



Lower the Voting Age to strengthen New Mexico's Democracy

16 Vote NM Coalition, February 2021

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Youth have the most at stake, but are shut out of our democracy.

“Old enough to fight, old enough to vote”

The voting age in most states was 21 until 1971 when the 26th Amendment was ratified, prohibiting states from enacting any minimum voting age higher than 18. This followed an outcry during the Vietnam War when many young men were drafted to serve in combat but were not permitted to vote.

Since the voting age is arbitrary and has been changed historically by the will of the people, we believe it's time to change it again, and that 16 is the appropriate age to join the electorate for the reasons that follow.



Youth marching to lower the voting age to 18. 1969.

Voting is a Habit.

Studies show that after their first time, voters are very likely to vote in every election thereafter.¹

Age 18 is a transitional time for nearly everyone. Many are moving, leaving their childhood home, beginning college or vocational training, enlisting in the armed forces, or starting a new job. It is not an ideal time to register to vote when one may be planning to change their address in just a few months.

At age 16, most New Mexicans are still rooted in their family homes, schools, and communities. This is a more opportune time to begin to build a habit of civic participation.

“No Taxation Without Representation”

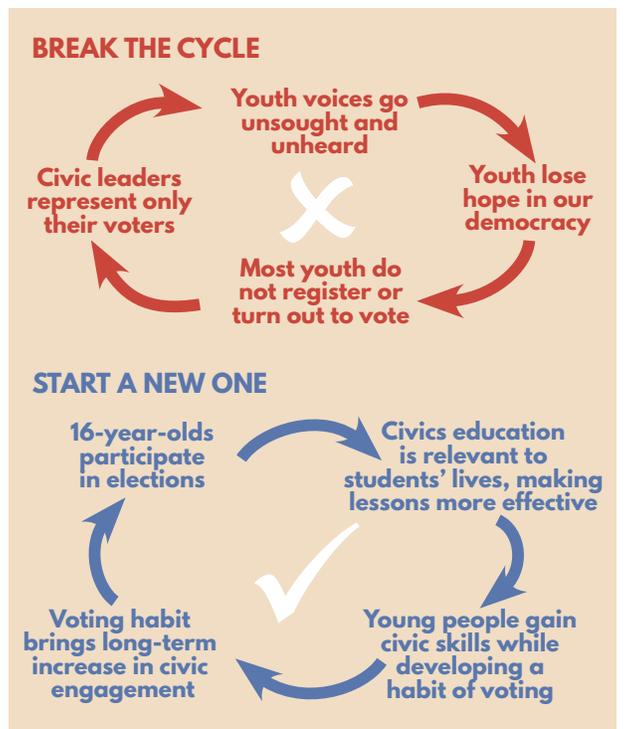
The cry of the American Revolution still applies today. With the working age of 16, many young people work and pay taxes, but have no representation or voice in how their tax dollars are spent. 16-year-olds also drive and carry insurance, but have no say in the governance of their roads. From infrastructure to economic, education to the environment, 16- and 17-year-olds have a stake in the policy decisions being made.

Youth are people who deserve rights.

Entrusting young people to participate in decision-making processes will grant them the respect, the self agency, and the representation they deserve, and we will all benefit from the inclusion of their voices in our civil discourse. After years in last-place on state rankings such as education and child wellbeing, New Mexico can take this powerful step to improving the lives of young people. We are poised to lead the nation in this expansion of voting rights.

16-YEAR-OLDS ARE

Drivers	Valuable
Workers	Intelligent
Taxpayers	Conscientious
Tried as adults	Worthy of Agency



¹Plutzer, Eric. "Becoming a Habitual Voter: Inertia, Resources, and Growth in Young Adulthood". Cambridge University Press. 3/3/2004.

Youth voices are powerful and deserve to be heard.

Youth spot systemic inequalities.

Because prejudices are taught, young people carry less of the societal baggage that holds back progress. Young people approach matters with fresh eyes, see the way they are, ask why, and how we can fix them. Whether all humans deserve equal treatment is not even a question, it is a starting place.

The challenges young people face today are unlike any generation before.

