



Lowering the Voting Age to 16

A White Paper from Generation Citizen

Executive Summary

As Abraham Lincoln famously described in the Gettysburg Address, America's democracy is a "government of the people, by the people, for the people." Sadly, today that description rings far from the truth. The government is not truly "of the people" or "by the people, but rather, widely dominated by special interests and career politicians.

A large part of this occurs because too many Americans do not vote. Turnout in the 2014 midterms was just 36 percent, which marked a 72-year low, and 25 percent of eligible voters are not even registered to vote. This is especially problematic amongst youth voters—only 19.9 percent of 18-29 year olds voted in the 2014 midterms, the lowest youth turnout rate ever recorded, and only 46.7 percent are registered to vote, the lowest rate in 40 years. **We have a voter crisis in America that demands bold solutions. We need to strongly consider lowering the voting age in American elections to 16 years old.**

There are many layers to the rationale for considering such a move. Strong citizen participation requires that voters be knowledgeable about the institutions that represent them, and America does not adequately educate its citizens—only one-third of Americans can name all three branches of government, and schools are failing to prioritize effective civics education as they focus on meeting accountability measures in other subjects, like STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math).

With few Americans voting and a real and growing lack of civic knowledge, there is no way the government can be truly "for the people." This sentiment is reflected in the population's opinions of its elected officials. Congress has a 12 percent approval rating, and only 24 percent of the public trusts government to do the right thing, both historical lows.

As the increasingly diverse millennial generation begins to come into leadership roles in society, now is a critical time to rejuvenate our democracy through new, bold ideas that spark excitement and participation in politics. Lowering the voting age for local elections to 16 has the potential to reinvigorate our democracy and stimulate increased political participation in a lasting way. If nothing else, campaigns to lower the voting age can spark conversations about the current state of our democracy and produce innovative ideas to revive it.

Takoma Park and Hyattsville, two cities in Maryland, have recently successfully lowered the voting age to 16 for their municipal elections, and other campaigns are underway across the country, most notably in San Francisco. Several European countries have lowered the voting age to 16 in various settings.



Lowering the voting age provides an opportunity to strengthen our democracy and increase voter turnout in the long run, as voting is a habitual action and 16 is a much better time to start that habit than 18—statistics from Maryland and Europe show that 16- and 17-year-olds do indeed vote at higher rates than older first-time voters. Enfranchising 16- and 17-year-olds can also drive demand for effective civics education in schools, and the combination of a lower voting age and better civics education can create a virtuous cycle that dramatically boosts civic engagement. Additionally, research shows that 16- and 17-year-olds are ready to vote, and letting them do so is a basic concept of rights and fairness.

To move this cause forward in the United States, the voting age must be lowered on the municipal level, one city at a time. A national, constitutional solution does not currently make sense. Rather, it should be up to states and municipalities. The legal feasibility of lowering the voting age in any given city depends on applicable state laws. A feasibility study by Generation Citizen has determined that city-level campaigns are currently legally feasible in more than 10 states, and possibly as many as 15. The feasibility study also proposes a few possible state-level strategies for states where city-level campaigns are not currently legally feasible.

Next steps begin with identifying and supporting local leaders in cities where success is most viable, and further developing effective communication strategies to convince the American public of the merits for such an argument. The larger, long-term vision will involve supporting several city campaigns, launching state level efforts, and spurring a national conversation on the topic.

This white paper expands on the points above. The paper, which refers to the most relevant research on the topic, presents a cohesive argument for lowering the voting age to 16 in municipal elections, addresses counterarguments, discusses the current landscape, explains the different legal pathways to success, and elaborates on suggested next steps to advance these efforts.



Why Should We Lower the Voting Age to 16?

Often, at first glance, lowering the voting age to 16 provokes incredulity from the public. Why should we lower the voting age if 18 year olds do not even vote in the first place? And aren't 16 year olds just kids?

A longer glance reveals that lowering the voting age offers a concrete way to strengthen our overall democracy. The body of research on lowering the voting age is somewhat limited, and further evaluation is needed to more comprehensively evaluate the arguments and determine the potential effects of lowering the voting age. However, the research that does exist, from this country and others, suggests that lowering the voting age makes sense a number of reasons:

- **Reason #1: We Need to Make Voting a Habit**

First and foremost, voting is a habit—a path-dependent process—and a person's first election is critical to establishing that habit.¹ Evidence from Takoma Park, Maryland and European countries that have lowered the voting age provides credence to the argument that the age of 16 is a much better time to start the habit of voting than 18.

In Takoma Park, the turnout rate for 16- and 17-year-olds exceeded any other demographic in the city's 2013 elections.² Evidence from Europe is also favorable. Austria lowered its voting age to 16 for all of the country's elections in 2008, and turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds has been higher than for older first time voters.³ In the 2011 local elections in Norway, 21 municipalities used a voting age of 16 as a trial project, and 16- and 17-year-old turnout was much higher than turnout among regular first-time voters (aged 18-21).⁴

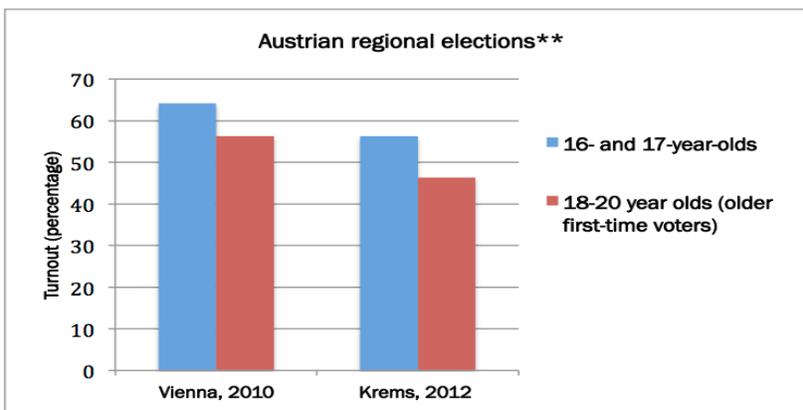
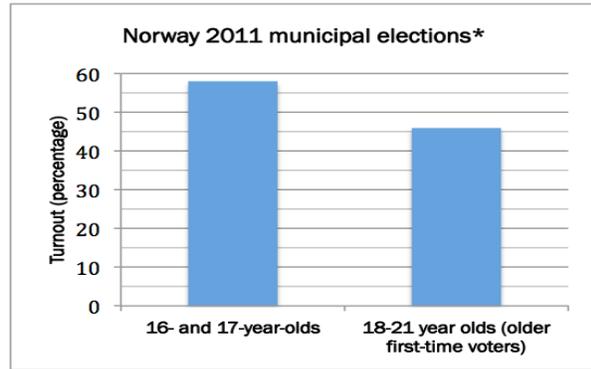
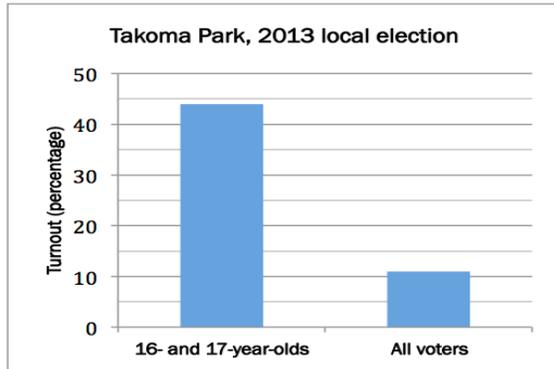
¹ Eric Plutzer, "Becoming a Habitual Voter: Inertia, Resources, and Growth in Young Adulthood," *American Political Science Review* 96.1 (March 2002): 42.

² J.B. Wogan, "Takoma Park Sees High Turnout Among Teens After Election Reform," *Governing* (Washington, D.C.), Nov. 7, 2013. <http://www.governing.com/news/headlines/gov-maryland-city-sees-high-turnout-among-teens-after-election-reform.html>.

³ Eva Zeglovits and 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," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 24.3 (January 8, 2014): 359.

⁴ Johannes Bergh, "Does voting rights affect the political maturity of 16- and 17-year-olds? Findings from the 2011 Norwegian voting-age trial," *Electoral Studies* 92 (2013): 92.

Age 16 is a better time to start the habit of voting than age 18



*16- and 17-year-old data is for the 20 municipalities that lowered the voting age as a trial. 18-21 year old data is for all municipalities in Norway.
 **Although Austria lowered the voting age nationally, it is difficult to get reliable data on national turnout by age group due to data privacy laws. Data presented here, from regional elections, comes from official electoral lists. See Zeglovits and Aichholzer, 2014.

Further, research suggests that voting in one election can increase the probability that a person will vote in the next election by 25 percent, and shows that early voting experiences are an important determinant of future voting behavior.⁵ The habit formation process begins when citizens reach the voting age and confront their first elections.

Unfortunately, the current voting age, 18, is a particularly bad time to start the habit of voting. Many 18-year-olds are in the midst of major life transitions, harming their ability to establish new voting habits. While some Americans vote in the first election they are eligible for and become habitual voters, most do not vote when they are eligible for the first time. These individuals become habitual nonvoters for at least the next few elections, until they pick up the habit later in life. This helps explain why turnout for voters younger than 30 is worse than for any other age group.

In fact, the turnout rate has dropped since the national voting age was lowered to 18 in 1971. This is not necessarily because people younger than 21 are less inclined to vote, but rather because 18- and 19-year-olds are at a traditionally unstable point in life. According to CIRCLE, the main reason why young people claim they do not vote is because they are too busy.⁶ Age 18 is when this barrier is

⁵ Elias Dinas, "The Formation of Voting Habits," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 22.4 (Nov. 2012): 433.

⁶ Kei Kawashima-Ginsberg, *Voter Registration among Young People in Midterm Elections*, (Medford, MA: Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, 2014.)



the highest, as people are adjusting to new responsibilities for the first time and may also struggle to determine the logistics of voting in a new location, without guidance from family or educators.

