

FREE
TO OUR
READERS

TUESDAY, JANUARY 20, 2026

TEEN VISION

THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA



~~Silent~~
Muted
Majority

IF TEENS PAY TAXES
THROUGH VAT AT THE
SCHOOL CANTEEN, SHOULD THEY
HAVE A RIGHT TO VOTE?

20
TEENS
REACT!

BY BRENDA BALUKA,
TENDO GRACE KENNETH
AND RANNEL DICKSON
NSEREKO

You buy a *rolex* at break
time... VAT inside. You
grab a cake and soda after

prep... Taxed. You jump
on a *boda* to link up with
friends at *Acacia*... the fuel
is taxed, which is why the
transport fare hurts. By
lunchtime, you've already
helped fund the national
budget.
Yet when it's time to

choose leaders who decide
where that money goes,
you're told: "You're too
young. Wait until you're
18." But when you commit
a crime, you are charged
as an adult in many cases!
Bummer! Welcome to the
teen dilemma of the year:

taxed, but not represented.

**WHAT DOES "TAXED BUT
NOT REPRESENTED"
EVEN MEAN?**

This phrase once
powered revolutions. It

simply means this: if the
government takes your
money, you deserve a voice
in how it's used.

And before anyone says,
"But teens don't pay taxes,"
let's be real. Teens pay
indirect taxes every day:
• VAT on snacks, drinks,

airtime, and data.

• Transport costs driven
up by fuel taxes.

• School supplies taxed
before they hit the shelf.

You may not earn a salary
yet, but your pocket money
is already part of the
national economy.

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<< CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17.

What's KAWA NOT KAWA

ACHILLES ARINATIVE, 17YRS, KANUNGU.



KAWA?

...internet is back. Notifications are blowing up from old messages. No riots.

NOT KAWA?

...going online to abuse the same government that employs your brothers, sisters and parents.

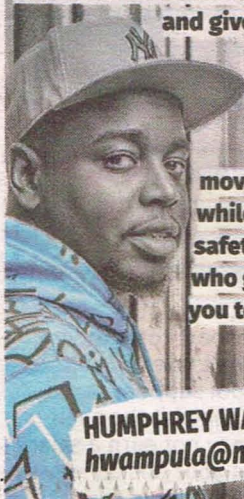
SEND US UR DOPE PHOTO AND TEXT US
WHAT'S KAWA—WHAT'S NOT VIA OUR
WHATSAPP: +256 783 002 805.

EDITOR'S WAGWEZ!

Hey Squadrino! Jump in!

Your parents' pressure isn't hatred. It's fear. Fear of watching a child they love drift into drug abuse, unwanted pregnancies, HIV/AIDS, or choices that quietly derail a future. Your parents would never forgive themselves if you got lost on their watch. That's why they push, question and sometimes sound harsh. Listen to them to guide and give you direction.

Direction doesn't mean having all the answers today; it means moving with intention while you still have safety and people who genuinely want you to win.



HUMPHREY WAMPULA
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WHAT THE LAW SAYS (AND WHY 18 BECAME THE MAGIC NUMBER).

Legally, voting is tied to adulthood. In most countries, including Uganda, the age of majority is 18. That's when you're allowed to:

- Vote.
- Sign contracts.
- Be fully responsible under civil law.

The logic? At 18, you're assumed to have the maturity to make long-term decisions. But here's where things get complicated. At 16, teens can already:

- Sit national exams that determine their future.
- Be charged under criminal law.
- Work, hustle and support families.
- Be affected by laws that were made by lawmakers they didn't help choose.

So the question becomes uncomfortable: If responsibility starts before 18, why does representation wait?

IS IT ABOUT MATURITY OR CONTROL?

Critics often say that teens are "too emotional" or "too naïve and easily influenced" to vote.

But let's pause. Adults (fully grown ones), still fall for misinformation and free handouts from candidates.

They still vote based on tribe, anger or WhatsApp group peer pressure. So maybe the hesitation isn't just about maturity. Some analysts argue it's also about power.

Young voters are:

- Harder to predict.
- Less loyal to political parties.
- More likely to demand change violently as we have seen in recent Kenyan riots mostly led by young people.

Giving teens the vote could force leaders to talk about education affordability, mental health, unemployment, and digital safety. Topics that don't always win easy applause.

So the quiet fear may not be teen ignorance, but teen disruption.

THE CASE FOR LOWERING THE VOTING AGE TO 16.

Supporters aren't saying teens know everything. They're saying teens know enough to matter.

1. Political Awareness Starts Early.

Teens debate politics in school, dormitories, classrooms, taxis, and online spaces. They organise climate change campaigns, school forums, and community clean-ups. Awareness already exists and voting would simply legitimise it.

2. Representation Forces Accountability.

If teens could vote, leaders would have to care about:

- More education funding.
- Youth mental health.
- Jobs and skills training.
- Curbing schools from ever increasing school fees every year.

