

## Should 16yr olds be allowed the vote?

In 2004, the Electoral Commission – the independent body in charge of running and monitoring local and general elections – ran an in-depth study into whether the voting age in Britain should be lowered to 16 or kept at 18. Three proposals were considered.

1. The voting age should be lowered to 16
2. The voting age should be raised
3. The voting age should stay at 18

### Argument 1 – The voting age should be lowered to 16

- **“At 16 years of age you are able to marry, pay taxes, and leave home. You can legally have sex, which implies it is the age at which the Government deems you old enough to become a parent.** If you are deemed old enough to become a parent, get married and contribute to the treasury, then **you should be deemed old enough to decide who makes the policies** that so greatly affect your life” *Anon*
- **“16 year olds are just as wise and politically-aware** as 18 year olds”
- **“A 16 year old can pay tax or be sent to fight for their country,** but they are currently **refused the right to vote** for the politicians who can decide how to **spend their taxes, or send them off to war**” *Andrew, Merseyside*
- **NOTE – (While you can join the armed forces and get married at 16, you may (only) do so with parental consent. And if you were to join the armed forces at 16, you would spend your first two years in training and at an army college; you are not legally allowed to be deployed to a battlefield until you turn 18.)**
- **“Funnily enough I campaigned for the voting age to be lowered years ago. I think that it gives youngsters more of an investment in what's happening.** However, I also think **voting should be compulsory** as it is in other countries, for example Australia” *Nicy W, Dartford*
- **“Apathy is the biggest problem facing the UK** political system. Engaging people in **decision-making at a younger age** would help improve this” *Anon*
- **“I believe that the 16 year-olds that would vote would be a self-selecting, politically interested minority** who would **add real value** to the political discourse” *Dan F, Edinburgh*
- **“Not particularly passionate about it but I can understand that some 16 and 17 year-olds really want to and are just as informed as older adults** (in some cases more so), so let them vote. Most people who vote **haven't got a clue about politics anyway**” *Jon C, Coventry*

### Argument 2 – The voting age should be raised

- **“18 year olds may think that they know everything** but they really do not. Unfortunately one does not realise this when one is 18. One needs to have **some experience of the world** and 21 should be the minimum age –**perhaps 25 would be better**” *Mike M, Gloucestershire*
- **“Because at 18, one is too easily swayed** by immoral politicians” *R Smith, Scotland*

- “Even with information on politics at school/college – this seems to be tainted by the teacher/lecturer’s bias and therefore **cannot be deemed independent**. It is evident, based on the school/college location, the 'leaning' toward a particular party. By **21, everyone should be able to use their own experience** to decide” *Anon*
- “Extending the period where the person is **unable to vote may increase their desire to eventually vote** when they hit 21. Maturity is obviously an issue here, too. Though 18 year-olds are getting there, **that extra three years (including the experience gained from work, training or university) would be beneficial in making a well-informed decision**. Democracy lives or dies on the ability of the electorate to make a well-informed decision, after all” *Pete, Bristol*
- “**Idealism turns to reality as you learn and observe**” *Dave, Wessex*
- “**The younger a person is, the less their ability to make informed judgements**, and the matter of government should not be skewed by this factor. **The mass student hysteria** regarding cuts demonstrated fairly well an **inability to see beyond narrow personal concerns**” *Benjamin L, Holywell*
- “**18 it is too young for them to have much of a judgement** on why there is a vote. To them it is more of an 'in the moment thing'. **Which party will lower the age of getting a drink, or keep the clubs open, and which won't?** Rather than which party will make life easier for the elderly, etc. With that I would also like to point out I would keep the voting age to 18 for the under 21's who join our Armed Forces. With the very nature of the job they are choosing they should have the choice of being able to vote” *Jennifer, Wirral*

### Argument 3 – The voting age should stay at 18

- “**If it’s not broken, don’t fix it**” *Derrick, Layland*
- “**18 is the age of adulthood, of legal independence** and of unrestricted activity. Only legal adults should have the vote” *Anon*
- “18 is the age of majority. **I don't see any reason to change this. 16 would be far too young** and to return to the old **21 would not take account of the fact that by that age many young people are living totally independent lives**. The school leaving age is being raised soon. It would be stupid to have people who **were still at school** being able to vote” *Linda E, Leeds*
- “**By the age of 18 one has a good understanding** of how the country is performing. The UK life expectancy is about 80 years, so **at 18 years nearly a quarter of one’s life has passed. Therefore, I think one easily has enough life experience by 18** to make an informed decision” *Anon*
- “18 year olds are **generally aware and intelligent** – while some 16 year olds clearly are, far more are apathetic or not fully understanding of politics. **Since it would be impractical to give the vote at differing ages** based on a test of intelligence and political awareness, 18 is an optimal age” *Anon*
- “**Apparently, the judgmental area of the human brain is not fully developed until the age of 19** (which might explain why there are so many motor accidents for young men of 17-21 age group). With age

generally comes **sagacity and deeper understanding without the knee-jerk**, emotive reactions most of us have experienced in our youth" *Alison, Cumbria*

- "Having had experience of 16 year old kids daily, **if it's not on an iPhone or iPad, they haven't a clue** about the real world" *Dave S, Gosport*

Their results showed that:

- The majority of those surveyed wanted the voting age to stay at 18
- Most countries also set the voting age at 18
- Arriving at a single definition of 'maturity' is difficult
- Bolstered the argument for retaining 18 as the age of electoral majority

### **Factual Points**

- **In 1969, the UK was the first country to reduce its voting age to 18, followed by the United States (1971), Canada, West Germany (1972), Australia (1974), and France (1974)**
- ***In 1984 Nicaragua became the first country to lower the voting age further, to 16, followed by Brazil in 1988 (for employed citizens). The Isle of Man, Guernsey, Jersey and Scotland all have a voting age of 16, and the 21<sup>st</sup> century has also seen Austria, Ecuador, Argentina, Malta, and Estonia join the group.***
- **As of October 2018, 314 out of 650 MPs support the proposition: including Conservatives Nicky Morgan, MP for Loughborough and Justine Greening, MP for Putney, Change UK – The Independent Group's Sarah Wollaston, MP for Totnes, the Green Party's Caroline Lucas, MP for Brighton Pavilion, and most Labour and Liberal Democrat MPs. Just over half of the members of the House of Lords support the idea.**
- ***William Pitt the Younger(28 May 1759 – 23 January 1806) became the youngest [British prime minister](#) in 1783 at the age of 24.***
- **The current Baby of the House, the unofficial title given to the youngest member of Parliament, is the Paisley and Renfrewshire South MP Mhairi Black (SNP). When elected in May 2015 she became the youngest ever UK Member at 20 years and 237 days.**

### **Bibliography**

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