

Cognitive Impairments and Voting Participation

“Den eneste funksjonshemminger som finnes er dårlige holdninger og mangel på kunnskap”

Holberg i Skolen – Drammen Vgs. 2023

Taleah Suhl & Inger-Marie A. Hansen



Preface

This research report is made related to *Holbergprosjektet i skolen* by two students at Drammen Upper Secondary school in Drammen.

Holberg gave us the opportunity to research any topic from dinosaurs to Covid-19. This versatile task felt massive at first. What could two teenagers from Drammen research? The answer was quickly found after a visit from Drammen Municipality in our social studies class. After this, we went to a conference about cognitive impairment. Here we heard the quote that made us sure that this was the correct thesis for us. “Den eneste funksjonshemmning som finnes er dårlige holdninger og mangel på kunnskap” (Tom Tvedt, personal communication, 14. January 2023).

This research report is also written as a request from Drammen municipality, which wants to raise election participation within this group. Although there are no statistics made on the matter in Norway, and little research to find on the subject at all, the municipality implied that the voting percentage in this group is significantly lower than it is within the remaining population. We knew we had to get to the bottom of this.

We could not have done this without the headteacher of the special needs class at our school, Reidar A. B. Lindberg. We would like to thank him for letting us interview his students, for his help to reach out to the parents and guardians, as well as letting us attend a parents' meeting and giving us time for our research. We would also give a special thank you to *Norsk Forbund for Utviklingshemmede* for letting us join their conference and letting us post our survey. We would like to thank them, and everyone who answered our survey.

We also received great help from our social science teacher, Erlend Staberg, who helped us with organization and opportunities. And Idunn Setland, our research contact for not letting us publish an unreadable report. A big thank you to them!

We hope you learn something from this report, and all left to say is: *Enjoy!*

Sammendrag på norsk

Denne rapporten fokuserer på årsakene til lav valgdeltakelse blant personer med kognitive funksjonsnedsettelser, i tillegg til at den ser på tiltak som kan bli iverksatt av kommunen for å få opp valgdeltakelsen blant denne gruppen. Problemstillingen er som følgende: *“What causes people with cognitive impairments to have a lower voting participation, and what measures can be introduced to promote voting engagement within this group?”*

Det er viktig å bruke stemmeretten. Til dette trenger vi universelle løsninger som gir alle likt grunnlag for å stemme. Politisk likhet, kapabilitetsinnfallsvinkelen og stemplingsteorien er brukt for å forklare hvorfor dette er spesielt viktig.

Ved hjelp av en kvalitativ tilnærming i form av forskningsintervjuer, direkte fra velgergruppen med kognitiv funksjonsnedsettelse, som gir oppgaven et perspektiv på mulige barrierer som fører til lav valgdeltakelse for mennesker med kognitivt nedsatt funksjonsevne. For å få et bedre perspektiv om tema, ble en kvantitativ spørreundersøkelse sendt ut til foreldregruppen, slik at det er mulig å se sammenhengen mellom politisk interesse til foreldre/verger og barnet, som i dette tilfelle er velgeren.

Det er flere faktorer som fører til at det er en lavere valgdeltakelse blant denne gruppen. Noen av disse inkluderer at informasjonen om partiene er for vanskelig å forstå som fører til at de ikke vet hva de ulike partiene står for, at de ikke har en mulighet for å komme seg til stemmelokalene, og at de kan ha lese, og skrivevansker, som fører til at de ikke kan stemme uten hjelp. Vi endte med 7 tiltak som vi mener er absolutt nødvendige basert på svar fra velgere og foresatte.

Tiltakene som blir nevnt for å få opp valgdeltakelsen i denne gruppen er derfor som følgende:

1. Forhåndsstemming i VTA-bedrifter
2. Organisert transport til valg lokasjon
3. Valgfunksjonærer med kompetanse om kognitiv funksjonsnedsettelse
4. Informasjonsbrev til mennesker med kognitiv funksjonsnedsettelse og deres pårørende
5. Tilpasset informasjon om de politiske partiene
6. Tilpasset informasjon om politisk deltagelse
7. Logoen til det politiske partiet på stemmeseddelen

Rapporten med fullstendig tiltaksliste blir etter forespørsel sendt til Drammen Kommune i håp om å øke valgdeltakelsen blant gruppen. Foreldre vi har snakket med har også etterspurt at tiltakene blir videresendt til nabokommunen, Lier.

Table of contents

Preface	2
Chapter 1: Thesis statement and methods	6
1.1 Thesis questions	6
1.2 Theories and theorists.....	6
1.2.1 <i>Martha Nussbaum: the Capabilities Approach</i>	6
1.2.2 <i>Howard S. Becker: The labeling theory</i>	7
1.2.3 <i>Robert A. Dahl: Political Equality</i>	7
1.3 Methods.....	7
1.3.1 <i>Qualitative method</i>	8
1.3.2 <i>Validity and reliability</i>	8
Chapter 2: Background information	9
2.1 Why is it important to vote?	9
2.2 Previous research.....	10
Chapter 3: Presentation of the results	11
3.1 Political parties in Drammen	11
3.2 Guardian, and parental opinion.....	12
3.3 What we found in the interviews	12
Chapter 4: Analysis of the findings	14
4.1 Political understanding, and interest.....	14
4.2. Accommodations.....	15
4.2.1 <i>Voting in VTA-Organizations</i>	15
4.2.2 <i>Transportation to polling station</i>	16
4.2.3 <i>Electoral officer and preparation letters</i>	16
4.2.4 <i>Adapted information letters about political parties</i>	16
4.2.5 <i>Adapted information about political participation together with the political parties</i>	17
4.2.6 <i>Logo on the ballot</i>	17
4.3 Conclusion.....	17
Chapter 5: Reflection	19
5.1 What could we have done differently?	19
5.2 Sources of error	19
Chapter 6: Sources	20
Chapter 7: Attachments	21
7.1 Attachement 1 - Mail.....	21
7.2 Attachement 2 – Survey	21
7.3 Attachment 3 – Answers to the quantitativ survey	29
7.4 Attachment 4 – Interview guide	33

Chapter 1: Thesis statement and methods

1.1 Thesis questions

Everyone should be able to use their voice and be a part of the democratic process. We contacted the four biggest political parties in Drammen and asked for their opinions on this matter. The parties' responses made us realize how important this report is, as none of the parties had any concrete plans to support this group. This led to our thesis question being the following:

"What causes people with cognitive impairments to have a lower voting participation, and what measures can be introduced to promote voting engagement within this group?"

This report aims to find out why this group has a lower voting participation rate, and to find out what influencing forces may affect this group. Examples of potential influences would be supportive parents and the availability of help from the municipality.

To elaborate on this thesis question, we have also conceived the following sub-thesis:

"What do the biggest political parties in Drammen say about this topic?"

