



YOUNG VOICES AT THE BALLOT BOX

Amplifying Youth Activism to Lower the
Voting Age in 2024 and Beyond

A White Paper from Generation Citizen (Version 4.0 - 2024)



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WELCOME, from the Director of Vote16USA

Dear Friends and Advocates,

It is with immense pride and boundless optimism that I welcome you to "Young Voices at the Ballot Box," a landmark policy report of Vote16USA dedicated to amplifying youth activism in our shared quest to lower the voting age to 16. As we stand on the cusp of 2025, we are witnessing an unprecedented surge of energy and commitment from young people eager to shape their futures and to strengthen our democracy. Youth are not just the leaders of tomorrow; they are the leaders of today. Across the nation, young activists are tackling critical issues head-on—climate change, gun violence, educational equity, and social justice. Their passion, creativity, and determination are inspiring, and they are making it clear that they are ready and willing to take an active role in the democratic process.

At Vote16USA, we believe that lowering the voting age to 16 is not just a step forward in expanding democratic participation—it is a necessary evolution of our electoral system. Allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote recognizes their stake in the policies and decisions that affect their lives. It empowers them to voice their concerns, to advocate for change, and to hold their elected officials accountable.

Research consistently shows that voting is a habit that, when developed early, leads to a lifetime of civic engagement. By granting voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds, we are fostering a culture of participation that will benefit our democracy for years to come. These young voters are already engaged with their communities and the issues that matter most to them. They are informed, connected, and ready to bring fresh perspectives to the ballot box. The push to lower the voting age is about more than just increasing voter turnout. It is about building a more inclusive, more representative democracy. Young people bring unique viewpoints and innovative solutions that can drive progress and address long-standing challenges. Their voices must be heard. Their contributions must be valued.

We are inspired by the countless stories of young activists who are already making a significant impact. From organizing climate demonstrations to advocating for policy changes at the local and national levels, their actions demonstrate the power and potential of youth-led movements. These young leaders are not waiting for permission to make a difference—they are demanding it and creating change now.

Our campaign to lower the voting age is a testament to our belief in the power of informed youth civic engagement. It is a recognition that democracy thrives when it includes the voices of all its members, especially those who will inherit its future. We are committed to supporting these young activists, providing them with the tools and platforms they need to succeed, and amplifying their voices in the halls of power.

As we embark on this journey together, we invite you to join us in advocating for this transformative change. Whether you are a young person eager to vote, a parent, an educator, or a community leader, your support is crucial. Together, we can ensure that the voices of our youth are heard and that their contributions are recognized. Thank you for your dedication to this cause and for standing with us as we work to make history. With your help, we can amplify youth voices at the ballot box and build a more vibrant, inclusive, and dynamic democracy for all.

In solidarity and hope,
LaJuan Allen
Director, Vote16USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are on a mission to strengthen generational equity and youth voice by lowering the voting age to 16. Democracy only works when citizens participate, and this policy can increase civic participation in the long run, spurring long-term increases in voter turnout and helping to ensure that elected officials are accountable to 16- and 17-year-old citizens.

Voting at sixteen will strengthen our democracy in the long run, by supporting young people in establishing the habit of voting when they are in the best position to do so. This is especially important given current demographic and electoral trends, in which older voters wield disproportionate influence, especially in local elections.

Sixteen-year-old voting was first adopted in the United States in 2013, when Takoma Park, Maryland lowered its voting age for local elections. Since then, six additional cities in Maryland have followed suit as well as Brattleboro, Vermont, and the voters of Berkeley and Oakland, CA have approved ballot measures to lower the voting age to 16 for school board races in both cities. Youth-led campaigns have also come incredibly close to successfully lowering the voting age in cities including San Francisco, Culver City, CA, and Washington, D.C. Efforts in other cities and in state legislatures have also gained significant momentum.

On the federal level, 125 members of congress supported a 2021 proposal to lower the voting age to 16 nationwide. Media outlets including the New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Wall Street Journal, NBC News, and NPR have covered the issue and these legislative advances in depth.

In addition to progress on campaigns and in the media, the ecosystem of advocates, researchers, and public officials dedicated to the success of this policy continues to grow. Today, the Vote16 Research Network is an anchor in this ecosystem and a critical source of information on new developments of interest to scholars, advocates, and community leaders invested in learning more about the promise of 16 and 17 year old voting . The network is convened by the University of Maryland Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement."

In 2015, Generation Citizen—a national civics education organization—launched the Vote16USA campaign to support these local and national efforts. That year, we published Vote16USA's first white paper "Young Voices at the Ballot Box." Multiple updates have followed. This latest edition of the Vote16USA white paper includes new research and reflects the latest progress on the issue. This paper also discusses next steps to advance the cause.

WHY SHOULD WE LOWER THE VOTING AGE TO 16?

REASON #1 WE NEED TO MAKE VOTING A HABIT

First and foremost, voting is a habit, and a person's first election is critical to establishing that habit. People who vote in their first election are likely to remain habitual voters, whereas those who do not are likely to remain habitual nonvoters.¹ Research shows voting in one election can increase the probability that a person will vote in the next election by 25 percent.²

"Voting in one election can increase the probability that a person will vote in the next election by **25 percent.**"

Cities and countries that have already lowered the voting age to 16 have seen much higher turnout rates for first time voters ages 16-17 than for first time voters ages 18-21. Evidence indicates this leads to a long-term boost in turnout. An analysis of the long-term effects of lowering the voting age in five countries found an average increase in turnout of 5 percent in the 20 years following the change in voting age.³

Young people start forming voting habits when they reach the voting age and participate in their first election. While some Americans vote in the first election they are eligible for at age 18 and become habitual voters, the majority of the electorate does not vote upon initial eligibility. In the 2020 election, which saw dramatically increased youth voter turnout compared to 2016, still only 42% of eligible 18-year-olds and 49% of 19-year-olds reported voting, according to the Census Bureau. In the 2022 midterms, those numbers were 20% and 25%, respectively.⁵ These rates are lower than any other age group.

This is partially due to the many barriers to voting that are unique to 18-year-olds. At 18, young people are often adjusting to new responsibilities such as starting college, entering the workforce, or joining the military. They may also struggle to determine the logistics of voting in a new location, either voting absentee or re-registering in a new area. Eighteen-year-olds, in general, face uniquely high barriers to voting and have comparatively little access to supportive resources that can help make voting easy, especially for those who are not in college.⁶

Sixteen-year-olds, however, are in a much better position to be engaged in their first elections. They are in a relatively stable phase of life and oftentimes surrounded by active voters, whether that be older family members or educators. Sixteen is a better time than 18 to establish the habit of voting.

This notion is supported by evidence from the jurisdictions that allow 16-year-old voting, both in the U.S. and internationally. It is also supported by research on the youngest eligible voters. While 18-year-olds as a whole turn out at very low rates, there is some evidence that 18-year-olds who are still in high school at the time of the election do turn out at higher rates than their slightly older peers who are one grade level higher and have already left home by the time of the election.⁷

As researchers behind studies on turnout among the youngest eligible voters concluded, "Today when voters become eligible at 18 years of age, most young voters have had none or few participatory opportunities before leaving home. A younger voting age would create more opportunities for acquiring the habit of voting before leaving home."⁸ Lowering the voting age to 16 would ensure that each new voter experiences at least one election while in high school, assuming two year election cycles. This allows them to establish the habit of voting in a stable environment where families and schools can help students understand the logistics of voting and establish the practice as a lifelong habit.

WHY SHOULD WE LOWER THE VOTING AGE TO 16?



Advocates rally in support of legislation to lower the voting age in California, 2019. Photo courtesy of Devin Murphy, California League of Conservation Voters

New research on youth voting in Scotland adds critical empirical evidence to this concept. A 2023 study by Jan Eichhorn and Christine Hübner and published by the University of Edinburgh in cooperation with the University of Sheffield and the think tank d|part investigated the long term impact of the change. They found that “There is a significant follow-through effect in voter turnout among young people who experienced and were allowed to vote in their first election at ages 16 or 17.”⁹ Young voters who were first eligible to vote at age 16 or 17 were statistically significantly more likely to have voted in 2021 than their peers whose first election came at age 18. This shows, concretely, that 16 is a better time than 18 to begin voting if we want to see new voters continue to turn out throughout their 20s.

Lowering the voting age has shown to be effective at increasing turnout among first-time voters, and research demonstrates that once someone cast their first ballot they are likely to continue the habit of voting for years to come. Lowering the voting age can effectively help young people create the habit of voting, increasing overall turnout in the long run.

In Takoma Park’s 2013 elections, the turnout rate for 16- and 17-year-olds exceeded any other demographic.¹⁰ In 2015 and 2017, voter turnout for registered 16- and 17-year-olds was more than double the city’s overall turnout rate.^{11, 12} In 2015,

Hyattsville, Maryland became the second city to lower the voting age. In that year’s election, the turnout rate for 16 and 17-year-olds was a quarter higher than the overall turnout.¹³ In its most recent election, a special election held to elect a city councilmember for one of the city’s wards in the fall of 2020, 16- and 17-year-olds registered to vote turned out at a rate higher than voters ages 18-30 and similar to the overall turnout rate.¹⁴

In 2008, Austria lowered its voting age to 16 for all elections and saw higher engagement from 16- and 17-year old first time voters than from 18-20-year old first time voters.¹⁵ Political engagement among this demographic has continued to increase since. Nearly ten years later, ahead of the 2017 general election, most 16- and 17- year olds said they were inclined to participate in the upcoming election.¹⁶

In 2011, 21 Norwegian municipalities lowered the voting age to 16 for local elections. Once again, voter turnout among 16- and 17-year-old first time voters was much higher than turnout among 18-21 year-old first-time voters.¹⁷

Increased participation is particularly important in local elections, where turnout is especially low and many cities struggle to get even one out of four voters to the polls.¹⁸ Lowering the voting age to 16 is a powerful solution to address this trend.

WHY SHOULD WE LOWER THE VOTING AGE TO 16?

REASON #2: SIXTEEN- AND 17-YEAR-OLDS ARE READY TO VOTE

Research shows that 16- and 17-year-olds have the necessary civic knowledge, skills, and cognitive ability to vote responsibly. A study comparing the qualities associated with voting—such as civic knowledge, political skills, and political interest—among citizens 18 and older and citizens below 18 found no significant differences between 16 year olds and those above age 18. Civic knowledge was determined by individuals' ability to answer questions on U.S. politics and government such as "Which of the two major political parties is most conservative at the national level?"; political skill was determined by individuals' self-reported ability to "write a letter to a public official" or "make a statement at a public meeting"; and political interest was determined by how frequently individuals follow national news.¹⁹

Research also shows that 16- and 17-year-olds have the mental reasoning ability necessary to make informed voting choices. Deciding how to vote relies on "cold cognition," the decision making process in which a person deliberates alone and unhurried, and draws on logical reasoning abilities. Research shows that cold cognition matures by 16, and does not improve as one gets older.²⁰ Research on overall reasoning and cognitive development also shows that there is drastic growth in these areas between ages 11 and 16, significant growth then plateaus at age 16 following this primary development phase.²¹

Additionally, a study on the quality of vote choices among 16- and 17-year-olds in Austria—after the national voting age was lowered to 16 in 2007—concluded that their vote choices were just as consistent with their political preferences as older voters' choices.²² These studies strongly indicate that 16-year-olds are just as ready to vote as 18-year-olds and claims to the contrary are misguided gut reactions.

REASON #3: SIXTEEN- AND 17-YEAR-OLDS HAVE A STAKE IN THE GAME, AND ELECTED OFFICIALS MUST TREAT THEM AS EQUAL CONSTITUENTS

Sixteen- and 17-year-olds work and pay taxes on their income and are affected by the decisions of elected officials today and for the rest of their lives, on issues from education policy to public works projects, climate change, and the national debt. They deserve to have a vote. The most reliable way for ordinary citizens to influence the government is through voting in elections, and by extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds we can ensure elected officials listen to their voices and address their concerns.

This is especially important given the United States' aging electorate and the increasing divergence between the demographics and political interests of younger and older citizens. The electorate is currently the oldest it has been since at least 1970, before citizens ages 18-20 were eligible to vote, and will only get older in the decades to come. The Census Bureau estimates that by 2034, those over the age of 65 will outnumber those 18 and younger for the first time ever, and by 2030, those 65+ will account for more than one-fifth of the population and more than a quarter of the voting age population, for the first time ever.²³

At the same time, young America is becoming more diverse. The public school population already consists of a majority of people of color, and has been since 2014. (In 2020, the public school population was 47% white, 15% Black, 29% Hispanic, 5% Asian, 1% Native American, and 3% 2+ races).²⁴

WHY SHOULD WE LOWER THE VOTING AGE TO 16?

