



# VOTING AGE STUDY

*Leaders' Guide and Consensus Questions*



# Overview of the Vote16 Consensus Question Packet

A Consensus Study process is a unique and defining feature of the League of Women Voters and serves as an example of our values in practice — democracy and civil discourse. Participation in a Consensus Study requires putting aside potential preconceived ideas or opinions and approaching a topic with openness, curiosity, and patience to review an issue and then work as a group to find agreement when responding to the consensus questions. A group of members then come to a consensus based on the “overall sense of the group and a judgment about whether member understanding and agreement have been achieved” (citing LWVME, 2018, which offers a full description of the consensus study process). By working to come to consensus, the groups provide the LWVME with key guidance on what position to take on the issue presented.

This Consensus Question Packet is an integral part of the LWVME’s latest study on the evidence surrounding a call to lower the voting age. **The question before the LWVME is whether expanding the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds is an issue that the League should support, oppose, or remain neutral on by neither supporting nor opposing.** While this topic often elicits an immediate opinion either for or against, we are asking all members to approach this issue with an open mind and to carefully review the study committee’s research report and, time permitting, some of the suggested readings.

## Origin of the Study

The topic of lowering the voting age to 16 came to the League’s attention as a result of Maine youth expressing a desire to vote. In 2021, a group of young organizers asked the LWVME to support their efforts by testifying on bills to lower the voting age that they had submitted to the Maine Legislature (LD 706 and LD 1051). At the committee hearings LWVME offered testimony neither for nor against because the board determined that LWVME doesn’t have a position on this topic. We are now asking our members to help us determine LWVME’s position using this Consensus Study process so that we will have an advocacy position when the issue again comes before the Legislature.

## **League's Current Positions on Voting Rights**

The question of whether to allow voting at 16 is a voting rights issue, a key priority of the LWVUS. The LWVUS was founded by the activists who secured voting rights for women through the passage of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution. Since that accomplishment in 1920, the League has continuously worked to promote the values and processes of representative government, with voting rights being at the core of the League's work both nationally and in Maine.

The LWVME's policy position about voting is based on the LWVUS position on Citizen's Right to Vote, announced by the National Board in March 1982. The position states:

The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that voting is a fundamental citizen right that must be guaranteed.

Voting is the most fundamental expression of citizenship in our democracy. The expansion of voting rights to include all Americans, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender, and the breaking down of barriers to citizens' voter participation — from literacy tests to poll taxes — has been one of the great successes in the evolution of American democracy (LWVME, August 2022, Impact on Issues, pg. 15).

Other leagues are considering whether the LWVUS position on a Citizen's Right to Vote as written should be interpreted to cover 16- and 17-year-olds (e.g., LWVBoston). LWVME has chosen to not take this approach and instead has undertaken a consensus process to ensure members have a clear understanding of the research surrounding the issue. This process is lengthier but will provide our position with a solid foundation.

## **A few words about study methods, the study report, and supplemental reading**

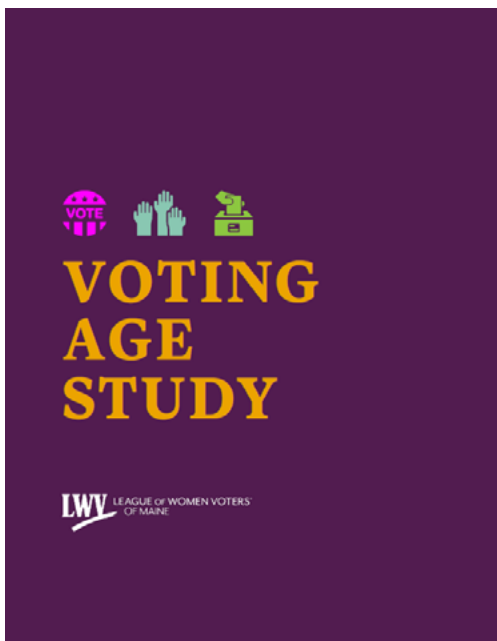
The study committee reviewed the literature on successful and unsuccessful efforts to grant 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in the U.S. and elsewhere in the world. The team also did a comprehensive review of evidence-based research and technical reports completed by a diverse and wide-range of social scientists, educators, legal experts, neuroscientists, political activists, and others. The team conducted interviews with people who have been directly involved in the US efforts to lower the voting age. The study report presents detailed information organized into the following sections:

