

## **Lowering the Voting Age:** **Online Polling Results from U.S. Youth**

Institutions used: Channel One, Alloy Media + Marketing,  
DoSomething.org

All Polling Conducted: April 15<sup>th</sup> - May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006

Total Respondents: 6,225

Polling organized and compiled May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2006

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## Executive Summary

The results from three polls about the voting age show that a majority of young people support lowering the voting age to 17. Further analysis of the polling results reveal four major findings that breakdown how gender, age (specific), and individual opinion impacts youth support for lowering the voting age.

## Introduction

The lowering the voting age polls were initiated as a direct result of youth driven interest on the Do Something ([www.DoSomething.org](http://www.DoSomething.org)) message boards. In response to this interest, Do Something organized an online poll through two third parties and on its own site. Channel One (in-school TV network reaching 350,000 classrooms) polled based on age and Alloy Media + Marketing (youth marketing network) polled based on gender. Both organizations utilized their polling to represent an accurate cross-section of suburban and urban youth across the U.S. (combine total 2,000 respondents).

The five question poll for Alloy Media + Marketing and Channel One was designed to gauge: (1) young people's opinions on increasing or decreasing voting age, (2) how they viewed their own level of responsibility, and (3) the responsibility of their peers. The poll also asked whether respondents would directly support an initiative to lower the voting age to 17.

The Do Something online poll was open to the general web traffic of [www.DoSomething.org](http://www.DoSomething.org) (12-24 year-olds). There was one question that specifically asked what the majority of respondents wanted the voting age to be.

The following is an analytical summary of the findings from these polls.

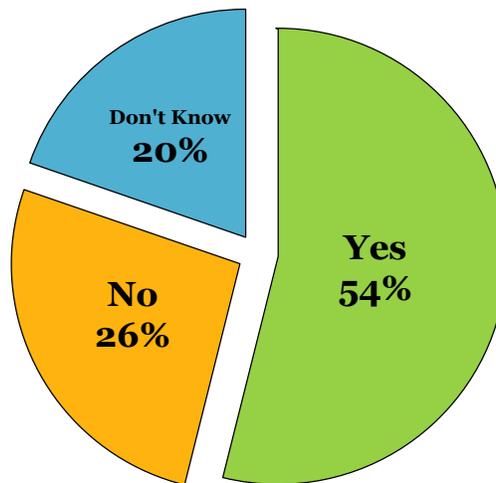
# Analysis

Between the three polls, there are four key findings that show overall youth levels of support for lowering the voting age and results based on age and gender:

## 1. Majority of young people support lowering the voting age

Results from Channel One poll

**Would you actively support lowering the voting age to 17?**



## 2. Majority are more confident in their own ability to vote compared to the ability of their peers

Of all youth respondents<sup>1</sup>:

- 76% stated that they were responsible enough to vote
- 20.4% stated that  $\frac{3}{4}$  (or more) of all 16 year-olds were 'qualified' to vote
- 35.1% stated that  $\frac{3}{4}$  (or more) of all 17 year-olds were 'qualified' to vote

## 3. Young Teens versus Older Teens:

Young teens (13-14 years-old) are more supportive of a lower voting age<sup>2</sup> :

- 49.7% of 13-14 year-olds would lower the voting age to 16
- 28.2% of 15-17 year-olds would lower the voting age to 16

## 4. Male/Female Disparity:

Males are more supportive of a lower voting age<sup>3</sup>:

- 62.6% of male respondents would lower the voting age to 16 or 17
- 45.4% of female respondents would lower the voting age to 16 or 17

<sup>1</sup> Channel One and Alloy Media + Marketing combine responses to question #1

<sup>2</sup> Channel One Poll responses question #2

<sup>3</sup> Alloy Media + Marketing combine responses to question #2

## Finding 1

### A majority of young people would support a lower voting age

Responses from each of the three polls show that there would be a consensus on a voting age of 17.

