



## **What opportunities does 16-year-olds voting create?**

- **16-year-olds voting forms lifelong civic engagement habits**
  - Someone who participates in one election is **25% more likely** to participate in the next one.<sup>1</sup>
- **16-year-olds voting will cause their parents to become more interested in the election, and vote responsibly, as well**
  - The November 2023 election only garnered a **24.53%** turnout, showing a need for increased interest in local government elections.<sup>2</sup>
  - When children of voting age live at home, their parents are **2.8 percentage points** more likely to vote according to a study published in the American Political Science Review.<sup>3</sup>
- **16-year-olds voting can encourage increased civic education requirements**
- **16-year-olds voting provides opportunities for the high school to provide lessons on responsible voting practices, and provide information on Board of Education candidates and policies**

## **Can and will 16-year-olds vote responsibly?**

- **16-year-olds have relevant civic knowledge**
  - Research shows that there is **no significant difference** in civic knowledge among 18+ citizens versus 16-18 year olds.<sup>4</sup>
- **16-year-olds are interested in civics & likely to vote**
  - When 16 and 17 year olds were given the ability to vote in Takoma Park, MD, they were **four times** more likely to vote over their 18+ counterparts.<sup>5</sup>
- **16-year-olds won't just match the votes of their parents**
  - Although not yet studied in the United States, studies from the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum found that over 40 percent of young voters had different voting intentions than their parents.<sup>6</sup>
- **16-year-olds have the necessary cognitive skills**

- Voting falls under the category of “**cold cognition**” - a type of decision making that **matures by age 16** and does not increase from there.<sup>7</sup> 16 year-olds also have **other adult responsibilities** such as having a job, driving, or taking care of family members.

### **What are the logistics of 16-year-olds voting?**

- 16 year olds would **require separate ballots** that list Board of Education members
  - The county would be required to issue these ballots
  - This would require **~1,200 new ballots** to be issued for 16 and 17 year olds, according to 2022 census estimates.<sup>8</sup>
- Enfranchising 16 year olds would also require **updates to the Voter Registration System**
  - This cost would be incurred by the Secretary of State, as is happening in Newark

### **Is it legal for East Brunswick to reduce the voting age to 16?**

- **There are no legal restrictions for <18 year olds to vote in NJ**
  - The NJ Constitution states that “every citizen of the U.S., of the age of 18 is entitled to vote. . .”.<sup>9</sup> This wording does not exclude under 18 year olds, but enfranchises everyone above 18.
  - Title 19, which references back to the Constitution, lists the reasons why someone cannot vote, such as being incarcerated. It does not, however, list being under 18 as a criterion for not being allowed to vote.<sup>10</sup>
- **Municipalities are permitted to expand power in this way**
  - The NJ Supreme Court has provided precedent to permit expansions of power that are not expressly prohibited by the state Constitution in *Gangemi v. Berry*<sup>11</sup>
  - The New Jersey Constitution and State election laws do not expressly state that the New Jersey State Legislature determines the age for local races.<sup>12</sup>
  - The NJ Constitution grants home rule to local municipalities , allowing the township to “interpret statutes liberally in favor of the existence of local power to deal with local needs... [and]... , grant to local government broad general powers to meet such

needs in addition to powers specifically enumerated” as established in *Whelan v. New Jersey Power Light & Co.*<sup>13</sup>

## Works Cited

<sup>1</sup> Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green & Ron Shachar (2003) "Voting May be Habit Forming: Evidence from a Randomized Field Experiment." *American Journal of Political Science* 47(3): 540-550. DOI: 10.1111/1540-5907.00038

<sup>2</sup> Pinkin, Nancy J. "November 7, 2023 General Election." Clarity Elections, 7 Nov. 2023, [results.enr.clarityelections.com/NJ/Middlesex/119048/web.317647/#/detail/0055](https://results.enr.clarityelections.com/NJ/Middlesex/119048/web.317647/#/detail/0055). Accessed 19 Aug. 2024.

<sup>3</sup> DAHLGAARD JO. Trickle-Up Political Socialization: The Causal Effect on Turnout of Parenting a Newly Enfranchised Voter. *American Political Science Review*. 2018;112(3):698-705. doi:10.1017/S0003055418000059

<sup>4</sup> HART, DANIEL, and ROBERT ATKINS. "American Sixteen- and Seventeen-Year-Olds Are Ready to Vote." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 633, 2011, pp. 201–22. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27895968>. Accessed 20 Aug. 2024.

<sup>5</sup> FairVote. "Historic Expansion of Suffrage: 16- and 17-Year-Olds Vote in City Election." [Fairvote.org](https://fairvote.org), 6 Nov. 2013, [fairvote.org/historic-expansion-of-suffrage-16-and-17-year-olds-vote-in-city-election/](https://fairvote.org/historic-expansion-of-suffrage-16-and-17-year-olds-vote-in-city-election/). Accessed 19 Aug. 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Jan Eichorn, *How lowering the voting age to 16 can be an opportunity to improve youth political engagement: Lessons learned from the Scottish Independence Referendum*, (Edinburgh, Scotland: d|part - Think Tank for Political Participation, 2014.)

<sup>7</sup> Icenogle, Grace et al. "Adolescents' cognitive capacity reaches adult levels prior to their psychosocial maturity: Evidence for a "maturity gap" in a multinational, cross-sectional sample." *Law and human behavior* vol. 43,1 (2019): 69-85. doi:10.1037/lhb0000315

<sup>8</sup> United States Census Bureau. "Explore Census Data." [Census.gov](https://census.gov), 2024, [data.census.gov/table/ACS5Y2022.DP05?q=East%20Brunswick%20township](https://data.census.gov/table/ACS5Y2022.DP05?q=East%20Brunswick%20township). Accessed 22 Sept. 2024.

<sup>9</sup> N.J. CONST. art. II, § 1, ¶ 3.3

<sup>10</sup> N.J.S.A. 19:4-1.

<sup>11</sup> *Gangemi v. Berry*, 25 N.J. 1 (1957)

<sup>12</sup> See NJ CONST. art. 2, § 1.3; N.J.S.A. 19:4-1; N.J.S.A. 40:42-4; N.J.S.A. 40:69A-30

<sup>13</sup> *Whelan v. New Jersey Power & Light Co.*, 45 N.J. 237, 251 (1965); N.J.S.A. 40:42-4.