



USING DEVELOPMENTAL SCIENCE TO INFORM VOTING AGE POLICY

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ABSTRACT

This article considers the evidentiary basis for lowering the voting age to sixteen based on research and perspectives from developmental science. The Twenty-Sixth Amendment lowered the voting age from twenty-one to eighteen based on logic and sentiment but was not informed by scientific evidence. The field of developmental science is capable of offering a cohesive set of guidelines about age-appropriate rights and responsibilities, given decades of research on the social, cognitive, and civic capabilities of adolescents. This article, in reviewing the evidence, argues that sixteen-year-olds should be granted the right to vote. The argument has three main parts. Part I explains how developmental scientific evidence offers nuanced age-based policy recommendations based on the context and demands of a given right or responsibility. Voting is an autonomy-rights issue, in which behaviors draw on reasoned decision-making, and evidence demonstrates that these capacities are solidified by age sixteen. In contrast, for protection rights issues, in which behaviors are made impulsively in emotionally charged and socially pressured situations, evidence favors policies that offer protections to adolescents and young adults. Part II argues that there is insufficient evidence to deny sixteen-year-olds the right to vote based on their demonstrated capacities for political knowledge, interest, and independence. In fact, considerable evidence exists to celebrate these capacities. Part III demonstrates that enfranchising sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds increases political interest and participation over the short and long term. The period of adolescence, where youth are more connected to home, school, and community, may be a better time to introduce voting rights, compared to ages eighteen to twenty, for both youth and their parents. The article concludes with several considerations for the future of voting age policy.

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INTRODUCTION

The United States, although a country founded on democratic principles, has a history marked by gradual expansion of voting rights to people of color, women, and young adults. Renegotiation and contestation of voting rights continues today.¹ The Twenty-Sixth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which granted the right to vote to eighteen-year-olds, reached its fiftieth anniversary on July 1, 2021,² making now an opportune time to reconsider the voting age and evaluate the evidentiary basis for this policy. The rapid ratification of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment occurred in part due to widespread agreement with two ideas: eighteen-year-olds were capable of voting, as demonstrated by their military service to the country in time of war; and lowering the voting age would benefit the country by creating a more engaged citizenry.³ Unlike the debates that led to the Twenty-Sixth Amendment's passage, in which logic and sentiment were strong but scientific evidence was wholly absent, today's debates to lower the voting age can rely on developmentally-informed empirical understanding of adolescents.⁴ Cumulative evidence from developmental and social science research

1. CAROL ANDERSON, ONE PERSON, NO VOTE: HOW VOTER SUPPRESSION IS DESTROYING OUR DEMOCRACY 13–39 (2018).

2. Proclamation No. 10,231, 86 Fed. Reg. 35,385 (June 30, 2021).

3. SONJA GROVER, YOUNG PEOPLE'S HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE POLITICS OF VOTING AGE 102–03 (6th ed. 2011).

4. See Susan Sawyer et al., *The Age of Adolescence*, 2 LANCET CHILD & ADOLESCENT HEALTH 223, 225–26 (2018).

demonstrates that sixteen-year-olds have sufficient capabilities to vote and that lowering the voting age to sixteen would strengthen democracy.⁵

The precise language of the Twenty-Sixth Amendment does not preclude individuals younger than eighteen from being granted the right to vote.⁶ The Amendment guarantees that voting rights cannot be denied to citizens eighteen and older but does not prevent states or localities from lowering the legal voting age.⁷ Since 1989, many local, state, and federal bills have been proposed to lower the voting age from eighteen.⁸ The first U.S. sixteen-year-old cast a ballot to vote in a local election on November 5, 2013, in Takoma Park, Maryland,⁹ and as of this writing, sixteen-year-olds are able to vote in at least some local elections in seven localities across two states.¹⁰ In twenty-one states and the District of Columbia, seventeen-year-olds are able to vote in at least some presidential or congressional caucuses or primaries if they turn eighteen on or before the general election.¹¹ Meanwhile, multiple local and state campaigns to lower the voting age at the federal, state, and local levels

5. See, e.g., Benjamin Oosterhoff et al., *Adolescents Provide More Complex Reasons for Lowering the Voting Age than Adults*, AM. PSYCH. ASS'N: DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCH. 8–10 (2022); Joshua A. Douglas, *In Defense of Lowering the Voting Age*, 165 U. PA. L. REV. ONLINE 63, 69–71 (2017).

6. U.S. CONST. amend. XXVI, § 1 (“The right of citizens of the United States, who are eighteen years of age or older, to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of age.”).

7. JOSHUA DOUGLAS, *VOTE FOR US: HOW TO TAKE BACK OUR ELECTIONS AND CHANGE THE FUTURE OF VOTING 18* (2019).

8. *The Movement to Lower the Voting Age: A History*, NAT'L YOUTH RTS. ASS'N, <https://www.youthrights.org/issues/voting-age/history-of-the-movement/> (last visited July 1, 2022).

9. DOUGLAS, *supra* note 7, at 12; see also Kevin Lewis, *Takoma Park Teens Cast Their Vote*, WJLA (Nov. 5, 2013), <https://wjla.com/news/local/takoma-park-teens-cast-their-votes-96425>.

10. Sixteen-year-olds can vote in all local elections in five localities in Maryland (Takoma Park, Hyattsville, Greenbelt, Riverdale Park, and Mount Rainier) and in school board elections in two localities in California (Oakland and Berkeley). *Maryland*, VOTE16USA, <https://vote16usa.org/project/maryland/> (last visited June 26, 2022); *Oakland, CA*, VOTE16USA, <https://vote16usa.org/project/oakland/> (last visited June 26, 2022); *Berkeley, CA*, VOTE16USA, <https://vote16usa.org/project/berkeley-ca/> (last visited June 26, 2022).

11. *Primary Voting at Age 17*, FAIRVOTE, https://www.fairvote.org/primary_voting_at_age_17 (last visited June 27, 2022). In some states, the right is limited to those who register with the Democratic Party, and in some others, seventeen-year-olds are allowed to vote in presidential primaries but not in congressional primaries. *Id.* Most of the information is up-to-date, but two inaccuracies are present. First, in Iowa, seventeen-year-olds are able to vote in both congressional and presidential primaries. See IOWA CODE ANN. § 48A.5(c)(1) (West 2021). Second, in Nevada and Wyoming, voters have to be at least eighteen years old to cast a ballot in a primary election. See NEV. REV. STAT. ANN. § 293.485 (West 2022); WYO. STAT. ANN. § 22-3-102(a)(ii) (West 2020).

are in progress.¹² Internationally, the most widely used minimum voting age is eighteen, yet twenty-seven countries have a voting age of sixteen or seventeen, and policies to lower the voting age are being actively considered in Europe and elsewhere.¹³ These U.S. localities and international contexts offer legal and logistical precedents for considering a lower voting age and opportunities to examine empirical evidence regarding the effects of enfranchising younger voters.

