

Opinion: Sixteen- and 17-year-olds deserve the right to vote

By A USA Today roundup, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.17.19

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A young girl listens as women gather for a rally and march at Grant Park on October 13, 2018, in Chicago, Illinois, to inspire voter turnout ahead of midterm polls in the United States. Photo by: Kamil Krzaczynski/AFP/Getty Images

In the 1960s, the United States was at war in Vietnam. The country asked itself a question. If 18-year-old men can die in Vietnam, shouldn't they be allowed to vote? Today, we must ask ourselves about 16- and 17-year-olds. They contribute to society through work. Some face police, courts and jails as adults. Shouldn't they have the right to vote?

In the teen years, many begin to work. That means they pay taxes. They start driving cars. On the flip side, about 250,000 teens each year go through the court system as adults. All these teens should be able to vote.

In some states 16- and 17-year-olds can preregister. This means they can register before their 18th birthday. Fourteen states allow teens to preregister at 16. Nine states allow it for 17-year-olds.

Ayanna Pressley represents Massachusetts in Congress. She wanted to lower the voting age to 16. Her proposed law failed. It got only 126 votes.

Voting is a habit. Let people start voting at a younger age. These 16- and 17-year-olds could go to the polls with their parents or other adults. It could begin a lifetime of voting.

Lowering the voting age is a worthy goal. Let's do it.

David de la Fuente works for Third Way, a research center.

Other Opinions

What do others say about giving teens the right to vote? Here are three other views.

Teens Don't Know Enough To Vote

Teens are too emotional. Car-rental agencies are right to make it hard for young drivers to rent a car. You have to be 25 to serve in Congress. Teens still have a lot to learn. They cannot be trusted to make decisions about the United States.

Jeff Jacoby writes for the Boston Globe.

Teens Don't Make Bad Choices Any More Than Adults Do

By 16, teens can make good decisions. They can gather information. They can weigh the pros and cons. They can look at the facts. They know to take time before reaching a decision. These are good skills for voting. Teenagers sometimes make bad choices. However, they do not make them any more often than adults do.

Laurence Steinberg teaches psychology at Temple University and writes for The New York Times.

Establish Patterns For A Lifetime

Voting for the first time at 16 is a good idea. This could set up a lifetime habit of voting. One objection is that teens will just vote like their parents. Studies show that people are always influenced by those around them. Teens might vote like their parents. But adults often vote like their spouses or neighbors.

Noah Berlatsky is a writer and editor who writes about gender and culture.

Quiz

- 1 David de la Fuente has an opinion about teens and voting.
Which sentence from the article shows this?
- (A) They contribute to society through work.
 - (B) Some face police, courts and jails as adults.
 - (C) Fourteen states allow teens to preregister at 16.
 - (D) Lowering the voting age is a worthy goal.
- 2 Read the section "Teens Don't Make Bad Choices Any More Than Adults Do."
What is Laurence Steinberg's point of view about voting at 16?
- (A) Teens do not have good skills for voting at 16.
 - (B) Teens are able to make good voting decisions at 16.
 - (C) Teens younger than 16 should be allowed to vote.
 - (D) Teens should be older than 16 to vote.
- 3 If readers are looking for the opinion that teens should not be trusted to vote, which section should they read?
- (A) Introduction [paragraphs 1-6]
 - (B) "Teens Don't Know Enough To Vote"
 - (C) "Teens Don't Make Bad Choices Any More Than Adults Do"
 - (D) "Establish Patterns For A Lifetime"
- 4 Which paragraph in the introduction [paragraphs 1-6] explains how a U.S. leader tried to CHANGE the voting age?
- (A) In the 1960s, the United States was at war in Vietnam. The country asked itself a question. If 18-year-old men can die in Vietnam, shouldn't they be allowed to vote? Today, we must ask ourselves about 16- and 17-year-olds. They contribute to society through work. Some face police, courts and jails as adults. Shouldn't they have the right to vote?
 - (B) In the teen years, many begin to work. That means they pay taxes. They start driving cars. On the flip side, about 250,000 teens each year go through the court system as adults. All these teens should be able to vote.
 - (C) Ayanna Pressley represents Massachusetts in Congress. She wanted to lower the voting age to 16. Her proposed law failed. It got only 126 votes.
 - (D) Voting is a habit. Let people start voting at a younger age. These 16- and 17-year-olds could go to the polls with their parents or other adults. It could begin a lifetime of voting.