" (consultation) process is a standardised component of legislative drafting (Finlex, n.d.; Oikeusministeriö, n.d.). Under guidelines from the Ministry of Justice, ministries must involve youth representatives in preparatory bodies, utilising both traditional written feedback and digital platforms to ensure the inclusion of youth perspectives in parliamentary committee debates (Finnish Government, n.d.; Ministry of Justice, n.d.; The Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.).

At the regional and local levels, the Municipalities Act and the Act on Wellbeing Services Counties guarantee all residents, regardless of age, the right to engage in discussion forums and resident panels, while those aged 15 and over are empowered to submit

referendum initiatives (410/2015, 2015; 611/2021, 2021). Moreover, under the Municipalities Act, municipalities are required to establish youth councils, which constitute a formal mechanism through which young people can influence local decision-making. While this mandate applies to all 309 municipalities, regardless of size, practical implementation varies. Larger urban centres tend to offer superior administrative resources and dedicated budgets, whereas youth councils in smaller municipalities often benefit from more direct, informal access to local leadership. However, these smaller councils frequently face greater challenges regarding recruitment and the continuity of professional support compared to their highly institutionalised urban counterparts (Kuntaliitto, 2025; Nuva ry, 2026).

National youth council and key actors

The Finnish youth landscape is institutionalised and professionalised, and centred around the Finnish National Youth Council, Allianssi. What makes this body unique in the Nordic Region is its hybrid membership structure. Unlike its counterparts in Denmark, Norway, and Iceland, which serve strictly as umbrella organisations for voluntary, youth-led NGOs, Allianssi represents a broader spectrum. It acts as a comprehensive body for approximately 150 member organisations, while simultaneously representing the professional youth work sector, including municipal and church-based youth workers (Gretschel et al., 2023, p. 4, 2023, p. 6).

Other key national actors include the Union of Local Youth Councils (Nuva ry) and various national student unions, which represent young people during formal consultations (European Commission, 2026; Nuva ry, n.d.). These efforts are supported by the State Youth Council, an expert advisory body to the Ministry of Education and Culture (Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector, n.d.; Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, n.d.; The Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.; Undervisnings- och kulturministeriet, n.d.).

Locally, youth participation is primarily structured around legally mandated municipal youth councils, which serve as the main institutional actors in youth representation (Gretschel et al., 2023, p. 4).

Greenland

Greenland's self-government mandates specific action plans for children's rights. The Inuusuttut Inatsisartui (Youth Parliament) serves as a formal, platform for young people to engage directly with the legislative process (Issuu, n.d.).

Sorlak acts as the national umbrella organisation for youth and children's associations, while the MIO (National Advocacy Centre for Children's Rights) and the NAKUUSA partnership provide specialised advocacy and education on youth perspectives. Sorlak is responsible for distributing lottery proceeds to youth organisations (Sorlak, n.d.).

Iceland

Formal mechanisms of participation

There are no formal mechanisms for consultation between central authorities and young people in Iceland. The Minister of Education appoints the formal Youth Council (Æskulýðsráð), a statutory advisory board historically dominated by adult professionals rather than young people. The National Youth Council (LUF) operates as an independent, youth-led umbrella organisation for over 40 NGOs (LUF, n.d.). The National Youth Act no. 70/2007 provides a legal basis for participation at the local level, stating that local governments should actively work to establish local youth councils made up of young people (70/2007, 2007). Although these local councils cannot directly change national youth policy, they influence national dialogue and impact local policies through regular cooperation and conferences with local authorities (Reykjavik, n.d.).

National youth council and key actors

Participation at the local level has expanded, with the number of municipalities maintaining youth councils increasing from 14 in 2008 to 33 in 2021 (Samband, n.d.). One central actor in Iceland is the National Youth Organisation (UMFÍ), which hosts conferences at which representatives from all local youth councils meet to discuss important topics in youth affairs. In addition, the institutional landscape includes various non-governmental organisations, such as UNICEF, UN-Women and Save the Children, as well as the Ombudsman for Children, all of which have established their own dedicated youth boards (European Commission, n.d.).

Norway

Formal mechanisms of participation

Youth involvement in Norway's national policymaking is structured through a formal, transparent consultation process (høring), where the Norwegian Children and Youth Council (LNU), representing approximately 100 member organisations, acts as the primary unified voice in this process. While any group can submit statements, LNU is a statutory consultee on national bills (European Commission, n.d.).

At the local level, the 2019 Local Government Act mandated the establishment of youth councils in all municipalities and counties and legally required that authorities consult them on all relevant policy matters. Furthermore, several ministries have increasingly supplemented this formal system with ad hoc youth panels that provide targeted expert advice on specific areas like rural development and High North policy (European Commission, n.d.). In 2019, the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs commissioned a five-year research and monitoring programme, which found that while many municipalities and county authorities have formally established youth councils, in line with the Local Government Act, good formal arrangements do not automatically

lead to real influence in practice. The report also highlights clear differences between municipalities that vary in terms of size and centrality: youth councils in small and less central municipalities tend to have fewer support structures and less training. However, the report notes these settings may also reduce the distance between young people and local decision-makers. In contrast, larger and more central municipalities can draw on more administrative resources, offer more frequent meetings and provide more training (Rambøll, 2024).

