

TED DEBATE CLUB

supplemental working sheet

d e b a t e a r t i c l e s

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Koreans divided over lowering voting age

Ongoing debates regarding the **legislative** move to lower the South Korean voting age from 19 to 18 continue within the South Korean parliament. Presently, all opposition parties — the Democratic Party, the People’s Party, and the Justice Party — are all in agreement on lowering the voting age, whereas the ruling Saenuri Party has still not reached a **consensus**.

The proposal for a lower voting age is not a new one, with a bill first presented as early as 1991. Since then, the issue has persistently been brought up by many politicians, such as the former Democratic Party representative Chang Ha-na, as well as the former Justice party representative Jeong Jin-hoo. Currently, major political figures such as the former Democratic Party leader Moon Jae-in have supported the move, pointing out the injustice in imposing military duty onto 18-year-olds yet refusing to grant them the right to vote.

The loudest call for action came from teenagers themselves. “Whoever is elected will influence the younger generation to a great extent,” said 18-year-old Chung Ji-won. “They will be in a position of power when we first start actively entering the world as productive members of society.”

Many other high school students have echoed their interest in taking a greater role in choosing their next leader. Kim Ju-yeon, a student at Gyeonggi Academy of Foreign Languages stated, “I believe that it is my duty as a citizen to know what is happening inside of Korea. I read the news everyday, and I routinely watch experts discuss current issues.”

An English teacher at a private institution, Park Hyeon-jin, 43, said, “In an age where everyone is well connected, 18-year-olds are plenty qualified as anyone else to have voting rights.”

When questioned about possible negative **ramifications** of giving such a responsibility to students who prioritize their studies, Park replied, “Studying, learning and understanding politics from a younger age, that’s a more useful, enriching form of learning.”

Though there were many persuasive arguments for the change, some are firm in their disagreement. “Teenagers are generally unproficient at logically weighing pros and cons. And high school seniors are too busy with their studies to comprehensively research and understand each politician’s political stance extensively,” said university student Kim Hyo-won.

If Korea does take this step and lowers the voting age to 18, it will be the last of the OECD countries to do so. The United States lowered the voting age to 18 from 21 in 1971, when it amended its constitution. In 2015, Japan was the most recent of the OECD countries to lower the voting age from 20 to 18.

Currently, South Korea is the only OECD country that sets the voting age at 19. The remaining 34 OECD nations allow voting from age 18 or 16.

Lowering the Voting Age to 18

With so many political issues competing on the forefront of the headlines, little attention is being given to the on-going debate of whether or not to lower the legal age to vote. At present, Koreans can vote from Korean age 20 or 21 whether their birthday has passed or not. And it means Koreans can vote from age 19 as the International age allows. In this situation, people want to lower the legal age to vote from 19 to 18 years of age as the new International age. In the past, Korea has been the scene of many student rallies where participants demanded a change in voting age policy. This topic seems to emerge every election year, yet nobody has championed this cause in government. However, recent influential student activism has triggered the renewed debate to reconsider the nation's voting age.

Politicians disagree on the matter. Those who support lowering the voting age, say that it can generate more interest in teenagers about politics and that they are mature enough to make decisions and handle the responsibility of the vote. They point to several instances where young Koreans have expressed their political opinions and it led to constructive change. Despite these positive points, Korea remains the only OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) country to not permit citizens as young as 18, the right to vote. In Korea, voting eligibility starts at the age of 19. The median age for voting around the world is also 18. Korea's youth can give their opinions and ideas, but without the right to vote, they have little impact on policy and government administration.

There are also those who object to any changes to the voting age. They argue that voters elect political leaders who make crucial decisions for our country. This is an enormous responsibility and citizens under the age of 19 do not have a fully developed sense of responsibility. As a result, they are incapable of exercising that responsibility in a reasonable manner. Furthermore, if Korea were to give

the right to vote to 18 year-olds, an additional 600,000 voters would be added to the list and this would give rise to the debate over the inequities between the voting and drinking ages as is seen in America.

The Dankook Herald (DKH) interviewed Kim Rae-yeong, Professor at the College of Law. The DKH asked the professor about the possibility of lowering the voting age. “Lowering the voting age has been suggested for a long time. Actually, people who study election law and conservative camps have filed petitions with the court on this matter Basically the ruling party believes that if teenagers get the right to vote, they will choose the Progress Party and they don’t want support for other parties to grow”, he answered. In the country’s first elections in 1948, the voting age was restricted to 21. This was lowered to 20 in 1960 and 19 in 2005. “As we can see, the age criteria in our election law has changed so frequently, it can be easily lowered again to 18.”

While Korean youth are often politically active, the 19 year-old voter restriction remains higher than other in most other nations. In socialist states such as Cuban and North Korean, citizens as young as 16 year can vote. Among OECD countries, the voting age is 18. However, German youth have always actively participated in politics. Before the First World War, German youth founded an outdoor activity group that expressed their **virulent patriotism**. These types of activities continued well into the Nazi era. Since then, the country’s youth hasn’t stopped voicing their ideas, but their messages have turned to ones of peace. Nowadays German adolescents are posting political messages on internet communities targeting young people. This community is composed of youth aged 14 year to 21 years old and it is a forum where they freely exchange opinions and ideas.

