

The **Vote16MO** Brief

A White Paper

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Executive Summary

Throughout American History, the principles of voting and who has access to it have consistently been contentious. From the Boston Tea Party, which rejects the notion that American citizens should be taxed without representation, to the women's suffrage movement, that rejects the belief that one could be denied a right to civic engagement simply because of their gender. This Vote16MO Brief presents a compelling case for the lowering of the voting age to 16 in Missouri's nonpartisan municipal and school board elections. It highlights the rationale behind this proposition, emphasizing the benefits of engaging young citizens in the electoral process at an earlier stage.

In this brief, you will find our five (5) leading reasons behind this campaign. Lowering the voting age to 16 in municipal and school board elections can effectively address taxation without representation, create a civic transition, strengthen civics education, value the perspectives of stakeholders, and increase civic engagement in municipal elections.

Throughout this brief, we will explore evidence and research from economists, government agencies, cognitive scientists, civic experts, political analysts and more. In doing so, we present a categorically unwavering and compelling case that supports the importance of implementing the Vote16MO model. We address and debunk seven (7) of the most common myths and misconceptions with hard data, research, and evidence. Finally, we have laid out our recommendation to the state and municipalities for best implementation practices. The Vote16MO Campaign is working with an overall mission to create a better prepared, better educated, and more engaged electorate of the future. With this, we can foster a more inclusive and representative republic, promote civic education, and cultivate a sense of civic responsibility among the youth population.

Lowering the voting age to 16 in municipal and school board elections presents a valuable opportunity to promote civic education, encourage lifelong participation, amplify youth perspectives, and address the issue of taxation without representation.

***Disclaimer:** the terms "democracy" "democratic process" and "constitutional republic" or "republic" are used interchangeably throughout this brief, as these terms are used by a vast array of individuals to describe the process by which our country holds elections, ensures representation of the people, and governs. Neither terms are used in a political fashion of any kind, nor should the usage be associated with such. *

History of the Voting Age

The voting age has not always been the standard of 18. Historically, the voting age has seen significant changes over time. In fact, the national voting age of 18 was not established until the 26th Amendment was adopted to the United States Constitution in July of 1971, roughly 51 years ago, that prohibited states from raising the age above 18. The minimum voting age in the United States was initially set at 21-years-old. However, the bipartisan Voting Rights Act of 1970 played a crucial role in shifting the minimum voting age from 21 to 18 years old (Oosterhoff, 2022). This change was driven by the recognition of the need to expand political representation and encourage civic engagement among young adults (Oosterhoff, 2022).

The passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1970 was a response to the social and political climate of the time. The Vietnam War and the draft had a significant impact on young adults, many of whom were being conscripted to fight in a war they had no say in through the electoral process. This led to widespread protests and calls for greater political participation for young adults.

The decision to lower the voting age was based on the belief that young adults should have the right to participate in the democratic process and have a say in decisions that affect their lives. Proponents of expanding the voting age argued that increasing political representation and encouraging civic engagement among young adults would lead to a more inclusive and representative democracy (Oosterhoff, 2022).

After the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1970 and the subsequent ratification of the 26th Amendment, the voting age of 18 has remained the standard across the United States for federal, state, and local elections—until recently. In 2012, the Maryland State Legislature adopted a constitutional amendment that would permit localities to lower the voting age in local elections via a city council vote. So far, five cities have already made this change to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in municipal elections: Takoma Park, Greenbelt, Hyattsville, Riverdale Park, and Mount Rainier. Beyond Maryland, several states and municipalities have implemented similar changes. The policy has proven to be a success, with 16- and 17-year-old voters turning out at higher rates than older voters, and with local leaders reporting young people engaging with city government in new ways.

This ongoing debate of who should be included into the electorate, what qualifies a person for active representation, where it is appropriate to introduce young voters initially, and what limitations there should or should not be to voting, all persist today. In the 1970s, this change was driven by the need to expand political representation and encourage civic engagement among young adults. The passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1970 and the ratification of the 26th Amendment played a crucial role in lowering the voting age and ensuring that young adults have the right to participate in the democratic process. Now, this call for change in policies to introduce young voters into the nonpartisan local election process will be nothing but beneficial to the Missouri electorate.

The Case for Lowering the Age

Vote16MO is a referendum campaign seeking to pass a ballot initiative to lower the voting age in local and school board elections to 16 on the November 2024 election ballot. Vote16MO presents a compelling case for lowering the voting age in local and school board elections. There are five (5) leading reasons that drive this campaign to lower the voting age in local and school board elections. This entire movement is inspired by the driving mission to create a better prepared, better educated, and more engaged electorate of the future. We categorically believe that lowering the voting age in local and school board elections will only benefit the electorate, with no downsides. You will find each of our reasons, supported by research and evidence, presented as follows:

#1: No Taxation Without Representation

"[It] is inseparably essential to the freedom of a people, and the undoubted right of Englishmen, that no taxes be imposed on them, but with their own consent, given personally, or by their representatives." This quote from Article III of the Stamp Act of 1765 adopted by the Congress of the United States outlines the historical grievances suffered by the United States if we continue to allow for any level of taxation without representation. Taxation without representation refers to the imposition of taxes on individuals who do not have the ability to vote and have a say in the decision-making process that determines tax policies. By granting 16-year-olds the right to vote, they would have a voice in the political process and be able to influence tax policies that directly affect them. A fundamental American value is that tax paying citizens have a right to have a voice in who and how their tax dollars are being spent. The principles of this historical slogan are structured into the foundation of the United States Federal Government through the U.S. Constitution and the Missouri State Government via the Missouri Constitution.

Missouri's constitution, however, independently exemplifies the principle no taxation without representation via popular consent practices that require certain types of taxes or tax increases to be approved by the electorate through popular votes or referenda. This ensures that significant tax changes or increases receive the consent of the governed before they can be implemented. Under the status quo, or current system, only taxpayers 18 and older are allowed to vote on their tax increases via the referenda presented by the state or local governments; resulting in 16- and 17-year-old taxpayers to have no say in whether or not their taxes should be increased. American conservative principles should cringe at this fact. Building trust in our elected officials requires our elected officials to acknowledge tax paying citizens should be able to participate, in some fashion, in how their tax dollars are being spent. The Vote16MO initiative can solve the discrepancy between American foundational principles and current unfortunate standards in the taxation system.

According to dated reports from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than half of 16- and 17-year-olds are officially employed in the U.S. More recently, the Department of Labor reports that child labor has increased by nearly 70% since 2018. While there is no data looking into the specific numbers regarding how many teens are employed in Missouri, using the information provided in reports from the U.S. Census, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the Urban Institute's State Fiscal Briefs, we can deduce that Missouri 16- and 17-year-olds pay at

least \$12,000,000 combined in local, state, and federal taxes each year. Realistically speaking, the amount is likely significantly higher than what can be conclusively estimated via these reports.

