



A Uniform Advance Voter Registration Age **Boosting More Efficient Registration and Education Programs** *A FairVote Democracy Innovation*

FairVote proposes that states establish a uniform initial voter registration age of no older than 16. These advance-registered voters would be automatically added to the voting rolls when they reach voting age. Ideally, they would also be sent information about the mechanics of voting and the timing of the first election for which they are eligible. Evidence collected from different states suggests this change will usually have no fiscal impact.

FACTS ABOUT UNIFORM VOTER REGISTRATION:

- **A significant disparity exists between the percentage of young people registered to vote and the percentage of the general population.**
 - 71% of eligible voters are registered; 59% of eligible voters age 18-24 are registered
- **A uniform voter registration age often does not exist.**
 - In some states, all 17-year-olds and some 16-year-olds can register. In other states, some 17-year-olds and no 16-year-olds can register. In many states it changes year to year based on the date of the next election.
 - The lack of uniformity creates confusion and makes it harder to run effective voter registration and education programs in schools and at the Division of Motor Vehicles.
- **A uniform advance-registration age does not require a new registration database system.**
 - In many states, advance-registered voters already are inputted into the voter registration database as “pending.” A State’s Board of Elections transfers “pending” voters to “active” status when they become eligible to vote.
- **Lowering the advance-registration age does NOT change the voting age.**
 - The 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution sets the voting age at 18-years-old.
 - Local and state jurisdictions can lower the voting age if they so choose, but it is a separate question from voter registration.

Why is 16-years-old a sensible age for advance-registration?

- When applying for a driver’s license, a 16-year-old can register to vote at the DMV.
- 16-years-old is the compulsory school attendance age in most states.
- Many states already allow 16-year-olds to register during parts of the election cycle.

Why aren’t the current registration programs in high schools good enough?

- Registration drives typically do not focus on anyone other than seniors.
- Registration drives have much higher registration rates in presidential election years.
- No statutory requirement for voter registration in schools exists.
- A standardized voting curriculum would encourage students to learn about the mechanics of participation (i.e. requesting absentee ballots).

Does registering to vote at a younger age have long-term benefits?

- Some states have already recognized the importance of early participation by allowing 17-year-olds to serve as full-time election judges.
- Registration boosts turnout: in 2008, 83% of registered 18-24-year-olds voted.
- Academic studies and electoral analyses show that voting behavior is habit-forming. If you vote, you will likely keep voting. If you don’t vote, you probably won’t start.