Unfortunately, not voting in the first election they are eligible for is likely to make 18-year-olds habitual nonvoters. The 26th amendment lowered the national voting age to 18 in 1971 largely to make it the same as the age for military service. While a morally sound argument, it is worth revisiting if lowering the age would maximize turnout and create life-long voters.

Lowering the voting age to 16 for local elections would ensure that each new voter experiences at least one election while in high school (assuming two year election cycles in each locality), allowing them to establish the habit of voting in a stable environment. Sixteen- and 17-year-olds can absorb their parents' beliefs that voting is important, and schools can help students understand the logistics and establish voting as an accepted norm. If a person casts a ballot in the first election they are eligible for at age 16 or 17, it is statistically more likely they will continue to participate in subsequent elections.

Research also shows that political participation is a social act, and citizens' social circles heavily influence turnout.⁷ Social networks based on high schools and family life are more likely to encourage voting than the brand-new networks 18-year-olds join after they leave the parental nest.

As researchers from Denmark claim, "Today when voters become eligible at 18 years of age, most young voters have had none or few participatory opportunities before leaving home. A younger voting age would create more opportunities for acquiring the habit of voting before leaving home." Helping 16- and 17-year-olds establish this important habit is a key step to increasing voter turnout in the long run. Lowering the voting age has shown to be effective at increasing turnout among first-time voters, and research demonstrates that once someone casts their first ballot they are likely to continue the habit of voting for years to come. Lowering the voting age can effectively help young people create the habit of voting, and, in the long run, increase voter turnout.

- ***Reason #2: We Need to Encourage Effective and Relevant Civic Learning***

Lowering the voting age can drive demand for effective civics education in schools, reviving a discipline that has been pushed to the side as schools focus on achieving accountability metrics in other subjects, such as STEM.

Enfranchising 16- and 17-year-olds, even in a limited capacity, has the power to invigorate civics education in high schools. Students learn best when the material presented is relevant to their lives. But, for many students, it can be difficult to feel a connection between the political process described in textbooks and the issues that affect them every day. This disconnect may provide one of the reasons that Americans largely fail at understanding how our government works. For example, only approximately one third of American adults can name the three branches of government, and

⁷ Yosef Bhatti and Kasper M. Hansen, "Leaving the Nest and the Social Act of Voting: Turnout among First-Time Voters," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 22.4 (Nov. 2012): 382.



another third can't name a single branch.⁸ Letting 16- and 17-year-olds vote will bring much-needed relevancy to civics classes, which can help address this startling lack of knowledge among the public.

In addition to motivating students to engage with civics classes, lowering the voting age can lead schools to focus more attention on effective civics education. When students are able to vote in local elections before leaving high school, it becomes harder for districts to ignore this crucial discipline. The high school classroom is the ideal place to teach and engage young people about important local issues, and lowering the voting age can inspire schools to take advantage of this opportunity.

As we call for lowering the voting age in local elections, significant initiatives (including funding for civic learning in the new Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and a movement to require high school seniors to pass the citizenship test) are simultaneously underway to strengthen civics education nationwide. These efforts naturally go hand in hand with the push to lower the voting age, and in tandem they have the potential to create a virtuous cycle that dramatically boosts civic engagement. Lowering the voting age can catalyze demand for stronger civics education, which even further cultivates an engaged and active citizenry.

Research shows that people who attend high schools with a strong culture of civic engagement have higher turnout rates in their 30's, regardless of their individual opinions on the importance of voting.⁹ Expanding voting to 16- and 17-year-olds can inspire both students and schools to renew their focus on civics, creating the potential for long-lasting, positive societal impact.

- **Reason #3: Sixteen- and 17-year-olds Have a Stake in the Game and are Ready to Vote**

Lowering the voting age also has a moral and justice argument behind it. Youth are affected by local political issues, including education funding, school board decisions, employment initiatives, police programs, and public works projects. They work without limits on hours and pay taxes on their income, can drive in most states, and in some cases, are tried in adult courts. Fifty-eight percent of youth participate in volunteer activities, and many 16- and 17-year olds have been living in their communities for years and feel a deep connection to local issues.¹⁰ They deserve the right to vote on issues that affect them on the local level as a basic right.

Furthermore, research shows that 16- and 17-year-olds are intellectually ready to vote. A 2011 study found that, on average, 16-year-olds possess the same level of civic knowledge as 21-year-olds.¹¹ Additionally, a study on the quality of vote choices among Austrian 16- and 17-year-olds, determined by the level of ideological congruity between a voter and the party they voted for, concluded that the

⁸ "Americans know surprisingly little about their government, survey finds," *Leonore Annenberg Institute for Civics of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania*, (September 17, 2014)

⁹ David E. Campbell, "Vote Early, Vote Often: The Role of Schools in Creating Civic Norms," *Education Next* 5.3 (2005).

¹⁰ Corporation for National and Community Service, "Youth Helping America: The Role of Social Institutions in Teen Volunteering," (November 2005).

¹¹ Daniel Hart and Robert Atkins, "American Sixteen- and Seventeen-Year- Olds Are Ready to Vote," *Annals of the American Academy* 633 (January 2011): 208.



quality of 16- and 17-year-olds' votes was equal to that of older voters.¹² Sixteen- and 17-year-olds have a stake in local issues, and they are ready to responsibly exercise the right to vote.

- **Reason #4: Demographic Trends Hurt Youth in Elections: Lowering the Voting Age can Reverse It**

Due to the country's shifting demographics, it is now more than ever important to increase the turnout rate among young voters (usually defined as those under 30). As the baby boomers continue to age, older voters considerably outnumber younger voters in many communities, especially given consistently strong turnout among older voters and weak turnout among young voters. This can adversely impact youth on the local policy level, because survey data suggests that older voters have shown significantly less support for public education funding than young voters.¹³

Importantly, younger and older voters have shown equal levels of support for Social Security funding, an issue most relevant to senior citizens.¹⁴ Enfranchising 16- and 17-year-olds can ensure young people's interests are represented on issues like school funding, without jeopardizing support for issues important to seniors. Lowering the voting age is not a ploy to simply add more young voters to the electorate. More importantly, as discussed above, it is a reform that can create habitual voters who, as they continue voting in their 20's, can increase the young voter turnout rate and protect young people's interests in local elections.

- **Why 16 (and not 17)?**

As efforts to lower the voting age in the U.S. have emerged in the past few years, most individuals and groups involved have advocated for lowering the age to 16, while some have targeted the age of 17. Takoma Park and Hyattsville successfully lowered their municipal voting ages to 16, and the effort in San Francisco is also focused on the age 16. The unsuccessful effort in Lowell targeted 17, but only because organizers thought it was a more winnable proposition than 16. Peter Levine, the director of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) penned an op-ed in Politico advocating for lowering the voting age to 17 as well, and did not explain why he chose 17.¹⁵ CIRCLE has also supported advocating for lowering the voting age to 16.

As these efforts grow and expand into a cohesive movement, it is important that everyone involved has the same specific goal of lowering the voting age to 16 for municipal elections. Turning 16 is a significant milestone in our society, and it ensures that every high school student experiences one election (assuming two year cycles) before graduating.

¹² Markus Wagner, David Johann, and Sylvia Kritzinger, "Voting at 16: Turnout and the quality of vote choice," *Electoral Studies* 31 (2012): 373.

¹³ Daniel Hart and Robert Atkins, "American Sixteen- and Seventeen-Year- Olds Are Ready to Vote," *Annals of the American Academy* 633 (January 2011): 215.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Peter Levine, "Why the Voting Age Should be 17," *POLITICO*, February 24, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/02/voting-age-17-115466.html#.VafjTCpVikq>.



Why Not Lower the Voting Age?

The arguments against lowering the voting age are many, and deserve adequate consideration. Ultimately, most counterarguments come down to claims about the maturity and ability of 16- and 17-year olds. Youth is a nebulous concept, and, in reality, legal age-based distinctions in our society are arbitrary and based on what is deemed best for society at large, as judged at a certain point in time. Lowering the voting age to 16 is simply in the best interests of our democracy. Some of the most relevant specific counter arguments are addressed as follows:

- **Reason #1: Instinctive, Negative Initial Reaction: 16-year-olds are Not Mature Enough to Vote**

This gut reaction is misguided. It is true that research exists showing 16-year-olds' brains are still developing and they do not perform as well as older adults in impulse-driven situations in which emotions run high. However, the decision-making process for voting does not fall into this impulse-driven category. Rather, it depends on "cold cognition," the thought out decision-making process in which 16-year-olds perform just as well as adults.¹⁶ Research shows that 16 year olds are mature enough to vote. We need to work to get past this initial gut reaction, especially since an initial, negative response usually does not even begin to consider how lowering the voting age can improve our democracy as a whole.

- **Reason #2: Sixteen-year-olds are Not Legally Defined as Adults**

Sixteen-year-olds play an important role in our society, and the age has special significance in our culture. Sixteen-year-olds can drive in most states, work without any restriction on hours, pay taxes, and in some cases be tried for crimes as adults. Also, high school students volunteer at twice the rate of adults, which shows a commitment to the community that is deserving of a vote in local elections.¹⁷ The legal definition should not affect their ability to vote.

- **Reason #3: Lowering the Voting Age is a Progressive Power Grab to Create More Liberals**

The perception that young voters favor Democrats is often overstated—in a 2014 Pew survey 50 percent of millennials self-identified as political independents,¹⁸ and longitudinal polling data on political ideology shows that millennials are trending conservatively.¹⁹ Accordingly, many political strategists believe the millennial generation is up for grabs.

Moreover, the effort to lower the voting age transcends party lines. The main goal of the effort is to invigorate our democracy by fostering active and engaged citizens. A more lively political discourse—in classrooms and in the broader public sphere—can stimulate ideas from across the political

¹⁶ Laurence Steinberg, "Why 16-year-olds should get to vote," *Chicago Tribune*, November 5, 2014,

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-voters-sixteen-allowed-science-perspec-1106-20141105-story.html>.

