

Young people and the vote

WHY VOTE?

The following comments come from a four-year national investigation led by a team of researchers from the University of Sydney and the Australian National University working in partnership with the Australian Electoral Commission. The research was funded by the Australian Research Council. The survey was commissioned to determine why young people do not enrol to vote. In 2004, approximately 82% of young Australians (17–25 years of age) were on the electoral roll compared with 95% of other Australians.

Voting YES

‘So I can have a say in the current government.’

‘Because unless you vote, you cannot say you have no influence! You can try to have an influence by voting.’

‘Because I think it’s really important that we all get our say, because we’re voting for who will run our country.’

‘Because I will. Everybody needs to vote. If you don’t vote, you don’t have the right to complain about the government.’

Voting NO

‘Because the government doesn’t affect my day-to-day life. Therefore, I don’t care who gets elected.’

‘Because if it isn’t required by me, then I wouldn’t bother finding out about it. I would leave it to those who know and are passionate about it.’

‘Why would you do anything you don’t like if you didn’t have to?’

‘Waste of a Saturday, time consuming, and I am too lazy. Although I would vote on important issues, such as becoming a republic.’

(Source: Print, M, Saha, L & Edwards, K, *Youth Electoral Study, Report 1*, 2004. Available on the AEC website).



Making it count. A young person lodging a vote

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THE VOTING AGE?

The voting age in Australia was lowered from 21 years to 18 years in 1973. Some people argue that it is time to lower the voting age again – to 16.

There are examples overseas for lowering the voting age. Brazil and Nicaragua have a voting age of 16, as do Germany and Austria for some local elections. Our neighbours in East Timor and Indonesia have a voting age of 17. The Isle of Man has decided to lower the voting age to 16. Also, a Member of the British Parliament has backed the idea of reducing the voting age to 16.

Two minor parties in Australia, the Greens and the Australian Democrats, have supported the idea of lowering the voting age in recent times.

A vote for 16 year olds say the Greens

The Greens say 16 and 17 year olds should be able to vote in Victorian elections, and that they will work to introduce optional voting for 16 and 17 year olds.

At the launch of the Victorian Greens Youth Policy, Youth Spokesperson Jim Reiher said: 'One of our key policies is for optional voting in State elections for 16 and 17 year olds. We don't want to make voting compulsory from a younger age, but we want teenagers to build an interest in politics and become involved in the political process.'

The Greens are committed to giving young people a real voice in Victorian politics. The Greens have nine candidates 25 years or under.

'Youth do get a raw deal in too many areas,' said Jim Reiher. 'We must face up to this and unlike the old parties, the Greens will actually do something about it.'

'The old parties say a lot about what they will do for youth,' said Jim Reiher. 'The trouble is, that once the men and women from the old parties get their seats in Parliament House the promises seem to quickly disappear.'

(Source: <http://www.vic.greens.org.au>>Media>Media Releases 2006>A Vote for 16 Year Olds Say the Greens 13/11/2006)

16 is too young to vote

Lowering the voting age to 16 will not encourage young people to enrol to vote. Sixteen year olds are too immature and too distracted by adolescent interests to become responsible and informed voters. They are still growing up and need more time to learn about the world before they take on the responsibility of voting.

Such learning must come from life experience, not formal education. Theoretical knowledge does not always translate to good practice. We already teach students about healthy eating but Australian youth suffer soaring levels of obesity.

Furthermore, just because some rights are acquired at 16 does not mean that other, unrelated, rights should be. We do not ask 16 year olds to serve in the defence forces or on juries, and we do not allow them to gamble or purchase alcohol and tobacco. Appropriately, different ages apply to different rights and that is the way it should remain.

(Source: Adapted from a contribution (Geoff) to the Bartlett Diaries: <http://www.andrewbartlett.com/blog/?p=150>)