In addition, France also ensures their youth have an opportunity to express their opinion on public policies. Every year since 1994, a panel has selected 500 youth councilors representing each local

constituency, to take part in a forum to discuss proposed legislation and choose the best from among them to be sent for further examination to the nation's parliament. From those bills sent for further review, 4 have been made it into law, through this process.

It is important to note that by lowering the age that a citizen can vote, you are also lowering the age that youth can run for office. In 2005, a 19 year old high school student in the United States successfully ran for mayor and in Germany a 19 year old became the youngest assemblywoman to be elected to office. Lastly, by lowering the voting age to 18, more candidates will propose ideas that address the needs of these young voters, such as better educational policies. For instance, Lee Jae-joung, Superintendent in Gyeonggi Province proposed that students go to school for 9 am.

Voting is one of the most common ways for a person to participate in politics. Teenagers are also citizens, so politicians should pay attention to their opinions and needs. There are some real concerns about lowering the voting age, however with some minor adjustments, Korea can overcome them. "Proper" political education is a solution. Germany has adopted neutral guidelines for political education. These guidelines were made by distinguished scholars who have different political views. Likewise, Korean students should be able to learn more about competing views. And in doing so, students will be able to enhance their ability to critically think and make their own decisions. In addition, they could also look at entering politics as a career at an earlier age.

Every citizen, including the young, should have all the same rights when it comes to participating in politics. It is the responsibility of all of us to check the facts, analyze the competing opinions and suggest the best possible outcome. Both adults, and the youth of Korea, must do their best

to improve the growth of our nation. Respecting each other and collecting the best solutions to address the problems we face, will no doubt lead to a more advanced democracy for our nation.

Should 16 Year-Olds Have the Right to Vote?

Pros and Cons

In 1971, at the peak of the youth protests of the baby boom, the United States passed the 26th Amendment, lowering the voting age from 21 to 18. It was the fastest passage of any **amendment** in U.S history. Young people strongly supported the amendment because they believed that “if they were old enough to fight, they were old enough to vote”.

Flash forward to 2015, as the old saying goes – history repeats itself. Now the discussion is over the voices of 16 and 17 year olds.

Rapidly more and more nations are deciding to lower their voting age, as well. Some of these nations include Austria, Argentina, Brazil, Germany, and the UK. The United States, as a result, is catching up. [Two Maryland cities](#) have already granted municipal voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds, and there’s a [recent push](#) in San Francisco to follow their lead. Additionally, more than 15 states already allow 17 year olds to vote in primaries to nominate candidates for president, Congress, and governor. So, what are the pros and cons of taking this nationwide?

PROS:



Teenagers spend more than half their day sitting in a class room, hearing about what their country is doing, what decisions their government is making, and how those decisions affect them, yet they don't have an influential voice on those decisions.

It's no surprise that, by lowering the voting age, 16 and 17 year olds have an opportunity to become more politically aware. A detailed study of voters' ages and habits in Denmark found that 18 year olds were far more likely to cast their "first vote" than 19 year olds, and that every month of extra age in those years resulted in a decline in "first vote" turnout. Essentially, if you give a 16-year old a ballot, they might just vote. If you give a 19 year old a ballot, they might just lose it in their dorm rooms or try to trade it in for dining dollars. Getting young people to vote while still living in stable conditions (with their parents) may strengthen their willingness to vote as adults.

CONS:

When considering lowering the voting age, one must consider what is really on the minds of teenagers around the country: Prom, high school, friends... and voting?

One of these things are not like the other.



Although there are some **compelling** reasons to consider lowering the voting age from 18, there are negative consequences for such an action, as well. First, one must ask if 16 or 17 year olds are at a point where they are mature enough to vote. Minors, according to current laws, are not yet mature enough to take part in consuming alcohol, tobacco products and make other important consent based decisions, they lack the “temperament”. In a sense, is voting any different?

According to the argument, due to their inexperience in the electorate they may also be easily swayed. Some believe young potential voters may be pressured to vote in certain ways due to the political beliefs of their teachers and parents. Therefore, they should have more time and experience to navigate the political landscape, time to craft their own political ideology, not just borrowing another's. They could lack the independence and critical thinking skills to understand what is in their own best interest. They may find themselves at risk of being manipulated by other's agendas.

Instead of what is the “cool” thing to do or wear, what your ballot could be the ticket into popularity.

That leads well into the question: are young people informed enough to vote? A democracy requires an engaged and informed electorate to thrive and 16 years olds are often under informed. Young people often are misinformed about the fundamental structure of government, and rarely keep up on current events. Holding off on voting may give them an advantage, by having more time to mature, and gain the adequate perspective to be responsible citizens.

So, now that you have heard two sides of the argument, what is your stance on this? Let us know!

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