¹⁷ Corporation for National and Community Service, "Youth Helping America: The Role of Social Institutions in Teen Volunteering," (November 2005).

¹⁸ Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood," (March 7, 2014).

¹⁹ Eli Il Yong Lee and Sandra Wechsler, "Now or Never: The Fight For the Millennial Generation," *Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing*, (2015).



spectrum. The effort to lower the voting age is based on increasing participation in democracy, not promoting any one ideology.

In practicality, to advance this cause, it will be beneficial to build a compelling conservative case to gain bipartisan support in the long run. A conservative appeal could focus on teaching young people about the importance of citizenship and instilling an appreciation for American democracy. Additionally, given the challenges with home rule laws (explained in detail later in this paper), lowering the voting age should be framed as an issue of local authority and autonomy. This change will happen incrementally and locally, rather than one fell national swoop.

- **Reason #3: Sixteen- and 17-year-olds will Simply Copy their Parents' Vote Choices**

Data from the 2014 Scottish independence referendum suggests this claim is untrue. A survey conducted prior to the referendum found that over 40 percent of young people had different voting intentions than a parent interviewed.²⁰ This claim will need to be studied more in the United States.

Current landscape in the United States

Activists in several U.S. cities have attempted to lower the voting age in their municipalities, to varying degrees of success. Two cities in Maryland—Takoma Park and Hyattsville—successfully lowered their voting ages to 16 in the past two years, and a significant effort is currently underway in San Francisco. Previously, activists in Lowell and Cambridge, Mass. saw initial success before their efforts stalled, and initiatives in smaller towns in Massachusetts and Vermont did not gain the level of public support required to move forward.

Takoma Park and Hyattsville successfully lowered the voting age in their cities to 16 for local elections in 2013 and 2015, respectively. Maryland's legal structure made it relatively simple for these cities to lower the voting age—the city councils only needed to vote in favor of a charter amendment and they could implement the change. In Takoma Park, the proposal was passed in the context of a larger effort to expand voting rights through several reforms, including same-day voter registration. In Hyattsville, the reform passed as a standalone measure. One council member proposed the idea, and a grassroots effort convinced other members of the proposal's merits. The Maryland-based organization FairVote, which studies and promotes a number of election reforms, supported the efforts in both cities. In Takoma Park's 2013 elections, the first after the change, 44 percent of registered 16- and 17-year-olds voted, the highest rate among any age group.²¹ The successes in Maryland have served as inspiration for other efforts around the country.

The most promising campaign currently underway is in San Francisco. The San Francisco Youth Commission, a body of 17 city residents between the ages of 12-23 that advises the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor on policies related to young people, adopted a resolution in 2015 encouraging the city to expand voting rights for local elections to 16- and 17-year-olds. Supervisor John Avalos proposed the measure as a charter amendment, and it will need the support of six of the

²⁰ 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.)

²¹ Wogan.



city's 11 Supervisors before going in front of voters as a ballot measure. Avalos aims to have the Board of Supervisors vote on the measure in the spring of 2016.²² If the board passes it, the amendment will be on the ballot at the November 2016 elections. The Youth Commission has created a leadership structure and a framework for its organizing efforts for the coming months, and is now working to gain the support of Supervisors and the public.

Additionally, organizers in Colorado are in the beginning stages of launching a campaign to lower the voting age to 16 for school board elections statewide. They are designing a youth led campaign and aim to get a bill introduced in the state legislature by December.

Prior to the successes in Maryland and the positive momentum we see today, activists in Lowell, Mass. made meaningful progress before their effort stalled. In 2009, a group organized by the United Teen Equality Center convinced the Lowell City Council to vote in favor of drafting a home rule petition to send to the state legislature. Had the petition cleared the legislature, it would have allowed the city to hold a referendum, which, if successful, would have lowered the voting age for local elections to 17. The petition gained bipartisan support at the State House and passed in the Senate. It is still alive in the House, but momentum has stalled.

Some of the inspiration for Lowell's campaign came from Cambridge, Mass., where high school students led an initiative to lower the voting age to 17 for municipal elections in 2002. Per Massachusetts law, the city council had to vote to send a home rule petition to the state legislature. The council voted in favor of the initiative 8-1, but the petition did not advance at the State House. The council re-voiced its support in subsequent years, and once sent a petition to the state seeking to lower the voting age for only School Committee elections, but did not succeed on the state level.

2015 initiatives in the cities of Brattleboro, Vt. and North Andover, Mass., were also unsuccessful. In Brattleboro, a local progressive advocacy group, Brattleboro Common Sense, proposed the measure along with other progressive reforms including new term limits for select board members. The proposal was included on the ballot at Town Meeting Day and failed by a vote of 679-390.²³ The primary organizer in Brattleboro believes the initiative may have been more successful if it was brought up on its own, rather than in the context of other reforms. The organization is planning to bring the issue up again. The proposal in North Andover was brought to a vote in a town meeting following a successful petition by three high school students, and the town voted against the measure, 130-70.²⁴ In both cases, if the votes on the town level were successful, the measures would have required approval by the state legislature.

Various other individual state and local policymakers around the country have proposed or suggested lowering the voting age on either the state or city level in the past few years, but with little organizing to move the proposals forward. Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi recently expressed support

²² Emily Green, "Plan to allow S.F. 16-year-olds to vote won't be on 2015 ballot," *SFGate*, June 8, 2015, <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Plan-to-allow-16-year-olds-to-vote-won-t-be-on-6314581.php>.

²³ Troy Shaheen, "Brattleboro rejects lower voting age, other progressive amendments," *VTDigger.org*, March 7, 2015, <http://vtdigger.org/2015/03/07/brattleboro-rejects-lower-voting-age-progressive-amendments/>.

²⁴ Garrin Marchetti, "North Andover rejects 16-year-old voters," *Eagle-Tribune*, May 20, 2015, http://www.eagletribune.com/news/merrimack_valley/north-andover-rejects--year-old-voters/article__ee0494b4-89bd-5745-9ec6-7fdcb72f63cf.html.



for lowering the voting age in a July 2015 speech at a convention hosted by Generation Progress, becoming the highest profile politician to publicly support the issue.

Current Landscape Internationally

The concept of 16- and 17-year-old voting has seen considerably more success internationally. Austria lowered its voting age to 16 for all of the country's elections in 2008, and turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds has been higher than the previous average for first time voters.²⁵ Austria presents a particularly important case study, because the voting age reform was accompanied by other measures intended to engage young citizens, including the elevation of the status of civic education in schools.²⁶ Austria's success shows the promise of a lower voting age combined with a renewed focus on civic education. This combination likely produces the best outcome in terms of civic engagement, as the two initiatives mutually reinforce each other. American cities considering lowering their voting ages should also examine areas for improvement in their schools' civic education programs.

In the 2011 local elections in Norway, 21 municipalities used a voting age of 16 as a trial, and 16- and 17-year-old turnout was much higher than turnout among regular first-time voters (aged 18-21).²⁷ Norway will continue the trial with a 16-year-old voting age in 10 new municipalities later this year.

More recently, the voting age was set at 16 for the 2014 Scottish independence referendum. Turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds was around 75 percent, and a post-election survey found that 97 percent of 16- and 17-year-olds who voted said they would vote again in future elections, further evidence that a person's first election is habit forming.²⁸ Following that vote, the Scottish parliament decided this June to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in all of Scotland's elections going forward.

Meanwhile, the United Kingdom is considering whether to lower the voting age to 16 for the 2017 EU referendum. Prime Minister David Cameron is opposed, but the issue has broad support in Parliament. In addition, Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina, and Nicaragua all have a voting age of 16, and other countries have lower voting ages in certain situations. For a complete list of countries with voting ages lower than 18, see Appendix A.

Legal Feasibility in the United States

The legal feasibility of lowering the voting age in any given city depends on state laws, because each state has the authority to establish the requirements for voting in its state and local elections. These requirements are set out in either state Constitutions or statutes. Local governments have varying degrees of authority in determining voter eligibility for their municipal elections, depending on the degree of home rule municipalities are granted in their particular states.

²⁵ Zeglovits and Aichholzer, 359.

²⁶ Ibid, 354.

²⁷ Bergh, 92.

²⁸ The Electoral Commission, "Scottish Independence Referendum Report on the referendum held on 18 September 2014," (December 2014).



An initial feasibility study by Generation Citizen has determined that city-level campaigns to lower the voting age for local elections are currently feasible in at least 10 states, and possibly as many as 15. In these states, cities could lower the voting age for their local elections through city charter amendments. Proposed charter amendments must be passed by the city council and then approved by voters at the next election. Maryland is unique among all states in the fact that it lets city councils change local election laws without a voter referendum. Since this is a legally untested area and some constitutional and statutory provisions can be interpreted multiple ways, actions to change the voting age in areas where it seems possible may be subject to challenges in court. See Appendix B for a more detailed discussion of the feasibility study, a 50 state map of legal feasibility in each state, and summaries of each state's applicable laws.

It should be noted that if advocates are interested in lowering the voting age for an entire state, either a state constitutional amendment or statutory change would be required, depending on the state. An amendment to the U.S. Constitution was required to lower the federal voting age from 21 to 18 in 1971.

Next Steps to Advance this Cause

To push this cause forward in the United States, next steps must begin with the identification of local leaders in cities where success is viable, based on our initial feasibility study. The larger, longer-term vision can take a few different tracks, with varying levels of ambition, depending on capacity. This section explains three next steps and presents two potential five-year visions.

Immediate Next Steps (To complete within the next 1-2 years):

- 1. In cities where success is legally feasible, identify local leaders and organizations and determine capacity to lead voting age campaigns**

We must study the local landscape in each city where a campaign to lower the voting age is legally possible. The goal of this step is to identify individuals and organizations with the interest and capacity to organize a campaign. Likely targets include youth advocacy organizations, youth organizing coalitions, and groups that have led previous voter-friendly initiatives, such as 17-year-old primary voting or 16- and 17-year-old pre-registration.

