

## 2015/20:Should the voting age in Australia be lowered to 16?

### What they said...

*'People under 18 can leave school, get a job, drive a car and pay taxes. They can also enlist in the Australian defence forces, become a parent and, in exceptional circumstances, get permission to marry. If the law permits them to undertake these activities, it is hard to see why they cannot also vote'*

Professor George Williams, University of New South Wales

*'In Australia, the age of appearing in an adult court and being free to marry is 18 in most circumstances... here are relatively few activities which have a minimum age of 16, with the exception of the age of consent and holding a firearms licence. In short, there is only partial evidence to support an equity argument'*

Professor Ian McAllister, Australian National University

### The issue at a glance

On October 31, 2015, federal Labor leader, Bill Shorten, pledged his party's support for a lowering of the voting age to 16 in Australia, should his party be returned to government.

Mr Shorten made this promise as part of an address to the New South Wales Young Labor conference.

The proposal immediately met with opposition from some prominent government spokespeople. Response from political scientists and from media commentators has been mixed; with some seeing it as an overdue reform and others considering it ill-judged.

### Background

(The information supplied immediately below is an abbreviation of the Wikipedia entry headed 'Voting age'. The full text can be found at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voting\\_age](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voting_age))

#### Voting age

A voting age is a minimum age established by law that a person must attain to be eligible to vote in a public election.

Typically, the age is set at 18 years; however, ages as low as 16 and as high as 21 exist.

The vast majority of countries in the world have established a voting age. Most governments consider that those younger than the chosen threshold lack the capacity to decide how to cast a vote. The voting age is often of such importance that it is set by means of a constitutional provision.

In May 2009, Danish Member of Parliament Mogens Jensen presented an initiative to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg to lower the voting age in Europe to 16. There has also been discussion of giving votes to children from birth, initially with the votes being cast by parents, who are presumed to better understand a child's interests.

When the right to vote was first accorded in democracies the voting age was generally set at 21, or in some cases even older. In the 1970s the voting age was reduced to 18 in many countries. Debate is currently under way in many places on proposals to reduce the voting age below 16.

Before the Second World War almost all countries had voting ages of 21 or higher. Czechoslovakia was early to act, reducing its age to 18 in 1946, and by 1968 a total of 17 states had made the same reduction. A large number of countries, particularly in Western Europe, reduced their voting ages to 18 during the 1970s, starting with the United Kingdom with the Representation of the People Act 1969. The USA (26th Amendment), Canada, Australia, France and others followed soon afterwards. By the end of the 20th century, 18 had become by far the most common age at which citizens acquired the right to vote. However, a few countries maintained voting ages of 20 years or higher. Eighteen-year-old men could be drafted to go to war; so many people felt they should be able to vote at the age of 18. Consideration of a reduction to 18 continued into the late 20th and early 21st centuries in those countries that had not yet made the change. Reductions were seen in India, Switzerland, Austria and Morocco during this time. Japan is due to make the change to 18 in 2016. A dispute is continuing in the Maldives

#### Reducing the voting age to 16

Around the year 2000 a number of countries began to consider whether the voting age ought to be reduced further, with arguments most often being made in favour of a reduction to 16. The earliest moves came during the 1990s, when the voting age for municipal elections in some States of Germany was lowered to 16. Lower Saxony was the first state to make such a reduction, in 1995, and four other states later copied the move.

Between 2000 and 2010, there were a number of legislative proposals for reductions in the voting age to 16 in various U.S. states, including California, Florida and Alaska, but none were successful. A national reduction was proposed in 2005 in Canada and a state reduction in New South Wales, Australia, but these proposals were not adopted.

#### Countries where 16-year-olds are currently allowed to vote

There are ten countries with a current voting age of 16. Nicaragua was the first country to lower its voting age, in

November 1984. It was followed by Brazil (1988), Isle of Man (2006), Austria and Guernsey (2007), Jersey and Ecuador (2008), Argentina (2012), Malta (2013 for local council elections starting from 2015) and Estonia (2015 in local elections only). In addition, people aged 16 to 18 can vote in Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro if employed.

