



## The Case for Children's Suffrage in a Nutshell

Democracies are governments that hold themselves accountable to the people. The key means of accountability is the people's right to vote. Voting has never been perfect, but over history it has gradually been extended to non-landowners, the poor, racial minorities, women, and younger adults.

But it is not extended to the third of humanity who are children.

Children and young people under 18 contribute enormously to democratic life. They fight for climate justice, fair education policies, Black Lives Matter, gun control legislation, religious freedoms, abortion laws, queer rights, and much more. They understand that they are impacted by policy choices around poverty, schooling, and health.

They have even created organizations like We Want the Vote and National Youth Rights Association that fight for children's suffrage.

The idea that children are too incompetent to vote ignores the facts and is discriminatory. Adults are held to no standard of competence, yet this does not bar them from suffrage. The proper measure of voting competence is whether a person understands what it means to vote. This is a fundamental human right to free speech that should be abridged only for exceptional reasons.

Democracies need children's input. Representatives need to respond better to children's lives. They need to provide stronger support to parents, teachers, medical professionals, and others involved in children's care. They need to develop economic, climate, health, and other policies with longer-term ambitions.

And democracies need to stop telling their citizens in the earliest stages of life that their voices do not count. This leads to a dangerous democratic disengagement, less informed citizens, and a people primed for authoritarian appeals.

It is time for democracies to become democratic.