"What are the largest parties in Drammen willing to do to increase voting participation within this group?"

"Do people with cognitive impairments want to exercise their right to vote, and do they have an interest in politics?"

"What kind of accommodations do the parents, or legal guardians think their children need to be able to vote?"

1.2 Theories and theorists

1.2.1 Martha Nussbaum: the Capabilities Approach

Martha Nussbaum (1947-) is an American philosopher and legal scholar (Grønlie & Granlund, 2022, p. 319). In her book, "Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach" she states that the approach is "focused on the choice or freedom", a society should offer opportunities, which people can choose to exercise or not (Nussbaum, 2011, pp. 18-19). In Norway, voting is a right most people have the ability to participate in, or not, if they choose not to. However, many people with cognitive impairments currently lack this

ability. The approach is concerned about capability failures being a result of discrimination, and it is an urgent task to “improve the quality of life for all people, as defined by their capabilities” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 19). This makes it an urgent task to ensure universal adaptation in the polling stations or make other adaptations to grant cognitively impaired persons an equal opportunity.

1.2.2 Howard S. Becker: The labeling theory

Howard S. Becker (1928-) is an American sociologist. His book *Outsiders* is considered a basis for the labeling theory. In *Outsiders*, Becker defines deviation as a result of society judging something or someone as wrong or different, i.e., labelling (Grønlie & Granlund, 2022, p. 372). The labeling theory can be used to analyze cognitively impaired people, as they are seen by society. The theory can be applied to the political parties’ prejudice on cognitively impaired people, as many of the political parties we spoke to describe this group as easily influenced, read more about this under 3.1.

1.2.3 Robert A. Dahl: Political Equality

Robert A. Dahl (1915-2014) was an American political scientist (Munro, 2023). In his book, *On Political Equality*, Dahl states that one of the minimum requirements for a political democracy is “Inclusion. Every member of the demos would be entitled to participate in the ways just described: elective participation, equality in voting, seeking an enlightened understanding of the issues, and exercising final control over the agenda” (Dahl, 2006, p. 10). Demos being the people of the democracy. Because of Dahls statements, we prioritized the importance of asking the potential voters which adaptations they would need to be able to exercise their right to vote, and how much they had learned about politics at their workplace or school prior to this project.

1.3 Methods

The method is the tool used to gather information, and it specifies how the information will be gathered. There are two main categories of methods: quantitative and qualitative method. The quantitative method is used to get an overview of the full picture (Grønlie & Granlund, 2022, pp. 28-29). On the other hand, a qualitative study with interviews helps us understand the informants’ experiences and give a personality to the numbers (Grønlie & Granlund, 2022, pp. 28-29). To get a full overview, and to cover the bigger picture of how the legal guardians or parents might influence the choices made by this group, a mix of the method would be preferred as they complement each other (Sundby & Johansen, 2019).

1.3.1 Qualitative method

Along with our social science class, we interviewed a total of 30 people from 5 VTA-organizations¹. According to NAKU, this is where most people with cognitive impairments work. We ourselves interviewed people at *Eiker Vekst* and *Unik-Bedrift*. At both organizations, the interview candidates were unprepared and the first two people to show interest at each department were the people we ended up interviewing. This may have resulted in the people picked not necessarily being the ones who needed the most adaptations.

A qualitative study uses non-numerical data to understand the subjective experiences of the respondent. We conducted direct, semi-structured interviews with the affected group. The interviews were done following an interview guide made for our social studies class by our teacher, Erlend Staberg. The same interview guide was used in every interview. Questions regarded previous voting experience, as well as news and political interests. In advance of the interviews, the interview guide was tested in collaboration with fellow students. This interview guide contained both open and closed questions regarding our topic, and to figure out if the order and formulation of the questions felt natural, they were tested out in both our social science class and the special needs class at Drammen VGs.

In addition to this, we also sent out a Forms survey to the parents and guardians. Ideally this would be a quantitative study, however, with the restricted time and resources available to us, we were unable to gather enough data for a valid and reliable study. Although the survey was presented at a parents evening with the special needs class at our school and posted in the Facebook group *NFU – Drammen og Lier lokallag*, we ended up with nine responses. The data collected is therefore not representative as quantitative data, however we chose to read the data qualitatively.

1.3.2 Validity and reliability

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the data material consists of two qualitative studies, one with the affected voters themselves, and one with the parents and guardians. This mixed method-approach tests the validity in the sources.

We ourselves interviewed people from *Eiker-Vekst* and *Unik-bedrift*. At every organization, both we, and our social science class visited, could only interview workers who are verbal,

¹ Organization that offers “permanent adaptation initiatives” (NAKU, n.d.) The Norwegian term for these organizations is *VTA-bedrifter*, but for clarity and simplification, we will be using this term, and referring to them as VTA organizations.

who were capable of talking to a stranger either alone or accompanied by a supervisor or coworker. It eliminates many potential voters with different struggles than the candidates we interviewed. To further expand our reach to citizens unable to voice their opinion on the matter we had non-structured interviews with supervisors at the workplace.

Our interview candidates were of the age range 19-65 +, and we interviewed all genders. The organizations we chose cover Drammen municipality from Mjøndalen to Svelvik, this makes the qualitative study valid for all ages, genders, and locations within the Municipality. The special needs class also has students from Lier, and *Eiker Vekst* has a few employees from Øvre Eiker. However, as there is no official difference in adaptations within the municipalities, this should have a minimal effect on the result. The interviews by our social studies class followed the same guide; however, the interviewed voters were pre-picked based on their political interests which makes the group less representative. However, this was our only way to reach out to the entire municipality.

When it comes to reliability, we followed semi-constructed interview guides. This was a necessity as some interviewees were dependent on examples in order to fully understand the questions. We were also unable to record the interviews, as many people would be handling these interviews, which would make it unethical for privacy reasons. This could affect our transcribing of the interviews. This was done to the best of our ability based on detailed notes we took during the interviews; however, it might not be accurate word-for-word.

Chapter 2: Background information

2.1 Why is it important to vote?

Voting is an essential human right. Voting is a crucial aspect of democracy and is an essential right for citizens in most countries. It is a way for individuals to make their voice heard, shape politics and the future, and it is a way of choosing who can lead the country. When people vote, they contribute to creating a representative government that reflects the values and needs the community (Stortinget, 2022). By exercising the right to vote, citizens can also honor the sacrifice of those who have fought for the right to vote and contribute to building a better future. Voting is a powerful tool for citizens to participate in the democratic process and shape the direction of their society (Civilrights.org, u.d.).

It is therefore critical to provide for the needs of the group with cognitive impairments². Everyone should have the opportunity to vote, and be a part of the democratic process, and vote for what they believe is right. Especially since this group uses the municipality's offers most frequently, they should have a say in the matter. It is a human right to vote, therefore it is important to make it accessible to everyone.