There have also been instances where countries have lowered the voting age to 16 for a particular election. An example of this was the recent Scottish independence referendum, in which those 16 and older were allowed to have their say.

### Internet information

On November 20, 2015, The Guardian published a comment by Michael White in which he discusses a range of arguments for and against lowering the voting age, finally stating that to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote is inconsistent as this age group is not generally seen as mature or independent.

The full text of this comment can be accessed at <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/blog/2015/nov/19/should-16-year-olds-be-allowed-to-vote>

On November 10, 2015, the ABC's current affairs program Behind the News (which aims to explain contemporary events to young viewers) televised a segment on Bill Shorten's proposal to extend the voting age to 16.

The treatment supplies arguments for and against the proposal.

A full transcript can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/btn/story/s4345701.htm>

On November 9, 2015, The Adelaide Advertiser published an opinion piece by former Democrat leader Natasha Stott Despoja. The comment is titled 'Lowering the voting age will make electoral system more accessible to the young'. Stott Despoja puts forward a number of reasons for the voting age to be lowered.

The full text can be accessed at [http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/opinion/lowering-the-voting-age-will-make-electoral-system-more-accessible-to-the-young/news-story/078d947c92a45796ffa090eed91b750e?="](http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/opinion/lowering-the-voting-age-will-make-electoral-system-more-accessible-to-the-young/news-story/078d947c92a45796ffa090eed91b750e?=)

On November 6, 2015, The Daily Telegraph published a comment by 16-year-old Caleb Bond in which he argues that despite his own strong political interests he considers the majority of his peers too disinterested and uninformed to vote.

The full text of this comment can be accessed at <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/rendezview/im-16-and-trust-me-we-are-too-young-to-vote/story-fnpug1jf-1227597790112?sv=79a6e7bb11a667c4d07e8ea48a587f63>

On November 2, 2015, Mamamia published an opinion piece by Maggie Kelly arguing that 16- and 17-year-olds are too immature to be given the right to vote.

The full text of this argument can be accessed at <http://www.mamamia.com.au/bill-shorten-16-year-old-voters/>

On November 1, 2015, ABC News posted a report titled 'Researcher cited in Shorten's voting proposal says less than one in 10 voters support lowering age'

The report looks at the arguments put by Professor Ian McAllister in opposition to the lowering of the voting age.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-11-01/researcher-casts-doubt-on-shortens-call-to-lower-voting-age/6902554>

On October 31, 2015, ABC News ran a report on the proposal made by Bill Shorten, the leader of the federal Labor Party, that the voting age be lowered to 16.

The full text of the report can be accessed at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-10-31/should-we-lower-the-voting-age-to-16/6901950>

On May 31, 2015, The Sydney Morning Herald published a comment by George Williams, the Anthony Mason Professor of law at the University of New South Wales. The opinion piece is titled 'Lowering the voting age to 16 would be good for democracy' and offers a number of arguments in support of a reduction in the age at which young people are eligible to vote.

The full text of the comment can be accessed at

<http://www.smh.com.au/comment/lowering-the-voting-age-to-16-would-be-good-for-democracy-20150531-ghdcyq.html>

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition has released a position paper arguing for the right to vote to be extended to 16 year-olds. The full text of this paper can be accessed at <http://www.ayac.org.au/uploads/The%20case%20for%20lowering%20the%20voting%20age%20to%2016.pdf>

On March 7, 2013, the Australian Electoral Commission issued a discussion paper considering the arguments put for and against the lowering of the voting age.

Though the author, Professor Ian McAllister, is cautious in his conclusions, the paper notes 'The evidence presented here suggests relatively little empirical support for main arguments used by advocates of lowering the voting age.'

