

The Twenty-Sixth Amendment: Is Eighteen Too Young?

Very recently, Representative Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts urged a movement to lower the legal voting age from eighteen to sixteen. She says, “By lowering the voting age from eighteen to sixteen years of age, my amendment will allow young people to have a say in our federal elections. To help shape and inform the policies that will set the course for the future. From gun violence to climate change, our young people are organizing, mobilizing, and calling us to action. They are at the forefront of social and legislative movements and have earned inclusion in our democracy.” The twenty-sixth Amendment in the U.S. Constitution states: “The right of citizens of the United States, who are 18 years of age or older, to vote, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of age.” While Representative Pressley desires the age to be lowered, that should not be the case. In fact, it should be raised. Even though the Amendment was created for a purpose during the time it was made, society has changed, and eighteen-year-olds have different mindsets and priorities than before.

The Twenty-Sixth Amendment was proposed on March 23rd, 1971 and adopted on July 1st, 1971. It is the last amendment in the Constitution to enforce voting rights. At first, the voting age was twenty-one years old, as it states in the Fourteenth Amendment that “male inhabitants of [each] state, [should be] twenty-one years of age, and citizens of the United States.”. It wasn’t until the Vietnam War when there were men between eighteen and twenty who were being drafted. They were fighting and risking their lives before they could even legally vote. Congress, now under serious pressure, enacted the Voting Rights Act of 1970 and lowered the voting age to eighteen. In the court case *Oregon v. Mitchell*, after Congress passed the Voting Rights act, the Supreme Court said that Congress had authority to lower the voting

age for federal elections, but not local or state elections, along with not allowing the states to reject any voter who were voting for presidency based on their residency requirements.

Oregon, Arizona, Idaho, and Texas disliked this, suing and arguing that this infringed on the states rights and that it was unconstitutional. The Court came to a conclusion that lowering the state and local voting age was indeed unconstitutional with proof from Article I section four of the Constitution, which says, "The Times, Places and Manner of holding Elections for Senators and Representatives, shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by Law make or alter such Regulations, except as to the Place of Chusing Senators." To resolve the issue, Congress proposed the Twenty-Sixth Amendment, was certified by President Richard Nixon, and the amendment was ratified in less than four months, which is the shortest ratification period for any of the Amendments.

A Senate Report that accompanied the Twenty-Sixth Amendment explained the three main reasons why they lowered the age. The first reason stated that "younger citizens are fully mature enough to vote". The second stated was "[they] bear all or most of an adult's responsibilities." The third reason was to give the young voters a chance "to influence our society in a peaceful and constructive manner." It was known, or thought, that citizens between eighteen and twenty-one had already completed high-school and were working or had achieved a high-level education. While that may be the case, that doesn't mean that eighteen-year-olds are mature enough to vote. ProCon.org lists three cons to lowering the voting age, the first one saying, "research in neuroscience suggests that the brain, specifically the prefrontal cortex, is still undergoing major reconstruction and development during the teenage years," and added that the prefrontal cortex is what "enables us to weigh dilemmas, balance trade-offs and, in short, make reasonable decisions in politics." In the same section, they add that most eighteen-

year-olds are still living with their parents and would most likely be influenced by their parents choices. To piggyback on this topic of eighteen-year-olds and maturity, Laurence Steinberg, PhD, and a professor of development psychology at Temple University made a comment about youth voting, saying: “[youth] likely possess the necessary intellectual skills to make informed choices about terminating a pregnancy but may lack the social and emotional maturity to control impulses, resist peer pressure and fully appreciate the riskiness of dangerous decisions.” Steinberg and a few of his fellow co-workers did a study to show that cognitive and emotional understandings matured and progressed differently. They gathered nine hundred and thirty-five ten to thirty year-olds to “examine age differences in a variety of cognitive and psychosocial capacities.” They all took a variety of tests that included “psychosocial maturity and cognitive ability” as well as other tests included “impulse control, sensation-seeking, resistance to peer influence, future orientation and risk perception . . . The cognitive battery included measures of basic intellectual abilities.” Although there were no significant differences between the ten and seventeen-year-old age groups, there were differences in maturity between the sixteen/seventeen year-olds and those of twenty-two years of age, along with eighteen to twenty-one year-olds and those of twenty-six years and older. Steinberg makes a remark on this study, saying “In contrast, differences in cognitive capacity measures increased from ages eleven to sixteen and then showed no improvements after age sixteen - exactly the opposite of the pattern found on the psychosocial measures. Certain cognitive abilities, such as the ability to reason logically, reach adult levels long before psychosocial maturity is attained.” This study proves that age and maturity does matter and it will affect our decision making, whatever the case.