This article presents an argument for lowering the voting age to sixteen, using evidence and perspectives from the field of developmental science—which is concerned with the interdisciplinary study of human development across the lifespan—and related social science disciplines. Part I describes how knowledge of adolescent development can offer a cohesive set of guidelines regarding adolescents' rights and responsibilities and considers voting rights in relation to other rights and protections afforded to U.S. adolescents. Part II presents evidence showing that sixteen-year-olds are developmentally capable of voting in terms of political knowledge, interest, and independence, yet also offers critiques of emphasizing capabilities as prerequisites to vote. Part III demonstrates how and why lowering the voting age would increase democratic participation. The article concludes by considering the future of voting age policy change.

I. USING DEVELOPMENTAL SCIENCE TO INFORM AGE-BASED POLICIES

Research on adolescent development is well positioned to shape policy concerning age-based rights and restrictions in the United States. Adolescence is a period of life between childhood and adulthood that is characterized by rapid biological, psychological, and social changes.¹⁴ The definition of adolescence has shifted across time and cultural contexts.¹⁵ In the United States, definitions of adolescence have recently expanded

12. See *Voting Age Status Report*, NAT'L YOUTH RTS. ASS'N, <https://www.youthrights.org/issues/voting-age/voting-age-status-report/> (last visited June 26, 2022).

13. See Jan Eichhorn & Johannes Bergh, *Conclusion*, in *LOWERING THE VOTING AGE TO 16: LEARNING FROM REAL EXPERIENCES WORLDWIDE* 231, 231–41 (Jan Eichhorn & Johannes Bergh eds., 2020). Germany is actively considering lowering the voting age to sixteen. Kate Connolly, *Votes at 16 Backed in German Coalition Talks After Success of Fridays for Future*, GUARDIAN (Oct. 22, 2021), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/21/germany-coalition-candidates-united-lowering-voting-age-16>.

14. *Adolescent Health: Overview*, WHO, https://www.who.int/health-topics/adolescent-health#tab=tab_1 (last visited July 1, 2022).

15. See, e.g., Carol Worthman & Kathy Trang, *Dynamics of Body Time, Social Time and Life History at Adolescence*, 554 NATURE 451, 454–55 (2018).

to lower ages to reflect earlier onset of pubertal development,¹⁶ a transition that sparks a cascade of biological, cognitive, and emotional growth. Adolescence has also extended to later ages to recognize physical maturation, such as how brain development continues to the midtwenties.¹⁷ The field's robust evidence-base concludes that the development of logical reasoning is complete by age sixteen,¹⁸ an age at which research has well documented adolescents' capacities for cognitive decision-making, paid labor, and family and societal contributions.¹⁹ In contrast, affect regulation and executive functioning continue to develop for at least another decade.²⁰ This evidence may support policies that extend protections to later ages in areas such as criminal trials and sentencing.

Based on this body of evidence, developmental science does not endorse a universal legal age of majority. Instead, determinations of age-based capacities must be placed in context of the demands of a given right or responsibility. Despite developmental scientists' comfort with a nuanced understanding of adolescent development, the field has been criticized for presenting contradictory age-based policy recommendations.²¹ Most famously, Supreme Court Justices Anthony Kennedy and Antonin Scalia accused the American Psychological Association ("APA") of "flip flopping" in amicus briefs filed in *Hodgson v. Minnesota*, 497 U.S. 417 (1990) and *Roper v. Simmons*, 543 U.S. 551 (2005).²² In *Simmons*, the Court abolished the juvenile death penalty, and in doing so, it drew extensively on evidence that adolescents demonstrate immature or impulsive decision-making in sensation-

16. *See id.* at 451.

17. *See* Sawyer et al., *supra* note 4, at 223.

18. *See id.* at 224; Grace Icenogle et al., *Adolescents' Cognitive Capacity Reaches Adult Levels Prior to Their Psychosocial Maturity: Evidence for a "Maturity Gap" in a Multinational, Cross-Sectional Sample*, 43 *LAW & HUM. BEHAV.* 69, 69–70 (2019).

19. *See, e.g.*, Icenogle et al., *supra* note 18, at 77–78 & fig.1A (demonstrating that adolescents' cognitive decision-making capacity is similar to adults across countries); Press Release, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Unemployment Among Youth Summary* (Aug. 18, 2021), <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/youth.nr0.htm> (documenting the proportion of youth who participate in the labor force); Andrew Fuligni, *The Need to Contribute During Adolescence*, 14 *PERSPS. ON PSYCH. SCI.* 331, 335–36 (2019) (providing a review of the evidence documenting adolescents' contributions to family); Barry Checkoway & Adriana Aldana, *Four Forms of Youth Civic Engagement for Diverse Democracy*, 35 *CHILD. & YOUTH SERVS. REV.* 1894, 1896 (2013) (using Diagram 1 to summarize forms of youth civic engagement).

20. Sawyer et al., *supra* note 4, at 224.

21. *See* Laurence Steinberg et al., *Are Adolescents Less Mature than Adults?: Minors' Access to Abortion, the Juvenile Death Penalty, and the Alleged APA "Flip-Flop"*, 64 *AM. PSYCH.* 583, 583 (2009).

22. *See id.* at 584.

seeking situations with peers.²³ In apparent contrast, the APA argued in *Hodgson* that adolescents had sufficient decision-making capacity to seek an abortion without parental consent.²⁴ As Steinberg and colleagues clarified with further evidence, in the contexts of deliberative, reasoned decision-making in which social and emotional influences are minimized, adolescents' reasoning capacities are indistinguishable from those of adults by age sixteen.²⁵ This kind of reasoning is at play in abortion decisions, where individuals have time to consider and weigh alternatives before acting.²⁶ However, in contexts that elicit high emotional arousal, social pressure, or impulsivity—characteristics that often describe situations in which crimes occur—adolescents' decision-making is less mature than adults', and this condition may be present likely past age eighteen and into one's twenties.²⁷ Thus, different decision-making contexts require different capacities. Fortunately, developmental scientific evidence is sufficiently advanced to make such nuanced distinctions and corresponding policy recommendations. We term behaviors that draw upon deliberative, reasoned decision-making as autonomy rights issues (also known as "participation rights"),²⁸ and developmental scientific evidence would favor policies that offer expanded rights to younger adolescents (e.g., sixteen-year-olds). Behaviors made quickly in highly emotionally charged and socially pressured contexts can be considered protection rights issues, and developmental evidence favors policies that offer expanded protections to adolescents and young adults.²⁹

This developmental evidence and legal history provide important contexts for considering policy that lowers the voting age. Voting is a multi-step action that requires extensive planning and commitment. At minimum, a voter must register to vote in advance of voting and engage in advance planning to determine where and when to cast a ballot. In-person voting requires setting aside time—an extensive amount in some locations—and deciding on transportation, while voting by mail requires following multi-step directions to complete and mail a ballot, often well

23. *See id.* at 583.