The full text of this paper can be accessed at [http://www.aec.gov.au/about\\_aec/research/caber/3b.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/about_aec/research/caber/3b.htm)

### Arguments in favour of extending the vote to 16- and 17-year-olds

1. It is inconsistent to credit 16- and 17-year-olds with significant social and economic maturity yet deny them the franchise

A 17-year-old living in Australia is able to engage in full-time employment; pay income tax; join the armed forces; be tried and locked up in an adult prison; become a parent; fly a plane; sign a lease; get a firearms license and (with a court order and parental permission) get married.

It has been argued that it is inconsistent to allow young people to exercise autonomy in such a wide range of social and economic activities and yet deny them the opportunity to vote.

In a speech given to the New South Wales Young Labor conference in Sydney on October 31, 2015, Mr Shorten, the leader of the federal Labor Party, argued that if people aged 16 and 17 could drive, work, pay taxes, join the military and make their own choices about medical treatment, they should also be allowed to vote.

This position has also been put by University of New South Wales law professor, George Williams, who has stated, 'Voting at 16 would be consistent with other changes and opportunities at this age. People under 18 can leave school, get a job, drive a car and pay taxes. They can also enlist in the Australian defence forces, become a parent and, in exceptional circumstances, get permission to marry. If the law permits them to undertake these activities, it is hard to see why they cannot also vote.'

Young people are aware of the anomaly involved in allowing them to exercise substantial social and economic responsibilities, while denying them the franchise.

In response to an article published on the ABC News site outlining Bill Shorten's support for granting access to the vote to 16-year-olds, James MacKay stated in agreement, '17 yr olds are apparently mature enough to join ADF (Australian Defence Forces) but not mature enough to vote? Doesn't make sense.'

Consultations with young people by the Youth Affairs Coalition of the ACT have shown that an overwhelming majority of young people (75%) believe that they and their peers have the ability to make complex decisions, like determining elected officials.

## 2. Many 16-year-olds recognise how the political process operates and the importance of the franchise

It has been argued that ignorance of and indifference to the operation of the political system is not a consideration used to prevent other older Australians from exercising their right to vote. Supporters of extending the voting age to 16 argue that these young voters may well be more interested in exercising their democratic rights than older citizens.

This point has been made by University of New South Wales law professor, George Williams, who has stated, 'Australians of all ages typically have low levels of knowledge about government, and can express disinterest about politics. Indeed, in my experience, 16- and 17-year-olds tend to be more passionate about the future of our nation and their democratic rights than other sections of the community.'

It has further been argued that if the voting age were lowered to 16 young people could be educated more intensively about their political system while they were still at school.

Professor Williams has further stated, 'One key advantage of allowing them [16-year-olds] to vote is that joining the electoral roll and voting for the first time can be combined with civics education.'

Similar views have been expressed by Natasha Stott Despoja, a former federal parliamentarian and leader of the Democrats. In an opinion piece published in The Adelaide Advertiser on November 9, 2015, Ms Stott Despoja noted, 'Pundits on TV derided young people as lacking energy and interest, only caring about sleeping in and social media. Apart from this superficial characterisation of young people, it underestimates the increasing levels of understanding among young Australians about the issues around them.'

Stott Despoja went on to argue, 'Sometimes, the quality of questions from school students who studied civics education would far outweigh in sophistication the kind of questions I would get at a business lunch.'

So we should not be too quick to write off political comprehension among young people.'

## 3. Allowing 16 year olds to vote will increase political engagement

It has been suggested that 16 is an ideal time to invite young people into full participation in the political process. They are old enough and involved enough in their society to be interested in the issues raised during elections; however, they have not been overwhelmed by the demands of end-of-secondary and beginning-of-tertiary education.

This point has been put by University of New South Wales law professor, George Williams, who has suggested that lowering the voting age could help get young people engaged in politics before their lives become too full with working or studying at university.

Professor Williams has stated, 'It is notoriously difficult to get 18-year-olds to enrol and vote, in part because this can be a time of great upheaval in their lives. Many are moving from school to university or into employment, often out of home, and are forming new relationships. Joining the electoral roll can be low on their list of priorities.'

