



YOUNG VOICES

AT THE BALLOT BOX

Amplifying Youth Activism to Lower the
Voting Age in 2020 and Beyond

A White Paper from Generation Citizen (Version 3.0 – Feb. 2020)





VOTE
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VOICE

OUR
VOICES
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Empowered
Engaged
Energetic

#ReadyToVote
ENVIRONMENTAL
JUSTICE

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READY
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VOTE

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Cover Photo: Youth leaders, elected officials, and allies rally for a lower voting age on the steps of the California State Capitol in August 2019.
Photo courtesy of Devin Murphy, California League of Conservation Voters.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“ BY EXPANDING THE RIGHT TO VOTE [TO 16- AND 17-YEAR-OLDS], MY COMMUNITY WILL BE ABLE TO FURTHER CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE WHERE EACH NEW GENERATION GROWS UP TO BE LIFE-LONG VOTERS, WITH THE VALUE OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT INSTILLED IN THEM. ”

- Megan Zheng

Vote16USA Youth Advisory Board Member

We are on a mission to lower the voting age to 16. Democracy only works when citizens participate; yet, compared to other highly developed, democratic countries, the U.S. ranks 26th in voter participation.¹ In U.S. presidential elections, only six out of 10 eligible citizens usually vote, and turnout for mayoral elections tends to be less than 25 percent.² Such low civic participation results in an unrepresentative democracy and hurts public trust in government, which is now near an all time low.³

Vote16USA seeks to address these trends by advancing work to lower the voting age to 16. This policy solution, paired with strong civic education in schools, can increase civic participation in the long run and ensure elected officials are accountable to 16- and 17-year-old citizens.

For the majority of American history, the voting age was 21. This dates back to the days of colonial assemblies, which used a 21 year old voting age, following the tradition of the English common law age of majority, which was based on the age at which men in Britain were eligible for knighthood.⁴ The 21-year-old voting age was adopted by all states when the Constitution was ratified. Some states began to lower the voting age to 18 in the 1940's led by Georgia and Kentucky and, in 1971, the 26th Amendment lowered the national voting age to 18. This reform followed a student-led movement that rallied behind the slogan “old enough to fight, old enough to vote” during the Vietnam War.

Eighteen, however, is not a voting age designed to produce the strongest, healthiest democracy

possible. *Sixteen is.* As this paper outlines, inviting citizens into the voting booth at 16 will strengthen American democracy by establishing voting as a lifelong habit among all citizens, and ensuring our government is more responsive to its population.

Sixteen-year-old voting was first adopted in the United States in 2013, when Takoma Park, Maryland lowered its voting age for local elections. Since then, three neighboring cities in Maryland have followed suit, and the voters of Berkeley, CA have approved a ballot measure to lower the voting age to 16 for school board races. In recent years, youth-led campaigns have come near to successfully lowering the voting age in major cities including San Francisco and Washington, D.C., and efforts in state legislatures have gained significant momentum.

On the federal level, 126 members of congress now support lowering the voting age to 16 nationwide. Media outlets including the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Wall Street Journal, NBC News, and NPR have covered the issue and these legislative advances in depth.

In 2015, Generation Citizen—a national civics education organization—launched the Vote16USA campaign to support these local and national efforts. That year, we published Vote16USA's first white paper “Young Voices at the Ballot Box,” and published a second edition in 2017. This third edition of the Vote16USA white paper reflects updates on research and recent progress on the issue. This paper also provides concrete next steps to advance the cause.

WHY SHOULD WE LOWER THE VOTING AGE TO 16?

Extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds will strengthen our democracy. Research shows that voting is a habit and age 16 is a better time than 18 to first establish that habit.⁵ Studies also show that 16-year-olds are ready to vote, as their civic knowledge and reasoning abilities are on par with those 18 and older.⁶ A lower voting age can also ensure the voices of young people are taken into account in the policymaking process and strengthen civics education, both of which are critical considering the country's shifting demographics and trends in civic engagement.

REASON #1: WE NEED TO MAKE VOTING A HABIT

First and foremost, voting is a habit, and a person's first election is critical to establishing that habit. People who vote in their first election are likely to remain habitual voters, whereas those who do not, are likely to remain habitual nonvoters.⁷ Research shows voting in one election can increase the probability that a person will vote in the next election by 25 percent.⁸

Cities and countries that have already lowered the voting age to 16 have seen much higher turnout rates for first time voters ages 16-17 than for first time voters ages 18-21. Evidence indicates this leads to a long-term boost in turnout. An analysis of the long-term effects of lowering the voting age in five countries found an average increase in turnout of 5 percent in the 20 years following the change in voting age.⁹

Young people start forming voting habits when they reach the voting age and participate in their first election. While some Americans vote in the first election they are eligible for at age 18 and become habitual voters, the majority of the electorate does not vote upon initial eligibility.

This is partially due to the many barriers to voting that are unique to 18-year-olds. At 18, young people are often adjusting to new responsibilities such as starting college, entering the workforce, or joining the military. They may also struggle to determine the logistics of voting in a new location, either voting absentee or re-registering in a new area.¹⁰

Sixteen-year-olds, however, are in a much better position to be engaged in their first elections. They are in a relatively stable phase of life and oftentimes surrounded by active voters, whether that be older family members or educators. Sixteen is a better time than 18 to establish the habit of voting.

Researchers from Denmark concluded, "Today when voters become eligible at 18 years of age, most young voters have had none or few participatory opportunities before leaving home. A younger voting age would create more opportunities for acquiring the habit of voting before leaving home."¹¹ Lowering the voting age to 16 would ensure that each new voter experiences at least one

election while in high school, assuming two year election cycles. This allows them to establish the habit of voting in a stable environment where families and schools can help students understand the logistics of voting and establish the practice as a lifelong habit.

Lowering the voting age has shown to be effective at increasing turnout among first-time voters, and research demonstrates that once someone cast their first ballot they are likely to continue the habit of voting for years to come. Lowering the voting age can effectively help young people create the habit of voting, increasing overall turnout in the long run.

VOTING IN ONE ELECTION CAN INCREASE THE PROBABILITY THAT A PERSON WILL VOTE IN THE NEXT ELECTION BY OVER

25%

In Takoma Park's 2013 elections, the turnout rate for 16- and 17-year-olds exceeded any other demographic.¹² In 2015 and 2017, voter turnout for registered 16- and 17-year-olds was more than double the city's overall turnout rate.^{13,14} In 2015, Hyattsville, Maryland became the second city to lower the voting age. In that year's election, the turnout rate for 16 and 17-year-olds was a quarter higher than the overall turnout.¹⁵

In 2008, Austria lowered its voting age to 16 for all elections and saw higher engagement from 16- and 17-year old first time voters than from 18-20-year-old first time voters.¹⁶ Political engagement among this demographic has continued to increase since. Nearly ten years later, ahead of the 2017 general election, most 16- and 17- year olds said they were inclined to participate in the upcoming election.¹⁷

In 2011, 21 Norwegian municipalities lowered the voting age to 16 for local elections. Once again, voter turnout among 16- and 17-year-old first time voters was much higher than turnout among 18-21 year-old first-time voters.¹⁸

Increased participation is particularly important in local elections, where turnout is especially low and many cities struggle to get even one out of five voters to the polls.¹⁹ The 2016 "Who Votes for Mayor?" research project showed that among the 30 largest cities in the United States, half of them saw turnout of 20 percent or lower in their most recent mayoral elections.²⁰ Lowering the voting age to 16 is a powerful solution to address this trend.



WHY SHOULD WE LOWER THE VOTING AGE TO 16?

REASON #2: SIXTEEN- AND 17-YEAR-OLDS ARE READY TO VOTE

Research shows that 16- and 17-year-olds have the necessary civic knowledge, skills, and cognitive ability to vote responsibly. A study comparing the qualities associated with voting—such as civic knowledge, political skills, and political interest—among citizens 18 and older and citizens below 18 found no significant differences between 16 year olds and those above age 18. Civic knowledge was determined by individuals’ ability to answer questions on U.S. politics and government such as “Which of the two major political parties is most conservative at the national level?”; political skill was determined by individuals’ self-reported ability to “write a letter to a public official” or “make a statement at a public meeting”; and political interest was determined by how frequently individuals follow national news.²¹

“ 16- and 17-year-olds know on average as much about the political system as do 21- and 22-year-olds. ”

- Daniel Hart and James Youniss
Renewing Democracy in Young America

Research also shows that 16- and 17-year-olds have the mental reasoning ability necessary to make informed voting choices. Deciding how to vote relies on “cold cognition,” the decision making process in which a person deliberates alone and unhurried, and draws on logical reasoning abilities. Research shows that cold cognition matures by 16, and does not improve as one gets older.²² Research on overall reasoning and cognitive development also shows that there is drastic growth in these areas between ages 11 and 16, significant growth then plateaus at age 16 following this primary development phase.²³

Additionally, a study on the quality of vote choices among 16- and 17-year-olds in Austria—after the national voting age was lowered to 16 in 2007—concluded that their vote choices were just as consistent with their political preferences as older voters’ choices.²⁴ These studies strongly indicate that 16-year-olds are just as ready to vote as 18-year-olds and claims to the contrary are misguided gut reactions.

REASON #3: SIXTEEN- AND 17-YEAR-OLDS HAVE A STAKE IN THE GAME, AND ELECTED OFFICIALS MUST TREAT THEM AS EQUAL CONSTITUENTS

Sixteen- and 17-year-olds work and pay taxes on their income and are affected by the decisions of elected officials today and for the rest of their lives, on issues from education policy to public works projects, climate change, and the national debt. They deserve to have a vote. The most reliable way for ordinary citizens to influence the government is through voting in elections, and by extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds we can ensure elected officials listen to their voices and address their concerns.

This is especially important given the United States’ aging electorate and the increasing divergence between the political interests of younger and older citizens. The electorate is currently the oldest it has been since at least 1970, before citizens ages 18-20 were eligible to vote, and will only get older in the decades to come. The Census Bureau estimates that by 2034, those over the age of 65 will outnumber those 18 and younger for the first time ever, and by 2030, those 65+ will account for more than one-fifth of the population and more than a quarter of the voting age population, for the first time ever.²⁵ These demographic trends put the interests of young people at risk, especially when considering the racial composition of different age groups. The citizens who comprise this older segment of the population are significantly less diverse than those who make up younger segments of the population, and, on average, are considerably less supportive of issues most important to young Americans.²⁶

Consider the example of school funding. Voters ages 18-25 have consistently expressed greater support for public funding for education than voters 65+. In addition, research shows that, on the local level, older voters are less likely to support increases for school funding when the composition of the school-aged population is substantially more diverse than that of the older voters.²⁷ By 2030, those ages 65+ will not only account for a greater share of the electorate than any time in history, this age cohort will also look substantially different than the country’s youngest citizens; the 65+ population will be three-quarters white while the population of those under the age of 18 will be less than one-half white.²⁸ Together, those factors put the interests of young people at a meaningful disadvantage. The inclusion of 16- and



WHY SHOULD WE LOWER THE VOTING AGE TO 16?

17-year-olds in the electorate, and the subsequent increase in turnout among voters in their 20s it would spur, would help make sure the interests of diverse young people are represented in a time of historic demographic change.

We know that elected officials pay most attention to those who vote. Lowering the voting age to 16 would immediately give 16- and 17-year-olds, who work and pay taxes, a say in decisions that affect their lives and how their tax money is spent. Further, it would give a louder voice to a diverse generation of young Americans who are at risk of being overshadowed by historic growth in the oldest cohort of voters as a proportion of the electorate.