24. *See id.* at 584.

25. *See id.* at 592.

26. *See id.* at 586.

27. *See id.* at 586, 592.

28. Steinberg and Icenogle review this developmental evidence, referring to deliberative decision-making as cold cognitions and emotionally charged decision-making as hot cognitions. Laurence Steinberg & Grace Icenogle, *Using Developmental Science to Distinguish Adolescents and Adults Under the Law*, 1 ANN. REV. DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCH. 21, 33–35 (2019). They link this evidence to age-related policy recommendations. *Id.*

29. GROVER, *supra* note 3, at 100, 210–11.

before an election. Additional planning and reasoning capacity is required to consider the candidates and issues prior to making voting choices. Clearly, voting is not hurried or impulsive and is not greatly influenced by emotional arousal in the moment or highly susceptible to peer influence. Voting is an autonomy rights issue for adolescents.

Still, some may fear that adolescents are especially susceptible to making impulsive voting choices void of reasoning. As noted, adolescents' general cognitive reasoning abilities are comparable to adults' abilities.³⁰ To provide further evidence for this point in the context of political issues, a study was conducted to compare adolescents' and adults' reasoning about lowering the voting age.³¹ This study drew on cognitive science research that has a long history of quantifying the complexity of arguments.³² Evidence showed that adolescents' reasoning displayed greater integrative complexity (i.e., ability to incorporate multiple perspectives to form a judgment) and greater elaborative complexity (i.e., ability to provide multiple reasons to support the same judgment) than adults' reasoning.³³ These findings support the assertion that political decision-making draws on complex reasoning skills and demonstrate that adolescents are developmentally prepared for and skilled in political reasoning.³⁴ Thus, evidence sufficiently justifies considering voting as an autonomy rights issue. To align policy with research evidence would mean applying a lower legal age barrier to voting.

Part II more closely examines evidence for adolescents' capacities that are more specific to political participation. We focus on the capacities of political knowledge, political interest, and independence, as these three capacities are often invoked to explain why adolescents should not be allowed to vote.³⁵ Yet, the notion of criteria for evaluating capacities to vote is flawed and capacities should be considered from a rights-based perspective.

II. EVIDENCE OF ADOLESCENTS' CAPACITIES TO VOTE

Evidence of adolescents' political capacities is part of a larger effort to document adolescent development and was not intended to be used as

30. See Steinberg et al., *supra* note 21, at 591–92.

31. Oosterhoff et al., *supra* note 5, at 2–10.

32. See *id.* at 2. For more information on the research from which this study drew, see generally Lucian Conway et al., *Does Complex or Simple Rhetoric Win Elections? An Integrative Complexity Analysis of U.S. Presidential Campaigns*, 33 POL. PSYCH. 599 (2012).

33. Oosterhoff et al., *supra* note 5, at 9.

34. See *id.* at 10.

35. Benjamin Oosterhoff et al., *Reconsidering the Minimum Voting Age in the United States*, 17 PERSPS. ON PSYCH. SCI. 442, 443 (2022).

a barometer for whether adolescents meet sufficient criteria to vote. In fact, no criteria to assess adults' capacities to vote exist, as such evaluations would directly violate civil rights.³⁶ Thus, there are no lawful criteria by which to judge sixteen-year-olds' capacities to vote. Care must be exercised to avoid applying more stringent conditions to voting for sixteen-year-olds than are required for older voters, which would constitute age-based discrimination.³⁷

Capacities to vote are best understood in the context of children's human rights. According to Article Twelve of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international agreement on children's rights ratified by nearly every country except the United States, children have a right to express their views in all matters that affect them and their views should be given weight in accordance with their age and maturity.³⁸ Moreover, voting is a fundamental human right, as individuals have natural, unalienable rights to freedom of expression and full participation in society.³⁹ Indeed, Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "*everyone* has the right to take part in the government of his [or her/their] country, directly or through freely chosen representatives."⁴⁰ From this rights-based perspective, young people deserve a voice in issues that most affect them, and voting for elected representatives who share one's views and interests is one way to exercise these rights to expression.

Adding to the rights-based perspective, social policy issues affect young people as much or more than they affect adults, including education policy, gun control, climate change, and reproductive rights.⁴¹ Recently, for example, discussions of lowering the voting age and gun control became intertwined during the March for Our Lives Movement, as more people realized that adolescents' lives are at stake due to the nation's gun violence crisis and that adolescents deserve to have a say in

36. Voting Rights Act of 1965, Pub. L. 89-110, § 4(c)–(d), 79 Stat. 437, 438–39 (1965).

37. See GROVER, *supra* note 3, at 173 (“[T]he same standard (intelligent and responsible voting) is *not* applied to citizens 18 years and older to determine voter eligibility. Hence, the age-based limitation on the vote is unconstitutionally discriminatory [sic] directed as it is only against those of young age (for instance we have no maximum voting age to exclude incompetent older voters).”).

38. U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 12, Nov. 20, 1989, 1577 U.N.T.S. 3, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/crc.pdf>.

39. GROVER, *supra* note 3, at 4–5.

40. G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, art. 21(1), Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Dec. 10, 1948) (emphasis added).

41. See, e.g., Teresa Wierzbianska, *Top 5 Election 2020 Issues Teens Want to Talk About (According to Teens)*, KQED (Feb. 19, 2020), <https://www.kqed.org/education/533128/top-5-election-2020-issues-teens-want-to-talk-about-according-to-teens>.

these policies.⁴² Arguably, every policy decision affects younger people more because they have to live longer with the consequences of any policy decision. Young people's direct, high, and long-term stakes in many societal decisions further signify why voting is a human rights issue for younger adolescents. Any efforts to shift enfranchisement debates from a rights issue to a political issue should be rejected on moral grounds. For example, arguments that state that enfranchising adolescents would shift the political majority in undesirable ways are not only politically partisan,⁴³ but are also fundamentally anti-democratic in ignoring voting as a human liberty.