- I. INTRODUCTION: PURPOSE, ORIGIN, AND GOALS OF THE STUDY
- II. STUDY METHODS
- III. US HISTORY OF LOWERING THE VOTING AGE AND THE VOTE 16 CAMPAIGN
- IV. GLOBAL EXPERIENCES
- V. WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE YOUNG VOTER
- VI. RESEARCH FINDINGS ON QUESTIONS RAISED ABOUT LOWERING THE VOTING AGE
- VII. PREDICTING FUTURE IMPACTS OF LOWERING THE VOTING AGE
- VIII. IMPACT OF CIVIC EDUCATION ON THE YOUNGER VOTER
- IX. PATHS TO IMPLEMENTATION IN MAINE
- X. SUMMARY

Although numerous opinion pieces on the topic of voting at 16 exist and were reviewed, the Study Committee focused on findings from evidence-based research by experts. The team uncovered many solid empirical studies supporting the pro side of the argument but significantly fewer studies providing evidence against voting at 16. In an effort to better examine opposing views, the team reviewed websites of organizations known for providing voting rights research more likely to support policies limiting access to the vote (e.g., limits on drop boxes, absentee ballots, and voter ID). The review of these websites failed to uncover any studies or reports on the topic of voting at 16 to include in this study. The lack of research supporting opposing arguments suggests a continued need for research on this topic.

Aside from several small studies in the US, the majority of research cited on the behavior of the 16- and 17-year-old voter was conducted in other democratic countries where a lower voting age has been law for many years. An extensive body of US research does exist on youth aged 18- to 24-years-old to or 18- to 29-years old and is summarized in the report. The team noted throughout the report the ages used in different studies. As readers review the research, they are encouraged to consider how the 16- to 17-year-old may, or may not, compare to the findings for the 18-year-old and older voter.

To ensure the consensus meetings are efficient and most useful, participating members are strongly encouraged to carefully read the study report before joining in the consensus meetings.



[Click here to read the study.](#)

Or scan the QR code below:



Below are a number of relatively short, easy-to-read documents that provide background on several of the debates underpinning the topic of lowering the voting age. All are available online at the hyperlinks. These documents are suggested reading in addition to the full study, not in place of the study.

- [Lowering the Voting Age - Top 3 Pros and Cons](#) (Latest update 9/30/2020)  
An introductory piece that lays out the 3 most common arguments for both sides of the debate. It might be useful to skim through before tackling the study report, which covers a wider range of pro/con issues.
- [Young Voices at the Ballot Box - A White Paper from Generation Citizen](#) (Version 3.0 - Feb. 2020)  
This paper covers the work that young people across the nation have been doing to advocate for this change. It offers a number of “pro” arguments and explains why several of the popular “con” arguments are based on “myths”. It includes appendices that describe the status of numerous efforts to lower the voting age. Also, a relatively easy read.
- [More Than The Vote: 16-year-old Voting and the Risks of Legal Adulthood](#) (2020)  
A law journal article about ways in which a lower voting age could hypothetically trigger a lowering of legal protections that currently benefit those under 18.
- [Where Left and Right Agree on Civics Education, and Where They Don't](#) (2020)  
This article examines the different views about civic education, the role of the teacher, and how it impacts young voters.
- [Lowering the voting age to 16 in Practice: Processes and outcomes compared](#) (2021)  
This is a review of much of the academic literature reporting on empirical studies of the Vote16 experience. The results tend to support lowering the voting age, but attention is given to the importance of the overall political and social context in which the change is made.

## Conducting the consensus meeting

This CQ packet contains 11 CQs intended to lead members through a discussion of the key issues raised in support of or in opposition to lowering the voting age. The final question asks what position your group would like the LWVME to take on this issue.

