

# ELECTIONS ARE APPROACHING

## WHO WILL DECIDE YOUR FUTURE?

Learning resources for schools



FINNISH NATIONAL  
AGENCY FOR EDUCATION



# Introduction



Image: Niina Rodionoff

The next parliamentary elections in Finland will be held on 2 April 2023. The Finnish National Agency for Education encourages schools to address the topic of elections and the importance of participation and voting in a democratic system with students.

The following information packages by relevant organisations have been put together to support teachers and inspire students, especially in the subjects of social studies and mother tongue and literature.

*Kristina Kaihari, Counsellor of Education, The Finnish National Agency for Education*

# ENCOURAGING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTIONS

**Democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental and human rights comprise a set of core values on which Finnish society is built. In Finland, democracy has long traditions and high appreciation among citizens. In comparisons examining the state of democracy, Finland is among the world's top countries.**

However, Finland's voter turnout is only at the average level of European countries. Voter turnout in Finland is also significantly lower compared to other Nordic countries. For a long time, voter turnout among young people has been lower than among other age groups. Young people with a higher education degree are the most active voters, while those who have only completed basic education are the least active. Voter turnout among young men with a low level of education is particularly low. The low turnout

among young people can also result in their under-representation in decision-making bodies.

Young people can be encouraged to vote through methods such as communication about the elections and working together with the third sector. In addition, it is important that parties also have young candidates. In the long term, schools can support voter participation through democracy education. It is an effective way to influence voter turnout among young people – even if the results are not visible until years later.

The Ministry of Justice believes that promoting youth participation and supporting democracy and human rights education is essential – both now and in the future.

*Niklas Wilhelmsson, Head of Unit, Ministry of Justice*

# IT'S TIME FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO SPEAK UP

**Decisions made by the Parliament of Finland have significant impacts on the lives of young people. Members of Parliament make decisions regarding e.g. the kind of help that is available for mental health issues and the amount of money invested in education. The parliamentary elections are also an important way for young people to influence matters related to them.**

You can contribute to the elections even if you don't have the right to vote. You can make a difference by talking about important issues or candidates on social media, organising an election debate at school, or challenging candidates by asking them questions at campaign events, for instance. Young people's voices should be heard and

their concerns raised in Parliament. That is why young people need to contribute to the elections.

It may feel like political discussion focuses on very difficult subjects, making it hard to voice your opinion. However, you cannot and you do not need to know everything. To participate, you don't need to be an expert in politics or complex legislation procedures. What is important is that you use your own perspective to contribute.

As young people, we are experts in our own lives — and that is enough.

*Ella Siltanen, Chair, the Union of Upper Secondary Schools in Finland*

SUOMEN  
LUKIOILAISTEN  
LIITTO



Image: Jami Ivanoff

# WHAT CAN WE DO TO INCREASE YOUTH VOTER TURNOUT?



Image: Salla Merikukka

Unfortunately, young people in Finland are not active voters. According to young people, reasons for not voting include not finding the right candidate and lack of sufficient information. For young people between 18 and 24 years of age, the voter turnout was 27.1% in the 2022 county elections and 55% in the 2019 parliamentary elections. This is considerably lower when compared to turnout among the most active voters: 63.7% of 70-year-olds voted in the county elections, and 82.5% of 71-year-olds voted in the parliamentary elections.

We cannot blame the youth for this. The elections are a power struggle, a competition for votes. Why would parties focus on attracting young voters when older people are more likely to go to the polls?

This has led to a vicious cycle: The parties don't field many young candidates, young people don't vote, and young candidates don't receive votes. Hence, young people aren't elected as decision-makers, and themes that the youth find interesting and relevant to their everyday lives aren't addressed in decision-making bodies. The voice of young people is not heard in public discussion, and young people don't feel like they can influence decision-making. This is particularly true where minors are concerned, although the law says they should have an opportunity to influence decisions related to them.

Even though societal themes may not be discussed in every home, addressing them in schools evens differences in social competence among students and increases participation. This is why schools, in particular, can increase voter turnout among young people. Finnish teachers are truly champions of democracy: with their support, young people can be convinced that they have sufficient knowledge and competence to participate and vote in the elections.