“Some states let you drive as early as 15. If they are letting you drive, and therefore putting yours and other lives at risk, they should give you the right to vote about who makes policies concerning your own life.”  
–Heather L., 18, NY

*If you had the power to set the voting age, when would you give people the right to vote?’(Q2), respondents were given options between 16 and 21<sup>4</sup>.*

<b>Channel One</b>	<b>Alloy Media</b>	<b>Do Something</b>
Age 16: 36.7%	Age 16: 30.1%	Age 16: 38.7%
Age 17: 16.9%	Age 17: 21.4%	Age 17: 13.7%
Age 18: 34.8%	Age 18: 38.6%	Age 18: 37.7%
19-21: 10%	19-20: 9.8%	19-20: 10%
Lower than 18: <b>53.6%</b>	Lower than 18: <b>51.5%</b>	Lower than 18: <b>52.4%</b>

When results for a lower voting age are combined, there is a clear majority of young people who believe that the voting age should be lowered to at least 17. If the voting age were going to be lowered to either 16 or 17, young people would prefer 16.

“I don’t think it’s worth all that effort to reduce the age by one year. Many things can happen in one year, but one year is a relatively insignificant amount of time. If one were to lower the voting age, it should be a more significant change.”  
–Snigdha S., 17, NY

<sup>4</sup> Each poll had respondents that abstained from voting or voted for ‘don’t care’ options. Percentages therefore don’t add up to 100%.

These findings were reinforced when young people were asked if they would actively support lowering the voting age:

*'Would you sign a petition lowering the voting age to 17?'*(Q5)

<b><u>Channel One</u></b>	<b><u>Alloy Media</u></b>
Yes: 54%	Yes: 60.9%
No: 26.4%	No: 39%
Don't know: 19.6%	Don't Know: N/A*

*\*Alloy Media + Marketing didn't give 'Don't Know' response option*

Results show that a majority of young people would actively sign a petition to support lowering the voting age to 17. Another interesting finding is that when respondents are given a 'Don't Know' option (Channel One Poll only), it takes more votes away from the 'No's than people who responded 'Yes'. This suggests that there are a significant percentage of swing votes that could go either way based on further information.

## Finding 2

### Majority are more confident in their own ability to vote compared to the ability of their peers

Respondents to Alloy Media + Marketing and Channel One polls reached a consensus on two questions regarding who is qualified to vote that showed:

1. Individual respondents rank their own responsibility above that of their peers.

*(Q1) 'Do you think you're responsible enough to (check all that apply):  
Drive a car, Vote, Speak at a town hall meeting, enlist in the army, run for office*

<b>Channel One</b> (13-17 year-olds)	<b>Alloy Media</b> (12-24 year-olds)
Vote: <b>75.7%</b>	Vote: <b>76.2%</b>
500 respondents	1,485 respondents

Channel One only polled teens between 13 and 17 years-old,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of these respondents self-reported that they were responsible enough to vote. These were also the same respondents that said:

- **20.4%** believe that at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of all 16 year-olds are 'qualified' to vote
- **35.1%** believe that at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of all 17 year-olds are 'qualified' to vote
- **75.5%** believe that they themselves were 100% 'qualified' to vote