Cynics of lowering the voting age in municipal elections argue that this demographic somehow does not pay “enough” in taxes to trigger the need for representation. However, the quote taken directly from the Stamp Act outlines vividly and obviously that any amount of taxation, without the right to any type of representation, is an abomination according to American history and fundamental principles.

At 16, Missouri workers begin to have very little restrictions regarding their work. As nearly unrestricted workers, both officially and unofficially employed, the legislative bodies that would be impacted by the results of Vote16MO have large implications on the jobs and career fields of 16- and 17-year-olds.

For Example:

16- and 17-year-old’s fields of work vary throughout the state of Missouri. Because of Missouri’s strong agricultural economy, a significant number of teens in rural Missouri work directly on farms or otherwise in the agricultural space. Local governments throughout the state have impacts on the agriculture industry, regulating jobs of these teens, and a school district’s Board of Education makes policies regarding the education surrounding the introduction into the agricultural space. These bodies have the same impact on teen small business owners throughout the state and customer service workers in the urban cores.

Furthermore, lowering the voting age can enhance civic education and political engagement among young people. Research has shown that levels of political knowledge are linked to political participation (Galston, 2001). However, despite increases in educational attainment, levels of political knowledge have remained stagnant (Galston, 2001). By allowing 16-year-olds to vote, they would have a direct stake in the political process and be more motivated to learn about civics and political issues (Galston, 2001). This increased engagement can lead to a better understanding of taxation policies and their implications.

In addition, lowering the voting age can address the issue of taxation without representation by ensuring that those who are affected by taxes have a say in the decision-making process. Currently, 16-year-olds are subject to various taxes, such as sales taxes, property taxes, and other local taxes. However, they are not given the opportunity to vote for the officials who make decisions regarding these taxes. Lowering the voting age would provide them with the ability to elect representatives who align with their interests and can advocate for fair taxation policies.

Moreover, granting 16-year-olds the right to vote can promote a sense of civic responsibility and encourage them to actively participate in the democratic process. By allowing them to vote, they would feel a sense of ownership and empowerment, leading to increased political engagement and a greater understanding of the importance of representation in taxation decisions. This can contribute to a more informed and active citizenry, ensuring that tax policies are more representative of the diverse needs and perspectives of the population.

In conclusion, lowering the voting age in local and school board elections to 16 can effectively address the issue of taxation without representation in Missouri. Granting 16-year-olds the right to vote would provide them with a voice in the political process and enable them to influence tax policies that directly impact them. Additionally, it would enhance civic education, promote political engagement, and foster a sense of civic responsibility among young people. By including 16-year-olds in the democratic process, Missouri can ensure that taxation policies represent the interests of all tax paying citizens.

#2: Creating the Civic Transition

Granting 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in nonpartisan local elections before being eligible to vote in partisan elections at the state and federal level at 18 can have several benefits. In the current system, young voters are thrust into the political process at all levels the age of 18– we seek to change that. The “civic transition” refers to the process by which we will ease voters into the electoral process, starting as simple and intimate as it gets, and, as voters get older and have experience in voting, they would gain access to voting rights at the state and federal level. This approach recognizes the importance of gradually introducing young people to the democratic process and allows them to develop their civic engagement skills and political knowledge in a controlled and nonpartisan environment. One of the main advantages of this approach is that it provides an opportunity for young people to gain practical experience in the voting process.

Taking advantage of nonpartisanship

The civic transition takes advantage of Missouri’s unique nonpartisan local election system, which prohibits partisan politics in elections at the local level. Candidates do not have a “(D)”, “(R)”, or “(I)” next to their name on the ballot. Residents rarely find that municipal candidates even mention their political party affiliation when running for local offices. Most notably, local citizens notice that municipal candidates rarely, if ever, engage in party-lined political debates. Why? It is because partisan politics are largely irrelevant at this level! Whether it is because multiple members of the same political beliefs are running for the same position or because the notable party-line issues have little influence from the constricted power of the municipal government, partisanship is rarely a deciding factor for a voter at the municipal level. This is important because this means that true governance, qualifications, and leadership take precedence over partisan politics, unlike our state and federal elections.

What does a nonpartisan local election process mean for inexperienced, young voters? Missouri’s unique nonpartisan local election system creates a perfect atmosphere for the first stage of the civic transition process. In our mission to create a better educated and better prepared electorate, we must account for the amount that partisan influence may have on voters. Unfortunately, partisan politics, which currently floods elections at the state and federal levels, have a large influence on average voters. By creating a civic transition process, one that is strictly prohibited from being heavily partisan, in which young 16- and 17-year-olds can experience voting and getting a grasp on the importance of governance over partisan politics, we will see continued success and an increasingly prepared electorate to withstand the challenges of a republic; the very challenges average voters prematurely face today.

Mirroring Missouri's Graduated Driver's Law

Lowering the voting age across the State of Missouri to 16 in nonpartisan local and school board elections, would simply be mirroring Missouri's current Graduated Drivers law. For reference, Missouri young drivers do not get the full and unregulated privilege of operating motor vehicles immediately at the age of 16. First, 15 1/2-year-olds may receive their learner's permit. Then, a 16-year-old may "graduate" from a learners permit to receive an Intermediate Driver's License. Then, an 18-year-old driver may graduate from an Intermediate Driver's License to an Under-21 Full Driver License.

MO Current Graduated Driver's Law:



Vote16MO Civic Transition:



Missouri's young drivers are not thrust onto the roads without prior experience driving— many would deem that to be insane. So why must we do it when it comes to voting? Lowering the voting age in nonpartisan elections will enable 16- and 17-year-olds to transition into voting, like how we transition drivers.

Benefitting education, civic responsibility, and de-polarizing elections

On a different note, research has shown that early voting experiences can have a lasting impact on individuals' future political behavior and engagement (Andersen, 2007). By allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in nonpartisan local elections, they can become familiar with the voting process, understand the importance of their participation, and develop a habit of voting. This early exposure can help establish a foundation for future political engagement and increase the likelihood of continued participation in partisan elections at the state and federal level.

Additionally, voting in nonpartisan local elections can help young people develop a sense of community and civic responsibility. Local elections often involve issues that directly impact the daily lives of individuals, such as education, public transportation, and local infrastructure. Allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in these elections empowers them to have a say in decisions that affect their immediate community. This can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility, as well as encourage young people to become more informed and engaged citizens.

Moreover, voting in nonpartisan local elections can serve as a steppingstone for young people to develop their political knowledge and understanding of the political system. Nonpartisan elections often focus on local issues rather than partisan ideologies, making them more accessible and less polarizing for young voters. This can provide an opportunity for young people to learn about the political process, engage in discussions about local issues,

and develop critical thinking skills. It will allow 16- and 17-year-olds to grasp governance over partisan party politics. If it is our wish, as a state or country, to back away from the grip that culture wars or partisan politics has on captivating and fear mongering the votes of the young and vulnerable, we must teach them how not to be the vulnerable, but how to be able to see through partisan politics. As they gain experience and knowledge through nonpartisan elections, they can be better prepared to participate in partisan elections at the state and federal level.

