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MeSoS Vienna
Department of Methods in the Social Sciences

Voting Age 16 Experiences from Austria

Dr. Eva Zeglovits

Department of Methods in the Social Sciences

University of Vienna

eva.zeglovits@univie.ac.at

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Why lowering voting age?

An answer from the scientists' perspective

“The most promising reform that might restore higher turnout would be to lower the voting age still further, perhaps to fifteen. (...) They could then learn to vote in the context of a civic class project where they were graded on their ability to discover relevant information (...).” (Mark Franklin, 2004, p. 213)



Why not lowering voting age?

An answer from the scientists' perspective

- lack of maturity
- lack of interest
- lack of knowledge
- possible low participation
- possible bad quality of the vote choice



Young Voters' Participation is crucial

- participation in the first election has an impact on one's voting career
- Start as a voter – stay a voter!
- Voting is a habit



Agents of political socialization

Who makes young people vote or abstain?

- family
- peers/friends
- media
- school
 - directly, via civic and citizenship education in classes
 - indirectly, via elements of school democracy



Austria's Electoral Reform of 2007

- Starting from 2000: several regions of Austria lowered voting age to 16 in local or regional elections
- 2007: electoral reform, lowering voting age to 16



Accompanying Initiatives in Austria

- campaign „DemokratiInitiative“ by Ministry of Education for federal election 2008
- many regional campaigns and activities for regional elections
- reform of civic and citizenship education in schools



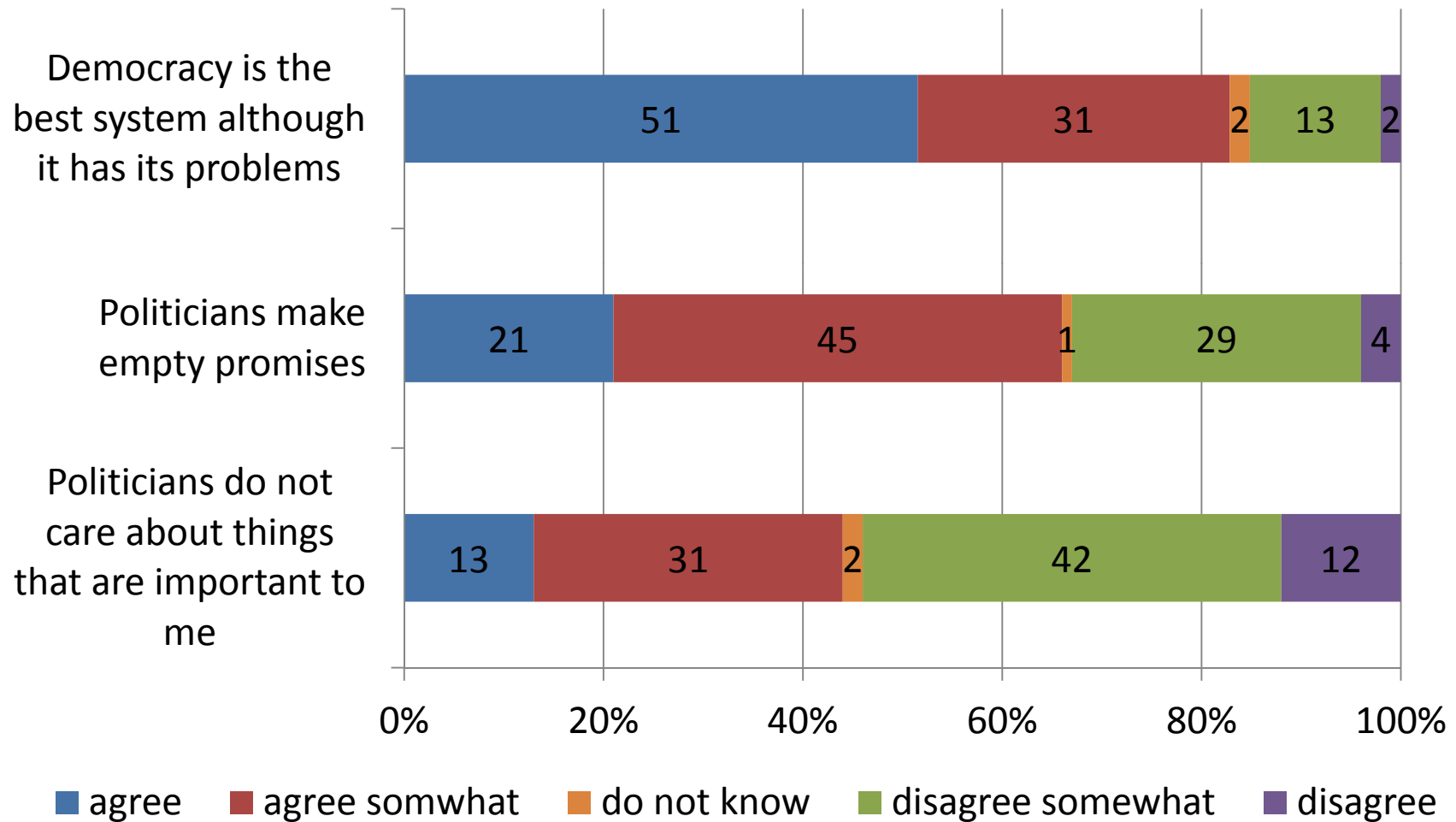
What happened in Austria?

