

SB 4 Articles/Lowering the Voting Age Act:

Expand the vote: Why America should lower the voting age

by Nina Attisha

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In the days leading up to Election Day, the race for the highest office in the land remained too close to definitively call. It had been a nail-biting few weeks, and if you're like me, you were anxious, doom-scrolling and obsessing over every poll. Being a Michigan voter can add to the stress of the election since our votes tend to matter more than votes from other, more ideologically secure states. I couldn't get across the Diag without countless well-intentioned people asking me, "Have you voted yet?"

As an 18 year old and first-time presidential election voter, I was giddy to cast my ballot during early voting. I proudly wore my "I voted early" sticker; I even managed to snag one of the werewolf "I voted" stickers designed by a young Michigander.

Like many young people, I've been itching to vote for years now. Students, especially those who make up Gen Z, are some of the most politically engaged people in our country. For years, we have been marching and organizing for many crucial issues like the climate and gun violence. We have advocated for climate action, racial justice and an end to gun violence. Our generation has survived a global pandemic, an insurrection and witnessed a historic rollback of women's reproductive rights. I was hopeful that when the polls closed on Tuesday, Gen Z's heightened activism would translate to record-breaking voter turnout.

This election, just 16% of the voting population was from Gen Z. Historically, half of all eligible Gen Z voters don't turn out to the polls. In the 2020 presidential election, only 51.4% of 18 to 24 year olds voted. In contrast, 76% of 65 to 74 year olds voted. With a low voter turnout, it's no surprise that our generation's concerns are often pushed aside and dismissed while policymakers appease the elderly. This, in turn, leads to more discouragement, frustration and political apathy.

How do we fix this? Yes, we can work hard to get more young people to vote, but what if more young people were eligible to vote? Lowering the voting age to 16 could keep young people energized and excited about participating in our democratic processes and create a foundation for long-term civic engagement.

Not only would younger voters bring more vibrance and energy to our political atmosphere, but they will also bring new, innovative ideas. If 16 to 17 year olds could vote, candidates would start campaigning at high schools, forcing public officials to think more creatively and generate new policies that appeal to a broader range of viewpoints and concerns. Proposals involving education reform, climate action and gun legislation could move to the forefront of political discourse. Taking American government classes in high school would be much more impactful if voting was not just a history lesson or a mock election.

The disconnect between Gen Z activism and the governmental decision-making process is disheartening and is one of the drivers of political apathy among young voters. It's no surprise that young adults aren't motivated to vote when they feel that their voices are never heard and policies are not directed towards

them. We are often blamed for “not caring” and being disengaged, but it’s hard to be involved in the electoral process when policymakers continuously ignore the issues we care about.

The concept of lowering the voting age is not unprecedented. Not only are there multiple countries that have expanded the age to 16, but some cities within the U.S. have done it, too. Four cities in Maryland, one in California and one in Vermont have lowered the voting age to 16 for all local elections. In Takoma Park, Md., 16 year olds have been able to vote for more than a decade — and it turns out they love voting. According to the city of Takoma Park, registered 16- and 17-year-old voters have outperformed all registered voters in each municipal election from November 2013 onward, with 63% of them voting in 2022, compared to 49% of all registered voters.

The lowering of the voting age at a local level sparks hope for national change. Although some people may argue that 16 year olds are too immature to vote, a study by William and Mary Law School showed that people are cognitively capable of voting by the age of 16. There is also evidence that encouraging people to start voting at an early age also leads to increased voting later in life. A study done in 2003 by Yale University’s Institution for Social and Policy Studies shows that voting may be habit forming and that voting in one election substantially increases the likelihood of voting in the future. If America wants to increase long-term civic participation and engagement, a very easy and effective way to do this is to allow 16 year olds to vote.

As Americans sit glued to their screens and watch the electoral map, examining states change to solid blues and reds this election day, ask yourself how differently it would look if the U.S. allowed another 8 million 16 and 17 year olds to join the electorate in 2020. It could be a game changer.

According to Jocelyn Benson, Michigan secretary of state, young people in our battleground state are already thrilled to be part of the political process.

“In 2022, Michigan led the nation in youth vote turnout,” she said in a state report on youth voting turnout. “And we encourage everyone in our state to be a part of this outreach to help us ensure that all eligible citizens are aware of their options to vote this year and beyond.”

Gen Z showed up on Election Day. From early voting to same-day registration, Michigan has been a leader in expanding the electorate. However, we can do more to include the voice and power of young people in the electorate. We did it before, and we can do it again. In 1970, Nixon extended the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which included a provision to lower the federal voting age from 21 to 18. A year later, the 26th Amendment was passed, lowering the voting age for all elections throughout the country.

Expanding the vote to include 16 year olds is not just about extending a right; it’s also about enriching our democracy with young people’s policy priorities and ideas. It is an investment in a lifetime of civic participation. By lowering the voting age, we can ensure that more voices are heard. Young people need to know that their opinions matter, not just as artists for “I voted” stickers, but also as legitimate voters.

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Opinion: The legal voting age should not be lowered

Organizations are considering lowering the voting age from 18 to 16, but younger teenagers are not prepared to take on the responsibility of voting

[Claire Guzman](#), Staff Writer

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A student is playing on their phone and receives a text reminding them that election day is coming up. They delete the message, not being that interested in politics and knowing that most of their age group doesn't know that much about this year's candidates. Passing by a bunch of voting signs, they overhear some of their lower classmen talk about not being able to have a say in politics.

This year there has been debate on the voting age in the U.S. The Meng Reintroduces legislation argues that it should be lowered from 18 to 16 years olds. The legal voting age has been lowered over the past and organizations believe the younger generation should have a say in politics. Even so, it might be hard for younger audiences to have a full grasp of politics and it's best to keep the age limit the way it is.

U.S. citizens of the age 18 years or older are considered legal adults, they're considered as equal constituents who have to pay taxes, can drive in most states and are tried in adult courts. Any citizen below the age of 18 is considered a minor, and is not granted the same rights as those above that age line. Their minds are still taking in new information from high school and aren't aware of government officials running for the next term and their policies they'd like to apply.

For the most part, 16 and 17 year olds are not ready to vote. They are still considered to be teenagers and not young adults. In this modern age, teens don't focus on political stances and voting. They are too invested with school and their own hobbies outside of school. The only time when teens are knowledgeable about this kind of information is if they want to focus on that in their future career or heard of it from family or a friend.

Schools do not teach enough about the importance of voting to their students. So when elections come around, students wouldn't know any background information and the beliefs each politician has. Students are often influenced by their parents beliefs or whoever their friend votes for. They grow up hearing the same information constantly and grow accustomed to thinking that way. It will be a one sided argument without knowing any information regarding the other party or candidate.

Regardless, there are some students who do know a lot about politics and are mature enough to vote. They'll have background information and know what that party stands for. But it is a rare minority of students, most study for other professions and don't know a lot of government officials. It's a small percentage of teens that know who to vote for, but it's not worth changing the age limit because of that.

Watching all the other adults go to their local voting area to submit their vote, the student couldn't be bothered as they had better things to do. Heading home realization sets in as they realize, they'll be the legal voting age in another year.

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