These twin trends result in a widening demographic divergence between the youngest and oldest Americans, a phenomenon known as the racial generation gap. The term is defined as “the difference between the percent of those 65 or older who are white, minus the percent of those aged 17 and younger who are white. The bigger the gap, the more demographically distinct the generations.”²⁵ In 1975, the gap was 12 percentage points. In 2015, it was 26 points, a dramatic shift. In some states, it is as high as 41 percentage points. In more than 150 counties, the gap has widened by 20+ points since 1990.²⁶

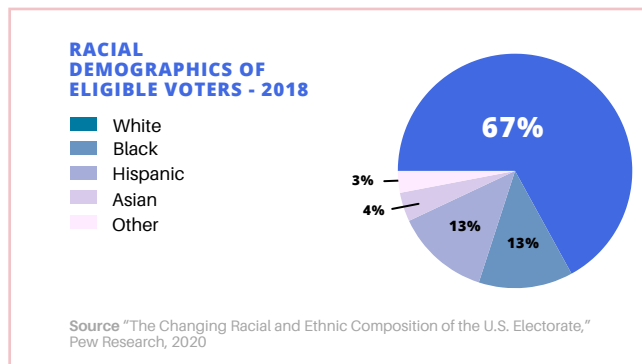
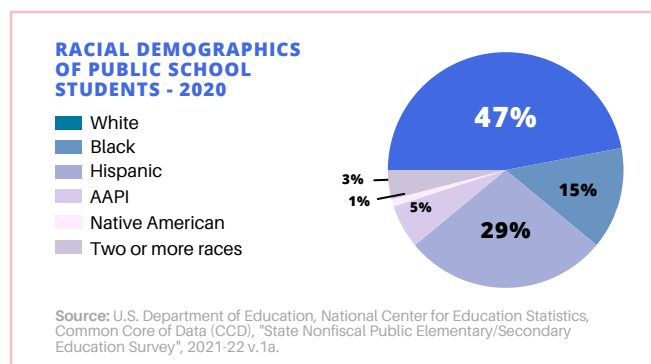
This can have serious consequences, including in education policy. Research shows that seniors are less likely to support spending on youth when the youth are from different racial groups than the seniors. Indeed, states and counties with larger racial generation gaps tend to spend less on public education on a per capita basis. Research published by PolicyLink and the USC Program for Environmental & Regional Equity analyzed the lower 48 states and found a general pattern: “as the racial generation gap increases, education spending declines.” In other words, a “negative relationship between educational spending and the (extent of) racial mismatch between the young and the old.”²⁷

Investing in the next generation is critical to our collective future, and given these dynamics it is

time we give younger people the opportunity to take this future into their own hands by voting in local elections.

Bridging the divide between our generations requires a host of policy solutions and community-based initiatives. The inclusion of 16- and 17-year-olds in the electorate, and the subsequent increase in turnout among voters in their 20s it would spur, would constitute a step in the direction of racial equity and help make sure the interests of diverse young people are represented in a time of historic demographic change. In view of this research, lowering the voting age not only makes political sense; it’s also an imperative from the standpoint of generational and racial equity to ensure that all young people from all backgrounds have a civic pathway to realize—and vote for—the futures they deserve.

We know that elected officials pay most attention to those who vote. Lowering the voting age to 16 would immediately give 16- and 17-year-olds, who work and pay taxes, a say in decisions that affect their lives and how their tax money is spent. Further, it would give a louder voice to a diverse generation of young Americans who are at risk of being overshadowed by historic growth in the oldest cohort of voters as a proportion of the electorate.



WHY SHOULD WE LOWER THE VOTING AGE TO 16?

REASON #4: LOWERING THE VOTING AGE TO 16 WILL STRENGTHEN CIVICS EDUCATION

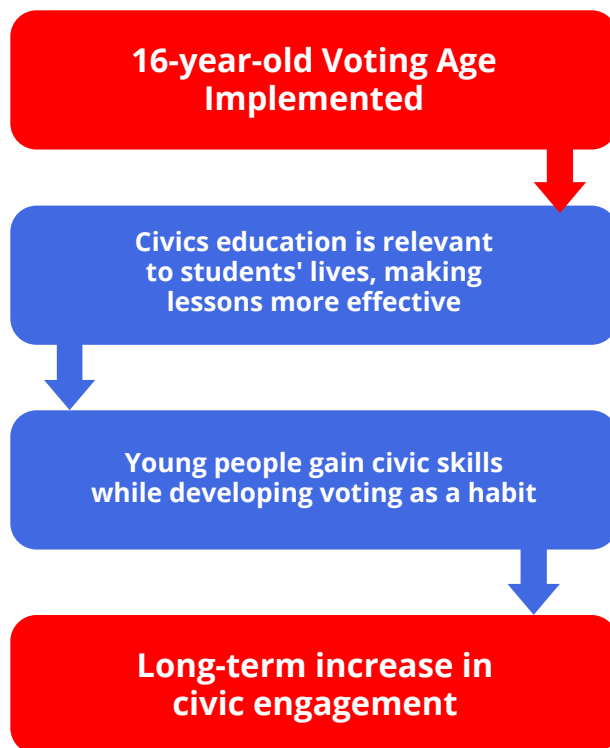
As we call for a lower voting age in the United States, significant initiatives are also underway to strengthen civics education nationwide. This work naturally goes hand in hand with the push to lower the voting age, and together strong civics education and a voting age of 16 have the potential to significantly boost civic engagement.

Prioritizing effective civics education is crucial for increasing long term civic participation. Research shows that people who attend high schools with a strong culture of civic engagement are more likely to vote in their 30s, regardless of their individual opinions on the importance of voting.²⁸ Though schools in the U.S. have largely overlooked civics in recent decades, several states and cities have recently moved to reprioritize it, including in Massachusetts, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and Utah, where state legislatures and in some cases, state Secretaries of State offices, have taken the lead in establishing more comprehensive civics requirements.

A lower voting age would make civics more effective by adding a level of relevance to civics courses by allowing students to directly apply what they're learning in the classroom in their communities. It would encourage schools to teach more civics and that of a higher quality given its immediate implications on students' lives. Allowing young people to vote while they are learning about government, and their role as citizens, in high school civics courses captures the full potential of civics education.

Strong civics education and a lower voting age would mutually reinforce each other to produce the best outcomes in terms of increasing civic engagement. Together, they can help young people gain foundational civic knowledge and skills, and develop a habit of participation.

This is supported by a case study from Austria where voting age reform was accompanied by other measures intended to engage young citizens, including the elevation of the status of civic education in schools.²⁹ Since 2008, when Austria lowered its voting age to 16 for all of the country's elections, turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds has been higher than the previous average for first time voters.³⁰ This success shows the promise of a lower voting age combined with a renewed focus on civic education. Lowering the voting age to 16 can bring civics education to life and help fuel its continued resurgence across the country.



MYTHS ABOUT LOWERING THE VOTING AGE

Like any bold idea, lowering the voting age faces an array of counterarguments, and these deserve adequate consideration. Ultimately, most counterarguments come down to claims surrounding the maturity and ability of 16- and 17-year olds. Youth is a nebulous concept, and, in reality, legal age-based distinctions in our society are arbitrary and based on what is deemed best for society at large, as judged at a certain point in time. Some of the most relevant specific counterarguments are addressed as follows:

MYTH #1: 16-YEAR-OLDS ARE NOT MATURE ENOUGH TO VOTE

Scientists distinguish between two kinds of cognition: “hot” cognition (psychosocial) and “cold” cognition (cognitive). Hot cognition occurs in decisions which are made under the influence of a group, under stress, or in a hurry. Cold cognition, in contrast, occurs in decisions which are made in the opposite conditions, where people have time and resources to make a deliberate, reasoned judgment. While sixteen-year-olds are not very good at making decisions which require “hot” cognition, they are just as good as older adults at making decisions which require “cold” cognition. Voting is an activity that relies on cold cognition. This type of thought processing ability is fully developed at 16, and does not improve as one further ages.³¹ Research also shows that by age 16, young people have the necessary civic knowledge and skills necessary to vote.³²

MYTH #2: THE VOTING AGE MUST BE TIED TO THE AGE OF LEGAL ADULthood

Sixteen-year-olds play an important role in our society. In most states, they can work without any restriction on hours, pay taxes, drive, and in some cases be tried for crimes as adults. The legal age of consent in many states is 16, and the compulsory school attendance age ends at 16 in many states. The legal definition linking adulthood to the age of 18 should not affect voter eligibility. It is also important to emphasize that our efforts are only to lower the voting age to 16. All other legal age limits should be set in accordance to what is best for each individual issue. Our country has set the driving age, in most states, at 16, and the drinking age at 21. Each should be considered on its own merits. For this specific issue, the voting age should be 16.

Figure 1

Psychosocial Maturity (Standardized Composite Scores) as a Function of Age (in Years)

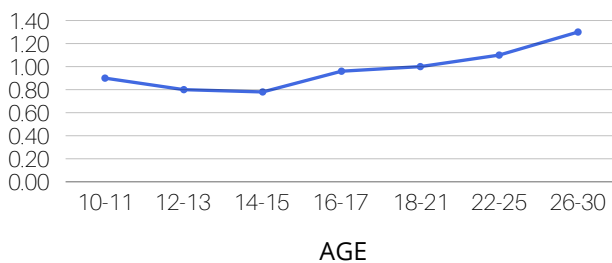
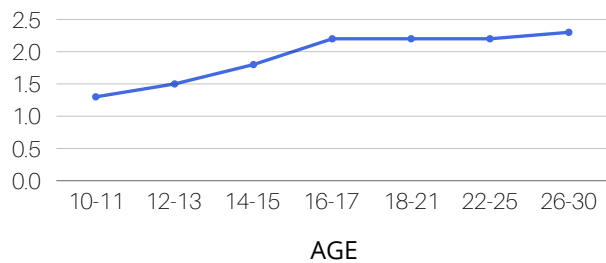


Figure 2

General Cognitive Capacity (Standardized Composite Scores) as a Function of Age (in Years)



Source: Reproduced from: Daniel Hart and Robert Atkins, “American Sixteen- and Seventeen-Year- Olds Are Ready to Vote,” *Annals of the American Academy* 633 (January 2011): 208.

MYTHS ABOUT LOWERING THE VOTING AGE

MYTH #3: LOWERING THE VOTING AGE IS A PARTISAN POWER GRAB

The effort to lower the voting age transcends party lines. The purpose of the effort is to invigorate our democracy by fostering active and engaged citizens. A more lively political discourse—in classrooms and in the broader public sphere—can stimulate ideas from across the political spectrum. The effort to lower the voting age is based on increasing participation in democracy, not promoting any one ideology. Republican legislators from three states have supported or co-sponsored legislation related to lowering the voting age in recent years.³³ In Europe, where discourse on a lower voting age is more developed, politicians from across the spectrum support the idea, and some groups have made affirmative cases for the reform from conservative points of view, such as *The Conservative Case for Votes at 16 and 17*, published in the UK in 2018.³⁴

MYTH #4: SIXTEEN- AND 17-YEAR-OLDS WILL COPY THEIR PARENTS' VOTES

This claim is reminiscent of arguments made by opponents of women's suffrage, who feared women would copy their husbands' votes. The argument is not a legitimate reason to deny someone the right to vote, and, in the case of women's voting, has been debunked as many married couples are increasingly voting for separate candidates.³⁵ Data from the 2014 Scottish independence referendum also suggests this claim is false. A survey conducted prior to the referendum found that over 40 percent of newly eligible young voters had different voting intentions than a parent interviewed.³⁶ This claim will need to be studied more in the United States, but the argument remains an insufficient reason to deny someone the right to vote.



Youth advocates testify on legislation to lower the voting age at a D.C. Council Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety hearing, June 2018.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE IN THE UNITED STATES

How can we lower the voting age on the city, state, or federal level?