REASON #4: LOWERING THE VOTING AGE TO 16 WILL STRENGTHEN CIVICS EDUCATION

As we call for a lower voting age in the United States, significant initiatives are also underway to strengthen civics education nationwide. This work naturally goes hand in hand with the push to lower the voting age, and together strong civics education and a voting age of 16 have the potential to significantly boost civic engagement.

Prioritizing effective civics education is crucial for increasing long term civic participation. Research shows that people who attend high schools with a strong culture of civic engagement are more likely to participate in elections in their 30s, regardless of their individual opinions on the importance of voting.²⁹ Though schools in the U.S. have largely overlooked civics in recent decades, several states and cities have recently moved to reprioritize it, including in Massachusetts, Illinois, Florida, and Tennessee where state legislatures have taken the lead in establishing more comprehensive civics requirements, and in cities such as New York City, where the Civics For All initiative bolsters civic learning in the nation's largest school district.³⁰

A lower voting age would make civics more effective by adding a level of relevance to civics courses by allowing students to directly apply what they're learning in the classroom in their communities. It would encourage

16-year-old voting age implemented



Civics education is relevant to students' lives, making lessons more effective



Young people gain civic skills while developing voting as a habit



Long-term increase in civic engagement

schools to teach more civics and that of a higher quality given its immediate implications on students lives. Allowing young people to vote while they are learning about government, and their role as citizens, in high school civics courses captures the full potential of civics education.

Strong civics education and a lower voting age would mutually reinforce each other to produce the best outcomes in terms of increasing civic engagement. Together, they can help young people gain foundational civic knowledge and skills, and develop a habit of participation.

This is supported by a case study from Austria where voting age reform was accompanied by other measures intended to engage young citizens, including the elevation of the status of civic education in schools.³¹ Since 2008, when Austria lowered its voting age to 16 for all of the country's elections, turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds has been higher than the previous average for first time voters.³² This success shows the promise of a lower voting age combined with a renewed focus on civic education. Lowering the voting age to 16 can bring civics education to life and help fuel its continued resurgence across the country.

MYTHS ABOUT LOWERING THE VOTING AGE

Like any new, bold idea, lowering the voting age faces an array of counterarguments, and these deserve adequate consideration. Ultimately, most counterarguments come down to claims surrounding the maturity and ability of 16- and 17-year olds. Youth is a nebulous concept, and, in reality, legal age-based distinctions in our society are arbitrary and based on what is deemed best for society at large, as judged at a certain point in time. Lowering the voting age to 16 is in the best interests of our democracy, and arguments against doing so are only myths. Some of the most relevant specific counterarguments are addressed as follows:

MYTH #1: 16-YEAR-OLDS ARE NOT MATURE ENOUGH TO VOTE

It is true that research exists showing 16-year-olds' brains are still developing and they do not perform as well as older adults in impulse-driven situations in which emotions run high. However, the decision-making process for voting does not fall into this impulse-driven category, which is known as "hot cognition." Rather, it depends on "cold cognition," a thought out decision-making process in which 16-year-olds perform just as well as adults.³³ Cold cognition is fully developed at 16, and does not improve as one advances further in age.³⁴ Research also shows that by age 16, young people have the necessary civic knowledge and skills necessary to vote.³⁵

MYTH #2: THE VOTING AGE MUST BE TIED TO THE AGE OF LEGAL ADULTHOOD

Sixteen-year-olds play an important role in our society. In most states, they can work without any restriction on hours, pay taxes, drive, and in some cases be tried for crimes as adults. The legal age of consent in many states is 16, and the compulsory school attendance age ends at 16 in many states. The legal definition linking adulthood to the age of 18 should not affect voter eligibility.

It is also important to emphasize that our efforts are only to lower the voting age to 16. All other legal age limits should be set in accordance to what is best for each individual issue. Our country has set the driving age, in most states, at 16, and the drinking age at 21. Each should be considered on its own merits. For this specific issue, the voting age should be 16.

MYTH #3: LOWERING THE VOTING AGE IS A PARTISAN POWER GRAB

The effort to lower the voting age transcends party lines. The purpose of the effort is to invigorate our democracy by fostering active and engaged citizens. A more lively political discourse—in classrooms and in the broader public sphere—can stimulate ideas from across the political spectrum. The effort to lower the voting age is based on increasing participation in democracy, not promoting any one ideology.

MYTH #4: SIXTEEN- AND 17-YEAR-OLDS WILL COPY THEIR PARENTS' VOTES

This claim is reminiscent of arguments made by opponents of women's suffrage, who feared women would copy their husbands' votes. The argument is not a legitimate reason to deny someone the right to vote, and, in the case of women's voting, has been debunked as many married couples are increasingly voting for separate candidates.³⁶

Data from the 2014 Scottish independence referendum also suggests this claim is false. A survey conducted prior to the referendum found that over 40 percent of young people had different voting intentions than a parent interviewed.³⁷ This claim will need to be studied more in the United States, but given the data on youth political preferences, it seems that young people demonstrate and express political beliefs independent from those of their parents.



CURRENT LANDSCAPE IN THE UNITED STATES

LEGAL FEASIBILITY

The legal feasibility of lowering the voting age in any given city depends on state laws, as each state has the authority to establish the requirements for voting in its state and local elections.

These requirements are set out in either state constitutions or statutes. Local governments have varying degrees of authority in determining voter eligibility for their municipal elections, depending on the degree of home rule municipalities are granted in their particular states.

An initial feasibility study by Generation Citizen has determined that city-level campaigns to lower the voting age for local elections seem to be currently feasible in seven states, while nine additional states appear to give cities the authority to lower the local voting age but have nuanced laws that may pose hurdles and require further analysis. In these states, cities could lower the voting age for their local elections through city charter amendments.

The process for passing charter amendments varies. In some cases, such as in Maryland, city councils can approve them by a majority vote. In other cases, proposed charter amendments must be passed by a city council and then approved by voters at the next election. Since this is a legally untested area and some constitutional and statutory provisions are open to interpretation, actions to change the voting age in areas where it seems possible may be subject to legal challenges. See Appendix B for a more detailed discussion of the feasibility study, a 50 state map of legal feasibility in each state, and summaries of each state's applicable laws.

To lower the voting age for an entire state, either a state constitutional amendment or statutory change would be required, depending on the state.

The United States Congress has the power to lower the lower the voting age for federal elections through federal statute. To enact a nationwide change applicable to federal, local, and state elections, an amendment to the U.S. Constitution would be required.

“Municipalities can expand voting rights in local elections if there are no explicit state constitutional or legislative impediments and so long as local jurisdictions have the power of home rule.”

-Joshua A. Douglas

“The Right to Vote Under Local Law” ³⁸



CURRENT LANDSCAPE IN THE UNITED STATES

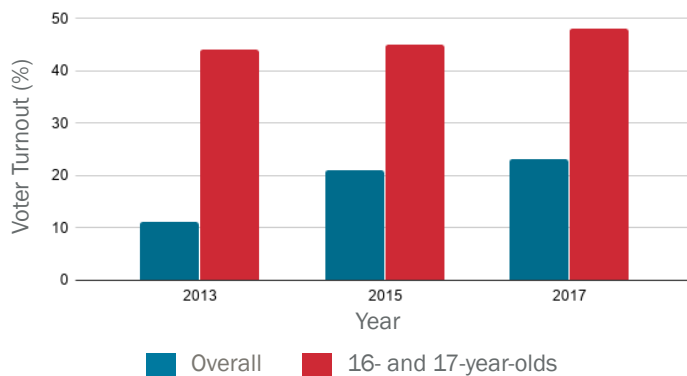
SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

Four United States cities have implemented a 16-year-old voting age for municipal elections: Takoma Park, Hyattsville, Greenbelt, and Riverdale Park, Maryland. Berkeley, California is currently working to implement a 16-year-old voting age for school board elections, a reform that was approved by voters in 2016. The brief sections below offer more detail on the status of 16-year-old voting in these cities, along with updates on the most notable recent efforts to lower the voting age on the local and state level around the country. Some efforts have aimed to lower the voting age to 17 for various reasons, including that in some cases it has been seen as a more winnable proposition than age 16.

I. Takoma Park, MD

In 2013, Takoma Park became the first of four Maryland cities to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds for municipal elections. Maryland's legal structure made it relatively simple for the cities to lower their voting ages — the city councils only needed to vote in favor of a charter amendment and they could implement the change. In Takoma Park, the proposal was passed in the context of a larger effort to expand voting rights through several reforms, including same-day voter registration. As discussed earlier in this paper, in the elections since implementation 16- and 17-year-olds have turned out at higher rates than older age groups. The Takoma Park-based organization FairVote, which studies and promotes a number of election reforms, supported the effort in Takoma Park.

Voter Turnout in Takoma Park, MD



“The results have exceeded our expectations.”

- Tim Male

Former Takoma Park City Councilmember

II. Hyattsville, MD

In Hyattsville, the reform passed as a standalone measure in January 2015. One council member proposed the idea, and a grassroots effort, which included high school students in a prominent way, convinced other members of the proposal's merits. FairVote supported this effort as well.

III. Greenbelt, MD

After Hyattsville lowered its voting age, interest picked up in the nearby city of Greenbelt. The city's Youth Advisory Committee (YAC), a group of young people that advise the city council on issues related to youth and families, studied the issue and sent a report to the City Council urging it to consider lowering the voting age. Over the next two years, the YAC organized work sessions, public hearings, and meetings with council committees. The City Council expressed a desire to solicit public opinion on the issue and placed a non-binding referendum question on the November 2017 ballot, asking voters whether they approved of lowering the local voting age to 16. The referendum showed that 55 percent of voters supported the idea, a striking increase from the 23 percent of residents who expressed support in response to a very similar 2015 survey question.^{39, 40} Taking the referendum question results into account, in early 2018 the City Council voted unanimously to officially lower the city's local voting age to 16. Greenbelt held its first election with 16- and 17-year-old voters in May 2019.

IV. Riverdale Park, MD

In May 2018, the Riverdale Park City Council voted to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds for local elections, becoming the fourth city in Maryland to do so. Riverdale Park held its first election with 16- and 17-year olds voters in May 2019.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE IN THE UNITED STATES

CURRENT CAMPAIGNS

I. MASSACHUSETTS

A. State Level Legislation

On the heels of a new law strengthening civics education in Massachusetts, the EMPOWER (Ensuring Municipal Participation of the Widest Eligible Range) Act was introduced in 2019 to make it easier for cities and towns to lower the local voting age.⁴¹

Currently, if a Massachusetts city or town wants to lower the voting age, local lawmakers must first approve it, and then send a “home rule petition” to the state legislature to request approval to implement the change locally. Home rule petitions must be approved by both chambers of the legislature and signed by the governor. The EMPOWER Act would do away with that requirement and allow cities and towns to implement the change directly on the local level if they choose to do so. Young people from across the state are leading advocacy efforts for the bill.