The scientific evidence of adolescents' political capacities is useful for demonstrating that sixteen-year-olds exhibit political maturity sufficient to guarantee their rights to express their views through voting. In contrast, common oppositional arguments to lowering the voting age state that adolescents lack sufficient political knowledge, political interest, and independence.⁴⁴ Although it cannot be demonstrated that sixteen-year-olds reach a particular threshold of political capacities to vote—as such a threshold does not and should not exist—there are no compelling reasons to deny sixteen-year-olds the right to vote and, instead, there is reason, backed by considerable evidence, to celebrate their capacities of political knowledge, interest, and independence.

A. *Political Knowledge*

Political knowledge comes in many different forms, and unresolved debates in political and developmental science as well as civic education concern what types of knowledge best prepare young people for civic life.⁴⁵ Many pedagogical approaches and research studies emphasize factual political knowledge about the political system as a core civic

42. Fenit Nirappil, *Youthful March for Our Lives Revives Push to Lower Voting Age to 16 in D.C.*, WASH. POST (Apr. 10, 2018, 4:05 PM), https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/youth-driven-march-for-our-lives-revives-push-to-lower-voting-age-to-16-in-dc/2018/04/09/3f6affe4-3c0f-11e8-974f-aacd97698cef_story.html.

43. See, e.g., David Faris, *Republicans' Problems with Young Voters Go Far Deeper than Trump*, WASH. POST (Sept. 15, 2020, 6:00 AM), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/09/15/republicans-problems-with-young-voters-go-far-deeper-than-trump/>.

44. Oosterhoff et al., *supra* note 35, at 443.

45. For different perspectives of how best to learn about civics, see generally NAT'L ACAD. EDUC., *EDUCATING FOR CIVIC REASONING AND DISCOURSE* (Carol D. Lee et al. eds., 2021), <https://3e0hjncy0c1gzjht1dopq44b-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/NAEd-Educating-for-Civic-Reasoning-and-Discourse.pdf>.

competency.⁴⁶ Using this metric, considerable empirical evidence across countries demonstrates that sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds have political knowledge that roughly matches or exceeds knowledge levels of young adults who have voting rights.⁴⁷ For example, research on sixteen- and seventeen-year-old voters compared to eighteen- to twenty-year-old first-time voters in Austria showed no differences in political knowledge.⁴⁸ Similar patterns have been found for political knowledge in the United States and Canada.⁴⁹ By undertaking specific comparisons between sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds and their eighteen- to twenty-year-old counterparts who are close in age but have legal voting rights, these studies find no differences in political knowledge between youth who are voting eligible versus ineligible.⁵⁰

Scholars have long assumed that factual political knowledge increases from adolescence to adulthood with greater exposure to political systems and information.⁵¹ Thus, perhaps unsurprisingly, Chan and Clayton reported that political knowledge was lower for sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds in Britain compared to those eighteen and older up to old age.⁵² The authors took these findings as evidence that sixteen and seventeen-year-olds were not politically mature enough to vote.⁵³ This logic requires addressing the question of how much political knowledge is sufficient to enable voting. U.S. adults are notably low on factual political knowledge, as a study in 2018 showed that only one-third of adults born in the United States would pass the U.S. citizenship test.⁵⁴

46. See *id.* at 4–5; see also William A. Galston, *Civic Knowledge, Civic Education, and Civic Engagement: A Summary of Recent Research*, 30 INT'L J. PUB. ADMIN. 623, 629–30, 636–39 (2007).

47. See, e.g., Julian Aichholzer & Silvia Kritzingner, *Voting at 16 in Practice: A Review of the Austrian Case*, in LOWERING THE VOTING AGE TO 16: LEARNING FROM REAL EXPERIENCES WORLDWIDE, *supra* note 13, at 81, 85; DANIEL HART & JAMES YOUNISS, RENEWING DEMOCRACY IN YOUNG AMERICA 104–06 (2018); Valérie-Anne Mahéo & Éric Bélanger, *Lowering the Voting Age to 16? A Comparative Study on the Political Competence and Engagement of Underage and Adult Youth*, 53 CANADIAN J. POL. SCI. 596, 604–06 (2020).

48. Aichholzer & Kritzingner, *supra* note 47, at 85.

49. See HART & YOUNISS, *supra* note 47, at 104–06, for U.S. examples. See Mahéo & Bélanger, *supra* note 47, at 604–06, for a Canadian example.

50. See *supra* note 47.

51. See William Galston, *Political Knowledge, Political Engagement, and Civic Education*, 4 ANN. REV. POL. SCI. 217, 219 (2001).

52. See, e.g., Tak Wing Chan & Matthew Clayton, *Should the Voting Age be Lowered to Sixteen? Normative and Empirical Considerations*, 54 POL. STUD. 533, 547–49 (2006).

53. See *id.* at 553–54.

54. Press Release, The Woodrow Wilson Nat'l Fellowship Found., National Survey Finds Just 1 in 3 Americans Would Pass Citizenship Test (Oct. 3, 2018), <https://woodrow.org/news/national-survey-finds-just-1-in-3-americans-would-pass-citizenship-test/>.

The findings that sixteen-year-olds possess reasonably similar political knowledge to young adults⁵⁵—who have a legal right to vote—coupled with evidence that U.S. adults typically do not perform impressively on assessments of factual political knowledge,⁵⁶ may prompt desires to consider other forms of political knowledge as important for the vote age debate.

Another form of political knowledge that is arguably important in today's political milieu is the capacity to assess the credibility and trustworthiness of political information. In an era of twenty-four-hour news cycles, an abundance of news outlets, and social media as a primary source of political news and information, discernment about credibility of political news is an essential skillset.⁵⁷ On this metric of political knowledge, young adults aged eighteen to twenty consistently outperform older adults, with younger people showing greater knowledge and discernment of fake news compared to their older counterparts.⁵⁸ Similarly, another study found that older adults searched for less political information and remembered less political information compared to younger adults.⁵⁹ As far as we know, sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds' political-information-seeking and knowledge of source credibility has not been studied relative to eighteen- to twenty-year-olds' knowledge, yet younger people may have advantages over older people in navigating the political landscape of today's times, which is largely online.

