



“Experiencing Democracy”

The effectiveness of participatory spaces (Demokratiewerkstatt) in fostering democratic competence among children and young people

Preliminary findings of an effectiveness study on democratic understanding

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In cooperation with the Parliament Austria / Demokratiewerkstatt (2025–2027)

***„Democracy used to be
nothing special to me,
even though it is
so much more.“***

(P2|post-survey, q5/5a, f-16y, w47_2025)

5 Durch die Teilnahme an der Demokratiewerkstatt konnte ich meine eigenen bestehenden oder fehlenden Vorstellungen über Demokratie und Politik besprechen und erweitern.

trifft voll zu trifft eher zu teils-teils trifft eher nicht zu trifft gar nicht zu

5a Wenn du magst, nenne ein Beispiel:

Demokratie war früher für mich nichts besonderes,
wobei es doch so viel mehr ist!

Project overview



Demokratiewerkstatt (DW) Parliament Austria

- Established 2007, following the voting age reduction to 16
- Ages 8–19 (grades 3 through final year)
- Interactive workshops on democracy, parliamentarism & the constitution etc.
- Immersive, place-based civic education

University College Of Teacher Education Vienna (PH Wien)

- Empirical assessment of workshop impact on democratic understanding and competence
- Covering all school levels from grades 3–13 and all school types (Austria-wide)
- Multi phased, mixed method approach (quant./qual.)

Core question



Do the methodological, didactical, experiential and spatial dimensions of the workshops translate into immediate/lasting shifts in democratic understanding and competences among participants?

Methodological	Didactical	Experiential	Spatial
workshop design and instruments	learning approach and content	immersive and participatory format	Parliament as active variable (qual.)

Target group and sample size

School Students

- Grades 3–13 across Austria
- All school types and levels
- Age range: ~8–19 years
- Attending DW-workshops

Expert Interviews

- Teachers (Austria-wide)
- All school types and levels
- Qualitative complement to quantitative data
- Conducted mostly via Zoom

Coordinating Partners

- DW and teachers as key data-collection coordinators
- Pre-visit survey distribution
- Follow-up survey facilitation
- Consent form management



***n*=**

[451|331|174]

preliminary sample
(presented today)



***n*=**

[1.500|1.000|800]

total planned
(final study)



**Grades
3–13**

all covered
in 2026/27



[7]

School-types

AHS, MS, BMHS,
PTS, ASO ...



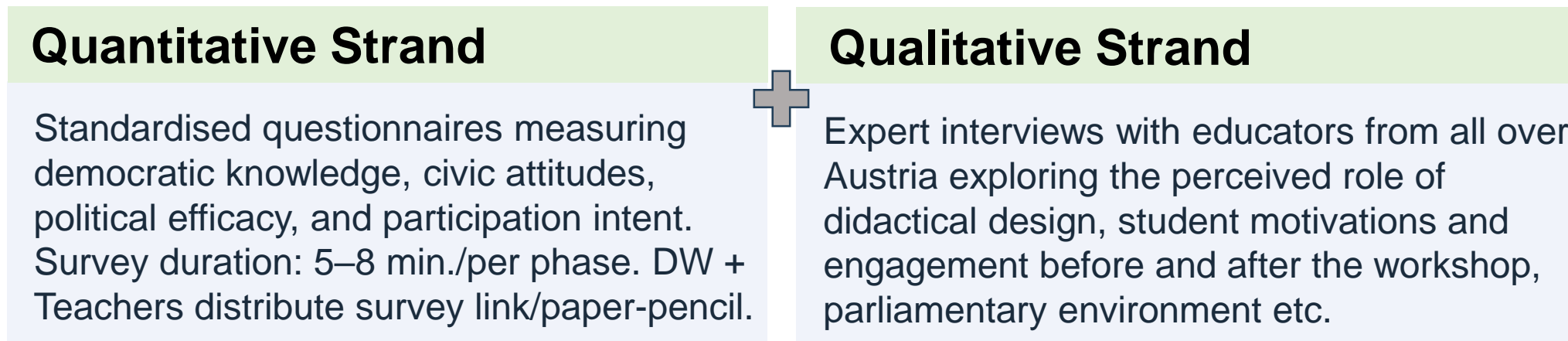
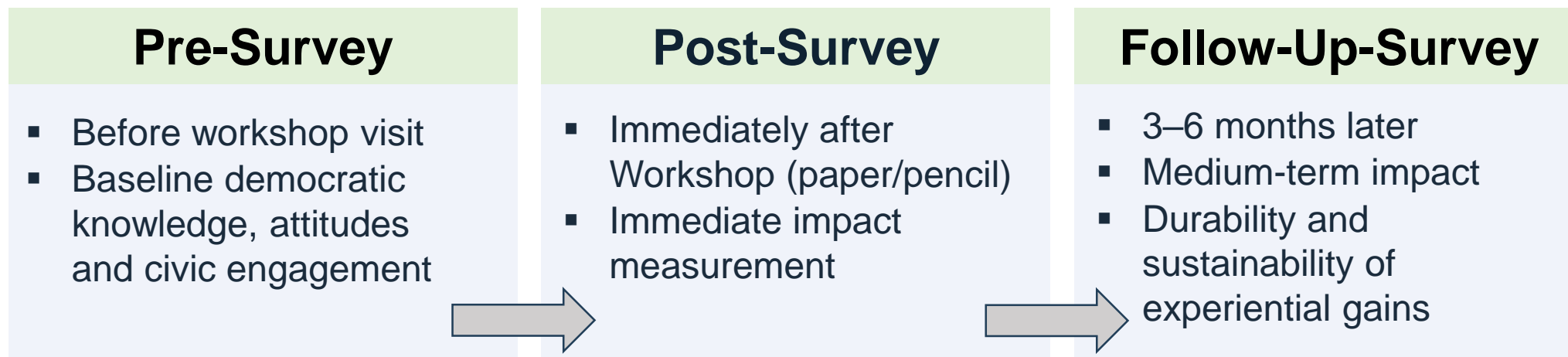
f/m/d

