

# Civic education – Denmark, Portugal and Sweden

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Denmark, Portugal and Sweden prioritise civic education as a fundamental aspect of school curricula. This practice is known under different names: “School Election” in Denmark (*Skolevalg*) and in Sweden (*Skova*) and “Youth Parliament” in Portugal. Civic education aims to equip the younger generation with the necessary skills to become informed and responsible citizens. Civic education can help strengthen young people’s participation and contribution to democratic processes.

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## Description

In mock elections organised in schools, students under the voting age can engage in a simulated voting process with ballot papers, voting lists and polling stations. Before the elections, politicians from different parties visit schools to present their ideas and policies and exchange with young people, fostering informed decision-making. The simulation of the voting process allows students to become accustomed with voting procedures before they reach voting age. Mock elections provide an opportunity for schools to discuss democratic governance and its principles. For instance, the Swedish Agency for Youth and Civil Society Affairs developed a “Democracy Package” with resources, exercises and tips for discussing politics and democracy. To encourage practical learning, schools compile assignments such as organising political newsrooms, conducting polls, running debates, drafting articles and creating short films. Sweden places an emphasis on running mock elections in schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas and on making them accessible for pupils with learning disabilities. In Denmark, all schools are invited to participate in the mock elections. In Portugal, the electoral process involves the selection of school deputies that design and present the school’s recommendations in district or regional sessions and, once endorsed, these recommendations are submitted to the national session of the “Youth Parliament”. Young deputies, representing each district or autonomous region, convene to discuss and approve the final recommendations.

## Outcomes

*Skolval* 2022 has been evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively by an external evaluation company, Dalarna University, Stockholm University and University and Mid Sweden University. Evaluation results highlighted that approximately 70% of participating students gained a better understanding of democratic processes and politics through the simulated school elections. About one-third of students indicated that their motivation to vote in the next national elections increased as a result of participating in *Skolval*. Notably, 82% of the students expressed an intention to vote in the next elections when they are allowed to do so. 75% of the respondents acknowledged that the experience deepened their knowledge of political parties. Furthermore, 43% were more interested in politics and 34% stated that *Skolval* increased their political commitment. Around 46% of respondents expressed that they feel more confident in influencing politics. Evaluation results highlighted significant differences between students born in Sweden and those born outside of Sweden, with the latter group showing greater confidence in influencing politics and indicating to be more politically engaged. The evaluation also highlighted that *Skolval* fosters resistance to disinformation. In Denmark, *Skolevalg* was evaluated by researchers from the University of Copenhagen in 2015 and 2017, concluding that *Skolevalg* enhanced students' political self-confidence. Moreover, the initiative strengthened students' trust in the political system and politicians. Students have also strengthened their understanding of political parties' ideologies. Portugal has observed an increasing number of schools and young people involved in the programme, from 445 schools participating in 2006 to 1 028 in 2022. In the 2022/23 editions, 2 326 students were chosen as young representatives to the parliament. By cultivating students' awareness and knowledge of political dynamics and democratic processes, mock elections empower them to be more active citizens.

## Further reading

Dansk Ungdoms Fællesråd (2024), [Skolevalg](#); Instituto Portugues do desporto e juventude (2023), [Parlamento dos Jovens](#); Intercult (2022), [It's time for school choice 2022](#); Myndigheten för ungdomsoch civilsamhällesfrågor (2023), [Demokratipaket till skolan](#); Myndigheten för ungdomsoch civilsamhällesfrågor (2023), [Skolval 2022 i samband med riksdagsvalet](#); Parlamento Dos Jovens (2024), [Parlamento dos Jovens](#).

This practice also supports the implementation of provisions II.1 and V.2 of the [OECD Recommendation on Creating Better Opportunities for Young People](#).

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