- 2. Further develop the arguments, talking points, and communication strategies, and develop framework for local or state public education campaigns**

Lowering the voting age to 16 for local elections is a relatively new idea on the political landscape, and public education campaigns are required to convince the public of the idea's merits and why now is the best time to pursue this initiative. Public education campaigns must be tailored to the specific city or state of interest, but it may be possible to design an overall framework that can be modified for each location. To execute successful public education campaigns, it is important to first fully develop the best arguments, talking points, and communication strategies. We must take the research-supported arguments that have been developed and learn how to best package and communicate them to different constituencies.



For example, city council members may respond best to an argument focusing on strengthening the democracy and investing in long-term voter turnout, while students thinking about getting involved in an organizing capacity may respond best to an argument about rights and fairness. This work can be guided by the successful efforts in Maryland and the ongoing work in San Francisco. Further research or polling on communication strategies may be required.

Five-Year Vision:

Option 1: Support 3-5 city campaigns to complete in the next five years

After identifying local leaders and developing communication strategies, the goal is to support 3-5 city campaigns that can achieve success in the next five years. This can be a combination of campaigns that are already underway, like in San Francisco, and new efforts in a diverse array of cities (geographic, political, demographic, etc.). It will be important to raise public awareness while gaining the support of key stakeholders in these cities. Stakeholder support is key to influencing city council votes and ballot referendums. Organizers can look to previous successful city-level campaigns to identify advocacy strategies that may be well-suited for this initiative. Specifically, it will be important to learn from campaigns that successfully rallied support for citywide referendums, or ballot propositions, because this is the method that most cities will have to use to lower the voting age.

It is also critical that we engage young people in guiding these efforts, because those who are directly affected by a policy change can most powerfully communicate the need for it. Additionally, when students take leadership and ownership of these local campaigns, they can effectively demonstrate that 16- and 17-year-olds are indeed competent to vote. The process of involving youth in organizing for change is also directly in line with the initiative's goal—to increase political participation and engagement among young people.

National organizations like Generation Citizen will support local organizers and facilitate dialogue and collaboration between organizers in different states to ensure campaigns learn from each other and are up to date on best practices. It is critical that these first few campaigns start in areas where success is most practical, both legally and politically, because it is crucial to establish a precedent of success for lowering the voting age. Additionally, if the first few campaigns link their call for a lower voting age with a call to improve civics education in their cities, the precedent of combining those two initiatives could amplify the impact of future efforts.

Option 2: With increased capacity, support 3-5 city campaigns, support at least one state level effort, and spur a national conversation

A more ambitious vision would include the support of local efforts as mentioned above, and also focus on at least one state level effort and a national conversation. Lowering the voting age has the potential to revitalize our democracy through increased voter turnout and civic engagement, but for that impact to be felt in a meaningful way, a critical number of 16- and 17-year-olds must gain the



right to vote. In this vision, we would identify the states that could most realistically change their voting age on the state level (ideally states with previously successful local efforts), and support campaigns to pursue this goal. This would involve larger-scale public education campaigns and the cultivation of state level stakeholders.

Stakeholders are also key to making this a national issue. A national public education campaign, combined with endorsements from national political and media figures, can lend credibility to the idea as it enters the public discourse. A national conversation on the issue can also help local initiatives to lower the voting age, since those efforts will have greater chances of success if the local elected officials and voters have already been introduced to the idea by a national public education campaign.

Additionally, it could be beneficial to gain support from unlikely allies at an early stage. Organizations interested in municipal authority, like the National League of Cities and analogous state level organizations, or labor unions and other groups who want young people to have strong voting habits for their own purposes, have the potential to be powerful allies. Unlikely partners like these can also help the cause avoid the liberal or progressive label and appeal to more moderate audiences, which is crucial to long-term success.

Organizations and Stakeholders Supporting this Effort

Several groups and individual leaders have supported efforts to lower the voting age. They include:

- **The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE)** – conducts research on youth voting and civic engagement
- **FairVote** – researches and promotes many election reforms; supported the successful efforts in Maryland
- **National Youth Rights Organization** – advocates for several youth rights issues, including lowering the voting age
- **San Francisco Youth Commission** – leading the effort to lower the voting age in San Francisco
- **United Teen Equality Center (Lowell)** – led the effort to lower the voting age in Lowell
- **Generation Citizen**
- **Funders Collaborative for Youth Organizing**
- **Academics and researchers, including:**
 - Peter Levine, Tufts University
 - Daniel Hart, Rutgers University
 - James Youniss, Catholic University
 - Robert Atkins, Rutgers University
 - Conne Flanagan, University of Wisconsin
 - Parissa Ballard, University of California- Berkeley
 - Felton Earls, Harvard University
 - William Damon, Stanford University



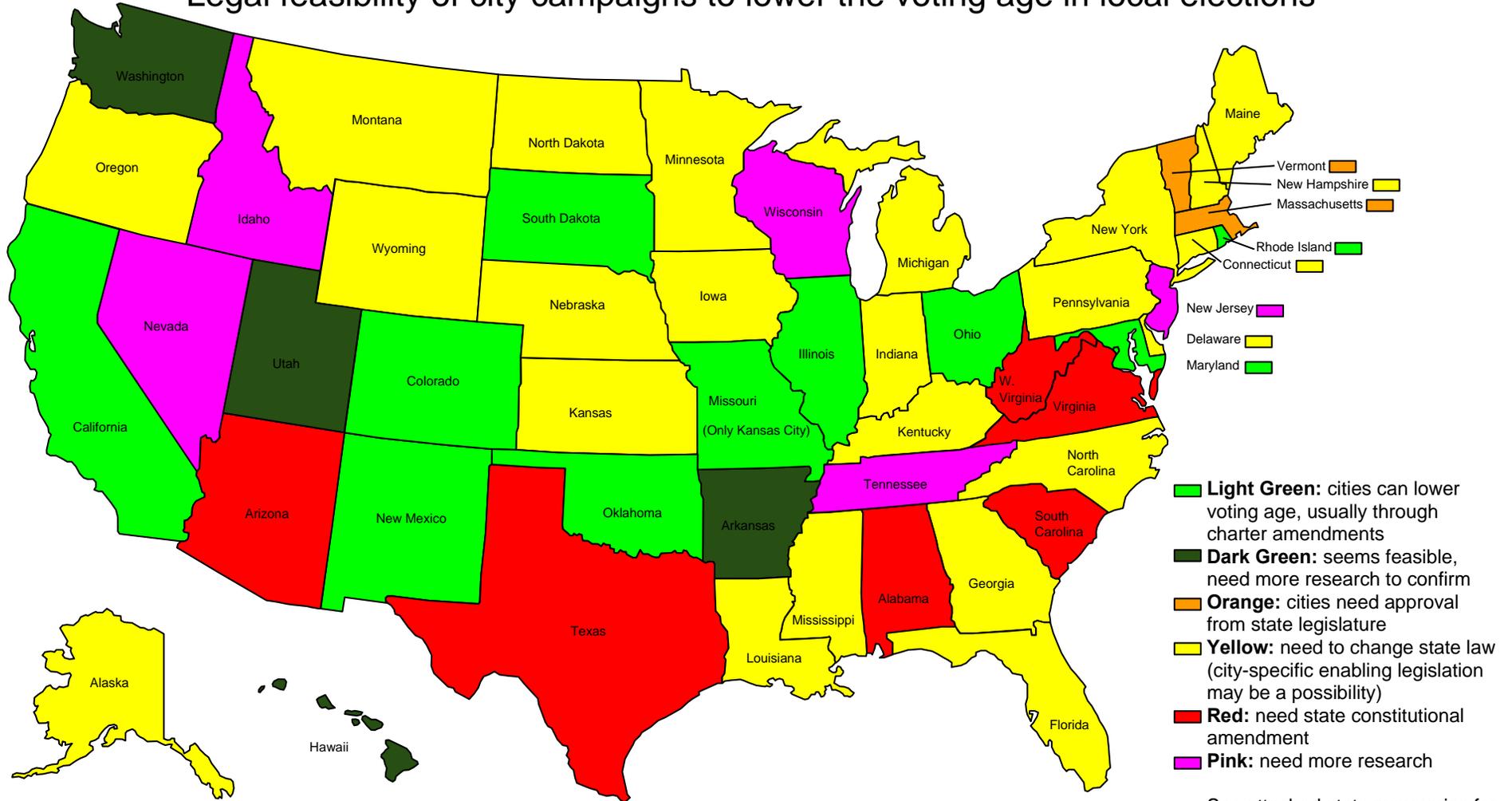
Appendix A

Countries with voting age lower than 18

Country	Voting Age
Argentina	16 for all elections. Lowered from 18 to 16 in 2012.
Austria	16 for all elections. Lowered from 18 to 16 in 2008. Some municipalities let 16-year-olds vote in local elections before the national change.
Bosnia	16 if employed, otherwise 18.
Brazil	16- and 17-year-olds and those over 70 have the option of voting, while those 18-69 are legally required to vote.
Croatia	16 if employed, otherwise 18.
Cuba	16 for all elections.
East Timor	17 for all elections.
Ecuador	16- and 17-year-olds and those over 65 have the option of voting, while those 18-65 are legally required to vote.
Germany	16 for several states, 18 for national elections
Guernsey (British Crown Dependency)	16 for all elections.
Hungary	16 if married, otherwise 18.
Indonesia	17 for all elections, and married persons regardless of age.
Isle of Man (British Crown Dependency)	16 for all elections.
Jersey (British Crown Dependency)	16 for all elections.
Malta	16 for Local Council elections, 18 for all other elections.
Nicaragua	16 for all elections.
Norway	Performed a pilot program with 16-year-old voting age for local elections in 20 municipalities in 2011; will continue the trial with 10 new municipalities this year.
Scotland	16 for all elections. The voting age was lowered to 16 for all Scottish elections in June 2015, following the success of a 16-year-old voting age in the 2014 independence referendum.
Serbia	16 if employed, otherwise 18.
Sudan	17 for all elections.