In recent years, local governments in nine cities and towns in Massachusetts have passed resolutions to lower the voting age to 16 for local elections, the state legislature has not given any of those municipalities the approval to implement the change. The EMPOWER Act would remove this barrier. Some of those cities and towns include:

B. Somerville, MA

In October 2018, the city’s Clean and Open Elections Task Force reported recommendations to improve election transparency, civic engagement, and voter turnout. One recommendation was to lower the voting age to 16. Inspired by this recommendation and vocal advocacy from young residents, the Somerville city council considered and approved of sending a home rule petition to the state legislature requesting approval to lower the voting age locally in May 2019.⁴²

C. Concord, MA

In 2018, following a Town Meeting vote, the city of Concord sought a home-rule petition to lower the voting age to 17 in town elections, resulting in a home rule petition introduced in the state legislature in 2019.⁴³

D. Northampton, MA

In July 2018, following research and education efforts led by students on the Mayor’s Youth Commission and other high schoolers, city councilors voted unanimously in support of a resolution to lower the voting age to 16 in Northampton. A home rule petition is expected to be introduced in the state legislature in 2020.⁴⁴



Young people testify on legislation to lower the voting age at a D.C. Council Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety hearing, June 2018.

“ A lot of Boston teenagers already have a big impact on what is done on a municipal level with things like the Mayor’s Youth Council, and other organizations that focus on youth civic engagement. But with the law in place to let us vote, it will solidify our political presence and show others who doubt the Vote16 movement that our voices matter just as much as theirs. ”

- Marianna Reddick
Vote16USA Youth Advisory Board Member



CURRENT LANDSCAPE IN THE UNITED STATES

II. CALIFORNIA

A. San Francisco, CA

In 2016, the historic Vote16SF campaign, led by young people from across the city, resulted in a ballot measure to lower the voting age that won 48% of the vote on election day, falling just short of passage.⁴⁵ See below for more detail on the 2016 effort. The landscape remains promising for another run in the San Francisco. Most of the city's elected officials are strong supporters and a growing coalition of young people is coming together to focus on a 2020 ballot measure campaign. A formal kick-off for a 2020 Vote16SF effort is expected in the early months of 2020.

B. Berkeley, CA

Berkeley, CA made history in 2016. Youth leaders in the city successfully advocated for the ballot measure Y1, to lower the voting age for school board elections in Berkeley to 16. The city council voted to put the measure on the ballot, and it passed with an overwhelming 70 percent of the vote. The change has yet to be implemented, but the Vote16Berkeley team is working to see that process through. In October 2018, the Berkeley Unified School District Board voted to allocate money to retain for a law firm to aid in implementing the change, ideally prior to the 2020 school board election.⁴⁶ This was an historic success that proves voters are ready to give 16-year-olds the right to participate in local elections.

III. COLORADO

A. Boulder, CO

Multiple recent and current efforts to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds in Colorado have raised the profile of the issue in the state. Students in Boulder continue to advocate for a lower voting age in municipal elections, aiming for more concrete action from the city council and a ballot measure in an upcoming election. Most members of the Boulder City Council expressed support for lowering the voting age at a May 2018 public meeting. Separately, a coalition called Student Voice Student Vote organized around a state bill that would have lowered the voting age for school board elections statewide in 2019 and will do so again in 2020. The 2019 bill did not move beyond committee but activists brought the issue to prominence in the state legislature and hope to build on that momentum in 2020.⁴⁷

IV. VERMONT

A. Brattleboro, VT

On March 5, 2019 the town of Brattleboro held its annual town vote, where citizens directly vote on an array of citizen-initiated propositions. One of these propositions was Article 2, which would lower the voting age to 16, as well as allow 16 year olds to serve on the Brattleboro Union High School school board and the Brattleboro Town School Board. Nearly 70 percent of residents voted yes, meaning legislation will be introduced in the state legislature to give the town the authority to implement it, similar to Massachusetts' home rule petition process. Four years earlier, when lowering the voting age was first proposed in Brattleboro in 2015, it was voted down by a 28 point margin.⁴⁸

V. WASHINGTON, DC

In 2015, a D.C Council member introduced the Youth Vote Amendment Act of 2015, which would extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds for all D.C. elections. The legislation gained multiple co-sponsors but did not advance beyond committee.⁴⁹ The legislation was reintroduced by seven out of thirteen councilmembers in 2018, backed by a robust, youth-led Vote16DC campaign coalition. After earning public support from eight members, the bill passed unanimously out of committee in November 2018.⁵⁰ Along the way, the young people leading Vote16DC catalyzed public dialogue around the issue and were featured in several local and national media outlets, including the Washington Post and NBC Nightly News, and earned an endorsement from the Washington Post's editorial board.⁵¹ Before the full council could vote on the bill, however, a motion was made to table it, and that motion succeeded after two of the bill's original co-introducers voted to table it, seemingly influenced by backroom pressure from members opposed to the bill. Vote16DC youth leaders hope to see the bill reintroduced in the future.

VI. OREGON

A bill to lower the voting age to 16 statewide was introduced in the Oregon state legislature in 2019, backed by Next Up Oregon (formerly known as the Oregon Bus Project), a leading organization in the democracy movement in the state. The bill's introduction and progress was covered by local and national news outlets including CNN and CBS News. Hundreds of youth activists rallied behind the bill and earned the support of many members of the legislature and Governor Kate Brown, but the legislation ultimately did not advance in 2019. Now, youth leaders and allies are working on a plan to continue to build support for the issue in 2020 and re-introduce the bill in the future.



CURRENT LANDSCAPE IN THE UNITED STATES

VI. FEDERAL LEVEL

Progress on the federal level has been one of the most significant developments in work around lowering the voting age in the past two years. First, Rep. Grace Meng introduced the first-ever proposed constitutional amendment to lower the voting age to 16 in 2018, and again in 2019. In addition, in March 2019, Rep. Ayanna Pressley proposed lowering the voting age to 16 for federal elections as an amendment to a larger bill concerning election reforms. The amendment advanced through the House Rules Committee and was debated on the House floor and voted on by the full House, where it failed but earned 126 votes in favor, from members of both parties, and was supported by the Speaker of the House.⁵² This represents tremendous progress at bringing the issue into mainstream consideration, and is a strong base for future progress on the federal level.

In 2019, this proposal, combined with the progress of youth-led local and state level Vote16 campaigns, helped bring the issue of lowering the voting age into mainstream political discourse more than ever before. Candidates running in the 2020 Democratic Primary have been repeatedly asked for their view on the topic. As of December 2019, none of the candidates are opposed to the idea and several are supportive or open to it on various levels: Secretary Julian Castro wants to lower the voting age to 17, entrepreneur Andrew Yang supports lowering it to 16, and Senator Bernie Sanders and Governor John Hickenlooper have expressed enthusiasm about local governments implementing 16-year-old voting.

Also in 2019, the first national, public polling on the idea of lowering the voting age to 16 was conducted. Multiple media organizations ran polls to test public opinion on the issue, with most finding that about 17% of likely American voters support it. It is encouraging to see the issue reach the level of prominence that it is being researched and covered in this way, and it's worth looking at the poll numbers specifically with appropriate context. First, it's important to remember that these surveys capture respondents' immediate reactions, and we know that lowering the voting age is often referred to as a "second look issue," meaning that many people have a negative immediate gut reaction, but a positive response after a brief conversation or learning about the issue. This has proved true on the local level on multiple occasions:

In San Francisco in 2016, initial polling showed that 36 percent of voters supported lowering the voting age. However, after a strong public education campaign, 48 percent voted in favor of the change just seven months later.

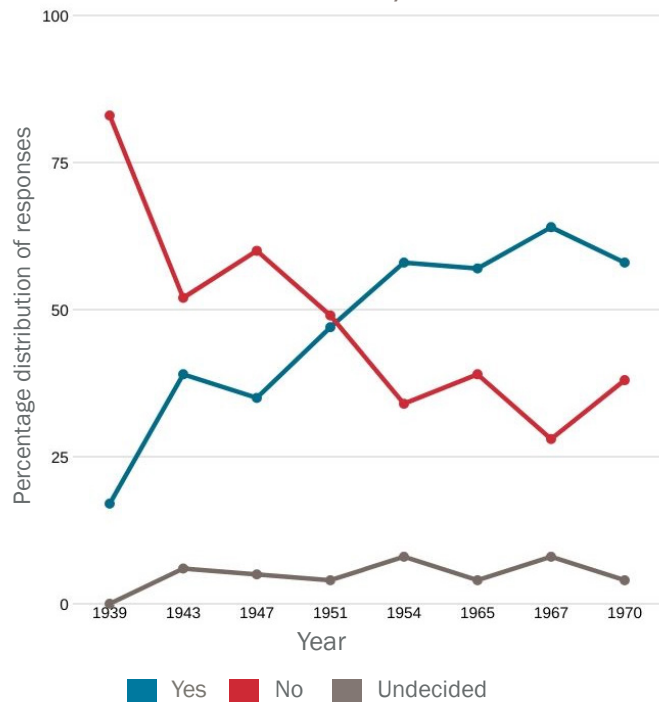
In Brattleboro, Vermont, residents in the town rejected a proposal to lower the voting age by a vote of 36% in favor and 64 percent opposed in 2015. In 2019, voters approved of lowering the voting age, with 69 percent voting in favor.

Initially, only 17% of the public supported lowering the voting age from 21 to 18.

In Greenbelt, Maryland, a 2015 survey with a response rate nearly equal to the city's voter turnout rate showed 23 percent support for a lower voting age. Later, in 2017, following a public education campaign led by young people, 55 percent voted in favor of lowering the voting age on a non-binding referendum question.

In addition, it's worth remembering that 16-year-old voting is still a relatively new idea and the movement around it is in its early stages. In fact, the 18-year-old voting age, which we now take for granted, garnered a similar result on public polls when it was first entering the public discourse.

Support for Changing the Voting Age From 21 to 18, 1939-1970



Source: Gallup George H. The Gallup Poll, 1935-1971. New York, Random House, 1972. p. 159, 364, 630, 1009, 1218, 1958, 2057, 2243, 2303.



CURRENT LANDSCAPE IN THE UNITED STATES

SUPPORT IN CONGRESS

A proposal to lower the voting age to 16 for federal elections brought new attention to the issue in 2019 and put a spotlight on perspectives from supporters on both sides of the aisle.

“ Our young people are at the forefront of some of the most existential crises facing our communities and our society at large. I believe that those who will inherit the nation we design here in Congress, by virtue of our policies and authority, should have a say in who represents them. ”

- Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-MA)
U.S. House of Representatives

“ Those who pay taxes should have a voice in our democracy. As a teen, I worked & paid taxes [...] I support policies that encourage work & this could be part of the conversation. ”

- Rep. Michael Burgess (R-TX)
U.S. House of Representatives



CURRENT LANDSCAPE IN THE UNITED STATES

VII. BILLS IN STATE LEGISLATURES

Multiple state legislatures are considering, or have recently considered, bills that would lower the voting age. Bills introduced in 2018 and 2019 include the following:

STATE	YEAR INTRODUCED	THIS BILL WOULD...
California	2019	Lower the voting age to 16 statewide. Another bill would allow 17-year-olds to vote if they turn 18 by the general election.
Connecticut	2019	Lower the voting age to 16 for local elections.
Hawaii	2019	Lower the voting age to 16 statewide through a Constitutional Amendment.
Kentucky	2019	Lower the voting age to 16 for local elections.
Massachusetts	2019	Lower the voting age to 16 statewide, in addition to the EMPOWER Act.
Michigan	2018	Lower the voting age to 16 statewide.
Nebraska	2018	Lower the voting age to 16 statewide, lawmakers have said they intend to propose legislation.
New York	2019	Lower the voting age to 16 statewide and includes an eight-period civic education requirement for graduation and allows students to register to vote in the classroom.
North Dakota	2018	Lower the voting age to 16 statewide, lawmakers have said they intend to propose legislation.
Oregon	2019	Lower the voting age to 16 statewide through a Constitutional Amendment.
Virginia	2019	Lower the voting age to 16 in local elections.