According to the Norwegian election law, *valgl. § 9-5(5)*, «A voter who is unable to vote alone due to physical or mental disability, may, at his or her own request, receive assistance from a returning officer or another person who the voter him/herself has selected. A returning officer shall inform the helper that he or she has a duty of secrecy. (...) » (Election act, 2002), despite this measure, twenty-three percent of the people we interviewed have not exercised their right to vote, which indicates a need for more accommodations.

2.2 Previous research

When searching for relevant research, the results were low, and we had to acquire our own research. We found one bachelor thesis; however, it did not focus on the voter group itself, but rather on their teachers, and healthcare personnel surrounding them. This bachelor's thesis was about "People with intellectual disability and political participation" (Ramberg, n.d.). In the summary, the bachelor claimed to provide a perspective on which obstacles may be important for low voter participation but is written by a student in nursing education.

Therefore, the focus is on the health aspect. In the interview part, social studies teachers from secondary school and health personnel were involved, but not the group itself. Despite the fact that the focus of this bachelor is different from ours, some of its conclusions are relevant to our research. The following conclusion have been reached in this bachelor's thesis:

"Slik politikken drives i dag kreves det forkunnskaper for å kunne forstå det byråkratiske språket, samt hva de ulike partiene står for. Dette står i kontrast med et inkluderende samfunn, hvor alle borgere skal ha like muligheter til å stemme ved et politisk valg"
(Ramberg, n.d.).

² Impaired cognitive functioning is, according to *Nasjonalt kompetansemiljø om utviklingshemming* (NAKU), defined by three criteria. 1) IQ lower than 70, 2) difficulties with language, motor-skills, and daily function, and 3) the symptoms were visible before the age of 18 (NAKU, n.d.).

Chapter 3: Presentation of the results

3.1 Political parties in Drammen

Sub-thesis: «*What do the biggest political parties in Drammen think about this topic?*”

We were interested to see if the political parties are willing to adapt for this particular group. Therefore, we sent out a standardized e-mail (appendix 1) to the four biggest political parties in Drammen; Arbeiderpartiet (Ap), Høyre (H), Fremskrittspartiet (FrP) and Miljøpartiet de Grønne (MDG). Everyone but AP responded, however, their focus was on what the municipality and independent organizations could do. The only party mentioning any universal adaptations was MDG. Although they ended their response with the following:

En problemstilling jeg ser med at et parti jobber for å hjelpe mennesker med kognitiv funksjonsnedsettelse å stemme er at man kan påvirke hva vedkommende stemmer. (...) det virker urimelig for meg å skulle rette seg spesielt mot en utsatt gruppe.

This was an argument we saw from all the responding parties. The parties were labeling this group as an easily influenced, vulnerable group. According to Becker, this falls under the theory of deviance. The political parties are making the people in need of extra adaption outsiders by not taking a more universal approach to arrangements and webpages.

Sub-thesis: “*What are the largest parties in Drammen willing to do to increase voting participation within this group?*”

The parties that did answer, gave vague answers, although they understood something needs to be done. The only party giving a concrete answer to what kind of measures could potentially be implemented was *Høyre* with the following statement:

Det er flere tiltak som man må gjøre lokalt den enkelte kommunen. Valglokalene må være fysisk tilrettelagt sånn at alle innbyggere kan stemme, (...). Informasjonen om hvordan man skal stemme må også komme ut til den enkelte personen (...). Det er viktig at kommunene lokalt gjør at alt dette er tilgjengelig, uansett om man har en fysisk funksjonshemmning eller har en utviklingshemming.

Although *Høyre* provided concrete measures, they are aimed at the municipality instead of the individual party. This was a common factor from all the political parties. Therefore, it seems as if the parties are not willing to do something themselves but only pass on the responsibility.

3.2 Guardian, and parental opinion

Sub-thesis: “*What kind of accommodations do the parents, or legal guardians think their children need to be able to vote?*”

One of the questions in the survey, gave the respondents the opportunity to rank their answers from highly suitable to a small degree, or they could pick “*Tiltaket gjelder ikke oss*”. Every respondent answered that electoral officers with competence about cognitive impairments would be highly, or quite highly suitable. Learning about elections and political parties at the workplaces would be also beneficial according to most. The adaptations the responders found less effective was to give parents a right to a paid day off to follow their child to the polling station, adaptive debate-night prior to the election, adaptive information from political parties, accommodated pre-poll voting in the town-hall and adaptive transportation to the polling station, pre-poll voting in one or more organizations. However, not as popular as electoral officers with competence about cognitive impairments.

3.3 What we found in the interviews

Sub-thesis: “*Do people with cognitive impairments want to exercise their right to vote, and do they have an interest in politics?*”

Hypothesis: The answers will vary, just like they would in any group of 30 people, but there are many people with an interest in politics and many who want to participate in the democratic process and vote.

Based on the 30 interviews conducted, most people would like to exercise their right to vote. To the question “*Synes du det er viktig å stemme ved Stortingsvalg og kommunevalg?*” 27 of 30, empathized the importance of voting. All the interviewees had at least one political topic they cared for, this ranged from more VTA-organizations, economics, elderly care, and legalizing weed, and make it more available for those who need them.

86% stated that they want to vote in the next election. Despite this, 40% answered no when asked if they were interested in politics.

To the following question: “*Synes du det er lett eller vanskelig å forstå politikk som blir sagt / formidlet på TV, nettet eller i aviser?*”, all 30 interviewees answered that politics can be difficult to understand. A direct statement being: “*(...) de bruker en del rare ord, og [det] burde være en forenkling*”, similar reasons were mentioned in other interviews as well.

Multiple interviewees said it depends on who conveys the information, “noen politikere er flinke, andre går rundt grøten så det blir vanskelig å forstå”. In the end, 100% of the 30 cognitively impaired people we interviewed agreed that politics is hard to understand to some extent, and many stated it needs to be easier to achieve the information.

In addition, we asked about interest in the news. To the question “*Følger du med på nyhetene?*”, 70% answered yes. 40% watched or read news the day prior to our interviews, implying that those 40% watch/read news regularly. The follow up question “*Hva slags nyheter er du mest interessert i?*” gave a variety of answers: “Liker ikke politikk, men om det var skjedd noe i nærområdet”, “Jeg er spesielt interessert i kvinnesaken og om å bestemme over egen kropp”,

For the purpose of exploring the ability of political participation in the safety of their workplace or at school, as an accommodation, a question was asked about learning politics at the workplace/school: “*Lærer du om politikk på skolen / i bedriften?*” The most common answer to that was no, or that they only learned a little politics at school. “Litt fra kommunene, viste hvordan man skulle stemme og hadde noen politiske aktiviteter i bedriften”, “Tror ikke det er lov å snakke om politikk og religion her faktisk”, “Ja, lært noe. Liker å ha besøk av politikere”, “Har ikke gått skole”. Those who had not learned about politics were not against the idea of learning about politics under the right premises; “Kommer an på hvem som lærer det bort, noen som snakker slik som dem. Ikke gamle damer lærere”.