National youth council and key actors

The Norwegian youth sector is characterised by a robust tradition of volunteerism and the "arm's length" principle, which ensures that an independent committee, rather than the government, allocates state funding to national and local voluntary organisations for both core operations and specific project activities. This both prevents political interference and safeguards the sector's role as an independent watchdog. LNU, representing 102 member groups and approximately 450,000 individuals with a broad range of cultural, political and social interests, serves as the primary national umbrella organisation. Other prominent actors involved in national consultations include the School Student Union of Norway, Youth Work Norway and the Norwegian Association of Youth with Disabilities (Gretschel et al., 2023).

Financial support is diversified through initiatives like the FriFond scheme, which redistributes national gambling revenues to local, low-threshold youth projects; and electoral-based grants for political youth wings, which are calculated based on the voting share of their respective mother parties. While this ensures a degree of financial stability, the sector faces modern challenges, such as a shift away from traditional long-term memberships and towards more professionalised, project-based engagement (Gretschel et al., 2023). Recognising the specific challenges faced by rural and peripheral municipalities, the Centre of Competence on Rural Development (Distriktssenteret) has emerged as an important national resource for youth participation in rural Norway. Through its dedicated "Ung i distrikts-Norge" programme, the centre supports rural municipalities in developing functional youth councils and organises regular knowledge-sharing conferences that bring together municipalities, regional youth councils and county authorities. The centre's work underscores a key finding: that attracting and retaining young people in rural areas is closely tied to whether they feel genuinely heard and engaged in local decision-making (Distriktssenteret, n.d.).

Sweden

Formal mechanisms of participation

Swedish youth participation is fundamentally rooted in a long-standing tradition of dialogue between the state and civil society organisations (CSOs), which generally have more structured opportunities to inform policy than individual citizens. The primary formal mechanism for national influence is the consultation system, which involves the

government sending legislative proposals and inquiry reports to relevant bodies for comment before they are finalised.

The National Council of Swedish Children and Youth Organisations (LSU) is customarily appointed as a formal referral body for all proposals affecting young people. The government also maintains a Youth Policy Council, which serves as a forum for discussion between the responsible minister and a diverse array of youth representatives.

While Sweden's Local Government Act (Kommunallagen 2017:725) does not specifically mandate the establishment of youth councils, it sets out general provisions for resident participation and consultation in municipal decision-making, and in doing so provides an indirect enabling framework for local youth engagement (Kommunallag (2017:725), 2017). At the local level, participation is increasingly data-driven; the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society (MUCF) produces the "LUPP" survey, a standardised tool used by 69% of municipalities to collect youth perspectives and inform local policy (MUCF, 2026). The Ombudsman for Children also has a legal mandate to engage in regular dialogue with minors, particularly those in vulnerable situations. Based on these dialogues, the Ombudsman produces thematic reports on issues such as housing (2022), crime prevention (2023) and mental health (2024) (Barnombudsmannen, 2022, 2023, 2024).

National youth council and key actors

The Swedish youth landscape is defined by a combination of government oversight and a diverse network of independent associations, rather than a single national youth parliament. MUCF is the central government authority tasked with implementing youth policy and distributing state grants to youth-led initiatives (Gretschel et al., 2023, p. 44). In the non-governmental sector, LSU serves as the primary national umbrella organisation, representing over 80 membership-based groups. It also appoints youth representatives to international bodies like the UN and EU. While LSU coordinates democratically structured associations, the Swedish Association of Youth Councils (Sveriges Ungdomsråd) acts as a civil society network for approximately 40 local youth councils (Sveriges Ungdomsråd, n.d.). This local focus is a hallmark of the Swedish model – nearly half of all municipalities maintain their own youth council or advisory board (MUCF, 2019). In addition, large-scale NGOs like Fryshuset play a significant role in national advocacy and youth development, focusing on social inclusion and entrepreneurship through a decentralised network of youth hubs (Gretschel et al., 2023, p. 20). Youth participation in rural areas of Sweden faces distinct challenges due to the country's dispersed settlement patterns. Hela Sverige ska leva (Rural Sweden), a national civil society organisation representing over 5,000 local development groups, actively works to amplify youth voices in rural communities through its "Unga i landsbygder" (Youth in Rural Areas) programme, as well as running webinars, co-financing research on young people's everyday lives in rural settings and supporting regional networks that connect local associations with youth-engagement work. The organisation's efforts highlight how impactful youth participation in sparsely populated areas requires adapted approaches that go beyond the standardised frameworks primarily designed for larger, urban municipalities (Hela Sverige ska leva, 2023).

Åland

Åland's youth policy is defined by its autonomous youth policy programme, which emphasises the right of young people to influence decision-making as a vital societal resource. Municipalities are primarily responsible for implementing the programme (Ålands regering, 2015).

The Åland Youth Council (Ålands ungdomsråd) is the central representative body for the island's youth and is supported by numerous non-governmental organisations funded through local Paf-funds (lottery revenues) (Ålands landskabsregering, 2014).