CURRENT LANDSCAPE IN THE UNITED STATES

PAST EFFORTS

A. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 2016

In 2016, San Francisco made history as the first city in the United States to put the question of lowering the voting age before voters as a ballot measure. More than 172,000 citizens voted in favor of the proposal, which finished just two percentage points shy of passing, a tremendous achievement for a youth-led campaign on the ballot for the first time.

The effort began in 2014, when high school students in the city were struck by the fact that they and their peers were significantly impacted by local elections but had no voice in the process. Youth leaders brought a proposal to lower the local voting age to the San Francisco Youth Commission, where the Vote16SF campaign was born. In less than two years, students working on the campaign earned the support of nearly every elected official and political club in the city. The Board of Education unanimously endorsed the proposal, and the Board of Supervisors voted 9-2 to put it on the ballot at the November 2016 election.

Initial polling showed just 36 percent of voters would support the measure, but youth pressed forward, and earned 48% of the vote after months of campaigning. This dramatic increase demonstrates that public education efforts can substantially shift public opinion on the issue, especially when young voices are at the center. This campaign proves that lowering the voting age on the local level is a viable policy idea that voters are ready to seriously consider. Campaign leaders are now working to bring the issue back to the ballot and win in 2020.

B. GOLDEN, CO 2018

The city of Golden voted on a ballot measure question that would have lowered the local voting age to 16 in 2018. The measure was placed on the ballot very shortly before the election and was supported by the mayor and the majority of city councilmembers, and young people led a campaign to educate voters about the measure. Ultimately, the measure was voted down, 35 percent - 65 percent, but this could have been due to supporters not having the time or resources to spread the message strongly enough.⁵³ Nonetheless, Golden became the first city in Colorado to put the question to a vote, which goes to show how the idea is gaining traction across the country.

C. LOWELL, MA 2009-2013

In 2009, a group organized by the United Teen Equality Center convinced the Lowell city council to vote in favor of drafting a home rule petition to send to the state legislature. Had the petition cleared the legislature, it would have allowed the city to hold a referendum, which, if successful, would have lowered the voting age for local elections to 17. The petition gained bipartisan support at the State House and passed in the Senate, but stalled in the House.

D. CAMBRIDGE, MA 2002-2006

High school students in Cambridge led an initiative to lower the voting age to 17 for municipal elections in 2002. Per Massachusetts law, the city council had to vote to send a home rule petition to the state legislature. The council voted in favor of the initiative 8-1, but the petition did not advance at the State House. The council continued to express its support in subsequent years, and in 2006 sent a petition to the state seeking to lower the voting age for only School Committee elections, but did not succeed on the state level.

E. OTHER PAST STATE-LEVEL BILLS

State Representatives and State Senators in several states introduced bills between 2003-2015 that would have lowered the voting age for either all of the states' elections or just school board elections in the state. None of these bills passed, and few made it out of committee. These bills include:

- 2003 - Texas
- 2004 - California
- 2004 - Iowa
- 2005 - Washington
- 2008 - Illinois
- 2008 - Michigan
- 2009 - Wisconsin
- 2011 - Washington
- 2014 - Missouri
- 2015 - Minnesota
- 2015 - New Mexico
- 2015 - Arizona
- 2015 - Hawaii



CURRENT LANDSCAPE INTERNATIONALLY

Initiatives to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds have seen considerably more momentum internationally. At least 16 countries around the world use a voting age of 16 or 17 for local, state, or national elections—including Germany, Austria, Estonia, Scotland, Ecuador, and Argentina. **A full list of these countries and their specific voting age policies is in Appendix A.*

As mentioned earlier in this report, research on the countries that have implemented 16- and 17-year-old voting shows positive results. In Latin America, the region with the most countries that allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote, research focusing on Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina, and Nicaragua shows that people who were able to vote starting at age 16 exhibited greater satisfaction with democracy and trust in government.⁵⁴

Evidence from Europe also supports the notion that 16 is a better age than 18 to establish voting as a habit. In Austria, over the 10 years since a 16-year-old voting age was implemented on the national level, turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds has been higher than 18-20 year-olds, and similar to the electorate's overall average. Sixteen- and 17-year-olds have followed political campaigns to the same extent as other eligible young voters and have exhibited higher levels of satisfaction of democracy, which has a positive effect on turnout.⁵⁵

In Germany, turnout among 16-20 year olds is higher than citizens up to 10 years older.⁵⁶ In Norway, where 30 municipalities have used a 16-year-old voting age for local elections on a trial basis, 16- and 17-year-old turnout was much higher than turnout among traditional first-time voters ages 18-

2008
Austria lowered its voting age to 16 for all elections.



2011
Norway allowed 16-and 17-year-olds in 21 municipalities to vote in local elections.



2014
Scotland allowed 16-and 17-year-olds to vote in the Scottish independence referendum.



2015
Scotland lowered the voting age to 16 for all elections.



2019
Wales passed a law granting 16-and 17-year-olds the right to vote in Welsh Assembly elections beginning in 2021.

21.⁵⁷ One of the most recent European countries to make the change, Estonia, also saw turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds exceed the overall voter participation rate. This is a remarkably positive result considering turnout among the youngest voters has tended to be significantly lower than the overall rate.

Preliminary calculations by Generation Citizen indicate that globally, 7.9 percent of all 17-year-olds are eligible to vote, and 4.1 percent of all 16-year-olds can vote. Enfranchising 16-and 17-year olds is not a new idea, and momentum for lowering the voting age has continued to gain steam across the globe.

Debate has advanced significantly in the UK. Scotland and Wales now both use 16-year-old voting for their elections (Scotland made the change in 2015, Wales in 2019), fueling a push to lower the voting age UK-wide. Members of parliament from all major political parties have spoken out in favor of the change and the “Votes at 16” campaign has been a notable political force. Iceland has also begun to consider the change; a bill introduced in 2018 was supported by a third of the members of parliament.

NEXT STEPS TO ADVANCE THE CAUSE

The landscape around 16-year-old voting in the United States has changed dramatically since the launch of Vote16USA and the publication of the first edition of this white paper in 2015.

In recent years, additional municipalities have lowered their local voting ages, campaigns in some of the country's largest cities made tangible progress that sets the stage for future success in enacting policy change, and the issue was debated on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives. The issue has also become more prominent in the public discourse. Media coverage on the topic has increased tremendously in the past three years, bills have been introduced and sparked public conversation on the state level in 13 states, and members of Congress, presidential candidates, and even the President are now talking about and taking stances on the issue.

To build on this momentum, we aim to advance legislation in concrete ways in targeted municipalities, while working to build widespread support for the issue and bring it further into mainstream policy conversations on the national level. Below are intended next steps to advance the cause through the year 2020. Updated iterations of this strategic outlook will be published on Vote16USA.org to keep up with shifting circumstances.

ADVANCE LEGISLATION ON THE MUNICIPAL AND STATE LEVELS

Maryland: In Maryland, opportunity exists to build on existing progress by supporting new cities in adopting 16-year-old voting on the local level. We aim to work closely with youth leaders, elected officials, and other partners in an array of cities to support further adoption of 16-year-old voting in the next two years. In addition, we will support efforts to ensure high turnout of young voters in the cities that have implemented 16-year-old voting, and we will support any data collection efforts to track the effects of a lower voting age on the local level.

California: Interest in lowering the voting age in California is very high among youth organizers, influential political and community organizations, and elected officials. Following the victory of Vote16 Berkeley and substantial progress made by Vote16SF in 2016, the conditions are ripe for ballot measure campaigns in 2020. We hope to support a renewed effort in San Francisco and earlier stage work led by youth organizers in other cities in California.

Massachusetts: While cities do not have direct authority to lower the voting age on the local level in Massachusetts, significant efforts are underway to pass legislation on the state level to change that. Should that work succeed, several municipalities are poised to take the next steps in lowering the voting age locally. There is an opportunity to anchor advocacy for this issue in the context of recently enacted legislation on civics education to build a comprehensive narrative around youth civic engagement.

Illinois: Young people in Illinois have made significant progress in building support for 16-year-old voting in recent years, and there may be an opportunity in the near future to advance legislation on the state level that would make it easier for cities to lower the voting age locally. Notably, Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot is a supporter, and several members of the state legislature have expressed interest and support. Such a measure would build on Illinois' recently enacted laws bolstering high school and middle school civics education.

Colorado: Colorado remains a ripe environment for progress through city charter amendment changes on the local level, due to the state's clear legal framework that allows cities to make and implement this change locally. Most members of the Boulder City Council are supportive, and we are working with young people to pursue a potential ballot measure campaign. Smaller cities may present opportunities for successful campaigns in the near future as well. Opportunity also exists to build on recent activity in the state legislature around considering a lower voting age for school board elections.



NEXT STEPS TO ADVANCE THE CAUSE

“ I am really proud of the amount of youth activism that has happened over the past year. It was teenagers that organized a worldwide climate strike and national walkouts to protest gun violence. ”

-Amira Tripp Folsom

Vote16USA Youth Advisory Board Member

DEMONSTRATE WIDESPREAD SUPPORT FOR 16-YEAR-OLD VOTING

Cultivate increased media coverage

Media coverage on Vote16USA and 16-year-old voting has increased dramatically over the past four years, and it is imperative to work intentionally to ensure it continues to grow in the years ahead. We will build relationships with reporters and conduct media outreach around key events to secure coverage in print and online publications, on television, and on the radio. We will also work to place op-eds from the diverse array of voices supporting lowering the voting age.

Leverage support from federal level elected officials

Interest in and support for 16-year-old voting has grown markedly among members of Congress, presidential candidates, and other national political figures. We will work with allies in Congress to continue to build the profile of the issue through their reach, and will leverage their support to bring attention to the issue around key moments in national politics, such as presidential debates and national and state party conventions.

Build the corps of individual and organizational endorsers and validators

Just like local level campaigns to lower the voting age have been bolstered by endorsements from widely known and respected individuals and organizations in the area, we believe the national effort can benefit tremendously from endorsements from both individual and organizational validators. We will work to build a corps of supportive individuals who are nationally-recognized leaders in politics, civic engagement, and other areas, and will work with partners in the field to build a strong list of national organizations publicly supporting the work.



Vote16USA Youth Advisory Board member Alek Schier, 17, gives a TV interview at the Council of the District of Columbia. June 27, 2018

Amplify youth activism on the issue to bring new attention to the issue and achieve legislative goals

The bedrock of progress toward each of these objectives is effective youth organizing. We know from experience that the most effective advocates for a lower voting age are the 16- and 17-year-olds who are directly affected. Through the Youth Advisory Board (a group of students leading local Vote16 efforts who help guide Vote16USA's national work), support for youth leaders of local campaigns, and other activities, we will ensure that young people remain front and center in this work. The stronger youth organizing is on this issue, the more possible it becomes to win endorsements, secure media coverage, earn support from key decision makers, grow the movement, and win campaigns to lower the voting age.