Appendix B

Legal feasibility of city campaigns to lower the voting age in local elections



See attached state summaries for explanations of the legal situation in each state



Appendix B (continued): Summary of feasibility study

Glossary and overview of feasibility study methods

Glossary

Constitution: Just like the U.S. Constitution is the “supreme law of the land” for the whole country, each state has its own Constitution that serves as a blueprint for the political and legal organization of the state. No state or local laws can conflict with the state Constitution.

Statute: Statutes are laws. Federal statutes apply to the whole country, while state statutes apply to one state. A compilation of all of a state’s laws is sometimes referred to as the state statutory code, or just the state code. Phrases like “election code” refer to a group of laws regulating one topic, in this case elections.

Case law: Case law is legal precedent that is established by judicial decisions in court cases. It often clarifies or interprets statutory or constitutional laws.

Home rule: Home rule refers to the degree of authority that local units of government (i.e. municipalities, cities, counties, etc.) have to exercise powers of governance within their boundaries. Each state determines how much home rule power, if any, its municipalities have. In some states, municipalities have a wide degree of authority to pass laws and govern themselves as they see fit, as long as they obey the federal and state Constitution. In others states, municipalities have virtually no home rule authority. In order for a municipality to lower its voting age, it must have the appropriate home rule power to do so.

Method for determining legal feasibility of lowering the voting age

Determining the legal feasibility of lowering the voting age in any given city starts with a two step process—first examining the state’s voting age provisions, and then its home rule laws. Although we are interested in individual cities, the initial analysis takes place on the state level.

Step 1: Analysis of voting age provisions

First, we must look at both the state Constitution and the state election statutes for provisions regarding the voting age. The key is to determine, in both the Constitution and the statute, whether the voting age requirement is phrased as a grant or a restriction. The Ohio Constitution, for example, says “Every citizen of the United States, of the age of eighteen years [...] is entitled to vote at all elections.” This phrase can be interpreted two ways: either (1) the right to vote is given *exclusively* to citizens over the age of 18, or (2) while those over 18 cannot be *denied* the right to vote, voting rights could be granted on a discretionary basis to those under 18.

To determine which of these interpretations is correct, further analysis is needed of case law in each state, although it is likely that many states do not have any case law on this subject. In the context of



the 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which is also worded as a grant, at least one federal court has suggested that the more inclusive interpretation is correct, noting that the amendment “provides that the right to vote cannot be denied on the basis of age to persons age eighteen or over, but it does not prohibit the states from setting a lower voting age.”²⁹ However, this decision is not binding precedent over state courts.

The Ohio provision quoted above is an example of what we call a grant. The Arizona Constitution, on the other hand, gives an example of what we refer to as a restriction: “No person shall be entitled to vote at any general election [...] unless such person be a citizen of the United States of the age of eighteen years or over.” This clearly prohibits those under 18 from voting.

If a state Constitution phrases the voting age as a restriction, the first step to lowering the voting age in cities in that state must be a state constitutional amendment to rephrase that provision. If a state statute phrases the voting age as a restriction, the state legislature must pass a new law to change the statute and make it more permissible of under-18 voting. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be a possible solution in this situation.

If both the state Constitution and state election statute phrase the voting age requirement as a grant, we can move on to an analysis of home rule. It is important to note, however, that the true meaning of the phrases we call grants is open for interpretation by individual state courts. If a municipality takes action to lower its voting age, this action could be challenged in court—and the state court may interpret the voting age provision as meaning that the right to vote is reserved *exclusively* to those over 18.

Step 2: Home rule analysis:

The second key to determining the legal feasibility of lowering the voting age in cities in any given state is establishing the degree of home rule, if any, municipalities are granted in that state. Home rule allows municipal flexibility in local affairs so far as is consistent with applicable state law, and it comes from the state Constitution, state statutes, or both. In some cases, a state will list exactly which subjects municipal governments can and cannot exercise control over. Other states with home rule are more vague in their descriptions of what powers local governments can exercise, leaving the issue open for interpretation. Lastly, there are instances in which municipalities can take action in a matter of local governance, but the action must be approved by the state legislature. This was the case in Massachusetts when Lowell and Cambridge tried to lower the voting age.

It may be necessary to consult with local experts to more conclusively determine the legal feasibility of a municipality lowering its voting age in some situations. Municipal actions in some areas where it seems legal may still be subject to court challenge over the interpretation of home rule statutes.

²⁹ Day v. Robinwood West Community Improvement Dist. 2010, 693 F. Supp. 2d 996. E.D. Mo.



Feasible states

In these states, our research indicates that cities can take action to lower the voting age for their local elections, usually through city charter amendments. A charter amendment must be proposed by one city council member, passed by the council, and then approved by a majority of voters as a ballot issue. Citizens can also bring a petition to propose a charter amendment in many cities, but this is not practical in most jurisdictions.

CALIFORNIA

Charter cities can change their local voting ages through charter amendments.

The California Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. California gives its charter cities (nearly every major city is a charter city) broad home rule authority. Elections are not specifically addressed, but municipalities “may make and enforce all ordinances and regulations in respect to municipal affairs” (Calif. Const. art. XI, § 5a) and case law supports the determination that elections are considered municipal affairs. This indicates that California charter cities may lower their local voting ages through city charter amendments, as San Francisco is pursuing now.

COLORADO

Charter cities can change their local voting ages through charter amendments.

The Colorado Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state Constitution provides a process for cities to adopt home rule charters, and gives charter cities the power to control “all matters pertaining to municipal elections” (Article 20 Sec. 6). Thus, home rule charter cities can lower the voting age for their local elections through charter amendments. All of Colorado’s major cities are home rule charter cities.

ILLINOIS

Charter cities can change their local voting ages through charter amendments.

The Illinois Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state Constitution states that home rule units (counties and municipalities with populations over 25,000) “may exercise any power and perform any function pertaining to [their] government and affairs” except as expressly limited, and that home rule powers “shall be construed liberally” (Article 7 Section 6). Neither the constitution nor state statutes explicitly preempt municipalities from lowering their voting ages, so it seems that municipal units in Illinois can indeed lower the voting age for their local elections, through charter amendments.

MARYLAND

Cities can lower the voting age for local elections by city council vote, except for Baltimore.

The Maryland Constitution grants the right to vote to those over 18, and does not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. Further, the Maryland election code states that: “Except for the City of Baltimore, the provisions of this section do not apply to a municipal corporation in the State in which the municipal or charter elections are regulated by the public local laws of the State or the charter of the municipal corporation” (Md. Code § 2-202). This gives cities the ability to regulate their local



elections, and is what allowed Takoma Park and Hyattsville to lower the voting age with just a city council vote.

MISSOURI

The city of Kansas City can lower the voting age for its local elections through either a charter amendment or a local ordinance.

The Missouri Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state has a specific statute that gives any city with a population over 400,000 the right to regulate its own elections ([§ 122.650.1](#)). The only such city in Missouri is Kansas City. Other charter cities “shall have all powers which the general assembly of the state of Missouri has authority to confer upon any city, provided such powers are consistent with the constitution of this state” ([Art. 6 § 19a](#)), but it is unclear whether this provision grants authority over local elections. The existence of the statute specific to cities over 400,000 suggests it does not. Kansas City’s charter includes a provision stating that state election laws shall apply to all city elections, “except as provision is otherwise made by this Charter or ordinance” ([§ 601](#)). So, Kansas City can lower its voting age for local elections, but further research is needed to determine whether a charter amendment would be required or just an ordinance.

NEW MEXICO

Charter cities can change their local voting ages through charter amendments.

The New Mexico Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state Constitution provides a process for cities to adopt home rule charters, and gives charter cities very broad authority (Article 10, Section 6). Further, the election code contains a section regulating municipal elections, but states that “The provisions of the Municipal Election Code shall not apply to home rule municipalities [...] unless the Municipal Election Code is adopted by reference by such municipality” (Election Code 3-8-1-E). This indicates that the nine home rule charter cities in New Mexico can indeed lower the voting age in their local elections, through charter amendments.

OHIO

Charter cities can change their local voting ages through charter amendments, but may be especially subject to court challenge.

The Ohio Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state Constitution provides that “municipalities shall have authority to exercise all powers of local self-government” (Art. 18 Sec. 3). The scope of “local self-government” is not defined, and has needed to be determined by the courts.. Generally, if an issue is a matter of “general and statewide concern,” it is outside the scope of home rule. There is no way to tell whether the voting age in local elections would be a matter of “general and statewide concern” or a “power of local self-government.” It appears that a city in Ohio could attempt to change its voting age through a charter amendment, declaring that doing so is a “power of local self-government,” and would then have to defend the action if it is challenged in court.

OKLAHOMA

Charter cities can change their local voting ages through charter amendments, which need to be approved by voters and the Governor.



Oklahoma’s Constitution phrases the voting age provision as a grant, and the statute refers back to the Constitution. Regarding home rule, cities with populations greater than 2,000 are allowed to adopt home rule charters and amend them so long as they do not conflict with the state Constitution or statutes. Charter amendments must be approved by the city council, then approved by voters, then submitted to the Governor for approval ([Constitution Section 18-3\(a\)](#)). The Governor shall grant approval if the amendment “shall not be in conflict with the Constitution and laws of this State.”

RHODE ISLAND

Cities can change their local voting laws through charter amendments.

The Rhode Island Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting ([Const. Art. 2 § 1](#) and [§17-1-3](#)). The state Constitution also says that any city can amend its charter and “enact and amend local laws relating to its property, affairs and government not inconsistent with this constitution and laws enacted by the general assembly” ([Article 13, Section 2](#)). Since the voting age provisions in the Constitution and election code are phrased as grants, it can be argued that if a city were to lower its voting age, this would be “not inconsistent” with the state laws. So, cities in RI can amend their charters to allow for a lower voting age in local elections. For example, Providence’s charter calls for elections to be conducted “pursuant to applicable provisions of state election law” ([§ 202](#)), but the charter can be amended if the city council passes a resolution that is then approved by voters.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Cities and counties can lower the voting age for their local elections through charter amendments.