Image: Andrei Miranchuk / Unsplash.com

Strengthening youth participation at the local and regional levels

The Nordic countries are often ranked among the strongest democracies in the world, with high levels of trust and civic engagement, and well-functioning representative institutions (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2025; Freedom House, 2026). This is also reflected in the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset, one of the most comprehensive and widely used measures of democracy. While the Nordic countries perform very strongly across electoral, liberal, egalitarian and deliberative dimensions, their scores on the participatory component are consistently lower, which indicates that direct citizen influence in decision-making is comparatively limited (Coppedge et al., 2025; Nord et al., 2026).

This gap can partly be explained by the way in which the Nordic system is organised. Power is decentralised to strong municipalities and regions, each of which manages extensive responsibilities within complex institutional frameworks. While these structures support stability and predictability, they can also make it difficult to embed comprehensive participatory approaches (Castell, 2016; Haveri, 2015; Sinervo et al., 2025).

Embedding participatory processes in local and regional governance is inherently challenging and requires not only sustained political support, but also appropriate organisational structures, cultures and resources within public administration (Fung, 2015; Kurkela et al., 2023). In practice, this means that municipalities and regions must actively organise and sustain participation as part of everyday governance. Building on this, Fung (2015) identifies the following key challenges that governments face in trying to achieve an impactful design space for participation.

1. Lack of leadership

Impactful participation depends on whether it is embedded within municipal and regional governance, rather than driven by individual initiative. If the leadership is weak, participation tends to rely on motivated staff or politicians, and remains project-based, which leaves it vulnerable to political shifts, staff turnover and changing priorities (Fung, 2015).

Interviews with DUF, Nuva ry, and LNU illustrate how this challenge manifests in the Nordic countries. In Denmark, the absence of national requirements for youth councils means that participation depends heavily on the priorities of local leadership. DUF notes that municipalities vary widely in how actively they reach out to youth organisations, and that engagement is frequently contingent on the interests of individual officials, rather than embedded institutional practice. In Finland, youth councils are legally mandated, but Nuva ry observes that their influence varies depending on the extent to which the municipalities support them and integrate them into decision-making. Rural municipalities in particular often lack the resources and staff capacity to sustain impactful participation. Similarly, in Norway, LNU highlights that while the 2019 reform made youth councils mandatory, formal requirements alone have not reduced the significant variation in practice across municipalities. In addition, research from Norway shows that although youth council coordinators play a crucial role in facilitating participation, they often lack the time, resources, or institutional support to fulfil this role effectively. (Rambøll, 2024).

Addressing this leadership challenge within local and regional governance may involve establishing clear roles and responsibilities for youth participation, ensuring coordination across departments and governance levels, and securing visible support from local politicians and senior officials. It may also entail allocating sufficient resources, in terms of staff, funding and skills, as well as fostering collaboration with regional or inter-municipal actors, so that participation is sustained over time and linked to broader municipal and regional strategies and decision-making processes.

2. Lack of consensus and joint understanding

This challenge concerns how participation is understood within municipalities and regions. Where there is no shared understanding of its purpose, participation is often used instrumentally, primarily to consult, rather than to influence decisions (Fung, 2006). This reflects differing expectations among public officials, politicians and participants about whether participation should inform, co-develop or shape outcomes.

Interviews with DUF, Nuva ry, and LNU suggest that where such a shared understanding is lacking, practices become inconsistent and more difficult for young people to navigate. In Denmark, DUF highlights a tendency for municipalities to bypass formal youth councils and instead seek input from "real" young people, on an ad hoc basis. While often well intentioned, this approach can undermine established and legitimate structures that have built up a level of experience. Across contexts, practical barriers such as administrative

procedures and complex, age-inappropriate language also create challenges, particularly in smaller and rural municipalities. In Finland, Nuva ry reports that roughly 20–25% of young people find administrative language difficult to understand. In Denmark, DUF points to bureaucracy and a high volume of regulations as barriers that can undermine the voluntary spirit driving youth engagement, and notes that cooperation with municipalities is often complicated by differences in institutional pace and culture.

Addressing this challenge may involve fostering an organisational culture in which municipal and regional staff act as facilitators and partners rather than just administrators. It also requires building regular, trust-based cooperation with youth organisations, and recognising young people as competent, knowledgeable actors. In addition, it may require prioritising time for relationship-building, ensuring teams have diverse skills and experience, and developing shared norms around participation across the organisation.

3. Limited scope

A third significant challenge concerns the “influence” dimension of the Democracy Cube. As outlined above, this ranges from forms of participation that generate individual or communicative effects, to forms in which participants exercise direct authority over decisions (Fung, 2006). In practice, many participatory processes operate with limited authority alongside formal governance structures, which make their impact indirect or incremental (Fung, 2015). While this does not necessarily indicate failure, a long-standing tendency toward consultative and low-authority forms of participation can contribute to scepticism and further disengagement or even distrust among participants, particularly in situations where previous engagement has not led to visible change.