The U.S. Constitution gives states the ability to set their own voting rules, as long as they do not contradict with the rules the Constitution lays out. The 26th Amendment sets the minimum voting age at 18—this means no state can establish an older voting age—but it leaves the door open for states to set a lower age, or to give municipalities the ability to do so.³⁷ This means the feasibility of lowering the voting age in any city depends on state laws, as each state has the authority to establish the requirements for voting in its state and local elections.

These requirements are set out in either state constitutions or statutes. State laws also determine how much flexibility cities have for making changes such as a lower voting age for elections on the local level.

In some cases, such as in Maryland, city councils can approve this change on the local level by a majority vote. In other cases, proposed city charter amendments must be approved by voters as a referendum. In some states, there is little or no flexibility for this change on the local level. See Appendix B for a more detailed discussion of the feasibility study, a 50 state map of legal feasibility in each state, and summaries of each state's laws.

To lower the voting age for an entire state, either a state constitutional amendment or statutory change would be required, depending on the state.

The United States Congress has the power to lower the voting age for federal elections through federal statute. To enact a nationwide change applicable to federal, local, and state elections, an amendment to the U.S. Constitution would be required.

The following pages include sections on:

- Cities that have adopted 16- and 17-year-old voting for city council or school board elections
- Ongoing city-level advocacy
- Current state-level advocacy
- Notable past city- and state-level efforts
- Recent action on the federal level
- A discussion of public support for Vote 16
- An update on institutional support for Vote 16



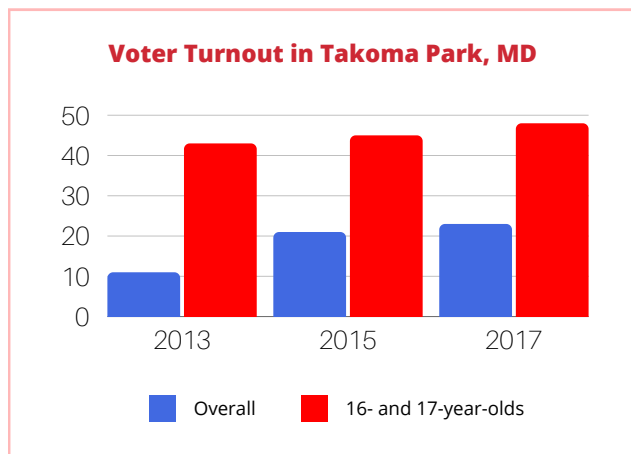
CURRENT LANDSCAPE IN THE UNITED STATES

CITIES THAT HAVE ADOPTED 16- AND 17-YEAR-OLD VOTING

Twelve United States cities have approved policies to use a 16-year-old voting age for local elections: Takoma Park, Hyattsville, Greenbelt, Riverdale Park, Mount Rainier, Somerset, Chevy Chase, and Cheverly, Maryland, for municipal elections; Brattleboro, Vermont for municipal elections; Berkeley and Oakland, California for school board elections; and Newark, NJ for school board elections. The sections below offer detail on the status of 16-year-old voting in these cities.

I. Takoma Park, MD

In 2013, Takoma Park became the first of five Maryland cities to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds for municipal elections. Maryland's legal structure made it relatively simple for the cities to lower their voting ages — the city councils only needed to vote in favor of a charter amendment and they could implement the change. In Takoma Park, the proposal was passed in the context of a larger effort to expand voting rights through several reforms, including same-day voter registration. As discussed earlier in this paper, in the elections since implementation 16- and 17-year-olds have turned out at higher rates than older age groups. The Takoma Park-based organization FairVote, which studies and promotes a number of election reforms, supported the effort in Takoma Park.



II. Hyattsville, MD

In Hyattsville, the reform passed as a standalone measure in January 2015, following one councilmember's proposal and a subsequent grassroots advocacy effort that prominently involved student leaders. FairVote supported this effort as well. Every local election since has included 16- and 17-year-old voters.

III. Greenbelt, MD

After Hyattsville lowered its voting age, interest picked up in the nearby city of Greenbelt. The city's Youth Advisory Committee (YAC), a group of young people that advise the city council on issues related to youth and families, studied the issue and sent a report to the City Council urging it to consider lowering the voting age. Over the next two years, the YAC organized work sessions, public hearings, and meetings with council committees, and conducted a survey that showed that more than 90 percent of high school students said they would vote in local elections if given the opportunity.³⁸ The City Council expressed a desire to solicit public opinion on the issue and placed a non-binding referendum question on the November 2017 ballot, asking voters whether they approved of lowering the local voting age to 16.

The referendum showed that 53 percent of voters supported the idea, an increase from the 23 percent of residents who expressed support in response to a very similar 2015 survey question.^{39, 40} Taking the referendum question results into account, in early 2018 the City Council voted unanimously to officially lower the city's local voting age to 16. Greenbelt held its first election with 16- and 17-year-old voters in May 2019.

IV. Riverdale Park, MD

In May 2018, the Riverdale Park City Council voted to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds for local elections, becoming the fourth city in Maryland to do so. Riverdale Park held its first election with 16- and 17-year olds voters in May 2019.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE IN THE UNITED STATES

V. Mount Rainier, MD

In January 2021, the Mount Rainier City Council voted to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds for local elections, becoming the fifth city in Maryland to do so.

VII. Chevy Chase, MD

In 2022, the Town Council of the Town of Chevy Chase adopted a resolution to amend the town charter to allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote in local elections.⁴¹

VII. Somerset, MD

Following a town referendum that showed more than 60 percent support among residents for lowering the voting age to 16, in 2023 the Somerset Maryland Town Council voted to lower the voting age to 16 for future elections.⁴²

VII. Cheverly, MD

In January 2024, Cheverly unanimously passed a charter amendment to allow youth at the age of 16 to participate in local municipal elections. The Town Council simultaneously created the a Youth Town Council to further bring youth voices into local government.⁴³

IX. Brattleboro, VT

To lower the voting age for local elections in a Vermont municipality, the Town's voters must first approve of the change via local referendum, and then the state legislature must pass legislation giving the Town the ability to implement the change. In Brattleboro, advocates first brought the question to voters in 2015, where it was rejected with only 36 percent in favor. Advocates brought the question before voters again in 2019, where it won with 69 percent voting in favor, a remarkable increase in public support. The state legislature passed a bill to allow the town to implement the change in 2022, but it was vetoed by the governor. One year later, in 2023, the state legislature again passed such a bill, and it was again vetoed by the governor. This time, the state House and Senate voted to override the veto, letting Brattleboro implement the change.⁴⁴

X. Newark, NJ

In January 2024, the Newark, NJ City Council unanimously approved an ordinance allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in school board elections in the city. Only 3 percent of registered voters turned out for the 2023 school board election. Newark is the largest city in the state and nearly 90 percent of residents are Black or Latino. The same week, NJ governor Phil Murphy called on the state legislature to lower the voting age to 16 for all school board elections in the state. The new voting age is expected to be implemented in time for Newark's 2025 school board elections.

"This will ensure that my voice and the voices of my fellow Newark students are not only acknowledged but also valued in decisions that directly influence the education we receive and our future."

– Breanna Campbell,
16-year-old Newark student
and Vote16 advocate

The New York Times

In Newark, 16-Year-Olds Win the Right to Vote in School Board Races

New Jersey's largest city will allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote. Supporters hope it's the start of a statewide and national movement.

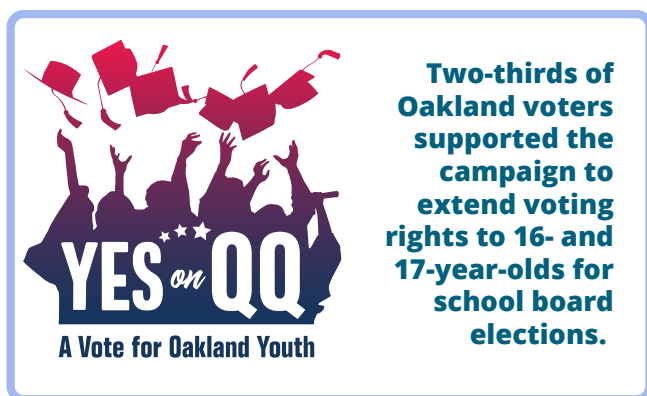
New York Times – January 10, 2024

CURRENT ADVOCACY AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

XI. Berkeley and Oakland, CA

In 2016, youth leaders in Berkeley, CA successfully advocated for the local ballot measure Y1, to lower the voting age for school board elections in Berkeley to 16. The city council voted to put the measure on the ballot, and it passed with an overwhelming 70 percent of the vote, but the change was not immediately implemented. In 2020, Oakland voters approved a similar measure (QQ) by a similar margin, making Oakland the largest jurisdiction to approve of 16-year-old voting in any form, following a strong advocacy and organizing effort by the student-led Oakland Youth Vote campaign. As of 2023, neither city had implemented the change, but recent actions indicate that 2024 may finally be the year 16- and 17-year-olds vote for school board members in both cities.

In June 2023, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors (both cities are in the county) officially directed the county's registrar of voters to implement both measures before the 2024 general election.⁴⁵ The city councils and school boards in both cities will also need to pass resolutions to establish details on the voting process for 16- and 17-year-olds.



ONGOING CITY-LEVEL ADVOCACY

A. Culver City, CA

Youth advocates in Culver City began building support for a lower local voting age in 2019. After years spent building a coalition of supporters, the Vote16 Culver City campaign succeeded in getting a ballot measure question placed on the ballot for the November 2022 election, Measure VY. (A ballot measure is required to make this change in a city in California.) The youth leading the campaign engaged with voters for months leading up to the election and secured endorsements from local leaders, including several elected officials at the city and state level and the Los Angeles Democratic Party. The measure ultimately lost by the slimmest of margins — just 16 votes out of 16,602 cast (49.95%).⁴⁶ Still, the fact that a youth-led campaign came so close to victory and outperformed baseline public support by a huge margin shows this is an issue that can win majority support. Advocates are now working to put the question back on the ballot in 2024.

B. Rockville, MD

Spurred by youth led advocacy, the city of Rockville included an advisory referendum question on the November 2023 ballot asking voters to weigh in on the idea of a lower local voting age. Advisory questions are non-binding and do not result in policy change like official ballot measures, but they can influence future action from a city council. In Maryland, cities have the ability to extend voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds through a city council vote; no referendum is required. About 30% responded Yes to the question in Rockville, which is about in line with baseline public opinion, and similar to the result in Greenbelt the first time the question was put before residents in 2015, before a future question in that city scored majority support.

CURRENT ADVOCACY AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

C. Jersey City, NJ

A youth-led effort to lower the voting age for school board elections in Jersey City is building momentum. In September 2023, the Jersey City Board of Education adopted an official resolution supporting the effort, the first time a school board in New Jersey officially supported 16 and 17 year old voting. Jersey City will now look to follow Newark as the second city in the state to make this change for school board elections.⁴⁷

“Voting is a lifelong habit. And studies show that, if a person votes in one election — they are more likely to turn out in the next election.

So, encouraging our young neighbors to engage with democracy, is really about encouraging them to become lifelong voters.”

– *New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy, in his January 2024 State of the State Address, citing Vote16NJ student leaders as inspiration for his call for 16-year-old voting in all school board elections. The same week, Newark made the change. Jersey City now looks to be next.*

CURRENT STATE LEVEL ADVOCACY

A. Washington, D.C.

Building on past efforts, detailed below, advocates in Washington, D.C. continue to call for the D.C. Council to extend voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds. A [new report](#) from DC Action discusses the implications for a lower voting age in detail, including how it would build on recent efforts to make DC’s democracy more inclusive, including a public financing of elections program and policies to extend the right to vote to people who are currently incarcerated and to non-citizen residents.

B. Missouri

Youth advocates with the Vote16MO campaign are working to advocate for a lower voting age for local and school board elections. They have built a statewide network of youth-led advocates, adult allies, and grassroots funders working to lower the voting age to 16.

C. New York

Legislation has been introduced in New York to amend the state’s constitution to lower the state’s voting age to 16. In New York City, a City Council resolution supporting the state legislation was introduced in August 2023 with 10 cosponsors.

