

Philosopher on voting rights for children

"They are politically incapacitated".

Not letting children vote is a form of discrimination for philosopher Mich Ciurria. She calls for the right to vote from birth.



Children could become more emancipated through the right to vote

Photo: bizoo/imago

wochentaz: Ms Ciurria, the governing parties in Germany want to introduce youth voting rights from the age of 16. But your position is more radical. What are you demanding?

Mich Ciurria: I think children of all ages should have the right to vote, like any other human being. Maybe a six-month-old child is not yet physically able to do so. But as soon as a child can vote, it should be allowed to do so.

And at what point can a child do that?

Actually, **as soon as it** can form a **political opinion** [<https://taz.de/!/Young-people-under-18-are-not-allowed-to-vote/!5802134/>]. A six-month-old baby, of course, can't; it can't even recognise itself in the mirror. It has no ego consciousness, so it cannot have any political interest. However, as soon as a child starts to express its wishes and needs, that should be enough to make it vote.

Shouldn't there then be a minimum voting age that starts when one can express such wishes and needs?

There is no good reason for a **fixed minimum voting age** [<https://taz.de>

<https://www.taz.de/!5849898/>. Adults who have no ego consciousness, for example, because of a disability, are not excluded from the right to vote. It is assumed that they do not vote at all because they have no interest in doing so. The same can be assumed for children.

IN THE
INTERVIEW:
ME CIURRIA



Photo: Jim
Rhodes

Mich Ciurria,

42, is a philosopher and teaches at the University of Missouri in the USA. Her research focuses on Marxist feminism and critical disability theory.

But people with disabilities often have them for life. A child, on the other hand, is only a child for a limited time. Isn't that an important difference?

No one stays the same in the course of their life. One changes physically and mentally. Some become mentally disabled, and yet they continue to have their

right to vote because it is considered sacrosanct. The fact that children are no longer children at some point does not mean that they should not have the right to vote.

Aren't we spoiling children's childhoods if they have to deal with the seriousness of politics at such an early age?

Childhood is a social construct. So it's something that we as a society have made up and invented rules for. That's why we have this image in our heads that children are innocent, passive, vulnerable and in need of protection. A very similar image was had of the housewife in the 20th century.

This is no coincidence, this particular idea of childhood serves a purpose in our society: it is about politically incapacitating children.

Their protest is often labelled as defiant or irrational by adults. But it would make more sense to give children the power to **represent their interests**

[\[https://www.taz.de/!5879177/\]](https://www.taz.de/!5879177/).

But how do you know that a child is ready to vote? Would there be a need for something like political literacy tests?

This proposal exists, and historical parallels can be drawn here as well. In the 1970s, there were literacy tests in the USA as part of voter registration: also a kind of skills test.

African Americans were denied access to education and were often illiterate. The test was used to deny them the right to vote. It was a product of racist thinking and was eventually banned. Skills tests also discriminate against people with

disability, as some disabilities affect the ability to read and write.

From a philosophical point of view, such tests are unjustified, especially if they only apply to a certain group. In the case of children, they would be age discriminatory. Many adults make incompetent voting decisions, but that is no reason to test them or exclude them from the right to vote.

Aren't children much more susceptible to manipulation than adults when it comes to elections? Parents could influence them and in this way manipulate elections.

I don't think parents can pass on their political values to their children so easily. Children often have very different beliefs and are influenced more by their peers than by their parents.

Is that so?

Yes, research shows that children up to the age of 10 are more influenced by their parents than by their peers. From then on, children almost completely reject what their parents think in many cases. Many young people are goths or like K-pop or Justin Bieber, even though their parents don't.

But if children could be manipulated by their parents in the first 10 years of their lives, shouldn't such voices be prevented?

No, quite the opposite. If a right to vote from the age of 0 would actually lead to many parents manipulating their children in this way, this would speak even more in favour of the right to vote. Because only then can these children vote for a policy that can protect them from their parents' manipulative behaviour.

The same concern of manipulation arose when women fought for the right to vote. It was believed that they would vote like their husbands. And that is even true, even today some women vote like their husbands. But no sensible person believes that women must therefore be politically incapacitated on principle.

When parents try to control how their children vote, we actually need to protect children by **strengthening their rights** [<https://taz.de>

[/!Bremerin-in-the-EU-Youth-Conference/!5755091/](#). Children are even being oppressed in a double way right now.

What do you mean?

Children are a particularly vulnerable group. They experience bullying at school, and here in the US, even bad things like school shootings. At home, they often have little protection from abuse, neglect and violence within the family. The US author and feminist bell hooks has written that many children grow up in a loveless environment and cannot do anything about it because they are politically incapacitated.

bell hooks politicises the situation of children and shows that it is a systemic problem that requires a political solution. The political disenfranchisement of children goes hand in hand with many other injustices that could be resolved if they were allowed to vote.

What kind of injustices are these, for example?

WOCHENTAZ



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to recognise individual, autonomous human beings.

Currently, it is considered perfectly okay to force children to go to church, take piano lessons or learn French. But basically, adults objectify them and treat them as if they were an extension of themselves.

They exercise control over their children's bodies and minds because they do not see them as autonomous individuals. And that is why they do not recognise their right to vote. If children had the right to vote, that would make people consider them as

Why aren't more children and young people campaigning to be allowed to vote?

Many young people know nothing about the debate. This is called epistemic injustice. It means that children do not have access to the knowledge they need to understand their oppression. This is common among politically oppressed groups.

And what can be done about it?

Children should be informed about youth suffrage and political groups that support youth suffrage. This would help them to understand their **own actions as political** [<https://taz.de/!deputies-demand-voting-rights-for-children/!5179236/>] significant to perceive.

If the policy were to invest more in structures that benefit children, wouldn't that already solve a large part of the problems?

The injustices children face can never be adequately addressed if they are not allowed to choose for themselves. We cannot trust adults to make right decisions for them without involving them in the decision-making process.

It is simply wrong to deny young people the right to vote. In the past, it was also said that women did not need to vote because their husbands, who voted on their behalf, only had their best interests at heart. This is not logical. There is no justification for anyone to make decisions on behalf of an oppressed person.

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