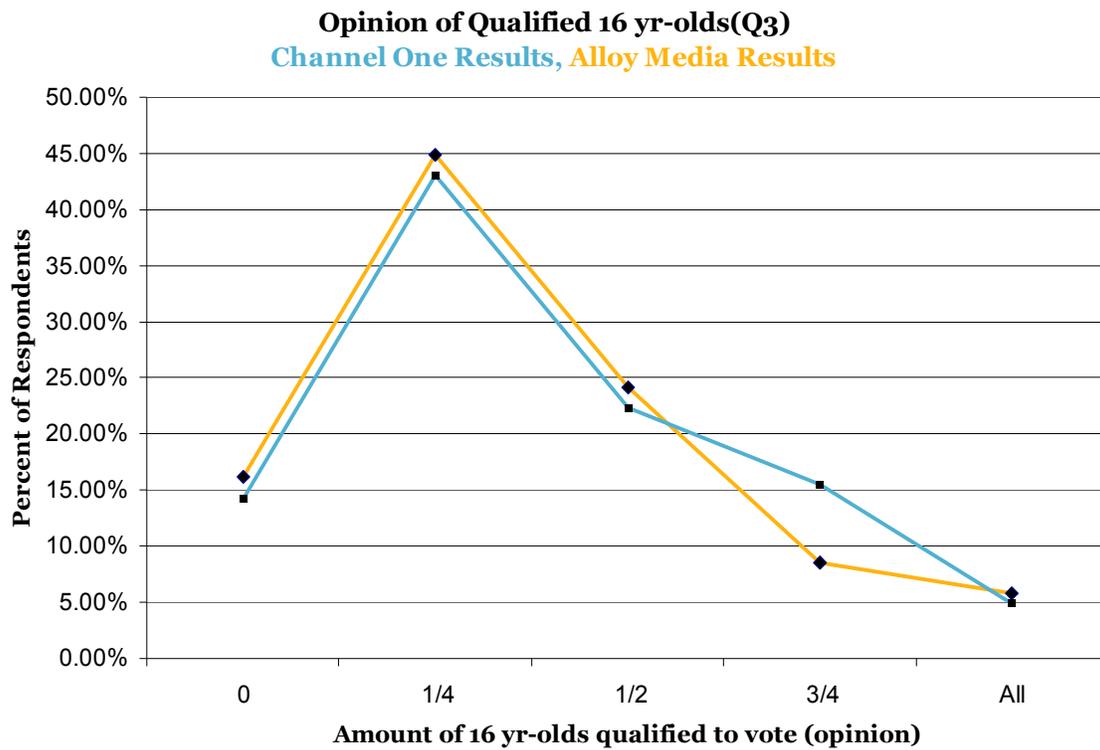
It is clear that young people have a greatly diminished opinion (compared to a self-opinion) about their demographic as a whole. There is no definitive explanation for this disparity. It is possible that when teens think of their contemporaries they only envision the predominantly negative portraits published by sensational media.

"While I think that I am responsible enough to do all these things (vote), I don't think that necessarily means that the rest of the population is. Not that being 18 years old automatically means you will be a wise and informed voter, but I think that at 18, you're living on your own."