D. Maine

In 2021, the Maine legislature considered a proposed state constitutional amendment to lower the voting age to 16 in the state. Despite strong organizing and testimony from youth advocates, the legislation did not move forward. The effort did, however, prompt the League of Women Voters of Maine to embark on an incredibly thorough study process that resulted in a published 112 page study that dives deep into the history, research, and predicted future impact of 16 year old voting.⁴⁸ Following the study, the League of Women Voters of Maine adopted a Final Position in support of 16 year old voting in Maine, stating: “LWVME believes that voting in Maine elections is a fundamental right that must be guaranteed to Maine citizens 16 years of age and older.”⁴⁹

The position statement also mentioned the connection to civic education, stating that “members also expressed the hope that establishing voting eligibility at 16 years old would cultivate a lifelong investment in democracy and create momentum to improve civic education.”

This formal position means that next time legislation is introduced to lower the voting age in Maine, the League of Women Voters of Maine will be ready to formally testify in support, a strong sign of support from one of the most prominent voting groups in the state.

E. Massachusetts

Currently, if a Massachusetts city or town wants to lower the voting age, local lawmakers must first approve it, and then send a “home rule petition” to the state legislature to request approval to implement the change locally. Home rule petitions must be approved by both chambers of the legislature and signed by the governor. Local governments in at least 10 cities and towns in Massachusetts have passed resolutions to lower the voting age to 16 for local elections in recent years, including the city of Boston, but the state legislature has not given any of those municipalities the approval to implement the change.

In response, legislation has been introduced on the state level in several recent legislative sessions to do away with that requirement and allow cities and towns to implement the change directly on the local level if they choose to do so. Youth-led organizing has led to significant political support for the bills, but none have advanced beyond the committee stage in the legislative process.

NOTABLE RECENT EFFORTS

A. San Francisco, CA 2016 and 2020

In 2016, San Francisco made history as the first city in the United States to put the question of lowering the voting age before voters as a ballot measure. More than 172,000 citizens voted in favor of the proposal, which finished just two percentage points shy of passing, a tremendous achievement for a youth-led campaign on the ballot for the first time. A second Vote16SF campaign in 2020 earned 49.2% of the vote, building on 2016 but falling just shy of passing.

B. Washington, D.C., 2018

Vote16 legislation was introduced by seven out of thirteen councilmembers in 2018, backed by a robust, youth-led Vote16DC campaign coalition. After earning public support from eight members, the bill passed unanimously out of committee in November 2018. Along the way, the young people leading Vote16DC catalyzed public dialogue around the issue and were featured in several local and national media outlets, including the Washington Post and NBC Nightly News, and earned an endorsement from the Washington Post’s editorial board. The bill was ultimately tabled.⁵⁰

C. Past state-level bills

State legislators in several states introduced bills between 2003-2022 that would have lowered the voting age for either all of a state’s elections or just school board elections in the state. A partial list states that have seen Vote16 bills introduced includes:

- Arizona
- California
- Connecticut
- Georgia
- Hawaii
- Illinois
- Iowa
- Kentucky
- Massachusetts
- Maine
- Michigan
- Minnesota
- Missouri
- New Mexico
- New York
- Oregon
- Texas
- Virginia
- Washington
- Wisconsin

CURRENT ADVOCACY AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

FEDERAL LEVEL

In January 2023, [Rep. Grace Meng \(NY\)](#) reintroduced legislation to lower the voting age to 16 nationwide through a constitutional amendment.⁵¹ Rep. Meng previously introduced the amendment to lower the voting age to 16 in 2018, and reintroduced it in 2019 and 2021. In addition, in March 2019, Rep. Ayanna Pressley proposed lowering the voting age to 16 for federal elections as an amendment to a larger bill concerning election reforms. The amendment advanced through the House Rules Committee and was debated on the House floor and voted on by the full House, where it failed but earned 126 votes in favor, from members of both parties, and was supported by the Speaker of the House.⁵² Pressley introduced the proposal again in 2021, attached to the larger “For the People Act,” and it earned 125 votes in favor on the floor of the House.⁵³ Twelve representatives who voted “no” in 2019 voted “yes” in 2021. This action on the federal level represents tremendous progress at bringing the issue into mainstream consideration, and can spur future progress at all levels of government.

PUBLIC SUPPORT

In 2019, the first national, public polling on the idea of lowering the voting age to 16 was conducted. Multiple media organizations ran polls to test public opinion on the issue, with most finding that about 17% of likely American voters support it. It is encouraging to see the issue reach the level of prominence that it is being researched and covered in this way, and it’s worth looking at the poll numbers specifically with appropriate context. First, it’s important to remember that these surveys capture respondents’ immediate reactions, and we know that lowering the voting age is often referred to as a “second look issue,” meaning that many people have a negative immediate gut reaction, but a positive response after a brief conversation or learning about the issue. This has proved true on the local level on multiple occasions:

In San Francisco in 2016, initial polling showed that 36 percent of voters supported lowering the voting age. However, after a strong public education campaign, 48 percent voted in favor of the change.

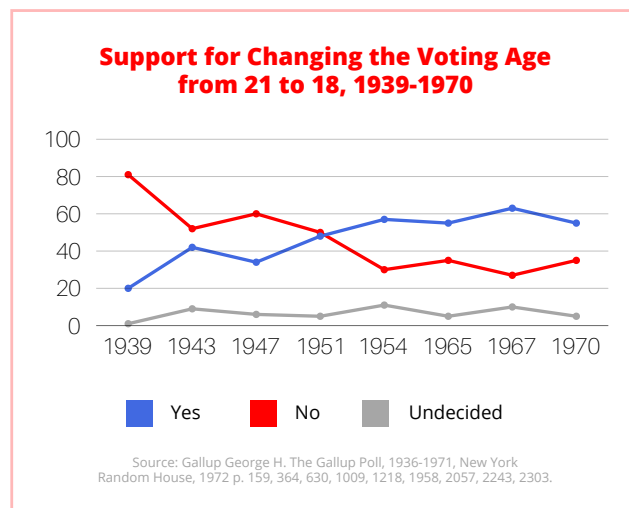
In Brattleboro, Vermont, residents in the town rejected a proposal to lower the voting age by a vote of 36 percent in favor and 64 percent opposed in 2015. In 2019, voters approved of lowering the voting age, with 69 percent voting in favor.

In Greenbelt, Maryland, a 2015 survey with a response rate nearly equal to the city’s voter turnout rate showed 23 percent support for a lower voting age. Later, in 2017, following a public education campaign led by young people, 55 percent voted in favor.

Recent survey research carried out by scholars with the Vote16 Research Network has also shown that opposition to lowering the voting age is much softer than most would predict. In 2022, their 2000 respondent survey, representative of the American population, found that when first asked, about one-third supported lowering the voting age. But once prompted to think about the competence of the young people in their communities, support grew to nearly half of respondents, a hugely significant shift.⁵⁴

In addition, it’s worth remembering that 16-year-old voting is still a relatively new idea and the movement around it is in its early stages. In fact, the 18-year-old voting age, which we now take for granted, garnered a similar result on public polls when it was first entering the public discourse.

Read more on public opinion on Vote16, and how it can shift, [from the Vote16 Research Network](#).



CURRENT ADVOCACY AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTERS

As advocacy efforts have advanced on the city, state, and national level in the U.S., support for 16 year old voting has also grown among institutions focused on voting, government, and social justice. Notable shows of support from leading organizations and institutions include:

League of Women Voters of Maine

The Maine group officially endorsed the policy of 16 year old voting after an incredibly thorough research study process that produced a 100+ page [report](#) that included analysis of research, history, interviews, and work to predict the future impact of lowering the voting age to 16.

Common Cause

The Common Cause Alliance for Emerging Power held a Vote16 Week of Action in April 2023 and hosted additional events around Vote16 in 2024, building on the work multiple state chapters have done to support local Vote16 efforts. Read more from the [Vote16 Research Network on the Week of Action](#).

Rock the Vote

Rock the Vote continues to stand strongly behind Vote16 efforts, [including](#) Rep. Meng's 2023 federal legislation.

NAACP Youth and College

NAACP Youth and College divisions throughout much of the country, particularly in New Jersey and Maryland, have leaned into championing Vote16.

Children's Defense Fund (CDF)

CDF spotlighted Vote16 at their 50th anniversary conference and has committed to supporting Vote16 as part of their larger commitment to supporting the civic life of young people.

New Jersey Institute for Social Justice (NJISJ)

NJISJ is the anchoring state partner for lowering the voting age to 16 across New Jersey, working closely in concert with Vote16NJ, the state's youth-led network

And many more!




CURRENT LANDSCAPE INTERNATIONALLY

Initiatives to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds have seen considerably more momentum internationally. At least 16 countries around the world use a voting age of 16 or 17 for local, state, or national elections—including Ecuador, Germany, Austria, Estonia, Scotland, and Argentina. A full list of these countries and their specific voting age policies is in Appendix A.

As mentioned earlier in this report, research on the countries that have implemented 16- and 17-year-old voting shows positive results. In Latin America, the region with the most countries that allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote, research focusing on Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina, and Nicaragua shows that people who were able to vote starting at age 16 exhibited greater satisfaction with democracy and trust in government.⁵⁵

Evidence from Europe also supports the notion that 16 is a better age than 18 to establish voting as a habit. In Austria, over the 10 years since a 16-year-old voting age was implemented on the national level, turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds has been higher than 18-20 year-olds, and similar to the electorate's overall average. Sixteen- and 17-year-olds have followed political campaigns to the same extent as other eligible young voters and have exhibited higher levels of satisfaction of democracy, which has a positive effect on turnout.⁵⁶

In Germany, where the voting age is 16 in some states and cities, turnout among 16-20 year olds is higher than citizens up to 10 years older.⁵⁷ Building on this success, the German Parliament approved a motion in November 2022 to lower the voting age to 16 for European Parliament elections beginning in 2024, but not for federal elections in Germany.⁵⁸ In Norway, where 30 municipalities have used a 16-year-old voting age for local elections on a trial basis, 16- and 17-year-old turnout was much higher than turnout among traditional first-time voters ages 18-21.⁵⁹



“Lowering the voting age to 16, in countries that have adopted this electoral reform, has **increased turnout** in these countries above what it would have been in the absence of the reform.”

– Mark N. Franklin, in *Lowering the Voting Age to 16: Lessons from Real Experiences Worldwide*, edited by Jan Eichhorn and Johannes Bergh

One of the most recent European countries to make the change, Estonia, also saw turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds exceed the overall voter participation rate. This is a remarkably positive result considering turnout among the youngest voters has tended to be significantly lower than the overall rate. Preliminary calculations by Generation Citizen indicate that globally, 7.9 percent of all 17-year-olds are eligible to vote, and 4.1 percent of all 16-year-olds can vote. Enfranchising 16- and 17-year olds is not a new idea, and momentum for lowering the voting age has continued to gain steam across the globe.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE INTERNATIONALLY

Debate has advanced significantly in the UK. Scotland and Wales now both use 16-year-old voting for their elections (Scotland made the change in 2015, Wales in 2019). The first Welsh election with 16- and 17-year-olds eligible to vote was held in 2021. Turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds was comparable to other younger age groups, but lower than among those ages 55 and above.⁶⁰ Early research points to opportunities for improvement in implementation ahead of future elections, including through stronger coordination with schools to ensure 16- and 17-year-olds receive information about their voting rights. The fact that the reform passed with broad consensus support across the political spectrum should hopefully make it easier for advocates to build strong partnerships for future work to ensure the reform lives up to its promise.

Scotland continues to provide notable inspiration. After first enfranchising 16 and 17 year olds for the independence referendum vote in 2014, the Scottish Parliament subsequently made the change for all local and national elections, with support from across the political spectrum, including from the Conservative party, which was originally opposed.⁶¹ (Sixteen and 17 year olds still cannot vote in UK-wide elections, however, since that decision is in the hands of the UK government rather than the Scottish government.)

IN RECENT YEARS, SEVERAL NATIONS HAVE JOINED THE GROWING LIST OF COUNTRIES ALLOWING 16- AND 17-YEAR-OLDS TO VOTE. SEE APPENDIX A FOR A FULL LIST OF COUNTRIES WITH A VOTING AGE LOWER THAN 18.



2008

Austria lowered its voting age to 16 for all elections.



2011

Norway allowed 16- and 17-year-olds in 21 municipalities to vote in local elections, as a trial.



2014

Scotland allowed 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in the Scottish independence referendum.



2015

Scotland lowered the voting age to 16 for all elections.



2019

Wales passed a law granting 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in Welsh Assembly elections beginning in 2021.