Nuva ry identifies a recurring pattern of tokenism in Finland. In other words, while decision-makers regularly consult youth to fulfil formal requirements, they do not systematically integrate the feedback into policy processes, which leaves young people uncertain as to whether their input has made any difference. Similarly, in Norway, LNU notes that youth are sometimes included for reasons of optics, rather than genuine co-influence. Furthermore, research from Norway finds that youth councils often deal only with matters proposed by the council itself, the administration, the youth council coordinator, school pupil councils or peer conversations, rather than broader outreach methods. There also appear to be limited opportunities to influence the budget process, as youth councils are often invited to provide input shortly before the budget is adopted (Rambøll, 2024)

Addressing this challenge may involve clarifying the role of participation in relation to decision-making, aligning participatory processes with formal governance structures, allocating sufficient time and resources, and ensuring that participants can see how their input is considered and used.



Image: Sofia Sabel/imagebank.sweden.se

A final, playful reflection on youth participation

Youth participation is often approached through individual initiatives, such as youth councils or consultations. In practice, however, its effectiveness depends on both how these initiatives function and how they relate to one another. We use the image of a Rubik's Cube to visualise this governance challenge.

This builds on Archon Fung's Democracy Cube, which distinguishes between who participates, how participation is organised and the extent of the participants' influence. The Rubik's Cube model highlights that these dimensions are interconnected. Changing one affects the others, and effective participation depends on how they are aligned in practice.

Seen in this way, youth participation becomes a question of calibration. Municipalities and regions need to reach relevant groups of young people, use appropriate methods and ensure that participation is meaningfully linked to decision-making. Different contexts require different configurations, and what works in one setting may not work in another.

At the same time, within municipalities and regions, participation unfolds across several initiatives, each of which is structured by who participates, how participation is organised and the participants' level of influence. Together, these initiatives form a connected design space for youth participation. The challenges are therefore to make participation work within each initiative, by aligning these three dimensions, and to ensure that different initiatives connect and reinforce one another across the wider municipal and regional system.

Solving this governance challenge requires strengthening leadership, building consensus and ensuring meaningful scope for participatory processes.

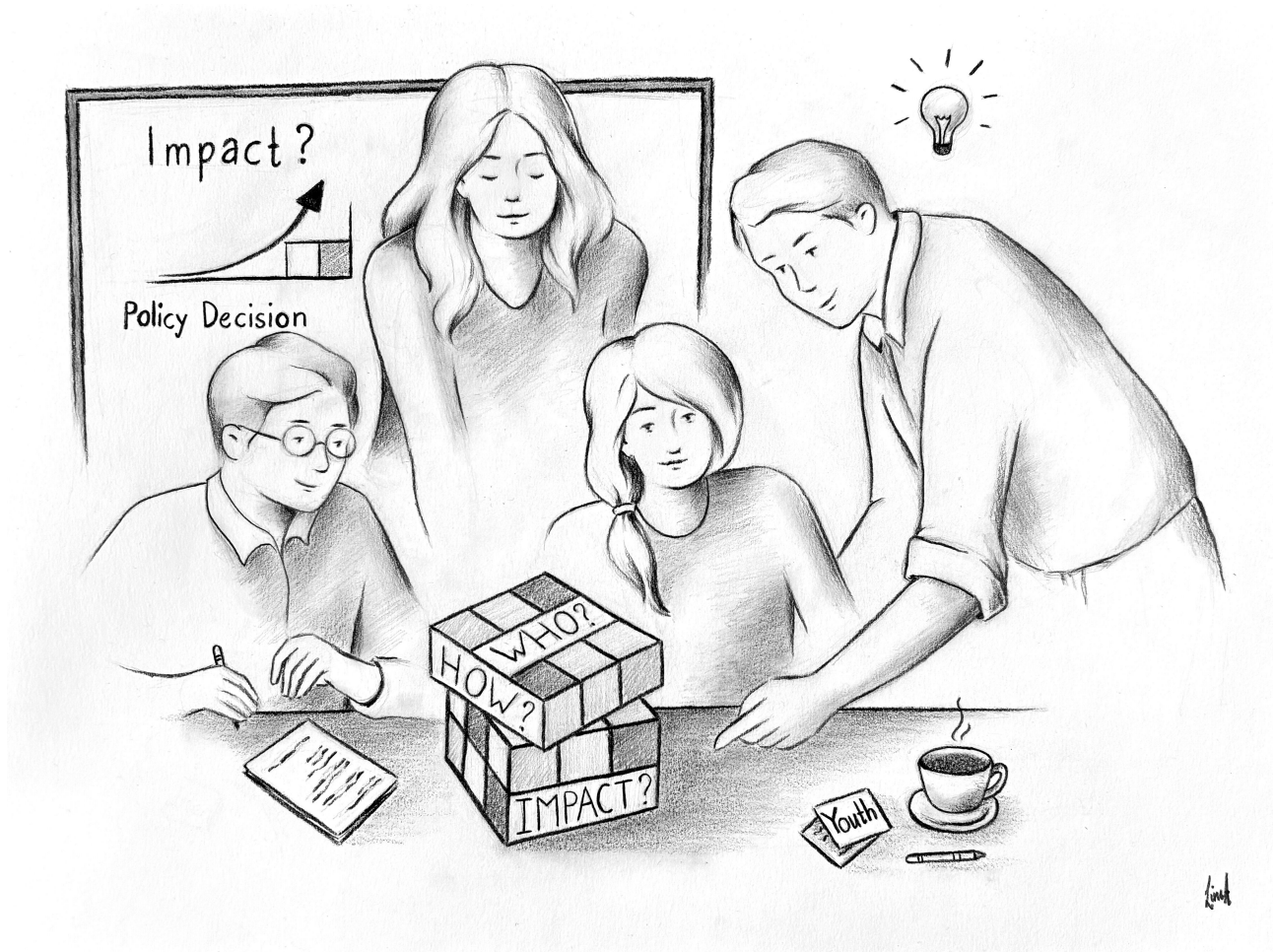


Illustration by Line Andreassen, Nordregio.