Young people's interest in politics rises

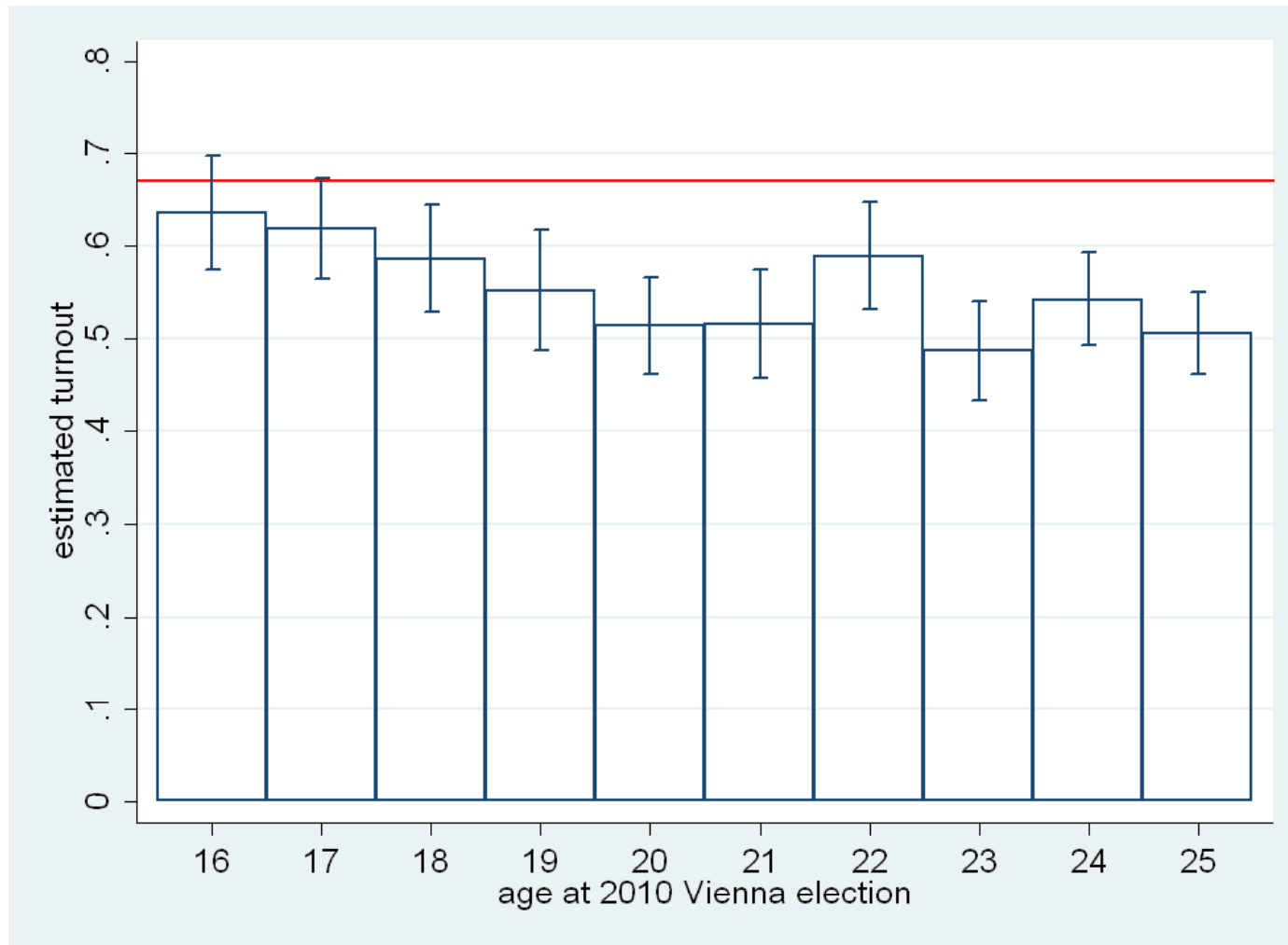
		16-18, federal elections 2008	16-17, Vienna election 2005	16-18, 2004
How interested are you in politics	Very interested	23	12	9
	Fairly interested	34	37	25
	Not very interested	34	38	50
	Not at all interested	9	12	14
	Don't know, answer refused	< 1	1	2
n		1.000	700	318



