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Text 1 - **Voting age to be lowered to 16 by next general election**

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BBC News, 17 July 2025 - Becky Morton, Political reporter, Adam Smith and Jonelle Awomoyi (extracts)

Sixteen and 17-year-olds would be able to vote at the next **general election\*\***, under government plans to lower the voting age. The pledge is part of a raft of measures being introduced through a new Elections Bill.

Other changes include expanding forms of voter ID to include UK-issued bank cards, moving towards automatic voter registration and tightening rules on political donations to protect against foreign interference.

5 The minimum voting age is already 16 for **local council elections\*\*** in Scotland and Wales, and elections to the **Senedd\*\*** and **Scottish Parliament\*\***. However for other elections, including to the UK Parliament, local elections in England and all elections in Northern Ireland, it is 18. Lowering the voting age to 16 across the UK would be the biggest change to the electorate since it was reduced from 21 to 18 in 1969.

10 A pledge to lower the voting age to 16 was included in Labour's election manifesto but it did not feature in last summer's **King's Speech\*\***, which sets out the government's priorities for the months ahead. The government has now confirmed it is planning to introduce the change in time for 16 and 17-year-olds to vote at the next general election, which is due to take place by 2029 but could be called earlier than this.

**Deputy Prime Minister\*\*** Angela Rayner told the BBC: "I was a mum at 16, you can go to work, you can pay your taxes and I think that people should have a vote at 16."

15 However, Conservative **shadow minister\*\*** Paul Holmes said the government's position was "hopelessly confused". "Why does this government think a 16-year-old can vote but not be allowed to buy a lottery ticket, an alcoholic drink, marry, or go to war, or even stand in the elections they're voting in?" he asked in the Commons.

Critics of the idea argue it could benefit Labour as young people are more likely to vote for left-wing parties. However, polls suggest Labour's youth vote is at risk of being chipped away at – by the Greens, Liberal Democrats and Reform UK.

20 In the UK 16 and 17-year-olds make up only around 3% of the population aged 16 and over so researchers say the impact on overall vote share is likely to be negligible, particularly as turnout tends to be lower for younger age groups.

The government has rejected claims it is introducing the change because it will benefit Labour. "This isn't about trying to rig votes for a particular party. This is about democracy and giving young people an opportunity to have a say," Rayner said.

25 **Voter ID**

Among the other plans set out by the government are expanding the list of accepted ID to vote in Great Britain to UK-issued bank cards. Labour opposed the introduction of voter ID under the Conservatives in 2023 but in its election manifesto the party only promised to "address inconsistencies" in the rules "that prevent legitimate voters from voting", rather than scrapping the policy entirely. Some 4% of people who did not vote at last year's general election said this was because of voter ID rules, according to the Electoral Commission.

30 But the Conservatives suggested allowing bank cards as voter ID could "undermine the security of the ballot box".

The government said it would also work towards creating an automated voter registration scheme over the coming years, with safeguards so that people are aware of their registration status and can opt-out if they wish.

35 Currently people in the UK need to register in order to vote, which can be done online or using a paper form. The Electoral Commission estimates that nearly eight million people are incorrectly registered or missing from the electoral register entirely, with the issue disproportionately affecting private renters and young people. (...)

The government said its plans would mean eligible voters could be directly added to the electoral register through better sharing of data between government agencies. (...)

40 The National Union of Students described lowering the voting age as "a major victory for young people". It called on the government to make it as easy as possible for 16 and 17-year-olds to vote by scrapping voter ID laws, implementing automatic voter registration and promoting political literacy in schools and colleges.

**Foreign donors**

Meanwhile, the government said changes to the rules around political donations would help to tackle foreign interference.

45 Currently political parties can only accept donations from individuals registered on a UK electoral register or UK-registered companies which carry out business in the country.

However, there have been concerns that foreign nationals could get around the rules by donating through a foreign company that is registered in the UK.

The issue came to the forefront at the end of last year, when it was reported that US billionaire Elon Musk could make a donation to Reform UK through the British arm of his social media company X.

