Why there's debate
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San Francisco could soon become the first major American city to lower its voting age to 16. A local ballot measure under consideration this November would allow 16- and 17-year-old residents to participate in citywide elections. The voting age for state and federal elections would remain 18.

If the measure is passed, it would mark a major step in a growing movement to extend voting rights to younger Americans. In 2013 the Washington, D. C., suburb of Takoma Park, Md., became the first city in the country to lower its voting age to 16 for local elections. A handful of other small cities in Maryland have since followed suit. Voters in Berkeley, Calif., passed a measure in 2016 allowing 16-year-olds to participate in school board elections.

The changes aren't limited to local races. More than a third of states allow 17-year-olds to vote in primary elections if they will be 18 by the general election. The issue has also received some attention at the federal level. A failed amendment to lower the national voting age in federal elections to 16 received support last year from more than 100 Democrats in the House of Representatives, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Several candidates in the 2020 Democratic primary, including Bernie Sanders and Pete Buttigieg, said they were "open to" the idea.

The U. S. has lowered its voting age once before. The 26th Amendment, ratified in 1971, changed the minimum voting age in the country from 21 to 18 after a period of intense criticism fueled by the fact that 18-year-olds were old enough to be drafted to fight in the Vietnam War but not to vote.

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