53/45/2

in %

Note: Total planned expert interviews *n*=45 | 2025–27 | Only 7 interviews used for this preliminary report.

Research design and methodology



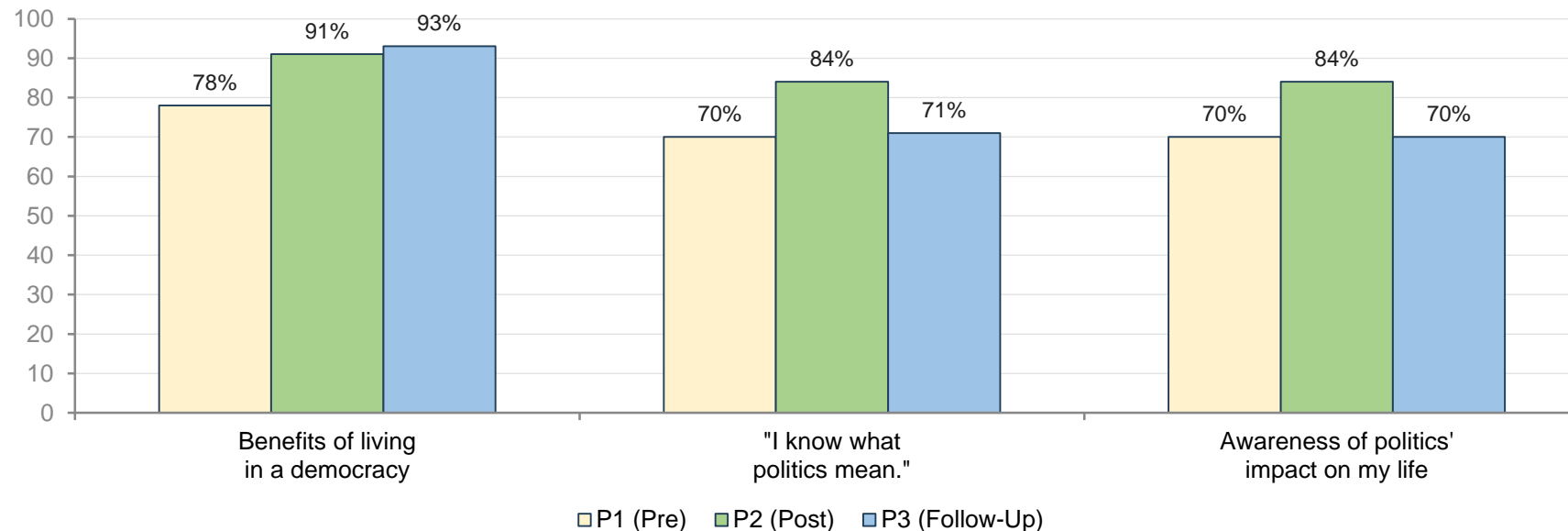
Preliminary findings

(n=451/331/174)



1. Understanding Democracy and Politics

Terminology and individual understanding/impact | P1 = Pre · P2 = Post · P3 = Follow-Up



Notes:

- 57% visited the DW for the first time.
- 5-pt. Likert scale
- Summarized stat. results “strongly agree“ and „agree“.
- Descriptive analysis with cross-tabulation.
- Data analysis with SPSS.