2022

Germany lowered the voting age to 16 for EU parliament elections.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE INTERNATIONALLY

New research on youth voting in Scotland, mentioned earlier in this report, lends empirical evidence to the notion that a voting age of 16 can result in more young people developing the habit of voting, resulting in higher turnout in years to come. The 2023 study by Jan Eichhorn and Christine Hübner found “significant follow-through effect in voter turnout among young people who experienced and were allowed to vote in their first election at ages 16 or 17.”⁶² Young voters who were first eligible to vote at age 16 or 17 were statistically significantly more likely to have voted in 2021 than their peers whose first election came at age 18. This is a hugely significant finding and should inform and inspire work in the United States and other countries.

The success of 16-year-old voting in Scotland and Wales fuels an ongoing push to lower the voting age across the UK. Several members of parliament have spoken out in favor of the change and the “Votes at 16” campaign has developed some amount of political force. The issue is now becoming more salient, but also more partisan, even as at least some members from all major parties have indicated support.⁶³

Youth advocates in New Zealand also continue to make significant progress in their advocacy for a lower voting age. The New Zealand campaign, a years-long, youth led effort called Make It 16, filed a court case in 2020 claiming that the voting age of 18 was unjustified age discrimination under the country’s laws. The case eventually made its way to the Supreme Court of New Zealand, which ruled that the voting age of 18 was indeed discriminatory. The court ruling, officially called a Declaration of Inconsistency, did not automatically change the voting age, but forced the parliament to consider the issue.⁶⁴

A bill to lower the voting age for local elections only is moving forward as of this writing, having passed its first reading in parliament and been referred to a committee.⁶⁵

In Canada, 77 Members of Parliament from four different political parties supported a recent House of Commons bill to lower the voting age to 16, an unprecedented level of multi-partisan support for the issue in Canada.⁶⁶

Momentum continues to build in Australia as well — read [this August 2023 update](#) published by a campaign leader via the Vote16 Research Network.



Current campaigns to lower the voting age around the world include youth-led efforts in the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (logos top to bottom)

NEXT STEPS TO ADVANCE THE CAUSE

The landscape around 16-year-old voting in the United States has changed dramatically since the launch of Vote16USA and the publication of the first edition of this white paper in 2015.

In recent years, several new municipalities have lowered their local voting ages, campaigns in some of the country's largest cities made tangible progress that sets the stage for future wins, and we continue to see progress on the state level across the country.

New national and state-based organizational partners have emerged as critical components of the Vote16 ecosystem, helping to build the collective efficacy and overall visibility of the movement. The Vote16 Research network, housed at the University of Maryland, has been a principal addition to this ecosystem, providing research expertise, strategic communications support, and an international perspective to domestic, youth-led efforts to extend enfranchisement to 16 and 17-year olds. Additionally, national organizations with deep regional and statewide reach, in particular Common Cause, NAACP Youth and College, and the Children's Defense Fund, have emerged as instrumental networks of support, capacity, and strategic thinking on how to build a democracy that welcomes and supporting youth voters recognition of their civic power, beginning with 16 year olds and the ballot box.

To build on this momentum, we aim to support youth advocates, adult allies, elected officials, and institutional supporters working to: (1) Implement and study the effects of 16 year old voting the large cities that have adopted it for school board elections, (2) Advance legislation in concrete ways in targeted states and municipalities, and (3) Demonstrate widespread support for the issue and bring it further into mainstream policy conversations on the national level. Below is an outlook for next steps to advance the cause in 2024 and beyond.

IMPLEMENT AND STUDY 16- AND 17-YEAR-OLD VOTING WHERE RECENTLY APPROVED

The cities of Oakland, CA and Newark, NJ are working to implement 16 year old voting for school board in 2024. These cities, with populations of 430,000 and 305,000, respectively, will be the largest US jurisdictions, by far, to run elections with 16- and 17-year-old voters. Supporting election administrators in implementing the change and then educating newly eligible voters about the process will be critical tasks. The implementation of a lower voting age in these cities also offers a monumental opportunity for research on the policy's effects. Read more on the potential for and importance of research alongside policy implementation [from the Vote16 Research Network](#).



Youth leaders in San Francisco campaigned for Prop G in 2020, a ballot measure that would have extended voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds for all local elections in the city.

NEXT STEPS TO ADVANCE THE CAUSE

ADVANCE LEGISLATION ON THE MUNICIPAL AND STATE LEVELS

Opportunities to advance legislation to lower the voting age in cities and states exist across the country. While the landscape is constantly evolving, some notable opportunities for advocacy include:

Maryland: In Maryland, opportunity exists to build on existing progress by supporting new cities in adopting 16-year-old voting on the local level. We aim to work closely with youth leaders, elected officials, and other partners in an array of cities to support further adoption of 16-year-old voting in the next two years. The Vote16 Research Network housed at the University of Maryland, launched in August 2021, is generating new research on the effects of 16- and 17-year-old voting in the five cities that have already implemented it.

California: Interest in lowering the voting age in California remains high among youth organizers, influential political and community organizations, and elected officials. The most notable work currently ongoing is the effort to implement 16- and 17-year-old voting for school board elections in Berkeley and Oakland in time for the next school board elections in 2024.

New Jersey: The state's largest city, Newark, has approved of 16-year-old voting for school board elections, and its second largest, Jersey City, has taken steps to do the same. Governor Phil Murphy proposed a lower voting age for all school board elections earlier in 2024. This momentum sets the stage for continued advocacy.

Washington, D.C.: After coming close to passing legislation to lower the voting age for all D.C. elections in 2018, D.C. continues to present an opportunity for game changing policy success, as it only takes a legislative victory to lower the voting age for all elections in the District. Advocates continue to plan for a future effort.

DEMONSTRATE WIDESPREAD SUPPORT FOR 16-YEAR-OLD VOTING

Cultivate Increased Media Coverage

Media coverage on Vote16USA and 16-year-old voting has increased dramatically over the past five years, and it is imperative to work intentionally to ensure it continues to grow in the years ahead. We will build relationships with reporters and conduct media outreach around key events to secure coverage in print and online publications, on television, and on the radio, elevating the voices of youth advocates who are the most powerful spokespeople for this cause.

Leverage support from federal level elected officials

Interest in and support for 16-year-old voting has grown markedly among members of Congress and other national political figures. We will work with allies in Congress to continue to build the profile of the issue through their reach, and will leverage their support to bring attention to the issue around key moments in national politics.

Build the corps of individual and organizational endorsers and validators

Just like local level campaigns to lower the voting age have been bolstered by endorsements from widely known and respected individuals and organizations in the area, we believe the national effort can benefit tremendously from endorsements from both individual and organizational validators. We will work to build a corps of supportive individuals who are nationally-recognized leaders in politics, civic engagement, and other areas, and will work with partners in the field to build a strong list of national organizations publicly supporting the work.

NEXT STEPS TO ADVANCE THE CAUSE

Amplify youth activism on the issue to bring new attention to the issue and achieve legislative goals

The bedrock of progress toward each of these objectives is effective youth organizing. We know from experience that the most effective advocates for a lower voting age are the 16- and 17-year-olds who are directly affected. Through the Youth Advisory Board (a group of students leading local Vote16 efforts who help guide Vote16USA's national work), support for youth leaders of local campaigns, and other activities, we will ensure that young people remain front and center in this work. The stronger youth organizing is on this issue, the more possible it becomes to win endorsements, secure media coverage, earn support from key decision makers, grow the movement, and win campaigns to lower the voting age.

CONCLUSION

“Our young people are at the forefront of some of the most existential crises facing our communities and our society at large. I believe that **those who will inherit the nation** we design here in Congress, by virtue of our policies and authority, **should have a say** in who represents them.”

– *Congresswoman
Ayanna Pressley*

More than 50 years after the 26th Amendment extended voting rights to those over the age of 18, the idea of 16- and 17-year-old voting continues to move into the mainstream public discourse on solutions to improve our democracy, while advancing generational and racial equity. The base of research on the topic has grown significantly in recent years, alongside significant growth in political support and legislative progress.

Extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds on the local level can increase turnout in the long run by making it easier for young people to establish the habit of voting, and 16- and 17-year-olds have indeed voted at higher rates than older first-time voters when given the chance, and have continued to turn out at future elections. Lowering the voting age can also catalyze improvements in civic education, and 16- and 17-year olds have shown they are ready to vote and have a stake in local issues.

Critically, lowering the voting age is an effort to help build an inclusive, age-diverse democracy by fostering active and engaged citizens at a time when policy reforms and educational initiatives are sorely needed to strengthen participation and faith in the democratic process.

It is still only ten years since the first American city implemented 16- and 17-year-old voting for municipal elections. The evidence that the policy works continues to build and support for the idea continues to grow among legislators and the public, and these trends are poised to only accelerate in the years to come.

Realizing the potential of the growing movement to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds requires supporting and amplifying the work young people are leading across the country. Following their lead, we will continue to move closer to a day when all 16- and 17-year-olds are eligible to vote, and our democracy is better for it.

APPENDIX A

COUNTRIES WITH A VOTING AGE LOWER THAN 18

COUNTRY	VOTING AGE
Argentina	16 for all elections. Lowered from 18 to 16 in 2012.
Austria	16 for all elections. Lowered from 18 to 16 in 2008. Some municipalities let 16-year-olds vote in local elections before the national change.
Bosnia	16 if employed, otherwise 18.
Brazil	16- and 17-year-olds and those over 70 have the option of voting, while those 18-69 are legally required to vote.
Croatia	16 if employed, otherwise 18.
Cuba	16 for all elections.
East Timor	17 for all elections.
Ecuador	16- and 17-year-olds and those over 65 have the option of voting, while those 18-65 are legally required to vote.
Estonia	16 for local elections; 18 for all other elections.
Germany	16 for several states and cities, 18 for national elections.
Guernsey (British Crown Dependency)	16 for all elections.
Hungary	16 if married, otherwise 18.
Indonesia	17 for all elections, and married persons regardless of age.
Isle of Man (British Crown Dependency)	16 for all elections.
Jersey (British Crown Dependency)	16 for all elections.
Malta	16 for Local Council elections, 18 for all other elections.
Nicaragua	16 for all elections.
Norway	Performed a pilot program with 16-year-old voting age for local elections in 20 municipalities in 2011 and 2015.
Scotland	16 for all elections. The voting age was lowered to 16 for all Scottish elections in June 2015, following the success of a 16-year-old voting age in the 2014 independence referendum.
Serbia	16 if employed, otherwise 18.
Sudan	17 for all elections.
Wales	16 for all elections. The voting age was lowered to 16 in 2020, following the success of the policy in Scotland.

APPENDIX B

LEGAL FEASIBILITY OF CITY CAMPAIGNS TO LOWER THE VOTING AGE IN LOCAL ELECTIONS

This study aims to determine the legal feasibility of municipal-level campaigns to lower the voting age for local elections in each state. Cities can take action to lower their local voting age in some states, while the law clearly prohibits this in other states. Some states remain unclear – advice from local legislative counsel is needed to better understand the situation in these states.

GLOSSARY





Case Law: Case law is legal precedent that is established by judicial decisions in court cases. It often clarifies or interprets statutory or constitutional laws.

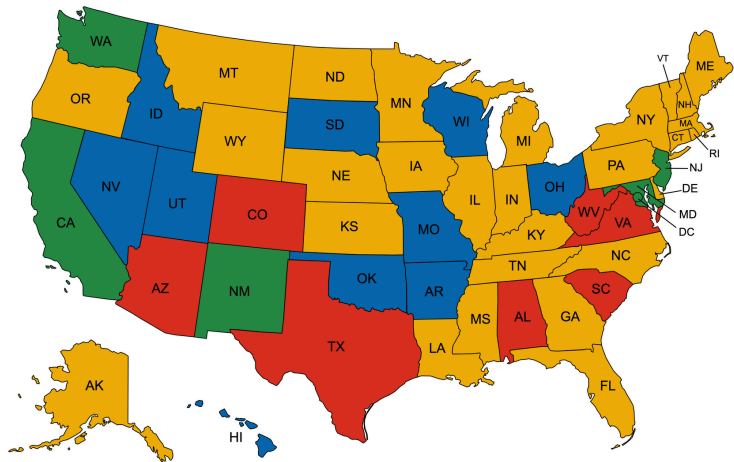
Home Rule: Home rule refers to the degree of authority that local units of government (i.e. municipalities, cities, counties, etc.) have to exercise powers of governance within their boundaries. Each state determines how much home rule power, if any, its municipalities have. In some states, municipalities have a wide degree of authority to pass laws and govern themselves as they see fit, as long as they obey the federal and state Constitution. In others states, municipalities have virtually no home rule authority. In order for a municipality to lower its voting age, it must have the appropriate home rule power to do so.