Several questions regarding case discussion were asked to determine how important it is to express their own opinion for those we interviewed. To the first question “*Liker du å diskutere saker?*”, twenty interviewees, or about two thirds, responded positively and answered that they do like to discuss different cases. “Ja, innenriks, samfunnsøkonomi, utenriks er vanskelig å påvirke, har bedre mulighet for å påvirke innenriks”, “Ja, syntes det er morsomt”, “Søsteren til min tidligere kjæreste var politisk aktiv, det var alltid gøy å snake med henne”. The remainders did not have any interest in discussions, their reasoning being is because it can be scary, or that they don’t know enough. “Helst ikke, er så mange som kommer med rare meninger at alt man sier blir feil”, “Kan ikke sånt, så nei”, “usikker”. To the question “*Snakker du om politikk med noen hjemme eller i familien?*” only 36% said no, which means the majority speaks about politics at home. When we rephrase the question to

friends, “*Snakker du om politikk med venner?*”, the answers changed, only 30% said no; “Hvert fall med venner en god del”, “På jobben, men ikke ofte”, “Diskuterer med læreren”, “Med en venn som er glad i politikk, ja”.

Many of the interviewees, as mentioned in chapter 1.3, were handpicked beforehand or volunteered to participate in our interview; this is evident in the answers to the question “*Hvordan opplevde du det å stemme?*” as 17 of the 26 who had voted before, stated that it went alright and without problem. However, 6 answered that it was difficult, scary and that they would prefer to vote in a familiar environment, 3 people skipped this question. “*Skjønte ikke egentlig hva jeg gjorde, jeg gikk inn og ut igjen*”, “*Turte ikke, men om man går sammen så kan det gå bra*”, “*Vansklig å brette lappen*”, “*Heller stemt på jobb, da ville flere stemt*”. Upon being asked “*Trenger du hjelp med å stemme?*” 21 people responded that they did not need help, but on the next question “*i så fall hva trenger du hjelp til?*” most of the interviewees gave some examples on how to make voting more accessible, even if they themselves do not need the help. “*Hvordan man stemmer*”, “*Lettere informasjon*”, “*Mer info om partiene*”, “*Trenger hjelp til å putte konvolutten inn i boksen*”, “*Trenger hjelp til framkomst og inn i boksen*”.

Chapter 4: Analysis of the findings

4.1 Political understanding, and interest

The most important findings that came from the interviews was that, contrary to common misconceptions, all the interviewees had at least one case or political matter, that was important to them, such as that VTA-organizations should be available to everyone who needs it. Additionally, 90% of respondents indicated that they believe voting in elections is important, but that it should be made easier so that everyone has the opportunity to participate. One of the voters stated the following: “*Når man er gammel nok skal man stemme Storting- og kommunevalg*”.

An issue many of the people we interviewed faced is a difficulty understanding the news. Many of those we spoke to stated that they do watch the news, however, the political aspect is often too difficult to understand. The political representatives use difficult wording, on

questions they could have answered in an easier way. This gives our group in particular a difficult time understanding what the parties stand for, and who to vote for.

The majority of the respondents to our survey to parents and guardians had finished upper secondary or had a higher education. Along with this, they tend to have political interest, voted in the previous election, and politics is a topic in most of the responding households. In most interviews, the interviewees stated that politics is not a topic at home, or with family/friends. This could be a source of error with the survey, as the parents with more interest in the subject have been more eager to respond to this.

4.2. Accommodations

The survey and interviews gave us different views of which adaptation the group needs. Although the views on which accommodations are necessary were not always the same amongst the two groups, both answers are considered in this analysis as many parents we spoke to mentioned that they often end up with the responsibility of their child's political participation. There is no doubt that universal election accommodations are essential components in democracy, as both Nussbaum and Dahl agree. The capabilities approach states that their lack of capability to vote currently is a result of discrimination, which is an urgent task for the municipality to solve. Dahls book, *introduction to Politics* agrees with this, as every member of the demos should be able to partake in democratic electives.

4.2.1 Voting in VTA-Organizations

Those interviewed at VTA-organizations all agreed that the opportunity to vote at their workplace is a necessary accommodation in order to increase voting participation. Multiple people stated that social anxiety makes voting difficult, and the option to vote safely in the familiarity of their workplace would make them want to participate in elections. Unik-bedrift had this in option during the previous elections, when visiting the organization, we asked the employees there how that went, and their responses were positive, and the majority we spoke to there had a decent understanding of politics. We also interviewed Solveig Taranger, department leader at Unik about the organization. She told us that the voting process went well, and that Unik would like to implement this process again with future elections. She also stated that this accommodation could be a good idea for other VTA-organizations to implement (personal communication, 23. February). When Arild Hansen, department leader at Eiker Vekst, was asked about implementing this in his organization for future elections, he seemed positive to idea, however he reflected on it being difficult, as the organization have

responsibilities that make it difficult to shut down for a day (personal communication, 13. February).

4.2.2 Transportation to polling station

A concern A. Hansen at Eiker Vekst raised was regarding transportation. His employees rely on busses and other forms of transportation, to and from work. If the workday was to be extended for voting, this would have to mean that the employees who wish to partake need to find other forms of transportation that day, as those who prefer not to vote should be free to go home. Public transport is often difficult to this group. Parents also brought this struggle up in our survey. Two of the parents thought accommodated transport to and from the polling station would be a highly helpful accommodation. The municipality would have to offer alternative transport to those wishing to vote at their workplace, if voting at the workplace affects regular transportation methods. Voters who wish to vote at another polling station should also be offered transportation from their homes.

4.2.3 Electoral officer and preparation letters

The most frequented accommodations amongst the parents were an electoral officer with education in cognitive impairments, and information letters for people with cognitive impairment, and their relatives or guardians. Many of the potential voters here are people who struggle with language and social function, a group we were unable to interview. Having the ability to vote in their workplace might not be enough of an accommodation for this group, as this was one of the least preferred adaptions in the survey. At the conference with NFU, we spoke to a few parents, and they were concerned about influencing their child's decision while voting, as they have no training on the matter. Other parents were concerned about their child's capability to be alone with a stranger. Sending out an information letter to prepare the parent/guardian and voter for the election day would be an important accommodation for many, however, a neutral electoral officer with education in cognitive impairments present during the election day would also be seen as a requirement if the voter prefer to vote without the parent present, or if the parent is unable to stay neutral. Sending out letters in advance would also help voters be prepared for what happens during an election.