Professor Williams went on to explain why the same factors discouraging initial involvement in the political process would pertain less among 16- and 17-year-olds.

Professor Williams stated, 'On the other hand, 16- and 17-year-olds tend to be in a more stable family environment, and still at school...It is a better age for gaining the knowledge and forming the habits needed to be an engaged Australian citizen.'

In 2011 the German city-state of Bremen officially lowered its voting age to 16 in a bid to encourage more young people to the polls. Prior to this several German states had already opened their local elections to voters aged 16-17. They found that this group consistently turned out to vote in higher numbers than those aged 18-24.

Similar findings were made in Austria. Research on voting in Austria showed the turnout rates of 16 to 17-year-olds was comparable to those of the electorate at large and was actually higher than the turnout rate among older teenagers. The voting turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds in Vienna in 2010 was 64.2% compared to 56.3% for those 18-20.

#### 4. Many 16- and 17-year olds have significant social and economic lives which are affected by the decisions governments take

It has been argued that 16- and 17- year-olds lead quite complex social and economic lives which are significantly affected by the decisions taken by government. Supporters of youth franchise claim that young people should therefore be able to vote for the party which they believe is most likely to advance their immediate interests.

According to this argument, 16- and 17-year-olds are not simply passive children whose immediate political interests can be assumed to coincide with those of their parents.

Issues such as penalty rates for overtime worked are of significant concern to 16- and 17-year-olds a significant proportion of whom are in the workforce and working in industries particularly affected by these issues.

In an opinion piece published in The Sydney Morning Herald on August 8, 2015, Anna Parry noted, 'An unlikely army of young shift-workers who pull beers into the early morning hours, wait on tables and serve coffees on weekends could swing the federal election, as a proposed rollback of Sunday penalty rates and industrial reform raises the spectre of WorkChoices.'

Parry went on to note, 'That's because young Australians make up the majority of weekend shift workers who would bear the brunt of cuts to Sunday penalty rates and any wage inequality.'

However, the young people referred to here are not all over 18. Many are currently without the right to vote and supporters of youth franchise argue that this is unjust. They claim that those who are directly affected by government policies should all be able to vote on where they want these policies implemented.

#### 5. Decisions taken by current governments will affect young people into the future

It has further been suggested that the decisions taken by current political leaders will have even greater impact on today's youth than upon those presently able to vote.

Developments such as global warming and the responses taken to them by governments are of greater importance to young people than they are to those currently in middle age and beyond as the effects of such events will be felt by youth into their adulthood and beyond.

This point was made by the leader of the federal Labor Party, Bill Shorten, in an address he made on October 31, 2015, to the New South Wales Young Labor movement. Mr Shorten stated, 'My message... is let's trust our young people because they're the people who are going to have to deal with the decisions that we're making right now.'

A similar point was made by George Williams, the Anthony Mason Professor of law at the University of New South Wales. Professor Williams has stated, 'The strongest arguments for extending the vote to young people apply when the community is making a long-term decision that will shape the future direction of the nation. This was why, for example, 16-year-olds were permitted to vote on whether Scotland should split from the United Kingdom.'

Putting the argument in an Australian context, Professor Williams has further stated, 'When Australians vote on changing the constitution, whether it be to recognise Aboriginal peoples or to become a republic, 16- and 17-year-olds should be given a say. Constitutional referendums typically involve reforms that extend over many decades. Young people have a large stake in such questions and so should be able to join the rest of the community in having their voice heard.'

The member for Strathfield, Jodi McKay, made related arguments in May 2015, when calling for the New South Wales Parliament to lead debate on changing the legal age of voting in New South Wales to 16 years of age.

Ms McKay argued, 'The fact that these young people are unable to have an immediate say on the future of education, on TAFE, on the environment, on health services and public transport, I believe does us a disservice.'

According to this line of argument, the fact that young people are likely to have a more heightened interest in developments which will only have an impact in the future may mean that their voting would lead to better long-term planning. One of the criticisms frequently made of the current political system is that voters and parties are too immediately focused on their current best interests and do not adequately consider the impact of policies on future generations. It has been suggested that allowing 16-year-olds to vote may help to address this problem.