The 11 questions here are a road map for where you are headed:

- CQ#1:** Would extending the vote to the 16- and 17-year-old be likely to have a positive impact over time on voter turnout or civic engagement?
- CQ#2:** Does municipal, state, and/or federal legislation impact 16- and 17-year-olds enough to justify lowering the voting age?
- CQ#3:** Is the 16- and 17-year-old competent enough to vote?
- CQ#4:** Could the 16- and 17-year-old's vote be unduly influenced by others, particularly parents?
- CQ#5:** Will the 16- and 17-year-old voter use reliable info sources in deciding how to vote?
- CQ#6:** Should the risk of partisan policy impacts discourage enfranchising 16- and 17-year-olds?
- CQ#7:** Will lowering the voting age further muddy the concept of "age of majority" and result in potential legal risk to 16- and 17-year-olds?
- CQ#8:** Should there be a relationship between high school civic education and the right to vote at 16 and 17?
- CQ#9:** Are potential administrative and implementation hurdles an adequate reason to deny 16- and 17-year-olds the franchise?
- CQ#10:** Other arguments for and against lowering the voting age.
- CQ#11:** What option below best describes the group's view about granting the vote to 16- and 17-year-olds (check the box that best reflects the group's consensus.

CQs #3-6 deal with whether your group believes that the 16- and 17-year-old exhibits levels of maturity, skills, civic knowledge, etc. to be given the right to vote. It is important to note that, in the past, these questions were raised during each attempt to expand the franchise of voting. These questions are not currently asked of voters over 18 who already have the franchise — there is no test of competency, no quiz about information sources, and no questions about influence by others.



**FACILITATOR TIP:**

Given that these CQ #3-6 are part of the debate, it will be important to help participants be aware of what group they are comparing the 16- and 17-year-old potential voters to, and this may vary based on the question. Should they be compared to the 18-year-old (today’s youngest voters), to the young voting demographic of 18-29-year-olds, to the average voter who is significantly older, or to the 16- and 17-year-olds in other democracies who have already been voting for a decade or more? If possible, have a discussion with your group on this general question before you turn to the more specific CQs. This should help your group to begin its discussion from the same understanding, although it is possible that views on the appropriate comparison group may change depending on the issue under consideration and the research available.

Each CQ will be accompanied by information about relevant sections of the study report and a summary of key findings contained in those sections. For ease of reading, we do not include all the citations for the key findings in this document. Source materials for all the research results summarized in the CQ Guide are available in the [study report](#), which members are asked to review prior to the meeting.



# CQ#1

## Would extending the vote to the 16- and 17-year-old be likely to have a positive impact over time on **voter turnout** or **civic engagement**?



Where can I find the research in the study guide to help answer this question?

Full Research is available on [pages 38-40](#) (chapter V, section D), [pages 51-52](#) (chapter VI, section D), [page 58](#) (chapter VII, section A), [pages 59-60](#) (chapter VII, section B), and [page 63](#) (chapter VII, section C).

**Voter Turnout:** The US trails most developed countries in turnout for national elections ranking 31st among 49 other countries. Low turnout has led many to wonder how we can strengthen our population's voting participation; some have proposed lowering the voting age.

Research has found that voting is a habit formed over years of participation and is less likely to become a habit if first voting is delayed. Voting eligibility at 16- and 17-year-old finds young voters in a more stable environment than their 18-year-old counterparts who are dealing with major life transitions (moving away from home, joining the military, going to college, etc.). The stable environment has been found to contribute to greater voter turnout among the 16- and 17-year-olds as well as serving as an important catalyst to vote in future local, state and national elections. In Takoma Park, Maryland, in 2013, for example, when the voting age was lowered to 16, registered voters under 18 had a turnout rate four times higher than voters over 18.

Some remain skeptical of these empirical results based on European experience and a limited number of US cases where voting at 16 has occurred. The skeptics believe that the turnout characteristics of the 18- to 29-year-olds, who exhibit one of the lower turnout rates in the US, are better indicators of future turnout for 16- and 17-year-old.

