

Lower the Voting Age?

Having started my own business while I was still in high school, I was a bit miffed when I first discovered that I was going to have to pay taxes – at age 17.

“But I can’t even vote yet!” I wailed to my father, “That’s like taxation without representation!”

That little moment of drama popped into my head when I read that San Francisco teens are leading an initiative to allow 16 and 17 year-olds to vote. Their arguments for the cause include the following:

“They pay sales and income tax. They drive and park in the city. They are affected by funding decisions, sometimes more than adults. And they can be tried as adults in court.

But perhaps most persuasive is the idea that granting 16-year-olds the vote could have a positive impact on civic engagement beyond their demographic.”

Currently, the measure seems to be supported by many left-leaning individuals, who believe younger voters will add to their ranks at the ballot box. But such might not be the case, as demonstrated by the Scottish referendum which first inspired the San Francisco students. Last fall, Scotland decided to allow 16 and 17 year-olds to vote for independence, and [“teen voters turned out to be sharply divided](#) and unexpectedly conservative.”

Setting party politics aside, do you believe it would be a good idea to lower the voting age? Do teens have the wherewithal to carefully contemplate and choose the candidate who would faithfully serve the public? Or would such a move cheapen the electoral process and make elections become more of a popularity contest?

Regardless of your position, do more parents need to follow the advice of Daniel Webster when it comes to teaching young people to carry out their civic duty?

“[Mothers should] impress upon their children the truth, that the exercise of the elective franchise is a social duty, of as solemn a nature as man can be called to perform; that a man may not innocently trifle with his vote; that every free elector is a trustee, as well for others as himself; and that every man and every measure he supports has an important bearing on the interests of others, as well as on his own.” – [Remarks to the Ladies of Richmond](#), 1840

Image Credit: Erin Leigh McConnell