



Lowering the Voting Age? [Guest Post]

by Intern on June 14, 2009

Hello there! If you are new here, you might want to [Sign up for our Email Newsletter](#) for updates on this topic.

By Nancy Lublin on the [Huffington Post originally here!](#)

Apathetic. Vain. Indifferent. Selfish. These are typical words used to describe teenagers today...on TV, in movies, by frustrated parents. But these words don't actually represent this generation at large. Instead, statistical evidence and trendspotting refers to today's teens as outspoken, informed, mature and wired. I'd like to call them something else: voters.

Simply, I believe the United States should lower the voting age to 17.

Today's 17-year-olds are faced with difficult decisions and ever-increasing responsibilities

- They can work (which means pay taxes, contribute to social security, FICA, etc).
- They can be tried in a court of law as adults in 36 states. (In fact, until the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional in 2005, the death penalty was a viable punishment for 16 and 17-year-olds.)
- In almost every state, 17-year-olds can operate heavy machinery and drive cars.
- And, 17-year-olds can enlist in the United States military. In fact, according to the official website for the Department of Defense, over 7,400 17-year-olds enlisted in the military in 2006 alone.

If we are comfortable entrusting these young individuals with defending our country and our honor, then they should be given the right to vote for their boss, the Commander in Chief. If we are comfortable arming them with a lethal weapon as they patrol in the name of freedom, then perhaps they're responsible enough to be armed with the right to vote.

The voting age is 17 in Indonesia, Israel (municipal elections), the Philippines (municipal elections), Seychelles, Sudan, and East Timor. And 16-year-olds can vote in Austria, Brazil, parts of Germany, Guernsey, Isle of Man, Nicaragua, and parts of Switzerland. Many countries around the world are currently looking at measures to lower the voting age, including the United Kingdom, Taiwan, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Venezuela. (It is worth noting—albeit in parentheses—that even Cuba and North Korea allow 17 year olds to vote.)

“Young voter” movements are taking place in cities nationwide, from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to Bethesda, Maryland. Several cities have considered measures to lower the voting age for local elections, including Berkely, CA; Iowa City, IA; Anchorage, AK; and Springfield, IL to name a few. In New York, Future Voters of America is championing an initiative to allow young people to serve as voting members of municipal boards. In 19 states, 17-year-olds are allowed to vote or caucus in state primaries if they will be 18 before the general election. And a national movement was recently launched by NYU student, Nick Jensen, called YouthInTheBooth.org .

In today's culture, allowing 17-year-olds the right to vote makes sense. Voter registration forms could be easily distributed in high schools nationwide and classes could take field trips to polling stations. Think how effective it would be for students to learn about the Constitution and our electoral process and then the social studies teacher could hand out registration forms, asking students to be more than informed citizens, but to be active citizens. Now that's an empowering education!

There is also statistical evidence that suggests that if people start voting at a young age, then they are more likely to vote later in life. In other words, civic engagement becomes a habit, something second nature, something expected. So, perhaps allowing 17 year olds the right to vote will help increase voter turnout in the long term.

The last time the voting age was lowered was in 1972. The Vietnam War draft was the catalyst for amending the Constitution to give 18-year-olds the right to vote. Lowering the voting age did not provoke a partisan shift in either direction or rioting in the streets. It gave a voice to a small but important slice of our population – an informed and engaged demographic that deserved to have their opinions counted.

Why not expand our democracy to include the voices of more active and engaged citizens?