### **Arguments against extending the vote to 16- and 17-year-olds**

#### 1. 16- and 17-year-olds lack knowledge and political engagement

Opponents of lowering the voting age to 16 argue that a majority of young people of this age do not have the interest or the knowledge to use the vote wisely. This comment has even been made by some teenagers when referring to their peers.

On November 6, 2015, The Daily Telegraph published a comment by 16-year-old Caleb Bond in which he argues that despite his own strong political interests he considers the majority of his peers too disinterested and uninformed to vote.

Caleb Bond claims, 'Let's be honest, most young people are chiefly concerned with enjoying themselves, and you can't blame them. They're more preoccupied with cars, sport and the opposite sex (especially the opposite sex). You only experience your youth once and if you want to have fun, go for it. Politics takes a back seat and it is evident.

Classmates ask me who the President is. That strikes me as a gaping hole in our understanding of politics as a country. Australia suffers a great deal of political illiteracy and to throw another group of people in the deep end, possibly even less knowledgeable than some adults, is not wise.'

Similarly, 16-year-old Caulfield Grammar student, Hannah Thomas, has stated, 'I'm against it, really. We're not quite mature enough. Some 16-year-olds would have a fair understanding about all the politics and what Australia needs, I guess, but there are also lots that have no idea.'

Ms Thomas went on to explain, 'We're pretty much isolated in our schools at that age and don't quite understand the full

outside world.'

The same views were put forward by two students quoted in a Behind the News segment on youth voting which was telecast on November 10, 2015.

One student identified as Rebecca stated, 'I don't think it's a very good idea because when you're 16 you have other things on your mind, like school and exams, so they wouldn't really make the right decision, they might just fluke it or something.'

Similarly another student named as Georgia acknowledged, 'I personally don't watch the news or read the paper or things like that, so I wouldn't be able to make an informed decision.'

## 2. The voting behaviour of 16- and 17-year-olds is likely to be highly influenced by others

One argument offered for withhold the franchise from those under 18 is that they are too immature to exercise this privilege independently. According to this argument 16- and 17-year-olds are likely to be excessively influenced by either the significant adults in their lives or by their peers.

It has been claimed that the voting behaviour of 16- and 17-year-olds is likely to be strongly affected by that of their parents. It has been suggested that this means there is no reason to extend the franchise to these young people as they have yet to develop independent political views.

A recent survey conducted in the United States has indicated the extent to which the voting intentions of teenagers are influenced by the voting behaviour of their parents. A 2005 Gallop Youth Survey found that 70% of the young people surveyed claimed to have the same political and social ideology as their parents. The survey also found that there were few differences among demographic groups on this question; boys and girls were equally likely to say that they shared the same political and social views as their parents as were those coming from different ethnic and cultural groups.

The Australian 2004 Youth Electoral Survey (YES) also found that respondents identified 'the family' as the most important source of information about voting in elections, followed by the television, newspapers and teachers. The Australian survey data revealed a gender differential in terms of the family members with whom participants discussed political issues. Male family members, and particularly fathers, were most likely to be mentioned in this context.

A 2011 Australian Electoral Commission review of the influence of parental political leanings on children's voting behaviour found that young people tend to adopt similar political orientations to their parents. The AEC report stated, 'This is not surprising given that students tend to talk to their parents more about politics, and acquire much of their political knowledge from their parents.'

In an opinion piece published in Mamamia on November 2, 2015, Maggie Kelly further argued that teenagers would be unlikely to exercise an independent vote because they would be prone to the influence of their peers.

Critics of lowering the voting age suggest that to do so potentially damages democracy because it creates a voting bloc particularly vulnerable to manipulation by political parties and others.

## 3. A significant majority of current voters do not want the franchise extended to 16- and 17-year olds

There is substantial popular opposition to the lowering of the voting age in Australia.