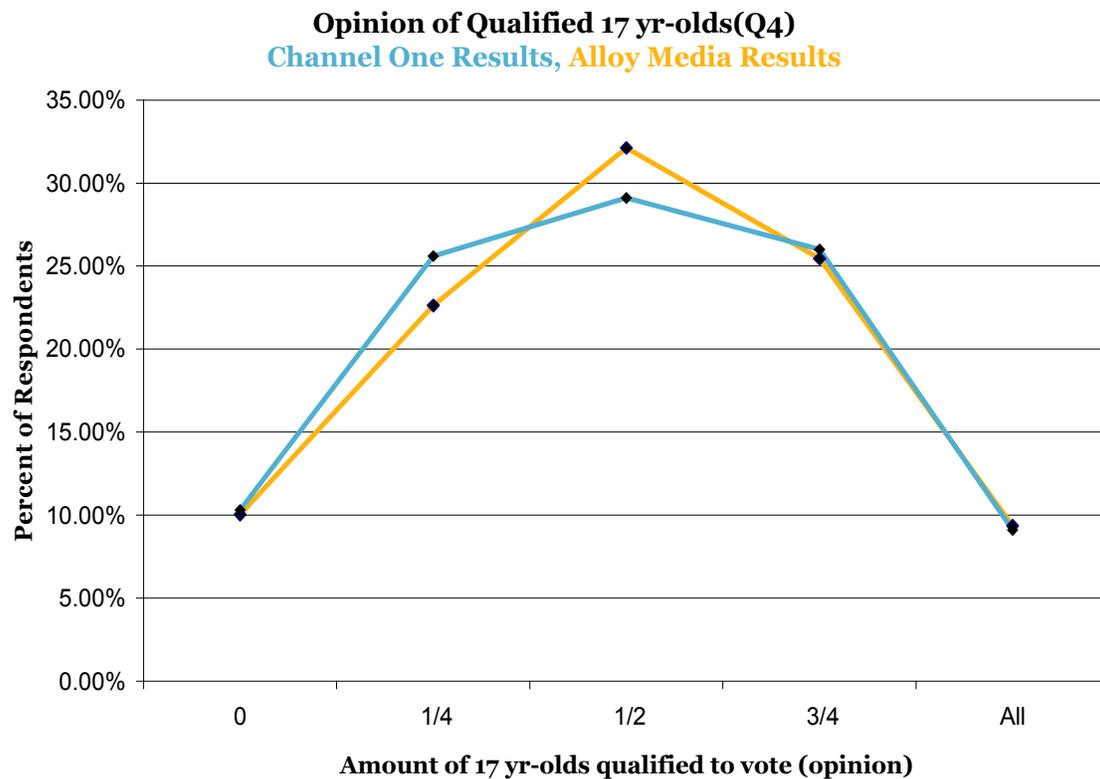
–Sam S., 17, FL

2. Respondents agree on the percentage of 16 and 17 year-olds that are qualified to vote.

(Q3) "In your opinion, what percentage of 16 year-olds are qualified to vote?"



(Q4) "In your opinion, what percentage of 17 year-olds are qualified to vote?"



Polling results from the Channel One and Alloy Media + Marketing surveys have shown similar overall opinions on the amount of 16 and 17 year-olds that respondents believe to be ‘qualified’ to vote. It is clear that there is a consensus of opinion that 17 year-olds are more qualified to vote than 16 year-olds.

- **42.7%** of Channel One respondents (13-17 year-olds) believe that at least half of all 16 year-olds are ‘qualified’ to vote.
- **64.2%** of Channel One respondents (13-17 year-olds) believe that at least half of all 17 year-olds are ‘qualified’ to vote.

Regardless of the low opinion of other teens’ ability to vote by poll respondents, it is a very positive result that approximately 75% of every respondent believed that they were responsible enough to vote.

### Finding 3

**Young Teens vs. Old Teens:** Young teens more supportive of lower voting age

Results from the Channel One Survey of 13 to 17 year-olds showed that teens under 15 were almost twice as likely to support a voting age of 16. When asked what age respondents would set the voting age to, 49.7% of 13-14 year-olds and 28.2% of 15-17 year-olds chose 16 as the best age.

One explanation for this discrepancy is that “respondents associate the ages of 16 & 18 as ‘milestone years’. The next milestone year for 13- to 14-year-olds is 16, therefore these younger teens would give people the right to vote at 16. Older teens (15- to 17-year-olds) would give people the right to vote at 18, their approaching ‘milestone year’.” – Channel One Analysis

This disparity decreases when teens are polled on their opinions about changing the voting age to 17.

<i>Channel One Polling Question</i>	<b>13-14 yr-olds</b>	<b>15-17 yr-olds</b>
Would set the voting age to at least 17 (Q2)*	62.3%	47.9%
At least 50% of 17 yr-olds are qualified to vote (Q4)*	63.3%	64%

*\*Percentages derived from polling question responses*

When respondents were asked to determine what percentage of ‘17 year-olds are qualified to vote’ the gap between younger and older teens completely disappears

These polling results show that a majority of teens believe that if the voting age were lowered, older and younger teens would agree on changing the voting age to 17.

## Finding 4

**Female Male Disparity:** Males are more supportive of a lower voting age

While both sexes agree that the voting age should be lowered, there is a significant disparity between the genders showing that males (ages 12-24) are more in favor of lowering the voting age.

Alloy Media + Marketing polling results showed that 62.6% of males (ages 12-24) would set the voting age to at least 17, if they had power. While only 45.4% of females of the same age group would lower the voting age<sup>5</sup>.

