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(English translation)

Why the right to vote at 16 can be a fundamental step for democracy

A group of more than 80 academics, as well as children's rights activists, have just signed a [manifesto](#) in which they consider voting at age 16 a fundamental step for democracy.

They argue that, at a time of growing concern about political disaffection and the questioning of democratic systems, it is necessary to move toward greater intergenerational justice, which requires recognizing the right of the youngest people to decide about their present and future.

They thus reflect a line of research, reflection, and debate that has been taking place in the field of childhood studies, whether from the perspective of sociology, law, or political philosophy, for years.

For its part, the CIS (Sociological Research Centre) May 2025 [barometer](#) introduced a question asking whether the voting age should be lowered to 16. 18.4% of the responses were positive, compared to 79.3% who opposed it. In other words, almost 8 out of 10 people (adults, those over 18) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this possibility. The distribution between the sexes was very similar, although men were slightly more in favor of the idea.

By age group, those most opposed were those aged 35/44 and 45/54. On the other hand, those interviewed over 65 were the most likely to view the idea. In other words, the parents of potential voters aged 16 or 17 were most opposed, while their grandparents were most in favor.

Leaving things as they are

Leaving aside the interpretations that could be made in terms of intergenerational relationships, the homogeneity of the responses suggests that Spanish adults believe things are fine as they are and that there is no need to modify the ages established in the Spanish Constitution to exercise the (mis)named right to universal suffrage.

Despite the lack of social demand regarding an issue that appears to be considered irrelevant, the Ministry of Youth and Children has announced that this reduction in the minimum age for

participation in democratic elections will be part of the measures included in the future state youth law.

To better describe this issue, it is important to explain three different ways in which researchers and experts have argued about restricting the right to vote based on age, each with its own nuances:

1. The [discussion surrounding children's citizenship status](#).
2. Arguments aimed at refuting opinions that reject their political participation or reduce it to mere learning.
3. [Arguments](#) that approach the issue from the need to renew democracy itself, as an inclusive way of guiding life in society.

Regarding the first issue, [experts consider](#) that children constitute one of the invisible groups in citizenship studies, where citizenship is implicitly equated with adulthood. This view contrasts with research conducted in the field of child participation, and even more so in contemporary children's movements, which portray children and adolescents as empowered, informed, compassionate, and global citizens, without diminishing their need for special protection.

Political Competence at 18

On the other hand, there is the underlying reason given for excluding children from voting: their lack of political competence. But if they are excluded for that reason, [one must also be willing to exclude](#) those over 18 who lack such competence.

Today, to be an elector, it is not necessary to know how to read or communicate in writing. It is also not necessary to have an interest in politics or have completed basic education, nor is it necessary to be intelligent, rational, or informed. The only rule that establishes electoral capacity is age, which is unfair.

Regarding the value that the vote represents for democracy, the view defended by [other experts](#) is that the exclusion of children from direct political representation is due not to a lack of literacy in the children themselves, but rather to existing conceptualizations of democracy. It is democracy that must adapt to adequately represent the child population, and this will only be achieved if it is reconceptualized as a politics of difference, one that responds to the diversity experienced by a political community.

The question of whether those in power should respond primarily to expressed social demands or whether they can, and should, anticipate introducing changes to the status quo that benefit the community is exemplified by the issue of children's suffrage.

In this case, should a reform that constitutes a step toward recognizing children as political actors be ruled out because it lacks popular support, or could we rely on expert knowledge to consolidate democracy? It is important that, as a society, we be able to answer this question.

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