Under the plans, political parties would have to assess companies they receive donations from. (824 words)

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Leaders | Vote early, vote often

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## Text 2 - Why the voting age should be lowered to 16

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Young voters are becoming disillusioned with elections. Catch them early and teach them the value of democracy  
*The Economist*, Feb 4th 2017

HOW young is too young? Rich democracies give different answers, depending on the context: in New Jersey you can buy alcohol at 21 and cigarettes at 19, join the army at 17, have sex at 16 and be tried in court as an adult at 14. Such thresholds vary wildly from place to place. Belgian youngsters can get sozzled legally at 16. But on one thing most agree: only when you have turned 18 can you vote. When campaigners suggest lowering the voting age, the riposte is that 16- and 17-year-olds are too immature. This misses the real danger: that growing numbers of young people may not vote at all.

The trend across the West is disturbing (see article). Turnout of American voters under 25 at presidential elections fell from 50% in 1972 to 38% in 2012; among over-65s it rose from 64% to 70% (data for the 2016 election are not yet available). For congressional races, the under-25 vote was a dire 17% in 2014. A similar pattern is repeated across the rich world.

Young people's disenchantment with the ballot box matters because voting is a habit: those who do not take to it young may never start. That could lead to ever-lower participation rates in decades to come, draining the legitimacy of governments in a vicious spiral in which poor turnout feeds scepticism towards democracy, and vice versa.

The disillusionment has many causes. The young tend to see voting as a choice rather than a duty (or, indeed, a privilege). The politically active tend to campaign on single issues rather than for a particular party. Politicians increasingly woo older voters—not only because they are more likely to vote but also because they make up a growing share of the electorate. Many young people see elections stacked against them. It is no surprise, then, that many of them turn away from voting.

Some countries make voting compulsory, which increases turnout rates. But that does not deal with the underlying disillusionment. Governments need to find ways to rekindle the passion, rather than continue to ignore its absence. A good step would be to lower the voting age to 16, ensuring that new voters get off to the best possible start.

This would be no arbitrary change. The usual threshold of 18 means that young people's first chance to vote often coincides with finishing compulsory education and leaving home. Away from their parents, they have no established voters to emulate and little connection to their new communities. As they move around, they may remain off the electoral roll. Sixteen-year-olds, by contrast, can easily be added to it and introduced to civic life at home and school. They can pick up the voting habit by accompanying their parents to polling stations. In Scotland, where 16- and 17-year-olds were eligible to vote in the **independence referendum in 2014\*\***, an impressive three-quarters of those who registered turned out on the day, compared with 54% of 18- to 24-year-olds. In 2007 Austria became the only rich country where 16-year-olds could vote in all elections. Encouragingly, turnout rates for under-18s are markedly higher than for 19- to 25-year-olds.

Merely lowering the voting age is not enough, however. Youth participation in Scotland might have been still higher if more schools had helped register pupils. Governments also need to work harder at keeping electoral rolls current. Some are experimenting with automatic updates whenever a citizen notifies a public body of a change of address. Civics lessons can be improved. Courses that promote open debate and give pupils a vote in aspects of their school lives are more likely to boost political commitment later in life than those that present dry facts about the mechanics of government.

### Standing up to gerontocracy

A lower voting age would strengthen the voice of the young and signal that their opinions matter. It is they, after all, who will bear the brunt of climate change and service the debt that paid for benefits, such as pensions and health care, of today's elderly. Voting at 16 would make it easier to initiate new citizens in civic life. Above all, it would help guarantee the supply of young voters needed to preserve the vitality of democracy. Catch them early, and they will grow into better citizens. (712 words)

See also "[Millennials across the rich world are failing to vote](#)" – *The Economist*, Feb 2017

Democracies are at risk if young people continue to shun the ballot box

## Text 3 - What happens when 16-year-olds get the vote? Other countries are already seeing the benefits

Christine Huebner



They turn out at high rates and are engaged, but don't expect electoral shocks – they're as politically diverse as anyone  
*The Guardian*, Thu 17 Jul 2025

The government has announced it will lower the voting age to 16 for all UK elections in time for the next general election. In 1969, the UK became the first major democracy in the world to lower the voting age from 21 to 18. Few people knew what to expect from this change.

Things are different now. In places such as Austria, Argentina and Brazil, as well as parts of Germany and, in the UK, Wales and Scotland, 16- and 17-year-olds are already allowed to vote in some or all elections.

