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DIASPORA VOTE EXPLAINS THE UNUSUALLY HIGH TURNOUT AMONG YOUNG AND RELATIVELY YOUNG PEOPLE AT RECENT 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

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About 373,398 people aged between 18 and 35 (25.69% of the total of 1,453,013 participants in Moldova) participated in the parliamentary elections of February 24, 2019; in the local elections in October-November 2019, this figure fell to 277,669 (or 23.43% of the total of 1,184,779); in the first round of the last presidential election, 367,058 young people participated (or 26.82% of the total of 1,368,516), and in the second round – 469,603 young people, which represents about 28.46% of the total of 1,650,131 participants. That latter result could be achieved primarily due to the mobilization of young people abroad.

Trends regarding the involvement of young people in the electoral process

The fact that the turnout of young Moldovans has been declining for several years now was evident from the data made public for the 2016-2019 elections by the Central Electoral Commission. On the other hand, that data was not conclusive enough to obtain an exhaustive picture of the turnout of persons aged 18 to 35, ie those persons eligible to vote and who are young, according to the Moldovan Youth Law 215/2016; this happened because the Central Electoral Committee (CEC) divides voters by age categories 18-25, 26-40, 41-55, etc. Even so, a remarkable detail in the overall picture depicted by the CEC statistics for those elections, was that in the 2016 presidential elections, out of the total number of participants, 10.7% were young people aged between 18 and 25, this percentage dropping to 8.5% – in the parliamentary elections of February 2019, and to only 6.15% in the local elections of October last year.

However, because these above figures are only fragmentary and provide insufficient evidence to understand the way in which the issue of youth participation in elections has evolved in recent years, IDIS “Viitorul” has requested and obtained from the CEC additional data on the last three elections; the data obtained, supplemented and compared with other public data regarding the last elections, constitute a revealing statistical landscape. Thus, we were able to determine that 373,398 people aged between 18 and 35 (25.69% of the total of 1,453,013 participants in Moldova¹) participated in the parliamentary elections of February 24, 2019; in the local elections in October-November 2019, this figure fell to 277,669 (or 23.43% of the total of 1,184,779²); in the first round of the last presidential election, 367,058 young people participated (or 26.82% of the total of 1,368,516), and in the second round – 469,603 young people³, which

¹ A limit of this text is due to the fact that CEC has failed to give us the data concerning the participation of young Moldovans from the diaspora in the 2019 parliamentary election: CEC to IDIS, nr. CEC-8/3184 din 28.10.2020.

² Ibidem.

³ CEC to IDIS, nr. CEC-8/3552 din 22.12.2020

represents ~ 28.46% of the total of 1,650,131 participants. That latter result could be achieved primarily due to the mobilization of young people abroad. The second round of the 2020 presidential election was attended by 130,947 people aged between 18 and 35 from the diaspora, which is almost 28% of all young participants. This figure far exceeds that of the participants in the Chisinau municipal constituency, of 97,097 voters. We also note that the number of young voters in Chisinau is declining compared to the 2019 parliamentary elections, which were attended by 125,836 young people (or 31.57% of the total of 398,654 voters in the constituency), but increasing compared to the general local elections of the same year in which only 62,268 young people participated (or 26.02% of the total of 239,375 voters). Another positive evolution that we notice is related to the fact that, in relative terms, the proportion of the youngest participants, aged 18-25 (8.44%), in the 2020 presidential elections, returned to the level of the 2019 parliamentary elections (8.5%), after reaching a negative record in the last local elections (6.15%).

Table 1. Top five constituencies with the highest turnout among young people

Constituency	Presidential 2020, round II	% din % of the total participants	Presidential 2020, round I	% of the total participants	Local general 2019	% of the total participants	Parliamentary 2019	% of the total participants
Chişinău	97,097	27.69% din 350,587	79,363	27.03% din 293,562	62,268	26.02% din 239,375	125,836	31.57% din 398,654
UTAG	16,194	23.51% din 68,878	10,695	19.62% din 54,492	13,988	23.63% din 59,199	13,860	22.92% din 60,494
Bălţi	12,591	25.19% din 49,968	12,461	26.48% din 47,050	8,759	23.44% din 37,368	11,938	24.75% din 48,236
Ialoveni	11,601	27.52% din 42,150	10,333	27.58% din 37,462	10,588	27.73% din 38,188	11,842	28.22% din 41,962
Ungheni	11,044	25.79% din 42,809	9,972	25.8% din 38,651	9,339	24.75% din 37,734	11,421	26.15% din 43,679

Table 2. Top five constituencies with the lowest turnout among young people

Constituency	Presidential 2020, round II	% din % of the total participants	Presidential 2020, round I	% of the total participants	Local general 2019	% of the total participants	Parliamentary 2019	% of the total participants
Basarabeasca	2,018	20.75% din 9,721	1,657	19.26% din 8,603	1,812	20.27% din 8,938	1,980	20.51% din 9,642
Donduşeni	3,157	18.56% din 17,008	2,865	18.85% din 15,198	3,374	19.56% din 17,252	3,424	19.45% din 17,600
Şoldăneşti	3,361	21.64% din 15,531	3,088	21.46% din 14,381	3,505	21.63% din 16,196	3,729	21.99% din 16,958
Ocniţa	3,796	18.07% din 21,004	3,368	17.64% din 19,092	3,880	19.01% din 20,411	4,199	19.65% din 21,366
Taraclia	3,830	21.15% din 18,107	2,904	18.96% din 15,316	2,860	19.40% din 14,744	3,895	22.03% din 17,677