Concluding remarks and next steps

Youth participation in the Nordic Region is widely supported in formal terms, but remains uneven in practice, particularly outside of urban centres. While strong democratic institutions provide an enabling foundation, impactful participation depends on how it is implemented within local and regional governance. This analysis highlights three persistent governance challenges (leadership, consensus and scope) that shape whether participation becomes influential or remains largely consultative – or worse, tokenistic. Addressing these challenges requires moving beyond formal structures to focus on how participation is embedded, understood and connected to decision-making in practice. By combining empirical evidence with lived experiences from rural and intermediate areas, this project aims to identify practical pathways that will strengthen youth participation and, in turn, reinforce democratic resilience in those areas where it is under the greatest pressure.

The next stage of the project will address this gap by focusing on participation as it unfolds in practice. Step 2 will collect youth participation stories from across the Nordic Region, with a particular focus on rural and intermediate contexts. These stories will examine how young people engage across different settings, how participation is organised in concrete contexts, and how influence is enabled or constrained. The aim is to capture both the diversity of participation practices and the points at which participation becomes limited, fragmented or difficult to sustain.

Step 3 will bring together youth organisations and public authorities in a joint diagnostic process aimed at developing a shared understanding of how participation operates within public administration, where it breaks down and how different dimensions of participation interact with governance conditions in practice.

References

Abas, A., Arifin, K., Ali, M. A. M., & Khairil, M. (2023). A systematic literature review on public participation in decision-making for local authority planning: A decade of progress and challenges. *Environmental Development*, 46, 100853.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envdev.2023.100853>

Ålands landskabsregering. (2014). *Ungdomspolitiskt program för landskapet Åland*.

Ålands regering. (2015, May 11). *Ungdomspolitik | Ålands regering*.

<https://www.regeringen.ax/kultur-fritid/ungdom/ungdomspolitik>

Arnstein, S. R. (1969). *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*.

<https://jstor.org/stable/community.33127599>

Bächtiger, A., Dryzek, J. S., Mansbridge, J., & Warren, M. D. (Eds). (2018). *The Oxford Handbook of Deliberative Democracy*. Oxford University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198747369.001.0001>

Baillie, A. (2025). *Public participation in policymaking: Exploring and understanding impact*. The Scottish Government.

Barnombudsmannen. (n.d.). *Barnombudsmannen*. Retrieved 1 April 2026, from

<https://www.barnombudsmannen.se/>

Barnombudsmannen. (2022). *Blir det nå skillnad—Eller säger vi det här helt i onödan?*

<https://www.barnombudsmannen.se/stallningstaganden/publikationer/blir-det-nan-skillnad---eller-sager-vi-det-har-helt-i-onodan/>

Barnombudsmannen. (2023). *Tidiga samhällsinsatser för att stärka barn och för*.

<https://www.barnombudsmannen.se/stallningstaganden/publikationer/arsrapport-2023/>

Barnombudsmannen. (2024). *Hur dåligt måste man må egentligen? - Samhällets insatser för att främja barns psykiska hälsa*.

<https://www.barnombudsmannen.se/stallningstaganden/publikationer/arsrapport-2024/>

Bekendtgørelse Af Lov Om Om Støtte Til Folkeoplysende Voksenundervisning, Frivilligt Folkeoplysende Foreningsarbejde Og Daghøjskoler Samt Om Folkeuniversitetet (Folkeoplysningsloven), LBK nr 1115 af 31/08/2018 (2018).

<https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2018/1115>

Bekendtgørelse Af Lov Om Ungdomsskoler, LBK nr 608 af 28/05/2019 (2019).

<https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2019/608>

Berman, S. (2021). The Causes of Populism in the West. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24(Volume 24, 2021), 71–88. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-102503>