Key findings:

- All indicators show clear gains from **P1**→**P2**. Results largely hold at follow-up (**P3**).
- Women score ~10 percentage points higher consistently across all age groups.
- “Best” results in Grade 8 and Grade 11 (aligning with History and Political Education curricula).

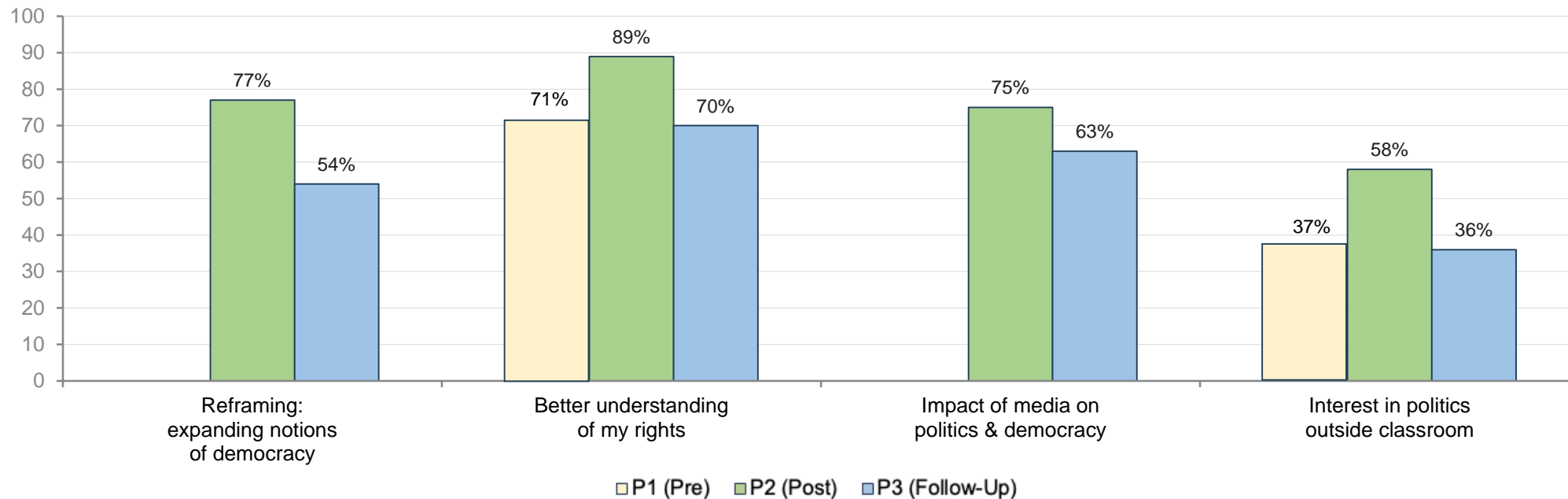
Preliminary findings

(n=451/331/174)



2. Reflecting, Reframing, Understanding & Engagement

Assess, adapt, align and action | P1 = Pre · P2 = Post · P3 = Follow-Up



Key findings:

- Very interesting results in **P2** “Reframing”, “rights awareness” and “media impact” (rich additional qualitative data collected).
- Media-literacy awareness is notably lower in Secondary 1 (drops almost by half compared to Secondary 2).
- Political interest spikes after the workshop (58%) but returns to baseline at **P3** (36%).
- Secondary 2 shows stronger reflection gains than Secondary 1.

