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Housing, Networks, and Scepticism: First-Time Voters in the 2025 Parliamentary Election

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Abstract

First-time voters in the 2025 Chamber of Deputies elections confirmed long-standing findings about Generation Z as a digitally socialized, issue-oriented group with low party loyalty. Their key concerns were the cost of living, housing affordability, education, and economic prospects, and they follow politics primarily through social media and online environments. Although these priorities featured prominently in party campaigns, the election results showed that thematic alignment alone was not enough to secure young voters' support. A large share of first-time voters also did not turn out to vote at all. This is not simple apathy; it reflects a different understanding of politics and elections as a tool that only makes sense to young people when they perceive it as directly relevant to their lives.

Key Takeaways

- Issues more important than parties: First-time voters primarily responded to issues concerning housing, the cost of living, education, and their economic future. They perceive politics through the lens of concrete problems rather than traditional party divisions.
- Digital environment and a different relationship to politics: Young people follow politics primarily on social media and online platforms, participate in petitions or public debates, but have a weaker connection to the act of voting itself and to institutional politics.
- Low mobilization and limited electoral impact: Although the campaigns of certain parties aligned thematically with the priorities of young people, lower turnout among first-time voters and their weak party identification meant their overall influence on the election results remained very limited.

Generation Z: Global and Digital

First-time voters, specifically the 18-to-22 group, belong to the broader demographic known as Generation Z (1997-2012). They are the first age cohort to have grown up entirely in an environment of constant internet connectivity, social media, and mobile technology. For them, the digital space is not merely an adjunct to the public sphere but its natural habitat; it is precisely here that a significant portion of their socialization, opinion formation, and political thinking takes place. Research shows that young people today obtain political information primarily through online platforms, short videos, and social media rather than traditional media. This media ecosystem fundamentally shapes both how young people perceive politics and how politicians try to reach them. Political messaging has become more personalized, visual, and emotionally charged. Consequently, politics is less tied to party platforms and more associated with specific issues, stories (often viral and not necessarily political in origin), and personalities.

Although most detailed empirical data on Generation Z comes from the US and cannot be mechanically transferred to the Czech context, it is also true that Generation Z across the Western world is growing up in a very similar media, technological, and cultural environment. They consume global content on the same platforms, share similar digital habits, and react to similar issues that spread online regardless of national borders. Consequently, certain patterns of political socialization identified by research in the USA are also present, in modified form, among young people in the Czech Republic and other Western countries (Pew Research Centre 2019; Pew Research Centre 2020).

Another characteristic feature is a weaker attachment to traditional political parties. First-time voters did not grow up during the era of a few dominant parties, nor during the transformation-era politics of the 1990s. Their party identification is therefore generally weaker and their political preferences more volatile. It should be added, however, that this phenomenon is not tied solely to the generation itself but also to the character of the present era. Fragmentation of the media space, digitalization of communication, and the personalization of politics are undermining the traditional model of long-term party loyalty across all age groups. The changing understanding of politics itself also plays an important role here; for a segment of Generation Z, politics is not primarily associated with institutions, parliament, or parties, but rather to issues that directly affect their lives and values. Political participation may thus take the form of online campaigns, content sharing, participation in demonstrations, or support for specific initiatives, without necessarily being tied to long-term or stable membership in a party or political movement. (Fisher 2012; Pinedo, Diemer, Frisby 2024).

Every generation is shaped by certain defining "big stories." For older generations these included the Cold War, the fall of communism, the September 11, 2001 attacks, the War on Terror, and the 2008 global financial crisis. For Generation Z, such formative moments were primarily the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The pandemic brought long-term school closures, restricted social contact, and a shift of a significant portion of life to the online realm. Shortly afterward came an energy and inflation crisis, rising housing costs, and labour-market uncertainty. The war in Ukraine additionally brought issues of security, defence, and geopolitics into public debate.

This experience sets Generation Z apart from older cohorts. While their parents' generation grew up in a period of economic growth and relative stability following the Czech Republic's accession to the EU, the first-time voters of 2025 entered adulthood in an atmosphere of prolonged uncertainty. Economic issues are therefore not an abstract political debate for them but an immediate question about their own future. Housing affordability, energy prices, and job prospects are among the key factors shaping their political thinking (Harvard 2025).