In summary, political knowledge is ambiguously defined, and many different forms of political knowledge exist. Evidence clearly shows that sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds are comparable in factual political knowledge to their young counterparts who can legally vote.⁶⁰ Older adults may be more politically knowledgeable in some areas than adolescents but are likely to lag behind them in other areas.⁶¹

55. See, e.g., HART & YOUNISS, *supra* note 47, at 104–06; Mahéo & Bélanger, *supra* note 47, at 604–06.

56. See Press Release, The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, *supra* note 54.

57. Jacky Tan, *The Art of Discerning Content: Why Is It Important?*, BUS. 2 CMTY. (Nov. 12, 2016), <https://www.business2community.com/content-marketing-tips/art-discerning-content-important-01704744>.

58. See generally Andrew Guess et al., *Less Than You Think: Prevalence and Predictors of Fake News Dissemination on Facebook*, 5 SCI. ADVANCES 1 (2019); Richard Lau & David Redlawsk, *Older But Wiser? Effects of Age on Political Cognition*, 70. J. POL. 168 (2008).

59. Lau & Redlawsk, *supra* note 58, at 175.

60. See, e.g., HART & YOUNISS, *supra* note 47, at 104–06; Mahéo & Bélanger, *supra* note 47, at 604–06.

61. See, e.g., Guess et al., *supra* note 58, at 2–3 & fig.2B; Lau & Redlawsk, *supra* note 58, at 178–82.

B. Political Interest

Opponents of a lower voting age often invoke the argument that sixteen-year-olds lack sufficient interest in voting.⁶² This argument suggests that if adolescents are apathetic to political participation, granting them the right to vote would be an ineffective policy exercise.⁶³ Research shows that sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds have similar levels of political interest to their eighteen- to twenty-year-old voting eligible counterparts, across countries.⁶⁴ A more robust way of considering adolescents' political interests is to examine evidence of adolescents' participation in civic life beyond voting. Across nearly every major social movement in the United States and internationally, young people have been at the forefront of political change.⁶⁵ Adolescents who are ineligible to vote lead and participate in movements to effect policy change on climate issues, gun violence, police violence, racial justice, immigration rights, voting rights, transgender rights, school funding, and many other issues.⁶⁶ Certainly, these examples illustrate sufficient interest in political participation among adolescents and provide evidence of their sophisticated, organized, and effective forms of political participation. Moreover, a large body of research on civic engagement among young people provides ample evidence that sixteen-year-olds, as well as younger adolescents, develop interest and motivations to take various actions that benefit the world around them.⁶⁷ From this perspective, the proof of adolescents' interest in meaningful societal participation is readily apparent.

Nonetheless, considerable political and public rhetoric positions youth as politically apathetic or disinterested.⁶⁸ The majority of adolescents around the world say they expect to vote in the future, yet

62. Markus Wagner et al., *Voting at 16: Turnout and the Quality of Vote Choice*, 31 ELECTORAL STUD. 372, 372 (2012).

63. *See id.* at 372–73.

64. *See, e.g.*, Aichholzer & Kritzinger, *supra* note 47, at 85.

65. SASHA COSTANZA-CHOCK, YOUTH AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: KEY LESSONS FOR ALLIES 1–2 (Danah Boyd et al. eds., 2013), https://cyber.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.harvard.edu/files/KBWYouthandSocialMovements2012_0.pdf.

66. Richard Bonnie & Joanna Lee Williams, *Teens are Leading Movements—It's Time to Promote Policies That Reflect Youths' Promise*, HILL (Oct. 11, 2019, 5:00 PM), <https://thehill.com/opinion/healthcare/465388-teens-are-leading-movements-its-time-to-promote-policies-that-reflect/>.

67. Laura Wray-Lake & Parissa Ballard, *Civic Engagement Across Adolescence and Early Adulthood*, in HANDBOOK OF ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG ADULT DEVELOPMENT 477, 477–80 (Lisa Crockett et al. eds., 2023).

68. *See generally* Martha Beach, *Why Teens Don't Care About Politics*, TEACH MAG., Sept.–Oct. 2015, <https://teachmag.com/archives/8559>.

this expressed interest does not translate into high voting rates when youth reach voting age.⁶⁹ Research from the European Union found that fourteen- to twenty-year-olds who plan not to vote have higher political apathy and political alienation, with the latter defined by mistrust of and feeling excluded from government institutions.⁷⁰ When adolescents experience systems that are not inclusive or welcoming to people like them, this experience can result in detachment from societal institutions and systems such as electoral politics.⁷¹ Adolescents under age eighteen are legally excluded from voting, and practically excluded from many other political spheres such as political parties, organizations, and policy debates.⁷² It is logical that if adolescents are and feel excluded from electoral participation, they may not uniformly express eagerness to participate. In contrast, as highlighted further in Part III, the act of voting increases political interest among adolescents.⁷³

In summary, evidence suggests a two-fold conclusion about adolescents' political interest: (1) adolescents have demonstrated interest in a wide range of political issues and can and do act on these serious interests; (2) political interest for voting may not be fully developed among sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds because these youth are legally excluded and lack the opportunity to immediately act on any electoral interests through traditional political participation.

C. Independence

A common concern of individuals who oppose a lower voting age is that sixteen-year-olds lack sufficient independence of thought to vote, and their voting choices would be too susceptible to coercion from parents, teachers, peers, or others.⁷⁴ Undue influences of external sources on individuals' voting choices have been a concern in the United States for centuries.⁷⁵ Most recently, evidence that Russian operatives

69. Marc Hooghe & Ruth Dassonneville, *Voters and Candidates of the Future: The Intention of Electoral Participation Among Adolescents in 22 European Countries*, 21 *YOUNG* 1, 18–19 (2013).

70. See Victor Dahl et al., *Apathy or Alienation? Political Passivity Among Youths Across Eight European Union Countries*, 15 *EUR. J. DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCH.* 284, 286, 290 (2018).

71. See CONSTANCE FLANAGAN, *TEENAGE CITIZENS: THE POLITICAL THEORIES OF THE YOUNG* 30–31 (2013).

72. See U.S. CONST. amend. XXVI; *Voting Age: Facts and Resources*, NAT'L YOUTH RTS. ASS'N, <https://www.youthrights.org/issues/voting-age/facts-and-resources/> (last visited July 4, 2022).

73. See *infra* Part III.

74. See Oosterhoff et al., *supra* note 35, at 445.

75. See *id.*

influenced U.S. adults' votes in the 2016 election through fake news and social media propaganda demonstrate the serious reality that adult voters can be unduly influenced by outside forces.⁷⁶ The United States instituted secret ballots in election procedures to combat potential undue influence for adult voters,⁷⁷ and every state has laws that regulate electioneering (i.e., campaigning or persuading voters) near polling places for the purpose of minimizing undue influences on voters.⁷⁸ Thus, clearly, adult voters are considered susceptible to coercion to such an extent that we have legal protective measures in place in our electoral system.

