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](http://www.crin.org/resources/infoDetail.asp?ID=20973)

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](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.” Philosopher 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." Educationalist John Holt

2 John Holt, How Children Learn, Pitman 1967