The young male and female disparity also carries over to whether or not respondents would actively support lowering the voting age. Results showed that 72.5% of males and 54.7% of females said they would 'sign a petition to lower the voting age to 17' (Alloy Media, Q5).

Female and male respondents were also asked to judge their peers by deciding what percentage of 17 year-olds they thought were 'qualified' to vote. Again young men responded more favorably than females. Polling showed that 68.4% of young men and 37.1% of young women believed that at least half of all U.S. 17 year-olds were 'qualified' to vote (Alloy Media + Marketing, Q4).

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<sup>5</sup> April, 2006 Polling results from Alloy Media: Action Sports Online Network (CCS.com, respondents: 531 male 12-24yrs) and Online Style Network (Alloy.com & dELiAS.com, respondents: 954 female 12-24yrs). Response for question #2: If you had the power to set the voting age, when would you give people the right to vote?

# Polling Questions

The results being analyzed in this summary came from an online, five question poll by Alloy Media + Marketing and Channel One (One Source polling):

1. Do you think you're responsible enough to (check all that apply):

Drive a car,  Vote,  Speak at a town hall meeting,  Enlist in the army  
 Run for office

2. If you had the power to set the voting age, when would you give people the right to vote?

16,  17,  18,  19,  20,  21

3. In your opinion, what percentage of 16 year-olds are qualified to vote?

0%  25%  50%  75%  100%

4. In your opinion, what percentage of 17 year-olds are qualified to vote?

0%  25%  50%  75%  100%

5. Would you sign a petition lowering the voting age to 17?

Yes  No  Don't Know\*

(\*Channel One option only)

Results also came from a one question poll by Do Something, Inc.

([www.dosomething.org](http://www.dosomething.org)) which asked: "At what age should you be allowed to vote?"

## Polling Results

	Channel One (Poll 500)		Alloy Media + Marketing (Poll 1,485)	
	13-14 yr-olds	15-17 yr-olds	Female	Male
<b>Question 1: Do you think you are responsible enough to (check all that apply)</b>				
Drive a Car	81.9%	94.6%	90.9%	89.0%
Vote	69.6%	79.6%	79.7%	71.4%
Speak at a town hall meeting	43.5%	50.7%	49.1%	37.0%
Enlist in the army	29.8%	37.8%	20.3%	42.9%
Run for office	28.8%	22.8%	19.8%	21.1%
<b>Question 2: ...when would you give people the right to vote?</b>				
Age 16	49.7%	28.2%	24.1%	40.9%
Age 17	12.6%	19.7%	21.3%	21.7%
Age 18	26.2%	40.5%	43.7%	29.4%
Age 19-21	11.6%	11.6%	10.9%	7.9%
<b>Question 3: In your opinion, what percentage of 16 year-olds are qualified to vote?</b>				
0	18.3%	11.6%	14.1%	20.2%
1/4	33.0%	49.7%	48.7%	38.5%
1/2	21.5%	22.8%	25.4%	22.1%
3/4	18.8%	13.3%	8.5%	8.8%
All	8.4%	2.7%	3.2%	10.5%
<b>Question 4: In your opinion, what percentage of 17 year-olds are qualified to vote?</b>				
0	16.2%	6.5%	8.3%	13.3%
1/4	20.4%	28.9%	25.1%	18.4%
1/2	27.2%	30.3%	33.0%	30.9%
3/4	22.5%	27.2%	26.4%	24.1%
All	19.6%	22.5%	7.2%	13.4%
<b>Question 5: Would you sign a petition lowering the voting age to 17?</b>				
Yes	58.6%	51.0%	54.7%	72.5%
No	20.4%	30.3%	45.3%	27.5%
Don't Know	20.9%	18.7%	n/a	n/a

**Do Something, Inc. [www.DoSomething.org](http://www.DoSomething.org)**

**(Poll 4,240)**

Age 16	49.70%
Age 17	12.60%
Age 18	26.20%
Age 19-21	11.60%

## About the Polls

Channel One (in-school TV network reaching 350,000 classrooms).