**Civic Engagement:** There is growing evidence of US youth increasing civic engagement on issues that have major consequences for their futures (e.g., climate change, gun violence, access to higher education, civil rights), as underscored by youth having organized and participated in civic actions such as the March for Our Lives and the Black Lives Matter protests. Youth also note that because the ratio of older to younger voters has increased, the current voting age results in disproportionate underrepresentation of youth and less attention to issues that affect younger vs older voters. Empirical research in European and Latin American countries having lowered the voting age found multiple examples of increased civic engagement, more positive democratic attitudes, democratic satisfaction, and political trust among newly enfranchised youth. Also noted were youth having greater levels of confidence in their own ability to understand politics and make decisions and more attention directed to the young voters from organizations and political parties.

**BREAK TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT & ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW:**

*Evaluate the 3 statements below as a group and indicate what the group's consensus position is for each statement.*

**CQ#1-A:** Do you think that building civic engagement and/or increasing voter turnout should be considered when extending the vote to 16/17-year-olds?



**CQ#1-B:** Do you think that changes in the ratio of older to younger voters should be considered when evaluating reasons to lower the voting age?



**CQ#1-C:** Please rank the following statement using the options below, with 1 being “strongly agree” and 5 being “strongly disagree”: Granting 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote will build a stronger foundation for voter participation or civic engagement.



## CQ#2 Does municipal, state, and/or federal legislation impact 16- and 17-year-olds enough to justify lowering the voting age?



Where can I find the research in the study guide to help answer this question?

Full Research is available on [page 12](#) (chapter III, section B), [pages 38-39](#) (chapter V, section D), [pages 61-64](#) (chapter VII, section C), and [page 99](#) (appendix A).

Many young people report a growing sense of anxiety about the livability of the world that they are inheriting. High rates of depression and suicide among youth in general, and transgender youth in particular, call attention to the problem. This anxiety is a driving force behind the issue-oriented organizing and advocacy demonstrated by youth in the US and Europe. These efforts make it clear that US youth see legislation on guns, climate, and civil rights protections as directly impacting them. Notable US youth advocacy efforts include, but are not limited to:

- The National Youth Rights Association
- March for Our Lives & Gun Violence Prevention Movement
- Climate Friday Strikes & School Walkouts
- Trans Rights & Queer Justice

At the local level, high school students have shown interest in playing a more direct role in decisions about school budgets, curriculums and, more recently, decisions about access to books and bathrooms. The state and local legislation being proposed on these matters is largely a discussion among politicians, educators, and parents and rarely includes the student perspective. Youth have pointed out that legislators, city councilors, and school board members do not pay much attention to them primarily because they cannot vote.

While opponents to voting at 16 do not deny that youth are affected by policy decisions being made today, they argue that only a minority of youth are informed and engaged enough to vote.

**BREAK TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT & ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW:**  
*Evaluate the 2 statements below as a group and indicate what the group's consensus position is for each statement.*

**CQ#2-A:** Do you think the impact of local, state, and federal legislation on a group of people should be considered when extending the vote to new groups?

 Yes

 No

 Uncertain

**CQ#2-B:** Are you aware of legislation that directly impacts 16- and 17-year-olds enough that they should have the ability to vote on it?

 Yes

 No

 Uncertain

## CQ#3 Is the 16- and 17-year-old competent enough to vote?



Where can I find the research in the study guide to help answer this question?

Full Research is available on [pages 42-45](#) (chapter VI, section A).

A key concern of opponents to lowering the voting age is that a 16- or 17-year-old does not possess the competency to vote. The question of maturity has also been raised but is quite broad and risks being subjected to personal bias or potential stereotyping. Evidence-based studies cited in the study focused on competency, developmental science, and decision-making capacity in place of referencing maturity. Of note, opponents' views on competency are similar to personal opinions used to restrict rights to others in the past including women, 18- to 21-year-olds, and non-white races. There are two key sources of information on this question: scientific research on brain development in youth and empirical studies comparing the "quality" of the 16- to 17-year-old vote to that of older voters.

Research on brain development supports the view that the mental ability to make "hot cognition" decisions is not fully developed until the early or mid-twenties -- well beyond the current minimum age for voting of 18. However, the skills needed for making "cold cognition" decisions such as voting for a candidate or understanding a policy are fully developed by the age of 16.