The rate of increase in the participation of young people in voting is due to a decisive extent to young people in the diaspora

The above data point to a series of interesting conclusions. We notice, first of all, an increase in the participation of young people in elections, both in absolute and relative terms. In relative terms, the increase is not so significant, of only 2.77%, if we compare the turnout of young people in the parliamentary elections

in 2019 and the presidential elections (round II) in 2020. This increase of 2.77%, however, must be understood in the context of an overall increase in the turnout of Moldovans, from [50.57% in February 2019](#) to [52.78% in November 2020](#). From this point of view, the increase in the youth turnout seems to be more significant than the increase of 2.77% would seemingly suggest, and, indeed, the situation looks quite different if we analyze the participation of young people in absolute terms. In this case, we note that the second round of the 2020 elections, was attended by 96 105 more young people (or 25.73%) than the parliamentary elections of 2019, which is a remarkable increase. Despite this result, young people continue to lag behind the national average turnout. [According to the data of the National Bureau of Statistics](#), the stable (that is, including diaspora) population of the Republic of Moldova aged 18-35 was 1,038,725 in 2019; this indicates that the figure of 469,603 participants in the second round of the 2020 election represents only 45.2% of the total number of people in this age group, which is significantly less than the national average of 52.78%. It is becoming clear that young and relatively young people are lagging significantly behind in this regard.

In addition, it should be noted that the rate of increase in youth turnout is largely accomplished by the young people in the diaspora. If we disregard the vote of the diaspora as a whole, then we see that out of the total of 1,390,973 participants on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, only 338,656 were young people aged 18-35, or only 24.34%, compared to of the 28.46% we have thanks to the participation of young people in the diaspora. Therefore, young people from abroad are responsible for more than 4 percentage points in the general youth turnout in the last elections, and in fact, this explains the recent positive tendency of the youth turnout. This is not surprising if we take into account the fact that while, as we have seen, on the territory of the Republic of Moldova the turnout of young people stands at 24.34%, then the turnout rate of young Moldovans in the diaspora is almost double – 49.75%, or 130,947 voters, out of the total of 263,177 participants in the diaspora.

The first question, and a very interesting one, should be asked about the determining causes of that massive participation of young people from abroad. However, an appropriate answer would go beyond the scope and limits of this brief research. We can assume that there is probably a combination of factors at play, such as the corruption with which Igor Dodon's name is generally associated, the risk of the latter creating distance between Moldova and the EU in which many young Moldovans work and live; also I. Dodon's [defiant](#) attitude, after the first round, towards the diaspora (which could explain, for example, the fact that in the first round only 77 471 young people aged 18-35 participated from the diaspora, while in the second round – 130,947); it is also possible that the increased participation of young Moldovans is part of the general trend of an increase the turnout of young people at EU level: for example, we know that the overall turnout of EU citizens is currently in the highest level since 1994 (EP elections, 2019) and that this could have not been achieved without a significant increase in the turnout of young and relatively young people (by 14% among young people under 25, and by 12% – among the voters aged between 25 and 39).

This optimistic and voluntary attitude of young people (including young Moldovans) from abroad contrasts so strongly with that of young people in the Republic of Moldova, that inevitably the second question arises: why do young Moldovans display such an attitude? Again, this question cannot be approached exhaustively and seriously in the present text. However, here too we identify a combination of factors, or causes, of which one could mention two that seem to be the most important.

The first is objective, and amounts to a failure of the education system which should be able to explain to young people that the right to vote, exercised in an informed and conscious manner, is the most effective, correct, and precise mechanism for dictating the course of evolution of a society of free people; it is obvious that the school in the Republic of Moldova fails to make the future voters understand the importance of the election mechanism, the causes that determine its necessity, as well as the consequences of the undermining of this mechanism essential to the functioning of a democratic society.

The second cause has rather subjective or psychological origins and illustrates the attitude of helplessness and resignation characteristic of many young Moldovans in relation to the problem of their participation in socio-political life. This attitude is summed up by many young people in the opinion that their participation in the elections does not matter, that their vote doesn't have the power to change anything. This situation seems to be a classic case of the manifestation of the phenomenon that American psychologists designated as "learned helplessness", a term used to describe the behavior manifested by subjects after repeatedly exposed to adverse stimuli, beyond their control and impossible to avoid, after which the subjects did not seek to avoid these stimuli even when obvious alternatives in this regard emerged. In the case of young Moldovans, they seem to be affected by the experience of previous generations who lived in the totalitarian Soviet system in which the vote of the citizens was really a show meant to legitimize a dictatorship, but also by the partially learned, partially lived experience of the last thirty years, a period in which voters' expectations have been repeatedly deceived by all those chosen to govern the country, and these repeated failures seem to have created an irrational impression of a no-exit, dead-end situation.