- Bjerkem, J. (2016). *The Norwegian Progress Party: An Established Populist Party*. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1007/s12290-016-0404-8>
- Bressanelli, E., & Bernardi, S. (2025). *Strengthening Resilience, Towards the European Democracy Shield*.
- Brunkert, L. J., Puranen, B., Turska Kawa, A., & Welzel, C. (2025). The democracy falling narrative: Debunking stereotypes about democratic deconsolidation in the EU. *18*(1), 40–66.
- Collins, K., & Ison, R. (2009). *Jumping off Arnstein's ladder: Social learning as a new policy paradigm for climate change adaptation*. (19: 358-373.). <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.523>
- Coppedge, M., Gerring, J., Knutsen, C. H., Lindberg, S. I., Teorell, J., Altman, D., Angiolillo, F., Bernhard, M., Cornell, A., Gjerløw, H., Glynn, A., Grahn, S., Hicken, A., Kinzelbach, K., Marquardt, K., McMann, K., Mechkova, V., Medzihorsky, J., Neundorff, A., ... Sundström, A. (2025). *V-Dem Dataset v15* [Data set]. Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. <https://doi.org/10.23696/VDEMDS25>
- Cornwall, A. (2008). Unpacking 'Participation': Models, meanings and practices. *Community Development Journal*, 43(3), 269–283. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsn010>
- Dalton, R. J. (2017, October 19). *The Participation Gap: Social Status and Political Inequality*. Oxford University Press. <https://academic.oup.com/book/11193>
- De Ruyter, A., Martin, R., & Tyler, P. (2021). Geographies of discontent: Sources, manifestations and consequences. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 14(3), 381–393. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsab025>
- Dijkstra, L., Poelman, H., & Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2020). The geography of EU discontent. *Regional Studies*, 54(6), 737–753. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2019.1654603>
- Distriktssenteret. (n.d.). *Ung i Distrikts-Norge*. Distriktssenteret. Retrieved 21 April 2026, from <https://distriktssenteret.no/fagomrader/ung-i-distrikts-norge/>
- Economist Intelligence Unit. (2025). *Democracy Index 2024: What's wrong with representative democracy?*
- Edwards, A. (2012). Tensions and New Connections between Participatory and Representative Democracy in Local Governance. In L. Schaap & H. Daemen (Eds), *Renewal in European Local Democracies: Puzzles, Dilemmas and Options* (pp. 55–77). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-18763-1_3
- Elstub, S., & Escobar, O. (2019). Defining and typologising democratic innovations. In *Handbook of Democratic Innovation and Governance* (pp. 11–31). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://www.elgaronline.com/display/edcoll/9781786433855/9781786433855.00009.xml>
- Ercan, S. A., & Gagnon, J.-P. (2014). The Crisis of Democracy: Which Crisis? Which Democracy? *Democratic Theory*, 1(2), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.3167/dt.2014.010201>
- European Commission. (n.d.). *Youth Wiki: Europe's Encyclopedia of National Youth Policies*. Retrieved 19 February 2026, from <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki>

- European Commission: Eurostat. (2009). *Youth in Europe: A statistical portrait*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2785/30500>
- European Parliament. (2025, January). *Erobarometer Youth Survey*.
- Faroe Islands. (n.d.). *Youth of the Faroe Islands*. Faroe Islands. Retrieved 30 March 2026, from <https://www.faroeislands.fo/people-society/population/youth-of-the-faroe-islands>
- Finlands Grundlag 731/1999, Pub. L. No. 731/1999 (2000). <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/lainsaadanto/1999/731>
- Finlex. (n.d.). *Effective legislative drafting: Legislative Drafting Process Guide*. Retrieved 1 April 2026, from <https://lainvalmistelu.finlex.fi/en/>
- Finnish Government. (n.d.). *The Government and Parliament*. Retrieved 1 April 2026, from <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/about-the-government/the-government-and-parliament>
- Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector. (n.d.). *Finnish National Youth Council and Youth Sector*. Nuorisola. Retrieved 1 April 2026, from <https://nuorisola.fi/en/finnish-national-youth-council-and-youth-sector/>
- Florida, R. (2021). Discontent and its geographies. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, (Volume 14, Issue 3), 619–624.
- Folketinget. (2024, March 25). *Ungdomsparlamentet 2026-27*. Folketinget. <https://www.ft.dk/da/ungdomsparlamentet>
- Freedom House. (2026). *Freedom in the World 2026*. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2026-03/FIW2026_final_digital%20%281%29.pdf
- Fung, A. (2006). Varieties of Participation in Complex Governance. *Public Administration Review*, 66(s1), 66–75. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00667.x>
- FUR. (n.d.). *FUR*. Retrieved 27 April 2026, from <https://www.fur.fo/>
- Goodin, R. E., & Dryzek, J. S. (2006). Deliberative Impacts: The Macro-Political Uptake of Mini-Publics. *Politics & Society*, 34(2), 219–244. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329206288152>
- Gretschel, A., Kautto, T., Lehtonen, J., Lehtonen, M., Särkiluoto, V., & Tarvainen, K. (2023). *Evaluation and monitoring of the activities of youth organisations in the Nordics: What could be learned among the Nordic countries?* Nordisk Ministerråd. <https://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:norden.org:diva-12970>
- Haveri, A. (2015). *Nordic local government: A success story, but will it last?* 28(2), 136–149.
- Hela Sverige ska leva. (2023, December 15). *Ungt engagemang i Hela Sverige ska leva: "De unga ska leva med allt det som händer idag"*. <https://www.helasverige.se/kunskap-och-media/de-unga-ska-leva-med-allt-det-som-hander-idag/>
- Hofer, K., & Kaufmann, D. (2022). Actors, arenas and aims: A conceptual framework for public participation. *Planning Theory*, 22(4), 357–379. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14730952221139587>