Right now, teens are discussed about, not with.

3. It's Not Unprecedented.

Countries like Austria allow voting from 16 years of age. Evidence shows that early voters are more likely

to remain engaged citizens later in life. Democracy, it turns out, is a habit best learned young.

NOT EVERY TEEN IS IN A UNIFORM.

But this debate can't be honest if it only centres elite or Kampala teens.

What about:

- Rural teens.
- Teens out of school.
- Teenage workers, young mothers, and caretakers.

These young people feel government decisions directly, through healthcare, food prices, and safety, but are often missing from civic conversations altogether.

Lowering the voting age without addressing inequality could still leave the most vulnerable unheard.

Representation isn't just about age. It's about access.

IF 16-YEAR-OLDS VOTE, WHAT COULD GO WRONG?

Lowering the voting age without preparation could lead to:

- Voting based on trends, not policies.
- Manipulation by social media propaganda.
- Civic confusion rather than empowerment.

These risks are real. Ignoring them weakens the argument.

Which is why the solution isn't just more voters, it's better preparation.

THE REAL FIX: CIVIC EDUCATION, NOT SILENCE.

If teens are old enough to fund the state, they're old enough to understand it.

What's needed:

- Civic education taught earlier and better.
- Simple explanations of how Parliament, taxes, and budgets work.

• Media literacy to fight misinformation.

• Spaces for respectful political debate.

Democracy shouldn't arrive suddenly at 18 like a surprise exam. It should be trained for.

YOU CAN'T VOTE YET. BUT YOU'RE NOT POWERLESS.

Even without the ballot, teens can still:

- Join student leadership and youth councils.
- Engage in community forums.
- Ask leaders hard questions.

• Learn how systems work. Democracy doesn't begin at the polling station. It begins with your voice.

THE QUESTION THAT WON'T GO AWAY.

Teens are already part of the system; economically, socially, and politically.

So, the real question isn't: "Are teens ready to vote?" It's this: "Is democracy ready to include them?"

Because if you're old enough to fund the state through your snacks, your rides, and your data bundles, maybe you're old enough to help decide its future too.

COUNTRIES THAT ALLOW TEENAGERS TO VOTE.

Argentina: Voting is optional for those aged 16–17 and compulsory starting at 18.

Austria: The first EU country to lower the voting age to 16 for all elections.

Brazil: Voting is optional for 16 and 17-year-olds and

mandatory for those 18–70.

Cuba: Teenagers can vote in national elections starting at age 16.

Ecuador: Voting is universal and optional for citizens aged 16–17.

Malta: Lowered the

voting age to 16 for all elections, including general and European Parliament elections.

Nicaragua: The legal voting age is 16.

United Kingdom: Following a landmark 2025 decision, the voting age for all UK elections has been

lowered to 16, set to be fully implemented for the next general election.

Countries Allowing Voting at Age 17

Greece: Citizens can vote if they turn 17

during the year of the election.

Indonesia: The national voting age is 17.

North Korea: The legal voting age is 17.

Timor-Leste: Teens are eligible to vote starting at age 17.

TEENS REACT



David Mwesigwa, 18, Senior Six, Seroma Christian High School.

"No, 16-year-olds should not be allowed to vote. Absolutely not. At that age, most of my troubles came from peer pressure. For example, being influenced by friends to play polythene football past my home curfew. I believe many 16-year-olds would follow the majority instead of making independent decisions. So for me, the answer is no."



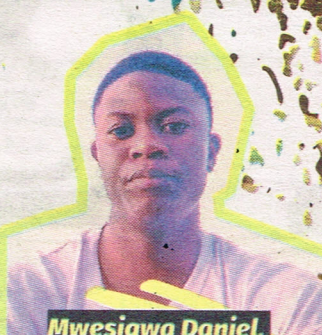
Namubiru Angel, 17, Senior Five, Faith High School, Namugongo.

"Yes, 16-year-olds should be allowed to vote. If we pay indirect taxes when buying things like candy, why shouldn't more teenagers participate in politics? Politics gives us leaders, and leaders create policies like taxes. So if we are affected, we should be represented. My answer is simply yes."



Prissy Nandakulula, 19, Senior Six.

"No, 16-year-olds shouldn't be allowed to vote. At that age, they already have a lot to worry about, such as schoolwork and responsibilities at home. I think voting would push them into adulthood too early and make them neglect important childhood disciplines."



Mwesigwa Daniel, 19, Senior Six, St. Balikuddembe Secondary School.

"Yes, 16-year-olds should be allowed to exercise their patriotic rights. Allowing them to vote would prepare them for the future and help shape them into responsible, thoughtful decision-makers."



Ssempijja Trevor Festus, 18, Senior Four, Kansanga Secondary School.