We can learn a lot from these places about what happens when 16- and 17-year-olds get the vote. My colleagues and I have spent years researching this, and our main finding is simple: nothing bad happens when the voting age is lowered to 16.

Including 16- and 17-year-olds in the electorate does not change election outcomes and it does not make elections less representative. Sixteen- and 17-year-olds are just as qualified to vote as other, older voters. Research from Germany and Austria shows that they are able to pick a political party or representative that best represents their views to the same extent as other, slightly older voters.

But some things may get better for young people and for democracy overall, especially if young people are taken seriously as voters and receive good education on political issues. Here is what to expect when 16- and 17-year-olds get to vote in the UK general election.

### **Higher turnout among the youngest first-time voters**

When 16- and 17-year-olds get to vote at the next UK election, expect them to turn out in about the same numbers as other voters, and slightly more often than other first-time voters (those aged 18 to 20).

In Austria, Latin America, Scotland, Wales and German federal states that lowered the voting age to 16, my colleagues and I consistently find that, when allowed to vote, 16- and 17-year-olds turn out at higher rates than young people who were enfranchised at age 18.

We believe this happens because younger people who are in full-time education and often still live at home can make for better, more engaged first-time voters compared with 18- to 20-year-olds, who often experience their first election in a highly transitory phase of their lives, while moving out of the parental home, taking up work or further education.

No major changes to election outcomes

A lower voting age is unlikely to change election outcomes. Sixteen- and 17-year-olds make up between 1.5% and less than 5% of the population in **constituencies**\*\* across the UK. They will have a very small impact on vote shares – and only in the most extreme (and improbable) scenario that all 16- and 17-year-olds turned out to vote and decided to vote in the same way.

Those who say that lowering the voting age to 16 is Labour's move to secure more votes at the next general election might be mistaken. Young people as a group have diverse political attitudes; they do not all vote for the same political parties. In Brazil, young people voted quite similarly to other age groups in the 2022 presidential election and in Austria, where young people have been enfranchised since 2007, the inclusion of 16- and 17-year-olds in the electorate did not change the political landscape.

Even for marginal elections, such as **Scotland's 2014 referendum on independence**\*\*, my colleague Jan Eichhorn from the University of Edinburgh showed that the inclusion of 16- and 17-year-olds did not change the outcome of the referendum as the youngest first-time voters cast their votes in diverse ways.

### **Political parties and a media that engage with younger voters**

Any political party can win the support of first-time voters. To do so, political parties have to engage with young people and offer attractive policy proposals, as Laura Serra shows.

We might also see the media show more younger voters in their reporting. In 2014, BBC Scotland raised the visibility of 16- and 17-year-olds by creating a diverse panel of young first-time voters, who provided input into programmes, were panellists on productions on different political topics, and audience members for the final referendum TV debate.

Young people who are allowed to vote also influence the adults in their lives. If young people are allowed to participate in elections at 16 and 17, when most are still living at home with their parents, they have the potential to shape political discussions within the family or household. In an ageing society, political parties and a media that engage with younger voters, and dinner-table conversations about political issues and across generations, can be a good outcome.

## A potentially stronger democracy

50 In the longer term, including 16- and 17-year-olds in the electorate might make democracy more resilient. In Austria and Latin America, young people who were enfranchised at 16 or 17 were more satisfied with democracy and democratic institutions – parliament or political parties.

The lowering of the voting age might also provide an opportunity to address inequalities in who participates in elections. Across all ages we see stark differences in who turns out to vote and who does not. After the lowering of the voting age in Scotland, however, we found 16- and 17-year-olds to be equally engaged with elections, regardless of their social  
55 background.

Schools and colleges play a crucial role in compensating for the lack of parents or peers to get young people voting. Good and statutory civic education for all young people makes a big difference for democracy in the long term. Austria has done well in combining the lowering of the voting age with a big reform of and investment in civic and citizenship education. In Scotland, young adults who remembered taking classes in school in which political issues were discussed  
60 were more likely to turn out in elections throughout their 20s. (969 words)

*Christine Huebner is a lecturer in quantitative social sciences at the University of Sheffield*

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## Opinion - Young people

### Text 4 - Votes for 16-year-olds? Sorry, but I'm not convinced

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Simon Jenkins



If Starmer is serious about bringing young people into his 'social contract', then protecting them from the tech giants must be his priority

*The Guardian*, Thu 17 Apr 2025 (adapted)

I remember being 16 in the 1960s. The prime minister seemed geriatric and I was sure he should be in care, while a group of us went to meet our young MP, a certain Margaret Thatcher. She was young, but she didn't  
5 seem as if she was with the times. We could not dream of voting for someone like her. Matter closed.

