

Why Lower the Voting Age in Local Elections?

Reason #1: We need to make voting a habit

Lowering the voting age can lead to a long-term increase in voter turnout, bringing more citizens in touch with their government and pushing the government to better serve its people. Research shows that voting is habitual. A person who votes in the first election they are eligible for is likely to continue voting consistently, while someone who doesn't will take several years to pick up the habit. It is clear that age 16 is a better time to establish a new habit than age 18, and data from places that have lowered the voting age shows that 16-year-olds do indeed vote at higher rates than older first-time voters.

Reason #2: Sixteen- and 17-Year-olds have a stake in the game, and politicians must pay attention to them

Youth are affected by local political issues as much as anyone. They also work without limits on hours and pay taxes on their income, can drive in most states, and in some cases, are tried in adult courts. Sixteen- and 17-year-olds deserve the right to vote on issues that affect them on the local level. Further, voting is the most reliable way for ordinary citizens to influence the government. Lowering the voting age would force local politicians to listen to 16- and 17-year-olds and address their concerns.

Reason #3: Sixteen- and 17-year-olds are ready to vote

Research shows that 16- and 17-year-olds are intellectually ready to vote. For example, on average 16-year-olds possess the same level of civic knowledge as 21-year-olds. Data from Austria, where the national voting age is 16, further indicates that sixteen- and 17-year-olds are ready to responsibly exercise the right to vote.

Reason #4: We need to encourage effective and relevant civic learning

Lowering the voting age can drive demand for effective civics education in schools, reviving a discipline that is too often pushed to the side. First, lowering the voting age can motivate students to engage with civics classes. Students learn best when the material presented is relevant to their lives, and civics classes fall short when they teach young people how government works without any ability to actually participate in it. Letting 16- and 17-year-olds vote will bring much-needed relevance to civics classes. In addition, lowering the voting age can lead schools to focus more attention on effective civics education. The high school classroom is the ideal place to teach and engage young people about important local issues, and lowering the voting age can inspire schools to take advantage of this opportunity.