The Australian Electoral Commission's 2013 inquiry into the lowering of the voting age in this country noted, 'In Australia, the public is...opposed to lowering the voting age. ... 94 per cent of the respondents in the 2010 Australian Election Study opposed any change, with 72 per cent saying that the age should "definitely stay at 18".'

Comparing opposition in Australia to that found in democracies overseas, the Australian Electoral Commission states, 'Australian public opinion is more emphatically opposed to lowering the age than is found elsewhere. Overall, just 6 per cent of the electorate favour any change.'

Professor Ian McAllister from the Australian National University has undertaken research which suggests that a significant majority of Australians are opposed to the lowering of the voting age.

Professor McAllister stated, 'Our research on lowering the voting age suggests that first of all there's not a lot of public support for it, less than one out of 10 voters would support lowering the voting age to 16.'

Professor McAllister has suggested that the reasons that the general public found persuasive when the voting age was lowered from 21 to 18 are not seen to pertain when it is proposed that the age be lowered to 16.

Professor McAllister pointed out, 'It was a more potent argument when there was a debate about lowering the voting age from 21 to 18, and it was argued for example in the context of the Vietnam War that people could go and fight for a country but they wouldn't be allowed to vote.'

## 4. Allowing 16- and 17-year olds the vote would be inconsistent as this age group is not generally regarded as politically, socially or economically independent

It has been claimed that it is inconsistent to allow the vote to 16- and 17-year-olds because our society acknowledges in that in many other areas they are not ready to function as mature adults.

In an opinion piece published in The Guardian on November 20, 2015, Michael White examined the conflicting views currently being exhibited in The United Kingdom where there is significant pressure to extend voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds.

White writes, 'Scotland, which has now extended the right to vote at 16 to all elections under Holyrood's control, presents the paradox most neatly. The SNP government has tried to restrict the purchase of alcohol at off-licences for those over 18, it may yet try again to raise the age at which people can buy drink to 21 (as in the US).'

White went on to elaborate the range of protective measure in place across the United Kingdom, all of which indicate that society does not regard this age group as mature and independent.

White notes, 'In recent decades, all four home countries and Westminster have piled in to protect the under-18s. In assorted legislation they cannot legally gamble, get a tattoo, buy tobacco, drinks, solvents, paint stripper, possess fireworks in a public place, use a sunbed, sign a property contract, write a will or open a bank account. They can't serve on a jury, appear in an adult court or overnight in a cell (it must be a children's home) or watch porn or extreme violence...'

Professor Ian McAllister has argued that the equity issues that prompted the voting age to be lowered from 21 to 18 do not apply when the proposal is to lower the voting age to 16.

Professor McAllister notes, 'Equity arguments gained considerable currency when the voting age was last lowered. This was the period when the U.S. was embroiled in Vietnam War and of the more than 58,000 soldiers who died in that conflict, one-fifth were less than 20 years old.

The large number of casualties among the young gave rise to the slogan "old enough to fight, old enough to vote".'

It has been claimed, however, that the same imperative no longer applies as though young people can join the defence forces, unlike in the 1960s and '70s they are not being conscripted to do so.

Professor McAllister has explained, 'In Australia, the age of appearing in an adult court and being free to marry is 18 in most circumstances... here are relatively few activities which have a minimum age of 16, with the exception of the age of consent and holding a firearms licence. In short, there is only partial evidence to support an equity argument.'

Regarding the payment of taxation, Professor McAllister observes, 'Most of those in this age category are school students who are financially dependent on their parents. They therefore may pay indirect tax on what they buy, but few will pay income tax.'

#### 5. Giving 16- and 17-year-olds the vote is unlikely to address the causes of political apathy

It has been suggested that the root cause of political apathy is not the age at which voters are first able to exercise this right.

Professor Ian McAllister's research suggests that in countries where voting is not compulsory, lowering the legal voting age actually reduces, rather than increases, the percentage of the population which votes.