## **What is Hot/Cold Cognition?**

Cold cognition skills are those used to make informed, well-thought-out choices using informed decision-making, non-emotional information processing, and reasoning. Such skills are used in logical reasoning, planning, and approaching a problem, such as voting, and are solidly established by 15 and do not improve in later years.

Hot cognition entails impulsive, emotional, or stressful decision making including responding to peer pressure. Such emotion regulation and impulse control is not fully developed until the early to mid-twenties.

Several studies in Europe have compared the “quality” or the “correctness” of votes cast by younger voters to that of older voters. Studies from Austria, Belgium, and Scotland found no convincing evidence that the quality/correctness of the younger voters’ votes was inferior to that of older voters.

## **What is a “quality” or a “correct” vote?**

Assessments of vote “quality” examine whether voting decisions accurately reflect a voter’s party preferences and whether their choices represent their interests well.

A “correct” vote was defined as a choice in which the participants’ own political position aligned with objective measures of a given candidate’s political position.

To date, we have no studies of this type for youth voters in the US towns and cities that have given 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in local elections. Can we assume that US 16- and 17-year-olds are likely to have the same level of voting quality and correctness as their European counterparts?

**BREAK TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT & ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW:**

*Evaluate the 3 statements below as a group and indicate what the group's consensus position is for each statement.*

**CQ#3-A:** Do you think that scientific studies on the mental competency of teenagers should be considered when evaluating the pros and cons of extending the vote to 16- and 17-year-olds?

 Yes

 No

 Uncertain

**CQ#3-B:** Do you think that empirical studies in Europe on the “quality” of votes by 16- to 17-year-olds compared to the “quality” of votes by older voters should be considered when evaluating the pros and cons of extending the vote to 16/17-year-olds in the US?

 Yes

 No

 Uncertain

**CQ#3-C:** Please rank the following statement using the options below, with 1 being “strongly agree” and 5 being “strongly disagree”: 16- and 17-year-olds on average possess the decision-making skills required to vote.

 1

 2

 3

 4

 5

# CQ#4 Could the 16- and 17-year-old's vote be unduly influenced by others, particularly parents?



Where can I find the research in the study guide to help answer this question?

Full Research is available on [pages 46-48](#) (chapter VI, section B).

There are two primary ways by which friends and family influence a young voter: by influencing the decision to go out and vote and by influencing for what or for whom the youth votes.

On the decision about whether to vote, a US national survey found that youth whose parents encouraged them to vote had a 67% turnout as compared to only 36% for those who were not encouraged. Also, first-time voters are more likely to vote if they are living with guardians who are civically active.

Regarding the youth's choices when voting, a common argument by opponents of lowering the voting age is that the inexperienced 16- and 17-year-old living at home will simply adopt their parent's views. Multiple studies have shown this is not the case, for example:

- A Scottish study demonstrated that 40% of those younger than 18 had a different view than parents on the vote for Scottish independence.
- In Maryland, researchers found little evidence to suggest any more influence on 16- and 17-year-olds than the social influences that take place on older adults by families, communities, and historical events.



Studies of reverse socialization — the young influencing the adults within a household — have found examples of youth encouraging others to become better informed on issues and vote.

Although the research on this topic does not support the hypothesis of undue influence, it remains a common argument among those who oppose lowering the voting age.

**BREAK TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT & ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW:**

*Evaluate the 2 statements below as a group and indicate what the group's consensus position is for each statement.*

**CQ#4-A:** Do you think that the degree to which a voter of any age might be influenced by others (e.g., family, friends, social media) in their voting decisions is a criteria that should be considered when extending the vote to new groups?



**CQ#4-B:** Please rank the following statement using the options below, with 1 being “strongly agree” and 5 being “strongly disagree”: 16- to 17-year-old voters are on average more likely to be influenced by others than older voters.



# CQ#5 Will the 16- and 17-year-old voter use reliable info sources in deciding how to vote?



Where can I find the research in the study guide to help answer this question?

Full Research is available on [pages 49-50](#) (chapter VI, section C).