Support of democracy of 16-18 year olds



Turnout at Vienna regional election 2010



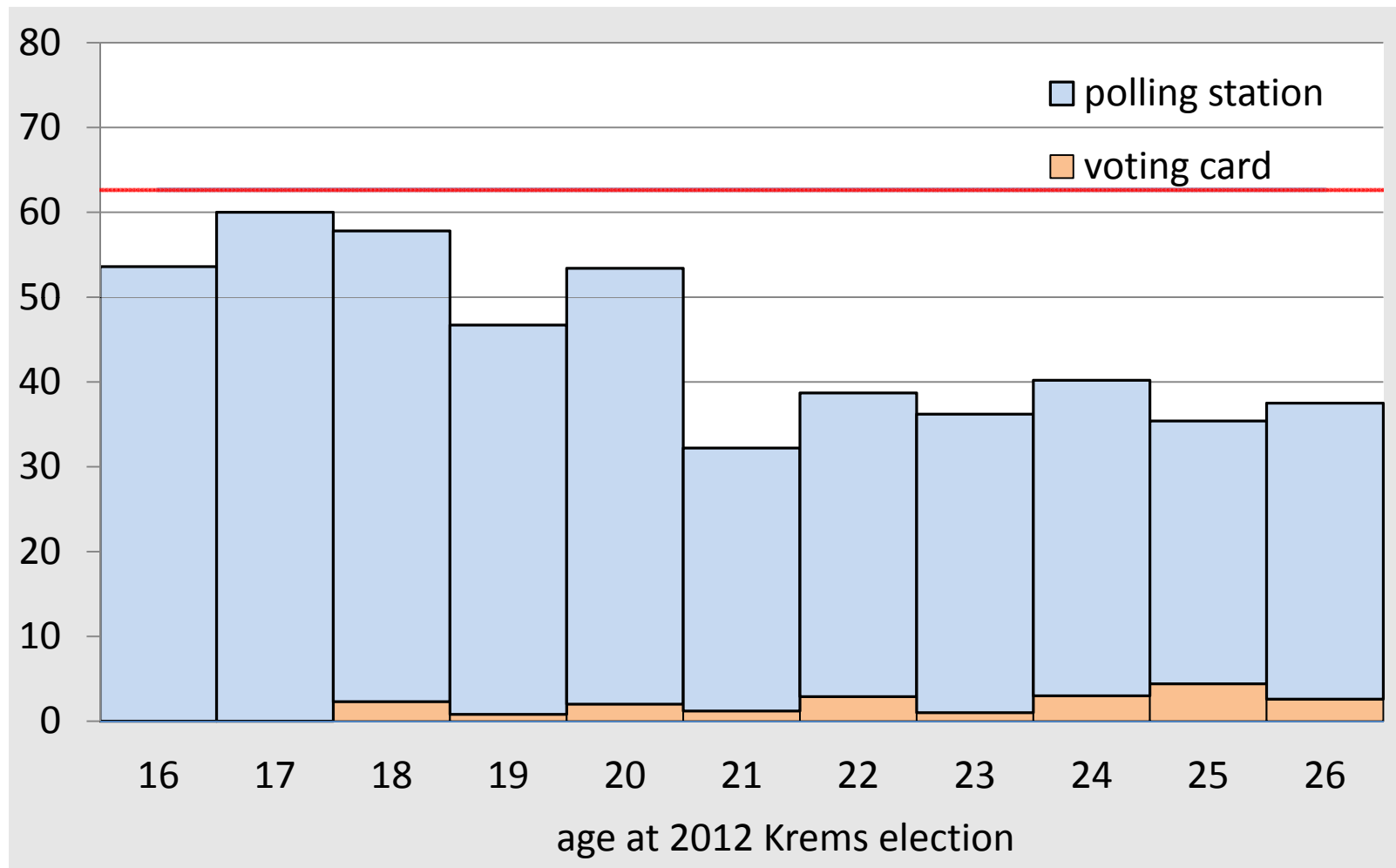
turnout estimated from a sample of electoral lists



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Turnout at Krems regional election 2012



What happened in Austria?

Patterns of voting and nonvoting (1)

Table 1 Reported turnout of students/working people

	16-18 year olds federal elections 2008	16-17 year olds Vienna 2005
working, including apprentices	82%	65%
pupils/students	89%	87%
total	86%	77%

survey data, overreporting turnout!



What happened in Austria?

Patterns of voting and nonvoting (2)

Table 2 Reported turnout by parents' country of birth

	16-18 year olds federal elections 2008	16-17 year olds Vienna 2005
both parents born in Austria	87%	82%
at least on parent not born in Austria	73%	65%
total	86%	77%

survey data, overreporting turnout!



Learings from the Austrian Case – Good news!

- Young people are interested and do turn out in about the same amount as older people
- Campaigns and activities are needed
- Young people want to be taken seriously



Learnings from Austria – Bad news

- Interest and turnout are not distributed equally
- Education and social status matter!
- Schools can only partly reduce education gaps

Challenges

- Address the less educated
- Address the less integrated
- Address the ones not in school
- Do not forget 18-25 year olds!
- Politicians, close the gap between yourself and young people!

