

# Voting at Age 16

Expanding voting rights to 16 and 17 year old  
San Franciscans

Presentation to the BOS Rules Committee  
Monday, June 8, 2015



# Where the effort began...

- YC and BOS passed respective resolutions in 2005
- Strong youth participation in November 2014 ballot issues
- Successful 2014 Young Voters' Forum at Balboa HS



YC'ers facilitating Minimum Wage workshop at Young Voter's Forum

# Where the effort began...

- Historically low voter turnout in SF and nationally
- Youth commissioners began research in Summer 2014 and passed a resolution on expanding voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds in municipal and school district elections in January 2015 after multiple readings

# Enfranchisement of young voters: A growing state, national, and international conversation

- Since 2008, increased voter suppression efforts in some states; 2013 Supreme Court Decision on Sec. 5 of the Voting Rights Act
- 17 year old participation in Chicago 2014 primary
- 16 year old voting in two MD cities
- Efforts to lower the voting age in MA and VT cities
- 16 and 17 year old voting in Austria, Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Norway, and the UK

# Voter turnout and representation: the national picture

- The US has poor voter turnout rates compared to other established democracies (40-60% versus 80-90% in other countries)
- Nationally, voter turnout is at its lowest levels since WWII
- Nationally, voters 18-29 have lowest turnout of any age group, though have increased their numbers since 2008

# Voter turnout and representation: the national picture

- 85% 16-17 year old turnout in 2014 Scottish referendum
- Senator Leno co-authored state constitutional amendment to allow 17 year olds to participate in primary elections



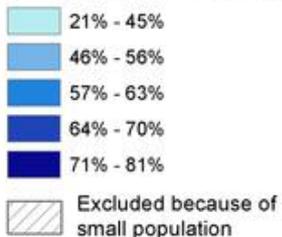
Youth turnout in force during Scottish referendum

# Voter turnout and representation: the local picture

- Voter turnout in SF was only 53% in Nov 2014 and 29% in Nov 2013
- In SF, voter turnout is lowest in the two neighborhoods with the highest number of youth and children: Bayview and Visitacion Valley
- Many children in SF are living in households where parents cannot vote. 35% of SF residents were born outside the U.S and 1 in 3 SFUSD students has an immigrant parent
- San Francisco has an aging electorate (currently 45.8 up from 44.2 in 1980, and projected to reach 47.6 by 2025)

# Proportion of Registered Voters Voting in November, 2010 Election by Precinct

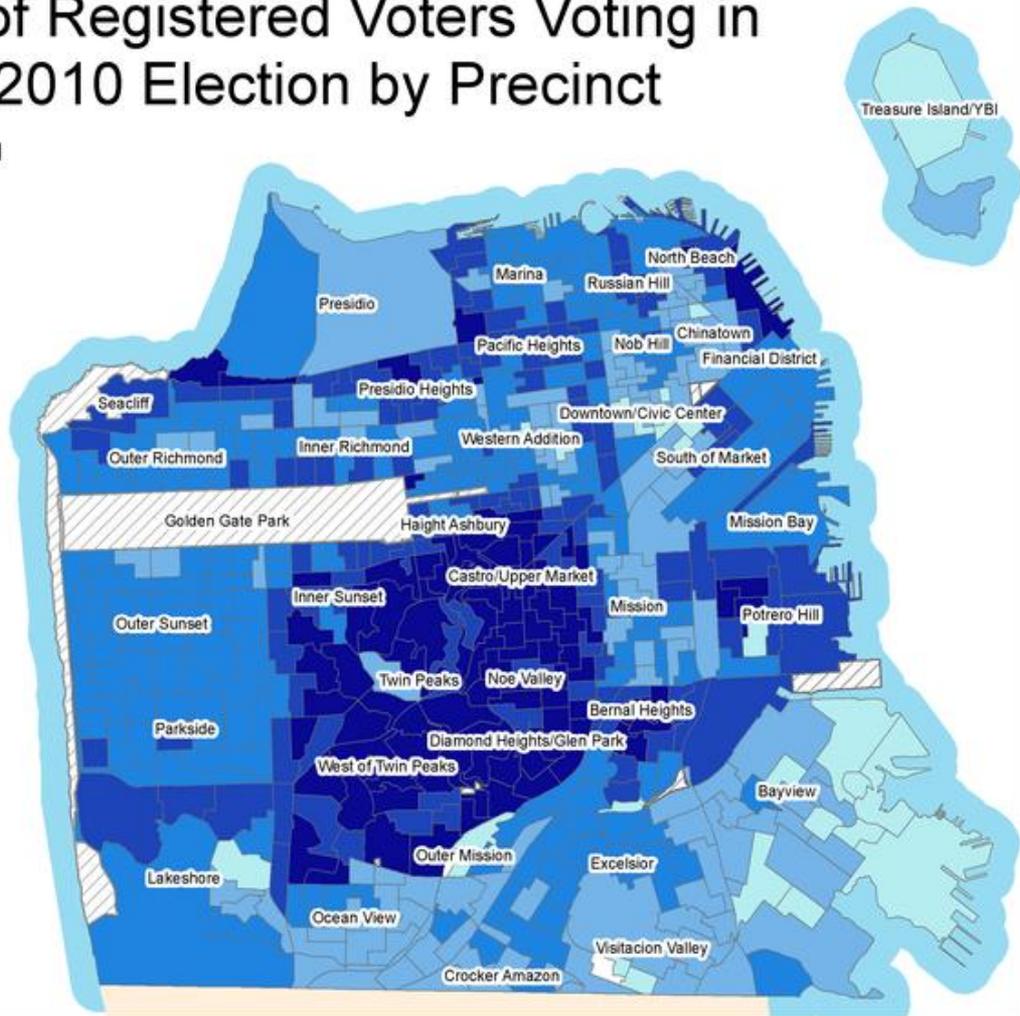
Percent of Voters that Voted in Each Precinct, 11/2010