Gun violence plagues communities and schools.¹ Active shooter drills at schools are traumatizing a generation.² Young people are taking on *three times* the amount of student debt as their parents³ as college is *more than seven times* the cost it was thirty years ago.⁴

As they enter adulthood, housing costs are 50% higher than their parents at this age,⁵ healthcare costs have tripled⁶ while wages have stagnated over the last 40 years.⁷

These challenges are being kicked down the road for the next generation to solve. Waiting for the franchise is no longer an option for teens of this generation, so they have taken to the streets, the airwaves, legislative hearings and the internet to advocate for their futures.



Student organizers of the March for Our Lives in Albuquerque, NM, March 24, 2018.

Youth are leading movements

for climate action, a just transition, decolonization, gun violence prevention, and for Black lives. These youth movements are at the cutting edge of organizing and activism, from online to offline, at levels local to global.

Though youth are taking advantage of these varied pathways of participating in our democracy, voting is arguably the most important of them all, and we are currently denying this right to some of the strongest movement leaders in our country.

Student perspectives are largely missing on education policy.

According to the *Yazzie/Martínez v. State of NM* ruling, the state has failed to provide students-- especially low-income, students of color, and students with disabilities--the programs and services needed to learn and thrive.⁸ As the state works to rectify these inequities and deficiencies, the voices of older students must be consulted. Students are literally the closest to the subject matter of education systems, being affected by it every day. Thus older students can offer important viewpoints in tackling the reform of our public education policy.

Youth are more adaptable to change.

Commitments to social change by young people show their capabilities of understanding complex issues, forming opinions based on that understanding, and independence of thought which may differ from their parents.

In a society which is witnessing unprecedented rates of change in social consciousness and technological innovation, young people bring crucial insights that strengthen our resilience as a society and as a species.

Youth are the future.

As we confront climate change, ecological collapse, energy transition, racial and economic equity crises, recessions, and global pandemics threatening our planet, it is crucial for the generations who will be most impacted by these crises to have a say in determining our collective responses.



Youth environmentalists lobby at the State Capitol in Santa Fe, NM.

¹ Grinshteyn & Hemenway. "Violent Death Rates". The American Journal of Medicine. 11/6/2015. ² Malte, Brian. "How active shooter drills in schools are traumatizing our children". USC Annenberg Center for Health Journalism. 9/18/2019. ³Hanson, Mel. "Average Student Loan Debt by Year". EducationData.org. 10/29/2020. ⁴"Tuition costs of colleges and universities". Annual Report, National Center for Education Statistics. 2018. ⁵McMahon, Tim. "Inflation Adjusted Housing Prices". InflationData.com. 6/14/2017. ⁶"The state of healthcare at the end of 2020". USAfacts.org. 12/10/2020. ⁷Desilver, Drew. "For most U.S. workers, real wages have barely budged in decades". Pew Research Center. 8/7/2018. ⁸"Judge rules New Mexico violates public school students' constitutional right to sufficient educational opportunities". NM Center on Law and Poverty. 7/21/2018.

Frequently Asked Questions

Are 16-year-olds mature enough to vote?

Currently, 16-year-olds are considered mature enough for many aspects of adult life, including driving, working, paying taxes, and being tried and sentenced as an adult. Youth are encouraged to choose their future career path around this age, and are already being recruited by colleges, universities, and the armed forces.

Psychologists, in their studies of the cognitive functions of decision-making, have found two types: 'hot' and 'cold.' While 16-year-olds continue to develop their 'hot' cognition that is used in quick and emotional moments, they have roughly the same cognitive function as adults when it comes to voting, which uses the 'cold' cognition. While voting can be emotional, people use calculated, 'cold cognitive', decision-making processes when casting their ballot.

Are 16-year-olds educated and informed enough to be entrusted to vote?

A 2011 study showed that American 16-year-olds are just as developed as 18-year-olds in civic knowledge, tolerance, political skill (ability to write to leaders, speak at meetings), and community service participation.²

A scientific study in Vienna focused on Austria's voting habits of youth under 18. They found that the quality of vote choice is similar between that of younger and older voters. Young people vote in their best interest. They recognize the ways in which politics shape their lives and vote in accordance with their values.³

Extending the franchise to 16- and 17-year-olds will bring new relevance to subjects like US History and Economics. Students will engage more in these courses, as they will be able to apply their knowledge directly at the ballot box. This engagement will spur improvements to civics education in schools.

