

Do We Really Need a Maximum Age Limit on Voting?

by Ege Gazitepe

Voting to elect the leaders who will govern us for an established time is one of the greatest and longest steps we ever took as a species. This mindset took an incredibly long time to settle and it took an even longer time for us to realize this process was only ethical if we allowed anyone older than 18 to participate in it. In the USA it took black men 82 years more than white men to gain the right to vote. Even worse women got their right to vote a staggering 132 years later than men in the USA. Despite all this, there is a new movement that began some years ago which started to gain real momentum around the 2016 US elections that supports an age limit on voting. So why is there a sudden surge of desire to take some people's right to vote? Before we get to that though we need to ask if this movement is based on any valid arguments or is it just rantings of the younger generations? Well, it seems to be a bit of both. Some arguments presented in this movement arises from real genuine concerns yet some others are just manifestations of unsympathetic thoughts about the older generation.

Firstly, let us try to see the parts of this movement that make sense. People who want a maximum voting age may want it because of their policy concerns. Younger generations have great and rightful fears on concepts like global warming, pollution, drinking water contamination, dwindling resources, extinction of vital species for earth's biosphere, etc. They think the older generation is incapable of solving these issues and they claim older people simply do not care about these problems because they are not the ones that have to face the consequences in the future. Even though this is an extremely wide generalization we can not ignore there is some truth in it. Most of the problems we face today exist only because we took a long time to fully understand the effects of industrialization and urban expansion. If we do not want to face these issues at a much severe rate in the future we need to take action and we need to take them fast yet how can we do it when the very 45th President of the United States said they do not believe these problems are real. Of course, these people do not come to these offices undemocratically. They are elected leaders and most leaders who say such things are, unsurprisingly, conservative leaders. Another generalization with some truth in it tells us older people generally vote conservative and since they make up the majority in the developed nations their votes make the real change in politics. This is why some people think we need a maximum voting age. So the pleas of the younger generation are somewhat understandable in this particular case.

Urging issues that need immediate actions of course does not end right there. There are many social problems that are haunting our societies. Racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia are issues that require much more than just mutual understanding to be solved. These problems require policies, laws, implementations, and regulations to be effectively solved. We need to elect people who will work on these problems but once again we know that conservative leaders are not the ones to go on these issues and yet again we know they will be the ones older generations will most likely vote for. Still, while all of these are genuine arguments with real concern is it enough to just implement a maximum voting age? Is this the only solution? Is this even ethical?

Let us look at the other side of the coin and see the flaws in all these. Firstly, taking a given right away from someone is already a surreal and never done thing before. It is against all democratic beliefs we hold dear, even though the people who support the cause say it is based on the idea of progress. Also, there are other more practical solutions we can look into before we choose to go on that way. We can try to raise the number of young people who vote. Data suggests that only %45 of the people between the ages of 18-29 turn out to vote in the 2016 US elections while the percentages were about %70 for the people who age 60+. It does not make much sense to want a maximum voting age if you do not vote yourself. Although we can gladly say that the times are changing and this data is outdated for 2020. While we do not have any hard-proof data at the moment due to elections being held only a few weeks back, estimates tell us about %60 percent of the people between the ages of 18-29 registered to vote this year. We do not know if they really voted after they registered and the percentage is still lower than that of the older generations but there is an improvement that is for sure. Younger generations are getting more politically aware and maybe this could lead to another possible solution. We can try to lower the voting age to 16 if necessary to include more people in the democratic process and create a counter-balance rather than taking older people out of the process. This is not a new thing to do either. Countries like Austria, Argentina, and Brazil already allow 16-year-olds to vote and if 16-year-old people can be mature enough to vote in those countries they can surely be in other nations too. However, it is understandable that this topic, while a good counter-solution to the maximum voting age, is still a topic largely open for discussion and its ratification as a law will take a long time to pass from legislative assemblies if it ever comes to life. On the other hand, implementing a maximum voting age also seems like an incredibly hard task to get through legislative assemblies in the first place. Defining the maximum voting age itself would be a long process because what is the maximum voting age exactly, the exact age is never mentioned by the people who support the cause with a unified voice, everyone talks differently. Some say 65, others say 80, you can hear as low as 50, it seems like there is not and never will be a consensus on this by the people who support maximum voting age. We should further analyze the motives of the people who support this cause. As previously mentioned while there are many people who support the cause just because they believe it will lead to better policies some do this because they are ageists. Ageism means discriminating against people because of their age. Every age group can be targeted by it but in this case, the targeted group is clearly the older people. The rise of the boomer stereotypes shows us that the youth does in fact have a discontent against the old people and maybe rightfully so, this is once again up to debate, yet we should not forget if any implementation of maximum voting age ever goes through everyone is going to be affected by it in the long run. No one stays young forever, we should never forget it.

Below are the pictures of two elderly ladies one aged 103 and the other aged 102 voting in the US presidential elections. It is worthy to note that both ladies were alive in a time where the woman could not vote.



Finally, in all honesty, we do not know truly what is right and what is wrong on this issue. A law like this never passed in the history of humankind ever before. We can just further the discussion and add our own thoughts on it. Let's just remember that we are all human and we are all going to be old one day before we give any judgment on the issue. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)

1. <https://www.kialo.com/should-there-be-a-upper-age-limit-for-voting-14742>
2. <https://www.debatingeurope.eu/2020/02/24/should-there-be-an-age-limit-for-voting/#.X7fBEWgza00>
3. https://ceasefire.net/post/23q5c/there_should_be_a_maximum_age_for_voting
4. <https://thetylt.com/politics/maximum-voting-age>
5. <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/09/30/politics/103-ruline-steininger-hillary-clinton/index.html>
6. <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/21/us/102-year-old-voter-pandemic-trnd/index.html>