

Should children be allowed to vote?

The UK general election is on Thursday, but young people under the age of 18 don't get a say.

What you need to know

- In the UK, only people over the age of 18 are allowed to vote in elections.
- The UK Prime Minister, Theresa May, has called a general election to be held on 8 June. Most people who are over the age of 18 will be able to vote for a Member of Parliament to represent their local area.
- There has been some discussion about whether the voting age should be lowered. The Conservatives say they will not lower the voting age to 16 if they win the general election, but other parties, such as Labour and the Green Party, are in favour of doing this.



Young people protest outside Westminster.

DID YOU KNOW?
In the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence, 80% of people aged 16-17 signed up to vote.

On 8 June, adults will go to polling stations to vote to decide which political party should be in power. Everyone in the country gets to have a say in how it should be run, by voting in elections. Almost everyone, that is. In the UK young people have to wait until they turn 18 before they can cast a ballot (vote) at their local polling station. In other parts of the world, young people already get a say. In Austria and parts of Norway the voting age in all elections is 16. Scottish 16-year-olds were allowed to vote in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. Voters' decisions can have a huge impact. Just last year a majority of British voters voted for the UK to leave the European Union (EU), a decision that will affect everyone – including young people. It is often said that young people and children are the future, and that voting shapes the country that they will inherit. If this is true, then shouldn't people who are under 18 be allowed to vote?

Yes – children care just as much as adults

Young people and children care a great deal about the world around them. Decisions made today will affect them for the rest of their lives – it is only fair that they should get a say. Allowing children to vote at an early age encourages them to be more involved in political issues as they grow up. After Austria lowered its voting age to 16 in all its elections in 2007, researchers found that younger voters were more likely to carry on voting later in life. For democracy to work well, everyone needs to feel that they can have their say, and there is no better way to make young people care about democracy than by letting them vote. In the EU referendum, a survey showed that 75% of 18 to 24-year-olds voted to remain. If children had been allowed to vote, they could have changed the result – a result that will affect their lives. Children's opinions matter; their voices should be heard.

No – children don't know enough

Young people are busy learning about the world, discovering their talents and having fun. They should not be expected to have to make big decisions, such as voting. A time will come when children are old enough to understand national issues and how the political system works, but until then it is unreasonable to expect them to know what is best for the country. Lots of adults make mistakes when they vote, or don't take it seriously. Children might be even less likely to make a well-informed and responsible decision. Besides, voters pay the salaries of our politicians, as well as for the police, roads, schools and other services, through their taxes (money that most working people give to the government). Those who are paying for the UK should get a say in how it is run. Children may be the future, but if they do not contribute to the country, why should they be allowed to make important decisions about it?

YES

3 reasons why children should be allowed to have their say

- 1 Children are engaged and passionate about politics. Decisions made today will affect children for the rest of their lives.
- 2 If children get involved in voting early, they are more likely to take part in future elections.
- 3 Children's votes could make a big difference to election results.

NO

3 reasons why giving children the vote is a bad idea

- 1 We should give children time to enjoy being children, not burden them with big decisions.
- 2 Important issues such as the EU can be confusing, and far too complicated for children.
- 3 Children do not pay taxes or contribute to running society like adults do. It is not fair for them to get to say how the UK is run.

THE WEEKLY POLL

To find out what everyone is voting on this week visit:
theweekjunior.co.uk/polls

YES

NO



What do you think?

Each week we ask our readers to vote in our The Big debate poll. You can find out what we're voting on at the moment by visiting theweekjunior.co.uk/polls.

Created in association with the English-Speaking Union. The English-Speaking Union is an educational charity helping young people to discover their voice and realise their full potential. For more information, please see esu.org



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