The civic transition acknowledges the importance of having educated and experienced voters throughout our electorate making decisions via their vote. In fact, the civic transition, by design, creates more educated and experienced voters at an earlier stage.

In conclusion, allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in nonpartisan local elections before being eligible for partisan elections at the state and federal level can be beneficial in several ways. It provides practical experience in the voting process, fosters a sense of community and civic responsibility, empowers young people to advocate for their interests, and helps develop their political knowledge and understanding. By gradually introducing young people to the democratic process, we can cultivate an informed and engaged citizenry that can actively face the challenges of our republic.

#3: Strengthening Civics Education

Lowering the voting age in such a small, but impactful manner would completely reshape the way Missouri does civics education. The "Learning by Doing" educational concept, a concept widely embraced by all of Missouri's leading universities, examines the impact that practicing a skill has on one's ability to effectively carry it out. This concept applies to voting. Under current educational standards across the state, Missouri's students spend about one-to-two weeks learning about municipal government, or one unit, and about the same amount of time on voting, just to move on to the next concept. Missouri students are then, by design, asked to hold on to that knowledge for up to three years before it can be put to use.

Lowering the voting age in local and school board elections to 16 can increase political knowledge. Research has shown that levels of political knowledge are linked to political engagement and participation (Galston, 2001). However, despite increases in educational attainment, levels of political knowledge have remained stagnant (Galston, 2001). Traditional classroom-based civic education has been found to significantly raise political knowledge (Galston, 2001). By allowing 16-year-olds to vote in local and school board elections, they would have a direct stake in the political process and be more motivated to learn about civics and political issues. A vast majority of educators agree that "education is better when it's authentic." Don't take it from us, take it from teachers across the state of Missouri.

"If this initiative were to pass, having students be able to vote right away, as opposed to me having to say, "Hey, in a year or two, this is something that you can look forward to doing," ...would make what I'm doing more relevant to their everyday lives and make what we're learning more meaningful." This statement by Jeff Chazen, a civics teacher with two decades of experience in the Parkway School District, demonstrates the direct perspective of a

high school civics teacher and how Vote16MO could heavily impact and benefit reception of the content of their lessons on this important matter.

In addition to strengthening civics education, lowering the voting age can also have positive effects on school performance. Research has shown that citizen involvement in local education policy making, such as through school board elections, can affect education performance (Webber, 2010). By allowing 16-year-olds to vote in school board elections, they would have a direct say in decisions that impact their education. This can foster a sense of ownership and responsibility, leading to improved school performance. To ensure the success of lowering the voting age, it is important to provide young people with the necessary skills and knowledge to participate effectively in the electoral process. Civic education campaigns and active involvement of the community, including schools, can play a crucial role in developing greater civic engagement and youth involvement in participatory republic (Pistoni et al., 2023). These campaigns should focus on promoting young people's awareness of their ability to contribute to society through voting and support their internalized motivations to vote (Pistoni et al., 2023).

We are doing a disservice to civics education, municipal government, and to the future of our country's civic engagement by keeping the current system as it is. Lowering the voting age in only these elections will reinforce the ideas and principles of the importance and impact of government at all levels, from municipal to federal, the importance of civic engagement, and the rights and duties of the citizens of a constitutional republic.

Research has emphasized that hands-on political education, including the right to vote, participation in candidate forums or debates, and candidate and issue research, can provide teenagers with the required political knowledge and ideological understandings to make them "competent voters and hence providing a political education is an alternative way to avoid the harm of having immature voters" within the adult-aged demographics.

In conclusion, lowering the voting age in local and school board elections to 16 can strengthen civics education in Missouri. It provides young people with a direct stake in the political process, motivates them to learn about civics, and fosters a habit of voting at a young age. By engaging in elections, young people can develop a sense of ownership and responsibility for their education and contribute to improved school performance. Civic education campaigns and community involvement are essential in supporting young people's participation and ensuring their effective engagement in the electoral process.

#4: They Have a Stake in The Game

Youth aged 16-17 have a significant stake in their communities, and therefore, they should be eligible to vote in local and school board elections in Missouri. Granting them the right to vote at this age recognizes their capacity to contribute to the decision-making processes that directly affect their lives and education.

At 16, young people can:

- Drive: Automobiles (cars), motorcycles, boats;
- Fly: (Private pilot's license at 16);
- Travel domestically and internationally;
- Own a business;

- Become emancipated;
- Be held criminally responsible for violations of the law;
- Work and pay taxes;
- Own firearms; and
- Join the military (with parental consent at age 17)

Young people have an active stake in the policies that are implemented on behalf of their community because of these responsibilities. Despite all these responsibilities, the current system draws the line at voting in local and nonpartisan elections.

Youth at this age are already actively involved in their communities. Studies have found that young people are participating in political activities, gathering political information, and showing enthusiasm for political events (Arabani et al., 2022). Allowing them to vote would align with their existing engagement and provide them with a formal avenue to express their opinions and preferences (Arabani et al., 2022). By including them in the electoral process, their voices and perspectives can be represented, ensuring a more inclusive and representative republic.

Furthermore, youth aged 16-17 are directly affected by decisions made in local and school board elections. Local policies and school board decisions have a direct impact on their education, extracurricular activities, and overall well-being. Allowing them to vote in these elections would give them a say in shaping the policies and decisions that directly affect their lives (Intl. Journal of Education, 2022). This can foster a sense of ownership and empowerment, as well as encourage them to become more informed and engaged citizens.

Additionally, research has shown that youth involvement in socio-economic activities can help mitigate youth restiveness and negative impacts on community development (Intl. Journal of Education, 2022). Allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote in local and school board elections can be seen as a form of socio-economic involvement, as it provides them with a platform to actively participate in shaping their communities. By engaging them in the democratic process, it can help address restiveness and promote sustainable community development (Intl. Journal of Education, 2022).

In conclusion, youth aged 16-17 have a stake in their communities and should be eligible to vote in local and school board elections in Missouri. Granting them the right to vote recognizes their capacity for civic engagement, allows them to contribute to decisions that directly affect their lives, and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility. By including them in the democratic process, we can cultivate an informed and engaged citizenry, ensuring a more inclusive and representative republic.

#5: Increasing Civic Participation

Lowering the voting age in local and school board elections to 16 will increase civic engagement rates and voter turnout rates in Missouri's local elections. This change would empower young people and encourage their active participation in the democratic process, leading to a more inclusive and representative republic.

Missouri's local elections see voter turnout rates range from as low as less than 1% to a high of 18%. These extremely low voter turnout rates undermine this country's and state's principles of creating a truly representative constituency.