4.2.4 Adapted information letters about political parties

“Mer info om partiene” was a common response when we asked the interviewees what they need help with, in order to vote. The existing information flyers are often wordy and hard to read. The use of pictures and symbols could simplify this. An example could be a table with

the political parties on one side, different causes on the other, and a yes or no for if this party supports this or not (illustrated below).

	Topic 1	Topic 2	Topic 3	Topic 4
Party 1	✗	✗	✓	✓
Party 2	✓	✗	✗	✓
Party 3	✗	✓	✗	✗

Figure 9: Demonstrating how a table can give the voter accessible information about whether or not the parties agree to different ongoing debates.

One of the people we interviewed told us how the brochures from political parties can also be simplified with the use of symbols instead of text, however, as the parties showed little to no interest in making their own accommodations, the list is based on how the municipality can give a simple overview of every party. The lack of this goes against Dahls point of inclusion as they are unable to seek an enlightened understanding.

4.2.5 Adapted information about political participation together with the political parties

One accommodation we mentioned in the survey was an election evening in the VTA-organizations. The response this was mostly positive. 66% thought this would be helpful. A large majority were also positive to the idea of learning about political parties in the VTA-organizations prior to the election. We had the opportunity to ask one of the people we interviewed, they said “Kommer an på hvem som lærer det bort, noen som snakker slik som dem. Ikke gamle damer lærere”. The candidate was otherwise positive to the idea, with the exception being if the event had too many strangers. Therefore, one adaption would be for the employees of a VTA-organization to have a politics-related evening, where they can learn about the political parties, and voting. The same adaptation could be hosted as a conference from the municipality, where everyone can participate.

4.2.6 Logo on the ballot

Illiteracy is a common issue within the group we interviewed. This makes it difficult to vote alone as the person is unable to find the correct political parties ballot. In Sweden, the logo of the party is shown next to the name on the ballot (Lind, 2018). This could be an accommodation to help illiterate people who could otherwise vote by themselves.

4.3 Conclusion

Thesis question: *What causes people with cognitive impairments to have a lower voting participation, and what measures can be introduced to promote voting engagement within this group?"*

Hypothesis: There are many factors that contribute to this group having a lower voting participation, and some measures such as transport, and elections in the VTA-organizations might be measures that will increase the voting participation.

The findings of both qualitative studies suggest that several factors have contributed to low voting participation among those with cognitive impairments. The information being difficult to understand is one reason. “(...) de bruker en del rare ord, og [det] burde være en forenkling”, “(...), andre [politikkere] går rundt grøten så det blir vanskelig å forstå”. This creates a lack of knowledge of what the political parties stand for, which leads to them choosing not to vote instead. Respondents of the survey demanded more accessible information: “Enkle partiprogram med bilde/figur illustrasjoner om saker som angår denne gruppen, (...). Stemmesedler [med] figurer (partilogoer) og bilder.”, “Bedre synliggjøring av hvilke partier som mener hva (...”).

Another factor that can affect the voting participation of this group is transport. This was mentioned as an obstacle several times: «Trenger hjelp med å komme til lokalelet». In addition, Parents also mentioned their children needing a companion: “Må ha med meg / verge inn i stemmebås” Shared transport from school, or the organizations, is a solution to the first problem. This would create an easier opportunity to get to the polling stations, and the voters would be able to bring a companion who can help them if they need help to vote. Pre-poll voting in the VTA-organizations would also solve this issue for those employed there.

Lastly, a commonly mentioned problem was illiteracy, “Kan ikke lese eller skrive, er svaksynt.”, “Trenger hjelp til å putte konvolutten inn i boksen”. This makes it impossible to read the ballot, and navigate the election center. A solution would be logos on the ballots, as well as an electoral officer with relevant competence when needed.

The most important findings that came from the interviews was that, contrary to common misconceptions, all the interviewees had at least one case or political matter, that was important to them. Therefore, these accommodations are important as they would give more people the capability to partake in the democracy. According to Dahls theory, without this, Drammen would lack its political democracy as the requirement of inclusion is not fulfilled. With these accommodations, a larger amount of citizens could participate electively, and seek an enlightened understanding of politics and political parties within the democracy.

The reasoning mentioned throughout chapter 4.2 and 4.3, leads us to the following list of necessary accommodations:

1. Pre-poll voting at VTA-organizations.
2. Organized transportation to polling station.
3. Electoral officers with competence about cognitive impairments.
4. Information letters for people with cognitive impairment, and their relatives or guardians about voting.
5. Adapted information letters about political parties.
6. Adapted information about political participation together with the political parties.
7. Logo of the political party on the voting ballot.

Chapter 5: Reflection

5.1 What could we have done differently?

The research project has been an educational and successful process. Although some things would have been interesting to do differently. A practical assessment of the measures mentioned in the report will be sent to the municipality, however we did not have enough time to send it before finishing our report. A response about the practical measures in the accommodations is therefore not included.

5.2 Sources of error

A source of error that may have occurred during the interviews is that the students from the special needs class have not voted before and may therefore overestimate themselves, when we asked if they would need help to vote. Several of the students said they could vote without help, we were later informed by their teacher, that this would not have been possible due to reading and writing difficulties.

The survey, which was sent out to the parents and guardians of the voter group, received 9 responses in total. According to NAKU approximately 382 of the 101 000 residents in Drammen Municipality are diagnosed with cognitive impairments. According to World Health Organization dark numbers could double this (NAKU, n.d.). Drammen Municipality themselves gave us an estimate of about eight hundred people (E. Staberg, personal communication, 14. February 2023). Therefore, nine respondents are not a representative

number, but it gives an idea of which accommodations are needed. It is a source of error as it is not representative for the entire group.

Several respondents have a political interest, have voted themselves, and indicate that politics is a discussed topic in their household. In most interviews however, the interviewees stated that politics is not a topic in their home, or with family/friends. This could be a source of error with the survey, as the parents with more interest in the subject have been more eager to respond to this.

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Chapter 7: Attachments

7.1 Attachement 1 - Mail

Mail sent to political parties in Drammen Municipality

Hei

Vi er to elever som kommer fra Drammen videregående skole. Vi jobber med et forskningsprosjekt om personer med kognitiv funksjonsnedsettelse og valg. Mange i denne gruppen stemmer ikke. Vi ønsker å finne ut hvilke tiltak både kommunen og partiene kunne iverksatt for å endre dette.

I denne sammenhengen lurer på om partiet deres allerede har tiltak for å oppfordre personer med kognitiv funksjonsnedsettelse til å stemme. Og om partiet er villige til å lage tiltak for denne gruppen i fremtiden.