At any age, having the political knowledge to guide voting choices is an important component of decision-making. Concerns regarding the limits of the US citizen's knowledge of politics have been raised in the past. A National Survey of a random sample of over 1,000 American citizens found nearly 6 in 10 American citizens would not pass the test given to immigrants seeking US citizenship; the test requires factual knowledge of American history and government.

Several studies have examined the younger voter and their use of information. In Scotland, young people eligible to vote at 16 used a variety of information sources to inform their voting decisions and held nuanced and well-founded views on Scottish independence. A US study on the effects of age on political cognition showed the younger age group actually did more searching for information, had more information processing, and had more accurate memories of political information than middle-aged and older adults.

Youth voters who are still in high school are well-placed to benefit from ongoing efforts to develop media literacy skills and promote civic education. Adding the right to vote to these educational efforts has the potential to teach a youth voter how to access quality information and offset the use of potentially unreliable sources shown to take place across all age ranges.

There is a tendency for opponents of Vote16 to stereotype youth as being glued to their cell phones and social media apps, and surveys do confirm that youth spend a lot of time using social media. However, empirical studies to date suggest that those phones and apps are also being used to build political knowledge and voting skills for already enfranchised youth and older voters do not always utilize unbiased, high-quality information sources.

**BREAK TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT & ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW:**  
*Evaluate the 3 statements below as a group and indicate what the group's consensus position is for each statement.*

**CQ#5-A:** Do you think that survey data on any age about the information sources used by different groups should be a factor in determining their eligibility to vote?



**CQ#5-B:** Please rank the following statement using the options below, with 1 being “strongly agree” and 5 being “strongly disagree”: 16- to 17-year-old voters are on average as likely as older voters to use quality information sources when making voting decisions.



**CQ#5-C:** Please rank the following statement using the options below, with 1 being “strongly agree” and 5 being “strongly disagree”: 16- to 17-year-old voters are on average more likely to use less reliable sources of information on news and politics than older voters.



## CQ#6 Should the risk of partisan policy impacts discourage enfranchising 16- and 17-year-olds?



Where can I find the research in the study guide to help answer this question?

Full Research is available on [pages 35-37](#) (chapter V, section C) and [pages 53-54](#) (chapter VI, section E).

Opponents of lowering the voting age have voiced their concerns in personal opinion pieces that the move to lower the voting age is a Democratic Party power grab. Such concerns mirror the argument for opposing statehood for the District of Columbia. In both cases, polling data does confirm that both youth and D.C. residents lean Democratic.

Findings on Generation Z and Millennials' views, for example, show the younger age group is more likely to support liberal, democratic policies. Polls also support a larger Democratic versus Republican turnout among youth with a preference for Democrats (55%) among 18- to 29-year-olds in the 2022 midterm election over Republicans (34%). On the other hand, younger voters fall more frequently in the "independent" category than older voters. A recent poll showed 40% identified as Democrats, 22% as Republicans, and 38% as independents or "something else".

Despite the poll numbers, the Vote16 movement argues that they are more motivated by issues of concern to youth rather than by party politics. Proponents of the Vote16 movement say that the effort to include the 16- and 17-year-old transcends party lines and supports democracy overall. Bringing in the younger population is believed to heighten engagement in the democratic process, strengthen voting as a habit, and motivate bringing civic education and critical thinking skills into the high school classroom to support future well-informed voters.

**BREAK TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT & ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW:**

*Evaluate the statement below as a group and indicate what the group's consensus position is.*

**CQ#6-A:** Do you think the partisan leanings of any proposed group of new voters should be considered when deciding whether to expand the franchise to them?

 Yes

 No

 Uncertain

# CQ#7 Will lowering the voting age further muddy the concept of “age of majority” and result in potential legal risk to 16- and 17-year-olds?



Where can I find the research in the study guide to help answer this question?

Full Research is available on [pages 55-56](#) (chapter VI, section F) and [page 96](#) (appendix A).