Sixteen-year-olds are great fun but they are not grown up. They cannot marry in England and Wales, drive, smoke, get a tattoo or buy alcohol on their own. They are  
10 legally classed as children and are supposed to be in formal education or training to 18. Sixteen-year-olds have not taken to the streets demanding the right to the franchise, like the Chartists or suffragettes did.

So why has Keir Starmer suddenly reiterated that he  
15 intends to enfranchise them to vote in UK-wide elections? The only plausible answer is that he hopes they will vote for him. In a desperate attempt to justify this manoeuvre, he says that, if 16-year-old soldiers "are old enough to take a bullet for our country", they should get the vote.  
20 (Likewise if they are "old enough to work" and "pay taxes".)

In fact, 16-year-olds are not old enough to "take a bullet", since frontline army service is banned for under-18s. Meanwhile, precious few 16-year-olds work,  
25 since Starmer's own party, when last in power, made it supposedly compulsory for them to remain in education or training to 18. As for taxes, younger children already pay VAT when they spend their pocket money. The whole argument is slapdash.

30 Even the expected electoral gain to Labour is dubious. Well under half of 18-24s turned out at the last general election. There is some evidence from Scotland, which lowered the voting age to 16 in 2014 for the independence referendum and in 2016 for Scottish parliamentary  
35 elections, that the new group would be active, though novelty may recently have been a factor in turnout. In Wales, which lowered the voting age to 16 in 2021 for Senedd and local government elections, early evidence suggests that the new group plans to vote at a similarly low  
40 rate to other age groups under 55. Either way, Starmer would be lucky to see more than half of his 1.5 million new voters actually turning out, with perhaps about a third of those voting for him. Even then, the general assumption that the young are leftwing has taken a bruising recently  
45 from rightwing influencers.

Where Starmer must be right is in wanting to bring young people into what he pompously calls his "social contract" with gen Z. Here, his absolute priority should not be the ballot box, but how he proposes to prepare the new  
50 cohort for their responsibilities. With social media so clearly dominant over the views and behaviour of those whose support he seeks, its proper regulation should be a priority for any such reform.

The present government shows no interest in such  
55 regulation. Indeed, if anything, quite the reverse. Rumour has it that Starmer, in his attempt to reduce tariffs, is on the brink of pledging no further curbs on the tech giants, in view of their closeness to Donald Trump. This would

follow the cabinet's apparent capitulation to those same  
60 giants in the matter of copyright and artificial intelligence.  
All this suggests a complete lack of concern for what must  
currently be the greatest threat to the mental health of gen  
Z. All Starmer has done is boast that he watched  
Adolescence. So what now: voting at 13?

65 The one thing that might excuse the government's  
cynicism is a programme to prepare teenagers for their  
new responsibility. The tyranny of academic GCSEs and  
exam culture should be suspended, if not for ever, then at  
least for one day a week, to be replaced by compulsory  
70 civic awareness. This should embrace an introduction to  
peace and war, national politics, local government, the law,  
practical economics and the handling of money. (...)

I know teachers who genuinely think it is not their job  
to "teach" a world outside education. They see no need to  
*Simon Jenkins is a Guardian columnist*

75 educate young people in how to relate to one another, work  
in groups or keep their minds and bodies in good shape.  
They see no reason to teach self-presentation or  
expression, the new skills of oracy so crucial to getting on  
in a creative career. Teachers seem to think all this is for  
80 parents, not schools, even when they know it is not true.  
The school curriculum is in the dark ages.