The South Dakota state Constitution and election code both grant the right to vote to those 18 and older, and do not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting ([Const. Art. 7 § 2](#) and [SDCL 12-3-1](#)). Any county or city in South Dakota can adopt a charter, and “A chartered governmental unit may exercise any legislative power or perform any function not denied by its charter, the Constitution or the general laws of the state” ([Const. Art. 9 § 2](#)). A state statute lists the restrictions on power of home rule units, and this list does not include elections. Therefore, it seems that home rule units (cities or counties) in South Dakota can lower the voting age for their local elections through charter amendments. Charter amendments must be approved by voters.

Likely feasible states

The laws in these states suggest that city- or county-level campaigns to lower the voting age are feasible, but more research is needed to reach a conclusion.

ARKANSAS

Counties can likely lower the voting age for their local elections. Need verification.

Arkansas’ Constitution and statutes do not deny a city or county the ability to lower the voting age for its local elections. First class cities can exercise power related to “municipal affairs” as long as it doesn’t conflict with state law (14-43-601). However, according to an Arkansas Municipal League handbook, the Arkansas Supreme Court has continued to apply Dillon’s Law and has been strict about city legislation it upholds. County governments, however, seem to have a greater degree of power. The state Constitution gives counties the power to “exercise local legislative authority not denied by the Constitution or by law” (Const. Amendment 55). The best advocacy strategy in Arkansas is probably on the county level. A county may be able to take action to lower its voting age



for county elections, but the interpretation of the voting age provision in the state Constitution may be subject to court interpretation. Further research is needed to verify a county's authority in this area.

HAWAII

Counties can likely lower the voting age for their local elections through charter amendments. More research is needed to verify.

Hawaii's Constitution grants the right to vote to those 18 and up and does not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state statutes do not contain a provision on the voting age. Local government in Hawaii is mostly administered on the county level, and counties have broad power to self-govern via charters, as long as charter provisions don't conflict with general laws of the state. It does not appear that there are any state laws that would prohibit a county in Hawaii from lowering the voting age for its local elections, but this needs to be confirmed. If it is not possible for counties to lower their voting ages, county-specific enabling legislation may be an option.

UTAH

Cities may be able to lower the voting age for local elections, but more research is needed to verify. The Utah Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The Constitution also gives cities the ability to adopt charters for their local government. Cities with charters have "the authority to exercise all powers relating to municipal affairs, and to adopt and enforce within its limits, local police, sanitary and similar regulations not in conflict with the general law, and no enumeration of powers in this constitution or any law shall be deemed to limit or restrict the general grant of authority hereby conferred" ([Const. Art. 11 § 5](#)). This provision seems like it may give charter cities the ability to lower the voting age, but this interpretation must be confirmed. There does not seem to be anything in the Constitution or statutes that specifically prevents a charter city from lowering its voting age, except for the inclusion of local elections in the statutory definition of "election" in the state election code ([20A-1-102](#)).

WASHINGTON

First class cities can lower the voting age for their local elections, most likely through charter amendments, but this interpretation must be confirmed.

Washington's Constitution grants the right to vote to those above 18, but does not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting, and the state election code is silent on the matter. Further, first class cities in Washington have the power to "provide for general and special elections, for questions to be voted upon, and for the election of officers" ([35.22.280](#)), and the chapter containing that provision also has a liberal construction statute ([35.22.900](#)). Therefore, it seems that first class cities in Washington may take action to lower the voting age in their local elections, most likely through charter amendments. Is this a correct interpretation?

Cities need state legislature's approval

In Massachusetts and Vermont, cities must get the state legislature's approval in order to lower the voting age for local elections.

MASSACHUSETTS

Need state legislature's approval for home rule petitions.



The Massachusetts Constitution and election code phrase the voting age requirement as a grant. Cities in Massachusetts have the ability to adopt home rule charters, but to amend a charter to lower the voting age, cities must send home rule petitions, also referred to as special act charters, to the state legislature ([Chapter 43B](#)). First, the city council must form a study committee, which recommends the home rule petition to the council. Then, if the city council votes in favor of the petition, it goes to the state legislature and is treated as a piece of legislation. If it passes the House and Senate and is signed by the Governor, the petition is returned to the city for implementation. Cities can write their petitions to make the proposal subject to approval by voters after being passed by the state legislature, but don't necessarily have to. See this paper's discussion of Lowell's effort to lower the voting age for more details on the process in Massachusetts.

VERMONT

[Need state legislature's approval for charter amendments.](#)

The Vermont Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. Municipalities in Vermont do have the ability to amend their charters, but all charter amendments must be approved by the city's voters as well as the state's General Assembly ([§ 2645](#)). It is possible for a city to amend its charter through this process to lower the voting age, because the state's election code says that charter provisions shall apply over state law when they provide for election procedures different than those outlined in the state laws ([§ 2631](#)).

[Need state legislation to give cities the power to lower the voting age for local elections](#)

In these states, some aspect of state law prevents a city from taking action to lower its voting age. Legislation is needed on the state level, and it could take three different forms:

- 1) A bill to change the law that prevents cities from lowering their voting ages (usually the state voter qualification statute or home rule statute)
- 2) A bill that specifically gives all cities the ability to lower their local voting ages through city ordinances or charter amendments. This is known as statewide enabling legislation. It is likely a better strategy than the one above, since it leaves no room for interpretation and allows for a more direct argument
- 3) A bill that gives one or more specific cities the ability to lower the voting age in their cities through ordinance or charter amendment. This is known as special legislation, or can be referred to as city-specific enabling legislation.

ALASKA

[Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.](#)

Alaska's Constitution presents the voting age requirement for voting as a grant (Art. 5 § 1), but the statute that provides voter requirements for state elections is less clear (15.05.010). A strict reading of the statute may interpret it as a grant, but the way the statute is structured makes it seem like a restriction. Further, there is a specific statute about voter qualifications for municipal elections (29.26.050). It does not mention age but refers back to the state election statute, and uses more restrictive language, lending credence to the more restrictive interpretation of the state election statute. Alaska's Constitution provides broad power to home rule cities, but a statute prohibiting home rule cities from acting to supersede specific statutes includes the municipal voter qualification statute mentioned above (29.10.200). So, for a home rule city in Alaska to lower its voting age, the statute concerning restriction of home rule powers must be changed, and the general voter qualification statute may need to be changed as well. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.



CONNECTICUT

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

The Connecticut Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. Additionally, Connecticut does grant home rule to its municipalities. However, the law specifically prohibits municipalities from taking action that affects “matters concerning qualification and admission of electors” (Title 7, Chapter 99, Section 7-192a). It may be possible for one or more specific cities to seek enabling legislation, but this is unclear because Connecticut’s Constitution contains a provision that limits the general assembly’s ability to enact special legislation specific to a single city (Article 10 Section 1). Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

DELAWARE

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Delaware’s Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, and the statute does not mention it, so the question turns to home rule. Delaware does give its cities a degree home rule powers, but cities are specifically prohibited from amending a municipal charter to “change the qualifications of those entitled to vote at municipal elections” ([§ 835](#)). Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

FLORIDA

Voter qualification statute and home rule statute prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

The Florida Constitution does not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting, but the state’s election code reads “A person may become a registered voter *only* if that person is at least 18 years of age” (Chapter 97) (emphasis added). Florida municipalities have home rule, but cannot take action that is preempted by or in conflict with state law. The way the election code is written, it would almost certainly either preempt or conflict with a municipality’s action to lower the voting age. Thus, it appears that the law would have to be changed to allow those over 18 to vote, while not specifically denying that right to those under 18. This may still leave enough ambiguity for a legal challenge—a more certain strategy would be to also change the home rule law to specifically state that municipalities have authority over their local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

GEORGIA

Voter qualification statute and home rule statute prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

Georgia’s Constitution grants the right to vote to those over 18 and does not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting. The Georgia code contains a statute listing voter qualifications that clearly restricts those under 18 from voting (§ 21-2-216). Further, while Georgia gives its municipalities some home rule powers, the home rule law lists specific powers that are reserved for the state, including “action affecting ... the procedure for election or appointment of the members [of the municipal governing authority]” (§36-35-6). For municipalities in Georgia to lower their local voting ages, the state legislature would need to pass bills changing both the voter qualification law and the home rule law. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

INDIANA

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

The Indiana Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The state has home rule, but it is extremely limited and specifically prohibits municipalities from conducting elections, or from regulating “conduct that is regulated by a state agency,” which would include elections (IC 38-1-3-9-7). Thus, advocacy efforts in Indiana would have to begin with changing the home rule law to allow municipalities to exercise



control over local elections. Given the limited nature of the current law, this seems particularly unlikely. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

IOWA

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Iowa's Constitution phrases the voting age provision as a grant, but the election code phrases it as a restriction (§ [48A.5](#)). The state Constitution has an amendment granting municipal corporations "home rule power and authority, not inconsistent with the laws of the General Assembly, to determine their local affairs and government" ([Section 38A](#)). However, the election code provides that "county commissioner of elections shall ... conduct the election pursuant to the provisions of [the state election code]" ([376.1](#)). It appears that, if the voting age statute was changed to make it a grant rather than a restriction, a city could take action to lower its voting age. While the county commissioner would still conduct elections pursuant to the state laws, a lower voting age would no longer be contrary to those laws. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

KANSAS

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

The Kansas Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, but the election code presents it as a clear restriction. Fortunately, Kansas does have relatively broad home rule powers. If the law regarding the voting age were changed to phrase the requirement as a grant, like the state Constitution does, it appears that cities would be able to use their home rule power to lower the voting age for local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