CONCLUSION

After many years of leadership and passionate advocacy from young people around the country, lowering the voting age to 16 is now beginning to break into the mainstream public discourse on potential solutions to improve our democracy. Now, the time is ripe to advance work to secure legislative victories on the local and state levels while continuing to advance widespread public education on the issue.

Extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds on the local level can increase turnout in the long run by making it easier for young people to establish the habit of voting, and 16- and 17-year-olds have indeed voted at higher rates than older first-time voters when given the chance. Lowering the voting age can also catalyze improvements in civic education that so many have called for in the past few years, and 16- and 17-year olds have shown they are ready to vote and have a stake in local issues.

Critically, lowering the voting age is an effort to reinvigorate our democracy by fostering active and engaged citizens. It is not the idea of one party, and it does not aim to benefit any political ideology. Rather, lowering the voting age is an effort to reinvigorate our democracy by fostering active and engaged citizens.

As the 2020 campaign cycle comes into full swing, national political discourse will remain alive with discussion and debate on many important issues. The health of our democracy itself is one of those critical issues. Lowering the voting age can and should be part of that conversation. There is a real possibility that by the end of 2020, 16-year-old voting could be law in multiple additional municipalities while enjoying vocal support from all levels of government and a growing share of the general public. Realizing that potential requires supporting and amplifying the work young people are leading across the country. Following their lead, we will continue to move closer to a day when all 16- and 17-year-olds are eligible to vote, and our democracy is better for it.

“ HELPING MY CITY TAKE THE FIRST STEPS TOWARDS ENCOURAGING YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IS AN EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITY. LEARNING TO VOTE AT A YOUNG AGE HAS PROFOUND EFFECTS ON SUSTAINED POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT, AND THE YOUTH OF OUR COUNTRY DESERVE TO HAVE A SAY IN THE ISSUES THAT AFFECT THEM. ”

- Sadie Fleig

Vote16USA Youth Advisory Board Member

APPENDIX A

COUNTRIES WITH A VOTING AGE LOWER THAN 18

COUNTRY	VOTING AGE
Argentina	16 for all elections. Lowered from 18 to 16 in 2012.
Austria	16 for all elections. Lowered from 18 to 16 in 2008. Some municipalities let 16-year-olds vote in local elections before national change.
Bosnia	16 if employed, otherwise 18.
Brazil	16- and 17-year-olds and those over 70 have the option of while those 18-69 are legally required to vote.
Croatia	16 if employed, otherwise 18.
Cuba	16 for all elections.
East Timor	17 for all elections.
Ecuador	16- and 17-year-olds and those over 65 have the option of while those 18-64 are legally required to vote.
Estonia	16 for local elections, 18 for all other elections.
Germany	16 for several states, 18 for national elections.
Guernsey (British Crown Dependency)	16 for all elections.
Hungary	16 if married, otherwise 18.
Indonesia	17 for all elections, and married persons regardless of age.
Isle of Man (British Crown Dependency)	16 for all elections.
Jersey (British Crown Dependency)	16 for all elections.
Malta	16 for Local Council elections, 18 for all other elections.
Nicaragua	16 for all elections.
Norway	Performed pilot programs in 2011 and 2015 in which 20 municipalities used a voting age of 16 for local elections each year.
Scotland	16 for Scottish Parliament and local elections
Serbia	16 if employed, otherwise 18.
Sudan	17 for all elections.
Wales	16 for Welsh Assembly and local elections.



APPENDIX B

METHOD FOR DETERMINING LEGAL FEASIBILITY OF LOWERING THE VOTING AGE

Determining the legal feasibility of lowering the voting age in any given city starts with a two step process—first examining the state’s voting age provisions, and then its home rule laws. Although we are interested in individual cities, the initial analysis takes place on the state level.

Step 1: Analysis of Voting Age Provisions

First, we must look at both the state Constitution and the state election statutes for provisions regarding the voting age. The key is to determine, in both the Constitution and the statute, whether the voting age requirement is phrased as a grant or a restriction. The Ohio Constitution, for example, says “Every citizen of the United States, of the age of eighteen years [...] is entitled to vote at all elections.” This phrase can be interpreted two ways: either (1) the right to vote is given exclusively to citizens over the age of 18, or (2) while those over 18 cannot be denied the right to vote, voting rights could be granted on a discretionary basis to those under 18.

To determine which of these interpretations is correct, further analysis is needed of case law in each state, although it is likely that many states do not have any case law on this subject. In the context of the 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which is also worded as a grant, at least one federal court has suggested that the more inclusive interpretation is correct, noting that the amendment “provides that the right to vote cannot be denied on the basis of age to persons age eighteen or over, but it does not prohibit the states from setting a lower voting age.”²⁷ However, this decision is not binding precedent over state courts.

The Ohio provision quoted above is an example of what we call a grant. The Arizona Constitution, on the other hand, gives an example of what we refer to as a restriction: “No person shall be entitled to vote at any general election [...] unless such person be a citizen of the United States of the age of eighteen years or over.” This clearly prohibits those under 18 from voting.

If a state Constitution phrases the voting age as a restriction, the first step to lowering the voting age in cities in that state must be a state constitutional amendment to rephrase that provision. If a state statute phrases the voting age as a restriction, the state legislature must pass a new law to change the statute and make it more permissible of under-18 voting. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be a possible solution in this situation.

If both the state Constitution and state election statute phrase the voting age requirement as a grant, we can move on to an analysis of home rule. It is important to note, however, that the true meaning of the phrases we call grants is open for interpretation by individual state courts. If a municipality takes action to lower its voting age, this action could be challenged in court, and the state court may interpret the voting age provision as meaning that the right to vote is reserved exclusively to those over 18.

Step 2: Home rule analysis:

The second key to determining the legal feasibility of lowering the voting age in cities in any given state is establishing the degree of home rule, if any, municipalities are granted in that state. Home rule allows municipal flexibility in local affairs so far as is consistent with applicable state law, and it comes from the state Constitution, state statutes, or both. In some cases, a state will list exactly which subjects municipal governments can and cannot exercise control over. Other states with home rule are more vague in their descriptions of what powers local governments can exercise, leaving the issue open for interpretation. Lastly, there are instances in which municipalities can take action in a matter of local governance, but the action must be approved by the state legislature. This was the case in Massachusetts when Lowell and Cambridge tried to lower their local voting ages.

It is necessary to consult with local experts to more conclusively determine the legal feasibility of a municipality lowering its voting age in some situations. Municipal actions in some areas where it seems legal may still be subject to court challenge over the interpretation of home rule statutes.

Step 3: Deeper Analysis

For states that appear feasible, the next step is to take a deeper look at state laws related to elections that would impact a cities’ ability to implement 16-year-old voting, such as voter registration laws. This research is specific to each state.



FEASIBLE STATES

In these states, our research indicates that cities can take action to lower the voting age for their local elections, usually through city charter amendments. A charter amendment must be proposed by one city council member, passed by the council, and then approved by a majority of voters as a ballot issue. Citizens can also bring a petition to propose a charter amendment in many cities, but this is less practical in most jurisdictions.

CALIFORNIA

Charter cities can change their local voting ages through charter amendments.

The California Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. California gives its charter cities (nearly every major city is a charter city) broad home rule authority. Elections are not specifically addressed, but municipalities “may make and enforce all ordinances and regulations in respect to municipal affairs” (Calif. Const. art. XI, § 5a) and case law supports the determination that elections are considered municipal affairs. This indicates that California charter cities may lower their local voting ages through city charter amendments, as San Francisco is pursuing now.

COLORADO

Charter cities can change their local voting ages through charter amendments.

The Colorado Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state Constitution provides a process for cities to adopt home rule charters and gives charter cities the power to control “all matters pertaining to municipal elections” (Colo. Const. art. XX 20, § 6). Thus, home rule charter cities can lower the voting age for their local elections through charter amendments. All of Colorado’s major cities are home rule charter cities.

MARYLAND

Cities can lower the voting age for local elections by city council vote, except for Baltimore.

The Maryland Constitution grants the right to vote to those over 18, and does not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. Further, the Maryland election code states that: “Except for the City of Baltimore, the provisions of this section do not apply to a municipal corporation in the State in which the municipal or charter elections

are regulated by the public local laws of the State or the charter of the municipal corporation” (Md. Code § 2-202). This gives cities the ability to regulate their local elections, and is what allowed Takoma Park and Hyattsville to lower the voting age with just a city council vote.

NEW JERSEY

Cities operating under optional plan municipal governments appear to have the ability to change their local voting ages through charter amendments.

The Constitution grants the right to vote to those over 18 and does not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting (NJ Const. art. 2, § 1.3) and the election code refers back to the Constitution (N.J. Rev. Stat. § 19:4-1). Regarding home rule, Title 40, section 40:69A-29 lists specific powers granted to optional plan municipal governments, and this list does not include the power to regulate elections. But, Title 40, section 40:69A-30 states that this list is not exhaustive, and the powers of municipalities should be construed liberally. This provision is written in a generous way and appears to let cities do anything that is not in conflict with other state law. So, it appears that New Jersey cities operating under optional plan municipal governments can lower the voting age, as long as this action is not interpreted to conflict with state laws on the voting age. Further research is needed on related provisions, including voter registration statutes.

NEW MEXICO

Charter cities can change their local voting ages through charter amendments.

The New Mexico Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state Constitution provides a process for cities to adopt home rule charters, and gives charter cities very broad authority (NM Const. art. 10, § 6). Further, the election code contains a section regulating municipal elections, but states that “The provisions of the Municipal Election Code shall not apply to home rule municipalities [...] unless the Municipal Election Code is adopted by reference by such municipality” (NMSA § 3-8-1). This indicates that the nine home rule charter cities in New Mexico can indeed lower the voting age in their local elections, through charter amendments.

OKLAHOMA

Charter cities can change their local voting ages through charter amendments, which need to be approved by voters and the Governor.

Oklahoma's Constitution phrases the voting age provision as a grant, and the statute refers back to the Constitution. Regarding home rule, cities with populations greater than 2,000 are allowed to adopt home rule charters and amend them so long as they do not conflict with the state Constitution or statutes. Charter amendments must be approved by the city council, then approved by voters, then submitted to the governor for approval (Constitution Section 18-3(a)). The governor shall grant approval if the amendment "shall not be in conflict with the Constitution and laws of this State." However, it is unclear how the governor decides to approve charter amendments in reality.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Washington, D.C.'s city council can pass a bill to lower the voting age in the city, but the U.S. Congress can overturn it.

Washington, D.C. is unique in this discussion. The city council can pass a bill to lower the voting age, but, like any other D.C. law, the U.S. Congress could pass a bill to overturn it.

CITIES THAT MAY BE ABLE TO LOWER THE VOTING AGE FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS, BUT THE LAW IS LESS CLEAR OR POTENTIAL BARRIERS EXIST

In these states, the constitutional and statutory provisions on the voting age are phrased as grants, and cities appear to have the necessary home rule power, but the legal situation is ambiguous enough to warrant scrutiny, or other potential barriers have been identified. These states range from those where it is somewhat likely that a city's action to lower the voting age would hold up to scrutiny, to those where it is possible but doubtful.

ARKANSAS

Counties may be able to lower the voting age for their local elections.

Arkansas' Constitution and statutes do not deny a city or county the ability to lower the voting age for its local elections. First class cities can exercise power related to "municipal affairs" as long as it does not conflict with state law (14-43-601). Act 1187 of 2011 repealed Dillon's Rule. This gave municipalities the authority to "perform any function and exercise full legislative power in any and all matters of whatsoever nature pertaining to its municipal affairs." However, Arkansas does not allow for 16-year-old voter pre-registration, and the state constitution's voter registration provisions require citizens to be 18 by the time of the next election to register. This would complicate voter registration for 16-year-olds to vote in local elections.