The truth of the matter is that teenagers are acquiring  
these skills and attitudes from social media. It is online that  
they are gaining a whole new context for their personal and  
85 social lives. They are doing so from the worst possible  
sources: biased, uncensored, unmediated and unregulated.  
It must be the worst preparation for that most sacred of  
democratic rituals – the vote. This is the grim reality of  
Starmer's new social contract. (830 words)

Coffee House

## Text 5 - Will 16-year-olds vote Labour?



Ross Clark

*The Spectator*, July 17 2025

**Gerrymandering\*\*** is as old as the hills, and neither of  
what have been Britain's two main political parties for the  
past century has a clean nose. Why did the Conservatives  
extend the franchise<sup>o</sup> to long-term expats who are not even  
5 paying taxes in Britain? And why has the present  
government just announced that 16- and 17-year-olds will  
be granted the vote in UK general elections for the first  
time? Forget any high-mindedness about fairness,  
encouraging responsibility and so on – these are raw  
10 attempts to swing the political arithmetic in the governing  
party's favour.

The only trouble is: has Labour made a fatal  
miscalculation in assuming that 16- and 17-year-olds will  
vote for the party? It is received wisdom that the young are  
15 more idealistic and left-wing than older people – as per the  
adage often attributed to Winston Churchill (possibly  
because of his own political transformation): if you are not  
liberal at 20 you have no heart, and if you are not a  
conservative at 40 you have no head. Moreover, it is  
20 certainly true that in recent elections age has been a very  
strong determinant of how people vote: the younger a  
voter, the more likely they are to have voted Labour; the  
older a voter, the more likely they are to have voted  
Conservative.

25 But will that relationship still hold for 16- and 17-year-  
olds? There have not been many polls asking for the  
opinions of this age group, but those held over the past year  
or so ought to fire a strong warning shot over Labour's

bows. They appear to confirm a reluctance to vote Tory  
30 among young voters, but also suggest that Reform is  
remarkably popular among this cohort. A JL Partners poll  
from July last year suggested that 39 per cent would vote  
Labour, 23 per cent Reform, 18 per cent Green, 9 per cent  
Liberal Democrat and just 5 per cent Conservative. That,  
35 however, was in the week of the last **general election\*\***,  
before Starmer and his government had had a chance to  
become unpopular.

Another poll was conducted by Find Out Now in  
February this year. It ought to be emphasised that it didn't  
40 ask 16- and 17-year-olds directly for their voting intentions  
but instead asked their parents how they thought their  
children would vote – so it is not necessarily the most  
reliable of polls. The Find Out Now poll suggested support  
for Reform at 30 per cent, level with Labour. The Greens  
45 were on 17 per cent, the Lib Dems 9 per cent and the  
Conservatives 7 per cent. The poll also suggested that just  
over half of 16- and 17-year-olds think immigration is too  
high – which may help explain their favourability toward  
Nigel Farage's party.

50 Overall, both polls suggest that received ideas about  
how 16- and 17-year-olds will vote may be biased towards  
the views of middle-class students. We think of young  
people as being woke and left-wing because we hear an  
awful lot about the antics of student activists. Yet half the  
55 population do not go to university and may well be less

motivated by woke ideas than by the fear that migrants are taking some of their potential job opportunities.

The expansion of the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds could end up being a very big problem for Labour if it means losing the votes of the working-class young. It is also worth noting the strong attraction of the Greens to young voters; that, too, could detract from Labour's vote.

The big losers from votes for 16- and 17-year-olds look like being the Conservatives and also the Lib Dems. (...)

But for those trembling at the prospect of having voters younger than "Gangnam Style", *The Avengers* and the London Olympics, never fear. After a turnout fall from 47 per cent to 37 per cent amongst 18-24 year olds at the last election, it seems incredibly unlikely that this will push the needle much in regard to electoral outcomes. Angela Rayner's supporting piece for this policy published in the *Times* quotes a figure of "1.6 million" potential new voters. If that same 37 per cent turnout figure is applied, that leaves 592,000, slightly more than 2 per cent of the 2024 vote total. And this is still significantly dwarfed by the roughly 9.5 million pensioners who took part. Britain remains substantially a gerontocracy.

However, young people are also not homogenous. Even if Labour are expecting a boost, this demographic could surprise them. As stereotypes dictates, this is genuinely a

generation that gets its news from TikTok and Instagram. And while the word "youthquake" originally referred to the millennial surge for Corbyn in 2017, these days it's the far-right populism that dominates much of social media.