KENTUCKY

Open to interpretation, but home rule law likely prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Kentucky's Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant. The voter qualification statute refers back to the Constitution, but in a way that may possibly be construed to restrict voting to only those above 18 ([KRS § 116.025](#)). Kentucky grants home rule via statute [82.082\(1\)](#), which says, "A city may exercise any power and perform any function within its boundaries [...] that is in furtherance of a public purpose of the city and not in conflict with a constitutional provision or statute." Additionally, cities do not have power where there is a "comprehensive scheme of legislation on the same general subject" ([82.082\(2\)](#)). Although the state election code does not specifically address municipal elections, it is certainly arguable that it is a "comprehensive scheme of legislation on the same general subject" as municipal elections. In sum, it would be possible for a city in Kentucky to take action to lower its voting age, declaring that doing so is "in furtherance of a public purpose of the city" and that the state election code does not represent a "comprehensive scheme of legislation on the same general subject" as municipal elections. But, these declarations are subject to court challenges, and it is possible a court would reject the city's claims, preventing it from lowering its voting age. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

LOUISIANA

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Louisiana's Constitution phrases the age requirement for voting as a grant, but a statute in the state's election code specifically states that "no one, under the age of eighteen years shall be permitted to vote in any election" ([Title 18 § 101](#)). If that statute were changed, local governments (parishes and municipalities) with home rule charters may be able to lower the voting age in their



local elections through charter amendments, because they can exercise any power that is “necessary, requisite, or proper for the management of its affairs, not denied by general law or inconsistent with this constitution” ([Const. Art. 6 § 5e](#)). However, whether changing the local voting age falls under this description is subject to interpretation. In sum, advocacy in Louisiana must start with changing the statute that prohibits those under 18 from voting, and then it may be possible for local governments to take action. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

MAINE

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Maine’s state Constitution phrases the voting age as a grant, but the state election code presents it as a restriction. Further, while Maine’s Constitution provides for municipal home rule, the state election code specifically states that “The qualifications for voting in a municipal election conducted under this Title are governed solely by [the state election code’s voter qualification statute, which is phrased as a restriction]” (Title 30-A § 2501). Therefore, in order for municipalities to lower their voting ages in Maine, the state election code must be changed to phrase the voter qualification provision as a grant. To eliminate ambiguity, the statute previously mentioned (§ 2501) could also be eliminated or changed to specifically state that the qualifications for voting in municipal elections are not governed by state laws. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

MICHIGAN

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age. Home rule law is open to interpretation, but may also prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

The Michigan Constitution phrases the voting age as a grant, but the election code says that to vote a person must be “not less than 18 years of age,” which is a restriction (Ch. 168 Sec. 492). Cities have a degree of home rule, but “No provision of any city or village charter shall conflict with or contravene the provisions of any general law of the state” (MCL 117.36; 78.27), and charter amendments must be submitted to the governor for approval. First, the voting age statute must be changed to phrase the age as a grant rather than a restriction. Even if this happens, it would be unclear whether a city could take action to lower its voting age, or if that would still conflict with or contravene the state law. To avoid this uncertainty, the home rule law would need to be changed to specifically give cities authority over elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

MINNESOTA

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age. More research is needed on home rule.

The Minnesota state Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, but the state’s election code phrases it as a restriction ([Ch. 201.014](#)). There is a state statute ([Ch. 205.02](#)) regarding the applicability of state election law to municipal elections, but further analysis is needed to understand how this affects cities’ ability to lower the voting age. Regardless, statewide or city-specific enabling legislation could be a viable option.

MISSISSIPPI

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

The Mississippi Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. However, the Mississippi home rule law specifically prohibits cities from changing “the requirements, practices or procedures for municipal elections,” unless specifically authorized by another statute (Miss. Code Ann. § 21-17-5). Thus, the home rule



law would have to be changed to allow municipalities to exercise home rule authority over local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

MONTANA

Voter qualification statute and home rule statute prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

Montana's state Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, but the state statute phrases it as a clear restriction ([13-1-111](#)). Further, while cities in Montana can adopt charters, they are still subject to state laws concerning elections, and charters "shall not contain provisions establishing election, initiative, and referendum procedures" ([§ 7-3-708](#)). So, for a municipality in Montana to have the ability to lower its local voting age, both the state law on voter qualifications and the home rule law would need to be changed. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

NEBRASKA

Voter qualification statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Nebraska's Constitution presents the age requirement for voting as a grant, but the election code defines an elector as a citizen "who is at least eighteen years of age." Cities with populations greater than 5,000 are allowed to adopt charters. City councils can propose charter amendments, which must be approved by referendum (Const. Art. 11-4), but charters are still subject to the Constitution and state laws. Therefore, the statute defining an "elector" must be changed before cities can take action to lower their voting ages through charter amendments. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

New Hampshire's Constitution phrases the voting age provision as a grant, and the statute simply refers to the Constitution (Const. Art. 11 and [§ 654:1](#)). However, while New Hampshire's towns and cities have the ability to adopt charters, charters do not give towns or cities any additional powers other than to determine the organization of their local government ([§ 49-C:15](#)). Further, New Hampshire law provides for the qualifications of voters in municipal elections ([49-C:5](#)). Additionally, in 2000, voters did not approve a proposed constitutional amendment that would have given cities and towns broad home rule powers. For a New Hampshire municipality to lower its voting age for local elections, the legislature would have to pass a bill specifically giving municipalities the authority to regulate local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

NEW YORK

Voter qualification statute and home rule statute prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

The New York Constitution phrases the voting age as a grant, but the state election code phrases it as a restriction. Additionally, while New York provides home rule, it is limited, and municipalities do not have control over voter registration requirements. Therefore, advocacy efforts in New York must aim to change both the state law on the election age and the state law on home rule. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option. This would be similar to the city-specific law that allowed New York City to extend voting rights to non-citizens for school board elections from 1969-2002, when the mayor took control of the schools.

NORTH CAROLINA

Voter qualification statute and home rule statute prevent cities from lowering local voting age.

North Carolina's state Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, but the state statute phrases it as a clear restriction ([§163-55](#)). North Carolina does not provide for home rule in



its Constitution, and home rule authority has been given in a limited way through subject-specific statutes. No such statute exists concerning municipal elections, and the state election code contains sections governing municipal elections (Chapter 163 Article 24). To lower the voting age in cities in North Carolina, advocates would have to pass a bill changing the voting age statute and specifically granting municipalities the authority to regulate local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

NORTH DAKOTA

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

North Dakota's Constitution and election statutes grant the right to vote to those over 18 and do not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting. But, state statutes list the powers that are given to home rule cities and counties, and both cities and counties have the power to "provide for all matters pertaining to [city or county] elections, except as to qualifications of electors" ([40-05.1-06](#) and [11-09.1-05](#)). So, for a city or county to lower the voting age in its local elections, these statutes would need to be changed. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

OREGON

Statute on state election law's applicability to local elections prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

Oregon's constitutional provision on the voting age is a bit ambiguous, but it can likely be interpreted as a grant ([Art. 2 § 2](#)). The state election code does not contain a voter qualification provision. Cities in Oregon have some degree of home rule, but the state election code states that "any primary election, general election or special election held in this state shall be conducted under the provisions of this chapter, unless specifically provided otherwise in the statute laws of this state" ([§ 254.016](#)). It seems that this provision prevents cities from enacting their own regulations related to elections, like lowering the voting age. In order to give cities in Oregon the power to lower their voting ages, either this statute or the home rule laws would need to be amended. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

PENNSYLVANIA

Home rule statute prevents cities from lowering local voting age.

The Pennsylvania Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. Pennsylvania gives its municipalities a degree of home rule, but the state law specifically prohibits municipalities from exercising home rule authority over "the registration of electors and the conduct of elections." Advocacy efforts in Pennsylvania would need to begin with changing that state law to give municipalities more control over their local elections. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.

WYOMING

Statute on state election law's applicability to local elections prevents cities from lowering local voting age. Voter registration qualification statute may be preventive.

Wyoming's Constitution phrases the voting age requirement as a grant, but the state election code's provisions on qualifications to register to vote is unclear ([22-3-102](#)). Regardless, the state election code does state that "a municipal election shall be governed by laws regulating statewide elections" ([22-23-101](#)). So, for a city in Wyoming to lower its voting age, that provision would have to be changed to give cities control over the regulation of their elections, and the registration qualification statute may need to be changed as well. Statewide or city-specific enabling legislation may also be an option.



State Constitution prevents cities from lowering local voting age

In these states, an aspect of the state Constitution prevents cities from taking action to lower the voting age on the local level. Advocacy in these states would have to focus on a state constitutional amendment, which would be rather unlikely. In most states, constitutional amendments must be approved by two thirds of each House and by the state's voters.

ALABAMA

State Constitution does not provide for any degree of home rule.

Alabama's Constitution phrases the voting age provision as a grant, and the statute simply refers to the Constitution. However, Alabama does not give its municipalities any degree of home rule. The state legislature can pass "local acts" that apply to one municipality. Home rule would have to be provided through an amendment to the Constitution, which is unlikely. Individual cities could advocate for "local acts" allowing them to lower the voting ages, but these acts still have to be passed as constitutional amendments.

ARIZONA

State Constitution specifically prohibits voting by those under 18.

The Arizona Constitution and election code both clearly restrict voting to only those over 18 years of age. Advocacy efforts in Arizona would have to start with an amendment to the state constitution, which is rather unlikely. A majority of each House must approve the amendment, and then it must be approved by the state's voters.

SOUTH CAROLINA

State Constitution prohibits municipalities from enacting provisions related to elections.

South Carolina's Constitution and election statutes grant the right to vote to those over 18 and do not specifically prohibit those under 18 from voting (Const. Art. 2 § 4 and S.C. Code Ann. § [7-5-610](#)). But, while the Constitution allows municipalities to adopt home rule charters, it specifically prohibits them from enacting provisions related to "election and suffrage qualifications" (Art. 8 § 14). City-specific enabling legislation may be a possibility, but this is unlikely due to the constitutional provision. Constitutional amendments must be approved by two-thirds of each House, and then approved by the state's voters.