HAWAII

Counties can likely lower the voting age for their local elections through charter amendments, although more research is needed to verify.

Hawaii's Constitution grants the right to vote to those 18 and up and does not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state statutes do not contain a provision on the voting age. Local government in Hawaii is mostly administered on the county level, and counties have broad power to self-govern via charters, as long as charter provisions do not conflict with general laws of the state. It does not appear that there are any state laws that would prohibit a county in Hawaii from lowering the voting age for its local elections, but this needs to be confirmed with more research on related statutes, including voter registration laws.

IDAHO

The election code appears to disqualify those under 18 from voting, but it is not entirely clear. City-specific enabling legislation may be an option.

The Idaho Constitution grants the right to vote to those over 18 and does not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting (Idaho Const. art. 6, § 2). The Idaho election code, however, contains a provision titled "Disqualified Electors Not Permitted to Vote" (Idaho Code. Ann. § 34-403) This provision states that "no elector shall be permitted to vote if he is disqualified as provided in article 6, sections 2 and 3 of the state constitution." Article 2 says, among other things, that all citizens over the age of 18 are qualified to vote. Taken together, this

APPENDIX B

could very well be interpreted as meaning that one who is not qualified to vote under article 2 is disqualified. In this case, the Disqualified Electors statute would need to be changed. Regarding home rule, the Constitution states that “Any county or incorporated city or town may make and enforce, within its limits, all such local police, sanitary and other regulations as are not in conflict with its charter or with the general laws” (Idaho Const. art. 12, § 2). This could likely be interpreted to give cities the ability to change the local voting age. City-specific enabling legislation could be an alternative to changing the Disqualified Electors statute. Further research is also needed on provisions related to implementation, including voter registration statutes.

MISSOURI

The city of Kansas City may be able to lower the voting age for its local elections through either a charter amendment or a local ordinance.

The Missouri Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state has a specific statute that gives any city with a population over 400,000 the right to regulate its own elections (§ 122.650.1). The only such city in Missouri is Kansas City. Other charter cities “shall have all powers which the general assembly of the state of Missouri has authority to confer upon any city, provided such powers are consistent with the constitution of this state” (Art. 6 § 19a), but it is unclear whether this provision grants authority over local elections. The existence of the statute specific to cities over 400,000 suggests it does not. Kansas City’s charter includes a provision stating that state election laws shall apply to all city elections, “except as provision is otherwise made by this Charter or ordinance” (§ 601). So, it appears that Kansas City can lower its voting age for local elections. However, City Council staff for Kansas City shared commented to Vote16USA staff that they are not confident in the city’s authority to make this change. Further research is also needed on provisions related to implementation, including voter registration statutes.

NEVADA

More research is needed on home rule law.

The Nevada Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. Nevada does not provide home rule through its Constitution, but it does give incorporated cities (the classification of city with the most autonomy

in Nevada) certain powers listed under NRS 268.008. Authority over local elections is not listed. But, the state law about city elections says that “conduct of any city election is under the control of the governing body of the city, and it shall, by ordinance, provide for the holding of the election, appoint the necessary election officers and election boards and do all other things required to carry the election into effect” (NRS 293C.110). This may mean that cities can lower the voting age for their local elections through charter amendments or ordinances, but the law is particularly open to interpretation. Further research is also needed on related provisions like registration statutes.

OHIO

Charter cities can change their local voting ages through charter amendments but may be especially subject to court challenge.

The Ohio Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state Constitution provides that “municipalities shall have authority to exercise all powers of local self-government” (Art. 18 Sec. 3). The scope of “local self-government” is not defined and has needed to be determined by the courts. Generally, if an issue is a matter of “general and statewide concern,” it is outside the scope of home rule. There is no way to tell whether the voting age in local elections would be considered “general and statewide concern” or a “power of local self-government.” It appears that a city in Ohio could attempt to change its voting age through a charter amendment, declaring that doing so is a “power of local self-government,” and would then have to defend the action if it is challenged in court. More research is needed on related statutes, like voter registration laws.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Cities and counties can lower the voting age for their local elections through charter amendments.

The South Dakota state Constitution and election code both grant the right to vote to those 18 and older, and do not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting (Const. Art. 7 § 2 and SDCL 12-3-1). Any county or city in South Dakota can adopt a charter, and “A chartered governmental unit may exercise any legislative power or perform any function not denied by its charter, the Constitution or the general laws of the state” (Const. Art. 9 § 2). A state statute lists the restrictions on the power of home rule units, and this list does not include

elections. Therefore, it seems that home rule units (cities or counties) in South Dakota can lower the voting age for their local elections through charter amendments. Charter amendments must be approved by voters. Further research is also needed on provisions related to implementation, including voter registration statutes.

UTAH

Cities may be able to lower the voting age for local elections, but the issue is especially open to interpretation.

The Utah Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The Constitution also gives cities the ability to adopt charters for their local government. Cities with charters have “the authority to exercise all powers relating to municipal affairs, and to adopt and enforce within its limits, local police, sanitary and similar regulations not in conflict with the general law, and no enumeration of powers in this constitution or any law shall be deemed to limit or restrict the general grant of authority hereby conferred” (Const. Art. 11 § 5). This indicates cities might be able to use their home rule power to lower the voting age. However, local elections are included in the statutory definition of “election” in the state election code (20A-1-102), which could prevent cities from acting on the issue. Further interpretation and case law research are needed, as well as research on related statutes, like the voter registration laws.

WISCONSIN

It appears that cities can lower the voting age through charter amendments, but the election code and home rule and provisions are especially open to interpretation, complicated by case law.

The Constitution (Art. 3 § 1) and statute (§ 6.02) both phrase the voting age requirement as a grant. The Constitution (Art. 11 § 3) gives cities power to “determine their local affairs and government, subject only to this Constitution and to such enactments of the legislature of statewide concern as with uniformity shall affect every city or every village.” It is likely that state election statutes are of “statewide concern,” especially since (§ 5.02) defines “election” as “every public primary and election.” If this is true, cities may still be able to lower the voting age, since doing so may not directly conflict with the state law. On the other hand, cities may be prohibited from doing anything in an area of statewide concern where there already are statewide laws. Case law does not give very clear direction but leans toward a more limited interpretation of home rule. Research is also needed on state status related to implementation, such as voter registration laws.

NEED STATE LEGISLATION TO GIVE CITIES THE POWER TO LOWER THE VOTING AGE FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS

In these states, some aspect of state law prevents a city from taking action to lower its voting age. Legislation is needed on the state level. Such a bill could take a variety of forms depending on the specifics of state law.

ALASKA

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Alaska’s Constitution presents the voting age requirement for voting as a grant (Art. 5 § 1), but the statute that provides voter requirements for state elections is less clear (15.05.010). A strict reading of the statute may interpret it as a grant, but the way the statute is structured makes it seem like a restriction. Further, there is a specific statute about voter qualifications for municipal elections (29.26.050). It does not mention age but refers back to the state election statute, and uses more restrictive language, lending credence to the more restrictive interpretation of the state election statute. Alaska’s Constitution provides broad power to home rule cities, but a statute prohibiting home rule cities from acting to supersede specific statutes includes the municipal voter qualification statute mentioned above (29.10.200). So, for a home rule city in Alaska to lower its voting age, the statute concerning restriction of home rule powers must be changed, and the general voter qualification statute may need to be changed as well. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

CONNECTICUT

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

The Connecticut Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. Additionally, Connecticut does grant home rule to its municipalities. However, the law specifically prohibits municipalities from taking action that affects “matters concerning qualification

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and admission of electors” (Title 7, Chapter 99, Section 7-192a). It may be possible for one or more specific cities to seek enabling legislation, but this is unclear because Connecticut’s Constitution contains a provision that limits the general assembly’s ability to enact special legislation specific to a single city (Article 10 Section 1). Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

DELAWARE

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Delaware’s Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, and the statute does not mention it, so the question turns to home rule. Delaware does give its cities a degree home rule powers, but cities are specifically prohibited from amending a municipal charter to “change the qualifications of those entitled to vote at municipal elections” (§ 835). Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

FLORIDA

Voter qualification statute and home rule statute prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

The Florida Constitution does not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting, but the state’s election code reads “A person may become a registered voter only if that person is at least 18 years of age” (Chapter 97) (emphasis added). Florida municipalities have home rule, but cannot take action that is preempted by or in conflict with state law. The way the election code is written, it would almost certainly either preempt or conflict with a municipality’s action to lower the voting age. Thus, it appears that the law would have to be changed to allow those over 18 to vote, while not specifically denying that right to those under 18. This may still leave enough ambiguity for a legal challenge—a more certain strategy would be to also change the home rule law to specifically state that municipalities have authority over their local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

GEORGIA

Voter qualification statute and home rule statute prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

Georgia’s Constitution grants the right to vote to those over 18 and does not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting. The Georgia code contains a statute listing voter qualifications that clearly restricts those under 18

from voting (§ 21-2-216). Further, while Georgia gives its municipalities some home rule powers, the home rule law lists specific powers that are reserved for the state, including “action affecting ... the procedure for election or appointment of the members [of the municipal governing authority]” (§36-35-6). For municipalities in Georgia to lower their local voting ages, the state legislature would need to pass bills changing both the voter qualification law and the home rule law. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

ILLINOIS

Charter cities have home rule authority to lower the voting age, but state law about voter registration would prevent implementation.

The Illinois Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state Constitution states that home rule units (counties and municipalities with populations over 25,000) “may exercise any power and perform any function pertaining to [their] government and affairs” except as expressly limited, and that home rule powers “shall be construed liberally” (art. 7 § 6). Neither the constitution nor state statutes explicitly preempt municipalities from lowering their voting ages, so it seems that municipal units in Illinois can lower the voting age for their local elections, through charter amendments. However, the state Constitution requires that “laws governing voter registration and conduct of elections shall be general and uniform” (Const. art. 3, § 4). Voter registration forms are required to include a space where the prospective voter affirms that “I will be at least 18 years old on or before the next election” (Ill. Comp. Stat. Ann. § 5/1A-16). A home rule unit could not use a different registration form without an amendment to state registration law. State legislation could amend the registration provision to affirm that home rule units that exercise their home rule authority to enact 16-year-old voting may also implement corresponding registration procedures.