Preliminary findings

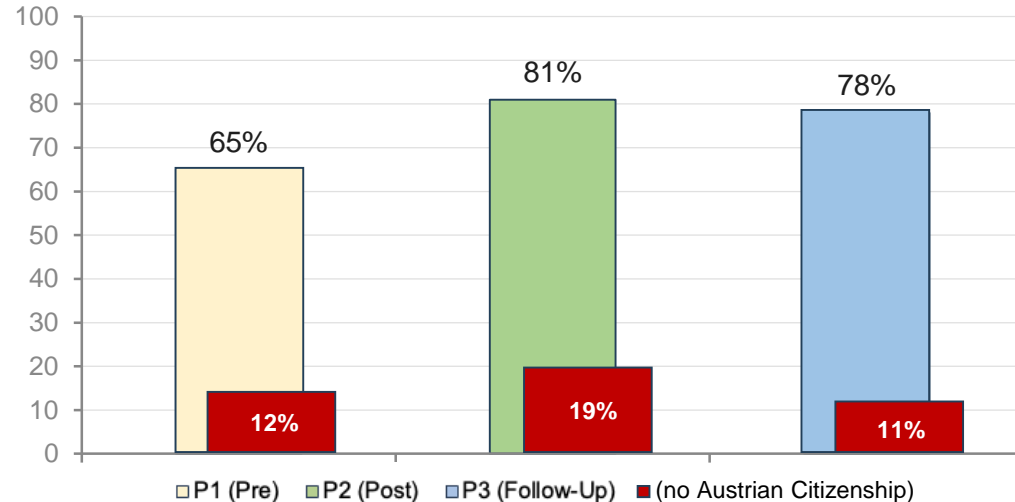
(n=451/331/174)



3. Community Belonging and Democratic Participation

Sense of belonging to community and democracy | P1 = Pre · P2 = Post · P3 = Follow-Up

"I feel as a part of my community and democracy."



Notes:

- Secondary 2 results show slightly better results among non-citizens (age 18+) who have already voted in their home countries.
- Responses from the expert interviews provide additional context on this issue. Political participation is often perceived solely as casting a vote („ticking a box“) on election day.

Key findings:

- The sense of community belonging rises strongly after the workshop (+16 pp, **P1**→**P2**) and largely holds at follow-up (78%). This is particularly relevant given that almost 24% of participants hold no Austrian citizenship.
- When examining the results of this 24%, a completely different picture emerges (see the red bar chart).

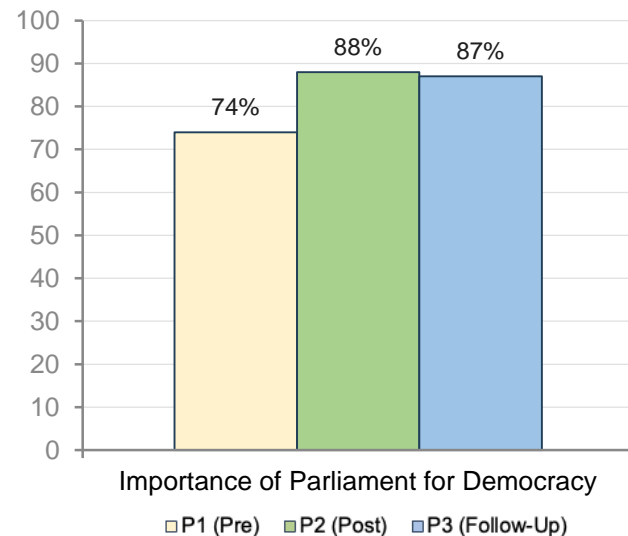
Preliminary findings

(n=451/331/174)



4. Importance of Parliament and parliamentary work for a functioning democracy

Parliament = key factor for democratic resilience | P1 = Pre · P2 = Post · P3 = Follow-Up



Notes:

- Secondary 2 data show even better results for **P2|94%** and **P3|88%**
- The results for lower secondary level remain consistently high at 80% (**P2→P3**).
- Many workshop participants also take part in a guided tour of Parliament after completing the Democracy Workshop programme. Feedback from expert interviews indicates that this experience left a lasting impression on many students.

Key findings:

- The perceived importance of Parliament / parliamentary work for a functioning democracy is already high at **P1**, increases significantly at **P2**, and remains remarkably stable throughout the post-workshop period (**P2→P3**). These results suggest that the workshop design (and the spatial experience) fosters a lasting understanding of Parliament's democratic role.

Preliminary conclusions

Didactics and methodology make a difference!

Active, reflective, and participatory workshop formats strengthen democratic knowledge and civic attitudes in measurable ways.

