

9. Are young people really capable of voting wisely?

Yes! Studies of intelligence, perception and memory show that teens are in many ways more capable than adults. Young people develop the capacity to act with consideration to a wider group in their early teens.

Access to information is readily available; young people know and understand issues, especially those affecting them, their friends, and their families – just as older people do.

Widespread Internet use means they can access more information than in the past.

Voting is not a test of IQ, experience, or wisdom. Many adults vote without being full informed, based on self interest, without experience of key issues.

A healthy society will listen to and involve young people. Otherwise we risk marginalizing and alienating them. As the overall population ages this becomes more crucial.

10. What do young people say about this idea?

Young people in New Zealand, and internationally, have mixed views. As did women prior to suffrage. Most of their concerns have been around their ability to make informed decisions. That is one of the reasons for the civics component of the Bill.

11. Isn't this against the Public Interest?

This begs the question who is the public, and why are 16 and 17 year olds not part of them? "What constitutes a "good" decision depends very much on what your goals and interests are, and it's clear that there's no broad agreement on that. Instead, it is a system for making *our* decisions - decisions we as a society can own.

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FAQs Civics & Voting Age Bill



Sue Bradford MP

1. Aren't you, in effect, proposing we lower the age of adulthood? This could create pressure to reduce the age for other 'adult' activities.

No, we have carefully worded the Bill to avoid this dilemma. Voting and political empowerment are entitlements we want to encourage, unlike smoking and other issues that we are still working on as a society.

2. Isn't this just another attempt to undermine traditional NZ values?

Quite the opposite! This is a move consistent with New Zealand's proud tradition of inclusive participatory democracy. We were, after all, the first country in the world to give women the vote.

3. Isn't the curriculum already overloaded without adding something new?

No, some high schools are already running successful civics modules. In fact, the government has been suggesting civics should be made an explicit part of the Social Studies curriculum.



4. Why is lowering the voting age important?

To strengthen our democracy. There has been a significant decline in young voter turn out, and we know that early voting patterns establish later voting habits.

The key reason for the decline in turn-out is believed to be two-fold.

1. At 16, most young people are more settled than at 18, many of whom are preparing to leave home for study or work. 16 year olds tend to be still living at home with their families and going to high school. This is a more stable and supportive environment in which to first exercise the right to vote.
2. Many young people believe that politics is not relevant to them because politicians ignore and stereotype youth. If the youth group of voters is expanded to include 16 and 17 year olds, young people will have greater collective influence and politicians will be encouraged to better represent the concerns of young people in Parliament.

Encouraging youth to participate when they are still in school and still taking civics classes may help to develop voting habits that will stay with them throughout life.

To improve the position of children and young people in this country.

Politicians have said they don't legislate for children and young people because they don't vote. This needs to change. All of the key national and international strategies for children and young people stress participation as a core value and method for improving their position in society.

"This exclusion is especially significant since what is being denied here are not merely citizens' rights but the right to be a citizen." (Youth Law Review)

5. Young people already have so much pressure on them, why add another thing to worry about?

Giving young people the ability to vote does not mean they *have* to vote. Those that wish to take up the opportunity will, and those that want to wait can simply do so.

6. Would this mean 16 year olds can stand for Parliament?

Yes, and if they can present themselves credibly enough to get the votes they could even become members of parliament. That would certainly show the world that New Zealand accepts its citizens on their personal merit.



7. Isn't this just an attempt to get votes for the Greens?

Sixteen & seventeen year olds account for 2.9% of the population. They will not all vote the same way. Therefore they are unlikely to change the balance of power. What's more, in Europe, against expectation, young people's votes have trended to the right.

8. Why is this a Green issue?

The Green Party has four fundamental principles defining our work: ecological wisdom, non-violence, social responsibility and appropriate decision making. This initiative clearly fits the latter two principles, and thus directly contributes to a sustainable society.