The question then is whether adolescents are considerably more susceptible to influence than adults. Research demonstrates that adolescents are more sensitive to social rewards than adults given their brain structure and function,⁷⁹ yet it is an open question as to whether this sensitivity would translate into susceptibility to influence on voting choices, considering voting is a private act with little social reward or social accountability. Compared to adults, adolescents' views and experiences are considered to be more powerfully shaped by historical moments such as natural disasters, wars, elections, and other major sociopolitical events.⁸⁰ From a developmental perspective, being open to new beliefs and perspectives is distinct from lacking independence of thought. Across many developmental domains, adolescents demonstrate independence of thought via developing unique personal identities and interests, displaying creativity, and engaging in disagreements with others.⁸¹

Some question whether adolescents are sufficiently independent from their parents' influence to vote.⁸² Adolescents are more similar in

76. Scott Shane, *The Fake Americans Russia Created to Influence the Election*, N.Y. TIMES (Sept. 7, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/07/us/politics/russia-facebook-twitter-election.html>.

77. Jill Lepore, *Rock, Paper, Scissors: How We Used to Vote*, NEW YORKER (Oct. 6, 2008), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/10/13/rock-paper-scissors>.

78. 18 U.S.C. § 594; see also *Electioneering Prohibitions*, NAT'L CONF. STATE LEGISLATURES (Apr. 1, 2021), <https://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/electioneering.aspx>.

79. Jorien van Hoorn et al., *Incorporating the Social Context Into Neurocognitive Models of Adolescent Decision-Making: A Neuroimaging Meta-Analysis*, 101 NEUROSCIENCE & BIOBEHAVIORAL REVS. 129, 130 (2019).

80. Benjamin Oosterhoff et al., *Historical Trends in Concerns About Social Issues Across Four Decades Among U.S. Adolescents*, 30 J. RSCH. ON ADOLESCENTS 485, 487 (2019).

81. See, e.g., Susan Branje et al., *Dynamics of Identity Development in Adolescence: A Decade in Review*, 31 J. RSCH. ON ADOLESCENCE 908 *passim* (2021).

82. See Anke Hufer et al., *Genetic and Environmental Variation in Political Orientation in Adolescence and Early Adulthood: A Nuclear Twin Family Analysis*, 118 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCH. 762, 763 (2020).

political ideology and attitudes to their parents, on average, than young adults.⁸³ Evidence of parent-adolescent similarity could be considered as demonstrating adolescents' lack of independent thought in political decisions—i.e., adolescents blindly accept their parents' views—or as evidence of political maturity—i.e., parents are reasonably politically mature and adolescents share these mature views.⁸⁴ Thus, adolescent and parent similarity in political views cannot provide definitive evidence in either direction for the voting age debate. Research in the Maryland jurisdictions where the local voting age has been lowered uncovered no evidence that sixteen- and seventeen-year-old voters replicate their parents' political preferences.⁸⁵ This pattern aligns with decades of research showing that adolescents actively decide whether and how much to adopt their parents' views.⁸⁶ Regarding peer influence on voting, adolescents tend to be similar in values and beliefs to friends, but research is inconclusive on whether this similarity is due to selecting to affiliate with similar peers or to social influence, in part due to little research on these dynamics related to political beliefs and behaviors.⁸⁷ We know of no existing research that has examined teacher influence on adolescents' political attitudes or opinions, but this possibility is unlikely, at least currently, given studies showing that often teachers are afraid to discuss politics and political views in classrooms, and thus tend to avoid political topics.⁸⁸

In summary, the current body of literature to date offers no solid evidence that adolescents would be more easily coerced to vote a particular way compared to adults. Taking the evidence on political knowledge, interest, and independence together, there is no evidence that adolescents have deficits that would preclude them from voting, particularly when they have so many interests at stake. Moreover, especially given that individual variation abounds in adults' political capacities, disparaging adolescents' capacities in debates about the voting age is tantamount to age discrimination. Indeed, research has

83. See *id.* at 763–64.

84. See Martin Okolikj & Marc Hooghe, *Political Congruence Between Adolescence and Their Parents: Evidence From a Quasi-Experimental Local Elections in the City of Ghent (Belgium)*, ACTA POLITICA (Mar. 7, 2022), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41269-022-00236-9>; Daniel Hart et al., *Stability and Change in Partisan Political Identification: Implications for Lowering the Voting Age*, 71 J. APPLIED DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCH. 1–2 (2020).

85. Hart et al., *supra* note 84, at 4–5.

86. Christopher Ojeda & Peter Hatemi, *Accounting for the Child in the Transmission of Party Identification*, 80 AM. SOCIO. REV. 1150, 1157 (2015).

87. Rene Veenstra et al., *Network-Behavior Dynamics*, 23 J. RSCH. ON ADOLESCENCE 399, 399–400 (2013).

88. DIANA E. HESS & PAULA MCAVOY, THE POLITICAL CLASSROOM 6, 189 (2014).

shown that ageist stereotypes against adolescents are a significant barrier to enfranchising sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds.⁸⁹ Rights-based debates often include oppositional arguments that disparage individuals' capacities to justify withholding rights—insufficient political capacities was a prominent part of arguments against granting voting rights to people of color and women in U.S. history.⁹⁰ However, notably, negative assumptions of adolescents can change after hearing evidence such as that presented in this article, as has been demonstrated in successful enfranchisement campaigns for younger voters.⁹¹

III. LOWERING THE VOTING AGE CAN INCREASE DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION

As voting rights are granted to sixteen- and/or seventeen-year-olds in different countries, the field has begun to accumulate evidence that lowering the voting age can increase young people's voter turnout and interest immediately and over a longer period of time.⁹² For example, sixteen- and seventeen-year-old voters in Norway and Estonia had higher turnout rates at or above the national average, and evidence from countries across South America suggests that lowering the voting age to sixteen can have positive effects on turnout for up to twenty years.⁹³ Similarly, lowering the voting age to sixteen has led to documented increases in adolescents' political interest, knowledge, and efficacy (i.e.,

89. See generally Laura Wray-Lake et al., *Reconsidering the Voting Age in Los Angeles and California*, in CALIFORNIA POLICY OPTIONS: 2020 209, 229 (Daniel J.B. Mitchell ed., 2020).

90. See, e.g., Arthur M. Dodge, *Woman Suffrage Opposed to Woman's Rights*, 56 ANNALS AM. ACAD. POL. & SOC. SCI. 99, 104 (1914).

