

**Submission
No 16**

**PROPOSALS TO INCREASE VOTER ENGAGEMENT, PARTICIPATION AND
CONFIDENCE**

Organisation: Run For It
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The Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters
Parliament of New South Wales
GADIGAL COUNTRY NSW 2000

Via email: jscem@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters,

Re: Submission in Support of Reforms to Increase Voter Engagement, Participation, and Confidence

I write on behalf of Run For It, a powerful movement of young people dedicated to rebuilding our democracy and creating a better kind of politics for future generations. Run For It supports young community leaders in running strategic and robust campaigns to be elected to local councils across Australia.

Empowering Young People through Lowering the Voting Age

One of the most effective ways to increase voter engagement, participation, and confidence is by ensuring that young people are actively involved in the democratic process from an early age.

As it stands, young people in New South Wales can drive, work, pay taxes, and enlist in the army at 16, yet they are denied the right to vote until they turn 18. This exclusion not only diminishes their role in society but also hinders their long-term engagement in democratic processes.

Young people today are more informed and connected than ever before. They are deeply affected by political decisions and have a vested interest in issues like climate change, education, and economic policy. Allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote would empower them

to contribute to the political landscape and ensure that their voices are heard in decisions that will shape their futures.

Research and experiences from other jurisdictions, such as Austria, demonstrate that lowering the voting age has led to positive outcomes. A recent study provides compelling evidence that this reform does not negatively impact the quality of democratic decisions or the legitimacy of electoral input. In fact, the potential positive consequences of lowering the voting age merit serious consideration and further empirical study.¹

The experience in Austria, where the voting age has been lowered to 16, offers valuable insights. Despite initial concerns, young Austrians—who are not particularly distinguished by high educational outcomes or political engagement compared to their peers in other OECD countries—have not exhibited unusual political behaviour. If anything, Austria might have been expected to see less motivated participation from citizens under 18. However, the evidence suggests that these young voters have integrated well into the democratic process.²

Moreover, while the study acknowledges the difficulty in distinguishing between cohort and age effects due to the limited time since the reform, it highlights the potential for instilling a habit of voting among young people who are still in school and living at home. This could have long-term benefits for democratic participation, as forming voting habits at a younger age might lead to more consistent voter engagement throughout their lives.³

Given these findings, we believe that the positive impacts observed in Austria can be generalized to other contexts, including New South Wales. Lowering the voting age to 16 could provide similar benefits in terms of increasing political engagement and fostering a habit of voting among younger citizens.⁴

Young voters, when given the opportunity to participate, are more likely to develop lifelong voting habits. They also bring fresh perspectives and priorities to the electorate, enriching the democratic process.

Recommendation

Given the importance of engaging young people in the democratic process and the positive outcomes observed in other regions, we recommend that the Parliament of New South Wales take decisive action to lower the voting age to 16. This reform would not only increase voter engagement among young people but also foster a more inclusive and representative democracy.

By lowering the voting age, New South Wales would send a powerful message that young people are valued members of society, capable of making informed decisions about their future.

This change would contribute significantly to the broader goals of increasing voter participation, engagement, and confidence in the electoral system.

¹ Markus Wagner, David Johann, Sylvia Kritzinger, 'Voting at 16: turnout and the quality of vote choice', *Electoral Studies*, (2012) 31(2): 372-383.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

We urge the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters to seriously consider this recommendation and to advocate for the necessary legislative changes to lower the voting age in New South Wales.

We have no objections to this submission being made public, we are also available to appear before the Committee, in the event the Committee requires it.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

RUN FOR IT