Fielded 4/20/2006-4/27/2006

Respondents: Total of 500

Screening: Survey was executed using OneSource – panel of teens 13-17 across the U.S. This panel is a proprietary panel to Channel One. The teens on the panel are representative of the US population and are not identified as being from Channel One Schools or from Non-Channel One schools

Alloy Media + Marketing (youth marketing network) polled based on gender.

Fielded: April, 2006

Respondents: 1,485

Screening: Polling results from online Alloy Media + Marketing website:

Action Sports Online Network CCS.com, respondents: 531, Target web traffic:

Males, 12-24yrs-old

Online Style Network: Alloy.com & dELiAS.com, respondents: 954, target web traffic: females, 12-24yrs-old).

Do Something, Inc

Online youth membership organization

A nonpartisan organization, 501 c (3) under NY 1

Fielded April 14<sup>th</sup> to May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006

Respondents: 4,240

Screening: Results from online poll on main page of [www.DoSomething.org](http://www.DoSomething.org).

Target web traffic audience: 12 to 24 year-olds.

## Quotes from Respondents

### Quotes from teens in favor of lowering the voting age:

“After thinking about it for several days now, I fully support the lowering of the voting age to 16. We need a voice in the country. I would fight for this for years to come – even if I could not reap the benefits from this, I know what it feels like to not have a fair say in the government... ☹ It’s a sad time for teenagers in America.. ☹” -Nick J., Age 16, NE

“Don't underestimate young people.” –Serena Z., Age 17, CA

“If one has a petition to lower the voting age to 17, I don’t think it's worth all that effort to reduce the age by one year. Many things can happen in one year, but one year is a relatively insignificant amount of time. If one were to lower the voting age, it should be a more significant change.” –Snigdha S., Age 16, NY

“I do think 16 year olds should vote because the small number of us who actually do keep up with the current politics and have developed our own opinions should have the opportunity to voice them.” –Rachel L., Age 18, CA

“Ideally, lowering the voting age would motivate 16-year-olds to become more active in the political sphere. I think for it to work there needs to be more emphasis on the voting process in the classroom to form the idea that voting is, you know, ‘a right, a privilege, and a duty,’” –Christina F., Age 17, AZ

“Interestingly, several States allow youth to get married when they are UNDER the age of 16 - which is probably a more important life-decision than even casting a vote.” –Daniel K., Age 17, IN

“Since you can go to war (into the military) when you're 17, you should be able to elect leaders that won't make bad decisions with your life. Most of the typical responses to why 17 year olds SHOULDN'T be able to vote can be completely rejected because you can apply those same situations to the 18 year-old demographic (i.e. lack of caring, etc.). Many young people are smart and want to have a voice in their future!” –Nick J., Age 16, NE

### **Quotes from teens not in favor of lowering the voting age:**

“I think lowering the age to 16 is a great idea. However, I think that the majority of the people at 16 in this day and age are not really politically forward on most issues. If the voting age were to be lowered, people would need to find a new approach to involve kids in political issues.” – Jessica K., Age 15, NY

“16 is too impressionable an age to be given the vote. Yes, there are a select few minors who have been ready to vote since we entered our teen years, myself included, but I don't think the majority is in the same place. Just from my experience at school, kids are simply voicing their parents' views or are greatly influenced and occasionally intimidated by teachers.” – Samantha C., Age 17, NY

“Not that being 18 years old automatically means you will be a wise and informed voter, but I think that at 18 you're living on your own and you're away from the pressures that might be placed on an apathetic 16- or 17-year old by parents/school etc. to vote in a certain direction.” –Samantha C., Age 17, NY

“I think most kids at the age of 16 are not politically up to date and have no clue or even care what's going on in the world around them. Furthermore I think a lot of kids are merely just influenced by their peers and simply go along with what their parents or friends are saying.” -Jessica K., Age 15, NY

“Although I believe that some teenagers are ready to vote and would make a very informed decision, those people represent the minority. I don't know many people who watch the news daily or are excited to read the newspaper everyday.” –Angel P., Age 17, IL