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Vote at 16, who is interested?

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Germany will in a few days have a new government formed by a coalition between the Social Democratic, Green and Liberal parties. The agreement between these three parties contemplates numerous reforms aimed at modernizing the country in different dimensions, among which is the recognition of the right to vote for its citizens from the age of 16. If the purpose were to come to fruition, Germany would be the second European country to incorporate this segment of the young population into the most characteristic political participation activity of democratic systems. It would follow the example of Austria, which introduced the law in 2007, and five other countries around the world. At the same time, in Germany, a right that young people already have in some states of the Federal Republic, be it at the regional or local level, would become generalized.

Interest in the age required to exercise the right to vote, and the subsequent debate, comes from afar and is rekindled from time to time, spurred at times by the influence of some political forces and at other times by the pressure of events or events of the social movements arisen in the heat of the same.

At present it can be said that the public role of the youngest, especially adolescents around the world, has been becoming more and more evident. It is enough to recall the high school students who ignited the conscience that led to the "outbreak" in Chile. Or the *Fridays for future* movement that has spread throughout the globe, raising its voice in defense of a planet that is the land of all, children and adults.

In general terms, this debate has shared similar arguments over time, either in favor or against increasing the age required for the exercise of the political rights of citizenship.

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The arguments in favor are based on the children's human rights guaranteed (**derechos humanos de niños y niñas**) by the signatory States of an international legal instrument such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. **Although the Convention does not expressly guarantee the right to political participation through voting, it does contain another set of mandates** that have been widely used and developed by public institutions and by children's organizations to promote their participation " in all matters that affect them ", in the terms used in the Convention itself.

Youth organizations (**organizaciones juveniles**), for their part, summarize the main beneficial arguments in three. These are the ones that refer to: **democratic participation** (the right to vote is a key element, particularly in terms of recognizing the views of young people); **to demographic changes** (lowering the voting age would help maintain a demographic balance between young voters and older adults); **to the rights and responsibilities of citizens** (young people have many responsibilities in society and should also have the rights that accompany them).

Arguments against lowering the legally established voting age generally assume the status quo, based on distorted images of the youth population that hide a resistance from the adult (majority) group to give up spaces of power. In a comparative historical perspective, **these arguments are similar to those that were made in their day regarding the vote of women, or the reduction from 21 to 18 years for the age of majority, which carried the right to vote.**

The debate in academic circles has gained momentum more recently in the heat of reflections on the **crisis of democracy and doubts about its future viability** as we know it (or idealize it) until now. A prominent representative in this line is the professor of political theory at the University of Cambridge David Runciman (**David Runciman**), who has been defending an extension of the right to vote that includes boys and girls in Primary Education, that is, from the age of six onwards. His proposal is based on a reading of history in which it would be demonstrated that democracy has no other way of correcting and

improving itself than to broaden its quantitative base, extending suffrage to those who are left out. This would have happened in the case of women and racial minorities, whose successive incorporation into the electorate would have allowed, during the last 150 years, different waves of reform that ended up completely transforming society. The essential thing for Runciman would be that the children would introduce with their vote a whole series of demands and unprecedented demands on the political agenda, as justified and reasonable (or as little justified and reasonable) as those that currently occupy our debates.

The Children's Voting Colloquium (*Children's Voting Colloquium*) initiative is promoted by academics from different parts of the world, in which organizations led by adults or young people concerned about human rights also participate. Its proposal is aimed at the abolition of a minimum voting age worldwide. While holding differing positions on how that goal can be achieved in practice, and recognizing that there may be different appropriate solutions in different contexts, they seek to catalyze a broader movement for truly universal suffrage, either through full voting rights to vote all, reduced voting ages, proxy votes, or some combination thereof.

In Spain, the question of the young vote oscillates between the indifference of the citizens and the occasional initiatives of a political party, which are soon overwhelmed by other causes that are considered a priority. However, the creation, last April, of a **subcommission in the Congress of Deputies for the reform of the Organic Law of the Electoral Law (LOREG)**, which among other issues aims to study the reduction of the voting age Up to 16 years of age, it can be an opportunity to address a change that interests us all in this aging society.

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