McAllister states, 'The evidence from 14 established democracies that lowered the voting age between 1970 and 1992 suggests that in the majority of cases, turnout declined. The estimate is made by comparing the average turnout in the two national elections prior to the change with the average turnout in the two national elections following the change.'

It appears that political interest and involvement generally increases with age and life experience rather than the reverse.

McAllister states his research findings thus, '[I]ntended turnout is lowest among the youngest groups-71 percent among those aged 18 to 20, and 68 percent among those aged 21 to 23. Thereafter turnout increases significantly, rising to 92 percent among those aged in their early 30s, before dropping away slightly among those aged in their late 30s and early 40s. This is a lifecycle effect, and reflects the pressures on time due to work and family commitments. For most of the remaining age groups, intended turnout is generally stable, at around 90 percent.'

#### Further implications

It seems unlikely that the voting age in Australia will be lowered to 16 in the foreseeable future. Until Bill Shorten's recent statement at a Young Labor gathering in New South Wales, the only political party supporting a lowering of the voting age was the Greens.

Currently the combined voting bloc of Labor and the Greens would not be sufficient to carry a bill reducing the voting age through the parliament.

The Liberal Party is currently opposed to the proposal and what is likely to create anxiety among those who support the idea in either major party is the extent of opposition among current voters. In Australia, opposition to lowering the voting age is among the highest in the world, running at approximately 90 percent.

It has been suggested that the extent of this opposition may be due to the fact that the issue has not yet been widely debated in this country. In the United Kingdom, where the issue has a much higher public profile and discussion of the pros and cons has been much more extensive, there is greater support for lowering the voting age.

Critics of the proposal in Australia have suggested that its current support within the Labor Party may be an attempt to reduce the attraction the new Liberal leader, Malcolm Turnbull, holds for young voters and to rebadged the Labor Party, bringing it more into line with the Greens, who are attracting an increasing constituency of young voters.

However, given Australia's aging demographic, and the increasing percentage of the voter population that will be in older rather than younger age classifications, it does not seem likely that there will be any significant political advantage afforded any party which aligns itself with the cause of 16- and 17-year-old potential voters. Vox pop surveys suggest that those in this age group are themselves uncertain of their fitness to vote and do not have a strong desire to do so.

The issue has gained far greater traction in Europe, especially within Great Britain, and should granting the suffrage to youth become widespread there, it may become more likely in this country. It is interesting to note that in Britain granting the vote to 16- and 17-year olds has recently won the support of prominent Tory (conservative) political leaders. To date there is no sign of this happening in Australia. Were Malcolm Turnbull to put his support behind the proposal the nature of the debate would shift. However, this is one of many issues which has the capacity to expose divisions within the Liberal Party and so is one that Turnbull is likely to ignore.

#### Newspaper items used in the compilation of this issue outline

AUST, October 31, 2015, page 3, news item by S Maher, 'Shorten to push for lower vote age'.  
<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/bill-shorten-to-push-for-lower-voting-age/news->

[story/c1b6af3e03ada0402b7566609a1c3805](http://www.theage.com.au/story/c1b6af3e03ada0402b7566609a1c3805)

AGE, November 7, 2015, page 33, Spooner cartoon on youth vote.

H/SUN, November 2, 2015, page 13, comment by Andrew Bolt, 'Our kids are not ready to vote'.

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/andrew-bolt/bill-shorten-our-kids-are-not-ready-to-vote/news-story/9cc27500e92f35f87aa970a3e5af44f1>

AUST, November 2, 2015, page 6, news item by S Maher, 'Evidence questions value of teen vote'.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/evidence-questions-value-of-teen-vote/news-story/97e0bcefb8828c6a33a0c4d9d72847c7?sv=fde66c060a3dda6a4982b80715ca9504&login=1>

AGE, November 2, 2015, page 16, letters incl, 'A privilege not to be wasted on the clueless / If you're mature enough'.  
(with Bruce Petty cartoon)

<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/the-age-letters/the-voting-age-a-privilege-not-to-be-wasted--on-the-clueless-20151101-gko0be.html>