In terms of values, this generation is often described, in the European context, as more open to questions of equality, minority rights, and climate policy. Research shows that younger generations generally tend to be more tolerant of cultural diversity and place greater emphasis on issues of justice and individual rights (Pew Research Center 2020; Pew Research Center 2021). This does not mean,

however, that they form a homogeneous "progressive" bloc. Research studies from the US emphasize that significant differences exist within Generation Z itself according to gender, education, social status, or degree of engagement in public life (Deckman 2024); the same is likely to be relevant for the Czech Republic.

The Czech context and specifics

In the Czech context, first-time voters in the 2025 Chamber of Deputies elections represent a generation whose political consciousness formed in a digital environment, under the pressure of economic and security crises, and amidst the shifting role of traditional institutions. Their values combine an emphasis on personal economic stability with a sensitivity to questions of justice, rights, and the future. However, they are not a unified political bloc but an internally diverse group whose political attitudes are shaped by the intersection of social status, education, media environment, and specific life experiences. Data from the EP Youth Survey 2024 indicate that young people (aged 16–30) in the Czech Republic deal with concerns very similar to their peers across the EU, but in several respects are even more pronounced. This serves as a crucial foundation for understanding the first-time voters of the 2025 elections.

The strongest emphasis is on economic security. When asked which issues should be prioritized in Europe over the next five years, 42% of young people in the Czech Republic named rising prices and the cost of living (EU average 40%). Climate and the environment were mentioned by 34% of Czech respondents (EU 33%), while economic conditions and job creation were cited by 30% (EU 31%). For young Czechs, then, economic issues are clearly not a matter of abstract policy but of personal experience.

In terms of political participation, it is notable that 44% of young Czechs have already voted at least once in local, national, or European elections (EU 39%). 35% have signed a petition (EU 26%), and 16% have taken part in volunteer activities (EU 20%). Thus, Czech youth show above-average activity in petitions and voting-related participation, but less so in organized volunteering.

The reasons behind voting behaviour are also significant. Among those who voted in the 2024 European elections, 38% of young Czechs said their main motivation was agreement with the given party or candidate's views (EU 30%). 25% believed that party could bring about change (EU 25%). Among non-voters, by contrast, a lack of information was cited more often in the Czech Republic (12%), as was the feeling of not having found any party or candidate that represented them (17%). This reflects the aforementioned weaker attachment to party politics and a greater emphasis on concrete content and credibility.

It is also worth noting where young people get their information. In the Czech Republic, the structure of information sources is even more digitally oriented than the European average. Social media serves as the primary source of information on politics and social issues for 42% of young people (matching the EU average), but online press and news platforms are also cited by 42% of Czech respondents, compared to 26% in the EU. Television remains at 39%. This indicates that Czech youth combine social media with online media considerably more than their peers elsewhere in the EU. Instagram is the main source for 53% of young people (EU 47%), Facebook for 38% (EU 27%), YouTube for 36% (EU 37%), and TikTok for only 20% (EU 39%). This suggests that Czech Generation Z is not as TikTok-oriented as elsewhere in Europe, relying instead more on a combination of Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.

How first-time voters affected the parliamentary elections

The 2025 Chamber of Deputies elections closely confirmed what long-term research on Generation Z had suggested. First-time voters did not behave as a "younger version" of older voters, but rather

as a distinct group with a different relationship to politics, different issues, and a different way of making decisions.

Crucially, a large share of them entered the elections as undecided voters. According to analyses by STEM and Kantar, this was a group that was often unsure whether they would vote at all. Nevertheless, with a turnout of around 60–65%, this group alone could represent up to five percent of all votes cast; a difference that, in a close election, can determine whether some parties cross the five-percent electoral threshold (Brodníčková 2025).

Across various studies, housing repeatedly emerged as a dominant theme. For young people this was not an abstract problem but a personal question about their future. While older voters in the campaign were most concerned with corruption, healthcare, food prices, or the moral decline of politics, young people judged political platforms by whether they gave them a realistic chance of living independently (Křížová 2025).

The role of education and family background was also strongly confirmed. Analyses showed that age itself is not the main predictor of voting behaviour; far more influential was whether a young person had a high-school leaving certificate (*maturita*) or was studying at university. Young people with a *maturita* and university students tended to favor centrist governing parties (Spolu, STAN, Piráti), whereas young people without such qualification were significantly more likely to prefer ANO, Motorists, or SPD. Among young men without a *maturita*, support for Motorists exceeded 20%, while among young women the party barely registered at all (Brodníčková 2025).

At the same time, it was confirmed that first-time voters have a weaker relationship to political parties as such. They made up their minds late, responded to the final phase of the campaign, and were strongly influenced by communication style. A STEM/MARK survey found that, surprisingly, neither influencers nor well-known public figures had much effect on them. Family influence had not disappeared entirely (31% acknowledged it), but it was significantly weaker than for previous generations (Křížová 2025).