Constitution: Just like the U.S. Constitution is the “supreme law of the land” for the whole country, each state has its own Constitution that serves as a blueprint for the political and legal organization of the state. No state or local laws can conflict with the state Constitution.

Statute: Statutes are laws. Federal statutes apply to the whole country, while state statutes apply to one state. A compilation of all of a state’s laws is sometimes referred to as the state statutory code, or just the state code. Phrases like “election code” refer to a group of laws related to one topic, in this case elections.

MAP OF LEGAL FEASIBILITY OF CITY CAMPAIGNS TO LOWER THE VOTING AGE IN LOCAL ELECTIONS

-  Need to change state law (city-specific enabling legislation may be a possibility)
-  Cities may be able to lower voting age through charter amendment, but the law is less clear or potential barriers exist. See state descriptions.
-  Need state constitutional amendment
-  Cities can lower voting age, usually through charter amendments



APPENDIX B

METHOD FOR DETERMINING LEGAL FEASIBILITY OF LOWERING THE VOTING AGE

Determining the legal feasibility of lowering the voting age in any given city starts with a two step process—first examining the state’s voting age provisions, and then its home rule laws. Although we are interested in individual cities, the initial analysis takes place on the state level.

Step 1: Analysis of Voting Age Provisions

First, we must look at both the state Constitution and the state election statutes for provisions regarding the voting age. The key is to determine, in both the Constitution and the statute, whether the voting age requirement is phrased as a grant or a restriction. The Ohio Constitution, for example, says “Every citizen of the United States, of the age of eighteen years [...] is entitled to vote at all elections.” This phrase can be interpreted two ways: either (1) the right to vote is given exclusively to citizens over the age of 18, or (2) while those over 18 cannot be denied the right to vote, voting rights could be granted on a discretionary basis to those under 18.

To determine which of these interpretations is correct, further analysis is needed of case law in each state, although it is likely that many states do not have any case law on this subject. In the context of the 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which is also worded as a grant, at least one federal court has suggested that the more inclusive interpretation is correct, noting that the amendment “provides that the right to vote cannot be denied on the basis of age to persons age eighteen or over, but it does not prohibit the states from setting a lower voting age.”²⁷ However, this decision is not binding precedent over state courts.

The Ohio provision quoted above is an example of what we call a grant. The Arizona Constitution, on the other hand, gives an example of what we refer to as a restriction: “No person shall be entitled to vote at any general election [...] unless such person be a citizen of the United States of the age of eighteen years or over.”

This clearly prohibits those under 18 from voting. If a state Constitution phrases the voting age as a restriction, the first step to lowering the voting age in cities in that state must be a state constitutional amendment to rephrase that provision.

If a state statute phrases the voting age as a restriction, the state legislature must pass a new law to change the statute and make it more permissible of under-18 voting. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be a possible solution in this situation. Determining the legal feasibility of lowering the voting age in any given city starts with a two step process—first examining the state’s voting age provisions, and then its home rule laws. Although we are interested in individual cities, the initial analysis takes place on the state level.

If both the state Constitution and state election statute phrase the voting age requirement as a grant, we can move on to an analysis of home rule. It is important to note, however, that the true meaning of the phrases we call grants is open for interpretation by individual state courts. If a municipality takes action to lower its voting age, this action could be challenged in court, and the state court may interpret the voting age provision as meaning that the right to vote is reserved exclusively to those over 18.

Step 2: Home Rule Analysis

The second key to determining the legal feasibility of lowering the voting age in cities in any given state is establishing the degree of home rule, if any, municipalities are granted in that state.

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Home rule allows municipal flexibility in local affairs so far as is consistent with applicable state law, and it comes from the state Constitution, state statutes, or both. In some cases, a state will list exactly which subjects municipal governments can and cannot exercise control over. Other states with home rule are more vague in their descriptions of what powers local governments can exercise, leaving the issue open for interpretation. Lastly, there are instances in which municipalities can take action in a matter of local governance, but the action must be approved by the state legislature. This was the case in Massachusetts when Lowell and Cambridge tried to lower their local voting ages.

It is necessary to consult with local experts to more conclusively determine the legal feasibility of a municipality lowering its voting age in some situations. Municipal actions in some areas where it seems legal may still be subject to court challenge over the interpretation of home rule statutes.

Step 3: Deeper Analysis

For states that appear feasible, the next step is to take a deeper look at state laws related to elections that would impact a cities' ability to implement 16-year-old voting, such as voter registration laws. This research is specific to each state.

FEASIBLE STATES

In these states, our research indicates that cities can take action to lower the voting age for their local elections, usually through city charter amendments. A charter amendment must be proposed by one city council member, passed by the council, and then approved by a majority of voters as a ballot issue. Citizens can also bring a petition to propose a charter amendment in many cities, but this is less practical in most jurisdictions.

CALIFORNIA

Charter cities can change their local voting ages through charter amendments.

The California Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. California gives its charter cities (nearly every major city is a charter city) broad home rule authority. Elections are not specifically addressed, but municipalities "may make and enforce all ordinances and regulations in respect to municipal affairs" (Calif. Const. art. XI, § 5a) and case law supports the determination that elections are considered municipal affairs. This indicates that California charter cities may lower their local voting ages through city charter amendments, as San Francisco is pursuing now.

MARYLAND

Cities can lower the voting age for local elections by city council vote, except for Baltimore.

The Maryland Constitution grants the right to vote to those over 18, and does not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. Further, the Maryland election code states that: "Except for the City of Baltimore, the provisions of this section do not apply to a municipal corporation in the State in which the municipal or charter elections are regulated by the public local laws of the State or the charter of the municipal corporation" (Md. Code § 2-202). This gives cities the ability to regulate their local elections, and is what allowed Takoma Park and Hyattsville to lower the voting age with just a city council vote.

NEW JERSEY

Cities operating under optional plan municipal governments appear to have the ability to change their local voting ages through charter amendments.

The Constitution grants the right to vote to those over 18 and does not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from

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voting (NJ Const. art. 2, § 1.3) and the election code refers back to the Constitution (N.J. Rev. Stat. § 19:4-1). Regarding home rule, Title 40, section 40:69A-29 lists specific powers granted to optional plan municipal governments, and this list does not include the power to regulate elections. But, Title 40, section 40:69A-30 states that this list is not exhaustive, and the powers of municipalities should be construed liberally. This provision is written in a generous way and appears to let cities do anything that is not in conflict with other state law. So, it appears that New Jersey cities operating under optional plan municipal governments can lower the voting age.

NEW MEXICO

Charter cities may be able to change their local voting ages through charter amendments.

The New Mexico Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state Constitution allows cities to adopt home rule charters, and gives charter cities very broad authority (NM Const. art. 10, § 6). Further, the election code contains a section regulating municipal elections, but states that “The provisions of the Municipal Election Code shall not apply to home rule municipalities [...] unless the Municipal Election Code is adopted by reference by such municipality” (NMSA § 3-8-1). This indicates that the nine home rule charter cities in New Mexico may be able to lower the voting age in their local elections, through charter amendments.

WASHINGTON

State law appears to grant cities the right to lower the voting age on the local level.

Washington’s home rule provisions permit municipal autonomy, and the state laws do not seem to prohibit cities from using this authority to choose to use a lower voting age for local elections.

WASHINGTON D.C.

Washington, D.C.’s city council can pass a bill to lower the voting age in the city, but the U.S. Congress can overturn it.

Washington, D.C. is unique in this discussion. The city council can pass a bill to lower the voting age, but, like any other D.C. law, the U.S. Congress could pass a bill to overturn it.

CITIES THAT MAY BE ABLE TO LOWER THE VOTING AGE FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS, BUT THE LAW IS LESS CLEAR OR POTENTIAL BARRIERS EXIST

In these states, the constitutional and statutory provisions on the voting age are phrased as grants, and cities appear to have the necessary home rule power, but the legal situation is ambiguous enough to warrant scrutiny, or other potential barriers have been identified. These states range from those where it is somewhat likely that a city’s action to lower the voting age would hold up to scrutiny, to those where it is possible but doubtful.

ARKANSAS

Counties may be able to lower the voting age for their local elections.

Arkansas’ Constitution and statutes do not deny a city or county the ability to lower the voting age for its local elections. First class cities can exercise power related to “municipal affairs” as long as it does not conflict with state law (14-43-601). Act 1187 of 2011 repealed Dillon’s Rule. This gave municipalities the authority to “perform any function and exercise full legislative power in any and all matters of whatsoever nature pertaining to its municipal affairs.” However, Arkansas does not allow for 16-year-old voter pre-registration, and the state constitution’s voter registration provisions require citizens to be 18 by the time of the next election to register. This would complicate voter registration for 16-year-olds to vote in local elections.

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HAWAII

Counties can likely lower the voting age for their local elections through charter amendments, although more research is needed to verify.

Hawaii's Constitution grants the right to vote to those 18 and up and does not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state statutes do not contain a provision on the voting age. Local government in Hawaii is mostly administered on the county level, and counties have broad power to self-govern via charters, as long as charter provisions do not conflict with general laws of the state. It does not appear that there are any state laws that would prohibit a county in Hawaii from lowering the voting age for its local elections, but this needs to be confirmed with more research on related statutes, including voter registration laws.

IDAHO

The election code appears to disqualify those under 18 from voting, but it is not entirely clear. City-specific enabling legislation may be an option.

The Idaho Constitution grants the right to vote to those over 18 and does not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting (Idaho Const. art. 6, § 2). The Idaho election code, however, contains a provision titled "Disqualified Electors Not Permitted to Vote" (Idaho Code. Ann. § 34-403) This provision states that "no elector shall be permitted to vote if he is disqualified as provided in article 6, sections 2 and 3 of the state constitution." Article 2 says, among other things, that all citizens over the age of 18 are qualified to vote. Taken together, this could very well be interpreted as meaning that one who is not qualified to vote under article 2 is disqualified. In this case, the Disqualified Electors statute would need to be changed. Regarding home rule, the Constitution states that "Any county or incorporated city or town may make and enforce, within its limits, all such local police, sanitary and other regulations as are not in conflict with its charter or with the general laws" (Idaho Const. art. 12, § 2). This could likely be interpreted to give cities the ability to change the local voting age. City-specific enabling legislation could be an alternative to changing the Disqualified Electors statute. Further research is also needed on provisions related to implementation, including voter registration statutes.

MISSOURI

The city of Kansas City may be able to lower the voting age for its local elections through either a charter amendment or a local ordinance.

The Missouri Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state has a specific statute that gives any city with a population over 400,000 the right to regulate its own elections (§ 122.650.1).

The only such city in Missouri is Kansas City. Other charter cities "shall have all powers which the general assembly of the state of Missouri has authority to confer upon any city, provided such powers are consistent with the constitution of this state" (Art. 6 § 19a), but it is unclear whether this provision grants authority over local elections. The existence of the statute specific to cities over 400,000 suggests it does not. Kansas City's charter includes a provision stating that state election laws shall apply to all city elections, "except as provision is otherwise made by this Charter or ordinance" (§ 601). So, it appears that Kansas City can lower its voting age for local elections. However, City Council staff for Kansas City shared commented to Vote16USA staff that they are not confident in the city's authority to make this change. Further research is also needed on provisions related to implementation, including voter registration statutes.

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NEVADA

More research is needed on home rule law.

The Nevada Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. Nevada does not provide home rule through its Constitution, but it does give incorporated cities (the classification of city with the most autonomy in Nevada) certain powers listed under NRS 268.008. Authority over local elections is not listed. But, the state law about city elections says that “conduct of any city election is under the control of the governing body of the city, and it shall, by ordinance, provide for the holding of the election, appoint the necessary election officers and election boards and do all other things required to carry the election into effect” (NRS 293C.110). This may mean that cities can lower the voting age for their local elections through charter amendments or ordinances, but the law is particularly open to interpretation. Further research is also needed on related provisions like registration statutes.

OHIO

Charter cities can change their local voting ages through charter amendments but may be especially subject to court challenge.

