

FACTFILE

Children and the right to vote

What is the issue?

- Should children be able to vote? If so, at what age?

Facts

- Children (people under the age of 18) have the right to vote in a number of countries including Sudan, Austria, Brazil and in some states of Germany.

Key points

- People acquire the ability to discuss, assess and make decisions about politics much earlier than popular opinion imagines.
- Children have rational thoughts and make informed choices. They often display very sophisticated decision-making abilities, for example when dealing with a bully at school or an abusive parent.
- A 16-year-old is likely to have more in common with a 19-year-old than a three-year-old but, according to conventional accounts, the 16 and three-year-old are equally “children”. There is no better example than that of a 17-year-old who dies in a war before even having the right to vote.
- The exclusion of children from decision-making is unfair because they can do nothing to change the conditions that exclude them.
- There have been campaigns in many countries calling for the lowering of the age at which people have the right to vote.
- While it is true that research shows that the electoral preferences of parents form a powerful influence on children's voting patterns, these influences persist whether we are ten, twenty, fifty or eighty years of age.
- Find out in which countries children can vote here: <http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=20973>
- Read more arguments in favour of children's right to vote here: <http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=22837>

Key quotes

- “Children should not be prevented from making decisions simply because they might make the wrong ones. It is important not to confuse *the right to do something* with *doing the right thing*.” Professor Bob Franklin, <http://www.crin.org/resources/infodetail.asp?ID=22837>
- “No political theory is adequate unless it is applicable to children as well as to men and women.”¹Philosopher Bertrand Russell
- “To trust children we must first learn to trust ourselves...and most of us were taught as children that we could not be trusted.”² Educationalist John Holt

1 Russell, Bertrand. Principles of Social Reconstruction. London: Allen and Unwin, 1971

2 John Holt, How Children Learn, Pitman 1967