Political parties consciously tried to reach the first-time-voter group in the campaign ahead of the 2025 elections. Compared with the 2021 elections, the ANO movement demonstrated significant activity in this regard: it prepared specific policy points aimed at young people, systematically involved “Young ANO” (its youth organization) and its own influencers in communication, and significantly strengthened its presence on social media through lighter, visually oriented content featuring party leader Andrej Babiš.

The issues ANO emphasized in its campaign, particularly social problems, housing affordability, education, and economic prospects for young people, clearly aligned with what research has long identified as the key priorities of Generation Z and first-time voters. In terms of messaging, there was thus a clear thematic overlap between young voters' stated demands and the movement's platform communication.

Nevertheless, the election results demonstrated that this thematic alignment did not translate into direct benefit for ANO among young voters. A large post-election study by six polling agencies (STEM, Ipsos, Kantar, Median, NMS, Data Collect), based on a joint dataset of more than 7,700 respondents, found that ANO did not gain significant support among the youngest voter cohorts. In the 18–22 age group, which includes first-time voters, ANO received only 12% of the vote, roughly equal to the support of small parties like *Motoristé sobě*. Among students, ANO's support was just 5%, whereas Spolu, STAN, and Piráti had 28%, 26%, and 26% respectively (iRozhlas 2026).

Interesting context comes from an earlier survey conducted for the Czech Council of Children and Youth as part of the Kantar Lifestyle 2024 study. It revealed that while 49% of young people are interested in politics, it is only a major concern for 13%. Even so, those who declare a lack of interest are not apathetic: 22% of them had signed a petition, and 5% had shared content

highlighting unethical conduct by politicians. This aligns precisely the electoral reality: the issue is not a lack of interest, but rather a different type of relationship to politics (Czech Council of Children and Youth 2024).

Research by CVVM also showed that interest in politics rises sharply with age. While two-thirds to three-quarters of people in the 55+ age group are interested in politics, the figure among 20–29-year-olds is 44%, and even lower for the youngest demographic. Among 15–19-year-olds, the proportion of respondents showing no interest in politics at all was 22% higher than among seniors. However, this does not imply apathy regarding public affairs. Rather, it reflects a different understanding of what "politics" even is. For young people, politics is not primarily about parliament, political parties, and institutional processes, but about issues that directly affect their lives (CVVM 2025).

This likely explains the deep scepticism young people show toward political institutions. Three-quarters of young people believe politicians care more about personal gain than about ordinary people's situations, 61% believe the media distorts information, and 43% think the country needs a strong leader. This combination of scepticism, distrust, coupled with relatively high personal satisfaction (89% of young people say they are satisfied with their lives, according to STEM/MARK) creates a distinctive stance: young people are not dissatisfied with their own lives, but with how politics and the state function (Czech Council of Children and Youth 2024; Křížová 2025).

The impact, or rather the lack thereof, of first-time and young voters on the election was also shaped by mobilization. Even though overall turnout in the 2025 elections was very high by Czech standards (nearly 69%), younger age groups had lower turnout than older generations, which in itself reduced the weight of their preferences in the overall result. This means that even though first-time voters' priorities resonated across certain party platforms, the resulting electoral arithmetic did not translate that positive reception into a decisive shift in support for political parties (iRozhlas 2026).

Conclusion

Are today's young people from Generation Z apolitical then? No. But they are a generation that understands politics differently: less institutionally, more through immediate, value-based engagement. At the same time, there is another crucial side to the picture: in the parliamentary elections, a large share of first-time voters did not show up to vote at all. This contradiction is key to understanding their relationship to politics.

This is not a lack of interest in public affairs. The data shows that young people are politically active in their own particular way: by sharing political content, taking part in public debates, and closely following politics online. What is missing, however, is a strong connection to the act of voting itself. For them, elections are not an automatic civic duty but a tool that only makes sense when they feel the outcome directly affects them and that some political platform genuinely addresses their situation.

Lower turnout can thus be understood as an expression of selective relevance. Young people are not disengaged from politics; rather, they selectively engage only where they perceive direct significance. The 2025 elections revealed this dual reality. A smaller segment of first-time voters actively engaged and made decisions based on issues relevant to them. A larger share, however, stayed on the sidelines, even though they follow, evaluate, and comment on politics. How political parties work with this information, and whether they manage to tap into the political potential represented by first-time voters, will be revealed in the next parliamentary elections in 2029.

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