Source: San Francisco Department of Elections, November, 2010 Gubernatorial Election

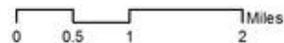
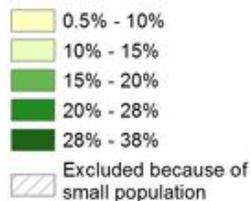
City and County of San Francisco Department of Public Health Environmental Health Section

Available at [www.thehdmt.org](http://www.thehdmt.org)



# Proportion of Population 17 Years Old and Younger

% Population Under 18 yrs



Source: US Census 2010

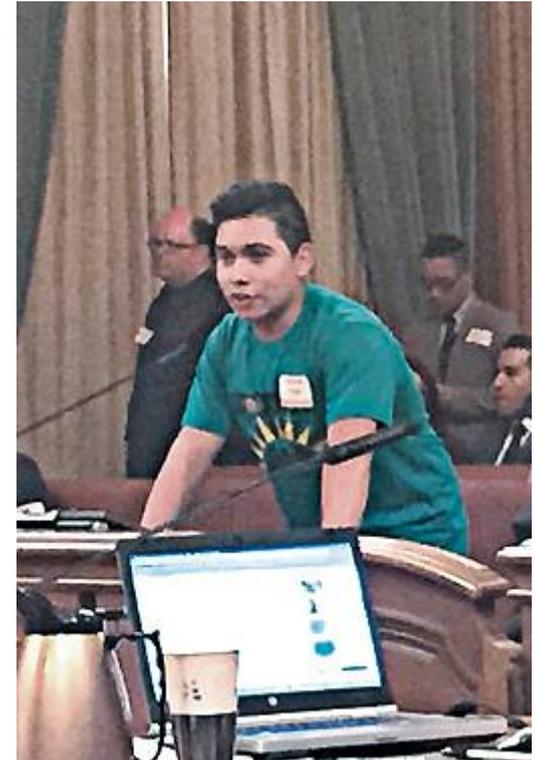
City and County of San Francisco  
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# We count on the civic contributions of SF youth.

- Youth participated heavily in issues on the 2014 ballot: ie, Prop C, soda tax, minimum wage
- Youth initiate legislative efforts: i.e. tobacco permit legislation
- Youth lead civic engagement efforts, ie. YAD, YEF, YC
- City makes critical investments in youth leadership
- We have a diminishing number of youth and families in San Francisco at the same time as we face economic and ecological challenges that will require young people's leadership to solve
- We need all hands on deck. We need young people to begin developing their civic leadership and participation now, not later.