The Ohio Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state Constitution provides that “municipalities shall have authority to exercise all powers of local self-government” (Art. 18 Sec. 3). The scope of “local self-government” is not defined and has needed to be determined by the courts. Generally, if an issue is a matter of “general and statewide concern,” it is outside the scope of home rule. There is no way to tell whether the voting age in local elections would be considered “general and statewide concern” or a “power of local self-government.” It appears that a city in Ohio could attempt to change its voting age through a charter amendment, declaring that doing so is a “power of local self-government,” and would then have to defend the action if it is challenged in court. More research is needed on related statutes, like voter registration laws.

OKLAHOMA

Charter cities can change their local voting ages through charter amendments, which need to be approved by voters and the Governor.

Oklahoma’s Constitution phrases the voting age provision as a grant, and the statute refers back to the Constitution. Regarding home rule, cities with populations greater than 2,000 are allowed to adopt home rule charters and amend them so long as they do not conflict with the state Constitution or statutes. Charter amendments must be approved by the city council, then approved by voters, then submitted to the governor for approval (Constitution Section 18-3(a)). The governor shall grant approval if the amendment “shall not be in conflict with the Constitution and laws of this State.” However, it is unclear how the governor decides to approve charter amendments in reality, and more local research is needed to determine the specifics of this part of the process.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Cities and counties can lower the voting age for their local elections through charter amendments.

The South Dakota state Constitution and election code both grant the right to vote to those 18 and older, and do not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting (Const. Art. 7 § 2 and SDCL 12-3-1). Any county or city in South Dakota can adopt a charter, and “A chartered governmental unit may exercise any legislative power or perform any function not denied by its charter, the Constitution or the general laws of the state” (Const. Art. 9 § 2). A state statute lists the restrictions on the power of home rule units, and this list does not include elections. Therefore, it seems that home rule units (cities or counties) in South Dakota can lower the voting age for their local elections through charter amendments. Charter amendments must be approved by voters. Further research is also needed on provisions related to implementation, including voter registration statutes.

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UTAH

Cities may be able to lower the voting age for local elections, but the issue is especially open to interpretation.

The Utah Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The Constitution also gives cities the ability to adopt charters for their local government. Cities with charters have “the authority to exercise all powers relating to municipal affairs, and to adopt and enforce within its limits, local police, sanitary and similar regulations not in conflict with the general law, and no enumeration of powers in this constitution or any law shall be deemed to limit or restrict the general grant of authority hereby conferred” (Const. Art. 11 § 5). This indicates cities might be able to use their home rule power to lower the voting age. However, local elections are included in the statutory definition of “election” in the state election code (20A-1-102), which could prevent cities from acting on the issue. Further interpretation and case law research are needed, as well as research on related statutes, like the voter registration laws.

WISCONSIN

It appears that cities can lower the voting age through charter amendments, but the election code and home rule and provisions are especially open to interpretation, complicated by case law.

The Constitution (Art. 3 § 1) and statute (§ 6.02) both phrase the voting age requirement as a grant. The Constitution (Art. 11 § 3) gives cities power to “determine their local affairs and government, subject only to this Constitution and to such enactments of the legislature of statewide concern as with uniformity shall affect every city or every village.” It is likely that state election statutes are of “statewide concern,” especially since (§ 5.02) defines “election” as “every public primary and election.” If this is true, cities may still be able to lower the voting age, since doing so may not directly conflict with the state law. On the other hand, cities may be prohibited from doing anything in an area of statewide concern where there already are statewide laws. Case law does not give very clear direction but leans toward a more limited interpretation of home rule. Research is also needed on state status related to implementation, such as voter registration laws.

NEED STATE LEGISLATION TO GIVE CITIES THE POWER TO LOWER THE VOTING AGE FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS

In these states, some aspect of state law prevents a city from taking action to lower its voting age. Legislation is needed on the state level. Such a bill could take a variety of forms depending on the specifics of state law.

ALASKA

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Alaska’s Constitution presents the voting age requirement for voting as a grant (Art. 5 § 1), but the statute that provides voter requirements for state elections is less clear (15.05.010).

A strict reading of the statute may interpret it as a grant, but the way the statute is structured makes it seem like a restriction. Further, there is a specific statute about voter qualifications for municipal elections (29.26.050). It does not mention age but refers back to the state election statute, and uses more restrictive language, lending credence to the more restrictive interpretation of the state election statute. Alaska’s Constitution provides broad power to home rule cities, but a statute prohibiting home rule cities from acting to supersede specific statutes includes the municipal voter qualification statute mentioned above (29.10.200). So, for a home rule city in Alaska to lower its voting age, the statute concerning restriction of home rule powers must be changed, and the general voter qualification statute may need to be changed as well. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

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CONNECTICUT

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

The Connecticut Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. Additionally, Connecticut does grant home rule to its municipalities. However, the law specifically prohibits municipalities from taking action that affects “matters concerning qualification and admission of electors” (Title 7, Chapter 99, Section 7-192a). It may be possible for one or more specific cities to seek enabling legislation, but this is unclear because Connecticut’s Constitution contains a provision that limits the general assembly’s ability to enact special legislation specific to a single city (Article 10 Section 1). Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

DELAWARE

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Delaware’s Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, and the statute does contradict it, so the question turns to home rule. Delaware does give its cities a degree home rule powers, but cities are specifically prohibited from amending a municipal charter to “change the qualifications of those entitled to vote at municipal elections” (§ 835). Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

FLORIDA

Voter qualification statute and home rule statute prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

The Florida Constitution does not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting, but the state’s election code reads “A person may become a registered voter only if that person is at least 18 years of age” (Chapter 97) (emphasis added). Florida municipalities have home rule, but cannot take action that is preempted by or in conflict with state law. The way the election code is written, it would almost certainly either preempt or conflict with a municipality’s action to lower the voting age. Thus, it appears that the law would have to be changed to allow those over 18 to vote, while not specifically denying that right to those under 18. This may still leave enough ambiguity for a legal challenge—a more certain strategy would be to also change the home rule law to specifically state that municipalities have authority over their local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

GEORGIA

Voter qualification statute and home rule statute prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

Georgia’s Constitution grants the right to vote to those over 18 and does not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting. The Georgia code contains a statute listing voter qualifications that clearly restricts those under 18 from voting (§ 21-2-216). Further, while Georgia gives its municipalities some home rule powers, the home rule law lists specific powers that are reserved for the state, including “action affecting ... the procedure for election or appointment of the members [of the municipal governing authority]” (§36-35-6).

For municipalities in Georgia to lower their local voting ages, the state legislature would need to pass bills changing both the voter qualification law and the home rule law. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

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ILLINOIS

Charter cities have home rule authority to lower the voting age, but state law about voter registration would prevent implementation.

The Illinois Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state Constitution states that home rule units (counties and municipalities with populations over 25,000) “may exercise any power and perform any function pertaining to [their] government and affairs” except as expressly limited, and that home rule powers “shall be construed liberally” (art. 7 § 6). Neither the constitution nor state statutes explicitly preempt municipalities from lowering their voting ages, so it seems that municipal units in Illinois can lower the voting age for their local elections, through charter amendments. However, the state Constitution requires that “laws governing voter registration and conduct of elections shall be general and uniform” (Const. art. 3, § 4). Voter registration forms are required to include a space where the prospective voter affirms that “I will be at least 18 years old on or before the next election” (Ill. Comp. Stat. Ann. § 5/1A-16). A home rule unit could not use a different registration form without an amendment to state registration law. State legislation could amend the registration provision to affirm that home rule units that exercise their home rule authority to enact 16-year-old voting may also implement corresponding registration procedures.

INDIANA

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

The Indiana Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state has home rule, but it is extremely limited and specifically prohibits municipalities from conducting elections, or from regulating “conduct that is regulated by a state agency,” which would include elections (IC 38-1-3-9-7). Thus, advocacy efforts in Indiana would have to begin with changing the home rule law to allow municipalities to exercise control over local elections. Given the limited nature of the current law, this seems particularly unlikely. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

IOWA

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Iowa’s Constitution phrases the voting age provision as a grant, but the election code phrases it as a restriction (§ 48A.5). The state Constitution has an amendment granting municipal corporations “home rule power and authority, not inconsistent with the laws of the General Assembly, to determine their local affairs and government” (Section 38A). However, the election code provides that “county commissioner of elections shall ... conduct the election pursuant to the provisions of [the state election code]” (376.1). It appears that, if the voting age statute was changed to make it a grant rather than a restriction, a city could take action to lower its voting age. While the county commissioner would still conduct elections pursuant to the state laws, a lower voting age would no longer be contrary to those laws. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

KANSAS

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

The Kansas Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, but the election code presents it as a clear restriction. Fortunately, Kansas does have relatively broad home rule powers.

If the law regarding the voting age were changed to phrase the requirement as a grant, like the state Constitution does, it appears that cities would be able to use their home rule power to lower the voting age for local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

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KENTUCKY

Open to interpretation, but home rule law likely prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Kentucky's Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant. The voter qualification statute refers back to the Constitution, but in a way that may possibly be construed to restrict voting to only those above 18 (KRS § 116.025). Kentucky grants home rule via statute 82.082(1), which says, "A city may exercise any power and perform any function within its boundaries [...] that is in furtherance of a public purpose of the city and not in conflict with a constitutional provision or statute." Additionally, cities do not have power where there is a "comprehensive scheme of legislation on the same general subject" (82.082(2)). Although the state election code does not specifically address municipal elections, it is certainly arguable that it is a "comprehensive scheme of legislation on the same general subject" as municipal elections. In sum, it would be possible for a city in Kentucky to take action to lower its voting age, declaring that doing so is "in furtherance of a public purpose of the city" and that the state election code does not represent a "comprehensive scheme of legislation on the same general subject" as municipal elections. But, these declarations are subject to court challenges, and it is possible a court would reject the city's claims, preventing it from lowering its voting age. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

LOUISIANA

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Louisiana's Constitution phrases the age requirement for voting as a grant, but a statute in the state's election code specifically states that "no one, under the age of eighteen years shall be permitted to vote in any election" (Title 18 § 101). If that statute were changed, local governments (parishes and municipalities) with home rule charters may be able to lower the voting age in their local elections through charter amendments, because they can exercise any power that is "necessary, requisite, or proper for the management of its affairs, not denied by general law or inconsistent with this constitution" (Const. Art. 6 § 5e). However, whether changing the local voting age falls under this description is subject to interpretation. In sum, advocacy in Louisiana must start with changing the statute that prohibits those under 18 from voting, and then it may be possible for local governments to take action. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

MAINE

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Maine's state Constitution phrases the voting age as a grant, but the state election code presents it as a restriction. Further, while Maine's Constitution provides for municipal home rule, the state election code specifically states that "The qualifications for voting in a municipal election conducted under this Title are governed solely by [the state election code's voter qualification statute, which is phrased as a restriction]" (Title 30-A § 2501). Therefore, in order for municipalities to lower their voting ages in Maine, the state election code must be changed to phrase the voter qualification provision as a grant. To eliminate ambiguity, the statute previously mentioned (§ 2501) could also be eliminated or changed to specifically state that the qualifications for voting in municipal elections are not governed by state laws. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

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MASSACHUSETTS

Cities need the state legislature's approval for home rule petitions.

The Massachusetts Constitution and election code phrase the voting age requirement as a grant. Cities in Massachusetts have the ability to adopt home rule charters, but to amend a charter to lower the voting age, cities must send home rule petitions, also referred to as special act charters, to the state legislature (Chapter 43B). First, the city council must form a study committee, which recommends the home rule petition to the council. Then, if the city council votes in favor of the petition, it goes to the state legislature and is treated as a piece of legislation. If it passes the House and Senate and is signed by the Governor, the petition is returned to the city for implementation. Cities can write their petitions to make the proposal subject to approval by voters after being passed by the state legislature, but don't necessarily have to. See this paper's discussion of Lowell's effort to lower the voting age for more details on the process in Massachusetts.

MICHIGAN

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age. Home rule law is open to interpretation, but may also prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

The Michigan Constitution phrases the voting age as a grant, but the election code says that to vote a person must be "not less than 18 years of age," which is a restriction (Ch. 168 Sec. 492). Cities have a degree of home rule, but "No provision of any city or village charter shall conflict with or contravene the provisions of any general law of the state" (MCL 117.36; 78.27), and charter amendments must be submitted to the governor for approval. First, the voting age statute must be changed to phrase the age as a grant rather than a restriction. Even if this happens, it would be unclear whether a city could take action to lower its voting age, or if that would still conflict with or contravene the state law. To avoid this uncertainty, the home rule law would need to be changed to specifically give cities authority over elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

MINNESOTA

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age. More research is needed on home rule.

