

The Voting Age Should Be Lowered to Sixteen

National Youth Rights Association

The National Youth Rights Association (NYRA) is a youth-led national nonprofit organization dedicated to fighting for the civil rights and liberties of young people. In the following statement from its Web site, it presents what it believes to be the top ten reasons for lowering the voting age to sixteen. Teens have adult responsibilities without adult rights, NYRA says. They pay taxes and live under the same laws as adults. If sixteen-year-olds could vote, politicians would have a reason to represent their interests. NYRA argues that it would be better to introduce voting to young people while they are settled in communities than when they have just moved away for college or work. The earlier in life the habit of voting is formed, the more likely they will be to go on voting when they are older. And since ignorant and incompetent adults are allowed to vote, there is no reason to withhold the vote from teens on the basis of their being uninformed. Schools may establish classes to prepare young voters. And finally, granting them the right to vote would increase young people's sense of responsibility and push them to become involved, active citizens.

“No right is more precious in a free country than that of having a choice in the election of those who make the laws under which . . . we must live. Other rights, even the most basic, are illusory if the right to vote is undermined.”

—*Wesberry v. Saunders*, 1964

National Youth Rights Association, “Top Ten Reasons to Lower the Voting Age,” National Youth Rights Association, September 25, 2008. Reproduced by permission. www.youthrights.org/vote10.php.

Top Ten Reasons to Lower the Voting Age:

Youth Suffer under a Double Standard

In 1971 the United States ratified the 26th Amendment to the Constitution granting the right to vote to 18–20-year-olds. The 26th Amendment was the fastest to be ratified in U.S. history. At the height of the Vietnam War most Americans realized the sick double standard inherent in sending 18-year-old soldiers to fight and die for their country when they weren't allowed to vote. Double standards didn't go away in 1971. Right now youth are subject to adult criminal penalties despite lacking the right to vote.

[Historian] Frank Zimring found that “Between 1992 and 1995, forty American states relaxed the requirements for transferring an accused under the maximum age of jurisdiction into criminal court,” and “In Colorado, for example, defendants under the maximum age for juvenile court jurisdiction may nonetheless be charged by direct filing in criminal court if they are over 14 years of age and are charged with one of a legislative list of violent crimes.”

What kind of twisted message do we send when we tell youth they are judged mature, responsible adults when they commit murder, but silly, brainless kids when they want to vote? This is a double standard, no different than during the Vietnam War. War isn't a dead issue now either, leaders who youth can't vote for today may send them to war tomorrow. Lowering the voting age is the just, fair way to set things straight.

Youth Pay Taxes

Just like all other Americans, young Americans pay taxes. In fact, they pay a lot of taxes. Teens pay an estimated \$9.7 billion in sales taxes alone. Not to mention many millions of taxes on income. According to the IRS, “You may be a teen, you may not even have a permanent job, but you have to pay taxes on the money you earn.” And teens do work: 80% of