TEXAS

State Constitution specifically prohibits voting by those under 18.

The Texas Constitution and election code both clearly restrict voting to only those over 18 years of age. Advocacy efforts in Texas would have to start with an amendment to the state constitution, which is rather unlikely. Two-thirds of each House must approve of the amendment, and then it must be approved by the state's voters.

VIRGINIA

State Constitution specifically prohibits voting by those under 18, and does not provide for home rule.

The Virginia Constitution phrases its voting age provision as "Each voter shall be [...] eighteen years of age" (Article 2 Section 1). This phrase clearly restricts voting to those over the age of 18, so advocacy efforts in Virginia would have to start with an amendment to the Constitution to change this



provision. In addition, Virginia does not offer home rule to its municipalities, which makes lowering the voting age in cities in Virginia especially unlikely.

WEST VIRGINIA

State Constitution specifically prohibits voting by those under 18, and does not provide for home rule.

West Virginia's Constitution and election code both clearly restrict voting to only those over 18 years of age (Const. Art 4 § 1 and WV Code § 3-1-3). Advocacy efforts in West Virginia would have to start with an amendment to the state constitution, which is rather unlikely. Two-thirds of each House must approve of the amendment, and then it must be approved by the state's voters.

More research is needed

The laws in these states are unclear, and more research is needed to determine the feasibility of municipalities lowering the voting age in local elections.

IDAHO

More research is needed on home rule law.

Idaho's Constitution and election code present the voting age requirement as a grant (Const. [Art. 6 Sec. 2](#) and [§ 34-402](#)). A provision in the Constitution states that "Any county or incorporated city or town may make and enforce, within its limits, all such local police, sanitary and other regulations as are not in conflict with its charter or with the general laws" ([Const. Art. 12 Sec. 2](#)). There is nothing else in the Constitution or statutes specifically addressing concepts of home rule, and the election code does not discuss local elections, other than by defining "general election" as "national, state, or county" elections ([§ 34-101](#)). Does Art. 12 Sec. 2 may mean that cities can control their local elections, or it may be limited to more traditional police powers. More research is needed.

NEVADA

More research is needed on home rule law.

The Nevada Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. Nevada does not provide home rule through its Constitution, but it does give incorporated cities (the classification of city with the most autonomy in Nevada) certain, specifically listed powers under [NRS 268.008](#). Authority over local elections is not listed. But, the state law about city elections says that "conduct of any city election is under the control of the governing body of the city, and it shall, by ordinance, provide for the holding of the election, appoint the necessary election officers and election boards and do all other things required to carry the election into effect" ([NRS 293C.110](#)). This may mean that cities can lower the voting age for their local elections through charter amendments or ordinances, but the law is unclear. More research is needed.

NEW JERSEY

More research is needed on home rule law.

The New Jersey Constitution and election code grant the right to vote to those over 18, and do not explicitly prohibit those under 18 from voting. The Constitution and state statutes provide for home rule for municipalities, but it is unclear if cities have the power to lower the voting age for local elections. Control over elections is not included in a statute that lists certain powers specifically granted to cities governed by optional forms of government (akin to home rule cities) ([NJSA 40:69A-](#)



[29](#)). But, another statute states this list is not exhaustive, and that powers of municipalities should be construed liberally ([NJSA 40:69A-29](#)). Thus, it seems there is a chance cities may have the ability to lower the voting age in local elections, but the law is ambiguous.

TENNESSEE

More research is needed on home rule law.

Tennessee's Constitution presents the voting age requirement as a grant, and the state's statutes don't address the voting age. Home rule is unclear. Art. 11 Sec. 9 of the Constitution gives any municipality the ability to become a home rule municipality, but it doesn't elaborate on powers granted. Title 6, Chapter 53 regulates municipal elections, but does not say whether home rule municipalities can form their own regulations regarding elections. This may be enough to determine that cities do not have the power to lower the voting age in their local elections, but there may be more to explore. Further research and analysis is needed, but it seems like municipalities in Tennessee do not have the power to lower the voting age in their local elections.

WISCONSIN

Further research is needed on home rule law.

The Constitution (Art. 3 § 1) and statute (§ [6.02](#)) both phrase the voting age requirement as a grant. The Constitution (Art. 11 § 3) gives cities power to "determine their local affairs and government, subject only to this Constitution and to such enactments of the legislature of statewide concern as with uniformity shall affect every city or every village." It is likely that state election statutes are of "statewide concern," especially since (§ [5.02](#)) defines "election" as "every public primary and election." If this is true, cities may still be able to lower the voting age, since doing so may not directly conflict with the state law. On the other hand, cities may be prohibited from doing *anything* in an area of statewide concern where there already are statewide laws.

Note: According to [this](#) document from the League of Wisconsin Municipalities (pg. 57), city councils can adopt a charter ordinance (similar to charter amendment) with a two-thirds vote of the council, and it doesn't necessarily have to go to referendum.



Appendix C

Existing research

The body of research on lowering the voting age is limited, due in part to the prospective nature of the subject. However, the studies that do exist, focusing both on the United States and European countries, provide evidence for many of the central arguments for lowering the voting age in local elections. Below are summaries of many of the most relevant studies.

“American 16 and 17 Year Olds are Ready to Vote” – Daniel Hart and Robert Atkins (2011)

Hart and Atkins use survey data to show that American 16-year-olds have civic knowledge equal to 21 year olds, and comparable to older adults. Additionally, 16-year-olds are indistinguishable from 18-year-olds, and comparable to older adults, in other metrics of their capacity to function as citizens. The study also discusses demographic trends, and ultimately argues that 16- and 17-year-olds should be allowed to vote.

“Leaving the Nest and the Social Act of Voting: Turnout among First-Time Voters” – Yosef Bhatti and Kasper M. Hansen (2012)

Bhatti and Hansen use a Danish government dataset of all eligible voters to study the effect of leaving home on young voter turnout. The study concludes that “the overall effect of leaving the nest on turnout is negative, although strongly conditional on the parental turnout.” In addition, the authors discuss the strong influence of a citizen’s social network on whether they vote. The authors also identify an interesting first phase on the graph of turnout by age, showing that 18 and 19 year olds vote at noticeably higher rates than their slightly older peers, and that “from age 18 – 19, each extra month of age is mirrored by a one percentage-point turnout drop.”

“How lowering the voting age to 16 can be an opportunity to improve youth political engagement: Lessons learned from the Scottish Independence Referendum” – Jan Eichhorn (2014)

The voting age was lowered to 16 for Scotland’s 2014 independence referendum, and Eichhorn found that the newly enfranchised voters “were not simply following the lead of their parents or appeared to be easily influenced in an inappropriate way.” This research also supports claims about the importance of informed classroom discussions of politics.

“Vote Early, Vote Often: The Role of Schools in Creating Civic Norms” – David Campbell (2005)

Campbell uses YSS survey data from 1965-1980 to find a link between strong civic norms at school and engagement in the political process. He finds that civic climate in school has meaningful effect on voter turnout at least 15 years later. Someone is more likely to vote if a high percentage of their peers believe that “voting is a good indicator of citizenship.” This factor even outweighs an individual’s own belief about whether voting is a good indicator of citizenship. Campbell concluded that “Any school-based reform aiming to enhance voter turnout among the rising generation should focus on ways to foster a strong civic climate.”

“Becoming a Habitual Voter: Inertia, Resources, and Growth in Young Adulthood” – Eric Plutzer (2002)



Pluzer studies voter turnout and presents framework for a developmental theory of turnout. In the course of discussion, he presents well-established claims about the habitual nature of voting and factors and patterns relevant to habitual voters and nonvoters across the age spectrum.

“Should the Voting Age be Lowered to Sixteen? Normative and Empirical Considerations” – Tak Wing Chan and Matthew Clayton (2006)

Chan and Clayton use survey data to examine whether the voting age should be lowered to 16 in the UK, using survey data. They conclude that 16-year-olds are less politically mature than older adults and should not be able to vote.

“Voting at 16: Turnout and the quality of vote choice” – Markus Wagner, David Johann, Sylvia Kritzinger (2012)

Austria lowered the voting age to 16 for all of the country’s elections in 2007. The authors use survey data regarding the 2009 European Parliament elections to test the quality of vote choice among 16- and 17-year-old voters. They find that while turnout among those under 18 was low, that was not due to lack of ability or willingness to participate effectively in politics. Most importantly, the quality of vote choices, determined by the level of ideological congruity between a voter’s stated preferences and the party they voted for, was equal between 16- and 17-year-olds and older voters.

“Does voting rights affect the political maturity of 16- and 17-year-olds? Findings from the 2011 Norwegian voting-age trial” – Johannes Bergh (2012)

This research tests whether differences in political maturity between 16- and 17-year-olds and older voters (established by Chan and Clayton, above) are evened out when the 16- and 17-year-olds are given the right to vote. Using survey data collected during Norway’s 2011 municipal elections, in which the voting age was lowered to 16 in some municipalities as a pilot project, Bergh compares political maturity of 16- and 17-year-olds to 18-year-olds in the municipalities with the temporarily lower voting age and those without. He concludes that no, having voting rights do not affect the political maturity of 16- and 17-year-olds. Bergh also analyzes turnout and shows that 16- and 17-year olds voted at much higher rates than older first-time voters.

“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” – Eva Zeglovits and Julian Aichholzer (2014)

This paper focuses on the consequences of lowering the voting age to 16 in Austria. The authors specifically address a pattern called “first-time voter boost,” in which first-time voters, usually 18- and 19-year-olds, vote at higher rates than their slightly older 20- and 21-year-old peers. The “first-time voting boost” did indeed hold true after Austria lowered its voting age. Sixteen- and 17-year olds turned out at significantly higher rates than older first-time voters (aged 18-20). The paper also discusses the Austria’s broader civic engagement efforts that coincided with the country lowering its voting age.