Vi håper på positivt svar fra dere, og svarer gjerne på spørsmål om det skulle dukke opp noen!

Mvh.

Inger-Marie Ask Hansen og Taleah Suhl

Drammen Videregående skole

7.2 Attachement 2 – Survey

Kognitiv funksjonsnedsettelse og valg - foreldregruppen

Hei!

Vi, Taleah Suhl og Inger-Marie Ask Hansen, gjennomfører et forskningsprosjekt i samarbeid med Drammen kommune. Vi ønsker å finne ut hvorfor mennesker med funksjonsnedsettelse har lavere valgdeltakelse, og hvilke tiltak Drammen kommune kan iverksette for at denne gruppen skal kunne bruke stemmeretten i større grad.

"Å stemme ved valg er en grunnleggende demokratisk rettighet. I lovverket er det ingen vilkår

knyttet til helse eller kognitiv funksjon. Likevel er dette en gruppe velgere som i liten grad stemmer" - kommentar av Drammen kommune

Målet med dette forskningsprosjektet er å komme fram til konkrete tiltak som kan øke valgdeltagelsen blant velgere med kognitive funksjonsnedsettelser. Undersøkelsen er anonym og det er frivillig å svare. Du kan også hoppe over spørsmål du ikke ønsker å svare på.

Tusen takk for at du ønsker å bidra i dette prosjektet! Ta gjerne kontakt om du har spørsmål eller ønsker å lese rapporten vår når den er skrevet ferdig i april! Taleahsuhl0@gmail.com

1. Hvilke utfordringer har barnet ditt i hverdagen? :::

Skriv inn svaret

2. Hvor gammelt er barnet ditt?

Under 16

16-17

18-21

22-29

Over 30

3. Hva er jobbsituasjonen til barnet ditt?

- Barnet mitt går på videregående skole
- Barnet mitt jobber i en VTA-bedrift
- Barnet mitt jobber i en VTAO-bedrift
- Barnet mitt får annet tilrettelagt tilbud
- Annet

4. Hva er jobbsituasjonen til barnet ditt?

- Barnet mitt går på videregående skole
- Barnet mitt jobber i en VTA-bedrift
- Barnet mitt jobber i en VTAO-bedrift
- Barnet mitt får annet tilrettelagt tilbud

5. Hva er jobbsituasjonen til barnet ditt?

- Barnet mitt går på videregående skole
- Barnet mitt jobber i en VTA-bedrift
- Barnet mitt jobber i en VTAO-bedrift
- Barnet mitt får annet tilrettelagt tilbud
- Annet

6. Hva er jobbsituasjonen til barnet ditt?

- Barnet mitt går på videregående skole
- Barnet mitt jobber i en VTA-bedrift
- Barnet mitt jobber i en VTAO-bedrift
- Barnet mitt får annet tilrettelagt tilbud

7. Hva er jobbsituasjonen til barnet ditt?

- Barnet mitt går på videregående skole
- Barnet mitt jobber i en VTA-bedrift
- Barnet mitt jobber i en VTAO-bedrift
- Barnet mitt får annet tilrettelagt tilbud
- Annet

8. Hvordan ser bositasjonen til barnet ditt ut?

- Barnet mitt bor hjemme med foresatte
- Barnet mitt bor på institusjon
- Barnet mitt bor i egen bolig
- Annet

9. Stemte du ved siste valg? (Stortingsvalget 2021)

- Ja
- Nei
- Ønsker ikke oppgi

10. Hvilket alternativ passer best for din utdanning

- Fullført obligatorisk skolegang
- Fullført videregående
- høyre utdanning 1-3 år
- Høyere utdanning 4-7 år
- Høyere utdanning mer enn 7 år

11. Hvor enig er du i følgende påstander? Fra helt uenig - helt enig

	Helt uenig	Nokså uenig	Verken enig eller uenig	Nokså enig	Helt enig
Jeg diskuterer politikk hjemme	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jeg er interessert i politikk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Barnet mitt viser interesse for å stemme	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Det er viktig for meg at barnet mitt bruker stemmeretten sin	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jeg føler at barnet mitt får tilstrekkelig med informasjon	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jeg mener at barnet mitt er i stand til å kunne stemme	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. Tenker du at barnet ditt trenger tilrettelegging for å kunne stemme?

 Ja Nei

13. Hvis ja, hva tenker du kunne bli gjort for å gjøre det lettere for barnet ditt å stemme?

Skriv inn svaret

14. I hvor stor grad hadde tiltakene under passet for deres situasjon? (Hvis tiltaket ikke er relevant for deres situasjon, velg "tiltaket gjelder ikke oss")

	I stor grad	I nokså stor grad	I nokså liten grad	I liten grad	Tiltaket gjelder ikke oss
Gi føresatte (eller andre nærmere pårørende) rett til fri med lønn for å følge til stemmelokale t	<input type="radio"/>				
Valgfunksjon ærer med kompetanse om veggere med kognitiv funksjonsned settelse	<input type="radio"/>				
Opplæring om valg i bedriftene før valget	<input type="radio"/>				

Lære om de politiske partiene i bedriftene før valget	<input type="radio"/>				
Tilrettelagt debattkveld i forkant av valget	<input type="radio"/>				
Egen tilrettelagt informasjon fra politiske partier	<input type="radio"/>				
Rigge til forhåndsstemming i én eller flere bedrifter	<input type="radio"/>				
Tilrettelagt forhåndsstemning medag i Rådhuset	<input type="radio"/>				
Tilrettelagt transport til valglokalet	<input type="radio"/>				
Informasjons brev til personer med kognitiv funksjonsned settelse, og deres pårørende eller verger	<input type="radio"/>				

15. Er det noe du ønsker å legge til, som vi ikke har spurt om, eller evt om du ønsker utdype noe:

Skriv inn svaret

:::

16. Hva syntes du om disse spørsmålene, var det greit å svare?



Link to the forms:

https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=1N1QPaEAt0qXiN7PFKhyjwD_heDb_eV1Nhd0gqvB9WSJUQ1ZJVDRUDk2SUozVlIJMFdCRzBNNzU2Si4u

7.3 Attachment 3 – Answers to the quantitativ survey

1. Hvilke utfordringer har barnet ditt i hverdagen?

7 Svar

ID ↑	Navn	Svar
1	anonymous	Kan ikke lese eller skrive, er svaksynt.
2	anonymous	Kognitive, kommunikasjon med andre, blir overvurdert, trygghet, trenger døgnbasert omsorg
3	anonymous	Utviklingshemmet, vansker med å gjøre seg forstått.
4	anonymous	Downs syndrom/autisme
5	anonymous	Hen kan f.eks. ikke lese. Og har veldig liten tallforståelse.
6	anonymous	Sosialt, språkforståelse. (Utviklingshemmede) vanskelig for å lære ting.
7	anonymous	Språk