Research has shown that lowering the voting age can have a positive impact on civic engagement and political participation among young people. A study by Zukin et al. (2007) found that early voting experiences can shape individuals' future political behavior and engagement (Andersen, 2007). By allowing 16-year-olds to vote in local and school board elections, they would have the opportunity to develop a habit of voting and become more engaged citizens (Andersen, 2007). This early exposure to voting can foster a sense of civic responsibility and encourage young people to participate in future elections.

Research from the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (C.I.R.C.L.E), tells us that an individual who votes in one election is more than 30% more likely to vote in the next; and an individual who votes in two or more consecutive elections is more than 60% more likely to form the habit of voting. Youth voters, age 16-17, would be able to participate in two or more consecutive elections before they turn 18. This could simply be from a municipal primary election and a municipal general election.

Results out of Takoma Park, MD help paint a picture of how lowering the voting age in local and school board elections can help local elections soar from, for example, 3% turnout, to now 49.77% turnout!

International research communicates the same result: In Austria, where the voting age was lowered to 16 nationally, there was evidence of a "first-time voting boost" among 16- to 25-year-olds (Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014). Contrary to the assumption that 16- and 17-year-olds lack political interest, research has found that they are capable of being politically engaged and participating in elections (Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014). Lowering the voting age can help develop a habit of voting at a young age, leading to higher levels of civic engagement in the long term (Wagner et al., 2012).

Furthermore, 16- and 17-year-olds are more likely to live at home and attend school, providing a supportive social context for their electoral participation (Mahéo & Bélanger, 2020). One of the largest contributing factors low voter turnout rates is pertaining to *when* voters are introduced to voting. Being introduced to voting at 18 provides for an unstable beginning. At this time, many young people are occupied with navigating the challenges of early adulthood, like moving away for college. Research has shown 16- and 17-year-olds benefit from having the support of their school to learn about getting registered to vote and making a plan to vote (Mahéo & Bélanger, 2020). Schools can also host School Board Candidate Forums. By lowering the voting age in these local elections, we're providing young voters with a more stable introduction to civic participation.

Additionally, research has shown that low voter turnout is associated with policies that favor privileged voters over underprivileged nonvoters (Lijphart, 1997). By lowering the voting age and increasing voter turnout rates, we can address this inequality in political representation. Young people, particularly those from marginalized communities, would have a greater opportunity to have their voices heard and influence policy decisions (Lijphart, 1997).

Lowering the voting age in local and school board elections to 16 can have a positive impact on civic engagement rates and voter turnout rates in Missouri's local elections. By

empowering young people and involving them in the republic process at an earlier age, we can foster a sense of civic responsibility, increase overall voter turnout, and address inequalities in political representation. This change would contribute to a more inclusive and representative republic in Missouri.

Vote16 Results:

Narrow Scope: Looking into Takoma Park, MD

Takoma Park, MD was the first city in the United States to lower the voting age in local elections. At the time, Takoma Park, MD was struggling with low voter turnout, averaging around 3%. Results out of Takoma Park, MD help paint a picture of how lowering the voting age in local and school board elections can help local elections soar from, for example, 3% turnout, to now 49.77% turnout!

Lowering the voting age in local and school board elections has had a positive impact on Takoma Park, MD. Research has shown that lowering the voting age can increase civic engagement among younger citizens (Andersen, 2007). In Takoma Park, this has been evident through increased participation and involvement of young people in local elections. By allowing younger individuals to vote, it provides them with a sense of agency and encourages them to become active participants in their community (Andersen, 2007). This has led to a more diverse and representative electorate in Takoma Park, as the voices and perspectives of younger generations are now being heard and considered in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, lowering the voting age has enhanced representative accountability in Takoma Park. Studies have found that voters in local elections hold incumbents responsible for the performance of local institutions, such as schools. By allowing younger individuals to vote in school board elections, it increases the pool of voters who can hold school board members accountable for their actions and decisions. This has led to better governance and decision-making in local schools, as elected officials are more likely to respond to the needs and concerns of a broader range of constituents.

In addition, lowering the voting age has addressed issues of inequality in representation in Takoma Park. Research has shown that retrospective voting, which involves voters considering the performance of incumbents when making their decisions, can exacerbate existing inequalities if certain groups are given greater attention than others. By allowing younger individuals to vote, it provides an opportunity to address these inequalities and ensure that the voices and concerns of younger generations are considered in the decision-making process.

Overall, lowering the voting age in local and school board elections has had a positive impact on Takoma Park, MD. It has increased civic engagement among younger citizens, enhanced democratic accountability, and addressed issues of inequality in representation. By allowing younger individuals to participate in the electoral process, Takoma Park has created a more inclusive and representative republic. However, it is important to continue monitoring and evaluating the effects of lowering the voting age to ensure that it continues to have positive impacts on the community.

Broader Scope: Nationally and internationally

Lowering the voting age in local and school board elections has been shown to have successful and positive impacts on the communities that implement them. Research has indicated that political knowledge and engagement are important factors in shaping engaged citizens and promoting political participation (Galston, 2001). However, levels of political knowledge have remained stagnant despite increases in formal educational attainment (Galston, 2001). This suggests that traditional classroom-based civic education may not be sufficient in raising political knowledge (Galston, 2001).

One of the positive impacts of lowering the voting age is increased civic engagement among younger citizens. Studies have shown that younger citizens are changing the ways they participate in public life, and this includes their involvement in local elections (Andersen, 2007). By allowing younger individuals to vote in local and school board elections, it provides them with a sense of agency and encourages them to become active participants in their communities (Andersen, 2007). This can lead to a more diverse and representative electorate, as it includes the perspectives and voices of younger generations.

Furthermore, lowering the voting age can enhance democratic accountability in local elections. Research has shown that voters in local school board elections hold incumbents responsible for the performance of local schools (Berry & Howell, 2007). This means that by allowing younger individuals to vote, it increases the pool of voters who can hold school board members accountable for their actions and decisions. This can lead to better governance and decision-making in local schools, as elected officials are more likely to respond to the needs and concerns of a broader range of constituents.

Additionally, lowering the voting age can help address issues of inequality in democratic accountability. Studies have found that retrospective voting, which involves voters considering the performance of incumbents when making their decisions, can exacerbate existing inequalities if certain groups are given greater attention than others (Flavin & Hartney, 2016). By allowing younger individuals to vote, it provides an opportunity to address these inequalities and ensure that the voices and concerns of younger generations are considered in the decision-making process.

Lowering the voting age in local and school board elections can have successful and positive impacts on the communities that implement them. It can increase civic engagement among younger citizens, enhance democratic accountability, and address issues of inequality in democratic representation. However, it is important to continue researching and evaluating the effects of lowering the voting age to ensure that it is implemented in a way that maximizes its benefits and minimizes any potential drawbacks.

Myths and Misconceptions

Across this state and country, there are several myths and misconceptions that run rampant throughout the general population, and even amongst legislators. We stand firmly grounded that there are categorically no substantial downsides or harms that will come from lowering the voting age in local and school board elections; and thus, no substantiated reason to reject this initiative.