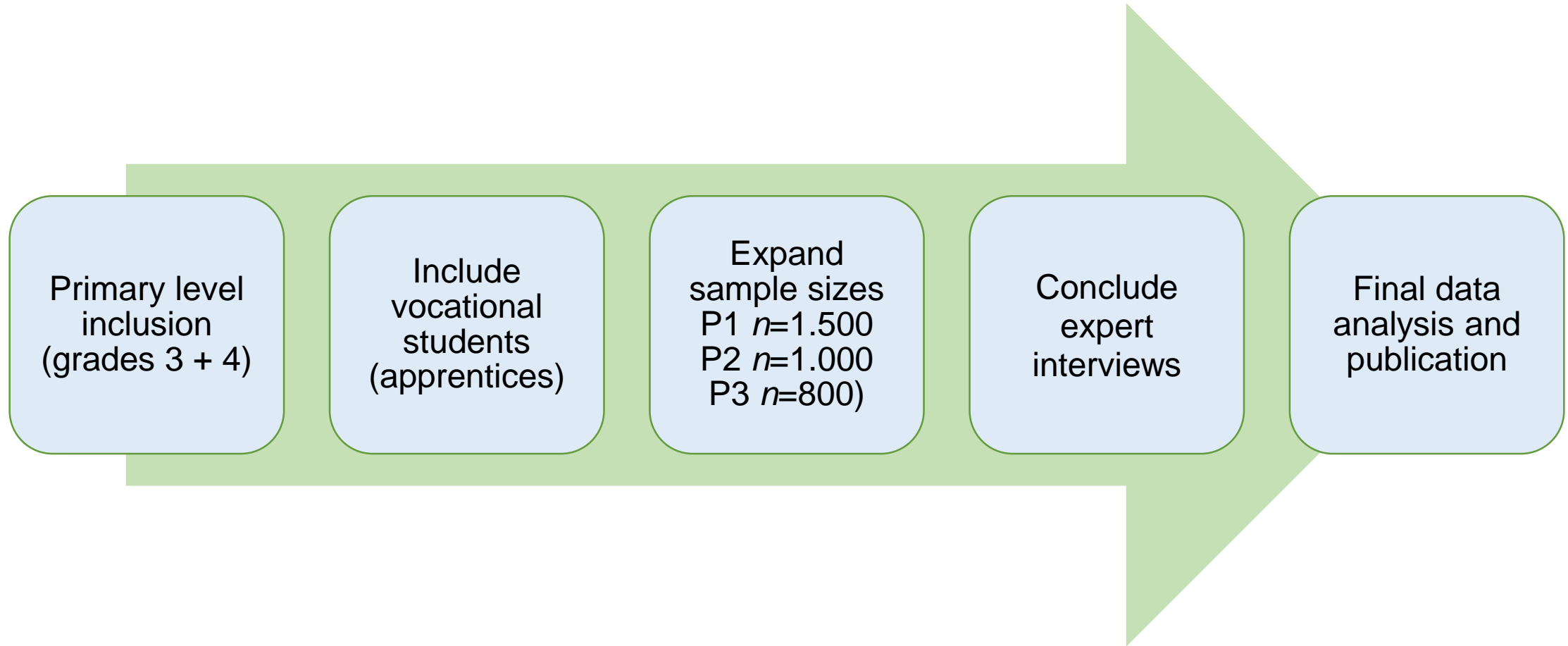
The Parliament as an authentic out-of-school learning environment amplifies learning effects by making democracy tangible.

Impact and effectiveness show variation across age groups and may also differ by gender and citizenship status.

The study provides insights into civic formation across grades 3-13.

Teachers and educators act as key multipliers, shaping the depth and durability of learning effects through pre- and post-engagement.

Outlook 2026/27 – What comes next?



Contact and Links



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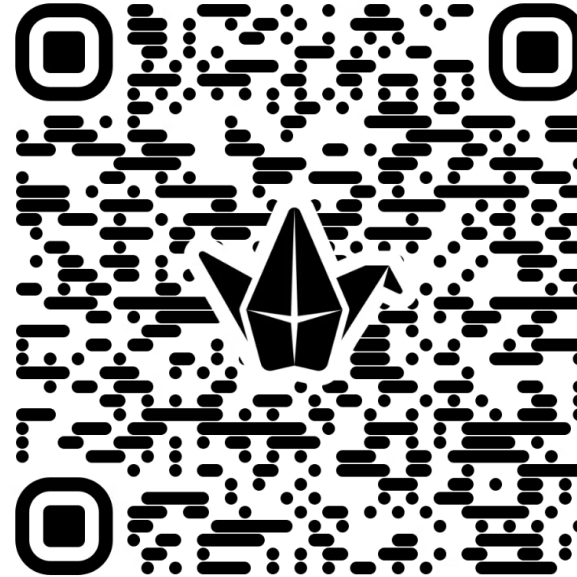
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Parliament Austria | Demokratiewerkstatt

<https://www.parlament.gv.at/erleben/demokratiebildung/demokratiewerkstatt>



Wir bilden Vielfalt. Wir bilden Zukunft.