Nigel Farage has more TikTok followers than all other MPs combined. The biggest news source on the platform is the *Daily Mail* at 23.2 million followers.

And if some young people are drifting right – even far-right – Labour could also have the opposite problem on their hands. As Oli Dugmore writes for the *New Statesman*, among young people "Palestine is the governing moral question of conversation", with the Labour party seen as complicit in Israel's military campaign in Gaza. Dugmore likens the radicalisation currently taking place to the feelings around the Vietnam War during the 1960s. It's hard to see that these young people, watching war crimes unfold on their sticky iPads, will spontaneously come to Keir Starmer's aid at the next election. More likely, they'll rally to Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana's new party (the latter is the second-most popular MP on TikTok).

"This is democracy in action," writes Angela Rayner in the *Times*. But as democracy has proved so many times in the past decade, sometimes people don't vote the way you expect them to. (959 words)

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## VIDEO

### Document 6 - Sixteen year olds to get vote in UK - but 'half don't want it'

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ITV News – July 17 2025

Lewis Denison reports - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ucn9-rdGbyM&ab\\_channel=ITVNews](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ucn9-rdGbyM&ab_channel=ITVNews)

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## Letters

### Document 7 - Educate teenagers on politics before letting them vote

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*Janet Perkins fears votes being cast for 'hilarious' Farage, but Dr John Fletcher thinks young people are more refreshing philosophers. Plus more letters on Labour's plan to lower the voting age to 16*

**The Guardian**, Wed 23 Jul 2025

*During the last general election, my grandson's secondary school held a mock election in which the oldest students voted (Voting age to be lowered to 16 across UK by next general election, 17 July). The majority voted for Nigel Farage, not because of his policies, but because the students thought he was "hilarious". To this result, my 16-year-old grandson said: "And that's why they don't give 16-year-olds the vote."*

■ Unless secondary schools and sixth forms start teaching politics and political systems in school and encourage the notion of informed debate, young voters will get their information from social media (and not from the Guardian app).

Having a well-informed tranche of young voters would be wonderful. Imagine an interested and probing group of voters who could challenge policy and refuse to put up with obfuscation.

However, unless we enable young teenagers to find the facts among the overwhelming amount of disinformation on social media, this move could end up being Keir Starmer's Brexit.

**Janet Perkins - Horsham, West Sussex**

■ Reducing the voting age to 16 is long overdue. For far too long, old people have had the arrogance to believe that they know best. They almost never change their voting habits. They read the same newspaper as they have always done, for confirmation bias, making them liable to information distortion. And for many, dare I say, their cognitive degeneration can put them out of touch with reality. I may have become a grumpy old man (now in my eighth decade), but I still recognise that young people are more refreshing philosophers.



**Dr John Fletcher - Dundee**

■ Rowena Mason draws attention to the disappointing turnout by 16- and 17-year-olds in the 2021 Senedd elections (Lowering the voting age: a boost for UK democracy or a shot in the dark?, 17 July). I was a member of the committee that recommended the lower voting age in Wales. But we also stressed that better civic education is needed if 16- and 17-year-olds are to become politically engaged. That did not happen. The UK government needs to learn that lesson.

**Paul Silk- Crickhowell, Powys**

■ I have no problem with votes at 16, provided that schools allow bona fide political parties access to their students. When I taught in a West German grammar school in the mid-1970s, the main political parties often used to man a stall in the playground, offering literature and other information to potential student voters.

I struggle to find such freedom in our schools, where politics, if discussed at all, tends to be theoretical rather than practical and certainly never party-based. Had we on these islands lived under a dictatorship, we might be less afraid of grasping the nettle, as countries like Germany have.

**John Marriott - North Hykeham, Lincolnshire**

■ So, the voting age is to be lowered to 16 by the next election. Is this to get their disgust and distrust of politicians in early? It might be better for the government to spend time looking at why voter turnout is so low, rather than make it worse by increasing the size of the electorate. The cabinet could do what it promised (change, not more austerity) and all politicians could represent the people's wishes.

**Martin Smith - Guildford, Surrey**

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## About the U.S.