# Why lower the voting age?

*Robust voter participation is the core of a healthy democracy. San Francisco is positioned to build lifelong voters and invest in voter turnout over the long term.*

*We know this is a “second look” issue. We believe research shows that age 16 is a better time to begin voting than age 18.*

# Age 16 is a better age to begin voting than age 18.

- At age 16, young people are embedded in their communities of origin, where they know and care about local issues
- 16 and 17 year olds are enrolled in school and are living with family members who are voters. They have the opportunity to have classroom and dinner table conversations that support informed voting choices
- By comparison, age 18 is a year of intense transitions for most young people, making it a challenging time to establish new voting habits
- As a result, many young people currently do not begin voting until their late twenties

# 16 year old voting builds lifelong voters.

## Research shows that:

Voting is habitual. Once someone casts their first vote, they will continue voting

The earlier someone starts voting, the more likely they are to be a lifelong voter

# 16 year old voting will increase voter turnout over the long term.

Teen voting will have a “trickle up” effect on parents and “trickle out” effect on peers, increasing voter turnout all around.

## **Research shows:**

When 16 and 17 year olds engage in civics, conversations about politics and civic life are brought home, with a positive effect on voter turnout for parents and family members of all ages.

Voting among young voters 18+ encourages peers and roommates to register and vote.

# When given the chance, 16 and 17 year olds will vote.

16 and 17 year olds register and turn out at greater rates than older voters. This has been seen in other countries that allow teens to vote (Norway Germany, Argentina, the United Kingdom, Brazil, and Austria).

It was also true in Chicago's 2014 primary and in Takoma Park, MD, where 16 and 17 year olds showed a four times greater turnout rate than older voters.

## POLITICS

### Takoma Park Sees High Turnout Among Teens After Election Reform

In the nation's first local election with 16-year-olds voting, many teens took advantage of their new right to cast a ballot this week.

BY J.B. WOGAN | NOVEMBER 7, 2013



FlickrCC/Mr. T in DC

# 16 and 17 year olds are prepared to vote.

Teens today have more access to knowledge and information and more outlets for debating social and political issues than ever before.

## **Research shows that:**

- 16-year-olds' political knowledge is about the same as 21-year-olds' and quite close to the average for all adults.
- Neurologically, 16 and 17 year olds have developed the ability to logically analyze information and make responsible voting choices

Teens can and do vote independently. In the Scottish independence referendum, 44% of teens voted differently than their parents.

# **16 and 17 year olds deserve to vote.**

Many civic responsibilities accrue at age 16. 16-17 year olds can work without limitations on hours, pay taxes, drive cars, and be tried in adult courts. As people who use public services and are affected by government decisions--16-17 year olds are ready to have a say in how government is run.

# The response so far...

Since the charter amendment was introduced in March, there has been a great deal of national and local press. The New York Times, Bloomberg News, Chicago Tribune, Seattle Times, and Detroit News all published stories on the legislation.



The Chronicle editorial board did not contact youth involved with this effort. Youth commissioners have invited *Chronicle* columnists to a moderated public debate with youth leading this effort.

# An issue of democratic engagement

Chronicle editorials on the legislation have framed this as a partisan issue. But this is a youth-led effort, backed by research, aimed at increasing civic participation.

16 and 17 year old voting would be good for democracy, but not necessarily for any certain political party.

- Age is not the biggest determinant of political affiliations
- Nationally, more 18-29 year olds register as democrats, but San Francisco is unique, and these national trends say little about the political preferences of young people in SF
- More than 1/3 of SF students attend private schools
- Research shows efforts to increase voter registration among high school students have led to increased registration of young voters who identify as conservative

# How many 16-17 year olds are there?

Based on estimates from the census, there are approx. 13,000 16 and 17 year olds in SF, though not all would be eligible to vote. The controller estimated this would increase the electorate by 1%--a small number, but over the long term, this could have an important impact on voter turnout in San Francisco.

# The opportunity before us...

*San Francisco has an opportunity to build on its reputation of innovation and commitment to participatory democracy by being the first major city to extend voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds. In doing so, it would invest in the civic and political development of its young people, encourage lifelong voters, and increase voter turnout over the long term.*

# Thank you very much!

Questions? Comments?

*For more information: [www.sfgov.org/yc](http://www.sfgov.org/yc)*