Won't they just duplicate their parent's votes?

Young people have independent opinions, ideas, and beliefs. 16- and 17-year-olds form their own political views through discussions with parents, peers, the news, and school. Whether young people share the views or disagree with their parents is both private and irrelevant to a discussion about their right to vote.

This is the same patronizing argument used against women's suffrage—"it will only double their husband's vote". It was false 100 years ago and is false today.

Why let 16-year-olds vote when 18-year-olds hardly vote anyway?

It is true that young people ages 18-24 vote at much lower rates than other age groups. But while apathy and disenchantment are often decried, there are barriers and inconveniences in the process of registration and voting.

At such a transitional time, many 18-year-olds are moving, which means a change of address, new legislative districts, and new poll locations.

In a study of 145,000 Danish youth, parental turnout was found to influence the young adults' turnout, and young adults living at home voted more than those who have moved out on their own. "When young adults leave home, the influence of their parents' strong voting habits decreases while the weaker voting patterns among their peers have a greater impact."⁴

Furthermore, voter turnout of young people has been growing,⁵ as the crises facing humanity are directly impacting their lives. Online media and digital communication serve to reach more young people than previous generations of journalism and political organizing. A growing number of young people want to participate in the political discourse, recognizing the ways politics affect their lives and futures.

Where can 16-year-olds already vote?

Many countries in Europe and South America use a 16-year-old voting age on various levels, including Scotland, Germany, and Austria. Research on countries that have lowered the voting age has shown that the change has led to increased overall voter turnout.⁴

In the USA, cities such as Takoma Park, Hyattsville, Mount Rainier, Greenbelt, and Riverdale Park in Maryland have a 16-year-old voting age for local elections, where the impacts have been universally positive. Berkeley, CA and Oakland, CA have approved of 16-year-old voting for school board elections.

How will you ensure that 16- and 17-year olds aren't voting illegally in the wrong elections?

New Mexico has a sophisticated system that prints each ballot for each individual voter. If the franchise is extended only for local elections, only those races and questions in which they are eligible to vote will show up on their ballots.

¹Crockett, Zachary "The case for allowing 16-year-olds to vote". Vox Media . 11/7/2016. ²Hart, Atkins "American Sixteen- and Seventeen-Year-Olds Are Ready to Vote." The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol. 633, 2011. ³Wagner, Johann, Kritzinger. "Voting at 16: Turnout and the quality of vote choice". Electoral Studies. 6/2012. ⁴Bhatti & Hansen. "Leaving the Nest and the Social Act of Voting: Turnout among First-Time Voters". Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties. 11/2012. ⁵"Half of Youth Voted in 2020, An 11-Point Increase from 2016". Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, Tufts University. 4/29/2021.

History of Legislation in New Mexico

- 2015** Representative Javier Martínez sponsored House Bill 249 (2015) to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in school board elections. HB 249 died after one committee.
- 2017** Rep. Martínez sponsored a similar bill, HB 99 (2017). It was never heard in committee.
- 2020** The **16 Vote NM Coalition** formed with over a dozen organizations, and began organizing a campaign.
- 2021** Senator Carrie Hamblen introduced Senate Bill 412 (2021) which would have expanded the definition of a qualified elector in New Mexico to include 16- and 17-year-olds. This would have allowed them to vote in all state and local elections. SB 412 died after passing its first committee.
- 2022** Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham and Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver announced priorities for expanding voting rights in NM, including allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in local elections. Many of these priorities were included in Senate Bill 8 (2022), sponsored by Representative Javier Martínez and Senators Peter Wirth, Carrie Hamblen, Harold Pope, and Katy Duhigg. The voting age change was removed in an early committee, and after much amending, a version of the bill, SB 144 (2022) ultimately died by filibuster in the Senate in the final moments of the session.



New Mexico Youth activists. From left: climate action lobbyists, police violence & racial inequality protest, die-in for immigrant human rights, rallying for just energy transition, and climate action speakers at the capitol.

16 Vote NM Coalition and Endorsers

as of February 23, 2022



Get in Touch

Visit 16voteNM.org. Sign the Petition online at <http://bit.ly/16voteNMPetition>.

Contact us at info@inclusivedemocracynm.org. Follow the hashtags #16voteNM and #NMLeg.

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