*Iida Laurila, Youth Participation Expert,  
The Finnish National Youth Council Allianssi*

# BEWARE OF TROLLS – Stay alert before the elections

**In the spring, citizens cast their ballots in the parliamentary elections. On election day, the Finnish flag is raised, and it's tradition to go for a cup of coffee after voting.**

At the same time, the landscape, and especially the media landscape in which the elections are conducted, looks very different than 20 years ago. For instance, televised electoral debates are only one campaigning arena among many. Today, a large part of election campaigns, debates, analyses and phenomena take place on the internet. We have moved from the era of traditional mass media into a considerably more fragmented information environment in which discussions and styles, information providers and audiences are more diverse than before.

This massive change has both positive and negative sides. One positive aspect is that people who share a common interest can easily find each other and get their voices heard. Candidates also have more options to increase visibility for themselves and the issues they support.

On the other hand, our media environment and, with it, the vulnerability of democracy have increased: candidates and political discussions compete with various trolls and other cyberbullies on social media for people's attention.

The logic of modern social media platforms favours shameless exaggeration and presenting issues as black and white: you're either with us, or against us. How can we help voters navigate the media maze? How can you tell whether something is or isn't true? How to spot unwanted attempts to influence you?

How can we filter the most relevant content from the information overload? One way to tackle these questions is by expanding the concept of traditional media literacy to digital information literacy, which includes an understanding of algorithms, the data economy, protection of privacy and identifying disinformation. Digital information literacy will help young people be aware of how they are being influenced and distinguish truth from lies.

*Veera Heinonen, Director, Democracy and Participation, Sitra*



Image: Miikka Pirinen

# DO YOU KNOW HOW PARLIAMENT WORKS?

With the parliamentary elections approaching, it's a good time to learn more about how Parliament works. Below, we have compiled resources with questions and answers related to parliamentary work.

## 1. | WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A PARTY AND A PARLIAMENTARY GROUP?

2:14 min [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7NyajQ\\_PHU&ab\\_channel=SuomenEduskunta](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7NyajQ_PHU&ab_channel=SuomenEduskunta)

## 2. | WHAT IS A COMMITTEE?

1:45 min [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzyJTKXCrHs&ab\\_channel=SuomenEduskunta](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzyJTKXCrHs&ab_channel=SuomenEduskunta)

## 3. | HOW ARE LAWS CREATED?

1:44 min [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hj3E6KlKWEk&ab\\_channel=SuomenEduskunta](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hj3E6KlKWEk&ab_channel=SuomenEduskunta)

## 4. | HOW DOES THE FINNISH PARLIAMENT PARTICIPATE IN EU DECISION-MAKING?

2:03 min [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-W3BT37um8&ab\\_channel=SuomenEduskunta](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6-W3BT37um8&ab_channel=SuomenEduskunta)

## 5. | HOW IS A NEW GOVERNMENT FORMED?

2:16 min [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBlUwuvi9Wk&ab\\_channel=Valtioneuvosto](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tBlUwuvi9Wk&ab_channel=Valtioneuvosto)

You can explore these questions together with students or give them as assignments to your students. The resources include videos about the Parliament and an information package about the parliamentary elections prepared by specialists at the Library of Parliament. This information package provides information on topics such as electoral legislation, central election principles and election results.

The questions and resources are intended mainly for students in grades 7–9 and upper secondary education.

On the website of the Finnish Parliament, you can also find other information packages prepared by the Library of Parliament on societal themes, such as civic engagement and historical topics. Information packages on societal themes help students comprehend topics such as the following:

- What is Finland like as a state?
- How is a new government formed?
- How can citizens participate in decision-making in society?

These information packages are great as source material for students in grades 7–9 and upper secondary education and as background information for teachers.

*Mikko Tujula, Democracy Education Specialist, Parliament of Finland*

Browse information packages on parliamentary elections: <https://www.eduskunta.fi/EN/naineduskuntatoimii/kirjasto/aineistot/yhteiskunta/Pages/default.aspx>