Some efforts to lower the voting age in Europe were opposed by parliamentarians and others who did not want to have multiple “ages of majority.” The same issue has been raised in the US, where multiple ages of majority already exist for participating in what are considered adult behaviors (e.g., driving, smoking, alcohol consumption, military service, access to credit, full-time employment, emancipation from one’s parents – and voting). In most cases, US ages of majority are determined by state legislatures and range from 14 to 18 depending on the issue and whether parents consent; the US has few national rules about the age of majority. [This link](#) provides an interactive state-by-state map with descriptions for “age of majority.”






Proponents of lowering the voting age argue that extending the right to vote to 16- and 17-year-olds is consistent with the fact that at 16 an adolescent’s relationship with the law significantly changes as they start driving, working without restrictions, getting married, or living emancipated from parents. Opponents note, however, that for the most part 16- and 17-year-olds need parental permission to enjoy these types of rights before the age of 18.

Opponents voice a concern that a lower voting age could lead to lowering the age of majority in areas where youth currently benefit from protections not afforded to adults. For example, the legal status of “minor” currently protects youth from certain types of criminal prosecution, imposes harsher penalties on individuals who might be tempted to exploit minors and allows disadvantaged youth to benefit from social services such as foster care until at least 18.




**BREAK TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT & ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW:**

*Evaluate the 2 statements below as a group and indicate what the group’s consensus position is for each statement.*

**CQ#7-A:** What do you think is the likelihood that a reduction in the voting age would lead to taking away existing legal protections and benefits now available to 16- and 17-year-olds?

-  Very unlikely
-  Somewhat Unlikely
-  Don't Know
-  Very Likely
-  Extremely Likely

**CQ#7-B:** Is the chance that these protections could disappear for some youth an adequate reason to deny the vote to all 16- to 17-year-olds?

-  Yes
-  No
-  Uncertain

# CQ#8 Should there be a relationship between high school civic education and the right to vote at 16 and 17?



Where can I find the research in the study guide to help answer this question?

Full Research is available on [pages 64-74](#) (chapter VIII).

In 2022 the LWVUS supported bringing the bipartisan Civics Secures Democracy Act for debate and passage, noting that: Effective civics education yields increased participation in elections, which is the best way to ensure that our elected leadership reflects the values of the population.

Civics education for K-12 schools in Maine is included as one of four strands of the Maine Learning Results for Social Studies and includes topics that spread through all grade levels, increasing in complexity. Best practices include civic engagement through individual student projects (service learning), media and digital literacy education, and classroom discussion. These practices are found in many areas of the state, but access is often dependent on economic and logistical factors. Reviews of Maine's performance in civic education note inconsistent attention to the Civic Education content area and some inconsistencies due to the local control approach that our state utilizes.

In states such as Maryland, a commitment to civic engagement and education includes mandates for best practices, thus creating an environment in which young voters were knowledgeable enough to advocate for lowering the voting age, and once lowered, demonstrated high rates of voter turnout. This also holds true internationally; 16- to 17-year-old voters often have better turnout when they have access to high-quality civic education and media literacy training at school.



While there is general agreement that learning about the foundations of our government and democratic process is important, there is opposition to including certain aspects referred to as “action civics”, where students may learn about their local government and choose a local issue or problem. Opponents describe the process as “protest civics”. Some argue that students are taught how to stage protests and walkouts by left-wing educators in classes that engage students in controversial issues and discussions. Some educators also share concerns about the curricular focus of civics shifting from knowledge to include social action.

**BREAK TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT & ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW:**

*Evaluate the 2 statements below as a group and indicate what the group’s consensus position is for each statement.*

**CQ#8-A:** Please rank the following statement using the options below, with 1 being “strongly agree” and 5 being “strongly disagree”: Giving 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote would create momentum to improve civics education in Maine.



**CQ#8-B:** Please rank the following statement using the options below, with 1 being “strongly agree” and 5 being “strongly disagree”: Legislation to give 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote should be accompanied by improvements in high school civic education.



## CQ#9 Are potential administrative and implementation hurdles an adequate reason to deny 16- and 17-year-olds the franchise?



Where can I find the research in the study guide to help answer this question?

Full Research is available on [pages 20-24](#) (chapter III, section C).