91. Conservative members of Scottish parliament were originally against lowering the voting age but changed their minds in part based on seeing how passionate and engaged teens were in the movement for Scotland. See Christine Huebner & Jan Eichhorn, *Votes at 16 in Scotland: Political Experiences Beyond the Vote Itself*, in LOWERING THE VOTING AGE TO 16: LEARNING FROM REAL EXPERIENCES WORLDWIDE, *supra* note 13, at 124.

92. See, e.g., *id.*; Eva Zeglovits & Julian Aichholzer, *Are People More Inclined to Vote at 16 than at 18? Evidence for the First-Time Voting Boost Among 16- to 25-year-olds in Austria*, 24 J. ELECTIONS, PUB. OP. & PARTIES 351, 354–55 (2014).

93. Guro Ødegård, *Why Did Young Norwegians Mobilize: External Events or Early Enfranchisement?*, in LOWERING THE VOTING AGE TO 16: LEARNING FROM REAL EXPERIENCES WORLDWIDE, *supra* note 13, at 199; Anu Toots & Tõnu Idnurm, *Modernizing Voting in a Post-Transition Country: The Estonian Experience of Lowering the Voting Age*, in LOWERING THE VOTING AGE TO 16: LEARNING FROM REAL EXPERIENCES WORLDWIDE, *supra* note 13, at 173; Mark N. Franklin, *Consequences of Lowering the Voting Age to 16: Lessons from Comparative Research*, in LOWERING THE VOTING AGE TO 16: LEARNING FROM REAL EXPERIENCES WORLDWIDE, *supra* note 13, at 21–24.

perceived competence to participate in politics).⁹⁴ Studies in Scotland and Austria have demonstrated that these positive outcomes are enhanced when combined with additional civic education efforts in schools.⁹⁵ Qualitatively, some sixteen-year-olds who have exercised a right to vote in local elections in the United States have described the experience of voting as a “political awakening.”⁹⁶ These patterns align with research demonstrating that earlier voting can establish long-term habits of electoral participation.⁹⁷ These findings suggest that lowering the voting age acts as an intervention that increases youth political interest and participation over time. Voter turnout in the short and long term has obvious benefits for democracy, which is predicated on representing voices of the people.⁹⁸ A well-functioning democracy requires an engaged electorate. Indeed, when Estonia passed a law expanding voting rights to sixteen-year-olds in 2016, a key rationale was to stabilize its democracy by enfranchising young voters in their rapidly aging society.⁹⁹

It is perhaps worth noting that not all sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds vote when they are eligible.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, women in the United States were given the right to vote in 1920, yet it took decades, until 1980, for women’s voter turnout rates to reach or exceed men’s voting rates.¹⁰¹ Building on the idea of political alienation noted in Part II, after new voters are enfranchised through expanded voter rights, it can take time to internalize and act on these rights, particularly in the wake of debates where one’s political capacities were publicly disparaged.

In some cases, sixteen- and seventeen-year-old voters have higher voter turnout than their eighteen- to twenty-year-old counterparts.¹⁰² This pattern can be explained by considering the different developmental

94. See, e.g., Eva Zeglovits & Martina Zandonella, *Political Interest of Adolescents Before and After Lowering the Voting Age: The Case of Austria*, 16 J. YOUTH STUD. 1084, 1093–94 (2013); Huebner & Eichhorn, *supra* note 91, at 126–27, 130–32.

95. Aichholzer & Kritzing, *supra* note 47, at 85; Daniel Kenealy et al., *Voting at 16: Lessons from Scotland for the Rest of the UK?*, in PUBLICS, ELITES, AND CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE IN THE UK; COMPARATIVE TERRITORIAL POLITICS 45, 54–56 (2017).

96. Huebner & Eichhorn, *supra* note 91, at 131.

97. Alexander Coppock & Donald Green, *Is Voting Habit Forming? New Evidence from Experiments and Regression Discontinuities*, 60 AM. J. POL. SCI. 1044, 1046 (2016).

98. John Filer & Lawrence Kenny, *Voter Turnout and the Benefits of Voting*, 35 PUB. CHOICE 575, 580–81 (1980).

99. Toots & Idnurm, *supra* note 93, at 169–72.

100. See, e.g., Zeglovits & Aichholzer, *supra* note 92, at 356.

101. Ruth Igielnik, *Men and Women in the U.S. Continue to Differ in Voter Turnout Rate, Party Identification*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (Aug. 18, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/18/men-and-women-in-the-u-s-continue-to-differ-in-voter-turnout-rate-party-identification/>.

102. See, e.g., Aichholzer & Kritzing, *supra* note 47, at 84; Ødegård, *supra* note 93, at 198–99.

contexts of adolescence and young adulthood. From age eighteen through the midtwenties, young people experience multiple transitions that can disrupt community attachments central to voting, such as leaving home, moving to new areas, starting college, taking on full-time employment, and/or joining the military.¹⁰³ These transitions are often not conducive to first-time voting, as first-time voters experience challenges with voter registration, identification laws, polling locations, as well as other logistical obstacles and time constraints to voting.¹⁰⁴ These barriers partly explain why eighteen- to twenty-year-olds have had comparatively lower turnout than older adults. In contrast, at ages sixteen and seventeen, adolescents are more consistently connected to school, community, and family contexts, which are key sources of information and support for first-time voters.¹⁰⁵ For these reasons, it is logical that adolescence may be a more developmentally appropriate time in life to introduce voting.

Finally, some evidence suggests that enfranchising adolescents may positively affect voter turnout for their adult parents. Using four years of election data from Denmark, where the minimum voting age was eighteen, Jens Dahlgaard found that in families with a newly enfranchised young voter, parents' turnout increased by 2.8 percentage points.¹⁰⁶ Dahlgaard concluded that one in nine parents who would have otherwise abstained from voting actually voted due to having a newly enfranchised child.¹⁰⁷ Importantly for the argument to lower the voting age, this effect was driven by parents whose children lived with them and was not evident for parents whose newly enfranchised eighteen-year-olds resided elsewhere.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, an experimental study consisting of a mock local election for sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds in Ghent, Belgium showed that this voting opportunity for adolescents significantly increased political discussions between adolescents and parents.¹⁰⁹ Political discussions stimulate political interest and participation across

103. See generally David Wood et al., *Emerging Adulthood as a Critical Stage in the Life Course*, in HANDBOOK OF LIFE COURSE HEALTH DEVELOPMENT 123 (Neal Halfon et al. eds., 2018).

