

Did you know that there are already 8 states that have municipalities that allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote in school board elections and 20 countries that allow 16 and 17-year-olds to vote? Lowering the voting age is not a new or untried concept. The data shows that 16- and 17-year-olds are mature and cognitively developed enough to vote, and that with the right education and support, long term voting engagement increases.

Lowering the voting age can make democracy more inclusive and representative by making sure young people — many of whom are directly affected by long-term policies like education, the economy, climate change, and housing — have a voice. In our proposal — that students will be able to vote in school board elections — they can see the tangible results in an area that directly and immediately impacts them — their education.

One of the more frequent rebuttals to lowering the voting age is that 16- and 17-year-olds aren't "mature enough" to vote. Studies show the opposite. A study done in 2025 looked at "voting competence" and found that 14-17-year-olds vote as competently as adults.

What does this mean?

Evidence shows that the argument that teens are "too immature" to have voting rights is not accurate.

Studies across multiple countries of 10 – 30 –year olds show that "cold cognition" (deliberative reasoning, logical thinking, and information processing) reach "adult like" levels at age 16(2).

What does this mean?

The argument that 16- and 17-year-olds are too easily persuaded does not apply. With the ability to reason and process, they are not more easily exploited than their older counterparts.

In addition to ensuring meaningful representation in our democracy, lowering the voting age has been shown to increase long term voter participation.

A recent study of the reform in Scotland found that people who first voted at age 16–17 had a higher turnout in their 20s compared to peers who first voted at 18 or older. Research from the Bertelsmann Stiftung in Germany concluded that allowing 16-year-olds to vote could raise overall voter participation to nearly 80% by 20–49 (versus a forecasted decline to 68% without such a reform). In European municipalities where 16 and 17-year-olds vote, turnout among these youngest voters often matches or exceeds that of older first-time voters - ages 18–20.

Contrary to a frequent argument against lowering the voting age, evidence suggests 16-year-olds are cognitively ready to vote. Research shows that 16-year-olds perform comparably to adults on measures of civic knowledge, political skills, and political efficacy⁶. When supported through education and awareness efforts, youth voter turnout does not lag far behind the population average — undermining arguments that younger voters are too disengaged or immature to participate responsibly⁷. Some analyses have shown that youth voter turnout outpaces that of older voters.

More studies need to be done to assess what accounts for these differences, but the evidence so far shows that 16- and 17-year-olds not only are mature enough to vote, but that younger voter engagement has positive long-term outcomes for civic engagement.

It is time for 16 and 17- year-olds to get the right to vote in school board elections!

Sources:

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