Inevitably, there will be those who object to our claim and may respond with one (or a couple) of a few of the most common myths and misconceptions, including:

- “Those with more experience should be making the decisions.”
- “At that age, they’re not mentally developed enough to cast a vote.”
- “They don’t even care! This demographic is apathetic.”
- “Young people can get involved in other ways!”
- “This will take away parent’s rights!”
- “The voting age must coincide with the draft age or age of military enlistment!”
- “It will benefit one political party over the other!”

Following, you’ll find our response to these myths and misconceptions:

1. “Those with more experience should be making the decisions.”

What makes sufficient experience? Is it age? Is it childhood? Is it your educational background? Is it the neighborhood where you live? Is it a variety of factors? By 16, a majority of newly eligible students will have spent twelve years (K-11) on the direct receiving end of the policies made by the district’s Board of Education. Over these twelve years, students develop an understanding of the function, power, and authority of the school board; along with the impacts this board has on the everyday lives of students. Why wouldn’t this daily experience qualify as “enough” to cast a ballot in these elections? This daily experience positions students to be able to form independent opinions, perspectives, and insight regarding the enforcement of school board policies, the impact of those policies on their own education, the culture and environment that is created, and much more. This shows that students can contribute something of value to the electoral and overall governance process– but school districts’ Boards of Education are not required, incentivized, or even encouraged to value these various perspectives of their students.

In furtherance, the assertion that 16 and 17-year-olds do not have enough life experience to vote in local and school board elections is a myth that does not align with the available evidence. Research has shown that political knowledge and engagement are important factors in shaping engaged citizens and promoting political participation (Galston, 2001). However, levels of political knowledge have remained stagnant despite increases in formal educational attainment (Galston, 2001). This suggests that traditional classroom-based civic education may not be sufficient in raising political knowledge (Galston, 2001).

Contrary to the myth, studies have indicated that 16 and 17-year-olds possess the cognitive skills necessary for voting, such as gathering and processing information, weighing pros and cons, and reasoning logically with facts (Patterson et al., 2019). Several countries, including Austria and Brazil, already allow 16-year-olds to vote in national elections, and some U.S. locations have set the minimum voting age for local elections at 16 (Patterson et al., 2019). In fact, research has shown that 16 and 17-year-olds who are given the right to vote in local elections, such as in Takoma Park, Maryland, are politically mature and more likely to vote compared to 18-year-olds (Patterson et al., 2019).

Moreover, concerns about the political maturity of 16 and 17-year-olds are not supported by developmental science (Oosterhoff et al., 2021). Negative stereotypes about teenagers may be a significant barrier to changing the voting age, as they do not align with the evidence (Oosterhoff et al., 2021). Granting 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote in local and school board elections would provide them with a sense of agency and allow them to have a say in decisions that directly affect their lives, such as education policies (Peto, 2017).

Lowering the voting age to 16 for local and school board elections in Missouri would have several benefits. It would increase civic engagement among young people, as research has shown that they are changing the ways they participate in public life (Andersen, 2007). Allowing 16 and 17-year-olds to vote would also enhance accountability, as it would increase the pool of voters who can hold elected officials accountable for their actions and decisions (Andersen, 2007). Additionally, it would address issues of inequality in representation by ensuring that the voices and concerns of younger generations are taken into account (Oosterhoff et al., 2021).

In conclusion, the claim that 16 and 17-year-olds do not have enough life experience to vote in local and school board elections is inaccurate and unsupported by the available evidence. Lowering the voting age to 16 in Missouri would align with developmental science and promote civic engagement, accountability, and equality in representation. Granting young people, the right to vote in local and school board elections recognizes their political maturity and empowers them to actively participate in shaping their communities and education systems.

2. "At that age, they're not mentally developed enough to cast a vote."

The assertion that all 16 and 17-year-olds lack sufficient cognitive development to vote in local and school board elections is a myth that does not align with the available evidence. Drawing upon research and expert opinions, we can demonstrate that young individuals possess the necessary cognitive capacity and political knowledge to make informed decisions and actively participate in the democratic process.

Concerns about the political maturity of 16 and 17-year-olds are not supported by developmental science (Oosterhoff et al., 2021). Negative stereotypes about teenagers may be a significant barrier to changing the voting age, as they do not align with the evidence (Oosterhoff et al., 2021). Oftentimes, critics cite research that asserts that the brain is not *fully* developed until age 25, and therefore 16- and 17-year-olds are inherently worse off mentally. This is a huge logical fallacy.

While it is factual that cognitive research finds that the brain is not fully developed until age 25, it is inaccurate to insinuate that individuals use their full cognitive capacity in order to cast a vote. The fact is individuals use what is often called "hot" and "cold" cognitive skills in order to make decisions throughout various circumstances in their everyday lives.

Hot and cold cognitive skills are two types of cognitive processes that can influence voting behavior. These terms are often used in psychology and neuroscience to describe different aspects of decision-making. Let's explore the differences between hot and cold cognitive skills as they relate to voting:

1. *Cold* Cognitive Skills:

Overwhelmingly, research confirms that cold cognitive skills are fully developed by age 16 (National Library of Medicine, 2018). Cold cognitive skills refer to rational and analytical thinking processes that are based on logic, facts, and careful evaluation of information. When individuals use cold cognitive skills for voting, they engage in a more deliberative and thoughtful decision-making process. This involves:

- Gathering Information: Voters with strong cold cognitive skills seek out information about candidates, political parties, and issues from a variety of reliable sources such as news outlets, debates, and official campaign materials.

- Analyzing Policies: They carefully analyze the policy proposals put forward by different candidates and evaluate their potential impact on society and the economy.

- Weighing Pros and Cons: Cold cognitive voters take the time to weigh the pros and cons of each candidate's platform and make informed comparisons between them.

- Long-Term Perspective: They consider the long-term consequences of their vote and how it aligns with their personal values and beliefs.

A vast majority of cognitive science research establishes that 16- & 17-year-old brains are not only capable of these skills, but overwhelmingly possess them. (*See sources section titled "Hot v. Cold Cognitive Research"*)

2. Hot Cognitive Skills:

Hot cognitive skills, on the other hand, are influenced by emotions, personal experiences, and immediate reactions to stimuli. In other words, hot cognitive skills are used in decisions that are made in the heat of the moment. When individuals rely on hot cognitive skills for voting, their decisions are more driven by emotional and impulsive factors. This involves:

- Emotional Responses: Voters with strong hot cognitive skills may be influenced by their emotions towards certain candidates or parties, such as feeling anger, fear, or excitement.

- Identity and Group Affiliation: Hot cognitive voters may align themselves with a particular political group, family tradition, or social identity, leading them to vote in ways that maintain group cohesion.

- Immediate Events: They might be swayed by recent events, scandals, or sensational news, which can trigger strong emotional responses that impact their voting decisions.

