



Voting for Those Under 18 Years Old

This I-CAN report gives an overview of the topic of lowering the voting age in state elections. Although no states have passed legislation lowering the voting age, several states have considered allowing minors to vote. Some do currently allow 17-year-olds to vote in primaries if they will be 18 by the general election.

Rational for lowering voting age

There are very few studies on the effects of lowering the voting age, but proponents argue that young people will become more involved in the civic process if they began voting in high school. One report, by Kids Voting USA, found that students participating in a mock-voting program were 14% more likely to register to vote at age 18.¹ Opponents contend that students are very impressionable and may not make wise voting decisions. They also say that since 18-24 year olds do not vote in large numbers, it is unlikely that lowering the voting age even further will increase participation.

Iowa Legislation

An Iowa bill introduced to the House and Senate in the 2003-2004 session would have given 17-year-olds the right to vote in school board elections. The bill died in committee. In 2002, the

¹ Kids Voting USA, quoted in "Voting Age" by Susan Vermeer. Education Commission of the States. <http://www.youthvote.org/news/newsdetail.cfm?newsid=363>

Iowa legislature considered, but did not pass, legislation to give 17-year-olds the right to vote in primary elections if they would be 18 by the general election.

Legislation in Other States

About a fifth of the states currently allow 17-year-olds to vote in primaries if they will be 18 by the general election.

Recently, several states have considered lowering the voting age in local or state-wide elections. The Cambridge and Berkeley City Councils each approved plans to allow 17-year-olds to vote in local elections. However, the states of Massachusetts and California have not yet given local governments the power to put such plans into action.

Arizona considered lowering the voting age to 16 in 2002. Michigan and Minnesota have both considered lowering the voting age to 17, and Texas to 14.

California has introduced a voting scheme which would give 14 and 15 year-olds a quarter of a vote and 16 and 17 year olds half a vote.

Most legislation on lowering the voting age has failed to be voted out of committee. While no bills have come close to becoming law, there is interest in the issue from student groups and organizations in many states.

This report was prepared in November, 2006 by the Iowa Civic Analysis Network (I-CAN), a non-partisan public policy undergraduate research group at the University of Iowa. For additional research on this or other issues, please visit our website at <http://www.uiowa.edu/~ican> or contact us at studorg-i-can@uiowa.edu