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TOM TOM ENGLISH



VOCABULARY

Cast =

Verb used together
with the noun “vote”
e.g. I cast my first vote
at the age of 19

Eligible =

Qualified or entitled to
do something

Ballot =

The sheet of paper or
card used to register a
vote. (Note, there are
other uses of “ballot”
both as a noun and a
verb)

Emphasise =

To give special
importance or value to
something

Read the article overleaf and discuss these questions:

1. What do you think about the new voting age? Is it a good idea? Why? Why not?
2. Do you usually vote? Why? Why not?
3. What do you think we can do to encourage young people to vote?
4. Do you agree that “the opinions of young people are not reflected in policies”. Explain your opinion.
5. What do you think is the “right” age to allow voting?
6. How about smoking? Drinking? Driving? Getting married?

VOCABULARY

Alienation =

Feeling of being isolated
or estranged; not part of
society

Turnout =

The number of people
attending or taking part
in some event.

Upper House =

The higher House in a
bicameral legislature
(in Japan, the House of
Councillors; in the UK
the House of Lords; in
the US

19-year-old student Kouki Nozuomuto **cast** his first ballot at a polling station earlier this week, using an early voting system. He is among 2.4 million newly **eligible** voters for Sunday's **upper house election**, the first since Japan lowered the voting age from 20 to 18. "I thought I'll just go in between classes, so I think maybe I should have spent more time to prepare. I came because it's a citizen's duty to vote and I want my voice to be heard."

Another 19-year-old voter, Izumi Funatsu, said she was nervous as she put her **ballot** in a box at the temporary polling site set up on a university campus. "I thought, 'Now I can deliver my voice and I am no longer a child,'" she said.

The government and political parties are using various strategies to motivate young people to vote, but it's unclear whether they will — and whether they are ready to do so. Some experts say they aren't, citing reasons such as growing up in a society that **emphasizes** conformity over individuality, few opportunities to debate the issues, and a belief that the opinions of young people are not reflected in policies. In an Asahi Shimbun opinion poll in June, 11% of the newly qualified voters said they were "greatly interested" in the election, lower than the 29% overall. In addition, 49% responded they would be voting "for sure," versus 68% overall.

Tomoaki Ikeya, a professor at Waseda University, said that expressing one's own opinion can be difficult in Japan, where obeying parents and teachers is a virtue. Pressure to conform means stating a differing opinion can be seen as disturbing the surrounding atmosphere, possibly leading to **alienation**, he said.

Candidates, political parties and the government are using comics and celebrities to try to reach young voters. Both the Liberal Democratic Party and Democratic Party have videos targeting young voters on their websites.

Kensuke Harada, leader of the nonprofit organization YouthCreate, who teaches classes on democratic participation, said more needs to be done. "Now 18-19-year-olds have the vote, and everyone is paying attention to how they will vote or what kind of attitude they have as members of society. But what needs to be changed are the adults, the whole society, education and politics, which have shaped the current 18-and 19-year-olds.", Harada said.

Lowering the voting age is aimed at increasing falling **turnout** among young people in general. In the previous **upper house** election in 2013, only a third of those in their 20s voted, down from 47% in 1989. Their voting rate is low, and so is their share of the population. The population aged between 0 and 14 dropped from 22.5 million in 1990 to 16.2 million in 2014. The number of over 65s doubled to 33 million in the same period.

The low birthrate and ageing population create a negative spiral that depresses young voter turnout, said Hiroshi Shiratori, director of the Institute of Policy Sciences. Issues relevant to young people, such as nursery school places, are not debated enough, because older voters dominate. "This makes child rearing more difficult so the birthrate stays low. That makes it harder for policies for the young to be reflected. That further facilitates a trend that policies are prioritized in favor of seniors. Because of that, the young remain indifferent about going to vote."