- Gut Instincts: Hot cognitive voters may rely on their gut instincts and intuitions rather than engaging in a lengthy analysis of the issues.

Overwhelmingly, research has shown that cold cognitive skills are fully developed by age 16 while the full development of hot cognitive skills are what remains in development for a few more years. Voting, in its most frequent and natural form, requires cold cognitive skills for voters to make the necessary decisions.

Research has shown that adolescents possess the political maturity to vote and make informed decisions (Oosterhoff et al., 2021). Moreover, public opinion research indicates that opposition to changing the voting age is primarily based on misconceptions about the political knowledge and cognitive ability of young individuals (Oosterhoff, 2022). By granting them the right to vote, Missouri would recognize their political maturity and provide them with the opportunity to actively participate in shaping their communities.

Contrary to the myth, research has shown that political knowledge is not solely dependent on age or formal education (Galston, 2001). Levels of political knowledge have remained stagnant despite increases in educational attainment (Galston, 2001). This suggests that traditional classroom-based civic education may not be sufficient in raising political knowledge (Galston, 2001). Moreover, recent studies have indicated that adolescents possess

the cognitive capacity and political knowledge to vote in elections (Oosterhoff, 2022). They are capable of gathering and processing information, weighing pros and cons, and reasoning logically with facts (Oosterhoff, 2022). Therefore, it is inaccurate to assert that all 16 and 17-year-olds lack the cognitive development necessary to vote.

3. "They don't even care. This demographic is apathetic."

The assertion that all 16 and 17-year-olds lack sufficient interest in their communities or local and school board elections to be granted the right to vote is a myth that does not align with the available evidence. Drawing upon research and expert opinions, we will demonstrate that young individuals possess the necessary civic engagement and political participation to make informed decisions and contribute to our nation's process of an operating constitutional republic.

Contrary to the myth, research has shown that many 16 and 17-year-olds are actively engaged in their communities and demonstrate an interest in political affairs (Hart & Atkins, 2010). Studies have indicated that adolescents possess the cognitive capacity and political knowledge to vote responsibly (Hart & Atkins, 2010). Moreover, research has shown that participation in activities such as volunteering and discussions about voting and elections can create a foundation for civic participation (Hart & Atkins, 2010). By granting 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote, Missouri would further encourage their civic engagement and foster a sense of responsibility towards their communities.

Examining the experiences of other countries can provide valuable insights into the political participation of young individuals. For example, studies conducted in West Java, Indonesia, have shown an increase in the political participation of youth in regional elections (Djuyandi & Herdiansah, 2018). These findings challenge the notion of political apathy among young people and highlight their willingness to engage in the democratic process when given the opportunity (Djuyandi & Herdiansah, 2018). By granting 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote, Missouri can tap into the potential of young individuals and foster a culture of active citizenship.

While concerns about political apathy among young people exist, it is important to recognize that apathy is not exclusive to any age group (Djuyandi & Herdiansah, 2018). Efforts should be made to address apathy through comprehensive civic education programs and initiatives that promote political awareness and engagement among all age groups. Oftentimes, low voter turnout rates amongst younger demographics are cited by critics as evidence of young voter apathy; however, this is yet another logical fallacy. To learn more about our position and research about what causes low voter turnout rates amongst younger demographics, along with exactly why Vote16MO will improve those turnout rates, see the section of this brief titled "Reason #5: Increasing Civic Participation" on page 10. Granting 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote can serve as a catalyst for increased political participation and encourage a lifelong habit of civic engagement (Hart & Atkins, 2010).

For reference, allow us to paint a picture of youth political engagement in different parts of the state:

- *Future Votes KC*: a coalition of 4 charter schools' most politically active students to organize efforts to get out the vote. Actively engages upwards of 40 students in this coalition to organize community efforts.

- *Urban Neighborhood Initiative's Policy & Advocacy Collective (UNI PAC)*: A selected group of rising leaders to research community policy impacting their demographic and create policy recommendations that are to be presented to local elected leadership.
- *The Youth Empowerment Initiative*: The Jackson County youth union that supports youth leadership, secures youth rights, and uplifts youth voices through the avenues of advocacy, support, and community impact. This union is not only nearly entirely led by youth, but also engages more than 200 youth throughout the county.
- *St. Louis' City Youth Commission*: This youth commission provides an opportunity for youth to have a seat at the table on a city-wide youth commission to represent their peers in the issues that are having the greatest impact on their everyday lives.
- *Future Farmers of America (Missouri)*: Future Farmers of America is a nonprofit organization that not only trains youth on how to become the future leaders of the agricultural industry, but also how to take their knowledge of agriculture and apply it to civic and political engagement at the local, state, and federal level.
- *Missouri High School Republicans*: The Missouri High School Republicans organization is a partisan, but active high school group that spans state-wide and works to uphold and promote conservative beliefs and values.
- *YMCA Youth and Government/Changemakers*: The YMCA serves as a community center for many communities across the state, but this very same organization is one that teaches youth the importance of civic engagement and how to be a leader in their community via their Youth and Government program and Changemakers program.
- *Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids*: The Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids is a national organization that motivates and mobilizes youth to work against youth tobacco usage and use the power of civic engagement at all levels to advocate for tobacco policies that help to keep these products out of the hands of children.
- *American Heart Association*: The American Heart Association is a national organization that mobilizes youth advocates to advocate for healthier communities from the perspective and challenges of youth.
- Along with hundreds of more organizations that are working throughout the state and individual youth advocates who work on their own to become civically engaged.

4. "Young people can get involved in other ways than voting."

While some argue that young individuals can engage in civic activities other than voting, it is crucial to recognize that voting is a fundamental right of all contributing citizens. We argue that extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds in Missouri is essential to acknowledge their civic engagement, promote participation, and ensure a more inclusive and representative republic. Drawing upon research and expert opinions, evidence demonstrates that young individuals are capable of meaningful civic involvement and should be granted the right to vote.

Research has shown that 16- and 17-year-olds are actively engaged in their communities and demonstrate an interest in political affairs (Andersen, 2007). They participate in activities such as volunteering, community participation, and discussions about voting and elections (Andersen, 2007). This engagement reflects their commitment to their communities and their desire to contribute to the democratic process. By granting them the right to vote,

Missouri would recognize and encourage their civic engagement, fostering a sense of responsibility and active citizenship.

To be anecdotal: We agree that young people can get involved in other ways, but why must voting and civic engagement be mutually exclusive for young people? Voting is a fundamental power of the citizens who participate and contribute to their communities. 16- and 17-year-olds are largely a part of that group. We can walk and chew gum at the same time.

5. "This will take away parent's rights!"

The claim that lowering the voting age to 16 in local and school board elections will eliminate or reduce parental rights is not supported by the available evidence. Lowering the voting age to 16 in Missouri will not undermine parental rights but instead increase parental awareness and strengthen the relationship between parents, their children, and the school district. Drawing upon research and expert opinions, the evidence demonstrates that involving young individuals in the democratic process can foster parental engagement and promote a more inclusive educational environment.

