



Lowering the Voting Age

Youth voters (voters between the ages of 18 and 30) are less likely to cast a ballot than any other age group.¹ Extending voting rights to people after the age of 16 in municipal elections increases the probability that they will develop life-long habits of voting. Our current voting age results in many Americans casting their “first vote” while in transition, as most 18-year-olds are leaving their long-term homes and/or schools.

Is this a new and untested idea?

There is a growing international movement for a lower voting age. Several established democracies, including Austria, Argentina, Germany, and the United Kingdom, have extended voting rights to 16-year-olds for national, regional, and local elections.² Last year, Takoma Park of Maryland joined the vanguard of this movement, becoming the first U.S. municipality to extend voting rights to people after they turn 16-years-old.³

Are they ready to vote?

Research confirms that 16- and 17-year-olds can be responsible and erudite voters. According to one study, 16-year-olds’ political knowledge is about the same as 21-year-olds’ and quite close to the average for all adults.⁴

Why is voting early so important?

Some youth voters cannot cast a ballot until they are 20-years-old, due to our 2-year election cycles. Meanwhile, studies show the later you vote, the less likely you are to become a habitual voter: 18-year-olds are more likely to vote than 19-year-olds, and every passing month in between these ages reduces the likelihood that they will vote.⁵

Will they show up at the polls?

Lowering the voting age increases turnout, promotes civic awareness, and creates opportunities for communities, schools, and families to embrace young people’s “first vote”. Takoma Park’s rate of voter turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds exceeded the rate among those 18 and older in its 2013 municipal election.⁶

Is this a slippery slope policy?

Extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds is consistent with the fact that turning 16 has special significance in our culture. At age 16, we can drive, pay taxes and for the first time work without any restriction on hours.

¹ "FairVote.org | Lowering the Voting Age." *FairVote*. N.p., n.d. Web. 18 Feb. 2014.

² Ibid.

³ Shin, Annys. "Takoma Park 16-year-old Savors His History-making Moment at the Polls." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 04 Nov. 2013. Web. 20 Feb. 2014.

⁴ Hart, Daniel, and Robert Atkins. "American Sixteen- and Seventeen-Year-Olds Are Ready to Vote." *The Annals of the American Academy of Social Science* 633.1 (2011): 201-22. Web. 20 Feb. 2014.

⁵ Ibid. 1.

⁶ "FairVote Policy Guide: A Right to Vote for 16-year-olds." *FairVote*. N.p., n.d. 2014.