The Minnesota state Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, but the state's election code phrases it as a restriction (Ch. 201.014). There is a state statute (Ch. 205.02) regarding the applicability of state election law to municipal elections, but further analysis is needed to understand how this affects cities' ability to lower the voting age. Regardless, statewide or city-specific enabling legislation could be a viable option.

MISSISSIPPI

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

The Mississippi Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. However, the Mississippi home rule law specifically prohibits cities from changing "the requirements, practices or procedures for municipal elections," unless specifically authorized by another statute (Miss. Code Ann. § 21-17-5). Thus, the home rule law would have to be changed to allow municipalities to exercise home rule authority over local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

MONTANA

Voter qualification statute and home rule statute prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

Montana's state Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, but the state statute phrases it as a clear restriction (13-1-111). Further, while cities in Montana can adopt charters, they are still subject to state laws concerning elections, and charters "shall not contain provisions establishing election, initiative, and referendum procedures" (§ 7-3-708). So, for a municipality in Montana to have the ability to lower its local voting age, both the state law on voter qualifications and the home rule law would need to be changed. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

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NEBRASKA

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Nebraska's Constitution presents the age requirement for voting as a grant, but the election code defines an elector as a citizen "who is at least eighteen years of age." Cities with populations greater than 5,000 are allowed to adopt charters. City councils can propose charter amendments, which must be approved by referendum (Const. Art. 11-4), but charters are still subject to the Constitution and state laws. Therefore, the statute defining an "elector" must be changed before cities can take action to lower their voting ages through charter amendments. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

New Hampshire's Constitution phrases the voting age provision as a grant, and the statute simply refers to the Constitution (Const. Art. 11 and § 654:1). However, while New Hampshire's towns and cities have the ability to adopt charters, charters do not give towns or cities any additional powers other than to determine the organization of their local government (§ 49-C:15). Further, New Hampshire law provides for the qualifications of voters in municipal elections (49-C:5). Additionally, in 2000, voters did not approve a proposed constitutional amendment that would have given cities and towns broad home rule powers. For a New Hampshire municipality to lower its voting age for local elections, the legislature would have to pass a bill specifically giving municipalities the authority to regulate local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

NEW YORK

Voter qualification statute and home rule statute prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

The New York Constitution phrases the voting age as a grant, but the state election code phrases it as a

restriction. Additionally, while New York provides home rule, it is limited, and municipalities do not have control over voter registration requirements. Therefore, advocacy efforts in New York must aim to change both the state law on the election age and the state law on home rule. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option. This would be similar to the city-specific law that allowed New York City to extend voting rights to non-citizens for school board elections from 1969-2002, when the mayor took control of the schools.

NORTH CAROLINA

Voter qualification statute and home rule statute prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

North Carolina's state Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, but the state statute phrases it as a clear restriction (§163-55). North Carolina does not provide for home rule in its Constitution, and home rule authority has been given in a limited way through subject-specific statutes. No such statute exists concerning municipal elections, and the state election code contains sections governing municipal elections (Chapter 163 Article 24). To lower the voting age in cities in North Carolina, advocates would have to pass a bill changing the voting age statute and specifically granting municipalities the authority to regulate local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

NORTH DAKOTA

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

North Dakota's Constitution and election statutes grant the right to vote to those over 18 and do not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting. But, state statutes list the powers that are given to home rule cities and counties, and both cities and counties have the power to "provide for all matters pertaining to [city or county] elections, except as to qualifications of electors" (40-05.1-06 and 11-09.1-05). So, for a city or county to lower the voting age in its local elections, these statutes would need to be changed. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

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OREGON

Statute on state election law's applicability to local elections prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Oregon's constitutional provision on the voting age is a bit ambiguous, but it can likely be interpreted as a grant (Art. 2 § 2). The state election code does not contain a voter qualification provision. Cities in Oregon have some degree of home rule, but the state election code states that "any primary election, general election or special election held in this state shall be conducted under the provisions of this chapter, unless specifically provided otherwise in the statute laws of this state" (§ 254.016). It seems that this provision prevents cities from enacting their own regulations related to elections, like lowering the voting age. In order to give cities in Oregon the power to lower their voting ages, either this statute or the home APPENDIX B Young Voices at the Ballot Box: Amplifying Youth Activism to Lower the Voting Age 32 rule laws would need to be amended. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

PENNSYLVANIA

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

The Pennsylvania Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. Pennsylvania gives its municipalities a degree of home rule, but the state law specifically prohibits municipalities from exercising home rule authority over "the registration of electors and the conduct of elections." Advocacy efforts in Pennsylvania would need to begin with changing that state law to give municipalities more control over their local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

RHODE ISLAND

State legislation is needed to give cities the authority to lower the voting age locally.

The Rhode Island Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly

prohibit those under 18 from voting (Const. Art. 2 § 1 and §17-1-3). The state Constitution also says that any city can amend its charter and "enact and amend local laws relating to its property, affairs and government not inconsistent with this constitution and laws enacted by the general assembly" (Article 13, Section 2). On the surface, it appears this this should be interpreted to mean that cities do have the power to lower the voting age, since the provisions about the voting age are presented as grants. However, conversations with elected officials and elections administrators in Rhode Island reveal that in reality the laws are interpreted to mean that the state controls all matters related to elections, despite cities' apparent home rule powers. So, legislation on the state level would need to more explicitly give cities this power.

TENNESSEE

State legislation is needed to give cities the power to lower the local voting age under home rule authority.

Tennessee's Constitution presents the voting age requirement as a grant, and the state's statutes don't address the voting age. Home rule is unclear. Art. 11 Sec. 9 of the Constitution gives any municipality the ability to become a home rule municipality, but it doesn't elaborate on powers granted. Title 6, Chapter 53 regulates municipal elections, but does not say whether home rule municipalities can form their own regulations regarding elections. While not explicitly clear, this is likely enough to determine that cities in Tennessee do not currently have the authority to lower the voting age for local elections. It is likely that state legislation would be needed to affirm a city's ability to lower the local voting age under its home rule authority.

VERMONT

Cities need the state legislature's approval for charter amendments.

The Vermont Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. Municipalities in Vermont do have the ability to amend their charters, but all charter amendments must be approved by the city's

APPENDIX B

voters as well as the state’s General Assembly (§ 2645). It is possible for a city to amend its charter through this process to lower the voting age, because the state’s election code says that charter provisions shall apply over state law when they provide for election procedures different than those outlined in the state laws (§ 2631).

WYOMING

Statute on state election law’s applicability to local elections prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Wyoming’s Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, but the state election code’s provisions on qualifications to register to vote is unclear (22-3-102). Regardless, the state election code does state that “a municipal election shall be governed by laws regulating statewide elections” (22-23-101). So, for a city in Wyoming to lower its voting age, that provision would have to be changed to give cities control over the regulation of their elections, and the registration qualification statute may need to be changed as well. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

NEED STATE LEGISLATION TO GIVE CITIES THE POWER TO LOWER THE VOTING AGE FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS

In these states, an aspect of the state Constitution prevents cities from taking action to lower the voting age on the local level. Advocacy in these states would have to focus on a state constitutional amendment, which would be rather unlikely. In most states, constitutional amendments must be approved by two thirds of each House and by the state’s voters.

ALABAMA

State Constitution does not provide for any degree of home rule.

Alabama’s Constitution phrases the voting age provision as a grant, and the statute simply refers to the Constitution. However Alabama does not give its municipalities any degree of home rule. The state legislature can pass “local acts” that apply to one municipality. Home rule would have to be provided through an amendment to the Constitution, which is unlikely. Individual cities could advocate for “local acts” allowing them to lower the voting ages, but these acts still have to be passed as constitutional amendments.

ARIZONA

State Constitution specifically prohibits voting by those under 18.

The Arizona Constitution and election code both clearly restrict voting to only those over 18 years of age. Advocacy efforts in Arizona would have to start with an amendment to the state constitution, which is rather unlikely. A majority of each House must approve the amendment, and then it must be approved by the state’s voters.

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COLORADO

Due to a 2020 referendum, the State Constitution now specifically restricts voting to only those 18 and older.

In 2020, a political group gathered signatures to place a proposed state constitutional amendment on the ballot, to change the wording of the state’s voter qualification clause to specify that only U.S. citizens ages 18 and older can vote in Colorado elections. This was part of a coordinated political effort by an organization that ran similar efforts in several states. Unfortunately, the amendment (Amendment 76) passed, meaning it would now take another state constitutional change to give cities the ability to lower the voting age for local elections. This amendment also had the effect of nullifying the state’s existing policy of allowing 17-year-olds who will turn 18 by the general election to vote in primary elections—a policy in place in 19 states and which had seen great success in Colorado, with 17-year-olds turning out at high rates. Despite the setback, youth organizers in Colorado continue to push for great youth representation in politics and to boost civic engagement among young people.

SOUTH CAROLINA

State Constitution prohibits municipalities from enacting provisions related to elections.

South Carolina’s Constitution and election statutes grant the right to vote to those over 18 and do not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting (Const. Art. 2 § 4 and S.C. Code Ann. § 7-5-610). But, while the Constitution allows municipalities to adopt home rule charters, it specifically prohibits them from enacting provisions related to “election and suffrage qualifications” (Art. 8 § 14). City-specific enabling legislation may be a possibility, but this is unlikely due to the constitutional provision. Constitutional amendments must be approved by two-thirds of each House, and then approved by the state’s voters.

TEXAS

State Constitution specifically prohibits voting by those under 18.

The Texas Constitution and election code both clearly restrict voting to only those over 18 years of age. Advocacy efforts in Texas would have to start with an amendment to the state constitution, which is rather unlikely. Two-thirds of each House must approve of the amendment, and then it must be approved by the state’s voters.

VIRGINIA

State Constitution specifically prohibits voting by those under 18, and does not provide for home rule.

The Virginia Constitution phrases its voting age provision as “Each voter shall be [...] eighteen years of age” (Article 2 Section 1). This phrase clearly restricts voting to those over the age of 18, so advocacy efforts in Virginia would have to start with an amendment to the Constitution to change this provision. In addition, Virginia does not offer home rule to its municipalities, which makes lowering the voting age in cities in Virginia especially unlikely.

WEST VIRGINIA

State Constitution specifically prohibits voting by those under 18, and does not provide for home rule.

West Virginia’s Constitution and election code both clearly restrict voting to only those over 18 years of age (Const. Art 4 § 1 and WV Code § 3-1-3). Advocacy efforts in West Virginia would have to start with an amendment to the state constitution, which is rather unlikely. Two-thirds of each House must approve of the amendment, and then it must be approved by the state’s voters.

APPENDIX C

VOTE16USA YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

The Vote16USA Youth Advisory Board is made up of young people from around the country who are working to advocate for 16-year-old voting in their cities or states. Board members help guide Vote16USA's national efforts, ensure that young voices remain at the center of the initiative, and support each other's local campaigns by sharing best practices and learning from other members' experiences. Youth Advisory Board members serve one-year terms beginning in the summer. For more information on the Board, including the application process, visit Vote16USA.org.

2024-2025 YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

Jessie Cai | Maryland
Kyle Chen | Minnesota
Carys Gill | Washington, D.C.
Yenjay Hu | New Jersey
Anya Khera | Massachusetts
Anjali Krishnamurti | New Jersey
Vanessa Li | Maryland
Nilani Maheswaran | Oregon
Amelia Rice | Maine
David Zhu | California

"We'll not only strengthen our democracy through increasing voter turnout, but we'll also create a more responsible and informed voter base by introducing the responsibility at a time in life where most youth have greater support from the teachers, parents, and mentors around them."

- Yenjay Hu, New Jersey

"Allowing 16 and 17 year olds to vote acknowledges their stake in our collective future and harnesses their energy and passion for societal change. By including their voices in the electoral process, we strengthen our democracy and pave the way for more informed, engaged and empowered citizens"

- Nilani Maheswaran, Oregon

"Lowering the voting age to 16 is not just a step towards inclusivity but a crucial investment in the future of our democracy. By enfranchising young people, we amplify diverse perspectives, encourage lifelong civic engagement, and ensure that the issues impacting the next generation are addressed with urgency and insight."

- Vanessa Li, Maryland

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