Lowering the voting age to 16 can increase parental awareness and involvement in local and school board elections. Research has shown that when young individuals are given the opportunity to vote, it sparks conversations within families about local political issues and encourages parents to engage in discussions with their children (Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014). This increased dialogue can lead to a deeper understanding of the local political landscape and foster a sense of shared responsibility for the community and the education system (Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014). By involving 16-year-olds in the voting process, parents become more aware of their children's perspectives and concerns, leading to a more informed and engaged parental community.

Extending voting rights to 16-year-olds can also strengthen the relationship between parents, their children, and the school district. Research has shown that parental involvement in education positively impacts student outcomes (Yoder & Kaiser, 1989). Allowing 16-year-olds to vote in school board elections provides an avenue for parents to collaborate with their children in shaping educational policies and decisions (Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014). This shared participation can foster a sense of partnership between parents and the school district, leading to improved communication, trust, and a more inclusive educational environment (Zeglovits & Aichholzer, 2014). By involving young individuals in the electoral process, parents and schools can work together to address the needs and concerns of students effectively.

6. "They would only copy their parent's vote!"

While family matters, including the concerns of certain households, family socioeconomic standings, and the influences of how someone is raised may contribute to the way all people vote, research and history proves that it doesn't control the way youth vote-- nor do their parents. The assertion that lowering the voting age in local and school board elections to 16 would result in 16- and 17-year-olds merely copying their parents' votes is inaccurate and unsupported by evidence. Lowering the voting age in Missouri will empower young individuals to make independent decisions and engage in the democratic process.

Drawing upon research and expert opinions, the evidence demonstrates that young voters are capable of forming their own political opinions and should be granted the right to vote.

Research on retrospective voting in local elections has shown that voters evaluate incumbents based on their performance in specific areas, such as school board elections (Berry & Howell, 2007). Voters place significant weight on evaluations of board members' competency, measured by the performance of local schools (Berry & Howell, 2007). This suggests that voters consider the performance of incumbents rather than blindly following party lines or parental preferences (Berry & Howell, 2007). Lowering the voting age would allow 16- and 17-year-olds to participate in this accountability process and make informed decisions based on their own assessment of candidates' performance.

Lowering the voting age recognizes the capacity of 16- and 17-year-olds to form independent political opinions. Research has shown that young individuals possess the cognitive abilities necessary for critical thinking and decision-making (Berry & Howell, 2007). They are capable of gathering information, evaluating different perspectives, and making informed choices (Berry & Howell, 2007). By granting them the right to vote, Missouri would acknowledge their ability to think critically and independently, fostering a sense of civic responsibility and engagement.

While it is true that individuals, regardless of age, may be influenced by their parents or other influential figures, it is important to recognize that young voters have the capacity to make decisions based on their own values and beliefs. Research on regional head elections in East Java, Indonesia, has shown that religious elite figures play a significant role in influencing voter behavior (Azizah, 2022). However, this does not imply that young voters are incapable of independent decision-making. Lowering the voting age allows young individuals to engage with a broader range of perspectives and influences, enabling them to develop their own political identities and make choices that align with their values.

The nationalization of elections, where voting patterns in one election influence voting behavior in other elections, is a well-documented phenomenon (Klemmensen, 2022). However, this does not imply that young voters will blindly follow national trends or mimic their parents' votes. Research has shown that young voters can have distinct political preferences and priorities (Klemmensen, 2022). By lowering the voting age, Missouri would provide young individuals with the opportunity to express their unique perspectives and contribute to the diversity of voices in local and school board elections.

The claim that lowering the voting age to 16 in local and school board elections would result in young individuals merely copying their parents' votes is inaccurate. Granting voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds in Missouri recognizes their capacity for independent decision-making and fosters a sense of civic responsibility. Young voters have the ability to evaluate candidates based on their performance and form their own political opinions.

7. "The voting age must coincide with the draft age or age of military enlistment!"

This assertion lacks merit due to the separation of military conscription or enlistment from local government authority. The case for lowering the voting age to 16 in Missouri examines the independent civic engagement and rights of contributing citizens, avoiding federal matters like military conscription.

One crucial factor that distinguishes local elections from federal ones is the local government's limited authority over military conscription or enlistment. Simply put: The Mayor and City Council are not the ones who wage war or call a draft. The latter is solely a federal matter, thus making it unreasonable to tether the voting age to the military enlistment age. Young people aged 16 and 17, who are ineligible for military service, are nevertheless active members of their communities, working, paying taxes, and contributing to society. Denying them the right to vote in local and school board elections due to an unrelated federal matter is a disservice to their civic rights.

Local government's lack of authority over military conscription or enlistment implies that the voting age in local and school board elections should not be tied to military age requirements Atkinson & Fahey (2022). The purpose of local elections is to ensure representation and accountability within the community, focusing on issues such as education, infrastructure, and public services. These responsibilities are distinct from military service, which falls under federal jurisdiction. Therefore, it is logical to separate the voting age from military conscription or enlistment age.

However, it is important to note that 17-year-olds *can* join the military with parental consent.

8. "It will benefit one political party over the other!"

The claim that lowering the voting age to 16 in nonpartisan local and school board elections in Missouri would benefit one political party over the other is a myth that lacks substantial evidence. Lowering the voting age in Missouri is a matter of civic engagement and participation, rather than partisan advantage. Drawing upon research and expert opinions, we find that lowering the voting age to 16 in nonpartisan elections promotes inclusivity, encourages political participation, and strengthens democracy— not partisan politics.

The key factor to keep in mind here is that Missouri's local and school board elections are nonpartisan. This means that the candidate's political affiliations are irrelevant at this level and are often not discussed and are never put on the ballot. For example, in nonpartisan local elections, you will never see a "D," "R," "I," or any other political party affiliation signage next to a candidate's name.

Nonpartisan local and school board elections are designed to focus on community issues and representation, rather than partisan politics (Jacoby, 2010). Research has shown that voters in nonpartisan elections evaluate candidates based on their personal characteristics, policy positions, and performance, rather than strict party affiliations (Jacoby, 2010). Therefore, lowering the voting age in nonpartisan elections would not disproportionately benefit one political party over the other, as voters are more likely to make independent decisions based on candidate qualifications and issue positions.

Implementation

One of the most important aspects of advocating for a change of this sort is to ensure that the change can be implemented in an effective, efficient, and non-disruptive manner. We want nothing more than for this initiative to be implemented in a manner that allows for a smooth process and for 16- and 17-year-olds to begin voting locally!

Our value of efficacy is seen within the structure of our campaign. The purpose behind leading a referendum campaign versus an initiative petition campaign is the start! A referendum is the process by which we work with the Missouri State Legislature to pass a piece of legislation that would be then put on the ballot for voters to decide its ultimate outcome. During the referendum process, we would be able to make sensible decisions regarding the implementation of this initiative and negotiations that our elected leaders could get on board with. When we are asking state legislators to vote to pass Vote16MO, we are not asking them to create any law, let alone lower the voting age. Instead, we are simply asking the legislators to put it on the ballot so that the qualified voters of the state of Missouri would be able to cast a vote in favor or against this initiative.