- Inglehart, R. F., & Norris, P. (2016). *Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash*. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2818659
- Irvin, R. A., & Stansbury, J. (2004). Citizen Participation in Decision Making: Is It Worth the Effort? *Public Administration Review*, 64(1), 55–65. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2004.00346.x>
- Issuu. (n.d.). *Greenland*. Issuu. Retrieved 29 April 2026, from https://issuu.com/nordicwelfare/docs/nwc-see_listen_and_include_webb/s/11901474
- Kommunallag 410/2015, Pub. L. No. 410/2015 (2015). <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/lainsaadanto/2015/410>
- Kommunallag (2017:725) (2017). https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-och-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/kommunallag-2017725_sfs-2017-725/
- Kuntaliitto. (2025, December 4). *Unges deltagelse må ikke overlades til samtalen – nu er tiden inde til handling*. <https://www.kuntaliitto.fi/blogi/2025/nuorten-osallistuminen-ei-saa-jaada-puheisiin-nyt-tekojen-aika>
- Lag Om Velfärdsområden 611/2021, Pub. L. No. 611/2021 (2021). <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/lainsaadanto/2021/611?language=swe>
- Lieberkind, J., & Bruun, J. (2021). The Reserved Young Citizens of the Nordic Countries. In *Northern lights on civic and citizenship education: A cross-national comparison of Nordic data from ICCS* (pp. 19–41). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-66788-7_2
- Lijphart, A. (1997). *Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma Presidential Address*. American Political Science Association. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/2952255>
- LUF. (n.d.). *The National Youth Council of Iceland*. Landssamband Ungmennafélaga. Retrieved 16 April 2026, from <https://luf.is/en/>
- Mansbridge, J., Bohman, J., Chambers, S., Christiano, T., Fung, A., Parkinson, J., Thompson, D., & Warren, M. (2012). A systemic approach to deliberative democracy. In *Deliberative Systems* (pp. 1–26). <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139178914.002>
- Meinander, H. (2021). *Three driving forces*. In: *The Nordic Economic, Social and Political Model*. (1st edn), 20–36.
- Ministry of Justice. (n.d.). *Ministry of Justice*. Retrieved 1 April 2026, from <https://oikeusministerio.fi/en/frontpage>
- MUCF. (2019, November 27). *Fokus 19—Det vore ju kul om de frågade nån gång*. <https://www.mucf.se/fokus19>
- MUCF. (2026, March 31). *MUCF - Myndigheten för ungdoms- och civilsamhällesfrågor*. <https://www.mucf.se/>
- Nord, M., Altman, D., Fernandes, T., Good God, A., & Lindberg, S. I. (2026). *Democracy Report 2026: Unraveling the democratic era?* V-Dem Institute. University of Gothenburg.

- Nordic Council of Ministers. (2017). *Youth, democracy, and democratic exclusion in the Nordic countries*. Nordic Council of Ministers. <https://doi.org/10.6027/ANP2017-794>
- Nordic Welfare Centre. (2021, April 2). *Se, lytte og inkludere—Deltakelse for barn og unge med funksjonsnedsettelse i Norden*. NVC. <https://nordicwelfare.org/en/publikationer/se-lytte-og-inkludere-deltakelse-for-barn-og-unge-med-funksjonsnedsettelse-i-norden/>
- Nordregio. (n.d.). *Young and Rooted: Strengthening youth representation in Nordic regions*. Retrieved 16 April 2026, from <https://nordregio.org/research/young-and-rooted-strengthening-youth-representation-in-nordic-regions/>
- Nuva ry. (n.d.). *Nuva ry. Suomen Nuorisovaltuustojen Liitto Ry*. Retrieved 1 April 2026, from <https://nuva.fi/en/>
- Nuva ry. (2026, March 18). *Nuorisovaltuustoselvityksen kysely on avattu*. Suomen Nuorisovaltuustojen Liitto ry. <https://nuva.fi/nuorisovaltuustoselvitys-2026/>
- O'Brien, K. L., & Leichenko, R. M. (2003). Winners and Losers in the Context of Global Change. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 93(1), 89–103. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8306.93107>
- OECD. (2020). *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/339306da-en>
- OECD. (2025). Exploring New Frontiers in Citizen Participation in the Policy Cycle. *OECD Public Governance Reviews*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/77f5098c-en>
- Oikeusministeriö. (n.d.). *Säädösvalmistelun kuulemisohje*. Säädösvalmistelun kuulemisopas. Retrieved 1 April 2026, from <https://kuulemisopas.finlex.fi/ohje/kuulemisohje/>
- Önnudóttir, E., Helgason, A., Hardarson, Ót., & Thórisdóttir, H. (2021). *Electoral Politics in Crisis after the Great Recession: Change, Fluctuations and Stability in Iceland*. (1st edn.).
- Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö. (n.d.). *Youth Act 2017*. Opetus- Ja Kulttuuriministeriö. Retrieved 30 March 2026, from <https://okm.fi/en/legislation-youth>
- Palonen, E., & Sunnercrantz, L. (2021). *Nordic populists as hegemony challengers*. In: *The Nordic Economic, Social and Political Model*. (1st edition), 153–176.
- Palumbo, R. (2017). Participatory Governance. In *Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance* (pp. 1–6). Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-31816-5_1834-1
- Perovic, B. (2016). *Defining youth in contemporary national legal and policy frameworks across Europe*. European Commission and the Council of Europe. <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents>
- Rambøll. (2024). *Kartlegging av medvirkning på systemnivå*.
- Ramos, F., Tavares, A. F., & da Cruz, N. F. (2026). Between promise and practice: A scoping review of the democratic outcomes of youth participation in local governance. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 181, 108738. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2025.108738>