104. Courtney Juelich & Joseph Coll, *Rock the Vote or Block the Vote? How the Cost of Voting Affects the Voting Behavior of American Youth: Part of Special Symposium on Election Sciences*, 48 AM. POL. RSCH. 719, 722 (2020).

105. See Franklin, *supra* note 93, at 14–15.

106. Jens Dahlgaard, *Trickle-Up Political Socialization: The Causal Effect on Turnout of Parenting a Newly Enfranchised Voter*, 112 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 698, 700–02 (2018).

107. *Id.* at 702.

108. *Id.* at 702–03.

109. Marc Hooghe & Dieter Stiers, *Political Discussion Begins at Home: Household Dynamics Following the Enfranchisement of Adolescent Children*, 26 APPLIED DEVELOPMENTAL SCI. 141, 148–49 (2022).

ages.¹¹⁰ Though few studies have examined the effect of enfranchising young voters on adults' voting habits, these two studies both show evidence for trickle-up socialization, such that lowering the voting age may change the family political socialization environment in ways that positively impact parents' voting.¹¹¹

In summary, enfranchising sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds appears to increase political interest and participation over the short and long term. The period of adolescence, where youth are more connected to home, school, and community, may be a better time to introduce voting rights, compared to age eighteen, for both youth and their parents.

CONCLUSION

This article has presented an argument, grounded in developmental science, for lowering the voting age to sixteen. Here, three considerations for the future of voting age policy are acknowledged. First, a caveat is in order: evidence for a voting age lower than sixteen was not systematically considered in this article. Age sixteen is a fully defensible age of enfranchisement based on the evidence put forth here, but this argument does not exclude the possibility that evidence could similarly support an even lower voting age. Indeed, children's rights arguments would not draw any sort of bright line at age sixteen,¹¹² and likewise, developmental scientists largely recognize that bright-line age boundaries are necessary policy translations separate from a more nuanced continuum of human developmental processes.¹¹³ Although voting age policy reform that focuses on expanding rights to sixteen-year-olds would be on firm evidentiary ground, as this article shows, the future of voting age policy should not consider the age boundary issue as fully resolved. For example, voting rights for even younger people are being advocated for in arguments for proxy-claim suffrage.¹¹⁴

110. William Eveland & Myiah Hutchens Hively, *Political Discussion Frequency, Network Size, and "Heterogeneity" of Discussion as Predictors of Political Knowledge and Participation*, 59 J. COMMUN 205, 215–17 (2009); Nakwong Jung et al., *The Mediating Effects of Knowledge and Efficacy in the Effects of Communication on Political Participation*, 14 MASS COMMUN & SOC'Y 407, 420–22 (2011).

111. See Hooghe & Stiers, *supra* note 109, at 148–49; Jung et al., *supra* note 110, at 420–22.

112. See, e.g., David Runciman, *Votes for Children! Why We Should Lower the Voting Age to Six*, GUARDIAN (Nov. 16, 2021, 1:00 P.M.), <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/nov/16/reconstruction-after-covid-votes-for-children-age-six-david-runciman>.

113. Steinberg et al., *supra* note 21, at 592–93.

114. See John Wall, *Why Children and Youth Should Have the Right to Vote: An Argument for Proxy-Claim Suffrage*, 24 CHILD., YOUTH & ENV'TS 108, 118–19 (2014).

Second, despite clear evidence to support voting rights for sixteen-year-olds and increasing attention and advocacy around this issue, momentum for a federal constitutional amendment is likely to build at a relatively slow pace. Youth can and are leading the way in this growing movement,¹¹⁵ as they did with the Twenty-Sixth Amendment.¹¹⁶ Other countries' paths to enfranchising sixteen-year-olds began with local and state-wide enfranchisement, such as in Austria,¹¹⁷ and in the United States, Georgia and Kentucky led the way in granting voting rights to eighteen-year-olds before the Twenty-Sixth Amendment was ratified.¹¹⁸ A change in state policy to enfranchise younger voters would be a powerful next step for normalizing the idea that sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds can and should vote. A state policy change would build momentum toward a national policy change.

Third, policy lowering the voting age should be considered alongside other policy interventions to ensure equitable access to voting. For example, research has demonstrated that lowering the voting age paired with improving school-based civic education has more positive effects on democratic participation.¹¹⁹ Yet, vast socioeconomic inequalities are evident in civic education across the United States.¹²⁰ Thus, policy that lowers the voting age without also addressing socioeconomic equity gaps in civic education risks reproducing inequitable voting access in younger generations. More broadly, voting rights are being actively contested and reduced in many states at a time when racial, ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic injustices are rampant across societal institutions.¹²¹ In this context, voting age policy may be a meaningful component of the

115. See, e.g., Melina Fike, *The Voting Age Should Be Lowered to 16-Years-Old*, TEEN VOGUE (Mar. 26, 2018), <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/the-voting-age-should-be-lowered-to-16-years-old>.

116. See, e.g., The 26th Amendment, HIST. (Apr. 23, 2021), <https://www.history.com/topics/united-states-constitution/the-26th-amendment>.

117. Johannes Pleschberger, *What Does Voting at 16 Change? The Case of Austria*, EURONEWS (Nov. 9, 2018), <https://www.euronews.com/2018/09/11/what-does-voting-at-16-change-the-case-of-austria>.

118. See *Georgia Age Requirements for Voting, Amendment 6 (1943)*, BALLOTPEDIA, [https://ballotpedia.org/Georgia_Age_Requirements_for_Voting,_Amendment_6_\(1943\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Georgia_Age_Requirements_for_Voting,_Amendment_6_(1943)) (last visited June 7, 2022).

119. See *supra* notes 94–95 and accompanying text.

120. Dimokritos Kavadias et al., *Inequality, Civic Education and Intended Future Civic Engagement: An Examination of Research in Western Democracies*, in THE PALGRAVE HANDBOOK OF CITIZENSHIP AND EDUCATION 583, 588–92 (Andrew Peterson et al. eds., 2020).

121. See, e.g., Nick Corasaniti, *Voting Rights and the Battle Over Elections: What to Know*, N.Y. TIMES (Dec. 29, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/article/voting-rights-tracker.html>.

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larger efforts toward the Third Reconstruction.¹²² Adolescents' voting rights should be prioritized in this larger envisioning of more just and equitable affordances of rights in the United States.

122. See Yael Bromberg, *The Future Is Unwritten: Reclaiming the Twenty-Sixth Amendment*, 74 RUTGERS U. L. REV. 1671, 1693–96 (2022).