INDIANA

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

The Indiana Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state has home rule, but it is extremely limited and specifically prohibits municipalities from conducting elections, or from regulating “conduct that is regulated by a state agency,” which would include



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elections (IC 38-1-3-9-7). Thus, advocacy efforts in Indiana would have to begin with changing the home rule law to allow municipalities to exercise control over local elections. Given the limited nature of the current law, this seems particularly unlikely. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

IOWA

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Iowa's Constitution phrases the voting age provision as a grant, but the election code phrases it as a restriction (§ 48A.5). The state Constitution has an amendment granting municipal corporations "home rule power and authority, not inconsistent with the laws of the General Assembly, to determine their local affairs and government" (Section 38A). However, the election code provides that "county commissioner of elections shall ... conduct the election pursuant to the provisions of [the state election code]" (376.1). It appears that, if the voting age statute was changed to make it a grant rather than a restriction, a city could take action to lower its voting age. While the county commissioner would still conduct elections pursuant to the state laws, a lower voting age would no longer be contrary to those laws. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

KANSAS

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

The Kansas Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, but the election code presents it as a clear restriction. Fortunately, Kansas does have relatively broad home rule powers. If the law regarding the voting age were changed to phrase the requirement as a grant, like the state Constitution does, it appears that cities would be able to use their home rule power to lower the voting age for local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

KENTUCKY

Open to interpretation, but home rule law likely prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Kentucky's Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant. The voter qualification statute refers back to the Constitution, but in a way that may possibly be construed to restrict voting to only those above 18 (KRS § 116.025). Kentucky grants home rule via statute 82.082(1), which says, "A city may exercise any power and perform any function within its boundaries [...]"

that is in furtherance of a public purpose of the city and not in conflict with a constitutional provision or statute." Additionally, cities do not have power where there is a "comprehensive scheme of legislation on the same general subject" (82.082(2)). Although the state election code does not specifically address municipal elections, it is certainly arguable that it is a "comprehensive scheme of legislation on the same general subject" as municipal elections. In sum, it would be possible for a city in Kentucky to take action to lower its voting age, declaring that doing so is "in furtherance of a public purpose of the city" and that the state election code does not represent a "comprehensive scheme of legislation on the same general subject" as municipal elections. But, these declarations are subject to court challenges, and it is possible a court would reject the city's claims, preventing it from lowering its voting age. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

LOUISIANA

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Louisiana's Constitution phrases the age requirement for voting as a grant, but a statute in the state's election code specifically states that "no one, under the age of eighteen years shall be permitted to vote in any election" (Title 18 § 101). If that statute were changed, local governments (parishes and municipalities) with home rule charters may be able to lower the voting age in their local elections through charter amendments, because they can exercise any power that is "necessary, requisite, or proper for the management of its affairs, not denied by general law or inconsistent with this constitution" (Const. Art. 6 § 5e). However, whether changing the local voting age falls under this description is subject to interpretation. In sum, advocacy in Louisiana must start with changing the statute that prohibits those under 18 from voting, and then it may be possible for local governments to take action. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

MAINE

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Maine's state Constitution phrases the voting age as a grant, but the state election code presents it as a restriction. Further, while Maine's Constitution provides for municipal home rule, the state election code specifically states that "The qualifications for voting in a municipal election conducted under this Title are governed solely by [the state election code's voter qualification statute,



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which is phrased as a restriction]” (Title 30-A § 2501). Therefore, in order for municipalities to lower their voting ages in Maine, the state election code must be changed to phrase the voter qualification provision as a grant. To eliminate ambiguity, the statute previously mentioned (§ 2501) could also be eliminated or changed to specifically state that the qualifications for voting in municipal elections are not governed by state laws. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

MASSACHUSETTS

Cities need the state legislature’s approval for home rule petitions.

The Massachusetts Constitution and election code phrase the voting age requirement as a grant. Cities in Massachusetts have the ability to adopt home rule charters, but to amend a charter to lower the voting age, cities must send home rule petitions, also referred to as special act charters, to the state legislature (Chapter 43B). First, the city council must form a study committee, which recommends the home rule petition to the council. Then, if the city council votes in favor of the petition, it goes to the state legislature and is treated as a piece of legislation. If it passes the House and Senate and is signed by the Governor, the petition is returned to the city for implementation. Cities can write their petitions to make the proposal subject to approval by voters after being passed by the state legislature, but don’t necessarily have to. See this paper’s discussion of Lowell’s effort to lower the voting age for more details on the process in Massachusetts.

MICHIGAN

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age. Home rule law is open to interpretation, but may also prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

The Michigan Constitution phrases the voting age as a grant, but the election code says that to vote a person must be “not less than 18 years of age,” which is a restriction (Ch. 168 Sec. 492). Cities have a degree of home rule, but “No provision of any city or village charter shall conflict with or contravene the provisions of any general law of the state” (MCL 117.36; 78.27), and charter amendments must be submitted to the governor for approval. First, the voting age statute must be changed to phrase the age as a grant rather than a restriction. Even if this happens, it would be unclear whether a city could take action to lower its voting age, or if that would still conflict with or contravene the state law.

To avoid this uncertainty, the home rule law would need to be changed to specifically give cities authority over elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

MINNESOTA

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age. More research is needed on home rule.

The Minnesota state Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, but the state’s election code phrases it as a restriction (Ch. 201.014). There is a state statute (Ch. 205.02) regarding the applicability of state election law to municipal elections, but further analysis is needed to understand how this affects cities’ ability to lower the voting age. Regardless, statewide or city-specific enabling legislation could be a viable option.

MISSISSIPPI

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

The Mississippi Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. However, the Mississippi home rule law specifically prohibits cities from changing “the requirements, practices or procedures for municipal elections,” unless specifically authorized by another statute (Miss. Code Ann. § 21-17-5). Thus, the home rule law would have to be changed to allow municipalities to exercise home rule authority over local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

MONTANA

Voter qualification statute and home rule statute prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

Montana’s state Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, but the state statute phrases it as a clear restriction (13-1-111). Further, while cities in Montana can adopt charters, they are still subject to state laws concerning elections, and charters “shall not contain provisions establishing election, initiative, and referendum procedures” (§ 7-3-708). So, for a municipality in Montana to have the ability to lower its local voting age, both the state law on voter qualifications and the home rule law would need to be changed. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.



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NEBRASKA

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Nebraska's Constitution presents the age requirement for voting as a grant, but the election code defines an elector as a citizen "who is at least eighteen years of age." Cities with populations greater than 5,000 are allowed to adopt charters. City councils can propose charter amendments, which must be approved by referendum (Const. Art. 11-4), but charters are still subject to the Constitution and state laws. Therefore, the statute defining an "elector" must be changed before cities can take action to lower their voting ages through charter amendments. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

New Hampshire's Constitution phrases the voting age provision as a grant, and the statute simply refers to the Constitution (Const. Art. 11 and § 654:1). However, while New Hampshire's towns and cities have the ability to adopt charters, charters do not give towns or cities any additional powers other than to determine the organization of their local government (§ 49-C:15). Further, New Hampshire law provides for the qualifications of voters in municipal elections (49-C:5). Additionally, in 2000, voters did not approve a proposed constitutional amendment that would have given cities and towns broad home rule powers. For a New Hampshire municipality to lower its voting age for local elections, the legislature would have to pass a bill specifically giving municipalities the authority to regulate local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

NEW YORK

Voter qualification statute and home rule statute prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

The New York Constitution phrases the voting age as a grant, but the state election code phrases it as a restriction. Additionally, while New York provides home rule, it is limited, and municipalities do not have control over voter registration requirements. Therefore, advocacy efforts in New York must aim to change both the state law on the election age and the state law on home rule. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option. This would be similar to the city-specific law that allowed New York City to extend voting rights to non-citizens for school board elections from 1969-2002, when the mayor took control of the schools.

NORTH CAROLINA

Voter qualification statute and home rule statute prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

North Carolina's state Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, but the state statute phrases it as a clear restriction (§163-55). North Carolina does not provide for home rule in its Constitution, and home rule authority has been given in a limited way through subject-specific statutes. No such statute exists concerning municipal elections, and the state election code contains sections governing municipal elections (Chapter 163 Article 24). To lower the voting age in cities in North Carolina, advocates would have to pass a bill changing the voting age statute and specifically granting municipalities the authority to regulate local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

NORTH DAKOTA

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

North Dakota's Constitution and election statutes grant the right to vote to those over 18 and do not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting. But, state statutes list the powers that are given to home rule cities and counties, and both cities and counties have the power to "provide for all matters pertaining to [city or county] elections, except as to qualifications of electors" (40-05.1-06 and 11-09.1-05). So, for a city or county to lower the voting age in its local elections, these statutes would need to be changed. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

OREGON

Statute on state election law's applicability to local elections prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Oregon's constitutional provision on the voting age is a bit ambiguous, but it can likely be interpreted as a grant (Art. 2 § 2). The state election code does not contain a voter qualification provision. Cities in Oregon have some degree of home rule, but the state election code states that "any primary election, general election or special election held in this state shall be conducted under the provisions of this chapter, unless specifically provided otherwise in the statute laws of this state" (§ 254.016). It seems that this provision prevents cities from enacting their own regulations related to elections, like lowering the voting age. In order to give cities in Oregon the power to lower their voting ages, either this statute or the home



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rule laws would need to be amended. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

PENNSYLVANIA

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

The Pennsylvania Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. Pennsylvania gives its municipalities a degree of home rule, but the state law specifically prohibits municipalities from exercising home rule authority over “the registration of electors and the conduct of elections.” Advocacy efforts in Pennsylvania would need to begin with changing that state law to give municipalities more control over their local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

RHODE ISLAND

State legislation is needed to give cities the authority to lower the voting age locally.

The Rhode Island Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting (Const. Art. 2 § 1 and §17-1-3). The state Constitution also says that any city can amend its charter and “enact and amend local laws relating to its property, affairs and government not inconsistent with this constitution and laws enacted by the general assembly” (Article 13, Section 2). On the surface, it appears this should be interpreted to mean that cities do have the power to lower the voting age, since the provisions about the voting age are presented as grants. However, conversations with elected officials and elections administrators in Rhode Island reveal that in reality the laws are interpreted to mean that the state controls all matters related to elections, despite cities’ apparent home rule powers. So, legislation on the state level would need to more explicitly give cities this power.

TENNESSEE

State legislation is needed to give cities the power to lower the local voting age under home rule authority.

Tennessee’s Constitution presents the voting age requirement as a grant, and the state’s statutes don’t address the voting age. Home rule is unclear. Art. 11 Sec. 9 of the Constitution gives any municipality the ability to become a home rule municipality, but it doesn’t elaborate on powers granted. Title 6, Chapter 53 regulates municipal elections, but does not say whether home rule municipalities can form their own regulations regarding

elections. While not explicitly clear, this is likely enough to determine that cities in Tennessee do not currently have the authority to lower the voting age for local elections. It is likely that state legislation would be needed to affirm a city’s ability to lower the local voting age under its home rule authority.

VERMONT

Cities need the state legislature’s approval for charter amendments.

The Vermont Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. Municipalities in Vermont do have the ability to amend their charters, but all charter amendments must be approved by the city’s voters as well as the state’s General Assembly (§ 2645). It is possible for a city to amend its charter through this process to lower the voting age, because the state’s election code says that charter provisions shall apply over state law when they provide for election procedures different than those outlined in the state laws (§ 2631).

WASHINGTON

State legislation would need to affirm that home rule powers extend to the issue of the local voting age.

The Washington constitution arguably frames voting as a right to those 18 and over, rather than a prohibition on those under 18. However, certain case law suggests that age is a minimum qualification, and the state registration statute indicates that registration is allowed only for those 18 or over. Washington’s home rule provisions permit municipal autonomy, but only to the extent that the legislature has not adopted “a law concerning [that] particular interest.” In the case of voting age, municipal efforts to lower the voting age would likely be found to conflict with the state registration statute, unless it can be shown that the registration statute itself is inconsistent with the constitutional language. State legislation would need to affirm that home rule authority extends to the issue of the local voting age and does not conflict with the registration statute.