- Reykjavik. (n.d.). *Youth councils*. Retrieved 16 April 2026, from <https://reykjavik.is/en/youth-council>
- Rhodes-Purdy, M., Navarre, R., & Utych, S. (2023). *The Age of Discontent: Populism, Extremism, and Conspiracy Theories in Contemporary Democracies*. (1st edition).
- Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2018). The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it). 11:189–209. <https://academic.oup.com/cjres/article-abstract/11/1/189/4821289?redirectedFrom=fulltext>
- Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2020). The Rise of Populism and the Revenge of the Places That Don't Matter. 1:4. <https://doi.org/10.31389/lseprr.4>
- Rodríguez-Pose, A., & Bartalucci, F. (2023). *The green transition and its potential territorial discontents*. <https://academic.oup.com/cjres/article/17/2/339/7427086?login=false>
- Russell, A. W. (2017). The macro-impacts of citizen deliberation processes. *newDemocracy Foundation Research Project 2015-7*.
- Salo, S. (2022). *The electoral breakthrough of the Finns Party. Reactions of Finnish Parliamentary Parties, 2011-2022*.
- Samband. (n.d.). *Samband íslenskra sveitarfélaga*. Retrieved 1 April 2026, from <https://www.samband.is/>
- Sinervo, L.-M., Kurkela, K., & Lehtonen, P. (2025). Searching for Nordic features: Institutional logics of participatory budgeting in local government. In *Future Public Governance and Global Crises* (pp. 88–102). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollchap-oa/book/9781035318674/chapter7.xml>
- Skirbekk, V., Tamnes, C. K., Júlíusson, P. B., Jugessur, A., & Von Soest, T. (2025). Diverging trends in the age of social and biological transitions to adulthood. *Advances in Life Course Research*, 65, 100690. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2025.100690>
- Smith, G. (2009). *Democratic Innovations: Designing Institutions for Citizen Participation*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511609848>
- Solijonov, A. (2016). *Voter Turnout Trends around the World*.
- Sørensen, J. F. L., & Svendsen, G. L. H. (2023). What makes peripheral places matter? Applying the concept of political capital within a multiple capital framework. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 103, 103136. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2023.103136>
- Sorlak. (n.d.). *Moderator for children and youth organizations in Greenland*. Retrieved 1 April 2026, from <https://www.sorlak.gl/en/>
- Sveriges Ungdomsråd. (n.d.). What we do and why. *Sveriges Ungdomsråd*. Retrieved 1 April 2026, from <https://www.sverigesungdomsrad.se/in-english/>
- Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs. (2010). *Youth and Youth Policy—A Swedish perspective*.

The Ministry of Education and Culture. (n.d.). *The Ministry of Education and Culture*. Opetus- ja Kulttuuriministeriö. Retrieved 1 April 2026, from <https://okm.fi/en/frontpage>

Undervisnings- och kulturministeriet. (n.d.). *State Youth Council*. Valtion Nuorisoneuvosto. Retrieved 1 April 2026, from <https://tietoanuorista.fi/en/state-youth-council/>

United Nations. (n.d.). *Youth*. United Nations. United Nations. Retrieved 5 February 2026, from <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>

Vejledning Om Lovkvalitet, VEJ nr 9539 af 26/06/2018 (2018).
<https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/retsinfo/2018/9539>

White, S. C. (1996). Depoliticising development: The uses and abuses of participation. *Development in Practice*, 6(1), 6–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0961452961000157564>

Wøien Meijer, M., Cedergren, E., & Guðmundsdóttir, H. (2023). *From Fields to Futures: 40 action points for rural revitalisation - Nordic Rural Youth Panel 2023*. Nordregio.
<https://doi.org/10.6027/R2023:131403-2503>

Youth Act, Pub. L. No. 70/2007 (2007).

Youth Act 1285/2016, Pub. L. No. 1285/2016 (2016).
<https://www.finlex.fi/sv/lagstiftning/forfattningsoversattningar/2016/eng/1285?language=eng&highlightId=798243&highlightParams=%7B%22type%22%3A%22BASIC%22%2C%22search%22%3A%22youth+act+%22%7D>

About this publication

Youth participation in policymaking in the Nordic Region

Myriam Chilvers, Line Andreassen, Rebecca Eriksson

Nordregio working paper 2026:4

ISBN: 978-91-8001-194-5 (digital)

ISBN: 978-91-8001-195-2 (PDF)

ISSN: 1403-2511

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.6027/WP2026.4.1403-2511>

© Nordregio 2026

Layout: Kotryna Juškaitė

Cover Photo: Elias Strale / Pexels

Nordregio

Nordregio is a leading Nordic and European research centre for regional development and planning, established by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 1997. We conduct solution-oriented and applied research, addressing current issues from both a research perspective and the viewpoint of policymakers and practitioners. Operating at the international, national, regional and local levels, Nordregio's research covers a wide geographic scope, emphasising the Nordic and Baltic Sea Regions, Europe and the Arctic.

Nordregio

Holmamiralens Väg 10

Skeppsholmen

Stockholm, Sweden

www.nordregio.org