

Enfranchisement and Legislative Responsiveness to Younger Voters: Evidence from Scotland

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Abstract

While the vast majority of countries around the world require that voters be 18 years of age to cast a ballot, advocates of extending the franchise to include individuals aged 16 and over point to greater engagement, and countries that have lowered the voting age to 16 have witnessed increased political participation compared to some older groups. While a handful of studies have looked at the effects of lowering the voting age to 16 on political knowledge or participation, we have almost no understanding of how youth enfranchisement influences legislative behavior. In this article, we adopt a quasi-experimental design and the synthetic control method to examine legislative responsiveness following 2014 legislation that lowered the minimum voting age from 18 to 16 in Scotland. Analysis of 1.8 million legislative speeches from the House of Commons and the Scottish Parliament over the course of two decades indicates that lowering the voting age had only marginal effects on legislative responsiveness to younger voters. We conclude that enfranchisement of 16- and 17 year-olds does not go far enough to address a lack of substantive representation of young people.

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