"I don't think teenagers should be allowed to vote. As teens, we might vote based on trends and vibes. Someone could vote for an incompetent leader just because they seem cool, not because they have good plans or ideas."



Tumukunde Sheillah, 17, Senior Four, Nakasero Senior Secondary School.

"Yes! If I'm taxed every time I spend my pocket money, I should have a say in who represents me at the decision-making table. I should be able to vote for the MP and president I believe will protect our future and do a good job."



Kisakye Mark, 18, Senior Six, St. Balikuddembe Secondary School.

"No, they shouldn't be allowed to vote. Sixteen-year-olds are easily influenced like leaves blown by the wind. In school campaigns, even a

lollipop can change a student's vote. Imagine what would happen if money was involved. Many would sell their decisions cheaply. Let them focus on UNEB exams and leave voting to older, more experienced people."



Enid Tracy, 17, Senior Five, Seeta High School.

"Yes, 16-year-olds should be allowed to vote. The difference between 16, 17, and 18 is very small. Eighteen

feels too late. If teenagers are taught decision-making early, why not allow them to use those skills at 16? If someone knows right from wrong, they can stand in line and cast a meaningful vote."

MORE VOICES.

TAX TALK.
Aisha Nahalema, 17, Senior Five, St. Jonathan High School, Kyaliwajjala.

"I think the voting age should be lowered to 16. We contribute to the economy every day. We pay tax on juice, books,

and even data bundles. So, why shouldn't we have a say in who makes decisions for us?"

DIGITAL TAXED.
Brian Kahembo, 17, Senior Five, St. Elizabeth High School.

"When I buy video games, airtime, or

anything online, tax is already included. If the government is taxing us, then it should also trust us to vote."

MATURITY MATTERS.
Kevin Madoi Maxwell, 16, Senior Four, Seeta High School, Mukono.

"At 16, many people are

still easily influenced. Voting is serious, and I think people should mature a bit more before being given that responsibility."

STUDENT LEADERS.
Shamim Nabooosa, 16, Prefect, Kira Senior Secondary School.

"We are already involved in leadership at school and in our communities. Lowering the voting age would encourage young people to be more responsible and more informed about politics."

WORKING VOICE.
Joshua Kalanzi, 17, Senior Five, Kisubi Mapeera Senior School.

"I work part-time with my brother during the holidays and help support my family. I'm affected by policies on education and jobs, so I believe 16-year-olds deserve a voice at the ballot."

LEARN FIRST.
Deborah Karunga, 17, Senior Five, St. Kizito High School, Namugongo.

"Most of us don't fully understand politics yet. We should focus on learning and civic education first before talking about voting

at 16."

BUSINESS BRAIN.
Daniel Olupa, 17, Senior Five, Code High School, Seeta.

"I run a small business selling phone accessories online. Every item I sell or buy is taxed. If I can manage a business, I think I can also choose a leader."

DEPENDENT VOTES.
Faith Kembabazi, 16, Senior Four, Code High School.

"Voting requires independent thinking. At 16, many teens still depend heavily on parents and teachers, and that could influence how they vote."

POLICY AFFECTED.
Isaac Mukibi, 16, Senior Four, St. Kizito High School.

"We are already affected by laws on education, health, and the economy. Lowering the voting age would force leaders to take youth issues more seriously."

PROTECT YOUTH.
Michael Sebunya, 17, Senior Five, Majorine High School, Mulawa.

"I support keeping

the voting age at 18 because politics can be manipulative. Young people should be protected until they are mature enough to make informed choices."

INFORMED CHOICE.
Nabwire Hannah, 17, Senior Five, Gayaza High School.

"I think the issue isn't age, but preparation. If a 16-year-old understands how government works and how policies affect their life, then voting makes sense. Democracy should reward knowledge, not just birthdays."

SHARED STAKES.
Okello Brian Junior, 18, Senior Six, Gulu High School.

"Whether we vote or not, we still live with the consequences of leadership. Prices, schools, jobs and so much more. Allowing informed 16-year-olds to vote would acknowledge that young people already share the country's burdens."

PERSONALITY TEST

INSTRUCTIONS: To answer, circle the option that best identifies you.
Flip paper upside-down to view results.

Young Citizen Challenge

TEST

When prices of snacks, transport or data increase, you mostly:

- A. Ask why and follow the news to understand what caused it.
- B. Complain but move on.
- C. Think it's unfair but feel you can't change anything.
- D. Don't really pay attention.

In school debates or discussions about leadership, you usually:

- A. Research facts before speaking.
- B. Share opinions confidently.
- C. Listen more than you talk.
- D. Avoid such conversations.

When adults say, "Young people don't understand politics," you:

- A. Feel challenged and want to prove them wrong.
- B. Feel partly offended but unsure how to respond.
- C. Think they may be right.
- D. Don't really care.

