### Why kids should be allowed to vote

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In the U.S. and U.K., the right to vote has gradually been extended from white male land-owning adult humans to adult humans of all races, sex, and classes. However, the requirement to be an adult and a human still persists. I can’t see a viable way for democracy to take into account the preferences of inarticulate non-human organisms such as dolphins or mushrooms, except through human voters’ compassion for them. However, I can see a way for democracy to better reflect the preferences of all humans, including children and adults of all personality types, rather than just some adults with personalities that incline them to vote when voting is difficult.

The traditional argument against allowing children to vote was that they lacked the knowledge, maturity, and judgment to understand their true long-term political interests. They might vote themselves free ice cream and an inalienable right not to do algebra. There must be some minimum age below which children simply can’t understand complex political issues such as progressive consumption taxes or campaign finance reform. (This argument from incompetence was, not coincidentally, the same argument used historically against enfranchising women, non-whites, non-land-owners, the illiterate, the mentally ill, etc.)

However, given our better understanding of individual differences in intelligence, personality traits, and mental health, such arguments from incompetence are much trickier to make today. The brutal fact of the matter is that most adults simply can’t understand complex political issues, either, but we still think it’s a good idea for them to try. Indeed, a 14-year-old with an IQ of 140 (yielding a ‘mental age’ of 20) probably understands their true, long-term political interests better than a 24-year-old with an IQ of 70 (yielding a mental age of 17). Likewise, children who happen to be highly conscientious, open, and stable probably make more discerning voters than adults who happen to be impulsive, reactionary, and neurotic.

For humans, our social and sexual interests start to diverge from those of our parents most clearly after we gain the capacity for independent reproduction, around puberty. So, the average age of puberty (e.g. age 12), seems a more biologically principled age at which individuals should gain their right to vote. True, adolescents might make a lot of silly choices when electing people and voting on referenda. But given recent elections, wars, and recessions in North America and Europe, it seems unlikely that they could do any worse than their elders.

The argument from incompetence must still apply to children below some age. New-borns could certainly express their preference for a presidential candidate by measuring their gaze time at the candidate’s photos, but we already know from developmental psychology that babies would just ‘gaze-vote’ for the most physically attractive and ethnically similar face (which is of course completely different from what we adults do…). So, children below some age cut-off, such as 12, may not be ready to vote as individuals. But that does not mean they must remain politically unrepresented. We simply have to identify some adults who could be trusted to understand their long-term interests and vote on their behalf. For mammalian species like ours, the mother seems the obvious choice. Women have evolved many adaptations, ranging from breast-milk to empathy, to nurture, protect, and understand their children. So, it seems sensible that a mother should be able to cast an extra vote on behalf of each child she is raising. If a mother has five children under the age of 12, she would be able to cast six votes – one for herself, one for each child. If she believes that her children would favor government spending on good schools and safe bike trails rather than on land-mines, she would be morally obligated to vote accordingly, and government spending patterns might shift to better reflect the interests of children. We are already willing to delegate most day-to-day voting to our elected representatives on our behalf. This Darwinian-feminist initiative would simply extend that representative-democracy principle to children and mothers. The result would be a more democratic society in which every living generation is better represented. All such innovative voting systems would be vulnerable to some fraud and abuse until the bugs were fixed, but if we can invent electronic voting machines that are allegedly invulnerable to partisan meddling, I’m sure we can figure out how to validate how many under-12 children each female voter has.