NEWSLETTER

### **The New York Times The Morning**

**Should Teens Vote?** We examine the voting age around the world.

By [Evan Gorelick](#), July 18, 2025, The Morning (New York Times)

*You're reading The Morning newsletter. Make sense of the day's news and ideas. Times journalists guide you through what's happening — and why it matters.*

Britain is about to add up to a million and a half people to its voter rolls. Some lean left, some lean right and others don't care about politics at all. But all of them are 16 or 17 years old. Liberals are thrilled with the plan, which lawmakers announced yesterday; conservatives are outraged.

In planning to lower the national voting age before the next general election, Britain joins a small but growing club of nations willing to test the boundaries of electoral inclusion. Brazil, an early adopter, cut its voting age to 16 in 1988.

Austria, Argentina and Malta followed suit in the 2000s. Most recently, Germany and Belgium decided to let 16- and 17-year-olds vote in some elections but not others.

A map shows places where the voting age in national elections is 16 years old, 17, 18, 20, 21 and 25. Nicaragua, Ecuador, Brazil, Austria, Argentina, Cuba and four other countries or territories have a voting age of 16. Greece, Indonesia and three other countries have a voting age of 17.

Beneath these changes lies a fundamental question: At what age does civic responsibility begin? Today, I explain the debate and look at how it is reshaping some democracies, including America's.

### Who's ready?

Legal codes are filled with age minimums. In the United States, you must be 18 to serve in the military, 21 to drink alcohol and 35 to run for president. Sometimes, these are built on easy-to-understand ideas. Alcohol, for instance, is meant only for people who are likely to drink responsibly.

The right to vote follows from the notion that governments draw their legitimacy from the consent of the governed. When can someone give that consent? Experts offer different answers to the question.

**Developmental psychology:** Research shows that by age 16, most adolescents can make informed voting decisions. Maturity is not a monolith: Policymakers think it takes more poise to buy a handgun (which Americans can do at 21) than it does to drive. Although 16-year-olds tend to be impulsive — a problem when it comes to wielding guns — voting is simply an expression of a preference. By 16, most adolescents can express and defend their preference.

**Partisan politics:** Reshaping the electorate has immediate political consequences. If new voters break left, for instance, an electoral expansion may help liberals. That's why politicians often see the franchise as a means to an end. In Britain, where young voters are typically more liberal, the ruling center-left party is now counting on a boost. That politicizes the process.

**Civic participation:** When people vote at younger ages, they tend to become repeat voters. That can improve voter turnout,

which is low in many places. And when younger people have the right to vote, elected officials are more responsive to their interests, research shows.

### In the United States

For most of American history, people had to be 21 to vote in federal elections. That changed when 18-year-olds started being shipped abroad to fight in the Vietnam War. They protested; they staged sit-ins; they burned their draft cards. If they could die for their country, why couldn't they vote for its leaders? So, in 1971, states ratified the 26th Amendment, which lowered the voting age to 18.

Without another broad-based movement, the federal voting age probably won't change anytime soon, said Franita Tolson, a law professor at the University of Southern California. But cities and states have their own election laws, and a handful have lowered voting ages.

In May 2013, Takoma Park, Md., lowered its minimum age to 16 for municipal elections, making it the first American city to do so. After the change, the new voters began to vote at rates two to three times as high as those of other voters. "Young people are already impacted by the decisions lawmakers make every day, from school funding to climate policy," said Janhitha Veeramachaneni, a 17-year-old in Jersey City, which is considering trimming its voting age. "We pay taxes, work jobs and navigate the world shaped by those in power."

There's one other way that teens can do what adults can: After Newark let 16- and 17-year-olds vote in local school-board races, only 73 new voters — out of 1,851 who had registered — showed up. Britain's governing party is probably hoping for better.

### See also

- This news analysis from *The New York Times* which I recommend

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/05/style/lower-voting-age-britain-us.html>

- This explainer from NPR: The U.K. will lower its voting age to 16. Could the U.S. follow suit?

NPR, JULY 17, 2025 <https://www.npr.org/2025/07/17/nx-s1-5471304/uk-lowers-voting-age-16>

### Places where the voting age in national elections is ...

■ 16 years old ■ 17 ■ 18 ■ 20 ■ 21 ■ 25



Notes: Based on 234 countries or territories with available data. Places with no data are in gray. • Sources: C.I.A. World Factbook; ACE Electoral Knowledge Network • By The New York Times