

## **The foundation of a 'diploma democracy'**

### **A longitudinal study of education and turnout in the Netherlands**

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Political participation of citizens is of crucial importance to the functioning of democracies. From a normative perspective it is also desirable that strata of society based on education, income, gender, ethnicity or every other relevant characteristic, participate equally in the political process. However, it is often corroborated that higher educated are more likely to be a member of political parties and societal organizations, that they are more likely to demonstrate, and to contact politicians and civil servants, and eventually, also more often go to vote in elections than the lower educated.

Our study examines the changes in the relation between education and turnout in the Netherlands. The guiding hypothesis is that the participation gap between higher and lower educated is increasing. Speculations on the support for this hypothesis have led some to use the term 'diploma democracy'. It is not the relation between education and turnout which is discussed in our contribution. The crucial question is whether the relation between education and turnout have altered the last decennia. Is there an increasing gap, is it remaining stable, or are there different periods of increase and decrease?

To answer these questions, we make use of the weekly polls from NIPO. These weekly polls among 800 respondents offer a unique possibility to study the trend in the association between education and turnout between 1962 and 2000. We try to explain the trend in the relation by political, sociological and economic macro trends.