2. Hvor gammelt er barnet ditt?

[Flere detaljer](#)

- Under 16 0
- 16-17 2
- 18-21 3
- 22-29 2
- Over 30 2



3. Hva er jobbsituasjonen til barnet ditt?

[Flere detaljer](#)

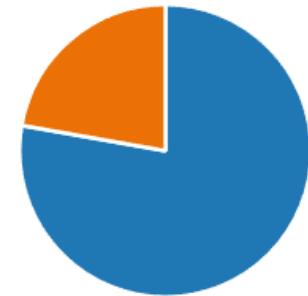
- Barnet mitt går på videregåend... 5
- Barnet mitt jobber i en VTA-bed... 3
- Barnet mitt jobber i en VTAO-be... 0
- Barnet mitt får annet tilrettelagt ... 1
- Annet 0



5. Stemte du ved siste valg? (Stortingsvalget 2021)

[Flere detaljer](#)

● Ja	7
● Nei	2
● Ønsker ikke oppgi	0



6. Hvilket alternativ passer best for din utdanning

[Flere detaljer](#)

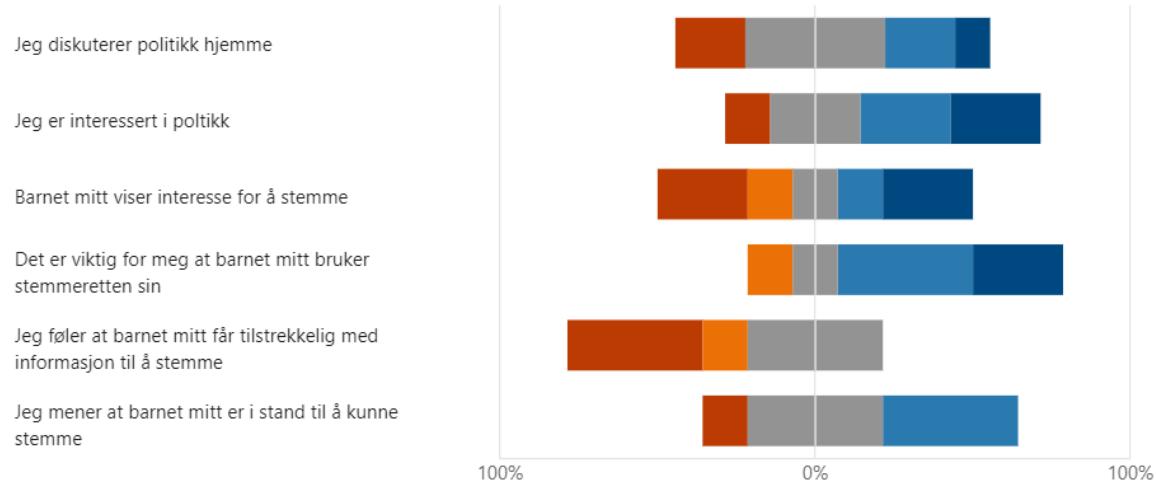
● Fullført obligatorisk skolegang	0
● Fullført videregående	3
● høyre utdanning 1-3 år	0
● Høyere utdanning 4-7 år	6
● Høyere utdanning mer enn 7 år	0



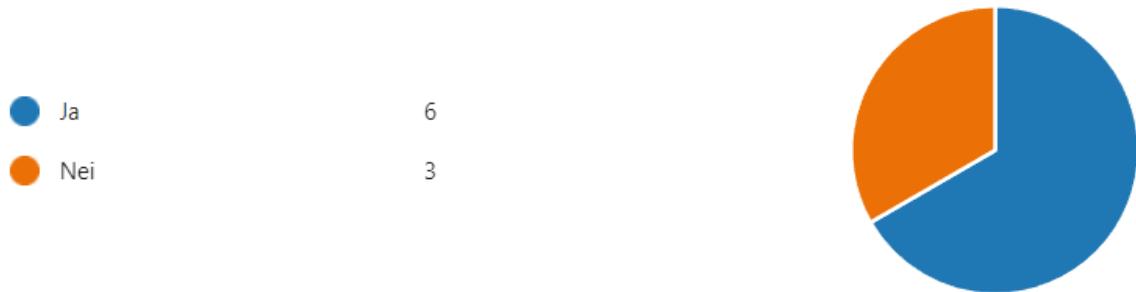
7. Hvor enig er du i følgende påstander? Fra helt uenig - helt enig

[Flere detaljer](#)

■ Helt uenig ■ Nokså uenig ■ Verken enig eller uenig ■ Nokså enig ■ Helt enig



8. Tenker du at barnet ditt trenger tilrettelegging for å kunne stemme?

[Flere detaljer](#)

9. Hvis ja, hva tenker du kunne bli gjort for å gjøre det lettere for barnet ditt å stemme?

5 Svar

ID ↑	Navn	Svar
1	anonymous	Bedre synliggjøring av hvilke partier som mener hva. I forkant av avstemming, en paneldebatt hvor de viktigste spørsmålene som angår utviklingshemmede blir stilt. Så kunne man gitt røde og grønne kuler el. ut i fra hva partirepresentantene svarer. De med flest grønne bør stemmes på. Det hadde også hjulpet om partilogoene var trykket i farger på hyllen med stemmesedlene (aller helst på stemmesedlene). Ledsager med seg i avstemmingen.
2	anonymous	Må ha med meg / verge inn i stemmebås
3	anonymous	Trenger noen med seg som kan finne alternative stemmesedler. Må være med inn i stemmeavlukket.
4	anonymous	Trenger opplæring i samfunns spørsmål
5	anonymous	Enkle partiprogram med bilde/figur illustrasjoner om saker som angår denne gruppen, hjelp til å komme seg til stemmelokale. Stemmesedler m figurer (partilogoer) og bilder.