The initiative petition process, on the other hand, would exclude the Missouri State Legislature from this process, making it more difficult to negotiate implementation and eliminating the certainty of making negotiations that legislators would be on board with. It would also unnecessarily polarize the process.

Creating a comprehensive, widespread change like this will not be simple, nor would we want to falsely claim such. However, we find that important issues like this require our attention and effort. We can do hard things. However, it is important to keep in mind that this is simply a two-year demographic. There will not be millions of voters on these rolls; if every single 16- and 17-year-old were to register, there would be less than 200,000 new registrants (US Census, 2021). It's important to eliminate fall narratives that will have individuals believing that there will be a new swath of voters that will double the work of local election authorities—this claim is categorically false. The number of 16- and 17-year-olds in Missouri does not exceed 200,000 (US Census, 2021).

We have several recommendations which we plan to make to cities and the State Legislature regarding how this initiative could be implemented:

Statewide changes:

First, there must be updates to Missouri's voter registration process. We have listened to concerns from election authorities regarding how the registration process would work under a system that must separate 16- and 17-year-old voters from those 18 and older. It would be accurate to say that there would need to be two voter registration rolls kept.

Preregistration: Preregistration laws, as implemented in 14 states excluding Missouri, allow 16- and 17-year-olds to complete their registration application prior to turning 18, automatically adding them to the voter rolls once they reach the eligible voting age (Holbein & Hillygus, 2014). This approach would facilitate the transition from 16-year-old pre-registrants to active voters at the appropriate time.

Not only could Missouri reap the civic benefits of having a pre-registration process, but Missouri localities could use this pre-registration system. Having a preregistration process would bring a greater purpose and benefit to the inevitable two voter registration rolls.

Voter Registration Forms: Modify the existing voter registration forms to include a specific section where individuals indicate their age. The form could be designed to require a birthdate, and applicants would need to specify if they are registering to vote in local and school board elections (for those aged 16 and older) or for all elections (for those aged 18 and older).

Online Registration: Online voter registration, the system can be updated to include age-specific options. During the online registration process, individuals would select their age range (e.g., 16-17 or 18+) to indicate their eligibility for different types of elections.

Training for Election Officials: Election officials should receive comprehensive training on the new voter registration process, emphasizing the importance of accurately identifying and categorizing eligible voters based on age.

Voter Database Management: Election authorities must continue to maintain a well-organized and up-to-date voter database. This means regularly cross-referencing data and verifying ages through official documents can help ensure the accuracy of the registration process.

Polling Place Procedures: Implement clear instructions for polling place staff to verify voters' eligibility based on their age and the type of election being held. This could involve training poll workers to ask for identification documents that indicate the voter's birthdate.

Initial funding: We request that the state appropriate funds to municipalities, commensurate with each need, for municipalities to host training for election officials, update registration systems, update registration forms, and make other necessary improvements. The MIT Election Data Science Lab found that election administration in 2017 cost approximately \$8.10 per voter. Adjusted for inflation, this is approximately \$10.10 per voter. Considering these numbers, we would request approximately \$1.5 million dollars to be allocated commensurately amongst municipalities for the aforementioned purposes.

Municipal changes:

Ballots & Voting: In most circumstances, 16- and 17-year-old voters will be able to vote using the normal municipal ballots that would be provided to all other voters on the election day for a municipality.

However, this is not always the case. For example, here are some instances in which 16- and 17-year-olds could not use the entire ballot during a municipal election:

- In the rare case of a vacancy in the State Legislature or U.S. House of Representatives, the Governor could call a special election in the district of the vacancy and place this partisan state or federal candidate election on the ballot of a municipal election.

- Some municipalities place judge elections on municipal election ballots. If these elections are ultimately not permitted in the Vote16MO legislation, 16- and 17-year-olds would not be eligible voters in these elections.
- Some municipalities host elections on the same day as other elections that may be partisan (county, state, federal), and this would mean that 16- and 17-year-old voters could not vote in these elections.

It is important to keep in mind that all these circumstances are very rare. This means that municipalities will not regularly have to accommodate undue burdens. In circumstances, like the aforementioned, in which 16- and 17-year-olds would not be eligible to vote, we offer the following implementation practices to separate the ballots:

Two separate ballots: Municipalities could separate issues/candidates that 16- and 17-year-olds can vote on from those issues/candidates cannot vote on. Election officials would then ensure that 16- and 17-year-olds get the correct ballot, which could be as simple as forming two separate lines (youth voters from adult voters) and checking IDs for birthdays. The various voting software, approved by the Missouri Secretary of State and used across the state in various elections, can separate these ballots via the Vote Session Activator Card that will help the software identify and separate a youth voter from an adult voter.

Perforated ballots: Municipalities could use perforated ballots, allocating one half of the ballot for issues that 16- and 17-year-olds can vote on and the other half for issues that youth voters cannot vote on. Election officials would simply tear along the perforated lines and hand a youth voter the half of the ballot that they are allowed to vote on.

Polling places: Municipalities could limit the number of or specify polling places for youth voters, such as public schools, so that specific ballots for youth voters would be at specified locations, making it easier for election officials at other polling locations.

By implementing these measures, the state of Missouri can effectively separate 16- and 17-year-old voters from 18+ year-old voters during the registration and voting process for nonpartisan local and school board elections. These steps would help ensure that municipalities are well equipped to implement the Vote16MO model and continually administer efficient, safe, and secure elections.

Conclusion

Lowering the voting age in local and school board elections to 16 will create a better prepared, better educated, and more engaged electorate of the future. Throughout this brief, we have explored evidence and research from economists, government agencies, cognitive scientists, civic experts, political analysts and more. In doing so, we have presented a categorically unwavering and compelling case that supports the importance of implementing the Vote16MO model. We have addressed and debunked seven (7) of the most common myths and misconceptions with hard data, research, and evidence. We have laid out our recommendation to the state and municipalities for best implementation practices.

Any questions regarding our campaign, including how to support us or join the effort, can be emailed to: info@vote16mo.org.
Visit our website: www.vote16mo.org

This brief was written by DJ Yearwood, the Vote16MO Campaign Director.
Research for this brief was conducted by DJ Yearwood, the Vote16MO Campaign Director.
DJ Yearwood is the 16-year-old Founder and Director of the Vote16MO Campaign.

This campaign was launched by DJ Yearwood on March 1, 2023, after the advocacy team of The Youth Empowerment Initiative, a nonprofit youth-union founded by Yearwood, identified the following issues as areas of concern to youth: Civic engagement and apathy, representational inequality, and taxation without representation.
Reach DJ by email at dj@vote16mo.org.

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