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## Britain to Lower Voting Age to 16 in Electoral Reform Push

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The U.K. government has confirmed plans to reduce the national voting age from 18 to 16 ahead of the next general election. The reform, which requires parliamentary approval, is part of a broader package aimed at encouraging civic participation and strengthening electoral integrity.

The proposal will bring Westminster elections in line with voting rules already in place in Scotland and Wales, where 16- and 17-year-olds can vote in local and devolved elections.

Should the legislation pass, the U.K. will join a limited number of countries, such as Austria, Brazil, and Ecuador, that allow voting at 16 in national elections.

Proponents of the move argue it will give young people a voice in decisions that affect their futures. However, sceptics question whether the change will meaningfully increase youth turnout, given persistent disengagement among younger and lower-income demographics. Political analyst Stuart Fox, a lecturer at the University of Exeter, noted that structural factors like education and community involvement may do more to boost participation than lowering the age threshold alone.

In addition to the voting age change, the government plans to implement automatic voter registration, simplifying the process for millions of eligible citizens. To accommodate this shift, officials also announced the expansion of acceptable identification at polling stations, including bank cards, aiming to reduce friction while maintaining secure election protocols.

The plans build on rules introduced in 2022 under the previous Conservative government that required photo ID at polling stations, a measure designed to combat voter fraud but criticised by some advocacy groups for potentially excluding vulnerable populations. The Electoral Commission, the U.K.'s election watchdog, estimates that approximately 750,000 people may have been deterred from voting in the 2024 election due to a lack of identification.

Alongside these changes, the government is tightening campaign finance regulations, including curbs on political donations from shell companies with opaque ownership structures. These steps, according to Democracy Minister Rushanara Ali, are intended to safeguard the democratic process from undue foreign influence.

Penalties for intimidation of electoral candidates will also be increased, reflecting growing concern over the safety and integrity of public office. These measures form part of a wider Resilience Action Plan to bolster confidence in U.K. institutions.

Turnout in the 2024 general election dropped to 59.7%, the lowest in over 20 years. Officials hope that by modernising voting rules and enhancing transparency, they can reverse this trend and rebuild trust.

While the reforms are billed as a step forward in strengthening democratic participation, the long-term impact remains to be seen. As with previous shifts in electoral law, much will

depend on how these changes are implemented and whether they genuinely resonate with the public.