WYOMING

Statute on state election law’s applicability to local elections prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Wyoming’s Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, but the state election code’s provisions on qualifications to register to vote is unclear (22-3-102). Regardless, the state election code does state that “a municipal election shall be governed by



laws regulating statewide elections” (22-23-101). So, for a city in Wyoming to lower its voting age, that provision would have to be changed to give cities control over the regulation of their elections, and the registration qualification statute may need to be changed as well. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

STATE CONSTITUTION PREVENTS CITIES FROM LOWERING LOCAL VOTING AGE

In these states, an aspect of the state Constitution prevents cities from taking action to lower the voting age on the local level. Advocacy in these states would have to focus on a state constitutional amendment, which would be rather unlikely. In most states, constitutional amendments must be approved by two thirds of each House and by the state’s voters.

ALABAMA

State Constitution does not provide for any degree of home rule.

Alabama’s Constitution phrases the voting age provision as a grant, and the statute simply refers to the Constitution. However Alabama does not give its municipalities any degree of home rule. The state legislature can pass “local acts” that apply to one municipality. Home rule would have to be provided through an amendment to the Constitution, which is unlikely. Individual cities could advocate for “local acts” allowing them to lower the voting ages, but these acts still have to be passed as constitutional amendments.

ARIZONA

State Constitution specifically prohibits voting by those under 18.

The Arizona Constitution and election code both clearly restrict voting to only those over 18 years of age. Advocacy efforts in Arizona would have to start with an amendment to the state constitution, which is rather unlikely. A majority of each House must approve the amendment, and then it must be approved by the state’s voters.

SOUTH CAROLINA

State Constitution prohibits municipalities from enacting provisions related to elections.

South Carolina’s Constitution and election statutes grant the right to vote to those over 18 and do not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting (Const. Art. 2 § 4 and S.C. Code Ann. § 7-5-610). But, while the Constitution allows municipalities to adopt home rule charters, it specifically prohibits them from enacting provisions related to “election and suffrage qualifications” (Art. 8 § 14). City-specific enabling legislation may be a possibility, but this is unlikely due to the constitutional provision. Constitutional amendments must be approved by two-thirds of each House, and then approved by the state’s voters.

TEXAS

State Constitution specifically prohibits voting by those under 18.

The Texas Constitution and election code both clearly restrict voting to only those over 18 years of age. Advocacy efforts in Texas would have to start with an amendment to the state constitution, which is rather unlikely. Two-thirds of each House must approve of the amendment, and then it must be approved by the state’s voters.

VIRGINIA

State Constitution specifically prohibits voting by those under 18, and does not provide for home rule.

The Virginia Constitution phrases its voting age provision as “Each voter shall be [...] eighteen years of age” (Article 2 Section 1). This phrase clearly restricts voting to those over the age of 18, so advocacy efforts in Virginia would have to start with an amendment to the Constitution to change this provision. In addition, Virginia does not offer home rule to its municipalities, which makes lowering the voting age in cities in Virginia especially unlikely.

WEST VIRGINIA

State Constitution specifically prohibits voting by those under 18, and does not provide for home rule.

West Virginia’s Constitution and election code both clearly restrict voting to only those over 18 years of age (Const. Art 4 § 1 and WV Code § 3-1-3). Advocacy efforts in West Virginia would have to start with an amendment to the state constitution, which is rather unlikely. Two-thirds of each House must approve of the amendment, and then it must be approved by the state’s voters.

VOTE16USA YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

SUMMARY

The Vote16USA Youth Advisory Board is comprised of young people from around the country who are working to advocate for 16-year-old voting in their cities or states. Board members help guide Vote16USA's national efforts, ensure that young voices remain at the center of the initiative, and support each other's local campaigns by sharing best practices and learning from other members' experiences. Youth Advisory Board members serve one-year terms beginning in the early summer.



Vote16USA Youth Advisory Board members at the board retreat in Washington, DC August 2019

CURRENT VOTE16USA YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

Alexis Campbell, Fayetteville, GA

Alik Schier, Washington, DC

Amira Tripp Folsom, Portland, OR

Arianna Nassiri, San Francisco, CA

Caleb DeBerry, Chicago, IL

Catie Macauley, Portland, OR

Helisa Cruz, Washington, DC

Joy Georgie, Boston, MA

Kayla Morrison, Denver, CO

Mahita Bobba, Los Altos, CA

Marianna Reddick, Boston, MA

Megan Zheng, San Francisco, CA

Noah Kassis, Northampton, MA

Sadie Fleig, Berkeley, CA

Tiffany Missembe, Washington, DC

Zo Pancoast, Berkeley, CA

“Vote16 will change the conversation surrounding voting and democracy to be more inclusive of young people, make voting a habit, and encourage young people to be civically engaged.”

- Amira Tripp Folsom

“At the core of the [VOTE16] movement are the principles of equity, engagement, and true democracy. By enfranchising young voters, we create a truly dynamic population that is empowered to use their voices on issues that affect them every day.”

- Catie Macauley

“Students have been underrepresented when it comes to... the issues that affect our age.”

- Caleb DeBerry

“The youth deserves a choice in policy because we are significantly affected by it.”

- Alexis Campbell

APPENDIX D

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YOUTH LEADERS

Adela Aguirre, *Vote16USA YAB 2017-2018*

A.J. Hessburg, *Vote16USA YAB 2018-2019*

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Anna Bernick, *Vote16USA YAB 2016-2017*

Anna He, *Vote16USA YAB 2016-2017*

Arianna Nassiri, *Vote16USA YAB 2019-2020*

Barclay Shove, *Vote16CO*

Caleb DeBerry, *Vote16USA YAB 2019-2020*

Carlie Hansen, *Vote16USA YAB 2016-2017*

Catie Macauley, *Vote16USA YAB 2019-2020*

Christopher Ficeto, *Vote16CT*

Daisy Villalva, *Vote16USA YAB 2018-2019*

Eliana Valenzuela, *Vote16USA YAB 2018-2019*

Ema Smith, *Vote16MD*

Esmeralda Alvarez, *Vote16USA YAB 2017-2018*

Eva Martinez, *Vote16USA YAB 2017-2018*

Eve Abraham, *Vote16CO*

Felix Andam, *Vote16USA YAB 2018-2019*

Hannah Sun, *Vote16USA YAB 2016-2017*

Helisa Cruz, *Vote16USA YAB 2019-2020*

Jason Chen, *Vote16USA YAB 2018-2019*

Jenny Gonzalez, *Vote16USA YAB 2018-2019*

Jill Wu, *Vote16USA YAB 2016-2017*

Jose Medel, *Vote16USA YAB 2017-2018*

Joseph Jackson, *Vote16USA YAB 2016-2017*

Joshua Cardenas, *Vote16USA YAB 2016-2017*

Joshua Park, *Vote16USA YAB 2017-2019*

Joy Georgie, *Vote16USA YAB 2019-2020*

Julieta de Jesus Hernandez, *Vote16USA YAB 2017-2018*

Justin Ziegelmueller, *Vote16USA YAB 2017-2018*

Kayla Morrison, *Vote16USA YAB 2019-2020*

Lorelei Vaisse, *Vote16USA YAB 2017-2018*

Mahita Bobba, *Vote16USA YAB 2019-2020*

Mariam Khan, *Vote16USA YAB 2018-2019*

Marianna Reddick, *Vote16USA YAB 2019-2020*

Margot Schocket-Greene, *Vote16USA YAB 2018-2019*

Megan Zheng, *Vote16USA YAB 2019-2020*

Melina Fike, *Vote16USA YAB 2017-2019*

Micah Carter, *Vote16USA YAB 2018-2019*

Nicholas Sims, *Vote16USA YAB 2018-2019*

Noah Kassis, *Vote16USA YAB 2019-2020*

Oliver York, *Vote16USA YAB 2016-2017*

Parker Smith, *Vote16KY*

Piper Samuels, *Vote16CulverCity*

Pooja Patel, *Vote16USA YAB 2018-2019*

QueSton Bell, *Vote16USA YAB 2018-2019*

Rebecca Rottenberg, *Vote16CulverCity*

Ritesh Vidhun, *Vote16CT*

Sadie Fleig, *Vote16USA YAB 2019-2020*

Sarah Hager, *Vote16CulverCity*

Tiffany Missembe, *Vote16USA YAB 2018-2020*

Tyler Okeke, *Vote16CA*

Vivekae Kim, *Vote16USA YAB 2016-2017*

Zo Pancoast, *Vote16USA YAB 2019-2020*



APPENDIX D

ADVISORY BOARD

Timothy Male, *Former City Councilmember of Takoma Park, MD*

Abby Kiesa, *Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement*

Allentza Michel, *Powerful Pathways*

Andrew Brennen, *Co-Founder, Prichard Committee Student Voice Team*

Connie Flanagan, *University of Wisconsin–Madison*

Daniel Hart, *Rutgers University*

Daniela Mrabti, *Alliance for Youth Action*

Jacob Carrel, *Harvard Law School*

Jen Devor, *Community Leader*

Joshua A. Douglas, *University of Kentucky*

Patrick Paschall, *City Council of Hyattsville, Maryland*

ELECTED OFFICIALS

State Assemblymember Andy Vargas, *Massachusetts*

Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley, *Massachusetts*

Councilmember Brianne Nadeau, *Washington, D.C.*

Councilmember Charles Allen, *Washington, D.C.*

Former Supervisor David Campos, *San Francisco*

State Assemblymember David Chiu, *California*

Councilmember David Grosso, *Washington, D.C.*

State Assemblymember Dylan Fernandes, *Massachusetts*

Councilmember Elissa Silverman, *Washington, D.C.*

Former Supervisor Eric Mar, *San Francisco*

State Assemblymember Evan Low, *California*

Congresswoman Grace Meng, *New York*

State Senator Hargett Chandler, *Massachusetts*

Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky, *Illinois*

Former Supervisor Jane Kim, *San Francisco*

Former Supervisor John Avalos, *San Francisco*

Mayor Kate Stewart, *Takoma Park, Maryland*

State Assemblymember Lorena Gonzalez, *California*

Former State Senator Mark Leno, *California*

City Councilmember Marsha Dixon, *Riverdale Park, Maryland*

Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi,

Supervisor Norman Yee, *San Francisco*

State Assemblymember Phil Tin, *California*

Councilmember Robert White, *Washington, D.C.*

Supervisor Scott Wiener, *California*

Denver School Board Director Tay Anderson, *Colorado*

Councilmember Vincent Gray, *Washington, D.C.*

COMMUNITY LEADERS and ORGANIZATIONAL CHAMPIONS

Adele Failes-Carpenter, *Vote16SF*

Alex Koroknay-Palicz, *NYRA*

Brian Conner, *NYRA*

Celi Tamayo-Lee, *Vote16SF*

Hannah Sun, *Vote16USA*

Nadia Gold-Moritz, *Vote16DC*

Rob Richie, *FairVote*

Roshan Bliss, *Project Voyce, Colorado*

Samantha Davis, *Black Swan Academy, Vote16DC*

SCHOLARS

Daniel Hart, *Rutgers University*

David Johann, *University of Zurich*

Eva Zeglovits, *University of Vienna*

James Youniss, *Catholic University of America*

Jan Eichhorn, *University of Edinburgh*

Johannes Bergh, *Institute for Social Research*

Joshua Douglas, *University of Kentucky College of Law*

Julian Alchholzer, *University of Vienna*

Laurence Steinberg, *Temple University*

Markus Wagner, *University of Vienna*

Robert Atkins, *Rutgers University*

Sylvia Kritzinger, *University of Vienna*

Vivian Hamilton, *William & Mary Law School*



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