10. I hvor stor grad hadde tiltakene under passet for deres situasjon? (Hvis tiltaket ikke er relevant for deres situasjon, velg "tiltaket gjelder ikke oss")

[Flere detaljer](#)

■ I stor grad ■ I nokså stor grad ■ I nokså liten grad ■ I liten grad ■ Tiltaket gjelder ikke oss

Gi foresatte (eller andre nærmre pårørende) rett til fri med lønn for å følge til stemmeloakalet



Valgfunksjonærer med kompetanse om velgere med kognitiv funksjonsnedsettelse



Opplæring om valg i bedriftene før valget



Lære om de politiske partiene i bedriftene før valget



Tilrettelagt debattkvald i forkant av valget



Egen tilrettelagt informasjon fra politiske partier



Rigge til forhåndsstemming i én eller flere bedrifter



Tilrettelagt forhåndsstemmedag i Rådhuset



Tilrettelagt transport til valglokalet



Informasjonsbrev til personer med kognitiv funksjonsnedsettelse, og deres pårørende eller verger



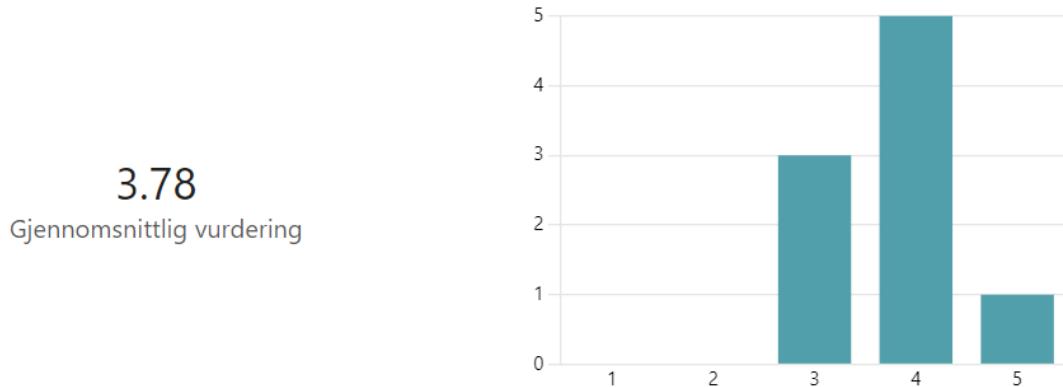
11. Er det noe du ønsker å legge til, som vi ikke har spurt om, eller evt om du ønsker utdype noe:

3 Svar

ID ↑	Navn	Svar
1	anonymous	Syns alle tiltakene som er ramset opp i nr. 10 er gode og dekkende, og som vil bidra til å øke stemmetallet. Hvis man i tillegg kunne markere stemmesedler eller hyller med partilogoer eller bilder av partiledere, hadde det vært fint.
2	anonymous	Mitt barn trenger opplæring i hva et samfunn er, hvem bestemmer i et samfunn og hva betyr det å velge/stemme
3	anonymous	Dette er en lettpåvirkelig velgergruppe. Viktig med nøytral informasjon.

12. Hva syntes du om disse spørsmålene, var det greit å svare?

[Flere detaljer](#)



7.4 Attachment 4 – Interview guide

INTERVJUGUIDE VELGERE

Velgere = elever i S-klassen og ansatte i VTA-bedrifter

Husk å introdusere dere selv før dere går i gang med selve intervjuet.

- Hva heter dere?
- Hvorfor gjennomfører dere dette intervjuet?
- Si at dere er takknemlige for at informanten stiller opp til intervjuet
- Si at det er greit å hoppe over spørsmål om noen er vanskelig eller ubehagelig å svare på
- Forklar at dere kommer til å notere underveis i intervjuet

Spørsmål til intervjuet:

Del 1: Skape en hyggelig stemning, vise at dere er interesserte i informantene

- Hvor gammel er du?
- Hvordan trives du på skolen / i bedriften?
- Hva holder dere på med i klassen / bedriften nå?
- Hva er favorittfaget ditt / hva liker du best å gjøre i bedriften?
- Har du noen spesielle interesser eller hobbyer? Hvilke?

Del 2: Bakgrunnsinformasjon om politisk interesse og valgdeltakelse**a) Politisk interesse**

- Hva ser du på tv? (Hva slags programmer? Hva er det du liker ved disse programmene?)
- Følger du med på nyhetene?
- Så du på nyheter i går?
- Hva slags nyheter er du mest interessert i?
- Er du interessert i politikk? (litt, passe, veldig)
- (Hvis vi må forklare POLITIKK = hvordan vi fordeler ressursene i samfunnet, f.eks. hvor mye penger hver av oss skal betale inn til staten, og hvor mye vi skal få tilbake fra staten. Vi kan betale mye (høye skatter) – og få mer tilbake (skole, sykehus, veier, tannlege...). Eller vi kan beholde mer av pengene selv, og betale mer for tjenester som skole, sykehus, veier og tannlege)
- Lærer du om politikk på skolen / i bedriften?
- Liker du å diskutere saker? (NB: Ikke kom med alternativ før informanten rekker å svare. Gi tid. Hvis det blir helt stille, kom med eksempel som om det er viktig å kildesortere avfall, om det bør være gratis å kjøre buss i Drammen)
- Snakker du om politikk med noen hjemme eller i familien?
- Diskuterer du politikk med venner?

b) Om valgdeltakelse

- Synes du det er viktig å stemme ved Stortingsvalg og kommunevalg?
- Har du stemt før?
- Hvis du har stemt før: Når stemte du sist?
- Hvordan opplevde du det å stemme siste gang? (NB: Vent med alternativ: morsomt, spennende, vanskelig...)
- Hva var det som ev. gjorde at du opplevde det sånn?
- Hvis du ikke har stemt før: Hvorfor ikke?
- Tror du at du kommer til å stemme neste gang du har mulighet? (Kommunevalg høsten 2023)

Del 3: Ønsker og behov

a. Ønsker

- Hvilke saker er viktige for deg? (NB: Vent litt. Er det økonomi, helse, utdanning, klimaet osv.?). Hvis dette blir for uklare begrep – spør om konkrete ting: Er det viktig for deg å få lov til å gå på skole? Vil du gå på skole etter videregående?
- Hvis du var konge / dronning, hva ville du endret for at du skulle ha det bedre i hverdagen?
- Liker du å bestemme selv i hverdagen din?
- Hva er ev. viktig for deg å bestemme selv? (Vent: hva du bruker penger på, hva du skal jobbe med, hva du skal ha lov til å si, hvor du skal bo, hva du skal gjøre på fritiden?)
- Ut ifra forrige svar: Hvorfor er dette viktig for deg?

b. Behov

- Synes du det er lett eller vanskelig å forstå politikk som blir sagt / formidlet på tv, nettet eller i aviser? (hva kan ev. være vanskelig å forstå?)
- Har du lyst til å lære mer om politiske partier?
- Trenger du hjelp til å stemme?
- I så fall, hva trenger du hjelp til? (Vent: å komme deg til lokalet, hjelp inne i lokalet?)

Del 4. Avslutning

- Spørre om informanten har noe mer han vil legge til?
- Spørre hvordan informanten synes det var å bli intervjuet om dette?
- Takke for intervjuet og si litt om hva dere skal gjøre videre nå (lage en rapport til Drammen kommune der dere foreslår tiltak for at flere skal stemme. Kommunestyret skal bestemme hvilke av tiltakene de vil gjennomføre til valget høsten 2023).
- Vil informantene få noen form for tilbakemelding på dette arbeidet? (ja, vi kan sende rapporten til skolen / bedriften slik at alle får se hva vi foreslår