If civic education became a serious subject at your school, you would:

- A. Be excited to learn how government works.
- B. Attend but not engage deeply.
- C. Feel it's too complicated.
- D. Find it boring.

When you see leaders making decisions that affect education or youth, you:

- A. Follow closely and ask questions.
- B. Discuss it with friends.
- C. Worry but stay silent.
- D. Ignore it completely.

If the voting age were lowered, your biggest concern would be:

- A. Whether young people are well informed.
- B. Whether leaders would manipulate youth.
- C. Whether teens would take it seriously.

Mostly A's - The Purpose-Driven Resilient Leader
Mostly B's - The Growing Survivor
Mostly C's - The Overwhelmed Heart

Results:

D. Whether it would change anything

Your idea of good citizenship is:

- A. Being informed, ethical, and active.
- B. Obeying laws and respecting leaders.
- C. Working hard and staying out of trouble.
- D. Focusing only on personal success.

WORRR'D

The Civic Thinker (Mostly A's)

You are analytical, informed and deeply aware of how systems work. You are the kind of young person who reads, questions and prepares for leadership long before the title arrives.

Advice: Read newspapers, follow parliamentary debates and learn how local government works.

The Emerging Voice (Mostly B's)

You are aware and opinionated but still growing in depth. You sense injustice and change, even if you don't yet fully understand the systems behind them.

Advice: Move from opinion to informed opinion. Ask "why" more often. Join debate clubs, youth forums, and school leadership to sharpen your civic voice.

The Quiet Observer (Mostly C's)

You care, but you doubt your influence. You often feel politics is too complicated for you to matter.

Advice: Remember: every confident citizen once started unsure. Learning how government works will replace fear with understanding.

The Detached Teen (Mostly D's)

You focus on your personal world and feel public affairs are distant from your life.

Advice: Begin small. Understand how school rules, taxes and local leadership affect you.



GOT QUESTIONS? GOT CHALLENGES AT SCHOOL? IN YOUR LIFE? WRITE TO US AT
teenvision@newvision.co.ug

DEAR TEEN VISION



Grace, 16, St. Mary's Girls' School, Lugazi, Buikwe.

I feel pressure from two sides. At school, people say I am too innocent. At home, they warn me not to grow up too fast. I feel like no version of me is ever right. Who am I supposed to be?

Advice:

Grace, adolescence is the season where identity is being shaped and confusion is part of that process. You are standing between childhood and adulthood, and both sides are pulling. That tension does not mean you are failing; it means you are developing. Instead of trying to fit into labels given by others, focus on values that do not change with trends: respect, discipline, and purpose. When you anchor yourself in who you want to become, the noise around you loses its power.

Amina, 15, Mbale Secondary School, Mbale.

I sometimes feel guilty for having thoughts and feelings I have never acted on. It's like my mind is ahead of my values. Does having certain thoughts mean I am already failing morally?

Advice:

Amina, thoughts are not the same as choices. The human brain explores

ideas long before the heart decides what to stand for. Morality is not judged by what crosses your mind, but by what you choose to do with it. Maturity is learning to guide your thoughts instead of being ruled by them. You are not failing; you are learning self-awareness. And that is the beginning of a strong character, not its end.

Collins, 18, Mbarara High School, Mbarara.

I fear that if I ever make one serious mistake, my parents' sacrifices will become meaningless. The thought alone makes me anxious and sometimes unable to breathe well. Is this pressure healthy?

Advice:

Collins, carrying your parents' sacrifices on your shoulders can feel like carrying a fragile glass cup in a crowded room... you fear every step might break it. While gratitude is healthy, fear-based perfection is heavy and emotionally exhausting. You honour your parents not by being flawless, but by being responsible, honest, willing to learn and making smart choices. Pressure becomes healthy only when it motivates, not when it suffocates. Talk to someone you trust. You are allowed to be human while still being grateful.

Andrew, 17, St. Kizito High School, Matugga, Wakiso.

Sometimes I feel like my life is on pause while everyone else is "living." I focus on school, avoid relationships and stay disciplined, but at night I wonder if I'm missing something important. Will I regret being too careful when I grow up?

Advice:

Andrew, this is a very quiet but heavy fear many disciplined teenagers carry. Your mind is comparing your present restraint with an imagined future regret, and that creates emotional tension. But growth is not measured by how much you experience; it is measured by how well you prepare. Many adults regret the mistakes that delayed their dreams more than the pleasures they delayed. The part of you that chooses patience is not killing your youth; it is protecting your future self. One day, when responsibility increases and life becomes complex, you will be grateful that your teenage years built strength, focus, and self-trust instead of wounds and confusion.

Columnists
answering
your
questions
from
Reach
A Hand,
Uganda



JOASH SSEBUGULU JOAN ATUHAIRWE MUGASA SHAROT ABAMIRWA