The second con *ProCon* lists in that people between eighteen and twenty-nine have low voter turnouts, which suggests the idea that people might not be ready to vote until later in life. The article states that only “12.5% of 18-year-olds participated in the 2014 midterm election, compared to 42% of the general population ... Over the last 30 years, voter turnout for 18- to 29-year-olds has never exceeded 21% in a midterm election.” This section additionally adds a quote from David Davenport, a researcher at Hoover Institution, who said, “My concern is if 16-year-olds were allowed to vote on any kind of broad scale, what we'd actually be doing is bringing the least politically informed, the least politically experienced, [and] the least mature in terms of making long-term judgments and trade-offs, directly into and potentially affecting our voter turnout and results.” Even though school's have now been pressured to add studies about the Constitution and the Founders, it still doesn't make up for the generation who didn't get the special treatment. If the voting age was ever to be lowered, it shouldn't happen for another ten years. James E. Miller, the editor-in-chief of Mises Canada and copywriter for Washington, D.C., wrote an article in 2015 about why eighteen-year-olds shouldn't vote from his point of view. Granting that I don't agree with everything he says, he does hit the nail on the head in one paragraph that I agree with one-hundred-percent. He says, “Suffrage shouldn't be awarded based on age – it should be based on whether or not you have a stake in society, meaning that you own property, are in the military, have children or, at the very least, pay taxes. That equates to anyone who has a job, pays rent, or has a mortgage. With a buy-in, you should have a voice in how government works. Without one, there is an incentive to milk the treasury for all its worth.” To sum up what Miller said, if you are not contributing to society, such as paying taxes, owning property, or paying for housing, you should not have a right to vote. Couch-potatoes who live off of McDonald's and their free WiFi are people we cannot

depend on to choose our President. Miller adds with his background when he was eighteen, saying how he could care less about his future and was boggled that despite his wrong choices, he still had a hand in who becomes President:

“I was far from a responsible adult. Legally speaking, I was no longer a child, but I sure acted like one. I was attending Harrisburg Area Community College and working at Hersheypark on the weekends. I wasn’t thinking a whole lot about my future. Instead, I hung out with girls, drank underage, and dabbled with marijuana. I was your typical American teenager, who could also pull the lever and help decide the next president of the country. I don’t know about you, but looking back, it was a dumb idea to let someone like me have a hand in choosing the commander-in-chief. I had responsibility, but no conception of what it means to invest in the long-term health of the nation. Amongst my peers, I was not an outlier.”

The third and final con was that most Americans, no matter what age or political view, all agreed that people under eighteen should not be given the right to vote. A poll in 2018 from *The Atlantic* and the Public Religion Research Institute that found “81% of Americans oppose lowering the voting age to 16, with a scant 16% in favor. Only 19% of young people support the idea, and just 9% of seniors. Among Democrats, 25% would like to see the voting age lowered; support among Republicans is a mere 6%. A different survey found 8% support for lowering the voting age to 16; 45% want to keep it at 18; and 46% would like to raise it back to age 21.” Some people in political office are pushing for sixteen-year-olds to be able to vote, but most citizen’s disagree with this recommendation. Timothy Furnish, Ph.D, and an assistant history professor at Georgia Perimeter College in Atlanta wrote an item on whether eighteen-year-olds’ rights to vote should be taken away. He gives his point of view and his experience with eighteen-year-olds as a college professor, which is similar to what James Miller spoke

about earlier in the text. He said, “As a college history professor, I can cite examples of eighteen and nineteen -year olds’ ignorance that make the Jaywalkers look like the Founding Fathers ... No one in an entire modern world history class this term knew when the American Revolution began . . . and I have had many students who thought that Nazi Germany used nuclear weapons in World War II.” Furnish’s main point in this one paragraph is that the students, the eighteen and nineteen year olds, don’t know their history! They take their voting right for granted because they don’t even know how they got it. Furnish continues; “The point is that we allow such uninformed people to vote! Indeed, we encourage it: MTV’s ‘Rock the Vote,’ P. Diddy’s ‘Vote or Die.’ There’s even an organization, ‘Youthrights.org,’ that demands we lower the voting age to 16 . . . we need some litmus test that demonstrates the prospective voter knows *something* and has not just been demagogued into believing that the GOP wishes to starve senior citizens or that the Democrats want Bin Ladin to move into the Oval Office.” Furnish’s concern about eighteen-year-olds voting for someone unqualified for President like Drake or Beyonce is something to be worried about. For all we know, both of these people don’t know anything about our government or the role of the President. The citizens of the United States just want a President who will do what they want them to do or the one who is the most dazzling and appealing to them, ignoring the consequences and risks, and today's eighteen-year-old’s don’t understand that.

To conclude, eighteen-year-old’s should not be given the right to vote. The majority of eighteen-year-old’s do not have any idea about our government and how it works they should be educated about it before they can vote. They also lack the maturity, are susceptible for beguilement, and are just beginning to contribute to society. Lowering the voting age will only

result in more inveigled and illogical decisions, therefore raising the voting age back to twenty-one should be strongly considered.

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