The Maine Municipal Association and the Maine Election Clerks Association presented testimony on the two bills for lowering the voting age that came before the 130th Maine Legislature. One bill proposed to lower the voting age in all state elections and the other concerned municipal elections only. Both organizations raised financial and administrative concerns that would need to be addressed if the bills passed.

Among the obstacles cited by these two associations were the:

- need to amend the state constitution to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in state elections
- need to change the state election code to allow municipalities to give the vote to 16- and 17- year-olds
- risk of legal challenges should a municipality change the voting age without a prior change in the state election code
- difficulties youth would have in providing proof of residency if they do not have rent or utility bills in their names

- the possibility that passage would diminish a city's home rule authorities
- extra costs (estimated at \$172,000/year) to prepare separate ballots and keep separate voter rolls for those under 18. (note: this was only cited as an obstacle for one of the bills. The other stated that costs could be absorbed into the current budget)
- challenges for election clerks, who would be held responsible if youth received ballots to which they were not entitled

The Maine Municipal Association was opposed to the passage of both bills, suggesting that the money required to implement the bill or litigate the outcomes of future municipal elections would be better invested in promoting and supporting civic engagement for Maine's youth and the public at large. The City Clerk's Association was neither for nor against.

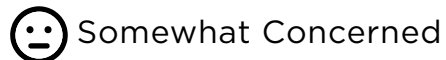
**BREAK TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT & ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW:**

*Evaluate the 2 statements below as a group and indicate what the group's consensus position is for each statement.*

**CQ#9-A:** Do you think that the existence of legal hurdles or potential lawsuits should influence the position that the LWVME takes on this issue?



**CQ#9-B:** Indicate your level of concern that lowering the voting age would result in increased costs for administration and confusion for clerks, administrators, and voters.



# **CQ#10** Other Arguments for and against lowering the voting age

Having reviewed and classified the most common arguments for and against lowering the voting age, does your group have other arguments that you consider relevant but not covered in the questions above? If so, please describe these arguments below.

# CQ#11

## What option below best describes the group's view about granting the vote to 16- and 17-year-olds?



Where can I find the research in the study guide to help answer this question?

Full Research is available on [pages 15-17](#) (chapter III, section B), [pages 25-30](#) (chapter IV), and [pages 101-102](#) (appendix B).

A variety of examples and pathways exist for how to lower the voting age to 16. See the chart for what cities in the US have done in Section III.B . Internationally, other democracies have tried and/or succeeded in lowering the voting age at both the state and federal levels.

Leininger et. al. describe giving 16-year-old only partial access to voting as “temporary disenfranchisement.” This happens when a 16-year-old voter is allowed to only vote in certain elections (e.g. school board but not state senator or state senator and local officers but not the president) but is denied the right to vote in other elections. Using Germany as a case study, these researchers warned that it could lead to increased and lingering frustration with democracy. Youth activists argue the opposite stating that lowering the voting age will increase political engagement and give their concerns greater legitimacy.

Additionally, lowering the voting age for only municipal school board elections has proven to be challenging. This requires the printing of an additional ballot and new administrative steps that have yet to be developed. Despite voters approving this measure in Berkeley in 2016, it has yet to be implemented due to barriers in the administrative process.

**BREAK TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT & ANSWER THE QUESTION BELOW:**

**CQ#11:** What option below best describes the group’s view about granting the vote to 16- and 17-year-olds?

*Check the box that best reflects the group’s consensus:*

Never.

Not now.

Only in School Board elections.

Only in municipal/local elections (including School Boards).

Start with School Board and municipal elections and evaluate that experience before moving on to state elections.

Move ahead with changing the state constitution to enfranchise 16- and 17-year-olds asap.

Move ahead at the state level and support efforts to change the minimum age for federal elections.

If your group consensus is “never”, please explain the key points in your discussion that brought you to this consensus.

Voting Age Study | Lowering the Voting Age to 16

If your group consensus is “not now” what would need to change for your group to consider one of the other options?



# THANK YOU!

Thank you for taking the time to discuss and provide your views on lowering the voting age. This process is essential to the League's internal democracy.

Your answers to these questions will be used to create our position. Once a position has been written the board will approve it and then it will head to our state convention on June 3rd for members to review.