

FACT SHEET

Electoral Amendment (Voting Age) Bill 2021

The *Electoral Amendment (Voting Age) Bill 2021* amends the *Electoral Act 2004* to allow for voluntary enrolment on the State roll for persons between the ages of 16 and 18 years.

In 1856 South Australia was the first Australian jurisdiction to extend the right to vote to all males aged 21 or older – which other jurisdictions quickly following. In 1970, New South Wales was the first State to lower the voting age to 18, and in 1973 the voting age was lowered to 18 for Federal elections.

We have lowered the voting age before, extending enfranchisement is not a new concept.

In 1984 Nicaragua lowered the voting age from 21 to 16, and was joined by Brazil and Estonia in the 1990's. In the 2000s the Isle of Man, Austria, Guernsey, Jersey and Ecuador all lowered their voting age to 16. In the 2010s Argentina, Malta, Scotland and Estonia joined these ranks, and in 2021, so did Wales.

East Timor, Greece, Indonesia allow 17-year-olds to vote.

A 2019 Senate inquiry examining a Greens bill to lower the Federal voting age to 16 rejected the bill, relying heavily on the argument that public support is not clear.

The history of the right to vote in democracy is replete with examples of enfranchised groups with the view that others should not be enfranchised. History has not treated them kindly, and rightly so.

This report also claimed 'little empirical evidence' to support the view that lowering the voting age that would improve political engagement. Recent evidence challenges this view.

In July 2021 the journal *Parliamentary Affairs* published an article by Jan Eichhorn and Johannes Bergh examining the impact of lowering the voting age to 16.

This article is particularly compelling as it examines findings from studies in a range of different countries.

None of these studies found any negative effects on political engagement or civic engagement. To the contrary, many studies found that 16- and 17-year-olds who have been given the right to vote were often more interested in politics, more likely to vote and demonstrated other pro-civic attitudes.

The study also found that 16- and 17-year-olds who have the right to vote were in many instances more politically engaged than those who are first allowed to vote at 18, and that this engagement carries on into later life.